

INNOVATION AND SELF-REFLECTION IN SOPHONIAS' PARAPHRASIS OF *DE ANIMA*

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In the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century the imperial ambassador Sophonias composed paraphrases on several Aristotelian texts, among them a paraphrase on *De Anima* (*On the Soul*). Despite the diversity and depth of the Neoplatonic commentary tradition based on *De Anima*, this particular Aristotelian treatise appears to have been outside the usual scope of Byzantine intellectuals. While Aristotle was considered an authority in the field of logic, his psychological views were thought of as controversial and disputable. In this context, the appearance of Sophonias' paraphrase appears to be an interesting exception. Inevitably, one comes to pose the question of the reasons for such text to appear. What was Sophonias' motivation? For whom was the text intended, and for what purpose(s)? Moreover, the paraphrase is accompanied by a preface of a rather self-reflective character. Namely, in this introduction to his commentary Sophonias gives an account of methodologies of writing commentaries employed in the preceding tradition and proposes an improvement – his own approach to commenting, which combines the advantages of the previous methods in order to achieve a more efficient understanding of the text.

This article attempts to reconstruct the context of Sophonias' preface to his *De Anima paraphrasis* on several levels. The first part of the exposition is dedicated to a prosopographical reconstruction based on the available evidence for Sophonias' life and activities. This section seeks to display the historical and intellectual background in order to analyze the possible intentions and purposes of the text itself. The second part of the article is dedicated to a detailed analysis of the preface and focuses both on the reflection of the author on the methodology of commenting on an Aristotelian text as well as on Sophonias' claim for novelty.¹

A Prosopographical Reconstruction

Three different identifications have been suggested for the historical figure which we know under the name of Sophonias (or Sophronias/Sophonios), who lived

¹ This article is based on my work, "Sophonias the Philosopher. A Preface of an Aristotelian Commentary: Structure, Intention, and Audience," MA thesis, Central European University (Budapest: 2008).

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and worked at the end of the thirteenth and through the first half of the fourteenth century (before 1294-1351).² First, an ambassador of Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282-1328) named Sophonias took part in the negotiations between the Byzantine imperial family and the house of Montferrat. Second, Sophonias the commentator wrote several paraphrases of Aristotle's treatises. Finally, there was a conspirator against the rule of Andronikos II – a certain Sophronios³ who conducted a secret correspondence with Charles of Valois (1270-1325), John Monomachos and his brother Constantine, Constantine Limpidaris, and another associate whose name is unknown.⁴ Angeliki Laiou, who gives a detailed account of the exchange of letters from 1307 to 1310 among Charles of Valois and his Byzantine supporters, mentions a certain monk Sophronias and discusses the content of his letter and the probability of his identification with the ambassador Sophonias.⁵ Some details of Sophronias' letter to Charles of Valois seem to support the hypothesis of a biographical background similar, if not the same, to Sophonias the philosopher, but no proof of this identification has yet been advanced.

According to Laiou's interpretation of Sophronias' letter⁶ compared to the letters of John Monomachos and Constantine Limpidaris addressed to Charles of Valois and Catherine of Courtenay respectively, Sophronias wrote in a manner suggesting closer familiarity with the addressee than Monomachos and Limpidaris; unlike them, he did not have to introduce himself and confirm his dedication to the Valois cause. On the contrary, his letter functioned as a kind of guarantee of the trustworthiness of the other two. Another argument from 1294 for the plausible identification of Sophronias with Sophonias the Byzantine ambassador is the remark of the author of the letter concerning the possibility of meeting Charles of Valois in France, "as if he were accustomed to such trips."⁷ On the basis of this evidence Laiou concludes that Sophonias and Sophronias might have been the same person and that the difference in the names could have been for reasons of

² Erich Trapp, et al., ed., *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1976-1983), entry 26424 (hereafter: *PLP*).

³ Dimiter Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium (1204-1330)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 131 (hereafter: Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*).

⁴ Angeliki E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins: the Foreign Policy of Andronicus II, 1282-1328* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 212 (hereafter: Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 215-216.

⁶ For the publication of this collection of letters, see Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, 213, footnote 54.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

discretion or that these two might be the secular and the monastic versions of the same name.⁸ Marie-Hélène Congourdeau,⁹ discussing the correspondence between Simon of Constantinople (ca. 1235-ca. 1325) and Sophonias based on an analysis of *Tractatus de Objectionibus Graecorum contra Processionem Spiritus Sancti a Filio*,¹⁰ also suggests the possibility that Sophonias was the author of the letter to Charles of Valois written in 1310.¹¹

On the other hand, Sophonias the ambassador and the commentator on Aristotle are almost unanimously identified as the same person in the secondary literature.¹² Some scholars have raised doubts regarding this identification based on the dating of the manuscripts of the paraphrases ascribed to Sophonias the commentator.¹³ This opinion has not found much support, however, and as Sten Ebbesen has pointed out, “at the present stage of research it still looks probable that Sophonias composed all the paraphrases normally attributed to him, and that he did so towards the end of the thirteenth century.”¹⁴

Based on the identification accepted by most of the scholars working on the early Palaeologan period, one can differentiate several principal events in Sophonias' biography: a dispute followed by correspondence with Simon of Constantinople, O.P., an embassy to Italy between 1294 and 1296, probable negotiations with Frederick III (1296-1337), and, later, conversion to Catholicism.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ M.-H. Congourdeau, “Frère Simon Le Constantinopolitain, O.P. (1235?-1325?),” *Revue des Études Byzantines* (hereafter: *REB*) 45 (1987): 165-174 (hereafter: Congourdeau: “Frère Simon Le Constantinopolitain”).

¹⁰ Ibid., footnote 22.

¹¹ Congourdeau gives a different dating for the same letter, 1306 or 1307, in “Note sur les Dominicains de Constantinople au début du 14e siècle,” *REB* 45 (1987): 175-181 (hereafter: Congourdeau: “Note sur les Dominicains”).

¹² See Congourdeau: “Frère Simon Le Constantinopolitain,” 168; Congourdeau “Note sur les Dominicains,” 180; Henry J. Blumenthal, “Sophonias' Commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*,” *Néoplatonisme et philosophie médiévale* 6 (1997): 309 (hereafter: Blumenthal: “Sophonias' Commentary”); Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, 131; Sten Ebbesen, *Commentators and Commentaries on Aristotle's “Sophistici Elenchi”* 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 333 (hereafter: Ebbesen, *Commentators*).

