

The Theme of the Universal Library in the Arabic Tradition

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The Letter of Aristeas, a text written in Greek by a Jewish author of the Alexandrian diaspora, probably in the second century B.C., traces the circumstances under which a Greek translation of the sacred book of the Jews, the Pentateuch, was commissioned by King Ptolemy II Philadelphus. The letter situates this undertaking in the broader context of the foundation of the Library of Alexandria on the advice of Demetrius of Phalerum, who instigated the plan to gather together all the world's books, both those in the possession of the Greeks and those "of other peoples."

The tradition of this text, which we might term the "travels of Aristeas," has followed some extremely distant twists and turns. Its path leads from Alexandria to China, with stops in Byzantium, the Arab world, and the Italy of the humanists.

The following pages¹ illuminate one segment of this "journey" through Arab culture, in particular during the splendid era of the Caliphate of Baghdad, where the memory of the universal Library of Alexandria lived on: the story became a myth with multiple variants, and the institution established by the Ptolemaic kings was an invitation to dream and reverie for a literate culture that cherished its own aspirations to the quest for all the books and all the knowledge in the world.

Al-Tabari, a great Arab historian of the ninth century (839-923), devotes a considerable portion of the first section of his Chronicle² to a dialogue between the Prophet and five Jewish wise men, all well versed in the Pentateuch. These wise men question the Prophet about the Pentateuch, asking for example: What was the first house on earth? (XIX); Who was the first man whose hair

turned white? (XXIII); What ten words did God speak to Solomon? (XVII); Who inhabited the world before Adam? (XXVII) – and so on.³ This dialogue is most likely modeled after biographical narratives written about the “enlightened” figures such as Buddha, Jesus, and Apollonios of Tyana, who have a ready answer for every question; the Prophet in Al-Tabari’s narrative follows this pattern. The same model subsequently finds broad application in the practice of *Erotemata* (“Questions”), which are put to and answered by an illustrious individual.⁴ But what recalls Aristeas⁵ is the type of question recorded by Al-Tabari, just as the designation of five Jewish wise men who are particularly well versed in the Pentateuch recalls the seventy-two Jewish wise men who were known as the most expert translators of the Pentateuch. Of course, in Al-Tabari, the Jewish wise men address questions to the Prophet, who answers them, whereas in Aristeas, the questions are asked by Ptolemy and answered by the Jewish wise men. It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to consider the numerous developments to which the theme of debate between a delegation of experts (such as the seventy-two translators) and a sovereign has given rise – as numerous as the variations spun on the wise men’s banquet. In the *Life of Constantine Cyril* (which has come down to us in Old Slavonic), the objective of the mission that took the saint to the Caliph’s court was to debate a religious theme.

In the anonymous *Report on the Affairs of Persia* – found in a large number of manuscripts, among which the Greek *Parisinus* 1084 (tenth century) stands out – the Persian king summons the wise men and instigates a discussion, in which the Christians prevail over both the “Greeks” (*Hellenes*) and the Jews. The dating of this document is a matter of some controversy; Eduard Bratke, who prepared an admirable edition of it in 1899,⁶ concluded after carefully weighing all the evidence that it dated from the end of the fifth century, just before the era of Justinian and Chosroes.

According to Bratke (238), one of the themes found in Al-Tabari (I, 649: Cyrus as a contemporary of Saint John the Baptist) stems from a passage in the Persian king’s religious discussion (11, 9-11), and reappears in the “Christian novel on Cyrus.” This transmission is an index of the circulation and mixing of cultures and reli-

gious influences in an area that was particularly conducive to such intermingling. It is revealing that in citing the books of the Old Testament, the anonymous author of the *Conversation at the Sassanian Court* does not draw upon the text of the Seventy, but rather follows Theodotion and Aquila (Bratke, 227-228).

