Porphyry and the *Theology of Aristotle*

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1 Introduction

Despite the fact that the *Theology of Aristotle* states, in its preface, that it is a commentary (Arabic *tafsīr*) by Porphyry, and that we know from Porphyry's own testimony that he composed commentaries (ὑπομνήματα) on some of the *Enneads* of Plotinus, current scholarly consensus denies that Porphyry played any role in the elaboration of this work.[1]

No historian of philosophy has made more important contributions to the study of the *Theology of Aristotle* (hereafter ThA) and the *Plotiniana Arabica* in general than Cristina D'Ancona, and I have taken this exemplary scholar to be representative of what I will call the anti-Porphyrian view. In what follows, I would like to re-examine and critically engage with some of C. D'Ancona's views on the possible role of Porphyry in the elaboration of the *Theology of Aristotle*.

2 The Evidence. The Preface to the *Theology of Aristotle*

As is well known, the *Theology of Aristotle* opens with a Preface, which reads as follows:

> The first chapter of the book of the philosopher Aristotle, that is called in Greek "Theology". It is the discourse on Divine Sovereignty, commentary (*tafsīr*) by Porphyry of Tyre, translated into Arabic by ʿAbd al-Masīḥ

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1 Among these studies, in addition to those of C. D'Ancona, I include those of Zimmermann 1986 and Adamson 2002. According to Zimmermann 1986, p. 131, followed by Adamson, the mention of Porphyry as commentator results from a "simple-minded error" committed at some stage of the transmission process in which Porphyry was originally mentioned as Plotinus' pupil and editor.

ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Nāʿima al-Ḥimṣī, corrected for Aḥmad ibn al-Muʿtaṣim bi-llah by Abū Yūsuf ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī, may God have mercy upon him.[2]

This paragraph transmits several precious items of information: it identifies the work's translator as the Syrian Christian ibn Nāʿima al-Ḥimṣī,[3] its corrector or editor as al-Kindī, and its dedicatee as al-Muʿtaṣim bi-llāh, son of the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim—which enables the translation to be dated to between 833 and 842 of our era.[4] Two points in particular have given rise to controversy: the attribution to Aristotle,[5] and the implications of the words "commentary by Porphyry of Tyre".[6] Following a long line of scholars, but especially the late Pierre Thillet, I will argue in this contribution that we should take this latter statement seriously.

In 1933, Willy Theiler suggested that in all of the many passages in which Augustine quotes or alludes to Plotinus, his knowledge came not from direct reading of Plotinus, but from Porphyry. "We hasard the supposition," wrote Theiler,[7] "that Augustine himself never read Plotinus' *Enneads* (in translation), that the quotations in him from Plotinus (…) are taken from work by Porphyry, as was the case for many later authors, who were happy to rely on his interpretation of Plotinus".[8] Thus, on this hypothesis,[9] almost all of Plotinus' considerable

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2 Badawi 1955, p. 1. Cf. Aouad 1989, p. 546. All translations from Greek and Arabic are my own unless otherwise indicated.

3 On this figure and his intellectual background, see now the important study by Treiger 2015.

4 Adamson 2002, p. 9.

5 The question here is whether the attribution to Aristotle is the result of a deliberate forgery or an honest, albeit ignorant mistake (Zimmermann 1986, p. 128). I agree with D'Ancona 2003b, p. 85 f. that the hypothesis of a deliberate forgery is much more likely. Cf. the Prologue of the work, p. 5, 12–13, where the author states, using the first person: "let us not waste words over this branch of knowledge, since we have already given an account of it in the book of the *Metaphysics*" (trans. Lewis). Despite Zimmermann's attempts to explain away this passage, it seems clear that the Adaptor is here impersonating Aristotle; cf. D'Ancona 2007, p. 45; D'Ancona 2011b, p. 13 n. 28. I would argue that this impersonation is implicit throughout the work.

6 *tafsīr Furfuriyūs al-Ṣūrī*. Although the word *tafsīr* can have many meanings, all of them refer to the basic sense of "interpretation". As a synonym of *šarḥ*, *tafsīr* refers to a systematic commentary; cf. Gacek 2009, p. 79. It is, for instance, the word used in the titles of the Long Commentaries of Averroes.

7 Theiler 1966, p. 161.

8 Theiler cites the example of Macrobius, who sometimes claims to be quoting Plotinus when he is in fact probably quoting Porphyry. At *In somnium Scipionis*, I 8, 5, for instance, Macrobius supposedly cites Plotinus' *De virtutibus* (I 2), where a comparison with *Sent.* 32 suggests his real source was Porphyry (cf. Schwyzer 1974, p. 227); at *In somn.* I 13, 9 f. Macrobius claims to be citing from *Enneads* I 9, but again, he seems to be relying on Porphyry's commentary.

9 This hypothesis is, of course, extremely controversial. Rejected by Henry 1934, for instance, it was accepted by Dörrie 1976a; 1976b.

influence on the Latin West throughout Antiquity and the Middle Ages was due, not to direct reading of Plotinus, who seems never to have been translated into Latin, but to explanatory commentaries by Porphyry,[10] which may, like other works by the philosopher from Tyre, have been translated by Marius Victorinus. According to Heinich Dörrie,[11] even in the Greek-speaking East, the understanding of Plotinus shown by Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, is essentially that of Plotinus as interpreted by Porphyry. Porphyry seems to have been famous for his explanations of Plotinus even during his lifetime. As Eunapius records in his *Lives of the Sophists*:

> For Plotinus, because of the celestial nature of his soul and the oblique and enigmatic character of his discourses, seemed heavy and hard to listen to. But Porphyry, like a chain of Hermes let down to mortals, by his variegated culture expounded everything in a way that was easy to understand and clear.[12]

The main vehicle by which the thought of Plotinus was handed down to the Latin West was, according to Theiler, Porphyry's commentaries (ὑπομνή-ματα) on the *Enneads*.[13] What, then, were these Porphyrian ὑπομνήματα on the *Enneads* of Plotinus?

3 The Evidence. Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*

Near the end of his *Life of Plotinus*, written in 301, some thirty years after Plotinus' death, Porphyry summarizes his activity, past and present, as editor of his teacher's *Enneads*.

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10 Cf. Dörrie 1976a, p. 467.

11 Dörrie 1976b, p. 28.

12 Eunapius of Sardes, *Vitae Sophistarum*, IV, 11, p. 9, 13–17. Cf. Dörrie 1976a, p. 465: Porphyry "war der einzige, der die oft schwierigen Gedankengänge Plotins in verständliches Griechisch zu dolmetschen vermochte." Dörrie goes so far as to refer to Porphyry as "Plotinus' publicist and translator" (1976a, p. 466).

13 As an example of the indirect tradition of Porphyry's ὑπομνήματα, Theiler cites Aeneas of Gaza, *Theophrastus*, p. 45, 7–8 Colonna: "Porphyry (…) interpreting Plotinus' book *Where does evil come from*? says somewhere, arguing that matter is not ungenerated …" (translation Dillon/Russell 2012, p. 40). Cf. Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists*, III, 5, p. 6, 15–16: "In addition, he [Porphyry] clearly commented on several of his [Plotinus'] books."

