THE DIALECTICS OF FRIENDSHIP: THE *RINGDOVE* CHAPTER IN THE ARABIC *KALILA WA-DIMNAH* AND ITS ELEVENTH-CENTURY GREEK TRANSLATION*

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Abstract

In the long history of translating the Sanskrit *Panchatantra* in the West, the *Ringdove* chapter has proven to be the most stable. Only a few minor details were changed by copyists and translators, leading to the question what the reason for its stability might be. This article argues that the unique content of the *Ringdove*, which describes a successful friendship between four different animal species, is the reason for its stability. The overall concept of what 'true friendship' consists of appears to have found cross-cultural resonance, leaving no need for changes. To examine this stability, this article compares Ibn al-Muqaffa''s Arabic version, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, that became the source of all successive translations west of India, to its eleventh-century Greek translation, *Stephanites kai Ichnelates*, by Symeon Seth. While certain features of Byzantine literature are found in *Stephanites*, the overall order of events and the dialectic method in the text that defines true friendship do not change. This leaves the Ringdove in the unique situation of a happy ending in which fate and predetermined enmity between species are overcome by the power of friendship. In this way, a focus entirely on the *Ringdove* chapter, which is entirely apolitical and life-affirming, challenges traditional views of the *Panchatantra/Kalila wa-Dimnah* as a Machiavellian political manual for princes told in fables.

Key Words

Kalila wa-Dimnah; Stephanites kai Ichnelates; Arabo-Greek literature; translation; friendship; textual transmission

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I. *Introduction*

> The king said: « [...] Tell me an example of some who loved each other in return and corresponded always in friendship. »
> The philosopher said: « Nothing can replace a true friend and plain proof of this is the example of the crow, the mouse, the gazelle and the turtle. »
> (SkI III, p. 201,1–5)[1]

The story the king requests in the third chapter (*The Ringdove*) of *Stephanites kai Ichnelates* is outstanding in more than one way. Not only does the king wish for a happy story of love and friendship, but his philosopher also tells him a story unrelated to courts and kings, as one might expect in a text often categorised as 'mirror for princes'.[2] This alone makes the *Ringdove* a chapter in dire need of closer analysis, as it calls into question the oft-ascribed categories of the whole text as Machiavellian, political guide, *etc*.[3] While the text indeed offers detailed advice on how to navigate politics and successfully manipulate and guide rulers, it also offers numerous general advice on life, finances, and relationship, making it truly multifaceted. In this, I agree with MacCormac Taylor, who already doubts that the text can be classified into one category even in its oldest version, the Sanskrit *Panchatantra*.[4]

Also noteworthy to me is the fact that the *Ringdove* chapter is surprisingly stable in its western transmission. In comparison to other chapters, where

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1 Symeon Seth, *Stephanites und Ichnelates. Überlieferungsgeschichte und Text* [=SkI], ed. Lars-Olof Sjöberg, Almqvist & Wiksell, Uppsala 1962. The *Ringdove* chapter is henceforth quoted as III.

2 On the debate concerning this genre: Günter Prinzing, « Byzantine Mirrors for Princes: An Overview », in Noëlle-Laetitia Perret, Stéphane Péquignot (eds.), *A Critical Companion to 'Mirrors for Princes' in Literature*, Brill, Leiden 2022, p. 108–135.

3 MacComac Taylor, *The Fall of the Indigo Jackal: The Discourse of Division and Purnabhadra's Pancatantra*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2007, p. 31–34. It has also been noted that the Arabic prefaces address a more general audience than princes or courtiers: Beatrice Gründler, Khouloud Khalfallah, « Anthologizing *Kalīla wa-Dimna*: The Incipit of the First *Risāla* », *Journal of Abbasid Studies*, 9 (2022), p. 112. For a traditional categorization: Franklin Edgerton (ed.), *The Panchatantra Reconstructed: An Attempt to Establish the Lost Original Sanskrit Text of the Most Famous of Indian Story-Collections on the Basis of the Principal Extant Versions,* vol. II: *Introduction and translation*, American Oriental Society, New Haven 1924 [1967], p. 4; Johannes Hertel, « Was bedeuten die Titel Tantrākhyāyika und Pañcatantra? », *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes,* 20 (1906), p. 81–89; *Tantrākhyāyika: die älteste Fassung des Pañcatantra*, ed. Johannes Hertel, Teubner, Leipzig 1909, p. 8; Viṣṇuśarmā, *Panchatantra*, in Patrick Olivelle (ed.), *Viṣṇuśarmā – The Five Discourses on Worldly Wisdom*, Clay Sanskrit, New York 2006, p. 18, 36–341; John B. Alphonso-Karkala, « Facets of Panchatantra », *Indian Literature*, 18/2 (1975), p. 74–76; Marianne Marroum, « *Kalila wa Dimna*: Inception, Appropriation, and Transmimesis », *Comparative Literature Studies*, 48/4 (2011), p. 514.

4 Taylor, *The Fall of Indigo Jackal*, p. 35; This agrees with the observation made by Ferial Ghazoul: Ferial Ghazoul, « Poetic Logic in *The Panchatantra* and *The Arabian Nights* », *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 5/1 (1983), p. 13–21.

characters, events, and even the outcome of the story can differ vastly, the *Ringdove* has but a few minor differences between versions.

The reason for this perceived stability of the *Ringdove* lies, I believe, in its universally applicable concept of true friendship that easily translates across cultures.[5] While in some translations the friendship concept carries notions of vassalage, it nevertheless narrates a nearly utopian exile setting.[6] The characters, especially the mouse and the crow are act separate or opposed to their own kind: the mouse has left the city and the crow is ready to defend the mouse against other crows. This seems to imply that true friendship might need an apolitical setting – in the Aristotelian sense of not belonging to a *polis* – in which no other interests can possibly interfere.[7]

To better the understanding of this concept of friendship, I will compare the chapter in the Greek *Stephanites kai Ichnelates* with the Arabic *Kalila wa-Dimnah*.[8] The focus of this comparison will be on the model of friendship introduced in the *Ringdove*, the method by which it is introduced, and how possible differences between the two languages affect both. Since the story is told by a philosopher character, the results of this comparison will help analyse the philosophical dimension of friendship in the *Ringdove*. In particular, the focus lies on how the role of fate and the (in)ability to overcome predetermined enmity between species can be gathered from the text. With this, it can be shown how storytelling and philosophy create a worldview on friendship that is translatable across cultures.

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5 Similar observations have been made for the Castilian and Hebrew version: Rachel Scott, « Translating Tales of True Friendship out of Al-Andalus: The Medieval Castilian and Hebrew Translations of Kalila wa-Dimna » in Rachel Scott, Abdool Karim Vakil, Julian Weiss (eds.), *Al-Andalus in Motion: Travelling Concepts and Cross-Cultural Contexts*, Boydell & Brewer, London 2021, p. 55–80. Equally, the differences in version noted by Abdoulaye Samaké and Amina Boukail never concern the definition of friendship: Abdoulaye Samaké, Amina Boukail, « The Global Fable in the Middle Ages », in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Globalism in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2023, p. 351–380, here p. 378–380.

6 Scott, « Translating Tales », p. 62–63, 70.

7 This agrees with Scott's observations for Castilian and Hebrew: Scott, « Translating Tales », p. 66, 70.

8 Another analysis of *Ringdove* by Detlev Quintern cannot be considered in this article due to several mistakes: First, Quintern believes Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ to be the author of the text indicating that Quintern did not read Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's introduction or any related research since the times of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ that would have clearly stated otherwise. Second, Quintern understands *Kalila wa-Dimnah* to be a children's book which, again, is not the target audience according to its introduction. Third, Quintern assumes expensive manuscript illuminations to be aimed at children. This shows a deeply concerning lack of engagement with the text and knowledge about its historical circumstances that make the article overall questionable in its scientific value: Detlev Quintern, « Crossing the Spatiotemporal Dimension of Human Culture: Moral Sense of Justice in the Fable of the Ringdove », in Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.), *Sharing Poetic Expressions*, Springer, Berlin 2011, p. 39–50, here p. 40, 43–45.

