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ARTICLES

El sueño como *σύστασις* (encuentro) con la divinidad entre Mediterráneo oriental y Occidente latino: algunos testimonios desde la Antigüedad Tardía al Humanismo

The Dream as *σύστασις* (Encounter) with the Divinity between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Latin West: Some Testimonies from Late Antiquity to Humanism

Silvia Acerbi
Universidad de Cantabria

Resumen

Haciendo un recorrido entre textos paganos (como el *Proskynema*, conocido como la 'visión de Mandulis') y cristianos, *in primis* el tratado *De anima* tertulianeo, exploraremos el mundo onírico-visionario tardoantiguo como lugar simbólico de encuentro con la divinidad y trámite sapiencial, sin obliterar algunas manifestaciones que, en esta misma dirección interpretativa, nos ofrecen otros testimonios literarios. Llegaremos a continuación a interrogarnos si su pervivencia en autores del tardo Medievo o del Humanismo italiano (por ejemplo, Giovanni Boccaccio, muy sensible a las manifestaciones onírico-visionarias) responde únicamente a razones formales, de continuidad de estilemas y motivos narrativos o, al contrario, perpetúa contenidos y, sobre todo, creencias profundamente enraizadas en el contexto religioso mediterráneo.

Palabras clave

Systasis; sueños; visiones; Mediterráneo tardoantiguo; Egipto; *Proskynemata;* Tertuliano, Humanismo italiano

Abstract

This paper explores the late-antique oneiric-visionary world as a symbolic place of encounter with the divinity and sapiential journey. It focuses on both pagan texts, such as the *Proskynema* known as the 'vision of Mandulis', and Christian ones, especially Tertullian's *De anima*, while also considering related evidence from other

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literary sources. Its aim is to examine whether their survival in authors of the late Middle Ages or of Italian Humanism – such as Giovanni Boccaccio, who showed a strong interest in oneiric and visionary experiences – can be explained solely in terms of formal or stylistic narrative continuity, or whether it instead reflects the persistence of contents and, above all, beliefs deeply rooted in the Mediterranean religious context.

Key Words

Systasis; dreams; visions; Late Antique Mediterranean; Egypt; *Proskynemata*; Tertullian; Italian Humanism

ὀνείροις παιζόμενοι

GREGORIO DE NACIANZO, Ἔπη Ἠθικά I, 2,14[1]

Ein Gott ist der Mensch, wenn er träumt,
ein Bettler, wenn er nachdenkt.

FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN, *Hyperion oder der Eremit in Griechenland,* Tübingen 1798

Cada nuevo ámbito de investigación entraña las peculiaridades de un imán: arrastra consigo todo un sistema de relaciones conexas, coagula una inmensa cantidad de ideas, de perspectivas, de recuerdos, incluso de sentimientos. Tengo que admitir que siempre he experimentado una fuerte atracción hacia la fenomenología de los sueños, en particular hacia los mecanismos terapéuticos empleados en psiquiatría (*Selbstheilungstendenz*, *hipnosis, mermerismo*), pero tres lecturas fueron especialmente significativas en mi aproximación, hace ya muchos años, al tema del sueño en la Antigüedad Tardía: el *Onirocriticon*[2] de Artemidoro de Daldis, que nos muestra cómo el sueño, esa « ficción multiforme del alma que

* En recuerdo afectuoso del prof. Santiago Montero Herrero (1943–2023), *per sempre* amigo y maestro.

1 Gregorio de Nacianzo, *Poemas Teológicos: 1. Dogmáticos – 2. Morales,* ed. Marcelo Merino Rodríguez, Ciudad Nueva, Madrid 2023, p. 533.

2 ARTEMIDORO DE DALDIS, *El libro de la interpretación de los sueños,* ed. M. CARMEN BARRIGÓN FUENTES, JOSÉ M. NIETO IBÁÑEZ, Akal, Madrid 1999; ARTEMIDORO, *Il libro dei sogni,* ed. DARIO DEL CORNO, Adelphi, Milano 2002; ARTEMIDORUS' *Oneirocritica,* ed. DANIEL E. HARRIS-MCCOY, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012; JOSÉ M. NIETO IBÁÑEZ, « El método de interpretación oniromantica en el *Onirocriticon* de Artemidoro de Daldis », *Estudios Humanísticos. Filología*, 16 (1994), p. 273–288; JEAN-MARIE FLAMAND, « Onirocritique et rationalité dans le monde grec antique: la méthode d'Artémidore de Daldis », *Quaderni di Studi Indo-Mediterranei*, 2 (2009), p. 125–148.

señala los bienes y los males futuros »,[3] siempre pertenece, para el hombre antiguo, a la esfera de lo divino; *Los Discursos sagrados*[4] de Elio Arístides, con sus fantasmagóricas asociaciones entre aspectos nosológicos y iatrománticos; y, por último, el *Tratado sobre los sueños*[5] del inquieto obispo neoplatónico Sinesio de Cirene, que escribe que el sueño es el único modo de adivinación que está al alcance de todos, es el reino de la libertad, ya que ningún tirano puede impedirnos soñar.[6]

Mucho antes de enfrentarme a estas lecturas y de descubrir, gracias a otras,[7] que los sueños son paradigmas, vectores fundamentales de la memoria cultural, hubo una figura de la infancia que me fue muy querida. Reaparecía todos los años en el anárquico pesebre navideño;[8] el únique no faltaba nunca a excepción de los protagonistas era un pequeño espejo para mi, enamorada del sueño y ya tan poco correspondida: el pastor durmiente. Observando la plácida estatuilla de barro me preguntaba cómo sería posible adormecerse delante de Dios: algo extraordinario estaba aconteciendo; los carruajes llegaban desde cada esquina del orbe, las estrellas corrían en el cielo, la noche estaba repleta de ángeles, pero el pastorcillo, sin preocuparse de lo que pasaba a su alrededor, dormía; *et Verbum caro factum est*, y él, a mi pesar, seguía durmiendo.

En aquel entonces aún no había habido biblistas que me explicaran que el sueño es la reacción humana en el umbral de las teofanías (por ejemplo, el sueño de Adán[9]

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3 Artemidoro de Daldis, *El libro de la interpretación de los sueños,* ed. M. Carmen Barrigón Fuentes, José M. Nieto Ibáñez, 1, 2, p. 69.

4 Aelius Aristide, *Discours Sacrés. Rêve, religion, médicine au IIe siècle après J.C.*, ed. André J. Festugière, Macula, Paris 1986; Elio Aristides, *Discursos,* V, ed. José M. Cortés Copete, Gredos, Madrid 1999, p. 246–434; cf. Laurent Pernot, « Les Discours sacrés d'Aelius Aristide entre médecine, religion et rhétorique », *Atti della Accademia Pontaniana,* 51 (2002), p. 369–383.

5 Sinesio de Cirene, *Himnos y Tratados*, ed. Francisco A. García Romero, Gredos, Madrid 1993; v. también Id., *I sogni*, ed. Davide Susanetti, Edizioni Adriatica, Bari 1992; Neil Bronwen, « Synesius of Cyrene on Dreams as a Pathway to the Divine », *Phronema*, 30/2 (2015), p. 19–36.

6 Sinesio de Cirene, *Tratado de los sueños,* en **«** Himnos y Tratados », ed. Francisco A. García Romero, p. 248: « Ni un tirano podría tomar las medidas necesarias para que no contempláramos visiones oníricas, a no ser que el acto de dormir lo declarara proscrito en su reino ». Se trata de una reivindicación onírica que numerosos autores –Shakespeare, Juana Inés de la Cruz, Kafka, Gadda, Pessoa, Borges, entre otros– harán suya siglos más tarde.

7 Karl Abraham, *Rêve et mythe*, Payot, Paris 1965; Geza Roheim, *Le porte del sogno. Il ventre materno. La discesa agli inferi,* 2 vols., Garaldi, Rimini 1973; Maurizio Bettini, *Alle porte dei sogni*, Sellerio, Palermo 2009.

8 Sobre el pesebre v. un pequeño ensayo histórico-antropológico escrito con finura por Maurizio Bettini, *Il Presepio, storia di un simbolo*, Giulio Einaudi, Milano 2018. En el pesebre napolitano, que en muchas casas de la ciudad queda expuesto no solo en el periodo navideño sino durante todo el año, el pastor soñador tiene incluso un nombre: Benino (durante el régimen fascista *Benino* se transformó en *Benito*, en honor a Mussolini).

9 Gen 2:21.

y el de Jacobo[10]), ni psicólogos que me señalaran que las revelaciones tienen como escenario preferente el mundo onírico.[11] Ni filósofos, uno en especial –Jean-Luc Nancy, autor de un ensayo exquisito titulado *Tombe de sommeil*– [12] que me convencieran de que en la experiencia onírica se esconde y revela un fragmento de aquella verdad universal a la que a cada uno de nosotros incumbe otorgar un nombre.

En otra Navidad de la infancia una tragedia domestica ensombreció el mismo anárquico pesebre cuando la estatuilla de San José fue víctima de un fatal accidente. No fue posible remplazarla con una similar a la que me había acompañado hasta entonces: en las tiendas el padre adoptivo del niño con atuendo de carpintero estaba agotado, y sólo se encontraban josés durmientes, más durmientes o dormidos que el pastorcillo. Un leve consuelo me vino entonces de la constatación de que también en la iconografía de muchos nacimientos San José aparecía o aislado [13] (solo ante el misterio: es la versión de los Apócrifos) o directamente dormido,[14] pero no por ser anciano como creía de niña, sino porque José, *nomen-omen* de grandes soñadores vétertestamentarios, es el soñador por excelencia de los Evangelios, en cuyo horizonte onírico Dios, después de haber edificado en el vientre de María el *Sancta Sanctorum* donde se gestará el embrión teantrópico, se insinúa con una proposición indecente. José, que no es sólo bueno sino justo, la acepta, y es a través del sueño que su integridad es capaz de doblarse a las exigencias transgresivas del diseño divino, sumergiéndose en una reflexión que se abre a los sueños y, gracias a los sueños, a la revelación de Dios.

En todas las épocas y culturas la vivencia onírica ha sido tenida como la forma privilegiada de comunicación del hombre con lo sobrenatural. Casi todas las civilizaciones antiguas han otorgado una especial relevancia a sus códigos y mensajes, reconociéndoles unos rasgos sagrados, y considerando por regla general que eran enviados por los dioses.[15] Entonces el sueño no era el simple contrapunto

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10 Gen 28:10–19.

11 Como referencia obligada para una aproximación psicoanalítica a los sueños v. SIGMUND FREUD, *La interpretación de los sueños*, Akal, Madrid 2013 (ed. orig. F. DEUTICKE, Leipzig – Wien 1900).

12 JEAN LUIS NANCY, *Tombe de sommeil,* Galilée, Paris 2007 (trad. esp.: *Tumba de sueño*, ed. Amorrortu, Buenos Aires – Madrid 2008).

13 En los Evangelios Apócrifos se dice que José está solo, aislado con respecto a María y al niño, así como aparece en muchos iconos bizantinos: cf. GEORGES DROBOT, *La lettura delle icone: introduzione storico-teologica all'icona della Natività*, EDB, Bologna 2000.

14 Hay excepciones occidentales donde el padre putativo de Jesús aparece *senex ac decrepitus* dormido, raramente en adoración, apartado en la izquierda como una simple comparsa. Podemos citar la *Natividad* de Giovanni de Módena (Iglesia de San Petronio, Bolonia), una escultura en la Puerta Mayor de San Marcos en Venecia, custodiada en el Museo Diocesano de Salerno, la magnífica obra de Giotto en la Capilla de los Scrovegni en Padua.

15 ARTURO BRELICH, « The Place of Dreams in the Religious World Concept of Greeks », en GUSTAVE E. VON GRUNEBAUM, ROGER CALLOIS (eds.), *The Dream and Human Society*, University of California Press,

de la vigilia sino su esencial polo dialéctico, en cuya ambigua dimensión verdad y ficción, racionalidad e irracionalidad, presencia y ausencia, vibraban el uno en el otro y oscilaban en un intercambio continuo, quizás porque en la Antigüedad no se tenía una concepción 'digital' del existir *–on/off–*, sino la experiencia de un *continuum* analógico, el mismo que se daba también entre la vida y la muerte de la que, en Grecia, el Sueño *–Hypnos–* mitológicamente era hermano o medio hermano: cada uno era *limes*, vía de acceso al divino, sin una clara dualidad.[16]

Ese *continuum* tiene quizás una pervivencia en el *transitus* que los ortodoxos llaman *Theotokos enkoimisis*: para los cristianos de Oriente en los tres días anteriores a la Ascensión María no está muerta sino más bien sumida en un sueño profundo (*dormitio* o *pausatio*, en el léxico latino). Siempre me sorprendió que las representaciones majestuosas, casi prepotentes, de las Asunciones occidentales (como la de Tiziano en Santa María Gloriosa dei Frati), se alejaran iconográficamente de forma tan profunda de los delicados iconos bizantinos que muestran a María, acuñada por el verano, mientras se desliza en un sueño fresco, infantil y no se da cuenta de lo que sucede a su alrededor: los apóstoles que acuden místicamente a Sion desde los cuatros rincones del mundo conducidos por un auriga angélico y precedidos por el Cristo en el fulgor de la juventud (casi un Hermes psicopompo) representado en un nimbo o una almendra llevando en las manos una pequeña efigie infantil, la *animula* visible de la Madonna que se separa y sube al cielo (metáfora de su nacimiento divino según un modelo probablemente egipcio instalado a través del gnosticismo en la tradición iconográfica cristiana).[17] Como la madre lo llevó, ahora el Hijo la lleva a ella, como ella le dio la vida, ahora él se la devuelve.[18]

Berkeley – Los Angeles 1966, p. 293–301; GIULIO GUIDORIZZI, « L'interpretazione dei sogni nel mondo tardoantico: oralità e scrittura », en TULLIO GREGORY (ed.), *I sogni nel medioevo*, Laterza, Roma 1985, p. 149–170; GIULIO GUIDORIZZI (ed.), *Il sogno in Grecia,* Edizioni dell'Ateneo, Roma – Bari 1988; PATRICIA C. MILLER, *Dreams in Late Antiquity. Studies in the Imagination of a Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1994; DANIELA BOCCASSINI (ed.), *Sogni e visioni nel mondo indo-mediterraneo / Dreams and Visions in the Indo-Mediterranean World*, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria 2009; CARLO BRILLANTE, *Studi sulla rappresentazione del sogno nella Grecia antica*, Sellerio, Palermo 1991; FRANCES FLANNERY-DAILEY, *Dreamers, Scribes, and Priests. Jewish Dreams in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras,* Brill, Boston – Leiden 2004; WILLIAM HARRIS, *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, MA – London 2009; GIL H. RENBERG, *Where Dreams May Come. Incubation Sanctuaries in the Greco-Roman World*, Brill, Boston – Leiden 2017; SERGIO PÉREZ CORTÉS, *Soñar en la Antigüedad. Los soñadores y su experiencia,* Anthropos, Barcelona 2017.

16 GRAZIELLA BECATTI, *Hypnos-Somnus: il Demone custode e l'erote dormente. Studio iconologico del dio del sonno dall'antichità all'epoca moderna*, Brepols, Turnhout 2018.

17 LUCA BELLOCCHI, « L'evoluzione del tema iconografico della *Dormitio Virginis* in ambito italiano », *Annales. Series historia et sociologia,* 22 (2012), p. 65–76.

18 Es la idea expresada por Dante Alighieri en el Canto XXXIII, 1–2 del Paraíso (DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. GUIDO VITALI, Garzanti, Milano 1943): « Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figlio, umile e alta più che creatura »: virgen-madre, madre-hija, que en el fondo es como decir esposa-hermana, como en el caso de la egipcia Isis.

En el mundo griego–romano, previo y coetáneo al cristianismo, la σύστασις, encuentro más o menos ritualizado con la divinidad,[19] lograda muchas veces a través de los sueños, proporciona sabiduría. Artemidoro afirma que es razonable que los dioses nos digan muchas cosas a través de sueños y visiones para ponernos a prueba a veces, otras para expandir nuestros conocimientos. Del mismo modo, algunos autores cristianos consideran que experiencias oníricas y visiones son un medio a través del cual Dios nos premia o nos amonesta.[20] En las siguientes páginas nos proponemos analizar tres testimonios seleccionados en diferentes contextos religiosos mediterráneos, para mostrar cómo, no sólo en el marco de la prismática religiosidad tardoantigua, caracterizada, tanto en ámbito pagano como en el cristiano, por el deseo de un contacto casi físico con la divinidad[21] percibida como portadora de salvación, sueños y visiones constituyen claves para interpretar y orientar la dirección de la historia de cada hombre. Estas ideas y concepciones tienen continuidad, *mutatis mutandis,* también en épocas y literaturas posteriores.

[19] El término σύστασις que, siguiendo el ejemplo de Giulia Sfameni, he elegido utilizar aunque no sea mencionado de forma explícita en las fuentes, es frecuente en los Papiros Griegos Mágicos (PGM) donde indica un encuentro ritualizado, duradero o instantáneo (en este segundo caso finalizado a la obtención de una revelación) con la divinidad, por vía directa o por el trámite de un médium, v. Alejandro García Molinos, « El vocabulario de los papiros mágicos griegos más allá de la magia: el caso de σύστασις », en Emilio Suárez de la Torre, Isabel Canzobre Martínez, Carmen Sánchez Mañas (eds.), *Ablanathanalba: magia, cultura y sociedad en el Mundo Antiguo*, Dykinson, Madrid 2020, p. 293–312. Como específica María Barral Gil, « Magia y teúrgia al encuentro de los dioses: comentario a tres prácticas de systasis de los Papiros Griegos Mágicos », TFM de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2020, en general el término σύστασις resume el momento culminante de praxis de adivinación, a menudo en ámbito teúrgico.

[20] Quizás la esposa de Pilato sea santa para los ortodoxos de Oriente porque, tal como nos cuenta Mateo, avisada por Dios a través de un sueño, intente –inútilmente– hacer una advertencia a su esposo: « No tengas nada que ver con ese justo; porque hoy he padecido mucho en sueños por causa de él » (Mt 27:19).

[21] El tema está ampliamente tratado en la literatura científica: Eric R. Dodds, « Supernormal Phenomena in Classical Antiquity», *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 55 (1971), p. 189–237; Hendrik S. Versnel, « What Did Ancient Man See When He Saw a God? Some Reflections on Graeco-Roman Epiphany », en Dirk Van der Plas (ed.), *Effigies Dei. Essays on the History of Religions*, Brill, Leiden – New York – København – Köln 1987, p. 42–55; Paul Veyne, « La nouvelle piété sous l'Empire: s'asseoir auprès des dieux, fréquenter les temples », *Revue Philogique,* 63/2 (1989), p. 175–194; Verity J. Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion. Greek Culture in the Roman world*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, MA – New York 2011; Georgia Petridou, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016.

I. *Testimonios oníricos desde el Egipto tardo-romano*

Los primeros textos escogidos para este *excursus* nos sitúan en ámbito pagano, si así se puede definir el complejo, sincrético *outillage* religioso del segundo Helenismo en el Egipto romano.[22] En la antigua Talmis, en la Baja Nubia, 50 km al sur de la primera catarata del río Nilo donde fue levantado el dique que dio vida al Lago Nasser, se encontraba el templo del dios solar nubio Mandulis/Merul[23] construido en época augustea en el emplazamiento de otro más antiguo.[24] Se trataba de una sede oracular cuya divinidad, como atestiguan varios testimonios epigráficos de épocas diferentes[25] (inscripciones griegas mezcladas con jeroglíficos

[22] Josef Locher, *Topographie und Geschichte der Region am ersten Nilkatarakt in griechisch-römischer Zeit,* Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart – Leipzig 1999; László Török, « Between Egypt and Meroitic Nubia: The Southern Frontier Region », en Christina Riggs (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, p. 749–761. El *Dodekaschoinos,* donde convivían varias etnias además de soldados y oficiales egipcios, nómadas en el desierto, habitantes de la baja Nubia, era una zona de profunda aculturación religiosa en la que divinidades nubias, egipcias y grecorromanas a menudo se sincretizaban: de hecho, los romanos nunca lograron una homogeneidad político-cultural.

[23] Μανδοϋλις es la forma helenizada de 'Mrwr', 'Merul' o 'Melul' en meroítico. Se trata de una divinidad originaria de Nubia que representaba la juventud solar. Se le consideraba hijo de Latona, o también de Horus, y por lo tanto nieto de Isis y Osiris. Su iconografía es muy variada: con más frecuencia es representado como un ser híbrido, un pájaro antropocéfalo cuya cabeza aparece rodeada por una corona con cuernos, plumas y cobras en círculo. En el templo romano hallado en Dendur, Mandulis es representado junto a la diosa Satet. Su culto en la zona de la Segunda Catarata es atestiguado desde época ptolemaica. En los siglos I–III d.C. fue venerado por los militares romanos acantonados en la zona. A partir del siglo IV, la divinidad fue la que más atenciones cultuales recibió por parte de los Blemios, pueblo que hacía incursiones en esa zona fronteriza. Mandulis tenía una pequeña –aunque muy famosa– capilla a él dedicada en Philé, pero su templo principal es el de Kalabscha. Cf. Ewa Laskowska-Kusztal, « Relations between the Cult of Mandulis at Kalabsha and the Religious Centres on Elephantine and Philae », en Monica Dolińska, Horst Beinlich (eds.), *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Interconnections between Temples*, vol. VIII, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 111–121.

[24] Dentro de la capilla luego dedicada a Mandulis en Kalabscha en los años 29–25 a.C., la iconografía dominante era la de Isis y Osiris, luego remplazada por la del dios Apolo. Entre el 25–22 la capilla fue destruida y se empezó la construcción de un templo. La monumentalidad del edificio y el programa epigráfico–iconográfico en ello contenido demuestran que Talmis era considerada la localidad más importante del *Dodekaschoinos* y el culto de Mandulis era de alguna manera la respuesta de los Nubios al célebre templo de Isis en Philé, v. Renberg, *Where Dreams May Come*. El templo de Kalabsha, trasladado para la edificación del dique de Aswān, fue reconstruido pieza por pieza por los arqueólogos del Instituto Arqueológico Germánico (New Kalabsha), v. Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, *Religious Encounters on the Southern Egyptian Frontier in Late Antiquity,* Barkhuis, Groningen 2005.

[25] Sobre estos enigmáticos 'writings on the wall' –¿inscripciones o graffiti?– v. la primera edición a cargo de Henri Gauthier, « Cinq inscriptions grecques de Kalabach (Nubie) », *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*, 20 (1909), p. 66–90, y la fundamental obra de Etienne Bernand, *Inscriptions*

grabados en las paredes del templo), se manifestaba a quien se preparaba adecuadamente para encontrarla.[26]

Entre los textos redactados en griego se ha hallado un largo poema[27] escrito por un soldado, un decurión de nombre *Paccius Maximus,* de origen nubio. Se trata de un προσκύνημα[28] acróstico y métrico, originariamente grabado en el muro del pórtico meridional del primer templo, para pedir el favor de la divinidad para sí mismo y sus conmilitones de la *Legio* III *Cyrenaica* a las órdenes de *Grinius Marcellus* (estamos entre los siglos I y II d.C.). Máximo escribe que el dios Mandulis « expulsó con hechizos el bárbaro discurso de los etíopes » y lo inspiró para que pudiera « cantar en dulce verso griego ». En primera persona cuenta que:

métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine. Recherches sur la poésie épigrammatique des Grecs en Égypte, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1969, nn. 166–170, p. 576–613. Cf. también IAN RUTHERFORD, « Pilgrimage in Greco-Roman Egypt: New Perspectives of Graffiti from the Mnemonionat Abidos », en ROGER MATTHEWS, CORNELIA ROEMER (eds.), *Ancient Perspectives on Egypt,* UCL Press, London 2003, p. 171–189.

[26] Ver los ensayos publicados por SARA I. JOHNSTON, PETER T. STRUCK (eds.), *Mantikê. Studies in Ancient Divination*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2005, y AUDE BUSINE, *Paroles d'Apollon. Pratiques et traditions oraculaires dans l'Antiquité tardive (IIe–Vie siècles)*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2005.

[27] Para el poema n. 166, v. BERNAND, *Inscriptions métriques*, p. 576–583, v. también MARCO TOTTI, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis-und Sarapis,* Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 1985, p. 102 n. 40. Las inscripciones del templo de Kalabsha han sido objeto de múltiples estudios: v. ARTHUR D. NOCK, « A Vision of Mandulis Aion », *Harvard Theological Review*, 27 (1934), p. 53–104 (publicado nuevamente en ARTHUR D. NOCK, ZEPH STEWART, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1972, vol. I, p. 357–400); FRANÇOISE *DUNAND,* « Le désir de connaître Dieu. Une vision de Mandoulis au temple de Kalabscha », en FRANÇOIS BOESPFLUG, FRANCOISE DUNAND (eds.), *Voir les dieux-Voir Dieu*, Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, Strasbourg 2002, p. 23–38; FRANÇOISE DUNAND, « Entre manipulation et désir de 'voir le dieu': les épiphanies divines dans la Grèce hellénistique », *Storiografia*, 6 (2002), p. 73–88. Existe una traducción al italiano en SERGIO DONADONI (ed.), *Testi religiosi egizi,* UTET, Torino 1970, p. 578–579 según el texto editado por HANS LEWY, « A Dream of Mandulis », *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*, 44 (1944), p. 227–234 con propuestas de integraciones; STANLEY M. BURSTEIN, « A Soldier and His God in Lower Nubia: The Mandulis Hymns of Paccius Maximus », *Graeco-Arabica*, 7–8 (1999–2000), p. 45–50; GAËLLE TALLET, « Interpréter les signes du dieu: une apparition de Mandoulis au temple de Kalabchah », en STELLA GEORGOUDI, RENEE KOCH PIETTRE, FRANCIS SCHMIDT (eds.), *La Raison des signes,* Brill, Leiden 2012, p. 343–383. GAËLLE TALLET, « Mandulis Apollo's Diplomacy: Echoes of Greek Culture and Hellenism at Talmis (Nubia) in the Roman Period », en IAN RUTHERFORD (ed.), *Greco-Egyptian Interactions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, p. 287–315. Para el contexto religioso v. BRONWEN NEIL, DORU COSTACHE, KEVIN WAGNER (eds.), *Dreams, Virtue and Divine Knowledge in Early Christian Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019.

[28] Como explica SABINO PEREA YÉBENES, « Compra de un caballo (PSI VI, 729). El caballo militar, mucho más que un animal », *Aqvila Legionis*, 10 (2008), p. 73 n. 22: « el término *proskynema* se refiere a inscripciones griegas en las que el fiel manifiesta su reverencia a un dios, intentando perpetuar con un 'obsequio', una ofrenda, la presencia 'espiritual' delante del dios. Parece que exige la presencia del oferente en el santuario, quizás tras un viaje »; GAËLLE TALLET, « Proskynema Formulas », en ROGER S. BAGNALL, KAI BRODERSEN (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, vol. X, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2013, p. 5586–5588.

> Cuando vine a contemplar este bendito lugar de paz y a dejar vagar libre en el aire la inspiración buscada por mi alma, una forma de vida que me era extraña conmovió mi mente por todos lados... En mi sabiduría compuse entonces una compleja canción, habiendo recibido de los dioses una idea sagrada y expresiva. Cuando estuvo claro que la Musa había logrado algo agradable para los dioses, sacudí mi canción festiva como el emparrado de un brote verde en el Helicón. Entonces una cueva me sedujo para entrar y dormir.[29]

El relato, dominado por un ideario religioso sustancialmente griego, nos informa a continuación que el soldado, tras entrar en una gruta –lugar epifánico por excelencia, dotado de una fuerte identidad simbólica–[30] vio en sueños a Mandulis que « llegó con mejillas brillantes a la mano derecha de Isis, exultando en su grandeza y en la gloria de los romanos, y pronunciando oráculos píticos como un dios olímpico », y se produjo entonces el anhelado encuentro con la divinidad.

En el segundo προσκύνημα, atribuido inicialmente al mismo Máximo pero recientemente considerado posterior con respecto al primero (siglo II–III d.C.),[31] escrito en una prosa rítmica que lo convierte casi en un himno sacro, se cuenta cómo, en el mismo lugar, después de haber alcanzado la pureza ritual y haber logrado una intensa concentración intelectual, un anónimo devoto recibe oníricamente la revelación de la naturaleza divina de Mandulis: relata haber tenido un sueño 'incubatori' gracias al cual la divinidad se había manifestado en toda su naturaleza: « Mandulis, el Sol, el soberano que todo ve, el rey del universo, el *Aion* que domina todas las cosas »:

> ¡Oh Señor, que irradias rayos, Mandulis, Titán, Macareus (Ἀκτινοβόλε, δέσποτα, Μανδοῦλι, Τιτάν, Μακαρεῦ) ! Habiendo observado algunos signos de tu poder, he meditado y me he preocupado por querer saber, sin duda alguna, si tú eres el Sol (ἰδέναι θέλων εἰ σὺ (ε)ἶ ὁ ἥλιος). Me hice extranjero a toda maldad y a toda impiedad, y me mantuve casto por mucho tiempo, y esta noche me puse a dormir por una

[29] Gauthier, « Cinq inscriptions grecques », inscrip. n. 168; trad. de Burstein, *A Soldier and His God in Lower Nubia*, p. 66–68; Tallet, « Mandulis Apollo's Diplomacy », p. 343–383; Ead., « Interpréter les signes du dieu », p. 298–306 piensa que se trate de una divinidad 'doble' que, como Aion, se mostraba con diferentes edades.

[30] Carmine Pisano, « La categoria di 'grotta sacra' tra testi classici e storiografia », en Arduino Maiuri (ed.), *Antrum. Riti e simbologie delle grotte nel Mediterraneo antico*, num. monográfico de *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*, 16 (2017), p. 27–46.

[31] Gauthier, « Cinq inscriptions grecques », inscrip. n. 166. En el pasado, antes de que se fijara con exactitud la datación de cada *proskynema*, se propuso que los *Himnos a Mandulis* fueran todos obra del mismo autor, cosa que hubiera tenido cierto interés: en la arquitectura oniromántica de la hagiografía cristiana contemporánea es frecuente que un sueño sea reforzado por otros, es decir, que haya más de un testimonio del mismo soñador con una función probatoria de la autenticidad del mensaje y de la objetividad de la experiencia onírica. A Máximo pertenece con seguridad la *inscriptio* métrica y acróstica n. 169, v. Bernand, *Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine*, p. 610–613 pero, como hemos dicho, no la n. 166, que es posterior.

> divina práctica de piedad, y obtuve el conocimiento. Con tu consentimiento te manifestaste a mí mismo atravesando con la barca la bóveda del cielo en una áurea corriente. Y después de hacer tu descenso navegando a las sombras de la tierra, como una luna tremenda y noctívaga, y haberte lavado en el agua santa de la inmortalidad, apareces como un niño. Tú viniste, elevándote en el momento oportuno, a tu tabernáculo aportando a tu imagen y a tu santuario un soplo de vida y de gran poder. Y por eso yo conocí que tú, oh Mandulis, eras el Sol y el Señor que todo lo ve, el Señor de todos, y la Eternidad (*Aion*) que tiene poder sobre todo. Oh felices las gentes que habitan en la sagrada Talmis, que Mandulis ama, y que está bajo el cetro de Isis, la de las bellas trenzas, la de los infinitos nombres.[32]

El testimonio, estilísticamente refinado, con una prosa cercana al hexámetro y una 'imagerie' mitológica muy clásica, confirma que nos encontramos en un momento espiritual de búsqueda acuciosa de manifestaciones divinas por parte de los fieles (a veces peregrinos religiosos, otras viajeros, soldados u oficiales de alto rango a cargo de las guarniciones fronterizas, miembros de la administración o incluso de los equipos de labranza), que recurren a todos los medios disponibles –rituales mágicos, tal como muestran numerosos papiros griegos, incubatorios o de otro tipo– para lograr un encuentro autóptico, una σύστασις terapéutica y salvífica, una intimidad sagrada con potencias oraculares o taumatúrgicas que, de invisibles, se hacen tangibles proporcionando un conocimiento físico y metafísico.[33]

En el *Corpus* de inscripciones griegas del templo hay προσκυνήματα mucho más breves que los textos citados. Sus diferentes características formales han inducido a creer que algunos testimonios fueran inspirados e incluso redactados por los miembros del clero local activo en el centro oracular: los sacerdotes que gestionaban los cultos interpretaban las imágenes oníricas –a veces, en estado de trance, verían ellos mismos al dios– y sobre todo se encargarían de la transcripción de los textos con un intento propagandístico,[34] como harán después los sacerdotes de los centros incubatorios cristianos en la narraciones de los *θαύματα*.

En estos Himnos al dios solar Mandulis los suplicantes insisten en el hecho de que se trata de visiones oníricas que llegan a alcanzar casi la materialidad de una presencia, de un encuentro cara a cara con el dios. Se trata sin duda de una dimensión interior poco frecuentada en el mediterráneo occidental contemporáneo, dimensión que quiebra los ejes de la concepción aristotélico-cartesiana del conocimiento. Los sueños ritualmente inducidos tienen el poder de

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[32] La traducción es mía.

[33] Paul Veyne, « Une évolution du paganisme gréco-romain: injustice et piété des dieux, leurs ordres ou 'oracles' », *Latomus*, 45/2 (1986), p. 259–283; Busine, « Paroles d'Apollon », pone el acento en el aspecto oracular, y lo mismo hace Tallet, « Mandulis Apollo's Diplomacy ».

[34] Es opinión de Siegfried Morenz, « L'affermarsi del Dio trascendente in Egitto », en Edda Bresciani (ed.), *Testi religiosi dell'antico Egitto,* Mondadori, Milano 2001, p. 807–874. Cf. también Edda Bresciani, *La porta dei sogni. Interpreti e sognatori nell'antico Egitto*, Einaudi, Torino 2005.

abrir la psique de sus autores y les permiten acceder a un territorio desconocido que ni la sola razón ni el solo conocimiento pueden revelarles –un conocimiento ensoñado (en la línea de la *träumerischer Erkenntnis* de la que hablará Thomas Mann)– cuya materia es la visión interiorizada de la divinidad « cuya antigua identidad egipcia, en el II–III siglo d. C. en que se fechan los documentos, está enteramente metamorfoseada en una visión teológico-cosmosófica con claros rasgos solares ».[35] En la perspectiva de la búsqueda de una revelación, la ἐπιφάνεια onírica constituye el núcleo, para decirlo en términos freudianos el ombligo del sueño, el punto en que éste se conecta con lo desconocido y constituye el centro de irradiación de una σοφία reservada a los fieles. No en vano estos sueños han sido puestos en relación por Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, y también por Gaëlle Tallet, con el del médico *Thessalos* (« Como mi alma continuamente me predecía que iba a relacionarme con las divinidades [θεοῖς ὁμιλῆσαι], continuamente tendía mis manos hacia el cielo suplicando a los dioses para que me concedieran una visión en sueño o una inspiración desde el alto [δι'ὀνείρου φαντασίας ἢ διὰ πνεύματος θείου »]).[36] El médico, originario de Tralles, tras una larga ceremonia basada en el ayuno y el silencio que culmina en un rito celebrado con la asistencia de un sacerdote oficiante, entra en comunicación, oral y visual, (¿sueño o visión estática?) con el dios Asclepio que, a cambio de su revelación sobre las arcanas correspondencias entre constelaciones zodiacales, plantas y planetas, le exige la sagrada promesa del secreto.

Se trata de otra fuente que contribuye a esclarecer la compleja tradición sapiencial del Egipto tardoantiguo, en particular de ese sustrato hermético-gnóstico-neoplatónico que concibe el sueño como un instrumento de trasmutación, una ascesis, un viaje iniciático cuyo objetivo es alcanzar una iluminación, un nivel integral de conciencia que sólo los dioses pueden dispensar.[37] Entre vigilia y sueño –hoy hablaríamos de fase hipnopómpica e hipnagógica– el soldado Máximo y el anónimo devoto de Kalabcha experimentan fenómenos psíquicos sensoriales (visivos y auditivos) que, por su viveza, son percibidos como

[35] GIULIA SFAMENI GASPARRO, « Oracoli e teologia: prassi oracolare e riflessione », *Kernos. Revue internationale et pluridisciplinaire de religion grecque antique*, 26 (2013), p. 139–156.

[36] Finalmente el médico, que se coloca « face au trône », recibe la vision de Asclepio–Imhotep: ANDRÉ J. FESTUGIÈRE, « L'expérience religieuse du médecin Thessalos », *Revue Biblique*, 48 (1939), p. 45–77; GIULIA SFAMENI GASPARRO, « Asclepio divinità epifanica e salvatrice: l'esperienza di Thessalos fra medicina, religione e magia », en ERNESTO DE MIRO, GIULIA SFAMENI GASPARRO, VALENTINA SALÌ (eds.), *Il culto di Asclepio nell'area mediterránea,* Gangemi, Roma 2009, p. 287–311; FRANCISCO MARCO SIMÓN, « From Thessalos of Tralles to Nicagoras of Athen: Religious Pilmigrage to Egypt in the Roman Empire », en FRANCISCO MARCO SIMÓN, FRANCISCO PINA POLO, JOSÉ REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ (eds.), *Viajeros, Peregrinos y aventureros en el mundo antiguo*, Ediciones de la Universidad de Barcelona, Barcelona 2010, p. 227–240.

[37] GIULIA SFAMENI GASPARRO, « Strategie di salvezza nel mondo ellenistico-romano. Per una tassonomia storico-religiosa », en *Pagani e cristiani alla ricerca della salvezza (secoli I-III), XXXIV Incontro di studiosi dell'antichità cristiana*, Inst. Patristicum Agustinianum, Roma 2006, p. 21–53.

reales. Y en aquel momento incierto entre concentración pertinaz y desvanecimiento en que el sueño se interrumpe, pero todavía habita residualmente la conciencia, ambos alcanzan la auspiciada gnoseología onírica.[38]

II. *Sueños cristianos como visiones, viajes extáticos y fuentes de profecía*

La potencia divina transmite el saber, la gracia acordada, a veces la salvación. También en el mundo cristiano hay muchas alusiones al sueño como σύστασις con la divinidad,[39] empezando por la literatura apocalíptica apócrifa, en particular el *Apocalipsis de Pedro*;[40] en el Pastor de Hermas se narran cinco sueños o visiones portadoras de salvación;[41] la *Visio Pauli*[42] constituyó un verdadero paradigma y fuente de inspiración para la hagiografía posterior. En la vida de Pacomio los sueños marcan los pasajes más significativos de la aventura espiritual del monje santo.[43] Muy conocidos son el sueño edénico incluido en el relato autobiográfico de la mártir Perpetua[44] y el sueño de San Jerónimo contado en la célebre carta a Eustoquio.[45] En años recientes se ha estudiado la *Visión de Doroteo* (Pap. Bodmer 29),

[38] No pueden no venirnos a la cabeza algunos pasajes de PAVEL FLORENSKI, *El iconostasio. Una teoría de la estética,* Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca 2016, p. 21–22 donde el sueño es descrito como frontera entre el mundo visible y el invisible: « El sueño representa el primer grado de la vida en el mundo invisible que nos conduce hace la frontera del ininteligible: en el umbral del sueño y la vigilia, al traspasar la zona intermedia que se encuentra entre ambos, aquella frontera a través de la que entran en contacto, nuestra alma se reviste de visiones oníricas ».

[39] PAOLO SINISCALCO, « Pagani e cristiani antichi di fronte all'esperienza di sogni e visioni », en VITTORE BRANCA, CARLO OSSOLA, SALOMON RESMIK (eds.), *I linguaggi del sogno*, Sansoni, Firenze 1984; MERCEDES LÓPEZ SALVÁ, « Los sueños en la Biblia y en el cristianismo griego antiguo », en MERCEDES LÓPEZ SALVÁ, IGNACIO SANZ, PABLO DE PAZ (eds.), *Los orígenes del cristianismo en la literatura, el arte y la filosofía*, Dykinson, Madrid 2016, p. 287–304.

[40] *Textos Gnósticos. Biblioteca Nag Hammadi II: Evangelios. Hechos. Cartas*, ed. ANTONIO PIÑERO, FRANCISCO GARCÍA BAZÁN, JOSÉ MONSERRAT TORRENTS, Trotta, Madrid 2016.

[41] PATRICIA C. MILLER, « All the Words Were Frightful: Salvation by Dreams in the Shepherd of Hermas », *Vigiliae Christianae*, 42/4 (1988), p. 327–338.

[42] II Cor 12, 2–4.

[43] Como, por ejemplo, la fundación de su comunidad monástica, v. PHILIP ROUSSEAU, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-century Egypt,* University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1985, p. 41–43 y 167–168.

[44] En la *Passio* v. § 87–88. JAN N. BREMMER, MARCO FORMISANO (eds.), *Perpetua's Passions, Multidisciplinary Approaches to the 'Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis',* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012; muy interesante es el trabajo de una discípula de Carl G. Jung, MARIE-LUISE VON FRANZ, '*Passio Perpetuae'. Le visioni e i sogni di Santa Perpetua, martire cristiana del III secolo,* Red Edizioni, Milano, 1997, que proporciona una lectura en clave de psicología analítica.

[45] JERÓNIMO, Epístola 22, v. MERCEDES LÓPEZ SALVÁ, « Adivinación y sueños en el paganismo y en el cristianismo », en RAMÓN TEJA, (ed.), *Profecía, magia y adivinación en las religiones antiguas*, *Actas del XIV Seminario sobre Historia del Monacato,* Fundación Sta. Mª La Real, Aguilar de Campo 2001.

un texto muy sugestivo de finales del siglo IV o inicios del V,[46] en la que el protagonista, en el mediodía, advierte « un plácido sueño que iba golpeando sobre sus párpados »[47] y tiene una visión onírica que lo traslada a las puertas del Palacio Celestial.[48]

Pero sin duda es Tertuliano quien en su tratado *Acerca del alma* funda una concepción propiamente cristiana de los sueños.[49] Un siglo después con respecto al segundo de los textos previamente analizados, el apologeta cartaginés escoge esta expresiva metáfora para describir el acto de la ensoñación: « Concipe gladiatorem sine armis vel aurigam sine curriculis, gesticulantes omnem habitum artis suae atque conatum: pugnatur, certatur, sed vacua iactatio est »[50] (« Imagina a un gladiador sin sus armas, o un auriga sin carros, que se agitan reproduciendo de igual modo gestos propios de su actividad: ahí se lucha, se hace un gran esfuerzo, pero este resulta vano »). Las imágenes que se crean en los sueños son verdaderas, pero no acontecen realmente: es como si el alma quisiera ser cuerpo y obrara como un mimo silencioso. Afirmar que un alma *naturaliter* cristiana, « a Deo data », pueda no conocer los sueños significaría empequeñecer su naturaleza, puesto que el sueño precisamente certifica su parentesco con Dios. « La mayoría de las personas trae su conocimiento de Dios a través de los sueños », escribe Tertuliano, sueños que son como « dones por Él dispensados al género humano », expresiones de la voluntad de la gracia divina de revelarse a través de imagines y parábolas.[51]

A pesar de coincidir con la afirmación aristotélica de la falsedad de algunas manifestaciones oníricas, admite Tertuliano que existen sueños verdaderos y 'honestos', lo que para el teólogo significa que son « proféticos o exhortaciones ».[52] Considera importante conceder atención a las ensoñaciones, pero interpretándolas de un modo diferente a como las entendía la cultura pagana, y

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[46] Sobre la Ὅρασις Δωροθέου v. Antonio H. M. Kessels, Pieter W. Van Der Horst, « The Vision of Dorotheus (Pap. Bodmer 29), edited with Introduction, Translation and Notes », *Vigiliae Christianae*, 41/4 (1987), p. 313–359.

[47] Traducción española disponible en Francisco A. García Romero, « Visión de Doroteo, hijo de Quinto el Poeta », *Asindonense*, 14 (2020), p. 7–24.

[48] Gianfranco Agosti, « Considerazioni preliminari sui generi letterari dei poemi del Codice Bodmer », *Aegyptus. Rivista italiana di Egittologia e di papirologia*, 81 (2001), p. 191–192, habla de un texto complejo « che pone rilevanti problemi di ordine religioso, psicologico». Cf. Gianfranco Agosti, « Contributi critico-testuali all'esegesi della *Visio Dorothei* », *Analecta Papyrologica*, 8–9 (1996–1997), p. 47–60; Gianfranco Agosti, « La Visione di Doroteo. Paideia classica ed esperienza visionaria nell'Egitto tardoantico », *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*, 79 (2013), p. 134–151.

[49] Jan H. Waszink, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De anima*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2010; Francesco Scorza Barcellona, « Sogni e visioni nella letteratura martiriológica africana posteriore al III secolo », *Augustinianum*, 29 (1989), p. 197–202; 201–202.

[50] Tertuliano, *De anima,* 45, 2.

[51] Tertuliano, *De anima,* 45, 2.

[52] Tertuliano, *De anima,* 46.

ofrece por ello su propia taxonomía ordenada en tres categorías (clasificación que quizá tiene su antecedente en Filón de Alejandría, quien a su vez parece haberla heredado del estoico Posidonio): sueños que son enviados por Dios; los que provienen de los *daimones;* sueños que provienen del alma, o *pneuma,* en movimiento perpetuo debido a su inmortal naturaleza divina.[53] Estos últimos son intrascendentes.[54] De las visiones oníricas que provienen de los demonios –entre las cuales se cuentan los sueños eróticos, los soberbios, en fin, aquellos que más perturban el alma– Tertuliano dice que son « mentirosas [...] y tanto más vanas, ilusorias, desordenadas e inmundas ».[55] Es esta obviamente la clase más numerosa.

La idea de que el sueño era un proceso donde pueden insinuarse los *dáimones* que lo hacen engañoso era conocida. En Oriente Clemente Alejandrino, contemporáneo de Tertuliano, también explora la relación entre sueños y demonología; en el capítulo 18 del cuarto libro de sus *Stromata* invita a no conceder atención a los sueños malignos sirviéndose de una anécdota: a Bocórides, que ejercía de juez, se había dirigido una prostituta para obtener justicia de un cliente que, después de haberla contratado, la había rechazado sin pagarle aduciendo que ya la había poseído en sueños; Bocórides ordenó al cliente ponerse al contraluz y tenderle una bolsa de oro, e invitó a la meretriz a coger la sombra de la bolsa.[56] Para Tertuliano los demonios pueden corromper el alma ya que la naturaleza de

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[53] Sofía Torallas Tovar, « Philo of Alexandria's Dream Classification », *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte,* 15 (2014), p. 67–82. Filón desarrolla una amplia explicación sobre la calidad del alma que puede tener una visión verdadera.

[54] Siguiendo a Tertuliano, Jerónimo, *Contra Rufino*, 3 admitirá que existen sueños insignificantes provenientes de la actividad del alma durante el reposo; tales imágenes no deben ser tomadas seriamente y tampoco pueden ser objeto de evaluación moral: « soñar con un adulterio no me llevará al infierno y soñar con una corona de martirio no me llevará al cielo ».

[55] Que muchos sueños son provocados por demonios malignos es una opinión general de los Padres como Justino, *Apologia,* 4, Taciano, *Discursos contra los Griegos, 8.*

[56] La anecdótica griega conoce varias novelas judiciarias llenas de argucia protagonizadas por el leyendario faraón Bocórides (que habría vivido en siglo VIII a. C.), llamado a actuar como juez. Como me sugiere uno de los revisores, esta historia la relata Plutarco en la *Vida de Demetrio* 27. Pertenece a los que podrían considerarse 'sueños de imaginería folclórica'. v. Dámaris Romero-González, « Hombres que sueñan con mujeres, y viceversa. Sueños de y con mujeres en Plutarco », *Studia Philologica Valentina*, n.s. 22 (2023), p. 75–83. También en Clemente, *Stromata* 4.18, leemos el episodio de la ἑταίρα: λέγουσιν οὖν οἱ τὰς ἱστορίας συνταξάμενοι Βοκχόριδος τοῦ δικαίου κρίσιν τοιάνδε. ἐρῶν ἑταίρας νεανίας πείθει μισθῷ τινι ὡρισμένῳ τὴν παῖδα ἀφικέσθαι τῇ ὑστε ραίᾳ πρὸς αὐτόν. προλαβούσης ὄναρ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας τὴν παῖδα παρ' ἐλπίδα κορεσθεὶς ἤκουσαν τὴν ἐρωμένην κατὰ τὸ τεταγμένον εἴργει τῆς εἰσόδου, ἡ δὲ ἐκμαθοῦσα τὸ γεγονὸς ἀπῄτει τὸν μισθόν, καὶ τῇδέ πως αὐτὴ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν τῷ ἐραστῇ πεπληρωκέναι λέγουσα. ἦκον οὖν ἐπὶ τὸν κριτήν. τὸ βαλλάντιον οὗτος τοῦ μισθώματος τὸν νεανίσκον προτείνειν κελεύσας, ἐν ἡλίῳ δέ, τὴν ἑταίραν λαβέσθαι προσέταξεν τῆς σκιᾶς, χαριέντως εἴδωλον μισθώματος ἀποδιδόναι κελεύσας εἰδώλου συμπλοκῆς. Sobre la utilización narrativa de la figura de Bocórides cf. Antonio Stramaglia, « Una novella perduta nella Roma di Augusto», en Isabella Colpo, Francesca Ghedini (eds.), *Il gran poema delle passioni e delle meraviglie. Ovidio e il repertorio letterario e figurativo fra antico e riscoperta dell'antico*, Padova University Press, Padova 2012, p. 451–461.

los dos es intermedia, es decir 'pneumática', 'aérea'. Siendo espíritus, « invisibles e imperceptibles, ellos se manifiestan en sus efectos, más que en su acción ».[57] La similitud con la sustancia del alma permite que los demonios actúen por contagio: mediante sus emanaciones pestíferas corrompen los espíritus humanos. Son estos efluvios los que, según Tertuliano, explican los malos sueños, las alucinaciones e incluso el fenómeno de la posesión.[58] Si la demonología de Tertuliano no es novedosa, su *rêverie* contiene lementos ciertamente originales.

Vienen luego los sueños provenientes de Dios, que incluyen visiones premonitorias o admonitorias:

> Pero [los sueños] provienen igualmente de Dios, quien prometió la gracia del Espíritu Santo a toda carne y también estableció que sus siervos y sus siervas habrían de soñar y profetizar; se han de considerar aquellos sueños que han sido dispuestos por la gracia de Dios mismo: algunos son honestos, santos, proféticos, reveladores, edificadores, amonestadores, cuya liberalidad suele derramarse también sobre los profanos (enviando Dios equitativamente sus gotas de lluvia y sus rayos de sol sobre justos e injustos).

La prueba decisiva de su existencia, según Tertuliano, es que están avalados por las Escrituras: « Dios prometió la Gracia del Espíritu Santo a toda carne y también estableció que sus siervos y siervas habrían de soñar y profetizar ».[59] Los sueños enviados por Dios son un don de la Gracia: no contradicen el hecho de que el futuro pertenece sólo a Dios y que ningún ser humano puede forzar la expresión de Su voluntad.[60] Lo que resulta importante es que para Tertuliano el alma es el vehículo apropiado para recibir revelaciones durante el reposo, y en tal grado que « la gran mayoría de los hombres conoce a Dios a través de las visiones ».[61] Tal como hacía Aristóteles, Tertuliano resalta además la importancia de los sueños recibidos durante la vejez o en proximidad de la muerte porque en estas condiciones el hombre está más cercano a Dios.[62]

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57 TERTULIANO, *Apologia*, 5.

58 TERTULIANO, *Apologia*, 5: « Los movimientos irracionales y fantásticos del alma hacen surgir vacías visiones de la mente, así que ella se fija locamente en las imágenes. Los *daemones* que exhalan sobre la materia, ávidos de emanaciones sacrificiales y siempre listos a inducir los hombres en error, se aprovechan de los engañosos flujos de las almas perdidas en la multitud y poseyendo sus pensamientos hacen fluir en las mentes vacías visiones que parecen venir de los ídolos y de las estatuas y hasta cuando un alma, espontáneamente, inmortal como es, se dirige hacia la razón, sanando el presente y previendo el futuro, los *daemones* se atribuyen el mérito ».

59 TERTULIANO, *De anima* 47.

60 JACQUES LE GOFF, « Le christianisme et les rêves (II–VII ème siècles) », en ID., *L'imaginaire médiéval*, Gallimard, Paris 1985.

61 TERTULIANO, *De anima* 47.

62 TERTULIANO, *De anima* 47.

Agrega el escritor africano una categoría extrema del sueño que llama 'éxtasis', –el momento en que el alma, sin abandonar el cuerpo, se presenta en estado puro y es sensible « en un estado que semeja a la locura »–[63] y que no rompe con la clasificación anterior: se trata de visiones enviadas por Dios, pero reservadas a seres excepcionales.

El pensador cristiano estima que el mejor ejemplo se encuentra en el sueño de Adán, una suerte de visión premonitoria en la que éste recibe la « fuerza profética del Espíritu Santo ». Tertuliano admite también que los sueños (o algunos de ellos) son la ventana para experiencias normalmente inaccesibles.[64] Siguiendo la versión bíblica al uso en África, la *Vetus Latina*, no se habla de 'sopor' en el texto de *Génesis,* sino que dice « y envió Dios un 'éxtasis' sobre Adán, y se durmió ».[65] Se trata de un pasaje muy significativo en cuanto relaciona el éxtasis con la 'nueva profecía', el Montanismo, la heterodoxia a la que el apologeta se adhirió al final de su vida.[66] De

[63] TERTULIANO, *De anima* 45, 2: « Estos que ni de Dios ni del demonio ni del alma parecen provenir, y que se encuentran fuera de la opinión, fuera de la interpretación, fuera de la posibilidad de la narración, ellos mismos los relacionan propiamente con el éxtasis y su disposición ».

[64] TERTULIANO, *De anima* 45, 3: « A esta fuerza la llamamos éxtasis, es una pérdida del sentido parecido a la locura. Así en un principio el sueño apareció juntamente con el éxtasis: 'y envió Dios el éxtasis sobre Adán y durmió' [Gen. 2: 21]. Pero « El sueño, pues, proporciona descanso al cuerpo, mientras que el éxtasis no da paz al alma y por eso ya incluso en la creación aparece unido al sueño con el éxtasis, y de la creación procede la naturaleza »: TERTULIANO, *De anima* 45, 3 47, 4.

[65] TERTULIANO, *De anima* 45, 3; *Contra Marcionem* 4, 22, 4.

[66] Es quizá esta adhesión al montanismo frigio lo que explica que Tertuliano haya sido uno de los autores cristianos que han prestado más atención a los sueños: a partir del siglo II la Gran Iglesia consideraba que con la desaparición de la primera generación de discípulos de Jesús había puesto fin a la época de la revelación y de la profecía, y la literatura de este tipo provocaba inevitablemente sospechas de herejía. Es por ello que una obra como *El Pastor de Hermas* fue excluida finalmente del Canon neo-testamentario y que este admitiese, con muchas vacilaciones y sólo a partir del siglo IV, el Apocalipsis o Revelación de Juan. Su acogida tan tardía quizá se explique por la difusión en esta época de la literatura hagiográfica y monástica y en ella los sueños y visiones vuelven a adquirir protagonismo. Como escribe RAMÓN TEJA in TEODORETO DE CIRO, *Historia de los monjes de Siria*, *Introducción, traducción y notas,* ed. RAMÓN TEJA, Trotta, Madrid 2008,p. 20: « Estas creencias fueron compartidas también por los cristianos y no faltaron tratadistas que les dedicaron su atención llegando a desarrollarse una especie de ciencia psicológica del subconsciente. Y fue en el campo de la hagiografía donde estas experiencias alcanzaron su máximo apogeo». PIERRE CANIVET señala como importantes tratadistas cristianos de los sueños y visiones proféticas a Diadoco de Foticea y Doroteo de Gaza: « a comienzos del siglo V, Diadoco de Foticea demuestra en el arte del discernimiento de los espíritus una larga experiencia y una agudeza que alcanzará con Doroteo de Gaza cien años más tarde el rigor de una ciencia psicológica. En efecto estos fantasmas invaden el campo oscuro del alma con tanta fuerza que, a veces, adquieren forma de cuerpo ante los ojos » (THEODORET DE CYR, *Histoire des moines de Syria*, ed. PIERRE CANIVET, ALICE LEROY-MOLINGHEN, vol. I, p. 27). CANIVET desarrolla estas ideas con mayor amplitud en su obra *Le monachisme syrien selon Theodoret de Cyr,* Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1977, p. 83–86. El autor francés piensa que la poca importancia que Teodoreto de Ciro atribuye a los sueños en las *Vidas de los monjes de Siria* se debe a la gran difusión que tenían entre los Mesalianos, muy

los pasajes citados queda claro que la experiencia estático-alucinatoria del éxtasis, junto con el trance, constituye una de las principales formas de σύστασις con Dios.[67]

III. Imago in somnis: *los difuntos como mediadores oníricos*

Desde Tertuliano pasaremos a hacer algunas consideraciones acerca de los sueños, novelescos y vernáculos, de Giovanni Boccaccio. Ya en una de sus obras en latín, la *Genealogia deorum gentilium*,[68] en el denso capítulo titulado *De Somno*, el autor del Decamerón analiza varias teorías sobre la naturaleza de los sueños realizando un compendio exhaustivo del patrimonio onírico y onirológico clásico y medieval. En su culta disertación, que arranca de la tradición mitológica, citando a Virgilio, a Séneca y a Ovidio, para luego ampliar sus observaciones con *exempla* tomados de la tradición bíblico-patrística, el autor sigue sin duda la estela de Fulgencio y del Macrobio de los *Comentarii in Somnium Scipionis*.[69] En esta síntesis enciclopédica aunque poco original, Boccaccio recupera parte de las teorías aristotélicas sobre la estimulación somática como el origen de actividad onírica;[70] también sigue la visión clásica de las dos puertas, de marfil y de cuerno,[71] y no duda en afirmar que

expandidos en los ambientes ascéticos de Siria. Así opina de ellos el obispo de CIRO en su *Historia Ecclesiastica* (THEODORET DE CYR, *Histoire Ecclesiastique,* ed. Annick Martin, Pierre Canivet, Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2006, vol. 1, 4–11): « Los Mesalianos son así denominados (*enthousiastai*) porque reciben la inspiración de un demonio que ellos interpretan como la presencia del Espíritu Santo... Y entregándose al sueño denominan profecías a sus ilusiones (*phantasiai*) y sus sueños ».

67 JACQUELINE AMAT, *Songes et visions: l'au-delà dans la littérature latine tardive*, Etudes Augustiniennes, Paris 1985; MARIA PIA CICCARESE (ed.), *Visioni del'aldilà in Occidente. Fonti, modelli, testi*, Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 1987; IOAN P. COULIANO, *Esperienze dell'estasi dall'Ellenismo al Medioevo*, Laterza, Bari 1989; ID., *I viaggi dell'anima. Sogni, visioni, estasi*, Mondadori, Milano 1991; GIUSEPPE TARDIOLA (ed.), *I viaggiatori del Paradiso. Mistici, visionari, sognatori alla ricerca dell'Aldilà prima di Dante*, SISMEL–Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 1993; CLAUDE CAROZZI, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà d'après la littérature latine (Ve–XIIIe siècle)*, École Française de Rome, Roma 1994.

68 MARÍA C. ÁLVAREZ MORÁN, ROSA M. IGLESIAS MONTIEL (eds.), *Los quince libros de la genealogía de los dioses paganos,* Palas Atenea, Madrid 2008. La fascinante obra de Boccaccio, a la que dedicó veinticinco años de su vida (1350–1375), ha sido objeto de críticas, resumidas en época moderna en el juicio de EDWARD GIBBON, *The History of the Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire,* Everyman's Library, New York 1993–1994, cap. LXVI, 4, que la estigmatizó como « a work, in that age, of stupendous erudition, and which he ostentatiously sprinkled with Greek characters and passages, to excite the wonder and applause of his more ignorant readers ». Hoy se le reconoce una enorme influencia en la literatura posterior.

69 MACROBIUS, *Commentariorum in Somnum Scipionis libri duo*, ed. LUIGI SCARPA, Liviana editrice, Padova 1981. Macrobio, que escribe entre el 384 y el 395, hace una lectura en clave neoplatónica del *Somnum Scipionis* ciceroniano que tendrá mucha influencia en los autores medievales. V. especialmente 1,2,14.

70 STEVEN F. KRUGER, *Il sogno nel Medioevo*, Vita e pensiero, Milano 1996, p. 127–131; JEAN C. SCHMITT, *Le corps, les rites, les rêves, le temps. Essais d'anthropologie médiévale,* Gallimard, Paris 2001.

71 HOMERO, *Odiséa* 19, 560–69; NONO, *Dionisíacas* 34, 89–90.

los sueños verdaderos son los que visitan al soñador al amanecer, cuando está absorto en la quietud necesaria para formas de revelación trascendente. Entonces, inspirándose probablemente en Gregorio Magno, admite la posibilidad de que los sueños sean atribuibles a la potencia celestial y que encierren por lo tanto una δύναμις y un mensaje divinos.[72] El sueño tiene entonces un valor didáctico como descubrimiento de verdad y revelación de identidad,[73] o incluso profético, como advertencia por parte de Dios relacionada con un evento crítico, presente o futuro, pero también pasado. Su valor esclarecedor puede expresarse en las palabras del ser soñado, un difunto, normalmente un ser amado, el/la cónyuge fallecido/a, que desvela al soñador, su enamorado/a o viudo/a, una verdad que le sería de otro modo denegada.

Considerando como todos los humanistas que *imitatio* y *aemulatio* son las esencias del pensar y escribir, y plenamente consciente de moverse en el surco de una larga y rica tradición, Boccaccio reelabora sabiamente los modelos greco–latinos y, en una compleja operación de reescritura, da vida a uno de los cuentos más célebres del Decamerón, el de Lisabetta de Messina (cuarto relato de la quinta jornada, dedicada a los amores infelices) cuyo amado, Lorenzo, se le aparece en sueño para comunicarle las verdaderas circunstancias de su muerte y el lugar de su sepultura.[74] Para la secuencia, la literatura crítica indica como posibles modelos *in primis* el sueño virgiliano de Dido[75] por la reacción de la protagonista frente al descubrimiento del destino del *coniux*: como Dido, que, oyendo el relato de Siqueo, de *amans* se transforma en el espacio de cuatro breves versos en *dux*, Lisabetta, « più che altra femina dolorosa», comprende que «quivi non era da piagnere », corta la cabeza del cadáver de su enamorado y la esconde en el tiesto de su olorosa albahaca mientras madura en su alma un profundo rencor en contra de sus propios hermanos, los verdaderos asesinos de su prometido. También se han observado similitudes con el relato apuleyano de Caris[76] a la que el esposo Tlepolemos aparece en sueño con la cara manchada de sangre (*sanie cruentam*), desfigurado por la palidez (*pallore deformem*) y, hablándole con palabras afectuosas (*mi coniux*), le

[72] Boccaccio, *Genealogia deorum gentilium* I, 31, 14.

[73] Tema desarrollado por el mismo autor en el *De casibus virorum illustrium*, II, XVIII, 1–2; 4–5: «Equidem maximum quoddam divinitatis occultum infixum mortalium animis est, eo que agente curis soluti seu minus corporea depressi mole, plura, sopito corpore, aut visione certissima, aut tenui sub velamine audimus videmusque futuri», cfr. Attilio Bettinzoli, « Il *De somno (et somniis)* di Boccaccio », *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 44 (2016), p. 313–326.

[74] Monica Balestrero, *L'immaginario del sogno nel Decameron*, Carocci, Roma 2009; Valentino Baldi, « L'immaginario onirico nella cultura medioevale e nel Decameron », *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 38 (2010), p. 130–155; Carmen F. Blanco Valdés, « Il sogno raccontato nel Filocolo di Giovanni Boccaccio », *Helvia* 44, 1–2 (2011), p. 151–160.

[75] Virgilio, *Eneida* I, 340–64.

[76] Apuleyo, *Metamorfosis,* VIII, 8–9; Laura Sanguineti White, *Apuleio e Boccaccio. Caratteri differenziali nella struttura narrativa del Decameron,* Edizioni Italiane Moderne, Bologna 1977.

desvela la verdad: no lo mató un jabalí sino el malvado Trasilo (*non sunt tota dentium vulnera: lancea mali Trasylli me tibi fecit alienum*), que planea casarse con ella. A pesar de las notables diferencias de los contextos narrativos en los que los sueños están insertos, encontramos una mayor contigüidad, casi un *continuum,* entre la figura de Lorenzo –que se aparece oníricamente a Lisabetta (§12) « pallido e tutto rabbuffato e co' panni tutti stracciati e fradici » – y el ovidiano Protesilao, que en *Heroides* 13, 40 aparece como *pallens imago*, profiriendo *multa querela* a Laodamia, que así le escribe: « aucupor in lecto mendaces caelibe somnos; / dum careo veris gaudia falsa iuvant. / Sed tua cur nobis pallens occurrit imago? / cur venit a labris multa querela tuis? / excutior somno simulacraque noctis adoro.../ »[77].

Las referencias intertextuales decameronianas que, como hemos visto, reenvían a varios hipotextos clásicos, sostienen la interpretación que nos interesa ofrecer (el sueño inspirado por Dios que se sirve de un difunto para revelar una verdad); interpretación que tiene confirmación en una de las obras tardías del autor, *Il Corbaccio* (1366). [78] El protagonista, desesperado por el amor no correspondido de una viuda, desea con todas sus fuerzas morirse, pero un día cae dormido por el agotamiento y tiene un sueño intensamente real: un hombre, que sostiene ser el difunto marido de su amada, le asegura haber sido enviado por Dios para salvarlo del peligroso *labirinto d'amore* en que ha ingresado.[79] En todos los casos mencionados el sueño con la aparición de un difunto se configura como 'revelador', portador de una verdad escondida, leitmotiv que tiene infinitas recaídas narrativas. La crítica literaria insiste, sin embargo, en los rasgos más superficiales de la rica *dream-vision literature* a la que atribuye una génesis en la tradición folclórica: el sueño que anuncia la vuelta, pacífica o no, del amado desde el más allá cuyo arquetipo enraizaría en la razón etimológica del anglosajón 'dream' y del alemán 'Traum' (desde el antiguo germánico 'draugr'), palabras que aluden todas ellas a una visita por parte de un difunto.[80] Pero el *background* es más antiguo y profundo. No se trata sólo de una re–semantización formal de la experiencia onírica, una reelaboración/re–contextualización a nivel de estilemas narrativos propios del Humanismo*,* una *visio in somniis* utilizada exclusivamente como dispositivo retórico. La dinámica en la que el sueño en su desarrollo es relatado por Boccaccio es claramente onírica: la técnica de representación es fuertemente expresionista como en los autores clásicos, donde el sueño como

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77 Ovidio, *Heroidas* 13, 40.

78 Vittore Branca (ed.), *Tutte le opere di G. Boccaccio,* 10 vols., Editrice Morcelliana, Milano 1964–1980; Gian Piero Barricelli, « Satire of Satire: Boccaccio's *Corbaccio* », *Italian Quarterly,* 18 (1975), p. 96–111.

79 Luigi Canetti, « Boccaccio teologo. Poesia e verità alla fine del Medioevo», *Intersezioni,* 31/2 (2011), p. 179–196.

80 Robert Moss, « Dreaming with the Departed », *Sacred Hoop*, 51 (2006), p. 12–18; Robert Moss, « Dream Visitations with the Death », *Schaman's Drum*, 72 (2006), p. 25–36; James L. Hillmann*, Il sogno e il mondo infero,* Rizzoli, Milano 1973.

visitación de un dios o de un difunto se hace profético y salvífico, por amargo o funesto que sea. No falta el retorno insistente e hipnótico a ciertas imágenes, emblemas recurrentes, verdaderos blasones heráldicos de la fenomenología de los sueños,[81] y la lógica de la narración se desintegra con el aflorar de contenidos psíquicos latentes que emergen silenciosos y resonantes, inmateriales y sensibles, perceptibles en su catártico, aunque doliente cometido de certificar su génesis en una σύστασις con la divinidad protectora.

IV. *Conclusiones*

A través de los *exempla* propuestos he intentado ilustrar experiencias muy heterogéneas de dinámicas onírico-visionarias que, en diferentes contextos religiosos de la *oikoumene* mediterránea y en un marco diacrónico muy amplio, implicaban una relación autóptica con la divinidad. Los soñadores del antiguo politeísmo sabían utilizar dispositivos que les permitían vivir experiencias de revelación y conocimiento capaces de influir concretamente en su destino individual en concomitancia con las vicisitudes de la vida. Lejos de ser productos interiores, los sueños se concebían como enviados por fuentes que trascendían al soñador y con las que este entraba en comunicación directa alcanzando una experiencia religiosa de plenitud y revelación. La relación establecida entre los dioses y sus devotos era un 'dialogo' directo y personal, una interlocución, un estado de intimidad y cercanía, una experiencia cada vez más centrada en el individuo, que se proponía buscar, gracias a una intensa preparación, en el espacio de un templo o en la sacralidad de un lugar epifánico, la posibilidad de elevarse noéticamente a la contemplación de la divinidad y obtener de ella una revelación.

También el cristianismo admitía estrategias onírico-sapienciales que facilitaban la comunicación y la comunión con Dios: se trata especialmente de tipologías de posesión carismáticas, 'inspiracionales', que propiciaban *in somniis* revelaciones extáticas a las que autores como Tertuliano concedían plena credibilidad.

Fuentes tardo-medievales, ya plenamente conscientes del tejido simbólico de la materia onírica, muestran formas de alcanzar con el sueño un conocimiento mediatizado por los difuntos cuyas epifanías –a pesar de su oscuridad y la de la misma muerte– se hacen enigmáticamente reales, portadoras de mensajes reveladores que entregan al soñador un hilo para moverse en el laberinto del Mas Allá. No hay que caer en la tentación de considerar tales visiones como mera ficción literaria o artificio retórico-narrativo. Son experiencias advertidas como inalcanzables por otros medios, y cuya codificación tiene lugar a través de

[81] « Heraldos de eternidad », definió Lord Byron los sueños: « [...]And look like heralds of eternity[...] » (del poema *The Dream* de 1816).

categorías semánticamente no consustanciales a la coherencia del lenguaje de la vigilia. Notamos que mientras en la tarda Antigüedad para la comunicación con el mundo sobrenatural se prefiere la palabra, en Boccaccio afloran códigos expresivos intensamente visuales.

En cualquier caso, en los testimonios analizados los sueños, « manifestación primaria de la vida humana, de la que muestran la contextura metafísica [...] allí donde ninguna teoría o creencia puede alcanzar [...] » como escribió María Zambrano,[82] marcan la frontera entre el mundo visible y el invisible. Todos los soñadores de estas páginas podían soltar las amarras de la conciencia y zarpar hacia regiones totalmente inaccesibles a la mente y a la conciencia del hombre contemporáneo que, como ha escrito Elémire Zolla, debería quizás « accettare il più delle volte l'esistenza onirica [...] come più vera del vero, un universo sottratto alle nostre classificazioni, impervio alle nostre categorie, oscillante, svanente ma nello stesso tempo fulgido e chiaro »,[83] algo que nos atraviesa misteriosa y enigmáticamente con su luz y con sus sombras y que, gracias a esta dialéctica, si no puede propiciarnos una *systasis* con Dios, al menos nos permite un encuentro con nosotros mismos.

[82] MARÍA ZAMBRANO, *Los sueños y el tiempo,* Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1992, p. 3–4.
[83] ELEMIRE ZOLLA, « L'estinzione », *Il Corriere della Sera*, 26 mayo de 2002.

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DEMONS OF TIME:

TRITHEMIUS AND HISTORY AS FORECASTING*

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Abstract

Abbot Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516) developed a distinctive esoteric theory of history that combined astrology and magic as tools for interpreting the past and anticipating future events. His most comprehensive work on the subject, entitled *De septem secundeis* (1508), outlines a theoretical system for computing world history from Creation to the year 1525. According to Trithemius, history progresses in cycles of 354 lunar years, each governed by one of seven angelic intelligences, or planetary spirits, whose regency shapes the character and direction of earthly happenings. While building on cryptographic ideas first introduced in his earlier *Steganographia*, the philosophical scope of *De septem secundeis* broadens considerably, drawing on medieval sources such as Albumasar, Albertus Magnus and Peter of Abano. Following his esoteric assumptions, Trithemius presents astrology, theology, and prophecy as interconnected methods for discerning divine will as it unfolds through history. Through this framework, the abbot engages major sixteenth-century debates on astrological determinism, human free will, religious reform, and eschatology, offering a philosophical response grounded in a vision of history as a divinely structured and intelligible order.

Key Words

Magic; History; Astrology; Religion; Prophecy

* The origins of this essay trace back to the autumn of 2021, when I undertook a research project at the Forschungszentrum Gotha of the University of Erfurt. During this period, I was granted the privilege of consulting several rare editions of Trithemian works preserved in the distinguished collections of the research library. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Martin Mulsow, Director of the Institute, as well as to his esteemed colleagues and the dedicated staff of the library, whose support was instrumental in facilitating my work. The term 'demon' in the title is employed in its etymological sense, deriving from the Greek δαίμων (daimōn), which refers to a divine or semi-divine power, spirit, intelligence, or intermediary force rather than an inherently malevolent entity. Throughout the article, demons are distinguished from angels according to context and religious traditions in order to avoid ambiguity.

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« I wonder », said he, « that a soothsayer doesn't
laugh when he sees another soothsayer. »

M. T. Cicero, *De divinatione*, II, 51

I. *Introduction: Magic and History*

An in-depth examination of the intellectual journey of Johannes von Heidenberg, better known as Abbot Trithemius (1462–1516), has been conducted by scholars, who have traced his most significant theoretical achievements. The study of the numerous writings of the Benedictine monk, who was a pupil of Konrad Celtis, Jakob Wimpfeling and Johannes Reuchlin, has illuminated Trithemius's legacy in a number of different areas. This includes his contributions as a humanist, theologian, and polymath, as well as his activities as a cryptographer, alchemist, and magician, occurring just prior to the onset of the Protestant Reformation. The meticulous tracing of Trithemius's biography has enabled scholars to direct their focus towards the diplomatic and political context in which his philosophical project was articulated. The complex relationship between Trithemius and the influential figures of his time, including Emperor Maximilian I of Habsburg, Margrave Joachim of Brandenburg, and Count Johannes von Westenburg, has also been a subject of much historical interest in order to understand how, in response to the theoretical concerns of his patrons, Trithemius developed the concept of reviving the occult sciences as a broader cultural program.[1]

Further scholarly research has led to a more accurate portrayal of the notorious 'Black Abbot', in line with his documented historical behaviour. In addition to his contributions to the Bursfelde Congregation and the expansion of the monastic libraries at the abbeys of Sponheim and Würzburg, Trithemius demonstrated an enduring passion for historical writing coupled with an unwavering dedication to occult wisdom. In the former, he displayed particular expertise in chronography, hagiography, ecclesiastical chronicles, and imperial genealogies; in the latter, he channeled his occult inclinations into the establishment of an esoteric philosophy that sought to counteract magical practices condemned by the Church, such as witchcraft. In the light of the new evidence, the portrait of Trithemius has been freed from the prejudices that accompanied his work, which was discredited over the centuries by accusations of fraud. The discredit he suffered was mainly the

[1] See Klaus Arnold, *Johannes Tritihemius (1462–1516)*, Kommissionsverlag Ferdinand Schöningh, Würzburg 1971; Noel L. Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius (1462–1516). The Renaissance of Monastic Humanism*, Brill, Leiden 1981; Id., *Trithemius and Magical Theology. A Chapter in the Controversy over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1999; Ioan P. Culianu, *Eros et magie à la Renaissance. 1484*, Flammarion, Paris 1984; Paola Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, Brill, Leiden 2007.

result of his reputation as a follower of necromancy and a practitioner of historical falsification, despite his protestations to the contrary.[2]

Nevertheless, a pivotal aspect of Trithemius's intellectual legacy remains underexplored and poorly understood by scholars: namely, the connection he established between magic and history, utilizing astrology as a methodology for interpreting the sequence of events in time. The combination of astrology and historiography served to elaborate on the ancient and divine wisdom that Renaissance scholars defined as 'natural magic' (*magia naturalis*). Trithemius's philosophical objective was to comprehend the trajectory of human history in the context of an astrological framework that offered a grammar of prediction and prophetic knowledge. Such overarching framework necessitated that theology be regarded as a concentrated examination of Scripture, to which astrology must have been incorporated. In order to evaluate the extent to which the writing of history also entails the revelation of its esoteric meaning, it is necessary to undertake a review of Trithemius's conception of history and its associated esoteric principles, which were founded upon a magical-religious understanding of time.

II. *What is History Worth?*

Trithemius's enthusiasm for history and passion for writing history are both evident throughout his intellectual activity, as evidenced by his exploration of a wide range of genres, including historical annals, literary catalogues, ecclesiastical chronicles, hagiographies, and bio-bibliographical compilations. A substantial proportion of his writings pertain to the history of literature, encompassing lists of Christian writers and their works, such as *De viribus illustribus ordinis sancti Benedicti* (1492), *De laude scriptorium manualium* (1494), *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis* (1494), and *Catalogus illustrium virorum Germaniam … exornantium* (1495). A further consistent group of historical texts comprises chronicles and annals, which focus on individual institutions, kingdoms, or nations: *Annales Hirsaugienses* (1509–1514), *Chronicon Spanheimense* (1495–1514), *Chronicon successionis ducum Bavariae* (1500–1506), and *Compendium sive breviarium … de origine regum et gentis Francorum* (1515).

[2] See Nikolaus Staubach, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Zeit. Die historiographischen Fiktionen des Johannes Trithemius im Lichte seines wissenschaftlichen Selbstverständnisses*, in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter, Internationaler Kongreß der Monumenta Germaniae Historica, München, 16.–19. September 1986*, vol. I, Harrassowitz, München 1988, p. 263–316; Richard Auernheimer, Frank Baron (eds.), *Johannes Trithemius: Humanismus und Magie in Vorreformatorische Deutschland*, Profil, München 1992; Harald Müller, *Habit und Habitus. Mönche und Humanisten im Dialog*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2006, p. 194–244; Armin Schlechter, Franz Stephan Pelgen (eds.), *Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516). Benediktiner, Humanist und Kirchenreformer*, Landesbibliothekszentrum Rheinland–Pfalz, Koblenz 2016; Anthony Grafton, *Magus. The Art of Magic from Faustus to Agrippa*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2023, p. 125–171.

In addition to these works, he authored hagiographies, including the *Vita beati Rabani Mauri* (1515) and the *Vita beati Maximi, episcopi Moguntini* (1516).[3]

The multifaceted nature of these writings attests to the abbot's antiquarian and encyclopedic interest, as evidenced by his commitment to producing detailed catalogues and extensive historical accounts. As Harald Müller and Johannes Helmrath have observed, Trithemius's preoccupation with the uninhibited proliferation of knowledge as a cultural phenomenon of his time is noteworthy. Trithemius's catalogues were designed to function as a bibliographical guide or a scholarly reference point. They aimed to facilitate navigating the accelerated dissemination of information enabled by the growing circulation of manuscripts and the rise of printing. This, in turn, was beginning to exert a dominant influence on the book market within the Holy Roman Empire. This didactic impetus, coupled with Trithemius's disdain for the innovation brought about by Gutemberg, which he perceived as detrimental to the work of amanuenses, led him to become a voracious collector of manuscripts. He used these as a tireless compiler of historical information, not always with an eye to philological correctness and historical accuracy.[4]

Nevertheless, Trithemius's understanding of the past entailed an examination of the merits of historical knowledge, the objective of acquiring which was the religious edification of the individual. This necessitated an introduction to the study of Scripture and the identification of the advancements made by Christian truth. Trithemius's confrontation with Italian humanism did not challenge the apostolic responsibilities he assigned to himself as a historiographer. As Klaus Arold summarised in his analysis of Trithemius's *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*: « The literary past is, for him – despite his own extensive knowledge of Greek and Roman classics – primarily of significance as a Christian era. All secular education appears to the Benedictine – much like to the entirety of the Middle Ages – as merely a preparatory stage for the study of the Holy Scriptures ».[5] In contrast to humanists

[3] This classification of Trithemius's historical writings into three primary genres – catalogues of Christian erudites, chronicles and annals, and ecclesiastical biographies – is derived from Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius*, p. 306. For a complete list, see Arnold, *Johannes Trithemius*, p. 240–246.

[4] Müller, *Habit und Habitus*, p. 42; Johannes Helmrath, « Perception of the Middle Ages and Self–Perception in German Humanism: Johannes Trithemius and the *Catalogus illustrium virorum Germaniam … exornantium* », in Patrick Baker (ed.), *Biography, Historiography, and Modes of Philosophizing. The Tradition of Collective Biography in Early Modern Europe*, Brill, Leiden 2017, p. 183; see also Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic*, p. 74–75.

[5] Klaus Arnold, « *De viris illustribus*: Aus den Anfängen der humanistischen Literaturgeschichtsschreibung: Johannes Trithemius und andere Schriftstellerkataloge des 15. Jahrhunderts », *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 42 (1993), p. 63: « Die literarische Vergangenheit ist ihm – ungeachtet seiner eigenen guten Kenntnis der griechischen und römischen Klassiker – in erster Linie als eine christliche Epoche von Bedeutung. Alle weltliche Bildung erscheint dem Benedektiner – wie dem gesamten Mittelalter – lediglich als Vorstufe zum Studium der Heiligen Schrift, [...] ».

such as Francesco Petrarca, Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni, and Lorenzo Valla, Trithemius did not engage in a comparative analysis of classical antiquity – considered the pinnacle of human cultural development – with the subsequent period of decline that gave rise to scholastic philosophy.[6] For Trithemius, the historical process did not entail a rupture between these stages, but rather a continuity. He perceived Christianity as the cohesive force that ensured the transmission of the classical heritage into subsequent centuries, serving as a theoretical unifying principle across the epochs.

Such a harmonious transfer of knowledge, which can be thought of as a *translatio studii*, paralleled a *translatio imperii* from the Roman Empire to the Frankish kingdom. It showed that the 'barbarians' expressed a kind of revival of classical culture together with the triumph of Christian scholarship. This process reached its apogee in the reign of Charlemagne, who was held up as an exemplar of a life dedicated to the cultivation of culture and religion in Trithemius's *Catalogus illustrium virorum Germaniam ... exornantium.* Charlemagne's legacy would become a source of pride for future emperors of the Holy Roman Empire.[7] At the same time, the abbot asserted that the maintenance of Christian culture was entrusted to the workshops for the dissemination of authentic monastic learning, exemplified by the Benedictine Order, whose reform he promoted in accordance with the Bursefeld Congregation, and whose cultural supremacy in the German nation he emphasised.[8]

In addressing the theoretical underpinnings of historical writing, Trithemius's prefaces to the first and second volume of his *Annales Hirsaugienses* offered concise yet comprehensive discourse on the historiographical methodology. The first preface delineated the formal components of historical composition, while the subsequent focused on the cultural imperatives of the historiographical vocation. In the examination of historical narrative, it is mandatory for every author to strive for a harmonious balance between veracity (*veritas*) and elegance (*decor*). Any account of facts should be an attempt to tell the truth, as the Christian writer is opposed to falsehood. Simultaneously, every historiographer must be mindful of stylistic embellishment, adhering to the principles of rhetoric established by ancient classical writers. An ideal narrative should be characterised by a judicious

[6] For a discussion of Trithemius's dual use of the adjective *scholasticus*, referring both to the theologians practising scholastic philosophy in the university and to the kind of language or style associated with scholastic learning, see HELMRATH, *Perception of the Middle Ages*, p. 190.

[7] HELMRATH, *Perception of the Middle Ages*, p. 206. The entry entitled 'Charlemagne' from Trithemius's *Catalogus* is edited and translated Ibid., p. 222–226.

[8] PAUL JOACHIMSEN, *Geschichtsauffassung und Geschichtsschreibung in Deutschland unter dem Einfluss des Humanismus*, Teubner, Leipzig – Berlin 1910, vol. I, p. 51–55; NICOLAUS HEUTGER, *Bursfelde und seine Reformklöster in Niedersachsen*, August Lax, Hildesheim 1969, p. 22, 48.

balance of verbal simplicity, which is achieved by asserting clarity and sincerity as a counter to the deceptive nature of language.[9]

In addition to style, the meticulous writer should possess an understanding of the appropriate historiographical genre for the narrative being crafted. Trithemius identified at least three main types of historical narrative, which differ in terms of scope and size of the subject matter they address. The *catholicon* (universal) encompassed the history of the world, including the deeds of peoples, kingdoms, empires, and their rulers, as well as the history of humanity in its entirety. The *idicon* (particular) pertained to the history of a distinct nation or people, whilst the *topicon* (local) focused on events related to a more specific locale, such as a city, an institution, or a family. To illustrate this point, one might consider the history of a monastery and its abbots, as exemplified by Trithemius's Hirsau annals, as well as the records of aristocratic dynasties and their members.[10]

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that historical memory serves both as an ornament and an enhancement to the state when assessing the value of history.[11] Trithemius's approach reveals its patriotic and propagandistic nature, as he aimed to foster a sense of self-awareness among the German people, echoing the ideology of both Celtis and Wimpfeling, who pursued similar objectives during the same period. As a member of the *Sodalitas Litteraria Rhenana* in Mainz, Trithemius responded to Celtis's call for the rediscovery of a glorious German identity by studying the origins and achievements of the ancient Germans. He argued that this subject had been willfully neglected, if not misrepresented, by historians over the centuries.[12] Consequently, he articulated his position with striking clarity: « We are Germans, we live in the Kingdom of Germany. Therefore, we are right to prioritize our own affairs ».[13]

This chauvinistic endeavour, shared by scholars such as Sebastian Brant, Willibald Pirckheimer, Beatus Rhenanus and Johannes Nauclerus, was intended to underline the fact that German history had been little cultivated. However, Trithemius regarded the achievements of the Germans to be as significant as those of the Romans, according to a triumphant historical process that culminated in

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9 Ioannes Trithemius, *Annales Hirsaugienses, Praefatio*, Johannes Georgius Schlegel 1690, vol. I, fol. A3r. See Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius*, p. 316–317. For a comprehensive information on the genesis of the *Annales*, see Arnold, *Johannes Trithemius*, p. 153–157.

10 Trithemius, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. I, fol. A3v. See Arnold, *Johannes Trithemius*, p. 144–146; Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius*, p. 317–318.

11 Trithemius, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. I, fol. A3r. See Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius*, p. 314.

12 Trithemius, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, *Epistola proemialis*, vol. II, fol. A3v. For a discussion of Celtis's call to redeem the glory of the German people, see his speech delivered to the students of the Ingolstadt Gymnasium, as recorded in Konrad Celtis, *Panegyris ad duces Bavariae, Oratio in Gymnasio in Ingelstadio publique recitata*, Erhard Ratdolt 1492, fol. A5v. On Celtis's idea of *translatio imperii* from Italy to Germany, see Ibid., fol. A5r.

13 Trithemius, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. I, fol. A3v.

the Empire of Maximilian I. While Celtis contended that the ancient Germans preferred to express themselves in Greek rather than Latin, Wimpfeling urged Trithemius to acknowledge that high culture had always existed in Germany.[14] In a similar fashion, Trithemius later propagated the myth, based on the contested provenance of the purported chronicler 'Hunibald', that the House of Habsburg was descended, through the Frankish Merovingians and Carolingians, from the Trojan heroes who fled to Germany to evade defeat at the hands of the Achaeans.[15]

Nonetheless, Trithemius deemed it essential to investigate the reasons behind the limited interest among scholars in the Germanic past. The scarcity of written records, coupled with the discord among the few that remain, are the primary factors contributing to this neglect. This situation can be traced back to at least two significant political causes. Firstly, the ancient Germans were an exceptionally warlike people, constantly engaged in struggles for survival. Their frequent and brutal conflicts with neighbouring tribes led them to prioritize military activities over the cultivation of literature. Secondly, the majority of their rulers were marked by a lack of moral integrity and a penchant for indolence, their actions offering little of value to be preserved in history. As a result, they failed to promote the glory of their people, viewing history not as a tool for commemoration, but as an irrelevant and even harmful force to the state.[16]

In this context, Trithemius placed significant emphasis on the pivotal role that memory, understood as the act of recording what is truly valuable, plays in defining the scope of historical inquiry. This critical emphasis enables us to concentrate on the comprehensive philosophical significance that Trithemius ascribed to historical writing. In accordance with the teachings of St. Augustine, Trithemius acknowledged the existence of three fundamental faculties within the human soul: intellect, memory, and will. The function of memory is to mediate between the will and the intellect, and it attains its highest form of expression in the recording of past events that transcend the limitations of time. History, therefore, serves to delineate those occurrences that are worthy of remembrance. It not only enables the recollection of past events, but also bestows upon humanity an enduring quality, as it showcases the indelible actions of eminent figures, which serve as exemplars of virtue and timelessness:

[14] Celtis, *Panegyris*, fol. A4r. See Wimpfeling's letter to Trithemius (17 September 1492), published as a paratext in the *Catalogus illustrium virorum Germaniam … exornantium*, in Helmrath, « Perception of the Middle Ages », p. 216–218. For a detailed analysis of Celtis and Wimpfeling's influence on Trithemius's cultural project, see Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius*, p. 241–245.

[15] Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius*, p. 95, 236–241, 325.

[16] Trithemius, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. II, fol. A3v.

> History is the preserver of a certain everlasting memory (*sempiternae quaedam memoriae conservatrix*) which, by inducing a certain venerable recollection, alone makes immortal the fame of good men who by their wisdom, courage, or holiness have succeeded with great labor in striving beyond and distinguishing themselves from ordinary men.[17]

History provides a source of moral and spiritual nourishment, offering insights that encourage the pursuit of virtue and goodness. Furthermore, it documents the fundamental tenets of Christianity, recalling the pivotal events that have shaped its history. Accordingly, the discipline of historiography serves an apostolic function, namely the proclamation of the divine message:

> If before us there had not existed any writers of historical affairs, who would have made known to the vulgar in the present day the origin of the world, the computation of all the years past, and those things which by and by have occurred among mortal men? Who would have been able to persuade the ignorant of the Incarnation, of the Nativity from the Virgin in its purity, and of the doctrine, miracles, passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ? Or who today would unfold for us, or would believe others unfolding, the passions of martyrs; the lives, conversations, and miracles of the saints; the sack of Troy; the spacious empire of the Roman world; the remarkable thoughts or deeds of the kings, philosophers, and princes; and all the other things which are very worthy of our knowledge? Only by history may it come about that, by means of reading, we who are separated by a very long period of time from those ancients may both be witnesses to their deeds and live with them in their own times.[18]

In its exhortation to engage in virtuous actions and to promote the welfare of others, history unites the recollection of past events with the anticipation of future rewards for the soul. Moreover, it serves a civic function, enhancing prudence and foresight by illustrating the misdeeds of malevolent individuals, whose actions we learn to condemn.[19]

III. *Beyond Nature:* Philomagus*'s Concerns*

Trithemius's pronounced interest in history reflects his acute awareness of the political and religious significance of the historiographer. However, his engagement with history cannot be fully appreciated without considering his involvement in occult philosophy, a field to which he consistently attributed paramount importance. The intersection of history, religion, and occultism within

[17] Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius*, p. 314. See Trithemius, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. I, fol. A2v.
[18] Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius*, p. 314–315. See Trithemius, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. I, fol. A2v.
[19] Trithemius, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. I, fol. A2v–A3r. See Arnold, *Johannes Tritihemius*, p. 144–145.

his intellectual framework was central to his theological profile. Simultaneously, his contribution to the discourse on the value of esoteric knowledge influenced the philosophical debates surrounding the occult sciences in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, significantly shaping the intellectual trajectories of learned figures such as Agrippa von Nettesheim, Theophrastus Paracelsus, Giordano Bruno, John Dee, Robert Fludd, and Athanasius Kircher.[20]

Trithemius's interest in magic and witchcraft followed two distinct yet interrelated paths, contributing to his controversial reputation. On one hand, he was regarded as a devotee of necromancy and demonology; on the other, he presented himself as a stringent critic of esoteric literature and a staunch opponent of witchcraft. His writings, including *Liber octo quaestionum* (1508), *Antipalus maleficiorum* (1508), the unfinished *De daemonibus* (1507), and the pseudepigraphic *Synusiastes Melanii Triandrici ad Iaymielem* (1508), position him as both a Christian apologist and an erudite cataloguer of forbidden arts. These works systematically categorize occult practices such as sorcery, enchantments, curses, necromancy, and demon summoning, while also offering guidance on remedies such as exorcism. In this regard, they serve a pedagogical function similar to his historical writings, providing guidance in a field of knowledge that is both complex and fraught with ambiguity. Trithemius's aim in composing such controversial texts was to dispel the secrecy surrounding witchcraft, which he viewed as both an ethical and religious issue that required open denunciation and theological framing.[21]

Concurrently, his parallel contributions on cryptography, including *Steganographia* (1499) and *Polygraphia* (1508), evince a discernible engagement with what Renaissance scholars usually referred to as *magia naturalis*. In this context, Trithemius distinguished between the condemned practices of demonic magic, which he termed *magia supersticiosa* and framed under the notion of witchcraft, and the divinely inspired wisdom, practised by ancient philosophers, which was

[20] For an in-depth examination of the reception of the Trithemian magic, see Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 157–237.

[21] On Trithemius and the witch issue, see Klaus Arnold, « Hexenglaube und Humanismus bei Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516) », in Peter Segl (ed.), *Der Hexenhammer. Entstehung und Umfeld des Malleus maleficarum von 1487*, Bölau, Köln 1988, p. 217–240; Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 51–57. Trithemius presented a self–portrayal as an enemy of witchcraft in his *De daemonibus*: see Klaus Arnold, « *Additamenta Trithemiana.* Nachträge zu Leben und Werk des Johannes Trithemius, insbesondere zur Schrift *De demonibus* », *Würzburger Diözesan–Geschichtblätter*, 37/38 (1975), p. 258. On the remedies against evil spell, see Trithemius, *Antipalus maleficiorum libri IV*, in Ioannes Buseus, *Paralipomena opusculorum Petri Blenensis et Ioannis Trithemii*, E typhographeo Balthasaris Lippij, Mainz 1605, p. 275–276. A theological interpretation of witchcraft is developed in Trithemius's answer to Emperor Maximilian I on the sixth question about the power of witches (*De potestate maleficarum*) in Id., *Liber octo quaestionum*, Impensis Iohannis Hasselbergen, Oppenheim 1515, fol. F3v–F4r.

rooted in the knowledge of nature. In this regard, he revisited and reinterpreted older classifications of this disputed branch of knowledge to the clarification of which had consistently contributed medieval scholars such as Isidore of Seville, William of Auvergne, Albertus Magnus, and Roger Bacon. Relying on the views of those scholars who had legitimized the interest in *magia naturalis*, particularly William of Auvergne and Albertus Magnus, Trithemius argued that magic, though stigmatised, was a learned science aligned with nature's laws and absolutely beneficial to humanity. Accordingly, he advocated for the integration of *magia naturalis* into Christian scholarship, presenting it as both a useful tool for rulers and a complement to, rather than a rival of, religious wisdom.[22]

Trithemius's position resonated with the broader Renaissance debate on natural magic, championed by scholars such as Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. The medieval distinction between natural and demonic magic was further elaborated by Ficino and Pico, who endorsed the former as a legitimate pursuit of science. Ficino conceptualised natural magic as the harmonious interplay of celestial and terrestrial forces, aimed at enhancing human well-being. Meanwhile, Pico elevated magic as the practical culmination of the knowledge of nature and considered it as the completion of natural philosophy. Within this intellectual framework, the rehabilitation of the *magus* figure was a recurring theme in the writings of both philosophers, who drew consistently on ancient pagan sources such as Plato, Apuleius, and Iamblichus, to depict the magician as a sage and priest. They revived an idealized image of the magician as conceived in antiquity, emphasizing his role as a custodian of divine wisdom related to religion and his capacity to mediate between the human and divine realms.[23]

This religious shift, which underscores a rupture between the Florentine philosophers and their medieval forerunners, led to the redefinition of the *magus* as the wise and learned 'minister' of the divine, regenerated through both faith

[22] See his letter to Joachim of Brandenburg (June 26, 1503), in Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, Apud Ioannem Birckmannum, Coloniae 1567, p. 102: « Magia autem naturalis pura est, solida, stabilis, et licita, quae principes maxime decet et ornat, nec umquam ab ecclesia prohibita, nec etiam iure prohibenda, quippe quae puris principiis naturae innititur, nullamque superstitionem admittit ». This programmatic claim is based on Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones magicae numero XXVI secundum opinionem propriam*, n. 2–3, in Stephen Alan Farmer (ed.), *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486). The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, Tempe (Ariz.) 1998: « Magia naturalis licita est, et non prohibita, et de huius scientiae uniuersalibus theoricis fundamentis pono infrascriptas conclusiones secundum propriam opinionem. Magia est pars practica scientiae naturalis ». On the distinction between *magia naturalis* and *magia supersticiosa*, see Trithemius's letter to Johannes von Westerburg (May 10, 1503) in Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 91–92.

[23] For a comprehensive discussion of Ficino and Pico's contribution to the Renaissance debate on natural magic, see Daniel Pickering Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, Warburg Institute, London 1958; Paola Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura della magia. Filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento*, Marsilio, Venezia 1996; Zambelli, *White Magic,* p. 13–34.

and knowledge. While they employed metaphorical language to depict the magician as the 'collaborator' of nature, both Ficino and Pico ultimately sought to extend the *magus*'s influence beyond the natural realm. They argued that true magicians could legitimately access religious mysteries by establishing contact with divine entities – such as demons, angels, stars, and planets. As a result, the traditional role of the magician as a humble servant of nature was reimagined, transforming the *magus* into a new, benevolent figure with the authority to interpret the Word of God, acquire prophetic gifts, and perform miracles. Such a theoretical program was designed to lend legitimacy to the practice of magic within Christian culture. In this way, Ficino recalled the chapters from the Gospel in which the Three Magi pay homage to the birth of Christ. He even went so far as to claim that, by linking lower beings to higher ones for the benefit of humanity, magicians performed a function akin to that of God. Similarly, Pico, an early advocate of Jewish Kabbalah, believed it could offer insight into the miracles of Christ, positioning this mystical tradition as a legitimate form of magic.[24]

To defend his reputation as a Christian scholar, Trithemius addressed accusations of engaging in forbidden arts in his autobiographical Nepiachus, by distinguishing between two forms of magic. His esoteric knowledge, allegedly acquired from the mysterious figures of Libanius Gallus and Pelagius of Maiorca (whom he identified with Fernando de Cordoba), enabled him to differentiate between natural magic, « which, as Pico declares, teaches us how to perform marvelous works by means of mediating natural virtues », and evil magic « which is effected with the cooperation of evil spirits ».[25] Accordingly, Trithemius classified occult phenomena into four types of illusion (*praestigium*), three of which were attributed to demons, while the last was considered to have a divine origin. The first type, he explained, required demonic intervention through explicit conjuring; the second relied on verbal enchantments, allowing demons to operate indirectly; the third, practiced by jugglers, could nevertheless be attributed to some form of demonic assistance; finally, the *praestigium naturale*, based on hidden virtues, « pertains to natural magic, under whose auspices marvelous effects (the causes of which those who admire them do not understand) are produced by proficients through the occult application of natural virtue ».[26]

Trithemius adopted the latter form of illusion, aligning himself with Pico's and, earlier, Albertus Magnus's interest in occult arts. By presenting himself as a

[24] Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. Carol V. Kaske, John. R. Clark, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Tempe (Ariz.) 1989, p. 395–397; Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones magicae*, p. 496–503.

[25] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 112. See Trithemius, *Nepiachus*, in *Corpus historicum medii aevi...*, ed. Johann Georg von Eckhart, apud Johann Friedrich Gleditsch, Leipzig 1723, vol. II, col. 1830.

[26] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 113. See Trithemius, *Nepiachus*, col. 1831.

philomagus, a 'lover of magic', he sought to legitimise a discipline he was labeling as 'wisdom of nature' (*sapientia naturae*).[27] He recalled the same scriptural argument earlier advanced by Ficino:

> This word 'magic' is Persian, and the Latin term for it is wisdom. Magi is the term for wise men, like those three who, as the gospel tells us, came from the East to adore the newborn son of God in the flesh in his cradle. I am not ashamed to be called a 'philomagus' with them, since I love divine, human, and natural learning. This is my magic, which I follow. No member of the faithful may traffic with the other, which is superstitious, diabolical and justly condemned by the holy church. I despise, loathe, and condemn it, with its authors.[28]

This theological framework allowed Trithemius's to advocate for a *restauratio magiae*, a restoration of an ancient wisdom underpinning legitimate magic. In a series of epistolary exchanges between 1503 and 1505, prior to his expulsion from Sponheim, Trithemius had already articulated his esoteric program. Corresponding with Germain de Ganay, Johannes von Westenburg and Joachim of Brandenburg, he addressed the revitalisation of magic. He lamented the « unjust damnation of this good and holy science of natural magic » (« haec bonae sanctaeque scientiae magiae naturalis iniusta damnatio »), which he attributed to ignorance and the spread of fraudulent literature that promoted superstitious and malign occult practices. As an exceedingly difficult science, it had been transmitted through an enigmatic language, employed by ancient authors to prevent the uneducated from accessing this divine wisdom. Moreover, many detractors and impostors condemned the books on magic as heretical and deceitful because they were unable to understand their true, non-literal meaning, and consequently were incapable of performing genuine wonders.[29]

In this context, Trithemius contended that such a defamed discipline, founded on natural principles, was essential for state rulers, religious instruction, and intellectual elevation altogether. His definition of magic was as incisive as revealing of the Florentine underlying framework: « By magic I mean nothing but wisdom, namely the understanding of physical and metaphysical things, which

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[27] Trithemius, *Nepiachus*, col. 1831.

[28] Grafton, *Magus*, p. 154. See Trithemius, *Nepiachus*, col. 1831. The same scriptural argument had already been put forward by Albertus Magnus, who stated that the word *magus* denoted the 'great' (*magnus*) wise man, who knows all things from their necessary causes, and by conjecturing the effects of natural things is able to exhibit and produce marvels. See Brann, *Trithemius and Magic Theology*, p. 23.

[29] See both Trithemius's letter to Johannes von Westerburg (May 10, 1503) in Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 91–92, and the aforementioned letter to Joachim von Brandenburg, in Ibid., p. 105–109.

consists in a science of divine and natural virtues ».[30] When comprehended correctly, this learning could elevate the soul to divine contemplation, fostering miraculous powers sanctioned by God. As a consequence, he envisioned the *magus* as the Ficinian and Pichian virtuous, God-fearing sage, endowed with celestial favour and intellectual rigor, whose primary objective was to contemplate God as the principle of everything. Therefore, according to this theoretical vision, magic becomes a sacred journey towards that wisdom that brings us close to God by awakening miraculous virtues, such as to make us miracle workers on behalf of God. As Trithemius proclaimed in his correspondence with Germain de Ganay:

> Our philosophy is heavenly, not worldly, that we might faithfully behold, by a direct intuition of the mind through faith and knowledge, that Founder of things Whom we call God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one Founder, one God, and one Highest Good existing in a Trinity of eternal Persons, and also that we may believe in His existence with conviction and become intimately acquainted with Him from Whom all things present to us derive, always adoring Him with a very fervid display of love and service.[31]

This path of knowledge unfolds in theoretical stages which mirror the phases of alchemical transmutation as a pattern for inner transformation. As Trithemius articulated: « Study generates knowledge; knowledge prepares love; love, similarity; similarity, communion; communion, virtue; virtue, dignity; dignity, power; and power performs the miracle ».[32] In this process of becoming acquainted with God and elevating the mind to acquire miraculous virtue, Trithemius honored what he considered a legitimate study and a beneficiary undertaking, « the sole path to the goal of magical perfections both divine and natural, by the virtue of which it is protected and propagated far from deceptive, diabolical, and superstitious influence ».[33]

IV. *Learning to Browse Time*

Among the historiographical writings in Trithemius's œuvre, *On the Seven Secondary Causes* reveals an intriguing philosophical challenge, providig valuable insight into the theoretical synthesis of the abbot's dual interests – magic and history – in a concerted endeavour to comprehend reality. Entitled *De septem secundeis, id est, intelligentiis, sive spiritibus orbes post Deum moventibus... libellus*, this

[30] See Trithemius's letter to Germain de Ganay (August 24, 1505) in *De septem secundeis*, p. 73: « Nihil aliud per magiam intelligi volumus quam sapientiam, physicarum scilicet et metaphysicarum intelligentiam rerum, quae divinarum et naturalium virtutum scientia constat ».

[31] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 127. See Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 69–70.

[32] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 127. See Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 72–73.

[33] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 127. See Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 73.

work is situated within early sixteenth-century literature on historical and political predictions based on what Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* (II, 4) considered as world astrology. This discipline focused on the influence produced by celestial bodies – such as stars and planets – on various regions of the Earth and, by extension, on human affairs. Ptolemy's model sought to explain the unique characteristics of nations and civilizations by linking specific geographical areas to particular astral influences. Within this framework, mental dispositions, cultural practices, religious beliefs, social structures, and even quotidian customs – such as dress, diet, and burial rites – were understood to be shaped by the stars under which each people had emerged. This model provided a remarkably coherent, though highly schematic, explanation for cultural diversity.[34]

Trithemius's *libellus*, which Friedrich von Bezold included in his review of the medieval « astrologische Geschichtskonstruktion », is an lengthy letter to Emperor Maximilian I. Composed in 1508, it was only published posthumously in 1522 by the Protestant reformer Johann Marquard of Meßkirch, at the Hieronymus Hoeltzel printing house in Nürnberg.[35] In this work, which falls within the genre of *catholicon* and later became known as *chronologia mystica*, Trithemius presents a universal chronology extending from creation to 1525. He divides world history into 21 cycles of 354 lunar years and 4 lunar months, governed by seven spirits or intelligences, each presiding over the seven planets: Saturn–*Orifiel*, Jupiter–*Zachariel*, Mars–*Samael*, Sun–*Michael*, Venus–*Anael*, Mercury–*Raphael*, Moon–*Gabriel*. A substantial number of authors of universal chronicles – ancient, medieval, and contemporary, both Christian and pagan – may have influenced the conceptualization of history as a sequence of cycles or epochs. Among the more

[34] Franz Boll, Carl Bezold, Willhelm Gundel, *Sternglaube und Sterndeuntung. Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie*, Teubner, 3rd ed., Leipzig – Berlin 1926, p. 65–66.

[35] The printing was accompanied by a German translation, entitled *Von den syben Geysten oder Engeln*. In his dedicatory preface to Abbot Jakob Zweifel von Amorbach, Marquard explained that after having found the manuscript in the library of Johannes Schwebel in Pforzheim, he copied and prepared it for publication due to its prescient insights into contemporary events: Trithemius, *De septem secundadeis, idest, intelligentijs, siue spiritibus mouentivbus orbes, libellus*, Impressum Nurenberge impensis Ioannis Haselbergs, Nürnberg 1522, fol. Aij. The enduring popularity of the work is attested by numerous reprints (Speyer 1529, Frankfurt 1545, Köln 1567, Strasbourg 1613) and translations into Dutch and French. See Friedrich von Bezold, « Astrologische Geschichtskonstruktion im Mittelalter », *Zeitschrift für Geisteswissenschaft*, 8 (1892), p. 67–72; Zambelli, *White Magic*, p. 73–80; Noel L. Brann, « The Shift from Mystical to Magical Theology in the Abbot Trithemius (1462–1516) », *Studies in Medieval Culture,* 11 (1977), p. 147–159. Henceforth, unless otherwise stated, all Latin citations are drawn from the 1567 edition of the *De septem secundeis*. On Marquard and Schwebel, see Arno Mentzel–Reuters, « Serielle Chronographie und historische Unschärfe. Das historiographische Spätwerk des Johannes Trithemius », in Markus Frankl, Martina Hartmann, Dorothea Klein (eds.), *Herbipolis. Studien zu Stadt und Hochstift Würzburg in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2015, p. 387–388, note 77.

recent writers explicitly cited by Trithemius in the preface to the *Annales Hirsaugienses*, notable examples include Jacopo Filippo Foresti's *Supplementum Chronicarum* (1483), Marcantonio Sabellico's *Enneades sive Rhapsodia Historiarum* (1498), and, above all, Hartmann Schedel's *Liber Chronicarum* (1493). At the same time, contemporary poetry – as exemplified by Celtis's *Carmen saeculare* and *Germania generalis* – also offered him a model for elaborating on a Christian interpretation of the ancient pagan planetary deities.[36]

Adhering to Aristotelian cosmology, Trithemius argued that these angelic governors function as secondary causes through which divine providence directs the course of earthly events. Each of these angels holds regency for no less than three periods throughout the ages, thereby establishing a causal link for phenomena that significantly impact both the natural and human realms. These events encompass, though are not limited to, natural occurrences such as earthquakes, tidal waves, and eclipses, alongside human-affecting events like wars, famines, plagues, the rise of new religions, and the formation of new kingdoms. In this framework, Trithemius sought to demonstrate how these cycles of influence were integral to the unfolding of history, with the celestial intelligences acting as intermediaries between the divine will and the material world.[37]

Trithemius's idea of cycles of planetary governance is highly structured. Human history begins with Orifiel's reign in the first lunar year and concludes with Michael's third reign, projected to end around 2233 AD. The birth of Christ is positioned in the lunar year 245 of the third reign of Orifiel, which corresponds to

[36] TRITHEMIUS, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. I, fol. A3v. On Celtis, see MENTZEL–REUTERS, « Serielle Chronographie », p. 389–390.

[37] Trithemius attributed this causal pattern to Peter of Abano, whose influence will be discussed shortly. See TRITHEMIUS, *De septem secundeis*, p. 3: « Veterum sententia est plurimorum, sapientissime Caesar, mundum hunc inferiorem ordinatione primi intellectus, qui Deus est, per secundas intelligentias gubernari, quorum opinioni conciliator assentiens medicorum dicit, septem planetis spiritus septem a principio coeli et terrae praefectos. Quorum unusquisque mundum annis gubernat trecentist, quinquaginta quatuor, mensibusque ex ordine quaternis ». As Arnold observed, Trithemius may also have been acquainted with this doctrine through Konrad Wimpina's critique of it in his *Tractatus... de nobilitate celestis corporis...*, [Leipzig 1503], fol. Iijr–v. See ARNOLD, *Johannes Tritihemius*, p. 163; On Wimpina, see also LYNN THORNDIKE, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, Columbia University Press, New York 1923–1941, vol. IV, p. 268–273. Trithemius's system of angelic cycles encompassing the whole of history, organised according to lunar years, is devised as follows: First cycle: Orifiel (Saturn), 1–354; Anael (Venus), 354–708; Zachariel (Jupiter), 708–1063; Raphael (Mercury), 1063–1417; Samael (Mars), 1417–1771; Gabriel (Moon), 1771–2126; Michael (Sun), 2126–2480. Second cycle: Orifiel (Saturn), 2480–2834; Anael (Venus), 2834–3189; Zachariel (Jupiter), 3189–3543; Raphael (Mercury), 3543–3897; Samael (Mars), 3897–4252; Gabriel (Moon), 4252–4606; Michael (Sun), 4606–4960. Third cycle: Orifiel (Saturn), 4960–5315; Anael (Saturn), 5315–5669; Zachariel (Jupiter), 5669–6023; Raphael (Mercury), 6023–6378; Samael (Mars), 6378–6732; Gabriel (Moon), 6732–7086; Michael (Sun), 7086–7441.

lunar year 5205 from creation. The whole account culminates in a religious prediction that is set to occur during Samael's third cycle (6378–6732 lunar years), with a particular emphasis on the year 1525 AD. However, the subsequent Gabriel's (final) cycle remains unelaborated.[38] In compiling this chronicle, Trithemius employed an astrological framework to organise significant historical events, according to an increasing timeline. Nevertheless, rather than focusing solely on a developing linear order of facts, he connected each historical period to the qualities of the planetary cycle governing it. This approach enables history to be interpreted through a synoptic perspective that links events to the characteristics of the ruling planets. In essence, the nature of celestial influences shapes earthly occurrences, providing an astrological lens through which to understand the progression of history.

As historical events are synchronised with the governance of the planets, Trithemius's account is predicated on the following interpretive framework. In the first cycle of Samael-Mars, the Deluge is said to have occurred, followed by the Trojan War and the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the subsequent cycle. The third cycle, characterized by increasing historical complexity, is associated with a series of natural phenomena such as eclipses, earthquakes, and tidal waves, which coincide with significant political events. Notably, the rise of Frederick Barbarossa marks the beginning of the third Samael cycle, while the ascent of Emperor Maximilian I signals its conclusion. This period also encompasses the initial incursions of the Tartars and later the Turks, alongside the establishment of monastic orders and the prophetic prediction of Christianity's eventual decline.[39]

Similarly, in his consideration of Zachariel-Jupiter, Trithemius underscores its consistent and positive influence on the advancement of human civilisation. In the first cycle, marked by the death of Adam, humanity transitions from a state of barbarism to one of lawfulness, establishes religious monotheism, and gains the moral discernment between good and evil, thereby embracing ethical living. The second cycle is characterized by abundance, justice, and the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham, alongside the promise of eternal salvation. During this phase, Prometheus plays a pivotal role in civilizing humanity, imparting the arts, and fostering the development of inventions essential for survival. The third cycle witnesses the emergence of influential figures, such as King Arthur, Boethius, Saint Benedict, and Emperor Justinian, shaping an era defined by extraordinary individuals.[40]

Trithemius's fascination with cryptography, evident in his controversial *Steganographia* and in its amended reworking, the *Polygraphia*, underpins the

[38] Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 4–5; Ibid., p. 60–61.
[39] Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 10–11, 22–23, 47–60.
[40] Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 7–8, 18–20, 40–44.

historiographical system employed in the *De septem secundeis*. The *Steganographia*, which Trithemius chose not to publish during his lifetime in order to circumvent allegations of occultism, ultimately faced a dark fate. In a 1499 letter, Trithemius disclosed to his friend Arnold Bost, a Carmelite monk from Ghent, the composition of a handbook, as Noel Brann summarised, on « steganography, that is, the art of writing secret messages and communicating them long distances by occult means ».[41] Regrettably the letter was intercepted by the prior of the Carmelite convent, who accused Trithemius of engaging in black magic. This accusation, compounded by grievances raised by fellow monks regarding alleged mismanagement, led to Trithemius's expulsion from the Abbey of Sponheim and the loss of the library he had meticulously curated there, effectively barring him from publishing the handbook. A similar allegation was made one decade later by Charles de Bovelles, who had previously visited the abbot and perused some chapters of the work. The scandal was revisited in a 1509 letter to Germain de Ganay, in which Bovelles denounced *Steganographia* as promoting black magic. As a consequence, the work was not printed until 1606, at which point it was swiftly included in the *Index librorum prohibitorum*.[42]

The first two books of the *Steganographia* described cipher systems disguised as magical prayers to demons, containing coded messages arranged by Trithemius using techniques that replaced letters with other letters or numbers. The third book, unfinished at the time of his death, hypothesised telepathic communication via seven planetary spirits, invoking subordinate intelligences to deliver messages to absent addressees within twenty-four hours. This supernatural method, which was revealed in the intercepted letter to Arnold Bost, was said to have been discovered by Trithemius through an unidentified philosopher called *Menastor*, whose encrypted name, as Arno Mentzel-Reuters claims, probably alludes to the *Picatrix*.[43] The procedure described by the abbot was based on the invocation of angels and involved, as in sorcery, the use of talismans or astral images inscribed with symbols of the desired spirit. These procedures became established in the medieval grimoires of the so-called pseudo-Solomonic literature such as *Ars notoria*, *De officiis spirituum*, *Clavicula Salomonis*, *De quattuor annulis*, *Almandal*, and *Liber sacratus*. They described defined magical rituals that could include prayers, fumigation, exorcisms, and elaborate engravings in ancient languages such as

[41] Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius*, p. 19–20. For a detailed analysis of the *Steganographia*, see Thomas Ernst, « Schwarzweiße Magie. Der Schlüssel zum dritten Buch der *Steganographia* des Trithemius », *Daphnis. Zeitschrift für Mittlere Deutsche Literatur*, 25 (1996), p. 1–205. See also Wayne Shumaker, *Renaissance Curiosa*, Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, Binghamton – New York 1982, p. 91–131.

[42] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 85–91; Zambelli, *White Magic*, p. 75–76, 84–85.

[43] Trithemius, *Steganographia*, iii, *praefatio*, Ex officina typographica Matthiae Beckeri, sumptibus Ioannis Berneri, Francofurti 1606, p. 160–161; see Mentzel–Reuters, « Serielle Chronographie », p. 390–391.

Greek, Latin, Hebrew or Arabic, and their purpose was to summon, command, or beseech demons.[44]

According to the esoteric tradition Trithemius was following, this art promised extraordinary abilities, including instant mastery of multiple languages, enhanced memory, and comprehensive knowledge of the seven liberal arts. However, the misuse of such techniques could have led the uneducated practitioner to engage in illicit activities such as necromancy, including the use of curses reminiscent of ancient Roman *defixiones*, where harm was inflicted through inscribed lead or silver sheets, akin to voodoo.[45] The very same *Picatrix*, which Trithemius had decried as execrable and superstitious in his *Antipalus maleficiorum*, presented some details and methods for evoking the seven planetary spirits and crafting talismans for various purposes, such as that indicated in the *Steganographia*, namely secret communication with an absent individual.[46]

Drawing on his sources, Trithemius elaborated an angelic catalogue that would form the central framework of his later interpretation of history. In the third book of the *Steganographia*, the exposition of the art was accompanied by numerological tables and lists, presented as calculations of the planets' positions in the sky. The planets and their corresponding ruling angels were then arranged according to their succession over 354 lunar years and 4 lunar months, thereby laying the foundation for a concise account of planetary history. This structure became the basis of the detailed chronology later set forth in the *De septem secundeis*. During the reign of Samael–Mars, the Great Flood occurred; under Gabriel–Moon, the confusion of languages took place; and during the reign of Michael–Sun, the Exodus from Egypt unfolded. By applying this explanatory principle, Trithemius asserted, anyone could calculate and even anticipate future events pertinent to their own era.[47]

Similarly, in the preface to the sixth book of *Polygraphia*, Trithemius elaborated on the angelic-planetary sequence, connecting it to a broader reflection on the origins of human language and the evolution of communication. He outlined a 'poetic' chronology inherited from antiquity, according to which humans

[44] For an overview on the pseudo–Solomonic magical texts, see Julien Véronèse, « La transmission groupée des textes de magie 'salomonienne' de l'Antiquitè au Moyen Âge », in Stéphan Gioanni, Benoît Grévin (eds.), *L'Antiquité tardive dans les collections médiévales. Textes et représentations, VI^e^–XIV^e^ siècle*, École française de Rome, Roma 2008, p. 193–223; Id., « Solomonic magic », in Sophie Page, Catherine Rider (eds.), *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, Routledge, London – New York 2019, p. 187–200; Ilaria Parri, *La magia nel Medioevo*, Carocci, Roma 2018, p. 54–67.

[45] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 84–85. On the ancient Roman *defixiones*, see Fritz Graf, *La Magie dans l'Antiquité gréco-romaine*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1994.

[46] Trithemius, *Antipalus maleficiorum*, i, ch. 2, in Zambelli, *White Magic*, p. 103.

[47] Trithemius, *Steganographia*, iii, *praefatio*, p. 163, in particular: « Et quidem si quis assertioni praefatae adhibet fidem, per semet ab origine mundi facile mutationes temporum, et gubernationem angelorum usque ad suam aetatem praescripto ordine poterit supputare ».

remained entirely illiterate for 1,063 years – spanning the first three celestial regimes (Orifiel–Saturn, Anael–Venus, and Zachariel–Jupiter) – relying instead on animal sounds or cave drawings to convey meaning. Each planetary ruler influenced civilization in distinct ways: Orifiel–Saturn promoted agriculture and city-building while keeping humanity in ignorance and servitude; Anael–Venus fostered culture and craftsmanship but also encouraged sensuality and indulgence, introducing leisure activities such as music and games; and Zachariel–Jupiter advanced hunting and settlement skills while instilling ambition, domination, and moral awareness. The sequence culminated with the reign of Raphael–Mercury, marked by the invention of writing – initially in pictographic symbols akin to hieroglyphs, later refined into alphabets, reflecting humanity's dispersion across the world. Trithemius concluded that through the written word, ancient poets transmitted concealed and esoteric teachings, embedding hidden wisdom within their narratives.[48]

V. *Loopholes of Human Freedom*

The mysterious content of the third book of *Steganographia*, which was deciphered only in the late 1990s, revealed it to be a 'rational' treatise despite its esoteric appearance. The strictly cryptographic nature of the writing was demonstrated by scholars such as Thomas Ernst and Jim Reed, who explained how Trithemius employed numerical ciphers linked to angelic invocations. In particular, he devised numerical cryptography systems, replacing letters with numbers to generate multiple encrypted alphabets. Deciphering the spells revealed that the invocation formulas concealed simple coded messages, constructed using numerical tables where each angel's name corresponded to a different alphabet. The key revelation lay in demystifying the *Steganographia*: there was nothing magical about it. The witchcraft formulas and demonic prayers were merely decorative or sacralised embellishments – magical-religious disguises for a purely rational cryptographic system.[49] Consequently, it can be assumed that further research might substantiate the hypothesis that *De septem secundeis* may also contain cryptographic layers, despite the absence of explicit decoding tables – a feature that differentiates it from the *Steganographia*.[50]

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[48] Trithemius, *Polygraphiae libri sex*, Impressum ductu Ioannis Haselberg de Aia, [Basel?] 1518, fol. Pvv–r. For a comprehensive examination of this work, see Maximilian Gamer, *Die Polygraphia des Johannes Trithemius nach der handschriftlichen Fassung. Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, 2 vols., Brill, Leiden – Boston 2022.

[49] Jim Reeds, « Solved: The Ciphers in Book III of Trithemius's *Steganographia* », *Cryptologia*, 22/4 (1998), p. 291–317; Ernst, « The Numerical–astrological Ciphers in the Third Book of Trithemius's *Steganographia* », *Cryptologia*, 22/4 (1998), p. 318–341.

[50] Mentzel–Reuters, « Serielle Chronographie », p. 388, 393.

In any case, rather than following traditional salvation history, Trithemius mapped world history onto the catalogue of biblical archangels, formulating a distinctive chronology dissimilar from conventional universal chronicles. Earlier chronologies, from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages – such as Eusebius of Caesarea's *Chronica*, Orosius's *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem*, or Bede the Venerable's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* – were constructed by cross-referencing the temporal frameworks provided by the Bible with the chronological systems employed by pagans, including the succession of Olympiads, the founding date of Rome, the sequence of consuls or emperors, and similar markers. These calculations identified historical epochs on the basis of key events, ultimately serving to date the birth of Christ with precision, which was in turn adopted as the reference point for distinguishing the Christian eras. Trithemius, however, focused on counting years in fixed sequences in his *De septem secundeis*, as Mentzel-Reuters effectively explained. Stripped of angelic rulers – whom, notably, he never taught the reader how to summon in this writing – his framework reveals itself as a serial division of history into equal periods, aimed at a rational calculation of time.[51] Yet, he carefully preserved history's theological foundation, maintaining an esoteric superstructure without veering into superstitious practices like the *ars notoria*.

Furthermore, Trithemius's astral-based chronology raises philosophical questions that extend its interpretation beyond the purely cryptographic or historiographical domain. Trithemius explicitly addressed the core issue of his system, discussing the relationship between celestial influence and free will. In this context, it becomes essential to ascertain the precise nature and limitations of astral causality within the theoretical framework devised by the abbot. His conceptualization of astral causation encompassed two foundational sources, which proved instrumental in facilitating his philosophical understanding of history. Trithemius's astrological vision was chiefly informed by the *Speculum astronomiae*, which he attributed to his revered Albertus Magnus, and by Peter of Abano's *Conciliator differentiarum philosophorum et medicorum*, which he explicitly recalled in the opening sentences of the *De septem secundeis*. Both works sought to reconcile astrology with Christian scholarship, emphasizing the secondary role of astral influences under divine providence. For this reason, it is essential to examine those sections of both works that most significantly contributed to providing a philosophical foundation for Trithemius's esoteric historiography.

Being structured into seventeen chapters and divided into two main sections, the *Speculum*, in particular, presented both a general introduction to astrological methods and a defense of their valuable utilisation. Primary objective of this XIII century survey of astrological literature was to identify the licit and illicit practice

[51] Mentzel–Reuters, « Serielle Chronographie », p. 389.

of astral based prognostication. The first section outlined the fundamental divisions of this disputed discipline, distinguishing between two notions of 'astronomy', the one understood as the mathematical study of skies and celestial motions, and the other as « the science of the judgements of the stars, which provides a link between natural philosophy and metaphysics » (« scientia iudiciorum astrorum, quae est ligamentum naturalis philosophiae et metaphysicae »).[52] According to the *Speculum*, astrology is defended as a legitimate *scientia media* mediating between metaphysics and natural philosophy, insofar as it enables indirect knowledge of God through the heavens and the celestial bodies, which function as secondary causes of the divine will. Far from being a superstition, astrology is conceived as a rational investigation of celestial causality that grants privileged access to the ordered structure of the cosmos. Consequently, the science of the stars is valued not merely for its predictive capacities, but above all for its ability to guide human reason towards knowledge and love of God through contemplating the harmonious order of the universe.[53]

The second section examined the technical aspects of astrology, categorizing its various branches – such as the revolution of the year according to planetary conjunctions within a zodiac sign, the doctrine of nativities according to the horoscope, and the foundation of electional astrology – and scrutinizing their legitimacy. While astrology's application in medicine, agriculture, and navigation was considered permissible, practices such as necromancy, talismanic magic, and demonic divinatory arts, as described in the pseudo-Hermetic and pseudo-Solomonic literature, were rejected as distortions of legitimate astrological knowledge.

In chapters 12–14, the *Speculum* addresses the philosophical challenges raised by the seemingly deterministic character of astral causality by arguing that celestial influence operates according to the (Neoplatonic–Hermetic) principle that higher beings act upon lower ones. Human beings, however, are not entirely subject to this cosmic order, insofar as it ultimately depends on God's will, which preserves the universal structure until the end of time. This prompts the fundamental question of the extent to which human freedom and free will can be

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[52] [Ps.–?]Albertus Magnus, *Speculum astronomiae*, in Paola Zambelli, *The Speculum Astronomiae and its Enigma. Astrology, Theology and Science in Albertus Magnus and his Contemporaries*, Springer, Dordrecht 1992, p. 209–213, 219–220. On the controversy over the attribution of the work to Albertus Magnus, see Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Le 'Speculum Astronomiae', une énigme? Enquête sur les manuscrits*, SISMEL–Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2001; Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, « Un testo periodizzante: lo *Speculum astronomiae* », *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 9/2 (2009), p. 497–501. In what follows, without engaging in the broader scholarly debate, the *Speculum* will be regarded as Trithemius himself understood it – that is, as a work authored by Albertus Magnus.

[53] Albertus Magnus, *Speculum astronomiae*, p. 221.

accommodated within this theoretical framework.[54] The *Speculum* maintains that human freedom consists in the capacity to anticipate and respond to celestial influences. In chapter 13, devoted to nativities, Albertus Magnus argues that every sublunary entity is subject to stellar influence in accordance with its inherent nature and its capacity to receive such influence, which in turn determines the effects it can produce. Since no entity can generate effects contrary to its own nature, human freedom resides in the ability to foresee how astral forces shape one's disposition and to regulate one's actions accordingly, without negating celestial causality.[55] In this way, free will is exercised within the context of astral determinism by modulating the degree to which planetary influences affect human nature: while astral forces themselves remain immutable, their effects can be moderated, thus preserving a space for freedom within a divinely ordained cosmos.[56]

In chapter 14, the *Speculum* further examines the compatibility of astrological interrogation with human free will. Albertus Magnus argues that inquiries concerning future events are marked by varying degrees of uncertainty, especially when they involve outcomes influenced by human choice. By contrast, events that lie beyond individual control are more susceptible to reliable prediction.[57] Within this framework, astrological interrogation is not presented as a threat to free will, but rather as a means of informing and guiding human deliberation. The *Speculum* maintains that astrological judgments do not impose necessity upon future events; instead, they disclose the most probable outcomes given specific celestial configurations. Future contingents therefore remain genuinely open, retaining the capacity both to occur and not to occur until they are actualised, at which point they assume necessity. This position aligns with the Aristotelian distinction between absolute and conditional necessity, according to which an event is not necessary in itself but becomes necessary once it has taken place. By adopting this perspective, Albertus Magnus seeks to reconcile astrological prediction with

[54] Albertus Magnus, *Speculum astronomiae*, p. 257: « For if an earthquake and a flood, or fires – as far as rich men and all the common people are concerned – war or peace, famine and death, as well as the appearance of some great prophet or heretic, or the rising of a horrible universal or particular schism are indicated by the figure of the revolution of the year, or of an eclipse, or of a conjunction (which signifies a [religious] sect) in accordance with that for which God, the most high, has provided, what has that to do with free will? Is it in a man's power to change such things? ».

[55] Albertus Magnus, *Speculum astronomiae*, p. 259.

[56] Albertus Magnus, *Speculum astronomiae*, p. 261: « But how should one respond to those questions concerning the character of the soul, except [by saying] that the native is not judged to be chaste or impure, wrathful or patient, and so on save according to his aptitude or lack of aptitude? Hence, nonetheless, he chooses this or that [conduct]. But it belongs to the operation of the heavens whether he is inclined more readily towards choosing that for which he has an aptitude ».

[57] Albertus Magnus, *Speculum astronomiae*, p. 261–263.

contingency, affirming that potentiality is not inevitably actualised, yet when it is, it unfolds according to a necessary causal order.[58]

As a consequence, astrological prognostication no more negates free will than does divine providence. The supposition that God, in His eternal knowledge, foresees human choices and might have inscribed them in the *liber universitatis* (the 'book of the universe') is granted; nevertheless, the heavens do not disclose the entirety of what is contained within the divine intellect, for they remain subordinate to ineffable divine providence. Accordingly, when astrological indications prove ambiguous, such opacity signifies that God has chosen to withhold that particular truth. On these grounds, Albertus Magnus defended astrological interrogations by maintaining that they do not abolish free will, but rather serve as a guide for human deliberation. The stars do not cause events; they signify them, and their influence upon the sublunary realm may be moderated through human agency. More generally, the problem of determinism in astrology mirrors that of divine providence: just as God's foreknowledge does not constrain human choices, so astrological predictions indicate probable outcomes without imposing necessity.[59]

The restriction of human freedom to the sphere of the rational prediction of effects announced by celestial configurations, as articulated in the *Speculum*, met with Trithemius's sustained theoretical opposition. A rigid adherence to astral causation theory – according to which all events in the sublunary world are determined by the configuration of the celestial bodies – would ultimately undermine both Christian faith and human responsibility for sin. As Trithemius explicitly stated in a 1487 letter to Nicholas von Merneck, the concept of fate is no consequence, and evil actions do not originate from constellations but are the result of human free will. Should Christians accept belief in fate, as the pagans once did, they would thereby deny both free will and divine grace. Every sin,

[58] Albertus Magnus, *Speculum astronomiae*, p. 265.

[59] Albertus Magnus, *Speculum astronomiae*, p. 265–267: « And perhaps, someone considering [this matter] more closely, will have the same uncertainty or one similar in kind to that uncertainty which concerns divine providence; since in those things which God operates by means of the heavens, the indication of heaven is nothing other than divine providence. In those things, indeed, which we initiate, nothing prevents [the fact] that there is also not a cause in heaven, but a signification. For of the two sides of a dilemma from which man can choose one or the other, God knew from eternity which of these he [i.e.: the man] would choose. For which reason, in the book of the universe, which is the vellum of heaven [...]. He was able to configure, if He wished, what He knew; [but] if He did this, then the compatibility of free will with divine providence or with the indication of an interrogation is the same. Therefore, if it cannot be denied that divine providence co–exists with free will, it cannot be denied that the profession of interrogations co–exists with it as well ».

therefore, proceeds exclusively from the human will, and whatever is not voluntary cannot properly be regarded as sin.[60]

Were a deterministic framework to be accepted, human beings – like all other natural entities – would be entirely subject, in both body and soul, to the prescriptions dictated by the intelligences governing the seven planets. However, Trithemius, drawing on Neoplatonic psychology to safeguard Christian truth, appealed to the highest part of the soul, which transcends reason (*ratio*), as a means of overcoming the linear transmission of effects through celestial causes. The mind (*mens*), conceived as the divine substance within human nature and the faculty that elevates the soul to the contemplation of truth, possesses the capacity to liberate itself from the angelic-planetary order, operating beyond the physical laws imposed upon human nature by the stars.

In his *De septem secundeis*, Trithemius asserted the complete independence of the spiritual domain from astral prescription. Moreover, his conception of *magia naturalis* as a form of wisdom that draws the soul closer to the divine is predicated on the autonomy of human intellectual faculties, which are not subject to the dictates of the stars. The human mind is envisaged as the receptacle of divine truth, its essential substance derived from a transcendent principle, thereby endowing it with a share in divine power. This Neoplatonic theory, which is rooted in Ficino's *Theologia Platonica* and Plotin's concept of 'undescended soul', was referred to by Trithemius as the « invisible fruits of the soul » (« invisibiles fructus animae ») of natural magic in his correspondence to Joachim of Brandenburg.[61] In this context, human participation in the divine plan for salvation is not determined by astral harmony, nor do the stars govern human foresight or decision-making. As articulated in the *De septem secundeis*, celestial movements may exert an influence over the physical body and its functions; however, they are incapable of exerting authority over the mind, which remains free and self-sufficient – provided it does not capitulate to bodily influences. Concurrently, the

[60] Trithemius, *Opera pia et spiritualia*..., Moguntiae, Ex typographeo Ioan[nis] Albini 1605, p. 954–955: « Quicunque putat fatum esse aliquid, quicunque dies observat et menses, quicunque genesim credit dominari in hominibus, non Christianus, sed paganus est, quoniam et superstitionibus inservit, gratiam Dei negat, et liberum tollit arbitrium. Fatum enim nihil est, et nullum ad peccandum constellatio provocat, minus compellit. [...] Cave autem, ne putes constellationes in hominibus aliquid posse efficere, sed voluntatem hominis causam scito peccati, quoniam omne peccatum volutarium est; quod vero non fuerit voluntarium, nec erit peccatum ».

[61] Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 105: « Magia siquidem naturalis non solum effectus operatur visibiles, sed etiam intellectum ipsius hominis in ea periti mirabiliter in cognitione divinitatis illuminat, invisibilesque fructus animae praestat ». On the tripartite division of the soul into *mens*, *ratio* and *idolum*, see Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology* xiii, transl. Michael J.B. Allen, ed. James Hankins, 6 vols., Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2004, vol. IV, p. 204. On Plotinus's theory, see Riccardo Chiaradonna, « La dottrina dell'anima non discesa in Plotino e la conoscenza degli intelligibili », in Eugenio Canone (ed.), *Per una storia del concetto di mente*, Leo S. Olschki, Firenze 2005, p. 27–49;

seven governing angels do not in any way subvert the natural order through their influence on sublunar beings.[62]

The emphasis on the supremacy of the mind reiterated a pivotal argument advanced by Trithemius in his letter to Ganay, in which he both proclaimed the autonomy of the intellectual faculty from celestial configurations, and articulated, in terms of divine wisdom and human freedom and self-determination, the metaphysical preeminence of the mind. Immune to astral influence, nourished by faith in Providence, and strengthened by the divine dispensation of truth, the mind stands beyond the reach of celestial forces, thus challenging the astrologers' claims to predictive authority. The epistemological distinction between a material (astral-based) and a spiritual (religion-based) causation, permits natural magic – whose legitimate use is granted by God – to enable human beings to be empowered to exercise extraordinary virtues that transcend their own bodily nature, as well as to perform wonders and miracles beyond the scope of astral prescription:

> For the stellar harmony has neither produced nor influenced the mind. A certain lover of the occult [*philocryphus*] said thus: « Whoever was aware of the state of celestial harmony would know both the past and the future ». But who can ever introduce me to one person in a thousand who understands this celestial harmony? The mind is born for supercelestial harmony, in whose likeness it lives. The stars do not understand, nor do they even feel anything, so they do not impart wisdom to our minds, nor do they have any dominion over us, who walk in the Spirit, confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, who has all things in His power, to whose likeness we must faithfully conform ourselves according to our strength. For He is the wisdom of God the Father, He is the source and origin of science, He is the centre through whom all things were made. Let vain and reckless men, lying astrologers who deceive minds and speak frivolous things, stay away. The disposition of the stars does not affect the immortal mind, the natural science, and the supercelestial wisdom, but the body only exercises its own dominion over the body. The mind is free, it is not subject to the stars, nor is it under their influence, nor does it follow their movement, but it only participates in the supercelestial principle, from which it was made and from which it is fecundated.[63]

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[62] Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 38: « Mutantur enim hominum cum tempore mores, et corpora inferiora secundum influentiam superiorum disponuntur. Mens quidem libera est, et influentiam astrorum non suscipit, nisi prae nimio, quod cum corpore habet, commercio se inclinando affectum commaculet suum. Angeli enim, qui motores sunt orbium, nihil eorum, quae natura constituit, destruunt, vel subvertunt ».

