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The “Perfect King” and his Philosophers

Politics, Religion and Graeco-Arabic Philosophy in Safavid Iran: the case of the Uṭūlūğiyyā

Marco Di Branco*

Abstract

During the long span of time which divides the age of Avicenna and Suhrawardi on the one hand, and that of the Safavid empire on the other, the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle seems prima facie to have sunk into oblivion in Persia. Closer study of the manuscripts of this work housed in the libraries of Iran, and of their readers, permits us to ascertain that this is not the case. This article, issued from the missions conducted within the context of the ERC Project 249431 “Greek into Arabic”, narrows the focus on the early Safavid era and shows the background of the interest in the pseudo-Theology of some scholars of that milieu. In particular, the discovery of a Prologue to the pseudo-Theology by Giyāṯ al-Dīn Manṣūr Daštākī (d. 949/1541) is accounted for, and some implications of this text are discussed.

1. Searching for a method

In the last decade, studies concerning philosophy in Iran during the Safavid period have experienced a significant increase: several works (of uneven quality) have been published, focusing on individual figures of thinkers linked to the political and cultural milieus of Isfahan, Shiraz, and Tabriz. Most of these contributions consist of publishing unedited texts, an approach that has the great merit of having made available new materials. What I would like to do in this paper is to narrow the focus on the historical-philosophical context of the circulation of what is in all likelihood the most important among the Graeco-Arabic works widespread in Safavid Iran: the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle. Rula Jurdi Abisaab,

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1 The most important contributions are the following: S.H. Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shirāzī. His Life and Works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy, Oxford U. P., Oxford-New York 2007 (Journal of Semitic Studies, Suppl. 18); R. Pourjavady, Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran. Najm al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Nayrizī and his Writings, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2011 (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, 82); J. Pfeiffer (ed.), Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th-15th Century Tabriz, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2014 (Iran Studies, 8).

Colin P. Mitchell, and Andrew J. Newman have shown how promising is to contextualize the doctrines in their ground-breaking studies on the dissemination of Shi‘ism in Iran promoted by Ismā‘īl I and his successors, on the epistolography produced by the Persian chancellery between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and on the society, history, politics and culture of the Safavid Iran. The two pillars of the studies on Safavid philosophy are represented by volume IV of En Islam iranien by Henry Corbin and by the path-breaking essay by Gerhard Endress “Philosophische Ein-Band Bibliotheken aus Isfahan”. The latter shows how this topic is best approached, namely through an integrated analysis which takes into account not only the philological, codicological, and prosopographical aspects, but also the philosophical, theological, and political implications of the texts discussed. In fact, during the Safavid era both the transmission and the fruition of philosophical texts are closely connected to the political and religious sphere. As Endress has it, “von Ideologen der Schia – die ihre Theologie mit dem Instrumentarium des rationalistischen Kalām schmiedete und die zur Integration der falsafa fand – wurde solche Philosophie als Paradigma eines universalen Führungsanspruchs in religiösen Staat der Safawiden erneuert und systematisch formulierte.”

In this paper, I will discuss a case in point of the cross-pollination between philosophy and political theology, namely the circulation of the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle at the Safavid court. Setting the scene for this implies first to survey the interplay among political activity, religious doctrine and philosophical speculation during the time frame which spans from the Safavid rise to power in Iran (907/1501) to the Kingdom of Shāh ʿAbbās, the most important ruler of the dynasty. It is in his reign (1052/1077-1642/1667) that the so called “School of Isfahan” flourished. The interest of the Safavid intellectuals for Graeco-Arabic philosophy is directly connected with specific political and religious issues; hence, the study of the reception of Graeco-Arabic philosophical texts in Persia must include an analysis of its historical context, if one wants to dig out the causes of a cultural and ideological nature which determined the popularity of such texts.

2. The dialectic between Sufism and Shi‘ism in the age of Shāh Ismā‘īl I (r. 907-930/1501-1524)

As is well known, the rise to power of the Safavid dynasty originated from a political and religious movement which took advantage of the religious syncretisms widespread in Anatolia and Persia, which combined elements coming not only from Shi‘ism and the Sunni messianism, but also from Buddhism and Mazdeism. This movement also created an effective hierarchical and militarized organization, which led it to the conquest and unification of Iran. However, once his leadership was

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8 Ibid., p. 11.


consolidated, Shāh Ismāʿīl, the first ruler of the dynasty, had to face the inevitable tensions between the populist and millenarist agenda of the Qizilbāš, i.e. the mystical traditions pervading Azerbaijan and Anatolia, and the need for stability and order implied in the establishment of the reign.11

Ismāʿīl, who was still under the influence of the apocalyptic propaganda of sufi origin, initially portrayed himself as a reincarnation of ʿAlī and as a manifestation of the divine light granting the royal investiture (farr).12 Nevertheless, already during the first years of his reign, the king invited to Persia some famous Shiʿite ʿulamāʾ coming mainly from the area of Ǧabāl Ṭāmil in Syria, and placed them in key positions with administrative and religious duties, in order to spread the Twelver Shiʿism through the country.13 This situation led to the establishment of an articulated dialectic relation between Shiʿism and Sufism, as is apparent in the documents of Ismāʿīl’s chancellery.14 A synthesis of mysticism and millenarist views was predictably the outcome of such a move, a mix which incorporates elements of the Shiʿite Sufism and of the juridical and religious doctrines deriving from the ‘orthodox’ Twelver Shiʿism. As has been pointed out, at the court of Ismāʿīl “we encounter a visual use of Shiʿite icons and slogans that, on the face of it, belied the lack of sophisticated appreciation of any legal and theological doctrines at these early dates (…). In those days men knew not of the Jaʿfarī faith and the rules of the 12 imāms”.15 As a consequence, the first Safavid ruler did not hesitate to react energetically against some heterodox aspects of Sufism: in particular, the cult of Ābū Muslim (d. 138/755), the celebrated hero of the ‘Abbasid revolution who was an object of extraordinary veneration in the extremist mystical milieus of Anatolia and Persia.16 It thus appears, already at this early stage of the Safavid rule, one of the most typical features of the relationship between power and religion as it was conceived of by the members of this dynasty: the habit of identifying and selecting


14 See for example Bashir, “Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions” (quoted above, n. 11), pp. 38-41.


leading personalities within the theological, mystical or philosophical circles, in order to co-opt them in the juridical apparatus; to this, it should be added the talent to replace them with personalities of even radically different leanings, depending on the political needs of the moment.

3. Shāh Ṭahmāsp (r. 930-984/1524-1576) and the transition from ‘popular’ to ‘doctrinal’ Shī‘ism

The year 938/1532 is that of the great religious change of Shāh Ṭahmāsp, son and successor of Ismā‘īl, which the same king defined as tawba (repentance) – a word of Qur’ānic origin very common both in Sufi and in Shi‘ite tradition. The effects of this “repentance” are visible in two royal decrees: the first is dated 939/1533; the second, while bearing no precise date, came a bit later. These documents attest Shāh Ṭahmāsp’s endorsement to some Twelver ‘ulamā’, among them, the prominent figure was ‘Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Karaki, the greatest jurist of the Safavid court in the period from the end of the reign of Ismā‘īl to 940/1533, when he died. Karakī was the author of works written originally in Arabic and soon translated into Persian which had an amazing circulation and which formed the doctrinal basis of a large-scale campaign in order to spread Shi‘ism in the Persian land. This campaign, inaugurated by Shāh Ismā‘īl I, was continued with much greater determination by Shāh Ṭahmāsp: under Karakī’s guidance the Shi‘ite clergy, often marginalized in their areas of origin, reached remarkable power not only in the religious sphere but also in economic and administrative activities. In addition, Karakī became the promoter of a renewed attack against the Sufi brotherhoods and the popular cults, reaching the goal of establishing himself as the unique reference authority for legal and doctrinal issues. According to him, Shāh Ṭahmāsp was a Shi‘ite political and spiritual leader, no longer a Sufi, as Shāh Ismā‘īl was.

Nevertheless, not all the Twelver ‘ulamā’ supported Karakī. Rather, many of them openly challenged his leadership. As a consequence, showing a complete lack of ethical and religious scruples, he did not hesitate to make agreements with the Qizilbash against his Shi‘ite opponents. According to Mitchell,


21 Ibid., pp. 23-24.


22 Cf. R.M. Savory, “The Principal Offices of the Safavid State during the Reign of Isma‘îl I (907-30/1501-24)”, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 23 (1960), pp. 91-105 (repr. in Id., Studies on the History of Safavid Iran, Variorum, London 1987 [Collected Studies, 256]); Id., “The Principal Offices of the Safavid State during the Reign of Ṭahmāsp (930-84/1524-76)”, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 24 (1961), pp. 65-85 (repr. in Id., Studies on the History of Safavid Iran). Interestingly, also in the second of the two decrees of Shāh Ṭahmāsp’s mentioned above there is no explicit prohibition of Sufi practices or philosophy; on the contrary, as noticed by Arjomand, “Two Decrees of Shāh Ṭahmāsp” (quoted above, n. 18), p. 256, the decree states that the officials of the court, when not attending their duties, can
in the epoch of Shāh Ṭahmāsp we can observe a kind of ‘bifurcation’ in the Safavid intelligentsia: on the one hand, there was the ‘orthodox’ Shi‘ite clergy, in part of Arab origin; on the other, the Persian notables, generally devoted to philosophy, hermeneutics and devotional mysticism.24 “Although these network were entangled and shifting constantly – Mitchell states – it would be reasonable to suggest that sixteenth-century Safavid epistemology was defined roughly by two broad intellectual camps: the juridically minded Shi‘ite émigrés and their Iranian supporters and those Neoplatonic influenced Persian scholastics who focused on logic, mathematics, and theosophy”.25 In fact, some ‘Neoplatonie’ (išrâqi) scholars would soon become key players in the philosophical-political scene of the Safavid court. However, some doubts can be cast on the radical division drawn by Mitchell: the sources suggest a more nuanced assessment, because it was often the case that members of both trends did belong to the same family (in some cases, they were father and son), not to mention the fact that various matrimonial alliances were soon established between Arab emigrants and Persian asyâd.26

