

# A Winged Word on Marriage: Socrates and the Gnomological Tradition

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## Abstract

A foreign saying on marriage became widely known in China through Qian Zhongshu's 1947 novel *Fortress Besieged*. As the novelist tells us, this saying has its source in both English and French literature, and in its different versions, marriage is either likened to a besieged fortress or a bird cage. This paper examines the origin and transmission of the saying in Greek, Arabic and Syriac sources, and argues that this saying originated in the so-called literature of the Christianized Socratic-Cynic philosophy, which once flourished in Syria. It became popular in the Byzantine and Arabic world after having been included into several famous Greek and Arabic gnomologies. Then it was introduced into modern languages, developed into different versions, finally came to China and became a household word among Chinese people.

## Keywords

Fortress besieged, wisdom literature, *Sokratikoi Logoi*, Qian Zhongshu, Syriac asceticism

## 1 Introduction

In 1947, a saying which compares marriage to a besieged fortress became widely known in China through the eponymous novel *Fortress Besieged* by Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910–1998), which is “the most delightful and carefully wrought novel in modern Chinese literature.”<sup>1</sup> In a conversation on marriage and divorce, two different versions of the same saying are mentioned. According to a self-styled Chinese ‘philosopher’ who claimed to be acquainted with Bertrand Russell, the latter had once, in a private conversation, quoted “an old English saying” to explain away his own marriages and divorces: “marriage is like a gilded bird cage. The birds outside want to get in, and the birds inside want to fly out.” A French parallel was immediately added by another interlocutor: “There’s a French saying similar to that. Instead of a bird cage, it’s a fortress under siege (*forteresse assiégée*). The people outside the city want to break in and the people inside the city want to escape.”<sup>2</sup>

It would be interesting to ask how this saying on marriage originated, and from whom. As we can gather from Qian Zhongshu’s notes,<sup>3</sup> he learned about the bird-cage metaphor

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<sup>1</sup> Xia Zhiqing 夏志清 (C. T. Hsia), *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 441.

<sup>2</sup> Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書, *Wei Cheng* 《圍城》 (Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House, 2012), 90; Ibid., *Fortress Besieged*, transl. by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K. Mao (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), 91. For transliteration of Chinese the *pinyin* scheme was adopted throughout the present article.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., “Notes on Bartlett’s *Familiar Quotations*” (wrongly included in “Notes on Nicoll’s *Lesser English Comedies of the Eighteenth Century*”), in *Qian Zhongshu shougao ji: Waiwen biji*. 《錢鍾書手稿集·外文筆記》 (*Manuscripts of Qian Zhongshu. Foreign Language Notes*), vol. 2 (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2014), 544: “French proverb: Le mariage est

from John Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*, where four versions of the saying from different authors are listed.<sup>4</sup> The old English saying which Russell quoted in the novel goes back to John Webster (1580–1634), whose tragedy *The White Devil* contained the following remark: “’Tis just like a summer bird-cage in a garden: the birds that are without despair to get in, and the birds that are within despair and are in a consumption for fear they shall never get out.”<sup>5</sup> It is, however, not the earliest bird cage metaphor on marriage, given that a similar metaphor can already be found in Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533–1592): “Il en advient ce qui se voit aux cages: les oiseaux qui en sont hors, désespèrent d’y entrer; et d’un pareil soin en sortir, ceux qui sont au-dedans.”<sup>6</sup> The saying on marriage was nevertheless well known during the sixteenth century in England, as another version of the same saying can be found in John Davies’ (1569–1626) *A Contention betwixt a Wife, a Widow and a Maid*, in which marriage is compared to public feasts where crowds gather: “Wedlock, indeed, hath oft compared been/ To public feasts, where meet a public rout, –/ Where they that are without would fain go in,/ And they that are within would fain go out.”<sup>7</sup> At the end of the list is a much later version in Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)’s *Representative Men*: “Is not marriage an open question, when it is alleged, from the beginning of the world, that such as are in the institution wish to get out, and such as are out wish to get in.”<sup>8</sup>

As to the metaphor of a besieged fortress, a similar version is mentioned in Pierre-Marie Quitard’s *Études historiques, littéraires et morales sur les proverbes français et le langage proverbial* (1860).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Quitard comments that this is in fact an Arabic saying, which had once been rephrased by Charles Dufresny (1648–1724): “On lit dans une comédie de Dufresny: Le pays du mariage a cela de particulier que les étrangers ont envie de l’habiter, et que les habitants naturels voudraient en être exilés. Cette phrase piquante a été composée d’après un proverbe arabe que voici: Le mariage est comme une forteresse assiégée, ceux qui sont dehors veulent y entrer, ceux qui sont dedans veulent en sortir.”<sup>10</sup> As is indicated in Qian’s notes, it is also from Quitard’s *Études historiques* that Qian learned about the besieged fortress metaphor and its Arabic origin.<sup>11</sup> Actually, before Quitard, Alexandre Dumas also used the besieged fortress metaphor in his book *Le véloce ou Tanger, Alger et Tunis* (1848), which states that this saying was written on an amulet worn by an Arabic merchant.<sup>12</sup> The

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comme une forteresse assiégée; ceux qui sont dehors veulent y entrer, et ceux qui sont dedans veulent en sortir (cf. Sir John Davies: *A Contention betwixt a Wife, a Widow, and a Maid*; Montaigne: *Essais*, vol.iii. ch. V; John Webster: *The White Devil*, Act I. Sc. ii).” Qian later changed “French proverb” to “Arab proverb,” see footnote 11.

<sup>4</sup> John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations, A Collection of Passages, Phrases and Proverbs Traced to Their Sources in Ancient and Modern Literature* (Boston: Little Brown, 1968), 190–1.

<sup>5</sup> John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. by John Russell Brown (London: Methuen, 1960), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Pierre Michel, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 100. Bartlett provides its English translation in his *Quotations*, 190.

<sup>7</sup> Sir John Davies, *A Contention Betwixt a Wife, a Widow and a Maid*, in *The Complete Poems of Sir John Davies*, ed. by Alexander Balloch Grosart, vol. 2 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1876), 83.

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1850), 157.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre-Marie Quitard, *Études historiques, littéraires et morales sur les proverbes français et le langage proverbial* (Paris: Techener, 1860).

<sup>10</sup> Namely in Charles Dufresny, *Amusements sérieux et comiques* (Liège: Joseph-Louis de Milst, 1705). See Quitard, *Études historiques*, 102. For a similar view see also Pierre-Marie Quitard, *Proverbs sur les femmes, l’amitié, l’amour et le mariage recueillis et commentés* (Paris: Charles Blot, 1889), 316.

<sup>11</sup> See Qian, “Notes on Bartlett’s *Familiar Quotations*,” 544, where he later changed “French proverb” to “Arab proverb,” and added: “Cf. Quitard: *Études sur les proverbes français*, p.102.”

<sup>12</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Le Véloce ou Tanger, Alger et Tunis* (Paris: Cadot, 1848), 70: “Notre janissaire portait celle-là, qui me parut étrange au bras d’un janissaire: ‘Le mariage est comme une forteresse assiégée: ceux qui sont dehors veulent y entrer, ceux qui sont dedans veulent en sortir.’ Je m’informai si le porteur de l’amulette était marié. L’amulette lui avait porté bonheur, il était resté célibataire.”

same saying was mentioned again several years later in Dumas' play *Romulus* (1854): "Tu sais, mon cher Célestus, qu'il y a un proverb arabe qui dit: 'Le mariage est comme une forteresse assiégée: ceux qui sont dehors veulent y entrer, mais ceux qui sont dedans veulent en sortir.'" (Wolf)<sup>13</sup>

There are other French versions worthy of note. In the tenth joy of marriage of a popular French satire *Les quinze joyes de mariage* (late 14th or 15th century), young men getting into marriage are compared to fish entering the net, and birds attracted to the cage: "La dixiesme joye de mariage, si est quant celuy qui est marié s'est mis dedans la nasse, pource qu'il a veu les aultres poissons qui se esbanoient dedens, ce lui sembloit; et a tant travaillé qu'il a trouvé l'entrée pour estre à ses plaisirs et deliz, comme dit est. Et peut l'en dire que l'on le fait entrer en la nasse de mariage comme l'oyseleur fait venir les oiseaux de riviere dedens la forme par certains autres oiseaux affectiés qui sont attachés en la forme, et leur donne à menger du grain; et les aultres oyseaux, qui ne font que voiler de riviere en riviere pour trouver viande qui leur plaist, cudent qu'ilz soient bien aises..."<sup>14</sup> The fishing net metaphor is also quoted in another work of Quitard: *Proverbs sur les femmes, l'amitié, l'amour et le mariage recueillis et commentés*, in which it is ascribed to the Greek philosopher Socrates: "Socrate disoit: 'Les jeunes gens cherchant à se marier ressemblent aux poissons qui se jouent autour de la nasse du pêcheur. Tous se pressent pour y entrer, tandis que les malheureux qui y sont retenus font tous leurs efforts pour en sortir.'"<sup>15</sup> However, these versions might have escaped Qian's notice, since we can find them nowhere in Qian's notes.

