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### *Cover*

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

# *The Curriculum of Aristotelian Philosophy among the Syrians*

John W. Watt

## *Abstract*

Since many Syriac texts on secular subjects have not come down to us, an assessment of the philosophical culture of the Syrians, both in the pre-Abbasid and early Abbasid eras, should take into account not only the preserved philosophical writings, but also those known to have once existed from references in other Syriac or Arabic texts. Equally important to bear in mind is the fact that particularly in the pre-Abbasid era, many learned Syrians were able to read Greek and were not confined in their reading to those works which had been translated. Considered in this light, it becomes clear that Syriac interest in Aristotelian philosophy, at least on the part of an elite which in the seventh century appears to have been particularly drawn to the School established at the monastery of Qenneshre on the Euphrates, did not fundamentally differ, despite its Christian colouring, from the Neoplatonic School of Ammonius at Alexandria, and in particular envisaged Aristotelian philosophy as proceeding from logic through physics and mathematics to metaphysics. The *Organon* was studied at least up to the *Sophistical Refutations*, and there is evidence of some interest in mathematics, particularly astronomy. In the pre-Abbasid period, however, there is no sign of any engagement with the physical treatises of Aristotle, despite some interest in natural philosophy evident in the *Hexaemeron* of Jacob of Edessa. The most likely explanation for the divergent estimations of Aristotle as logician and natural philosopher is the rejection of his theory of the eternity of the world, already manifested in the reserve of some Christians at Alexandria to his *Physics*, and the rejection of the theory together with the support provided to the creation story of *Genesis* in the writings of John Philoponus, fragments of whose *Contra Aristotelem* and *De Opificio mundi* are extant in Syriac. In Abbasid Baghdad, Syrians and Christians writing in Arabic who wished to engage with Muslim philosophers could no longer confine their writing on natural philosophy within the framework of the biblical *Hexaemeron*, and Aristotle's physical treatises again assumed great significance, without, however, Christians abandoning their rejection of the eternity of the world. The *Metaphysics* was regarded from the earliest days of Syriac Aristotelianism as the culmination and goal (*telos*) of Aristotelian philosophy, but while in the School of Alexandria the curriculum was completed by a pagan exposition of Plato, such as is evident in the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus, the pioneer of Syriac Aristotelianism, Sergius of Res'ainā, fashioned a Christian version of the curriculum by replacing it with the biblical interpretation presented in the corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius.

Interest in Aristotle on the part of Syriac scholars from the sixth century onwards is widely recognised as having contributed to the diffusion of Greek philosophical thought in the Near East. Syrians were among the students of the Neoplatonists in Alexandria, and Aristotle and his commentators were still being studied in Syriac in ninth and tenth century Baghdad, but the depth and range of that Syriac engagement are still subject to diverse opinions, and these diverging opinions impact on the significance one may attribute to Syriac Aristotelianism for early Graeco-Arabic philosophy. One reason for the divergences is that some important extant texts are still unedited or untranslated, another is the paucity of extant Syriac manuscripts from that early period.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article was presented at a symposium in Geneva in May 2017 on 'Aristotle in Armenia', for the invitation to which I should here like to thank Prof. Valentina Calzolari.

Most surviving Syriac manuscripts that date back to the tenth century or earlier come from two monastic libraries in Egypt, only one of which, Deir al-Surian, contains a significant number on philosophy, and even these, unsurprisingly in a monastery, are greatly outweighed by the number on biblical and patristic matters.<sup>1</sup> An assessment of the importance of texts which are currently lost to us, based necessarily only on references to them present in other writings, both Syriac and Arabic, affects the picture we will draw of the philosophical culture of the Syrians both in the pre-Abbasid and early Abbasid periods.

The most notable of the lost pre-Abbasid philosophical texts are the seventh century translations by Athanasius of Balad of the complete *Prior Analytics*, the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Topics*, and the *Sophistical Refutations*.<sup>2</sup> If it is thought surprising that such important texts have not survived in Syriac, no less so is the fact that the ninth century Syriac translations of Ḥunayn and Iṣḥāq of the *Categories* to the *Topics* and other treatises of Aristotle mentioned by the *Fihrist* are also lost.<sup>3</sup> The Syriac versions of Galen have suffered a similar fate: very little of the twenty-six or so translations of Sergius of Reš'ainā mentioned by Ḥunayn in his famous *risāla*, and the round ninety-six of his own in the same text, has survived.<sup>4</sup> The dominance of Arabic and corresponding decline of Syriac as the preferred literary medium for works of philosophy and medicine from the tenth century will be one

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<sup>1</sup> The other source of several early manuscripts is St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai, some of which are of interest for 'popular philosophy' (ethics). The Deir al-Surian manuscripts are mostly now located in the British Library or the Vatican, while a few still remain on site. For fuller discussion of these issues, cf. S.P. Brock, "Without Mushē of Nisibis, Where Would We Be?" in R. Ebied - H. Teule (eds.), *Symposium Syriacum VIII*, Peeters, Leuven 2004, pp. 15-24. In the magisterial catalogue of W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838*, 3 vols., British Museum, London 1870-1872, only 36 (1154-89) of the approximately 1200 pages of manuscript description are devoted to those dealing with 'scientific literature' (logic, grammar, ethics, medicine, and agriculture). It is no doubt a safe assumption that philosophy was a minority interest among Syrians, but the fact that monastic libraries are the sole source of Syriac manuscripts from the Near East may exaggerate the disparity between their interest in theological and non-theological subjects. Unfortunately the library of the most famous monastery to support philosophical studies, Qenneshe (see below), has not survived.

<sup>2</sup> The evidence for these lost translations comes from *Letter 48* of Patriarch Timothy I (d. 823) and the Paris manuscript of the Arabic *Organon*. On the Syriac translations of the six-volume *Organon*, both the extant and the lost, cf. H. Hugonnard-Roche - A. Elamrani-Jamal, "L'*Organon*. Tradition syriaque et arabe", in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques (DPhA)*, CNRS-Éditions, Paris 1989, I, pp. 502-28; S.P. Brock, "The Syriac Commentary Tradition", in C. Burnett (ed.), *Glosses and Commentaries on Aristotelian Logical Texts*, Warburg Institute, London 1993, pp. 3-18; and J.W. Watt, "Al-Fārābī and the History of the Syriac *Organon*", in G.A. Kiraz (ed.), *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone. Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway 2008, pp. 751-78, esp. pp. 755-8, 763-4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, pp. 248.20-249.15 Flügel (Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. G. Flügel, Voegel, Leipzig 1871-1872) for the *Categories* to *Topics*, pp. 249.26- 252.4 for the others. Cf. A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, Marcus und Webers, Bonn 1922, pp. 227-31. The *Fihrist's* statement that Ḥunayn made an Arabic translation of the *Categories* is clearly wrong. Ḥunayn made a Syriac version, Iṣḥāq an Arabic (though not, as commonly assumed, from his father's Syriac); cf. F.E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus*, Brill, Leiden 1968, pp. 7-8; D. King, *The Earliest Syriac Translation of Aristotle's Categories*, Brill, Leiden 2010, pp. 21-9. Some of these lost translations were probably used by Bar Hebraeus, but their recovery from his works is difficult on account of his heavy reliance upon Avicenna. Cf. for the *Rhetoric*, for example, J.W. Watt, *Aristotelian Rhetoric in Syriac*, Brill, Leiden 2005, pp. 6-8, 20-29, 41-5. A Syriac version of *Poetics* 1449 b 24-1450 a 9 was cited by Bar Shakko (d. 1241) in his *Book of Dialogues*; cf. D. Margoliouth, *Analecta Orientalia ad Poeticam Aristoteleam*, Oxford U.P., London 1887, pp. 77-9 Arabic pagination (Syriac) and 54-6 (Latin translation).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. G. Kessel, *Appendix 4*, in J.C. Lamoreaux, *Hunayn ibn Iṣḥāq on his Galen Translations*, Brigham Young U.P., Provo 2016, pp. 168-80; S.P. Brock, "The Syriac Background to Ḥunayn's Translation Techniques", *Aram* 3 (1991), pp. 139-62, esp. pp. 153-6. See also J.W. Watt, "Why Did Ḥunayn, the Master Translator into Arabic, Make Translations into Syriac? On the Purpose of the Syriac Translations of Ḥunayn and his Circle", in J. Scheiner - D. Janos (ed.), *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdād, 750-1000 C.E.*, Darwin Press, Princeton 2014, pp. 363-88, esp. pp. 363-70.

reason for their loss. Only in the thirteenth century did a ‘Syriac Renaissance’ occur in these fields of study, but after that time Syriac scribes and their readers who interested themselves in philosophical matters mostly preferred to copy or read the expositions of Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) of Aristotelian philosophy, rather than Aristotle himself or his late antique commentators,<sup>5</sup> and Bar Hebraeus depended for his interpretation of Aristotle largely on Avicenna. By contrast, clarity on the earlier curriculum of Aristotelian study among the Syrians before and during the early Abbasid period can serve to bring into sharper focus both the elements of continuity in the history of philosophy in the Near East between the late antique and early medieval periods, and the way in which that philosophical tradition was subsequently developed and enriched by Arabic writers.

The earliest Syriac Aristotelian known to us is Sergius of Reš‘ainā, who studied in Alexandria in the time of Ammonius and died in 536.<sup>6</sup> In order, however, to gain an overall perspective on the Syriac Aristotelian tradition, it will be useful to begin with a text from an author two centuries later, George, bishop of the Arab tribes (d. 724). In his commentary on the *Categories*, preserved in a single 8/9<sup>th</sup> century manuscript (BL *Add.* 14,659), George proceeded through the ten traditional questions of the *prolegomenon* to that treatise and thus raised the question, number four in the sequence, of the ‘end’ of Aristotelian philosophy:<sup>7</sup>

What is the end of the Aristotelian philosophy? We say (it is) that we may know the one principle, cause, and creator of all. For the Philosopher demonstrates in the treatise called *Metaphysics* (Syr. *bātar kyānyātā* = Gr. *meta ta physika*) that the principle and cause is one, bodiless, from which everything has come into being.

There is no doubt that George was familiar with Philoponus’ corresponding *prolegomenon*,<sup>8</sup> but the fact that George is hardly very original here is exactly the point I wish to make. Since Sergius was a student at Alexandria, one would expect his commentary on the *Categories* to exhibit a close similarity to those of the Alexandrians. But George’s acquaintance with Aristotelian philosophy was entirely gained in the Syriac-speaking area. Two hundred years after Sergius, the Neoplatonic Aristotelianism of the school of Ammonius was alive and well in Syriac-speaking Mesopotamia. George and the Syriac tradition in which he stood did not study Aristotle primarily to win debates with rival churchmen, as is sometimes suggested,<sup>9</sup> but for the same reason as the Neoplatonists of late

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J.W. Watt, “The Syriac Translations of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq and their Precursors”, in M. Tamcke - S. Grebenstein (eds.), *Geschichte, Theologie und Kultur des syrischen Christentums*. Beiträge zum 7. Deutschen Syrologie-Symposium in Göttingen, Dezember 2011, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2014, pp. 423-45, esp. pp. 429-33.

<sup>6</sup> On Sergius, see H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Sergius de Reš‘ainā”, in Goulet (ed.), *DPhA*, VI (2016), pp. 214-27, and J. Watt, “Sergios (Sargīs) von Reš‘aynā”, in C. Riedweg - C. Horn - D. Wyrwa (eds.), *Die Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike*, Teilband 3, Schwabe, Basel 2017, §194 (Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie).