[63] Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 74–75: « Stellaris enim harmonia mentem nec dedit nec influit. Quidam philocryphus dicebat sic: 'Quicunque conditionem coelestis harmoniae notam haberet, tam praeterita quam futura cognosceret.' Quis autem mihi dabitur ex millibus unus, qui harmoniam hanc intelligat coelestem? Ad supercoelestem mens nata est, cuius similitudine vivit. Astra nihil intelligunt, nec sentiunt quidem, unde nec sapientiam menti nostrae conferunt, nec

The exaltation of the mind over reason, understood as the precise calculation of astral influences, together with the recognition of the individual soul – fortified by faith – as the central agent in attaining both physical and metaphysical knowledge, did not imply a wholesale rejection of astrology. Trithemius himself acknowledged its legitimacy within the contentious sphere of 'world astrology.' Yet he confined its objective validity to the material realm, conceding the susceptibility of sublunar beings to the influence of celestial bodies. This attempt, however, to reconcile astral causality with free will does not, upon closer scrutiny, resolve the theoretical aporia inherent in endorsing astrology's prognosticative methods. If the human being is free as soul yet constrained as body, to what extent, then, do the stars govern the fate of humanity as a whole, given their purported sway over the course of history?

VI. *Cursed Conjunctions*

Trithemius's conception of astral causality drew upon Peter of Abano's *Conciliator differentiarum philosophorum et precipue medicorum*, explicitly cited at the outset of *De septem secundeis*. His framework for classifying historical events was based on the *differentia* 9 of that work, in which Peter applied astrological knowledge to historical inquiry. Among the 210 *differentiae* comprising this influential 1303 treatise – grounded in Aristotelian cosmology and Ptolemaic astrology and aimed at reconciling conflicting views between philosophers and physicians – the *differentia* 9 addressed the question of whether human nature had advance or declined over time, and whether the notion of a diminution in human longevity, now comparatively brief when measured against that of former generations and corroborated by scriptural accounts in *Genesis*, could be substantiated or rejected (*Utrum natura humana sit debilitata ab eo quod antiquitus necne*). Peter's argument was structured into four demonstrations–corresponding to the four *propter* sections into which the chapter is divided–each designed to harmonise the divergent opinions of esteemed authorities.

In this context, Trithemius's primary focus elaborated on the section entitled *propter tertium*, which addressed the question of the changing human lifetime span from the perspectives of astronomy, philosophy, and medicine. Of particular note

aliquod in nos dominium habent, qui spiritu ambulamus, confitentes Dominum Iesum Christum, omnia in sua potestate habentem, ad cuius similitudinem pro viribus fideliter oportet conformare. Ipse est enim sapientia Dei patris, ipse est fons et origo scientiae, ipse est centrum, per quem facta sunt omnia. Abeant homines temerarii, homines vani, et mendaces astrologi, deceptores mentium, et frivola garrientes. Nihil enim ad mentem immortalem, nihil ad scientiam naturalem, nihil facit ad sapientiam supercoelestem stellarum dispositio, sed corpus in corpus dumtaxat suum habet imperium. Mens est libera, nec stellis subiicitur, nec earum influentias concipit, nec motum sequitur, sed supercoelesti principio, a quo et facta est et facundatur, tantum communicat ». See Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 128–129.

is the astronomical explanation, which is further divided into three additional sections. Peter established different types of astral causality, proceeding methodically from a general to a specific standpoint. In the first section, he conducted an examination of the fixed stars within the eighth sphere, in addition to the constellations that constitute the zodiac signs. His reasoning was grounded in the medieval cosmological model of concentric celestial spheres, particularly the motion of the fixed stars (eighth sphere) and the precession of the equinoxes. According to Peter, when the cardinal points of the zodiac (Aries, Cancer, Libra, Capricorn) were perfectly aligned with their corresponding signs in the fixed zodiac, the transmission of celestial virtue to the sublunary world was more direct and efficacious. As this alignment has progressively diminished, due to cosmic cycles, the influence of the heavens upon human generation and temperament has weakened. However, since these motions are cyclical, future realignments may restore more favorable conditions for human vitality. This investigation resulted in the formulation of a causal structure, whereby higher entities are believed to impart a simple, homogeneous, and immaterial influence upon the lower ones which, in turn, are considered to be intermediate entities responsible for the conversion and transmission of these influences.[64]

Following such a theory, Peter transitioned to the second case, which focuses on intermediate causality stemming from planetary influences, particularly their conjunctions (small, medium, or great, especially those involving Saturn and Jupiter in the Aries every 960 years) and solar and lunar eclipses. These celestial events, depending on their quality and zodiacal position, are said to directly influence not only human health and longevity but also political regimes, religious movements, and the rise of prophetic figures. As a consequence, he asserted that the movements of the seven planets govern all transformations in the sublunary realm. For instance, while eclipses are known to signal climatic or geological changes, it is asserted that planetary conjunctions shape the destinies of kingdoms and religions by presiding over the births of miraculous individuals, namely rulers and prophets such as Nebuchadnezzar, Moses, Alexander the Great, Jesus, and Muhammad.[65] As Bruno Nardi has emphasised, Peter of Abano's causation pattern

[64] All references to the *Conciliator* are taken from the edition published in Venice by the Giunti printers in 1565: see Petrus Abanus Patavinus, *Conciliator controversiarum, quae inter philosophos et medicos versantur*, apud Iuntas, Venetiis 1565, fol. 14r–15v.

[65] Petrus Abanus, *Conciliator*, fol. 15v, in particular: « Secunda quidem causa astrologica sumitur ex planetis, et maxime ex coniunctionibus Saturni et Iovis, et solaribus eclipsibus et lunaribus, utcumque: ex coniunctione namque Saturni et Iovis in principio Arietis, quod quidem circa finem 960 contingit annorum, tunc enim secundum ascendens coniunctionis et dominium eius, secundum etiam locus coniunctionis eorum ex domibus, aut secundum fortunas vel infortunas locum ascendentis et coniunctionis aspicientes, variatur non solum natura humana fortitudine aut debilitate, longaevitate aut e contrario: immo et totus mundus inferior commutatur, ita non

is predicated on the notion that the influence of celestial bodies extends beyond strict physical phenomena, encompassing both the physiological constitution and the moral inclinations of body and soul. Concurrently, the seven planets are believed to exercise a distinct influence over specific phases of human life, with each planet presiding over a particular domain of human activity. Even extraordinary occurrences adhere, to a certain degree, to this cosmic order. However, according to Peter, despite being foretold by celestial conjunctions, such events, nevertheless, retain their miraculous nature.[66]

The final case concerned the planets as specific causes of historical events. This doctrine was attributed to Abraham ibn Ezra, an erudite Jewish polymath of the twelfth century in Spain, renowned as a poet, mathematician, and biblical exegete. As Graziella Federici Vescovini has shown, Peter of Abano, who translated some of ibn Ezra's astronomical treatises, erroneously conflated him with Averroes in the *differentia* 9.[67] But in his *Liber rationum*, ibn Ezra had already delineated the historical pattern that subsequently was to be adopted by Trithemius, through the *Conciliator*, in his *De septem secundeis*: the seven archangels, each governing the motions of one of the seven planets, took turns ruling the sublunary world for cycles of 354 years and four lunar months. The planets under their command marked key biblical events – during Mars's reign, the Great Flood occurred, foretold by a planetary conjunction in Pisces; under the Moon's rule, the confusion of languages, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Exodus from Egypt took place.[68] While elaborating on ibn Ezra's views, Peter concluded his argument

solum regna, sed et leges, et prophetae consurgunt in mundo significative saltem, seu causaliter in quibusdam volentes prioribus quam neglectis reliquas condere, sicut apparuit in adventu Nabuchodonosor, Moysi, Alexandri Magni, Nazarei, Machometi ».

66 Bruno Nardi, *Saggi sull'aristotelismo padovano. Dal secolo XIV al XVI*, Sansoni, Firenze 1958, p. 32–35.

67 Petrus Abanus, *Conciliator*, fol. 15v: « Est autem 3 causa huius considerationis ex planetis accepta secundum quod eis debetur quoddam regimen commune in mundo, quo unusquisque sua maneria mundum habet gubernare potissime per intelligentiam sibi secundum Aver.[roem] in tract.[atu] *De substantia orbis* virtute copulatam et si substantia extra consistat. Huius autem intelligentia est septenaria secundum numerum 7 planetarum, seu intelligentia, seu angeli dicantur. Nam prima quidem est Satur.[ni] Cassiel, secunda Iovis Sachiel, tertia Martis Samael, quarta Solis Michael, quinta Vene.[ris] Anael, sexta Mercurii Raphael, septima vero Lunae Gabriel. Ordo autem in ducatu eorum existit, quoniam primo Satur.[nus], deinde Venus, postea Iup.[iter], deinceps Mercu.[rius], postea Mars, deinde Luna, demum Sol. Ducatus autem et regimen uniuscuiusque est 354 annorum, et quatuor mensium lunarium ad similitudinem anni lunaris continentis ». See Graziella Federici Vescovini, « La versio latina degli *Excerpta de secretis Albumasar di Sadan.* Una edizione », *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 65 (1998), p. 283, note 32.

68 Abraham ibn Ezra, *Liber rationum*, in *Abrahe Auenaris Judei Astrologi peritissimi in re iudiciali opera...*, Ex officina Petri Liechtenstein, Venetiis 1507, fol. L3v (*De gubernatoribus mundi*): « Cassiel, Satkiel, Samael, Michael, Anael, Raphael, Gauriel sunt quoque septem angeli secundum septem planetas. Quorum quilibet ducit mundus 354 annis, 4 mensibus, numero dierum Lunae. Et inceperunt

by addressing planetary influence within the sole human sphere. The variability of human nature, and its improvement or decline, was thus determined by the different effects of each planet, which depended not only on its inherent qualities, but also on its celestial position, its angular relations with other planets, and its conjunctions. Consequently, human history unfolded according to such universal astral conditions.

As demonstrated, in the *differentia* 9, Peter revisited a contentious issue of medieval astrological debate, also explored by Albertus Magnus in the *Speculum*'s chapter on revolutions: the validity of world astrology, grounded in the theory of the 120 planetary conjunctions, especially the great conjunctions of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars within a specific zodiacal sign. The prognostication of global events extended the methods of individual horoscopes – judicial astrology – to humanity as a whole, deemed a privileged object of astral causality. By examining planetary conjunctions, along with extraordinary phenomena such as eclipses, astrologers attempted to chart the world's horoscope, predicting natural disasters or political-religious upheavals. This doctrine, which the *Speculum* endorsed as a natural science, traced back to Arab thinkers such as Māshā'allāh and al-Kindī, although its classical formulation found definitive expression in Albumasar's *De magnis coniunctionibus* – written between 861–866, translated by John of Seville in the twelfth century, but published in Augsburg only in 1489. Albumasar's astrological conception of cosmic order, based on planetary conjunctions which recur on a cyclical basis, aligned with Plato's *Timaeus* (38b–39d), wherein the theory of the Great Year posits the periodic return of all planets to the same degree in the sky, suggesting catastrophic cosmic cycles. As a result, this notion aroused religious and metaphysical anxieties in Jewish and Christian culture, particularly

secundum modum quem dicam. Sa.[turnus], Venus, Iupiter, Mer.[curius], Mars, Luna, Sol. Saturnus autem praecessit, quum Sol et Luna fuerunt creati in principio horae. Sa.[turnus] duxit mundum 354 annis et 3 parte anni. Deinde Venus, et postea alii. Ita qui reditione constituunt circulum. Invenies quoque per istum numerum Martem servire tempori diluvii, et Lunam quando linguae fuerunt divisae. Et in mutatione Sdom [Sesom, *ed.*], id est Sodomae, et exitus Aegypti, qui fuit anno 2400 ac 48 annis adde, fuit gubernator Sol. Cum autem templum fuit destructus, primo fuit anno 3338, ducebat tunc Iupiter. Cuius tempore fuit perfectus templum secundo. Et in destructione secunda fuit Mercu.[rius] anno 3828. Et cum fuerunt completi 4708 anni, incepit Sol ducere. Et eius Michael princeps, sicut scriptum est tempore Ys[r]ael. Illo tempore stabit Michael, noster princeps in Daniele ». See Petrus Abanus, *Conciliator*, fol. 15v: « [...] cum Mars mundum gubernaret, factum est diluvium propter coniunctionem maxime planetarum in Piscibus. Sub ducatum autem Lunae dispartitae sunt linguae, subversa est Sodoma, et multa alia apparuerunt iudicia secundum naturas, et proprietates ducatuum planetarum ». On the use of Ibn Ezra's writings by Pietro d'Abano, see Shlomo Sela, « Pietro d'Abano, Translator of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings », *Sefarad*, 79/1 (2019), p. 7–87, in particular p. 45–46.

with regard to the prophesied Antichrist and the apocalyptic end of the world heralded by celestial signs.[69]

A sensitive aspect of the doctrine, vehemently opposed by Pico della Mirandola in his *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, was the so-called 'horoscope of religions,' which applied individual astrological principles to major historical-religious shifts, suggesting that religions, like natural phenomena, followed a predetermined rise and fall dictated by planetary cycles. Philosophers such as Albumasar, Roger Bacon, Pierre d'Ailly, and Pietro Pomponazzi explored the possibility of the *mutatio legum* understood as the calculation of a religion's duration and its eventual transition. For instance, Albumasar associated specific Jupiter conjunctions with the emergence of known religious beliefs: when conjoined with Saturn, it indicates Judaism; with Mars, the worship of stars and idols; with Venus, Islam; with Mercury, Christianity; and with the Moon, it signifies doubt, instability, or atheism, due to the Moon's rapid motion and inherent mutability. In the same way, Roger Bacon, drawing on the work of Albumasar, developed this scheme and associated the conjunction Jupiter–Sun with Egyptian polytheism, Jupiter–Mars with Chaldean religion, Jupiter–Saturn with Judaism, Jupiter–Mercury with Christianity, Jupiter–Venus with Islam, and finally, the Jupiter–Moon conjunction, which ominously foretells the Antichrist's advent and the decline of Christianity.[70]

This synthesis of astronomical calculation, religious prophecy and astral determinism posed a profound challenge to traditional religious authorities, as

[69] VON BEZOLD, « Astrologische Geschichtskonstruktion », p. 31–33; BOLL, BEZOLD, GUNDEL, *Sternglaube und Sterndeutung*, p. 29–44; EUGENIO GARIN, *Lo zodiaco della vita*, Laterza, Bari 1976, p. 1–30; PAOLA ZAMBELLI, « Introduction: Astrologers' Theory of History », in EAD. (ed.): *'Astrologi hallucinati': Stars and the End of the World in Luther's Time*, de Gruyter, Berlin – New York 1986, p. 1–28; MARCO BERTOZZI, « Il fatale ritmo della storia. La teoria delle grandi congiunzioni astrali tra XV e XVI secolo », *I Castelli di Yale*, 1/1 (1996), p. 29–49; GRAZIELLA FEDERICI VESCOVINI, *Medioevo magico. La magia tra religione e scienza nei secoli XIII e XIV*, UTET, Torino 2008, p. 225–275.

[70] On the horoscope of religions, see VON BEZOLD, « Astrologische Geschichtskonstruktion », p. 35, 38–41; BERTOZZI, *Il fatale ritmo della storia*, p. 31–34; FEDERICI VESCOVINI, *Medioevo magico* p. 247–248; EAD., « The Theological Debate », in BRENDAN DOOLEY (ed.), *A Companion to Astrology in the Renaissance*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2014, p. 99–140. On the horoscopes provided by Albumasar and Bacon, see ALBUMASAR, *De magnis coniuctionibus*, tract. I, diff. III, Erhardius Ratdolt, Augustae Vindelicorum, 1489, fol. B2v–B3v; *Abū Maʿšar on Historical Astrology: the Book of Religions and Dynasties, On the Great Conjunctions*, vol. II: *The Latin Versions*, ed. and transl. KEIJI YAMAMOTO, CHARLES BURNETT, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2000, p. 23–27; ROGER BACON, *Opus Majus*, ed. JOHN HENRY BRIDGES, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1897–1900, vol. I, p. 225–226. On Pico and astrology, see OVANES AKOPYAN, *Debating the Stars in the Italian Renaissance. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's* Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem *and Its Reception*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2021. It is also noteworthy that in the sixteenth century, Girolamo Cardano employed his astrological expertise in the same branch of study to substantiate the Gospel's account by providing the horoscope of Christ. See GIROLAMO CARDANO, *La natività del Salvatore e l'astrologia mondiale*, ed. ORNELLA POMPEO FARACOVI, Mimesis, Milano 2002.

world astrology undermined biblical truth and relegated Christian eschatology and its promise of salvation to a mere episode in the universal cycle, ultimately destined to end with the next conjunction. By reducing sacred history to a predictable sequence of planetary configurations, this doctrine risked collapsing divine providence into cosmic necessity, thereby casting doubt on the uniqueness of Christian revelation. Therefore, such a worldview threatened to replace faith with fatalism and undermined the very foundation of the theological concepts of freedom and grace.

VII. *Casting Risky Horoscopes*

The *De septem secundeis* is an unusual example in the context of this astrological literature. It adopted the theoretical framework of world astrology as outlined by Peter of Abano, presenting a universal chronology based on planetary cycles and casting a horoscope of religions. Towards the end of his letter to the Emperor, Trithemius prophesied the decline of Christianity due to the rise of a new grand religious movement, which would erase all previous religions (« Secta religionis consurget magna, veterum destructio religionum »). However, Trithemius's adaptation of Peter's model diverged in crucial ways from both its declared source and the Arab astrological tradition. His cycles did not correspond to conjunctions but rather to fixed regencies where each spirit's influence peaks midway through its cycle, with residual effects extending into the next. Furthermore, Trithemius's historical account was based on the inherent qualities of both each planet and its ruling intelligence, while completely ignoring the position or distance of the planets from each other, as well as their relocation through the zodiac. From this perspective, Trithemius redrafted past events and predicted future developments. According to his overall pattern, the attributes of Samael–Mars or Zachariel–Jupiter could be understood as harbingers of imminent political and religious upheavals.[71]

In the third book of the earlier *Steganographia*, planetary spirits were described as angels that a magician could summon through rituals including prayers and incantations in order to transmit secret thoughts or messages to far-off people. However, modern scholars have deciphered such spells, thereby revealing the

[71] Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 11–12: « Et notandum, quod veteres tradiderunt philosophi quoties Samael, spiritus Martis, rector est orbis, totiens monarchiae notabilis alteratio surgit. Religiones variantur et sectae, mutantur leges, principatusque ad extraneos transferuntur et regna, quod ex historiis per ordinem facile possumus invenire. Verum non statim a principio regiminis Samael hunc manifestat sui moris affectum, sed posteaquam gubernationis suae medium excesserit, quod idem et de aliorum planetarum spiritibus est intelligendum, ut in historiis patet qui omnes secundum proprietates naturae astrorum suorum influunt et operantur ad inferiora mundi huius ». See also, Ibid., p. 42: « [...] circa in principio regiminis huius angeli Zacharielis Iouis, cuius est proprium spiritus, imperia mutare et regna, [...] ».

cryptographic nature of the work, which employed encrypted languages disguised in esoteric and demonological terms.[72] Consequently, there has been a temptation to incorporate the *De septem secundeis*, in conjunction with *Steganographia* and *Polygraphia*, within Trithemius's cryptographic program, as it may potentially conceal coded messages or ciphers behind the temporal sequences or numerical cycles marking the alternation of angelic-planetary regimes. However, as Mentzel-Reuters has observed, the *De septem secundeis* does not provide tables of numbers or letters, nor any other clear indication that could serve as a key for deciphering an encrypted text. His distinctive approach lies in projecting world history onto the angelic order, formulating an unconventional chronology that does not align with a traditional salvation history centered on Christ's birth as the pivotal axis. Instead, Trithemius's primary focus is the systematic enumeration of years: when the theological-angelical framework of his pattern is removed, a purely serial division of history into equal-length segments is revealed, with the aim of 'rational' calculation of time.[73]

[72] A well-known example, also cited by Arnold and Culianu, is drawn from the first book of the *Steganographia*, in which Trithemius describes different methods for decoding encrypted messages. By using the name of the angel placed at the beginning of a message (*Parmesiel*), it becomes possible to identify the cipher needed to decrypt the encoded text. This process involves isolating only those letters within the text that carry meaning and disregarding all others as irrelevant. In the demonic conjuring provided, one must read only the even letters of the even words: « Parmesiel oShUrMi delmuson ThafLoIn peano ChArUsTrEa melani LiAmUmTo colchan PaRois madin MoErLaI bulre ATlEoR don mElCoUe peloin, IbUtSiL meon mIsBrEaTh alini DrIaCo person. TrIsOlNaI lemom aSoSlE midar iCoRiEl pean ThAlMo, asophiel IlNoTrEoN baniel oCrImOs esteuor NaElMa besrona ThUlAoMoR fronian bElDoDrAiN bon oTaLmEsGo merofas ElNaThIn bosramoth ». Through this process, the invocation is revealed to conceal a simple Latin message that explains the procedure itself: « Sum tali cautela ut prime litere cuiuslibet dictionis secretam intencionem tuam reddant legenti » – « I use such caution that the first letters of each word convey your secret intention to the reader ». See Trithemius, *Steganographia*, p. 2.

[73] Mentzel–Reuters, « Serielle Chronographie », p. 389. Trithemius outlines 21 historical cycles beginning with the creation of the world – marked as year 1 and the start of Orifiel–Saturn's first regency – and extending to year 7441, which concludes the third regency of Michael–Sun. This final cycle approximately corresponds to 1879–2233 CE in our current calendar. Trithemius places the birth of Christ in the 245th year of Orifiel–Saturn's third regency, which corresponds to approximately year 5205 from creation. His treatise does not reach the final regency of Michael, but ends with a religious prophecy centered on the third cycle of Samael–Mars (6378–6732), specifically highlighting the year 1525 CE. The subsequent and final cycle, that of Gabriel–Moon (6732–7086), is left to prophetic insight, from which the future course of history must be discerned. On the religious–political meaning of the birth of Christ, Trithemius notes as follows: Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 34: « Nota quam pulchra divinae providentiae ordinatio! Mundus enim sub Orifielis regimine primo creatus est, et sub tertio quoque misericorditer redemptus, instauratus et renovatus, ut huic descriptioni regiminis mundi septem spirituum planetarum fidem non modicam tanta factorum consonantia ministrare videantur. In primo enim regimine Orifielis una totius mundi fuit monarchia, sub secundo [...] in multos divisa.

Nonetheless, Trithemius was careful to maintain a mystical explanation of history that upheld the esoteric understanding of his discourse, as evidenced by the use of prophetic language – without, however, straying into openly superstitious domains or practices such as the *ars notoria*. His commitment to a magical-initiatory interpretation of history is documented in the mystical-apocalyptic prophecy that concludes the treatise. As Noel Brann effectively summarised, considering Trithemius's cosmic vision, « the supposition guiding the abbot in this endeavor is that prophecy [...] represents the extension of history into the future. Conversely, history is consummated prophecy ».[74] The foretelling presented in the *De septem secundeis* pertained to the ominous events marking the end of the third cycle of Samael–Mars, further reinforcing the perception of Trithemius's contribution as an intricate blend and esoteric speculation, astrological historiography, and cryptographic encoding:

> Toward the end of this third revolution of Samael,[75] the image of conflict will shift back to the beginning, and many will be lost. Unless *gamma* is brought back to *alpha*, by the ministry of God, there will be a transfer of some monarchy or of a great kingdom. A great religious sect will arise, and with it the destruction of the old religions.[76] It is to be dreaded that the fourth beast will lose one head. Through the medium of Samael, Mars first of all governed over the flood, and the second time over the destruction of the Trojans. This time, near the end of the epoch, it will watch over the great loss of unity. For from preceding events future ones can be inferred which will follow them. This third revolution of Mars will not be completed without the fulfillment of a prophecy and the founding of a new religion. For in the year 1525, the crosses seen on men's garments a decade earlier will reveal their effect. From now, in the year 1508, there remain seventeen years until the end of Samael's governance, during which signs will appear, marking the beginning of evils. But in thirteen years' time, you, summoned by right, will give place to one who does not know; yet after death, you will rise again greater for me in the third, unless the mist should hide you.[77]

Iterum sub tertio, ut cernitur, in unitatem revocata, licet, si recte metiamur, manifestum etiam fit in secundo regimine Orifielis unam totius mundi fuisse monarchiam, cum turris construeretur Babylon ».

74 Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 134.

75 As Mentzel–Reuters recalls, in ancient Jewish literature, Samael is identified with the Devil: see Mentzel–Reuters, « Serielle Chronographie », p. 391; Gershom Scholem, « Samael », *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., 17 (2007), p. 714–715, in particular p. 714: « Samael, from the amoraic period onward the major name of Satan in Judaism ».

76 On the concept of *secta religionis* as referring to heretical groups in the sixteenth century, see Mentzel–Reuters, « Serielle Chronographie », p. 392.

77 Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 134–135. Adjustments and additions have been made to Brann's partial translation of the passage. Presented here is the original Latin text as it appears in the *editio princeps*: Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, Impressum Nurnberge, Ioannes Haselbergs,

The text's symbolic and deliberately enigmatic formulation posed significant interpretative challenges while eliciting admiration among early readers of *De septem secundeis*. The prophecy for the year 1525 was soon read as a prediction of the Protestant Reformation, and in particular of the Peasants' War. Such retrospective and historically contingent alignment has prompted modern scholars to suspect possible textual manipulations, or even deliberate interpolations, in the printed version, especially in light of the loss of the original manuscript.[78] It remains plausible that such interpolations arose during the process by which Marquard commissioned a copy of the manuscript, potentially introducing revisions or corrections of his own. Conversely, if the transcription was executed faithfully, the interpolated material must already have been present in the exemplar consulted, having been introduced at an earlier stage of the text's transmission.[79]

Notwithstanding these serious philological issues, and the reservations they elicit, we can still endeavour a kind of interpretation or decoding of the prophecy as a scholarly challenge. Trithemius foretells the imminent occurrence of grave calamities for humanity under the third cycle of Mars–Samael, predicated on the 'image of conflict' moving to the beginning, unless the Greek letter *gamma* (γ) is brought back to the Greek letter *alpha* (α) through divine intervention. Such an event would prevent political upheavals and inhibit the proliferation of a new

Nürnberg 1522, fol. B4r: « Circa finem huius 3 revolutionis Samaelis altercationis imago transibit ad primum, et erit perditio multorum. Nisi enim γαμμα [*ed.* Y] reducatur, deo ministrante, ad αλφα, erit alicuius monarchiae, vel magni alicuius translatio regni. Secta religionis consurget magna, veterum destructio religionum. Timendum ne caput unum amittat bestia quarta. In Samaele Mars primo praedixit diluvium, Troianum in secundo excidium, in tertio erit circa finem magnum unitatis detrimentum. Ex precedentibus iudicentur futura quae sequuntur. Non consumabitur Martis haec tertia revolutio sine prophetia, et novae alicuius institutione [*ed.* institutionis] religionis. Ab hinc anno Christianorum 1508 restant anni usque ad finem gubernamenti Samaelis 17, in quibus dabuntur significantes initium malorum figurae. Anno enim Christianorum 1525 cruces in vestimentis hominum, visae ante decennium quod praeteriit, suum ostendent effectum. Sed 13 ab hinc, iure citatus, locum dabis nescienti. Maior post fata resurges mihi in tertio, nisi licet nebula tegas ».

[78] See Isidor Silbernagl, *Johannes Trithemius. Eine monographie*, Krüll'sche Universitäts-Buchhandlung, Landshut 1868, p. 126–127; Wilhelm Schneegans, *Abt Johannes Trithemius und Kloster Sponheim*, Reinhard Schmithals, Kreuznach 1882, p. 182–183; von Bezold, *Astrologische Geschichtskonstruktion*, p. 70–72; Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius,* p. xiii; Mentzel–Reuters, *Serielle Chronographie*, p. 392, note 102.

[79] Mentzel–Reuters, « Serielle Chronographie », p. 391. This problematic picture is further substantiated by the textual intricacies found even within this brief passage which arises complex philological issues, as discussed by Mentzel–Reuters in his clarifying essay. The *editio princeps* of the *De septem secundeis* presented the Latin letter Y, which likely stands for the Greek γ. This interpretation is supported by the peer 1522 German edition, which reads: « Es sey dann, daß das γαμμα auß götlicher ordnung zu dem αλφα, das ist das hynderst zum fordersten widerummb gefürt werde », as reported in Mentzel–Reuters, « Serielle Chronographie », p. 392–393.

religious sect that threatens to supplant traditional worship. The numerical value of the Greek letters, in accordance with ancient numerical conventions, may symbolize the numbers 3 and 1, potentially alluding to cryptographic procedures or serving as fundamental elements within religious and esoteric frameworks. The numbers 1 and 3 not only remind the Trinity and God's assistance against evil, but also function as metaphysical principles in Trithemius's vision of alchemy, facilitating intellectual ascent to truth and the performance of miracles by means of natural magic.

Given its mathematical character, Trithemius's alchemical inquiry was underpinned by numerological assumptions, such as the concept of the *tetractys*, drawing from ancient Pythagoreanism, a tradition that was reinvigorated also through Nicolas of Cusa up to Johann Reuchlin's teachings, particularly in his *De arte cabbalistica*. Trithemius theorised that remarkable natural phenomena, including wonders, portents, and miracles, emerge from the interplay of metaphysical concepts such as unity, duality, triad, tetrad and decade.[80] The practical implementation of numerical principles in alchemy is of particular significance, as these are employed in the manipulation of the four natural elements (water, air, fire, and earth) to evoke the occult virtues of things. As these virtues do not originate from the elements themselves, but rather from their structured interaction influenced by celestial bodies, the alchemist should have been cognizant of both the numerical principles employed in working with the elements and the Hermetic doctrine of the correspondence between higher and lower worlds. This essential concept, particularly successful in Renaissance Neoplatonic cosmology, was embraced by Trithemius following the second precept of the *Tabula Smaragdina*, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus.[81]

Both in the 1503 letter to Johannes von Westenburg and in the 1505 letter to Germain de Ganay, Trithemius focused on the relationship between the One/Monad (*unarius* or *monas*), the Two (*binarius*), the Three (*ternarius*), the Four (*quartenarius*) and the Ten (*denarius*), describing their properties as connected to

[80] Trithemius, *Polygraphiae libri sex*, *praefatio*, fol. A6v: « Adest viro sapienti mens sana in corpore bene morigerato, quae desiderio sublimioris intelligentiae sursum acta, cum per similitudinem binarii a ternario redierit in unitatem, deinceps iam facile ad denarium consurget. Pythagoras Samius ille philosophus, discipulos monuit non esse quaternarii obliviscendum, in quo prima numerandi perfectio comprehenditur. Sic etenim numeramus, unum, duo, tria, quatuor. Siste mentem, habes namque decem. Denarius enim perfectionis est caput ». On the rediscovery of Pythagorism in the Renaissance, see Christiane L. Joost–Gaugier, *Pythagoras and Renaissance Europe: Finding Heaven*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2009.

[81] An insight on the use of the numerical principles in natural magic is presented in Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 93–97. For the Hermetic reference see Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 125–126; Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 67: « Quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius, et quod est inferius est sicut quod est superius, quia solis unitatibus constat omnis numerus ad perpetranda miracula unius rei multa ».

the ascent to the first principle and the transition from the last to the first, as well as the preeminence of the One over the other principles. In this context, he underlined the very same process of *reducere* (to bring back), which in the prophecy connected *gamma* and *alpha*, while in alchemy it related the Three to the One.[82] Such a numerological framework, which recurs many times throughout Trithemius's epistolary exchanges concerning magic, was derived from the teachings of Pelagius of Maiorca through the mediation of Libanius Gallus.

In a 1505 letter to Trithemius, Libanius encouraged his pupil to conduct himself as both a Christian and a Pythagorean, emphasising inner unity and the unity of all things in the One – while eschewing the multitude and preserving in silence the *anacrisis.*[83] This referred to both the secret transmitted to him by his master, the hermit Pelagius, and the eponymous work by Pelagius himself, entitled *Peri anacriseon ton hypnoticon* (*On Revelations of Secret Things in Dreams*), which Libanius would have earlier delivered to Trithemius. This work, dated 1480 and divided into three books, was an esoteric letter addressed to Libanius which dealt with theurgy understood as *ars notoria*. As Peter Forshaw summarised, « It provides extensive advice on how to obtain knowledge in a brief space of time, about any licit art, such as alchemy, discover hidden treasures, or find solutions to problems, with a long list of divinatory arts ». Pelagius's aim was to teach « to raise the intellect and mind from sensible things and elevate them, by intervals to heavenly things ».[84]

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[82] Carlos Gilly, « Tra Paracelso, Pelagio e Ganello: l'ermetismo in John Dee / Between Paracelsus, Pelagius and Ganellus: hermetism in John Dee », in Carlos Gilly, Cis van Heertum (eds.), *Magia, alchimia, scienza dal '400 al '700; L'influsso di Ermete Trismegisto / Magic, Alchemy and Science, 15th–18th Centuries*, Centro Di, Firenze 2002, vol. I, p. 288 (letter to Johannes von Westenburg): « To it, i.e. to the monad, one may proceed from the ternary and the quaternary, so that the denary be completed, from which, through number, there is a return to one[ness]; [there is thus] simultaneously an ascent and a descent to the monad through the tetraktys [...] All those who do not know this principle of the monad will not gain anything in the ternary, and will not attain the sacred quaternary»; Ibid., p. 288 (letter to Germain de Ganay): « The ternary must be reduced to the unity, so that the mind may achieve perfect understanding of these things. The unity is not really a number and yet it is the origin of all numbers. If one rejects the binary, then the ternary can be converted the unity. This recognition of the unity, Germain, is, as Hermes was wont to say, 'true without lies, certain and most true' ». See Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 66–67, 93.

[83] Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 78–80: « Silentio anacrisim serva, nec ante tempus emitte columbam. [...] Unus esto tecum, et cave ne solus. Multitudinem fugito omnem, quia unum est omnia, et sine uno est nihil. [...] Tu tantum in Christo manens fidelis, in uno solo, quod licite potes, Pythagoricus esto ».

[84] Peter Forshaw, *The Mage's Images: Heinrich Khunrath in His Oratory and Laboratory,* vol. III: *Mage & Alchemist*, Brill, Leiden 2025, p. 251. According to both Ms. Lat. 7456 and Ms. Lat. 7486A of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the full title of the work is *Magistri Pelagii heremitae sanctissimi ad Libanium suum in philosophia naturali discipulum epistola in opus subjectum Peri anacriseon ton hypnoticon*. On Pelagius writings, see Julien Veronese, « La notion d''auteur–magicien' à la fin du

Furthermore, Pelagius described the ability to communicate with angels, to learn from them the *arcana* (hidden truths), and to receive their aid in times of danger.

Writing to Trithemius, Libanius referred to this mystical gift as *anacrisis* – a Greek term connoting 'inquiry' or 'examination' in legal context (ancient Greek: ἀνάκρισις) – following Pelagius's use of the term within his own semantic field as referring to the idea of 'intellectual vision' (*visio intellectualis*) and of learning how to access a mystical-prophetic disclosure.[85] In his work, Pelagius had devised a path to spiritual ascent grounded in the interplay between four metaphysical principles: the Monad, the Binary, the Ternary, and the Quaternary, understood not merely as numerical categories, but rather symbolic articulations of the soul's ontological condition and its potential return to divine unity. In this context, the process of *anacrisis* becomes a (Neoplatonic) contemplative and theurgical operation: a mystical form of inner questioning or invocation through which the *arcana* are disclosed to the soul. Pelagius emphasized that such revelation is accessible only to those whose intention is unwavering and whose desire is fervently directed toward spiritual knowledge. When the mind is seized by the intensity of this longing, it is momentarily « carried away from itself » and in this state of ecstasy the *arcana* unveil themselves.[86]

As Carlos Gilly explained, the same Libanius provided in his *Brevis terminorum explicatio libri primi Pelagii, a Libanio tradita Trithemio*, an interesting decipherment of the numerical concepts employed by Pelagius in the *Peri anacriseon*, which would have effectively helped Trithemius in understanding this wondrous art. According to Libanius, the *Monas* signifies the divine mind – the immutable source and principle of all being and knowledge – while the *Binarius* represents either the

Moyen Âge: Le cas de l'ermite Pélagius de Majorque († v. 1480) », *Médiévales*, 51 (2006), p. 119–138; Jean Dupebe, « L'écriture chez l'ermite Pélagius. Un cas de théurgie chrétienne au XV^e^ siècle », in Roger Laufer (ed.), *Le texte et son inscription*, Editions du CNRS, Paris 1989, p. 113–153; Id., « L'ermite Pélagius et les Rose–Croix », in *Rosenkreuz als europäisches Phänomen in 17. Jahrhundert*, Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Pelikan, Amsterdam 2002, p. 134–157.

85 Peter Forshaw, *The Mage's Images*, p. 252.

86 Gilly, « Tra Paracelso, Pelagio e Ganello », p. 289, which presents a quotation and translation of a passage from the *Anacrisis* included in the Ms. Lat. 2902, Paris, Arsenal, fol. 272r–274r: « In order to obtain a distinct revelation of the anacrises, it is necessary that the seeker's intention is firm and constant, and the desire in asking as ardent as possible. The stronger the fervour of the request, the easier it will be to obtain the result requested. This is why each time the mind, thrilled by the intensity of the desire, is carried away, the secrets of the mystery are revealed at once, as all experts of this art have testified: who know how to make the Pythagorean Binary [= the angelic intellect] descend, have drawn the Ternary [= mind, human soul] in the Monas [= divine mind]. Indeed, if man does not learn how to sublimate the Binary in the Monas, he will not succeed in extracting the desired purity from the turbid wine. In the Binary the unity is present only once and hardly is it subtracted through the sacred Quaternary [= working of the mind] from the straight line in the subsistent order, it liberates itself and returns to the most pure and finest Monas ». The conceptual clarifications, included by Gilly in square brackets, will be discussed shortly.

fragmented human mind or the intermediary angelic intellect, depending on its contextual relation to the *Ternarius*. The *Ternarius* itself functions as a mediating principle, denoting the human soul or mind in its active, elevated state, following its path to ascent toward reintegration and unity. Together, these conceptual metaphors delineate a hierarchical metaphysics of spiritual progression, deeply rooted in Neoplatonic psychology. The *Quaternarius*, elsewhere in the same commentary, expands this schema to encompass both the operation of the mind and the human body. Pelagius's mystical system envisions the soul's journey as a movement from multiplicity and division, through mediated harmony, back into the realm of the Monad.

This symbolic order culminated in a series of striking metaphors that describe the soul's progressive interior transformation. As Libanius maintained, « the mind turns the stars into the sun ». It means that the multiplicity of thoughts, images, or intellectual intuitions – figured as stars – is transfigured into the unified light of the sun, emblematic of divine truth and pure intellection. Crucially, this metamorphosis occurs through a spiritual habituation (*consuetudo*) by which the soul becomes accustomed to divine realities, eventually transcending the limits of rational thinking. Similarly, the image of the « line beneath the Monad » signifies the soul's vertical aspiration toward the divine, motivated not by intellectual inquiry but by a longing born of love (*desiderium amoris*). Finally, the triangle emerges as a symbolic synthesis of these dynamics: it represents the soul not merely as intellect, but as intellect animated by desire and inquiry, seeking God through a dialectic of contemplation and yearning. In this geometrical metaphor, thinking, loving, and questioning are not separate faculties but converging movements of a single soul oriented toward the divine. The interplay of number, form, and spiritual psychology in this schema reflects a vision of ascent that is at once intellectual, affective, and metaphysical: a contemplative path of gnosis, wherein the soul regains its original unity through divine illumination and existential purification.[87]

[87] GILLY, « Tra Paracelso, Pelagio e Ganello », p. 293, note 19: « Unitas et Monas frequenter ponuntur pro Mente divina et principio totius [...]. Binarius aliquando ponitur pro intellectu angelico, aliquando etiam pro Mente humana, maxime quando Ternarius non sequitur [...]. Ternarius pro Mente sive anima humana semper accipitur, nisi quando de S. Trinitate sermo proprie habetur [...]. Quaternarius, in hoc libro, pro operatione mentis ponitur. Alias in Philosophia saepius pro humano corpore, ut Deus, Angelus, Anima, Corpus [...]. Binarii Lucentis, id est, Angeli proprii aperta visio ... Ternarius sine interpositione Binarii est Mens sine Angelo in Deum erecta [...]. Stellas Mens convertit in Solem, quando longa consuetudo superat rationem [...]. Linea sub Monade ipsa est Mens per Desiderium amoris elevata in Deum [...] Triangulus est Mentem cum desiderio Quaestionis in Deum elevare; Monadem sine haesitatione inmobili consistentia interrogare; et accepto responso in seipsum descendere ». Libanius's *Brevis terminorum explicatio* is copied in the same manuscript.

Following in the footsteps of his esoteric forerunners, Trithemius identified the path to magical gnosis as one of inner 'reduction' according to three steps: a return of multiplicity to oneness, the rejection of the dyadic principle, and the transmutation of the ternary into the monad. This process, grounded in spiritual discipline and enacted through the *magus*'s volition and faith in God, reestablishes the being's lost unity and initiates a process of supernatural reintegration.[88] A recontextualization of this doctrine helps re-reading the first section of Trithemius's religious prophecy. Informed by alchemical-numerological lens, Trithemius's language is revealed to function as a dual device, serving as a warning to the emperor and an exhortation to take appropriate measures. The threat of subversion, foretold by the rise of the religious sect, may be averted, provided that the path of *anacrisis* is pursued judiciously. In accordance with the theoretical tenets espoused by Pelagius, this process entails the recollection of the Ternary (*gamma*) into the Monad (*alpha*).

As Trithemius would have later outlined in the *quaestio prima* (*De fide et intellectu*) of his 1515 *Liber octo quaestionum*, which follows Thomistic concepts, there is a tripartition of the intellect according to degree from the higher (perfect) to the lower (imperfect) being: divine, angelic, and human. Therefore, it is imperative for the human mind to undergo a reorientation towards the mind of God. In order to reconstitute unity from division, this reorientation is facilitated by the mediating function of the angelic mind, in the same manner as with the human intellect, which acquires knowledge through the intermediation of the angelic intellect.[89] This signifies the restoration of the soul's alignment with the divine order against the cataclysm prophesied, not merely as a theoretical proposition, but rather as a practical injunction based on the principles of *magia naturalis*. In this context, Trithemius's *De septem secundeis* can be understood as an appeal towards political-theological intervention under God's assistance, in which a vision is encoded that sees mystical gnosis as the safeguard of both cosmic and imperial stability.

Although Trithemius did not explicitly refer to great conjunctions, his prophecy concerning the year 1525 may have been influenced by contemporary

[88] Trithemius's distinction between true and false alchemy, as outlined in his letter to de Ganay, was grounded on these conceptual foundations. Whilst the former sought spiritual purification through comprehension of numerical principles governing nature, the latter, predicated on secular endeavours to manufacture gold, was motivated solely by human avidity and lack of faith. See Trithemius, *De septem secundeis*, p. 68–69; Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 70–71, 126–128.

[89] Trithemius, *Liber octo quaestionum*, ch. I, fol. Aiiv: « Unde manifestum est quod angelicus [intellectus] immobiliter proprium apprehendit obiectum. Ad quod humanus per medium angelicum post multas sui exercitationes [...] tandem aliquando discurrens sibi parat ascensum ». On the tripartition of the intellect, see ibid., fol. Ar–v; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I[a], q. 87, art. 3.

astrological literature on the terrifying flood predicted for 1524. This hypothesis was supported by Paola Zambelli, who drew attention to the shattering fear as a result of the grand conjunction of all planets in Pisces around February 20th, as anticipated by Johannes Stöffler and Jacob Pflaum in their *Almanach nova* (1499). In their calculations included in this widespread *prognosticum*, Stöffler and Pflaum identified sixteen planetary conjunctions occurring in the water sign of Pisces in February 1524, which they interpreted as heralding a period of extraordinary and transformative upheaval.[90] This widely circulated forecast inspired more detailed and ominous interpretations from coeval astrologers, such as Luca Gaurico in his multiple *prognostica*, who anticipated cataclysmic events such as a great flood, earthquakes, widespread disease, and the emergence of a false prophet.

Since the prediction sparked intense debate among prominent astrologers (such as Johann Virdung, Georg Tannstetter, Agostino Nifo, Paul of Middleburg) and incited public anxiety about the approaching of a second universal flood, Trithemius's prophecy could have been prompted by the frightening expectations it generated.[91] The temporal proximity to the predicted deluge, the forecasted rise of a new religious sect, the implied warning of dynastic collapse, and the emphasis on political-religious disorder, all resonate with the tone of contemporary predictions. Furthermore, Trithemius's symbolic language suggests an implicit engagement with the same cosmological worries. His allusions to cataclysm, spiritual disintegration, and the need for divine restoration, while veiled, may reflect a theurgical reinterpretation of the astrological fears surrounding the year 1524, reframed within his own esoteric framework as a break in religious unity, according to his planetary cycle system.

Besides, Trithemius's forecast drew upon biblical apocalyptic narrative, as he alluded to the beasts described in the *Book of Daniel*, particularly in the chapters delineating four visions concerning the history of humanity as the sequence of four empires which prepare the advent of the kingdom of God (Dn 7:1–28). In this prophecy, Daniel is said to have encountered four monstrous beasts that symbolise

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[90] Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. V, New York, Columbia University Press, 1941, p. 181: « In this year we shall see eclipse neither of sun nor moon. But in this year will occur positions of the planets well worthy of wonderment. For in the month of February will occur twenty conjunctions, small, mean and great, of which sixteen will occupy a watery sign, signifying to well nigh the whole world, climates, kingdoms, provinces, estates, dignitaries, brutes, beasts of the sea, and to all dwellers on earth indubitable mutation, variation and alteration such as we have scarce perceived for many centuries from historiographers and our elders. Lift up your heads, therefore, ye Christian men ». See Ioannes Stoefflerinus Iustigensis, Iacobus Pflaumen Vlmensis, *Almanach nova plurimis annis venturis inservientia...*, Ioannes Reger, Ulm 1499, [fol. 389r]. The hypothesis is presented in Zambelli, *White magic*, p. 78–80.

[91] On the unfolding of the whole debate, see Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, p. 178–233; Paola Zambelli, «Many Ends for the World: Luca Gaurico Instigator of the Debate in Italy and in Germany», in Ead. (ed.), '*Astrologi hallucinati*', p. 239–264; Robin B. Barnes, *Astrology and Reformation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, p. 82–130.

ancient historical empires: a winged lion representing Babylon, a bear with ribs in its mouth signifying the Median Empire, a four-headed winged leopard denoting the Persian Empire, and a final beast described obscurely as possessing iron teeth and ten horns, which is reputed to indicate the Macedonian empire. An eleventh small horn, which rises among the others and uproots at least three of them, bearing human-like eyes and a mouth that speaks arrogant words, is interpreted as referring to Antiochus IV Epiphanes and, accordingly, the Seleucid dynasty that emerged from the dissolution of Alexander the Great's empire.[92]

Prominent Christian exegetes of the *Book of Daniel*, including Irenaeus of Lyon, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine, engaged in discourse about the correct interpretation of Daniel's metaphors and the foretelling of the Antichrist. For instance, as Eusebius of Caesarea before him, St. Jerome conducted a fierce polemics with Porphyry's *Against the Christians*, which sought to deny both the authorship of the prophet's book and the very same nature of its prophecies, contextualising them as referring to past historical events.[93] In his *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, he focused on the identification of the fourth beast with the Roman Empire, while challenging Porphyry's reading of the third and fourth beasts as both referring to the Macedonian history, thereby collapsing the fourth and third empires into a single Macedonian sequence which would have denied any reference to future happenings. In Porphyry's exegesis, the leopard represented Alexander, with the final unidentified beast being interpreted as a symbol of his four successors. In this way, Daniel's mention of the ten horns implied a review of ten kings up to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the eleventh ruler, while the uprooted horns signified Ptolemy VI Philometor, Ptolemy VII Evergetes, and Artaxia I of Armenia.[94]

On the contrary, St. Jerome claimed that the ten horns denoted the collapse of the Roman Empire and its subsequent division into ten kingdoms. By adopting this exegetical framework, he considered the absence of an animal comparison for the fourth beast as serving to emphasise the unparalleled brutality of Rome and

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92 For an overview, see JOHN J. COLLINS, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Matrix of Christianity*, Crossroad, New York 1987 (1984[1]), p. 68–92; JOHN J. COLLINS, PETER W. FLINT (eds.), *The Book of Daniel. Composition and Reception*, 2 vols., Brill, Boston – Leiden 2002.

93 SOPHRONIUS EUSEBIUS HIERONYMUS, *Commentaria in Danielem*, in JACQUES PAUL MIGNE (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, vol. XXV, Paris 1845, col. 491–492; PORPHYRY, *Against the Christians*, ed. ROBERT M. BERCHMANN, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2005, p. 157; JAY BRAVERMAN, *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel. A Study of Comparative Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Hebrew Bible*, The Catholic Biblical Association of America, Washington (DC) 1978, p. 91–94. On Porphyry's interpretation of Daniel's prophecies, see PHILIP MAURICE CASEY, « Porphyry and the Origin of the Book of Daniel », *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 27/1 (1978), p. 15–33; SAMUEL MULLINS, « The Rules of Engagement: Porphyry's Attack on Christian Allegory », *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition*, 19/1 (2023), p. 47–64.

94 EUSEBIUS HIERONYMUS, *Commentaria in Danielem*, col. 530.

regarded this beast as a combination of all the ferocious characteristics of the previous ones. As Porphyry's sought to contain the Daniel's visions within the context of Hellenistic dynasties, St. Jerome reasserted the eschatological orientation of the prophecy, identifying the little horn with the Antichrist, who will arise in the last days from the fragmentation of the Roman Empire. As St. Jerome maintained, Daniel's vision anticipated the final judgment in accordance with the broader Christian apocalyptic tradition.[95]

However vivid Trithemius's apocalyptic imagery may be, it remains fundamentally unclear which of Daniel's beasts he intended to invoke. In his prophecy, he warns of the danger that the 'fourth beast' might lose one of its heads. This formulation, however, appears at odds with Daniel's vision, as Mentzel-Reuters has observed. In the biblical account, it is the third beast – the leopard – that possesses four heads, whereas the fourth beast is not likened to any known animal and is described instead as having a single head crowned with ten horns, three of which are uprooted by a smaller, eleventh horn. Trithemius thus seems to conflate features of the third and fourth beasts, giving rise to a marked interpretative ambiguity. Whether this conflation reflects a deliberate mystical strategy, an exegetical misunderstanding, or a mere scribal error remains an open question.

If Trithemius's prophecy was shaped by Jerome's commentary or by Porphyry's critical observations, its cryptic imagery may plausibly be read as an allusion to the Holy Roman Empire. Trithemius appears to have engaged with the *Book of Daniel* in a selective and unsystematic manner, fashioning an allegorical construct designed to address pressing contemporary political concerns. By embedding theological and political anxieties within a deliberately opaque biblical idiom, he may have sought to deliver a veiled admonition to Emperor Maximilian, who had been crowned in Trent on 4 February 1508 and later played a key role in the formation of the League of Cambrai against Venice during the second phase of the Italian Wars. In doing so, the abbot positioned the Holy Roman Empire at the centre of an imminent eschatological crisis. This interpretation is further reinforced by the concluding apostrophe, addressed directly to the emperor, which anticipates his eventual resurgence or triumph in the face of the impending upheaval.

At the heart of the prophecy lies a symbolic characterization of Maximilian I, portrayed by Trithemius as a Christ-like figure, as suggested by the idea of resurrecting greater after death in the third cycle of Samael–Mars. The lexical choices are carefully calibrated to resonate with the imagery of the mythical phoenix, a creature that is cyclically reborn from its own ashes. This well-established symbol of Christ here seems less to anticipate a strictly soteriological

[95] Eusebius Hieronymus, *Commentaria in Danielem*, col. 530–531.

resurrection than to prefigure the political and spiritual renewal of the German Empire under Maximilian's guidance. Similarly, the motif of concealment 'behind a cloud' may be read as an allusion to the biblical topos of divine hiddenness. In the Gospels, Christ's post-resurrection appearances culminate in his ascension into heaven (Matthew 24:30; Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51), accompanied by his concealment within a cloud (Acts 1:9–11). Such imagery of veiling or obscuration may signify not a definitive withdrawal, but rather a temporary absence preceding a triumphant return, thereby reinforcing the messianic typology ascribed to the German emperor. Moreover, the present participle *nescienti* is not entirely incidental to this Christological framing. It may subtly evoke the theological controversy surrounding the Arian doctrine of the *Christus nesciens*, namely Christ's professed ignorance of the precise moment of the Last Judgement, as articulated in Mark 13:32. Within Trithemius's symbolic economy, this element of divinely sanctioned unknowing may serve to underscore the tension between concealment and revelation, ignorance and foreknowledge, that underpins both eschatological expectation and imperial destiny.[96]

Furthermore, Trithemius draws attention to the appearance of 'the crosses on men's clothing' (« cruces in vestimentis hominum »), which were seen almost a decade before 1508 and were believed to manifest their full significance by 1525. This detail invited a layered interpretation. On one level, as Zambelli suggests, the imagery evokes the Crusades. On another level, the rise of the religious sect could be linked to the threat posed by the Turks. As Mentzel-Reuters notes, a later German translation of the *De septem secundeis*, entitled *Wunderbüchlein, wie die Welt von anfang regiert ist* and published in Speyer in 1529, adopted this latter reading. Therefore, Trithemius foretelling could be interpreted as a call for a renewed campaign against the Ottoman Empire.

Although his interpretation of the crosses is embedded within an esoteric and highly opaque symbolic framework, Trithemius nonetheless correlates the phenomenon with specific historical events, which he documents with remarkable care. In the *Annales Hirsaugienses*, he records the reappearance of such miraculous signs at pivotal moments in history, including a notable instance in 958, during the reign of Emperor Otto I. The phenomenon resurfaced once again in 1500, this time on an unprecedented scale across wide regions of Europe. According to Trithemius's account, crosses began to appear spontaneously on garments and household textiles – shirts, women's clothing, tablecloths, and other fabrics – not only on items in daily use, but even on those kept in locked chests and seemingly untouched. The manifestation extended to liturgical textiles as well, including altar cloths, corporals, and priestly albs. The first occurrences were

[96] See Kevin Madigan, « *Christus Nesciens*? Was Christ Ignorant of the Day of Judgment? Arian and Orthodox Interpretation of Mark 13:32 in the Ancient Latin West », *The Harvard Theological Review*, 96/3 (2003), p. 255–278.

reported along the Rhine and soon spread throughout much of Germany, encompassing Swabia, Franconia, Bavaria, Austria, Bohemia, and Saxony, before reaching Denmark, Poland, Holland, Brabant, and even parts of France. These signs provoked widespread fear and astonishment among the population. The crosses themselves were described as small and irregular in form, resembling stains produced by a greasy or oily substance. They could not be removed by washing and typically faded only after nine days, a temporal detail that further reinforced their perceived supernatural character.[97]

In addition to the crosses, Trithemius also records the manifestation of other signs of Christ's Passion – nails, the lance, the crown of thorns, scourges, and Greek-like characters. These appeared in churches during divine services, on canons' rochets, on altar cloths, and on the garments of certain women – always on linen. Notably, the abbot links these portents with a significant mortality rate that followed their appearance, suggesting that they served as divine omens warning of the plague that spread soon after. Indeed, in 1502 and again in 1503, the plague afflicted many of the same regions where the crosses had first appeared, seemingly confirming their connection to impending catastrophe.[98]

Yet the significance of these crosses should not be reduced to that of mere portents of disease or physical calamity. They also bear a deeper mystical and theological resonance, functioning as symbols of an impending religious upheaval.

[97] TRITHEMIUS, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. II, p. 580 (year 1500): « Anno praenotato cruces apparuerunt in lineis vestimentis hominum, in camisiis, in linteaminibus, in mensalibus, in peplis mulierum, in albis sacerdotum, et corporalibus, non solum in his, quae in quotidiano habebantur usu, sed etiam in illis, quae abscondita jacebant in cistis, ad quae nullus poterat aeris penetrare influxus. Caeperunt autem inprimis apparere circa Rhenum, ac deinde per totam Germaniam, in Suevia, in Francia Orientali, in Bavaria, in Austria, in Bohemia, in Saxonia, in Dacia, in Polonia, in Hollandia, in Brabantia, per Galliamque totam, non sine timore et horrore magno mortalium. Subito et insperato apparuerunt, ut cadere quodammodo putarentur de coelo. [...] Erant autem cruces parvulae, confusi et subrubri coloris, ac si pannus aliqua pinguedine mixti coloris fuisset intinctus. Non poterant aliqua lotione deleri, sed post nonum diem ut plurimum per se evanescebant. In quibus etiam cum crucibus magnis apparuerunt multae cruces parvulae, characteres in mondum Graecarum litterarum, clavi quoque, lancea, spinea corona, virgae, flagella, et reliqua Dominicae Passionis insignia, eratque videre terribile miraculum. Astantibus enim in ecclesia canonicis apparuerunt in rocchetis eorum, simul et in pallis altarium, et presertim in peplis mulierum, non omnium, sed quarundam, et solum in lineo. Magna mortalitas has cruces secuta est ».

[98] TRITHEMIUS, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. II, p. 588 (year 1502): « Eodem anno, magna ubique per omnem Germaniam pestilentia grassabatur, et multa milia hominum consumpsit. Praesignata ut multorum fuit opinio per cruces, quas in lineis vestibus hominum ante biennium apparuisse diximus, quarum casus in annum duravit tertium, non simul et semel il locis omnibus, sed jam in isto, tunc vero in alio. Videbantur etiam nonnulli cruces habuisse in suis corporibus ad cutem, qui ut plurimum omnes eodem anno, vel sequente fuerunt consupti a peste »; ibid., vol. II, p. 595 (year 1503): « Adhuc saeviens pestilentia consumpsit mortales, et pecorum ingens mortalitas fuit, praestiteruntque iam nunc, quae apparuerunt cruces ante biennium, significationis suae formidabile triplicis futurae calamitatis principium ».

Trithemius records additional signs of a heightened apocalyptic consciousness around 1501, among them the emergence of a mysterious eastern ruler variously named *Sichin* or *Sophoi*, who can almost certainly be identified as Shah Ismāʿīl I of Persia, the founder of the Safavid dynasty. Trithemius depicts Shah Ismāʿīl as a charismatic and militarily formidable leader who assembled a vast following drawn largely from social outcasts and the dispossessed, enabling him to seize control of Persia and to challenge Ottoman supremacy. This sudden ascent is framed not merely as a geopolitical development, but as a portent of a far-reaching spiritual crisis. According to Trithemius, the new Shah aspired to universal dominion and sought to impose a single, unified religion upon the world, thereby abolishing religious plurality altogether. In this light, he was perceived by contemporaries as an ambivalent and deeply troubling figure, simultaneously revered by some as a new prophet and feared by others as the Antichrist.

The abbot's commentary on these events is markedly polemical, particularly in his denunciation of the Jews, whom he accuses of erroneously identifying this figure as their long-awaited Messiah. For Trithemius, such beliefs exemplified the dangers of false messianic expectation in an age of eschatological ferment. Accordingly, the year 1501 is construed not simply as a chronological marker, but as a symbolic threshold: the onset of an eschatological transformation characterised by upheaval, deceptive hope, and the imminence of divine judgement.[99]

This extended analysis allows us to draw several conclusions regarding a plausible interpretation of Trithemius's cryptic message to Maximilian I. The notion that Trithemius possessed genuine prophetic insight into future developments – such as the Protestant Reformation – may be safely set aside. Nor is it necessary to presume textual manipulation, since the prophecy associated with the year 1525 merely condenses a range of historical episodes, symbolic motifs, and esoteric traditions into a small number of densely charged formulations, all refracted through the astrological framework of the *De septem secundeis*. Rather than functioning as a literal prediction, Trithemius's prophecy is more convincingly understood as a symbolic admonition: a veiled warning

[99] Trithemius, *Annales Hirsaugienses*, vol. II, p. 583–584: « Triennio ferme de illo duravit rumor in tota Europa magnus, aliis dicentibus illum prophetam Dei esse novum atque potentem, qui totum mundum sibi subjecturus sit, et omnes religionum diversitates revocaturus in unitatem. Erant qui hominem ipsum dicerent esse finalem illum Antichristum, alii nescio quid aliud eum in orbe magnum somniabant esse futurum. Sed plus omnibus laetabantur caeci et infelices Judaei per totam Europam ubilibet constituti, hunc suum rati Messiam, quem semper expectant nunquam futurum, [...]. Mittunt sibi nuntios Judaei atque munuscula, spem erigunt, confortant animo desperatos, multa promittunt, maxima pollicentur, hunc esse testantur, quem sibi salvatorem diu sunt praestolati, quo videlicet regnante magnum Palestinae sint brevi dominium recepturi. Sed erraverunt decepti ut saepius, quoniam Sophi nullam gentem, ut dicitur, magis habet invisam, quam Judaeorum ».

addressed directly to the emperor. By encoding a vision of impending religious and political rupture within the language of biblical typology and apocalyptic allegory, Trithemius urges Maximilian to assume a quasi-messianic role in the preservation of order and the defense of Christendom. Within this interpretive framework, the appearance of crosses serves as both visual evidence and symbolic confirmation of this summons, anchoring the urgency of the message in concrete phenomena observed between 1500 and 1502 and interpreted as manifestations of divine intent. Trithemius's prophecy, therefore, is best read not as a forecast of specific future events, but as a politically charged exhortation cloaked in apocalyptic imagery: a plea for decisive imperial intervention at a moment perceived as one of acute historical and spiritual crisis.

VIII. *Emperor's* Enchiridion

A strictly political interpretation of the prophecy provides a compelling lens through which to apprehend the ultimate purpose of Trithemius's *De septem secundeis*. As Francisco de Paula Souza de Mendonça has insightfully observed, the fact that Trithemius – through his cryptographic writings – sought to furnish his high-ranking correspondents with instruments capable of enhancing and consolidating political authority over time lends considerable weight to this reading. Both the *Steganographia* and the *Polygraphia*, with their intricate systems for the encoding and transmission of secret messages, illustrate how cryptography could be harnessed by rulers for strategic ends: to protect sensitive information in diplomatic exchanges, to detect conspiracies or internal dissent, and, ultimately, to secure the continuity of sovereign power.[100] By way of example, in his controversial letter of 1499 to Arnold Bost, Trithemius asserts that the mysteries of the art of steganography – disclosed to him through supernatural means – are principally of value within the political sphere, and that, for the good of the state, such knowledge ought to be reserved exclusively for princes. He explicitly cautions against its wider dissemination, contending that, if placed in the wrong hands, it could give rise to deception, betrayal, and moral corruption.[101]

[100] Francisco de Paula Souza de Mendonça, « Anjos planetários e o mundo sublunar: Trithemius, astrologia e política nos séculos XV e XVI », *Revista História: Debates e Tendências*, 19/1 (2019), p. 135–146.

[101] See the concluding remarks of the letter, which was included in Gaspar Schott, *Schola steganographica in classes octo distribuita*, Sumptibus Iohannis Andreae Endteri, Würzburg 1680, p. 215: « Si quaeris, unde mihi ista, quae nemo alius novit? Audi. Non ab homine, neque per hominem ista didici, sed per revelationem nescio cuius. [...] Neminem ista adhuc docui, quamvis multi promittentes magna saepe rogarint, praeter unum principem cui scribo. Nec decet ista alios scire, quam principes, alioquin multa ea fierent mala, traditiones, deceptiones, fornicationes, et alia quaecunque vellent homines mali. Sed bene utentes arte, multa per eam bona reipublicae facere possent ».

In this light, the *De septem secundeis* likewise emerges as a distinctly political instrument. By constructing a historical model grounded in the cyclical governance of planetary intelligences, Trithemius offers Maximilian a conceptual framework through which to interpret, anticipate, and regulate collective human behaviour – whether that of subjects, allies, or adversaries. The supremacy of the German emperor, legitimated within the present cycle ruled by Mars, is thus underwritten by knowledge of Samael, the planetary intelligence presiding over the age, together with the religious and socio-political transformations that his influence is destined to unfold. Armed with this esoteric insight, Maximilian would be positioned to act deliberately and strategically: to discern recurring patterns, neutralise emerging threats, and ultimately shape the course of events, thereby attaining a degree of mastery over historical contingency. By embedding cryptographic prophecy within a planetary historiography, Trithemius offers a form of strategic foresight – a coded manual of imperial governance concealed beneath prophetic language. His synthesis of mystical, political, and cosmological elements thus elevates astrology into a quasi-rational science, capable of disclosing both divine intention and the scope of human agency. The *De septem secundeis*, in this interpretation, does not simply forecast future events; it equips its imperial reader with the interpretative instruments required to navigate – and potentially to direct – them.[102]

Trithemius's *De septem secundeis* offers a sophisticated synthesis of astrology, theology, and cryptography, constructing a deterministic yet pliable model of history that reconciles astral causality with human agency. By mapping the rise and decline of empires onto celestial cycles governed by planetary intelligences, the abbot advances a teleological vision that merges prophetic insight with political utility, thereby addressing the perennial tension between fate and free will. His historiographical method frames history as both a divine narrative and a coded system, wherein human actors – most notably rulers – may exert influence through knowledge, discernment, and timely action. In this context, the emperor is no longer merely a passive subject of fate, but an informed participant in the divine economy, capable of negotiating historical contingency through esoteric understanding.

The philosophical implications of this model resonate beyond immediate politics, engaging Renaissance debates on providence, contingency, and the compatibility of divine omniscience with human freedom. Trithemius constructs a vision of history as a decipherable text – a tapestry woven by divine will but legible to those equipped with the right interpretive tools. His fusion of prophetic language, astrological theory, and cryptographic methods reflects the intellectual ambitions of Renaissance polymathy and situates his work at the crossroads of

[102] DE PAULA SOUZA DE MENDONÇA, « Anjos planetários », p. 141.

magic, religion, and statecraft. In the final analysis, the *De septem secundeis* presents history not merely as a record of past events, but as a structured system through which the human intellect may understand the nature of time, anticipate its unfolding, and act prudently within it. Trithemius thus provides a framework for navigating the complexities of temporal power, religious transformation, and eschatological expectation – an ambitious attempt to align cosmic order with political foresight at a moment of profound historical uncertainty.

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SEARCHING FOR MUSIC, FINDING RATIOS:
THE BRETHREN OF PURITY'S EPISTLES *ON MUSIC* AND *ON PROPORTIONS* IN THE JUDEO-ARABIC MEDICAL TRADITION*

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Abstract

This study examines the inclusion of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ's epistles *On Music* and *On Proportions* (*Epistles 5* and *6*) under a single title, *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* (*Book of Music*), in the Berlin composite manuscript Or. Oct. 350, a fifteenth-century Judeo-Arabic compilation from the Iberian Peninsula devoted to medicine. The *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* (fol. 28v–30v) also contains a short passage on the musical nature of the pulse that explicitly refers to Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) – a section absent from the known Arabic corpus of the *Epistles*. Through an examination of the codicological and textual structure of the manuscript, the study investigates how the transmission of *ʿilm al-mūsīqī* (the science of music) within a Judeo-Arabic medical framework reflects a broader understanding of ratios and proportions as principles connecting musical, mathematical, and physiological knowledge. It suggests that such an understanding preserves the original theoretical sense of *mūsīqī*, later echoed in its European reception under the aegis of al-Fārābī.

Key Words

Judeo-Arabic tradition; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ; Ibn Sīnā; al-Fārābī; Arabic music theory; medicine; mathematics; examination of pulse

I. *Introduction*

> Contepletur numeros secundum se Arithmeticus, numeros certe sub ratione ad aliud cognoscent Musicus, et Algebræus.
> Gulielmi Gosselini, *De arte magna, seu de occulta parte numerorum*[1]

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[1] (« Let the arithmetician contemplate numbers in themselves while the musician and the algebraist know them in relation to one another »). GULIELMUS GOSSELINUS, *De arte magna, seu de*

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The folios 28v–30v of the Berlin composite manuscript Or. Oct. 350[2] contain several notable features that contribute to their significance. First, they are written in Arabic in Hebrew characters – here referred to as Judeo-Arabic in this graphic and codicological sense – and contain a compendium of two *Epistles* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ (Brethren of Purity, tenth century), providing compelling evidence that these texts were known and studied within Jewish intellectual circles. Secondly, since the manuscript has been identified as copied in various Sephardic scripts and dated mainly to the fifteenth–sixteenth century in Iberian Peninsula, these folios further support the idea that the Ikhwanian tradition was known and transmitted in that milieu.

Additionally, the two epistles correspond to *Epistle 5*[3] (*Epistle on Music*) and *Epistle 6*[4] (*Epistle on Proportions*), both presented under the shared title *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* (*Book of Music*). Amnon Shiloah had already identified the presence of both epistles in the Berlin manuscript. The present analysis builds on this observation by reconsidering the significance of their joint transmission: the two treatises are not merely copied side by side, but appear as complementary parts of a single study on musical science. This fusion, grounded in the concept of ratios and proportions, nuances interpretations that treat the two epistles as separate works and risk overlooking the mathematical dimension of the theoretical science of

occulta parte numerorum, quae et algebra et almucabala vulgo dicitur, libri quatuor, Aegidius Beys, Paris 1577, p. 2. As in Peter Pesic's study of the relations between music and mathematics, I begin with this same passage from Gosselinus which – though composed in the late Renaissance – encapsulates the enduring conception of *musica est scientia proportionum*: while arithmetic contemplates *numeros secundum se*, music considers *numeros sub ratione ad aliud* – numbers in relation to one another. Could there be a more fitting expression of what Arabic and Judeo-Arabic scholars called *ʿilm al-mūsīqī*, the mathematical science of ratios and proportions? See, Peter Pesic, *Music and the Making of Modern Science*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2014.

2 Moritz Steinschneider, *Verzeichniss der hebräischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, vol. II, A. Asher, Berlin 1897, p. 98–100 (Oct. 350). This manuscript, catalogued as *Medizinische Sammelhandschrift: Arabisch in hebräischer Schrift* (Medical Compendium Manuscript: Arabic in Hebrew Script) and held by the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Germany, is accessible as a digital resource at https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN1042512213; and at https://www.qalamos.net/receive/DE1Book_manuscript_00004163 (Accessed Oct. 2025). See also Amnon Shiloah *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (c. 900–1900): Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in Libraries of Europe and the U.S.A.*, G. Henle Verlag, München 1979, p. 383–384, cat. no. 286.

3 Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Risāla fīʾl-mūsīqī* (*Epistle on Music*; *Epistle 5*, hereafter). Please refer to the critical edition, Id., *On Music: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 5*, ed. and transl. Owen Wright, Oxford University Press – The Institute of Ismaili Studies, Oxford 2010.

4 Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Risāla fīʾl-nisab al-ʿadadiyya wa al-handasiyya wa al-taʾlīfiyya.* (*Epistle On Arithmetical, Geometrical and Harmonic Proportions*; *Epistle 6*, hereafter). See Id., *On Composition and the Arts: Arabic Edition and English Translation of Epistles 6–8*, ed. and transl. Nader El-Bizri, Godefroid de Callataÿ, Oxford University Press – The Institute of Ismaili Studies, Oxford 2018.

music – a discipline through which, as the Brethren state, « dexterity in every art and craft » (*al-ḥidhq fī al-ṣanāʾiʿ kullihā*) is attained.[5]

Within this framework, the *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* appears in a composite manuscript (Berlin, Or. Oct. 350) comprising several well-known Arabic treatises primarily devoted to medicine. At first glance, the inclusion of a musical treatise among medical texts may seem accidental – perhaps the result of the compiler's choices or the constraints of available space. Yet there are strong reasons to think otherwise. First, the index preceding the collation confirms the actual structural organization of the extant manuscript, listing the science of *mūsīqī*[6] among the medical works, even though the individual treatises do not occupy exactly the same place in the order. Second, the inclusion is further justified by the final section of the treatise itself, which explicitly applies musical ratios to the perception of the pulse, thus connecting musical and medical knowledge. Third, if we reconsider how the science of music was understood in the Arabic and Judeo-Arabic traditions up to the fifteenth century, its presence within a medical compilation appears entirely consistent.

Understanding *mūsīqī* [7] as a mathematical science of number, ratio, and proportion clarifies its practical role within a medical framework.

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[5] I have addressed this problem in two related studies, where I argued that previous scholarship has often treated *Epistles 5* and *6* separately, without sufficiently considering their conceptual affinity and their shared grounding in the science of ratios and proportions. See Laura Tribuzio, « Restoring Harmony through the Propaedeutic Science of Music: A Reconsideration of the Brethren of Purity's *Epistle on Music* and Its Relation with the *Epistle on Proportions* », in Godefroid de Callataÿ, Sébastien Moureau (eds.), *Power, Religion, and Wisdom. Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in al-Andalus and Beyond = Micrologus. Nature, Sciences and Medieval Societies*, 33 (2025), p. 335–367; and Ead., « The Exception is Music. From Harmony to the Occult Arts in the Reordering of the Brethren of Purity's *Epistles 5* and *6* », in Godefroid de Callataÿ, Sébastien Moureau (eds.), *Science and Craft: The Relations Between the Theoretical and Practical Sides of the Occult and Esoteric Sciences in the Islamic World*, SISMEL–Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze (forthcoming 2026). The present article builds on these studies by showing that the Judaeo-Arabic *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* offers manuscript evidence for the close relationship between the two epistles.

[6] In Arabic and Judeo-Arabic sources, the term for music appears in both forms, *mūsīqī* and *mūsīqā*. For reasons of consistency, I have adopted *mūsīqī* as the normalized analytical form, since it is more frequently attested in the manuscript. Where the form *mūsīqā* occurs, I indicate it explicitly, as in the title *Kitāb al-mūsīqā*. In this case, I retain the manuscript form rather than following Shiloah's normalization as *Kitāb al-mūsīqī*.

[7] It would be prudent to refrain from translating the term *mūsīqī* as 'music' in this specific context, as it appears to have been employed primarily as a transliteration of the Greek word *mousikē* (μουσική), generally used to refer to *harmonia* (ἁρμονία). Since the eighth–ninth centuries, this transliterated Greek term has been utilized in scientific and philosophical Arabic contexts to designate the discipline primarily concerned with ratios and proportions. This particular discipline is technically referred to as *ʿilm al-taʾlīf* (the science of harmony), as exemplified by the excerpt from the Brethren of Purity provided here: « In this Epistle, which is commonly known as the 'Epistle on Music' (*al-risāla al-mulaqqaba biʾl-mūsīqī*), we want to recall the art that is composed by bodily and spiritual [matter] which is the art of harmony (*ṣināʿa al-taʾlīf*) and the

In this tradition, *mūsīqī* was a mathematical discipline concerned with ratios and proportions – the science of harmony (*ʿilm al-taʾlīf*) – which could also be brought into relation with physiological observation. For a physician, musical science could therefore offer a conceptual framework for understanding measured relations in the body, especially in the analysis of the pulse, a central component of medical assessment and prognosis in classical medicine. With this additional section – absent from the original Epistles – the *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* echoes *Avicenna's Kitāb al-Qānūn fī l-ṭibb* (*The Book of the Canon of Medicine*) by showing how musical ratios could be brought into relation with the proportional and rhythmic structure of the pulse. The final section of the treatise should therefore not be understood as a simple appendix or as a mere justification for the presence of musical material in a medical manuscript. It does not offer a full commentary on Avicenna's passage in the *Qānūn*, but rather a selective and highly compressed reworking of it. The compiler explicitly recalls Ibn Sīnā's discussion of musical ratios in relation to the pulse, yet reshapes this material in light of the proportional theory developed earlier in the treatise. In this sense, the Judaeo-Arabic *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* adds something significant to Avicenna's observations: it re-situates the medical discussion of the pulse within an Ikhwānian mathematical framework, where musical consonance, proportion, and the rhythm of the living body are brought into relation.

II. *The Brethren of Purity's* Epistles 5 *and* 6 *in the Judeo-Arabic Tradition*

A substantial body of literature has explored the transmission and reception of the Brethren of Purity's ideas in al-Andalus and, more broadly, in the medieval Iberian Peninsula, both through direct and indirect references. Several studies have traced their influence across different intellectual circles, with particular attention to Jewish authors and readers.[8]

Within the Judeo-Arabic transmission of the *Epistles*,[9] notable translations include, to the best of my knowledge, the *Risāla al-jāmiʿa* (*The Comprehensive*

knowledge of proportions (*al-nisab*) », Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Epistle 5*, p. 6. For further evidence and detailed explanations, see Tribuzio, « Restoring Harmony », p. 346–355.

[8] While likewise it is not within the scope of this paper to present a comprehensive survey of this vast field, it is worth noting the sustained scholarly interest in the influence of the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* on both Kabbalistic and Neoplatonic Jewish thought, as well as in the exploration of their possible Ismāʿīlī background – an approach exemplified by Sarah Stroumsa, « Wondrous Paths: The Ismāʿīlī Context of Saadya's 'Commentary on *Sefer Yeṣira*' », *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter*, 18/1 (2015), p. 74–90; Ehud Krinis, « Cyclical Time in the Ismāʿīlī Circle of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ (Tenth Century) and in Early Jewish Kabbalists Circles (Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries) », *Studia Islamica*, 111/1 (2016), p. 20–108.

[9] Apart from the preliminary list of approximately one hundred manuscripts scattered across Europe, Iran, and Turkey, as reported by Nader El-Bizri, a comprehensive inventory of the *Rasāʾil*

Epistle),[10] *Risāla fī'l-mūsīqī* (*Epistle on Music*; *Epistle 5*), and the *Risāla fī l-nisab al-ʿadadiyya wa-l-handasiyya wa-l-taʾlīfiyya* (*Epistle on Arithmetical, Geometrical, and Harmonic Proportions*; *Epistle 6*). Let us now consider the last two epistles and examine both their direct and indirect forms of transmission in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa.

Indirect evidence, such as echoes or references found in other works, provides valuable insights into the dissemination and reception of the Brethren's ideas.

a. An instance of indirect evidence appears in Shem-Tov ben Yosef ibn Falaquera's *Sefer Ha-mavaqqesh* (*Book of the Seeker*), composed in the seventh/thirteenth century. In this text, three out of six questions are devoted to the science of music and reflect the content of *Epistle 5*.[11]

b. Another indirect example is found in Moses ibn Ezra's *Maqāla al-Ḥadīqa* (*Treatise of the Garden*), an Arabic text written in Hebrew characters. Here, Ibn Ezra discusses nine philosophical anecdotes (*nawādir*) concerning music and the acoustics of sound, which closely parallel *Epistle 5*.[12]

Direct evidence consists of Arabic excerpts of the Epistles written in Hebrew script:

Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ manuscripts has long been lacking. This gap is now being addressed by G. Van Den Bossche's ongoing digital catalogue, *Manuscripts of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ Textual Tradition*, which currently lists 466 entries. The project adopts a deliberately broad definition of the corpus, encompassing the core *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* and its sister texts (*Risālat al-jāmiʿa* and *Risālat jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa*), as well as the Persian abridged translation *Mujmal al-ḥikma* and several personal selections or abridgements. See *The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ Manuscript Project*, https://ikhwansafamss.github.io/catalogue/ (Accessed Oct. 2025). See also Nader El-Bizri, *The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and Their Rasāʾil. An Introduction*, Oxford University Press – The Institute of Ismaili Studies, Oxford 2008, note 41, p. 22–23.

[10] Ehud Krinis, « *Al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa* and its Judeo-Arabic Manuscript », in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi (ed.), *Islam: identité et altérité. Hommage à Guy Monnot*, Brepols, Turnhout 2013, p. 313–331.

[11] Amnon Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Tradition*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1992, p. 56-58. See also Id., « The Chapter on Music in Ibn Falaqera's *Book of the Seeker* », in Judith Cohen (ed.), *Proceedings of the World Congress on Jewish Music, Held in Jerusalem, July 31–August 4, 1978*, Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature Ltd., Tel Aviv 1982, p. 373–377.

[12] Amnon Shiloah, « The Musical Passage in Ibn Ezra's *Book of the Garden* », in Id., *The Dimension of Music in Islamic and Jewish Culture*, Variorum, Aldershot 1993, p. 211–224. Shiloah shows a close resemblance only with the *nawādir*, but I would like to underline that also the parts on the acoustic of the sound seems to be closely connected to *Epistle 5*. See also Israel Adler, *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music, in Manuscripts and Printed Books from Geonic Times up to 1800*, The Jewish Music Research Centre – Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1975, p. 160.

a. One fragment from Cairo Genizah[13] deals with tuning of the lute (*al-ʿūd*) and appear to draw analogies between playing its notes and writing words.[14]

b. A second example occurs in the manuscript Berlin Or. Oct. 350 (fol. 28v–30v), which contains a compilation of *Epistles 5* and *6* under the shared title *Kitāb al-mūsīqā*.[15]

The first direct witness, however, remains elusive. Our only source of information is Henry George Farmer's brief study *Two Genizah Fragments on Music*, which reports a communication from Richard Gottheil of Columbia University. In February 1933, Gottheil sent Farmer transcriptions of two fragments from an unspecified set of Genizah manuscripts said to have been discovered « in Paris ». The older fragment reportedly contained a page from the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ's *Risāla fi'l-mūsīqī*, transcribed into Hebrew characters. Beyond Farmer's brief half-page summary,[16] little additional information is available. The present location of the fragment once owned by Gottheil is unknown, and despite repeated searches – including

[13] Henry G. Farmer, « Two Genizah Fragments on Music », *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society*, 19 (1961–1962), p. 52–62. This paper was reprinted twice: (1) As a booklet, under a revised title « Jewish Genizah Fragments on Music » and together with a second paper: Id., *The Oriental Musical Influence and Jewish Genizah Fragments on Music*, London – New York 1964 (edition consulted). (2) As an article in a collection of reprinted works by Farmer: « The Oriental Musical Influence and Jewish Genizah Fragments on Music », in Eckhard Neubauer (ed.), *Studies in Oriental Music. History and Theory. Reprint of Writings Published in the Years 1925–1966*, vol. I, :Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 328–358.

[14] For a compilation of musical fragments from the Cairo Genizah that demonstrate the Jewish community's engagement with music theory, see Hanoch Avenary, « Paradigms of Arabic Musical Modes in the Genizah Fragment Cambridge, T-S N.S. 90.4 », *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre*, 4 (1982), p. 11–28. Although not a Judeo-Arabic transcription, the Genizah fragment *T-S Ar. 41.23* is worth mentioning here, since – as G. Ferrario has shown – it belongs to the same environment of transmission in which Jewish scholars engaged with the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* through Arabic-script copies. Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Library, *T-S Ar. 41.23* (Cairo Genizah fragment, Arabic script, 1 f., ʿAbbāsid book-hand); cf. Ferrario Gabriele, « In a Hidden Place: Traces of Bāṭinism in the Fragments of the Cairo Genizah », in de Callataÿ, Moureau (eds.), *Power, Religion, and Wisdom*, p. 313–315.

[15] For the reference to the manuscript, see note 2, *supra*. For the editions see Adler, *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music*, p. 50–54; Shiloah Amnon, « Deux textes arabes inédits sur la musique », *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre*, 1 (1968), p. 221–248. In this paper, I will refer to Shiloah's Judeo-Arabic edition for comparison. It includes a French translation, which shows some degree of looseness or imprecision in certain passages.

[16] This is why I refer to *Jewish Genizah Fragments on Music* as a brief printed study rather than a scholarly article. I must admit that locating this publication was challenging. Initially, I held hope of finding Professor Gottheil's transcript. Yet, upon receiving the text, my disappointment was notable as the reference to the Ikhwān's fragment proved quite brief (p. 23–24). See Farmer, « Jewish Genizah Fragments on Music », p. 23–24.

inquiries to the National Library of Israel,[17] its whereabouts remain uncertain. It may still be traceable in the private papers of Gottheil or Farmer, although this remains purely speculative.

This account is significant for two reasons. First, it illustrates the remarkable scholarly energy devoted to the study of Arabic music theory in Hebrew sources during the 1930s, reflected in the discoveries drawn also from the Genizah material. Second, it reflects the conditions under which early researchers worked, when the main effort was devoted to identifying, cataloguing, and transcribing fragments, often before a fuller critical analysis could take shape.

In contrast to this lost fragment, the second piece of direct evidence survives in the Berlin manuscript Or. Oct. 350, edited separately by Amnon Shiloah (1968) and Israel Adler (1975).[18] The task of editing was hindered by the poor legibility of the manuscript and its rough handwriting. Even so, the work of both editors remains noteworthy, particularly in view of the textual and geographical variations typical of the Judeo-Arabic language.

III. *The Berlin Composite Manuscript (Or. Oct. 350): Structure, Dating, and the Place of* Kitāb al-mūsīqā

The Berlin manuscript Or. Oct. 350 is a composite collection of eight treatises, copied in several distinct hands and displaying both linguistic and paleographical variations. The only dated portion occurs at the end of the seventh treatise – Abū Bakr ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī's *Kitāb al-aqrādhibīn*[19] (*Book of Compound Drugs / Pharmacopeia*) – on fol. 165r, where the explicit, written in a Western Sephardi semi-cursive Hebrew hand, records the completion of the work in Seville, 5226 AM / 1466 CE. The same hand also appears in the preceding treatise – no. 6, *Kitāb al-taqsīm wa-al-tashjīr* (*Treatise on Division and Ramification*) – and in the following no. 8, the anonymous *Theoretical and Practical Instructions for the Doctor*; together they form a continuous sequence extending from fol. 107r to 168v.

The manuscript, catalogued in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin as a *Medizinische Sammelhandschrift: Arabisch in hebräischer Schrift* (*Medical Compendium Manuscript: Arabic in Hebrew Script*), was described by M. Steinschneider[20] as a composite volume of 168 folios in various Spanish scripts, mostly from the fifteenth century, with the portion comprising fol. 91r–165v completed on 15 Shebaṭ 5226 (1466 CE)

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[17] I would like to express my gratitude to Ehud Krinis (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev) and Friederike Schmidt (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg) for their generous help and insightful comments on the Judeo-Arabic transcriptions in Hebrew characters. The final version and any remaining inaccuracies are entirely my own.

[18] See note 15, *supra*.

[19] The normalized Arabic form of the title is *Kitāb al-aqrābādhīn*.

[20] See note 2, *supra*.

in Seville and followed by later additions.[21] In his description, Steinschneider seems to extend this date to all texts within that range, including treatise 5 (Ibn Sīnā, *Qānūn II, 1*). A closer codicological examination, however, indicates that only treatises 6–8, copied by the same Western Sephardi semi-cursive hand, belong to the dated section, whereas treatise 5 is written in a distinct script. Moreover, Steinschneider did not take into account the index on fol. 1r, written in a different hand and listing twelve treatises, whereas the extant manuscript preserves only eight.[22] Notably, in this index *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* occupies the third position, recorded as *al-thālith fī ʿilm al-mūsīqā* (אלתלת פי עלם אלמוסיקא). The explicit reference suggests that the presence of the musical treatise was not accidental, but that it was understood, at least by the compiler of the index, as belonging to a broader medical and scientific compilation.

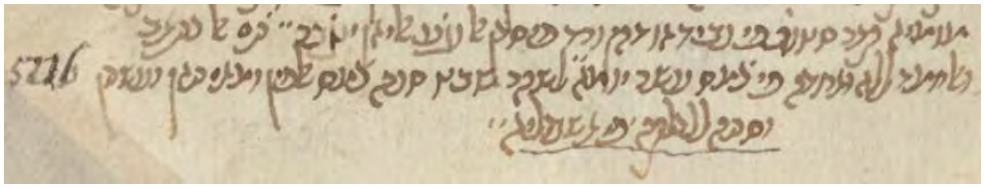

Fig. 1: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Or. Oct. 350, fol. 165r: explicit of *Kitāb al-Aqrāḍhibīn (Pharmacopeia*, Judaeo-Arabic). The closing lines refer to the completion of the treatise, praising God and dating the copy to the fifteenth day of the month of Shevat, in the year five thousand two hundred and twenty-six from the Creation, in Seville. (Manuscript property of: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung).

The dated explicit, found on fol. 165r, reads as follows:

> תם אלכתאב ואלחמד ללה ו[...]דח פי כמס עשר יומה ולשחר שבט סנת כמס אלפין ומאיתאן ועשרין וסתה ללכליקה פי אשבילייה.[23]
>
> *Tamma al-kitāb wa-l-ḥamdu li-llāh wa-[...]dihi fī khams ʿashar yūma wa-li-shahr Shubaṭ sanat khams alfīn wa-māʾitani wa-ʿishrīn wa-sitta li-l-ḫalīqa fī Ishbiliya.*

[21] The use of Arabic in Hebrew script in this late Sephardi context is noteworthy and should not be taken as evidence for a fifteenth-century composition of the text itself. Rather, it points to the continued copying or reworking of earlier Arabic scientific material within a Judeo-Arabic written tradition.

[22] Steinschneider also included a ninth part, which, however, does not correspond to a distinct treatise but rather to a collection of notes scattered throughout the manuscript. See STEINSCHNEIDER, *Verzeichniss der hebräischen Handschriften*, p. 99–100.

[23] The Hebrew-script transcription is given in normalized modern type; the Latin transliteration is diplomatic and preserves the manuscript reading without correction.

تمّ الكتاب، والحمدُ للهِ وحمدِهِ،[24] في اليوم الخامسَ عشرَ من شهر شِباط، سنةَ خمسِةِ آلافٍ ومائتَيْن وستٍّ وعشرينَ للخلقةِ في إشبيلية.[25]

> The book is completed, and praise be to God and His praise, on the fifteenth day of the month of Shevat, in the year five thousand two hundred and twenty-six from the Creation, in Seville.[26]

A visual comparison between the folios containing *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* (fol. 28r–30v) and those of the following medical section (fol. 107r–168v) shows two closely related but not identical hands. Both are written in a Western Sephardi semi-cursive typical of fifteenth-century Andalusi manuscripts, sharing comparable overall proportions and several similar letterforms – most notably in *mīm* (מ / م) and *tāʾ / tav* (ת / ت). However, the *alef* (א / ا) differs clearly in shape and execution. Yet the musical section displays lighter ink, a less even line, and more variable pressure, whereas the medical section is more regular and deliberate. These traits suggest a related Sephardi scribal milieu, broadly compatible with the fifteenth-century Andalusi context of the dated medical section, though they do not prove that the two parts were copied by the same individual or formed a single codicological unit. The Seville colophon should therefore not be directly extended to the musical section, but it provides a useful point of comparison for situating the manuscript within a late Sephardi written tradition.

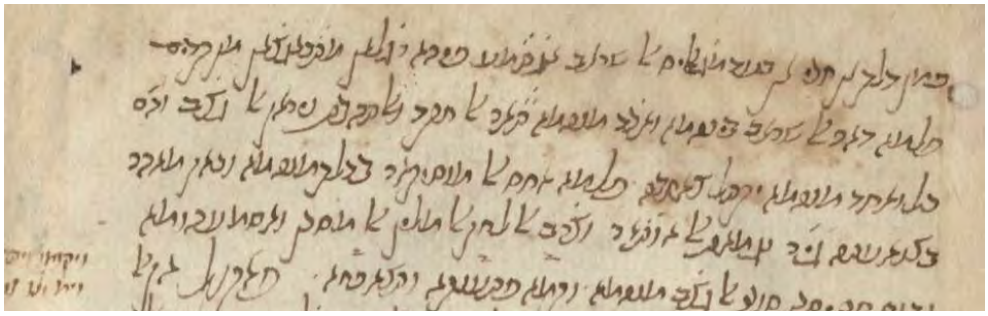

Fig. 2: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Or. Oct. 350, fol. 29v. (Manuscript property of: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung).

[24] Normalized Arabic. The sequence דה[…]ו, following *al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, is interpreted here as *wa-ḥamdihi* (وَحَمْدِهِ, 'and His praise'). The reading, though not certain owing to the fusion and partial obscurity of the middle letters—possibly representing a *ḥet/mem* ligature—accords with Iberian–Sephardi devotional usage.

[25] Normalized Arabic.

[26] Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Or. Oct. 350, fol. 165r.

The internal arrangement of *Or. Oct. 350* reveals a coherent compilation of eight Judeo-Arabic treatises, whose contents are listed below in manuscript order.

1. Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, *Madkhal al-ṭibb ʿalā sabīl al-masʾalati wa-l-jawāb* (*Medical Introduction to the Writings of Galen in Questions and Answers*).[27]
2. Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Qawl al-thāmin min Kitāb al-mūsīqā* (*The Eighth Discourse from the Book on Music*).[28]
3. Anonymous, *Risāla fī ḥifẓ al-ṣiḥḥa* (*Epistle on the Preservation of Health*).[29]
4. Anonymous, *Dustūr* (*Medical instruction*).[30]
5. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Kitāb al-thānī min al-Qānūn fī l-ṭibb fī l-adwiya al-mufrada* (*The Second Book of the Canon of Medicine, on Simple Drugs*, also known as *Materia Medica*).[31]
6. Abū Bakr ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-taqsīm wa-l-tashjīr* (*Treatise on Division and Ramification*).[32]
7. al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-aqrādhibīn* (*Pharmacopeia*).[33]
8. Untitled anonymous text, described by Steinschneider as « Theoretical and Practical Instructions for the Doctor ».[34]

Both the manuscript's material sequence and the index on fol. 1r confirm that the *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* was positioned among medical and pharmacological works. Its inclusion therefore appears deliberate rather than incidental, reflecting the compiler's perception of mūsīqī as relevant to a broader medical-scientific framework.

[27] מדכל אלטב אלפה הנין אבן אסהק אלכתב גאלינוס עלי סביל אלמסאלה ואלגואב, fol. 4r–22r; followed by notes before the next treatise.
[28] אלקול אלתאמן מן כתאב אלמוסיקא, fol. 28v–30v; followed by notes before the next treatise.
[29] רסאלה פי הפט אלצחה, fol. 32v–59v.
[30] דסתור, fol. 59v–90v, in the same hand as the preceding text.
[31] אלכתאב אלתאני מן אלקאנון מן אלאדויה אלמפרדה, fol. 91r–106v.
[32] כתאב אלתקסים ואלתשגיר, fol. 107r–150v.
[33] כתאב אלאקראבין, fol. 151r–165r.
[34] Fol. 166v–168v.

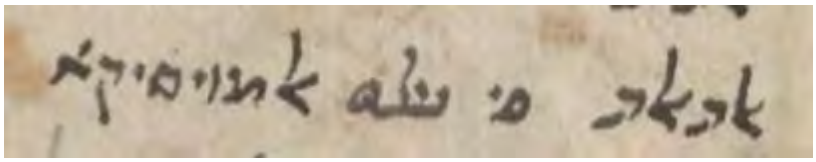

Fig. 3: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Or. Oct. 350, fol. 1r: excerpt from the index listing *Kitāb al-mūsīqā*, recorded in Judeo-Arabic script as אלתלת פי עלם אלמוסיקא (*al-thālith fī ʿilm al-mūsīqā*), indicating its position as the third treatise in the compilation. (Manuscript property of: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung).

The position of *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* in a corpus devoted to the body and its functions gains further significance in light of its closing section, which discusses the rhythm of the pulse, a domain where musical proportions and medical observation intersect. As will be examined in the following pages, this passage reveals a conception of *mūsīqī* not merely as an art of sound, but as a mathematical science grounded in numerical ratios and harmonic proportions, capable of being brought into relation with medical observation.

IV. *The* Kitāb al-mūsīqā*: Berlin Or. Oct. 385, fol. 28v–30v*

The following passage reproduces the incipit of the Judaeo-Arabic compilation of the *Kitāb al-mūsīqā*:

> אלקול אלתאמן מן כתאב אלמוסיקא מא חו לאיק באלאנסאן הפטח לאנה מן מלאד אלנפס קאל גרצנא פי הדא אלכתאב מערפה אלנסב וכיפיה אלתאליף אללתאן במערפתהא יכון אלחדק פי אלצנאיע כלהא.[35]
>
> The eighth discourse from the Book of Music,[36] on what is fitting for a human being to retain, for it is among the delights of the soul. He said: our purpose in this book is the knowledge of proportions (*al-nisab*) and the modality by which harmony (*kayfiyyat al-taʾlīf*) manifests; through the knowledge of them both, dexterity in all the arts is achieved.

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[35] Hebrew script (as in the manuscript, normalized modern type). Following is the normalized Arabic version.
القول الثامن من كتاب الموسيقى ما هو لائق بالإنسان حفظُه، لأنه من ملاذّ النفس. قال: غرضُنا في هذا الكتاب معرفةُ النِّسَب وكيفيّةُ التأليف، اللتان بمعرفتهما يكون الحِذقُ في الصنائع كلِّها.

[36] Shiloah supplies here the verb *yuʿlim* ('instructs') in his edition, but the phrase can also be read coherently without it. With *yuʿlim*, the passage would read: « The eighth discourse from the Book of Music instructs what is fitting for a human being to retain, for it is among the delights of the soul ». See, SHILOAH, « Deux textes arabes inédits sur la musique », p. 224.

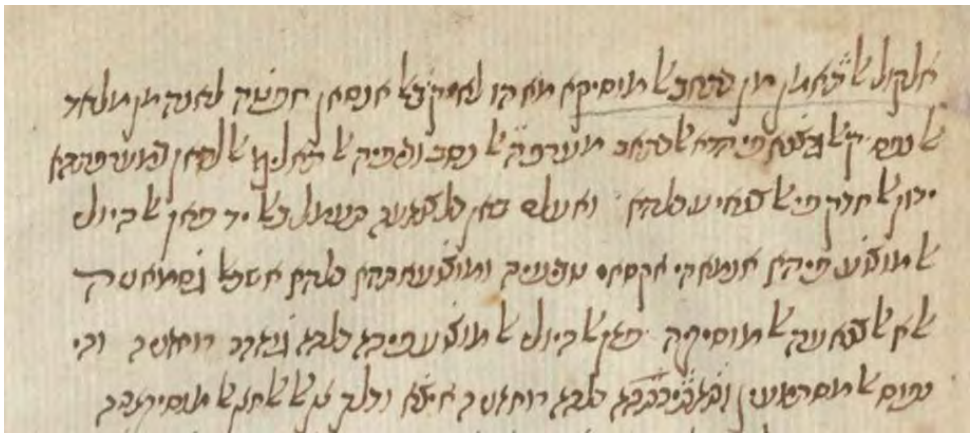

Fig. 4: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Or. Oct. 350, fol. 28v: beginning of *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* (Judaeo-Arabic). The opening lines introduce the eighth discourse (*al-qawl al-thāmin*) « on what delights the soul », corresponding to the *Epistle on Music* of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*. (Manuscript property of: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung).

Shiloah raised the question of whether the mention of the « eighth discourse » at the beginning of the manuscript (fol. 28v) might indicate the original placement of the *Epistle on Music*, possibly situated after the two epistles *On the Theoretical Speculative Arts* (*Epistle 7*) and *On the Practical Arts* (*Epistle 8*). Although my own reading follows a different line of evidence, I consider his hypothesis plausible.[37]

However, it is clear that the « eighth discourse » cannot refer to the position of the manuscript within the collection to which it belongs, as it is in fact the second manuscript following Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq's *Medical Introduction to the Writings of Galen in Questions and Answers*,[38] nor can it refer to its place in the index, where it appears as the third entry.

What can therefore be reasonably asserted is that the copyist was reproducing – or perhaps rewriting – a pre-existing compilation rather than copying directly

[37] Shiloah's supposition is not without basis, since *Epistle 7* itself classifies music among the propaedeutical sciences, yet places it after the theoretical (*al-ṣanāʿiʿ al-ʿilmiyya*) and practical arts (*al-ṣanāʿiʿ al-ʿamaliyya*), and therefore after *Epistles 7* and *8* in the actual systematization. What Shiloah did not take into account, however, is that in the Judaeo-Arabic tradition, the two treatises *On Music* (*Epistle 5*) and *On Proportions* (*Epistle 6*) are transmitted together, since *Proportions* represents the mathematical treatise on music. This arrangement suggests that the compiler of the Judaeo-Arabic collection regarded *Music* and *Proportions* as a single composite treatise, positioned beyond the theoretical sciences as a synthesis linking the mathematical foundations (*Epistles 1–4*) to the philosophical arts. See Shiloah, « Deux textes arabes inédits sur la musique », p. 224; Tribuzio, « The Exception is Music », p. 64.

[38] מדכל אלטב אלפה הנין אבן אסהק אלכתב גאלינוס עלי סביל אלמסאלה ואלגואב
مدخل الطب ألفه حنين ابن اسحق الكتب جالينوس على سبيل المسالة والجواب

from an original Arabic exemplar.[39] Whether the text of reference was in Arabic or Judeo-Arabic cannot be definitively determined.

At the level of manuscript analysis, the evidence suggests that the copyist had access to a model in which the epistles *On Music* and *On Proportions* had already been arranged together, with *On Music* preceding *On Proportions*. This points to a manuscript tradition – or at least to a scribal practice – in which coupling the two epistles served to emphasize the mathematical dimension of *mūsīqī*, a feature absent from the epistle *On Music* itself, which was not, as I have argued elsewhere and will briefly recall in section VII (see *infra*), intended to represent the Brethren's theoretical treatise on music.

The subsequent statement by the copyist further supports the thesis that the epistle *On Proportions* was traditionally regarded as the mathematical section of the musical subject.

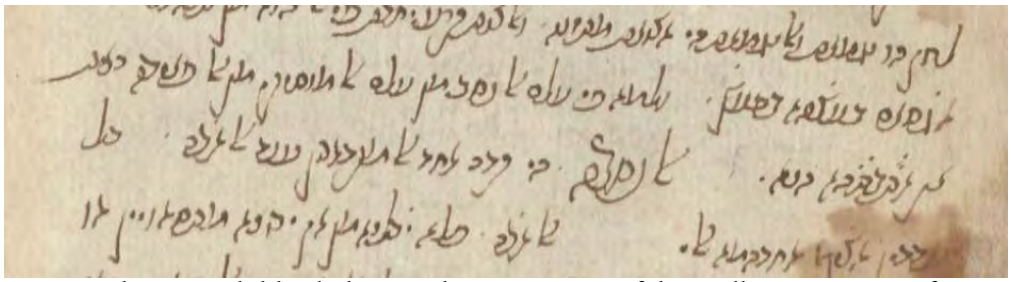

Fig. 5: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Or. Oct. 350, fol. 29v, ll. 7–10: passage from the *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* contains, on line 8, what appears to be a compiler's insertion, noting that the discussion of proportions was considered useful for the science of music and therefore suitable to be recorded at this point in the text. This suggests a conscious intervention in the arrangement of the material. (Manuscript property of: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung).

[39] One could infer this based on the use of the term 'qawl' discourse, which suggests that each epistle (*risāla*) is mentioned as a distinct section within a larger treatise or compilation. Additionally, the use of another term, 'kitab' (treatise, book), to refer to a single epistle implies a potential reorganization or revision of the original content and structure. These two terminological choices suggest that the epistles may have undergone alterations or refinements in their presentation.

ולמא פי עלם אלנסב מן עלם אלמוסיקי מן אלפאידה ראית אן אתבתהא חנא ...[40]

ولما في علم النسب من علم الموسيقي من الفائدة، رأيت أن أثبتها هنا ...

> And since there is benefit in the science of proportions within the science of music, I deemed it appropriate to record it here.

This remark provides valuable insight into the reasoning behind the arrangement. By observing the usefulness of the science of proportions (*ʿilm al-nisab*) for the science of music (*ʿilm al-mūsīqī*), the copyist acknowledges the close relationship between the two disciplines. The statement does not necessarily imply that the science of proportions is entirely subsumed under music; rather, it shows that musical science draws upon proportional theory as one of its mathematical foundations. It is therefore likely that, influenced by a textual tradition in which proportions were treated as essential to the understanding of music and harmony, he decided to copy the two epistles together.

This evidence confirms that music was conceived as a mathematical science in Arabic writings from the third/ninth century onwards. The inclusion of the Brethren's *Epistle on Proportions* within this framework indicates that the mathematical interpretation of *mūsīqī* was already firmly established and remained influential throughout the Middle Ages. Its presence in the Judaeo-Arabic *Kitāb al-Mūsīqā* further demonstrates the continuity of this conception across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The enduring legacy of this approach is reflected in later Arabic and Jewish texts and finds a significant parallel in Latin scholastic thought, where the mathematical study of harmony – already firmly established through Boethius' *De institutione musica* – continued to define music as a rational and speculative science, as we have already seen in Gosselinus.

V. *Music, Medicine, and the Pulse: Ibn-Sīnā's Ratios in the Judeo-Arabic* Kitāb al-mūsīqā

As previously noted, fol. 28v–30v of *Or. Oct. 350* transmit a Judeo-Arabic reworking of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ's *Epistle on Music* and *Epistle on Proportions*, unified under the title *Kitāb al-mūsīqā*. This section offers a closer examination of how the compiler

[40] Berlin Or. Oct. 385, fol. 29v (Hebrew script as in the ms.). The Judeo-Arabic rewriting of *Epistle 6* commences from this point. Adhering to the original text's structure, it starts by exploring the concept of ratios (*al-nisab* / אלנסב), classifying them into two categories: those where the two terms are equal and those where the first term is greater than the second. These are then further subcategorized into five distinct species (*al-nisab al-khamsa* / אלנסב אלכמסה). Subsequently, the discourse delves into the comprehensive analysis of the threefold distinction of proportions (*al-nisab* / אלנסב): namely arithmetic (*al-nisba al-ʿadadiyya* / אלנסבה אלעדדיה), geometric (*al-nisba al-[h]andasiyya* / אלנסבה אלאנדסיה) and harmonic (*al-nisba al-taʾlīfiyya* / אלנסבה אלתאלפיה).

reshaped the two treatises into a single reflection on proportions as the theoretical basis of music.

The first part (fol. 28v–29v), broadly corresponding to *Epistle on Music*, defines *mūsīqī* as the knowledge of numerical ratios and measured motions that underlie harmony in both the cosmos and the soul, and explains the principle of *munāsabāt* (correspondences or proportional affinities). It focuses on the ethical and therapeutic effects of melody and on the role of human need in placing music among the theoretical and practical arts, particularly with respect to medicine, hospitals, and astrological prognostications.

The second part (beginning on fol. 29v, line 8, and continuing through fol. 29r, 30r, and 30v)[41] opens with the compiler's intervention already mentioned: « And since there is benefit in the science of proportions within the science of music, I deemed it appropriate to record it here ».

With this explicit statement, the compiler introduces material from *Epistle on Proportions*, presenting a concise exposition of *nisab* (*ratios*)[42] – its species, degrees, and examples. The text distinguishes between equality and inequality, simple and multiple ratios, and the three canonical forms of proportion: arithmetic, geometric, and harmonic. The discussion culminates in a concise reference to Ibn Sīnā, whose analysis of the pulse in the *Qānūn fī l-ṭibb* exemplifies the same numerical harmony in the living body – derived from the harmonic proportion 3 : 4 : 6, which generates the intervals of the fourth, the fifth, and the octave, each expressed through its corresponding ratio: 4 : 3, 3 : 2, and 2 : 1. The text explains that every 'sound' (*ṣawt*) begins from a fixed reference point, the fundamental or starting note (*wāḥid*), the lowest pitch serving as the standard for comparison, and rises in accordance with these ratios – the fourth spanning four degrees from the starting note, the fifth five, and the octave eight. [43] It concludes that these are the

[41] Fol. 29r and 29v are misbound in the manuscript and appear in reversed order.

[42] In the main Arabic tradition, both 'ratio' (λόγος) and 'proportion' (ἀναλογία) were usually translated by the same term, نسبة (*nisba*, pl. *nisab*), with no consistent attempt to distinguish between the two. This reflected a tendency to view the relation between quantities and the equality of such relations as belonging to a single conceptual field. In the later Latin translations, the same overlap persisted: *ratio* and *proportio* were often used almost interchangeably. This linguistic convergence made it even harder to describe the science of music, which, by its nature, should have been defined as the science of harmony. Yet, because harmony itself was expressed through musical practice, the two domains became indistinguishable. The confusion introduced by translation and transmission – from Greek into Arabic and later into Latin – thus reinforced the tendency to merge *harmonia* and *musica* into one and the same discipline. See section VII for further discussion and Tribuzio, « Restoring Harmony », p. 353 and passim.

[43] Shiloah regarded the passage as problematic, interpreting *wāḥid* (واحد) as the numeral 'one', given the surrounding discussion of ratios. In Arabic and Persian practical theory, however, *wāḥid* designates the first open string – the heaviest and lowest tone – which, together with the remaining strings, is commonly referred to as 'one', 'two', 'three', and 'four', rather than by the older names *bamm*, *mathnā*, *mathlāth*, and *zīr*. Recognizing this meaning clarifies the text and

very ratios mentioned by Ibn Sīnā in connection with the pulse, required for its proper understanding, before closing with the invocation: « And God is the All-Knowing, Lord of the Worlds ».

ומן הדה אלנסבה אסתכראג תאליף אלאלחאן. פאלדי באלארבעה הי ארבעה אצואת והי אלזאיד תלת ואלדי באלכמסה אלזאיד נצף והי כמסה אצואת ואלדי באלכל [והי] אלצעפא והי תמאניה אצואת ואעני הנא בקולי אצואת [אן] יבדא אלצות כאנה מנכפץ וירפע רפאעתה אלי מקדאר זיאדה אלתלת והו [ארב]עה [בו]אחד ממא אבתדי בה אלדי הו אלזאיד תלת או כמסה בואחד [והו] אלזאיד נצף או תמאניה בואחד והו אלזאיד[44] אלצעפא וקד דכר ך סינא פי אלנבץ הדא אלנסב לחאגתה כאנת פי דלך ללנבץ פאן לם תתבין לה מן כלאמה (...) [45] פיתחצל פיתחצל לה צורה אלנבץ עלי אלכמאל. ואללה הו אלעאלם ודב אלעאלמין.[46]

من هذه النِّسبة يُستخرَج تأليف الألحان. فالتي بالأربعة هي أربعةُ أصوات، وهي الزائدةُ ثُلثًا، والتي بالخَمسة هي الزائدةُ نِصفًا، وهي خمسةُ أصوات، والتي بالكلّ، وهي الضِّعف، هي ثمانيةُ أصوات. وأعني هنا بقولي "أصوات" أن يبدأ الصوتُ كأنّه منخفضٌ ثم يُرفَع رفعته على مقدار زيادة الثُّلث، وهي أربعةٌ بواحدٍ مما ابتدأ به، وهي الزائدةُ ثُلثًا؛ أو خمسةٌ بواحد، وهي الزائدةُ نِصفًا؛ أو ثمانيةٌ بواحد، وهي الزائدةُ الضِّعف. وقد ذكر ابن سينا في النبض هذه النِّسَب لحاجةٍ كانت في ذلك للنبض، فإن لم تتبيَّن له من كلامه، فيتحصّل له صورةُ النبض على الكمال. والله هو العالم ربُّ العالمين.

From this proportion[47] is derived the composition (*ta'līf*) of melodies. The fourth consists of four sounds and corresponds to an increase by a third (4:3); the fifth consists of five sounds and corresponds to an increase by a half (3:2); and the octave, that is, the double, consists of eight sounds (2:1). By "sounds" I mean that a tone begins as if low, then rises in pitch according to the measure of its proportional increase – four to one from the fundamental or starting note (*wāḥid*), when the excess is a third; five to one [from the starting note], when the excess is a half; and

shows that the compiler retained the technical lexicon of instrumental theory within a mathematical framework. See SHILOAH, « Deux textes arabes inédits sur la musique », p. 221–248, in part. note 88; p. 233–234.

[44] The word אלזאיד (*al-zā'id*, 'the exceeding' or 'added') is omitted in Shiloah's Judeo-Arabic transcription, most likely by oversight. SHILOAH, « Deux textes arabes inédits sur la musique », p. 228.

[45] Shiloah notes that, at this point, the copyist attempted to erase a word by scraping the parchment; see SHILOAH, « Deux textes arabes inédits sur la musique », p. 228.

[46] Or. Oct. 350, fol. 30v. In Shiloah's Judeo-Arabic transcription, several forms appear normalized and at times over-corrected – for example, the feminine *hiya* referring to *aṣwāt* ('sounds') is rendered as the masculine *huwa*. Similar fluctuations occur elsewhere. In the normalized Arabic transcription presented here, these forms have been regularized according to grammatical context, whereas in the unnormalized version diacritics and graphic signs (e.g., three points for *th* [ث], one dot for *kh* [خ] or *dh* [ذ]) are reproduced as they appear in the manuscript.

[47] Just before citing Avicenna, the *Kitāb al-mūsīqī* discusses the threefold classification of proportions – arithmetic, geometric, and harmonic – and concludes with the definition of the harmonic proportion, expressed as 3:4:6. Here, the ratio between the middle term (4) and the first term (3) is 4:3, corresponding to the fourth; the ratio between the greater term (6) and the middle term (4) is 6:4, reduced to 3:2, corresponding to the fifth; and the ratio between the greater term (6) and the first term (3) is 6:3, reduced to 2:1, corresponding to the octave. Algebraically, this relation may be expressed as $a : c = (b - a) : (c - b)$.

> eight to one [from the starting note], when the excess is the double. Ibn Sīnā mentioned these same ratios with regard to the pulse, since they were required for that purpose. Even if they are not explicitly evident from his words, one may nevertheless derive from them a complete understanding of the pulse. And God is the All-Knowing, Lord of the Worlds.

In the *Qānūn fī l-ṭibb*, the extensive chapter on the pulse appears in Book I, *al-fann al-thānī* (Second Section), within the third teaching (*taʿlīm*) devoted to symptoms and indications (*al-aʿrāḍ wa-l-dalāʾil*).[48] In its opening chapter, Avicenna, following Galen,[49] explains that the measurement of metrical correspondences (*munāsabāt al-wazn*) perceived in the pulse are not merely comparable to musical intervals in a loose sense, but can be described through precise numerical ratios. Alongside the multiple ratios (in which one term is an exact multiple of another, such as 2 : 1 or 3 : 1, representing the octave and the twelfth), he lists the epimoric ratios (where the greater term exceeds the lesser by one of its parts, such as 3 : 2, 4 : 3, and 5 : 4), corresponding respectively to the fifth, the fourth, and the major third. These proportional relations express the rhythmic alternation of expansion and contraction in the artery, so that bodily harmony is defined by numerical commensurability.[50]

The relationship, however, must be carefully qualified. The pulse is measured through ratios that are mathematically precise; yet these ratios are borrowed from *ʿilm al-taʾlīf*, where they properly define relations of pitch, sharpness, and heaviness.

Their application to the pulse is therefore not a simple identification between music and physiology, but an analogical transfer of a mathematical model from musical consonance to bodily rhythm.

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[48] For Ibn Sīnā's passage on musical ratios in the pulse, see Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Qānūn fī l-ṭibb*, ed. Muḥammad A. al-Ḍannāwī, 3 vols., Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, Beirut 1999, vol. I, p. 168–182. In Greek and Arabic medicine, the study of symptoms related to the *animal faculty* (*al-quwwa al-ḥayawāniyya*) – the vital power residing in the heart and circulating through the arteries to preserve innate heat – was conducted by observing the movements of the radial artery. This discipline, known as the *science of the pulse* (*ʿilm al-nabḍ*), served to diagnose both the strength or weakness of the animal faculty and the equilibrium of innate heat within the heart.

[49] وَجَالِينُوس يَرَى أَنَّ الْقَدْرَ الْمَحْسُوسَ مِنْ مُنَاسَبَاتِ الْوَزْنِ مَا يَكُونُ عَلَى إِحْدَى حُذُو النِّسَبِ الْمُوسِيقَارِيَّةِ الْمَذْكُورَةِ
Galen holds that the perceptible measure of rhythmic correspondence is that which follows one of the musical ratios mentioned above. (Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Qānūn fī l-ṭibb,* vol. I, p. 171). For Galen's ambiguous position on the validity of rhythmic examination in pulse evaluation, as well as his listing of musical ratios for pulse diagnosis, see Laura Tribuzio, « The Science of Pulse between Logical and Musical Speculations, from Galen to Ibn Sīnā's Arabic Commentaries », *Eurasian Studies*, 10 (2012), p. 235–259, in part. p. 256.

[50] We can also observe that, in Ibn Sīnā's tradition, these ratios are identified differently. For example, in a writing attributed to him – but of doubtful authenticity – titled *Rag shināsī yā risāla-yi nabḍ*, the reported ratios are 6:1, 2:1, and 4:1; see Ibn Sīnā, *Rag shināsī yā risāla-yi nabḍ*, ed. Muḥammad Mishkwāt, Anjuman-i Āthār-i Millī, Teheran 1951, p. 32.

Comparing Avicenna's adaptation of the Galenic[51] discussion of pulse ratios in the *Qānūn* with the passage in the *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* shows that the Judeo-Arabic compiler reproduces only three of them – 4 : 3, 3 : 2, and 2 : 1 – the intervals derived directly from the harmonic proportion 3 : 4 : 6 and regarded as the most consonant in music. They correspond, respectively, to the fourth [four degrees from the *wāḥid*], the fifth (five degrees, 3 : 2 = 6 : 4), and the octave (eight degrees, 2 : 1 = 6 : 3). These relations arise naturally from the experiment of the string: by doubling, halving, and dividing it in these simple ratios, one generates the same consonances that define musical harmony – and, by extension, the rhythmic balance of the pulse.

The *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* does not merely reproduce Avicenna's example but reinterprets it within its own structure. The ratios described in the final lines are the direct and practical outcome of the theoretical model of harmonic proportion developed earlier in the text. In Avicenna, the transfer from *taʾlīf* to pulse remains analogical, since *taʾlīf* strictly concerns pitch relations. In the Judeo-Arabic compilation, however, the same ratios are integrated into a broader Ikhwānian conception of *mūsīqī* as a science of proportion and measured motion. The vibration of the string and the pulsation of the artery are not identical phenomena, but both become intelligible through the same numerical language of commensurable ratios.

Mūsīqī thus emerges not simply as the science of audible sound, but as a discipline capable of quantifying measured motion, whether in pitch or in pulse. Avicenna's employment of these ratios in the *Qānūn* explains why the compiler could naturally situate this musical treatise among medical writings: both disciplines depend on the same logic of proportion and measure. The convergence between musical and physiological reasoning does not erase the analogy between them; rather, it reveals a shared mathematical foundation through which harmony expresses the measured correspondence of movements in nature.

VI. *Notating Ratios: Numerical and Letter Numerical Notation in the* Kitāb al-mūsīqā

Although Amnon Shiloah correctly identified the *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* as comprising material from both the *Epistle on Music* and the *Epistle on Proportions*, the significance of their joint transmission has not been fully explored. A closer examination of the Judeo-Arabic compilation suggests that the two treatises are not merely juxtaposed, but deliberately fused and arranged as a progression from

[51] On Ibn Sīnā's selective reworking of Galen's pulse ratios and on the analogical, rather than identical, relation between musical ratios and pulse perception, see Tribuzio, « The Science of Pulse between Logical and Musical Speculations », p. 247–260.

the general to the particular. The central focus thus falls on the concept of *nisba* (ratio/proportion), which is marked throughout the manuscript by the parallel use of Hindu-Arabic numerals and Hebrew letter-numerals following *abjad* values to indicate a series of ratios drawn from the *Epistle on Proportions* (fol. 29r; see figures 6–8).

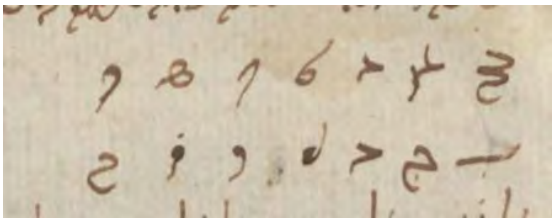

Fig. 6: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Or. Oct. 350, fol. 29r, ll. 5–6, *Kitāb al-mūsīqā*. The upper line gives the numerical ratios (in Arabic numerals), and the lower line gives the corresponding values written in Hebrew letters used in the abjad system (following the Judeo-Arabic practice): 3:2; 4:3: 5:4; 6:5; 7:6; 8:7; 9:8 (epimoric ratios). (Manuscript property of: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung).

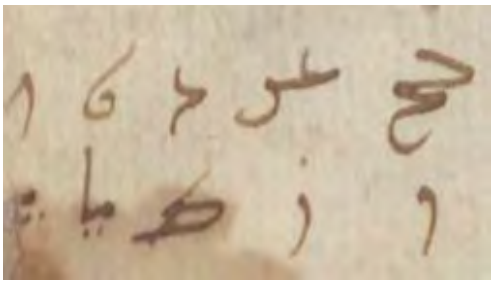

Fig. 7: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Or. Oct. 350, fol. 29r, ll. 8–9: 5:3, 7:4, 9:5, 11:6, 13:7 (superpartient ratios). Manuscript property of: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung).

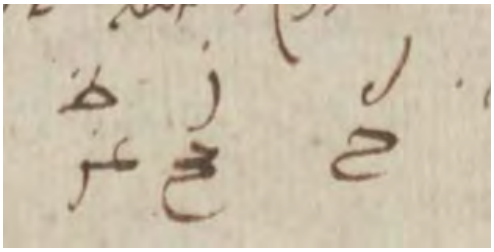

Fig. 8: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Or. Oct. 350, fol. 29r, ll. 11–12: 5:2, 7:3, 9:4 (multiple-superparticular ratios). Manuscript property of: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung).

This notational arrangement reinforces the mathematical basis of *mūsīqī* by making the sequence of ratios immediately legible within the page layout. It should not be understood as a fully diagrammatic visualization of proportions, but rather as a graphic-numerical mode of notation. In this respect, it differs from other Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew musical or medical commentaries, where string ratios could be represented more literally through proportional lines or diagrams.

The compiler's connecting remark signals the shift from the general exposition of the science of music to the specific analysis of ratios and proportions, thus shaping a single, continuous argument in which *nisba* emerges as the mathematical principle linking music and the natural order.[52]

VII. *The Enduring Mathematical Tradition of* mūsīqī *in the Judeo-Arabic Transmission of the Brethren: On the Status of* mūsīqī

A clear understanding of the Judeo-Arabic transmission of the Brethren's conception of music requires a more precise account of the semantic and disciplinary status of *mūsīqī* within the Arabic philosophical tradition and its Judeo-Arabic reception. Rather than treating *mūsīqī* as a self-evident equivalent of modern 'music', this section examines how the term could designate both practical musical activity and a theoretical-mathematical science concerned with proportion, harmony, and motion.

> فقد يُظَنُّ بهذه الصِّناعةِ [الموسيقية] أنّها نظريّةٌ وعَمَليّةٌ، بسببِ مُشاركتِها صِناعةَ عِلمِ الموسيقى العمليّةِ في الاسم، وليس كذلك ...
>
> One may mistakenly think of this craft [music] as both theoretical and practical, due to its sharing a name with the practical science of music; yet this is not the case ...[53]

Al-Fārābī's caution regarding the shared name of practical and theoretical music is particularly useful for the present discussion. It does not imply that *mūsīqī* was simply reduced to audible performance but rather shows that authors themselves were aware of the need to distinguish between practical music-making and the theoretical science of music. In the Arabic philosophical context relevant to the Brethren, and in the Judeo-Arabic manuscript examined here, *mūsīqī* is therefore approached primarily as a theoretical mathematical discipline, grounded in proportion and motion.

The Brethren themselves express a similar awareness in several passages of the *Epistles*, introducing the lexeme *mūsīqī* with phrases such as *mulaqqaba bi-* ('commonly known as'), *yuʿrafu bi-* ('known as'), or *khuṣṣa bi-* ('designated by') when

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[52] On more explicitly diagrammatic representations of musical ratios in Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic materials, including proportional lines, see Adler, *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music*. The present manuscript does not employ such diagrams; its interest lies rather in the juxtaposition of numerical and letter-numerical notation. Given the Sevillian provenance of the manuscript in a Christianate milieu after 1248, this notational practice should also be situated within a broader Mediterranean context in which Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin mathematical cultures interacted. The evidence considered here, however, does not allow us to posit any direct dependence on a specific textual source.

[53] al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr*, ed. Ġaṭṭās ʿAbd al-Malik al-Khashaba, Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Ḥifnī, al-Majlis al-aʿlā li-l-funūn wa-l-ādāb wa-l-ʿulūm al-ijtimāʿiyya, Cairo 1967, p. 89.

referring to the science of harmony (*ṣināʿat al-taʾlīf*). These expressions suggest that *mūsīqī* could function as a conventional label rather than as an exact technical definition – for instance, when they write of « the science of harmony which is commonly known as *mūsīqī*. »

In doing so, they acknowledged that this discipline was generally called *mūsīqī* without being identical to it in meaning.[54]

The terminological tension already present in the Arabic reception of Greek materials formed the focus of my earlier studies on *Epistles 5* and *6*,[55] where I situated both texts within their third/ninth-century philosophical and scientific context. The present section builds on that argument by examining how the Judeo-Arabic *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* preserves and reorganizes this understanding of *mūsīqī* as a theoretical mathematical science, without reducing it to practical music-making.

VII.1. Is *mūsīqī* Synonymous with 'Music'? *Mūsīqī* and the Order of *Epistle 5* and *Epistle 6*

Based on the analysis of the sources, it appears that during the third/ninth century, the term *mūsīqī* was adopted in Arabic literature as a transliterated generic term referring to the mathematical science of ratios and proportions. This science was more properly denoted by the Arabic term *taʾlīf*, corresponding to the Greek lexeme *harmonía* (ἁρμονία, 'harmony').

The foundations of harmony as a field of mathematical inquiry were established by the Pythagoreans, who conducted empirical investigations into the relationship between quantities and numbers within the domain of *mousikē* (μουσική). This close connection between music and mathematic was continuously reinforced throughout the Greek tradition and its subsequent transmission.[56] Consequently, by the third/ninth century, *mūsīqī* in Arabic usage had come to denote a distinct branch of mathematics devoted to the study of ratios and proportions.

This historical perspective suggests that the characterization of *mūsīqī* as a propaedeutic science in medieval Arabic sources requires further qualification.[57]

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[54] I have provided a detailed examination of how *mūsīqī* is mentioned by the Brethren, including an appendix on the use of the term *mulaqqaba* throughout the *Epistles* in Tribuzio, « Restoring Harmony », p. 341–342; p. 362–364.

[55] Tribuzio, « Restoring Harmony » and Tribuzio, « The Exception is Music », p. 69–74.

[56] For the history of harmony in Greek literature – which remains difficult to reconstruct and often uncertain – see, among others, Andrew Barker, *The Science of Harmonics in Classical Greece*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007 and Árpád Szabó, *The Beginnings of Greek Mathematics*, transl. A. M. Ungar, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht – Boston 1978.

[57] Indeed, it is evident that there have been two distinct research fronts in the study of mathematics and music. The mathematical front has critically examined the mathematical nature of music within Greek and Latin literature. However, the musical front, which focuses on music as a part of the *quadrivium*, has not sufficiently clarified the relationship between music and mathematics.

In the context examined here, *mūsīqī* denotes not only a preparatory discipline, but also the science of harmony itself, that is, the study of ratios and proportions forming the mathematical foundation of consonance, balance, and order.

Re-examining this point compels a new reading of *Epistles 5* and *6*. The traditional interpretation, which treats *Epistle 5* as an introduction to *mūsīqī* and *Epistle 6* as an arithmetic appendix, obscures the original structure.[58] Evidence suggests that the two epistles form a single intellectual unit.[59] *Epistle 6* represents the theoretical core: it develops the mathematical basis of *mūsīqī,* called *ʻilm al-taʾlīf* (ʻscience of harmony') *Epistle 5,* originally following *Epistles 7* and *8*,[60] appears as a practical adaptation of that theory. The Judeo-Arabic transmission confirms this reading, since both epistles are transmitted together under the single title *Kitāb al-mūsīqā.*

VII.2. *Mūsīqī* between Mathematics and Perception: The Case of al-Fārābī

Arabic writings from the third/ninth century onward consistently associated *mūsīqī* with mathematics, defining it as a science grounded in ratios (*nisab*) and

The current conceptual boundaries between these two fields have influenced investigations for a considerable period, underscoring the need for a comprehensive examination of Arabic literature sources to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

58 For the broader redactional and codicological context that invites a reconsideration of the traditional separation between *Epistles 5* and *6*, see Janne Mattila, *The Formation of the Ikhwānian Corpus: A Philological Study of the Epistles and Two Summaries Attributed to the Brethren of Purity*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2025, esp. chapters 1–3. Mattila's discussion of the gradual redaction of the *Epistles*, their curricular order, manuscript variation, titles, transitions, and internal cross-references is particularly relevant to the unstable position and relationship of *Epistles 5* and *6* in the transmission. My reading is compatible with this broader framework, while focusing specifically on their musical and mathematical unity.

59 See note 5, *supra.*

60 A re-evaluation of the order of the *Rasāʾil* suggests that the epistle *On Music*, which does not place strong emphasis on mathematical aspects, was subsequently relocated and positioned alongside *On Proportions*. See Tribuzio, « The Exception is Music », p. 74–81. Abbas Hamdani, in his study « The Arrangement of the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* and the Problem of Interpolations », in El-Bizri (ed.),*The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and Their Rasāʾil*, p. 83–100, challenges the traditional view of the *Rasāʾil* as a gradual and collaborative corpus. He proposes instead that the *Epistles* were not composed sequentially but rather simultaneously, following a coherent plan of content and arrangement between 260/873 and 297/909. While my own research focuses on selected thematic areas within the *Rasāʾil*, rather than the corpus as a whole, my findings resonate with the conclusions of Godefroid de Callataÿ, who argues that the composition was a lengthy, multi-author process, possibly initiated as early as the 10th century or before. It therefore seems plausible that the writing of the fifty-two epistles was a gradual and cumulative enterprise, with multiple contributors working at different stages. Revisions and rearrangements likely occurred over time, accounting for the textual variations and the shifting positions of *On Music* and *On Proportions*. As Hamdani and other scholars have suggested, further manuscript-based study is needed to clarify the complex evolution of the *Rasāʾil* and the interplay of different authorial voices; cf. de Callataÿ, « From Ibn Masarra to Ibn ʿArabī », p. 232.

harmony (*taʾlīf*). This conception, which we encounter in the Brethren's *Epistles*, derives from an older Pythagorean framework[61] transmitted through the works of al-Kindī and his circle, often referred to in modern scholarship as *la tradition kindienne*, where music functions as a mathematical discipline concerned with proportions rather than with sound itself. Within this tradition, represented by al-Kindī, Qusṭā ibn Lūqā, al-ʿĀmirī, and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, the four mathematical sciences were understood to comprise arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music – the last dealing with relations among numbers rather than with numbers taken *per se*.[62]

Al-Fārābī's contribution, while often read as a departure from this tradition, should rather be seen as its complement. In the *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr* [63](*Great Book of Music*, fourth/tenth centuries) he distinguishes between two approaches to the science of music. One is empirical, deriving its principles from practical experience (*tajriba*) and the sensory study of melodies and rhythms. The other is theoretical, treating music through mathematical categories that express its fundamental proportions. For al-Fārābī, both aspects are necessary: music is a practical art whose theoretical study nonetheless belongs among the speculative sciences. He thus maintains the same conceptual boundary found in al-Kindī's tradition between arithmetic – concerned with number considered in itself (*ʿadad ʿalā iṭlāq*) – and music, which deals with numbers in relation to one another (*al-nisab*). In the *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* (*Enumeration of the Sciences*),[64] widely known among Jewish and Latin

[61] The term 'Pythagorean framework' refers to the mathematical conception of *mūsīqī* as a science of ratios and harmony. In Arabic sources, this framework is not presented in opposition to Aristoxenus's perceptual approach but rather integrated with it; both rational and sensory criteria coexist. See Laura Tribuzio, « La scienza acustica tra *philosophia* e medicina nella tradizione avicenniana (XI–XIII s.) », PhD diss. Università degli Studi di Bari 2006, p. 23–30.

[62] On this intellectual lineage, which modern scholarship has called *la tradition kindienne*, see Daniel De Smet, « Une classification ismaélienne des sciences. L'apport d'Abū Yaqūb al-Sijistānī à la 'tradition d'al-Kindī' et ses liens avec Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī », in Anna Aksoy, Wim Raven (eds.), *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages. Studies in Text, Transmission and Translation in Honour of Hans Daiber*, Brill, Leiden 2008, p. 79 note 13. See also Tribuzio, « The Exception Is Music », p. 69–74, on the classification of *mūsīqī* within this tradition.

[63] Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr*, p. 47–105; see also Rodolphe d'Erlanger, *La Musique arabe.* t. I : *Grand traité de la musique* (*Kitābu l-Mūsīqī al-Kabīr*), Geuthner, Paris 1930, p. 5–36. In this treatise al-Fārābī distinguishes between *al-ṣināʿa al-naẓariyya* (the theoretical art) and *al-ṣināʿa al-ʿamaliyya* (the practical art), showing that music, though rooted in sensory experience, belongs to the theoretical/speculative sciences, more specifically to the mathematical sciences. This articulation complements, rather than departs from, the earlier Kindian conception of *mūsīqī* as a mathematical discipline.

[64] Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*, ed. ʿUthmān Āmīn, 2nd ed., Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, Cairo 1949, p. 76; p. 86–88. al-Fārābī maintains a clear distinction between arithmetic (*ʿadad ʿalā iṭlāq*), which studies numbers in themselves, and music (*al-nisab*), which investigates numbers as relational magnitudes. For an analysis of how this distinction is echoed and reinterpreted in later Arabic sources, see Tribuzio, « Restoring Harmony », esp. note 44.

readers,[65] al-Fārābī reiterates this classification.[66] There, *mūsīqī* occupies an intermediate position: it belongs to mathematics by virtue of its subject matter (*ratios*), yet also touches upon physics because of its concern with sound and perception. This double affiliation of music with both mathematics and physics helps explain the semantic and disciplinary flexibility surrounding *mūsīqī*, as well as the terminological caution already observed in the Brethren's *Epistles*. It also provides a useful framework for understanding how later readers and compilers could associate the science of proportions with music without necessarily collapsing the two disciplines into one. It is in this broader intellectual horizon that the Judaeo-Arabic arrangement of *Epistles 5* and *6* may be reconsidered.

VIII. *Conclusion:* Epistles 5 *and* 6 *between Manuscript Evidence and al-Fārābī's Legacy?*

The joint transmission of *Epistles 5* and *6* in the Judaeo-Arabic *Kitāb al-mūsīqā* is supported by both manuscript evidence and the internal content of the two texts. Their arrangement under a single title, together with the compiler's remark on the usefulness of the science of proportions for music, suggests that the association was not accidental. *Epistle 6* provides the theoretical-mathematical

[65] For the Hebrew transmission of this work, in addition to other direct and indirect references, it may be noted that around 1250 Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera incorporated several passages from al-Fārābī's *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* into his own 'Enumeration of the Sciences' (*Rēshit ḥokhmāh*); subsequently, Qalonymos ben Qalonymos completed the full Hebrew translation of the treatise in 1314 (*Be-mispar ha-ḥokhmōt*), thereby broadening access to al-Fārābī's theories. See Mauro Zonta, « Influence of Arabic and Islamic Philosophy on Judaic Thought », in Edward N. Zalta, Uri Nodelman (eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University (first published 10 Dec 2007; substantive revision 21 Feb 2024): https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-judaic/ (Accessed Oct. 2025). For the inclusion of musical passages in *Tibb al-nufūs* by Joseph ben Judah Ibn ʿAqnin and in *Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera's Rēshit ḥokhmāh*, see Adler, *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music*, p. 155–158 (290); p. 166–168 (330); for Qalonymos ben Qalonymos's translation see Ibid., p. 201–202 (470). In the Latin tradition of the *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*, two translations entitled *De Scientiis* were produced in twelfth-century Toledo – one literal by Gerard of Cremona and another paraphrastic by Dominicus Gundissalinus – which were later incorporated into thirteenth-century Latin encyclopaedism (Vincent of Beauvais, Roger Bacon, Jerome of Moravia). See Andrea Pozzobon, « La tradizione latina dell'*Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* di al-Fārābī », Ph.D. Diss., Università di Padova 2012.; Id., *La classificazione delle scienze (De Scientiis)*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2013; Charles Burnett, *Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages: The Translators and Their Intellectual and Social Context*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2009.

[66] The *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* (translated into Latin as *De Scientiis*) divides theoretical music (*ʿilm al-mūsīqī al-naẓarī*) into five discourses (*aqwāl*); the second (*qawl fī uṣūl hādhihi l-ṣināʿa*) concerns « the derivation (*istikhrāj*) of the notes ... and the clarification (*tabyīn*) of their ratios to one another ». The sequence *istikhrāj al-naghm / tabyīn al-nisab* shows that musical pitches are conceptually derived from mathematical relations, not merely described by them – a nuance later flattened in the Latin *De Scientiis*, where *tabyīn* is rendered *declaratio* and *nisab* simply *proportiones* rather than *ratios*. See also note 42, *supra*.

discussion of ratios and proportions, while *Epistle 5* explores their qualitative and practical manifestations in music, the arts, and the natural order. The two epistles are therefore presented not as independent treatises, but as complementary parts of a single musical-mathematical inquiry.

