

A Byzantine philosopher's devoutness toward God:
George Pachymeres' poetic epilogue to his commentary
on Aristotle's *Physics**

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George Pachymeres was born in Nicaea in 1242 and died sometime after 1307, perhaps as late as 1315, in Constantinople, where he served as a high-ranking member of the clergy at St Sophia. Pachymeres has long been well known among Byzantinists for his important historical work, which covers the first forty-eight years of the Palaiologan dynasty (1259–1307).¹ As a historian he has been repeatedly praised for his objectivity and his mastery of ancient Greek language and literature,² which have made him appear in the history of culture as an illustrious example of the so-called 'Byzantine Humanism'.³ His humanism is certainly not irrelevant to his status as one of the most prolific writers of philosophy in Byzantium. Apart from his *Philosophia*, a synopsis of the *corpus aristotelicum* in twelve books, which has been widely known in the West from the time of the Renaissance via its Latin translation,⁴ Pachymeres also produced for teaching purposes, as I have argued elsewhere, a series of 'running commentaries' on Aristotle,⁵

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¹ Failler & Laurent (1984–2000).

² See Hunger (1978: 447–53); Fryde (2000: 315–19); Failler (2004).

³ See, most characteristically, Arnakis (1966–67).

⁴ P. Becchius (Basel, 1560). The first book of the *Philosophia*, which abridges the *Organon*, was published earlier in Greek (Paris, 1548). An edition of the whole work is being prepared by the Academy of Athens; three books have appeared until now: Book 10 (on the *Metaphysics*, cf. Pappa 2002), Book 11 (on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, cf. Oikonomakos 2005) and Book 6 (on the *De partibus animalium*, cf. Pappa 2008). A new, critical edition of the first book has been recently undertaken by the present author.

⁵ By 'running commentary' (or exegesis) I mean what Byzantine authors themselves often designated as ἐξήγησις, that is, the kind of commentary which comments on a text in its entirety by dividing it into lemmas. It is therefore clearly distinguished from other types of commentaries such as paraphrases and synopses, which do not presuppose *reading* the text commented on.

which have not yet been published:⁶ on the six treatises of the *Organon*, on the *Physics*, on the *Metaphysics* and on the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁷ He is also the author of the *continuatio* of Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides*,⁸ contained in his autograph codex *Parisinus gr.* 1810 along with other Platonic dialogues and commentaries on Plato.⁹ It becomes clear that Pachymeres was deeply engaged in doing philosophy. Why?

This may seem a trivial question, but it is of particular importance in the case of Byzantine philosophy. Philosophy in Byzantium has often been seen quite schematically by modern historians as part of a Byzantine's standard erudition—roughly amounting to the idea of the Byzantine 'scholar' (be it a monk, an aristocrat, or a state or church official)—or as the self-justified continuation of a long-established venerable intellectual activity, which was naturally passed on to the Byzantines from Greek antiquity—and so one finds it legitimate to speak of the middle period of 'Greek', by this time Christianized, philosophy. However, not all periods of Byzantine history were equally intense with regard to philosophical activity, nor were they all characterized by the same understanding of the content and scope of philosophy.¹⁰ It is the main purpose of the present contribution to offer an explanation for Pachymeres' intense philosophical activity at the beginning of the fourteenth century by means of a close reading of the poem which he appended to his commentary on the *Physics* and of some parallel texts. The case that I will try to make is that, through his philosophical activity, Pachymeres wished to defend a certain conception of how man should see his life and shape his devoutness, as opposed to a self-fashioning of monastic inspiration which dominated (the Church of) his time. I will further suggest that Pachymeres' intellectual stance did not emanate from a mere theo-

⁶ The only exception is the commentary on the *Physics*, which has recently been published under the name of Michael Psellos; cf. Benakis (2008). I have argued fully in favour of Pachymeres' authorship of this commentary in Golitsis (2007). Unfortunately, due to its erroneous *stemma codicum* and its misreadings (I shall refer to one case below), Benakis' edition cannot be used as a wholly reliable source for the text.

⁷ On Pachymeres' philosophical works and teaching see Golitsis (2008: 54–60). The *Philosophia* was conceived as a means to a first acquaintance with the Aristotelian corpus, having a wider scope and being addressed (at least ideally) to a wider audience; it was followed (at least for Pachymeres' students) by the study of Aristotle's text through the various running commentaries and by the study of Plato.

⁸ See Westerink & al. (1989).

⁹ On Pachymeres' autographa, almost exclusively philosophical in their content, see Harlfinger (1996: 48) and Golitsis (2010b).

