1 The Eastern Origin

_The Book of Sindbad the Philosopher_ (henceforth _BSP_), also known under the title of _The Seven Viziers_, tells the story of a prince who is led by his teacher’s astronomical calculations into keeping a seven-day oath of silence. Bound by his promise to do so, the prince cannot defend himself when false accusations of rape are made against him by one of the king’s wives, and when, as a result, his father sentences him to death. The king’s seven viziers know that the king will later regret his rash judgement on the prince, and so they use their storytelling skills to change their master’s mind. In the course of the ensuing week, one wise man a day tells one or two stories in order to persuade the king both of the wiliness of his wife, and of the innocence of his son. Meanwhile, the king’s wife tries to reverse the effect of these counsels by responding with daily stories of her own. When the time of the prince’s silence passes, he speaks at last, and convinces his father of his innocence, while the wife confesses her guilt.

This, in brief, is the main storyline as found in numerous early versions of the _BSP_. What is more, the overarching frame-story includes several further features that all early versions share, such as the opening motif of a childless king whose prayers for a son are realised, but at a price: the king also receives a prophesy that his heir is destined to undergo a life-threatening danger (the Command of Seven-day Silence). Subsequently, the king’s son is tutored for many years, but without learning anything. Eventually, Sindbad the Wise enters into a contract with the king whereby Sindbad commits himself to teaching the prince within six months everything that the young man has failed to learn across his many preceding years of schooling. Sindbad then keeps his promise. In good time, he equips the prince with the kind of knowledge that should make him the wisest in his father’s kingdom. However, only a day before the prince’s education comes to an end, Sindbad makes his student promise to keep silence for seven days.
When considering the question of the origins of this Sindbad material, a distinction must be drawn between what we can learn from the texts that happen to have survived, and what knowledge about their origin we can derive from secondary sources. Among the surviving texts we find a group of fairly diverse versions and redactions that can be traced more or less directly to the original stock material of the Sindbad-Story, though without necessarily including the original text of the book. These texts are sometimes referred to as the ‘Eastern’ or ‘Oriental group’ on account of the Indian, or rather the Persian-Arabic origin of their source material. Derived from this group are all later versions written in various languages of the western Middle Ages, such as, for example, The Seven Sages of Rome or the Dolopathos. Since these form a distinct group that is significantly different from the versions of the Eastern group, modern scholarship describes them with a collective term, the ‘Western group.’

To the Eastern group belongs, first of all, the Byzantine Syntipas (G), which, according to its prologue, was translated from Syriac into Greek in the late 11th century by Michael Andreopoulos. The Syriac source of the Byzantine translation has been preserved by indirect transmission in a 16th-century fragmentary

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2 For further secondary literature on the versions of the so-called Western Group, see: Runte, *The Seven Sages*; Lundt, “Sieben weise Meister”, pp. 656–60; Marzolph, “Sindbād”, p. 704; Mallette, “Seven Sages”; Foehr-Janssens, “De Jérusalem à Rome”.

3 On Byzantine Syntipas, see the chapter by I. Toth in this volume.