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DIFFERENT ATTITUDES  
TO ARISTOTLE'S AUTHORITY  
IN THE ARABIC MEDIEVAL COMMENTARIES  
ON THE METAPHYSICS

AMOS BERTOLACCI

THE Arabic reception of the two main exponents of Greek philosophy, Aristotle and Plato, has been extensively investigated in recent scholarship, and its salient features are now sufficiently clear.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle's works and the commentaries thereupon were the center piece of the translation movement of scientific and philosophical works from Greek into Arabic that took place in the VIII-X centuries C.E.<sup>2</sup> From the very beginning of Arabic philosophy, he was considered the unchallenged champion of *falsafa*

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<sup>1</sup> On the Arabic reception of Aristotle's philosophy, see F. E. PETERS, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam*, New York-London, New York University Press-University of London Press, 1968; IDEM, *Aristoteles Arabus. The Oriental translations and commentaries on the Aristotelian corpus*, Leiden, Brill, 1968; G. ENDRESS, *L'Aristote arabe. Réception, autorité et transformation du Premier Maître*, «Medioevo», 23, 1997, pp. 1-42; H. DAIBER, *Salient Trends of the Arabic Aristotle, in The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, edited by G. Endress, R. Kruk, Leiden, Research School CNWS, 1997, pp. 31-41; R. ARNZEN, G. GULDENTOPS, A. SPEER, M. TRIZIO, D. WIRMER, *Philosophische Kommentare in Mittelalter- Zugänge und Orientierungen. Zweiter Teil*, «Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie», 32.3, 2007, pp. 259-290 (*Mittelalterliche arabische Kommentare zum Corpus Aristotelicum*, pp. 277-284); C. D'ANCONA, *Aristotle and Aristotelianism*, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three*, vol. IV, Leiden, Brill, 2008, pp. 153b-169a; P. ADAMSON, *Aristotle in the Arabic Commentary Tradition*, in *Oxford Handbook on Aristotle*, edited by C. Shields, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming. On the Arabic reception of Plato's philosophy, see F. ROSENTHAL, *On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy in the Islamic World*, «Islamic Culture», 14, 1940, pp. 387-422; 15, 1941, pp. 396-398 (repr. in IDEM, *Greek Philosophy in the Arab World*, Haldershot [Hampshire], Variorum, 1990, no. 11); A. J. ARBERRY, *Some Plato in an Arabic Epitome*, «Islamic Quarterly», 2, 1955, pp. 86-99; R. WALZER, *Platonism in Islamic Philosophy*, «Entretiens», vol. III, Vandœuvres-Genève, Fondation Hardt, 1957, pp. 203ff. (repr. in IDEM, *Greek into Arabic. Essay on Islamic Philosophy*, Oxford, Cassirer, 1962, pp. 236-252); R. WALZER, *Aflātūn*, in *The Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition*, vol. 1, Leiden-London, Brill, 1960, pp. 234-236; J. C. BÜRCEL, *A New Arabic Quotation from Plato's Phaedo and its Relation to a Persian Version of the Phaedo*, in *Actas IV Congresso de Estudos Arabes e Islamicos*, Leiden, Brill, 1971, pp. 281-290; F. KLEIN-FRANKE, *Zur Überlieferung der platonischen Schriften im Islam*, «Israel Oriental Studies», 3, 1973, pp. 120-139; D. GUTAS, *Plato's Symposium in the Arabic Tradition*, «Oriens», 31, 1988, pp. 36-60; H. H. BIESTERFELDT, *Phaedo arabus: Elemente griechischer Tradition in der Seelenlehre islamischer Philosophen des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts*, in *Tod und Jenseits im Altertum*, edited by G. Binder, B. Effe, Trier, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1991, pp. 180-202; P. E. WALKER, *Platonism in Islamic Philosophy*, «Studia Islamica», 79, 1994, pp. 5-25; D. GUTAS, *Galen's Synopsis of Plato's Laws and Fārābī's Talhīs*, in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, edited by G. Endress and R. Kruk, Leiden, Research School CNWS, 1997, pp. 101-119; D. N. HASSE, *Plato arabico-latinus: Philosophy- Wisdom Literature- Occult Sciences*, in *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages. A Doxographic Approach*, edited by S. Gerssch, M. J. F. M. Hoenen, P. T. van Wingerden, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter, 2002, pp. 31-64 (pp. 32-34); D. C. REISMAN, *Plato's Republic in Arabic: a Newly Discovered Passage*, «Arabic Sciences and Philosophy», 14, 2004, pp. 263-300; ARNZEN, GULDENTOPS, SPEER, TRIZIO, WIRMER, *Philosophische Kommentare in Mittelalter*, cit., pp. 259-260.

<sup>2</sup> On the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, see D. GUTAS, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries)*, London and New York, Routledge, 1998 (Italian transl.: *Pensiero greco e cultura araba*, a cura di C. D'Ancona, Torino, Einaudi, 2002); R. RASHED, *Greek into Arabic: Transmission and Translation*, in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy. From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. J. E. Montgomery, Leuven-Paris-Dudley (Ma), Peeters, 2006, pp. 157-196; D. GUTAS, *Greek Philosophical Works Translated into Arabic*, in *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. R. Pasnau, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 802-814; C. D'ANCONA, *Greek Sources in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy*, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, on-line.

(the term designating the philosophy of Greek origin), as the existence of many pseudo-Aristotelian works in Arabic witnesses.<sup>1</sup> While his works (especially the authentic ones) were repeatedly classified, commented upon, paraphrased, and digested, Aristotle himself gradually became the «First Teacher», namely the proponent of an articulated system of disciplines capable of providing true knowledge of universal reality, and the icon of the demonstrative method devised in logic and systematically applied to the different branches of philosophy. Comparatively, the fate of Plato's philosophy in the Arab world was much less glorious. His works were only marginally involved in the translation movement; in lack of complete versions of his dialogues, Arab authors knew Plato's thought to a large extent indirectly, through the Arabic translations of Galen's compendia, the references widespread in the works of Aristotle and the Greek Neoplatonists translated into Arabic, as well as through the abundant information available in doxographies and gnomologia. Initially regarded as «divine», i.e. the author representing the pinnacle of the entire system of knowledge, his area of competence was progressively relegated to the much narrower domain of ethics and politics. Thus, in a diachronic perspective, one detects two opposite, complementary, trends: while Aristotle's influence tends to increase in time, the ascendancy of Plato's thought gradually and concomitantly decreases. The first Arab philosophers apparently knew many more dialogues of Plato than the ones that the following generations had at their disposal, and read them in a form much more extensive (if not integral) than the one documented by the surviving fragments. This progressive textual eclipse of Plato is evidently tantamount to his doctrinal marginalization: the epithet «First Teacher» that was assigned to Aristotle displays in its initial element («First»), if read from a historical point of view, a clear anti-Platonic value.

Despite the attestations of a clear-cut pro-Platonic and anti-Aristotelian attitude in early Arabic philosophy, represented by the physician and «free-thinker» Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. ca. 925), such a radical rejection of Aristotle's authority in favour of Plato's remained an isolated, and very much resented, case among Arab thinkers.<sup>2</sup> Schematically, in mainstream Arabic philosophy four different types of attitudes towards Aristotle

<sup>1</sup> When, for example, at a very early stage of the history of *falsafa*, the Arabic adaptations of Plotinus' *Enneads* and Proclus' *Elements of Theology* were composed, they were intentionally ascribed to Aristotle under the titles *Book of Aristotle the Philosopher, called in Greek "Theology"*, namely *Discourse on the Divine Sovereignty* and *Book of Aristotle's Exposition of the Pure Good* (also known, respectively, as *Theologia Aristotelis* and *Liber de causis*), in order to be accepted and gain prestige in the Arabic philosophical milieu, thus eventually becoming part of the Arabic Aristotelian corpus. Many Arabic pseudo-Aristotelian works were translated into Latin: see the overview in C. B. SCHMITT, *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Latin Middle Ages*, in *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages: The Theology and Other Texts*, edited by J. Kraye, W. F. Ryan and C. B. Schmitt, London, The Warburg Institute, 1986, pp. 3-14.

<sup>2</sup> Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's philosophy is fragmentarily known through quotations, very often polemical, of his adversaries: see E. K. ROWSON, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its fate: Al-ʿĀmirī's Kitāb al-Amad ʿalā l-abad*, New Haven, American Oriental Society, 1988, p. 76, #11; pp. 216-217; S. STROUMSA, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam. Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought*, Leiden, Brill, 1999, pp. 87-120. For a case of possible influence of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's thought on subsequent philosophers, see D. URVOY, *Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and Yahyā ibn ʿAdī*, in *In the Age of al-Fārābī: Arabic Philosophy in the Fourth/Tenth Century*, edited by P. Adamson, London-Turin, The Warburg Institute-Nino Aragno Editore, 2008, pp. 63-70. Later attestations of anti-Aristotelian attitudes in Arabic philosophy are scanty. In his reworking of Aristotle's *Elenchi Sophistici* in the *Book of the Cure*, Avicenna witnesses the existence of contemporary thinkers who, being unable to meet the standards of Aristotelian philosophy, either denied the validity of philosophy, or disparaged Aristotle in order to follow Plato, Socrates and the Pythagoreans (see the English translation of the relevant passage in D. GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition. Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*, Leiden-New York-København-Köln, Brill, 1988, pp. 34-35). A historical connection of these unnamed thinkers with Abū Bakr al-Rāzī cannot be excluded, although their attempt to reject philosophy *tout court* indicates that they were not part of mainstream *falsafa*.