After Karaki’s death, the role of the first jurisconsult of the empire was assumed by Qâdi-i Ġahân Qazvînî (d. 961/1554). The scion of a prominent family of Qazvin, he studied logic, philosophy and astronomy with the famous theologian and philosopher Ġalal al-Dîn al-Dawânî (b. 830/1426) at the Madrasa-i Mansûriyya of Shiraz, one of the most important cultural centres of Persia since pre-Safavid times.27 Thanks also to his training, Qâdi-i-Ġahân proved to be able to discuss with those milieus, which had been severely marginalized in the period marked by Karaki’s hegemony; he established good relations with both philosophers and theosophists and with the Sufis of the influential brotherhood Nûrbašîyya. Nevertheless, at his death, the Shi‘ite theological-bureaucratic apparatus regained the control of the situation, resuming hostile actions against the Sufis: eventually the Nûrbâšîyya decided to abandon Persia.28 Among the most zealous opponents of Sufism and philosophy there is Šayḫ Hasan,  

“read the books of the masters of Sufism and sincerity, like the books of ethics which are spiritual medicine”, a label which is evocative if not directly of Rhazes’ al-Tibb al-râhî, at least of the literary genre of the “Refinement of Character”, famously combining Neoplatonism and Aristotelian ethics. On the various works of Persian authors of the XIth and XIIth centuries bearing the title Spiritual Medicine cf. R. Brague, Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi (Rhazes), La médecine spirituelle. Traduction de l’arabe, introduction, notes et bibliographie, Flammarion, Paris 2003, p. 37 with n. 95.


26 Cf. infra, p. 196.

the author of a treatise against the mystics and ‘gnostics’ (‘arifân), the ‘Umdat al-maqaṣl fi kufr abl al-ḍālāl (Best Arguments Regarding the Infidelity of the Misguided).29 Although strongly influential at court, he still had to face fierce opposition, coming fully to light only after Shâh Ṭâmâsp’s death. The last years of the latter’s reign were in fact characterized by a further rigorous change (the so-called “Second Repentance”: 963/1556), during which Šâh Ḥasan issued a new series of decrees on ethical and religious matters which were allegedly inspired by ʿAlî ibn Abî Taḥlib himself in a dream.30 It is quite evident that Shâh Ṭâmâsp’s choice of relying on the more rigorous Shiʿite clergy, modelling in this sense the madrasa system and using only bureaucrats from that milieu, is linked to the desire to maintain through the Twelver hierarchies a strong control on those provincial areas that had not yet fully integrated into the Safavid state. It should be stressed that this decision of Shâh Ṭâmâsp – as well as similar, or even contrary decisions by other Safavid rulers – is based on exclusively political, ideological and religious criteria, and has no social or ‘ethnic’ justifications. An example which sheds light on this is the matrimonial alliance established by Karâkî, the implacable opponent of Sufis and philosophers, with an important family of the region of Āstarâbâd:31 this same family also gave birth to one of the most important šâraqî thinkers of Safavid Persia, Mîr Dâmâd, who was the son of the son-in-law of the same Karâkî.32 This circumstance highlights once again the ideological lack of scruples which characterizes not only the Safavid rulers, but also the members of the social and intellectual aristocracy of the asyâd: the rulers were always ready to seek support in the speculations of the various juridical and philosophical schools and of the various Sufi orders, depending upon the political needs of the moment; the aristocrats were always ready to diversify their ideological profile, thanks to their copious philosophical and religious interests.

4. Shâh Ismâʿîl II (r. 984-985/1576-1577): restoration of the sunna or recomposition of the élites?

The death of Shâh Ṭâmâsp marks a profound crisis in the structure of the Safavid rule: in 984/1576 a putsch of the powerful tribe of the Afsâr enthroned Mîrzâ Ismâʿîl (r. 984/1576 - 985/1577), the rebel son of Ṭâmâsp, who had languished in prison for twenty years for plotting a conspiracy against his father.33 Scholars often describe the policy of Ismâʿîl II as “crypto-Sunnism”, ascribing to him the desire to restore the sunna in Persia.34 However, Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti remarks that “Ismâʿîl II’s Sunnism was in its turn an invocation to the Shariʿa, with the intention of providing himself with a weapon which would enable him to undermine the power of the shiʿi ulamâ’ by establishing a new balance of power between the Iranian aristocracy and the Qizilbash tribes still active in the political field, since, owing to their mutual rivalry, both these elements were not unwilling to give him a sure degree of support”.35 Ismâʿîl II decided to put a stop to the political

30 On Shâh Ṭâmâsp’s dream and on the meaning of his decrees cf. Babayan, Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs, pp. 319-20.
32 On Mir Dâmâd see infra, pp. 212-13.
34 Cf. for example Arjomand, The Shadow of God & the Hidden Imam (quoted above, n. 19), p. 120; Abisaab, Converting Persia (quoted above, n. 3), pp. 41-4; Newman, Safavid Iran. Rebirth of a Persian Empire (quoted above, n. 10), p. 46.
power of the Shi’ite élite that shaped the outline of the bureaucratic empire of Shâh Tâhmâsp; this is reflected in the ideological-religious aspiration to return to the conditions that had brought Ismâ’il I to the throne through a resolute struggle against the Shi’ite rigorism that characterized the last phase of the reign of Tâhmâsp. However, Mitchell’s careful examination of the documentation produced by the chancellery of Ismâ’il II has shown unequivocally that this ruler, despite his will to undermine the structure of power represented by the Twelver hierarchy at the service of his predecessor, never challenged the Safavid’s allegiance to Shi’ism.36 “By attempting to halt the trajectory of jurist notables like Mir Sayyid Husayn al-Karakî – states Mitchell – and instead privilege networks of scribes, accountants, adils, and scholar-bureaucrats, Ismâ’il II established a dynamic that characterized the Safavid court and chancellery politics for the next two decades.”37 After all, Ismâ’il II’s attempt lays the foundation of the administrative ‘revolution’ of Shâh ‘Abbâs.38

5. Khudâbandah (r. 985-996/1577-1588) and his ‘sublime group’

The reform of Ismâ’il II contains in itself the main elements, political and bureaucratic, that will appear clearly only later, but it was the short reign of his brother Muḥammad Khudâbandah which represented a grand tournant of Safavid history, in particular for what concerns the ideological and doctrinal aspects of the élite of the government. Khudâbandah studied at the school of one of the most prestigious and controversial scholars of the early Safavid era, Šâyḫ Husayn ‘Abd al-Šâmad.39 One of the key texts for understanding the importance of this turning point is a short letter of Khudâbandah to a famous scholar of Shiraz, Mir Faṭḥ Allâh Širâzî, who emigrated to India in the early ’80s of the sixteenth century.40 From this epistle we learn not only that Khudâbandah, when he was governor of Shiraz, attended the circle of Mir Faṭṭ Allâh Širâzî, but also that the king considered its members as “the most exalted group (zumrāb-i ‘alî al-ṣân)” and “the most perfect kind of humanity (ḥulâsab-i anvâ-i insân).”41 As Mitchell explains, Khudâbandah alludes here to the circle of scholars which loosely coalesced around the Madrasa-i Mânsûrîyya: consequently, Mitchell rightly concludes that “the later intellectual accomplishments and the resurgence of ishrâği philosophy under the banner of Mir Dâmâd and Mullâ Šadrâ would appear to owe its roots, at least partly, to Khudâbandah’s gubernatorial sponsorship and support of this ‘most exalted group’.”42 But the appreciation of Khudâbandah for “the most exalted group” is not confined to the intellectual and doctrinal sphere. In fact it has, as usual, political implications: those of a real challenge to the Qizilbash – still very powerful in spite of Ismâ’il II’s attempts to limit their authority – and of further consolidation of the Twelver hierarchy through the support offered to prominent members of the Gnostic and Sufi order.

37 Ibid., p. 158.
39 On this interesting personality see Stewart, “The First Shaykh al-Islâm of the Safavid Capital Qazvin”.
milieu, co-opted in his chancellery. It is precisely this milieu that elaborated the absolutist theology of the “perfect man” embodied by the Shāh, which would become a central element of the Safavid ideology starting from the reign of Shāh ʿAbbās.

