The edition of the *Cream of Wisdom*, the longest of several works on Aristotelian philosophy composed by the thirteenth-century Syriac scholar Gregory Barhebraeus, has been a major component of the *Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus* project. Here, a brief account of the Syriac tradition of Aristotelian philosophy and an overview of Barhebraeus’ philosophical works are followed by a report on the progress of the edition and some observations arising from the edition of two further books of this work, the *Book of Heaven and the World* and the *Book of Generation and Corruption*.

1. *Introduction*

Syriac occupies a unique position in the transmission of Aristotelian philosophy as one of the first foreign languages into which a major portion of the Aristotelian corpus was translated, as an intermediary for its transmission to the Arabo-Islamic world, and as a language in which a more or less continuous tradition of the study of that corpus was maintained for a period of at least eight centuries. A work that stands very much at the end of that tradition (if we leave aside the Syriac *Book of Isagoge* by the Chaldean patriarch Joseph II, 1667–1713/4)¹ and that might be considered its crowning achievement is the *Cream of Wisdom*, the philosophical encyclopedic work by the Syrian Orthodox maphrian Gregory Barhebraeus (1225/6–1286). The production of a critical edition of this text has been

¹ On Joseph II, see Herman Teule, “Joseph II, Patriarch of the Chaldeans (1696–1713/4), and the *Book of the Magnet*. First Soundings”, in *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage*, ed. R. Ebied and H. Teule (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 221–241 (on the *Book of Isagoge*, a work which was originally composed in Arabic and then translated into Syriac, see ibid., 228, where, for “Harvard Syr. 150”, read “149”).
an important component of the ‘Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus’ project. In what follows I shall first say a few words about the Syriac reception of Aristotelian philosophy to place the _Cream of Wisdom_ in its context. This will be followed by some notes on the progress of the edition of the work and some preliminary observations on the two books (out of the twenty-two books that the work comprises) that I am currently editing.

2. _Syriac Tradition of Aristotle_

If we ignore the indirect importation of Aristotelian ideas through theological literature, and concentrate on the translation of Aristotle’s works and commentaries of them and the composition of works specifically related to Aristotelian philosophy, the history of the reception and assimilation of Aristotle in Syriac may be divided into three main periods. The first is what might be called the ‘purely Syriac’ period, which stretches until the beginning of the time when Arabic translations began to be made. This period itself can be divided into the period of the earliest translations, which began in the sixth century, and the later period in which many of these translations were revised, which began in the latter half of the seventh century. The second main period of reception is that of

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