cal or ethical matters, like it had been for al-Jāḥiẓ or al-Bayhaqī; it was rather a display of virtuosity and a way to show his mastery of Arabic eloquence and his thorough knowledge of the literary tradition.[81] This is still more evident in another work of his, *Taḥsīn al-Qabīḥ wa-Taqbīḥ al-Ḥasan* ("Beautifying the ugly and uglifying the beautiful"), shaped according to the principle of the paradox, considered in literary criticism as a sign of eloquence.[82] It contains a selection of the materials taken from his two other titles mentioned above, where things usually considered blamable are instead praised, and the other way round. The success of the *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwiʾ* genre is also attested in other cases, in method if not in content, and the practice of first praising and then blaming the same thing is also found in famous works like *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī* and al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt.*[83] If al-Jāḥiẓ applied the dialectical approach to ethics in order to show the shortcomings of extremism and demonstrate the superiority of the Aristotelian way of the happy medium, in later times, and especially with al-Thaʿālibī, "the typical man of letters unhampered by knowledge of Aristotle and his philosophy,"[84] this method gradually lost its ethical slant to become a sort of bravura performance completely devoid of any educational intent. The peculiar trait of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* is the systematic application of the method perfected by al-Thaʿālibī in a very different, moralizing and educative perspective. In some way the two extremities of the line along which the genre developed, al-Jāḥiẓ first and al-Waṭwāṭ last, join each other in that al-Waṭwāṭ's anthology shares the ethical orientation of al-Jāḥiẓ' works, even if in very different terms. *Mutatis mutandis*, our Mamluk bookseller in a certain sense could thus be seen as the spiritual heir of the great Abbasid polymath.

5. A Philosophical Background?

The proclaimed ethical purpose and the organization of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* refl ct a certain philosophical background in al-Waṭwāṭ's education, which is also attested by the philosophical concepts and terms that surface throughout the text. Terminology, notions, and the conceptual frame of his work are strongly dependent on Hellenizing philosophy and deserve a careful examination. For instance, in his introduction al-Waṭwāṭ starts by stating that the difference of habits *(akhlāq)* is a function of the difference of elements *(aʿrāq),* and the inclination of each individ-

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[81] Geries, *Un Genre littéraire arabe,* 137.

[82] On this literary practice and al-Thaʿālibī's work in particular see Geert J. Van Gelder, "Beautifying the Ugly and Uglifying the Beautiful: The Paradox in Classical Arabic Literature," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 48 (2003): 321–51.

[83] Geries, *Un Genre littéraire arabe,* 143.

[84] Van Gelder, "Beautifying the Ugly," 336.

ual depends on his essences and accidents *(jawāhir wa-aʿrāḍ).*[85] The relationship between physical constitution and psychology, or in other terms between body and soul, is typical of the humoral physiology of Greek philosophy and medicine that was integrated into Islamic medicine, and so also is the terminology used. But ethics is by far the most interesting facet of this long-standing tradition: in *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* al-Waṭwāṭ shows the same ambivalent attitude towards virtues and vices typical of Aristotelian thought (which by no means corresponds to moral relativism) that al-Jāḥiẓ adopted in his works. In Aristotelian ethics, and its Islamic reception, a good or a bad behavior can only be assessed as such in context: that is to say that virtues and vices are not absolute, but they must be judged depending on circumstances. In brief, behavior can only be evaluated in terms of the way a certain man shows his positive or negative features in a specific context. Everything is relative, and thus an excess of virtue can turn into a blamable feature: for instance, generosity can become profligacy, and so on.[86] To demonstrate the ambivalence reigning in the ethical realm al-Waṭwāṭ, like some of his predecessors in the genre *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwiʾ,* praises and blames the same feature, both for virtues and vices. This mirror symmetry in the inner organization of the chapters of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* very properly highlights the relativity of evaluation in ethics, especially in the third section of each chapter, devoted to blaming virtues and praising vices, which is a tell-tale mark of this approach. Al-Waṭwāṭ seems aware that absolute virtue cannot exist and that it can accidentally be spoiled by some external element, just as the moon is darkened by an eclipse, and good and evil can only be defined by reciprocally contrasting them.[87] The same premises seem to be at the core of what could be defined in Aristotelian terms as "the golden man," whose rational soul stands in the middle *(mutawassiṭat al-ḥāl)* between the two poles: every virtue is thus an intermediate condition between excess and deficiency, a mean between two extremes.

This position, shared by al-Jāḥiẓ and the Islamic ethicists of that period, is widely represented in *adab* literature. Nevertheless, in *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* the ambivalent attitude so characteristic of the *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwiʾ* genre is much more mitigated and there seems to be little margin for ambiguity: the lexical entries are used to pinpoint unambiguous concepts, the book has a rigorous and clear-cut structure, and the conceptual frame and organization of the work are clearly articulated in a systematic antonymic disposition. Antonymy is in fact the backbone of this anthology, starting from the title which distinctly sets forth a positive pole opposed to a negative pole. This is not fortuitous at all, inasmuch as the title serves as a key of interpretation for the whole text and is, as al-Waṭwāṭ

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[85] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 7.

[86] Geries, *Un Genre littéraire arabe,* 54 ff.

[87] Al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 8, 9.

says (showing here a remarkably lucid perception of the processes implied in anthologizing), "an instructive announcer"[88] of the contents of the book. Antonymy is also represented in the choice of the ethical themes, since both a notion and its contrary are treated; and antonymy is at the core of the method of exposition, based on the successive praise and blame of the positive or negative feature involved. There is a remarkable harmony of content and form, of themes and organization, and this gives this work its peculiar flavor.

