ХРИСТІАНСКІЙ ВОСТОКЪ

ТОМЪ 6 (XII)

НОВАЯ СЕРІЯ

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СЕРИЯ, ПОСВЯЩЕННАЯ ИЗУЧЕНИЮ
ХРИСТИАНСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ НАРОДОВ АЗИИ И АФРИКИ

ТОМ 6 (XII)

НОВАЯ СЕРИЯ

На основе материалов международной конференции
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ALBERTO RIGOLIO

ARISTOTLE'S POETICS IN SYRIAC AND IN ARABIC TRANSLATIONS: READINGS OF "TRAGEDY"

Aristotle's *Poetics* was translated into Syriac by an anonymous translator of the late ninth or early tenth century, and, within a few decades, was translated again from Syriac into Arabic by Abū Bišr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d. 940), who was a member of the Church of the East[1]. Only a passage of about thirty lines survives from the Syriac translation – enough to prove Abū Bišr's dependence on the Syriac –,[2] while the Arabic translation survives almost entirely in the codex *Parisinus Ar.* 2346[3]. Abū Bišr's translation is notoriously characterised by frequent misunderstandings of the Aristotelian text as well as by a style that is often hardly intelligible[4]. In modern scholarship the Arabic *Poetics* has been described as "uncommonly inarticulate" and "un indigeribile grottesco pasticcio."[5]

Both the lack of familiarity with Greek literature, which constitutes the subject of Aristotle's *Poetics*, and, perhaps, the incomplete mastery of "high" Arabic language by Abū Bišr Mattā, whose mother tongue was Syriac, must have played their parts in the outcome of the Arabic *Poetics*[6]. Recent studies, however, have emphasised that a number of textual misunderstandings may not be the result of a passive and uninformed reading, but they may contain traces of particular interpretations of the

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[1] A candidate for the authorship of the Syriac translation is Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn. Another translation into Arabic (or revision) was carried out by Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (lost), on which Ibn Sīnā wrote a commentary. An overview of the *status quaestionis* is available in Schrier, O.J., 'The Syriac and Arabic versions of Aristotle's *Poetics*,' in Endress, G., and Kruk, R., eds., *The ancient tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, Leiden 1997, 259–278; and Watt, J.W., 'Christianity and the renaissance of Islam. Abū Bishr Mattā, al-Fārābī, and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī,' in Tamcke, M., ed., *Christians and Muslims in dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, Beirut 2007, 99–112.

[2] The passage is quoted in Jacob bar Šakko's *Book of Dialogues* and edited in Margoliouth, D.S., *Analecta orientalia ad Poeticam Aristoteleam*, London 1887 (= Hildesheim 2000), ٧٧–٩٧.

[3] The manuscript dates back to the eleventh century, and the text is edited in Tkatsch, J., *Die arabische Übersetzung der Poetik des Aristoteles und die Grundlage der Kritik des griechischen Textes*, Wien 1928.

[4] Zimmermann, F.W., *Al-Farabi's commentary and short treatise on Aristotle's* De Interpretatione, Oxford 1981, lxxvi, has pointed out that one of the factors compromising Abū Bišr Mattā's style is the Hellenization of the language – a feature with which Syriac scholars were familiar, but which the Arab readers of the time were not equally prepared to tolerate.

[5] Respectively Zimmermann, 1981, lxxvi, and Gabrieli, F., 'Intorno alla versione araba della *Poetica* di Aristotele', *RAL* 5 Ser. 6 (1929), 224–235, 233; see also Tkatsch 1928, I 108 and Edzard, L., and Köhnken, A., 'A new look at the Greek, Syriac, and Arabic versions of Aristotle's *Poetics*' in Edzard, L., and Watson, J., eds., *Grammar as a window onto Arabic Humanism*, Wiesbaden 2006, 222–264, 228.

[6] Abū Bišr Mattā had been educated in Syriac at the monastery of Dayr Qunnā and is likely to have belonged to one of the least Arabicized parts of the Christian community, as his Arab opponents did not fail to notice; see Zimmermann 1981, LXXVI.

