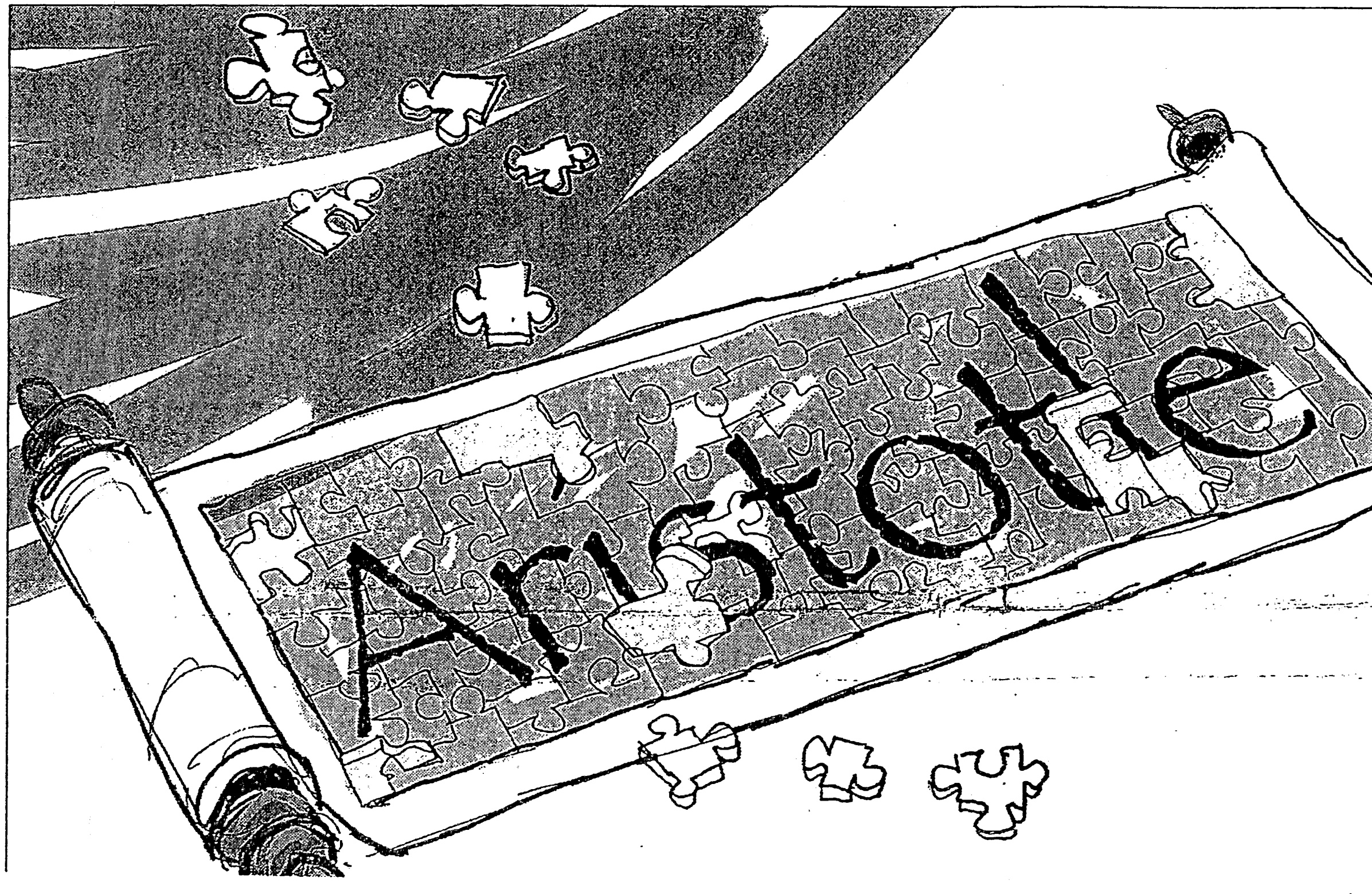


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Would an Aristotle by any other name seem as smart? As **JOHN ALLEMANG** reports, a Canada-U.S. scholarly team is bringing attention to an ancient Greek masterpiece long considered 'lost' — but actually just misidentified

Hiding in plain sight



An original work by an ancient Greek philosopher would be a priceless thing, if you could dig one up. And if that work was a seminal masterpiece on the very nature of philosophy by the fourth-century BC teacher Aristotle, surely few discoveries in the history of intellectual thought could rival such a find.

So when Douglas Hutchinson of the University of Toronto and Monte Ransome Johnson of St. Louis University say with complete confidence that they have identified a long-lost published work of Aristotle, it's not surprising that a fellow scholar can describe their discovery as "stunning."

The surviving texts from ancient Greece are woefully few, occupying only a few scant library shelves, and Aristotle is especially underrepresented — all we have from the pupil of Plato and the teacher of Alexander the Great are unpublished lecture notes intended for his inner circle, as brilliant and influential as they are.

