Oral Pedagogy and the Commentaries of the Athenian Platonic Academy[1]

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In the Athenian Platonic academy, the most fundamental characteristic of the school itself was oral pedagogy.[2] Not unlike many centers of learning today, what shaped the school was the authority of central figures, not merely a curriculum of learning or a series of texts. By teaching through lecturing and discussion, the Athenian Platonists insisted on close, personal interaction between teacher and student. Students learned directly from their teachers, who in turn, had learned by listening to their own teachers. In this way, the Athenian Academy created an almost tangible, auditory connection between third-century teachers and sixth-century students, which served as the basis for intellectual authority in the Academy. Thus, oral pedagogy is so essential to the Athenian school that the Platonic commentaries seem to be shaped around it. This method of instruction also speaks, most fundamentally, to the idea that the Athenian Academy was an institution that insisted upon the total indoctrination of its pupils.[3]

1. Many thanks to Wayne Hankey, John Dillon, and Kenneth Wear for suggestions which have improved this article.

2. It is possible to speculate as to whether Justinian's closing would have affected the oral transmission of ideas, since it made teaching publicly difficult. There have been numerous studies of the outcome of Justinian's decree in 529. See E. Watt's excellent treatment, "Justinian, Malalas, and the End of Athenian Philosophical Teaching in 529," *The Journal of Roman Studies* XCIV (2004): 168–82. See other noteworthy discussions in A. Cameron, "The Last Days of the Academy at Athens," *PCPS* 195 (1969): 7–29; J. Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978), 322–29; H.J. Blumenthal, "529 and its Sequel: What Happened to the Academy," *Byzantion* 48 (1978): 369–85; U. Hartmann, "Geist im Exil: Römische Philosophen am Hof der Sasaniden," in *Grenzüberschreitungen: Formen des Kontakts zwischen Orient und Okzident im Alterum*, ed. M. Schuol *et al.* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002), 123–60.

3. The Athenian Academy viewed "philosophy as a way of life" (to borrow from the title of P. Hadot's seminal work) which meant, for these philosophers, that philosophy entailed living a certain lifestyle, rather than studying a certain philosophy. Because Platonism also included theurgy, as the ritual expression of its philosophy, and theology, in so far as it used commentaries and exegesis of Plato to explain the gods, I think it can be argued that Platonism is a religion or philosophical religion, rather than a philosophy. On calling Platonic commentaries "theology," see P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. A.L. Davidson, trans. M. Chase (Oxford:

A. General: School Curriculum

The basic curriculum of the Academy[4] consisted of the works of Aristotle, beginning with the logical works and proceeding to the ethics, physics, mathematics, and theology, the foremost work being the *Categories*, which was the subject of a school text book by Porphyry and commentaries by Ammonius, followed by a selection of the dialogues of Plato, read in a fixed order.[5] As set out by Iamblichus, the school followed a two-stage program which arranged the dialogues so that they proceeded on a plane corresponding to the progress of the mind: after the introductory *Alcibiades*, the *Gorgias* deals with civic virtues, the *Phaedo* with purificatory virtues, the *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus* (epistemology), *Sophist* and *Statesman* (physical world), *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* (Theology), and *Philebus* (on the Good); in the second stage of the program, the perfect dialogues, the *Timaeus* (physics) and the *Parmenides* (metaphysics), were read.[6] The later commentators based their commentaries of Platonic works on other, previous commentaries so that the Athenian tradition itself became authoritative. The earlier Athenian Platonists were viewed as divine masters whose works were studied and referred to by later members of the school.