All these metaphors can be regarded as different versions of the same saying in which marriage is compared to an apparently attractive but in reality difficult and unpleasant place, either the besieged fortress, the bird cage, public feasts, a particular country or the fishing net. All these different versions also testify to the great popularity that the saying had enjoyed since the fifteenth century in Europe. This raises a series of interesting questions: Where does this saying come from? Should we accept Quitard's view that it is an Arabic saying? If yes, how did it originate in the Arabic culture? Which metaphor represents its earliest version? Or does it have any other earlier versions? To whom should the saying be attributed? Could the author be Socrates? What is the transmission history of the saying? The present paper intends to deal with these questions, and argues that the English/French marriage saying has, in fact, Greek parallels, and indeed can be traced back to the so-called Socratic tradition. It might involve ancient Cynic themes, and might have undergone a process of Christianization, especially in Syria. It became popular in the Byzantine and Arabic world after having been included in several of the most famous Greek and Arabic gnomologies. Then it was introduced into modern languages, developed into different versions, finally came to China and became a household aphorism among Chinese people.

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<sup>13</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Romulus: Comédie en un acte, en prose* (Paris: Librairie théâtrale, 1854), 13. See also Fan Xulun 范旭倫, "Cong Falanxi chuanlai Alaboren de yanyu," 從法蘭西傳來阿拉伯人的諺語. (An Arabic Saying from France). *Dushu* 《讀書》 (Reading) 12.12 (2010): 1–5.

<sup>14</sup> *Les quinze joyes de mariage*, ed. by François Tulou (Paris: Garnier frères, 1884), 135–6. The fishing net motif serves as the red thread through the chapters of the whole book. The same metaphor is also employed in the *Le roman de la rose*, the best-known French literature from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, although in a different context: there an unhappy monk is compared to a fish caught in a net (13, 949–84), see Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. by Ernest Langlois, vol. 4 (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1914–24), 42–3.

<sup>15</sup> Quitard, *Proverbs sur les femmes*, 316–7.

## 2 The Marriage Saying in the Greek, Arabic and Syriac tradition

In two articles published in 1958, F. Rosenthal investigated Ibn Durayd (d. 933)’s collection of the sayings of the ancient philosophers, and tried to identify its relationship to both the other Arabic florilegia and to Greek wisdom literature. Among them we find a very similar saying on marriage ascribed to the Greek philosopher Socrates, which, as the author reveals, also has parallels in other florilegia: Two Arabic compilations, namely that by Ibn Hindū (d. 1019) and that by al-Mubaššir b. Fātik (d. 1097), and one Greek florilegium, *Antonius Melissa* (11th century). In the following the sayings are quoted from Rosenthal together with a full English translation.<sup>16</sup>

Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb al-Muġtanā* (Socrates, no. 61); Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients,” 50; Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded),” 179:

وأستشاره رجل في التزويج فقال: إن أصحاب التزويج يشبهون بالسمك الذي يصاد بالقفاف فالذي يكون خارجا يريد الدخول فيها والذي قد حصل فيها يروم الخروج منها فأنظر لا يصيبك مثل هذا.

And a man asked him for advice about marrying, he said: “People of marrying (The married people) are like fish which are caught in the fish-baskets.<sup>17</sup> Those outside want to get in, and those already in (the baskets) want to get out. Be careful that you do not get into such a situation.” (Rosenthal’s translation, modified)

Ibn Hindū, *Al-Kalim ar-rūḥāniyya* 83 (Socrates); Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients,” 50; Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded),” 180:

وأستشاره فتى في التزويج فقال له سقراط احذر أن يعرض لك كما يعرض للسمك مع الشبكة فإن السمك الخارج منها يطلب الدخول فيها والداخل فيها يطلب الخروج منها.

A young man asked him for advice about marrying. Socrates said to him: “Be careful that it does not happen to you that which happens to fish with the net, for those outside wish to get in and those inside wish to get out.”

al-Mubaššir b. Fātik, *Muḥtār al-ḥikam wa-maḥāsin al-kalim* (Socrates, no. 190); Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients,” 50; Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded),” 180:

وأستشاره فتى في التزويج فقال: احذر أن تكون كالسمك فإن ما كان خارج الشبكة يطلب الدخول فيها، وما كان فيها يطلب الخروج عنها.

A young man asked him for advice about marrying, and he said: “Be careful not to be like the fish, for when they are outside the net they wish to get in, and when they are inside, they wish to get out.”

*Antonius Melissa* 1091 C (Socrates); Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients,” 50; Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded),” 180:

<sup>16</sup> Franz Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients from Ibn Durayd’s ‘Kitāb Al-Muġtanā,’” *Orientalia* 27.1 (1958): 29–54, esp. 31–54; *Ibid.*, “Sayings of the Ancients from Ibn Durayd’s ‘Kitāb Al-Muġtanā’ (Concluded),” *Orientalia* 27.2 (1958): 150–83, esp. 159–83. If not otherwise indicated the English translations are mine.

<sup>17</sup> Rosenthal has translated this sentence as follows: “...With regard to marriage, people are like fish and the baskets used for fishing...” See Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients,” 50. This does not make any sense. In my view, بالقفاف should not, in parallel with بالسمك, follow يشبهون (thus “like fish and the baskets”) but should follow directly يصاد. This reading can be supported by other Arabic versions like ‘Askarī, *Dīwān al-ma‘ānī*: إن المتزوجين يصاد بالقفاف الذي يصاد بالسمك الذي يصاد بالقفاف, and the Greek versions (both CP and AM): ὥσπερ οἱ ἰχθύες ... οἱ περὶ τοὺς κύρτους.

ὁ αὐτός, πρὸς τοὺς αὐτὸν συμβουλευομένους περὶ τοῦ γῆμαι, ἔφη, “ὥσπερ οἱ ἰχθύες, ὧ νεανίσκοι, οἱ περὶ τοὺς κύρτους· οἱ μὲν ἔξωθεν ὄντες βούλονται εἰσελθεῖν, οἱ δὲ ἔνδον ὄντες βούλονται ἐξελθεῖν· οὕτως δὲ ὑμεῖς ὁρᾶτε μὴ τὸ αὐτὸ πάθητε.”<sup>18</sup>

To those who consulted him about marrying, the same man<sup>19</sup> said: “Young men, just like the fish around the baskets/nets, those outside want to get in, but those inside want to get out. So see to it that the same thing doesn’t happen to you.”

In these versions preserved in the Graeco-Arabic tradition, marriage is compared to fishing-baskets/nets, and young people eager to be married bear comparison with fish which are eager to get inside the fishing net, but once they get inside, are eager to get out. This indicates that the French fishing net metaphor as quoted in Quitard’s *Proverbs sur les femmes* is much earlier than other versions, and only later on developed into metaphors like a special country or the besieged fortress.<sup>20</sup> As was already shown by Rosenthal, it is from an Arabic translation of a Greek florilegium that all these Arabic versions originate, among which Ibn Durayd’s work is the oldest.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it is no wonder that Ibn Durayd’s version of our saying is closer to the extant Greek version than the other Arabic versions. If we do not posit the existence of another (lost) Greek version, both al-Mubaššir and Ibn Hindū might have modified the text.<sup>22</sup> Ibn Hindū might have rephrased the Greek version and rearranged the order of the sentences by placing the last sentence in Greek at the very beginning of Socrates’ word.<sup>23</sup> The reformulated version can be detected again in al-Mubaššir, although we are not sure whether it was used directly or not. This, however, does not exclude the possibility that Ibn Hindū and al-Mubaššir can be more accurate with regard to some of the details, for example, the young age of the questioner.

