

TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH LITERATURE:
THE LITERARY FRAMES OF THE PSEUDO-ARISTOTELIAN
SIRR AL-ASRĀR AND *KITĀB AL-TUFFĀHA*

By

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The pseudo-Aristotelian *Sirr al-Asrār* presents itself as an epistle from the old Aristotle to his pupil Alexander. It contains chapters on behaviour, warfare, medicine, astrology etc. The work seems to have been composed in Arabic in the 10th century¹. It seems to have spread widely² and was translated into several Oriental and European languages, including the vernaculars of the Iberian Peninsula³. Compared to the *Sirr al-Asrār*, the *Kitāb al-Tuffāha*, in which a dying Aristotle instructs his students not to be afraid of death, was much less successful⁴: Composed in Arabic some fifty or so years earlier⁵, it was translated into some

¹ A Greek or Syriac original seems improbable to me; more recently, a Middle Persian original has been argued for (cf. VAN BLADEL 2004), but I find it difficult to assume a single source for this work. For problems of the text's dating and original language, cf. FORSTER 2006: 11–19. There are two Arabic versions, a long and a short form: whether one of them developed out of the other or whether they both go back to a common archetype is yet to be established, cf. FORSTER 2006: 20–30. The edition by BADAWI 1954: 67–171, gives a version of the long form, but some mss. of the short form were used. I shall speak of “the Arabic version” all the same, as short and long form have very much in common, but shall note differences where they are important.

² Some 75 mss. are extant, and the work was cited by several Arabic authors, cf. FORSTER 2006: 12–14 and 30–38.

³ There are at least two Persian and two Turkish translations from the Arabic (cf. FORSTER 2006: 44–47); for the Hebrew, the Castilian, and the Latin versions, all of them translated directly from the Arabic, see below sections 1.2, 1.3, 1.5 and 1.6; for the Iberian vernacular translations from the Latin see below section 1.4.

⁴ I know of 10 (or 11) mss., seven of them already mentioned by SEZGIN 1970: 50, one by BIELAWSKI 1974: 128; to these can be added Teheran, Kitābkhāna-yi Dānishgāh, 1035 (cf. DĀNISH-PAŽŪH 1332sh: 274 f. no. 288) and Teheran, Majlis-i shūrā-yi millī, no. 3455 (cf. HĀ’IRI 1348sh: 1385 f.) and perhaps Teheran, Majlis-i Sanā, 14’986 (cf. Dānish-pažuh, [ca. 1359sh], vol. 1, 384, no. 595, though this possibly is in Persian).

⁵ As the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-ṣafā’* (an encyclopaedia which can be dated to sometime between 940 and 960, cf. FORSTER 2006: 18 f.) contain a reference to the *Kitāb al-Tuffāha*, this dating can