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*Sonderforschungsbereich 980*  
**EPISTEME IN  
BEWEGUNG**

## **WORKING PAPER NO. 20**

Gyburg Uhlmann

Were Platonic Dialogues Read in  
Late Antique School Lessons on  
Aristotelian Logic?

On Ancient Commentators on  
Aristotle and Their Teaching  
Practices

*Sonderforschungsbereich 980*  
Episteme in Bewegung.  
Wissenstransfer von der Alten  
Welt bis in die Frühe Neuzeit

*Collaborative Research Centre*  
Episteme in Motion. Transfer of  
Knowledge from the Ancient World  
to the Early Modern Period

Berlin 2019  
ISSN 2199-2878

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*Zitationsangabe für diesen Beitrag:*

Uhlmann, Gyburg: Were Platonic Dialogues Read in Late Antique School Lessons on Aristotelian Logic? On Ancient Commentators on Aristotle and Their Teaching Practices, Working Paper des SFB 980 *Episteme in Bewegung*, No. 20/2019, Freie Universität Berlin  
Stable URL online: <https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/handle/fub188/17607>

Working Paper ISSN 2199 – 2878 (Internet)

Diese Publikation wurde gefördert von der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

Sonderforschungsbereich 980  
„Episteme in Bewegung“  
Freie Universität Berlin  
Schwendenerstraße 8  
D – 14195 Berlin  
Tel: +49 (0)30 838-503 49  
Email: [info@sfb-episteme.de](mailto:info@sfb-episteme.de)

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# Were Platonic Dialogues read in late antique school lessons on Aristotelian Logic?

On ancient commentators on Aristotle and their teaching practices\*

Gyburg Uhlmann

## 1 Introduction: Curriculum and philosophical practices

As early as the third century AD there was a structured path of learning in the Platonic philosophical schools in Athens and at other locations where philosophy was taught in those days. This path was officially accepted and practiced by all later commentators and teachers. These later commentators and teachers always refer back to the Syrian philosopher Iamblichus as the one predecessor who introduced a fixed curriculum that contained a list and order of texts that should be read and interpreted by masters and students in order to reach the summit of philosophical expertise.<sup>1</sup>

The lecture plan included a didactic order that established a hierarchy between certain Aristotelian and Platonic texts. The students were supposed to learn Aristotelian logic first by reading treatises from the text corpus that was later called “organon”, but the reading of certain, well chosen Platonic dialogues was intended to come later. In the commentary tradition both text corpora were strongly linked and entangled with each other; the philosophical position underlying this is the object of debate in modern scholarship, since it implies the assumption that Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy are basically in agreement and differ only in certain identifiable minor points.<sup>2</sup>

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\*The argument presented in this paper was developed in the context of the SFB 980 Episteme in motion, funded by the DFG (German research foundation). I am grateful to Carolyn Kelly and Orla Mullholland for suggesting linguistic improvements as native speakers.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Leendert G. Westerink, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, Amsterdam 1962, xxxvii; Alain Festugière, *L'ordre de lecture des dialogues de Platon aux Ve/VIe siècles*, in: *MH* 26, 1969, 281-296.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Ilsetraut Hadot, *The Role of the Commentaries on Aristotle in the teaching of Philosophy*

However, of interest is not only the very fact of the mutual reference between Platonic and Aristotelian texts in the commentary tradition and school practices in late antiquity and their impact on the understanding of both philosophies, but also the manner in which they were related and positioned in the school curriculum.

The rationale of the decision to start with Aristotelian logical treatises from the *organon* was clear: they were regarded as the ideal texts with which to learn the methodological instruments and the formal tools for the practice of rational argumentation and for the uncovering of the truth value of certain arguments as far as one can judge by the formal structure of the argument. This tool kit, though, was not regarded as part of the philosophical practices themselves but as a necessary prerequisite for such practices.

We witness the application of this didactic division between formal instrument and disciplinary content everywhere in the late antique Aristotelian commentators' exegeses: the underlying syllogisms of various Aristotelian arguments are uncovered and made explicit by the commentators, the dihaeretic structure of arguments is laid open in order to elucidate the necessity of the argument, the possibilities of being trapped by homonymies in a syllogism are pointed out, etc.

A major part of the exegetical activities that Byzantine scribes executed when they tried to support the reader in his or her reading of Aristotelian treatises consisted in adding both text and diagrammatical scholia that transferred logical operations or relations into syllogistic form or into diagrammatical images.<sup>3</sup> They thereby continued the late antique curricular practices and consolidated the hierarchical order of the succession of the treatises in the reading process.

However, in late antiquity the logical treatises from the *organon* had to be taught first, before the reading of "real" philosophical texts was advised, the latter constituting the primary philosophical practice in the different branches of philosophy, since these texts were regarded as guide to the development of specific reliable knowledge that presupposed a mastery in the formal structure

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according to the Prefaces of the neoplatonic Commentaries on the Categories, in: H. Robinson (ed.), *Aristotle and the Later Tradition*, Oxford 1991 (Studies in Manuscript Cultures), 175–189; Han Baltussen, *Philosophy and Exegesis in Simplicius: The Methodology of a Commentator*, London 2008, esp. 147-158 and idem, *From polemic to exegesis: The ancient philosophical commentary*, in: *Poetics Today* 28, 2007, 247–281; idem, *Simplicius on elements and causes in Greek philosophy: critical appraisal or philosophical synthesis?*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, 111-129; Ilsetraut Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Harmonization of Aristotle and Plato*, Leiden 2015.

<sup>3</sup>Christian Brockmann, *Scribal annotation as evidence of learning in manuscripts from the First Byzantine Humanism: the Philosophical Collection*, in: J. B. Quenzer, Dmitry Bondarev and J.U. Sobisch (eds.), *Manuscript Cultures: Mapping the Field*, Berlin 2014 (Studies in Manuscript Cultures 1), 11–33 (with fig. 1–10).

of argumentation. Therefore, the commentators assumed that the philosophical disciplines themselves were not suitable for as yet insufficiently prepared beginner students.