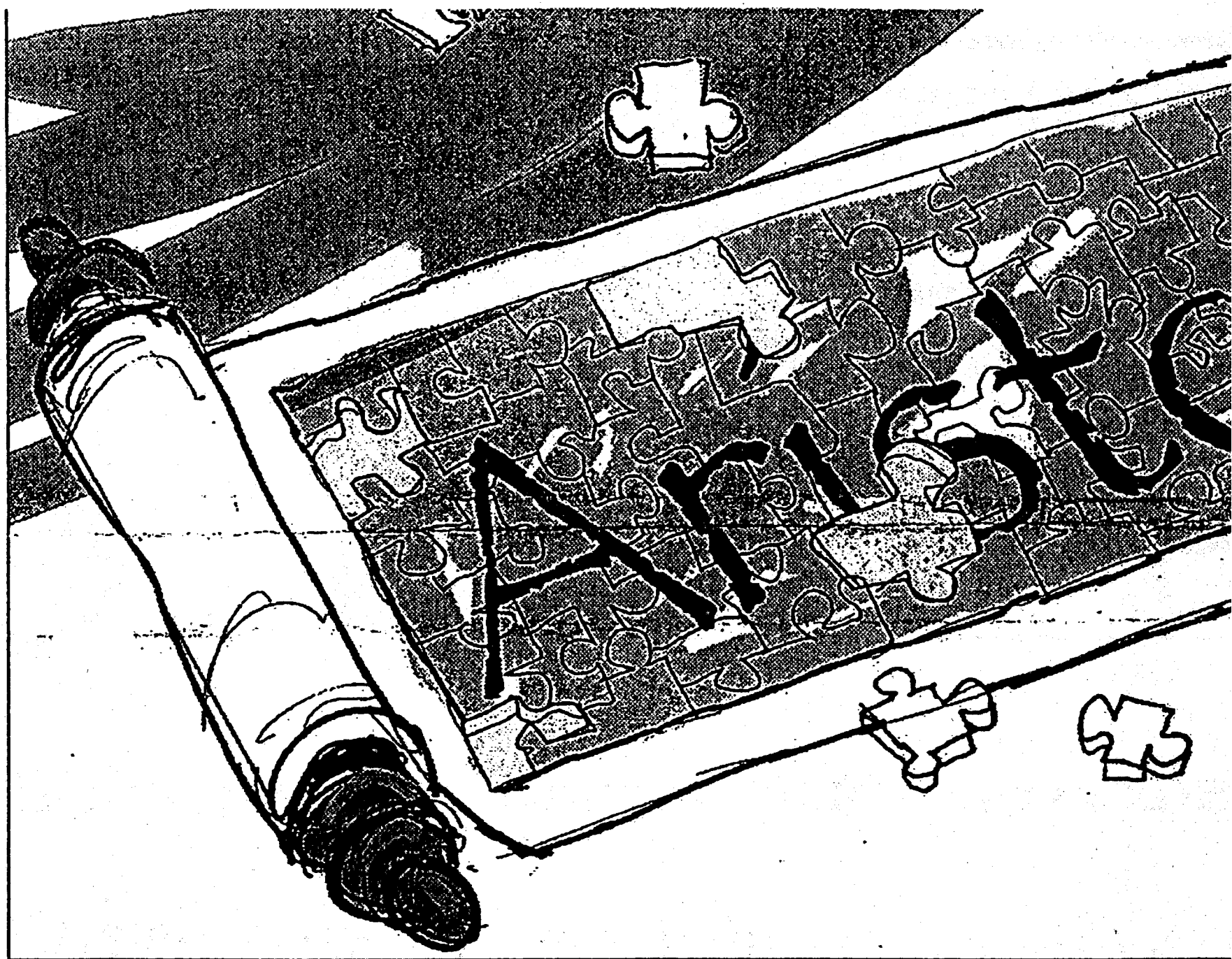
What Prof. Hutchinson and Prof. Johnson are unveiling to the world is a considerable part of Aristotle's long-lost *Protrepticus*, the great man's very own introduction to philosophy.

"This is a work with real power," Prof. Hutchinson says. "It's brilliant in content, written in beautifully polished Greek, and it's a masterpiece that people will go to."

The *Protrepticus* (the Greek title translates as "exhortation") can lay claim to being Aristotle's most famous and most popular work in antiquity — a contemporary of Aristotle's describes it being read out in a humble cobbler's shop. And thanks to these two scholars, the *Protrepticus* should now enjoy a long-overdue renaissance in the modern world.

"If it is in future accorded its proper recognition by Aristotelian scholars, as they have shown it deserves," says David Sedley of Christ's College, Cambridge, "it will make a real difference to our understanding of Aristotle's ethics, his philosophy of nature and his metaphysics."

Now here's where the discovery gets a little complicated, as any claim to recovering an ancient



Greek text must necessarily be: As much as those who thrill to the discoveries of ancient texts would like them to turn up out of the blue and fully formed, the real world of classical scholarship doesn't usually work that way.

Even seasoned academics have enough of the Indiana Jones spirit to hope the preserving sands of the Egyptian desert or the stratified muck of Vesuvius will suddenly reveal Aristotle's personal library or dozens of Sophocles's missing dramas. But meanwhile, Aristotle's *Protrepticus* has been staring them right in the face, if only they had known where — and how — to look.