So we arranged the fifty-four books in this way in six *Enneads*, and we have written commentaries on some of them without any order (καταβεβλή-μεθα δὲ καὶ εἴς τινα αὐτῶν ὑπομνήματα ἀτάκτως),[14] because friends urged us to write on points they wanted cleared up for them. We also composed headings (κεφάλαια) for all of them except *On Beauty*, because it was not available to us, following the chronological order in which the books were issued; and we have produced not only the headings for each book but also summaries of the arguments (ἐπιχειρήματα), which are numbered in the same way as the headings.[15]

In addition to the treatises of the *Enneads* themselves, Porphyry here informs us that he has added three kinds of items to his edition: headings (κεφάλαια), or abbreviated descriptions of contents;[16] summaries of the arguments (ἐπι-χειρήματα); and commentaries (ὑπομνήματα). Based on Porphyry's testimony, C. D'Ancona, following earlier scholars,[17] has proposed a two-stage process of elaboration:

1.   As the treatises were first issued (c. 263–270),[18] Porphyry first provided them with headings, and wrote commentaries on some of them, at the request of his ἑταῖροι, i.e., presumably, his fellow members of the School of Plotinus.

2.   Some thirty years later, when preparing his definitive edition of the *Enneads*, Porphyry added summaries of the arguments of the treatises, which "are numbered as headings" (ἃ ὡς κεφάλαια συναριθμεῖται). These headings, probably numbered, were not copied by the scribe of the arche-type of the surviving manuscripts of the *Enneads*, but some manuscripts preserve traces of them in the form of marginal numbers, probably inten-ded as references to Porphyry's ὑπομνήματα, κεφάλαια, and/or ἐπιχειρή-ματα.[19]

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14   Note Porphyry's emphasis that his commentaries were written "without any order," and compare the frequent observation of modern commentators that the *Theology of Aris-totle* lacks any order; cf. Zimmermann 1986, p. 130, who speaks of the *Plotiniana Arabica*'s "chaos".

15   Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, ch. 26.

16   On κεφάλαια in Greek texts, see for instance Regenbogen 1940, p. 1472–1475; Goulet-Cazé 1982, p. 315–321; Scholten 1996, p. 28 f. To the examples listed by Scholten one may add the κεφάλαια contained in the manuscripts of the *Commentary on the Categories* by Dexippus; cf. Dexippus, *In Cat.*, p. 1–3 (Book I); 36–38 (Book II); 62–63 (Book III).

17   In particular, Goulet-Cazé 1982.

18   That Porphyry's ὑπομνήματα on the *Enneads* represent an earlier work was pointed out by Theiler, *Porphyrios und Augustin*, 17 = 1966, p. 180 n. 41.

19   D'Ancona 2012, p. 53–54. On these marginal numbers, see Goulet-Cazé, 1982, p. 313.

It has long been suggested that the headings (*ruʾūs al-masāʾil*) preserved in the *Theology of Aristotle*,[20] 142 short sentences indicating the contents of the first 34 chapters of *Ennead* IV 4 [28], bear some relation to these lost features of Porphyry's edition. Although this was disputed by Zimmermann,[21] recent work by C. D'Ancona[22] has confirmed that these headings preserved in the *Theology of Aristotle* are in fact remnants of the Arabic translation of Porphyry's κεφάλαια and ἐπιχειρήματα.[23]

Two of the three editorial features that Porphyry, according to his own testimony, added to the *Enneads*, have thus been shown to be included in the *Theology of Aristotle*, although only the faintest traces survive of them in the Greek tradition. This being the case, it does not seem to be wildly unlikely that the third element, Porphyry's ὑπομνήματα, may also have left traces in this work as well. If this is so, however, since these ὑπομνήματα were composed some thirty years before Porphyry's edition of the *Enneads*, we could expect them to reflect a relatively early phase in the Tyrian scholar's philosophical development. This might partially explain what some authors, including C. D'Ancona, have taken to be the philosophical incompetence of the author of the *Theology*, although it must be said that the reports of this incompetence seem to me to be greatly exaggerated.[24]

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20   *Theology of Aristotle*, p. 8–18. Cf. Aouad 1989, p. 548–550.

21   Zimmermann 1986, p. 165–173.

22   D'Ancona 2013.

23   According to Peter Adamson (2002, p. 44–47), the headings were written by the same person who wrote the paraphrase itself. Adamson contends that the author of the paraphrase, whom he calls the Adaptor, was al-Ḥimsī; but if he accepts D'Ancona's cogent demonstration that the headings were written by Porphyry, he would have to concede, at the very least, that Porphyry was, if not the author, then at least an important contributor to what we know as the Arabic Plotinus.

24   D'Ancona agrees with Zimmermann's (1986, p. 121; 133; 173) judgment of the "pervading dilettantism" and "amateur character" of the *Theology*'s author; she argues for this judgment in D'Ancona 1991. Most of the instances she cites, however, could be explained as divergent interpretations of Plotinus' text, rather than failures to understand it. For a different view, according to which the *Theology of Aristotle* evinces "philosophical sophistication," cf. Adamson 2002, p. 2; 12 *et passim*.

4   The Doctrines

4.1   Indices porphyriens *in the* Plotiniana Arabica

As Pierre Thillet pointed out nearly a half-century ago,[25] the most fruitful way to approach the study of the sources of the *Plotiniana Arabica* is to focus on those passages which do not correspond to Plotinus' Greek, but represent interpolations into or interpretations of the text of Plotinus.[26] In ground-breaking studies first presented in 1969, Shlomo Pinès and Pierre Thillet (1971) identified what the latter scholar called "indices porphyriens," present in the *Plotiniana Arabica* but absent from Plotinus. These include the following features: a preference for describing the derivation of the various levels of the universe in causal terms;[27] the idea that the First Principle produces being, while the second principle produces Form;[28] the doctrine of learned ignorance; and the identification of the First principle with pure being.[29] For her part, C. D'Ancona has identified sev-

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25   Thillet 1971, p. 295.

26   According to Zimmermann (1986, p. 116), the author of these interpolations is the translator Ibn Nāʿima al-Ḥimṣī. Yet he also admits that the presence of doctrinal shifts with regard to Plotinus may be traced back to "a common Neoplatonic vulgate," and adds that he does not mean to deny "the possibility of some reliance by Himsi on Porphyrian glosses lost to us". On the scant likelihood of Ḥimṣī being the sole author of the interpolations, cf. Daiber 1988.

