

GREEK ETHICAL TREATISES IN ARABIC: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CATALOGUE OF THE GREAT MORALIST, MISKAWAYH (D.1030)

Mohd Nasir Omar^{1*}, Zaizul Ab. Rahman¹

¹ Department of Theology & Philosophy, National University of Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.

*For correspondence; Tel: +6013-3322833, E-mail: abunasir@ukm.edu.my

ABSTRACT: *In the East, Greek philosophy was studied as early as the fourth century, not however, by the Muslims but by the Arab Syrian Christians. It was Syrian Christians who brought wine, silk and other precious items to the West, but it was the Syrians also who cultivated Greek sciences for many centuries before they eventually transmitted them to the Muslim philosophers, especially in the tenth and eleventh century Baghdad. Miskawayh (d.1030), a great Muslim moralist, was among the philosophers who flourished in Baghdad at such times. He was well educated in Islamic studies as well as in philosophy, especially Greek philosophy. The many quotations from Greek sources which are found in his writings, especially in his major work on ethics, Tahdhib al-Akhlaq (The Refinement of Character), provide important evidence for this study to argue that they also have contributed to the formation of his thought. Thus, this study which uses content analysis method seeks to analyse Greek ethical treatises cited and used by Miskawayh in his own writings, especially Tahdhib al-Akhlaq. The result of this study shows that Miskawayh is generally careful in citing his Greek sources by their Arabic titles, however, while his works mention the names of several Greek philosophers, the only ethical works which are mentioned by name are those of Aristotle and Galen, such as Kitab Niqumakhiya (Nicomachean Ethics) by Aristotle, and Kitab al-Akhlaq (Ethics) by Galen.*

Keywords: Miskawayh, Akhlaq, Greek Language, Greek Philosophers, Greek Books

1. INTRODUCTION

Miskawayh [1] states that he served Buwayhid vizier, al-Muhallabi (d. 963) from 341/953 until his death in 352/964. During this service when he was approximately between the ages of 20 and 32, he resided mainly in Baghdad. It was then among the most eminent centers of learning and philosophical studies in the world. Its philosophers were not only well-acquainted with Greek thought but also held a continuing philosophical discussion in which many scholars took part. Among the philosophers who flourished in Baghdad at that time were such men as Abu Sulayman al-Sijistani (d. 985), Yahya ibn 'Adi (d. 794), Hasan b. Suwar (d. 1017), 'Isa b. 'Ali (d. 1001), Ibn Zur'ah (d. 1008) and others. Miskawayh was associated with this group of philosophers. Al-Tawhidi [2-3], who was both a friend of his and also a member of the group confirms this.

Miskawayh [1] also states that he served Abu al-Fadl (d. 971) for seven years. One of his important duties to work as his librarian. He adds that Abu al-Fadl's library contained every kind of books on science and wisdom. There were a hundred camel loads of books or more. Ibn al-Nadim [4] also gives the information that he himself saw Abu al-Fadl transporting some torn books to Baghdad. They were in the Greek language. Their safekeeping was then the duty of Miskawayh, who was also responsible for the libraries of Abu al-Fath (Miskawayh [1]; al-Sijistani [5] and al-'Amili [6] and 'Adud al-Dawlah (al-Khawansari [7] and al-Qifti [8]). The precise nature of Miskawayh's duties as a librarian is not known, but it is reasonable to suppose that he consulted these Greek books as well as those in Arabic and Syriac. Miskawayh [9] himself suggests that one of the conditions necessary for studying philosophy was to have access to books, meaning most probably that one should refer to the original sources in any serious attempt to understand the nature of hikmah (philosophy).