While Plato's dialogues were interpreted in a religious light, it also seems that there was a separate classification of lectures based on other sacred texts—when Syrianus suggested that Proclus and Dominus decide between a lecture class on either the *Chaldean Oracles* or the Orphic writings, the two quarreled and wound up having no class at all.[7]

As for the progress of the student within this curriculum, advancement paralleled the progression through initiations in theurgic ritual. Students read Plato, commentaries on Plato, or works such as the *Chaldean Oracles,* depending on spiritual readiness of the particular student. This progression is well laid-out in the following passage by Marinus:

Blackwell, 1995), 72, where he defines theology as the rational exegesis of a sacred text, and 73, on philosophy as exegesis; see also *ibid.* 266–67, where Hadot explains the difference between discourse about philosophy and philosophy itself: the latter entails living physics, logic, etc. Still, the distinction between "philosophy," "theology," and "religion" is highly problematic and this article does not intend to define or redefine any of these terms.

4. For a discussion of activities in the Athenian School see H.D. Saffrey, "Accorder entre elles les traditions théologiques: une charactéristique du néoplatonisme athénien," in *Le Néoplatonisme après Plotin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2000), 143–58. For a listing of the major philosophical works studied at the time of Justinian, see C. Wildberg, "Philosophy in the Age of Justinian," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 2005), 318–28.

5. M.L. Clarke, *Higher Education in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1971), 106.

6. L.G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo I: Olympiodorus* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1976), 15.

7. Marinus, *Life of Proclus* (*Vita Pr.*) XXVI.

> Within less than two years, Syrianus read with him all the writings of Aristotle in logic, ethics, politics, physics and even theology. And after going through these sufficiently as if they were preparatory rites or lesser mysteries, he led them, systematically and not, as the *Chaldean Oracle* says, "by enormous steps," up to the greater mysteries of Plato and revealed their truly divine visions to the untainted eyes of his soul and the pure gaze of his mind. And Proclus, on his own part, by constant practice and attention, both day and night, and by writing down everything that was said in the form of a summary with his own opinions, produced in a short time, so much, that by the age of twenty-eight he had written his *Commentary on the Timaeus* as well as many other commentaries, all finely done and full of learning.[8]

This passage gives us some idea how a student (albeit an exceptional student) might progress in his studies. Moreover, it reveals that as part of this progression, a student might be expected to copy lecture notes and provide his own commentary. Such commentaries were often marked by the formulaic phrase *apo phonês* (a phrase popular in fifth- and sixth-centuries Athens and Alexandria[9]) followed by the master's name and the name of the student auditor/copyist. With this formula, questions arise as to what extent the students' "own commentaries" factor into their lecture notes.

B. Lecturing Style: Plotinus, Proclus and Damascius

Based on doxographical reports and stylistic variations of commentaries, we can gather what a seminar might have looked like at various times throughout the late Academy.[10] For the most part these commentaries reproduce the oral teaching given in the schools and were published later by pupils from lecture notes.[11]

While the works of Plotinus are not systematic commentaries, they do interpret the texts of Plato and Aristotle in the format of general treatises on various topics which were then collected and copied by a student, Porphyry—these treatises reflect the orality of the second-century school. We are told in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* that in the first several years of the school, Plotinus followed the example of his teacher Ammonius and wrote nothing. Of these "seminars," Porphyry says that Amelius, a student, made notes, in the form of a hundred volumes, which he ultimately bequeathed to his adopted son when he retired to Apamea—these notes are, however,

8. *Vita Pr.* XIII, trans. L.J. Rosán in *The Philosophy of Proclus: The Final Phase of Ancient Thought* (New York: Cosmos, 1949), 20. All translations of Marinus' *Life of Proclus* in this article are by Rosán.

9. M. Richard, "*Apo Phonês*," *Byzantion* 20 (1950): 192.

10. For an excellent description of what daily life was like in the Platonic Academy, see J.M. Dillon, "Philosophy as a Profession in Late Antiquity," in *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Brown*, ed. A. Smith (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2005), 1–17.