Ancient commentators reflected on a regular basis in an introductory preface on the suitability of the reader, his *epitedeiotes*, which was needed for the specific tasks of the treatise under discussion. This was part of the second catalogue of preliminary clarifications that preceded the beginning of every running commentary,<sup>4</sup> a practice that seems to have been established long before Proclus, who died in AD 485. We know that Proclus wrote and taught a now lost treatise called *Synanagnosis*, which contained rules and advice for the curricular reading of philosophical texts.<sup>5</sup>

That is to say, the reading of Platonic dialogues, or at least the Platonic dialogues that constituted the curriculum which aimed for philosophical perfection and for the highest happiness that human beings can achieve, was – as far as its theoretical concept is concerned – strictly regulated and not meant to start earlier than after the preparatory classes in logic had been completed successfully.

Considering the practical – economic and financial – difficulties which many students had to overcome and which prevented many from the continuation of their studies at all, the time consumed by that phase of preparation could take many years and remained for many students the only philosophical education they would ever receive.<sup>6</sup>

In this paper we ask what it means when philosophical education is structured in a strict sense and when this structure relates primarily to a text corpus that is supposed to be read in a certain order that is founded and reflected upon epistemologically, psychologically and ontologically. How did the late ancient masters and students deal with these widely accepted orders and restrictions? Did they really only start reading and teaching Plato after so many years of preparation? Did they really abstain from the pleasure of reading Platonic dialogues and their study as long as it was advised by the standard curriculum?

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<sup>4</sup>Jaap Mansfeld (ed.), *Prolegomena: Questions to be settled before the study of an author or text*, Leiden 1998.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Ilsetraut Hadot, *The Role of the Commentaries on Aristotle in the teaching of Philosophy according to the Prefaces of the neoplatonic Commentaries on the Categories*, esp. 184-186.

<sup>6</sup>On the whole question of social and political contexts of the practices the reflexes of which we can see in the extant commentaries cf. Edward J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, University of California Press, 2006; idem, *The Final Pagan Generation*, University of California Press, 2015 and idem, *Hypatia: The Life and Legend of an Ancient Philosopher*, Oxford University Press, 2017.

## 2 Evidence

We do not have to speculate about this: there is sufficient evidence for us to doubt that in practice the reading order was performed in a – superficially understood – strict sense and with rigidity. Rather, we find traces of Platonic readings at almost every stage of the curriculum in the commentaries.

If we confine ourselves for the time being to the corpus of extant commentaries on treatises of the *organon*, we find in 11 commentaries altogether i. e. 5 references to the *Alcibiades*, 45 to the *Phaedo*, 31 to the *Gorgias*, 15 to the *Phaedrus*, and 10 to the *Philebus*. There is also a substantial number of references to dialogues that did not count as part of the curriculum and therefore were not interpreted on a regular scholarly basis. The *Republic*, for example, is cited 38 times. While all of these texts in theory presuppose completion of the reading of Aristotelian logic, we have to ask why the commentators are entitled to argue with these – in theory – still unknown texts?

Since the extant commentaries are largely products of the philosophical or logical classes or at least were written in the context of the teaching in these schools and had students of Aristotelian and Platonic studies in mind as intended audience, we must assume that the references to Platonic texts (as well as to advanced Aristotelian treatises such as the *Metaphysics* or *Physics*) took place in the oral lectures as a part of the instruction inside the classrooms. That is: this was not only a private issue of personal reading interests, rather, the entanglement of different readings and associations of texts seems to have been a regular part of the teaching methods and learning process.

Since these movements always go hand in hand with reflections on and affirmations of the curricular order and the primacy of the Aristotelian texts compared to the Platonic dialogues in the commentaries' preliminary, the presence and non-presence or pre-presence of Platonic philosophy in these lectures and teaching needs to be specifically observed and interpreted.

Therefore, further examinations are needed concerning the questions which texts are cited and why and on which occasion, to what purpose, with which impact and claim of understanding etc. And we have to clarify whether or not the underlying accepted structure of anagogically structured learning is subversively undermined by these practices of citation and reference.<sup>7</sup>

This contextualization proves to be even more necessary given that Boethius, who aims to transfer the Greek tradition of an Aristotelian and Platonic curriculum into his Roman context, omits the references to Platonic texts that seem to have been traditionally used in the logical commentaries at least as early as

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Gyburg Uhlmann, On the Function of Platonic Doctrines in Late Antique Commentaries on *Metaphysics* A 9, A 6 and M 4 – an Example of Late Antique Knowledge Transfer, in: Working Papers des SFB Episteme in Bewegung 1, 2014, 1–37.

Porphry's commentaries.<sup>8</sup> As Christian Vogel recently elaborated convincingly, Boethius only refers to Plato once in his commentaries, namely in both of his commentaries on Aristotle's *de interpretatione* in the context of the discussion about the relationship between the Aristotelian treatise and the Platonic *Cratylus*, in which Plato seems to suggest a theory of language that is contrary to Aristotle's explanation in chapter one of his hermeneutics. I.e., that Boethius only cites Plato when the text itself (nearly) forces him to do so and when it is absolutely inevitable in respect to the topic treated. In the Greek commentaries there are plenty of cases in which the commentator refers to Plato without a similar necessity or impulse from the Aristotelian text.

Therefore, it seems even more reasonable to assume that it is the very context of Greek late antique school institutions in Athens and Alexandria that allowed or even entitled the commentators to include Platonic references in Aristotelian commentaries.

As there is no controversy over the place and function in the curriculum of the commentaries on the treatises of the *organon*, we start with this text corpus of altogether 19 extant commentary texts ranging from the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias around AD 100 until the commentaries of Stephanos at the beginning of the 7th century AD. However, the majority of texts under consideration were written in the 5th and the beginning of the 6th century AD.

We exclude - for the time being - Simplicius' commentaries, since one first would have to reflect on the different relationship in which Simplicius' written commentaries stood to the curricularly teaching structure in the school institutions.

### **3 Analyzing Platonic traces: Categories of references**

As a methodological tool we will start with three categories of different sorts of references and quotations that derive from different relations between the quoting (or referring) commentary text and the quoted (or referred to) Platonic text.

First of all we have intensive use of Platonic images and similes or descriptive passages that help to clarify a question in the imagination of the reader, i.e. of references that are illustrative or exemplary (1); secondly, these cases have to be distinguished from terminological (2) references in which the commentator refers to a Platonic passage, in which Plato gives a certain distinction or denomi-

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<sup>8</sup>Christian Vogel, Boethius' Übersetzungsprojekt: Philosophische Grundlagen und didaktische Methoden eines spätantiken Wissenstransfers, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016 (Episteme in Bewegung 6), 79-82.

nation that the commentator believes to be useful for the understanding or the classification of the Aristotelian passage or argument; thirdly, the commentator refers to a passage from a Platonic treatise that is the standard reference text, i.e., the locus classicus for the understanding of a certain problem or solution of a question. We will call these references integratory (3).

