

Plato arabico-latinus:
Philosophy – Wisdom Literature – Occult Sciences

DAG NIKOLAUS HASSE

The knowledge and image of Plato in the Latin middle ages was determined to a great extent by sources translated from Arabic into Latin, in spite of the fact that none of Plato's dialogues was transmitted in its entirety via Arabic to the West. The Arabic influence, however, is ignored in most studies of the medieval Plato. The present article, far from treating exhaustively a field where much research remains to be done, lays out evidence for the importance of Arabic sources in a number of diverse areas. It points to the transmission of Plato's philosophical doctrines in the works of Averroes and its consequences for the slow turning of Western intellectual interests from Plato to Aristotle; it draws attention to the great success of Latin Platonic sayings imported from the Arabic; and it describes the content and reception of two Arabic-Latin treatises attributed to Plato, the *Liber vaccae*, on magic, and the *Liber quartorum*, on alchemy.

It is the basic principle of the present article (as of the entire volume) that it takes an historical approach to medieval Platonism: it aims at reconstructing the medieval image of Plato. Material not attributed to Plato in the Middle Ages is passed over – such as the *Liber de causis* –, while material spuriously attributed to Plato is included – such as the *Liber vaccae*. This does not mean that the article dispenses with distinguishing between the spurious and the authentic. For without this distinction, the historian is bereft of a device of considerable importance for understanding the origin and development of a tradition. It is hoped, therefore, that the article is useful both for those who are interested in the transmission of Plato in Arabic and Latin and for those who are interested in Plato as read and perceived by the Middle Ages.

1. The Arabic Tradition

While the last century did not see much research on Plato Arabico-Latinus after the pioneering study of Raymond Klibansky,¹ it did on Plato Arabus. Our current state of knowledge may be summed up as follows:² In the Arabic speaking world, just as in the Latin West, the most successful Platonic dialogue was the *Timaeus*. The crucial figure in the transmission, however, was not Calcidius but Galen. Arabic bibliographers mention three translations of the *Timaeus*, of which no manuscript has as yet been found. What is extant is Galen's paraphrase of the entire *Timaeus* which formed part of his *Platonikōn dialogōn synopsis*, lost in the Greek original.³ There also exist fragments of Galen's second, medical summary of the *Timaeus*⁴ and traces of Proclus's and Plutarch's commentaries.⁵

In contrast to the Latins, the Arabs had access to, and made considerable use of, material from the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Galen's *Synopsis* contained summaries of both treatises; these summaries survive in Arabic fragments.⁶ An Arabic translation of a late Greek commentary on the *Republic* (or possibly Galen's *Synopsis*) was the basis for Averroes's own commentary on the work which still exists in the Hebrew rendering⁷ and in Jacob Mantino's Latin translation of the sixteenth century (we shall return to it below). Alfarabi draws extensively on the same ancient commentary or a similar work, perhaps even a translation of the *Republic*, in his late magnum opus, the treatise *The Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabi-*

¹ R. Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition During the Middle Ages. Outlines of a Corpus Platonicum Medii Aevi*, London 1939, 17-18. Cf. C. Steel, 'Plato Latinus (1939-1989)', *Rencontres de cultures dans la philosophie médiévale: traductions et traducteurs de l'antiquité tardive au XIV^e siècle*, ed. J. Hamesse and M. Fattori, Louvain-la-Neuve, Cassino 1990, 308.

² The two most informative and by now classical surveys of Plato Arabus remain: F. Rosenthal, 'On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy in the Islamic World', *Islamic Culture* 14 (1940), 387-422, plus addenda in *Islamic Culture* 15 (1941), 396-398 (reprinted in: F. Rosenthal, *Greek Philosophy in the Arab World*, Aldershot 1990, art. 2); R. Walzer, 'Aflātūn', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, vol. 1, Leiden, London 1960, 234-236. Compare also: F. Klein-Franke, 'Zur Überlieferung der platonischen Schriften im Islam', *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 (1973), 120-139; P. E. Walker, 'Platonisms in Islamic Philosophy', *Studia Islamica* 79 (1994), 5-25.

³ Edited (and, for the convenience of Western scholars, translated into Latin) as the first volume of the *Plato Arabus* series: *Galenī compendium Timaei Platonis: Aliorumque dialogorum synopsis quae extant fragmenta*, ed. P. Kraus and R. Walzer, London 1951 (*Plato Arabus*, 1). Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq mentions the work among his translations; see G. Bergsträsser, *Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq: Über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Übersetzungen*, Leipzig 1925, n. 124.

⁴ Listed among Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq's translations; see Bergsträsser, *ibid.*, n. 122.

⁵ Walzer, 'Aflātūn', 234.

⁶ Edited in *Plato Arabus*, 1.

⁷ Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, ed. E. I. J. Rosenthal, Cambridge 1956.

tants of the Perfect City.⁸ Other authors also quote the *Republic*, thus perhaps confirming the bio-bibliographers' claim that a translation was made by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq.⁹

As to the *Laws*, it is reported that two Arabic translations of the work were produced, though it is not clear whether the reference is to a complete translation of the *Laws* or to the translation of Galen's *Synopsis* of it; the latter is more likely for Galen's summary is extant in two derivative recensions, one by Alfarabi¹⁰ and the other by the Christian scholar Abū l-Farağ Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib.¹¹ Many traces of this or another Greek compendium of the *Laws* can be found in Alfarabi's *Principles*, in Averroes's commentary on the *Republic*, and in other Arabic authors.

The dialogues most often used and cited in Arabic philosophical literature are without doubt the *Timaeus*, the *Republic* and the *Laws*.¹² But we are also informed of further translations by Arabic scholars: of Olympiodorus's commentary on the *Sophist* and of Proclus's commentary on the *Phaedo* (lost in the Greek original).¹³ Of the *Phaedo*, in fact, there survives a Persian rendering of an Arabic version of the dialogue, which paraphrases much of the text but gives a literal translation of the final passage on Socrates's death. This translation may well have been the source for some of the long quotations from the *Phaedo* in Arabic literature.¹⁴ The various accounts of Socrates's death in bio-bibliographical texts, however, probably draw on a lost treatise by Alkindi called *The Story of Socrates's Death*, which must have offered a version of the *Phaedo*.¹⁵ Alkindi also played a role in the transmission of quotations from the *Symposion* in Arabic; a lost treatise of his probably contained a summary of the *Sympo-*

⁸ See the Index Auctorum in Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, ed. and tr. by R. Walzer, Oxford 1985.

⁹ A longer quotation in Ibn Baḥṭišū' possibly derives from such a translation; see Klein-Franke, 'Zur Überlieferung der platonischen Schriften', 128-130.

¹⁰ Alfarabi's compendium was edited (and translated into Latin) as the third volume of the *Plato Arabus* series: *Alfarabius: Compendium legum Platonis*, ed. F. Gabrieli, London 1952 (Plato Arabus, 3).

¹¹ See D. Gutas, 'Galen's Synopsis of Plato's *Laws* and Fārābī's *Talḥiṣ*', *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, ed. G. Endress and R. Kruk, Leiden 1997, 101-119.

¹² A long extract from the *Republic* appears in al-ʿĀmiri's *Kitāb as-saʿāda wa-l-isʿād*, ed. and tr. by A. J. Arberry, 'Some Plato in an Arabic Epitome', *Islamic Quarterly* 2 (1955), 86-99.

¹³ R. Walzer, 'Buruklus', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, vol. 1, Leiden, London 1960, 1340, and idem, 'Aflāḥūn', 234-235.

¹⁴ This has been argued for a quotation in ar-Ruhāwī; see J. C. Bürgel, 'A New Arabic Quotation from Plato's *Phaido* and its Relation to a Persian Version of the *Phaido*', *Actas, IV Congresso da Estudos Árabes e Islâmicos*, Leiden 1971, 281-290. On the reception of the *Phaedo* among Bīrūnī, al-ʿĀmiri and others, see E. K. Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate: Al-ʿĀmiri's Kitāb al-Amad ʿalā l-abad*, New Haven 1988, 29-43.

¹⁵ D. Gutas, 'Plato's *Symposion* in the Arabic tradition', *Oriens* 31 (1988), 36-60, esp. 45-46.

sion, which included the Alkibiades speech (217a-219d). The majority of *Symposion* quotations on love, however, come from collections of sayings, which draw on the Greek tradition of wisdom literature.¹⁶

With this we turn to the indirect transmission of Plato which was of considerable importance for the formation of the image of Plato in Islamic culture.¹⁷ The Greco-Arabic translation movement was particularly productive with respect to the works of Galen and of the commentators on Aristotle from late antiquity. These texts carried many quotations from Plato, as did gnomological and doxographical treatises, which were equally favoured by the translators. While the gnomological tradition contributed to the knowledge of ethical doctrines, Galen and the Greek commentators covered a wide range of philosophical issues, such as vision, the parts of the soul, or self-movement. Pseudo-epigraphical literature, that is, treatises on alchemy and magic of Arabic origin attributed to Plato, is an important subject of its own, which will be addressed below in the section on occult sciences.

It is this indirect, diffuse tradition of Plato, which influenced the Latin West. For the philosophical treatises that draw directly on Plato's works were not known to the scholastics: Alfarabi's *Principles*, for instance, were not rendered into Latin, and Averroes's commentary on Plato's *Republic* was translated as late as 1539. It is, ironically, a very Aristotelian body of sources that transported Plato's philosophical doctrines to the West: the commentaries by Averroes.

2. Philosophy

Averroes was, of course, not the only philosophical author who was translated from Arabic into Latin and who would mention Plato in his works. But he surpassed his colleagues as a source on Plato: in reading Averroes, the scholastics were led to reassess several key doctrines of Plato.

To mention briefly the less influential references to Plato in authors other than Averroes: Isaac Israeli's *Liber de definitionibus* invokes the authority of Plato for definitions of philosophy, the soul and nature.¹⁸ Alkindi sees Aristotle and Plato in agreement on their being four categories of the

¹⁶ Gutas, *ibid.*, 36-60.

¹⁷ This was first and forcefully argued by Rosenthal, 'On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy', 393-395. See the section on wisdom literature in this article and the references in n. 66 below.

¹⁸ Isaac Israeli, *Liber de definitionibus*, ed. J. T. Muckle, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 12-13 (1937-38), 300-305/331, 312/333, 320/337.

intellect.¹⁹ Avicenna's *Philosophia prima* contains several references to Plato's theory of ideas.²⁰ In Costa ben Luca's *De differentia animae et spiritus* one finds Plato quoted with the definition of the soul as an incorporeal substance moving the body: "anima est substantia incorporea movens corpus".²¹ This definition reappears in Hermann of Carinthia, Dominicus Gundissalinus, Jean de la Rochelle and Albertus Magnus.²² Since Costa ben Luca had contrasted Plato's and Aristotle's definitions of the soul – immaterial substance versus perfection of the body – the fundamental differences between Plato's and Aristotle's concept of the soul became a commonplace of early scholasticism.

Turning to Averroes, one finds that his attitude towards Plato is much dependent upon his being a follower and admirer of Aristotle. "I believe", says Averroes, "that this man (that is, Aristotle) was a measure in nature and a model invented by nature to demonstrate the ultimate perfection of the human being in matter."²³ Aristotle had in many places criticized his teacher Plato, sometimes openly, often silently. In his commentaries on Aristotle's works, Averroes uncovers what he considers silent references to Plato, using them as a basis for a critique of Plato's philosophical position much more explicit and comprehensive than Aristotle's. Several doctrines attributed to Plato are declared erroneous: that the world is created and imperishable,²⁴ that the four elements are generated from geometrical

¹⁹ Alkindi, *De intellectu*, ed. A. Nagy, Münster 1897 (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters, Band 2, Heft 5), 1.

²⁰ Avicenna, *Liber De Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*, ed. S. van Riet, 3 vols, Louvain, Leiden 1977-83, 236, 359, 360, 427.

²¹ Costa ben Luca (= Qusṭā ibn Lūqā), *De differentia spiritus et animae*, in *The Transmission and Influence of Qusta ibn Luqa's On the difference between spirit and soul*, ed. J. C. Wilcox, University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Mich. 1985, 167: "Dicamus itaque quod Plato philosophus diffinivit animam sic: Anima, inquit, est substantia incorporea movens corpus".

²² Hermann of Carinthia, *De essentiis*, ed. C. Burnett, Leiden 1982, 174; Dominicus Gundissalinus, *Liber de anima*, ed. J. T. Muckle, *Mediaeval Studies* 2 (1940), 37; Jean de la Rochelle, *Tractatus de divisione multiplici potentiarum animae*, ed. P. Michaud-Quantin, Paris 1964, 63; Albertus Magnus, *De homine* (Summa de creaturis, secunda pars), in *Opera omnia*, ed. A. Borgnet, 38 vols, Paris 1896, vol. 35, 20. On Hermann's and Gundissalinus's usage of Costa's definition see C. Burnett, 'Magister Iohannes Hispalensis et Limiensis and Qusṭā ibn Lūqā's *De differentia spiritus et animae*: a Portuguese Contribution to the Arts Curriculum?', *Quodlibetaria Mediaevalia. Textos e Estudos* 7-8 (1995), 242-251, 261, 266.

²³ Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, ed. F. S. Crawford, Cambridge, Mass. 1953, Lib. 3, cap. 14, 433: "Credo enim quod iste homo fuit regula in natura et exemplar quod natura invenit ad demonstrandum ultimam perfectionem humanam in materiis".