Aristotelian text[7]. Through the analysis of the transmission of some passages into Syriac and into Arabic, the present paper explores this possibility further, and it attempts to relate the textual evidence to the historical and cultural setting of the surviving Syriac and Arabic translations of the *Poetics*.

It is regrettable that the surviving Syriac passage does not go beyond Aristotle's definition of tragedy. The section opens:[8]

ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχού- σης, ἡδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἑκάστῳ τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις, δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι'ἀπαγγελίας, δι'ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημά- των κάθαρσιν.

Tragedy is the imitation of a serious and complete action of some magnitude, in a language enriched in a distinct way sepa- rately for (each) section (of the play), by (people) who act and not through narration, (and) which through pity and fear attains the purification of these very emotions.

At first sight, the Syriac translation of the passage is barely comprehensible:[9]

ܠܓܝܬܐ ܗܟܝܠ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܡܛܪܘܬܗ ܕܣܘܥܪܢܐ ܟܫܝܪܐ ܘܓܡܝܪܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܪܒܘܬܐ ܒܡܠܬܐ ܒܣܝܡܬܐ ܣܛܪ ܡܢ ܚܕ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܐܕܫܐ ܗܢܘܢ ܕܥܒܕܝܢ ܒܡܢܘܬܐ ܘܠܘ ܒܝܕ ܣܘܘܕܐ ܐܠܐ ܒܝܕ ܚܢܢܐ ܘܕܚܠܬܐ ܡܡܙܓ ܠܚܫܐ ܘܓܡܪ ܘܕܟܐ ܕܗܢܘܢ ܕܚܫܝܢ.

Tragedy is the imitation of a diligent and accomplished action which has magni- tude, in a pleasant language *without*[a] each one of the kinds *that act*[b] in the parts, and not through *promise*[c] *but* through pity and fear *it tempers the passions and*[d] it attains the purification of *those who suffer*.[e]

The passage attests, at least, five variants (in *italics*). In the translator's defence, it must be said that two of them were possibly contained in the Greek manuscript he was reading (*a* and *c*), and they may in fact have considerably impaired his comprehension of the text[10].

Moreover, the conciseness of the Greek, as well as the Syriac translator's lack of familiarity with Greek theatre, may have led him to miss the reference to the actors (*b*), a fact that had a major impact on the subsequent transmission of the

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[7] Schrier 1997 and Serra, G., *Da 'tragedia' e 'commedia' a 'lode' e 'biasimo,'* Stuttgart 2002.

[8] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b 24–28, ed. Gudeman, A., *Aristoteles* Peri poiētikēs: *mit Einleitung, Text und Adnotatio critica, exegetischem Kommentar, kritischem Anhang und Indices nominum, rerum, locorum*, Berlin 1934.

[9] Ed. Margoliouth 1887, ܥܙ, lines 2–7. I read ܣܐܥܘܪܘܬܐ [sā'ōrūṯā], instead of the (as far as I am aware of) unattested ܣܘܥܪܘܬܐ [sū'ārūṯā].

[10] Two possible Syriac readings of the Greek manuscript are (*a*) χωρίς ἑκάστων or χωρίς ἑκάστου "without each one(s)" for χωρίς ἑκάστῳ "separately for each;" (*c*) δι'ἐπαγγελίας "through prom- ise" for δι'ἀπαγγελίας "through narration."

Poetics, as will be discussed below[11]. Instead, the variants (*d*) and (*e*) may witness to an effort to expand on the concept of *catharsis*[12]. It appears, then, that apart from the misunderstandings, which, incidentally, are also attested in the readings of some Renaissance scholars,[13] the Syriac passage does not deliberately depart from the Greek.