and Plato are detectable. Initially, the acknowledgment of Aristotle's primacy is joined with the recognition of an inner consistency between his and Plato's views, along the lines of the originally Porphyrian idea of a harmony between Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy.<sup>1</sup> This harmonizing tendency is best instantiated by the initiator of Arabic philosophy, al-Kindī (d. after 870), as well as by the group of scholars and translators working under his direction, and by some later philosophers influenced by his thought.<sup>2</sup> Al-Kindī himself expressly extols Aristotle's authority in the context of the attainment of universal knowledge and the pursuit of trans-confessional truth, devoting one of his works to a detailed survey of Aristotle's *corpus* of disciplines; he openly praises Plato's name, on the other hand, when he describes the eternal bliss that the human rational soul obtains after a virtuous life in the world. In the field of psychology – the crucial *trait d'union* between Aristotle's universalism and Plato's transcendence – he openly applies the «harmony» paradigm, as the titles, the opening statements, or the arguments of some of his works attest.<sup>3</sup> The translations composed within his circle, including some of the most important physical and metaphysical works of Aristotle, mirror the same harmonizing approach, in so far as, even in the rendering of Aristotelian texts, they display «a tendency towards interpretation with a markedly Neoplatonic preference».<sup>4</sup> The very attribution to Aristotle of the Arabic adaptations of Plotinus' and Proclus' metaphysics (*Theologia Aristotelis; Liber de Causis*), composed within al-Kindī's

<sup>1</sup> R. WALZER, *Porphyry and the Arabic Tradition*, in *Porphyre* («Entretiens Fondation Hardt», vol. XII), Vandœuvres-Genève 1965, pp. 275-299; G. ENDRESS, *La 'Concordance entre Platon et Aristote'. L'Aristote arabe et l'émancipation de la philosophie en Islam médiéval*, in *Historia Philosophiae Medii Aevi. Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters (Festschrift K. Flasch)*, edited by B. Mojsisich, O. Pluta, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, Grüner, 1991, pp. 237-257; C. D'ANCONA, *The Topic of the 'Harmony Between Plato and Aristotle': Some Examples in Early Arabic Philosophy, in Wissen über Grenzen. Arabisches Wissen und lateinisches Mittelalter*, edited by A. Speer, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter, 2006, pp. 379-405; G. ENDRESS, *The Way to Happiness. Platonism and Demonstrative Science in Arabic Islamic Philosophy, in The Political Identity of the West: Platonism in the Dialogue of Cultures*, edited by M. van Ackeren, O. F. Sumnerell, Frankfurt, Lang, 2007, pp. 27-53. In the article *From Late Antiquity to the Arab Middle Ages: The Commentaries and the 'Harmony between the Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle'*, in *Albertus Magnus und die Anfänge der Aristoteles-Rezeption im lateinischen Mittelalter. Von Richard Rufus bis zu Franciscus de Mayronis*, edited by L. Honnefelder, R. Wood, M. Dreyer, M.-A. Aris, Münster, Aschendorff, 2005, pp. 45-69, C. D'Ancona argues that the fact that many Greek commentaries on Aristotle translated into Arabic, written indifferently by Aristotelian and Neoplatonic interpreters, shared the same style of literal exegesis typical of Alexander of Aphrodisias may have contributed to the propagation of the 'harmony of Plato and Aristotle' paradigm in Arabic philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> On al-Kindī's attitude towards Plato and Aristotle, besides the studies mentioned above, nn. 1-2, see also G. ENDRESS, *Building the Library of Arabic Philosophy. Platonism and Aristotelianism in the Sources of al-Kindī*, in *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, edited by C. D'Ancona, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2007, pp. 319-350.

<sup>3</sup> See AL-KINDĪ's *Treatise on the soul, epitomized from the book of Aristotle and Plato and the other philosophers*, in *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafīyya*, edited by M. 'A. Abū Rīdā, Dār al-fīkr al-'arabī, Cairo, 1950-1953, vol. 1, pp. 272-280. According to C. D'Ancona (*Al-Kindī e la sua eredità*, in *Storia della filosofia nell'Islam medievale*, a cura di C. D'Ancona, Torino, Einaudi, 2005, p. 296, n. 58) the book in question is the *Theologia Aristotelis*; for other opinions on its identity, see *ibidem*, p. 347, n. 196. The aim of al-Kindī's *Discourse epitomized and concise on the soul* (in *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafīyya*, cit., pp. 281-282) is to show the congruence of Aristotle's and Plato's account of the soul. See also his *Treatise on the intellect* (*ibidem*, pp. 353-358), whose first lines (p. 353, 6-8) express the intention of providing «a concise informative account concerning the intellect according to the opinion of those who where praiseworthy among the Greek ancients. Now among the most praiseworthy of them were Aristotle and his master, the wise Plato – since the sum and substance of what Plato had to say about that subject is the same as what was said by his disciple Aristotle» (Engl. transl. in R. J. MCCARTHY, *Al-Kindī's Treatise on the Intellect*, «Islamic Studies», 3, 1964, pp. 119-149 [p. 125]; cf. P. P. RUFFINENGO, *Al-Kindī. Sull'intelletto. Sul sonno e la visione*, «Medioevo», 23, 1997, pp. 337-394 [p. 347]).

<sup>4</sup> G. ENDRESS, *The Circle of al-Kindī. Early Arabic Translations from the Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosophy, in The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, cit., pp. 43-76 (p. 59).

circle and meant to integrate Aristotle's sketchy account of the Unmoved Mover in the *Metaphysics* and to reconcile it with the Islamic world-view, is another instance of the same trend: significantly, at the end of the first chapter of the *Theologia Aristotelis* the fictitious author of the work (allegedly Aristotle) takes the word in order to exalt the value of Plato's philosophy.<sup>1</sup> In the same vein, the *topos* of the harmony between Aristotle and Plato finds expression in different members of al-Kindī's «tradition»,<sup>2</sup> as well as in other philosophical schools,<sup>3</sup> and, most conspicuously, in a specific treatise on this topic, the *Kitāb al-Gam' bayna ra'yay al-ḥakīmayn Aflātūn al-ilāhī wa-Aristūṭālīs* (*Book of the Agreement of the Opinions of the Two Sages, the Divine Plato and Aristotle*), which is traditionally ascribed to al-Fārābī, but whose authorship is debated.<sup>4</sup> One distinctive feature of the Arabic reception of the *topos* of the harmony of Plato and Aristotle is worth noticing: contrary to the Greek tradition, in most of its attestations, it is Plato that is reconciled with Aristotle as supreme authority, rather than Aristotle with Plato.<sup>5</sup>

The tendency to assign to Plato an authority comparable to that of Aristotle did not convey, in any case, the effacement of the differences between the philosophies of these two thinkers. Significantly, with regard to the same psychological context in which al-Kindī expresses his belief in the harmony of Aristotle and Plato, a contemporary of al-Kindī, Qusṭā ibn Lūqā (d. 912), insists on the divergences between Plato's and Aristotle's definition of the soul.<sup>6</sup> The diffusion of the Arabic translations of Aristotle's works – which, like their originals, contain many criticisms of Plato, as well as of other Greek

<sup>1</sup> See PLOTINO, *La discesa dell'anima nei corpi* (Enn. IV 8 [6]). *Plotiniana Arabica* (Pseudo-Teologia di Aristotele, Capitoli 1 e 7; "Detti del sapiente greco"), a cura di C. D'ANCONA, Padova, Il Poligrafo, 2003, pp. 235, 1-238, 10.

<sup>2</sup> ENDRESS, *La 'Concordance entre Platon et Aristote'*, cit., p. 245, refers to Abū Ḥasan al-ʿAmirī (d. 992) and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023). On the main features of the line of thinkers stemming from al-Kindī, see P. ADAMSON, *The Kindian Tradition. The Structure of Philosophy in Arabic Neoplatonism*, in *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, cit., pp. 351-370.

<sup>3</sup> Also the so-called «Aristotelians of Baghdad» seem to have kept Plato in very high esteem: see the belief in the harmony of Plato and Aristotle expressed by Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī (d. 974) in his treatise *On Universals* (text in M. RASHED, *On the Authorship of the Treatise On the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages attributed to al-Fārābī*, «Arabic Sciences and Philosophy», 19, 2009, pp. 43-82 [p. 66]), and the conspicuous presence of some Platonic dialogues, together with Aristotle's works and commentaries thereupon, in Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī's library (see G. ENDRESS, *The works of Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī. An analytical inventory*, Wiesbaden, Reichert Verlag, 1977, pp. 6-7). One of Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī's most important disciples, ʿIsā Ibn Ishāq Ibn Zurʿa (d. 1008), argued for the soul's immortality by appealing to the authority of Plato and Aristotle (see G. GRAF, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. II, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1947, p. 254).

<sup>4</sup> The most recent and comprehensive edition of this work, including an Italian facing translation and a detailed commentary, is the one by C. MARTINI BONADEO: *Al-Fārābī, L'armonia delle opinioni dei due sapienti, il divino Platone e Aristotele*, Pisa, Edizioni Plus Pisa University Press, 2008, with extensive bibliography on previous editions, translations, studies. Doubts on the Farabian authorship of this work, already expressed by previous scholars, are systematically advanced by RASHED, *On the Authorship*, cit.; M. RASHED, *A New List of Farabi's Writings and the Author of the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages Plato and Aristotle*, «Arabic Science and Philosophy» (forthcoming). Striking doctrinal discrepancies between the *Kitāb al-Gam'* and the other works by al-Fārābī have been noticed, among others, by D. M. DUNLOP in *The Arabic Version of the Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. A. A. Akasoy, A. Fidora, With an Introduction and Annotated Translation by D. M. Dunlop, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2005, p. 91, n. 367.

