

The Triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom” and a New Porphyrian Fragment in Arabic

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Abstract

The article presents, for the first time, a new Arabic fragment of Porphyry on the triad “Goodness–Power–Wisdom” preserved by the medieval Copto-Arabic theologian al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl (d. between 1270 and 1286). The article argues that the fragment is authentic and belongs to Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus* and that it was translated into Arabic, whether as part of an Arabic adaptation of Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus* or as embedded in some later work, by Ishāq ibn Hunayn (d. 910). The article further contextualizes this fragment with particular attention to the tenth-century Muslim philosopher al-Isfizārī. It shows that al-Isfizārī likely drew on Porphyry in *Question 20* of his metaphysical treatise *Kitāb fī Masā’il al-umūr al-ilāhiyya*.

In his article “Goodness Power Wisdom: A Middle Platonic Triad”, John Whittaker explores the early history of the idea that the divine is characterized by three qualities: goodness (χρηστότης or ἀγαθότης), power (δύναμις), and wisdom (σοφία or, in the writings of Proclus and later Neoplatonists, γνῶσις).¹ According to Whittaker, the triad most likely originated in the context of Middle Platonic defense of the idea of divine providence against Stoic and Epicurean objections.² By the second century AD, the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom” came to be integrated into the tradition of commentary upon Plato’s *Timaeus*, which subsequently became the main vehicle for its diffusion and impact on late antique philosophical thought, both Pagan and Christian.³

The transmission of the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom” from Greek into Arabic has been in the focus of recent research. Thus, Elvira Wakelnig has shown that it plays a significant

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¹ J. Whittaker, “Goodness Power Wisdom: A Middle Platonic Triad”, in M.-O. Goulet-Cazé - G. Madec - D. O’Brien (eds.), *ΣΟΦΙΗΣ ΜΑΙΗΤΟΡΕΣ/Chercheurs de sagesse: Hommage à J. Pépin*, Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, Paris 1992, pp. 179-94; cf. J. Whittaker, “Proclus and the Middle Platonists”, in J. Pépin - H.D. Saffrey (eds.), *Proclus lecteur et interprète des anciens*, Actes du colloque international du CNRS, Paris (2-4 octobre 1985), CNRS, Paris 1987, pp. 277-91, here 282-7.

² Whittaker, “Goodness Power Wisdom” (above, n. 1), pp. 186-9 and 191-2.

³ Whittaker, “Goodness Power Wisdom” (above, n. 1), p. 190: “Whatever its ultimate origin, it remains nonetheless the case that in the sources to which we have access the triad Goodness-Power-Wisdom first comes to the fore in the second century of our era in the ambit of the interpretation of the *Timaeus*. Its appearance at this date is no doubt in part a consequence of the random survival of texts and of our resultant dearth of Hellenistic philosophical literature. However, the absence of the triad from the writings of Philo of Alexandria strongly suggests that in his day the triad had not yet assumed the dominant role that it was destined to play in the later tradition of commentary upon the *Timaeus* of Plato”.

role in the Arabic Christian philosopher Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī (d. 974), who identified the triad with the hypostases of the Christian Trinity,⁴ and in a wide variety of Muslim philosophical works (al-Isfīzārī, Miskawayh, the *Longer Theology of Aristotle*, and others), where the triad describes the threefold perfection of God.⁵ She argued that the triad was transmitted into Arabic via the Neoplatonic *prolegomena* to the study of philosophy.⁶ Michael Chase has presented evidence (surveyed also by Whittaker) that this triad is found in Proclus, where it seems to be tied to Proclus’ interpretation of the *Chaldean Oracles*. Chase argued that since Porphyry was the first Neoplatonic commentator on the *Chaldean Oracles*, the transmission of the triad into Arabic could have taken place (in addition to the Neoplatonic *prolegomena* channel postulated by Wakelnig) via translations of Porphyry’s works.⁷ Other transmission channels (e.g., via Greek patristics and/or Syriac literature) are, of course, possible as well and, indeed, have been suggested by other scholars; consequently, we should construe these explanations as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.⁸

Recently, I was fortunate to discover a new Arabic fragment attributed to Porphyry that showcases the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom”. It is preserved in the Coptic theologian al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl’s (d. between 1270 and 1286) Arabic Christian religious encyclopedia *Maḡmū’ uṣūl al-dīn* (*Summa of the Principles of Religion*).⁹ As we shall see, this new fragment probably originates from Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus* (extant only in fragments in Greek)¹⁰ and thus lends support to Chase’s hypothesis regarding Porphyry’s role in the transmission of the triad into Arabic.

The purpose of the present contribution is to draw Graeco-Arabists’ attention to this important passage and to discuss its transmission into, and circulation in,

⁴ Goodness corresponds to the Father, Wisdom to the Son, and Power to the Holy Spirit.

⁵ On al-Isfīzārī, see Section 2.3 below.

⁶ E. Wakelnig, “What Does Aristotle Have to Do with the Christian Arabic Trinity? The Triad ‘Generosity-Wisdom-Power’ in the Alexandrian *Prolegomena* and Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī”, *Le Muséon* 130.3-4 (2017), pp. 445-77. On Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī’s use of the triad, see Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, *Treatise on Divine Unity According to the Doctrine of the Christians: Arabic Text, English Translation and Commentary*, ed. and trans. G. Mandolino, Brill, Leiden 2024 (Eastern Christian Texts, 1), pp. 56-74, 212-20, and 296-302 (with a wealth of references to this triad in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic sources). On the Neoplatonic *prolegomena* to the study of philosophy, see, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, ed. L.G. Westerink, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam 1962, pp. XXV-XXXII.

⁷ M. Chase, “The Triad of Goodness, Power, and Wisdom: Pagan, Christian, and Muslim Authors in Search of Authorities”, <https://cnrs.academia.edu/MichaelChase> (retrieved 2025-07-08). For a survey of Arabic translations of Porphyry, see H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Porphyre de Tyr: III. Survie orientale”, in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, CNRS Éditions, Paris 2012, vol. V.2, pp. 1447-68.

⁸ A. Treiger, “From Dionysius to al-Ġazālī: Patristic Influences on Arabic Neoplatonism”, *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 9.1-2 (2021), pp. 189-236 (revised reprint: A. Treiger, *The Church Fathers in Arabic Translations*, Brill, Leiden 2025 (Receptio Patristica, 2), pp. 337-80; discusses Arabic adaptations of Greek patristic sources as a possible transmission channel); Mandolino, *Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī* (above, n. 6), pp. 61-74 and 297-302 (highlights the importance of Christian hexameral literature in the transmission of the triad into Arabic).

⁹ al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl, *Maḡmū’ uṣūl al-dīn/Summa dei principi della Religione*, ed. W. Abullif (edition in 2 vols.: I.1 and II.1; apparatus in 2 separate vols.: I.2 and II.2), trans. B. Pirone (2 vols.), Franciscan Centre of Christian Oriental Studies, Cairo 1998-1999. On this work, see also S.Kh. Samir, “Date de composition de la Somme Théologique d’al-Mu’taman b. al-‘Assāl”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 50 (1984), pp. 94-106; W. A[bullif], *Dirāsa ‘an al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl wa-kitābihi “Maḡmū’ uṣūl al-dīn” wa-taḥqīqihī*, Franciscan Centre of Christian Oriental Studies, Cairo 1997, pp. 200-1.

¹⁰ Porphyrii in Platonis *Timaeum commentariorum fragmenta*, ed. A.R. Sodano, Istituto della Stampa, Napoli 1964; Porphyrii philosophi *Fragmenta*, ed. A. Smith with D. Wasserstein, Teubner, Stuttgart 1993, p. 198.

Arabic.¹¹ Here is the text of the fragment as it appears in the oldest manuscript, the thirteenth-century *Vat. ar.* 103 (with one emendation indicated by an asterisk):¹²

وقال الحكيم فرفوريس¹³ الصوري: إذا نحن قَصَدْنَا أن ننفي¹⁴ عن العلة الأولى¹⁵ الأعراض¹⁶ التي تلحقنا¹⁸ العائقة¹⁹ عن كمال الشيء على أفضل أحواله، سَمِيناه: جواداً، حكيماً، قادراً، وقَصَدْنَا بهذه الثلاثة²⁰ أن يُدَلَّ²¹ على أنه لا شيء أفضل ممَّا يَصْنَعُ، وأنه لم يَعْقَهُ عن إحكام الصنعة واحدٌ من هذه العوارض التي تعوقنا نحن عن ذلك: لا الجهل العارض لنا في أكثر الأمور، ولا الشرّ والحسد²² العارض لكثير منّا، ولا الضعف الموجود بجميعنا²³ في أكثر الأمور.

The sage (*al-ḥakīm*) Porphyry of Tyre said: If we set it as our goal to negate of the First Cause the passions (*al-aʿrād*)²⁴ affecting us that hinder [us from producing] a perfect thing in the most excellent of states, we call Him good, wise, and powerful (*ḡawādan*, *ḥakīman*, *qādiran*). Our intention in these three [characteristics] is that it be indicated that there is nothing more excellent than what He produces and that He is not hindered from perfecting [His] work (*ihkām al-ṣanʿa*) by any of the passions (*al-ʿawāriḍ*) that hinder us from this: either by ignorance (*ḡahl*) that affects us in most things, or by evil (*ṣarr*) and envy (*ḥasad*) that affect many of us, or by weakness (*duʿf*) that is present in all of us in most things.

¹¹ This Arabic Porphyrian fragment is rather similar to – though uses a different terminology than – a passage from *Longer Theology of Aristotle*, X.12; for an edition and English translation, see A. Treiger, “Aristotle, The *Longer Theology of Aristotle*, Book X.6-13: A Critical Edition and Translation”, in O. Michaelis - S. Schmidtke (eds.), *Religious and Intellectual Diversity in the Islamicate World and Beyond*. Essays in Honor of Sarah Stroumsa, Brill, Leiden 2024 (Islamic History and Civilization, 205.2), vol. 2, pp. 863-900, at pp. 888-9; cf. Wakelnig, “What Does Aristotle” (above, n. 6), pp. 466-8.

¹² I have consulted Wadīʿ Abullīf’s edition of the text – al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Maḡmūʿ uṣūl al-dīn*, ch. 18, §14, vol. I.1, p. 377 (cf. apparatus, vol. I.2, pp. 342-3) – as well as four manuscripts: *Vat. ar.* 103 (13th cent.) [=V], f. 188r-v, https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.ar.103 (retrieved 2025-07-08); Paris, BnF, *ar.* 200 (year 1613) [=P], f. 127v, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b11004842v> (retrieved 2025-07-08); Paris, BnF, *ar.* 201 (13th-14th cent.) [=R], f. 213r-v, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b11004400s> (retrieved 2025-07-08); Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale 584 (*Garṣūnī*, 19th cent.) [=G], f. 68r, <https://w3id.org/vhmm1/readingRoom/view/504976> (retrieved 2025-07-08). In nearly every case, MS V seems to me to preserve the best reading. I have therefore reverted to the readings of V and put the readings of the other three manuscripts and of the printed edition in the apparatus. On MS V, see Samir, “Date de composition” (above, n. 9); A[bullīf], *Dirāsa* (above, n. 9), pp. 200-1.

¹³ فرفوريس VPR G edition (I have found no manuscript support for this reading).

¹⁴ ننفي VP G edition] R. نفي.

¹⁵ الاولى VP G edition] الاولى R.

¹⁶ الأعراض VPR G edition. (The emendation is necessary, because without it, it would be hard to explain the reading العائقة التي تلحقنا العائقة in most early manuscripts).

¹⁷ الذي VPR] الذي G edition.

¹⁸ يلحقنا R] تلحقنا V.

¹⁹ العائقة VPR] العائق G edition.

²⁰ الثلاثة VPR G] الثلاثة edition (I have found no manuscript support for this reading).

²¹ يدل VP G edition] ندل R. (The reading of R is, of course, possible and would even result in a smoother Arabic; however, in view of the general reliability of V, I am inclined to adopt the reading of V over R. The passive of *yudalla* may reflect a passive infinitive in the underlying Greek).

²² والحسد VPR G] والحسد edition (I have found no manuscript support for this reading).

²³ جميعنا V G] لجميعنا PR edition.

²⁴ As discussed below, the terms *aʿrād* and *ʿawāriḍ* mean “passions” (they must render the Greek παθήματα).

We now need to discuss the content and the likely original context of the fragment and address the question of its authenticity (as we shall see, there are good reasons to believe that it is authentic). This will be the subject of the first section of the article. In the second section, I shall discuss the question of this fragment's line of transmission from Greek into Arabic and its circulation in Arabic and possible impact on Arabic philosophical thought. In the third section, I shall present my conclusions and outline avenues for future research.

1. Content, Context, and Authenticity

First of all, let us consider the content of the passage. The fragment argues that it is precisely because the First Cause is good, wise, and powerful and is subject to none of the opposite characteristics (evil and envy, ignorance, and weakness, respectively) that He is able to produce what is supreme in perfection. His “product” is, evidently, the universe as a whole, and so the fragment implies that the universe is supreme in perfection. We, on the other hand, are affected by these negative qualities, and it is for this reason that we are unable to produce anything perfect.

The fragment would fit well into a commentary on the *Timaeus*. The *Timaeus* (29A) describes the world as “the most beautiful of things that have become” (κάλλιστος τῶν γεγονότων) and the Demiurge as “the Best of causes” (ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων).²⁵ It maintains (30A) that “it was not, nor can it ever be, permitted that the Best should produce anything but that which is most beautiful” (θέμις δ’ οὐτ’ ἦν οὐτ’ ἔστιν τῷ ἀρίστῳ δρᾶν ἄλλο πλὴν τὸ κάλλιστον). Moreover, the *Timaeus* argues (29D-30A) that the Demiurge’s creative activity stems from the fact that He is good (ἀγαθός); it also specifically points out that the Demiurge lacks the quality that opposes goodness, i.e., “jealousy” (φθόνος):

Let us, then, state for what reason becoming and this universe were framed by Him who framed them. He was good; and in the good no jealousy in any matter can ever arise (ἀγαθός ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος). So, being without [jealousy], He desired that all things should come as near as possible to being like Himself. ... Desiring, then, that all things should be good and, so far as might be, nothing imperfect (βουληθεὶς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἀγαθὰ μὲν πάντα, φλαῦρον δὲ μηδὲν εἶναι κατὰ δύναμιν), the God took over all that is visible – not at rest, but in discordant and unordered motion – and brought it from disorder into order, since He judged that order was in every way the better.

The word “good” (ἀγαθός) was often translated into Arabic as *ḡawād*,²⁶ and the word “jealousy” (φθόνος) as *ḥasad* (literally, “envy”)²⁷ – precisely what we see in the

²⁵ Here and below, I follow Cornford’s translation of the *Timaeus* (slightly modified); see F.M. Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1997.

²⁶ Galeni *compendium Timaei Platonis aliorumque dialogorum synopsis quae extant fragmenta*, ed. P. Kraus - R. Walzer, Warburg Institute, London 1951, p. 5:9-10: والجواد لا حسد معه، والإنسب في خلق العالم جود الله تبارك وتعالى، والحواد لا حسد معه cf. G.J. Moseley, “*Plato Arabus*: On the Arabic Transmission of Plato’s Dialogues - Texts and Studies”, PhD diss., Yale University, 2017, p. 215. See also Aristoteles’ *De Anima: Eine verlorene spätantike Paraphrase in arabischer und persischer Überlieferung*: Arabischer Text nebst Kommentar, quellen-geschichtlichen Studien und Glossaren, ed. R. Arnzen, Brill, Leiden 1998 (Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus, 9), p. 693; Proclus, *On the Eternity of the World/De Aeternitate mundi*, ed. and trans. H.S. Lang - A.D. Mango - J. McGinnis, University of California Press, Berkeley 2001, pp. 153-163, esp. p. 160, n. 5; cf. E. Wakelnig, “The Other Arabic Version of Proclus’ *De Aeternitate mundi*: The Surviving First Eight Arguments”, *Oriens* 40 (2012), pp. 51-95, at p. 61, n. 22 and the text of the first argument, pp. 64-9 (because *ḡawād* and *ḡūd* render ἀγαθός and ἀγαθότης respectively, I prefer to translate them as “good” and “goodness” rather than “generous” and “generosity”).