¹⁰ See the excellent account by B. Bydén and K. Ierodiakonou, 'Byzantine Philosophy', in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/byzantine-philosophy/>).

retical concern about philosophy but also reflects facts related to his own life. Finally, I will try to show how Pachymeres' extended philosophical exegesis can be regarded as marking a new phase in the history of Byzantine philosophy.

*The study of the Physics: Aristotle
'Christianized' and exemplified*

Pachymeres' commentary on the *Physics* ends with a poem written in hexameter (there is no epilogue in prose), which is directly inspired by the preceding study of Aristotle. It is preserved in ff. 154^v–155^r (ff. 1^r–154^r contain the commentary) of his autograph codex *Laurentianus plut.* 87,5 and goes as follows:¹¹

¹¹ The poem was first published by Bandini (1770: coll. 385–86), with a number of transcription errors, and later by Cougny (1890): *Epigrammata exhortatoria et supplicatoria*, no. 101, with many erroneous conjectures. Here is a new, revised transcription of the poem (I have regularised the punctuation), which I first published together with a French translation in Golitsis (2007: 652–53) (its revision and rendering into English owe much to the insights of Börje Bydén and Katerina Ierodiakonou):

Φύσιος ἦψαο ἀκαμάτοισι νόοιο μενοιναῖς,
 ἄτε τελεῆεν σχῶν κέαρ ἐν νοί· σῶμά τε φύσει
 ὅσσα τε καπφύσιν, ὥσπερ ἐὴν φύσιν, οὔτοι ἀπέδρα,
 ὡς σὰς ἀλυκτοπέδας οὐκ ἔκφυγεν, ὡς τ' ἐγένοντο
 5 ὡς τε γεγῶτ' ἐνὶ καὶ ὡς φθιτῆς ἔμμορε μοίρης.
 Ταῦτ' ἄρα θείαις μήτισι φύσιος ὄντα ἄποινα,
 αἰὲν ἀθύρματ' ἔασσι παλιμπλάγκτοιο χρόνοιο,
 σεῖο δ' ἐπιφροσύνης πυκινὰ σπουδάσματα κλυτά.
 Μετρεῖ ταῦτα φύσις, μετρεῖ χρόνος, οὐδὲ σὲ λήθει
 10 μέτρον ἔχοντα χέρεσσιν ἀειμνήστοιο σοφίης.
 Ἄτάρ ἔγνωσ, ἔγνωσ καὶ ὄσ' οὐκ ἔδαέν (sic) γε βέβηλοι·
 καὶ γε τὸ σῆς σφεδανῆς διζήσιος ἄθλον ἀπηῦρας,
 εὔρες καὶ πόλον, οὔτι γ' ἔρημον ἐόντα προνοίης,
 εὔρες νώνυμον ἀίδιον κράτος ἀμερὲς αἰὲν
 15 ὡσαύτως ἔχον, ἠδ' ἀκίνητον ὑπ' οὐδενὸς ἄλκαρ,
 ἐκτὸς ἐὸν πόνου, ὡς δὲ πάσης μεταβλήσιος ἔξω,
 καὶ ἐ καθίζεις ἄνω, ὅπου τιμιώτατον αὐτῶ.
 Στήθι, πέραν μὴ ζήτηε, ἄβατόν ἐστι τὸ πόρσω
 καὶ γε σοφοῖς πᾶσι καὶ γ' ἀσόφοις· κενὸς ὅς γε μαστεύσοι,
 20 ἠύτε σύ δε σοφὸς σοφίης μέτρα οἶσθα βροτείης
 καὶ οἱ προσκύρσας ὄσ' ἐρύματ' ἀδηρίτω, ἔστης.
 Στήσω γραφίδα καὶ τὸς ἄρ' ἐνθάδε ἠύτε κώπαν,
 ἄλα διερχόμενος μειλίγματ' ἄγων πνοιῶν σῶν,
 ὅττι κινῶν ἔστης, ἀμενηνὸς ἐγὼ γεγαῶς τις
 25 πλεῖον ἔχων ἢ σύ, ὕμνον αὔειν πατρὶ ἀπάντων.
 Ταῦτ' ἄρα σοὶ χριστώνυμος ἱερὸς αἰὲν ἀλιτρός,
 ἀχρεῖόν τε γεώργιον ἀλλ' ἀγαθοῖο φυτουργοῦ,
 καὶ πάχος οὖλος ὕλη τ' οὐκ ἐκ μέρους πλέα αἰσχους
 ἡμμένος ὄφικίων ἱερῶν ῥιπαῖσιν ἀχράντοις·

