

TOWARDS A TEXTUAL HISTORY AND RECONSTRUCTION OF ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS'S TREATISE ON THE PRINCIPLES OF THE UNIVERSE

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Abstract

Among Alexander of Aphrodisias's works, a key-role is played by his treatise *On the Principles of the Universe*. It contains Alexander's exegesis of Aristotle's theory of the unmoved mover, as in *Metaphysics Lambda* and in *Physics* VIII. Its original Greek text is lost, but a sixth-century Syriac version and two tenth-century Arabic ones are still extant. All these versions have already been published, and two of them have been rendered into modern languages (English, French, Italian) in the last ninety years, but a really deep textual comparison between them, aiming at the reconstruction of the lost Greek text, has not yet been made. Usually, a key-role is given to the second, later Arabic version of it, mostly since it is more complete than the other ones. Here, a philological re-examination of the history of the textual transmission of Alexander's work is given, and some new conclusions about it are suggested, according to which the role of the first Arabic version, and that of the Syriac one in particular, are found to be more important than hitherto suspected.

It is hard to find a Greek philosopher whose textual transmission owes more to Semitic languages than Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. about 200 CE).¹ Sure, not every writing transmitted in his name has the same chances to be authentic (some have definitely none); nor does every middle age version of his authentic works offer the same reliability and closeness to its Greek *Vorlage*.² On the whole, it

¹ R. Goulet and M. Aouad, 'Alexandros d'Aphrodise', in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, vol. I (Paris 1989), 125–39. As Goulet and Aouad recall, 'il est peu d'auteur anciens dont l'oeuvre soit aussi dispersée; traduction directe et indirecte; versions syriaques, arabes, hébraïques, latines; des nombreux titres enfin, attestées par les biobibliographes arabes, mais dont l'authenticité est parfois remise en question par les spécialistes' (*DPhA* I, 1989, 127).

² Relevant literature in S. Fazzo, 'Alexandros d'Aphrodise', in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, *Supplément* (Paris 2003), 61–70.

is pretty clear that the most relevant contribution of the Arabic is the transmission of two major treatises of Alexander: *On Providence* and *On the Principles of the Universe*. The authors of this article have provided in 1999 a critical edition and a comprehensive study of the two Arabic versions of the treatise *On providence*, whose Greek exemplar is now lost, in spite of a few later quotes (as late as Cyril of Alexandria's *Contra Julianum*).³ We aim now to give a detailed account of our findings concerning the troublesome textual history of the treatise *On the Principles of the Universe* (henceforth: *De principiis*). These findings are intended to justify and to explain the method we are now following in preparing a new edition and commentary of the treatise.

The relevance of the subject deserves to be considered as well: *De principiis* makes us well acquainted with Alexander's interpretation on a subject whose relevance is second to none in Aristotelian philosophy: namely, Aristotle's theory about the unmoved mover and beyond, i.e. the whole of Aristotle's theory about the principles of the universe. Though not being compiled in the form of a continuous commentary, the treatise is based on Alexander's own exegesis of book *Lambda* (XII), which he regarded as the final book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.⁴ *De principiis* thus includes an extensive paraphrase of chs 6–10 of *Lambda*, focused on the Prime Mover and the way it relates to the universe. Starting from paragraphs 63–4, Alexander broadly follows the sequence of argument in the relevant sections of *Lambda*, with extensive additions from book VIII of Aristotle's *Physics*.⁵ To this one must add that in the previous part of the *De principiis* the same subject matter (always borrowed from *Lambda* and *Physics* VIII), is given with an independent arrangement, probably for

³ S. Fazzo and M. Zonta, *Alessandro di Afrodizia: La provvidenza. Questioni sulla provvidenza* (Milan 1999); S. Fazzo, 'La versione araba del *peri pronoiis* di Alessandro di Afrodizia e i frammenti greci nel trattato *Contra Julianum* di Cirillo di Alessandria', *Aevum* 2 (Milan 2000), 399–419.

⁴ S. Fazzo, 'L'exégèse de *Métaphysique Lambda* dans le *De principiis* et dans la *Quaestio* I.1 d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise', *Laval théologique et philosophique* 64/3 (2008), 607–26. For a further piece of Greek evidence on Alexander's exegesis of book *Lambda*, see Fazzo's forthcoming edition of another Greek text by Alexander or from his school, described on p. 611 of the article just cited.

⁵ After we had submitted this paper, a much needed book appeared with all the Greek fragments from Alexander's commentary to Aristotle's *Physics*: M. Rashed (ed.), *Alexandre d'Aphrodise, Commentaire perdu à la Physique d'Aristote (livres IV–VIII): les scholies byzantines, édition, traduction et commentaire* (Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca et Byzantina 1, Berlin and Boston, MA 2011). Future inquiry on Alexander's *De principiis* will have to take this new material and work into careful account.

the sake of a broader readership which was not expected to be directly acquainted with Aristotle's texts.⁶ Alexander's exegesis has been so influential on the reception of Aristotle's texts, that it is still difficult to separate it from the original significance of those texts; on a number of fundamental issues, the well-known prime mover's theory which is commonly ascribed to Aristotle can be more properly regarded as Alexander's. Alexander made a synthesis of *Lambda* and of *Physics* VIII which is coherent in itself and was extremely successful.

Still, in spite of the subject's relevance, the two current editions of *De Principiis*, based only on the one translation, have been scarcely quoted and studied so far; moreover, neither of them has a full summary and comprehensive commentary.⁷ Probably, such desiderata need to be based on a general textual reconstruction, still to be accomplished.⁸ As a matter of fact, different stages in the textual history of the treatise, both in Syriac and Arabic, carry unedited information about its contexts of transmission.

The original Greek text of Alexander's *De principiis* is apparently lost; but we have three later versions of it. Only one of these really covers the second part, so the evidence on that latter part is poorer but simpler. Concerning the former, by contrast, one has to investigate how the three sources are related. As Gerhard Endress noted in the introduction of his 2002 edition of a shorter Arabic text on the same subject and transmitted under Alexander's name, the textual history of our treatise *De principiis* is a complicated one.⁹ Different

⁶ Both of Aristotle's books *Lambda* and *Physics* VIII are crucial and crucially difficult. Their mutual relationship is not always obvious from the outset. Alexander commented upon both of them line-by-line but, unfortunately, neither of Alexander's commentaries survives. We just have some quotations in later authors, especially Simplicius's Greek commentary on *Physics* VIII and Averroes's Arabic commentary on book *Lambda*. But neither series of fragments amounts to a coherent witness of what Alexander's exegesis ought to be.

⁷ Silvia Fazzo aimed to fill part of this gap in her 'L'exégèse de *Métaphysique Lambda* dans le *De principiis* et dans la *Quaestio* I.1 d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise'. However, that analysis only covers *De principiis* §§63–4 onward. A thorough analysis will be given as an introduction to our forthcoming edition of the treatise.

⁸ Sparse references to books *Lambda* and *Physics* VIII are found in Genequand's reference edition (Ch. Genequand, *Alexander of Aphrodisias On the Cosmos*, Leiden 2001), although they do not have any systematic character; this might be partly due to the obscurity of some points of the text.