"It's been covered in a shroud of uncertainty," Prof. Johnson says. "This was the most inaccessible and arcane Greek artifact, and we want to turn it into the most popular introduction to Greek philosophy — which is what Aristotle intended it to be."

The pages of Aristotelian Greek that the two scholars have isolated were enclosed like a vein of ore within a later philosophical work — which, just to make matters worse, is also known as the *Protrepticus* — compiled by a Neoplatonist teacher named Iamblichus, who taught in Roman Syria in the third and fourth centuries AD.

Iamblichus was a borderline plagiarist, and didn't identify the authors from whom he wove together

his own exhortation to the study of philosophy. But since the standards of acknowledging your sources were looser in the ancient world, it may be fairer to say that what he did was to put together a "greatest hits" study guide for his students with his own narrative added to smooth the bumps from one unattributed excerpt to another.

As long ago as 1869, a classical scholar intimately familiar with the workings of Aristotle's mind spotted the presence of the master in Iamblichus's compilation. The fact that Iamblichus's work bore the same title as Aristotle's apparently lost work reinforced the suspicion. What allowed the deduction to be made with even more assurance was that Iamblichus had also lifted material from Plato — philosophical dialogues that still survive independently.

If classical scholarship had proceeded as it should from 1869 forward, Aristotle's *Protrepticus* soon would have emerged with its own identity and aspirations to greatness.

Instead, it remained a work hidden in the murky shadows of doubt and disbelief. The magisterial Oxford Classical Dictionary, for instance, does little more than mention its existence, and even then refers to it as "lost."

It may as well have been, to judge from the way generations of schol-



BRIAN GABLE/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

ars have fiddled with Iamblichus and ad-libbed his text — in one case, even adding a pastiche of pseudo-ancient Greek — to produce bits of bargain-basement Aristotle that have inevitably been banished to the “Fragments” section of the philosopher’s *Collected Works*.

No one reads fragments, if they can help it, particularly when their pedigree is so murky. And so it has come to pass that Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* has been effectively concealed from the wider world. Prof. Johnson compares it to the way some books of the Bible became canonical and others were banished to the Apocrypha, “just because certain councils of people got together early on and said, ‘This doesn’t count.’”

But much the way a cut-rate Italian painting later can be revealed to be a valuable work of Titian — or an unlabelled dress in a second-hand shop can be recognized, and reappraised, as a Chanel — all the *Protrepticus* needed was to be seen for what it was.

The patterns began emerging six years ago when Prof. Hutchinson and Prof. Johnson (who was then a graduate student) studied the presumed Aristotelian chapters of Iamblichus’s *Protrepticus* with the Greek-philosophy reading group at the University of Toronto. They resolved to make a serviceable trans-

lation for university students.

They decided to study the techniques Iamblichus used to cut and paste his Plato — since we still possess the dialogues Iamblichus borrowed, it was possible to determine his exact work habits. They discovered that Iamblichus added very little to the text, except for a sentence or so of over-enthusiastic introduction, a conclusion and an occasional passage to bridge over the brief dialogue elements in Plato’s original. Otherwise, Plato flowed along on his own, faithfully in order.

“Iamblichus was incredibly precise,” Prof. Hutchinson says. “He didn’t change a single word when he didn’t have to.”

To their surprise, no one ever had studied Iamblichus so methodically. And when they turned to the Aristotelian section, they recognized exactly the same compilation technique at work: Instead of trying to sift out bits and pieces of Aristotle, all they needed to do was remove the small (and easily predictable) contributions of Iamblichus and *voilà* — pure gold.

Other issues remained: Were they certain all the material came from the original *Protrepticus*? Was the treatise a dialogue in its pre-Iamblichus form? How much was missing?

But the most persuasive proofs had been carried out with a rigour that will be hard to match.

The detailed results are to be published this year in the Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, with a translation and full commentary due out next year. In the strictest sense what the two scholars have done isn’t the same as turning up a papyrus scroll in the desert, but to scholars in the field, the effect isn’t so different.

“Their research comes very close to being a rediscovery of a lost work,” says Chris Bobonich of Stanford University. “Only now will the *Protrepticus* be studied by more than a handful of scholars.”

And studied with greater respect — a confident attribution to Aristotle carries a lot more cachet than the name Iamblichus, in the brand-conscious world of classical scholarship.

John Allemang is a feature writer for The Globe and Mail.

Philosophy as a way of life

Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* is designed as an argument for philosophy as a way of life and as an end in itself — as opposed to acquiring knowledge or rhetorical skill in order to succeed in law or politics, the usual glories promised to young Athenians by the Sophists.

Its message is encapsulated in this paragraph from *Protrepticus*, Chapter 7.

To have wisdom and cognition is in itself valuable for humans, for it is not possible to live as a human without these; and it is also useful for our way of life, for nothing good comes to us unless it is accomplished after we have reasoned and acted in accordance with wisdom. Moreover, whether living successfully consists in enjoyment or in having virtue or in wisdom, according to all these we should do philosophy, for these things come to us most of all, and in a pure way, through doing philosophy.