<sup>5</sup> Remarkably, in the passages of al-Kindī's works quoted above, p. 147 n. 3, Aristotle is always mentioned before Plato. Likewise, in a key-passage of Abū Ḥasan al-ʿAmirī's (d. 992) *Kitāb al-Amad ʿalā l-abad* (*Book on the Afterlife*), incorporated into the coeval *Ṣiḥwān al-ḥikma* (*Depository of Wisdom*) and resumed by later authors (see ROWSON, *A Muslim Philosopher* cit., pp. 84, 7-86, 11; 251-262; cf. ENDRESS, *La 'Concordance entre Platon et Aristote'*, cit., p. 245 and n. 24; D'ANCONA, *The Topic of the 'Harmony Between Plato and Aristotle'*, cit., pp. 391-393), the topic of the 'harmony' between Aristotle and Plato is formulated in a peculiar way: Aristotle is said to have given consistency to Plato's contradictory statements on the eternity/createdness of the world, thus holding a kind of superiority over his master.

<sup>6</sup> See HASSE, *Plato arabico-latinus*, cit., p. 35; D'ANCONA, *Al-Kindī e la sua eredità*, cit., p. 309, n. 119.

predecessors of Aristotle – certainly contributed to convey a clearer perception of the doctrinal distinction of Aristotle's and Plato's philosophical options.<sup>1</sup> This gradually brought to the formation of a second type of attitude towards the authority of the two Greek masters, in which the role of Plato was no more equated, but subordinated, to that of Aristotle. A prime example of this attitude is provided by al-Fārābī (d. 950), at least in the works of his whose authorship is certain.<sup>2</sup> The «Aristotelianism» of al-Fārābī is evident: he commented extensively, according to different styles of exegesis (introductions, epitomes, literal commentaries) on the entire Aristotelian corpus (logic, natural philosophy, metaphysics, practical philosophy), although not all his commentaries are extant. Furthermore, he defended key points and sensible issues of Aristotelian philosophy against various opponents of Aristotle, both Greek and Arab, writing in this vein refutations of Galen, Philoponus, and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī. Al-Fārābī paid considerable attention also to Plato: he wrote a compendium of Plato's *Laws* (a commentary on the *Republic* is attested) and provided an overall account of Plato's philosophy. However, in many occasions and respects he stressed the larger scope of Aristotle's philosophy with respect to Plato's, as well as the superiority of the former over the latter. Thus, he portrays the history of Greek philosophy as a progressive movement in which Plato's contribution (no more an individual ethics leading to personal immortality in the afterlife, like in al-Kindī, but a politics of the social welfare based on ethical principles) follows a previous, less perfect, stage of knowledge, but precedes and is crowned by the theoretical disciplines founded by Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> This historical view is centered on al-Fārābī's awareness that Plato's dialectical procedures are inferior to Aristotle's technique of demonstration expounded in the *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, apart from the *Kitāb al-Ġam'*, the resumptions of the topos of the harmony between Plato and Aristotle in al-Fārābī are very rare: significantly, the occasional instances that one finds regard only the general goals that these two philosophers intended, and are accompanied by remarks on the different methods they adopted in order to reach this common aim.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the remarks on the criticisms of Plato contained in the Arabic translations of the *Metaphysics*, in A. BERTOLACCI, *On the Arabic Translations of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, «Arabic Sciences and Philosophy», 15, 2005, pp. 241-275 (pp. 247, n. 16; 274-275).

<sup>2</sup> On al-Fārābī's attitude towards Plato and Aristotle, besides the studies mentioned above, p. 145 n. 1, see also H. DAIBER, *Al-Fārābī's Aristoteles. Grundlagen seiner Erkenntnislehre*, in *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk*, edited by A. Vrolijk, J. P. Hogendijk, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2007, pp. 99-112.

<sup>3</sup> *Alfarabi's Book of Letters (Kitāb al-Ĥurūf). Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Arabic Text, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by M. Mahdi, Dār al-Mašriq, Beirut, 1969, pp. 142-153. See D. GUTAS, *Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone Between Alexandria and Baghdad*, «Der Islam», 60, 1983, pp. 231-267 (also in IDEM, *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition*, Aldershot-Burlington-Singapore-Sidney, Ashgate, 2000, IX), pp. 259-260.

<sup>4</sup> *Al-Fārābī's Philosophy of Aristotle (Falsafat Aristūṭālīs)*. Arabic Text, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by M. Mahdi, Dār Mağallat Šī'r, Beirut, 1961, pp. 77-78. The *Philosophy of Aristotle* is the third part of a tripartite work (known in its entirety as the *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*), whose first and second parts are the *Attainment of Happiness* and the *Philosophy of Plato*; Engl. transl. in *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*. Translated with an introduction by M. Mahdi, New York, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962; rev. ed. 1969; rev. ed., with a *Foreword* by C. E. Butterworth and T. L. Pangle, Ithaca (N.Y.), Cornell University Press, 2001, pp. 86-87.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Fārābī, *The Attainment of Happiness (Taḥṣīl al-sa'āda)*, Hyderabad, 1345 H., p. 47, 3-11; *Al-Fārābī's Philosophy of Aristotle (Falsafat Aristūṭālīs)*, cit., p. 59, 5-7, Engl. transl. in *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, cit., pp. 49-50, 71. In the Introduction to the first edition of the translation, M. Mahdi contends that «Alfarabi presents here three separate and largely independent accounts of philosophy... without attempting to harmonize any of the doctrines or teachings of the two masters. ...Alfarabi's reticence on the area of agreement between Plato and Aristotle... is certainly striking» (p. 5).

A further phase of the Arabic reception of Plato and Aristotle is marked by Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 1037). After an initial stage in which the endorsement of the doctrine of the agreement between Plato and Aristotle (the former still called «divine») is mixed with occasional criticisms of Plato, in his mature major works the philosopher of Bukhara advocated a general «dismissal of non-Aristotelian philosophical traditions» and «spoke in condemnatory ... terms about Plato». <sup>1</sup> With this rejection of Plato's authority to the advantage of Aristotle's, Avicenna brought to the extreme consequences the tendency, already present in al-Fārābī, of subordinating Plato to Aristotle. What is typical of Avicenna in this regard is the peculiar, almost ambivalent, attitude towards Aristotle, an attitude conveniently described by Dimitri Gutas as «reverential but critical»: on the one hand, Avicenna openly raises Aristotle to the status of «First Master», thus sanctioning his role of universal transmitter of knowledge, regardless of ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliations; on the other hand, however, he replaces the «adulation» of Aristotle of previous and contemporary Arab interpreters not only with the «respect» due to the thinker whom he regards as the philosopher *par excellence*, but also with an attitude of «critical appreciation», in which profound esteem and subtle dissent coexist. <sup>2</sup> Avicenna's criticisms of Aristotle regard both, on a large scale, the systemic flaws of the Aristotelian corpus, in terms of incompleteness, intrinsic incoherence, and methodological imperfection (aspects which Avicenna names metaphorically «missing corollaries», «loose ends», «breaches») <sup>3</sup> and, more specifically, some crucial doctrinal key-points in logic, natural philosophy, psychology and metaphysics. <sup>4</sup> Noteworthy is that, in both cases, the criticism is nuanced and moved «from within» the Aristotelian tradition – i.e. it comes from an author like Avicenna who deeply sympathizes with and fully endorses Aristotle's thought, despite presenting it in a modified form in his own works – rather than being radical and «from without», as in the case, for example, of a dismissive opponent of Aristotle like Abū Bakr al-Rāzī. In other words, Avicenna's position does determine neither the formation of an anti-Platonic trend nor the insurgence of an anti-Aristotelian current within Arabic philosophy, but rather evidences the degree of maturity reached by Arabic philosophy in its entirety with respect to its Greek background in the 11<sup>th</sup> century: after an initial phase of assimilation of Greek philosophy, Avicenna initiates the period of doctrinal and ideological independence of *falsafa* with regard to its Greek an-

<sup>1</sup> GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, cit., pp. 286-287; to the evidence discussed by Gutas, the quotation of Plato's *Sophist* in the youthful *Al-Mabda' wa-l-Ma'ād (Provenance and Destination)*, ed. A. Nūrānī, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Tehran University, Tehran, 1984, p. 121, 12-13, can be added. It is worth noticing that in the text quoted by Gutas at p. 287, taken from Avicenna's reworking of Aristotle's *Elenchi Sophistici* in the *Book of the Cure* (see the fuller translation at p. 38 of Gutas' book), Plato is not mentioned by name, but simply referred to as Aristotle's teacher. A similar generic mention of Aristotle's masters and teachers, without precise indication of their names, occurs in the Introduction of the *summa* of Avicenna called *The Easterners* (see the English translation by Gutas, p. 45).

<sup>2</sup> On Avicenna's attitude towards Aristotle throughout his career, see GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, cit., pp. 287-288. On his polemic against the so-called Aristotelians of Baghdad, see also S. PINES, *La 'Philosophie Orientale' d'Avicenne et sa polémique contre les Bagdadiens*, «Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge», 27, 1952, pp. 5-37; H. V. B. BROWN, *Avicenna and the Christians Philosophers in Baghdad*, in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition. Essays presented to R. Walzer*, edited by S. Stern, A. Hourani, H. v. B. Brown, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1973, pp. 35-48.

<sup>3</sup> See the famous introduction to Avicenna's *summa The Easterners (or Eastern Wisdom)*, whose English translation and commentary is available in GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, cit., pp. 43-49, 224-225.

<sup>4</sup> A sample of Avicenna's revisions of crucial issues of Aristotelian philosophy is provided by GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, cit., pp. 237-285.

cestors. This new attitude is characterized by the balanced evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the main Greek authorities, and will contribute decisively to the transformation of Arabic philosophy into an intellectual field in its own right, consciously autonomous from its Greek heritage.