27   For an example, cf. *Theology of Aristotle*, X.1, p. 134, 5, where the Adaptor transforms Plotinus' statement (V 2, 1, 1) that "the One is all things and not a single one of them" into the claim that "The absolute One is the *cause* of all things and not like any of the things". Cf., for instance, Porphyry, *In Parmenidem*, XIII, 22–23, where the intelligence "that cannot enter within itself," and is "beyond all things" (ἐπέκεινα πάντων), hence coinciding with the First One, is called "the uncoordinated cause of all things" (πάντων αἰτία ⟨ἀ⟩σύζυγος). On causality in the *Neoplatonica Arabica*, cf. D'Ancona 2001a, p. 102–103 and especially 1999a.

28   This corresponds to the doctrine C. D'Ancona (1992) has described as *creatio mediante intelligentia*.

29   On these last two principles, see below. One could add to this list. The Adaptor believes in an allegorical interpretation of the *Timaeus* (cf. Adamson 2002, p. 142–143), as did Porphyry. He is also a firm believer in the harmony of Plato and Aristotle, a topic to which Porphyry devoted two (now lost) treatises; cf. Karamanolis 2006, p. 243–330. Indeed, what D'Ancona (1998, p. 854) describes as the "crucial inspiration (…) that Aristotle and Plato were not at variance with one another, transmitted to the first falāsifa by the Alexandrian commentators," was already to be found in Porphyry; cf. I. Hadot 2015, p. 54–64. Adamson (2002, p. 69) has noted that the Adaptor was more concerned with ethics than Plotinus, or was interested in making explicit the ethical dimension of Plotinian thought; compare Porphyry's elaboration of the Plotinian scheme of the virtues in his *Sentence* 32, or the hortatory ethical tone of such works as the *De abstinentia* or the *Letter to Marcella*. D'Ancona (2007, p. 45) and others have called attention to the Adaptor's importa-

eral additional non-Plotinian features as characteristic of the *Theology of Aristotle*. These include the transformation of Plotinus's One into a principle that creates what derives from it instantaneously and by its being alone; that thinks and knows its derivatives; and that exercises providence over them. D'Ancona argues that most of these features derive from the Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite, with whose writings the Christian translator al-Ḥimṣī will, she believes, have been familiar.[30] In what follows I will examine her arguments with regard to some of these characteristic doctrines.

4.2 *The Identification of the First Principle with Being*

Perhaps the most striking of the doctrines that are present in the *Plotiniana Arabica*, but absent from Plotinus, is the one that identifies the First Principle with pure being (Arabic *anniyya* or *huwiyya*, terms that usually translate the Greek neuter participle τὸ ὄν, or the infinitive τὸ εἶναι).[31] Yet the anonymous *Commentary on the Parmenides*, ascribed with great plausibility to Porphyry,[32] contains the doctrine of the One as pure being (τὸ εἶναι) in a manner closely

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tion of Aristotelian material into the *Plotiniana Arabica*: compare Porphyry's inclusion of Peripatetic material into his exposition of Plotinus in his *Sentences* (Schwyzer 1974, p. 227). Porphyry's lost *Commentary on the Categories* addressed to Gedalios seems to have been largely devoted to defending Aristotle's doctrines against the attacks of Plotinus; cf. P. Hadot 1974.

30 According to the current state of scholarship (Treiger 2005, p. 234; 2007, p. 366), the only known translation of the entire *Corpus Dionysiacum* into Arabic is that by ʿĪsā b. Isḥāq Ibn Saḥqūq, also a native of Ḥims, which is extant in two MSS (Sinai MS ar. 268; 314) and dates from 1009, nearly two centuries after Ibn Nāʿima's translation of the *Theology of Aristotle*. To be sure, some earlier, partial translations did exist: but the version of *Divine Names* 4.18–35 by Ibrāhim b. Yūḥannā al-Anṭākī dates from the late 9th-early 10th centuries (Treiger 2007, p. 238), while the anonymous translation of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1–9 is also ascribed conjecturally to al-Anṭākī (ibid., p. 238 & n. 85). If so, then even these fragmentary Arabic translations of the Ps.-Dionysius postdate the translation of the *Theology of Aristotle* by at least half a century. It is true, however, that various Syriac translations of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* were in circulation since the late 6th century. In a forthcoming paper (Treiger 2020), Professor Treiger claims to have discovered a "ninth-century Arabic Dionysian paraphrase" which he reconstructs on the basis of passages in various works al-Ġazālī. Despite the author's great erudition, I am not convinced by his arguments. The passages he discusses show thematic, but not lexicographical similarities, and I see no reason to believe they represent "paraphrases" of an (otherwise unattested) early periphrastic translation of Dionysian texts, rather than independent treatments of themes that were widely diffused in Greek Neoplatonic and Patristic texts.

31 Thillet 1971, p. 301; Pinès 1971, p. 305, D'Ancona, 2000, p. 56. *Anniyya* more often translates τὸ εἶναι, while *huwiyya* more often renders τὸ ὄν; cf. Endress 1997, p. 61; Adamson 2002, p. 219 n. 32.

32 On this attribution, cf. for instance Chase 2012; Chase, *in press*.

parallel to the doctrine of the first principle as *anniyya faqaṭ*[33] ('simple being'), which plays a crucial role in the *Plotiniana Arabica*.

I need not go into this subject in detail, since it's been expertly addressed by Richard Taylor (1998), among others. Suffice it to say that Cristina D'Ancona believes that the argumentative context of the occurrence of the formula of "pure being" (*anniyya faqaṭ*) in the *Plotiniana Arabica* and "being" (τὸ εἶναι) in Porphyry's *Commentary on the Parmenides* are too different to able to prove the dependence of the former on the latter. Even if one acknowledges this difference, however, it remains possible that Porphyry may have included the same doctrine within a *different* argumentative context in his lost *Commentaries on the Enneads*. In any case, the parallels in formulation between the *Plotiniana Arabica* and the *In Parmenidem* remain quite striking, as when the Adaptor decribes the First Principle as "pure act" (*al-fiʿl al-maḥḍ*, p. 51, 13), while Porphyry says that the first principle "acts, or rather is pure action" (ἐνεργεῖ δὲ μᾶλλον καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν καθαρόν; *In Parmenidem*, 12, 26). It is crucial to note, as Richard Taylor and Peter Adamson have pointed out, that this notion of the First Principle as pure act is not to be found in the Pseudo-Dionysius, whom D'Ancona has identified as the likely source for the *Plotiniana Arabica*'s doctrine of the First Principle as being.[34]

4.3   *Porphyry and the* Plotiniana Arabica *on Soul and Intellect*

I will also have to be brief in my discussion of Cristina d'Ancona's important article from 1999, entitled "Porphyry, Universal Soul and the Arabic Plotinus". Here, D'Ancona starts off from what she describes as the characteristic Porphyrian tendency to minimize the difference between the hypostases of Soul and Intellect, sometimes to the point of identifying them. One of the main proof texts of this doctrine is a passage from Iamblichus' *De anima*:[35]

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33   The term *anniyya*, of disputed etymology (cf. Adamson 2002, p. 124–126), occurs some 87 times in the *Theology*, most frequently in contexts without parallels in the *Enneads*, with the meanings of "being, existence, reality"; cf. Thillet 1971, p. 301. For the First Principle as *al-anniyya al-ūlā* cf. *Theology of Aristotle*, p. 26; 27; 51; 87, and compare Marius Victorinus (*Adv. Ar.*, II, 4, 8, 1092; IV, 16, 29, 1025A), who, probably under Porphryian influence, calls God *esse primum*. Cf. Pinès 1971, p. 310.