²⁷ M. Ullmann, *Wörterbuch zu den griechisch-arabischen Übersetzungen des 9. Jahrhunderts*, Harrassowitz,

Arabic Porphyrian fragment cited above. Moreover, the *Timaeus* (92C) ends with the famous declaration that the world is (among other superlatives) “supreme in perfection” (τελεώτατος):

For having received in full its complement of living creatures, mortal and immortal, this world has thus become a visible living creature embracing all that are visible, an image of the intelligible, a perceptible god, supreme in greatness and excellence, in beauty and perfection, this heaven single in its kind and one (θνητὰ γὰρ καὶ ἀθάνατα ζῶα λαβὼν καὶ συμπληρωθεὶς ὅδε ὁ κόσμος οὕτω, ζῶον ὁρατὸν τὰ ὁρατὰ περιέχον, εἰκὼν τοῦ νοητοῦ θεοῦ αἰσθητός, μέγιστος καὶ ἄριστος κάλλιστός τε καὶ τελεώτατος γέγονεν εἷς οὐρανὸς ὅδε μονογενὴς ὢν).

It is precisely the world’s being “supreme in perfection” that the three qualities of the divine – goodness, power, and wisdom – are deployed to explain in the Arabic Porphyrian fragment.

The Arabic Porphyrian fragment also features a divine-human contrast: the First Cause is unaffected by ignorance, jealousy, and weakness and is therefore able to produce a perfect universe; we, on the other hand, are affected by these three passions and it is these passions that hinder us from producing perfect effects. We see a similar pattern in a Greek fragment from Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus* (fr. 51 Sodano), where Porphyry argues that the Demiurge creates without any tools, just in virtue of His own being (αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι):

Fourth and next is the section of [Porphyry’s] arguments in which he shows that divine Intellect (τὸν θεὸν νοῦν) practises a mode of creation [which is performed] just by being (αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι) and establishes [this] by several [arguments]. Even artisans [he says] need tools for their activity [only] because they do not have mastery over all [their] material (διὰ τὸ μὴ πάσης κρατεῖν τῆς ὕλης). They show this themselves by using these tools to get [their] material ready for use (πρὸς τὸ εὐεργὸν ποιῆσαι τὴν ὕλην) by drilling, planing, or turning it, all of which [operations] do not impart form, but [merely] eliminate the unreadiness of the [material which is] to receive the form. The actual conformation (λόγος) [of the work], on the other hand, supervenes (παραγίνεται) upon the substrate (τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ) instantaneously (ἄχρονως) from the art (ἀπὸ τῆς τέχνης) once all the inhibiting factors have been removed (πάντων ἐξαίρεθέντων τῶν ἐμποδίων). And if there were no inhibiting factor in the case of [artisans] either (καὶ εἰ μὴδεν ἦν καὶ τοῦτοις ἐμπόδιον), they [too] would add the form to the matter all at once (ἁθρόως) and would have absolutely no need of tools.²⁸

Here we see a very similar divine-human contrast: the Demiurge has complete control over matter (in fact, as Porphyry argues in a later section of fr. 51, the Demiurge does not

Wiesbaden 2002 [=vol. I]; Supplement Band I: A-O, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2006 [=vol. S-I]; Supplement Band II: Π-Ω [=vol. S-II], Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2007, vol. I, p. 730 (s.v. φθονέω and φθόνος); vol. S-II, p. 601 (s.v. φθονερός and φθόνος).

²⁸ Porph., *In Tim.*, fr. 51, p. 39.4-14 Sodano = Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*, 3 vols., ed. E. Diehl, Teubner, Leipzig 1903-1906, vol. I, p. 395:10-22. English translation from: Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, 5 vols., trans. H. Tarrant - D.T. Runia - M. Share - D. Baltzly, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2006-2013, vol. II, p. 269 (slightly modified). On causality “just by being” (αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι), see C. D’Ancona, “Plotinus and Later Platonic Philosophers on the Causality of the First Principle”, in L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 1996, pp. 356-85; cf. Mandolino, *Yahyā ibn ‘Adī* (above, n. 6), pp. 304-8.

even need any pre-existing matter for His creative activity);²⁹ this is why He is able to create instantaneously and without tools. Human artisans, on the other hand, do not have complete control over matter and are therefore in need of both time and tools to remove the material substrate's imperfections. Significantly, the Greek fr. 51 speaks of "inhibiting factor(s)" (τὰ ἐμποδῶν, ἐμπόδιον) relative to human artisans – evidently, in reference to the material substrate's unpreparedness to receive the form and to the human artisans' inability to exercise full control over their materials. This language is quite similar to the Arabic Porphyrian fragment, where the three passions (ignorance, jealousy, and weakness) are said to "hinder" (various forms of the verb *ʿāqa* are used) human beings from producing perfect effects. The parallelism is rather striking.

In view of the above discussion, it seems quite likely, first, that the Arabic Porphyrian fragment discussed herein is authentic and, second, that it originates from Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus*.

However, one significant difficulty remains. If the source of the Arabic Porphyrian fragment is indeed Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus*, it seems reasonable to assume that the fragment, as penned by Porphyry, referred to the Platonic Demiurge and that, consequently, the triad "Goodness-Power-Wisdom" characterized the creative activity of the Demiurge. Given that the Neoplatonic tradition identified the Demiurge with the Intellect – as indeed suggested by Porphyry's fr. 51 Sodano, which attributes creative activity to the "divine Intellect" (ὁ θεῖος νοῦς) – it is rather unlikely that Porphyry would have identified the Demiurge with the First Cause (i.e., the Neoplatonic One).³⁰ How can this be reconciled with the fact that the Arabic Porphyrian fragment attributes creative activity not to the Demiurge (i.e., the Intellect), but to the First Cause (*al-ʿilla al-ūlā* = ἡ πρώτη αἰτία)?

There are two possible solutions to this problem. The first solution would be to argue that Porphyry's views of the Neoplatonic hierarchy are complex, that they are characterized by a desire to harmonize diverse influences (Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus and the *Chaldean Oracles*), and that, as a result, they evince a tendency towards "telescoping" or "compressing" the Neoplatonic hierarchy.³¹ In the words of John Dillon, "Porphyry wishes, at least to some extent, to 'telescope' ... the first two Plotinian hypostases, by propounding the position that the One, in its 'positive' creative aspect, may be identified with the highest element of the intelligible realm, One-Being, or, in Chaldaean terms, the 'Father' of the triad of 'Father-Life (or Power)-Intellect'".³² It is this "telescoping" tendency that could perhaps account

²⁹ See discussion in Section 2.3 below.

³⁰ If anything, Porphyry was inclined to demote the Demiurge to the level of the Neoplatonic Soul (according to Proclus, frs. 41-43 Sodano), not to promote the Demiurge to the level of the One. See Porph., *In Tim.*, frs. 41-43, pp. 26-28 Sodano. That Porphyry, like his teacher Plotinus, postulated the One beyond the Intellect is clear, e.g., from Porphyry's *Sent.* 43: 'Ο νοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρχὴ πάντων· πολλὰ γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ νοῦς, πρὸ δὲ τῶν πολλῶν ἀνάγκη εἶναι τὸ ἓν ("Intellect is not the first principle of all things; for Intellect is many, and prior to the many there must be the One"); see J.M. Dillon, "Intellect and the One in Porphyry's *Sententiae*", *International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 4 (2010), pp. 27-35, at p. 34.

³¹ On Porphyry's role in harmonization of Plato and Aristotle, see G.E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, pp. 243-330.

³² Dillon, "Intellect and the One" (above, n. 30), p. 28 (with references to earlier publications); cf. J.M. Dillon, "Logos and Trinity: Patterns of Platonist Influence on Early Christianity", in J.M. Dillon,

for Porphyry’s inconsistency in identifying the Demiurge with different hypostases of the Neoplatonic hierarchy depending on the context. Moreover, the fact that Plato in the *Timaeus* spoke of the Demiurge as “the Maker and *Father* of this universe” (τὸν ... ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντός, 28C) would have made the identification of the Demiurge with the “Father” of the Chaldean triad – and consequently with “the One, in its ‘positive’ creative aspect” – quite natural.³³

An alternative solution would be to argue that in the original Greek, as penned by Porphyry, the fragment indeed explicitly referred to the Demiurge (i.e., the Intellect). However, at some point during its transmission (in Greek or Arabic) or, alternatively, in the process of translation from Greek into Arabic, creative activity, and with it the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom”, was reattributed to the First Cause, understood simply as the theistic God. On this explanation, the fact that the Arabic Porphyrian fragment attributes creative activity to the First Cause rather than the Demiurge (i.e., the Intellect) does not cast doubt on its authenticity or on its likely attribution to Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*. We just have to assume that the fragment underwent editing along the way (whether in Greek or in Arabic) to bring it into line with the theistic worldview.³⁴

The Great Tradition: Further Studies in the Development of Platonism and Early Christianity, Ashgate Variorum, Aldershot 1997, Essay VIII, pp. 1-13, at pp. 9-10: “For Porphyry (we are told by Damascius), the First Principle is the Father of the intelligible triad [i.e., the triad Being-Life-Intellect from Plato’s *Sophist*, 248E equated with the triad Father-Power-Intellect from the *Chaldean Oracles*]. ... [T]he Father, while maintaining his ‘incomparable superiority’ [i.e., transcendence], also presides over a triad made up of Potency or Life, and Activity (*energeia*) or Intellect”. On this subject, see also S. Strange, “Porphyry and Plotinus’ Metaphysics”, in G. Karamanolis - A. Sheppard (eds.), *Studies on Porphyry*, Institute of Classical Studies, London 2007, pp. 17-34. On Porphyry “telescoping” the Neoplatonic hierarchy, see also A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1990, p. 136: “Porphyry ... seems to me to come close to regarding the embodied soul as Intellect/Being seen through ‘a screen of imagery’. His refusal adequately to distinguish these two hypostases was a regular complaint of his successors. Certainly like any Neoplatonist he described an hypostasis as brought into existence by a higher one or, from another point of view, as self-created. But this is consistent with his having believed that this existence depended also on a dim sight or confused thought of the higher one, so that in a true light the hypostases would contract like a concertina into one”; cf. A.C. Lloyd, “Porphyry and Iamblichus”, in A.H. Armstrong (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 1967, pp. 283-301, at pp. 287-93.

³³ It should also be recalled that many Neoplatonist authors use “theistic” language; in doing so, they deploy the term “the God” (ὁ θεός) quite fluidly to refer to any hypostasis of the Neoplatonic hierarchy or to all of them combined. The following words of Koenraad Verrycken about the late Neoplatonist commentator Ammonius Hermiae seem to apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to Porphyry as well: “[T]he use of the term *ho theos* is perfectly compatible with a distinction between the divine Intellect (*Nous*) and ‘the very first principle (*hê prôtistê arkhê*)’. This ambiguity makes it possible to indicate, by the single term *ho theos*, either the highest principle alone or the Demiurge, or ... both together. Now, this possibility of either unfolding or telescoping, as it were, the concept of God according to the needs of the context, seems to be one of the basic features of Ammonius’ metaphysics”. See K. Verrycken, “The Metaphysics of Ammonius Son of Hermias”, in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, Bloomsbury, London 2016, pp. 215-50, at p. 226.

³⁴ I gratefully acknowledge Cristina D’Ancona’s insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article, in which she brought this possibility to my attention.

2. Transmission History

We now have to address the thorny question of this Arabic fragment's transmission from Greek into Arabic – from Porphyry to al-Mu'taman ibn al-ʿAssāl. There are four aspects to this question that need to be considered:

- First, is it possible to identify the translator?
- Second, was the fragment transmitted as part of a complete or partial Arabic translation of Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus* (primary transmission) or via a quotation from Porphyry in another, later Greek work that was translated into Arabic (secondary transmission)?
- Third, how did the fragment circulate in Arabic?
- Fourth, how did it eventually reach al-Mu'taman ibn al-ʿAssāl?

I shall now discuss these four questions in order.

2.1. The Translator

It is obviously quite challenging to identify the translator when one has only a very short Arabic fragment to go on, and, moreover, without the underlying Greek. Nonetheless, I believe there are good reasons to think that the translator was Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn (d. 910), who translated into Arabic an entire library of philosophical works: Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione* (both from Ḥunayn's Syriac versions), Aristotle's *Physics*, several books of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (of which Book α and fragments of other books are preserved), Themistius' *Commentary on Metaphysics A* (the translation was possibly revised by Ṭābit ibn Qurra), Aristotle's *De Anima* (fragmentarily preserved; Hebrew and Latin translations from the Arabic are extant) with the commentary of Themistius (extant in full), the first four books of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Theophrastus' *On First Principles*, Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Intellect and On Vision according to Aristotle*, Proclus' *De Aeternitate mundi* (the first nine arguments only), Nemesius of Emesa's *De Natura hominis*, and others.³⁵ There are several clues that point in this direction.

Our first and most significant clue is the term *ʿawāriḍ* (sg. *ʿāriḍ*). While one's initial inclination would be to interpret this term as a reflection of the Greek *συμβεβηκότα*,

³⁵ Recent studies of Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn's translations and translation technique include: Theophrastus, *On First Principles (Known as His Metaphysics): Greek Text and Medieval Arabic Translation*, ed. D. Gutas, Brill, Leiden 2010 (Philosophia Antiqua, 119); M. Ullmann, *Die Nikomachische Ethik des Aristoteles in arabischer Übersetzung*, 2 vols., Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2011–2012 (as convincingly shown by Ullmann, only Books I–IV of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, up to 1128b, were translated by Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn); Aristotle, *Physics VIII, Translated into Arabic by Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn* (9th c.), ed. R. Arnzen with P.S. Hasper, De Gruyter, Berlin 2021 (Scientia graeco-arabica, 30); Themistius, *Paraphrase of Aristotle's Metaphysics 12: A Critical Hebrew-Arabic Edition of the Surviving Textual Evidence, with an Introduction, Preliminary Studies, and a Commentary*, ed. Y. Meyrav, Brill, Leiden 2019 (*Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus*, 25); K. Eksell, "Pragmatic Markers from Greek into Arabic: A Case Study on Translations of Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn", *Studia graeco-arabica* 5 (2015), pp. 321–44; A. Treiger, "Reconstructing Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn's Arabic Translation of Aristotle's *De anima*", *Studia graeco-arabica* 7 (2017), pp. 193–211; P. Starr, "Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn's Version of Περὶ φύσεως ἀνθρώπου: A 'Balance of Alternatives' in Translating εἰσροῦ", in Ž. Paša (ed.), *Between the Cross and the Crescent: Studies in Honor of Samir Khalil Samir, S.J. on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma 2018, pp. 659–67.

“accidents”, I believe this would be a mistake: the context of the passage is decidedly non-Aristotelian, and such an Aristotelian term as *συμβεβηκότα* would, therefore, be uncalled for.³⁶ A search in the database “Glossarium Græco-Arabicum” indicates that the term *‘awāriḍ* can also translate the Greek *πάθη*, “passions” – a term that makes perfect sense in the context of the Arabic Porphyrian fragment.³⁷ The notion that the divine is *ἀπαθής* (“impassible”) is a commonplace of late antique Platonism; Porphyry himself insists on the gods’ impassibility in his *Letter to Anebo* (extant only in fragments).³⁸

It should now be pointed out that the translation of *πάθη* (and of the related term *παθήματα*) as *‘awāriḍ* is characteristic of only one translator: Ishāq ibn Hunayn (though it should be noted that he also uses alternative translations for *πάθη*, notably *infi‘ālāt*).³⁹ Here are some typical examples from his translations:

(1) Aristotle, *Categories*, 9 b 4-15/Arabic p. 341.7-8 Georr⁴⁰

ὥστε καὶ εἴ τις φύσει τῶν τοιούτων τι *παθῶν* πέπονθεν

إن كان أيضاً إنسان قد ناله بالطبع بعض هذه الانفعالات من عوارض ما طبيعية.