11. Clarke, *Higher Education in the Ancient World*, 108.

not extant.[12] When Plotinus himself began to write treatises (twenty-one of which he had written before Porphyry came to the school, thirty-three more after his arrival), they were based on subjects and problems that came up in the meetings of the school and, hence, were not systematic. These treatises, moreover, were not intended for publication; rather they were distributed to "a few people," members of the school who were first scrutinized—still, we know this point of pedagogy only through Porphyry, whose motives have been questioned by modern scholars.[13] The result of Porphyry's editorial efforts was the *Enneads*, published following Plotinus' death. Still, these written notes were not to be used as a substitute for Plotinus' teaching—to be sure, pupils in subsequent years would not receive a copy of the *Enneads* to study in private.

The meetings of the Plotinian school reflected emphasis on discussion. Plotinus would ask pupils to read aloud the commentaries of Middle Platonists such as Severus, Cronius or Numenius, and would then comment upon them with the teachings of Ammonius in mind.[14] He encouraged his students to ask questions: when a man called Thaumasius complained that he could not stand Porphyry's incessant questions, and demanded a treatise, Plotinus responded, "But if when Porphyry asks questions we do not solve his difficulties we shall not be able to say anything at all to put into the treatise."[15] With this format, the courses were said to be "lacking in order"[16] and "like conversations"[17] and Plotinus refers to those attending as his *hetairoi* rather than the expected *mathetai*. Students were not "talked-at" as inferiors, but engaged in discussion. We can gather that each class began with a direct or indirect quotation from Plato or Aristotle followed by a number of direct questions on the text,[18] reflected in the following passage from the *Enneads*:

12. Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* (*Vit. Plot.*) 3.40.

13. *Vit. Plot.* 4.1; on Porphyry's motives, see J.F. Finamore, "Biography as Self-Promotion: Porphyry's *Vita Plotini*," *Dionysius* XXIII (2005): 49–62, which persuasively argues that Porphyry used the *Vita* to promote himself by examining Porphyry's rhetoric, among other arguments, and, on Porphyry's succession to head the school, see H.D. Saffrey, "Pourquoi Porphyre a-t-il édité Plotin?" in *Le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, 3–26, which surveys various opinions on why Porphyry edited the works of Plotinus, including why he edited the works when he did.

14. *Vit. Plot.* 13–14.

15. *Vit. Plot.* 13, trans. A.H. Armstrong in *Plotinus, Enneads,* vol. 1, rev. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Press, 1989), 39–41. All further translations of Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* and of Plotinus in this article come from this source.

16. *Vit. Plot.* 3.35.

17. *Vit. Plot.* 18.1.

18. This is certainly not the case with all the treatises—*Enn.* 4.3 "On the Nature of the Soul" quotes the lemma (on *Tim*. 35a) at the end of the treatise.

> Why does it move in a circle?
> Because it animates intellect.
> And what does the movement belong to, soul or body? Is it that soul is in the movement directed towards it? Or [does it move] because soul is eager to go? Or does soul exist in a state of discontinuity? Or is soul carried along itself and carries heaven with it?
> But if that was so, it would be no longer carrying it around; it would have finished its conveyance; that is, it would rather make it stand still, and not always go around in a circle….[19]

Plotinus begins with an indirect quotation from *Timaeus* 34a and proceeds with Aristotle's criticism of the *Timaeus* in the *De Anima*. His method of frequent questions and proposed answers suggests the dialectic of his school. The style, moreover, reflects a casual format for classroom procedure. Plotinus' texts are unsystematic, and from Porphyry's reports, it seems that his classroom style was fairly informal. But the unsystematic style could also reflect Plotinus' manner of writing his own notes. Porphyry tells us that:

> When Plotinus had written anything he could never bear to go over it twice; even to read it through once was too much for him …. In writing he did not form the letters with any regard to appearance or divide his syllables correctly, and he paid no attention to spelling …. He worked out his train of thought from beginning to end in his own mind, and then he wrote it down, since he had set it all in order in his mind, he wrote as continuously as if he was copying from a book.[20]

It seems that the treatises were written in light of classroom sessions, reflecting questions raised on particular days. We have reason to believe that, just as Plotinus said, the discussions resulting from Porphyry's questions comprised certain treatises. Plotinus (or sometimes a student, for that matter) would write responses to questions or discussions from previous class sessions, which were then read and discussed amongst those gathered. We also have to wonder, as an argument *ex negativo*, why Porphyry makes such a point of discussing Plotinus' discussion seminars and why other students are reported to be so shocked by the "conversation-like" procedure. It seems appropriate, although inconclusive, to speculate that other classrooms at the time were more like medieval (or sophistic) lectures, without much discussion or interaction.