6. A flexible élite

From this survey a conclusion imposes itself: the Shiʿite élite proved to possess the great ability to remain at the centre of the political stage, meeting the ever-changing needs of the rulers who followed one another on the throne. Even though from a theological and doctrinal point of view this élite had internal conflicts, a prosopographical analysis shows that all its prominent members did belong to a limited number of family circles, which in many cases were linked by ties of kinship. In this regard, Devin J. Stewart argued that the crisis which exploded during the reign of Ismāʿīl II “galvanized Shiʿite scholars and brought together within this category several groups, that in earlier times, had had quite different concerns and agenda and had often opposed each other”. For example, two very different figures like the Shiʿite rigorist ʿAli ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Karakī and the ‘Neoplatonic’ Mir Dāmād were members of the same family, and the same is true for lesser known but equally important figures such as Ṣayḥ ʿĪzz al-Dīn Ḥusayn b. ᾩbd al-Ṣamād (918/984-1512/1576) and his son Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿĀmilī (953/1030-1547/1629). This comes as no surprise in Islamic Persia: a study by Richard W. Bulliet on the city of Nishapur between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries pointed out similar ideological and juridical divisions at the heart of the aristocracy, divisions that caused a state of permanent opposition, giving rise also to impromptu outbursts of violence. As in the Safavid context, the two rival groups belonged to the same social class, very different from the popular strata which adhered to mystical-social movements such as the so-called hurramiyya. However, their ideological divisions were no less radical and concerned especially teaching, namely the possibility of forming society in their own image and likeness: this conflict ended only with the advent of the Seljuks, who just took away from the Persian aristocracy the monopoly of juridical-religious teaching and put it under the control of their new state. As for the Safavid era, it is often stated that the main turning point in relations between the ruler and the religious and bureaucratic élite of the empire would have occurred in the era of Shāh ʿAbbās (996/1038-1588/1629), when the king promoted a revolutionary alliance between ‘throne and altar’, so to say “an alliance in which the orthodox Shiʿi clergy underwrote the Shah’s claim to a special Shiʿi legitimacy and declared obedience to him to be ordained by God, while the Shah in return did everything in his power to support and promote orthodox Shiʿism and the shiʿi clerical establishment”. In the light of what we have seen so far, the ‘revolutionary’ conduct of Shāh ʿAbbās should certainly be reconsidered, since it seems to have its roots in the

43 Ibid., pp. 175-6.
45 On Ṣayḥ ʿĪzz al-Dīn Ḥusayn b. ᾩbd al-Ṣamād see above all Stewart, “The First Shaykh al-Īslām of the Safavid Capital Qazvin” (quoted above, n. 25), passim.
policy of his predecessors. For example, it should be pointed out that two of the most important members of Shâh ‘Abbâs’s court, Bahâ’ al-Dîn al-‘Amîlî and Mîr Dâmâd, exercised an important role in the chancellory of both Ismâ’îl II and Khudâbandah. What distinguishes the relationship of Shâh ‘Abbâs with the religious and bureaucratic élite of his empire from that entertained by the previous rulers is his inclination, albeit not exclusive, for the šâri‘î milîli, and his hostile attitude towards the Qizilbâsh and the proliferation of popular Sufism, which was always dangerous to the established order. We will see, however, that the choice of ‘Abbâs to put in the hands of renowned šâri‘îyyân philosophers (who were, at least in part, already active at the court of Ismâ’îl II and Khudâbandah) some of the most important religious and bureaucratic offices of the Safavid state is mainly linked to a precise ideological project: to create the doctrinal framework for the new conception of kingship elaborated by Shâh ‘Abbâs, and at one and the same time to reject the accusations of the Shi‘ite scholars towards the Safavid monarchy.52

7. The ‘Perfect King’ and his philosophers: the ‘ilm šâri‘î and absolutism

As is known, the Persian-Islamic model of kingship adopted by the Safavid dynasty is connected from its beginning with the idea of a special status of the monarch, not only from the socio-political point of view, but also in the more committal sense of the ontological nature, so to say, of the man who embodies kingship. Even in the pre-Islamic age Persian culture took for granted that “subject and a sovereign were clean diembodies kingship. Even in the pre-Islamic age Persian culture took for granted that “subject and a sovereign were clean different things”. In the Islamic world, the elaboration of this point is rooted in the Platonic-shaped political thought of al-Fârâbî and, in Persia, Naṣîr al-Dîn al-Ṭûsî (d. 672/1274). The latter is the author of the Aḥlāq-i Nâsîrî, a mirror for princes deeply influential on many Timurid and Safavid scholars, including the already mentioned Ġalâl al-Dîn al-Dâwânî, Ḵâyâl al-Dîn Mânsûr Daštaki (d. 948/1541), who was the scion of a noble and cultivated family of Shiraz, and especially

49 Cf. Newman, Safavid Iran. Rebirth of a Persian Empire (quoted above, n. 5), pp. 43-4, with n. 23.

50 As Mitchell rightly underlines, “‘Abbâs was careful to avoid any undue accruing of power by a particular hierocrat or group of clerics” (The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran, quoted above n. 4, p. 192).

51 On the vehement attacks of the famous philosophers šâri‘î Mullâ Šadrâ Sirâzî against the alleged “Sufis”, whom he sees as unlearned charlatans and pretenders, see Babayan, “Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas” (quoted above, n. 16), pp. 127-30, and Ead., Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs (quoted above, n. 29), pp. 417-22.

52 On the religious dissenters who openly criticized the Safavid monarchy see for example Babayan, Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs, pp. 404-7.


54 The features of the true imâm as given by al-Fârâbî in his Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Perfect City leave no doubt on the fact that in his opinion the exxata quaestio of legitimacy must be answered via the Platonic model of the Philosopher-King; at one and the same time, the very fact that the ruler of the perfect city is called imâm reveals his leanings, by no means hostile to the Šî‘a (one may recall that in 942 he joined the retinue of the Bûwayhid Sayf al-Dawla). Cf. Abû Naṣr al-Fârâbî, Mahâlî ‘râd abî al-madîna al-fâdîla. A revised text with introduction, translation and commentary by R. Walzer, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1985, revised edition by G. Endress, Great Books of the Islamic World, Chicago 1998, pp. 246.5-248.14; H. Daiber, The Ruler as Philosopher: A New Interpretation of al-Fârâbî’s View, North Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam - New York 1986.

55 On Ġalâl al-Dîn al-Dâwânî see supra, p. 195, n. 27. On Ḵâyâl al-Dîn Mânsûr Daštaki and his family see Pourjavady, Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran (quoted above, n. 1), pp. 24-32, and infra, pp. 207-11.

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49 Cf. Newman, Safavid Iran. Rebirth of a Persian Empire (quoted above, n. 5), pp. 43-4, with n. 23.

50 As Mitchell rightly underlines, “‘Abbâs was careful to avoid any undue accruing of power by a particular hierocrat or group of clerics” (The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran, quoted above n. 4, p. 192).

51 On the vehement attacks of the famous philosophers šâri‘î Mullâ Šadrâ Sirâzî against the alleged “Sufis”, whom he sees as unlearned charlatans and pretenders, see Babayan, “Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas” (quoted above, n. 16), pp. 127-30, and Ead., Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs (quoted above, n. 29), pp. 417-22.

52 On the religious dissenters who openly criticized the Safavid monarchy see for example Babayan, Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs, pp. 404-7.


54 The features of the true imâm as given by al-Fârâbî in his Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Perfect City leave no doubt on the fact that in his opinion the exxata quaestio of legitimacy must be answered via the Platonic model of the Philosopher-King; at one and the same time, the very fact that the ruler of the perfect city is called imâm reveals his leanings, by no means hostile to the Šî‘a (one may recall that in 942 he joined the retinue of the Bûwayhid Sayf al-Dawla). Cf. Abû Naṣr al-Fârâbî, Mahâlî ‘râd abî al-madîna al-fâdîla. A revised text with introduction, translation and commentary by R. Walzer, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1985, revised edition by G. Endress, Great Books of the Islamic World, Chicago 1998, pp. 246.5-248.14; H. Daiber, The Ruler as Philosopher: A New Interpretation of al-Fârâbî’s View, North Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam - New York 1986.

55 On Ġalâl al-Dîn al-Dâwânî see supra, p. 195, n. 27. On Ḵâyâl al-Dîn Mânsûr Daštaki and his family see Pourjavady, Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran (quoted above, n. 1), pp. 24-32, and infra, pp. 207-11.
Muzaffar al-Husaynī al-Ṭabib al-Kašānī (d. 963/1556), who wrote for Shāh Ṭahmāsp the Ablaq-i ʿīfāʾi, a sort of reworking of Ťūsī’s Ablaq-i Nāsirī.  

The focus of this political theory is an idea of kingship based on holiness and messianism. As Ahmed Afzar Moin writes in his foundational study The Millennial Sovereign, “there developed in this period an ensemble of rituals and knowledge to make the body of the king sacred and to cast it in the mold of a prophesied savior, a figure who would set right the unbearable order of things and inaugurated a new era of peace and justice – the new millennium. Undergirded by messianic conceptions and rationalized by political astrology, this style of sovereignty attempted to bind courtiers and soldiers to the monarch as both spiritual guide and material lord”.

This ideological orientation enjoyed considerable popularity during the entire Safavid period, continuing through the end of the dynasty, as shown by its reappearance in the philosophical and political treatises of the Qāgār age. For what concerns the Safavids, two political treatises published by William C. Chittick are worth mentioning, which date from the time of Shāh ʿAbbās II (r. 1052/1077 - 1642/1667) and of Shāh Ṣūltān Ḥusayn (r. 1105/1135 - 1694/1722). Apart from some doctrinal differences, the two writings share in a vision of kingship basically inspired by that of Naṣīr al-Din al-Ṭūsī. The philosophical basis of such a vision can be traced back to one of the greatest philosophers of Medieval Persia, Šīhāb al-Dīn Yahya al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), the founder of the “science of illumination” (ḥikmat al-īsraʾīq). It comes as no surprise that Suhrawardi’s Kitāb Ḥikmat al-īsraʾīq had a great revival during the Timurid and Safavid ages, especially in Central Asia, Persia, and India. Illuminationism sprung from Isfahan, where Avicenna had lived for a long time and where Suhrawardi got acquainted for the first time with the Avicennian tradition.