However, it soon becomes obvious that the instances will exceed the limits of these categories, because these traces of Plato prove to be of further influence and implications and have the tendency to become entangled with the passage and treatise that is presently commented upon. We will have to analyze and describe how the commentators deal with these transgressions and with the question of different levels of understanding that must be presupposed.

## 4 First example: terminological references (2)

We will first present an (at first glance) terminological (2) reference from Ammonius' commentary on *de interpretatione*,<sup>9</sup> the third treatise in the curriculum of the logical *organon*.

Ammonius uses references to Platonic dialogues 33 times in his commentary on *de interpretatione*, including references and quotations from 11 dialogues, including exceedingly complex texts such as the *Philebus*, the *Parmenides* and the *Phaedrus*, which are read in the Platonic curriculum as theological treatises that mark the keystone of the learning process.

Many of these references are – naturally – taken from the *Cratylus*, the relation of which to the Aristotelian theory of language at the beginning of *de interpretatione* is crucial for the understanding of the text and of the Aristotelian logic tradition. Obviously, Ammonius read the *Cratylus* or at least excerpts from the *Cratylus* with his students.<sup>10</sup>

What is more striking are the (many) other dialogues which are included in the commentary without any external necessity.

The first example we will discuss from this group is cited in the lemma ad 17a17ff. (Ammon. in de int. 75,20-77,25). Ammonius comments upon Aristotle's distinction between (mere) expression (phasis) and assertion (apophansis).

τὸ μὲν οὖν ὄνομα καὶ τὸ ῥῆμα φάσις ἔστω μόνον, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἔστιν εἰπεῖν οὕτω  
δηλοῦντά τι τῆ φωνῆ ὥστ' ἀποφαίνεσθαι, ἢ ἐρωτῶντός τινος, ἢ μὴ ἀλλ' αὐτὸν προαι-  
ρούμενον. (de int. 17a17-20)

<sup>9</sup>There are two similar passages in Ammonius: Ammon. in de int. 13,9ff. (R. 392c); 48,17ff. (Sph. 261dff.).

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Michael Krewet, Wissenstransfer in Scholien. Zur Präsenz Platons in den Marginalien von de interpretatione-Handschriften, in: Working Papers des SFB Episteme in Bewegung 6, 2015, 1-23.



“Let us call a noun or verb simply an expression (phasis), since by saying it one cannot reveal anything by one’s utterance in such a way as to be making a statement (apophansis), whether one is answering a question or speaking spontaneously.”<sup>11</sup>

In the passage discussed Ammonius explains the lexis of the lemma, i.e. he comments upon single words and expressions that Aristotle uses;<sup>12</sup> in our case he states that the expression “ἔστω” (“let be...”) in Aristotle’s “let a noun or a verb be only an expression” stresses that the term “expression” which refers to vocal sounds that cannot by themselves express something true or false is a coinage of Aristotle.

Ammonius underlines this claim by referring to a usage of the word “phasis” in Plato’s *Timaeus* in order to clarify that it was only Aristotle who coined this specific meaning, whereas in Plato the word is used rather unspecifically.

The argument, thus, does not seem to be very exciting or worth further consideration, but seems rather to be an arbitrarily chosen instance that is to be classified as (mere) terminological reference.<sup>13</sup> However, the passage that Ammonius refers to and which he summarizes is indeed relevant and should be read verbatim along with the passage in Ammonius. He says:

τὰ γοῦν ἔνυλα εἶδη τὰ ἐν γενέσει καὶ φθορᾷ τὴν ὑπόστασιν ἔχοντα διὰ τὴν συνεχῆ ῥύσιν φεύγειν φησὶν οὐχ ὑπομένοντα τὴν τοῦ τόδε καὶ τοῦτο καὶ πᾶσαν ὄση μόνιμα αὐτὰ ὡς ὄντα ἐνδείκνυται φάσις. (Ammon. in de int. 77, 23-25)

“He [i.e. Timaeus] says that the emmattered forms that have their being in genesis and corruption flee because of the continuous flux and do not sustain the expression (phasis) “this” and “that” and everything that indicates that they were something that is.”

Ammonius underlines that Plato’s *Timaeus* only means the very act of predication without any reference to propositional truth or falsehood or the lack of truth or falsehood. It is yet also true that the passage is not selected at random, since Plato’s *Timaeus* here introduces an ontologically fundamental distinction that is relevant for the possibility for predication and verbal communication in general. If one had to pick up a passage in Plato where the problem of correct predication in reference to the things in the empirical world is expounded, this fundamental passage in the *Timaeus* would be the first to be considered.

φεύγει γὰρ οὐχ ὑπομένον τὴν τοῦ τόδε καὶ τοῦτο καὶ τὴν τῶδε καὶ πᾶσαν ὄση μόνιμα ὡς ὄντα αὐτὰ ἐνδείκνυται φάσις. (Plat. Ti. 49e2-4)

<sup>11</sup>Translation by John Ackrill (ed.), Aristotle. *Categories and De Interpretatione*, Oxford 1963.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. on the distinction between *theoria* and *lexis*: Alain Festugière, *Modes de composition des commentaires de Proclus*, in: MH 20, 1963, 77-100.

<sup>13</sup>David Blank declares this to be a “not very relevant parallel from Platonic usage” (David L. Blank, *Ammonius: On Aristotle On Interpretation 1-8*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014 (1996) (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), Ft. 263.

“For it flees and does not stand the word “this” or “that” or “this one” or any which presents it as persistent and distinct being.”

As we can see, Ammonius paraphrases the Platonic text – which is text-critically problematic – quite faithfully. Plato in this context not only uses the word “phasis” but also “rhema” (verb) (49e1) and “onoma” (noun) (50a2) in order to address the potential predicates (that something verbally address something: *prosagoreuomen*). This corresponds to Aristotle’s definition, since Aristotle introduces “onoma” and “rhema” as principal species of the expression (*phasis*), yet Plato does not have Aristotle’s terminological distinction between “onoma” and “rhema”.<sup>14</sup> And he does not intend a reference to propositional truth or falsehood. Therefore, Ammonius is able to point out that it was Aristotle who first fixed a terminological meaning.