<sup>7</sup> The commentary is still unedited, but the *prolegomenon* is published with an English translation and discussion in J.W. Watt, “The *Prolegomena* to Aristotelian Philosophy of George, Bishop of the Arabs”, in S. Grebenstein - S. Griffith (eds.), *Christsein in der islamischen Welt. Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2015, pp. 141-63, esp. pp. 144-52. The manuscript is described by Wright, *Catalogue*, vol. III (above, n. 1), pp. 1163-4.

<sup>8</sup> The text of George published as indicated above (the manuscript is deficient at the beginning) is clearly dependent on Philoponus, *In Cat.*, pp. 5.15-8.27 Busse (Berlin 1898, *CAG* XIII 1).

<sup>9</sup> D. Gutas, “Origins in Baghdad”, in R. Pasnau (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2009, pp. 11-25, esp. pp. 14-15; Id., “Die Wiedergeburt der Philosophie und die Übersetzungen ins Arabische”, in U. Rudolph (ed.), *Philosophie in der islamischen Welt 1. 8.-10. Jahrhundert (PIW)*, Schwabe, Basel 2012 (Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie), pp. 69-70. Against the hypothesis that logic played much part in theological disputations in

antiquity: to acquire knowledge of the single principle of everything.<sup>10</sup> This principle is envisaged without the special characteristics of the Neoplatonic One, and as an efficient, not merely a final, cause.<sup>11</sup> George, and presumably Philoponus, no doubt identified it with the Christian God.<sup>12</sup>

Two other important points can be taken from this text. One is connected to the observation made above concerning the limited extant Syriac evidence from this period. Since we have no manuscript evidence of a Syriac version of Philoponus' commentary, either George read it in Greek, or a Syriac version that once existed has been lost. In one sense it hardly matters which is the case, once we realise that George, and many other learned Syrians of the pre-Abbasid years, could read Greek. Syriac translations were made of some important texts, and George himself made translations of the *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, and *Prior Analytics*.<sup>13</sup> But those who could read Greek were not confined in their reading to those works which had been translated. Thus although we have no manuscript evidence for Syriac versions of any of the Greek commentators, Syriac Aristotelians with a knowledge of Greek could and did read at least some of them, in addition to Aristotle himself. Works of around a dozen Greek commentators are said by Ibn al-Nadīm to have been available in tenth century Baghdad.<sup>14</sup> Some of them at least are likely to have been known to pre-Abbasid Syrians. Towards the end of the eighth century the East Syrian patriarch Timothy I asked a correspondent named Sergius to look out for commentaries by Alexander, Olympiodorus, and Stephanus, as well as by the Syriac Sergius of Reš'ainā, in the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Mar Zina.<sup>15</sup>

The other important point to emerge from George's *prolegomenon* is that his conception of Aristotelian philosophy was not confined to logic. Point five asks the question:

What are the things which lead us to the end? We say that (it is) the doctrine of the things which are in (or subject to) time and change. For from these, by the intermediation of mathematics, we may ascend to those which always exist in like manner, and thus after bodiless substances (ascend) to the first cause of all.

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the pre-Abbasid period, cf. D. King, "Why were the Syrians interested in Greek Philosophy?" in P. Wood (ed.), *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2013, pp. 61-81, and J.W. Watt, "Pensée grecque, controverses syriaques", in F. Ruani (ed.), *Les controverses religieuses en syriaque*, Geuthner, Paris 2016, pp. 349-80, esp. pp. 354-63.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. in general D. King, "Logic in the Service of Ancient Eastern Christianity: an Exploration of Motives", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 97 (2015), pp. 1-33.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. R. Sorabji, *Matter, Space, and Motion. Theories in Antiquity and their Sequel*, Duckworth, London 1988, pp. 273-81; K. Verrycken, "The *Metaphysics* of Ammonius Son of Hermeias", in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed*, Duckworth - Bloomsbury Academic, London - Ithaca N.Y 1990 (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), pp. 199-231, esp. pp. 220-26.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Simplicius. Commentaire sur les Catégories*, Traduction commentée sous la direction de I. Hadot, Fasc. I: *Introduction, première partie (p. 1-9,3 Kalbfleisch)*. Commentaire et notes par I. Hadot, Brill, Leiden 1990 (*Philosophia Antiqua*, 50), p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> These are all preserved, uniquely, along with his commentaries, in the manuscript *Add.* 14,659; cf. above, n. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Theophrastus, Alexander, Porphyry, Themistius, Iamblichus, Syrianus, Ammonius, Philoponus, Simplicius, Olympiodorus, Stephanus, Theon, and Allinus. Cf. Watt, "Why did Hunayn" (above, n. 4), pp. 379-82.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy, *Ep.* 19, *Timothei Patriarchae I epistulae*, ed./tr. O. Braun, E Typographeo Reipublicae, Paris 1914/1915, pp. 129/86 (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium [CSCO] 74/75*). Cf. V. Berti, "Libri e biblioteche cristiane nell' Iraq dell' VIII secolo: una testimonianza dell'epistolario del patriarca siro-orientale Timoteo I (727-823)", in C. D'Ancona (ed.), *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*. Proceedings of the Meeting of the European Science Foundation Network "Late Antiquity and Arabic Thought. Patterns in the Constitution of European Culture" held in Strasbourg (March 12 - 14, 2004), Brill, Leiden 2007 (*Philosophia Antiqua*, 107), pp. 307-17, esp. pp. 310-12; Id., *Vita e studi di Timoteo I, patriarca cristiano di Baghdad*, Association pour l'avancement des études iranniennes, Paris 2009, pp. 325-6.

For George, therefore, as for the Alexandrian commentators, the curriculum of Aristotelian philosophy proceeded from physics and mathematics to metaphysics. In point three George had already confirmed that they must be preceded by the logical treatises. It is therefore the entire Alexandrian curriculum of Aristotelian theoretical philosophy, from logic to metaphysics, which in theory at least was the subject of George's interest.

George was the last of the Aristotelian scholars known to us who were connected at some stage of their lives to the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Qenneshre, on the banks of the Euphrates. This monastic institution was celebrated in the Syriac-speaking region as a centre of Greek studies, and had originally been located near Antioch. It migrated there, at the time of the Chalcedonian persecution of miaphysites around 530, under the leadership of John bar Aphthonia, whose father had taught rhetoric in Edessa. John himself appears to have written exclusively in Greek, and it is quite possible that its membership included some who were interested in philosophy from the earliest days of its relocation or before it. However the earliest Aristotelian scholar known to us from Qenneshre is Severus Sebokht (d. 666/7); he was followed by Athanasius of Balad (d. 686/7), Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), and George, all of whom were familiar with Greek while writing in Syriac.<sup>16</sup>

Severus' works include a treatise on the syllogisms of *Prior Analytics*<sup>17</sup> and a letter to a periodetes named Jonan on some logical issues. The first of these begins:

Our aim in this treatise is briefly to demonstrate, that is to set down in writing, regarding the types of categorical syllogisms which are (treated) in the book of *Prior Analytics* of the philosopher Aristotle. I shall speak about their construction and resolution, together with how many of them and what they are, and also how many and what are their figures, according to the logical and syllogistical art. For this is useful for us, and greatly helps with the ultimate science of logical and demonstrative knowledge (*theoria*) which (is based on) these (syllogisms) which are treated in the *Book of Apodeictics* (= *Posterior Analytics*), the (*Book*) in which truth is genuinely demonstrated and distinguished from falsehood by means of the logical art. Thus if it is beneficial to know the truth and to love it over falsehood, then it is possible to know this by means of syllogisms.

It ends:

The student should first know that this book of the *Analytics* is not for itself. On the contrary, as the book of *Categories*, which teaches (us) about simple namings (or predications), (leads us up) to the *Peri hermeneias*, which (teaches us) about the first combination of simple namings, (which in turn) leads us up to this book of the *Analytics*, so also this book of the *Analytics*, which teaches us about the construction together with the resolution of categorical syllogisms, leads us up to the use of the logical treatise of the book of the *Apodeictics*, which is the aim and fulfilment of the whole logical art, which (in turn) is the instrument (*organon*) of the whole of philosophy, which (in turn), according to a fine Platonic word or definition, is assimilation to God according to what is possible for man.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> On Qenneshre and these four Aristotelian scholars, cf. H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Die Schule von Keneschre", in Riedweg-Horn-Wyrwa (eds.), *Die Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike, Teilband 3* (above, n. 6), §197; J. Watt, "Jakob von Edessa", *ibid.*, §198; and H. Daiber, "Die syrische Tradition in frühislamischer Zeit", in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), pp. 43-7. A striking contemporary testimony to the dedication of Athanasius and Jacob to the study of Greek is found in the prologue of Phocas' translation of Pseudo-Dionysius; cf. below, n. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Unedited. Cf. Baumstark, *Geschichte* (above, n. 3), p. 246, n. 11 (with the correction of Cambridge, *Add.* 3287 to 3284, cf. below, n. 21) and Hugonnard-Roche, "Sévère Sebokht", in Goulet (ed.), *DPhA VI* (2016), pp. 230-35, esp. p. 233.

<sup>18</sup> MSS BL, *Add.* 14,660, foll. 47v-54r and *Add.* 17,156, foll. 3r-5v; cf. Wright, *Catalogue*, vol. III (above, n. 1), pp. 1160-3.

Thus although Severus dealt only with the early chapters of the *Prior Analytics*, his interest in it was to help the student understand the *Posterior Analytics*, and beyond that the whole of philosophy. The ‘end’ of philosophy is the well-known saying of Plato (*Theaetetus* 176 B 1), which is regularly cited as one of the definitions of the subject, and in the Greek context this would imply that the student on completing the study of Aristotle should proceed to that of Plato. In the Syriac context, however, the implication could be different. The same Platonic text was cited by Sergius, but neither Sergius nor Severus showed any interest in Plato, and since the *Metaphysics* is the only treatise with a theological dimension in the Aristotelian school corpus, it can hardly be doubted that, like Sergius<sup>19</sup> and George, Severus considered the *Metaphysics* to be the culmination of Aristotelian philosophy. It seems unlikely, however, that the *Metaphysics* by itself would ever have been considered sufficient to achieve the ‘assimilation to God according to what is possible for man’. Severus thus appears to adhere to the Neoplatonic curriculum, in which Aristotle’s logic, physics, and metaphysics served as preliminary to the theological truth found in Plato, but without engaging any writings of Plato himself. This prompts the question whether something other than the Platonic dialogues represented for him the fulfilment of philosophy, a point to be considered below (in the section on metaphysics).

The letter to Jonan indicates that the students for whom Severus wrote were indeed actively interested in logical questions. Jonan had asked Severus to clarify a number of issues around Aristotle’s logic, such as his understanding of the contradictory opposites and negations of *De Interpretatione* 10 and the meaning of ‘figure’, but also whether in Aristotle’s *Analytics* there was a *Prior* and a *Posterior*. Severus clarified that there were four books between the *De Interpretatione* and the *Topics*, the latter two of which could be designated *Apodeictics* or *Posterior Analytics*. He presented the ‘standard’ view that the (*Prior*) *Analytics* were written on account of the *Apodeictics*, but also mentioned the view that *Prior Analytics* I was composed for the *Apodeictics*, and *Prior Analytics* II for the *Topics*.<sup>20</sup> The treatise on the syllogisms of the *Prior Analytics* is said to have been written in 638,<sup>21</sup> the translation of the *Eisagoge* by Athanasius of Balad in 645,<sup>22</sup> but we do not know the date of his translations of *Prior Analytics* to *Sophistical Refutations*. However if the afore mentioned dates are correct, and Athanasius translated the later books of the *Organon* at about the same time as the *Eisagoge*, the students Severus was addressing would presumably have had to read the later books in Greek. Severus seems to have known commentaries by Alexander, Ammonius, and Philoponus, in addition possibly to others unknown to us,<sup>23</sup> and no doubt it was mainly in Greek that these commentaries were available at Qenneshre, even though over the course of time some Syriac translations cannot be ruled out.