The passage was subsequently translated from the Syriac by Abū Bišr Mattā as follows (the rendering of a word with a double translation, which I indicate with inverted commas, is a stylistic feature of the work):[14]

فصناعة المديح هى تشبيه ومحاكاة للعمل الارادى الحريص والكامل التى لها عظم ومداد فى القول النافع ما خلا كل واحد واحد من الانواع التى هى فاعلة فى الاجزا لا بالمواعيد وتعدل الانفعالات والتاثيرات بالرحمة والخوف وتنقى وتنظف الذين ينفعلون.

The art of *madīḥ* [lit.: "praise"] is 'the comparison and the imitation' [i.e.: μίμησις] –of an *intentional*,[f] eager and accomplished action– which [i.e.: the μίμησις] *have*[g] 'magnitude and extension,' in a *useful*[h] speech, *except for*[i] each one of the kinds that are active in the parts, not through *promises*,[j] and it tempers 'the passions and the impressions' and through pity and fear it 'purifies and cleanses' those who suffer.

In this sentence alone, the Arabic translator added five further changes (in *italics*), rendering Aristotle's definition hardly recognisable[15].

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[11] (*b*) the translator interpreted δρώντων as in agreement with τῶν εἰδῶν "of the kinds that act" rather than as a substantivized participle meaning "of (people) who act."

[12] (*d*) seems to be an addition of the Syriac; (*e*) is a radical change of the Greek text, possibly underlining a different interpretation of *catharsis*, and perhaps relying on the misunderstanding that τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων "such emotions" in fact refers to ἐλέου καὶ φόβου "pity and fear."

[13] Schrier 1997, 266 n. 18.

[14] Ed. Tkatsch 1928. With Margoliouth 1887, I read ينفعلون [*yanfa'ilūn*] "they suffer" instead of يفعلون [*yaf'alūn*] of the manuscript. Also, كل واحد واحد for the expected كل واحد , "each one," may be a Syriacism.

[15] (*f*) Abū Bišr's addition of الارادى [*'al-'irādī*] "voluntary," which is similarly added to eight other passages, is not justified by Aristotle's text and, according to Schrier 1997, 267-68 and 271, it may result from the "ethical" view that an action can be praiseworthy only when it has been performed voluntarily (possibly a reading of Aristotelian origin, see *Eth. Nic.* 1109b30-1115a3); (*g*) results from the ambiguity of the Syriac where, unlike the Greek, both ܬܪܓܘܕܘܬܐ [*ṭrāgodūtā*] "tragedy" and ܣܥܘܪܘܬܐ [*sā'ōrūṭā*] "action" are feminine, and Abū Bišr wrongly attributed عظم ومداد "magnitude and extension" to tragedy rather than to the action; (*h*) ܡܗܢܝܢܝܬܐ [*mahnyānitā*] means both "pleasant" and "useful;" (*i*) "except for" is another possible meaning of مهلا من ; (*j*) as opposed to the Syriac text, the Arabic has the plural.

A major change in the Arabic text is represented by the translation of the word "tragedy." As far as it is possible to tell from the surviving text, the Syriac translator consistently rendered the Greek words for tragedy, τραγῳδία, and comedy, κωμῳδία, with loanwords from Greek. The choice must not have been particularly problematic, as by this time loanwords from Greek were not rare in Syriac. One can only speculate, however, what precisely the translator meant with the words ܠܝܓܘܕܘܬܐ [ṭrāgodūṭā] and ܩܘܡܘܕܝܐ [qūmōdiyā][16].

Abū Bišr Mattā adopted a different strategy. Instead of using loanwords from Greek –as he did, for instance, when translating τὰ ἔπη "epic poetry" with صنعة افى "the art of epic poetry" [ṣanʿat ʾafī]–,[17] he used what could be, in his view, the Arabic equivalents for *tragedy* and *comedy*. He relied on his familiarity with Arabic literature, and his choice fell upon مديح [madīḥ] to translate *tragedy*, and هجاء [hiǧāʾ] to translate *comedy*:

τραγῳδία	>	ܠܝܓܘܕܘܬܐ	>	مديح	*madīḥ*	lit. "praise"
κωμῳδία	>	ܩܘܡܘܕܝܐ	>	هجاء	*hiǧāʾ*	lit. "invective; lampoon"