⁹ G. Endress, 'Alexander Arabus on the First Cause. Aristotle's First Mover in an Arabic Treatise attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias', in C. D'Ancona and G. Serra (eds), *Aristotele e Alessandro di Afrodizia nella tradizione Araba* (Padova 2002), 19–74. The text is named 'VE35' in van Ess' list of works of Alexander transmitted in Arabic. See J. van Ess, 'Über einige neue Fragmente des Alexander

versions of it are transmitted in different languages,¹⁰ and there is as yet no consensus about the interrelationship of these versions and how exactly they relate to the lost Greek version. Having set out to produce a new edition on a comprehensive basis, we soon realized that we needed a general reconstruction, possibly a stemma, in order to judge the nature and value of the different sources at our disposal. With this goal in mind, we will focus here on the three versions of *De principiis* itself, leaving aside related texts such as the shorter one edited by Endress. Despite its closely related subject matter, it seems to be a different text — as Endress notices, it would seem to be a summary, but not necessarily of our treatise.¹¹ So it will not help us in reconstructing *De principiis*. Instead, we intend to focus on those texts which can be considered as different versions of one and the same work by Alexander.

All three versions were made in the Near East between 500–950, thus at least three centuries after the original composition of the work. The earliest version was made in Syriac: it is found in MS London, British Library, *Additional* 14658, on folios 99v–107v. It includes a text which has the following title: *Discourse on the causes of the whole, said by*¹² *Mar Sargis priest of Re'sh 'Ayna, according to the opinion of the philosopher Aristotle, how it is the circle* (sic; perhaps: 'in the way it circulates'? This text (we will call it 'SYR') was studied and

von Aphrodisias und des Proklos in arabischer Übersetzung', *Der Islam* 42 (1966), 148–68.

¹⁰ On a Greek shorter counterpart, see Alexander's *Quaestio* I.1, and partly I.25 (as found in *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis praeter commentaria scripta minora*, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, Supplementum Aristotelicum 2, ed. I. Bruns, Berolini 1889–92, vol. II), with Fazzo, 'L'exégèse de *Métaphysique Lambda* dans le *De principiis* et dans la *Quaestio* I.1' (n. 4).

¹¹ See Endress' critical edition (in Endress, 'Alexander Arabus on the First Cause', 65–74). An edition based on one Princeton manuscript with an English translation is in Ch. Genequand, *Alexander of Aphrodisias On the Cosmos* (Leiden 2001), 136–43. The first part (Endress, 'Alexander Arabus on the First Cause', 65; Genequand's edited text is altered, see Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 137) introduces a discussion of self-motion. The conclusion states that the Creator cannot will anything impossible. With reference to God (but not to a Creator) the topic can be found in Alexander's *Quaestio* I.18, quoting in turn Plato's *Theaetetus*. But the problem of God's will became a much more controversial one in Islamic religious thought, which divided the two theological schools of Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites. Therefore, we cannot be sure that 'VE35' relies uniquely on Greek sources and goes back directly to a Greek exemplar, as Endress supposes (see Endress, 'Alexander Arabus on the First Cause', 47).

¹² Alternatively, the Syriac could be literally translated: 'said to' (*d-amir l-*). But the formula is not unusual in manuscripts to identify the author of the work.

translated into Italian (but not edited) by Giuseppe Furlani in 1922.¹³ He ascribed it to Sergius of Reš 'Ayna, a philosopher and translator of Greek philosophical and medical texts from Greek into Syriac, who lived in Syria in the first three decades of the sixth century.¹⁴ Only in 1992, at the 'Syriac Symposium' held in Cambridge, did Dana Miller identify the original author as Alexander of Aphrodisias.¹⁵ He based this conclusion on a first comparison of the Syriac text with the Arabic text which had been published in 1947 by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī.¹⁶

In 2010, two articles by Emiliano Fiori and Daniel King re-examined the text and its contents.¹⁷ Fiori published the Syriac text as found in the London manuscript (in a sort of 'diplomatic' reproduction of it), and translated it into French, mostly following Furlani's 1922 version.¹⁸ King in turn offered an interpretation of the content of the work, and pointed out what he saw as important divergences from Alexander's text, as established by the later Arabic version which King seems to take as corresponding much more closely to the lost Greek original.

There are at least fifteen extant manuscripts of the *De principiis*, which preserve two Arabic versions of Alexander's treatise. They are different in length, and often in style too. The shorter version is preserved in eight manuscripts. It was edited by Charles Genequand in 2001, who calls it 'text B'.¹⁹ As we are going to argue, this version was the first to be made and was indeed a partial basis for the other Arabic version. Henceforth, we will call it 'ARA I'. The translator of ARA I was Abū 'Uṭmān al-Dimašqī, a physician who in AH 302/914

¹³ G. Furlani, 'Il trattato di Sergio di Rêsh'aynâ sull'universo', *Rivista trimestrale di studi filosofici e religiosi* 4 (1923), 1–22.

¹⁴ About him, see H. Hugonnard-Roche, 'Sergius de Reš'ainâ, traducteur du grec en syriaque et commentateur d'Aristote', in Id., *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque. Études sur la transmission des textes de l'Organon et leur interprétation philosophique* (Paris 2004), 123–42.

¹⁵ D.R. Miller, 'Sargis of Reš'aynâ: On What the Celestial Bodies Know', in R. Lavenant (ed.), *VI Symposium Syriacum* (Rome 1994), 221–33.

¹⁶ 'A. Badawī, *Arisṭū 'inda 'l-'Arab* (al-Qāhira 1947), 253–77.

¹⁷ E. Fiori, 'L'épitomé syriaque du *Traité sur les causes du tout* d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise attribué à Serge de Reš'aynâ', and D. King, 'Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Principles of the Universe* in a Syriac Adaptation', *Le Muséon* 123 (2010), 127–58 and 159–91.

¹⁸ 'Pour la traduction nous nous appuyons sur l'excellente traduction italienne de Furlani, qui n'aurait presque pas besoin d'être retouchée. Nous en retiendrons plusieurs choix de mots et d'expressions' (Fiori, 'L'épitomé syriaque', 128).

¹⁹ Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 128–35.

CE became the director of the main hospital (*bimaristān*) in Baghdad, according to the thirteenth-century Arab-Islamic bibliographer Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a.²⁰ He is known to have translated other minor texts by Alexander. His style is not always lucid, as we will see, but his competence is considerable.

The longer version — Genequand's 'text A', which we call 'ARA II', because we argue that it comes after text B (see below) — was first published by Badawī and then re-published in a critical edition, with an annotated English translation, by Genequand.²¹ This version provides the sole basis for current scholarly acquaintance with Alexander's *De principiis*, since people referring to the treatise refer to this version. It could not have been otherwise, at least if one takes only one version into account, since ARA II is much longer: it is divided into 151 paragraphs by Genequand, and of these ARA I covers only the contents of paragraphs 1–49. Yet the part shared between ARA I and ARA II tells us something about the whole transmission process.

In at least one passage, which appears at the end of his version, it seems that ARA I stops translating when the text becomes too garbled.²² ARA II, by contrast, keeps running but has the argument wrong. This can be considered as it results from Genequand's edition and translation of ARA II. Already in paragraph 47, the Arabic text has *al-mutaḥarrak*, 'the moved thing', whereas Genequand implicitly corrects the argument by translating 'the mover'.²³ A further problem is at the end of paragraph 48: Alexander follows Aristotle, arguing in further detail that the first eternal movement could not be one, if the moved thing were one but the mover were not eternal and one. ARA II might have a problem: '(48) The same consequence (i.e. a plurality in movement) follows when the mover is multiple, not one, because if the moved is one and *the mover is not one*, then motion in this case

²⁰ Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a, *'Uyūn al-anbā' fi ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'*, ed. N. Riḍā' (Beirut 1965), 316, ll. 6–8.

²¹ Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 42–127.

²² Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 135, ll. 4–5: 'And the discourses which can be said about these things are many. This is the last of what is found of this treatise'. According to us, al-Dimašqī deliberately interrupted his translation, although he had the whole text at his disposal; the latest remark is a scribe's gloss. The discussion in the part of the treatise at issue is closely related to the exegesis of the connection between *Physics* VIII, chs 1 ff. and *Metaphysics* XII, ch. 6, about the eternity of movement. The former argues for the eternal existence of *some* movement, whereas the latter uses the statement of a *single*, eternal movement as a starting point. The textual transmission shows the translators' perplexity so as whether the argument for an unmoved mover is based on the eternal motion or vice versa.

²³ Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 66, l. 13.

too will not be one and continuous, but multiple and manifold, since homogeneity and continuity become manifold *because of the difference between the things moved*.²⁴ Thus, it seems odd that the plurality is ascribed to the moved things, since in the hypothesis at issue the moved is still one (see above): for the difference should be between the movers, not between the moved things, as is suggested by the context. By contrast, as a matter of fact, the corresponding section of ARA I appears to have translated the correct variant reading ‘mover’.²⁵ Further in ARA II, at paragraph 49, where the proof is given for the prime mover of the first heaven’s motion, the argument seems to get even worse, in spite of Genequand’s attempts at improvement (in angle brackets).²⁶ The argument, as it can be judged from the printed text of ARA II, does not run correctly: instead of using the movement to infer about the mover’s activity (as Aristotle does both in *Physics* VIII and in *Metaphysics Lambda* 6–7), it seems to imply that if there were no motion, (as a consequence) there were no mover. But if so, then motion would have priority on the mover, which cannot be the case: substance is prior to movement by all means; moreover, the text says that eternal motion comes from outside, whereas Alexander clearly states that eternal motion is due to the first heaven’s desire of imitating the first substance’s perfection. There are thus some parts which are sound and in line with Aristotle’s argument, according to Alexander’s exegesis, but other parts are corrupted and manifestly need improvement. Sergius’s version stops earlier (as al-Dimašqī’s does), but the parallel section gives pretty good sense.²⁷

This already suggests something about the style of the two versions. The author of the longer one, ARA II, wanted to produce a more complete exemplar, but did not necessarily always have a better understanding of the text.

The evidence concerning the authorship of ARA II is complex, as the manuscripts ascribe it to different translators. Still, we can construct a plausible account on the basis of this evidence.

²⁴ Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 67, l. 17 – 69, l. 1.

²⁵ Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 134, ll. 24–5: *li-annahā ‘inda naqli ‘l-muḥarriki yatašattata istiwā’ahā*, ‘since, when the mover changes, its regularity is dissolved’.

²⁶ See Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 69, ll. 4–9: ‘(49) (...) The mover imparting the eternal motion would not exist if the thing moved with the eternal motion were so moved while <the mover> did not exist; on the contrary, <motion> must be understood to come from outside, and if <the mover> did not exist, the motion of the divine body would then not remain one and continuous’.

²⁷ See paragraph 24 in Fiori, ‘L’*épitomé syriaque*’, 151.

1. The first and most valuable witness is the Arabic manuscript of the treatise which is by far the oldest one: MS Damascus, al-Zāhiriyya Library, *Āmm* 4871, folios 107b–112b, dating to AH 558/1163 CE.²⁸ It ascribes the translation to Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abdullāh al-Naṣrānī al-Kātib. The translator explicitly says that he has based his work upon a previous Greek-to-Syriac version by Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (died around AH 256/870 CE). This brings us to two key figures in the history of the text, one well-known, the other less so. Whereas Ḥunayn b. Ishāq is a prominent scholar, so that we will be able to quote statements he gives on his own work and translation’s technique,²⁹ we have very little secure evidence about Ibrāhīm. According to al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* (written in AH 376/987 CE), Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abdullāh (probably his true name) was one of the translators ‘from various languages into Arabic (*min al-luḡāti ilā ’l-lisāni ’l-‘arabi*)’.³⁰ According to Genequand, it seems that Ibrāhīm worked in the Baghdadian ‘school of translators’ founded by Ḥunayn b. Ishāq and continued by his son, Ishāq (died in AH 297/910 CE). He was dead around the middle of the tenth century, since al-Nadīm, who lived and worked in the second half of that century, refers to ‘his legacy’ as something known by contemporary scholars.³¹
2. Nonetheless, four other manuscripts of some value for the textual reconstruction of ARA I ascribe the translation to Ishāq b. Ḥunayn. This might be suspected to be a *lectio facilior*, for the name of Ḥunayn’s son was better known. Already in the case of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, it seems that Ibrāhīm’s translation circulated under Ishāq’s name.³² From al-Nadīm,³³ we know that in the

²⁸ See further Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 27.

²⁹ See G. Bergsträsser, *Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Übersetzungen* (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 17/2, Leipzig 1925).

³⁰ See R. Tajaddod, *Kitāb al-Fihrist li-’l-Nadīm* (Tehran, n.d.), 305, l. 11.

³¹ Moreover, al-Nadīm puts Ibrāhīm’s name on the list *after* that of Ishāq b. Ḥunayn and that of al-Dimašqī (who lived in the tenth century as well), so it seems likely that he was still active toward the middle of that century.

³² Al-Nadīm affirms (Tajaddod, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 310, line 13): *wa-qīla inna Ishāqa naqalahu ilā ’l-‘arabi, wa-naqalahu Ibrāhīmu bnu ‘Abdillāhi*, ‘it is said that Ishāq (b. Ḥunayn) translated it into Arabic, and Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abdullāh translated it’. Might this word, ‘and’, in Arabic *wa-*, be used in the sense of ‘while, in reality’? That is to say: in reality, was the version of the *Rhetoric* ascribed to Ishāq b. Ḥunayn made by Ibrāhīm al-Kātib? If this hypothesis were to be correct in this case, it might be true for version ARA I of Alexander’s work as well.

³³ Tajaddod, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 313, ll. 11–12: *ṣarḥu Aliskandari li-’l-Samā’i kulluhū, wa-li-Kitābi ’l-Burbāni, ra’ayuhū fī tarikati Ibrāhīmi bni ‘Abdillāhi ’l-nāqili ’l-Naṣrāni*.

library (literally: in the ‘legacy’, in Arabic *tarikā*) of Ibrāhīm al-Kātib there were Arabic versions of two other works by Alexander: his extensive commentaries on Aristotle’s *Physics* and *Posterior Analytics*. Ibrāhīm’s interest in Alexander’s works lends further credence to the idea that he was the real author of ARA II, which is the fuller version of Alexander’s treatise. It is also, on the whole, the best version (although for some passages other versions do suggest valid alternatives, or improve our understanding of ARA II). This fits well with the possibility that the author was an expert on Alexander. Probably, therefore, the real author of the version ARA II was Ibrāhīm al-Kātib (as explicitly stated in the oldest manuscript). Since this author was little known, the version from Ḥunayn’s and Ishāq’s school was later ascribed to Ishāq b. Ḥunayn, the well-known chief of the school.³⁴

3. Another manuscript, a very important one for the transmission of Alexander’s works, is the MS of Istanbul, Carullah, n. 1279, folios 54r–58v, dated AH 881/1477 CE. The *De principiis* section begins with a remark by the copyist, stating that the beginning of the translation he was copying was defective, and describing the treatise as an ‘extract’ by Ḥunayn: *istikhrāḡu Ḥunayni*, it says.³⁵ *Istikhrāḡ* is not the standard Arabic word for ‘translation’ (*tarḡama* or *nage* would be more likely); but the same verb (although in a different form, *ikhrāḡ*) occurs in the reference to Ḥunayn’s Syriac translation in another fifteenth-century Istanbul manuscript. This is manuscript *E* (Istanbul, Suleymaniye Library, *Es’ad Efendi* 1933) of the Arabic version of Galen’s *Compendium Timaei Platonis*, edited by Paul Kraus and Richard Walzer, whose comments on the term deserve to be quoted in this connection. They argue that the word *ikhrāḡ* must have been already found in Ḥunayn’s Syriac version, for it is in Syriac, not in Arabic, that the idea of ‘extracting’ is used to signify a translator’s activity.³⁶ If so, the words *istikhrāḡu Ḥunayni* in the Carullah manuscript need not mean that Ḥunayn translated the treatise into Arabic. More likely, the translation was said to have ‘been extracted’ by Ḥunayn

³⁴ Genequand (in Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 32) even suggests that there might have been two complete Syriac-to-Arabic versions of Alexander’s treatise: one by Ishāq and another by Ibrāhīm, who worked at the same school and might have even compared the results of their work. However, he provides no compelling argument for this suggestion.