<sup>19</sup> For the citation of the *Theaetetus*, see chapter one of Sergius’ commentary on the *Categories*, translated in H. Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d’Aristote du grec au syriaque. Études sur la transmission des textes de l’“Organon” et leur interprétation philosophique*, Vrin, Paris 2004 (Textes et traditions, 9), pp. 187-231, esp. p. 191, with commentary pp. 204-5; on the planned exposition culminating with the *Metaphysics*, see the citation from Sergius below. The commentary is not yet edited.

<sup>20</sup> H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Questions de logique au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les épîtres syriaques de Sévère Sebokht et leurs sources grecques”, *Studia graeco-arabica* 5 (2015), pp. 53-104, esp. pp. 62-9, with commentary pp. 72-93.

<sup>21</sup> According to a note in MS. Cambridge, *Add.* 3284 (18<sup>th</sup> century), fol. 41r. Cf. W. Wright, *A Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 1901, p. 886.

<sup>22</sup> According to a note in MS. *Vat. syr.* 158 (9/10<sup>th</sup> century), fol. 16r. Cf. S.E. Assemani - J.S. Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus*, vol. 3, Ex Typographia linguarum orientalium Angeli Rotilii in aedibus maximorum, Romae 1759, p. 306.

<sup>23</sup> Hugonnard-Roche, “Questions de logique” (above, n. 20), pp. 53-7.



A century at least before Severus, Sergius also wrote in Syriac while making use of Greek commentators. His commentary on the *Categories* does not formally raise the ten traditional questions of the *prolegomena*, but his introductory chapters do cover some of the same ground. In the course of them he makes clear his conception of the curriculum and his intention to comment on the whole of it:

The book written by him [Aristotle] about simple namings is called *Categories*, that which he wrote about their first combination *On Interpretation*, that about the linkage of discourse is named *Prior Analytics*, and that about the art of demonstrations itself is named *Apodeictics*. Together with this there is that called *Topics*, and that about the refutation of sophists which he named *Sophistical Refutations*. With these, therefore, this philosopher completed the whole art of logic, which is, as we have said, an instrument of philosophy and not a part of it. Some people say that the *Art of Rhetoric* which was composed by him is also part of the same (art) of logic. However, let us turn now to the subject itself and start to speak as (well as) we can about the aim of each one of these treatises, beginning the sequence with that on *Categories*, which is about simple namings, and similarly treating each of them one by one in the same way. Then we will go on to his other treatises, those on the parts of praxis, and on all natures, mathematics, and the other ones called theological.<sup>24</sup>

Whether or not Sergius did write commentaries on any treatise other than the *Categories*, that is the only one which has come down to us. It is likely that it was written before the old, anonymous Syriac translation of the *Categories* itself, but even if that is not the case, it is clear that Sergius did not make use of this translation, and, since we know of no sixth century Syriac translations of any texts of Aristotle beyond *Prior Analytics* I.7, we can also assume that his projected commentaries on the remainder of the corpus, whether or not any were ever written, were similarly envisaged without recourse to a Syriac version of the corresponding Aristotelian treatise. If therefore Sergius expected his readers also to read the treatises of Aristotle himself, he must have assumed that they would do so in Greek.

The logic curriculum envisaged both by Sergius and the Qenneshre Aristotelians was not therefore that of the ‘truncated *Organon*’ ending at *Prior Analytics* I.7, even though the extant sixth century translations do not extend beyond that point.<sup>25</sup> There is little doubt that some Syrians, as well as some Greeks, Latins, and Armenians, were satisfied with this reduced curriculum. It has been appropriately described as a ‘corpus minimal’ corresponding to a ‘bagage philosophique minimal’ of learned study in late antiquity.<sup>26</sup> The Syriac Aristotelians from Qenneshre, however, clearly

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. J.W. Watt, “Sergius of Resʿainā on the *Prolegomena* to Aristotle’s Logic: The Commentary on the *Categories*, Chapter Two”, in E. Coda - C. Martini Bonadeo (eds.), *De l’Antiquité tardive au Moyen Age. Études de logique aristotélicienne et de philosophie grecque, syriaque, arabe et latine offertes à Henri Hugonnard-Roche*, Vrin, Paris 2014 (Études Musulmanes, 44), pp. 31-57, esp. p. 35 with commentary pp. 48-9. The Syriac text is still unedited. Cf. above, n. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. above, n. 2.

<sup>26</sup> H. Hugonnard-Roche, “La tradition gréco-syriaque des commentaires d’Aristote”, in V. Calzolari - J. Barnes (eds.), *L’œuvre de David l’Invincible et la transmission de la pensée grecque dans la tradition arménienne et syriaque*, Brill, Leiden 2009 (Philosophia antiqua 116), pp. 153-73, esp. p. 173. Hugonnard-Roche, “Syriac Studies”, *Studia graeco-arabica* 3 (2013), p. 243, further suggests that works based on the ‘truncated’ and full versions of the *Organon* belong to different literary genres, the former being manuals of logic designed to teach the categorical syllogism, the latter exegetical commentaries. As he also observes, the preponderance of manuscripts devoted to the former does not imply a lack of interest among the learned in the latter.

did not limit themselves to it.<sup>27</sup> We would surely have a much fuller understanding of their more extensive engagement with Aristotle's logic if any commentaries (or translations) from their hands on the *Posterior Analytics* to the *Sophistical Refutations* had come down to us. However the lost translations by Athanasius of Balad of the *Organon* from the beginning of the *Prior Analytics* to the end of the *Sophistical Refutations*, the extant commentary and translation on the entire *Prior Analytics* by George, and Severus' desire to guide students towards the *Posterior Analytics* – all of these together leave no room for doubt that they studied the whole *Organon* (from the *Eisagoge* to at least the *Sophistical Refutations*), and along with its Greek and Syriac texts also had available those of some of the Greek commentators. Athanasius' translations were not therefore isolated oddities or idiosyncratic personal preferences. They were, on the contrary, made for the study of, and instruction in, these treatises, and the texts of Severus cited above show us the outline of the curriculum in which it was intended that they should be used.<sup>28</sup>

Qenneshre seems to have been the favoured location to which those members of the West Syrian confession who were interested in philosophy were drawn. Whether in its curriculum it was unique among the West Syrians, and whether in the seventh century a curriculum of comparable extent was taught at any school of the East Syrians, cannot be established on the basis of our current evidence. In the following century, however, that curriculum was known in the Tigris region among both West and East Syrians, and in particular to the East Syrian patriarch Timothy I, whose interest in logic and the complete *Organon* is evident in a number of his extant epistles.<sup>29</sup> He knew the translations of Athanasius of Balad, sought commentaries or scholia on the *Topics*, *Sophistical Refutations*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*, and pursued the search for commentaries, whether in Syriac or Greek, by Alexander, Olympiodorus, Stephanus, and Sergius.<sup>30</sup> The fact that he sought these commentaries in the West Syriac monasteries of Mar Mattai and Mar Zina points to the spread of the Qenneshre curriculum also to the West Syriac monasteries in the Tigris region. Commentaries or analyses of the later books of the *Organon* from authors of a Syriac background writing in Syriac or Arabic in ninth and tenth century Baghdad are known to have been composed by al-Marwazī, who wrote in Syriac,<sup>31</sup> and in Arabic by the Syro-Arabs Abū Bišr Mattā<sup>32</sup> and Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī.<sup>33</sup> Al-Fārābī studied the *Organon* at least to the *Posterior Analytics* with the Syro-Arab Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān (and Abū Bišr Mattā?).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>27</sup> It scarcely needs saying that there is no evidence that these Syriac scholars felt themselves liberated from an episcopal prohibition (in Alexandria!) against the study of the full *Organon* by the coming of Islam to their lands, as al-Fārābī fantasised; cf. recently U. Rudolph, "Der spätantike Hintergrund", in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), pp. 22-4.

<sup>28</sup> Against the restriction of the (entire) Syriac tradition in pre-Abbasid times to the 'truncated *Organon*', cf. further Watt, "The Syriac Translations of Ḥunayn" (above, n. 5), pp. 435-44; Id., "The Syriac Aristotelian Tradition and the Syro-Arabic Baghdad Philosophers", in D. Janos (ed.), *Ideas in Motion in Baghdad and Beyond. Philosophical and Theological Exchanges between Christians and Muslims in the Third/Ninth and Fourth/Tenth Centuries*, Brill, Leiden 2015, pp. 7-43, esp. pp. 12-14.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Berti, *Vita e studi di Timoteo I* (above, n. 15), pp. 316-32.

<sup>30</sup> *Epp.* 48, 43, and 19. See for *epp.* 48 and 43, *Die Briefe 42-58 des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I*, ed./tr. M. Heimgartner, Peeters, Leuven 2012, pp. 89-90, 66/74-5, 49-50 (CSCO, 644/645); and for *Ep.* 19, above, n. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 249.13-14 Flügel (on the *Posterior Analytics*) and p. 263.15-17. Cf. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus* (above, n. 3), pp. 17-18.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 249.14 Flügel (on the *Posterior Analytics*) and p. 264.2-4 (on 'the four books of logic').

<sup>33</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 249.17-21 and p. 264.12 Flügel (on the *Topics*), and G. Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī. An Analytical Inventory*, Reichert, Wiesbaden 1977, pp. 33-4 (on the *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations*).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. U. Rudolph, "Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī", in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), pp. 370-72.

The sixth century Aristotle translations, as also the translations we possess from Sergius (namely of Pseudo-Dionysius and a very small portion of his medical work), are all in idiomatic Syriac and aim to give a comprehensible rendering of the original. Seventh century translations, both of Aristotle and other texts, are excessively literal, and exhibit the same approach to the translation of Greek texts as that of the Armenian Hellenizing School. For both the Qenneshre translators and the Armenian Hellenizers, an ideal translation mirrored the original as closely as possible, irrespective of the likely incomprehensibility of such a translation, without an expositor, to those not schooled in the requisite terminology. Both groups had a profound respect, bordering on reverence, for the Greek wording, and possessed a good knowledge of the language.<sup>35</sup> The difference between the freer, reader-oriented style of the Syriac translations of the sixth century and the literal, text-oriented style of the seventh is not absolute, and some signs of movement from the former to the latter are already discernible within those of the sixth century.<sup>36</sup> The reasons for the change need not therefore be attributed solely to external influences, but it is not impossible that the Armenian Hellenizing tradition had some influence on the Syriac, especially if the said Armenian tradition began as early as the middle of the fifth century or the beginning of the sixth.