In fact, *madīḥ* and *hiǧāʾ* are quite specific terms, as they both designate particular modes of Arabic poetry. A "poem of *madīḥ*" is a panegyric addressed to individuals or to families, clans, tribes, that praises the personal and moral qualities of the addressee, such as courage, generosity and modesty. A "poem of *hiǧāʾ*" may be considered, so to speak, its antonym, as it consisted of attacks in verses addressed to adversaries or rival families – a form of invective that stigmatises avarice, cowardice and disloyalty. Both kinds of poems originated from the pre-Islamic tradition of the *qaṣīd* and were initially designed to be performed on particular occasions[18].

Unintuitive as it may seem, though, the association of *tragedy* with "panegyric poetry," and of *comedy* with "abusive poetry" was not totally unjustifiable. An Arabic reader could find some support for Abu Bišr's rendering of the two terms in another passage above in the *Poetics*, where Aristotle stated:

> Tragedy differs from comedy in relation to the above mentioned *differentia*: the latter strives to represent (characters) worse (than existing humans), the former (strives to represent characters) better than existing humans[19].

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[16] The same question can be raised about Jacob bar Šakko (d. 1241), since he interpolated the Aristotelian passage with a note on the epithet ܠܝܓܘܕܐ [ṭragōdā, τραγῳδός] attributed to David, since on occasion he also grieved when singing, as when moistening his couch with tears (Ps. 6.7); see Margoliouth 1887, ٨٧, lines 1–3.

[17] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1460a12; see also 1458a 15–16.

[18] Houtsma, M. Th., *et al.*, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition*, Leiden 1960–2009, *s.v.*

[19] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448a 16–18: ἐν αὐτῇ δὲ τῇ διαφορᾷ καὶ ἡ τραγῳδία πρὸς τὴν κωμῳδίαν διέστηκεν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ χείρους ἡ δὲ βελτίους μιμεῖσθαι βούλεται τῶν νῦν.

To interpret Aristotle with Aristotle could be a good scholarly habit, and even more so on this particular occasion, since another Aristotelian passage replicates the same view[20]. It is possible that such passages were behind the interpretation of *tragedy* and *comedy* as panegyric and abusive poetry respectively[21].

It would be problematic to establish whether the Syriac translator, through the loanwords, also meant by tragedy some sort of panegyric poetry performed by a sole individual, rather than a theatrical play. Certainly, it seems unlikely that he considered tragedy and comedy to be theatrical pieces. This, at least, is what emerges from the translation of another passage:[22]

πρῶτον μὲν ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἂν εἴη τι μόριον τραγῳδίας ὁ τῆς ὄψεως κόσμος
First, by necessity, a part of the tragedy should be the set [lit.: "the order of what is seen;" *i.e.*: "the arrangement of the spectacle, the scene"]

ܗܘ ܐܢܫܠܐ ܐܘܬܗ ܕܝܬ ܗܟܢ ܐܠܝ̈ܬܕ ܡܢܝܬܐ ܣܝܬܐ ܡܢ ܘܗܘܦܝܢ̈ܕܐ
by necessity, a part of the tragedy shall be the decorum of the face

The Syriac translator rendered ὁ τῆς ὄψεως κόσμος, "the order of what is seen," with the literal ܣܝܬܐ ܘܗܘܦܝܢ̈ܕܐ "the beauty of the face," adopting a word-for-word translation. Yet, although ܗܕܪܐ [*hedrā*], "beauty; decoration, adornment," can often be a good translation of κόσμος, "order; ornament, decoration" and ܘܗܘܦܝܢ̈ܕ [*parṣōpā*], "face," can correspond to ὄψις, "aspect, face; sight; vision," in our passage the transmission of the text went wrong. Indeed, ὄψις should be interpreted as "what is seen," instead of "face" as the Syriac translator did. Thus, in translation "the set, the scene" became "the decorum of the face;" and, as a result, the reference to the theatre disappeared from the Syriac text.