Miskawayh [1], does not inform us of his teacher of philosophy or Greek literature as he does regarding his teacher of history, Ibn Kamil al-Qadi (d.960). We do know that his teacher of alchemy was Abi al-Tayyib, the alchemist

[2,10]. Most probably al-Sijistani (d. 985) and Hasan b. Suwar (d.1017) were among the philosophers whom he admired and consulted, particularly on philosophical subjects. Al-Qifti [8] mentions that a group of scholars of 'ulum al-awa'il (ancients sciences) used to discuss with al-Sijistani. Perhaps Miskawayh was one of them, since he was well-acquainted with ancient sciences. Both Hasan bin Suwar, also called Ibn al-Khammar, and al-Sijistani were interested in Aristotle's ethics, and even translated some of them into Arabic and this a subject of direct interests to Miskawayh [4, 8,11]. Though there is only one reference to the works of the latter in Miskawayh's writings [12-13], his connection with these philosophers is clear enough from the information given about him by his close friend, al-Tawhidi [2,10].

In his service of the Buwayhids, Miskawayh's role as librarian gave him unusually good access to the sources of learning, both Islamic and Greek, available in the Buwayhid court. While through his readings and his participation in the learned discussions which took place in the School of Baghdad, Miskawayh familiarized himself with the legacy of the Greek philosophical tradition. The many references in his writings to Greek ethical works indicate that his interaction with Greek thought was substantial, but since none of the Greek works which he cited have survived other than in incomplete form, it is impossible for us to trace such works accurately.

2. MISKAWAYH KNEW THE GREEK LANGUAGE

It is very probable that Miskawayh knew the Greek language, although there is no direct evidence to prove that he did. However, there is important circumstantial evidence which suggests his ability to read Greek. Both Yaquut [14] and al-Qifti [8] inform us that Miskawayh was familiar with 'ulum al-awa'il (ancient sciences). Al-'Amili [6], states that Miskawayh was a mutakallim lughawi (philological theologian) and well-versed in kutub al-aqdamin walughatihim (ancient books and their languages). Al-

Khwansari [7] confirms al-'Amili's statement for he writes of Miskawayh: "He was independent in his thinking, and intelligence and well acquainted with the books of the ancients and their languages".

These terms, 'ulum al-awa'il (ancient sciences) and kutub al-aqdamin wa-lughatihim (ancient books and their languages) are indirect but significant evidences. According to Plato [15], the former concerns philosophical methodology, while the latter generally means the philosophical content of Greek books and their language. Among Muslim philosophers who have been mentioned as being familiar with these sciences were al-Kindi (d. 873) and Abu Sulayman al-Sijistani (d. 985). Both of them knew the Greek language [4,8,11]. Miskawayh [13], himself also writes that he quotes Aristotle's works both directly and from commentators:

"We shall now state what he (Aristotle) said and add to it what we have taken also from him in other sections so as to bring together what was mentioned by him in different places. We shall also, in the measure of our capacity, add what we have taken from the commentators of his works".

In the *Jawidan Khirad* Miskawayh [16], tells us that he himself translated (tarjamtu) one part of Aristotle's *sahifah* (leaf) on *fawa'id al-'aql* (the use of intellect). Ibn al-Nadim [4], al-Qifti [8], and Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah [11] each give extensive listings of all the books and treatises by Aristotle which, to their knowledge, were available in Arabic and Syriac translations. Their lists make no mention of this work, and our research has not discovered any other reference to its translation into Arabic or Syriac. Therefore, while we cannot claim to have researched this matter exhaustively, the evidence to hand tends to lead us to the conclusion that Miskawayh's statement that he had translated this particular *sahifah* should in all probability, be interpreted to mean that he had translated it from its Greek original into Arabic.

Miskawayh [17], also quoted Aristotle's book, *Sina'ah al-Supsata 'iyyah* (Calling of Those in Error) which he mentions as still being in the Greek language. Furthermore, while there can be no question that Miskawayh was the compiler of *Laghz Qabis* from the Greek, he does not mention the name of the translator (s) of the material. Since as in the case of his *Jawidan Khirad* he makes a point of nothing the names of translators, this must suggest that he was himself the translator of the contents of *Laghz Qabis* [15]. However, an argument from silence should never be regarded as conclusive.