(Note that here Ishāq uses both *infi‘ālāt* and *‘awāriḍ* to translate *πάθη*).

(2) Aristotle, *Physics*, IV.12, 221 a 11-13/Arabic I, p. 449.1-3 Badawī⁴¹

τοῦτο δὲ σημαίνει ἥτοι ὡς μέρος ἀριθμοῦ καὶ *πάθος*, καὶ ὅλως ὅτι τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τι, ἥ ὅτι ἔστιν αὐτοῦ ἀριθμός

وهذا القول يدلّ إمّا على ما هو كاجزاء للعدد والعارض له، وبالجمله على شيءٍ ما منسوب إلى العدد.

(3) Aristotle, *Physics*, IV.14, 223 a 18-19/Arabic I, p. 472.17 Badawī

κινήσεως τι *πάθος* ἢ ἕξις

عارضٌ ما للحركة أو هيئة لها

³⁶ To be clear: I am not, of course, arguing that Porphyry would not use the term *συμβεβηκότα* (“accidents”); quite the contrary, “accident” is one of the famous *πέντε φωναί* (five predicables) of Porphyry’s *Isagoge* (alongside *genus*, *species*, *differentia*, and *proprium*). All I am saying is that *συμβεβηκότα* would not fit the context of this specific passage.

³⁷ “Glossarium Græco-Arabicum”, <https://glossga.bbaw.de> (retrieved 2025-07-08), s.v. *‘ariḍ*.

³⁸ Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo*, fr. 1; see A.R. Sodano, *Porfirio, Lettera ad Anebo*, L’Arte tipografica, Napoli 1958, pp. 4.11-5.3. For an English translation, see A.P. Johnson, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre: The Limits of Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2013, p. 138. On the textual tradition of the *Letter to Anebo* (preserved in fragments by Iamblichus, Eusebius, and Augustine), see the introductions to Henri Dominique Saffrey and Alain-Philippe Segonds’ critical editions of Porphyry’s *Letter to Anebo* and Iamblichus’ *De mysteriis*: Porphyre de Tyr, *Lettre à Anébon l’Egyptien*, ed. and trans. H.D. Saffrey - A.-P. Segonds, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2012; Jamblique, *Réponse à Porphyre (De mysteriis)*, ed. and trans. H.D. Saffrey - A.-P. Segonds, with A. Lecerf, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2013.

³⁹ A search for *παθ** in the database “Glossarium Græco-Arabicum” produces 126 results; of these, only six translate the underlying Greek term (*πάθος* in four cases and *παθήματα* in two cases) as *‘ariḍ*. It is extremely significant that all these six results come from Ishāq ibn Hunayn’s translations.

⁴⁰ *Les Catégories d’Aristote dans leurs versions syro-arabes*, ed. K. Georr, L’imprimerie catholique, Beirut 1948.

⁴¹ *Aristūṭālīs, al-Ṭabī‘a, tarġamat Ishāq ibn Hunayn*, 2 vols., ed. ‘A. Badawī, al-Dār al-qawmiyya li-l-ṭibā‘a wa-l-naṣr, Cairo 1964.

(4) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.5, 1105 b 19-22, 28-30/Arabic pp. 167.12-14, 167.20-169.1 Akasoy & Fidora⁴²

ἐπεὶ οὖν τὰ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γινόμενα τρία ἐστί, **πάθη** δυνάμεις ἔξεις, τούτων ἅν τι εἴη ἡ ἀρετή. λέγω δὲ **πάθη** μὲν ἐπιθυμίαν ὀργήν [...] **πάθη** μὲν οὖν οὐκ εἰσὶν οὕθ' αἱ ἀρεταὶ οὕθ' αἱ κακίαι, ὅτι οὐ λεγόμεθα κατὰ τὰ **πάθη** σπουδαῖοι ἢ φαῦλοι

إذا كانت الأشياء التي تحدث في النفس ثلاثة – عوارض وقوى وحالات – فليت شعري أيما من هذه هي الفضيلة، وأعني بالعوارض الشهوة والغضب [...] فليست الفضائل والخسائس عوارض لأننا ليس يقال فينا بالعوارض إننا من أهل الفضيلة أو من أهل الخسائس

(5) Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Vision according to Aristotle*, Greek I, p. 144.7-9 Bruns/Arabic p. 153.13-14 Gätje⁴³

ἐστὶ γὰρ πλείω σώματα διαφέροντα κατ' εἶδος ἀλλήλων κοινόν τι τὸ τῆς διαφανείας **πάθος** ἔχοντα

وذلك أنّ هاهنا أجسام كثيرة مختلفة بالنوع فيها عارض الاستشفاف مشترك

(6) Themistius, *In De Anima*, Greek p. 107.14-15 Heinze/Arabic pp. 194.20-195.1 Lyons⁴⁴

ἐν ἀνθρώποις δὲ οὕτως ἄρα καὶ τὰ **πάθη** μέτοχα λόγου

وليس الأمر في الناس كذلك لكنّ عوارض النفس منهم أيضاً مشاركة للنطق

The Arabic Porphyrian fragment also calls passions *a'rād* (sg. *'arad*). This translation, too, occasionally appears in Ishāq's œuvre, though not as frequently as *'awārid* or *infi'ālāt*; nor is the translation *a'rād* (unlike *'awārid*) unique to Ishāq. Here is one example from Ishāq's translation of Aristotle's *Physics*:

(7) Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII.1, 251 b 27-28/Arabic II, p. 811.10-11 Badawī = p. 10.8 Arnzen

εἴπερ ὁ χρόνος **πάθος** τι κινήσεως

إذ كان الزمان إنما هو عرضٌ مّا من أعراض الحركة

The second clue is the translation of the Greek ἐμποδ- with the Arabic verb *'āqa* (rather than, for example, *mana'a*). It appears only once in Manfred Ullmann's *Wörterbuch zu den griechisch-arabischen Übersetzungen des 9. Jahrhunderts*. Ullmann indicates that the expression *lā 'awā'iqā labu* translates ἀνεμποδιστος in Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn's version of Nemesius' *De Natura hominis*.⁴⁵ Here is the relevant passage:

⁴² A.A. Akasoy - A. Fidora (eds.), D.M. Dunlop (trans.), *The Arabic Version of the Nicomachean Ethics*, Brill, Leiden 2005. For more examples from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see Ullmann, *Die Nikomachische Ethik* (above, n. 35), vol. 1, p. 233; vol. 2, p. 26.

⁴³ Alexandri Aphrodisiensis *Praeter commentaria scripta minora*, ed. I. Bruns, 2 vols., Reimer, Berlin 1892 (Suppl. Aristotelicum, II.2); H. Gätje, *Studien zur Überlieferung der aristotelischen Psychologie im Islam*, Carl Winter, Heidelberg 1971, pp. 140-172.

⁴⁴ Themistii *In libros Aristotelis De Anima paraphrasis*, ed. R. Heinze, Reimer, Berlin 1889 (CAG V.3); M.C. Lyons (ed.), *An Arabic Translation of Themistius['] Commentary on Aristoteles' De Anima*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia 1973.

⁴⁵ Ullmann, *Wörterbuch* (above, n. 27), vol. II, p. 887.

(8) Nemesius, *De Natura hominis*, ch. 17, p. 226.108-117, pp. 227.8-10 Matthaei = ch. 18, p. 79.8-14 Morani/Arabic p. 146 Haji-Athanasiou⁴⁶

ὁθεν Ἀριστοτέλης αὐτὴν ὀρίζειται ἐνέργειαν τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἔξεως **ἀνεμπόδιστον**. τὰ γὰρ **ἐμπόδια** τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἐνεργείας, λύπη· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ εὐδαιμονία, ἐνέργειά ἐστιν **ἀνεμπόδιστος** τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἔξεως· συμβαίνει δὴ κατὰ τὸν ὅρον τοῦτον τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν ἡδονὴν εἶναι, καὶ διεσφάλλαι τὸν ὅρον· διορθούμενος οὖν ὠρίσατο τὴν ἡδονὴν τέλος εἶναι τῶν τοῦ ζώου κατὰ φύσιν **ἀνεμπόδιστων** ἐνεργειῶν, ὡς συμπεπλέχθαι καὶ συνυπάρχειν τῇ εὐδαιμονίᾳ τὴν ἡδονήν, ἀλλ' οὐχ ἡδονὴν εἶναι τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν.

وذلك حدّها أر<س>طاطالس فقال إنّها فعل لا عائق فيه للهيئة الطبيعية، >وذلك أنّ العائق للفعل هو الأذى ولكن السعادة أيضاً هي فعل لا عائق فيه للهيئة الطبيعية>،⁴⁷ فيلزم بحسب هذا الحد أن تكون السعادة لذّة فيدخل هذا الحدّ الخلل، ولما أصلح أرسطاطالس هذا الحدّ واستوفاه، حدّ اللذّة فقال إنّ اللذّة هي غاية أفعال الحيّ الطبيعية التي لا عائق فيها حتّى تكون اللذّة مقرونة⁴⁸ بالسعادة موجودة مع وجودها ولا تكون السعادة لذّة.

Other similar examples from the Arabic Nemesius can be given.⁴⁹ The same ἐμποδ- ~ 'āqa correspondence is also attested in Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn's other translations, for instance that of Aristotle's *Physics*. The following examples will suffice:⁵⁰

(9) Aristotle, *Physics*, IV.8, 215 a 21-22/Arabic I, p. 363.9 Badawī

ἐὰν μή τι **ἐμποδίσῃ** κρεῖττον

ما لم يعقّه عن ذلك عائق أقهر منه

(10) Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII.4, 255 b 7/Arabic p. 35.6 Arnzen (cf. II, p. 840.5 Badawī)

ἐὰν μή τι κωλύῃ καὶ **ἐμποδίζῃ**

ما لم يمنعه مانع أو يعقّه عائق

(Note that here as well as in the following example, Ishāq differentiates √mn' and √wq: the former is used to translate κωλύω, the latter to translate ἐμποδίζω).

(11) Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII.4, 256 a 2/Arabic II, p. 844.10 Badawī = p. 38.4 Arnzen

ἢ ὑπὸ τοῦ τὰ **ἐμποδίζοντα** καὶ κωλύοντα λύσαντος

أو عن المزيل للعوائق والموانع

⁴⁶ Nemesius Emesenus, *De Natura hominis graece et latine*, ed. C.F. Matthaei, J. J. Gebauer, Halle 1802; Nemesii Emeseni *De Natura hominis*, ed. M. Morani, Teubner, Leipzig 1987; M. Haji-Athanasiou, "Le Traité de Némésios d'Emèse *De Natura hominis* dans la tradition arabe", PhD diss., Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1982.

⁴⁷ Omitted in the *manuscrit de base* due to homoioteleuton; supplied from the apparatus.

⁴⁸ معروفّة in the *manuscrit de base*; the correct reading مقرونة (~συμπεπλέχθαι) is supplied from the apparatus.

⁴⁹ E.g., Nem., *De Nat. Hom.*, ch. 2, line 298, p. 92.1 Matthaei = p. 26.1 Morani ἐμποδίζει ~ p. 53.13 Haji-Athanasiou عاقها (read so).

⁵⁰ For more references, see Arist., *Physics* VIII (Arabic), pp. 144 and 226 Arnzen.

The third clue is the translation of φθόνος as *ḥasad* (rather than, for example, *buhl*).⁵¹ It appears, e.g., in Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn's translation of the first four books of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*:

(12) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.5, 1105 b 21-23/Arabic p. 167.14-15 Akasoy–Fidora
λέγω δὲ πάθη μὲν ἐπιθυμίαν ὀργὴν φόβον θάροςος **φθόνον** χαρὰν φιλίαν μῖσος πόθον ζῆλον ἔλεον
وأعني بالعوارض الشهوة والغضب والخوف والجرأة والحسد والسرور والمحبة والبغضاء والشوق
والغيرة والرحمة

(13) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.7, 1108 a 35-b1/Arabic p. 181.6-7 Akasoy–Fidora
νέμεσις δὲ μεσότης **φθόνου** καὶ ἐπιχειρεκακίας

وهاهنا حال متوسّطة بين الحسد والشماتة يقال لها باليونانية [...]

Admittedly, the φθόνος ~ *ḥasad* correspondence is rather common in Graeco-Arabic translation literature and thus does little to point specifically to Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn; nonetheless, it has some corroborating force.

Finally, the Arabic Porphyrian fragment has the interesting expression *ihkām al-ṣanʿa* (translated above as “perfecting [His] work”). I have found one case where Ishāq uses the related participle *muhkam* (“perfect, masterful, well-crafted”) to translate the adverb καλῶς (“well, beautifully”). It appears in Ishāq's translation of Proclus' *De Aeternitate mundi*:

(14) Proclus, *De Aeternitate mundi*, 6th argument, *apud* Philoponus, *Contra Proclum*, p. 120.1-2 Rabe/Arabic p. 39.12-13 Badawī⁵²
διότι τὸ καλῶς ἀρμολογεῖν λύνειν ἐθέλειν κακοῦ

لأنّ المؤلف تأليفاً مُحْكَمًا فليس ينقضه إلّا شرير

If the term *ihkām* in the Arabic Porphyrian fragment also renders some derivative from the same root as καλῶς, we can wonder if *ihkām al-ṣanʿa* could perhaps reflect the expression δρᾶν ... τὸ κάλλιστον in *Timaeus* 30A. If true (obviously, more information on the use of *ihkām* in Ishāq's translations is needed to substantiate this claim), this would further strengthen the theory developed herein that this fragment originates from Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus*.

⁵¹ On the translation of φθόνος as *buhl* (not attested in the database “Glossarium Græco-Arabicum” or in R. Arnzen - G. Endress - D. Gutas - G.J. Moseley, *A Greek and Arabic Lexicon (GALex): Materials for a Dictionary of the Mediaeval Translations from Greek into Arabic*, Brill, Leiden 2020²- [in progress], vol. 2, p. 82, s.v. *buhl*), see Ullmann, *Wörterbuch* (above, n. 27), vol. S-II, p. 601 (s.v. οὐδεὶς φθόνος [sc. ἐστὶ]). See also Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *Commentary on the Isagoge* and the apocryphal Aristotle's *Letters to Alexander* (both texts are cited in Wakelnig, “What Does Aristotle” [above, n. 6], p. 456, n. 38 and p. 466, n. 83, respectively), and a passage in the *Longer Theology of Aristotle* (Treiger, “The Longer Theology of Aristotle, Book X.6-13” (above, n. 11), p. 888). In the citation from Galen's *Synopsis of Plato's Timaeus* in n. 26 above both *ḥasad* and *buhl* are used. It is also significant that al-Gazālī uses *buhl* in contexts that hearken back to the Demiurge's lack of φθόνος in *Timaeus* 29e – see E.L. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over al-Ghazālī's “Best of All Possible Worlds”*, Princeton U.P., Princeton 1984, pp. 62 and 83; A. Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation*, Routledge, London 2012, pp. 79-80.

⁵² Ioannes Philoponus, *De Aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, ed. H. Rabe, Teubner, Leipzig 1899; ‘A. Badawī (ed.), *al-Aflātūniyya al-muhdatta ‘ind al-‘arab*, Wikālat al-maṭbū‘āt, Kuwait 1977, pp. 34-42.

None of these clues would be decisive on its own; yet their combination is sufficient to build a case if not for certainty, then at least for strong likelihood, that the translator of this Porphyrian passage into Arabic was none other than Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn.

2.2. Primary or Secondary Transmission?

Was there an Arabic translation, whether complete or partial, of Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*? This is certainly possible.