¹³ Michael Hayduck, “Preface to *Sophonias in libros Aristotelis De Anima paraphrasis*, by Sophonias,” in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* (hereafter: *CAG*) 23, 1, ed. Michael Hayduck (Berlin: Berolini, 1883), v, footnote 2 (hereafter: Hayduck, “Preface.”) In dating the time of composition of the *De Anima Paraphrasis* one has to take into consideration that in the late 1800s Greek palaeography was still not a very advanced discipline.

¹⁴ Ebbesen, *Commentators*, 333.

The Correspondence with Simon of Constantinople

As mentioned above, Sophonias corresponded with the Dominican, Simon of Constantinople (ca. 1235-ca. 1325).¹⁵ A letter that Simon wrote to Sophonias¹⁶ has been preserved and though still not edited, it has been discussed by Marie-Hélène Congourdeau in her brief study of Simon and his correspondence.¹⁷ The letter recalls a theological discussion Simon and Sophonias convened in the Dominican monastery in Euripos, where Simon resided from the age of twenty-six to the age of sixty-four.¹⁸ Congourdeau points out that this dispute was used by Sophonias as preparation for his future negotiations with the pope in Rome.¹⁹ Therefore, Congourdeau concludes, the letter was written after 1294.²⁰ At the same time, it must have been written earlier than 1305, as in the letter Simon addresses Sophonias as a friend to be convinced regarding the Latin position on the *filioque*,²¹ and it is known that Sophonias had converted to Catholicism by 1305.²² Although Congourdeau does not discuss the contents of the letter in detail, she mentions that in this particular text Simon made extensive use of Aristotle, which he did not apply to the rest of his correspondence. Therefore, Congourdeau argues that Simon's addressee, Sophonias, the ambassador of Andronikos II, is identical with Sophonias, the commentator on Aristotle.²³

¹⁵ See also Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, 51 and 126; Hayduck, "Preface," v, footnote 2.

¹⁶ See also Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (hereafter: BAV) MS Gr 1104, f.23-46'.

¹⁷ Congourdeau, "Frère Simon Le Constantinopolitain," 165-174; and idem, "Note sur les Dominicains," 175-181.

¹⁸ Congourdeau, "Frère Simon Le Constantinopolitain," 166.

¹⁹ Congourdeau, "Note sur les Dominicains," 180.

²⁰ Ibid., 181.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Sophonias' conversion is attested by the Toulouse preacher Guillaume Bernard de Gaillac in his tract preserved in the Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, MS UU 55. Congourdeau argues that Gaillac must have written it later than 1307 in Pera. This conclusion is based on the mention of Maximos Planoudes' death. Gaillac describes the events in Constantinople between 1305 and 1307. There he mentions the complaints of a certain Greek monk, Sophonias, provoked by his persecution by the Greeks because of his conversion to the true faith. Therefore, by the time of these events Sophonias had already converted to the Catholic faith. I base the information introduced here on Congourdeau, "Note sur les Dominicains," 176-178.

²³ Congourdeau, "Note sur les Dominicains," 180 and footnote 25.

The Embassy

In 1294 Sophonias was sent to Italy to the court of Charles II d'Anjou (1254-1309) in Naples to negotiate a marriage between Andronikos' son, Michael IX Palaiologos (r. 1294-1320) and Charles' niece, Catherine of Courtenay (1274-1307/8).²⁴ Afterwards he was sent to Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) in Rome. This embassy was part of the marriage negotiations which Andronikos II started in 1288, when Michael IX was eleven years old. The marriage to Catherine of Courtenay was perceived as a diplomatic maneuver, as she had inherited the title of titular empress of Constantinople.²⁵ A successful ending of the negotiations would have meant a Byzantine triumph against Western claims on the restored empire. In addition, the dowry of Catherine of Courtenay was strongly desired not only by Andronikos II, but also by the house of Aragon and the French court.²⁶ Andronikos' renunciation of the union of the churches formed another obstacle to him achieving his intentions.

Sophonias' embassy was described by George Pachymeres in his *Συγγραφικαὶ ἱστορίαι*.²⁷ According to Laiou "the embassy of Sophonias points up once again the need for the Byzantines to reconcile themselves with the papacy before the marriage negotiations could be concluded."²⁸ Pachymeres comments that Sophonias was sent as a personal emissary of Andronikos in order to avoid writing an official letter according to the protocol. Namely, "in such letter it would have been necessary to address the pope as 'most Holy,' which would have been the greatest crime in the estimation of those secure

²⁴ George Pachymeres, *Georges Pachymère, relations historiques*, ed. A. Failler and V. Laurent, *Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae* (CFHB) xxiv (Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles Lettres", 1984). See also *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453*, vol. 4, ed. Franz Dölger (Munich: Beck, 1960): No. 2156a.

²⁵ Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, 49.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ George Pachymeres, *Georgii Pachymeris de Michaele et Andronico Palaeologis libri tredecim*, ed. I. Bekker, 2, *Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn: Weber, 1835): 3-652 (hereafter: Pachymeres, *Historiae*): 202.8-203.3: Ο δὲ βασιλεὺς πρέποντα γάμον τῷ παιδί παρεσκεύαζε. καὶ τὸν μὲν ἱερομόναχον Σοφονίαν, ἄνδρα σοφὸν τε καὶ συνετόν, ἀποπέμπει πρὸς Πισουλίαν τὸ κινούμενον κήδος διαπρεσβεύσεσθαι. ὡς δ' ἐν τῷ μεταξύ ἀπελθὼν περιήρηγαι (ἔδεδῆσε γὰρ καὶ εἰς πάπαν ἐκείνον γενέσθαι, κὰν οὐχὶ πρὸς ἐκείνον γράμμασιν ἱκανοῦτο τοῖς ἐκ βασιλείως, οἷς ἔδει ἀγιώτατον γράφειν τὸν πάπαν καὶ κρίμα τὸ μέγιστον γίνεσθαι, ὡς τοῖς ἀσφαλῆσι τὴν πίστιν ἐδόκει), πολλοὶ δ' ἦσαν οἱ προσλιπαροῦντες ἄλλοθεν, ἔνθεν μὲν ἐκ τοῦ ἐν τῇ Κύπρῳ ῥηγὸς ἔνθεν δὲ καὶ ἐξ Ἀρμενίων, τὰ ἐν χερσὶ τῶν προσδοκωμένων ποιούμενος περὶ πλείονος, καὶ ἄλλως τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ πάπα τῆς Ρώμης ὑπειδόμενος ὑπερηφανίαν, τῆς φροντίδος ἐκείνης ἀπαλλαγείς ἔγνω ἐπὶ θατέρῳ τῶν ἀξιούντων τὰ τοῦ κήδους συστήσασθαι.