As already noticed by Corbin, another important centre of Illuminationism especially in the early Safavid period was Shiraz, the city of the great ʿīsraʾīq scholar Ṭūb al-Dīn al-Šīrāzī (d. 710/1311), who wrote a commentary on Suhrawardi’s Kitāb Ḥikmat al-īsraʾīq. These two ‘schools’ represent

the two sides of the same īsāqī coin, as shown, among other things, by the continuous exchange between the scholars of the two cities.65

Although often overlooked in the histories of philosophical thought, Illuminationism, due to its Platonist connotations, has significant political implications. According to Suhrawardi, rulers should bear a sort of hallmark of divine revelation, which seals the relationship existing between them and the invisible source of their authority. In this sense, rulers represent the connection between the world of sense-perception and that of the pure enlightening essence from which everything originates, including political authority. In the īsāqī view, this is not an abstract idea: rulers, divinely inspired, reside in a separate realm, the “eight clima (al-īqlīm al-tāmin)” from which they receive the authority necessary to rule,66 as pointed out by Hossein Ziai in his account of the transcendent foundation of power in Illuminationism.67 Suhrawardi himself did not refrain from dealing with kings and princes, in the attempt to put into practice his ideal of a Platonic-Islamic utopia.

As shown by Corbin, it is possible to identify a proper ‘chain’ of īsāqī philosophers, from Šams al-Dīn Ṣahrazūrī to Saʿdī ibn Mansūr ibn Kammūna, from Qūb al-Dīn al-Ṣīrāzī to Mir Haydar Amuli, from Saʿīn al-Dīn Turka Ṣafāqānī to Ibn Abī Ğumhūr,68 whose circles appear to be more and more connected to one another from the Timurid period onwards, in parallel with the rise of absolute monarchs such as Tamerlane and Akbar. On the other side, the Safavids themselves were openly inspired by the model of the mystical and illuminationist authority that appeared first under the Timurids, identifying the latter as their direct predecessors.69 As a matter of fact, the Safavid era experienced a true īsāqī revival reaching its peak in the era of Shāh ‘Abbās (r. 996-1038/1588-1629), and of Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā in the field of speculative thought. This revival remained as a philosophical and political element recurring well beyond the end of the reign of Shāh ‘Abbās. As Endress has it,

The Safavid philosopher-theologians of the school of the Mīr-i Dāmād and Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā) from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century not only read Avicenna and his commentators, but retracted the chain of transmitters and commentators of their spiritual and intellectual traditions, to its

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67 Ziai, “Source and Nature of Authority”, p. 307: “One can be a legitimate ruler only by the command of God; thus governance or actual political dominion is justified in the strict sense if and only if it is by and through linkage with the divine, i.e., by the command of God. One of the primary pillars of the illuminationist view of politics, then, is the way living rulers develop the capacity to become recipients of divine command. In addition, they must demonstrate that they have had authority divinely conferred on them, that is, that they control qualities their subjects commonly associate with divine inspiration”. Cf. also Corbin, En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques, II (quoted above, n. 62), pp. 94-6.
origins in the various fields of theology, philosophy, mysticism, and – depending on their professional competence – of mathematics and astronomy. Beyond their immediate curricular traditions, however, they fell back on the texts of gnostic and Neoplatonic hikma from the first period of reception and translation of the original Greek sources (...) Here, the tradition recorded in our manuscripts and in a library of biographical testimonies of a living and variegated practice, can be traced as a continuous, coherent and widely disseminated teaching tradition from the generation of Ibn Sinā’s disciples until the eighteenth century.70

As is well known, and has been established by a series of scholars with the decisive contribution of Endress himself,71 it was precisely in the “first period of reception and translation of the original Greek sources” that Plotinus’ Enneads IV-VI became the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle.72 Thus, following the transmission of this text from Baghdad to Safavid Persia amounts to retracing one of the paths of the dissemination of Greek science and philosophy in the Muslim East, and indeed the most important one in the field of metaphysics.

8. The pseudo-Theology of Aristotle as a foundational text of the hikmat al-išraq

In the elaboration of the hikmat al-išraq a foundational role is played by Greek philosophy transmitted to the Islamic world via the translation movement of the ‘Abbāsīd era.73 In a well known passage of his Kitāb Ḥikmat al-išraq Suhrāwārī acknowledges the contribution of Greek philosophers to the “Science of Illumination”:

70 Endress, “Reading Avicenna in the madrasa”, p. 421.
72 The translation of Plotinus’ Enneads IV-VI dates from the first half of the IXth century: the terminus ante quem is the revision of the translation made by al-Kindī for his pupil Ahmad, the son of the caliph al-Mu’tasim (r. 218-227/833-42). This piece of information is given, together with the name of the translator, ‘Abd al-Masīh ibn Na‘īma al-Himsi and other important items, at the beginning of the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle: cf. ‘A. Badawi, Aḥsātin ‘inda l-‘arab. Plotinus apud Arabes. Theologia Aristotelis et fragmenta quae supersunt, Dār al-Nahḍat al-Miṣrīyya, Cairo 1955, 19662 (Dirāsāt Islāmiyya, 20), p. 3.4-9, and infra, p. 210.
73 Cf. J. Walbridge, The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrāwārī and the Heritage of the Greeks, State University of New York Press, Albany 2000, and Id., The Wisdom of the Mystic East. Suhrāwārī and Platonist Orientalism, State University of New York Press, Albany 2001. Parting company with Corbin’s account of the hikmat al-išraq as the direct heir of the wisdom of ancient Persia, Walbridge casts Suhrāwārī as a “reviver of pre-Aristotelian Greek philosophy” and as “the champion of Plato and Presocratic divine philosophy. The Persian Sages appear as confirmation of these ancient philosophical views, particularly the doctrine of the Platonist Forms. (...) Suhrāwārī was primarily a self-conscious Platonist, a reviver not of Iranian but of Platonist wisdom” (The Wisdom of the Mystic East, pp. 13-15). Even though one can easily agree on the fact that this was the intention of Suhrāwārī, the latter’s claims should be taken with qualification. Discussing this point would exceed the limits of the present paper; I limit myself to remarking that the “pre-Aristotelian Greek philosophy” (in particular Empedocles’ doctrine mentioned by Suhrāwārī in the passage quoted above) has little to do with genuine Presocratic thought, coming as it does from doxographical sources reworked in al-Kindī’ times, such as the “Doxography” of the pseudo-Ammonius (cf. U. Rudolph, Die Doxographie des pseudo-Ammonius. Ein Beitrag zur neuplatonischen Überlieferung im Islam, Steiner, Stuttgart 1989 [Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 49/1]). In particular on the Neoplatonized Empedocles see D. De Smet, Empedocles Arabus. Une lecture néoplatonicienne tardive, Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Brussel 1998. Walbridge is not unaware of Suhrāwārī’s acquaintance with the Neoplatonic works produced in the formative period of falsafa: cf. The Wisdom of the Mystic East, pp. 53 and 82.
That there are dominating lights, that the Creator of all is a light, that the archetypes are among the dominating lights — the pure souls have often beheld this to be so when they have detached themselves from their bodily temples. They then seek proof of it for others. All those possessing insight and detachment bear witness to this. Most of the allusions of the prophets and the great philosophers point to this. Plato, Socrates before him, and those before Socrates — like Hermes, Agathodaemon, and Empedocles — all held this view. Most said plainly that they had beheld it in the world of light. Plato related that he himself had stripped off the darkness and beheld it.74

Behind this remarkable though generic assessment, inspired by al-Šahrastānī’s outline of the history of Greek philosophy,75 one can detect a source which counts as the true starting point of the ḥikmat al-īrāq: the Arabic Plotinus, transmitted under the label of “Aristotle’s” Theology (Kitāb ʿUṭulūġiyā ʿay al-rubūbiyya).76 It is well known that the pseudo-Theology had been commented upon by Ibn Sinā,77 and his Notes may count as one of the main conduits that transmitted the text to Central Asia; but Suhrawardi was also directly acquainted with the pseudo-Theology, independently of Ibn Sinā’s intermediation. In his Kitāb al-Talwīḥāt (Book of Intimations), providing a first account of the ʿilm ʿirāqī, he explicitly mentions “Aristotle”. The latter, he says, appeared to him in a dream and, entering into a dialogue with him, explained the principles of Illumination in the language of the Theology.78 Obviously, the “Aristotle” of Suhrawardi’s dream is nobody if not the “Aristote


virtuel” outlined by Gerhard Endress in a famous essay,79 the “Aristotle” who emerges from Ibn Sinā’s reading and re-working of the Aristotelian tradition: a character, created by the Arab falsāṣīfa who combined, both in the formative period of falsāṣāfī and in its mature developments, some genuine elements of Aristotle’s own thought and some fundamentally Neoplatonic traits.