You grasped Nature through the untiring desires of your mind,
 for you had in your heart such a perfect strength. The natural body
 and all that is according to nature, how they naturally are, have not eluded you,
 as they did not escape your bonds, <and you discovered> how they came to be,
 5 how they can be and how they have obtained their share of mortal fate.
 These are, then, a ransom in Nature's divine crafts,
 toys, ever and again, of wandering Time,
 objects of the solid study of your glorious wisdom.
 Nature measures them, Time measures them, they do not escape even you,
 10 who have in your hands the measure of everlasting wisdom.
 But you knew, you also knew what pagans did not teach.
 For you discovered the prize of your vigorous search,
 you found a pole which is not devoid of providence,
 you found an eternal power which is nameless, always partless
 15 and the same, a safeguard unmoved by anything,
 which is free of pain, as it is beyond any change.
 And you placed it on high, where it is most honourable for it to be.
 Stay still! Do not seek further, what lies ahead is inaccessible
 to all the wise as well as the unwise. Vain is he who wishes to seek further,
 20 since you, who are wise, who know the measures of human wisdom
 and have reached what on account of so many fortifications is unconquerable, have
 stopped.
 Hence I too will put down my stylus here like an oar,
 as I pass through the sea carrying your soothing breeze,
 since you stopped moving <me>, although I, a fleeting creature of no importance,
 25 have more than you, to utter a hymn to the Father of everything.
 These verses are then for You by me, a sinful man who bears the holy name of
 Christ,
 a worthless plant, though grown by a planter who blesses,
 <me>, <who am> all thickness, and matter full of shame not <just> in part,
 who have attained the holy offices through immaculate gusts of wind.
 30 And as long as I have held in the great Church the glorious rank of the chief
 advocate,
 I have never appeared as the prosecutor of my first icon,
 and as long as I have been entrusted with the guard of justice in the palace,
 33 I have never passed judgement on myself because of destructive enemies.

To begin with, some words about the form. The poem has what one might call 'Byzantine literary features'. Composed in dactylic hexameters, it eruditely imitates the exemplary poetry and language of Homer.¹² Loans from

30 καί γε φέρων ἐν ἱρῶ μεγάλῳ πρωτέκδικον αὔχος,
 ἔκδικος οὔποτε δειχθεὶς πρώτης εἰκόνος ἀμῆς,
 καὶ φυλακὴν γε δικαίου πιστευθεὶς ἐν ἀνάκτων,
 οὔποτ' ἑμαυτὸν ἀπ' ἐχθρῶν δικάσας ὀλετήρων.

¹² Having written scholia on the *Iliad* (see Turyn 1972: 23–25), Pachymeres was very well acquainted with Homer. His hexameters have in most cases canonical caesuras (16 penthemimeres, 8 tritotrochaic, 2 hephthemimeres, 2 trithemimeres; v. 1 is divided by a caesura after the fourth trochee; vv. 6, 27, 31 and 33 have no caesura at all) and are metrically almost impeccable (in vv. 19, 25 and 33 one must erroneously read πᾶσι, σύ, δικάσας in

Parmenides and Pindar can also be detected,¹³ revealing through mimesis the author's classical culture. *Jeux de mots* (in a broad sense) characteristic of Byzantine poetry also appear: the wording ἄτε τελεῖεν σχῶν κέαρ (v. 2) alludes to Aristotle's name; vv. 27, 28, 30 and 32 reveal quite skilfully the name of the author and the offices he held: ἀχρεῖόν τε γεώργιον ... | καὶ πάχος οὔλος ὕλη τ' οὐκ ἐκ μέρεος πλέα αἴσχους | ... καὶ γε φέρων ἐν ἱρῶ μεγάλῳ πρωτέκδικον αὔχος | ... καὶ φυλακὴν γε δικαίου πιστευθεὶς ἐν ἀνάκτων ...¹⁴ In addition, the poem seems to achieve at its end its proper Byzantine identity, liberating itself from potential charges of slavish imitation of ancient models. For its 33 verses need not be a fortuitous number: the author, who calls himself χριστώ-νυμος (v. 26), wanted perhaps to let the sensitive reader count the years of Christ's life, thus subordinating the Homeric hexameter to a Christian end.¹⁵ Be that as it may, a closer look at the content of the poem will indeed reveal to us a Christian reworking of ancient Greek heritage with regard to Aristotle's *Physics*.