²⁸ Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, 50.

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in the [Orthodox] faith.”²⁹ Based on this evidence, Laiou argues that the choice of a monk as ambassador was not incidental: “such a man might more easily than a layman deal with the probable overtures of the papacy.”³⁰ Sophonias’ embassy, however, did not succeed and therefore he returned to Constantinople in March 1296. As far as the marriage of Michael IX is concerned, he finally married Rita-Maria of Armenia.³¹

Negotiations with Frederick III

Possibly during his stay in Italy he also discussed a Byzantine-Aragonese marriage with the king of Aragon and Sicily, Frederick III (r. 1296-1337), as suggested by Laiou,³² who presents an account of Frederick’s letter to his brother James II in which he announces his coronation as king of Sicily and his intention to turn to the Byzantine-Aragonese alliance in order to assure support for his hold over the island. Aid was expected as a result of negotiations for the marriage of Frederick’s sister, Yolanda, to Michael IX. Based on the fact that by the time the letter was written (April 3, 1296), Michael was already married (an event apparently unknown to Frederick), Laiou argues that Frederick must have held these negotiations not with Andronikos II, but with some accredited Byzantine residing in Italy at that time. Therefore, she suggests that probably the Byzantine in question was Sophonias and that his return to Constantinople in March 1296 may have been connected with these discussions.

Intellectual and Scholarly Activities

There is no evidence on the educational background of Sophonias; he must have received thorough rhetorical and philosophical training.³³ As C. N. Constantinides observes,

²⁹ Ibid., 202.11-14, tr. Laiou: ἐδέησε γὰρ καὶ εἰς πᾶπαν ἐκείνον γενέσθαι, κὰν οὐχὶ πρὸς ἐκείνον γράμμασιν ἱκανοῦτο τοῖς ἐκ βασιλέως, οἷς ἔδει ἀγιώτατον γράφειν τὸν πᾶπαν καὶ κρίμα τὸ μέγιστον γίνεσθαι, ὡς τοῖς ἀσφαλῆσι τὴν πίστιν ἔδδκει.

³⁰ Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, 50.

³¹ Ibid., 51.

³² Ibid., 56.

³³ On late Byzantine education in general see C. N. Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries (1204-ca. 1310)* (Nikosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 1982), 125 (hereafter: Constantinides, *Higher Education*); Sophia Mergiali, *L’enseignement et les lettrés pendant l’époque des Paléologues* (Athens: Kentron Ereunes Byzantiou, 1996); E. Fryde, *The Early Palaeologan Renaissance*

Sophonias' paraphrases suggest that he used them for teaching activities, but there is no extant evidence confirming this assumption.³⁴ Where and with whom Sophonias received his education and what scholarly circle(s) he participated in is likewise unknown. He was a contemporary and friend of Joseph the Philosopher (ca. 1280-1330).³⁵ One may only offer hypotheses concerning other acquaintances of Sophonias; e.g., the fact that George Pachymeres mentions his embassy to Italy together with their common interest in Aristotle may well suggest that they knew each other.

Sophonias wrote paraphrases of several of Aristotle's treatises: *Categoriae* [*Categories*], *Parva Naturalia*, *Sophistici Elenchi* [*Sophistical Refutations*], *De Anima* [*On the Soul*], *Analytica Priora* and *Analytica Posteriora* [*Prior and Posterior Analytics*].³⁶ Critical editions of most of Sophonias' paraphrases are published in the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*,³⁷ namely, the paraphrases of the *Categoriae*,³⁸ *Sophistici Elenchi*,³⁹ *De Anima*,⁴⁰ *Parva Naturalia*,⁴¹ and *Analytica Priora*.⁴² Those on the *Analytica Priora* and *Parva Naturalia* were edited under the name of Themistius, those on the *Categoriae* and *Sophistici Elenchi*⁴³ as anonymous.

One might infer from Sophonias' writings the kind of sources he was acquainted with and had access to. According to Sten Ebbesen's account of *SE*,⁴⁴ Sophonias was acquainted with Nikephoros Blemmydes' compendium of logic and with the scholia of Leo the Magentine. The sources he based his paraphrasis on in *DA* on will be discussed below at greater length. It is also worth mentioning that from the four edited paraphrases by Sophonias (the paraphrases of the *Categoriae*, *Sophistici*

(Leiden: Brill, 2000); and N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (rev. ed., London: Duckworth, 1996).

³⁴ Constantinides, *Higher Education*, 125.

³⁵ Ibid. See also B. Tatakis, *La Philosophie Byzantine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949), 246 (hereafter: Tatakis, *La Philosophie byzantine*); M. Treu, "Der Philosoph Joseph," *Byzantinisches Zeitschrift* 8 (1899): 1-64 (hereafter: *BZ*); Constantinides, *Higher Education*, 108.

³⁶ Blumenthal: "Sophonias' Commentary," 309. Interestingly, Constantinides attributes three more paraphrases to Sophonias: *Ethica Nicomachia*, *Physica* and *Metaphysica* (in *Higher Education*, 125). I have not found, however, evidence supporting that statement.

³⁷ Namely, in *CAG*, 23, ed. Michael Hayduck (Berlin: Berolini, 1883) (hereafter: *CAG*, 23) and *CAG*, 5, 6, ed. Paul Wendland, G. Reimer (Berlin: Berolini, 1903) (hereafter: *CAG*, 5, 6).

³⁸ *Anonymi in Aristotelis Categoriae Paraphrasis*, in *CAG*, 23, 2, 1-87.

³⁹ *Anonymi in Aristotelis Sophisticos Elenchos Paraphrasis*, in *CAG*, 23, 4, 1-68.

⁴⁰ Sophonias, *Sophonias De Anima Paraphrasis*, in *CAG*, 23, 1, 1-175.

⁴¹ Themistius, *Themistii (Sophoniae) In Parva naturalia*, in *CAG*, 5, 6, 1-44.

⁴² Idem, *Themistii Quae Fertur in Aristotelis Analyticorum Priorum Librum I Paraphrasis*, in *CAG*, 23, 3, 1-164.