Al-Fārābī's legacy [67] may help to contextualize this arrangement within a broader intellectual tradition in which *mūsīqī* was understood not merely as practical music-making, but as a theoretical science grounded in mathematical reasoning and informed by sensory experience. This does not require assuming a direct dependence on al-Fārābī by the Judaeo-Arabic compiler. Rather, his formulation offers a useful horizon for understanding how later readers could view ratios, proportions, and harmony as belonging to the wider domain of musical science. In this sense, the Berlin manuscript does more than preserve a textual variant: it shows how the relation between music and proportion could be reorganized within a medical and scientific compilation, where *mūsīqī* emerges as a science of harmony capable of connecting mathematical abstraction, perceptual experience, and the order of the living body.

This study has taken its starting point from Gulielmus Gosselinus, who opened his *De arte magna, seu de occulta parte numerorum* (Paris, 1577) with the observation: « Contempletur numeros secundum se Arithmeticus, numeros certe sub ratione ad aliud cognoscet Musicus et Algebræus » – « Let the arithmetician contemplate numbers in themselves, while the musician and the algebraist know them in relation to another ».[68] By associating music and algebra as disciplines concerned with number in relation, Gosselinus places both within the domain of what he calls *de occulta parte numerorum* – the hidden part of numbers. Music and algebra, in this perspective, do not contemplate number in itself, but investigate the relations that govern it.

The folios 28v–30v of Berlin Or. Oct. 350 reflect a comparable concern within a much earlier Judaeo-Arabic and Ikhwānian framework. Through the joint transmission of the *Epistle on Music* and the *Epistle on Proportions*, the manuscript preserves a conception of *mūsīqī* as a science of ratios and proportions: an inquiry into the mathematical order underlying sound, harmony, and, in its final section, the measured rhythm of the living body. The comparison with Gosselinus is not meant to suggest direct continuity, but to illuminate a shared intellectual problem:

[67] For the Hebrew reception and translations, see note 65, *supra*. On the Latin tradition of De Scientiis and its influence on medieval European writers on music, see Henry G. Farmer, « The Influence of al-Fārābī's 'Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm' (De Scientiis) on the Writers on Music in Western Europe », *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 (July 1932), p. 561–592, esp. 573; and Don M. Randel, « al-Fārābī and the Role of Arabic Music Theory in the Latin Middle Ages », *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 29/2 (Summer 1976), p. 173–188, esp. 176.

[68] See note 1, supra.

how number, when considered relationally, becomes capable of explaining domains that are not immediately reducible to arithmetic alone.

In this sense, the Berlin manuscript and Gosselinus's treatise, though distant in time, language, and context, both point to the same broader question: the search for what remains hidden yet intelligible within numerical relations.

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Dossier for the Study of Miguel Asín Palacios' *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*, Part 1, Sections II, III and IV*

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Abstract

This article closely examines sections II, III, and IV of Part 1 of Miguel Asín Palacios's *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*. Written in the early 1900s, this notable text sparked a scholarly discussion about possible Islamic influences on Dante's *Divina Commedia*, preceding the identification of the *Liber Scalae Machometi*, commonly known as the 'missing link'. The paper begins with an overview of the pertinent Qur'ānic verses, which shed light on the remote origins of this scholarly debate (Part 1, Section I). It then places the work in the context of early twentieth-century Spanish Arabists, who drew attention to the Islamic cultural heritage in Spain and Europe. The central focus is a comparative examination of the Arabic textual sources employed by Asín Palacios in Part 1, Sections II, III, and IV, together with the accompanying appendix. Over the years, his account of the progressive development of the *isrāʾ* and *miʿrāǧ* narratives has been widely questioned, primarily because of his erroneous attribution of a key source text: ch. 167 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*), entitled *Kīmiyāʾ al-saʿāda* (*The Alchemy of Happiness*), composed by the Murcian philosopher and Ṣūfī master Ibn ʿArabī. Nevertheless, setting aside this misidentification, Palacios' investigation into the sources remains worthy of consideration and acknowledgment.

Keywords

Islamic afterlife beliefs; *isrāʾ*, *miʿrāǧ*; Miguel Asín Palacios; Dante

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I. *Introduction*

Due to space constraints, a much shorter version of this essay that only partially accounts for the collected documentation is forthcoming in the journal *Romanic Review*. Here I have decided to offer the entire dossier regarding the pioneering Part 1, Sections II, III and IV of *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*,[1] the famous work by Miguel Asín Palacios, which opened the question of possible Islamic sources for the *Divina Commedia* in the early 20th century, before the discovery of the *Liber Scalae Machometi*, the so-called missing link.[2] This literary question and historiographical problem became one of the most unaddressed and compelling in 20th century Dante studies and, more generally, in the cultural debate.

After an introductory outline of the scriptural data from the Qurʾānic texts where the remote origins of the relevant traditions are found (discussed by Asin Palacios in Part 1, Section I), and a presentation of the worldview of Spanish Arabic scholars at the beginning of the last century, who drew attention to the Islamic cultural heritage in Spain and Europe, I will check against the Arabic sources the analysis proposed by Miguel Asín Palacios in Part 1, Sections II, III and IV and its related Appendix. This part of Asín Palacios' book remains relevant even today, in contrast with other parts of the same work that now appear outdated. Even though the focus of my contribution is not Asín Palacios' comparison with Dante's *Divina Commedia*, but rather his meticulous analysis of the formation of increasingly complex cycles of legends of the *isrāʾ* (night journey) and *miʿrāǧ* (ascent), I will present the main examples of the comparison suggested by Asín Palacios, who accumulates many analogies.

One may ask: what novelty does this contribution intend to add to the debate? The short answer, which is far too simple in relation to such a debated topic, is

[1] Miguel Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia. Seguida de la historia y crítica de una polémica*, Estanislao Maestre, Madrid 1943[2] (reprint Forgotten Books, London 2018).

[2] The known text with the closest structural parallels to the *Divina Comedia* – though their precise relation is still unclear, due to a lack of philologically reliable and compelling evidence – is the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder*, found by Ugo Monneret de Villard. He discusses it in *Lo studio dell'Islam in Europa nel XII e nel XIII secolo*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1944 (Studi e testi, 110), a long essay published as an introduction to a study concerning the Florentine Dominican missionary Ricold of Monte Croce who went to Baghdad at the end of the thirteenth century and returned to Florence in 1301. For the first time, Monneret connects the two medieval Latin and French translations of the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* to one another, noting that they were overlooked by Asín Palacios and including them in a broad cycle of translations from Arabic and Hebrew in Christian Spain. See below p. 162–163.

none. However, in the history of these studies, Miguel Asín Palacios's analysis of the progressive construction of the complex of legends of the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāǧ* has often been dismissed too quickly on the basis of his false assumption regarding the possible source-text at the origin of the knowledge of such a complex of legends in the Medieval West: Chapter 167 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*) entitled *Kīmiyāʾ al-saʿāda* (*The Alchemy of Happiness*) by the Murcian thinker and ṣūfī mystic Ibn ʿArabī. This notwithstanding, Miguel Asín Palacios' pioneering work on the sources still deserves to be highlighted.[3]

II. *The Remote Origin of the Complex of Legends*

In the *Qurʾān*, *Sūra* 17 (*The Night Journey*, also known as *The People of Israel*), v. 1, belonging perhaps to the late Meccan period, shortly before 622, the year of *hiǧra*, we read of a *isrāʾ* that the Prophet Muḥammad is said to have undertaken from Mecca (the Holy Temple, *al-masǧid al-ḥarām*) to Jerusalem (the Farthest Temple, *al-masǧid al-aqṣā*) or to an immaterial temple in the celestial space:[4]

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[3] See Maxime Rodinson, « Dante et l'Islam d'après des travaux récents », *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 140/2 (1951), p. 203–236.

[4] See Jamel Eddine Bencheikh, *Le voyage nocturne de Mahomet*, preface de André Miquel, suivi de *L'aventure de la parole*, Imprimerie nationale, Paris 1988 (a rewriting of the Prophet Muḥammad's journey following some known versions, including the one attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās); Claude Gilliot, « Coran 17, isrāʾ 1 dans la recherche occidentale. De la critique des traditions au Coran comme texte », in Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi (ed.), *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam: ascensions célestes et itinéraires spirituels*, Peeters, Louvain – Paris 1996, p. 1–26. For a synthesis of this important article, see Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, « MEʿRĀJ i. DEFINITION », *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2010, available at < http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/meraj-i > [consulted 30 June 2025]. In 1844, considering the first verse of *Sūra* 17 to have no relation with either this part or the rest of the *Qurʾān* in general, Gustav Weil, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran*, Velhagen & Klasing, Bielefeld 1844, argued that this verse was probably added during the time of the first caliph Abū Bakr (r. 632–634). Weil stresses the polemical aspect of the tradition that uses the *miʿrāǧ* narrative to prove the superiority of Muḥammad over prophets of the past and the supremacy of Islam vis-à-vis previous religions. By contrast, Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Göttingen 1860, p. 135, and later Friedrich Schwally in Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally (eds.), *Geschichte des Qorāns*, *Zweiter Teil: Sammlung des Qorāns*, Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig 1919, p. 85–88, argue for the authenticity of the verse narrating the Prophet's dream regarding his *isrāʾ* from Mecca to Jerusalem. As for the 'fable of ascension', it could only have been joined to this verse after the Prophet's death, most likely in reference to ecstatic celestial journeys reported in older Christian literature. According to Anthony Ashley Bevan, « Mohammed's Ascension to Heaven », in Karl Marti (ed.), *Studien zur semitischen Philologie und Religionsgeschichte: Julius Wellhausen zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 17. Mai 1914 gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern*, Verlag von Alfred Töpelmann, Giessen 1914, p. 49–61, the traditional interpretation of this verse rests on three assumptions: i. 'the servant' in the verse is really Muḥammad; ii. 'the further sanctuary' is Jerusalem; and iii. the journey was miraculous in nature. While the first two assumptions may seem plausible, the third is not demonstrable. Two years after the publication of Bevan's study, Bertram Schrieke, « Die Himmelsreise Muhammeds »,

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ.

Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Further Mosque the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.[5]

Then, *Suwar* 53 (*The Star*), v. 1–18 and 81 (*The Darkening*), v. 19–25, indicate a heavenly or celestial *miʿrāǧ* (which literally also means 'ladder' or 'stairway') of the Prophet Muḥammad and his visits to Paradise and Hell.[6]

وَالنَّجْمِ إِذَا هَوَى ١ مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوَى ٢ وَمَا يَنطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَى ٣ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَى ٤ عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَى ٥ ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَى ٦ وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَى ٧ ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى ٨ فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَى ٩ فَأَوْحَى إِلَى عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَى ١٠ مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَى ١١ أَفَتُمَارُونَهُ عَلَى مَا يَرَى ١٢ وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَى ١٣ عِندَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنتَهَى ١٤ عِندَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَى ١٥ إِذْ يَغْشَى السِّدْرَةَ مَا يَغْشَى ١٦ مَا زَاغَ الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَى ١٧ لَقَدْ رَأَى مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَى ١٨.

By the Star when it plunges, your comrade is not astray, neither errs, nor speaks he out of caprice. This is naught but a revelation revealed, taught him by one terrible in power, very strong; he stood poised, being on the higher horizon, then drew near and suspended hung, two bows'-length away, or nearer, then revealed to his servant that he revealed. His heart lies not of what he saw; what, will you dispute with him what he sees? Indeed, he saw him another time by the Lote-Tree of the Boundary nigh which is the Garden of the Refuge, when there covered the Lote-Tree that

Der Islam, 6 (1916), p. 1–30 argued that the *al-masǧid al-aqṣā* is to be located in heaven. He argues that the identification of this 'Further Mosque' with Jerusalem derives from a tradition of Umayyad origin, invented during the rule of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705), with the aim of glorifying Jerusalem to the detriment of Mecca, which was governed by the anti-caliph ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 692). More recently, Angelika Neuwirth has offered a detailed literary and philological analysis of verse 17:1 in « Erste Qibla-Fernste Masǧid? Jerusalem im Horizonte des historischen Muḥammad », in Ferdinand Hahn et al. (eds.) *Zion-Ort der Begegung (Festschrift für Laurentius Klein)*, Athenäum, Bodenheim 1993, p. 227–270, in particular p. 240–259. She argues that this verse narrates the spiritual experience of the Prophet Muḥammad's *isrāʾ* to Jerusalem and is in perfect harmony with what follows. See also: Josef van Ess, « Vision and Ascension: Sūrat al-Najm and its Relationship with Muḥammad's miʿrāj », *Journal of Quarnic Studies*, 1/1 (1999), p. 47–62. For a more in-depth analysis of this verse, in particular regarding the destination of the night journey and the identification of the servant, as well as the stylistic and structural differences between this verse and the rest of the *sūra*, see Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, Guillame Dye, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II: *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique, Tome 1: sourates 1–26*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2019, p. 656–664.

5 Arthur John Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, A Touchstone Book Published by Simon & Schuster, New York, NY 1996, vol. I, p. 302.

6 See van Ess, « Vision and Ascension: Sūrat al-Najm and its Relationship with Muḥammad's miʿrāj », p. 47–62; Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, *L'ascesion céleste du prophete Muḥammad: note bibliographique*, in Id. et al. (eds.), *Penseé grecque et Sagesse d'Orient. Hommage â Michel Tardieu*, Brepols, Turnhout 2009, p. 47–61.

> which covered: his eye swerved not, nor swept astray. Indeed, he saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord.[7]

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ ١٩ ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِندَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ ٢٠ مُّطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ ٢١ وَمَا صَاحِبُكُم بِمَجْنُونٍ ٢٢ وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ ٢٣ وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ ٢٤ وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ ٢٥.

> Truly this is the word of a noble Messenger having power, with the Lord of the Throne secure, obeyed, moreover trusty. Your companion is not possessed; he truly saw him on the clear horizon; he is not niggardly of the Unseen. And it is not the word of an accursed Satan; where then are you going?[8]

Finally, in *Sūra* 84 (*The Rending*), v. 19, some authors found a reference to the description of the world of the hereafter in various overlapping or parallel degrees/levels:

لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَن طَبَقٍ.

> you shall surely ride stage after stage.[9]

From these very scarce Qurʾānic references, a rich production of fantastic legends blossomed in Islam,[10] often, but not only, in the form of Sayings of the Prophet (*aḥādīṯ*, plur. of *ḥadīṯ*) in which, as Asín Palacios writes,

> la fecunda imaginación oriental prodigó sus más espléndidas galas llenando el inmenso horizonte, que el supuesto viaje nocturno le ofrecía, con variadísimos episodios y pintorescas escenas en número cuasi infinito. Un libro entero no bastaría a contener el estudio documentado de la completa evolución de todas las ramificaciones de la leyenda, nacidas como glosa de aquel insignificante versículo del Alcorán, bajo la forma de *ḥadīṯs* o tradiciones del Profeta, en cuya boca se pone la descripción pormenorizada de todas las maravillas que vio en su nocturno viaje.[11]

What is the historical context in which these verses were immediately re-elaborated?

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7 Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. II, p. 244. See Amir-Moezzi, Dye, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II: *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, *Tome 2: sourates 27–114*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2019, p. 1599–1606.

8 Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. II, p. 326. See Amir-Moezzi, Dye, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II: *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique, Tome 2: sourates 27–114*, p. 1990–1993.

9 Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. II, p. 331. See Amir-Moezzi, Dye, *Le Coran des Historiens,* vol. II: *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, *Tome 2: sourates 27–114*, p. 2015–2016.

10 As one finds in different cultural and religious contexts. Compare for example the brief reference to Enoch walking with God in Genesis 5:24 or Paul's reference in 2 Corinthians 12: 1–9 to being taken up into the third heaven.

11 Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 10.

In 619, the year of sorrow (ʿām al-ḥuzn), almost tenth year after the first revelation, Prophet Muḥammad experienced the greatest sadness of his life: Ḫadīğa, his wife for twenty-five years, died. This loss was followed closely by the death of his uncle Abū Ṭālib ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, the chief of the Banū Hāšim, who had supported and defended him since he was a young orphan. The new chief of the clan, Abū Lahab, under pressure from Banū Qurayš, was increasingly hostile to the Prophet Muḥammad, to the point of depriving him of all protection against tribal customary law. Hence, Prophet Muḥammad decided to go to al-Ṭāʾif, a city located about 120 kilometers east of Mecca, on the caravan route to Yemen. The people there harshly rejected him and his message. This period of strong opposition immediately precedes the *hiğra* of 622, when Prophet Muḥammad accepted the invitation of a group of Hebrew residents of Yaṯrib, an area of palm-covered oases 325 kilometers north of Mecca, in search of someone who could reconcile their territories, which had been torn apart by fighting between the Aws and the Ḫazrağ, two rival clans of the Banū Qayla, in which the three main Jewish clans, Nadīr, Qurayza and Qaynuqāʿ, were also involved. In the face of these difficulties, the community bothered the Prophet Muḥammad with constant requests for miracles.[12]

In this context a *miʿrāğ* would have been the ultimate miracle, the manifest proof of the truthfulness of God's messenger.[13] According to the Kātib al-Wāqidī, Ibn Saʿd (d. 845), the *isrāʾ* probably took place on 17 Rabīʿ I and the *miʿrāğ* on Ramadan of 621, even if, since tenth century, the *Laylat al-miʿrāğ* was celebrated during the night preceding 17 Rağab.[14]

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[12] Miracles are explicitly rejected by the Prophet Muḥammad in the *Qurʾān*. See for example *Sūra* 13 (*Thunder*), v. 7 and 27: « The unbelievers say, 'Why has a sign not been sent down upon him from his Lord?' Thou art only a warner, and a guide to every people »; « The unbelievers say, 'Why has a sign not been sent down upon him from his Lord?' Say: God leads astray whomsoever He will, and He guides to Him all who are penitent » (Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. I, p. 268, 270–271). See Amir-Moezzi, Dye, *Le Coran des Historiens,* vol. II, *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, *Tome 1: sourates 1-26*, p. 558–559, 561–563. The *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Buḫārī (d. 870) and the *Ṣaḥīḥ* Abū l-Ḥusayn Muslim ibn al-Ḥağğāğ al-Naysābūrī (d. 875), for example, mention Muḥammad's miracle of the splitting of the moon six and seven times (respectively).

[13] *Qurʾān*, *Sūra* 17 (*The Night Journey*), v. 90–93: They say: « We will not believe thee till thou makest a spring to gush forth from the earth for us, or till thou possesses a garden of palms and vines, and thou makest rivers to gush forth abundantly all amongst it, or till thou makest heaven to fall, as thou assertest, on us in fragments, or thou bringest God and the angels as a surety, or till thou possessest a house of gold ornament, or till thou goest up into heaven; and we will not believe thy going up till thou bringest down on us a book that we may read. Say: 'Glory be to my Lord! Am I aught but a mortal, a Messenger?' » (Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. I, p. 312). See Amir-Moezzi, Dye, *Le Coran des Historiens,* vol. II, *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, *Tome 1: sourates 1-26*, p. 683–686.

[14] Ibn Saʿd, Muḥammad, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr,* ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿUmar, Maktabat al-Ḫāngī, al-Qāhira 2001, vol. I, p. 118.15; Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, transl. Syed Moinul Haq, Habibul Khan Ghazanfar, Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi 1967, vol. I, p. 245.

Very early the main evidence of a cluster of legends were grouped into three different accounts recorded in the *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya* by Ibn Hišām,[15] in Qurʾānic commentaries such as the *tafsīr* by al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) – his *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*[16] based on *aḥādīṯ* collections by al-Buḫārī, by Muslim, and by Nasāʾī (d. 915) –, then in the works of the genre *dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, such as those by Aḥmad al-Bayhāqī (d. 1066),[17] and later in the works dedicated to the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāǧ* of the Prophet, subject of a religious literary genre called *kutub al-miʿrāǧ*, such as the *al-Isrāʾ wa-l-miʿrāǧ* falsely attributed to the Prophet's companion, Ibn ʿAbbās (d. c. 686; see below).[18]

(i) According to the first account, probably the oldest, the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāǧ* are one single event: the celestial *miʿrāǧ* took place during the span of a single night from Mecca to the Farthest Temple located in heaven. No other details are given.

(ii) According to the second account, v. 1 of *Sūra* 17 (*The Night Journey*) is linked to v. 60 of the same *Sūra* where the *isrāʾ* is called 'vision' (*ruʾyā*):

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لَكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ أَحَاطَ بِالنَّاسِ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الرُّؤْيَا الَّتِي أَرَيْنَاكَ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَالشَّجَرَةَ الْمَلْعُونَةَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ وَنُخَوِّفُهُمْ فَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلَّا طُغْيَانًا كَبِيرًا.

> And when We said to thee, 'Surely thy Lord encompasses men', and We made the vision that We showed thee and the tree cursed in the Koran to be only a trial for men and We frighten them, but it only increases them in great insolence.[19]

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[15] ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hišām, *Al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā et al. (eds.), Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, al-Qāhira 1955, vol. I, p. 396–408.

[16] Abū Ǧaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Ǧarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʿān, taʿlif Abū Ǧaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Ǧarīr al-Ṭabarī,* 30 vols., Maṭbaʾat al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, Būlāq 1905–1911, vol. XV, p. 3.6–14.7; vol. XXVII, pp. 26.7–36.7. The margins include the commentary by Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 1021). For the different accounts see in particular vol. XV, p. 5.9–12: « The scholars differed regarding the manner in which God, the Blessed and Exalted, took His Prophet, peace be upon him, on a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest mosque. Some said that God took him bodily and made him travel by night on al-Burāq from His Sacred House to His farthest House until He brought him there and showed him whatever He willed of His wondrous signs, lessons, and great dominion ». Al-Ṭabarī himself believes that the Prophet Muḥammad « was carried in body »; p. 13.22: « Others still said that he was led on a journey with his spirit and not with his body ».

[17] Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhāqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa wa-maʿrifat aḥwāl sāḥib al-šarīʿa*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿtī Qalʿaǧī, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Bayrūt 1985; vol. II, p. 354–405.

[18] Ida Zilio-Grandi, *Il viaggio notturno e l'ascensione del profeta nel racconta di Ibn ʿAbbās*, Einaudi, Torino 2010. Alongside this work, we can also mention the *Kitāb al-miʿrāǧ* by Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qušayri [ʿAbd al-Karīm Ibn Hawāzin al-Qušayrī, *Kitāb al-miʿrāǧ*, in ʿA. Ḥ. ʿAbd al-Qādir (ed.), *Dār al-kutub al-ḥadīṯa*, Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīṯa, al-Qāhira 1964], probably written in response to the *Miʿrāǧ-nāma* attributed to his contemporary Avicenna.

[19] Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. I, p. 309. See Amir-Moezzi, Dye, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II, *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, *Tome 1: sourates 1–26*, p. 675, albeit with no reference to the 'vision' (*ruʾyā*).

So, the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāǧ* were not conceived as something that took place in the state of wakefulness and the physical world, but in sleep as a sort of vision occuring in Prophet Muḥammad's mind (*ruʾyā*), or as a truthful dream. It seems that many intellectuals and philosophers supported this interpretation still at the end of the twelfth century. Faḫr-al-Din al-Rāzī (d. 1209) in his *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr aw mafātīḥ al-ġayb* felt obliged to defend the doctrine of a physical journey which he considered 'orthodox'.[20]

(iii) According to the third account – the one reconstructed by Miguel Asín Palacios – the main elements, albeit with many variations, are the following. One Friday night, while Prophet Muḥammad is asleep, he is awakened by the archangel Ǧibrīl (Gabriel), accompanied (or not) by the angel Mīkāʾīl (Michael) and a third mysterious character, to begin a journey in several stages. After having his heart cleansed of doubt and idolatry, he makes an *isrāʾ* at the speed of lightning, mounted (or not) upon a winged animal with an angelic or female human face named *Burāq* (lit. 'lightning'), from Mecca (from the Kaʿba, or from his own house, or from the house of Umm Hānīʾ, the sister of his cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī) to the Farthest Mosque in Jerusalem to lead the prayer of God's messengers, the Prophets who had preceded him, in the site of Abraham's intended sacrifice of Ishmael, where the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-ṣaḫra*) would later be built. Accompanied by Ǧibrīl, who answers his many questions, he climbs a steep mountain to the Earthly Paradise and sees Hell below Jerusalem, shaped like a funnel formed by levels into which the damned are placed. The location of Hell is problematic: some authors present it as visible from some astronomical heaven, others from the terrestrial world. From the top of the mountain, the Prophet Muḥammad then begins to cross the astronomical heavens, starting with that of the Moon, where he meets Ādam (Adam) and the ideas of all earthly creatures. Proceeding up to the seventh heaven, he meets various Prophets in their celestial dimension, including ʿĪsā (Jesus), Yaḥyā (John the Baptist), Yūsuf (Joseph), Idrīs (Enoch), Hārūn ibn ʿImrān (Aaron), Mūsā ibn ʿImrān (Moses) and Ibrāhīm (Abraham), though Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and ʿĪsā are the most frequently mentioned. Then the Prophet Muḥammad reaches the Lotus of the Utmost Boundary (*sidrat al-muntahā*), beyond which the angel Ǧibrīl can no longer accompany him. The Lotus of the Utmost Boundary blossoms at the right hand of God's invisible Throne (*al-ʿarš*) and is the limit (*intihāʾ*) of knowledge to which man can aspire as a creature. Here Muḥammad passes through darkness, silence, and frost to a mysterious light surrounded by spheres of shining angels, in whose presence he becomes a mere perception and is able to see God, who gives him His message: the promise of the joys of Paradise to the righteous and the threat of torment to the wicked. Finally, the Prophet Muḥammad descends to

[20] See Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ġayb*, Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāṯ al-ʿarabī, Bayrūt 1995, vol. VII, p. 293–297. Guy Monnot, *Le commentaire de Rāzī sur le voyage nocturne*, in Amir-Moezzi (ed.), *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam*, p. 62–64.

Jerusalem and returns to Mecca. The next day, he recounts what he had seen in the presence of Umm Hānīʾ, who in turn tells Mālik, one of the Prophet's companions, from whom the tradition originated, was authenticated and spread. This became the Sunni orthodox account, according to which the *isrāʾ* and the celestial *miʿrāǧ* took place in the real world and in a state of full consciousness. It was a miracle aimed at proving the Prophetic mission of Muḥammad.[21]

The narrative of the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāǧ* extended far beyond the circles of traditionists and theologians, flourishing in the literature of the *mirabilia* (*ʿaǧāʾib wa ġarāʾib*), in popular literature, and in poetry. To take but one example, the Egyptian poet, grammarian and calligrapher al-Būṣīrī (d.1294) wrote the *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* (the *Poem of the Mantle*) or *al-Kawākib al-Durriyya fī madḥ ḫayr al-barriyya* (*Resplendent Stars in Praise of the Best of Creation*),[22] a composition of 175 verses in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad, who is said to have cured him of his paralysis by appearing to him in a dream and wrapping him in his cloak, the *burda*. The news of al-Būṣīrī's miraculous recovery spread throughout the court of the Mamlūk sultan and among the people, earning the poet the reputation of a saint. His poetic compositions were said to have thaumaturgical properties, such that his verses were written on amulets and recited at the washing of the dead and funerals to invoke divine mercy for the dead.

سَرَيْتَ مِنْ حَرَمٍ لَيْلاً إِلَى حَرَمٍ
كَمَا سَرَى الْبَدْرُ فِي دَاجٍ مِنَ الظُّلَمِ

وَبِتَّ تَرْقَى إِلَى أَنْ نِلْتَ مَنْزِلَةً
مِنْ قَابِ قَوْسَيْنِ لَمْ تُدْرَكْ وَلَمْ تُرَمِ

وَقَدَّمَتْكَ جَمِيعُ الأَنْبِيَاءِ بِهَا
وَالرُّسْلِ تَقْدِيمَ مَخْدُومٍ عَلَى خَدَمِ

وَأَنْتَ تَخْتَرِقُ السَّبْعَ الطِّبَاقَ بِهِمْ
فِي مَوْكِبٍ كُنْتَ فِيهِ الصَّاحِبَ العَلَمِ

حَتَّى إِذَا لَمْ تَدَعْ شَأْوًا لِمُسْتَبِقٍ
مِنَ الدُّنُوِّ وَلاَ مَرْقَى لِمُسْتَنِمِ.

You travelled by night from one sacred place to yet another, /Just as the full moon travels across the pitch-black sky / That night you ascended until you reached a station of nearness / Only two bows-lengths distant, a station never before attained or even hoped for / Thus all the Prophets and Messengers gave precedence to you, /The precedence of a master over those who serve him, / You traversed the Seven Heavens with them, /And you were the standard bearer – leading their procession,

[21] For a synopsis of all the elements of the *miʿrāǧ* narrative see Bencheikh, *Le voyage nocturne de Mahomet*.

[22] Muḥammad ibn-Saʿīd al-Būṣīrī, *Kawākib al-durriyya fī madḥ al-bariyya*, ed. Vincenz Rosenzweig von Schwannau, Anton Schmid, Wien 1824.

/ Until you left no greater goal for the seeker of eminence / and proximity, Nor any higher station for the one seeking elevation.[23]

III. *Spanish Arabic Studies at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*

The two journeys of Prophet Muḥammad and Dante were first compared by the Spanish Priest and Arabist Miguel Asín Palacios. On 29 January 1919, during the ceremony of his public installation at the Royal Academy of Madrid, Asín Palacios read an excerpt from his volume which would be published that same year as *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*. The highest ecclesiastical and civil authorities were present; it was not only an academic, or scientific conference, but an institutional occasion of the highest prestige, where the cultural policy of Spain as a nation was developed and celebrated. This publication opened the so-called question of the possible Arabo-Islamic sources of the *Divina Commedia*. At stake was not only the originality of the *Divina Commedia* but its originality as a symbol of Medieval Christianity considered independent of any imitative process of other models. Asín Palacios writes in his introduction to the volume:

> La tesis de este libro que, seguramente, sonará en algunos oídos a sacrilegio artístico o hará dibujar quizá la sonrisa de la ironía en los labios de no pocos que todavía creen en la inspiración del artista como fenómeno preternatural, independiente de todo estudio imitative de modelos ajenos.[24]

The volume suggested the pervasive presence of foreign sources in Dante's work, which were considered controversial due to their non-European and Muslim origins. But with this work, the Spanish abbot placed himself in a precise intellectual path aimed at demonstrating the « transitability of the frontiers of migrating ideas, the intrinsic circulation of cultural material as a place of the constitution of civilizations », as Andrea Celli writes in his study of Spanish Arabism.[25]

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[24] Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes. Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muḥammad*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2010, p. 127–128, v. 107–111.

[24] Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 3.

[25] Celli, *Figure della relazione. Il Medioevo in Asín Palacios e nell'arabismo spagnolo*, Carocci, Roma 2005, p. 52. See the critical remarks in Stefano Rapisarda, « Arabismo al revés. A proposito di un recente libro su Asín Palacios e l'arabismo spagnolo », in A. Fabiani, *España al revés. Atti del primo convegno di studi interdisciplinari*, Ragusa Ibla 4–5 aprile 2006, in *Quaderni di Dipartimento di Filologia Moderna dell'Università di Catania*, Catania 2008, p. 103–114. See also Stefano Rapisarda, « La Escatologia musulmana di Asín Palacios nella cultura italiana contemporanea. Una ricezione ideologica? », in Claudio Giuseppe Antoni, *Echi letterari della cultura araba nella lirica provenzale e nella* Commedia *di Dante. Atti del Convegno internazionale (Università degli Studi di Udine, 15-16 aprile 2005)*, Campanotto Editore, Pasian di Prato 2006 (Zeta Università, 96), p. 159–190.

In the aftermath of the First World War, when Europe was faced with an estimated fifteen to seventeen million deaths and the possibility of annihilation, Spain experienced a period of political and social uncertainty, during which the country sought to define its national identity, including the process of coming to terms with its Arabo-Islamic historical legacy.

This legacy was the central theme of the research of another important Spanish Arabist, Julián Ribera y Tarragó (1858–1944),[26] a student of Francisco Codera Zaidín (1836–1917),[27] who was a professor of Greek, Arabic, and Latin at the Universidad Central in Madrid and the director of the *Bibliotheca arabico-hispana* project.[28]

In 1887, at the age of twenty-nine, Julián Ribera y Tarragó became Professor of Arabic at the University of Zaragoza, where he taught Miguel Asín Palacios, a young seminarian, as a student. From 1904, he was professor at the Universidad Central in Madrid, first of the History of Jews and Muslims and then, from 1913 until his retirement, of Spanish-Arabic Literature. He writes:

> La más ridícula postura que puede adoptar un español es la de empeñarse en servir a España negándose a aceptar las influencias que ésta ha recibió durante los siglos en que estuvo en lucha contra el islamismo. ¡Como si no hubiera sido la Europa

[26] Emilio García Gómez, « Don Julián Ribera y Tarragó », *al-Andalus*, 2 (1934), p. I–VIII; Bernabé López García, « Julián Ribera y su taller de arabistas: una propuesta de renovación », *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos*, 22–23 (1983–1984), p. 111–128.

[27] James Thomas Monroe, *Islam and the Arabs in Spanish Scholarship. Sixteenth Century to the Present*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1970; Manuela Manzanares de Cirre, *Arabistas españoles del siglo XIX*, Instituto Hispano-Árabe de Cultura, Madrid 1972.

[28] The *Bibliotheca arabico-hispana* is a series of ten published volumes that appeared in Madrid between 1882 and 1895, including the most famous biographies of scholars in Islamic Spain. The ten published volumes are the following: vol. I–II: Ibn Baškuwāl, Ḫalaf ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, Aben-Pascualis, *Assila (Dictionarium biographicum) ad fidem codicis Escurialensis Arabice nunc primum editit et indicibus locupletissimis instruxit Franciscus Codera*, Apud J. de Rojas, Matriti 1882–1883; vol. III: al-Ḍabbī, Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAmīra, *Desiderium quaerentis historiam virorum populi Andalusiae (Dictionarium Biographicum) ab Adh-Dhabbí scriptum ad fidem codicis escurialensis arabice nunc primum ediderunt, indicibus additis Franciscus Codera et Julianus Ribera*, Apud J. de Rojas, Matriti 1885; vol. IV: Ibn al-Abbār, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh, Almôcham de discipulis Abu Ali Assadafi (i.e. *al-Muʿǧam fī aṣḥāb al-Qāḍī al-Imām Abī ʿAlī al-Ṣadafī*), *(dictionarium ordine alphabetico) ab Aben al-Abbar scriptum ad fidem codicis escurialensis arabice nunc primum edidit, indicibus additis Franciscus Codera et Zaydin*, Apud J. de Rojas, Matriti 1885–1886; vol. V–VI: Ibn al-Abbār, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh: *Complementum libri Assilah (dictionarium biographicum) ab Aben al-Abbar scriptum, partem, quae superest, ad fidem codicis escurialensis arabice nunc primun edidit, indicibus additis Franciscus Codera et Zaydin*, Apud Michaelem Romero, Matriti 1886–1889; vol. VII–VIII: Ibn al-Faraḍī, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad, *Historia virorum doctorum Andalusiae (Dictionarium biographicum) ab Aben al-Faradhi scripta ad fidem codicis Tunicensis Arabice nunc primum edidit, indicibus additis Franciscus Codera. Accedunt duo fragmenta inedita ex Aben Pescualis Assila*, Typographia La Guirnalda, Matriti 1891–1892; vol. IX–X: Muḥammad ibn Ḫayr, *Index librorum de diversis scientiarum ordinibus quos a magistris didicit Abu Bequer ben Khair ad fidem codicis escurialensis arabice nunc primun edidit, indicibus additis Franciscus Codera et Zaydin et J. Ribera Tarragó*, In typ. fratrum Comas, Caesaraugustae 1894–1895.

> entera la que se hubiese dejado influir, a veces más profundamente que la misma España! Los traductores de Toledo, la Escolástica, las escuelas de Medicina y otras ciencias en Europa, se dieron mucha más prisa en admitir la ciencia árabe que la propia Península; y no sólo en el campo en las disciplinas profanas, sino hasta en la teología y en la mística (Alberto Magno, Santo Tomás, Lulio, etc.).[29]

In this intellectual and ideological framework, Julián Ribera y Tarragó investigated the fortune of the Islamic culture of al-Andalus not only in the formation of Spanish historical and literary culture and identity, but also in other literary traditions. In *El cancionero de Abencuzmán*, he studied the collection of poems (*diwān*) of the Cordovan poet Ibn Quzmān (d. 1160) and compared them with later Castilian and Provençal lyric poetry. When he presented this study in his inaugural speech at the Royal Academy of Spain in 1912, he insisted on the importance of studying Arabic sources for the reconstruction of Spanish medieval history, as well as the fusion of Islamic and Christian cultures, the contributions of the former to the latter, and the need to implement Arabic studies in Spain.[30] At that time there were only three chairs in the universities of Madrid, Zaragoza, and Granada.

In *La Música de las Cantigas*[31] Ribera y Tarragó emphasized the importance of the Andalusian Arabic musical synthesis for the development of the medieval music of troubadours and Minnesänger between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries:

> Las canciones, se sabe por experiencia, viajan con la velocidad de una golondrina, trasmigrando de ciudad en ciudad, de nación en nación, de Oriente a Occidente, pasando por todos los climas de la tierra [...].[32]
>
> Nació la música árabe, no por generación espontánea ni por raptos líricos personales, sacándola de la nada, sino por directa imitación de las melodías persas y bizantinas, las cuales fueron aprovechadas, juntamente con la música instrumental, y con los mismos instrumentos con que se ejecutaban en esos pueblos vecinos conquistados. [...] La Música, como voladora golondrina, vino de Persia y Bizancio a revolotear y a posarse algún tiempo en los arenales de la península arábiga, donde hasta entonces no había anidado.[33]

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[29] Julian Ribera y Tarragó, « El arabista español », in *Disertaciones y Opúsculos. Edición colectiva que en su Jubilación del Profesorado le ofrecen sus discípulos y amigos*, 1887–1927. *Con una introducción de Miguel Asín Palacios*, vol. I: *Literatura, historia y cultura araba, lo cientifico en la historia*, Maestre, Madrid 1928, p. 484–485.

[30] Julián Ribera y Tarragó, *Discursos leidos ante la Real Academia Española en la recepción pública del señor D. Julian Ribera y Tarragó el día 26 de mayo de 1912*, Imprenta Ibérica – Estanislao Maestre, Madrid 1912.

[31] Julián Ribera y Tarragó, *La música de las Cantigas. Estudio sobre su origen y naturaleza con reproducciones fotográficas del texto y transcripción moderna*, Real Academia Española – RAE, Tipografía la Revista de Archivos, Madrid 1922.

[32] Ribera y Tarragó, *La música de las Cantigas*, p. 12.

[33] Ribera y Tarragó, *La música de las Cantigas*, p. 27.

> La música como pájaro volador alejóse de aquellas regiones [...]. Felizmente no se ha perdido. La Antigua música árabe, como golondrina viajera, voló de Oriente y penetró en la península Española, en la misma época de su formación clásica; aquí moró, anidó y crió durante muchos siglos, cariñosamente atendida, hasta que, después de haberse inventado la notación musical europea moderna, quedó fijada y escrita en tal forma, que hoy se podrá leer y aun ejecutar de manera semejante a como se ejecutó en el siglo X.[34]

Finally, we may note his reading of the figure of the Majorcan Ramon Llull as a Christian *ṣūfī*:

> Aquel despego suyo de toda orden monástica o regular; aquella profesión de solitario eremita en la que exclusivamente sirve a su *Amado*; aquel andar desnudo y pobre, discurriendo de tierra en tierra, predicando unas veces por calles y plazas, en formas rudas, a grandes y pequeños, proponiendo que se taña por las noches un caracol para que las gentes cuiden de hacer examen de conciencia, a riesgo de que le tachen de fatuo y loco, y otras evangelizando por montes y valles, yendo a merced del Cielo que le mantiene; aquel abandonarse en una Cueva a la extática contemplación, en compañía de su *Amado*, sin las soledades en que se encontraba en la humana sociedad: todo eso lo hacían por las costas de África, por él visitadas, multitud incontable de morabitos moros de su tiempo.
>
> Aquel su criterio especial científico en el que toda ciencia se tiene por infusa o por iluminación de Dios, y se presenta sin aparato erudito, y en el que la fe es superior al entendimiento y la verdad es principio común a ambos, y el entendimiento sube por una escala donde la fe le precede, y en ésta se apoya aquél para penetrar os secretos de Dios; aquella disposición unitaria de la ciencia, donde todo, alto y bajo, sensible e intelectual, se armoniza, reduciéndose las mayores discordancias y antinomias: todo esto lo profesaban y decían los morabitos musulmanes bastantes años antes de que él naciera. [...]
>
> Aquel método especial didáctico que se tiene como innovación introducida por el Doctor Iluminado, por el que todo se enseña en verso, incluso la lógica, y todo se vulgariza en prosa por medios figurativos, no en forma especulativa y abstracta, sino con representaciones gráficas, con esquemas, círculos concéntricos, excéntricos, cuadrados, etc., para que entre por los ojos en la inteligencia de las muchedumbres, era método peculiar y característico de los sufíes musulmanes coetáneos de Lulio.[35]

[34] Ribera y Tarragó, *La música de las Cantigas*, p. 53.

[35] Julián Ribera y Tarragó, *Orígenes de la filosofía de Raimondo Lulio*, in *Disertaciones y Opúsculos*, vol. I, p. 159–161.

Miguel Asín Palacios's *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* is fully embedded within this tradition of studies.

The author's biography is well known,[36]and it is thus sufficient to recall here a few essential data. Born in Zaragoza, he took priestly vows at the age of twenty-four and graduated in theology in his hometown. In 1896, he obtained his doctorate from the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy under the supervision of Julián Ribera y Tarragó. In 1903, he obtained the chair of Arabic at the Universidad Central in Madrid. Later he directed the Royal Spanish Academy. He was close to the Spanish royal house, becoming the ecclesiastical officer of King Alfonso XIII in 1914. His closeness to the king is evidenced by correspondence with the king's personal secretary, Emilio María de Torres, spanning from 1922 to 1935, beyond the year of Alfonso XIII's deposition and retreat to Rome in 1931. Among many cultural initiatives, he founded the School of Arabic Studies in 1932 and promoted Arabic studies through the journal *al-Andalus* beginning in 1933. Decades later it was renamed *al-Qantara*. At the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, he became deputy director of the Higher Council for Scientific Research. He retired from the university in 1944, the year of his death.

In *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* Miguel Asín Palacios systematically compares Dante's work to the otherworldly realms described in the Arabic traditions of the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāǧ* of the Prophet Muḥammad. Following a principle of accumulation, he points out an impressive series of coincidences that lead him to formulate three hypotheses:

1. The structural topographic precursor of the *Divina Commedia* may be found in the Muslim traditions of the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāǧ* of the Prophet Muḥammad.

[36] See Emilio García Gómez, « En la jubilacíon de don Miguel Asín », *al-Andalus*, 6 (1941), p. 265–270; Emilio García Gómez, « Don Miguel Asín (1871–1944). Esquema de una biografia », *al-Andalus*, 9 (1944), p. 267–291; Ángel Gonzáles Palencia, « Don Miguel Asín Palacios (1871–1944) », *Arbor*, 4–5 (1944), p. 3–30; Monroe, *Islam and the Arabs*, p. 174–195; José Valdivia Válor, *Don Miguel Asín Palacios. Mística cristiana y mística musulmana*, Hiperíon, Madrid 1992; Dolores Oliver Pérez, « Recuerdos de Miguel Asín », *Endoxa: Series Filosóficas*, 6 (1995), p. 11–35; Joaquín Lomba, « Don Miguel Asín Palacios, pionero del arabismo », *Turia*, 31(1995), p. 125–138; Miguel Cruz Hernández, « D. Miguel Asín Palacios, arabista e islamólogo, a los cincuenta años de su muerte », *Cuadernos de Aragón*, 24 (1997), p. 21–29; Fernando Rodríguez Mediano, *Humanismo y progreso. Pidal Gómez-Moreno, Asín. Romances, monumentos y arabismo,* Nivola Libros y Ediciones, Madrid 2002; José Valdivia Válor, « Miguel Asín Palacios un hombre de nuestro tiempo », in José Valdivia Válor (ed.), *Siete sabios de ayer y de hoy*, Editorial Pre-Textos, Valencia 2004, p. 117–145; Manuela Marín, « Arabismo e historia de España (1866–1944). Introduccíon a los epistolario de Julián Ribera Tarragó y Miguel Asín Palacios », in Ead. et al., *Los epistolario de Julián Ribera Tarragó y Miguel Asín Palacios. Introducción, Catálogo e Índices*, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid 2009, p. 11–439, in particular p. 44–59.

2. Accordingly, we should investigate Dante's direct or indirect knowledge of Muslim literary texts. In particular, we should analyze the otherworldly visions narrated by the satirical poet Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (d. 1057),[37] and, most importantly, the mystical-philosophical and eschatological narrative of the Andalusian Murcian thinker and *ṣūfī* Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240).[38]

The first text of al-Maʿarrī is the *Risālat al-Ġufrān* (*The Epistle of Forgiveness*), composed around the year 1033 in response to a *Risāla* he had received from a

[37] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ Aḥmad ibn ʿAbdullāh ibn Sulaymān al-Maʿarrī was born in 973 in Maʿarra, today known as Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān, in Syria. He contracted smallpox at the age of four, which left him with impaired hearing and weak eyesight, as he himself states in a letter addressed to the head of Fatimid propaganda, Abū Naṣr ibn Abī ʿImrān al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn: « God knows that I am hard of hearing and of sight, this fate having befallen me when I was four years old, so that I cannot distinguish between the House and its inhabitants. Then to this was added a whole train of disasters, so that my figure came to resemble a curved branch, and finally I have in my latter years become crippled and unable to rise » [DAVID SAMUEL MARGOLIOUTH, « Abu 'l-ʿAlā al-Maʿarrī's Correspondence on Vegetarianism », *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 34/2 (1902), p. 317, p. 296.17–297.1 (Arabic text)]. Between 1008 and 1010, he was in the capital Baghdad but, unable to find patronage, became disappointed by the clientelistic dynamics. After only eighteen months, on his way back to Syria, he learned of his mother's death, which was followed by the deaths of his brothers. This harsh life experience rooted his pessimism and led him to take an ascetic turn, characterized by isolation, as evidenced by letter VIII of the Margoliouth collection: « And my soul did not consent to my returning till I had promised it three things — seclusion as complete as that of al-Faniḳ in the constellation of the Bull; separation from the world like that of the egg-shell from the chick; and to remain in the city even though the inhabitants fled through fear of the Greeks » [See DAVID SAMUEL MARGOLIOUTH, *The Letters of Abuʾl-ʿAlā of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān edited from the Leyden Manuscript, with the Life of the Author by al-Dhahabi and with translation, notes, indices, and biography*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford 1898, p. 43, p. 34.18–20 (Arabic text)]. He was called *rahm al maḥbisayn* (hostage of two prisons): his blindness and his house, and died in 1058. For the biography of al-Maʿarrī, see DAVID SAMUEL MARGOLIOUTH, « Biography of Abuʾl-ʿAlā al-Maʿarri », in ID., *The Letters of Abuʾl-ʿAlā of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān*, p. XI–XLIII. Al-Maʿarrī wrote works in both poetry and prose. Relevant for our purposes is the *Risālat al-Ġufrān* (*The Epistle of Forgiveness*); See AL-MAʿARRĪ, *L'épître du pardon*, ed. VINCENT-MANSOUR MONTEIL, Gallimard, Paris 1984.

[38] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī was born in Murcia in 1165 to the family of a minor official and received the standard education of a scholar, without any particular attention to religious topics. In early adolescence, he underwent a visionary conversion through the intervention of the Qurʾānic ʿĪsā, which led to a revelation (*futūḥ*) of his soul towards the divine realm. Shortly after, around 1180, his father introduced him to Averroes. Ibn ʿArabī recounts an elliptical conversation in which he explains to the philosopher the limits of rational perception. Ibn ʿArabī studied Islamic sciences with numerous masters in al-Andalus and North Africa. In 1201, he left the Muslim West to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca and did not return. He traveled extensively in Iraq and Anatolia, finally settling in Damascus in 1223, where he mentored disciples and wrote prolifically until his death in November 1240, twenty-five years before Dante's birth. Among his many talented disciples, the most influential was his stepson Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (1210–1274), who began the process of systematizing his teachings and clarifying his perspective in dialogue with contemporary philosophy, even initiating a correspondence with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī.

certain ʿAlī ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥalabī, known as Ibn al-Qāriḥ, a traditionist and grammarian whose aim was to dispel the bad opinion that al-Maʿarrī had formed of him and to solicit financial support. Ibn al-Qāriḥ's letter boastfully displays his own learning and orthodoxy by criticizing poets and scholars as heretics, implicitly challenging al-Maʿarrī's religious views. In response, al-Maʿarrī writes *The Epistle of Forgiveness*, showcasing his own erudition with two main aims. The first is theological: to demonstrate God's infinite mercy. The second is literary-critical: he addresses a series of exegetical issues by narrating a satirical encounter in the realms of the afterlife between Ibn al-Qāriḥ and Arabic *literati* from both pre-Islamic and Islamic eras, including the poetess al-Ḫansāʾ, Imrūʾ al-Qays, and the Christian court poet al-Aḫṭal. The *Epistle* is divided into two parts: the first describes the imaginary journey of Ibn al-Qāriḥ, now deceased, through the Gardens of Paradise and his encounters with numerous poets and scholars whose sins had been forgiven, despite their licentious lifestyles, ignorance of the true religion, and heresy. Then, Ibn al-Qāriḥ travels to Hell, where he speaks with Iblīs and various penitent poets before returning to the Gardens of Paradise for eternity. Here Ibn al-Qāriḥ is an old, pedantic grammarian who pesters the blessed and the damned with inappropriate questions about literature to display his philological erudition. In the second part of the epistle, al-Maʿarrī responds directly to Ibn al-Qāriḥ, discussing heresy and heretics, but making no allusion to financial support. Although one may read al-Maʿarrī from a literary-critical perspective, the *Epistle of Forgiveness* also appears as a critique of the mass of popular material and hedonistic representations of Islamic Paradise deriving from the *Qurʾān*, rather than the traditions of *isrāʾ* and *miʿrāǧ*.[39] It is an oversimplification to consider *The Epistle of Forgiveness*, as Asín Palacios does, « una hábil imitación literaria de las versions más sobrias de la leyenda del *isrāʾ* ».[40] However, al-Maʿarrī's use of Islamic eschatology from the *Qurʾān*, including the legend of the *isrāʾ*, as a

[39] See for example *Qurʾān*, 56 (*The Terror*), v 1–38: « When the Terror descends (and none denies its descending) abasing, exalting, when the earth shall be rocked and the mountains crumbled and become a dust scattered, and you shall be three bands – Companions of the Right (O Companions of the Right!) Companions of the Left (O Companions of the Left!) and the Outstrippers: the Outstrippers those are they brought nigh the Throne, in the Gardens of Delight (a throng of the ancients and how few of the later folk) upon close-wrought couches reclining upon them, set face to face, immortal youths going round about them with goblets, and ewers, and a cup from a spring (no brows throbbing, no intoxication) and such fruits as they shall choose, and such flesh of fowl as they desire, and wide-eyed houris as the likeness of hidden pearls, a recompense for that they laboured. Therein they shall hear no idle talk, no cause of sin, only the saying 'Peace, Peace!' The Companions of the Right (O Companions of the Right!) mid thornless lote-trees and serried acacias, and spreading shade and outpoured waters, and fruits abounding unfailing, unforbidden, and upraised couches. Perfectly We formed them, perfect, and We made them spotless virgins, chastely amorous, like of age for the Companions of the Right. A throng of the ancients and a throng of the later folk » (Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. II, p. 254–255).

[40] Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 90.

narrative framework could indicate how widespread and popular the legend was at this time. It may also be the first audacious attempt to present a common man as the protagonist of a journey towards religious and spiritual perfection.

The most interesting of the allegorical-mystical adaptations of the *isrāʾ* and *miʿrāǧ* legends,[41] according to Asín Palacios, is Ibn ʿArabī's *Kīmiyāʾ al-saʿāda* (*Alchemy of Happiness*), chapter 167 of the *Kitāb al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*Book of the Meccan Revelations*).[42] Four texts by Ibn ʿArabī draw inspiration from the account of the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāǧ*, three of which recount his personal journeys to the afterlife in different ways.[43] In the *Kīmiyāʾ al-saʿāda*, however, his description of the *miʿrāǧ* is impersonal: a character with prophetic qualities presents himself to two individuals eager to ascend the degrees of *miʿrāǧ* to obtain happiness. The first candidate, a theologian, blindly entrusts himself to the hands of the prophet-guide, while the second, a philosopher, begins his journey with an act of pride, declaring that he can obtain the beatific vision of God's throne on his own, using his reason. The two travelers retrace the stages of the Prophet Muḥammad's *miʿrāǧ*, beginning with the astronomical heavens. Whereas the theologian is received by the prophets, from whom he receives clear teachings superior to those obtainable by natural reason, the philosopher, distant from his companion, limits himself to conversing regarding problems of physics with the intelligences that move the heavens according to the emanationist cosmology of the Arabic Neoplatonic Aristotle. When they reach the end of the astronomical heavens, the philosopher is forced to stop while his companion proceeds. Philosophical reason alone can only guide man in the first stages of his journey in search of happiness, in the practice of moral and intellectual virtues; it cannot elevate him to the

[41] These are based on the model of Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī from the ninth century, who attributed to himself a real *miʿrāǧ*, but in spirit, to God's Throne through the same stages as the Prophet Muḥammad: see Reynold Allyn Nicholson, « An Early Arabic Version of the *Miʿrāj* of Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī », *Islamica*, 2 (1926), p. 402–415.

[42] It consists of 37 volumes, divided into 560 chapters, which will fill an estimated 15.000 pages in its modern edition. Regarding the editions of this work, see < https://ibnarabisociety.org/futuhat-al-makkiyya-printed-editions-claude-addas/ > [consulted 12 June 2026]. Chapter 167 has been translated into French (Mohyiddin Ibn ʿArabi, *L'Alchimie du Bonheur Parfait traité d'alchimie spirituelle*, transl. Stéphane Ruspoli, Berg International, Paris 1981) and Italian (Muhyî-d-Dîn ibn ʾArabî, *L'alchimia della felicità*, transl. Massimo Jevolella, Boroli Editore, Como 1999). Currently, there is no complete translation of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, but Eric Winkel is working on one, and information on how to access his translation can be found on < http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/infopdf/futuhat-winkelannouncement.pdf > [consulted 12 June 2026].

[43] In 1198, he composed in Fez the *Kitāb al- isrāʾ* (*The Book of the Night Journey*). In Konya, seven years later, he wrote the epistle *Risālat al-Anwār* (*The Epistle of Lights*). In this epistle, addressed to a friend, he describes his mystical *miʿrāǧ* through the levels of being and knowledge to reach the vision of the Lord, the highest degree of human perfection. Chapter 327 of the *Kitāb al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* again recounts the Murcian mystic's experience of ascent in detail. His ascent, which is not only mystical but projected towards the attainment of gnosis, concludes with the return to the world of created beings endowed with knowledge.

sublime spheres of Paradise, a symbol of the theological virtues unattainable without illuminating grace.[44]

3. The transmission of Muslim eschatology to the West must have occurred in the eleventh century during the Islamic domination of Spain and Sicily.[45]

[44] See James Winston Morris, « The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn ʿArabī and the Miʿrāj », *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 107 (1987), p. 629–652; 108 (1988), p. 63–77; Id., « Ibn ʿArabî's spiritual Ascension », in Michael Chodkiewicz (ed.), *Les Illuminations de La Mecque*, Sindbad, Paris, 1989, p. 351–381.

[45] In this perspective the new study Frederik Stephen Colby, *Muḥammad's Ascension in Muslim Spain: Elaborations and Contestations of the Mirāj in the Eleventh- to Twelfth-Century Maghrib*, Suny Press, Albany, New York 2025, is absolutely relevant. He analyzes the particular features and four major players or authors in the western tradition of the complex of legends regarding the Prophet Muḥammad's ascent: the Mālikī *muḥaddiṯ* and *qāḍī* in Granada and Ceuta, ʿIyāḍ (d. 1149) in his *al-Šifāʾ bi-taʿrīf ḥuqūq al-muṣṭafā* (*The Cure through Coming to Know the Rights of the Pure Prophet*); the contemplative and *Qurʾān* exegete Ibn Barrağān, the 'Ġazālī of al-Andalus' (d. 1141) in his earlier and lengthier commentary *Tanbīh al-afhām* (*Reminder of Understandings*) and his shorter and later commentary *Īḍāḥ al-ḥikma* (*Wisdom Deciphered* or *The Unseen Discovered*); the contemplative Ibn Qaṣī al Rūmī (d. 1151) in his *Ḫalʿ al-naʿlayn wa-iqtibās al-nūr min mawḍiʿ al-qadamayn* (*The Removing of the sandals and capture the light from where your feet are*), particularly the part (?) entitled *The Removing of Removing*; the renowned scholar in Islamic disciplines Suhaylī (d. 1185) in his commentary on Ibn Hišām's recension of Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* known as *al-Rawḍ al-unuf fī šarḥ al-sīra al-Nabawiyya* (*The Foremost Meadows Doors in the Explication of the Prophetic biography*). Concerning these narratives, Colby observes: « Engagement with official Sunnī reports of Muḥammad's ascension from the standard collections of 'sound' hadith was noted in this works, as was to be expected given the Sunna-based emphasis of the Mālikī legal method that predominated throughout al-Maghrib and that experienced something of a resurgence of attention under the afore-mentioned Amazigh dynasties. A result of this study that may be less expected, however, was the broad engagement of both Muslim and non-Muslim sources with less official and more detailed versions of the story of Muḥammad's ascension often attributed to the Prophet's cousin Ibn ʿAbbās (see below p. 142-149), that flourished in this cultural context » (p. 113). These narratives show that Muḥammad's ascension was a topic of vivid polemical debate in al-Andalus not only in an intrareligious cultural and political debate (see for example the 'Hanging Sword' anecdote with respect to the civil strife in al-Andalus), but also in an interreligious polemic from both Iberian Christian and Iberian Hebrew perspectives, as evidenced respectively by the twelfth chapter of the anonymous anti-Muslim *Liber Denudationis* composed in Arabic between 1085 and 1132 and translated into Latin, and the writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra, such as the *Ḥay ben Meqitz* (see the topic of the 'Favor of the Prophets' narrative in which Prophet Muḥammad has the preeminent favor given to him by God with respect to the previous prophets).

IV. *The Pioneering Part 1, Sections II, III, and IV of* La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia

In the opening part of *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*, Asín Palacios collects the Muslim traditions of the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāǧ* of Prophet Muḥammad and distinguishes them into three different cycles.

IV.1. The first cycle

(1) The first comprises six sayings of the Prophet (*aḥādīṯ*) datable between the ninth and twelfth centuries in which the Prophet Muḥammad, in the first person, speaks of a simple *isrāʾ* on earth without *miʿrāǧ*. Asín Palacios divides these into two redactions.[46]

(1.A) The first redaction (A) is composed of two *aḥādīṯ* narrated by Saʿīd ibn Manṣūr (d. 842), among others, and reported as n. 2835 and n. 3089 in the Sunni collection of 46,000 sayings entitled *Kanz al-ʿummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afʿāl* (*Treasures of the Doers of Good Deeds*) by ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, who lived between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[47] The following is n. 2835:

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[46] Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 10–18.

[47] ʿAlī Ibn Ḥusām al-Dīn Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-ʿummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afʿāl*, Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-Niẓāmiyya, Ḥaidarābād 1896, vol. VII, p. 248.9–22 n. 2835; p. 280.22–32 n. 3089. Cfr. Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 424–427. Saying n. 3089 is not reported by Asín Palacios in his book:

عن سُلَيْم بن عامر أبي يحيى الكَلَاعِيّ قال: حدثني أبو أمامه الباهِلِي قال: سَمِعْتُ رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول: "بينا أنا نائم إذ أتاني رجلان فأخذا بضبعيَّ وأتيا بي جبلاً وعراً فقالا لي: اصعد. فقلت: إني لا أطيقه. فقالا: إنا سنسهله لك. فصعدت حتَّى إذا كنت في سواء الجبل إذا أنا بأصوات شديدة فقلت: ما هذه الأصوات؟ قال: هذا عواء أهل النار. ثم انطلق بي فإذا أنا بقوم مُعَلَّقِين بعراقيبهم مُشَقَّقَةٍ أشداقهم تسيل أشداقهم دماً. قلت: من هؤلاء؟ قال: هم الذين يفطرون قبل تحلّة صومهم". فقال أبو أمامه: خابت اليهود والنصارى. فقال سُلَيْم: لا أدري أشيئًا سمعه أبو أمامه من رسول الله صلّى الله عليه وسلّم أم شيئاً من رأيه. ثمّ انطلق بي فإذا أنا بقوم أشدّ شيء انتفاخاً ونتنة ريحًا وأسواه منظرًا. قلت: من هؤلاء؟ قال: هؤلاء قتلى الكفار. ثمّ انطلق بي فإذا أنا بقوم أشدّ شيء انتفاخًا وأنتنه ريحًا وأسواه منظرًا كأنّ ريحهم المراحيض. قلت: من هؤلاء؟ قال: هؤلاء الزانيون والزواني. ثمّ انطلق بي فإذا بنساء تنهش ثديهن الحيات. قلت: من هؤلاء؟ قال: هؤلاء اللّاتي منعن أولادهنَّ ألبانهنَّ. ثمّ انطلق بي فإذا بغلمان يلعبون بين نهرين. قلت: من هؤلاء؟ قال: هؤلاء ذراريّ المؤمنين. ثمّ أشرف بي شرفاً فإذا بنفر ثلاثة يشربون من خمر لهم. قلت: من هؤلاء؟ قال: هؤلاء جعفر وزيد وابن رواحة. ثمّ أشرف بي شرفًا آخر فإذا أنا بنفر ثلاثة. قلت: من هؤلاء؟ قال: هذا إبراهيم وموسى وعيسى وهم ينتظرونك.

From Sulaym ibn ʿĀmir Abū Yaḥyā al-Kalāʿī who said: Abū Umāmah al-Bāhilī narrated to me saying: I heard the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) say: « While I was sleeping, two men came to me and took me by the arm. They brought me to a rugged mountain and said to me, 'Climb'. I said, 'I cannot'. They said, 'We will make it easy for you'. So, I climbed until I reached the top of the mountain, where I heard loud screams. I asked, 'What are these screams?'. He replied, 'This is the howling of the people of Hell'. Then they took me further and I saw people hanging by their tendons, their mouths torn, blood flowing from their mouths. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are those who break their fast before it is permissible'. Abū Umāmah said, 'May the Jews and Christians fail'. Sulaym said, 'I don't know if Abū Umāmah heard this from the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) or if it was his own opinion'. Then they took me further and I saw people extremely swollen, with the foulest odor and the worst appearance. I

إني رأيت ربي فأخذ بيدي فانطلق بي حتى أتاني جبلاً طويلاً وعراً فقال لي: ارق، فقلت: لا أستطيع. فقال: إني سأسهله لك. فإنه كلما رفعت قدمي وضعتها على درجة حتى استوينا على رأس الجبل فانطلقنا فإذا نحن برجال ونساء مُشَقَّقَةٍ أشداقهم فقلت من هؤلاء قال هؤلاء الذين يقولون ما لا يفعلون ثم انطلقنا فإذا نحن برجال ونساء سُمِّرَت أعينهم وآذانهم قلت ما هؤلاء قال هؤلاء الذين يرون أعينهم ما لا يرون ويسمعون آذانهم ما لا يسمعون ثم انطلقنا وإذا نحن بنساء معلقاتٍ بثدييهن مُصَوَّبَةٍ رؤوسهن ينهشن ثديي الحيات قلت ما هؤلاء قال هؤلاء اللاتي يمنعن أولادهن من ألبانهن ثم انطلقنا وإذا نحن برجال ونساء أقبح شيء منظراً وأقبحه لبوساً وأنتنه ريحاً كأنما ريحهم المراحيض قلت ما هؤلاء قال هؤلاء الزانيون والزناة ثم انطلقنا فإذا نحن بقوم أشد انتفاخاً وأنتن ريحاً قلت ما هؤلاء قال هؤلاء موتى الكفار ثم انطلقنا فإذا نحن نرى دخاناً ونسمع عواءً قلت ما هذا قال هذه جهنم فدعها ثم انطلقنا فإذا نحن برجال نيام تحت ظلال الشجر قلت ما هؤلاء قال هؤلاء موتى المسلمين ثم انطلقنا فإذا نحن بغلمان وجوارٍ يلعبون بين شجرتين قلت ما هؤلاء قال هؤلاء ذرية المؤمنين ثم انطلقنا فإذا نحن برجال أحسن شيء وجهاً وأحسنه لباساً وأطيبه ريحاً كأن وجوههم القراطيس قلت ما هؤلاء قال هؤلاء الصديقون والشهداء والصالحون ثم انطلقنا فإذا نحن بثلاثة نفر يشربون خمراً ويغنون قلت ما هؤلاء قال ذاك زيد بن حارثة وجعفر وابن رواحة التفت إليهم فقالوا قد نالك قد نالك ثم رفعت رأسي فإذا ثلاثة نفر تحت العرش قلت من هؤلاء قال ذاك أبوك إبراهيم وموسى وعيسى وهم ينتظرونك.

I saw my Lord, and He took my hand and set off with me until He brought me to a long, rugged mountain. He said to me, 'Climb'. I said, 'I cannot'. He said, 'I will make it easy for you'. And so, every time I lifted my foot, He placed it on a step until we reached the top of the mountain. Then we set off, and we came upon men and women with split mouths. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are those who say what they do not do'. Then we continued and came upon men and women whose eyes and ears were nailed. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are those whose eyes see what they should not see, and whose ears hear what they should not hear'. Then we proceeded and came upon women hanging by their breasts, their heads lowered, with snakes biting their breasts. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the women who deny their children their milk'. Then we proceeded, and we came upon men and women with the ugliest appearance, the most repulsive clothing, and the foulest smell, as if their odor was that of latrines. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the adulterers and adulteresses'. Then we moved on, and we came upon people who were even more swollen and foul-smelling. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the deceased unbelievers'. Then we proceeded, and we saw smoke and heard howling. I asked, 'What is this?'. He replied, 'This is Hell, so let us leave it'. Then we moved on, and we came upon men sleeping under the shade of trees. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He

asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the slain unbelievers'. Then, they took me further and I saw people even more swollen, with a fouler odor and worse appearance, their smell was like that of latrines. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the adulterers and adulteresses'. Then they took me further and I saw women whose breasts were being bitten by snakes. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are those who denied their children their milk'. Then they took me further and I saw children playing between two rivers. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the offspring of the believers'. Then they took me up to a high place and there were three people drinking their wine. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are Ǧaʿfar, Zayd, and Ibn Rawāḥa'. Then, they took me up to another high place and there were three people. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and ʿĪsā, and they are waiting for you' ». Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

> replied, 'These are the deceased Muslims'. Then we proceeded, and we came upon young boys and girls playing between two trees. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the offspring of the believers'. Then we moved on, and we saw men with the most beautiful faces, the finest clothing, and the most pleasant fragrance, their faces like parchments. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the truthful ones, the martyrs, and the righteous'. Then we continued, and we came upon three individuals drinking wine and singing. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are Zayd ibn Ḥāriṯa, Ǧaʿfar, and Ibn Rawāḥa'. I inclined myself towards them, and they said, 'You have attained, you have attained'. Then I raised my head, and there were three figures beneath the Throne. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'That is your father Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and ʿĪsā, and they are waiting for you'.

Asín Palacios observed several analogies between this text and the prologue of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* in the *Divina Commedia*. In both cases, the main character (Prophet Muḥammad in the *aḥādīṯ*) is the narrator. The journey takes place at night after the main character wakes from a deep sleep, accompanied by an unknown guide. The first stage consists of ascending a steep and inaccessible mountain and the protagonist places his feet in the footsteps of the guide. The three main dwellings of the hereafter broadly coincide in both texts, but the protagonist visits them in a different order and there are many differences of detail. Prophet Muḥammad visits Purgatory first, where he encounters in sequence hypocrites who do not act according to their words, those who are impure in their sight and hearing, mothers who have not nourished their own children, those who break their fast before the proper time (only in n. 3089), adulterers and adulteresses, and unbelievers. Then he sees Hell, the proximity of which is revealed by a tumult of angry voice, but which, unlike Dante, he is not allowed to visit. Finally, he sees Paradise, where he encounters the Muslims, the offspring of believers, the righteous, martyrs and saints of Islam, Zayd ibn Ḥāriṯa,[48] Ǧaʿfar ibn Abū Ṭālib[49] and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa,[50] and beneath God's throne, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and ʿĪsā. In both texts, the guide satisfies the traveler's curiosities and, faced with the traveler's discouragement, offers his help.

(1.B) Redaction B of the first cycle comprises four *aḥādīṯ* reported by al-Buḫārī, Muslim and Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), who were among the most authoritative *muḥaddiṯūn* in Sunni Islam of the 9th century, as well as Alī ibn ʿUmar al-Dāraquṭnī

[48] He was an adopted son of the Prophet Muḥammad who appointed him general of his armies in various military expeditions. He died on the battlefield of Muʾta in 629. He is explicitly mentioned in *Qurʾān*, *Sūra* 33 (*The Confederates*), v. 37.

[49] He was a cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad and one of the first companions to convert to Islam who died in the battle of Muʾta.

[50] A descendant of the pre-Islamic poet Imruʾ al-Qays, he was himself a poet and secretary of the Prophet Muḥammad. He died in the battle of Muʾta.

(d. 995) and ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Hibat Allāh Ibn ʿAsākīr al-Dimašqī (d. 1176). They are n. 3083, n. 3084, n. 3085 and n. 3091 of the collection *Treasures of the Doers of Good Deeds*.[51]

Asín Palacios assumes as a model *ḥadīṯ* n. 3083, indicating in the footnotes how it differs from the other three *aḥādīṯ*, which he calls respectively a, b, and c. *Ḥadīṯ* n. 3083 explicitly states that the Prophet Muḥammad is taken by two guides (or angels) to Jerusalem, where the visions of the afterlife, whose interpretations will be revealed to the traveler at the end of the journey, begin. The punishments are by analogy or contraposition, here occurring in the limbs that were the instruments of sin. The most specific analogies with Dante are the punishment of adulterers, which strongly recalls the punishment of the lustful in Dante's *Inferno* V, v. 28–39 (tormented by an infernal storm that never ceases) and the punishment of usurers, which recalls the punishment of simonists in *Inferno* XII, v. 46–48; 100–102:

فانطلقت معهما فإذا بيت مَبْنِيٌّ على بناء التَّنُّور أعلاه ضَيِّقٌ وأسفلُه واسِعٌ تُوقَدُ تَحْتَهُ نار فيه رجال ونساء عراة فإذا أُوقِدَتْ ارتفعوا حتّى يكادوا أن يخرجوا فإذا خُمِدَت رجعوا فيها فقلت ما هذا قالا لي انطلق فانطلقت فإذا نهر من دم فيه رجل وعلى شاطئ النهر رجل بين يديه حجارة فيقبل الرجل الذي في النهر فإذا أراد أن يخرج رمى في فيه حجرًا فرجع إلى مكانه فهو يفعل به ذلك فقلت ما هذا قالا لي انطلق[52].

I set off with them, and there was a house built like an oven, narrow at the top and wide at the bottom. A fire was lit beneath it, with naked men and women inside. When the fire intensified, they rose up until they almost came out, and when it subsided, they returned into it. I asked, 'What is this?'. They replied to me, 'Move on'. So, I moved on, and there was a river of blood with a man in it, and on the bank of the river there was a man with stones in front of him. The man in the river would come forward to get out, but the man on the bank would throw a stone into his mouth, forcing him back to his place. This kept happening to him. I asked, 'What is this?'. They replied to me, 'Move on'.

Redaction B presents further noteworthy affinities, such as Ibrāhīm's bosom, which is comparable to limbo in *Inferno* IV, and the majordomo of Hell, who is comparable to Minos in *Inferno* V, vv. 4-5:

[51] ʿALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-ʿummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afʿāl*, vol.VII, p. 278.18–279.1 n. 3083; p. 279.2–21 n. 3084; p. 279.22–280.11 n. 3085; p. 281.3–35 n. 3091. Cfr. ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 14–18, 427–430.

[52] ʿALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-ʿummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afʿāl*, vol.VII, p. 278.23–26 n. 3083.

فانطلقت معهما فإذا روضة خضراء إذا فيها شجرة عظيمة وإذا شيخ في أصلها حوله صبيان[53].

So, I set out with them, and behold, there was a green garden with a huge tree in it, and at its base there was an old man surrounded by children.

وإذا رجل قريب منه وبين يديه نار فهو يحثها ويوقدها [54].

And a man was near him, and in front of him there was a fire, he was stirring it and igniting it.

There is an attempt at a *miʿrāǧ*, which however cannot yet be realized for the Prophet Muḥammad:

ثم قالا لي ارفع رأسك فرفعت فإذا كهيئة السحاب فقالا لي وتلك دارك فقلت لهما دعاني أدخل داري فقالا إنه قد بُقِيَ لك عمر لم تستكمله فلو استكملته دخلت دارك[55].

Then they said to me, 'Raise your head', so I raised it, and there was something like a cloud. They said to me, 'That is your home'. I said to them, 'Let me enter my home'. They replied, 'You still have some life remaining that you have not completed. If you had completed it, you would have entered your home'.

IV.2. The second cycle

(2) The second cycle distinguished by Asín Palacios includes *aḥādīṯ* dating from the ninth to twelfth centuries, in which the Prophet Muḥammad narrates, again in the first person, his *miʿrāǧ*, rather than his *isrāʾ* (as in the first cycle), through the celestial spheres up to the throne of God.[56] Asín Palacios subdivides these *aḥādīṯ* into three distinct redactions.

(2.A) Redaction A includes those *aḥādīṯ* handed down by al-Buḫārī (n. 3887)[57] and by Muslim in short form (n. 173),[58] both dating back to the ninth century. Asín Palacios uses as an example the later version reported by ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad Ḫāzin al-Baġdādī (1279/1280–1341) in his *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ǧalīl al-musammā lubāb*

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53 ʿALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-ʿummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afʿāl*, vol.VII, p. 278.26–27 n. 3083.

54 ʿALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-ʿummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afʿāl*, vol.VII, p. 278. 27 n. 3083.

55 ʿALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-ʿummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afʿāl*, vol.VII, p. 278.34–279.1 n. 3083.

56 ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 18–58.

57 ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUḪĀRĪ, *Kitab Manāqib al-ʿAnsār* (*Merits of the Helpers in Madina*) n. 63, *ḥadīṯ* 3887, Chapter 42: *Al-Miʿrāǧ*, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3887 [consulted 30 June 2025].

58 ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, *Kitāb al-Īmān* (*The Book of Faith*) n. 1, *ḥadīṯ* 172, Chapter 75: *Fī ḏikr al-Masīḥ ibn Maryam wa-al-Masīḥ al-daǧǧāl* (*Mentioning al- Masīḥ Son of Mariam and al-Masīḥ al-daǧǧāl*), < https://sunnah.com/muslim:172 > [consulted 30 June 2025].

al-taʾwīl fī maʿānī al-tanzīl (*Commentary on the Supreme Qurʾān entitled The Best of the Interpretation of the Meanings of Revelation*).[59]

فصل في ذكر حديث المعراج وما يتعلّق به من الأحكام وما قال العلماء فيه

حدّثنا قتادة عن أنس بن مالك عن مالك بن صعصعة أنّ نبيّ الله صلّى الله عليه وسلّم حدّثهم عن ليلة أُسْرِىَ به قال

بينما أنا في الحطيم وربّما قال في الحجر مضطجعًا ومنهم من قال بين النّائم واليقظان أذ أتاني آت فقد قال وسمعته يقول فَشُقَّ ما بين هذه إلى هذه فقلت للجارود وهو إلى جنبي ما يعني به قال من ثغرة نحره إلى شعرته وسمعته يقول من قصّته إلى شعرته فاستخرج قلبي ثمّ أُتِيتُ بطست من ذهب مملوءة إيمانا فَغُسِلَ قلبي ثمّ حُشِىَ ثمّ أُعِيدَ ثمّ أُتِيتُ بدابّة دون البغل وفوق الحمار أبيض فقال له الجارود أهو البراق يا أبا حمزة قال أنس نعم يضع خطوه عند أقصى طرفه فَحُمِلْتُ عليه فانطلق بي جبريل عليه السلام حتّى أتى السماء الدّنيا فاستفتح فقيل من هذا قال جبريل قيل ومن معك قال محمّد قيل وقد أُرْسِلَ إليه قال نعم قيل مرحبا به فنعم المجيء جاء فَفُتِحَ فلمّا خلصت فإذا فيها آدم فقال هذا أبوك آدم فسلّم عليه فسلّمت عليه فردّ السلام ثم قال مرحبًا بالابن الصالح والنبيّ الصالح ثمّ صعد حتّى أتى السماء الثانية فاستفتح قيل من هذا قال جبريل قيل ومن معك قال محمّد قيل وقد أُرْسِلَ إليه قال نعم قيل مرحبًا به فنعم المجيء جاء فَفُتِحَ فلمّا خلصت فإذا يحيى وعيسى وهما ابنا الخالة قال هذا يحيى وعيسى فسلّم عليهما فسلّمت فردّا ثمّ قالا مرحبًا بالأخ الصالح والنبيّ الصالح ثمّ صعد بي إلى السماء الثالثة فاستفتح قيل من هذا قال جبريل قيل و من معك قال محمّد قيل وقد أُرْسِلَ إليه قال نعم قيل مرحبًا به فنعم المجيء جاء فَفُتِحَ فلمّا خلصت إذا يوسف قال هذا يوسف فسلّم عليه فسلّمت عليه فردّ ثمّ قال مرحبًا بالأخ الصالح والنبيّ الصالح ثمّ صعد بي حتّى أتى السماء الرابعة فاستفتح قيل من هذا قال جبريل قيل ومن معك قال محمّد قيل وقد أُرْسِلَ إليه قال نعم قيل مرحبًا به فنعم المجيء جاء فَفُتِحَ فلمّا خلصت فإذا إدريس قال هذا إدريس فسلّم عليه فسلّمت عليه فردّ ثمّ قال مرحبًا بالأخ الصالح والنبيّ الصالح ثمّ صعد بي حتّى أتى السماء الخامسة فاستفتح قيل من هذا قال جبريل قيل و من معك قال محمّد قيل وقد أُرْسِلَ إليه قال نعم قيل مرحبًا به فنعم المجيء جاء فلمّا خلصت فإذا هرون قال هذا هرون فسلّم عليه فردّ ثمّ قال مرحبًا بالأخ الصالح والنبيّ الصالح ثمّ صعد بي حتّى أتي السماء السادسة فاستفتح قيل من هذا قال جبريل قيل ومن معك قال محمّد قيل وقد أُرْسِلَ إليه قال نعم قال مرحبًا به فنعم المجيء جاء فلمّا خلصت فإذا موسى قال هذا موسى فسلّم عليه فسلّمت عليه فردّ ثمّ قال مرحبًا بالأخ الصالح والنبيّ الصالح فلمّا تجاوزت بكي قيل له ما يبكيك قال أبكى لأن غلاما بُعِثَ بعدى يدخل الجنّة من أمّته أكثر ممّا يدخلها من أمّتى ثمّ صعد بي إلى السماء السابعة فاستفتح جبريل قيل من هذا قال جبريل قيل ومن معك قال محمّد قيل وقد أُرْسِلَ إليه قال نعم قيل مرحبًا به فنعم المجيء جاء فلمّا خلصت فإذا إبراهيم قال هذا أبوك إبراهيم فسلّم عليه قال فسلّمت عليه فردّ السلام ثمّ قال مرحبًا بالابن الصالح والنبيّ الصالح ثمّ رُفِعْتُ إلى سدرة المنتهى فإذا نبقها مثل قلال هجر وإذا ورقها مثل آذان الفيلة قال هذه سدرة المنتهى فإذا أربعة أنهار ونهران باطنان ونهران ظاهران فَقُلْتُ ما هذان يا جبريل قال أمّا الباطنان فنهران في الجنّة وأمّا الظاهران فالنيل والفرات ثمّ رُفِعَ إلى البيت المعمور ثمّ أُتِيتُ بإناء من خمر وإناء من لبن وإناء من عسل فأخذت اللبن فقال هي الفطرة أنت عليها و أمّتك ثمّ فُرِضَت علىّ الصلوات خمسين صلاة كلّ يوم فرجعت فمررت على موسى فقال بم أُمِرتَ قُلْتُ أُمِرّتُ بخمسين صلاةً كلّ يوم قال إنّ أمّتك لا تستطيع خمسين صلاةً كلّ يوم وإنّي والله قد جَرّبْت الناس قبلك وعالجت بنى اسرائيل أشدّ المعالجة فارجع إلى ربّك فاسأله التخفيف لأمّتك فرجعت فَوُضِعَ عنّى عشرًا فرجعت إلى موسى فقال مثله فرجعت فَوُضِعَ عنّى عشرًا فرجعت إلى موسى فقال مثله فرجعت فَوُضِعَ عنّى عشرًا فرجعت إلى موسى فقال مثله فرجعت فَوُضِعَ عنّى عشرًا فرجعت إلى موسى فقال مثله فرجعت فأُمِرْتُ بعشر صلوات كلّ يومٍ فرجعت إلى موسى فقال مثله فرجعت فأُمِرْتُ بخمس صلوات كلّ يوم فرجعت إلى موسى فقال بما أُمِرْتَ قلت أُمِرْتُ بخمس صلوات كلّ يوم قال إنّ أمّتك لا تستطيع خمس صلوات كلّ يوم وإنّي قد جرّبت الناس قبلك وعالجت بني اسرائيل أشدّ المعالجة فارجع إلى ربّك فاسأله التخفيف لأمّتك قال سألت ربّي حتّى استحييت ولكن أرضى وأسلّم[60].

[59] Cf. Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 430–431.

[60] ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad Ḫāzin al-Baġdādī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ǧalīl al-musammā lubāb al-taʾwīl fī maʿānī al-tanzīl*, Ḥasan Ḥilmī al-Kutubī, al-Qāhira 1900, vol. III, p. 159.6–160.9.

Chapter on mentioning the *ḥadīṯ* of the *miʿrāǧ*,
its related *aḥkām*, and what scholars have said about it

Qatāda[61] narrated to us from Anas ibn Mālik[62], from Mālik bin Ṣaʿṣaʿa, that the Prophet of Allāh, peace be upon him, told them about the night he was taken on a journey, saying:

While I was in the *ḥaṭīm*[63] – or perhaps he said in the *hiǧr* – lying down, and in a state between sleep and wakefulness – when someone came to me and said – and I heard him say –, 'Cut open from here to here'. I asked my companion al-Ǧārūd,[64] who was by my side: 'What does he mean by this?'. He said: 'From the suprasternal notch to the pubic area' – I heard him say 'from his jugular notch to his pubic area'. Then he extracted my heart and brought a basin of gold filled with faith. My heart was washed, filled and put back in its place. Then I was brought a white beast, smaller than a mule but larger than a donkey. Al-Ǧārūd asked: 'Was it the Burāq, oh Abū Ḥamza?'[65] Anas replied: 'Yes. The animal's step (was so wide that it) reached the farthest point within sight'. I was made to ride on it. Then Ǧibrīl, peace be upon him, departed with me until we came to the lowest heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ǧibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!' The gate was opened. When I entered, there was Ādam. He said: 'This is your father Ādam, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous son and the righteous Prophet'. Then Ǧibrīl ascended with me till we reached the second heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ǧibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!' The gate was opened. When I entered, there were Yaḥyā and ʿĪsā who were cousins. He said: 'These are Yaḥyā and ʿĪsā, greet them'. I greeted them, and both returned my greetings to me. Then they said: 'Welcome to the righteous brother and the righteous Prophet'. Then Ǧibrīl ascended with me till we reached the third heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ǧibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!'. The gate was opened. When I entered, there was Yūsuf. He said: 'This is Yūsuf, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous brother and the righteous Prophet'. Then Ǧibrīl ascended with me till

61 Qatāda ibn al-Nuʿmān (c. 581–c. 644) was one of the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad and a member of the Anṣār.

62 Anas ibn Mālik ibn Naḍr al-Ḫazraǧī al-Anṣārī (c. 612–c. 712), also known as Abū Ḥamza, was another companion of Prophet Muḥammad.

63 The *ḥaṭīm* is the semi-circular wall or enclosure (*hiǧr*) directly in front of and facing the Kaʿba, the cubical building at the center of the *masǧid al-ḥarām* in Mecca. It is part of the sacred precinct surrounding the Kaʿba.

64 Ǧārūd ibn Muʿallā was a companion of Prophet Muhammad and the head of ʿAbd al-Qays tribe.

65 See note 62.

we reached the fourth heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ǧibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!' The gate was opened. When I entered, there was Idrīs. He said: 'This is Idrīs, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous brother and the righteous Prophet'. Then Ǧibrīl ascended with me till we reached the fifth heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ǧibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!'. When I entered, there was Harūn. He said: 'This is Harūn, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous brother and the righteous Prophet'. Then Ǧibrīl ascended with me till we reached the sixth heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ǧibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!'. When I entered, there was Mūsā. He said: 'This is Mūsā, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous brother and the righteous Prophet'. When I left him (i.e. Mūsā) he wept. Someone asked him 'What makes you weep?' Mūsā said 'I weep because a young man who was sent after me will have more of his nation enter Paradise than of my nation'. Then Ǧibrīl ascended with me till we reached the seventh heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ǧibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!'. When I entered, there was Ibrāhīm. He said: 'This is your father Ibrāhīm, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous son and the righteous Prophet'. Then I was raised to the Lote-Tree of the Utmost Boundary. Its fruits were like the jars of Hağr and its leaves were as big as elephants' ears. He said: 'This is the Lote-Tree of the Utmost Boundary'. There were four rivers, two hidden and two visible. I asked: 'What are these, oh Ǧibrīl?' He replied: 'The two hidden are rivers in Paradise, and the two visible are the Nile and the Euphrates'. Then I was raised to the Much-Frequented House (*al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr*). Then I was brought a vessel of wine, a vessel of milk, and a vessel of honey. I chose the milk. He said: 'This is the natural disposition (*fiṭra*) that you and your community are on'. Fifty prayers were prescribed for me every day. I returned and passed by Mūsā, who asked me: 'What have you been ordered?' I replied: 'Fifty prayers a day'. He said: 'Your community won't be able to handle that. By God, I have indeed tested people before you and dealt with the Tribe of Israel most strenuously. Return to your Lord and ask for a reduction for your community'. I went back and it was reduced by ten. I returned to Mūsā and he said the same. I went back and it was reduced by ten. I returned to Mūsā and he said the same. I went back and it was reduced by ten. I returned to Mūsā and he said the same. I went back and it was reduced by ten. I returned to Mūsā and he said the same. I went back and I was prescribed five prayers every day. I returned to Mūsā and he asked: 'What have you been ordered?' I replied: 'Five

> prayers every day'. He said 'Your nation cannot manage five prayers every day, and I have tested people before you and dealt with the Tribe of Israel most intensively. So, return to your Lord and ask Him to reduce it for your nation'. (Muḥammad) said: 'I asked my Lord until I felt ashamed, but I accept and submit'.

The Prophet Muḥammad is in the enclosure of the mosque in Mecca, probably asleep. Ǧibrīl appears to him alone or accompanied by other angels and performs a purification ritual to prepare the Prophet for the *miʿrāǧ*. The *miʿrāǧ* begins from the temple of Mecca via the mount Burāq. The stages of the *miʿrāǧ* are ten: the first seven correspond to the numbered astronomical heavens.[66] The scene at each heaven continues to repeat itself. In each heaven, the Prophet Muḥammad meets a prophet: Ādam, Yaḥyā and ʿĪsā, Yūsuf, Idrīs, Harūn, Mūsā, Ibrāhīm. The eighth stage consists of the vision of the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary, of fabulous proportions and features, from whose roots spring the two hidden rivers of Paradise and the two visible rivers that irrigate the earth, the Nile and the Euphrates. In the ninth stage, the Prophet Muḥammad visits the Much-Frequented House. Then he receives the order of the five prayers every day.[67]

Asín Palacios draws, albeit cursorily, the following connections between this account and the *Divina Commedia*: the guiding role of Ǧibrīl in the *miʿrāǧ*, comparable to that of Beatrice in Dante's *Paradiso*; the stages of each ascent proceed through the astronomical heavens, despite the differing in number and the degree of precision with regard to Ptolemaic astronomy; and the encounter with the Prophets in each heaven.[68]

(2.B) Redaction B is an anonymous account, found in the *Al-Isrāʾ wa-l-miʿrāǧ* (p. 122 and p. 133 note 45 in this document) attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās (d. ca. 686), cousin and companion of the Prophet Muḥammad. Undoubtedly apocryphal, this attribution endowed the text with powerful authority in Sunni Islam.[69] It focuses primarily on the *miʿrāǧ* but includes Muḥammad's infernal vision in the *isrāʾ*, and thus represents a first attempt to merge the two. Asín Palacios reproduces the Arabic text from a photographic reproduction of the MS. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, 882, f. 84r–87r, focusing primarily on its presentation of

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[66] On the mention of the seven heavens see *Qurʾān*, *Suwar* 2 (*The Cow*), v. 29; 17 (*The Night Journey*), v. 44; 23 (*The Believers*), v. 86; 41 (*Distinguished*), v. 12; 65 (*Divorce*), v. 12; 67 (*The Kingdom*), v. 3; 71 (*Noah*), v. 15.

[67] The account given by Asín Palacios is enriched with elements that are not present in the source he mentions.

[68] Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 21–23.

[69] According to Asín Palacios, the text was probably compiled by Isḥāq ibn Wahb, an Egyptian traditionist of the ninth and tenth century, as in the case of other *aḥādīṯ* attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās. Even today the dating and attribution of this text are very problematic. See Bencheikh, *L'aventure de la parole*, p. 284; Fernando Cisneros, *El Libro del viaje nocturno y la ascension del Profeta*, El Colegio de México, Ciudad de México 1998, p. 39–40; Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's Night Journey*, p. 4, 165–167.

Hell.[70] In this account, Ǧibrīl accompanies the Prophet Muḥammad up to either the third heaven (in the Leiden manuscript) or the fifth (in edited versions), where he meets the guardian of Hell, a fiery angel with a terrible face and appearance who, sitting on a stool, prepares his instruments of torture. The Prophet Muḥammad would like to see Hell, to satisfy his curiosity. Although the guardian denies him access, God's command comes from above, allowing the Prophet to peer through a narrow opening in the gate, from which a burning cloud of fire and smoke comes out.

فلم أرفي الملائكة أعظم منه خلقة كالح الوجه شديد البطش ظاهر الغضب لو أشرف على أهل الدنيا لماتوا قال النبيّ صلّى الله عليه وسلّم فلمّا سلّمت عليه ردّ عليّ السلام وهو مُغْضَبٌ فجزعت منه لقلّة تبسّمه قال جبريل لا خوف عليك هذا الملك خُلِقَ من غضب الجبّار منذ خلقه الله تعالى ما ضحك ولا تبسّم يزداد غضبه في كلّ يوم على من ليس في قلبه رحمة ينتقم من العصاة والجبّارين وأهل الكبائر فقلت يا مالك اكشف عن أطباق جهنّم لأنظر إليها فقال لا تستطيع النظر اليها وهذه النداء يا مالك لا تُخَالِفُ له أمرا فعند ذلك فُتِحَ له باب جهنّم مقدار خرم الإبرة فخرج منها وهج ودخان لو دام ساعة لأظلمت السموات والأرض فنظر فيها فإذا هي سبع طباق بعضها فوق بعض فلم أستطيع النظر اليها لشدّة عذاب الكفّار والمشركين[71] .

I have not seen among the angels any greater in creation than him, with a grim face, severe in might, visibly angry. If he had looked upon the people of the world, they would have died. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said: 'When I greeted him, he returned the greeting while angry, and I was frightened by his lack of smiling'. Ǧibrīl said: 'Do not fear. This angel was created from the wrath of the Almighty. Since God the Exalted created him, he has never laughed nor smiled. His anger increases every day toward those who have no mercy in their hearts. He takes vengeance on the disobedient, the tyrants, and those who commit major sins'. I said: 'Oh Mālik, uncover the layers of Hell so I may look at them'. He replied: 'You cannot bear to look at them'. And then came the call: 'Oh Mālik, do not disobey this command'. At that, he opened the gate of Hell the size of a needle's eye. A blaze and smoke came out which, would have darkened the heavens and earth if it had lasted for an hour. We looked inside and saw seven layers, one above the other. I could not bear to look at it due to the severity of the punishment for the unbelievers and polytheists.

[70] See Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 23–30, 432–437. The version proposed by Asín Palacios is more primitive than the one presented in Zilio-Grandi, *Il viaggio notturno e l'ascensione del profeta,* p. xl, whose Italian translation is based on the main printed editions. For a comparison with Dante's *Divina Commedia* see Maria Piccoli, « Viaggio nel regno del ritorno. Davanti a Dio, davanti all'uomo », in Zilio-Grandi, *Il viaggio notturno e l'ascensione del profeta*, p. 73–102 and Maria Piccoli, « Le visiones occidentali anteriori alla Commedia e la tradizione dell'Isrâ' wa' l Mi'râj. Intertestualità o poligenesi? », *Doctor Virtualis*, 12 (2013), p. 191–241.

[71] See Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 432.6–11.

In relation to this version, it is perhaps appropriate to dwell on Asín Palacios' observations on the similarities with Dante's design. The scene recalls the fiery hurricane that illuminates the scene when Dante is about to take his first steps in Hell (*Inferno* V, v. 1–33, in particular v. 31–33: « La bufera infernal, che mai non resta, mena li spirti con la sua rapina; voltando e percotendo li molesta »). The figure of the guardian recalls Minos, to whom Virgil says, « Non impeder lo suo fatale andare » *Inferno* V, v. 22, as well as Charon, Pluto, Phlegyas, the demons at the gates of the city of Dis, the Minotaur, and the demons of the fifth *bolgia* of the eighth circle. The Muslim Hell appears to be made up of seven layers descending in proportion to the gravity of the sins and their respective punishments. Each layer contains various overlapping dwellings, corresponding to different moral subcategories of sinners. Here the Prophet observes the first layer and its fourteen dwellings, whose torments, according to Asín Palacios, are echoed in Dante's *Inferno*, as I have tried to summarize in the following table.

Hell in Redaction B, the *Al-Isrāʾ wa-l-miʿrāǧ* attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās (d. ca. 686), found in MS. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, 882, fol. 84r–87r (See Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 432–434)	*Divina Commedia*
Snakes and scorpions torture the bodies of tyrants, wicked guardians, and usurers on various overlapping or parallel layers. مَحْبُوس في تلك الصناديق رجال ونساء وعندهم حيّات وعقارب وهم يتصارخون قلت يا مالك فما كان ذنب هؤلاء في الدنيا قال كانوا يظلمون الناس ويأكلون أموالهم بغير حقّ ويتكبّرون ويتجبّرون ولا ينبغي الكبرياء والجبروت إلّا لله تعالى ثمّ نظرت فرأيت أقوامًا مشافرهم كمشافر الكلاب والإبل والزبانية تقمعهم بمقامع من نار وتدخل تلك الحيّات من أفواههم فتقطّع أمعاءهم وتخرج من أدبارهم فقلت من هؤلاء قال الذين يأكلون أموال اليتامى ظلمًا إنما يأكلون في بطونهم نارًا وسيصلون سعيرًا ثمّ نظرت وإذا بقوم بطونهم كأمثال الجبال تغلي حيّات وعقارب كلّما أراد أحدهم أن يقوم سقط على وجهه من عظم بطنه قلت من هؤلاء قال آكلو الربا. (Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana,* p. 433.1–9) Imprisoned in those boxes are men and women with snakes and scorpions, and they are screaming. I said, 'Oh Mālik, what was their sin in the world?'. He replied, 'They used to oppress people and consume their wealth unjustly, and they were arrogant and tyrannical, while power	***Inferno* XXIV v. 79–105** Noi discendemmo il ponte da la testa/ dove s'aggiugne con l'ottava ripa,/ e poi mi fu la bolgia manifesta: e vidivi entro terribile stipa di serpenti, e di sí diversa mena che la memoria il sangue amcor mi scipa. Più non si vanti Libia con sua rena;/ché se chelidri, iaculi e faree/ produce, e cencri con anfisibena, né tante pestilenzie né sì ree/ mostrò già mai con tutta l'Etïopia/né con ciò che di sopra al Mar Rosso èe.

and tyranny befit only God the Exalted'. Then, I looked and saw people whose lips were like those of dogs and camels, and the guards were suppressing them with maces of fire. Those snakes were entering their mouths, cutting their intestines, and coming out of their rear ends. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'Those who consume the wealth of orphans unjustly; they are only consuming fire into their bellies, and they will be burned in a Blaze'. Then, I looked and saw people whose bellies were like mountains, boiling with snakes and scorpions. Whenever one of them tried to stand, he fell on his face due to the enormity of his belly. I asked, 'Who are these?' He replied, 'The usurers'.	Tra questa cruda e tristissima copia/ corrëan genti nude e spaventate,/ sanza sperar pertugio o elitropia: con serpi le man dietro avean legate;/ quelle ficcavan per le ren la coda/ e 'l capo, ed eran dinanzi aggroppate. Ed ecco a un ch'era da nostra proda,/ s'avventò un serpente che 'l trafisse/ là dove 'l collo a le spalle s'annoda. Né O sì tosto mai né I si scrisse,/com'el s'accese e arse, e cener tutto/ convenne che cascando divenisse; e poi che fu a terra sì distrutto,/la polver si raccolse per sé stessa/ e 'n quel medesmo ritornò di butto. (The description of the serpents that torture the damned continues in canto XXV)
Slanderers who claw their faces with bronze nails ثمّ رأيت رجالًا ونسأء مُعَلّقِين بألسنتهم بكلاليب من نار ولهم أظفار من نحاس يخمشون بها وجوههم قلت من هؤلاء قال الّذين يشهدون الزور ويمشون بالنميمة ويرمون الفتن بين الناس ويقعون في أعراضهم. (Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 433.10–13) Then I saw men and women hanging by their tongues with hooks of fire, and they had nails of copper with which they were scratching their faces. I asked, 'Who are these?' He replied, 'Those	***Inferno* XXIX, v. 73–90** Io vidi due sedere a sé poggiati,/com'a scaldar si poggia tegghia a tegghia,/dal capo al piè di schianze macolati; e non vidi già mai menare stregghia/ a ragazzo aspettato dal segnorso,/ né a colui che mal volontier vegghia, come ciascun menava spesso il morso/

who bear false witness, spread gossip, sow discord among people, and slander them'.	de l'unghie sopra sé per la gran rabbia/ del pizzicor, che non ha più soccorso; e sì traevan giù l'unghie la scabbia,/ come coltel di scardova le scaglie/ o d'altro pesce che più larghe l'abbia. 'O tu che con le dita ti dismaglie',/ cominciò 'l duca mio a l'un di loro,/ "e che fai d'esse talvolta tanaglie, dinne s'alcun Latino è tra costoro/ che son quinc'entro, se l'unghia ti basti/ etternalmente a cotesto lavoro'.
A rabid thirst tortures the drunkards ثم نظرت فرأيت أقوامًا يستغيثون من العطش فتأتيهم الزبانية بأقداح من نار فإذا تناولوها سقط لحم وجوههم من حرّها فإذا شربوها قُطِّعَت أمعاؤهم وخرجت من أدبارهم قلت من هؤلاء قال شُرَّابُ الخمر. (Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana,* p. 433.16-18) Then I looked and saw people crying out in thirst. The guards of Hell came to them with cups of fire. When they took them, the flesh of their faces fell off from the heat. When they drank from them, it cut their intestines and came out from their rear ends. I asked, 'Who are these?' .He said, 'The drinkers of wine'.	***Inferno* XXX, v. 58–69** 'O voi che sanz'alcuna pena siete,/ e non so io perché, nel mondo gramo',/ diss'elli a noi, 'guardate e attendete a la miseria del maestro Adamo;/ io ebbi, vivo, assai di quel ch'i' volli,/ e ora, lasso!, un gocciol d'acqua bramo. Li ruscelletti che d'i verdi colli/ del Casentin discendon giuso in Arno,/ faccendo i lor canali freddi e molli, sempre mi stanno innanzi, e non indarno,/ ché l'imagine lor vie più m'asciuga/ che 'l male ond'io nel volto mi discarno. ***Inferno* XXX, v. 118–129**

	‘Ricorditi, spergiuro, del cavallo’,/ rispuose quel ch’avëa infiata l’epa;/ ‘e sieti reo che tutto il mondo sallo!’. ‘E te sia rea la sete onde ti crepa’,/ disse ’l Greco, ‘la/ lingua, e l’acqua marcia/ che ’l ventre innanzi a li occhi sì t’assiepa!’. Allora il monetier: ‘Così si squarcia/ la bocca tua per tuo mal come suole;/ ché, s’i’ ho sete e omor mi rinfarcia, tu hai l’arsura e ’l capo che ti duole,/ e per leccar lo specchio di Narcisso,/non vorresti a ’nvitar molte parole’.
The wicked sons submerged in fire and tortured by demons with iron hooks every time they ask for forgiveness ثمّ رأيت رجالاً ونساءً يُعَذبونَ في النَّار. قد وُكِّلت بهم زبانية بمقامع من حديد كلّما استغاثوا يقمعونهم ويطعنونهم برماح من نار في بطونهم ويضربونهم بسياط من نار فلم أر أحدًا من أهل الكبائر أشدّ عذابًا منهم قلت من هؤلاء قال العاقون والديهم. (Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 433.25-28) Then I saw men and women being tormented in the fire. They were guarded by angels with iron maces. Whenever they cried out for help, the angels would suppress them, stab them with spears of fire in their bellies, and strike them with whips of fire. I had not seen anyone among the people of major sins suffering more severe punishment than them. I asked, ‘Who are these?’ He replied, ‘Those who are disobedient to their parents’.	***Inferno* XXI, v. 1–21** Così di ponte in ponte, altro parlando/ che la mia comedìa cantar non cura,/venimmo; e tenavamo ’l colmo, quando restammo per veder l’altra fessura/ di Malebolge e li altri pianti vani;/ e vidila mirabilmente oscura. Quale ne l’arzanà de’ Viniziani/ bolle l’inverno la tenace pece/ a rimpalmare i legni lor non sani, ché navicar non ponno – in quella vece/ chi fa suo legno novo e chi ristoppa/ le coste a quel che più vïaggi fece;

	chi ribatte da proda e chi da poppa;/ altri fa remi e altri volge sarte;/ chi terzeruolo e artimon rintoppa –: tal, non per foco ma per divin'arte,/ bollia là giuso una pegola spessa,/ che 'nviscava la ripa d'ogne parte. I' vedea lei, ma non vedëa in essa/ mai che le bolle che 'l bollor levava,/ e gonfiar tutta, e riseder compressa. ***Inferno* XXII, v. 16–30** Pur a la pegola era la mia 'ntesa,/ per veder de la bolgia ogne contegno/e de la gente ch'entro v'era incesa. Come i dalfini, quando fanno segno/ a' marinar con l'arco de la schiena/ che s'argomentin di campar lor legno, talor così, ad alleggiar la pena,/ mostrav'alcun de' peccatori 'l dosso/ e nascondea in men che non balena. E come a l'orlo de l'acqua d'un fosso/ stanno i ranocchi pur col muso fuori,/ sì che celano i piedi e l'altro grosso, sì stavan d'ogne parte i peccatori;/ ma come s'appressava Barbariccia,/così si ritraén sotto i bollori.

The martyrdom of the assassins who, although stabbed by demons, continuously revive to reiterate their torment	*Inferno* **XXVIII, v. 34–42**
ثمّ رأيت أقوامًا تُذَبِّحُهم الزبانية بسكاكين من نار كلّما ماتوا عادوا كما كانوا قلت من هؤلاء قال الّذين يقتلون النفس التي حَرَّمَ الله ظلمًا. (Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 434.1-3)	E tutti li altri che tu vedi qui,/ seminator di scandalo e di scisma/ fuor vivi, e però son fessi così.
Then I saw people being slaughtered by the guardians of Hell with knives of fire. Every time they died, they returned to their original state. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'Those who kill people that God has forbidden to be killed, unjustly'.	Un diavolo è qua dietro che n'accisma/ sì crudelmente, al taglio de la spada/ rimettendo ciascun di questa risma,
	quand'avem volta la dolente strada;/ però che le ferite son richiuse/ prima ch'altri dinanzi li rivada.

(2.C) Redaction C of the second cycle is closely related to B, but in this version, when the gate of Hell opens, the Prophet Muḥammad is terrified by the flames, smoke, and stench emerging from it and begs Ǧibrīl to have it closed again.[72] It is particularly interested in the episodes of the *miʿrāǧ* occurring beyond the seventh heaven. As described by Asín Palacios, it is extremely baroque and polished, characterized by repetitions, hyperboles, and ample use of the metaphorical imagery of light, color, and music. It is contained in the apocryphal collection of *aḥādīṯ* reported in the *Kitāb al-Laʾālī l-Maṣnūʿa fī l-aḥādīṯ al-mawḍūʿa* (*The Book of Artificial Pearls Concerning Fabricated Traditions*) by Ǧalāl al-Dīn al-Ṣuyūṭī, an Egyptian polymath and *muḥaddiṯ* known as the *Šayḫ al-Islām* (d. 1505). He reports the account by the traditionist Ibn Ḥabān (d. 965).[73]

Al-Ṣuyūṭī's report begins with the image of a rooster with green down and white feathers as the pedestrial of God's Throne, intoning a prayer to God. Asín Palacios compares this to Dante's eagle in the heaven of Jupiter (*Paradiso* XIX):

> ابن حبان حدّثنا محمّد بن سدوس النسوي حدّثنا حميد بن زنجويه حدّثنا محمّد بن خداش حدّثنا علىّ بن قتيبة عن ميسرة بن عبد ربه عن عمر بن سليمان الدمشقي عن الضحّاك عن ابن عبّاس مرفوعًا لما أُسْرِىَ بي إلى السماء رأيت فيها أعاجيب من عباد الله وخلقه ومن ذلك الّذي رأيت في السماء ديك له زغب أخضر وريش أبيض بياض ريشه كأشدّ بياض. رأيته قطّ وزغبه تحت ريشه أخضر كأشدّ خضرة رأيتها قطّ وإذا رجلاه في تخوم الأرض السابعة السفلى ورأسه تحت عرش الرحمن ثاني عنقه تحت العرش له جناحان في منكبيه إذا نشرهما جاوزا المشرق والمغرب فإذا كان في بعض الليل نشر جناحيه وخفق بهما وصرخ بالتسبيح الله يقول سبحان الملك

[72] See Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 31–58, 437–439.

[73] Al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Kitāb al-Laʾālī al-Maṣnūʿa fī l-aḥādīṯ al-mawḍūʿa*, al-Adabiyya, al-Qāhira 1899, vol. I, p. 33–42.

القدّوس سبحان الله الكبير المتعال لا إله إلّا هو الحيّ القيّوم فإذا فعل ذلك سبّحت ديكة الأرض كلّها وخفقت بأجنحتها وأخذت في الصّراخ فإذا سكن ذلك الديك في السماء سكنت الديكة في الأرض[74].

Ibn Ḥabān narrated to us from Muḥammad ibn Sadūs al-Nasawī, from Ḥumayd ibn Zanǧawayh, from Muḥammad ibn Ḫidāš, from ʿAlī ibn Qutayba, from Maysara ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, from ʿUmar ibn Sulaymān al-Dimašqī, from al-Ḍaḥḥāk, from Ibn ʿAbbās, who attributed it to the Prophet: 'When I was taken on the night journey to the heavens, I saw wonders among God's servants and His creation. Among what I saw in the sky was a rooster with green down and white feathers. The whiteness of its feathers was the most intense white I had ever seen, and its down under the feathers was the most intense green I had ever seen. Its feet were in the depths of the seventh lowest earth, and its head was under the Throne of the Most Merciful, with its neck bent under the Throne. It had two wings on its shoulders that, when spread, extended beyond the east and the west. At a certain point in the night, it would spread its wings, flap them, and cry out glorifying God, saying: 'Glory be to the Holy Sovereign, glory be to God, the Great, the Exalted. There is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting'. When it did this, all the roosters on earth would glorify God, flap their wings, and begin to crow. When that rooster in the sky became quiet, the roosters on earth would become quiet.'

Then the Prophet Muḥammad sees an angel half made of snow and half of fire, who invites the believers to unite their hearts into one. Asín Palacios compares it to the angels who fly with their wings in Dante's mystical rose.

ثمّ مررت بخلق عجب من العجب من الملائكة نصف جسده ممّا يلي رأسه ثلج والآخر نار ما بينهما رُتِقَ فلا النار تذيب الثلج ولا الثلج يطفئ النار وهو قائم ينادى بصوت له رفيع جدًّا يقول سبحان ربّي الّذي كفّ برد هذا الثلج فلا يطفئ حرّ هذه النار، سبحان ربّي الّذي كفّ حرّ هذه النار فلا تذيب هذا الثلج اللهمّ مُؤَلِّفًا بين الثلج والنار ألّف بين قلوب عبادك المؤمنين[75].

Then I passed by a wondrous creation among the angels: half of its body from the head down was snow, and the other half was fire, with no separation between them. The fire does not melt the snow, nor does the snow extinguish the fire. It stands calling out in a very loud voice, saying: 'Glory to my Lord who has restrained the cold of this snow, so it does not extinguish the heat of this fire. Glory to my Lord who has restrained the heat of this fire, so it does not melt this snow. O God, You who have united snow and fire, unite the hearts of Your believing servants'.

Then he encounters the angel of death seated on a throne, who rule the reins of the universe and is constantly engaged in taking souls. The entire world and everything within it are between his knees, while he fixes his gaze on a tablet of

[74] Al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Kitāb al-Laʾālī al-Maṣnūʿa fī l-aḥādīṯ al-mawḍūʿa*, vol. I, p. 63.9–20.
[75] Al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Kitāb al-Laʾālī al-Maṣnūʿa fī l-aḥādīṯ al-mawḍūʿa*, vol. I, p. 64.4–8.

light on which are discernible lines of writing. The angel of death is the most hardworking of the angels.[76]

A generic *miʿrāǧ* – well narrated in other redactions – continues up to the sixth heaven, covering for each heaven a distance of five hundred years. The Prophet Muḥammad has a vision of a multitude of Cherubim moving like waves of the sea. Their bodies are covered with a thousand wings and faces with which they intone a timorous song of praise to God across the spheres, the words of which, for their sonority, seem to shatter the skull. Then the Prophet Muḥammad is led by Ǧibrīl to the seventh heaven where he encounters new angelic creatures whom he is able to see through an 'energy' that comes to him from God, but his guide warns him not to speak of what he will see from this point on.

ثمّ جاوزناه ومررت بملائكة كثيرة لا يحصى عددهم إلّا الله الواحد الملك القهّار منهم من له وجوه كثيرة بين كتفيه الله أعلم بعدها ثمّ وجوه كثيرة في صدره وفي كلّ وجه من تلك الوجوه أفواه وألسن وهم يحمدون الله ويسبّحونه بتلك الألسن كلّها فرأيت من خلقهم وعبادتهم الله أمرًا عظيمًا فجاوزناهم من سماء إلى سماء حتّى بلغنا بقوّة الله إلى السماء السادسة فإذا خلق كثير فوق وصف الواصفين يموج بعضهم في بعض كثرة وإذا كلّ ملك منهم ممثّلئ ما بين رأسه ورجليه وجوه وأجنحة وليس من فم ولا رأس ولا وجه ولا عين ولا لسان ولا أذن ولا جناح ولا يد ولا رجل ولا عضو ولا شعر إلّا يسبّح الله بحمده ويذكر من آلائه وثنائه بكلام لا يذكره العضو الآخر رافعين أصواتهم بالبكاء من خشية الله والتحميد له وعبادته لو سمع أهل الأرض صوت ملك منهم لماتوا كلّهم فزعًا من شدّة هوله ، قلت يا جبريل من هؤلاء، قال سبحان الله العظيم هؤلاء الكروبيّون عن عبادتهم الله وتسبيحهم له وبكائهم من خشيته خُلِقُوا كما ترى لم يكلّم واحد منهم صاحبه إلى جنبه قطّ ولم يروا وجهه ولم يرفعوا رؤوسهم إلى السماء السابعة منذ خُلِقُوا ولم ينظروا إلى ما تحتهم من السموات والأرضين خشوعًا في جسمهم وخوفًا من ربّهم [...] ثمّ جاوزناهم فحملني جبريل فأدخلني السماء السابعة فأبصرت فيها خلقًا وملائكة من خلق ربّهم لا يُؤْذَن لي أن أحدّثكم عنهم ولا أصفهم لكم، ثمّ أخبركم إنّ الله أعطاني عند ذلك مثل قوّة أهل الأرض وزادني من عنده ما هو أعلم به ومنّ عليّ بالثبات وحدّد بصري الرؤية نورهم ولولا ذلك ما استطعت النظر فقلت سبحان الله العظيم الّذي خلق مثل هؤلاء، قلت يا من هؤلاء يا جبريل فأخبرني وقصّ عليّ من شأنهم العجب ولم يُؤْذَن لي أن أحدّثكم عنهم[77].

Then we passed him and came upon numerous angels, their number known only to God, the One, the King, the Subduer. Among them were those with many faces between their shoulders, God knows their number, and many faces on their chests. On each of these faces were mouths and tongues, all praising and glorifying God. I saw from their creation and worship of God a most great order. We passed them from heaven to heaven until we reached, by God's power, the sixth heaven. There was an abundance of creation beyond the description of describers, surging into one another in multitude. Each angel was filled from head to toe with faces and wings. There was no mouth, head, face, eye, tongue, ear, wing, hand, foot, limb, or hair that did not glorify God with His praise and mention His blessings and praise with words not repeated by another part, raising their voices in weeping from fear of God and praising Him and worshipping Him. If the people of Earth heard the voice of one of these angels, they would all die from the intensity of its terror. I said, 'Oh Ǧibrīl, who are these?' He replied, 'Glory be to God, the Great. These are the Cherubim. They

[76] Al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Kitāb al-Laʾālī al-Maṣnūʿa fī l-aḥādīṯ al-mawḍūʿa*, vol. I, p. 64.11–16.
[77] Al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Kitāb al-Laʾālī al-Maṣnūʿa fī l-aḥādīṯ al-mawḍūʿa*, vol. I, p. 66.6–68.8.

> were created as you see for the worship of God, glorifying Him and weeping from fear of Him. Not one of them has ever spoken to his companion beside him, nor have they seen each other's faces. They have not raised their heads to the seventh heaven since they were created, nor have they looked at what is below them of the heavens and earths, out of humility in their bodies and fear of their Lord'. [...] Then we passed them, and Ǧibrīl carried me and brought me into the seventh heaven. There I saw creations and angels from the creation of their Lord that I am not permitted to tell you about or describe to you. Then I inform you that God gave me at that time the strength of all the people of Earth and increased me from Himself with what He knows best and granted me steadfastness and sharpened my vision to see their light. Without that, I could not have looked. I said, 'Glory be to God, the Great, who created such as these'. I asked, 'Who are these, oh Ǧibrīl?' He informed me and related to me wonders of their affairs, but I am not permitted to tell you about them.

Ǧibrīl leads him by hand into the proximity of God, Whose description is the main theme of this redaction. Seventy ranks of angels stand in the heights of light in this second heaven. The Prophet Muḥammad ascends beyond and encounters another seventy ranks. This repeats until he reaches seven groups of seventy angelic ranks that rotate around God's Throne singing His praises. The Prophet Muḥammad expresses his amazement.

> فلقد خُيِّلَ إليّ أنّي قد نسيت كلَّ ما رأيت من عجائب خلق الله الّذي دونهم ولم يُؤْذَنْ لي أن أُحَدِّثَكم عنهم ولو كان أُذِنَ لي في ذلك لم أستطع أن أصفهم لكم ولكن أخبركم أن لو كنت ميّتًا قبل أجلي فزعًا من شيء لمتّ عند رؤيتهم وعجائب خلقهم ودويّ أصواتهم وشعاع نورهم، ولكنّ الله تعالى قَوَّاني لذلك برحمته وتمام نعمته ومنّ عليّ بالثبات عند ما رأيت من شعاع نورهم وسمعت دويّ أصواتهم بالتسبيح وَحَدَّدَ بصري لرؤيتهم كي لا يُخْطَفَ من نورهم[78].
>
> I felt as if I had forgotten everything I had seen before of the wonders of God's creation below them. I am not permitted to tell you about them, and even if I were allowed, I would not be able to describe them to you. But I inform you that if I were to die before my appointed time out of fear from anything, I would have died upon seeing them, the wonders of their creation, the resonance of their voices, and the radiance of their light. But God strengthened me for that with His mercy and the perfection of His favor and granted me steadfastness when I saw the radiance of their light and heard the resonance of their voices glorifying Him. He sharpened my vision to see them so that I would not be blinded by their light.

Then the Prophet Muḥammad ascends, crossing seven seas. One is of radiant flames and brilliant light, with a terrifying roar and clamor. Another is like lofty peaks in the air, with snow of intense whiteness that radiates like the sun and thunders like flowing water. This is followed by another sea of fire, more intense than the first, with waves surging like mountains, and another sea of water that surges like firm mountains, one above the other, where he sees wondrous angels

[78] Al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Kitāb al-Laʾālī al-Maṣnūʿa fī l-aḥādīṯ al-mawḍūʿa*, vol. I, p. 69.7–13.

beyond any description thus far. The water falls short of their knees, while their heads reach up to the Throne of the Lord of Might. Then follows a sea of light that outshines all the others, its light surpassing all light, submerging all fire, and outshining all radiance. Its brilliance nearly blinds him. While he is ascending, he sees angels surrounding God's Throne, standing in tight rows, and he emphasizes how this extraordinary sight made him forget all the previous wonders. He is forbidden from describing these angels, and even if allowed, he could not do justice to them. They glorify God with powerful voices, affirming His uniqueness and greatness. When the angels speak, a brilliant light emerges from their mouths, so intense that it could burn all creation below if not for God's decree. The Prophet Muḥammad asks Ǧibrīl about these angels, and Ǧibrīl identifies them as various classes of Cherubim, created by God in ranks and forms that transcend human comprehension. The Prophet Muḥammad and Ǧibrīl then ascend faster than an arrow and the wind toward the Throne of the Lord of Glory. Upon witnessing the Throne, the Prophet realizes that all the creation he has witnessed before pales in comparison to its magnificence.

ثمّ جاوزناهم بإذن الله متصعّدين في جوّ علّيّين أسرع من السهم والريح بإذن الله وقدرته حتّى وصلنا إلى العرش ذي العزّة العزيز الواحد القهّار، فلمّا نظرت إلى العرش فإذا ما رأيته من الخلق كلّه قد تصاغر ذكره وتهاون أمره واتّضع خطره عند العرش، وإذا السماوات السبع والأرضون السبع وأطباق جهنّم ودرجات الجنّة وستور الحجب والنار والبحار والجبال الّتي في علّيّين وجميع الخلق والخليقة إلى عرش الرحمن كحلقة صغيرة من حلق الدرع في أرض فلاة واسعة تيهاء لا يُعْرَفُ أطرافها من أطرافها وهكذا ينبغي لمقام ربّ العزّة أن يكون عظيمًا لعظم ربوبيّته وهو كذلك وأعظم وأجلّ وأعزّ وأكرم وأفضل وأمره فوق وصف الواصفين وما تلهج به ألسن الناطقين[79].

After we had left the Cherubim behind, by the permission of God we continued to ascend through the celestial ether, faster than an arrow and the wind, thanks to the divine omnipresence that allowed us to do so, until we reached the throne of the Glorious, the Unique, the Victorious. But, as I directed my gaze toward the Throne, I felt that all the created things I had seen were diminishing in my spirit, losing their value and lowering themselves when compared to the Throne. The seven heavens, the seven earths, the seven layers of Hell, the degrees of Paradise, the various veils, lights, seas, and mountains that exist in the celestial heights – in a word, the entire creation – appeared to me, when compared to the Throne of the Merciful, as something like a small ring among all those that make up a coat of mail, lost in the midst of a vast desert land whose limits are unknown. This is how the station of the Lord of Might should be – great due to the greatness of His Lordship. And it is so, even greater, more majestic, mightier, nobler, more excellent, and His affair is beyond the description of describers and what the tongues of speakers can express.

On a green crown (*rafrāf*) with hands to protect his eyes the Prophet Muḥammad leaves Ǧibrīl and is raptured to the presence of God, Whom he now sees with his heart. God brings him closer and makes him witness to His revelation. The Prophet

[79] Al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Kitāb al-Laʾālī al-Maṣnūʿa fī l-aḥādīṯ al-mawḍūʿa*, vol. I, p. 73.20–74.5.

Muḥammad experiences an emotion that erases all his fear. Immediately after, there is a conversation between God and His servant to whom He entrusts his Prophetic mission. God says to the Prophet that He has taken him, Muḥammad, as a close friend as He did with Ibrāhīm, that He has spoken to him directly as to Mūsā, that He has given him the opening of the Book and the closing verses of *Sūrat al-Baqara* (*The Cow*),[80] which were from the treasures of His Throne, that He has sent him to the white, black, and red people of the earth, to the *ǧinn* and the humans, and that He had not sent a prophet to all of them before him. He goes on saying that He made the earth, its land and sea, pure as a place of prostration for him and his nation. He has sent down to him the master of all books, a guardian over them, a *Qurʾān*. After this the Prophet Muḥammad begins his descent and reflects on his vision.

> فإذا إلهي قد ثَبَّتَ بصري في قلبي وإذا أنا أبصر بقلبي ما خلفي كما أبصر بعيني ما أمامي، فلمّا أكرمني ربّي برؤيته أَحَدَّ بصري[81].
>
> Behold, my God had strengthened in my heart the intuitive energy, in such a way that I now saw with my heart what was behind me, just as with my carnal eyes I saw what was in front of me. The fact was that God, in granting me the grace of His vision, had sharpened my sight.

The Prophet Muḥammad remains absorbed in the complete and luminous contemplation of creation and listens to the harmonious concert of the angelic hierarchies: the voices of the Cherubim and those above them, and the sound of the Throne and the veils around him glorify God. The sounds are varied, some creaking, some rumbling, some roaring, some resonating, some crashing, all different from each other, some louder than others. Ǧibrīl satisfies the Prophet's final curiosities, and they both descend faster than an arrow and the wind until they enter the gardens of Paradise.

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[80] See *Qurʾān* 2 (*The Cow*), v. 285–86: « The Messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord, and the believers; each one believes in God and His Angels, and in his Book, and His Messengers; we make no division between any one of His Messengers. They say, 'We hear, and obey. Our Lord, grant us Thy forgiveness; unto Thee is the homecoming. God charges no soul save to its capacity; standing to its account is what it has earned, and against its account what it has merited. Our Lord, take us not to task if we forget, or make mistake. Our Lord, charge us not with a load such as Thou didst lay upon those before us. Our Lord, do Thou not burden us beyond what we have the strength to bear. And pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us; Thou art our protector. And help us against the people of the unbelievers » (Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. I, 71–72). See Amir-Moezzi, Dye, *Le Coran des Historiens,* vol. II, *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, *Tome 1: sourates 1–26*, p. 110.

[81] Al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Kitāb al-Laʾālī al-Maṣnūʿa fī l-aḥādīth al-mawḍūʿa*, vol. I, p. 76.6–8.

The last part of this version presents an exaggeratedly materialistic description of the Garden or Islamic Paradise,[82] probably juxtaposed with the preceding in homage to popular ideas at the time and to form a contrast with the legend as rewritten heavily from the perspective of Arabic Neoplatonism and the Philosophy of Illumination (*ḥikmat al-išrāq*).

Asín Palacios highlights the similarities between this version and the *Divina Commedia* in terms of the dematerialization of Paradise achieved through the metaphors of sound and light, whose intensity increases throughout the *miʿrāǧ*. More specific connections include: (1) the imagery of an arrow and the wind for the speed of the *miʿrāǧ* and, respectively, for Dante and Beatrice's passage from the first to the second sphere and for the souls that fly to meet them in the sphere of Venus;[83] (2) the image of the whirlwind for the souls that appear to him in the heaven of Saturn;[84] (3) the impossibility of description and the traveller's inability to report what he sees;[85] (4) the Prophet Muḥammad's initial bewilderment at each successive stage of the *miʿrāǧ* until God sharpens his sight by conferring on him a new power;[86] (5) Ǧibrīl's continuous intercession for the Prophet Muḥammad until the moment when they separate, along with the latter's continuous turning to thank God for the benefits granted to him;[87] (6) the vision of the luminous divine essence in concentric circles of angels;[88] (7) the physiological phenomena of ecstasy.[89]

Redaction C of the second cycle, in many respects close to redaction B, was quite widespread from the twelfth century in al-Andalus, as evidenced by the discovery in a mine in the vicinity of Granada of MS. Madrid, Real Academia, Codera (Gayangos) 241, f. 1–8, a manuscript containing a fragment of the *miʿrāǧ*

[82] For an example of a materialistic description of the Garden or Islamic Paradise, see Frederick Stephen Colby, « A Thirteenth Century Composite Account of Muhammad's Visit to Paradise. Translation and Commentary on the Tour of the Garden in Amcazade Huseyin Pasha 95/2 », *Doctor Virtualis*, 12 (2013), p. 169–189, in particular p. 171–183.

[83] See *Paradiso* VIII, v. 22-24; V, v. 91–93.

[84] See *Paradiso* XXII, v. 99.

[85] Cf. *Paradiso* I, v. 4–9; X, v. 43–47; XXIII, v. 55–59; XXX, v. 19–22; XXXI, v. 136–138; XXXIII, v. 55–56, 90, 106, 121–123, 139, 142.

[86] Cf. *Paradiso* III, v. 128–129; XIV, v. 77–78, 82; XXV, v. 118–121; XXIII, v. 28–33, 76–84, 118–119; XXVIII, v. 16–18; XXIX, v. 8–9; XXX, v. 46–51, 55–60; XXXIII, v. 52–54, 76–84 which I quote as paradigmatic example: « Io credo, per l'acume ch'io soffersi/ del vivo raggio, ch'i' sarei smarrito,/ se li occhi miei da lui fossero aversi./ E' mi ricorda ch'io fui più ardito/ per questo a sostener, tanto ch'i' giunsi/ l'aspetto mio col valore infinito./ Oh abbondante grazia ond' io presunsi/ ficcar lo viso per la luce etterna,/ tanto che la veduta vi consunsi! ».

[87] Cf. *Paradiso* II, v. 29–30; X, v. 52–54.

[88] Cf. *Paradiso* XXVIII, v. 57–63, 93–94, 97–99

[89] Cf. *Paradiso* XXXIII, v. 57–63, 93–94, 97–99.

from Muḥammad's encounter with Azrāʾīl, the Angel of Death in the fourth heaven up to the divine Throne.[90]

IV.3. The third cycle

(3) Finally, the third cycle is comprised of a single redaction, a synthesis and fusion of all the previous ones, presenting a continuous narrative in which Muḥammad's visits to Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise follow one another.[91] For this redaction, we have a date *ante quem* in the ninth century, since the great commentator al-Ṭabarī cites it in his already mentioned exegetical work of the *Qurʾān*, the *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* (XV, 3.6–14.7). In his commentary al-Ṭabarī records two long composite narratives, a report on the authority of the early companion of Muḥammad, Abū Hurayra, and another report on an early authority among the *ṣaḥāba* named Abū Saʿīd Ḫudrī. A peculiar element of interest of the third cycle is the allegorical-moral richness of the episodes of temptation faced by the Prophet Muḥammad during the *isrāʾ*. These include the voice of the Devil and an old woman, a symbol of the caducity of world, who invites him to abandon his pathwhich. According to Asín Palacios, this scene is similar to Dante's vision in the fifth circle of Purgatory (*Purgatorio* XIX, v. 7–36; 55–60):

فسار رسول الله صلّى الله عليه وسلّم فإذا هو بعجوز نَاءٍ عن الطريق أي على جنب الطريق قال أبو جعفر ينبغي أن يقال نَائِيَة ولكن أُسْقِطَ منها التأنيث فقال ما هذه يا جبرئيل قال سريا محمّد فسار ما شاء الله أن يسير فإذا نداء يَدْعُوهُ مُتَنَحيًا عن الطريق يقول هلمّ يا محمّد قال جبرئيل سريا محمّد فسار ما شاء الله أن يسير قال ثمّ لقيه خلق من الخلائق فقال أحدهم السلام عليك يا أوّل والسلام عليك يا آخر والسلام عليك يا حاشر فقال له جبرئيل اردد السلام يا محمّد قال فردّ السلام ثمّ لقيه الثاني فقال له مثل مقالة الأوّلين حتّى انتهى إلى بيت المقدس فَعُرِضَ عليه الماء واللبن والخمر فتناول رسول الله صلّى الله عليه وسلّم اللبن فقال له جبرئيل أصبت يا محمّد الفطرة ولو شربت الماء لغرقت وغرقت أُمَّتُكَ ولو شربت الخمر لغويت وغوت أُمَّتُكَ ثمّ بُعِثَ له آدم فمن دونه من الانبياء فَأَمَّهم رسول الله – صلّى الله عليه وسلّم تلك الليلة ثمّ قال له جبرئيل أمّا العجوز الّتي رأيت على جانب الطريق فلم يبق من الدنيا الا بقدر ما بقى من عمر تلك العجوز وأمّا الّذي أراد أنْ تميل اليه فذاك عدوّ الله إبليس أراد أنْ تميل إليه وأمّا الّذين سلّموا عليك فذاك ابراهيم وموسى وعيسى.[92]

The Messenger of God, peace be upon him, set out, and there he saw an old woman beside the road, or on the side of the road (Abū Ǧaʿfar said it should have been said *nāʾiya* – feminine for distant/remote , but the feminine form was dropped) so he asked, 'What is this, oh Ǧibrīl?'. He replayed, 'Walk on, oh Muḥammad'. So, he proceeded as far as God willed him to proceed. Suddenly, there was a voice calling him off the road, saying, 'Come, oh Muḥammad'. Ǧibrīl prompted, 'Walk on, oh Muḥammad'. So, he proceeded as far as God willed him to proceed. Then he met some of the created beings, and one of them said, 'Peace be upon you, oh First One!

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[90] For a general introduction and English translation, see Frederik Stephen Colby, « Appendix: Translation of Real Academia de la Historia MS Codera 241 », in Id., *Muḥammad's Ascension in Muslim Spain*, p. 28–33, p. 119–124.

[91] See Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 59–66, 439–443.

[92] Abū Ǧaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Ǧarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʿān,* vol. XV, p. 5.34–6.10.

Peace be upon you, oh Last One! Peace be upon you, oh Gatherer!' Ǧibrīl said to him, 'Return the greeting, oh Muhammad'. So, he returned the greeting. Then the second one met him and said to him the like of what the first ones had said, until he reached *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem). Water, milk, and wine were presented to him, and the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, took the milk. Ǧibrīl said to him, 'You have attained the natural disposition, oh Muḥammad. If you had drunk the water, you would have drowned, and your nation would have drowned. If you had drunk the wine, you would have gone astray, and your nation would have gone astray'. Then, Ādam and the Prophets after him were sent to him, and the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, led them in prayer that night. Then Ǧibrīl said to him, 'As for the old woman you saw beside the road, nothing remains of this world except what remains of that old woman's life. As for the one whom you were about to incline toward, that was the enemy of God, Iblīs, who wanted you to incline toward him. As for those who greeted you with peace, they were Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and ʿĪsā'.

In the second part of the account, al-Ṭabarī presents hellish punishments, some similar to and some different from those described in the texts of the other cycles:

ثمّ أتى على قوم تُرْضَخُ رؤوسهم بالصخر كلّما رُضِخَتْ عادت كما كانت لا يفتّر عنهم من ذلك شيء فقال ما هؤلاء يا جبرئيل قال هؤلاء الّذين تتثاقل رؤوسهم عن الصلاة المكتوبة ثمّ أتى على قوم على أقبالهم رقاع وعلى أدبارهم رقاع يسرحون كما تسرح الإبل والغنم ويأكلون الضريع والزقوم و رضف جهنّم و حجارتها قال ما هؤلاء يا جبرئيل قال هؤلاء الّذين لا يؤدّون صدقات أموالهم وما ظلمهم الله شيئًا وما الله بظلّام للعبيد ثمّ أتى على قوم بين أيديهم لحم نضيج في قدور ولحم آخر نيء قذر خبيث فجعلوا يأكلون من النّيء ويدعون النضيج الطيّب فقال ما هؤلاء يا جبرئيل قال هذا الرجل من أُمَّتِكَ تكون عنده المرأة الحلال الطيّبة فتأتي امرأة خبيثة فتبيت عندها حتّى يصبح والمرأة تقوم من عند زوجها حلالًا طيّبًا فتأتي رجلًا خبيثًا فتبيت معه حتّى تصبح قال ثمّ أتى على خشبة في الطريق لا يمرّ بها ثوب إلا شقّته شيء إلّا خَرَقَتْهُ قال ما هذا يا جبرئيل قال هذا مثل أقوام من أُمَّتِكَ يقعدون على الطريق فيقطعونه ثمّ قرأ ولا تقعدوا بكلّ صراط توعدون وتصدّون عن سبيل الله ثمّ أتى على رجل قد جمع حزمة حطب عظيمة لا يستطيع حملها وهو يزيد عليها فقال ما هذا يا جبرئيل قال هذا الرجل من أُمَّتِكَ تكون عنده أمانات الناس لا يقدر على أدائها وهو يزيد عليها ويريد أن يحملها فلا يستطيع ذلك ثمّ أتى على قوم تُقْرَضُ ألسنتهم وشفاههم بمقاريض من حديد كلما قُرِضَتْ عادت كما كانت لا يفتر عنهم من ذلك شيء قال ما هؤلاء يا جبرئيل فقال هؤلاء خطباء الفتنة من أُمَّتِكَ الّذين يقولون مالا يفعلون ثمّ أتى على حجر صغير يخرج منه ثور عظيم فجعل الثور يريد أن يرجع من حيث خرج فلا يستطيع فقال ما هذا يا جبرئيل قال هذا الرجل يتكلّم بالكلمة العظيمة ثمّ يندم عليها فلا يستطيع أن يَرُدَّها ثمّ أتى على واد فوجد ريحًا طيّبة باردة وفيه ريح المسك وسمع صوتًا فقال يا جبرئيل ما هذه الريح الطيّبة الباردة وهذه الرائحة الّتي هي كريح المسك وما هذا الصوت قال هذا صوت الجنّة تقول يا ربِّ آتني ما وعدتني فقد كثرت غرفي واستبرقي وحريري وسندسي وعبقري و لؤلؤي و مرجاني و فضّتي وذهبي وأكوابي وصحافي وأباريقي وفواكهي و نخلي و رمّاني و لبني و خمري فآتني ما وعدتني فقال لك كلّ مسلم ومسلمة ومؤمن ومؤمنة ومن آمن بي وبرسلي وعمل صالحًا ولم يشرك بي ولم يتّخذ من دوني أندادًا ومن خشيني فهو آمن ومن سألني أعطيته ومن أقرضني جزيته ومن توكّل علىّ كفته إنّي أنا الله لا إله إلّا أنا لا أخلف الميعاد وقد أفلح المؤمنون وتبارك الله أحسن الخالقين قالت قد رضيت ثمّ أتى على واد فسمع صوتًا منكرًا ووجد ريحًا منتنة فقال ما هذه الريح يا جبرئيل وما هذا الصوت قال هذا صوت جهنّم تقول يا ربِّ آتني ما وعدتني فقد كثرت سلاسلي وأغلالي وسعيري وجحيمي وضريعي وغسّاقي وعذابي وعقابي وقد بعد

فعري واشتدّ حرّي فأتتني ما وعدتني قال لك كلّ مشرك ومشركة وكافر وكافرة وكلّ خبيث وخبيثة وكلّ جبار لا يؤمن بيوم الحساب قالت قد رضيت قال ثمّ سار حتّى أتى بيت المقدس[93].