The relation between the poem and the general object of the *Physics* is obvious from its first verse or, better, from its first word (φύσις). Pachymeres addresses himself to Aristotle, praising him for having amazingly 'trapped' (σᾶς ἀλυκτοπέδᾶς οὐκ ἔκφυγεν) and come to know the changing essence of nature and its ways of constituting the natural bodies, which are subject to the cosmic processes of coming-to-be and perishing (vv. 1–5). He subsequently refers to nature and time, which measure the finitude of all natural beings, as Aristotle himself has done thanks to his wise and scrupulous study (vv. 6–10). But this vigorous intellectual effort in the realm of natural objects and their 'mortal fate' would have been left without 'reward'

order to retain the prosody). It seems to me, though, that Pachymeres was aware of these discrepancies, which in this case should be regarded as a sign of a personally engaged style of composition that cares more for the content and less for the form. At least the two poems which introduce his *Philosophia* and his *Quadrivium*, written, respectively, in twelve ionic hexameters and thirty Byzantine dodecasyllables, are metrically impeccable; they can be found, respectively, in Migne (*PG* 143: coll. 419–20), and in Tannery & Stéphanou (1940: 3). Besides Homer, a closer source of inspiration for Pachymeres' poems could, of course, have been Gregory of Nazianzus.

¹³ V. 12: δίζησις, a Parmenidean word, certainly known to Pachymeres through Simplicius' commentary on the *Physics*. With vv. 18–19 cf. Pindar, *Ol.* 3.44–45: τὸ πρόσω δ' ἐστὶ σοφοῖς ἄβατον | κάσφοις.

¹⁴ I.e. Γεώργιος Παχυμέρης πρωτέκδικος δικαιοφύλαξ. Pachymeres' patriarchal (*protek-dikos*) and imperial (*dikaiophylax*) offices are often mentioned in the titles of his works.

¹⁵ Pachymeres mainly used 33 lines per page to write his *Philosophia* in his autograph codices *Berolinensis Ham.* 512 and *Parisinus gr.* 1930. Even a *usus scribendi* could be inspired by a religious cause.

(ἄθλον) had the ancient philosopher not found a safe pole which is beyond any change or movement, an eternal power which has no parts (vv. 11–17). This points directly to the last book of the *Physics* and the first unmoved mover, Aristotle’s God, seen here through Christian eyes.

The affinity between Aristotle’s first mover and the Christian God is in fact stressed by Pachymeres in the commentary itself. For instance, commenting on *Physics* VIII 6, 258b13ff.,¹⁶ Pachymeres explains that

From this point on, <Aristotle> philosophizes about how it can be that something unmoved and exempt from all change, both absolutely and accidentally, which moves something else, really exists; that is the divine, which is primarily and by itself, unlike and unmixed with regard to all moving things. And this is ‘the blessed and only Sovereign’; it has in fact an absolute power over all things, because it surpasses all things in so far as it is not subject to any kind of movement.¹⁷

Pachymeres’ reference to the ‘blessed and only Sovereign’ (ὁ μακάριος καὶ μόνος δυνάστης) is to be traced back to Saint Paul’s First Epistle to Timothy,¹⁸ as the readers for whom the commentary was intended would surely recognize. In highlighting the ‘Sovereign’s’ transcendence in terms of power (δύναται γὰρ κατὰ πάντων ὡς ὑπερφέρον πάντων), Pachymeres was very probably relying on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s treatise *De divinis nominibus*,¹⁹ on which he had previously

¹⁶ “Ὅτι δ’ ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τι τὸ ἀκίνητον μὲν αὐτὸ πάσης ἐκτὸς μεταβολῆς, καὶ ἀπλῶς καὶ κατὰ συμβεβηκός, κινητικὸν δ’ ἑτέρου, δῆλον ὧδε σκοποῦσιν ...

¹⁷ *Laurentianus plut.* 87,5, f. 137^v, ll. 1–4: Ἐντεῦθεν φιλοσοφεῖ πῶς ἔσται τι ἀκίνητον καὶ ἐκτὸς ἀπάσης μεταβολῆς καὶ ἀπλῶς καὶ κατὰ συμβεβηκός, κινητικὸν δὲ ἑτέρου, ὅπερ ἔστι τὸ θεῖον καὶ μόνως καὶ πρώτως καὶ ἀσυγκρίτως καὶ ἀμιγῶς ἐκ πάντων τῶν κινουμένων. καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ “ὁ μακάριος καὶ μόνος δυνάστης”. δύναται γὰρ κατὰ πάντων ὡς ὑπερφέρον πάντων κατὰ τὸ μὴ ὑποκεῖσθαι κινήσει ἡτινιοῦν.

¹⁸ Cf. 1 Timothy 6:13–16: Παραγγέλλω [σοι] ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζωογονοῦντος τὰ πάντα καὶ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ μαρτυρήσαντος ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου τὴν καλὴν ὁμολογίαν, τηρῆσαί σε τὴν ἐντολὴν ἄσπιλον ἀνεπίλημπτον μέχρι τῆς ἐπιφανείας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἣν καιροῖς ἰδίους δείξει ὁ μακάριος καὶ μόνος δυνάστης, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων καὶ κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων, ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν, φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον, ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται· ᾧ τιμὴ καὶ κράτος αἰώνιον· ἀμήν.