²⁴ Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De caelo libros*, in *Aristotelis opera cum commentariis Averrois*, Venice 1562-74 (reprinted: Frankfurt am Main 1962), vol. 5, Lib. 1, cap. 105, f. 72^{rb} (commentary on Aristotle, *De caelo*, I.10, 280a2-7): "Male fecit in dicendo mundum esse generatum et non corruptibilem".

figures (an error attributed by Averroes to the general preoccupation with geometry in Plato's time),²⁵ that the first mover of the world – the world soul – is moving itself.

On the whole, Averroes's critique is 'fortiter in re' but comparatively moderate in tone. Other philosophers with whom Averroes disagrees – Avicenna, in particular – are attacked in a more polemical vein. It seems that Averroes was aware that his understanding of Plato was hindered by the fact that much of the Greek philosopher's œuvre was not available to him. He once speaks openly on this issue when commenting on a passage in Plato interpreted differently by Aristotle and Themistius: "In general, it is difficult for us today to understand the opinions of the ancients, since we have no knowledge of them".²⁶

On one point, however, Averroes does not moderate his criticism: on the matter of Plato's style. When Plato maintains that forms and numbers do not have a location since location is a common substrate, he speaks metaphorically – says Averroes – since he likens the substrate to something material. He criticizes Plato's definition as being rhetorical and not demonstrative ("definitio rhetorica non demonstrativa").²⁷ When Plato explains in the *Timaeus* that the creator generated the angels with his own hand and then ordered them to create the other mortals, he himself retreating to rest, Plato speaks in his typically obscure words ("dixit in suis verbis obscuris") and is not to be understood literally, comments Averroes.²⁸

It is in accordance with this attitude that Averroes designs the methodic principle of the afore-mentioned commentary on Plato's *Republic*. As he puts it in the opening sentence: "The intention of this treatise is to summa-

²⁵ Averroes, *ibid.*, Lib. 3, cap. 61, f. 223^{rb} (commentary on Aristotle, *De caelo*, III.8, 306a1-18): "Et hoc quod dixit (sc. Aristoteles) quod Socrates et Plato propter diligentiam fecerunt quod faciunt dicentes sermonem impossibilem, intendebat quod illi peccaverunt propter amorem et fecerunt sermonem ex genere sermonum sophisticorum. Et intendebat quod Plato non intendebat facere sermonem falsum, sicut faciunt sophistae, sed accidit ita quod fecit sicut illi propter amorem magistri et amorem geometriae, et quia in suo tempore magnificabatur geometria, credebant geometrica esse principia rerum sensibilibus".

²⁶ Averroes, *Commentarium in De anima*, Lib. 1, cap. 26, 35: "Et universaliter difficile possumus hodie intelligere opiniones Antiquorum, quia non sunt notae apud nos".

²⁷ Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De physico auditu libros*, in *Aristotelis opera*, vol. 4, Lib. 4, cap. 18, f. 128^{va} (commentary on Aristotle, *Physics*, 209b34-210a2): "(...) contingit ei concedere quod formae sunt in loco (...) Et hoc contingit Platoni nisi vocaverit locum commune secundum transumptionem, quia assimilatur materiae, et sic erit definitio Rhetorica non Demonstrativa".

²⁸ Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libros*, in *Aristotelis opera*, vol. 8, Lib. 12, cap. 44, f. 328^{rb} (commentary on Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII.8, 1073b1-10): "Hoc autem quod Plato dixit in suis verbis obscuris quod Creator creavit angelos manu, deinde praecepit eis creare alia mortalia et remansit ipse in quiete sine labore, non est intelligendum ad litteram".

size the theoretical statements contained in the treatises ascribed to Plato in <the field of> political science, but to omit the dialectical statements”.²⁹ On the basis of this principle, Averroes bypasses entire passages of the *Republic* because they are rhetorical and do not contain demonstrative reasoning, hence being “not necessary for this science”.³⁰ Averroes aristotelianizes Plato’s text. One reason for his writing a commentary on Plato and not on Aristotle is that Aristotle’s *Politics* was not available to him, as he laments.³¹

Style is a permanent topic of the Platonic tradition, in the West as well as in the East.³² In the twelfth century, Peter Abelard, William of Conches and others conceive of the Platonic usage of ‘similitudines et exempla’ – to employ the Macrobian phrase³³ – as of a chance to treat theological topics philosophically. In the course of that century, in a complex process, the schoolmen take an increasingly sceptical view of the ‘mos Platonicus’ as a means of validating truth in theology. When the topic of Plato’s style is transported into the thirteenth century, Averroes begins to influence the discussion.

²⁹ Averroes, *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, ed. E. I. J. Rosenthal, 21 (Hebrew), 111 (English translation). Cf. also *ibid.*, 105/251: “As for the first treatise of this book, it consists only of dialectical arguments; and there is no proof in them except by accident. The same applies to the opening of the second. Therefore we do not explain anything of what is contained in it”. Cf. the Latin translation of the opening sentence: “Praesentis operis propositum est summam excerpere ea quae Plato sub demonstrandi ratione in libro de Republica explicavit, his tamen praetermissis quae probabilia videntur” (*Paraphrasis Averrois in libros de republica Platonis speculativos*, Venice 1552, 89). For context, see R. Bague, ‘Averroès et la République’, *Images de Platon et lectures de ses œuvres*, ed. A. Neschke-Hentschke, Louvain, Paris 1997, 99–114, and D. Urvoey, *Ibn Rushd (Averroes)*, London 1991, 111–115.

³⁰ Averroes, *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, 105/250.

³¹ Averroes, *ibid.*, 22/112: “The first part of this art <of politics> is contained in Aristotle’s book known as *Nicomachea*, and the second part in his book known as *Politica*, and in Plato’s book also upon which we intend to comment. For Aristotle’s *Politica* has not yet come into our hands”.

³² For an Arabic example, see the quotation from al-Mubaššir’s *Muhtār al-ḥikam wa-maḥāsini al-kalim*, ed. ‘A. Badawī, Madrid 1958, 128, translated in F. Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, Berkeley 1975, 29: “Plato expressed his philosophy in obscure allusions and allegories, so that his aims are clear only to sages trained in philosophy”. In its fourteenth-century Latin version, the sentence runs: “Et ostendit scientiam suam per allegoriam occultans eam, ut ipsam non intelligeret nisi sapiens” (*Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*, ed. E. Franceschini, Venice 1932 (Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere et arti, 91/92), 462).

³³ Macrobius, *In somnium Scipionis*, ed. J. Willis, Leipzig 1970, Lib. 1, cap. 2, 6–7: “(...) cum de his inquam loquuntur summo deo et mente, nihil fabulosum penitus attingunt, sed siquid de his assignare conantur quae non sermonem tantummodo sed cogitationem quoque humanam superant, ad similitudines et exempla confugiunt. Sic Plato cum de τὰ γὰρ ὅτι loqui esset animatus, dicere quid sit non ausus est, hoc solum de eo sciens quod sciri quale sit ab homine non possit, solum vero ei simillimum de visibilibus solem reperit et per eius similitudinem viam sermoni suo attollendi se ad non comprehendenda patefecit”.

In his early psychological summa *De homine* (about 1243), Albertus Magnus refutes the Platonic theory that the soul moves the body by means of numerical harmony, which exists since the creation of the soul from circles. One has to understand this Platonic statement either metaphorically, says Albertus, or according to the literal truth: “Aut hoc quod dicit Plato intelligitur metaphorice aut secundum veritatem sicut verba sonant”.³⁴ If Plato is read according to the sense of his words, then Aristotle’s counterarguments hold.³⁵ Here we encounter a mode of reading Plato’s philosophical language which is inspired by Averroes, as the wording of Albertus’s passage shows. It contains the phrase “sicut verba sonant”, a rare Latin expression for “literally”,³⁶ which Albertus inherits from Averroes Latinus. The Arab philosopher remarks on the occasion of a very different Platonic doctrine (on universal forms) that it is true in certain respects but false according to the sound of the words, and that Aristotle had criticized this literal sense of Plato’s philosophy in his *Metaphysics*: “Et est sermo verus ex hoc modo et falsus secundum quod sonant verba eius – et est modus quem Aristoteles laborabat destruere in *Metaphysica*”.³⁷

The Latin readers understood this warning: in a metaphorical sense Plato’s opinions may be true, their literal sense remains false. Thomas Aquinas enlarges upon this viewpoint by transforming it into a fully-fledged critique of Plato’s philosophical style. He argues in the commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima* (about 1268), taking up Albertus’ example of the soul being created from circles:

Here one needs to remark that Aristotle in criticizing Plato’s opinions often does not refute them with respect to Plato’s intention, but according to the sound of his words (“quantum ad sonum verborum eius”). This he does because Plato had a bad method of teaching: he says everything metaphorically and teaches by use of images, so that he means something different with his words than the sound of the words indicates, for example, when he says that the soul is a circle. And hence Aristotle argues against Plato with regard to how his words sound, lest anybody lapses into errors because of his words.³⁸

³⁴ Albertus Magnus, *De homine*, Qu. 3, 23a.

³⁵ Albertus, *ibid.*, 23b: “Si autem intelligatur secundum sensus verborum, tunc sunt contra eum rationes Aristotelis”.

³⁶ Among the few earlier testimonies to this phrase is Peter Abelard, *Ethica (Scito te ipsum)*, ed. D. Luscombe, Oxford 1971, 26: “Quae si de operatione tantum ut verba sonant accipiamus, nequaquam reatus interdicatur (...) Neque enim ille qui falsum testimonium vult dicere vel etiam in dicendo consentit, dummodo illud non dicat quacumque de causa reticens, reus legis efficitur, si prohibitio huiusmodi de opere sicut verba sonant accipitur”. Luscombe translates with “following the sound of words”, and “according to the sound of the words” (*ibid.*, 27).

³⁷ Averroes, *Commentarium in De anima*, Lib. 3, cap. 5, 409.

³⁸ Thomas von Aquin, *Sententia libri de anima*, ed. R. A. Gauthier, Rome, Paris 1984 (Editio Leonina, 45, 1) Lib. 1, cap. 8, 38: “Ubi notandum est quod Aristoteles plerumque quando

It is clear that Averroes's derogatory judgement on Plato's language influenced the reading of Plato among the scholastics. Can the same be said of the content of Plato's philosophy? Which Platonic doctrines reached the West by way of Averroes's commentaries?

The doctrinal areas covered by Averroes are of course determined very much by Aristotle's presentation of Plato's philosophy. It needs careful philological investigation to trace the respective roles of Aristotle and Averroes in transmitting Plato's work and to decide whether the scholastics quote Aristotle or Averroes.³⁹ To encourage further scholarship on the issue, I shall point to three quotations which are attributed to Plato by the scholastics but formulated by Averroes: first, that everything which moves something else is moving itself; second, that reason is located in the brain, desire in the heart and the nourishing faculty in the liver; third, that there exists a 'giver of forms' ('dator formarum') who from outside inserts the forms in matter.

1. Early medieval philosophy was acquainted with the first of these doctrines (on self-movement) through Macrobius's commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis*, which contains a long passage contrasting Aristotle's doctrine of the 'unmoved first mover' with Plato's of the 'self-moving soul'. Macrobius himself sympathizes with the latter.⁴⁰ Averroes's long commentary on the *Physics* replaced Macrobius as the principal source on this issue.⁴¹ The Arab philosopher refutes Plato's position on the grounds that it holds for incorporeal beings only: the self-movement of the world soul does not explain corporeal movement on earth.⁴² Accordingly, Alber-

reprobat opiniones Platonis, non reprobat eas quantum ad intentionem Platonis, sed quantum ad sonum verborum eius. Quod ideo facit quia Plato habuit malum modum docendi: omnia enim figurate dicit et per simbola docet, intendens aliud per verba quam sonent ipsa verba, sicut quod dixit animam esse circulum. Et ideo ne aliquis propter ipsa verba incidat in errorem, Aristoteles disputat contra eum quantum ad id quod verba eius sonant".

³⁹ A helpful tool in this regard is R. J. Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism*, The Hague 1956, who prints all quotations of Plato in Thomas's œuvre with source references.

⁴⁰ Macrobius, *In somnium Scipionis*, Lib. 2, cap. 14-16, 135-151, for example 141: "Plato enim cum dicit animam ex se moveri, id est cum αὐτοκίνητον vocat, non vult eam inter illa numerari quae ex se quidem videntur moveri, sed a causa quae intra se latet moventur". On the original doctrine see Plato, *Phaedrus*, 245c-e.

⁴¹ Averroes, *Commentarium in De physico auditu*, Lib. 8, cap. 39, f. 379^{rb}: "intendit Plato secundum suam positionem quod omnis motor de necessitate movetur"; Lib. 8, cap. 40, f. 380^{ra} (commentary on Aristotle, *Physics*, 257a32 ff.): "videbatur Platoni quod motum ex se componitur ex moto et motore qui movet se"; Lib. 8, cap. 46, f. 386^{va}: "Plato enim dicit quod omne movens se est aeternum, et anima apud ipsum est aeternum"; Lib. 8, cap. 77, f. 422^{vb}: "(...) et innuit ut videtur Platonem .i. qui opinabatur principium motuum esse animam et ipsam seipsam movere".