Then he came upon a people whose heads were being smashed with rocks, and whenever they were smashed, they returned to their former state, without any respite from that. He asked, 'Who are these, oh Ǧibrīl?' He replied, 'These are those whose heads are turned away from the prescribed prayers'. Then he came upon a people on whose fronts and backs were hooks, being driven as camels and sheep are driven, eating *al-ḍarīʿ* (a bitter, thorny plant), *al-Zaqūm* (a tree in Hell), the pavement of Hell, and its stones. He asked, 'Who are these, oh Ǧibrīl?' He replied, 'These are those who do not pay the obligatory charity on their wealth, though God has not wronged them in anything, for God is not unjust to His servants'. Then he came upon a people in front of whom were raw meat in pots and rotten, foul-smelling meat. They were eating the rotten meat and leaving for the good raw meat. He asked, 'Who are these, oh Ǧibrīl?' He replied, 'This is a man from your nation who has a lawful, pure wife, but he goes to an impure woman and stays with her until morning. And the woman gets up from her lawful husband and goes to an impure man and stays with him until morning'. Then he came upon a piece of wood on the road that would tear any garment that passed by it and rip anything that came near it. He asked, 'What is this, oh Ǧibrīl?' He replied, 'This is the example of some people from your nation who sit on the road and cut it off'. Then he recited, 'And do not sit on every path, threatening and barring from God's way those who believe in Him' [*Qurʾān*, 7 (*Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*), v. 84). Then he came upon a man who had gathered a huge pile of firewood that he could not carry, yet he was adding more to it. He asked, 'What is this, oh Ǧibrīl?' He replied, 'This is a man from your nation who has people's trust that he is unable to fulfill, yet he keeps adding more, intending to carry it, but he cannot do so'. Then he came upon people whose tongues and lips were being cut with scissors of iron, and whenever they were clipped, they returned to their former state, without any respite from that. He asked, 'Who are these, oh Ǧibrīl?' He replied, 'These are the preachers of discord from your nation, who say what they do not do'. Then he came upon a small enclosure from which a huge bull emerged. The bull tried to return from where it had come out but could not. He asked, 'What is this, oh Ǧibrīl?' He replied, 'This is a man who utters a grave word, then regrets it, but cannot take it back'. Then he came upon a valley where he found a pleasant, cool breeze, and the fragrance of musk, and he heard a voice. He said, 'Oh Ǧibrīl, what is this cool, fragrant breeze, this scent like musk, and this voice?' He replied, 'This is the voice of Paradise', saying, 'Oh Lord, give me what You have promised me, for my chambers have increased, as have my fine silk, my silk brocade, my silk, my carpets, my pearls, my coral, my silver, my gold, my cups, my plates, my ewers, my fruits, my palm trees, my pomegranates, my milk, and my wine. So, give me what You have promised me'. God said, 'For you is every Muslim man and woman, every believing man and woman, and whoever believes in Me and My messengers, does righteous deeds, does not associate partners with Me, does not take others as equals to Me, and whoever fears Me – they are safe. Whoever asks Me, I will give them. Whoever

[93] Abū Ǧaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Ǧarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʿān,* vol. XV, p. 6.18–7.14.

> lends to Me, I will repay them. Whoever puts his trust in Me, I will suffice them. I am God, there is no god but Me. I do not break the promise, and the believers have certainly succeeded. Blessed is God, the Best of creators'. The Paradise said, 'I am satisfied'. Then he came upon a valley where he heard an offensive sound and found a putrid odor. He asked, 'What is this smell, oh Ǧibrīl? And what is this sound?' He replied, 'This is the voice of Hell', saying, 'Oh Lord, give me what You have promised me, for my chains have increased, as have my shackles, my blazing fire, my Hellfire, my thorny plants, my pus, my punishment, and my torment. My depth has become vast, and my heat has intensified. So give me what You have promised me'. God said, 'For you is every polytheist man and woman, every disbeliever man and woman, every wicked man and woman, and every tyrant who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning'. The Hell said, 'I am satisfied'. Then he traveled until he came to *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem).

Upon arriving at *al-masǧid al-aqṣā*, the Prophet ties his horse to a rock, enters, and prays with the angels. Then he meets the souls of previous Prophets who praise God. Prophet Ibrāhīm praises God for making him a close friend, giving him a great kingdom, and saving him from the Fire. Prophet Mūsā praises God for speaking to him directly (as uncreated word in the burning bush), enabling the destruction of Pharaoh's people, and guiding his community with truth and justice. Prophet Dawūd (David) praises God for giving him a great kingdom, teaching him the Psalms, subjugating iron, mountains, and birds to him, and granting him wisdom. Prophet Sulaymān (Salomon) praises God for subjugating the winds, *ǧinn*, humans, and birds to him, favoring him over others, and giving him an unmatched pure kingdom. Prophet ʿĪsā praises God for making him His Word, creating him like Ādam, teaching him scriptures, giving him the ability to create life, cure the blind and lepers, revive the dead, and protecting him from Satan. Finally, Prophet Muḥammad praises God for sending him as a mercy to humanity, revealing the *Qurʾān*, making his community the best and most moderate one, relieving his burdens, and making him the final Prophet and intercessor on the Day of Resurrection. The narration continues describing Prophet Muḥammad's ascent through the fifth, sixth and seventh heavens. In the fifth, he meets Prophet Hārūn surrounded by the Children of Israel. In the sixth, he sees Prophet Mūsā weeping out of humility before God. In the seventh heaven, he meets Prophet Ibrāhīm with a swollen face, sitting by the gate of Paradise, along with people of different spiritual states bathing in a purifying river.

> ثمّ صُعِدَ به إلى السماء السابعة فاستفتح جبرئيل فقيل من هذا قال جبرئيل قالوا ومن معك قال محمّد قالوا أوقد أُرْسِلَ إليه قال نعم قالوا حيّاه الله من أخ ومن خليفة فنعم الأخ ونعم الخليفة ونعم المجيء جاء قال فدخل فإذا هو برجل أشمط جالس عند باب الجنّة على كرسيّ وعنده قوم جلوس بيض الوجوه أمثال القراطيس وقوم في ألوانهم شيء فقام هؤلاء الّذين في ألوانهم شيء فدخلوا نهرًا فاغتسلوا فيه فخرجوا وقد خلص من ألوانهم شيء. ثمّ دخلوا نهرًا آخر فاغتسلوا فيه فخرجوا وقد خلص من ألوانهم شيء ثمّ دخلوا نهرًا آخر فاغتسلوا فيه فخرجوا وقد خلص من ألوانهم شيء فصارت مثل ألوان أصحابهم فجاؤوا فجلسوا إلى أصحابهم فقال يا جبرئيل من هذا الأشمط ثمّ

من هؤلاء البيض وجوههم ومن هؤلاء الّذين في ألوانهم شيء وما هذه الأنهار الّتي دخلوا فجاؤوا وقد صفت ألوانهم قال هذا أبوك ابراهيم أوّل من شُمِّطَ على الارض وأمّا هؤلاء البيض الوجوه فقوم لم يلبسوا إيمانهم بظلم وأمّا هؤلاء الّذين في ألوانهم شيء فقوم خلطوا عملًا صالحًا وآخر سيّئًا فتابوا فتاب الله عليهم وأمّا الأنهار فأوّلها رحمة الله وثانيها نعمة الله والثالث سقاهم ربّهم شرابًا طهورًا[94].

Then he ascended with him to the seventh heaven, and Ǧibrīl asked for the gate to be opened. It was asked, 'Who is this?' He replied, 'Ǧibrīl'. It was asked, 'And who is with you?' He said, 'Muḥammad'. They said, 'Has he been sent to?' He replied, 'Yes'. They said, 'May God greet him, from a brother and a successor. What an excellent brother, and what an excellent successor, and what an excellent coming he has come with!'. He entered and saw a man with a swollen face, sitting by the gate of Paradise on a chair, and with him were people sitting, their faces as white as paper, and others whose colors were different. Those whose colors were different stood up, entered a river, bathed in it, and they came out with their colors purified. Then they entered another river and bathed in it, and they came out purified of whatever colors they had, becoming like the colours of their companions. Then they entered another river and bathed in it, and they came out purified of whatever colors they had. They came and sat with their companions. He asked, 'Oh Ǧibrīl, who is this man with the swollen face, and who are these whose faces are white, and who are these who have some color, and what are these rivers that they entered and then came out with their colors purified?' He replied, 'This is your father Ibrāhīm, the first to have a swollen face on earth. As for those whose faces are white, they are a people who did not mix their faith with wrongdoing. As for those who have some color, they are a people who mixed righteous deeds with other evil deeds, so they repented, and God accepted their repentance. As for the rivers, the first is God's mercy, the second is God's blessing, and the third is where their Lord gave them a purifying drink to drink.

Asín Palacios observes similarities between this passage and Dante's three purifications in different streams of water at beginning and end of the *Purgatorio*, prior to his entries into purgatory and the celestial abodes (*Purgatorio* I, v. 94–96, 127–129; XXXI, v. 100–103; XXXIII, v. 127–129, 142–145). The first purification occurs when he leaves Hell. Virgil, advised by Cato, washes Dante's face. As a result of this first bath, his cheeks regain the natural color they had been deprived of by tears. The second and third purifications occur shortly before leaving Purgatory, when Matelda and Statius successively immerse Dante in the waters of Lethe and Eunoe, whose respective virtues erase the memory of sin and renew the soul's supernatural energy towards the good, disposing it to enjoy celestial glory.[95]

Regarding this version, Asín Palacios writes:

[94] Abū Ǧaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Ǧarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʿān,* vol. XV, p. 8.30–9.7.

[95] Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 65–66.

> Y como la época de esta redacción fundida non es posterior a la de las fragmentarias, precisa concluir che la fantasía colectiva de los tradicionalistas musulmanes debió muy pronto decidirse a realizar la tal fusión y esto por motivos artísticos más che por razones teológicas, es decir, para saciar la piadosa curiosidad de los fieles che anhelarían un relato total, integrado del viaje nocturno y de la ascensión, más que con el fin de justificar lógicamente la varia e contradictoria muchedumbre de versiones fragmentarias sobre un mismo hecho.[96]

After his keen reconstruction of these three narrative cycles in their various redactions, Asín Palacios examines their influence on representations of the afterlife in Christian legends that flourished from the eleventh century onward, which were already considered official sources of Dante's design.[97] He argues that before Dante wrote his masterpiece, there already existed throughout Christian Europe a very rich collection of popular poetic representations of the afterlife influenced by the eschatological literature of Islam, and concludes as follows:

> Dante Alighieri aparéesenos ahora dependiendo del islam, por la concepción de su poema, en dos sentidos: indirectamente, por los elementos islámicos que existen en las leyendas de sus predecesores cristianos; directamente, por los elementos islámicos que, sin existir en dichas leyendas, existen en la *Divina Comedia*.[98]

Finally, Asín Palacios raises the question: through which channels could Dante have had access to such literature? He is convinced that the Islamic traditions of the afterlife from Eastern and Western Islam reached Christian Europe through merchants, pilgrims, crusaders, missionaries, Norman adventurers, slaves, Jewish merchants, prisoners, scholars and travellers. He also believes that Spain played a

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96 Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 62.

97 See Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 271–353.His examination is admittedly carried out on the basis of secondary literature, including the following studies in particular: Arturo Graf, *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del Medio Evo*, Loescher, Torino 1892–1893; Alessandro D'Ancona, *I precursori di Dante*, Sansoni, Firenze 1874; Charles Labitte, « La Divine Comédie avant Dante », in *Oeuvres de Dante Alighieri*, Charpentier, Paris 1858; Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam, « Des sources poétiques de la Divine Comedie », in *Oeuvres complètes d'Orzanam*, t. V, Lecoffre, Paris 1859. Among Christian legends he considers: (i) Legends about infernal visions, including the *Vita Sancti Macarii Romani* (seventh to ninth century), the *Visio Sancti Pauli* based on 2 Cor 12:1-4 (eleventh to thirteenth century), the *Visio Tungdali* (dating to the second half of the twelfth century, as the Irish monk was still alive in 1149), the *Visio Alberici* (Montecassino, thirteenth century), the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* (second half of the twelfth century), the *Sólarljóð*: the Scandinavian *Song of the Sun in the Edda* (eleventh century), the *Visio Thurkilli* (thirteenth century), the *Visio Joachimi abbatis* (twelfth century), a *Visio* of the so-called Singer of Reggio Emilia (thirteenth century); (ii) Legends of sea voyages, including the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (eleventh century), the *Legend of the Three Monks of the Chion Monastery* (fourteenth century), the German *Legend of the Cistercian Monk Felix* (fourteenth century), and the *Legend of the Young Prince* (after the twelfth century).

98 Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 353.

dominant role in this process, as can be observed from documents citing the legend of the *miʿrāǧ* produced in the Iberian Peninsula between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, including:

- the *Historia arabum* of the Archbishop of Toledo Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada composed between 1170 and 1247, which contains redactions 2.A and 2.B of the *miʿrāǧ* narrative.
- the vernacular *Crónica general* or *Estoria d'Espanna* commissioned by King Alfonso the Wise between 1260 and 1268, which includes the same accounts, apparently taken from the *Historia arabum*.
- the vernacular *Impuñacion de la seta de Mahoma* (or *Sobre la seta mahométana*) attributed to the Catalan Mercedarian friar of Valencia and later Bishop of Jaén, San Pedro Pascual (b. 1227, martyred in Granada on 6 December 1300). This text was written in Granada during a period of imprisonment and survives in MS. Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, árabe h.II.25, dating back to the sixteenth century. It contains a citation of a text entitled *Elmiregi*, *Elmeregi*, *Miragi* or *Miraj*. Asín Palacios believes this latter to be an Arabic text, but it is actually the summary of an Arabic-Castilian translation of the *Liber Scalae Machometi,* the so-called 'missing link'. Chapter VIII of this text, the *Libro del parayso e del infierno*, contains an account of the *miʿrāǧ* accompanied by mocking comments, which indirectly goes back to redaction 2.C and 3. As bishop, Pascual was in Rome between 1288 and 1292 at the papal court and there gave his *Impuñacion* to pope Nicolas IV. In 1302 Dante himself arrived in Rome as an ambassador for Florence.
- In addition, Asín Palacios highlights the fact that the Guelph Brunetto Latini, Dante's trusted master, of whom he says « m'insegnavate come l'uom s'etterna » (*Inferno* XV, v. 85) wrote the allegorical-didactic poem *Tesoretto* and the encyclopaedic *Tesoro*, both of which are rich in references to Islamic philosophical, mystical and religious culture. Furthermore, around 1259–1260 Brunetto was an ambassador at the court of King Alfonso the Wise, who was elected emperor of Germany and thus capable of opposing the Ghibellines supported by King Manfred of Sicily.[99]

Asín Palacios' study was published in 1919, two years before the celebrations of the six-hundredth anniversary of Dante's death. The initial reaction of scholars was one of bewilderment. He recounts the debate between orientalists and Dantists in

[99] Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 355–398.

his later rebuttal, *Historia y crítica di una polémica* (1924), and responds to the main observations and criticisms that were raised against him.[100]

From 1924 to 1949 there was almost silence, until it was broken by a new discovery, five years after the death of Asín Palacios.[101] Working independently, without knowing one another until the end, the Spaniard Jose Muñoz Sendino and the Italian Enrico Cerulli, found French and Latin versions of redaction 2.C according to Asín Palacios' classification in two codices respectively preserved in MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laudensis Misc. 537 (late thirteenth century) and MS. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Lat. 6064 (late fourteenth century).[102] Muñoz Sendino published his findings in *La escala de mahoma*[103] and Cerulli in *Il libro della scala e le fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina Commedia*.[104]

From the first sheet of both manuscripts, it appears that in 1264 King Alfonso X the Wise, having mistaken redaction 2.C for a sacred text of Islam, commissioned a translation of it from Arabic into vernacular Castilian by the Jewish physician, Abraham Alfaquím (*al-ḥakīm*). Although no manuscripts of either this version or his Arabic source have come down to us, a paraphrase of the former is preserved in the *Libro del parayso e del infierno* of San Pedro Pascual's *Impuñación de la seta de Mahoma*. From this vernacular Castilian version, the notary Bonaventura da Siena, a Tuscan Ghibelline exile at the court of Alfonso, derived (faithfully?) both the Latin version, the *Liber Scalae Machometi*, and the vernacular French version, the *Livre de l'Eschièle Mahomet*. These two versions spread throughout Europe and could have reached Italy. Additionally, Cerulli found another manuscript containing the Latin version dated to the fourteenth century in MS. Roma, Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, Lat. 4072, which also includes the *Collectio Toletana*, a collection of texts pertaining to Islam, which Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, commissioned and had translated in 1141–1143 and diffused throughout Europe.[105] The testimony establishing the closest connection between the *Liber Scalae Machometi* discovered

[100] Asín Palacios republished *La escatología musulmana* with the *Historia y crítica di una polémica* as an appendix in 1943: ibid., p. 469–611. For a synthetic overview, see SABINA BACCARO, « Dante e l'Islam. La ripresa del dibattito storiografico sugli studi di Asin Palacios », *Doctor Virtualis*, 12 (2013), p. 35–73.

[101] See note 2.

[102] This manuscript was known to Monneret who could not consult it because of the World War II.

[103] JOSÉ MUÑOZ SENDINO, *La escala de Mahoma*, Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales, Madrid 1949.

[104] ENRICO CERULLI, *Il Libro della Scala e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina Commedia*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1949. Volume 150 of the same series (Studi e testi) was Ugo Monneret de Villard's study, for which see note 2. See ANDREA CELLI, « Gli studi di Enrico Cerulli su Dante », *Doctor Virtualis*, 12 (2013), p. 13–33.

[105] Regarding the presence of the Latin translation (the *Liber Scalae Machometi*) in a class of codices at the end of *Collectio Toletana,* see MARIA CORTI, « La Commedia di Dante e l'Oltretomba islamico », *Belfagor*, 50/3 (1995), p. 307–308.

by Cerulli and Dante is its literal citation in the *Dittamondo* (V, XV and V, XIII) of Fazio degli Uberti, a Tuscan poet of the generation following Dante.[106]

However, the conclusions of the two scholars differ. Whereas Muñoz Sendino took a maximalist approach, suggesting that the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* served as a model for Dante, Cerulli took a reductionist approach. He rejects this hypothesis, emphasizing instead the role of biblical sources antecedent to Qurʾānic traditions, such as Jacob's ladder for the luminous ladder Dante encounters in the sphere of Saturn, and scholastic influences, which had assimilated Avicenna and al-Ġazālī, for the immaterial punishments in Dante's *Inferno*. Although he did not deny the possible influence of Qurʾānic traditions on the *Divina Commedia*[107] – detected with respect to the cosmography and topography of places, the role of

[106] See Alessandro D'Ancona, « La leggenda di Maometto in Occidente », *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 13 (1889), p. 199–281, in particular p. 266–267. See in addition Luciano Gargan, « Biblioteche bolognesi al tempo di Dante. I libri di un frate converso domenicano (1312) », in Raffaella Bertazzoli et al. (eds.), *Studi per Gian Paolo Marchi*, ETS, Pisa 2011, p. 475–487, who demonstrates that the *Liber Scalae Machometi* circulated in Bologna during the early 1300s, as evidenced by its presence in the inventory of books belonging to a Bolognese Dominican converso in 1312.

[107] In a later study, Enrico Cerulli, *Nuove ricerche sul Libro della Scala e la conoscenza dell'Islam in Occidente*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1972 (Studi e testi, 271), Cerulli finds a precise reference to the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* in the *Setenario*, an unfinished draft of an encyclopedia by Alfonso X the Wise. He cites Amador de los Rios' thesis that this work influenced the *Tresor*, indicating more than a merely diplomatic exchange between Alfonso the Wise and Brunetto Latini. See also Maria Corti, *La felicità mentale*, Einaudi, Torino 1988[3], p. 96–109, who wonders why in the second book of the *Tresor*, begun in Toledo in September 1260, Brunetto Latini uses, for Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, not Robert Grosseteste's translation from Greek, but the *Translatio Alexandrina* or *Summa Alexandrinorum*, an Arabic-Latin translation by Hermann the German in 1244, as can be seen from the explicit of some codices. Likewise, in the fourth book of the *Convivio*, Dante, following in Brunetto's footsteps, uses the Arabic-Latin compendium, although in some cases he refers directly to the *Tresor*. According to Corti, « La Commedia di Dante », p. 301–314, Brunetto encountered the *Nicomachean Ethics* in Toledo through the Arabic-Latin translation of Hermann the German, who himself returned to Spain between 1260 and 1266 as Bishop of Astorga. She also argues that the idea itself of a 'tesoro' as an encyclopedia of knowledge was suggested to Brunetto by the *Setenario* by Alfonso X, who became king in 1252. The *Setenario* was conceived as a philosophical-ethical premise for the *Libro de las Leyes* (the *Partidas*), which Brunetto quotes in *Tresor* I, 1, 6: « Et nostre empereres dist el Livre de Loi que comencement est grignour partie de la chose ». According to Jaime Ferrero Alemparte, « Hermann el Alemán traductor del siglo XIII en Toledo », *Hispania Sacra*, 35 (1983), p. 9–56, 'nostre empereres' could refer to Alfonso X shortly after 1260, who was elected emperor in Frankfurt in 1257, though it was not confirmed by the Pope. Another sign of the close bond between Alfonso and Brunetto is the translation of the *Tresor* commissioned by Alfonso's son Don Sancho, which perhaps already existed in a previous translation commissioned by Alfonso himself, as the vast manuscript tradition would seem to support (Ibid. p. 17). Brunetto was evidently a man of *curiositas* who read the important works of Alfonso and remained in contact with Castilian culture from 1261 to 1266, during in his time in France. He certainly knew the *Liber Scalae Machometi* translated in Toledo by Bonaventura da Siena.

the guide, the punishments inflicted on the damned –, he compared it to the Arabic-Spanish column of Almeria inserted in the historically and artistically Christian structure of the Cathedral of Pisa (i.e. the marble capital of Fatḥ originally placed on the tympanum of the north transept now preserved in the Museum of the Opera del Duomo).

V. *Conclusion*

Even if at times it seems that Dante was inspired by earlier texts, the assumption that a single work may be fully identified as his source is perhaps untenable. What texts did Dante know? What could he have read? How can we assess his indirect influences, mediated through other sources? At what point does a text known to Dante rise to the level of a source of inspiration?[108] In her study « La Commedia di Dante e l'Oltretomba islamico »,[109] Maria Corti stresses the importance of (i) thematic sequences belonging to the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* found with the same structural and architectural layout and in the same order in the *Divina Commedia,* looking for possible intertextuality between the two texts (e.g. X offers a structural model to Y without necessarily being its source, because a summary of X has been read or an oral narration has been heard by the author of Y).[110] She

[108] See Piccoli, *Viaggio nel regno del ritorno,* p. 73–102.

[109] Corti, « La Commedia di Dante », p. 309 ff.

[110] For example, Muḥammad, speaking in the third person, like Dante, is in a deep sleep when Gabriel awakens him; on the journey to Jerusalem, three voices/temptations try to stop him, but the guide explains, encourages, and offers the traveller new theological notions, also serving to present cultural observations; Muḥammad and his guide ascend a stairway to the heaven of the moon, where luminous angels move (cf. *Paradiso* XXI, v. 32; XXII, v. 72); to access the Islamic heaven, the righteous must cross a bridge enveloped in flames (cf. *Purgatorio* XXVIII); Muḥammad finds a great garden with an enormous tree under which the blessed sit, two springs originate from a source at the foot of the tree and become rivers, and the blessed drink from one and immerse themselves in the other to receive, after ablution, God's grace (cf. *Purgatorio* XXVIII and XXIX); a procession arrives on camels with fur like red and white silk, wearing gold around their necks and precious stones, while the angels riding them invite the blessed to follow them to the throne of God, who reveals His face (cf. *Purgatorio* XXXI, v. 145); Muḥammad's guide changes in Paradise: Gabriel gives way to Riḍwān, the angel who guards the gates of heaven; the eight heavens traversed by Muḥammad present the metaphysics of light: God is light, light is joy, and splendor and joy define the celestial nature (cf. *Paradiso* XXVI, v. 1–100); faced with such splendor, Muḥammad loses his sight but sees with his heart (cf. *Paradiso* XXVI, v. 1*;* XXXIII, v. 61–63); the luminous angelic hosts, moving in circles, become music and song (cf. *Paradiso* XXI, v. 59; XXI, v. 136–138; XXXI, v. 131; XXXII). On the categories of 'interdiscursivity', 'intertextuality' and 'direct source' see Maria Corti, « Dante and Islamic Culture », in Jan M. Ziolkowski (ed.), *Dante and Islam*, Fordham University Press, New York 2015, p. 45–63. See also Massimiliano Chiamenti, « Intertestualità Liber Scale Machometi-Commedia? », in Simona Foà, Sonia Gentili (eds.), *Dante e il locus inferni. Creazione letteraria e tradizione interpretativa*, Bulzoni, Roma 1999 (Studi e testi italiani, 4), p. 45–51.

also highlights (ii) extended and isomorphic correspondences among thematic and formal sequences (language, similes, and metaphors) to argue that the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* is a possible source of the *Divina Commedia*.[111]

Current research is generally oriented toward finding more firmly grounded philological evidence regarding the relationship between the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* and the *Divina Commedia*.[112] However, even after a century, reconsidering Asín Palacios's reconstruction of the formative phase of the *isrāʾ* and *miʿrāǧ* complex of legends remains significant with respect to the interdiscursivity – direct data which are not found in a literal source, but circulate in the culture of the time – and, at least in part, the intertextuality at play here.[113] Asín Palacios' research shows the importance of considering broader cultural influences and narrative structures when examining potential connections between texts, rather than focusing exclusively on direct textual borrowings. Ideas and narrative patterns can be transmitted through cultural osmosis, summaries, and oral

[111] These correspondences, which concern Hell, are the following: seven descending terraces with the *habitatio dyaboli* at the bottom; a terrible wind dominating the first ledge and the bottom; a giant chained devil (*Inferno* XXXI, v. 86–88); a gloomy atmosphere that prevents Muḥammad from distinguishing the reality he encounters; there is a correspondence between the *habitatio dyaboli* and the city of Dis: a fortress surrounded by ditches, with walls and black towers from eternally burning fire, a door opens in the fortress through which the damned enter, and seven others through which demons pass (*Inferno* VIII, v. 70–115); there are analogies between the seventh, eighth, and ninth *bolge* in the *Inferno* and the fourth and fifth ledges of the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder*, with a final list of sins starting with the sewers of discord (cf. the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder*, paragraph 199, where Gabriel speaks about those « qui verba seminant ut mittant discordiam inter gentes ». Dante puts the same words in the mouth of Muḥammad (*Inferno* XXVIII) and repeats in verse 35 the metaphor of the 'seminator' of scandal and schism); Muḥammad reflects on the contrapasso (cf. *Inferno* XXVIII, v. 142).

[112] See Abderrazak Halloumi, *« Le Livre de l'Eschiele Mahomet », un manuel d'islamologie au XIIIe siècle, Préface de Martin Aurell et Éric Palazzo*, Classiques Garnier, Paris 2024, p. 551 (« Histoire culturelle », 26), including the review of Stefano Rapisarda in *Medioevo Romanzo*, 49/2 (2025), p. 444–446.

[113] See Rodinson, *Dante et l'Islam d'après des travaux récents*, p. 222: « Voici un exemple qui semble frappant: on sait que les' devins dans la 4e bolgia du 8e cercle de l'enfer sont punis en ayant la tête retournée vers l'arrière, leur cou étant 'tordu' de sorte que les pleurs de leurs yeux coulent sur leurs fesses (Inferno, XX, v. 11 ss.). L'explication du supplice est donnée par Dante lui-même (ibid., 38–39): parce qu'ils ont voulu voir trop en avant, ils seront forces à regarder en arrière . C'est fort logique et conforme au système de peines qu'a adopté Dante. Mais , dans le Coran (IV, 50) , Dieu menace les Juifs qui n'auront pas cru en lui de 'tourner leurs visages vers l'arrière' et une explication courante des commentateurs arabes médiévaux est qu'ils auront la tête et le cou retournés, précisément comme les damnés dantesques. Asin Palacios (*La escatología musulmana*, p. 155–157) a recueilli divers textes légendaires ou théologiques attestant que cette idée était courante en Islam . Dante a-t-il réinventé cet étrange supplice? Ce n'est pas absolument impossible, mais la coïncidence est bien troublante et le cheminement de la pensée à partir d'une métaphore (voir en avant, d'où peine consistant à regarder en arrière) n'est pas si naturel que l'hypothèse d'un récit d'origine musulmane parvenu aux oreilles ou aux yeux du poète, récit suggérant une image plastique nette et originale éminemment propre à s'imposer à l'esprit d'un tel visionnaire, ne soit une hypothèse bien tentante ».

traditions, influencing literary works in ways that may not be immediately apparent through traditional source analysis. In the introduction to the Italian translation of Asín Palacios' work, published in 1994, Carlo Ossola suggests, among the lines of research to which he calls the scholars of the *Divina Commedia*, a more in-depth study of Latin and Romance texts that, in addition to the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder*, conveyed Islamic elements to Dante, as well as a more open study of Spanish-Arabic Romance culture for the proper understanding of Dante's use in the *Paradiso* of the metaphysics of light for which Thomas already proclaimed himself indebted to Arabic philosophy. To conclude *Galeotto* non *fu il libro e chi lo scrisse* (*Inferno* V, v. 137).

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On the Origin and Aim of the Translator of the Early Greek Qu'ran*

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Abstract

The article discusses what origin or background the translator of the early (medieval) Greek translation of the Qur'an may have had. A few extant fragments of the translation have an inconsistent use of the *iḍāfa* (genitive) construction, but the article argues that the variation falls within the usual when translating between Arabic and Greek. Furthermore, it is suggested that the manuscript that the Byzantine excerpter, Niketas Byzantios, worked on the basis of, may have been a bilingual (Arabic and Greek) manuscript.

Keywords

Qur'an; Arabic into Greek; Niketas Byzantios; *Refutatio*; Islamo-Christian Polemical Writings

I. *Introduction*

The early Greek translation of the Qur'an has received increasing attention the last decades, after receiving relatively little interest in the first more than a century after the publication of the two texts offering valuable fragments of it.[1] Now,

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1 Presentation and translation of fragments in Karl Förstel, *Schriften zum Islam von Arethas und Euthymios Zigabenos und Fragmente der griechischen Koranübersetzung: griechisch-deutsche Textausgabe*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2009, p. 86–122, and Christian Høgel, « An Early Anonymous Greek Translation of the Qur'ān. The Fragments from Niketas Byzantios' *Refutatio* and the Anonymous *Abjuratio* », *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, 7 (2010), p. 67–120, after which a series of publications by Manolis Ulricht have appeared: Manolis Ulbricht, « Der Islam-Diskurs bei Niketas von Byzanz », *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 114 (2021), p. 1351–1394; Id., « Die Verwendungsweise der griechischen Koranübersetzung durch Niketas von Byzanz », *Byzantion*, 92 (2022), p. 491–519; Id., « Nachweis der Existenz einer vollständigen und schriftlichen Vorlage der griechischen Koranübersetzung. Eine philologische Untersuchung des Codex Vaticanus graecus 681 », *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 72 (2022), p. 533–550; Id., « Die

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recent presentations and discussions have changed the scholarly perception of the text, and today we no longer repeat the rejection of the translation on the grounds of lacking quality.[2] Instead we acknowledge how the fragments display the work of a well-informed translator (or group of translators), producing a complete Greek rendering of the Qur'an, of which we today have about 82 fragments of varying length (from a short line to almost half a page). Produced in the 860's CE at the latest, but possibly decades or even centuries prior to that, the translation is one of our earliest sources to the interpretation of Qur'an, making its Greek rendering of great value to all who study the history of Qur'an and its reception. In this article, some of the main features regarding the aim of the translator will be discussed, taking as point of departure the thesis put forward by Ulbricht that the translation carries signs of Christian traits, based on linguistic features and the interpretation of these. Our conclusion will be that we hardly find evidence for this, and that we therefore are still not able to really pinpoint the origin or purpose of the translation, being hampered by not knowing the date, time, or background to the translation, in fact anything that can explain why somebody took the time and care to produce a full translation of the Qur'an sometime in the seventh, eighth, or ninth century CE. But further studies may eventually bring up clues to this, and the following is an attempt to further that investigation.

Since the complete translation has been lost to us, our only access to the Greek rendering comes out of two extant Byzantine Greek texts that quote the translation: the so-called *Refutatio* (in Greek *Anatropē*), composed by Niketas Byzantios in Constantinople around the 860's CE, and the anonymous *Abjuratio,* a text intended to be recited by converts from Islam to (orthodox) Christianity.[3]

philosophisch-dialektische Arbeitsweise und das theologische Selbstverständnis des Niketas von Byzanz », *Byzantinoslavica*, 80 (2022), p. 30–58; Id., « Die Klassifizierung in 'Philologische Kategorien' der im Coranus Graecus überlieferten Koranfragmente. Eine Einteilung in Wörtliches Zitat, Freies Zitat, Paraphrase und Anspielung », *De Medio Aevo*, 12/1 (2023), p. 125–145; Id., « The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation of the Quran (Vat. gr. 681) », *Dumbarton Oaks papers*, 77 (2023), p. 221–244. See also Christian Høgel, « The Byzantine Panoplia Tradition and the Greek Qur'an Translation in the Latin West », *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 20/3 (2018), p. 21–32.

[2] Adel-Théodore Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'islam. Textes et auteurs (viiie–xiiie s.)*, Éditions Nauwelaerts, Louvain – Paris 1969, Kees Versteegh, « Greek Translations of the Qur'ān in Christian Polemics (9th C. A.D.) », *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 141/1 (1991), p. 52–68, Erich Trapp, « Gab es eine byzantinsche Koranübersetzung? », *Diptycha hetaireias byzantinon kai metabyzantinon meleton*, 2 (1981), p. 7–17, Reinhold Glei, « Der Mistkäfer und andere Missverständnisse. Zur frühbyzantinischen Koranübersetzung », in Id. (ed.), *Frühe Koranübersetzungen. Europäische und außereuropäische Fallstudien*, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, Trier 2012, p. 9–24; for earlier scholarship and its (in most cases ungrounded) criticism, see Christian Høgel, « The Greek Qur'an: Scholarship and Evaluations », *Orientalia Suecana*, 61 suppl. (2013), p. 173–180.

[3] The most recent editions are the following, *Refutatio:* Karl Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz. Schriften zum Islam*, Echter Verlag, Würzburg 2000, p. 2–152 and *Abjuratio: PG*, 140, p. 124–136. Ulbricht,

Niketas's *Refutatio* contains the bulk of our material with 80 fragments; the *Abjuratio* contains three fragments, one duplicating one of those found in the *Refutatio*, giving us a total of 82 fragments.[4] In studying the Greek translation, we of course have to take the polemical nature of these transmitting texts into account, but luckily both texts contain very close direct quotations of the original wording of the translation. This we know because the translation was a word-for-word translation, and we are therefore able to identify quoted passages very precisely, matching Arabic words with Greek appearing in the same order, and to distinguish these from the many passages where Niketas paraphrases or in other ways refers to Qur'anic contents.[5] Also, the Greek translation has a very particular Greek, which makes it quite distinguishable from Niketas's Greek.[6] What we have, therefore, are 82 direct quotations of the early Greek translation, found in two texts presenting (in the case of the *Refutatio*) a polemical reading of these quotations and (in the case of the *Abjuratio*) formulas for anathematizing Islam.[7] The main theme here will be the Greek translation, but some attention needs also to be paid to the transmitting texts, not least the treatise by Niketas. In the following come, therefore, a short overview of Niketas's working method (since he is the most important source), then a description of the main features of the translation, subsequently a presentation and analysis of the thesis of Ulbricht, and finally a brief conclusion.

II. *Some Words on the Procedure of Niketas Byzantios*

Since Niketas Byzantios's *Refutatio* is by far our most important source for the early Greek translation, we need to pay close attention to his working procedure to get an idea about how he handled the text. As has been shown in previous scholarship, Niketas had absolutely no Arabic and was working solely on the basis of a Greek Qur'an that he had at hand, referring to the book under various polemical labels. Niketas gives no information about how or from whom he acquired the book and seems to have worked on his own, only with a Greek text at hand, though also

« The Authorship », p. 224 narrows down the probable time of composition for the *Refutatio* to « sometime after 856–63 ».

4 I here use the numbering and counting employed in Høgel, « An Early Anonymous ». A promised edition by Ulbricht (see Ulbricht, « Der Islam-Diskurs », p. 1352), has not yet been published. Also, chapter 3 of this, by Ulbricht referred to in Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 227, under the title of « Graeco-Arabica am Beispiel der ältesten Koranübersetzung: Die Übersetzungstechnik im Coranus Graecus samt Glossar und Konkordanz der wörtlichen Koranzitate (griechisch–arabisch, arabisch–griechisch) » was unavailable to me.

5 On Niketas's procedures when paraphrasing, see Ulbricht « Die Klassifizierung ».

6 Many features of the Greek of the translation were presented in Trapp, « Gab es eine ».

7 Ulbricht employs the term *Coranus Graecus* when referring to the translation, but the present text will just use 'the Greek translation' as referent.

sharing other – partly polemical – information on Islam. As is clear from the prologue, and the prologues to Niketas's other polemical writings, he wrote on the instigation of a patriarch, possibly the patriarch Photios, who was himself an author of polemical writing.[8] A large middle section of the *Refutatio* contains Niketas's polemical reflections as he browses through his Greek translation of the Qur'an. In this section, he indicates numbers and titles of suras, mixes quotations with paraphrases and interpretations, and at one point he says that he will now skip a series of suras, jumping in his presentation from sura 18 to sura 38, though paraphrasing some of the intermediate sections.[9] So, in this part of his text he is working as a reader of the translation he has at hand and not, it seems, retrieving information from any other source. But at times, and not least in the latter part of his treatise (ch. XIX–XXX), he seems to adduce information from other sources. That he in some way has two sources – external polemical material as well as the Greek translation – is clear not least from the fact that he deals with the same sura, sura 112, twice, with a variation in his treatment of one Greek word coming out of the translation of this sura. The first time Niketas refers to the content of the sura, the word *al-ṣamad* is rendered *holosphairos,* the second time – when quoting the full Greek version of sura 112 – it is *holosphyros*.[10] The two renderings are very different in meaning but phonetically almost identical. So, despite the semantic difference, they probably somehow go back to the same translation – whether oral or written – but we have no means of reconstructing this. This is, in any case, yet another sign of Niketas's complete dependence on somebody else's translation, having no means of checking the original Arabic.

As indicated above, we know that Niketas quoted the Greek text very conscientiously. In quotation after quotation the Greek renders the Arabic by giving almost exactly one Greek word for every Arabic word in the Qur'an and in the same order, appearing as such in Niketas's text. Since he had no Arabic, this feature can only go back to the original translator. The strict adherence to the Greek wording when quoting did, however, not prevent Niketas from interpreting the meaning in ways that more served his polemical aim than a strict reading of the text. Also, in some places he combined passages that he found in the proximity of each other, quoting disparate passages in sequence as if not skipping anything of importance. Some of these combinations do, however, result in misconstruing

[8] Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 223–224.

[9] See Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 68 and Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 226–229. On the numbering of Niketas – with one digit lower than the now prevalent one – see Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 68.

[10] The two passages in Niketas's text are found in Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz,* Introduction, p. 44, l. 81–92 and section XVIII, p. 116, l. 144–146. On the meanings and implications of this, see Christos Simelidis, « The Byzantine Understanding of the Qur'anic Term *al-ṣamad* and the Greek Translations of the Qur'an », *Speculum*, 86 (2011), p. 887–913.

the meaning.[11] Also, and of central importance for our study here, he sometimes inserts a definite article when none was found in the Arabic, just as we may suspect that he did not always copy transliterated names with a consistent spelling.[12] The latter variation in terms of spelling, and probably also the use of definite article, may however also depend on the transmission of either the translation or Niketas's polemical treatise. The single manuscript that transmits the *Refutatio,* the Vat.gr. 681, is near contemporary with Niketas, but we have no proof it has come directly from his hand. So, with these reservations in mind, we may turn to the Greek translation itself.

III. *The Main Features of the Greek Translation*

The Greek translation, as we know it from the 82 fragments that have been transmitted, shows some very consistent features. First of all, it is a word-for-word translation, meaning that every word in the Arabic text has been rendered into 'one' Greek word, presented in the same order.[13] Such radically direct translation is of course only possible if the target language has the needed flexibility in terms of word order and other basic linguistic features. And this is the case of Greek, which with a high degree of inflection can have the various sentence parts appear in almost any order. Furthermore, Greek also shares a number of features with Arabic in terms of sentence subordination, the use of definite articles, etc. Still, some features do cause problems for this manner of translation, especially prepositions. The highly unusual employment of Greek prepositions as complements to verbs (as well as certain verb + case combinations) was noted already by Trapp. [14] When it comes to the *iḍāfa* construction (or genitive construction), which is characteristic of Arabic (and other Semitic languages), this on the one hand is easily reproduced in Greek, normally with the second part of the construction appearing in genitive in Greek, but here the specific use of definite article in Arabic (with no article being possible for the first part of the construction) is bound to put some demands on the translator in order to find a viable solution in Greek.[15] We shall return to this below.

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[11] Ulbricht, « Die Verwendungsweise », p. 497–508.

[12] On inconsistent rendering of definite articles, see Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 232, referring to the « Graeco-Arabica » (vol. III of his dissertation), which was unfortunately unavailable to me. On the inconsistent spelling of names, see Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 230.

[13] The word-for-word nature of the translation was first pointed out in Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 69.

[14] Trapp, « Gab es eine », p. 11–12, who also notes that verbs that usually carried a preposition in Greek but had not done so in the Arabic original came out with unusual case constructions.

[15] On the *iḍāfa* construction, see also Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 232–233.

The word-for-word nature of the translation, together with Niketas's systematic reading of a number of suras with indication of numbers and titles of these, makes it clear that the Greek rendering was of a Qur'an very closely resembling the one we know, though some divergencies may take us into landscape of the various readings that Muslim interpreters made of the Qur'anic text.[16] As is also clear from some of the renderings, the translator had knowledge not only of Arabic but also of Muslim interpretation of several Qur'anic passages.[17] The Qur'an contains many words not known from other early Arabic writing, and it would in a sense have been unlikely to think of a Qur'anic translator who worked solely on the basis of good Arabic. Such a translator would soon start searching for help. The translator(s) working to produce this Greek rendering had information at hand, managing also to be consistent in the rendering of certain linguistic stems and, it seems, of technical vocabulary.[18] It is even possible that certain poeticisms entered the Greek text, mirroring the poetic nature of the Qur'anic source text.[19] All these features characterizing the translator – or the translator team – working in an organized and consistent manner led the present writer in 2010 to suggest a Muslim or at least Islamic origin for the Greek translation, under the assumption that some Muslim readers or even officials would have found a translation useful and the listed features of satisfactory quality.[20]

Regardless of the actual origin, the most common background to a word-for-word translation is that of an interlinear translation, i.e. a translation produced to appear on the page above (or below, or even next to) the original text, often serving as an aide-mémoire. The fact that Arabic and Greek are written in each their direction does not exclude such origin. Every Arabic word could have a Greek word added above (or below, or even in between), though in some cases the result would be two words. To ease the reading of the Greek, signs (dots or such) could be added to indicate every chunk of Greek to be read at a time. This would work for just about all the text contained in the 82 extant fragments. There are, however, cases where the translator may have diverted from this. When we read *dia tou hagiou pneumatos* as translation of the *iḍāfa* construction *bi rūḥi l-qudus*,[21] this may have appeared as an interlinear translation, but only with e.g. dots framing

[16] On Niketas having a complete Greek translation at hand, see Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 68 and Ulbricht, « Nachweis ». On the possible divergencies between the Arabic text employed by the translator and the present standard Qur'an, see Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 229–230.

[17] Versteegh, « Greek Translations », p. 61.

[18] On consistency in stems and the use of technical vocabulary, see Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 70–71.

[19] This was suggested in Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 71–72 and p. 111, concerning frgm. 70. Here the final rhyme of the Arabic seems to find poetic representation in internal rhyme/alliteration in the Greek.

[20] Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 72–74.

[21] Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p 75, frgm. 2: بر ح القدس translated into διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.

this whole sequence (• *dia tou hagiou pneumatos* •). For the case is a bit complicated, for several reasons. First, the Greek rendering turns the second part of the *iḍāfa* construction (namely the words *l-qudus*) into an adjective (*hagios*). The reason for this is that the words to be translated, meaning 'the Holy Spirit', are so common in Greek (whether Christian or any other Abrahamic writing) that any other rendering would sound somewhat strained. But since all other *iḍāfa* constructions that we find rendered into Greek in our translation consistently reproduce the two parts in the sequence found in the Arabic text, it is possible that the translation originally read • *dia tou pneumatos* • *tou hagiou* •. But this would then produce a doubling of the definite article, as required by Greek syntax. So, as we see, the rules governing the *iḍāfa* construction as well as the definite article put some demands on the translator. And it will be fruitless guess work to attempt deciding what the original translation had here. What is certain is that the Greek translation exhibits a very clear word-for-word structure, with some dilemmas creating possible choices for the translator. And in some cases, we are certain about the choices made, in others we may see small inconsistencies that it is hard to ascribe to either translator or copyist with any certainty.

We do not possess the book that Niketas had in hand, but it would be wonderful to know what kind of a book it was, how the Greek text appeared on the page of the manuscript, and whether it e.g. contained the Arabic text as well. Here our only source is the few short paragraphs that Niketas spends on describing the book, especially in his first refutation.[22] This is where Niketas tells us that it contains 113 chapters and a prologue (i.e. 114 suras). But it does not come down to a real description. Due to spelling mistakes in the copying of the Greek, Trapp deduced that the translation was made after the introduction of the Greek minuscule script and written with that script.[23] This conclusion may seem a bit over-stated, but we may probably say that the copy that Niketas worked from was in the minuscule.

Furthermore, several scholars assert that the manuscript reproduced also the single letters, the so-called *fawātiḥ,* which come at the beginning of 29 suras of the Qur'an.[24] This they deduce from the words that come a bit further on in the same section that contains some description of the manuscript. Here Niketas speaks of the demonic nature of the qur'anic text – that it contains Manichaean ideas and all sorts of spells:

> Καὶ πλεῖστα δὲ αὐτοῦ τῆς Μανιχαϊκῆς μυσαρίας συλλέλεκται τερατεύματα, δαιμόνων τινῶν προσηγορίαι καὶ κατ' αὐτῶν ὁρκωμοσίαι ἐπὶ δυσφήμοις προσφωνήσεις τε πρὸς τῶν δαιμόνων χώρους καὶ ὁμολογίαι, ὅτι καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν

[22] These come at certain points in the passage. See Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, p. 44–48, I.104–174.
[23] Trapp, « Gab es eine », p. 10–11.
[24] Ulbricht, « Nachweis », p. 29.

> ἀπόστολοι καὶ προφήται παρὰ τοῦ διαγγελλομένου ἐν τῇ τοιαύτῃ γραφῇ Θεοῦ πλειστάκις κεχειροτόνηνται.[25]
>
> And most wonderous tales he has collected from the Manichaean pollution: the names of some demons, some oaths to be used against these containing abusive words, pronouncements against places of demons, and assurances that also from these apostles and prophets are most often elected by the God announced in this writing [i.e. the Qur'an].

He then adds some observations that are difficult to translate:

> Καὶ στοιχεῖον δὲ γοητικῶς προγραφὲν καὶ ψῆφοι μεταγεγραμμέναι παρ' αὐτῷ διαφόρως τυγχάνουσι.[26]

Already A. Mai, the first editor of Niketas's treatise, translated στοιχεῖον … γοητικῶς προγραφὲν with *littera fraudulenter praeposita,* « a letter deceitfully placed in front » and in a footnote explained that this referred to the Qur'anic single letters.[27] Förstel and Ulbricht offer the same explanation.[28] The passage is, however, difficult. Niketas is not being very precise, and his use of singular *stoicheion* instead of plural *stoicheia* makes it unlikely that he is referring to the single letters, which in most cases come in clusters of more than one letter and appear in front of altogether 29 suras. Another explanation would here be that *stoicheion* means not 'letter' but 'element' or 'segment' and refers to single Arabic words, which Niketas took to be of some magic nature. The *psephoi* in the second half of the sentence, which all previous commentators translate or interpret as 'views' or 'sentences', could here be taken in the original meaning of 'pebble', pointing to the dots separating sentence segments, as explained above.[29] Or it

[25] Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, p. 48, I.168–172.

[26] Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 48, I.172–173.

[27] *PG*, 105, col. 711, adding a footnote: « Videtur denotare solitarias illas, nulloque sensu, ut Moslemi fatentur, praeditas litteras, quas multarum surarum initiis praepositas videmus » (« this seems to indicate those single – senseless as the Muslims concede – initial letters, which we placed in front of many sura openings »).

[28] Förstel translates « einzelne <den Kapiteln> zum Zweck der Zauberei vorangestellte Buchstaben » (Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, p. 49). Ulbricht, « Nachweis », p. 541–542. I see no reason to believe that Niketas is here somehow dealing with sura 7, as indicated by Ulbricht. Furthermore, Ulbricht also indicates that the beginning of Niketas's refutation no. 6 contains reference to the single letters. In Niketas's words ὁ ἕκτος τῷ Μωάμετ μῦθος ἐπιγράπτεται μὲν Εἰς τὰ γωνρίσματα, τουτέστιν εἰς τὰ παραστατικὰ σημεῖα καὶ τὰς ἀποδείξεις, ὅτι ἐκ Θεοῦ δῆθεν αὐτῷ ἡ τοιαύτη δέδοται γραφή (Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, p. 80, VI.1–3), but these words only clarify the name of sura 7, i.e. the *gnōrismata* are explained as *ta parastatika semeia kai tas apodeixeis* (« the characterizing signs and proofs »), as also in the translation of Förstel.

[29] Mai translates ψῆφοι μεταγεγραμμέναι παρ' αὐτῷ διαφόρως with *sententiae varie mutatae* (*PG*, 105, col. 711). Förstel translates *in verschiedener Weise abgeänderte Urteile* (Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, p. 49); Ulbricht does not translate this part of the sentence.

could refer to the dots of the Arabic script. A translation of the quote above would then run as this:

> And a segment magically inserted in front and pebbles inscribed by it in different ways also occur. (my translation)

With this interpretation, the last sentence refers altogether to visual objects visible on the pages of the manuscript, coming in a section in which Niketas is keen to prove its demonic nature, and in this way the singular *stoicheion* would make sense (as 'a word segment' that Niketas is not able to read and sees as magical), as would the *psephoi,* which hardly ever means 'views' or 'sentences' but rather 'votes' or 'decisions', a meaning stemming from pebbles being used for voting. If this interpretation is corrected, Niketas's manuscript was bilingual, possibly with dots separating word segments.

With these words on the translation and how it appeared to Niketas, we turn to Ulbricht's thesis on the aim and nature of the translation.

IV. *Ulbricht's Thesis*

In Ulbricht's article entitled « The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation of the Quran (Vat. gr. 681) » from 2023 a thesis is proposed concerning the origin of the Greek translation of the Qur'an. This thesis is introduced on p. 223 of the article, where Ulbricht states that he will « elaborate on the Christian understanding of the quranic text as documented in the *Coranus Graecus* ». Later in the article, the author offers a series of arguments in support of the thesis. We will deal with these shortly, but first a note on the consequences of such Christian origin. It will of course make a difference if the translator was a Christian (or a group of Christians), through it might be difficult to say exactly which. As we have already seen, much precision went into the extensive work of translating the whole Qur'an, and the polemical statements that we have hitherto referred to all went back to the work of Niketas, not to the translator. But according to Ulbricht also the translator stood behind some modifications concerning two themes, namely « sexuality and the quranic image of God », to which he adds yet a third kind of modification by the translator, namely « in quranic verses dealing with theological issues with respect to Muslim and Christian dogmas ».[30] Furthermore, according to Ulbricht, some omissions of negative or interrogative particles lead « to diametrically opposed, sometimes even salacious, statements within the Greek translation, and the description of the quranic God is pejoratively connoted ».[31]

[30] Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 231.
[31] Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 231.

We will now go through the cases of modifications discussed by Ulbricht and see whether they fit clearly into a pattern. The three kinds of modification mentioned by Ulbricht often occur where we find a surprising use of the definite article, but also other features play a role, as we shall see. Ulbricht highlights five Qur'anic passages as rendered in the Greek translation: Q 3:45, 3:64, 9:30, 5:19, 3:44.

Q 3:45

In this Quranic verse, the Greek translation, as preserved through Niketas's text, renders the Arabic *bi-kalimatin minhu* into the Greek *ton logon autou.*[32] A first thing to note is that the Arabic preposition *bi-* disappears in the Greek, and instead we find now an additional definite article, *ton.* As mentioned above, definite articles do appear and disappear in the Greek translation, in some cases governed by the requirements of Greek, in other cases not. Prepositions, on the other hand, tend to be rendered into Greek even when they do not fit the language parameters.[33] The passage therefore seems to have been modified, using Ulbricht's term, but probably so that the preposition fell out and was replaced by a definite article. Whether this gives the passage a clear Christian reference, in the sense of *logos* now being a referent to Christ, is hard to say. Christ does appear as the next word, but in another case (nominative instead of accusative). In fact, if anything, Christ now appears as an apposition to God, both appearing in the nominative case, since in the passage Christ has only participles connected to him (and no definite verb). But none of this concerns the Greek *logon,* which I believe any reader would take to carry some general sense ('word' or 'speech'). Not even Niketas equates *logon* and Christ in his comments. So, some irregularity does appear in this passage, but hardly anybody's attempt through translation to bend the Qur'anic text into supporting or mirroring Christian dogma.

Q 3:64

As Ulbricht tells us, there are in the Greek Qur'an four passages in which *logos* represents the Arabic word *qawl* and three in which it represents the Arabic word *kalima*, and all the three latter are in passages that treat Christological questions: Q 3:45 (discussed above), in Q 4:171, as well as in Q 3:64, the passage now under discussion. Here Ulbricht solves the seeming lack of analogy between the Greek *ton logon ton stoichounta* and the original Arabic *kalimatin sawāʾin.* They both mean something like « a/the word that is equitable ». But the Greek translation carries a definite article, according to Ulbricht turning this into a Christological statement (Christ being the « equitable Word »).[34] It is true, as pointed out by Ulbricht, that

[32] Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 80–81, frgm. 13.
[33] Trapp, « Gab es eine », p. 11–12, Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 76 n. 37.
[34] Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 234

the Qur'anic passage comes right after a Christological section (Q 3:45–57, 58–63), but the words of Q 3:64 clearly speak of God in the Qur'anic way, and any reader would soon discover that a consistent distinction between God and Christ is here upheld. It is therefore hard to believe that anyone would have read the passage the way Ulbricht suggest, and also hard to explain why a translator would want « to make the quranic concept of 'God's Word' accessible or more familiar to non-Muslim readers». [35] If really wanting to make Christian and Muslim dogma correspond on this, much more intervention into the text would be needed. So, it is possible that Christian language has entered the text here, but then probably by slip caused a subsequent copyist or by Niketas himself, who does not comment upon this possible Christological meaning.

Q 9:30

In this passage, we find two instances of the same *compound*, *bnu llāhi* ('the son of God') translated differently, as *hyios theou* and *ho hyios tou theou,* respectively.[36] First of all, this observation should make us question whether the translator paid much attention to this. Could it simply be two different renderings that the translator found equally good? We find support for such a deliberation on our part in the complications that the Arabic implied for a Greek translator. The expression *bnu llāhi* is (again) an *iḍāfa* construction, and as such a difficulty in any case for a translator from Arabic to Greek. The first word does not and cannot carry a definite article in Arabic, the second here only does it as part of God's name. According to Arabic grammar having a definite article on the second part makes the whole construction definite. But which solution is then most correct for a word-by-word translator into Greek? Well, various solutions offer themselves, but the most likely renderings are just the ones we see, either with no definite articles at all or with definite articles on both. These are also the variations that we see in the New Testament (as in Mark 15:39), appearing also there as translations (probably from an oral context) of a similar Semitic/Aramaic construction. It is true, as Ulbricht points out,[37] that Niketas a bit later in his refutation on sura 9 does claim that Muhammad tries to claim the title of, or position as, son of God for himself. But Niketas does not refer to Q 9:30 there, and the passage only shows how far Niketas is prepared to twist the Qur'anic text to serve his polemical purposes.

Q 5:19

In this passage, the Arabic *min bashīrin* ('any bringer of good news') is translated as *ho evaggelizomenos* ('the bringer of good news'), so again a case of a definite article

[35] Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 234–235.
[36] Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 90–91, frgm. 33.
[37] Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 236.

inserted into the Greek rendering.[38] First in our analysis we may note here that the Arabic uses a common partitive construction with *min* ('of' + noun in plural, meaning 'any ...'). This construction has a near parallel in Greek, requiring however that one inserts an additional indefinite pronoun *tis* (together with a genitive plural). Here a simple singular has been employed, and we find such partitive construction rendered into a noun in singular also in other places of the Greek translation. This also happens in fragment 14, where the Arabic *min naṣirīn* becomes *ekdikos* in Greek. In this other example no definite article is added, but *ekdikos* is a Greek noun (or adjective), whereas the chosen rendering for *bashīrin* is a Greek participle *evaggelizomenos.* One quite simple explanation for the article is therefore the need to underline that this word here has a nominal function (as subject of the clause). A common manner of making this clear in Greek is, as mentioned, to add the indefinite article *tis* ('someone'). Here instead another solution was found, that of adding a definite article. Following this line of thought makes it very unlikely that Christian vocabulary went into the wording of our passage. We are witnessing an attempt at a quite literal translation, and if we take the word *evangelizo* to be very Christian, we must remember that Greek of all kinds were floating around in all parts of the eastern Mediterranean, making religious parlance adopt the available religious Greek words.

Q 3:44

The final passage discussed by Ulbricht is a complicated case. The Arabic *aqlāmahum* ('their pens'), which comes in a proverbial phrase, is translated as *autōn tas agkalas* ('their wings').[39] Since it would in any case be difficult for the translator to find anything in Greek that closely resembles the Arabic expression, given its gnomic nature, we may start looking for what could have led to such a distant rendering. One solution, which Ulbricht also refers to as a case of 'phonetic proximity', is that *agkalas* simply transliterates *aqlāma-* (without the possessive suffix). In general, the Greek translation displays extensive use of transliterations, which appear consistently with names and with words of which the meaning is uncertain, in most cases because the Qur'anic text poses the question as to the meaning of the given word.[40] The latter is not the case here, so perhaps the translator believed that this was a name, or reused it as a loan word or neologism. In any case, the passage does contain surprising features in Greek: the insertion of *aggeloi* ('angels') as a new subject of the clause, the reordering of noun and possessive genitive (*-hum* after the Arabic noun becomes *autōn* before the Greek noun), and the fact that the same Arabic passage *wa-mā kunta ladayhim* ('and you

[38] Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 86, frgm. 23.
[39] Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 80–81, frgm. 13.
[40] Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 71.

were not there'), appearing twice in close proximity in our passage, comes out in Greek with two different syntactical solutions (first as a double genitive *sou mē ontos ekeise* and then a few words later as *kai ouk ēs ekeise*). In any case, there is hardly an argument for seeing this as « a result of an unconscious association with Christian intertext », which it would in any case be hard to explain.[41] What we find is a possible transliteration, with some variation inexplicably introduced into the Greek rendering.

So, if it is hard to argue for a Christian voice or standpoint in the fragments that we have of the Greek translation of the Qur'an, it may be best to repeat some of the features that clearly demonstrate that the translator had an intimate understanding of the text:

- the translation demonstrates knowledge of secondary interpretations coming from the Muslim world (see above footnote 17);
- the translation reflects a fine-tuned care of precision, see e.g. how *ahl al-kitāb* becomes *hoi oikeioi tes graphēs,* with the communal meaning of *ahl* ('the people of ...') retained and *kitāb* with the sense of 'writing' or even 'scripture'.[42]
- the translation of Arabic *sura* as *ōdē,* as commented upon by Ulbricht[43] again shows the translator knowing both the context of the Arabic text and what the right word for this would be in Greek.

V. *Conclusion*

As the analysis above has shown, it is hard to argue for a clear Christian phrasing built into the Greek translation of the Qur'an by its translator. It is in fact hard to understand why a translator of that text would want to make the Qur'anic text suggest that « the concepts of Christ's filiality and divinity were also present in Islam ».[44] So much of the text, even in the extant passages of the Greek translation, shows the Qur'an arguing for the opposite. So, if this did enter the translation, it must be ascribed to faulty copying. In any case, as indicated above, there is hardly an argument for this, in fact more for the opposite. The conclusion must then again be that the translator could at least equally well have been a Muslim or a person well-trained in the Muslim tradition.

41 Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 238.
42 On *graphēs* as 'scripture', see fragments 5, 16, 19, 26, 41, 45, and 55, but note also that it is sometimes interpreted as a plural form. See also Høgel, « An Early Anonymous », p. 74.
43 Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 239–240.
44 Ulbricht, « The Authorship », p. 234.

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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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IN MEMORIAM

In memoriam
Malcolm Heath
(1957–13.II.2025)

Dana L. Munteanu
Ohio State University

It seems unfathomable that I was asked to write this piece in memory of Malcolm Heath. At the end of a semester, not too long ago, I used to write a long email to Malcolm, sharing scholarly ideas, political concerns and life anecdotes. His reply would usually start with a witty, self-deprecatory paragraph about the pleasure of getting lost digging into a forgotten commentary, then it would continue with stories about the many delights and occasional sorrows of teaching and with some research and travel plans. Since this sad task I have undertaken resembles one last message, with no expected reply, I shall try to say few things about the man besides highlighting the scholar's many accomplishments.

Whoever met Malcolm Heath in person may have had the impression that he was shy and reserved. Yet Malcolm was daring in his scholarly investigations, excited about ideas and unapologetic in his approach to literature and rhetoric. He enthusiastically explored untrodden paths of research, while remaining precise in his method. Among his last lectures available online, for example, is one entitled « Not all animals are dumb: language, communication and Aristotle's animals », at the *Hellenic Society and the Roman Society* on 10th March 2020 in London. For sure, this is not every classicist's cup of tea. As a study in contrasts, he may have seemed aloof, a formidable figure in the field, but he remained kind, patient and generous toward upcoming scholars, peers and friends. Many of his colleagues at the University of Leeds and elsewhere, former students, and myself can testify that he would read our manuscripts carefully and comment on them despite his busy

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schedule, and he would do so for no other reason than the intrinsic pleasure of exchanging scholarly ideas.

A simple list of Malcolm Heath's academic positions and accomplishments can give the reader a good idea about his illustrious career as a classicist. Malcolm Heath obtained his PhD from Oxford in 1984. After holding Lecturer positions at Wadham (1981–1987) and St. Andrews (1987–1988), as well as a Research Fellowship at Hertford College (1984–1987), he taught at the University of Leeds for over three decades, reaching the highest academic rank as Professor of Greek Language and Literature which he held until his retirement (2000–2022). The sheer amount of Malcolm's scholarly works, editorial contributions and review record speaks for itself: eight monographs (*The Poetics of Greek Tragedy*, London 1987; *Political Comedy in Aristophanes*, Göttingen 1987; *Unity in Greek Poetics*, Oxford 1989; *Hermogenes on Issues: Strategies of Argument in Later Greek Rhetoric*, Oxford 1995; *Aristotle: Poetics* (Translation), Harmondsworth 1996, *Menander. A Rhetor in Context*, Oxford 2004; *Interpreting Classical Texts*, London 2002; *Ancient Philosophical Poetics*, Cambridge 2013); several co-edited volumes, such as *Papers of the Leeds International Latin Seminar* (vols 6–7 and 9–10, 1990–1998), edited with Francis Cairns, and *The Poetics in its Aristotelian Context*, London 2020, edited with Pierre Destrée and myself. In addition, he published over seventy scholarly articles and essays and reviewed over four hundred books (!) for the prestigious « Review in Greek Literature » section in *Greece and Rome* (2005–2023) alone, besides serving on editorial boards of renowned classical journals.

More difficult it is to capture the uniqueness of Malcolm Heath's originality, wit and intellectual curiosity. Several features of Malcolm's scholarly contributions deserve highlighting. One of these remains his unabashed emphasis on the philosophical background of the ancient literary criticism and his interest in the practical uses of rhetoric in antiquity. Thus, he has illuminated less discussed topics (e.g., his discussion of Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris*, or the « marriage between Homer and Plato » in the textual criticism of Maximus of Tyre, Plotinus and Longinus, *Ancient Philosophical Poetics,* 2013, p. 125-180), and brought attention to less-known authors (e.g., his translation and commentary of the fragments and testimonia of Menander of Laodicea in the book-length 2004 study). Another is the ability to express clearly complicated ideas and concepts, and to calibrate those appropriately for targeted audiences. Malcolm's translation of the *Poetics*, for example, accompanied by minimal notes makes accessible a difficult text to broad audiences – by no means a simple feat. A third, rare quality of Malcolm's writing consists of deliberate reflection on our ways of examining classical texts, a kind of meditative meta-interpretation of methods and ideas. As he puts it in *Interpreting Classical Texts* (2002, p. 9–38), we should accept interpretative disagreement as a catalyst of fruitful enquiries and reflect on our own critical claims to clarify various angles of interpretative approaches. This may appear baffling to some,

when Malcolm could defend an interpretative position adamantly. Heath's first book, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (London 1987), for instance, discusses how Greek thinkers have emphasized pleasure and emotions as responses to tragedies in the fifth- and fourth-century BCE. While nothing appeared controversial in the topic per se, the study took a solitary path vis-à-vis a wave of scholarship focusing the political aspects of classical Greek drama. Now some scholars (myself included) do not see an absolute divide between the historic and philosophical approaches to literature and rhetoric. Tragedy surely played a crucial role in ancient Athens, reflected social realities *and* stirred emotions that were not disconnected from the *polis*. While Heath did not deny the overlap, he advocated for the right of the ancient authors to express themselves as literary critics without being deemed unworthy by us because they would not discuss certain topics of contemporary interest. Any adherence to a theory may be fine, he has insisted, as long as it does not dogmatically cloud every other possibility of analysis. In case of a scholarly disagreement, he once said: « I am not sure I am convinced, but I'll think about it and, regardless of the outcome, I know I would have learned a lot from this. » This kind of scrutiny of one's own position and willingness to change it if the evidence presents itself remains rare even among the best of us.

Let me conclude with ring composition, on a personal note. When my first book underwent the peer review process, one anonymous reader made strangely idiosyncratic comments from which I guessed it might have been Malcolm Heath. After the book was published, I reached out to Malcolm and asked him if he had been one of the readers, and if so, if he would be interested in another Aristotelian project. He responded with surprise: yes and yes. Therefore, I like to believe that we met through a kind of scholarly « recognition » (*anagnôrisis*), through books. As a co-editor Malcolm never assumed any air of superiority, despite his seniority, and worked diligently, without complaint, on the most unmerciful tasks, such as creating an index after realizing that our work had not yet been finished. I do have regrets: I could never convince Malcolm to like opera, even though he was an admirer of symphonic music and a lover of Edward Grieg. More seriously, it would be a pity if Malcolm's book manuscript, *Poetical Animals*, an account of Aristotle's anthropological approach to poetry and to other arts which he finished before death, as well as his work on Longinus, would remain unpublished.

Finally, I believe I know what Malcolm would have liked us all to keep in mind both in remembrance of him and for our own benefit: the joy of intellectual discovery. One of his favorite passages from Aristotle's *Protrepticus* (fr. B.44) reminds us that we pay good money to see all sorts of athletic and dramatic competitions for their own sake and not for any material gain, and thus it would be foolish « not to think it right to contemplate the nature and reality of things without payment (*amisthi*) ». Malcolm particularly liked the word thrown at the end as an unexpected punchline « for free » (*amisthi*). He thought of it as a

memorable reminder of how fortunate we have been to enjoy a life of contemplation. Indeed, some of us were lucky to have collaborated with Malcolm, or intrigued to have read his works, and, if neither, at least, fortunate that, even in dark times, we may observe small things and contemplate bigger ones in the universe – without payment.

In memoriam
Alfred Lyon Ivry
(14.I.1935–23.II.2026)

Josep Puig Montada
Universidad Complutense, Madrid

Gran especialista en filosofía judía y árabe, en particular de la edad media, Alfred Ivry había nacido y se había criado en Brooklyn, en una familia de emigrantes procedentes de las actuales Polonia y Ucrania. En 1953 se matriculó en el Brooklyn College, en el que se graduó en Literatura inglesa y Filosofía en 1957. Al mismo tiempo se graduó en el Herzliah Bet Midrash LeMorim, un centro de formación de profesores de hebreo.

Alfred Ivry obtuvo dos doctorados, el primero en 1963, en filosofía judía medieval, por la Universidad de Brandeis, en Waltham, MA sobre Moisés de Narbona dirigida por Alexander Altmann y el segundo, en 1971, en filosofía islámica medieval, por la Universidad de Oxford, bajo la dirección de Richard Walzer y de Samuel Miklos Stern. Su tesis de Oxford fue publicada bajo el título *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics. A Translation of Ya'qūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī's Treatise* On First Philosophy, SUNY, Albany NY 1974.

La carrera académica de Alfred Ivry transcurrió en las universidades de Cornell (1967–1974), Ohio State (1974–1976), Brandeis (1976–1989) y finalmente New York University (1989–2005) con una posición doble: Skirball Professor of Jewish Thought y Professor of Islamic Philosophy. En NYU fue asimismo director del Medieval and Renaissance Center, y cuando fui invitado gracias a Alfred a dar unas conferencias en abril de 1999, pude apreciar el reconocimiento y aprecio del que gozaba entre profesores y alumnos.

La formación de Alfred Ivry se asentaba sobre una sólida base de filosofía, de las dos lenguas clásicas, y de dos lenguas semíticas, hebreo y árabe. No le interesaba

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ser provocador con nuevas teorías o nuevas interpretaciones sino entender y explicar los autores en sus fuentes. Sus intereses eran amplios, de modo que produjo investigación en distintas áreas, pero Averroes y Maimónides destacan al respecto. De la cuestión del alma y del intelecto y la respuesta que le dio Averroes se ocupó durante largo tiempo y tres libros deben ser citados:

- Ibn Rushd, *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Nafs*, edición crítica de Alfred L. Ivry, Al-Majlis al-Aʻlá li-l-Thaqāfa, El Cairo 1994.
- *Averroës' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's* De Anima*: A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with English Translation*, 1st ed., Brigham Young University Press, Provo, UT 2002.
- *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's* De Anima. *Critical Hebrew edition of the translation by Moses ibn Tibbon*, The Israel Academy of Arts and Science, Jerusalem 2003.

Aunque en su original árabe, el comentario medio solamente se conserva en dos manuscritos, en hebreo tenemos dos traducciones, una por Shem Tob ben Isaac de Tortosa y otra por Moshe ben Samuel ibn Tibbon, preservadas en un buen número de manuscritos. Alfred Ivry utilizó los dos manuscritos árabes y algunos manuscritos representativos de las dos traducciones para esta edición crítica y la completó con su traducción y anotación. De este modo podemos conocer el pensamiento de Averroes sobre el intelecto en un periodo capital de su vida.

Alfred Ivry publicó más de un centenar de trabajos sobre filosofía árabe y judía, además de muchísimas reseñas, pero solamente voy a señalar dos más sobre sendos autores judíos. Moisés de Narbona nació en Perpinyà hacia 1300 y falleció después de 1362, también se le conoce como Maestre Vidal Bellsom y fue un destacado seguidor de Averroes, y de Maimónides, y comentador de ambos. Ivry editó críticamente su *Ma'amar bi-shelemut ha-nefesh* (*Tratado sobre la perfección del alma*, Academia de Israel, Jerusalén 1977) con un estudio pero sin la traducción inglesa que incluía su tesis doctoral de 1963, por desgracia.

Alfred Ivry admiraba a Maimónides y precisamente nos conocimos en el *Sixth Jerusalem Philosophical Encounter* (1985) dedicado al pensador cordobés con ocasión del 850 aniversario de su nacimiento (1135). Meir Jacob Kister había propuesto mi nombre y allí me encontré rodeado de sabios, un tanto avergonzado, y entre ellos estaba Alfred, a quien conocía por su obra sobre al-Kindī, que me acogió cariñosamente y me presentó a Shlomoh Pines.

Alfred Ivry era profesor en Brandeis y organizaba el *Boston Colloquium in Medieval Philosophy*. En mi primera estancia en Harvard, en 1986, me incluyó entre los participantes y me agració con una amistad que ha durado hasta su muerte acaecida en Paramus, NJ. Gracias a la técnica y por mediación de su hijo, Jonathan, pudimos conversar en verano de 2024 y aprecié su lucidez mental a pesar de la

debilidad del cuerpo que le había obligado a trasladarse con su esposa a una residencia medicalizada.

Como en el caso de Herbert Davidson, Maimónides siempre reclamó la investigación de Alfred Ivry pero sobre todo en la segunda parte de su vida. La gran obra es *Maimonides'* Guide of the Perplexed*: A Philosophical Guide*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2016. Con Maimónides le unían la religiosidad judía y la necesidad de dar una explicación racional, de Dios y de su creación. En su libro, Alfred Ivry señala que para Maimónides el camino hacia esta perfección intelectual exige el complimiento de la Ley, de la ley mosaica. Alfred Ivry vivía entregado a la familia y a la comunidad siguiendo la Ley, pero se negaba a que esta fuera tiránica, oponiéndose a la cerrazón de algunos correligionarios. Era practicante, pero sabía sonreír y veía más allá. זכרונו לברכה.

In memoriam
Graziella Federici Vescovini
(05.IV.1933–16.VII.2025)

Jöel Biard
Université de Tours

Graziella Federici Vescovini nous a quittés le 16 juillet 2025. Elle était née en 1933 à La Spezia, en Ligurie. Après des études de philosophie à Florence puis à Turin, elle a soutenu une thèse sur la pensée mathématique de Nicolas de Cues. D'abord assistante volontaire auprès d'Eugenio Garin à Florence, elle devint assistante de Nicola Abbagnano en histoire de la philosophie à Turin jusqu'en 1971. Elle y enseigna sans interruption l'histoire de la philosophie médiévale de 1965 à 1981, avant de devenir professeur ordinaire d'histoire de la philosophie antique et médiévale à l'université de Sassari en Sardaigne, de 1981 à 1985. Ensuite, elle fut professeur à Parme de 1985 à 1996, et enfin elle enseigna l'histoire de la philosophie et l'histoire des sciences à la faculté des sciences de la formation de l'université de Florence à partir de 1996. Après avoir dirigé le programme d'études dans les universités de Sassari, Parme et Florence, le département de philosophie à Sassari, elle fut présidente de cursus d'études à l'Institut des sciences de l'éducation de Florence. Elle était professeur émérite depuis 2008.

En 1988, elle avait reçu le prix Saletto Veneto, récompensant la meilleure œuvre culturelle et scientifique, pour son édition critique du *Lucidator dubitabilium* de Pietro d'Abano. Elle était membre de différentes sociétés internationales comme la SIEPM, la FIDEM ou la SIHSPAI (Société internationale d'histoire des sciences et de la philosophie arabes et islamiques), mais aussi membre (d'abord membre correspondant puis membre ordinaire) de l'Académie internationale d'histoire des sciences, membre de l'Accademia Sperelliana de Gubbio, de

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l'Accademia Pontaniana (qui date du XV^e^ siècle), et de la Società nazionale di scienze, lettere ed arti de Naples.

L'œuvre de Graziella Federici Vescovini se caractérise à la fois par une grande profusion, tant par la quantité de ses contributions que par la diversité de ses champs d'intérêt, et par la présence continue de plusieurs orientations fortes. Quelques auteurs majeurs ont eu dans son parcours une importance particulière.

Le premier est Nicolas de Cues. Après un travail initial consacré à sa pensée mathématique, et à côté de nombreux articles, elle a traduit en italien et commenté ses *Œuvres philosophiques* (1972), puis a repris la publication annotée de nombreux textes tels que *La Docte ignorance* (1991), *La Paix de la foi* (1993), *La Chasse de la sagesse* (1998) ou *L'idiota de mente* (2003). Elle a aussi rédigé une monographie (*Il pensiero di Nicolà Cusano* en 1998) présentant de façon remarquablement synthétique tous les aspects de l'œuvre du Cusain, lequel semble l'avoir toujours fascinée par son articulation originale de la philosophie platonicienne et hermétique, de la théologie et des mathématiques, sans oublier un certain concordisme dans sa vision des religions et de la paix.

Toutefois son nom restera surtout attaché à la redécouverte et à la valorisation de Blaise de Parme (Biagio Pelacani). Après de premiers articles dès 1960, c'est l'ouvrage principal, *Astrologia e scienza. La crisi dell'aristotelismo sul cadere del Trecento e Biagio Pelacani da Parma*, publié en 1979, qui fit véritablement redécouvrir ce maître, célèbre de son temps, mais dont l'importance avait été jusque-là minorée dans les études médiévistes en dépit de quelques mentions par A. Maier. Cet ouvrage qui présente la pensée du maître parmesan dans toute son amplitude, s'appuie sur une somme considérable de travail sur des manuscrits inédits. Il propose une lecture systématique qui met en valeur les aspects les plus radicaux de ce penseur. De ce fait, il minimise parfois le fait que celui-ci s'insère dans une tradition de commentaires aristotéliciens, dont il reprend les questions et parfois l'éventail des réponses possibles: Blaise de Parme relance souvent les problèmes là où Albert de Saxe, Nicole Oresme ou Marsile d'Inghen les avait laissés. Mais grâce à un pluralisme épistémologique véritablement original, Blaise de Parme propose des lectures renouvelées des doctrines aristotéliciennes, tout en avançant certaines thèses ou théories alternatives, explorant une conception de la nature de tendance matérialiste. Graziella Federici Vescovini a systématiquement mis en avant cet aspect matérialiste de la pensée de Blaise de Parme. Après avoir proposé en 1974 une édition de quelques questions sur le *De anima*, elle impulse au début des années 2000 une série d'éditions critiques de cet auteur, réalisées en collaboration, un travail dont d'autres chercheurs prendront ensuite le relai.

Le troisième auteur majeur qui a compté dans sa vision du Moyen Âge est Pietro d'Abano, dont elle édita et présenta les œuvres d'astronomie en 1988 (avec une nouvelle édition en 1992). Avec Pietro d'Abano, qui sera emprisonné par l'inquisition puis condamné *post mortem*, c'est l'importance de l'astronomie-

astrologie qui est soulignée, non seulement dans ses aspects techniques comme la mesure des mouvements célestes, mais aussi ses conséquences philosophiques, notamment sur le problème du déterminisme astral. De même les liens entre médecine et astrologie conduisent à redessiner l'encyclopédie des sciences d'une manière qui va marquer les universités d'Italie du Nord tout au long du XIV^e^ siècle. Elle devait y revenir en 2020 avec *Pietro d'Abano tra storia e leggenda.*

Car au-delà de ces quelques auteurs (dont la présence massive dans sa bibliographie ne doit pas faire oublier qu'elle s'intéressa aussi aux maître parisiens tels que Jean Buridan et Albert de Saxe, à Thomas Bradwardine, aux savants et philosophes arabes, à Buser, à Jacques de Forli, à Alberti, à Ficin, et même à Descartes et à John Dewey), c'est une vision du Moyen Age qui est au centre de l'œuvre de Graziella Federici Vescovini. Du point de vue chronologique, ses intérêts la portèrent surtout vers le XIV^e^ siècle, secondairement les XV^e^ et XVI^e^ siècles. Mais la chronologie découle de choix plus fondamentaux. En premier lieu, le privilège accordé à quelques champs disciplinaires: l'optique, la médecine, l'astrologie; en deuxième lieu une connexion forte entre histoire de la philosophie et histoire des sciences; en troisième lieu l'importance des penseurs arabes pour comprendre certaines disciplines de l'encyclopédie tardo-médiévale.

La « perspective » ou optique est au croisement de ces différentes dimensions et elle retint l'attention de Graziella Federici Vescovini tout au long de sa carrière. Dès 1964, elle publie dans *Rinascimento* un article intitulé « Contributo per la storia della fortuna di Alhazen in Italia », puis, dans *Centaurus* la même année, édite les *Questions de perspective* de Dominique de Clavasio (ou Dominicus de Clivaxo). L'année suivante, elle publie *Storia della prospettiva medievale*, ouvrage qui sera réédité en 1987 puis repris en 2003 sous le titre *La teoria della luce e della visione ottica dal IX al XIV secolo. Studi sulla prospettiva medievale e altri aggi.* Cette histoire qui au premier abord conduit de Robert Grosseteste à Blaise de Parme (dont les *Questiones super Perspectiva communi* furent publiées en 2009 par un groupe qu'elle animait), multiplie en vérité les détours par Euclide, al-Kindi, Roger Bacon, Avicenne, Alhazen, ainsi que Jean Buridan, Dominique de Clavasio et Henri de Langestein. Chemin faisant, tous les principaux enjeux de cette discipline sont traités: l'intromission ou l'extramission des rayons lumineux, leur caractère physique ou mathématique, la théorie de l'œil (avec les sources antiques mais aussi Avicenne, Hunain ibn Ishaq, Ali ibn Isa). Le caractère scientifique de l'optique comme théorie de la lumière et de la vision croise les enjeux philosophiques sur la perception, la connaissance sensible et même le statut de l'âme sensitive.

La médecine est tout autant au recoupement des tendances qui ont passionné Graziella Federici Vescovini. En 1978, elle publie un article sur l'application de la théorie de la latitude des formes à la médecine par Simone del Castello, maître ès arts formé à Paris et enseignant à Bologne. Jacques de Forli ou Ugo Benzi retiennent ensuite son attention, mais c'est surtout Pietro d'Abano qui est le point

d'appui essentiel de sa réflexion sur le statut de la médecine. L'auteur du *Conciliator medicorum et philosophorum* défend une conception de la médecine qui ne la réduit pas à une pratique mais comprend une dimension théorique et philosophique. La médecine traite de toutes les questions concernant la vie humaine, le corps, le statut de l'âme. Le thème est abordé de façon récurrente dans différentes publications sur la médecine et la philosophie à Padoue, avec une réflexion générale sur la médecine comme synthèse d'art et de science. Graziella Federici Vescovini fut en effet l'une des premières à souligner ce qui est aujourd'hui largement admis, à savoir les conséquences épistémologiques de la mise en avant de la médecine dans le cursus d'études et dans l'encyclopédie des sciences, qui conduit à reformuler le rapport entre singulier et universel, comme entre théorie et pratique.

Pietro d'Abano n'est pas seulement riche d'enseignements sur la médecine, il l'est tout autant (avec Blaise de Parme) pour une autre discipline essentielle dans la conception du savoir médiéval défendue par Graziella Federici Vescovini: l'astrologie. Il faut bien entendu rappeler que dans l'Italie du XIV^e^ siècle, « astrologie » et « astronomie » sont deux termes souvent interchangeables – le premier étant le plus fréquemment employé. Certes, on ne peut ignorer la dimension d'astrologie judiciaire, et Blaise de Parme rédige plusieurs horoscopes; mais dans le même temps à Bologne, les lecteurs d'astrologie ont pour charge d'étudier les textes proprement astronomiques sur le mouvement des astres. L'astrologie comporte une dimension physique, donc une théorie du cosmos, qui s'appuie longtemps sur des opuscules synthétiques tels que la *Sphère* ou la *Theorica planetarum*, ainsi qu'une dimension mathématique, dans le prolongement de Ptolémée et des astronomes arabes. L'astrologie-astronomie a ainsi des aspects rationnels et même scientifiques, et c'est précisément cette fonction théorique de la rationalité de l'astrologie dont Graziella Federici Vescovini n'a cessé de souligner les conséquences pour la vision d'ensemble du monde médiéval. Tous ses travaux en la matière ont été intégrés dans le volume *Astrologie et science au Moyen Âge* paru en français en 2021, qui étudie l'histoire de cette discipline depuis ses origines grecques jusqu'au XVI^e^ siècle en présentant les textes disponibles depuis les savants grecs et arabes et leurs traductions latines, puis les débats autour du statut de l'astrologie à partir du XIII^e^ siècle jusqu'à la Renaissance.

Nous mentionnerons plus rapidement un champ d'études qui est voisin: celui de la magie. Le statut de la magie avait fait l'objet de quelques études, en relation à l'astrologie voire à la démonologie. En 2008, Graziella Federici Vescovini publie *Medioevo magico* (dont elle donne une version française en 2022), partant à nouveau des sources arabo-latines, et examinant le statut licite ou illicite de la magie, tout en étudiant ses relations avec les autres sciences – mathématiques, astronomie, médecine – ainsi qu'avec la théologie et la religion. Que l'on ne croie pas par conséquent à une fascination pour l'irrationnel. Il s'agit au contraire de voir dans

quelle mesure la magie participe elle aussi à la recherche d'explications causales et partage la volonté d'agir sur le monde de nature ou des esprits au moyen de règles.

Dans toutes ces recherches, ainsi que nous l'avons déjà signalé, Graziella Federici Vescovini manifeste le désir constant de travailler à la frontière de différents domaines, en montrant comment les concepts nés dans un domaine ont des effets dans des champs voisins. Ses objets sont ainsi souvent aux frontières de la science (même s'il importe d'être attentif aux divers sens que ce terme prend au Moyen Age) et de la philosophie. Quels que soient les champs du savoir envisagés, c'est leur composante ou ambition scientifique qu'elle souligne, y compris les formes nouvelles de rapport entre mathématiques et physique, que ce soit chez les maître parisiens ou, différemment, dans la tradition de Pietro d'Abano. Mais ces composantes scientifiques ont toujours des effets philosophiques.

Enfin, et cela va de pair, elle a insisté, à une époque où c'était beaucoup moins courant qu'aujourd'hui, sur l'importance de la culture arabo-musulmane et de la traduction des textes qui en étaient issus, dans l'émergence et le développement de nombreux champs du savoir, tels que les mathématiques, l'optique, la médecine, l'astronomie mathématique, l'astrologie.

Graziella Federici Vescovini a ainsi défriché de nombreux secteurs qui étaient peu explorés il y a un demi-siècle. Elle a mis en évidence la rationalité philosophique et même scientifique de champs disciplinaires ou de domaines d'objets souvent tenus à l'écart. Son esprit vif la conduisait parfois à des affirmations rapides, mais toujours à la valorisation des aspects les plus originaux, voire les plus radicaux. Tout cela a montré la voie pour de nombreux travaux de recherche. Nombre d'entre nous garderons le souvenir d'une collègue passionnée par ses recherches, expansive, joyeuse et bienveillante, toujours prête à partager ses découvertes et compétences.

In memoriam
Yaḥyā Michot
(03.VII.1952–1.IV.2025)

Olga L. Lizzini
Aix-Marseille Université

Le 1er avril 2025, Yahya (Yaḥyā) Michot – né Jean – grand nom des études avicenniennes et interprète passionné d'Ibn Taymiyya, s'éteignait à Hartford, dans le Connecticut. Il était professeur émérite à ce qui est aujourd'hui la Hartford International University for Religion and Peace où, en tant que titulaire de la chaire d'études islamiques et de relations entre chrétiens et musulmans (*Professor of Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations*), il avait enseigné depuis 2008, assurant également sa collaboration à *The Muslim World*, la revue publiée par cette même institution.[1]

J.M. était né à Thuin, dans la province du Hainaut en Belgique (Wallonie), le 3 juillet 1952. Attiré dès l'enfance par les lettres, il suivit de 1964 à 1970 les cours de la section gréco-latine du Collège Cardinal Mercier (Braine-l'Alleud) – premier de classe tout au long de ses études, il y obtint la médaille d'or de *Primus perpetuus* – pour ensuite poursuivre ses études à l'Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL, Louvain-la-Neuve) jusqu'en 1983. Tourné d'abord, outre la philosophie, vers l'hébreu et les études bibliques – la question de la Révélation était pour lui déjà

[1] *The Muslim World: A Journal Devoted to the Study of Islam and of Christian-Muslim Relations; v.* par example*, 100th Anniversary Special Issue*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2010; cf. Yaḥyā Michot, « Between Entertainment and Religion: Ibn Taymiyya's Views on Superstition », *The Muslim World*, 99 (2009), p. 1–20; Id., « Ibn Taymiyya's 'New Mardin Fatwa': Is Genetically Modified Islam (GMI) Carcinogenic? », *The Muslim World*, 101 (2011), p. 130–181; Id., « An Important Reader of al-Ghazali: Ibn Taymiyya », *The Muslim World*, 103 (2013), p. 131–160; Id., « Philosophical Exegesis in Context. Some Views by Ibn Taymiyya », *The Muslim World*, 109 (2019), p. 582–594. Cf. également sa conference sur Duncan Black MacDonald (m. 1943): < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcR11vttFDk > (dernière consultation 18.05.2026).

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centrale –, J.M. découvrit au fil de ses années universitaires la langue arabe et l'islam, qu'il finit par embrasser comme sa propre religion.

Sa trajectoire académique fut, d'emblée, celle d'un esprit d'exception. Bénéficiaire du soutien du FNRS (Fonds national de la recherche scientifique belge) à partir de 1974, il obtint en 1981 le titre de Docteur en philosophie avec une thèse en trois volumes consacrée à la théorie eschatologique d'Avicenne (« La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne »), rédigée sous la direction de Simone Van Riet, responsable à l'époque du Centre de philosophie arabe et de son projet majeur: *l'Avicenna Latinus.*[2] Un volume entier de la thèse, qui lui valut le titre « avec la plus grande distinction et félicitations du jury », était réservé aux textes arabes traduits. En 1983, il ajouta à ce premier titre un second, en langue arabe et en islamologie – des disciplines qui lui étaient devenues familières lors de son séjour cairote, où – objecteur de conscience – il avait enseigné le français au Collège Patriarcal d'Héliopolis (1978–1980). En 1983, Jean Michot, puis Yaḥyā, fut ainsi chargé d'enseignement à l'UCL de Louvain (d'abord assistant de 1983 à 1989, puis premier assistant de 1989 à 1996, et enfin, de 1996 à 1997, chef de travaux) à l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie.[3]

Son parcours universitaire et, plus largement, son existence même changèrent considérablement en 1998. Michot fut d'abord *Visiting Fellow*, puis *KFAS Fellow*, à l'Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, et donc *Lecturer* à la Faculté de théologie de l'Université d'Oxford, où il enseigna la théologie islamique et la langue arabe jusqu'en 2008. Cette même année, il quitta Oxford pour le Connecticut où il accepta le poste de Professeur au prestigieux Hartford Seminary (désormais Hartford International University for Religion and Peace) où il poursuivit sa carrière universitaire.

Dans les trois institutions pour lesquelles il lui arriva de travailler, Y.M. enseigna avec une attention, une compétence, une organisation et un dévouement exemplaires des cours de langue, d'histoire et de littérature arabes, d'islamologie, de philosophie arabo-islamique et, au Hartford Seminary, de dialogue interreligieux, à des dizaines et des dizaines d'étudiants dont il se déclarait toujours, peut-être avec une pointe d'ironie, le « serviteur ».

Polyglotte, il avait un amour évident pour les langues:[4] outre le français, sa langue maternelle, qu'il cultivait dans ses travaux comme une langue littéraire,

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[2] V. Claude Troisfontaines, « In memoriam Simone Van Riet (12 avril 1919 – 28 novembre 1993) », *Revue Philosophique de Louvain,* 92 (1994), p. 146–151: < https://www.persee.fr/doc/phlou_0035-3841_1994_num_92_1_6846 > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026).

[3] De cette période est la traduction à laquelle il avait sans doute commencé à travailler dans les années au Caire: *Mémoires de Ramadan de Ahmed Bahgat*, Traduit de l'arabe et annoté par Jean R. Michot, L'Harmattan, Paris 1991.

[4] V. aussi son CV encore en ligne < https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/sites/default/files/2021-09/Yahya_Michot_CV.pdf > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026).

l'anglais qu'il pratiqua avec une maîtrise croissante depuis qu'il s'était établi à Oxford; et puis le néerlandais, l'espagnol, l'allemand, le latin et le grec ancien, le persan, le turc ou l'italien – des langues souvent apprises par goût et par curiosité; il me demanda, avant un de mes retours en Italie, de lui rapporter un exemplaire de *La Divina Commedia* qu'il souhaitait relire pour le pur plaisir; et, bien sur, parmi ces langues, on doit nommer l'arabe, la langue qui était pour lui celle de la Révélation,[5] une langue qu'il était capable non seulement de traduire avec une grande précision, mais aussi d'utiliser naturellement dans les discussions et les interventions publiques. De 1995 à 1997 et puis de 2003 à 2005 il participa aux journées des *Durūs ḥasaniyya* organisées par le roi du Maroc.

Ceux qui ont pu assister à ses cours ont pu apprécier sa grande culture, sa curiosité sincère, la rigueur qu'il mettait dans ses recherches, son sérieux, toujours paradoxalement accompagné d'un sens de l'humour aigu, ainsi que son infatigable générosité intellectuelle qui se traduisait par des heures de relecture commune des textes. Ceux qui ont lu ne serait-ce qu'un de ses livres ou de ses nombreux articles connaissent sa langue précise et jamais ennuyeuse, la vivacité intellectuelle qui l'animait, l'originalité des problèmes qu'il choisissait d'explorer. Ceux qui ont eu l'occasion de discuter avec lui ont pu reconnaître son intelligence, mais aussi la façon dont il alliait, à un sérieux presque ascétique, une ironie cinglante, la netteté – parfois abrupte – de ses positions et un certain goût pour la provocation.

Sa biographie fut marquée par des passages continuels: entre pays, langues, institutions, appartenances intellectuelles. Le séjour en Égypte, durant les années de formation, fut aussi l'occasion d'un premier livre; [6] vinrent ensuite l'engagement académique à Louvain et au sein de la communauté musulmane de Belgique, Oxford à partir de 1998 et enfin Hartford à partir de 2008. Une vie façonnée par la recherche et l'enseignement, mais aussi par les affections – son épouse Louise, rencontrée au Caire, l'a toujours accompagné, ainsi que leurs deux enfants – et par les voyages sur les cinq continents, souvent à l'occasion des nombreuses invitations à donner des cours ou des conférences.

Les changements dans sa vie ne furent toutefois pas uniquement dus à l'évolution de sa carrière. Son transfert à Oxford s'apparenta, au début, à un exil: il quitta à contrecœur l'UCL – et Bruxelles – en raison du scandale qu'avait provoqué en 1997 la publication, sous pseudonyme, de sa traduction d'une *fatwā* d'Ibn Taymiyya sur les moines chrétiens. L'histoire de cette affaire, qui suscita des réactions nombreuses et variées, est longue et surtout complexe; on ne peut en donner ici que les éléments essentiels, même s'ils ne pourront pas suffire à

[5] Yaḥyā Michot, « Revelation », in Tim Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, MA 2008, p. 180–196; cf. aussi l'article dans Shihadeh (ed.), *Sufism and Theology*.

[6] V. *supra* n. 3.

restituer ni la rudesse du débat ni la complexité de son protagoniste. En 1997, un essai sous forme de *pamphlet,* signé par un certain « Nasreddin Lebatelier »,[7] fut publié*:* Ibn Taymiyya, *Le statut des moines. Traduction française en référence à l'affaire de Tibéhirine de* Nasreddin Lebatelier (*Rubbān al-ghāriqīn fī qatl ruhbān Tibhirīn*).[8] Dans cet essai, la traduction et la présentation de la *fatwā* sur les moines du savant hanbalite étaient accompagnées d'une introduction et de plusieurs notes de commentaire. Tout en représentant une illustration savante du texte, le travail mettait en relation la position de Ibn Taymiyya sur le statut des moines avec l'assassinat, par le GIA algérien, le 21 mai 1996, des sept moines enlevés dans la nuit du 26 au 27 mars de la même année au monastère de Tibhirine, en Algérie.[9] L'introduction indiquait que la communauté islamique avait condamné par consensus (*iǧmā'*) les assassinats des moines de Tibhirine, tout en faisant entendre Ibn Taymiyya et la position – fondée au demeurant sur les « textes fondateurs » – selon laquelle les moines « qui se sont fait comme un nid sur la tête », c'est à dire – selon Ibn Taymiyya – les moines actifs dans la société et dans le prosélytisme, pouvaient légitimement faire l'objet d'un jihad (*ǧihād*).[10] Le rapprochement et le choix du pseudonyme, « Nasreddin », suscitèrent des réactions très fortes et une polémique éclata qui devint vite un scandale aux lourdes conséquences. En

[7] Le pseudonyme choisi par l'auteur mérite attention: Nasreddīn, figure du sage-fou de la tradition populaire islamique, s'associe à Le Batelier, le passeur – ce que confirme d'ailleurs le titre arabe, *Rubbān al-ghāriqīn* (« le batelier des noyés »). Le grand spécialiste se masque ainsi en sage-bouffon pour dire, avec une élégance oblique, des choses très sérieuses. Le Batelier désigne le conducteur d'un bateau, comme le même Nasreddin Hoja est parfois décrit dans la tradition. Thuin était connue en tant que ville de batellerie: en 1880, Armand Michot y fonda un chantier naval pour la construction de péniches. On pourrait se demander par ailleurs si ce nom n'évoque pas aussi la bataille – et donc, implicitement, le *jihād* qui est précisément au cœur du traité. Quoi qu'il en soit, cette résonance garde toute sa pertinence dans un texte qui s'interroge sur la légitimité du recours à la force armée contre des moines. Sur Thuin, v. < https://www.telesambre.be/emission/replay/replay-le-chantier-naval-de-thuin/72686?utm_source=chatgpt.com > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026), cf.*:* < http://www.patrimoinevivantwalloniebruxelles.be/patrimoines/nature/fiche_nature/?n=20 > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026). Sur Nasreddin en philosophie on a au moins *Apprendre à philosopher avec Nasreddin Hodja*, par Oscar Brenifier et Isabelle Millon: < http://www.pratiques-philosophiques.fr/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/PHILOSOPHER-AVEC-NH-MISE-EN-PAGE-ORIGINALE-2.pdf > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026).

[8] Ibn Taymiyya, *Le statut des moines.* Traduction française en référence à l'affaire de Tibéhirine de Nasreddin Lebatelier (*Rubbān al-ghāriqīn fī qatl ruhbān Tibhirīn*), Safîna Éditions, Beyrouth 1417/1997. On notera le style typique des titres arabes: *rubbān al-ghāriqīn* (le batelier des noyés) est en assonance avec *ruhbān Tibhirīn* (les moines de Tibhirine).

[9] < https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassinat_des_moines_de_Tibhirine >; cf. au moins < https://www.oasiscenter.eu/it/lo-spirito-di-tibhirine-continua-a-soffiare-in-marocco > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026).

[10] Sur le monachisme vu par l'islam, v. au moins Samuela Pagani, « L'invention des *ādāb*: 'innovations' soufies et monachisme dans l'exégèse du verse 57:27 du Coran », in Francesco Chiabotti, Eve Feuillebois–Pierunek, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, Luca Patrizi (éds.), *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam. Sufi adab*, Brill, Leiden 2017, p. 221–275.

répondant aux polémiques, Y.M. déclara que son intention était d'explorer, dans son étude, « le fossé profond qui sépare les textes musulmans classiques – y compris ceux utilisés par le GIA [Groupe islamique armé] – et le consensus (*ijmāʿ*) des condamnations contemporaines du drame de Tibhirine ».[11] En insistant sur le consensus [12] de condamnation de la part de la communauté concernant le « drame » de Tibhirine – à savoir le crime perpétré par le GIA – Y.M. démontrait que l'islam sunnite contemporain censurait l'assassinat, tout en signalant que les instructions d'Abū Bakr, auxquelles Ibn Taymiyya se référait pour ses arguments, les légitimaient – instructions auxquelles le consensus justement s'opposait.[13] La condamnation – et l'adhésion de l'auteur à celle-ci – se situaient donc sur le plan des sources de la loi islamique.

Suite à la polémique, Y.M. retira de la circulation l'essai (il le republia en 2005 dans une version « dés-actualisée », qui est encore disponible en ligne)[14] et finit par quitter l'UCL.[15] Après une brève période en tant que *Visiting Fellow*, il rejoignit donc l'Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. C'était renoncer non seulement à son université, à Louvain-la-Neuve, où il présida le Centre de philosophie arabe, mais aussi à la vie de la communauté musulmane de Bruxelles, dans laquelle il était activement engagé en tant que président du Conseil supérieur des musulmans de Belgique (fonction qu'il occupa de 1995 à 1998).[16] Oxford représenta néanmoins pour lui une ouverture décisive sur le monde académique anglophone et prépara la phase américaine qui allait suivre.

La vie de recherche de Michot s'est déployée dans l'espace – non toujours apaisé – entre l'intellect (*al-ʿaql*), seul guide affiché de ses interprétations des textes de l'islam classique, et la tradition (*al-naql*) de la foi qu'il avait embrassée. On retrouve

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[11] Cf. YAḤYA MICHOT, « Droit de réponse », *Témoignage chrétien*, 2782 (31 octobre 1997); cf. ARMAND VEILLEUX, « Jean Yahya Michot et la littérature politique du G.I.A. », *Collectanea cisterciensia,* 62 (2000), p. 78–80.

[12] En islam, on lit, « aucun corps social particulier » a le droit « de pouvoir reformuler le dogme et la norme et, a fortiori, de les transformer et de les réécrire. C'est à la communauté tout entière qu'est alors confiée la gestion du magistère, une communauté dont il est impossible qu'elle puisse se mettre d'accord sur quelque chose qui constituerait un égarement » (cf. IBN TAYMIYYA, *Le statut des moines*; cf. IBN TAIMIYYA, *Fetwa des moines*, p. 3 (pour les références, v. infra la *note*).

[13] Cf. IBN TAYMIYYA, *Le statut des moines*, p. 21–22; « assassinats » apparaît entre guillemets.

[14] < https://www.muslimphilosophy.com/it/works/ita%20moines.pdf > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026): IBN TAIMIYYA, *Fetwa des moines*. Traduction française et introduction par YAḤYA MICHOT, E-version « dés-actualisée », considérablement abrégée mais enrichie d'addenda, de IBN TAYMIYYA, *Le statut des moines*. Traduction française, en référence à l'affaire de Tibéhirine, par NASREDDIN LEBATELIER (*Rubbân al-ghâriqîn fî qatl ruhbân Tîbhirîn*), El-Safîna, Beyrouth 1417/1997 (« Fetwas d'Ibn Taymiyya, II »); cf. IBN TAYMIYYA, *Le statut des moines*.

[15] Cf. PHILIPPE VAN PARIJS dans la vidéo: « Hommage au Professeur Yahya Michot »: < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAN9yY_OGSE > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026).

[16] Cf. les textes en YAḤYA MICHOT, *Musulman en Europe. Réflexions sur le chemin de Dieu (1990–1998)*, préface de TARIQ RAMADAN, Éditions Jeunesse sans frontières, Paris 2002.

peut-être ici la marque profonde de sa réflexion: non pas celle d'un érudit détaché, mais d'un chercheur en quête, un savant pour qui le texte classique n'était jamais seulement objet d'analyse, mais lieu d'interrogation. D'où aussi l'attention minutieuse à la langue de ses auteurs: chaque terme devait être interrogé dans sa précision sémantique et dans ses résonances internes à la tradition. Les lexiques qui clôturaient ses travaux de traduction – et qui représentent un modèle pour la recherche – n'étaient pas un appendice, mais une partie essentielle de sa démarche. Il ne s'agissait pas d'un exercice formel, mais de la conviction que la pensée vit dans la densité des mots. C'est en ce sens que son interprétation d'Avicenne et sa lecture d'Ibn Taymiyya ont marqué les études contemporaines.

Avicenne (Ibn Sīnā, mort en 1037/428) et Ibn Taymiyya (mort en 1328/728): la production scientifique de Y.M. s'est en effet articulée essentiellement autour de ces deux figures centrales – et à bien des égards opposées – de la tradition intellectuelle de l'islam. D'un côté le grand philosophe et médecin persan qui a signé à la fois l'apogée de la tradition classique de la *falsafa* et le début d'une nouvelle ère, tant en philosophie qu'en théologie en islam; de l'autre, l'érudit de tradition hanbalite, d'une importance capitale aussi bien pour la tradition intellectuelle de l'islam que pour ses courants anti-intellectualistes. Ces deux auteurs, très différents mais tous deux centraux – Ibn Taymiyya est pour Michot « un pair d'Avicenne, d'Ibn 'Arabī, de Mullā Sadrā al-Širāzī et alii » –[17]constituent la clé de voûte de son travail intellectuel. Il faudrait des dizaines de pages pour rendre compte de l'ensemble de ses travaux, et nous ne pouvons ici que nous limiter à l'essentiel. On pourra peut-être un jour rassembler dans un corpus unique les différents travaux qu'il a rédigés et publiés souvent de manière fragmentaire dans diverses revues, cahiers ou pamphlets (c'est notamment le cas des écrits sur Ibn Taymiyya).[18]

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[17] V. Jean R. [Yahya] Michot, *Musique et danse selon Ibn Taymiyya. Le « Livre du Samâ' et la danse (Kitâb al-Samâ' wa l-Raqṣ) » compilé par le shaykh* Muhammad al-Manbiji, Vrin, Paris 1991, p. 7. Dans la présentation aux *Études taymienes/Taymiyyan Studies* (Al-Bouraq, Paris 2020) on lit « Près de quarante ans après avoir découvert le Shaykh de l'Islam Ibn Taymiyya (m. 728/1328), je continue à penser que nous avons, en sa personne, un véritable théologien, au sens le plus noble donné à ce terme en Occident: quelqu'un capable de parler de Dieu d'une manière qui interpelle les intellects et les cœurs de nos contemporains. La chose s'explique sans doute, entre autres raisons, par le fait qu'il ne vécut pas dans une tour d'ivoire mais fut amené, en sa qualité de mufti, à constamment réfléchir et agir en phase avec la société de son temps. Tout controversé qu'il soit pour d'aucuns, et quelques réserves qu'on ait vis-à-vis de certaines de ses vues ou actions, l'étudier est toujours un plaisir ».

[18] Sans prétendre à l'exhaustivité: v. – avec les textes cités en bas – Yaḥyā Michot, « Ibn Taymiyya's Commentary on the Creed of al-Hallaj », in Ayman Shihadeh (ed.), *Sufism and Theology*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2007, p. 123–136; Id., « Misled and Misleading... Yet Central in their Influence: Ibn Taymiyya's Views on the Ikhwan al-Safa' », in Nader El-Bizri (ed.), *The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and their Rasā'il: An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, p. 139–179. Sur Avicenne, v. « *Al-Nukat wa-l-fawā'id:* An Important Summa of Avicennian *Falsafa* », in Peter

La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne. Le retour à Dieu (ma'âd) *et l'imagination*, publié en 1986 par Peeters (Louvain) pour le compte de l'Académie royale de Belgique, est la réécriture de la thèse de doctorat soutenue par Michot.[19] Il s'agit d'un texte qui – dans ce qui était à l'époque quasi un désert –[20] s'affirma comme fondamental pour l'étude de la philosophie d'Avicenne. Suivi quelques ans plus tard par l'ouvrage, différent mais tout aussi fondamental, de Dimitri Gutas (*Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*),[21] et par les nombreux précieux essais de Jules Janssens,[22] son collègue associé à la KU de Louvain, c'est ce texte, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne,* qui a formé des générations de chercheurs. Pour l'eschatologie, la théorie de l'imagination, la psychologie, la cosmologie et, au-delà, la métaphysique d'Avicenne, ce livre reste un ouvrage essentiel. Michot y met en lumière à la fois la cohérence systématique de la pensée d'Avicenne et le rôle fondateur de l'imagination dans la construction de son système. L'imagination n'est pas une faculté marginale dans l'architecture psychologique du monde et de l'humain, mais le principe d'une réalité qui est « imaginale » (et non pas imaginaire). L'imagination est ainsi le lieu de médiation entre l'intellect et le monde sensible, entre la métaphysique et l'expérience, entre la révélation et la compréhension, tout en étant un lieu de vérité. Dans la lecture qu'en donne Michot, l'eschatologie, la théorie de la prophétie, la psychologie et la cosmologie d'Avicenne ne peuvent être comprises sans reconnaître cette fonction structurante de l'imagination. Sa lecture de la pensée avicennienne reste philosophique, non symbolique ou irrationaliste même quand elle est confiée à des images. Pour Michot Avicenne établit une théorie de la réception de la manifestation divine: les choses reçoivent le flux divin comme des « prismes » qui reflètent la lumière en la « colorant ». L'idée d'une manifestation de lumière – plus efficace, aux yeux de Michot, pour rendre compte du flux avicennien comme « épiphanie créatrice », que ne l'était l'idée d'une émanation nécessaire de l'être – visait à dégager au cœur du système avicennien un concept unificateur capable de rendre compte de l'ensemble des phénomènes expliqués par le système. [23]

ADAMSON (ed.), *Classical Arabic Philosophy: Sources and Reception*, Warburg Institue, London 2007, p. 90–123.

19 JEAN R. [YAḤYA] MICHOT, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne. Le retour à Dieu* (ma'ād) *et l'imagination*, Peeters, Louvain 1986.

20 Si l'on exclut les travaux pionniers de A.M. Goichon et, parmi les majeurs, de S. M. Afnan, F. Rahman, M. Marmura.

21 DIMITRI GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 1988; cf. *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Second, Revised and Enlarged Edition, Including an Inventory of Avicenna's Authentic Works), Brill, Leiden – Boston 2014.

22 Pour la bibliographie de Jules Janssens (jusqu'en 2021), v. DANIEL DE SMET, MERIEM SEBTI (éds.), *Penser avec Avicenne. De l'héritage grec à la réception latine, en hommage à Jules Janssens*, Peeters, Louvain 2022, p. 11–19.

23 MICHOT, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne*, p. 87–93.

Avicenne aurait cherché à articuler, dans le cadre de la rationalité philosophique, ce processus de « manifestation divine » que la mystique appelle *taǧallī* et pour lequel Michot utilisait, à propos d'Avicenne, le couple de termes « désaltération/épiphanie » de Dieu:[24]

> L'inférieur comme dés-altération/épiphanie de la réalité supérieure dont il participe, à laquelle il est associé: telle semblerait être pour Avicenne, non seulement la clef permettant d'expliquer l'activité humaine mais, chose beaucoup plus importante, le secret même de la création [...] né de l'extériorisation de la pensée de Dieu, manifestation de cette pensée, le crée se développe, à partir de Lui et vis-à-vis de Lui, selon une relation structurellement identique à un rapport dés-altération/épiphanie.[25]

Depuis 1980, Michot a consacré de nombreux articles fondamentaux à Avicenne (sur ses *Épîtres*, sur le *Kitāb al-Hidāya* et plus en général sur l'imagination, l'eschatologie, l'âme), et a publié, outre son ouvrage majeur sur l'eschatologie (*La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne)*, la *Lettre au Vizir Abû Sa'd*[26] et la *Réfutation de l'astrologie*,[27] texte pour lequel, avec son humour caractéristique et son goût pour la confrontation, il décida de confier la préface à Elizabeth Teissier, astrologue française, déjà mannequin et actrice, célèbre dans le monde francophone pour avoir animé une émission quotidienne sur l'horoscope, sur Antenne 2. Parmi les trésors avicenniens qu'il a rendus accessibles, il faut également mentionner la traduction annotée du *Livre de la Genèse et du Retour* (*Kitāb al-mabda' wa-l ma'ād),* d'abord mise à disposition sous forme privée (« version exploratoire », 1994), puis

[24] Jean R. [Yahya] Michot, « Dés-altération et épiphanie: une lecture avicennienne de la danse mevlevie », in Selçuk Üniversitesi, *6 Millî Mevlânâ Kongresi* (Tebliğler), 24–25 Mayis 1992, Selçuk Üniversitesi Yayinlari, n. 110, Selçuku Arastirmalari Merkezi Yayinlari n. 9, Selçuk Üniversitesi Rektörlügü, Konya 1993, p. 25–32 (pour la version corrigée et augmentée, v. < https://muslimphilosophy.com/michot/IS-Des-alteration.pdf > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026); cf. Id., « La réponse à Bahmanyār et al-Kirmanī. Présentation, traduction critique et lexique arabe-français de la *Mubāhata* III », *Le Muséon*, 110 (1997), p. 143–221; les prémisses de cette interprétation sont déjà dans les travaux précédents, v. Id., « Cultes, magie et intellection: l'homme et sa corporéité selon Avicenne », in Ch. Wenin (éd.), *L'homme et son univers au Moyen Age. Actes du congrès international de Philosophie médiévale, 30-août – 4 septembre 1982*, Éditions de l'Institut supérieur de philosophie, Louvain-la-Neuve 1986, 2 vols., vol I, p. 220–233 (v. p. 226–227).

[25] Michot, « Dés-altération et épiphanie », p. 27; cf. Id., « Cultes, magie et intellection », p. 227 où Michot met en relation « l'humanisme » d'Avicenne à la conception même « de la création comme épiphanie; le crée, certes inférieur et moindre bien, n'étant pas exclu mais au contraire compris, intégré à titre de manifestation d'une volonté providentielle ».

[26] Ibn-Sina, *Lettre au vizir Abū Saʿd*, édition princeps d'après le manuscrit de Bursa, trad. de l'arabe, introduction, notes et lexique par Yaḥya Michot, Al-Bouraq, Beyrouth 2000.

[27] Avicenne, *Réfutation de l'astrologie*, édition et traduction du texte arabe, introduction, notes et lexique par Yaḥya Michot, Al-Bouraq, Beyrouth – Paris 2006 (avec un essai de Elizabeth Teissier).

publiée en ligne (2000).[28] Parmi ses nombreux articles, on mentionnera notamment ses études sur l'âme, l'imagination et les formes fictives,[29] le travail sur la « pandémie » avicennienne: Y.M. a été peut-être le premier à souligner le rôle d'Avicenne en tant que fondateur d'une nouvelle façon de faire de la philosophie et de la théologie en Islam.[30] Enfin, bien qu'apparemment marginal dans sa production, son article sur la danse mevlevie, où sont mobilisés les éléments clés de la cosmologie avicennienne, mérite d'être rappelé.[31]

Michot a su en effet montrer non seulement l'extraordinaire intelligence interne du système d'Avicenne, mais aussi la profondeur de la tradition philosophique et plus généralement intellectuelle de l'islam, saisie dans sa cohérence mais aussi dans ses tensions, entre raison et foi.

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[28] AVICENNE, *Livre de la Genèse et du Retour*. Traduction française intégrale par J. R. [YAHYA] MICHOT, éd. en ligne 2002 (première parution « version exploratoire », Bruxelles 1994).

[29] J.R. [YAḤYA] MICHOT, « Les sciences physiques et métaphysiques selon la *Risālat fī-aqsām al-'ulūm* d'Avicenne. Essai de traduction critique », *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale,* 22 (1980), p. 62–73; ID., « Le commentaire avicennien du verset: 'Puis Il se tourna vers le ciel...'. Édition, traduction et notes », *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales* (= *MIDEO),* 14 (1980), p. 317–328; ID., « Tables de correspondance des *Ta'līqāt* d'al-Fārābī, des *Ta'līqāt* d'Avicenne et du *Liber Aphorismorum* d'Andrea Alpago », *MIDEO*, 15 (1982), p. 231–250; ID., « L'épître sur la connaissance de l'âme rationnelle et ses états attribuée à Avicenne », *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 82 (1984), p. 479–499; ID., « Prophétie et divination selon Avicenne. Présentation, essai de traduction critique et index de l'Épître de l'âme de la Sphère », *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 83 (1985), p. 507–535; ID., « Cultes, magie et intellection: l'homme et sa corporéité selon Avicenne », in WENIN (éd.), *L'homme et son univers au Moyen Age*, p. 220–233; ID., « Avicenna's Letter on the Disappearance of the Vain Intelligible Forms after Death», *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale*, 27 (1985), p. 94–103; ID., « L'épître sur la disparition des formes intelligibles vaines après la mort d'Avicenne. Édition critique, traduction et index », *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale*, 29 (1987), p. 152–170; ID., « L'eschatologie dans le 'Livre de la Guidance' d'Avicenne. Présentation, traduction et index de la dernière section du *Kitāb al-Hidāya* », *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale*, 30 (1988), p. 138–152; ID., « Un Important Recueil Avicennien du VIIe / XIIIe S.: La Majmū'a Huseyin Celebi 1194 de Brousse », *Bulletin de Philosophie Medievale*, 33 (1991), p. 121–129; ID., « Une nouvelle œuvre du jeune Avicenne: Note complémentaire à propos du ms. Huseyin Celebi 1194 de Brousse », *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale,* 34 (1992), p. 138–152; ID., « *La* Définition de l'âme, section I de l'*Épître des états de l'âme.* Traduction critique et lexique », in ALAIN DE LIBERA, ABDELALI ELAMRANI-JAMAL, ALAIN GALONNIER (éds.), *Langages et Philosophie. Hommage à Jean Jolivet*, Vrin, Paris 1997, p. 239–256; ID., « La réponse à Bahmanyār et al-Kirmānī. Présentation, traduction critique et lexique arabe-français de la *Mubāḥaṯa* III », *Le Muséon*, 110 (1997), p. 143–221; ID., « Al-Fārābī and His Influence on the Early Avicenna: The Evidence from the *Kitāb al-Mabda' wa-l'-Ma'ād* », in FEHRULLAH TERKAN, SENOL KORKUT (eds.), *Proceedings of the International* al-Farabi *Symposium*, Ankara, October 7–8 2004, Elis Yayinlari, Ankara 2005, p. 327–340; ID., « Le riz trop cuit du Kirmānī. Présentation, édition, traduction et lexique de l'*Épître* d'Avicenne contestant l'accusation d'avoir pastiché le Coran », in FRANK DAELEMANS, JEAN-MARIE DUVOSQUEL, ROBERT HALLEUX, DAVID JUSTE (éds.), *Mélanges offerts à Hossam Elkhadem par ses amis et ses élèves = Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique / Archief- en Bibliotheekwezen in België*, Numéro Spécial / Extra Nummer 83 (2007), p. 81–129.

[30] Jean R. [YAḤYA] MICHOT, « La Pandémie avicennienne au VI/XII[ème] », *Arabica,* 40 (1993), p. 287–344.

[31] MICHOT, « Dés-altération et épiphanie ».

Quelques années après la publication de *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne*, Michot publia chez Vrin une traduction très fidèle, accompagnée – comme toujours – d'un lexique, d'un court texte d'Ibn Taymiyya: le *Kitāb al-samā' wa l-raqṣ*: compilation d'al-Manbiǧī telle qu'éditée en 1323/1905 dans le deuxième tome de la *maǧmū'a al-rasā'il al-kubrā* d'Ibn Taymiyya.[32] Une série d'écrits sur et de Ibn Taymiyya suivit. Parmi ceux-ci il convient de mentionner les « Textes spirituels » – publiés quasi mensuellement à partir de 1990, puis rassemblés en ligne avant d'être publiés dans la Nouvelle série à partir de 2009,[33] textes qui – avec les « *fetwas* » – ont été partiellement réunis en volumes et traduits en plusieurs langues.[34] Les « Textes spirituels » n'étaient pas une sélection arbitraire dans une

[32] MICHOT, *Musique et danse selon Ibn Taymiyya*; cf. la recension de ERIC CHAUMONT in *Bulletin critique des Annales islamologiques*, 10 (1993), p. 67–69: < https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bcai/10/31/ > (dern. consul. 18.05.2026).

[33] Voici ce que Y.M. écrivait dans la présentation de la « Nouvelle série » (I–XX) de textes (2009–2015), que l'on peut consulter sur academia.edu: < https://www.academia.edu/21317491/Yahya_Michot_Textes_spirituels_d_Ibn_Taymiyya_Nouvelle_série_I_XX_ > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026): « De 1990 à 1998, j'ai publié seize 'Textes spirituels' d'Ibn Taymiyya à Paris, dans la revue *Le Musulman* de l'Association des Étudiants Islamiques de France. Ces 'Textes' furent suivis, de 1999 à 2002, par vingt et une 'Pages spirituelles' d'Ibn Taymiyya publiées dans le mensuel *Action* de l'association Action Islamique de Maurice. Ces 'Textes' et ces 'Pages' peuvent aisément être lus sur divers sites de l'internet, notamment < www.muslimphilosophy.com > et < www.academia.edu >. La 'nécessité' (*al-ḍarūra*), comme l'aurait dit Avicenne, n'a pas permis à ces séries de se prolonger pendant quelques années. Mon envie de partager avec d'autres le plaisir et l'intérêt que je trouve habituellement à la lecture du Shaykh de l'Islam demeurait cependant intacte. D'où cette nouvelle série de 'Textes spirituels' que je proposai directement aux internautes à partir de 2009, sans plus passer par une publication sur papier ».

[34] Ici quelques titres sans prétendre à l'exhaustivité: Les *Pages spirituelles d'Ibn Taymiyya*, in *Action*, Port-Louis (Mauritius) publiées à partir de 1999 (voir la liste bibliographique); les *Textes spirituels d'Ibn Taymiyya*, in *Le Musulman*, Association des Étudiants Islamiques de France, Paris (à partir de 1990; voir la liste bibliographique). Les *Fetwas d'Ibn Taymiyya* (Textes traduits de l'arabe, annotés et présentés en relation à certains textes modernes par YAḤYA MICHOT, Éd. Albouraq, Beyrouth (diff. la Librairie de l'Orient, Paris) ont été publiées à partir de 1996: IBN TAYMIYYA, « Les intermédiaires entre Dieu et l'homme: *Risâlat al-Wâsita Bayna l-Khalq wa l-Haqq*. Traduction française suivie de *Le Shaykh de l'Islam Ibn Taymiyya: chronique d'une vie de théologien militant* », *Le Musulman*, 4 (1996), p. 1–27 (A.E.I.F. Éditions, Paris 1417/1996 [Fetwas du Shaykh de l'Islam Ibn Taymiyya, I]); ID. *Le haschich et l'extase*. Textes traduits de l'arabe, présentés et annotés, Albouraq, Beyrouth – Paris 2001 (Fetwas d'Ibn Taymiyya, 3); ID. *Mardin: Hégire, fuite du péché et « demeure de l'Islam »*. Textes traduits de l'arabe, annotés et présentés en relation à certains textes modernes. Préface de JAMES PISCATORI, Albouraq, Beyrouth – Paris 1425/2004 (Fetwas d'Ibn Taymiyya, 4); ID., *Les Saints du Mont Liban. Absence,* jihâd *et spiritualité, entre la montagne et la cité*. Cinq fetwas traduits de l'arabe, introduits et annotés. Préface de NADER EL-BIZRI, Albouraq, Beyrouth – Paris (Fetwas d'Ibn Taymiyya, 5). La *fatwā* du statut des moines compte comme volume II. Quelques textes sont parus comme « Écrits spirituels d'Ibn Taymiyya »: IBN TAYMIYYA, *Un Dieu hésitant ?* Texte traduit de l'arabe, introduit et annoté, Albouraq, Beyrouth – Paris 1425/2004 (Écrits spirituels d'Ibn Taymiyya, 1), ID. *Mécréance et pardon* Textes traduits de l'arabe, introduits et annotés, Albouraq, Beyrouth – Paris 1426/2005 (Écrits spirituels d'Ibn Taymiyya, 2). Cf. *La place du Prophète dans l'Islam* [Images animées], participant YAḤYA MICHOT, Centre socio-culturel de la rue de Tanger, Paris 1996;

œuvre plus vaste: ils en étaient, aux yeux de Michot, le cœur. La loi et la spiritualité n'étaient en effet pas, pour lui, deux dimensions distinctes de l'expérience religieuse mais une seule et même réalité. Insister sur la dimension spirituelle d'Ibn Taymiyya n'était alors pas une tentative de le dépolitiser au sens d'un retrait du monde, mais l'affirmation que l'obéissance à la révélation et à la tradition (*sunna*) est l'acte religieux fondateur. Sa lecture visait aussi à soustraire Ibn Taymiyya aux instrumentalisations contemporaines – tant des lectures radicales que des chercheurs qui, à ses yeux, arrachaient les textes à leur contexte doctrinal et historique[35]. Il demeure cependant une tension non résolue dans cette lecture: restituer Ibn Taymiyya à la complexité de son contexte signifiait aussi prendre au sérieux une théologie de la révélation qui limite radicalement les prétentions autonomes de la raison. La *fatwā* de Mardīn, consacrée au statut juridique de la ville de Mardīn sous domination mongole, occupe dans ce cadre une place particulière.[36]

Le sang et la foi d'al-Ḥallāj: *Fetwas, commentaire du « Credo », « Épître » et autres textes*, traduits de l'arabe, introduits et annotés par Yaḥya Michot, Éd. Albouraq, Beyrouth – Paris 2017; « Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology: Annotated Translation of Three Fatwas », in Carool Kersten (ed.), *The Fatwa as an Islamic Legal Instrument: Concept, Historical Role, Contemporary Relevance,* Gerlach Press, Berlin 2019, vol. II, p. 231–282; *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule: Ibn Taymiyya on Fleeing from Sin; Kinds of Emigration; The Status of Mardin: Domain of Peace/War, Domain Composite; The Conditions for Challenging Power*. Texts translated, annotated and presented in relation to six modern readings of the Mardin Fatwa by Yaḥyā Michot, foreword by James Piscatori, Interface Editions, Oxford 2006; *L'opium et le café*. Édition et traduction d'un texte arabe anonyme, précédées d'une première exploration de l'opiophagie ottomane et accompagnées d'une anthologie, [avant-propos et choix de textes par] Yaḥya Michot, Éd. Albouraq, Beyrouth (diff. Librairie de l'Orient, Paris 2008); *Against Extremisms.* Texts translated, annotated and introduced by Yaḥyā Michot; with a foreword by Bruce B. Lawrence, Éd. Albouraq, Beyrouth (diff. Ozoir-la-Ferrière) 2012; cf. *Études taymiyennes/Taymiyyan studies*, Éd. Albouraq, Paris 2020. Pour d'autres textes, cf. Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Aqḥiṣārī (d. 1041/1631 or 1043/1634), *Against smoking: an Ottoman manifesto*; introduction, editio princeps and translation by Yahya Michot, foreword by Mohammad Akram Nadwi, 1ère éd., Kube Publishing, Markfield (Leicestershire) 2010.

35 Sur l'importance du contexte, v. aussi l'entretien pour OummaTV: < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bldVAY_QVyI > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026).

36 Elle a fait l'objet, à partir des années 1980, d'une instrumentalisation systématique par des mouvements jihadistes, qui s'en sont servis pour légitimer la violence contre des gouvernements musulmans jugés non conformes à la *sharī'a*. Michot publia en 2004 une traduction française annotée du texte (Ibn Taymiyya, *Mardin. Hégire, fuite du péché*) suivie en 2006 d'une version anglaise (Ibn Taymiyya, *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule*). Son but explicite était de montrer que les lectures jihadistes reposaient sur des erreurs philologiques et historiques. Dans le texte de cette *fatwā* Ibn Taymiyya interroge le statut de la ville de Mardin, dont les gouverneurs Artuklides étaient des musulmans assujettis aux Mongols, lesquels – tout en étant convertis à l'islam – appliquaient encore la *Yasā*, leur loi traditionnelle. Pour Ibn Taymiyya la ville a un statut complexe (*murakkab*) et n'est ni domaine de guerre (*dār al-ḥarb*) ni domaine de l'islam (*dār al-islām*). La traduction de Y.M. – que l'on ne peut pas considérer à l'abri de toute instrumentalisation – fut suivie, par une conférence internationale sur la *fatwā* et ses thèmes, organisée en mars 2010 dans la même ville de Mardin par le « Global Center for Renewal and Guidance » (GCRG) en coopération avec

Dans les années 2000, dans des écrits intelligents et cultivés mais, au moins en partie, également militants – Y.M. étudia conjointement ses deux auteurs, en les comparant. Il consacra quelques articles au *Darʾ taʿāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql – Le rejet de la contradiction entre la raison et la tradition* –, œuvre majeure du théologien-juriste – un article traitait du neuvième des quarante-quatre points par lesquels Ibn Taymiyya réfute l'« objection rationaliste » des *mutakallimūn* et des *falāsifa*,[37] un autre du commentaire d'Ibn Taymiyya sur l'eschatologie d'Avicenne, extrait du *Darʾ taʿāruḍ* –[38] et travailla aussi plus largement à la réception avicennienne d'Ibn Taymiyya, notamment dans un article sur le commentaire dédié par Ibn Taymiyya au *K. al-Ishārāt* d'Avicenne.[39] Comme tous les autres, ces travaux sont destinés à faire vivre les textes classiques: Y.M. a été essentiellement un auteur de traductions, d'éditions, de commentaires et d'introductions aux textes.

Les deux figures auxquelles Y.M. a consacré sa vie d'étude peuvent apparaître comme diamétralement opposées. Avicenne élabore son système philosophique sur la base de la raison, l'intellect (*ʿaql*), qui est la substance même du Premier Principe dont émanent les intelligences et donc le monde entier. À partir de cette construction intellectuelle, le philosophe interprète donc la révélation à la lumière de la raison, qui finit par coïncider avec la vérité de la révélation voire s'y superposer (un point qui reste toutefois, il faut le préciser, ouvert à la réflexion). À l'opposé, Ibn Taymiyya déconstruit les schémas, les règles et les visées de la raison (*ʿaql*) pour montrer la nécessité de la révélation et donc de la tradition

l'Université Artuklu de Mardin, sous la présidence du cheikh ʿAbd Allāh bin Bayyah: < https://binbayyah.net/english/the-new-mardin-declaration/ > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026). À l'issue de cette conférence la « Nouvelle Déclaration de Mardin » fut signée: on y condamna toute interprétation violente du texte. Tout en reconnaissant une tradition fautive dans l'édition de la *fatwā* qu'il avait traduite, Michot commenta la conférence avec ironie, en remarquant, entre autres, que les participants avaient confondu la *fatwā* de Mardin avec les *fatwās* anti-mongols de Ibn Taymiyya (YAḤYA MICHOT, « Ibn Taymiyya**'**s **'**New Mardin Fatwa**'**: Is genetically modified Islam (Gmi) carcinogenic? »**,** *The Muslim World*, 101 (2011), p. 130–181: < http://www.muslimphilosophy .com/michot/ITA-Mardin-Conference.pdf > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026).

[37] YAḤYA MICHOT, « Vanités intellectuelles... L'impasse des rationalismes selon le *Rejet de la contradiction* d'Ibn Taymiyyah » *Oriente Moderno*, 19/80 (2001), p. 597–617. Sur Ibn Taymiyya, v. au moins JOHN HOOVER, *Ibn Taymiyya*, Oneworld, London 2019; ADRIEN CANDIARD, *Le Dieu immédiat. Le concept de vérité dans le* Darʾ taʿāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql *d'Ibn Taymiyya*, Cerf, Paris 2023.

[38] YAḤYĀ MICHOT, « A Mamluk Theologian's Commentary on Avicenna's *Risāla Adhawiyya* - Being a Translation of a Part of the *Darʾ al-taʿāruḍ* of Ibn Taymiyya with Introduction, Annotation, and Appendices », Part I: *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 14/2 (2003), p. 149–203; Part II: *Journal of Islamic Studies,* 14/3 (2003), p. 309–363.

[39] YAḤYĀ MICHOT, « Knowing the Unknown. Ibn Taymiyya's Commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*, namaṭ X », in ABDELKADER AL GHOUZ (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy from the 12th to the 14th Century*, Bonn University Press, Bonn 2018, p. 119–210. Sur les *Ishārāt*, v. YAḤYĀ MICHOT, « Tutoring Bahmanyār 'from behind a veil': the *Ishārāt* in Avicenna's professional career », *The Muslim World*, 112 (2022), p. 473–491.

(*naql*).[40] Avicenne présente un Dieu rationnel, à l'origine d'un monde intelligible et donc accessible aux outils de la philosophie. Ibn Taymiyya adhère à l'idée d'un Dieu libre, affranchi de toute obligation de l'intellect et auquel l'homme ne doit qu'un seul acte: l'adoration et la soumission à Sa loi. Y.M. lui seul aurait pu dire ce qui avait réuni, dans son âme curieuse, passionnée et en même temps rigide, deux auteurs si différents. L'impression, pour ceux qui le regardaient et le lisaient de l'extérieur, était que les deux auteurs étaient pour lui comme deux aspects de la même recherche: celle du sens des choses du monde et celle de sa norme. Dans le système solide d'Avicenne, c'est la métaphysique qui guide l'interprétation des textes révélés, tandis que chez Ibn Taymiyya, tout système métaphysique est soumis à la critique au nom de la révélation: la métaphysique et la rationalité n'ont que de vaines prétentions face à l'adhésion nécessaire à la règle de la révélation, c'est-à-dire à tout ce qui est pour lui tradition ou *sunna* (*naql*). La place croissante d'Ibn Taymiyya dans les travaux de Michot pourrait donc signaler un déplacement important: de l'intérêt pour la rationalité philosophique avicennienne vers une conception dans laquelle la tradition de la révélation assume un rôle de plus en plus décisif.

Dans l'article paru dans *Oriente Moderno* en 2000,[41] en présentant et traduisant en français un passage du même *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-ʿl-naql*, Michot place ce texte dans le contexte du blocage et de l'épuisement de la raison spéculative islamique aux VIIe/XIIIe–VIIIe/XIVe siècles, contexte qu'Ibn Taymiyya lui-même met en parallèle à celui de l'astronomie ptolémaïque arabe (la « cosmographie »), pour insister sur l'« impasse » des rationalistes. Ces derniers non seulement se contredisent entre eux mais se démentent souvent eux-mêmes, et la fragmentation interne dont ils témoignent dénonce – pour Ibn Taymiyya et, on est tenté d'en déduire, pour Michot aussi – la vanité de leurs prétentions épistémologiques, confirmant ainsi la validité de la voie alternative, celle des *al-fiṭar al-salīma*, les « natures premières saines » qui s'accorderaient d'emblée avec la révélation prophétique (*naql*).

Dans un bref texte sur la révélation que Michot écrivit pour *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, on peut lire:

[40] V. Michot, « Vanités intellectuelles »; cf. Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*; Candiard, *Le Dieu immédiat*.
[41] Michot, « Vanités intellectuelles ».

> Beyond the realm of what the Lord creates, the dimension of what God says should be given even more importance, as it is exclusively according to this other uncreated reality that the fullest kind of relation can be developed with the divine. It is revelation that brings some moral distinctions into the created reality, with its commands and its prohibitions, and thus initiates, through religion, the differentiation between good and evil, between virtue and sin, between God's friends and His foes.[42]

Une recherche sur le monde, donc, et sur le Dieu qui seul lui donnerait sens. Du regard sur l'humain que l'on reconnaît pourtant toujours dans ses écrits, témoignent entre autres les dernières leçons à Hartford, sur *Les Mille et Une Nuits*,[43] qui laissent transparaître quelque chose de sa personnalité: âpre et polémique mais vive, ironique, rigoureuse et, à sa manière, généreuse.

[42] MICHOT, « Revelation », p. 181. Cf. MICHOT, « Ibn Taymiyya's Commentary on the Creed of al-Hallaj ».

[43] Le premier cours en 2018: < https://www.readkong.com/page/yahya-m-michot-the-arabian-nights-rs-633-hartford-7233650 >; < https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/news-events/news/video-professor-yahya-michot-presents-his-january-2018-course-arabian-nights > (dern. cons. 18.05.2026).

REVIEW ARTICLES

SPECTERS OF RENAISSANCE:

A NOTE ON A RECENT VOLUME ON RENAISSANCE SCHOLASTICISM*

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In his well-known *History of Italian Philosophy*, first published in 1945, Eugenio Garin maintained that « the greater expression of the philosophical thought of the 15th century was due to a group of thinkers who, gathering in Florence around the Medici, retained for themselves the task of confirming the truths of Platonism [...] ».[1] This statement led to two problematic conclusions: on the one side, the unequivocal identification of 'Renaissance philosophy' with the revival of Platonism in Florence; and on the other side, a sharp rupture between 'Aristotelian' sholasticism and 'Platonic' Renaissance philosophy. A substantial body of scholarship published over the last few decades has sought to demonstrate that the reality was far more complex than what Garin portrayed.

The framework of relations between scholastic thought and Renaissance philosophy has been the object of deep investigation and debate. Whereas in the past – at the time of Garin – the notion of a radical rupture was generally favored, today we are enough engaged in the philological and doxographical study of the sources to acknowledge that philosophy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries could arise thanks to some form of engagement – whether critical or laudatory – with earlier thought.[2] The difficulty, rather, has shifted toward a different kind of

* Review of AMOS EDELHEIT, *Renaissance Scholasticism. Fighting back*, Brill, Leiden 2025 (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, 247). I want to express my gratitude to the many friends and colleagues who accepted to read this long review-article and gave me useful feedback on it.

1 EUGENIO GARIN, *Storia della filosofia italiana*, Vallecchi, Firenze 1945 [eng.transl. by Giorgio Pinton, *History of Italian Philosophy*, Rodopi, Amsterdam 2008, vol. I, p. 329].