This approach does not focus minor changes in wording that have no semantic impact on the text and thus do not change the overall concept of friendship. For cases in which the translation impacts the meaning of the text, the terminology developed by Gerard Genette in his *Palimpsestes* is used according to the following understanding:[9]

Reduction: less quantitative text
Expansion: more quantitative text
Transmotivation: substitution of a motive for the same outcome in the plot
Demotivation: less (psychological) motivation of a character
Motivation: more (psychological) motivation of a character
Revaluation: more character importance, more 'attractive' in the text's value system
Devaluation: less character importance, less 'attractive' in the text's value system

These aspects usually impact the philosophical dimension of the story, as they place more or less emphasis on certain perspectives and contexts. In this sense, they indicate paradigm shifts between source text and translation.

In order to understand the meaning the concept of friendship in the *Ringdove* has for the text's stability, I will begin with considering the textual transmission until the Greek text. In the next step, I will explain the relationship between the Arabic *Kalila wa-Dimnah* and the Greek *Stephanites kai Ichnelates,* and the possibilities and limits of establishing a link between them. This is necessary for the following discussion of the major differences between Greek and the two closest Arabic manuscripts along with the quotes inserted by Symeon Seth to see whether they affect the concept of friendship. As a final step, the concept of friendship will be analysed. One major point of the analysis focuses on the dialectic method by which the concept is developed and how the plot confirms the given definitions. The other point concentrates on the most important motifs of fate and forces that jeopardise the friendship in order to understand the possibilities and limitations of what the *Ringdove* defines as true friendship.

II. *The Textual Transmission of the* Ringdove *Chapter*

In order to properly understand the relationship between the Arabic *Kalila wa-Dimnah* and the Greek *Stephanites kai Ichnelates*, one cannot forego the textual transmission, starting with the Sanskrit *Panchatantra*.

As for when the *Panchatantra* was written and by whom, the lack of witnesses before the sixteenth century and the existence of both a Kashmiri (*Tantrākhyāyika*)

[9] Gerard Genette, *Palimpsestes: Literature in the Second Degree*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1997, passim.

and a Sanskrit version make a definite answer impossible.[10] While much research has been done in the futile attempt to reconstruct an Urtext, I agree once more with Taylor that these attempts unnecessarily devalue the existent texts.[11] Even without an Urtext, it is still possible to draw conclusions from the surviving material.

In the *Panchatantra*, the *Ringdove* is the second chapter, following the story of the *Lion and Bull*.[12] From my understanding, both stories are set as contrasting examples of a broken friendship and a lasting friendship. This becomes even more apparent when looking at the chapter titles in the Sanskrit version. Here, the first story is called *On Causing Dissension among Allies* and the second *On Securing Allies*. If we look at the content, the first story focuses on a friendship between the lion king and a bull who becomes his most trusted advisor. Their friendship, transcending boundaries between herbivores and carnivores, domesticated and wild animals, only lasts until a scheming jackal manages to drive them apart, resulting in the lion killing the bull and handing the bull's position to the jackal. The second story tells about an equally unlikely friendship between animals. However, as mentioned above, this friendship prevails against external foes and concludes with a happy ending for the characters.

The five original chapters of the *Panchatantra* were then combined with fables from the *Mahābhārata* and other stories by Burzoe, who translated everything into Pahlavi for the Persian king in the sixth century.[13] Yet, as his translation is lost, its extent can only be guessed from the Syriac translation by Bud from the sixth century.[14] At nearly the same time, the Persian court official Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ translated the text as *Kalila wa-Dimnah* for the Arab rulers of the former Persian empire.[15] Unlike Bud, who reduced Burzoe's text, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ expands his

[10] Alphonso-Karkala, « When the East Meets the West », p. 75–76; Olivelle, *Viṣṇuśarmā*, p. 17–20; Edgerton, *Panchatantra Reconstructed*, p. 3. Olivelle (*Viṣṇuśarmā*, p. 22) also discusses the possible title of the original Sanskrit text.

[11] Taylor, *The Fall of Indigo Jackal*, p. 32–35; Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2001, p. 2.

[12] Olivelle, *Viṣṇuśarmā*, p. 5–6.

[13] Karla Mallette, « Narration as Raumschach: Kalila and Dimna in time, space and languages », *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 13 (2022), p. 313–314.

[14] On Bud's translation: Beatrice Gründler et al. « An Interim Report on the Editorial and Analytical Work of the AnonymClassic Project », *Medieval Worlds*, 11 (2020), p. 245–247; Johannes Schleifer, « Studien in Kalila wa-Dimna », *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 29 (1915), p. 399–419; Marroum, « *Kalila wa Dimna* », p. 513.

[15] Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, « *Kalila and Dimna* in Persian literature (ペルシア文学におけるカリーラとディムナ) », *Bulletin of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan*, 12/1 (1969), p. 4–5; Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, in Michael Fishbein (ed.), *Kalilah and Dimnah. Fables of Virtue and Vice*, New York University Press, New York 2021, p. xiii–xvi; Al Safi Hind Rafea Abalrasul, « When the East Meets the West: Literary Interference and Cultural Transfer », *Journal of Humanistic and Social Studies*, 11/1 (2020), p. 14; Hassan, Iyas, « Langue nomade en cour impériale. L'arabe d'Ibn

source significantly and even adds an additional chapter after *Lion and Bull* that continues the story of the scheming jackal.

This new extension found in any translation based on Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ breaks up the dichotomy of the two *Panchatantra* chapters. In my opinion, this shows that the positive outcome of the contrasting *Ringdove* chapter, at least for Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, was not enough to counterbalance the desolate ending of *Lion and Bull*. Although the Arabic versions of the new *The Trial of Dimnah* chapter differ greatly in their proceedings, they all end, nevertheless, with the death of the scheming jackal who goes unpunished in the *Panchatantra*.

III. *The Link between Arabic and Greek*

However, when comparing Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's text to its eleventh century Greek translation by Symeon Seth, a few problems arise need to be to addressed first. The Greek *Stephanites kai Ichnelates* survives in manuscripts more than a hundred years older than the oldest extant Arabic manuscripts, the oldest imperial copy was most likely written during his lifetimes and is preserved in the codex Laurentianus Plut.XI.14.[16] However, Symeon Seth heavily redacted the text, reducing it by around 25% and altering the translated content for various reasons.[17] Thus, while his source text must remain a mystery, I have nevertheless been able to identify

al-Muqaffaʿ entre deux ères », *Bulletin d'études orientales*, 65 (2017), p. 223; Josep Puig Montada, « Ibn al-Moqaffaˇ y el orgullo sasánida », *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía*, 24 (2007), p. 92–94; Tarek Shamma, « Translating into the Empire. The Arabic Version of *Kalila wa Dimna* », *The Translator*, 15/1 (2009), p. 72–74; Bahaa-eddin Mazid, « Date-palms, Language and the Power of Knowledge: An Analysis of a Fable from Kalila and Dimnah », *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41 (2009), p. 2515–2534, 2521–2522; Marroum, « *Kalila wa Dimna* », p. 514–516.