It was doubtless on account of this exaggerated fidelity to the Greek wording and resultant deformation of natural Syriac that in the tenth century Ibn Suwār, who did not know Greek, found Athanasius' translation of the *Sophistical Refutations* incomprehensible or unsatisfactory.<sup>37</sup> All the indications are that the ninth century Syriac translations of Ḥunayn (and Ishāq) reverted to a more natural Syriac idiom and were directed to the sense of the Greek, rather than its wording.<sup>38</sup> According to the *Fihrist* a fresh set of Syriac translations of the six-volume *Organon* (less, possibly, the *Sophistical Refutations*) was made by Ḥunayn and Ishāq.<sup>39</sup> From the Abbasid period we also have the first evidence of Syriac versions of the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, that of the former from the notes of Ibn al-Samḥ to his edition of the Arabic *Rhetoric*, of the latter from the Syriac-to-Arabic translation of the *Poetics* by Abū Biṣr Mattā.<sup>40</sup> From the same period comes the only explicit evidence

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<sup>35</sup> On the Armenian, cf. V. Calzolari, "L'école hellénisante I", in M. Nicheanian, *Âges et usages de la langue arménienne*, Entente, Paris 1989, pp. 110-30, esp. pp. 122-7 ('particularités linguistiques'). For the Syriac, cf., e.g., S.P. Brock, "Towards a History of Syriac Translation Technique", in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum 1980*, Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, Roma 1983, pp. 1-14. The contrast between the manner of the sixth century translations and those of the Qenneshre scholars was sharply drawn by Phocas, who maintained that at the time of Sergius the art of translation from Greek had not yet been adequately mastered by many, but the passage of time and generations had brought forth other 'lovers of toil' such as the saintly and renowned Athanasius, patriarch of Antioch, and Jacob, bishop of Edessa, who by their ability cleared the way as much as is possible and in some manner conjoined (*hwau mzaugānē d-*) the two languages; cf. G. Wiessner (ed.), "Zur Handschriftenüberlieferung der syrischen Fassung des Corpus Dionysiacum", *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Phil.-hist. Klasse 3* (1972), pp. 165-216, esp. p. 198. Cf. above, n. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. D. King, *The Syriac Versions of the Writings of Cyril of Alexandria. A Study in Translation Technique*, Peeters, Leuven 2008, esp. pp. 353-88 (CSCO, 626); Id., *The Earliest Syriac Translation of Aristotle's Categories* (above, n. 3), pp. 69-79.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Watt, "The Syriac Translations of Ḥunayn" (above, n. 5), pp. 442-4. It was probably for the same reason that Ḥunayn considered one of Ayyūb's Galen translations incomprehensible; cf. S.P. Brock, "Changing Fashions in Syriac Translation Technique: The Background to Syriac Translations under the Abbasids", *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 4 (2004), pp. 3-14, esp. pp. 8-9.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Brock, "The Syriac Background to Ḥunayn's Translation Techniques" (above, n. 4); Id., "Changing Fashions in Syriac Translation Technique" (above, n. 37), pp. 3-14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, pp. 248-9 Flügel. Cf. above, n. 3. The version of the *Sophistical Refutations* by Ishāq sought by Yaḥyā, as also those of the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* (*Fihrist*, p. 253.3-4 Flügel), could have been in Syriac or Arabic.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. M.C. Lyons, *Aristotle's Ars Rhetorica. The Arabic Version*, Pembroke Arabic Texts, Cambridge 1982, pp. 1-1v;

of Syriac versions of some of the Greek commentators.<sup>41</sup> Earlier than Ḥunayn we also know of Syriac translations of the *Prior Analytics* and *Sophistical Refutations* by Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785),<sup>42</sup> and in the late years of the eighth century patriarch Timothy I, as indicated above, showed a keen interest in texts and commentaries on the *Organon*. Despite Ibn Suwār's criticism of Athanasius' translation of the *Sophistical Refutations*, the Baghdad Aristotelians knew and made use of his translations as well as those of Theophilus of Edessa and Ḥunayn and Iṣḥāq.

Like the Syriac versions of Galen made for Syrian doctors, these philosophical translations were produced for Syriac readers (though for the philosophical we do not know the identity of the patrons). While not made merely to facilitate the production of Arabic versions, both the medical and philosophical sometimes secondarily served that purpose.<sup>43</sup> The old (pre-Ḥunayn) Arabic version of the *Topics* commissioned from Timothy by al-Mahdī was made from Syriac,<sup>44</sup> as were the translations by Abū Biṣr Mattā which completed the Arabic *Organon*, that of the *Posterior Analytics* from Ḥunayn's and Iṣḥāq's Syriac, that of the *Poetics* from an anonymous. Ḥubayš and 'Isā ibn Yaḥyā made their Arabic versions of Galen from Ḥunayn's Syriac, and Syriac interest in both Galen and Aristotle, a tradition going back to Sergius, remained vibrant in the early Abbasid period. The famous physician Yūḥannā ibn Māsawayh, who commissioned eighteen Syriac translations of Galen from Ḥunayn and three from Ḥubayš, declared that when Galen and Aristotle agree on something, 'that's (the way it is)', but when they differ, it is very difficult for reason to find the right answer on it.<sup>45</sup> Reference has already been made to al-Marwazī, mentioned as a teacher of Mattā, who "wrote about logic and other things only in Syriac, and was a well-known physician in Baghdad".<sup>46</sup>

The Alexandrian curriculum of Aristotelian philosophy, the basis of Syriac Aristotelianism, determined also the structure of Arabic Aristotelianism, but with the significant additions of the biological works and, in contrast to the pre-Abbasid Syriac Aristotelian cursus, the physical. This

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L. Tarán - D. Gutas, *Aristotle. Poetics. Editio maior of the Greek text with historical introductions and philological commentaries*, Brill, Leiden 2012 (Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava, Supplementum, 338), pp. 91-2; and cf. above, n. 3. Whether or not Timothy had a Syriac version of the *Poetics* (and the *Rhetoric*) is uncertain; cf. Watt, "The Syriac Aristotelian Tradition" (above, n. 28), pp. 17-18.

<sup>41</sup> On the basis of the evidence in the *Fihrist*, it would appear that possibly eleven or more Syriac versions of the commentators were known in Baghdad: four by Alexander, three by Themistius, two by Olympiodorus, and one each by Philoponus and Simplicius. Nine of these were on the physical treatises, one on the metaphysical (Alexander on *Lambda*), and possibly one on the logical (Themistius on the *Posterior Analytics*? Cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 263.25-6 Flügel). Four of them were said to be extant in Syriac (without naming a translator), and seven to have been translated (into Arabic) by Mattā or Yaḥyā. Throughout the present article it is assumed that Mattā and Yaḥyā translated exclusively from Syriac. Cf. Watt, "Why did Ḥunayn" (above, n. 4), p. 380.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. above, n. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Watt, "Why did Ḥunayn" (above, n. 4), pp. 363-77.

<sup>44</sup> Timothy, *Ep.* 43, ed./tr. Heimgartner (above, n. 30), pp. 65-6/47-9.

<sup>45</sup> Yūḥannā ibn Māsawayh, *Le livre des axiomes médicaux*, edition and tr. by D. Jacquart - G. Troupeau, Droz, Geneva 1980, p. 116, no. 8. Cf. G. Strohmaier, "Griechische Philosophen bei arabischen Autoren des Mittelalters", in P. Bruns (ed.), *Von Athen nach Bagdad zur Rezeption griechischer Philosophie von der Spätantike bis zum Islam*, Borengässer, Bonn 2003 (Hereditas, 22), pp. 161-79, esp. p. 167. For some evidence, 'buried' in hagiography, of a concern for medicine in East Syrian Christianity earlier than our evidence for the medical centre at Jundishapur, cf. P. Bruns, "Von Bischöfen, Ärzten und Asketen – Schnittpunkte von Christentum und Medizin im spätantiken Sasanidenreich", in *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone* (above, n. 2), pp. 29-42. See also G.J. Reinink, "Theology and Medicine in Jundishapur", in A.A. MacDonald et al. (eds.), *Learned Antiquity: Scholarship and Society in the Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West*, Peeters, Leuven 2003, pp. 163-74.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 263.15-17 Flügel.

curriculum is broadly manifested in *The Number of Aristotle's Books* by al-Kindī,<sup>47</sup> *The Philosophy of Aristotle* by al-Fārābī,<sup>48</sup> and the account of Aristotle's writings in the *Fihrist* (pp. 248-52 Flügel). Perhaps the most striking example, however, of a similar perception of the nature and purpose of Aristotelian philosophy across Greek, Syriac, and Arabic cultures is the short treatise of al-Fārābī (the authorship of which has not gone unquestioned) *On What Must Proceed the Study of the Philosophy (of Aristotle)*,<sup>49</sup> points four and five of which may be cited here to set beside those of George quoted near the beginning of this article:

Four. The end pursued in the study of philosophy is the knowledge of the Creator Sublime, who is one, unmoved, the efficient cause of all things, and disposer to this world of his generosity, wisdom, and justice. In the works in which the Philosopher accomplishes this, there is assimilation to the Creator to the extent of the human faculty.

Five. The way which one devoted to philosophy must follow is to strive for right action and attain the end. Striving for right action takes place through science, for action is the fulfilment of knowledge. The attainment of the end in science occurs only through the understanding of nature, for this lies closest to our reason, then follows mathematics. The end in action is first attained when man first establishes himself, but then teaches others who live in his house or his city.<sup>50</sup>

### *Mathematics and Physics*

While for the most part the commentators evidently assumed that the disciplines lying between logic and metaphysics were to be studied in treatises of Aristotle, the wording of their *prolegomena* does not always require it,<sup>51</sup> and in practice mathematics in late antiquity was studied not from Aristotle but from mathematicians.<sup>52</sup> Extant works of Severus Sebokht testify to an interest in mathematics at Qenneshre, albeit directed almost exclusively to astronomy,<sup>53</sup> and the discovery of further texts since the pioneering work of Nau<sup>54</sup> has enabled the identification of eleven astronomical

<sup>47</sup> Cf. G. Endress - P. Adamson, "Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī", in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), p. 103.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Rudolph, "Al-Fārābī", in Id., *PIW* (above, n. 9), pp. 401-2. The 'broadly manifested curriculum' referred to here is not meant to obscure the well-known differences between al-Kindī and al-Fārābī. The logical treatises and the Alexandrian-Syriac *Organon* did not have the significance for al-Kindī that they had for the Baghdad Aristotelians and al-Fārābī.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 381.

<sup>50</sup> *Alfārābī's Philosophische Abhandlungen*, ed./tr. F. Dieterici, Brill, Leiden 1890, p. 53.13-22/ pp. 88-9.

<sup>51</sup> Philoponus speaks only about "instruction" (*In Cat.*, p. 6.3 Busse [*CAG* XIII 1] *didaskalia*), Olympiodorus (*In Cat.*, p. 9.31 Busse [*CAG* XII 1] *bathmos*) and David (*In Cat.*, p. 121.6 Busse [*CAG* XVIII 1] *bathmoi*) about the "levels" of philosophy. Ammonius speaks about the "treatise" (*In Cat.*, p. 6.18 Busse [*CAG* IV 4] *pragmateia*) on each, but does not specify the author. Only Simplicius speaks of "all the writings" (*In Cat.*, p. 6.16 Kalbfleisch [*CAG* VIII 1] *sungrammata*) of the Philosopher".

<sup>52</sup> Cf. C. Scholten, *Antike Naturphilosophie und christliche Kosmologie in der Schrift De Opificio mundi des Johannes Philoponos*, W. de Gruyter, Berlin 1996, pp. 396-400; Id., *Johannes Philoponos. De Opificio mundi*, 3 vols., Herder, Freiburg 1997, vol. 1, pp. 11-17; Rudolph, "Der spätantike Hintergrund", in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), pp. 20-21.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. É. Villey, "Qenneshre et l'astronomie aux VI<sup>e</sup> et VII<sup>e</sup> siècles", in É. Villey (ed.), *Les sciences en syriaque*, Geuthner, Paris 2014 (Études syriaques, 11), pp. 149-90; H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Mathématiques en syriaque", *ibid.*, pp. 67-106.