34   It seems to me unlikely that, as Taylor and Adamson suggest, this notion may have been independently developed, on the basis of the Plotinus' *Ennead* VI.8, by Porphyry and the Adaptor of the *Theology of Aristotle*, simply because, as far as I know, very few Greek authors other than Aristotle, Plotinus, Porphyry ever proposed such a doctrine. For two subsequent authors to come up with such an unusual doctrine independently of one another seems to be too much of a coincidence, especially when one adds that the *Theology of Aristotle* presents itself as the work of Porphyry.

35   Porphyry fr. 441, ap. Iamblichus, *De Anima*, 6, p. 30, 10–13: Πορφύριος δὲ ἐνδοιάζει περὶ αὐτήν,

As for Porphyry, he is of two minds on the subject, now dissociating himself violently from this view, now adopting it as a doctine handed down from above. According to this doctrine, the soul differs in no way from intellect and the gods, and the superior classes of being, at least in respect to its substance in general.

This "typical confusion" of Soul and Intellect is, according to D'Ancona, absent from the *Theology of Aristotle* in passages where one would expect it to appear. This shows that the Porphyry is unlikely to have been the main Greek source behind the *Theology of Aristotle*.

I would have two main responses. First, *argumenta e silentio* are of notoriously doubtful value: it is a tricky business to infer what Porphyry *would* or *should* have said in any given passage of his lost *Commentary on the Enneads*. He may have had his reasons for omitting the doctrine from the passages in question, or the Adaptor may, for whatever reason, have chosen to omit this portion of Porphyry's comments. More tellingly, however, Peter Adamson has found traces in the *Theology of Aristotle* of precisely this Porphyrian hesitation over the distinction between the hypostases, particularly Soul and Intellect. Alongside passages in which the Plotinian hypostases of the One, Intellect, Soul, and the sensible world are clearly distinguished,[36] Adamson points out that there are others which exhibit what he calls a "tendency to compress the emanative hierarchy," passages which "collapse the soul and intellect together".[37] Such hesitancy is indeed strongly reminiscent of A.C. Lloyd's description of what he called Porphyry's typical "telescoping of the hypostases," as well as of Iamblichus' characterization of Porphyry as "being of two minds on the subject".[38]

4.4 *The Doctrine of Learned Ignorance*

What has been called the doctrine of learned ignorance or *docta ignorantia* holds that in order to grasp the nature of the first principle, one needs to make use not of discursive or even intuitive thought, but of a higher form of knowledge that can be likened to ignorance. Although Hermetic, Neo-Pythagorean,

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πῆ μὲν διατεταμένως αὐτῆς ἀφιστάμενος, πῆ δὲ συνακολουθῶν αὐτῇ, ὡς παραδοθείσῃ ἄνωθεν. Κατὰ δὴ ταύτην νοῦ καὶ θεῶν καὶ τῶν κρειττόνων γενῶν οὐδὲν ἡ ψυχὴ διενήνοχε κατά γε τὴν ὅλην οὐσίαν.

36 Adamson (2002, p. 220 n. 51) cites *Sayings of the Greek Sage* 1.41–45.

37 Cf., with Adamson, *Epistle of the Divine Science*, p. 166–168; *Theology of Aristotle* x.192, p. 163 B.; *Theology of Aristotle* x.31, p. 138–139 B. "Even more than Plotinus," writes Adamson (n. 53), "he [sc. the Adaptor] treats the intelligible world (soul and intellect together) as having one single nature".

38 Lloyd 1967.

and Middle Platonist authors, through their use of the techniques of negative theology,[39] had paved the way for this doctrine before the time of Porphyry, it found its most explicit formulation in the Tyrian philosopher. In his *Sentence* 25, for instance, we read:

> On the subject of that which is beyond Intellect (…) it is grasped only by means of an ignorance superior to intellection (ἀνοησίᾳ κρείττονι νοήσεως).[40]

Similarly, in Porphyry's *Commentary on the Parmenides* (X, 25–29, p. 96 Hadot), one reads that the only criterion of the knowledge (γνῶσις) of God is the ignorance (ἀγνωσία) that one has of him. Finally, the *Theosophy of Tübingen* reports that Porphyry said that knowledge of the First Principle is ignorance (ἀλλ' ἔστιν αὐτοῦ γνῶσις ἡ ἀγνωσία).[41] As Willy Theiler pointed out long ago, Augustine is very probably dependent on Porphyry when he writes about "that highest God, who is best known through ignorance of him".[42]

As in the case of the doctrine of the First Principle as being, C. D'Ancona denies that the presence of this admittedly Porphyrian doctrine in two passages of the *Theology of Aristotle*[43] can be taken as proof of a Porphyrian role in the elaboration of this work. The Arabic passages, she contends, do not reflect Porphyry's arguments, but only the formula, stripped from its context.[44] In conclusion, while conceding that the author of the *Theology* may have been influenced by the Porphyrian formula of "ignorance greater than knowledge," stripped of its context, C. D'Ancona prefers to explain the presence of this

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39   On the origins of negative theology in Greco-Roman Antiquity, the discussion in Festugière 1954, p. 92–140 remains unsurpassed. On negative theology in Porphyry see, most recently, Beatrice 2016, p. 126–130.

40   Translation Dillon, in L. Brisson et al., ed., 2005, vol. II, p. 566–567, modified. Cf. Porphyry, *In Parmenidem*, II, 17 on μηδὲν ἐνοούσῃ νοήσει.

41   *Theosophia Tubignesis*, II, 13, p. 34, 109 Beatrice. For these and other references, cf. the notes by Jean Pépin in L. Brisson et al., ed., 2005, vol. II, p. 566–567.

42   Augustine, *De ordine* 2, XVI, 44, 18–19: *de summo illo Deo, qui scitur melius nesciendo*. Cf. Theiler 1966, p. 173 n. 29; Beatrice 2016, p. 127.

43   *Theology of Aristotle* p. 9, 8; *Theology of Aristotle* II, p. 37, 2–4. With the Arabic *bi-jahlin ašraf min al-ʿilm*, cf. Porphyry's ἀνοησίᾳ κρείττονι νοήσεως.