Seen in this light, the various cases of vindication of the authority of Plato and Aristotle that surface momentarily in post-Avicennian Arabic philosophy in different areas of the Muslim world can be taken as conservative attempts to defend the prestige of the two Greek masters against Avicenna's original approach to ancient sources. In different respects, the revival of Plato's authority, with a marked anti-Aristotelian vein and frequent dismissals of Avicennian key-tenets, in al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191),<sup>1</sup> the praise of Aristotle's philosophy, mixed with a vigorous criticism of Avicenna's innovations, in the Aristotelian commentaries of Averroes (Ibn Rušd, d. 1198),<sup>2</sup> and the proclaimed return to Aristotle and Galen in philosophy and medicine, rejecting Avicenna's scholarship in these fields, in ʿAbdallaṭīf al-Baġdādī (d. 1232),<sup>3</sup> are all instances of this anachronistic tendency. The external standing aloof from Avicenna, mixed with an internal much more complex and «dialectical» relationship with his thought, is the only common feature of these otherwise opposite conceptions of philosophical authority: Suhrawardī's Platonism has ideological roots that seem to lie outside philosophy *stricto sensu*, and relies on a knowledge of Plato that is mostly second-hand; Averroes' Aristotelianism expresses a clearly defined project of equating Aristotle with human rationality *tout court*, and produces a systematic exegesis of the texts of the *corpus* that, despite its scarce impact in the Islamic world, will be very influential in both Latin and Hebrew subsequent philosophy; ʿAbdallaṭīf al-Baġdādī, a teacher of Islamic sciences and a polymath more than a professional philosopher, connects himself with the Neoplatonized Aristotle of the Kindian tradition rather than with the historical Aristotle of the original texts.<sup>4</sup>

In the present article, I wish to focus on the first three stages outlined above, presenting examples of the corresponding attitudes towards Plato and Aristotle that can be found in different specimens of the Arabic exegesis of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The works taken into account belong to distinct literary genres (introductions, paraphrases, literal commentaries, original treatises etc.). The examples I will discuss not only provide concrete evidence of the aforementioned trends in the Arab reception of Plato and Aristotle, but also document the multifarious interpretations which one of the

<sup>1</sup> See J. WALBRIDGE, *The Leaven of the Ancients. Suhrawardī and the Heritage of the Greeks*, Albany (New York), State University of New York Press, 2000; cf. D. GUTAS, *Essay-Review: Suhrawardī and Greek Philosophy*, «Arabic sciences and philosophy», 13.2, 2003, pp. 303-309. At p. 183 of the aforementioned book, Walbridge maintains that «[t]he reverse of Suhrawardī's Platonism was his critique of the Islamic Peripatetics: Avicenna and his followers». Cf. IDEM, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East. Suhrawardī and Platonic Orientalism*, Albany (New York), SUNY Press, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> G. ENDRESS, *Le projet d'Averroès: Constitution, réception et édition du corpus des œuvres d'Ibn Rušd*, in *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition. Sources, Constitution and Reception of the Philosophy of Ibn Rušd (1126-1198)*, edited by G. Endress, J. Aertsen, Leiden-Boston-Köln, Brill, 1999, pp. 3-31, A. BERTOLACCI, *The Andalusian Revolt Against Avicennian Metaphysics: Averroes' Criticism of Avicenna in the Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, in *Averroès, l'averroïsme, l'antiaverroïsme*, Proceedings of the XIV<sup>e</sup> symposium annuel de la SIEM, Genève, 4-6 October 2006, edited by A. De Libera, forthcoming. On Averroes' attitude towards Plato, see HASSE, *Plato arabico-latinus*, cit., pp. 35-37.

<sup>3</sup> D. GUTAS, *The Heritage of Avicenna: The Golden Age of Arabic Philosophy, 1000-ca. 1350*, in *Avicenna and His Heritage*. Proceedings of the International Colloquium 'Avicenna and his Heritage', Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve, 8-11 September 1999, edited by J. Janssens, D. De Smet, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2002, pp. 81-97 (p. 91).

<sup>4</sup> C. MARTINI BONADEO, *Seguaci e critici di Avicenna*, in *Storia della filosofia nell'Islam medievale*, a cura di C. D'Ancona, Torino, Einaudi, 2005, pp. 627-668.

most important of Aristotle's works underwent during the formation period of Arabic philosophy (9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries).

## I

Among al-Kindī's works dealing with metaphysics, the most important is certainly the *Kitāb fi l-Falsafa al-ūlā* (*Book on First Philosophy*), which represents the first extensive treatment of metaphysics (called «first philosophy») in Arabic. As to its typology, this work belongs to the genre of the «book» (*kitāb*) or «epistle» (*risāla*), that is the independent treatise on a specific topic or discipline. Doctrinally, it can be described as an interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and of the other Greek metaphysical works available to al-Kindī (Plotinus, Proclus, Philoponus), meant to provide a philosophical explanation of the Islamic tenets of God's unicity and sovereignty over the world.

In the *Falsafa ūlā* we find a rightly famous quotation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*:

Aristotle, the most distinguished of the Greeks in philosophy, said: «We ought to be grateful to the fathers of those who have contributed any truth, since they were the cause of their existence; let alone (being grateful) to the sons; for the fathers are their cause, while they are the cause of our attaining the truth». How beautiful is that which he has said in this matter!<sup>1</sup>

This free citation of *Metaph. α, 1, 993b11-19*, has been repeatedly recalled and commented upon in secondary literature.<sup>2</sup> In the present context, abstaining from an analysis of its content, I wish just to stress three distinctive formal features of the reported text. First, it is the only eponymous quotation of a philosopher in the extant part of the work.<sup>3</sup> Second, it is the only «literal» (though not verbatim) quotation of a work of philosophy, as al-Kindī's premise («Aristotle ... said») and conclusion («How beautiful etc.») attest. Third, it occurs in the very first pages of the treatise, within what can be considered its introduction. Such a glaring initial praise of Aristotle, accompanied by a report of this latter's text, in the only reference to a philosophical authority occurring in the work, shows clearly al-Kindī's intention to put his *Falsafa ūlā* under Aristotle's patronage.

Al-Kindī's acknowledgement of Aristotle's foremost rank in philosophy and metaphysics does not always imply doctrinal consensus. On the contrary, recent studies have underscored the many cases in which al-Kindī departs, totally or partially, from genuine Aristotelian doctrine in his *Falsafa ūlā*.<sup>4</sup> It is important noticing, however, that these departures from Aristotle's authority, amounting to «punctual» rejections of his teaching,

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres philosophique et scientifiques d'Al-Kindī. Volume II. Métaphysique et Cosmologie*, edited by R. Rashed, J. Jolivet, Leiden-Boston-Köln, Brill, 1998, p. 13, 11-13; cp. *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafīyya*, cit., p. 103, 1-3; English translation in A. L. IVRY, *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics. A Translation of Ya'qūb al-Kindī's Treatise "On First Philosophy" (fi al-Falsafah al-Ūlā)*, Albany (New York), State University of New York Press, 1974, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> See *Œuvres philosophique et scientifiques d'Al-Kindī*, cit., p. 12, n. 10; IVRY, *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, cit., p. 128. Among recent studies, C. D'ANCONA, *Al-Kindī on the Subject-matter of the First Philosophy. Direct and Indirect Sources of Falsafa l-ūlā, Chapter One*, in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter*, ed. J. A. Aertsen, A. Speer («Miscellanea Mediaevalia», 26), Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1998, pp. 841-855.

<sup>3</sup> Only the first of the two treatises of the work has survived. The present quotation is preceded by another quotation of Aristotle (*Œuvres philosophique et scientifiques d'Al-Kindī*, cit., pp. 11, 20-13, 11; cp. *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafīyya*, cit., p. 102, 5-19; IVRY, *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, cit., p. 57): in this case, however, Aristotle is not referred to by means of his proper name (*Aristūṭālīs*), but by means of the generic expression «the distinguished philosophers before us who are not our co-linguists».

<sup>4</sup> See P. ADAMSON, *Al-Kindī*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 47-105.

are always performed in a completely silent way. In other words, al-Kindī adopts doctrinal stances that are different from, and sometimes opposite to, those of Aristotle, without however expressing any dissent. One example regarding the doctrine in which al-Kindī most notably departs from Aristotle – i.e. the doctrine of the eternity of the world, advocated by Aristotle and refused by al-Kindī – clarifies this point particularly well. The introduction in *Falsafa ūlā* is a kind of long paraphrase of *Metaph. α, 1*, as the text reported above, among others, attests. The following exposition starts with a discussion of the «eternal» (*al-azālī*),<sup>1</sup> a topic that corresponds in all likelihood to the mention of the «eternal unmovable substance» (ἀίδιον τινὰ οὐσίαν ἀκίνητον) at the beginning of *Metaph. Λ, 6* (1071b4-5). The correspondence is not indicated by al-Kindī, since no explicit reference to Aristotle occurs in this passage; it is, nonetheless, attested by the fact that al-Kindī, after describing the salient features of the «eternal», passes to demonstrating that body, time and movement cannot be infinite.<sup>2</sup> Now, as far as time and movement are concerned, his position is opposite to Aristotle's thesis in the lines of *Λ, 6* immediately following the mention of the eternal unmovable substance (1071b6-7), where movement and time are said to be neither generable nor corruptible. The eternity of movement and time certifies, in Aristotle's opinion, the existence of an eternal unmovable substance, namely the Unmoved Mover. This same eternity is rejected by al-Kindī, since it implies the eternity of the world and its co-eternity with God. Thus, the part of *Falsafa ūlā* following the introduction amounts to a sort of silent rebuttal of *Metaph. Λ, 6*, 1071b3-11.<sup>3</sup>

A younger contemporary of al-Kindī, the mathematician Ṭābit ibn Qurra (d. 901), is the author of the first extant Arabic commentary on the *Metaphysics*.<sup>4</sup> The relevance of this work as the first available example of the Arabic exegesis of Aristotle's work does not need to be stressed; it is attested, for example, by the glosses on it written four centuries after its composition by the famous theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). As to its literary genre, Ṭābit's commentary is a «concise exposition» (*talhīṣ*), i.e. a summary of

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres philosophique et scientifiques d'Al-Kindī*, cit., pp. 27, 8-29, 5; cp. *Rasā'īl al-Kindī al-falsafīyya*, cit., pp. 113, 1-114, 9; IVRY, *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, cit., pp. 67-68.