In his *al-Milal wa-l-nihāl*, the twelfth-century Muslim heresiographer al-Šahrastānī cites a passage that he claims comes from Porphyry’s *Risāla ilā Anābū* (*Letter to Anebo*), which scholars have convincingly argued has nothing to do with the real *Letter to Anebo* and originates instead from Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*.⁵³ This implies that in the Arabic tradition, Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus* was either mixed up with, or circulated under the name of, *Risāla ilā Anābū*.⁵⁴

This is corroborated by the only other known Arabic fragment from Porphyry’s *Risāla ilā Anābū*; this fragment was discovered by the late David C. Reisman but was never published.⁵⁵ It appears in the tenth-century Neoplatonist philosopher al-Isfīzārī’s still unedited *Risāla fī ḥadaṭ al-‘ālam* (Istanbul, Ragıp Paşa 1463, fol. 56r; emendations are indicated by an asterisk):

⁵³ A.R. Sodano, “Una citazione apocrifia dalla ‘Lettera ad Anebo’ di Porfirio nel ‘Kitāb al-Milal wa-nihāl’ di Muḥammad aš-Šahrastānī”, *Rendiconti della Accademia di archeologia, lettere e belle arti* N.S. 35 (1960), pp. 35-56; Porphyrii in *Platonis Timaeum* pp. XV-XVI and 119-22 (includes an Italian translation of the passage); J. Jolivet - G. Monnot (trans.), *Shahrastani, Livre des religions et des sectes*, 2 vols., Peeters, Leuven 1986-1993, vol. 2, pp. 357-9 and notes thereto (for the Arabic original, see al-Šahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa-l-nihāl*, ed. ‘A.‘A. Muḥannā - ‘A.Ḥ. Fā‘ūr, Dār al-ma‘rifa, Beirut 1993, vol. 2, pp. 484-5); K. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2009, pp. 95-100, esp. p. 99 (it is, however, misleading to argue that al-Šahrastānī’s “Arabic citation is actually entirely the same as one of the surviving fragments of Porphyry’s *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*”; in reality, Sodano included an Italian translation of al-Šahrastānī’s passage in his collection of fragments from Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*, there being no other surviving fragment to which al-Šahrastānī’s passage is identical). It may be added here that the Andalusian Jewish scholar Šēm Ṭōḥ Ibn Falaquera cites a section of the same passage in a Hebrew translation in his commentary on Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* – see Šēm Ṭōḥ Ibn Falaquera, *Môreḥ ha-mmôreh*, ed. Y. Shifman, hā-Iggûḏ hā-‘ôlāmî lō-maddā‘ē ha-yyahādûṭ, Jerusalem 2001, pp. 258.58-259.62.

⁵⁴ Here and below, I deliberately keep the Arabic form of the title to differentiate it from Porphyry’s real *Letter to Anebo*.

⁵⁵ See P. Adamson, “Porphyrius Arabus on Nature and Art: 463F Smith in Context”, in G. Karamanolis - A. Sheppard (eds.), *Studies on Porphyry, Institute of Classical Studies*, London 2007, pp. 141-63, at p. 143, n. 8: “David Reisman informs me that there is a fragment of this work [Porphyry’s *Letter to Anebo*] to be found in the writings of the 10th century Neoplatonist al-Isfīzārī, who possibly knew it through [Abū Bakr] al-Rāzī”. Following Adamson’s lead, I went over all the writings of al-Isfīzārī and was finally able to locate the fragment in al-Isfīzārī’s unpublished *Risāla fī ḥadaṭ al-‘ālam* (Istanbul, Ragıp Paşa 1463, ff. 54v-57r, at f. 56r, accessible at: <https://portal.yek.gov.tr/works/detail/2069> (retrieved 2025-07-08); I thank Elvira Wake-linig for directing me to the portal of Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, through which I was able to consult this manuscript). On this famous philosophical manuscript, see M.C. Kaya, “‘Sadaqa the Copyist’: A Hanbalite Scribe of MS Süleymaniye Library, Ragıp Paşa 1463”, *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* 68 (2019-2022), pp. 301-16.

وقال فرفوريس⁵⁶ في رسالته إلى أنابوا إن هذه الأشياء المتفاوتة في العالم واقعة⁵⁷ بالعرض، فمتى رفعنا العرضية عن العالم بالوهم بقيت الأشياء الطبيعية الجوهرية لا يشوبها خبث ولا تفاوت، وأيضاً فإن وجود الطبيعة في الأشياء بالفعل إنما يكون من ابتداء تحرك الأشياء إلى وقت كمالها، ثم لا يكون لها بعد ذلك وجود بالفعل، لكن بالقوة.

Porphry said in his *Risāla ilā Anābū*: These disparate things in the world happen by accident,⁵⁸ so if we were, notionally (*bi-l-wahm*),⁵⁹ to remove accidentality from the world,⁶⁰ the physical, substantial things would remain unaffected by either malice or disparity. Further,⁶¹ the presence of nature in things in actuality only takes hold from the beginning of the things' motion until such time as they reach perfection; after that, [nature] no longer has presence in actuality but [only] in potentiality.

Though attributed to *Risāla ilā Anābū*, this Porphyrian passage, like the one cited by al-Šahrastānī in *al-Milal wa-l-nihāl*, has nothing to do with Porphyry's real *Letter to Anebo*. It would certainly be more at home in Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus* (or in some other Porphyrian work dealing with physics or metaphysics). Significantly, immediately following this Porphyrian quotation, al-Isfizarī cites Plato's *Timaeus* (38B: χρόνος δ' οὖν μετ' οὐρανοῦ γέγονεν, ἔνα ἄμα γεννηθέντες ἄμα καὶ λυθῶσιν) – a further sign of the connection of the *Risāla ilā Anābū* to the *Timaeus*:

وقال أفلاطن إن السماء والزمان خلقا معاً ويفسدان معاً.

Plato said that heaven and time were created together and will disintegrate together.⁶²

Relatedly, it should be recalled that the tenth-century Muslim historian al-Mas'ūdī has an interesting account of, as he puts it, “questions and answers on metaphysical sciences (*al-masā'il wa-l-ğawābāt fī l-'ulūm al-ilāhiyya*) that took place between Porphyry of Tyre, ...

⁵⁶ MS. قرقورس] my emendation فرفوريس.

⁵⁷ MS. واقعة] my emendation واقعة.

⁵⁸ Here, there is no doubt that *bi-l-'araḍ* means “by accident” (κατὰ συμβεβηκός).

⁵⁹ *bi-l-wahm* most likely translates κατ' ἐπίνοιαν. This expression is used in a similar way in al-Isfizarī: D. Gimaret, “Un traité théologique du philosophe musulman Abū Hāmid al-Isfizarī (IV^e-X^e s.)”, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 50.1 (1984), pp. 209-52, at pp. 234.5, 234.17, 237.22, 249.13, 249.15.

⁶⁰ The clause “if we were ... to remove accidentality from the world” probably reflects the Greek genitive absolute. Moreover, the first-person plural (“we”) may be a passive-active transposition (on such transpositions in Ishāq ibn Hunayn's translations, see Ullmann, *Die Nikomachische Ethik* (above, n. 35), vol. 2, p. 282, §7); thus, the Greek could have had a passive participle (probably something like ἐξαίρεθέντος ... τοῦ συμβεβηκέναι or ἐξαίρεθέντων ... τῶν συμβεβηκότων).

⁶¹ On the expression *wa-aydan fa-inna*, see Ullmann, *Die Nikomachische Ethik* (above, n. 35), vol. 2, pp. 328-9, §118.

⁶² This Platonic saying is alluded to by Proclus in *De Aeternitate mundi*, argument 5; see Proclus, *On the Eternity of the World/De Aeternitate mundi*, pp. 56-57 Lang - Mango - McGinnis. It is also invoked by Philoponus at the end of the second section of the Arabic epitome *De Contingentia mundi*; see G. Troupeau, “Un Épitomé arabe du *De contingentia mundi* de Jean Philopon”, in E. Lucchesi - H.-D. Saffrey (eds.), *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière: Antiquité païenne et chrétienne*, P. Cramer, Geneva 1984, pp. 77-88 (reprinted in: G. Troupeau, *Études sur le christianisme arabe au Moyen Âge*, Variorum, Aldershot 1995, Essay V), at p. 81.21 and p. 86; cf. S. Pines, “An Arabic Summary of a Lost Work of John Philoponus”, *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972), pp. 320-52, at p. 329.

[who supported] the doctrines of the Greek Ṣābiʿans [= Pagans] ..., and the Egyptian priest Anebo, who supported the first philosophy of Pythagoras, Thales the Milesian, and others, this being the doctrine of the Egyptian Ṣābiʿans [= Pagans]; this happened in letters (*rasāʾil*) between them, well known to specialists in the sciences of the ancients and their doctrines and sects”.⁶³ The fact that al-Masʿūdī mentions both “questions” and “answers” suggests that he was aware not only of Porphyry’s *Letter to Anebo*, but also of Iamblichus’ rejoinder to Porphyry, the *De Mysteriis*, which was written in response to Porphyry’s *Letter to Anebo* under the name of “Anebo’s” alleged teacher “Abammon” (both “Anebo” and “Abammon” being fictional personalities).⁶⁴

Al-Masʿūdī then goes on to mention the philosopher Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, who, he claims, wrote “a book in three parts (*maqālāt*)” in support of the Pythagoreans sometime after the year 310 AH (=922/3 AD). As suggested by Kevin van Bladel, this is most likely a reference to al-Rāzī’s own discussion (I would argue, refutation) of Porphyry’s “book to Anebo”;⁶⁵ it may have been al-Rāzī’s treatise that served as al-Masʿūdī’s source for the above information. Then, as noticed by van Bladel, al-Masʿūdī “for no apparent reason, begins to give information about the *Timaeus* of Plato and its Arabic translations and commentaries, and other works on the ordering of the world”. According to van Bladel, “One may suppose, then, that somehow Porphyry’s *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* became mixed up with or circulated together with his *Letter to Anebo*, and that this confusion must have happened by the time of al-Rāzī, so that when al-Masʿūdī used al-Rāzī’s work as a source on the Ṣābiʿians, he began also to include information about commentaries on the *Timaeus* because he associated the two with one another”.⁶⁶

In light of the above considerations, it would seem highly probable that the *Risāla ilā Anābū*, as it circulated in Arabic, included material from (not necessarily an integral translation of) the following sources: Porphyry’s authentic *Letter to Anebo* with Iamblichus’ responses and Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*.⁶⁷ This would explain why both al-Šahrastānī

⁶³ Al-Masʿūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-l-išrāf*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Brill, Leiden, 1894, p. 162.

⁶⁴ On Porphyry’s *Letter to Anebo* and Iamblichus’ *De Mysteriis*, see n. 38 above.

⁶⁵ P. Kraus (ed.), *Épître de Bērūnī contenant le répertoire des ouvrages de Muḥammad b. Zakarīyā ar-Rāzī*, Imprimerie Orientaliste au Calame, Paris 1936, p. 17, no. 128: نقض كتاب فرفوروس إلى أنابو المصري. Confusingly, Ibn al-Nadīm claims that Abū Bakr al-Rāzī authored a refutation of Anebo’s letter to Porphyry, rather than Porphyry’s letter to Anebo (Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a’s wording is identical to Ibn al-Nadīm’s; in al-Qifṭī, “refutation” [*naqd*] is corrupted into “commentary” [*tafsīr*]) – see Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm, Abul-Farağ Muḥammad ibn Ishāq Composed at 377 AH*, 4 vols., ed. A.F. Sayyid, al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, London 2009, ch. 7, vol. II.1, p. 309.16–17: كتاب في نقض كتاب أنابوا إلى فرفوروس في شرح مذاهب أرسطاطاليس في العلم الإلهي; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-aʿyibbāʾ*, 2 vols., ed. A. Müller, Cairo 1882, vol. 1, p. 317.9–10; Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Taʾrīḥ al-ḥukamāʾ*, ed. J. Lippert, Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig 1903, p. 274.11–12. On the conflicting versions of the title, see S. Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*, trans. M. Schwarz, ed. T. Langermann, Magnes, Jerusalem 1997, p. 100, n. 157; van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes* (above, n. 53), pp. 98–9. I follow al-Bīrūnī’s version of the title of this book for two reasons. First, because it is known independently that Abū Bakr al-Rāzī polemicized against Porphyry – see Adamson, “Porphyrius Arabus” (above, n. 55), pp. 146–51. Second, because if, as al-Masʿūdī claims, al-Rāzī wrote “in support of the Pythagoreans”, this would mean that he supported “Anebo” and refuted Porphyry, rather than the other way round.

⁶⁶ van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes* (above, n. 53), p. 99.

⁶⁷ It is noteworthy that according to Ibn al-Nadīm, Porphyry wrote “two books” (*kitābānī*) to Anebo. These “two books” could refer to Porphyry’s real *Letter to Anebo* with Iamblichus’ responses and to material from Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*, respectively. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ch. 7, vol. II.1, p. 175.12 Sayyid: كتابان له إلى أنابوا (reading *Anābū* for *Abānwā*).

and al-Isfizārī cite, under the title of *Risāla ilā Anābū*, material that seems to come from Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus* as well as the strange transition, in al-Mas'ūdī's account, from the Porphyry-Anebo correspondence to a discussion of Plato's *Timaeus*.

If, as just argued, the Arabic *Risāla ilā Anābū* contained some material from Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus*, this would mean that there was indeed an Arabic translation (more likely partial than complete) of this commentary. The Arabic Porphyrian fragment on the triad "Goodness-Power-Wisdom" preserved by al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl could therefore originate from that Arabic translation.

Alternatively, it is certainly possible that Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus* was cited in some (unknown) later Greek work (perhaps by Proclus, Philoponus, or Simplicius), which was then translated into Arabic. If it is via an Arabic translation of any such later Greek work that the Porphyrian fragment concerning the triad "Goodness-Power-Wisdom" entered the stream of Arabic literature, then it would be a question of secondary transmission. We can envision different scenarios of how this could have taken place. For example, Ishāq ibn Hunayn is credited with an Arabic version of Olympiodorus' *Commentary on the Sophist*. Though this work is lost in both Greek and Arabic, if such an Arabic translation existed (and there is no reason to doubt that it did), it is not out of the question that Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus* could have been cited there.⁶⁸ Another possibility is that Porphyry's fragment was transmitted into Arabic via a doxographical or gnomological source.⁶⁹ There is no question that these and similar scenarios are possible; however, in the absence of specific evidence for such secondary transmission, this would be unwarranted speculation.

2.3. Circulation in Arabic: al-Isfizārī

Given that al-Isfizārī cited the *Risāla ilā Anābū* – a text that, as argued above, may have contained material from Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus* – in his *Risāla fī ḥadaṭ al-'ālam*, is it possible that he used it (perhaps alongside other Porphyrian works) also in his main metaphysical treatise *Kitāb fī Masā'il al-umūr al-ilāhiyya*? Though in this treatise he never refers to Porphyry by name, I believe this is most likely the case.

In order to demonstrate this, we shall have to focus on *Question 20* of the treatise. Strikingly, *Question 20* is a kind of commentary on the triad "Goodness-Power-Wisdom", so there is a strong link here to the Arabic Porphyrian fragment preserved by al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl; moreover, al-Isfizārī's *Question 20* seems to harken back to Porphyry's discussion of the Demiurge's mode of creation in virtue of His own being (αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι) in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, fr. 51 Sodano.

At this point, I would like to offer a complete English translation of al-Isfizārī's *Question 20*, which has not yet been translated, to my knowledge, into any language.

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ch. 7, vol. II.1, p. 156.2-3 Sayyid: رأيت بخط يحيى بن عدي: سوفسطس ترجمة إسحاق، بتفسير الأمفيديورس.

⁶⁹ I am grateful to Cristina D'Ancona and Giovanni Mandolino for suggesting this possibility to me. For an up-to-date survey of Arabic doxographical and gnomological literature, see D. Gutas, "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 (Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 1 The Near and Middle East, 115.1), pp. 655-80.

Question 20: Why did God create the world and what is the cause that made [Him] do that?