¹⁹ Cf. *De div. nom.* 203.23–204.4 Suchla: Ἡμεῖς δὲ τοῦ θεολόγου [sc. τοῦ θεοῦ Παύλου] κατὰ τὸ ἐφικτὸν στοχαζόμενοι τὸν ὑπερδύναμον θεὸν ὑμνοῦμεν ὡς παντοδύναμον, ὡς “μακάριον καὶ μόνον δυνάστην”, ὡς δεσπόζοντα ἐν τῇ δυναστείᾳ αὐτοῦ τοῦ αἰῶνος, ὡς κατ’ οὐδὲν τῶν ὄντων ἐκπεπτωκότα, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ὑπερέχοντα καὶ προέχοντα πάντα τὰ ὄντα κατὰ δύναμιν ὑπερούσιον καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς οὔσι τὸ δύνασθαι εἶναι καὶ τόδε εἶναι κατὰ περιουσίαν ὑπερβαλλούσης δυνάμεως ἀφθόνω χύσει δεδωρημένον. ‘We, aiming as far as we can at <what> the Theologian (sc. the divine Paul) <says>, celebrate the supra-potent God as omnipotent, as “blessed and only Sovereign”, as ruling in His might over eternity, as being not at all inferior to any being, or rather as transcending and anticipating all beings according to His supra-essential power, as of-

written a commentary.²⁰ With his commentary on the last book of the *Physics*, Pachymeres was now providing this absolute power of God—which for a Christian believer was of course an unquestionable truth, established through revelation—with a philosophical background or, so to speak, a ‘physical’ demonstration, logically structured through Aristotle’s argumentation about the necessary existence of a reality which is not subject to any kind of movement (κατὰ τὸ μὴ ὑποκεῖσθαι κινήσει ἡτινιοῦν).

We can ultimately see the same Christian-oriented handling of the *Physics* in the poetic epilogue of the commentary. Pachymeres suggests that Aristotle was in effect not a ‘pagan’ thinker, because his knowledge surpassed that of the pagans (v. 11: ἀτὰρ ἔγνωσ, ἔγνωσ καὶ ὅσ’ οὐκ ἔδᾶέν γε βέβηλοι).²¹ By thoroughly studying nature and natural beings, Aristotle managed to secure a double advantage: he not only became aware of the finitude and, one may add, the vanity of human existence, which is dominated by change and time,²² but, most importantly, he was also led to the discovery of an unmoved eternal power (κράτος) which is said to be provident, nameless and *free of pain* (vv. 13–16). Next to the Christian doctrines of providence and the apophatic onomatology of the divine, we can recognize in these verses Saint Paul’s ‘blessed Sovereign’, to whom ‘honour’ (τιμὴ) and ‘eternal power’ (κράτος αἰώνιον) are precisely due.²³ Aristotle, Pachymeres says, assigned to this eternal power the ‘most honourable place’ (v. 17: ὅπου τιμώτατον). For that he should not only be praised but should also be regarded as a forerunner of Christian truth. And the preceding study of his *Physics* was now to be seen as a path which finally led to God.

For a Christian thinker, however, God’s essence is unknowable. Still according to Paul, ‘<God> resides in inaccessible light’ and ‘no man has ever seen or is able to see Him’.²⁴ Pachymeres suggests that Aristotle be-

fering to all beings with His rich outpouring their capacity to exist and to be that or this according to the superabundance of His supra-exceeding power.’

²⁰ Pachymeres’ commentary on the pseudo-Dionysian corpus has been edited by B. Cordier (Antwerp, 1634; reprinted in Migne, *PG* 3: *passim*). It is to be dated around 1285; see Aubineau (1971).

²¹ This verse is reminiscent of (and in a way completes) a well-known poem by John Mauropous (11th century) on Plato’s and Plutarch’s closeness to Christianity; see Hörandner (1976: 257) and Karpozilos (1982: 103–4).

²² A lesson which, nevertheless, could also be acquired through the study of other philosophers: see, for instance, the mention of Heraclitus and Cratylus in Pachymeres’ *History* below.

²³ 1 Timothy 6:16 (cited above, n. 18): ... ᾧ τιμὴ καὶ κράτος αἰώνιον.