After Al-Tabari, an explicit echo of Aristeas' narrative is found in Arab culture at the beginning of chapter VII of Al-Nadim's *Fihrist*, which is devoted to Greek writings translated into Arabic. The full title of this work, *Kitab al-Fihrist*, means "The Catalog" or "The Index of Books." The *Fihrist* opens with the following declaration:

This is a catalog of the books of all peoples, Arab and foreign, existing in the language of the Arabs, as well as of their scripts, dealing with various sciences, with accounts of those who composed them and the categories of their authors, together with their relationships and records of their times of birth, length of life, and times of death, and also of the localities of their cities, their virtues and faults, from the beginning of the formation of each science to this our own time, which is the year three hundred and seventy-seven after the Hijrah (A.D. 987/88).⁷

"A catalog of the books of all peoples ... existing in the language of the Arabs": this program is precisely analogous to that of Ptolemy Philadelphus as portrayed by Aristeas, and even more similar to Epiphanes' version. The work, however, contains even more than it promises. For example, the first section of the first chapter describes "the languages of the peoples, Arab and foreign, the characteristics of their methods of writing, their types of script and forms of calligraphy" (vol. 1, 2), whereas the fifth section of the fifth chapter contains a richly detailed description of the forms of mysticism, including practices "based on hallucinations and aberrations" (vol. 1, 4). The contents are arranged according to a complex scheme: near the beginning come the "Arabians who were masters of literary style" (vol. 1, 2) and last of all the alchemists; the Greek authors dominate the seventh chapter, which is devoted to "philosophy and the ancient sciences" (vol. 1, 4) (mathematics, music, mechanics, medicine).

In the first section of the first chapter, when the discussion turns to Greek script, the first source to be recalled and cited is Ishaq al-Rahib. The somewhat confused text begins by mentioning the invention of the alphabet, brought to Greece from Egypt by Cadmus (Qatmus) and Agenor (Aghanun); it goes on to discuss the

last four letters “derived” by Simonides (Simunidus), bringing the Greek alphabet to a total of 24 signs. Then reference is made to a synchronism: “It was in those days that *Socrates* (Suqratis) appeared, according to what *Ishaq* al-Rahib (Isaac the Monk) records in his history” (vol. 1, 28; original emphasis). Isaac the Monk reappears twice more in the *Fihrist*, first in the general introduction to the origin of Greek books (vol. 2, 576) and again as a biographical source for Plato (vol. 2, 594). Like the passage on Socrates, the text concerning Plato mentions a synchronism. In both cases, it is understood that Isaac the Monk was defining the period in which the personage in question was born: Socrates was born in the time of Simonides, the presumed inventor of the four new alphabetic signs (Socrates was indeed born in 469 B.C., before Simonides’ death); Plato’s birth took place “at the time of Artaxerxes the Long-Handed” (whose reign in fact ended around 425 B.C.; Plato was born in approximately 428). “Ishaq the Monk said, ‘Plato became known and his work became famous during the days of *Artaxerxes* [I] known as ‘the Long Hand.’ ... This king ... belonged to Persia, so that there was no connection between him and Plato” (*Fihrist*, vol. 2, 594).

It is no easy matter to extrapolate from these three citations the nature of Isaac the Monk’s *History*, to which the *Fihrist* makes reference. Dodge’s idea, which holds that it was a history of the Ptolemies of Egypt (*Fihrist*, vol. 2, 1017), does not seem plausible. The fact that Isaac’s work devotes a brief account to the history of Ptolemy Philadelphus and of Demetrius in their pursuit of all the books in the world does not lend support to Dodge’s notion, for this same narrative, taken from the beginning of the *Letter of Aristeas*, crops up repeatedly in the most varied contexts; and, in the case of Isaac the Monk, two citations out of three have to do with elementary bibliographical information about Greek philosophers. The *Fihrist* itself mentions the history of Ptolemy and of Demetrius in the introduction to the chapter that deals, in part, with Greek philosophers: there are thus grounds for thinking that Isaac’s work resembled the *Fihrist*, to some degree. Both appear to include the birth of alphabets among their interests.

In the introduction to chapter seven of the *Fihrist*, Isaac the Monk’s text on the way in which Ptolemy Philadelphus had gath-

ered together all the books in the world comes after a longer, more detailed passage that Al-Nadim quotes from the Persian Abu Sahl ibn Nawbakht. Abu Sahl had been Harun Al-Rashid's librarian (786-809) in "The House of Wisdom," the institution founded by the Caliph and primarily devoted to translations of Greek classics (*Fihrist*, vol. 2, 651).⁸

Isaac the Monk, in contrast, describes Ptolemy's analogous undertaking in an account based on the beginning of the *Letter of Aristeas*, as Al-Nadim reports:

Ishaq al-Rahib relates in his *History* that when *Ptolemy Philadelphus*, who was one of the kings of Alexandria, reigned, he made a search for books of learning, placing a man named *Zamirah* in charge. According to what is related, he collected fifty-four thousand one hundred and twenty books. Then he said: "Oh, King, there are still a great many more [books] in the world, in Sind [China], India, Persia, Georgia, Armenia, Babylon, al-Mawsil [Mosul], and among the Greeks." (*Fihrist*, vol. 2, 576; original emphasis)

An expanded version of this account is found in the *Ta'rikh al-Hukama* of Ibn al-Qifti (1172-1248, approximately two centuries after the *Fihrist*)⁹:

Amr said to him: "What do you need?" John said: "Books of wisdom from royal libraries. You have them in your custody and we need them, whereas they are of no use to you." He said to him: "Who collected these books and what is their history?" Jean told him: "When Ptolemy Philadelphus was king of Alexandria, he loved science and learned men, and he sought after books of science. He ordered that they be collected and he designated special warehouses to hold them. The books were brought together and he put a man known as *Zamirah* in charge of them; he enjoined *Zamirah* to be diligent in collecting and storing them, offering the highest prices for them and encouraging specialized merchants to bring them. Thus did *Zamirah*, and after some time, fifty-four thousand one hundred and twenty books had been collected. When the king had learned and verified their number, he said to *Zamirah*: "Do you think there are still other books of science on this earth that we do not possess?" *Zamirah* answered him: "There are still many more books in the world, in Sind, in India, in Persia, in Georgia, in Armenia, in Babylon, in Mossoul and among the Romans (*Rum*)." The king marveled and said: "Continue your work." And *Zamirah* did not leave off until the king died. These books were always kept and preserved and all the kings who followed and their successors up to our day took care to do the same.

The list of peoples who still have books in their possession (to be conquered, we may infer, for the Library) is the same in the *Fihrist* and in Ibn al-Qifti's text: the *Rum* are the "Romans," that is, the Byzantine Greeks. Perhaps we are to take Ptolemy Philadel-

phus' bidding to Zamirah ("Continue your work") as an echo of the famous invitation issued by Ptolemy to Demetrius, to obtain *the other books too*. Such is the drift, moreover, of the preceding question: "Do you think there are still other books of science on this earth that we do not possess?" It is worth comparing the known list of the Arab tradition with the known lists of the late ancient tradition (Epiphanes) and the Byzantine tradition.

a)	b)	c)
Epiphanes, <i>De mensuris et ponderibus</i> (PG 43, 252)	George Syncellus, <i>Ecolga Chronograph</i> (Mosshammer, I, 327):	George Cedrenus, <i>Sinopsis histor.</i> (Bekker, 289):
Ethiopians	"All the Greek books"	"The rest of the Greek books"
Persians	Chaldean books	Chaldean books
Elamites	Egyptian books	Egyptian books
Babylonians	Roman books	Roman books
Assyrians		
Chaldeans	d)	
Phoenicians	John Tzetzes, <i>Prolegomena de Comoedia</i> (Koster, 32):	
Syrians	"all the books of the Greeks and of all the other peoples"	
Greeks	(= <i>Anonymus Cramerii</i> II, p. 43 Koster)	
Romans ("not yet, at that time, called Romans)		
e)	f)	g)
Fihrist (vol. 2, 576):	Ibn Al-Qifti:	Abul-Farag (<i>Hist. Dynast.</i> trans. Pococke, 160):
Sind	Sind	Al-Mamun procures the Greek books
India	India	h)
Persia	Persia	Leon the African (Hottinger, 248):
Georgia	Georgia	Al-Mamun procures books in these languages:
Armenia	Armenia	Greek
Babylonia	Babylonia	Persian
Mossoul	Mossoul	Chaldean
Greeks	<i>Rum</i>	Egyptian