This, however, is not the central argument of the quoted passage: Plato’s *Timaeus* starts anew in his cosmological *logos* around one Stephanus page before our passage, because he intends to develop – for theoretical purposes – a language and a methodological attitude that allows him to predicate something correctly of the things that are in constant change and flux, i.e. the individual beings of the empirical sublunar world. Their constant flux poses a problem: how could something be grasped as something definite and identical if it changes the next moment after one has pointed at it? If there is nothing identical, how can one be justified to call it “something”, which means: to consider it as something that is identical with itself and something to which one could refer to as something distinct? Identity *is* the minimum requirement for predication.

Our predicative practices in normal language do not reflect this essential problem and need for identity in order to refer to something as something distinct. Plato’s *Timaeus* therefore suggests – hypothetically, and definitely not as something to be implemented in everyday life – a way in which our predication would gain a mimetic relationship to the actual ontological situation, and makes the fundamental distinction between intelligible and sensible substances and the essential function of the forms for the possibility of gaining knowledge of singular sensible objects.

*Timaeus*’ approach to predication, therefore, is paradoxical and not immediately obvious. It confronts the reader with a decisively ontological question and analysis. This approach does not take for granted our way of addressing the things that we cognitively grasp but asks for justification and sufficient reasons for our confidence in the perceptibility of objects *tout court*. This is in every sense

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<sup>14</sup>There is, however, also a slight difference in Plato’s usage: he uses “phasis” here as a general term rather than “onoma” and “rhema” (by referring to every possible expression) and syntactically constructs the expression differently: whereas he uses an apposition with “rhema” and “onoma”, but puts a genitivus explicativus when using “phasis”.

advanced in respect to the required level of reflectiveness, and can be compared to what Aristotle himself does in the so-called books on substance in the lectures on *Metaphysics* or *First Philosophy*.

In order to make his point Ammonius could have mentioned Plato's usage more or less *en passant*. The fact that he even paraphrased the passage centers the attention of the reader or listener more strongly on the Platonic context and content, which is basically ontological. (Not only) at first glance it is striking that Plato's *Timaeus* reveals the difference between the predicational habits of our everyday language and the ontological structure of the things that we refer to and of which we communicate our recognitions. This holds especially true since the student of the Aristotelian *organon* is supposed to start with Aristotle's *Categories*, in which Aristotle describes the everyday predications without confronting them (as he does in the *Metaphysics*) with the ontological basis for them.

What is implied, then, when Ammonius refers his students to this Platonic passage and its importance for predicational differentiations? First of all, it is obvious, that without a knowledge of the fundamental reasons why Plato introduces forms as principles of knowledge and communication, the passage that the commentator paraphrases, will not be intelligible or at least not intelligible as such in its principal meaning. Did Ammonius then acquaints his students with the different methodological approaches towards predication or did he just pass over this question, which is crucial for language theory in general?

In the transmitted commentary there is no further hint of it. At any rate, a teacher of the curricular logical treatise *de interpretatione* would have to circumvent or decisively extend and rearrange the general anagogical path if he wanted to introduce Plato's theory of predication and of the possibility of gaining certain knowledge about the sensible world. He would have to transfer Platonic knowledge to a considerable extent into the introductory classes if he wished to make this reference be meaningful.

If we assume that he may have done so, then we will also be forced to rethink the philosophical reading workload and the rigidity of its order and ask: did the students of the introductory classes already know their Plato by heart? Did they extensively read Platonic dialogues and discuss them in class? Were there already - at this state of the philosophical education where Plato in theory was basically absent - traces of Plato present?

Or can we assume that the teacher in the philosophical elementary classes deliberately introduces basic ontological texts in order to acquaint their students with these tasks and questions even if they were not yet ready to answer them by themselves? But, there is another option: instead of fully elaborating and deducing the meaning he could have offered an introductory reading of the text with reflections on its Platonic context. Could the traces of Plato, thus, inspire the stu-

dents to further studies that go beyond the limits of the present classes?

## 5 Second example: exemplary references (1)

Let us take a look at another example of Platonic traces in the logic curriculum. Our second example comes from the introduction in Ammonius' commentary on the *Prior Analytics*,<sup>15</sup> which is Aristotle's general syllogistics by which he provides the precondition for the theory of the scientific proof (and infallible apodeictic knowledge). As we have mentioned before, the introduction followed a scheme that was established not later than the time of Proclus, i.e. in the 5th c. AD. One of the questions that had to be raised according to that scheme was the meaning of the title of the treatise. In his commentary Ammonius uses this section (5,5ff.) for the introduction of the two basic methods of Aristotelian logic, i.e. analysis and synthesis. To exemplify these methods he refers to two famous passages from the *Symposium*<sup>16</sup> and the *Phaedrus* respectively: first to Diotima's narrative about the ascent from the single sensible beautiful things to the intelligible ocean of beauty itself as an example of the method of analysis, then to Socrates' second speech, the so-called Palinodia, in which Socrates praises enthusiasts because of the divine nature of their abilities and actions. In order to corroborate the truth of his suggestion that the mania of the lovers can be of a divine nature, he starts by an (intentionally explicitly<sup>17</sup>) rational proof for a syllogistic structure, in which in the premisses two terms, soul and immortality, are mediated by the terms being unmoved and being perpetually moved in order to achieve the result by synthesizing both with each other.

Both target contexts are mentioned very briefly and sketchily:

ἀνάλυσις δὲ ἐστίν, ὅταν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς εἰδῶν ἀναδράμωσιν ἐπὶ τὰ ἐν τοῖς νοητοῖς. ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἐρωτικὴ ἀνάλυσις, ἣ κέχρηται ἐν τῷ Συμποσίῳ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς κάλλους ἀνατρέχων ἐπὶ τὸ νοητὸν κάλλος (Ammon. in Apr. 5,22-25)

"Analysis is when we ascend starting from the forms in the sensible objects up to that in the intelligibles. There is also an erotic analysis, which [Plato] has used in the *Symposium* where he ascends from the beautiful, which is in the sensible things, to the intelligible beauty."

and

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<sup>15</sup>Ammon. in Apr. 5,20-6,11.