Greek and Syro-Arabic gnomologies containing similar sayings are not confined to these four texts. In his work *Socrates Arabus*, Alon collects the sayings and anecdotes attributed to Socrates in medieval Arabic literature. Among them we find two similar Arabic sayings in al-‘Askarī (d. 1010) and aš-Šahrazūrī (d. between 1288–1304). There is also a later Syriac version preserved in Barhebraeus (d. 1286).<sup>24</sup>

Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, *Dīwān al-ma‘ānī* (II 92,18–20); Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Muḥammad Maḥmūd at-Tarkazī aš-Šinqīṭī et al. (eds.); Alon, *Socrates Arabus*, 122–3:

<sup>18</sup> Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), *Antonius Melissa*, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 136 (Paris: Classiques Garnier Numérique, 1865). See also Socr. I C 391 Giannantoni, *ANTON. II*, xxxiv 49.

<sup>19</sup> On ὁ αὐτός in gnomologia, see Gotthard Strohmaier, “Ethical Sentences and Anecdotes of Greek Philosophers in Arabic Tradition,” in *Actes du Ve Congrès international d’arabisants et d’islamists* (Bruxelles: Centre pour l’Étude des problèmes du monde musulman contemporain, 1971), 463–71.

<sup>20</sup> Since when and how the saying was passed on into Western Europe is a thorny question that remains to be answered; nor are we clear when and how the fishing net metaphor develops into the more popular besieged fortress version in the later tradition. However, there is still good reason to believe that a role was played by the transmission of Al-Mubaššir’s legendary *Muḥtār al-ḥikam*, which was translated into five European languages from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, and is preserved in at least one hundred and twenty manuscripts (seventy in middle French alone). Due to the scope of the *Muḥtār al-ḥikam* transmission, the specific context of its translations remains to be investigated, see David Joseph Wrisley, “Modeling the Transmission of al-Mubashshir Ibn Fātik’s *Muḥtār al-Ḥikam* in Medieval Europe: Some Initial Data-Driven Explorations,” *Journal of Religion, Media & Digital Culture* 5.1 (2016): 228–57.

<sup>21</sup> Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded).”

<sup>22</sup> See also Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded),” 155: “It should be noted, however, that Ibn Durayd’s text of no. LXI corresponds to the Greek, while both Ibn Hindū and Mub. have modifications of the text along similar lines.”

<sup>23</sup> As he has always done with other sayings, see Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded),” 153: “Ibn Hindū, it seems, permitted himself a good deal of freedom as far as the phrasing of the individual sayings is concerned.”

<sup>24</sup> Ilai Alon, *Socrates Arabus: Life and Teachings* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1995), 122–3.

ومن التشبيه المصيب قول سقراط لرجل استشاره في التزويج: إن المتزوجين مثل السمك الذي يصاد بالقفاف، فما حصل فيها يروم الخروج منها وما كان خارجا يبغي الدخول فيها.

And an appropriate allegory is a saying of Socrates for a man who asked him about marrying, that the married people are like fish which are caught in the fish-baskets; when they are inside they want to get out, and when they are outside, they want to get in.

Šams ad-Dīn aš-Šahrazūrī, *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ* (130,11–3); ‘Abd al-Karīm Abū Šuwayrib (ed.): واستشاره رجل في التزويج، فقال له احذر ان تكون كالسمك، فالداخل في الشبكة يطلب الخروج والخارج يطلب الدخول. And a man asked him for advice about marrying, and he said to him: “Be careful not to be like the fish: those inside the net want to get out, and those outside want to get in.”

Gregorius Barhebraeus, *Ktābhā d-tunnāyē mġaḥḥkānē*, Chapter 1 (*Mellē mautrānyātā d-pīlōsōpē yaunāyē*) (Socrates, no. 41); Budge (ed.), *The Laughable Stories*, Syriac (12,22–3; 13,1–2), English (13,14–9):

وهذا هو 25  
 له من حبر حتى يتزوج. والداخل في الشبكة يطلب الخروج والخارج يطلب الدخول.

A certain friend of Socrates took counsel with him concerning the marrying of a wife, and he replied, “Take heed that there happen not unto thee that which befel the fish in the matter of the net; those which were inside longed to go out, and those which were outside were eager to go in.” (E.A. Wallis Budge’s translation, modified)<sup>26</sup>

Despite the fact that al-‘Askarī’s work is closer in time to the work of Ibn Hindū and al-Mubaššir, his version of our saying corresponds well to Ibn Durayd, and thus also to the Greek. The last sentence in the latter two is, however, omitted in al-‘Askarī. On the other hand, aš-Šahrazūrī, a later author relying “heavily on his predecessors,”<sup>27</sup> provides us with a version very close to the one in al-Mubaššir. The Syriac version of Barhebraeus from the period of Syriac Renaissance, also the latest one among these versions, seems to be closer to the Ibn Hindū version.

There are two more hitherto unnoticed versions worthy of mention. We find another Arabic version of our saying in al-Ābī’s (d. ca. 1030) *Naṭr ad-durr*, on which Barhebraeus’ compilation has been proved to be based.<sup>28</sup> Thus it is no wonder that this version is also very close to Ibn Hindū’s:

Abū Sa‘d Maṣṣūr b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ābī, *Naṭr ad-durr* (VII 20,17–9); ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Baġāwī et al. (eds.):

سقراط: استشاره فتى في التزوج فقال له احذر من أن يعرض لك ما يعرض للسمك في المصيدة، فإن الخارج عنها يطلب الدخول فيها والداخل فيها يطلب الخروج منها.

<sup>25</sup> Variant: ⲛⲉⲧⲏⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓ Diogenes.

<sup>26</sup> See E. A. Wallis Budge (ed.), *The Laughable Stories Collected by Mār Gregory John Bar-Hebraeus: The Syriac Text Edited with an English Translation* (London: Luzac and Co., 1897). For Arabic translations of Barhebraeus’ *The Laughable Stories*, see Ulrich Marzolph, “Die Quelle der ergötzlichen Erzählungen des Bar Hebräus,” *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985): 81–125, esp. 100–3.

<sup>27</sup> See Strohmaier, “Doxography,” in EI3.

<sup>28</sup> See Takahashi, “Barhebraeus”; in EI3; Marzolph, “Die Quelle.”

Socrates: A young man asked him for advice about marriage<sup>29</sup>, and he said to him: “Be careful that does not happen to you what happens to fish in a trap/net, for those outside wish to get in and those inside wish to get out.”

With respect to the Greek tradition, *Antonius Mellisa* [AM] has long since been regarded as the only Greek source from which all other Arabic versions originate. There is, in fact, another Greek version preserved in the *Corpus Parisinum* [CP], which is slightly different from the AM version. In the most recent critical edition of CP by Searby, the editor comments that this saying is “not much of an answer but, all in all, not a bad saying,” and reports that he has found no parallels elsewhere.<sup>30</sup>

CP 6, *Gnomologium Alphabeticum* (Socrates, no. 149); Searby (ed.), *The Corpus Parisinum*, Greek (I 379,1–4), English (II 803,22–4):

Ὁ αὐτὸς πρὸς τὸν συμβουλευόμενον ὑπὲρ τοῦ γαμεῖν ἔφη· ὥσπερ οἱ ἰχθύες, ᾧ νεανίσκε, οἱ περὶ τοὺς κύρτους οἱ μὲν<sup>31</sup> ἔξωθεν ὄντες βούλονται εἰσελθεῖν, οἱ δὲ ἔνδον ὄντες βούλονται ἐξελεθεῖν, οὕτως καὶ σὺ ὄρα μὴ τὸ αὐτὸ πάθῃς.