16 Khalfallah Gründler, « Anthologizing *Kalīla wa-Dimnah* », p. 106–107; Kuroyanagi, « *Kalila and Dimna* in Persian literature », p. 5. Girón-Negrón compares several medieval versions of the *Ringdove* but fails to mention that his Arabic 'edition' is *de facto* a nineteenth century copy by Cheikho from an Egyptian manuscript from 1339 and clearly *not* Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's eighth century autograph he treats it as. Furthermore, calling it the « oldest version preserved in its entirety » without considering that 1100 years between autograph and edition might have changed the text is already wrong. This is especially the case since the oldest extant version is a copy of Symeon Seth's Greek translation from a lost Arabic source in the eleventh century: Codex Laurentianus Plut.XI.14. For this reason, the results in this article are difficult to compare with my analysis as their understanding of the textual tradition and especially the Arabic is lacking: Luis M. Girón-Negrón, « The Medieval Avatars of Kalilah wa-Dimnah: The Digression on Wealth and Poverty in the Ringdove Chapter », *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, 31/1 (2004), p. 219–245, here p. 221. For details on Cheikho: Johannes Stephan, « A Sense of No Ending: Kalīla and Dimna between Fluidity and Completeness », *Al-Abhath*, 71 (2023) p. 53–81, here p. 59–60.

17 Lilli Hölzlhammer, « Altindische Weisheit in Byzanz. Zu den didaktischen Erzählstrategien in Symeon Seths Stephanites und Ichnelates und seinen arabischen Vorgängern », *Fabula*, 63/1 (2022), p. 99–102.

two manuscripts from the British Library as closely related: MS Or. 8751 (799/1369)[18] and MS Or. 4044 (fifteenth century).[19]

The similarities between the manuscripts and the Greek text become visible when segmenting passages of the text into smaller units, as the following example taken from another chapter, *The War of Owls and Crows* shows. The segmentation is taken from the synoptic edition that is being prepared by the AnonymClassic project in Berlin.[20] In order to emphasise the relative closeness between L4044 and L8751 in comparison to other Arabic manuscripts, the oldest existent Arabic manuscript found in Istanbul, Ayasofya, MS 4095 (1221) is also included.[21]

Unit no.	Unit content	A4095	L8751	L4044	Symeon Seth
1	Title	1	1	1	
2	Abstract			2	
3	King Understood Previous Chapter	2	2	3	1
4	King Asks Can Foe Become Friend	3			
5	King Asks About Fawning Foe	4	3	4	2
6	Phil Answers Never Trust Foe	5			
7	Foe May Take Advantage	6			
8	Phil Answers Parable Owls Crows	7	4	5	3
9	King Requests Story	8	5	6	
10	Crows and Owls Homes	9	6	7	4
11	Owls Attack Crows	10	7	8	5
12	Morning After Battle	11	8	9	6
13	Crow King Evaluates Danger	12	9	10	7
14	Crow King Fears Ongoing Aggression	13	10	11	8
15	Five Wise Crows	14	11	12	9
16	King C[row] Asks First Crow	15	12	13	
17	Opinion Escaping	16	13	14	10
18	King C[row] Asks Second Crow	17	14	15	
19	Begin Opinion No Escape	18	15	16	11
20	Opinion Reject Escaping	19	16	17	12
21	Opinion Prepare	20	17	18	13

[18] London, British Library MS Or. 8751 (799/1369) [=L8751].
[19] London, British Library MS Or. 4044 (fifteenth century) [=L4044].
[20] https://kalila-and-dimna.fu-berlin.de/collations (last accessed 18.06.2025).
[21] Istanbul, Ayasofya, MS 4095 [=A4095].

22	Crows to Fight Back Owls		18	19	
23	Defending Is First Option		19	20	14
24	Escape Only at Defeat	21	20	21	15

Due to the table above showing the beginning of the chapter *The War Between Owls and Crows*, the differences between L4095 and the other texts are still manageable. Yet, while it is still part of the same tradition as L4044 and L8751 within the Arabic context, its text is expanded with further units that the other versions are missing. In cases where A4095 expands the text, the presence of units in Symeon Seth's translation always follows L4044 and L8751. However, it is noticeable that while the Arabic manuscripts have roughly the same number of units, Symeon Seth has significantly fewer. This is indicative for his treatment of his source, that aims to reduce the overall amount of text and enhance its accessibility by removing embedded tales and repetitive content.

The same observation can also be made on the text level when comparing the wording of units, as the following comparison of units 10 and 11 shows:

UNIT	A4095	L8751	L4044	SYMEON SETH
10	قال الفيلسوف زعموا أنّ أرضًا تُسمّى كذا وكذا وكان حولها جبلٌ عظيمٌ محيطٌ بها وكان فيها شجرةٌ عظيمةٌ كثيرة الغصون شديدة الالتفاف يُقال لها بيرود وكان فيها وكر ألف غرابٍ ولهنّ مَلكٌ منهم [فخرج] [مَلك] [البوم] وكان في ذلك الجبل وكر ألفٍ من البوم	قال الفيلسوف إنّه كان في جبل من الجبال شجرةٌ عظيمةٌ كأعظم ما يكون من الدوح وأشده إلتفافًا وكان فيها ألف غراب عليهم ملك وكان في ذلك الجبل أيضًا مكان فيه ألف بومة عليهم ملك منهم	قال العالم زعموا أنّه كان في جبل من الجبال شجرة عظيمة من الدوح وكان فيها وكر ألف غراب عليها ملك منها وكان في ذلك الجبل أيضًا مكان فيه ألف بومة عليها ملك منها	λέγεται γάρ, ὡς ἔν τινι ὄρει δένδρον ἦν ὑπερμέγεθές τε καὶ ὑψιπέτηλον, ἐν ᾧ κόρακες διῆγον χίλιοι, ὧν ἦρχε κόραξ εἷς. ἦσαν δὲ ἐν ἑτέρῳ τόπῳ πλησίον βοῦφοι χίλιοι παρ' ἑνὸς καὶ αὐτοὶ κυριευόμενοι καὶ πρὸς τοὺς κόρακας ἀεὶ ἐχθρωδῶς διακείμενοι. (SkI IV, 215, 4–7)
	The philosopher told the following tale: Around a land called so-and-so there was a great mountain	The philosopher said: On a mountain, so they say, there stood an enormous tree with widespread	The learned man said: On a mountain, so they say, there stood an enormous tree with widespread	It is said that on a certain mountain there was an overly tall and towering tree,

	on which stood an enormous tree with many very entangled branches, called Yabrud, that harboured the nests of a thousand crows ruled by a king. [Then the owl king came out] and there was also on that mountain a nest of a thousand owls[22]	and very entangled branches that harboured a thousand crows ruled by a king. A thousand owls also lived on the mountain; they too were governed by a king.	branches that harboured the nests of a thousand crows ruled by a king. A thousand owls also lived on the mountain; they too were governed by a king.	in which a thousand crows were living who were governed by one crow. Nearby in another place there were a thousand owls and they too were ruled by one and felt hostile towards the crows.
11	فخرج مَلك البوم ذات ليلةٍ لعداوةٍ بين البوم والغربان *ووقعن البوم على الغربان فأكثرن فيهنّ القتل والجراح	فخرج ملك البوم ليلة لعداوة لم تزل بين البوم وبين الغربان بمن معه من البوم فقتل منهنّ كثيرًا وجرح كثيرًا	فخرج ملك البوم ذات يوم لعداوة قديمة بين الغربان والبوم فأغار على الغربان بمن معه فقتل منهم كثيرًا وجرح كثيرًا	καὶ μιᾷ τῶν νυκτῶν ἐπῆλθον τούτοις καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν ἀπέκτειναν, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ ἐτραυμάτισαν. (SkI IV, 215, 7–9)
	One night, because of the enmity between owls and crows, the owl king and his followers ambushed the crows, so most of them were killed or wounded.	One night, because of the enmity which had not ceased between owls and crows, the owl king and his followers killed and wounded many of them.	One night [lit. day], because of the long standing enmity between owls and crows, the owl king and his followers ambushed the crows, killing and wounding many.	And one night they attacked them and killed many of them and wounded many.