In the fifth century, the school of Proclus continued this method, with the actual format becoming more rigorous. Proclus' lectures consisted of two parts: the *pragmata*, or general introduction to a work, perhaps also containing a section on the history of interpretation, and the *lexis*, which considered the details of the text. The order of *pragmata* and *lexis* was a liberal affair.[21]

19. Plotinus, *Enneads* II.2.1.

20. *Vit. Plot.* 8.

21. A.J. Festugière, "Modes de composition des commentaires de Proclus," *Museum Helveticum 20* (1963): 89 offers a discussion of possible variations within *pragmata-lexis* format.

It seems, then, that Proclus' lectures were more structured than those of Plotinus, but the Platonic School was still based on oral dictation of notes and discussion of texts.

The commentaries as we have them are chiefly Proclus' own work, but that on the *Cratylus* is the work of a student, taken *apo phonês* from the lectures. The question also arises, however, as to what extent Proclus' lectures are his own notes of lectures given by Syrianus. In Marinus' *Life of Proclus*, we learn that Plutarch urged a young Proclus to write down everything he learned, by "appealing to his ambition, saying that when these notes were complete, there would be a commentary on the *Phaedo* written by Proclus."[22] And, as we know from the quotation already given, Proclus' method for copying Syrianus' lectures was to "write down everything that was said in the form of a summary with his own opinions."[23] The opinions of Syrianus are introduced in the text as that of "my master" and are written in the style of general comments, rather than indirect quotations. This style is opposed to that which he uses when discussing the thought of Iamblichus, whose lectures he would not have heard directly. For Iamblichus, whom he refers to as "the divine Iamblichus," he uses direct quotations introduced by the phrase "he says." The quotations are in the body of the commentary (as opposed to the quotations of Plato that begin the discussion, which are clearly separated from the text, as it is arranged in the manuscript form). Moreover, these quotations are in Iamblichus' own style—this leads one to suppose that Proclus read from a manuscript copy of Iamblichus, while his summaries of Syrianus' thought are taken from lecture notes.

This is significant not only because commentaries were structured on the authority of previous great teachers, a technique important in medieval exegesis, but also in that the authority was transferred based on a personal relationship from teacher to student. Proclus did not merely quote the written text of Syrianus as an authority on Plato; rather he gathered his information from school sessions he had with his teacher Syrianus. Authority was transferred directly—Proclus was authoritative, in part, because of his relationship with a great master.[24] Such a direct, oral tradition is apparent not just in the doxography, but in the written commentaries as we now have them.

22. *Vita Pr.* XII.

23. *Vita Pr.* XIII.

24. Hermeias' *Commentary on the Phaedrus* also appears to be a direct transcript from Syrianus, which includes recorded comments by Proclus. A remark is made concerning an aporia "by my companion Proclus" and a reply given by the philosopher (sc. Syrianus). It appears from this passage that Hermeias' commentary is a written-up transcription of Syrianus' seminar. See A.D.R. Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus*' Commentary on the Republic (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1980), 20; K. Praechter, "Hermias," *RE* (1912); *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, ed. L.G. Westerink (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1962), x, note 6.