2 This point was recognised also by EUGENIO GARIN, « Giovanni Gentile interprete del Rinascimento », *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 1-2 (1947), p. 117–128: 121: « Per intendere a pieno questo delicato rapporto bisogna, forse, abbandonare lo schema della frattura come antitesi e salto brusco (immanenza/trascendenza; libertà/necessità; natura/spirito), ed esplorare insieme le nascoste parentele tra l'ultima Scolastica e il primo Umanesimo, in cui la

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inquiry: namely, the task of identifying differences alongside continuities between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.[3]

The volume edited by Amos Edelheit fits within this line of inquiry. It comprises ten chapters, each focusing on a distinct episode in the cultural life of the Renaissance, with the aim of highlighting both elements of continuity and moments of rupture with scholastic thought. Nine of these chapters adopt specific focus on singular episodes or authors. They will therefore be discussed first, insofar as they present highly targeted research and debates that update the current state of scholarship in this field (section I). The opening chapter, by contrast, offers a broader perspective on the nature of Renaissance philosophy as such. Given the importance of this chapter from a general perspective, it will deserve a specific analysis in the second part of the present article (section II).

I. *Review of the Chapters*

Chapter 2, authored by Peter Howard, reassesses fifteenth-century Florence from the perspective of scholastic philosophical and theological traditions. The Florentine *Studium*, founded in 1348 and reorganized in 1473, is here presented as an institution with its own specific dynamics, not merely a provincial echo of the University of Paris. Its development depended on the city's particular urban, civic, and religious fabric, and was led by two central Dominican figures: Antonino Pierozzi (1389–1459) and Bartolommeo Lapacci Rimbertini (1402–1466). Pierozzi, who served as *regens* of the *Studium*, tried to employ his scholastic background to shape public religious life. In the civic life of Florence speculative theology acquired a practical dimension, especially in discussions of charity (p. 39). Howard focuses in detail on the impact of theological debates and instructions on the citizenship, and on the development of a new lexicon and argumentation which could reach this peculiar audience (e.g. with the use of the vernacular). In this respect, Howard understands scholasticism both as a set of principles and as a mental habit, asking how Florentine preaching adapted scholastic thought to the local cultural climate and to the *studia humanitatis*.

Pierozzi's *Summa theologiae* is a clearly scholastic work, yet it also integrates grammar and rhetoric, reflecting humanist influences. As a proof of this, Pierozzi

polemica è, spesso, come ogni polemica, lotta dei figli contro i padri, degli scolari contro i maestri ».

[3] In this respect I completely agree with John Monfasani, « The Renaissance as the Concluding Phase of the Middle Ages », in Id., *Renaissance Humanism, from the Middle Ages to Modem Times*, Routledge, London 2015 (Variorum Collected Studies Series), p. 165–185: 185: « The almost desperate urge to find 'the modern us' in the Renaissance in contradistinction to the backward 'other' of the Middle Ages is as unfruitful and silly as the reciprocal tendency to view the Renaissance as hardly more than a glossy veneer masking the continuation of medieval superstitions and deplorable health conditions ».

defended the study of pagan authors as a legitimate aid to knowing God, and he praises Leonardo Bruni's Greek translations, even drawing material from the *Historia florentina* (p. 63). According to Howard, scholasticism in fifteenth-century Florence should be understood as an intellectual posture open to a broad cultural world, not as a method confined to university classrooms. Pierozzi and Rimbertini stand as examples of scholasticism shaped by civic impulses and urban cultural life.

The chapter also opens the floor to further potential investigation. Howard reads the dynamic of integration of humanism and scholasticism, or the rediscovery of texts, and the civic diffusion of theology, as specific to Florence. Yet similar processes characterized other Italian and Iberian centers such as Rome, Venice, Ferrara, Salamanca. Furthermore, the analysis, which now relies mainly on two Dominican witnesses, could benefit also from the comparison with some others Franciscan cases (e.g. Bernardino da Siena). A fuller comparison with the wider Italian landscape of political and intellectual life would nuance the claim that Florence alone exemplifies this civic-rooted scholasticism.

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Chapter 3, authored by Marian Michèle Mulchahey, examines the relationship between humanism and the medieval scholastic tradition through one of the most emblematic figures of the Florentine Renaissance: the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498). The opening claim (p. 67) stresses that humanism cannot be reduced to a purely literary movement tied to Greek studies and detached from philosophy. This raises a broader question – left implicit by the author – regarding the degree to which traditional philosophical practice intersected with the vast new wave of Greek rediscovery and translation, and what impact this had on teaching and commentary within late fifteenth-century intellectual life.

Savonarola is a good example of this interaction between humanism and scholasticism. He taught logic, natural philosophy, and Thomistic theology. Even though he lacked the explicit traits commonly attributed to a humanist, he nonetheless engaged with the humanist world: he refined his Latin style and employed new rhetorical strategies (p. 71). His early education in the school of Battista Guarino in Ferrara implies exposure to the Greek-oriented pedagogical reforms of that school – an important point that ought to be emphasized, especially regarding contacts with Greek scholars and new philological approaches. Nonetheless, some textual features suggest that Savonarola may have deliberately avoided Latin literary sources, distancing himself from some humanistic obsession with classical eloquence.

Our understanding of Savonarola's didactic writings relies on the Borromeo Codex preserved at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana (p. 79). These works show references to traditional scholastic authorities – both Dominican and Franciscan –

while also displaying direct engagement with Aristotle. The Aristotelian doxography is not merely cited as authoritative statements but is actively discussed and confronted (p. 87). In the conclusion, Mulchahey highlights Savonarola's continuity with the long durée of scholasticism and its enduring mental habits. Such continuity should not surprise us: Savonarola was deeply embedded in the highly structured Dominican theology (one should remember that the university of Padua even maintained a chair *in via Thomae*). Hence, Savonarola's chronological position late in the fifteenth century does not diminish his scholastic background: his use of sources, questions, and argumentative methods remain firmly scholastic.

The chapter aims to show the influence of scholasticism on a 'non-medieval' thinker but, if one has to say the truth, Savonarola appears in fact rather scholastic. The merit of this chapter is to situate Savonarola within the broader transformation of late-fifteenth-century intellectual culture, where scholastic habits coexisted with – and were increasingly reshaped by – the philological and philosophical innovations emerging from the Greek revival.

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Chapter 4, authored by Amos Edelheit, addresses a crucial issue in the study of Renaissance philosophy: namely, the role of Marsilio Ficino in the intellectual transformations of the fifteenth century. Engaging directly with Kristeller's interpretation of Ficino, Edelheit argues that a thinker's philosophical training cannot be distinguished from his reading practices: indeed, one cannot study a Renaissance philosopher by neatly dividing the context of their education from the texts they later read and assimilated, because these two dimensions are intrinsically interwoven (p. 116). This insight forms the basis for a broader reconsideration of what Renaissance philosophy actually was.

Edelheit then articulates a pivotal point of the volume: the revival and assimilation of ancient pagan philosophy – in all its phases, languages, and genres – was mediated through scholasticism. The transmission of Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew philosophical materials impacted on a system of concepts and method which had been consolidating for over two centuries. Thus, to understand Renaissance philosophy is to understand how this long-standing pattern of philosophical practice absorbed and reinterpreted new theoretical inputs made available by the humanists. The Renaissance, therefore, should not be imagined as a clean break with the Middle Ages, but rather as a period of intensive interaction between an established intellectual framework and unprecedented textual discoveries.

Edelheit rejects the widespread assumption that scholasticism was a static and outdated relic. Rather, he emphasizes its dynamism: scholasticism continuously evolved, adapted, and responded to new intellectual challenges. Far from

disappearing in the fifteenth century, scholasticism remained the dominant philosophical tradition across European universities. What we habitually call the Renaissance unfolded *within* scholastic culture rather than *after* it. In turn, Edelheit prompts further questions: How did scholasticism transform during the fifteenth century? Under what pressures? Through which actors and institutions? The chapter points toward these larger issues, though it focuses on a specific case: Ficino's early *Summa philosophiae*.

Edelheit examines one of Ficino's earliest philosophical works, the *Summa philosophiae*, preserved in Florence, Biblioteca Moreniana, cod. Palagi 199 (datable to 1454–1455). The chapter does not explicitly mention the broader intellectual context, but this is essential for the analysis: indeed, those years coincide with the height of the 'Plato-Aristotle Controversy'. George of Trebizond had just completed his polemical treatise against Theodorus Gaza concerning the translation of the *Problemata*, and in the following year he finalised his *Comparatio*, a hard-hitting defense of Aristotle's supremacy over Plato. Ficino's first philosophical notes are to be set within this atmosphere of doctrinal debate.

The *Summa* discusses the classical tripartite division of philosophy – divine philosophy, natural philosophy, and mathematics – following the schemes derived from Aristotle and elaborated by scholastic tradition. Edelheit demonstrates convincingly that Ficino was not merely familiar with this medieval discussion but fully at ease within it (p. 127). Scholastic distinctions and categories provided the conceptual scaffolding through which he approached the Aristotelian corpus. This scholastic imprint is visible across all three components of the work: metaphysics, natural philosophy, and the doctrine of the soul. Throughout these sections, Ficino employs a standard scholastic vocabulary and constructs his arguments within a framework inherited from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century debates (p. 127, 131).

By reconstructing Ficino's early engagement with scholastic method and terminology, Edelheit offers a direct response to Kristeller's thesis. Ficino's familiarity with scholastic thinking was not a residual effect of early education later abandoned in favor of Platonism. Instead, it permeated his mature reading practices and informed his independent intellectual development. In this sense, the chapter convincingly shows that Ficino's philosophical evolution cannot be understood without acknowledging the continuous presence – and creative reworking – of medieval scholastic structures within his approach to ancient and newly recovered texts.

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Chapter 5 examines the role of Thomism within Renaissance philosophical culture through Brian Garcia's study of the Dominican thinker Dominic of Flanders (1425–1479). The chapter situates Dominic within a broad revival of Thomistic studies

that flourished both in Cologne and in Italy during the fifteenth century. A movement that, as Garcia notes following Serge-Thomas Bonino, displayed several distinctive features: (1) a strong fidelity to the *litera* of Thomas Aquinas; (2) the use of the Thomistic corpus as a pedagogical framework; (3) reliance on pre-existing interpretative traditions; and (4) a tendency not to innovate but rather to reinforce and defend Thomistic arguments.

Dominic of Flanders served as *regens* of the Dominican *studium* in Florence until 1479, succeeding Antonino Pierozzi. His intellectual activity thus stands at the intersection of Dominican institutional hierarchy and the engagement with scholastic theology. Garcia's article focuses particularly on one central debate: the human intellect's capacity – or incapacity – to understand separate substances. This question hinges on a classical Thomistic claim: in our present life, human knowledge depends on *phantasmata*, and therefore the intellect cannot attain direct knowledge of immaterial entities. Dominic approaches this problem with a great command of the major scholastic positions. He systematically engages with the commentaries on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by Albert the Great, Duns Scotus, and Antonius Andreae, reconstructing their arguments with precision. His discussion shows not only familiarity with divergent medieval interpretations but also adherence to the method of scholastic disputation: outlining objections, presenting authoritative positions, and articulating a structured solution.

In the end, Dominic's stance exemplifies what Garcia characterizes as an 'hyper-Thomistic' conclusion (p. 153). In full continuity with Aquinas – drawing particularly on the *De anima* and the *Summa contra Gentiles* – Dominic reaffirms that human cognition in this life proceeds exclusively through *phantasmata*, and that separate substances cannot be intellectually apprehended by embodied beings. This alignment with Aquinas is not merely thematic but methodical: Dominic's reasoning is constructed within a strictly Thomistic conceptual framework, without attempting speculative departures or original reformulations.

Garcia's study thus highlights Dominic of Flanders as a representative figure of the Renaissance Thomistic revival: a movement which was deeply rooted in the scholastic tradition, committed to the textual integrity of Aquinas, and influential on later Dominican thought. Indeed, his positions anticipate the Thomistic orientations that would characterize sixteenth-century Dominican centers such as the School of Salamanca. Although not innovative in content, Dominic's work demonstrates the vitality, continuity, and pedagogical strength of Thomism in a period often mischaracterized as dominated solely by humanism or Platonism.

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In Chapter 6, Simone Fellina examines Jacopo Mazzoni's attempt to integrate scholastic philosophical thought with Platonism. Fellina reconstructs how Mazzoni sought to demonstrate the doctrinal compatibility between the Platonic

tradition and Christianity, drawing on arguments from Thomas Aquinas and Cajetan to support this reconciliation. Fellina first emphasizes that Florentine Platonism (with the sole exception of Cattani da Diacceto) always maintained a theoretical connection to Thomism and scholastic philosophy, thereby confirming the conclusions advanced by Edelheit in Chapter 4.

Fellina also develops an issue that is fundamental to the volume as a whole: the academic impact of Platonism, that is, the influence of Plato's thought on those masters who practiced philosophical commentary within institutional settings. Mazzoni, who taught in Pisa from 1588 and in Rome from 1597, had a strong Platonic interest, and he was officially assigned to lecture on Platonic texts on feast days – a circumstance that helps to reflects the balance between Platonic commitment and the dominant scholastic framework. Fellina highlights the methodological distance separating Ficino from Mazzoni: Mazzoni rejects Ficino's idea of a *pia philosophia*, and grants no privileged status to Plotinus or Neoplatonism; by contrast, he displays a clear adherence to Thomism (p. 157).

As Fellina shows, Mazzoni's thought reveals the osmosis of scholasticism and the new fifteenth-century bibliographical resources, even though Mazzoni remains clearly distinct from Platonism on several key issues, beginning with fundamental metaphysical principles (p. 174): with regard to the divine causal essence and the nature of ideas in the mind of God, Mazzoni aligns squarely with Thomas Aquinas. Fellina also devotes attention to Mazzoni's epistemology, showing that even here, despite Platonic influences, scholastic thought prevails. Fellina identifies three areas in which Mazzoni articulates an affinity between Platonism and Thomism (p. 159-164): the doctrine of creation as a voluntary act of God, derived from the *Timaeus*; the doctrine of creation from nothing, inspired by the *Republic*; and the conception of the temporal creation of the world.

In conclusion, Fellina demonstrates that in the final quarter of the sixteenth century a lively debate emerged in Italy concerning the possibility of reconciling Platonism with Christian theology. Whereas figures such as Francesco Vieri and Francesco Patrizi da Cherso adopted an openly apologetic stance toward Platonism, other philosophers, including Giovanni Battista Crispo, challenged any such reconciliation (p. 181). Mazzoni occupies an intermediate position, seeking instead to illustrate the usefulness and the doctrinal affinity of Platonism to Christianity, but without sharing Ficino's teleological view on Platonism.

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In Chapter 7, Matthew Gaetano examines the relationship between Platonism and Thomism at the University of Padua, focusing on a single but revealing case study: the teaching of the Dominican Girolamo Vielmi (1519–1592), who held a chair of Theology from 1554. Vielmi represents a peculiar figure within the Paduan context, for he taught theology and Sacred Scripture, he never lectured on

Aristotle's works in the philosophy curriculum, and his intellectual orientation was distinctly Platonic (p. 193). Vielmi's case exemplifies a broader tendency visible over roughly two decades: the attempt, undertaken by certain theologians, to incorporate Platonic insights into scholastic discourse.

Gaetano depicts a tension within the university between scholastic theologians reluctant to absorb Platonic doctrines (though their identity remains unclear) and professors more willing to engage with, and integrate, theoretical elements drawn from Platonism. Vielmi belongs firmly to this latter group. His intellectual formation was shaped by a significant network of early sixteenth-century Dominican theologians who paid considerable attention to Platonism – figures such as Chrysostomus Javelli, Francesco Silvestri, Nicolas de Mirabilibus, Ludovico Valenza, Gianfrancesco Beato, and Sisto Medici. Some of these thinkers taught at Padua before Vielmi; others were even his masters. Their presence suggests a wider cultural and pedagogical environment within Dominican theological teaching that was receptive to assimilating aspects of Platonic thought.

When inaugurating the academic year 1554/1555, Vielmi already employed Platonic material. According to Gaetano, Vielmi's approach reflects the doctrine of the concord between Plato and Aristotle, an approach strongly influenced by Simplicius's commentary on the *Physics* (p. 197). A distinctive feature of Vielmi's position is his recognition of a difference between medieval and Renaissance scholasticism: namely, the centrality of Greek. According to Vielmi (p. 199), Thomas Aquinas and his contemporaries either lacked access to, or did not make systematic use of, the Greek philosophical corpus, and for Vielmi this represented a genuine limitation – a constraint *ex ignorantia*. This insight alone, as Gaetano rightly notes, illuminates how a standard academic professor, rooted in traditional scholastic pedagogy, perceived himself to be operating within a transformed intellectual landscape, in which newly available Greek texts created unprecedented possibilities for philosophical understanding and speculation. Such a remark captures the methodological self-awareness of Renaissance scholasticism.

Gaetano's conclusions are particularly valuable, as they articulate with precision how sixteenth-century scholasticism interacted with the expanding availability of Platonic texts. The strategy observed in Vielmi was not an isolated phenomenon but instead characteristic of an entire phase of Renaissance scholastic culture. Figures such as Guilelmus Hamerus, Mattia Aquario, Vincent Baron, Serafino Piccinardi, and even the famously hyper-scholastic Domingo Bañez made regular use of Platonic materials and did not hesitate to recommend readings from the Platonic corpus in their lectures and writings. Through this analysis, Gaetano demonstrates that the integration of Platonism into scholastic frameworks was not a marginal curiosity but a significant and multifaceted current within the intellectual life of sixteenth-century Padua and beyond.

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In Chapter 8, Stefano Caroti examines Marcantonio Zimara's notion of prime matter, continuing a line of research he has pursued for several years. Zimara emerges as an exemplary figure for understanding the continuity between medieval scholasticism and Renaissance philosophy. This continuity is clearly illustrated by his critical engagement with Ermolao Barbaro concerning the translation of Themistius's commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, an episode that highlights Zimara's competence in Greek and his extensive use of late-antique commentators. Zimara's methodological aim is to explain Aristotle in a manner that is as pure and reliable as possible, drawing directly on Greek sources and employing textual criticism rather than relying uncritically on medieval Latin intermediaries.

Within this framework, Caroti offers detailed reconstruction of the debate on prime matter: namely, whether it should be understood as pure potentiality, as maintained by Aristotle and Averroes, or whether it possesses both potentiality and a certain mode of actuality, as argued by Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, and Gregory of Rimini. As Caroti notes (p. 237), Zimara inclines toward a conciliatory solution, according to which matter has an *esse* that is proper to it in an absolute sense, while remaining merely potential in relation to the specific form it receives. One of the principal merits of Caroti's contribution – thanks also to his outstanding philological expertise – lies in his careful reconstruction of Zimara's position throughout Zimara's own writings, which allows him to trace significant shifts and variations in argumentation across works such as the *Tabula cum dilucidationibus*, the *Solutiones contradictinum*, and the *Theoremata*. Particularly persuasive is Caroti's methodological conclusion, according to which the task of the historian of philosophy is « to highlight the distinctiveness of every thinker and to set them in their appropriate context. This entails resisting reductive explanations, inherited prejudices, and narrow schemes of taxonomy [...] » (p. 263).

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In Chapter 9, Michael Engel addresses Pietro Pomponazzi and the limits of theological discourse as they emerge from the lectures Pomponazzi delivered at Padua in the very early sixteenth century. Engel focuses in particular on a set of questions on the soul edited by Antonino Poppi in 1970 on the basis of a Neapolitan manuscript, while leaving aside the *reportatio* of Pomponazzi's commentary on the *De anima* preserved in the same library and dating from the same period. Engel's central aim is to show that, in these lectures, Pomponazzi did not primarily seek to transmit doctrinal contents intended to shape the students' theoretical or religious convictions. Rather, Pomponazzi aimed to provide them with a methodological training concerning what can and cannot be legitimately asserted from a logical and argumentative point of view (p. 267). The chapter develops this

interpretative perspective and shows that Pomponazzi adopts a lenient attitude toward Averroes, who is often rehabilitated. By contrast, Thomistic philosophy is frequently criticized for its clumsy attempt to reconcile Christianity and Aristotelianism – a criticism that helps to explain Pomponazzi's invectives against Hervaeus Natalis (p. 271).

In conclusion, Engel emphasizes, following Kristeller, that « the irreligion of Pomponazzi [...] is the invention of contemporary critics » (p. 277). According to Engel, Pomponazzi's objective in his early sixteenth-century university teaching was to identify doctrines that could concretely serve the defense of the immortality of the soul. This, in turn, accounts for his silence regarding Alexander of Aphrodisias and for his rehabilitation of Averroes (p. 279). From a critical standpoint, however, it would have been useful to note also the shift in Pomponazzi's perspective that occurred only a few years later. In a well-known essay entitled « Ci fu una evoluzione in senso alessandrista nel pensiero di Pomponazzi? »,[4] Antonino Poppi extensively discussed Pomponazzi's transition from an initial phase of Averroism to a closer engagement with Alexander's thought around 1505 – a problem that has also been carefully examined by Vittoria Perrone Compagni in her entry « Pomponazzi, Pietro » of the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*.[5] These studies should necessarily integrate Martin Pine's dated work, which appears nowadays forced in its interpretative orientation, despite its success (owing largely to its accessibility in English).[6]

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In Chapter 10, Trent Pomplun adopts a diachronic approach to the theological controversy surrounding the Immaculate Conception, and produces a compelling study that reconstructs the successive phases of the debate while highlighting both moments of intense polemical engagement and periods in which the issue receded into relative obscurity. Pomplun traces the origins of the controversy to Duns Scotus, but places particular emphasis on its development within the early modern Franciscan tradition, where the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception functioned as a doctrinal marker of Scotist identity in opposition to Dominican and Jesuit theology (p. 283).

Special attention is devoted to Dominican resistance to the doctrine, with figures such as Torquemada, Javelli, Spina, Báñez, and Melchor Cano. During the early modern period, Franciscans and Jesuits developed a sophisticated

[4] Antonino Poppi, *Saggi sul pensiero inedito di Pietro Pomponazzi*, Antenore, Padova 1970 (Saggi e Testi, 8), p. 27–92.

[5] Vittoria Perrone Compagni, « Pomponazzi Pietro », in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Roma, Treccani [= *DBI*], vol. LXXXIV (2015), *sub voce*.

[6] Martin Pine, *Pietro Pomponazzi: Radical Philosopher of the Renaissance*, Antenore, Padova 1986 (Saggi e Testi, 21).

hermeneutics of a range of biblical passages that appeared to analyze the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (p. 288), with rhetorical strategies playing a crucial role in uncovering the purported hidden meanings of Sacred Scripture. In the final section of the chapter, Pomplun reconstructs the historical debate over biblical arguments in favor of the Immaculate Conception, emphasizing that any scriptural passage could be interpreted through recourse to the *sensus plenior*, while the definition itself was evaluated in different ways depending on the theological perspective adopted (p. 294). Only in the eighteenth century did the doctrine acquire an authoritative status, grounded in extra-biblical considerations. Nonetheless, several Dominicans continued to argue for the enduring validity of Cajetan's criticisms, while regarding Scotist doctrine as heretical (p. 298). Significantly, even in the 1950s there were still scholars who sought to rehabilitate Aquinas's criticisms of the Immaculate Conception, thereby attesting to the longevity and resilience of this controversy.

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Like all edited volumes, this book displays elements of considerable originality alongside less innovative aspects, and some gaps. In the final part of this review, I wish to draw attention to some of these shortcomings, with a view to encouraging future research that may further develop the already well-conceived focus established by Edelheit. The first gap – and perhaps the most significant – concerns the selection of philosophers under consideration. The majority of the volume is devoted to extra-academic philosophers (such as Ficino) and to theologians (including Pierozzi, Savonarola, Rimbertini, Dominic of Flanders, and Vielmi), with the aim of demonstrating that, despite their chronological placement in the Renaissance, they possessed a solid scholastic background. This however is almost evident from the fact that they were friars or clergymen, educated under a well-established theological system (*scil.* the *Studia*). What is lacking, however, is an investigation in the opposite direction, namely, an analysis of the extent to which humanistic culture permeated the work of university professors of philosophy. Further research into the relationships among university teachers, translators, and editors of Greek classics will be essential for examining the processes of intellectual exchange between these two spheres that characterized the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. I will delve into this issue in the second part of the review.

A second aspect that would merit further development concerns the geographical scope of the contributions. No essay focuses on fifteenth-century Padua; Bologna and Pavia are entirely absent, while Florence dominates the first part of the book. This geographical distribution of the essays has the unintended effect of reviving the opposition introduced by Renan between Paduan Aristotelianism and the new Platonic philosophy in Florence – an opposition that has been widely regarded as obsolete for at least seventy years. A promising

direction for future research would be for instance to clarify the relationship between the University of Padua – the stronghold of Italian Aristotelianism – and the protagonists of the Plato–Aristotle Controversy, many of whom received their education in Veneto. Moreover, the broader European context still remains unexplored: what was taking place, and how was philosophical curriculum in Spain, France, England, or the Empire? Such a perspective must necessarily be integrated, lest the prejudice of viewing the Renaissance as a purely Italian phenomenon continue to prevail.

Finally, a third area that would warrant further investigation concerns the relationships among the various educational institutions of the period: not only universities and Dominican *studia*, but also academies and, above all, the Franciscan Order. Renaissance Franciscan theology is almost entirely absent from the present volume, yet it deserves much closer attention, since the spread of print enabled it to achieve an unprecedented level of intellectual dissemination in the sixteenth century. Philosophers such as Antonio Trombetta established key hermeneutical parameters – e.g. in the field of metaphysics – that had a significant impact on professors across all faculties. Any study of the interaction between Renaissance philosophy and scholasticism can no longer afford to disregard this central pillar of early modern intellectual speculation.

II. *On Being and Essence of 'Renaissance Philosophy'*

II.1. Review of John Marenbon's Chapter 1

The first chapter of the volume, authored by John Marenbon, presents a provocative essay that compels the reader to confront a problematic categorization of the history of philosophy. Marenbon raises the fundamental question of whether it is possible to speak of a distinct 'Renaissance philosophy' apart from the medieval one, and, if so, how such a category might be meaningfully defined. In doing so, he interrogates both the chronological boundaries that would delimit this philosophical period and the essential characteristics that would justify its conceptual independence.

Marenbon's response is explicitly negative from the very opening lines of the chapter, where he declares himself a skeptic of Renaissance philosophy, stating that he does not believe there is a discrete philosophical period that can be labelled as such (p. 13). More specifically, Marenbon denies that it is possible to identify either clear chronological coordinates or distinctive features that would justify conceiving Renaissance philosophy as an autonomous entity. Throughout the chapter, Marenbon carefully emphasizes that the act of establishing periodizations is a demanding intellectual operation, insofar as it requires the identification of specific characteristics – an « essence or spirit » (p. 17) – for the period in question. Consequently, he criticizes proponents of Renaissance

philosophy for their failure to provide a precise account of either its beginning or its end (p. 19). In contrast, Marenbon advances an alternative framework, which he terms the 'Long Middle Ages' (p. 17), extending from the third century CE to the death of Leibniz, in the early eighteenth century. He argues that these fifteen centuries of philosophical history form a coherent whole on two principal grounds:

1. First, philosophy during this extended period was structured around the thought of Plato and Aristotle, whose schools functioned as « the main instrument for transmitting the ancient tradition to four sub-traditions: Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Jewish ». The emergence of the medieval tradition is located in the work of Plotinus and Porphyry, who, according to Marenbon, « ensured that Aristotle loomed as large, or larger, than Plato », and whose « work marks the beginning of the whole period ».[7]
2. Second, the coherence of the Long Middle Ages is further secured by the circulation of texts and translations across the four languages – Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew – which provided a unifying framework for philosophical activity throughout these centuries.

In the second part of the article (a genuine *pars destruens*) Marenbon identifies four common theses that seek to define the distinctive essence of the Renaissance. For each of these interpretative positions, he advances detailed critical arguments aimed at exposing their limitations. The theses under examination are as follows:

a. Renaissance philosophy can be identified by the rise of humanism and decline of scholasticism (§4.1 in his chapter);
b. The beginning of Renaissance philosophy is marked by a change in textual tradition (§4.2 in his chapter);
c. The beginning of Renaissance philosophy is marked by a shift of philosophical thinking away from the universities (§4.3 in his chapter);
d. The end of the Middle Ages and beginning of the Renaissance is marked by a break with Arabism (§4.4 in his chapter).

Marenbon's arguments compel the reader to reconsider critically many assumptions that are often taken for granted concerning the historiographical category of 'Renaissance philosophy'. The value of this chapter lies in its ability to confront us with a complex puzzle of chronologies and identities, thereby encouraging a more rigorous reflection on the very field of inquiry within which we routinely operate. It invites scholars to develop a heightened awareness of the

[7] JOHN MARENBON, « Against 'Renaissance Philosophy' », in EDELHEIT, *Renaissance Scholasticism*, p. 13–34 (= MARENBON), p. 18.

specific nature of their object of study and to articulate its defining features in a more precise manner. In the following pages, I shall seek to engage with Marenbon's arguments and to draw from them a number of constructive considerations that may contribute to the advancement of awareness on Renaissance studies.

II.2 Analysis of Arguments (*c*) and (*d*)

First, I would like to note that I find Marenbon's observations concerning points (*c*) and (*d*) particularly persuasive. In §4.3 of his chapter, Marenbon challenges the view that Renaissance philosophy can be defined on the basis of a rupture between philosophical thought and the activities traditionally carried out within the universities. This argument reminds us of a point that is far from self-evident, namely that Renaissance philosophical thought cannot be univocally identified with the extra-academic humanistic intellectual production that flourished from the fifteenth century onward. While it is undeniable that humanism played a significant role in shaping philosophical debates between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – a point to which I shall return shortly (section II.5, below) – it is equally important to recall that throughout these two centuries a continuous tradition of university masters across Europe persisted in their long-standing practice of textual commentary. Accordingly, a comprehensive and careful assessment of 'Renaissance philosophy' can no longer afford to neglect either dimension of philosophical reflection, whether conducted within or outside the universities of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In §4.4, Marenbon also criticizes the hypothesis that Renaissance thought may be defined by a progressive disengagement of the Latin world from Arabic philosophy. In this respect, he convincingly highlights the intense editorial activity that, at the end of the fifteenth century, accompanied the Latin translations and Venetian printings of the works of Avicenna and Averroes. To enumerate here all the philosophical questions – both metaphysical and natural – on which Arabic thought, in its various forms, continued to exert influence throughout the sixteenth century, would require a chapter in its own right, and in many respects such work has already been undertaken.[8]

II.3. Analysis of Argument (*a*): Humanism and Scholasticism

In §4.1, Marenbon presents the first thesis advanced by defenders of the 'Renaissance philosophy'. This thesis is articulated through two main claims: first, that there existed a strong connection between Renaissance philosophers and the

[8] See at least Dag N. Hasse, *Success and Suppression: Arabic Sciences and Philosophy in the Renaissance*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2016.

humanist milieu (p. 21: « the most innovative, important and exciting philosophy began to be that done by thinkers connected in some way with humanism »); and second, that humanism exerted a concrete and profound impact on scholasticism and on the traditional ways of conceiving philosophy itself (p. 22: « humanism had so profound an influence on the whole philosophical culture at this time »).

Marenbon challenges both claims. First, he maintains that it is not possible to establish an effective comparison between the scholastic–philosophical world and the humanist milieu, insofar as these represent fundamentally different kinds of intellectual activity. As he observes,

> Historians of philosophy, it might be argued, have a responsibility to be balanced in their treatment of the different types of philosophy going on at a time, so long as they seem worthwhile to the people at the time, irrespective of their judgement, from a present-day perspective, of their relative values.[9]

Second, Marenbon seeks to downplay the impact of humanism on traditional scholastic thought. In his view, very few university professors genuinely assimilated humanist methods or interests, and – with the notable exception of Agostino Nifo (1469/1475–1529/1546) – all continued to teach in the very same manner as their medieval predecessors.[10]

Concluding this broader critique of the significance of humanism, Marenbon identifies the epistemological standard that any defense of Renaissance philosophy would have to meet: scholars in Renaissance philosophy « would have to show that humanism had a transformative effect on most of the philosophy done in the period under consideration, but they are far from being able to do so ». In fact, I shall argue that such a demonstration is possible.

From the fifteenth century onward, it is possible to document an unparallel and growing impact of the humanist milieu on the practices and standards of academic philosophy. [11] This development occurred for contingent historical reasons; nevertheless, it undeniably took place. These reasons are basically three: 1) the movement of Byzantine intellectuals; 2) the circulation of Greek manuscripts; 3) the invention of the press. Marenbon is correct in observing that scholastic medieval culture was not devoid of knowledge of Greek, and he cites figures such

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[9] Marenbon, p. 21–22.

[10] Marenbon, p. 22: « Few of Nifo's contemporaries or successors as Arts Masters followed his example, however. In most of the university philosophy, whether written in Italy, Spain or north of the Alps, it is striking, rather, that the methods, intellectual assumptions and texts used remain the same ».

[11] On this point see the classic Paul O. Kristeller, « The Impact of Early Italian Humanism on Thought an Learning», in Id., *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, vol. I, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 1985 (Storia e Letteratura. Raccolta di Studi e Testi, 166), p. 65–91: 77–85.

as John Scotus Eriugena (815–877) and John of Salisbury (1120–1180).[12] Even so, a striking quantitative disparity immediately emerges. From the fifteenth century onward, the number of Greek manuscripts available, as well as the amount of texts translated into Latin, increased to an extent vastly exceeding those accessible to Eriugena or Salisbury.[13] I prove a brief example of this quantitative difference: two catalogues of the Vatican Library dating 1295 and 1311 (that is, shortly after the activity of William of Moerbeke) record approximately 30 Greek codices;[14] by contrast, Cardinal Bessarion alone, at his death in 1472, bequeathed no fewer than 482 Greek codices to the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice.[15]

Beyond the increased availability of texts, what also changed was the overall approach adopted by their readers. Figures such as Eriugena or Salisbury did not systematically question the linguistic precision or the internal coherence of the Greek texts they engaged with. By contrast, the philological expertise developed by intellectuals such as Valla, Barbaro, Gaza, Del Medigo, Budé, or Melanchton, represents a methodological innovation without precedent in scholastic medieval culture, one that had important consequences in the decades that followed. It is worth recalling that, in this respect, in Lutheran Germany Valla's philological approach provided a crucial methodological foundation for the Reformation, largely through the printed editions disseminated by Ulrich von Hutten.[16]

It should not be overlooked that the institutional organization of universities and faculties of the Arts underwent a profound transformation from the late fourteenth century onward. During this period, a phenomenon of growing and ultimately irreversible significance emerged: the flourishing of Greek language

[12] Marenbon, p. 23: « The outstanding philosopher of the Carolingian era, John Scotus Eriugena, learned Greek, though admittedly not to read its classical literature or pagan philosophers ».

[13] Cf. Jill Kraye, « From Medieval to Early Modern Stoicism», in Jaqueline Hamesse, Charles Burnett, José Meirinhos (eds.), *Continuities and Disruptions between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Brepols, Louvain-la-Neuve 2009 (Textes et Etudes du Moyen Âge, 48), p. 1–24: 1: « A key aspect of disruption, on the other hand, was the recovery in the Renaissance of a large quantity of philosophical material from antiquity – mostly, though not exclusively, in Greek – which had not been available in the medieval West ».

[14] See Franz Ehrle, *Historia Bibliothecae Romanorum Pontificum*, Typis Vaticanis, Roma, 1890, t. I, p. 95–99; Augustus Pelzer, *Addenda et Emendanda ad Francisci Ehrle Historiae Bibliothecae Romanorum Pontificum*, in Bibliotheca Vaticana, Roma 1947, p. 23–24.

[15] For the index, see Lotte Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library and the Bibliotheca Marciana. Six Early Inventories*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 1979 (Sussidi Eruditi, 31). On the role of Bessarion see Michael Malone-Lee, « Cardinal Bessarion and the Introduction of Plato to the Latin West », in Giancarlo Abbamonte, Stephen Harrison (eds.), *Making and Rethinking the Renaissance. Between Greek and Latin in 15th-16th Century Europe*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2019 (Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volumes, 77), p. 109–124.

[16] Hajo Holborn, *Ulrich von Hutten and the German Reformation*, transl. Roland H. Bainton, Greenwood Press Publishers, Westport 1965.

studies throughout Europe (not only in Italy!).[17] This process of transformation in university teaching at the institutional level – namely, in the establishment of academic chairs and the subjects included within curricular programs – was undoubtedly connected to the intensive relations between the Latin West and the Byzantine world. Intellectual exchange between Italy and Constantinople was particularly vigorous in the late fourteenth century; it became systematic during the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1437–1445); and was dramatically intensified by the Ottoman conquest of 1453, which resulted in the migration of many of the foremost representatives of Greek culture into Western Europe.[18]

This transformation was initiated by Manuel Chrysoloras (c. 1350–1415), who in 1397 obtained the first European chair of Greek at Florence, where he also produced a Latin translation of Plato's *Republic*.[19] After studying in Byzantium, Guarino Veronese (1364–1470) succeeded Chrysoloras in 1408; he later moved to Venice in 1411 and finally settled in Ferrara in 1441.[20] Throughout his teaching career, Guarino trained entire generations of humanists, theologians, and philosophers. The young Girolamo Savonarola might have attended this school, and his grandfather Michele was close to Guarino.[21] From 1419 onward, Greek was taught in Florence by Giovanni Aurispa (1376–1459), a translator of Plutarch, who transferred to Bologna in 1425.[22] In 1429, Aurispa's Florentine chair of Greek was

[17] See, at least, the recent volume by Niccolò Zorzi, Ciro Giacomelli (eds.), *Tra Oriente e Occidente. Dotti bizantini e studenti greci nel Rinascimento Padovano*, Padova University Press, Padova 2022, who provide a concrete assessment of the presence of Greek scholars in Padua. See also Nigel G. Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy. Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, Bloomsbury, London 1992; Jonathan Harris, *Greek Émigrés in the West, 1400–1520*, Porphyrogenitus, Camberley (UK) 1995.

[18] Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice. A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988; Deno Geanakoplos, *Constantinople and the West*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1989; Id., *Greek Scholars in Venice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mss.) 1962; Id., *Interaction of the 'Sibling' Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330–1600)*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1976; Federica Ciccolella, « Through the Eyes of the Greeks: Byzantine Émigrés and the Study of Greek in the Renaissance », in Abbamonte, Harrison (eds.), *Making and Rethinking the Renaissance*, p. 9–26. On the humanists and translators, see Leighton Durham Reynolds, Nigel Guy Wilson, *Copisti e filologi: La tradizione dei classici dall'antichità al Rinascimento*, Antenore, Padova 1969 (Medioevo e Umanesimo, 121), p. 135–139.

[19] Lydia Thorn-Wikkert, *Manuel Chrysoloras (ca. 1350–1415): Eine Biographie des byzantinischen Intellektuellen vor dem Hintergrund der hellenistischen Studien in der italienischen Renaissance*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 2006 (Bonner romanistische Arbeiten, 92); Ian Thomson, « Manuel Chrysoloras and the Early Italian Renaissance », *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 7/1 (1966), p. 63–82.

[20] Gino Pistilli, « Guarini, Guarino », in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Roma, Treccani, vol. LX (2003), *sub voce*.

[21] See Mulchahey's chapter in the volume. On Michele Savonarola and his connection with Guarino Veronese, see Chiara Crisciani, Gabriella Zuccolin (eds.), *Michele Savonarola: medicina e cultura di corte*, SISMEL–Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2011 (Micrologus Library, 37).

[22] Emilio Bigi, « Aurispa, Giovanni », in *DBI*, vol. IV (1962), *sub voce*.

assumed by Francesco Filelfo (1398–1491), who later taught in Siena and was active in Milan during the 1450s. He translated, among other works, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.[23]

Between 1456 and 1471, the Byzantine scholar John Argyropoulos (1416–1487) held the chair of Greek in Florence, during which time he translated Aristotle.[24] He briefly returned to Florence between 1477 and 1481. In 1491, the chair of Greek passed to Janus Lascaris (1445–1534), who in 1513 moved to Rome under the patronage of Pope Leo X and founded the Greek College on the Quirinale.[25] According to Sperone Speroni, Lascaris maintained that philosophy could not be practiced without knowledge of Greek.[26] In the six years between the first and the second teaching of Argyropoulos, the Florentine chair of Greek was temporarily occupied by the Byzantine scholar Andronicus Callistus (1400 c.–1486). Callistus had previously taught Greek letters in Bologna (1458–1466) and had participated in the controversy concerning the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. In 1475, he briefly moved to Milan before traveling to Paris and London, where he was invited to teach Greek, thereby attesting to the transalpine diffusion of humanistic interests.[27]

In parallel, Constantine Lascaris (1434–1501) taught in Milan, before relocating in 1465 to Naples and later to Messina. There, he assumed the chair of Greek at the convent of San Salvatore at Faro, an institution specifically founded by Cardinal Bessarion.[28] Giorgio Valla (1447–1499), a common pupil of both Callistus and Lascaris, taught in Pavia from 1466 to 1485 and then at the Scuola di San Marco in Venice.[29] The Venetian context was no less vibrant in its cultivation of Greek studies. Giorgio Merula (1430–1494), a pupil of Francesco Filelfo, was first appointed to Mantua in 1460 and subsequently to Venice in 1465. From 1468 onward, he taught grammar at the Scuola di San Marco.[30] During the same period, the Athenian scholar Demetrius Chalcondyles (1423–1511) was active in Perugia;

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23 Paolo Viti, « Filelfo, Francesco », in *DBI*, vol. XLVII (1997), *sub voce*.

24 Emilio Bigi, « Argiropulo, Giovanni », in *DBI*, vol. IV (1962), *sub voce*.

25 Massimo Ceresa, « Lascaris, Giano », in *DBI*, vol. LXIII (2004), *sub voce*.

26 Sperone Speroni, *Dialogo delle lingue*, in *Trattatisti del cinquecento*, Ricciardi, Milano 1978, vol. I (Letteratura Italiana - Storia e testi).

27 Luigi Orlandi, *Andronikos Kallistos: A Byzantine Scholar and His Manuscripts in Italian Humanism*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2023 (Studies in manuscript cultures, 32). Further information on Florence and Paris can be found in Luca Bianchi, *Studi sull'Aristotelismo nel Rinascimento*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2003 (Subsidia Mediaevalia Patavina, 5), p. 181–183.

28 Massimo Ceresa, « Lascaris, Costantino », in *DBI*, vol. LXIII (2004), *sub voce*; Ludovico Perroni-Grande, « Per la storia del monastero del Ss. Salvatore di Messina e per la biografia di Costantino Lascaris », *Archivio di storia messinese*, 3 (1902), p. 208–211.

29 Amedeo A. Raschieri, « Valla, Giorgio », in *DBI*, vol. XCVIII (2020), *sub voce*.

30 Alessandro Daneloni, « Merlani, Giorgio », in *DBI*, vol. LXXIII (2009), *sub voce*. On the School of San Marco, see Bruno Nardi, « La scuola di Rialto e l'umanesimo veneziano », in Id., *Saggi sulla cultura veneta del Quattro e Cinquecento*, ed. Paolo Mazzantini, Antenore, Padova 1971 (Medioevo e Umanesimo, 12), p. 45–98.

then he moved to Padua, where he remained from 1463 until 1475, when he replaced Callistus in Florence.[31] Niccolò Leonico Tomeo (1456–1531) took his place in Padua, and was responsible of establishing the Greek text of Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia*.[32]

In 1505, the Paduan chair of Greek was assumed by Marcus Musurus (1470 c.–1515), a colleague of Pietro Pomponazzi and the teacher of an entire generation of Renaissance philosophers, including Zimara, Contarini, and Erasmus of Rotterdam.[33] Meanwhile, in Ferrara, Theodorus Gaza (1398–1475) held a teaching position and in 1448 was even elected rector of the Faculty of Arts. In 1450, he relocated to Rome to serve at the papal court, where he entered into conflict with another prominent Byzantine translator, George of Trebizond. During his stay in Ferrara, however, Gaza copied the Greek text of Plato's *Republic* and *Parmenides* for Filelfo and composed a commentary on the *Gorgias*.[34]

The landscape of established and official academic chairs within the Italian *studia* of the second half of the fifteenth century leaves little room for doubt: the community of humanists – particularly professors of Greek and translators – was institutionally integrated into university faculties and actively contributed to philosophical translating and commenting. As a result, student curricula were enriched with new competencies, foremost among them grammatical training. This process of incorporation, however, also had a significant impact on the scholarly output of these intellectuals. Methods such as linguistic comparison (Greek–Latin–Hebrew), textual criticism, and *emendatio* gradually permeated the practices of philosophical commentary in any faculty or collegium. For this reason, Marenbon's distinction between « different types of philosophy » (p. 21) might seem inadequate to describe this cultural context.

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31 Armando Petrucci, « Calcondila, Demetrio », in *DBI,* vol. XVI (1973), *sub voce*; Deno Geanakoplos, « The Discourse of Demetrius Chalcondyles on the Inauguration of Greek Studies at the University of Padua », *Studies in the Renaissance*, 21 (1974), p. 118–144.

32 Emilio Russo, « Leonico Tomeo, Niccolò », in *DBI*, vol. LXIV (2005), *sub voce*. On Tomeo see Stefano Perfetti, *Aristotle's Zoology and Its Renaissance Commentators (1521-1601)*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2000 (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy – Series 1, 27), p. 65–85.

33 Paolo Pellegrini, « Musuro, Marco », in *DBI,* vol. LXXVII (2012), *sub voce*. On Musurus, see David Speranzi, *Marco Musuro. Libri e scrittura*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Roma 2013 (Bollettino dei classici. Supplemento, 27).

34 Concetta Bianca, « Gaza, Teodoro », in *DBI*, vol. LII (1999), *sub voce*; Perfetti, *Aristotle's Zoology*, p. 11-28; Id., « *Cultius atque integrius*. Teodoro Gaza traduttore umanistico del *De partibus animalium* », *Rinascimento*, s. 2, 35 (1995), p. 253–260. Concerning the conflict with Trebizond, see John Monfasani (ed.), *Vindicatio Aristotelis. Two Works of George Trebizond in the Plato-Aristotle Controversy of the Fifteenth Century*, Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Tempe (Ar.) 2021 (Medieval and Renaissance Text and Studies, 573); and Luca Burzelli, Riccardo Saccenti, « A Note on Two Works of George of Trebizond Edited by John Monfasani », *Mediterranea. International Journal on the Transfer of Knowledge*, 9 (2024), p. 331–348.

It must be added that this phenomenon was by no means confined to Italy and cannot be restricted to a national framework.[35] In 1411, antipope Benedict XIII (1328–1423) promulgated new constitutions for the ancient University of Salamanca with the aim of elevating it to a level comparable to Paris, Bologna, and Oxford. It is significant that two 'humanistic' chairs – one in grammar and one in languages – were incorporated into the curriculum, with compulsory instruction in grammar established as a prerequisite for access to the remaining examinations. These same constitutions were reaffirmed by Pope Eugene IV in 1446.[36]

Within this context of profound institutional reform, the Iberian Peninsula experienced a period of intense humanistic ferment, whose leading figures held teaching positions in universities and schools. The humanist bishop Alonso de Cartagena (1384–1456) managed an entourage of pupils in the Hospital del Rey in Burgos, who later became prominent humanists and professors: Alonso de Palencia (1423–1492), Diego Rodríguez Almela (1426–1489), Alonso de la Torre (1410–1460 c.).[37] Few texts capture this climate of renewed, humanistically grounded institutions more effectively than Alonso de la Torre's *Visión deleitable* (1440 c.).[38] By the early sixteenth century, nearly all universities on the Iberian Peninsula had begun to establish trilingual chairs or *Collegia*. At Salamanca, the trilingual college was officially ratified in 1550, although as early as 1511 petitions had been submitted for chairs devoted to comparative studies. The first chair of

[35] Indeed, JOHN MARENBON, « When Was Medieval Philosophy? », Inaugural Lecture, University of Cambridge 2011 (from http://www.dspace.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/240658, last accessed 10.05.2026), p. 10, considers that the label 'Renaissance philosophers' only applies to those who were born in Italy: « Although the historians may talk about humanism, usually the distinguishing criterion is brutally geographic: Italians (and Greeks who came to Italy) belong to the Renaissance, their contemporaries elsewhere in Europe are medieval ». Against this statement see LUCA BIANCHI, « Un lungo medioevo? Note sulla periodizzazione della storia della filosofia », *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 102/3 (2023), p. 392–412: 402.

[36] LUIS ENRIQUE RODRÍGUEZ SAN PEDRO BEZARES, « Evolución del corpus legislativo en la Universidad de Salamanca (siglos XV-XVIII). Estado de la cuestión », *Estudios de Historia Social y Económica de América*, 13 (1996), p. 573–582: 575; PILAR VALERO GARCÍA, MANUEL PÉREZ MARTÍN, « Pedro de Luna y el Estudio Salmantino. Aspecto Institucional: su *Constitución* », *Studia Historica: Historia Moderna*, 8 (2009), p. 131–149: 132.

[37] On Cartagena see the recent editions of ALONSO DE CARTAGENA, *Libros de Tulio: De senetute. De los ofiçios*, ed. MARÍA MORRÁS, Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, Alcalá de Henares 1996; MARÍA MORRÁS, JEREMY LAWRANCE (eds.), *Alfonso de Cartagena's* Memoriale virtutum *(1422). Aristotle for Lay Princes in Medieval Spain*, Brill, Leiden 2022 (The Iberian Religious World, 8); LUIS FERNÁNDEZ GALLARDO, *Alonso de Cartagena. Una biografía política en la Castilla del siglo XV*, Junta de Castilla y León, León 2002.

[38] Concerning de la Torre see at least LUIS GIRÓN-NEGRÓN, *Alfonso de la Torre's* Visión Deleytable. *Philosophical Rationalism and the Religious Imagination in 15th Century Spain*, Brill, Leiden 2001 (Medieval Iberian Peninsula, 14).

Greek was assigned in 1495 to the Portuguese scholar Arias Barbosa.[39] The University of Alcalá de Henares founded a *collegium trilingue* in 1528 by mandate of its rector, the theologian Mateu Pascual Catalán.[40] As will be discussed in greater detail below, this cultural environment – characterized by the interaction of scholasticism, humanism, and institutional academic planning – is essential for understanding the emergence of new philosophical traditions, such as the School of Salamanca, from the 1530s onward.

Within the Holy Roman Empire, the interaction between humanism and scholasticism can be observed from the mid-fifteenth century onward, although the formal institutionalization of chairs of Greek occurred considerably later. In the 1450s, the theologian and astronomer Georg von Peuerbach (1423–1461), professor at Vienna, translated Ptolemy's *Almagest* together with his renowned pupil Johannes Regiomontanus (1436–1476).[41] At the University of Basel, Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522) taught Latin from 1477 onward and, as far as can be ascertained, commented on Aristotle using the Greek text. Reuchlin studied also in Italy under Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.[42] Thanks to his initiative, the first chair of Greek in Germany was established at Leipzig and was awarded to Petrus Mosellanus (1493–1524).[43] Among Reuchlin's most distinguished pupils was Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), to whom he was also closely related. Regarded as the finest Greek scholar in the Empire after Erasmus, Melanchthon was

[39] Ana M. Carabias Torres, « Evolución histórica del Colegio Trilingüe de Salamanca: 1550-1882 », *Studia historica. Historia moderna*, 1 (1983), p. 143–168. Concerning Barbosa, see José López Rueda, *Helenistas Españoles del Siglo XVI,* Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid 1973 (Manuales y anejos de 'Emerita', 27), p. 53–59; Luis Gil Fernández, *Panorama social del Humanismo español (1500-1800),* Tecnos, Madrid 1997 (Estudios, 17), p. 49, 240–241, 532, 543.

[40] Antonio Alvar Ezquerra, « El Colegio de San Jerónimo o Colegio trilingüe », in Antonio Alvar Ezquerra, Santiago Aguadé Nieto (eds.), *Historia de la Universidad de Alcalá*, Editorial Universidad de Alcalá, Alcala de Henares 2010, p. 215–222; Id., « El Colegio Trilingüe de la Universidad de Alcalá de Henares (Notas para su estudio) », in María Consuelo Alvarez Morán, Rosa María Iglesias (eds.), *Contemporaneidad de los Clásicos en el umbral del Tercer Milenio*. Actas del Congreso Internacional (La Habana, 1–5 diciembre de 1998), EDITUM, Murcia 1999, p. 515–523.

[41] Friedrich Samhaber, *Die Zeitzither: Georg von Peuerbach und das helle Mittelalter*, Raab, Wambacher 2000; Irmela Bues, « Johannes Regiomontanus (1436–1476) », *Fränkische Lebensbilder*, 11 (1984), p. 28–43; Rudolf Mett, *Regiomontanus. Wegbereiter des neuen Weltbildes*, Teubner – Vieweg, Stuttgart – Leipzig 1996 (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse, 48).

[42] On humanism in Germany, see the fundamental Jan-Hendryk de Boer, *Die Gelehrtenwelt ordnen: zur Genese des hegemonialen Humanismus um 1500*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2017. See also Werner Beierwaltes, « Reuchlin und Pico della Mirandola », *Tijdschrift voor filosofie*, 56 (1994), p. 313–337; see also Joseph Dan, « The Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin and Its Historical Significance », in Id. (ed.), *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters*, Harvard College Library, Cambridge (Mass.) 1997, p. 55–95.

[43] Robert Schober, *Petrus Mosellanus, 1493–1524, ein vergessener Mosel-Humanist*, Görres-Verlag, Koblenz 1979.

appointed in 1518 to the newly established chair of Greek at Wittenberg.[44] The events associated with the Lutheran Reformation are sufficiently well known that they need not be rehearsed here. It should nevertheless be recalled that this philological approach to texts – whether Greek or biblical – played a crucial role in bringing Luther and Melanchthon together in matters of textual hermeneutics.[45]

With regard to France, in 1452 Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville (1403–1483) reformed the statutes of the University of Paris.[46] Within the Faculty of Arts, the study and practice of grammar were formally introduced and strongly encouraged.[47] Five years later, an alumnus of Manuel Chrysoloras, Gregorio Tifernate (1414–1462) – known as the first Latin translator of the Pseudo-Timaeus of Locri[48] – was appointed. He thus became the first professor of Greek in Paris. Castellani's tenure, however, was relatively brief, and in 1474 he was replaced by two new figures: Andronicus Callistus, who later departed for London, and Hermonymus of Sparta (1435–1503). Emerging from the circle of Gemistos Plethon at Mistra, Hermonymus traveled to Italy, where he resided in both Rome and Milan. From the 1470s onward, he was active in Paris, where he obtained the chair of Greek at the Sorbonne.[49] Among his pupils were such prominent figures as Guillaume Budé (1467–1540), Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (1455–1536), Johannes Reuchlin, and Beatus Rhenanus (1485–1547). In effect, a substantial portion of the leading European humanists of the sixteenth century passed through Hermonymus's lectures in Paris.

The list of academic institutions that established chairs in Greek grammar or linguistic comparison could be extended for many pages, far beyond the scope of

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[44] On Melanchthon see at least Günter Frank (ed.), *Philipp Melanchthon: Der Reformator zwischen Glauben und Wissen. Ein Handbuch*, De Gruyter, Berlin – Boston 2017; Ernst Wolf, *Philipp Melanchthon: Evangelischer Humanismus*. Rede bei der Immatrikulationsfeier der Georgia Augusta am 12. November 1960, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen – Zürich 1961 (Göttinger Universitätsreden, 30).

[45] Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, The Beacon Press, Boston 1952, p. 69. On the connection between Reformation and Renaissance, see Monfasani, « The Renaissance as the Concluding Phase of the Middle Ages », p. 179.

[46] Anna Esposito, « Estouteville, Guillaume d' », in *DBI*, vol. XLIII (1993), *sub voce*; Jacques Verger, *La réforme du cardinal d'Estouteville (1452): l'université de Paris entre Moyen Âge et modernité*, in *Les Universités en Europe (1450-1814)*, Bulletin de l'Association des Historiens modernistes des Universités française, Paris 2013, p. 55–76.

[47] Ricardo García-Villoslada, *La Universidad de Paris durante los estudios de Francisco de Vitoria (1507-1522)*, Apud aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, Roma 1938, p. 322–323.

[48] Giacomo Mancini, « Gregorio Tifernate », *Archivio storico italiano*, 81 (1923), p. 65–112; John Butcher, Andrea Czortek, Matteo Martelli (eds.), *Gregorio e Lilio. Due Tifernati protagonisti dell'Umanesimo italiano*, University Book, Umbertide 2017 (Quaderni. Biblioteca del Centro studi 'Mario Pancrazi', 13).

[49] Maria P. Kalatzi, *Hermonymos: A Study in Scribal, Literary and Teaching Activities in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries*, Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece, Athens 2009.

the present article. This abundance of names (encompassing intellectuals, cities, and translated works) serves to demonstrate that, beginning in the fifteenth century, a genuinely new phenomenon emerged within the Western faculties. The university system, structured around chairs and *curricula*, opened itself to the incorporation of new academic figures: namely, the professors of Greek grammar, who most of the times were also translators of classical texts. Through these newly institutionalized roles, philosophical debate was enriched by the availability of previously marginal or inaccessible classical sources – Plato, Theophrastus, Diogenes Laertius, Simplicius, Plutarch, among others – supported by an unprecedented circulation of Greek manuscript codices. This observation does not entail denying that the scholastic Middle Ages possessed grammatical instruction, incorporated it within the curriculum of the liberal arts, or showed interest in Greek learning. But we might agree on the fact that the commitment of medieval masters or friars (like Burgundio of Pisa, James of Venice, Bartholomew of Sicily, or William of Moerbeke)[50] to the recovery of manuscripts, their translation, and the discussion of textual problems, can hardly be compared with the scale and intensity of these activities as they developed in the fifteenth century.

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The establishment of new chairs of Greek, which gradually spread throughout Europe, indicates that the university context was beginning to incorporate into its institutional framework the textual and methodological innovations that the humanist milieu had been disseminating since the early fifteenth century. We have already observed the circulation of Greek scholars across national boundaries; the complementary perspective concerns the extent to which local professors absorbed and benefited from these new approaches in their daily practice of commentary.

Philosophy professors teaching at Padua from the mid-fifteenth century provide the most significant example of this osmosis between humanism and university philosophy – one could call it 'scholasticism', if preferred. Nicoletto Vernia (1442–1499), who taught natural philosophy at Padua for nearly thirty years, undertook a groundbreaking initiative: namely, one of the very first printed editions of the Latin-translated Aristotelian corpus in six volumes (Venice, by Andrea Torresani, 1482). Vernia exemplifies the emerging figure of the fifteenth-century philosophy professor: no longer merely a commentator, but also a commentator-philologist concerned with the textual correctness of Aristotelian arguments. Although he did not know Greek personally, he was able, through

[50] Regarding the Greek manuscripts available to these translators, see REYNOLDS, WILSON, *Copisti e filologi*, p. 104–106.

collaboration with two Hellenists – Agostino dal Bene and Girolamo Bagolino (d. 1552) – to access Greek manuscripts with which he emended Aristotle's texts.[51]

Vernia himself provides evidence of how a traditional scholastic commentator could now engage with problems of textual criticism. In the preface to his edition of Burley's *Expositio in Physicam*, he informs the dedicatee, Sebastiano Badoer (1427–1498), that he had to employ emendation practices in order to establish the correct text of the commentary.[52] On the same occasion, Vernia expressed his admiration for Ermolao Barbaro (1454–1493), who had recently translated from Greek into Latin Themistius's commentary on the *Physica*.[53] These passages suggest that Vernia understood the practice of textual editing and textual criticism as a novel tool – derived from his engagement with the humanist milieu – and one that served his professional activity as a teacher. Unlike many university masters of the preceding two centuries, Vernia recognized the problems of textual reliability inherent in the works to be commented, and acknowledged the necessity of reconstructing the text through the comparison of manuscripts, whether Latin or Greek. Moreover, he demonstrated a clear awareness of the hermeneutic potential of the Greek commentators newly translated into Latin during the fifteenth century. The spread of movable-type printing from the mid-1460s onward functioned as a powerful amplifier of this new methodology, promoting its dissemination among both humanists and university professors. It is noteworthy that the humanist milieu itself applauded Vernia's philological commitment. In a famous letter of October 1483, Ermolao Barbaro praised Vernia for his efforts to restore the textual and lexical accuracy of Aristotelian works in their Latin translation.[54]

Vernia was by no means the only professor to combine the traditional practice of scholastic commentary with the production of philologically accurate editions. On a closer look, the intellectual landscape of the University of Padua in the final three decades of the fifteenth century offers numerous comparable examples. The

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[51] Marco Forlivesi, « Vernia Nicoletto », in *DBI,* vol. XCVIII (2020), *sub voce*; Edward Mahoney, *Two Aristotelians of the Italian Renaissance: Nicoletto Vernia and Agostino Nifo*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2000 (Variorum Collected Studies Series, 697).

[52] Nicoletus Vernia, *Praefatio*, in Gualtherus Burlaeus, *Expositio in Aristotelis Physicam*, Johannes Herbort, de Seligenstadt, Venetiis 15 Apr. 1482, fol. A2ra: « Superioribus diebus ab impressoribus quibusdam rogatus ut Burleum super libris de phisico auditu emendarem, qui antea impressus corruptissimus erat. Quem cum essem hoc anno lecturus ob scolasticorum utilitatem, laborem hunc libenter suscepi ».

[53] Nicoletus Vernia, *Praefatio*, fol. A2ra: « Volentes ergo ipsam philosophiam diuidere per eius diffinitionem tangamus quam Themistius in prohemio libri de phisico auditu ponit. Dicit: [...]. Et hoc est quod Themistius inquit in eodem prohemio de phisico auditu quem nuper transtulit de greco in latinum in omni disciplinarum genere eruditissimus Hermolaus Barbarus, qui et si nomine Barbarus sit, re tamen non barbarus ».

[54] Ermolao Barbaro to Nicoletto Vernia (in Ermolao Barbaro, *Epistolae, orationes et carmina*, ed. Vittore Branca, 2 vols., Bibliopolis, Firenze 1943, epistola 31).

most renowned among them is Elijah del Medigo (1458–1493), who, despite not holding a formal teaching position at Padua, was appointed by the Venetian government as an 'arbiter' of philosophical disputes at the university – probably also as lecturer.[55] Del Medigo pursued philosophical activity along three interconnected lines: first, as an exegete of contemporary philosophical problems, as evidenced by his well-known *Quaestiones De efficientia mundi*, *De primo motore*, and *De esse et essentia et uno*; second, as a translator of Aristotelian and Averroist works, including Hebrew–Latin versions of the epitome on the *Meteorologica*, of Kalonymos's commentary on the *Meteorologica*, Averroes's paraphrase of *De partibus animalium*, and the prologue to *Metaphysica* XII; and third, as an editor of scholastic texts, most notably the *Quaestiones super Physicam* of Jean de Jandun (1280–1328).[56]

A direct pupil of Vernia, Antonio Fracanziani (1450–1506), published the first printed edition of Avicenna's *Metaphysica*, a text that he had personally emended (*castigata*) together with the friar Francesco da Macerata.[57] It remains unclear on what basis the Latin text was corrected, and it is not known whether Fracanziani possessed any knowledge of Arabic. Nevertheless, even Fracanziani – despite being a traditional university professor – felt compelled to emphasize that he was offering a text purified according to the most recent philological criteria.[58]

A further testimony to this Paduan context is mentioned by Pietro Pomponazzi, who, in his unpublished commentary on *Metaphysica* XII, refers to one of his former teachers at Padua:

> I am like a certain doctor in the ancient Studium of Padua who, whenever he failed to understand a passage, immediately declared it corrupt; to such an extent that, once he had grown old, he understood nothing at all, because he considered all his books corrupt.[59]

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[55] On Elijah see Michael Engel, *Elijah Del Medigo and Paduan Aristotelianism: Investigating the Human Intellect*, Bloomsbury, New York 2016 (Bloomsbury Studies in the Aristotelian Tradition); and Giovanni Licata, *Secundum Avenroem: Pico della Mirandola, Elia del Medigo e la 'seconda rivelazione' di Averroè*, Officina di studi medievali, Palermo 2022.

[56] Concerning these editions, see Antonino Poppi, *Causalità e infinità nella scuola padovana dal 1480 al 1513*, Antenore, Padova 1966, p. 135-150.

[57] Maria Muccillo, « Fracanziani, Antonio », in *DBI*, vol. XLIX (1997), *sub voce*.

[58] Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, « Survivance et renaissance d'Avicenne à Venise et à Padoue », in Agostino Pertusi (ed.), *Venezia e l'Oriente fra tardo Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Sansoni, Venezia 1966, p. 75–102: 88–90.

[59] Petrus Pomponatius, *Expositio super XII Metaphysicae*, t.c. 14: « Sum autem similis cuidam doctori antiquo patavino qui, quando non intelligebat locum aliquem, statim ipsum dicebat corruptum, in tantum quod, effectus senex, nil iam intelligebat, quum haberet omnes suos libros corruptos ». I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Vittoria Perrone Compagni, who is preparing the edition of this *Expositio*, for sharing the text with me before its publication.

It is impossible to determine with certainty whom Pomponazzi had in mind – nor can it be excluded that he was referring to Vernia, given the reference to an 'aged master'. Notwithstanding its ironic tone, the passage bears witness to the fact that traditional commentary practices were by then being hybridized with forms of textual criticism that increasingly supplemented – or at least accompanied – conceptual exegesis. Philosophical practices in Padua were now, for the first time, established on a strong philological basis.

In his chapter, Marenbon refers to Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525), presenting him as an example of the standard prototype of the university professor exclusively concerned with commenting on the Aristotelian tradition in a scholastic manner (p. 22). However, even Pomponazzi is affected by the encounter between academic philosophy and the humanistic milieu in the generation of teachers who preceded him. Marenbon mentions only the *Tractatus de immortalitate animae* (1516). Yet, if one turns to Pomponazzi's university classes, a different picture emerges. Pomponazzi repeatedly emends the *lectiones* of the texts of *Aristoteles* and *Averroes Latinus*, proposing alternative textual readings intended to clarify their meaning. The *reportationes* of his courses are replete with textual comparisons, in which the professor contrasts 'his text' (*mea littera*) with other translations (*alia littera*). Aquinas also, in his commentaries on Aristotle, occasionally engaged in the comparison of different *litterae*, albeit with considerably less frequency. The crucial point, however, is that, unlike Aquinas, Pomponazzi directly addresses the translators' exegetical choices and does not refrain from criticizing the semantic adequacy of the Greek–Latin renderings.[60]

It is well known that, during his time in Bologna, Pomponazzi engaged in discussions on numerous problematic points of the Greek text with his colleague and friend, the Hellenist Lazzaro Bonamico (1479–1552).[61] In a passage of the *Expositio super Metaphysicam*, Pomponazzi compares the Latin translations with the Greek original:

[60] See for instance Petrus Pomponatius, *Quaestio de remanentia elementorum in mixto*, in Luca Burzelli, *Pietro Pomponazzi and the Renaissance Theory of the Elements*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2024, p. 268: « Et nota quod error stat in una littera haec et Theodorus habet ly *haec* et transtulit *ex*, sed ly *haec* abundat. Unde textus vult dicere quod prima compositio est vocatorum elementorum, scilicet ignis, aeris, aquae et terrae ». Concerning this general approach by Pomponazzi, see Leonardo Graciotti, « Pomponazzi Filologo Aristotelico », *Aristotelica*, 1 (2022), p. 87–100.

[61] Petrus Pomponatius, *Super I De partibus animalium*, in Milano, Venerabile Biblioteca Ambrosiana, ms. D. 417 inf., f. 3r: « Quia multi sunt viri greci a quibus quottidie adisco (D. Lazarus noster, Iohannes Hispanus, Petrus Iacobus Neapolitanus et alii), ego rogo eos ut me corrigant ubi male dixero, ut vobiscum adiscam; nam magis amo scientiam quam me ».

> Indeed, the text must stand as it is found, for I have consulted excellent Hellenists. They stated that the phrase stands in the manner in which it stands in our [translation]. The translator intended that the '*si*' be understood as a '*quoniam*'; for this reason, his wording reads '*quoniam*'.[62]

Such a passage – and it is not an isolated case – reveals the depth to which the methodologies and interests of the humanistic world had penetrated academic debate and the practices of scholastic commentary. Undoubtedly, Pomponazzi did not know Greek and did not regard himself as a refined translator of classical texts. Nonetheless, like his master Vernia, Pomponazzi had come to understand that the practice of Aristotelian exegesis could no longer proceed without recourse to textual criticism.

Between 1521 and 1523, two different pupils of Pomponazzi – Pietro Alcionio (1487–1527) and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490–1573), both humanists – produced and published two competing Latin translations of the pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo*.[63] Alcionio claimed to have collated the Aldine edition against Bessarion's manuscript codices and thus to have relied on a purer and more reliable Greek text.[64] Both translations were explicitly addressed to an academic readership: in the preface to his work, Sepúlveda even mentions Pomponazzi and his lectures on the *Meteorologica* (1523) as the natural audience for this new and more authoritative Latin translation.[65]

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[62] Petrus Pomponatius, *Expositio super XII Metaphysicae*, t.c. 6: « Re vera textus debet stare ut iacet, quia consului optimos Graecos; dixerunt quod littera stat hoc modo ut in nostra habetur: translator voluit ut ly *si* intelligatur pro *quoniam*; ideo sua littera dicit *quoniam* ».

[63] Mario Rosa, « Alcionio, Pietro », in *DBI,* vol. II (1960), *sub voce*; Julian Solana Pujalte, « Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda: un umanista spagnolo difensore di Alberto Pio contro Erasmo », in Maria Antonietta Marogna (ed.), *Alberto Pio da Carpi contro Erasmo di Rotterdam nell'età della Riforma*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2005, p. 11–26: 14–15. An overall discussion of the secondary literature on Sepúlveda can be found in Julian Solana Pujalte, « Estudios filológicos sobre la obra de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1984–2003) », in Fabio Forner, Carla M. Monti, Paul G. Schmidt (eds.), *Margarita amicorum. Studi di cultura europea per Agostino Sottili*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2005, p. 1051–1072. Concerning the editions of *De mundo*, see Luca Burzelli, « Discussing the authorship of *De mundo*. Humanistic debates in Bologna between 1521 and 1523 », *Medioevo*, 51 (2026), forthcoming.

[64] Pietro Alcionio to Federico II Gonzaga, in Aristotelis *Libri De generatione et Interritu duos, Meteoron* [...], *De mundo* [...], Bernardinus de Vitalibus, Venetiis 1521, fol. Qiiiv: « [...] codices tum formulis expressi, tum manu scripti, quos multos vel ex ipsa Graecia nuper allatos habuimus, ita multis mendis confusi atque inversi circumferebantur, ut ad rectam veramque perstruendam lectionem nullum laborem nullamque diligentiam sufficere experti fuissemus, nisi Andreas Naugerius quosdam certissimae fidei summaeque vetustatis mihi ex Bessarionea Bybliotheca prompsisset ». Bessarion's codices of *De mundo* are now stored in Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, mss. gr.200, fol. 303–308; gr.215, fol. 157–167; gr.216, fol. 59–77; gr.265, fol. 201–215; gr.308, fol. 35–46; gr.379, fol. 343–349 (see Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*).

[65] Johannis Ginés Sepulvedae *Praefatio ad Herculem Gonzagam*, in Aristotelis *Liber de mundo...*, per Hieronymum de Benedictis, Bononiae 1523, fol. Aiv: « [...] quem librum, si paulo intensiore cura legere tanti putabis, magno is (mihi crede) tibi erit adiumento ad studia meteorologica quae, licet

This renewed awareness of the importance of the textual dimension in exegetical practice becomes evident also when one considers the names of humanists that appear in Pomponazzi's lectures. Upon taking up his teaching post in Bologna, Pomponazzi became, in certain respects, deeply preoccupied with the comparison of translations and with the assessment of their hermeneutical consistency. In these *reportationes*, figures such as John Argyropoulos, Marsilio Ficino, Bessarion, and Theodorus Gaza are regularly mentioned, each in connection with specific problems concerning the translation of the Greek text. The impact of Gaza's translation, together with the broader humanistic concerns of textual criticism, on Pomponazzi's *Expositio super De partibus animalium* cannot not be overstated. In *lectio* 2 of Book II, Pomponazzi goes so far as to sketch the history of the transmission of the Aristotelian corpus:

> Gentlemen, I have two interpretations: the ancient one and this one by Theodorus [Gaza]. The ancient one says nothing. As for that of Theodorus, I tell you that I believe the Latins are not the only ones to possess corrupt texts, but that the Greeks do as well. Because nearly two thousand years have passed since Aristotle lived, and there were many wars, and Aristotle's books were hidden and sold, and so on. In my view, in this passage Aristotle's opinion is as follows...[66]

References of this kind to Gaza's translation recur throughout the *Expositio*, in which no fewer than twenty mentions of the *littera Theodori* can be identified. These examples show that, although Pomponazzi was concerned exclusively with explicating the contents of the Aristotelian text – much like a medieval scholastic master – the manner and methods by which this exegesis was conducted had nonetheless undergone a substantial transformation. New strategies of commentary were now being incorporated into traditional ones. This clear concern for the reliability of the Greek text and of the various Latin translations is a direct outcome of the fifteenth-century encounter between humanism and scholasticism, and it left an indelible mark on the practice of philosophical commentary.

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nunc in Bononiensi gimnasio cui tu es praecipuo maximoque ornamento, doctore Petro Pomponatio celeberrimo philosopho aemuleris, adiutus acri ingenio (nec mediocri eruditione Iohannis Francisci Furnii omnium horarum iuvenis et ad summam doctrinam spectati) ipsa tamen huius libri lectio per se tibi non mediocriter ad eadem opitulabitur ».

[66] Petrus Pomponatius, *Expositio I et II De partibus animalium*, ed. Stefano Perfetti, Olschki, Firenze 2004, p. 138, l. 144–150: « Domini, ego habeo duas interpretationes: antiquam et istam Theodori. Antiqua nihil dicit. De ista Theodori dico vobis quod credo quod non tantum Latini habeant textus depravatos, sed etiam Graeci. Nam sicut circiter duo milia anni ex quo fuit Aristoteles et interim fuerunt multa bella et libri Aristotelis fuerunt absconditi et mercefacti, ideo etc. Sed, quantum mihi videtur, in ista parte sententia Aristotelis est ista... ».

The new 'philological' approach to the standard texts of academic commentary did not concern university professors alone, but also extended to the *Studia* of friars. The case of the Dominican Francesco Silvestri (1474–1528) is, I believe, emblematic. Although best known for his commentary on the *Summa contra gentiles*, Silvestri was also a commentator on the *Analytica posteriora*.[67] In a recent study, Pietro Rossi has shown that Silvestri did not confine himself to commenting on the Latin text, but instead interpolated the Latin translation of the *Analytica* on the basis of Greek variants identified in Aristotle's citations in Philoponus. The prefatory letter to the *Annotationes in libros Posteriorum*, dedicated to Ippolito d'Este, alternates between Latin and Greek passages, the latter drawn from the *Suda* lexicon, Philoponus, or Themistius.[68] Such a philologic and bilingual approach is by no means usual for a master of the thirteenth century; yet, this is the peculiar didactic approach of a professor of philosophy in the fifteenth to the sixteenth century.

This situation appears to confirm the same institutional configuration I have outlined for Pomponazzi. In comparison with scholastic commentary practices, the doctrinal content of these lectures or works remains unchanged; what changes is the method of inquiry. From the fifteenth century onward, intellectuals and teachers in the *studia* and universities had access to Greek manuscripts, instructors in Greek, and a learned audience interested in reconstructing the authentic form of classical texts. This is what Renaissance philosophy professors used to do, and this is the new approach through which they analyzed classical authorities. By contrast, how many fourteenth-century masters did – or even, could – emend the Latin translation of Aristotle on the basis of Greek variants drawn from a late-antique commentator?

This is the crucial point: Renaissance professors of philosophy carried out their didactic task with a strong philological commitment, working on Latin and Greek texts together. Throughout his teaching career at Padua, Marcantonio Passeri (aka. *Genua*, 1491–1563) sought to reconcile the Aristotelian commentary tradition with the newly available late-antique commentaries translated into Latin at the end of the fifteenth century.[69] Alessandro Piccolomini (1508–1578), professor of philosophy at Padua, produced Latin translations of Aristotle's *Rhetorica* and

[67] Giorgio Caravale, « Silvestri, Francesco », in *DBI*, vol. XCII (2018), *sub voce*. On the impact of Humanism on logic, see Kristeller, « The Impact of Early Italian Humanism », p. 83–84.

[68] Pietro B. Rossi, « Javelli's *Compendium logicae* and the Dominican Exegesis of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* in the Renaissance », in Tommaso de Robertis, Luca Burzelli (eds.), *Chrysostomus Javelli. Pagan Philosophy and Christian Thought in the Renaissance*, Springer, Cham 2023 (International Archives of the History of Ideas / Archives internationales d'histoire des idées, 243), p. 53–82: 66–68, and 74–79; Id., « La tradizione esegetica greca nelle *Annotationes in Posteriora* del domenicano Francesco Silvestri (d. 1528) », *Studia Graeco-arabica*, 14 (2024), p. 1063–1074.

[69] Alba Paladini, *La scienza animastica di Marco Antonio Genua*, Congedo, Galatina 2006 (Dipartimento di Filologia Classica e di Scienze Filosofiche. 'Testi e Saggi', 38).

Mechanica, as well as of Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentary on the *Meteorologica*.[70] He was also committed to a systematic vulgarization of Aristotelian philosophy.[71] Vincenzo Maggi (1498–1564), who succeeded Genua at Padua in 1533, translated and commented on Aristotle's *Poetica*.[72] Simone Porzio, professor of philosophy at Naples and Pisa, translated the treatise *De coloribus*.[73]

A final reference must be made to the School of Salamanca and to the development of the academic tradition commonly known as *Second Scholasticism*. According to Marenbon,

> A lack of interest for humanism, with regard both to the manner of their philosophizing and the positions and arguments they propose, is even more obvious in the succession of highly sophisticated, innovatory philosopher-theologians who worked in the Spanish universities from the time of Victoria [***sic!***] (d. 1546) through Suárez (d. 1617) to the end of the seventeenth century.[74]

In fact, it has long been known that the philosophical tradition to which Marenbon refers originated and developed in Salamanca through the direct engagement of medieval scholasticism with Iberian humanism. First, several celebrated Salamancan professors in different areas were also distinguished humanists and, in some cases, accomplished Hellenist:[75] for instance, the father of Castilian grammar, Elio Antonio de Nebrija (1444–1522), taught Greek at Salamanca and Alcalà for forty years.[76] As María Morrás clearly showed, from 1417 onwards, academics in Salamanca were commenting on Aristotle's *Ethica* only using Bruni's humanistic translation.[77]

Second, figures such as Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546) and Domingo de Soto (1494–1560) not only benefited from an educational and cultural environment permeated by humanism, but also actively sought to absorb materials, sources, and problems from that tradition. As Santiago Orrego Sánchez has noted, the first generation of masters of the School of Salamanca appropriated several

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70 Franco Tomasi, « Piccolomini, Alessandro », in *DBI*, vol. LXXXIII (2015), *sub voce*.

71 On this point see Luca Bianchi, « Volgarizzare Aristotele: per chi? », *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 59 (2012), p. 480–495.

72 Elisabetta Selmi, « Maggi, Vincenzo », in *DBI,* vol. LXVII (2006), *sub voce*.

73 Vincenzo Lavenia, « Porzio, Simone », in *DBI,* vol. LXXXV (2016), *sub voce*; Eva Del Soldato, *Simone Porzio: un aristotelico tra natura e grazia*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2010 (Centuria, 6).

74 Marenbon, p. 23.

75 See, for instance, Paula Oliveira e Silva, « Francisco de Vitoria », in Ángel Poncela González (ed.), *La Escuela de Salamanca. Filosofía y Humanismo ante el mundo moderno*, Editorial Verbum, Madrid 2015, p. 131–162: 136

76 Pedro Martín Baños, *La pasión de saber. Vida de Antonio de Nebrija*, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Huelva, Huelva 2019.

77 María Morrás, « Las sendas del aristotelismo en el Cuatrocientos hispánico. Una aproximación contextual », *Cahiers d'études hispaniques médiévales*, 41/1 (2018), p. 215–240.

authoritative sources from the humanist milieu, foremost among them the work of Tommaso de Vio (aka. Cajetan; 1469–1534).[78] The impact of Cajetan is immediately evident to anyone who opens any page of Vitoria's commentary on Aquina's *Prima pars*.

Moreover, this 'humanist' tendency within the early Salamanca School goes beyond Cajetan. Vitoria drew extensively on leading humanists of his own time, or of the immediately preceding generation, in developing his theological analyses. He studied in Paris together with Domingo de Soto from 1508 to 1522, precisely at the height of humanist ferment associated with figures such as Guillaume Budé and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples. As Garcìa-Villoslada showed almost a century ago, the university of Paris at the beginning of the sixteenth century was not only house to nominalist scholastics (like John Mair), but also a vivid humanist environment. When Vitoria arrived in France, François Tissard d'Ambroise (1460 c.–1508) was still active in the Collège de Coqueret, and Girolamo Aleandro (1480–1542) was working in the Collège La Marche.[79] Vitoria was deeply influenced also by Budé, whom he frequently mentioned in his lectures: Vitoria's discussion of the meaning of the terms *entelecheia* and *endelechia* in the commentary on the *Prima pars*, q. 75, art. 1, amounts to little more than a paraphrase of Budé's *De asse*.[80]

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[78] Santiago Orrego Sánchez, *La actualidad del ser en la primera escuela de Salamanca*, PhD tesis, Universidad de Navarra 2003, p. 10: « Puede admirarse en Vitoria, Soto y Cano su apertura a las influencias de otras escuelas teológicas y al movimiento humanista, que se mitiga notablemente en sus sucesores de la segunda mitad del siglo »; Id., « The 16th Century School of Salamanca as a Context of Synthesis between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in Theological and Philosophical Matters », in Hamesse, Burnett, Meirinhos (eds.), *Continuities and Disruptions*, p. 113–137: 114: « It is also customarily said that one of the most relevant features of the School of Salamanca was the integration of the new ideals and methods of Renaissance Humanism with those of the medieval Scholastic tradition ». See also Vicente Beltrán de Heredia, « Orientación humanística de la teología vitoriana », *Ciencia Tomista*, 72 (1947), p. 7–27; Ricardo García-Villoslada, « Erasmo y Vitoria », *Razón y Fe*, 107 (1935), p. 19–38, p. 340–350, p. 506–519.

[79] Juan Belda Plans, *El maestro Francisco de Vitoria, OP (c. 1483–1546), Fundador de la Escuela de Salamanca*, Madrid, Fundación Ignacio Larramendi, 2014, p. 13. Concerning Vitoria's connection with humanists in Paris, see Orrego Sanches, « The 16th Century School of Salamanca », p. 116: « There is evidence of Vitoria's sympathy with humanist attempts to reform theology. While he was studying in Paris, Vitoria openly defended Erasmus in front of certain commissions of theologians. The greatest Spanish humanist and friend of Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives, wrote a letter to Erasmus telling him that he had an admirer and defender in the person of Vitoria, and Erasmus himself sent a letter to Vitoria, asking him for his support in Spain ».

[80] Franciscus de Vitoria, *Super Primam partem*, q. 75, art. 1 (Madrid, Biblioteca de la Universidad Complutense, ms. 231, fol. 717v): « Et quia ibi Aristoteles ponit diffinitionem anime, et Sanctus Thomas hic dicit quod est primus actus corporis, oportet explicare diffinitionem anime, et prima particula est actus. Et Cicero, 1 *Tusculanarum*, quum dicit quod anima sive prima vita est endelechia, id est continua motio, vel quod est idem quod energia, id est actus. Ac ita Themistius ita transfert, et Ieronimus *Ad Paulinam:* viva vox habet nescio quod latentis energie. Et idem habet Iustinus in articulo. Et Plutarcus, libro 4 *De placitis Philosophorum*, dicit quod secundum Aristotelem anima est mortalis. Probat: nam omnis anima est enthelechia, id est actus corporis;

According to the *reportator* of the ms. Barcelona, Biblioteca Universitaria 16-2-22, in that passage Vitoria mentioned together Cicero, Budé, Argyropoulos, and the *Miscellanea* of the famous humanist Angelo Poliziano: not exactly a corpus of traditional scholastic masters; even less, a « lack of interest for humanism ».[81]

These considerations do not want to deny how much Vitoria and Domingo de Soto benefited from masters like Almain and Mair. But we cannot dismiss that they were also shaped by significant humanist influences, which they themselves integrated into their commentaries by incorporating innovations arising from the study of classical texts in their original languages.

From a broader perspective, it therefore seems possible to maintain that, in Italy as well as in the Iberian Peninsula, France, and the German Empire, the traditional teaching of philosophy in universities and religious *studia* was substantially affected by humanism. This process of intellectual osmosis unfolded along four essential lines: (1) the unprecedented availability of texts in their original languages; (2) the presence of teachers of Greek capable of training new generations in the critical discussion of texts; (3) a renewed interest among the educated public in philological debate; and (4) the new and indispensable support of the printing press, which made it necessary to adopt systematic criteria for the textual editing of classical and medieval works. Together, these four elements delineate the difference between medieval and Renaissance philosophical practices.

II.4. Analysis of Argument (*b*): New Texts and Problems

In §4.2, Marenbon advances a second interpretive hypothesis concerning the nature of Renaissance philosophy, which he characterizes as « more robust ». According to this view, the distinctive character of Renaissance philosophy is to be sought in a significant transformation of the textual tradition.[82] This hypothesis

ergo est corruptibilis sicut corpus. Et ita translatio nostra habet: anima est actus corporis. Et salvant Ciceronem quia Greci communiter scribunt enthelechiam et proferunt cum t, et non cum d, ut proferunt athici. Et ipse fuit athicus. Sed hic non agimus de voce et probatione, sed de re ». Cf. Guillaume Budé', *De asse*, Sébastien Gryphe, Lyon 1515, p. viir-ixv; Luigi A. Sanchi, « Per la ricezione di Poliziano in Francia: spunti dall'opera erudita di Guillaume Bude », *Archivum Mentis*, 3 (2014 [2015]), p. 233–246: 239; Id., « Guillaume Budé et ses devanciers italiens: à propos des commentaires de la langue grecque », *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 65/3 (2003), p. 641–653.

81 Franciscus de Vitoria, *Super Primam Partem*, in Barcelona, Biblioteca de la Universitat de Barcelona, ms. 16-2-22, q. 75, art. 1: « Graeci accusant Ciceronem quod non recte interpretatur Aristotelem et merito accusant, inquit Budeus. Nam apud graecos (ait Argiropilus) sunt duo nomina, scilicet endelechia, quod significant actum, per t; sed endelechiam per d significant motionem continuam. Angelus Politianus defendit Ciceronem sed re vera non bene ».

82 Marenbon, p. 24: « Those wishing to make shallow period divisions in text-based disciplines look primarily to changes in textual traditions ».

naturally alludes to the rediscovery of the ancient and late-antique Greek philosophical corpus – such as Platonism, Skepticism, Aristotelian commentators, and Epicureanism – which was translated into Latin for the first time by the humanists discussed in the preceding section. Against this interpretation, Marenbon raises two critical objections intended to demonstrate its inadequacy:

1. Firstly, these newly available texts did not become integrated into university curricula (p. 25: « these newly available texts did not become part of the university Arts curriculum, where Aristotle remained supreme well on into the seventeenth century »).
2. Secondly, these texts allegedly failed to stimulate genuinely new intellectual perspectives, insofar as the philosophical contents in question were already substantially known within medieval scholasticism (p. 25: « Were these texts being introduced for the first time, in any case, and to what extent, within the strand of philosophers where they were used, did they open up new intellectual horizons? »).

In support of this second point, Marenbon briefly surveys a series of historical considerations. According to Marenbon, although scholastic philosophers did not possess the Platonic dialogues as a whole, the *Timaeus* nonetheless sufficed to inform them about Plato's philosophy in its broader outlines.[83] Elements of Plotinus's thought, moreover, were known through Augustine, while Proclus was accessible through Boethius and the Pseudo-Dionysius (p. 25). Stoicism, for its part, was thoroughly familiar to Peter Abelard;[84] Epicureanism was likewise already well known to Abelard; and Skepticism, finally, « received sophisticated discussion from the twelfth century onwards » (p. 26).

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Marenbon's arguments against the hypothesis of a change in textual tradition are of considerable interest, insofar as they invite a reassessment of textual transmission in light of its concrete effects. Thanks to the work of Marcia Colish, we know to what extent the Latin world, already before the sixth century, was familiar with Stoicism and influenced by it: indeed, the development of Stoicism in the Renaissance would not have been the same without the mediation of the

[83] Marenbon, p. 26: « thinkers made imaginative and wide-ranging use of it [*scil.* Plato's work], finding, for instance, and using in their discussions, the main details of the argument of the *Republic* from the opening of the *Timaeus* ».

[84] Marenbon, p. 25–26: « It is unlikely that any philosopher since ancient times until Spinoza had closer parallels with so many aspects of Stoic doctrine than Abelard ».

Latin Middle Ages.[85] At the same time, however, we must ask whether this fact is sufficient to downplay the innovations that characterized the study of Stoicism from the fifteenth century onward.[86] These innovations were not limited to the textual corpus, which now included the first Latin translation of Epictetus and of the Stoic dossiers by Diogenes Laertius. A more important innovation is the self-awareness of some intellectuals that they constituted a new school of thought, one that explicitly identified itself as (neo-)Stoic and produced works with the aim of distinguishing itself as such. In this sense, Justus Lipsius's *De constantia* (1584) represents a turning point in the medieval and early modern tradition of Stoicism: as John Sellars observes, with Lipsius « the fortunes of Stoicism changed dramatically ».[87]

The same approach may also be extended to all the case studies examined by Marenbon. As Henrik Lagerlund has clearly observed, the Middle Ages did not produce genuinely skeptical philosophers, with only a few exceptions (e.g. John of Salisbury, drawing on Cicero).[88] Even Nicholas of Autrecourt (1299–1369) was regarded as a skeptic only *secundum quid*, insofar as he did not conceive of himself as such (*simpliciter*) and was in fact developing an anti-skeptical epistemology.[89]

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[85] Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Brill, Leiden 1985 (Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, 34). See also Jacqueline Lagrée, *Juste Lipse et la restauration du stoïcisme : étude et traduction des traités stoïciens* De la constance, Manuel de philosophie stoïcienne, Physique des stoïciens *(extraits)*, Vrin, Paris 1994 (Philologie et Mercure); Gerard Verbeke, *The Presence of Stoicism in Medieval Thought*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 1983; Sten Ebbesen, « Where Were the Stoics in the Late Middle Ages? », in Steven K. Strange, Jack Zupko (eds.), *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 108–131.

[86] Cf. Kraye, « From Medieval to Early Modern Stoicism», p. 23: « [...] I hope I have been able to show that, despite many continuities, the disruption occasioned by the Renaissance recovery of Greek Stoic texts unknown in the Middle Ages gave rise to a new set of attitudes towards Stoicism and its different phases, with the late period considered to be, until the mid-seventeenth century, the school's philosophical highpoint ».

[87] John Sellars, « Stoicism in the Renaissance », in Marco Sgarbi (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*, Springer, Cham 2017, *sub voce*; Kraye, « From Medieval to Early Modern Stoicism», p. 12: « In any discussion of Stoicism's revival in the Renaissance, pride of place must be given to Justus Lipsius, who contributed more than any other scholar both to the recovery of ancient Stoic thought and to its restoration as a living philosophy adapted to the needs of contemporary Christians ».

[88] Henrik Lagerlund, « A History of Skepticism in the Middle Ages », in Id. (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism. The Missing Medieval Background*, Brill, Leiden 2010 (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, 103), p. 1–28: 10: « As will be evident from this book discussions of skepticism increase rapidly in medieval philosophy after the late thirteenth century, but even though this is the case there where not many skeptics in the Middle Ages ».

[89] Lagerlund, *A History of Skepticism*, p. 20; Christophe Grellard, « Nicholas of Autrecourt's Skepticism: The Ambivalence of Medieval Epistemology », in Lagerlund (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism*, p. 119–144; Johannes M.M.H. Thijssen, « The Quest for Certain Knowledge in the Fourteenth Century: Nicholas of Autrecourt against the Academics », in Juha Sihvola (ed.), *Ancient*

This circumstance further confirms the difficulty of speaking of a medieval skeptical tradition, as opposed to the presence of merely sporadic skeptical arguments.

The Middle Ages – already from the Patristic period – were undoubtedly familiar with skeptical doctrines, as synthesized by Cicero in the *Academica* and summarized by Augustine in the *Contra Academicos*. Marenbon rightly points to a Latin translation of Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, the circulation and impact of which, however, remain unknown – if indeed it had any impact at all. In any case, the absence of a direct textual tradition and of significant circulation helps to explain why scholastic philosophy does not exhibit a properly skeptical 'school', *i.e.* a group of philosophers who recognized themselves as skeptic, and methodically adopted a skeptical approach in order to weaken other systematic thoughts. At most, scholastics used skeptical arguments, which were largely derived from Cicero and Augustine. By contrast, the Renaissance is marked by two salient features in this respect: (1) the availability of new information through indirect transmission, especially via Diogenes Laertius; and (2) the emergence of a group of philosophers who explicitly self-identified with Skepticism.[90] The first of these was Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533), in the *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* (1520)[91], followed by Francisco Sanches's work *Quod nihil scitur* (1581), as well as by Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592)[92], and Pierre Charron (1541–1603).[93] These latter figures benefited directly from Henri Estienne's 1562 edition of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, which expounded the skeptical corpus with a direct source.[94] They can be regarded as a genuinely skeptical tradition *simpliciter*, insofar as they acted with full awareness to critique and dismantle ancient or scholastic systems of thought (first, Aristotelianism).

Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition, Societas Philosophica Fennica, Helsinki 2000 (Acta Philosophica Fennica, 66), p. 199-223.

90 On this point see Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism, from Erasmus to Spinoza*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979.

91 On Pico see the excellent work by Gian Mario Cao, *Scepticism and orthodoxy: Gianfrancesco Pico as a reader of Sextus Empiricus; with a Facing Text of Pico's Quotations from Sextus*, Fabrizio Serra Editore, Pisa 2007 (Bruniana and Campanelliana. Ricerche filosofiche e materiali storico-testuali, 22.3).

92 See at least Ann Hartle, « Montaigne and Scepticism », in Ullrich Langer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005 (The Cambridge Companions to Philosophy and Religion), p. 183–206.

93 On Charron see José R. Maia Neto, *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-Century French Philosophy: The Charronian Legacy 1601–1662*, Springer, Cham 2014 (International Archives of the History of Ideas / Archives internationales d'histoire des idées, 215).

94 Luciano Floridi, « The Diffusion of Sextus Empiricus's Works in the Renaissance », *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56/1 (1995), p. 63–85; Jose R. Maia Neto, Gianni Paganini, John C. Laursen (eds.), *Skepticism In the Modern Age. Building on the Work of Richard Popkin*, Brill, Leiden 2009 (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 181).

Another domain in which humanism appears to have concretely stimulated the emergence of new horizons of philosophical debate is Epicureanism. That Epicurean doctrines had been circulating since at least the twelfth century is now well established, thanks above all to the seminal work of Aurélien Robert – whom, surprisingly, Marenbon never mentions on this issue.[95] This however is not the point. The real point is to acknowledge that humanism after Bracciolini provided a new impetus to the study of Epicureanism, in terms of intensity.[96] With Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457), we witness a genuine challenge to Aristotelian ethics, supplanted by a new theory of pleasure. This undertaking was pursued in a systematic manner through three foundational works of Renaissance thought: *De voluptate* (1431), *De vero falsoque bono* (1433), and the *Dialecticae Disputationes* (1449–1457).[97]

Raphael Ebgi has shown the extent to which the young Marsilio Ficino was connected to these doctrines, to the point of attributing to him a true 'philosophy of pleasure'.[98] The construction of this new philosophical perspective is commonly associated with several factors: the rediscovery of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* in 1417; Traversari's Latin translation of Diogenes Laertius's *Vita Epicuri* in 1433; and, above all, Rinuccio Aretino's Latin translation of a dossier of Greek letters on the madness of Democritus, derived from a manuscript from Piacenza.[99] The development of these debates on Epicureanism – whether in support of or in opposition to it – constitutes a distinctive feature of fifteenth-century philosophy, owing to the systematic manner in which the discussion was conducted and to the availability of a broader range of both direct and indirect sources. Investigating into this new context – which depended on a new textual basis! – will allow the reader to understand how much the circulation of Epicurean philosophy developed from twelfth to fifteenth century. The ability to distinguish the original

95 Aurelien Robert, *Épicure aux enfers. Héresie, athéisme et hédonisme au Moyen Âge*, Fayard, Paris 2021 (Fayard Histoire).

96 See, on this point, Alison Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2010 (I Tatti studies in Italian Renaissance history, 2).

97 Lodi Nauta, « The Price of Reduction: Problems in Valla's Epicurean Fideism », in Sabrina Ebbersmeyer, Eckhard Kessler (eds.), *Ethik – Wissenschaft oder Lebenskunst? Modelle der Normenbegründung von der Antike bis zur Frühen Neuzeit*, LIT Verlag, Berlin 2007 (Pluralisierung & Autorität, 8), p. 173–195; Maristella De Panizza Lorch, « The Epicurean in Lorenzo Valla's *On Pleasure* », in Margaret J. Osler, (ed). *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991, p. 89–114.

98 Raphael Ebgi, *Voluptas. La filosofia del piacere nel giovane Marsilio Ficino (1457–1469)*, Edizioni della Normale, Pisa 2019 (Clavis, 7).

99 Sebastiano Gentile, « Ficino, Epicuro e Lucrezio », in James Hankins, Fabrizio Meroi (eds.), *The Rebirth of Platonic Theology*, Firenze, Olschki 2013 (Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento. Atti di convegni, 27), p. 119–136. On Aretino's translation see Dean P. Lockwood, « De Rinucio Aretino Graecarum Litterarum Interprete », *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 24 (1913), p. 51–109: 89–93.

views of Plato, Aristotle, or Sextus Empiricus, from the expositions offered by Calcidius, Averroes, or Cicero, constituted one of the most characteristic preoccupations of philosophers engaged in commentary from the fifteenth century onward.

I would like, finally, to dwell on the circulation of the thought of Plato and the Neoplatonic philosophers, above all Plotinus. That the Middle Ages as a whole – not merely the scholastic tradition – were acquainted with Platonic thought is a self-evident fact. Indeed, if one were to apply Marenbon's criterion of 'indirect sources', one might even argue that Aristotle's *Metaphysica* alone was sufficient to mediate the circulation of a wide range of Platonic doctrines. The problem, however, lies in attributing the transmission of Plato exclusively to the *Timaeus* (and its associated commentary), or that of Plotinus solely to Augustine. Such an approach, indeed, entirely bypasses the crucial distinction between direct and indirect sources. This distinction may well appear superfluous from a modern analytic perspective. Yet, if we wish to understand what actually took place in the fifteenth-century *Studia* across Europe, it becomes indispensable. The 'new' – and often almost obsessive – engagement with primary texts in original languages constitutes the keystone for understanding the philosophy of the fifteenth century.

Marenbon makes a problematic claim, when he says that « [...] the fact that from the fifteenth century people could read a range of Plato's own dialogues made much less difference than it might have done, because usually the overall frame of interpretation was still that of Plotinus and later Platonism ».[100] Since the 1970s, John Monfasani has been studying and editing the texts and figures involved in an intellectual debate known as the 'Plato-Aristotle Controversy', which originated at a specific place and time: in Mistra, with Gemistos Plethon (1355–1452). Through the Council of Ferrara-Florence, the controversy was transmitted to Italy, where it generated one of the most significant philosophical debates of the following 150 years. Intellectuals from across Europe and the Byzantine world took part in it, including figures such as Nicholas of Cusa from the German lands; Byzantine scholars like George of Trebizond, Theodorus Gaza, and Bessarion; and Iberian humanists such as Alfonso de Palencia.[101]

[100] MARENBON, p. 26.

[101] On this point see JOHN MONFASANI, « Cardinal Bessarion's Greek and Latin Sources in the Plato-Aristotle Controversy of the 15th Century and Nicholas of Cusa's Relation to the Controversy », in ANDREAS SPEER, PHILIPP STEINKRÜGER (ed.), *Knotenpunkt Byzanz Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen*, Berlin, De Gruyter 2012 (Miscellanea Mediaevalia, 36), p. 469–480; ID., « Marsilio Ficino and the Plato-Aristotle Controversy », in MICHAEL J. ALLEN, VALERY REES (eds.), *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, Brill, Leiden 2002 (Brill's studies in Intellectual History, 108), p. 179–202; ID., « Aristotle as the Scribe of Nature: The Frontispiece of Vat. Lat. 2094 and the Plato-Aristotle Controversy of the Fifteenth Century », *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 69 (2006), p. 193–205; ID., « The Humanists and the Plato-Aristotle

From the Controversy there emerged in Florence a famous debate concerning the primacy of the One over Being, involving Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (*De ente et uno*, 1491), Marsilio Ficino (*In Parmenidem*, 1494), Francesco Cattani da Diacceto (*De pulchro*, 1499), and, later on, Gasparo Contarini (*Compendium primae philosophiae*, 1527).[102] These thinkers disagreed sharply over the priority of the One with respect to Being, at times emphasizing a Proclean, hypostatic exegesis, at others a Porphyrian one, and ultimately finding themselves in profound disagreement over Plato's own *ratio*.[103] Consequently, it seems difficult to reduce the circulation of Platonic thought in the Renaissance to a merely derivative or uncritical exposition of late Platonism, as this was far from homogeneous.

Another pivotal point to consider is that – contrary to Marenbon's assertion[104] – the Controversy did in fact have significant implications for the university milieu. It involved numerous intellectuals across Italy, many of whom were humanists holding teaching positions, with the case of Theodorus Gaza at Ferrara being perhaps the most emblematic. Simone Fellina, Maude Vanhaelen, and Eva del Soldato have recently shown the extent to which, in the sixteenth century, the contraposition between Plato with Aristotle – sometimes even of replacing the latter with the former – was actively debated in university teaching.[105] That such

Controversy of the Fifteenth Century », in Chiara Continisio, Marcello Fantoni (eds.), *Testi e contesti per Amedeo Quondam*, Bulzoni, Roma 2016 (Biblioteca del Cinquecento, 158), p. 79–94.

[102] Giuseppe Martano, « Il *Parmenide* e il *Sofista* in un'interpretazione teologica di Pico della Mirandola », in *Studi Pichiani. Atti e memorie del Convegno di Studi Pichiani per il V Centenario della nascita di G. Pico della Mirandola (Modena – Mirandola, 25-26 maggio 1963)*, Aedes Muratoriana, Modena 1965, p. 119–125; Silvia Magnavacca, « El *De Ente et Uno*: una ontologia augustiniana », *Patristica et Medievalia*, 11 (1990), p. 3–26; Stephan Toussaint, « Humanisme et vérité », in Id., *L'esprit du Quattrocento. Le* De Ente et Uno *de Pic de la Mirandole*, Honoré Champion, Paris 1995 (Constance de la philosophie, 1), p. 9–124; Francesca Lazzarin, « Introduzione », in Marsilio Ficino, *Commento al* «Parmenide» *di Platone*, ed. Francesca Lazzarin, Olschki, Firenze 2012 (Immagini della ragione, 15), p. vii-clxx: lxxxix-ci; Raphael Ebgi, « Il *De ente et uno*: fiore raro dell'Umanesimo italiano », in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Dell'Ente e dell'Uno*, ed. Raphael Ebgi, Franco Bacchelli, Bompiani, Milano 2010/11 (Bompiani Testi a fronte, 133), p. 43-157; Luca Burzelli, « '*Unum indivisum*'. Il problema dell'uno da Pico a Contarini », in Gianluca Garelli, Anna Rodolfi (eds.), *Fructibus construere folia. Omaggio a Vittoria Perrone Compagni*, Società Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze 2020 (Biblioteca Palazzeschi, 19), p. 161–175; Christopher Celenza, « Francesco Cattani da Diacceto's '*De pulchro*', II.4, and the Practice of Renaissance Platonism », *Accademia*, 9 (2007), p. 87–98.

[103] On the porphyrian interpretation, see Riccardo Chiaradonna, « Nota su partecipazione e atto d'essere nel neoplatonismo: l'anonimo *Commento al Parmenide* », *Studia graeco-arabica*, 2 (2012), p. 87–97. On the circulation of these two platonic lines in the Renaissance, see Luca Burzelli, « Uno-Essere-Molteplice », in Michele Ciliberto (ed.), *L'età nuova. Umanesimo e Rinascimento,* 4 vols., Edizioni della Normale, Pisa 2025, vol. III, p. 901–912.

[104] Marenbon, p. 25: « these newly available texts did not become part of the university Arts curriculum ».

[105] Simone Fellina, *Platone Allo Studium Fiorentino-Pisano (1576–1635). L'insegnamento Di Francesco De' Vieri, Jacopo Mazzoni, Carlo Tomasi, Cosimo Boscagli, Girolamo Bardi*, Scripta, Verona 2019 (Bonae

reforms did not always occur at the institutional level is not sufficient, *ipso facto*, to conclude that there was no debate concerning the relative priority of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle in the universities.

Moreover, it can be documented that traditional academic professors, while remaining committed to their task of commenting on the Aristotelian corpus, increasingly incorporated Platonic doctrines and questions that had recently become available in Latin translation and were widely circulating. In his commentary on *De generatione et corruptione* (1521–1523), the 'hyper-Aristotelian' Pietro Pomponazzi felt compelled to devote nearly two full lectures (part of *lectio* 35 and the entirety of *lectio* 36) to discussing the doctrine of Porphyry, Plotinus, and Marsilio Ficino, as presented in Book VII of the *Theologia Platonica*, concerning the indivisibility of the human soul. I have compared it with commentaries by Richard Rufus, Albert the Great, Aquinas, or Buridan: beyond standard references to the doctrine of the elements in the *Timaeus*, I found nothing analogous. By contrast, similar discussions do appear in Ludovico Boccadiferro,[106] and more generally in the commentaries of Agostino Nifo.

II.5. Identity and Difference of Renaissance Philosophy

At this point, a reader might legitimately ask whether a distinct essence existed for Renaissance philosophical thought – and, if so, what that essence might have been. In this respect, I find it entirely appropriate to acknowledge the extent to which both Medieval and Renaissance philosophy were engaged in the analysis of ancient thought, thereby challenging older periodizations that were excessively compartmentalizing. At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that there were moments of quantitative and qualitative transformation in the academic sphere, in which the material availability and accessibility of texts fostered new approaches and perspectives of reflection, teaching, and publishing.[107]

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artes. Fondazione Centro studi Leon Battista Alberti, 5); Eva Del Soldato, Maude Vanhaelen (eds.), *Teaching Plato in Italian Renaissance universities*, Brepols, Turnhout 2024 (Studia Artistarum, 51).

[106] Ludovicus Buccaferreus, *In duos libros Aristotelis De generatione et corruptione*, apud Franciscum de Franciscis, Venetiis 1571, fol. 72b. As Bianchi, *Studi sull'Aristotelismo nel Rinascimento*, p. 127–128, suggested, Boccadiferro lies at the border between 'scholastic aristotelianism' and 'humanistic aristotelianism' exactly for his interest in Platonic doctrines, and for his expertise in Greek commentators like Olympiodorus, Simplicius, Themistius and Philoponus. See also Eugenio Garin, *Umanisti, artisti, scienziati: studi sul Rinascimento italiano*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1989 (Nuova biblioteca di cultura, 301), p. 143.

[107] This objection is already underlined by Bianchi, « Un lungo medioevo? », p. 404: « È comunque difficile sottrarsi all'impressione che egli sottolinei più del dovuto alcune costanti, alcune permanenze, e sottovaluti invece delle discontinuità che è impossibile considerare superficiali ». In this respect, a good comprehensive approach is adopted by Monfasani, « The Renaissance as the Concluding Phase of the Middle Ages », p. 175–177, who underlines both the elements of

On this point, one should ask themselves to what extent the transformation in question is *enough* to determine a change: how deeply has the intellectual landscape changed from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century? Marenbon would say that the change was limited; by contrast, others would argue that the change was profound.[108] I support this second interpretation. In my view, the impact of fifteenth-century humanism on the teaching of philosophy was decisive, insofar as it introduced new texts and new methods, all of which can be well documented. Pedagogical practices were no longer the same, and professors were fully aware of this shift: all the cases examined thus far conform to this framework. As Matthew Gaetano clearly emphasizes (in Edelheit's volume, p. 198–199), a mid-fifteenth-century professor such as Girolamo Vielmi openly defined himself as distinct from – and superior to – his scholastic predecessors like Aquinas precisely because he knew Greek. In this respect, the teaching method was understood by Renaissance professors as an essential criterion of distinction.

The invention of printing further intensified this transformation, as professors and humanists were increasingly required to assume the role of editors of Latin, Greek, Jewish, and Arabic texts – a task they had never previously been required to perform.[109] In addition, the establishment of institutes devoted to linguistic comparison (Greek, Latin, and Hebrew) during the Renaissance constitutes the clearest evidence of this transformation at the institutional level within the faculties of Arts. One might object that William of Moerbeke already represented a proto-humanist figure in the thirteenth century, and I would agree on this characterization; but this is true only *accidentaliter*. Moerbeke is neither qualitatively nor quantitatively comparable to figures such as Lorenzo Valla or Theodore Gaza, whether in terms of the number of manuscripts used and translated, or (above all) with respect to his general approach, as he never adopted a systematic philological criterion (e.g., through *collatio*, *emendatio*, *conjecturae*...) in order to comment. By contrast, these two parameters constitute the cornerstone of philosophical practices in the fifteenth century.

continuity and the unquestionable self-perception of Italian Renaissance intellectuals (and, later, of the seventeenth-century French ones) to embody a different tradition.

[108] A point similar to mine is presented also by James Hankins, « Humanism, Scholasticism, and Renaissance philosophy », in Id. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007 (Cambridge Companions to Philosophy), p. 30–48: 46: « The humanist movement greatly enriched the study of philosophy in the Renaissance as it did in many other aspects of European culture ». On the other side, I would not say, like Hankins, that humanism did not produce great philosophers, nor would I consider Machiavelli and Montaigne simply as '*provocateurs*'.

[109] On this topic, see Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2012; Eugene F. Rice – Anthony Grafton, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe, 1460–1559*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York – London 1994², p. 1–10; Kristeller, « The Impact of Early Italian Humanism », p. 71; Reynolds, Wilson, *Copisti e filologi*, p. 140–144.

One might further object that such 'textual' changes within the universities are not sufficiently conspicuous to warrant speaking of an epochal transformation. This objection, however, disregards the broader context beyond the university. On this point, I wish to be very clear. Up to this stage, I have deliberately confined my discussion to philosophy *within* the universities, in order to remain on the same analytical ground as Marenbon. The crucial point is that, when we deal with fifteenth and sixteenth century, we cannot abstract from what was occurring outside the universities. Those broad cultural developments, in fact, decisively shaped the identity of an entire epoch. Beyond the academic sphere, it is worth recalling that the impact of new texts and intellectual figures was registered across the cultural landscape of two centuries, shaping their artistic-literary expressions, political thought, and natural knowledge. The intellectual humanistic world as a whole – not merely the universities – was transformed by renewed contact with antiquity, now made accessible through Latin translation. Figures such as Lorenzo Valla, Leonardo Bruni, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Michel de Montaigne, cannot be dismissed or marginalized simply because they did not hold university teaching positions.[110] They all brought about a profound transformation within their respective disciplines: political thought after Machiavelli – an avid reader of Lucretius – was no longer the same; Valla is rightly counted among the founders of textual criticism; and Montaigne – another reader of Lucretius – was the first to break with the anthropocentric and Eurocentric perspective that had long shaped philosophical reflection.[111]

The contribution of these and many other intellectuals to the essence of their time (and arguably of our own) is far more significant than what Marenbon's stringent criteria would allow. They demonstrate that the change was a broader process, which occurred both within and beyond the universities. The society as a whole, beginning with the civic magistracies, was affected by the impact of the development of humanism, a phenomenon unprecedented in its intensity when compared to the scholastic Middle Ages. Anyone who might object that Alcuin had already developed a comparable pedagogical model would have to confront a crucial fact: the *Schola Palatina* was little more than a cenacle of a few individuals,

[110] In this respect, we cannot underestimate the impact of some fundamental works which shaped the political and naturalistic debate of the century. Leonardo Bruni translated Arisotle's *Politica* and *Ethica ad Nichomacum*, which served as fundamental text for the entire 15th century political milieu. Concerning the natural philosophy, one should not forget the impact of Jacopo da San Cassiano's translation of Archimedes's corpus. See Paolo d'Alessandro, Pier Daniele Napolitani, *Archimede Latino. Iacopo da San Cassiano e il corpus archimedeo alla metà del Quattrocento*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2012 (Sciences et savoirs, 1); Stefano Pagliaroli, *Iacopo Cassiano e l'Arenario di Archimede,* Centro interdipartimentale di studi umanistici, Messina 2012 (Percorsi dei classici, 20).

[111] Cf. Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, ch. 1; Nicola Panichi, « Montaigne lettore di Lucrezio. Le postille al *De rerum natura* », *Philosophia*, 2 (2018), p. 29–59.

whereas in the fifteenth century we witness a vast expansion of humanistic practices that reshaped the educational and political institutions of the time.

Focusing on the academia, in the fifteenth century, thanks to the interaction between humanists and university professors, there was a qualitative leap in both the knowledge of and reflection on a substantial portion of ancient thought – areas that, in the Scholastic Middle Ages, except for occasional flourishing, had not received systematic attention.[112] Renaissance professors across Europe understood that they could no longer confine themselves to commenting on *Aristoteles* and the *Averroes Latinus*, but were required to engage – both in their teaching and in their writings – with late-antique doxography (with figures such as Themistius, Simplicius, and Philoponus), which appeared to offer the most innovative and reliable sources for reconstructing the *ratio Aristotelis*.[113] Many professors made strategic use of the printing systems in order to fix this new doxography in written form: one may think of the extensive commentaries produced by Nifo and Boccadiferro, or of Marcantonio Zimara's ingenious project of creating a comparative *tabula* of the entire Aristotelian corpus. Finally, university philosophy came also to recognize that Aristotle did not always appear reliable and that his authority had to be questioned in light of new empirical evidence. For example, the geographical explorations of the late fifteenth century marked a turning point in the exegesis of the *Meteorologica* and helped to expose the fallibility of Aristotelian thought.[114]

If we seek an emblem of this new phase in the university teaching of philosophy, we should not look to figures such as Gabriel Biel or John Mair (as Marenbon does), but rather to Johannes Eck (1486–1543).[115] Eck was trained under

[112] In this respect I must disagree with Eugenio Garin, *L'umanesimo Italiano*, Roma – Bari, Laterza 1994, p. 18: « Il tema del 'ritorno a Platone' richiama qui un Vecchio e sempre nuovo equivoco, e cioè l'idea che l'umanesimo sia stato determinato e caratterizzato dalla conoscenza di nuovi testi classici prima ignorati; la lettura di Cicerone, di Lucrezio e di Seneca, di Platone e di Plotino avrebbe rinnovato la cultura; un aumento quantitativo di letture classiche si sarebbe trasformato in un salto qualitativo ». This observation by Garin seems to bypass entirely the problem of the relationship between humanistic culture and the scholastic philosophical tradition – and, indeed, Garin's overall approach to humanism is mostly tied to extra-academic figures (Salutati, Bracciolini, Alberti).

[113] See, for instance, Bianchi, *Studi sull'Aristotelismo nel Rinascimento*, p. 127–128, on Boccadiferro and Simplicius.

[114] On this point see Craig Martin, « Experience of the New World and Aristotelian Revisions of the Earth's Climates during the Renaissance », *History of Meteorology*, 3 (2006), p. 1–16; Reijer Hooykaas, *Humanism and the Voyages of Discovery in 16th-century Portuguese Science and Letters*, Noord-Hollandsche U. M., Amsterdam 1979 (Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van wetenschapen, AFD. Letterkunde, 42/4).

[115] Max Ziegelbauer, *Johannes Eck, Mann der Kirche im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung*, EOS-Verlag, Sanct Ottilien 1987; Erwin Iserloh, *Johannes Eck (1486–1543): Scholastiker, Humanist, Kontroverstheologe*, Aschendorff-Verlag, Münster 1981 (Katholisches Leben und Kirchenreform im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung, 41).

German humanists; then he became professor of theology and philosophy at Ingolstadt. He translated the Bible into Latin, and edited a commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* (1520) where he gathered an elephantine apparatus of references to late-antique Greek commentators. Eck truly embodies the connection of the humanistic milieu with scholastic philosophy, and the development of new editorial strategies for the production of innovative scholarly works. Anyone inclined to doubt this need only consider whom the Roman Curia dispatched to debate with the Lutherans: not a scholastic professor from Leuven or Paris, but Eck and Aleandro. The main theological controversy of the sixteenth century was lead by philologists (Eck, Aleandro, Melanchthon, Erasmus).

To overlook these differences in content and method is to flatten the processes of knowledge transfer across these two centuries, reducing them to an undifferentiated flow of mere Aristotelian or Platonic commentaries. We do no great service to medieval philosophical thought if we reduce it to Hegel's 'dark night'. After all, one may say that, *mutatis mutandis*, even Augustine articulated a form of the '*cogito*' as early as the fifth century AC; yet this does not lead us to regard Augustine as the father of modern rationalism.

II.6. Questioning the Periodization of the Long Middle Ages

I confess that, personally, I am not particularly fond of periodizations in general:[116] for instance, labelling Pomponazzi as an 'Averroist', a 'Renaissance' thinker, or a 'scholastic' one contributes very little to understanding the substance of his thought if such labels are not accompanied by appropriate criteria – criteria that are textual, doxographical, or thematic in nature. Nevertheless, the ability to delimit the scope of one's investigation remains a crucial operation, allowing one to navigate the material and account for it with precision.

Marenbon's proposal of a 'Long Middle Ages' is particularly interesting, insofar as this appears coherent at least in one respect: namely, the corpus of texts on which these fifteen centuries of history focused.[117] Yet, one might raise some perplexities regarding the definition of the beginning and end of this long – indeed, very long – period. Marenbon situates the beginning of the Long Middle Ages with the interventions of Plotinus (d. 270) and Porphyry (d. 305 c.), who supposedly established the Aristotelian corpus as the curriculum of the schools (p. 18). In fact, if by '*curriculum*' we mean a study program consciously designed for students and sanctioned at any institutional level, the incorporation of Aristotle

[116] The same 'confession' seems to be shared by KRISTELLER, « The Impact of Early Italian Humanism », p. 67.

[117] It seems almost superfluous to note that the notion of a 'Long Middle Ages' originates with JACQUES LE GOFF, *Un long Moyen Âge*, Fayard, Paris 2004. However, Le Goff develops this idea according to criteria entirely different from those adopted by Marenbon: rather than engaging with the textual corpus of philosophy, he focuses instead on social relations in a broader sense.

only occurred with Iamblichus (250–330).[118] Plotinus was undoubtedly influenced by Aristotle, as Riccardo Chiaradonna has shown – whom Marenbon does not cite on this decisive point.[119] However, within the Plotinian circle, Aristotle's presence had not yet assumed institutional dimensions. This consideration would at least require postponing the beginning of the Long Middle Ages by nearly a century, perhaps to the foundation of the School of Apamea in 304 AC.

Yet this possibility also encounters difficulties. Iamblichus may have established the exegesis of the Aristotelian text within his own school, but he was certainly not the first, nor did he intervene in other schools. Commentary on Aristotelian texts had been a well-established practice in the Peripatetic School for centuries. Philosophers such as Aspasius (100–150 c.), Herminus (fl. second century), and Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. second to third centuries) all lived before Plotinus;[120] and yet, technically, they should also fall within Marenbon's definition of the Long Middle Ages, as through their commentaries they « acted as main instruments for transmitting the ancient tradition » (p. 18). Hence, if one wishes to adhere strictly to Marenbon's criteria, the beginning of the Long Middle Ages should be backdated by at least a century – that is, to the beginning of the 2nd century CE. Some might even – rightly – propose an even earlier starting point, including figures such as Nicolaus of Damascus (64 BC – 4 AC) or, why not, Boethus of Sidon (75–10 c.).[121] This, of course, would mean to start Medieval philosophy before Christ: can we really accept this?

Regarding the end of the 'Long Middle Ages', Marenbon designates Leibniz (1646–1716) as the terminus, on the grounds that by his time Aristotelian teaching had ceased to be the bread and butter of university curricula. For the sake of brevity, I will leave aside the fact that standard Aristotelian curricula are well

[118] On this point one must consider the fundamental work by Dominic J. O'Meara, « The Curriculum », in Id., *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Clarendon press, Oxford 2005, p. 61–68. See also Adrian Lecerf, « Iamblichus and Julian's 'Third Demiurge': A Proposition », in Eugene Afonasin, John Dillon, John F. Finamore (eds.), *Iamblichus and the Foundations of Late Platonism*, Brill, Leiden 2012 (Ancient Mediterranean and Medieval Texts and Contexts. Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition, 13), p. 177–202; Marie-Odile Goulet-Caze, « L'Arrière-plan scolaire de la *Vie de Plotin* », in Porphyre, *La vie de Plotin*, 2 vols., ed. Jean Pepin, Luc Brisson, Vrin, Paris 1982–1992, p. 231–327; Riccardo Chiaradonna, *Porphyry and the Aristotelian Tradition*, in Andrea Falcon (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden 2016 (Brill's Companions to Classical Reception, 7), p. 319–340.

[119] Riccardo Chiaradonna, *Sostanza, Movimento, Analogia. Plotino critico di Aristotele*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2002 (Elenchos, 37).

[120] See on this point Inna Kupreeva, « Aristotelianism in the Second Century AD: Before Alexander of Aphrodisias », in Falcon (ed.), *Brill's Companion*, p. 138–159; and Cristina Cerami, « Alexander of Aphrodisias », ibid., p. 160–179.

[121] See also Myrto Hatzimichali, « Andronicus of Rhodes and the Construction of the Aristotelian Corpus », in Falcon (ed.), *Brill's Companion*, p. 77–100; and Andrea Falcon, « Aristotelianism in the First Century BC », p. 101-119.

documented in South American colonies as late as the end of the eighteenth century, both in Chile and Colombia.[122] However, these cases would raise the issue of a global perspective, which is systematically neglected in Marenbon's account.[123] If we focus on the European continent, however, it is clear that Aristotelian philosophy, while remaining a subject of academic study, encountered an unprecedented crisis from the third quarter of the sixteenth century onward. Bernardino Telesio (1509–1588) provides perhaps the clearest indication of this decline, together with the waning of Aristotelian hylomorphism.[124]

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries seem to fit 'with difficulty' into Marenbon's periodization. From the fifteenth century onward, while still adhering to a traditional curriculum, teachers came to realize that they could no longer comment on Aristotelian texts in the same manner as their fourteenth-century predecessors. As Olga Weijers highlighted, even the traditional style of the *quaestio* changed across the decades, from the mid-fourteenth century.[125] New philological tools and new exegetical corpora were now beginning to reshape the practice of commentary: we should not forget that now students in the classes often new the Greek. Textual exegesis began to be systematically accompanied by textual criticism, and new academic roles were institutionalized to support the teaching of theology and philosophy alongside the study of languages. Just as the universities of the thirteenth century incorporated the Aristotelian–Averroist corpus, from the fifteenth century onward the entire landscape of academic philosophy responded to the rediscovery of ancient thought, placing it in dialogue with Aristotelianism.

Also seventeenth-century French universities were marked by a conflict between Aristotelian traditionalism and emerging philosophies, foremost among them that of Descartes.[126] Extending the Long Middle Ages into the eighteenth

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[122] See at least Walter B. Redmond, *Bibliography of Philosophy in the Iberian Colonies of America*, M. Nijhoff, The Hague 1972 (International Archives of the History of Ideas – Archives internationales d'histoire des idées, 51); Celina Anna Lértora Mendoza, *Fuentes para el Estudio de las Ciencias Exactas en Colombia*, Academia Colombiana de Ciencias Exactas, Físicas y Naturales, Bogotá 1995 (Colección Enrique Pérez Arbeláez, 9); Roberto Hofmeister Pich, Alfredo Santiago Culleton, « Scholastica colonialis », *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale*, 52 (2010), p. 25–45.

[123] See, for instance, Enrique Villalba Pérez, *Consecuencias Educativas De La Expulsión De Los Jesuitas De América*, Universidad Carlos III, Madrid 2003 (Biblioteca del Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 8), p. 115.

[124] See the excellent essays contained in Pietro Daniel Omodeo (ed.), *Bernardino Telesio and the Natural Sciences in the Renaissance*, Brill, Leiden 2019 (Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy and Science, 29).

[125] Olga Weijers, « The Development of the Disputation Between the Middle Ages and Renaissance», in Hamesse, Burnett, Meirinhos (eds.), *Continuities and Disruptions*, p. 139–150.

[126] See the recent and fundamental book by Mattia Mantovani, Davide Cellamare (eds.), *Descartes in the Classroom. Teaching Cartesian Philosophy in the Early Modern Age*, Brill, Leiden 2023 (Medieval and

century, according to Marenbon's criteria, creates a significant exegetical problem in interpreting both Rationalism and the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century, as both movements conceived themselves as openly anti-Aristotelian.

These aporias, both *ex parte ante* and *ex parte post*, reveal certain ambiguities within Marenbon's category of the Long Middle Ages. Uncertainty regarding its decisive starting point – particularly with respect to the notion of a 'curriculum' – as well as its end point, makes it impossible to establish true homogeneity[127] across these fifteen centuries of intellectual history, which are so diverse in terms of geographical context (from Paris to Baghdad), religious practices and institutions (from Zoroastrianism to the Spanish Inquisition), and style (from Augustine's *Confessiones* to Averroes's *De theriaca*).

The concept of 'Medieval philosophy' (as much as 'Long Middle Ages') appears to be a blanket term, running from Aristotle's Lyceum to the foundation of the Yale University (1701). One might easily replace it instead with more precise subdivisions, such as 'Patristics', 'Islamic Philosophy', 'Jewish Philosophy', 'Byzantine Philosophy', 'Scholastic Philosophy'.[128] These labels offer a more fine-grained understanding of the context we are talking about. By contrast, if I were to discover tomorrow the works of the previously unknown master *Lucas de Mantua* (my own invention), the scholarly community would understand very little from my describing him as 'a medieval philosopher' as this, according to Marenbon, would mean everything from Proclus to Leibniz. One might even say that the category we ought truly to dispense with is the so-called 'Medieval Philosophy' – which, by the way, is the greatest invention of Renaissance philosophers![129]

Early Modern Philosophy and Science, 35). See also Monfasani, « The Renaissance as the Concluding Phase of the Middle Ages », p. 177.

127 See Bianchi, « Un lungo medioevo? », p. 402, who accuses Marenbon to have just expanded the Middle Ages without discussing its essence. For his part, John Marenbon, « The Long Middle Ages in Philosophy: A Justification », *Thémata. Revista de Filosofía*, 70 (2024), p. 13–40, replies that Bianchi has misunderstood his aim, that is « to designate an area that it is useful to look at together, in a single book or course or conference ».

128 Cf. Bianchi, « Un lungo medioevo? », p. 410–411: « Per quanto riguarda, in particolare, il concetto di Medioevo, non sono così sprovveduto da immaginare che riusciremo a liberarcene ma possiamo provare a sottrarci progressivamente alla sua influenza adottando scansioni temporali alternative che, come quella da me suggerita, siano più attente alle maggiori trasformazioni di metodo, forme, fonti e contenuti che la ricerca filosofica ha conosciuto ».

129 On this point see the fundamental book by Andreas Speer, *1000 Jahre Philosophie. Ein anderer Blick auf die Philosophie des 'Mittelalters'*, Brill, Leiden 2023. On the creation of the concept of *aetas media* by Biondo Flavio, see Giuseppe Sergi, *L'idea di Medioevo. Fra storia e senso commune*, Donzelli, Roma 1998 (Virgolette, 9).

It is regrettable to learn from Marenbon that within the Faculty of Philosophy at Cambridge the name of Pietro Pomponazzi is unknown,[130] and, with him, the Renaissance as a whole. This is all the more regrettable (if it is true), when one considers the University of Cambridge's long-standing historical connection with the Italian Renaissance, dating back to figures such as Henry More (1616–1687)[131] and, more recently, Quentin Skinner (1940–), who brilliantly engaged with the philosophical culture of the Medieval, Renaissance, and Early Modern periods (I am thinking of *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, edited together with Charles Schmitt). Nevertheless, this oblivion has little to do with the nature or periodization of Pomponazzi's thought as such, or with Renaissance philosophy more broadly. Rather, it reflects a matter of individual choices.

III. *Conclusions*

John Marenbon's chapter offers a significant opportunity for scholars of medieval and Renaissance philosophy, and the author deserves full credit for this. Marenbon challenges researchers to confront the limitations of simplistic reconstructions or superficial syntheses, highlighting ambiguous boundaries, margins, and misunderstood or poorly documented traditions. It is therefore worthwhile to return to his guiding research question and attempt an answer: *what allows us to distinguish Renaissance philosophy from medieval scholastic philosophy*?

As we have seen throughout these pages, three factors shaped not only the broader humanistic culture, but also the very teaching of academic philosophy, from the fifteenth century onward:

1. the ever-increasing availability of manuscripts containing previously unknown or inaccessible texts;[132]

[130] Marenbon, p. 32, fn. 53: « But my most striking evidence is completely anecdotal: when I proposed setting a text by Pomponazzi, no one in the Cambridge Philosophy Faculty (to whom figures such as Anselm, Avicenna, Maimonides, Ockham were familiar, at least by name) had heard of him! ».

[131] See on this point, at least Cecilia Muratori, Gianni Paganini (eds.), *Early Modern Philosophers and the Renaissance Legacy*, Springer, Cham 2016 (International Archives of the History of Ideas / Archives internationales d'histoire des idées, 2020); Sarah Hutton, « Henry More, Ficino and Plotinus: The Continuity of Renaissance Platonism », in Luisa Simonutti (ed.), *Forme Del Neoplatonismo*, Olschki, Firenze 2017 (Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento. Atti di convegni, 25), p. 281–296; Sears Jayne, « Ficino and the Platonism of the English Renaissance », *Comparative Literature*, 4 (1952), p. 214–238; David Leech, « Ficino and Henry More on the Immortality of the Soul », in Stephen Clucas, Peter J. Forshaw, Valery Rees (eds.), *Laus Platonici Philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and His Influence*, Brill, Leiden 2011 (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 198), p. 301–316.

[132] In this regard, readers interested in medieval and Renaissance culture should never lose sight of the two foundational studies on the transmission of the classics to the modern world: Remigio Sabbadini, *Le scoperte dei codici latini e greci nei secoli XIV e XV*, Sansoni, Firenze 1905; and Giorgio Pasquali, *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo*, Le Monnier, Firenze 1934.

2. the emergence of new intellectual figures in the milieu outside universities, notably humanists, who introduced a new corpus of previously inaccessible ancient texts, and brought new issues and agendas to which university masters were called to react (see, for instance, Vitoria's debate on the justification of the conquers in the New World); and
3. the medium of print, which exponentially disseminated these new bodies of knowledge and methodologies.

It is important to underline that these factors impacted on the universities, and not only on the extra-academic contexts. Such impact cannot be underestimated. Indeed, new texts and translators brought about a shift in perspective and methodology within a teaching tradition that had been consolidating for three centuries.

The essays contained in the volume edited by Amos Edelheit effectively demonstrate the continuous interaction between the humanistic and scholastic worlds, bringing together professors, translators, friars, Hellenists, Hebraists, and printers. Research in the coming years should focus on these figures and their interactions, on the circulating textual heritage, and on the micro-dynamics within this network of intellectuals. Beyond this, let me say that we have so far been playing with categories. It is worth remembering, they are nothing but labels, often very useless regarding the specific author or topic we are studying. Establishing periodizations can be useful insofar as it concretely helps to reconstruct the cultural context in which a philosopher operated; yet, in itself, it risks devolving into an arid form of speculation. Both medieval and Renaissance studies still possess a vast body of unedited material, that today constitutes a far more pressing challenge than the task of fixing boundaries and labels (which are, almost by definition, partial and restrictive).[133] As Paul Valéry aptly remarks, « one cannot get drunk with the labels on the bottles ».

[133] For the sake of accuracy, it should be noted that in his chapter Marenbon consistently acknowledges the importance of primary sources and is careful to avoid one of the most common errors in recent scholarship: namely, assessing the category of the 'Renaissance' solely on the basis of historiographical debates from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. It is difficult to see how one could establish the self-perception of Renaissance individuals by considering only figures such as Brucker (1696–1770), Burckhardt (1818–1897), or Kristeller (1905–1999), while neglecting textual evidence drawn from the works and university courses of the period itself. Primary sources and documentary evidence must therefore remain our first and main guide.

TRANSPORTATION AT THE CROSSROAD*

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Over the past few decades, mobility has attracted sustained and growing attention within the scholarly community. By focusing on the processes through which people, objects, and ideas move across space and time, mobility studies raise a crucial set of questions and offer methodological approaches that are relevant across the humanities. They illuminate both the spatial complexity of cultural phenomena and their inherently dynamic character. The emergence of mobility studies has been closely tied to a renewed scholarly attention to space, which, as Edward Soja has noted, has long been marginalized in humanistic research in favour of predominantly social perspectives.[1] Mobility studies are significant in that they provide tools for rethinking notions of presence and immediacy. They also prompt reflection on the medial and material condition of movement, drawing attention to technological developments such as logistics and the operational infrastructure that enable mobility. Finally, mobility studies offer a key framework for understanding cultural phenomena on a global scale, helping to elucidate how distance structures and mediates human interactions across the world.[2]

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* KELLEY HELMSTUTLER DI DIO, *Shipping Sculptures from Early Modern Italy. The Mechanics, Costs, Risks, and Rewards*, Harvey Miller, London 2025.

1 EDWARD W. SOJA, *Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, Verso, London – New York 1989, esp. p. 10–42, where the author critiques the lack of « critical sensibility to the spatiality of social life » (p. 11) in twentieth-century epistemologies. See also HENRI LEFEBVRE, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, London 1991, esp. p. 86, where the author explains that movement activates space, and that space « attains 'real' existence by virtue of networks and pathways ».

2 Since the early 2000s, the social sciences have seen much theorization of mobility, the critical emergence of which was first described by MIMI SHELLER and JOHN URRY, « The New Mobilities Paradigm», *Environment and Planning*, 38 (2006), p. 207–226. In setting forth their manifesto, the authors emphasize mobility as opposed to sedentarism, which « treats as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placeness » (p. 208). Among the most representative works building on this agenda are TIM CRESSWELL, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*, Routledge, London 2006; JOHN URRY, *Mobilities*, Polity, Cambridge –

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Within the humanities, art history has emerged as one of the fields most actively engaged with this critical focus on mobility. Since the early 2000s, scholars have begun to reinterpret a broad array of subjects through this conceptual framework, examining not only the transnational circulation of artists but also the movement, relocation, and recontextualization of objects at various scale, from portable icons to entire buildings. The prominence of mobility as an analytical category is shown by a substantial corpus of monographs, articles, collaborative research initiatives organized around this theme, many of which prominently feature *mobility/movement* as keywords in their titles or abstracts. Among the scholars who have been particularly influential in advancing this field from different perspectives, one may cite, in strict alphabetic order, Stephen Greenblatt – who first christened the field in his *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* –,[3] Christopher Heuer, Alina Payne, Jennifer Roberts, to mention but a few. (It is perhaps not a coincidence that this list includes only scholars based in the United States, reflecting the extent to which the engagement with questions of mobility in art history and cultural studies has, to a significant degree, emerged within an anglophone scholarly context). As of December 2025, *kubikat.org* – one of the leading bibliographical databases for art historical publications – indexes more than five thousands entries under « mobility », reflecting a pronounced and ongoing rise that began in the early 2010s. Significantly, this historiographical turn is both international in scope, engaging scholars across diverse academic traditions, and diachronic in ambition, extending from the medieval period to contemporary art. Taken together, these features position mobility – perhaps alongside materiality – as one of the most influential and productive paradigms currently shaping the discipline of art history on a global scale.

In an object-based discipline such as the history of art, it is hardly surprising that – more than the travelling artist –[4] is the physical object in motion that has emerged as one of the principals, if not the paradigmatic, topics of investigation. It is nonetheless important to observe that, in addressing objects in motion, art history has more often than not approached questions of mobility mostly through dematerialized narratives of cultural exchange. Such accounts tend to privilege interpretative frameworks that trace the reception of objects as they circulate across geographical and cultural boundaries, for instance as diplomatic gifts, collectibles, or commodities. In schematic terms, these studies may be understood as spatial extensions of more traditional methodologies informed by reception theories: a foreign object enters a new context and is assumed to elicit a

Malden 2007; Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description*, Routledge, London 2011; and Thomas Nail, *Being and Motion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018.