⁴² Averroes, *ibid.*, Lib. 8, cap. 40, f. 380^{rb}: "Et error contingit Platoni ex hoc quod opinabatur quod primus motor in corpore qui movetur ex se non est corpus – et est vera opinio – et

tus Magnus finds Plato's position 'non verus', 'inconveniēns', 'irrationabilis'.⁴³ Thomas Aquinas follows Averroes's line of argumentation in maintaining that Plato gives a very wide meaning to the term 'movement', in a way that abstract intellectual knowledge too becomes movement.⁴⁴

2. The second doctrine concerns the localization of reason, desire and the faculty of nourishing in the body. It does not derive from Plato's *Republic* where the three parts of the soul are first presented,⁴⁵ but from the *Timaeus*: logistikon (reason) is located in the brain, thymos (courage, zeal) in the heart, epithymiai (the desires) in the liver.⁴⁶ In Themistius's Paraphrase of Aristotle's *De anima* (fourth century AD) this doctrine is condensed into one sentence,⁴⁷ and from there it may well have reached Averroes. Other channels are also possible: The doctrine travelled in Greek handbooks of late antiquity, which contributed to its being known to very many Arabic authors;⁴⁸ it also appears several times in Galen's works.⁴⁹

opinans est cum hoc quod omnis motor, sive fuerit corpus sive non, non movet nisi moveatur uno modo motus, dicto univoce. Et fuit impossibile apud ipsum ut motor qui est corpus moveat se, et similiter qui est virtus in corpore, et tunc conclusit ex hoc quod anima non est in corpore et quod est aeterna, cum moveat se. Et hoc esset verum, si anima moveret se essentialiter, et moveret se motu proprio abstractis (?), scilicet ut intellectus et intellectum in ea essent idem, ut declaratum est de primo motore et de ceteris motoribus abstractis. Sed iste motus dicitur aequivoce cum motu qui est a motoribus qui sunt corpora aut virtutes in corporibus".

⁴³ Albertus Magnus, *Physica*, ed. P. Hoßfeld, Münster 1987-93, Lib. 3, tract. 1, cap. 5, 159: "Et propter hoc putabant quidam ut Plato et sui similes quod omne movens componitur ex motore et mobili, et ideo omne movens movetur, et hoc non est verum"; *ibid.*, Lib. 8, tract. 2, cap. 6, 600: "Irrationabiliter igitur dixit Plato nullum movens inveniri et immobile"; *ibid.*, Lib. 8, tract. 2, cap. 7, 605: "(...) scilicet quod semper sequitur hoc inconveniens, scilicet quod idem sit movens et motum et secundum eundem motum motus, eo quod Plato posuit quod movens non movet nisi in eo quod movetur".

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, ed. R. P. Mandonnet, 3 vols, Paris 1929-33, Lib. 1, dist. 45, qu. 1, art. 1, ad 3, 1034: "Sed forte propter hoc Plato posuit quod primum movens seipsum movet, inquantum cognoscit se et amat se, ut in VIII Phys. dicit Commentator"; *id.*, *Quaestiones de anima*, ed. B.-C. Bazán, Rome, Paris 1996, Qu. 1, c. 8: "Et in idem redit dictum Platonis ponentis animam immortalem et per se subsistentem ex eo quod movet se ipsam. Large enim accipit motum pro omni operatione, ut sic intelligatur quod intellectus movet se ipsum, quia se ipso operatur". For similar passages, see Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism*, 7, 31, 77, 78.

⁴⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 439d-440a.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Timaeus*, 67c-71d.

⁴⁷ Themistius, *In De anima Paraphrasis*, ed. R. Heinze, Berlin 1899 (Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, vol. 5), 93-94.

⁴⁸ Rosenthal, 'On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy', 416-419.

⁴⁹ In Galen's *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* Plato is said to place reason in the head, courage in the region of the chest and the desiring part in the region of the navel (Cap. 3, 1, ed. and tr. P. de Lacy, Berlin 1984, 170 = ed. C. G. Kühn, in *Opera omnia*, 20 vols, Leipzig 1821-1833, vol. 5, 288). Cf. Galen's presentation of his own theory, *ibid.*, Cap. 7, 3, 438-440 (= ed. Kühn, vol. 5, 600-601), where imagination, memory, intellection, reasoning,

Themistius and Galen usually name reason, courage and the desires as the three Platonic parts of the soul. Galen occasionally identifies Plato's desiring faculty with Aristotle's nourishing faculty.⁵⁰ In Averroes, courage is replaced by desire and the desires are replaced by the Aristotelian faculty of nourishing.

The theory is of philosophical interest because the unity of the soul is at stake when the soul's parts are given different locations in the body. It is possible to infer from Plato's doctrine that there are several souls in one human body. In his long commentary on *De anima*, Averroes places the doctrine in a way that makes Plato a protagonist of the plurality of souls. Aristotle himself had referred to some unnamed persons who maintain that the soul is divisible and that different parts of it think and desire – but then, how should the soul be given unity?⁵¹ Averroes comments:

With this he refers to Plato ("innuit Platonem") who thought that the soul is essentially divided in the body according to the division of the organs in which the soul performs its various actions, and that it is not united in one organ; thus the intellective part is in the brain only, the desiring part in the heart, the nourishing part in the liver.⁵²

This comment proved influential. In the twelfth century a similar doctrine was cited from the newly translated medical sources but not attributed to Plato: 'virtus animalis' was located in the brain, 'virtus spiritalis' in the heart, 'virtus naturalis' in the liver.⁵³ But in the thirteenth century the situation is different. Already the earliest Latin commentators on

sense-perception and motion are located in the head, anger in the heart, and nutrition and desire in the liver. This passage obviously conflates Platonic and Aristotelian concepts.

⁵⁰ Galen, *Quod animi mores corporis temperamenta sequantur*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Kühn, vol. 4, 782: "The temperament of the heart belongs to the courage part of the soul, that of the liver to the desiring part, as Plato calls it, or the nourishing and vegetative part, as Aristotle says". Cf. also the second passage in n. 49.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *De anima*, 411b5-7.

⁵² Averroes, *Commentarium in De anima*, Lib. 1, cap. 90, 121: "Innuit Platonem, qui opinatur quod anima essentialiter dividitur in corpore secundum divisionem membrorum in quibus agit suas actiones diversas, et quod non communicatur in aliquo membro, ita quod pars intelligens est in cerebro tantum, et desiderans in corde tantum, et nutriens in epate".

⁵³ Examples are: Adelard of Bath, *De eodem et diverso*, ed. C. Burnett, Cambridge 1998, 70; William of Conches, *Dragmaticon*, in *Guillelmi de Conchis opera omnia*, ed. I. Ronca, Turnhout 1997 (*Corpus christianorum continuatio mediaevalis*, 152), vol. 1, Cap. VI.15-16, 232-233; William of St.-Thierry, *De natura corporis et animae*, ed. M. Lemoine, Paris 1988, Cap. I.21, 93. The doctrine is quoted from Constantine the African, *Pantegni (Theorica)*, Cap. IV.19 (edited in C. Burnett, "The Chapter on the Spirits in the Pantegni of Constantine the African", *Constantine the African and 'Alī Ibn al-'Abbās al-Mağūsī, The Pantegni and Related Texts*, ed. C. Burnett and D. Jacquart, Leiden, New York, Cologne 1994, 99-120, esp. 114-117). Apuleius, *De Platone*, Lib. 1, cap. 13, ed. C. Moreschini, Stuttgart, Leipzig 1991, 103, attributes the doctrine to Plato, but does not seem to have influenced the discussion.

Aristotle present Plato in the way shown by Averroes, that is, as the protagonist of the doctrine that the soul is divisible with respect to its localization in the body. For example, Adam of Buckfield, author of an early commentary on *De anima* (about 1245), agrees with Averroes and Aristotle in refuting the divisibility of the soul, but adds that a connected question remains unsolved: whether there are three different substances in one soul, a vegetative, a perceiving and an intellective substance. Adam of Buckfield cautiously formulates an affirmative answer to the question, thus taking the position of the plurality of substances, a position much debated in later scholasticism.⁵⁴

Albertus Magnus is an ardent opponent of this theory. He complains in the 1250s that in his time there still exist Latin philosophers who adhere to the error that there are several substances but one soul in a human body: "Hunc errorem usque hodie sequuntur quidam Latinorum philosophorum (...) qui dicunt esse diversas substantias et unam animam in corpore hominis (...)".⁵⁵ The originator of this theory was Plato, says Albertus, for he maintained that there were different substances in the body with respect to being and location: "(...) dixit enim <Plato> haec omnia diversas esse substantias secundum esse et situm, sed tamen unam animam".⁵⁶ It is due to Averroes's influence that Albertus writes "secundum situm": it is the localization thesis which makes Plato's doctrine a stumbling block to partisans of the unity theory.⁵⁷

3. The third Platonic doctrine mediated by Averroes concerns the so-called 'giver of forms' ('dator formarum'), from which created forms flow into matter, for example, the form of a certain human being into the matter

⁵⁴ Adam von Buckfield, *Sententia de anima*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Canon misc. 322, ff. 1^r-63^r, partially edited by D. A. Callus, 'Two Early Oxford Masters on the Problem of the Plurality of Forms. Adam of Buckfield – Richard Rufus of Cornwall', *Revue Néoscholastique de Philosophie* 42 (1939), 420-424, 433-438, esp. 433 (= MS Canon misc., f. 2^{ra}): "Quarum prima <quaestio> est utrum anima sit partibilis secundum subiectum, ut dixit (MS: sicut dicit) Plato, an sit impartibilis secundum partibilitatem subiecti. Plato enim dicebat quod virtus intelligibilis est in cerebro, ita quod nulla alia; concupiscibilis autem in corde; naturalis autem seu nutritiva (MS: vegetativa) in epate. Et sic posuit animam esse partibilem quantum ad subiectum". For an introduction to the debate, see E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, New York 1955, 416-420.

⁵⁵ Albertus Magnus, *De anima*, ed. C. Stroick, Münster 1968, Lib. 1, tract. 2, cap. 15, 58, lin. 48-51.

⁵⁶ Albertus, *ibid.*, 58, lin. 36-38.

⁵⁷ When Thomas Aquinas presents Plato as holding that there are several souls in one human body, he also takes his cue from Averroes; see Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, Lib. 1, qu. 76, art. 3, c.: "Dicendum quod Plato posuit diversas animas esse in corpore uno etiam secundum organa distinctas quibus diversa opera vitae attribuebat, dicens: vim nutritivam esse in hepate, concupiscibilem in corde, cognoscitivam in cerebro. Quam quidem opinionem Aristoteles reprobatur in libro De anima, quantum ad illas animae partes quae corporeis organis in suis operibus utuntur (...)".

disposed to receive this form. Plato does not speak of a 'giver of forms', but of the demiurge, a master mechanic and designer, who creates the souls, places them upon the fixed stars and then conjoins them with a human body.⁵⁸ But thirteenth-century scholastics use the term 'dator formarum' when referring to Plato's doctrine.

In his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Albertus Magnus mentions a group of philosophers – meaning Avicenna in the first place – who claim that the forms of all living beings are located at a transcendent 'intelligentia'. He proceeds:

This opinion is very similar to that of Plato who postulates a giver of forms. According to this opinion, says Averroes, the forms derive from outside and are not extracted from the potentiality of matter, but introduced into it.⁵⁹

Thomas Aquinas remarks in *De potentia* that the forms must derive from an entity which is able to create 'ex nihilo', and adds:

(...) this is the supernatural being which Plato calls 'giver of forms'. Avicenna had maintained that it is the ultimate intelligence among the separate substances. Some modern writers following them argue that it is God.⁶⁰

There are a number of similar quotations among scholastic writers of the thirteenth century. It is obvious from these selected examples that the Western schoolmen did not agree on how to integrate the Platonic theory into a Christian doctrinal system. The 'moderni' whom Thomas refers to (just as Adam of Buckfield and Bonaventura before him), can be identified on the grounds of quotation techniques and by the wording of their intellect theory. The two most important names are Jean de la Rochelle and Alexander of Hales, Franciscan theologians, whose writings date between 1230 and 1245: both, in their own way, identify the Christian God with the 'dator formarum', that is, the separate active intellect – a theory, which is criticized by Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas and others.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Plato, *Timaeus*, 41d-43a.

⁵⁹ Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, ed. B. Geyer, 2 vols, Münster 1960-64, vol. 2, Lib. 11, tract. 1, cap. 8, 470: "Haec autem opinio multum assimilatur Platonis opinioni, qui ponit datorem formarum, et secundum eam, ut dicit Averroes, forma est ab extrinseco et non educta de potentia materiae, sed potius inducta".

⁶⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, in *Quaestiones disputatae*, Turin, Rome 1927, Qu. 3, art. 8, c. 64: "(...) et hoc est agens supernaturale quod Plato posuit datorem formarum. Et hoc Avicenna dixit esse intelligentiam ultimam inter substantias separatas. Quidam vero moderni eos sequentes, dicunt hoc esse Deum".

⁶¹ E. Gilson, 'Pourquoi saint Thomas a critiqué saint Augustin', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 1 (1926-7), 5-127; D. N. Hasse, *Avicenna's De anima in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul, 1160-1300*, London, Turin 2000 (Warburg Institute Studies and Texts, 1), 203-223.

What are the sources for this theory? The term 'giver of forms' first appears in Arabic philosophical texts; it was used by Avicenna and later by Algazel and Averroes. The original phrase *wāhib aṣ-ṣuwar* in its strict Avicennian sense refers to the entity from which created forms – not intelligible forms – flow upon predisposed matter. The 'giver of forms' therefore is not an epistemological but a metaphysical concept. Avicenna identifies the 'giver of forms' with the lowest of the celestial intelligences.