To a man who consulted him about marrying, the same man said, “Young man, just like the fish around the nets. The fish outside the nets want to get in, but the ones inside want to get out. So see to it that the same thing doesn’t happen to you.” (Searby’s translation, with modifications)<sup>32</sup>

This saying belongs to the Omicron part of CP 6 (145–54),<sup>33</sup> a collection of apophthegms alphabetically arranged according to the author’s name. Thus, as is indicated in the first apophthegm in this part, the supposed author is Oenopides. However, the fact that most of the sayings in this part have parallels in the Socratic tradition reveals that they used to be ascribed to Socrates. This is especially obvious in 151, another version of Socrates’ anecdote in Xenophon,<sup>34</sup> in which Socrates’ name is actually mentioned: “The same man was condemned by the Athenians to be hanged (thrown off a cliff). When his wife Xanthippe wept and said, ‘O Socrates, they are killing you unjustly,’ he said, ‘Would you rather they were killing me justly?’”

Overall, slight variations among different versions of our saying can be observed at least in the following five respects: 1. Most versions have only one questioner, with the exception of the Greek version in CP, in which there is a group of them. 2. The questioner(s) is/are described as young both in the Greek versions and in two Arabic versions: those of al-Mubaššir and Ibn Hindū, while the questioner’s age is not mentioned in other versions. The questioner in the Syriac version, however, is a certain friend (ܩܘܪܬܐܢܐ) of Socrates. 3. In

<sup>29</sup> Different from “marrying (التزويج)” in all other Arabic versions, al-Ābī employed “marriage (التزوج).”

<sup>30</sup> See Denis Michael Searby, *The Corpus Parisinum: A Critical Edition of the Greek Text, with Commentary and English Translation: A Medieval Anthology of Greek Texts from the Pre-Socratics to the Church Fathers, 600 B.C.-700 A.D.* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 803. See also Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded),” 156: “Of the Greek works, the one most often quoted is the Gnom. Vat., with twenty-nine references, while Diogenes Laertius is in second place with twenty-seven. However, these frequency figures as such do not mean very much. It is worth noting that other works occasionally furnish the only known parallels, such as Ant. Mel. for no. LXI...”

<sup>31</sup> οἱ μὲν om. D.

<sup>32</sup> Searby omitted οἱ περὶ τοὺς κύρτους in his translation.

<sup>33</sup> Searby, *The Corpus Parisinum*, II, 803–5.

<sup>34</sup> Xenophon, *Ap.* 28.

most versions the author's name is not directly mentioned, but indicated by 'the same man,' while Socrates is explicitly named in Ibn Hindū, al-'Askarī, and in the Syriac version of Barhebraeus. Remarkable is also the conflation of Socrates with Diogenes in the Syriac tradition, which is, as is well known, a common error in the transmission of Socrates in the Islamic world.<sup>35</sup> 4. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the instruments used for fishing are different: They are mostly nets, but sometimes fishing-baskets. The variants might originate from the Greek word κύρτος which can mean either a net (for fish) or a cage (for birds).<sup>36</sup> According to Oppian's *Halieutica*, κύρτος refers to one of the four kinds of fishing instruments, the so-called weel, a long basket "with wide funnel-shaped mouth and narrow throat, so constructed that once the fish has entered, it cannot get out again."<sup>37</sup> 5. Contrary to the "outside-inside" order in most versions, the order contained in the Syriac version is the reverse.

Despite slight variations, the basic text is more or less the same, as was often the case with gnomologies. As to the form, it chiefly has the following three characteristics: 1. the typical "Socrates answered" structure: "when told or asked something, Socrates answered so-and-so;"<sup>38</sup> 2. the employment of the so-called *homoeoma* (ὁμοίωμα, likeness); 3. the binary structure contained in Socrates' answer: inside-outside.<sup>39</sup> It appears that the marriage saying indeed has a Greek origin, and can be traced back at least to the *Corpus Parisinum*, a Greek gnomology probably compiled in the 9th century. In nearly all versions it has been attributed to Socrates, the Greek philosopher who did not write anything during his lifetime, but posthumously became the main character in the *Sokratikoi Logoi* and one of the largest contributors of sayings to the Greek and Arabic gnomologies.

### 3 Socrates on Marriage: From the Classical to the Medieval

Due to the fictional character of *Sokratikoi Logoi*, it is now *communis opinio* that we know very little of the historical Socrates, both his life and thought; but we do know that hostility to marriage is seldom attributed to him in the Socratic writings from the classical to the Hellenistic period, although it is also true that others often jeer at his marriage in these works.<sup>40</sup> The Platonic Socrates emphasizes his obligations as the head of his family,<sup>41</sup> while the Xenophontic Socrates defends his wife and marriage against doubts expressed both by his friends and by his own son.<sup>42</sup> The Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus includes Socrates in the list of philosophers whose lives show that marriage need not hinder one's study of philosophy,<sup>43</sup> while other Stoic philosophers like Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Oliver Overwien, *Die Sprüche des Kynikers Diogenes in der griechischen und arabischen Überlieferung* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> See Searby, *The Corpus Parisinum*, II, 803: ... "the lobsters (fish) outside the cage," for κύρτος see Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), s.v.: 1. trap, used by a fisherman, fig. net; 2. cage, for birds.

<sup>37</sup> See Alexander W. Mair (trans.), *Oppian Colluthus Tryphiodorus* (London: William Heinemann, 1928), 353, note a.

<sup>38</sup> Searby, *The Corpus Parisinum*, I, 3. See also Alexander Demandt, *Sokrates antwortet* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1998); Francisco Rodríguez Adrados, *Greek Wisdom Literature and the Middle Ages: The Lost Greek Models and Their Arabic and Castilian Translations* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 232.

<sup>39</sup> Searby, *The Corpus Parisinum*, I, 7.

<sup>40</sup> See Kenneth Lapatin, "Picturing Socrates," in *A Companion to Socrates*, ed. by S. Ahbel-Rappe and R. Kamtekar (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 137–39.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, *Crt.* 53e–54a.

<sup>42</sup> Xenophon *Smp.* 2.10, *Mem.* 2.2.

<sup>43</sup> Musonius Rufus, Lecture 14: "When someone said that marriage and life with a wife seemed to him to get in the way of



consistently recognize Socrates as the perfect man who keeps a good balance between philosophical issues and other obligations, in both public and private life,<sup>44</sup> and see a clear difference between him and the homeless Cynics, the only philosophical school in Greek antiquity which is totally against marriage.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, we know there are also Cynic aspects of Socrates' character: he does not care about worldly goods, he is content with his simple and virtuous life, and, if necessary, he can choose to neglect his family for the sake of justice. These aspects made him the forerunner of the Cynics, and they sometimes receive much greater emphasis in a later tradition.<sup>46</sup> For example, in Valerius Maximus *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, we find a negative comment on marriage attributed to Socrates, which shares some similarities with our saying:

... Idem, ab adolescentulo quodam consultus utrum uxorem duceret an se omni matrimonio abstineret, respondit utrum eorum fecisset, acturum paenitentiam. "hinc te" inquit "solitudo, hinc orbitas, hinc generis interitus, hinc heres alienus excipiet, illinc perpetua sollicitudo, contextus querellarum, dotis exprobratio, adfinium grave supercilium, garrula socrus lingua, subsessor alieni matrimonii, incertus liberorum eventus." non passus est iuvenem in contextu rerum asperarum quasi laetae materiae facere dilectum. (Giannantoni I C 178=Valer. Max. VII 2 ext. 1)

... Socrates also, when consulted by a young fellow whether to take a wife or keep away from matrimony altogether, replied that whichever he did he would be sorry. "On the one hand," he said, "you will fall prey to loneliness and childlessness and the extinction of your line and an alien heir, on the other to perpetual anxiety, a tissue of complaints, harping on the dowry, the haughty frown of in-laws, the clacking tongue of your wife's mother, the stalker of other men's spouses, the doubtful outcome of children." He did not allow the young man in a context of disagreeables to think that he was making a choice of happiness. (D.R. Shackleton Bailey's translation)

A much shorter version can be detected in Diogenes Laertius 2. 33: "ἔρωτηθεις πότερον γῆμαι ἢ μή, ἔφη, 'ὁ ἂν αὐτῶν ποιήσης, μεταγνώσῃ.'" "Someone asked him (Socrates) whether he should marry or not, and received the reply, 'Whichever you do you will repent it.'" (R.D. Hicks's translation) Notable is also another short version in Stobaeus's florilegium, which is again different from D.L.: "Σωκράτης ἐρωτηθεις τίνες μεταμέλονται τῶν ἀνθρώπων, εἶπεν 'οἱ γήμαντες.'" "Someone asked Socrates which group of people has regrets, and he said: 'those who get married.'" (Giannantoni I C 293=Stob. IV 22b, 59)

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studying philosophy, Musonius said that marriage did not hinder Pythagoras or Socrates or Crates, each of whom lived with a wife, and no one could name other philosophers who were better than these..." See William B. Irvine (ed.), *Musonius Rufus: Lectures & Sayings*, transl. by Cynthia King (CreateSpace, 2011), 59.