3 Stephen Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009.

4 David Y. Kim, *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance. Geography, Mobility, Style*, Yale University Press, New Haven– London 2014.

discernible response, manifested in practices of replication, adaptation, veneration, or reuse. Within this frame, mobility is inevitably reduced to a mere vector that enables cultural transfer, while the material, logistical, and infrastructural conditions of movement itself – the technologies of transit – remain analytically underexamined. This approach, however, frequently neutralizes the intrinsically mobile moments of the material phenomena under scrutiny, privileging instead the points of origin and destination – that is, the relatively static moments of creation and reception, which continue to function as the primary benchmarks in an object's life. What unfolds between these two poles, by contrast, remains largely uncharted. Objects disappear from view only to re-emerge elsewhere, a process that effectively effaces the spatial and temporal continuum in which they exist. Despite their displacement, they are frequently treated as inhabiting a condition of perpetual instantaneity, as though permanently fixed in a single time and place. The mobility invoked by this approach is therefore more metaphorical than material, resembling less a factual condition of movement than a process of cultural exchange.

In order to address – or, more precisely, to redress – the limitations of this approach, which might more aptly be described as a theory of long-distance reception, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the concrete modalities through which mobility actually occurs. This turn has prompted closer attention to the issue of transportation, a topic that is attracting growing recognition across the discipline.[5] As one of its most incisive proponents, the Americanist Jennifer Roberts, argued in her influential book of 2014, *Transporting Visions*, this reorientation entails examining mobility « in its clunky and literal sense », rather than treating it primarily as a metaphor, foregrounding the logistical, mechanical, and operational phases through which the works of art move across space.[6] Such an approach requires moving beyond abstract, reception-driven narratives to interrogate the practical conditions of the displacement of the artistic object. It demands close attention not only to the

[5] Among the titles that have recently appeared and that consistently foreground transportation and its multifaceted dimensions, one should mention at least Tim Anstey, *Things That Move. A Hinterland in Architectural History*, The MIT Press, Boston, 2024; David Landau, *Art on the Move in Renaissance Italy*, Ad Ilissum, London, 2025; and the several entries related to mobility/transportation in Uwe Fleckner, Mari Lending (eds.), *Provenance in Architecture. A Dictionary*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Berlin 2025, *ad vocem*.

[6] Jennifer L. Robert, *Transporting Visions. The Movement of Images in Early America*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2014, p. 2. More recently, « Transportation » has been also the topic of a special issue of the French journal *Perspective* published in 2022: see in particular Victor Claass, « Histoires de l'art en route », *Perspective*, 1 (2022) [DOI: 10.4000/perspective.26454, last accessed 10.05.2026]. Bringing together contributions by museum specialists and historians of the visual culture, the volume arguably represents, to date, the most explicit intervention from a European scholarly perspective in the debate on the impact of transportation on the works of art.

material and technological frameworks that enable movement, but also to the geographical, geopolitical, and human factors that actively shape, constrain, and inflect it. As Roberts eloquently puts it, this requires submitting « the picture to the captivation of extrinsic transport systems managed [...] by custom agents, packers, drivers, couriers, postmen, and slaves », thereby revealing the work of art as the product of an extended network of circulation, profoundly shaped by the processes and conditions of its transportation.[7]

This long preamble helps to situate the volume under review here within its broader scholarly context and to clarify its position in relation to the research conducted over the past few years. As a matter of fact, Kelley Helmstutler Di Dio's recent monograph, *Shipping Sculptures from Early Modern Italy*, exemplifies the application of this approach to the early modern period and signals a phase of consolidation of research into the transportation of artistic objects. The author, Rush C. Hawkings Professor of Art History at the University of Vermont, is not new to this line of investigation, that she previously addressed in the anthology *Making and Moving Sculptures in Early Modern Italy* (2015), which she edited and which laid important groundwork for the present study.[8] Lavishly produced by Harvey Miller and illustrated with numerous high-quality colour reproductions, *Shipping Sculptures* examines – as its subtitle explains – *the Mechanics, Costs, Risks and Rewards* inherent the relocation of sculptures, covering the period roughly between c. 1520 and 1750. Through a close examination of the logistical complexities involved in moving objects by land and sea from Italy to Spain at the end of the Renaissance, the book moves beyond a conventional historical survey or a study of the reception of, and taste for, Italian sculptures in the Iberian Peninsula (although, for obvious reasons, this dimension frequently informs the author's analysis). Instead, it offers an account of mobility as a structuring condition of sculptural production and circulation, foregrounding transport not as an ancillary concern, but as a central category within the history of early modern European sculpture.

The volume is structured into four chapters, each devoted to the examination of a distinct aspect of early modern transportation of sculptures. The opening chapter offers a detailed analytical reconstruction of the transit of sculptures to their final destinations, addressing individually and in depth each stage and component of the transport process, while the three that follow examine specific case studies of sculptures-in-motion chosen in relation to their sites of display – respectively, ecclesiastical settings, private residences, and public spaces. Whereas the first chapter will be of particular interest to historians working broadly in transportation and mobility studies, regardless of their geographic and

[7] Jennifer L. Robert, *Transporting Visions. The Movement of Images in Early America*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2014, p. 1.

[8] Kelley Helmstutler Di Dio (ed.), *Making and Moving Sculptures in Early Modern Italy*, Ashgate, Farnham 2015.

chronological focus, the remaining three are likely to prove especially engaging for specialists in Renaissance sculpture in general and for those concerned with artistic exchanges between Italy and Spain more in particular. The book concludes with a substantial documentary appendix (p. 177–219), which presents transcriptions of a large corpus of documents – most of them previously unpublished – that form the empirical foundation of the study. These documents are drawn primarily from Italian archives (Genoa, Milan, Florence), with additional material from Spanish repositories (Simancas), and testify to the breadth and rigor of the author's archival research. Indeed, Helmstutler Di Dio's investigation is clearly driven by the recovery of this rich body of documentation – which she began assembling in the early 2000s (p. 7) – and by the opportunity to analyse it systematically, thereby bringing coherence to a category of sources that has not always been fully exploited in previous art historical scholarship.

For the readers more interested in the practical aspects of transportation, the first chapter (« From Origin to Destination », p. 17–62) will be of particular interest, as it offers a thorough examination of « the how, why and when » (p. 7) of moving sculptures in the early modern period. Here the author provides a detailed account of the distinct phases of the process of transportation, identifying 10 steps that articulate its complexity – from the preliminary identification, at a distance, of an object to be purchased or commissioned, through the preparation of crates and the selection of routes by lands or sea, to the final installation of the work at its destination. The chapter introduces art historians to a set of issues that have rarely received systematic attention within a discipline still reluctant to engage with the material lives of the artworks, especially in those liminal spaces represented by transportation. These include the preparation of sculptures for shipment – practices that appear to have been relatively consistent also across non-sculptural media and that typically involved wrapping objects in padding of cloth or straw before their encasement (p. 31; the same procedure is also vividly illustrated in Jean-Antoine Watteau's *L'Enseigne de Gersaint* of 1720); the selection of routes, generally informed by complex cost-benefit considerations (p. 36); and the payment of custom duties or tolls (p. 57–58), underscoring the fact that artistic objects, like any other exported good, were subject to taxation upon arrival, with exemption only rarely granted (such as, for example, when the sculptures were considered a royal possession, as in the case for the bronzes for the Escorial, which were marked with symbols on the case to ensure their direct delivery to Philip II [p. 98]).

The three subsequent chapters examine specific case studies of sculptures sent from Italy, grouped according to their sites of display. They address a range of objects different in scale and subject, with focused discussions devoted respectively to Benvenuto Cellini's *Crucifix* and Pompeo Leoni's bronze sculpted retable for San Lorenzo at the Escorial in the context of works for churches; to

Pietro Tacca's *Equestrian Statuette of Louis XIII*, along with Giambologna *Samson and the Philistine* and Cristoforo Stati's *Samson and the Lions*, in relation to works destined to private settings; and to the equestrian monuments of Philip III and Philip IV as examples of sculptures intended for public spaces. Where the documentation allows, these chapters also incorporate discussions of additional sculptures of Italian provenance. In the case of sculptures destined for ecclesiastical contexts, for example, the analysis is further expanded to include works executed in different materials – namely Carrara marble and bronze – and, in some instances, objects dating to periods earlier than the chronological framework privileged for the book (such as the case of Lorenzo Suárez de Figueroa's tomb slab attributed to Alessandro Leopardi, dated c. 1503). The uneven survival of documentary evidence inevitably results in case studies of varying depth, and in some instances the analyses developed in this section overlap with the more general observations advanced in the opening chapter. Nevertheless, the wealth of documents examined – much of it, as said, previously unpublished – makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of some of the most significant Italian sculptures in Spain.

The numerous documents collected in the three final appendices also merit attention. These materials are not conceived merely as ancillary support for the historical reconstructions developed in the book's central chapters; rather, they form their empiric backbone. The documents provide not only a substantial body of historical data that allows the processes under examination to be reconstructed with precision, but also detailed information concerning materials, labour, and logistics. The largest portion of the appendices – nearly half of their total extent – is devoted to documents relating to the Escorial project. These records meticulously register every aspect of expenditure, from the materials used to construct the crates to the daily wages paid to cart drivers. They preserve remarkably granular information, such as the exact number of oxen assigned to pull each cart transporting a crate along the route from Sale to Pozzolo, in Piedmont, in January 1589 – specifically, two pairs per cart (doc. 2.5.63). The documents are equally valuable for their linguistic evidence, recording specialized terminology that points to a largely lost artisanal vocabulary: they specify, for example, the types of wood prescribed for the crates (« travetto di *rogore* »; « *pobbia* »). Taken together, these sources provide a vivid sense of the material complexities of sculptural transport and underscore its highly customized character. They also indicate, albeit indirectly, the extent to which such operations were coordinated – and in some cases actively directed – by the artist responsible for the sculptures, in this instance Pompeo Leoni.

The rich documentary component, which brings into focus otherwise complex and difficult-to-trace phenomena, constitutes one of the undeniable strengths of this book. At the same time, the prominence of primary sources also foregrounds

a broader methodological challenge, both for this book and for the field more in general. In my view, the central question here concerns how historical evidence concerning transportation can be more fruitfully integrated with the analysis of the works of art themselves. Put it differently, how can historical reconstruction be made to engage more directly with the material reality of the objects to which it refers? How might documentation relating to transport be brought into closer dialogue with the artworks whose histories it records? The risk is that histories of art transportation may incline toward the mere documentary record, even as they seek to remain attentive to the material and visual dimensions of the objects under consideration. This is a risk that Helmstutler Di Dio's volume at times runs. A sense of the priority accorded to the documentary evidence may be gleaned, for instance, from the treatment of crucial factors for understanding and organizing mobility – such as the weight or height of the sculptures – which are only rarely specified and, when they are (as in the list of bronzes discussed on p. 97–99), derive almost exclusively from archival sources. The absence of such information can limit the reader's ability to fully grasp the scale of the logistical challenges involved.[9] Mobility risks remaining an administrative or logistical abstraction, rather than a condition that concretely informed artistic design and material configuration. In the case of Alessandro Leopardi's tomb slab mentioned above, for example, the failure to clarify that the work is a bronze slab weighing approximately 1,800 kilograms – a figure which is not reported in the text, and which roughly corresponds to the weight of a modern utility vehicle – renders less intelligible the magnitude of the effort required to transport it to Spain.

In other words, to be effective, an inquiry of this kind cannot be confined to a mere chronicle of transport – « the how, why and when » – but must be expanded to include sustained reflections on the impact of transport on artistic creation *tout court*. This applies both to substantial objects for which the effects of mobility can be readily apparent (such as sculptures), and to works whose effects might seem less consequential at first glance (such as paintings or works on paper).[10] Such an approach would require close attention to the transformative effects of displacement, which may include material damages and formal alterations – the effects of what the French mediologist Régis Debray eloquently called « the

[9] For one of the few sustained art-historical engagements with the question of weight – an issue closely tied to the problems of mobility and transport, yet otherwise marginal within the discipline – see David Y. Kim (ed.), *Matters of Weight. Force, Gravity, and Aesthetics in the Early Modern* Period, Edition Imorde, Emsdetten 2013.

[10] For a preliminary analysis of the impact of transportation on paintings, with particular reference to the questions of chromatic persistence over distance, see Mattia Biffis, « Itinerant Matters: Rubens and the Itineraries of Painting », *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift – Journal of Art History*, 90 (2021), p. 211–230. For a similar approach in a multimedia perspective, see also the abstracts collected in Mattia Biffis, Victor Claass, Eleonora Pistis, « Matter in Motion », in *Proceedings 36e congrès du Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art*, forthcoming.

tragedy of transmission »[11] – but also to its anticipatory role in shaping the finished object. This is what Jennifer Robert has described as the *preprocessing* of the transport event on the object: artists were often keenly aware of the spatial demands their works would have to meet and were therefore compelled to conceive them with transportation already in mind. This awareness (a practical form of anticipatory thinking, or figural decision-making) could inform the choice of materials, the manipulation of formats, the division of objects into smaller components, or the decision to complete the works at their destination––the range of possible responses is broad and must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Even specific formal choices (for example, in the case of sculptures, the inclusion or avoidance of projecting or delicate elements) could be shaped by the prospect of physical displacement. In this sense, artists worked with a form of intentionality – to borrow a critical term introduced in art historical scholarship by Michael Baxandall in his *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* of 1985[12] – conditioned by the practical demands of transport. It is precisely this intentionality that a history of transport should seek to foreground and systematically explore.

Because of the logistical demands required to move them, sculptures constitute an especially revealing field to probe the relationships between mobility and artistic decision-making. They do so, quite literally, on a grand scale. *Shipping Sculptures* offers a few valuable insights into these dynamics, although they might have been developed more fully along the hermeneutical lines suggested here. For example, the recurrent choice of materials well suited to, and resilient under, transport – above all marble and bronze – points to a conscious avoidance of fragile media, such as terracotta, which were particularly susceptible to damage in transit. This raises broader questions about how such material constraints shaped the presence and character of Italian sculptures in Spain. It is equally striking that many of the sculptures examined in the volume are not characterized by pronounced virtuosity; rather, they appear as works of restrained ambition and compact form. One might ask whether such formal restraints may be understood as a deliberate strategy to safeguard the physical integrity of the object during displacement, and thus as evidence of a practical, anticipatory mode of thinking that shaped the artistic production in view of its displacement. Faced with the

[11] Debray's words deserve particular attention here: « Transport *by* is transformation *of*. That which is transported is remodeled, refigured, and metabolized by its transit [...] To transmit should not be considered merely to transfer (a thing from one point to another), any more than cultural inheriting should be deemed a mere instance of receiving (it is rather a process of selecting, reactivating, and recasting) »: Régis Debray, *Transmitting Culture*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000, p. 27.

[12] Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London, 1985.

prospect of transport, sculptors such as Benvenuto Cellini and Pompeo Leoni learned how to temper their virtuosity in favour of durability. From this perspective, it is difficult to imagine that a major artistic revolution – such as the emergence of the Baroque style – could have been driven primarily through the long-distance transport of sculptures.

Apart from considerations of labour, time, and expenses, moving a block of marble is not necessarily a titanic undertaking: even cultures with relatively limited technological means were able to conceive and execute the long-distance transport of massive megalithic structures, for example. Transporting a sculpture, by contrast, poses a fundamentally different challenge. In the absence of adequate protective technologies, sculptural forms risked damage that could compromise their aesthetic integrity and, with it, their cultural value. Even today, within the global economy of museum exchange and art transportation, sculptures remain a particularly vulnerable category, requiring specialized care and attention. In a sense, the issue at stake here is not mass – as it was still the case, for example, in Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's pioneering study of the Carrara quarries[13] – but form.

Kelley Helmstutler Di Dio's volume represents one of the most comprehensive treatments of this subject to date and is of considerable importance not only for its historical and documentary contributions – shedding light on complex practices that are otherwise sparsely recorded – but also more broadly for the study of Italian sculptures in Spain. The opportunity it offers to engage with the linguistic dimension of transport is a further strength of the book, particularly in its substantial appendices. Furthermore, its publication also attests to the growing importance that studies of transportation have come to assume within the history of art, as evidenced, for example, by their increasing significance for provenance research. At times, however, the study tends to underplay the impact of movement on the objects themselves – a frontier that future scholarship will need to address more directly. In other words, a history of transport should aim not only to reconstruct routes and procedures, but also to elucidate the ways in which mobility informed artistic choices and shaped the material configurations of the works of art. It is along these lines that future research on the subject might most productively advance.

[13] Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Les maîtres du marble. Carrare 1300–1600*, S.E.V.P.E.N., Paris, 1969.

JACOPO DE' BARBARI'S *VIEW OF VENICE*: NOTE ON A RECENT PUBLICATION*

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The *View of Venice* (c. 1497–1500), a monumental woodcut print, features Venice's urban fabric gracefully interwoven with its aqueous environment – a tessellation of over 120 small, interconnected islands (Fig. 1). It is widely regarded as one of the most significant artistic and technological masterpieces of the Renaissance period. This remarkable work of art represents a significant advancement in the field of pictorial representation of cities, showcasing an unprecedented level of urban topographical accuracy from a lofty vantage point and in a monumental form. Notably, it also represents one of the earliest expressions of the autonomy of Western woodcut technique at the turn of a half-millennium, as evidenced by the emblematic title « Venetie MD » emblazoned at the top. The monumental composite dimensions of the work, measuring more than 1,35 by 2,75 meters – it was printed on six separate sheets of customized paper, the largest sheets produced in Europe –, its complexity of production and its groundbreaking scientific and artistic invention signal the scope of the project, which took three years to complete.[1]

As Jürgen Schulz pertinently observed, the *View of Venice* is most efficaciously characterized in superlatives – « the largest and most detailed », « the most influential », « a major work of art ».[2] Its author, the Venetian artist Jacopo de' Barbari (c. 1460/70–1516), and its ambitious German sponsor, the merchant Anton Kolb (c. 1471–1541), suggest a large-scale collaborative enterprise with an

* Review of KRISTIN LOVE HUFFMAN (ed.), *A View of Venice: Portrait of a Renaissance City*, Duke University Press, Durham – London 2024.

1 On the extraordinary size of the paper, see DAVID LANDAU, PETER PARSHALL, *The Renaissance Print 1470–1550*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1994, p. 16–17 and 43–45.

2 JUERGEN SCHULZ, *The Printed Plans and Panoramic Views of Venice*, Leo S. Olschki, Florence 1970, p. 17.

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international agenda. The magnitude, novelty and prowess of the *View* were recognized by the Venetian state, who granted Kolb one of the earliest known copyright permissions for a printed image in October 1500.[3]

Fig. 1: Jacopo de' Barbari, *View of Venice*, first state, 1500, woodcut print, 132.7 x 277.5 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Art, The John R. Van Derlip Fund © Minneapolis Institute of Art.

Nevertheless, the printed image is not merely a manifesto on the new technology of the printing press to circulate and promote information (both real and imagined) in written and visual terms; it is also a celebration of the city's mythical identity and a glorification of the Venetian state. The representation of ancient gods, Mercury and Neptune, is said to be aligned to safeguard the city, while inscriptions accompanying them make clear their protection over the state's commercial interests and its maritime dominion. The topographically elevated terrain that envelops the summit incorporates toponyms that denote Venetian territorial possessions on the mainland and a conduit to Northern Europe. The

[3] Venice, State Archive, Collegio notatorio, Registro 15 [1499–1507], October 1500, fol. 28r. The original document of Anton Kolb's copyright permission and export licence request for the *View of Venice* is reproduced in *Appendix 2* of the reviewed volume, p. 336–337. In it, Kolb seeks two permissions: first for a copyright on the invention of the image, and second, for the exclusion of taxes on its sale in the provinces. The state granted a privilegio for four years: this is the first given to a published image, implying that the State was fully aware of the image's novelty. See CHRISTOPHER WITCOMBE, *Copyright in the Renaissance. Prints and the Privilegio in Sixteenth-Century Venice and Rome*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2004, p. 32–33. Kolb must set the price at no less than three florins (the amount that an average skilled worker in Venice might expect to receive over the course of a month) in order to recover the investment.

depiction of the winds personified and encircling the periphery of the bird's-eye view is reminiscent of a map's compass rose. The lower border is framed by islands, such as those of the Giudecca and San Giorgio, which are tilted and magnified to reveal luxurious gardens that would otherwise be hidden behind private villas and monastic complexes. A regatta, clearly marked on the lower right, exemplifies the recreational pursuits that were accessible only to the most prosperous Renaissance cities. The city of Venice is depicted here in a state of jubilant triumph, a visual manifestation of its opulent wealth and formidable power. This imagery has been recorded with an enduring sense of timeless splendor, capturing the pinnacle of the city's international authority during its historical heyday.

As image, the *View of Venice* is characterized by a tension between the realism of its depiction and its idealized representation, thus aligning with the broader characteristics of Renaissance portraiture. Visual enhancements and optical alterations include a composite of multiple viewpoints that enliven and enrich a viewer's observations. De Barbari employed the bird's-eye view technique to accentuate Venice's distinctive *forma urbis* and to highlight specific locations, thereby enabling the viewer to perceive a more expansive view of the city (e.g. the Rialto Bridge, the sole crossing point over the Grand Canal that connects the city's two halves – *de ultra* and *de citra* – and the focal point of a densely concentrated commercial zone, the Mercerie, an economic corridor of paved, interconnected streets lined with three hundred shops; Piazza San Marco with the Ducal Palace, the seat of Venetian governance, framed by the Clocktower, a technological and artistic marvel of its own, realized in the same years as the View; and the Arsenal). Additionally, the absence of traditional, fortified gates enclosing most other Renaissance city-states flaunting Venetian confidence and awareness of its natural lagoon defenses is noteworthy.

The *View* has been consistently used as a document for how the city and specific locations appeared in 1500 and the object of numerous scholarly studies documenting and identifying a range of subjects from specific sites to people and their activities. Turning the pages of Alvise Zorzi's *Venezia scomparsa*,[4] an essential book reconstructing the transformation of the urban fabric – its monuments, system of circulation and transportation, even daily life – confirms the foundational status of Jacopo de' Barbari's work for our visual knowledge of the lagoon circa 1500: its woodcut details often appear as evidence of the only remaining sign of a vanished place or of the original setting for those areas that still exist or came later.

The print has also been the focus of cartographic, representational, and morphological analysis. This was initiated by the two short but innovative studies

[4] The book went through eighteen editions between its initial publication in 1971 (Banca cattolica del Veneto, Venice) and 1977 (Electa, Milan), and multiple reprints (Mondadori, Milan, since 2001).

by Giuseppe Mazzariol and Terisio Pignatti[5] that accompanied the one-to-one reproduction of the first state print of the *View*, which were followed by the seminal articles by Juergen Schulz,[6] Piero Falchetta,[7] Martin Kemp[8] and Deborah Howard,[9] as well as the article by Vanna Bagarolo and Vladimiro Valerio.[10] A more interdisciplinary approach, finally, is represented by the essays in the exhibition catalogue *A volo d'uccello: Jacopo de' Barbari e le rappresentazioni di città nell'Europa del Rinascimento*[11] and by the two volumes edited by Corrado Balestrieri Trincanato and Dario Zanverdiani.[12]

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5 Giuseppe Mazzariol, Terisio Pignatti (eds.), *La pianta di Jacopo de' Barbari*, Cassa di Risparmio, Venice, 1962.

6 Juergen Schulz, « Jacopo de' Barbari's *View of Venice*: Map Making, City Views, and Moralized Geography before the Year 1500 », *Art Bulletin*, 60/3 (1978), p. 425–474. An enlarged Italian version of this study was published later: « La veduta di Venezia di Jacopo de' Barbari: cartografia, vedute di città e geografia moralizzata nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento », in Id., *La cartografia tra scienza e arte: carte e cartografi nel Rinascimento italiano*, Panini, Modena 1990, p. 13–63.

7 Piero Falchetta, « La misura dipinta. Rilettura tecnica e semantica della veduta di Venezia di Jacopo de' Barbari », *Ateneo Veneto*, 178 (1991), p. 273–305; Id., « Il putto rovesciato o Venezia nel cucchiaio: note ultime sulla Veduta di Jacopo de' Barbari », in Fabrizio Borin, Filippo Pedrocco (ed.), *Venezia e Venezie: descrizioni, interpretazioni, immagini. Studi in onore di Massimo Gemin*, Il Poligrafo, Padua 2003, p. 23–28.

8 Martin Kemp, « Jacopo de' Barbari: *View of Venice* », in Jay A. Levenson (ed.), *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, exhib. cat. (Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art, 1991), National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. 1991, p. 253–255. See also Landau, Parshall, *The Renaissance print*, p. 43–45 and now Silvia Urbini, « ALU.0100.1 Veduta di Venezia a volo d'uccello », in *Atlante delle xilografie italiane del Rinascimento*, < https://archivi.cini.it/storiaarte/detail/4685/mappa-4685.html > (last accessed May 2026) and Giovanni Maria Fara, David Landau (eds.), *Renaissance in Black and White. The Art of Printmaking in Venice (1494–1615)*, exhib. cat. (Museo civico di Bassano del Grappa, Bassano del Grappa, Ca' Rezzonico, Museo del Settecento veneziano, Venice, 2024), Scripta edizioni, Venice 2024, entries no. II.1 Ve and II.2 Ve, p. 107–108.

9 Deborah Howard, « Venice as a Dolphin: Further Investigations into Jacopo de' Barbari's *View* », *Artibus et Historiae*, 18/35 (1997), p. 101–111.

10 Vanna Bagarolo, Vladimiro Valerio, « Jacopo de' Barbari: una nuova ipotesi indiziaria sulla genesi prospettica della veduta Venetie MD », in Vladimiro Valerio (ed.), *Cartografi veneti: mappe, uomini e istituzioni per l'immagine e il governo del territorio*, Editoriale Programma, Padua 2007, p. 118–135.

11 Giandomenico Romanelli, Susanna Biadene, Camillo Tonini (eds.), *A volo d'uccello: Jacopo de' Barbari e le rappresentazioni di città nell'Europa del Rinascimento*, exhib. Cat. (Museo Correr, Venice, 1999), Arsenale, Venice 1999, in particular: Andrea Masciantonio, « 'Per la materia difficilissima': spunti per una lettura d'insieme della veduta prospettica di Venezia », p. 76–83, Piero Falchetta, « La veduta prospettica di Venezia tra teoria e pratica di misurazione dello spazio », p. 69–75 and Francesco Guerra, Caterian Balletti, Carlo Monti, Evangelos Livieratos, Chryssoula Boutoura, « Informatica e 'infografica' per lo studio della veduta prospettica di Venezia », p. 93–100.

12 *Jacopo de' Barbari, il racconto di una città*, 2 vols., Cetid, Mestre 2000, republished as *Venezia città mirabile. Guida alla veduta prospettica di Jacopo de' Barbari*, Caselle di Sommacampagna, Cierre 2009. This volume presents the results of one of the earliest computer projects to employ de' Barbari's *View*, leveraging its power of detail. The authors reproduced numerous thumbnails of individual details, including diverse elements of the city's fabric and iconographical elements of the *View*. These were organised into fifty categories, ranging from « Abbaini » (dormer or attic windows)

To supplement this already abundant scholarly output, this monumental volume – comprising 23 essays, an introduction, an epilogue and three appendices – represents the culmination of a collaborative, multidimensional digital humanities project relating to the *View of Venice*. Part of the *Visualising Venice project*[13] – an international research consortium of art and architectural historians, architects, engineers, and visual and media specialists, it was developed over three years in the Wired! Lab at Duke University.

The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University hosted an exhibition in 2017 entitled *A Portrait of Venice. Jacopo de' Barbari's View of 1500* comprised seven digital displays, which served as companions to the extraordinary woodcut print on loan from the Minneapolis Institute of Art, one of the twelve extant, first-state impression that was prominently on display (Fig. 2).[14] This installation, curated by Kristin Love Huffman, editor of this volume and Instructor of Art History in Duke University's Department of Art, Art History & Visual Studies, represented a new prototype. The integration of touchscreens not only served to revitalize Venice and its historical legacy for a diverse audience but also served to extol the remarkable visual elements of the print and the milieu in which it was produced.

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to « Zattere » (waterfront quays), and are illustrated with 890 images, most of which are from the *View* itself. Others are included for comparison, including many drawings by EGLE RENATA TRINCANATO, the eminent architect and historian who revolutionised the study of Venetian vernacular (*Venezia minore*, Edizioni del Milione, Milan 1948, published in forty editions between 1948 and 2010 in three languages).

13 See KRISTIN HUFFMAN, ANDREA GIORDANO, CAROLINE BRUZELIUS (eds.), *Visualizing Venice. Mapping and Modeling Time and Change in a City, New York*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2028 (< https://www.routledge.com/Visualizing-Venice-Mapping-and-Modeling-Time-and-Change-in-a-City/Huffman-Giordano-Bruzelius/p/book/9780367885717 >, last accessed May 2026). The previous Visualizing Venice exhibitions include *Acqua e Cibo: storie della laguna e della città* (2016) and *Venice, The Jews and Europe, 1516–2016*, both organised in Venice, at Palazzo Ducale in 2015–2016 and 2016 and curated by Donatella Calabi. The two catalogues were published by Marsilio.

14 < https://nasher.duke.edu/exhibitions/portrait-venice-jacopo-de-barbardis-view-1500/ > (last accessed May 2026). See KRISTIN LOVE HUFFMAN, « Jacopo de' Barbari's View of Venice (1500): 'Image Vehicles' and 'Pathways of Culture' Past and Present », *Mediterranea. Internation Journal on the Transfer of Knowledge*, 4 (2029), p. 165–214: p. 180–186. The Minneapolis copy comes from the incredible collection of Victor Masséna, Duke of Rivoli and Prince of Essling, a great bibliophile and author of the still unsurpassed census, *Les livres à figures vénitiens de la fin du XV^e^ siècle et du commencement du XVI^e^ [...]. Études sur l'art de la gravure sur bois à Venise*, Leclerc-Olschki, Paris – Venice 1907–1914. The known first-state prints (in subsequent years the matrices underwent some specific changes that resulted in two additional known states: the second one dated between 1511 and 1514, the third one is dated within the sixteenth century, with a propensity toward the second half) are located in the following institutions: Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett; Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art; Hamburg, Kunsthalle; London, British Museum; Minneapolis, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Nuremberg, Germanisches National Museum; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France; Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia; Venice, Museo Correr (2); Venice, Museo Navale. See BALESTRIERI TRINCANATO, ZANVERDIANI, *Venezia città mirabile*, p. 19.

The exhibition enabled visitors to pursue narratives in a non-linear fashion through the perusal of separate displays as well as through the independent, yet thematically related chapters within each one, as – we can say – if reading the essays in this edited volume. The material presented here had the capacity to adapt to the viewer's level of knowledge and curiosity, as this new media offers malleable possibilities to both the neophyte and the cognoscente visitors alike. The viewer is transported to Venice through an immersive and multi-sensory experience, visually engaging and audibly resonating with animation, colorization and ambient sound. In this ambitious project, the technological accomplishment of the woodcut in the late fifteenth century is further enhanced by the integration of twenty-first century digital technologies. Innovative visualization tools and strategies have been shown to be as important for the conception and dissemination of the *View* as they have been for the realization of this project, including the exhibition and this book.

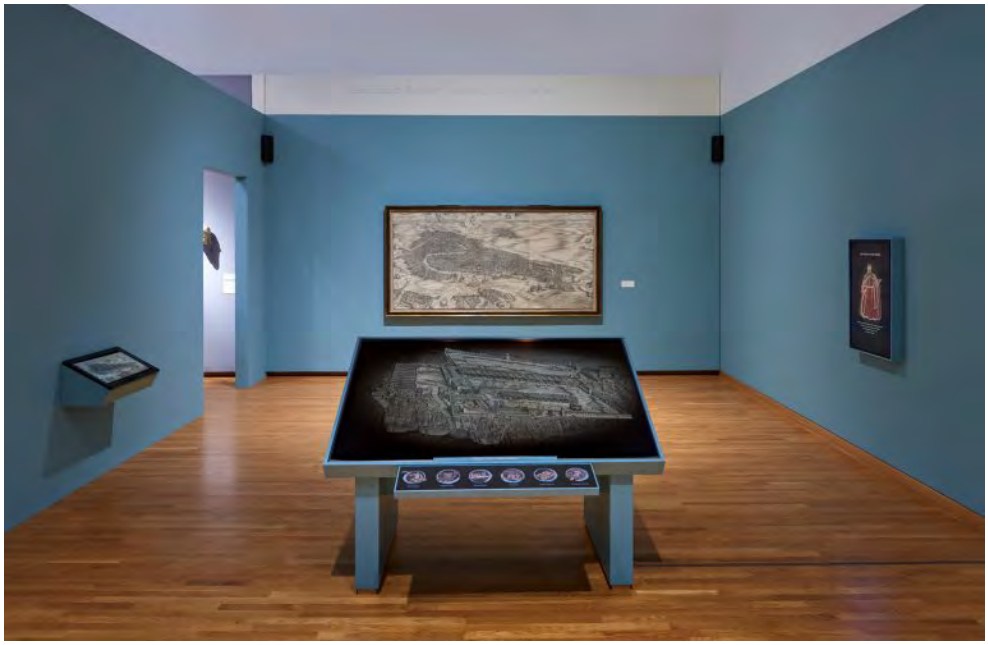

Fig. 2. View of the exhibition *A Portrait of Venice. Jacopo de' Barbari's View of 1500*, Durham, The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, 2017.

The volume is also the result of an international symposium with interdisciplinary scholars of early modern Venice.[15] A significant proportion of the essays expand upon the engaging presentations. The publication is further enriched by the contributions of experts in the field, who have been invited to provide additional texts. All address two overarching themes: the representation of Venice and Venetian life in the print, and the print as a manifestation of cartographic and artistic phenomena. In addition to the original, scholars were granted access to the high-resolution reproduction that had been produced for the exhibition; this version was the largest and highest-quality one ever available for study.[16] The convergence of perspectives and methodological approaches among scholars has been facilitated by the collaborative efforts of museums – first of all the Correr museum in Venice, home of the six wooden matrices used to print the *View* and two of the twelve extant first-state woodcuts –, institutions, and non-profit grant-making foundations (Samuel H. Kress Foundation, The National Endowment of the Humanities, the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation and the Wired ! Lab at Duke University). This partnership permitted a team of colleagues from *Visualizing Venice*, along with the staff from the Correr museum, to conduct light laser scans of the wooden matrices.

Following the prologue by Kristin Love Huffman and Andrea Bellini, the editor's introduction – *The* View *as an Urban Portrait* – and the plates, the volume is divided into two parts. The first part, *The View as a Printed Cartographic and Artistic Visualisation*, contains essays that coherently delineate the view as an advanced product of Renaissance artistic, humanist and scientific culture. The essays in the second part are more centrifugal in conception and relate to the urban systems and lived experiences of early modern Venice, including its unique identity and idiosyncrasies, social, political and economic infrastructures, and cosmopolitan residents. Using de' Barbari's image as a starting point, each essay has been conceived as a standalone piece, although interrelated themes weave throughout and across the two parts.

The eleven essays in Part I expand our understanding of the scientific, artistic and theoretical strategies for interpreting the collaborative elements of this extraordinary representation of a city, which was incomparable at the time. The fact that it took more than three years to create the *View* highlights the woodcut as a product of technological advancements in printmaking and international collaboration. The essays in this section provide a context for the artistic genesis of the work and offer insight into Jacopo de Barbari, whose elusive career in Venice

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15 *Stories about Venice and de' Barbari's Marvelous View of 1500*, helded October 12 and 13 at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in conjunction with the exhibition: < https://sites.duke.edu/venicesymposium/program/ > (last accessed May 2026).

16 Duke Digital Repository image 10.7924/G8MK69TH: < https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r4pr7pr2m >, last accessed May 2026.

remains undocumented. He lived at a time of rich transnational cultural exchange, which spurred artistic and scientific invention across the Alps, notably in Nuremberg, the home city of Anton Kolb. Venice was one of the world's most vibrant cultural centers at that time. Works on paper were ideal for circulating imaginative expression; the most extensively illustrated incunabulum, Hartmann Schedel's *Nuremberg Chronicle* (or, in the Latin version, *Liber chronicarum*), with woodcuts by Wohlgemut, Pleydenwurff and Albrecht Dürer, printed in 1493, offers good proof of this.[17] In it, the representation of Venice is derived from the large-scale panoramic view of *Civitas Veneciarum*, which was printed on four sheets that folded out from Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam*, first published in Mainz in 1486 by Erhard Reuwich[18] and, introducing the notion of place in a systematic ordering of the world, highlights Venice as a port of passage for pilgrims en route to the Holy Land.

Karenedis Barzman's essay, *The View of Venice in a Genealogy of City Views and Government Mapping*, initiates Part I by situating the *View* within the historical development of city views and state-sponsored representations of Venetian territorial possession. The essay subsequently locates its production in the early stages of the systematic collection and visualization of geospatial data in government archives. This pivotal moment in the development of cartography occurred in the latter half of the fifteenth century, marking the inception of what we now term a geographic information system (GIS) in Venice. This innovation was devised to enhance the management of Venetian territories. This assertion is substantiated by the extensive collection of state-commissioned maps of Venetian sites unearthed by Barzman in Venice's archives. Such chorographic representations, or descriptive mapping, emerged as part of the ancient Ptolemaic and of the understandings of Strabo's *Geography*, first translated in Latin in 1458 under the sponsorship of Jacopo Antonio Marcello a Venetian patrician and government official, that informed the labelling, identifiers and units of measurement that became keys to reading these maps. It is noteworthy that de' Barbari initiated his unparalleled *View* during a period when Venice was undertaking a comprehensive initiative to render its landholdings fully visible through pictorial representations and shared with them some of the same nested features, including text and directional indicators, even if these appeared as wind

[17] Nuremberg, Anton Koberger, for Sebald Schreyer and Sebastian Kammermeister, 12 July 1493 (Latin, ISTC, is00307000) and 23 December 1493 (German, ISTC is00309000). In creating this remarkable incunabulum, which comprises over 1,800 illustrations, Dürer, who was the printer's godson, was privileged to be the apprentice of the highly skilled senior artist Michael Wolgemut. See LANDAU, PARSHALL, *The Renaissance Print*, p. 38–40.

[18] ISTC ib01189000. See FREDERIKE TIMM, *Der Palästina-Pilgerbericht des Bernard von Breidenbach und die Holzschnitte Erhard Reuwichs. Die* Peregrinatio in terram sanctam *(1486) als Propagandainstrument im Mantell der gelehrten Pilgerschrift*, Hauswedell & co., Stuttgart 2006.

heads drawn from the classical tradition of world mapping. In Venice, as nowhere else, the time was ripe for the congruence of public and private interests in the evolving fields of cartography. And this could be nowhere more apparent than in publication of the Barbari's print.

Fig. 3–4: Jacopo de' Barbari, *View of Venice*, first state, 1500, woodcut print, 132.7 x 277.5 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Art, The John R. Van Derlip Fund, details: the « Greco », or north-easterly wind, proposed self-portrait of Jacopo de' Barbari, and the « Scirocco », or south-easterly wind, proposed portrait of Anton Kolb.
© Minneapolis Institute of Art.

In his essay *A City as a World, Jacopo de' Barbari's* View *in 1500*, Piero Falchetta sheds further light on these map-like tendencies within the *View*. First, he presents the historiography of the scholarly debate regarding the print, which divided into two camps, though it is difficult to draw a clear line between the two theories. On the one hand, there are those who believe that the image is the result of artistic work intended to celebrate the power and splendor of Venice. On the other hand, cartographic theorists assert that the *View* is the result of a « scientific » program and geometric process and are interested in the cartographic procedures available at the time, such as projecting perspective onto a cylindrical surface, which may have been employed by de' Barbari and his collaborators. This overview of the various theories and hypotheses reveals that much of the scholarly discussion of the *View* has focused on technical features, particularly the specific effects of distortions, which were most likely caused by inadequate instruments and the process of converting the surveyed urban fabric into a drawing taken from an artificially elevated viewpoint. Falchetta then discusses the inclusion of the eight personifications of the principal winds (the « Greco », or north-easterly wind, is a proposed self-portrait of Jacopo de' Barbari, and the « Scirocco », or south-easterly wind, is a proposed portrait of Anton Kolb) (Fig. 3–4) or the main directional coordinates, which were a Ptolemaic convention used to represent the world as a sphere. This helped to explain the distorted surfaces in the *View*, which resulted in the invention of the first Ptolemaic perspective map of a city – yet another innovation for its time. Ptolemy's *Geography* was published in several printed editions during the second half of the fifteenth century: the projection of Venice onto flexible space could thus have been inspired by Ptolemy's second projection, with the personified winds in the *View* deliberately referencing cartographic methods.

Unsurprisingly, the mathematical plotting of fixed coordinates would have been invaluable to a city that relied on seafaring trade and movement between maritime locations. Cosimo Monteleone's essay, *A Perspectival Investigation of Jacopo de' Barbari's* View of Venice, outlines the value placed on mathematics as part of the scientific and artistic backdrop of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Venice. The essay attempts to indicate new possible paths of interpretation relating to the fifteenth-century study of mathematics, which has been little explored until now. Specifically, the essay offers new insights into the print, examining the role of perspective within the scientific, cultural and artistic context of Venice at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and how this may have influenced Jacopo de' Barbari's work. By the mid-fifteenth century, mathematics had incited great curiosity and intellectual interest in town, becoming indispensable to the Rialto School, where logic and philosophy were taught. Among the supporters of this scientific renaissance were leading scholars in Venice and the Veneto shortly before the publication of the *View*: Ermolao Barbaro, Giorgio Valla, and Luca

Pacioli. The latter is depicted alongside a young man on his left, possibly Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino in a painting dated 1495 and attributed to de' Barbari himself (Naples, Museo di Capodimonte) (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5: Attributed to Jacopo de' Barbari, *Portrait of Luca Pacioli (1445–1517) with a student (Guidobaldo da Montefeltro?)*, 1495, oil on panel, 98 x 108 cm, Museo di Capodimonte, Naples. Public domain © Musei di Capodimonte.

Compasses, geometric diagrams, and scientific books are scattered on the table, and a crystal rhomboid octahedron is painted in perspective and suspended on a barely perceptible wire in the top left corner. Despite the uncertain attribution, the painting is from the Venetian School and demonstrates mastery of geometric challenges, such as the *perspectiva artificialis* and laws of optics. This indicates the artist's access to ancient mathematical and scientific treatises in the state's library, which was bequeathed to Venice in 1460 by Cardinal Bessarion (1403–1472), along with contemporary manuscripts and printed books. Artists such as Alberti, Piero della Francesca and Dürer codified these approaches in written and visual form.

Thus, it can be concluded that, by the end of the fifteenth century, scientific treatises and measuring instruments were available to survey a city, and basic mapping of space would have used geometric models to translate measurable reality. Based on the considerations made in this essay, it is possible to conclude that the *View* is a scientific cartographic representation of Venice, although its degree of precision cannot yet be established. Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize that, in order to depict Venice from above, Jacopo de' Barbari translated its measurable shape into an appropriately scaled drawing. The distortions could thus be explicated not only as a compositional device, but also as an adaptation to the constraints imposed by the perspective code. This could explain why, since its publication, the uncanny correspondence with many aspects of the real Venice is one of the primary features that continues to fascinate observers today.

The emergence of directional order within social networks, as illustrated in the *View*, is a phenomenon that merits further investigation. Jacopo de' Barbari, a native of Venice, presented an image that not only registered his perceptual experience of the city, but also conveyed his vision of his own habitat. In his essay *An Artist's Address Book, Notes on Venice's Artistic Geography*, Giorgio Tagliaferro proposes a theoretical construct of artistic geography that is largely based on Henri Lefebvre's theory of the « production of space ». This theory centers social discourse on the representation of space, encouraging us to consider the view not merely as a topographical record, but also as part of a lived experience understood through the interconnections of spaces[19]. According to Lefebvre, space is produced by, and produces, physical, mental and social practices that respectively reflect the threefold characterization of space as perceived, conceived and lived. Applying Lefebvre's scheme to the *View* reveals it to be a conceptualized « representation of space », presenting Venice as both a geographical abstraction and a coherent system of signs informed by scientific knowledge, as well as a «representational space » that expresses the author's appropriation of the physical space through social practice. This facilitates the viewer's ability to comprehend the subject's lived experience through the agency of imagination. The concept of foregrounding the plurality of social, professional and material interests linked to Venice's urban economy has the potential to emphasize the coexistence of multiple operational modes within the city's fabric. This is characterized by both continuities and discontinuities. Tagliaferro applied these theoretical undercurrents by taking painters as an example. The geographical locations where they resided, pursued their occupations, and procured materials for their artisanal pursuits gave rise to a series of social networks that were

[19] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, Oxford 1991(first ed., *La production de l'espace*, Anthropos, Paris 1974), p. 33, 36–46.

intrinsically linked to specific locales. Vincenzo Catena, a prosperous painter who was a contemporary of de' Barbari and was apparently associated with Giorgione, resided in the central commercial hub of San Bartolomeo, in the vicinity of Rialto Bridge. However, the high volume of economic, financial and communication transactions carried out in and around the artist's *contrada* exposed him to cross-connections with other trades and diverse social groups, and his membership of the Scuola di San Rocco, on the other side of Rialto, provided another possible means for him to establish extra-parochial and socially differentiated connections.

The artists were exposed to new trends through their presence in Venice and the interconnectedness of artistic communities. Furthermore, the presence of foreign artists who travelled to the city and were granted commissions could also exert an influence on the broader artistic community. Anna Christine Swartwood House draws attention to the tendency to overlook the margins when attempting to understand the entirety of the *View*'s message, rather than focusing solely on the urban form. In her essay *Beyond Venice. At the Margins of the View*, she puts forward the argument that the margins of the print – which, she notes, have received virtually no attention from scholars – offer valuable insights into Venice and its connection to the wider world. In order to comprehend the artistic and geographical achievements of the *View*, it is essential to reunite the aquatic and mountain frontiers with the central focus. On initial observation, the open aquatic and rural horizons sharply contrast with the meticulously differentiated urban center. This contrast pertains to a seminal conceptualization of the relationship between a city and its outskirts during the fifteenth century, whereby the center engages in a perpetual conflict with the periphery to uphold the prevailing hierarchy between high and low culture, as well as between civilized urbanity and untamed nature, a hierarchical structure that proved to be a readily manifestable concept. The virtues of Venice, as represented by de' Barbari, are largely related to commerce. The mountainous landscape frontier, which traverses the top three sheets in a continuous fashion, serves as a reminder of Venice's incursion into the *terraferma*. It also functions as a mapping indicator, with four named cities (Marghera, Mestre, Treviso and Serravalle), all of which were Venetian possessions, acting as guideposts that formed the trade route for the movement of people and objects of luxury goods, including printed materials – quite possibly the six sheets of the *View* and most certainly copies of the *Nuremberg Chronicle* – across the Brenner Pass, from Venice to the north, to reach an export market abroad. The most renowned documentarian of this « space between », who regarded it as a domain for experimentation and potential, was Albrecht Dürer. Dürer documented his travels over the Brenner Pass from Nuremberg to Venice in 1494-95 through a series of drawings and watercolors. As has been previously observed, Jacopo de' Barbari intended that Mercury serve as a form of signature, yet it is noteworthy that in the *View*, he is depicted both ruling over Venice and

signifying its trading partners, most notably Germany, which is invoked by the mountainous frontier (Fig. 6). The pagan god may also concisely express the interrelations of commerce, geography, and the horizon in the sixteenth century. This phenomenon, too, underscores the imperative for a unification of the center with its margins, a concept that Mercury's integration reinforces.

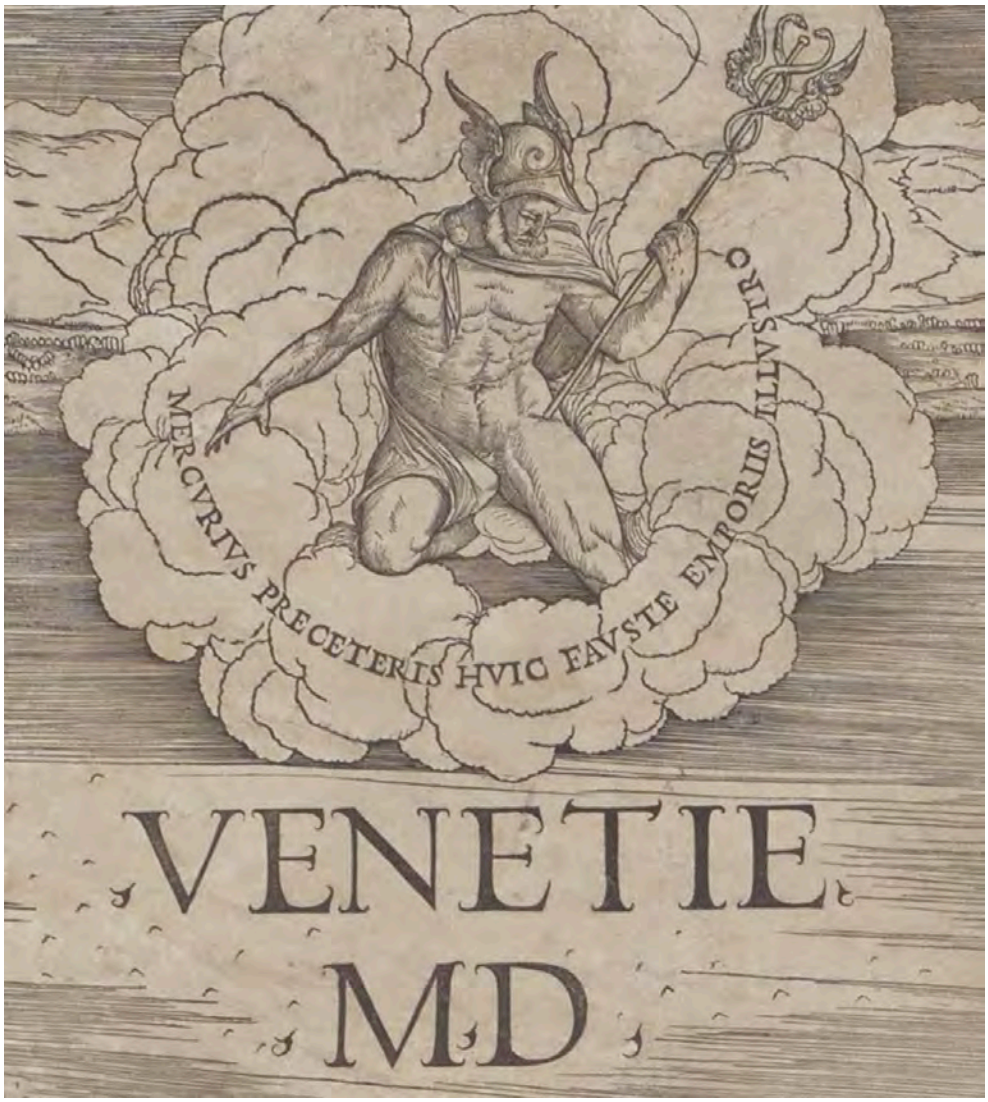

Fig. 6: Jacopo de' Barbari, *View of Venice*, first state, 1500, woodcut print, 132.7 x 277.5 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Art, The John R. Van Derlip Fund, detail: Mercury © Minneapolis Institute of Art

The conviction that Venetian eminence stemmed from its distinct maritime connection and that Venetian affluence was derived from oceanic trade had been a long-standing component of the city's self-concept. De' Barbari's *View* offers a visual representation of these concepts, as evidenced by its strategic placement of Mercury and Neptune, along with the banners held by these classical deities. The work underscores the city's waterways, commercial prosperity, and military strength. Furthermore, the depiction of over 500 vessels, including 148 large merchant ships and 85 cargo ships, transporting luxury goods and commodities between Mediterranean ports and the institutions within the city that regulated and profited from this commerce, serves to convey an impression of maritime prosperity. In *Vessels of Political Communication*, Monique O'Connell contextualizes the *View* as a component of the tradition in Venice of recording « truths » in written form. Humanist chronicles encompassed the documentation of broader patterns of Venetian history, including those recorded by Marcantonio Sabellico and Bernardo Giustinian, in addition to the diaries of Marin Sanudo, Gerolamo Priuli, Pietro Dolfin and Marcantonio Michiel. These chronicles provided detailed accounts of quotidian Venetian life, encompassing both the prosaic and the extraordinary. The two approaches to documenting Venice's history – general praise and propaganda, and detailed realism and personal opinions – are present in the *View*. The overarching vision of the city's appearance is offered, as well as a particular focus on individual streets, canals and buildings. Text and image about the Venetian state are mutually reinforcing, with the text providing a contextual framework for the image and the image serving to augment the text's message. However, O'Connell invites us to consider an interpretation of the image that challenges traditional paradigms. Specifically, she poses the question of whether the image represented the state at the peak of its prosperity, or whether it was instead intended to occlude a pivotal moment in history. In the year prior to the *View*'s publication, wars on two fronts, the eastern Mediterranean, with the Ottomans, and the mainland, in the alliance with the French against Milan, threatened Venetian hegemony, while between 1497 and 1500 the Portuguese's circumnavigation of the Cape of Good Hope endangered the Venetian economy, namely its monopoly over the lucrative spice trades. In a world where people were increasingly accustomed to consuming news, receiving information in polemical form, and seeing and hearing arguments bolstered by combinations of print and image, the *View* formed part of a network of political communication, both written and visual.[20] This asserted the state's persistent strength despite any political and economic challenges.

[20] See Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007 and Rosa Salzberg, *Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2014.

The print industry played a key role in disseminating hyperbolic messages about the Venetian state. A major hub and a crossroad for import and export, Venice was the leading center of the European publishing industry around 1500, with its streets teeming with bookshops, stationers, and street vendors. Printing businesses benefited from transnational networks and international investments, which were concentrated near the Rialto, Piazza San Marco and the Mercerie, the axis that connected the two main sites. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Frezzaria, just west of Piazza San Marco, was home to a concentration of immigrants and print shops. Foreigners – primarily Germans residing in their warehouse near Rialto Bridge, the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, the longtime residence of Anton Kolb –, and printing often went together. In her essay *Navigating the Business of Print in Venice with Jacopo de' Barbari*, Bronwen Wilson considers the *View* as a tool for mapping the business of print. Drawing inspiration from the depictions of Neptune and Mercury which point with their trident and caduceus, as well as the winds with their fan-like rays, which mirror the wind roses found on portolans, she suggests that the map's precision in locating places associated with print is due to its deliberate design, influenced by the convergence of printmaking, mapmaking, and mobility. She suggests that the woodcut functions not only as a topographical map, but also as an itinerary that moves viewers from place to place and orients them to the business of print. The collaboration between the Venetian artist de' Barbari and the German publisher Anton Kolb was an important factor in this process, as was experimentation with the potential of the medium and the unique cityscape, as well as the use of instruments for printing, measuring and travelling. Viewed from a distance and surrounded by personifications of winds, the islands resemble a vast map of the world. This Olympian vantage point offers an idealised, utopian and timeless image of the city that reflects the government's long-standing approach of managing competing interests by integrating individuals into the city as a whole.[21]

Although scholarly attention has primarily focused on the print rather than the matrices used to print the *View*, their size constitutes an overall « monumental » picture measuring approximately 140 by 287 centimeters. This places them among the largest wooden blocks ever made, and among the few large-format examples preserved today (Fig. 7). Valeria Cafà discusses the story of these sculptural artefacts in her essay *On the Collection History of the View's Matrices*. The essay reconstructs known data about the events relating to the six blocks prior to their entry into the museum.

[21] Brownen Wilson, *The World in Venice: Print, the City, and Early Modern Identity*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2005; Ead., « Venice, Print, and the Early Modern Icon », *Urban History*, 33/1 (2006), p. 39–64.

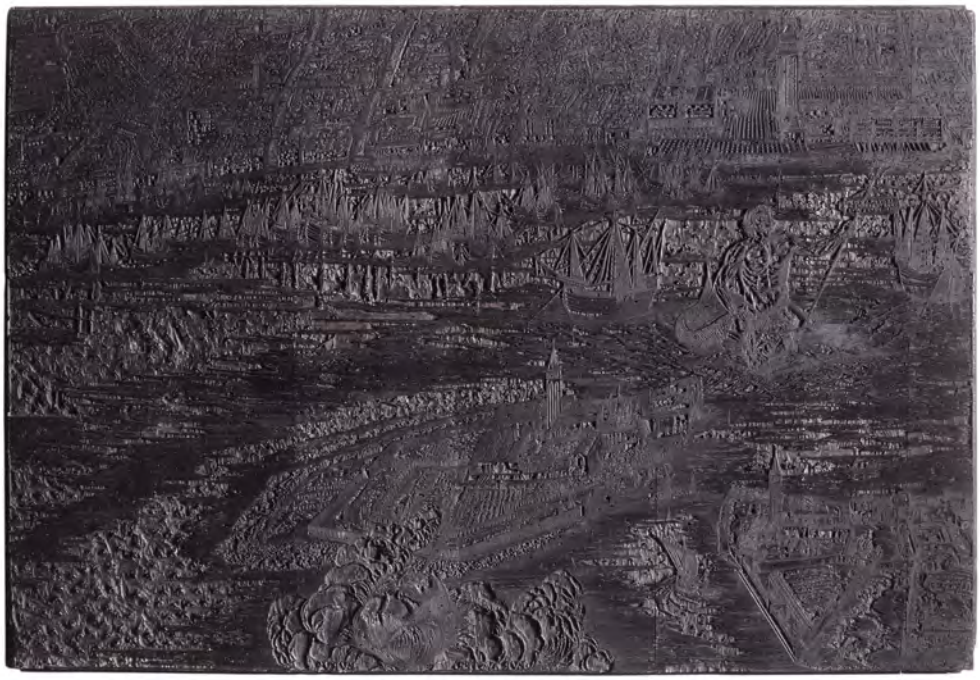

Fig. 7 - Anonymous engraver from Jacopo de' Barbari, woodblock matrix for the print *The View of Venice* (corresponding to the bottom centre), woodcut, 1497–1500, p: 684x995x17 cm; b699x1012x22 cm, Museo Correr, Venice. © Museo Correr, Venice.

Albeit intrinsically linked to the prints, the matrices are works of art in their own right and have a different history, presence and esteemed value in Venice, first among printmakers and later among collectors.[22] After 1500, the matrices underwent specific changes resulting in two additional known states. In the first state, dated between 1511 and 1514, the small section containing the date « MD »

[22] The measurements of the individual parts are shown below. Each part of the matrix consists of two sections: the carved and engraved section (called the « plate ») and the smooth section on the reverse (called the « block »). Each part is indicated by a letter of the alphabet, starting with the first at the top left (A) and ending with the last at the bottom right (F): A- plate: 683 x 909 x 14; block: 695 x 930 x 15; B- p: 682 x 995 x 17; b: 698 x 1013 x 15; C- p: 685 x 913 x 17; b: 696 x 928 x 14; D- p: 683 x 912 x 15; b: 698 x 928 x 14; E- p: 684 x 995 x 17; b: 699 x 1012 x 22; F- p: 682 x 908 x 14; b: 695 x 925 x 15. It is symptomatic of a change in attitude towards these artefacts, now particularly at the centre of research interest, that the 1999 *A volo d'uccello* exhibition catalogue still stated that the matrices should not be evaluated « as autonomous artistic objects but as works of art intended for transposition onto paper » (p. 102). See the monographic issue of *Studi di Memofonte*, 17 (2016) and Elizabeth Savage, Femke Speelberg (eds.), *Printing Things: Blocks, Plates, and Stones 1400–1900*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, forthcoming.

disappears and the roof of the San Marco bell tower is corrected to reflect its completion between 1513 and 1514. This first revision was followed by a further retooling in the second half of the sixteenth century, which aimed to restore the matrices to their original state, producing prints closer to the first state. Venice had changed so much that a revision could no longer modify select notable points, the choice, therefore, was to return to the *View* of 1500, effectively changing the value and purpose of the entire work: no longer a timely documentation of the current state of the city but rather, its memory at a precise moment – at the turn of a new century. The six pear wooden blocks have seemingly always remained in Venice. However, their documented presence has been lost for over two centuries. They reappeared in the second half of the eighteenth century in two short handwritten notes contained in two volumes of the Gradenigo-Dolfin Memorials: the first attributed them to « Alberto Duro » (this reference to the celebrated master as the author must have contributed to their preservation) and located them in the house of Baron Tassis; the second described them as « somewhat moth-eaten » (more likely heavily attacked by woodworms).[23] How and exactly when the matrices entered the family's collections remains unclear. Those who benefited from the Tassis family's misfortune at the end of the eighteenth century included the patrician Teodoro Correr, who had begun his collection of Venetian art and history in those very years. There are almost no provenance records for the works in his collection that he bequeathed to the city of Venice. His collection simply merged into the Museo Civico e Raccolta Correr, forming the nucleus of today's museum.[24] An inventory of Teodoro's holdings in his palazzo on the Grand Canal, compiled in 1831, referenced the *View* mounted on canvas and hung on the wall. Correr may have been thus the first to display the print alongside the six wooden blocks in his museum. This display visually connected the two works of art – the woodcut and the matrices – and was replicated in the first room of the Fondaco dei Turchi (the present-day Natural History Museum) in 1880, where the collection was first moved. It continues to be exhibited in the Correr Museum in Venice today.

It is especially fitting that de' Barbari, even after he left Venice for Nuremberg, continued to adopt Hermes's/Mercury's caduceus as his signature, featured in most attributed prints and selected paintings, is one example of his clever erudition, linking himself with the city and his work of drawing and printing it.

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[23] Biblioteca del Museo Correr, *Commemoriali*, mss Gradenigo-Dolfin, n. 200, tome 11, fol. 11r and tome 16, fol. 25v.

[24] Museo Correr, « Classe XXXIII – tipi e piastre da stampa in metallo e in legno ». A recent overviw of Class XXXIII and in particular of the corpus of wooden matrices has been compiled by Ilaria Andreoli, « Il fondo di matrici lignee del Museo Correr: una presentazione », *Studi di Memofonte*, 17 (2016), p. 25–57.

The three essays that conclude the first part of the volume are in fact dedicated to his work.

Woodcuts, engravings and drawings offered Renaissance artists a creative outlet, free from the constraints of traditional commissions in terms of typology, content and site-specificity. The great innovators in graphic arts at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the next were Andrea Mantegna, Albrecht Dürer, and Jacopo de' Barbari.[25] In her essay, *The Graphic Inventions of Jacopo de' Barbari*, the volume's editor, Kristin Love Huffman, discusses Jacopo de' Barbari's noteworthy contributions, which, while inventive, have received little attention, especially the woodcuts he created just prior to the publication of the *View* – the foundation for his appreciation by prestigious patrons in northern European courts – and the engravings and watercolors produced in the years immediately following. Around the time of his involvement with the ambitiously conceived *View*, the artist devised another large-scale, multisheet woodcut set: the *Battle of the Satyrs* (a single sheet measuring approximately 385 x 495 mm) and *Triumph over the Satyrs* (three sheets measuring approximately 290 x 1270 mm). These early examples of pictorial poetry that were embraced by artists such as Lorenzo Lotto and Giorgione in the following decade, with small-scale paintings that were prized by Venetian collectors. When studied together as an unfolding narrative intended to be read sequentially, de' Barbari's woodcuts reveal the artist's awareness of humanist themes, his ability to translate them into visual form, and his skill in creating intricate imagery. They represent a moment in time when the sophistication of imagery and composition was achieved in a medium – engraving – that, until de' Barbari, had been less exploratory in terms of format and subject matter. These inventions reveal de' Barbari's understanding of the contemporary humanist revival of poetic and philosophical sources, offering insights into his movement within humanist circles. In an effort to decipher the visual, multivalent registers of meaning in these early woodcuts, Huffman considers their various humanist underpinnings: allegorical/mythological, literal, political, historical, scientific and expressly self-referential. These visual connections extend to other prints conceived independently by the artist: *Victory Reclining Among Her Trophies*, c. 1500–1501, and *The Satyr and His Family*, c. 1504, continue metonymic references from the Satyr woodcuts. Shortly after producing the *View*, and most likely while staying with Frederick the Wise, the artist introduced the still life genre, which

[25] On Renaissance print, see LANDAU, PARSHALL, *The Renaissance Print,* and EVELYN LINCOLN, *The Invention of the Renaissance Printmaker*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 2000 and specifically on Venice, see now FARA, LANDAU (eds), *Renaissance in Black and White*. On de' Barbari, see JAY A. LEVENSON, « Jacopo de' Barbari and Northern Art of the Early Sixteenth Century », Ph. D. Diss., Columbia University 1978, SIMONE FERRARI, *Jacopo de' Barbari: un protagonista del Rinascimento tra Venezia e Dürer*, Mondadori, Milan 2006 and BEATE BÖCKEM, *Jacopo de' Barbari: Künstlershaft and Hofkultur um 1500*, Böhlau Verlag, Cologne 2016.

had not been seen as a standalone subject since antiquity. The *Dead Partridge* (1504) (Fig. 8) is a stunning depiction of the bird as it would have appeared immediately after the hunt and is yet another triumph.[26] Like his woodcuts and engravings, this work on paper features unprecedented subject matter. And, like the *View*, its mesmerising detail captivates the viewer.

Fig. 8: Jacopo de' Barbari, *Dead Gray Partridge*, 1504, watercolour on paper, 25,7 x 15,2 cm. British Museum, London. Public domain © Trustees of the British Museum.

[26] Watercolour on paper, 27.7 x 15.2 cm, The British Museum, London.

In her essay, *Revisiting 'lontani et altra fantaxia' An Eyckian Perspective on Giovanni Bellini and Jacopo de' Barbari*, Mary Pardo revisits textual and visual evidence for the critical connotations of the term *lontani* (distances), which, around 1500, was used as a supplement and near-synonym for *paesi* (countrysides) – a term now translated as « landscapes ». The term *lontani* is discussed in relation to the specifically Eyckian legacy: it is argued that its use correlates with the survival of Jan van Eyck's pictorial strategies and the memory of his specific innovations into the late fifteenth century. In this context, the relationship between Bellini's *fantasia* and his conception of distant landscape views is examined, as well as the prototypes of northern artists that were long appreciated by Venetian connoisseurs and are usually cited as sources for Bellini's topographical inventions. Jan van Eyck's panoramic topographies in paintings such as the *Rolin Madonna* and various *Crucifixions* (including one now at the Ca' d'Oro in Padua, which was already there by 1460) or the Antwerp *Saint Barbara* offered models for urban depictions in the style of portraits and bird's-eye projections. De Barbari's illusionistic rendering of urban stereotomy, or descriptive geometry, not only indicates his sophisticated understanding of van Eyck's visual strategies, but also his place among celebrated contemporaries such as Bellini. If the best Quattrocento models for optically coherent, portrait-like urban depictions achieved with tonal modelling were found in the panoramic topographies of Eyckian painting, *lontani* et *altra fantaxia* (a phrase quoted by nobleman Michele Vianello from a letter by Bellini himself) were pictorial features that the Venetian considered to be unique to his art and the pleasure it gave to viewers and himself. Bellini internalised his *lontani* and enjoyed nourishing his imagination by following his paintbrush on an « aimless » journey (*vagare*), as seen in his *Sacred Allegory* (c. 1490–1500).[27] This work brings together the raking light of the foreground, meteorological light from the sky, and reflected and refracted light in the water, bridging the differences between near and far.

The early 1500s – the period in which de' Barbari launched his career north of the Alps – were a decisive and fertile time for intercultural and artistic exchanges between Italy and the North. Among Italian artists documented to have been active north of the Alps in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, de' Barbari is the most noteworthy. As outlined by Rangsook Yoon in her essay, the last of the volume's first part, *Jacopo de' Barbari, a Wandering Court Artist in the North. Changing Perspectives on His Role in Northern Renaissance Art*, he was an urbane, erudite humanist who demonstrated uncanny adaptability as he moved among prestigious courts in northern Europe. His illustrious yet nomadic career began with his involvement in creating the *View* and the recommendation of the Nuremberg patrician Anton Kolb. While his role as a cultural mediator,

[27] Oil on canvas, 73 x 119 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

introducing and disseminating Italian humanistic knowledge of classical antiquity and Renaissance artistic theories in Germany, is irrefutable, his critical importance has diminished in the twentieth century. In her analysis of critical works on cultural and artistic exchanges between Italy and the North, Yoon contextualizes de' Barbari's nomadic artistic career within the framework of early modern mobility and the circumstances of Renaissance court artists. By examining his presence in various northern courts (including Nuremberg, Wittemberg, Souburg and Mechelen), Yoon illustrates de' Barbari's transformative role in conveying the artistic motifs and ideals of the Italian Renaissance to the North. In particular, she highlights his contribution to the movement to elevate painting to the status of the eighth liberal art. His patrons in northern courtly circles highly appreciated his mathematical knowledge, which underpinned the theoretical discourse about ideal human proportions. This is evident not only in Dürer's artworks and writing, but also in de' Barbari's influence on several young artists who would soon become major figures, including Cranach the Elder, Gossart, and Hans Süss von Kulmbach. De' Barbari's renderings of nude figures and his studies of ideal human proportions, allegedly derived from the Vitruvian canon which was still obscure in the North, acted as a catalyst in the formation of these younger artists at a time when de' Barbari's artistic leadership prevailed in the courts that employed them. The esteem in which de' Barbari was held by his contemporary patrons, humanists and colleagues, as well as his overall art-historical significance, needs to be re-examined in light of the prestige, artistic commissions and social position accorded to sixteenth-century court artists, who were often treated as members of a prince's inner circle and enjoyed both tangible and intangible benefits. German and Burgundian-Netherlandish monarchs invested heavily in displaying their humanistic and classical learning and taste, and in promulgating such developments in their courts, where a taste for antiquity was previously absent or just beginning. Artists like De' Barbari, who were willing to relocate from Italy, played an essential role in establishing new artistic traditions at princely residences.

The *View* persisted for over two hundred years as the quintessential image of Venice, serving as a legacy of memory for the city. Subsequent representations of the city adopted the *View*'s visual strategies as a means of presenting the city to the world until the eighteenth century, when Lodovico Ughi's plan of Venice was published.[28] This marked the transition to standard, mathematically charted representations that can be geo-rectified within digital platforms and are therefore relatable to nineteenth-century cadasters and contemporary maps.

[28] [*Iconografica rappresentatione della inclita città di Venezia consacrata al reggio serenissimo dominio veneto*], [Venice]: Giuseppe Baroni a S. Giuliano, [1729?], 128 x 177 cm, < https://lccn.loc.gov/2006629148 >, last accessed May 2026.

The thirteen essays in Part II open with the systems and networks necessary for a city that prided itself on its uniqueness and international status as a trading hub – the invisible ingenuity necessary for a city that was truly in a class of its own, built in a lagoon. This was the result of human creativity coexisting within a mutually fortifying ecosystem, as revealed by the details of the print, thanks to the city's inimitable *forma urbis*. The Queen of the Adriatic had sovereignty over a vast maritime domain. Born of the sea, she was the beautiful mythological goddess, Venus. She remained untouched and unblemished by foreign attack for over one thousand years thanks to the lagoon's waterways, which provided natural defenses. Alongside contemporary written chronicles and personal accounts, the *View* reinforced the notion of Venice as a marvelous, miraculous and divine city. It also underscored the power, wealth and exceptionality of the harmonious Venetian state, otherwise known as *La Serenissima*.[29]

Jacopo de' Barbari's print depicts the city at the end of a remarkable century of financial and political success, physical growth, urban improvements and construction activity. The Venetian Republic amassed a collection of myths to explain the reasons for its legendary peace, stability, and longevity. One fundamental strand of these myths was the city's own seemingly miraculous foundation; the essential point being that the site was divinely chosen, through the figure of Mark the Evangelist. This divine choice itself gave rise to a city that was unique in its physical context. The entire city was built through the resourcefulness, determination and ingenuity of the Venetian people in a physical environment that most others would deem impossible. Since these foundations are invisible, the palazzi appear to rise straight out of the water. It was almost as if the Venetians were defying the rules of nature and gravity itself. Venice was also a true bastion of Christianity, unstained by any classical or pagan associations. In his essay, *Toward the Perfect City. Urban Development in the Quattrocento*, Richard Goy considers some of the practical ways in which the vision of the « triumphant » was realised during the Quattrocento. This culminated in Marin Sanudo's written laudation, *Laus Urbis Venetae* (1493), and de' Barbari's graphic one, bearing the bold title « Venetie MD » at the top. By the time de' Barbari's *View* was published in 1500, the city's overall form and communication networks had already been established; nonetheless, the 25 per cent population increase over a century is significant given the city's virtually finite form and limits. Thus, land reclamation would not cease in an effort to ease congestion, notably along the northern rim of the city, during the sixteenth century. Goy introduces readers to the process of

[29] See Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *Venise triomphante: les horizons d'un mythe*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1999, David Rosand, *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 2001, Iain Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City: History, Memory and Myth in Renaissance Venice*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 2007 and Karl Appuhn, *A Forest on the Sea. Environmental Expertise in Renaissance Venice*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2009.

expansion and land reclamation – a dynamic phenomenon that is evident in the view of the western and eastern edges of the city. This was an extensive area of marsh and mudflat that evolved over the Quattrocento. Urbanization remained an ideal Venetian balance of practical necessity, fiscal acumen, public and private interests, and secular and religious interests. However, it was always an investment in the city that displayed a strong sense of civic and patriotic pride – a sentiment that is equally prominent in Sanudo's words. Much as driving timber piles into the clay for a new palazzo represented Venetian ingenuity, resourcefulness and strength of will, reclamation reinforced the idea that the Venetians were in command of their destiny, unhindered by the vagaries of their natural surroundings.

As Sanudo famously wrote « Venice is in the water and has no water ». Before the modern era, the city's only sources of fresh water were rain and barges from the mainland. The Venetians quickly learned how to capture this precious resource, devising an ingenious system whereby rainwater was collected in cisterns hidden beneath almost every campo, cloister and courtyard in the city. Each cistern was topped by a *vera da pozzo*, or wellhead. As Venice possessed no stone of its own, all the materials for the wellheads had to be imported from elsewhere. Venetians were masters at repurposing antique remains, and in the early days, wellheads were made from genuine Roman or Greek *spolia*. The purity of the public cisterns was protected by the authorities. The wells had wooden or metal covers that were locked at night and opened every morning by the parish priest or his representative, who would ring the church bells to signal this. Like palaces, which were personal urbanistic interventions, the sculpted wellheads distributed throughout the city provided sustenance and served as places to socialize with neighbors. Patricia Fortini Brown discusses the more than fifty ornamental wellheads identified in the *View* in Venice, Giudecca and Murano – during the Renaissance, there were some 7,000 wellheads in total, in public and private spaces – in her essay *The Wellhead as an Amenity of Venetian Urban Space*. Her close analyses reveal that the iconography and the decorative style of wellheads indicated the history and importance of a site and mirrored the changing tastes in architecture and sculpture over time in Venice. Many wellheads became collectors' items, traveling the world. The Austrians led the way, shipping the weighty showpieces to Germany, Austria, Russia, and beyond, but British and Americans were not far behind.

The wellheads were not the only distinctive features that shaped daily life. The more than one hundred bell towers, which are all connected to churches, dominate the skyline and, like the wellheads, have been documented in the *View*. Although mostly freestanding, Venice's campanili are distinct from all others in Italy. Two basic architectural elements are common to almost all Venetian towers: first, a tall, single brick shaft without openings; and second, an architecturally

distinct belfry. Venetian builders seem to have combined these elements in almost every possible configuration. From the vantage point of the *View*, Venice appears quiet and serene. At ground level, however, it was occupied by over 100,000 busy people and filled with sounds, none of which were louder or more ubiquitous than those produced by the three hundred or so bells that rang out from the bell towers. In his essay, *Hidden in Plain Sight (and Hearing). Venetian Bells and Their Towers*, Jonathan Glixon counts 94 freestanding *campanili* and 12 « a vela » (that is inserted in the roof) in the city itself, for a total of 106; in addition, there are 22 more on the islands of the lagoon, bringing the grand total to 128. This daily framework included bell ringing for religious services, peals to mark the beginning and end of the working day, as well as the evening and nocturnal hours when outdoor activities were limited for safety reasons. Bells also rang in case of fire, to celebrate military victories or peace treaties, for processions and funerals, and simply to indicate the hour, as with public clocks. On an ordinary day, this amounted to more than half an hour of continuous ringing, plus around 135 individual strikes (on Sundays and festivals, there was less continuous ringing, but more strikes). This sonic environment, which resonated across the city from dawn until dusk and reverberated through spaces given that water amplifies sound, structured the rhythm of Venice's everyday life.

The essays in Part II also highlight the visibility and invisibility of Venice's residents and the lives they lived within the city's walls. Four contributions emphasize the active and dynamic role that certain groups residing in the city – typically perceived as being on the margins, whether figuratively or literally – played in the political, economic, religious and social life of early modern Venice.

The *View* documents a period when convent complexes were less influenced by idealizing and self-referential logic - such as monastic rules and reforming decrees – and more by their natural and urban contexts, and the demands of practicality. Historically, convents served as urbanistic anchors, imposing a formal hierarchy on an island due to their scale and chronological position. Around the mid-fourteenth century, convents began to occupy sites on the city's less developed outer shores, where they could construct spacious complexes to support the imperative of separation from the profane realm. However, as the city became increasingly developed, the isolation of the convents began to be compromised. Some convents founded in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries took a different approach, settling within dense areas where expansion required the acquisition of neighboring properties, enabling convents to grow piecemeal over time. In her essay, *Santa Lucia and Corpus Domini at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century. The View and Urban Patterns*, Saundra Weddle focuses on two convents in close physical proximity: the Dominican nuns at Corpus Domini, who were inserted into an undeveloped site, and the new religious community of the Augustinians at Santa Lucia, which was founded later, on a denser site. The essay discusses how growth

over time led to a perception of encroachment and potential disruptions to devotional life, along with financial repercussions stemming from ownership rights and the devotional attraction of sacred relics.

The dynamic interplay between religious institutions serving their communities and the city illustrated the interconnected nature of their various residents. Venice has always identified itself through the religious buildings that marked its legendary origins: the image of the church served as a powerful reminder of the Venetian Christian religion, and of Rome's role as guardian of piety and the Catholic faith. Yet it also embodied the distinctive civic identity of a capital that promoted itself as « Altera Roma », the true descendant of the ancient metropolis. Furthermore, following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Venice established itself as the rightful heir to Byzantium's sacred legacy, then under threat from the iconoclastic impiety of the Ottomans. This spiritual turmoil provided the backdrop to a wide range of social, artistic and intellectual activities related to places of worship, which characterized the final decades of the century. Over time, these cultural maneuvers were sustained and glorified by literature, imagery, cartography and the arts, which were called upon to reinforce the *imago urbis*: a solid, self-sufficient and, above all, pious city. Arranged principally as a ring along the contours of the city – in settlements on the interface of land and water – many ecclesiastical institutions contributed significantly to the spatial maturation process leading to the physical creation of the new urban districts. Since the early thirteenth century, religious communities had initiated land reclamation operations on a scale that sometimes covered entire neighborhoods. These pioneering campaigns sought to rectify Venice's frayed and irregular borders, while enhancing urban areas still dominated by swamps and marshes. These efforts intensified in the sixteenth century due to population growth, the need to drain mud from canal excavations, and the government's desire for a regular and permanent boundary for urban settlements. In *Monastic and Convent Life as a City Phenomenon*, Ludovica Galeazzo[30] highlights the role of monastic and

[30] Ludovica Galeazzo, an Associate Professor of Architectural History in the Department of Cultural Heritage at the University of Padua, has been a member of the collaborative initiative « Visualizing Venice/Visualizing Cities » since 2011 (University of Padua and Duke University) and has worked as assistant curator on three international exhibitions on early modern Venetian history displayed at the Ducal Palace (*Acqua e cibo a Venezia*, 2015; *Venice, the Jews, and Europe*, 2016) and the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke (*A Portrait of Venice: Jacopo de' Barbari's View of 1500*, 2017). Galeazzo is now the Principal Investigator of the project *Venice's Nissology. Reframing the Lagoon City as an Archipelago: A Model for Spatial and Temporal Urban Analysis (16th21st centuries)*: < https://veniss.eu > (last accessed May 2026). *VeNiss* has been awarded an ERC Starting Grant from the European Research Council for five years (2023–2027) and is based at the Università degli Studi di Padova, in the Department of Cultural Heritage, in partnership with the Department of Architecture at the Università degli Studi di Firenze and I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies. A sizeable interdisciplinary team of art and architectural historians, socio-economic and literary scholars, as well as experts on digital

conventual complexes as urban hubs connecting people. These complexes form a notable ring around the city's periphery, occupying the outskirts where more extensive properties were found. In addition to the buildings, religious communities cultivated sizeable green spaces containing medicinal plants, vineyards, and edible fruits and vegetables. The interlocking exchange between religious institutions and Venice was not limited to food alone. Nunneries and monasteries were an integral part of Venetian social and cultural life, as well as the urban and economic essence of the everyday city. The Benedictine monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore, located at the lower border of the *View*, was an important site for hosting visitors to the city; it also rented out building spaces for storage or leased landholdings to local industries such as cloth dyeing and sail manufacturing. Like the monastery, the garden was at the heart of contemporary spiritual and intellectual culture. In the first half of the sixteenth century, it was the main catalyst for the reform movement in Venice. The Dominican monastery of San Giovanni e Paolo, one of Venice's main humanist centers and played a significant role in timber-related commercial operations. It had extensive possessions, warehouses and shops which were rented out to private citizens at high prices. Another notable example was the renowned pastry laboratory located within the nunnery of Santa Croce on the Giudecca. Once again, de' Barbari's *View* is an invaluable iconographic resource. Not only does it capture the city's physical growth, but it also describes the ongoing processes.

While largely hidden within the *View*, Venice's inhabitants – men and women, natives and foreigners, patricians, the bourgeois citizen class and the general populace – nonetheless reinforced state interests as they advanced their own. On certain occasions, this socially diverse group greeted Italian, European and Mediterranean rulers and their families and entourages, creating a visual juxtaposition of republican and monarchical governing systems. As a republic, the Venetian state was emphatically gendered as masculine. However, Venetian symbolism and ritual also featured allegories of women, idealized and real ones. The Venetians also personified their city as a woman. Her iconography drew on the Virgin Mary, personifications of Justice, and even the Roman goddess Venus – who, like the Venetian economy, was born from the sea. However, while the personification of Venice was powerful, she did not represent a symbol of female empowerment; the male-dominated republic created and controlled her, just as it

survey, 3D modelling, and semantic web is working to develop a methodology for grasping the urban dynamics of Venice's cluster of islands, one of the most enduring and contradictory human-made settlements. See LUDOVICA GALEAZZO, « Resemanticising Lost Landscapes: A Database of the Venetian Archipelago», *TRIBELON Journal of Drawing and Representation of Architecture, Landscape and Environment*, 1/2, (2024), p. 64–75 < https://doi.org/10.36253/tribelon-2943 > (last accessed 2026).

did the gendered female sea. In her essay *Gendered Space(s) and the* View, Holly Hulburt argues for the reconsideration of women of all classes and ages, both foreign and Venetian, as integral to Venetian politics and the urban fabric of Venice, and as necessary for its continued success. By participating in civic rituals and honorary processions, or attending weddings, *feste* or taverns, women acted as vital information brokers. Whether in semi-private palatial *ridotti* – intellectual or entertainment gatherings similar to French salons that served as loci for political strategizing during pastimes such as gambling – their presence was pivotal. Furthermore, as their bodies were adorned with Venetian-traded and manufactured goods like damask and pearls, they formed a living tableau the city's commercial dominance.

In his essay *Wifely Mobility in Renaissance Venice*, Stanley Chojnacki discusses the movement and stability of families and individuals around the city, examining the variety of residences among patrician families. While some families remained in the same parish (*contrada*) for decades and tended to cluster in specific areas, others, such as the Vitturi family, moved around the city, residing in six different *sestieri*. In particular, Chojnacki traces the unusually peripatetic movement of Cateruzza Vitturi within the city (and to Treviso, a Venetian mainland territory), which she used to enact her loyalties and protect her self-interests.

By 1500, Venice had experienced centuries of sovereignty over an Italian state: a powerful, oligarchic republic with extensive territorial and maritime holdings. At this time, the Venetian state had reached its zenith, extending beyond the city's administrative epicenter. However, the maritime hegemony that had fueled its dramatic expansion was fatally undermined by the rising Ottoman Empire and European monarchies, as well as the accelerating expansion of trade routes outside the Mediterranean. Christopher Columbus's discovery of the Americas in 1492 led to a reconceptualization of the world and a shift in the international market. By 1500, the Portuguese had already circumnavigated the Cape of Good Hope. Nevertheless, market demands and the steady import and export of goods, including luxury items, were key features of the economic vibrancy of early modern Venice. Networks of individuals and commodities reflected global markets.

Giada Damien's essay, *Two Palaces, a Chapel, and an Art Collection on the Grand Canal. The World of Domenico di Pietro in Jacopo de' Barbari's* View *of Venice*, sheds light on the life of the jeweler and antiquarian Domenico di Pietro, who was active in Venice in the fifteenth century. His will from 1496 reveals that he had amassed a substantial fortune in cash, precious objects and real estate by the end of his life. Numerous other archival records show his business transactions, revealing that he served a wide network of clients throughout Europe. Among these clients were some of the most prestigious collectors of the time, including Lorenzo de' Medici, Pius II, Paul II, Innocent VIII, the Este family, and King Matthias Corvinus. His

wealth and status enabled him to contribute to the embellishment of the facades of the Scuola Grande di San Marco, of which he was a member and Guardian Grande for many years. His taste for lavish displays of expensive colored marbles and decorative sculptures visibly reflected his personal taste for luxury and expensive materials, as well as his trade in jewels, his social standing and the prestige of his international clientele. This can be inferred by comparing it with the jeweler's own private commissions undertaken in those same years, all encrusted with slabs of expensive marble: a private funerary chapel in Santa Maria della Carità, described by Marcantonio Michiel as « ornatissima di pietre » (demolished in 1807); an important palace on the Grand Canal, near the church of San Giacomo dall'Orio, which was acquired by the Signoria for the exorbitant sum of 10,000 ducats; and another palace on the Grand Canal, in the parish of Sant'Agnese – probably the one known today as Palazzo Contarini Polignac, just steps away from the church of the Carità.

The *View* must be understood as something more than merely a tool used by merchants to gain information about a city renowned for its commercial enterprises. The *View* itself was a luxury item and was intended for a market with ready buyers. Departing from this premise, Blake de Maria's essay, *Luxury Goods in Jacopo de' Barbari's Venice*, explores Venetian involvement in the global luxury goods network, including manufacturing, trading and retailing, during a pivotal period in global trade, spanning approximately 1480 to 1550. After providing an overview of what constituted a luxury good in sixteenth-century Venice – exemplified by all kinds of glassware, including mirrors, as seen in the two-sided *Portrait of a Man* in Berlin, which is sometimes attributed to Jacopo de' Barbari (Fig. 9) – and discussing the problems inherent in the notion of luxury/*luxuria* as presented in ancient and modern sources, de Maria traces the concentration of the luxury trade along the Mercerie, from Rialto to Piazza San Marco, as well as on ephemeral stalls in central locations during feast days and festivals. Thanks to the Republic's long-standing trade agreements, Venetian merchants were permitted to reside in cities such as Alexandria, Istanbul, Aleppo and Basra. These residencies ensured a constant supply of eastern goods available for purchase in the lagoon city. These foreign objects were designated as « luxury » not only because of the value of the materials used to create them, but also because of their place of origin. During the Renaissance, material culture from faraway places became associated with the exotic, elevating the status of many a necessity to that of a luxury item. Gemstones certainly qualify as such, and their fungibility further increases their value. Venice was geologically incapable of producing gems, although the Venetians were notorious jewel forgers, which makes sense given the city's glassmaking facilities, thus, the gems had to be imported from India, Sri Lanka, or Myanmar. The processing of commodities into luxury goods often took place in the city's outskirts. This decision certainly satisfied practical and security

concerns, as glassmaking furnaces were transferred to the island of Murano in the late thirteenth century. These locations offered easier movement of products, as goods could be transported around the open waterways surrounding the city rather than through the smaller, more crowded canals cutting through it. Many of the workers who transformed raw materials such as textiles into fine fabric bolts available for purchase in Venetian shops lived in terraced housing built in these outlying areas. Since dyeing, spinning and weaving often took place at home, many of these workers were women. Thus, merchant families contributed not only to the decorative embellishment of the city via palatial architecture, but also to its infrastructure. This was necessary for the growth and maintenance of their commercial enterprises, exemplified by the construction of housing for workers. Throughout the sixteenth century, luxury goods from the Americas, including gold, cochineal and emeralds, found their way to Venice's marketplace. However, despite the expansion of the luxury goods market and the development of global trade, Venice would no longer enjoy the primacy of the wealthy mercantile warehouses memorialized in Jacopo de' Barbari's *View*.

Fig. 9: Attributed to Jacopo de' Barbari, *Portrait of a German* (recto) / *Two lovers in a room* (verso), circa 1500, oil on panel, 59,5 x 45 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin. Public domain © Berlin Gemäldegalerie.

Venice acted as a true entrepôt; during the early modern period, its trade network extended from the eastern Atlantic coast to the western Black Sea coast and beyond. Venetian merchants traded in a variety of goods, including finished products such as carpets, in addition to raw materials imported into Venice for processing before being utilized in the city or exported elsewhere. However, retail production and trade could also be highly specialized and localized. Julia A. Delaney's essay, *Both by Sea and Land. Venetian Trade and Retail in the* View, examines the *View* from the perspective of Venetian mercantile activities and the movement of goods around, throughout and within the city. The essay takes merchants dealing in coloring materials (*vendecolori*), which were particular to Venice around the time of the *View*'s publication in 1500, as a case study. These merchants stood to make vast sums of money from their work, and their goods were used in a wide array of luxury goods for which Venice was known, such as paintings, glass, and textiles displayed in the area around Campo San Bartolomeo. The manufacture and sale of lead white (*cerussa*, *biacca* or *biacca di Venezia*) are of particular interest, as it was used not only as a pigment, but also in glazes and as a flux in the ceramics and glassmaking industries. During the early modern period, Venetians produced the highest-quality lead white on a large scale, dominating the global market and making select individuals extremely wealthy and allowing them to prosper within an otherwise fixed class system.

Around 1500, approximately 120,000 people lived in Venice, a vibrant and cosmopolitan community, one of the largest and most populous Renaissance cities in the Mediterranean and Europe. Although almost no one is represented apart from a few exceptions, such as boatmen on the water or workers in the Arsenal; nonetheless, by closely examining the built environment, the *View* offers a lens through which to understand contemporary Venetian society and reconstruct the social fabric. Despite the invisibility of the inhabitants, consequently, the numerous social and economic interactions, along with the political relations and tensions that formed the Serenissima, can be perceived. With its empty streets and squares, the *View* generally represents the mythologized sociopolitical serenity of the state, reflecting an ideological vision of Venetian society. However, it also highlights spaces where patricians and non-elite Venetians met, socialized and negotiated power. Specific sites and their buildings expressed and shaped these power relations. Traversing the city from the San Marco area in the south to the island of Murano in the north, Maertje van Gelder and Claire Judde de Larivière's essay, *Imagining Social and Political Relations in the* View. *From Piazza San Marco to Murano*, traces how the city's inhabitants would have filled the otherwise empty spaces of the *View* and thus how Venetian society functioned. It also points to state strategies for maintaining social harmony that, at times, masked the realities of unrest and civil discord centered upon Piazza San Marco. This was an animated economic hub and the theatre of religious, political and punishment rituals, as well

as an arena for the exchange of information. In contrast to this public engagement and bustling activity, de' Barbari's *piazza* is strikingly empty and devoid of people. This visual effect is enhanced by the sheer size of the square, which is delineated by architecture serving the state: St Mark's Church, the Granai and the Ducal Palace, as well as other political buildings. Government policy and the centralized management of essential needs in Venice, as well as in its satellite territories, could either maintain or disrupt social cohesion. Murano is a case in point: the island's two main areas were divided by its own Grand Canal, which ran from west to east. The northern part of the island was populated by peasants and fishermen who lived in thatched huts, tended their gardens and dried their nets along the quays. The south of the island was home to the famous glass furnaces and other trades that contributed to the community's distinctive way of life. Patricians and other wealthy Venetians used the island as a place of villeggiatura, or a rural retreat. The Ponte Lungo was the only way to cross Murano's Grand Canal and was a strategic point of passage between the two parts of the island. As such, it was a site of frequent conflict and brawling between peasants of the north and the artisans of the south. Although it was in close proximity to Venice, Murano functioned as an independent yet interdependent dominion, governed by a *podestà* who oversaw it. At times, he was subjected to severe disapproval by local citizens, who made their dissatisfaction clear.

Due to its prosperity and prominence as a commercial entrepôt – identified as *Civitas Mercatorum*, an emporium of trade with transcultural connections stretching as far as the eastern Mediterranean and northern Europe – Venice was an important travel destination and part of the pilgrimage route to the Holy Land, attracting large numbers of visitors. As a model melting pot, it stood at a crossroads of worldly encounters, bringing together Germans, Jews and other foreigners travelling from far and wide – east, west, north and south. In *Cosmopolitan in Venice and State Strategies*, Martina Massaro discusses the cosmopolitan nature of Venice and government tactics for welcoming (and containing) foreigners. She proposes that the relationship between the sixteenth-century architectural transformations at Piazza San Marco and urban interventions such as those at the Rialto and the Ghetto were related to the cosmopolitan Venetian identity and the city's changing needs. Two fires – one in 1512 that destroyed the northern side of St Mark's Square and another in 1514 that burned the Rialto – generated the need to redesign and rebuild these two main districts, providing an opportunity to reconsider their functions. During the first half of the sixteenth century, the Venetian state transferred most of the commercial activities that had previously been located at St Mark's square to the Rialto, establishing it as the primary location for Venetian market activity and international exchange. Political acts issued by the Great Council, the state's largest governing body, established that the various foreign communities must be

given separate areas in which to live. These decisions led to the creation of new residential spaces specifically for foreigners, who maintained a consistent yet transient presence in the city while becoming permanent or semi-permanent residents. By controlling sites as either buildings or isolated *campi*, the state welcomed numerous non-Venetian communities, while simultaneously monitoring their presence and providing a steady source of tax revenue for the city. Massaro examined the case of the Jewish community, the first permanent foreign community established in 1516, and discussed a series of mandates that led to the relocation of non-Venetians from guesthouses near Piazza San Marco to other sites in Venice. The establishment of a Jewish quarter as a permanent area of residence created a cosmopolitan microcosm within a cosmopolitan city and initiated a new Venetian strategy of welcoming immigrants by offering guarantees such as the ability to retain cultural traditions, albeit subject to segregation. Although all foreign and religious communities were subject to vigilant surveillance, the Jews, like other minorities, were valuable to the state (and the Venetian market depended on) due to their economic activity, particularly as money lenders and creditors in market exchanges. Thus, the Republic offered Jews guarantees to practice Judaism and build synagogues that accommodated different rituals for the national communities present in the Ghetto. They were also allocated permanent residences regulated by state law (i*us casaca*, i.e. the right of *ḥazaqah*, *more Hebraeorum*), which, while excluding them from owning property, permitted lifetime rental agreements. In return, the Jews paid heavy taxes, were obligated to lend money and, most importantly, ensured the indispensable credit of the Venetian market for the circulation and exchange of goods around the world.

The volume concludes with an epilogue by Tracy E. Cooper entitled *Venice Lost and Found*, in which she considers the importance of woodcut prints as artefacts that mediate between the past and the present, offering a visualization of the Renaissance city that allows us to rediscover a lost Venice. The *View* encourages close, slow observation, prompting comparative analysis and facilitating understanding and interpretation of Venice then and now. Alongside Cooper's epilogue, in Appendix 1, are short entries on key sites in Venice and visible elements of the *View*. This helps travelers and readers to bridge the past and present. Kristin Love Huffman signs the introduction, *The View and Its Relevance Today. Venice Then and Now* and the entries for *Piazza San Marco*, *The Grand Canal*, *Palatial Splendour*, *Venice's Churches*, and *Venetians: Visible and Invisible Inhabitants*, Ludovica Galeazzo wrote the entry for *Rialto*, Maartje van Gelder on *The Arsenal* and Jonathan Glixon on *Church Bell Towers*. Appendix 2 reproduces Anton Kolb's petition and the Collegio's positive response on the copyright permission and export license request for the *View of Venice* (15 October 1500, Venice, Archivio di Stato (ASVe), Collegio Notatorio, reg. 15, fol. 28r), and Appendix 3 provides the

transcription (by Bonnie Blackburn) of Anton Kolb's will (12 October 1541, ASVe, Notarile Testamenti, b. 128 (notary Francesco Bianco), no. 157, fol. 67v–68r).

One of the fascinating aspects of the *View* is that it encourages observers to approach it from any point, allowing their gaze to wander from one point to another, just as the perfect visitor to Venice should do, pausing periodically to linger on curious details. The essays in this volume reflect this varied, rich, complex and dynamic approach to the observation of documented historical realities. Through numerous academic contributions, analyses of the socio-political and cultural context of early modern Venice, and the presentation of original insights into this iconic image, readers are offered new content, new archival evidence, varied perspectives (from art and architecture and musicology, to civil engineering, urban studies, environmental history and political economy, from gender studies to media studies) and stimulating curiosities about a vibrant, complex, and distinctive Renaissance city, its normative and governmental models (secular and ecclesiastical), and the intersecting networks of people who resided and lived there, both natives and foreigners, such as Jacopo de' Barbari and Anton Kolb. It is a pity, however, that in many cases it is difficult to identify a common thread among the 23 different essays, except for the one, often too tenuous and almost specious, of the *View*, and the overall impression is rather that of an amalgamation requiring greater consistency and, occasionally, less redundancy among the various contributions. There is also a cruel lack of an historiographic essay, which one would have expected in the introduction, presenting and discussing the contents of the numerous previous bibliographical sources.

A View of Venice. Portrait of a Renaissance City is intended for « anyone with a curiosity about Venice – from individuals with a recently adopted interest to those interested in European history, the Renaissance, urban studies, and art and architectural history », but often the essays, which are all rather short on average, never more than ten pages, notes comprised, are too specific for a « beginner » reader or too concise to offer a re-evaluation of certain aspects that are more interesting to a specialist reader. The model seems more suited to an interactive website than to a scientific publication, even if it is intended for a wider audience.

The digital humanities project and accompanying volume present digital technology as a palimpsest superimposed on the technologies used in the early sixteenth century in engraving, cartography and image creation. This interaction has opened up new avenues of research, extending the original graphic system and information into a digital dimension and, at the same time, recapturing the very essence of the *View* as an artefact, revealing the insistent three-dimensionality of the printed woodcut image. As the essays point out, the epic portrait of Venice, a unique city and microcosm of the world, is a cartographic exercise, a documentation of important places and spaces, but also a work of art that draws attention to its own artificiality and technical expertise. It is therefore

to be regretted that the volume includes neither a contribution on the production of printed texts and images in Venice and their worldwide circulation[31] nor an essay dedicated to woodcut printing in Venice between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Furthermore, it lacks, above all, a more in-depth analysis of the engraving technique of the matrices in light of the high-definition images made captured of the originals.[32] In 1999, on the occasion of the exhibition *A volo d'uccello: Jacopo de' Barbari e le rappresentazioni di città nell'Europa del Rinascimento*, the matrices underwent treatment that provided an opportunity to analyze their nature and manufacture, as well as their state of preservation.[33] However, technology has certainly evolved. One would have expected a report on the close analysis of the print and the woodblocks, mentioned *en passant* thanks also to the « microexamination afforded by the new ultra-high-resolution scanning of the original » (p. 309) and the light laser scans of the wooden matrices.

It is to be hoped that the catalogue of the upcoming exhibition on Italian Renaissance woodcuts at the British Museum will touch upon this central question [34] More importantly even, the project to restore the woodblocks, generously funded by Save Venice, and the reorganization of their museography at the Correr Museum, may fill this void.

In conclusion, a note on the aesthetic quality of the volume, which pays homage, except for an excessively pinkish tone in the reproductions of the *View*, to the finest products of Venetian Renaissance printing: detailed index, elegant typeface, pleasant and airy layout, high-quality paper, binding and color reproductions, very few misprints, rendering it a particularly enjoyable read.

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[31] HUFFMAN, the editor of the volume, had incidentally addressed this topic in « Jacopo de' Barbari's View of Venice (1500) », p. 172–176.

[32] On this topic see LAURA ALDOVINI, *Innovation in Late Fifteenth-Century Printmaking* and MATTIA BIFFIS, « The Large Formats », in FARA, LANDAU (eds.), *Renaissance in Black and White*, p. 77–86 and p. 123–132.

[33] ROMANELLI, BIADENE, TONINI (eds.), *A volo d'uccello*, exhib. Cat., esp.: GIUSEPPE TRASSARI FILIPPETTO, *Tecnica xilografica tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento: il 'nuovo stile'*, p. 53–57, STEFANO BERTI, ANNA GAMBETTA, SIMONA LAZZARI, *Indagini sulle matrici lignee della veduta di Venezia e prospettive per la conservazione*, p. 106–110; CARLO FEDERICI, *Venetia MD; Museo Correr cl XLIV n. 57. Relazione di restauro*, p. 111–116 and STEFANO BERTI, entries n. 8, p. 134–137 (woodblocks) and 9, p. 138–141 (print).

[34] *Italian Renaissance Woodcut 1400–1500*, London, British Museum, Prints and Drawings galleries, 8 October 2026 – 21 March 2027. The exhibition, curated by Laura Aldovini, David Landau, Silvia Urbini, Sarah Vowles and Grant Lewis is closely related to the *Atlas of Italian Renaissance Woodcuts*, a digital project launched in 2015 by the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice, see < https://archivi.cini.it/storiaarte/archive/IT-SDA-GUI001-000038/atlante-xilografie-italiane-del-rinascimento.html/ >, last accessed May 2026.

NOTES

La legislazione arcaica di Locri Epizefiri: la figura e le leggi di Zaleuco*

The Archaic Legislation of Epizephyrian Locri: The Figure and Laws of Zaleucus

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I. *Introduzione*

La legislazione arcaica di Locri Epizefiri è legata dalla tradizione al nome di Zaleuco: sulla sua figura, sull'epoca in cui visse e sul contenuto delle sue norme gravano numerose incertezze dovute alle testimonianze molto spesso frammentarie, discordanti e in alcuni casi caratterizzate da un alone leggendario. Un nuovo approccio metodologico che tenga conto della natura qualitativa e complessa delle fonti letterarie potrebbe contribuire a fare luce su un tema come questo che ancora oggi è oggetto di indagine da parte non solo di studiosi di storia antica, ma anche di esperti di filosofia, di politica e di diritto.[1]

* In memoria della professoressa Maria Antonietta Marogna dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, amica e collega.

1 Si segnala a questo proposito l'importanza della tradizione letteraria relativa al Corpus delle leggi di Zaleuco fino all'epoca moderna, come rivela la ricostruzione del codice di Zaleuco del 1800 da parte di un giudice regio del regno delle Due Sicilie, Bonaventura Portoghese. Cfr. Bonaventura Portoghese, *I frammenti della legislazione di Zaleuco da Locri. Raccolti, illustrati, e posti in rapporto colle legislazioni degli antichi popoli e con quella in vigore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie*, Stamperia di Musumeci-Papale, Catania 1856, rist. in copia anastatica da Ed. Zaleuco, Locri 1998.

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Per quanto riguarda la sua esistenza, già gli antichi avevano posto la questione: Cicerone, in un noto passo del *De legibus* (II.15),[2] ricordando che Timeo negava l'esistenza di Zaleuco, ne affermava la storicità sulla base della testimonianza di Teofrasto[3] e di quella degli stessi Locresi, suoi clientes.

Anche gli studiosi moderni hanno espresso giudizi discordanti: Beloch e Delatte ritenevano i nomoteti di Locri e Catania (Zaleuco e Caronda) come ipostasi di divinità solari[4] e, in un noto articolo, il Van Compernolle scriveva così: « Il silenzio assoluto di Pindaro, di Demostene e soprattutto di Platone, come pure la timida apparizione del personaggio nell'opera di Eforo e nella Politica di Aristotele, mi fanno pensare che Zaleuco non sia il legislatore di Locri »[5] e giungeva alla conclusione che, intorno alla metà del IV secolo a.C., nell'ambito di quelle travagliate vicende che caratterizzarono Locri, i democratici avrebbero creato la figura di un legislatore leggendario di nome Zaleuco, ispirato da Atena, al fine di conferire alla nuova costituzione il prestigio dell'antica costituzione aristocratica: come in quegli anni la propaganda democratica aveva elaborato la tradizione sull'origine servile dei Locresi,[6] così si fece di Zaleuco un ποιμήν e uno schiavo; successivamente dopo la cacciata di Dionigi II da Locri, il legislatore

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[2] Cicero, *De legibus* II, 15: « [15] Quintus**:** Quid quod Zaleucum istum negat ullum fuisse Timaeus? Marcus: At <ait> Theophrastus, auctor haud deterior mea quidem sententia – meliorem multi nominant –, commemorant vero ipsius cives, nostri clientes, Locri. Sed sive fuit sive non fuit, nihil ad rem: loquimur quod traditum est » (« Quinto: 'Perché Timeo afferma che codesto Zaleuco non sia mai esistito?'. Marco: 'Ma [lo afferma] invece Teofrasto, autore per nulla inferiore a mio avviso – molti anzi lo considerano migliore –, e poi lo ricordano i suoi stessi concittadini, i miei clienti locresi. Ma che egli sia esistito oppure no, non importa per il nostro tema: noi riferiamo ciò che è stato tramandato' »).

[3] L'opposizione tra Timeo e Teofrasto è presente in un altro frammento di Timeo. Cfr. Timaeus, *FGrHist* 566 F 130a (= Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 6, 1, 18): « quis Zaleucum leges Locris scripsisse non dixit? Num igitur iacet Theophrastus, si id a Timaeo, tuo familari, reprehensum est? » (« Chi non disse che Zaleuco dettò le leggi ai Locresi? Ha per questo perduta la stima Teofrasto, se il tuo amico Timeo lo ha ripreso? »).

[4] Karl Julius Beloch, *Griechische Geschichte*, vol. I² 1, Trübner, Strassburg 1912, p. 350 e vol. I² 2, Trübner, Strassburg 1913, p. 257–258; Armand Delatte, *Essai sur la politique pythagoricienne*, University of Michigan Library, Liège – Paris 1922, p. 177.

[5] René Van Compernolle, « Le tradizioni sulla fondazione e sulla storia arcaica di Locri Epizefirî e la propaganda politica alla fine del v secolo av.Cr », *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di lettere e filosofia*, III ser., 6/2 (1976), p. 329–400, in part. p. 385–386. Van Compernolle è più volte ritornato su questa sua posizione in altri contributi: cfr. René Van Compernolle, « La legislation aristocratique de Locres Epizephyrienne, dite legislation de Zaleukos », *Antiquité Classique*, 50 (1981), p. 759–769; Id., « Gründung und frühe Gesetzgebung von Lokroi Epizephyrioi », *Probleme des archaischen Griechenlands*, Universitätsverlag, Konstanz 1982, p. 21–39.

[6] Sulla tradizione relativa all'origine servile dei coloni locresi cfr. Domenico Musti, « Problemi della storia di Locri Epizefirii », in *Atti del XVI convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia, Taranto, 3-8 ottobre 1976*, Arte tipografica, Napoli 1977, p. 23–146, in part. p. 37–65; Domenico Musti, *Magna Grecia. Il quadro storico*, Laterza, Bari 2005, p. 212–221.

divenne un εὐγενής. Così fecero pure i neo-pitagorici, e Zaleuco diventò discepolo di Pitagora.[7]

Il Pareti, seguendo Timeo, dubitava della storicità di Zaleuco e riteneva che, sotto il nome del legislatore, verso il VI secolo fossero state riunite le leggi in vigore a Locri fin dalla fondazione della colonia.[8]

L'Hölkeskamp, pur ammettendo la storicità di Zaleuco, pensava che il nomoteta fosse l'autore di singoli *nomoi* e che molte delle leggi a lui attribuite fossero state emanate in epoche diverse e che pertanto non facessero parte di un'unica legislazione.[9]

La Mittica, riprendendo la posizione di Van Compernolle, è giunta alla conclusione che tutta la vicenda di Zaleuco è avvolta da un alone leggendario, tanto più se si tiene conto dell'impossibilità di individuare lo spazio storico occupato da Zaleuco: la versione del pastorello, ispirato da Atena, potrebbe essere nata proprio nel IV secolo, subito dopo la rivoluzione democratica a Locri, come strumento ad una propaganda politica a sostegno del nuovo assetto democratico e lo stesso Zaleuco, capace di disporre di pene uguali per tutti, come vuole una costituzione democratica, diventò il perfetto antecedente del cittadino democratico.[10]

Il Mele riteneva che Zaleuco fosse « una divinità solare e tutto quanto si riferisce alla sua biografia umana e cronologia è quindi solo posteriore e arbitraria elaborazione ».[11]

Di contro non sono mancati studiosi (Crispo, Musti, Pugliese Carratelli, Camassa)[12] che hanno difeso la tradizione antica relativa all'esistenza di Zaleuco, individuando un nucleo storico di notizie attendibili relative al legislatore, che

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7 DIODORUS, *Bibliotheca Historica* XII, 20, 1; SENECA, *Epistulae ad Lucilium* 90, 6; DIOGENES LAËRTIUS, 8, 1, 15–16; PORPHYRIUS, *Vita Pythagorae* 21; IAMBLICUS, *De Vita Pythagorica* 7, 33; 23, 104; 27, 130; 30, 172; 36, 267; SUDA LEXICON, s.v. Ζάλευκος.

8 LUIGI PARETI, *Storia della regione lucano-bruzzia nell'antichità*, ed. ANGELO RUSSI, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 1997, vol. I, p. 181.

9 KARL-JOACHIM HÖLKESKAMP, *Schiedsrichter, Gesetzgeber und Gesetzgebung im archaischen Griechenland*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1999, p. 187–198.

10 MARIA PAOLA MITTICA, « Le tradizioni su Zaleuco. Storia politico-sociale di un codice e di un legislatore leggendari », *Sociologia del diritto*, 3 (2008), p. 83–113, in part. p. 95, 107–108.

11 ALFONSO MELE, « Tra Zaleuco, Caronda e Parmenide: legislatori e filosofi in Magna Grecia e Sicilia », in *Poleis e politeiai nella Magna Grecia arcaica e classica. Atti del cinquantatreesimo convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia, Taranto 26–29 settembre 2013*, Istituto per la storia e l'archeologia della Magna Grecia, Taranto 2016, p. 233–267, in part. p. 238.

12 CARLO FELICE CRISPO, *Contributo alla storia della più antica civiltà della Magna Grecia*, Arti grafiche Aldo Chicca, Tivoli 1940, p. 8; MUSTI, « Problemi della storia », p. 72–73; GIOVANNI PUGLIESE CARRATELLI, « Primordi della legislazione scritta », in ID. (ed.), *Magna Grecia. Lo sviluppo politico sociale ed economico*, Electa, Milano 1987, p. 99–102, in part. p. 99; GIORGIO CAMASSA, « La codificazione delle leggi e le istituzioni politiche delle città greche della Calabria in età arcaica e classica », in SALVATORE SETTIS (ed.), *Storia della Calabria antica*, vol. I, Gangemi, Roma – Reggio Calabria 1987, p. 613–656, in part. p. 617.

secondo i cronografi sarebbe vissuto intorno al VII secolo a.C.: Eusebio fa risalire l'opera di Zaleuco al 662/1 a.C..[13]

Sarà dunque opportuno una rivisitazione e un'analisi delle fonti letterarie per verificare se sia possibile dipanare una questione così intricata come quella legata al legislatore Zaleuco e alle sue leggi.

II. *Zaleuco di Locri: primo legislatore dell'occidente o figura leggendaria?*

La prima fonte antica in cui compare il nome di Zaleuco è Eforo di Cuma:[14]

> Τῆς δὲ τῶν Λοκρῶν νομογραφίας μνησθεὶς Ἔφορος, ἣν Ζάλευκος συνέταξεν ἔκ τε τῶν Κρητικῶν νομίμων καὶ Λακωνικῶν καὶ ἔκ τῶν Ἀρεοπαγιτικῶν, φησὶν ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις καὶ νίσαι τοῦτο τὸν Ζάλευκον, ὅτι, τῶν πρότερον τὰς ζημίας τοῖς δικασταῖς ἐπιτρεψάντων ὁρίζειν ἐφ' ἑκάστοις τοῖς ἀδικήμασιν, ἐκεῖνος ἐν τοῖς νόμοις διώρισεν, ἡγούμενος τὰς μὲν γνώμας τῶν δικαστῶν οὐχὶ τὰς αὐτὰς εἶναι περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν, δεῖν δ' <εἶναι> τὰς αὐτὰς· ἐπαινεῖ <δὲ> καὶ τὸ ἁπλουστέρως αὐτὸν περὶ τῶν συμβολαίων διατάξαι.
>
> Eforo, facendo menzione della legislazione scritta dei Locresi, a cui Zaleuco diede una sistemazione riprendendo sia alcune norme legislative dei Cretesi, sia degli Spartani, sia degli Areopagiti, dice che fra le prime novità introdotte da Zaleuco vi fu questa, che, mentre anticamente si affidava ai giudici il compito di determinare la pena per ciascun delitto, egli la determinò nelle leggi stesse, ritenendo che le opinioni dei giudici, anche intorno agli stessi delitti, potessero non essere sempre uguali come invece sarebbe necessario che fossero. Eforo loda il legislatore anche per aver stabilito normative semplici riguardo ai contratti.[15]

Il passo di Eforo, riportato da Strabone, è significativo per diverse ragioni e per questo bisogna soffermarvisi con cautela. Innanzitutto si dice che Zaleuco aveva messo ordine alla precedente νομογραφία locrese,[16] riprendendo *nomima* cretesi, spartani e areopagitici:[17] la forma verbale συνέταξεν, utilizzata da Eforo, da una parte indica che a Locri, già prima di Zaleuco, esistevano delle norme scritte,

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13 Cfr. EUSEBIUS, *Chronicon,* Versio Armena, sub Ol. 29.3=662/661 a.C..

14 EPHORUS, *FGrHist* 70 F139 (= STRABO, 6, 1, 8, 260).

15 La traduzione del passo è tratta da STRABONE, *Geografia*, *l'Italia* (libri V–VI), ed. e trad. ANNA MARIA BIRASCHI, Bur, Milano 2007, p. 227–229.

16 Anche la riforma di Solone ad Atene e quella di Licurgo a Sparta, inserendosi in un clima di tensione politico-sociale, svolgono un'opera di riappacificazione delle contese e di riordino legislativo. Cfr. GIOVANNA DAVERIO ROCCHI, *Città-Stato e Stati federali*, Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto, Milano 1993, p. 45.

17 Parmeggiani sottolinea la conoscenza analitica e solida che Eforo aveva della costituzione di Locri Epizefiri come rivelerebbe anche il confronto con le costituzioni di Creta, Sparta e Atene. Cfr. GIOVANNI PARMEGGIANI, *Eforo di Cuma. Studi di storiografia greca*, Patron, Bologna 2011, p. 250, 251, 305, 306.

dall'altra allude ad un'azione di riordino che probabilmente presuppone quel disordine politico-istituzionale, di cui parla Aristotele in un noto frammento,[18] in cui vengono ricordate sia la ταραχή che portò i Locresi a rivolgersi all'oracolo sia la risposta dell'oracolo, che invitò i Locresi a scegliere Zaleuco per la loro legislazione.

D'altra parte a sostegno della tesi secondo cui Zaleuco non sarebbe stato il primo a mettere per iscritto la legislazione locrese, c'è la cautela con cui lo Pseudo-Scimno afferma « τοῦτους [τοὺς Λοκροὺς τοῦς Ἐπιζεφυρίους] δὲ πρώτους φασὶ χρήσασθαι νόμοις / γραπτοῖσιν, οὓς Ζάλευκος ὑποθέσθαι δοκεῖ »: lo Pseudo-Scimno, utilizzando le voci verbali φασὶ e δοκεῖ, non ha probabilmente fatto uso di una semplice *variatio*, ma ha voluto dare alle sue affermazioni una sfumatura particolare.

La forma δοκεῖ rimanda alla radice δοκ da cui si forma la parola δόξα (che per esempio in ambito filosofico si oppone ad ἀλήθεια): evidentemente utilizzando questo verbo, l'autore presenta ciò che dice con una forte accezione limitativa, trattandosi di una conoscenza che non è fondata su basi sicure.

Il forte valore attenuativo dell'affermazione sembra sottolineato anche dall'altro verbo, qui utilizzato, φασὶ: è come se l'autore volesse riferire ciò che viene tramandato, senza essere sicuro della fondatezza della notizia.

La vera novità dell'intervento di Zaleuco consistette nel determinare le pene nelle stesse leggi: un atto normativo, ispirato al principio di uguaglianza, che intendeva limitare l'arbitrio dei giudici, sottraendo proprio a questi ultimi la discrezionalità nella determinazione delle pene in corrispondenza dei reati.[19]

Ci sono altri elementi che destano un qualche interesse e suscitano delle conseguenti perplessità: qual è la natura di questi *nomima* a cui Zaleuco attingerebbe? Inoltre, il riferimento eforeo ai *nomima* spartani, cretesi e aeropagitici è reale o inventato?

È stato osservato che il termine *nomima* rimanderebbe ad un corpus di diritto consuetudinario, costituito da norme disancorate dalla dimensione storica e trasmesse oralmente.[20]

Nel caso di Creta e di Sparta si potrebbe trattare di un riferimento a due modelli affini (quello cretese e quello spartano), ma il riferimento alle norme areopagitiche sembra una pura invenzione eforea e isocratea determinata dalle nuove prerogative di cui viene investito l'Areopago all'inizio del IV secolo.[21]

Per poter capire il motivo per il quale Eforo esalta l'opera di Zaleuco, che sottraendo le pene alla discrezionalità dei giudici, le determinò nelle leggi stesse,

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18 Aristoteles, fr. 548 (Rose) (= *Scholia in Pindari Olympionicas*, 10, 17 i).

19 Cfr. Giorgio Camassa, « Eforo e l'invenzione della legge », *Quaderni di storia*, 80 (2014), p. 71–93, in part. p. 75.

20 Camassa, « Eforo », p. 73.

21 Camassa, « Eforo », p. 74.

è necessario riprendere il passo eforeo[22] perché la parte finale tradisce la polemica che Eforo ha inteso attuare attraverso il riferimento al legislatore Zaleuco.

Aggiunge poi che gli abitanti di Turi, volendo col tempo mostrarsi più sottili rispetto ai Locresi in materia di legislazione, divennero sì più celebri, ma non migliori: infatti hanno buone leggi (εὐνομεῖσθαι) non coloro che prendono in considerazione tutti i dettagli che gli accusatori di professione possano immaginare, ma quelli che rimangono saldi ad alcuni principi semplici. Anche Platone osservò che dove vi sono moltissime leggi, ci sono anche moltissimi processi e costumi malvagi, allo stesso modo che, dove ci sono molti medici, è verisimile che vi siano anche molte malattie.[23]

Il Camassa ha ben evidenziato che l'elogio di Zaleuco e dell'*eunomia* locrese rappresenta lo sfondo attraverso cui Eforo rivolge una dura accusa nei confronti del sistema normativo della democrazia ateniese, celata nel riferimento a Turi.[24]

Ma perché Eforo riteneva che proprio i Locresi fossero stati i primi a dotarsi di leggi scritte (Πρῶτοι δὲ νόμοις ἐγγράπτοις χρήσασθαι πεπι|στευμένοι εἰσί)?[25]

Probabilmente tale idea doveva essere stata supportata da un'antica tradizione che era ben nota e consolidata nel mondo greco: il poeta Pindaro aveva elogiato l'*Atrekeia* locrese,[26] Platone in diverse opere aveva ricordato Locri come città ben governata,[27] Demostene nell'orazione *Contro Timocrate* (XXIV 139–141) aveva sottolineato con forza l'immutabilità delle leggi locresi.[28]

Quale migliore città se non Locri, Eforo avrebbe potuto scegliere come modello culturale e normativo da proporre rispetto ad Atene caratterizzata da un clima politico e giudiziario molto teso, dominato da sicofanti e da politici di professione che alteravano le norme?[29]

Aristotele rappresenta un'altra interessante fonte in cui sono presenti dei riferimenti alla legislazione locrese e a Zaleuco e in una prospettiva più ampia, in

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22 EPHORUS, *FGrHist* 70 F 139 (= STRABO, 6, 1, 8, 260).

23 La traduzione del passo è tratta da STRABONE, *Geografia*, ed. BIRASCHI, p. 227–229.

24 CAMASSA, « Eforo » p. 74–75.

25 La notizia di Eforo secondo cui i Locresi sarebbero stati i primi ad adottare leggi scritte è presente nello PSEUDO-SCIMNO (*Orbis descriptio* 314 sg. = *FGrHist* 70 F 138 b) e in un altro passo di SERVIO DANIELINO (in *Aeneidem*, 1, 507) che rivelano strette consonanze semantiche con il testo di Eforo, riportato da Strabone: è probabile che Pseudo-Scimno e Servio Danielino abbiano utilizzato Eforo, che rappresenta l'unica fonte antica a noi pervenuta che ricorda come i Locresi fossero stati i primi a far uso di leggi scritte. Cfr. LUIGI PICCIRILLI, « Servio Danielino e i Nomoi Locresi », *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 130 (1987), p. 94–95.

26 PINDARUS, *Olympia* X, 13–15.

27 PLATO, *De Legibus,* 638b2–3: *Timaeus*, 20a.

28 DEMOSTHENES, *Contra Timocratem*, 139–141.

29 CAMASSA, « Eforo », p. 74–75.

rapporto con Creta, che – giova ripetere – rappresentò una sorta di substrato istituzionale e un modello costituzionale per le altre realtà poleiche della Grecia.[30]

In un passo della *Politica* (II, 1274a), Aristotele dice:

> Altri legislatori furono Zaleuco a Locri Epizefiria e Caronda di Catania, che diede leggi ai concittadini e alle altre città calcidiche in Italia e in Sicilia. Alcuni tentano di stabilire dei nessi, supponendo che Onomacrito fosse il primo esperto nell'arte legislativa, che l'avesse appresa a Creta, pur essendo di Locri, e che a Creta dimorasse esercitando l'arte dell'indovino e che Taleta fosse suo compagno, che Licurgo e Zaleuco fossero scolari di Taleta e Caronda di Zaleuco. Ma si asseriscono queste cose senza tenere nessuno conto della successione cronologica.[31]

Come si può notare è lo stesso Aristotele che contesta questa ricostruzione[32] a causa della successione cronologica evidentemente errata e secondo cui all'origine della legislazione vi era Onomacrito, di cui si dice che era locrese, pur dimorando a Creta, dove esercitava l'arte mantica: suo compagno era Taleta, il quale a sua volta sarebbe stato maestro di Licurgo e di Zaleuco, e quest'ultimo infine maestro di Caronda. Aristotele, dunque, sembra ammettere almeno implicitamente il primato di Locri.

La cronologia errata, a cui Aristotele non dà credito, potrebbe risalire allo stesso Eforo (fonte utilizzata da Strabone per sua stessa ammissione) che tendeva a collegare i grandi legislatori come Licurgo, Zaleuco e Caronda al mondo cretese,[33] anche se l'origine locrese di Onomacrito, implicitamente ammetterebbe di fatto il primato locrese in ambito legislativo, confermando ciò che dice Strabone a VI 1 8 C 259 quando dichiara che i Locresi erano stati i primi ad avere leggi scritte (Πρῶτοι δὲ νόμοις ἐγγράπτοις χρήσασθαι πεπι|στευμένοι εἰσί).

Aristotele, dunque, quando dice che alcuni (τινες) tentano di stabilire dei legami e di collegare Zaleuco e Caronda, attraverso forme di discepolato, forse si riferisce ad Eforo,[34] che evidentemente aveva tentato di costruire una storia unitaria della legislazione, attribuendone l'origine a Onomacrito.[35]

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[30] Cfr. Camassa, « La codificazione delle leggi », p. 613–656; Pugliese Carratelli, « Primordi della legislazione », p. 99–102; Giorgio Camassa, « Sacralizzazione e semplicità incompromessa delle antiche leggi. Due poli del pensiero storiografico di Eforo », *La Parola del Passato*, 68 (2013), p. 289–302.

[31] Ho riportato la traduzione contenuta in Aristotele, *Politica*, ed. e trad. Carlo Augusto Viano, Bur, Milano 2012, p. 223.

[32] Cfr. Hölkeskamp, *Schiedsrichter, Gesetzgeber*, p. 188; Aristotele, *La Politica*, libro II, ed. Federica Pezzoli, Michele Curnis, « L'Erma » di Bretschneider, Roma 2012, p. 397.

[33] Cfr. Aristotele, *Politica*, ed. Viano, p. 222–223, n. 113.

[34] Cfr. Musti, *Magna Grecia. Il quadro storico*, p. 216.

[35] Cfr. Aristotele, *Politica*, ed. Viano, p. 222, n. 113.

III. *Lo stato sociale di Zaleuco: di origine servile o di nobili natali?*

Riguardo allo stato sociale di Zaleuco vi sono due differenti filoni riconducibili uno ad Aristotele e l'altro a Diodoro. Aristotele,[36] che secondo la testimonianza di Clemente di Alessandria aveva scritto una costituzione dei Locresi,[37] narra che i Locresi, quando interrogarono il dio per sapere come avrebbero potuto liberarsi da un grande disordine interno (ταραχή), ricevettero come risposta dall'oracolo che essi avrebbero dovuto darsi delle leggi perché un certo pastore (τις ποιμὴν) di nome Zaleuco era in grado di dare leggi eccellenti ai suoi concittadini. I Locresi, dopo averlo individuato, gli chiesero dove avesse trovato queste leggi e Zaleuco rispose che gli era apparso in sogno la dea Atena:[38] per questo i Locresi lo resero libero e lo designarono legislatore (διὸ αὐτός τε ἠλευθέρωται καὶ νομοθέτης κατέστη).

Secondo il racconto di Diodoro,[39] Zaleuco, originario di Locri, era un uomo di origine nobile (ἀνὴρ εὐγενὴς), stimato per la sua cultura e discepolo di Pitagora: grazie al consenso di cui godeva fu scelto come legislatore.

La notizia di Diodoro, in base alla quale Zaleuco viene presentato come allievo di Pitagora, è evidentemente anacronistica e si spiega con la volontà da parte della fonte utilizzata da Diodoro di mettere in rapporto il legislatore locrese con Pitagora.[40]

D'altra parte la notizia secondo cui Zaleuco era allievo di Pitagora contrasta con quanto riportato da Dicearco di Messana (fr. 34 Wehrli)[41] che riporta l'episodio di Pitagora, che, fuggito da Crotone, giunse presso Locri dove non fu accolto dagli anziani della città, i quali dissero di non avere nulla da biasimare nelle loro leggi.

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[36] ARISTOTELES, fr. 548 (Rose) (=*Scholia in Pindari, Olympionicas*, 10, 17 i): « διὰ τί δέ, φησὶν Ἀριστοτέλης· ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐχρῶντο τῷ θεῶ πῶς ἂν πολλῆς ταραχῆς ἀπαλλαγεῖεν, ἐξέπεσεν αὐτοῖς χρησμὸς ἑαυτοῖς νόμους τίθεσται. ὅτε καί τις ποιμὴν ᾧ ὄνομα Ζάλευκος πολλοὺς νόμους δυνηθεὶς εἰσενεγκεῖν τοῖς πολίταις δοκίμους, γνωσθείς τε καὶ ἐρωτηθεὶς πόθεν εὕροι ἔφησεν ἐνύπνιον αὐτῷ τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν παρίστασθαι· διὸ αὐτός τε ἠλευθέρωται καὶ νομοθέτης καθέστη ».

[37] CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, *Στρωματεῖς*, 1, 26, 152 Sylb.

[38] Il dono delle leggi da parte di un dio è un topos comune anche in altri ambienti diversi dalla tradizione greca: pensiamo a Mosè che sul monte Sinai riceve le leggi delle dieci tavole direttamente da Jahvè.

[39] DIODORUS, *Bibliotheca Historica* XII, 20, 1: « Ζάλευκος τοί νῦν ἦν τὸ γένος ἐκ τῆς Ἰταλίας Λοκρός, ἀνὴρ εὐγενὴς καὶ κατὰ παιδείαν τε θαυμασμένος, μαθητὴς δὲ Πυθαγόρου τοῦ φιλοσόφου. Οὗτος πολλῆς ἀποδοχῆς τυγχάνων ἐν τῇ πατρίδι νομοθέτης ᾑρέθη ».

[40] In ordine cronologico, la prima fonte che mette in rapporto Zaleuco con Pitagora è Diodoro Siculo, a cui ne seguono altre come Seneca, Diogene Laerzio, Porfirio, Giamblico. Cfr. MUSTI, « Problemi della storia », p. 76.

[41] FRITZ WEHRLI, *Die Schule des Aristoteles,* vol. I: *Dikaiarchos*, Schwabe, Basel – Stuttgart 1967², fr. 34 e p. 53.

La notizia diodorea è sulla falsariga di quella contenuta in Eforo e nella *Politica* di Aristotele: Zaleuco sembra distinguersi per la sua formazione e per la sua cultura ed è per questo che viene scelto come nomoteta con la differenza che Aristotele, nella *Politica*, con estrema cautela e diffidenza rispetto a quanto dicono alcuni, riferisce che Zaleuco fu allievo di Taleta di Gortina, al contrario Diodoro presenta Zaleuco come discepolo di Pitagora.

Chi possa essere la fonte di Diodoro non è facile dirlo: potremmo ipotizzare una fonte filopitagorica interessata a presentare Zaleuco, uno dei grandi legislatori dell'Occidente, come allievo di Pitagora.[42]

Un quadro davvero contraddittorio emerge dalle fonti esaminate (Eforo, Aristotele, Diodoro): in Eforo, Zaleuco trarrebbe ispirazione da altre legislazioni, nella *Politica*, Zaleuco è presentato come un discepolo del cretese Taleta, anche se Aristotele sembra prendere le distanze da certi nessi cronologici (πειρῶνται δὲ τινες καὶ συνάγειν [...] ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν λέγουσιν ἀσκεπτότερον τῶν χρόνων λέγοντες); nella Λοκρῶν Πολιτεία dello stesso autore, egli è un ποιμήν, ispirato da Atena, di condizione servile come è evidente dal riferimento alla sua liberazione; al contrario in Diodoro, Zaleuco è presentato come un uomo εὐγενὴς, ammirato per la sua παιδεία e discepolo di Pitagora.

Ciò che desta perplessità a parere di alcuni studiosi,[43] rispetto a queste fonti che ricordano espressamente il legislatore,[44] è il silenzio su Zaleuco da parte di autori come Pindaro, Platone e Demostene, che nelle loro opere avevano dato spazio alle leggi locresi.

Pindaro, cantore della dinastia dei Dinomenidi, scrisse due odi olimpiche (la X e la XI) per il pugile locrese *Agesidamos* e in particolare nella decima olimpica esalta l'*Atrèkeia* di Locri; nella *II Pitica*, ricorda il canto di ringraziamento della fanciulla locrese nei confronti del tiranno siracusano Ierone che l'ha liberata dalle sofferenze della guerra, un probabile riferimento all'attacco reggino del tiranno Anassila contro Locri nel 477 a.C..[45]

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[42] Per un quadro delle ipotesi relative alla fonte usata da Diodoro nel libro XII cfr. MARTA SORDI, « Le staseis di Turi e la guerra del Peloponneso », *Tyche*, 19 (2004), p. 167–174, in part. p. 173–174.

[43] Cfr. VAN COMPERNOLLE, « Le tradizioni sulla fondazione », p. 385; HÖLKESKAMP, *Schiedsrichter, Gesetzgeber*, p. 194-195; MITTICA, « Le tradizioni su Zaleuco », p. 99–103.

[44] Anche Polibio (XII, 16), nell'ambito della polemica nei confronti di Timeo per quanto riguarda i suoi errori relativi a Locri Epizefiri, ricorda *en passant* Zaleuco a proposito della contesa fra due giovani per il possesso di uno schiavo: in questa circostanza nomina il complesso di norme in base alle quali si giudica (τὸν Ζαλεύκου νόμον). Per una discussione di questo passo cfr. VANIA GHEZZI, « I Locresi e la legge del laccio », *Dike*, 8 (2006), p. 101–113; IGNAZIO D'ANGELO, « La costituzione aristocratica di Locri Epizefirii tra eunomia, inalterabilità e innovazione », *Aiônos. Miscellanea di studi storici*, 21 (2017), 2019, p. 39–77.

[45] Sull'offensiva reggina contro Locri nel 477 a.C. cfr. GIOVANNA DE SENSI SESTITO, « La Calabria in età arcaica e classica », in *Storia della Calabria antica*, vol. I, p. 227–303, in part. p. 253, 259; ID., « I Dinomenidi, nel basso e medio Tirreno fra Imera e Cuma », *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome*

Platone, che ebbe stretti rapporti con la tirannide dionigiana, conosceva molto bene la legislazione locrese, come rivelano i riferimenti molto chiari all'*eunomia* locrese sia nel *Timeo*[46] sia nelle *Leggi*,[47] tuttavia in nessuna delle sue opere è ricordato Zaleuco.[48]

Demostene nella celebre orazione *Contro Timocrate*[49] intende ricordare agli Ateniesi come si legifera nella città ben governata dei Locresi (πόλις εὐνομουμένη) e sottolinea che in più di 200 anni a Locri fu cambiata una sola legge: anche in questo caso Demostene non cita affatto Zaleuco.

Come poter interpretare il silenzio di queste autorevoli fonti letterarie? E come riuscire a conciliare questi silenzi con le testimonianze altrettanto autorevoli tramandate da Eforo, Aristotele, Teofrasto, Polibio e Diodoro? Come conciliare l'immagine del pastore Zaleuco di origine servile presente in Aristotele con quella del legislatore di nobili natali contenuta in Diodoro?

Per quanto riguarda il silenzio di alcune fonti letterarie, è bene precisare che il contesto in cui queste fonti parlano delle leggi locresi non è detto che implicasse per forza il ricordo di Zaleuco.

D'altra parte per quale motivo dovremmo dare credito al solo Timeo, unica fonte che nega la storicità di Zaleuco, mentre Eforo, Aristotele, Teofrasto, Polibio, Diodoro, Cicerone ne ammetterebbero l'esistenza? È possibile che tutte queste fonti siano in errore?

Riguardo ai due racconti apparentemente contraddittori di Aristotele e di Diodoro circa l'origine sociale di Zaleuco, il Camassa in diversi contributi scientifici ha già sottolineato il carattere simbolico del passo aristotelico, soprattutto se si tiene conto di altre attestazioni a Creta o in realtà diverse dal mondo greco: a Creta il legislatore assume i tratti del re pastore come si evince

Antiquité, 93 (1981–1982), p. 617–642, in part. p. 624 n. 26; MAURIZIO GIANGIULIO, « Aspetti di storia della Magna Grecia arcaica e classica fino alla guerra del Peloponneso », in *Magna Grecia. Lo sviluppo politico, sociale*, p. 9–54, in part. p. 41; ID., « Le città di Magna Grecia e Olimpia in età arcaica », in ATTILIO MASTROCINQUE (ed.), *I grandi santuari della Grecia e l'Occidente*, Università degli studi di Trento, Trento 1993, p. 93–118, in part. p. 108 n. 45; NINO LURAGHI, « Anassilao di Reggio », in *Tirannide arcaiche in Sicilia e Magna Grecia. Da Panezio di Leontini alla caduta dei Dinomenidi,* Leo S. Olschki, Firenze 1994, p. 187–229, in part. p. 216–224; GIUSEPPE CORDIANO, « Espansione territoriale e politica colonizzatrice a Reggio (ed a Locri Epizefiri) fra il VI e V secolo a.C. », *Kokalos*, 41 (1995), p. 79–121, in part. p. 95–103; VANIA GHEZZI, « I tiranni siracusani e le vergini locresi », *La Parola del Passato*, 59 (2004), p. 321–360, in part. p. 323–328; IGNAZIO D'ANGELO, « L'attacco reggino del 477 a.C. contro Locri e l'intervento di Ierone », *Aevum*, 76/1 (2002), p. 9–15; GIOVANNA DE SENSI SESTITO, « Siracusa, le guerre di confine tra Locri e Reggio e il 'trattato' di Eliano », *Aiônos. Miscellanea di studi storici*, 17 (2011–2012), p. 17–48.

46 PLATO, *Timaeus,* 20a.

47 PLATO, *De Legibus* 1, 638b.

48 Nel passo del Timeo, appena citato, lo scoliasta inserisce altre informazioni su Timeo e dice che Zaleuco fu nomoteta di Locri (*Scholia in Timaeum* 20 A).