<sup>16</sup>There is only scarce evidence in the commentators on Aristotle. There are only two further references to the *Symposium* in the corpus edited in the CAG-series: Anonym. in Rh. 321,20; Ammon. in de int. 36,5.

<sup>17</sup>Phdr. 245c1-4.

οἷον θέλω ἀποδείξαι ὅτι ἡ ψυχὴ ἀθάνατός ἐστιν, καὶ συνάγω λήμματά τινα, ἐξ ὧν πλέκω συλλογισμόν οὕτως ἢ ψυχὴ αὐτοκίνητον πᾶν αὐτοκίνητον ἀεικίνητον πᾶν ἀεικίνητον ἀθάνατον ἢ ψυχὴ ἄρα ἀθάνατος. αὕτη σύνθεσις ἐστίν. ἀνάλυσις δέ, ὅταν τὸν συλλογισμόν εὐρόντες κείμενον παρὰ τινι τῶν παλαιῶν ζητῶμεν ὑπὸ ποῖον σχῆμα ἀνάγεται, καὶ οὕτως αὐτὸν ἀναλύωμεν εἰς τὰ λήμματα τὰ ἐξ ὧν συνετέθη οἷον τοῦτον αὐτὸν τὸν εἰρημένον συλλογισμόν ἐὰν βουληθῶ ἀναλύσαι εὐρών παρὰ Πλάτωνι κείμενον, ἄρχομαι ἀπὸ τοῦ συμπεράσματος καὶ λέγω ἢ ψυχὴ ἀθάνατός ἐστιν πόθεν δὲ τοῦτο κατεσκευάσθη: ἐκ τοῦ ‘πᾶν ἀεικίνητον ἀθάνατόν ἐστιν’ καὶ ‘πᾶν αὐτοκίνητον ἀεικίνητον’. καὶ οὕτως ἀναλύω τὸν συλλογισμόν εἰς τὰ λήμματα ἐξ ὧν συνετέθη. καὶ αὐτὰ δὲ τὰ λήμματα ἐὰν βουληθῶ ἀναλύσαι, ἀναλύω αὐτὰ εἰς τοὺς ὅρους πᾶν γὰρ λῆμμα ἔχει πάντως τὸν μὲν ὑποκείμενον τὸν δὲ κατηγορούμενον ὅρον. (Ammon. in APr. 5,34-6,11)

For example, I want to demonstrate that the soul is immortal, and I connect premisses out of which I braid a syllogism like that: The soul is self-moved. Everything that is self-moved is eternally moved. Everything that is eternally moved is immortal. Therefore, the soul is immortal. This is the Synthesis. Analysis is, when we investigate when we have found a syllogism available in one of the older [thinkers], under which figure it can be led back, and in this way we dissolve it into those premisses out of which it has been composed. For example, if I wish to analyze this just mentioned syllogism which I find in Plato, I start from the conclusion and say: the soul is immortal: Through what has that been shown. Through the [argument] “everything that is eternally moved is immortal and everything that is self-moved is eternally moved.” And by this I analyze the syllogism into the premisses out of which it is composed. And if you wish to analyze the premisses themselves, I analyze them into the terms. For every premiss has in general the substratum on the one hand, the predicate on the other.”

Ammonius notices that Plato does not present his apodeixis via the method of synthesis but that of analysis, and he therefore presents the premisses first as elements of the synthetic syllogism before reporting the order of the argument in Plato. That serves as first evidence for the mutual dependance between both methods and their convertibility.

We have to ask again: what could a student of the elementary propaedeutic classes possibly understand and reflect when he followed his master’s references? It seems probable to assume that he only had to recognize the abstract relation and process referred to in the expression “where he ascends from the beautiful, which is in the sensible things, to the intelligible beauty” (“ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς κάλλους ἀνατρέχων ἐπὶ τὸ νοητὸν κάλλος”) and called erotic analysis (Ammon. in APr. 5,25). The transfer of knowledge would then in fact be only of an exemplary nature.

Yet, this description seems to fall short. For, there are several advanced di-

stinctions and premisses that must be considered in order to be able to follow the Platonic trace. Without these further reflections the reference cannot be turned into something productive, since it does not become clear why the Platonic cases can work as either analysis or synthesis.

For example one must be aware of the idea that there is a continuity between the sensible beauty of singular bodies and the form of beauty itself. But, to conceptualize this one must accept (and reflect upon) the Platonic insight that there is also a continuity between perceptions of the senses and cognitive acts of the ratio and the intellect. Besides one must form a concept of what might be the aim of the ascent from one side to the other and of what is the question to which the ladder of eros claims to be the answer. In Diotima's speech multiple perspectives and disciplinarily distinct theses are entangled: there is on the one hand the definition of the very nature of the philosopher and of the ability to render an account of one's opinions and acts of recognition, i.e. of what Plato calls the ability of the "logon didonai". For Diotima draws an analogy between Eros and the philosopher in his need and striving for true knowledge that cannot be proven wrong. On the other hand, Plato introduces the task of understanding the nature of Eros as a divine power which is neither God nor Not-God, but which partakes in the nature of divinity without being identical to it. Finally, the ladder of eros in Diotima's speech leads the reader or listener up to the ocean of beauty, or in other words: to that, which is beauty self-by-itself. Since this form of the beautiful is close to the form of goodness itself (or even mutually convertible) it ranges in the highest realm of Platonic dialectics and is philosophically theorized together with the pivotal passages in the *Parmenides*, the *Phaedrus*, or the *Republic*. In the theoria of this object, human rationality can find its primary actualization.

This induces several further questions and answers about Plato's theory of the substantial faculties of the rational human soul, about his ontology and theory of forms. That is: in the sketchy reference to a pivotal passage for Plato's theory of forms and knowledge itself-by-itself Plato is almost totally absent for the beginner student. He can become present if the student is encouraged and guided to understand step by step the sufficient reasons why there can be a ladder of the beautiful instances up to the distinct intelligible form of beauty itself and a sufficient reason why one should strive to ascend to the top of this ladder.