<sup>44</sup> As Döring rightly observes: "Epiktet betrachtete die zeitgenössischen Kyniker mit Abscheu. Sokrates war demgegenüber ein Mann gewesen, der wie jeder andere Frau und Kinder gehabt, sich als Staatsbürger betätigt, an Feldzügen teilgenommen, kurz, der wie wohl kein anderer der großen philosophischen Ahnherren ein normales Leben geführt und trotzdem seine sittliche Integrität stets unangefochten bewahrt hatte und der schließlich lieber in den Tod gegangen war, als daß er sich selbst untreu geworden wäre." Klaus Döring, *Exemplum Sokratis: Studien zur Sokratesnachwirkung in der kynisch-stoischen Popularphilosophie der frühen Kaiserzeit und im Frühen Christentum* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1979), 45–6. See also Abraham S. Halkin, "Classical and Arabic Material in Ibn 'Aḳnīn's 'Hygiene of the Soul,'" *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 14 (1944): 43.

<sup>45</sup> Konrad Gaiser, *Für und Wider die Ehe* (München: Heimeran, 1974), 93.

<sup>46</sup> See Halkin, "Classical and Arabic Material," 44–5; Overwien, *Die Sprüche des Kynikers Diogenes*, 404.

There are many similarities, both in form and content, between these three versions and our saying. In form they share the ‘when told or asked something, so-and-so answered this’ structure and the binary structure contained in the answer, and in content they share the emphasis on the tough and thorny problems which confront those who choose marriage and thus regret it. Also remarkable is the fact that, while in the other two versions those who get married and those who do not both repent, the Stobaeus version agrees with our saying and omits the latter group. Overall, the resemblances shared by these versions and our saying reveal the possibility that negative thoughts on marriage were already put into Socrates’ mouth in a much earlier tradition of florilegium starting from the very beginning of this era. It is also interesting to ask whether the source used by Valerius Maximus was Greek or not.

There are also differences worthy of note. Setting aside the length of Socrates’ answer, which is either too long (Valerius Maximus) or too short (D.L. and Stobaeus) in comparison with our saying, a more significant difference lies in the fact that the metaphor involved in our saying, whether fishing-baskets/nets, bird cage or besieged fortress, does not appear in any of them. Accordingly, Socrates’ attitude towards marriage does not seem as pessimistic as in our saying – we all know what fishing-nets and bird cages mean for fish and birds. Neither did he regard marriage as a trap, nor did he advise people not to get married; instead, here simply two choices are compared, each of which has its own shortcomings.

A whole group of sayings containing a similar metaphor, however, can be found in Alon’s collection of *Socrates Arabus*. In these sayings women are compared to different things which appear pleasant but are in reality bad, like “the poisonous oleander tree,” “the thorny palm tree,” or “the trap/net.” As related to the ‘trap’ metaphor, women are also compared to “the prison” or “the hunter.” Our saying on marriage is included in this group and it is no. 285 in Alon:

274. He was asked: “What do you have to say about women?” He said: “Women are like the oleander tree: It looks glorious and splendid, but when an inexperienced person tastes it, it kills him.”

275. Socrates was asked: “How can you allow yourself to condemn women when, were it not for them, neither you nor [other] sages like yourself would have come into being?” He answered: “Women are like the thorny palm tree. It wounds [one] if its thorns penetrate the human body, but [at the same time] it produces ripe dates.”

276. He said to a disciple of his: “My son, if [you] cannot avoid women, then deal with them as if you had to eat dead [animal’s] flesh, which you should only do when in great need, and only as much as to sustain life. For if one takes [from that meat] more than one needs, it will sicken him and kill him. Women are likewise: He who only associates with them when in need will escape unharmed. He, on the other hand, who befriends them while in no such need will regret it and will be subject to hateful [consequences].”

281. He said: “The shrewd person is he whom women cannot hunt down, for if he is caught, his wings will be clipped never to grow again.”

282. Socrates saw a hunter standing by a beautiful woman. He said to him: “May your trade be of use to you, for this is a female hunter! Take care not to be caught [by her]!”

283. “Women are a trap into which only he falls who is deceived by it.”

284. “Beware of the trap laid on the ground for men by women. It nullifies one’s wisdom, degrades one’s status, engenders revenge and leads to low mindedness.”

285. A young man asked Socrates’ advice about marriage and he said to him: “Take care not to be like the fish, which when it is outside the net wants to get in, but once it is inside, wants to get out.”

288. “A woman’s prisoner is never set free.”<sup>47</sup>

Alon’s collection is not an exhaustive list of the misogynistic sayings of the Arabic Socrates. Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s *Hygiene of the Soul* (*Tibb an-nufūs*), for example, also contains a series of Socrates’ misogynistic sayings in which women are compared to dangerous things like “fatal poison” (246), “scorpion” (248), “the wiles of Satan, the upright ladder leading to Satan” (249), “high seas” (256).<sup>48</sup> In saying no. 262 a pretty woman is once again compared to a “net”: “Socrates saw a disciple of his looking at a pretty woman and said: ‘My son, beware lest she catch you in her net and you perish.’ He replied: ‘O Philosopher, I am only admiring the handiwork of God in her.’ Socrates answered: ‘My son, turn her inside out in your imagination, and her ugly form will become apparent to you.’”

It is interesting to ask since when and how such a motif developed in the Socratic literature. One possibility which cannot be ignored is that it could stem from the Cynic tradition and might have been attributed later to Socrates, as is normally the case in the *Socrates Arabus*. It is well known that the Arabs were unable to distinguish between Socrates and the Cynic philosopher Diogenes – the Socrates gone mad – and that is why Socrates has been called Socrates of the jar (*Suqrātu l-hubb*) in the Arabic world, and why a series of Cynic doctrines, including hostility to women and marriage, has been put into Socrates’ mouth in the Arabic wisdom literature. Moreover, this possibility is well supported by evidence from Diogenes Laertius VI 61, where we indeed find Diogenes comparing a beautiful woman to “a deadly honeyed potion”: “Seeing an Olympian victor casting repeated glances at a courtesan, ‘See,’ he said, ‘yonder ram frenzied for battle, how he is held fast by the neck fascinated by a common minx.’ Handsome courtesans he would compare to a deadly honeyed potion.” We also find in D.L. his advice on marriage: “When asked what is the right time to marry, he replied, For those who are young, not yet, for those who are older, never at all (D.L. VI 54).”<sup>49</sup> Other misogynistic sayings of Diogenes can also be found in Alon’s collection, for example, the famous Herculaneum inscription on Diogenes and woman – Diogenes, the Cynic philosopher, once saw a woman carried away by a torrent and said: “Let

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<sup>47</sup> Alon, *Socrates Arabus*, 61.

<sup>48</sup> See Halkin, “Classical and Arabic Material,” 131–3.

246. He said: Women are a fatal poison. He who leaves it is not hurt; he who takes it is killed.

248. He said: A woman possesses a more violent heat than fire and a more poisonous sting than a scorpion. She satisfies her passion and then does not mind if she slays [the man].

249. He said: Whoever wishes to escape the wiles of Satan should under no circumstances submit to a woman. For women are an upright ladder, and Satan has no power over one except when one is climbing it.

256. He said: A woman’s husband is like a voyager on the high seas. If he arrives safely, he is congratulated upon his escape, but if he perishes, he has only himself to blame.

