

# Porphyry and the Arabic tradition

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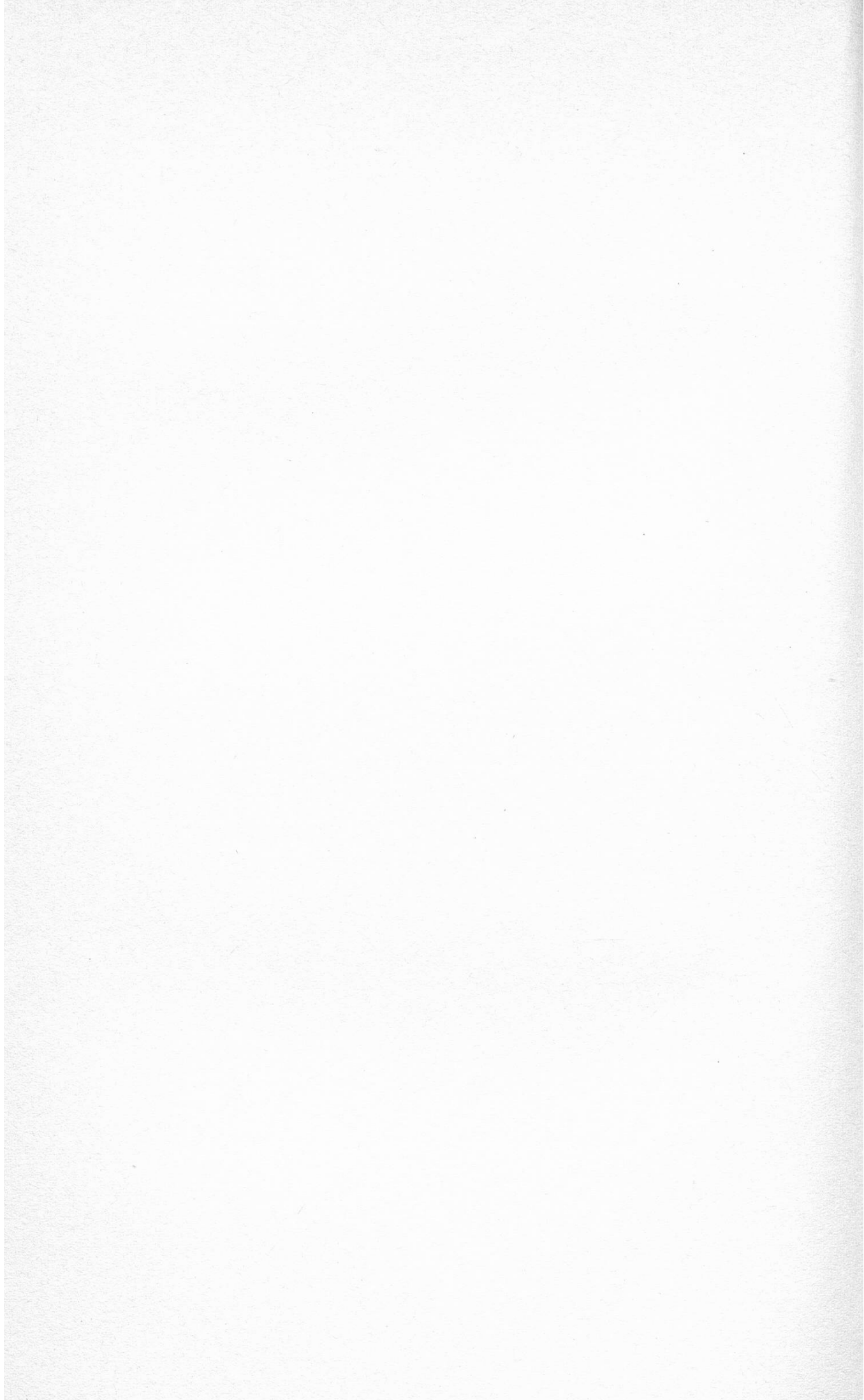
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VIII

RICHARD WALZER

Porphyry and the Arabic Tradition



## PORPHYRY AND THE ARABIC TRADITION

In spite of some progress made in recent years, the survival of Greek philosophy in Arabic translations is still largely ignored and minimised, or, at least, much underrated by classical scholars as well as by general historians of philosophy. This is in part due, no doubt, to the Orientalists themselves who, since they are few in number, have concerned themselves but rarely with writing with a view to the general reader and have, mostly, preferred to address their publications to specialists. It is, in this context, relevant to refer to an anthology of Arabic passages in German translation, published recently by Prof. F. Rosenthal of Yale University under the title *Das Fortleben der Antike im Islam*.<sup>1</sup>

### I

#### THE EXTANT ARABIC MATERIAL

Apart from the interesting and on the whole adequate translations of a considerable number of still extant Greek philosophical and scientific texts, the Muslim Arabs had, during the first four centuries of Islam, become acquainted with numerous Greek philosophical essays and books which were looked at with indifference in subsequent centuries of the Greek Byzantine civilisation, no longer copied by scribes and hence eventually lost in their original Greek form. Only a relatively small part of these Arabic translations has been traced in oriental libraries, which have become better but by no means sufficiently known in this century; and those traced have not all been published

<sup>1</sup> *Die Bibliothek des Morgenlandes* (herausg. von G. E. VON GRÜNEBAUM), Zürich 1965 (407 pp.).

adequately. Because of the small number of available experts some have remained unknown for the time being. This deficiency can, in part, be made up by quotations from works either to be found in Arabic versions of otherwise lost Greek texts which refer to the work in question or in books written by Arabic philosophers in their own right. Other evidence of lost Greek philosophical thought is provided by works written by Arabic authors which ultimately go back to lesser known Greek ideas; sometimes they can be recognised as such unambiguously, sometimes they can be identified as such by more or less cogent evidence, sometimes not more than a likely guess appears to be permissible.