As for Proclus' own lecturing style, it is fairly clear that the commentaries on the *Timaeus* and *Republic*, for instance, are taken from his notes taken at Syrianus' lectures, and follow the *pragmata-lexis* lecturing formula. His more systematic work, *The Elements of Theology*, written in a compacted, often chiasmic style, is perhaps a good example of a text disseminated in manuscript. It is important to note, moreover, that *The Elements of Theology* was disseminated primarily in manuscript form because it functioned as a handbook—it is not a series of lecture notes. Handbooks served a different purpose in the Academy than lectures (they would not have been the topic of discussion), and so *The Elements of Theology* should not be seen as an anomaly in the commentary tradition, but rather a text in a different category. As for other material on Proclus' mode of lecturing, we are told by Marinus that:

> [h]e had an unbounded love of work; sometimes he would teach five or more classes in a day, write on average about seven hundred lines of prose, visit with other philosophers, and then in the evening give lectures that were not based on any text.[25]

This is most likely pious exaggeration, but it gives us an idea of the range of Proclus' work. These unwritten seminars (*agraphoi synousiai*) were perhaps the time for real discussion to take place, as the *pragmata-lexis* formula seems to imply a straight-lecture format. As compared with Plotinus, Proclus systematized the lectures given at the Platonic school. Still, he carried on the tradition of unwritten teaching begun by Socrates.

It is fairly clear from the style of Damascius' commentaries that his writings were also from lecture notes (unlike his contemporary Simplicius whose style seems to be meant for manuscript, rather than oral dissemination). This is of particular interest since he represents a bridge between the opening and closing of the Platonic school. Even a year or so later when the school re-opened, it opened only as a kind of research institution—lectures were no longer given, although manuscripts were produced for written dissemination. By that time, however, Damascius was in his seventies and had already written many of his commentaries, which were produced as lectures. With Damascius, we generally see the same lecture style as Proclus: quotations from a Platonic text followed by interpretation and discussion. Damascius' lectures innovate in content in so far as they are commentaries on Proclus' commentaries, rather than on the Platonic dialogues themselves. In style, they are far more structured than those of his predecessor: there were approximately forty lectures (*praxeis*)[26] on a given Platonic work, each of which was then divided

25. *Vita Pr.* XXII.

26. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo II: Damascius* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1977) 25.

into a *theoria* (or general survey of the work) and a *lexis* (detailed observations)—the division between the two, however, is not clear-cut. Each lecture lasted approximately forty-five minutes. As we saw with Proclus, because doxography repeatedly tells us of the direct interaction between teacher and students and of the philosophic discussions taking place, it seems that there must have been more than these straight lectures. Discussions would have taken place at dinner (dining is most certainly a philosophical activity), or at special question and answer periods.

After going through the cycle of Platonic dialogues, Damascius was sometimes willing to change a set lecture completely. For instance, Damascius' *Phaedo Commentary*, as we have it, is two sets of lectures, from student notes taken over a period of time, and they are notably different. These lectures are interesting for study because they are undoubtedly not a question of excerpts, but are indeed notes of the complete lectures.[27] Still, some question has been raised as to whether a portion of the commentary is a written treatise meant for separate circulation. L.G. Westerink calls attention to section 208 of the commentary where Damascius says, "I shall take it that the reader has first studied the divine thoughts of my great predecessor, since I see no sense in repeating what has once been well said."[28] Westerink says that Damascius must have intended that the reader approach his manuscript with the text of Proclus close at hand. Westerink points to the use of the term *ton enteuksomenon* to refer explicitly to a reader of texts. This word, however, can also mean "audience," specifically an audience hearing a text read. It is important to note at this point that the Platonic school valued the skill of memorization highly (as did institutions from ancient times to the Renaissance), and students would have had reams of both Plato's dialogues and Homer's poems stored away in the recesses of their minds.[29] Thus, it is not certain that students had texts at hand when discussing them. Scrolls would have proved cumbersome in the classroom and unnecessary should the texts have been memorized.

It seems clear, based on lecture style, that even at the Academy under Damascius, texts were meant to be heard. As far as classroom procedure is concerned, doxography tells us that the importance placed on discussion in

27. *Ibid.,* 15.