⁴³ Hereafter: *SE*.

⁴⁴ Ebbesen, *Commentators and Commentaries*, 333.

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Elenchi, *De Anima*, *Parva Naturalia*, and *Analytica Priora*) only the first three are accompanied by a preface. Moreover, the preface opening the *DA paraphrasis* is the only one that is not a mere summary of the following philosophical doctrine, but offers separate subject matter and agenda.

Sophoniae De Anima Paraphrasis

In his preface, Sophonias provides a classification of the types of Aristotelian commentary and therefore methods of interpretation and clarification of the *DA* used before him in the Greek tradition. He explains the characteristics of paraphrasis as compared to a “proper” commentary,⁴⁵ and, finally, introduces his own way of writing a commentary as a distinct type.

Before proceeding to the analysis of Sophonias’ preface itself, it is necessary to specify what is to be understood under the labels of “proper commentary” and “paraphrasis.”⁴⁶ In this article, I am applying the term “commentary” as a collective denomination for the class of exegetic texts as a whole. Its subdivisions, such as *synopsis*, *eisagogē*, *epitomē*, *stoicheiōsis*, *paraphrasis* or lemmatic commentary I am addressing as subgenres classified under the genre of commentary. The first three types of commentary mentioned above (*eisagogē*, *epitomē*, *stoicheiōsis*) function mainly as summaries and introductions to Aristotle’s theory regarding a certain subject. The lemmatic commentary functions as a reference to a particular statement within the text. Unlike the paraphrasis, it is clearly distinguished from the main exposition. The lemmatic commentary coexisted with the paraphrasis and from the evidence of the extant texts it appears to have been more widespread. Both types of commentary were applied to Aristotle’s texts in order to provide explanations and a better understanding of the theoretical matter at hand. This need was provoked by the various difficulties which one encounters in Aristotle’s treatises, e.g., unclear diction or unclear argumentation.

⁴⁵ Sophonias differentiates two kinds of Aristotelian commentary in his preface: “proper” commentary and paraphrasis. Generally speaking, by “proper” commentary he refers to the *scholia* written on the different treatises of Aristotle. If one considers, however, that Sophonias’ main source is the lemmatic commentary produced by John Philoponus, then it is more specific to refer to the “proper” commentary as “lemmatic.” Hereafter I will refer to it using both expressions: “lemmatic” or “proper” commentary. To refer to its practitioners I will appropriate the Greek term used by Sophonias in opposition to “paraphrasts,” namely, “exegetes.”

⁴⁶ Whether there is a difference between the commentary (the *scholia*) and the paraphrasis is a question explored by Katerina Ierodiakonou in her case study of Michael Psellos’ paraphrasis of *De Interpretatione*, see Katerina Ierodiakonou, “Psellos’ Paraphrasis on Aristotle’s *De interpretatione*,” in *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, ed. Katerina Ierodiakonou, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2002): 157-181 (hereafter: Ierodiakonou: “Psellos’ Paraphrasis.”)

Commentary: A Definition

Based on the general assumption that a text is intended for a certain audience, I have reconstructed the historical context of Sophonias' paraphrasis in order to identify its probable target audience. That is, by defining the areas of Sophonias' activity (diplomacy, teaching, theology) I aim to explore whether the paraphrasis, and specifically its preface, can function within any of them. The paraphrasis, however, can also address its own author. That is, an exegetical text is also a result of one's attempt to clarify a certain problem for him/herself. In the case of Sophonias' preface and the presentation of Sophonias' "novel" methodology of commenting one could argue that the justification he is offering is intended not only for his audience, but also provides a self-reflection on the motivation for writing on an often-discussed subject.

John Dillon's rather expanded "definition" of the types of commentators and commentaries provides some additional insights concerning two of the main aspects of the essence of the commentary.⁴⁷ First, a commentary is dependent and preconditioned by the text upon which the interpretation is produced. As Glenn Most points out,⁴⁸ "there is nothing natural about the general form of the commentary itself."⁴⁹ That is, the commentary arises from the text; it accompanies it by functioning as a reference, clarification or expansion tool.

The appearance and existence of a commentary prove, on the one hand, that the text itself is not self-explanatory.⁵⁰ On the other hand, it states and confirms the authority of the treatise commented on.⁵¹ The fact that a commentary is

⁴⁷ John Dillon, "A Case-Study in Commentary: The Neoplatonic Exegesis of the *Prooimion* of Plato's Dialogues," in *Commentaries – Kommentare*, ed. Glenn W. Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999): 206-223.

See *ibid.*, 206: "The first is the straightforward scholarly desire to explain obscurities in diction or reference in a source work, and this leads naturally to a commentary of the philological and antiquarian type... The second impulse is one afflicting particular persons of a philosophical or theological disposition, which seeks to explain away inconsistencies or inconsequentialities in, or unworthy aspects of, an otherwise enormously respected work, by showing that the author did not intend a given passage to be taken literally, or that two apparently inconsistent or even contradictory passages can be reconciled by taking them to refer, say, to two different stages of a given process, or to the same phenomenon at two different levels of reality."

⁴⁸ Glenn Most, "Preface," in *Commentaries – Kommentare*, ed. Glenn W. Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999): vii-xv (hereafter: Most, "Preface").

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, viii.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

always produced on a respected, well-known, significant work is the second aspect suggested by Dillon's definition.

The "relatedness" of the commentary constitutes it as an entity without an independent existence and function; the commentary's nature is inevitably characterized by a certain "secondariness."⁵² Therefore it is always dependent on certain preconditions, such as the availability and accessibility of the original text and the cultural and institutional context that created the importance of the text commented on and its authority.⁵³ Furthermore, a commentary not only demonstrates the importance of the treatise commented on, but it also shows that in some cases its authority is "no longer entirely self-evident"⁵⁴ and therefore it needs to be re-confirmed, re-distributed and re-imposed within a certain social context.⁵⁵ In some cases, however, a commentary is not brought about by the need to re-establish the authority of the text, but by the commentator's intention to partake in the scholarly tradition on the subject and thereby to (re-)establish his/her own authority.