That Miskawayh makes use of the Syriac translation of Greek works which had not yet been translated into Arabic is also proven. Leaving aside the tales of Yaqut [14], al-Qifti [8] and al-Khwansari [7], concerning his vast knowledge of ancient books and their languages, we may point out some direct testimonies from Miskawayh himself. In *Kitab al-Sa'adah* [17], he quotes a book on Aristotle's logic that was written for Anusharwan. This work was available in syriac. He also discusses Aristotle's books on *Tadbir al-Manzil* (House Management) and *Tadbir al-Mudun* (City Management), adding that these works had not yet been translated into Arabic, though he also mentions that he had

made his own Arabic translation of part of *Tadbir al-Mudun* without stating whether this was taken from Greek or from Syriac [17]. His statement is very ambiguous. However, we may safely state that this work was not yet available in an independent Arabic translation.

Furthermore, Miskawayh [17], also quotes Aristotle's *Kitab al-Qiyas* (On Logic) which he himself mentions as only preserved in *al-naql al-qadim* (and old transcript or translation). It is not know for certain in what language it was, but, there are two possibilities: firstly, it might be in Greek or Syriac, because the old transcript is generally known in both languages, although the former, Greek, is more common. Secondly, it might be in Persian since some of the Greek books on *al-mantiq* (logic) and on *al-tibb* (medicine) were already available in Persian, a language in which Miskawayh was well-versed [4,8].

Miskawayh was also skilful in the correct literary use of both languages, namely, Arabic and Persian. The former needs no explanation as almost all of his works were written in Arabic. The latter is firmly supported by his origin and by the fact that he wrote *Kitab Nuzhat Nama 'Ala'i* in Persian. Both Indian and Pahlavi literature are also found in his work *Jawidan Khirad*, and its title, is itself a translation from Pahlavi. This work contains a selection of Persian, Indian, Greek and Arab wisdom, which was translated into Arabic by Hasan bin Sahal (d.236/850) and completed by Miskawayh himself [16]. When it is properly analyzed it will probably reveal a great degree of his concern in the above traditions of wisdom literature.

3. GREEK ETHICAL TREATISES CITED BY MISKAWAYH

The Greek Philosophers whom Miskawayh [12-13, 16-17] frequently mentions by name and quotes, sometimes at considerable length, are mostly the earlier authors. Aristotle, for example, is frequently cited. Plato and Socrates are also quoted many times. Aristotle and Galen appear in most cases within the context of their specified works. We have already discussed the probability that Miskawayh read many of these works in their original Greek texts, and this would explain why he often omits any reference to Arabic translators and commentators. Of all the books of Aristotle, it is only the *Kitab Fada'il al-Nafs* (The Virtues of the Soul) which he admits to having read in its Arabic translation by Abu 'Uthman al-Dimashqi (d. ca. 925) whom he considers the best translator of his time, and who was responsible for reproducing this work in Arabic without any difference in expression and substance from the original (Greek). This statement reveals that Miskawayh was careful and concerned in listing his sources when he wished to document his ideas.

Miskawayh [12-13, 16], mentions very few Greek authors of the late antiquity on whom he depended. He only once mentions Porphyry, a commentator of Aristotle, when dealing with the divisions of the good. But no exact title of Prophyry's commentary has been cited. He also once mentions Bryson when he discusses the education of the young. About the former, Porphyry, he writes, "Aristotle's division of the good as reported (*haka 'anhu*) by Prophyry. And from the latter, Bryson, he quotes, "A section

on the education of the young, and of boy in particular, most of which I translate (naqaltu) from the work of Bryson". These two words, *haka 'anhu* (reported by) and *naqaltu* (I translate) show that the quotations are direct. Although Miskawayh did not cite the titles of these works, the names of Greek authors are proof enough that Miskawayh knew their works as he also knew the works of Alexander.