In rendering the same passage, Abū Bišr wrote:

فليكن اولا من الاضطرار جزو ما من صناعة المديح في صفة جمال وحسن الوجه
First, by necessity, a part of the art of *madīḥ* shall be *the description of* the 'beauty and grace' of the face.

The passage is not straightforward, and it may be problematic to determine what Abū Bišr meant by the addition of في صفة , possibly meaning "in the description." With only the Syriac translation at his disposal, he perhaps intended the Syriac ܘܗܘܦܝܢ̈ܕ [*parṣōpā*], "face," as the face of the person who was praised in the poem of *madīḥ*[23].

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[20] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448b 20–27.

[21] Serra 2002, 15.

[22] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b 31–33; Margoliouth, 1887, ٨٧, lines 7–8.

[23] Serra 2002, 18-19, hypothesised, instead, that Abū Bišr intended here the face of the poet who performed a poem of *madīḥ*.

Another passage illustrates the translators' interpretation of tragedy:[24]

ἔστιν δὲ τῆς μὲν πράξεως ὁ μῦθος ἡ μίμησις, λέγω γὰρ μῦθον τοῦτον τὴν σύνθεσιν τῶν πραγμάτων
the plot is imitation of the action; indeed here by 'plot' I mean the composition of the facts

Here Aristotle argued that the "plot" is an essential part of tragedy, and by "imitation of the action," the philosopher meant the performances of the tragic actors on the stage. The focus of the passage is on the actors, whose imitative actions constitute the plot, a fundamental part of the tragedy[25].

Yet, in the Syriac translation of the passage, there is no room for the actors or for their performance. The genitive πράξεως was not interpreted as the object of the μίμησις, that is to say "the imitation of an action" as in Greek, but, rather, πράξεως was construed with μῦθος, the "plot," and it has become its object:[26]

ܟܘܬܒܐ ܕܝܢ ܕܣܥܘܪܐ ܐܘܗܕܐ ܡܢ ܣܥܘܪܐ ܐܝܬ ܗܝ ܐܡܪ ܠܗ. ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܟܘܬܒܐ ܠܬܪܟܒܐ ܕܣܥܘܪܘܬܐ.

Then, the plot of a *narrative* [*tenyā*] is the imitation; indeed by 'plot' I mean the composition of the facts

The Syriac translator interpreted πράξεως as meaning "a narrative," that is to say "a narrated event," which requires a narrator, – and not "an action." If one follows the Syriac, imitation is the plot of a "narrative story," which, accordingly, does not require the performance of the actors. The Syriac translation again missed the dramatic element of tragedy.

Abū Bišr Mattā could not find a sole hint of the theatrical performance in the Syriac translation of this passage. His interpretation of tragedy as a poem of *madīḥ* seemed to work again, and he translated:[27]

وخرافة الحديث والقصص هى تشبيه ومحاكاة واعنى بالخرافة وحكاية الحديث تركيب الامور

The narration of 'a (related) event and stories' is 'the comparison and the imitation;' by 'narration and imitation of a (related) event' I mean the structure of the facts.

Abū Bišr translated the "plot of a narrative" of the Syriac with "the narration of the related event and the stories." The introduction of a double translation results in a

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[24] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450a 3–5.

[25] Serra 2002, 20–29.

[26] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b 31–33; Margoliouth 1887, ٩٧, lines 1–3.

[27] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b 31–33; together with Badawī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Fann al-shi'r: ma'a al-tarjamah al-'Arabīyah al-qadīmah wa-shurūḥ al-Fārābī wa-Ibn Sīnā wa-Ibn Rushd*, Cairo 1953, 97, I read خرافة [*kurāfat*] instead of خرفة.

redundant list of three words with meanings pertaining to "narration," with no trace of dramatic performance[28].