Ammonius deals here with passages that were famous back then. This holds true for Diotima's speech, the ladder of love (Eros) and the ascent to Beauty itself in the *Symposium*. Although we have little evidence about philosophical commentaries on the *Symposium* in antiquity<sup>18</sup> – which is astonishing considering the fact

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<sup>18</sup>We hear that Proclus wrote a commentary on Diotima's speech: Heinrich Dörrie u. a., *Der*

that the dialogue was ranked among the curricular dialogues since Iamblichus – the central passage is often cited or even partly quoted in Platonic sources starting from the third century BC throughout the Greek (and also even the later Latin) antiquity.<sup>19</sup> This is true even beyond the scholarly exegetical practices and the philosophical schools.<sup>20</sup>

It holds especially true for the passage Phdr. 246e-248c, i.e. the chariot allegory, in which Socrates visualizes the inner nature of the human soul and its relationship towards the divine by the symbol of a chariot, pulled by two horses and steered by the charioteer, which symbolizes the three parts of the human soul. However, also the neighboring passages that refer to the nature of the human soul, too, were well known in antiquity, and already before the neoplatonic exegeses. In the Latin West of the Roman Empire a specific situation developed: Cicero translated the argument for the immortality of the soul into Latin and contextualized it in his *De re publica* (rep. VI, 6-29), a text that was further transmitted through Macrobius' commentary on the *Republic*.<sup>21</sup> Macrobius' commentary was widely used from the 5th century onwards and throughout the Middle Ages – an interest that is reflected in the large number of manuscripts (about 230 manuscripts between the 9th and 15th century).<sup>22</sup> Boethius, in his commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge* (I,11) refers to Macrobius' commentary affirmatively and respectfully (comm. minor: I, 11). Cicero, together with (the later) Macrobius text, dominates the Roman Latin context, in which the knowledge of the middle part of the *Phaedrus* was part of the general education in the intellectual circles. It is not possible to determine the extent to which amount the deeper meaning of the chariot allegory and its ontological or even theological implications were – apart from Macrobius' own philosophically deep understanding – fully understood by readers outside the philosophical schools. By itself the distribution of a text in the Latin West does not allow conclusions to be drawn for the Greek East, since

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Platonismus in der Antike: Grundlagen, System, Entwicklung, Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1987, Baustein 79.4 and 79.5, Commentary on p. 199f. with reference to scholia in Proclus. in Plat. Rem. II 371,14.

<sup>19</sup>On the wide recognition of the *Phaedrus* cf. Heinrich Dörrie u. a., *Der Platonismus in der Antike: Grundlagen, System, Entwicklung, Commentary* to Baustein 79.3, 197f. For a new interpretation of the *Phaedrus* cf. Gyburg Uhlmann, *Rhetorik und Wahrheit. Ein prekäres Verhältnis von Sokrates bis Trumpf*, J. B. Metzler Verlag: Stuttgart 2019.

<sup>20</sup>We have evidence from the time of the Middle Platonists that especially the middle part of the *Phaedrus* was much read and often cited. (Cf. P. Boyance, *Sur l'exégèse hellénistique du PP-hèdre* (Phèdre, p. 246 c), in: idem, *Miscellanea di studi alessandrini in memoria di A. Rostagni*, Turin 1963, 45-53 and H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink (eds.), *Proclus. Théologie Platonicienne. Livre IV. Texte établi et trad.*, Paris 1981, IX-XLV.

<sup>21</sup>Mireille Armisen-Marchetti (ed.), *Macrobie, Commentaire au songe de Scipion, texte établi, traduit et commenté* (2 voll), Paris 2001-2003.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. *ibidem*.

the conditions and contexts of reception and transfer of knowledge were so different. However, the fact that Macrobius has a neoplatonic background and that neoplatonism was primarily rooted in the Greek-speaking world may hint at a popularity of these famous texts also in the Greek East. However, the very fact of acquaintance even in the Latin West could have been a starting point for the passing reference in a Greek school commentary, given that its intellectual environment generally showed much more acquaintance with Platonic texts.

But we also have earlier traces of readings of Plato's *Phaedrus*, and in particular of the so-called Palinodia, of which the chariot allegory is part, in Greek contexts. Plotinus interprets this passage (seemingly) independently from the rest of the dialogue as part of his reflections on the intelligible realm (V,8,10). To sum up, the intellectual environment had knowledge of this passage throughout Greek and even later Latin antiquity. This knowledge was part of approaches to Plato's dialogues that did not necessarily follow the aim of an essentially systematic understanding of the text but could also receive and adopt other elements and perspectives. This knowledge was part of approaches to Plato's dialogues that did not necessarily follow the aim of an essentially systematic understanding of the text, but could also receive and adopt other elements and perspectives. However, we have to take into account that not every acquaintance with a philosophical text needs to have taken place in the philosophical classes.

The fact of reception outside the philosophical classrooms can lead to another option, the option of low-level, preparatory understanding: the commentator/teacher could have given a short account of the relevant elements of Platonic ontology and theory of recognition without going into detail or deducing the concepts sufficiently, i.e. we can assume a certain form of preliminary understanding that does not meet the needs of a proper scientific understanding that can render an account of the knowledge, but which rather helps to integrate the newly learned concepts or arguments into a larger philosophical horizon.

## 6 Third example: integratory references (3)

Our third example can be classified as integratory: We have called those references integratory that are the most cited texts of reference for a certain question under discussion. We take an example not from a commentary on the *organon* but on the *Physics* by John Philoponus, who was a pupil of Ammonius Hermeiou, the most important philosophical teacher in Alexandria in the 5th century. John Philoponus himself was one of the most high-profile natural scientists of his time. His other commentaries stand explicitly – according to the wording of the title – in close relationship to the lectures of his teacher, and also his commentary on the *Physics* too is rooted in the Ammonian teaching tradition, although



it may have been based to a larger extent on his own lectures and interpretations.<sup>23</sup>

The passage we want to focus on for our third type of references, i.e. the integratory references, is the lemma on the beginning of the second chapter of book one. It is thus to be read in the context of the lemmata on I,1 and especially of the first lemma which explains *Physics* I,1. In both these – narrower or wider contexts – however, John develops the key questions and answers of Aristotle’s approach to a philosophically sound physical science through an intensive dialogue with Plato’s *Timaeus*. The methodologically central passages in the *Timaeus* to which John Philoponus refers are (1) the introduction of the principles of physical entities and processes in Ti. 28aff. with the thesis that we need to distinguish between the intelligible forms that are eidetically constitutive for the sensible cosmos and the deviations from the forms that are caused by the influence of the receiving substratum that is not by itself formed/positively determined; and (2) the actual introduction of matter as third principle in the explanation of processes in the sublunar cosmos in Ti. 48a-52c.<sup>24</sup>

These passages and their contexts function in John Philoponus’ commentary as the implicit subtext for the elucidation of both Aristotle’s concept itself and his analogical approach towards this concept. The specific reference to one of these texts therefore plays an integratory (3) role in the hermeneutic method of the exegeses.

