

ARISTOTELIANISM AS A COMMENTARY TRADITION*

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I. The commentary tradition as an area of research

Aristotelian studies in the second half of the twentieth century underwent a decisive change: after two thousand years of travelling together, the *fortuna* of the Master and that of his Greek commentators began to follow separate paths. This was certainly progress – indeed, necessary progress, as we can now see when taking stock of the twentieth century’s arguments about the very meaning of interpretation, with particular regard to the interpretation of written texts as a primary philosophical activity.

The crisis (if we may term it as such) started in the study of Aristotle himself – his Greek commentators did not yet constitute an independent field of research. Various intellectual currents were involved. Prominent among these were nineteenth-century advances in philological and historical research, and the analytic tendencies that progressively influenced Aristotelian studies in the twentieth century. A decisive part was played by the editorial enterprises sponsored in the nineteenth by the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences. Within a relatively short period of time two fundamentally important works appeared: the standard critical edition of Aristotle’s complete works directed by I. Bekker (1831-1870),¹ promoted by F. Schleiermacher;² and that of the

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¹ *Aristotelis Opera, edidit Academia Regia Borussica. Accedunt Fragmenta Scholia Index Aristotelicus*, in five volumes. Volumes 1 and 2 contain the works of Aristotle or attributed to Aristotle (ed. I. Bekker, 1831); volume 3 has a selection of Latin translations (ed. C. A. Brandis, 1831); vol. 4, a selection of Greek commentaries (ed. C. A. Brandis, 1836; later on, most of the material in this volume was edited anew in the *CAG*); vol. 5 (1870) has the first comprehensive collection of Aristotelian fragments edited by V. Rose, Syrianus’ commentary on *Metaphysics* 3, 4, 13, 14 (prepared by Brandis, edited by H. Usener after Brandis’ death) and H. Bonitz’s never superseded *Index Aristotelicus*. The collection of the fragments was conceived to fill a major gap in Aristotelian literature; towards this end a competition was opened in the 3-7-1856 open session of the Academy (the *Öffentliche Sitzung zur Feier des Leibnizischen Jahrestages*, which was celebrated in honour of Leibniz’ birthday every year on one of the closest Thursdays to the 1st of July) on a testamentary legacy devoted by one von Miloszewsky (a military man from Köpenick, died in 1796) to sponsor competitions in theoretical philosophy (‘für Preisfragen zur Untersuchung philosophischer Wahrheiten’, as reported in *Bericht der Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 1850, p. 247; see Harnack 1900, esp. I.2. 612). But by the deadline in March 1859 the advertisement met no reply; therefore, in the 1859 *Öffentliche Sitzung* the offer was renewed and the prize was doubled to 200 ducats; finally in 1862 three scholars submitted research on the subject and the prize was won by V. Rose’s *Aristoteles Pseudepigraphus* (see the relevant reports in *Monatsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 1856, 372f., 1859, 503f., 1862, 442-446). Under its original title, Rose’s work was printed at first in Leipzig in 1863. As this title indicates (see also the author’s preface, esp. p. 4) the editor regarded the fragments (apparently all of them) to be spurious. This thesis did not meet acceptance within the Academy, but the edition was included in Bekker’s volume 5 under the (softer) title *Aristotelis qui ferebantur*

Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca (CAG), promoted by Eduard Zeller and directed by Hermann Diels (1882 -1909).³ These editions, however, were only one aspect of an intense and wide-ranging scholarly movement. Provided as they were with various types of indices, the Aristotelian commentaries were opened up for extensive use by different disciplines, including the history of language and grammar. Their availability in a critical edition was of immediate significance for those engaged in extracting and collecting fragments of lost works in ancient philosophy. Two major collections appeared in the same year: *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* edited by Diels (Berlin 1903)⁴ and *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* edited by H. von Arnim (Leipzig 1903).⁵ A collection of the extant evidence for the history of the early Peripatos, which from the start was one of the aims of the CAG edition,⁶ had to wait longer, until the appearance of F. Wehrli's volumes *Die Schule des Aristoteles* (1944-59).⁷

librorum fragmenta. Under this same title, the last, revised edition of Rose's collection was printed in Stuttgart in 1886. Thereafter, various specialized or selective editions appeared (see especially Walzer 1934, with some new materials; Ross 1935, 1955) but Rose's arrangement remains the standard reference, as acknowledged by O. Gigon's preface to his new general edition of the fragments (appended to a reprint of the Bekker edition: *Aristotelis Opera. Editio altera*, vol. 3: *Librorum deperditorum fragmenta*, Berlin 1987, p. V).

² Until 1831, Schleiermacher was the secretary of the *Philosophische Klasse* of the Academy, and *ad interim* of the *Historische-Philologische Klasse* as well (1827 to 1829), then of the joint *Philosophische-Historische Klasse* (from 1832 to his death in 1834, see the relevant annual reports *Abhandlungen der Königl. Preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, whose first pages give every year a list of the members of the Academy). His role of promoter is mentioned by Bekker's 'Praefatio', vol. 1 p. III (not reproduced in the Berlin 1960 reprint). On the part played by Schleiermacher for the XIX century Aristotelianism see Thouard *forthcoming*.

³ *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, edita consilio et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Regiae Borussicae* = CAG. In 1874 E. Zeller set up the editorial committee together with H. Bonitz and J. Vahlen; until 1877 the editing was co-ordinated by A. Torstrik, after whose death this role was fulfilled by Diels (who was teaching at the time at the Königstädtisches Gymnasium of Berlin and was about to publish one of his most influential works, the collection of *Doxographi Graeci*, 1879; see n. 7 below). An idea of the context and the expectations that shaped and prompted this great editorial undertaking can be gained from the reviews by Usener 1892, 1007-09, 1012, and by Praechter in 1909 (English trans. in Sorabji 1990a, 31-54). The background to the project can also be seen in the correspondence edited in Ehlers 1992. A table of the CAG volumes with a chronological list of the principal Greek commentators is given by Sorabji 1990b, 27-30. A general table of Greek and Byzantine commentaries on Aristotle is provided by Goulet, 'L'oeuvre d'Aristote' in Goulet 1989, vol. 1 424-442, esp. 437-441.

⁴ Diels himself edited the richest source of such fragments, Simplicius' commentary on the *Physics* (CAG 9-10, Berlin 1882-95). That a collection of fragments needs a truly critical edition of the sources of fragments is emphasized in Usener 1892, 1011f. In this sense Diels' edition was only a first step. The account Diels gives of the state of the text in the different manuscripts is not reliable enough and his recording of the variant readings is second-hand (the collation was mostly made by G. Vitelli) so that a new edition is strongly needed, as shown by Taràn 1987 (I am grateful to H. Baltussen for drawing my attention to this disquieting *comptendu*).

⁵ An important contribution to the von Arnim collection was made by the independent treatises of Alexander of Aphrodisias edited by I. Bruns in two supplementary volumes to CAG: *Supplementum Aristotelicum* 2.1-2 (Berlin 1889-92).

⁶ In the 6-7-1865 *Öffentliche Sitzung* the Berliner Academy announced a new competition for the editing of the fragments of the early Peripatetics: Theophrastus, Eudemus, Aristoxenus, Phainias, Dikaiarchos, Heraclides, Clearchus, Demetrius of Phaleron, Straton, Aristoxenus. This was on the same Miloszewsky fund on which a collection of Aristotelian fragments had been successfully sponsored in 1856 -1862 (see note 1 above). The advertisement did not however elicit any response, although the prize was renewed in 1868, then doubled to 200 ducats (1870 marks) in 1871. The reason, as Usener 1892, 1012 suggests, was that none was able to undertake this task in the absence of a critical edition of the commentators; and it was also as a result of this unfortunate experience that the Academy in 1874 decided to sponsor an edition of the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* (see n. 3 above; on the competition for the editing of Peripatetic fragments. see *Monatsberichte* 1865, 328f.; 1868, 425f.; 1871, 358f.; 1874, 484; its first advertisement was in 1865, not in 1862 as in Fazzo 2003b, 369 n.5, nor in 1868 as in Usener 1892, 1012).