44   D'Ancona 1993, p. 6. Adamson (2002) uses similar considerations to reject Porphyrian influence on the doctrine of *docta ignorantia* as found in the *Theology of Aristotle*, arguing—unconvincingly, in my view—that both the *Theology of Aristotle* and the author of the *Parmenides* commentary developed the notion independently, on the basis of Aristotle and Plotinus' *Ennead* VI.9.

theme in the *Theology* by an influence of the Ps.-Dionysius, who she admits derived his inspiration from Porphyry.[45]

As in the case of the doctrine of the First Cause as Being, such an approach might be adequate if it were the case that we knew that Porphyry had expressed the doctrine of learned ignorance *only* in *Sentence* 25 and in the *Commentary on the Parmenides*. But we have no reason to believe that this is so: Porphyry may have discussed this doctrine in any number of those of his many works that happen not to have come down to us.[46] If the non-Plotinian interpolations in the *Theology of Aristotle* were in one way or another based on a *lost* commentary or commentaries by Porphyry on the *Enneads* of Plotinus, why could Porphyry not have expressed his doctrine of learned ignorance in this work, using a different argumentative context, different proofs and different examples? Like Adamson (*supra* n. 44), D'Ancona sometimes seems to argue almost as though the claim of the pro-Porphyrian advocates was that the author of the *Theology* was influenced by an Arabic translation of Porphyry's *Sentences* or *Commentary on the Parmenides*:[47] but this is of course not the case. Instead, the claim is that that author was influenced by a *lost* commentary or commentaries by Porphyry on the *Enneads*.

4.5 *Divine Knowledge and Providence*

In an important series of papers,[48] Cristina D'Ancona has argued that one finds in the *Plotiniana Arabica* a phenomenon she has referred to, following Zimmer-

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45 Adamson, for his part, also arguing for some form of Dionysian influence, claims that if the Porphyrian hypothesis, which claims that Porphyry wrote the Greek basis of the *Theology of Aristotle*, were true "we would expect to find an extensive Porphyian development on the theme of ignorance," which is not the case. But (i) there is no "extensive development on the theme of divine ignorance" elsewhere in Porphyry's surviving works, either, although it is an indisputably Porphyrian doctrine; and (ii) even if there were such a development in Porphyry's ὑπομνήματα, the Adaptor may simply have chosen not to reproduce it. No one is claiming that the *Plotiniana Arabica* is merely a complete and mindless transcription of Porphyry's lost commentaries, but that it is *based on* such commentaries.

46 In the latest enumeration of Porphyry's works, R. Goulet (2012) lists 60 titles of works by Porphyry, excluding his commentaries (11 on Aristotle, 7 on Plato; cf. Chase, 2012, p. 1349–1376). Few of these works survive: some two dozen have been edited in modern times, often in the form of collection of fragments. Even in the case of a preserved, well-edited work like the *Sentences*, however, only about half, at most, of the original work has come down to us; cf. Schwyzer 1974, p. 223.

47 Cf. D'Ancona 1993, p. 14, where she argues that the verbal link between Sentence 25 and the 16th question head of the *Theology* "is not complete enough to admit that it reproduces the Porphyrian passage". But no one has claimed that the Arabic text *reproduces* a text from Porphyry's *Sentences*!

48 D'Ancona 1997; D'Ancona 1999a; D'Ancona 2002; D'Ancona 2003.

mann,[49] as an Aristotelianization of Plotinus.[50] In Plotinus, as is well known, there is a twofold, and symmetrical, lack of knowledge as far as the First Principle is concerned. As we have seen when discussing the doctrine of *docta ignorantia*, the One cannot be known by what is inferior to it and derives from it. Symmetrically, the First Principle does not think,[51] but is beyond thought.[52]

For Plotinus, at any rate, the proximate agent in ensuring divine providence is the Intellect, and since it is the source of that Intellect, the One need not actually *do* anything in order for *pronoia* over the universe to be ensured. Instead, it ensures providence by its mere existence.[53] This tendency is intensified in Proclus, for whom the First Principle cannot know its derivatives. In order to preserve the First Principle's utter transcendence, knowledge of its derivatives, and consequently the divine providence which presupposes such knowledge, is delegated to the henads or intelligible gods. In the *Plotiniana Arabica*, by contrast, the First Principle is said both to know and to exercize providence over its derivatives. C. D'Ancona has characterized this elimination of the henads and attribution of their functions to the First Principle as a return beyond Proclus to Plotinus, at least in the sense that omnipresence is restored to the First Principle,[54] and it is to be explained, in her view, by the influence of the Pseudo-Dionysius, who similarly transfers cognitive and providential functions from the henads back to the First Principle. For C. D'Ancona, this return was made possible by the Christian translator Ibn Nā'ima's knowledge of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, in whom we find Proclus' association of universal providence with an omnipresent divine principle, now attributed to a God who creates by being alone.

This is certainly a possible reconstruction, but one may wonder if it is the only possible one. In particular, one may wonder whether the Pseudo-Dionysius is the only thinker who may have propitiated this return, beyond

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49   Cf. Zimmermann 1986, p. 124–125.

50   D'Ancona, 1997, p. 421.

51   This is the theme of *Ennead* v 6 [24]; cf. D'Ancona 1997, p. 427–428; D'Ancona 2002, p. 22 f., with discussion of the key Plotinian texts; D'Ancona 2003, p. 216 f., p. 227. See also Krämer 1964, p. 394–403; Rist 1967, p. 38–52.

52   There are, however, passages in which Plotinus suggests that a certain kind of knowledge may, after all, be attributed to the One, a knowledge that may be characterized as a kind of hyper-knowledge (ὑπερνόησις, VI 8, 16, 32) or simple self-intuition (VI 7, 39, 1–2). This strange kind of (hyper-)intellectual activity is the source of all other kinds of thought as they occur in inferior beings. Cf. Linguiti 1995, p. 158, with references to further literature.

53   D'Ancona, 2002, p. 26, 29; Gerson 1994, citing VI 7, 39, 26–27; VI 7, 37, 29–31.

54   DAncona 1999a, p. 61.

Proclus, to the notion of a First Principle that knows and exercizes providence over its derivatives.

We do indeed find another such thinker: none other than Porphyry, who, in his *Commentary on the Parmenides*, describes the First Principle as follows:

> he never remains in ignorance of the things that will be, and has known those that have happened, he who has never come to be in ignorance.[55]

Here, then, knowledge of individual things and/or events[56] is explicitly ascribed to the First Principle: knowledge not only of present events, but also of those in the past and the future.[57] When asked by his anonymous interlocutor whether God knows the all, Porphyry replies in the affirmative; and when challenged to explain how such knowledge can avoid introducing multiplicity into God, he replies as follows:

> Because I say that it is a knowledge outside of knowledge and ignorance, from which knowledge derives[58] … He is found to be mightier than knowledge and ignorance,[59] and knowing everything, but not like other knowers (…) he is knowledge itself[60] … Thus, there is a knowledge of a knower, who proceeds from ignorance to knowledge of the known object; and again, there is absolute knowledge (γνῶσις ἀπόλυτος) that is not of the knower and the known, but that is that One, viz. knowledge, prior to all known and unknown things, which moves toward knowledge.[61]

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55 Porphyry, *In Parmenidem*, IV, 31–V, 14, p. 104: … μόνον ὅτι μηδ' ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ μένει ποτὲ τῶν ἐσομένων, γιγνόμενα δὲ ἐγνώρισεν ὁ μηδέποτε ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ γενόμενος.