<sup>2</sup> *Œuvres philosophique et scientifiques d'Al-Kindī*, cit., pp. 29, 6-39, 22; cp. *Rasā'īl al-Kindī al-falsafīyya*, cit., pp. 114, 10-122, 21; IVRY, *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, cit., pp. 68-75.

<sup>3</sup> Since the introduction of al-Kindī's *Falsafa ūlā* is interwoven with frequent extensive quotations of *Metaph. α* (the quotation recalled above is accompanied by many other silent references to this book of the *Metaphysics*) and is immediately followed by the just mentioned critical reworking of the doctrine of *Metaph. Λ, 6*, al-Kindī's strategy in *Falsafa ūlā* consists in using book *α* of the *Metaphysics* as introductory to the "theological" core (chapters 6-10) of book *Λ*. This consideration of *Metaph. α* as preliminary to *Metaph. Λ, 6-10* is noteworthy not only in a theoretical perspective, but also from a historical point of view, since the same consideration will be adopted by Avicenna (see A. BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā': A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2006, pp. 60-62).

<sup>4</sup> Critical edition in D. C. REISMAN, A. BERTOLACCI, *Ṭābit Ibn Qurra's Concise Exposition of Aristotle's Metaphysics: Text, Translation and Commentary*, in *Sciences and Philosophy in 9<sup>th</sup> Century Baghdad. Ṭābit Ibn Qurra (826-901)*, edited by R. Rashed, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter («Scientia Graeco-Arabica», 4), 2009, pp. 715-776. Despite being a mathematician, Ṭābit was certainly qualified to write an exposition of Aristotelian metaphysics. As a scholar with knowledge of Greek, Syriac, and Arabic, he was involved in numerous translations of scientific and medical works through his association with Ḥunayn ibn Iṣḥāq's (d. 873) circle of translators, in addition to building a curriculum of summaries and compendia in those fields. His knowledge of the Aristotelian corpus is evident in his compendia and abridgements of parts of the *Organon* (*Categoriae*, *De Interpretatione*, *Analytica Priora*) and his uncompleted (?) commentary of *Physica*. His familiarity with Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and the neo-Aristotelian commentaries of it is indicated by his reported correction of Iṣḥāq ibn Ḥunayn's (d. 910) translation of Themistius' paraphrase of the *Metaphysics* (see *ibidem*, pp. 718-719).

the essential points of the *Metaphysics*, presented in precise form.<sup>1</sup> From a doctrinal point of view, the commentary is a reworking of most of the theological core of the *Metaphysics*, namely of chapters 6-9 of its twelfth book ( $\Lambda$ ). In focusing on the natural theology of the *Metaphysics* and trying to reconcile its positions with Islamic, or at least monotheistic, tenets (for instance, when will is attributed to the First Principle and Its unicity is called by means of the Islamic term *tawhīd*), Ṭābit appears to share the theologizing interpretation of the *Metaphysics* that was inaugurated by al-Kindī and remained common in the Arab world until the time of al-Fārābī.<sup>2</sup>

Besides being the first known commentator of the *Metaphysics*, however, Ṭābit is also an important witness of the early Arabic reception of Plato's philosophy. Among his works, there are treatises (either extant or attested) related to Plato's *Republic* and *Meno*, two dialogues with which he probably had first-hand acquaintance.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is not surprising to find in the introduction to his commentary on the *Metaphysics* an allusion to the doctrine of the harmony between Plato and Aristotle:

Aristotle entitled this book of his *Metaphysics* both because his intention in it was to investigate a substance that is not in motion and unsusceptible to desire for anything outside its essence, and because this is not the behavior of natural things, although, in order to explain that, he is forced to investigate, as he proceeds, many things about substance that is in motion. Plato, on the contrary, raises that essence that is not in motion above substance and places substance under it, i.e. according to cause and caused, since in his opinion one concept does not encompass both. However, if we understand the actual doctrine that both these men follow, their differences on [that topic] need not prejudice us in what we want to learn about this essence that is not in motion.<sup>4</sup>

In the introduction to the commentary, Ṭābit faces some of the preliminary questions to the study of Aristotle systematized by the Greek Neoplatonic commentators.<sup>5</sup> The reported text documents his resumption of three such questions (explaining the title of the commented work, elucidating the author's goal, and solving the apparent disagreement between Plato and Aristotle); a fourth topic (Aristotle's intended obscurity)

<sup>1</sup> See D. GUTAS, *Aspects of Literary Form and Genre in Arabic Logical Works*, in *Glosses and Commentaries on Aristotelian Logical Texts. The Syriac, Arabic and Medieval Latin Traditions*, edited by C. Burnett, London, The Warburg Institute of the University of London, 1993, pp. 29-76 (pp. 38-40). The fact that Ṭābit's commentary regards only the theological core of the *Metaphysics* ( $\Lambda$ , 6-9) might mirror the basic meaning of the word *talḥīṣ*, outlined by Gutas as «to look at something, discriminate or distinguish it from heterogeneous elements, determine its precise boundaries, and present it by giving precisely and in detail its elements» (*ibid.*, emphasis mine).

<sup>2</sup> REISMAN, BERTOLACCI, *Ṭābit Ibn Qurra's Concise Exposition of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, cit., pp. 719-723. Besides knowing and being influenced by his philosophy, Ṭābit might even have met al-Kindī (see GUTAS, *Plato's Symposium in the Arabic Tradition*, cit., p. 42, n. 25).

<sup>3</sup> See GUTAS, *Plato's Symposium in the Arabic Tradition*, cit., pp. 46-47; REISMAN, *Plato's Republic in Arabic*, cit. pp. 265-266.

<sup>4</sup> REISMAN, BERTOLACCI, *Ṭābit Ibn Qurra's Concise Exposition of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, cit., p. 737, 8-17; Engl. transl. p. 736.

<sup>5</sup> Two partially overlapping sets of preliminary questions were discussed by the Greek commentators of Aristotle. The first set consisted of ten points and was intended to be an introduction to Aristotle's philosophy in general; consequently it was discussed before the commentary on the first work of the Aristotelian corpus, i.e. the *Categories*. The second set encompassed six or seven points, and functioned as an introduction to each work of Aristotle; therefore it was repeatedly discussed at the beginning of the single commentaries (beginning with the commentary on the *Categories*). For the Greek sources of these sets of questions, cf. SIMPLICIUS, *Commentaire sur les Catégories*, translated by I. Hadot, Fascicle 1, Leiden, Brill, 1990, pp. 21-47, 138-160, and J. MANSFELD, *Prolegomena: Questions to be settled before the study of an author, or a text*, Leiden, Brill, 1994, pp. 10-21. For their Arabic reception, see BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Sifā'*, cit., pp. 169-170, and the bibliography mentioned there.

is discussed immediately afterwards.<sup>1</sup> The explanation of the apparent disagreement between Plato and Aristotle is the topic most extensively dealt with in this context. In Ṭābit's own reformulation and application to the case of the *Metaphysics*, the issue revolves around the fact that Aristotle qualifies the First Principle as substance (*ḡawhar*), whereas Plato regards It simply as an essence (*dāt*), placing the scope of substance at a lower level.<sup>2</sup> Ṭābit's solution is quite basic: he insists on the common feature of the Aristotelian and Platonic account of the First Principle (It is either a substance or an essence *that is not in motion*), adopting in the last lines of the reported text Plato's terminology («essence»), but resuming Aristotle's way of describing the First Principle's nature («substance») in the remainder of the commentary. Ṭābit's stance on the issue can be regarded as simplistic or unsatisfactory: for our purposes, however, the very fact that he resumes the doctrine of the harmony of Plato and Aristotle is noteworthy, regardless of the theoretical value of the explanation he provides.

Thus, in the initial phase of the Arabic reception of the *Metaphysics* we find significant instances of laudatory reverence towards Aristotle, joined with totally silent divergences from his doctrine (al-Kindī), and examples of the effort to put his authority on metaphysical matters in agreement with Plato's point of view (Ṭābit ibn Qurra). In this respect, the Arabic exegesis of the *Metaphysics* by al-Kindī and Ṭābit ibn Qurra is a faithful image of the first phase of the transmission into Arabic of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy outlined above.

## II

The work of al-Fārābī most directly related to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is his famous *Maqāla fī Aḡrād al-ḥakīm fī kull maqāla min al-kitāb al-mawsūm bi-l-ḥurūf* (*Treatise on the Purposes of the Sage in each treatise of the book named by means of letters*), in which the «sage» is Aristotle and the book of Aristotle referred to is the *Metaphysics*.<sup>3</sup> The *Fī Aḡrād* is neither a commentary on the *Metaphysics*, nor a reworking of it, but rather an introduction. In it, al-Fārābī deals with some peculiar issues – like the «goal» (*ḡaraḍ*) of the *Metaphysics*, the «name» (*ism*) of the science contained in it, and the «divisions» (*aqsām*) of this work – that correspond to some of the already mentioned preliminary questions discussed by the Neoplatonic commentators of Aristotle at the beginning of their exegesis of the single Aristotelian works.<sup>4</sup> The difference with respect to the Greek prole-

<sup>1</sup> Among the four preliminary topics touched upon by Ṭābit, the first two (explaining the title of the commented work, and elucidating the author's intention) come from the second set of preliminary questions, whereas the second two (solving the apparent disagreement between Plato and Aristotle, and Aristotle's intended obscurity) correspond to two questions of the first set. In fact, one of the ten points constituting the general introduction to Aristotle by the Neoplatonic commentators at the beginning of their commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* is the description of the qualities the good interpreter of Aristotle must possess; the ability to show the inner agreement between the opinions of Aristotle and Plato is one such quality according to Simplicius' Commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* (SIMPLICIUS, *Commentaire sur les Catégories*, cit., pp. 15, 123-130).

