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*Further, with God's help, we begin to write the treatise composed by the chief  
physician Sergius on the goal of Aristotle's Categories<sup>1</sup>*

[Prologue]

- 1        There is a story, O brother Theodore<sup>2</sup>, told by the ancients about the bird called stork. It rejoices and becomes strong at the time when it separates itself from the cultivated land and retreats into a desert place, and it lays down in its first abode until the moment when its life is completed<sup>3</sup>. In the same manner, as it seems to me, a man will not be able to comprehend the ideas of the ancients and to enter into the mystery of knowing their writings, unless he separates himself from the whole world and its concerns, and also abandons his body — not physically but intellectually — and casts behind him all its desires. For only then will his mind be emptied and able to turn to itself and contemplate by itself, clearly seeing what has been written by them and properly distinguishing between those things that are stated correctly and those that are not put like that. Then nothing opposed to his lightness will be able to impede him through the weight of his body in the course of such a path as this<sup>4</sup>.
- 2        So, when we were translating certain writings of Galen the doctor from the Greek language into the tongue of the Syrians<sup>5</sup>, I was the one who translated, while you wrote down after me and improved the Syriac text as the style of this tongue demands it. And when you saw the clear divisions of the terms that are in the writings of this man, the definitions and demonstrations that are fre-

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1 The reference to the *Categories* in the title is characteristic of mss. BCD. The last part of the title in P, “...on the goal of all Aristotle's writings”, reflects the contents of Books I–II that deal with the whole corpus of Aristotle's texts with a focus on the logical treatises (the *Organon*).

2 Sergius addressed his treatise to Theodore, who, according to Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq, was bishop of the town Karḥ Ḡuddan (cf. the introduction). In what follows (§§2–5), Sergius explains that Theodore became his disciple and assisted him in the translation work.

3 The same Syriac word (spelled either as *ḥorba* or as *ḥurba*) may be translated either as “desert place” or as “stork”. This specifically Syriac wordplay makes it likely that the “story” quoted by Sergius was known to him in Syriac and not in Greek.

4 The question of how one should prepare himself for the study of philosophy was treated as one of the *prelegomena* points, cf. Ammonius, *In Cat.* 6.21–24. Similar to Sergius, David starts his *Prolegomena philosophiae* with the notion that the person who begins to learn philosophy should “bid farewell to all earthly cares” (πάσῃ τῇ τοῦ βίου φροντίδι χαίρειν εἰπόντες), see David, *Prolegomena* 1.4–5 (trans. in Gertz 2018: 83).

5 Sergius translated a large corpus of writings of Galen which are listed in a letter of the 9th century Syriac translator and physician Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq (see Bergsträsser 1925, Lamoreaux 2016) and of which only some portions have come down to us.



quently and excellently set in them, you asked me where precisely this man had received such a foundation and beginning in education and acquired such riches, i.e., from himself or from someone else among the authors before him.

- 3 To this, for the sake of the love of learning which is in you, I answered that the beginning, the origin, and the reason of this whole teaching was Aristotle, not only for Galen and for his other fellow doctors, but also for all writers and famous philosophers that came after him. For until the time when nature brought forth this person into the world of men, all parts of philosophy and of the whole of learning were dispersed in the manner of simple drugs and scattered without order and knowledge among various writers. But he alone like a wise doctor collected all parts<sup>6</sup> that were scattered, put them together skilfully and intelligently, and prepared out of them one perfect remedy of his teaching which uproots and destroys the frail disease of ignorance in the souls of those who sincerely approach his writings. Just as those who build statues (ἀνδρίδας) shape every part of the figure separately and afterwards put them together one after another as the craft demands it, thus creating a perfect statue; in the same way he (i.e. Aristotle) also combined, joined and put together every single part of philosophy in the order demanded by nature, and by means of all his books made of it one perfect and awe-inspiring statue of the knowledge of all beings<sup>7</sup>.

- 4 Now, when you had heard this from me, O brother Theodore, you immediately wished to know the goal of the teaching of this man, the order (τάξις) of

6 Thus ms. P, mss. BCD: "writings".

7 Sergius' presentation of Aristotle finds a close parallel in *Praeparatio Evangelica* XI.2.2–4, where Eusebius quotes Atticus, the second century Platonist, who praises in nearly the same words Plato for bringing together various disciplines which before him were scattered and creating from them a perfect body (σῶμά τι) of philosophy.

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his writings, and the sequence in which they should be understood<sup>8</sup>. And after I had made an attempt to tell in your presence one thing after another of what I could remember about it, your love also persuaded me to send you in written form what I had reported orally before you. When I was asked about it, I said, because of the greatness of this task, that there is one treatise where I had written briefly about the goal of Aristotle's philosophy and that it would explain as far as possible the teaching of this man to those who come across it<sup>9</sup>. You, nevertheless, were not persuaded by this but even more lovingly urged us that, instead of doing it in the way we had done previously, i.e. (speaking) generally about the whole teaching of this sage concerning the principles of the universe, we should rather briefly describe what seems proper to us regarding each of his writings separately.

- 5     Thus, since it was not possible for me to avoid your request, there is something that I must urge upon you and upon those who might read this treatise, before I come to the analysis of these things. After having read only one time what is written here, one should not turn immediately to useless accusations and reproaches. Rather one should keep reading and trying to comprehend — one time, and another, and a third, and a fourth time, — if this is what the subject requires. But if even then something would look obscure<sup>10</sup>, in that case he should not be reluctant to go to someone who is able to instruct him and to explain him what he does not understand. Thus he will save himself from the tumult that occurs in the minds of those who do not comprehend what they are reading, and also spare himself accusations and reproaches, of which the author of the book has no use.

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8 Sergius formulates Theodore's alleged inquiry in the form of the preliminaries (*prolegomena*, cf. the list of the preliminaries by Ammonius, *In Isag.* 21.6–10) some of which he is going to discuss in the following two books of his commentary (cf. §21). Here, Sergius refers to two points, the goal (ὁ σκοπός) and the sequence of the reading (ἡ τάξις τῆς ἀναγνώσεως). Later on, in §5, he mentions also the problem of obscurity of Aristotle's language, which was considered among the *prolegomena* points as well.

9 As it becomes clear from the next sentence, Sergius refers here to the treatise *On the Principles of the Universe* which is attributed to him and which is in fact a revised version of Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Universe*.

10 The obscurity of Aristotle's language was one of the *prolegomena* questions, which Sergius discusses in §§61–64 below.

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6 For there are many who are so violently driven by envy as if by mighty blasts of wind that as soon as they start reading a book they turn to reproach instead of understanding, because they believe that by insulting others they will increase their own glory. What they do not comprehend is that everything, whatever it may be, is proven by its own strength and not by the weakness of something else. For comparing one's strength with someone else's weakness does not make one firm. Neither will smallness of some nature bring greatness to something that is compared with it. Instead, it would be proper for them, if they are seeking good judgement, to receive from someone a systematic explanation of what has been written. And if there is something that seems to need clarification and correction by others, they should set it straight without envy and deal with it without reproach. Thus they will not put human nature to shame and bring no slander on it, since it is not possible for it to succeed in everything.

7 I am saying all this, so that anyone who reads this should be aware that I am now writing about the goal of his (i.e. Aristotle's) writings<sup>11</sup>, not because I am overcome by the glory of (this) man, much less because I have the same opinion as him, but because I was compelled by your love, as I mentioned above, and because I am sure that these things bring much learning and great riches to those who read them with comprehension. Now, let us turn to the account of the subject matter of that about which we are going to write.

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11 Ms. P: "teachings".