56 Cf. Porphyry, *Contra Nemertium*, fr. 279F Smith, where God, equivalent to the Intellect, adjusts the lifetime of particulars to one another, with a view to what is profitable to the whole and to the duration of its harmony: οὐ μόνον δὲ ἐπὶ συμφέροντι τοῦ ὅλου καὶ ⟨εἰς⟩ τὴν διάρκειαν αὐτοῦ τῆς ἁρμονίας ἄλλον ἄλλωι ἁρμόζει (sc. ὁ θεός) χρόνον τῶν κατὰ μέρος, ἀλλ' ἤδη καὶ κηδεμὼν ὑπάρχων καὶ σωτὴρ καὶ ἰατρός …

57 Note the contrast here with the view of Plotinus, for whom not even the Intellect, much less the One, can know future states affairs in the sensible world; cf. Noble & Powers, 2015, p. 59, n. 20. On God's knowledge of the future, cf. Porphyry, *Against Nemertius*, fr. 280F: θεὸς δὲ εἰδὼς ὁ μέλλον …

58 Porphyry, *In Parmenidem*, V, 10–11, p. 104: Ὅτι φημὶ εἶναι γνῶσιν ἔξω γνώσεω⟨ς⟩ καὶ ἀγνοίας, ἀφ' ἧς ἡ γνῶσις.

59 Cf. *Epistle of the Divine Science*, p. 118–119, p. 175, transl. Lewis p. 323: the First Agent is "above all knowledge (*fawqa al-ʿilmi*), because it is the first knowledge".

60 Porphyry, *In Parmenidem* V, 29–34, p. 108: (…) γνώσεως καὶ ἀγνοίας εὑρίσκεται [κρεί]ττων καὶ πάντα γιγνώσκ (…) ν (…) αὐτὸ τοῦ[το γνῶσις ο]ὖσα.

61 Porphyry, *In Parmenidem* VI, 4–12, p. 108–110: οὕτως ἔστι καὶ γνῶσις γιγνώσκοντος καὶ ἐξ

For Porphyry, then, the First principle is identical to knowledge itself, but the knowledge in question is one that is absolute (ἀπόλυτος), prior to the distinction between knowing subject and known object. By virtue of this knowledge, this Principle knows the All, including things that have occurred and those that will come to be.[62]

4.6   *Instantaneous Creation and Action by Being Alone*

As C. D'Ancona points out, the *Plotiniana Arabica* are characterized by two additional features that are not attested explicitly in Plotinus: the doctrine of instantaneous creation and the doctrine of action "by being alone". The two doctrines are intimately related. As we read in a passage from the *Sayings of the Greek Sage*,[63] the creative act of the First Agent must take place all at once: if it did not, unmanifested acts would still remain within him. But if this were so, he would not make things by his being alone (*lam tafʿal al-ašyāʾa bi-annihā faqaṭ*), but by some kind of reflection and motion (*bi-rawiyyati wa-ḥarakati mā*), which is absurd and repugnant.

One sees from this text that the prime consideration motivating the doctrine of creation all at once (*dafʿatan wāḥidatan*) and by being alone (*bi-anniyati* or *annihi faqaṭ*) is not so much, as Adamson contends, the avoidance of duality in the First Principle, as it is the avoidance of motion and reflection in him. And the prime motivation for excluding motion and reflection from the First Principle is that they introduce change. Yet that the First Principle must be immutable is a firm principle throughout the *Plotiniana Arabica*,[64] as it was throughout Greco-Roman Neoplatonism.[65]

ἀγνοίας εἰς γνῶσιν ἐλθόντος τοῦ γιγνωσκομένου καὶ πάλιν ἄλλη γνῶσις ἀπόλυτος οὐ [γιγν]ώ[σ-κοντ]ος οὖσα καὶ γιγνωσκομένου, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἓν τοῦτο γνῶσις οὖσα πρὸ παντὸς γιγ(ν)ωσκομένου καὶ ἀγνοουμένου ⟨καὶ⟩ εἰς γνῶσιν ἐρχομένου.

62   We seem to have here a case of a phenomenon frequent in Porphyry, especially in his *Sentences*, where he often reformulates the thought of Plotinus in what Schwyzer called a "schoolmasterly" and systematic way (1974, p. 227: "schulmässig"; p. 231: "strenges Systematisierung"). Here, in the case of a doctrine—the attribution of knowledge to the One—in which Plotinus displayed a certain unresolved tension, Porphyry comes up with a doctrine which is systematized to the point of rigidification, as it were, than the one found in Plotinus.

63   *Sayings of the Greek Sage* § 37, p. 98, 15–22 f. Wakelnig 2014 = ed. Badawi p. 187, 4–10.

64   Cf. *Sayings of the Greek Sage* § 32, p. 94, 7 Wakelnig 2014 = ed. Badawi, p. 184, 10: *wa-yanbaġī li-l-fāʿil al-awwal an yakūn sākinan ġayr mutaḥarrak*; cf. *Sayings of the Greek Sage* § 44, p. 114, 13–15 Wakelnig; *Theology of Aristotle* p. 33; 63; 84, 10; 88, 10 ed. Badawi.

65   Cf. Proclus, *On the Eternity of the World*, apud Philoponum, *De aeternitate mundi*, p. 55, 22 f. Rabe.

The doctrine of instantaneous creation holds that world is created in no time whatsoever, but all at once (*dafʿatan wāḥidatan* = Greek ἀθρόως).⁶⁶ Compare, once again, a passage such as *Theology of Aristotle*, p. 51, 13–14:

> When he [sc. the Creator] acts, he merely looks towards his essence and he carries out his activity all at once (*dafʿatan wāḥidatan*).⁶⁷

Many other passages could be cited,⁶⁸ but these suffice to give the gist of the idea. It should be stressed that as in the case of the texts asserting God's identity with being, most of those mentioning the doctrine of instantaneous creation have no parallel in Plotinus.

C. D'Ancona has pointed out⁶⁹ that this doctrine has its likely source in the works of John Philoponus, several of whose works were known in Arabic translation. Yet Philoponus himself preserves a text by Porphyry that proves that this notion of instantaneous creation was already present in the latter's *Commentary on the Timaeus*:⁷⁰

> In addition, Porphyry says that things that derive their existence from [a process of] generation and coming to be, for example a house or a ship or a plant or an animal, are also said to be generated. For this reason we do not describe a flash of lightning or a snapping of the fingers or anything else that exists and ceases to exist in an instant as generated: as Aristotle also says, all such things come to be without a [process of] generation

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66   The relevant texts in the *Theology of Aristotle* have been studied by Zimmermann 1986, p. 202–205; cf. Pseudo-Ammonius, *Doxography*, 8.2; 17, 5–6 Rudolph. In the Ismaʿīlī tradition, one finds the notion of creation *dafʿatan wāḥidatan* in Nasafī, al-Sijistānī, Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, and the *Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ* (*Epistle* 35, 3, vol. III, p. 238, 13–21 al-Bustānī); cf. Rudolph 1989, p. 149–150; Chase 2016.