⁷ *Die Schule des Aristoteles*, Basel-Stuttgart 1944-59: 1, *Dikaiarchos* (1944), 2, *Aristoxenos* (1945), 3, *Klearchos* (1948), 4, *Demetrios von Phaleron* (1949), 5, *Straton von Lampsakos* (1950), 6, *Likon und Ariston von Keos* (1952), 7, *Herakleides Pontikos* (1953), 8, *Eudemos von Rhodos* (1955), 9, *Phainias von Eresos, Chamaileon, Praxiphanes* (1959), 10, *Hieronymos von Rhodos, Kritolaos und seine Schüler* (1959). The second edition (1967-1969) has been supplemented by two further volumes on *Hermippus* (1974) and *Sotion* (1978). Wehrli does not include the fragments of Theophrastus. Until recently the standard edition was that of F.

The Aristotelian texts to which the commentaries referred were not included in the *CAG*. This choice may have been necessary for technical reasons. Nevertheless, it had consequences for the future use of these volumes, which were left in a sense detached from their original function. The effect of dismantling the traditional fixed connection between text and commentary was increased by the fact that any single reader could now have easy access to all the principal surviving Greek commentaries at once. This laid a greater emphasis on the individual nature of the diverse interpretations of the same Aristotelian passages made by different commentators. It thus opened the door to comparisons, first, between one commentary and another; second, between ancient interpretations and modern ones; and, finally, between the text itself and the tradition of interpretation.

In this way, especially after the two World Wars, advances in philological and historical research came together with a growing, widespread interest in a direct reading of Aristotle. As a main consequence, it has been possible to question the theoretical and historical foundations of scholasticism. This system of thought, which used to be regarded as Aristotle's, turned out to be not entirely supported by analytic examination of his works.⁸

In this context, it is not simply the original meaning of Aristotelian passages that is open to discussion, but also the legitimacy of the traditional, 'normalizing' exegesis. This consisted of harmonizing one passage with another, and all of them with a number of general assumptions which were not necessarily implied in the text. The overall interpretation was thus provided on the basis of preconceived theoretical constructions.

Throughout their history, scholasticism and commentary practice have been closely related. Together they played a decisive role in shaping a system of thought that was to last until well into the 17th century. Attention is now being paid to the intermediate periods of such a development: the very fact that the mainstream of philosophical enquiry in the Western world was, in its substance, a commentary tradition has become a matter of interest and can be regarded as a research topic in itself.⁹

II. Aristotelianism as a commentary tradition: a challenge for historiography

More than any other philosophical current of the imperial period, Aristotelianism operated as a commentary tradition. Based on the texts of the Master – on their precise wording and

Wimmer (Leipzig 1854-62). That edition has now been completely replaced by Fortenbaugh, Huby, Sharples and Gutas 1992. The relevant commentary is currently in progress: of the ten planned volumes three have appeared so far: 3.1, *Sources on physics* (1998) and 5, *Sources on biology* (1995) by R. W. Sharples, and 4, *Sources on psychology* (1999) by P. M. Huby. A fourth commentary volume on rhetoric and poetics by W. W. Fortenbaugh will appear in 2005. As for Wehrli's volumes, they are now partly superseded by those edited by W. W. Fortenbaugh and others in the Rutgers University Studies in Classical Humanities. The fragments of Theophrastus' *Opinions of the Natural Philosophers* are themselves a primary source for doxography, as in Diels' *Doxographi Graeci* (Berlin 1879); on Diels' method in this work see J. Mansfeld in Mansfeld and Runia 1997, 64-120. The commentators are also important as a textual source (namely, as an indirect tradition) for the editing of Aristotle's works, as Diels 1882 first pointed out; see also H. Usener 1892, 1011-13. See however Fazzo 2002c, 370-373.

⁸ The process was strengthened by scholarly discussion of the first attempts to introduce a genetic approach to Aristotle's writings in order to establish a chronology among them, in particular about W. Jaeger's works (*Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Metaphysik des Aristoteles*, Berlin 1912; *Aristoteles: Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung*, Berlin 1923, 2nd ed. 1955). It was possibly an effect of the scholastic, a-historical tradition, that this happened almost a century later than on Plato's dialogues (whose chronology started being discussed from Schleiermacher's time). Thereafter, even if some of Jaeger's theses were not generally accepted, it became evident that Aristotle's original philosophy – as opposed to Aristotelian scholasticism – had been a developing system and not a static one. Most scholars nowadays agree on this, but the discussion is still ongoing.

⁹ The commentary tradition continues into Arabic: as J. Jolivet says, 'the commentary is congenital to Arabo-Islamic philosophy' (I quote from Jolivet 2000). See also the essays of D'Ancona, Gutas, Druart, Endress referred to in the bibliography and below.

terminology – Aristotelian philosophy found in the commentary format not only a means of transmission, but also a preferred tool for the development of doctrine. A closed system, but not a static one, it evolved in two main directions: internal consistency and external competitiveness. Thus, the basic aim was, on the one hand, systematic coherence and didactical proficiency; on the other, fuller responsiveness to the various issues that emerged in the long span of time between Aristotle and the last traces of an Aristotelian school.¹⁰

In a broad sense, one can see a development of this sort starting from the early Peripatos, among Aristotle's immediate successors, Eudemus and Theophrastus. But a major part of the process – namely, work on the texts of Aristotle – probably came to a halt in the next generation. We are told that the libraries of Aristotle and Theophrastus were dispersed, while the dialogues and the more popular texts remained in circulation (the so-called *exoteric* works, ie. those written for publication *outside* the school).¹¹ As a matter of fact, the Aristotelian legacy among masters and teachers of the Hellenistic period was often elementary and non-specialized, open to various influences from other contemporary schools, especially Stoicism.¹²

The development of Aristotelianism into a commentary tradition was not completed until the first centuries of the Christian era. This development presupposes, above all, the accessibility of the treatises or *pragmateiai* written by Aristotle for his own school (the so-called 'esoteric' works). Here, according to the commonly held view, a decisive role was played by the editorial activity of Andronicus, a Peripatetic scholar who arranged them and made them accessible during the first century BC.¹³ Toward the end of the century, these treatises were available again, or became available for the first time (as seems to have been the case with the *Metaphysics* as a whole, although some of its individual

¹⁰ The main issues of this kind are fate and providence (see on Alexander of Aphrodisias treatises nn. 39 and 48 below), and generally speaking theology. See Sharples 2002, Fazzo 1999 and 2002a, 147-174.

¹¹ Concerning the fate of the library of Aristotle and Theophrastus there is a famous and dramatic story recorded by Strabo (13, 608) and Plutarch (*Sulla* 26), whose literal sense almost certainly cannot be trusted. Among the many doubts and reservations which have been raised, extreme scepticism has been expressed by Gottschalk 1972, esp. 335ff. Still, the mention of this story by authoritative sources can probably tell us something about the value placed on the legacy of Aristotle in the first centuries of the Roman period. For example, the legend says that Aristotle's books were hidden for centuries and eaten by bookworms in the cellar at Scepsis, next, that they were restored by a corrector, Apellicon, who was learned and eager but philosophically incompetent. This would have hardly gained acceptance if Aristotle's school-treatises had not been really difficult to find for a considerable length of time, if most or all of them had not come into circulation within a considerably short time, and if they had not been hard to read, whether because of lacunae (as implied by the mention of bookworms) or because of readings which were difficult to sustain from a theoretical point of view (as indicated by the emphasis on the revisor's incompetence).

¹² For this period see Gottschalk 1987. Thereafter, traces of Stoicism could be detected both in Peripatetic doctrine and terminology. By the time of Alexander of Aphrodisias, much work was done in order to reduce terminological blending with Stoicism to a minimum. This did not however completely rule out any contamination by Stoic doctrines and vocabulary.