<sup>2</sup> The demonstration of the existence and the description of the nature of a substance (*οὐσία*) that is eternal and unmoved is the target of book Λ of the *Metaphysics*; cf. Λ, 1, 1069a30-33, Λ, 6, 1071b3-5; Λ, 7, 1073a3-5. The reference to Plato regards probably *Republic* VI, 509b6-10.

<sup>3</sup> Arabic text in *Alfārābī's Philosophische Abhandlungen*, ed. F. Dieterici, Leiden, Brill, 1890, pp. 34-38. For additional editions and translations, see BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, cit., p. 66, n. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Namely the question of the goal, title and division into chapters of the work commented upon (see above, n. 1, and p. 154 n. 5). Among these issues, the goal (*ḡaraḍ*) is no doubt the most important, as the title of al-Fārābī's essay makes clear.

gomena is that these three introductory topics are discussed by al-Fārābī in the form of an independent treatment, that is, they are not preliminary to a subsequent, more extensive exegesis, but constitute a self-standing metaphysical essay. Al-Fārābī's work is important in different respects. Doctrinally, it argues clearly and convincingly that in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* philosophical theology is part of a broader doctrine of being, or ontology, and it keeps Aristotelian philosophical theology distinct from Islamic revealed theology. With regard to its Greek sources, moreover, it documents the direct or indirect influence of Ammonius Son of Hermeias. In the context of the reception of the *Metaphysics* in the Muslim world, finally, it represents the first extant *integral* exegesis of Aristotle's work in Arabic, it marks a decisive departure from the way of conceiving the science of metaphysics typical of al-Kindī and Ṭābit ibn Qurra, and it exerted a decisive influence on Avicenna's understanding of this discipline.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Fī Aḡrād*, the esteem for Aristotle is witnessed not only by the epithet «sage» ascribed to him in the title (if it is really by al-Fārābī's pen). More substantially, it is attested by the author's defense of the real content of the *Metaphysics*, in the introduction, against the «Kindian» misrepresentation of this work that was current at the time of al-Fārābī (i.e. the misconception of the *Metaphysics* as tantamount to the study of the Neoplatonic triad «Creator-Intellect-Soul», and of the science of metaphysics as identical with Islamic theology), and his complaint of the lack of Greek literal commentaries on the *Metaphysics* (apart from Alexander of Aphrodisias' and Themistius' exegesis of book Λ).<sup>2</sup> With regard to Plato, on the contrary, within the description of books Z and H of the *Metaphysics* (reckoned respectively as sixth and seventh, since book A is not taken into account), al-Fārābī places the following critical remarks about the doctrine of ideas:

The sixth treatise contains a verified discussion of «being» said *per se*, with special regard to substance and the distinction of its types, namely hyle, form and compound [cp. Z, 1-3]; if true definition belongs to the existents, to what of them it belongs; if it belongs to substance, to what substance it belongs; how the compounds are defined [cp. Z, 4-6]; which parts [of the things that are defined] are found in the definitions [cp. Z, 10-12]; what forms are separate [from matter] and what are not [cp. Z, 13]; that the [Platonic] Ideas do not exist [cp. Z, 14-16].

The seventh treatise contains a summary of the previous treatise; *the completion of the discussion of the Platonic forms and of the fact that generated things do not require them for being generated*; a verified discussion of the definitions of separate things, if they exist, and of the fact that their definitions are these things themselves (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in al-Fārābī's *Fī Aḡrād* the traditional recognition of Aristotle's authority and primacy in metaphysics is joined with the reproduction of some of the most acute criticisms of Plato that can be found in the *Metaphysics*. In so doing, al-Fārābī declares the incompatibility of Aristotle's metaphysical system with Plato's and disqualifies the latter with regard to the former. In other words, far from indulging in the tendency to harmonize Aristotle and Plato, he underscores the points in which the two authors' views on metaphysics are at variance and stresses the deficiencies of Plato's metaphysical perspective with respect to Aristotle's. On account of these features, the *Fī Aḡrād*

<sup>1</sup> See A. BERTOLACCI, *Ammonius and al-Fārābī: The Sources of Avicenna's Concept of Metaphysics*, «Quaestio», 5, 2005, pp. 287-305; BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, cit., pp. 65-103.

<sup>2</sup> *Alfārābī's Philosophische Abhandlungen* cit., p. 34, 8-18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 37, 14-21.

represents a significant instance of the second phase of the Arabic reception of Plato's and Aristotle's authority.

### III

Among the many works of philosophy written by Avicenna, the *Kitāb al-Šifā'* (*Book of the Cure*) is, by the author's own admission and his disciples' acknowledgement, his *magnum opus*.<sup>1</sup> This consideration is justified by the extent, the range of sources, the doctrinal content and the later impact of this work. Accordingly, the metaphysical section of the *Šifā'*, the *Ilāhiyyāt* (*Science of Divine Things*), can be taken as Avicenna's masterpiece on metaphysics. In Avicenna's vast and varied philosophical output, the *Šifā'* is the best representative of the *summa* of philosophy, a literary genre of which Avicenna can be regarded as the inventor: the group of disciplines forming the curriculum of studies of Late Antiquity become in the *Šifā'* a series of treatises forming a single, albeit articulated, «encyclopedic» work. Within the *Šifā'*, the *Ilāhiyyāt* is a thorough adaptation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in which the text of Aristotle – with accretions taken from Aristotelian Greek commentators, Arabic Neoplatonic metaphysics, and previous Arab philosophers, in constant dialogue with Islamic religion and theology – is rearranged according to the epistemological rules of the *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>2</sup>

The attitude towards the authority of Plato and Aristotle in the *Ilāhiyyāt* presents four complementary aspects. First, Avicenna emphasizes the absolute primacy of Aristotle in philosophy by referring to him, in a significant number of cases, by means of the definite description «First Teacher» (*al-mu'allim al-awwal*), or by naming the *Metaphysics* with the cognate expression «First Teaching» (*al-ta'lim al-awwal*).<sup>3</sup> In some of these quotations, Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius – also referred to by means of definite descriptions – are mentioned together with the «First Teacher» as the chief interpreters of his thought. Significantly, Avicenna never expresses disagreement with the doctrines of Aristotle mentioned in these quotations; he rather presents his own exposition as their elucidation. Occasionally, he also defends the texts of Aristotle that he quotes from possible criticisms. Needless to say, no other philosophical authority receives a similar treatment.

In at least a couple of cases – and this is the second noteworthy aspect – Avicenna in the *Ilāhiyyāt* alludes to the superiority of Aristotle over Plato in a historical perspective. His judgment is based on methodological considerations: the main idea, expressed in a veiled but effective manner, is that Aristotle used for the first time demonstration in philosophy in general, and in metaphysics in particular, thus surpassing the methodological standards of Plato and all previous philosophers. That demonstration is something carried out after Plato, and against him, by Aristotle is implicit, for example, in the following text:

<sup>1</sup> The presence of two lengthy prefaces to the work, one written by Avicenna, the other by his secretary and biographer al-Guzḡānī – a unique case in Avicenna's *œuvre* – witnesses of its importance. In his own preface, Avicenna compares the *Šifā'* to the rest of his philosophical production, showing the substantial congruence between the former and the latter (see GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, cit., pp. 51-53).

<sup>2</sup> See BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, cit.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 318-319, 560-561, 573. From a stylistic point of view, these quotations are not eponymous, but can be named «explicit determinate», since they clearly show that an author or a work is being quoted (in this sense they are explicit), revealing at the same time the identity of the quoted author or work (in this sense they are determinate).

- [a] ... it was not impossible for a numerous sect [of philosophers] to conceive that, among the [different] things, there is one that moves itself,  
 [b] until the demonstration (*al-burhān*) of this impossibility arose.<sup>1</sup>

Section [a] of this text refers primarily to Plato's doctrine of the soul's self-motion (*Phaedrus* 245c5-246a2; *Laws* 895e10-896a4). Avicenna knew this doctrine through Aristotle's *De Anima* – where it is not ascribed to Plato, but generically to «some philosophers», together with the similar theory (probably by Xenocrates, Plato's second successor in the Academy) that the soul is a self-moving number<sup>2</sup> – and *Metaphysics*, where it is explicitly attributed to Plato.<sup>3</sup> Section [b], on the other hand, refers probably to Aristotle's arguments for the impossibility of self-motion, provided, in general terms, in *Phys. Θ*, 5, 257a31-258b4, and with particular regard to the animals' self-motion, in *Phys. Θ*, 6, 259b1-31. Thus, in the reported text Avicenna regards a doctrine held by Plato and his followers as replaced by an apodictic proof – a «demonstration» (*burhān*) – provided by Aristotle, conveying the idea that the stage of perfection in metaphysics (i.e. the use of demonstration in this discipline) starts only with Aristotle.