The first observation one can make when comparing these two units is that only A4095 has a name for the tree. Otherwise, the Arabic manuscripts are very similar in their wording. Looking at Symeon Seth's translation, however, one can see the way he processes the text. In the beginning, he removes the passage about the philosopher narrating the story – it is superfluous because the king does not

[22] All translations in Greek and in Arabic (as long as Fishbein is not quoted) have been made by me in order to emphasize the similarity between versions.

request the story in Greek and unit 9 is missing. Instead, the philosopher starts telling his story immediately. Similarly, in unit 10 the Greek text moves up the introduction to the enmity between crows and owls. Thus, unlike Arabic, the Greek unit 11 needs no explanation of why the owls would attack them. By adding the enmity to the setup of the story in unit 10, the Greek text slightly smoothens the transition from the exposition to the first event of the story. In Arabic, the enmity is only mentioned when the ambush takes place, turning it into more of an afterthought than in the Greek text where the enmity is established in the exposition.

To sum up, while L4044 and L8751 are both similarly close to Symeon Seth's version, the many conscious alterations undertaken by him create an often rather different rendition. This can lead to interesting results when comparing Greek and Arabic in the *Ringdove* chapter based on their understanding of true friendship. As the *Ringdove* chapter has not been edited by the time of my writing (July 2024), I will compare Symeon Seth's text as edited by Lars Sjöberg with the edition of L4044 by Michael Fishbein. The only exceptions are cases in which Symeon Seth's *Ringdove* is closer to L8751, in which the manuscript is consulted. However, it should be noted that L4044 occasionally has expansions unique to this manuscript that are not found in L8751 or Symeon Seth's translation. These expansions can be attributed to the copyist of L4044 who actively engaged with their source text.

IV. *Major Differences between Arabic and Greek: The* Ringdove

> *A crow watches a flock of doves being captured by a hunter with a net. Yet the doves, led by their mistress, manage to fly away together with the trap. The intrigued crow follows them to a mouse den where the mouse, an old friend of the mistress, frees them from the net. Impressed by the mouse's loyalty, the crow befriends the mouse as well and convinces her to move in together with the turtle, another friend of the crow. Here, the mouse finally confesses her troubled past of losing all her wealth and power and thus living as an outcast from the other mice. The turtle consoles the mouse and they become friends. Later, a gazelle joins the group of friends. One day, the gazelle is caught by a hunter. When the mouse and the crow free it from the net, the turtle also joins them. The gazelle reproaches her for putting herself in danger due to her slowness. However, the turtle replies that the worry for her dear friend forced her to come. When the hunter returns, the turtle is caught. As the mouse is about to despair about the turtle's capture, the crow encourages her to devise a plan to trick the hunter. In the end, by combining their individual strengths, they successfully free the turtle and scare off the hunter.*

In order to develop the concept of friendship in the *Ringdove*, I will begin with an analysis of the major semantic changes between L4044, L8751, and *Stephanites kai Ichnelates*. This will lead me to the meaning of quotes that Symeon Seth introduces and their effect on the text. With these differences in mind, I will proceed to

analyse the common ground of friendship found in Arabic and Greek and how it is directly and indirectly presented in the text.

As stated above, the *Ringdove* remains surprisingly stable in comparison to the other chapters, despite being rather lengthy. Between Arabic and Greek, there are three instances that alter the plot and characters, or substitute a unit, and even these alterations are rather minor. First, as a character, both Arabic manuscripts depict the crow as more pious compared to the crow in *Stephanites kai Ichnelates*.

L8751	L4044	Symeon Seth
وكان فلما رأيت وفاك والاخوه وما خلص الله منه الحمام بك رغبت في اخاياك (fol. 42v)	وإنّي لمّا رأيت من وفائك لأصدقائك وما نفع الله بك الحمام ما رأيت رغبت في مخالطتك ومخاللتك	καὶ ἰδών σου τὴν πρὸς τοὺς φίλους διάθεσιν ἠθέλησα φιλιωθῆναί σοι (SkI III, 204, 4–5)
and when I saw your loyalty and brotherhood, and from what God saved the pigeons through you, I wanted to be your brother	When I saw your loyalty to your friends and how through you God helped the doves, I became eager to spend time in your company and become friends.[23]	and seeing your affection towards friends, I wanted to become friends with you

While the Greek crow simply aspires to become friends with the mouse because it observes the mouse being kind to the dove, the Arabic crow perceives the action of the mouse to be an act of God. In this sense, the mouse's friendship becomes desirable on an additional religious level in Arabic. The fact that both manuscripts share this trait makes it likely that Symeon Seth deliberately decided not to translate it, keeping the friendship on a more practical, worldly level.

Second, in the mouse's background story, the Arabic mouse explains her motivation for attempting to regain her lost wealth: she is convinced that this would partially restore her powers and make some of her friends return. The mouse in *Stephanites kai Ichnelates*, however, is demotivated as she provides no internal motivation and instead explains her plan (SkI III, 208, 11–14). In the end, no matter the plan or motivation, the mouse fails her attempt in every version. Third, the mouse in all versions has a long lament about the importance of wealth. While *Stephanites kai Ichnelates* customarily shortens the speech at various points without changing the overall content, there is one instance where it emphasises shame being the worst part of poverty. It has no corresponding unit in L8751 and rewrites the one in L4044 by substituting it partly with a quote:

[23] Fishbein, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 186–187.

فالموت أهون من الفاقة التي تضطرّ صاحبها إلى مسألة الناس ثمّ لا سيّما مسألة الأشحّاء اللؤماء

Death is easier to bear than poverty, which forces its victim to beg – especially if he must beg from those who are mean and miserly.[24]

καὶ ἄμεινον τοῦ βίου προαπελθεῖν ἢ τὸν ἥλιον κατὰ τὸν εἰπόντα αἰσχύνης κτήσασθαι μάρτυρα, καὶ μάλιστα εἰ πρός τινας τῶν φειδωλῶν ποιεῖται τὴν αἴτησιν. (SkI III, 208, 9–11)

And as it was said, it is better to depart from life than to bring upon oneself the sun as a witness of shame; especially if one has to make a request from someone miserable.

Both versions conclude that death is easier to bear than poverty because one has to beg from people one would normally consider as below one's status. While the meaning does not change, *Stephanites kai Ichnelates* emphasises it through a suitable quote from Aphthonius's *Progymnasmata*, quoting Hesiod on a related topic. This becomes meaningful since it indirectly points out the speaker's superior knowledge that would make it hard to beg from less educated people who are « miserable » (τινας τῶν φειδωλῶν), despite being richer. In this sense, the superiority of the one who has to beg in L4044 is not specified.

Overall, L4044, L8751 and Symeon Seth's translation do not differ so much on a textual level that would influence the characters' personalities and thus change their friendship. Yet the mouse being an educated character in the Greek text and the quoting of a well-studied rhetorical school text from Aphthonius, while at first glance a minor difference, has to be considered more carefully.

For this, it is first necessary to consider the cultural meaning of quotes in Byzantine literature.[25] Generally speaking, they are not only used to enhance or prove an argument by borrowing someone's authority,[26] but also serve two other purposes. First, as they are not linked to an exact citation but usually remain

[24] Fishbein, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 200–201.