Before approaching Porphyry I think, I ought to illustrate this general statement with a few examples. We may, in this way, get a better starting point for our discussion, in that we may succeed in seeing more clearly what we can reasonably expect from the Arabic tradition in the case of Porphyry's lost Greek works. We can, as we shall see, obtain a number of quotations of works which are not preserved anywhere else—one of very considerable length—and can also try to reconstruct certain trends of his thought without being in a position to assign them with certainty to a particular work.

\* \* \*

Only those authors found their way to the Arabs who were still read in Greek centres of learning, say, after A.D. 500. For such centres (like Alexandria and others) continued somehow to exist within the Islamic world as well for some considerable time after the Arab conquest of Egypt, Palestine and Syria in the 7th century. The greater part of the corpus of Aristotle's lecture courses is now, in editions of varying quality, available for study in Arabic. In addition to the descriptive survey to be found in the

2nd edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*<sup>1</sup>, four books of the *Physics*, with 10th century Arabic commentaries, have just been published from a Leiden manuscript: we can expect two complete editions of the whole *Physics* in the near future. The publication of the Arabic version of the *Generation of Animals* is in an advanced state of preparation, and an edition of the Arabic text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is soon to be expected as well. No translation of the *De gen. et corr.* has as yet been traced.

The Arabic versions of Aristotle—or the Syriac versions on which some of these depend—are still not very regularly used for the establishment of the original Greek text, although their relevance has been discussed in the case of the *Organon*<sup>2</sup> some books of the *Metaphysics*<sup>3</sup> and—but mainly from the Arabic-Latin medieval version—of the *Physics*<sup>4</sup> and two biological books<sup>5</sup>. The Syriac and Arabic translations have been more consistently collated and taken into consideration in the recent Oxford editions of the *Categories*, the *Περὶ ἑρμηνείας*<sup>6</sup>, the *Poetics*<sup>7</sup> and the *Generation of Animals*<sup>8</sup> and, to a minor degree, in the editions of the *Analytics*<sup>9</sup> and the *Physics*<sup>10</sup>. Serious comparative studies of Greek and Arabic philosophical terminology, which are

<sup>1</sup> s.v. Aristûtâlis (I p. 630). Cf. vol. II (1965) p. XVIII.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. R. WALZER, *Greek into Arabic* (Oxford 1962), pp. 60 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. WALZER, *op. cit.*, p. 114 ff.; P. THILLET, *Actes du Congrès Budé à Lyon* (1958).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Sir DAVID ROSS, *Aristotle's Physics* (Oxford 1936), pp. 102 ff., 108, 114; A. MANSION, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957), pp. 81 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. L. PECK's Loeb editions of the *Parts of Animals* (p. 46 f.) and of the *Generation of Animals* (p. xxi f.).

<sup>6</sup> Ed. L. MINIO-PALUELLO (pp. xi, f.; xvi ff.).

<sup>7</sup> Ed. R. KASSEL (p. x f.).

<sup>8</sup> Ed. H. J. DROSSAART LULOFS (p. xviii f.).

<sup>9</sup> Ed. W. D. ROSS et L. MINIO PALUELLO (Oxford 1964), pp. xi f. 187 f.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. n. 4.

definitely of more than antiquarian interest, have scarcely started.

As examples of translations of post-classical Greek philosophical texts I refer to the chapter *περὶ νοῦ* in Alexander of Aphrodisias' *De anima mantissa*<sup>1</sup>, to a group of his *Problemata*<sup>2</sup>, to Themistius' *Paraphrase of Aristotle's De anima*, which is just being printed<sup>3</sup>, and to Ps.-Plutarch's *Placita Philosophorum* (where the Arabs seem to have been able to lay hands on a better MS tradition)<sup>4</sup>. Twenty propositions from Proclus' *Elements of Theology* have turned up in Arabic (ascribed to Alexander of Aphrodisias!).<sup>5</sup>

Although Porphyry seems to have been largely responsible for the eventual adoption of the Aristotelean reading syllabus in the later Neoplatonic schools, only one undisputed work of his is preserved both in Greek and in a complete Arabic version, the *Isagoge* (composed in Sicily between 268 and 270), which became the first philosophical work to be read by a beginner both in the Greek Neoplatonic as well as in the Arabic philosophical course<sup>6</sup>. It was studied by Muslim philosophers in a translation due to Abû Uthmân ad-Dimashqî (± A.D.900), but it had been well known already to Al-Kindî more than half a century before. Avicenna's interpretation of the insignificant little book (more of the type of Alexander of Aphrodisias' monograph *De anima* than a running commentary) is available in a comparatively recent Egyptian edition and deserves to be

<sup>1</sup> J. FINNEGAN, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 33 (1956), p. 159 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Greek into Arabic*, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> M. LYONS, *Oriental Studies* II (Oxford 1966).

<sup>4</sup> The Arabic text was published by A. BADAWI, *Islamica* 16 (Cairo 1954) pp. 91 ff. A second MS is available in Princeton, cf. MIDEO 3 (1956) p. 379.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. E. R. DODDS, *Proclus, The Elements of Theology*, 2nd edition (Oxford 1963), pp. 341 f.

<sup>6</sup> For particulars cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, II (Leiden 1965), s.v. *Furfûriyûs*, p. 948.

studied by somebody concerned with the history of logic, who is, at the same time, able to compare it with the Greek commentators. The *Isagoge* eventually found its way even into the syllabus of the orthodox Muslim theological college, the *madrasa*. It was—and to a certain extent, still is—mostly studied together with a 13th century commentary by a certain Al-Abhari, which eventually completely replaced the original work. The Arabic version of the *Isagoge* does not appear to contribute anything to the establishment of its Greek text, although a minute collation of it has never as yet been attempted. Like the presumably post-Boethian (i.e. post 525) Christian archetype of the Greek MSS it consistently substitutes the Arabic equivalent of ἄγγελος (*mal'ak*) for Porphyry's θεός, in accordance with a well known usage of Greek patristic writers adopted by almost all the Arab translators<sup>1</sup>.