67   Speaking of the First Principle, the author of the *Epistle on Divine Science* (p. 175, 1) writes in an interpolation to his paraphrase of Ennead V 3 [49], 12.28–36: "He does not proceed from doing one thing to doing another. He makes and originates things all at once" (*lākin-nahū faʿala al-ašyāʾ wa-ibtadaʿahā dafʿatan wāḥidatan*).

68   Cf. *Theology of Aristotle* p. 8, 12; 31, 3; 4; 6–7; 11; 32, 4; 41, 5.

69   D'Ancona 2001, p. 107 f.; 2003, p. 315–317.

70   Porphyry, *Commentary on the Timaeus* fr. 36, p. 23, 14–24, 5 Sodano = Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi* VI, 8, p. 148, 7–15 Rabe: ἔτι φησὶν ὁ Πορφύριος γενητὸν λέγεσθαι καὶ τὸ διὰ γενέσεως καὶ τοῦ γίνεσθαι τὸ εἶναι λαβόν, ὡς οἰκία καὶ πλοῖον καὶ φυτὸν καὶ ζῷον, καθὸ τὴν ἀστραπὴν καὶ τὸν κρότον καὶ ὅσα ἐξαίφνης ὑφίσταται καὶ παύεται οὐ λέγομεν εἶναι γενητά· πάντα γὰρ τὰ τοιαῦτα, ὡς καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης φησίν, ἄνευ γενέσεως εἰς τὸ εἶναι παραγίγνεται καὶ χωρὶς φθορᾶς εἰς τὸ μὴ εἶναι μεταβάλλει· καὶ δῆλον, ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἂν κατὰ τοῦτο γενητὸν εἶναι τὸν κόσμον ὑπόθοιτο ὡς διὰ γενέσεως εἰς τὸ εἶναι παραγενόμενον· ἅμα γὰρ νοήματι εἰς οὐσίωσιν ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα παρήγαγεν.

and switch to non-existence without [a process of] decay. It is clear that **nobody would hold that the world is generated in the sense of having to come to be through a process of generation, for God brought all things into substantification simultaneously with ⟨his⟩ thought (ἅμα γὰρ νοή-ματι εἰς οὐσίωσιν ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα παρήγαγεν).**

Here, Porphyry distinguishes things that come to be bit by bit over a period of time, whether artificial or natural, from phenomena that occur instantaneously such as lightning or a snapping of fingers: such things, which come into and out of existence instantaneously, are not said to be generated. Likewise, the world was not generated in the sense of having undergone a process of generation, but came into existence at the same time as God's thought: that is, instantaneously.

C. D'Ancona has often pointed to the importance of the formula of action by being alone (*bi-anniyati faqaṭ* = Greek αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι), referring to it as a Proclan innovation[71] and suggesting that it found its way into the *Theology of Aristotle* by way of the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Once again, however, this idea is already to be found *expressis verbis* in Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus*:[72]

The fourth point of [Porphyry's] arguments, in addition to what has been said, is that in which he shows that the divine Intellect carries out its mode of creation (δημιουργία) **by its mere being (αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι),** and he

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71   Cf. D'Ancona 1995, p. 148–149.

72   Porphyry, *Commentary on the Timaeus*, fr. 51, p. 38, 5–15 f. Sodano = Proclus, *In Timaeum*, vol. 1, 395, 10 f. ed. Diels, translation Runia-Share (modified): Τέταρτον πρὸς τοῖς εἰρημένοις ἐστὶ τῶν λόγων κεφάλαιον, ἐν ᾧ τὸν τρόπον ἐπιδεικνύει τῆς δημιουργίας **αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι** τὸν θεῖον νοῦν ἐπιτελούμενον, καὶ κατασκευάζει διὰ πλειόνων· καὶ γὰρ οἱ τεχνῖται δέονται πρὸς τὴν ἐνέρ-γειαν ὀργάνων διὰ τὸ μὴ πάσης κρατεῖν τῆς ὕλης, δηλοῦσι δὲ καὶ αὐτοῖς τοῖς ὀργάνοις χρώμενοι πρὸς τὸ εὐεργὸν ποιῆσαι τὴν ὕλην, τρυπῶντες ἢ ξέοντες ἢ τορνεύοντες, ἃ δὴ πάντα οὐ τὸ εἶδος ἐντί-θησιν, ἀλλ' ἐξαιρεῖ τὴν ἀνεπιτηδειότητα τοῦ δεξομένου τὸ εἶδος· **αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ λόγος ἀχρόνως ἀπὸ τῆς τέχνης παραγίνεται τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ,** πάντων ἐξαιρεθέντων τῶν ἐμποδῶν. καὶ εἰ μηδὲν ἦν καὶ τού-τοις ἐμπόδιον, **τό τε εἶδος ἀθρόως ἂν τῇ ὕλῃ προσῆγον καὶ** ὀργάνων οὐδὲν ἂν ὅλως ἐδεήθησαν (…) εἰ τοίνυν καὶ τέχναι ἀνθρώπιναι καὶ ψυχῶν μερικῶν φαντασίαι καὶ δαιμόνων ἐνέργειαι τοιαῦτα δρῶσι, τί θαυμαστὸν **τὸν δημιουργὸν αὐτῷ τῷ νοεῖν τὸ πᾶν ὑπόστασιν παρέχεσθαι τῷ αἰσθητῷ,** ἀύλως μὲν ⟨παράγοντα⟩ τὸ ἔνυλον, ἀναφῶς δὲ ἀπογεννῶντα τὸ ἁπτόν, ἀμερῶς δὲ ἐκτείνοντα τὸ διαστατόν; καὶ οὐ δεῖ τοῦτο θαυμάζειν, εἴ τι ἀσώματον ὂν καὶ ἀδιάστατον ὑποστατικὸν εἴη τοῦδε τοῦ παντός· εἴπερ γὰρ τὸ σπέρμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τοσοῦτον ὄγκον ἔχον καὶ πάντας ἐν ἑαυτῷ τοὺς λόγους, ὑφίστησι τοσαύτας διαφοράς (…) πολλῷ δὴ οὖν μᾶλλον ὁ δημιουργικὸς λόγος τὰ πάντα παράγειν δύναται **μηδὲν εἰς τὸ εἶναι τῆς ὕλης δεηθείς,** ὥσπερ ὁ τοῦ σπέρματος· ἐκεῖνος μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἔξω ὕλης, ὁ δὲ τῶν πάντων ὑποστάτης ἐν ἑαυτῷ διαιωνίως ἔστηκε **καὶ ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ μένοντος τὰ πάντα παρήγαγε.**

establishes this by several arguments. Even craftsmen need tools for their activity because they do not have mastery over all their material (ὕλη). They show this by using tools to make their material easy to use by drilling, planing, or turning it, all of which operations do not insert a form, but eliminate the inappropriateness of what is to receive the form.