Suhrawardî’s dream is modelled on the legendary dream of al-Ma’mūn,80 the paradigmatic act of foundation of the translation movement. As shown by Corbin, explicit references to the pseudo-Teology are embedded also in the Kitāb Ḥikmat al-īrāq,81 not to say that the passage of the Kitāb al-Talwīḥāt quoted above ends with an echo of one of the most famous items of the Arabic Plotinus, the narrative of the author’s ascension to the intelligible realm82 – with the difference that the ascension, in Suhrawardî’s allusion, was performed by Plato and not by Aristotle, as is the case in the pseudo-Teology.83

Often I have been alone with my soul and have doffed my body and laid it aside and become as if I were naked substance without body, so as to be inside myself, outside all other things. Then I do see within myself such beauty and splendour as I do remain marvelling at and astonished, so that I know that I am one of the parts of the sublime, surpassing, lofty, divine world, and possess active life. When I am certain of that, I lift my intellect up from that world into the divine world and become as if I were placed in it and cleaving to it, so as to be above the entire intelligible world, and seem to be standing in that sublime and divine place. And there I see such light and splendour as tongues cannot describe nor ears comprehend (pseudo-Teology of Aristotle, Chapter I, trans. Lewis).84

It is therefore not a coincidence that, during the Safavid era, when an extraordinary revival of the ʿilm ʿirāqī took place bringing with it a renewed interest for falsāṣāfī, the pseudo-Teology of Aristotle was widely read and repeatedly copied at court. According to Christian Jambet, the pseudo-Teology was conceived of as the model for the order established by divine sovereignty itself, thus providing the philosophical basis of the theory of the rule of the Perfect Man.85 More importantly, the pseudo-

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81 Cf. for example Suhrawardî, The Philosophy of Illumination, pp. 110-11; Corbin, En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques, II, pp. 97-8.


83 See below, Appendix II.


Theology found quite naturally its place in the new landscape of the “universal competence in all of the disciplines of the intellectual and the religious learning” described by Endress as the hallmark of the theologian-scientists who, following the path laid by al-Ṭūsī, combined science (mostly astronomy and mathematics) with Ibn Sinā and Suhrāwārdī: in their works “not only theology is clad in the language of philosophy, but all of the rational sciences are put under the aegis of ǧīkma. Indeed, the merging of the paradigms of rational knowledge left permanent traces in the final integration of the Greek traditions of rational science with the Islamic view of the First Cause”. 86

But Plotinus had been translated into Arabic in 9th century Baghdad, and it was from Baghdad that the pseudo-Theology spread, directly or indirectly, 87 in the East of the Islamic world. As for the direct circulation of the text, The Notes by Ibn Sinā show by themselves that it was available in Persia within 1030, namely the date of the sack of Isfahan. In fact, they were part and parcel of Ibn Sinā’s Kitāb al-Inṣāf, which went lost during this sack. 88 Ibn Sinā was in all likelihood acquainted with the pseudo-Theology already in his youth, because this text is alluded to in the Compendium on the Soul 89 and there is evidence that it was available in Persia even before Ibn Sinā: echoes of it feature in the works of the Persian philosopher al-ʿĀmirī (d. 382/992). 90 Thus, it comes as no surprise that there
dévolu au plus haut degré de l’existence humaine, celui de l’Anthropos parfait. Il suffira aux theories eschatologiques de projeter cette gouvernance intellectuelle sur le cours de l’histoire, sur la personne du Guide, pour transformer la théologie mystique en théorie des grades et pouvoirs spirituels. Le parallèle avec l’œuvre du Pseudo-Denys est frappant. Au lieu de la hiérarchie dionysienne des grades ecclésiastiques, nous aurons la hiérarchie des ‘dignitaires’ ou celle des fonctionnaires de la Cité parfaite. Mais, a contrario, il suffira aux théories de l’ascension spirituelle de situer ce pôle intelligible au terme de l’évolution de la substance de l’homme singulier pour en faire la base d’une eschatologie personnelle, d’une gnose, guidant la conversion de l’homme sensible en l’homme de l’intelligence. […] Nous pouvons donc dire que la Théologie a une fonction paradigmatique.” This obviously should not be taken in the sense that the pseudo-Theology actually contains a theory of the “rule of the Perfect Man”, which does not feature among the topics dealt with in it: Jamet’s claim should be understood as an account of what the Ismāʿīlī readers saw, or were looking for, in a text whose focus is metaphysics with a special emphasis on the destiny of the soul.

87 One of the main conduits for the circulation in Persia of the doctrines held in the pseudo-Theology was predictably the collection of the Epistles of the Ḥāwiw al-Ṣafā (for some examples of topics and terms of the pseudo-Theology embedded in them, cf. S. Diwald, Arabische Philosophie und Wissenschaft in der Enziklopädie. Kitāb Ḥāwiw as-Safā, III. Die Lehre von Seele und Intellięt, O. Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1975, pp. 23, 55, 138-9, 179). Another source of knowledge of the doctrines of the pseudo-Theology is represented by the doxographical tradition which transmits the “Sayings of the Greek Sage”, which are part and parcel of the Arabic translation of Plotinus produced within the “Circle of al-Kindī” (cf. E. Wakelimg, A Philosophy Reader from the Circle of Miskawayh edited and translated, Cambridge U. P., Cambridge 2014) and which are quoted also by al-Sahrastānī, who was in his turn a source of Suhrāwārdī (cf. above, n. 75).
88 Cf. D. Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition. Introduction to reading Avicenna’s Philosphical Works, Brill, Leiden, 1988 (Islamic Philosophy and Theology. Texts and Studies, 4), p. 136: “The Fair Judgment was drafted approximately between 19 December 1028 and 7 June 1029, and this first draft was destroyed by Ma’sūd’s soldiers who pillaged Avicenna’s saddlebags in January 1030”.
89 The Compendium on the Soul is one of Avicenna’s first works; here, he states that the part of the theoretical science dealing with divine matters establishes “the First Creator, the First Created, and the universal soul; the way in which creation occurs; the rank of the Intellect with respect to the Creator, of the soul to the Intellect, of sublunar matter and the forms to the soul, and of the spheres, stars and generated beings to matter and form” (trans. Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, p. 19): this enumeration lists the topics dealt with in the pseudo-Theology.
are so many manuscripts of the pseudo-\textit{Theology} coming from Persia.\footnote{91} However, one should notice from the outset that most of them date from a much later age than al-ʿĀmirī’s or Ibn Sīnā’s.

That a group of the manuscripts of the pseudo-\textit{Theology} are of Iranian origin had been noticed as early as in the 30s of the 20th century by Andrei Borisov\footnote{92}, to whom we owe also the discovery of the so-called “Longer Version” of this work.\footnote{93} In all likelihood, Borisov’s idea that the textual tradition of the pseudo-\textit{Theology} splits into an “Iranian branch” and a “Judaic branch” cannot be held any longer at its face value,\footnote{94} but what remains true is that a consistent group of manuscripts share the common feature of having been produced in Persia. Nowadays, thanks to the missions conducted within the context of the ERC project “Greek into Arabic”, one can specify that they were produced mostly during the Safavid and Qajar ages.\footnote{95}

The relationship existing among them will be discussed in the philological introduction to the critical edition of the pseudo-\textit{Theology}; it is my duty now, in this preparatory essay, to pave the way for the history of the reception of this foundational text in Persia. Following the path laid by Endress in the two essays mentioned above,\footnote{96} I will provide in the next paragraph an outline of the

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\footnote{91} There are two versions of the pseudo-\textit{Theology of Aristotle}: (i) the Arabic text as it has come down to us, which was edited in 1882 by F. Dieterici (F. Dieterici, \textit{Die sogenannte Theologie des Aristoteles aus dem arabischen übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen versehen}, J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, Leipzig 1883), (ii) the so-called “Longer Version”, a text which exists only fragmentarily in Judeo-Arabic script, and which seems to have some features in common with the Latin translation, edited in 1519. It was Andrei Borisov who discovered the existence of these fragments, in a series of articles in Russian analyzed by Treiger, “Andrei Jakolevič Borisov (1903-1942) and his Studies of Medieval Arabic Philosophy”, \textit{Arabic Sciences and Philosophy} 17 (2007), pp. 159-95, p. 168: “On the basis of this survey Borisov comes to the conclusion that the textual tradition of the Th\textsc{A} can be divided into two secondary branches – Iranian and Judaic – to which all known manuscripts of the text belong. Manuscripts of the latter are more ancient, since the oldest known Iranian manuscript goes back to the 16th century at the earliest, whereas the oldest manuscript of the Judaic branch (...) seem to belong to the 13th century. Furthermore, all Iranian manuscripts contain the Short Version of the Th\textsc{A}, whereas all Judaic manuscripts (and the Latin translation) contain the Long Version of the text. Borisov explains the interest accorded to the Th\textsc{A} in the Iranian milieu as a consequence of the spread of the Ismā‘īliya and related religious and philosophical teaching”.

\footnote{92} The critical edition of the pseudo-\textit{Theology of Aristotle} which is currently being prepared by the team of “Greek into Arabic” includes, as an individual volume prepared by Prof. Paul Fenton, also the critical edition of the “Longer Version”, with an assessment of the relationship between the manuscript tradition of the latter and that of the standard version of the pseudo-\textit{Theology}.

\footnote{93} I have particularly benefited from the seminar held by Rüdiger Arnzen, “Some dates for the – allegedly or truly – undated manuscripts of the \textit{Theology}” during the 2nd Workshop of the project “Greek into Arabic”, Pisa, November 12-14, 2012.
circulation of the pseudo-Theology during the pre-Safavid and Safavid age. After the conclusion of the missions that I am conducting within the context of “Greek into Arabic”, a complete picture will become possible. Through an in-depth examination of the dates and places of the production of the manuscripts, of the prosopographical aspects related to copyists and patrons, of the circumstances in which the pre-Safavid, Safavid and Qajar copies of the pseudo-Theology were commissioned and produced, and taking into account also the other texts associated with it in the manuscripts, new and decisive data will be obtained not only on the dissemination of Graeco-Arabic philosophy in Iran, but also on the philosophical-political attitudes of the Persian élite up to the threshold of modern times.