\* \* \*

But in studying the legacy of Greek philosophy in Islam scholars have, very understandably, not been too keen to compare texts known with their Arabic version. They have, on the whole, been more attracted by the chance of finding otherwise lost Greek works in Syriac or Arabic or Arabic-Hebrew versions, either the complete texts or, at least, larger or smaller fragments of them. To give again a few examples: We have, from the 1st century A.D. Nicolaus of Damascus' treatise *On plants*. As Averroes informs us, Nicolaus also held very unorthodox views about the structure of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: that he was aware of the fact that books Δ and Λ could not possibly have been original parts of a coherent course of lectures on first philosophy—a welcome early ally of W. Jaeger's and other

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Greek into Arabic*, p. 167, n. 2.; V. ROSE, *Aristoteles Pseudepigraphus* (Leipzig 1863), p. 678.



modern Aristoteleans analysis of this so strangely arranged work<sup>1</sup>.

An Arabic paraphrase of a lost book by Galen on ethics does not only provide a completely unknown work by this author—more than 100 works by Galen became familiar to the Arabs—but also yields a large extract from and references to a lost treatise by Posidonius<sup>2</sup>. Galen's *Paraphrase of Plato's Timaeus* is available in Arabic only (though with a modern Latin translation)<sup>3</sup>. A completely unknown treatise by Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On the principles of the Universe* (في مبادئ الكون = Περὶ τῶν τοῦ παντός ἀρχῶν?) has been edited in Arabic (cf. F. Rosenthal, *Fortleben der Antike* p. 201). Large fragments of Alexander's lost *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics Λ* can be recovered from Averroes' extant commentary<sup>4</sup>. Themistius' commentary on the *De caelo* has survived in a Hebrew translation from the Arabic, as well as his commentary on *Metaphysics Λ*, parts of which exist also in Arabic quotations by Averroes: both are published, together with revised 16th century Latin translations, in vol. V of the Berlin edition of the *Greek Commentaria in Aristotelem* (1902-3).

There are no fragments of earlier Greek thought to be found in Arabic texts except a few lines quoted by later authors. The transmission of a fragment of Aristotle, tentatively attributed to the dialogue *Eudemus*<sup>5</sup> and referred to by Al-Kindî, may ultimately be due to Porphyry's renowned and very learned *Commentary on the myth of Er*<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. now H. J. DROSSAART LULOFS, *Nicolaus Damascenus on the Philosophy of Aristotle* (Leiden 1965), *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. F. ROSENTHAL, *Fortleben der Antike*, pp. 120-133. *Greek into Arabic*, pp. 142 ff., pp. 164 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Plato Arabus*, I (London 1951).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. FREUDENTHAL, *Die durch Averroes erhaltenen Fragmente Alexanders zur Metaphysik des Aristoteles* (Berlin 1884).

<sup>5</sup> Sir DAVID ROSS, *The Works of Aristotle etc.* (Oxford 1952), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Greek into Arabic*, p. 42 n. 5.

Before I proceed to review tenets and passages from Greek philosophy which can be identified as such in Arabic texts but cannot be attributed with any certainty to any individual author, it seems to be advisable, at this stage, to give a survey of the Arabic evidence of sections of Porphyry's works which are mentioned as such by Arabic authors and to consider which among them appear to be particularly worthy of a detailed study. Mention has already been made of his commentary on Plato's *Republic*. His commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, frequently referred to by Simplicius (about fifty times) existed in a 9th century Arabic translation; a passage on φύσις and τέχνη is quoted by Muhammad b. Zakariyyâ al-Râzî, one of the most independent and learned early Arabic philosophers<sup>1</sup>. It is possible that the commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics* from the *Leiden MS*, which are just being published (cf. above p. 277), and the translation of Aristotle's text itself follow Porphyry's views; but it will take some time to come to a decision, since, in this case, the Arabic commentators did not refer to their Greek predecessors by name. After all, only Alexander's<sup>2</sup>, John Philoponus<sup>3</sup> and Porphyry's commentaries on the *Physics* appear to have become known to and used by the Arabs.

Both Ammonius'<sup>4</sup> and Boethius'<sup>5</sup> commentaries on the *Περὶ ἑρμηνείας* appear to depend, to a very large degree, on Porphyry's lost commentary, and so does Al-Fârâbî's recently published commentary<sup>6</sup>. It may well be that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Opera philosophica* I, p. 121 Kraus. Cf. S. PINES, *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences*, 1962, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> An Arabic fragment of this commentary—which is known to us in quotations by later Greek commentators on the *Physics*—has been discovered among the materials from the Cairo Geniza in Cambridge by S. M. STERN.

<sup>3</sup> *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, XVI-XVII. Cf. S. PINES, *Un précurseur bagdadien de la théorie de l'impetus*, *Isis*, 1953, pp. 247 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, IV 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ed. C. MEISER (Leipzig 1880).

<sup>6</sup> Ed. W. KUTSCH-S. MARROW (Beyrouth 1960).

Al-Fârâbî has preserved otherwise unknown sections of Porphyry's work, which exist neither in Boethius' nor in Ammonius' commentaries. His very interesting discussion of the difference of languages—he is aware of the fact that Arabic differs from both Greek and Persian in not having a *verbum substantivum*—may well go back to similar discussions by Porphyry who shows a keen interest in the difference of languages, and may, in this respect, depend on Stoic predecessors.

Porphyry's *Commentary on Metaphysics*  $\Lambda$ <sup>1</sup> does not appear to have become known to the Arabs: Ibn Rushd used Alexander's and Themistius' commentaries instead, which were known to him in translations by a 10th century Christian Aristotelean.

An otherwise unknown commentary by Porphyry on the *Nicomachean Ethics* (in twelve books) was translated into Arabic in the second half of the 9th century<sup>2</sup>. It seems to have been quite popular among early Islamic philosophers. It is a reasonable guess that Al-Fârâbî (d.A.D.950) used it in his own lost commentary, and this can be supported by an interesting polemical reference to Porphyry he made—which is, by chance, preserved by Averroes<sup>3</sup>. Two other 10th century authors on ethics, Al 'Âmirî (d.A.D.992) and Miskawaih (d.1030) appear both to have used Porphyry's commentary to some extent, and it will be worth our while to give some attention to their works, since more substantial information about Porphyry's commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* may be gleaned from them.