[A] It is not possible that there should be an [external] cause which made God bring the world into being, for if [creation] had a cause outside the essence of the Creator, then He would not be the Prime Mover, and God would not be the Cause of causes. Rather, it is God's [own] (1) **plenteous goodness**, (2) **perfect wisdom**, and (3) **abundant power and overpowering divine force** (*sa'at ġūd Allāh wa-kamāl hikmatihī wa-faḍl qudratihī wa-ġalabat quwwatihī al-ilāhiyya*) that made it necessary [for Him] to create the world in its entirety.

[B] This is because **His goodness** makes it necessary [for Him] to bring existents into being, to fashion every species of animals and plants, and to equip them with devices, limbs, and faculties in the necessary quantity, at the necessary time, and in the necessary condition – just as we observe currently in the world.

[C] Similarly, **His wisdom** makes it necessary [for Him] to perfect⁷⁰ the affairs of the world, to produce⁷¹ every kind of what is therein, at the necessary time, in the necessary quantity, and in the necessary condition, and to preserve them [all] from corruption by various subtle [stratagems] of wisdom – just as we find world affairs and all the kinds of things therein to be arranged currently.

[D] He preserves some of them from corruption by continuous motion, like the [celestial] sphere and the heavenly bodies; others He preserves through alteration, like the elements; others He preserves through procreation, like plants and animals. This is because heavenly bodies have permanence in virtue of their continuous motion and their subtle matter. The elements, on the other hand, are constituted from matter which is weak in its nature; this is why they are unable to remain permanently in the same state or to retain one [and the same] species; therefore, they need rest [which they get] when they alternate from some opposites into others. As for the bodies of animals and plants, they consist of opposites and cannot remain in the same state even for a single instant, for necessity plunges them into dissolution and death. This is why God preserves all the species of earthly animals and plants from corruption by means of their individual members' procreation, just as He preserves the elements by means of alteration and change.

[E] If these bodies, which are subordinate (?)⁷² to the sphere of the moon, were to remain in the same state for a period of time, they would perish instantly, and so God preserves them from corruption in three ways – the heavenly bodies by continuous motion, the elements by alteration, and the bodies of animals and plants by procreation – so that the world may remain forever new and fresh in accordance with the will of its Creator, however He wills [it to be].

[F] As for **His abundant power and overpowering divine force**, they make it necessary [for Him] to create [all] things from nothing (literally: not from something, *lā min šay'*). This is because every existent thing has an action, and it is in the business of transmuting what is nearby from what does not [initially] conform to its nature into its nature (*min ša'nihī iḥālat*

⁷⁰ (؟) إحكامه MS] إحكام Gimaret.

⁷¹ واحدًا من my emendation] إحداث MS and Gimaret.

⁷² (؟) قيد MS] قدر Gimaret.

mā ḡāwarahu mimma laysa min ṭab‘ihī ilā ṭab‘ihī) – just as fire transmutes what is nearby into heat, snow transmutes what is nearby into cold, and fragrant things [transmute what is nearby] into fragrance (*ka-mā tuḥīlu l-nār mā ḡāwarahā ilā l-ḥarāra wa-l-ṭalḡ mā ḡāwarahu ilā l-bard wa-l-ašyā’ al-ṭayyibat al-rīḥ ilā l-ṭīb*).⁷³ Because the exalted God existed when there was no other existent thing with Him, He inevitably transmuted what was nonexistent into existence – by His abundant divine force. Just as fire, snow, and perfumes (*al-nār wa-l-ṭalḡ wa-l-ašyā’ al-ṭayyiba*) transmute what is nearby from what does not [initially] conform to their nature into their nature (and not only these things but also plants, trees, and animals transmute foodstuffs into their own nature), so also every existent thing does the same. It is in the same way that we have to conceptualize God with His overpowering divine force: He alone existed, with nothing else beside Him, yet He transmutes and produces, so it is inevitable that He should transmute nonexistence into existence.

[G] John the Grammarian (Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī = Philoponus) and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī have argued that if it were the case that God’s action proceeded in this manner, then it would necessarily follow that [His action] is nature-based (*ṭabī‘iyyan*), not choice-based (*iḥtiyāriyyan*), and it would be inappropriate to call such an agent good, wise, and powerful.

[H] This, however, is sophistry. This is because the choice-based action of the rational soul consists in [making others] akin to its own substance. When it is able to disengage itself from matter, its action consists of abstracting and stripping material forms from their matter, bringing them, notionally, to the same level as the hidden entities which are its own objects of intellection, such as the genera and the species. It is in the same manner that God transmutes nonexistence into existence by [His] choice and substantifies it (*yuḡawhiruhu*) by producing a form within it whenever He wishes. If His action were nature-based, it would not be posterior to His essence, and He would be unable to refrain from [performing] the action.

[I] While it is possible for an accident to produce [another] accident, as [for example] being in motion produces heat and being at rest produces cold, substance is more potent in its action than accident. The Prime Mover is more overpowering than all things, and so He has even more power to produce substance from accident than to produce an accident. Rather, it will be found upon reflection that all the acts of production and bringing-into-being are to be attributed to Him (may He be magnified and exalted!), for it is He who substantifies (*yuḡawhiru*) by bringing nonexistence into existence and by producing forms within it.

[J] The nonexistent thing that can become existent once it gets united to a form is what Aristotle calls “matter” (*hayūlā*). Thus, the first thing that God created was matter, and He turns it into an existent by producing a form within it. The form produced within it comes about from the First Paradigm (*al-miṭāl al-awwal*),⁷⁴ which is His foreknowledge

⁷³ These three examples – and indeed the “transmutation model” presented in [F] – are inspired by Plot., *Enn.* V.1[10], 6.22-40. See discussion below.

⁷⁴ I am grateful to Cristina D’Ancona for suggesting to me that this is a silent quotation from the Arabic version of Plotinus’ *Enneads* V.1[10], 6.14, ἀγαλμα τὸ πρῶτον ἐκφανέν, rendered in Arabic as *al-miṭāl al-awwal* – see *Theology of Aristotle*, Book VIII, ed. ‘A. Badawī, in *Aflūṭīn ‘ind al-‘arab*, Maktabat al-nahḍa al-miṣriyya, Cairo 1955, p. 108.16.

(*sābiq ʿilmihī*) regarding what existent things are going to be before they come to be. Because He is always knowing, this knowledge is called abstract Forms and Paradigms (*ṣuwaran muḡarrada wa-miṭālāt*)⁷⁵ – because⁷⁶ a thing can exist “before multiplicity”, “with multiplicity”, and “after multiplicity”: “before multiplicity” and “after [multiplicity]” means with God; “with multiplicity” means with Him but also within existent beings which are endowed with forms.⁷⁷

[K] Just as the paradigms (*miṭālāt*) of all the crafts (*ṣināʿāt*) are found with the craftsmen before the thing crafted [comes into being], and it is from these [paradigms] that the forms come to be in the crafted objects, such that by means of these [forms] [the objects] become something else,⁷⁸ so is the case also with the forms of the world and of all the beings that have their Paradigm (*miṭāl*) with the exalted God prior to the production of the things that get produced. I am not concerned at this point with [the question of] whether one has to posit here that these abstract Forms and Ideas (*ṣuwar muḡarrada wa-anwāʾ*) exist and subsist on their own, as the divine Plato believed (*kamā raʾahu al-ilāhī Aflātun*), or whether they subsist [only] within individuals, which is alleged to be Aristotle’s doctrine (*kamā yuẓannu bi-Aristū annahu yaʿtaqiduhu*).⁷⁹

As we can see, al-Isfizārī’s *Question* 20 falls into three main sections:

- (1) Paragraphs [A]–[F] argue that God is good, wise, and powerful and then proceed to work out the implications of each of these qualities for the modality of God’s creation of, and providential care for, the world; significantly, Paragraph [F] argues for creation *ex nihilo* and presents an interesting “transmutation model” of creation: just as fire, snow, and perfume “transmute” (*yuhīlu/tuhīlu*) their surroundings into heat, cold, and fragrance respectively, so God “transmutes” nonexistence into existence;
- (2) Then we have Paragraph [G], which presents Philoponus’ and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī’s objection to the “transmutation model” just discussed; according to these thinkers, this model implies that God’s actions are “nature-based” (*ṭabīʿī*) rather than “choice-based” (*iḥtiyārī*) and, therefore, God cannot be held to be “good, wise, and powerful” (the reason

⁷⁵ Cf. J. Dillon, “The Ideas as Thoughts of God”, *Études platoniciennes* 8 (2011), pp. 31–42. On the term *muḡarrad*, cf. C. D’Ancona, “Degrees of Abstraction in Avicenna: How to Combine Aristotle’s *De Anima* and the *Enneads*”, in S. Knuuttila – P. Kärkkäinen (eds.), *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, Springer, Berlin 2008 (Studies in the History of Philosophy of Mind, 6), pp. 47–71 (I am grateful to Giovanni Mandolino for this reference).

⁷⁶ *فلا* seems both out of place and ungrammatical.

⁷⁷ On the Neoplatonic (and later medieval) notion that universals exist in three modes – “before the many” (πρὸ τῶν πολλῶν), “in the many” (ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς), and “after the many” (ἐπὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς) – see, e.g., S. Fortier, “Ammonius on Universals and Abstraction: An Interpretation and Translation of Ammonius’ *In Porphyriū Isagogen* 39,8–42,16”, *Laval théologique et philosophique* 68.1 (2012), pp. 21–33; A. de Libera, *La querelle des universaux de Platon à la fin du Moyen Âge*: Édition augmentée d’une postface, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2014, pp. 230–3. On the Porphyrian roots of this idea, see Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement* (above, n. 31), pp. 315–6.

⁷⁸ For example, wood in the hands of a carpenter takes on a new form and becomes a desk, a bed, or a chair.

⁷⁹ Gimaret, “Un traité théologique” (above, n. 59), pp. 236–8. On the Platonic Ideas in Arabic, see R. Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen in der arabischen Philosophie: Texte und Materialien zur Begriffsgeschichte von ṣuwar Aflātūniyya und muthul Aflātūniyya*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2011 (Scientia graeco-arabica, 6); though al-Isfizārī is mentioned once in this monograph (p. 6), this passage is not referenced.

for this being that this model, with the particular examples of fire, snow, and fragrance used therein, sidesteps God's rationality);

(3) In Paragraphs [H]–[K] we have what seems to be al-Isfizārī's own rejoinder to Philoponus and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, in which al-Isfizārī (most likely, drawing on some threads from the same source that he used in [A]–[F]) defends the idea that God is a rational agent and offers additional clarifications about how exactly “transmutation” of nonexistence into existence takes place. Strikingly, al-Isfizārī claims that God's first creation is matter (*hayūlā*),⁸⁰ that therefore the “transmutation model” describes generation of matter, and that matter is “subsequently” (“subsequently” in the logical, not in the temporal sense) informed by forms that originate from the Paradigm, which is identical to God's foreknowledge.

If we are to take Section 2 (Paragraph [G]) seriously, as I believe we should, this would imply that Section 1 (Paragraphs [A]–[F]) comes from a source that is chronologically earlier than Philoponus, was accessible to both Philoponus (in Greek) and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (in Arabic), and was criticized by both thinkers. Realistically, this could only be Porphyry or Proclus; yet Proclus is out of the question because he did not toy with the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, while Porphyry does indeed have recourse to the notion of creation *ex nihilo* in his works (for example, in a later section of the same fr. 51 Sodano of his *Commentary on the Timaeus*).⁸¹ As this question was dealt with extensively in a recent article by Michael Chase, I shall cite three key passages from his discussion.

Some Porphyrian texts on matter come close to the Christian view of *creatio ex nihilo*. For Porphyry, the demiurgic *logos* can produce all things without any need for matter. If Plato calls the Demiurge “Father and maker”, says Porphyry, it is because a father (*patēr*) is one who generates the whole from himself (πατὴρ μὲν ἐστὶν ὁ ἀπ’ ἑαυτοῦ γεννῶν τὸ ὅλον), like Ariston generated Plato, while a maker (*poiētēs*) is like a house-builder who does not

⁸⁰ This notion is not uncommon in Arabic sources. See D. De Smet, *Empedocles Arabus: Une lecture néoplatonicienne tardive*, Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Brussels 1998, pp. 96–111; D. De Smet, “Le Souffle du Miséricordieux (*Nafas ar-Rahmān*): un élément pseudo-empédocléen dans la métaphysique de Mullā Ṣadrā aš-Širāzī”, *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 10 (1999), pp. 467–86; S. Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire: Matter and Method in Jewish Medieval Neoplatonism*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2013, esp. pp. 22–7, 91–117, 165–88; T. Werthmann, “Neoplatonic Variations on a Pre-Socratic Theme: Transposing a Material Element into the Intelligible World”, in Michaelis - Schmidtke (eds.), *Religious and Intellectual Diversity in the Islamicate World* (above, n. 11), pp. 812–32; S.N. Haq, *Names, Natures and Things: The Alchemist Jābir ibn Ḥayyān and His Kitāb al-Aḥjār (Book of Stones)*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1994, ch. 2, esp. p. 54; *Kitāb Gāyat al-ḥakīm wa-aḥaqq al-natīgātayn bi-l-taqdīm al-mansūb ilā Abī l-Qāsim Maslama ibn Aḥmad al-Mağrībī*, ed. H. Ritter, Teubner, Leipzig 1933, ch. I.6, p. 50.1–6 (the Intellect is said to be created from Light, which serves as matter [*hayūlā*] for the Intellect). On the Arabic (and Hebrew) terms for matter, see now Meyrav, *Themistius' Paraphrase* (above, n. 35), pp. 527–40.

⁸¹ One has to be very careful about how one defines creation *ex nihilo* relative to Porphyry. It is not creation “of all things, visible and invisible” by the theistic Creator God, as Christians understood it. Rather, it refers to how the Demiurge (the Neoplatonic Intellect) produces lower levels of reality. Nor does Porphyry's version of creation *ex nihilo* imply that the world is created in time (i.e., that time itself has a beginning). For Porphyry, the world is not created in time (Porphyry emphatically upholds eternity of the world and hence believes that the account of creation in Plato's *Timaeus* must not be understood literally). Depending on one's point of view, Porphyry's creation *ex nihilo* can be described as instantaneous (ἅθρόως, “all at once”) or eternal.

himself generate the matter he uses (ὥς οὐκ αὐτὸς τὴν ὕλην γεννῶν).⁸² Given that Plato calls the Demiurge both “Father” and “Maker”, he must, according to Porphyry, have believed that the Demiurge creates matter. Thus, Porphyry envisaged the Demiurge’s creative activity as taking place both instantaneously and eternally, by virtue of his thinking. Since his thinking is his being, however, this is equivalent to saying that the Demiurge creates by virtue of his being alone. [...] According to a quotation preserved by Aeneas of Gaza, Porphyry rejected as impious the Middle Platonic belief that matter is an ungenerated principle. Instead, matter is generated or has come into being, as Porphyry claimed, citing the *Chaldaean Oracles* (cf. fr. 34 des Places).⁸³ If matter is generated by the Father, however, it is not generated in time (*akbronon*), but causally, in that the Father bestows existence upon it throughout all perpetuity. [...] It may, then, have been later in his philosophical career that Porphyry, now under the combined influence of Plotinus and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, hit upon the idea that matter is *patrogenês*, i.e. that God creates matter, a doctrine which he was to bequeath to virtually all subsequent Neoplatonists. It may have seemed to Porphyry that the *Chaldaean Oracles* provided divine, or at least semi-divine, justification for the doctrine of God’s creation of matter, a doctrine which eliminated the ambiguities of Plotinus’ doctrine on matter.⁸⁴

Though Chase does not articulate this conclusion in quite the same terms, it would seem that for Porphyry, the Demiurge is both “Father” and “Maker” in the sense that He is the Father of matter and the Maker of everything else from matter. Matter, therefore, must be engendered “first” and everything else must be produced “subsequently” from matter (though, because Porphyry regards creation as happening all at once, “first” and “subsequently” must be understood in the logical, not in the temporal sense, i.e., as signifying a causal relationship of priority and posteriority, not a chronological sequence).⁸⁵

It should be added that the three examples used in Section 1 of al-Isfizarī’s text to illustrate the “transmutation model” of creation *ex nihilo* are clearly inspired by Plotinus’ *Enneads* V.1[10], 6.22-40. In this crucial passage, Plotinus seeks to explain how Nous (Intellect) is generated by the One, without the One being moved, i.e., “without any inclination or act of will or any sort of movement on its part” (οὐ προσενέυσαντος οὐδὲ βουληθέντος οὐδὲ ὄλως κινήθέντος). Plotinus compares Nous to the One’s “radiance” (περίλαμψις), similar to the bright periphery of the sun (ἡλίου τὸ περὶ αὐτὸ λαμπρόν), which is constantly generated by the sun, without the sun being moved (ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἀεὶ γεννώμενον μένοντος). He further explains that:

⁸² Porph., *In Tim.*, fr. 40, p. 26 Sodano = Procl., *In Tim.*, vol. I, p. 300.1-6 Diehl; cf. English trans. by Tarrant-Runia-Share-Baltzly (above, n. 28), vol. 2, p. 154: “Porphyry says that Father is he who engenders the whole from himself, whereas Maker is he who receives the matter from another. Hence Ariston is said to be Plato’s father as cause of the whole being, whereas the builder is said to be maker of the house because he himself did not engender its matter”.