<sup>54</sup> See the annotated collection of his articles in É. Villey - H. Hugonnard-Roche (eds.), *Astronomie et cosmographie syriaques: recueil d'articles de François Nau*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway 2014 (Œuvre des grands savants syriacisants; Scholars of Syriac. Collected works, 1).

works known there, as well as a few others not directly connected to it.<sup>55</sup> Of particular note is the treatise of Severus *On the Astrolabe*, the recent discovery of a manuscript of which at Mardin has enabled the construction of a better critical text than was available to Nau.<sup>56</sup> The prologue to this treatise shows not only that Severus was familiar with the tradition of edition and commentary on scientific texts in late antiquity, but also, with the references to Aristotelian logic and pedagogy, that he considered astronomy to fall within the curriculum of Aristotelian philosophy. Notable also is the fact that all the sources of the work were Greek. The parallelism with the situation in the area of logic is exact: authors writing in Syriac knew and made use of Greek texts, especially those employed in or originating in the environment of the school of Alexandria, for which no Syriac translations were either made or have survived to our day.<sup>57</sup> Ptolemy and Theon of Alexandria were the principal Greek astronomical writers who according to our evidence from Severus' works were known at Qenneshe, to which it now seems probable that we should add Ammonius' *On the Astrolabe*.

The most important difference between the Alexandrian and pre-Abbasid Syriac Aristotelian corpora is the complete absence of the physical treatises from the latter. It seems very likely that this reflects a lack of significant engagement with these works on the part of Syrians, rather than merely an accident in the transmission of texts, and if so it is certainly not inexplicable. In his *Appearance of Philosophy*, al-Fārābī imagined a clash between Christian thought in the pre-Islamic era and Aristotelian philosophy with his fantasy of an episcopal prohibition on the teaching of logic beyond the 'truncated *Organon*',<sup>58</sup> but he was aiming at the wrong target. The real problem for some Christian students in Alexandria – some but not all – lay not in the logical treatises, but the physical. In the *Ammonius* of Zacharias of Mytilene, the philosophy master is said to have challenged Christian students in the course of a lecture on Aristotle's *Physics* on their refusal to consider the universe to be co-eternal with the Good.<sup>59</sup> Aristotle's logic was not considered a threat to their faith by philosophically inclined Christians, but the difference between the concept of an eternal and self-existent universe with a heaven inhabited by planetary and stellar gods, and the doctrine of a temporally limited world created and governed by a single deity, constituted a severe stumbling block for many of them. While the problem affected the *Physics* and *De Caelo* in particular, since the *physika* were treated as a single coherent group, Aristotle's status as a philosopher of nature was compromised in the eyes of many Christians.

Not all of them considered the idea of the eternity of the world incompatible with their faith, and Sergius, the Syriac Aristotelian pioneer, did not directly confront it in his treatise *On the Causes of the Universe according to the View of Aristotle the Philosopher, that it is a Sphere*.<sup>60</sup> This is not an independent work, but a carefully adapted Syriac version of a treatise by Alexander of Aphrodisias,

<sup>55</sup> Villey, "Qenneshe et l'astronomie" (above, n. 53), pp. 160-81.

<sup>56</sup> É. Villey, "Ammonius d'Alexandrie et le *Traité sur l'astrolabe* de Sévère Sebokht", *Studia graeco-arabica* 5 (2015), pp. 105-28.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-16.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. above, n. 27. For different suggestions as to the causes of al-Fārābī's fantasy, cf. Watt, "Al-Fārābī and the History of the Syriac *Organon*" (above, n. 2), pp. 771-8; G. Endress, "Die Bagdader Aristoteliker", in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), pp. 292-3.

<sup>59</sup> Zacaria Scolastico, *Ammonio*, edizione traduzione a c. di M.M. Colonna, La Buona Stampa, Naples 1973, p. 98/150-51.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. E. Fiori (ed. and tr.), "L'épitomé syriaque du *Traité sur les causes du tout* d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise attribué à Serge de Rēš'aynā", *Le Muséon* 123 (2010), pp. 127-58. Sergius thus accepted the spherical universe of secular astronomy and philosophy, not the 'biblicist' notions of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Cosmas Indicopleustes, against which Philoponus argued in his *De Opificio mundi* (see below).

which is not extant in Greek but has survived in an Arabic version.<sup>61</sup> Sergius modified Alexander's original text by eliminating attributes such as 'divine' or 'ungenerated' in relation to the celestial bodies and replacing them with terms such as 'revolving', 'pure' or 'superior', agreeing with the view that the First Mover must be eternally creating and causing movement, but refraining from affirming that the creation itself is eternal.<sup>62</sup> In his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius he correctly reproduced the view of the Areopagite that the creation was not co-eternal with the creator.<sup>63</sup> Had Sergius commented on the physical treatises of Aristotle, one imagines he would have refrained from personally endorsing the theory of the eternity of the world, but while we know that he intended to write such commentaries, we have no evidence that his intention was ever realised.<sup>64</sup>

Already in the sixth century in ecclesiastical circles outside those of the philosophers we have evidence of a general Christian hardening against any flirtation with the antique conception of the divinity or rationality of the heavenly bodies.<sup>65</sup> The extent to which conciliar condemnations in the Byzantine realm may have influenced the Qenneshre Aristotelians is of course uncertain, but it is nevertheless the case that the one significant treatise on nature we have from them is a commentary not on Aristotle's physical treatises, but on the creation story of *Genesis*. Jacob of Edessa's *Hexaemeron* owed much to that of Basil, but differed in incorporating a significant amount of natural philosophy, even though many of its sources, while certainly *Greek* (as he himself often stated), are still unidentified.<sup>66</sup> Jacob strongly maintained that the perceptible creation consists of only four elements, not Aristotle's five, and that it was created in time:

As long as he knew it was the right thing (to do), he held back and restrained the sea of his goodness ... and arrested his will from creating. But when it was pleasing to his will, and his all-knowing wisdom

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<sup>61</sup> See C.F. Genequand (ed. and tr.), *Alexander of Aphrodisias on the Cosmos. Arabic text with English Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, Brill, Leiden 2001 (Islamic philosophy and theology, 44); Id., *Alexandre d'Aphrodise. Les principes du tout selon la doctrine d'Aristote*. Introduction, texte arabe, traduction et commentaire, Vrin, Paris 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. D. King, "Alexander of Aphrodisias's *On the Principles of the Universe* in a Syriac Adaptation", *Le Muséon* 123 (2010), pp. 159-91, esp. pp. 167-70.

<sup>63</sup> *De Divinis nominibus* X.2-3 (937 B - 940 A, ed. B.R. Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum*, Vol. 1, *De Divinis nominibus*, De Gruyter, Berlin 1990, pp. 215-7). Cf. the Syriac version of Sergius in *Dionigi Areopagita. Nomi divini, teologia mistica, epistole: la versione siriana di Sergio di Rēs aynā (VI secolo)*, ed. E. Fiori, Peeters, Leuven 2014, pp. 91-3 (CSCO, 656).

<sup>64</sup> On Sergius' intention to comment on the physical treatises, cf. the citation of Sergius above, n. 24. He did translate the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*; cf. P. de Lagarde (ed.), *Analecta Syriaca*, Teubner, Leipzig 1858, pp. 134-58. Like Alexander's treatise, it did not belong in the main philosophy corpus (cf. below, n. 82), and with its doctrine of the dependence of the cosmos upon God, it did not present Sergius with as acute a problem as he faced with the former. His translation is accordingly much more faithful to the original than is the case with Alexander. Here too his version can be read as implying that God is eternally active in moving and preserving (391 b 16-19, 397 b 5-8, Syriac p. 136.10-12, p. 149.16-18 Lagarde), without the implication of the actual eternity of the creation.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. J.T. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh. Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq*, Univ. California Press, Berkeley 2006, p. 193.

<sup>66</sup> In geographical matters Ptolemy was certainly used by Jacob (whether in Greek or Syriac); cf. O. Defaux, "Les textes géographiques en langue syriaque", in *Les sciences en syriaque* (above, n. 53), pp. 107-47, esp. pp. 126-32. Other possible non-Christian sources include Theophrastus, *De Lapidibus*, and Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo*. Jacob's account of the winds could have been taken from *De Mundo* 4 (but not from Sergius' translation), though it could also have been derived from another Greek source which transmitted Timosthenes' system of the twelve-rose compass. Cf. M. Greatrex, "Jacob of Edessa's Use of Theophrastus, *De lapidibus*", in M.F. Wiles - E.J. Yarnold (eds.), *Papers presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford, 1999: Studia Patristica vol. 35*, Peeters, Leuven 2001, pp. 391-4; Daiber, "Die syrische Tradition", in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), p. 45; H. Takahashi, "Syriac and Arabic Transmission of *On the Cosmos*", in J.C. Thom (ed.), *Cosmic Order and Divine Power*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2014, pp. 153-67, esp. p. 158 and n. 28.

agreed that the right thing from that moment was to create, he uncovered the sea of his goodness and showed the immensity of his power.<sup>67</sup>

In a section directed principally against astrology, but also attacking late antique ideas concerning the divinity of the heavenly bodies, he wrote:

They are not gods, nor (are they) living, rational, autonomous or free-willed, nor do they possess animate reason or govern this (sublunar) universe, as some erring Greeks and Chaldeans thought about them and called them gods, rulers of this world and what is in it.<sup>68</sup>

Jacob the Aristotelian philosopher doubtless did not wish to point the finger directly at Aristotle as one of these ‘erring Greeks’, but he was probably well aware that Aristotle was prepared to accept ‘the tradition handed down from early times’ that the heavenly bodies are gods.<sup>69</sup>

The Qenneshre scholars were not the first Aristotelians in the Alexandrian Neoplatonic tradition to reject the doctrine of the eternity of the world and the divinity of the heavens. In the previous century John Philoponus had done so, in his *Contra Proclum* and *Contra Aristotelem*, and while also commenting on Aristotle’s *Physics*, he had written an *Exegesis of the Mosaic Cosmogony* - the treatise conventionally known as *De Opificio mundi* - in which he claimed that Aristotle had invented a new idea, being the first natural philosopher to have proposed that the world had no beginning and was ungenerated, while in fact the beginning and temporal creation of the world had already been clearly described by ‘Moses’.<sup>70</sup> Whether or not Jacob’s *Hexaemeron* was directly influenced by that of Philoponus,<sup>71</sup> it is likely that Philoponus’ attack on Aristotle and his decision to write a commentary on *Genesis* incorporating Greek natural philosophy provided the intellectual foundation within the Aristotelian tradition for a comparable work in Syriac.<sup>72</sup> Against that it is often supposed that Philoponus’ influence in the Syriac sphere was confined (despite George’s use of his commentary on the *Categories*) to his forays into Christian theology, but a strict demarcation between theological and philosophical influence is not tenable. Among his works preserved in Syriac (and only fragmentarily in Greek) are his *Treatise Concerning the Whole and the Parts* and his *Diatētēs*. A reader of the former would find there a treatise on a recognised philosophical theme (‘mereology’), indebted particularly to Aristotle’s *Physics* and *De Generatione et corruptione*. Only if he went on to the *Diatētēs* would he perceive a theological motive in, or application of, the former treatise, in which the philosophical doctrines of the whole and the parts, actuality and potentiality, are applied to the Christological controversy.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Iacobi Edesseni *Hexaemeron, seu in opus creationis libri septem*, ed. J.-B. Chabot, tr. A.A. Vaschalde, E Typographeo Reipublicae, Paris 1928-1932, p. 45a.7-19/36 (CSCO, 92/97). On the four elements, cf. *ibid.*, ed. Chabot, pp. 64b32-68a25/tr. Vaschalde, pp. 52-4. The ether, according to Jacob, is not a fifth element, but ‘the mixture of air and fire ... is called by the Greeks ether, which translated means flaming air. This is the third element’: Chabot, p. 67a.29-b.5/tr. Vaschalde, p. 53.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.163a36-b8 Chabot; tr. Vaschalde, p. 138.