These lists reflect the political horizons of the lands and cultures where they arose. Whereas in the case of the Alexandrian Jew hiding behind the name Aristeas, the allusion to "other peoples" is vague, and Aristeas' brief work cites the mission to Jerusalem as the sole concrete example of translation and contact with other peoples, for Epiphanes the peoples whose books are collected and translated are essentially those named in Holy Scripture. But the list changes again for the Arab authors: they consider as probable that Ptolemy Philadelphus paid attention to the literary civilization of the peoples with whom the Abbasid Caliphate, at the height of its powers, established a connection (particularly starting when the Empire's center of gravity moved from Syria to Iraq with the foundation of a new capital, Baghdad). In this light it is easier to understand the nature of the list supplied by the *Fihrist* and repeated word for word by Ibn al-Qifti, with its rigorously geographical arrangement from East to West: China, India, Persia, Georgia and Armenia (Babylon and Mossoul – that is, Iraq – are an addition conceived "from the point of view" of Ptolemaic Egypt). This in a sense is an "Arabized" Ptolemy, whose horizon is the same as that of the Caliphs, or of the Sassanian Ardashir, who indeed collected books from China, India and Greece. The itinerary of the Armenian delegation charged with improving the translation of the Bible is described in an analogous fashion: Armenia-Alexandria-Greece-Byzantium-Armenia (Moses of Khorene, III, 61-62).

The vague and contradictory nature of Aristeas' report is probably what led to such a multiplicity of versions. In his "written account" to the king (§ 30), Demetrius of Phalerum speaks of the *small number* of books that are still absent from the royal library, besides, of course, the holy books of the Jews, which form the main object of his brief text.¹⁰ In contrast, in the initial dialogue between Demetrius and Ptolemy Philadelphus (§ 10), the books already present in the library comprise 200,000 scrolls, whereas the goal to be reached is 500,000: therefore, the books still to be acquired outnumber those that are already in the library. What we are led to infer is that the missing books are those of other peoples; indeed, the example noted is that of the Jewish Pentateuch, and the way in which allusion is made to it implies that it is just one among a number of examples: "I have been told that

the laws of the Jews would *also* be worthy of transcription and inclusion in the library.”¹¹ John Tzetzes hewed to the model without hazarding any conjectures as to the other peoples implied by the statement that “the laws of the Jews would *also* be worthy of inclusion in the library.” In contrast, each of the other traditions stemming from Aristeas – the Byzantine and Arabic traditions – has proposed its own list, each with its respective peculiarities and internal distinctions.

Sixty years before the *Filrhist* (which attributes the story about Ptolemy Philadelphus and Zamirah to Isaac the Monk), Aristeas’ text, already altered by being given a Providential slant (the seventy identical translations), was found in the chronicle of Euty-chios, the Greek patriarch of Alexandria from 933 to 939, who was known under the Arabic name of Sa’id ibn-al-Bitrik. His chronicle, written in Arabic (*Nazm al Djawhar*), was translated into Latin by Poccocke in 1658. Here is his version of the story:¹²

After him, Ptolemy, whose name was Alexander with the nickname of Galeb-Ur, reigned for twenty-seven years. In the twentieth year of his reign, this king, through the good offices of his envoys, had seventy Jews brought to Alexandria with the purpose of having them translate from Hebrew into Greek the Law and the Books of the Prophets. He installed each one in an apartment to see how each would interpret the text. When the translations were complete, the interpretations were examined: the translations were identical, with no discrepancies at all. Thus he brought all the books together, marked them with his seal, and had them placed in the temple of the god named Serapis.

There is no allusion here to translations from other languages, but only to the Seventy. Euty-chios exhibits no point of contact with the Arabic tradition regarding the Seventy, but does adopt the originally Christian conception of the miraculous inspiration that moves the seventy translators.

In an essay on historiographic traditions related to the destruction of the Library of Alexandria at the time of the Arab conquest, P. Casanova has observed that a passage of the *Prolegomena* (*Muqaddamah*) of Ibn Haldun (1332-1406) recounting the Moslem conquest of Persia proposes the same framework and the same episodes as those on which Ibn al-Qifti bases his narrative of the Moslem conquest of Alexandria.¹³ The great Tunisian historian asks: “What has become of the scientific knowledge of the Per-

sians, whose writings were destroyed at the time of the conquest, by Umar?"¹⁴ There follows an enumeration of the peoples whose books were destroyed with the conquest of Persia: "Where is the knowledge of the Chaldeans, the Assyrians, the inhabitants of Babylonia? Where is the knowledge that used to reign among the Copts?" He then assesses the consequences: "There is only one nation, that of the Greeks alone, whose scientific production we have in our possession." This page then provides a list of the peoples whose works had been concentrated in Persia and who perished with the Arab conquest: Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Babylonians; to this list should be added the Greeks, whose works were, exceptionally, saved because of the Arabs' strong interest in Greek science. This enumeration represents a segment of Epiphanes' list. Assyrians (of Mossoul), Babylonians and Greeks also figure in the lists provided, in connection with Alexandria, by the *Fihrist* and by Ibn al-Qifti, but the Chaldeans are absent from these last-mentioned accounts. The aspect of the tradition concerning Alexandria that is most similar to that about the conquest of Persia is the motive invoked to justify such a drastic and destructive decision. Ibn Haldun continues:

The Moslems, at the time of their conquest of Persia, found an innumerable quantity of books and scientific anthologies in this country, and their general Sa'd ibn abi Waqqas wrote to Caliph Umar requesting permission to distribute them to the true believers with the rest of the booty. Umar answered him in the following terms: "Throw them in the water; if they contain anything that can lead toward the truth, we have received better guides from God; if they contain errors, we will be rid of them, thanks be to God!" As a result of this command, they threw the books in the water or burned them, and with that the Persians' scientific knowledge disappeared.¹⁵

A later version of the story of Ptolemy Philadelphus and his illustrious library, adapted to accommodate the far more recent reality of the Caliphate, is to be found in the idealization of Caliph al-Mamun (813-833), a descendant of the great and enlightened Harun al-Rashid. This idealization turns upon the theme of the pursuit of books from "all over the world."

A) Bar Hebraeus (Gregory Abul-Farag, 1226-1286):¹⁶

When the seventh caliph, Abd Allah al-Mamun, the son of Harun Al Rashid, came to power, he finished the work undertaken by his ancestor Al Mansur. He began to seek science in the places where it had been produced,

and he personally communicated the following request to the kings of the Greeks: that they should send him the books of philosophy that were to be found among them. When they had sent him what they possessed, the Caliph sought out expert interpreters and commissioned them to make careful translations of these works. The translations were made with the greatest possible care. Finally, the Caliph urged that the books be read and inspired a desire to study them in depth. He himself regularly listened to the learned men, attended their debates and took pleasure in their disquisitions: he knew that the learned men were creatures of God, the beings He had chosen for Himself and claimed for His own among all His servants.

B) Leon the African (born ca. 1489 – died after 1550), *De viris quibusdam illustribus apud Arabes*:¹⁷

Al-Mamun was then burning with an insatiable desire to know the sciences of the Ancients, for at the time there were no scientific writings in Arabic. So he summoned to his presence a very large number of learned men of various native tongues and asked them to name the authors and titles of books devoted to the different sciences that were written in Greek, in Persian, in Chaldean and in Egyptian. The names of numerous works were put forward. Al-Mamun then sent many of his servants to Syria, to Armenia and to Egypt, to buy these books: they returned loaded down with countless items.

Leon the African's account continues by supplying details concerning the translators under whose direction the versions of the different texts were prepared.

He entrusted the translation of texts in Greek to John, the son of Mesuah, whom we have already mentioned, for at that time the Christians studied Greek, but he commissioned translations of Greek texts from as many others as possible, all of whom answered to John. He entrusted the translation of Persian texts to Mahan and to the above-mentioned Mesuah. They translated the book of Galen, etc.

Ptolemy Philadelphus' decision to collect all the books in the world was based on advice from Demetrius (Aristeas, 9-11); in the case of Al-Mamun, the capacity of advisor was filled by none other than Aristotle, who appeared to the Caliph in a dream, according to a tradition reported by al-Nadim in the *Fihrist* (vol. 2, 583). The episode figures in the introduction to chapter seven – shortly after the account, cited previously, of the meeting that took place between Ptolemy Philadelphus and Zamirah – and is entitled “Mention of the Reasons Why Books on Philosophy and Other Ancient Sciences Became Plentiful in This Country.” What al-Nadim relates is a dialogue that occurs in a dream and involves Aristotle – with his “broad forehead, joined eyebrows, bald head,

bloodshot eyes" – and the Caliph, who asks the philosopher the crucial question: "What is Good?" (vol. 2, 584). This dreamed dialogue, explains al-Nadim, was one of the most powerful reasons for the Caliph's interest in books. Ptolemy may have had Demetrius for his advisor, but al-Mamun was entitled to consult with none other than Aristotle himself, the very master from whom Demetrius was descended, through Theophrastus.