While Miskawayh's works [12, 17], mention the names of several Greek philosophers, the only philosophical works which are mentioned by name are those of Aristotle and Galen. The two most important Aristotelian sources cited by Miskawayh are the *Kitab al-Akhlaq* (Ethics) and the *Fada'il al-Nafs* (The Virtues of the Soul). The first can unquestionably be attributed to the authorship of Aristotle. Unfortunately Miskawayh does not indicate the precise edition of the original text which he used, nor does he state whether this edition was in Greek, Syriac or Arabic. We know, however, that Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 874) had translated (*naqala*) the Greek original into Arabic, and that this hand-written translation was in the possession of Christian philosopher, Yahya ibn 'Adi (d. 974), with whom Miskawayh had a close contact, though about which he remains discreet in his own writing. In all probability it was this translation which Miskawayh used. *Kitab Fada'il al-Nafs*, on the other hand, is not listed as a work of Aristotle in the Arabic sources. However, Pines [18], has demonstrated that this work preserves an authentic Aristotelian core, although it is probably of Neo-Platonic attribution. An Arabic version is known to have been prepared by Miskawayh's close friend Abu 'Uthman al-Dimashqi (d. ca. 925) whose linguistic abilities he admired, and it was this source which Miskawayh quoted in his chief ethical treatise *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*.

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is cited by Miskawayh [12-13], in its Arabic title, *Kitab Niqumakhiya*. It is not mentioned however, in the Arabic sources, and there is clear evidence that it had not been translated into Arabic in the time of Miskawayh. Arberry [19], discovered the earliest Arabic translation of this text in Morocco, dated presumably 619/1222, which is proof definite that Miskawayh could not have consulted it in Arabic. Nor is it likely that he could have consulted it in Syriac because there is no mention of a Syriac translation in the catalogues of al-Qifti [8] and Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah [11]. Therefore we have good reason to suppose that Miskawayh must have consulted a Greek version of which Ibn al-Nadim [4], and other Arabic sources had no knowledge.

Aristotle's other books, *Tadbir al-Mudun* (City Management) and *Tadbir al-Manzil* (House Management) had not yet been translated into Arabic, except for Miskawayh's [17] own Arabic version of part of *Tadbir al-Mudun* which we have already mentioned. Aristotle's other two works, *al-Tadhkir* (Message) and *al-Ta'alim* (Training) were recorded and attributed to him by early Arabic biographers such as al-Qifti [8] and Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah [11]. They did not mention, however, whether these works had been translated or not. Most probably they were only available in Greek original texts, for otherwise, these biographers would have mentioned the names of their translators as they did in the case of Aristotle's

other works. This is corroborated by Miskawayh's own reference to these works and his comment that no part of them had been translated. Therefore, it again seems most probable that he must have consulted them in Greek.

In Miskawayh's time almost all of Aristotle's books on *mantiq* (logic) and *tabi'iyah* (physical sciences), were already available in both Arabic and Syriac. Arabic sources not only regarded them as authentically attributable to Aristotle, but also went into the question of the identity of their translators. It is to be noted that these works seem to have been given little attention by Miskawayh [17], for it is only in one of his works, *Kitab al-Sa'adah*, that he mentions their names with passing reference to their content. He attributes particular importance to *Kitab Sina'at al-Supsata'iyah* (Book of Calling of Those in Error) as a work of wisdom in the Greek language, though Ibn al-Nadim [4] indicates that it was available in both Syriac and Arabic translation by the time of Miskawayh, the Syriac version having been prepared by Ibn Na'imah and the Arabic by Yahya ibn 'Adi, Miskawayh's friend. Likewise, *Kitab al-Qiyas* (Book of the Analogy) which Miskawayh [17] also mentions, was available in both Arabic and Syriac. The existence of these translations means that Miskawayh would not necessarily have been dependent on the Greek originals. Nevertheless he refers to them as being in Greek, and makes no reference to the translations or translators, so the possibility of his having consulted the Greek original remains. Once again Miskawayh leaves the matter in some ambiguity in his own writings.