9. Pre-Safavid and Safavid manuscripts of the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle and their readers: Giyāṭ-al-Dīn Mansūr Daštaki, and after

During the long span of time which divides the age of Avicenna and Suhrawardi on the one hand, and that of the Safavid empire on the other, the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle seems prima facie to have sunk into oblivion in Persia. In fact, this phenomenon is only apparent: analysis of the “chains of transmission” concerning philosophers like Dawānī and Daštaki reveals that the illuminationist strand was lively also during the pre-Safavid period. Therefore, the lack of information about readers and copies of the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle is due in all likelihood to the poor preservation of the manuscripts written before the foundation of the Safavid empire.

After Suhrawardi, the first Persian philosopher to have an explicit recourse to the pseudo-Theology is the already mentioned Giyāṭ-al-Dīn Mansūr Daštaki (d. 948/1541), who was one of the most esteemed scholars during the reign of Shāh Ismā’īl, spending various periods of time in his military camps, although preserving on doctrinal matters an independent stance which led him eventually to leave the court under the reign of Shāh Ṭahmāsp. During one of my missions to Iran, I was lucky enough to find in the manuscript Tehran, Kitābkhāna-i Markazī-i Dānīšgāh-i Tihrān 5392 (hereafter: T) the text of the pseudo-Theology preceded by a Prologue by one “Giyāṭ, known as al-Mansūr”, who is none other than our Daštaki. Here he announces a commentary on the pseudo-Theology. The same Prologue features also in the manuscript Princeton, University Library, Garrett Yabuda 1029 (hereafter: P). The importance of these two manuscripts is heightened by the fact that both trace back to Daštaki’s own era: P is dated 1620, and T, albeit undated as for the main text, contains indications that point to an even earlier date.
In both manuscripts (T: f. 1 r 1-19; P: f. 111 r 1-19) the Prologue says:

Thou my God, Perfection of the lights, You who effuse quietness on those who know the secrets: illuminate us with Your light, make us perfect by the knowledge of Your secrets, close the door on separation from You and open for us the way to the proximity to Your presence. Illuminate our sight towards the understanding of the light of Your beauty, and guide the contemplation of your people. Make the people of Light and Illumination be victorious and let them share in the contemplation of lights, make them happy and bless and sanctify them, in particular our Master, the Master of mankind who is the guide to the right path, the rescuer of the community who has removed the darkness of the gloom through the beginning of the dawn of the light of the Word; he who has effused on us the lights of the guide to the right path, away from the darkness of both reprobation and seduction. And his family is the most perfect among those who possess knowledge and wisdom and the noblest among those who possess nobility and magnanimity.

Then, the poor and humble Giyāṭ, known as al-Manṣūr, says: “Our aim in this book of ours is the introduction to knowledge, the opening of the exposition, the seal of the demonstration, and the secret of the explanation, that is the fourth vision of the fourth of the pillars of the garden of rejoicing, which consists in the pursuit of the truth of knowledge in view of the unveiling of the Theology that has been put together by the leader of the great wise men, the great philosopher, Aristotle the wise. He composed it in the ancient language of Greece; then one who knew and understood it interpreted and...
translated it. Then I first occupied myself with the interpretation and the literal quotation of his speech and of his treatise; then, I turned to what I needed, items or discourses which help to refine items in all steps, especially about it [i.e. the treatise]; I have accomplished the discourse, and in this hearts became tired”. In sum, the author of this noble book was the great philosopher Aristotle the wise, and its commentator was Porphyry of Tyre; its translator was ʿAbd al-Masih al-Ḥimṣī, and its corrector was Yaʿqūb al-Kindī. The one who prepared, adorned, corrected, verified and rectified it was the blessed AbūʿAli ibn Muhammad Manṣūr al-Husaynī, may his Lord be merciful towards him, may the much-forgiving and generous God nobilitate his state and grant success to his deeds, may He reveal him the divine kinds of knowledge.

This Prologue is interesting on various counts. First and foremost, it provides the first attestation of the renewed interest in the pseudo-Theology at the very beginning of the Safavid era. The “noble book” is cast from the outset as part and parcel of the doctrine shared by the Madīnati al-nūr wa-l-iṣrāq. One may wonder what was the intended readership of a commentary on the pseudo-Theology. In all likelihood Daštākī occupied himself with commenting upon the pseudo-Theology for an iṣrāʾīl circle at the court of Shāh Tahmāsp, who at the beginning of his reign was evidently on very good terms with the “people of Light and Illumination”: in 936/1529 he appointed Daštākī, the most important iṣrāʾīl philosopher of the time, ṣadr at the Safavid court, and in the same period Daštākī supported, among other things, the practice of prostration to the Shāh, which he found analogous to the angels’ prostration to Adam when God ordered them to do so: a clear sign of his emphasis on the preternatural qualities of the emperor. Nevertheless, for Daštākī and the iṣrāʾīl milieu the situation changed very quickly. In fact, shortly after his appointment as ṣadr, Daštākī challenged the powerful jurist Karakī about a number of legal questions, among which the problem of the calculation of the qibla. A council was convened in the presence of Shah Tahmāsp to settle the disagreement, and Karakī triumphed: in 938/1531-1532 Daštākī was dismissed and returned to Shiraz.

The Prologue contains two distinct items: an account of the circumstances of the composition of the commentary on the pseudo-Theology by Daštākī, and a quotation of his own words, which ends when the scribe resumes his account and specifies that the work is indeed by “Aristotle”, but the one who has spent so much effort in polishing it is Ġiyāṭ; the formulae adopted by the scribe show that when the Prologue was composed, he was already deceased. The whole text is rich in allusions not only to the iṣrāʾīl movement, but also to Sufism: the desire to become muḥābiḍ al-anwār, the heartfelt request to be kept in the vicinity (qurban) of God, the appellation of faqīr for Daštākī, are as many hints to Sufi spirituality. An evident wordplay connects the first part of the Prologue to the quotation of Daštākī’s passage. The Master, the sayyid al-wārā (the Prophet himself) is designated as ġiyāṭ ummati, and Daštākī is presented as the poor, humble “Ğiyāṭ”; God is asked to grant victory (nasara) to the iṣrāʾīl community, and Daštākī has “al-Manṣūr” as one of his names.

The Prologue shows that both Daštākī and its author are totally reliant on the pseudo-Theology itself as for the pieces of information given about the work and its history. That the pseudo-Theology is authored by Aristotle lies beyond doubt for them, and what the Prologue says about the “commentary” by Porphyry, the translation by Ibn Nāʿima al-Ḥimṣī, and the revision by al-Kindī, is taken from the incipit of the pseudo-Theology, upon which Daštākī elaborates:

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104 “al-Manṣūriyya” was also the name of the madrasa founded by Ṣadr al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Manṣūr Šīrāzī Husaynī, the father of Daštākī: cf. Minorsky, “A Sayyarghil of Qāsim b. Jahāngīr”, quoted above n. 27.
<table>
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<th><strong>pseudo-Theology, pp. 3.3-9, 4.3-5 Badawi</strong></th>
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| The First Chapter of the book of Aristotle the Philosopher, called in Greek *Theologia*, being the discourse on Divine Sovereignty; the interpretation of Porphyry of Tyre, translated into Arabic by 'Abd al-Masih ibn Nāʿima al-Ḥimṣī and corrected for Ahmad ibn al-Muṭsam billāb by Abū Yusuf Yaʿqūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, may God grant him peace (...).

The Philosopher said: First desired last attained and first attained last desired. Where we finish, in the branch of knowledge contained in this book of ours, is the limit of our aim and the extreme of our desire in the whole of our previous works (trans. Lewis slightly modified, quoted above n. 72, p. 486). |

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<th><strong>Prologue</strong></th>
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<td>Then, the poor and humble Giyāt, known as al-Mansūr, says: “Our aim in this book of ours is the introduction to knowledge, the opening of the exposition, the seal of the demonstration, and the secret of the explanation, that is the fourth vision of the fourth of the pillars of the garden of rejoicing, which consists in the pursuit of the truth of knowledge in view of the unveiling of the Theology that has been put together by the leader of the great wise men, the great philosopher, Aristotle the wise. He composed it in the ancient language of Greece; then one who knew and understood it interpreted and translated it. Then I first occupied myself with the interpretation and the literal quotation of his speech and of his treatise; then, I turned to what I needed, items or discourses which help to refine items in all steps, especially about it [i.e. the treatise]. I have accomplished the discourse, and in this hearts became tired”. In sum, the author of this noble book was the great philosopher Aristotle the wise, and its commentator was Porphyry of Tyre; its translator was ‘Abd al-Masih al-Ḥimṣī, and its corrector was Yaʿqūb al-Kindī.</td>
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More importantly for the purposes in hand here, the Prologue reveals the clear intention of connecting the pseudo-*Theology* with the philosophical tradition Daštakī belongs to: that of the Avicennian-Illuminationist thought. This is shown by a detail which sheds light on the intentions of the promised commentary. We are told that its aim is to provide the “seal of the demonstration, ḥātimat al-burhān” and to open the way to the “unveiling of the Theology, kašf Uṯūlūqiyā”: two
expressions which are clearly reminiscent of one of the early works by Daštaki, the *Mirāt al-haqāiq wa-muğlı al-daqaqīq*, on which Pourjavady has called attention:

In the epilogue to this work, he explains that he once underwent an extraordinary inner experience in 895/1490-91, as a result of which solutions to some philosophical problems became clear to him. Thus explanations in this work are based not on demonstrative proof (*burhān*) but rather on the evidence of a spiritual unveiling (*kaif*).  