¹³ The main source of evidence for Andronicus' editorial responsibility is Plutarch, *Life of Sulla* 26: 'Andronicus of Rhodes obtained copies from Tyrannio, made them public and drew up the catalogues which are still in circulation' (therefore, according to Moraux 1951, esp. 308f., Andronicus is the main source for Ptolemy's *pinax* of Aristotle's works, which unlike the previous lists of Aristotle's works, does contain the bulk of Aristotle's treatises, approximately in the order which became traditional later on). In some cases, Andronicus himself may have collected the treatises which advance the same argument, or he may have bound them together by uniting separate pieces. This could be implied by Porphyry *Vit. Plot.* 24: '[Andronicus] divided the writings of Aristotle and Theophrastus, bringing together those on related subjects' (eg. as opposed to 'allowing them to remain in a random chronological order as they had been issued', *ibid.*). The extent to which this provides evidence for some sort of an 'edition' is, however, controversial. We do not know exactly what Andronicus' activity and output amounted to, and we have no reason to suppose that he prepared a critical edition in the modern sense, produced by comparison among different manuscript and by collation of variant readings. This can therefore be regarded as a scholarly legend, as emphasized by Barnes 1997, who argues that Andronicus' importance has been largely overestimated.

books were already listed among Aristotle's works). The Aristotelian *corpus* was largely accessible to the 'early commentators', in particular to Boethus of Sidon, a pupil of Andronicus, and to Nicolaus of Damascus. The latter's compendium of Aristotelian philosophy implies the circulation of a *Metaphysics* not too far in content and shape from the one we do have, with the same title, *Meta ta physika*.¹⁴

A major qualitative change took place in the course of the second century AD, when the commentary tradition adopted the specific aims of a period of archaizing and of a return to the classics. Literary Atticism is one of the best-known expressions of this archaizing tendency, which saw in the ancients both a timeless model for stylistic imitation and, in the context of philosophy, a legacy of truth that could be neither extended nor surpassed.

This is why the commentary gained such a central position in Aristotelian literature. Still, it was conceived as something to be used, rather than as a product with a cultural value of its own. For this reason, the successive stages of the commentary tradition tend to obliterate one another. A new commentary on a given work of Aristotle thus appropriated, not without criticism and selection, the interpretative legacy of the preceding commentary. At this point the earlier commentary could cease to be consulted and transmitted and so often came to be lost.¹⁵ In the new commentary, both recent and earlier components co-exist in successive layers, often without distinction, so that it is difficult to determine what the most recent commentator has himself contributed and what he has inherited from his predecessors.¹⁶ For both reasons, therefore, commentaries tend to be an impersonal product: both because of their original purpose – to help the reader of a text written by someone else – and because of the peculiar dynamics of their use and transmission. Within the Peripatetic tradition, the personality of the commentator is

¹⁴ Gottschalk 1987 and 1990. On Nicolaus (64 BC-after 4 AD, if identical, as commonly held, to Nicolaus the historian and biographer of Augustus), see Drossaart-Lulofs 1965; Moraux 1973-2001, vol. 1. 445-514. In the fragments preserved by Averroes, Nicolaus appears to disagree with the arrangement of the subject matter in *Metaphysics* 3 and 5, see *ibid.*, *Test.* 7, p. 12. Greek quotations from Nicolaus' compendium are the first direct source both for the title of Aristotle's *Meta ta physika* (see Vuillemin-Diem 1995, 29-33, and for the inclusion of book 2 [*alpha elatton*] see Drossaart-Lulofs 1965, fr. 20 and 21 and p. 30).

¹⁵ In a sense, such a process of exclusion and neglect was almost inevitable, especially when dealing with works which had to be copied by hand and which are much longer than the Aristotelian text to which they refer. This was already Diels' explanation of the disappearance of Alexander's commentary on the *Physics*, see his Praef. in CAG 9, p. V n. 1: *Duo eius modi corpora non tulit Byzantinorum aetas, cum praesertim Simplicius optima quaeque ex Alexandro iure translaticio transcripsisset. Nam observandum est summam capitum fere ubique esse Alexandream, cuius plerumque nomen, nisi ubi dissentire placebat Simplicio, non apparet.* On the other hand, since a new commentary was made, one has to suppose that the former one either was already lost, or did not suit the needs of that later period (when Aristotle's Neoplatonic readers regarded his thought as basically coherent with Plato's). Therefore, as a general tendency, any new *continuous* commentary was probably intended to supersede the former commentary. By contrast, paraphrases and shorter commentaries after Alexander might still presuppose the availability and use of Alexander's great commentaries – as we can see in Themistius (*in An. Pr.* 1. 2-10 Wallies) and in Syrianus (whose commentary was to cover eg. only some passages of *Metaphysics* book 4, see his *in Met.* 54. 11-13 Kroll).

¹⁶ See, eg., in relation to their dependence on Alexander's commentaries, the cases of Syrianus (Luna 2001, 72-98, see also n. 26 below), Philoponus (and Averroes, with Fazzo 2002b), Simplicius (see the preceding note); for dependence on Syrianus, see the case of ps. Alexander *in Met.* 13 and 14 (with Luna 2001, 1-71). For an instructive parallel, see also Marinus' report about Proclus' commentary on the Orphic poems: to avoid competing with his master Syrianus, who had commented on parts of the same poems, Proclus refrained from writing a new commentary; instead, following a suggestion of Marinus, he wrote his own glosses in the margins of Syrianus' commentary. In this way a commentary by Proclus was produced, which included Syrianus' commentary. That may explain why the *Suda* attributes a commentary on the Orphic poems both to Syrianus and to Proclus: probably one and the same work (possibly in two different versions): see Marinus, *Proclus* 27 with Saffrey and Segonds 2001, 151f.. Marinus' anecdote is quoted by Zuntz 1975, 75-77, whose general remarks on the commentary tradition of literary texts are also applicable to philosophical exegesis: 'Wir wissen ja längst, aus zahlreichen für uns befremdlichen Tatsachen, wieviel weniger ausgeprägt der Begriff des literarischen Eigentums in Altertum war als bei uns. Speziell in der exegetischen Literatur müssen wir offenbar den extremen Fall anerkennen: bei diesen Kommentaren fiel der Begriff der individuellen Verfasserschaft fast vollständig fort' (Zuntz 1975, 76).

overshadowed not only by the authority of the Master, but also by the collective authority of the school.

We are now in a position to understand the first basic difficulty that the history of philosophy faces in attempting to give an account of the work of commentators and, hence, in evaluating the Aristotelianism of late antiquity. The evidence is plentiful, but it does not sufficiently explain the activity of individuals. This difficulty is further increased by another factor: the theoretical foundations of nineteenth-century history of philosophy, which inevitably persist in categorizations and evaluations that still have an influence, especially in areas that are not yet fully explored. This approach concentrated, on the one hand, on important individuals, and, on the other, on the reconstruction, through ‘successions’ or *diadochai*, of a progressive development of ideas that, from imperfect and embryonic beginnings, came to be displayed in all their fullness and power. In both respects, the historical approach has been opposite to the emphases and aims of the commentary tradition itself, which tends to play down the intermediary contributions while looking backward to the past in order to search for (or to reconstruct)¹⁷ a timeless truth, held to be definitively contained in the foundational texts of the school.

Such historiographical difficulties have led to negative judgements on the culture of commentaries. Hence its summary treatment – if not complete neglect – in many scholastic manuals, where the commentary seems to be just a dry and long-winded repetition of what is already contained in the texts of the great masters. Nor has the commentary tradition been judged any less critically where it has been possible to point out differences between Aristotle’s and a commentator’s Aristotelianism: this kind of instances have led to harsh accusations, both of deliberate betrayal, and of incompetence and misunderstanding of the original text.

The rediscovery of the work of the commentators as a living tradition of re-workings of Aristotle’s philosophy, and not just of its transmission (or distortion), has taken place only in our own day. And even now, this does not mean that the relevant problems mentioned have been resolved in a single way, nor that methodological principles of inquiry have been firmly and generally agreed on. Rather, specific interests and contexts have prompted the different, particular direction that research on individual topics has followed (see below, § V). But it is precisely this plurality of complementary approaches that is producing now one of the richest, most lively and dynamic fields of research in ancient philosophy.