There are variations of the title of Galen's *Kitab al-Akhlaq* (Ethics). All the early sources including Ibn al-Nadim [4], al-Qifti [8] and Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah [11], cite it as *Kitab al-Akhlaq*, while other authors, Miskawayh [12], al-Biruni (d. 1050) and Ibn Gabirol (d. ca. 1059) call this work *Akhlaq al-Nafs* (The Character of the Soul) (Kraus [20] and Walzer [21]). However, they unanimously agree that it can be reliably attributed to Galen. It contains four discourses which, according to Ibn al-Nadim, had been copied by Hubaysh b. Hasan, the nephew of Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 874), though he does not give any indication as to the language in which they were written. It is probable, however, that Hubaysh simply copied the Greek, since, as a translator, Ibn al-Nadim reports that he worked from Syriac into Arabic. Al-Qifti provides us with no further evidence, nor are there any other references to an Arabic or Syriac translation. Therefore, it seems most likely that Miskawayh's quotations from, and paraphrases of, this work must have been made from reference to the Greek original.

Galen's work under the title of *al-Tashrih* (Anatomy) appears to comprise several books. Hubaysh bin Hasan was responsible for translating all of them into Arabic, probably from syriac (Ibn al-Nadim [4]; and al-Qifti [8]). The content of these books was discussed by Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah [11], who mentions that they are already widespread in the hands of people. Miskawayh [12] did not clarify which one of them he consulted for his quotations, but on the criterion of content, it seems likely that he used *Kitab 'Illaj al-Tashrih* (Book of the Anatomy Treatment), which was also known as *al-Tashrih al-Kabir* (Great Anatomy), since the view there propounded about the formation of bodies is in close

agreement with his own writing. He quotes simultaneously both Galen's *Kitab al-Tashrih* and *Kitab Manafi' al-A'da'* when treating that matter. The *Kitab al-Tashrih* is lost in the Greek original as well as in Arabic, and therefore our knowledge of its content is dependent upon the summary by Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah. *Kitab Manafi' al-A'da'* (The Uses of the Organs) contains seventeen discourses. It was translated into Arabic by Hubaysh b. Hasan and corrected by Hunayn ibn Ishaq. We are not told much about this book by either Miskawayh or al-Qifti, nor by Ibn al-Nadim. However Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah records its list of chapter-headings which he numbers as seventeen, but unfortunately he does not discuss their content.

There is a slight difference in the title of Galen's *Kitab Ta'arruf al-Mar' 'Uyub Nafsihi* (Man's Understanding of His Own Defects). Both Miskawayh [12] and Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah [11], have *ta'arruf* (Understanding), but they differ in the second word, the former giving *ta'arruf al-mar'* (man's understanding) while the latter gives *ta'arruf al-insan* (people's understanding). Both Ibn al-Nadim [4] and al-Qifti [8], use *ta'rif* (acquainting) in place of *ta'arruf*. Ibn al-Nadim giving the second part of the title as *'uyub nafsihi* (his own defects) while al-Qifti gives *'uyubihi* (his defects). This work was translated into Syriac by a certain Tuma, and revised by Hunayn ibn Ishaq. In spite of its variant titles in Arabic, there is no dispute about its authorship. For this reason, it looks as if the above writers were not able to consult the complete form of its original text. This is confirmed by Hunayn ibn Ishaq [11], who states that he could only obtain one of its two discourses, and that was anyway defective (*naqisah*). A similar situation pertains in respect of the last of Galen's books mentioned by Miskawayh [12]: *Khiyar al-Nas Yantafi'una bi-A'da'ihim* (that the Best People derive Benefit from Their Enemies). Both Ibn al-Nadim and al-Qifti, give its title as *Intifa' al-Akhyar bi-A'da'ihim* (The Best People take Advantage of their Enemies). While Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah includes, *qad yantafi'una* (may benefit). This book is now totally unknown.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Miskawayh is generally careful in citing his Greek sources by their Arabic titles, however, he does not normally give the name of translators, other than Abu 'Uthman al-Dimashqi and Ishaq ibn Hunayn, each of whom he mentions once; some of the Greek sources had clearly not been translated in Miskawayh's time. We must conclude therefore, that despite his own silence on this matter, Miskawayh was able to consult Greek originals where no translations existed. This conclusion is confirmed, in our judgement, by the additional evidence of Miskawayh's direct references to the commentaries on Aristotle's works by Porphyry, Bryson and Alexander, all of which were in Greek.