In the two passages discussed, the translators changed the references to the performative aspects of tragedy into diegetic features that could describe a narrated poem. A little further, the passage ἐπεὶ δὲ πράξεώς ἐστι μίμησις, πράττεται δὲ ὑπὸ τινῶν πράττοντων "since imitation is of an action, (tragedy) is acted by people who act" became in Syriac ܕܡܛܠ ܕܡܬܕܡܝܢܘܬܐ ܘܡܬܚܒܠܢܘܬܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܐܝܬܝܗ ܡܢ ܗܢ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܐܦ ܡܫܬܥܝܢ "since imitation is of an action, (tragedy) is *narrated* by people who *narrate*."[29] In short, the dramatic aspect of tragedy did not make its way into the Syriac translation, as both tragedy and comedy were interpreted as recited or narrated pieces, rather than theatrical plays.

On the ground of the present textual survey, one may account for a variant in another passage. In the definition of tragedy reported in the first text above (*b*), the Greek word in the genitive case δρώντων, meaning "tragedy is an imitation (made up) *by people who act* [i.e. the actors]," is interpreted in Syriac, instead, as in agreement with τῶν εἰδῶν, the different "kinds" of language that characterize the different parts of the tragedy. Again, the translator missed the reference to the actors' performances.

Far from reporting Aristotle's view, the translations attest to the Syriac translator's and Abū Bišr Mattā's own interpretations of tragedy and comedy. The Syriac translator thought of tragedy as a narrative piece, while Abū Bišr Mattā interpreted tragedy as a poem of *madīḥ*. Their awareness of Greek literature was scarce, but nevertheless they were not prevented from reading and studying Aristotle's *Poetics*, a treatise dealing with Greek drama. Rather, the distance that separated Greek and Arabic literatures prompted translators and later scholars such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rušd to put forward their interpretations of the Aristotelian text[30].

In fact, the translation of Abū Bišr was itself the result of a venture of interpretation in its own right. Abū Bišr's efforts to transmit the *Poetics* into Arabic were not

[28] The introduction of the third double translation may also witness to the same interpretation: the Syriac ܥܒܝܕܬܐ [*šū'īṯā*] "plot" is rendered with الخرافة وحكاية الحديث "narration and imitation of a related event." This addition seems to show that, if one follows Abū Bišr, the "imitation of an event" was equivalent to its narration.

[29] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b 36–37; Margoliouth 1887, ٨٧, lines 12–13; see also Serra 2002, 24.

[30] Kemal, S., *The philosophical poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes: the Aristotelian reception*, London 2003. A later Arabic translation by Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's (or possibly a revision of Abū Bišr's), who brought back in the words "tragedy" and "comedy," is regrettably lost, and it is problematic to estimate Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's contribution to the interpretation of the *Poetics* (Schrier 1997, 271–72). Ibn Rušd made an effort, in his commentary on the *Poetics*, to make links to Arabic poetry, and Ḥazīm al-Qarṭājannī (d. 1285) wrote a work on poetics which combined the Graeco-Arabic and indigenous Arabic traditions (Heinrichs, W., *Arabische Dichtung und griechische Poetik*, Beirut 1969; Schoeler, G., *Einige Grundprobleme der autochthonen und der aristotelischen arabischen Literaturtheorie*, Wiesbaden, 1975). By 1286, Barhebraeus had composed the *Book of Cream of Wisdom*, where he wrote about tragedy relying on the Syriac translation of the *Poetics* and possibly on Ibn Sīnā's commentary (Schrier 1997, 273–275).

motivated by an interest in Greek literature, but, rather, by an interest in Aristotelian logic; and they should be considered within the translation movement of ninth- and tenth-century Baghdad. Here, the translation of philosophical texts from Greek into Arabic, often through the intermediary of Syriac translations,[31] was functional to the attempt, by philosophers such as Abū Bišr Mattā, al-Fārābī and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, to found an Arabic school of philosophy. The Arabic *Poetics* is a witness to the study of Aristotle in Arabic scholarship, and it attests the efforts to reproduce, beyond language boundaries, a philosophical tradition rooted in Late Antiquity[32].