⁸³ Porph., *Fragmenta*, fr. 368F, pp. 439-40 Smith.

⁸⁴ M. Chase, “Porphyry”, in H. Tarrant - D.A. Layne - D. Baltzly - F. Renaud (eds.), *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden 2018 (Brill’s Companions to Classical Reception, 13), pp. 336-50, part. pp. 342-3, 344, 346; see also Chase’s earlier draft “Porphyry on Matter”, <https://cnrs.academia.edu/MichaelChase> (retrieved 2025-07-08), where some of the sources—notably fr. 368F Smith (from Aeneas of Gaza) and the related passage from John Lydus’ *De Mensibus* – are discussed in greater detail. On Porphyry’s views on creation, see also Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement* (above, n. 31), pp. 277-84.

⁸⁵ If this is an accurate presentation of Porphyry’s position, then al-Isfizarī’s claim in Paragraph [J] that “the first thing that God created was matter” (cf. n. 80 above) may also be a reflection of the same (as I have argued, Porphyrian) source that he used in Paragraphs [A]-[F].

All things which exist, as long as they remain in being, necessarily produce from their own substances, in dependence on their present power, a surrounding reality directed to what is outside them, a kind of image of the archetypes from which it was produced: fire produces the heat which comes from it; snow does not only keep its cold inside itself. Perfumed things show this particularly clearly. As long as they exist, something is diffused from themselves around them, and what is near them enjoys their existence (πῦρ μὲν τὴν παρ' αὐτοῦ θερμότητα· καὶ χιὼν οὐκ εἴσω μόνον τὸ ψυχρὸν κατέχει· μάλιστα δὲ ὅσα εὐώδη μαρτυρεῖ τοῦτο· ἕως γὰρ ἐστὶ, πρόεισί τι ἐξ αὐτῶν περὶ αὐτά, ὧν ἀπολαύει ὑποστάντων ὁ πλείσιον). And all things when they come to perfection produce; the One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly; and its product is less than itself.⁸⁶

It is I think quite clear that the author of Paragraph [F] – who is, consequently, the author of the entire Section 1 of al-Isfizārī's chapter (though it is, of course, possible that al-Isfizārī reworked his source) – is applying this Plotinian model of the generation of the Nous to the (non-Plotinian) idea of creation *ex nihilo*. Given Porphyry's interest in creation *ex nihilo* and the fact that he often draws inspiration from Plotinus even when he articulates his own views distinct from his teacher's, it is very likely that the author whom al-Isfizārī is following here is none other than Porphyry.⁸⁷

A philological observation may be added here: Paragraph [F] indeed has the appearance of having been translated from Greek. It is particularly significant that it features the expression *al-ašyā' al-ṭayyibat al-rīḥ*; this expression looks like an exact rendering of Plotinus' ὅσα εὐώδη (which perhaps appeared as τὰ εὐώδη in what I believe was Porphyry's passage dependent on Plotinus and cited or reworked by al-Isfizārī's). Similar renderings of εὐώδης and εὐωδία are attested in the Graeco-Arabic translations of Hunayn and his school.⁸⁸

It is hardly surprising that Philoponus and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī took issue with the “transmutational model” of creation. They must have immediately recognized that it implied that creation proceeded from God without volition (it may be recalled that this was precisely the reason why Plotinus articulated the “transmutational model” in the first place: he wanted to explicate how Nous is generated by the One without any movement and, specifically, without an act of will, οὐδὲ βουληθέντος).⁸⁹ Where did Philoponus and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī articulate their objections to the “transmutational

⁸⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.1.6.31-40 (Armstrong's translation); see A.H. Armstrong (ed. and trans.), *Plotinus with an English Translation*, 7 vols., Harvard U.P., Cambridge MA 1966-1988, vol. 5, pp. 30-33. An Arabic version of this passage is preserved in the “Sayings of the Greek Sage” – see E. Wakelnig, *A Philosophy Reader from the Circle of Miskawayh*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2014, pp. 94-5, §32 and commentary, pp. 364-5; cf. F. Rosenthal, “aš-Šayḥ al-Yūnānī and the Arabic Plotinus Source”, *Orientalia* N.S. 21 (1952), pp. 461-92, 22 (1953), pp. 370-400, 24 (1955), pp. 42-66, at pp. 476-477. Cristina D'Ancona has suggested to me that the whole description of creation in al-Isfizārī's Question 20 may depend on the Arabic Plotinus. This is a fruitful avenue of inquiry for future research.

⁸⁷ Of course, as with the Arabic Porphyrian fragment, al-Isfizārī reflects a theistic adaptation of Porphyry's idea. While for Porphyry it would have been a matter of the Demiurge (i.e., the Intellect) creating the world, in al-Isfizārī the Demiurge is tacitly replaced by the theistic Creator.

⁸⁸ Ullmann, *Wörterbuch* (above, n. 27), vol. 1, p. 276; vol. S-I, pp. 424-5; “Glossarium Græco-Arabicum”, <https://glossga.bbaw.de> (retrieved 2025-07-08), s.v. εὐωδ*. The “Greek Sage” passage (see n. 86 above) has: *ḍawāt al-rawā'ih al-ṭayyiba* and *al-šay' ḍā al-rā'ihā al-ṭayyiba*.

⁸⁹ Cf. Mandolino, *Yahyā ibn 'Adī* (above, n. 6), pp. 304-8 (discusses the same Plotinian passage as cited above and Yahyā ibn 'Adī's counterarguments).

model” of creation? This is a difficult question to answer. I have not seen anything similar in Philoponus’ *Contra Proclum*, which would be the natural place to look for it, or, for that matter, in his other works, though Philoponus does, of course, object to the Neoplatonic idea that God and the world are coeval, and that God generates the world “just by being” on the model of the sun and its light.⁹⁰ If the Arabic epitome *De Contingentia mundi* is an extract from a longer Arabic text (i.e., from a lost integral Arabic translation of Philoponus’ so-called “third anti-eternalist book”), then it is quite possible that Philoponus refuted the “transmutational model” there.⁹¹ As for Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, we already have had a chance to mention that he is credited with a refutation of Porphyry’s “book to Anebo”;⁹² if, as argued above, this “book to Anebo” (i.e., *Risāla ilā Anābū*) contained material from Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*, then it is possible that it is there that Abū Bakr al-Rāzī refuted the “transmutational model”. Unfortunately, it is impossible to verify these hypotheses because the relevant texts are now irretrievably lost.

Two more pieces of circumstantial evidence seem to link al-Isfīzārī to Porphyry. First, the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom”, which, as we have seen, features in the Arabic Porphyrian fragment preserved by al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl, is fundamental for al-Isfīzārī. In addition to Question 20 (translated and discussed above) – which, as argued above, is effectively a commentary on the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom” – al-Isfīzārī refers or alludes to this triad in Question 4,⁹³ Question 25,⁹⁴ Question 26,⁹⁵ and Question 28.⁹⁶ While some of these references are rather casual, al-Isfīzārī’s commitment to the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom” is not to be denied. If this triad is known to al-Isfīzārī from Porphyry, as seems likely, this is a sign of a strong connection between the two thinkers.

Second, al-Isfīzārī’s treatise has many similarities (and may well share a common source) with Miskawayh’s *Minor Triumph* (*al-Fawz al-aṣḡar*).⁹⁷ It is therefore hardly accidental that Miskawayh (*Fawz*, ch. I.2) also refers to the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom”; moreover, as noted by Chase, this triad is introduced right before a citation from an (unspecified) work by Porphyry.⁹⁸ This is another confirmation of the tight connections

⁹⁰ Philop., *De Aet. mundi contra Proclum*, pp. 14.18–28 Rabe; English trans.: Philoponus, *Against Proclus’s “On the Eternity of the World 1–5”*, trans. M. Share, Cornell U.P., Ithaca 2005, pp. 26–7. For an Arabic version of this passage, see E. Wakelnig, “al-Anṭākī’s Use of the Lost Arabic Version of Philoponus’ *Contra Proclum*”, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 23 (2013), pp. 291–317, at p. 303.

⁹¹ On the *De Contingentia mundi*, see now G. Mandolino, “On the Origins of John Philoponus’s *De Contingentia mundi*”, *Mediterranea: International Journal on the Transfer of Knowledge* 9 (2024), pp. 165–211; I am grateful to Giovanni Mandolino for a copy of this article.

⁹² See n. 65 above.

⁹³ Gimaret, “Un traité théologique” (above, n. 59), p. 219.18–22; cf. Wakelnig, “What Does Aristotle” (above, n. 6), pp. 470–471.

⁹⁴ Gimaret, “Un traité théologique” (above, n. 59), p. 247.11–13.

⁹⁵ Gimaret, “Un traité théologique” (above, n. 59), p. 249.7.

⁹⁶ Gimaret, “Un traité théologique” (above, n. 59), p. 252.4–5.

⁹⁷ See Wakelnig, “What Does Aristotle” (above, n. 6), p. 469; E. Wakelnig, “Die Philosophen in der Tradition al-Kindī: al-‘Āmirī, al-Isfīzārī, Miskawayh, al-Sīgīstānī und al-Tawḥīdī”, in H. Eichner – M. Perkams – C. Schäfer (eds.), *Islamische Philosophie im Mittelalter: Ein Handbuch*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 2013, pp. 233–52, here pp. 242–5. If it is a matter of al-Isfīzārī and Miskawayh sharing a common source, one may even wonder whether this common source is Porphyry. This subject remains to be investigated.

⁹⁸ Chase, “Triad” (above, n. 7), p. 15; cf. Wakelnig, “What Does Aristotle” (above, n. 6), p. 469. For a translation of this Porphyrian citation, see Adamson, “*Porphyrius Arabus*” (above, n. 55), pp. 161–2 (Adamson believes that

– which are still to be investigated – between al-Isfizārī, Miskawayh, Porphyry, and the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom”.

2.4. How Did the Porphyrian Fragment Reach al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl?

In his religious encyclopedia *Mağmū‘ uṣūl al-dīn*, al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl used a wide variety of sources: the Bible, biblical apocrypha, patristic works in Arabic translations (John Chrysostom, Dionysius the Areopagite, Basil of Caesarea, and others), Greek Christian philosophical works in Arabic translations (Nemesius’ *De Natura hominis*, with a mistaken but very common attribution to Gregory of Nyssa, and Philoponus’ *De Contingentia mundi*), works of Christian Arabic philosophy and theology (Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, Naẓīf ibn Yumn, Ibn al-Ṭayyib, Elias of Nisibis, al-Arfādī, and others), as well as treatises by Jewish and Muslim theologians (Maimonides and Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, respectively).⁹⁹

Given the astonishing variety of sources used by al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl, it is not out of the question that he could have had a treatise by Porphyry (*ex hypothesi*, Porphyry’s *Risāla ilā Anābū*, with material from the *Commentary on the Timaeus*) at his disposal. However, secondary transmission seems, on balance, more likely. In other words, al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl probably came across the Porphyrian quotation in an otherwise unknown Christian Arabic or Muslim theological work (the paragraphs in which he discusses the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom” may reflect the content of that work).¹⁰⁰ He had certainly procured manuscripts of many treatises authored by, and those that circulated among, the Baghdad Aristotelian philosophers.¹⁰¹ Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī in particular was a key influence on him. It is significant that, as shown by Elvira Wakelnig, it is precisely Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī who introduced the triad “Goodness-Power-

this citation comes from Porphyry’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics*). This is one of the two Porphyrian passages cited in Miskawayh’s *Minor Triumph*; on the second passage (*Fawz*, ch. I.5), see Adamson, “*Porphyrius Arabus*” (above, n. 55), pp. 162–3. For an edition and French translation of Miskawayh’s *Minor Triumph*, see Miskawayh, *al-Fawz al-aṣḡar/Le petit livre du salut*, ed. S. ‘Uḏayma, trans. R. Arnaldez, Maison arabe du livre, Tunis 1987; the Porphyrian passages are found on pp. 40–41 and 48–50 (Arabic section)/pp. 19–20 and 24–26 (French section).

⁹⁹ W. Abullīf, “Les sources du *Mağmū‘ uṣūl al-dīn* d’al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl”, *Parole de l’Orient* 16 (1990–1991), pp. 227–38; A[bullīf], *Dirāsa* (above, n. 9), pp. 184–9. On al-Mu’taman’s use of some of these sources, see N. Seleznyov, *Pax Christiana et Pax Islamica: Из истории межконфессиональных связей на средневековом Ближнем Востоке* [*Pax Christiana et Pax Islamica: On the History of Interconfessional Ties in the Medieval Middle East*], Реѹтунг новинок и популярных книг издательства, Moscow 2014 (*Orientalia et Classica*, 45), pp. 33–42 (on Naẓīf ibn Yumn), 101–6 (on al-Arfādī), 107–19 (on Ibn al-Ṭayyib), 121–8 (on Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq); N. Seleznyov, «Книга общности веры»: *Средневековый восточнохристианский экуменический трактат* [*“The Book on the Concordance of Faith”: A Medieval Oriental Christian Ecumenical Treatise*], Grifon, Moscow 2018 (on al-Arfādī); E. Platti, *Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī: Théologien chrétien et philosophe arabe, sa théologie de l’Incarnation*, Departement Oriēntalistiek, Leuven 1983, pp. 36–46; Mandolino, “On the Origins” (above, n. 91), pp. 167–70 (on Philoponus); Haji-Athanasios, “Le Traité de Némésios d’Emèse” (above, n. 46), pp. LXXXII–XCII; M. Morani, *La tradizione manoscritta del “De Natura hominis” di Nemesio*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1981, pp. 90–6 and 182–5; A. Treiger, “New Evidence on the Arabic Versions of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*”, *Le Muséon* 118.3–4 (2005), pp. 219–40, at p. 225, n. 18; G. Schwarb, “The Reception of Maimonides in Christian-Arabic Literature”, *Ben ‘Ever la-‘Arav* 7 (2014), pp. 109–75, esp. pp. 123–4; G. Schwarb, “Excursus III: The Coptic and Syriac Receptions of Neo-Ash‘arite Theology”, in S. Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2016 (*Oxford Handbooks*), pp. 547–66, esp. 555–7 (on Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī).

¹⁰⁰ For a translation, see Appendix below, §§9–13.

¹⁰¹ On the Baghdad Aristotelians, see G. Endress – C. Ferrari, “The Baghdad Aristotelians”, in Rudolph-Hansberger-Adamson (eds.), *Philosophy in the Islamic World* (above, n. 68), pp. 421–525 (see p. 463 on the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom”).