<sup>69</sup> Arist., *Metaph.* Λ 8, 1074 a 38 - b 14.

<sup>70</sup> *De Opificio mundi* II 13, ed. G. Reichardt, Joannis Philoponi *De Opificio mundi* libri VII, Teubner, Leipzig 1897, p. 82.3-12; ed./tr. Scholten, Johannes Philoponos, *De Opificio mundi* (above, n. 52), vol. 1, p. 224.12-20/225.

<sup>71</sup> Unambiguous evidence of such influence is hard to find, but a case has been made by M. Wilks, “Jacob of Edessa’s Use of Greek Philosophy in his *Hexaemeron*”, in B. ter Haar Romeny (ed.), *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of his Day*, Brill, Leiden 2008, pp. 223-38, esp. pp. 226-8.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh* (above, n. 65), pp. 190-94.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. D. King (introd. and tr.), “A Treatise Concerning the Whole and the Parts”, in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Philoponus: On Aristotle Categories 1-5 and A Treatise Concerning the Whole and the Parts*, Bloomsbury, London 2015, pp. 167-221, esp.



In an analogous way one can consider Philoponus' *Contra Aristotelem* and his *De Opificio mundi* as related works, the former a philosophical treatise refuting the doctrine of eternity, the latter applying it to the theological issue of divine creation. The former is preserved only in fragments (mainly by his adversary Simplicius),<sup>74</sup> the latter complete in a single Greek manuscript of the tenth or eleventh century.<sup>75</sup> A seventh century Syriac manuscript, British Library *Add.* 17,214, which consists of short extracts from patristic theologians, contains brief contiguous citations from these two works:<sup>76</sup>

From John the Grammarian, an indication of (the proposition of) the second chapter of the eighth book *Against Aristotle*: Our account proposes about that which is dissolved into not-being that it is not evil in and by itself, and about the world itself that it will not be dissolved into not-being. (Further) from the second chapter: However the world will not be dissolved into not-being, because neither are the divine oracles dissolved into this, while we have clearly spoken of new heavens and a new earth. From the same, from the sixteenth chapter of the first book of the treatise *On Six Days*: The apostle made known the corruption of all bodies when saying, 'The creation itself will be liberated', he says, "from bondage to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (*Ep. Rom.* 8.21).<sup>77</sup>

The accuracy of the latter is confirmed from the Greek. Of the former only six books are mentioned by Simplicius and the Arabic tradition, but as Christian Wildberg has argued, that is no reason to dispute the accuracy of the Syriac fragment. The later books may have been of a more theological and eschatological character than the earlier, and correspondingly of less interest to Simplicius and the Arabic tradition.<sup>78</sup> Among the Christian Syrians, however, the refutation of the eternity of the world *a parte ante* and *a parte post* would both have been of interest. It is clearly impossible to say from these fragments how much, if any, of these works was translated directly into Syriac.<sup>79</sup> The final composition of the manuscript occurred in Syriac, for Ephraim and Philoxenus of Mabbug are among the authors cited, but it is not impossible that an earlier redaction containing the extracts from Philoponus once existed in Greek. Despite these imponderables, the fragments provide

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pp. 169-78. See on the *Diatētēs* H. Chadwick, "Philoponus the Christian Theologian", in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, Institute of Classical Studies, London 2010, pp. 83-96, esp. pp. 87-9. A treatise on the whole and the parts, differing from Philoponus, was composed by Yahyā ibn 'Adī; cf. Endress, *The Works of Yahyā ibn 'Adī* (above, n. 33), pp. 53-5.

<sup>74</sup> Philoponus, *Against Aristotle, on the Eternity of the World*, introd. and tr. C. Wildberg, Duckworth, London 1987.

<sup>75</sup> *Vindobonensis theologicus graecus* 29. It is externally attested in Greek only by Photius (9<sup>th</sup> century). Cf. Scholten, *Antike Naturphilosophie* (above, n. 52), p. 15; Id., *De Opificio mundi* (above, n. 52), vol. 1, p. 67.

<sup>76</sup> On the manuscript, cf. Wright, *Catalogue* (above, n. 1), vol. II, pp. 915-7. Cf. also Baumstark, *Geschichte* (above, n. 3), pp. 162-3.

<sup>77</sup> Fol. 72vb36(ult.)-73ra19 = *Contra Aristotelem*, fragment 134, tr. Wildberg, *Against Aristotle* (above, n. 74), p. 148; fol. 73ra19-29 = *De Opificio mundi* I 16, ed. Reichardt, p. 40.8-12; ed./tr. Scholten, vol. 1, p. 146.20-23/147).

<sup>78</sup> Wildberg, *Against Aristotle* (above, n. 74), p. 26; Id., "Prolegomena to the Study of Philoponus' *Contra Aristotelem*", in Sorabji, *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science* (above, n. 73), pp. 239-50, esp. pp. 239-42.

<sup>79</sup> The third and last fragment from Philoponus in this manuscript (foll. 73ra29-b17) is entitled from the eleventh chapter of the fourth book *Against Andrew the Ariomanite* (Greek *areiomantēs*). It is connected to the other two fragments through the theme of the finite term of the world and its "deliverance from bondage to corruption" (*Ep. Rom.* 8,21). In other Syriac manuscripts there are fragments from writings of Philoponus *Against Andrew* and *Against the Arians*. It is likely (though not certain) that they are all taken from the same work, directed against an Arian named Andrew. Cf. A. Van Roey, "Fragments anti-ariens de Jean Philopon", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 10 (1979), pp. 237-50, the fragment from *Add.* 17,214 at p. 241 (Syriac) and 242 (Latin). It is quite possible that, like the *Diatētēs*, this Christological writing was translated complete into Syriac.

us with a clear indication that these two works could both have been known in Graeco-Syriac circles in the seventh century (the era of the Qenneshre Aristotelian scholars). In the ninth century much of the *Contra Aristotelem* was known to al-Kindi,<sup>80</sup> but it is naturally not surprising that we have no evidence from Muslim writers that they knew the *De Opificio mundi*.

The physical treatises of the Aristotelian school corpus were not necessarily unknown to Syriac Aristotelians who were able to read Greek,<sup>81</sup> but since they were seen as compromised, they were neither translated nor cited by Syriac authors subsequent to Sergius.<sup>82</sup> Some of the commentators on the physical treatises might also have been known, even though not translated. In a remarkable passage in the East Syrian *Legend of Mar Qardagh* (late sixth or seventh century), the hagiographer not only correctly represents the difference between the pagan and Christian conceptions of the heavens, but also compares the movement of the heavenly bodies – moved by God – to ‘the manner of a stone or an arrow or a cart’ – moved by us. Not only does he thus appear to be aware that Philoponus’ impetus theory extended to both earthly and celestial motion, but his reference to the objects of earthly movement represents a striking echo of the ‘stone and arrow’ in Philoponus’ theory of projectile motion presented in his commentary on the *Physics*.<sup>83</sup>

As a result of the emergence in the Abbasid period of Muslim interest in the Aristotelian school corpus, the attitude of Syriac philosophers to the physical treatises underwent a significant change. With Muslim thinkers not beholden to the ‘six days’ of *Genesis*,<sup>84</sup> it is not surprising that among Christians who engaged philosophically with them it ceased to present the same ‘embargo’ on Aristotle as a philosopher of nature as had been the case hitherto.<sup>85</sup> It seems, however, that the change occurred rather gradually. Timothy referred to a passage in the *De Generatione et corruptione*, but it is possible that he only knew it through a commentary on the *Eisagoge*, and he sought a work designated

<sup>80</sup> Cf. H.A. Davidson, “John Philoponus as a Source of Medieval Islamic and Jewish Proofs of Creation”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89 (1969), pp. 357-91.

<sup>81</sup> The *Physics* was certainly known to Sergius. Cf. S. Aydin, *Sergius of Reš‘ainā. Introduction to Aristotle and his Categories, Addressed to Philotheos*, Brill, Leiden 2016, pp. 138-45, 229-36.

<sup>82</sup> The pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo* was translated by Sergius; cf. above, n. 64. However, according to all the commentators except David, it did not belong among the universal works, and therefore did not form part of the genuine philosophy corpus; cf. Hadot, *Simplicius. Commentaire sur les Catégories* (above, n. 12), pp. 65-8. Later Syriac Aristotelians may have used it for information on terrestrial phenomena without accepting all its cosmological doctrine, e.g. the fifth element. Cf. above, n. 66.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh* (above, n. 65), pp. 28-32, 194-7.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. T. Nagel, “Juden, Christen und Muslime: Religionsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen”, in *Christsein in der islamischen Welt* (above, n. 7), pp. 39-64, esp. p. 39.

<sup>85</sup> Around the middle of the ninth century, Ibn Qutayba wrote disapprovingly of those dazzled by beguiling novelty talking of “*Generation and Corruption, Physics* (*sam‘ al-kiyān*), single words, quality, quantity, time, demonstration, and combined expressions”, indicating therefore some acquaintance with the said physical treatises as well as the *Categories* or the *Organon*; cf. Ibn Kutaiba’s *adab-al-kātib*, ed. M. Günert, Brill, Leiden 1900, pp. 3.11-4.2, tr. G. Lecomte, “L’introduction du *kitāb adab al-kātib* d’Ibn Qutayba”, in *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, vol. 3, Institut Français de Damas, Damascus 1957, pp. 45-64, esp. p. 53. His ‘novelty’ was in contrast to traditional Islamic religious sciences, but in relation to the earlier Syriac philosophical tradition, it can be said that serious attention to the physical treatises was indeed new, but that to the logical was a continuation of what had gone before. Ibn Qutayba continued (ed. pp. 4-5 Günert, tr. p. 55 Lecomte) with a discussion in connection with *ḥadd al-mantiq* of the meaning of the saying “the beginning of action is the end of thought” and the construction of a house, well known as a parable of the construction of the *Organon* both to Alexandrians (cf. *Prolégomènes à la philosophie de Platon*, éd. L.G. Westerink, tr. J. Trouillard avec la collaboration de A.-Ph. Segonds, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2003 [CUF], p. XLVII) and Syrians (cf. Watt, “Sergius of Reš‘ainā on the *Prolegomena* to Aristotle’s *Logic*” [above, n. 24], pp. 34-5).