Contrary to Aristotle, who is named with the honorific title of «First Teacher» and whose nominal quotations are always inspired by respect and admiration, Plato is referred to by Avicenna in the *Ilāhiyyāt* with his proper name, if not obliquely through generic indefinite expressions, being almost invariably criticized.<sup>4</sup> In a way, the criticism of Plato runs through the entire *Ilāhiyyāt*: it is announced in the first treatises of the work;<sup>5</sup> it is fully displayed in two chapters at the end of the first part of the work (VII, 2-3), which are devoted respectively to the exposition and the refutation of Plato's doctrine of ideas and mathematical separate entities (together with the similar views of Socrates and the Pythagoreans), as their titles make clear;<sup>6</sup> it is briefly anticipated and resumed in the treatises of the work that precede and follow these two chapters.<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Šifāʾ, al-Ilāhiyyāt (1)*, edited by Ğ. Š. Qanawātī, S. Zāyid, al-Hayʾa al-ʿamma li-šūʿun al-maṭābīʿ al-amīriyya, Cairo 1960; *Al-Šifāʾ, al-Ilāhiyyāt (2)*, ed. M. Y. Mūsā, S. Dunyā, S. Zāyid, al-Hayʾa al-ʿamma li-šūʿun al-maṭābīʿ al-amīriyya, Cairo, 1960, VIII, 6, p. 357, 16-17 [p. 415, 32-34], according to the correction of the Arabic text proposed in BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifāʾ*, cit., p. 537 (numbers between square brackets refer to pages and lines of the critical edition of the Latin translation of the *Ilāhiyyāt*: AVICENNA LATINUS, *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina, I-IV*. Édition critique par S. Van Riet. Introduction par G. Verbeke, Louvain-Leiden, Peeters-Brill, 1977; *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina, V-X*. Édition critique par S. Van Riet. Introduction par G. Verbeke, Louvain-Leiden, Peeters-Brill, 1980). The English translation is mine; cf. also AVICENNA, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*. A parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced, and annotated by M. E. Marmura, Provo (Utah), Brigham Young University Press, 2005, p. 286; *Libro della Guarigione, Le Cose Divine* di Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), a cura di A. Bertolacci, UTET, Turin, 2007, pp. 664-665. Further remarks on this and the similar passage of *Ilāhiyyāt* VII, 2, p. 310, 10-14 [p. 358, 91-99] can be found in BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifāʾ*, cit., pp. 217-220.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle reports the former doctrine in *De An. A*, 2, 404a20-25, and refutes it in *De An. A*, 3. The latter doctrine is expounded in *De An. A*, 2, 404b27-30, and rejected in *De An. A*, 4, 408b32-409a30.

<sup>3</sup> *Metaph. Λ*, 6, 1071b37-1072a3. Since Avicenna portrays the advocates of this doctrine as numerous, he is probably referring not only to Plato, but to the Platonic school in general.

<sup>4</sup> BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifāʾ*, cit., pp. 453-454, 559, 563, 566, 570, s.v. *Aflātūn* (Plato), *al-ḥukamāʾ al-aqdamīn* ('the ancient wise men'), *fariq lahum ʿadadun* ('a numerous sect'), *man* ('the person[s] who').

<sup>5</sup> *Ilāhiyyāt* III, 1, ed. cit., p. 94, 5-8, pp. 94, 14-95, 12 [p. 105, 26-30, pp. 106, 39-61]; cp. v, 2, p. 211, 8-9 [p. 244, 63-65].

<sup>6</sup> M. E. MARMURA, *Avicenna's Critique of Platonists in Book VII, Chapter 2 of the Metaphysics of His Healing*, in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy. From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, cit., pp. 355-370.

<sup>7</sup> v, 1, p. 204, 5 [p. 236, 4]; VIII, 7, p. 365, 16 [p. 427, 68].

quotations of Plato in the *Ilāhiyyāt* are taken either from the *Metaphysics*<sup>1</sup> or from sources different from Aristotle (for example the Arabic translation of Galen's compendium of the *Timaeum*, the Neoplatonic commentaries of Aristotle available in Arabic, and Arabic works expressly dealing with Plato like the *Kitāb al-Ġam*).<sup>2</sup> In both cases, regardless of his sources' different sensibilities, Avicenna's attitude towards Plato remains «Aristotelian», i.e. sharply critical. Although the *Ilāhiyyāt* certainly marks an unparalleled peak of Avicenna's aversion for Plato,<sup>3</sup> the anti-Platonism expressed in this work instantiates a general feature of Avicenna's thought.<sup>4</sup>

With respect to previous metaphysical works of Avicenna, one notices in the *Ilāhiyyāt* a decreasing number of quotations of Aristotle.<sup>5</sup> This less marked dependence on Aristotle is joined in this work with another remarkable «stylistic» feature, namely the fact that Aristotle is quoted not only as «First Teacher», but also by means of less conspicuous formulas.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes Avicenna refers to Aristotle himself by means of generic names («the Ancients», *al-awwalūna*; «a group», *qawm*), pronouns («some», *man*) or verbs («they say», *yaqūlūna*). In other cases, he refers to Aristotle's views, rather than to Aristotle himself, describing them neutrally as «what is said» (*mā yuqālu*, *yuqālu*), a thing that «was believed» (*ẓunna*) or a «statement» (*qawl*, *qawluhum*, *qawl al-qā'il*). A further set of instances, finally, underscores the common opinions or *endoxa* that Aristotle occasionally discusses: in this case, Avicenna refers to «what is commonly believed» (*al-mašhūr*) and to «the commonly accepted meaning» (*al-mā'nā al-mašhūr*), occasionally ascribed to the «common people» (*al-mašhūr 'inda al-ḡumhūr*); to the «common people» (*al-ḡumhūr*) themselves; and to the opinions of «philosophers» (*al-falāsifa*) and «geometers» (*al-muhandisūna*). Quotations like these can be called «explicit indeterminate»: they are explicit, because Avicenna makes clear that he is reporting someone else's thought, but they are indeterminate, since it is not clear whom exactly Avicenna is referring to; only the content reveals that Aristotle and the *Metaphysics*, as well as some of his other works, are at stake.<sup>7</sup> The explicit indeterminate quotations of Aristotle in the *Ilāhiyyāt* are significant, since they often reveal a critical attitude towards Aristotle

<sup>1</sup> *Metaph.* A, 5-6, 8-9; Z, 13, 14-16; M (see BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, cit., pp. 336-337, 353-354).

<sup>2</sup> See BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, cit., p. 454, nn. 69-71.

<sup>3</sup> Signs of a positive reception of Plato's philosophy surface outside the *Šifā'*. Commenting on the *Theologia Aristotelis* in the *Kitāb al-Inṣāf* (*Book of the Fair Judgement*), for example, Avicenna connects to Plato his own distinction between Creator and creatures based on the essence-existence distinction (*Šarḥ Kitāb Uṭūlūḡiyā al-mansūb ilā Aristū*, in *Aristū 'inda l-'Arab*, ed. 'A. Badawī, Maktabat al-nahḍa al-miṣriyya, Cairo, 1947, p. 46). We may also wonder whether Avicenna's doctrine, in the *Ilāhiyyāt* and elsewhere, according to which caused things, simply possible on account of themselves, are necessary on account of their causes, might be a reflex of Plato's doctrine (*Tim.* 41A-B; *Polit.* 270A3-4), transmitted by Proclus, of the world being immortal on account of its Creator.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the dismissal of Plato's doctrine of ideas in the earlier *Al-Mabda' wa-l-Ma'ād* 11, 7, ed. cit., p. 85, 6-7: «It seems that by 'forms' Plato means these forms [i.e. the intelligible forms that are thought by the heavenly intelligences]. But the apparent [meaning] of his doctrine is inconsistent and false, [as] Aristotle has thoroughly discussed in many books». The reference is to *loci* like *An. Post.* A, 11, 77a5-9; *Metaph.* Z, 2, 1028b19-21; Z, 14 *in toto*; Z, 15, 1040a8-b4; Z, 16, 1040b27-1041a3; A, 1-5; A, 8, 1073a17-22; A, 10.

<sup>5</sup> In *Al-Mabda' wa-l-Ma'ād*, for example, we find the same four explicit references to *Metaphysics* A that occur in the *Ilāhiyyāt*, plus other four. See *Mabda'* ed. cit., p. 61, 10 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 392, 4 [p. 462, 43-44]); p. 61, 18 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 392, 9 [p. 462, 53]); p. 62, 3 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 392, 15-16 [p. 463, 65]); p. 68, 7 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 401, 16 [p. 476, 34]); p. 34, 3; p. 68, 14; p. 68, 21; p. 85, 8.

<sup>6</sup> See BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, cit., pp. 319-320.

<sup>7</sup> These quotations regard *Metaph.* α, Δ, Z and I and, occasionally, other works by Aristotle (*Categories*, *De Interpretatione*).

on Avicenna's part:<sup>1</sup> it is as if in the *Ilāhiyyāt* Avicenna aimed at hiding or disguising his disagreement towards the «First Teacher», using an indirect way of expressing his dissent. See, for example, the following text:

A group (*qawm*) [of philosophers] thought that the premises are so [i.e. material causes] with regard to the conclusion. But this is false. On the contrary, the premises are so [i.e. material causes] with regard to the form of the syllogism. As to the conclusion, it is not a form [inhering] in the premises, but something necessarily resulting from them, as if the premises produced the conclusion in the soul.<sup>2</sup>

Although the chapter in which it is contained (*Ilāhiyyāt* VI, 4, Avicenna's treatment of the material, formal and final causes) depends implicitly, in many respects, on *Metaphysics* Δ, 2, the reported text amounts to a criticism of a passage of this same chapter (Δ, 2, 1013b20-21): Aristotle is designed by means of the expression «a group (of philosophers)» (*qawm*), and a particular aspect of his doctrine of material causality (the consideration of the syllogistic premises as matter of the conclusion) is rejected.<sup>3</sup>

As to their target, veiled criticisms of Aristotle of this kind regard not only specific doctrines, as in the reported example, but also more general methodological issues: in this latter case, Avicenna underscores Aristotle's excessive reliance on procedures that can be regarded as «dialectical» and the insufficient demonstrative tenure of his metaphysical discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas the dissent towards Aristotle remains implicit and therefore «potential» in the *Šifā'*, outspoken «actual» criticism of Aristotle emerges in a slightly later work of Avicenna that is not a *summa*, but a literal commentary of the Aristotelian «enlarged» corpus. Of this work – the *Kitāb al-Inšāf* (*Book of the Fair Judgement*) – only two parts are extant, thanks to *reportationes* or summaries, made by Avicenna's disciples, of the original version: the exegesis of the theological core of the *Metaphysics* and a more extensive explanation of the *Theologia Aristotelis*. The extant part of the work dealing with the *Metaphysics* is a commentary (*šarḥ*) on *Metaph.* Λ, 6-10, 1071b5-1075a27: though largely incomplete, it represents an extremely precious piece of evidence, since it is the only surviving example of literal exegesis of the *Metaphysics* by Avicenna. Equally important is the presence in this part of the work of explicit criticisms of Aristotle.<sup>5</sup> One bright example of this attitude can be found in Avicenna's commentary on Aristotle's considerations on the divine *noesis* as self-intellection in *Metaph.* Λ, 9.