Wisdom" into Arabic Christian theological discourse.¹⁰² Moreover, as hypothesized by Graf, it is from Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's writings that al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl gained his knowledge of ancient philosophy. Graf even mentions Porphyry in this regard.¹⁰³ We cannot be sure, of course, but the possibility that al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl owed his knowledge of Porphyry to an unknown treatise either by Yaḥyā himself or another member of his school seems to be the likeliest explanation for the appearance of the Arabic Porphyrian fragment in the *Maḡmū' uṣūl al-dīn*.

It may be added that al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl cites Porphyry on two other occasions: in ch. 11, §87 (vol. I.1, p. 274) and in ch. 34, §15 (vol. II.1, pp. 105-106). The first citation (ch. 11, §87) reads:

وقال فرفوريس: ¹⁰⁴واخطر ببالك أن جميع الآراء يُتَشَكَّكُ ¹⁰⁵في كثير منها، لأنّه قد يكون فيها ما لا يُدْرَك، أو يُدْرَك بصعوبة لغموضه.

Porphyry said: And keep in mind that all the opinions are [such that] there is doubt concerning many of them, because there is much in them that is incomprehensible or can only be grasped with difficulty because of its abstruse nature.

Al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl citation is derived at second hand from the treatise by his brother al-Šafī ibn al-'Assāl *al-Šaḥā'ih fī ḡawāb al-naṣā'ih*.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, it corresponds to a section of the lengthier Hebrew quotation from Porphyry preserved by the thirteenth-century Andalusian Jewish philosopher, commentator, and translator Šēm Ṭôḥ Ibn Falaquera.¹⁰⁷ While there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of this citation, especially as it is now attested in both Arabic and Hebrew, it does not seem possible to identify the Porphyrian work from which it originates.

The second Porphyrian citation in al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl's *Maḡmū' uṣūl al-dīn* (ch. 34, §15) is fr. 260F Smith (from Porphyry's *Symmikta Zētēmata*),¹⁰⁸ which al-Mu'taman ibn al-

¹⁰² See also Mandolino, *Yahyā ibn 'Adī* (above, n. 6), pp. 296-7: "The use of the triad of attributes goodness-wisdom-power in Arabic trinitarian theology is to be considered an original development inaugurated by Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, followed by scholars such as his pupil Ibn Zur'a and by 'Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl".

¹⁰³ G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 5 vols., Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1944-1953, vol. 2, pp. 409-10: "In der philosophisch-rationellen Darlegung und Begründung geht Abū Ishāq [al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl] auf den Wegen des Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī und seiner Schule. Ihn ruft er auch am häufigsten als Zeugen auf, besonders zur Abwehr der gegen die christlichen Grunddogmen gerichteten Angriffe. Es scheint, dass er auch durch diesen zu den 'Philosophen' (Aristoteles, Plato, Porphyrius, Ammonius) und den unter ihren Namen laufenden Schriften geführt wurde".

¹⁰⁴ فرفوريس V (f. 138v) edition.

¹⁰⁵ يتَشَكَّكُ Pirone's emendation (Italian trans., vol. 1, p. 258); this reading is confirmed by al-Šafī ibn al-'Assāl and by the Hebrew version | يتَشَكֵּל V edition.

¹⁰⁶ al-Šafī ibn al-'Assāl, *al-Šaḥā'ih fī ḡawāb al-naṣā'ih*, ed. M. Ğirġis, Maṭba'at 'Ayn Šams, Cairo 1643 AMart [1926/7], ch. 2, p. 22.

¹⁰⁷ G. Freudenthal - A.P. Johnson, "A New Porphyry Fragment?", *Classical Quarterly* 70.1 (2020), pp. 410-28, at p. 415: "For there are in those [unaccustomed] doctrines many things that require of the student much investigation and he may [also] hit upon some doubts; however, this does not happen with this kind of [unaccustomed] doctrines only, but is a universal feature of all doctrines, in most cases. For in all these matters there are things that are impossible or difficult to grasp".

¹⁰⁸ *Porphyrii philosophi Fragmenta*, fr. 260F, pp. 286-88 Smith. On this work, see H. Dörrie, *Porphyrios' "Symmikta zetēmata": Ihre Stellung in System und Geschichte des Neuplatonismus nebst einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten*, C.H. Beck, Munich 1959.

‘Assāl cites as part of a longer quotation from Nemesius’ *De Natura hominis* (misattributed, as already mentioned, to Gregory of Nyssa).

3. Conclusions and Avenues for Future Research

We can draw the following conclusions from the above discussion. First, the Arabic Porphyrian fragment on the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom” preserved by al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl is authentic and most likely originates from Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*.

Second, material from Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus* seems to have circulated in Arabic in conjunction with, and as part of, Porphyry’s *Risāla ilā Anābū*. This *Risāla ilā Anābū* (with the embedded *Commentary on the Timaeus* material) was known to Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, who wrote a refutation of it, to al-Isfizarī who cited it in his (still unpublished) *Risāla fī ḥadaṭ al-‘ālam*, and to al-Šahrastānī who cited it in his *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*.

Third, the Arabic Porphyrian fragment on the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom” preserved by al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl seems to be part of the same text as the one which al-Isfizarī used in *Question 20* of his *Kitāb fī Masā’il al-umūr al-ilāhiyya*, Paragraphs [A]-[F] (and less systematically in the remainder of the chapter). This text therefore must have also been Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*, presumably under the guise of *Risāla ilā Anābū*. The fact that al-Isfizarī’s source uses Plotinus’ *Enneads* V.1[10], 6 and creatively redeploys it in defense of creation *ex nihilo* and the fact that al-Isfizarī claims that his source was refuted by Philoponus and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī further corroborate the attribution to Porphyry.

Fourth, the evidence examined herein strongly suggests that Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*, presumably under the guise of *Risāla ilā Anābū*, played a major role in shaping both Christian and Muslim philosophical discourse. In particular, al-Isfizarī had direct access to it and seems to have used it extensively. The following questions still remain to be examined: (1) Do other sections of al-Isfizarī’s *Kitāb fī Masā’il al-umūr al-ilāhiyya* depend on Porphyry? (2) Are the similarities (including verbatim correspondences) between al-Isfizarī’s *Kitāb fī Masā’il al-umūr al-ilāhiyya* and Miskawayh’s *Fawz* to be explained by both thinkers’ using a common source, and if so, is this common source Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*? (3) Could Miskawayh’s citations from Porphyry in *Fawz*, ch. I.2 and I.5 also originate from Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*?

Fifth, it has been demonstrated that the Arabic Porphyrian fragment on the triad “Goodness-Power-Wisdom” preserved by al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl was most likely translated into Arabic by Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn. Unless this is a question of secondary transmission (see Section 2.2 above), this would imply that it is Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn who translated Porphyry’s *Commentary on the Timaeus* (or sections therefrom) into Arabic. Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn’s terminology and translation technique have been the subject of in-depth studies by Dimitri Gutas, Manfred Ullmann, Rüdiger Arnzen, and others.¹⁰⁹ It remains to be seen whether the fragments of *Risāla ilā Anābū* preserved by al-Isfizarī and al-Šahrastānī show signs of having been translated by Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn and whether the same is true of the (*ex hypothesi*) “Porphyrian section” of *Question 20* of al-Isfizarī’s *Kitāb fī Masā’il al-umūr al-ilāhiyya*, of other sections of this treatise by al-Isfizarī, of the material common to al-Isfizarī and Miskawayh, and of Miskawayh’s own quotations from Porphyry. While there is still a lot of work to be done, it is my hope that this preliminary study will have laid a foundation for a more in-depth examination of all these questions.

¹⁰⁹ See references in n. 35 above.

Appendix

Translation of *al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl*, Mağmū‘ uṣūl al-dīn, ch. 18, §§1-30

[I.1, 374]¹¹⁰ [§1] Chapter Eighteen: [§2] Containing [discussion of] the attributes of the divine Essence (*ṣifāt al-dāt al-ilāhiyya*), expressed [1] by philosophical attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-ḥikmiyya*), i.e., “intellectus”, “intelligens”, and “intellectum”¹¹¹ (*al-‘aql wa-l-‘āqil wa-l-ma‘qūl*), [2] by religious attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-ṣar‘iyya*), i.e., “fatherhood”, “sonhood”, and “procession” (*al-ubuwwa wa-l-bunuwwa wa-l-inbi‘āt*), so that the Father corresponds to the intellectus, the Son to the intelligens, and the Spirit to the intellectum, and [3] by the attributes by which scholars and religious leaders (*a’immat al-dīn*) described [God] (may He be praised!), i.e., “wisdom”, “goodness”, and “power” (*al-ḥikma wa-l-ğūd wa-l-quḍra*). These are the properties and the attributes under which fall all other properties and attributes [of God], “properties” and “attributes” being [two] ancient synonymous affirmative¹¹² terms designating the same meaning (*alfāz mutarādifa qadīma tubūtiyya tadullu ‘alā ma‘nan wāḥid*).

[375] [§3] The limitation (*al-ḥaṣr*) [of philosophical attributes] to intellectus, intelligens, and intellectum is explained by that¹¹³ the intellectus is a substance that intellects all existents. Since [God] (may He be praised!) is one of the existents, it is necessary that He should intellect His own essence (*dātahu*), so that He is intelligens with respect to His essence, and since His essence intellects Him He is intellectum with respect to¹¹⁴ His essence. Now, intellectus and intellectum are one and the same thing in actuality, as explained by Aristotle in the *De Anima*, by Alexander [of Aphrodisias] in his treatise *On the Intellect*,¹¹⁵ as well as by the master Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī in his treatise *On the Exemplification of the Trinity* (*fī l-tamṭīl li-l-tatlīt*).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Here and below, page references are to vol. I.1 of the edition. I have also consulted the apparatus of Abullīf’s edition and MS V, ff. 186v-191r.

¹¹¹ I have opted for these Latin terms to avoid infelicities of such English renderings as “intellect”, “intellecting”, “intellected” (or “object of intellect”, “thing intellected”). On the theory, first put forward by Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, that applies this triad to the Christian Trinity, see R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes*, 750-1050, Beauchesne, Paris 1985, pp. 222-33; Mandolino, *Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī* (above, n. 6), pp. 57, 121, 315.

¹¹² For an explanation of this term see *al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl*, *Mağmū‘ uṣūl al-dīn*, ch. 11, §7, vol. I.1, p. 253 Abullīf.

¹¹³ Read *anna* for *inna*.

¹¹⁴ Here and below (see n. 129), the passive participle (*ma‘qūl*, *ma‘lūm*, etc.) takes its agents as a direct object or as an indirect object introduced by *li-*, due to analogy with the corresponding active participle and/or due to the influence of Syriac.

¹¹⁵ F. M. Schroeder - R.B. Todd (trans.), *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators on the Intellect: The De Intellectu Attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius’ Paraphrase of Aristotle, De Anima 3.4-6*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1990, pp. 48-9. On the Arabic (and Latin) transmission of Alexander of Aphrodisias’ *De Intellectu*, see now C. D’Ancona, “The ‘Conjunction’ of the Intellect with the Separate Substances and God: The Greek and Graeco-Arabic Background”, *Studia Graeco-Arabica* 11.1 (2021), pp. 177-213; C. D’Ancona, “Il Περὶ νοῦ di Alessandro di Afrodizia: version araba e latina”, *Studi sull’Aristotelismo medievale (secoli VI-XVI)* 2.2 (2022), pp. 15-45 (I am grateful to Cristina D’Ancona for sharing this article with me).

¹¹⁶ The reference is to Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī’s *Maqāla fī tamṭīl al-naṣārā al-ibn bi-l-‘āqil dūna l-ma‘qūl wa-l-rūḥ bi-l-ma‘qūl dūna l-‘āqil* (alternative title: *Maqāla yuṭbatu fihā waṣf al-ilāh al-wāḥid bi-l-tatlīt wa-tamṭīl al-ab wa-l-ibn wa-l-rūḥ al-quddūs bi-l-‘aql wa-l-‘āqil wa-l-ma‘qūl*), ed. A. Périer, *Petits traités apologetiques de Yaḥyā Ben ‘Adī*, J. Gabalda, Paris 1920, pp. 24-7 (with French translation). As pointed out to me by Giovanni Mandolino (personal correspondence, May 16, 2024), this section of *al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl*’s discussion, and especially the last lines (including the reference to Aristotle and Alexander), comes from the Trinitarian part of Yaḥyā’s *Refutation of al-Warrāq* – see N. ‘Abbās (ed.), *Nazariyyat al-tawḥīd wa-l-tatlīt ‘inda Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī fī kitābibi “al-Radd ‘alā al-Warrāq”*, Ġāmi‘at al-Qiddīs Yūsuf, Beirut 2014, p. 316.12-15. Yaḥyā refers to the same sources also in: E. Platti

{§4} So this one and the same Essence is the abstract essence of the intellectus that exists in three states: a state in which it is by itself (*mufrada*), a state in which it is intelligens, namely [the state of] its conceptualizing itself (*taṣawwuruhā li-dātiḥā*), and a state in which it is intellectum, namely [the state of] its being conceptualized by itself (*mutaṣawwara min dātiḥā*). Neither of the [latter] two aspects (*al-ma'nayayni*)¹¹⁷ can be conceptualized without the other [i.e., first] aspect: [that of] the intellectus.

{§5} The limitation of religious attributes [to] fatherhood, sonhood, and procession is explained by what the philosopher al-Ḥasan ibn al-Samḥ¹¹⁸ said with regard to God being eternally (*lam yazal*) Father, Son, and Spirit. He said:¹¹⁹

{§6} God eternally knows His essence, and it is He, and nobody else, who is the cause of His knowing His essence. Therefore, it is necessary that there be realized in Him an aspect (*ma'nā*)¹²⁰ of His being a cause that agrees (*muwāfiq*) with an effect in its very essence (*fī nafs dātiḥi*). It is also agreed upon that He is a living being. It follows from these two [premises] that God is eternally a living cause that agrees with a living effect, which [in turn] agrees with [its cause] in its very essence. Now, [it is the case with] every living cause which agrees with its effect in its very essence that the cause is a father, and the effect is a son.¹²¹ Therefore, God the exalted is eternally Father and Son.

{376} {§7} As for His eternally being Spirit, the veracity thereof becomes apparent when one examines what is the case with each¹²² of the inspirited beings that [we observe] before us. For the generative force (*al-quwwa al-mukawwina*) alters it and transfers it from one state (literally: thing, *ṣay'*) to another¹²³ till it makes it reach¹²⁴ the spirit and makes it stop¹²⁵ naturally at this point. <From>¹²⁶ these [arguments] it becomes clearly necessary that there be, in a living being, a spirit.¹²⁷

{§8} It is [also] clear that the object of knowledge (*al-ma'lūm*) is the final cause (*ḡāya*) of knowledge [in its striving] to apprehend¹²⁸ it as it is. Now, the Essence of God is an

(ed.), *La grande polémique antinestorienne de Yahyā ibn 'Adī*, Peeters, Leuven 1981, vol. 1, p. 38.11-14; however, there he only mentions Aristotle and Alexander, without the titles of the respective works. Nonetheless, his adversary al-Miṣrī knows which work he is referencing (*fī maqālatihī fī l-nafs 'alā ra'y Aristūṭālīs*) – see E. Platti (ed.), *La grande polémique antinestorienne de Yahyā ibn 'Adī*, Peeters, Leuven 1982, vol. 2, p. 215.4-10. I am deeply grateful to Giovanni Mandolino for these references.

¹¹⁷ On this term, see Haddad, *La Trinité divine* (above, n. 111), pp. 168-9; R.M. Frank, “*al-Ma'nā*: Some Reflections on the Technical Meanings of the Term in the *Kalām* and Its Use in the Physics of Mu'ammār”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87.3 (1967), pp. 248-59.

¹¹⁸ Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan ibn al-Samḥ (d. 1027) – Peripatetic philosopher from the school of Yahyā ibn 'Adī. His glosses on Aristotle's *Physics* are printed in Badawī's edition of the Arabic translation of this work: Badawī (ed.), *Aristūṭālīs, al-Ṭabī'a* (above, n. 41); cf. his introduction, pp. 20-21; see also S.M. Stern, “Ibn al-Samḥ”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 16 (1956), pp. 31-44; G. Endress, “Ibn al-Samḥ”, in U. Rudolph - R. Hansberger - P. Adamson (eds.), *Philosophy in the Islamic World* (above, n. 68), pp. 490-6.