*The Natural Principles of Bodies* which he ascribed to “someone of the Platonic dogma”, not the Aristotelian. Aristotelian natural philosophy was probably only known to Job of Edessa through secondary compilations.<sup>86</sup> The designation of the *Physics* in some Arabic texts as *sam‘ al-kiyān* points to a Syriac *šem‘ā kyānāyā* (Greek *physikē akroasis*) and thus to some Syriac interest in the text prior to Ishāq’s Arabic translation, and the translations – Greek to Syriac and Syriac to Arabic, of Ḥunayn, Ishāq, Mattā, and Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī – of Aristotle’s *physika* and the Greek commentaries on them,<sup>87</sup> as also the glosses from Syriac in the Arabic *Physics* (MS. Leiden Or. 583), show that by then distrust of these treatises had diminished in the Syriac philosophical community. The form in which the text of the *Physics* became available (in whole or part) to Syriac readers is uncertain, but the Christian Baghdad Aristotelians writing in Arabic commented extensively on it.<sup>88</sup>

The acceptance of the *physika* into the curriculum did not, however, always lead to acceptance of the teaching on the eternity of the world. While al-Kindī knew some of these treatises, he also knew Philoponus’ arguments against the doctrine, and, unlike al-Fārābī and the Muslim *falsafa*, held to the temporal creation of the universe.<sup>89</sup> On the Christian side, the doctrine continued to be rejected. Despite Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī’s involvement in commenting and translating the physical treatises and their Greek commentators,<sup>90</sup> when challenged by the Muslim al-Miṣrī that if he followed Aristotle in everything, he must also accept his theory of the eternity of the world, he declared that Aristotle was not his guide in matters to do with Christianity,<sup>91</sup> and claimed that authentic proofs indicate that there had been a time when the world had not been created before the creator made it.<sup>92</sup>

### *Metaphysics*

George named no treatises on physics or mathematics, but did name the *Metaphysics* as the culminating treatise of Aristotelian philosophy, even though his source, Philoponus, did not do so. This suggests that he knew it and that it was important to him, but might he have merely taken the reference from another *prolegomenon*? In Ammonius (possibly) and Simplicius he could have read the

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Y. Arzhanov - R. Arnzen, “Die Glossen in MS. Leyden Or. 583 und die syrische Rezeption der aristotelischen *Physik*”, in Coda-Martini Bonadeo (eds.), *De l’Antiquité Tardive au Moyen Age* (above, n. 24), pp. 415-63, esp. pp. 419-21. On the other hand, the fact that the *De Generatione et corruptione* was particularly mentioned by Ibn Qutayba (see previous note) might be thought to heighten the possibility that it was already known in its entirety to Timothy. *The Natural Principles of Bodies* might be the (doxographical) work from which an extract is cited in the MS. Deir al-Surian 27, foll. 98-9; cf. S.P. Brock - L. van Rompay, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts and Fragments in the Library of Deir Al-Surian, Wadi Al-Natrun (Egypt)*, Peeters, Leuven 2014, pp. 168-9.

<sup>87</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 250.10-11, 22-3 (*Physics*), 29-30 (*De Caelo*); p. 251.3-7 (*De Gen. et corr.*), 8-10 (*Meteorologica*), 11-15 (*De Anima*), and 21-2 (*Liber Animalium*).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Arzhanov-Arnzen, “Die Glossen” (above, n. 86), pp. 425-9, 434-63; and on the commentaries from the school of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, cf. P. Lettinck, *Aristotle’s Physics and its Reception in the Arabic World*, Brill, Leiden 1994 (summary in the introduction, esp. pp. 4-6, 32-3).

<sup>89</sup> Cf. G. Endress, “Building the Library of Arabic Philosophy. Platonism and Aristotelianism in the Sources of al-Kindī”, in D’Ancona (ed.), *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists* (above, n. 15), pp. 319-50, esp. pp. 345-8; Endress - Adamson, “Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī”, in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), p. 129; and Davidson, “John Philoponus” (above, n. 80).

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī* (above, n. 33), pp. 27-30, 35-8.

<sup>91</sup> *La grande polémique antinestorienne de Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī*, vol. I, ed./tr. E. Platti, Peeters, Louvain 1981, p. 106.12-15/91 (CSCO, 427-428).

<sup>92</sup> Id., vol. II, 1982, p. 203.18-19/178-9 (CSCO, 437-438). See in general Endress, “Die Bagdader Aristoteliker”, in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), pp. 321-2; and Watt, ‘Pensée grecque, controverses syriaques’ (above, n. 9), pp. 373-5.

passage from the *Iliad* ('Let the ruler be one') with which Aristotle concludes *Metaphysics Lambda*,<sup>93</sup> but he would have needed to know the *Metaphysics* to know that it came from there. He could, however, have known this from Olympiodorus,<sup>94</sup> or found explicit references to the *Metaphysics* in a longer passage from David.<sup>95</sup> There is no other evidence that he knew either Olympiodorus or David, but even if he did, why would he not have read the *Metaphysics*, given that he believed it to be the goal of Aristotelian philosophy? The Greek text was translated by Uṣṭāt for al-Kindī, so there is no reason it could not have been known to George, in Greek if not in Syriac.<sup>96</sup>

As it would have been strange for Severus Sebokht not to have read the *Posterior Analytics* given his view of the logic curriculum, similarly it seems natural in the light of George's account of the whole Aristotelian philosophy that he would have read the *Metaphysics*. The difference lies in the fact that while we know Athanasius of Balad translated the former, we know of no translator of the latter. We do, however, know of some citations or echoes of the *Metaphysics* by Jacob of Edessa in his *Encheiridion*.<sup>97</sup> By themselves they do not prove that Jacob had a complete text at his disposal, either in Greek or Syriac. They might have been taken from an epitome, handbook, or other secondary source, but such an assumption is not necessary. The citations are perfectly consistent with the thesis that the *Metaphysics* was studied by the Aristotelians of Qenneshreh.

Ammonius' harmonisation of Plato and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* had to some extent already prepared the way for Christians' acceptance of the treatise, with its interpretation of Plato's Ideas as principles in the divine Intellect which were causally responsible for the creation of the world.<sup>98</sup> However this was still understood as without beginning or end, and the eternity of the world does make a brief appearance in the *Metaphysics*.<sup>99</sup> Both the very brevity of these statements, and the fact that the doctrine belonged to the domain of physics rather than metaphysics, can credibly account for the acceptance by the pre-Abbasid Syriac Aristotelians of the *Metaphysics* alongside their rejection of the physical treatises. Formally, the classification of the one as *theologika* and the other as *physika* could permit them to disregard an assertion about the eternity of the world within the theological context, just as, for example, a biblical statement about the "eternity of the world (earth)" (*Ecclesiastes 1,4 eis ton aiōna*) could be set aside by Philoponus as a source of knowledge about nature on the grounds that the book in question was "more ethical than physical".<sup>100</sup> While accepting

<sup>93</sup> Ammonius, *In Cat.*, p. 6.16 app. crit. Busse (*CAG IV 4*); Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 6.10-11 Kalbfleisch (*CAG VIII*).

<sup>94</sup> Olympiodorus, *In Cat.*, p. 9.22-4 Busse (*CAG XII 1*).

<sup>95</sup> David, *In Cat.*, pp. 120.1-121.4 Busse (*CAG XVIII 1*) for the passage unique to David; see the references to the *Metaphysics* at p. 120.1 and 26, and the citation of the *Iliad* at p. 119.33.

<sup>96</sup> Around the same time as Uṣṭāt translated the *Metaphysics* into Arabic, Ḥunayn translated *Lambda* into Syriac; cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 251.27-9 Flügel.

<sup>97</sup> G. Furlani (ed./tr.), "L'*Encheiridion* di Giacomo d'Edessa nel testo siriano", *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 6.4 (1928), pp. 222-49, esp. p. 227/241. Cf. Id., "Di alcuni passi della *Metafisica* di Aristotele presso Giacomo d'Edessa", *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 5.30 (1921), pp. 268-73. The passages are *Metaph.* Δ, 1014 b 16-17; 17-18; 18-20; 26-8; 36; 1015 a 13-15. On the overall thrust of the *Encheiridion*, in particular Jacob's interest in ontology, cf. H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Le vocabulaire philosophique de l'être en syriaque, d'après des textes de Sergius de Rēš'ainā et Jacques d'Édesse", in J.E. Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy. From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, Peeters, Leuven 2006, pp. 101-25, esp. pp. 111-21. Cf. also the similarity in intention noted between Jacob and Philoponus, *ibid.*, pp. 121-3.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. above, n. 11.

<sup>99</sup> *Metaph.* Λ 6, 1071 b 3-10; 8 1073 a 24-b 1; 1074 a 36-8.

<sup>100</sup> *De Opificio mundi* III 10, ed. Reichardt, p. 135.1-24; ed. Scholten, vol. 2, pp. 322.8-324.5, with the comment

Philoponus' criticism of the eternalist doctrine, if they followed his *Contra Aristotelem*, they could attribute the motion of the heavens to nature or soul,<sup>101</sup> if the *De Opificio mundi*, to God's impressed force.<sup>102</sup> For modern criticism which sees profound changes over time in Philoponus' thought, it is improbable that when he wrote these works he still held his earlier positive views on the value of the *Metaphysics* derived from the Ammonian synthesis,<sup>103</sup> including those embodied in his commentary on the *Categories*, but such a critical approach to his writings is unlikely to have played any part in the thinking of the Qenneshre Aristotelians, who would have treated his writings as a unified whole.

Sergius' citation of *Theaetetus* 176 B 1 in the *prolegomena* to his commentary on the *Categories* and his understanding that 'the theological treatises' (the *Metaphysics*) constituted the culmination of the Aristotelian corpus have been mentioned above. Equally important are the remarks with which he concludes the commentary:

These things are called in Greek 'categories', about which Aristotle wrote (this) short treatise, which is the portal and commencement of the discipline which (is designated) by (the word) 'logic' ... I urge you therefore to meditate on them, so that you may grasp and remember these things which will be profitable for you in connection with the entire teaching (of the Philosopher) on natures and other doctrines which are useful for the truly discerning. But if time allows us, we will work (our way through) all the (logical) treatises one by one, so that you may understand the discipline of logic. For without them it is not possible to comprehend the treatises of medicine, nor understand the doctrine of the philosophers. Nor, furthermore, (is it possible without them) to uncover the true meaning of the divine scriptures, in which is the hope of our salvation, unless through his exalted way of life someone should receive divine power so that he has no need of human instruction. For there is no possible way or path to all things knowable by human power except through the discipline of logic.<sup>104</sup>

One would surely be correct in assuming that only an elite minority of Christians would have ascribed to the view that the study of logic was necessary in order "to uncover the true meaning of the

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pp. 324-5, n. 65. The separation of the *Metaphysics* from the five physical treatises can still be seen in the bipartite structure of the 10<sup>th</sup> century MS. *Paris. gr.*1853 according to the analysis of F. Ronconi, "Le corpus aristotélicien du *Paris. gr.* 1853 et les cercles érudits à Byzance. Un cas controversé", *Studia graeco-arabica* 2 (2012), pp. 201-25.

<sup>101</sup> *Contra Aristotelem*, fragment 49, tr. Wildberg, *Against Aristotle* (above, n. 74), pp. 65-7.

<sup>102</sup> *De Opificio mundi* I 12, ed. Reichardt, pp. 28.20-29.9; ed./tr. Scholten, vol. 1, pp. 124-7. This latter solution obviously represents a fundamental departure from Aristotle; cf. Sorabji, *Matter, Space, and Motion* (above, n. 11), pp. 244-6, and Scholten, *Antike Naturphilosophie* (above, n. 52), pp. 373-9. Attribution of celestial motion to soul would be ruled out for any who agreed with Jacob on that point (cf. above, n. 68), but Jacob attributes it not to Philoponus' impressed force, but to their inner nature established by God, a view similar to Philoponus' earlier conception, prior to the composition of the *De Opificio mundi* (cf. Sorabji, *Matter, Space, and Motion*, pp. 211-13, 233-4). Cf. Chabot (ed.), *Iacobi Edesseni Hexaameron*, pp. 164a.28-164b.5 tr. Vaschalde, p. 139 (above, n. 67): "These (matters) of the motion (of the heavenly bodies) are not voluntary, free, or independent, but (derive) from the nature (*mkānūtā*) which God the Creator 'ennatured' (*akin*) and placed in them, so that they should be moved in accordance with the movement of the sun. The sun is their illuminator and mover, just as the Creator and Sustainer 'ennatured' it, and neither is it moved nor does it move (the others) by its own will or freedom". On this new status afforded to the sun and its repositioning at the outer edge of the cosmos, cf. Wilks, "Jacob of Edessa's Use of Greek Philosophy in his *Hexaameron*" (above, n. 71), pp. 228-36.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Scholten, *Antike Naturphilosophie* (above, n. 52), pp. 373-9; Verrycken, "The *Metaphysics* of Ammonius" (above, n. 11), pp. 223-6.