Averroes criticizes this theory, which he attributes to Alfarabi and especially to Avicenna, "who believed that all forms derive from the active intelligence which he calls 'giver of forms' (...) All <these> authors incline much to the standpoint of Plato" ("Omnes homines declinant magis ad opinionem Platonis").⁶² This is the very interpretation which was to become successful in the West: that the Arabic doctrine of a celestial intelligence as the giver of forms smacks of Plato. Averroes describes the Platonic standpoint as follows: "It is believed that there exist substances and forms which deliver these forms, by force of which animals and plants exist; and this is the main argument which is attributed to Plato".⁶³

The interpretative scheme presented by Averroes was itself in need of interpretation, since it did not name the entity which takes the place of the 'giver of forms' in Plato's philosophy. Albertus Magnus seems to think of the demiurge, for he once calls Plato's 'dator formarum' a 'deus deorum' – which, apart from being a biblical term, reminds of a passage in the *Timaeus*.⁶⁴ Thomas Aquinas once compares the form-giving substances to

⁶² Averroes, *Commentarium in Metaphysicorum libros*, Lib. 7, cap. 10, f. 181^{ra} and 181^{va}-b (commentary on Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VII.9, 1034a31-b8): "Et ideo quia Avicenna oboedit istis propositionibus, credidit omnes formas esse ab intelligentia agente, quam vocat datorem formarum (...) Et homines erraverunt in hoc quia non intellexerunt demonstrationem Aristotelis, et non est mirum de Avicenna sed de Alfarabio, videtur enim in suo libro de duabus philosophiis dubitare de hoc. Et omnes homines declinant magis ad opinionem Platonis, qui est similis ei quod loquentes nostrae legis opinantur, scilicet quod agens omnia est unum et quod non operantur in se ad invicem".

⁶³ Averroes, *ibid.*, f. 180^{vb}: "Et ex hoc existimatur substantias et formas esse dantes istas formas, per quas sunt animalia et plantae; et haec est maior ratio quae attribuitur Platoni".

⁶⁴ Albertus, *Metaphysica*, Lib. 1, tract. 5, cap. 3, 72 (commentary on Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.8, 989b19-21): "Dicit <Aristoteles> tamen velut aliquid propinquum dicto eorum qui posterius dixerunt de principiis, et propinquum habens, quae nunc magis apparent, quia etiam Plato posuit datorem formarum deum deorum aliquando movere et aliquando non, sicut Anaxagoras". Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 41a. Further passages on 'Plato's' dator formarum in Albertus: *Metaphysica*, Lib. 1, tract. 5, cap. 8, 79, lin. 67; *De caelo*, ed. P. Hoßfeld, Münster 1971, Lib. 2, tract. 3, cap. 5, 152, lin. 89; *Physica*, Lib. 1, tract. 3, cap. 15, 69, lin. 19; *ibid.*, Lib. 2, tract. 2, cap. 3, 102, lin. 24; *De homine*, Qu. 17, art. 3, 152a-b: "Et istae rationes sunt ad hoc quod necesse sit ponere datorem formarum, ut posuerunt Plato, Avicenna, Theodorus, et alii sequentes eos". With attribution to Avicenna: Albertus, *Super primum sententiarum*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Borgnet, vol. 25, 44.B.2, 392: "Et sic est etiam de datore formarum Deo quod omnia implet esse substantiali secundum eorum capacitatem

the Platonic ideas: "(...) quod quidem principium Plato ideam posuit, Avicenna intelligentiam agentem".⁶⁵

One can conclude that the Arabic-Latin transmission of Plato's philosophy is fragmentary but influential. The thematic fields presented in this survey touch the core of Plato's philosophy: the style of his dialogues, the doctrine of the self-moving soul of the *Phaedrus*, the tripartite division of the soul of the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, the creator of souls of the *Timaeus* (or the Platonic ideas, in the understanding of Thomas Aquinas). The reception of Averroes in the thirteenth century lead to a re-interpretation of major Platonic tenets. Averroes did not only play a significant role in the slow turning of Western intellectual favours from Plato to Aristotle, he also set the parameters within which medieval Platonism continued to develop in the following centuries.

3. *Wisdom Literature*

Philosophical treatises are not the only carriers of Platonic teachings in Arabic literature; many doctrines travelled in works belonging to the genre of wisdom literature. The term refers to collections of moral sayings and anecdotes which are attributed to famous philosophers of the past. In Greek culture, so-called gnomologia exist since the fourth century BC, being the equivalent to the rich wisdom literature originating in the Near East. The Arabs much cultivated the genre, already in pre-Islamic times, and hence, when coming in contact with Hellenistic literature, adopted much material from the Greek gnomologia.⁶⁶ The Latin Middle Ages in turn drew on both cultures, the Greek and the Arabic.⁶⁷

(...)' (drawing on Avicenna's *De anima*, V, 7, ed. S. van Riet, Louvain, Leiden, 1968-1972, 172-4). Without attribution: Albertus, *De anima*, Lib. 3, tract. 2, cap. 4, 183, line 35. See A. de Libera, 'Albert le Grand et le platonisme. De la doctrine des idées à la théorie des trois états de l'universel', *On Proclus and His Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, Leiden 1992, 101-102, and idem, 'Albert le Grand ou l'antiplatonisme sans Platon', *Contre Platon*, vol. 1, ed. M. Dixsaut, Paris 1993, 260-262.

⁶⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, Lib. 2, dist. 18, qu. 2, art. 3, sol. 467: "Quidam enim philosophi, ut Plato, Avicenna et Themistius, posuerunt omnes animas a principio separato esse, quod quidem principium Plato ideam posuit, Avicenna intelligentiam agentem, et theologi hanc viam tenentes ipsum Deum". Similar passages are conveniently accessible in Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism*, 10-11 (In II Sent., 1.1.4.ad 4), 15 (In IV Sent., 43.1.1.sol), 43 (De Vir. in com., 8.c), 44 (Quodlib., IX.5.11.c).

⁶⁶ Fundamental for scholarship on this tradition is D. Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation. A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia*, New Haven 1975 (American Oriental Series, 60). A helpful survey of Arabic wisdom literature is given by Gutas in 'Pre-Plotinian Philosophy in Arabic (Other than Platonism and Aristotelianism): A Review of

The crucial work in the chain of transmission of Arabic sayings to the Latin West is the Spanish *Bocados de oro* ('Morsels of Gold'), the Latin version of which is called *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*.⁶⁸ *Bocados de oro* itself is a translation of the Arabic work *Muḥtār al-ḥikam wa-maḥāsin al-kalim* ('The Choicest Maxims and Best Sayings'), composed in 1048-49 AD by the scholar and physician Abū l-Wafā' al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik, who lived in Cairo.⁶⁹ The Spanish rendering of al-Mubaššir's work was produced before 1260, very probably in the first half of the century.⁷⁰ The translation, which is less repetitious and shorter than al-Mubaššir's original, is of impressive quality.⁷¹ *Bocados de oro* were widely read in vernacular cultures: there exist translations in French and Provençal and three English versions, apart from the Latin translation, which is extant in twelve manuscripts (the French translation was made from the Latin version around 1400; the other vernacular versions depend on the French). It testifies to the popularity of the book that an English translation, *The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*, appeared in print in 1477 as one of the earliest books ever printed in England.⁷²

Bocados de oro contain brief biographies and moral sayings of twenty-two ancient sages. It is not the only book with wisdom literature translated

Sources', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 36, 7 (1994), 4949-4954; see this article for references to the various Arabic gnomologia, several of which are accessible in critical editions (for example Ibn Abī 'Awn, *al-Aḡwiba al-muskita*; Ibn Durayd, *al-Muḡtanā*; Anonymous, *Šiḡwān al-ḥikma*, in two different abridgements; al-Mubaššir, *Muḥtār al-ḥikam wa-maḥāsin al-kalim*).

⁶⁷ For an introduction to and bibliography on the medieval tradition, see the entry 'Sprichwort, Sprichwortsammlung', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 7, Munich 1995, 2135-2142.

⁶⁸ *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*, ed. Franceschini, 393-597.

⁶⁹ For information on al-Mubaššir, see F. Rosenthal, 'Al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik. Prolegomena to an Abortive Edition', *Oriens* 13-14 (1961), 132-158. A translation of Mubaššir's chapter with miscellaneous sayings from less known philosophers (296-322, ed. Badawi) is provided by F. Rosenthal, *Das Fortleben der Antike im Islam*, Zurich, Stuttgart 1965, 172-199.

⁷⁰ The late dating of all manuscripts of the *Bocados* (fifteenth century) and their plain design are features not characteristic of translations made in the time of Alfonso the Wise (who reigned 1252-84); they indicate that the *Bocados* were translated earlier during the reign of Ferdinand III (1230-52). See W. Mettmann, 'Neues zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der sogenannten Bocados de Oro', *Wort und Text: Festschrift für Fritz Schalk*, ed. H. Meier and H. Sckommodau, Frankfurt am Main 1963, 119, and M. Crombach, *Bocados de Oro: Kritische Ausgabe des altspanischen Textes*, Bonn 1971, xxi.

⁷¹ For a comparison of translation and original see Rosenthal, 'Al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik', 152-155, esp. 153: "(...) it is certainly possible to state that the work of the Spanish translator deserves the highest praise".

⁷² The vernacular versions are accessible in the following modern editions: French: R. Eder, 'Tignonvillana inedita', *Romanische Forschungen* 33 (1915), 851-1022 (Plato 950-965); Provençal: C. Brunel, 'Une traduction provençale des Dits des philosophes', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 100 (1939), 309-328 (Plato 318-319); C. F. Bühler, *The Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers. The Translations made by Stephen Scrope, William Worcester and an Anonymous Translator*, London 1941 (Plato 110-149).

from the Arabic into Spanish – one of the major source books of Arabic proverbial literature, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq's *Nawādir al-falāsifa* ('Anecdotes of the Philosophers'), was translated as *El libro de los buenos proverbios* in the early thirteenth century, that is, contemporary with *Bocados de oro*⁷³ – but *Bocados* stand signally apart: it is the only work which re-joined the learned world through its Latin translation, thus contributing to the tradition of Plato Latinus.

Tracing the sources of these sayings is a difficult undertaking. The gnomologia often do not agree on the authorship of sayings. In fact, the variety of attribution is characteristic of the genre.⁷⁴ The important feature of a philosophic maxim is that it comes from a wise man; its credibility does not rest on being quotable from the œuvre of this philosopher, but on its ethical substance. The following saying from the Latin version of the *Bocados* serves to illustrate the point:

Et dixit <Plato>: decet hominem in speculo suam faciem intueri quia si viderit eam decoram, pro malo geret agere turpe opus; si vero turpem censuerit, nollet duo turpia congregare.⁷⁵

Plato says that a man ought to consider his face in the mirror, since, if he finds it beautiful, he will not bear doing anything ugly, and if he finds it ugly, he will refrain from accumulating two ugly things.

There is no doubt that this saying transmits ancient philosophical material. Versions of it are contained in three Greek writers: in Diogenes Laertius (third century AD) the proverb is attributed to Socrates; in Ioannes Stobaeus (fifth century AD) it is uttered by Bias, one of the seven sages; in the anonymous *Dicta philosophorum* of late antiquity the authority is

⁷³ *El libro de los buenos proverbios* was edited by Hermann Knust, in *Mittheilungen aus dem Eskurial*, Tübingen 1879 (Bibliothek des litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 141), 1-65 (and by H. Sturm, *The libro de los buenos proverbios*, Lexington 1970). As to the Arabic original, 'A. Badawī published al-Anṣārī's later recension of Ḥunayn's work as *Ādāb al-falāsifa*, Kuwait 1985. Closely related to the *Buenos proverbios* and the *Bocados de oro* is the Catalan *Tractado de la nobleza y lealtad* of the early thirteenth century, which does not seem to draw directly on Arabic sources; see J. K. Walsh, *El libro de los doze sabios o Tractado de la nobleza y lealtad* (ca. 1237), *estudio y edición*, Madrid 1975.

⁷⁴ On the problem of attribution cf. G. Strohmaier, 'Ethical Sentences and Anecdotes of Greek Philosophers in Arabic Tradition', *Actes du V^e congrès international d'arabisants et d'islamisans*, Brussels 1970, 464-465. On the different functions of gnomologia in Greek and Arabic societies, see Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature*, 451-469.

⁷⁵ *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*, ed. Franceschini, 481. The Spanish text, from which the Latin translation was made, runs: "E conviene al omne que cate su fas en el espejo porque si se vee feroso terna por mal de faser fea obra, e si la vee fea non querra ayuntar dos cosas feas", *Bocados de oro*, ed. H. Knust, in *Mittheilungen aus dem Eskurial*, 231. For the Arabic original, see al-Mubaššir, *Muḥtār al-ḥikam* (to be read in conjunction with Rosenthal's prolegomena, cf. n. 69), 160, lines 4-5 (full references in n. 32).

Plutarch.⁷⁶ It is only in Arabic sources that the saying is attributed to Plato (or Solon). Even though the saying is not reported among Plato's works as far as we know them, we cannot rule out the possibility that the earliest Arabic gnomologia took it from a source of the Greek Platonic tradition.⁷⁷ The proverb, one may say in passing, was particularly successful in the West, since it was taken over in a very popular medieval collection of sayings, Pseudo-Burley's *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum* – we shall return to it later.⁷⁸

In some cases, however, the attribution to Plato is less accidental. Two sayings in Mubaššir's compendium have been shown to transport genuine Platonic material – in the sense that the attribution to Plato appears already in a number of Greek sources. A proper source study of Mubaššir's work (which does not yet exist), is likely to reveal more than the two:

Asked by what means one should take revenge on one's enemy, he <that is, Plato> replied: By becoming more and more excellent himself.⁷⁹

At certain times a man's enemies are likely to be more useful to him than his friends because his enemies present to him his faults which he consequently tries to avoid, afraid of their gloating; he then takes hold of his good fortune and sees to it as much as he can that it will not come to an end.⁸⁰

These sayings are attributed to Plato in Hellenistic sources, notably the *Gnomologium Vaticanum*,⁸¹ which may well transport Platonic teachings not transmitted among the extant works of Plato. It is true that at present we know very little about the later transmission of such material, but one can safely say that more of Plato came to the West via the Arabic gnomological route than one is used to expect.