In John Philoponus’ lemma to Ph. 184b15ff.<sup>25</sup> (in Ph. 20,21-25,11) he explains Aristotle’s approach to the analysis of physical objects by the need to identify certain principles and causes due to the composite nature of sensible objects.

At first John deals with the crucial question how Aristotle could possibly claim in discussion that Parmenides of Elea, who lived from about 520/515 to 460/455 BC, refers to the sensible cosmos when he calls the principle one and definite and unmoved (Phlp. in Ph. 21,22ff.) given that the textual evidence from the first part of Parmenides’ didactic poem “de natura/peri physeos”, which is referred to as “de veritate/peri aletheias”, makes it very obvious that Parmenides exclusively talks about the intelligible being.

It is this context in which Philoponus affirmatively refers to the pivotal distinction that the *Timaeus* sets by distinguishing between that which can be grasped by the intellect in combination with the ratio on the one hand (νοήσει μετά λόγου περιληπτά), and that which can be grasped by opinion together with a-ra-

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Pantelis Golitsis, μετά τινων ιδίων ἐπιστάσεων: John Philoponus as an editor of Ammonius’ lectures, in: idem, Aristotle and His Commentators: Studies in Memory of Paraskevi Kotzia, De Gruyter, 2019, 167-194.

<sup>24</sup>Phlp. in Ph. 5,7-6,8; (connected to Plato’s *Phaedo* (75d)) in 7,17-20; 22,10ff. (Ti. 28a); 515,25 (Ti. 48aff.); 520,27 (Ti. ); 521,13.

<sup>25</sup>Ἀνάγκη δ’ ἔτι μίαν εἶναι τὴν ἀρχὴν ἢ πλείους,...

tional perception on the other (δόξη μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστά), thereby distinguishing intelligible objects from sensible objects (ἀεὶ ὄντα vs. αἰσθητά)<sup>26</sup>. This reference is not forced by the Aristotelian text, but forms a locus classicus for the distinction between sensible and intelligible objects of recognition in the field of natural sciences in late antique Neoplatonism. In Philoponus' commentary on *Physics* Book I it functions as an instrument to lead the reader or student through Aristotle's argument and to hint from the beginning on what Aristotle has in mind in his discussion of principles.

To understand the function of this, one has to bear in mind that at first reading it is not at all obvious why Aristotle should start his approach to a methodologically sufficiently grounded episteme of the sensible world with reflections on any theory about the principles of being in general that one finds in the history of sciences. What could be the reason to reflect upon Eleatic conceptions about principles which were developed explicitly for the sake of understanding something that can be grasped by pure reason and not by the senses alone, i.e. of something that is different from the sensible cosmos?

A knowledge of Plato's account, for the necessary methodological preliminary considerations before one starts with the development of a specific model of physical sciences, proves to be useful in this context for orientation in the Aristotelian arguments, since it terminologically elucidates the difference between statements about the intelligible and those about the sensible. Philoponus' reference clarifies the textual situation in Aristotle from the very beginning by hinting at a pivotal genuinely Platonic distinction.

Besides, it is specific to the hermeneutic approaches of late ancient commentators on Aristotle first to present a guideline for the reading of the text which combines both general and specific information about the very nature of the epistemic scope and the methods used by the author.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Phlp. in Ph. 22,9-12: "ἐν δὲ τοῖς πρὸς δόξαν περὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ὁ λόγος, ἅπερ καὶ ὁ Τίμαιος δοξαστὰ προσηγόρευσε τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἀεὶ ὄντα νοήσει φησὶ μετὰ λόγου περιληπτά, τὰ δὲ αἰσθητά, ἅπερ γινόμενα καὶ ἀπολλύμενα καλεῖ, δόξη φησὶ μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστά. "In the part [of Parmenides' "de natura"] on opinion (doxa) the argument is about the sensible things, which are addressed also by Timaeus as being receivable by (mere) opinion. For, he says that the beings that are everlasting can be grasped by intellect together with ratio, whereas he says that the sensible things, which he calls things that come to being and pass away, can be grasped by opinion (doxa) together with the a-rational sense perception."

<sup>27</sup>Cf. another example in Phlp. in Ph. for a reference to the *Timaeus*: 145,1-148,18: reference to the usage of τὸδε in the predication process: differentiation between predicates and things.

## 7 Reasons for the underlying Platonic text corpus

These observations lead to the conclusion and thesis that there is a wide and (potentially) almost complete Platonic text corpus underlying the teaching of Aristotelian logic and other disciplines which goes beyond even the Iamblichean curricular selection of Platonic dialogues. The absent and at the same time present Platonic text and its contexts has certain qualities that serve the commentator in his effort to explain and explicate the text that he comments upon. It is therefore, from the perspective of the commentator, reasonable to use Platonic references extensively.

But is that also true from the perspective of the student and beginner? What is the (historical and conceptual) rationale for the philosophical masters to embed such traces of Platonic text, which cannot be presupposed in the, as it were, official reading workload of the students in Aristotelian logic or philosophy?

We have already seen that the present and absent Platonic text fragments could arouse in the students the will to ascend to the higher realms of philosophical perfection and to promote their elementary studies. A preliminary introduction into Platonic text passages and topics could have functioned as an inspiration, with effects not only in terms of philosophical perfection and happiness through education, but also in terms of educational practices, since it would have provided well considered reasons not to confine oneself to the elementary classes but to stay in the school institutions also for the master classes.

However, to fully understand the relationship between subversively induced striving after Platonic knowledge and Aristotelian logical techniques, we should take a look at the Aristotelian corpus itself. Even though there is a considerable number of passages in Aristotle that are overtly critical towards Platonic or Platonizing concepts, Aristotle develops his thought and solutions in a fruitful and promoting dialogue with Platonic texts and insights. The same admittedly holds true for other pre-Aristotelian thinkers and it is a substantial part of Aristotle's thinking to seek a confrontation with other approaches - John Philoponus rightly says about the general method to discuss his predecessors

Ἐνθεῦτεν εἰσβάλλει εἰς τὸν περὶ τῶν ἀρχῶν λόγον. ὅπερ δὲ εἶωθε ποιεῖν ἀεὶ, τοῦτο καὶ νῦν ποιεῖ πρότερον τὰς τῶν παλαιότερων ψευδεῖς διελέγχει δόξας. (Phlp. in Ph. 20.20-22)

“Here, he goes about the argument about the principles. What he used to do every time, that is what he does now. First, he refutes the wrong opinions of the former [thinkers].”