49 DEMOSTHENES, *Contra Timocratem*, 139–141.

dal *Minosse* di Platone o dello Pseudo-Platone;[50] nell'antico mondo orientale, l'ideologia del re pastore era molto diffusa come rivelano le attestazioni scritte a proposito di sovrani sumeri come Lugalzagesi (2350–2325 a.C.) e Lipit-Istar (1934–1924 a.C.) e di re babilonesi come Hammurabi (1792–1750 a.C.). Il fatto che per esempio Hammurabi, autore del famoso codice, definisca se stesso 'pastore' del suo popolo, ci autorizza forse a pensare che Hammurabi non sia mai esistito o a trarre conclusioni affrettate sul suo stato sociale?[51]

Nessuna contraddizione dunque tra il racconto di Aristotele e quello di Diodoro circa lo status sociale di Zaleuco: molto singolare l'immagine di uno Zaleuco, pastore di genti, che non solo non contraddice l'immagine diodorea di un legislatore di nobili natali ma anzi la rafforza attraverso un racconto favolistico e la caratterizzazione simbolica del 'pastore', comune ad altre esperienze politiche del mondo greco e orientale.

IV. *La legislazione scritta attribuita a Zaleuco*

Prima di passare in rassegna le fonti antiche che attribuivano a Zaleuco una serie di norme legislative, sarà opportuno fare una premessa sul carattere di queste norme, partendo dalla considerazione che il ruolo di Zaleuco fu quello di codificatore e innovatore di materiale normativo preesistente e in parte trasmesso oralmente:[52] a ciò sembrerebbe alludere Eforo per il tramite di Strabone[53] che sottolinea che Zaleuco diede una sistemazione alla legislazione locrese rifacendosi a norme cretesi, spartane e areopagitiche.

Eforo rappresenta la prima fonte letteraria che ricorda l'intervento innovativo di Zaleuco in materia penale: mentre anticamente era affidato ai giudici (τοῖς δικασταῖς) il compito di determinare la pena per ciascun delitto, Zaleuco la determinò nelle leggi stesse, pensando che le opinioni dei giudici non fossero uguali intorno agli stessi delitti.

Eliano sembra confermare quanto riferito da Eforo quando dice che Zaleuco, legislatore di Locri, prescrisse che l'adultero, colto in flagrante, venisse privato degli occhi (Ζάλευκος ὁ Λοκρῶν νομοθέτης προσέταξε τὸν μικρὸν ἁλόντα ἐκκόπτεσθαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς).[54]

La *lex talionis*, di cui parla Eliano, è ricordata anche da Demostene che, nell'orazione *Contro Timocrate* (140–141), riferisce che a Locri una sola legge era

[50] Giorgio Camassa, « Il pastorato di Zaleuco », *Athenaeum*, 64 (1986), p. 139–145; Id., « Leggi orali e leggi scritte. I legislatori », in Salvatore Settis (ed.), *I Greci. Storia Cultura Arte Società*, vol. II*, Einaudi, Torino, 1996, p. 561–576, in part. p. 568.

[51] Camassa, « La codificazione delle leggi », p. 617.

[52] Pugliese Carratelli, « Primordi della legislazione », p. 99.

[53] Ephorus, *FGrHist* 70 F 139 (= Strabo, 6, 1, 8, 260).

[54] Aelianus, *Varia Historia* XIII, 24.

stata cambiata nel corso di più di duecento anni: un uomo privo di un occhio, minacciato di essere privato totalmente della vista, ottenne che il colpevole di tale minaccia venisse punito con l'accecamento di entrambi gli occhi, e non di uno solo come era previsto dalla precedente norma.

In entrambe le fonti (Eliano e Demostene) i provvedimenti prevedono l'accecamento: nel caso di Demostene la perdita totale della vista avviene su base analogica in quanto chi minaccia di accecare viene a sua volta punito con la stessa pena; nel caso di Eliano l'accecamento ha una valenza simbolica perché nella relazione amorosa il primo senso ad essere coinvolto è quello della vista.

E sempre a proposito dell'adulterio, due notizie, contenute in Eliano[55] e Valerio Massimo,[56] ricordano in modo quasi paradigmatico la sorte di Zaleuco e del proprio figlio, che colto in flagrante adulterio, fu condannato dal padre alla mutilazione degli occhi: il popolo pregò Zaleuco di risparmiare il proprio figlio e, solo dopo qualche tempo, il legislatore acconsentì a cavare un occhio a sé stesso e uno al figlio, salvaguardando in questo modo la vista di entrambi.

I racconti di Eliano e di Valerio Massimo sono probabilmente di natura leggendaria e intendono mettere l'accento sulla proverbiale severità del legislatore,[57] testimoniata anche da una norma, riportata da Eraclide Lembo,[58] secondo cui, se uno viene sorpreso a rubare, gli si cavano gli occhi. A questo proposito l'autore ricorda l'episodio che coinvolse il figlio di Zaleuco, sorpreso a commettere un furto: mentre i Locresi volevano lasciarlo andare, Zaleuco non lo permise e fece cavare un occhio al figlio e un altro a se stesso.

Rispetto ai testi di Eliano e di Valerio Massimo, dove il figlio di Zaleuco è colto in flagrante adulterio, nel testo di Eraclide invece è sorpreso a rubare: il problema della discordanza tra i due testi rimane aperto anche se « nelle legislazioni arcaiche, il reato – e quindi il principio di pena – è lo stesso per un ladro – ossia per uno che violi un bene materiale – e per un adultero – ossia per uno che violi la donna di qualcun altro ».[59]

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55 AELIANUS, *Varia Historia* XIII, 24. Cfr. LUISA PRANDI, *Memorie storiche dei Greci in Claudio Eliano*, « L'Erma » di Bretschneider, Roma 2005, p. 16, 146.

56 VALERIUS MAXIMUS, 6, 5 ext. 3.

57 Sul passo di Valerio Massimo cfr. CINZIA BEARZOT, « Legislatori e tiranni in Valerio Massimo », in *Valerio Massimo e le exterae gentes*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2022, p. 29–61, in part. p. 49–51. La studiosa ha sottolineato che nel racconto di Valerio Massimo vengono evidenziati i temi della coerenza e dell'equità a proposito della condotta di Zaleuco.

58 HERACLIDES LEMBI, *Excerpta Politiarum* 31, 60–61 Polito. Cfr. MARINA POLITO, *Dagli scritti di Eraclide sulle costituzioni: un commento storico*, Arte tipografica, Napoli 2001, p. 169–172.

59 POLITO, *Dagli scritti di Eraclide*, p. 171.

Lo storico Polibio (XII 16)[60] ricorda delle norme di Zaleuco a proposito di una causa di diritto privato: si tratta di una contesa per il possesso di uno schiavo, un caso di appropriazione (ἀγωγή), come è stato sottolineato da alcuni studiosi.[61]

> Νεανίσκων δυεῖν περί τινος οἰκέτου διαφερομένων συνέβαινε παρὰ μὲν τὸν ἕτερον καὶ πλείω χρόνον γεγονέναι τὸν παῖδα, τὸν δ'ἕτερον ἡμέραις δυσὶ πρότερον εἰς τὸν ἀγρὸν ἐλθόντα μὴ παρόντος τοῦ δεσπότου μετὰ βίας εἰς οἶκον ἀπηχέναι τὸν δοῦλον, κἄπειτα τὸν ἕτερον αἰσθόμενον ἐλθεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν, καὶ λαβόντ' ἀπάγειν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχήν, καὶ φάναι δεῖν κύριον αὐτὸν εἶναι διδόντα τοὺς ἐγγυητάς· κελεύειν γὰρ τὸν Ζαλεύκου νόμον τοῦτον δεῖν κρατεῖν τῶν ἀμφισβητουμένων ἕως τῆς κρίσεως παρ' οὗ τὴν ἀγωγὴν συμβαίνει γίνεσθαι. τοῦ δ' ἑτέρου κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν νόμον παρ'αὐτοῦ φάσκοντος γεγονέναι τὴν ἀγωγήν - ἐκ γὰρ τῆς οἰκίας τῆς ἐκείνου τὸ σῶμα πρὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν ἥκειν ἀπαγόμενον - τοὺς προκαθημένους ἄρχοντας διαποροῦντας ὑπὲρ τοῦ πράγματος ἐπισπάσασθαι καὶ συμμεταδοῦναι τῷ κοσμοπόλιδι. τὸν δὲ διαστείλασθαι τὸν νόμον, φήσαντα παρὰ τούτων τὴν ἀγωγὴν αἰεὶ γίνεσθαι, παρ' οἷς ἂν ἔσχατον ἀδήριτον ᾖ χρόνον τινὰ γεγονὸς τὸ διαμφισβητούμενον· ἐὰν δέ τις ἀφελόμενος βίᾳ παρά τινος ἀπαγάγῃ πρὸς αὑτόν, κἄπειτα παρὰ τούτου τὴν ἀγωγὴν ὁ προϋπάρχων ποιῆται δεσπότης, οὐκ εἶναι ταύτην κυρίαν. τοῦ δὲ νεανίσκου δεινοπαθοῦντος καὶ μὴ φάσκοντος εἶναι τοῦ νομοθέτου ταύτην τὴν προαίρεσιν, προκαλέσασθαί φασι τὸν κοσμόπολιν, εἴ τι βούλεται λέγειν ὑπὲρ τῆς γνώμης κατὰ τὸν Ζαλεύκου νόμον. τοῦτο δ'ἐστὶ καθισάντων τῶν χιλίων καὶ βρόχων κρεμασθέντων λέγειν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ νομοθέτου γνώμης· ὁπότερος δ' ἂν αὐτῶν φανῇ τὴν προαίρεσιν ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον ἐκδεχόμενος, τὸν τοιοῦτον διὰ τῆς ἀγχόνης ἀπόλλυσθαι βλεπόντων τῶν χιλίων. ταῦτα προτείναντος τοῦ κοσμοπόλιδος, τὸν νεανίσκον εἰπεῖν φασιν ἄνισον εἶναι τὴν συνθήκην· τῷ μὲν γὰρ ἔτη δύ' ἢ τρία καταλείπεσθαι τοῦ ζῆν· συνέβαινε γὰρ εἶναι τὸν κοσμόπολιν οὐ πολὺ λεῖπον τῶν ἐνενήκοντ'ἐτῶν· αὐτῷ δὲ τοῦ βίου τὸ πλεῖον ἐκ τῶν εὐλόγων ἔτι μένειν. ὁ μὲν οὖν νεανίσκος οὕτως εὐτραπελευσάμενος ἐξέλυσε τὴν σπουδήν, οἱ δ' ἄρχοντες ἔκριναν τὴν ἀγωγὴν κατὰ τὴν τοῦ κοσμοπόλιδος γνώμην.
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> Tra due giovani era sorta una controversia riguardo ad uno schiavo. I fatti stavano così: lo schiavo era stato per un tempo notevole al servizio di uno dei due giovani, ma l'altro, due giorni prima, recatosi nei campi in assenza del padrone, aveva condotto via di forza lo schiavo, portandoselo a casa propria. Quando il primo se ne fu accorto, andò a casa di costui, si riprese lo schiavo e lo condusse davanti al magistrato dichiarando, dietro cauzione, che era lui il legittimo proprietario. E in effetti la legislazione di Zaleuco stabiliva che quanto era oggetto della contesa restasse, fino al momento della sentenza, di proprietà di colui presso il quale era stato sottratto. Quando l'altro, in forza della stessa legge, si diede a sostenere che

[60] L'episodio narrato rientra nella polemica di Polibio nei confronti di Timeo per quanto riguarda i suoi errori relativi a Locri Epizefiri.

[61] Cfr. Arnold Kränzlein, *Eigentum und Besitz im griechischen Recht des fünften und vierten Jahrhunderts v. Chr.*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1963, p. 155–158; Alberto Maffi, *Studi di epigrafia giuridica greca*, Giuffrè, Milano 1983, p. 43–44; Ghezzi, « I Locresi e la legge », p. 108.

> la sottrazione dell'oggetto del contendere era avvenuta presso di sé (e lo schiavo che veniva ora condotto davanti al magistrato era appunto stato portato via da casa sua), i giudici incaricati, di fronte alla difficoltà presentata dal caso, si appellarono al *kosmopolis* e lo misero al corrente della questione. Quest'ultimo interpretò la legge, dichiarando che in ogni caso la sottrazione si riteneva avvenuta nella casa di coloro che fossero stati gli ultimi a possedere l'oggetto della contesa per un certo periodo, senza che venisse nel frattempo contestato. Nel caso poi che uno l'avesse sottratto a qualche altro con la forza e se lo fosse portato a casa propria e successivamente il precedente proprietario, a sua volta, lo riportasse via a costui, quest'ultima non costituiva una sottrazione prevista dalla legge. Quando il giovane cominciò a protestare vivamente, sostenendo che non era quella l'intenzione del legislatore, si dice che il *kosmopolis* gli abbia chiesto se voleva esprimere la sua opinione circa il senso da attribuire alla legge secondo le modalità previste dalla legislazione di Zaleuco, e cioè trattare del pensiero del legislatore davanti all'assemblea dei Mille e sotto una corda appesa alla forca. Quello di loro due che avesse dato l'impressione di interpretare male la sua intenzione, sarebbe morto impiccato sotto gli occhi dei Mille. Dicono che il giovane, di fronte ad una simile proposta avanzata dal *kosmopolis*, abbia risposto che il patto non era equo, perché a lui restavano da vivere due o tre anni soltanto (infatti il *kosmopolis* aveva poco meno di novant'anni), mentre egli aveva ancora davanti a sé, con ogni probabilità, la gran parte della vita. Il giovane, dunque, con questa battuta di spirito, ruppe il clima di serietà che dominava, ma i magistrati giudicarono la sottrazione secondo l'interpretazione data dal *kosmopolis*.[62]

Il passo di Polibio, che riporta la contesa per il possesso di uno schiavo, ci permette di recuperare due norme ascrivibili alla legislazione di Zaleuco.

Innanzitutto la legge di Zaleuco che stabiliva che l'oggetto di una contesa dovesse rimanere nella proprietà di colui al quale era stato sottratto fino al momento della sentenza. A questa legge fanno appello entrambi i giovani che si contendono lo schiavo, sia il secondo giovane che sottrae lo schiavo al primo presso il quale lo schiavo era stato per tanto tempo, sia il primo giovane che lo sottrae all'altro giovane in seconda battuta. Di fronte alla difficoltà del caso gli *archontes* chiamano in causa un altro magistrato, il *kosmopolis*, che svolge la funzione di interpretare la legge di Zaleuco.

Particolarmente importante nel caso giudiziario, riferito da Polibio (XII 16), è proprio la figura del *kosmópolis*, il cui titolo richiama quello dei supremi magistrati cretesi, i *kósmoi*.[63] Il ruolo e la funzione del *kosmópolis* sono stati

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[62] La traduzione del testo di Polibio è di ALESSANDRO VIMERCATI, in POLIBIO, *Storie*, *libri I-XL,* Rusconi, Milano 1987, p. 808–809.

[63] Sui rapporti tra Locri Epizefirii, Creta e Sparta cfr. ALFONSO DE FRANCISCIS, *Stato e società in Locri Epizefiri*, Libreria scientifica, Napoli 1972, p. 135–136; MUSTI « Problemi della storia », p. 48–65; ALFONSO DE FRANCISCIS, « Le tavole di Locri negli studi dal 1972 ad oggi », in DOMENICO MUSTI (ed.), *Le tavole di Locri. Atti del colloquio sugli aspetti politici, economici, culturali e linguistici dei testi*

oggetto di un acceso dibattito fra gli studiosi, anche perché solo Polibio ricorda questo magistrato a Locri, mentre tale titolo non compare nelle tavolette dell'*Olympieion*. Gli studiosi hanno visto nel *kosmopolis* di volta in volta il magistrato eponimo,[64] che compare nelle tavolette locresi del tempio di Zeus, un 'gran vecchio' che esercita una funzione 'prodicastica',[65] il magistrato supremo,[66] il supremo giudice, continuatore del primitivo legislatore [67] e supremo moderatore della vita cittadina,[68] il precedente di quel *basileus* che compare nelle tabelle locresi e che percepisce una contribuzione dalla città di Locri,[69] il custode della legislazione, colui che deve garantire il significato originario delle leggi.[70]

A mio avviso, la funzione del *kosmopolis* potrebbe essere ricondotta alla ἐπιείκεια, di cui parla Aristotele[71] nell'*Etica Nicomachea* e nella *Retorica*. Secondo il filosofo, la legge si esprime in termini universali, non riuscendo così a cogliere la realtà in tutti i suoi aspetti e per questo motivo interviene l'equo (τὸ ἐπιεικές), la cui funzione è quella di integrare la legge dove essa è insufficiente. La ἐπιείκεια è dunque un correttivo della legge (ἐπανόρθωμα νόμου), laddove la legge è difettosa a causa della sua universalità.[72] Inoltre nella *Retorica*, Aristotele dice che l'equo è il giusto, che va oltre la legge scritta, la quale può rivelarsi difettosa, oltre che per la generalizzazione, anche per una svista del legislatore: per questo è necessario che intervenga la valutazione secondo equità perché si deve badare non alla lettera della legge, ma allo spirito del legislatore. La ἐπιείκεια interviene come fonte giuridica suppletiva per colmare le lacune dell'ordinamento legale:[73] essa si configura come interpretazione della legge secondo il presumibile intendimento del legislatore.[74] Il *kosmopolis* sembra svolgere proprio la funzione

dell'archivio locrese (Napoli 26–27 aprile 1977), Edizioni dell'Ateneo & Bizzarri, Roma 1979, p. 15–36, in part. p. 30; CAMASSA, « La codificazione delle leggi », p. 619–621.

64 DE FRANCISCIS, *Stato e società*, p. 135; ID., discussione in *Le tavole di Locri. Atti del colloquio*, p. 238–240.

65 MUSTI, discussione in *Le tavole di Locri. Atti del colloquio*, p. 298–299.

66 PUGLIESE CARRATELLI, « Primordi della legislazione », p. 101.

67 FRANCO SARTORI, *Dall'Italìa all'Italia*, Editoriale Programma, Padova 1993, p. 67.

68 SARTORI, *Dall'Italìa*, p. 362.

69 FELICE COSTABILE, « La 'contribuzione al re': ruolo finanziario e cronologia dei magistrati locresi », in ID. (ed.), *Polis ed Olympieion a Locri Epizefiri. Costituzione economia e finanze di una città della Magna Grecia. Editio altera e traduzione delle tabelle locresi*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 1992, p. 139–150, in part. p. 149; ID., « L'archivio finanziario di Locri Epizefiri ed il Basileus », in *Enigmi delle civiltà antiche dal Mediterraneo al Nilo*, vol. I, Iiriti, Reggio Calabria 2007, p. 251–307, in part. p. 298–299.

70 GHEZZI, « I Locresi e la legge », p. 109.

71 Sulla ἐπιείκεια aristotelica cfr. ANGEL RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, « La virtù dell'epicheia. Teoria, storia e applicazione (I). Dalla grecia classica fino a F. Suárez », *Acta Philosophica*, 6 (1997), p. 197–236, in part. p. 201–213; LAURA SOLIDORO MARUOTTI, *Tra morale e diritto. Gli itinerari dell'aequitas. Lezioni*, Giappichelli, Torino 2013, p. 169–170.

72 Cfr. ARISTOTELES, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1137b11–1138a3.

73 D'ANGELO, « La costituzione aristocratica di Locri Epizefiri », p. 53.

74 Cfr. ARISTOTELES, *Rethorica* I, 13, 1374a–b.

di interpretare la norma e l'intenzione del legislatore nei casi dubbi e complessi come quello presentato da Polibio:

> l'appropriazione avviene in due tempi, prima è il secondo giovane che sottrae lo schiavo al primo, poi è il primo che lo sottrae al secondo [...] e in seguito entrambi i giovani fanno appello alla legge di Zaleuco, che stabiliva che gli oggetti contesi [...]dovessero restare a colui che aveva subito l'appropriazione fino al momento del giudizio.[75]

Il *kosmopolis* specifica, chiarisce, interpreta il senso della legge, interviene quasi suppletivamente, dichiarando che « l'appropriazione avviene sempre a danno di coloro presso i quali un oggetto divenuto conteso è rimasto per un qualche tempo non contestato ».[76]

La costituzione locrese, dunque, presentava alcune garanzie processuali, che limitavano la discrezionalità dei giudici attraverso l'intervento di magistrati. Di fronte all'insoddisfazione del secondo giovane che ha messo in dubbio l'interpretazione dello stesso *kosmopolis*, quest'ultimo propone al giovane di confrontarsi davanti all'assemblea dei Mille con un cappio al collo: chi dei due avesse interpretato male, a giudizio dei Mille, l'intenzione del legislatore sarebbe stato strangolato.

Pertanto l'autorità del *kosmopolis* non era neanche assoluta, visto che chiunque poteva contestarlo davanti all'assemblea dei Mille:[77] come è stato messo in evidenza dal Costabile, « contestare l'interpretazione costituzionale del kosmopolis poteva costare al ricorrente la pena di morte nel caso che il consiglio ne avesse rigettato l'istanza ».[78]

Nella parte finale del passo, Polibio attribuisce un'altra norma a Zaleuco, ovvero, la legge del laccio che nel testo appare come uno strumento normativo da applicare qualora qualcuno avesse contestato l'interpretazione del *kosmopolis* in relazione all'intenzione del legislatore.

La legge del laccio presente a Locri è ricordata anche da Demostene nell'orazione *Contro Timocrate* (139–141), sebbene essa non venga messa in relazione direttamente con Zaleuco: Timocrate è un cittadino ateniese che è stato accusato di aver presentato una legge dannosa per la città con lo scopo di favorire alcuni suoi amici ambasciatori e Demostene, con un evidente intento persuasivo nei confronti dei giudici, presenta Locri come città ben governata (πόλις εὐνομουμένη) perché

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75 Ghezzi, « I Locresi e la legge », p. 108.
76 Ghezzi, « I Locresi e la legge », p. 109.
77 Ghezzi, « I Locresi e la legge », p. 110.
78 Costabile, « La costituzione democratica », in Id., *Polis ed Olympieion a Locri Epizefiri*, p. 210–227, in part. p. 226.

> Lì ritengono così doveroso osservare le leggi vigenti da tempo, preservare le tradizioni e impedire di legiferare per favorire i reati o per offrire vie di scampo, che chiunque voglia presentare una nuova legge fa la sua proposta con la corda al collo: se la legge viene giudicata buona e utile (καλὸς καὶ χρήσιμος), il suo autore se ne viene fuori con la vita salva, altrimenti la corda viene tirata e lui muore [...][79]

al contrario, « [...] i nostri uomini politici, giudici, innanzitutto quasi non fanno passare mese senza legiferare in difesa dei loro interessi ».[80]

Quanto Demostene racconta a proposito di Locri ha chiaramente uno scopo ben preciso: egli intende offrire ai suoi concittadini un modello legislativo basato sulla tutela e sulla salvaguardia delle leggi antiche evidentemente perché ad Atene vi era la tendenza a cambiare continuamente le leggi.

Ciò che è importante rilevare in questa sede a proposito della legislazione locrese è che essa – come dice Demostene – subì un solo emendamento in relazione alla legge del taglione in più di duecento anni.

Un uomo privo di un occhio, infatti, poiché era stato minacciato da un altro uomo della privazione dell'unico occhio che aveva, riuscì ad ottenere una modifica alla legge in modo che il colpevole dell'accecamento non fosse privato di un solo occhio, come prescriveva la legge fino ad allora, ma di entrambi gli occhi. La modifica della norma si concretizzò, pertanto, in un inasprimento della legge del taglione.

Anche se gli ambiti di intervento della legge del laccio sono diversi in Demostene e in Polibio, tuttavia entrambe le fonti sono concordi nel sottolineare la funzione principale della norma: tutelare le leggi antiche e metterle al riparo da qualsiasi tentativo di innovazione perché evidentemente i cambiamenti vengono avvertiti come situazioni di instabilità.

In un passo della *Biblioteca Storica* (XII 21), Diodoro attribuisce a Zaleuco una legge contro il lusso:

> Una donna libera doveva farsi accompagnare, a meno che non fosse ubriaca, soltanto da una serva; di notte non doveva allontanarsi dalla città, a meno che avesse un amante; non doveva ornarsi con gioielli d'oro né indossare abiti ricamati sull'orlo, a meno che fosse una etera; l'uomo non doveva portare anelli d'oro né indossare mantelli di foggia milesia, a meno che esercitasse la prostituzione o avesse un amante. Di conseguenza, con l'esclusione infamante operata dalle pene previste, gli riuscì agevole tener lontani i cittadini dai danni della lussuria e

[79] La norma locrese del laccio è riportata anche negli *Anecdota greca* (AB I 220.21) e in STOBEO (III 39.36) secondo la medesima prospettiva demostenica, ovvero come provvedimento per tutelare le leggi vigenti e per impedirne l'introduzione di nuove. Cfr. GHEZZI, « I Locresi e la legge », p. 103.

[80] Si tratta di uno stralcio della traduzione del passo demostenico contenuta in LUCIANO CANFORA, MARIA L. AMERIO, ISABELLA LABRIOLA, ANTONIO NATALICCHIO, MARIA R. PIERRO, PASQUALE M. PINTO, GIUSEPPE RUSSO (eds.), *Discorsi e lettere di Demostene*, vol. II, Utet, Torino 2000, p. 401 e 403.

> distoglierli da una condotta sfrenata: nessuno infatti voleva, ammettendo la propria ripugnante degradazione, diventare ridicolo agli occhi dei concittadini. Inoltre con numerose altre leggi disciplinò validamente i contrasti e ogni altro aspetto che nella vita di tutti i giorni poteva divenire oggetto di controversia, ma sarebbe troppo lungo per noi elencarle e in contrasto con la finalità della nostra storia.[81]

In questo caso la norma fa leva su una dimensione di natura psicologica: la vergogna di essere additata come una persona dedita alla ubriachezza, alla prostituzione, al tradimento diventa un deterrente per chi intende ostentare il lusso in maniera eccessiva.

Diventa pertanto difficile credere alla notizia contenuta in Ateneo (X 429 a) secondo cui veniva condannato a morte in base ad una legge di Zaleuco chi veniva sorpreso a bere vino puro se non dietro prescrizione medica.

Infine merita di essere ricordato un provvedimento di natura economica relativo alla scadenza dei prestiti e contenuto in Zenobio (VI 9), che tramanda un proverbio 'patti locresi':

> 'Patti locresi': presso i Locresi Epizefirii, come si racconta, ci fu il legislatore Zaleuco che stabilì come legge un decreto relativo alla scadenza dei prestiti. Poiché molti non rispettarono il decreto, si affermò questo proverbio per coloro che non mantengono la parola data.[82]

V. *Conclusioni*

A questo punto possiamo tentare di definire le acquisizioni di questo lavoro:

1. Nonostante autorevoli studiosi abbiano messo in dubbio la storicità del legislatore Zaleuco, la cui figura sarebbe stata creata all'indomani di quelle vicende che portarono a Locri all'avvento della democrazia, tuttavia bisognerebbe essere prudenti a non dare il giusto credito alle testimonianze di Eforo, Aristotele, Teofrasto, Polibio, Diodoro e Cicerone, nelle cui opere compare la figura e l'opera legislativa di Zaleuco: i racconti relativi al nomoteta, pur essendo caratterizzati da un alone leggendario e religioso, da una cronologia errata e da intenti propagandistici,[83] attestano

[81] La traduzione del passo è tratta da DIODORO SICULO, *Biblioteca storica*, *frammenti dei Libri IX–X*, *Libri XI–XIII*, ed. CALOGERO MICCICHÉ, Rusconi, Milano 1992, p. 291–292.

[82] ZENOBIUS, 6.9: « Λοκρὸι τὰς συνθήκας· παρὰ Λοκροῖς τοῖς Ἐπιζεφυρίοις, ὥς φασιν, ἐγένετο Ζάλευκος νομθέτης· ὃς νόμον ἔθηκε, συγγραφὴν ἐπὶ τῶν δανεισμάτων μὴ γίνεσθαι. Ὅθεν πολλῶν ἀρνουμένων τὰ συναλλάγματα, ἐπὶ τῶν ψευδομένων ἡ παροιμία ἐκράτησεν ».

[83] L'apparizione della dea Atena a Zaleuco (ARISTOTELES, fr. 548 [Rose] [= *Scholia in Pindari*, *Olympionicas*, 10, 17 i]) intende conferire forza e sacralità alle norme; l'episodio relativo alla comminazione di una pena da parte di Zaleuco nei confronti del figlio accusato di furto o di

la storicità del legislatore, la cui attività viene inserita, come in altre poleis greche, in un contesto di disordine interno (ταραχή).[84]

2. La novità dell'attività legislativa di Zaleuco non consistette nell'aver dato ai Locresi il primo codice di leggi scritte, che evidentemente erano già presenti a Locri prima di Zaleuco: la sua attività fu finalizzata da una parte a riordinare la νομογραφία precedente, dall'altra a determinare le pene nelle leggi stesse con lo scopo di limitare le decisioni arbitrarie dei giudici.[85]

3. Sebbene l'immutabilità della legislazione di Zaleuco venga garantita dalla norma del laccio, che in Demostene e in Polibio ha la funzione di preservare le leggi antiche e di metterle al riparo da qualsiasi tentativo di innovazione, tuttavia rimane uno spazio di libertà di interpretazione e di cambiamento della norma medesima: sia il caso di ἀγωγή, riferito da Polibio (XII 16), sia la proposta di modifica della legge del taglione, riportata da Demostene (*Contro Timocrate* 139–141), evidenziano la possibilità per i Locresi di proporre degli emendamenti anche se con un cappio al collo!

adulterio (AELIANUS, *Varia Historia* XIII, 24; VALERIUS MAXIMUS 6, 5 ext. 3), sottolinea la proverbiale severità del legislatore; la successione cronologica, che collega Licurgo, Zaleuco e Caronda a Creta, e a cui Aristotele (*Politica* II, 1274a) non dà credito, vuole essere il riconoscimento di una ideale dipendenza della legislazione locrese, oltre che di quella spartana, da Creta, sede ancestrale della legislazione per il pensiero greco.

84 ARISTOTELES, fr. 548 (Rose) (= *Scholia in Pindari, Olympionicas*, 10, 17 i).

85 EPHORUS, *FGrHist* 70 F139 (= STRABO, 6, 1, 8, 259).

EXPERIENCING GOD IN THOUGHT.
TOWARDS A NEW INTERPRETATION OF ANSELM'S ARGUMENT (*PROSLOGION* 2–4)*

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NIEDERSÄCHSISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN ZU GÖTTINGEN

Nur wo Du Gott denkst, denkst Du, rigoros gesprochen
Ludwig Feuerbach

I. *The Rule of Thinking*

I.1. The interpretative approach to be presented is fundamentally determined by the fact that Anselm's proof does not deal with something objective or conceptual that would be external to it as a proof, but that it is a proof from thinking itself and thus itself the thinking of which it speaks, with constant use of the terms *cogitare* and *intelligere*. This means that, in the execution of the proof, through thinking, what it seeks to prove arises from itself – one may term it 'performative'. It does not remain external to what is to be proven, but is itself

* The present issue of *Mediterranea* includes the English version (by Andrea Aldo Robiglio) of a lecture originally delivered at the plenary session of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences on 3 July 1998 and subsequently published in German: JOACHIM RINGLEBEN, « Erfahrung Gottes im Denken: Zu einer neuen Lesart des Anselmschen Argumentes (*Proslogion* 2-4) » [1998], *Nachrichten des Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, I. *Philologisch-Historische Klasse*, 2000, nr. 1, p. 4–36. For the purposes of this new edition, the text has been thoroughly revised by the author and supplemented with a new appendix, thereby constituting a fresh contribution. Anselm's *Proslogion* and his other writings are cited according to the edition: SANCTUS ANSELMUS CANTURIENSIS EPISCOPUS, *Opera omnia*, ed. FRANCISCUS SALESIUS SCHMITT, 6 vols., Thomas Nelson & Sons, Edinburgh 1946–1961, with reference to page and line numbers. It should be noted that all the works examined here – namely the *Proslogion*, *Monologion*, and *De veritate* – are included in vol. I of the edition published in 1946. The author's reading has recently been reaffirmed in JOACHIM RINGLEBEN, « Der sogenannte ontologische Gottesbeweis – Anselms Argument im Vergleich mit Descartes », *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 66 (2024), 4, p. 465–485, < https://doi.org/10.1515/nzsth-2024-0051 > (last accessed June 2026).

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only the thinking execution of what arises in it. It is the actualization of what it deals with; it is its self-evidence for thinking. This proof is the representation in thought of what is to be proven. Therefore, the thinking that follows the proof already experiences within itself what is proven *eo ipso*. The proof is the intellectual way in which its subject – the existence of God – is and is experienced as proving itself in thought.

This heuristic thesis must prove itself in the understanding of the proof as a whole and of all its individual steps. The key to this is contained in the famous opening statement, according to which God is believed to be « aliquid, quo nihil maius cogitari possit »,[1] a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Even though Anselm does not explicitly prove *that* God is identical with what is named in this formula until chapter 3, this (final) step of the proof, like the first step taken here in chapter 2 concerning the existence of such an « aliquid », depends on a correct understanding of that formula, i.e. one that is consistent with the proof. Anselm himself claimed that understanding this formula is sufficient to prove the existence of that « than which nothing greater can be conceived (*quo maius cogitari nequit*) ».[2]

I.2. It is widely accepted that this formula is not a concept of God, for example in the sense of a definition of essence.[3] When Anselm begins by presenting his thesis as a *propositio*, he says: « we believe that you are something (*credimus te esse aliquid*), *quo nihil maius cogitari possit*) »,[4] he is not making the « assumption » of a

[1] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. I, p. 101.5. Quite obviously, the formula goes back primarily to Anselm's reading of Augustine; cf. ALEXANDRE KOYRÉ, *L'Idée de Dieu dans la Philosophie de St. Anselm*, Leroux, Paris 1923, p. 40 f.. It is well known that in the *Monologion* Anselm attempted to prove the existence of God using the concept of *bonum per seipsum*, which as *summe bonum* is at the same time also *summe magnum* (ANSELMUS, *Monologion,* ed. SCHMITT, vol. I, chap. 1; p. 15.5 and 11).

[2] ANSELMUS, *Quid ad haec* [*scil.* 'Gaunilonis pro insipiente'] *respondeat editor ipius libelli*, hereafter *Responsio*, in, ID., *Opera omnia*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. I, p. 138.30–139.3.

[3] In this respect, it cannot be said that Anselm's argument is about « wanting to extract » being from a concept or existence from an idea, cf. IMMANUEL KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in: *Kants Werke*, Akademie Textausgabe, vol. III, de Gruyter, Berlin 1968, B 631. Even JOHN LESLIE MACKIE, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the existence of God*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1982, speaks of a « mere concept » or « mere definition » (ibid., p. 52; also for *Prosl.*, chap. 3, p. 88). This brings him to his criticism of Anselm: one does not need to include non-existence in one's concept (viz. insofar as it is merely a concept); cf. ibid., p. 52 (on the question of instantiation: p. 51, 54). Mackie then returns to Kant: « appealing to and illustrating Kant's final dictum that 'Whatever, and however much, our concept of an object may contain, we must go outside it, if we are to ascribe existence to the object' » (ibid., p. 55; KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 629).

[4] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.5. This second sentence of the first paragraph of chapter 2: « Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid... » (ibid., p. 101.2 f.) requires a preliminary understanding of what we *actually* believe when we believe. It provides the hermeneutic key that unlocks *what* we believe when we believe *that* God exists (« quia es sicut credimus »; p. 101.4) and *that is* what we

being that has the « property » mentioned in the formula – can this formula even be misunderstood as a statement of property?[5] – but rather he states: God is only conceived when he – whatever his essence may be – is conceived in such a way that nothing greater than him can be conceived *in thought itself*, or when God is conceived as something beyond which nothing greater can be *conceived*.[6] By referring to the act of thinking, the expression *maius cogitari*, Anselm's instruction on « how one must think if one wants to think about God » is at the same time an explanation of how one must think in order to *think* at all. It is therefore not just a matter of « theological rules on how to think about God so that we actually think about the God we profess and pray to, and not something completely different »,[7] but of rules of thinking as true thinking. This explains the striking «lack of content» in the formula.[8] It does not provide a concept of God; rather, it functions as a kind of « rule of thinking »[9] which, instead of determining what God is, prescribes a « way of thinking »[10] through which God may genuinely be thought. But this also means « that in this formula, thinking

believe him to be (« hoc es quod credimus »*;* ibid.). Strictly speaking, *credimus* in the second sentence does not simply mean the same thing as *credimus* in the first sentence, but rather its actual intention.

5 Nevertheless, Hubbeling still assumes that Anselm is referring to the « essence » of God and, in particular, that the *maius* refers to the « property » of such an essence, namely that it also exists (HUBERTUS GEZINUS HUBBELING *Einführung in die Religionsphilosophie*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1981, p. 80 and 84). Anselm allegedly « concludes from a logical possibility to a real possibility » (ibid., p. 82 and 85). If the result is then: « A being beyond which nothing greater can be conceived is conceivable » (p. 80, 83, 84), two things must be noted in response: a) Anselm is not concerned with the conceivability of a being as such, but with the conception of something that can only be conceived as unsurpassable in thought; b) that thinking encounters something beyond which nothing greater can be conceived, which is not only the « conceivability » or Hubbeling's « logical possibility », but already the thinking of what is to be thought.

6 Thus INGOLF ULRICH DALFERTH, in a study that has significantly shaped recent theological discussions of the *ratio Anselmi*, offers a subtle and, to my mind, largely persuasive account: « *Fides quaerens intellectum*. Theologie als Kunst der Argumentation in Anselms's *Proslogion* », *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche,* 81 (1984), p. 54–105; here: 78 f..

7 DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 80.

8 DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 80.

9 Thus DIETRICH KORSCH in the concluding section of his essay: « *Intellectus fidei*. Ontologischer Gottesbeweis und theologische Methode in Karl Barths Anselmbuch », in DIETRICH KORSCH, HARTMUT RUDDIES (eds.), *Wahrheit und Versöhnung. Theologische und philosophische Beiträge zur Gottelehre*, Gerd Mohn Verlag, Gütersloh 1989, p. 143. Understanding the formula « Quo maius cogitari nequit » as *a rule of thinking* means that, in this formula, thought has to do with itself (ibid.). Therefore, the same applies to Korsch: *maius* is then not to be related to *id* or *aliquid*, but to *cogitari* (ibid.); it is about the « continuous application of thought to itself » (ibid.). My reading of the argument is very close to this; see note 19 below.

10 DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 79.

has to do with itself » – and not with a supreme being named God.[11] However, even for this expression « rule of thinking », it is not a rule that is opposed to thought, a presupposed rule for all possible instances of thought, but rather one that must be realized and understood by thought as such in its comprehension, i.e. that it concerns the movement by which real thinking grasps itself, or in other words, the rule by applying which thinking can become aware of itself as thinking.[12]

To anticipate: the formula *quo nihil maius…* refers to the fact that God – if he is indeed God – is always conceived in thought as the « greater » entity. In order to express the relativity of this determination in relation to thought, the term *maius* is used rather than *maximus*, *summus*, or similar terms.[13] It refers to a specific act of thought that transcends its own limits (« quo… maius »).

This relativity to thought is also evident in the equivalence that Anselm attributes to the formulations « beyond which nothing greater can be thought (*quo maius cogitari non potest*) »[14] and (« nothing *greater* can be conceived (*quo nihil maius cogitari possit*) ».[15] A mode of being (*nihil maius*) thus corresponds equivalently to a mode of thinking this being (*cogitari non potest*). In other words, the negation of thinking (« cannot be thought ») corresponds precisely to a negation of the thought (« nothing greater »). Anselm thus indicates linguistically that the thought is reflected in the thinking of it, or that a negation undertaken by thinking is reflected in the thought.

The thought articulated by the formula (which, as it turns out, is a thought of God) is thus the 'highest' thought, in the sense that it possesses a determinately specifiable content. Yet it is so only insofar as it proves irrefutably capable of giving rise to an even higher (*maius*) thought, through which thinking turns critically upon itself and distances itself from its own prior determinations.

To understand this, everything depends on the meaning that *maius* has in the proof, and thus for thinking itself. Surprisingly, many interpreters have paid too little attention to this *maius* and have often taken it quite uncritically in an external, summative sense: « greater » is that which exists not only in the mind

[11] This fundamental insight, which I share with Korsch, provides the most important argument against Gaunilo's island-objection. Cf. KORSCH, « *Intellectus fidei*. Ontologischer Gottesbeweis und theologische Methode in Karl Barths Anselmbuch ».

[12] Cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 104 (and 102).

[13] In this respect, Cusanus's formula is not entirely clear: « maximum autem hoc dico, quo nihil maius esse potest » (*De docta ignorantia* I, 2; in NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, ed. LEO GABRIEL, vol. I, Herder, Vienna 1964, p. 198).

[14] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.18.

[15] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.5.

but also in reality. According to this view, a thought plus the existence of that thought is « greater » than a mere thought.[16]

The formula itself presupposes that, beyond everything thought as such (*eo ipso*), something « greater » can be thought – with the exception of the unique case under discussion here. Being able to think something greater is the possibility of transcending what is thought by thinking as such. This possibility is the potency of thinking as thinking. The special case of a « quo maius cogitari nequit »[17] must make itself clear to thinking itself as something in which it necessarily thinks its inability to go beyond it as thinking, so that in this case – that of the elucidation of a *maius, quo...* – thinking, in one and the same act, comprehends its own limit and thereby comes into its own as thinking. In no case, therefore, may such a *maius* be imposed externally on thinking (or on the proof) – for example, in the sense of external assumptions that a thought plus reality is naturally « greater » than a mere thought.[18] For the invocation of such an external thesis would place thought – and therefore the proof itself – in contradiction with its own presuppositions.

Let us try to clarify the formula in this sense. It speaks of that beyond which nothing greater « *can* be thought ». This means, first of all, that it is not something that is (or should be) greater than everything else (including everything thought and thinkable), nor is it something that is thought to be greater than anything else that exists, is thought or is thinkable (i.e. not something that is thought of as « the greatest »). Rather, it is solely about something that exists in thought only in such a way that thought becomes aware of its own ability to think and of its inability to conceive of anything greater. If the formula *quo maius cogitari nequit* suggests something like a limit of thought, then this must arise within thought itself and prove unavoidable for it. In this context, the *non posse* does not denote a merely factual limit, but rather the attempt to think beyond the very possibility of thought itself. The *maius* is thereby shown to be the greater, namely that which must, for good reason, be conceived as unsurpassably greater.

This further implies that the *maius* must disclose itself within thought itself as an incontrovertible experience of thinking as such, as an insight intrinsic to the act of thought. The *non posse*, therefore, cannot merely be posited in the abstract; it must be grasped by thought itself and arise immanently in the course of its own unfolding.

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16 Hubbeling also understands *maius* as the addition of reality to a « mere » thought, cf. HUBBELING, *Einführung in die Religionsphilosophie*, p. 80. This is obviously also the case with MACKIE, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 49 f., 51 and 52.

17 ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.16.

18 See HERBERT VORGRIMLER, *Theologische Gotteslehre*, Patmos, Düsseldorf 1998 (3rd ed.), p. 27.

The fact that nothing greater than that *aliquid* can be thought ultimately means that thinking is not only factually incapable of doing so in a particular case, but incapable of doing so as thinking in general. The articulated and intellectually grasped impossibility-in-principle partakes, as such, of the necessity proper to thought itself. Only as a necessary thought of thought would this impossibility be established for thought as such.[19]

II. *Anselm's Original Insight*

These considerations concerning the key formula suggest that any interpretation of Anselm's argument must begin by asking where and in what sense the meaning of the *'maius'* is specified within the text itself.

Anselm introduces his proof by engaging the « fool » (*insipiens*) of Psalm 14:1 (Psalm 53:1), who denies the existence of God. His aim is to show that even the denier cannot evade the cognitive force of the formula « aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit ». For upon hearing these words, the *insipiens* cannot but grasp their meaning: « intelligit quod audit ».[20] The extent to which this apparently trivial statement introduces the proof is revealed in Anselm's next sentence, which takes up the theme of « understanding (*intelligere*) » and has always been of particular importance to interpreters.

II.1. « And what he understands exists in his intellect (*et quod intelligit in intellectu eius est*) ».[21] This important sentence clearly marks a step forward in the line of reasoning of the proof and is intended to guide the fool along the path of thought; it is therefore not merely a repetition of the claim that the fool must have understood what he hears when he hears that formula. The two parts of the sentence relate to each other in such a way that the relative clause refers to the act of understanding or proper thinking (« intelligit »), while the main clause, as an implication of such *intelligere* (or a conclusion drawn from it), states the existence of what is understood (or thought) and exists within the act of understanding (« in intellectu est »).[22] Here the emphasis falls on *'est'*. The

[19] It should be noted that thinking here does not signify merely having an idea, forming a representation, or the alike. The proposition that something « cannot » be thought can be justified only within thought itself, namely as a necessary insight arising from thought's « experience » of itself, from thought reflecting upon its own activity.

[20] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.8.

[21] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.9.

[22] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.18. See also the Fragment on the *aliquid* first brought to light by Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, *Benediktiner von Grüssau. Ein neues unvollendetes Werk des hl. Anselm von Canterbury*, Aschendorff, Münster 1936 (Beiträge zur Geschichte und Philosophie des Mittelalters, 33/ 3), p. 42 f.; for an analysis, see Dalferth, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 87 f. (with note 145).

sentence articulates a distinction between that which is thought and the act of thinking through which it is thought.[23] If the relative clause formulates, as it were, the act of understanding in the mode of *intentio recta* (cf. verb: *intelligit*), the main clause formulates, in a reflective mode – viz., *intentione obliqua* –, the epitome of thought (cf. noun: *in intellectu esse*), insofar as it possesses a certain being for thought (*est*). The structure of the sentence thus expresses a distinctive feature of understanding: what is understood enjoys a certain distinctness, independence, and resistance – perhaps even effectiveness – with respect to the act of understanding that apprehends it. Understanding (*intelligere*) is therefore not a simple act, but the disclosure of a difference between the act of understanding and that which is understood, between thinking and what is thought. Thinking is thus conceived as the constitutive distinction between the execution of thinking (*intelligere*) and the being of what is thought in it, for it (*in intellectu esse*).

It will become apparent later that this distinction between thinking and what is thought, as thinking takes place, reproduces within thinking precisely the difference that is the subject of the proof, namely the difference between what is thought as such (*in intellectu esse tantum*) and what is to be thought (actual being, *in re esse*).

Perhaps we may take one step further at this point, in keeping with the overall thrust of the interpretation. Since what one understands (*quod intelligit*), according to Anselm, is also « in intellectu eius », it seems reasonable to assume that one must also understand (*intelligere*) that it is *in intellectu*. But then this very *intelligere* is itself also *in intellectu eius*: in understanding something, one simultaneously understands that one's understanding of it is (only) in this understanding. Understood in this way, the structure of Anselm's sentence articulates the actual content of *intelligere* as it is in itself. If this were not the case, it could not be said of the « fool » that he does not (yet) understand « illud esse ».[24] If there is to be any possibility of understanding it as existing (« intelligat illud esse »), then he must already be able to recognise that it is first *in intellectu eius* before he can recognise that it is not only *in intellectu eius*, but absolutely. The *intelligere* of something (« quod ») is therefore, first and foremost, an *intelligere* of the fact that it is *in intellectu*, and then, in one case, it may also be an *intelligere*

[23] WOLFGANG RÖD, *Der Gott der reinen Vernunft. Die Auseinandersetzung um den ontologischen Gottesbeweis von Anselm bis Hegel,* Beck, Munich 1992, p. 32, notes that Anselm did not 'define' « being in the intellect » and then adds: « Anselm apparently took it for granted that what is thought is a kind of object and, as such, has a kind of being ».

[24] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.9: « Sed certe ipse idem insipiens, cum audit hoc ipsum quod dico: 'aliquid quo maius cogitare non potest', intelligit quod audit; et quod intelligit in intellectu eius est, etiam si non intelligat illud esse ».

illud esse and, in another case (which is in fact the case with the fool), a *non intelligere illud esse*.

In any case, if this distinction between *intelligere* and *in intellectu esse* can be shown to be binding on the fool (« convincitur »),[25] then it must also be possible to render intelligible to him the proof of truth of the « aliquid, quo nihil maius cogitari possit », which Anselm's argument is directed at. The conceptual meaning of *maius* must be understood from this distinction, which is constitutive for thinking, and to do precisely this means to have understood Anselm's proof.

First, however, Anselm emphasizes the limits of this preparatory step. The fool must be able to understand what has been explained – namely, the distinction between thinking and what is thought, as disclosed within thinking itself – even if he does not (yet) understand that the *aliquid* exists: « etiam si non intelligat illud esse ».[26] For the moment, therefore, he remains within the sphere of thinking as such, without yet making the transition from what exists only *in intellectu eius* to what also exists outside thought.

Anselm formulates this further step, which the fool has not yet grasped and which is completed only in the final section of the chapter, in terms closely corresponding to those of the preceding insight. Might it be that the fool is a fool precisely because he has not yet fully understood – or thought through – what is already contained in the interplay of the relative clause and the main clause? If so, Anselm's claim would be that, when consistently understood, the thinking of what is understood in thought is already, in itself, an understanding of its real being.

This interpretation accords with Anselm's own remark in the reply to Gaunilo that understanding the mere verbal expression *quo maius…* does not yet constitute knowledge of the thing signified.[27] In my reading, this remains true so long as the formula is not related to thinking itself. To have the *quo maius… in intellectu* instantiates a distinctive case of thinking something. What is to be thought in these words is the present actuality of the law of thought itself.

II.2. However that may be, Anselm immediately follows with a sentence that returns to the distinction just discussed and states explicitly: « Aliud enim est rem esse in intellectu, aliud intelligere rem esse ».[28] This apparently obvious distinction succinctly recapitulates the quintessence of the preceding argument. Once again, what is striking is the close similarity of the two formulations, as though, by a slight rearrangement of the same words, one and the same phenomenon were differentiating itself from itself. In my view, the decisive

[25] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.13
[26] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.9.
[27] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 138.9–11
[28] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.9-10.

question for the interpretation of this sentence – and here the hermeneutical maxim formulated at the outset again becomes relevant – is *who* is making this distinction and from whose perspective it is made; more precisely, to which instance it properly belongs. Is it merely a distinction imposed from without (even if by Anselm himself), one which obviously makes sense to everyone in some way? Or does the sentence articulate a distinction that arises within the very act of understanding (or thinking) under discussion and is immediately evident to that understanding itself? Suppose, then, that the strongest interpretation is correct: namely, that the distinction between *rem esse in intellectu* and *intelligere rem esse* belongs to thought in such a way that thought consists in nothing else than this very act of distinguishing. If so, a further step in the proof would thereby be achieved. Anselm would have shown that, with respect to thought itself, the distinction between *esse in intellectu* and the *esse* of a *res* is a self-distinction internal to thought insofar as it is *intelligere*.

The example of the painter, that follows and substantiates the quoted sentence, confirms precisely this reading.[29] At first glance, it appears trivial, but its purpose is to demonstrate (empirically, as it were) that the distinction between the mere idea in the painter's mind (*esse in intellectu*) and its realisation (*facere*) is entangled: the two aspects are distinguished only in relation to each other, so that the distinction is possible only through this relation. Importantly, this distinction occurs within the painter's « mind » (« praecogitat », « habet in intellectu »)[30], i.e., as an insight of his thinking.

Returning to this illustrative and justificatory example – « aliud est rem esse in intellectu, aliud intelligere rem esse » – we may now say: in thinking itself, the being of the thought-of is distinguished, for the sake of thought, from the thought of being as such (*rem esse*), that is, in contrast to what is merely thought. Thinking, as such, distinguishes the thought-being (*esse in intellectu*) from the own being of the thought thing (*rem esse*) – and it does so understandably (*intelligere*).

Thus, what Anselm seeks to demonstrate to the fool and to the attentive reader, by appealing to an insight into thinking itself, is therefore the following. In thinking, the separation of thought-as-act from the thought-as-object – or that of the merely thought from the thing to be thought (the thing itself) – occurs through thinking itself.

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[29] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.10–13: « Nam cum pictor praecogitat quae facturus est, habet quidem in intellectu, sed nondum intelligit esse quod nondum fecit ». In a similar vein, Augustine had already distinguished the visibly crafted chest (*arca*) from the idea of the chest that pre-exists in the mind of its maker. Cf. AUGUSTINUS HIPPONENSIS, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*, ed. RADBODUS WILLEMS, Brepols, Turnhout 1954 (CC, SL, 36), 1, § 17.

[30] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.11.

I regard this as Anselm's « original insight », which alone allows us to recognize the intellectual meaning of the *maius* formula. It consists in the fact that, in thinking something, thought inevitably distinguishes its thought of this something (viz., the thought) from the thought-something as such (viz., the thing to be thought). It is not difficult to see that, in this basic insight, the two sentences of Anselm under discussion belong together. It can be schematized as the constitutive self-distinction of thinking concerning:

P_1 « quod intelligit, in intellectu eius est [...] intelligat illud esse ».[31]

P_2 « aliud enim est rem esse in intellectu, aliud intelligere rem esse ».[32]

$T = (I \rightarrow R_1 ...)... \rightarrow R_2$

In the relationship between P_1 and P_2, Anselm articulates – this is my thesis – the concept of thinking that is decisive for his proof ('*quod*' here means a *res*, insofar as it is *in intellectu*, and '*res*' denotes the object of thought, as thinking *of* something, insofar as it is always twofold for thought: as a thought-*res* and as a *res* to be thought – or as thought and thing itself).

Thinking (T) is therefore the relation of an act of understanding (*intelligere,* I) to a thing understood (*res*, R) in such a way that the relation of this *res* to the *intelligere* (i.e., R_1, *rem esse in intellectu*) is distinguished from this *res* itself, its own being in general (R_2, *rem esse*). By thinking R_2, the thought simultaneously reflects on this thinking that R_1 is not R_2, and in doing so thinks R_2 as itself (as distinct from R_1). The understanding of the thing itself (*intelligere rem esse*, R_2) is only possible in the thinking of its thought (*esse in intellectu*, R_1) and, at the same time, in the rejection of it as a mere thought: $R_1... \rightarrow R_2$

If the sentence P_2 is to be understood as a constitutive self-distinction of thinking or thought, then two assumptions must be clarified in order to grasp its meaning.

A_1) The sentence P_2 must refer to a double *intelligere*. To think *aliud est rem esse in intellectu* is itself an *intelligere*, so that it should be read as: *aliud*$_1$ *est intelligere, rem esse in intellectu; aliud*$_2$ *intelligere, rem esse*.

A_2) The distinction and classification of the *aliud*$_1$*... aliud*$_2$ is itself an *intelligere*, or rather, it is thought itself. In that the *intelligere rem esse in intellectu* (*aliud*$_1$), as *intelligere*, distinguishes the other *rem esse* (*aliud*$_2$) from itself. In and through this distinction, thought is determined as thought.

With these two assumptions, it is said that 'to think that *aliud*$_1$ (« rem esse in intellectu ») and *aliud*$_2$ (« rem esse »)' *is* essentially thinking itself.[33] To think

[31] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.8-9.
[32] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.10.

intelligere rem esse as a difference (*aliud quid*) presupposes thinking *intelligere rem esse in intellectu* as something specific (cf. later: « solo »). Only because and insofar as it is recognized that « rem esse in intellectu » does *not* mean that *rem esse* – or rather that « rem esse in intellectu » *only* (« solo ») means *esse in intellectu* – can the insight that *rem esse* is distinguished from this as *something else.* It is only in the self-knowledge that *rem (solo) esse in intellectu,* that a knowledge of the object – that *rem esse* (viz., $aliud_2$) – becomes possible, just as the latter is possible only in the conceptual distinction from the former.

This also means that the inner difference in thinking ($I \rightarrow R_1$: *in intellectu esse*) is repeated in the outer ($I \rightarrow R_2$: *intelligere rem esse*), which in turn presupposes the former. Thinking *is* this distinguishing of the inner and outer distinctions from each other as their (mutually determining) relation to each other.

In short: to think a thought about something means to carry out the distinction within the thought itself, namely that the thought, as something thought, is not the thing to be thought that it is thinking. Thought as thinking refers to something else, which it thinks-of within itself as distinct from itself.

As Wolfgang Cramer so aptly put it: « Dismissing thinking is <still> thinking ».[34] Anselm's *maius*-formula is closely related to this fundamental feat of thought, which is 'to bracket oneself' in favor of the thing itself. Because thinking as thinking is at the same time the ability to think 'even more' or 'even further', it can always think of something « greater » than its own thoughts and can, for example, also think of that beyond which nothing greater can be thought.[35] Thinking, as such, is therefore at the same time the ability to think about being able not to think any further; that is to say, thinking can think even of its own inability to think. That is why thought is capable of transcending every thought that has been thought, or rather, it precedes its objects of thought as such in order to be with the thing to be thought. Thinking is – in the strict sense – only possible as the self-distinction of its object of thought as 'thought' from itself as that which is to be thought. Thinking essentially distinguishes its thought from the thought to be thought.

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[33] This seems to me to have been overlooked by ADOLF SCHURR, *Die Begrundung der Philosophie durch Anselm von Canterbury. Eine Erörterung des ontologischen Gottesbeweises*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1966, p. 79, with the result that he misinterprets the relationship between $aliud_1$ and $aliud_2$. Because he does not take into account the parallelism revealed by P_1 and P_2, the phrase *in intellectu* becomes an arbitrary addition. Schurr overlooks the fact that the two become distinguishable from each other precisely because of this parallelism. Instead of a « transcendental-constitutive meaning » (ibid., p. 75), one must speak of the dialectic of the self-distinction of thought.

[34] WOLFGANG CRAMER, *Grundlegung einer Theorie des Geistes*, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1965, p. 63.

[35] For Anselm, however, this does not entail that thought, *qua* act of thinking, is itself a constant *maius*. Such a purely formal interpretation fails to account for the essential intentionality or object-directedness of thought.

II.3. In my opinion, these considerations reveal the core of Anselm's proof in chapter 2. Only against this background does it become plausible how the distinction between « being only in the mind (*esse in solo intellectu*) »[36] and « also being in reality (*esse et in re*) »[37] can be introduced in Anselm's line of thought and what, consequently, the meaning of *maius* is in thinking.

By withdrawing its thought of something as « merely (*solo*) » a thought from the other-to-be-thought (which is *not* « only » given in thought), the thought itself regards the thing thought not merely as a thought (*in solo intellectu*), but the real thing itself (*res, esse in re*). In this idea of 'only' (*in solo intellectu* or « mere thought »), the '*maius*' (*et in re; quod maius est*) is already presupposed. Through this constitutive self-distinction, thinking is at once within itself and outside itself, or more precisely: it is within itself (as withdrawing itself) while at the same time being outside itself, at the thing. Or conversely: it is only in relation to the other of itself (the thing to be thought) that it is at the same time within itself (distinguishing itself as a conceived thought).[38]

It is only from this point that the *maius* in Anselm acquires its significance for thinking itself and in its execution. In that thinking distinguishes its thoughts as « only » its own from the thing to be thought, in order to relate precisely in this way to itself – that is, in this withdrawal into itself and self-critical presence to oneself, thinking is precisely beyond itself – the thing itself is always « greater » to it than its thinking reference to it. It is only because thinking itself can

[36] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.16.

[37] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.17; see also p. 102.03

[38] At this point, my interpretation comes closest to the suggestions advanced by Korsch. He characterizes the 'self-enhancement' of thinking associated with the *maius*-formula as follows: « that it is not only the thinking of itself, but also of its other or the other of itself [...]. It thinks what it thinks, in difference and at the same time in relation to itself; in difference, it emerges that what is thought is more than its thought; in relatedness, it expresses that even that which transcends consciousness is only such in relation to consciousness » (KORSCH, « *Intellectus fidei.* Ontologischer Gottesbeweis und theologische Methode in Karl Barths Anselmbuch », p. 144). I likewise concur with Korsch's more general formulation that « thinking is assured of itself precisely when its own possibilities open up the possibilities of the other » (ibid., p. 128), which aptly captures the basic thrust of my reading of Anselm's argument. Yet Korsch's proposal becomes fully convincing only when this structure is not merely posited as a thesis but reconstructed as something that necessarily presents itself in the very act of thinking. This, I contend, is precisely what the movement of Anselm's argument invites us to undertake. For that reason, Korsch's subsequent application of these insights to the idea of God remains somewhat schematic (cf. ibid., p. 144). His appeal to a « transcendence of consciousness » (and related notions) risks relocating the problem to the level of a general theory of knowledge, thereby obscuring the specific logical movement at stake in Anselm's text. The brief references to chapter 3 of the *Proslogion* accordingly remain rather abstract. Thus, for example, the notion of a « capacity of consciousness for negation » (ibid.) appears as an externally introduced category rather than as a determination emerging from the immanent development of the argument itself.

distinguish a 'merely thought' thought from the 'real thing' to be thought about that, in every act of thinking, it is referred to a *maius*, which is beyond it as (mere) thought.

An *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* can only be conceived by thought because, as 'mere' thought, it must always and already differ from its object (as the « greater ») in order to be thought at all. Only he who can think *in solo intellectu* can also think *a quo nihil maius*, and that means: only he thinks at all.[39]

III *The Proof from Thinking*

The above provides the prerequisites for interpreting the final paragraph of chapter 2, which now explicitly provides the proof of existence for what has already been demonstrated as « aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit » and as being (*est*) « in intellectu ».[40] In order to understand Anselm's sentences, we must once again recall the guiding interpretative perspective here – which will later also be explicitly identified as the only appropriate one to be demonstrated – according to which the proof is the very act of thinking about thinking.

III.1. Already for the first sentence, which anticipates the result of the proof,[41] this means that the formulation « non potest esse » can and must be understood in the sense of: « non potest cogitari esse » (sc. *in solo intellectu*). For this

[39] As Dieter Henrich has argued against the separation of thinking and being (in Thomism): thinking cannot be asserted unilaterally and radically against the objectivity of the thought – as is the case, for example, in skeptical objections – unless every factual statement is to become meaningless; cf. Dieter Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis*, Mohr – Siebeck, Tübingen 1967, p. 8.

[40] Wolfgang Röd has characterized Anselm's argument as non-*a priori*: it implies « reference to a subject who thinks the central concept of the argument and thus has it in his intellect » (Röd, *Der Gott der reinen Vernunft*, p. 31); in this sense, I speak here of « experience » in thinking. Jos Lensink describes Anselm's type of proof as speculative. Cf. Jos Lensink, « Im Spiegel des Absoluten. Kritische Erwägungen zum ontologischen Gottesbeweis », in Hans Heinz Holz (ed.), *Strukturen der Dialektik*, Meiner, Hamburg 1992 (= *Dialektik. Enzyklopädische Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Wissenschaft*, 82 [1992]), p. 75–90, and quotes Hegel on Anselm: « With regard to the concept, however, a genuine proof would require not merely that the transition proceed in a rational manner, but that it be demonstrated from the very nature of thought itself that thought, taken in its own immanence, negates itself, and that therein lies the determination of being itself – or, what is the same, that thought determines itself as being » (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, II, in Id., *Werke in 20 Bänden*, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer, Karl Marcus Michel, Bd. 19, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1971, p. 558). Following on from this, Philipp Marheineke understood *thinking about God* as his proof and saw in it the « true side of the ontological argument » (Philipp Marheineke, *Die Grundlehren der christlichen Dogmatik als Wissenschaft* [Zweite, völlig neu ausgearbeitete Auflage], Duncker und Humblot, Berlin ^{2}1827, p. 96 f., § 164).

[41] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.16.

formulation is obviously equivalent to the one that appears explicitly in the second sentence: « potest cogitari esse » (sc. *et in re*).[42] The second sentence states that what is « in solo intellectu est » can at the same time be thought of as existing « et in re ».[43] Provided that the proof is derived from thinking as such, such 'capability' cannot be just one possibility among others; rather, it must be grounded in a necessity for thought, so that we are talking about a necessity of thinking of the *esse et in re*. The condition for (thinking of) *in solo intellectu esse* is that « potest cogitari esse *et in re* ».[44] The self-reflection of thought as mere thinking (*in solo intellectu*) – or of the thought as such – is only possible on the condition that it is possible to think something that is not merely thought. In this respect, the possibility of thinking anything *et in re* is a necessary condition for thinking *in solo intellectu*.

For the possibility of thinking something *et in re* is necessary (and in fact inevitably realized) in order for thinking to be able to distinguish what is thought (as merely such) from that which is to be thought.[45] Anselm thus makes use of something like the basic axiom of thinking, according to which, if something is thought that has a being only in the intellect, something must necessarily be (able to be) thought that has a being not only in the intellect but also *in re*. This follows necessarily if, in the third sentence, one combines the assumption: « Si... est in solo intellectu »[46] with the possibility asserted as essential in relation to it: « est quo maius cogitari potest ».[47] Consequently, one cannot conceive of *in solo intellectu esse* in any other way than that one can necessarily also think of something greater (*maius)* beyond it – which is precisely what *esse et in re* represents. For Anselm, thinking means that no « merely (*solo*) » can be thought in isolation, without the « also (*et*) » through which it goes beyond its limitation.[48] Thinking can only attribute something to itself (as merely thought) by simultaneously referring to something that it does not merely attribute to itself. Thinking is, in its very essence, this movement of self-distinction.

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[42] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.17. This is also supported by the phrase that appears in the third sentence, second half: « quo maius nihil cogitari potest » (p. 102.1).

[43] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.16 f..

[44] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.16 f..

[45] Gillian Evans accordingly summarized Anselm's *unum argumentum* in the following fundamental formula: « that, for whatever 'a' we can imagine, God is 'a + x' ». See GILLIAN ROSEMARY EVANS, *Anselm and Talking about God*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1978, p. 46.

[46] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.18.

[47] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.1.

[48] In a certain parallel to this, Anselm pointed out in his *Responsio* to the *Liber apologeticus* (i.e. *Quid ad haec responded quidam pro insipiente*) that even the negation of something still includes the thought of that which is negated: « Quisquis igitur negat aliquid esse quo maius nequeat cogitari: utique intelligit et cogitat negationem quam facit. Quam negationem intelligere aut cogitare non potest sine partibus eius. Pars autem eius est quo maius cogitari non potest » (ibid. p. 138.15–18).

In this context, Anselm's only explicit statement on the meaning of *'maius'* is also worth noting. Being able to think necessarily « esse et in re » is the very thought of which Anselm says here: « quod maius est ».[49] It is only from this context of usage that the decisive clarification regarding the *maius* – which is absolutely essential for understanding the entire proof – can bederived. In light of everything that has been said so far, the meaning of the *maius* – in accordance with the schematic formula mentioned above – is that thinking is only truly thinking when it relates what it thinks to the thing to be thought, in such a way that it distinguishes its thought from the thing itself $I \rightarrow (I \rightarrow R_1 \neq \rightarrow R_2)$. It withdraws (in the form of the thought) from the thing to be thought in order to think its own reality. Only from a *maius* understood in this way (viz., greater than it thinks) can it think anything at all. By distinguishing the thing to be thought as *maius* from its being thought as such, it *thinks* first and foremost what it thinks. As the thought of thinking attains truth by distinguishing what it thinks – as *solo in intellectu* – from its *esse et in re*, while simultaneously relating it to the latter, thinking is fulfilled within the horizon of the *maius.* Only in view of that possibility – namely, of being, as thinking, beyond itself as (mere) thinking – is thinking wholly at one with itself, and thus is it self-reflexive.[50]

« Maius » does not originate from an external, additive perspective (*et... et*), but refers to the self-transcendence experienced (i.e. conceived) in thinking itself – a self-transcendence necessary for thought as such. By thinking something and thereby distinguishing itself as the thinking of the something (thought) from the something itself that it is thinking, thinking comes fully into its own by being more than mere thought.

In this respect, the *maius* refers to the highest thought of thinking as such, which is constitutive of it. At the same time, it is clear that this is not a *maximum* but – relative to the thinking of a particular thing – the 'more' of the *esse et in re* of that thing, which is distinguished from its mere being thought. Because the ground of thought, which is announced in the *maius*, keeps it in motion by forcing it to go beyond itself (viz., beyond its thoughts) time and again, it always asserts itself in thinking only as that *maius*, and not as a conclusive thought of anything highest (*maximum).*

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[49] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.17.

[50] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.10–13. The example of the painter, in the third paragraph of the second chapter, provided only an empirical illustration of thought's self-reflexivity; only at this point is that structure thematised within thought itself and as such. Because thought is genuinely at home with itself only insofar as it is outside itself, Kant's language of a « going out (*Herausgehen*) » cannot be absolved of a certain reifying tendency. Nor does Mackie's claim that a contradiction arises in the notion of a *mere* object of consciousness (Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 54–55) recognize that being-in-itself is such only insofar as it is a being-beyond-itself.

III.2. The third sentence: « Si ergo… »[51] formulates a hypothetical train of thought, and in it the proof is to be found. This only happens if it is understood correctly. This understanding, which aligns with the proof, must therefore first be safeguarded against a common misunderstanding, which concerns in particular the contradiction formulated in the second half of the sentence: « id ipsum quo maius cogitari non potest, est [viz. if it is thought to remain *in solo intellectu*], quo maius cogitari potest ».

This is not about a supposed contradiction between the 'concept' of *aliquid* (as « id quo maius cogitari nequit ») and its actual conception (as « in solo intellectu »). In that case, Anselm would have merely deduced the contradiction here, but would not have demonstrated the right of the thought *quo maius cogitari nequit* itself within thought; the argument would already have been presupposed, but not established through argumentation. Rather, one must understand at this point as follows: « id ipsum quo maius cogitari non potest » expresses or, better, 'conceptualizes' precisely what results from the experience of thinking when attempting to think it *in solo intellectu*. It thereby proves for thinking itself that this is only possible within the horizon of the presupposition that the following always already holds: *maius cogitari potest.*[52]

In short, the contradiction in question does not mean that one has not thought what one ought to think (according to the formula); rather, it means that one has not realized that one has already made use of and is thinking exactly what the formula states (viz., gives cause to think) when one attempts to think it *in solo intellectu*.

Only if this is the case is the « certe » of the fourth proposition[53] not analytical and trivial, but meaningful. It refers to the evidence of this insight for the thinking that recognizes and sees through itself in this step of the argument, i.e. the plausibility of the proof.

III.3. From what is contained in the third proposition, the fifth and last proposition merely draws the conclusion recognized in the very thought of that contradiction, with the self-certainty of thinking itself (« ergo procul dubio »): « Existit… aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re ».[54]

'Existere' is the term newly introduced here by Anselm for the specific and true being of the *aliquid*. Its meaning is further defined by its *esse* both in thought and reality: *et in intellectu et in re*.

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51 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.17–102.1.

52 The reader should note that the formula is here extended beyond the immediate context of Anselm's original formulation.

53 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 102.1.

54 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 102.2 f..

It follows from this, and must be noted in the face of a seemingly insurmountable prejudice or misunderstanding, that the « existence » proven here is by no means merely an *esse in re* (i.e. 'objective existence', concrete reality, etc.).[55] From the fact that, according to Anselm's statement in the second sentence, it is « maius » to be able to conceive that something is not merely thought (« in solo intellectu »),[56] it does not follow that it would be *maius* if something were conceived as existing *solo in re*.[57] Rather, anything that is only « in re » cannot be the *maius* precisely because it may also be thought as non-existent, which – according to chapter 3 – must be excluded from that of which it is impossible to conceive anything greater, viz., *quo maius cogitari nequit*, in that its non-existence cannot even be conceivable (« nec cogitari possit non esse »).[58] On the other hand, the « greater » being *in re* is not an arbitrary possibility entertained by thought; rather, it constitutes the very condition under which thought realizes itself.[59]

Similarly, it should be noted that Anselm's argument demonstrates that the *aliquid* also exists *in intellectu*, or that it only exists in truth (*vere esse*), in that it is

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[55] Dalferth is also quite right, see DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 83, note 119: « Existence need not be equated with *esse in re* [...] in the case of God, who is himself the highest truth [*De veritate*, cap. 1, in ANSELMUS, *Opera omnia*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. I, p. 176 f.], <so that> the phrases 'God's being' and 'God's existence' may be used interchangeably ». In his careful logical considerations – ROBERT SCHNEPF, « Sein als Ereignis. Zu einigen Voraussetzungen des Gottesbeweises bei Anselm von Canterbury », *Patristica et Mediaevalia,* 19 (1998), p. 3–22 – Schnepf rightly emphasizes that Anselm's concept of « being » or « existence » (of God) cannot be plausibly derived either from its modern interpretations as an « existential quantifier » or from that as a predicate (ibid., p. 8 f., 20, 22). Whether Schnepf himself does justice to Anselm's specific use of *'existere'* (*et... et*) seems questionable to me, because the introduction of the category « event (*Ereignis*) » (p. 11, 17, 20, 21) is not sufficient, at least as long as its relation to « thinking (*intelligere*) » remains unclarified. Here, it might be useful to consider the adverbially modified 'existential statements' in Anselm, to which Schnepf draws attention (ibid., p. 13 f.). Subsequently, while Schnepf recognizes the particular illuminating power of the greater-than relation (ibid., p. 9, 11, 15), he interprets it (a) from a later passage in the *Proslogion* that is no longer part of the proof (p. 16 f.), and (b) nevertheless arrives at an only formal and essentially quantitative definition of *maius* (p. 17, 18: « unconditional »); here too, the relation to *thought as such* remains unconsidered, however agreeable many critical remarks may otherwise be. The casual reference to the « transcendent God » may also be significant in this regard (Ibid., p. 17, note 51: « Anselm's proof of God is not a proof of an all-encompassing immanent whole; it is, rather, a proof of the transcendent God »).

[56] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.17.

[57] Cf. « Quidquid non esse potest, non est quod cogitat » (ANSELMUS, *Responsio*, p. 138, 26–27).

[58] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.6.

[59] Wolfgang Röd, who renders the formula *quo maius cogitari non potest* as « the unsurpassable (*das Unüberbietbare*) » (RÖD, *Der Gott der reinen Vernunft*, p. 33 f.), thus emphasizes that it is not a matter of identifying something that exists in an abstract, objective sense, but rather of the actual process of thinking itself (cf. p. 32). At the same time, this entails the insight that « it is conceivable that the unsurpassable possesses reality » (p. 33).

in intellectu as it is *in re*, and *in re* as it is *in intellectu*. The simultaneity of both (*et... et*) is, for thought, precisely their distinction in their inseparable relation to each other. The fact that the *aliquid* truly exists solely as « et in intellectu » is particularly significant in view of the fact that it is explicitly identified with God, in chapter 3.[60] For Anselm, God is not merely an objective thought, for such a thought refers to something that exists and may or may not exist. The *Proslogion* therefore by no means proves anythink like the unrelated 'objective' existence of a supreme being called God. Rather, Anselm's work is concerned with the experience of God's existence in thought for thought's sake.[61]

The *et... et*, which is proven for the existence of the *aliquid*, corresponds to the self-transcendence of thought (identified as the meaning of the *maius*-formula), or rather its self-distinction in the doubling of its thought as thought-of-thing and thing-to-be-thought (R_1, R_2). *'Existere'* denotes true being or truthfulness as the ground of thought, which is the condition of possibility for the thinking distinction between merely being in thought (the thought only as such) and the thought-of being. From this relation to truth, in which all thinking is grounded, arises the necessity of the possibility of thinking a *maius* beyond which no further 'more', viz., *maius*, may be thought.

The *existere* of the conclusion of the final sentence of chapter 2 summarises, in technical terms, what has been experienced in thinking in the second and third sentences of this paragraph, and refers to the trans-objective presence of the relation to truth that is constitutive of thought. The existence of the *aliquid*, understood in this way, is the « highest thought » of any thinking (in the sense set out above in relation to the second sentence) as the thought of the ground of thinking.

It is easy to see that this thought cannot be superseded by any particular thought, since it is precisely the condition of that thought's 'thinkability' and truth – and thus also the condition of the actual determination – as to whether a single, particular thought is merely thought (*solo in intellectu*) or also existing in reality (*et in re*). A « highest thought » understood in this way cannot be superseded as a supposedly « mere » thought in itself,[62] since it is precisely the condition for the possibility of formulating such an objection (see *infra* for more details) against every thought as such. In this highest thought of its own, thinking grasps itself, and from it, it is able to reflect upon itself. It is the very

[60] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.3: « Et hoc es tu, domine deus noster ».

[61] Since the *maius* is not about a greater concept, but rather about a greater (viz., more intensive) act of thinking, one could also interpret the meaning of '*et... et*' to mean that, for Anselm, the 'existing' God is not anything that can be instantiated.

[62] As has been attempted again and again in endless variations since Gaunilo. Mackie also shares Gaunilo's objection of 'merely thought', cf. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 53 f.; see *infra*, section VI.1.

thought that all thinking as such must already presuppose in order to be thinking at all; that is, in order to be able to think itself as thinking.

That is why the reality of God (*esse et in intellectu et in re*) is not a mere thought, for God guarantees the reality of thinking itself (which, as mere thinking, distinguishes itself from itself). Only because God is (also) *in re*, as the ground of truth for all *in re*-being of thoughts, does thinking know itself to be real in itself and, thereby, is real thinking. In its «highest thought», thinking becomes reality to itself, as reality-related thinking.

IV. *The Necessary Thought (*Proslogion*, Chapter 3)*

It is important briefly to indicate the consequences that arise from the interpretation of chapter 2 for an understanding of the following chapter.

Chapter 3 aims to prove that the truth of *aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet*, as existing *et in intellectu et in re*, is such (« sic vere est ») that its non-existence cannot even be conceived (« nec cogitari possit non esse »).[63] Anselm argues that to be able to conceive an *aliquid* whose non-existence cannot even be conceived (« quod non possit cogitari non esse »)[64] is « greater (*maius*) » than one whose non-existence can be conceived (« quam quod non esse cogitari potest »).[65]

The *aliquid* whose (possible) existence can be conceived is the *res*, as opposed to the mere thought of it (*in solo intellectu*). However, the possibility of conceiving it is understood by thought as its necessity. For only by conceiving thinking as such can thought distinguish itself (i.e., its own conception) from it. Where thought recognizes this, it thinks the unthinkable as its own condition, i.e., that under whose presupposition alone it can withdraw, think differently, and reflect upon its own 'ability'. That which cannot be thought away or thought of as non-existent (« quod non possit cogitari non esse ») is the necessity of a *res* as such, in relation to which thinking determines itself as thinking. In thinking what cannot be thought away, thought thinks its own possibility.

This means: only if something can be thought which, as non-being, cannot be thought, can anything be thought as such; that is, in this way can the distinction between *in solo intellectu* and *in re* be made. Only in this way can thinking think its ability to think away (what is merely thought), that is, itself, in distinction from the thing itself that is to be thought.

Chapter 3 shows, building upon Chapter 2, that the possibility of distinguishing *in solo intellectu* from *in re* is only conceivable under the necessary precondition of their unity; that is, under the precondition of something that, because it is *et in intellectu et in re*, cannot at all be dismissed as merely *in intellectu*.

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[63] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 102.6.
[64] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 102.7.
[65] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 102.8.

This necessary thought – necessary so that thinking can grasp itself as thinking, and thus always also as the possibility of 'mere thinking' – is the thought of what is necessary for thinking, of what cannot be thought away. That which can be conceived as existing (« potest cogitari esse ») already presupposes that which cannot be conceived as non-existing (« quod non possit cogitari non esse »), i.e., the necessary.[66]

The question to be posed to the text is therefore: Why is it « greater » to be able to think of that which cannot be thought away, or rather, whose non-existence cannot even be conceived? And we should answer this from the perspective of thought. When thinking thinks its inability to be and to do otherwise, it does not (merely) think of one possibility among others (*potest cogitari*), but rather that in which it is at once present in itself and in the thing itself, i.e., *et in intellectu et in re.* Only in this way does it conceive of itself as true thought. In the ability to think that which cannot be thought as non-existent (*Nicht-Wegzudenkend*), thinking becomes aware of its own necessity. For this is the very possibility by which it realizes itself as true thinking and is thus necessary for itself.

That something which cannot be thought away can nevertheless be thought constitutes a « greater » thought for thinking. As the possibility of thinking beyond everything that has been thought, or of mentally dismissing every determinate thought, it is a greater thought only if it is precisely the thought beyond which thinking, *qua* thinking, cannot go without negating itself as thinking – otherwise, it would be merely another contingent possibility, one that could in turn be superseded. That is why it is precisely the thought of the « quo maius nequit cogitari ».[67]

The ability to think of that thought (i.e., 'the indismissible') is « greater » only if it is a 'must' for thinking. Therefore, what Anselm says in his response to Gaunilo applies precisely to this thought: « If it can be thought at all that it is, then it is necessary (*si vel cogitari potest esse, necesse est illud esse*) ».[68] At least it can

[66] Bonaventura, *Sent.* I, d. 7, a. 1, q. 2, in Doctor Seraphicus S. Bonaventura, *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, in: Id., *Opera Omnia iussu et auctoritate P. Bernardini a Portu Romatino*, ed. PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura, Ex typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, Quaracchi 1882, p. 135 f.. Lensink draws attention to a (limited) parallel in Moses Mendelssohn's presentation of the ontological proof. Mendelssohn concedes that 'existence' is not a property of things but rather « the position of all properties of a thing », yet he simultaneously maintains that, whereas the contingent can be conceived apart from such positing, the necessary cannot. See Lensink, « Im Spiegel des Absoluten », p. 90, note 31; cf. Moses Mendelssohn, « Beweisgründe a priori vom Daseyn eines allervollkommensten, nothwendigen, unabhängigen Wesens », in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe*, Band 3, 2: *Schriften zur Philosophie und Ästhetik*, ed. Leo Strauss, Fromnann-Holzboog, Stuttgart 1973, p. 152.

[67] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 102.8-9.

[68] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 131.1–2.

be thought (« potest cogitari esse aliquid... ») that which, as non-being, cannot even be conceived (« quod non possit cogitari non esse »).[69] But to be able to conceive the necessary means to have to think it, since it cannot only be thought as 'merely thinkable'. Rather, it can be conceived precisely because thinking is necessary in itself and can also conceive of that. The necessity of the existence of the indismissible is a condition for the possibility of its being thought, if it is to be thought at all – just as *esse et in re* is a condition for the possibility of thinking something as *in solo intellectu*.

If thinking can think a thought that cannot be superseded at all, it can think it only as the thought that it must think. It is the necessary thought (of thought, thinking of itself) that it thinks as the prerequisite for all non-necessary, overtakable thoughts. Since thinking is possible only on the condition that there is something that cannot be conceived as non-existent – that is, that what is conceived cannot also be thought as dismissible (« quod non esse cogitari potest »), this necessarily presupposed thought is « greater » than any other and is therefore the thought of that beyond which nothing greater (viz., a greater thing) can be conceived.

Therefore, it would also be a self-contradiction of thought as such if it did not (or did not have to) think of that beyond which nothing greater can be thought, and whose non-existence cannot even be thought. The phrase « quod convenire non potest »[70] refers to the self-consistency of thought, insofar as it is thought and thinks of itself as such. The indismissible thought, *id quo maius nequit cogitari*, is thus the thought with which (or in which) thinking necessarily thinks itself (or thinks along with itself, 'co-thinks') whenever it thinks anything at all. The thinking of this thought is at the same time thought's reflection upon itself as thinking. Its non-existence cannot even be conceived (« nec cogitari possit non esse »),[71] since otherwise nothing at all would be thought. The impossibility of even merely conceiving the non-being of *aliquid* is the impossibility of thinking the absolute non-being of thought.

Being so true (« sic vere ») that its negating is impossible even in thought, and that its existence is true both in the mind and in reality, *et in intellectu et in re*, applies only to the condition under which thinking alone is genuinely thinking. Thinking cannot even conceivably eliminate from thought the possibility of this truth (or the truth of this thought) without ceasing to be thinking, i.e. without falling into the self-contradiction of negating itself as thinking through the very act of thinking.

[69] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 102.7.
[70] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 102.10.
[71] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 102.6.

This truth belongs solely to the concept of God (« sic… vere est…, ut nec cogitari possit non esse »).[72] Since God is truth itself (« deum veritatem esse credimus »),[73] God alone possesses being « most truly (*verissime*) » and « most fully (*maxime*) ».[74] Insofar as thinking, in God, conceives the necessary ground of its own truthfulness, the thought apprehends with God the non-transcendability of truth itself[75] as the necessary prerequisite of every true thought (« quidquid… est, vere est, inquantum est hoc quod ibi [*scil.* in summa veritate] est »).[76] To want to think the non-existence of the truth of thinking would be similarly self-contradictory (« valde absurdum »)[77] as the attempt of the creature (i.e., the created mind) to outrun its Creator in thought, i.e. the very instance whose unattainable precedence is the prerequisite for the creature's own existence and for this very attempt.

In this sense, chapter 3 proves the necessity of the concept of God, whose true existence had been proven in chapter 2. However, by proving the impossibility of negating this concept even in thought, Anselm's insight into the necessity of the concept of God (or the necessity of God's existence) is at the same time an insight into the necessity of our thinking about the concept of God, or an insight into why we have to think of it as necessary and necessarily existing.[78]

Against this background, the status of the *inspiens* is clarified at the end of chapter 3. Whereas in chapter 2 he could still be considered convinced (« convincitur ») by rational insight to the extent that he must admit the *aliquid* « esse vel in intellectu »,[79] the fact of his denial of God shows that he has recognized neither the existence nor the necessity of this *aliquid*. Anselm attributes this here to an inconsistency in the understanding of what is thought *in solo intellectu*, i.e. to an inconsistency in the thinking of one's own thinking and its necessary conditions: it is precisely in this that he is «stultus» and «insipiens», in that he denies what « tam in promptu sit rationali menti ».[80]

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72 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.1 f..

73 Anselmus, *De veritate,* ed. Schmitt, p. 176.4.

74 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.8. See also chap. 14, p. 111 f.. Cf. Anselm Stolz, « *Vere esse* im 'Proslogion' des hl. Anselm », *Scholastik: Vierteljahresschrift für Theologie und Philosophie*, 9 (1934), p. 400–409.

75 Everything that exists apart from God can be thought of as not existing: « quidquid est aliud praeter te solum, potest cogitari non esse » (chap. 3, p. 103.6 f.).

76 Anselmus, *De veritate*, p. 185.15. See also chap. 11, p. 191.19 f..

77 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.6

78 God is not simply the unsurpassable *maius*, but the necessity of the *maius* per se. Nothing greater can be conceived beyond Him: not only a) because He grounds the very conceivability of anything greater *in re*, but also b) because, as this ground itself, He is always already thought (*et in intellectu*).

79 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.13 f..

80 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.10.

The *insipiens* is therefore judged as such solely on the basis of the internal consistency and consequence of this thought within itself and not by any external standard. He is – understood from the point of view of thinking – truly *stultus*, i.e. a false thinker and someone who does not understand himself in his own thought (*insipiens*); but according to Anselm, he is also necessarily a denier of God's existence. The Bible quotation from Psalm 14:1,[81] repeated at the end, is – against the backdrop of Anselm's argument – strictly vindicated in such a way that the fool denies God's existence precisely because, and only insofar as, he is a «fool (*insipiens*)». His being an *insipiens* coincides with denying God's existence.

V. *The Word 'God'* (« vox significans »*; Chapter 4)*

Having thus established the connection between the denial of God and the self-deception of thought, Anselm takes up the task in chapter 4 of explaining the possibility of the *insipiens*' speech in even greater detail – specifically, 'how' (« quomodo ») it operates – within the context of the argument. For Anselm must also be able to explain the *insipiens*' standpoint as a mistaken one (as a self-misunderstanding of thought) within the framework of his own solution. If Anselm's argument could not make intelligible 'how', under the conditions of thought, the denial of God could arise at all, he would, as it were, have proved too much.[82]

In order to fulfil this theoretical requirement, Anselm therefore adopts the position of the *insipiens* from Psalm 14, 1 as strongly as possible and considers his *dicere in corde* to be real thinking: « idem sit dicere in corde et cogitare ».[83] If this is the case, then the *insipiens* is tasked with clarifying, to the extent possible, the misunderstanding of thinking regarding itself, as formulated in the first paragraph of chapter 4: How could he in fact think what, in truth, he could not think, or: How could he not have thought what he did somehow think?[84]

These aporetic questions are based on a contradiction, since the fool – as the first sentence of the second paragraph puts it – both really thought it (« quia vere et cogitavit »)[85] – since he said it in his heart (and was therefore somehow able to think it) - and he did not say it in his heart (« et non dixit in corde »)[86] – since he was unable to think it (and therefore, in truth, he did not think it). If both are

[81] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.9 f..

[82] The fact that Anselm is aware of the possibility of this thought of the denier of God as a possibility in thought underlines once again how fundamentally he is oriented towards thinking itself.

[83] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.15–16.

[84] Cf. Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.14–15.

[85] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.16.

[86] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.17.

equally possible (« quod si vere... »)[87] and the contradiction is to be resolved, then only on the condition that the assumed identity of *dicere in corde* and *cogitare* does not apply absolutely: « non uno tantum modo dicitur aliquid in corde vel cogitatur ».[88]

This means that Anselm, at the same time, posits unity and difference between saying[89] and thinking («idem», « non uno tantum modo ») in such a way that the possibility of the fool's opinion becomes intelligible from their difference, or rather as a one-sided clinging to unity. Precisely because the unity of thinking and speaking exists only in their distinction – or, more precisely, as this difference – the one-sided approach of the *insipiens* becomes possible.

The following sentence explains this possibility of dissolving the connection between speaking (about something) and thinking (of something) within thought: « Aliter enim cogitatur res, cum vox eam significans cogitatur, aliter [sc. cogitatur] cum id ipsum quod res est intelligitur ».[90] From this, we can see that *cogitare* itself has two aspects: as mere *cogitare* (i.e., « dicere in corde ») and as *intelligere.* Thinking is structured by a self-difference between the thinking intention directed merely at the *vox* (the *dicere* only as *dicere*, viz., *cogitare* according to the unity of *dicere in corde* and *cogitare*) and the thinking intention directed at the *res ipsa* (*intelligere* in accordance with the « non uno modo »). Within *cogitare* itself, (mere) *cogitare* and *intelligere* relate to one another like *vox* and *id ipsum quod res est,* i.e. like what is merely thought (as such) and that which is to be thought. The quoted sentence thus takes up, in parallel formulation, the key sentence from chapter 2: « Aliud [...] est rem esse in intellectu, aliud intelligere rem esse ».[91] The term *vox* is the linguistic representative of the thought *esse in intellectu* (or *in solo intellectu*), and « id ipsum quod res est » is the thought of *rem esse* (or of *intelligere et in re esse*).

The fact that Anselm's 'original insight', as formulated in the sentence in chapter 2, also applies to the relationship between *vox significans* and *res ipsa* (*significata*) is already foreshadowed in chapter 2 itself by the remark that the fool hears (« audit ») the *maius*-formula and understands what he hears (« intelligit quod audit »).[92] What is heard corresponds, in thought, to the *vox* (*significans*). Accordingly, the *vox* as mere *vox* can only be conceived at all in a differentiating relation to, or by setting itself apart from, the presupposed *res ipsa* – just as the merely conceived being of the *res* is in relation to its own being to be conceived. It is only because thinking (*cogitare*) is always already *intelligere* that it can

87 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.16.
88 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.17 f..
89 Since it is connected to a *vox* (see below), it cannot be limited to the *dicere in corde*.
90 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.18 f..
91 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.9 f..
92 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 101.8.

withdraw as mere *cogitare* (a *vox* as such) before the thing to be thought (*id ipsum quod res est*) – just as it can only grasp itself as mere thinking (*solo in intellectu*) when it is thinking of the *et in re*.

Thinking (*cogitare*) therefore exists in this irreducible duality of (mere) *cogitare* (« dicere in corde », *vox*) and *intelligere* (*rem esse*) as the one act of thinking.

Anselm understood that it is precisely because of the truth-relatedness of thinking that this duality inevitably arises in every definition of thought. This is the case, for example, when we speak of 'thought as such': it is inevitably characterized by the ambiguity of expressing what is thought merely as thinking 'as such' (*solo in intellectu)* as well as the thing to be thought itself as given to (mere) thinking (*intelligere rem esse)*, i.e. the ambiguity of merely thought and reality-related thought: the thought only as thought or as something thinking.

Since God possesses such power with respect to the truth-relatedness of thought to itself that only thinking in this way is truly thinking, the formal possibility stated by Anselm in the third proposition (« illo modo ») – namely, the possibility of thinking God's non-existence qua *cogitare*, that is, as mere thinking as such – is realizable only on the assumption that it remains impossible to think « isto modo » (i.e., qua *intelligere rem esse*).[93]

The impossibility asserted in the fourth proposition – namely, that for one who truly understands what God is (« intelligens quod deus est »), it is impossible to conceive of His non-existence at all (« cogitare quia deus non est »)[94] – is therefore also an impossibility for thought as such, insofar as thought has become transparent to itself and to its own presupposition: « nullus intelligens id quod cogitare est, potest cogitare quia cogitatum non est »! This correspondence between the thought of God and thought's self-understanding holds because « id quod cogitare est » is already implied in the formula *id quo maius cogitari non potest*. This 'rule of thinking', in turn, gives rise to the thought of what God is: « Deus enim est id quo maius cogitari non potest » (5th proposition).[95]

However, that impossibility – of conceiving God's non-existence while fully understanding the concept of God – not only leaves the possibility open, but also explains it in the first place, i.e., that thought can (abstractly) grasp itself one-sidedly as mere thought and (correspondingly) can entertain mere words in thought (« licet haec verba [sc. quia Deus non est] dicat in corde »).[96] However, this happens abstractly, i.e. by severing the constitutive connection between *cogitare* and *cogitatum* or *vox* and *(extranea) significatio* (viz., « id ipsum quod res

[93] Cf. Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.20.
[94] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.21.
[95] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.2.
[96] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.1.

est »).[97] Precisely because, for Anselm, just as a true thought exists *et in intellectu et in re*, so too a *vox* is *a vox* only as *vox significans*, that it is conceivable to think of it as *a* mere *vox,* i.e. without *significatio* or with a different one (« aut sine ulla aut cum aliqua extranea significatione »).[98]

That God – as Anselm's fifth proposition once again explicitly states – « est id quo maius cogitari non potest »[99] (and as such exists *et in intellectu et in re*) means that He functions not only as a rule governing the truthfulness of thought but also a 'rule of thought' for thinking the meaningfulness of a *vox*. A mere meaningless *vox* (*sine ulla significatione*) is not « id quo maius cogitari non potest », since it can only *be thought of* at all on the condition that it is connected to a meaning. Therefore, a *vox significans* is *maius*, and to think of the inseparable relation of a *vox* (or the « verba » about God) to *significatio* is that « quo maius cogitari nequit » – especially in the case of the thought of God.

In this context, the phrase in the sixth sentence, « Quod qui bene intelligit… »,[100] must necessarily also be understood in relation to the relationship between *vox* and *significatio* (or *res ipsa*), precisely because it must be understood in relation to the identity of God with the *quo maius cogitari non potest*. The 'foolish' denier of God is such precisely because of this lack of *bene intelligere,* i.e. of a true self-understanding of thought in his own thinking.

Since God, as the « quo maius cogitari non potest », cannot be dismissed or reduced to a mere *vox* without human thought misunderstanding itself (i.e., *non bene intelligit*), the impossibility of conceiving of anything greater than God is the necessity of His being (« ipsum sic esse »)[101] in such a way that He cannot even occur in thought as non-being (« ut nec cogitatione queat non esse »).[102] That God, as non-being, cannot even be conceived – precisely because He is the *quo maius nequit cogitari* – has already been proven in chapter 3. Here it is emphasised that He cannot occur in true thinking in this way – but only in purely formal thinking as such (cf. 3rd sentence: « illo modo ») – because without being the truth (*sic esse*), He cannot even be *cogitatio* itself. Precisely because He is necessary for thought as truth, *cogitatio* is more than 'just' *cogitatio*.

If God cannot even *be* in thought, then he can even less be *conceived* as non-being « in thought (*nec cogitatione*) ». Consequently, He certainly cannot be thought of as non-being « in reality (*in re*) », that is, as non-existent. This conclusion only proves, once again, that thinking necessarily differs within itself:

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97 In this respect, Dalferth's questioning of the « referential applicability » of Anselm's formula does not seem convincing to me (cf. Dalferth, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 91, note 161 and p. 92, note 164).

98 Anselmus, *Proslogion,* p. 104.1 f..

99 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.2.

100 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.2 f..

101 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.3.

102 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.3 f..

as merely « in thought (*nec cogitatione*) », i.e. positing a hypothetical possibility, and as thinking the real (« id ipsum quod res est »); or rather, *cogitare* is the self-distinction between *cogitare* and *intelligere*.

This is precisely what the seventh and final sentence of the second paragraph of chapter 4 reiterates. The insight (*intelligere*): « sic esse deum »[103] means that « sic vere » is the idea of thinking according to which thought distinguishes itself from itself, or rather from its necessity, and is perfected as thought through the recognition of its truth-bearing power. Not being able to think that what is « verissime », namely God, does not exist, means precisely that one is always unable not to think.

If one reflects on the connection between the fifth proposition and the seventh, namely on the correspondence between « Deus est id quod maius cogitari non potest »[104] and « sic esse deum, [ut][105] nequit eum non esse cogitare »,[106] this brings to light the following: God's peculiar being is revealed in thinking or being thought, and thus stands in a relationship of correspondence with it. God's being, as such, still determines the thinking related to Him; or rather, His being already entails the peculiar way in which He is thought: the 'that' (i.e., that He exists) is essentially connected with a 'how' (i.e., of being thought),[107] and with the 'how' of thinking about Him (i.e., as *id quo maius cogitari non potest*) also gives rise to the 'that' of his existence.[108] For Anselm has proven that God's (« sic vere ») *esse* is nothing other than his *existere* (i.e., *et in intellectu et in re*).

From this follows – as the concluding sentence of chapter 4 explicitly states – the inescapability of the idea of God for self-aware thought in general: « ut... non possim non intelligere [*viz.*, te] ».[109] For Anselm's proof has shown that even if he wanted to distance himself abstractly from his belief in God (« si te esse nolim

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[103] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.4.

[104] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.2.

[105] Inserted in accordance with the sixth sentence (second half: Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.3) and chapter 3, first sentence of the second (p. 103.3).

[106] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.4.

[107] Jan Rohls has, in my opinion erroneously, placed the proof of the 'that' prior to the demonstration of the 'how' (cf. Jan Rohls, *Theologie und Metaphysik. Der ontologische Gottesbeweis und seine Kritiker*, G. Mohn, Gütersloh 1987, p. 42).

[108] Dalferth is also correct in this regard; see Dalferth, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 84. The fact that « God's existence cannot be recognized through a specific proof, but can only be recognized incidentally in the endeavor to understand the peculiar nature of His existence » (ibid.) holds precisely because of the inextricable connection with the self-awareness of thought as thought (cf. *esse in intellectu*). 'Existence', precisely, cannot be abstractly thematized or proven as mere *esse in re*. The remarks against a 'proof of God' therefore seem somewhat artificial (ibid., p. 83 note 123; p. 98 and 104).

[109] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.6 f..

credere »)[110] – although he actually knows that this is impossible: « quia nisi credidero, non intelligam »[111] – he could only do so at the price of losing, along with the inner rationality of faith, the rationality of his thinking as well; and that would mean renouncing thought while still thinking. Hence, the realization through thought of God's inevitable self-revelation in thought as such (« te... non possim non intelligere ») is central to the implementation of the *Proslogion*'s argumentative programme: « intelligere veritatem tuam, quam credit et amat cor meum ».[112] Only because of the experience of God in thought itself can it be said: « credo ut intelligam ».[113]

VI. *God in Thought*

Anselm demonstrates and proves, on the basis of thinking, that thinking necessarily entails an experience of God, and he demonstrates this precisely through thought's self-experience as thought. In this respect, one might say that what Kant called the 'ontological' proof of God is actually a noological variant of the 'cosmological' proof, relating solely to thinking itself instead of to the thinking of the contingent world. It proceeds from the experience of thought itself – and not, for example, from *a priori* concepts – and in this way it could still (as a variant of the cosmological proof) be accorded the primacy that Kant assigns to it as an ontological proof, namely that it is the condition for all other cosmological arguments.[114]

We speak here of 'experience' because, as has been shown, in the act of thinking, thought is aware of itself as a spontaneous activity in which truth itself proves to be powerful. Thinking, as independent thinking, is at the same time experience, insofar as it becomes aware of its own conditions of exercise and its internal necessity by being thinking and only thinking. The fact that it can only realize itself as thinking in the self-realization of truth as thinking allows thinking to become experienceable as relating to God. Precisely as thinking of itself, it is also the experience of God.

VI.1. To experience God in thought means to experience, within thought itself, the inescapable relation of thought to truth: God as truth itself, which has power over our thinking.[115] If God is experienced in thought as the unconditional

[110] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 104.6

[111] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 100.19 (quotation taken from Isahiah 7, 9).

[112] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 100.17 f..

[113] Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 100.17 f..

[114] Cf. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 635.

[115] Anselm's argument shows how God is close to thought as thought, that is to say, how God, who is Himself the truth, is truth for thought. See Augustine, « ipsa veritas Deus est »; cf. Id., *De libero*

relation of thought to truth – from which alone thought consists – then Anselm's argument articulates the thinking experience of the 'creatureliness' of thought itself.[116]

For the necessary insight: « *non solo* in intellectu, *sed etiam* in re » contains the setting and transgressing of a boundary for thinking (viz., *maius*). Thinking experiences a limit within itself, i.e., initially as a limit (viz., *solo*) and at the same time beyond it (i.e., as thinking; and therefore 'within itself'); i.e., thinking thinks itself only by simultaneously thinking its Other (viz., *etiam in re*). Thinking repels itself; while thinking, it is not merely thinking. This self-limitation of thinking (in that, as thinking, it is at the same time the withdrawal from the thought, the letting-be of the Other as its truth) is the way in whichh it is aware of its relation to and dependence on something *quo maius cogitari nequit,* i.e. of its created nature. The fact that there is nothing better for thought to conceive than the Creator (« aliquid melius te »)[117] corresponds, in the self-experience of thought, to the fact that it is the *aliquid* « quo maius cogitari non potest ».

And precisely because, in the conception of *quo nihil maius*, thought limits itself and acts as a creature, Anselm ultimately demonstrates – from this God presented as the Creator (cf. chap. 3) – « quod maior sit quam cogitari possit »,[118] and proves this precisely from the fact that something of this 'kind' can be thought and that it must apply to God if He is « that than which nothing greater can be conceived (*quo maius cogitari nequit*) ». It is in the tension and interconnection between the two statements: « quo maius cogitari nequit » and « maius quam cogitari possit »,[119] that the meaning of «experience of God in thought» is revealed. For they articulate both the truth-referential nature of thought as a created act, over which truth itself holds sway, and, at the same time, God as truth – that is, as the ground of thinking itself, transcending every particular act of thought. God is « maior... quam cogitari possit », because it has been shown that He must already determine thought (viz., in its self-distinction) in order for it to come about as thought at all. That which enables thought to

arbitrio, ed. William McAllen Green, Brepols, Turnhout 1970 (CC, SL, 29) II, 15, line 4. For a theological appropriation of this state of affairs – namely, the compulsion of thought towards truth for its own sake and the capacity for truth of thought, which is in principle related to something outside itself – one may, for instance, refer to Althaus, who sees in this a miracle in which God manifests Himself to humankind (Paul Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit: Lehrbuch der Dogmatik,* G. Mohn Gütersloh 1958, p. 80; see, in general, § 9: « Gott in der Wahrheitsbeziehung des Geistes » [God in the Truth Relationship of the Spirit], p. 79 f. and § 8: « Der Selbsterweis Gottes an das theoretische Denken » [God's Self-Revelation to Theoretical Thinking] (proofs of God), p. 76 ff.).

116 Cf. Anselmus, *Proslogion*, chap. 3, p. 102-103, and Dalferth, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 100 and note 208.

117 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 103.5.

118 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 112.13-14.

119 Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 112.15.

think in the first place is «greater» than anything that thought can possibly conceive (including thought itself) and is therefore even greater than can be conceived, even when it is conceived.[120] Anselm's entire proof is subject to this self-limitation before the unthinkable truth of God, insofar as, according to chapter 1, he does not claim to « penetrare altitudinem tuam »,[121] but only to « aliquatenus intelligere veritatem tuam »[122] and, according to chapter 2, only insofar as he asks for the « intellectus fidei quantum scis expedire ».[123]

At this point, at the very latest, the old objection arises as to whether the concept of God introduced via the logic of *non solo in intellectu, sed etiam in re* is not «merely» the concept of thought thinking about itself – that is, of the fact that it must always think of both, albeit as distinct from one another. This implies that Anselm proves only the 'idea' of a necessary existing being or a necessary existing thought, but not its 'reality'.

However, this objection merely repeats the situation of a dualism between thinking and being (*intelligere* and *res*), which Anselm is precisely seeking to overcome; in other words, it simply presupposes this dualism in opposition to Anselm's argument. The demonstration that thought, in itself, necessarily refers to its other in order to distinguish itself from it as 'mere' thinking cannot itself be reduced to a mere state of being thought, for it is precisely this possibility that is ruled out by the concept of such a relationship (as the distinguishing relation through which thought is, in the first place, thought at all).[124] In proving that, in order to think, we necessarily presuppose a unity of thinking and being in itself, and in making the distinction between being thought and being without ourselves, Anselm shows that it is precisely not the merely 'thought' relationship between thought and being that is thought, but rather this relationship as being

[120] In this respect, the *maior ... quam cogitari possit* from chapter 15 also applies to what Anselm describes in the *Monologion* as a consideration (*consideratio)* that « rationabiliter comprehendit incomprehensibile esse » (ANSELMUS, *Monologion*, chap. 64, p. 75.11), i.e. *docta ignorantia.*

[121] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 100.15-16.

[122] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 100.17.

[123] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.3-4.

[124] Stolzenberg makes a relevant and comparable remark on the analogous case of an objection to Hermann Cohen's thesis of the «identity of thinking and being». This objection is that Cohen's original 'positing' of being – which is to be attributed to thought – is merely one characteristic of thought and, precisely because it is only one characteristic of thought, does not at all capture the true essence of anything. In response to this objection, Stolzenberg rightly argues – and in clear proximity to Anselm's argument – that « it is pointless to place this relationship under the restriction of its mere being thought, for this very thing is ruled out by this relationship. It is not, as it were, the merely conceived relationship between thought and being, but this relationship itself; and within it, the mere fact of being thought – as a moment of its content – is not only not contained, but is implicitly, indeed, sublated » (JÜRGEN STOLZENBERG, *Ursprung und System. Probleme der Begründung systematischer Philosophie im Werk Hermann Cohens, Paul Natorps und beim frühen Martin Heidegger*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen 1995, p. 57).

related in the difference itself; that is to say, mere thought is posited as a moment within thought only insofar as it is negated: 'posited as sublated'.

The fact that – to put it more generally – « the thought of existence » is not yet « the existence of the thought itself »,[125] does not apply in the case of Anselm's proof. For it follows from this that the «existence» of the thought is itself the thought in which thinking distinguishes its thought as something (merely) thought from the thought of the « existence of the thought itself ».

One could also say that Anselm advocates the truth-relatedness or truth-capacity of a necessary thought. Necessary thought, or the thinking of necessity, is however no longer subject to the alternative of «merely subjective» thought and «objective» being. It is precisely the indirect apagogical method of his proof (as *reductio ad absurdum,* in which the truth of Anselm's proposition is inferred from the contradiction inherent in its negation) that reveals the necessary conditions of thought even in the very act of contesting Anselm's proposition (in the sense of that objection). That is to say: this proof shows precisely that the restriction to a 'mere' (that which exists in thought in the sense of the « fool ») is itself conceivable only under the condition of the *maius*, or rather that the reduction to mere thought already presupposes, in thought, the transcending of thought (thought as such).

In this sense, the thought of God as the thought of the (critical) self-distinction of thinking (which grasps its own finitude) from its infinite truth is indeed the highest thought of thinking, because thinking exists (and can remain) only in the thinking of this thought. However, because thought is thought, its highest thought cannot be something that has actually been thought, but at most the highest conceivable (*summum cogitabile)*, as John Duns Scotus correctly understood from Anselm.[126] It is in this thought alone that thinking achieves self-transparency, so that, starting precisely from Anselm, Ludwig Feuerbach's statement is strangely confirmed: « Only where you think God do you, strictly speaking, think at all ».[127]

In thinking this highest thought or conceivable thing (*quo nihil maius cogitari possit*), thinking experiences that it itself (as *intellectus*) is not or is not true

[125] Thus Emanuel Hirsch on the occasion of his Kant lecture, in EMANUEL HIRSCH, *Geschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie, im Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegungen des europäischen Denkens*, vol. IV, Gerd Mohn, Gütersloh 1964[3], p. 295.

[126] JOHANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Tractatus de primo principio*, cap. 4, prop. 9, in ID., *Abhandlung über das erste Prinzip*, ed. WOLFGANG KLUXEN, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1974, p. 104–107; see the explanation by Kluxen at p. 233.

[127] LUDWIG FEUERBACH, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, in ID., *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. WILHELM BOLIN, FRIEDRICH JODL, vol. VI, Frommann – Holzboog, Stuttgart – Bad Cannstadt 1960[2], p. 45. See, on that, EBERHARD JÜNGEL, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt: zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1977, p. 188–194 (on Anselm, p. 192).

without a *res* that it thinks (the thought). The idea of the inseparability of *intellectus* and *res* in this sense is the true idea of thinking about itself. To think the existence of God *et in intellectu et in re* therefore means to think the ultimate 'reality' of thought itself and is therefore its necessary and highest thought.

VI.2. God proves Himself to be God for thought in that He proves Himself to be *quo nihil maius cogitari possit*, and that He proves Himself in this way within thought itself. This can be summarised by saying that, in the *Proslogion*, Anselm « seeks a correspondence to God in thought »[128] and – as Dalferth in particular has shown – proves that all the postulates that Anselm sets up for his argument are also fundamental characteristics of his conception of God himself.

This is already evident from the *Prooemium*, according to which (a) the argument sought, like God himself, should be one (« unum argumentum »),[129] corresponding to the unity of thought.[130] (b) The argument must be self-sufficient (« se solo indigeret »),[131] that is, it must be able to be founded and proven by itself, just as God is founded in Himself.[132] (c) The argument must therefore not require any other argument for its proof, just as God – as Anselm expressly emphasizes – as the *summum bonum* requires no other (« nullo alio indigens »),[133] so as to be equally self-sufficient.[134] (d) Anselm's argument must, by its very nature, lead to the realization of God's true existence (« solum ad astruendum quia deus vere est »),[135] just as it is characteristic of God that He reveals Himself on His own accord to human understanding. This means that the very act of thinking the argument, purely as such, simultaneously releases an awareness of God's existence.

Dalferth has summarized these connections in the following sentence: « Anselm thus demands a concept of God which reveals itself as God's concept precisely because it is distinguished by the same fundamental characteristics as God Himself ».[136] This correspondence – that Anselm's idea of God is distinguished by the same fundamental characteristics as God himself – can, in

[128] DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 76; cf. p. 74.
[129] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.6.
[130] Hence, the formula *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* is already Anselm's one and only argument, insofar as it can be understood as the law governing the exercise of thought.
[131] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.7.
[132] That is to say, the argument must be developed from thinking itself in the process of thinking – as has been attempted here.
[133] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.8. See also chap. 22, p. 117.2.
[134] This implies that the argument can be developed exclusively through thought's self-application. Postulates (b) and (c) explicitly justify the hermeneutic reconstruction of the proof presented here, insofar as they locate the argument within the thinking of thought, i.e., within thought's self-knowledge.
[135] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.7
[136] DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 76.

my view, be understood from the fact that, in Anselm's sense, thought is only thought at all insofar as it is God's thought. Anselm's argument consists precisely in demonstrating this. As shown above, it demonstrates that thought comes into its own by conceiving, in God, the ground of its own constitutive relation to truth. Just as thought-in-itself distinguishes itself from its ground and is thought precisely in this self-distinction, [137] so too the reconstructed unity of correspondence between God and the thought is safeguarded, against the danger of a « deification of the idea of God »[138] invoked by Dalferth, precisely because this unity is at the same time already the 'difference' between the notion of God and God Himself, as well as that between God and thought in general.[139]

The correspondence of God in thought, as Anselm's characteristic argument suggests we should conceive it, enables thought's complete self-comprehension (or self-penetration), since it is at the same time the self-limitation of thought in view of its foundation in God (that in which « nothing greater can be conceived »). By becoming aware, through thought itself, of its limit in that which it necessarily conceives as *id quo nihil maius*, the act of thinking establishes itself *as* thought, or rather finds itself thereby grounded. Only by being, at the same time, more than itself is thought truly thought. Its truth – in God as its condition – is at the same time its distinction from itself as mere thought. Thought is perfectly self-contained in that it is, at its limit, the ground of its existence *as* thought; Feuerbach already hinted at this. This means: thought is sufficient in that it is so *self*-sufficient that it perceives itself as not self-sufficient, but as relating to its ground in that which is distinguished from it – to which, in order to be thought, it is nevertheless related – while remaining irretrievably different (*maior!*), thought realizes itself as thought through this self-grasp. In self-distinction, it is one with itself; in realizing its groundedness, it is sufficient unto itself and is wholly at home with itself, in that it is not merely *at home* with itself. Since its 'self-grounding' consists in thinking its own self-limitation,[140] thought comes to itself precisely by thinking its highest thought.

VI.3. However, according to Anselm – and this is precisely what his proof shows – the awakening of thought as thought is only true as the fulfillment of God in the highest thought. For the correspondence between the idea of God and God Himself – which the argument necessitated to characterize through theomorphic postulates (see above § I-IV) – depends on God's bringing Himself to knowledge in thought through the form of the argument. Anselm writes the argument of the

[137] See the remarks above on createdness (and being a creature).
[138] Dalferth, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 76.
[139] Dalferth, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 78 and 81.
[140] On the 'self-justifiability' of the *unum argumentum*, cf. Dalferth, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 77.

Proslogion, as the *Prooemium* again states, « in the role of one who undertakes to *raise* his mind to the contemplation of God (*sub persona conantis erigere mentem suam ad contemplandum deum*) »;[141] yet chapter 1 in particular states on several occasions that God Himself must enlighten this mind (« illumina nos, ostende nobis teipsum. Restitue te nobis »),[142] that is to say, raise it up to Himself so that it may even hope to understand what it believes (« quaerentis intelligere quod credit »).[143] The « Preface (*prooemium*) » testifies to how that longed-for but elusive *cogitatio* imposed itself upon him of its own accord – and even against Anselm's resistance (« se coepit cum importunitate quadam ingerere [...] sic se obtulit »).[144] That is to say, Anselm describes the 'conception' of his argument in the style of an encounter with divine self-manifestation (viz., Revelation). The argument, the *ratio Anselmi*, is thus the conceptual counterpart of the experience of God's Self-attestation in thought as the fundamental condition of thought.[145]

According to Anselm's argument, God manifests Himself in thought simply by proving Himself through Himself.[146] The old saying that God is known only from God – i.e., on the basis of his self-manifestation – not only applies to Anselm's method *sola ratione*, but is in fact the most fundamental instance of any *sola ratione* approach. Accordingly, Anselm does not simply identify God in our thought with his *unum argumentum* (i.e., the formula « quo nihil maius cogitari possit »); rather, it must be said fundamentally that God identifies Himself for us in our thinking[147] or, as one might also put it, God is not identified externally with what the argument asserts (cf. chap. 3: « Et hoc es tu, domine deus noster »),[148] but through the argument God convinces us of Himself.[149]

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141 ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.21–94.1. This is reminiscent of Hegel's interpretation of the proofs of God's existence as the 'elevation' (*Erhebung*) of the human mind to the idea of God.

142 ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 99.18 f..

143 ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 94.1 f. The motif of *fides quaerens intellectum* goes back to Augustine: « Ergo intellige, ut credas; crede, ut intelligas » (AUGUSTINUS EPISCOPUS, *Sermo* XLIII, 7; PL 38, col. 258), and especially: « Intellectus enim merces est fidei. Ergo noli quaerere intelligere ut credas, sed crede ut intelligas; quoniam 'nisi credideritis, non intelligetis' [Isaiah 7:9] » (ID., *In Evangelium Ioannis tractatus XXIX*, 6; PL 35, col. 1630).

144 ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.16–18.

145 On this experiential background, cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 72.

146 Pannenberg emphasizes this, with reference to Hegel, in relation to the 'ontological proof' (WOLFHART PANNENBERG, *Systematische Theologie*, vol. I, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1988, p. 107, note 108). On the self-limitation of reason that this implies, cf. also JÜNGEL, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, p. 197 f..

147 « De se per seipsum probat » (ANSELMUS, *Responsio*, p. 135.21 f.). Cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 105.

148 ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.3.

149 Cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 101 and LENSINK, « Im Spiegel des Absoluten », p. 77 and 83.

In this respect, the term *illuminatio* (enlightenment) used by Anselm[150] also retains the rational meaning that God's self-presentation (to thought) is at the same time the self-unlocking of thought as thought (according to its ground and its truth). Insofar as God allows Himself to be experienced in thought, God leaves thought to itself in genuine independence. God's presence in thought establishes true thinking as such. Hence, the request for enlightenment quoted above, prior to the formulation of the argument (chap. 1), corresponds to the concluding acknowledgement for the insight granted through enlightenment (« sic intelligo te illuminante »),[151] which follows the argument's very completion (chap. 4). It is evident that, in these contexts, Anselm's embedding of his strictly rational argument in *prayer* should be rendered intelligible.[152] It should, however, have become clear that the experience of God in thought articulated by the argument does nothing other than rationally explicate the intellectual implications of prayer (as one seeking God's presence).[153]

VII. *Theological Conclusion*

Anselm has shown that it is already the distinctive power (*vis*) of the word 'God' that brings thought back to itself.[154] It is precisely this power that is also at work

[150] On truth and light, see ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, chap. 14.

[151] ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.6.

[152] For more details, see DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 64 and 73; on *illuminatio*, p. 66.

[153] Cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 101 and 105.

[154] At the end of his *Responsio* to Gaunilo, Anselm emphatically reiterates that understanding his decisive formula – or, rather, its meaning – is sufficient to prove the existence of that which is greater than anything that can be conceived*:* « Tantam enim vim huius prolationis in se continet significatio, ut hoc ipsum quod dicitur, ex necessitate eo ipso quod intelligitur vel cogitatur, et re vera probetur existere et id ipsum esse quidquid de divina substantia oportet credere » (ANSELMUS, *Responsio*, p. 138.30-139.3; cf. ROHLS, *Theologie und Metaphysik*, p. 52 and 56). In that the *significatio* of the articulated formula (« hoc ipsum quod *dicitur* ») immediately compels an understanding of the existence of that which it expresses (« eo ipso »), this *vis* corresponds to the necessity (« ex necessitate ») whereby, in the thinking insight into that (« quod intelligitur vel cogitatur »), one finds oneself already convinced of the 'existence' of God (« et revera probetur existere »). Therefore, this *necessitas* is actually God's self-evidence in the thinking of the formula, and the *vis* of its meaning is precisely the « vis existendi per se », which, according to the *Monologion*, belongs to the *Unum* alone (ANSELMUS, *Monologion*, chap. 3, p. 16.7). In this way, Anselm was able, from the very outset, to claim that the *vis* of the expression *quo maius cogitari non possit* was the *vis* of the word 'God': « Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid, quo nihil maius cogitari possit » (ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, chap. 2, p. 101.4 f.). And this is precisely what makes it plausible that here, in the *responsio*, by recognizing the existence of the *aliquid*, Anselm can also consider it as proven that this refers to the existence of God: « et id ipsum esse quidquid de divina substantia oportet credere » (ibid., p. 139, 2 f.). That is to say, the formula, once understood, immediately brings to light the existence of God (viz., the *significatio* of the word 'God'). It is precisely this *vis* that defines the understanding of what is stated in the formula as a thinking act. Therefore, the proof (the *ratio Anselmi*) is thought's self-knowledge,

in the Word of God and, consequently, also in faith. The power of faith is the power of the Word of God, and theology thinks within this power.

Martin Luther said of this power of faith that it is « inestimable and infinite », indeed that it shares in divine omnipotence (« fides sit res omnipotens »).[155] And it is precisely by virtue of such *virtus* that faith accomplishes, in an unsurpassable measure, what Anselm demonstrated for thought. For, according to Luther, faith attributes to God a glory (*gloria)* « beyond which nothing greater can be conceived or spoken of Him » – in Luther's own words: « qua nihil maius ei tribui potest ».[156]

insofar as thought necessarily follows the rule of *quo nihil maius cogitari possit* in order to think and to be itself. In doing so, thinking realizes that what is stated by this formula is powerful within it – or effective within it – as its condition of truth, namely as the *vis* of *necessitas*.

[155] See MARTIN LUTHER, *Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, vol. XL, Erste Abteilung, *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commentarius ex praelectione D. Martini Lutheri collectus* [1535], Hermann Böhlhaus, Weimar 1911, p. 360.19-20: « Qui Rhetor est, exaggeret hunc locum, et videbit, quod fides sit res omnipotens quoque virtus eius sit inaestimabilis et infinita ».

[156] LUTHER, *Werke*, vol. XI, p. 360.21.

Appendix:

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF ANSELM'S FORMULATION « QUO NIHIL MAIUS... »

a. Among possible biblical antecedents of Anselm's formula, Psalm 40:6 stands out: « There is none comparable to you (*non est qui similis sit tibi*) ».[157] This corresponds to Sir 43:30: « Even if we praise everything highly, [...] he is still *much higher than* all his works » (« *viel höher als* alle seine Werke », according to Luther's translation).[158] That is why God's « greatness » (μεγαλοσύνη, *magnitudo*) is unfathomable (Ps 145:3), and since his power is of « exceeding greatness » (Eph 1:19: ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος, *supereminens magnitudo*), God is « greater than all gods » (Ex 18:11; Ps 86:8 *et al.*). This is always implied when it is often said that God is great (cf. I Chr. 16:25; Job 36:26; Ps 48:2; 86:10; 96:4; Isa 10:6; Sir 46:6, etc.).[159]

Thus, in the New Testament, it can be said that « God the Father is greater than all » (John 10:29: πάντων μεῖζόν ἐστιν, *maius omnibus est*) and therefore also « greater » than our hearts (1 John 3:20: μείζον, *maior*). God himself can swear only by himself, since there is « no one greater than he » (Heb 6:13: οὐδενὸς [...] μείζονος; *neminem maiorem*).

b. Long before Anselm, antiquity already produced formulations bearing a striking family resemblance to his famous coinage.

Among philosophers, Aristotle states that « the greater good is always the more choiceworthy » (ἀγαθῶν δὲ τὸ μεῖζον αἱρετώτερον ἀεί).[160] Likewise, Epicurus speaks of « some nature so excellent that nothing can be better than it (*necesse sit praestantem esse aliquam naturam, qua nihil sit melius*) ».[161] The Stoics took this up in Chrysippus's phrase: « qua nihil potest esse praestantius ».[162] Seneca

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157 אֵין עָרֹךְ אֵלֶיךָ. LXX-Ps 36:6: τίς ὁμοιωθήσεταί σοι; V: *non est qui similis sit tibi*. Cf. Ps 71:19; Isa 40:25; Jer 10:6; Bar 3:36 et al. Kant speaks similarly of the sublime; see below, section **g**.

158 κύριον ὑψώσατε καθ' ὅσον ἄν δύνασθε, ὑπερέχει γὰρ καὶ ἔτι. V. 28 says: μέγας παρὰ πάντων.

159 God is « great » in honour and glory (Ps 138:5 and 150:2).

160 ARISTOTELES, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 7, 1097b19 f.

161 *Epicurea*, ed. HERMANN USENER, Teubner, Leipzig 1887, p. 240 [Fr. 358]. The sentence is found in CICERO, *De natura deorum* 2, 46 (MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, *Scripta quae manserunt omnia*, Fasc. 45, ed. OTTO PLASBERG, WILHELM AX, Teubner, Stuttgart 1961, p. 66). In this work, the divinity of the cosmos is also referred to (in the Stoic tradition) as « nihil excellentius » (ibid. 2, 7.18-8.21). On « melius » in Anselm, cf. ANSELMUS, *Monologion,* ch. 2, ed. SCHMITT p. 15.20: « quod tanto maius tanto melius est aut dignius ». In ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, « melius » (probably in Augustine's footsteps, see below) first appears in ch. 5, p. 104. In Cusanus, « melius » is found in *De principio*, ed. GABRIEL, vol. II, p. 242*:* « quo melius cogitari nequit ».

162 *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, ed. HANS FRIEDRICH AUGUST VON ARNIM, vol. II: *Chrysippi fragmenta logica et physica*, Teubner, Leipzig 1903, p. 302 [Fr. 1012]. This phrase is repeated by Boethius in

may also have been an important witness to Anselm's ingenious formulation: « Quid est deus? Mens universi. Quid est deus? Quod vides totum et quod non vides totum. Sic demum magnitufdo illi sua redditur, *quo nihil maius cogitari potest*, si solus est omnia, si opus et intra et extra tenet ».[163]

Anselm might also have been inspired by Roman poets in his formulation. Horace, for example, tells of the ancient « father » who precedes gods and men: « Unde nihil maius generatur ipso ».[164] Ovid formulates a similar rhetorical question: « quid Iove maius habemus? »[165]

c. From Patristic theology, reference should be made to Gregory of Nyssa; According to him, reflection on God « cannot cease in its search for what is ever greater » (*Homilies on The Song of Songs*, XII: τὸ ἀεὶ ζητοῦντα τὸ πλεῖον [...] μὴ ἵστασθαι).[166] However, the decisive inspiration for Anselm is likely to be found in Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octaginta tribus*, q. 28, we read: « Nihil autem maius est voluntate dei ».[167] *Confessiones* VII, 4 provides an insightful clarification: « quia voluntas tua non est maior quam potentia tua ».[168] « Esset autem maior, si te ipso tu ipse maior esses ».[169] From this, Anselm was able to conclude: If God himself cannot be greater than himself, then nothing else can be either![170]

Anselm also found the same pattern expressed with *melius* rather than *maius* in Augustine. The Bishop of Hippo writes in *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de*

reference to *the summum bonum*; cf. *De consolatione philosophiae* III, 10, 15: « quo nihil constat esse praestantius ».

163 Seneca the Younger, *Natural Questions*, Books I–III, ed. Thomas H. Corcoran, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1971 (Loeb Classical Library, 450), p. 11. It sounds as if one could hear Cusanus speaking here!

164 Horace, *Odes* I, 12, v. 17 (Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. Niall Rudd, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2004 [Loeb Classical Library 33], p. 46). See the linguistically similar phrase: « possis nihil urbe Roma / Visere maius » (*Carmen saeculare*, in Quintus Horatius Flaccus, *Epodi*, ed. David Roy Shackleton Bailey, Teubner, Stuttgart 1995 [3rd edition], v. 9, p. 135).

165 Ovidius, *Metamorphoses* II, 62: Cf. also: « ne quicquam mundus Iove maius haberet » (XI, 224). Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2 vols., ed. Frank Justus Miller, George Patrick Goold, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1916, vol. I, p. 64 and vol. II, p. 136.

166 Gregorius Nyssenus, *Opera*, vol. VI, *In Canticum Canticorum*, ed. Hermann Langerbeck, Brill, Leiden 1960, p. 352.16 f..

167 Augustinus Hipponenisis, *De diversis quaestionibus octaginta tribus*, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, Brepols, Tunhout 1975 (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 44A), p. 35.4.

168 Augustinus Hipponenisis, *Confessionum libri tredecim*, ed. Luc Verheijen, Brepols, Turnhout 1981 (CC, SL, 27), VII, 4, line 15. See also the following line [16]: « voluntas enim et potentia dei deus ipse est ».

169 Augustinus Hipponenisis, *Confessionum libri tredecim*, VII, 4, line 16.

170 Cf. Augustinus Hipponenisis, *De libero arbitrio*, ed. William McAllen Green, Brepols, Turnhout 1970 (CC, SL, 29), II, 6, the formulation: « quo nihil superius esse constiterit », II, 6, line 48. Cf. ibid., II, 15, line 1: « si adhuc nihil esset superius ».

moribus Manichaeorum II, 11, 24: « quo esse aut cogitari melius nihil possit ».[171] And Anselm's way of thinking and speaking is particularly close to a passage in *De doctrina christiana* I, 15: « Nam cum ille unus cogitur deorum deus [...] ita cogitatur ut aliquid quo nihil sit melius atque sublimius illa cogitatio conetur attingere ».[172] Finally, in *Conf.* VII, 4, Augustine affirms, very much in Anselm's spirit: « Neque enim ulla anima umquam potuit [...] cogitare aliquid, quod sit te melius, qui summum et optimum bonum es ».[173]

A later echo of this idea may be found in Boethius: « nam cum nihil deo melius excogitari queat, id quo nihil melius est, bonum esse quis dubitet? » – For since nothing better than God can be conceived, who could doubt that what is such that nothing better can exist is good?[174]

d. Chronologically, several passages in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* echo the formula of the *Proslogion*. In chapter 13, one reads that nothing is greater or better than God: « deo nihil maius aut melius ».[175] Already in chapter 12, God is described as: « ita sit benignus, ut nihil benignius cogitari queat ».[176]

For the medieval tradition, Bernard of Clairvaux may also be cited: « quid est Deus? Quo melius nihil cogitari potest »[177] – for what is there like God? Than whom nothing better can be conceived.

e. The subsequent history of Scholasticism offers abundant evidence for the enduring reception and adaptation of Anselm's formula. Bonaventura writes about God that nothing can be conceived beyond it that is better: « nihil potest

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[171] Augustinus Hipponenisis, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*, ed. Johannes Baptist Bauer, Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna 1992 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 90), p. 109.1.

[172] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. Roger Philip Hywel Green, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995, p. 18. This line of thought is developed further in the subsequent paragraph: « Nec quisquam inveniri potest qui hoc deum credat esse quo est aliquid melius » (ibid.).

[173] Augustinus Hipponenisis, *Confessionum*, VII, 4 line 3.

[174] Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio*, ed. Ludwig Bieler, Brepols, Turnhout 1984 (CC, SL, 94), III, prosa 10, 7, p. 53.22 f..

[175] Anselmus, *Opera omnia*, ed. Schmitt, vol. II, p. 46*. Of God's mercy it is said: « ut nec maior nec iustitior cogitari possit » (ibid., chap. 20, p. 152*).

[176] Anselmus, *Monologion*, in Id., *Opera omnia*, ed. Schmitt, vol. III, p. 42. Cf. also chap. 13, which contains a similar formulation in terms of syntax: « Nihil autem iniustius toleratur, quam quo nihil est minus tolerandum » (ibid., p. 44). The formulation is also found: « ut illis nihil sit maius aliud » (p. 17.21 f.) or, for example, in, ed. chap. 4, p. 17.21 f.: « ut illis nihil sit maius aliud » and similar.

[177] Bernardus Clarevallensis, *De consideratione libri quinque ad Eugenium papam*, VII, 15, in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. Jean Leclercq, Henri Rochais, vol. III, Editiones cistercenses, Rome 1963, p. 437–438.

cogitari ultra ipsum melius, nobilius nec dignius ac per hoc nihil maius »,[178] since « impossibile est ipsum cogitari non esse ».[179] Chapter 6, § 2 of the *Itinerarium* offers a strikingly Anselmian formulation, describing the *optimum*, or supreme being (« quod simpliciter est »), as that than which nothing better can be conceived: « quo nihil melius cogitari potest ».[180]

Thomas Aquinas is well known to quote Anselm's dictum – without mentioning its author – as evidence for the view that « ut Deus sit per se notum »:[181] « significatur enim hoc *nomine* id quo maius significari non potest ».[182] He then objects: « ille qui audit hoc nomen 'Deus', non intelligit significari aliquid quo maius cogitari non possit » – after all, some have gone so far as to think that « Deum esse corpus ».[183] The Dominican master also reiterates Gaunilo's objection: even if someone associates Anselm's meaning with the immediate understanding (*intelligere*) of the divine name, it does not follow that one thereby understands « quod significatur per nomen, esse in rerum natura ». At this stage, what is signified remains « in apprehensione intellectus tantum » and has not yet been shown to exist in reality, « in re ».[184] A factually consistent critique of Anselm's argumentation – once again, his name is not mentioned – can also be found in *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 10 and 11.[185]

The pseudo-Hermetic *Liber XXIV philosophorum* (c. 1210) likewise deserves mention. Its fith thesis states: « Deus est, quo nihil melius excogitari potest ».[186] The ensuing commentary unfolds the implications of this definition through the interconnected notions of *perfectio, bonum* and *unum*.

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[178] Bonaventura, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, 5, par. 7, in Id., *Opera omnia*, vol. V, ed. PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura, Ex typographia Collegii S. Bonaventura, Quaracchi 1891, p. 295 f.; and Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* likewise preserves a few echos of the formula (e.g., Bonaventura, *In I librum Sententiarum*, d. 37, pars 2, a. 1, q. 3, concl.; *In III librum Sent.*, d. 14, a. 1, q. 2, concl.).

[179] Bonaventura, *Itinerarium*, cap. 5, par. 6, line 19.

[180] Bonaventura, *Itinerarium*, cap. 6, par. 2, line 1. Cf. Id., *Commentaria in quattuor libros Sententiarum*, I, d. 8, a. 1, q. 2.

[181] Of course, whatever may already be notum is brought to light in Anselm only through his analysis of the very act of conceiving this thought (see above).

[182] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 1, arg. 2.

[183] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 1, *ad secundum*. However, one might note that the view that God is a body can scarcely be regarded as a serious conceptual alternative to Anselm's definition.

[184] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 1. Anselm himself had already sought to display the impossibility of this *tantum:* in his account, what is understood as *id quo maius cogitari non potest* cannot remain merely « in apprehensione intellectus ». Aquinas's appeal to those who deny God's existence likewise seems misplaced, since Anselm's argument proceeds precisely from the standpoint of the « insipiens », who denies that God exists.

[185] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 10, n. 2 and 11, n. 2

[186] *Liber viginti quattuor philosophorum*, ed. Françoise Hudry, Brepols, Turnhout 1997 (CC, Continuatio Mediaevalis, 143A), Sententia 5, line 1.

This brief thirteenth century section may be concluded with two further references. In *Sermo* XXIX, Meister Eckhart invokes Anselm as the first witness for the claim « Deus unus est » (according to Gal 3:20 and Deut 6:4): « deus est, quo nihil melius excogitari potest ».[187] John Duns Scotus, for his part, engages more extensively with the « ratio Anselmi de summo cogitabili »[188] in greater conceptual detail. In his *Tractatus de primo principio*, 79, the *Doctor Subtilis* performs a conceptual « colouring » (« potest *colorari* illa ratio ») of the correctly quoted Anselmian formula « Deus est quo maius cogitari non potest » and it does so by emphasizing the internal *consistency* as a condition of the argument.[189]

f. Turning to the early Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino offers a curious adaptation of Anselm's formula. Conceiving God as the *summus opifex*, he applies Anselm's characterization not to the idea of God, but to the divine act of creation itself: « quo maius effici nequit ».[190]

The pattern appears already in the works of Nicholas of Cusa, already cited above. This begins as early as *De docta ignorantia* I, 2 (1440): « Maximum autem hoc dico, quo nihil maius esse potest ».[191] It recurs repeatedly In later works, for example in *De visione Dei* I (1453), where God is described as: « summitas ipsa omnis perfectionis et maior quam cogitari possit ».[192] In the same treatise (cap. 18), the loving Trinitarian unity of Father and Son is described as « quo maior esse nequit ».[193] Finally, in *De non-aliud* IV (1461/62), Anselm's insight appears as a universally acknowledged theological principle: « Omnes enim theologici Deum

[187] MEISTER ECKHART, *Lateinische Werke*, vol. IV, ed. ERNST BENZ, BRUNO DECKER, JOSEF KOCH, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1956, p. 263.5. The wording of the quotation is evidently dependent upon the *Liber XXIV philosophorum*, a dependence subsequently confirmed by the passages from Augustine, Bernard, and Seneca cited above.

[188] Of course, Anselm does not have in mind a single, definitive 'highest' thought. Can one really maintain, with Scotus, that in this « cogitabili summo summe quiescit intellectus »? Anselm's own account seems rather to point toward an inexhaustible movement of thought, not to its final repose in a supreme concept.

[189] JOHANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Tractatus de primo principio* ed. KLUXEN, p. 104. A further 'recolouring' occurs in the idea of a « perfectius cogitabile » or « visibile » (ibid., p. 106). On the reception and development of the *ratio Anselmi* in Scotus's other writings (e.g., *Ordinatio*, I, d. 2, pars 1, q. 2, which lays no claim to *coloratio*), see HARTMUT GRABST, « Johannes Duns Scotus' Rezeption des Anselmianischen Arguments », *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter*, 2 (1997), p. 105-125.

[190] MARSILIO FICINO, *De Christiana religione*, ch. 16, ed. GUIDO BARTOLUCCI, Edizioni della Normale, Pisa 2019, p. 199.10.

[191] NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, ed. LEO GABRIEL, vol. I, Herder, Vienna 1964, p. 198. In Anselm's case, of course, one cannot speak of « maximum »; see above in the main text.

[192] NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. III, Herder, Vienna 1967, p. 98.