²⁴ 1 Timothy 6:16: ... φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον, ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται.

came aware of that too, to the extent that he ended his *Physics* with the discovery of the eternal power and went no further.²⁵ What comes next in the poem (vv. 18–19: στῆθι, πέραν μὴ ζήτεε, ἄβατόν ἐστι τὸ πρόσω | καὶ γε σοφοῖς πᾶσι καὶ γ’ ἀσόφοις) is an exhortation which only technically is addressed to Aristotle himself; it concerns in effect all people—both the wise and the unwise, as Pachymeres says, recalling Pindar—who should let themselves be taught from Aristotle’s example, who is presented as the ‘wise’ *par excellence*, the one who knows ‘the measures of human wisdom’, and thus become conscious of the limits of human knowledge before the unlimited divine (vv. 19–21). Philosophical research has therefore to come to a halt, and so does exegesis. The exegete puts down his stylus like an oar in the sea of knowledge which Aristotle has until now dominated with his breeze (vv. 22–23), and the poem becomes the epilogue of a commentary which has followed, all the way through, the philosopher’s voyage towards the discovery of God. Nevertheless, Pachymeres had another ten verses to add.

*A parallel text from Pachymeres’ History:
philosophy and devoutness*

In the fifth book of his *History*, Pachymeres reports Nikephoros Blemmydes’ (1197–1272) attitude to Patriarch Joseph I (1267–75)—who visited Blemmydes in his monastery intending to persuade him of his benevolence regarding the Arsenite schism (a grave ecclesiastical controversy having originally to do with Patriarch Arsenios’ deposition in 1261)—with the following words:

As a matter of fact, this man (sc. Blemmydes), *who was pursuing the life of a philosopher*, was completely detached from worldly things and remained indifferent to the events, having no feelings of compassion or repulsion for the one or the other man; but his mind was as if it were not contained in a body at all. He regarded both Arsenios and Joseph as being one and the same, for he was not paying attention to raw events so that he could come to judge that this one is the victim and that one the usurper—for he was surely thinking that such concerns belong to a grovelling intelligence which can see nothing beyond what is present—but *he knew on the one hand the stability and immutability of God and on the other hand man’s incapacity to stay at any one point in the same state*, be it for a brief instant. Heraclitus, he thought, put it well indeed: one cannot bathe twice in the same river, and Cratylus even better: not even once. Since things pass like in a current flowing perpetually, there was nothing new or in any way strange about the fact that Arsenios could be the victim of an injustice. One thing, and only one, was

²⁵ It might be further added that Pachymeres was thus rendering Aristotle’s philosophy harmless to Christian dogma.

indeed necessary: devoutness. If devoutness is preserved, all the rest is necessarily banished by those who choose to live in an appropriate way.²⁶

This passage echoes, at least to some extent, the content of the poem. For Blemmydes is credited here with the knowledge which Pachymeres ascribes in the poem to Aristotle, that is knowledge of God's immutability and of man's fragile course through the various events of life. This was for Pachymeres the kind of ethical knowledge to be acquired through the study of ancient philosophy—as the mention of Heraclitus and Cratylus in the passage suggests (a loan, of course, from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* IV 5, 1010a10–15)²⁷—or, moreover, to be assimilated to philosophy itself. For Blemmydes is explicitly said to have pursued a philosopher's life (φιλόσοφον διαζῶν βίον), living almost as a mind outside its body. He could therefore be detached from the passions of a mere bodily existence, which would have led him to a vain reaction to the Arsenite schism. Yet this was not all: such an understanding of human life and fate should awaken someone to the 'one and only necessary thing': devoutness (τὸ εὐσεβές).

Now, Blemmydes was a monk, and one can plausibly think that his otherworldly-centred perception of human life was inspired not just (if at all) by ancient philosophical doctrines, but rather by monastic ideals.²⁸ This may well be true,²⁹ but it was definitely not how Pachymeres saw things. In the *prooimion* of his *Philosophia*, written shortly after his *History*³⁰ and