28. Trans. Westerink, *Ibid.*,126.

29. In his *De vita Pythagorica*, Iamblichus praises the Pythagorean use of memorization: "They thought it necessary to hold fast and to preserve in the memory everything taught and said, and to prepare themselves accordingly in their lessons and lectures until the time when the faculty which learns and remembers is able to receive these; because (memory) is that through which one acquired knowledge, and in which one must preserve it." Iamblichus adds that "nearly all" philosophers knew the sayings of Epicharmus by heart. Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* 164, trans. J.M. Dillon and J. Hershbell in *On the Pythagorean Way of Life* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991).

the later Academy was similar to that in the days of Plotinus. Damascius reports that his teacher, Isidore, compares his teaching to Socrates, rather than Plato, because he placed emphasis on the orality of instruction:

> When defending Socrates Isidore spoke too profoundly for his pupils' understanding …. When lecturing he lacked the linguistic skill necessary to present his views satisfactorily. And yet, not being aided in this respect by nature or by training, he still made zealous efforts at clarity. Leaving to others the graceful display of words, he occupied himself with revealing the thing itself, pronouncing concepts rather than words: indeed it was not so much concepts that he brought to light as the very essence of things themselves.[30]

As with earlier times, the Academy in the days of Damascius emphasized oral teaching and direct interaction between teacher and student.

From the commentary tradition, we see that the heart of the Athenian Academy is the school itself; the commentaries as we have them are actually the product of lectures and discussions. The purpose of the commentaries, moreover, was the instruction of pupils at the school. The Platonists saw themselves as direct inheritors of a religious tradition—this inheritance gave them the authority to read and discuss texts and it gave them the responsibility to directly transfer the tradition to their own students.

From comments made by Athenian Platonists and from the commentaries themselves, it appears that oral pedagogy was the foremost method of instruction, which restricted school activity to a particular time and place, insofar as students needed to learn directly from instructors for the information to be authoritative. Such a manner of pedagogy, moreover, also supported the Athenian Academy as a religious house. Students needed to converge in one place in order to learn the religious doctrines of the master theologians Homer and Plato, as expressed in their writings, and the writings of previous Platonic commentators, particularly Iamblichus and Syrianus. By forcing students to learn directly from teachers, the Athenian Platonists were able to oversee the proper interpretation of texts which were viewed as religious documents, containing essential truths.

C. Oral Teaching In Late Antique Islamic Academies

It might be helpful in this connection to examine accounts of medieval Islamic *halqa*, informal or "spontaneous circles" of higher learning, when trying to reconstruct the goings on of the Athenian School.[31] These schools

30. Damascius, *Philosophical History* 37D, trans. P. Athanassiadi in *Damascius: The Philosophical History* (Athens: Apamea Cultural Association, 1999), 117.

31. This comparison was first mentioned to me by John M. Dillon in conversation. Dillon mentions that it was Peter Brown who compared the Platonic Academy to the learning centers in the mediaeval Arab world in conversation with him in the first place; see Dillon, "Philosophy as a Profession in Late Antiquity," 1.

acted as private circles of higher learning, with communities of scholars meeting in a residence or bookstore to discuss and translate texts.[32] They differed from previous Islamic schools because they did not hold any legal status in society, nor were they funded through the state—they were comprised of scholars who dedicated themselves to a group for the study of philosophical texts.[33] The brunt of activity in these centers, moreover, centered on religious interpretations of Neoplatonic commentaries translated into Arabic between AD 750–850.[34] Sociologically, these schools offer interesting parallels to the Athenian Academy in so far as oral teaching methods prevailed in commentary-making for these religious schools.[35] Because more evidence exists for

32. C.M. Stanton, *Higher Learning in Islam: The Classical Period, AD 700–1300* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990), 123.