¹¹⁹ The quotation covers §§6-8. This is clear from the fact that in §9 the author resumes his discussion of the three kinds of sets of attributes applied to God by referring to the third set of attributes. The editor is wrong in assuming that the quotation continues till §13; see A[bulḥif], *Dirāsa* (above, n. 9), p. 187.

¹²⁰ See n. 117 above.

¹²¹ The sentence seems to be syntactically misformulated, but the sense is clear.

¹²² I read *wāḥid wāḥid* in place of *wāḥid* (two manuscripts have this reading; the reading *wāḥid* is due to haplography).

¹²³ This description seems to refer to the process of generation of a living being (e.g. of a foetus in the womb).

¹²⁴ I read *tabluḡu* in place of *yabluḡu* (taking *al-quwwa al-mukawwina* to be the subject).

¹²⁵ I read *taqifu* in place of *yaqifu* (taking *al-quwwa al-mukawwina* to be the subject).

¹²⁶ I would suggest adding *min* before *hādihī* (or *hādā*, according to one manuscript).

¹²⁷ I would suggest secluding *hādihī* in line 4 and following five manuscripts in reading *rūḥan* in place of *rūḥ*.

¹²⁸ I read *yudrikuhu* in place of *tudrikuhu* (one of the manuscripts indeed has this reading).

object of knowledge with respect to¹²⁹ itself; <therefore>¹³⁰ it is a final cause. <A final cause>¹³¹ of a living thing in its very essence is the spirit; so the Essence of God [as] an object of knowledge¹³² with respect to¹²⁹ itself <is the Spirit>.¹³³ By this we know that God is eternally Father, Son, and Spirit.

{§9} The limitation of the attributes applied to God by religious scholars and leaders [to] goodness, wisdom, and power is explained by that the Creator’s work could not be accomplished according to the most excellent, most complete, most perfect, most correct, the best, and the truest of states unless there existed in him these three aforementioned attributes which correspond in the analogy to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

{§10} This is because should it be the case that the Creator were greedy and avaricious with His creation and that His greed and envy prevented Him from transferring it from potentiality to actuality, from causing it to appear in existence from non-existence, and from permitting it to appear in existence, He would not have a perfect creation.

{§11} And should it be the case that this good Creator were not wise and that His ignorance of His work prevented Him from perfecting it, His creation would not be accomplished, and even if it existed it would be deficient and useless.¹³⁴

[377] {§12} And should it be the case that the good and wise [Creator] were not powerful, He would be unable to accomplish His creation and perfect it according to the right arrangement and the proper state, [so that] no one would think well of it and agree with Him concerning it.

{§13} [Therefore] without these three attributes combining together in the Creator, His creation would not be complete and perfect. But with [these attributes] combining in Him, He needs nothing else in addition to them in His creation.

{§14} The sage (*al-ḥakīm*) Porphyry of Tyre said {see the Arabic Porphyrian passage translated in Section 1 above}.

{§15} The great and learned imām Faḥr al-Dīn ibn al-Ḥaṭīb [al-Rāzī] (may God have mercy on him!) said in his book entitled *The Pinnacle of the Intellects* [*in Knowing the Principles (of Theology)*] (*Nihāyat al-‘uqūl fī dirāyat al-uṣūl*):¹³⁵

No one will object should one describe Zayd, for example, as intellecting, thinking, and reasoning and should one describe the Creator as existent,¹³⁶ wise, and powerful.

[378] {§16} Aristotle said in the fourth chapter (*maqāla*) of the *Book of Politics on Managing the Authority* (*Kitāb al-Siyāsa fī tadbīr al-ri’āsa*):¹³⁷

¹²⁹ See n. 114 above.

¹³⁰ I would suggest adding *fā-*.

¹³¹ I would suggest adding *wa-ḡāya*, which may have dropped through homoeoteleuton.

¹³² Should one read *al-ma’lūma* in place of *ma’lūma*?

¹³³ I would suggest adding *hiya al-rūḥ*, otherwise the passage is unintelligible. The entire paragraph seems to be corrupt.

¹³⁴ I read the verb in the passive: *lā yuntafa’u bihā*.

¹³⁵ Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-‘uqūl fī dirāyat al-uṣūl*, 4 vols., ed. S.‘A. Fūda, Dār al-ḡaḥā’ir, Beirut 2015 (for Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī polemic against Christians, see vol. 1, pp. 541-4; this quotation is not found there). I believe al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl cites Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī at second hand from al-Ṣafī ibn al-‘Assāl, *al-Ṣaḥā’ih*, ch. 3, p. 30; cf. Schwarb, “Excursus III” (above, n. 99), p. 554. (There seems to be some confusion about where the citation from Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī begins and ends).

¹³⁶ The context would seem to require “good” (*ḡawād*) rather than “existent” (*mawḡūd*). Could this be a scribal mistake due to the fact that these two words have three consonants in common?

¹³⁷ The reference is not to Aristotle’s *Politics*, but to the spurious work *Sirr al-asrār*, on which see: F.E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus: The Oriental Translations and Commentaries on the Aristotelian*

Things are established on at least three [requirements], without which perfection of a thing would not be established.

{§17} The master Yahyā ibn ‘Adī has a treatise on this issue, of which the following is an abridgement:¹³⁸

It is [one] of the observable things that when we¹³⁹ set two mirrors one facing the other, we find in each of them an image of all that faces it. Since however each one of them faces the other, there must be in each of them an image of the other.

{§18} It is also apparent upon observation that we¹³⁹ do not find in each of the mirrors only an image of the other to the exclusion of all the images reflected in [the other] but we find in each of the mirrors an image of the other with all the images that [the other] has received.

{§19} Now, it is clear that the image of [the first mirror] is one of the images that [the other mirror] has received.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, it necessarily follows that the image of each of [the mirrors] is reflected and is found in [this mirror] itself. Now, if we examine [it], we find the image of any of these mirrors [to have] three states, each of which is distinct from the two others.

[379] {§20} First, the state which belongs to it insofar as it exists in concreto (‘*aynan*), namely the form¹⁴¹ existing in iron or some other polished body [capable of] receiving images of what faces it. It is clear that this form in this state is the cause of the existence of the image in the other two states, since [the first form] removes the two [images] under the supposition¹⁴² of its having been removed, while they do not remove¹⁴³ it under the supposition¹⁴² of their having been removed. This [kind of] existence is analogous to

Corpus, Brill, Leiden 1968, pp. 67-72, and cf. p. 54 (in the section on Aristotle’s *Politics*) where Peters notes that *Kitāb al-Siyāsa fī tadbīr al-rī’āsa* is an alternative title of *Sirr al-asrār*. The text of *Sirr al-asrār* was edited by ‘A. Badawī, in *al-Uṣūl al-yūnāniyya li-l-naẓariyyāt al-siyāsiyya fī l-islām*, Cairo 1954, pp. 67-177. Our quotation is found in a slightly different form on p. 137.4-5: *لولا الثالث لما كمل ثبات شيء، فأقل ما ثبت عليه الأشياء ثلاثة*. It is interesting to note that al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl (or his source) takes the quotation out of context, for in the original it continues to argue that seven rather than three is the perfect number (p. 137.5-7): *وأوسطها خمسة، وأكملها سبعة: فالسموات سبع، والأرضون سبع، والسيارة سبع، والأيام سبعة، ودوران القمر سبع، وأيام المسرات سبع، وأيام الأحزان سبع – إلى كثير غير هذا يطول شرحه وذكره*. On *Sirr al-asrār*, see also M. Grignaschi, “L’origine et les métamorphoses du *Sirr al-Asrār*”, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 43 (1976), pp. 7-112; M. Grignaschi, “La diffusion de *Secretum Secretorum* dans l’Europe occidentale”, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 48 (1980), pp. 7-70; M. Grignaschi, “Rémarques sur la formation et l’interprétation du *Sirr al-Asrār*”, in W.F. Ryan - C.B. Schmitt (eds.), *Pseudo-Aristotle, “The Secret of Secrets”: Sources and Influences*, Warburg Institute, London 1982, pp. 3-33 (and other articles in this volume); R. Forster, *Das Geheimnis der Geheimnisse: Die arabischen und deutschen Fassungen des pseudo-aristotelischen Sirr al-asrār/Secretum secretorum*, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden 2006.

¹³⁸ The reference is to Yahyā ibn ‘Adī’s treatise *Maqāla fī Ṣiḥḥat i’tiqād al-naṣārā fī l-Bāri’ annahū ǧawhar wāḥid dū ṭalāt šifāt*; see *Petits traités apologétiques*, pp. 11-23 Périer. According to Gerhard Endress (G. Endress, *The Works of Yahyā Ibn ‘Adī: An Analytical Inventory*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1977, p. 101), there is an abridgement of this treatise by al-Ṣafī ibn al-‘Assāl (al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl’s brother). It is possibly this abridgement that al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl quotes below.

¹³⁹ Read *annā* in place of *innā*.

¹⁴⁰ The following section (*minhumā ... qabilathā*) is to be secluded, for it is a repetition of a phrase from the preceding paragraph.

¹⁴¹ The term used for “form” (*sūra*) is the same as has been used previously and is used in what follows for “image”.

¹⁴² Read *bi-tawabḥumi* in place of *yatawabḥamu*.

¹⁴³ Read *yarfa’ānihi* (with five manuscripts) in place of *irtifā’uhu*.

the existence of the Father, since He is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, and They are His effects.

{§21} The second state is the existence of this very form in the opposite mirror, and it is thus analogous to the description (*waṣf*)¹⁴⁴ of the Spirit as proceeding and issuing forth from the Father.

{§22} The third state¹⁴⁵ is¹⁴⁶ what results, by way of reflection, in the mirror from which [the form] emanated [in the first place]. This [image] is analogous to the attribute (*ṣifa*) of the Son, for He is similar to the Father in two aspects: first, in the image, and second, in that He exists in [the] essence and does not issue therefrom.

{§23} It has become clear that¹⁴⁷ insofar as it is an image, it is one image, but when the states (or if you wish: the three attributes) become joined to it, it becomes three things, being one insofar as it is an image and many in its attributes, which is what was to be demonstrated. This analogy is clearer than the analogy of intellectus, intelligens, and intellectum for someone who knows only the sensibles and has no familiarity or acquaintance with other [i.e., intelligible] things.

[380] {§24}¹⁴⁸ The first form in the iron is the first state, which is analogous to the Father. The image emanating from it to the opposite [mirror] is the second state, which is analogous to the Spirit as proceeding and issuing forth from the Father. As for the third state, this is the reflection of the first mentioned form upon, and the return to, its source, and this is analogous to the Son.

{§25} The priest (*al-qiss*) Anbā Yūḥannā al-Anṭākī,¹⁴⁹ the disciple of Ibn Buṭlān,¹⁵⁰ said concerning analogies that require that one thing be described by a number of descriptions:

[381] {§26} Everything that acts upon a thing acted upon, both in [the realm of] nature and otherwise, produces its effect in the thing acted upon only by imparting it its essence.¹⁵¹ This is the case with fire, for it warms an adjacent body like¹⁵² heat that is its form. Now, it is obvious that the definition of heat that is in the body and of [heat] that is in the fire is the same definition; the difference being only in the substrate (*al-mawḍūʿ*). When it is

¹⁴⁴ This term seems to be synonymous with *ṣifa* in the next paragraph.

¹⁴⁵ That the word *ḥāl* is indefinite may be due to the influence of Middle Arabic; see J. Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic, Based Mainly on South-Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium*, 3 vols., Secrétariat du CSCO, Louvain 1966-1967, vol. 2, pp. 359-60, §239.

¹⁴⁶ Read *hiya* for *wa-hiya*.

¹⁴⁷ Here and below read *annabā* in place of *innabā*.

¹⁴⁸ I do not reproduce the illustration on p. 380. The word *inqaṭaʿat* in the right mirror should probably be corrected to *inʿaṭafat*.

¹⁴⁹ On this eleventh-century author, see M.N. Swanson, “Yūḥannā al-Anṭākī”, in D. Thomas *et al.* (eds.), *Christian Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, 21 vols. to-date, Brill, Leiden 2009- (in progress) (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations), vol. 3, pp. 274-6. This quotation by al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl is the only text remaining from him.

¹⁵⁰ On this author, see Graf, *Geschichte* (above, n. 103), vol. 2, pp. 191-4; L. Conrad, “Ibn Buṭlān in Bilād al-Shām: The Career of a Travelling Christian Physician”, in D. Thomas (ed.), *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, Brill, Leiden 2001, pp. 131-57; D. Oltean, “From Baghdad to Antioch and Constantinople: Ibn Buṭlān and the Byzantines”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 114.1 (2021), pp. 355-76; J. Glynias, “Baghdad on the Orontes: Between Greek and Arabic Intellectual Worlds in 11th-Century Antioch”, PhD diss., Princeton University, 2022, pp. 465-537; Ibn Buṭlān, *The Doctors’ Dinner Party*, ed. and trans. P.F. Kennedy - J. Farrell, New York U.P., New York 2023.

¹⁵¹ Read *yuksibahu dātahu* for *taksibuhu dātuhu*.

¹⁵² The reading *miṭla* seems to be out of place; one would expect some expression meaning “by imparting it”.

considered in abstraction from the two [substrates], namely the fire and the adjacent body, it is one in essence, but [at the same time] somehow different in nature.

{§27} Similarly, a carpenter who makes¹⁵³ a chair does so only by imparting to the wood that he assembles [as] a chair the form <of>¹⁵⁴ a chair in his soul, and from this form his act proceeds and obtains in the wood. This is because he makes¹⁵⁵ a chair not by that by which he is a man, or by that by which he is an animal or a body or a substance, but by the form obtaining in the soul of the carpenter; and it is this very form that comes to be in the chair. When it is considered in abstraction from the two essences, no difference in essence will result for it. But when it is considered together with the carpenter, it is called acting, and when it is considered while in the wood, it is called acted upon and a chair.

{§28} Similar is the case with knowledge, knower, and thing known, for when the form of the thing known obtains in the soul of the knower, this person is called knower on account of it, not on account of that through which he is a man or an animal, but on account of nothing else but the form of the thing known. Therefore, it is one in the knower and in the thing known, but different [382] insofar as we consider it in the knower or in the thing known. When this essence is considered in abstraction from the substrates, it is one and undifferentiated, and is at the same time knowledge, knower, and thing known.

{§29} If, according to what we have made clear, this is the case with natural things and artifacts, how much more [should this be so] with spiritual things whose essences do not require circumscription (taḥayyuz) [in matter].

{§30} Thus, according to what Aristotle has shown, things can exist in three places: in the First Cause, where¹⁵⁶ they exist spiritually (*rūḥāniyya*); in the heaven (*al-falak*), where they exist relationally (*nisbiyya*);¹⁵⁷ and in the sensibles, where¹⁵⁸ they exist objectively (*wuḡūdiyya*). An analogy for that would be the form of the essence of the same garment: in the soul of the weaver, it is spiritual; when he prepares a warp of cloth, it becomes relational; and when it turns into the garment itself, it becomes objective.

¹⁵³ Here and below, I read *yanḡuru* for *yanḡuzu*.

¹⁵⁴ I suggest adding *hiya* after *allatī*.

¹⁵⁵ I suggest reading *nāḡiran* for *nāḡizan*.

¹⁵⁶ The First Cause is treated as masculine (*fihī* rather than *fihā*) because it is identified with God. For a similar case of personification of the Cause, cf. *Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ's Twenty Chapters ('Isbrūn Maqāla)*, ed. and trans. S. Stroumsa, Brill, Leiden 1989 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 13), pp. 55, 57.

¹⁵⁷ Another possible translation would be “rationally”; in this case the reference would be to mathematical ratios (*nisab*) of the movements of the celestial spheres.

¹⁵⁸ Read *fihā* (with six manuscripts) for *fihimā*.