Here, we have proof that it was Porphyry, not Syrianus[73] or Proclus,[74] who was the originator of the notion of creation by being alone (αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι), which he linked to the notion of instantaneous creation. His basic argument is by analogy: human craftsmen need tools and time to use them only because the material on which they have to work presents obstacles which require preparation such as drilling or planing: once this preparatory work is completed, the form is instantaneously communicated to the object on which they were working. If there were no such obstacles, all of which are due to matter, a craftsman could instantly insert the form present in his mind into the object of his labors. But this is the case for the Demiurge: having no need for matter, he has no need of time or tools, but produces the world instantaneously, by thinking alone (αὐτῷ τῷ νοεῖν in this fragment corresponds nicely to ἅμα νοήματι in the one cited previously).

There is, moreover, another parallel worth citing. With Porphyry's remarks about the Demiurge's lack of need for tools, one may compare the following passage from the *Theology of Aristotle* x.190, p. 163:

> … when craftsmen wish to fashion a thing (…) when they work they work with their hands and other instruments whereas when the Creator wishes to make something (…) He does not need any instrument in the origination of things (*fī-ibdāʿ l-ašyāʾ*) because he is the cause of instruments, it being he that originated them.

5   Conclusion

Let me summarize and try to be clear about exactly what my claim is.

I believe the *Plotiniana Arabica* in general, and the *Theology of Aristotle* in particular, may preserve traces of Porphyry's ὑπομνήματα on Plotinus' *Enneads*, which are otherwise lost.

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73   As asserted by D'Ancona 1999a, n. 49; D'Ancona 2000, p. 94.
74   Cf. D'Ancona 1995, p. 82, n. 37.

Of the themes we have studied that are present in the *Plotiniana Arabica* but absent from Plotinus, some, as D'Ancona has emphasized, are attested or approximated in the Pseudo-Dionysius, others in Philoponus. But *all* the themes we have examined are attested for Porphyry, who was active two centuries prior than they. Most importantly, it is Porphyry, not Dionysius or Philoponus, to whom the authorship of the *Theology of Aristotle* is attributed in the work's prologue. It is Porphyry, not Dionysius or Philoponus, who, as D'Ancona has proved, is the likely author of the *ru'ūs al masā'il* preserved in the second part of the *Theology of Aristotle*. And it is Porphyry, not Dionysius or Philoponus, who we know, from his testimony, was the author of ὑπομνήματα on the *Enneads*.[75]

It remains possible, of course that the *Theology of Aristotle*'s attribution to Porphyry may be the result of some misunderstanding or series of misunderstandings, and that the Adaptor derived these doctrines from his readings of Dionysius, Philoponus, and perhaps other sources unknown to us. Yet it seems more economical to take the *Theology of Aristotle*'s prologue at face value, and suppose that these doctrines, all attested for Porphyry, were indeed found in a commentary or commentaries by Porphyry on the *Enneads* of Plotinus, which have disappeared in Greek, leaving behind only the faintest of traces. As far as the Prologue's attribution to Aristotle, rather than Plotinus, is concerned: rather than representing some unlikely error, this is almost certainly the result of deliberate pseudigraphy. Assuming the Adaptor and/or the editor (al-Kindī) knew that the Greek text they were translating was by Plotinus, not Aristotle, the decision to attribute the text to the First Master will have been motivated by the same concerns that motivated all the many pseudepigraphic attributions in Arabic-language philosophical literature. The name and identity of Plotinus was virtually unknown in the Arab-speaking world,[76] so that it was standard practice for an editor such as Kindī, anxious to ensure the authoritative reception of this his work, to attibute it to the most prestigious sage among the Greeks.[77]

My claim is not, course, that the *Theology of Aristotle* represents a word-for-word translation of Porphyry's commentaries, with nothing omitted and no

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75   This last point renders it superfluous, in my view, to speculate on Porphyrian works other than these ὑπομνήματα as possible sources of the non-Plotinian material in the *Theology of Aristotle*.

76   Cf. Chase 2019, p. 601 n. 68.

77   The list of works attributed pseudonymously to Aristotle and/or Alexander of Aphrodisias in Arabic philosophical literature is, of course, lengthy indeed. They include a great deal of material that in fact derives from Proclus (see Endress 1973 and the discussions in Kraye et al., eds., 1986, *passim*) or John Philoponus (see Hasnawi 1994).

extraneous material added. Instead, the Arabic adaptor may have worked from a Greek manuscript of the *Enneads* which contained Porphyry's ὑπομνήματα, perhaps written in the margin surrounding the text. These ὑπομνήματα took the form of explanatory paraphrases on passages from some of the *Enneads*, in which Porphyry provided explanations of texts which he had been asked by his collegues to explain. Ibn Nā'ima will have duly translated both Plotinus' text and Porphyry's commentary,[78] similar to the way Boethius' logical writings have been surmised to derive, at least in part, from the scholia in the margins of manuscripts of Aristotle's *Organon* and Porphyry's *Isagoge*.[79] An editor, probably al-Kindī, then went over the result, adding Islamic formulae, changing the sense of some passages in a more monotheist, creationist direction, and providing transitional phases to link the various sections. The editor is probably responsible for the current structure of the *Theology of Aristotle*, which appears at first glance to be chaotic, but nevertheless, as C. D'Ancona has shown, does present signs of coherent structure. It is not impossible that the choice of passages from the *Enneads* translated in the *Theology of Aristotle* may be due to the fact that it was these passages that Porphyry chose to comment upon,[80] since his companions found them especially difficult.

I believe that this reconstruction of matters, while far from certain, provides at least a possible explanation of the genesis of the *Plotiniana Arabica*. The arguments against the Porphyrian hypothesis, based largely on *argumenta e silentio*, are not definitive, while the large number of Porphyrian parallels we find throughout the *Theology of Aristotle* provide reason for taking seriously the attribution of the *Theology of Aristotle*, at least in some sense, to the Tyrian Neoplatonist.

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78   H. Dörrie 1976, p. 28–29 suggests a similar phenomenon occurred in the Latin world. In Porphyry's "edition with commentary" (*kommentierte Ausgabe*) of Plotinus, individual phrases of Plotinus were interwoven with Porphyry's commentary in such a way that readers such as Augustine and Ambrose were unable to distinguish Plotinus' thought from that of Porphyry. As we have seen, Dörrie suggests that even Gregory of Nyssa, although he had no need of translation, viewed Plotinus through a Porphyrian lens, as it were.

79   Shiel 1958. For discussion of the pros and contras of this hypothesis, cf. Militello 2010, p. 23–24.

80   Cf. the text from Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* ch. 26, cited above, n. 14: "and we have written commentaries *on some of them* [sc., of the *Enneads*] without any order (καταβεβλήμεθα δὲ καὶ εἴς τινα αὐτῶν ὑπομνήματα ἀτάκτως)".

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