III. Alexander of Aphrodisias and the Aristotelian commentary tradition

Some of these points can be illustrated by referring to the most important and representative exponent of Greek Aristotelianism, Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. ca. 200 AD). Alexander’s central position is due both to his own personal stature and to the crucial part that his work came to play in traditional Aristotelian interpretation. On the one hand, Alexander is the first Aristotelian commentator from whom we possess entire commentaries on complete works. Indeed, because of the above-mentioned tendency for works of this type to supersede one another, his commentaries almost entirely replaced the previous legacy of literature handed down by the Peripatetic school. On the other hand, later commentators were no longer distinctively Aristotelians, and quite often we find them

¹⁷ A sort of ‘a backward-looking supplement of truth in the past’ when commenting texts from classical antiquity has been detected in Galen’s exegesis of Hippocrates by Vegetti 1986, esp. 237.

going beyond the boundaries of Alexander's loyal orthodoxy.¹⁸ Strictly speaking, if we are talking about Aristotelian commentators on Aristotle, Alexander is therefore both the first of whom we have solid knowledge, and the last.¹⁹ Shortly after him, all traces disappear of a Peripatetic school that can be recognized as such by contrast with other contemporary philosophical sects.²⁰

This does not indicate a complete neglect of Aristotle's texts and commentary tradition. Some parts of the Aristotelian corpus could still keep being read and commented upon in a changing and developing cultural context, while some other parts rather fell into obscurity. For example, the biological treatises suffered from a declining interest in the more empirical and observational aspects of natural science; the *Politics* looked seriously dated in a different institutional frame; and the supreme position assigned to the *Metaphysics* by Aristotle and his school was taken over by other hierarchies of principles, inspired either by religion and mysticism or, within in a philosophical context, by Neoplatonist metaphysics.

Aristotle's works on logic and physics, by contrast, continued to form the basic philosophical canon. Hence the proliferation of commentaries on the *Categories*, which was the first Aristotelian book to be read in the schools. Its reading was introduced by Porphyry's *Introduction (Eisagoge)* to the *Categories*, which was itself also commented on.²¹

¹⁸ On the general process and problem of updating Aristotelianism and of making a system of it, see Fazzo 2002a.

¹⁹ Among Alexander's predecessors, Aspasius (first half of the II century AD) is the best known, for we have large extracts of his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* (apparently slightly more than half, see Becchi 1994) edited by G. Heylbut in CAG XIX.1 (1889). After Alexander, a special case are the paraphrases of Themistius (IV century AD), who declared himself a follower of Aristotle, but was strongly influenced by Neoplatonism and did therefore not completely refrain from criticizing Aristotle (see Blumenthal 1990; a hint in this direction also in Henry 2003). In composing his paraphrases Themistius did indeed make use of the commentaries of his predecessors, especially Alexander, on whom he did not think he could significantly improve; he did not in any way intend to replace them, but had a different aim (see his *In An. Post.* 1.2-7 Wallies). The activities and influence of Themistius are discussed (with appended general bibliographies) by Todd 1996 and 2003, esp. 59-73. See also Brague 1999. The paraphrase can be regarded as a different genre from the commentary in a strict sense (although this latter may have paraphrastic sections as constitutive parts), as noticed in C. D'Ancona's general overview, D'Ancona 2002, esp. 224f.

²⁰ Traces of distinctively Peripatetic school activity seem to disappear shortly after Alexander. Slightly later (225-230 ca.) we know just the name of a few scholars, who were still called Peripatetics and distinguished as such from the exponents of other sects: Heliodorus of Alexandria, Ammonius and Ptolemy. They are mentioned by Longinus (ca. 210-272/3) ap. Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 20, who met them in his youth, when travelling with his parents; none of them – he says – produced new commentaries of his own; but Heliodorus recorded some oral teachings of his predecessors. Another report, from Cassius Dio's *Roman History* 78.7, tells us that Peripatetics were still having *syssitia* in Alexandria in Caracalla's time (211-217). This was before Longinus' time, but after Alexander's appointment by Septimius Severus and Caracalla (between ca. 198 and 209 or 211). As a gift of thanks, he presented to them his treatise *On fate* (cf. Alex. *De fato* 164.3-165.13 Bruns). However, the gift does not seem to have been appreciated enough by the son of Septimius: shortly afterwards, as Emperor, Caracalla persecuted Aristotelian philosophers and forbade their *syssitia*, charging their Master, Aristotle, with the death of Alexander the Great. See Cassius Dio, *loc. cit.*: 'Toward the philosophers who were called Aristotelians he [Caracalla] showed bitter hatred in every way, even going so far as to desire to burn their books, and in particular he abolished their common messes (*syssitia*) in Alexandria and all the other privileges that they had enjoyed; his grievance against them was that Aristotle was supposed to have been concerned in the death of Alexander' (trans. Cary 1955; see also Natali 1996, 215). This may have caused the already declining Aristotelian school to sink even more quickly into oblivion (I owe information for this note to S. Menn). At any rate, whereas Longinus (ap. Porph. *loc. cit.*) still talks about Platonist scholars (*diadochoi*) in Athens, we do not know any Aristotelian scholar after Alexander of Aphrodisias. Alexander's title of *diadochos* in Athens is recorded with a full name of him as a Roman citizen, 'Titus Aurelius Alexander', in a newly discovered inscription: see Chaniotes 2004, text n. 4.

²¹ Porphyry (234-305/310 AD), a Neoplatonist, was apparently the first to produce commentaries both on Plato and Aristotle. By this, he further developed his teacher Plotinus' interest in the works by Aristotle, and was in his turn influential on later Neoplatonists and Neoplatonist schools. Porphyry's *Eisagoge* became part of the

A significant feature of Porphyry's work, and a common theme in later school literature, is the tendency to conceal the differences in thought between Aristotle and Plato.²² Later on, this 'harmonizing' tendency, to place Aristotle within a Neoplatonic framework, is most clearly represented by Simplicius (c. 490-560 AD), the author of extant commentaries on Aristotle's physics, psychology, and on the *Categories*.²³ Indeed, it was the harmonizing activity of the Neoplatonic commentators, aimed at neutralizing as far as possible the differences between Aristotelianism and Platonism, which permitted the incorporation of the principal points of the Aristotelian system into the new Neoplatonic one. We encounter a different attitude in the Christian Alexandrian philosopher John Philoponus (c. 490-570 AD) who also commented on Aristotle's logic, psychology and physics. As he believed in the world's creation, he vigorously opposed the eternity of the world, as well as the mortality of the soul. This led him not only to reject Alexander's interpretation (as Simplicius sometimes does, for the sake of his own interpretation), but also, at certain points, to criticize Aristotle himself.²⁴ In light of these different aims, Aristotle's works on physics (including *De anima*) required a different general interpretation (though not always a different literal one) from those found in Alexander's commentaries. Those of Simplicius and Philoponus replaced them.²⁵ These scholars preserve traces of Alexander's commentaries in a selective and critical way. Philoponus refers to him by name dozens of times and Simplicius hundreds of times, mostly in order to discuss or revise his interpretations (or variant readings) or to oppose them openly, in particular in the case of Philoponus. They did not particularly care to give the reader an overall impression of Alexander's views; they often cite him on passages that were or could be matters of dispute, while borrowing from him elsewhere without acknowledgement, as may have happened for many introductory summaries and for other technical parts of his commentaries.

Alexander's commentaries are 'continuous' (and in this respect would serve as a model for the major Neoplatonic commentaries²⁶ and for the 'commentarium magnum' of

canon as an introduction to the study of Aristotelian logic and, as such, the prelude to the Neoplatonic curriculum; it was itself the subject of commentaries, two of which are published in the *CAG*, namely those of Elias (*CAG* XVIII 1) and David (*CAG* XVIII 2). See further George Karamanolis' contribution to this volume.

²² Porphyry tried to show eg. that Aristotle's categories could be reconciled with Plato's theory of ideas: see Sorabji 1990b, 2; Hadot, P. 1990. The heated debate on the *Categories* has recently been rekindled; see de Haas 2001 and R. Chiaradonna's contribution to this volume.