[25] On the meaning of quotes in Byzantine literature: Nikos Zagklas, « Theodore Prodromos and the use of the poetic work of Gregory of Nazianzus: Appropriation in the service of self-representation », *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 40/2 (2016), p. 223, p. 229–242; Stratis Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, p. 51–87. Quotes could also come from florilegia: Barbara Crostini, « Spiritual 'Encyclopedias' in Eleventh-century Byzantium? Miscellaneous Evidence for an Encyclopedic Outlook », in Peter van Deun, Caroline Macé (eds.), *Encyclopedic Trends in Byzantium?*, Peeters, Leuven 2011, p. 213–214; Denis M. Searby, « Byzantine 'Encyclopedism', Sacro-Profane Florilegia and the Life of Saint Cyril Phileotes », in Denis M. Searby, Ewa Balicka Witakowska, Johan Heldt (eds.), *ΔΩΡΟΝ ΡΟΔΟΠΟΙΚΙΛΟΝ*, Uppsala University Press, Uppsala 2012, p. 197–198.

[26] On borrowing authority with quotes: Stratis Papaioannou, « Voice, Signature, Mask: The Byzantine Author », in Aglae Pizzone (ed.), *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2014, p. 23–25; Larisa Orlov Vilimonović, *Structure and Features of Anna Komnene's* Alexiad, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2019, p. 73–74.

unmarked or vaguely referenced without a name, their identification depends on the reader's education. For example, a phrase like « κατὰ τὴν ποίησιν – as poetry says » can refer to Homer, Hesiod or other famous authors, a phrase like « κατὰ τὸν προφήτην – as the prophet says » can refer to a Psalter or any biblical prophet. Furthermore, a phrase like « κατὰ τὸν εἰπόντα – as it was said », as found in the mouse's speech above might reference any other text, or just imitate a reference in order to strengthen the argument. This leaves the identification of a quote to the reader, separating the educated from the uneducated much like the mouse does with her unreferenced quote.

Second, quotes also serve as a way of characterisation. In the case of a historical person, the quotes are a way of establishing a writing persona. For example, an excessive use of Homer quotes in poetry might indicate the poet's aspiration to be a poet on the same level as Homer.[27] Similarly, fictive characters can be characterised by their use of quotes. Especially in Symeon Seth's translation, a clear pattern can be established in other chapters, where antagonistic characters like the jackal Ichnelates tend to quote mainly Christian sources. Wise and successful characters like the crow that helps their king to defeat the owls in *The War of Owls and Crows* usually quote Classical Greek sources. Often, these characters end up in confrontations that end with the Classical Greek-quoting character triumphing.

This, however, is different in the *Ringdove.* Here, quotes are used to reevaluate characters or to remotivate their acts of encouragement for each other.
Additionally, I will show that each quote is tied to a single character while also representing a specific scholarly tradition: Classical Greek learning, Christian teachings, or contemporary Arabic sciences.

Furthermore, the Ringdove also contains the only quote ever spoken by the philosopher-narrator of the frame story:

> ὁ δὲ φιλόσοφος εἶπε· **φίλου πιστοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντάλλαγμα τῶν ὄντων οὐδὲν.** (SkI III, 201, 3)
>
> The philosopher said: **There is nothing in existence that is a substitute for a faithful friend.** (Greg. Naz. PG 35, 832.21–22, quoting Eccl./Sirach 6:15.1 Septuagint)

The quote itself is the beginning of a speech about Gregory of Nyssa by Gregory of Nazianzus, who is quoting Ecclesiastes from the Old Testament. Unlike the other Christian quotes, this quote is not meant to hide evil intentions. Instead, it sums up the overall message of Rd about the value of true friends.

The other five quotes in Rd are all from classical sources except for the last one. Interestingly, the first three are part of a single speech that laments poverty. A

[27] VILIMONOVIĆ, *Structure and Features*, p. 81–103; PAPAIOANNOU, *Michael Psellos*, p. 43, 137.

comparison with L4044 and L8751 shows that the part containing the quotes is most likely original to *Stephanites kai Ichnelates*. Only L4044 has a comparable passage that is, however, far from Symeon Seth's elaborations. Alison Noble notes that Symeon Seth probably had a specific passage in Aphthonius's *Progymnasmata* in mind when composing the mouse's lament about poverty (SkI III,207,13–208,11).[28] Since Aphthonius was one of the central authors of Byzantine education,[29] Symeon Seth most likely knew the text well. Noble also argues convincingly that this becomes evident since Aphthonius's passage uses the same quote from Theognis as Symeon Seth.

> καλῶς ἔφη ὁ εἰπών, ὅτι δεῖ **χρημάτων καὶ ἄνευ τούτων οὐδέν ἐστι γενέσθαι τῶν δεόντων** καὶ ὡς **χρὴ πενίην φεύγοντα καὶ ἐς μεγακήτεα πόντον ῥιπτεῖν καὶ πετρῶν, Κύρνε, κατ' ἠλιβάτων**. (SkI III, 207, 13–15)
>
> He spoke well who said that **money is necessary and without it, nothing may be done that ought to be** (D., Olynthiaca 1,20), and that **someone fleeing poverty should throw himself into the yawning depths of the sea, Cyrnos, or from precipitous rocks** (Thgn, Eleg. I, 175–176)[30].
>
> καὶ **ἄμεινον τοῦ βίου προαπελθεῖν ἢ τὸν ἥλιον** κατὰ τὸν εἰπόντα **αἰσχύνης κτήσασθαι μάρτυρα**, καὶ μάλιστα εἰ πρός τινας τῶν φειδωλῶν ποιεῖται τὴν αἴτησιν. (SkI III, 208, 9–11)
>
> And as it was said, **it is better to depart from life than to bring upon oneself the sun as a witness of shame** (Aphth., Progymnasmata 10, 9, 1 quoting Anach. 779);[31] especially if one has to make a request from someone miserable.

From the perspective of the character, the quotes revaluate the mouse as someone with a good education, fitting for her past as a city mouse. Now impoverished, the mouse expresses her distress, repeatedly contemplating suicide, which her Classical education is encouraging. From this perspective, the mouse mirrors the depressed, impoverished scholar who learns that true friends are more valuable than gold.

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28 Eugenios of Palermo, *Stephanites kai Ichnelates*, in Alison Noble, Alexander Alexakis, Richard P. H. Greenfield (ed.), *Animal Fables of the Courtly Mediterranean: The Eugenian Recension of Stephanites and Ichnelates*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2022, p. 474–475.

29 Byron David MacDougall, « John of Sardis' Commentary on Aphthonius' Progymnasmata: Logic in Ninth-Century Byzantium » , *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 57 (2017), p. 723, p. 726–744.

30 Theognis, *Elegiae*, in Douglas Young (ed.), *Theognis*, Teubner, Leipzig 1971, p. 1–83.

31 Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata* 8, in Aphthonii *Progymnasmata,* ed. Hugo Rabe, Teubner, Leipzig 1926; *Anacharsis*, in Demetrios Chrestides, *Markiana Anekdota,* University of Thessaloniki Press, Thessaloniki 1984, p. 205–290, v. 779.