A commentary is also characterized by its aim and functional aspects. The reason behind the commentary is the text commented on; hence, the commentary is chronologically posterior. Nevertheless, its aim is to overcome the time distance and to re-establish the meaning of the original in its initial integrity.⁵⁶ Thus, it proceeds in the same way as the primary exposition, sometimes preserving its structure, in sometimes not. A commentary, however, is always brought about by some sort of deficiency in the understanding of the original. The meaning has been either lost or become unclear, either the reasons for its importance are forgotten and need to be re-confirmed or the perception of the text is no longer functional in its context. Therefore, the task of the commentator is to transmit the meaning of the original in such a way as to be perceived as coherent by the reader. To state it concisely – the commentary's purpose and intention is to interpret, summarize or paraphrase the original text so that it makes sense again. It has to be noted, however, that the "deficiency" in the understanding of the original text, unless it is due to damage to the material which physically contains the exposition, is not inherent, but comes from the contemporary perception of that work. That is to say, in different contexts different theses from the same

⁵² Ibid., vii.

⁵³ Ibid., viii-ix.

⁵⁴ Ibid., x.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ By "integrity" here I refer to the coherence of the meaning of the text commented on.

treatise are perceived as problematic, unclear, and therefore in need of additional explanation. Consequently, the solutions of the interpreters change according to the shift in the problematic places.⁵⁷

The Preface.

Categorization of the Previous Commentators According to their Methodology

Sophonias' preface to his paraphrasis on *DA* extends to 79 lines in print⁵⁸ and is considered the most "profitable" part of the text for the identification of its peculiarities. Sophonias does not give any personal information at the beginning of the paraphrasis nor does he specify the motivation for or the audience for his work. This particular piece of the text, however, is the one that says the most about the author's intention and purposes.

The preface contains a categorization of the preceding Greek commentary tradition. Straightforwardly, Sophonias describes what he understands as the distinctive features of a "proper" commentary and a paraphrasis before he enumerates what he considers to be the most prominent representatives of the two types of exegetic writing on Aristotle's texts. His predecessors accomplished the task of commentating in two different ways and that divides them into two groups according to their methodologies. The first group, the so-called "proper" commentators⁵⁹ (οἱ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐξηγηταί),⁶⁰ is characterized by keeping the original diction of Aristotle in the lemmas and clarifying it by attaching the interpretation bit by bit to the main text. They preserve the diction (λέξις) of Aristotle as it is, that is, they transmit the text in its original form. The clarifying interpretation is attached as a separate unit – both spatially and conceptually:

⁵⁷ Most, "Preface," xiii: "But problems are not an inherent aspect of a text: they are created by a reading which asks questions of the text to which the text only partially responds. Hence the kinds of problems a commentator will discover in his text are at least in part a result of the approach he takes to it. What counts as a problem in different periods? How do different kinds of commentaries try to solve these problems? What counts as a solution? Under what circumstances can the commentator admit that he cannot find a solution?"

⁵⁸ Sophonias, *Sophonias in libros Aristotelis De Anima paraphrasis*, in *CAG* 23, 1 (hereafter: Sophonias, *De Anima*), 1-186.

⁵⁹ Throughout this article I choose to refer to the "proper commentators" as either "exegetes" by appropriating the Greek term ἐξηγηταί, or "scholiasts" when relevant.

⁶⁰ Sophonias, *De Anima*, 1.5.

For the ones who were proper commentators, expounding the text in an individual manner and in its specifics, attached their commentary to the interpretation. Observing the diction of the Philosopher sound as well as [at the same time] in division, they also brought forth their own explanation for the sake of clarity [of the original].⁶¹

If one compares this final remark regarding the clarification of “their own explanation”⁶² with the description of the paraphrastic methodology which follows (in which the diction is not united or complemented by the proper comments of the commentator⁶³), that could suggest a certain conclusion about Sophonias’ presentation of the role of the individuality of both the exegetes (ἐξηγηταί) and the paraphrasts (παραφρασταί). According to Sophonias’ description the “proper” commentary is delivered by its author, while the paraphrasis is composed as if it were Aristotle himself explaining. The “proper” commentary seems to intend an interpretation which has the status of an independent text with parallel content related to the main exposition. Most important, it is a product with clearly distinguished authorship. The exegete is an author in his own right – presenting a style and argumentation that support and explain Aristotle’s theory. Such commentators are Alexander of Aphrodisias, Simplicius, Ammonius, and John Philoponus.

The second group includes the so-called paraphrasts. Unlike the “proper” commentary, a paraphrasis is embedded in the main body of the exposition, which makes it easier to read and therefore understand the passage. Unlike the exegetes, the paraphrasts do not keep the original diction of Aristotle, that is, the primary form of the text, because their method of clarification consists mainly of extending it by using rhetorical figures or by inserting proper sentences in order to unfold the concise meaning and to clear the reasoning.⁶⁴

A second feature of the paraphrasis is the so-called *ἀνταγγελία*,⁶⁵ namely, as Sophonias formulates it, to put on the garment of Aristotle himself (*αὐτὸν γὰρ*

⁶¹ Ibid. 1.5-8: οἱ μὲν γὰρ, ὅσοι περ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐξηγηταί, ἰδίως ἐκθέμενοι καὶ κατὰ μέρος τὸ κείμενον τὴν ἔρμηνειαν ἐπισυνήψαν, σώαν τε καὶ τῆ διαιρέσει τὴν λέξιν τοῦ φιλοσόφου τηρήσαντες καὶ τὰ παρ’ ἑαυτῶν προσέφερον εἰς σαφήνειαν. [emphasis mine]

⁶² Ibid. 1.8: καὶ τὰ παρ’ ἑαυτῶν προσέφερον εἰς σαφήνειαν.

⁶³ Ibid. 1.13-14: τὴν μὲν λέξιν παρήκαν αὐτὴν, οὔτε διηρημένην οὐδ’ ἠνωμένην τοῖς ὑπομνήμασι συνταξάμενοι.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 1.14-17: μόνον δὲ τὸν νοῦν συνεσταλμένον τῆ τοῦ ἀνδρός περινοῖα ἢ που καὶ τῆ περι τὴν λέξιν ἀσαφεῖα καὶ τῆ τῆς ἀπαγγελίας δεινότητι (πολὺ γὰρ τὸ νοερόν αὐτῷ καὶ γοργόν) ἐξαπλώσαντες καὶ καθάραντες καὶ σχήμασι καὶ περιόδοις κοσμήσαντες.

⁶⁵ I choose to preserve the Greek term without translating it.