It is difficult to ascertain, in the present state of our knowledge, how far and to what extent the Arabs became acquainted with Porphyry's *Φιλόσοφος ιστορία* and how much

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Simplicius, *De caelo*, p. 503, 34 f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam* (above p. 278, n. 1), p. 949.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also Al-Fârâbî, *Al-Jam'*, p. 17, Dieterici and below p. 295.

their knowledge of the lives of earlier Greek philosophers altogether depends ultimately on this work. All the four books existed in a Syriac translation, and at least two—but perhaps more—were available in Arabic as well. An Arabic version of his *Life of Pythagoras*—which also exists in Greek—is, since 1894, easily accessible in print;<sup>1</sup> more recently, in 1937, a section of the *Life of Solon* was, together with the Arabic *Life of Pythagoras*, discussed by Prof. Rosenthal, who also made it very probable that an Arabic *Life of Zeno* somehow reproduces the corresponding section of Porphyry's work<sup>2</sup>. As far as I know, classical scholars have never taken the slightest notice of these publications.

Before finishing this part of my paper, I should mention the largest work by Porphyry which is preserved in an Arabic translation—if it turns out to be written basically by him—I mean the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* which was translated into Arabic in the days of the philosopher Al-Kindî in the first half of the 9th century, and later on provided with a kind of commentary by Avicenna<sup>3</sup>, whose thought has certain affinities with Plotinus. The Arabic writer refers to the original as a commentary written by Porphyry, and I cannot see at all why Porphyry should not have written a commentary on eight or more essays of Plotinus—which an unknown late Greek or Syriac writer came to attribute to Aristotle. A study of the text—now so adequately placed at our disposal in the 2nd volume of Henry-Schwyzler's *Plotinus*<sup>4</sup>—from this point of view should be possible and promising. It is very gratifying to learn that a French scholar has actually embarked on such a study.

<sup>1</sup> Ibn Abî Usaibi'a, *Uyûn al-anbâ* Ip. 38.

<sup>2</sup> F. ROSENTHAL, *Arabische Nachrichten über Zeno den Eleaten* (Orientalia 6 (1937) p. 30 ff.). *Fortleben der Antike*, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> French translation by G. VAJDA, *Revue Thomiste* 1951, p. 346 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Paris-Bruxelles 1959. Cf. p. xxvi ff.: *De Plotinianis Arabicis*.

The value of the work for the text of Plotinus has been duly emphasized by its recent editors.

The Arabic evidence for the *Letter to Anebo*, available in a German translation since 1850<sup>1</sup> and a re-translation into Italian published in 1946<sup>2</sup>, has been attributed to the commentary on the *Timaeus* by Prof. Sodano<sup>3</sup>.

\* \* \*

I mentioned in the beginning still another way of recovering lost Greek thought from Arabic philosophical texts which deserves to be used with more determination than it has hitherto been done, although it implies some risk. The Arabs were not particularly interested in recording the names of the philosophers whose views they chose to accept, and hence often reproduced their views without referring either to the work in question or to its author. In such cases, we have sometimes to be satisfied with pointing to a particular philosophical trend, say, e.g., the Platonic Academy in the 5th century or the Alexandrian School of the 6th century or middle-Platonic tradition as distinct from post-Plotinian thought. It is tempting to attribute such texts to definite authors and to definite works.

It is, for instance, obvious that a recently published *Consolatio* by Al-Kindî<sup>4</sup> is completely based on well known standard arguments of Greek popular philosophy, but it has been proved wrong to ascribe its model to the well known 4th century writer Themistius<sup>5</sup>. Al-Fârâbî's treatise *On*

<sup>1</sup> Th. HAARBRÜCKER, *Religions partheien* II (Halle 1850-1), p. 000.

<sup>2</sup> F. GABRIELI, *La parola del passato*, I (1946), p. 344 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Napoli, 1958.

<sup>4</sup> H. RITTER-R. WALZER, *Uno scritto morale inedito di Al-Kindî* (Roma 1938).

<sup>5</sup> M. POHLENZ, *Göttinger gelehrte Anzeigen*, 200 (1938), p. 409 ff.; S. VAN RIET, *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 61 (1963), p. 13 ff.

*Plato's philosophy*<sup>1</sup> contains a list of all the dialogues in a supposedly chronological order and is still fully aware of the political aspect of Plato's thought; it must ultimately go back to some originally middle-Platonic work which was still read and used in later centuries. The possibility cannot be ruled out that this was a work by the Platonist Theo of Smyrna, who lived in the first half of the 2nd century and was still known to Proclus in the 5th century; but there is no way of proving or disproving this assumption.

In the case of Porphyry, I think that quite detailed information of this type is available for two or perhaps three of his otherwise lost works<sup>2</sup>. The *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* has already been mentioned: we are, I think, allowed to go beyond the few direct quotations which have been noticed and to attribute to it much more. We know very little about the seven books in which Porphyry set out to demonstrate the ultimate identity of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies *Περὶ τοῦ μίαν εἶναι τὴν Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους αἴρεσιν*<sup>3</sup>. The Arabic tradition as to be found in Al-Fârâbî, Al-Âmirî and Miskawaih allows us, I think, to get a fuller picture of what this book may have been like, and what Porphyry may have stated in it about the concordance of Plato's and Aristotle's views. The essential features of Porphyry's paraphrase of a number of Plotinus' essays<sup>4</sup> may be recovered through a thorough analysis of the Arabic *Theology of Aristotle*, rearranged in its original order and freed from later additions<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> F. ROSENTHAL-R. WALZER, *Plato Arabus II* (London 1942); English translation by MUHSIN MAHDI, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (New York 1962), p. 53 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, p. 282, n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Suda*, s.v. Πορφύριος

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Life of Plotinus*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above, p. 283, n. 4.