258. He said: Whoever wishes to reduce himself to nought before his decease should make a woman master over him, for he will be dead while alive.

259. He said: Whoever wishes to lead an easy life and to pass his time without hardships should not become involved in a passion for women.

<sup>49</sup> A similar saying has been attributed to Thales, see e.g. D.L. I 26. For Gaiser’s comment see Gaiser, *Für und wider die Ehe*, 61, note 9.

the evil be carried away by an(other) evil” – turns up with its different versions in various Arabic gnomologies where Socrates is discussed.<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, in comparison with the Cynic tradition, what is impressive in the *Socrates Arabus* is the greater number of sayings against women and the employment of diverse metaphors. Some of the metaphors, for example, the ‘trap/net’ metaphor, can seldom be found in any hitherto known Cynic tradition, either in Greek or in Arabic; it can be found, however, in the sapiential literature of the Bible, first and foremost, the books of *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*: “Right away he follows her, and goes like an ox to the slaughter, or bounds like a stag toward the trap until an arrow pierces its entrails. He is like a bird rushing into a snare, not knowing that it will cost him his life” (*Prov.* 7: 22–23); “I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her” (*Eccles.* 7: 26).<sup>51</sup> Is it possible that the ‘woman-trap/net metaphor’ attributed to Socrates in the Arabic tradition was borrowed from the Judaic-Christian tradition?<sup>52</sup>

#### 4 Syriac Gnomologia Between Greek and Arabic

Earlier researches already remind us of the fact that the Arabic Socrates not only takes an extremely pessimistic attitude towards worldly things like marriage, but also feels quite pessimistic about this world itself. In one of the sentences attributed to Socrates, for example, our world is compared to a mirage, which leads the traveler astray in the desert. Such a pessimistic attitude, as Strohmaier argues, cannot be traced back to a Greek text, “but a Syriac one”: “We know that a radical asceticism together with a sometimes more friendly attitude towards the Greek heritage was characteristic of Syrian Christianity. Among the few remnants of secular Syriac literature there are also some gnomologia. We may assume therefore that Syriac gnomologia sometimes served as intermediate stages for the Arabic, after they had been amalgamated with some newly coined sayings of the Christian ascetics.”<sup>53</sup> It thus has been suggested that some of the sayings attributed to Socrates should be traced back to Syriac Christianity, a branch of early Christianity springing up in the eastern empire, which on the one hand shares “common religious and cultural heritage” with Judaism,<sup>54</sup> while on the other, as the opposite extreme from the Latin west, it is famous for

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<sup>50</sup> See Alon, *Socrates Arabus*, 60–1. See also Strohmaier, “Ethical Sentences and Anecdotes,” 465–6. Such transformation started already in a much earlier tradition, see Overwien, *Die Sprüche des Kynikers Diogenes*, 407–8; Dimitri Gutas, “Sayings by Diogenes Preserved in Arabic,” in *Le Cynisme ancien et ses prolongements: Actes du colloque international du CNRS*, ed. by Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé and Richard Goulet (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), 475–518.

<sup>51</sup> As to the latter, a very similar saying can also be found in *Socrates Arabus*: “It was said to Socrates: ‘So and so, your enemy, has died.’ He said: ‘I wish you had told me that he had got married, for marriage would have been worse for him than death.’” See Alon, *Socrates Arabus*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> See also *Proverbs* 22: 14: “The mouth of a loose woman is a deep pit; he with whom the Lord is angry falls into it”; 23: 26–28: “My child, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways. For a prostitute is a deep pit; an adulteress is a narrow well. She lies in wait like a robber and increases the number of the faithless.” For Jewish attitudes toward women in wisdom literature, see Leonard Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1976).

<sup>53</sup> See Strohmaier, “Ethical Sentences and Anecdotes,” 466–7. A similar view held by Strohmaier appears in another article “Die Arabische Sokrateslegende und ihre Ursprünge,” in which the role of a special branch of Syriac Christianity – that of the Church of the East – is emphasized: “Die Neigung, sich die griechischen Weisen als große Asketen vorzustellen, ist jedoch schon in der nestorianischen Christenheit nachzuweisen, wo sich eine streng asketische Stimmung mit einer sehr aufgeschlossenen Haltung gegenüber dem griechischen Erbe verbunden hatte.” See Gotthard Strohmaier, “Die arabische Sokrateslegende und ihre Ursprünge,” in *Studia Coptica*, ed. by Peter Nagel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1974), 131.

<sup>54</sup> See Lucas Van Rompay, “Judaism, Syriac Contacts With,” in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed.

its strict asceticism.<sup>55</sup> Strohmaier's view was also accepted and followed by Rodríguez Adrados, who has convincingly shown in his monograph *Greek Wisdom Literature and the Middle Ages* that Greek gnomologies gradually found acceptance and developed more deeply in Syria after originating in Constantinople.<sup>56</sup> By collecting and reediting sayings of the Greek Church fathers from both Christian and pagan sources, the Syrian Christians compiled Greek gnomologies as instructional works suitable for a Christian readership, and developed the literature of the so-called Christianized Socratic-Cynic philosophy.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, it is revealing that both Greek versions of our saying are from compilations of Christian and classical sayings, the so-called sacred-profane florilegia which flourished in the Byzantine age.<sup>58</sup> The largest part of CP (CP 1) is a collection of Christian quotations and sayings,<sup>59</sup> while AM is partly based on *Sacra Parallela*, a major Christian thematic anthology. Christian sayings including negative sayings about women and marriage can also be found in other florilegia like GV (*Gnomologium Vaticanum*) and WA (*Die Wiener Apophthegmen-Sammlung*).<sup>60</sup> Some of them remain anonymous, while in a later development, others are attributed to pagan philosophers like Socrates, Protagoras, Democritus or Secundus.<sup>61</sup> This explains why some sentences attributed to Socrates in the Arabic collections appear not to have a Greek origin at all: "They tended to prefer those sayings and philosophers who could be either Christianized or presented as models of ascetic and pious conduct."<sup>62</sup>

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by Sebastian P. Brock et al. (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011), 232–6.

<sup>55</sup> For Syriac influence on the Greek gnomology, see Sebastian Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning," in *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 28 and 34, note 132; Nicole Zeegers-Vander Vorst, "Une gnomologie d'auteurs grecs en traduction syriaque," in *Symposium Syriacum 1976*, ed. by François Graffin and Antoine Guillaumont (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1978), 163–77. See also Halkin, "Classical and Arabic Material," 47; Overwien, *Die Sprüche des Kynikers Diogenes*, 407; Yury Arzhanov, "Das Florilegium in der Hs. Vat. Sir. 135 und seine griechisch-arabischen Parallelen," in *Geschichte, Theologie und Kultur des syrischen Christentums. Beiträge zum 7. Deutschen Syrologie-Symposium in Göttingen* (=GOF.S 46), ed. by Martin Tamcke and Sven Grebenstein (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 35–48; Alberto Rigolio, "Syriac Translations of Plutarch, Lucian and Themistius: A Gnostic Format for an Instructional Purpose?" in *Education and Religion in Late Antique Christianity. Reflections, Social Contexts and Genres*, ed. by Peter Gemeinhardt, Lieve Van Hoof, and Peter Van Nuffelen (London: Routledge, 2016), 73–85. As Peter Brown pointed out, exactly in respect to marriage, sexuality and relations between men and women, early Christianity distinguishes itself from the Christianity of all subsequent centuries, including medieval Catholicism and the Christianity of modern times, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 8.

<sup>56</sup> See Rodríguez Adrados, *Greek Wisdom Literature and the Middle Ages*, 227: "...this literature, which without doubt originates in Constantinople, was developed especially in Syria, where the Greek original of *Bocados* and those of the other works were collected and studied by the Arabs, in the original Greek versions or in Syriac translations." See also 216, 221.

<sup>57</sup> Dimitri Gutas, "Pre-Plotinian Philosophy in Arabic (Other than Platonism and Aristotelianism): A Review of the Sources," in *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 4949. On the popularity of florilegia in late antiquity, see also Averil Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity* (Washington: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2014), 33: "During the period from the fifth century onwards we see a steadily increasing reliance in theological debates on proof texts, florilegia from the Fathers or from Scripture, specially compiled, and indeed eventually often manipulated or even faked." For the Syriac gnomologies in the seventh century see e.g. Yury Arzhanov, "The Arabic Version of the Syriac Gnomologies 'On the Soul' by Mubaššir b. Fātik," *Christianskij vostok* N. S. 6 (2013), 312–22.