⁷⁶ These versions were traced and printed by Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature*, 338-340 (n. 10).

⁷⁷ Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature*, 340. Cf. the simile of the mirror in Plato, *Alcibiades 1*, 132e-133c.

⁷⁸ Pseudo-Walter Burley, *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum*, ed. H. Knust, Tübingen 1886 (reprinted: Frankfurt am Main 1964), 228, line 14: "Item dicebat <Plato> hominem debere in speculo saepe suam faciem intueri quoniam, si viderit eam decoram, indigne feret agere turpe opus, si vero turpem censuerit verebitur utique simul duo turpia sibi aggregare".

⁷⁹ al-Mubaššir, *Muhtār al-ḥikam*, 132, line 10 (= *Bocados de oro*, 216, lines 16-18; = *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*, 464, lines 16-18). The Greek sources of this saying, a rival attribution of which is Diogenes, are discussed by F. Rosenthal, 'Sayings of the Ancients from Ibn Durayd's *Kitāb al-Muḥtanā*', in: F. Rosenthal, *Greek Philosophy in the Arab World. A Collection of Essays*, Aldershot 1990, article 7 (first published 1958), 47, and Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature*, 345-346 (translation taken from Gutas, 125).

⁸⁰ al-Mubaššir, *Muhtār al-ḥikam*, 140, lines 2-4 (= *Bocados de oro*, 231, lines 9-12; = *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*, 480, line 30 - 481, line 2). On the sources, see Rosenthal, 'Sayings of the Ancients', 39, and Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature*, 367-368 (translation taken from Gutas, 141).

⁸¹ *Gnomologium vaticanum e Codice Vaticano Graeco 743*, ed. L. Sternbach, Berlin 1963, n. 432, 161, and n. 424, 159.

We should not, however, restrict our attention to sayings that have an authentic ring to them. It is the great contribution of the genre that it enriched the image of Plato and his teaching by collecting and – if we like it or not – creating a body of ethical proverbs bearing his name. If we are to understand medieval Platonism historically, we ought to complete the picture by considering teachings that we know to be spurious. As an example I choose a Pseudo-Platonic proverb that also illustrates the extent to which Arabic sources influenced the Western gnomological tradition. The quotation is from the Latin version of the *Bocados*:

Et dixit: nullus erubescit de sene ob sui aetatem vel albedinem capillorum, sed erubescit propter sui sensus substantiam illustrantis eundem. Oportet igitur ut, cum eadem in nobis fuerit substantia, pudorem habentes ab ea turpibus non utamur.⁸²

And Plato said: no one respects an old man because of his age or his white hair, but one respects him because of the substance of his mind, which illuminates him. If we possess this substance, we ought to respect it and should not act disgracefully.

There do not exist any Greek parallels for the saying about the white hair. It first appears in an anonymous Arabic collection of Platonic proverbs, which was composed about 1000 AD and bears the title *Taqwīm as-siyāsa al-mulūkiya* ('The Correct Policy for Kings'). The collector adopted Platonic sayings from various Arabic gnomologia, among them Ḥunayn's *Nawādir*, and added non-Platonic sayings from other sources.⁸³ The present saying is such an addition.⁸⁴ The attribution to Plato was meant to increase its authority.

The mechanisms of transmission and the strategies of the collectors become apparent also when we follow the saying's journey to the West. It reached the Latin world by way of Mubaššir, the Spanish *Bocados de oro*, and the Latin *Bocados*. It entered the mainstream of medieval Platonism when it was taken over into Pseudo-Burley's *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum*, one of the most successful medieval Latin gnomologia. This book was composed in the 1320s and was erroneously attributed to Walter Burley since the fifteenth century. It is transmitted in the impressive number of about 270 manuscripts and 21 early prints. The reader is told

⁸² *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*, ed. Franceschini, 481. The Spanish version runs: "E dixo: non ha omne verguença del viejo por la su edad nin por la blancura del su cabello, mas ha verguença [del] por la sustancia del seso que en el luse, pues conviene que quando aquella sustancia fuere en nos, que hayamos verguença della, e que non usemos cosa fea", *Bocados de oro*, ed. Knust, 232. The Arabic original is: al-Mubaššir, *Muḥīār al-ḥikam*, 160, lines 16-18.

⁸³ On this anonymous text which remains unpublished, see Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature*, 377-380. His reading of the text is based on MS Istanbul Aya Sofya 2822, ff. 1^r-203^v.

⁸⁴ Gutas, *ibid.*, 369 (no. 55b).

about the life, the morals and the teachings of 131 wise men of antiquity, from Thales to Priscian, with the exception of Christian authors.⁸⁵ There are some Platonic sayings in Pseudo-Burley's *Liber de vita et moribus* which can be traced in one or the other dialogue of Plato's.⁸⁶ But these are exceptional cases, as we would expect from a true exponent of the genre.

Turning to the saying about the white hair, one notes differences between the Latin *Bocados* and Pseudo-Burley's version, which runs as follows:

Interrogatus an verecundum sit homini esse canum ait: Non est verecundum seni si capillorum albedinem, sed si morum turpitudinem patiatur.⁸⁷

Asked whether a person should be ashamed of having white hair, Plato answers: an old man ought not to be ashamed when his hair turns white but when he succumbs to bad manners.

Pseudo-Burley has obviously changed the meaning of the saying. Both versions argue that white hair is something superficial and that old men should not get accustomed to bad manners. But whereas the Arabic saying speaks of respect for the old man, Pseudo-Burley talks about the shame felt by the old man himself. He omits the entire middle section on the substance of the mind (the Arabic original uses the term *ġawhar al-'aql*, 'substance of the intellect').⁸⁸ As a result, the three-piece sequence 'white hair – mind – good manners' is reduced to a simple contrast between inside and outside: 'white hair – good manners'. Pseudo-Burley thus partly loses the substance of the saying, but what he gains is an increase in conciseness and clarity: he knew what he was doing.

Hence, the image of Plato as presented by the Arabic-Latin gnomological tradition should not be misunderstood as the result of a contingent process. The collectors created this image with precise ideals in mind: the anonymous collector of the *Taqwīm as-siyāsa al-mulūkīya* aimed at a solid authorization of his material, the Spanish translator shortened the com-

⁸⁵ Much information on transmission and influence of the work is supplied by J. Prelog, 'Die Handschriften und Drucke von Walter Burleys *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum*', *Codices manuscripti* 9 (1983), 1-18. On the question of authorship, see M. Grignaschi, 'Lo pseudo Walter Burley e il *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum*', *Medioevo: Rivista di storia della filosofia medievale* 16 (1990), 131-190, and, in the same volume, J. Prelog, 'De Pictagora Philosopho. Die Biographie des Pythagoras in dem Walter Burley zugeschriebenen *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum*', 191-251.

⁸⁶ For example Pseudo-Burley, *Liber de vita et moribus*, 226: "Tunc vero beatus et felix dicendus est orbis terrarum cum sapientes efficiuntur reges et reges efficiuntur sapientes" (Plato, *Republic*, 473d); *ibid.*, 228: "Item dixit escam malorum esse voluptatem eo quod ea capiuntur homines sicut hamo pisces" (cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 69d).

⁸⁷ Pseudo-Burley, *Liber de vita et moribus*, 224.

⁸⁸ al-Mubaššir, *Muḥtār al-ḥikam*, 160, line 17.

pendium to avoid repetitiveness, and Pseudo-Burley worked on the most suggestive wording.

The influence exerted by Arabic wisdom literature is profound, as the example of Pseudo-Burley's *Liber de vita et moribus* shows. Each of its chapters contains a biographical and a gnomological section. While most of the biographical material in the chapter on Plato comes from Western sources, no less than twenty-two sayings of the about forty are adopted from *Bocados de oro*.⁸⁹ This is all the more noteworthy since Pseudo-Bur-

⁸⁹ The following sayings in Pseudo-Burley (= LVM) are drawn from the Latin version (= BL) of the *Bocados de oro* (= BO), that is, the translation of al-Mubaššir (= M). The two sayings cited above (notes 78 and 87) are not listed: (1) Interrogatus Plato in quo quis sapientiam adipisci posset ait: In non expectando quae evenire non possunt, nec de praeteritis recordari. (LVM 222, 20-22; BL 484, 16-18; BO 236, 23 - 237, 1; M 166, 8-9). (2) Interrogatus etiam Plato: Per quid cognoscitur sapiens? ait: Sapiens cum vituperatur non irascitur et non extollitur cum laudatur. (LVM 224, 1-3; BL 464, 14-16; BO 206, 14-16; M 132, 8-9). (3) Interrogatus: Per quid homines cognoscuntur? ait: homines ut vasa testea simili modo probamus. Illa quidem in sono, hos vero in sermone cognoscimus. (LVM 224, 3-5; BL 465, 29 - 466, 2; BO 209, 6-10; M 132, 12-14). (4) Interrogatus: Quanto censu homo debet esse contentus? Ait: Tantum acquirat quis quod defectum non habeat in eo quod est ei necesse, et quod non expediat ei hominibus adulari (LVM 224, 5-8; BL 465, 7-10; BO 207, 19 - 208, 2; M 133, 6-7). (5) Interrogatus quis esset inter homines fortior ait: Qui propriam iracundiam vincere potest. Interrogatus quis esset inter homines debilior ait: Qui suum secretum celare non potest. Interrogatus: quis est inter homines potentior? ait: Qui suam abscondere scit paupertatem. Interrogatus: Quis est inter homines temperantior? ait: Cui sufficit id quod habet. (LVM 224, 9-15; BL 474, 29 - 475, 3; BO 223, 17-20; M 147, 23-24). (6) Interrogatus Plato: Quis est homo bonorum morum? ait: Qui malorum morum hominem pati potest. (LVM 224, 15-16; BL 480, 6-7; BO 230, 8-9; M 158, 22). (7) Interrogatus qualium locorum vel urbium habitatio sit vitanda ait: Non inhabites terram in qua sumptus lucra exsuperant et in qua mali praevalent bonis et ubi plurimum domini mercuntur. (LVM 224, 19-22; BL 482, 28-30; BO 234, 12-14; M 164, 9-10). (8) Interrogatus in quo quis principum gratiam posset obtinere ait: Si volueris insipientis principis gratiam obtinere ipsius sequere voluntatem, si vero sapientis, quae ad rem pertinent vel contra rationem sunt ostendere non omittas. (LVM 224, 22-26; BL 483, 4-6; BO 235, 3-5; M 164, 19). (9) Item qui suam animam quae unica est gubernare non potest, quomodo multorum hominum gubernator erit? (LVM 228, 10-12; BL 469, 11-13; BO 215, 15-16; M 140, 1). (10) Item: mali mores inficiunt opera. Non poteris esse patiens, donec tuis cupiditatibus praevaleas. (LVM 230, 15-17; BL 465, 20-21; BO 208, 13-15; M 133, 19). (11) Item dicebat: de tribus doluit anima mea, scilicet de largo divite qui venit ad paupertatem, de honorabili qui despectionem incurrit, de sapienti, quem sapientia deserit. (LVM 230, 17-19; BL 468, 7-10; BO 213, 4-6; M 138, 3-4). (12) Duo disputatores non habent inter se odium quia quaestio eorum est ad idem, etsi alter alterum intendit vincere; hoc ideo fit, quod quilibet eorum conatur, alterum ad suum sensum reducere. (LVM 230, 19-22; BL 469, 2-6; BO 215, 5-9; M 139, 13-14). (13) Oportet dominum sedere a populo et non familiariter conversari cum eis, alioquin despicitur. (LVM 230, 23-25; BL 476, 4-6; BO 225, 4-5; M 150, 14-15). (14) Reges hoc maxime diligunt quos sciunt cupiditates vicisse. (LVM 230, 25-26; BL 476, 20-22; BO 225, 17-18; M 151, 8-9). (15) Si pater non studet instruere filium artem vel scientiam quibus alatur, proficiat vel lucretur filius ille, non tenetur necessitatibus providere paternis. (LVM 230, 26-28; BL 476, 24-26; BO 226, 2-4; M ?). (16) Iniuriator excusat se consuetudine bonus ratione. (LVM 230, 28; BL 478, 27-28; BO 228, 18-19; M 156, 18). (17) Magni cordis est qui non recipit ex

ley was not in want of ancient sources but worked with, for example, Diogenes Laertius. It is well established that Arabic wisdom literature much influenced European vernacular texts. The case of Plato reminds us that this is true also for the learned Latin tradition.

4. Occult Sciences

In contrast to the philosophical doctrines and proverbial sayings attributed to Plato, Platonic views on occult matters were known to the West not as quotations in the works of Averroes or al-Mubaššir, but in the form of two fully-fledged treatises (to pass over a number of other short texts):⁹⁰ the *Liber vaccae* ('The Book of the Cow'), predominantly on magic, and the *Liber quartorum* ('The Book of the Quarters'), on alchemy. These works are Pseudo-Platonica, which received their attribution to Plato in Islamic culture, without doubt for the reason that their anonymous authors hoped to give additional weight to the authority of their works. Pseudo-Platonica have been on the agenda of Plato Latinus since Raymond Klibansky's article of 1939,⁹¹ but they continue to be passed over in sur-

paupertate gravamen. (LVM 230, 29; BL 480, 5-6; BO 230, 7-8; M 158, 21). (18) Non utaris operibus dum verba sufficiunt. (LVM 230, 29-30; BL 482, 24; BO 234, 8-9; M 164, 4). (19) Melius est in obitu relinquere divitias inimico quam in vita pauperem esse et petere ab amico. (LVM 230, 31-32; BL 485, 25-26; BO 239, 14-16; M ?). (20) Cave ab inimico potente et domino praedatore. (LVM 230, 32-33; BL 486, 18-19; BO 241, 4-5; M 174, 7-8).