This realisation is then spelt out by the turtle, a character with little physical abilities but superior in its empathy. When comforting the mouse, the turtle shows the same education as the mouse but with a positive outlook on life:

> τὰ γὰρ **ἐν γενέσει καὶ φθορᾷ ἐν ῥοῇ ἐστι καὶ ἀπορροῇ**, καθάπερ εἴ τις σφαῖρα, τάχιστα μετακυβευόμενα καὶ μεταρριπτόμενα. (SkI III, 210, 10–11)
>
> **For things that are born and die are always in a state of ebb and flow**, just like a ball, being moved about and turned upside down very swiftly. (Phlp., Apo., p. 439, 8–9)[32]

It should be noted that John Philoponus, the Christian philosopher from Late Antiquity the turtle is quoting, was especially popular with Arabic scholars in the twelfth century for his commentaries on Aristotle.[33] This could also connect the quote to Symeon Seth's Arabic education since the quote derives from one of these commentaries.[34]

However, while the turtle helps the mouse to change her perspective on poverty, the mouse by no means loses the ability to utter elaborate laments. When the turtle is captured by the hunter, the mouse is struck with grief about losing her friend. In this instance, the crow intervenes, representing Christian faith with a quote from Luke 8:13:

> λέγεται γάρ, ὡς ὁ μὲν ἀνδρεῖος ἐν καιρῷ δοκιμάζεται συμπλοκῆς, ὁ δὲ πιστὸς ἐν ταῖς δόσεσι καὶ λήψεσι, καὶ οἱ φίλοι **ἐν καιρῷ πειρασμοῦ**. (SkI III, 213, 16–18)
>
> For it is said that the brave person is put to the test in trying circumstances, the trustworthy one in their receipts and payments, and friends **in a time of trial**. (Lc 8:13)

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[32] John Philoponus, *In Aristotelis analytica posteriora commentaria*, in Ioannis Philoponi *In Aristotelis analytica posteriora commentaria cum anonymo in librum II,* ed. Maximilianus Wallies, De Gruyter, Berlin 1909, p. 439, p. 8–9.

[33] Michael Chase, « Philoponus' Cosmology in the Arabic Tradition », *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales*, 79/2 (2012), p. 271–306.

[34] On Symeon Seth's references to his Arabic education: Petros Bouras-Vallianatos, Sophia Xenophontos, « Galen's Reception in Byzantium: Symeon Seth and his Refutation of Galenic Theories on Human Physiology », *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 55 (2015), p. 441; Joe Glynias. « Reconstructing Middle Byzantine Arabo-Greek Astrology from Later Greek Manuscripts », *Mediterranea. International Journal on the Transfer of Knowledge,* 7 (2022), p. 188, p. 195; Antonie Pietrobelli, Marie Cronier, « Arabic Galenism from Antioch to Byzantium: Ibn Buṭlān and Symeon Seth », *Mediterranea. International Journal on the Transfer of Knowledge*, 7 (2022), p. 282, p. 290–291; Dimitri Gutas, Anthony Kaldellis, Brian Long, « Intellectual Exchanges with the Arab World », in Anthony Kaldellis, Niketas Siniossoglou (eds.), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017, p. 94. Pietrobelli and Cronier also argue that he might have been Ibn Buṭlān's student: Pietrobelli, Cronier « Arabic Galenism », p. 282–300.

The quote interrupts and urges her to devise a plan to save the turtle. Similar to the philosopher's quote in the frame narrative, it is used in an honest way and accomplishes its aim: the mouse comes up with a plan and they manage to free the turtle.

As these quotes are unique to the Greek text without corresponding passages in Arabic, they express additional deliberations about friendship. With the exception of the gazelle, who is the character with the least appearance and direct speech among the friends, they each relate to a philosophical tradition through their quotes. The mouse incorporates classical education, the turtle Arabic Aristotelianism, and the crow Christian wisdom. From this perspective, the different species can be understood as symbolising different philosophical traditions. Accordingly, their successful collaboration implies that a collaboration between different traditions could be fruitful. Classical education devises the best plans but tends to indulge too much in its rhetorical might, modern Arabic knowledge is capable of understanding and uniting the traditions but needs them nevertheless to accomplish something. Finally, the Christian faith provides the emotional encouragement for the others to act upon their knowledge and possesses the ability to unite them, just as the crow is the one to establish the friendship between them. From this point of view, the *Ringdove* chapter in *Stephanites kai Ichnelates* devises a model in which three different educations support each other, turning the bond of friendship also into a scholarly collaboration.

V. *A Dialectic Discovery of Friendship in a Deterministic World*

While the use of quotes and their implications for the friendship between the characters is unique to the Greek text, the overall method to discover the concept of true friendship and the definition of true friendship is found in every version of the text. Accordingly, the following section discusses what method the text employs to set up a convincing depiction of friendship and how friendship is defined within the text. To emphasise the closeness between Arabic and Greek, the passages are quoted from both languages.

The *Ringdove* presents two methods of depicting friendship, the careful dialectic discovery of a potential friend's friendship values and the trial of true friendship. From this perspective, the story is built up the following way: the crow watches the mouse prove her friendship to the ringdove. Then, in a conversation, he convinces the mouse to become his friend. In a second conversation, the turtle becomes friends with the mouse as well, convincing her to forget about her past. After also befriending the gazelle, they prove in a final trial the durability of their friendship. In this way, two trials brace the two conversations about friendship, delivering the hard proof for the theoretical deliberations in the conversations.

Considering the trials, they both mirror each other.[35] In both, a friend of the mouse is trapped in ropes by a hunter with their life being in danger. To survive, the doves have to fly to the mouse in the first trial while the crow has to find the trapped gazelle for the mouse to run to her. The mouse then gnaws diligently through the rope trapping the friend, yet the captured animal has to worry about another friend each time. In the case of the dove, she worries about her flock, in the case of the gazelle, the slow turtle is in danger of being captured instead. Yet, the mouse also frees the flock and, with the encouragement of the crow and the gazelle and the distraction created by them, can free the turtle as well. In both cases, collaboration and trust appear as the main essence of friendship, or, as the dove in L4044 emphasizes:

لا تتخاذلن في المعالجة ولا تكوننّ نفس واحدة منكنّ هي أهمّ لها من نفس صاحبتها

« Stay true to each other! Don't focus more on your own life than on your companion's. »[36]

The narration starts with this strong display of trust and companionship that inspires the marvelling crow to befriend the mouse. Even so, the deliberations that explain how a bird and a mouse might have become friends is only shown afterwards when the crow approaches the mouse. Interestingly, they begin by debating the merits of a new friendship in a conversation. In this dialectic model, the mouse presents the arguments that would speak against a friendship, while the crow refutes them one by one.

The second conversation should probably be considered a therapeutic conversation. While the one with the crow enabled the friendship, the mouse sharing her traumatic past and the turtle kindly correcting her perspective on life deepens their bonds. In this way, their conversation demonstrates how friendship can even heal old wounds.

With this, the *Ringdove* presents a convincing friendship-finding model composed of praxis and theory, in which the seen example inspires new friendship. This new friendship is first theorised before being put to test.

The theory, as stated above, is developed in a dialectic way. One character, the mouse, points out reasons why the desired friendship is unlikely to last, while the other, the crow, refutes them. Overall, the mouse has three arguments. The first is that the crow is a predator that would eat her, the second, that the natural enmity between predator and prey can only ever have a temporary truce, the third, that

[35] Johannes Stephan notes that the *Turtle and Monkey* book following the *Ringdove* can be understood as contrasting while other stories throughout *Kalila wa-Dimnah* are also mirroring each other. Accordingly, this is a conscious narrative device: Stephan, « No Ending », p. 69–71, p. 76.

[36] Fishbein, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 184–185.

while the crow might be a true friend, other crows will still eat her. Her first arguments are additionally accompanied by a *mathal* (pl. *amthāl* – proverb, saying),[37] that emphasises her point.