Abū Bišr Mattā, al-Fārābī and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī worked at the creation of a corpus of texts to be used within philosophical instruction in Arabic; and this curriculum was shaped upon earlier philosophical scholarship. It has been recognised that the neo-Aristotelian curriculum, which had been developed within Greek Alexandrian scholarship during the fifth and sixth centuries, provided the model for the philosophical instruction of tenth century Arabic philosophers. According to this tradition, logic was to be studied first, before philosophy proper, as it was intended as an instrument, the *Organon*, for further philosophical enquiry. Also, according to the Late Alexandrian curriculum, the set texts for the study of logic were those written by Aristotle and by his commentators, such as Porphyry and Alexander of Aphrodisias, which were repeatedly translated and revised in ninth- and tenth-century Baghdad[33].

A characteristic aspect of the Late Alexandrian curriculum of philosophical studies was the inclusion of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* in the *Organon*. The inclusion of the two treatises in the set texts for the preliminary study of logic after the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations* is witnessed by John Philoponus and the commentator Elias, both living in the sixth century. According to John Philoponus, the *Poetics* needed to be studied since it described the *paralogismoi*, the "false reasoning" that shares the same structure with syllogism proper[34]. Similarly, the commentator Elias wrote of five kinds of syllogism, according to the degree of truth of their premises. According

[31] Syriac translations were also produced to be used as intermediary stages in the translations from Greek into Arabic. This might be the case of the *Poetics*, given the short period separating the Syriac and Arabic translations.

[32] Walzer, R., 'Zur Traditionsgeschichte der Aristotelischen Poetik,' *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica*, N.S. 9 (1934), 5–14, (= Cassirer, B., ed., *Greek into Arabic*, Oxford 1962, 129–136).

[33] Zimmermann 1981, XXI-XXIV.

[34] John Philoponus, *In Arist. Categ.* XIII 5.8–14: "Among the logical works (of Aristotle), some are about the principles of the investigation, such as the *Categories*, *On Interpretation* and the two books of the *Prior Analytics*, some are about the investigation itself, such as the *Posterior Analytics*, where (Aristotle) explains about the demonstration, the *Topics*, the *Sophistical Refutations*, the *Rhetoric*, and –as someone says– the *Poetics*: by themselves they do not discuss the investigation, but, in view of the demonstration, they cooperate by teaching us the (sorts of) investigations through which false reasoning (*paralogismoi*) takes place."

to Elias, the least true among the syllogisms is the so-called "poetic syllogism," since it is based on entirely false premises. So, no matter its falsity, the investigation through "poetic syllogism" shares some features with demonstration proper, and as such it was to be studied[35].

Elias' interpretation, which originated in Late Antique Alexandria, found its way to the tenth century, first to Abū Bišr Mattā, then to his pupil al-Fārābī. Al-Fārābī wrote of five kinds of syllogism, the last and least truthful being the so-called "poetic syllogism," as he explained in his *Canons of Poetry*[36]. It is the study of Aristotelian logic, as it had been framed during Late Antiquity, that prompted Abū Bišr Mattā's translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Indeed, Abū Bišr himself was a prominent figure among the initiators of the reception of Aristotelian philosophy in Arabic. If we believe his contemporary opponents, he was even the main promoter of the study of Aristotelian logic among Arabic scholars[37]. The fact that a scholar of Aristotelian logic translated the *Poetics*, and the collocation of the Arabic *Poetics* in the *Parisinus Ar.* 2346 (11th cent.), together with the other Arabic translations of the Aristotelian *Organon* –or, better, the Baghdad *Organon*– provides the background of this venture of translation and interpretation of our Aristotelian treatise[38].

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[35] Elias Commentator, *In Categ. prooem.* XVIII 116.29–117.4: "The logical works (of Aristotle) are divided into three (groups): about what precedes the investigation or the demonstration, about what concerns the demonstration itself and about what assumes (the quality) of the demonstration. […] Those which assume (the quality) of the demonstration are the *Topics*, the *Sophistical Refutations*, the *Rhetoric*, and the *Poetics*. Five are the kinds of syllogism: demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, sophistic and poetic (*poietikos*). And naturally, since the premises (*protaseis*) on which they are based are five: the premises are entirely true and they produce the demonstrative (syllogism), or they are entirely false and they produce the poetic fabulous (syllogism), or they are partially true and partially false, and this is three ways: […]."