<sup>58</sup> See Rodríguez Adrados, *Greek Wisdom Literature and the Middle Ages*, 93ff.

<sup>59</sup> See Searby, *The Corpus Parisinum*, I, 10. "Prefer to live with a lion or a dragon than to live with a bad woman" (CP 1, 293 [294]); "It would be the ultimate outrage to be ruled by a woman" (CP 3, 203 [788]); Pythagoras said: "It is the same to fall into a fire as to fall in with a woman" (CP 5, 94 [1457]); "A woman flatters only for the sake of hurting you" (CP 7, 50 [1755]); "The savagery of a lioness and that of a wife are on the same level" (*Monostichs of Menander* 128 [1833]); "A wife is an ever present pain" (*Monostichs of Menander* 156 [1861]); "Live with a lion rather than a woman for wife" (*Monostichs of Menander* 167 [1872]).

<sup>60</sup> Curt Wachsmuth (ed.), "Die Wiener Apophthegmen-Sammlung," in *Festschrift Zur Begrüssung Der XXXVI. Philologen-Versammlung* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1882), 3–36; Leo Sternbach (ed.), *Gnomologium Vaticanum: E Codice Vaticano Graeco 743* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1963).

<sup>61</sup> Searby, *The Corpus Parisinum*, 57.

<sup>62</sup> Gutas, "Pre-Plotinian Philosophy in Arabic," 4949. See also Ute Pietruschka, "Tradierung und Umformung christlicher

Early Christian asceticism in Syria shares not a few similarities with the Cynics, insofar as criticism of women and marriage is also very well attested in the early Syriac tradition. A strict view on the subject of marriage is already apparent in *Acts of Thomas* in the second century AD, in which marriage is called “the deed of shame (ܟܘܢܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܒܐ)” or “this deed of corruption (ܟܘܢܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܒܐ).”<sup>63</sup> Much earlier than the aforementioned Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s saying no. 249 which compares women to “the wiles of Satan,” “an upright ladder to Satan,” the fourth century Syriac writer Aphrahat had already likened women to “a weapon of Satan (ܟܘܢܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܒܐ)” (*Demonstrations* 6.6).<sup>64</sup> The life of the ascetic described in Ephrem’s works, as Brock summarized, is “a remarkable one:” “the ascetic lives in the desert or in the mountains like a wild animal, totally untouched by any of the appurtenances of civilization, which is regarded as work of Satan. He lives out in the open, completely exposed to the elements and extremes of heat and cold; he eats roots and wild fruits, his clothing – that is, if he had any at all, and many had not – consisted of straw or leaves tied together; his hair was so shaggy, his nails so long that he resembled a bird of prey more than a human being.”<sup>65</sup> There is no wonder that the ascetics thus flee far from women and marriage, as Vööbus tells us in his groundbreaking *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*: “the ascetics do not accept any service of hospitality from women, regardless of whether they are virgins, single or married, Christian or heathen, the ascetics accept service only from men”; or “she (woman) was depicted as someone whose body is fire and whose appearance is something that pollutes the eye.”<sup>66</sup>

Due to the Greeks’ relatively mild attitude towards women and marriage, it is reasonable to suppose that the Syrian Christians could be dissatisfied with some of the Greek texts. As Siniosoglou argues in her *Plato and Theodoret*, the perfect Greek Socrates who keeps a good balance between his philosophical and profane life indeed puzzled Syrian Christians like Theodore, as there is an inconsistency between his behavior and his philosophy from a Christian point of view: “... mocking and having fun with Myrto and Xanthippe at one time, while meditating for hours on the nature of the Good at another.”<sup>67</sup> An example which Vööbus once mentioned in his *Asceticism* well demonstrates how the Syriac translators could be dissatisfied with the Greek text, and what kind of adjustments they could have made in order to meet the needs of the Syrian Christians. The word of God addressed to John the Apostle in *Acta Joannis* CXIII, originally in Greek: “John, if you had not been mine, I would

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und muslimischer Spruchmaterials in arabischen Gnomologien,” in *Orientalische Christen und Europa: Kulturbegegnung zwischen Interferenz, Partizipation und Antizipation*, ed. by Martin Tamcke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 23–32; *Ibid.*, “Apothegmata Patrum in muslimischem Gewand: Das Beispiel Mālik ibn Dīnār,” in *Begegnungen in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart: Beiträge dialogischer Existenz. Eine freundschaftliche Festgabe zum 60. Geburtstag von Martin Tamcke*, ed. by Claudia Rammelt, Cornelia Schlarb, and Egbert Schlarb (Berlin: LIT, 2015), 160–71; Yury Arzhanov, “Abba Platon und Abba Evagrius,” *Ibid.*, 75–82.

<sup>63</sup> William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: edited from Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum and Other Libraries* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1871), 183.

<sup>64</sup> Jean Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*, I (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894), 265.

<sup>65</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” *Numen* 20.1 (1973), 1–19: 11–2.

<sup>66</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *A History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1958), 82–3. Similar phenomena are, however, not confined to Syria, but also to be found in the desert fathers in Egypt. Among sayings of the fathers we detect some concerning marriage, in which taking a wife is synonymous with giving oneself a great deal of trouble: “Abba Olympius of the Cells was tempted to fornication. His thoughts said to him, ‘Go, and take a wife.’ He got up, found some mud, made a woman and said to himself, ‘Here is your wife, now you must work hard in order to feed her.’ See Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Oxford: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 160.

<sup>67</sup> Niketas Siniosoglou, *Plato and Theodoret: The Christian Appropriation of Platonic Philosophy and the Hellenic Intellectual Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 132, see also 133ff.

have let you take a wife (Ἰωάννη, εἰ μὴ ἦς ἐμός, εἴασα ἄν σε γῆμαι),” turns into in Syriac: “you are needful to me, John, and if not I would let you take a wife to mourn and weep (ܘܝܘܢܗܐ ܕܐܝܢܐ ܕܘܟܠܢܐ ܕܘܟܠܢܐ ܕܘܟܠܢܐ ܕܘܟܠܢܐ ܕܘܟܠܢܐ ܕܘܟܠܢܐ ܕܘܟܠܢܐ ܕܘܟܠܢܐ ܕܘܟܠܢܐ ܕܘܟܠܢܐ).”<sup>68</sup> Most recently Rigolio also offered a systematic presentation of the editing and abridgement strategy that the Syriac translators employed in their translation of Greek texts.<sup>69</sup> They not only systematically omitted mentions of pagan deities, but also often rephrased the form of the text according to the principles of gnomic composition, like expanding on the original texts, employing *inclusio* – repetitions of the same words or same moral recommendations both at the beginning and at the close of a gnomic sequence, or inserting an instructional addition. That the Syriac gnomologies came into being not through translation, but also through “starke Überarbeitung” of the Greek texts according to the needs of Christians has also been demonstrated by Arzhanov through various examples from the Syriac collection of philosophical sentences in *Vaticano Siriaco 135*. He further convincingly shows that the reedited Syriac sentences were then accepted and literally translated by the Arabs as genuine Greek wisdom literature.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, we have good reason to imagine that our saying might have undergone a similar reediting process: While keeping the traditional Greek elements like the ‘Socrates answered’ form, the binary structure contained in the answer, and the traditional theme ‘Socrates/Diogenes gave advice on marriage,’ the Syrian compiler might have taken the Judaic-Christian ‘trap/net’ metaphor into play and completely rephrased the whole saying.