33. J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1992), 122.

34. See also Stanton, *Higher Learning in Islam*, 65. The Nestorian physician Hunain translated almost of all of Galen; Aristotle (the *Categories, Physics, Magna Moralia*, and *Hermeneutics*); Plato (the *Republic, Timaeus*, and *Laws*); Hippocrates (*Aphorisms*); Dioscorides (*Mater Medica*); Ptolemy (four books on Astronomy); and the *Old Testament*. His son Ishaq is attributed with translating Aristotle (*Metaphysics, On the Soul, On the Generation and Corruption of Animals*) and the Aristotelian commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias. Stanton, *Higher Learning in Islam*, 67. A listing of Platonic texts is also included in the *Catalogue*, Baghdad bookseller Abu'l-Faraj Muhammad ibn al-Nadim's tenth-century encyclopedia of the literature and sciences of Islam. Texts listed include Arabic versions of the Timaeus, Proclus "the Platonist," Alexander of Aphrodisias, Porphyry, Ammonius (Hermieu), Plutarch of Chaeronea, Olympiodorus, Hippocrates, "another Plutarch," John Philoponus, and Plotinus' *Enneads* 4–6, circulated under the title of the *Theology of Aristotle*. Listed in F. Peters, "The Greek and Syriac Background," in *Greek and Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th C.)*, ed. D. Gutas (London: Routledge, 1998), 43.

35. There has been some discussion as to whether the Platonist philosophers, led by Damascius, reached Harran in northern Syria when they left after the closing of the Platonic Academy in 529. See P. Vallat, *Farabi et l'École d'Alexandrie: Des prémisses de la connaissance à la philosophie politique* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2004), 39–41. There has been further speculation as to whether the philosophers, upon reaching Syria, established Platonism in Harran. This article will avoid this debate and merely examine the two types of schools sociologically to give a better impression of pedagogy in the Athenian Academy. On this debate, see M. Tardieu, "Sabiens coraniques et 'Sabiens' de Harran," *Jo. Asiatique* 274 (1986): 1–44; D. Gutas, "Pre-Plotinian Philosophy in Arabic (other than Platonism and Aristotelianism): A Review of the Sources," *ANRW* 36.7 (1994): 4943; J. Lameer, "From Alexandria to Baghdad: Reflections of the Genesis of a Problematical Tradition," in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism: Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences Dedicated to H.J. Drossart Lulofs on His Ninetieth Birthday,* ed. G. Endress and R. Kruk (Leiden: Research School CNNS, 1997), 181–92. Supporters of the conclusion include I. Hadot in *Simplicius, Commentaire sur le manul d'Épictète* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996) and "La vie et l'oeuvre de Simplicius d'après des sources grecques et arabes," in *Simplicius: Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie*, ed. I. Hadot (Paris: W. de Gruyter, 1987), 10–20; and P. Athanassiadi, "Persecution and Response in Late Paganism: the Evidence of Damascius," *JHS* 113 (1993): 29.

these schools, it may be possible to get an idea, at least, of what the Athenian Academy looked like in practice by examining the *halqa*.

Students in *halqa* applied to study with a master teacher for an indefinite period of time.[36] The first course of instruction was often Porphyry's *Isagoge,*[37] followed by the commentaries on Aristotle of the Platonic school. The Islamic schools considered Aristotle to be the master of philosophical thought, even though interpretation was primarily Platonic, as filtered through commentaries made by the later Platonists. Even though their schools focused on Platonic commentaries, Islamic scholars had an unclear picture of the Athenian Academy and were only aware of various authors, without much sense for chronology. Students read a version of the *Enneads* circulated under the title of the *Theology of Aristotle*[38] and were aware of Proclus, Plutarch, Gregory of Nyssa and others, whom they connected with the Aristotelian exegetical tradition.[39] Even al-Fârâbî, who is considered by modern scholars to be one of the greatest Islamic Platonists, was compared to Aristotle by his contemporaries.[40]