This is a survey of the greater part of the material which is available. It is not too much, but it does, on the other hand, not seem to be negligible. I propose to discuss mainly the last named three works.

## II

### THE CONCORDANCE

The modern study of Al-Fârâbî's works <sup>1</sup>, inaugurated by M. Steinschneider in 1869 and continued above all, though not too adequately, by F. Dieterici at the end of the 19th century, has made it highly probable that he had some information about Porphyry's *Concordance* and followed a similar trend of thought in his own philosophy. Other works by Al-Fârâbî which were published more recently added more substance to this likely guess; one can, through a thorough analysis of his view, give very strong support to it. Newly discovered essays by Al-Kindî, who lived in the first half of the 9th century, point to similar conclusions. But a treatise by a little-known 10th century philosopher, Al-'Âmirî, which was published for the first time in 1958 <sup>2</sup> and is still untranslated <sup>3</sup>—has made it almost certain that the Arabs knew quite a lot about Porphyry's *Concordance*: it provides us, moreover, with rather detailed information about the structure and method of the work. It is, at first sight, a mere collection of quotations, mainly from Plato and Aristotle, about ethical and political topics. These quotations are given in a systematic order under apposite headlines without any elaborate commentary; the reader is left in no doubt that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, II (Leiden 1966), p. 778 ff., s.v. Al-Fârâbî.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-sa'âda wa'l-is'âd*, ed. M. MINOVI (Wiesbaden 1957).

<sup>3</sup> A study of the work, accompanied by a partial translation, by Dr. A. GHORAB, will be published in the near future.

Plato and Aristotle held identical or, at least, non-contradictory views about almost every topic mentioned. Another Arabic author, Miskawaih in his treatise on moral philosophy<sup>1</sup>, sets out to harmonize Plato and Aristotle in a different way from Al-Fârâbî and Al-Âmirî: according to his view, Aristotle is an appropriate guide for this world, while Plato is the right guide for the world-to-come: it is in this way that their views are eventually complementary<sup>2</sup>.

\* \* \*

Al-Fârâbî has given a summary outline of his views on the universe, on man and organised society in several of his books, which are intended to be read rather by generally educated readers than by professional philosophers. He claims to give a new lease of life to the philosophy of the ancient Greeks which he believes to be dead in its country of origin. At the end of the first part of one of these general books, entitled *On obtaining felicity*, we come, as a prelude to parts 2 and 3, across the following statement: «This philosophy came to us from the Greeks, from Plato and Aristotle. Both philosophers showed us the ways to their thought and, moreover, pointed out how it could be re-established once its light had become dim or even after it had been annihilated altogether»<sup>3</sup>. He announces that the second part of the work will deal with the whole of Plato's philosophy and the third with the philosophy of Aristotle in its entirety and concludes: «It will thus become manifest that the aim of these two philosophers is one and the same and that they intended to offer one and the same philosophy.» If we approach Al-Fârâbî's own thought with this key in

<sup>1</sup> *Kitâb tabdhîb al-Akhlâq*. Partial translation by F. ROSENTHAL, *Fortleben der Antike*, pp. 133-145.

<sup>2</sup> *Greek into Arabic*, p. 224 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. MUHSIN MAHDI (above, p. 285, n. 1), p. 49 f.



hand, we shall find that it fits very well, and that it can, indeed, be understood in this way. A minute analysis of his philosophy, as I intend to give in a forthcoming analytical commentary on one of his main works, confirms this view in many details. It is worth emphasizing that Al-Fârâbî's set-books of logic, physics, psychology, metaphysics and ethics are Aristotle's lecture courses, whereas Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* have this position in politics. I confidently believe that this apparent neglect of Aristotle's *Politics* is neither due to Al-Fârâbî's choice nor to the fact that the translators had not been able to find a manuscript of the work. Whereas Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* were highly unpopular with Proclus and his like—who appreciated the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* above all—the Arabs had, since the middle of the 9th century, translations not only of the *Timaeus* (the full text), but also of the *Republic* and the *Laws*, and no translation of Aristotle's *Politics* at all. This must obviously correspond to a Greek philosophical school tradition; and, indeed, there is no Greek commentary on Aristotle's *Politics* among the numerous extant Aristotle commentaries of late Antiquity. I think it quite probable that Porphyry inaugurated this mixed syllabus of Plato and Aristotle reading: it would be quite in keeping with his view that Plato's and Aristotle's systems are ultimately one and the same.

The words of Al-Fârâbî just quoted agree with well known similar statements in pre-Islamic authors. I just recall St. Augustine, *Contra Acad.* 3,42: *non defuerunt acutissimi et solertissimi viri qui docerent disputationibus suis Aristotelem ac Platonem ita sibi concinere ut imperitis minusque attentis dissentire videantur, multis quidem saeculis multisque contentionibus, sed tamen... est, ut opinor, una verissimae philosophiae disciplina.* It appears, in view of our earlier discussions, superfluous to reiterate that Augustine here depends on Porphyry—as well as Boethius in his commentary on the *Περὶ ἑρμηνείας* (as I have mentioned before, p. 281) II

p. 80, 1: *his peractis non equidem contempserim Aristotelis Platonisque sententias in unam quodam modo revocare concordiam eosque non ut plerique dissentire in omnibus sed in plerisque et his in philosophia maximis consentire demonstrem.* Simplicius insists (*De caelo* 640, 28): ὅπερ δὲ πολλάκις εἶωθα καὶ νῦν εἰπεῖν καιρὸς ὅτι οὐ πραγματικὴ τις ἐστὶν τῶν φιλοσόφων ἡ διαφωνία.