⁹⁰ The treatise *Liber Platonis de tredecim clavibus sapientiae maioris translatus de arabico in latinum anno domini 1301* exists in only one manuscript: MS Venice, San Marco XVI, 1, f. 20^r-26^r (XIV century); incipit: "Narraverunt quod in terra Romanorum fuit quidam philosophus qui vocabatur in arabico Platon (...)"; see L. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, New York 1923-, vol. 2, 783, and D. W. Singer, 'Alchemical Texts Bearing the Name of Plato', *Ambix* 2 (1946), 124. Thorndike and Singer also refer to a short alchemical treatise entitled *Liber Platonis super aptationem lapidis pretiosi scribens filio suo* (only MS Florence, Riccard. 119, formerly L.III.13, ff. 1^r-2^v). Another brief alchemical work with the title *Sublimacio mercurii secundum Platonem* exists in MS Vatican City, Bibl. Apostolica, Pal. Lat. 1339, ff. 94^r-95^v (L. Thorndike and P. Kibre, *A Catalogue of Incipits of Mediaeval Scientific Writings in Latin*, Cambridge, Mass. 1963, 1534; further manuscripts in Singer, *ibid.*, 120). A short medical treatise entitled *Interrogatio Platonis ad Aristotelem magistrum de quatuor elementis temporum* is found in MS Bruxelles, Bibliothèque royale, 2419-31, ff. 84^r-v (Thorndike and Kibre, *ibid.*, 486). Further references to Platonic works in translation literature are: Petrus Alfonsi, *Disciplina clericalis*, ed. A. Gonzalez Palencia, Madrid, Granada 1948, Cap. 25, 66: "Plato retulit in libro de prophetiis quod quidam rex erat in Graecia senex, gentibus crudelis (...)"; *Epistola Argafalau ad Alexandrum* (enclosed in the astrological *Liber Alchandreii*, late tenth century), second sentence: "Dicis te in opere quodam Platonis phylosophi quod inscribitur summa operis universi legisse ipsum philosophum tacitae hominum cogitationi respondere consuevisse" (communication by Charles Burnett).

⁹¹ Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition*, 18.

veys of medieval Platonism.⁹² It has often been said that Plato in the middle ages is almost tantamount to the history of the reception of the *Timaeus*.⁹³ Outside this mainstream of Platonism, there only exist treatises badly transmitted and seldom read. Plato's *Menon* was translated but is extant in only five manuscripts; the translation of the *Phaedon* exists in nine manuscripts.⁹⁴ It is worth emphasizing that the Arabico-Latin treatises were transmitted more fully. The *Liber vaccae* exists in twelve manuscripts.⁹⁵ Of the *Liber quartorum* twelve manuscripts were known by 1946,⁹⁶ but their number is likely to be higher.

Let us first turn to 'The Book of the Cow'. The Arabic original, which was probably composed between 850 and 900 AD, is extant only in one fragment.⁹⁷ The book's title is *Kitāb an-nawāmīs* ('The Book of the Laws'), *nawāmīs* being the plural form of a loanword which imitates the Greek νόμος. The book traveled under various titles in the West, which can be explained as follows: The title *Liber aneguemis* contains the Arabic word in transcription, while *Libri institutionum* is a proper translation. The term *Liber tegimenti* (or *regimenti*) comes from a passage in the preface of the 'Book of the Cow' where Plato's title is interpreted as being a 'tegmentum', that is, as a metaphor covering a hidden meaning.⁹⁸ The reference to the cow in the title *Liber vaccae* comes from its first experiment, in which the womb of a cow is used to produce an artificial animal. The

⁹² Cf. *Images de Platon et lectures de ses œuvres: Les interprétations de Platon à travers les siècles*, ed. A. Neschke-Hentschke, Louvain 1997; *Platon in der abendländischen Geistesgeschichte: neue Forschungen zum Platonismus*, ed. T. Kobusch, Darmstadt 1997; *Platonismus in der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, ed. W. Beierwaltes, Darmstadt 1969.

⁹³ See, for example, Steel, 'Plato Latinus (1939-1989)', 304; Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition*, 28.

⁹⁴ Steel, 'Plato Latinus', 305.

⁹⁵ Listed by D. Pingree, 'Plato's Hermetic Book of the Cow', *Neoplatonismo nel rinascimento*, ed. P. Prini, Rome 1993, 144 (without folio numbers). Page's reading of the *Liber vaccae* is based on MS Oxford Corpus Christi 125, f. 126^r-142^r (first half of the fourteenth century); see S. Page, *Magic at St. Augustine's, Canterbury, in the Late Middle Ages* (Ph.D. thesis University of London, The Warburg Institute), London 2000, 70-90. I have used MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CLM 615, f. 103^r-108^v (early fourteenth century, incomplete) and MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 71, f. 36^r-56^r (fifteenth century).

⁹⁶ Singer, 'Alchemical Texts Bearing the Name of Plato', 124-125 (to be used with some caution).

⁹⁷ MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, arabe 2577, ff. 104-105. Other fragments proposed for identification seem to draw on a summary of Plato's laws translated or composed by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq; see Pingree, 'Plato's Hermetic Book of the Cow', 135, n. 15.

⁹⁸ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber vaccae*, MS Digby, f. 41^v: "Inquit hunain: galienus dixit quod iste philosophus scilicet plato non nominavit librum suum hunc liber aneguenis nisi propter causam quam ego narr-> post horam hanc et rememorabor eius in loco suo. Dico ergo quod plato non intendit per id nisi tegimentum". The title "liber regimenti" (or "liber tegimenti") is used by Pseudo-Albertus, see n. 113 below.

translator of the treatise has not yet been identified; he worked in Spain in the twelfth century.⁹⁹

The term 'laws' lent itself for a forged title because the Arabs knew that Plato had written a book of the same title. As was said at the beginning of this survey, Arabic authors seem to have worked not with a full translation of Plato's *Laws* but with Galen's *Synopsis* of it. In the preface to the *Liber vaccae*, it is explained that Galen had set out to write an abbreviation of Plato's *Liber aneguemis* or book of the ten treatises and that this served Ḥunayn as a Vorlage for his Arabic version of Plato's treatise.¹⁰⁰ The anonymous author thus places his work in the context of the Platonic tradition, which in Islamic culture owed much to Galen's paraphrases of Plato and to Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, who is responsible for several translations of works of the Platonic tradition, including Galen's paraphrases.¹⁰¹

As we shall see presently, the book was received with much disapproval by Western scholars. Its content is the following:¹⁰² After the end of the preface which contains a short theoretical section on the generation of rational animals,¹⁰³ there follow four magical experiments. The first experiment leads to the generation of a rational animal: the magician's water or semen¹⁰⁴ is mixed with sun-stone and inserted into the womb of a sheep or cow; the animal is closed up in a dark house until it gives birth; the offspring is put in a powder of various substances so that it takes on human skin; the animal's members can be used to make the moon appear, to turn a person into a sheep, cow or ape, to walk on water and cross the entire world in an instance.¹⁰⁵

In the second recipe, which in many features runs parallel to the first, it is an ape in whose vulva a mixture is inserted; it is kept in a dark house and gives birth to an offspring which is smeared with a mixture and held for some time in a vessel; the parts of the resulting form can be used to make

⁹⁹ Pingree, 'Plato's Hermetic Book of the Cow', 134-135, 138-139.

¹⁰⁰ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber vaccae*, MS Digby, f. 40^v: "Galenus cum propter amatum voluit abbreviare[s] librum Platonis philosophi qui nominatum est liber aneguenis amplificatus est ei sermo et processit in eo (...)"; f. 40^v: "(...) exposui librum platonis decem tractatum usque ad finem eorum". A proper interpretation of the preface will have to be postponed until the appearance of a critical edition of the text.

¹⁰¹ See the introductory section of this article.

¹⁰² My summary profits considerably from the studies of Pingree, 'Plato's Hermetic Book of the Cow', and Page, *Magic at St. Augustine's, Canterbury*, mentioned in note 95 and henceforth referred to with 'ibid.'. For a summary and discussion of the first experiment see Pingree, *ibid.*, 140-141, and Page, *ibid.*, 71-72; for the second, third and fourth experiment, see Page, *ibid.*, 71-75.

¹⁰³ Translated by Page, *ibid.*, 83.

¹⁰⁴ Pingree reads the Latin 'aqua' as a translation of the Arabic *mā'*, 'water', 'liquid', which could also mean 'semen' (Pingree, *ibid.*, 141).

¹⁰⁵ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber vaccae*, MS Digby, f. 42^v-43^r.

contact with demons or to influence trees.¹⁰⁶ In the third recipe it is an animal not further specified which is prepared in a certain way and put in a dark house until it gives birth. The members of its offspring can be used to acquire invulnerability or invisibility or to cause rain.¹⁰⁷

The fourth recipe shifts the focus from the usage of the animal's members to the artificial generation of animals itself. The recipe is short enough to be quoted in full, in order to give an impression of its style and content:

When you want to make bees, make a house and put in it twenty-four windows all around the eastern side. The windows should be small. Shut them. Then take a small calf and decapitate it in this house and sieve its blood. Then return to this place of its decapitation and close its (...) mouth, nose, ears, eyes and vulva if it is a female calf, which is better than a male one. Then take a big penis of a dog and do not stop hitting the calf with it, until its flesh changes and its mouth dies. Watch out that nothing of its skin is torn apart. Continue hitting until seven days are over, for it becomes similar to mark. Then split the skin, take it off and grind it well. Then take a part of a sea-... (?), throw it upon it and mix them well. Afterwards put it in a corner of the house and shut the windows, the door and the entire house well. After seven days it has been turned into worms. Take as much dead bees as you like, grind them and open one window so that you can see. Strew the bee powder on the worms, for they will eat it and wings will grow on them. On the second day, open another window and strew another handful of the said bee powder on the worms every day until four days have passed. Then they turn into bees. If you want to produce a calf out of bees, which is possible, invert the operations; the procedure is not different in any minor or major point.¹⁰⁸

The *Liber vaccae* proceeds to enumerate suffumigations which produce miraculous effects and illusions such as rain, a terrifying animal, or a burning house. One recipe, for example, proposes to take "abchataṭ" (perhaps: cats, *al-qīṭaṭ*), tear it and mix it with the skin of a turtle, burn it,

¹⁰⁶ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber vaccae*, MS Digby, f. 48^{r-v}.

¹⁰⁷ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber vaccae*, MS Digby, f. 43^r.

¹⁰⁸ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber vaccae*, MS Digby, f. 43^v-44^r, MS Munich, CLM 615, f. 106^{rb-va}: "Quando vis facere apes fac domum et pone in ea .24. <or .14.> fenestras in latere orientali circuito et sint parue et claude eas. Deinde accipe vitulum parvum et in ipsa domo decolla ipsum et col[li]a sanguinem eius. Deinde redi ad hunc locum eius collacionis et claude sutus (?) et os eius et nares et aures et oculos et vulvam si est vitula et est melius quam vitulus. deinde accipe virgam canis magnam et non cesses percutere eum cum ea donec alteratur caro eius et fungatur os ipsius. Ecce cave ne disrumpatur aliquid de cute eius et sic percussus quousque pertineant 7 dies. ipse enim fiet similis medule. deinde finde cutem et extrahe illud et iterum bene tere ipsum. deinde accipe ex liarli (?) marino partem et proice ipsam super ipsum et permisce illud bene. postea pone illud in angulo domus et opilla illas fenestras opillatione bona et portam et claude domum bene nam illud fiet vermes post 7 dies. accipe ergo ex apibus mortuis quantum vis et tere eas et apperi unam fenestram ut videas et pulverum de apibus pulveriza super vermes. ipsi enim comedent eum et orientur eorum ale et in die secundo aperi fenestram aliam et iterum de praedicto pulvere apum proice pugnillum ad vermes omni die donec transeant idest quatuor dies ex hiis fient apes et cum volueris facere vitulum ex apibus quod est possibile, tunc converte operationem in eo et via eius non diversa est neque in parvo neque in magno."

and let the smoke rise on an exalted place at noon; the effect will be that the sky darkens, that the stars can be seen and that the world is frightened.¹⁰⁹ Inserted in this part is a magical experiment similar to the first four which aims at creating an artificial animal of monstrous appearance.¹¹⁰ It also contains a section on worshipping the stars in temples which is necessary for performing the magical operations of the treatise successfully.¹¹¹

Testimonies for the reception of the 'Book of the Cow' are few and predominantly negative.¹¹² This does not preclude that the book was esteemed by other readers who did not refer to it. The tradition of magic, being less literary than other genres, has a practical side which is difficult to reconstruct today. One writer who quoted the *Liber vaccae* approvingly is the anonymous author of *De mirabilibus mundi* (dating ca. 1300), which traveled under the name of Albertus Magnus.¹¹³ But William of Auvergne in the thirteenth, Nicolaus Oresme in the fourteenth and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in the fifteenth century rejected the book as a whole.