According to Abul-Farag, Al-Mamun's great book hunt reflected goals opposed to those pursued by the Chinese and the Turks,¹⁸ who sought to excel "in the mechanical arts." The reference to the Chinese and their predilection for the "mechanical arts" at the expense of "philosophy" is not a vague allusion, but rather reflects – in what is perhaps a legitimate hypothesis – the tradition that has reached us through the *Historical memoirs* of Sseu-Ma Ts'ien: Ch'in Shih Huang-ti, the Emperor who had the Great Wall built (213 B.C.), is reported to have caused, at the urging of his advisor Li Szu, all books to be destroyed except those relating to medicine, pharmacology, and divination.

Sseu-Ma Ts'ien's account¹⁹ depicts the meeting between the traditional scholars and the renegade advisor Li Szu. To the traditionalists who recalled the experience of earlier rulers, Li Szu offered this objection:

Your Majesty has for the first time accomplished a great work and has established a glory that will last for ten thousand generations. This is something that the stupid scholars cannot understand. The scholars do not pattern themselves upon the present, but study Antiquity in order to denigrate the present; they sow doubt and confusion We must defend ourselves. Your subject proposes that all the official histories – with the exception of the *Memoirs of the Ch'in dynasty*²⁰ – be burned. Anyone in this Empire who dares conceal a copy of the *Discourse of the Hundred Schools* will be required to report to the civil and military authorities who are charged with burning these books. Those who dare discuss among themselves the *Canon of Poems* and the *Canon of History* will be put to death and their bodies will be displayed in the market square The only books that will not be proscribed are those on medicine and pharmacology, on divination by means of sea tortoises and yarrow, and on agriculture and arboriculture.

Whereas Demetrius, according to Aristeas (as well as all the sources that have issued in one way or another from Aristeas), sought with some success to augment the royal library, Li Szu asked his sovereign to destroy books. Ptolemy Philadelphus and

Ch'in Shi Huang-ti were nearly contemporaries; each of them, concerned about the future of his library, called upon an advisor and followed his counsel. In a remarkable coincidence, both Ptolemy's advisor Demetrius and Ch'in Shih Huang-ti's counsellor were renegades. Ch'in Shih Huang-ti is Ptolemy's opposite, just as Sseu-Ma Ts'ien's narrative is the opposite of the *Letter of Aristeas*. Abul-Farag shows an awareness of this contrast in his assertion that Al-Mamun's approach to book-hunting was contrary to that adopted by "the Chinese and the Turks."²¹

The tradition of the *Letter of Aristeas* thus reaches far and wide. Its trajectory can be traced from Alexandria to China, just as, for example, the matter of *The Thousand and One Nights* takes off from India, continues towards Baghdad, and finally arrives in Cairo, where it acquires the form with which Western readers are most familiar. In its golden age (the eighth and ninth centuries), the Caliphate was the hub of civilization: it mined and reworked the cultures of the peoples with whom it came into contact; it was a crossroads through which motifs, literary models, and currents of thought spread and contaminated one another. It is significant in and of itself that the first chapter of the *Fihrist* speaks of the three alphabets – Arabic, Greek, and Chinese: and this chapter on the alphabets also has its counterpart precisely in chapter one of Liu Xie's sixth-century treatise *The Treasury of Letters*,²¹ a work that bears more resemblance to the *Fihrist* than does Photius' *Library*. Aristeas' legend of seventy-two translators certainly figures among those well-traveled motifs that have followed the meandering paths of civilization. And this is hardly surprising if we consider how inextricably his opusculum was bound to the history and tradition of the Old Testament, a corpus accepted as a book of truth by three concurrent religions converging in this pulse point suspended between East and West.

Translated from the French by Jennifer Curtiss Gage.