³⁵ See Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 27.

³⁶ See P. Kraus and R. Walzer, *Galenii Compendium Timaei Platonis* (London 1951), 18–19.

already in the Syriac manuscript (hence the peculiar Arabic word). This apparently means that there was a Syriac intermediary version by Hunayn, and that someone else could have translated it into Arabic. This would be in agreement with what we find in the Damascus manuscript, namely that the treatise was translated into Syriac by Hunayn, and then this Syriac version was translated into Arabic by someone else from his school, namely Ibrāhīm.

As for ARA I, there is reason to believe that it also comes from the same Syriac version. According to Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a, al-Dimašqī, was 'one of the best translators, and was devoted to 'Alī b. 'Īsā', a member of Hunayn's school of translators.³⁷ Al-Dimašqī's version (ARA I) may likewise be based upon a previous Syriac version, that by Hunayn, due to his indirect connection to Hunayn's school. If Hunayn's version was available to Ibrāhīm, who worked after al-Dimašqī and in al-Dimašqī's steps, it is likely that it was already in al-Dimašqī's hands. Further hints in that direction will emerge in what follows. This would suggest that al-Dimašqī used a manuscript of Hunayn's Greek-to-Syriac version, and Ibrāhīm used that version as well.

Thus we can argue that ARA I and ARA II represent two translations of Hunayn's Syriac version, with one preserving a fuller text than the other. Moreover, as parallels between the two show (see below), the second accomplished part of his task on the basis of the first. Some sentences are very different, while some are virtually identical, and there are numerous intermediary cases. This is unsurprising. A significant parallel case is the following: in one other case at least, Ibrāhīm al-Kātib seems to have completed a version which had been made by Abū 'Uṭmān al-Dimašqī. The former translated the first seven books of Aristotle's *Topics* into Arabic, and the latter translated the eighth book, presumably adding his work to that previous translation.³⁸ Apparently, in both cases (that of the *Topics* and that of the

³⁷ Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a, *Uyūn al-anbā'*, 282, l. 23: *aḥadu 'l-naqalati 'l-muḏīdīna, wa-kāna munqati'an ilā 'Alī bni 'Īsā.*

³⁸ D. Gutas, *Greek Thought Arabic Culture* (London and New York 1998), 61, says that al-Dimašqī translated the first seven books of the *Topics* from the original Greek text. But he does not give arguments against the possibility of a Syriac intermediary version, and this can not be worked out in that case either. As a matter of fact, according to Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal, from al-Nadīm's own statement we should conclude that Alexander's and Ammonius's commentaries on the *Topics* were not directly rendered into Arabic from their original Greek text, but through a previous Syriac version by Ishāq b. Hunayn ('l'ouvrage qui contient les commentaires d'Alexandre et d'Ammonius a été traduit, suivant la lecture que je fais du passage d'al-Nadīm, en syriaque par Ishāq, et du syriaque à l'arabe par al-Dimašqī':

De principiis), the completions were based upon a comparison of the previous Syriac versions: Iṣḥāq's one in the case of the *Topics*,³⁹ Ḥunayn's one in the case of the *De principiis*. This means that Ibrāhīm was able to work after al-Dimašqī and to expand on, perhaps to revise, what his predecessor had done (a crucial point, since it gives us a basis for establishing the relative chronology of the two versions). Hence it would be natural to suppose that in the case of the *De principiis*, too, Ibrāhīm (ARA II) did the same, by completing the previously made, and partial, Arabic version by al-Dimašqī (ARA I). If so, a proper assessment of ARA II should take into account the likelihood that it was based on a previous translation into Syriac, and also involve comparison with the previous Arabic version, ARA I.

Such an investigation has not yet been undertaken. Genequand did publish the text of ARA I, by al-Dimašqī, but there is no modern translation of this text; neither has the text of ARA I been compared to that of ARA II, nor has it been employed for reconstructing features of the lost Greek original on such a broad basis, since Genequand did not commit himself to any particular relationship between the two Arabic versions and the lost Greek original. However, Genequand's edition with translation of ARA II, has sometimes been regarded as the unique and faithful rendering of the lost Greek text by Alexander.⁴⁰ So far as we can see, Genequand did not mean to suggest this.⁴¹ Still, so far it remains unclear whether any improvement

see H. Hugonnard-Roche and A. Elamrani-Jamal, 'Organon — Tradition syriaque et arabe 5 Les *Topiques*', in R. Goulet [ed.], *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques. Tome 1: De Abam(m)on à Axiothèa* [Paris 1989], 524–6, on p. 525); if al-Dimašqī employed a Syriac version for the commentaries on the *Topics*, why should he not have used a Syriac version for the plain text of Aristotle's work too? As for Ibrāhīm, it is not unlikely that he completed his task on the eighth book from a Syriac version, given his general profile (of a translator 'from various languages into Arabic') and especially his connection with Ḥunayn's school (see above). If so, one might wonder whether a Syriac version covered the eighth book only or all of the books, and whether or not it was known to al-Dimašqī. That Ibrāhīm al-Kātib added his work on the eighth book of the *Topics* to al-Dimašqī's previous translation is well known to Genequand as well, which has a mention of it: see Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 31 and 33.

³⁹ Tajaddod, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 309, ll. 26–8: *al-kalāmu 'alā Ṭūbīqā: naqala Iṣḥāqu haḍā 'l-kitāba ilā 'l-suryānī, wa-naqala Yahyā bnu 'Adī alladī naqalahū Iṣḥāqu ilā 'l-arabī, wa-naqala 'l-Dimašqī minhū sab'a maqālātīn, wa-naqala Ibrāhīmu bnu 'Abdillāhi 'l-tāminata.*

⁴⁰ As noted above, this seems to be the assumption of King, 'On the Principles of the Universe'.

⁴¹ It can be regarded as significant that Genequand's edition of ARA II appeared within Brill's series of 'Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science, Text and Studies'

is possible on a more comprehensive basis, and this matter definitely needs further exploration. As we intend to argue, ARA II can be regarded as the most important document from the indirect tradition of the treatise, and thus as a starting point for research by Alexander scholars, but it does not provide either direct or unique evidence for Alexander's text.

That is the question at the heart of our current research and of the present contribution. But as soon as the Arabic translations are compared, some factual data suggest that there is a relationship between the two. This would already imply that a fuller understanding of ARA II requires at least a look at ARA I too. As already mentioned, our main evidence is that ARA I and II are identical at many points. From this we infer that ARA I is not only an earlier version, but also an underlying substrate of ARA II. This does not exclude that the translator of ARA II freely departed from ARA I. But he worked with the earlier version at his side, and in cases where he saw no room for improvement, he retained the previous translation. A good example is paragraph 2, which, for the reasons discussed below, can be regarded as the first certainly authentic part of the treatise.⁴² It is a particularly significant part of the text, offering a general introduction to the method of an inquiry into principles.⁴³ In this paragraph,⁴⁴ the literal differences between the two versions are very few, and evidently fewer than those found in the Syriac version by Sergius of Reš 'Ayna.