ὑποδύντες Ἀριστοτέλην) and to speak through Aristotle's mask (καὶ τῷ τῆς αὐταγγελίας προσχρησάμενοι προσωπεῖω), that is, to keep the exposition in the first person singular as if the author of the paraphrasis were Aristotle himself.⁶⁶ In such a way, the reasoning of Aristotle is perfected, that is, completed. It seems as though the paraphrast does not leave traces and marks of his own individuality as a thinker, at least as far as Sophonias' description of the paraphrastic method suggests. Perhaps this is the reason for the general perception of paraphrases as compiled texts without particular originality meant to serve the needs of a relatively elementary instruction in philosophical matters.⁶⁷ Such a general conclusion, however, should be avoided as it has been disproved by research on individual cases (e.g., Themistius, Michael Psellos, Theodore Metochites).⁶⁸

The preservation of the diction, the αὐταγγελία, and the completion of the primary text contribute to the easier comprehensibility of the paraphrasis and the knowledge it delivers. By adding some insights which they found to be the most useful achievements within the topic and by bringing forward a multitude of theories connected to each chapter, the paraphrasts emphasized the most important arguments and enriched the knowledge available for those who studied philosophy.⁶⁹ By doing so, they demonstrated their scholarly excellence.⁷⁰

Sophonias seems to imply that although both the lemmatic commentary and the paraphrasis have the goal of making the text clearer and explaining the difficult passages, the paraphrasis is much more successful as an instrument of education. That is illustrated by his claim that its usage renders the road to philosophy "easy to follow" (εὐπορον).⁷¹ That expression, in my opinion, leads in at least two directions.

⁶⁶ For similar usage of the αὐταγγελία, see Ierodiakonou, "Psellos' Paraphrasis," 165 and Sten Ebbesen, *Commentators and Commentaries on Aristotle's "Sophistici Elenchi"* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 64-82.

⁶⁷ Ierodiakonou, "Psellos' Paraphrasis:" 164 and 166.

⁶⁸ Robert Todd, "Introduction" in Themistius, *On Aristotle On the Soul*, tr. Robert B. Todd, (London: Duckworth, 1996), 1-13 (hereafter: Todd, "Introduction"); Ierodiakonou, "Psellos' Paraphrasis," Börje Bydén, *Theodore Metochites' Stoicheiosis Astronomike and The Study of Natural Philosophy and Mathematics in Early Palaiologan Byzantium*, (Gothenberg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2003).

⁶⁹ Sophonias, *De Anima*, 1.23-27: οἱ δὲ καὶ ἐπιστασίας καὶ ἐπιβολάς, ἃς ἐφεύρον, τὰς χρησιμωτάτας ἐπισυνήψαν καὶ θεωρημάτων πλήθος ἐκάστῳ τῶν κεφαλαίων προσέφερον, τῆς τε ἐπιστημονικῆς αὐτῶν ἕξεως ἔλεγχον τοῦ τε πολυμαθοῦς καὶ τῆς διὰ πάντων ἀκρότητος, εὐπορον ἐντεῦθεν τὴν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν ὁδὸν τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦς ὑπολείποντες [emphasis mine].

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1.25-28: τῆς τε ἐπιστημονικῆς αὐτῶν ἕξεως ἔλεγχον τοῦ τε πολυμαθοῦς καὶ τῆς διὰ πάντων ἀκρότητος, εὐπορον ἐντεῦθεν τὴν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν ὁδὸν τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦς ὑπολείποντες, ταῖς τε ἀνακμπτούσαις ἀπορίαις γενναιοτάτας τὰς λύσεις ἐπήνεγκαν. [emphasis mine].

⁷¹ Ibid., 1.26-27: καὶ τῆς διὰ πάντων ἀκρότητος, εὐπορον ἐντεῦθεν τὴν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν ὁδὸν τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦς

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On the one hand, it marks the general statement that the lemmatic commentary and the paraphrasis of Aristotle's doctrines are considered philosophical enterprises. On the other hand, they are both preparatory for dealing with philosophy *per se*, namely, with Aristotle's theory. In that sense, both types of commentary could assume a propaedeutic function – to make one able to deal with the proper matters of philosophy. Therefore, how each of these two prepares the “apprentice” is important. The lemmatic commentary, situated physically beside the main text, below it, or interspersed, exists on its own as a separate text with individual style. It presents an independent explanation, sometimes a complementary, but distinct, theory. As it is distinguished from the main text, it is perceived as a reference tool. In contrast, the paraphrasis, a periphrastic exposition, presents the meaning of the text, and therefore shows different ways of constructing a treatise, a different methodology, and way of expression. Consequently, it succeeds both in transmitting knowledge and in introducing the language and rhetorical techniques of philosophy to the reader in an easy and fluent way. Thus, a paraphrasis appears to be an educational tool intended mainly for the initial levels of the study of philosophy.

Finally, at the end of the revision of the preceding commentary tradition Sophonias gives some examples of authors of paraphrases. According to him, that sort of exegetic work was done first by Themistius, and then by others, the latest of whom was Michael Psellos.⁷²

Limitations and Rules of Both Exegesis and Paraphrasis

Sophonias continues clarifying the difference between the two groups, while criticizing the weaknesses of both methods of commenting:

And those [the exegetes] were induced only to show the content and to clarify the meaning, as far as the phrasing permitted, thoroughly following the systematic method once for all: the others [the paraphrasts] added some most useful [authoritative] observations and considerations, which they had discovered, and brought forward a multitude of theoretical insights regarding each chapter, proof of their scholarly skill, their polymathy and their excellence in all [regards];

ὑπολείποντες [emphasis mine].