Notes

1. This article reproduces chapter 4, "La tradizione araba," of Luciano Canfora's most recent book, *Il Viaggio di Aristeo* (Bari: Laterza, 1996), pp. 33-46. Thanks are due to Mr. Laterza, who authorized the French translation upon which this English version was based.
2. See Part I, chapters II-XXIV.
3. *Chronique de Abou-Djafar-Mohammedben-Djarir-ben-Yezid-Tabari*, trans. from the Persian version by Hermann Zotenberg, Paris, 1867/1874, vol. 1, pp. 14-72.
4. See for example Basil the Great, *Letters* 231-236, all of which are addressed to Amphilochios of Iconion with a view to resolving his doctrinal questions; or again, the 313 answers given by Photius to the questions of Amphilochios of Cyzicus: the *Amphilochia*.
5. The importance of the "table talk" portrayed by Aristeas led Johannes Dru-sius, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, to insert this part of the *Letter* in Book II of the *Apophthegmata Hebraeorum*, Franeker, 1591, and in a larger collection of *Apophthegmata Hebraeorum atque Arabum*.
6. *Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch am Hof der Sasaniden*, "Texte und Untersuchungen," N.F., 4, 3, Leipzig, 1899.
7. *The Fihrist of Al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge, New York, 1970), vol 1, pp. 1-2.
8. Abu Sahl tells of the initiative to collect books, but attributes it to the Sassanian (*Fihrist*, vol. 2, 575). This is a concise history of Persia, starting with its occupation by Alexander the Great – a history of oppression and divisions until "Ardashir ibn Babak of the lineage of Sasan ... became master of their land" and "did away with their schisms, assuming for himself the sovereignty." According to Al-Nadim's transcription, Abu Sahl continues: "Then he sent to India and China for the books in those directions, and also to the Greeks. He copied whatever was safeguarded with them, even seeking for the little that remained in al-Iraq ... Shapur, his son, followed his example, so that there were transcribed into Persian all of those books, such as the ones of Hermes the Babylonian, who ruled Egypt; Dorotheus the Syrian; Phaedrus the Greek from the city of Athens, famous for learning; Ptolemy [Ptolemaeus Alexandrinus]; and Farmasib the Indian. They explained them [the books], teaching the people about them in the same way that they learned from all of those books" (vol. 2, 575). The list of learned men who had been brought from various parts of the world to "explain" these books coming from all over the world provides a specific parallel to one element of the tradition that had been formed on the basis of Aristeas (from Epiphanes to Tzetzes): according to this tradition, Ptolemy Philadelphus had summoned to Alexandria translators who were competent in each of the languages represented in the books he had gathered together in his Alexandrian library.
9. This page is cited from the translation by Giuseppe Furlani, "Giovanni il Filopono e l'incendio della Biblioteca di Alessandria," *Bulletin de la Société archéologique d'Alexandrie*, no. 21, N.S. VI, 1, 1925, pp. 60-61.
10. Pelletier translates as follows: "besides a few others, we are missing the books of the Law of the Jews"; Clara Kraus's version is more to the point: "Along

with a *small number* of others, we are missing the books containing the Law of the Jews.”

11. The expression “*Prosèggeltai*,” among others, refers to information received by the librarian *from abroad*.
12. This is the only account of the Arab tradition derived from Aristeas that is included in Wendland’s compilation.
13. “*L’incendie de la bibliothèque d’Alexandrie par les Arabes*,” *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, 1923, pp. 163-166.
14. This is the same condottiere whom the conqueror of Alexandria, Amr, asks what fate should be accorded the books.
15. Throwing the books in the river is a theme that recurs again in the same Ibn Haldun’s writings, in connection with the sacking of Baghdad by the Mongols, in 1258, and also in the *Thousand and One Nights* as a nightmare that causes the Baghdad city gates to be closed each night “to prevent heretics from taking science books and throwing them in the Tiger.”
16. *Historia Compendiosa Dynastiarum*, Latin trans. Pococke, Oxford, 1663, p. 160.
17. I have drawn upon the translation by Johann Heinrich Hottinger, *Bibliothecarius quadripartitus*, Tiguri, 1664, p. 248, reproduced unaltered by Fabricius in volume XIII of his *Bibliotheca Graeca*, Hamburg, 1725, p. 261 and by Giuseppe Simone Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, Rome, 1725, Vol. 3, 1, pp. 501-502.
18. “*Abstinentes ab eo cui praecipue inhiant Sinenses et Turcae*.”
19. Sima Qian, *Mémoires historiques de Sseu-Ma Ts’ien*, trans. E. Chavannes, Paris, 1985, pp. 171-174.
20. This was the dynasty to which the current sovereign belonged.
21. He adds “the Turks,” because he had time to see, or to hear accounts of, the sacking of Baghdad: in 1258, when the conquerors pillaged the libraries of Baghdad (among other things), and the Euphrates, according to Ibn Haldun, turned black with ink.
22. The Chinese title is *Wen xin diao long*.