²³ Thus, Simplicius aimed to show 'how the ancients are in agreement despite the apparent disagreement of their doctrine of the principles' see eg. Simplicius *in Phys.* 29.4f. with Baltussen 2002, esp. 182f., 176-178. On Simplicius' harmonizing attitude see also Menn 1992, 552f. and n. 13, on Simplicius *in De caelo* 485.16-22: Simplicius tries to identify Aristotle's God with Plato's Good (with special reference to Plato's *Rep.* 509b9), and quotes an otherwise unknown fragment from Aristotle *On prayer* (485.21f.= fr. 1 *Peri euchês*, p. 57 Ross) in order to show that Aristotle recognizes something 'beyond *nous* and *ousia*'. On the polemics of Simplicius against Philoponus, see Hoffmann 1987.

²⁴ Beside Aristotle's works, Philoponus also commented on the biblical *Hexaemeron* in his *De opificio mundi*. On him, see Sorabji 1987 and de Haas 1997, both including general bibliographies.

²⁵ See eg. for Philoponus Fazzo 2002b, esp. 160-88. The *Physics* and *De caelo* were also the subject of paraphrases by Themistius, see n. 19 above.

²⁶ See D'Ancona 2000 and 2002, n. 19: Syrianus seems to have revived Alexander's style of continuous commentary and to have transmitted it to his pupil Proclus. Subsequently, this model was adopted by Simplicius, Ammonius and Philoponus. However, a continuous commentary can engage in analysis to a greater or lesser degree: size and depth of commentaries on each single *lemma* vary considerably depending both on the author and on the text. Syrianus' commentary on *Metaphysics* 3-4 contains less analysis of the text than Alexander's does, and a great part of this analysis derives from Alexander. In fact, for book 4, Syrianus decided not to have a continuous commentary, but to concentrate only on some passages. He used Alexander's commentary while pursuing his own very different aim: the defence of Plato against Aristotle's criticisms, as we can see from his sharp words against Aristotle at the end of his commentary *in Met.* 195. 2-9 Kroll; cf. Luna 2000, 301-09 and Luna 2001, 72-98. Generally speaking, defence of Plato against Aristotle's criticisms can be regarded as a part of the work of reconciliation carried on by the 'harmonizing' commentators: see above, n. 23). On

Averroes).²⁷ They include a detailed analysis of the whole of Aristotle's text and discuss it 'lemma' by 'lemma' (in Greek, λήμμα, from the verb λαμβάνω: a section that is 'taken' for examination) one section after another. The commentary on individual lemmata in some cases begins with introductory summaries and recapitulations of previous discussions; these may perform the function of introducing, organizing and making easily accessible larger passages, chapters or groups of chapters, especially when their general sense is obscure, difficult or complicated. Usually the standard beginning involves a repetition or explanation of the content of the individual passage, which is to a greater or lesser extent paraphrased. This paraphrastic element can consist simply of making explicit the logical and syntactical links, for example by replacing pronouns with nouns, clarifying what the main verb is, changing the word order, or replacing ambiguous expressions with more obvious and incontrovertible ones, usually borrowed from within Aristotle's terminology. Sometimes, more than one explanation of the literal sense is given as possible; variant readings of the text can be recorded as well. Furthermore, if the topic is a complex one, the commentator may produce a logical analysis of the various passages in which Aristotle expresses a particular argument. In one way or another, implicitly or explicitly, it is a matter of clarifying a text by reducing it to easily recognizable forms of argument. Thus, the procedure consists in reducing to syllogisms those arguments that can be considered demonstrative in the strict sense, or in clarifying other procedures to which Aristotle may have recourse. One of them, for example, is the method of classifying concepts under one another as genus and species, so that what is said of the genus applies to each of the species as well, and what distinguishes one species from another can be regarded as a kind of *differentia specifica*.²⁸ Another method is distinguishing and eliminating different possibilities by means of binary division (διαιρέσις), leaving only one remaining possibility (*quod erat demonstrandum*). In these ways Aristotle's teaching comes to be rearranged from within, through the interpretation of individual texts. The content – the basic meaning of a text – is established primarily through this activity of clarifying and paraphrasing. It is precisely here that the commentator's work, by failing to draw attention to itself, tends to be almost automatically incorporated into that of his successors.

Another characteristic type of comment, bequeathed by Alexander and his predecessors to later commentators, consists of referring, explicitly or implicitly, to parallel texts. A

the other hand, some typical features of Neoplatonic commentaries are not yet found in Alexander's time: the formalistic introduction, with its standard set of preliminary questions (see here below § 5 and n. 50); and the subdivision of the commentary on each lemma into two parts: a *theōria*, which gives the general sense of the passage, and a *lexis* (so called at least in Olympiodorus) where the very wording of the text is explained. Such a distinction exists as a possible guideline in Proclus, but becomes rigid and formalistic in Olympiodorus, to the extent that his *lexis* does not always refrain from repeating, sometimes with very similar words, what has already been said in the previous *theōria*. The distinction between *theōria* and *lexis* was first emphasized by Festugière 1963; see further Segonds 1985, xliv-xlvii, lxxiii-lxxiv; Pépin and Saffrey 1987. On the same distinction in Asclepius, see Luna 2001, Étude III, in part. 103ff.

²⁷ Following Latin terminology, I use 'great commentary' to refer to Averroes' continuous commentaries (in Arabic generally *tasrīf*, or *sharḥ*), which include Aristotle's text section by section functioning as lemmata, and which are formally modelled on Alexander's continuous commentaries (See also Dante: '...Averrois, che 'l gran comento feo', *Inf.* IV, 144). The expression therefore does not simply indicate length, but is to be understood in a technical sense, by contrast with other types of commentary that Averroes wrote, namely the 'middle commentary' (*talkhīṣ*), which can be regarded a kind of a paraphrases (see however n. 38 below) and the epitome or compendium (*mukhtaṣār* or *tajrīd*, *jawami*). However, these types of commentary are not always consistently distinguished in Arabic terminology, as shown by Gutas 1993, especially 31-43.

²⁸ See eg. Dalimier 2000, Fazzo 2002b, 162-5. Averroes also displays a tendency to reorganize demonstrative arguments in syllogistic form, fitting perfectly into an interpretative tradition whose origin is characteristically Greek (see Hugonnard-Roche 2000), and is often likely to be following Alexander.

complex web of cross-reference is established from the outset as a general framework for the understanding of any single passage. This is not a neutral feature : it implies that the interpretation of any part of the corpus will suit the needs of a previously established system of doctrines. The assumption (hardly discussed until the twentieth century) is that there is general agreement between the different works of Aristotle and that therefore doctrines and theories expressed or implicit in one treatise can be employed to explain those in another.²⁹

Although this reworking has an overall impact on Aristotelian school-teaching, it is applied to and can be verified more directly from the terminology. Here, the difference can be measured by comparison with the natural flexibility of Aristotle's lexical usages. Step by step, the commentary tradition translates the different parts of his philosophical system into a standard language. This aims to be unified and unambiguous, so that the signifier and the signified correspond to each other in a consistent way.³⁰ The process of terminological simplification occurs for the most part without discussion. Still, it can be detected in particular cases, especially where Aristotle's own language becomes ambiguous, or for any other reason is not undisputed and needs clarification, which means, translation into the language of the school; or where texts contradict one another; or where they are in contrast with an established doctrine, so to produce an exegetical problem (often called *ἀπορία*, which literally means: 'lack of a way out'). This is also a well-developed part of Alexander's commentary.³¹ It is here that the focus on terminology reveals its greatest ideological power, helping to fix and codify Aristotelianism into an established scholastic form. For, by distinguishing between different meanings of a single term and by paying attention to definitions, it is possible to smooth out contradictions between one work and another, so to preserve the assumption that Aristotle's teachings are basically consistent and that his individual works are coherent with one another, suitable therefore to be taught in the school.

²⁹ It has thus been possible to say that the commentators explain Aristotle through Aristotle, in a similar way to that in which the philologists in Alexandria explained Homer through other passages of Homer. See, among other discussions by P. L. Donini, his 1995. The points of contact between philosophical commentary and Hellenistic philology have been emphasized by Hadot, P. 1987; see also Abbamonte 1995, to which I refer especially for the analysis of Alexander's method of paraphrasing (see more fully Abbamonte *forthcoming*). The importance and intensity of the discussion of terminology, indicated below, can also be regarded as a pointer in this direction.

