CHAPTER THREE

THE ARABIC TEXT:
MANUSCRIPTS, TRANSMISSION,
EDITIONS

1. The Arabic Manuscripts

The Arabic translation of the Essay by Theophrastus On First Principles survives in two known manuscripts, one in the Malik library in Tehran and the other in the Bodleian at Oxford. The first,

Tehran Malik 5925, pp. 2–28, according to the numbering of the pages by Crubellier 2013, is written in an airy and slightly angular scholar’s nash, almost completely devoid of diacritical points. The title page and the first page are missing; the text of the Essay thus begins at 4a12 (see the apparatus of the Greek text). It is dated 461 Hijra/1069 AD in its colophon, which reads,

The treatise by Theophrastus, the advocate of Aristotle’s arguments in metaphysics, (in) the translation by Ishaq, is finished.

I, Yahiya ibn-Jarir, the physician from Tikrit, transcribed it from a corrupt copy, in Mayafarighin in the year 461. Praise be to God.

It was collated with its exemplar, which was very corrupt.

The scribe is the Jacobite Christian medical scholar and theologian, Abū-Nasr Yahiya ibn-Jarir at-Tikriti, student of Ibn-Zur’a, the Baghdad Aristotelian philosopher from the school of Yahiya ibn-‘Adi. According to Ibn-Abi-Uwaybi’a, who has a brief notice on him (I,243), he was still alive eleven years after he copied this manuscript, in 472/1079–1080. His medical works mentioned by Ibn-Abi-Uwaybi’a concern sexual hygiene (Graf 1947, 260, refers to possible extant copies), but he also wrote an astrological piece which is extant, though its authorship is contested (GAS VII,19; GALS I,862, Graf 1947, 260). His major theological work is Kitab al-Mursid, The Guide, in which he mentions that he visited Constantinople in 450/1058 (Graf 1947, 260–262). Like most of the scholars of his time he was a man of many talents and of apparent interest
who deserves to be studied beyond the few essays that have been devoted
to his theological views.\(^1\)

The manuscript was copied in Mayyāfāriqīn, just west of lake Van
in eastern Anatolia, at the sources of the Tigris. It contains, following
Theophrastus’s Essay, al-Fārābī’s *Principles of the Opinions of the People
of the Perfect State* (*Mabādi’ ārāʾ āhl al-madīna al-fādīla*), and it was used by
R. Walzer 1985 for his edition of that text (cf. pp. 22–25). The manuscript
has marginal notes and corrections by the same scribe, one of which, in
both Syriac and Arabic in the part on al-Fārābī, refers to “Gregory of
Nyssa or some other Gregory” (Walzer p. 24). The manuscript is defective
both at the beginning and end; it is missing at least two pages at the
beginning—a title page and the first page of Theophrastus’s text—and
a few pages at the end of al-Fārābī’s text. This is unfortunate, because
we are deprived of the title which Theophrastus’s Essay carried in this
manuscript; the colophon gives a description of its contents, which in all
likelihood reflects the Scholium in some Greek manuscripts (see above,
Chapter 1.2), but not the title.

The probable provenance of this manuscript bears some discussion,
given that it is the chief witness for one independent branch of the
transmission of the text of Theophrastus’s Essay. It was copied, as just
mentioned, in Mayyāfāriqīn in 1069–1070. Mayyāfāriqīn at that time
was the seat of the court of the Marwānid dynasty which ruled the
region of Diyārbakr (380/990–478/1085).\(^2\) The city had come to promi-
nence as political and cultural center already during the time of Sayf-
ad-Dawla and the previous dynasty of the Ḥamdānids, who were over-
thrown by the Marwānids in 380/990–991, and it enjoyed a further
period of cultural efflorescence under the long and illustrious reign of
the Marwānid Naṣr-ad-Dawla (401/1011–483/1061). Yaḥyā’s brother,
al-Fadl ibn-Jarīr, served as the physician of Naṣr-ad-Dawla (Ibn-Abī-
Uṣaybi’a I,243), and in all likelihood Yaḥyā moved to Mayyāfāriqīn
together with his brother, where he stayed and worked also through the
reign of Naṣr-ad-Dawla’s successor, his son Niẓām-ad-Dīn (453/1061–
472/1079). It was during the rule of Niẓām-ad-Dīn that Yaḥyā copied
our manuscript, and it is interesting to note that Ibn-Abī-Uṣaybi’a gives
this ruler’s date of death as the year through which Yaḥyā was known

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\(^1\) For this, his major surviving work, see Mouawad 1997, with further references.

\(^2\) For the Marwānids see, most conveniently, the article by C. Hillenbrand in *EP*,
VI,626–627.