⁷² For an analysis of one of Psellos' paraphrases (of *De Interpretatione*) see Ierodiakonou, “Psellos' Paraphrasis.”

leaving the path to philosophy easy to follow from that point on for those [who came] after them, they offered most noble solutions to the difficulties which had emerged. So, to say it all in a conclusion pertaining to all, each of them approached his task in his own way.⁷³

Sophonias appropriates John Philoponus' commentary on *DA* as the main source for his paraphrasis.⁷⁴ As he himself states in the preface "following the exegetes in the majority and especially Philoponus, we inserted whole sections into ours, as they were phrased with those verbally."⁷⁵ Sophonias classifies the commentary approach of Philoponus as representative of the methodology of the exegetes. The structure of Philoponus' text is the structure of a lemmatic commentary. Sophonias criticizes such a methodology of exegesis first for the discontinuity of the original diction. Then he points out that an exposition with such a structure is not easy to follow and the reader can easily lose track of the line of reasoning. Finally, Sophonias claims that the exegetes do not properly use the "conjunctions, additionally the occasional transposition of whole colons and the addition or omission and exchange of periods according to the rule."⁷⁶ At the same time, they were much occupied "proffering problems and solutions, so that ... it was not easy for some to observe the continuity."⁷⁷ Sophonias concludes that the result of applying the lemmatic commentary can be to forget the beginning of the exposition or to approach what follows in a confused manner.⁷⁸ Although the exegetes seem to have chosen a not-so-appropriate form of interpreting the reasoning of Aristotle, however, they have

⁷³ Sophonias, *De Anima*, 1.23 -2.4: και οι μὲν μόνον σαφηνίσει τὸ κείμενον και τὸν νοῦν ἐκφάναι προήχθησαν, ὅσον ἢ λέξις ἐχώρησε, τῷ τεχνικῷ καθάπαξ ἐπόμενοι· οἱ δὲ και ἐπιστασίας και ἐπιβολάς, ἅς ἐφεύρον, τὰς χρησιμωτάτας ἐπισυνήψαν και θεωρημάτων πλήθος ἐκάστῳ τῶν κεφαλαίων προσέφερον, τῆς τε ἐπιστημονικῆς αὐτῶν ἕξεως ἔλεγχον τοῦ τε πολυμαθοῦς και τῆς διὰ πάντων ἀκρότητος, εὐπορον ἐντεῦθεν τὴν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν ὁδὸν τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦς ὑπολείποντες, ταῖς τε ἀνακυπτούσαις ἀπορίαις γενναιοτάτας τὰς λύσεις ἐπήνεγκαν· και τὸ ὅλον ὑπὲρ ἀπάντων εἰπεῖν, οἰκείως τῇ ἑαυτοῦ προθέσει ἀπήντησεν ἕκαστος.

⁷⁴ Philoponus' *De Intellectu* (Book III of his *De Anima* commentary) is partially preserved in Sophonias' paraphrasis. For a detailed study see Simone van Riet, "Fragments de l' Original Grec du *De intellectu* de Philopon dans une Compilation de Sophonias," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 63 (1965): 5-40.

⁷⁵ Sophonias, *De Anima*, 3.3-4: και τοῖς ἐξηγηταῖς ἐπόμενοι καν τοῖς πλείοσι και μάλιστα Φιλοπόνῳ ὅλας περικοπάς, ὡς κατὰ λέξιν εἶχεν ἐκείνοις, τοῖς ἡμετέροις ἐνέθεμεν.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.15-16: συνδέσμων ἀκαιρίαν, ἔτι δὲ και κῶλων ἔστιν ὅτε μεταθέσεις ὅλων και προσθήκην ἢ ἔλλειψιν και περιόδων κατὰ τάξιν ὑπαλλαγήν.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.17-19: τῇ τε τῶν ἀποριῶν ἐπεισαγωγῇ και τῶν λύσεων πολλὰ κατατριβουσιν, ὡς μὴ εὐχερές τισιν εἶναι [...] τὸ συνεχές ἔχειν.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.19-20: ἀλλὰ κινδυνεύειν ἐπιλελῆσθαι τῇ μεταξυλογίᾳ και τῆς ἀρχῆς και τοῖς ἐξῆς συγκεχυμένως προσφέρεσθαι.

offered a great deal in order to resolve the difficulties which arise from the text itself. In comparison, the paraphrastic method offers the one who uses it an elegant solution for the problem of making the interpretation easier to comprehend. It results in a continuous exposition with unified diction and a homogenous style.

From the discussion so far, it appears natural that Sophonias chose to deal with the text of *DA* through the technical *instrumentarium* of the paraphrasis. Whatever hypothesis about the audience and the purposes of this work one might hold, to prefer a type of commentary which leaves “the path to philosophy easy to follow from that point on for those [who come] after them”⁷⁹ is a justifiable motivation. On the other hand, although the paraphrasts had “offered most noble solutions to the difficulties which had emerged,”⁸⁰ Sophonias claims that he does not prefer and he does not “like to be content with the latter [paraphrasts] if it is not also possible to profit from the [results of the] first group [the exegetes].”⁸¹ One’s first impression is that Sophonias is inconsistent in his claims and – even more – contradicts himself in his own statements. A Further consideration of this difficulty gives a more satisfactory explanation. Sophonias has structured his treatise using the continuous and fluent form of the paraphrasis, at the same time including the exegesis offered by John Philoponus in his lemmatic commentary. The lemmas from Philoponus’ text are followed by excerpts from his interpretation, sometimes revised and significantly shortened by Sophonias. The punctuation of Aristotle’s passages is altered as well; long sentences are often divided into several shorter ones, therefore, the phases of the argument become easier to distinguish. The word order is sometimes corrected as well.⁸² The second part of the question, that is, why did Sophonias choose not to refer to some of the paraphrasts (e.g., to Themistius) instead of to Philoponus as far as the interpretation goes must be related to the intention of his treatise. Both types of commentary allow the development of the exegesis of philosophical significance. Therefore, the choice of source must be dictated not by the efficiency of the approach, but by the content of the argumentation and the theoretical platform it creates. The

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1.26-27: εὐπορον ἐντεῦθεν τὴν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν ὁδὸν τοῖς μετ’ αὐτοὺς ὑπολείποντες.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 1.27-28: ταῖς τε ἀνακυπτούσαις ἀπορίαις γενναιοτάτας τὰς λύσεις ἐπήνεγκαν.

⁸¹ Ibid. οὐδὲ ἀγαπῶμεν ἀρκεῖσθαι τοῖς παρ’ ἐκείνων, εἰ μὴ καὶ τῶν πρώτων ἐξέσται τυχεῖν.

⁸² One can find examples of the change of word order and the substitution of some conjunctions, for instance, in the paraphrase of *DA* 413^b24. Aristotle’s text reads as follows: “καθάπερ τὸ αἶδιον τοῦ φθαρτοῦ.” Sophonias paraphrases: “ὡσπερ τοῦ φθαρτοῦ τὸ αἶδιον.” Another example is the paraphrase of *DA* 415^b8. Aristotle states: “ἔστι δὲ ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ ζῶντος σώματος αἰτία καὶ ἀρχή,” while Sophonias changes it to “Ἔστι δὲ ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ ζῶντος σώματος ἀρχὴ καὶ αἰτία.” Aristotle’s text is quoted according to the edition of William D. Ross, *Aristotle. De anima* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

question of how Philoponus' theory of the soul and intellect could serve the possible purposes of Sophonias' paraphrasis, however, requires a separate comparative study of both texts, which cannot be completed within the limits of this article.