If it is correct to assume that Al-Fârâbî understood his own position in this way, this will apply also to his analysis of the human intellect, which he develops out of Aristotle's *De an.* III 5, basing himself on Alexander of Aphrodisias' interpretation of the chapter, i.e. distinguishing a νοῦς ὑλικός or κατὰ δύναμιν, a νοῦς καθ' ἑξιν, a νοῦς κατ' ἐνέργειαν and a νοῦς θύραθεν which in Latin, I think on the base of the Arabic translation of θύραθεν as ἐπίκτητος, is called *intellectus acquisitus*. He should have assumed that in holding his view Aristotle expressed clearly what had been in Plato's mind before. Exactly this is explicitly put forward by Al-Kindî in a treatise *On the intellect* (*Rasâ'il* I p. 353), who also, in the main, follows Alexander of Aphrodisias: «... according to the renowned ancient Greeks—and among the most renowned of them are Aristotle and his teacher, the philosopher Plato—since the implication of Plato's words is brought out by Aristotle's statement...». It has been claimed—though not proved—that this treatise of Al-Kindî goes back to Porphyry; it is certainly not impossible. In another very short treatise, on Plato's and Aristotle's views on the soul of the world and the soul of man, Al-Kindî contends in a similar way that there is no real difference between the opinions of the two philosophers, although they may appear incompatible at first sight<sup>1</sup>. In a third treatise by Al-Kindî<sup>2</sup> the human soul in particular is

<sup>1</sup> *Rasâ'il* I, p. 281. English translation in A. ALTMANN-S. M. STERN, *Isaac Israeli* (Oxford 1958), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Rasâ'il* I, p. 272 ff. Italian translation by G. FURLANI, *Rivista trimestrale di studi filosofici e religiosi* 3 (1922), pp. 50 ff.

discussed according to Plato's and Aristotle's views: it is the same text in which the fragment ascribed to Aristotle's *Eudemus* is quoted which had, most likely, been mentioned by Porphyry in his *Commentary on the myth of Er*<sup>1</sup>.

It appears thus highly probable that much of Al-Fârâbî's and some of Al-Kindî's thought may ultimately be connected with Porphyry's *Concordance of Plato's and Aristotle's views*: I think, for instance, of Al-Fârâbî's analysis of the various faculties of the human soul, his very unusual tenets on immortality, on philosophical truth and religious symbolism, his way of reporting Plato's *Republic* in general and his description of the wrong states in particular. But before committing ourselves to guesses of this kind, it seems now appropriate to turn to Al-'Âmirî's work, who was a pupil of a disciple of Al-Kindî, and to ask whether it does not allow us to find a firmer and less hazardous footing.

\* \* \*

It seems difficult to believe that Porphyry could have filled seven books (= ca. 350 pages of a Teubner sized text, compared with the 200 pages of the incomplete four books *De abstinentia*), unless they were, like, for instance, the *De abstinentia*, interspersed with copious quotations. Porphyry could prove his case by referring to parallel passages and commenting on them. He will not have been the first to confront Platonic and Aristotelean texts in this way but his work became very influential in later centuries, as it seems, and was widely used and relied on. It is worthwhile to examine Al-'Âmirî's book on ethics and politics as a late echo of this work of Porphyry: not only because it consistently confronts Platonic and Aristotelean passages in the way indicated but because, in addition, Porphyry's name

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 280, n. 6.

appears in a prominent passage in the beginning of the work and in several other places as well <sup>1</sup>. There is, however, no explicit mention of the title of the *Concordance*. I shall quote some particular passages before talking about the book in general.

P. 44, 6 : Why does man have different pleasures? Plato and Aristotle are both said to express the same view about this topic. A quotation from Aristotle is provided. Several quotations from Plato follow, most of which can be connected with *Republic*, *Timaeus* and *Laws*. No comment by Al-'Âmirî.

P. 47 : Both Plato and Aristotle are said to agree in their views about the pleasures of knowledge. Special quotations from each author are given.

P. 49 f. occur quotations from Galen, Porphyry and Aristotle (Furfûriyûs is a certain emendation of the Ghurghuriyûs of the Arabic MS).

An important statement, which recalls Al-Kindî's words referred to above (p. 289) occurs on p. 50. There we read that Plato's description of the pleasure of knowledge as the filling of a need is identical with Aristotle's well-known different view : Plato is not to be understood literally but metaphorically, κατ' ἀναλογίαν (?), whereas Aristotle gives the right answer explicitly. The author asserts this in his own name, but it is beyond doubt that he found this idea in his source :  
 واقول: قد قال افلاطون بأن لذة العرفة انما هي تمام النقصان ويشبه ان يكون انما قاله على سبيل التشبيه ، والتحقق فيه ما قاله ارسطوطاليس .

But Plato and Aristotle are not made to agree where such an identity of their views cannot be postulated : as in the case of courage (ἀνδρεία), which, as you are aware, is restricted to fortitude in war in Aristotle's *Ethics*.

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 5, 53, 192, 253 Minovi.

These are a few passages in which the close relation between Plato and Aristotle is expressly stressed. But whenever available, parallel quotations from Plato and Aristotle occur on almost every page throughout the book. It is worth mentioning that passages on ethics from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* appear on the same level as passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. One is reminded of the coordination of *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* since the days of Theophrastus and Horace's *Ars poetica*—but this is a more obvious procedure than to take the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Rhetoric* together. This way of dealing with uncoordinated works of Aristotle appears to correspond to Alexander of Aphrodisias' attitude, for instance, who was read and studied in Plotinus' school and with whom Porphyry, as we know, was very familiar. The *Rhetoric* does not appear to have been very popular in the Neoplatonic schools, but Al-Fârâbî wrote a commentary which survives, in part, in Averroes' *Commentary on the Rhetoric*.

The point has to be stressed that Al-'Âmirî, in referring to Plato or Aristotle, mostly does not mention the particular work from which the quotation is taken. The greater part of these quotations can be identified but not all of them have been, as yet. Porphyry's *Concordance* will have been quite different in this respect; as far as I can make out, it was always his practice to give exact references, and it was essential for him to do so in this particular case. But Al-'Âmirî's readers were not as sophisticated as a Greek reading public at the end of the third century of the Christian era. They may have been quite satisfied to be informed about the Greek philosophers' views in this way and did not care for more precise information. It is equally unlikely that Porphyry's work looked like the anthology from Greek authors compiled by John of Stobi in the 5th (?) century. Porphyry will and must have argued his case, I suppose, for every topic mentioned. Very few casual remnants of

such arguments survive still in Al-'Âmirî's book, as has been shown.