This rejection is interesting for the reason that the *Liber vaccae* could not be condemned simply as demonic, that is by employing the standard theological argument against magic since late antiquity.¹¹⁴ The suffumigations described in the *Liber vaccae* work without the invocation of evil

¹⁰⁹ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber vaccae*, MS Digby, f. 44^r-56^r (with omissions: MS Munich CLM 615, f. 106^v-108^v); the example is on f. 106^v in the Munich MS: "Quando tu fumigabis in die manifeste cum ea obtenebrabitur mundus et videbis stellas omnes et lunam donec timeat mundus ex illo. Accipe et ipse <qui> dicitur abchatat et in forma sua similis est alcatant, tere igitur illud et confice cum felle testudinis et sicca illud in umbra. Cum ergo volueris operationem cum eo, accipe unum ex illis granis et fumiga cum eo super ignem spinarum et dimitte ipsum super locum altum, nam tu videbis lunam et stellas in die sed non suffumiges cum eo nisi in meridie".

¹¹⁰ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber vaccae*, MS Digby, f. 48^{r-v} (see Page, *ibid.*, 75-76).

¹¹¹ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber vaccae*, MS Digby, f. 50^{r-v} (see Pingree, *ibid.*, 142-143).

¹¹² For the context of Arabic-Latin transmission of magic see D. Pingree, 'The Diffusion of Arabic Magical Texts in Western Europe', *La diffusione delle scienze islamiche nel medio evo europeo*, ed. B. Scarcia Amoretti, Rome 1987, 57-102; C. Burnett, *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds*, Aldershot, 1996.

¹¹³ The explicit references to Plato are the following: Pseudo-Albertus, *De mirabilibus mundi*, Lyon 1615, 69-70: "Plato vero dicit in libro Regimenti quod qui non fuerit opifex Dialecticae (...) et qui non est eruditus in scientia naturali (...) et qui non fuerit doctus in scientia astrologiae (...) et qui non fuerit doctus in scientia necromantiae (...), non poterit intelligere nec verificare omnia quae philosophi scripserunt (...)"; 71: "Plato, Aristoteles, et legitimi et omnes qui intenderunt super ultimum philosophiae tam certificarunt quod mirabilitas exit a rebus secundum modos valde diversos"; 72: "Merito ergo Plato dixit quod qui non fuerit valde solers in dialectica (...)"; 76: "Dixit auctor libri regimenti quod quaedam sunt manifesta sensibus in quibus nullam scimus rationem (...)"; 77: "(...) causae mirabilium sunt latentes et ex tam diversis praecedentibus quod humanus intellectus secundum Platonem non potest eas imitari".

¹¹⁴ L. Thorndike, 'Some Medieval Conceptions of Magic', *The Monist* 25 (1915), 107-139, and R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1990, 8-17.

spirits, and the artificial bees seem to be similar to true animals. The human-like being created in the first three recipes resembles a demon, but this 'forma', as the author calls it, is not qualified as a spirit, nor does it appear to be evil.¹¹⁵

William of Auvergne, accordingly, rejects the book for describing "wicked effects originating from the dirt of creatures which are created by this kind of mixing <that is by mixing animals of diverse genus>". William does not doubt that it is possible to create new and as yet unknown animals by mixing sperms of various animals, as proposed by the *Liber vaccae*. But such mixtures, which are undertaken in illicit 'curiositas', are against the laws of nature, says William, which is why the book is called 'leges Platonis'.¹¹⁶

William's confidence in the potential success of the book's experiments is shared by Nicolaus Oresme. And Oresme also finds that the experiments are wicked, dangerous and in conflict with the laws: "Human laws, which conform to nature, justly prohibit such things as dangerous". But his criterion for the demarcation of good and bad experiments is different; it is based on differences in the substances. Stones, plants and seeds are appropriate substances for good magical experiments, sperm and poisons are not: "These things ought to be concealed, as for example the powers and activities possessed by sperm, poisons, and certain other things in some abominable mixtures and abusive applications".¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Cf. Page, *ibid.*, 72 and 85.

¹¹⁶ William of Auvergne, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, ed. F. Hotot, with *Supplementum*, ed. B. Le Feron, Orléans, Paris, 1674 (reprinted: Frankfurt am Main 1963), vol. 1, *De legibus*, Cap. 12, 43: "Post hoc dicemus causas prohibitionis commixtionis animalium diversi generis (...) Quinta <causa>, ut nefanda opera, et maleficia, quae de fecibus ex huiusmodi commixtione procreatis fiebant, declinarentur; et haec opera leguntur in libro qui dicitur Neumich, sive Nevemich, et alio nomine vocantur leges Platonis, qui liber totus est de huiusmodi commixtionibus, et vocatur leges Platonis, quia contra leges naturae est". *Ibid.*, Cap. 24, 70: "Non erit igitur dubitandum in novis seminum commixtionibus et ipsorum adiutoriis nova animalia et necdum visa posse gigni, sicut aperte docetur in Emuth, de quo superius fecimus mentionem. Scito autem quia omne genus peccati idolatriam provexit, sicut evidenter apparet de curiositate, quae est libido sciendi non necessaria (...)".

¹¹⁷ Nicolaus Oresme, *De configurationibus qualitatuum et motuum*, ed. M. Clagett, Madison 1968, Pars 2, cap. 31, 358: "Alia enim secretiora ipsa natura ut ita dicam veluti mater pudica non vult detegi, sed propter inhonestatem vitandam et ad cavendum abusum celanda sunt, sicut sunt vires vel activitates quas haberent spermata, venena, et quaedam alia in aliquibus mixtionibus abhominandis et applicationibus abusivis. Haec namque potius dicenda sunt veneficia seu maleficia quam bona experimenta, ut sunt quaedam posita in libro qui dicitur vacca Platonis et in pluribus aliis. Propter quod leges humanae quae sunt naturae conformes iuste talia prohibent tamquam periculosa" (English translation by Clagett, 359). Clagett remarks that the sentence "ut sunt (...) aliis" only appears in three late manuscripts and may not have been in the original version.

William and Oresme not only found the magic of the *Liber vaccae* in conflict with natural laws, they also found the substances and procedures base and disgusting. The latter reaction, in fact, seems to have been intended by the anonymous author of the *Liber vaccae*. He tries to increase the suggestiveness of his recipes by provoking the natural aversion of the reader: the aversion to decaying processes, to the usage of blood, semen, and intimate parts of the body. This strategy was successful. Western readers were both convinced and repelled. As David Pingree has shown, the *Liber vaccae* works with symbols, in this not differing from magical literature ascribed to ʿĠābir ibn Ḥayyān: blood signifies the part of the mother, semen the part of the father, the dark house stands for a second womb. What is different in the *Liber vaccae*, is to propose the usage of real semen, real blood and a real womb – instead of artificial mixtures or vessels in their place.¹¹⁸ That the anonymous author takes the Jabirian approach to extremes, may have contributed to the book's negative reception.

The rejection of its content naturally provoked doubts concerning its authenticity. William of Auvergne and Nicolaus Oresme refer to it with the phrases “*alio nomine vocant leges Platonis*” and “*in libro qui dicitur vacca Platonis*”, which indicates that both of them were not fully convinced of Plato's authorship. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, finally, dismissed the book as spurious:

An example <for anonymous writings put in circulation under the wrong name> are Plato's books on the cow, which the magicians distribute and which they call *Libri institutionum*: They are full of detestable dreams and nonsense, and are no less alien to Plato than these dreadful things are alien to Plato's decency and wisdom.¹¹⁹

A very different, much more favourable reception was given to the alchemical *Liber quartorum*, the second Pseudo-Platonic text of Arabic provenance which influenced the West.¹²⁰ Its reception, it seems, was not hampered by doubts concerning its authenticity. The origin and transmis-

¹¹⁸ See Pingree, *ibid.*, 137. For the placing of the *Liber vaccae* in the Jabirian context, see P. Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān. Contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam*, 2 vols, Cairo 1942-43, vol. 2, 104-105.

¹¹⁹ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam*, ed. E. Garin, 2 vols, Florence, 1946/52, Lib. 1, 64: “(...) sicut libros Platonis de vacca magi circumferunt et quos vocant institutionum, execrabilibus somniis figmentisque refertos, et a Platone non minus alienos quam ista sint mendicabula a Platonis procul et probitate et sapientia”.

¹²⁰ For context, see M. Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam*, Leiden 1972, 145-270 (chapter on alchemy); G. C. Anawati, ‘Arabic Alchemy’, 853-885, and R. Halleux, ‘The Reception of Arabic Alchemy in the West’, 886-902, both in *Encyclopedia of the History of Arabic Science*, ed. R. Rashed, London, New York 1996, vol. 3.

sion of the *Liber quartorum* still awaits proper study.¹²¹ Its format is that of a commentary on a text attributed to Plato which serves as a littera. This combination of commentary and littera is extant also in the Arabic.¹²² The frequent usage of the phrase *ilā 'an qāla* ('until he says') in the littera indicates that the text commented upon is not quoted in full. The words 'until he says' were consistently left out by the Latin translator, which contributed much to the obscurity of the Western version.¹²³ The Latin text was printed in 1660 in Zetzner's *Theatrum chemicum*, where it covers 85 pages.¹²⁴ There also exists a Latin short version, which only contains the littera, circulating under the title *Summa Platonis*.¹²⁵ The Arabic title of the entire work is *Kitāb ar-rawābī*, ('Book of quarters', of which the title *Liber quartorum* is a faithful translation). It was known to some Islamic authors that Plato's works were grouped in tetralogies; the anonymous author thus chose a title that could make the work pass as Platonic.¹²⁶

Alchemy, in contrast to magic, could not be treated solely as a practical science, for it presupposes knowledge of the structure of the world and of mineral matter in particular. As an alchemical writer, one could give an Aristotelian bent to the description of this structure, by listing and classifying stones, mountains and minerals, and by discussing their internal composition. But one could also give it a Platonic turn, as did the author of the *Liber quartorum*. After he has already supplied – in the littera of the text – detailed information on the substances needed, on the most propitious time for the experiment, on its duration and on the properties of the instruments, Pseudo-Plato presents a cosmological scheme which reminds of the *Timaeus*. For the 'laborator', who performs the experiment, will not be able to understand the production of these things if he does not know the causes.¹²⁷ The first cause is God (*ilāh*). Upon God follow 'intelligentia' (*'aql*) and 'anima' (*nafs*). 'Anima' is an indivisible unity, invisible and always moving (just as the Platonic world soul). By her force, nature and all things composed of others come to be, first ether, then the substance of division and composition, then triangles (as in the *Timaeus*), out of which

¹²¹ See the brief references in Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, 155, and F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, Leiden 1967-, vol. 4, 98.

¹²² Pseudo-Plato, *Kitāb ar-rawābī*, ed. 'A. Badawī, *Al-Aflātūniya al-muḥdaṭa 'inda l-'arab*, Kuwayt 1977², 117-239.

¹²³ For examples see notes 130 and 134 below.

¹²⁴ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber quartorum*, in *Theatrum chemicum*, ed. L. Zetzner, Strassburg 1660 (reprinted: Turin 1981), vol. 5, 101-185.

¹²⁵ Singer, 'Alchemical Texts Bearing the Name of Plato', 116, 124-125.

¹²⁶ Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān*, vol. 2, 51.

¹²⁷ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber quartorum*, 155-156: "Asserui in his quae posui quod non intelligitur generatio huius nisi per notitiam et expressionem principii et causarum eius" (*Kitāb ar-rawābī*, 197, line 15).

heavenly bodies are made; then the four qualities and elements, then the body, human beings and animals. Pseudo-Plato dwells particularly on the properties of qualities and elements, and finally returns to matters of alchemical praxis.¹²⁸

The unknown author not only adopts details of the myth of world creation in the *Timaeus*, he also follows an important principle of this cosmology, the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm – for this scheme fits his kind of alchemy perfectly: he can use it for explaining that an alchemical vessel should have the form of a sphere,¹²⁹ or that a certain constellation of stars is conducive to a specific alchemical experiment.¹³⁰ The *Liber quartorum*, therefore, not only carries the name of Plato, it also imports genuine Platonic material from the *Timaeus* into alchemical theory.

I am not aware of any study of the Western reception of this Pseudo-Platonic treatise. In a first and modest attempt to lift the work from obscurity, I shall muster a number of testimonies from the sixteenth century which demonstrate that the *Liber quartorum* was not only copied and read but also quoted. In this respect, the *Liber quartorum* was a more popular treatise than the *Liber vaccae*, the *Menon* and the *Phaedon*. In the sixteenth century, the treatise seems to reach the apogee of its influence, as is the case with other medieval alchemical traditions.¹³¹ The testimonies cited in the following also serve to introduce the reader to Pseudo-Plato's alchemical theories.

Plato does not count among the most famous names of sixteenth-century alchemical literature, which are Geber, Avicenna, Aristotle, Rhazes, Arnald of Villanova and Raimundus Lullus. But there are clear indications that his *Liber quartorum* was read with interest. An example is the following quotation from Robert Talaudanus's *Animadversio in Braceschum* (printed in 1561):¹³²

It is fully correct for Plato to write: Even though you may use other metals <that is, than gold and silver>, you do not need them, for it is impossible that you derive from them this pure and balanced substance, which is proper to mercury and sulphur. If you nevertheless prefer to use them, it will be necessary for you to first transform them so that they become similar to the two perfect substances. This will

¹²⁸ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber quartorum*, 172 (*Kitāb ar-rawābī*’, 222, line 5): “Oportet ergo te scire quod non solvitur res (...) nisi per dominationem ignis vel aquae”.

¹²⁹ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber quartorum*, 134: “Vas autem factum est rotundum ad imitationem superius et inferius” (*Kitāb ar-rawābī*’, 165, line 18).

¹³⁰ Pseudo-Plato, *Liber quartorum*, 144: “Cumque sint duo luminaria in mansionibus altissimis, res est facilis in recessu, fac ea cadere” (*Kitāb ar-rawābī*’, 180, line 15; the Arabic reads “until he says” before “fac ea cadere”).