²⁶ *Relations historiques* 5.2 (2: 439.6–18 Failler): Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος, φιλόσοφον διαζῶν βίον, ὅλος τῶν ὧδε ἐξήρητο καὶ ἀπαθῶς εἶχε πρὸς τὰ γινόμενα, οὔτε τινὶ προσπαθῶν οὔτε μὴν ἐμπαθῶν, ἀλλ' ἦν ὁ νοῦς ἐκείνῳ ὡς εἰ μὴ σώματι ὅλως κατείχετο, ἐν ἐλογίζετο καὶ Ἀρσένιον εἶναι καὶ Ἰωσήφ, οὐ γυμνοῖς αὐτοῖς προσέχων τοῖς γιγνομένοις, ὡς τὸν μὲν κρίνειν ἀδικηθέντα, τὸν δ' ἐπιβήτορα—ταῦτα γὰρ χαμερπούς τινος διανοίας καὶ μηδὲν ἐχούσης τῶν παρόντων πλέον εἰς θεωρίαν ἠγεῖτο—, ἀλλ' εἰδῶς Θεοῦ μὲν τὸ εὐσταθές καὶ ἀκίνητον, ἀνθρώπων δὲ τὸ μηδὲν ἐν μηδενὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ κἂν βραχὺ μένειν. Εὖ γὰρ καὶ Ἡρακλείτῳ εἰρησθαι τὸ μὴ ἐπὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ εἶναι δις βάπτειν, καὶ Κρατύλῳ μᾶλλον ὡς μηδὲ ἀπαξ· τῶν πραγμάτων δίκην αἰέτρου ρεύματος παρατρέχοντων, μὴ καινὸν εἶναι μηδ' ἄλλως ξένον, εἰ καὶ Ἀρσένιος ἀδικοῖτο· τὸ γὰρ ἀναγκαῖον ἐν εἶναι καὶ μόνον τὸ εὐσεβές· τούτου δὲ τηρουμένου, τᾶλλ' ἀπερρίφθαι ἀνάγκη τοῖς αἰρουμένοις ζῆν κατὰ τρόπον.

²⁷ Bydén (2002: 198 n. 54) thinks that Pachymeres quotes in this passage a statement of Blemmydes himself. In my opinion, the historian ascribes to Blemmydes words or thoughts that fit his own representation of Blemmydes as a 'philosopher'. At any rate, even if Blemmydes actually pronounced those words, Pachymeres sided with him.

²⁸ All the more, it might be further argued, because 'true' philosophy was often equated in Byzantium with Christian asceticism; see Dölger (1964) and Kaldellis in this volume.

²⁹ See his *Περὶ πίστεως* (*Sermo ad monachos suos*) in Migne (*PG* 142: coll. 585–606). A testimony of how Blemmydes was seen by his contemporaries in Ephesus, amounting to a description which fits the profile of an unapproachable monk, can be found in George of Cyprus' autobiography; cf. Lameere (1937: 181.12–22).

³⁰ On the chronology of these works see Golitsis (2009).

preceding his commentary on the *Physics*,³¹ Pachymeres expresses his anti-monasticism indirectly, when speaking of the ‘benefits of wisdom’ that he wishes to recall in the mind of his readers with his work.³² One of these recollected benefits, he insinuates, will be to love the senses, which are precisely hated by those who, due to their inhuman insensibility, despise philosophy.³³ As I have argued,³⁴ this is a rather clear-cut reference to the rigorist Patriarch Athanasios I (1303–09) and his zealous monks, who sought to impose ascetic ideals and monastic discipline on the clergy.³⁵ Against such a background, Pachymeres’ conception of φιλόσοφος βίος, as applied in his *History* to Blemmydes’ case, could not simply be that of a monastic or ascetic life, despite the fact that Blemmydes was a monk. It rather refers to a philosophically trained intellectual life, which would induce suspension of judgment on human affairs and thus liberation from mundane human concerns: a variation on a sceptic’s *ataraxia*, one could say, serving in this context as a foundation to real devoutness to God. Based on philosophy and coming from a ‘detached *nous*’, such devoutness had to be reflective and could hardly be combined with the anti-intellectualist faith of pure monastic life. At most, one could say that Pachymeres’ Blemmydes was an example of how monks should be.

Pachymeres says in the *prooimion* of the *Philosophia* that he has solely devoted himself to the contemplative activity of *nous*,³⁶ so that when he offers as a hymn to God the ten last verses of his poetic epilogue to the commentary on the *Physics*, we are likely to see the kind of ‘intellectual’ devoutness which he ascribed in the *History* to Blemmydes. This gesture, he

³¹ In the commentary on the *Physics* Pachymeres refers twice to a previous teaching of the *De partibus animalium* and once to a previous teaching of the *De anima*; these have to be identified, I think, with Books 6 and 7 of the *Philosophia*; see Golitsis (2008: 57–59).

³² “Ἐδοξε καὶ βίβλος ξυντέθειται αὕτη, ἣ δὴ Φιλοσοφία τὸ ὄνομα ..., ἐμοὶ μὲν μέλημα ἐραστὸν ..., τοῖς δ’ ἄλλοις τῶν κ α λ ὶ ν τ ῆ ς σ ο φ ί α ς ὑπόμνησις, ἵν’ οἷς ἀμελεῖται φιλοσοφία, τούτοις ἔχοι θαυμάζεσθαι. (Text established according to mss. *Laurentianus plut.* 86,22 and *Athous Iviron* 191, due to the loss of the corresponding folio in Pachymeres’ autographon *Parisinus gr.* 1930.)