For the first argument, the mouse compares the foolishness of trying to befriend each other to the following image:

> إنّما ينبغي للعاقل أن يطلب ما إليه سبيل كيلا يُعدّ جاهلًا كرجل أراد أن يجري السفن في البرّ والعجل في البحر على الماء
>
> The wise man should only seek what is possible for him, lest he be considered ignorant, like a man who wanted to run ships on land and wheels in the sea on water.[38]
>
> δεῖ γὰρ τὸν νουνεχῆ τὰ δυνατά, οὐχὶ τὰ ἀδύνατα ἐπιζητεῖν. ὁ γὰρ τοιούτοις ἐπιχειρῶν ἔοικε τῷ καθ' ὕδατος ἐλαύνοντι ἅμαξαν, κατὰ δὲ τῆς ξηρᾶς πλοῖον. (SkI III, 204, 5–8)
>
> A sensible person should strive for possible things, not for the impossible. One who tries such things resembles one who drives a wagon on water and a ship on dry land.

In the second argument, she likens the natural enmity between crows and mice to the relationship between fire and water:

> فإنّ الماء وإن سُخّن فأُطيل إسخانه فليس يمنعه ذلك من إطفاء النار إذا صُبّ عليها
>
> Even if water is heated and kept heated for a long time, this does not prevent it from extinguishing the fire if it is poured on it.[39]
>
> τὸ γὰρ ὕδωρ κἂν τῷ πυρὶ θερμανθῇ, ἀλλ' οὐ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀποβάλλει φύσιν, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ πῦρ σβέννυσι τούτῳ ἐπιχεόμενον. (SkI III, 204, 17–18)
>
> Water, even if warmed up by fire, does not throw away its own nature, since it quenches the fire when it is poured onto it.

Both *amthāl* are based on a total incompatibility between two objects: wagons and water, ships and land, water and fire. The inanimate nature of these objects

[37] Oxford Dictionary of Islam 2003, https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195125580.001.0001/acref-9780195125580-e-1465?rskey=MGQXkU&result=1461 (last accessed 10.05.2026). A *mathal* can also refer to parables or longer, exemplary narratives. For an example translated and reinterpreted in Christian, Rabbinic and Islamic tradition: MARSTON R. SPEIGHT, « A Versatile *Mathal*: 'The Man who Hired Laborers' », *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 15 (2004), p. 91–98.

[38] FISHBEIN, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 188–189; translated by Fishbein with alterations by me to enhance the closeness to the Greek.

[39] FISHBEIN, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 188–189.

additionally emphasises the deterministic view of their behaviour. Like objects, crows and mice have no free will to overcome the limitations of their true nature.

The crow, however, proves (double negative) just as proficient with words. He counters the first argument by claiming that the mouse will be of greater help to him as a lifelong friend than as a one-time meal. Corresponding with the mouse's argumentative strategy, he also uses a *mathal* arguing that the mouse's friendship qualities have already convinced him:

> فإنّ ذا الفضل لا يخفى فضله وإن هو أخفى ذلك كلّه جهده كالمسك الذي يُخبأ ويُكتم ولا يمتنع بذلك ريحه من الأرج والفوح
>
> It is easier to hide musk, whose scent diffuses no matter how much you try to hide it and seal it up, than it is to conceal an intelligent person's excellence, try as he may to conceal it.[40]
>
> ἀλλ' ἡ τοῦ σπουδαίου ἀρετὴ τῇ τοῦ μόσχου ἔοικεν εὐωδίᾳ, ἥτις καὶ συγκαλυπτομένη διαχεῖται καὶ κατάδηλος γίνεται. (SkI III, 204, 12–14)
>
> But the virtue of the diligent resembles the fragrance of musk; even concealed it spreads and becomes widely known.

Similarly, he counters the water-fire *mathal* by comparing his true friendship to a gold vessel/cup:

> ومثل ذلك مثل الكوز من الذهب الذي هو بطيء الانكسار هيّن الإصلاح والإعادة له إن أصابه كسر أو ثلم والمودّة بين الأشرار سريع انقطاعها بطيء اتّصالها كالكوز من الفخار يكسره أدنى عتب ثمّ لا وصل له أبدًا
>
> It is like a golden cup: slow to break, but easy to restore and mend if broken. Affection between the wicked, however, is quick to be severed and slow to be rejoined, like a clay cup broken by the slightest defect, never again to be put back together.[41]
>
> ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸ χρυσοῦν ἀγγεῖον δυσσκέδαστόν ἐστι καὶ εὐκατασκεύαστον, τὸ δὲ ὀστράκινον εὔθρυπτον μέν, δυσανάκτιστον δέ, οὕτως ἡ μὲν εἰλικρινὴς φιλία ἐστὶ δυσμετάβλητος, ἡ δὲ μὴ καθαρὰ ἄστατός ἐστι καὶ δυσίατος. (SkI III, 204, 20–205, 2)
>
> Just as a gold vessel is hard to break and well-worked, while earthenware easily breaks and is hard to fix, so also is sincere friendship hard to change, while the impure is easily damaged and hard to repair.

In this sense, he is not questioning the implied assumption that their behaviour is determined, as the *amthāl* still use inanimate objects. However, he corrects the type of object, likening his sincere friendship to a gold vessel instead of clay and

[40] Fishbein, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 188–189.
[41] Fishbein, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 188–191.

the mouse's hidden loyalty to covered musk. Accordingly, their friendship is predetermined, as it is impossible for him to ignore the mouse's fragrance while his offer of friendship is as durable and precious as gold.

This convinces the mouse to accept his friendship, replying with another *mathal* that she will be equally faithful and not act like the hunter who lures their prey:

> قال الجرذ إنّ أهل الدنيا يتعاطون أمرين يتواصلون عليهما ذات النفس وذات اليد فأمّا المتبادلون ذات النفس فهم الأصفياء المتخالصون وأمّا المتبادلون ذات اليد فهم المتعاونون الذين يسمح بعضهم بالانتفاع ببعض ومن كان إنّما يصنع المعروف التماس الجزاء واكتسابًا لمنافع الدنيا فإنّما مثله فيما يأخذ ويعطي مثل الصيّاد وإلقائه الحبّ للطير لا يريد به نفع الطير

> « People in this world base their relationships on two sorts of things », said the rat,[42] « Some relationships are based on feelings in the heart; other relationships are based on material goods. Those who share what resides in the heart are pure friends who regard each other with sincere affection. Those who exchange material goods are those who cooperate for an advantage and seek to profit from one another. Those who do good deeds only to gain a reward and acquire worldly benefits are like a hunter who scatters grain for the birds, not for their benefit, but for his own ».[43]

> οἱ ἐν τῷ βίῳ ἀναστρεφόμενοι κατὰ δύο τρόπους ἀλλήλους ἀντιφιλοῦσιν, οἱ μέν, ὅσοι ψυχικῶς φιλοῦσιν, οὐ δι' ἄλλο τι τὸν φίλον ἀσπάζονται ἢ μόνον διὰ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ψυχάς, οἱ δὲ χρειωδῶς φιλοῦντες ἕνεκά τινος ἑτέρου τῶν βιωτικῶν πραγμάτων τὴν φιλίαν συνιστῶσι, καὶ ἐοίκασιν οὗτοι τῷ θηρευτῇ, ὃς ὑπορρίπτει τὸν σῖτον δέλεαρ κάτωθεν τοῖς πτηνοῖς καὶ οὐ ταῦτα φιλοτιμούμενος ἀλλ' ἑαυτῷ τὸ συμφέρον μεταποιούμενος. (SkI III, 205, 7–12)

> Those living their lives have loved each other in two ways: some love spiritually, they do not welcome the friend because of something else but only because of their own souls, while others love out of necessity and establish friendship the sake of something else of the things in life, and they resemble the hunter who throws grain as bait down to the birds, not to honour them but to acquire some advantage for himself.