(not e.g. in that of 'Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus', where a number of Greek-to-Arabic versions of philosophical texts were edited).

⁴² This does not mean it reflects the original beginning of the treatise; we have no evidence about the *incipit* of the original Greek version.

⁴³ A parallel passage concerning the method of an inquiry into the first principle (*prôtê archê*) by means of *analysis* is found in the Greek counterpart mentioned above (n. 10), Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Quaestio* I. 1, 4, ll. 4–7: 'This is shown by analysis. For it is not possible for there to be any demonstration of the first principle, but one must begin from the things that are posterior and evident and, making use of analysis, establish the nature of that [first principle] through agreement with these' (tr. R.W. Sharples, in Alexander of Aphrodisias *Quaestiones 1.1–2.15*, London 1992).

⁴⁴ The following English versions, as found in tables nn. 2 and 4, as well as in table n. 5, are deliberately literal; they intend to show every possible difference between the Syriac adaptation and the two extant Arabic versions of Alexander's work in detail. However, we have added to tables nn. 2 and 4 a slightly free English version of them, for the reader's sake. In this version, the passages which are clearly different in SYR, ARA I and ARA II are put in italics; the passages or the words which are different in ARA II with respect to ARA I are put in bold.

Table n. 1
Syriac and Arabic translation of paragraph 2

	SYR	ARA I	ARA II
1	ܩܘܠܝܢ ܐܢ ܐܘܩܠ	وأقول ⁴⁵	وأقول إن أفضل
2	ܥܡܐ ܕܩܘܠܝܢ ܕܩܘܠܝܢ	ما ثبت به	ما تثبت به
3	ܕܐܡܬܐܢ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܐܡܬܐܢ	أمثال هذه الأشياء	أمثال هذه الأشياء
4	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	بحسب رأيي	بحسب رأيي
5	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	هو أن نبين أن	هو أن أبين أن
6	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	المبادئ التي توطأ لها	المبادئ التي توطأ لها
7	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	موافقة مطابقة	توافق وتلزم
8	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	للأمور الواضحة الظاهرة	الأشياء النبئية الظاهرة المعروفة
9	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	إذ كان ليس يمكن أن نستعمل فيها	إذ ليس يمكن أن يستعمل فيها
10	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	الأقاويل البرهانية	الأقاويل البرهانية
11	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	من قبل أن البراهين	إذ كان البرهان
12	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	إنما تكون من أشياء هي أشدّ تقدماً ومن أسباب	إنما يكون من أشياء التي هي أشدّ تقدماً ومن أسباب
13	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	وأن المبادئ الأول	وكان المبادئ الأول
14	ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ	لا شيء يتقدمها	لا شيء يتقدمها
15		ولا لها سبب	ولا لها علة أصلاً

Critical apparatus⁴⁶

1 [ܩܘܠܝܢ ܐܢ ܐܘܩܠ] SYR ARA I-II (أقول < ?); + ARA II (dittography?) 2 [ܥܡܐ ܕܩܘܠܝܢ ܕܩܘܠܝܢ] SYR omitted by ARA I-II 5 [ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ] SYR ARA I نبين ARA II أبين < ?) 6 [ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ] SYR = ARA I-II (المبادئ التي توطأ لها < ?) 9 [ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ] SYR = ARA I-II (موافقة مطابقة < ?) 11 [ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ] SYR omitted by ARA I-II (من قبل أن البراهين < ?) 12 [ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ] SYR ARA I-II (إنما تكون من أشياء هي أشدّ تقدماً ومن أسباب < ?) 13 [ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ] SYR ARA I-II (وأن المبادئ الأول < ?) 14 [ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ] SYR ARA I-II (لا شيء يتقدمها < ?) 15 [ܕܐܢܝܢ ܕܐܢܝܢ] SYR omitted by ARA I-II (ولا لها سبب < ?).

Table n. 2
English translations

1	But	I say:	I say: surely the best (way) of
2	the proper beginning	what ascertains	what ascertains
3	of what is similar to those (things),	what is similar to these things,	what is similar to these things,
4	according to my opinion, is	according to my opinion,	according to my opinion,

⁴⁵ Textual correction: *وإذ كل* in the edition.

⁴⁶ The critical apparatus notes the evident differences between SYR and both or one of the Arabic versions (ARA I and II). Differences between ARA I and ARA II as such are not taken into consideration. The Syriac readings preceded by “<” represent what we suppose it was found in Hūnayn’s lost version.

5	(the fact) that one puts forward	is (the fact) that we explain that	is (the fact) that I explain that
6	all the arguments	the principles which are apt for them	the principles which are apt for them
7	(which are) apparent and which are in agreement	(are) in agreement and coincident	agree with and adhere to
8	with our sensation, and those which fall under our eyes.	with the manifest and evident things,	the explained, evident and well-known things,
9	In fact, one cannot support them	since we cannot support them	since they cannot be supported
10	with logical arguments,	with demonstrative discourses,	with the demonstrative discourses,
11	since all the logical arguments	because of (the fact) that the demonstrations	since the demonstration
12	come out of the cause and their previous principle,	come out of things (which) are stronger ⁴⁷ in precedence and from causes,	comes out of things which are stronger in precedence and from causes,
13	but the First Cause	and that the First Principles	and the First Principles
14	has no precedent.	have no precedent,	have no precedent,
15		and have no cause.	and have no cause at all.

(SYR) But, according to my opinion, *the proper beginning of what is similar to those things is (as follows): one puts forward all the apparent arguments which are in agreement with our sensation and fall under our eyes. For one cannot support them with logical arguments, since all the logical arguments come out of (their) cause and their previous principle; but the First Cause has no precedent.*

(ARA I) *I say that, according to my opinion, what ascertains what is similar to those things is (as follows). We explain that the principles which are apt for them are in agreement with and in adherence to the manifest and evident things. For we cannot support them with demonstrative discourses, since the demonstrations come out of stronger previous things, and from causes; but the First Principles have no precedent and no cause.*

⁴⁷ The expression 'things which are stronger', as found in ARA I and II, might come out of an incorrect interpretation of the Syriac word ܩܝܘܢܐ, 'principles' (whose singular form is found in SYR), as a term derived from the verb ܩܝܘܢܐ, 'to attack'.

(ARA II) *I say that, according to my opinion, the best way to ascertain what is similar to those things is (as follows). I explain that the principles which are apt for them are in agreement with and in adherence to the explained, well-known and evident things. For they cannot be supported with demonstrative discourses, since the demonstration comes out of stronger previous things, and from causes; but the First Principles have no precedent and no cause at all.*

The current English translation⁴⁸ is unclear about the most crucial points of this difficult passage. In particular, the phrase ‘the principles which lead up to them’ (line 6) cannot stand, because it suggests that there is something above the principles. By contrast, the main point of this paragraph 2 is that principles have nothing before them, therefore they cannot be demonstrated starting from anything prior to them. The point seems to be more difficult to grasp from Sergius’s Syriac version of this introduction, but is clear in the Arabic versions which turn out to be quite similar to each other. Based on these few lines as a sample, we would suggest that the author of ARA II very probably read and used ARA I, and tried to complete it by comparing it with other witnesses, at least one complete copy of Ḥunayn’s Greek-to-Syriac version. Moreover the Syriac version is not completely without interest, since, as it appears in lines 2–3 at least, it is clearer than the Arabic ones.