However, the relationship towards Platonic texts seems to be even closer and more essential. This very fact becomes obvious especially in philosophically pivotal passages such as the last chapter of the Aristotelian theory of scientific

knowledge, i.e. his *Posterior Analytics*. As Peter Adamson has shown convincingly<sup>28</sup> Aristotle writes with the underlying condition of constant exchange with Plato and his major concepts. He implicitly and explicitly refers to the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*, two dialogues that are especially akin to the scope of the *Posterior Analytics*.

Another example is the lectures on the *Physics*. As we have seen, Aristotle develops in the first book approaches to the scientific description and analysis of processes of change, genesis, and corruption. Physical things cannot be understood in the same way as intelligible concepts, since they are subject to constant change and since they are constituted out of an underlying matter or substratum and qualities that come and go, which means: they are constituted out of a plurality which is – unlike intelligible objects – not or not necessarily a unity self-by-itself but a plurality that is an entanglement of different units or things that are in no way necessarily connected, a fact that becomes obvious by the constant flux of qualities.

Here, the constant dialogue with Plato and especially with Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* (especially with the cyclical argument from the *Phaedo* (Phd. 69e-72e)) is even more dominant and constitutive than the way it is explicated and unraveled in Philoponus' commentary and its explicit references and quotations from both dialogues.

This becomes obvious in the very order of arguments about the number and nature of principles which had been discovered by other thinkers before Aristotle and in the solution that Aristotle finally presents in Chapter 7 of Book I. This last solution (Ph. 189b30ff.) introduces a third principle which interacts with the two contrary principles which had been discovered in the argumentation before. Since Aristotle adduces the argument that one needs to assume an underlying (hypokeimenon) principle that is able to be receptive towards contrary qualities, he argues from the compound nature of (physical) things, which becomes obvious in the way we predicate something from these objects.<sup>29</sup>

Aristotle here again uses the instruments which he established in his *Categories* and his hermeneutics (*de interpretatione*) and distinguishes between different forms of predication and of relationship between underlying substratum (hypokeimenon) to predicated quality (kategoroumenon).<sup>30</sup> This was one of the passages that led scholars such as Wolfgang Wieland to understand Aristotle's *Physics* as basically analytical in terms of linguistic analysis or analysis of predication.

What has not yet been seen so far in scholarship is that Aristotle's approach

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<sup>28</sup>Peter Adamson, *Posterior Analytics II.19: a Dialogue with Plato?*, in: V. Harte u. a. (eds.), *Aristotle and the Stoics Reading Plato*, London 2010, 1–19.

<sup>29</sup>Ph. 190b10-191a2.

<sup>30</sup>Ph. 189b34-190a12; 190a26-b16.

and argument is based on Plato's linguistically argued introduction of matter as third principle in the *Timaeus*. The same holds true for the discussion of models in the history of science that have dealt with the inquiry into principles.

But that should be the task of another paper. Certainly, it is in no way necessary to conclude that students of the Aristotelian logic need to be confronted with the underlying Platonic background in order to understand in itself the concept that Aristotle is thereby developed itself. The clarification of sources and influences is a task for scholarly practices. Yet, the structure of Aristotle's thinking and development of concepts functions for the ancient Greek commentators as a model for the structure of their hermeneutical practices, too, since it works in an essentially disputational way and carves out consent and approbation as well as *aporiai*, i.e., contradictions that hint at the lack of differentiations in a position. Both produce dynamics for the development of even better concepts and ideas.

We can therefore state that the analogical structure of Aristotelian argumentation is transferred into the commentaries and widely used. This structure also implies an essentially didactic impact. It is thus plausible that the commentators *could* also have imitated Aristotle in bringing in substantial Platonic concepts and arguments in order to introduce the disputational component even at an early state of the educational process. To open up the textual horizon by the introduction of Platonic texts is thus a legitimate option for the teachers of Aristotelian logic.

## 8 Conclusions

To sum up: Commentators on Aristotle in late antique philosophical schools integrated traces of Plato, which led to and prepared for Platonic knowledge at all stages of the propaedeutic and advanced curriculum. Although this was excluded theoretically in the didactic concept of philosophical teaching, the actual practices evidently allowed different sorts of integration of material that was supposed to be read at a later stage when the students were advanced enough to fully understand the impact of these texts. By looking at these practices it becomes obvious that the theoretically essential role of the curricular order cannot be used as an argument for the inelasticity of late antique philosophical schools, their teaching methods, and hermeneutics. The commentators showed no rigidity in the use of the curricular canon but were ready to adapt the different sorts of texts for their own specific didactic purposes and for the purposes of their students.

When we analyze the method and way in which the commentators referred to the Platonic passages and contexts, the impression emerges that the very need

to better understand the fragmented piece of text in a wider context and horizon may have had the function of giving an impulse for further preoccupation with the material on the part of the student. The teacher could use the differentiation between a preliminary and a proper engagement with a text or problem, which was well-established in the hermeneutical methods of the Aristotelian commentators.

Although we will have to take into account the possibility of mere and simple references that were not further traced back to the Platonic context and their deeper meaning, and of mere and simple reception of the very fact of the reference to a Platonic text, yet the written commentaries presented the traces of Plato in a way that at least allowed the reader or hearer to dig further and follow the traces that hint at a deeper meaning which could not yet be understood by the reference alone without further studies or instructions.

Therefore, we should rethink the dynamics of the late antique philosophical curricular reading and teaching workload, which in practice did not show any kind of rigid adherence to an inflexible standard system. The picture that emerges if one looks at the presence and non-presence of Plato in Aristotelian commentaries is that of a dynamic institution where the borders and limits of the curricular texts were tested and confronted with different perspectives on them. With these instance in mind one can easily understand the practices of Byzantine scribes who added references to Platonic dialogues as scholia at the margin of the manuscript pages. They thereby finally transferred the Platonic reference from the commentary text into the Aristotelian text itself.

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