There are other reasons which suggest that Al-'Âmirî was not acquainted with Porphyry's original work but with a somewhat later edition of it, not to be dated, I think, earlier than the 6th century (Proclus is once quoted). References to Arabic and Persian authors—here and there also a rejection of an Arabic author's view—will have been added by Al-'Âmirî himself or by his teacher.

At the very beginning of Al-'Âmirî's book (p. 5) we read Porphyry's definition of felicity (εὐδαιμονία): it conforms to Aristotle's view, although it is expressed in very different terms: « Porphyry says » he reports « that felicity is the entelechy of the form of man (or that state in which man realises his form) » *انما هي استكمال الانسان صورته*, the perfection (τελειότης) of man, in so far as he is a human being, results from his voluntary actions *وكمال الانسان بحسب* ; his perfection, in as far as he is God ( *ملاك* « angel »: the normal Arabic translation for « God », <sup>1</sup>) and reason, intellect (νοῦς) is contemplation (θεωρία) *وكماله بحسب ما هو ملاك وعقل في النظر*

Both perfections are complete ( *تام* ) in their own right, but if one compares them, the 'human' perfection is evidently deficient and faulty. One has, then, to distinguish between a human felicity, ἀνθρωπίνη εὐδαιμονία, and a felicity resulting from the highest activity of the mind, εὐδαιμονία νοητική. This is Porphyry's way of describing the outcome of Aristotle's speculation on moral philosophy and human perfection. We note also that by defining felicity as ἐντελέχεια he imports metaphysical thought into ethics (according to common later practice). Al-'Âmirî's first book is based on this definition, illustrating it continuously with passages both from Plato and Aristotle, and mentioning Porphyry occa-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 279, n. 1.

sionally—once explicitly his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*—as he may have done himself. In book II the author treats virtue and excellence in exactly the same way. I suggest that a future collection of the fragments of Porphyry should include the first two books of Al-‘Âmirî in full—if you prefer, in small print—and perhaps part of the remaining four books as well.

So much for the possible repercussions of Porphyry’s *Concordance* in Al-‘Âmirî’s book, written, it is true, about 600 years later and probably depending on a 6th century modification or re-edition of the book. I must limit myself here to pointing out that his work deserves a special study from this point of view and that I am convinced that the results will be worth considering.

### III

#### THE COMMENTARY ON THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

It appears that Porphyry’s commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* is expressly referred to by Al-Fârâbî and Al-‘Âmirî; Miskawaih refers, (ch. 3) in his survey of the ἀγαθά, to Porphyry ‘who reports on the authority of Aristotle’: his account of the different kinds of goods shows obvious resemblances to the survey of Peripatetic ethics by Arius Didymus—whose source I am now inclined to date at the end of the 2nd century B.C. and to connect with the pseudo-Aristotelean *Magna Moralia* (which I believe to have been written at the same time) on one side and with Cicero, *De Fin. V* on the other—and to the so-called *Divisiones Aristoteleae* which are also referred to by Alexander of Aphrodisias (*Comm. in Top.* 242, 4) and Simplicius (*Cat.* 65, 5). Porphyry evidently continued a Peripatetic tradition of commenting on Aristotle’s *Ethics* of which we do not know very much otherwise. But Miskawaih reproduces in addition in

chapters 3-5 of his treatise large sections from an otherwise unknown Neoplatonic commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* which one is tempted to identify with Porphyry's commentary as well. I have, very briefly, discussed some aspects of his treatment of human relations and friendship, of φιλία, in two previous papers<sup>1</sup>. Chapter 5 of Miskawaih's book represents a skilful rearrangement of the topics discussed in books 8 and 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The treatment of the spiritual ἔρωσ and the emphasis of the friendship of the pupil and the master as the disciple's spiritual father seems to me particularly characteristic of a neoplatonic expositor of Aristotle and will have been added by him. I see no reason why this expositor should not have been Porphyry. The fact that Al-Fârâbî rejected the mystical union of the philosopher with God as γρᾶδων ὕθλος in his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*—as we learn from Averroes<sup>2</sup>—allows us to reconstruct a similarly typical Neoplatonic statement from his words: we are bound to infer that Porphyry, whom he follows in his commentary, described the τελεία εὐδαιμονία in *Nic. Eth.* book X as ἔνωσις—we know from a polemical remark of Avicenna<sup>3</sup> that Porphyry in fact held this view. Since Porphyry was not the first Greek philosopher to write a commentary on an Aristotelean treatise—though obviously the first Neoplatonist—we should not suppose that his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* contained too much information which would provide substantial additions to our knowledge of his own thought. Reading through chapters 3-5 in Miskawaih's

<sup>1</sup> *Entretiens Hardt* III (Vandœuvres-Genève 1957), pp. 203 ff. *Greek into Arabic*, pp. 220 ff., 236 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. MUNK, *Mélanges de Philosophie Juive et Arabe* (Paris 1859), p. 348 n. 3: *sententiatus est Abû Nasr (i.e. Al-Fârâbî) in Ethica sua verba dicentium quod uniemur cum intellectu abstracto esse verba vetularum*. Cf. Porphyry, *Opuscula*, p. 255, 15 Nauck.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. F. RAHMAN, *Prophecy in Islam* (London 1958), p. 15 ff.



book shows clearly, according to my lights, that he must have read the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the help of a paraphrase or a commentary; more than once this can be actually proved by comparing an extant Greek paraphrase. Mis-kawaih does not cover the whole *Nicomachean Ethics* but only a great part of book I, on felicity, εὐδαιμονία, book V on justice, parts of books VIII-IX on friendship and the second part of book X. We meet similar innovations as we find here everywhere in this kind of commentaries. There is a παθητικὴ ἡδονή and a ἡδονὴ κατ' ἐνέργειαν; the term φιλία is specified, the differences between φιλία and ἔρως and ἀγάπη (? *mawadda*) are explained in detail; there is not only a geometrical and arithmetical proportion but also a harmonic proportion (of which we hear first in Philo); there is polemic against the Stoics which we can expect in authors like Alexander of Aphrodisias and Porphyry, but which makes scarcely any sense for an Arabic philosopher. The Arabic tradition—most likely derived from Porphyry—should be constantly compared with all the Greek remnants of Peripatetic interpretations of Aristotle's *Ethics*.