Let us now go back to the higher branches of the history of the text. From what we have seen so far, it appears that both Arabic versions were based on the same previous Syriac version, that by Ḥunayn. Both versions were probably made during the first half of the tenth century, and there are textual reasons for thinking that one of them was produced in part on the basis of the other one. But there is a third source to be taken into account: the Syriac adaptation by Sergius of Reš ‘Ayna. Having worked at length on the three translations, we see now that there is some relation among the three, and that this relation is not simply explained by their independent reference to a unique Greek *Vorlage*. This raises the question of how the lost Greek-to-Syriac version by Ḥunayn b. Ishāq and that of Sergius might relate to each other. Did they depend upon a common ancestor? This

⁴⁸ ‘The best to ascertain such things is in my opinion to show that *the principles that lead up to them* are in necessary agreement with the things that are evident, manifest and well known. For it is not possible concerning them to use demonstrative reasonings, since demonstration proceeds from prior things and from the causes, whereas there is nothing prior to the first principles, nor do they have any cause’ (Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 43).

would be proved if there were a ‘conjunctive-disjunctive error’ in them, for instance a passage found in two or more witnesses of the textual tradition, which could not have appeared in the original source as it does in the transmitted text.⁴⁹ We shall now suggest that the prologue of *De principiis* (section 1 of Genequand’s edition), which presents the work as a private letter between two correspondents, meets these criteria.

The prologue appears in all three sources: in Sergius’s adaptation of Alexander’s treatise, and in both Arabic versions and thus in their lost common Syriac ancestor. Yet it probably did not belong to the original text. This can be argued on two grounds: because such an introduction is likely to be by Sergius, and because it is unlikely to be by Alexander. If so, the three sources at our disposal are not unrelated to each other, having at least one common source which already started with this spurious introduction.

The two Arabic versions basically preserve this passage, though they handle the text with a degree of freedom. Here is paragraph 1 of the *De principiis* in three columns, corresponding to the three medieval versions, and followed by their English translations.

Table n. 3

	SYR	ARA I	ARA II
1	ܩܘܠܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܠܡ	لما تأملت	لما تأملت
2	ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ	الفحص الذي مخرجه مخرج	الفحص الذي مخرجه مخرج
3	ܡܚܘܒܐ	التوبيخ الجميل	التوبيخ الجميل
4		وقعت من التوبيخ اللطيف الموقع مني على الفحص الكائن	
5	ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ	عما	عن الأشياء التي
6	ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ	اكتب به اليك فيما التمسته مني	كنت كتبت بها اليك جواباً عما سألته
7	ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ	وانت بمعرفة	اذ كانت معرفتك
8	ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ	ما سألت عنه من ذلك	بصعوبة الأمر فيها
9		ليس بدون أحد من الناس	ليست مقصرة عن معرفة غيرك
10	ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ	لم أتكاسل	لم أتثاقل
11	ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ ܕܡܚܘܒܐ		

⁴⁹ The reference is to P. Maas, *Textkritik* (Leipzig 1952), 53 ff.

9		are not inferior to anybody (else),	is not unknown to others,
10	I have not refused,	I have not refused	I have not refused
11	according to my possibility, ⁵⁰		
12	to describe you	to explain my belief about it to you,	to explain my opinion about it to you,
13	what you have asked me many times	according to your request to me about this,	in a clear(er) way,
14			and I will include in this,
15			insofar as I am able,
16			a book in which I will write more explicitly
17		and I have represented	for confirming
18	about the first causes of the universe	the discourse about the first principles	the discourse about the principles
19	according to Aristotle's opinion.	according to Aristotle's opinion,	according to Aristotle's opinion.
20		insofar as I was able,	
21		and I begin this (as follows).	

(SYR) Since I *was aware that your inquiry about those things that you have asked me to write down is due to the criticism which comes from our agreement*, I have not refused what you have asked me *many times*, insofar as I was able, *although I also know the difficulty of your questions, namely to describe to you the first causes of the universe according to Aristotle's opinion*.

(ARA I) Since I *have reflected on your inquiry based on the criticism, from the criticism about your extant inquiry (sic), with regard to what I have written about what you have asked me — and your knowledge about this question is not inferior to anybody else — I have not refused to explain to you my belief about it, according to what you have asked me, and I have represented the first principles according to Aristotle's opinion, insofar as I was able. I begin this as follows*.

(ARA II) Since I *have reflected on your inquiry based on the criticism, with regard to what I have written as a reply about what you have asked me, as your knowledge about the difficulty of this question is well known to others*, I have not refused *to explain to you my opinion about it in a*

⁵⁰ This statement is found in ARA I and ARA II too, but in different places: ARA I inserts it in line 20, ARA II puts it in line 15.

correct way. Insofar as I am able, *I will make a book, in which I write and confirm about the principles according to Aristotle's opinion, in a clearer way (with respect to what I have explained about it before).*

As the above comparison shows, it seems that the better and clearer text is found in SYR. By contrast, both ARA I and ARA II offer a more convoluted text,⁵¹ which might result from an attempt to render a corrupted Syriac text into Arabic. Possibly Ḥunayn, whose Syriac version was the starting point for both, had a bad copy of Sergius's original text. Nonetheless, the Arabic version found in ARA I is closer to SYR. It seems that ARA II tries to adapt its own version in light of the general purposes of the work. For instance, lines 20–1 of ARA I seem to have been adapted in lines 14–16 of ARA II.

Thus we now need to explain the presence of the epistolary prologue in both Sergius and Ḥunayn's translation (the direct source of ARA I). A simple explanation, of course, is that it derives from Alexander's original text. Yet there are reasons to believe that the prologue was firstly introduced in the Syriac tradition. It has common features with letters as a philosophical genre in Syriac literature. As Sebastian Brock has signalled, this kind of 'introductory letter' is found in many medieval Syriac texts, e.g. in a theological text written by St Ephrem, a well-known Syriac author of the fourth century.⁵² So, it seems not too far-fetched to suppose that this letter was added by a Syriac writer, rather than being a feature of the original Greek work.

We can be more specific: our prologue has parallels with other texts by Sergius himself. This is what led Furlani to identify Sergius's correspondent with Theodore of Marw, whom Sergius addresses elsewhere in his prologues. An interesting example is the long introduction of Sergius's commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, where Furlani's hypothesis finds further support. In the Paris manuscript of this latter

⁵¹ See also Genequand's version of ARA II: 'Having considered the investigation, the starting point of which was the fair criticism of the matters concerning which I had written to you in answer to the question you had asked, as you know as well as anyone else the difficulty involved in this, I did not defer uncovering to you my own opinion about them, as you deserve it, nor to include in this, as far as possible, a tract of mine in which I should aim at ascertaining the theory concerning the principles according to Aristotle's opinion' (Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 43).

⁵² See e.g. S.P. Brock, 'Ephrem's Letter to Publius', *Le Muséon* 89 (1976), 261–305; S.P. Brock, 'Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition', in M. Schmidt and C.F. Geyer (eds), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Regensburg 1982), 11–40; P.J. Botha, 'Ephrem the Syrian's Fictitious Use of the Epistolary Form in his *First Discourse to Hypatius*', *Scrinium* 6 (2010), 32–48.

work, where Sergius addresses Theodore, he apparently refers to the *De principiis* as to a former writing of his which is well-known to the same Theodore. The reference seems to have escaped scholarly attention.⁵³ Here is the relevant section of Sergius’s introduction to his *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories*, as found in the MSS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, syr. 354, folios 2v, line 1–3r, line 1, and Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Mingana Collection, n. 606, folios 52v–53r, including the self-reference to the treatise ‘on the whole teaching of the sage about the causes of the universe’ at lines 16–17.