Description of Sophonias' Method. "Innovation"

Finally, Sophonias' own methodology of commenting remains to be discussed. In his account of Sophonias' exegetical methodology in the paraphrasis of the *SE*,⁸³ Sten Ebbesen distinguishes four constitutive characteristics similar to the features of the scholastic exegesis. The first is the addition of glosses in the main exposition. The second is the substitution of synonyms for single words in otherwise unchanged sentences. The third is the replacement of imprecise or difficult phrases by means of clearer ones. The last is the addition of examples.⁸⁴ This summary of Ebbesen's description of Sophonias' exegetic methodology provides a useful paradigm for the analysis of Sophonias' approach to the text of *DA*.

Sophonias' preface gives an account of the previous Greek commentary tradition according to methodological criteria and provides a categorization and explanation of its divisions. He does not comment on Aristotle's method; the main focus is the different ways of approaching a philosophical text and not the different ways of approaching a philosophical problem itself. The structure of Sophonias' preface to some extent, however, reflects and repeats Aristotle's methodological enterprise in *DA*. On the one hand, Aristotle is revising the previous theories on the essence of the soul and then trying to develop a universal method of inquiry about the essence – of the soul, first – then, eventually, of the essence of every single being, and finally of the essence itself. Sophonias' preface has the same characteristics – a revision of the previous methodological approach and the development of a new one that overcomes the disadvantages of the former. "Following the exegetes,"⁸⁵ but adopting the form of paraphrasis, he aims to provide sufficient explanation, that is, to keep up to the standards of the others, and in addition to offer "something **new** and to some extent **useful** in the studies of Aristotle" [emphasis mine].⁸⁶

⁸³ Ebbesen, "Commentators and Commentaries:" 333-341.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 335.

⁸⁵ Sophonias, *De Anima*, 3.3-4: καὶ τοῖς ἐξηγηταῖς ἐπόμενοι καὶ τοῖς πλείοσι καὶ μάλιστα Φιλοπόνῳ ὅλας περικοπὰς, ὡς κατὰ λέξιν εἶχεν ἐκεῖνοις, τοῖς ἡμετέροις ἐνέθεμεν. [emphasis mine]

⁸⁶ Ibid., 2.34: τάχ' ἂν τι καινὸν ἡμῖν ἐν τοῖς Ἀριστοτελικοῖς καταλείψει. [emphasis mine]

Sophonias twice refers to his approach as “novel” (τι καινόν) in the preface.⁸⁷ It is important to interpret his claim for innovation in both the context of the purposes of his text and the general context of the notion of “Byzantine originality” or καινοτομία, which has been the subject of continuous discussion in the scholarship.⁸⁸ Whether the Byzantines strove conservatively to preserve their Hellenic and Roman heritage or transformed it significantly is not the subject of this article; in the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century context it may suffice to refer to a famous letter written by Manuel Moschopoulos (while imprisoned) defending himself against the accusation of “innovation.”⁸⁹ The opposition of imitation versus innovation,⁹⁰ however, influences the understanding of Sophonias’ place in the commentary tradition on Aristotle. He claims the invention of a different methodology which, however, produces a rather standard commentary. Where, then, is the novelty? I would argue that Sophonias’ claim for “originality” should not be taken as a statement of revolutionizing the exegetical methodology. It should be understood as its “improvement.” Sophonias is not denying the preceding tradition; he analyses it and complements it in order to offer a more profitable approach. Therefore, his “innovation” is an improvement by rearranging the already existing material, that is, the approaches of the exegetes and the paraphrasts. The result of this process is a third type of methodology which is added to the previous two. It complements the already existing tradition of commenting without altering the material essentially.⁹¹

⁸⁷ The second occurrence is *ibid.*, 2.6: και εἰ μὴ καινόν τι τὸ παρ’ ἐμοῦ, καὶ τί που καὶ συνεισφέρων χρήσιμον. [emphasis mine]

⁸⁸ See the overview of this discussion by Alexander P. Kazhdan, “Innovation in Byzantium,” in *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music*, ed. A. R. Littlewood (Oxbow Books: Oxford, 1995), 1-17 (hereafter: Kazhdan: “Innovation in Byzantium.”)

⁸⁹ See L. Levi, “Cinque lettere inedite di Manuele Moscopulo,” *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 10 (1902): 55-72.

⁹⁰ Kazhdan, “Innovation in Byzantium,” 11.

⁹¹ Börje Bydén proposes an additional aspect of Sophonias claim for “novelty”: “...in the Early Palaeologan Aristotelian commentaries...literary innovation served as an excuse for writing and publishing commentaries at a time when hardly anybody had the ability to offer significant new philological or philosophical insights, but many people wished they had had,” see Bydén, “Literary Innovation,” 33.

Concluding Remarks

Among the leading intentions throughout this study was to explore possible hypotheses about the purposes and audience of Sophonias' treatise by analyzing the features of its preface. Therefore, Sophonias' categorization of the preceding Aristotelian commentary tradition and his discussion of the various methods of commenting constitute the focus of this analysis. As a result, I argue that the most probable reason for the composition of Sophonias' paraphrasis is that it was meant to serve educational purposes, that is, to introduce certain apprentice(s) to Aristotle's theory on the soul. Sophonias developed a method different from that of the exegetes and the paraphrasts in order to deliver the subject matter in a more efficient way. That is, the "innovative" character of his approach has to be understood as an improvement, not a change, in the commentary tradition on Aristotle. Sophonias' improvement is methodological and, therefore, does not concern the elaboration of Aristotle's psychological theory. One still has to consider it, however, as an important characteristic of this late Byzantine commentary. The claim for "novelty" is also an example of the self-reflection and self-representation of the commentator. That is to say, Sophonias' justification for introducing a different approach from the previous commentators was intended to serve his audience as well as himself. Although this cannot be ascertained unequivocally, it is clear that the promotion of an "innovative" approach within the studies of Aristotle is a key element within the inquiry about the purposes and audience of Sophonias' paraphrasis.