[36] Walzer 1934, 131–132; Gutas, D., 'Paul the Persian and the classification of the parts of Aristotle's philosophy: a milestone between Alexandria and Bagdad,' *Der Islam* 60 (1983), 231–267; Black, D.L., *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in medieval Arabic philosophy*, Leiden 1990; Watt 2007; Watt, J., *Al-Farabi and the history of the Syriac Organon*, Piscataway 2009.

[37] His main interests were in Aristotelian philosophy, and logic in particular. Unfortunately his own logical writings are lost, but his surviving translations, always from Syriac into Arabic, include the *Posterior Analytics*, (together with a commentary by Alexander of Aphrodisias and a paraphrase by Themistius) and the *Sophistical Refutations*. Both the works, together with the *Poetics*, had been included in the late Alexandrian *Organon*. Zimmermann 1981, LXXVI–LXXVII.

[38] Zimmermann 1981, lxxviii-lxix. The confinement of the *Poetics* to the field of logic must not have remained free from criticism. Ibn al-Atīr (d. 1239) wrote: "someone dabbling in philosophy once discussed this with me and in the course of the conversation mention was made of something that Abū 'Alī Ibn Sīnā had said on rhetoric and poetry. He mentioned a genre of ancient Greek poetry called *ṭarāghūḏiyā*. He got up and brought the book, *aš-Šifā'* by Abū 'Alī [Ibn Sīnā] and showed me what he [Ibn Sīnā] had said. When I read it I found him stupid, for he talks at great length and breadth about the matter, as if he were addressing some ancient Greek, but all he says is

In a tradition of philosophical scholarship developed in fifth and sixth century Alexandria, the study of Aristotle's *Poetics* was part of the study of logic. Abū Bišr Mattā's reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*, a treatise dealing with Greek drama and tragedy in particular, was filtered through the works of Late Antique Alexandrian commentators. According to John Philoponus and Elias, the Aristotelian *Organon* should also include the *Poetics*, since the so-called "poetic syllogism" had the same structure as syllogism proper. Abū Bišr Mattā, a logician himself, directed his efforts towards the recreation, in Arabic, of the very texts used for the study of logic in sixth-century Alexandria, and the Arabic translation of the *Poetics* was part of this enterprise. In this context, references to Greek literature could be substituted with more meaningful examples for Arabic readers. The interpretations of tragedy as "eulogistic poetry," and of comedy as "abusive poetry," were developed by Abū Bišr Mattā in this context, and, most likely, on the basis of the very Aristotelian text.

drivel, wholly useless to a speaker of Arabic. In addition to all this, these people rely, according to what he mentions about rhetorical [and poetical] speech, on producing (syllogisms made of) two premises and a conclusion. But this is something that would not have occurred to Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā whenever he composed poetry or rhymed prose. For he has written in this style, but in pouring forth whatever he composed he would have never thought of two premises and a conclusion! If he had to think first of all of two premises and a conclusion and only after this would compose poetry or prose, he would never have produced anything useful and he would have had a lengthy struggle! No, I shall say more: whenever the ancient Greeks themselves composed their poems they did not do so while at the same time they had any thought of two premises or conclusion. These things are merely concepts that have been invented and which only serve to lengthen their writings about rhetoric and poetry. But they are, as the saying goes, 'futile bubbles of air, like the poetry of al-Abīwardī.'" (Aḥmad al-Ḥūfī and Badawī Ṭabānah, eds., *Ḍiyāʾ ad-Dīn Ibn al-Aṯīr. al-Maṯal as-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib wa-š-šāʿir*, Cairo 1973, II 5–7; trans. by Prof. Gerard van Gelder, to whom I am grateful for having drawn my attention to the passage).