Table n. 5

1	<p>ܒܘ ܗܘܐ ܡܢ ܥܘܠܡ ܕܡܪܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.</p>	Therefore, when you, our brother Theodore, have heard from me those things,
2	<p>ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.</p>	you have firstly desired to know <i>which is the aim of the teaching of that man</i> [scil.: Aristotle],
3	<p>ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.</p>	<i>which is the order of his writings</i>
4	<p>ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.</p>	and <i>which is the disposition of his discourses</i> ;
5	<p>ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.</p>	and when in your presence I have tried to say what I remembered little by little.
6	<p>ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.</p>	Then again, on these (topics) your affection asked me to write down for you
7	<p>ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.</p>	what I had previously told you by words of mouth.
8	<p>ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.</p>	Although I would abstain from (doing) this, because of the highness of the matter,
9	<p>ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.</p>	I said that I had written myself a short treatise
10	<p>ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.</p>	on the contents of Aristotle’s philosophy.

⁵³ Our attention has been drawn to this prologue by the French translation in Henri Hugonnard-Roche’s *La logique d’Aristote du grec au syriaque* (Paris 2004), 168–9. But the sentence which contains this reference is omitted there, despite being found in both manuscripts.

11	<p> ܐܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ </p>	And that this is enough for those who are interested, to make them know,
12	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ</p>	as far as it is possible,
13	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ.</p>	the opinion of the man.
14	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ.</p>	However, you have not been satisfied with this,
15	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ.</p>	but you have friendly urged us to do much more,
16	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ.</p>	not in such a general way, on the whole teaching of the sage
17	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ</p>	about the causes of the universe,
18	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ.</p>	as we have made long time ago,
19	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ</p>	but about each one of his writings in particular
20	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ.</p>	(you have urged me) to speak in a concise way what seems (correct) to us.
21	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ.</p>	Therefore, since I have not been able to decline your request,
22	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ.</p>	before introducing those (matters),
23	<p>ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ ܕܢܘܩܡܝܢ.</p>	I am urging you...

The following features are noteworthy:

1. The passage begins as a sort of private letter, which does not belong to Alexander’s style, as we will see shortly, whereas it perfectly fits with the general structure of both introductions.
2. The introduction, like the prologue of *De principiis*, takes the form of a reply to another scholar about possibly critical observations from him or somebody else.
3. The *De principiis* appears to be referred to here as a previous work by Sergius: ‘a short treatise (*mimrā*) in short on the contents of the philosophy of Aristotle (*‘al nišā d-pīlasāwṗūteh d-Arīštūtālīūs*)’ (lines 9–10), about ‘the opinions of the man (*‘al tar‘ūteh d-gabrā*)’ (line 13), ‘that about the causes of the universe (*haw d-meṭul ‘ellāteh d-hānā kul*)’ (line 17).

It can thus be argued that section 1 of *De principiis* is likely to originate from the prologue of a Syriac version of the treatise, probably Sergius’s own.

Against the possibility that it instead goes back to Alexander himself, we can observe that no such prologue is found in any of the

extant authentic Greek works of Alexander. It does not resemble the only personal address we find in his corpus, namely his dedication of the treatise *De fato* to the Roman Emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla.⁵⁴ That preface does not have the character of a private letter but of a protreptic introduction about the relevance of the theory of fate for one's life choices. It is analogous to the preface of another treatise, his *De anima*, where Alexander argues (without addressing any particular reader) that the theory of soul is of paramount importance in light of the Delphic precept: 'Knowing one's soul is to know oneself'.⁵⁵ By contrast, there is nothing protreptic in the *De principiis* prologue, nor any claim that Aristotle's theory should be preferred to those of other thinkers — another, even more typical feature of Alexander's introductions (see e.g. his *De providentia*).⁵⁶ So it is quite unlikely that it was put at the beginning of this work by the author himself.

The hypothesis which we would suggest is thus the following: the prologue is by Sergius, the first to make the treatise available in a Syriac translation. As we have seen, the prologue recalls features found in another prologue by Sergius. Moreover, it seems that in other Syriac versions of Greek texts, Sergius might have added some further materials of his own.⁵⁷ This helps make it credible that he is responsible for the addition of the epistolary frame. But how did this 'wording' reach the Arabic tradition of the text, so that it was reproduced in ARA I and ARA II?

This could be explained if Hunayn, the author of the lost Syriac translation upon which both Arabic translations of the *De principiis* were based, knew and employed Sergius's adaptation as one of the main sources of his own work.⁵⁸ This hypothesis is in itself plausible,

⁵⁴ See Bruns, *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis praeter commentaria scripta minora*, vol. II, 165, lines 3–15.

⁵⁵ See Bruns, *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis praeter commentaria scripta minora*, vol. I, 1, lines 1–2, line 9.

⁵⁶ See S. Fazzo and M. Zonta, *Alessandro di Afrodizia. La provvidenza. Questioni sulla provvidenza* (Milan 1999), 96–7.

⁵⁷ As pointed out by Sebastian P. Brock (private communication, 2nd December 2011), a similar case is that of Sergius's *Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, prefixed to his own translation of the Dionysian corpus, and transmitted in the mss. of Phokas's revision of it too (late seventh cent.): see P. Géhin, 'Manuscrits sinaitiques dispersés. I. Les fragments syriaques et arabes de Paris', *Oriens Christianus* 90 (2006), 23–43, on pp. 37–8.

⁵⁸ A similar fact seems to result in the Syriac textual tradition of the passages of Hippocrates' *Aphorisms*, which are often quoted in Gesios' commentary on Hippocrates' *Epidemics*. Both of them were translated into Syriac: the former, by

for in other cases Ḥunayn, instead of translating Greek texts to Syriac anew, revised previous translations,⁵⁹ at least in one case a translation by Sergius himself. This is what Ḥunayn says about one of Galen's works he translated from Greek into Syriac, the *De internorum morborum curatione*⁶⁰:

وقد كان سرجس ترجم هذا الكتاب، مرتين مرةً لثيادوري أشقف الكرخ ومرةً لرجل يقال له أليبع، وقد كان بختيشوع بن جبريل سألني تصقحه وإصلاح أسقاطه، ففعلتُ بعد أن أعلته أن ترجمته أجود وأسهل، فلم يقف الناسخ على تخلص المواضع التي أصلحتها فيه وتخلص كل واحد من تلك المواضع بقدر قوته، فيقي الكتاب غير تام الإستقامة والصحة إلى أن كانت آيأمانا هذه، وكنت لا أزال أهمّ بإعادة ترجمته، فشغلني عنه غيره، إلى أن سألني إسرائيل بن زكريّا المعروف بالطيفوري إعادة ترجمته وترجمته.

Sergius translated this work twice, once for Theodore bishop of Khark, and again for a man named Alīsa'. Bakhtīšū' b. Ġibrīl asked me to examine and improve it (i.e. Sergius's translation) correctly. I did so, after having understood that it (i.e. the Greek text) had been translated (into Syriac) in a better and easier fashion. But the scribe did not manage to rectify the passages that I have improved, only rectifying each of those passages as far as he could, so that the book remained less than perfectly correct and accurate. This is how it came down to us, and I have not given more importance in repairing his translation. Other things distracted me from (doing) this, until Isrā'īl b. Zakariyā, known as al-Ṭayfūrī, asked me to repair his translation, and I translated it.

From the above passage, it is clear that Ḥunayn was well acquainted with Sergius's Greek-to-Syriac versions of Galen's works, and even sometimes corrected them. He might have done the same in the case of Sergius's adaptation of the *De principiis* (which he must have regarded as a translation of it).⁶¹ So, Ḥunayn's lost Syriac translation of the Greek text, which was used as the main (and probably unique)

Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq; the latter, by Sergius. A comparison of these two versions, as made by Kessel, shows that they are quite similar and the differences between them are almost impossible to convey in English, although both passages reveal approaches that are characteristic to Sergius and Ḥunayn': see G. Kessel, 'The *Syriac Epidemics* and the Problem of Its Identification', in P.E. Portmann (ed.), *Epidemics in Context. Greek Commentaries on Hippocrates in the Arabic Tradition* (Scientia Graeco-Arabica 8, Berlin and Boston 2012), 93–123.