#### IV

##### THE THEOLOGY OF ARISTOTLE

It would be impertinent, in the presence of so many Plotinian scholars, to embark here on a detailed discussion of the *Theology of Aristotle*. It is clear that it is an odd transformation of a paraphrase of some essays of Plotinus, made at a time when the historical knowledge of Greek philosophy was in decline or in surroundings where an attribution of Plotinian thought to Aristotle did not really matter. I am unable to say whether this event took place in Greek or Christian Syriac lands. We find, within the Arabic tradition, Proclus changed to Aristotle in the so called *Liber de causis*

—which may well have a similar origin—and Alexander of Aphrodisias being disguised as Proclus, a fact comparable to Alexander in Neoplatonic garb, as he appears in the greater part of the *Commentary on the Metaphysics* which is ascribed to him in the Greek manuscripts. I can not see any valid reason why the paraphrase of Plotinus used by the author of the *Theology* should not be based on a paraphrase by Porphyry, probably the first ever attempted, intended to introduce students into this still widely unknown philosophical work. Père Henry's attempt to make the *Theology* reflect or even reproduce the oral teaching of Plotinus did not meet with approval and is, in my view, not the right explanation of the peculiar features which he observed—the transposition for instance of new Plotinian terms into the conventional terminology. Unless a thorough analysis of the *Theology* brings to light features which are absolutely incompatible with Porphyry, I think it will be a reasonable working hypothesis to start a study of the text as it is available in the 2nd volume of Henry-Schwyzler from this point of view. That there are certain sections which will turn out to be later additions will, I trust, not invalidate my case.

A well known passage from Olympiodorus' commentary on the *Phaedo*<sup>1</sup> contrasts Porphyry and Plotinus, as the last philosophers, with the thinkers of a « priestly » kind, Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus. Olympiodorus tries to mediate between these contrasts. But Porphyry was evidently still—or again—appreciated, against the Athenian Neoplatonists, in the school of Alexandria and may be even divested there of some « Plotinian » elements. It is interesting to realise that this, I think Alexandrian, tradition reached the Arabs and became of some importance for them.

<sup>1</sup> In *Phaed.*, p. 123, 3 Norvin.

## DISCUSSION

*M. Theiler*: Es wäre von hohem Interesse, am Rand von zuverlässig übersetzten und kommentierten Texten nachprüfen zu können, was die Araber Neues für die griechische Überlieferung des Porphyrios darbieten, und was zwar durch das Sammelbecken Porphyrios hindurchgeht, aber ältere — etwa mittelplatonische — Lehrmeinungen enthält.

*M. Walzer*: Mir liegt daran, Wege zu finden, wie man klassische Philologen, die des Arabischen nicht mächtig sind, mit dieser Literatur in angemessener Auswahl vertraut machen kann. Der Artemis-Verlag plant eine solche Veröffentlichung auf englisch und deutsch — mit kurzen Einleitungen und erklärenden Anmerkungen (wo nötig) — und es interessiert mich zu hören, ob Sie einem solchen Plan für vernünftig und sinnvoll halten.

*Une discussion suit cette remarque de M. Walzer. Elle aboutit à la conclusion qu'une telle anthologie serait importante et utile; la question est posée de l'état actuel des travaux que s'étaient proposés MM. Walzer et Dörrie en vue de publier l'ensemble des fragments de Porphyre.*

*M. Sodano*: Mi si permetta di rivolgere al prof. Walzer la seguente domanda: la tradizione araba è sempre esatta e precisa? Io, ad esempio, ho potuto costatare che il passo attribuito da Muhammed aš-Šaharastânî (*Lib. de sectis religiosis et philos.* p. 345-47 Cureton-F. Gabrieli, *Plotino e Porfirio in un eresiografo musulmano*, in «La parola del passato» III (1946) p. 344 sgg.) alla *Lettera ad Anebo* debba piuttosto, a mio parere, riferirsi al commentario che il Neoplatonico dedico al *Timeo* (cfr. una citazione apocrifia dalla *Lettera ad Anebo* di Porfirio nel *Kitâb al-Milal wan-nihal* di Muhammad aš-Šaharastânî, in *Rend. Acc. Arch. Lett. Belle arti Napoli XXXV* 1960 pp. 35-56). Cosa può dire il prof. Walzer sull'argomento?

E, in secondo luogo : quale contributo puo dare la tradizione araba alla ricostituzione dei commentari di Porfirio ai dialoghi platonici?

*M. Walzer* : Non è, a mio parere, facile accertare se il passo che gli Arabi attribuiscono alla *Lettera ad Anebo* si riferisca invece al *Commento al Timeo*, perchè abbiamo soltanto frammenti di ambedue gli scritti porfiriani. Alla seconda domanda, direi che non credo che la tradizione araba possa dare un apprezzabile contributo alla ricostituzione dei commentari di Porfirio.

*M. Dörrie* : Setzt sich in der Tradition der Araber ein Reflex alexandrinischer — oder anderswo lokal fixierbarer — Traditionen fort?

*M. Walzer* : Dazu möchte ich auf die Veröffentlichung M. Meyerhoff's *Von Alexandrien nach Bagdad*, in den *Sitzungsber. der berlin. Akademie* (phil. hist. Klasse) von 1928 verweisen. Betonen möchte ich, dass die spätgriechische Tradition die islamische Welt auf verschiedenen Wegen und in verschiedener Form erreicht hat.

*M. Dörrie* : Spielt die Vermittlung durch das Syrische eine wichtige Rolle?

*M. Walzer* : Ohne Zweifel!

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