³⁰ The coupling of *ὑλη* (matter) and *εἶδος* (form) in Alexander, taken as opposite concepts, is a case in point. 'Matter' in Alexander is consistently called *ὑλη*, and this is not as obvious as it might appear. The comparison with Aristotle's texts shows that the word *ὑλη* translates in Alexander a plurality of Aristotelian expressions, which indicate any kind of substrate, such as *τὸ ὑποκείμενον* (in the coming-to-be process), *τὸ ἐξ οὗ* (in the physical theory of the four causes), *τὸ δεκτικόν* (the receptacle), *τὸ δυνάμει* (in opposition to *τὸ ἐνεργείᾳ*). Hence the scholastic concept of 'matter', which is quite general and which can be defined only negatively, by its lack of qualification and determination, and by its being therefore truly 'susceptible of opposite determinations' (*τὸ τῶν ἐναντίων δεκτικόν*). By contrast, the word *εἶδος* in Alexander's school implies any kind of determination and is thus used to translate, e.g., Aristotle's *μορφή*, *σχῆμα*, *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*, *οὐσία*; its definition is complementary to that of matter, and it is as broad as possible ('that in virtue of which everything is what it is'). The simplification of the two opposite concepts is reciprocally related. Hence the *coupling* of form and matter, that serves as a general explanatory scheme in the soul-body relation and in a whole range of other contexts where it was not directly introduced by Aristotle (whose original wording often had just one of the two terms, or neither of them). This process is not an innovation on Alexander's part; rather, he brings to achievement and to fruition the work of his predecessors. This can be gathered from Alexander's discussions of problems or '*aporiai*' where multiple solutions are recorded: there, each stage appears to approach a step closer to the conceptual simplification described above. This happens not only in the aporetic sections within Alexander's commentaries, but also, and more particularly, in some of the short pieces called *Quaestiones* (in Greek: *ἀπορία καὶ λύσεις*) collected by I. Bruns, *CAG*, Suppl. 2.2, Berlin 1892). On the whole process see Fazzo 2002a, 14, 43-112; for some examples from Alexander's commentaries, *ibid.*, 45 n. 63.

³¹ On the part played by problems in the commentary tradition, with particular reference to Alexander, see Fazzo 2002a, 23-35, 213-216.

Within the commentary, the discussion of problems is often placed at the end of the interpretation of the individual lemmata (or subsidiary lemmata if the lemma is broken up into smaller units). There can be, and indeed often are, multiple solutions for single problems. These multiple solutions might count as evidence of the tendency for interpretations to be preserved in layers. Each of them might have been deemed authoritative at some time within the tradition, and this is possibly the reason why the commentator avoids making any dogmatic choices. Moreover, the problem/solution (*aporia/lysis*) format has the advantage of remaining open not only to earlier interpretations but also to subsequent ones; later commentators may record the different solutions reported by their predecessors and then easily make the transition to their own.³² Here one can see how this way of taking problems into account contributes to scholastic systematisation: the system can be presented as coherent, complete and permanently valid, provided that it incorporates the remaining inconsistencies in the form of an open spectrum of exegetical possibilities.

As a result, the main developments in the reading, interpretation and re-thinking of the Aristotelian texts tend to be preserved in the different phases of the commentary tradition, even though later commentators had a very different ideological perspective from Alexander's. For such developments directly answer the requirements of the school: simplicity, doctrinal consistency, clarity of exposition, and a strong appeal to the authority of the ancients and of Aristotle in particular, especially with regard to basic philosophical subjects such as logic and physics. In this way, mediated and restructured by generations of commentators, Aristotelianism came to constitute the universal grammar of philosophical language and scholarly thought.

IV. The *fortuna* of Alexander and other Greek commentators

Revivals of interest in the Greek commentators on Aristotle have played a part in or followed, usually within a few decades, any major periods of recovery and reconsideration of the Aristotelian corpus itself: in the Arabic³³ and Latin Middle Ages,³⁴ in the Renaissance,³⁵ in the modern period (the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the

³² For this reason one can assume as a working hypothesis – even though in most cases it cannot be proven – that the last solution mentioned is also the last to be put forward in time and therefore the most likely to have been developed by the commentator himself, see Fazzo 2002a, 25f n. 26, 27 n. 29, 199-201, 207-210.

³³ The relation between the production of Arabic commentaries on Aristotle and the availability of Greek commentaries is particularly close in the case of Averroes, see Druart 1994; D'Ancona 2002. On Averroes' bibliography see Endress 1999.

³⁴ Only a minor part of Aristotelian scholarship in Latin Middle Age was directly affected by the interpretations of the Greek commentators. But especially after the Fourth Crusade (1204) and the subsequent period of fifty-seven years of Latin rule in Byzantium, an increasing number of texts became available in Greek. William of Moerbeke, the main Aristotle's translator of this era, produced translations from Greek commentaries as well (edited in the series *Corpus Latinum commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum*, Louvain – Paris 1957-). He usually had no previous Latin translation, and was therefore something of a pioneer in this field (whereas eg. in the case of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, he did not produce a completely new translation of his own, but revised for the most part the *translatio 'media'*, see G. Vuillemin-Diem's introduction [above, n. 14] p. 18ff.). An important research tool is the *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum: Medieval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries. Annotated Lists and Guides* (Washington, D.C. 1960-), which includes entries on the *fortuna* of individual commentators; see in particular Todd 2003 and Cranz 1960 and 1971.

³⁵ Both in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance the production of Latin translations from the commentators was connected with the contemporary production of original commentaries. For Medieval commentaries, see the inventory by C. Lohr in a series of subsequent issues of *Traditio*, 23-30 (1967-1974). For the Renaissance commentaries see Lohr 1988. Both of Lohr's inventories include: a concise preface listing the different literary forms within the exegetical literature; bio-bibliographical notes on every author; an indication of manuscripts and editions for every work. They are complemented by a common catalogue of incipits and

twentieth century, when the standard editions were produced) and again in our own time (although with the change of perspective described at the beginning of section §1).³⁶ There is thus a connection between the translation of Aristotelian texts from the Greek, the circulation and translation of the relevant Greek commentaries, and the production of new commentaries.

This did not prevent Aristotle's texts from circulating in conjunction with Arabic commentaries, namely, those of Averroes.³⁷ But Averroes, in his turn, made extensive use of Arabic translations of the Greek commentaries, as we can see in the case of Book 12 of the *Metaphysics*: Alexander's commentary on this book being now lost, it is chiefly preserved in quotations within Averroes' own commentary. In his preface, Averroes states that for the portion of the book where he has Alexander's commentary (about two-thirds of the whole) he intends 'to summarize it clearly and briefly' (Averroes *in Met.*, p. 1393 Bouyges). In the light of this preface and of many subsequent references and discussions of Alexander's exegesis, it seems that part of the *Great Commentary* of Averroes on the *Metaphysics* was structured as a 'super-commentary', that is, as a commentary on Alexander's commentary on the *Metaphysics*.³⁸