This narrative is modelled upon a passage of Ibn Sinā’s autobiography, in which he recounts how the sudden intuition of the solution to a theoretical problem came to him in a dream, after he had completed all the steps of demonstrative reasoning. Daštaki’s narrative follows in Ibn Sinā’s footsteps, and it is telling that the commentary announced in the Prologue counts for him precisely as the *kaif* of the work labelled *Theology*, which was written in Greek, an ancient language, by the *rāis* of the philosophers and wise men of the past, Aristotle. Such an “unveiling” marks the turning point between demonstrative science, *burhān*, and intuitive knowledge leading to the spiritual peak of Illumination, *iṣrāq*. That the pseudo-*Theology* is framed against the background of Daštaki’s Avicennian and Illuminationist readings is suggested by the twin allusion to Ibn Sinā’s autobiography and to Suhrawardi’s heritage as it appears in the *Promenade of Souls and Garden of Rejoicings in the History of Philosophy* by al-Šahrazūrī (d. between 1288 and 1304), with its climactic account of Suhrawardi at the end of the chain of transmission of *hikma*.

It is worth noticing that the two manuscripts of Tehran and Princeton do not contain the promised commentary, but only the text of the pseudo-*Theology*. Further research will ascertain whether or not the commentary is extant as an independent work, and in this case the *Tahrīr Utulāğiyā* mentioned by the editor of Daštaki’s works ‘Abd Allāh Nūrānī, and listed also by Pourjavady, is the best candidate. Be this as it may, the Prologue attests in and by itself that the pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle* features already at the beginning of the Safavid revival of the *hikmat al-iṣrāq* as the pinnacle of man’s knowledge: demonstrative science paves the way for the ascension to the direct, intuitive vision of truth itself, and it is “Aristotle” who performs this ascension, providing guidance to it by his *Theology*.

Another reference to the pseudo-*Theology* is contained in a work of Nağm al-Dīn Mahmūd b. Muhammad b. Mahmūd al-Nayrizī (d. after 943/1536), a pupil of Daštaki who had close relationships with prominent personalities of the newly established Safavid regime.

105 Cf. Pourjavady, *Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran*, p. 27 with n. 156.

106 The passage of Ibn Sinā’s *Autobiography* is translated into English and commented upon by Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (quoted above, n. 88), pp. 27-8: “Every time I was at loss about a problem, concerning which I was unable to find the middle term in a syllogism, I would repair on its account to the mosque and worship, praying humbly to the All-Creator to disclose to me its obscurity and make its difficulty easy. At night I would return home, set the lamp before me, and occupy myself with reading and writing. Whenever I felt drowsy or weakening, I would turn aside to drink a cup of wine to regain my strength, and then I would go back to my reading. Whenever I fell asleep, I would see those very problems in my dream: and many problems became clear to me while asleep”.

107 Also in this case the allusion is quite concealed, and the terminology is not exactly the same: al-Šahrazūrī’s “Garden of Rejoicings” is the *rawdat al-afraw* and Daštaki’s one is the *rijāl al-ridwān*, but the allusion was undoubtedly clear for the addressees. On al-Šahrazūrī cf. the excellent entry by E. Cottrell, “al-Shahrazuri, Muhammad ibn Mahmud Shams al-Din”, in H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy, Philosophy Between 500 and 1500*, Springer Science + Business media B.V. 2011, pp. 1190-4.

108 Pourjavady, *Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran*, p. 31 n. 199.

109 As Pourjavady rightly underlines (ibid., p. 57), Nayrizī had been under the patronage of rulers who have been appointed by the Shāh: he may even have been sponsored by the Shāh himself. This fact “indicates that he was on good terms
ādīyaḥ ḥikma, an unedited commentary on the Ḥidāyat al-ḥikma of the philosopher, mathematician and astronomer Atūr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. ca. 663/1265), completed in Shiraz in 905/1595-6, al-Nayrizī lists the various sources which he used for his commentary: among them, he mentions the Theology, which he attributes to Aristotle.110 Pourjavady has the great merit of calling attention to this passage of the Ṣāḥḥ Ḥidāyat which, along with Daštakī’s commentary, is one of the first attestations of the renewed interest in the Theology.

Further references to the Theology in Safavid philosophical literature feature in the works of Mir Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), who was an eminent member of the “School of Isfahan”111 and an intimate of the Safavid court during the reign of both Shāh ‘Abbās and Shāh Ṣafvat.112 As Corbin, Endress, Ian R. Netton and Sajjad H. Rizvi have noticed, in Mir Dāmād’s Kitāb al-Ḡadawāt, Kitāb al-Qabāsāt and Risālat al-Ḥal ʿiyā the quotations of and allusions to the Theology are numerous.113 In particular, in his Kitāb al-Ḡadawāt Mir Dāmād mentions a Persian version of the Theology, which may have been prepared by Abū l-Ḥayr Muhammad Taqi al-Dīn b. Muhammad al-Fārisī, a pupil of Daštakī;114 in the Risālat al-Ḥal ʿiyā his vocabulary is reminiscent of that of the pseudo-Theology.115

As for Muhammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Yahyā al-Qawāmī al-Ṣirāzī, also known as “Ṣadr al-muṭaʿallīhīn” and popularly as “Mullā Ṣadrā”, he famously was a reader of the Theology. Mullā Ṣadrā was born in one of the noblest families of Shiraz; he studied philosophy and theology with Mir Dāmād in Isfahan, and taught in his native-city at the bequest of the family of Shiraz’s Safavid governors.116 In

with the new government. He was directly linked to the court, perhaps through Shāh Mīr, the son of Malik Mahmūd Ǧān, who had studied with Nayrizī for a while and was later on appointed by the Shah as vizier”. Cf. also H. Corbin, Philosophie iranienne et philosophie comparée, Buchet-Chastel, Tehran-Paris 1977, pp. 96 f.

110 Al-Nayrizī, Ṣāḥḥ Ḥidāyat al-ḥikma, MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Carullah 1327, f. 211, quoted by Pourjavady, Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran, p. 113 with n. 26.


115 Mīr Dāmād, Risālat al-Ḥal ʿiyā, pp. 365-8 Corbin (see above, n. 113); cf. Corbin, En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques, IV, p. 46.

116 On Mullā Ṣadrā’s biography see Rizvi, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (quoted above, n. 113), pp. 5-30.
his autograph notes concerning his works, edited in 1998 by Muḥammad Barakat, there is a list of books that he possessed in his personal library, and this list includes a Maḏmūʿ a rasāʾīl containing the Uṭūlāʾīya,117 which Mullā Ṣadrā quotes and repeatedly comments upon in his philosophical works.118

The last milestone in the history of the Safavid reception of the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle is represented by the commentary by the philosopher, theologian, jurist and politician Qādī Saʿīd Qummī (d. 1103/1691), who was appointed as qaḍī in Qom by ‘Abbās II.119 His unfinished Taʿliqāt (Glosses) on the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise mark the main exegetic effort concerning the Theology implemented during the Safavid era.

Appendix I

Tehran, Kitābkhāna-i Markazi-i Dānišgāh-i Tihrān 5392.

Muṣṭafā Dirāyatī, Fīhrīstwārā-i ḫaṭṭī Kitābkhāna-i Mūza wa-Markazi-i Asnād-i Maḏgīs-i Šūrā-i Islāmī, Tihrān 1389 h./2010, vol. 1, p. 184, n° 5117. – Muḥammad Taqī Dānīšpažūḥ, Fīhrīst-i nuṣḥahā-i ḫaṭṭī Kitābkhāna-i Markazi-i Dānišgāh-i Tihrān, vol. 15, Čāphāna-i Dānišgāh-i Tihrān, Tihrān 1345 h./1966, p. 4234. 73 ff., paper, 7 × 13 cm, 19 lines on 12 × 17.5 cm. – Nastaʿliq. A fine old copy, but suffering from worm-damage. – Not dated, ca. 10th/11th cent. h. Reader’s note on first end paper, dated Ǧumādā I 1067; waqf notice of the family of Mullā Muḥammad Ismāʿīl Astarābādī dated 1249 h; further information, also on the seals, is given in the catalogue.

Uṭūlāʾīya.

The manuscript contains an ‘edition’ of the ps.-Aristotelian Theology, with a prologue by Ǧiyāǧ al-Dīn Maṇṣūr Daštāki (d. 948/1541) announcing a Tahḏīb of the text, but without the promised commentary. No marginal annotations.

Princeton, University Library, Garrett Collection, Yabuda 1029.


The second text, an Arabic adaptation of a treatise written in Persian by Afdal al-Din (Baba Afdal) al-Kašani (d. ca. 610/1213-14), ends with an apograph of the author’s and translator’s colophon, i.e. Sadr al-Din (Mullä Sadrä) Muhammad al-Siräzi (d. 1050/1640): “Muhammad, also known as Sadr ad-Din as-Siräzi, wrote these lines by his guilty and ephemeral hand in the days and months of the year 1031, compiler and translator [of this treatise], humble and submissive, praising God and asking for His forgiveness through the intercession of His Prophet, praying and blessing His Prophet, may God forgive him, his parents and all the believers wherever they may be in the lands, and God save them from the pains of the Day of Return; God is the one who grants the right way. – Survive will my writing as a token of this temporal existence, while its writer will be buried beneath the stones. [Dated on] Monday, the 29th of the holy month’s blessings come down on the people of faith, in the year 1129 of the sacred Hiğra, [by] Ibn Muhammad Rahîm Isfandyar, may God forgive both [father and son]”.


Princeton University Digital Library URL: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/2514nk55z>.

(The treatise was first printed in Rasâ’il Âhûnd Mullâ Sadrä, Kâhrâna-i Aqâ Mirzâ ‘Abbâs, Tihrân 1302/1885, no. 7: pp. 278-340).