This final *mathal* mirrors the preceding events of the doves that were captured in the same way and follows the capture of the gazelle and the turtle. The recurring hunter-with-a-net theme appears to have leitmotif qualities, representing what threatens friendship. From another perspective, the *mathal* and its preceding explanation of the selfish friendship present an interpretation of the hunter character for the narrative as a whole. The hunter is not only the 'danger' that threatens true friends, but they are also the false promise of a relationship that at

[42] In Arabic, the mouse is usually a rat. However, there is usually little distinction between mice and rats.

[43] Fishbein, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 190–191.

first glance looks like kindness. However, the bait or the initial kindness only hides the net that will trap the unassuming animal to be exploited for the sole benefit of the hunter. Yet, the solution for the hunter problem is already given, as a true friend will be able to free a captured animal from their net.[44] This perspective on the hunter character as the personification of the false friend also explains why a mouse might become friends with a crow, a turtle, and a gazelle but no attempts are made to befriend a hunter. From the outset, the hunter character is the negative example that enhances and tries the true friendship between the animal characters.

The hunter, however, is not the only thing to threaten true friendship. In fact, becoming ensnared in their trap is in every case – the dove's, the gazelle's, and the turtle's – lamented as a stroke of the other great threat: fate.[45] The gazelle only utters a rhetorical question on whether it would have been possible to escape fate despite being clever. Both the dove and the mouse lamenting the capture of the turtle paint fate in vivid *amthāl* that emphasise the impossibility of going against destiny.

Dove:

وقد تنكسف الشمس والقمر إذا انتهيا إلى ميقات قضاء ذلك عليهما وقد تُصاب الحيتان في لجج البحار التي لا سبيل إلى السباحة فيها ويُستنزل الطير من الهواء فالسبب الذي يدرك به العاجز حاجته هو الذي يحول بين الحازم وطلبته.

When it is decreed, the sun and the moon are eclipsed, fish are caught in the depths of the sea, and birds are brought down from the air. The very means that enable the weakling to reach his objective can block the resolute man from his goal.[46]

ὅ τε γὰρ ἥλιος ἐπισκοτούμενος τῇ σελήνῃ ἐκλείπει, καὶ ἡ σελήνη τῇ σκιᾷ τῆς γῆς συγκαλύπτεται, καὶ ὁ θαλάσσιος ἰχθὺς ἐκ βάθους καὶ κλύδωνος ἁρπάζεται καὶ τὰ πτηνὰ ἐξ ἀέρος κατάγεται, ὅτε ὁρισθῇ τὸ τοιοῦτον· καὶ δι' οὗ πολλάκις ὁ ἀσύνετος τυγχάνει τῶν ἐφετῶν, δι' αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου ὁ ἐχέφρων ἀποτυγχάνει τῶν κατὰ σκοπόν. (SkI III, 203, 2–7)

The obscured sun is blocked by the moon and the moon concealed by the shadow of the earth and the fish of the sea is snatched out of the depths by the waves and the birds are brought down from the air, as it is determined for them; and through this (fate) the foolish often achieve their desires, while in the same way the prudent fail to reach their aim.

[44] Samaké, Boukail, « The Global Fable », p. 365–366.
[45] This has also been observed by Samaké and Boukail: Samaké, Boukail, « The Global Fable », p. 364.
[46] Fishbein, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 186–187.

Gazelle:

هل يغني الكيس مع المقادير المغيّبة شيئًا

Is quick wit of any use against events that proceed in accordance with God's hidden decrees?[47]

τί ἄν τις ἀπώνατο τῆς οἰκείας συνέσεως, ὅτε δεῖ τὸ ὡρισμένον τελεσθῆναι; (SkI III, 212, 8–9)

What use is one's intelligence when what is determined must be fulfilled?

Mouse:

كما لا يدوم للطالع من النجوم طلوعه ولا لآفلها أفوله لكنّها في تصرّف وتقلّب لميقات ومستقرّ على إطلاق العليم .ولا يزال الطالع من النجوم إلى أفول والآفل إلى طلوع والمشرق مغربًا والمغرب مشرقًا إلى الوقت المعلوم

just as a rising star must set or a setting star must rise, undergoing change and alteration according to an appointed time and resting place set by the All-knowing. The star that has risen sets, and the star that has set rises; the star in the east travels to the west, and the star in the west travels to the east until the appointed time.[48]

καὶ ὥσπερ ὁ ἀστὴρ ἀνατέλλων οὐ προσμένει τῇ ἀνατολῇ, ἀλλὰ περιφερόμενος διὰ τάχους δύνει καὶ ὁ ἑῷος ἑσπέριος γίνεται καὶ τὸ ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ μέρος δύνει καὶ τὸ δῦνον ἀνατέλλει, οὕτως τὰ παρ' ἡμῖν εἰσιν εὐμετάβλητα. (SkI III, 213, 7–10)

And just as the rising star does not remain in the east but sets down being carried around with haste and the dawn becomes dusk and the part that was in the east sets and causes the sunset, so also are our affairs easily changed.

Just as the hunter *mathal* carries a second layer of meaning for the text, the similarity of motifs in the dove's and mouse's speech should not be seen as coincidence. Likening a deterministic world view to the movement of heavenly bodies such as the moon, earth, sun, and stars is related to an astrological explanation model. If their movement is determined, so is the movement of living beings, meaning that the hunter must hunt, and the prey must be preyed upon. As the gazelle and the dove agree, wisdom alone is not enough to resist fate; like heavenly bodies they have to follow their destiny. In this respect, the hunter's net could be understood as a symbol of the bindings of fate, from which there is no escape on one's own.

In this instance, however, the power of true friendship is depicted as being strong enough to overcome determination and fate. Where one character's

[47] Fishbein, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 208–209.
[48] Fishbein, *Kalila wa-Dimnah*, p. 210–211.

strength is not enough, the help of true friends is able to not only distract the hunter but to also cut through the bonds of fate.

By repeating this core message of the *Ringdove*, the text paints a clear picture of what true friendship is like and why it is desirable. It is interesting to see that this positive message appears to have been universally accepted, while other chapters that focus on the negative aspects of relationships have been frequently edited. This results in the impression that there exists a transcultural agreement on what a true friend is and what they can accomplish.[49] The details of ruining relationships, however, appear to be more culturally specific, as these chapters turn out to be overall less stable from the perspective of their narrative. In this sense, the relative stability of the *Ringdove* chapter should be attributed to its message of friendship and how friendship can overcome even the worst atrocities of fate.

Furthermore, the noted stability of the text also confirmed by scholars of other versions stresses the importance of content when discussing medieval translations. Medieval translations are often more fluid than modern scholars might be comfortable with. By comparison, the understanding of friendship and the way it is demonstrated by different *Ringdove* versions remains stable in a way that agrees better with a modern understanding of a faithful translation. This hints that the concepts of fluidity/stability might overall depend on notions of truth and understanding. Since the concept and presentation of friendship in *Ringdove* was understood and considered to be true, copyists and translators saw no need to interfere with their interpretations. Thus, by looking at other stable medieval translations one might discover further transculturally accepted concepts, similar to the concept of friendship in *Ringdove*.

[49] On a further note, this positive perspective on friendship as being the strongest power also serves as an explanation of why in other chapters the friendships between different species all fails. The lion and the bull are both equally trapped by the scheming jackal, the mouse and the cat only become allies for a limited amount of time due to a shared danger, and the turtle only befriends the monkey for the personal gain of being fed with figs.

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