[193] NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. III, p. 178.

viderunt, quid maius esse quam concipi possest ».[194] In one of his last works, *De venatione sapientiae* XXVI (1462/63), Cusanus explicitly affirms the truth of Anselm's claim that « Deum esse maius quam concipi possit ».[195] Indeed, he had already stated as much in the *Apologia* (1449), composed in defense of the *Docta ignorantia*: only the ignorant could maintain that God is anything other than « id, quo maius concipi nequit ».[196]

Cusanus, however, appropriated the *maius*-formula in a way that goes well beyond Anselm's intentions. In *De Beryllo* VII, with unmistakable reference to Anselm, he writes that God can be speculatively apprehended « per maximum, quo nihil maius esse potest, pariter et minimum, quo nihil minus esse potest ».[197] Here, Anselm's *ratio* is transformed in accordance with Cusanus's doctrine of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Of the *maximum*, to which nothing can be opposed, Cusanus accordingly states: « secum simul coincidit minimum ».[198]

More surprisingly, traces of this line of thought may also be found in Martin Luther, who was acquainted with Nicholas of Cusa and appears to have been influenced by him in some of his more speculative reflections.[199] Some of Luther's statements remain relatively general, as when he writes: « that godhood is something greater than all other things ».[200] Yet Anselm's formula also reappears in a more explicit form: « cum solus deus sit id, quo maius dici non potest ».[201] In his theologically significant late work *On the Supper of Christ: Confession* (1528), Luther writes, in terms that clearly recall Cusanus:

[194] NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. II, Herder, Vienna 1966, p. 454.

[195] NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. I, p. 120. Gabriel's footnote to this passage notes: « This idea is essential to Cusanus's philosophy, since it is he who gives him the 'regula doctae ignorantiae' ».

[196] NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. I, p. 534.

[197] NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. III, p. 8. He formulates a similar idea in « Propositiones » on *De non-aliud*: God as the non-other is « ipsius maximi maximum et ipsius minimi minimum » (ibid., vol. II, p. 562).

[198] CUSANUS, *De docta ignorantia*, II, in ID., *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. I, p. 198. Just as the maximum is the « absolutum unum est, quod est omnia », so too is the minimum that coincides with it: « quare et in omnibus ». For a more detailed explanation, cf. ibid.; the passage has already been quoted above.

[199] This may have been conveyed by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples.

[200] MARTIN LUTHER, *Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, vol. XIX, *Schriften 1526*, Hermann Böhlhaus, Weimar 1897, p. 205.29-30: « dass die gottheit etwas grösseres sey für allen andern dingen ».

[201] LUTHER, *Werke*, vol. I, *Schriften, Predigten, Disputationen 1512/18*, Hermann Böhlhaus, Weimar 1883, p. 590.5-6. In addition, there is the phrase quoted above, from *2. Galatervorlesung*, in LUTHER, *Werke*, vol. XL, Hermann Böhlhaus, Weimar 1911, p. 360.20 f..

> That God [...] is [...] a supernatural, unfathomable being / who is wholly and completely in every grain / and yet is in all and above all and outside all creatures [...] *Nothing is so small / God is yet smaller; nothing is so great / God is yet greater* [...]. It is an ineffable being, above and beyond everything that one can name or think.[202]

Here one can discern, unmistakably, at least an indirect continuation of Anselm's thought, mediated through Nicholas of Cusa.[203]

g. This brief survey of the sources and reception of Anselm of Canterbury's celebrated formula may be concluded with two modern examples that can plausibly be read as traces of its enduring influence.

In §25 of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant characterizes the *sublime* as a « greatness that is only equal to itself»[204] and, correspondingly, as « that which *is great beyond all comparison* ».[205]

An even more explicit reminiscence occurs in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. Referring to what he calls the « oldest (Anselmian) formulation of the ontological proof », he writes: « The highest, above which there is nothing, *quo maius non datur*, is God » before proceeding to expound the argument and compare it with the Cartesian proof.[206]

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[202] « Das Gott [...] sey [...] ein ubernatürlich unerforschlich wesen / das zu gleich ynn eym iglichen körnlin gantz und gar / und dennoch ynn allen und uber allen und ausser allen Creaturn sey [...] *Nichts ist so klein / Gott ist noch kleiner, Nichts ist so gros / Gott ist noch grösser* [...]. Ists ein unaussprechlich wesen uber und ausser allem das man nennen oder dencken kann » (MARTIN LUTHER, *Werke in Auswahl*, ed. OTTO CLEMEN, vol. III, de Gruyter, Berlin 1959, p. 404.26–38).

[203] Luther was familiar with Anselm's life and writings (cf. LUTHER, *Werke*, *Tischreden*, vol. V, Hermann Böhlau, Weimar 1919, n° 6415, p. 650; Luther's marginal notes on Anselm's *Opuscula* survive (cf. LUTHER, *Werke*, vol. IX, *Schriften und Predigten 1509/21* [Nachträge und Ergänzungen zu Bd. 1-6, 8, 9], Hermann Böhlau, Weimar 1893, p. 104–114), and brief, generally approving references occur elsewhere). The sentence « Quando Deus loquitur, non frustra loquitur » (LUTHER, *Werke*, vol. XXXIX, Zweite Abteilung, Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, Weimar 1932, p. 199.9) may even directly derive from ANSELMUS, *Monologion*, in ID., *Opera omnia*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. I, p. 33 f..

[204] « Größe, die bloß sich selber gleich ist »; cf. IMMANUEL KANT, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, in *Kants Werke*, Akademie-Textausgabe, vol. V, de Gruyter, Berlin 1968, p. 250.7–8.

[205] « Das, was über alle Vergleichung groß ist » (KANT, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, p. 248.9 f.). Kant's following statements echo both Luther and Pascal: « That nothing in nature can be given, however great it may be judged by us, which cannot be considered in another relationship, degraded to the infinitely small, and conversely, nothing so small that it cannot be expanded in comparison [...] to the size of the world (*daß nichts in der Natur gegeben werden könne, so groß als es auch von uns beurtheilt werde, was nicht in einem anderen Verhältnisse betrachtet, bis zum Unendlich-Kleinen abgewürdigt werden könnte, und umgekehrt nichts so klein, was sich nicht in Vergleichung [...] bis zu einer Weltgröße erweitern ließe*) » (ibid., p. 250.14–19).

[206] FRIEDRICH WILHELM JOSEPH SCHELLING, *Philosophie der Offerbarung*, in ID., *Ausgewählte Werke in zehn* Bänden [Reprint of the 1859-1860 Cotta Edition], Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1966, vol. II [= 1st part of *The Philosophy of Revelation*], p. 157: « Das Höchste, worüber nichts ist,

Finally, to cite a more recent – perhaps only coincidental – echo in this long history of reception, Anneliese Maier reformulates the motif as follows: « infinitum est quo nihil est maius ».[207] In this concise expression, Anselm's insight and Cusanus's metaphysics appear once again to converge.

quo maius non datur, ist Gott ». See also vol. III, p. 27, 169 *et passim*. On Hegel's examination of Anselm, see RINGLEBEN, « Der sogenannte ontologische Gottesbeweis », p. 481–484.

[207] ANNELIESE MEIER, *Ausgehenses Mittelalter. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geistesgeschichte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, vol. II, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura: Rome 1964, p. 49. On thirteenth-century theories of the actual infinite, see now PAOLO MANCOSU, *The Wilderness of the Infinite: Robert Grosseteste, William of Auvergne, and Mathematical Infinity in the Thirteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2026.

REVIEWS

JOHN ANDREW MORROW, *MUHAMMAD AND THE CHRISTIANS: COMMEMORATING THE COVENANTS OF THE PROPHET,* ACADEMICA PRESS, WASHINGTON 2025, XXXVI, 246 PP., FIGURES B/W, ISBN: 9781680533873.

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The book under review, by J.A. Morrow, aims to chart the ways in which the so-called covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad circulated over the centuries among Christians and the role played by these important Islamic documents. The volume consists of a prologue by Marianne Farina, a preface by the author, and the seven chapters that comprise the bulk of the work. The book concludes with the bibliography section and an index of proper names and subjects.

Chapter 1 (« The Qur'anicity of the Prophet's Covenants », p. 1–37) argues that the Prophet Muhammad's covenants with Christians are fundamentally consonant with the Qur'ān and therefore authentic. While prior debates have alternated between viewing the covenants as genuine or as political fabrications, the chapter insists that the Qur'ān must be the ultimate arbiter (*prima scriptura*). Building on ten external criteria identified by Ibrahim Mohamed Zein and Ahmed El-Wakil, it maintains that qur'ānic consistency outweighs all other evidence.

Using the critical edition of the Covenant with the Christians of Nağrān, the author examines its clauses alongside qur'ānic verses. He finds sustained alignment on: the *basmala*; Muḥammad's mission as warner and bearer of glad tidings; the universal address to Christians (*al-naṣārā*) as 'People of the Book'; the sanctity of covenants (*'ahd*, *mīṯāq*, *ḏimmah*); justice; protection of churches and monasteries; limits and ethics of warfare; fair, non-oppressive taxation (including nuanced treatments of *ǧizyah* and *ḫarāǧ*, exemptions for clergy and the vulnerable, and moderation by capacity); hospitality; non-compulsion in religion (Q 2:256); courteous disputation; interfaith marriage with full respect for a Christian wife's religious practice; and communal solidarity without treachery. Violations of the covenant incur, of course, qur'ānic censure.

Addressing verses perceived as hostile to Christians, the chapter proposes four contextualising readings: specificity to certain groups; reference to Arabian heresies; critique of tritheism rather than the orthodox Trinity; and the coexistence of theological disagreement with ethical obligation. It rejects abrogation in favour of 'occasionalism', whereby verses apply contextually rather

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than being cancelled, thus preserving the Qur'ān's ethical core. Concluding, the chapter contends that the covenant's coherence with qur'ānic principles of justice, mercy, and pluralism strongly supports its Prophetic origin and invites further corroboration from sunnah and sīrah.

Chapter 2 (« Muhammad, Mount Sinai, and the Mystical Eagle: Unearthing the Mythic Substrata », pp. 39–71) investigates the long-circulating Sinai tradition that a pre-prophetic Muḥammad visited the Monastery of St. Catherine and was shaded by an eagle, assessing its historical kernel and mythic accretions. After outlining the stable narrative core (monks witnessing a protective raptor, an abbot predicting Muḥammad's future eminence, and an early pledge later fulfilled in the ashtiname) the chapter surveys candidates and intermediaries (e.g., Tamīm al-Dārī, Diḥyah al-Kalbī, Ṣuhayb al-Rūmī) and considers possible settings (Sinai, Aylah, Tabūk). A newly surfaced Arabic legend of Pachomius (MS 814, Dār al-Kutub) is presented as an Islamic account of a monastic encounter, structurally akin to Baḥīrah's traditions, though tinged with ambivalence about astrology and divination.

The 'eagle' is examined zoologically (four plausible Sinai raptors) and symbolically, drawing on Jewish, Christian and Islamic associations (John the Evangelist, apocalyptic throne imagery, Būrāq/Gabriel banners). Parallel avian motifs in early sources include hostile Latin polemics (*Istoria de Mahomet*; *Tultusceptru*) and the contested 'Satanic verses' (*ġaranīq*, cranes). Angelology is central: early reports suggest an initial role for Isrāfīl/Seraphiel –often depicted with avian attributes– before Ǧibrīl, raising questions about transmission, form, and later doctrinal discomfort. The chapter situates these motifs within broader Near Eastern mythic strata (bird-headed divinities, Zoroastrian angelic genealogies), and notes their afterlives in Islamic art (eagle capitals) and Sūfī speculation (e.g., Peacock Angel resonances).

In sum, the Sinai eagle legend likely preserves an ancient stratum predating the canonised *Sīrah*, with monastic memory retaining avian imagery that later Muslim redactors sometimes transposed (e.g., 'cloud'). Whether or not Muḥammad physically visited Sinai is ultimately secondary: the covenant's existence and ethical programme stand, while the eagle narrative illuminates the mythopoetic environment in which Muslim-Christian covenants were imagined, transmitted, and defended.

Chapter 3 (« Gabriel Sionita and the Covenant at the University of Cambridge », p. 73–90) traces the transmission, reception, and contestation of the Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of the World, foregrounding the 1630 Arabic–Latin edition issued in Paris by the Maronite scholar Gabriel Sionita. The chapter catalogues an extensive roster of early-modern and modern proponents who treated the text as authentic, alongside a substantial corpus of detractors (from Grotius and Bayle to twentieth-century scholars) some of whom alleged

forgery. Against this polemic, the author foregrounds manuscript evidence that multiplies the text's attestations and complicates charges of fabrication. Newly highlighted witnesses include copies linked to Fāris al-Shidyāq and the John Rylands Library, as well as Cambridge University Library holdings: Dd.11.33 (a neat transcription associated with Antoine Vitré) and Add.1901 (a large scroll fragment), the latter bequeathed via Mrs Petermann, widow of the orientalist Julius Heinrich Petermann.

Through close comparison, the Cambridge scroll is shown to belong to the Muʿāwiyah transmission lineage and to share a striking pattern of named witnesses with the Shidyāq/Rylands recension, while differing in wording and style. The chapter situates these recensions in a broader ecology of early covenants, arguing that many later copies adapt a foundational treaty – the Naǧrān Covenant preserved in the Chronicle of Seert – rather than the shorter versions in Muslim sources. It also reconstructs seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Christian printing and distribution networks (Vitré, Capuchins, *Propaganda Fide*) that likely facilitated circulation to Arabic-speaking Christians, and suggests Ottoman (and, to a degree, Safavid) state adoption of covenantal norms as instruments of plural governance. The conclusion reframes the authenticity debate around historical reception: whatever the precise archival pathway, the covenant functioned as a shared moral–legal charter underpinning Muslim-Christian coexistence across centuries.

Chapter 4 (« The Arabic Garshuni *Covenant of the Prophet* from Mar Behnam Monastery in Iraq », p. 91–122) examines and contextualises a Garšūnī manuscript (Arabic written in Syriac script) preserving a Covenant of the Prophet, now held in the Syriac Catholic Archdiocese of Baghdad and digitised by the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library. The text was copied on 25 July 1934 by Rufāʾīl, son of the priest Yaʿqūb Sākā, for the priest Fetrus Sābā of Bartella. It resurfaced in 2017, when monks safeguarded manuscripts during the ISIS assault on northern Iraq. The copying is linked to the Assyrian massacres of 1933, when Christian communities revived Prophetic covenants as protective instruments amid persecution.

The manuscript proves to be a version of the Ashtiname of St. Catherine (Covenant with the Monks of Sinai) rather than the « Covenant with the Christians of the World ». It guarantees: the inviolability of churches and Christian property; prohibition of demolishing places of worship; exemption from *ǧizyah* and *ḫarāǧ* for clergy and ascetics; protection against forced conversion and military conscription; the right to maintain and repair churches, with Muslim assistance when needed; courteous interfaith disputation; and « validity until the Hour. »

The chapter addresses critical objections such as linguistic anachronisms, the absence of a seventh-century autograph, and the covenant's seemingly unilateral nature, and counters them by situating the text within early Islamic diplomatic and legal practice. It highlights continuity from the Prophet's Naǧrān treaty,

corroboration of the *ḏimmah* concept through inscriptions and papyri (e.g., Jerusalem 32, Nessana 77), and rhetorical coherence with qurʾānic discourse and later *ʿahd-nāmes* of the Ottoman Empire, which, though issued unilaterally, generated bilateral obligations.

The chapter concludes that the Iraqi Gharšūnī manuscript is a faithful copy of the Sinai covenant, significant both for its transmission context and as evidence of how Middle Eastern Christian communities mobilised Prophetic covenants as claims to protection in times of crisis.

In chapter 5 (« The Art of the Covenant: Symbolic Representations and their Significance », p. 123–156) the author examines the artistic and symbolic dimensions of the Prophet Muḥammad's covenants with Christian communities. These documents are not only juridical texts but also visual artefacts conveying authority, protection and interfaith respect. Islamic art, generally aniconic and abstract due to juristic discouragement of figurative representation, nevertheless produced richly decorated covenants that combined calligraphy, geometry, colour symbolism and, at times, human or prophetic imagery.

The chapter first analyses a celebrated miniature in Rašīd al-Dīn Hamadānī's *Ǧāmiʿ al-Tawārīḫ*, long debated in meaning. Dimitrios Kalomirakis proposed that it promotes Shīʿī claims to ʿAlī's succession, but the author argues instead that it visualises the granting of the ashtiname (covenant) to the monks of Sinai, stressing Mongol rulers' Christian ties and their endorsement of the Prophet's protection. The narrative of Muḥammad's youthful encounter with the monk Baḥīrā is critically reviewed, noting legendary embellishments and historical implausibilities, yet acknowledging a core memory of contact with Christian monastics.

A substantial section surveys artistic features of extant covenants. Central is the hand of the Prophet, appearing in varied forms (right or left, upright, palm-down, stylised or lifelike) symbolising divine authority, protection, warning, or welcome. Other motifs include mosques, minarets, monastic landscapes (especially St Catherine's at Sinai), talismanic circles and stars, vegetal ornament, and colour codes (black for authority, gold for royalty, red for prestige, white for peace). Exemplary pieces include Ottoman Turkish banners from Sinai, Mount Athos and Syria, some incorporating mystical ladders, protective seals, and numerological symbolism such as the number twelve.

The chapter concludes that these covenants constitute purposeful didactic and political art: official proclamations visually affirming Islam's commitment to mercy, justice, and the protection of Christians as People of the Book, blending legal authority with enduring artistic heritage.

Chapter 6 (« The Christians of Najran: Two Conflicting, Incompatible, and Irreconcilable Portraits », p. 157–193) examines two irreconcilable portrayals of the Christians of Nağrān: an Islamic narrative that casts their encounter with

Muḥammad as a failed debate ending in a threatened mubāhala and subordination through *ǧizyah*; and the Exordium to the Naǧrān Covenant, which presents long-standing trust, collaboration, and protection. The chapter argues that, despite contradictions, the 'gist' (a delegation, exchange, and a treaty) is historically plausible. It reconstructs the treaty tradition: recensions transmitted by al-Šaybānī, al-Balāḏurī and others, renewed by the Rašīdūn Caliphs Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān, guarantee life, property, clergy, churches and exemption from military service, albeit with tribute; some clauses appear later interpolations. Claims of deportation under ʿUmar are reassessed; epigraphic and papyrological evidence indicates continued Christian presence in Naǧrān for centuries. The Exordium (preserved in the *Chronicle of Seert*) praises bishops and monks for aiding Muḥammad's mission, suggests early contacts (possibly with Jewish-Christians) and reframes Q 3:61 less as a literal cursing duel than as a Late Antique oath-curse appended to compacts.

Polemical Sunni and especially Twelver Shīʿī traditions amplified the episode to assert doctrinal supremacy via the 'People of the Cloak' and a *mubāhalah* festival, often caricaturing the Naǧrānites. By contrast, covenantal texts and Timurid–Safavid artworks present a conciliatory tableau; a Timurid miniature dignifies a Christian delegation.

The chapter concludes that the Naǧrān dossier was reworked to underwrite jurisprudence and triumphalist narratives. Yet, taken as normative, the Prophet's covenants furnish a precedent for protection of the People of the Book and warrant a reassessment of Islamic legal memory regarding non-Muslim rights.

Chapter 7 (« Were the Covenants of the Prophet Ever Negated? Imam al-Shafiʿi's *Covenant of Protection* and The *Covenant of the Prophet* », p. 195–211) examines whether the Prophet's covenants with Christians were ever annulled, arguing they were not, though later jurists reshaped their application. It opens by situating the covenants within a scribal culture in which authorised variation (glosses, harmonisations, and formulaic substitutions) was normal. Despite such redactional activity, core legal formulae (especially *ḏimmat Allāh*) display striking stability across recensions, indicating a shared 'master template'.

A substantial section contextualises Muslim-Christian relations through ruling elites' family ties with Christians and corroborating Christian testimonies. Early Umayyad practice – exemplified by Muʿāwiya and Yazīd – appears broadly laissez-faire and consonant with protective covenants, a picture reinforced by documentary and epigraphic traces. The chapter also notes the pervasive Christian maternal lineage of Ottoman sultans, suggesting durable, pragmatic incentives to maintain Christian protections.

The analytical centrepiece is a line-by-line comparison between the Prophet's covenants and Imām al-Šāfiʿī's Template Covenant of Protection (in *al-Umm*). While clearly indebted to the prophetic model, al-Šāfiʿī's text reframes it within

ʿAbbāsid statecraft, retaining guarantees (life, property, churches, clergy, due process, capped *ǧizyah*) yet adding restrictive clauses: forfeiture of protection for public blasphemy, bans on public Christian rites and church building in Muslim garrison towns, distinctive dress and saddlery, limits on intermarriage, entry prohibitions for Mecca and residence limits in al-Ḥijāz. The tone thus shifts from ally-facing benevolence to hegemonic regulation. Subsequent policy (al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik, ʿUmar II, al-Mutawakkil) and the later, spurious Pact of ʿUmar further entrenched constraints, overshadowing prophetic protections in some legal circles.

The chapter concludes that al-Šāfiʿī did not abrogate the Prophet's covenants; rather, he adapted their template to new social conditions. The covenants endured – textually and normatively – though their spirit was progressively diluted by later juristic and political developments.

Although *Muhammad and the Christians* offers an impressively wide-ranging survey of the so-called covenants of the Prophet, its argumentative edifice rests on several contested foundations. The book's strength lies in the sheer breadth of sources marshalled, together with the author's determination to read the covenants as a coherent whole. Yet the work at times conflates textual reception with historical origin: late Gharšūnī or Ottoman copies are treated as if they could decisively illuminate seventh-century practice, and the line between hagiographical accretions and authentic memory remains blurred. Consequently, while the book is valuable as a synthetic and imaginative defence of the covenants' relevance for Muslim–Christian relations, its historical argumentation is more persuasive as advocacy than as a decisive demonstration of authenticity. On the other hand, for the benefit of the book, it would have been advisable to use a standard transliteration system for Arabic words, names and titles of works.

The main strength of this work lies in its historical scope, and it remains, indeed, a valuable study for understanding the subject of the covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad or those attributed to him, thus helping to shape interfaith relations throughout history. We therefore sincerely congratulate the author for his tireless efforts in offering us this new tool of research.

SVEN K. KNEBEL, *JESUIT UND NEUZEIT: DISKURSARCHÄOLOGISCHE STREIFZÜGE IN DIE PHILOSOPHIEGESCHICHTE*, BRILL – FINK, LEIDEN 2024, X, 492 PP., ISBN: 9783770569168 (HARDBACK), 9783846769164 (E-BOOK).

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The present book is a collection of eight papers, each ranging from 30 to 150 pages, plus an introduction of 81 pages. Two of these papers, on Vázquez and Arriaga, are published here for the first time (along with the introduction), while the others are re-editions of publications from 1991 to 2018.

Chapter 1 addresses the coordination or cooperation of will and intellect. The technical term is « doxastischer Voluntarismus » (doxastic voluntarism). This epistemological approach is connected with Robert Holcot (1290–1349) and discusses the question of to what extent the will is involved in assenting to truth. « Voluntas vult, ut intellectus credat » (Diego Granado, 1629, quoted at p. 93, note 46). This problem was present in the famous early modern probabilism, but more generally, it is evident in questions that cannot be answered with yes/no or undecided.

Chapter 2 interprets the Jesuit Gabriel Vázquez (d. 1604) as the origin of the « Perception Theory of Judgment » (throughout labeled as such in English). The thesis is: A judgment is the knowledge of the convenience or inconvenience and repugnance of one thing with another in a proposition (p. 131). The problem with that thesis is the involvement of perception/representation/cognition in judgment. For, a judgment is the commitment to connect subject and predicate and thus an act of cognition (p. 142). Knebel follows the early modern debate about this question that eventually made the fusion of logic with epistemology possible insofar as the connection between judgment as an intellectual performance and the logical convenience vs. contradiction becomes a feature of the intellect (p. 205).

Chapter 3 investigates the interpretation of « reflection » in school-philosophy with emphasis on Suárez. It opens with twenty propositions from « knowledge of knowing to know » (p. 209) via the relation of « first » and « second intentions » (p. 212) to the problem of infinite progress in the reflection on reflections, which touches upon the acts of knowledge in God who should have no distinction between « direct » and « reflexive » knowledge; but supposed God does know

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about his direct knowledge by means of reflexive knowledge then this reflection goes on *ad infinitum* (p. 215). Obviously, this goes back to Aristotle who even in sense perception admits self-reference (*De anima* III.2, 425b11; cf. III.4, 429b10). In the sources discussed by Knebel it is pondered as implicit reflection (p. 224) together with all of its semantic, epistemic, volitive, and vital implications, which amounts to « virtual reflection » (p. 229). The heading of the chapter indicates its direction: « Suárez, or: the Cogito » and the point is that the Cartesian *cogito* is precisely this sort of reflection that does not have to be a separate act of thinking but is a virtual or implicit awareness of thinking (p. 241). The chapter closes with Latin/German excerpts from the Jesuit Jean Bagot (1591–1664) who defended the virtual reflection in his *Apologeticus Fidei*, Paris 1645 (p. 257).

Chapter 4 shows that Sebastian Izquierdo, SJ, (1601–1681) studied the temporal dimension of thinking as it is important in Christian theology of the afterlife and of divine knowledge. He proposed that the blessed (*beatus*) has to be conscious and sure of the eternity of his state (p. 257). Hence follows that even beatitude is a reflective act and transports the temporality of human thinking (as we know it from Augustine's *Confessions*) into eternity (p. 258). Knebel then discusses several theories of time, especially those that view time as past-present-future versus time that is comprehensive, valid in theology. The comprehensive eternity is that of God's way of 'being in time' and is systematically connected with God's relation to his finite creation. This 'eternity' is an infinite source of heresies.

Chapter 5 continues the problem of subject/object relations in cognition with the question whether « in school-philosophy, the division of labor between logic and metaphysics prevented Jesuit scholasticism from lapsing into psychologism » (p. 299–300). In the background of this question is modern psychologism as in authors like John Locke and Bernard Bolzano and the notions of 'formal' truth versus 'transcendental' truth in Thomism. Broadly speaking, psychologism resulted from anthropocentric gnoseology (p. 311). As such it is an outcome of Suárezism that discussed the ontological status of cognition, and the main player was Arriaga. Idealism and realism plus a number of other '-isms' are the competing options. In the end, Bolzano appears as the legitimate heir to his « Prague predecessor Arriaga » (p. 342).

Chapter 6 investigates a predecessor of Leibniz and his 'best of all possible worlds'. Components are the notions of moral commitment to the 'choice of the best', probabilism, and the *mundus optimus*. The heroes are Diego Ruiz de Montoya and his pupil Diego Granado in Sevilla. The doctrine is that once God decided to create one out of possible things he also decided against creating any other such thing (p. 360–361). In that view, Leibniz was a latecomer (*Nachzügler*, p. 370), which seems to explain the contemporary critique of his *Theodicée* by the French Jesuits. Finally, Knebel publishes by way of extensive quotations in footnotes a lecture by

another Sevilla Jesuit, Jorge Hemelman (1574–1637) on divine providence and will and the necessity to create the *optimum* (p. 372–390).

The seventh chapter of this book deals with Friedrich von Spee's famous *Cautio criminalis*. Whereas this work is commonly known for having denounced the witch trials as juridically invalid because torture extorted from the victims such confessions that were no valid proofs of sorcery, Knebel discusses the implications for natural law and especially for the individual's freedom of acting against the interest of self-preservation. The dilemma of witch trials was that the outcome was always the death of the suspect: either through torture or execution, and not only that, but the victim would inevitably end up in hell. So, the question is (p. 400): is it at all possible to incriminate oneself for the sake of evading torture? Humans are masters of their bodies and lives and also of their reputation (p. 402). These were the considerations that led to the abolition of extorted confessions (p. 431).

The last chapter discusses the theorem « puella est domina sui corporis » in the context of rape and defloration. The problem was that an unmarried young woman 'owed' her virginity to her parents, who would lose their dowry if the daughter lost her virginity. Against that, one considered the right of the woman to consensual sexual engagement and also the right to remain unmarried. In this chapter, the hero is Étienne Bauny (d. 1649), the preferred Jesuit targeted by Blaise Pascal in his *Lettres provincials*, and the overall context is Jesuit probabilism.

Now a discussion of the title of the book and the introduction is in order. The title does not promise a discussion of what Jesuits might have contributed to modernity, rather, it opposes two concepts: that of 'Jesuit' and that of '*Neuzeit*'. Once, these concepts were mutually exclusive because modernity neglected Jesuit philosophy; in addition to that, 'modernity' does not actually exist because *Mittelalter* and *Neuzeit* are nothing but « Idola fori! » (popular prejudices – p. 79; cf. p. 25 on Protestant anti-Jesuit activism). Consequently, the pretended introduction reads as a polemical complaint about the disregard of early modern scholasticism by the leading philosophers and historians of philosophy. Just one example: Ernst Cassirer's four-volume *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* (1906) is insulted – without further information – as « Geschichtsklitterung » (fake history) for missing any treatment of Jesuit philosophy (p. 31). The otherwise innovative achievement of this work, namely, to integrate Renaissance philosophy into the neo-Kantian concept of philosophy, and the further development of Cassirer's philosophy towards anthropology (*Individuum und Kosmos*) and philosophy of history (*Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*; *An Essay on Man*), all this is eclipsed in Knebel's polemic. The fact that neo-Kantianism was overcome by Cassirer and thus made a fresh look into early modern philosophy, including scholasticism, at all possible could have informed the research.

The introduction claims that Jesuits are quasi synonymous with second scholasticism or Baroque scholasticism, although Knebel constantly cites Dominicans, Carmelites, Franciscans, etc. He also claims that Spain is the home of this school philosophy, if not of all philosophy (p. 80), and neglects that the Jesuits designed their teaching so that it could be continued everywhere. When he names them a « Bildungskonzern » (educational corporation – p. 1 and passim) he touches upon their main intentions. Furthermore, Knebel quotes next to Spaniards also French and Italian scholastics. Names that are missing in an overview of Jesuits in modernity are, for instance, Christoph Clavius, Athanasius Kircher, and Christoph Scheiner from Germany. When explaining the neglect of Jesuit philosophy in the world of Enlightenment and Protestantism, he identifies its cause with the political fight of the national powers against the Jesuits. But it should be noted that this had clearly motives in power politics because the Jesuits as confessors influenced the catholic princes; and that had nothing to do with Jesuit metaphysics.

The subtitle of the book: « Diskursarchäologische Streifzüge in die Philosophiegeschichte » is a combination of pretension and feigned modesty. Forays or excursions tend to be unplanned, incidental, and without preestablished results; something one may well leave out. « Discourse archeology » is, on the other hand, a highly loaded ambition. Knebel frequently labels his research with this term from Michel Foucault's *Les mot et les choses*. In pursuing the history of philosophy in terms of archeology, one directs the attention to the local and temporal context of a philosophy, its 'discourse' in the sense of commonly agreed interest, terminology, and patterns of argument. Most importantly, this type of research does not aim at extolling the big names; rather, it aims at understanding what the temporally and culturally remote thinkers intended themselves. Archeology does neither destroy nor appropriate ruins, it reconstructs them by understanding their own world. Archeology is, evidently, the opposite of Whiggish history of philosophy which reads past authors only for the sake of praising the progress made by the successors and the successful. Yet, this last feature is a characteristic of Knebel's research in that he appropriates Jesuits for the later ones. Except for the first and the eighth chapter, all chapter headings identify one author as the leader: Vázquez, Suárez, Izquierdo, Arriaga, Ruiz de Montoya, Spee. This is done in spite of the body of each chapter that abounds with references to countless other authors. In most cases, the thrust of the argument is to show that one Jesuit author is, indeed, a precursor of the more famous ones.

After these remarks, some comments are in order on the complaint about the forgetfulness of modern historiography with regard to Jesuit and other scholastic philosophy. Of the researchers who have contributed to this in recent decades, the following are not mentioned by Knebel: Ugo Baldini, Robert Bireley, Gianpaolo Brizzi, Daniel Haider, Karl Hengst, Ulrich Lehner, Riccardo Quinto, and Wilhelm

Schmidt-Biggemann, just to name a few. Schmidt-Biggemann is missing in the index of names, but he is cited on pages 10 and 395 as editor of books. The first case is the most conspicuous because it refers to *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie: Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts* (4 in 8 vols.). Correctly Knebel criticizes that its volume 1/1 (Basel 1998) has little to say about scholasticism and Jesuits in Spain. But he does not mention volume 4/1 (2001) that contains about 90 pages on Catholic school-philosophy in Germany, plus about 80 pages on school-philosophy in Reformed areas and about 100 pages on the Lutheran schools. Furthermore, Knebel polemicizes repeatedly against the old history of philosophy by Friedrich Ueberweg (since 1862); for instance: « Im *Überweg* hatten die Jesuiten nichts verloren » (The Jesuits had no business in the *Überweg*; p. 32). Only the 1907 edition added some remarks. What is strange is the fact that Knebel misspells Ueberweg as Überweg (except in the index of names); perhaps it was meant as a joke (Überweg as « super-way »?); possible, as the book is full of willful puns. What is more important, however, is the fact that the mentioned *Grundriss*, co-edited by Schmidt-Biggemann, was expressly published as the new edition of the old Ueberweg, *Grundriss*. Knebel cannot have been uninformed about that because both Schmidt-Biggemann and the author of the section on Catholic school-philosophy at the time of its production worked at the same Berlin university as Knebel.

The author claims what is timelessly valid (*zeitlos Gültigen*) is not the main focus of the book, and only uncharted territory (*Neuland*) has been broken, since there has not been enough time to cultivate what is already known (p. 80). With *Jesuit und Neuzeit* the reader has a comprehensive testimony of Knebel's scholarship and of epistemology, ontology, ethics, and law of early modern Jesuits.

EMMANUELE VIMERCATI (ED.), *THE RECEPTION OF JOHN PHILOPONUS' NATURAL PHILOSOPHY. ARISTOTELIAN SCIENCE FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE RENAISSANCE*, BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC, LONDON – NEW YORK – OXFORD – NEW DELHI – SYDNEY 2024 (BLOOMSBURY STUDIES IN THE ARISTOTELIAN TRADITION), XIV, 247 PP., ISBN: 9781350416277.

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The volume consists of the editor's introduction and of 13 chapters, each addressing a different subject. As Vimercati's introduction explains (p. 1), the volume originates from a cycle of workshops held at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome in 2022–2023. It is divided into three main parts, covering different time spans. Part I is devoted to Philoponus's natural philosophy against the background of late antique philosophy, Part II to the fortune of Philoponus's natural philosophy in the Arabic, Byzantine and Latin Middle Ages, and Part III to its fortune in the Renaissance. In what follows, I will provide a brief outline of each contribution, accompanied by some remarks. Given my lack of competence concerning the Renaissance period, my remarks will mostly deal with the contributions in parts I and II.

Part I: Late Antiquity (and Its Legacy)

Chapter 1 (« John Philoponus' absolute place and its reception by Francisco of Toledo ») by Ioannis Papachristou deals with Philoponus's theory of place and an episode of its Renaissance fortune. Papachristou outlines Philoponus's theory of place as a three-dimensional extension (a subject developed more fully in his recent monograph on the topic).[1] Such a theory is known for its departure from Aristotle's view of place as limit of the containing. Papachristou indicates the possibility of Philoponus's influence on the alternative views of internal and external space in the Renaissance, both relying on the notion of place as an extension. The Jesuit Francisco of Toledo, in his commentary on the *Physics* (1573), supports the former view, internal place, by resorting to Philoponus's characterisation of place as a measure of body. However, Papachristou stresses

[1] IOANNIS PAPACHRISTOU, *John Philoponus on Physical Place*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2021 (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy. De Wulf-Mansion Centre. Series I, LX).

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that this factual convergence takes place for very different ends: unlike Francisco, Philoponus did not conceive of place as internal to body, rather of body as coming to be in place, despite the fact that no place can be devoid of body.

Chapter 2 (« Philoponus on natural and impressed power ») by Emmanuele Vimercati stresses how Philoponus's unaristotelian revisions of the notion and role of power (δύναμις) allow him to accomplish a unified picture of the inner working of nature. On the one hand, in his commentary on *Physics* II, Philoponus departs from Aristotle in stressing the analogy, rather than the differences, between the movement of animate, inanimate, and simple bodies (i.e. the elements), insofar they all possess an inner principle of movement. On the other hand, in his fragmentary arguments from *Against Aristotle*, preserved by Simplicius, Philoponus criticises the proof for the infinity of movement from *Physics* VIII 1, 251a10–23 by denying that a natural being must pre-exist its potentiality for movement and receive it from an external cause. The criticism results in a revised picture which rethinks potentiality as an intrinsic property of substance and removes the necessity of an eternal succession of movers. Such a transfer of the potentiality for movement entirely within the movable is completed by Philoponus's rejection of the role of two external factors, place and medium, in the account of movement. Finally, according to Philoponus's account of heavenly motion, the outermost sphere is moved by divine power and moves the adjacent firesphere supernaturally (ὑπερφυής). A famous passage from Philoponus's *De opificio mundi*[2] provides a glimpse into the integration of all these motive powers into a single, consistent picture. The subject carefully analysed by Vimercati may provide ground for further interesting investigation. For instance, Vimercati himself mentions as still « controversial » (p. 27) the question concerning the inspiration (Stoic vs. Neoplatonic) of Philoponus's revised definition of nature as « life (ζωή) or a power (δύναμις) which has descended into bodies (καταδεδυκυῖα διὰ τῶν σωμάτων), and which moulds and manages them (διαπλαστικὴ αὐτῶν καὶ διοικιστική) » (Vimercati's translation, p. 26).[3] Additionally, one may wonder if Philoponus's account of power/potentiality as an intrinsic cause of movement could be linked to the account of the desire of bodies for their proper station provided by the corollary on place, within the framework of Philoponus's rejection

[2] Joannis Philoponi *De opificio mundi libri VII*, I, 12, ed. Gualterus Reichardt, Teubner, Leipzig 1897 (Scriptores sacri et profani, I), p. 28.26–29.7.

[3] Greek text in Ioannis Philoponi *In Aristotelis Physicorum libros tres priores commentaria*, ed. Hieronymus Vitelli, Reimer, Berlin 1887 (Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, 16), p. 197.34–35. On the issue see James E. McGuire, « Philoponus on *Physics* II 1: Φύσις, Δύναμις, and the Motion of the Simple Bodies », *Ancient Philosophy*, 5/2 (1985), p. 241–267; and Edward M. Macierowski, Richard F. Hassing, « John Philoponus on Aristotle's Definition of Nature », *Ancient Philosophy*, 8/1 (1988), p. 73–110.

of the Aristotelian notion of place and of its causal action on moving bodies.[4] Finally, one may wonder if, and how, Philoponus's view concerning the bodies' intrinsic possession of a power of motion is to be reconciled with a passage from his commentary on the *De anima* where Philoponus, in line with Aristotle's *Physics* VIII 4, claims that natural bodies are not moved by nature, rather, they are set in motion by an external mover.[5] This is specifically said to be the case of the movement of the elements moving towards their proper place, which according to this passage is a movement contrary to nature and can only be said to be according to nature in a qualified sense (i.e. insofar as it is toward their natural place). It is possible that the discrepancy is only apparent, or that its solution lies in the different origin of the material (e.g. Ammonius's teaching vs. Philoponus's own opinion); in any case, the subject may provide material for future research.

Chapter 3 (« Philoponus on the nature of the heavens. Revisiting some old debates »), by Marc-Antoine Gavray, covers a widely studied ground, that is, Philoponus's criticism of the incorruptibility of the heavenly substance. However, while this topic has been usually addressed with a focus on Philoponus's criticism of Aristotle's theory of aether in his *Against Aristotle*,[6] Gavray deserves credit for integrating the picture with similar criticism from other works by Philoponus, at the same time carefully considering how the context of provenance (e.g. the different polemical target or literary genre) may have affected Philoponus's treatment of the subject and thus rightly avoiding to jump to conclusions about the internal evolution of Philoponus's thought.

Chapter 4 (« John Philoponus on being human ») by Mark Edwards[7] focuses on Philoponus's view of the human soul both as a biblical commentator in the *De opificio mundi* and as an Aristotelian commentator. The gist of the author's analysis is that Philoponus held a Platonic interpretation of Aristotle, including his view concerning the soul's immortality and separability, which enabled him to bring Aristotle into agreement with Christian belief. To the author's discussion of this point, one may add that of course Philoponus did not achieve this « Platonisation

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4 Ioannis Philoponi *In Aristotelis Physicorum libros quinque posteriores*, ed. Hieronymus Vitelli, Reimer, Berlin 1888 (Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, 17), p. 581.18–31.

5 Ioannis Philoponi *In Aristotelis De anima libros commentaria*, ed. Michael Hayduck, Reimer, Berlin 1897 (Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, 15), p. 65.1–66.28 (the same text is mentioned by Knox in chapter 12 of the volume, albeit for entirely different reasons). The text can be contrasted with p. 120.24–33 (concerning the participation of the world soul even by inanimate bodies), rightly mentioned by Vimercati (p. 26 and footnote 31) as suggesting an assimilation between bodily power and soul.

6 The reference work is Christian Wildberg, *John Philoponus' Criticism of Aristotle's Theory of Aether*, De Gruyter, Berlin – New York 1988 (Peripatoi. Philologisch-historisches Studien zum Aristotelismus, 16).

7 Pages 66–67 of the contribution should be compared with Mark Edwards, *Aristotle and Early Christian Thought*, Routledge, London – New York 2019 (Studies in Philosophy and Theology in Late Antiquity), p. 161.

of Aristotle » himself; rather, in this regard he stood in a long tradition of Neoplatonic commentators of Aristotle, a notable case being Philoponus's own Alexandrian teacher Ammonius.

Part II: The Medieval Tradition

Chapter 5 by Carmela Baffioni is devoted to « Proclus, Philoponus and the Brethren of Purity on the eternity of the world ». It contains the first comparison between Philoponus's arguments against the eternity of the world and the encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity, thus allowing for the first time an assessment of their reciprocal relationship. Baffioni quotes (p. 83) *Ep*. 39 and 40 of the Brethen of Purity, both of which reject the notion that the world may at any instant subsist without God, who is its cause. The rejected analogies are those of the house and its builder, and of the book and its writer. The acceptable analogies are the speaker and his speech, the torch and its light, sunlight and air, fire and its heat, unity and number. While Baffioni rightly remarks that the analogies of the torch, sunlight, and fire are found in Philoponus too, it is noteworthy that at the same time some of them happen to be more widespread analogies either for Neoplatonic emanation or for the inner trinitarian relationships in Christian theology, also available in Arabic;[8] the same goes for the Brethren's analogy (*Ep*. 15, Baffioni p. 81), found in Syrianus[9] but spread via Pseudo-Dionysius (*De divinis nominibus* II, 4),[10] of the lamps illuminating or darkening a room at the same time as they are introduced or removed respectively. However, despite their use of Neoplatonic emanationistic imagery, the Brethren depart from emanationism in that they stress that God's production of the universe is not necessary, but it is the result of God's will.

Chapter 6 by David Twetten is devoted to « Averroes as critic and continuator within the heritage of Philoponus's philosophical theology ». Among the doctrinal elements that according to Twetten represent Philoponus's legacy to Averroes, the main one appears to be Averroes's critical reception of Philoponus's argument for the corruptibility of the universe based on the finitude of bodily power. Twetten rightly highlights Averroes's misreading of Alexander of Aphrodisias as a proponent of Philoponus's argument. Twetten explains this by pointing to Arabic version D15 of Alexander's *De providentia*. In this Arabic adaptation, entitled *On the*

[8] A famous example of the former is of course Plotinus, *Enn.* V 1[10], 6.25–39; for the latter, see some examples in Rachid Haddad, *La trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes (750–1050)*, Beauchesne, Paris 1985 (Beauchesne Religions), p. 119–120.

[9] Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, Brill, Leiden 1978 (Studien zur Problemgeschichte der antiken und mittelalterlichen Philosophie, 8), p. 197.

[10] *Corpus Dionysiacum I. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De divinis nominibus*, ed. Beate Regina Suchla, De Gruyter, Berlin – New York 1990 (Patristische Texte und Studien, 33), p. 127.4–128.2.

Governance of the Spheres (*Fī l-tadbīrāt al-falakiyya*), Philoponus's argument is incorporated into Alexander's text. Twetten takes the relevant Philoponian passage to be a « counterfactual statement » (p. 99), given the disavowal that immediately follows in the Arabic text as printed by Ruland; at the same time, according to Twetten the doctrine expressed by that disavowal may have served as the inspiration for Averroes's refutation of Philoponus's argument (p. 100). However, Ruland specifies that the disavowal at hand is found as a marginal note in the Escorial manuscript that he employed for his edition.[11] Therefore, on the one hand D15 simply contains Philoponus's argument, thus making it all the more conceivable that Averroes could read Alexander as a proponent of the Philoponian argument. On the other hand, the fact that the rejection of Philoponus's argument is a marginal note leaves open other possibilities concerning its exact relationship with Averroes's solution to Philoponus's argument (e.g. the marginal note could be inspired by, rather than inspire, Averroes's solution).

Chapter 7 by Tommaso De Robertis is entitled « Philoponus's natural philosophy in the medieval Byzantine world: Psychological and cosmological debates ». De Robertis's contribution is a welcome addition to scholarship concerning Philoponus's fortune in Byzantine philosophy. The chapter selects two specific doctrinal points of Philoponus's natural philosophy that possess at the same time philosophical and religious significance, in order to assess their Byzantine reception. The first point is Philoponus's doctrine of the soul's « double entelechy », from his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*; the other is Philoponus's criticism of Aristotle's theory of aether (itself a pillar of Aristotelian cosmology), set forth in his lost *Against Aristotle*, in part accessible to Byzantine scholars through Simplicius's commentaries on *On the Heavens* and on the *Physics*. The « double entelechy » doctrine turns Aristotle's open-ended statements about the immortality of the soul, or of a part of it only, into a positive theory of the immortality of the rational faculty of the soul. Philoponus's criticism of the Aristotelian fifth element of the heavenly sphere revolves around the invalidity of the inference from the circular movement of the heaven to its substance. Philoponus's « double entelechy » of the soul as well as several aspects of his criticism of aether reappear in Byzantine philosophy, thus attesting to the suitability of both these Philoponian tenets for the agenda of Byzantine philosophers.

Chapter 8 (« Philoponus and the renewal of Aristotelian cosmology in the late Latin Middle Ages ») by Alessandro Ghisalberti is devoted to some renowned modifications of Aristotelian natural philosophy during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Ghisalberti stresses the fact that such modifications result

[11] Hans-Jochen Ruland, « Die arabischen Fassungen von zwei Schriften des Alexander von Aphrodisias. Über die Vorsehung und Über das liberum arbitrium », Ph.D. Diss., Universität des Saarlandes, Saarbrücken 1976, p. 92.

from the encounter of the inner working of the Aristotelian universe with the notion of the radical contingency of the world and God's omnipotence, an encounter which was called for by Tempier's famous condemnation of 1277. Ghisalberti first introduces the most famous representative of the changing Aristotelian cosmology in Latin scholasticism, John Buridan. Buridan's crucial *Questions on the Heavens*, of which Ghisalberti provided an Italian translation,[12] manage to depart from Aristotle on a number of crucial issues thanks to the distinction between natural and absolute possibility. Thus, the copenetration or coexistence of bodies in the same physical space, as well as the existence of vacuum, the world's rectilinear motion, the unicity of the universe and of its centre, while impossible naturally, become possible hypotheses resting on divine omnipotence. However, Ghisalberti does not confine his reconstruction to Buridan. The chapter includes an outline of the history of impetus theory, one of the most famous contributions of Medieval Scholasticism to the revision of natural philosophy, which paved the way for the subsequent developments of the Scientific Revolution. Its starting point in late antiquity is Philoponus's revision of the Aristotelian account of motion at a distance in favour of the theory of a « borrowed power » initiated by the mover and dwelling in the moved object once it is no longer in contact with the mover. In addition to Buridan, who applied impetus theory to projectile motion, the acceleration of falling bodies, and heavenly motion, Ghisalberti includes mention of the Arabic philosophers who either upheld the theory (Avicenna) or criticised it yet transmitted it to the Latin Middle Ages by doing so (Averroes), as well as its proponents other than Buridan in Latin Scholasticism (such as Franciscus de Marchia). The variety of versions of the theory and of reasons for its rejection by Medieval philosophers shows the potential of this theory for laying bare their main assumptions in natural philosophy. Thus, for instance, among the Latin proponents, Oresme shares with Buridan the explanation of the heavenly movement through impetus theory (p. 136); however, unlike Buridan, who questioned the traditional role of the angelic intellects, Oresme appears to harmonise the two causes of explanation. Among the opponents, Averroes is mentioned as rejecting impetus theory, because in his view nature cannot act within and between bodies as if it were a soul (p. 135). Similarly, Ockham rejects the notion of an impressed force because he deems it to be causeless, thus preferring to provide aporetic statements on the subject (p. 134).

Part III: Renaissance

Chapter 9, « Why Aristotle? Patterns in Renaissance philosophy », by Paul Richard Blum, deals with Philoponus in an indirect way. The author analyses « some

[12] GIOVANNI BURIDANO, *Il cielo e il mondo. Commento al trattato «Del cielo» di Aristotele*, ed. ALESSANDRO GHISALBERTI, Rusconi, Milano 1983 (I classici del pensiero).

Renaissance editions, introductions and other programmatic statements on Aristotle [...] to see how the editors or commentators viewed the role and importance of this very philosopher » (p. 145). Both the introduction and the conclusion of the chapter indicate that the analysed texts, stemming from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, show a shifting interest in the Renaissance fortune of Aristotle, from moral to natural philosophy, corresponding to the transition from « humanist approach » to the « later methodic and scientific interest » (p. 158). Blum concludes that Philoponus's fortune is, naturally enough, especially linked with the latter stage of Aristotle's reception.

Chapter 10, « Philoponus's metaphysical cosmology in Renaissance debates », is authored by Pietro Daniel Omodeo. Omodeo's contribution deliberately departs from what we might call the traditional « genealogical » approach to Philoponus's fortune in the Renaissance – an approach which he deems to be classically illustrated by Koyré and Kuhn – in order to adopt a « more contextualist approach » (p. 167), i.e. an approach that shows how Philoponus's Renaissance fortune is embedded in the ongoing debates of the sixteenth century. Omodeo especially stresses Philoponus's role in what he labels « metaphysical cosmology », i.e. the metaphysical foundations of cosmology during that age. Thus, for instance, Philoponus's criticism of aether as a fifth heavenly substance appears to have anticipated and provided with a theoretical background the Renaissance debate over the fluidity of the heavens. At the same time, the Renaissance circulation of Philoponus's *Contra Proclum* (first published in Venice in 1535 at the hands of Vittore Trincavelli) provides a philosophical foundation for creationism within the framework of a heated debate over the eternity of the world, against the non-creationistic views maintained by intellectuals as diverse as the Paduan Aristotelian Cesare Cremonini, Nicolaus Cusanus, and Giordano Bruno. Philoponus's commentary on the *De anima*, which contains a distinctive solution to the issue of the immortality of the soul, joins the ranks of other Aristotelian commentators in elucidating this issue, at the same time providing a psychological analysis capable of contributing to the issue of the cause of celestial motion and the animation of the heavens (an issue that in the Aristotelian tradition goes back to the interpretation of *Metaphysics* XII and *De caelo* II). In this context, Omodeo mentions the relevance of the publication of Pseudo-Philoponus's commentary on *Metaphysics* by Francesco Patrizi (Ferrara, 1535).

Chapter 11, « Francesco Piccolomini (1523–1607) and Giacomo Zabarella (1533–1589) on Philoponus's definition of prime matter », by Antonio Petagine, explores the Renaissance fortune of Philoponus's concept of matter. In some of his works, particularly book XI of *Against Proclus*, Philoponus abandons the Aristotelian view of matter as a purely indeterminate substrate, in favour of its characterisation as essentially possessing three-dimensionality. Petagine shows that two of the most prominent Paduan Aristotelians of the fifteenth century, Piccolomini and

Zabarella, subscribe to important aspects of the Philoponian characterisation of matter, accommodating it into the scholastic debate over the potential or actual nature of matter and its relationship to dimensions.

Chapter 12 (« Philoponus's contribution to Copernicus's doctrine of gravity ») by Dilwyn Knox proposes an updated version of a hypothesis put forth by the author in some of his previous publications, to which he refers. Knox's hypothesis is that Copernicus's account of gravity in his *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* contains doctrinal echoes of Philoponus's commentary on the *De anima*, particularly concerning the non-natural motion of the particular elements detached from their main mass. Knox defends his own hypothesis against the rival hypothesis of Anna De Pace (who favours Plutarch's *De facie* as Copernicus's source) and against the criticism raised by the editors of the 2015 *Belles Lettres* edition of Copernicus's *De revolutionibus*.

Chapter 13 (« Philoponus in Galileo's early works ») by Flavia Marcacci presents the reader with a balanced assessment concerning the influence of Philoponus on Galileo's early works such as the collection of *Iuvenilia* and the *De motu antiquiora*, where Philoponus's name occurs with frequency. On the one hand, Marcacci points out the convergence of Philoponus's and Galileo's views concerning the creation of the world, the rejection of aether as a distinct heavenly element, and elemental motion; she also allows for the possibility that Philoponus's Neoplatonic theory of the « praeternatural » motion of the firesphere (i.e. a motion that is not natural for fire, but above its nature) influenced Galileo's formulation of a circular *motus neuter*, i.e. neither natural nor violent. On the other hand, Marcacci warns against overemphasising Philoponus's contribution to Galileo's thought: « this relevance should be limited to certain aspects of Galileo's perspective, without being overstressed in the absence of further philological evidence »; and she specifies that « a distinct line of influence from Philoponus to Galileo is often hard to recognize beyond the aspects explored in this chapter » (p. 231).

Overall, the volume refines and advances our knowledge of Philoponus's doctrines on natural philosophy on several points, most importantly those that entail a departure from 'orthodox' Aristotelianism. The width of the chosen chronological timeframe and the variety of linguistic milieus in relation to which Philoponus's fortune is investigated deserves special appreciation and makes the volume particularly useful for scholars, especially for those working in the fields of the history of philosophy and the history of science.

COLETTE SIRAT, *TEACHING AND STUDYING PHILOSOPHY IN JEWISH CULTURE DURING THE MIDDLE AGES*, BREPOLS, TURNHOUT 2025 (STUDIES ON THE FACULTY OF ARTS: HISTORY AND INFLUENCE), 134 PP., ISBN: 9782503614915.

ELLEN DE DONCKER
UCLOUVAIN

In *Teaching and Studying Philosophy in Jewish Culture during the Middle Ages*, Colette Sirat offers a work of remarkable clarity. Modest in length yet wide in chronological and geographical scope, this volume, published by Brepols in the series *Studies on the Faculty of Arts. History and Influence*, accomplishes something that has long been needed but rarely attempted: a synthetic account of philosophical pedagogy within medieval Jewish culture. Rather than rehearsing once more the doctrines of great thinkers in isolation, Sirat asks how philosophy was actually taught, transmitted, appropriated, and contested from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. The book represents the mature fruit of reflections she has developed over several decades, during which the theme of education in medieval Jewish contexts surfaced repeatedly in her scholarship and gave rise to a number of focused studies.[1] These are now gathered, further developed and integrated into

[1] COLETTE SIRAT, « Entering the Field of Philosophy: Provence, Mid-Fourteenth Century », in GEORGE J. BROOKE, RENATE SMITHUIS (eds.), *Jewish Education from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Studies in Honour of Philip S. Alexander*, Brill, Leiden 2017 (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, 100), p. 398–411; EAD., « *Studia* of Philosophy as Scribal Centers in Fifteenth-Century Iberia », in JAVIER DEL BARCO (ed.), *The Late Medieval Hebrew Book in the Western Mediterranean*, Brill, Leiden 2015 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 65), p. 46–69; EAD., « Le cursus des études et le cadre institutionnel et intellectuel chez les juifs », in COLETTE SIRAT, SARA KLEIN-BRASLAVY, OLGA WEIJERS (eds.), *Les méthodes de travail de Gersonide et le maniement du savoir chez les scolastiques*, Vrin, Paris 2003 (Etudes de philosophie médiévale, 86), p. 18–32; EAD., « L'enseignement des disciplines dans le monde hébreu », in OLGA WEIJERS, LOUIS HOLTZ (eds.), *L'enseignement des disciplines à la Faculté des arts (Paris et Oxford, XIIIe-XVe siècle). Actes du colloque international*, Brepols, Turnhout 1997 (Studia artistarum, études sur la faculté des arts dans les universités médiévales, 4), p. 495–509; EAD., « La philosophie et la science selon les philosophes juifs du Moyen Âge », in REIJO TÖRINOJA, ANJA INKERI LEHTINEN, DAGFINN FOLLESDAL (eds.), *Knowledge and the Sciences in Medieval Philosophy: Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Medieval Philosophy (S.I.E.P.M.), Helsinki 24–29 August 1987*, vol. I, Philosophical Society of Finland, Helsinki 1990 (Acta philosophica Fennica, 48), p. 250–260.

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a concise yet substantial volume that serves both as a thorough introduction to the subject and, potentially, as a handbook for students engaging with the growing field of Jewish educational history. Although interest in the history of Jewish education has increased in recent years,[2] no previous study has systematically addressed Jewish philosophical education in the Middle Ages. In this respect, Sirat's contribution is both timely and foundational.

The introduction establishes the very broad framework within which Sirat situates her inquiry. She sketches the early formation of what she calls the 'religions of the Book', whose predominance divided much of the known world into overlapping yet distinct cultural spheres. Jewish communities lived in both Christian and Muslim polities, negotiating their intellectual and social existence between majority cultures while preserving their own textual traditions. In the early Middle Ages, education centered primarily on the transmission of religious texts. Rabbanite sages accepted the Talmud as Oral Torah, whereas Karaites rejected it, and these divergent attitudes toward authority already implied distinct intellectual temperaments. Sirat is attentive to the importance of vernacular languages and to the plurality of linguistic registers in which Jewish life unfolded. This sensitivity to language becomes crucial once philosophy enters the picture. In the introduction, however, one would expect a meta-reflection on what counts as (philosophical) teaching in a Jewish Medieval context. Do our contemporary concepts of teacher, classroom, students still apply, as they might do in the case of the *yeshivot,* or do we need other frameworks to conceptualize Jewish philosophical pedagogy in its broadness? And does translation of philosophical texts, as a deliberate and creative act of knowledge transfer, already qualify as a form of philosophical instruction?

Sirat *does* specify what she means by 'Hebrew philosophy': she does not just refer to works composed in Hebrew, but rather to philosophy used by Jews and embedded in Jewish intellectual networks. Many philosophical texts circulated in Arabic, sometimes in Hebrew characters; others were translated into Hebrew from Arabic or, more rarely, from Latin. These translations formed part of a vast movement of knowledge transfer that characterized the Abbasid world and, later, Christian Europe. Furthermore, Sirat underscores the instability of Hebrew philosophical vocabulary in this period: there was no fixed technical lexicon, and terms fluctuated according to translator, region, and context. Sirat's attention to this point offers a new perspective to the growing research on Jewish Medieval

[2] For instance, BARRY CHAZAN, ROBERT CHAZAN, BENJAMIN M. JACOBS, *Cultures and Contexts of Jewish Education*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2017; KARINA MARTIN HOGAN, MATTHEW GOFF, EMMA WASSERMAN (eds.), *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, SBL Press, Atlanta 2017 (Early Judaism and Its Literature, 41); GEORGE J. BROOKE, RENATE SMITHUIS (eds.), *Jewish Education from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Studies in Honour of Philip S. Alexander*, Brill, Leiden 2017 (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, 100).

philosophical vocabulary,[3] not as merely linguistic developments, but as traces of contact, of groups of students, of schools and of transmission between teacher and student.

The introduction also offers a brief overview of the Islamic world between the ninth and twelfth centuries, that carefully delineates the intellectual currents that would also later shape Jewish pedagogy. Indeed, two rationalist tendencies flourished within Islam and found echoes in Judaism. The first, *kalām*, was adopted by Rabbanites as well as by Karaite scholars, often referred to as *mutakallimūn* well into the modern period. The second current was rooted in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy and the sciences inherited from the Greeks and transmitted by Christian and Muslim scholars. This latter trend was frequently regarded as 'external sciences' and aroused suspicion in both Jewish and Islamic circles. Yet from the twelfth century onward, especially after the Almohad persecutions in Spain prompted migrations to Christian kingdoms and more tolerant Muslim regions, Jewish intellectuals increasingly engaged with Aristotelianism in sustained and creative ways. Arabic remained a major literary language for Jews even after their relocation, and philosophical study in Hebrew blossomed particularly in Provence, Spain, and Italy between 1200 and 1600. However, in Ashkenaz, as Sirat underlines, resistance to philosophical study was more pronounced; there, the Talmud and its commentaries dominated the curriculum, and the dialectical style known as *pilpul* flourished.

Sirat's first chapter, devoted to the twelfth century, traces the 'discovery' of science from Spain and southeastern Italy. The Tibbonid family emerges as central in this process, translating Arabic works into Hebrew and composing original treatises for a cultivated audience. Sirat rightly insists on the sociological dimension of this development. Philosophy was not merely an elite pastime; it generated popular enthusiasm and heated controversy. The translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed* by Samuel ibn Tibbon proved decisive in opening the work of Maimonides to Jews in Christian Europe. Yet it also triggered a bitter dispute culminating in excommunications in 1232.

The second and third chapters, treating the thirteenth century, form the heart of the book. Sirat situates the growth of philosophical study within specific urban and social contexts. Towns in Provence and Italy, characterized by relative

[3] For instance, Reimund Leicht, Giuseppe Veltri (eds.), *Studies in the Formation of Medieval Hebrew Philosophical Terminology*, Brill, Leiden 2020 (Studies in Jewish History and Culture, 57); Sandra Debenedetti Stow, « Il giudeo-italiano dal medioevo al primo Rinascimento: Caratteristiche, metodologia, studi e sviluppi », *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 82/2–3 (2016), p. 257–284; Giancarlo Schirru, « Particolarità grafiche e fonetiche nei testimoni del glossario trecentesco di Yəhudah Romano », in Laura Minervini, Bernardino Pitocchelli (eds.), *Studi sui testi giudeo-italiani del medioevo e della prima età moderna*, Éditions de linguistique et de philologie, Strasbourg 2025, p. 61–96.

material ease and more relaxed relations among religious communities, fostered a middle class receptive to science and philosophy. Philosophical ideas entered Jewish culture not only through formal treatises but also through scriptural exegesis, poetry, and polemics. Sirat is particularly attentive to the production of encyclopaedias, introductions, and glossaries designed to assist students unfamiliar with Arabic sources. Some of these were composed by scholars without knowledge of Arabic, who relied on oral transmission and partial access to Latin learning; others were written by scientists fully trained in the Arabic sciences, producing genuine encyclopaedic syntheses.

Here, Sirat's methodological commitment becomes evident. Because Jewish medieval philosophy was not institutionally organized at the communal level, she relies on manuscript evidence: the number of extant copies, their scripts, marginalia, and personal annotations. « The only incontestable testimony of reading is writing » (p. 19), she observes, and this principle guides her meticulous descriptions of codices. Variants and glosses testify to oral transmission and to the lively discussions that accompanied textual study. The examples appended to the volume, namely *London, British Library, Add.* 14763 (a 1242 copy of the *Guide*) *Paris, BnF hébr. 956* (with the title *Shushan ha-Limudim,* i.e., *The Lys of the studies,* possibly a manual of philosophy used in the middle of the 14th century by the circle of scholars studying philosophy in Provence), and *Paris, BnF hébr. 1005* [4] (an elementary philosophical compendium), are integral to her argument. Through them, she reconstructs circles of scholars, for instance, the so-called *meʿayyenim* of Provence, and glimpses the intellectual formation of students who moved from introductory manuals to the middle commentaries of Averroes.

The fourth chapter highlights the fourteenth century in Provence and Spain as a period of extraordinary vitality. The number of scientist-philosophers is indeed remarkable. The Hebrew translations of the Ibn Tibbon family and many others had rendered many texts accessible. Especially the commentaries of Averroes on Aristotle became foundational texts, with the 'short commentaries' crucial for Jewish students in Provence, Spain and Italy. A more-or-less regular philosophical cursus emerges, including Al-Farabi's classification of sciences, the 'short' commentaries of Averroes, Maimonides's *Guide* and other works. Jewish students first absorbed Jewish traditions, often through the commentary of Abraham ibn Ezra, before turning to science. Astrology, integrated into medicine and coloured by Neoplatonic motifs, flourished. Knowledge of Latin among Jews increased, and Christian logic began to circulate within Jewish milieus. The curriculum described in the *Shushan ha-Limudim* (*Paris, BnF hébr. 956,* cited above), where works of Averroes and al-Ghazali are copied and commented, as part of 'metaphysics' to be

[4] Sirat addresses this manuscript and its contents more in detail in SIRAT, « Entering the Field of Philosophy ».

studied at the very end of the cursus of sciences, illustrates a manual of philosophy used at the end of the thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth century. Yet, not all students proceeded to metaphysics, and those who did formed relatively small scholarly circles devoted to speculative inquiry, called *meʿayyenim* ('searchers').

The fifteenth century, marked by the Disputation of Tortosa and the expulsions from Iberian territories, presents a more precarious landscape. Jews were excluded from Christian universities, yet they modelled their own institutions on university structures. *Yeshivot* incorporated philosophical and scientific texts alongside traditional study, with the *yeshivot hokhmot hitzoniyot* as schools of philosophy and science next to the more traditional *yeshivot talmudiot,* where Talmud and religious matters were studied. The existence of *yeshivot hokhmot hitzoniyot,* or, as Sirat calls them, '*yeshivot* of philosophy', is well attested in at least nine manuscripts, and they provide information on the texts studied there – philosophical texts such as Averroes's commentaries and Maimonides's *Guide* and other Jewish philosophical texts, and some scientific books. Also the spread of printing, the growing knowledge of Latin, and the diffusion of Kabbalah transformed intellectual horizons in the fifteenth century. Sirat concludes by contrasting the defensive posture of Spanish thinkers, who erected barriers around the Torah in response to external pressures, with the openness of Italian scholars to the new currents of thought that heralded the Renaissance. In this context, Jewish thinkers can no longer be confined within a narrowly 'medieval' frame; they actively participate in the broader cultural ferment of the Quattrocento.

Among the great merits of Sirat's book is her provision of scholarly tools. She directs readers to resources such as Jacob Klatzkin's *Thesaurus philosophicus linguae hebraicae*, Giuseppe Sermoneta's Hebrew-Italian philosophical glossary,[5] and the list of glossaries compiled by her student Jean-Pierre Rothschild.[6] She offers clear classifications of the sciences and concise yet informative portraits of major thinkers, always attentive to their geographical and intellectual environments. Her discussion of Maimonides's *Guide* is particularly lucid, and offers a great

[5] GIUSEPPE SERMONETA, *Un glossario filosofico ebraico-italiano del XIII secolo*, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, Roma 1969.

[6] JEAN-PIERRE ROTHSCHILD, « Remarques sur la tradition manuscrite du glossaire hébreu-italien du commentaire de Moïse de Salerne au *Guide des égarés.* En appendices : note sur les glossaires médicaux hébreux, liste des manuscrits hébreux contenant des glossaires », in JACQUELINE HAMESSE, DANIELLE JACQUART (eds.), *Lexiques bilingues dans les domaines philosophique et scientifique (Moyen Âge – Renaissance). Actes du Colloque international organisé par l'École Pratique des Hautes Études-IVe section et l'Institut de Philosophie de l'Université Catholique de Louvain (Paris, 12–14 juin 1997),* Brepols, Turnhout 2001 (Textes et études du Moyen Âge, 14), p. 49–88.

overview and summary of its main points, picked up by other Medieval Jewish teachers.

The very richness of Sirat's synthesis, however, invites further reflection. What, precisely, counts as 'philosophical teaching'? The emphasis throughout the volume falls predominantly on metaphysics and the sciences that support it. Ethics, although present in the sources and undeniably central to thinkers such as Maimonides, appears less foregrounded in the reconstruction of curricula. One might ask whether the ethical formation implicit in scriptural exegesis, homiletics, and communal instruction should be considered part of philosophical pedagogy. A more substantial issue concerns Ashkenaz. Sirat presents it largely as a monolithic bastion of Talmudic traditionalism opposed to philosophy. While this portrayal corresponds to dominant narratives of medieval Jewish intellectual history, recent scholarship suggests a more nuanced picture.[7] The study of Aristotelian science formed a recognized, if limited,[8] current in late medieval Central Europe, especially in and around Prague, where Jewish readers encountered Hebrew translations of southern philosophical works. Though many Ashkenazic scholars regarded philosophy with suspicion, fearing its impact on halakhic reasoning and traditional exegesis, philosophical motifs nonetheless entered religious discourse by the late fourteenth century. A small circle of scholars engaged systematically with Aristotelian texts, discussed their compatibility with tradition and Kabbalah, and even sought to disseminate philosophical learning more broadly. Philosophy remained marginal rather than dominant, yet it was neither wholly absent nor entirely alien to Ashkenazic culture. A final, minor reservation concerns a few editorial oversights that escaped proofreading, including the inadvertent repetition of a paragraph.

These reservations, however, do not diminish the achievement of the book. On the contrary, they raise questions that stimulate future research. By foregrounding pedagogy, Sirat compels us to reconsider the social and material

[7] Milan Žonca, « Menahem ben Jacob Shalem and the Study of Philosophy in Late Medieval Prague », in Ota Pavlíček (ed.), *Studying the Arts in Late Medieval Bohemia: Production, Reception and Transmission of Knowledge*, Brepols, Turnhout 2021 (Studia Artistarum, 48), p. 27–47; Tamás Visi, « The Emergence of Philosophy in Ashkenazic Contexts: The Case of Czech Lands in the Early Fifteenth Century », *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 8 (2009), p. 213–243.

[8] David Berger, « Polemic, Exegesis, Philosophy, and Science: On the Tenacity of Ashkenazic Modes of Thought », *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 8 (2009), p. 27–39; against Ephraim Kupfer who proposed a too systematic and widespread use of philosophy amongst Ashkenazi Jews: Ephraim Kupfer, « Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-meʾot ha-14–15 (Concerning the Cultural Image of Ashkenazic Jewry and its Sages in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries) », *Tarbiẓ*, 42 (1973), p. 113–147.

conditions under which philosophy lived within Jewish communities. She demonstrates that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries prepared the way for the fourteenth-century efflorescence of philosophical study, and that the fifteenth century, far from representing mere decline, integrated Jewish thinkers into the wider transformations of the Renaissance. In doing so, she confirms insights advanced by scholars such as Giuseppe Veltri regarding the under-studied role of Judaism in Renaissance culture.[9]

Sirat's volume is thus both a synthesis and an invitation. It provides a coherent line through diverse writings and contexts, highlights the versatility of Jewish teachers, and opens a window onto a period that has too often « figured scarcely in the cartography or chronology of the history of Jewish thought ».[10] By attending to manuscripts, glossaries, curricula, and controversies, she invites to view the lived reality of philosophical learning. The book stands as an instructive starting point for further research on the education of Jewish philosophy in the later Middle Ages.

[9] GIUSEPPE VELTRI, *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb: Foundations and Challenges in Judaism on the Eve of Modernity*, Brill, Leiden 2009 (Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 8); GIUSEPPE VELTRI, *Il Rinascimento nel pensiero ebraico,* Paideia, Turin 2020 (Biblioteca di Cultura Ebraica Italiana, 3).

[10] JEAN-PIERRE ROTHSCHILD, *Moise b. Sabbatai, lecteur juif du Livre des causes et adversaire de la Kabbale, en Italie, vers 1340*, Brepols, Turnhout 2018 (Philosophy in the Abrahamic Traditions of the Middle Ages, 2), p. 1.

RUDI TE VELDE, *METAPHYSICS BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE: THOMAS AQUINAS ON METAPHYSICS AS A SCIENCE*, ASCHENDORFF VERLAG, MÜNSTER 2021 (BEITRÄGE ZUR GESCHICHTE DER PHILOSOPHIE UND THEOLOGIE DES MITTELALTERS, TEXTE UND UNTERSUCHUNGEN, N. F., 87), 246 PP., ISBN: 9783402103074, 9783402103081 (E-BOOK PDF).

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Rudi te Velde's recent book, *Metaphysics Between Experience and Transcendence*, a substantial (and somewhat creative) study of the nature of metaphysics, is certainly deserving of a place alongside some of the most important works of Thomistic metaphysics written by such scholars as John Wippel, Lawrence Dewan and Cornelio Fabro. This work is a circling meditation on its central theme: « the movement from physics to metaphysics » and especially « the double movement to the subject and to the principles of the subject » of metaphysics (p. 226). In this way metaphysics is between experience and transcendence as the metaphysician sees that « the whole of being, that is, the multiple and diversified being of the world, as given to us in experience, is ultimately not intelligible as being, *inquantum est ens*, unless it is reduced to a first principle of being, which is not itself part of that whole » (p. 30).

The first chapter considers metaphysics in its medieval context and is especially concerned with the differing conceptions of the nature of metaphysics. Te Velde touches on the positions of Averroes and Avicenna and correctly notes that Aquinas « adopted the Avicennian model » (p. 20). Te Vede then goes on to contrast Aquinas's understanding of metaphysics with that of Siger of Brabant (and briefly to that of Scotus), who lacks the « reductive movement » of metaphysics which is present in Aquinas's conception. Importantly, for Siger, being qua being includes God and « opens a space prior to the distinction of God and creation » (p. 20). What this means is that the consideration of God becomes, in some sense, just one more task of the metaphysician, whereas for Aquinas arriving at the knowledge of God is « not simply part of the business of metaphysics » but is its principal aim and goal without which being qua being cannot be rendered intelligible. After this te Velde considers John Haldane's understanding of metaphysics and concludes that it is too strongly influenced by the early modern distinction between general and special metaphysics and so

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again, like Siger, lacks the reductive movement and conceives of metaphysics as in some way independent from the consideration of God. As such, this conception of metaphysics loses the classical focus on the notion of « being as expressing the intrinsic intelligibility of things » (p. 38). This contrast to Haldane would also help to differentiate the actual position of Aquinas from so many of the Thomistic manuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which follow, somewhat uncritically, the division of general and special metaphysics.

While this first chapter is insightful insofar as it explicates Aquinas's understanding of metaphysics and how it differs from other medieval and modern conceptions, it is also valuable insofar as it acknowledges the Avicennian lens through which Aquinas interprets Aristotle's (apparently) disparate remarks concerning the nature of metaphysics as a science of first causes, the divine and being qua being. Still, one wonders if there is not a Dionysian element in Aquinas's thought conditioning the Avicennian. For Aquinas, like Avicenna, Siger and Scotus and contra Averroes, the subject of metaphysics is being qua being and not God. However, for Aquinas, God is beyond being – beyond *ens commune* – and this seems to be Aquinas's interpretation of Dionysius's frequent remarks that God is beyond being, while still being *ipsum esse*. Thus, following Dionysius, God is at once beyond being and at the same time, following Avicenna's identification of essence and existence in the *necesse esse per se*, God is *ipsum esse per se subsistens*.

The second chapter turns to the three degrees of abstraction and the famous, and thorny, issue of *separatio*. The two main questions of this chapter are, first, what is *separatio* and, secondly, how one can know that being « is separable from matter » or need not be material (p. 51)? The degree of metaphysical abstraction, *separatio*, is constitutive of metaphysics and « is special in the sense that the intelligibility of being is in itself free from matter and need not be made free » (p. 64). Thus, for te Velde, it is not so much that we discover being qua being through *separatio* but rather the being which is presupposed in every act of the mind is « uncovered in its intrinsic intelligibility, by positing it as being free from matter » (p. 67). Additionally, in this chapter te Velde cautions us against seeing the role of judgment as our way of « reaching out » to the real or bridging the gap between the mind and real existents since for Aquinas, because being is the proper object of the intellect, there is no gap with which to begin (p. 66). Finally, te Velde argues against the position of Benedict Ashley, that prior knowledge of immaterial being is required to ground the *separatio*. The first issue is that it is *inconveniens*, we might say, for prior knowledge of the Unmoved Mover, which for Aquinas is God, to be required so that we have access to the metaphysical consideration of being and then arrive at the knowledge of God's existence as the cause of being qua being. For te Velde this is « close to a vicious circle » (p. 68). The second, and more substantial worry, is that for te Velde to prove the existence of an immaterial being

« one already needs to have access to the notion of being according to its metaphysical degree of intelligibility » (p. 69).

With regard to this chapter, first, te Velde's last point here could, I think, be strengthened by a brief consideration of the Fourth Way. Critics of the Fourth Way have at times argued that since it moves from gradations, then it ought to arrive at some being which is also, for example, the biggest, hairiest or smelliest. However, this argument does not deal with all manner of gradations, but with the transcendental perfections as found according to diverse grades within things. Thus, it must already be understood that for these perfections to lead to something that is most perfect and immaterial, that they must be, in themselves, independent from matter. Otherwise, the argument could only lead to a most perfect material being which, for Aquinas, would be impossible.

Secondly, one wonders if te Velde's position does not perhaps fall back into that of Ashley since, according to te Velde, the argument from motion at the end of Aristotle's *Physics* is neither physical nor metaphysical but « proves the necessity of making a transition from physics to metaphysics » (p. 73). However, would not Ashley essentially agree with this claim, since it is the argument from the *Physics* that is the gateway to metaphysics? Viewed in this light, it might be the case that te Te Velde and Ashley only disagree on whether it should be regarded as a « physical proof ». Furthermore, what does this mean for the integrity of physics as a science distinct from metaphysics if the argument at the end of the *Physics* is « neither physical nor metaphysical in character » (p. 73), especially since Aquinas says in *De Trinitate* V.2 ad 3 that natural science treats of the First Mover, not as its subject but as the end toward which it tends? Does this not make the argument proper to physics, showing that both physics and metaphysics arrive at knowledge of God through their own proper principles? And if the argument is not proper to physics, would this not render the investigation of mobile being incomplete? However, te Velde argues that the argument from motion is not based solely on an empirical fact, since that would make it an empirical argument. Rather, the argument's « underlying assumption » is that « nature is posited as being » and ultimately shows that « the whole of changeable reality as it falls under human experience would not be intelligible qua being if it were taken to be all there is, as Aristotle argues » (p. 73). Yet, if this is the case, as Aquinas says often in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, it pertains to the metaphysician to consider sensible substance qua substance or qua being. And so, to consider the realm of nature qua being or qua intelligibility is not the domain of the natural scientist but of the metaphysician. But would this then not make the argument at the end of the physics a metaphysical argument, proceeding from the distinctive metaphysical vantagepoint on reality?

The third chapter is devoted to *resolutio*, the process of « reducing something to its ground » upon which it depends for its intelligibility (p. 83). It is through this

process that « human thought becomes metaphysical » (p. 75). Such a process is necessary because an understanding of being, as the *primum cognitum*, is implicit within the mind's very first contact – and every subsequent engagement – with reality. Nevertheless, not every person is a metaphysician. Thus, as Aquinas writes concerning the discovery of the « object domain of metaphysics » (p. 76): *haec enim transphysica inveniuntur in via resolutionis, sicut magis communia post minus communia*. In this way being becomes the explicit object of philosophical investigation.

As it pertains to metaphysics, *resolutio* is twofold. There is the *resolutio secundum rationem* by which one proceeds from less universal to more universal intelligibilities or formalities and finally arrives at the consideration of being qua being and those properties that follow on being as such. Secondly, there is the *resolutio secundum rem* by which one proceeds from effects to causes and simultaneously arrives at knowledge of God as the universal cause of all being and the knowledge of creation. As te Velde observes, this means that creation « can only be conceived from a metaphysical standpoint » (p. 98).

In this chapter te Velde offers an interesting interpretation of the relation between the *resolutio secundum rationem* and the *resolutio secundum rem* which merits further reflection and discussion from fellow scholars of Aquinas. For te Velde, it seems that the *resolutio secundum rationem* is not exactly the « condition » for the possibility of the *resolutio secundum rem* – at least insofar as this language suggests two « distinct » stages or « steps » of metaphysical inquiry (p. 87, note 146). The worry is that to misconstrue this twofold *resolutio* is to compromise the « inner coherence of metaphysics » (p. 87). For te Velde, this is, it seems, exemplified in Wippel's methodology in his *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* where he first analyzes the metaphysical structures of finite being independently from its divine ground. As te Velde writes:

> what I find problematic in this approach is the idea that, while speaking of 'the structure of finite being', we could, for the time being, disregard the theological part of metaphysics and restrict our attention to the complex ontology of the world. But this goes against Aquinas's metaphysical intention (p. 105).

And so, once thought becomes metaphysical it, *ipso facto,* becomes theological as well (p. 105). For te Velde, it seems that we ought not conceive of an established ontological study of finite being which could be conducted independently of the knowledge of a « transcendent cause of being » since « the intelligibility of reality cannot be fully accounted for before the absolute, the *primum ens*, is reached and affirmed » (p 87). Turning to *Summa Theologiae* I.44.2 where both modes of metaphysical *resolutio* are at play, te Velde understands them to be « two sides of the same coin » (p. 88). Thus « when the *resolutio* of reason... finally leads to the discovery of the common dimension of being, then at the same time it will be

apparent that this common being, in each thing present in a particularised manner, must be reduced to the common cause of being » (p. 87–88). The simultaneous uncovering of being qua being and the arrival at the knowledge of the universal cause of being qua being are, then, indicative of *intellectus* or the « intellectual-intuitive mode of knowing » which characterizes metaphysics (p. 88). In support of this interpretation, while analyzing *Summa Theologiae* I.44.2, te Velde writes:

> the text offers no argument to prove the existence of such a cause. It is as if, from the metaphysical viewpoint, the dependency of all things on a universal cause is immediately apparent. Once the intellect has discovered being in common, the subject of metaphysics, it immediately apprehends the reference of the subject to its principles, that is, the transcendent cause of being. As far as I can see, there is no explicit discursive reasoning which concludes to the existence of the 'principle' on the basis of the 'subject' of metaphysics. There is, strictly regarded, no step of discursive reasoning going from ontology to theology (p. 99).

Concerning a point of clarification, if this is an accurate characterization of Aquinas's understanding of metaphysical progression (and some scholars of Aquinas might very well not agree), and even if there is « no step of discursive reasoning going from ontology to theology », is there not at least still a logical (and not necessarily temporal) priority – for us – on the discovery of being as common to all things?

The fourth chapter, devoted to the categorical division (or differentiation) of being and the transcendentals, opens with a consideration of the Aristotelian background to the categories and an analysis of *De Veritate* I.1. Te Velde, however, notes the Avicennian lens through which Aquinas approaches the Aristotelian categories as it was from Avicenna that Aquinas took the teaching that « nothing is posited in a genus by reason of its esse but only by reason of its essence » and « that everything which belongs to a genus must have an essence distinct from its essence » (p. 119–120). In this way the « categorical order of reality is seen to be a particular way of having something universal » in virtue of which the « transcendental character » of being « comes into view » and so can be realized as something « not absolute, existing in and from itself » (p. 121).

In addition to an insightful analysis of the Platonic elements at work within Aquinas's metaphysics, due principally to the *Divine Name*s of Dionysius and the *Liber de Causis* (p. 126–132), in this chapter te Velde offers some cautionary remarks about regarding metaphysics as a science of the transcendentals. As te Velde notes, Aquinas never regards metaphysics as a science of the transcendentals. Such a characterization is more indicative of the shift undergone in the thirteenth century from a theological to an ontological conception of metaphysics (p. 137). Again, this covers over the essential reductive movement of metaphysics from

experience to transcendence. In fact, such an understanding of metaphysics is more akin to a Scotistic or « conceptualistic approach » which lacks the reductive movement and is rooted in a concept of being which is prior to and attempts to embrace both the finite and infinite within a broader horizon (p. 139–140).

The fifth chapter is dedicated to analogy. Analogy is expressive of the « intelligible connections » the mind makes between things in different genera and, in the case of God, even between being as a whole and that which transcends every generic and categorical mode of being. As such analogical predication employs a « semantic transfer » to attempt to simultaneously express the similarity and difference between the analogates (p. 158). In this way « difference » is « a constitutive part of the 'intelligible connection' which underlies analogical sameness » (p. 150). Furthermore, analogy, te Velde observes, is « located at the very center of the double metaphysical movement towards the subject of metaphysics » and the cause of its subject (p. 141). Te Velde applies the term « transcendental analogy » to the being which is predicated analogically of the ten categories and is arrived at via the *resolutio secundum rationem* and applies the term « theological analogy » to the order of creatures to God which is discovered via the *resolutio secundum rem*.

The order of creatures to God is particularly important insofar as the failure to keep this in mind leads to the erroneous understanding of analogy as an attempt to bridge the gap between the infinite and finite in virtue of a concept which can « stretch » or « extend » to both God and creatures. Such a view, it seems, implicitly conceives of God as an instance of being, himself contained within *ens commune* (p. 151). Instead, creatures only are in virtue of their similitude and order to God. To use Aquinas's example of pure subsisting whiteness, if such a thing existed there could be no more universal analogate or concept of whiteness which could contain both it and the particular white things which participate in it. To use a different image, there can be no third analogate or concept in virtue of which a woman's portrait would bear its likeness to her face. Rather, her face would simply be the exemplar to which the portrait would be the analogical likeness and to which it would be ordered. No all embracing « stretch » concept would be needed (or intelligibly could) bridge the gap between and ground the likeness of her face to her portrait.

Te Velde states that the metaphysical foundation for this correct understanding of analogy can been seen in Dionysius's statement that God is not a this or a that but is *omnia ut causa omnium* (p. 163). As such, God comprehends within his absolute simplicity the whole of being and so he

> cannot be characterised in opposition to something else, or as a part of a whole, but only in terms of the whole of the God-world complex: God is that whole, in the manner of the cause, thus as gathering (*praehabet*) the distinct manifold of the world

> in his simple unity; the world is that same whole, but in the manner of the effect, a differentiated order of many and diverse things. Dionysius's formula emphasises that we cannot posit the existence of the world and then add to this, from the outside, another reality of God, ending up with two distinct realities (p. 164).

In the sixth chapter te Velde continues his circling meditation on metaphysics as mediating between experience and transcendence and investigates the inner logic of the reductive movement of metaphysics. Here one of the major themes that is treated in detail are the first principles of all intellectual life which are at once naturally known and, in a sense, derived from sense knowledge (p. 174). In particular, being is known « spontaneously » and « immediately » in the minds very first contact with reality. This expresses the mind's always already « being-in-contact-with-reality » (p. 175). As « these first principles virtually contain all the knowledge which can be derived from them » but still cannot « carry us beyond that which we can know from objects grasped by the senses » (p. 176) this naturally leads to the analogy of the human intellect to the eye of an owl. Nevertheless, insofar as the owl has eyes it still has a natural affinity for the sun. In an analogous way, even though the human intellect must begin with what is most intelligible to it but which is least intelligible in itself and proceed to what is most intelligible in itself, still insofar as the proper object of the intellect is being there remains in the human person an inclination or orientation to arrive at knowledge of the First Cause of all reality (p. 180–181). Although te Velde does not refer to it, a relevant text that would pertain to the point under discussion is found in *Summa Theologiae* II-II.2.3 where Aquinas writes *natura autem rationalis, inquantum cognoscit universalem boni et entis rationem, habet immediatum ordinem ad universale essendi principium*.

In the seventh and final chapter te Velde addresses two especially prevalent challenges to the possibility of metaphysics in the modern world. The first is the challenge of a scientistic naturalism while the other is a Heideggerian inspired critique of metaphysics as onto-theology (p. 197–198). In this chapter, in the course of critiquing naturalism, te Velde draws an interesting connection between Aristotle's remarks in *Metaphysic*s IV and Newman's *Idea of a University* as both thinkers saw the need of a more universal perspective to integrate the distinctive particular branches of scientific inquiry (p. 202). As such, the committed naturalist overlooks the way in which the various empirical scientific disciplines depend on deeper and more fundamental principles for their intelligibility; principles which they themselves do not examine and which if they did they would (by definition) no longer be empirical sciences. In addition to this, te Velde observes the various ontological claims that are uncritically made by such figures as Richard Dawkins and notes the way in which they misconstrue the God-world relationship as that of two extrinsic entities added together.

In addressing the second challenge, the Heideggerian charge of onto-theology, te Velde compares Aquinas's understanding of being to that of Suarez and suggests that « in Suarez's conceptualistic approach to metaphysics, we are much closer to Heidegger's onto-theology » (p. 2015). Finally, in addressing the attempt to have theology without being te Velde takes up as something of a test-case God's immutability, God's promises and the philosophical presuppositions in Scripture. As such te Velde concludes that « the metaphysical thinking of God in terms of being, as found with Aquinas, is not necessarily opposed to the hermeneutical approach to religious belief [...] but rather is presupposed by it » (p. 220, 225).

In conclusion, te Velde's *Metaphysics Between Experience and Transcendence* is an excellent treatment of the nature and methodological progression of metaphysics, written by a master metaphysician. This book contains much that deserves careful consideration and is one which this reviewer has himself returned to several times. Indeed, no review can do justice to the wealth and depth of metaphysical reflection present in this text. While not everything in the book will garner universal agreement from scholars of Aquinas and other metaphysicians, it is a very valuable contribution to metaphysical research and is a tremendous accomplishment.

ALESSANDRO MULIERI, SERENA MASOLINI, JENNY PELLETIER (EDS.), *MARSILIUS OF PADUA. BETWEEN HISTORY, POLITICS, AND PHILOSOPHY*, BREPOLS, TURNHOUT 2023 (DISPUTATIO 36), 440 PP., ISBN: 9782503601335 (HARDBACK), 9782503601342 (E-BOOK).

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While trying to make sense of what authors – and past authors in particular – have actually said, and have meant to say, we realise how problematic the relationship between *thought* and *what-has-been-thought-about-it* is. The problematic implications of our interpretative effort become even more evident when we consider that, as Benedetto Croce put it, it is always an interest of the present that triggers the desire to understand the past. Then we realise that dealing with the divergent ways in which an author's writings have been received throughout time is part of the problem. Needless to say, facing such difficulties is the best way to attain historical significance in that uninterrupted collective intellectual activity that Michael Oakeshott called « the conversation of mankind », comprising the countless voices apt to provide meaningfulness to all human endeavours.

From the second half of the nineteenth century onward, initially in the context of the question of the relationship between State and Church, Marsilius of Padua (1275/1285–1342/1343) and his *Defensor pacis* (1324) have been the focus of scholarly attention. The attractive force of the visions, concepts and ideas displayed in the *Defensor pacis* in particular seems far from declining. The growth of Marsilian studies as such guarantees no direct increase in our knowledge of his life and work. Yet, this very growth is definitely important in so far as it gives us the chance to reflect on how scholars came to represent to themselves Marsilius of Padua and his writings. How to explain this enduring interest? Several answers can be given, which are not mutually exclusive.

The Paduan thinker is widely known as one of the most controversial medieval authors, not only on account of his unorthodox and radical views, but also of his alleged 'modernity'. The themes of Marsilius's modernity and adaptability to current affairs were at the core of the conference held at the University of Padua in 1942 to celebrate the sixth anniversary of his death (see *Marsilio da Padova. Studi raccolti nel VI Centenario della morte*, edited by Aldo Checcini and Norberto Bobbio, CEDAM, Padua). The most notable interpretative achievements date back to the

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1950s, 1960s and 1970s, whose common denominator was overcoming the limits of scholarly work that had respectively emphasised the modernity of *Defensor pacis*, the role of Marsilius as the forerunner of the *esprit laïque*, his conciliarist vocation, his commitment to 'radical democracy', his favour for political absolutism, and even his role as the founder of legal positivism. Then a wave of new studies developed stressing the varied historical, political and philosophical sources that influenced his thought, as well as the contexts and perspectives which in turn have been influenced by the latter. This trend found expression, for example, in the international conference held again at the University of Padua in 1980 to celebrate the seventh anniversary of Marsilius's birth. The 1979 and 1980 issues of the Italian journal for the history of medieval philosophy *Medioevo* hosted the most relevant contributions part of the new wave of interest for Marsilius's life and work. The tendency to approach Marsilius's writings as a whole in light of a multiplicity of research perspectives and contexts grew steadily.

Evidence of the enduring attractive force of Marsilius's work can be found in two different volumes that appeared thanks to the effort of distinguished publishers such as Brepols and Brill respectively. In the aftermath of the Marsilius of Padua World Congress hosted by the 2003 International Medieval Congress (IMC), which the Institute for Medieval Studies at the University of Leeds organises and administers since 1994, in 2006 Gerson Moreno-Riaño edited a volume containing accounts ranging from papalist responses to the *Defensor pacis* to issues in translating it, from the nature of Marsilius' political activism to the relevance and influence of medical language and sources, from the traditional problems of power and sovereignty in the first *dictio* to theological and ecclesiological arguments in the second one (see *The World of Marsilius of Padua*). The 2011 Brill volume that Cary J. Nederman and Gerson Moreno-Riaño edited aims to cover aspects that induce to interpret the *Defensor pacis* as a unified and coherent work. Emphasising the importance of the variety of sources and instances that underpin it, the book includes accounts of the impact of the Paduan tradition of natural philosophy seeking respectively to uncover the influence within the latter of medicine and astrology, to stress the impact on Marsilius of Franciscan debates on evangelical poverty at the court of Ludwig the Bavarian and the importance of Marsilius himself in genealogies of the modern understanding of rights, to shed light on Marsilius' adherence to the Ghibelline vision of politics, on the influence of the ideas presented in the *Defensor pacis* on early modern authors, and last but not least on the possible influence of Ibn Rushd's work (see *A Companion to Marsilius of Padua*).

In most recent scholarship, new light has been shed on aspects of his life previously unknown, making us wonder about where Marsilius as a political philosopher ends and the political actor begins. It has been emphasised that Marsilius' political thought constitutes a powerful source of inspiration,

theoretical and practical. On the other hand, it has been remarked that the fortune of his major work depends on the imagination of scholars far too eager to adjust it to cohere with their current expectations and interests. Some interpreters argued that a degree of continuity between late medieval and early modern political discourses can be detected in light of the peculiar theory and practice of Christianity that Marsilius promoted. Eventually, both the widely accepted views of the Paduan thinker as the first truly secular post-classical political thinker, and as a precursor of the republican humanists of the Renaissance, have been questioned with a view to asserting that he was a genuine imperialist, hence, as other interpreters claimed, either a supporter of Ghibelline politics or one of the most prominent theorists of 'Ghibellinism'. Far from being the herald of secular politics in medieval Europe, Marsilius of Padua is also said to have promoted a profoundly Christian understanding of history as a providentially ordained process. In this vein, the *Defensor pacis* was meant to show that the events of his time were the last stage in a divinely ordained apocalyptic process. The year 2024 marked the seven hundredth anniversary of Marsilius of Padua's completion of the *Defensor pacis* (24 June 1324). One of the sessions of the IMC celebrated this momentous event, providing the opportunity to engage Marsilius's thought, writings, milieu, influences, context, and reception in relation to both Marsilius himself and the enduring philosophical issues that have continued to have salience. A new collection of essays is thus expected to be released in the near future.

The 2023 volume edited by Alessandro Mulieri, Serena Masolini and Jenny Pelletier stems from a conference held in July 2018 at the University of Leuven, which had as a title *Marsilius of Padua. Between History, Politics, and Philosophy*. It comprises fifteen contributions by younger and senior scholars introduced by a comprehensive note provided by Alessandro Mulieri. The volume is divided into three parts. Like in the already mentioned 2006 Brepols book edited by Moreno-Riaño, which comprises fourteen essays, in the 2023 volume too chapters are not numbered.

Part One is concerned with Marsilius of Padua's sources. In order to more precisely situate some of the arguments expounded in the *Defensor pacis* in the broad context of the divergent interpretations of 'medieval Aristotelianism', Roberto Lambertini addresses the question of Marsilius's selective and skilful reading of Aristotle's *Politica*. According to the author, a careful examination of the manuscript tradition related to William of Moerbeke's translation suggests that certain incongruencies of citation by Marsilius himself most likely depend on the fact that he used a little-known copy of the *Politica*, one including fewer but longer chapters. Gert-Jan van de Voorde takes as his focus Marsilius's appraisal of the Roman trial of Jesus in the background of the Augustinian reading of it. In particular, the question of the political meaning of the trial to Marsilius and

Augustine is addressed. The author suggests that Marsilius acquired knowledge of Augustinian ideas more from contemporary sources than directly from Augustine's work. On account of his political activism, Marsilius viewed the trail as proof of Jesus's definitive sanctioning of the earthly supremacy of temporal authority. Augustine is seen as a theologian whose political ideas served theology and were subordinate to faith. By contrast Marsilius was a political strategist whose theological considerations were instrumental to promote a purely political agenda. In making this point, however, the author relies on an extremely rigid separation between 'use' and 'influence' on the side of Marsilius with regard to Augustine's work, one whereby the nature of 'influence' and 'use' remain unexplored. Marco Toste's contribution too is concerned with the question of Marsilius's position in the context of medieval interpretations of Aristotle's *Politica*. The author offers relevant insights toward a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the *Defensor pacis* and Peter of Auvergne's Aristotelian political ideas, the latter being identified as 'the missing link' between Marsilius and Aristotle. In particular, Toste advances the hypothesis that, while at the Parisian Arts Faculty, Marsilius became familiar with Peter of Auvergne's commentaries of *Politica*. In his essay, Iacopo Costa explores the psychological foundation of the conception of law expounded in the *Defensor pacis* and its impact on the Marsilius's vision of salvation and divine law. The question of the very nature of this impact – theological; philosophical; psychological – besides its obvious political relevance, remains largely unanswered. The innovative character of Marsilius's conception of law and order is overstated. A detailed and well-articulated parallel between Aquinas and Marsilius is made, but it overshadows the latter's interest for contemporary civil and canon law elaboration. The first part of the volume ends with Alessandro Mulieri's contribution on the meaning, function, and sources of collective prudence in the *Defensor pacis* seen as a political and ideological weapon against papal plenitude of power. The topic is in fact seldomly treated in Marsilian studies. As far as the reception of the notion of collective prudence is concerned, Marsilius's debt toward Peter of Abano and Peter of Auvergne is acknowledged. Marsilius is said to have meant to substitute natural law as the foundation of human law with a secular idea of knowledge and experience.

Part Two explores the relationships between Marsilius's ideas and contemporary authors and traditions of thought. Juhana Toivanen's contribution deals with the question of the role that Marsilius assigned to 'emotions' in the establishment of social and political institutions in both the *Defensor pacis* and the *Defensor minor*. The author claims that Marsilius had a theory of emotions, although not a full-fledged one. At the same time, he specifies that Marsilius himself was not interested in theoretically elaborating on emotions because this type of intellectual activity would be irrelevant to the political goals that he sought to

achieve. On these grounds, it is unclear in what sense and how the emotional dimension of human life can be said to play an important role in Marsilius' political theory, as Toivanen does. The usage of a terminology so embedded in the current vocabulary of psychology seems to be instrumental to the purpose of shedding light on one of the possibly most neglected aspects of Marsilius's political thought. If this were the case, however, one should also be prepared to accept that in so doing a too high degree of conceptual ambiguity is going to affect the whole interpretative project. Hence, answering the question of the relevance of emotions in Marsilius's major writings becomes a task particularly difficult to perform. Ferdinand Deanini focuses on the tension between the concept of the 'good life', based upon the ideas of self-sufficiency and living well, and the notion of 'perfect life', deriving from the *imitatio Christi*, which requires the renunciation to all the wealth of this world. The author convincingly suggests that, concerned as he was with exploiting the possible political implications of the poverty controversy, Marsilius proved to be unable to explain why the priestly part should still engage in civic activity. Gianluca Briguglia explores the question of Marsilius's Ghibelline commitment and his contribution is an attempt at radically reconceptualise it. One of the implicit assumptions of this author's essay is that we should leave behind as untenable and anachronistic the rigid separation between Marsilius the man of learning and the man of action. If Marsilius had practical political aspirations, and accordingly he crafted persuasive strategies, he nevertheless theorised a distinct approach to understand and deal with the problems of politics. On a parallel basis, the suggestion is made that we should not be satisfied with seeing Marsilius as merely a supporter of Ghibelline politics. Rather we should acknowledge his role as 'philosopher of Ghibellinism', and fully exploit the heuristic potential of this qualification. Hence, we should be able to speak plausibly of 'Ghibellinism' as a political theory. The concept of 'Ghibellinism' – and 'Guelphism' too – would have to be theoretically related to distinctive political sets of institutions, implying two levels of power: local self-government and empire – or papacy – at a higher level. Briguglia refers comparatively to Dante Alighieri, who is said to have been politically a Ghibelline, but to a limited extent. Certainly, the author claims, he was not a 'philosopher of Ghibellinism' in the sense in which Marsilius is said to have been so. Briguglia acknowledges the importance of the militant and ideological components of the *Defensor pacis*. If, on the one hand, the author argues, and rightly so, that a rigid division between political theory and practice cannot be found in Marsilius's self-understanding as a political philosopher, on the other hand, in the light of the new *-ism* which the author presents, with regard to Marsilius of Padua the realms of political theory, political philosophy, and political ideology appear to be interchangeable. The essay, however, does not account for this interchangeability. Charles F. Briggs argues that despite being on opposite sides of the question of papal vs. imperial sovereignty, both Marsilius of Padua and his

Italian Dominican adversaries deplored the factional and violent politics that plagued the central- and northern Italy communes during the late thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth century. They fundamentally agreed on that sufficiency of life could not be achieved without peace and tranquillity, although they radically differed in their identification of the true source of the said lack of peace and tranquillity, hence in their prescriptions for the solution of the problem. The author emphasises the versatile political vocation of a number of Italian Dominican authors. In opposition to Marsilius, who saw the community as an artificial totality, they conceived of it as a whole anterior to its parts. The reader is reminded that despite the fact that Marsilius's answer appears to be more compelling to our current sensibility, the political thought and solutions offered by the Dominicans carried greater weight among not only the prelates of the Church against whom Marsilius railed, but also the lay elites – including the jurists - of the communes that Marsilius hoped to free from papal interference. The conclusion that had Marsilius not been so hostile to the papacy, the Dominicans might have taken no exception to the *Defensor pacis* appears to be redundant. Jacob Langeloh establishes a parallel between John of Paris, Dante Alighieri, and Marsilius of Padua taking as his focus the way in which these authors approached the problem of contingency and finality in history. The essay seeks to demonstrate that the *Defensor pacis* contains no eschatological view of history. The author tries to confute George Garnett's thesis that the *Defensor pacis* was meant to show that the events of his time were the last stage in a divinely ordained apocalyptic process. Despite Marsilius's ability to delve into theological argumentation, Langeloh argues, he ultimately embraced a contingent view on the political event of the day. David Lloyd Dusenbury argues that the Augustinian interpretation of the Roman trial of Jesus – in which Jesus renounces temporal kingship, and Pilate nevertheless convicts him as a king – structures late medieval theories of secular authority in ways that have not been adequately recognized in current scholarship. The author seeks to retrace the Augustinian reading of Pilate's guilt with a view to bring to light unexplored aspects of the political significance of this tradition in the writings of Dante Alighieri, Lorenzo Valla, and Marsilius of Padua himself. The author's conclusion is opposite to the one endorsed by van de Voorde in the first part of the volume. Besides inviting to rediscover a hitherto unnoticed element in Marsilius's denunciation of papal plenitude of power, the author stresses the importance of seeing Marsilius's political vision as a 'drama', one to be properly understood in light of biblical elements. The suggestion is made that if Jesus had not made his 'great refusal' before Pilate, there is reason to believe that the autonomy of the secular order could not have been even theorised, and actualised, in late medieval and early modern Europe.

Part Three focuses on both the presence of Marsilius's ideas in early modern thought and the relevance of the former for contemporary debates. In addressing

the question of the citation of Marsilius in anti-Venetian polemists, Serena Masolini explores the impact of Marsilius of Padua on Tommaso Campanella chiefly, and on Cardinal Bellarmino too. The author reconsidered the presence of Marsilius in Campanella's work in particular, analysing the two interconnected categories under which the name of Marsilius was understood and employed: Marsilius the pupil of Aristotle and Marsilius the critic of papal claims *in temporalibus*. Masolini concludes that the image that results from the combination of the two categories in question turns out to be 'the negative' of Campanella himself, who championed both a new anti-Aristotelian philosophy and papal authority *in spiritualibus et temporalibus*. The author gives priority to a way of tracking down Marsilius's doctrinal influence that turns around the role that the legacy of the image attached to his name played in the writings of those who referred to him, regardless of whether or not they had any direct access to his works. This analytic strategy can be considered a variation on Umberto Eco's view of the so-called *intentio lectoris*. No references to such instance, or to the ones methodologically related to it, are found in the essay. Cary J. Nederman's contribution has analytic character. It draws attention to a paradox seldomly examined in current scholarship. Even though Aristotle himself warned against the inaccurate usage of the word 'science', which had different meanings, Aristotelian 'political science', expressed in its Latinised form *scientia politica*, has constituted the dominant medieval paradigm for investigation into the realm of politics and society. Marsilius of Padua, who employed the word *scientia* rather seldomly, and hardly conjoined with *politica*, is still taken to be the champion of political Aristotelianism. Once more, Nederman suggests that the foundations on which Marsilius's vision of 'political science' rests cannot be properly characterised as Aristotelian. In his contribution the author establishes a challenging parallel between Marsilius's view of the self-interested individual and contemporary rational choice theory, which is still fashionable in the USA and elsewhere. Nederman's conclusion is thought-provoking for it suggests that by both extracting Marsilius from the mire of medieval Aristotelianism and associating his understanding of self-interest with current political science we may acquire a definitely incisive insight into dilemmas posed by the civic affairs of Marsilius's time. The author, however, is adamant in reminding us that by breaking down the bonds of the philosophical orthodoxy of his time, Marsilius had no intention whatsoever to be seen as a 'political scientist'. Frank Godthardt, who contributed to the refinement of our knowledge of Marsilius's life, explores in historiographical fashion the ways in which at the time of the Third Reich three German scholars – Wilhelm Schneider-Windmüller (1908–1969), Richard Scholz (1872–1946), and Friedrich Bock (1890–1963) – assessed the political importance of the *Defensor pacis* and repositioned it as foreshadowing the Third Reich. Scholz is the historian who produced the two-volume critical edition of the *Defensor pacis* in

1932 and 1933 as part of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* series. He is often said to have resisted the Nazi appropriation of Marsilius's ideas. Godthardt conveniently sheds light on the ambiguities that characterised Scholz's interpretation. The latter moved from considering Marsilius's theory of the political community as a 'consistent democratic construction' to viewing it in 1938–1939 and again in 1942 as a remarkably flexible or adaptable theory that apparently allowed the *Führer* of the Third Reich to occupy the position of Marsilius's *pars principans*. If different political orders can be legitimised by Marsilius's conception of the political community, Godthardt, who accepts the view of the elasticity and generic nature of Marsilius's political theory, poses the question of whether the latter, based as it was upon the principle of the manifold delegations of powers, is compatible with the *Führerstaat* and with National Socialist church policy. His answer is negative. The last essay in the volume is mostly a tribute to Umberto Eco's memory as a medievalist by Gregorio Piaia. The latter takes as its focus Eco's famous 1980 debut novel *Il nome della rosa* (*The Name of the Rose*) and discloses the presence in it of Marsilius as a supporter of democratic ideals. Piaia explains that the figure of Marsilius plays a particular role in the novel that finds its inspiration in the socio-political climate of the late 1970s in Italy, one profoundly affected by the terrorism of the so-called *anni di piombo* ('years of lead'), which in turn disrupted the progressive front. The 'deadly decade', namely the 1970s, brought about a crisis in the movement of renewal that the cultural avant-garde had started in the early 1960s, culminating in the fateful 1968. The *anni di piombo* marked the predominance of violence over political action and change. It meant that an impressive cultural and political programme was jeopardised, hence the 'silence of the intellectuals'. In the case of Eco, his choice to devote his energies to the field of fiction was inspired by the desire to sublimate the defeat that he, and many others of his generation, suffered on the ideological-political plane. The genre of fiction could then become a means of reasserting a programme based upon the ideas of democracy, freedom and equality. In this context Marsilius played a functional role.

In general, the volume edited by Mulieri, Masolini and Pelletier comprises contributions that take up issues that were essential in the past scholarship, but, to the extent that they do so, they bear witness to the high potential for further elaboration and exploitation that Marsilius of Padua's work possesses. Marsilius's work appears to be an intellectually eclectic and intriguing combination of several contemporary themes and traditions and streams of thought. Complexity and ambiguity characterised his life and work. Most likely, these are the features of an existential tension that the Paduan thinker experienced as a passionate man of learning, fatally attracted by political struggle, honours, and wealth. Marsilius was particularly keen on using a variety of vocabularies, which he deployed as the circumstances dictated. All contributions acknowledge that a mixture of passion,

self-interest, and the desire to acquire and use knowledge critically lies in the background of Marsilius's work. The contributors proved to be aware of the risks inherent in seeking linear filiations and teleological causal links, which they carefully avoided. They treated ideas as social facts that exist independently of the authors who expressed them. Finally, all essays may well constitute the basis for further exploring how philosophy, theology, politics, law, and even ideology and ideology critique coalesced within the *Defensor pacis*. A perspective of the kind, if we think about the role that what we ordinarily call ideology and ideology critique might have played in Marsilius's search for political wisdom and effective political action, can be pursued without having to rely on the notion of anticipation, which would keep us mired in endless discussions about Marsilius's modernity, as well as on total embeddedness, which, if applied consistently, would jeopardise the quest for significance that our attempts to read past texts *iuxta propria principia* sustain.

MASSIMILIANO LENZI, OLGA L. LIZZINI, PINA TOTARO, LUISA VALENTE (EDS.), *FONTI, FLUSSI, ONDE. L'ACQUA TRA REALTÀ E METAFORA NEL PENSIERO ANTICO, MEDIEVALE E MODERNO*, SISMEL – EDIZIONI DEL GALLUZZO, FIRENZE 2022 (MICROLOGUS LIBRARY, 111), VI, 462 PP., ISBN: 9788892901599, ISSN: 24653276.

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This volume, the outcome of a conference held in Rome in 2018, brings together seventeen essays that explore the manifold roles of water in ancient, medieval, and early modern thought. The editors have arranged the contributions around five broad themes, ranging from water as a physical substance and origin of life, through navigational and metaphysical metaphors, to its place in religious imagination and poetic expression. The introduction rightly emphasises the cultural centrality of water, from its practical functions in medicine and navigation to its symbolic resonance in philosophy and theology. The breadth of traditions represented – Greco-Roman, Christian, Islamic, and Jewish – demonstrates the ambition to situate water as a cross-cultural and diachronic theme. As is often the case with conference proceedings, the quality of contributions varies, with some essays retaining the character of oral presentations. Yet, taken together, the volume offers a timely and valuable resource for scholars interested in the intersection of natural philosophy, theology, and metaphorical imagination. The richness of the collection emerges most clearly when its essays are viewed in sequence; I shall therefore offer a concise presentation of each, followed by a broader evaluation of the work as a whole.

Diana Quarantotto opens the collection with a study of Aristotle's reflections in *Phys. IV.5*, where he imagines a world composed entirely of water, drawing on Homer's image of the encircling Ocean. Water here functions as a privileged element and explanatory medium: it clarifies principles such as impenetrability, upward motion, and the relation of bodies to their environment. The metaphor extends even to the celestial sphere, which, like Homer's Ocean, remains distant and imperceptible. Quarantotto highlights the heuristic role of water in Aristotle's thought, though the concentration on a single passage inevitably narrows the scope. Comparisons with modern physics occasionally risk anachronism, but

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overall the essay illustrates how water served Aristotle as a conceptual tool for explaining complex phenomena.

Gabriella Zuccolin follows with an exploration of the transmission of Aristotelian and Galenic ideas about moisture into the Islamic and Latin traditions. The balance of heat and humidity, central to humoral theory, is examined through Aristotle's notion of 'hot moisture', Galen's reflections on fevers, and Avicenna's *Canon*. Albert the Great later affirmed the significance of moisture in combination with heat for both physical and spiritual health. Zuccolin's essay consolidates well-known material, offering a clear survey of sources and debates. While its originality lies more in presentation than in argument, it provides a useful overview for readers seeking to understand the medical-philosophical discourse on moisture across cultures.

Marilyn Nicoud considers the role of hot springs in medieval thought, noting that while bathing was common in Italy during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, scholarly literature initially paid little attention to their nature. Early explanations, such as those of Michael Scot and Pietro d'Abano, attributed the phenomenon to subterranean winds. Later authors, including Gentile da Foligno and Ugo Benzi, began to assess the therapeutic value of thermal waters, culminating in Francesco Casini's *De balneis* and other contemporary writings, which offered empirical observations. Nicoud assembles a wide range of sources, though the survey character leaves certain questions unresolved, particularly why interest in hot springs intensified in the fourteenth century. The suggestion that this sudden proliferation of writings can be explained simply by the rise of 'empirical observation' seems somewhat unconvincing, since the attraction of thermal waters must also have reflected broader intellectual currents. Nonetheless, the essay provides a helpful catalogue of medieval approaches to the medical uses of water.

The transition to the early modern period is marked by Pina Totaro's study of Buffon's *Theory of the Earth* and his rejection of the view that fossils were relics of the Flood. Buffon divided the history of the earth into successive epochs, presenting a narrative of creation and transformation in which water played a foundational role. Totaro introduces readers to Buffon's position within contemporary debates, but the essay offers little sense of the broader intellectual context. References to Buffon's contemporaries are fleeting, and there is no engagement with his predecessors or with the tradition of physico-theology in which the problem of fossils and the Flood was so widely discussed. As a result, the reader is left without a clear understanding of the contours of the controversy or of Buffon's place within it. The absence of sustained contextualisation, together with the lack of reference to recent scholarship on the subject, makes the essay feel closer to a conference presentation than to a fully developed publication. Even

so, it succeeds in highlighting the complexity of early modern discussions of water, fossils, and biblical interpretation.

Massimiliano Lenzi contributes a study of Aristotle's famous comparison of the soul to a sailor on a ship in *De Anima*. He traces how Alexander of Aphrodisias resisted Platonic readings of this passage, insisting that the metaphor underscored the corporealisation of the soul, while later thinkers such as Plotinus and Porphyry reinterpreted it to emphasise the rational soul's addition to the body's natural faculties. Philoponus developed Porphyry's position further, transmitting it into the medieval tradition through Avicenna and the scholastics. Lenzi's analysis is valuable in showing the long afterlife of a single Aristotelian image. Unfortunately, the English prose is so strained that the essay becomes very difficult to follow, which significantly diminishes its accessibility to the reader.

Luisa Valente explores storms and navigation as ethical metaphors from Cicero and Seneca through Augustine and into the medieval period. The storm symbolises the passions and the unpredictability of life, while philosophy offers a way to steer clear of danger. Seneca's tripartite division of life – pleasure, contemplation, and action – was reworked by Augustine, who initially echoed the classical structure but later, as a theologian, insisted that true navigation required more than philosophical *otium*. Medieval authors such as Bede, Hrabanus Maurus, Abelard, and Alan of Lille christianised these metaphors, presenting the Church as a ship that enables believers to withstand the storms of existence. Valente's essay gathers familiar material but does so effectively, showing the continuity and transformation of ancient imagery in Christian thought.

Mirella Capozzi turns to Kant, who likened reason to a voyager across turbulent seas in search of the island of truth. The metaphor captures both the dangers of dogmatic illusions and the promise of rational progress, with Kant's imagery of mirages and the collapse of old geographies reinforcing the precariousness of philosophical navigation. Capozzi's essay is coherent and engaging, though its division into numerous short sections lends it a somewhat fragmented style. Placed after Valente, however, it forms a natural continuation of the theme of navigation, extending the metaphor into the Enlightenment.

The metaphysical dimension of water is addressed by Francesco Fronterotta, who revisits Heraclitus's dictum that 'ever newer waters flow'. He distinguishes between ontological and epistemological interpretations, arguing for the restoration of the ontological meaning whereby flux expresses the very nature of being. The essay is philologically clear and conceptually precise, though the point itself is well known, and its contribution consists chiefly in a careful restatement rather than in the development of new arguments. Riccardo Chiaradonna develops the metaphysical theme further in his analysis of Plotinus, for whom flux is conceived as a process of causal outflow. In Plotinus's system, incorporeal principles stream into matter, which reflects the forms like a mirror, while bodies

remain secondary and imperfect. Chiaradonna's essay is conceptually strong, enriching the Platonic vocabulary and showing how water imagery can illuminate the dynamics of metaphysical transmission. Olga Lizzini complements this with a survey of Arabic philosophy, focusing on Avicenna, al-Farabi, and Maimonides. She examines the doctrine of divine effusion as a continuous flow of causality, drawing on Qur'anic imagery and Neoplatonic language. Her essay synthesises familiar material, presenting purification and flow as central metaphors, and while largely descriptive, it situates Islamic and Jewish thought within the broader tradition of reflection on water as a medium of creation and metaphysical order.

The religious imagination section begins with Enrico Norelli's contribution, which examines water as a boundary and connection between divine and human spaces in Jewish and Christian apocalypses. In the *Book of Watchers*, Enoch's encounters with heavenly beings occur at Mount Hermon near the 'waters of Dan', reflecting the association of divine presence with aquatic sites. In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, revelation requires ascent and the crossing of water, while in Revelation the sea is abolished in the redeemed universe, a motif with possible political resonance given the text's association of Rome with the sea. Yet, Revelation also envisions a river of life flowing from God's throne, transforming water into the locus of perfect communion between divine and human. Norelli's essay provides a clear synthesis of these examples, underscoring the tension between water as a site of divine judgment and as a symbol of ultimate reconciliation.

Samuela Pagani focuses on the Islamic tradition, with particular attention to Fuzuli's sixteenth-century *Poem of Water* and the roots of its imagery of the Prophet as a white pearl emerging from water. The poem, composed in Baghdad, uses the repeated refrain *su* (water) to underscore the centrality of the element. Pagani situates this within a broader cosmological and mystical framework: water as the origin of creation, as divine attribute, and as symbol of purity and love. She draws on sources such as al-Shahrastānī, who described creation beginning from a precious stone dissolved into water, and on Ibn ʿArabī, for whom water represented both primordial matter and the first intellect. The essay highlights the continuity between ancient cosmological ideas and their Islamic reworking, while showing how Sufi literature transformed water into a metaphor of the heart and union with God.

Maurizio Mottolese explores hydraulic imagery in Kabbalistic discourse, where water serves as a metaphor for divine efflux and cosmic order. Drawing on the *Bahir* and later commentators, he shows how sefirot were imagined as channels or pipes through which wisdom flowed, sustaining the universe. Tribes became pipes, fulfilling the law and sustaining the cosmic network; sin was described as a rupture in the pipes, which Moses sought to repair. Figures such as Menahem ben Recanati and Joseph Gikatilla elaborated on wells, external pipes, and bad waters, using hydraulic language to describe spiritual life and temptation. Mottolese

demonstrates how the imagery of flow, seminal discharge, and irrigation structured Kabbalistic cosmology, with man envisioned as a vessel unlocking supernal sources. His essay is methodologically clear and well-illustrated, offering a strong example of how metaphors of water shaped mystical thought.

Anna Lisa Schino addresses the Flood as a metaphor of divine wrath and its rationalist critique in the works of Agostino Nifo and Gabriel Naudé. The first part of her essay revisits the failed prophecy of a universal flood in 1524 and Nifo's reflections on it, material already familiar from the scholarship of Paola Zambelli and many others. The slightly more original section concerns Naudé, who read Nifo as a model of rationality in an age allegedly prone to superstition. Schino shows how Naudé used Nifo's scepticism to argue for a measured response to apocalyptic fears. The essay gives the impression of a lightly revised conference talk, with limited contextualisation of broader European debates, but it succeeds in highlighting Naudé's role in reframing the Flood as a test case for rational critique.

The final section of the volume is devoted to poetics. Sonia Gentili considers Dante's image of the 'sea of being' and the shipwreck of Ulysses, tracing its antecedents in Gregory of Nazianzus, John of Damascus, and Thomas Aquinas, and linking it to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The essay is concise (only 9 pages, including an abstract) and still bears the imprint of its oral delivery, offering a brief survey rather than extended analysis. Hansmichael Hohenegger offers a more substantial contribution on Goethe, examining how water metaphors illuminate his reflections on art, science, and language. For Goethe, language is marked by imperfection and struggles to grasp reality fully, yet it remains a living medium through which meaning flows. This tension is expressed in images of water: on the one hand, the 'sea of falsehood' associated with alchemical discourse, and on the other, the purifying stream of poetic inspiration, which conveys the creative power of art despite the limits of expression. Hohenegger's essay is methodologically rich, drawing on multiple contexts and showing how water functions as a metaphor for the plurality of languages and modes of representation. Luciano De Fiore, by contrast, offers a wide-ranging meditation on sirens, moving from Homer to modern culture. The essay recalls well-known narratives and invokes figures such as Foucault and Lacan without sustained analysis, concluding with the suggestion that the siren symbolises trauma. The contribution is eclectic and impressionistic, standing apart from the more focused and academic studies in the volume.

Taken together, the collection illustrates both the richness and the unevenness typical of conference proceedings. Some essays, such as those by Hohenegger, Mottolese, Chiaradonna, and Capozzi, offer substantial and well-contextualised analyses, while others remain closer to the format of oral presentations. The absence of contributions with an environmental perspective is striking,

particularly given recent historiographical trends, and the chronological coverage leaves a gap between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, a period crucial for the rethinking of water and its resources in Europe. Nevertheless, the volume succeeds in presenting water as both physical necessity and inexhaustible metaphor, a theme that continues to inspire reflection across traditions and disciplines. It will serve as a valuable resource for scholars seeking to understand how one of the most fundamental elements of life has shaped philosophical, religious, and poetic imagination from antiquity to modernity.

ARTHUR FIELD, *THE INTELLECTUAL STRUGGLE FOR FLORENCE: HUMANISTS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MEDICI REGIME, 1420–1440*, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, OXFORD 2017, VII, 370 PP., ISBN: 9780198791089.

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KU LEUVEN

To reconstruct the events that unfolded in Florence over the brief span of two decades preceding the mid-fifteenth century, Arthur Field leads the reader through a remarkably rich intellectual itinerary, animated by encounters, tensions, and interpretative challenges. Following a period of relative ideological indeterminacy, the closing years of the second decade of the fifteenth century witnessed, according to Field, the gradual crystallization in Florence of two competing ideological formations corresponding to the pro- and anti-Medicean political divide. Poggio Bracciolini, Niccolò Niccoli, Ambrogio Traversari, and Carlo Marsuppini – figures « all four very close to Cosimo » (p. 322) – are presented as the principal agents of a far-reaching cultural reconfiguration, one that progressively generated a coherent set of intellectual and political orientations identifiable as a distinctively Medicean ideology. Published seven years ago, the book has lost none of its intellectual vitality or scholarly significance; if anything, it has established itself as indispensable reading for historians of early Quattrocento Florence. Its enduring authority rests on an exceptionally wide-ranging – and at times astonishing – command of both archival and literary sources. Revisiting the work in light of subsequent scholarship, some of which has entered into fruitful dialogue with its arguments, only confirms the solidity and lasting importance of Field's achievement.

The « Acknowledgements » (p. V–VII) open with the central question: « Was there an ideology of the early Medici regime? » – that is, an ideology presumed to have taken shape following Cosimo's return from exile in Venice at the end of 1434. The response advanced is carefully nuanced, resisting rigid conceptual demarcations while remaining, in its general orientation, affirmative, albeit insufficiently conceptualized. At times, the argument risks collapsing into a series of binary oppositions – conservative versus progressive, traditional culture versus radical humanism, vernacular versus Latin, aristocracy versus democracy, Plato versus Aristotle, and so forth – that tend to simplify rather than clarify the

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underlying analytical stakes. Field occasionally appears to suggest (most notably in Chapter 4, devoted to Leonardo Bruni; see *e.g.* p. 151) that the mere existence of a recognizable political faction, together with individual adherence to it, suffices to posit a corresponding political ideology. Yet such an assumption would seem to require further theoretical grounding, since it can hardly be regarded as self-evident. Moreover, in a work otherwise marked by considerable sensitivity to the contingencies, intricacies, and ironies of historical processes, the sharp distinction drawn between the theory (« plan or general strategy ») of a political faction and its practical « execution » (p. 5) appears more striking than genuinely illuminating. One early reviewer, Robert Black (*American Historical Review*, 124 [2019], p. 754–755), characterized Field's approach as informed by a « neo-Marxist paradigm ». The label itself seems to me of limited analytical usefulness, except insofar as it draws attention to certain occasional oversimplifications and sweeping generalizations – perhaps symptomatic of intermittent interpretative impatience – which surface at various moments in the argument and which, in their level of abstraction, recall some of the characteristic tendencies of neo-Marxist historiography in the 1970s and 1980s.

The volume is structured in three parts. The first (p. 3–72) reconstructs the « political and social background » and consists of two chapters: the first devoted to the period 1378–1426, and the second to the crucial years in which the political reputation of the banker Cosimo de' Medici was formed (1426–1434). These pages are particularly compelling, grounded in a meticulous reading of chronicles and archival sources. Field's use of literary materials that have often been neglected by historians – such as Giovanni Gherardi's *Rime* and, more broadly, the late-Gothic literary corpus already explored by literary scholars including Domenico Guerri and Antonio Lanza – is especially effective in illuminating specific aspects of the period, often with clarity regarding the meanings contemporaries attached to individual events. The awareness of the historical mutability of political labels (*e.g.*, p. 9 on 'Guelf') is salutary. The handling of archival documentation, including a careful study of the 'Pratiche' (*i.e.*, *ad hoc* committees of citizens or municipal officials tasked with drafting resolutions for the 'Priori', who would then decide on their adoption), is likewise useful. Occasional analogies with contemporary decision-making in departmental or board meetings are lightly drawn but not without heuristic value, insofar as they help to animate the reader's historical imagination (*e.g.*, p. 17). The incidental analysis of « social mobility » (p. 19 ff.), conducted in critical dialogue with Anthony Molho's reconstructions, invites broader reflection on the interpretative possibilities – and limitations – of archival evidence, while the discussion of political intimidation (p. 61), grounded in surviving documentation, offers yet another instance of the author's keen eye for historically revealing detail. At the same time, these chapters tend at times to adopt an incipiently teleological perspective, rereading half a century of

Florentine history in light of Cosimo's return in 1434. While such a retrospective optic is not in itself illegitimate, it is not always counterbalanced by an equivalent emphasis on contingency and on the openness of alternative historical trajectories. One may note a tendency in this section towards a certain determinative framing, where a more fine-grained analysis might have yielded additional insight. One example may suffice: Field's use of the notion of « consensus » is judicious, yet it remains insufficiently differentiated, without fully unpacking the heterogeneous components and shifting configurations this concept may have encompassed at different moments.

The second part (p. 73–229), entitled « Traditional Culture », is divided into three chapters. Chapter 3 (« Traditional Culture and the Critique of Radical Humanism », p. 75–126) reconstructs the so-called anti-Medicean ideology set in opposition to the radical humanism of Niccolò Niccoli and Poggio Bracciolini, and identified, in Field's account, with Coluccio Salutati and his circle. The cult of the *tre corone* – Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio – is closely associated with this cultural tradition. Texts such as Giovanni Gherardi da Prato's *Paradiso degli Alberti*, rediscovered and edited by the formidable Russian scholar Alexander Nikolayevich Veselovsky (p. 77 and *passim*), are appropriately cited as representative expressions of this intellectual milieu. The author returns to this interpretative framework in Chapter 5, devoted to Francesco Filelfo (« Francesco Filelfo, Oligarchic Virtue, and Medicean Vice», p. 187–229), who is presented as an ideological ally of the late Bruni. This aspect, while certainly not the only original element in Field's interpretation, is nonetheless the only one explicitly acknowledged as such by Robert Black's otherwise restrictive assessment. The reader learns a great deal from the manuscript sources examined throughout this chapter; one need only consider, for instance, the perspicuous remarks on money (p. 215–216). Between these two chapters lies one of the most fascinating sections of the book: Chapter 4, « Leonardo Bruni and Civic Humanism » (p. 126–186). Bruni emerges here as the locus of a complex intellectual trajectory: from a youthful standard-bearer of progressive humanist culture, translator of Plato, and associate of Poggio and Niccoli, to a later figure increasingly estranged from the Medici milieu and more receptive to Aristotle, oligarchic political sensibilities, and the cultural prestige of the *tre corone*.

The third part, entitled « Medici Culture » (p. 231–327), consists of two richly detailed chapters followed by a brief concluding section (p. 320–327). Although Chapter 7, « Poggio and the Ideology of the Medici Regime » (p. 276–319), carries the principal argumentative burden of the monograph and offers the clearest formulation of its central thesis, many readers may ultimately find themselves more deeply engaged by the literary felicity and psychological acuity of the preceding chapter, « The Man Who Was Nothing » (p. 233–275), devoted to Niccolò Niccoli. This remarkable biographical portrait – subtle, many-sided, and

narratively compelling – arguably constitutes, together with the previously discussed Chapter 4, the most accomplished section of the volume. However, Chapter 7 advances considerably broader ambitions. « Poggio's work may be viewed – Field writes – as a sort of 'embryonic' form of a Medici party ideology, even if this was not his [Poggio's] intention » (p. 315). What is at stake, then, is an *intentio operis* rather than an *intentio auctoris* – the latter being, in this case, far from unequivocally recoverable. Even so, the reader is left with a certain sense of perplexity by the end of the discussion. Poggio's *De nobilitate* (1440) is paraphrased at considerable length and presented as a cornerstone of the broader argument. Yet Poggio is credited with introducing conceptual innovations that were, in fact, already present in the juridical and philosophical debates of the Trecento, beginning with Bartolo da Sassoferrato. Field does cite the famous epistle on nobility by Lapo da Castiglionchio the Elder (p. 99), but Chapter 7 does not appear fully to integrate either its implications or the wider tradition to which it belongs. The notion that one of the principal definitions of nobility – the juridical one – necessarily entailed forms of variability dependent upon political geography had already been clearly articulated by Bartolo and subsequently reiterated for more than a century in disputes concerning 'true nobility', debates effectively ignited, in the Florentine context, by Dante's canzone *Le dolci rime*. Very little of this broader intellectual background enters Field's reconstruction. Although he does invoke an important classical authority, Juvenal, the specifically medieval and early humanist genealogy of the debate remains largely unaddressed. As a result, what may legitimately be understood as a contribution – certainly not the most radical one – to a long-standing and highly stratified discussion is ultimately presented as an epoch-making 'deconstruction' (p. 322) of the traditional idea of 'natural nobility'.

The book perhaps still lacks the *extrema manus* and, taken as a whole, may not persuade even all of its most sympathetic readers. Allow me, therefore, to indicate a few examples of what I have referred to above as the author's occasional lack of patience. These concern three related aspects: first, an approach to textual analysis that oscillates between meticulous close reading and, at times, a more cursory treatment that can occasionally prove misleading; secondly, a bibliographical coverage that is extensive, though not always fully up to date or sufficiently attentive to certain important strands of critical scholarship; and finally, a certain degree of historical myopia.

Let us begin with the first point. Field can be exact to the point of pedantry, as illustrated by the numerous precise qualifications, corrections, and self-corrections scattered throughout the volume (see, for instance, p. 293, n. 83; p. 304, n. 143: « my summary of this may be misleading »; *etc.*). Yet this very scrupulousness sits somewhat uneasily alongside interpretations that are, at times, advanced *a volo d'uccello*, with a breadth and rapidity that occasionally

outpace the evidentiary nuance displayed elsewhere. On p. 108, in summarizing *Il Paradiso degli Alberti*, Field writes: « When at the Paradiso villa the Paduan Biagio Pelecani, a great natural philosopher, outlined the Aristotelian teaching on human happiness [...] Luigi Marsili remarked that Christian theologians argued similarly ». In the text itself, however, the master from Parma is explicitly corrected by Marsili, who criticizes Aristotle's position in the light of Augustine and the Christian doctrine of original sin. On p. 140, while discussing Bruni's claim in the *Historiae Florentini Populi* that « the Romans borrowed so much from the Etruscans in terms of law and religion », Field feels compelled to remark that « to modern sensibilities it is rubbish ». I am not entirely sure what is meant here by 'sensibilities'; but if the discussion is framed in properly scholarly terms, one need only recall the research synthesized by Marta Sordi in *Il mito troiano e l'eredità etrusca di Roma* (Jaca Book, Milan 1989), which in several respects lends support to Bruni rather than to Field's quick dismissal. At p. 138, n. 56, Field emends the '*ragioni*' of a source to '*regioni*', rendering it as « regions of the Empire ». Yet *ragioni* is perfectly acceptable in its transmitted form and need not be understood in a geographical sense; it more plausibly refers here to « claims », or, in a juridical register, « rights ».

The second aspect is equally evident in several places. Notably, the name of Carlo Dionisotti does not appear in the bibliography, despite the fact that a number of his insights into fifteenth-century humanism – particularly concerning the Quattrocento reception of Dante, the debate on nobility, and the tensions between clerical and lay culture – would have been highly pertinent to the present discussion. Francesco Tateo's name is likewise absent, despite the fact that his studies on fifteenth-century dialogues *de nobilitate* remain essential points of reference for any serious treatment of the subject. Nor does the author appear to have engaged with Johannes Bartuschat's research on « The Legend of the Artist » (*Les « Vies » de Dante, Pétrarque et Boccace en Italie, XIVe–XVe siècles: contribution à l'histoire du genre biographique*, Longo, Ravenna 2007), which would have considerably illuminated the significance of Bruni's *Vitae* – works that are not exclusively modelled, as Field implies, on Plutarchan biography. As Lorenzo Tanzini already observed in his review for *Archivio Storico Italiano* (176 [2018], p. 413–414), the volume does not always engage in a balanced manner with more recent scholarship: a broader consideration of recent historiography – including the contributions of a younger generation of scholars such as Brian Maxson, whose work has explored the circulation of humanistic culture within ruling elites – would have further strengthened the analysis and rendered it more fully accountable to the current state of scholarship.

Finally, the third aspect concerns a certain historiographical short-sightedness or, if one prefers, an excessively Florence-centered perspective. Field frequently discusses the Papacy, yet almost always from a Florentine vantage point, without

fully reversing the perspective and viewing Florence, so to speak, from elsewhere. Even when he appears to attempt such a shift, he tends to do so through the eyes of Bracciolini, thereby ultimately reproducing the very Florentine centrism noted above. One may compare, for instance, Field's treatment of Cosimo de' Medici's years of exile with the analysis more recently offered by Tanzini (*Cosimo de' Medici. Il banchiere statista padre del Rinascimento fiorentino*, Salerno Editrice, Rome 2022, p. 94–114), especially regarding the decisive role played by the presence of the papal Curia and the Pope in Florence – a presence initially made possible, and indeed encouraged, by the anti-Medicean faction, yet one that ultimately proved instrumental both in facilitating Cosimo's return and in neutralizing the political maneuvers of Rinaldo degli Albizzi and Ridolfo Peruzzi. It is likewise surprising that, in a study devoted to the crucial two decades between 1420 and 1440 and fundamentally concerned with elucidating the rise of Cosimo de' Medici, the Council of Constance (1414–1418) and the broader international dynamics it embodied receive virtually no attention in their own right (see p. 282–283). Yet it was precisely at Constance that the young banker Cosimo had already begun to construct, with considerable political acuity, the international network of alliances, relationships, and interests that would later underpin his ascent to power.

This having been said, the book advances a thesis of considerable clarity, grounded in a confident and often impressive command of the sources. At times, the sharp delineation of opposing factions, together with the posited correspondence between political alignments and ideological orientations, renders the classification of individual authors somewhat strained – notably in the case of Bruni, whom Field himself treats with commendable nuance, acknowledging both the complexity of the figure and the evolution of his position across Florence's successive political configurations. Yet even where one may hesitate before certain aspects of the interpretative architecture, the argument remains consistently stimulating and intellectually productive. Field has produced a learned, incisive, and often remarkably witty study, rich in insight and animated by genuine historiographical ambition. Above all, it succeeds in raising a series of important questions that deserve – and have indeed already begun to provoke – further investigation. The volume invites two distinct ways of reading, and with them two different judgments of its achievement. Taken as a unified monograph, the book reveals a degree of unevenness that is difficult to overlook. Although its underlying thesis and the sequence of chapters gesture toward coherence, that sense of unity is not consistently sustained in execution. Read instead as a collection of studies on Florence in the first half of the fifteenth century, the volume appears in a very favorable light. Its value then resides less in the force of a single overarching argument than in the richness of its individual insights, findings, and interpretive perspectives. Seen in this way, the work's apparent lack

of cohesion may itself be revealing: the volume's very heterogeneity comes to function as a suggestive intellectual self-portrait, in which it is the breadth of approaches and interests, rather than any single unifying design, that most vividly reflects the distinctive scholarly imagination of its author.