<sup>104</sup> MS. British Library, *Add.* 14,658, foll. 60va-61ra. Those "of an exalted way of life who have no need of human instruction" are presumably ascetics opposed to philosophy and Greek culture. It is hard to tell whether Sergius is being ironical here, or genuinely acknowledging their different way.

divine scriptures'. A very special understanding of the Bible is clearly implied here, mediated perhaps through an author who could only be properly studied by those who had previously mastered logic. Sergius' statement in fact looks like a parallel to, or an adaptation of, the contemporary Neoplatonic belief that the philosophy curriculum culminating in the 'theological' interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides* had to begin with logic. Sergius, however, showed no special interest in Plato, although at Alexandria as a pupil in the school of Ammonius he could hardly have been unaware of Plato and the *Platonic Theology* of Ammonius' teacher Proclus. Nevertheless, as Sergius stated in the prologue of the commentary, it was Aristotle whom he considered to be "the origin, beginning, and principle of all knowledge, not only for Galen and the other physicians like him, but also for all the writers called philosophers who came after him".<sup>105</sup>

Despite Ammonius' synthesis, pagan Neoplatonists in general were not unaware of problems in asserting the harmony of Plato and Aristotle. There is no evidence of Syriac interest in the Platonic corpus, but since, as noted above, the Platonic "assimilation to God according to what is possible for man" was considered by both Sergius and Severus Sebokht to be the goal of the curriculum, the *Metaphysics* seems unlikely to have been the endpoint for them of "the whole of philosophy". For the Alexandrians in the school of Ammonius, the endpoint was the study of Plato in the interpretation of Proclus, for Sergius, it appears, the study of the Bible in the interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius, whose works he translated into Syriac. In his prologue to this translation, which probably is based on an earlier independent treatise, he envisaged a multi-stage ladder of knowledge (*theoria*), some of whose steps consisted of Christian spiritual progress according to the teaching of Evagrius of Pontus, and others of a philosophical cursus comprising logic, physics, mathematics, and metaphysics. Beyond all of these, however, he envisaged a further stage which, "by means of all these already mentioned, touches, as far as is permitted, on the exalted radiance of the hidden divinity". This final stage is subsequently described as "the hidden and veiled vision of the intellect which reaches out, as much as is possible, through some distant similarity between them, towards the unfathomable radiance of Being", and "not a knowledge but an excess of ignorance and superior to knowledge". In its present context, it clearly refers to the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>106</sup>

Pseudo-Dionysius was the only Christian writer translated by Sergius; his other translations were entirely from the non-Christian Greek tradition and limited to philosophy (pseudo-Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias) and medicine (especially Galen). Since he apparently had no interest in

<sup>105</sup> The prologue is translated in Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique* (above, n. 19), pp. 165-86, the citation at p. 168.

<sup>106</sup> Sergius' prologue is edited with a French translation by P. Sherwood, "Mimro de Serge de Rešayna sur la vie spirituelle", *L'Orient syrien* 5 (1960), pp. 433-57; 6 (1961), pp. 95-115, 122-56. There is a better translation by E. Fiori, *Sergio di Resh'ayna. Trattato sulla vita spirituale*, Monastero di Bose, Bose 2008. The citations above are from Sherwood "Mimro de Serge", 6 (1961), pp. 122-5, Fiori, pp. 40-41. In this treatise Sergius designated (Aristotelian) physics and metaphysics respectively as knowledge "which extends over visible natures" and that which "ascends to hidden substances above vision". Cf. the terminology of Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 6.16-18 Kalbfleisch (*CAG VIII*): the (theoretical) writings of Aristotle "lead up to knowledge, via that of natural things to that of those above nature." The surprising inversion in the sequence of mathematics and metaphysics in Sergius' scheme is probably on account of the fact that mathematics was not studied from Aristotle, and when thinking about his writings (as in the passage of Simplicius just cited), physics was perceived as leading on to metaphysics; cf. similarly David, *In Cat.*, p. 120.23-6 Busse (*CAG XVIII.1*): the *Metaphysics* immediately follows the physical treatises. Sergius keeps physics and metaphysics next to one another and places mathematics after them. His scheme is also discussed by E. Fiori, "Un intellectuel alexandrin en Mésopotamie", in Coda-Martini Bonadeo (ed.), *De l'Antiquité Tardive au Moyen Âge* (above, n. 24), pp. 59-90, esp. pp. 77-86. Even if Sergius wrote this treatise (or an earlier form of it) before he knew the corpus of Dionysius, by placing it at the front of his translation of the corpus he evidently determined that it should subsequently be read in connection with it.

translating any other Christian theologian, he seems to have seen ‘the Areopagite’ as connected in a special way to the Greek philosophical tradition, and more specifically as a Christian counterpart to (the Athenian) Proclus, whose Neoplatonic reading of the Bible completed and perfected the Aristotelian curriculum for Christians in the way that Proclus’ interpretation of the *Parmenides* did for pagans.<sup>107</sup> There is no doubt that the Qenneshre scholars, and others, were attentive readers and followers of Dionysius, and it appears quite possible that Sergius’ view of his place at the summit of the philosophical curriculum remained influential in Syriac Aristotelian circles.<sup>108</sup> ‘Dionysius’ did not accept the doctrine of the eternity of the world.<sup>109</sup>

In the ninth century al-Kindī wrote *On First Philosophy* not only without adhering to that doctrine, but even placing at the outset a lengthy exposition against it. In his armoury he possessed, alongside Philoponus’ writings against the doctrine, the pseudonymous *Theology of Aristotle*.<sup>110</sup> Also for the author of the *Harmony of Plato and Aristotle* – possibly al-Fārābī – this last work was of great significance,<sup>111</sup> as he considered it to be the direct continuation of the *Metaphysics*. Thus noting in the *Theology* the allusions of ‘Aristotle’ to the words of ‘Plato’ affirming that the One creates everything in an atemporal act, he could resolve what he saw as only an apparent contradiction between the temporal and eternalist views of creation in the works of Plato and Aristotle respectively.<sup>112</sup> Syriac Aristotelians did not believe that Aristotle wrote the Dionysian corpus, but it does not seem unrealistic to consider both the late antique juxtaposition of Aristotle and Plato and the Muslim juxtaposition of the *Metaphysics* and *Theology of Aristotle* as analogous to a Syriac juxtaposition of Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>113</sup> Christian interest in the *Metaphysics* is evident in the Abbasid period. In the *Fihrist* we hear of Syriac and Arabic translations of certain of its Books and some

<sup>107</sup> The term *Plato christianus* was coined by P. Bettolo, “Scuole e ambienti intellettuali nelle chiese di Siria”, in C. D’Ancona (ed.), *Storia della filosofia nell’Islam medievale*, Einaudi, Torino 2005, pp. 48-100, at p. 98. Perhaps we may nuance Bettolo’s insight by suggesting that the Bible itself was Sergius’ *Plato christianus*, while Pseudo-Dionysius could be termed *Proclus christianus*. That Pseudo-Dionysius’ Christianized Neoplatonism owed much to Proclus has long been established. Cf. also J.W. Watt, “The Syriac Aristotle between Alexandria and Baghdad”, *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 7 (2013), pp. 26-50, esp. pp. 33-6.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 41-5; Id., “From Sergius to Mattā. Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius in Syriac Tradition”, in J. Lössl - J.W. Watt (eds.), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity*, Ashgate, Farnham 2011, pp. 239-57; and A. Treiger, “Palestinian Origenism and the Early History of the Maronites: in Search of the Origins of the Arabic *Theology of Aristotle*”, in Janos (ed.), *Ideas in Motion* (above, n. 28), pp. 44-80. On George’s knowledge of and dependence upon Pseudo-Dionysius, cf. V. Ryssel, *Georgs des Araberbischofs Gedichte und Briefe*, Hirzel, Leipzig 1891, pp. 36-43, 75-7 (translation), 152-5, 163-6, 191-2 (commentary). George’s treatises *On Souls, Spirits, and Intellects* and *Whither Souls Migrate* in *Add.* 14,538, foll. 17r-v, translated in Ryssel, *ibid.*, pp. 142-4 with commentary p. 232, in which Daiber, “Die syrische Tradition”, in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), p. 47, detects a Neoplatonic tinge, may have been influenced, as was Sergius’ prologue to his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius, not only by Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius (as noted by Ryssel), but also by the doctrine of Evagrius of Pontus; cf. on Evagrius’ differentiation of ‘souls’ and ‘intellects’, A. Guillaumont, *Les ‘Kephalaiā Gnostica’ d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1962, pp. 103-6.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. above, n. 63.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Endress, “Building the Library of Arabic Philosophy” (above, n. 89), pp. 333-6, 349-50; Endress-Adamson, “Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī”, in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), pp. 105-6, 129-30. The controversy over the eternity of the world continued in the period after al-Kindī to engage both Muslim and Christian thinkers. Cf. above n. 92.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Rudolph, “Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī”, in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), pp. 402-3.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. C. Martini Bonadeo, *al-Fārābī. L’armonia delle opinioni dei due sapienti, il divino Platone e Aristotele*, PLUS, Pisa 2008 (Le vie del sapere. Testi), pp. 63-7, 203-6.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Le mouvement des traductions syriaques. Arrière-plan historique et sociologique”, in R. Goulet - U. Rudolph (eds.), *Entre Orient et Occident: La philosophie et la science gréco-romaines dans le monde arabe*, Fondation Hardt, Geneva 2011, pp. 45-86, esp. p. 71.

Greek commentators from the hands of Ḥunayn, Ishāq, Mattā, and Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī,<sup>114</sup> and elsewhere of commentaries on individual books by Mattā<sup>115</sup> and Yaḥyā.<sup>116</sup> Yaḥyā’s theology may have been influenced not only by Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and Philoponus’ arguments against the eternity of the world, but also by Pseudo-Dionysius,<sup>117</sup> and his pupil Ibn Zur‘a also seems to have assumed some connection between the *Metaphysics* and Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>118</sup> Syriac Aristotelians and their Syro-Arabic successors thus probably accepted the *Metaphysics* into their philosophical curriculum not as its final end, but as the precursor to the corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, pp. 251.25-252.1 Flügel; Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī* (above, n. 33), pp. 27-8. Note also Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 252.2-4 Flügel for Porphyry and Themistius on *Ethics*, translated by Ishāq and written in his hand in Syriac.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Endress, “Die Bagdader Aristoteliker”, in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), p. 299.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Id., *The Works of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 71-3; Id., “Die Bagdader Aristoteliker”, in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), pp. 318-22.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Watt, “From Sergius to Mattā’ (above, n. 108), p. 256; Endress, “Die Bagdader Aristoteliker”, in Rudolph (ed.), *PIW* (above, n. 9), p. 329.