## 5 Conclusion

However, as the Barhebraeus version is the only Syriac version we have, we are not sure if an earlier Syriac version of our saying really existed, nor are we certain about its original form, especially whether it was written in Greek or Syriac.<sup>71</sup> What we know for sure is the following: 1. Although preserved in at least six Arabic sources, the marriage saying does not, however, originate in the Arabic culture. 2. The fishing net metaphor, as the hitherto earliest version, is already found in the 9th-century Greek gnomicology *Corpus Parisinum*. 3. In all earlier versions the saying has been attributed to Socrates – not the classical Socrates as described in the *Sokratikoi Logoi*, but the so-called medieval Socrates, namely the Cynic, Christianized Socrates, who became the main exemplar of the Greek philosopher in the Byzantine and Arabic tradition. 4. As the literature of the so-called Christianized Socratic-Cynic philosophy once flourished especially in Syria, the role played by the Syriac ascetics in the transmission history is also not to be ignored. This might also explain the extremely negative attitude towards marriage indicated in the ‘trap/net’ metaphor in our saying.

As we have seen, the earliest fishing net metaphor preserved in the Graeco-Syro-Arabica tradition was gradually accepted by different nations and cultures, and developed different versions such as the bird cage, the besieged fortress, public feasts, or a particular country as

<sup>68</sup> Vööbus, *A History of Asceticism*, 77, footnote 63.

<sup>69</sup> Rigolio, “Syriac Translations of Plutarch, Lucian and Themistius.” For the principles of gnomic writing, see also Overwien, *Die Sprüche des Kynikers Diogenes*, 138.

<sup>70</sup> Arzhanov, “Das Florilegium in der Hs. Vat. Sir. 135 und seine griechisch-arabischen Parallelen.”

<sup>71</sup> Rodríguez Adrados, *Greek Wisdom Literature and the Middle Ages*, 236: “As I have said, we must look for this date and this origin in the 6th to 7th centuries and in the setting of a Syrian Christianity whose language was Greek, though it was reflected at other times in Syriac (and later in the translations into Arabic).”

Dufresny put it. Cited in genres like satire, play and philosophical essay, the modern versions of the saying, unlike the ancient versions, do not appear designed to convince readers to avoid marriage; but rather they have gradually lost the original ascetic sense and indicate instead a satirical sense of humour. It is from these modern versions in English and French that the metaphor of marriage finally came to be known by a Chinese writer and became a household word among the Chinese. The popular saying, however, does not prevent Chinese people from regarding Qian's marriage with Yang Jiang 楊絳, another renowned writer, as exemplary, nor is the besieged fortress metaphor confined to the description of marriage in China: As a well-known idiom, "Weicheng" (圍城, the besieged fortress) applies to many things in which similar conflicts exist, for example, a seemingly good career. After all, marriage is not the only *aporia* among worldly things.

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## Appendix

Language	Source	Text with Translation
Greek	<i>Corpus Parisinum</i> (9th century) 6, <i>Gnomologium Alphabeticum</i> (Socrates, no. 149); Searby (ed.), <i>The Corpus Parisinum</i> , Greek (I 379,1–4), English (II 803,22–4)	Ὁ αὐτὸς πρὸς τὸν συμβουλευόμενον ὑπὲρ τοῦ γαμεῖν ἔφη· ὥσπερ οἱ ἰχθύες, ᾧ νεανίσκε, οἱ περὶ τοὺς κύρτους οἱ μὲν ἔξωθεν ὄντες βούλονται εἰσελθεῖν, οἱ δὲ ἔνδον ὄντες βούλονται ἐξελθεῖν, οὕτως καὶ σὺ ὄρα μὴ τὸ αὐτὸ πάθῃς. To a man who consulted him about marrying, the same man said, "Young man, just like the fish around the nets. The fish outside the nets want to get in, but the ones inside want to get out. So see to it that the same thing doesn't happen to you."



Arabic	Ibn Durayd (d. 933), <i>Kitāb al-Muġtanā</i> (Socrates, no. 61); Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients,” 50; Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded),” 179	وأستشاره رجل في التزويج فقال إن أصحاب التزويج يشبهون بالسماك الذي يصاد بالقفاف فالذي يكون خارجا يريد الدخول فيها والذي قد حصل فيها يروم الخروج منها فأنظر لا يصيبك مثل هذا. And a man asked him for advice about marrying, he said: “People of marrying (The married people) are like fish which are caught in the fish-baskets. Those outside want to get in, and those already in (the baskets) want to get out. Be careful that you do not get into such a situation.”
Greek	<i>Antonius Melissa</i> (11th century) 1091 C (Socrates); Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients,” 50; Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded),” 180	ὁ αὐτός, πρὸς τοὺς αὐτὸν συμβουλευομένους περὶ τοῦ γῆμαι, ἔφη, “ὥσπερ οἱ ἰχθύες, ὧ νεανίσκοι, οἱ περὶ τοὺς κύρτους· οἱ μὲν ἔξωθεν ὄντες βούλονται εἰσελθεῖν, οἱ δὲ ἔνδον ὄντες βούλονται ἐξελεῖν· ξοῦτως δὲ ὑμεῖς ὀρᾶτε μὴ τὸ αὐτὸ πάθητε”. To those who consulted him about marrying, the same man said: “Young men, just like the fish around the baskets/nets, those outside want to get in, but those inside want to get out. So see to it that the same thing doesn’t happen to you.”
Arabic	Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī (d. 1010), <i>Dīwān al-ma‘ānī</i> (II 92,18–20); Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Muḥammad Maḥmūd at-Tarkazī aš-Šinqīṭī et al. (eds.); Alon, <i>Socrates Arabus</i> , 122–3	ومن التشبيه المصيب قول سقراط لرجل استشاره في التزويج: إن المتزوجين مثل السمك الذي يصاد بالقفاف، فما حصل فيها يروم الخروج منها وما كان خارجا يبغى الدخول فيها. And an appropriate allegory is a saying of Socrates for a man who asked him about marrying, that the married people are like fish which are caught in the fish-baskets; when they are inside they want to get out, and when they are outside, they want to get in.
Arabic	Ibn Hindū (d. 1019), <i>Al-Kalim ar-rūḥāniyya</i> 83 (Socrates); Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients,” 50; Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients (Concluded),” 180	وأستشاره فتى في التزويج فقال له سقراط احذر أن يعرض لك كما يعرض للسمك مع الشبكة فإن السمك الخارج منها يطلب الدخول فيها والداخل فيها يطلب الخروج منها. A young man asked him for advice about marrying. Socrates said to him: “Be careful that it does not happen to you that which happens to fish with the net, for those outside wish to get in and those inside wish to get out.”
Arabic	Abū Sa‘d Mansūr b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ābī (d. ca. 1030), <i>Naṭr ad-durr</i> (VII 20,17–9); ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Baġāwī et al. (eds.)	سقراط: أستشاره فتى في التزويج فقال له احذر من أن يعرض لك ما يعرض للسمك في المصيدة، فإن الخارج عنها يطلب الدخول فيها والداخل فيها يطلب الخروج منها. Socrates: A young man asked him for advice about marriage, and he said to him: “Be careful that does not happen to you what happens to fish in a trap/net, for those outside wish to get in and those inside wish to get out.”
Arabic	al-Mubaššir b. Fātik (d. 1097), <i>Muḥtār al-ḥikam wa-maḥāsīn al-kalim</i> 190 (Socrates); Rosenthal, “Sayings of the Ancients,”	وأستشاره فتى في التزويج فقال احذر أن تكون كالسمك فإن ما كان خارج الشبكة يطلب الدخول فيها، وما كان فيها يطلب الخروج عنها. A young man asked him for advice about marrying, and he said: “Be careful not to be like the fish, for when they are



Chinese	<p>錢鍾書 <i>Wei Cheng</i> 《圍城》 (<i>Fortress Besieged</i>, 1947), quoted respectively as an English and French saying in the novel; Qian later changed “French proverb” to “Arab proverb”</p>	<p>他引一句英國古話，說結婚仿佛金漆的鳥籠，籠子外面的鳥想住進去，籠內的鳥想飛出來.....</p> <p>法國也有這麼一句話。不過，不說是鳥籠，說是被圍困的城堡 <i>forteresse assiégée</i>，城外的人想冲进去，城里的人想逃出来。</p> <p>He quoted an old English saying that marriage is like a gilded bird cage. The birds outside want to get in, and the birds inside want to fly out... There’s a French saying similar to that. Instead of a bird cage, it’s a fortress under siege (<i>forteresse assiégée</i>). The people outside the city want to break in and the people inside the city want to escape.</p>
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