More generally, in the Arabic Middle Ages Alexander held a central position among commentators: he was 'the Commentator' *par excellence*, just as Aristotle was 'the Philosopher' *par excellence*. Even his name was assimilated into the language of the *falāsifa*: the first syllable, 'Al-', was taken to be the definite article 'al-': 'al-Iskandar al-Afrūdūsī' (or: al-Afrūdīsī). Because of his unrivalled importance, Alexander was able to act as mediator between the Aristotelian text and Arabic culture. He was regarded not only as clarifying Aristotle's doctrine, but also as extending it in a theological direction (on the

explicit: Lohr 1995. In recognition of the impact of the Greek commentators on Renaissance culture, Charles Lohr has initiated a project to reprint their Latin edition (*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca versiones Latinae temporis resuscitatarum litterarum = CAGL*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1990-). A new wave of scholarship on Renaissance Aristotelianism was inspired in the second half of the twentieth century by the studies of Charles Schmitt; basic references to these can be found in Goulet 1989, 441f. and Todd 2003. See especially Schmitt 1988; Lohr and Sparr 1988; Krayer 1996a; Blackwell and Kusukawa 1999; Bianchi 2003. There are worthwhile sub-topics regarding the history of Aristotelianism in Italy. Best known and outstanding is the school of Aristotelianism in the Veneto, both for its contribution to development of scientific method and for the influence it exercised in Europe, through the medium of Padua's University: see among others Piaia 2002; Olivieri 1983; and Nardi's fundamental essays, Nardi 1965. By contrast, sixteenth-century Aristotelians in Milan and Pavia are almost unknown and deserve further research. A part of their activity can be detected through the *marginalia* in the margins of the volumes owned by scholars of the circle of Ottaviano Ferrari and of his pupil Cesare Rovida (both of whom were from Milan and taught at the University of Pavia during the XVI c.). Their working method was based on: a marked commitment to the study of Aristotle's Greek commentaries; reading groups on Greek texts, where some commentary and explanatory activity was also held in Greek; use of various kinds of handwritten notes in the margins of their printed editions. These notes include: variant readings, critical remarks and explanatory glosses (usually in Latin, sometimes in Greek), cross-references within the works of Aristotle and of all his available commentators. A *Greek* commentary on *Physics* I-III by Rovida may be consulted in MS Bibl. Ambr., Milan, S 89 inf., fols 5-41. See Fazzo 1999a, esp. 74f.

³⁶ For this reason the resources that make it possible to reconstruct the *fortuna* of Aristotle also shed light on that of the commentators. Basic bibliographical references in Goulet 1989, 441f.

³⁷ Averroes' commentaries are included in the Giunta Latin edition of Aristotles *Opera omnia* (first edition: Venice 1550-1552, edited again in 1562, 1573-1576; the 1562 edition has been reprinted in Frankfurt a. M., 1962).

³⁸ As for the fragments of Alexander's commentary on *Metaphysics* 12 preserved by Averroes, there is a pioneering collection of quotations by Averroes which is still the standard treatment: Freudenthal 1884. Alexander turns out to be a primary source for Averroes in at least one of his 'middle commentaries' as well, namely his *talkhīṣ* to Aristotle's *De gen. et corr.*, where the starting point for Averroes' paraphrase is often Alexander's commentary rather than Aristotle's treatise, as noticed in Fazzo 2002b, esp. 188. Moreover, in at least one case it turns out that Averroes commented directly on a work by (or attributed to) Alexander: *De intellectu* (*Mantissa* II, *CAG* Suppl. Ar. II.1, 106.18-116.24). A commentary on this treatise (apparently a continuous one: a *Sharḥ maqālat al-Iskandar fi 'l-' aql*) is listed in Endress 1999, 374, § 43.5.

basis of some short sections from Proclus' *Elements of Theology* that were falsely attributed to him) and in the direction of a belief in divine creation (on the basis of two short works deriving from Philoponus' *Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World* that were also falsely attributed to him). It is no accident that it was the Arabs who preserved Alexander's treatises *On Providence* and *On the Principles of the Universe*, whose Greek original was lost at some stage (apparently quite soon) during late antiquity.³⁹

Starting in the second half of the fifteenth century, Byzantine scholars established schools in Italy that taught the use of the Greek commentators as aids to the interpretation of Aristotelian texts.⁴⁰ The earliest printed editions of the Aristotelian corpus (first in Latin translation and then in the original Greek, beginning with the famous edition of Aldus Manutius, 1495-98) were rapidly followed by editions of the commentators (these also, first in Latin translation).⁴¹ It soon became standard practice to refer to Aristotelian treatises together with at least one of the Greek commentators, whose interpretation could be discussed and criticized, but was usually the starting point for the basic understanding of the text.⁴² It is clear therefore that Renaissance philosophy as well, being often concerned with Aristotelian themes and issues, found in the commentators a valuable resource for helping Hellenists in the difficult task of reading Aristotle without the support of outdated medieval scholastic interpretations.⁴³ The commentators represented the most ancient and, in a sense, the most authoritative interpretation of Aristotle. This is reflected in the fact that the sixteenth-century debate over the immortality of the soul among Aristotelians at the University of Padua was regarded as a dispute between Averroists and 'Alexandrists'. It can also be seen in the role played by 'Simplicius', the Peripatetic interlocutor, in Galileo's *Dialogue on the Two Great World Systems* (1632). These examples are well-known, and by no means isolated. They reveal the role played by the commentators in

³⁹ Both are now available: see Genequand 2001; Thillet 2003; Fazzo 1999b. The last (and apparently the only) evidence in Greek for Alexander's treatise *On providence* in Greek is from the first half of the fifth c. AD and is probably a second hand one. The author, Cyril of Alexandria, gives a number of quotations but does not seem to know the whole of the treatise. See Fazzo 2000. A picture of the *status quaestionis* concerning the Arabic translations by or attributed to Alexander can be found in the article on 'Alexandros d'Aphrodise' by Goulet and Ouad 1989 with the relevant up-dating by Fazzo 2003a.

⁴⁰ See eg. Todd 1994. Prominent Byzantine scholars such as John Argyropoulos, Gemistos Plethon and Bessarion arrived in Italy for the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438, where the union between the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Church was discussed as a means of securing Western aid against the Turks; see on this Wilson 1992, 54-67. Bessarion, who accepted to move to the Roman Catholic Church and was made a cardinal, remained in Italy (except for diplomatic missions) from 1440. Though dedicating himself to church affairs and politics, he was himself a scribe, a translator, a philologist, a philosopher, and a collector of manuscripts. He left his books to the Republic of Venice, thus forming the core collection of the Biblioteca Marciana. On his scholarly and editorial activity see Mioni 1976. Many other scholars arrived after 1453, escaping the Turkish domination of Constantinople. They remained in Italy teaching Greek, editing texts, copying and revising manuscripts. For a map of their editorial activity see Staikos 1998. Some Italian humanists as well, such as Poliziano and Barbaro, promoted the use of Greek commentators for the study of Aristotle; both are discussed, with references, in Kraye 1996b: Barbaro, 144-5, Poliziano, 148. See on Barbaro the following note as well.

⁴¹ The first printed edition of a commentary on Aristotle was Ermolao Barbaro's translation (1481) of Themistius' paraphrasis in *De anima* (1481). As a humanist, Barbaro intended to translate philosophical texts in a more elegant Latin than that used by medieval translators. He therefore both influenced philologists and was criticized by them (see Kraye 1996b, esp. 146) as shown eg. by the critical comments of his contemporary Nogarola reported by Nardi 1965, 367: *Hermolai interpretationem, praeter vates et ariolos, intelliget nemo!*. This clearly fits with J. Kraye's remark (*ibid.*, 143): until the XVI c., many professional philosophers preferred to stick to the medieval translations (especially William of Moerbeke's, above, n. 34) whose terminology allowed them to maintain both a consistency within the scholastic commentary tradition and a continuity between their own arguments and those found in Aristotle's texts.

⁴² See n. 35 above.

⁴³ Evidence of this kind of connection with the Greek commentators is contained in the abundance of annotations found in the margins of the earliest printed Greek editions of the commentators. Some examples are discussed in Fazzo 1999a.

opening up Aristotelianism to a full and lively debate. It is a role that they play to this day.

V. Recent trends

We have seen that it was only in the twentieth century, after the two World Wars, that the study of *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* began to come into its own as a field of research.⁴⁴ Among the first to make profitable use of the CAG were those Orientalists, chiefly from Germany, who were interested in Greek-Arabic connections and translations. In the case of Alexander, the availability of critical editions of the texts made it possible to identify the Greek counterparts of many short pieces transmitted in Arabic under his name but with titles different from those familiar to us.