5. REFERENCE

- [1] Miskawayh (1920-1921). *Tajarib al-Umam*. In H.F. Amedroz and D.S. Margoliouth (Trans.), *The Eclipse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate*. Oxford: Blackwell. Vols. IV, V and VII.
- [2] Al-Tawhidi (1944). *Kitab al-Imta' wa'l-Mu'anasah*. Edited by Hasan al-Sandubi, Cairo.
- [3] Al-Tawhidi (1964). *Risalah al-Sadaqah wa'l-Sadiq*. Edited by Ibrahim al-Kaylani, Damascus.
- [4] Ibn al-Nadim (1871-1872). *Kitab al-Fihrist*. Edited by G. Flugel, J. Rodiger, A. Muller. 2 vols. Leipzig: Verlag Von F.C.E. Vogel.
- [5] Al-Sijistani (1979). *Muntakhab Siwan al-Hikma*. Edited by D. M. Dunlop. *The Muntakhab Siwan al-Hikma of Abu Sulayman al-Sijistani*. Berlin: W. De Gruyter.
- [6] Al-'Amili (1938). *A 'yan al-Shi'a*. 10 vols. Damascus: Ibn Zaydun Press.
- [7] Al-Khawansari (1888). *Rawdat al-Jannah fi Ahwal al-'Ulama' wa'l-Sadat*. Teheran.
- [8] Al-Qifti (1903). *Ta'rikh al-Hukama'*. Edited by J. Lippert. Leipzig: Dieterich's che-Verlags.
- [9] Miskawayh (1964). *Risala fi Mahiyat al-'Adl*. Edited and translated by M. S. Khan. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- [10] Al-Tawhidi (1929). *Al-Muqabasat*. Edited by Hasan al-Sandubi. Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Rahmaniyya.
- [11] Ibn Abi Usaybi'a (1982, 1984). *'Uyyu al-Anba' fi Tabaqat al-Atibba'*. Edited by A. Muller. 2 vols. Konigsberg.
- [12] Miskawayh (1966). *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*. Edited by C.K. Zurayk. Beirut: American University of Beirut.
- [13] Miskawayh (1968). *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*. Translated by C.K. Zurayk. *The Refinement of Character*. Beirut: American University of Beirut.
- [14] Yaqut (1907-1926). *Irshad al-Arib ila Ma'rifat al-Adib*. Edited by D. S. Margoliouth. 7 vols. Leiden - London.
- [15] Badawi 'A R (Ed.). (1952). *Jawidan Khirad*. Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahdah al-Misriyyah.
- [16] Miskawayh (1952). *Jawidan Khirad*. Edited by 'A. R. Badawi, Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahdah al-Misriyyah.
- [17] Miskawayh (1917). *Kitab al-Sa'ada*. Cairo: al-Madrasah al-Sina'iyah al-Ilahiyyah.
- [18] Pines (1971). "Miskawayh and Paul the Persian", *Iran Shinasi*, 2ii, (3): 121-129.
- [19] Arberry A J (1957). *Revelation and Reason in Islam*. London: G. Allen & Unwin.
- [20] Kraus P (1937). "Kitab al-Akhlaq li-Jalinus", *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Egypt*, Vol. V, Part 1: 19-20;
- [21] Walzer R (1962). *Greek into Arabic*. Oxford: Bruno Cassirer