<sup>1</sup> Of the fifteen cases of explicit indeterminate quotations that I have been able to identify in the *Ilāhiyyāt* (see the table in BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, cit., p. 317) only four attest a consensual attitude.

<sup>2</sup> *Ilāhiyyāt* VI, 4, ed. cit., p. 279, 15-17 [p. 321, 46-50]; cf. AVICENNA, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, cit., p. 216; *Libro della Guarigione, Le Cose Divine* di Avicenna, cit., p. 540. See BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, cit., pp. 333-335.

<sup>3</sup> Albertus Magnus was apparently the first Avicennian 'scholar' – in the sense of a knowledgeable and penetrating interpreter of Avicenna – to discover and identify this quotation. In his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, after paraphrasing sympathetically Aristotle's position, he points out and rejects Avicenna's criticism of Aristotle. See A. BERTOLACCI, «*Subtilius specularando*». *Le citazioni della Philosophia Prima di Avicenna nel Commento alla Metafisica di Alberto Magno*, «Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale», 9, 1998, pp. 261-339 (pp. 273-275).

<sup>4</sup> See BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, cit., pp. 220-221, 234 and n. 72, 339-351.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Šarḥ Ḥarf al-Lām li-Ibn Sīnā*, in *Arištū 'inda l-'Arab*, cit., p. 23, 21; p. 30, 23 (with regard to Λ, 9, 1074b28-29; cf. GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, cit., p. 288 and n. 12); p. 31, 11-18 (text quoted below).

I [i.e. Avicenna] say: «If the man (*al-rağul*, i.e. Aristotle) means to say that the best thing is [for the divine Intellect] to intellect Itself alone, he says something that is impossible. For if It intellects Itself as It is, It also intellects that which is attached to Itself in act. Accordingly It would intellect Itself being the principle and ... Its intellecting all [things]. For otherwise It would not intellect Itself as It is. If, however, he means to say that Its intellection begins with Its intellecting Himself, and that from Itself It intellects the [other] things, not from the [other] things [themselves], and that consequently the [other] things are not the cause of Its being Intellect, but that, on the contrary, Its being Intellect in Itself is the cause of the [other] things, [his statement] would be correct. But [in that case] he [i.e. Aristotle] ought to have stated this and not have kept silent about it».

He [i.e. Avicenna] says: «Neither should it be accorded that *not seeing some things is better than seeing [them]* (*Metaph. Λ*, 9, 1074b32-33). For this is a saying most characteristic of the vulgar».<sup>1</sup>

In this text Avicenna remarks several shortcomings of the corresponding text of Aristotle. First of all, it is unclear what Aristotle means: according to a possible interpretation, his opinion is patently wrong and unacceptable; according to another interpretation, his opinion is true, but imperfectly formulated. In any case, according to Avicenna, Aristotle's starting-point (the principle that it better not seeing than seeing certain things) is methodologically weak. Avicenna open insistence on the defects regarding content (uncertainty, falsity), style (opaqueness) and method (reliance on *endoxa*) of Aristotle's lemma in one and the same passage of his commentary is remarkable.

If considered together with the implicit criticism of Aristotle that can be detected in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Šifā'*<sup>2</sup> – a tendency which is not limited to the metaphysical part of this *summa*, but is characteristic of the entire work<sup>2</sup> – the explicit dissent towards «the man» (*al-rağul*) formulated in the *Inšāf* can be regarded as the counterpart of the respect, deference, and esteem expressed towards Aristotle, both at a «formal» level and in a substantial way, in the rest of Avicenna's metaphysical *œuvre*. In general, Avicenna's results to be a «critical» evaluator of Aristotle, that is, on the one side, a follower deeply conscious of the greatness of Aristotle's achievements and the superiority of the «First Teacher» with respect to the other ancient thinkers, but, on the other side, also an independent thinker capable of detecting and declaring the flaws and deficiencies of his model.

#### CONCLUSION

The present article has tried to document the different aspects that the attitude towards Aristotle's authority has assumed in the so-called «classical period» of Arabic philosophy (IX-XI c.). Three main phases of this development have been outlined here. In the first (al-Kindī and Ṭābit ibn Qurra), the esteem for Aristotle as philosophical leading authority is accompanied by the acknowledgment of Plato's comparable standing in philosophy, in the name of the doctrine of the harmony between Plato and Aristotle inherited from Greek sources. In the second phase (al-Fārābī), the roles and respective

<sup>1</sup> *Šarḥ Ḥarf al-Lām li-Ibn Sīnā*, in *Aristū 'inda l-'Arab*, cit., p. 31, 11-18; English translation (slightly modified) in S. PINES, *Some distinctive metaphysical conceptions in Themistius' Commentary on Book Lambda and their place in the history of philosophy*, in *Aristoteles. Werk und Wirkung. Paul Moraux gewidmet*, vol. II: *Kommentierung, Überlieferung, Nachleben*, edited by J. Wiesner, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1987, pp. 177-204 (pp. 191-192).

<sup>2</sup> See the *loci* of the parts of the *Šifā'* corresponding to Aristotle's *Topics* and *Physics* discussed in BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, cit., p. 320, n. 22.

values of Aristotle and Plato are separated and differentiated, and, while Aristotle is extolled to the rank of undisputed master of philosophy, Plato starts to be criticized on the footsteps of Aristotle's dissent towards his master. In the third phase (Avicenna), together with the recognition of Aristotle's *magisterium* («First Teacher») and of his supremacy over Plato, signs of dissatisfaction with his teachings begin to be expressed, more or less clearly.

Three main aspects of Arabic philosophy have emerged in the course of the analysis. The first is the paramount importance assigned to Aristotle, among the various Greek philosophical authors, by all the thinkers engaged in *falsafa*. This obvious point is worth being stressed against a tendency in contemporary scholarship to emphasize the Neoplatonic, rather than Aristotelian, character of Islamic metaphysics and philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Although the Neoplatonic curriculum of studies was faithfully adopted by Muslim thinkers; although Neoplatonic commentators of Aristotle served as invaluable transmitters of doctrines and opinions to the Arabs; and although Neoplatonic metaphysical writings like the *Theologia Aristotelis* and the *Liber de Causis* contributed considerably to the shaping of Arabic metaphysics, Arabic philosophy remains nonetheless essentially Aristotelian, i.e. an effort to fully understand, reformulate and, occasionally, revise Aristotle's original texts, these latter constituting the permanent main bulk, in logic, natural philosophy and metaphysics, of the philosophical training. The expressions of deference towards Aristotle, widespread in all the main representatives of classical Arabic philosophy until (at least) Averroes, are just the exterior manifestation of this substantial and undisputable fact.

Second, the Arabic reception of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* can be assumed as a significant parameter to evaluate more general trends regarding Arabic philosophy in its entirety *vis à vis* its Greek heritage. The present essay has tried to show that writings differently related to the *Metaphysics* (being introductions to this work, commentaries thereupon, or original treatises on metaphysics) mirror faithfully the attitude towards the authority of Aristotle that is attested, on a larger scope, by Arabic philosophy as a whole. The same representative capacity can be seen in contiguous areas of the transmission of the *Metaphysics* into Arabic culture: a comparative study of the different Arabic translations of Aristotle's work, for example, provides an insightful specimen of the various doctrinal currents that characterize the early phase of the history of Arabic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> The paramount importance of the *Metaphysics* in Arabic philosophy can be prospected from two complementary view-points: on the one hand, this work is regarded by the *falāsifa* as the culmination, the synthesis and the «heart» of Aristotle's system; on the other hand, the philosophical discipline expounded in the *Metaphysics* represents the *regina scientiarum* according to the shared epistemological view.

Third, in the history of Arabic philosophy Avicenna plays a key-role. The «dialectical» relationship that he establishes with Aristotle (endorsement of the main tenets of Aristotle's philosophy, on the one hand, criticism and revision of the Stagirite's positions, on the other) is crucial in this regard: in Avicenna, the admiration for the «First Teacher» is closely joined with the awareness of his own function of «new Aristotle», charged with bringing the system of philosophy, clearly articulated and well grounded, but still imperfectly realized in the Greek master, to full completion. Thus, it is not co-

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, WALZER, *Platonism in Islamic Philosophy*, cit.

<sup>2</sup> See BERTOLACCI, *On the Arabic Translations of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, cit.

incidental that in Avicenna's own mind the *Šifā'* replaces progressively the Aristotelian *corpus* as the philosophical work deserving to be commented upon.<sup>1</sup> Seen in this light, the criticisms that Avicenna moves to Aristotle on specific doctrines and on methodological issues, some of which have been documented above, manifest the incipient emancipation of Arabic philosophy from its Greek background, and mark the starting-point of its further development as an autonomous intellectual enterprise.

<sup>1</sup> See GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, cit., p. 294.



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