¹³¹ For an overview of sixteenth-century alchemy, see L. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, New York 1923-, vol. 5, 532-549, and vol. 6, 238-253.

¹³² On Talaudanus and his work see Thorndike, *History*, vol. 5, 546-547.

never happen if you do not strew on them sun and moon united in one compound. See how according to the very testimony of Plato, the Elixir cannot be formed out of an ignoble metal, as long as this metal is not transformed into gold or silver by virtue of the Elixir, which is made from perfect substances. And this Plato says very reasonably.¹³³

The quotation is not a literal one.¹³⁴ Pseudo-Plato does not speak about the Elixir in this passage, nor does he mention mercury and sulphur; these substances do not in fact play any significant part in his alchemy. Talaudanus, in contrast, groups mercury and sulphur with the higher substances gold and silver, apparently following the tradition which makes them father and mother of the alchemical process. The gist of Pseudo-Plato's argument, however – that lesser substances than gold and silver have to be transformed in order to be useful in the alchemical experiment – is adopted and welcomed as a doctrine supported by high authority: "ipso Platonis testimonio". Talaudanus's quotation is typical for the sixteenth-century reading of the *Liber quartorum* in that it draws on the technical passages rather than on Pseudo-Plato's cosmological and philosophical doctrines.

Lorenzo Ventura quotes Plato as an authority on the duration of the alchemical experiment:

All authorities posit nine months for accomplishing the work, some more, some less. Plato for instance says that for this purpose fewer days are needed than the major luminous body <that is, the sun> needs for one circuit.¹³⁵

¹³³ Robert Talaudanus, *In Ioannem Braceschum Gebri interpretem animadversio*, in G. Gratarolus, *Verae alchemiae (...) modus*, Basle 1561, 47-111, here 109-110: "Merito igitur Plato sic ait: Licet aliis metallis uti possis, tamen eius non indiges, cum ex eis habere non possis substantiam illam mercurii et sulfuris temperatam et mundam. Quod si eis uti volueris, necessarium est ut primo convertas ea in similitudinem duorum corporum perfectorum, quod nunquam fiet donec Sol et Luna in uno corpore iuncta proiciantur super ipsa. Vide quomodo ipso Platonis testimonio ex nullo metallo ignobili formari possit Elixir quin prius illud metallum beneficio Elixiris ex corporibus perfectis confecti in aurum mutetur vel argentum. Nec citra rationem id dixit Plato"; for a similar quotation see *ibid.*, 103.

¹³⁴ Compare Pseudo-Plato, *Liber quartorum*, 119: "(Littera:) Corpora vero alia, quare indiges uti eis, cum possis habere quod est fortioris temperantia? Si indigueris usu eorum, oportet primum ut convertas ea in similitudinem duorum corporum. (Commentary:) Corpora alia sunt quinque; Saturnus, Jupiter etc. Sunt fortioris defectus in compositione et maioris faecis quam et aurum et argentum". Arabic: *Kitāb ar-rawābī*, 144, line 18. Instead of 'Saturnus, Jupiter etc.' the Arabic reads 'iron, copper, lead and others'. Between 'temperantia' and 'si indigueris' the Arabic reads 'until he says'.

¹³⁵ Lorenzo Ventura, *De ratione conficiendi lapidis philosophici*, in: *Theatrum chemicum*, ed. L. Zetzner, vol. 2, 272: "Omnes autem communiter ponunt 9 menses operi perficiendo, aliqui vero plus, alii minus. Unde inquit Plato quod pauciores dies praeparationis est circuitus et revolutio luminaris maioris" (*Liber quartorum*, 152; *Kitāb ar-rawābī*, 191, line 15). On Ventura and his *De ratione conficiendi* see *Geheimnisse der Alchimie*, ed. M. Bachmann and T. Hofmeier, Basel 1999, 198-199.

A longer sequence of quotations from the *Liber quartorum* appears in the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De practica lapidis philosophici* printed in 1550. Plato is quoted with detailed advice on the alchemical procedure: one ought to lead the division of elements as far as possible; the spiritus (*rūh*) needs to be reduced to the corpus (*ḡasad*) and be ennobled; what remains is a bright and luminous body et cetera.¹³⁶

The anonymous treatise *Clangor buccinae* ('Sound of the Trumpet'), likewise printed in 1550, quotes Plato on the traditionally final step in the alchemical experiment, the 'projectio', explained at the end of the *Liber quartorum*: the strewing of the Elixir on the material which is to be transformed. Again the author mentions specific substances not referred to by Pseudo-Plato:

Plato says: If a small amount of sulphur is strewn on the mass of body so that it holds power over it, it will transform the body into a powder, the colour of which is similar to a body upon which the spiritus of gold and silver is poured.¹³⁷

At least in terms of outer appearance, the alchemist has now produced a substance which looks like the most noble metals.

A common feature of these testimonies is that they quote Pseudo-Plato approvingly and without signalling doubts concerning the treatise's authenticity. While Plato never seems to have gained a significant reputation as a magician, at least not as the author of 'The Book of the Cow', he became a respected alchemical authority among scholarly circles of the six-

¹³⁶ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Tractatulus de practica lapidis philosophici*, in *De Alchimia opuscula*, Frankfurt am Main 1550, 165^{r-v}: "Et ideo ut dicit Plato oportet te pro posse tuo separationem elementorum exercere donec non remaneat aliquid de spiritu in corpore, nisi quod non sentiat" (*Liber quartorum*, 174; *Kitāb ar-rawābī*, 225, line 9); 167^r: "Plato quoque dicit: Cum dixeris unamquamque speciem ex partibus operis, reduc spiritus ad corpus et sublima illud. Quod vero sublimatur ex illo erit clarum et lucidum" (*Liber quartorum*, 180; *Kitāb ar-rawābī*, 232, line 15); 167^v: "Et ideo dicit Plato: Cum spiritus solverit animam simul et corpus non stat fixum, coniunge ergo ipsum cum corpore ut generet sibi simile" (*Liber quartorum*, 181; *Kitāb ar-rawābī*, 233, line 20); 168^r: "Et hoc ideo quia ut dicit Plato natura naturam sequitur, et natura continet naturam et docet eam contra ignem proeliari" (from *Turba philosophorum*, in *Turba philosophorum. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Alchemie*, ed. J. Ruska, Berlin 1931 (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und der Medizin, 1), 151). No manuscripts of the *Tractatulus* have been located; see C. B. Schmitt and D. Knox, *Pseudo-Aristoteles Latinus. A Guide to Latin Works Falsely Attributed to Aristotle before 1500*, London 1985 (Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts, 12), 39.

¹³⁷ Anonymous, *Clangor buccinae*, in *De Alchimia opuscula*, Frankfurt am Main 1550, 58^v: "Unde dicit Plato: Si parum sulphur proiciatur super multitudinem corporis ita ut supra ipsum habeat potentiam, convertit ipsum in pulverem cuius color erit sicut color corporis super quod proicitur spiritus auri vel argenti" (*Liber quartorum*, 184; *Kitāb ar-rawābī*, 237, line 7). This quotation, in fact, is not from the littera but from the commentary. Pseudo-Plato writes 'opus' ('amal) instead of 'sulphur'.

teenth century. That the *Liber quartorum* obviously draws on doctrines from the *Timaeus*, may have increased its credibility.

It also contributed to the alchemical authority of Plato that his name was attached to a chapter of the *Turba philosophorum*, the well-known work of Arabic origin, extant only in the Latin translation and in Arabic fragments, which took a central place in Western alchemy. The anonymous author combines Greek doxographical material – for which no other source seems to be traceable than Hippolytus's *Refutatio omnium haeresium* – with Greek and Arabic alchemy.¹³⁸ Sermo 45 of the 72 is attributed to Plato; it ends with the popular alchemical aphorism: “Et scitote quod natura naturam superat, natura natura gaudet, natura naturam continet”.¹³⁹ The saying, often quoted in Arabic literature under Plato's name, derives from Greek literature, where it is attributed to Democritus and others.¹⁴⁰ In the sixteenth century, it appears as a Platonic saying, for instance in the pseudo-Aristotelian *De practica* mentioned above.¹⁴¹ It serves as the opening line of a short alchemical recipe attributed to Plato (MS Digby 219): “Plato, the greatest of the philosophers, said: nature rejoices in nature; nature overcomes nature; nature contains and augments nature”. The text proceeds to describe the alchemical wedding of the dry and the humid, drawing partly on Sermo 55 of the *Turba* (ascribed to “Orfultus”).¹⁴²

¹³⁸ See, most pertinently, U. Rudolph, ‘Christliche Theologie und Vorsokratische Lehren in der *Turba philosophorum*’, *Oriens* 32 (1990), 97–123. The *Turba* is put in the context of doxographical transmission by Gutas, ‘Pre-Plotinian Philosophy in Arabic’, 4954 and 4958. For references to editions and translations, see J. Telle, ‘*Turba philosophorum*’, *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 8, Munich 1997, 1098.

¹³⁹ *Turba philosophorum*, 151. Repeated *ibid.*, 119, 130, 168.

¹⁴⁰ See Democritus, Φυσικά καὶ μυστικά, ed. M. Berthelot, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*, 3 vols, London 1963, vol. 3, 43, and Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, 155, with further references.

¹⁴¹ See n. 136 above.

¹⁴² MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 219, f. 76 (sixteenth century): “PLATO philosophorum maximus dixit. Natura natura letatur: natura naturam superat. natura naturam continet et augmentat. (*Turba*, 151, line 14) Nec est generatio vera: nisi in natura sua. Est ergo artis lapis unus: materia una: natura una: opus unum: regimen unum: et una dispositio eiusdem ad album et ad rubeum simul faciendum. Igitur qui res non examinat: nichil novit. Nam artis fundamentum est ipsum experimentum. Certum namque est omne artificium per frequens exercitium assumere incrementum. Studeas ergo cum operatus fueris omnia signa cuiusque decoctionis in mente recondere: eorumque causas diligenter inquirere. Hec enim necessaria sunt omnino: omni artifice idoneo. Matrem sequitur sua proles. et illis in aere coniunctis: nil melius. quia unum continet alterum docens preliari contra ignem. (*Turba*, 165, line 20) Sternentur igitur in lecto subrugeo magne gravitatis: ut duo fiant unum federe caritatis. Nam humidum solvit siccum. et siccum coagulat humidum: ut volatu prodeat genitum amborum fecem prolike. genitum collige. Est radix operis ut in tertia stet parte liquoris. Quum tunc primo apparet albedo / album collige iterum imbibe. coque et sicca in cinere. Hoc opus hoc ordine: itera sepiissime. Sit tamen semper siccum: antequam alias suum bibat humidum: alioquin remanet humidum: nec umquam fiet siccum. Nam unum contrariorum excedens: destruit

That Plato is credited with passages from other Sermones of the *Turba*, is not a singular phenomenon. Plato obviously served better as an authority than many of the obscure names attached to the other chapters. It is indicative that one could increase this authority by attributing an aphorism from the *Turba* to "Plato in quarto", that is, to Plato in his *Liber quartorum*, as can be witnessed in an alchemical treatise travelling under the name of Albertus Magnus.¹⁴³ Without doubt, the author Plato and his major book on the subject were well known in alchemist circles.

5. Conclusion

Looking forward in history from the viewpoint of the fourth century BC, one notes in conclusion that a considerable amount of genuine Platonic material was transmitted to the Latin Middle Ages via Arabic sources. Pieces of Plato's philosophy reached the West in the works of Averroes, in gnomological handbooks and also in the cosmological part of the spurious *Liber quartorum*. In this respect, the Arabic-Latin tradition is an important counterpart to the medieval transmission of *Timaeus*, *Menon* and *Phaedon*.

Looking backwards from the perspective of the late Middle Ages, one realizes that it is difficult to understand the Western perception of Plato without awareness of its Arabic sources. The Latin West was offered various Arabic images of Plato: Plato as a philosophical authority described in terms of the Peripatetic tradition, as the wise author of moral sayings, and as an authority on magic and alchemy. It has become evident that these images were very influential, but not imported as such. Some did not find much acceptance at all, such as the magical Plato; some were transformed, for instance the metaphysical concept of the 'giver of forms', which was interpreted in Christian terms; some gained popularity among scholars of a certain time and leaning, for example, the alchemical Plato. Many circumstances of this reception remain to be examined. It is hoped that the reader has been led to conceive of the spurious material presented above not as a

reliquum. Et ignis si humiditatem quam desiccat non invenerit: comburit<ur>. Si vero fuerit nimis humidum prolongatur in evum".

¹⁴³ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *De concordantia philosophorum in lapide*, in *Theatrum chemicum*, ed. L. Zetzner, Strassburg 1659, vol. 4, 813: "Et subdit Plato in quarto: Convertite naturas et quod quaeris invenies"; the quotation is from *Turba philosophorum*, 165, line 20 ("Orfultus"). Cf. Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *De lapide philosophorum*, in *Theatrum chemicum*, ed. Zetzner, vol. 4, Cap. 6, 857: "Unde quidem dixit Plato: Accipite lapidem nostrum in tabulas tenues et ponite in vase nostro firmiter clauso et afflate igne leni donec confringatur"; this is drawn from *Turba philosophorum*, 118, lines 7 and 10 ("Arisleus").

mere curiosity, but as an avenue to a historical grounding of our understanding of the Platonic tradition.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Earlier versions of this paper were delivered as lectures at the colloquium in Nijmegen, at the medieval Latin seminar in Freiburg im Breisgau and at the Institut für Philosophie in Würzburg. I am grateful for the invitations and for the various suggestions I received. I owe special thanks to Charles Burnett, Dimitri Gutas and Sophie Page for much good advice.