A first list of Arabic texts attributed to Alexander was drawn up by A. Dietrich in 1964, and supplemented by J. Van Ess in 1966.⁴⁵ Still, items included in this list were heterogeneous and mixed up. By the end of the century, further advances enabled scholars to distinguish, at least in a majority of cases, between genuine and spurious works, between whole texts and extracts, between single texts and groups or collections of texts, between literal translations and free adaptations. As for these latter – which turned out usually to be early versions, originating from the circle of al-Kindī in the ninth century – it was furthermore possible to detect the underlying working methods, and to relate them to the specific cultural inclinations that had motivated the translators.⁴⁶

In the English-speaking world, interest in the Greek commentators derived its initial impetus from those who favoured an analytical approach to Aristotelian texts. Because of the variety of positions they took, the commentators became interlocutors in dialogues on themes and problems in ancient philosophy that were revived on account of their potential relevance for contemporary debates.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Extensive use of the CAG lies at the foundation of the first general history of Greek Aristotelianism, Moraux 1973-2001 (Paul Moraux was the founder of the Aristoteles-Archiv at the Free University in Berlin; his early monograph is a pioneer work on Alexander: Moraux 1942). Moraux 1973-2001, vol. 3, devoted to Alexander, was published posthumously under the editorship of J. Wiesner in 2001, accompanied by a chapter on ethics and determinism and an extensive and up-to-date bibliography (618-650), both by R. W. Sharples. For a general summary of Alexander's philosophy see Sharples 1987.

⁴⁵ See Dietrich 1964, esp. 92-100; van Ess 1966, 148-168 (hence the reference system in use for the Arabic Alexander, with 'D' or 'vE' followed by an index number). These contributions have been a useful starting point but they are now severely outdated: as mentioned above, many items turned out not to be Alexander's at all; in some cases different translations were made of the same Greek original (and different translations might have been revised versions of one another); some items are not single texts but groups or collections of texts: for details and bibliography see Goulet and Aouad 1989 with Fazzo 2003a. A new reference system is therefore an obvious *desideratum*.

⁴⁶ In this period and context the use made of Alexander's texts typically involved a sort of circularity; those translations are not literal because they have been adapted to the requirements and interests of the al-Kindī circle (especially in astrology: for example, *On Providence* was converted into a treatise *On Government by the Spheres*), while al-Kindī's own writings freely incorporated material drawn from this Arabic (that is, Arabized) Alexander. See Fazzo and Wiesner 1993, 119-53. A milestone in the study of translations in the al-Kindī circle is Endress 1972; see recently Adamson 2002. On the Greek to Arabic translation movement see Gutas 1998.

⁴⁷ Such a perspective will be presented in Richard Sorabji's forthcoming sourcebook in three volumes, *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-600 AD, A Sourcebook*, arranged by issues rather than by authors (60 chapters with about 350 sub-topics): vol 1, Psychology (with Ethics and Religion), vol 2, Physics, vol 3, Logic and Metaphysics. Each chapter has a narrative by Sorabji introducing the topic along with the translations. It does not cover the whole of the CAG, but includes some items not in the CAG. Some other collections of papers have already been cited: Sorabji 1990a, which includes a general bibliography on the commentators (485-524); Goulet-Cazé 2000; Moreschini 1995; also Wiesner 1987. For an updated general bibliography, see John Sellars' contribution to the present volume. Other collections concern single authors: on Aspasius see Alberti and Sharples 1999; on Alexander see Movia 2003; on Simplicius, Hadot, I. 1987b; on Philoponus, Sorabji 1987. Among translations, the most notable is the impressive undertaking of the translation of the *Commentaria in*

In ethics, a lively debate on determinism and free choice gave a central role not only to Aristotle but also to Alexander of Aphrodisias. As an Aristotelian, Alexander opposes Stoic determinism in his writings *On Fate* (Περὶ εἰμαρμένης).⁴⁸ By these, he devoted himself to a theme that was not to be found in Aristotle's works. Still, he used Aristotelian conceptual equipment and terminology, so that his work is marked by a spirit of continuity with Aristotle.

By contrast with Alexander's zealous orthodoxy, a commentator who has attracted attention for his disagreements with Aristotle is the Christian John Philoponus. He represents a special, and in many respects atypical, case of a commentator who takes a firm position against Aristotle on central issues of Aristotelian physics, especially on the eternity of the world.⁴⁹

As for Simplicius, Philoponus' contemporary and rival, and for the other Neoplatonic commentators, one of the most widely studied aspects of their work is the way in which the very structure of their commentaries served the needs of their school. This is particularly apparent in commentaries on the *Categories*, the first work of Aristotle that students were assigned to read. Thus, the 'Prologues' of the different Neoplatonist and Christian commentators from the latter part of the fifth century onwards (Ammonius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus, Simplicius, David) were formalized into a series of canonical questions. The answers provided by the commentator had not only a value as an aid to reading the *Categories* but also a pedagogical function of their own.⁵⁰

An important trend in very recent scholarship has been an interest in exegetical methods and their theoretical foundations.⁵¹ This has led scholars to investigate the relationship between text and commentary, which was usually taken for granted in the past. Attention is now focused on how Aristotelianism was constructed by the commentators, and how

Aristotelem Graeca into English directed by R. Sorabji ('Ancient Commentators on Aristotle', London and Ithaca, NY). For recent translations from Alexander, see the article on this author in Goulet 1989 and 2003; Sharples 2004; an edition and translation of the so-called *Mantissa* (Suppl. 2.1 p. 101-186) by R. W. Sharples with the collaboration of A. Lemoine, is in preparation for the Budé series.

⁴⁸ We have of Alexander a long and a short treatise *On fate* (the major one is edited in *CAG, Suppl.* II.2. 164-212; the minor treatise in *CAG, Suppl.* II.1. 179.24-186.31 = *Mantissa* XXV). Moreover, his writings includes other short pieces on related topics, namely *On What is in Our Power* (Περὶ τοῦ ἐφ' ἡμῖν, *Suppl.* II.1. 169.33-172.15, 172.16-175.32 = *Mantissa* XXII and XXIII) and *On Chance* (Περὶ τύχης, *Suppl.* II.1. 176.1-179.23 = *Mantissa* XXIV). All of them are translated in Sharples 1983, see now also Sharples 2004; for the major treatise *On fate* see also Thillet 1984 and the translations by C. Natali and E. Tetamo, Milano 1996 and by A. Magris, Firenze 1996. There has been much discussion since then; see Sharples 'General bibliography' in Moraux 1973-2001, vol. 3 under 'Fate, determinism'. For a comprehensive view, see Donini 1995, 72-89; Donini 1987b. Alexander opposes the Stoics not only in the context of ethics but also in that of physics, as it is clear both in his *On Fate* and in his treatise *On Mixture*, which is for exactly this reason an important (although polemical) source for Stoic physics: see Todd 1976.

⁴⁹ See above. An indication of the interest prompted by a 'dissident' interpreter is the fact that the first volume to appear in the series of translations directed by R. Sorabji (above, n. 47) was an edition of the fragments of Philoponus' treatise *Against Aristotle on the eternity of the world* (Wildberg 1987: not identical with *Against Proclus on the eternity of the world*, mentioned above, which has been preserved in its entirety and is also now appearing in English translation in the series).

⁵⁰ See Hadot, I. 1987a, 99-119 and Hadot, I. 1990, esp. vol. 1 19-182. It was the introductory function of commentary on the *Categories* that prompted Simplicius to include elements of the doctrine of categories after Aristotle, based on the commentaries of Porphyry and Iamblichus: see Hoffmann 2000. See also Hadot, I. 1996 with the bibliography indicated there, 456-63, and Baltussen 2002.

⁵¹ Contributions from this perspective include *inter alia* Donini 1994 and Romano 1992; on Alexander in particular Abbamonte 1995, Bonelli 2001a and 2001b; Accattino and Donini 1996; Fazzo 2002a, 2002b esp. 161-169; see moreover Sharples' general bibliography included in Moraux 2001, 618-650. For a comparison with Plato's interpreters see Tarrant 2000; on Theophrastus' approach to Plato's texts, Baltussen 2000, esp. 56-70; Baltussen 2003.

the understanding of Aristotle's texts was affected by the fact that they thought, taught and wrote through the medium of Aristotle's words and works.

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