⁵⁹ See Bergsträsser, *Hunain ibn Ishāq über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Übersetzungen*, on numbers 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 28, 30, 33, 35, 36, 37, 40, 44.

⁶⁰ Bergsträsser, *Hunain ibn Ishāq über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Übersetzungen*, 12, line 21–p. 13, line 6.

⁶¹ One might wonder, concerning Sergius's work, whether his adaptations and translations from Greek texts like Alexander's have to be regarded as two entirely

source of both Arabic versions of it (ARA I and II), was based upon a correction and completion of Sergius's work, through a comparison with the original Greek text. We may infer that there was a common Syriac ancestor of the whole text, as it is found in its extant versions. This ancestor included a 'conjunctive-disjunctive error', which consists in an addition to the text: the epistolary introduction. It should probably be identified with Sergius's adaptation, upon which Ḥunayn based his own Syriac version. Then both al-Dimašqī and Ibrāhīm employed a copy of this latter for their own versions. This copy could have been more or less direct; we have no way of deciding this question. But their activity was close enough in space and time to make it unlikely that Ḥunayn's Syriac version suffered extensive corruption before reaching them.

Now, another question arises. If the Syriac and Arabic versions of the work come out of the same original text, i.e. this 'common ancestor', what implications does this have for the textual reconstruction of the work? King, who has studied the contents of Sergius's adaptation, seems to regard version ARA II as the main and most faithful witness of the lost original text. But from what we have tried to show, it seems that version ARA II relies on the lost Syriac version by Ḥunayn (both directly and through the comparison with ARA I, which depends on that version as well). It is therefore more distant from the original Greek than the Syriac adaptation by Sergius. As a matter of fact, a comparison of the Syriac adaptation with both Arabic versions of Alexander's work shows that there are some cases where a passage of the Syriac text agrees with version ARA I against version ARA II. Concerning such points of agreement, they are more likely to reflect the lost original Greek text than ARA II. Furthermore, there are some points where the Syriac version by Ḥunayn, as used by al-Dimašqī (ARA I) and Ibrāhīm (ARA II), was evidently corrupt, whereas Sergius's adaptation (SYR) appears to be correct.⁶² In many cases, the text of ARA II is evidently better than that of

different genres in philosophical literature. This is a subject we hope to be able to pursue in greater detail elsewhere. See also n. 45 above.

⁶² See e.g. in paragraph 1, lines 4 (there is a dittography in ARA I), 7, 13 (the text seems to have been corrupted in the textual tradition of ARA I), 18 (the last words of this passage are correct in SYR, but were apparently altered in ARA I due to an erroneous reading of the Syriac text, and this alteration was transmitted to ARA II); in paragraph 2, lines 2 and 12 (here, the term 'principle', correctly found in SYR, is omitted both in ARA I and in ARA II), and line 6 (the correct reading is here 'arguments', as in SYR, not 'principles', as in the Arabic versions).

ARA I.⁶³ Yet in other cases the text of ARA II seems to be worse than that of ARA I.⁶⁴

This further confirms our hypothesis about the history of the text in Arabic. Version ARA I, by al-Dimašqī, comes before version ARA II, by Ibrāhīm. The latter probably aimed to produce a more complete version and corrected ARA I through a comparison of the Greek-to-Syriac version by Ḥunayn. In a number of cases, moreover, the comparison of the three sources shows that the Syriac version by Ḥunayn was very close to the Syriac version by Sergius. Ḥunayn in his turn probably checked his own translation against Sergius's version and might have adopted suggestions from it.

The advantage of the stemma which results from this series of hypotheses (for which see below) is that we are now able to appreciate some better readings which version ARA I has with respect to version ARA II, as can be shown by the comparison with the Syriac. The agreement of ARA I with the Syriac version (when both are available and in agreement) has a better chance of helping to reconstructing the lost Greek original: Sergius sometimes 'adapted' it, but version ARA I translated it more faithfully, so that it is sometimes clearer than what is found in version ARA II.

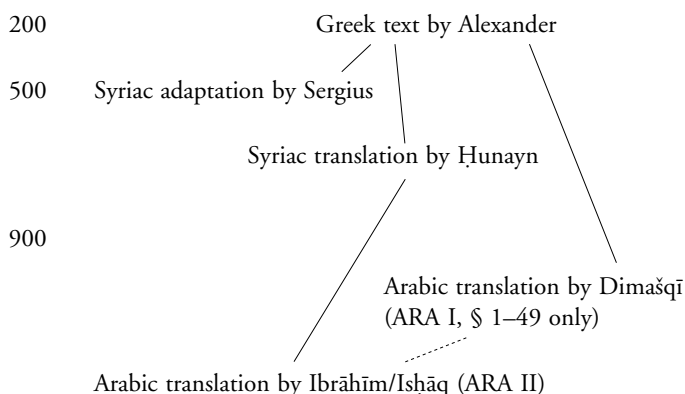
Here follows Table n. 6: the stemma of the translations of the *De principiis* which sums up our working hypothesis. Genequand's stemma is also compared.⁶⁵

⁶³ See e.g. paragraph 1, lines 4 (here, ARA II omits the dittography found in ARA I, probably through a direct comparison of the original Syriac text) and 21 (this passage of ARA I too is not found both in SYR and in ARA II).

⁶⁴ See e.g. paragraph. 1, lines 13–18 (here, ARA II seems to have tried to explain in greater detail what is found in ARA I, which is nearer to SYR, but has somewhat altered the original meaning of the text).

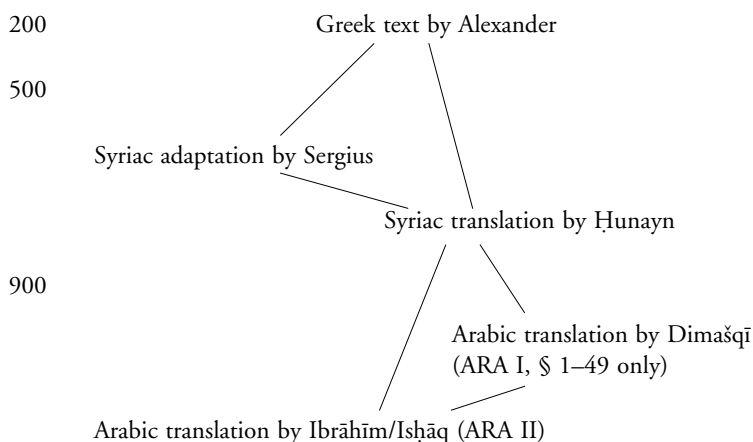
⁶⁵ Genequand, *On the Cosmos*, 41. This article represents a preliminary step towards a new edition of Alexander's treatise. We are particularly grateful to Peter Adamson for thorough discussion and revision of it, to Sebastian B. Brock for supporting Silvia Fazzos contribution to this research.

Table n. 6
Translations' *stemma* of Alexander's *De principiis* as in Genequand 2001:



This *stemma* explains Genequand's choice to translate and edit Alexander's *De principiis* based on ARA II (Genequand's Text A).

Revised *stemma* of the extant versions from Alexander's *De principiis*:



Drawing on this *stemma*, we suggest the use of the three available versions of Alexander's *De principiis* to reconstruct the lost Greek treatise. The triangular relations outlined above (Ḥunayn; and Ḥunayn - Dimašqī - Ishāq), detected through comparisons of the three relevant sources, help explain the transmitted texts of Ara II and Ara I (Genequand's Texts A and B).

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