Other elements hinting at a philosophical background can be pointed out. Vocabulary, philosophical premises, and perspective are all hints at the familiarity the author must have had with the contents and methods of Greek philosophy, perhaps not based on the habitual reading of the direct sources but on the extensive perusal of secondary sources and learned conversations. One significant example is the use of the term *al-nafs al-nāṭiqah* ("the rational soul"), which alludes to the theory of the tripartite soul formulated in Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedrus.* This is not limited to mere lexicographical pointers; concepts and ideas can also readily be identified, such as the exhortation to practicing virtue. Al-Waṭwāṭ affirms that natural disposition *(khulq)* can be defined as a habit of the soul that a man practices spontaneously. Men can have good or bad natural dispositions, but those who do not have good natural dispositions can acquire praiseworthy morals by means of practice and familiarity (*al-riyāḍah wa-al-ulfah*).[89] This statement unquestionably recalls the Aristotelian notion of virtue as a habit; in Aristotle's moral philosophy, a virtuous character needs to be trained to virtue by teachers and experience. This theory emerges from the words of al-Waṭwāṭ when he states that man achieves virtue by keeping good company, or, on the contrary, acquires vice by keeping bad company.[90] The point is of course introduced by the usual quotations of the appropriate Muslim traditions, but soon the passage takes a more general tone and an unknown *ḥakīm* is brought up to explain the point further; he specifies that a friend of good morality *(akhlāq)* and behavior *(sīrah)* is a paragon and a model to imitate. This corresponds to the premises of Aristotelian ethics: the importance of friendship in directing man to virtue or vice, depending on good or bad company, is one of the points emphasized in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* a work widely known in the Arab world. In all probability al-Waṭwāṭ had this treatise in mind when he mentioned "those who occupy themselves with ethics" *(al-mutakallimūn fī al-akhlāq),*[91] and it is also no accident that the fifteenth chapter of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* is devoted to friendship and the significance of choosing good friends. In this connection al-Waṭwāṭ also emphasizes

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[88] Ibid., 9.

[89] Ibid., 10.

[90] Ibid., 11.

[91] Ibid., 10.

the importance of personal effort and commitment to reach perfection (*kamāl*),[92] which is a point also treated in the *Nicomachean Ethics,* where the excellent human being is defined as somebody "doing well and being serious" *(spoudaios).* Aristotle also asserts that for a human being virtue must involve reason, and again this is echoed by al-Waṭwāṭ, who underlines the role of thinking *(fikr)* and discernment *(tamyīz)* in leading to virtue.[93] The insistence on the practical nature of ethics, rather than on its theoretical character, also reflects al-Waṭwāṭ's apparent reliance on Aristotelian thought. In this perspective, virtue is rooted in practice and behavior much more than in knowledge, and this equates to saying that to become good one must actually be virtuous and behave as a virtuous man. That is why al-Waṭwāṭ over and over again urges the reader to behave in a praiseworthy manner and to practice virtue.[94] This practical slant also finds a very proper and concrete realization in the structure of *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ,* and namely in the second section of each chapter, where each virtue or vice is depicted through the representation of people characterized by it or who became famous for it. Thus, in each chapter sections one and three constitute a kind of theoretical frame for the notion presented, bracketing a second section that shows, so to speak, virtue (or vice) "in context," concretized in the sayings and deeds of virtuous (or corrupt) people. This careful construction is a further indication of the harmony of the conceptual premises with content and form that characterizes *Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ.*

6. Conclusion

In his anthology, al-Waṭwāṭ showed his capacity for reusing the literary models of the past and adapting them to the goals and expectations of his contemporaries. Taking on the *al-maḥāsin wa-al-masāwiʾ* pattern, he does not tread in the footsteps of al-Thaʿālibī, with the pronounced aesthetic and literary tones of his works. He prefers instead to adopt the ethical intent of the origins of the genre, and thus adapt the literary tradition to the requirements of his time. Anthologies were not "mere repackagings of the literary tradition, but innovative manipulations of that tradition in ways that appealed to contemporary developments in literary taste and sensibilities…[and] late pre-modern and early modern anthologists reinterpreted the canon in ways that appealed to an expanding readership."[95] This is certainly true in the case of al-Waṭwāṭ, whose attachment to the works of the past is based on a sincere appreciation and desire to revive their message. The case of

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[92] Ibid., 11, 14–15.

[93] Ibid., 15.

[94] E.g., al-Waṭwāṭ, *Ghurar,* 12, 15.

[95] *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1350–1850,* ed. J. E. Lowry and D. J. Stewart (Wiesbaden, 2009), 7.

Ghurar al-Khaṣāʾiṣ shows that anthologizing was much more than the process of collecting apposite anecdotes and pieces of poetry, and authors were in a position to adopt literary canons and to use the materials of the tradition in an innovative way. Accordingly, forms of inter-textual references were used "to determine one's relation with the past, to enter into a dialogue with its central texts, to introduce their message into contemporary discourse and to adapt it to the then-prevailing tastes."[96] As an author of encyclopedias, of sophisticated *inshāʾ* compositions, and of anthologies, al-Waṭwāṭ perfectly embodied this and the other literary trends of his period.

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[96] Bauer, "Mamluk Literature," 114.