There is no direct evidence that the exemplar of the Uṣûlîyiya was also transcribed from Mullä Sadrä’s copy, even though the book was found in his personal library; see M. Barakat, *Yaddîštâb-i Mullâ Sadrâ hamrâ bâ fibrîst-i kitâbîni-i sahsî-i Mullâ Sadrâ*, Intisârät-i Bidâr, Qum 1377 h./1998, pp. 65-73; cf. Rizvi, *Mullâ Sadrâ Sirâzî*, pp. 117-13, in part. p. 130, and Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy* (quoted above, n. 117), p. 184, n. 86.
Appendix II

Suhrwardi, the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle, “Plato”, and “Aristotle”

As mentioned above (p. 203 and n. 77), the passage of the Kitāb Ḥikmat al-išrāq which alludes to the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle is puzzling: while in the latter the statement “Often I have been alone with my soul and have doffed my body (…)” is attributed to Aristotle, Suhrwardi attributes the saying to Plato, and this not only in the passage quoted above, p. 203, but also in another passage, while in the K. al-talwiḥāt he occasionally remarks that the narrative of the mystical ascension has been attributed also to Aristotle. This mention of Plato attracted first the attention of Carlo Alfonso Nallino. In the 20s of the 20th century, in his book-length review article of the Italian translation published in 1917 by Ignazio Di Matteo of the mystical poem by Ibn al-Fārīḍ (d. 632/1235), apropos a verse which is clearly reminiscent of the topic of the ascension, Nallino remarked:

Par di sentire qui una eco fedele delle prime parole colle quali Plotino (Enneadi IV, viii. 1) descrive le estasi da lui experimentate (…), descrizione ben nota agli Arabi, che sogliono attribuirla ad Aristotele, trovandosi essa inserita nella Teologia del pseudo-Aristotele. (…) La visione è riferita per intero nella Teologia (…) e nel trattatello d’al-Fārābī sull’accordo fra Platone e Aristotele (…). Ad essa accenna pure as-Suhrawardi al-Maqtūl (m. 587 eg.), Ḥikmat al-išrāq, 378, ma attribuendola a Platone; il commentatore ash-Shirāzī la riferisce per intero (pp. 378-379), togliendola dal K. al-talwiḥāt dello stesso as-Suhrawardi, dove ancora figura Platone in luogo dello pseudo-Aristotele (Plotino).

120 Cf. above p. 204 with n. 84. The narrative in the first person is preceded by the words “kalām labū, Discourse of the author”, p. 22.1 Badawi. There is no scholarly consensus about the author who is alluded to: according to F. W. Zimmermann, “The Origins of the so-called Theology of Aristotle”, in J. Kraye, W. F. Ryan, C.-B. Schmitt (eds), Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages: the “Theology” and Other Texts, The Warburg Institute, London 1986, pp. 110-240, in part, pp. 143-9 and 217-21, it is Plato, while C. D’Ancona et al., Plotino. La discesa dell’anima nei corpi (quoted above, n. 82), pp. 280-2 point to Aristotle. Given that in the standard version of the pseudo-Theology the book is attributed to Aristotle, and that there is no mention of Plato at this point, I think that the speech in the first person is referred to Aristotle: the mention of Plato occurs only in indirect testimonies (Suhrawardi and the Latin version) which cannot prevail over the direct testimony of the pseudo-Theology itself.

121 “The faith of Plato and the master visionaries is not built upon such rhetorical arguments, but upon something else. Plato said: ‘When freed from my body I beheld luminous spheres’. These that he mentioned are the very same highest heavens that some men will behold at their resurrection ‘On the day when the earth will be changed to other than this earth and the heavens, and will appear before God, The One, the ‘Triumphant’. Plato and his companions showed plainly that they believed the Maker of the universe and the world of intellect to be light when they said that the pure light is the world of intellect. Of himself, Plato said that in certain of his spiritual conditions he would shed his body and become free from matter. Then he would see light and splendour within his essence. He would ascend to that all-encompassing divine cause, and would seem to be located and suspended in it, beholding a mighty light in that lofty and divine place. The passage of which this is a summary ended with the words ‘but thought veiled that light from me’. Suhrawardi, The Philosophy of Illumination. A New Critical Edition of the Text of Ḥikmat al-išrāq with English Translation, Notes, Commentary, and Introduction by J. Walbridge - H. Ziai, Brigham Young University Press, Provo (UT) 1999 (Islamic Translation Series), pp. 110-11.


Ten years later, in his review of Massignon’s *Recueil de textes inédits concernant l’histoire de la mystique en pays d’Islam* (1929) Nallino noticed that in the Latin version of the pseudo-*Theology* the same attribution to Plato occurs. Here is the Latin passage:

\*Atque hoc idem opinatus est Plato de anima universali dicens: Ego pluries speculando secundum animam relictis corporis exuviis visus sum mihi frui summo bono cum gaudio admirabili, unde restiti quodammodo attonitus; tum, agnoscentis me esse partem mundi superioris adeptusque vitam aeternam, sub luce magna inenarrabili inaudibilisque ac incogitabili, lassitudine autem delapsus ab ista speculatione intellectus ad imaginationem lux illa defferuit, unde remansi tristis. Rursum relicito corpore reversus inveni animam luce plenam, et tum corpori influentem, tum supra elevatum. Inquit igitur Plato: qui conatus mundum supremum ascendere intellexerit substantias divinas causasque universales, profecto maximum consequetur praemium.\*\(^{124}\)

The hypothesis advanced by Nallino was that two versions circulated in the Arab world, one with Aristotle as the speaker, and another with Plato:

A p. 176 [of Massignon’s book] è riportato il famoso racconto dell’estasi di Plotino (*Enneadi* IV 8, 1) secondo la cosiddetta *Teologia d’Aristotele* in arabo: estasi che, narrata in prima persona nella *Teologia*, è quindi considerata dagli Arabi come estasi d’Aristotele. Mi sia permesso qui di osservare che dieci anni or sono (…) avevo rilevato che il racconto si trova anche in due opere del famoso mistico eterodosso as-Suhrawarî al-Maqtûl, ma attribuito a Platone anziché ad Aristotele; aggiungo ora che questa stessa attribuzione a Platone ricorre anche nel rimaneggiamento latino, attraverso versione ebraica, della predetta *Teologia di Aristotele*, fatta fare intorno al 1515 dal ravennate Francesco Roseus o De Roseis e stampato per la prima volta a Roma nel 1519 (...). Ciò fa supporre che effettivamente corressero fra gli Arabi due diverse redazioni della *Teologia*, almeno per quel che riguarda questo capitolo, e che il ”Platone” d’una delle due sia una confusione, facilmente spiegabile presso gli Arabi, in luogo di “Plotino”.\(^{125}\)

This explanation did not meet the approval of Geoffrey Lewis, the translator of the Arabic Plotinus into English: since the “discourse of the author” is said to be an allegory (*ramz*), Lewis suggested that the translator into Latin was spontaneously led to refer the speech to Plato, who famously expresses himself allegorically.\(^{126}\)

When he discovered the so-called “Longer Version” of the pseudo-*Theology*, Andrei Borisov\(^{127}\) also noted that it expands the text with respect to the standard version; the comparison with the Latin version convinced him not only that the Latin version had been made on the basis of the “Longer Version”, but also that the latter was the original version of the pseudo-*Theology*, while the standard version was, in his eyes, an abridgement.

\(^{124}\) Sapientissimi Philosophi Aristotelis Stagiritae Theologia sive mystica philosophia secundum Aegyptios noviter reperta et in latinum castigatissime redacta, Romae 1519, Liber Primus, caput quartum, fol. 3 r. The text is identical also in the edition published by Francesco Patrizi da Cherso at the end of his *Nova de universis philosophia* under the title *Mystica Aegyptiorum et Chaldaeorum a Platone, voce tradita, ab Aristotele excepta et conscripta philosophia*, Ferrariae, apud Benedictum Mammarellum, 1591, Liber primus, Caput quartum, p. 5 r.


\(^{127}\) Cf. above p. 206 and n. 92.
If so, one may think that in the original version the speaker was Plato: this is the hypothesis advanced by Zimmermann.\textsuperscript{128} According to D’Ancona, the mention of Plato by Suhrawardi and in the Latin translation is best accounted for by the presence in the standard version of the pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle*, at the end of the first chapter (where the narrative of the ascension is located), of a long passage where the author, “Aristotle”, praises “the noble divine Plato, *Aflaṭūn al-īrāf al-ilāhī*” for his doctrines.\textsuperscript{129} Finally, Garth Fowden thinks that Suhrawardi substituted Plato for Aristotle on his own devising:

Al-Suhrawardi’s so-called ‘illuminationist’ philosophy was in part inspired by the Arabic version of Plotinus’ *Ennead* 4.8.1 on the experience of shedding the body and beholding “the sublime light high in that divine place” – though, realizing al-Kindi’s “Aristotle” could not possibly have said this, al-Suhrawardi reattributed the idea to Plato.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{128} Zimmermann, “The Origins of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*”, thinks that it was Ibn Nā’ima al-Ḥimṣi, the translator of Plotinus into Arabic, who substituted Plato for Plotinus (p. 145). Fenton, “The Arabic and Hebrew versions of the *Theology of Aristotle*” (quoted above, n. 82), p. 260, sides tentatively with the opinion that Plato stands for Plotinus in Suhrawardi’s source.

\textsuperscript{129} D’Ancona, “The Greek Sage” (quoted above, n. 76).

\textsuperscript{130} Cf. Fowden, “Pseudo-Aristotelian Politics and Theology in Universal Islam” (quoted above n. 78), p. 71 (= p. 143).