Teachers in the schools wrote commentaries on the studied texts by interpreting items they found useful and then stating the authority from which they heard the information. As with the Athenian commentaries, originality was not the order of the day—scholars sought to show that their opinions were part of an unbroken philosophic tradition.[41] Comments were carefully cited so that every statement had religious authority attached to it. The author's opinion, moreover, was entered in third person form—perhaps to place the author on the same level as the traditionally well-esteemed teachers.[42] Lectures followed the same format seen in the Athenian Platonic commentaries. The lecture first outlined the subject, followed by a treatment of the subject broken down into subheadings where the teacher offered his own analysis of the text.[43] At this stage, students offered questions or comments, and a discussion ensued that was sometimes incorporated into the final draft of the manuscript if the teacher changed his mind concerning a point based on classroom argument.[44] These sessions took place twice daily, at two-hour sessions in the morning and afternoon.[45]

36. Stanton, *Higher Learning in Islam*, 124.
37. *Ibid.,* 125.
38. Peters, "The Greek and Syriac Background," 43.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. J. Pedersen, *The Arabic Book* (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1984), 22.
42. Stanton, *Higher Learning in Islam*, 22.
43. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*,124.
44. *Ibid*.
45. *Ibid*.

As far as the manner in which the commentary was disseminated to pupils in the classroom, the teacher wrote his manuscript (at this point, known as a draft copy) and dictated it to the pupils in his circle. This manuscript was then recopied by the senior or most promising student, who added his own marginalia.[46] The student read the manuscript back to the author in order for him to authorize that the transcript be made into book form; once authorized it was no longer a draft but "made white," or copied accurately.[47] The interaction between teacher and student during this process was keen. Biographies of scholars from these spontaneous schools note to whom the individual read his drafts, as well as from whom he heard his philosophy.[48] This method of transmission also resulted in different versions of the work, depending on how frequently a scholar read his manuscript and who was in the audience listening.

Even with the advent of the written book, the oral transmission of a text was held superior to private study.[49] While information was eventually transcribed into manuscript form, a student did not read books silently to himself—a text was said to be either "heard from" a mentor or transcriptions were "read to" a teacher for correction. Such a system of learning made oral transmission the only legitimate form of scholarly learning.[50] True knowledge was derived from a teacher, rather than a text, and the personal connection between student and teacher was very strong. As with the Platonists, moreover, Islamic teachers were also religious masters who instructed students on the divine ways through proper interpretation of texts.

Conclusion

Oral pedagogy was the foremost characteristic of the Athenian School of Platonism. Existence of this manner of teaching and lecturing is seen not just in doxography, but in the commentaries themselves. It necessitated students and teachers meeting in one place for direct, personal interaction. Behind the idea of lectures, discussions, and vocal religious rituals was the crux of the Academy itself, the purpose of which was not to produce texts but to produce students, followers of a religious/philosophical tradition. By transmitting instruction through discussion, teachers ensured the continuance of their religious Academy—students could not simply read from books, they had to come to the school for complete immersion. What made instruction authoritative was the fact that teachers had heard such words from previous,

46. Stanton, *Higher Learning in Islam,* 124.
47. Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, 27.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 24.
50. *Ibid.*

holy instructors. The next generation was initiated in the Platonic tradition by likewise hearing the wisdom of their predecessors and partaking in their rituals. Oral pedagogy, thus, tied one generation of Athenian Platonists to the next to create a tradition. We see the same phenomenon of oral pedagogy occurring in the late antique Islamic schools. These schools were likewise institutions, which also tied authority to personal interaction with instructors. By examining these Islamic schools, we can flesh out some of the missing holes in our understanding of the teaching method in the Athenian School. More importantly, we can view the Athenian Academy as part of a tradition of religious, scholarly institutes in the Near Eastern world. With all of this in mind, it becomes clear that when Justinian closed the Academy for teaching and lecturing, he did not merely hamper the dissemination of their ideas—he destroyed the tradition itself because there was no place for religious indoctrination and the philosophical way of life.