³³ Cf. *Parisinus gr.* 1930, f. 4^v, ll. 26–28: ... ἐκείνοις [sc. τοῖς τῆς φιλοσοφίας καταφρονηταῖς] δ’ ἀπεναντίας τούτων ἐξ ἀναλγησίας ἢ πρόθεσις, ὡς μισῆσαι καὶ αὐτὴν μίαν τῶν ἀγαθῶν οὔσαν καὶ πρωτίστην, τὴν αἴσθησιν. The passage is based on Aristotle’s famous observation which opens the *Metaphysics* (I 1, 980a 21–22): Πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει· σημεῖον δ’ ἡ τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἀγάπησις.

³⁴ Golitsis (2009).

³⁵ On Patriarch Athanasios’ rigid ecclesiastical policy and his controversies with the clergy (especially with that of St Sophia), see Maffry Talbot (1973) and, more recently, Patedakis (2006).

³⁶ Cf. *Parisinus gr.* 1930, f. 4^r, ll. 32–33: ... μόνη δὲ τῆ θεωρία σχολάζων τοῦ νοῦ καὶ τοῖς μακαρίοις ἐντρυφῶν ἐκείνου κινήμασιν.

says, comes out as something in which the 'unimportant' Pachymeres surpasses the 'wise' Aristotle (vv. 24–25: ἀμενηνὸς ἐγὼ γεγαῶς τις | πλεῖον ἔχων ἢ σὺ, ὕμνον αὖειν πατρὶ ἀπάντων), since the philosopher stopped at the discovery of the prime mover or God. Uttered by an admirer of Aristotle,³⁷ these verses were of course not intended as a claim of superiority over Aristotle's philosophical skills, but as a declaration of the superiority of faith over philosophy.³⁸ Although this declaration limits the scope of philosophy, it is not meant to diminish its value: Aristotle expressed, of course, no devoutness to God; but it was he who led Pachymeres to do so.

Pachymeres describes himself before God as a 'worthless plant', a 'sinful man' who is 'full of matter and thickness' (vv. 26–28); he then refers to the high offices that he 'immaculately' attained within the ecclesiastical and palatine hierarchy: as chief advocate of the Church, he says, he has never prosecuted his first icon (vv. 29–31), that is, Christ; and as chief justice of the imperial court he has not been forced by destructive enemies to pass judgment on himself (vv. 32–33). Although the self-humiliation expressed in vv. 26–28 is typical of Christian anthropology, one could hardly miss the personal tone which resonates throughout Pachymeres' *sphragis*.

The last verses of the poem, especially those referring to Pachymeres' ecclesiastical office, constitute a straightforward confession of devoutness.

³⁷ Pachymeres' genuine admiration for Aristotle can also be detected in his running commentary on the *Sophistici elenchi*, where he responds to Aristotle's closing demand (184b6–8: λοιπὸν ἂν εἴη πάντων ὕμων [ἢ] τῶν ἠκροαμένων ἔργον τοῖς μὲν παραλειμμένοις τῆς μεθόδου συγγνώμην τοῖς δ' εὐρημένοις πολλὴν ἔχειν χάριν) with the following words (*Vindobonensis phil. gr.* 150, f. 198^v; I have regularised the punctuation and the orthography): ἡμεῖς δὲ ἄλλ' οὐχ ὅπως συγγνώμην ἔχειν σοι τῶν ἐλλειμμένων ὀφείλομεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ συγγνώμην ζητοῦμεν ἐφ' οἷς οὐκ ἀξίως χάριν τῶν εὐρημένων ἀνελλιπῶς τὴν χάριν σοι ἔχομεν.

³⁸ That the content of religious faith surpasses philosophical demonstration is characteristically illustrated in the very last lines of the commentary, in which Pachymeres, probably committing himself to the view that the omnipresent God is both immaterial and material, overcomes Aristotle's negation of the first mover's infinitude in respect of magnitude with the following exhortation to his disciple (*Laurentianus plut.* 87,5, f. 154^r, ll. 33–36): Οὗτος τοίνυν ἀναιρεῖ καὶ τὸ ἄπειρον εἶναι πρὸς τῷ πεπερασμένον εἶναι διὰ τὰς πρώτας αὐτοῦ ὑποθέσεις καὶ τὸν τοῦ ἀπίρου διορισμόν. σὺ δὲ καὶ ἀμερὲς εἴποις ἂν αὐτὸ καὶ ἀμέγεθες, ὡς μηδὲν ἔχον σῶμα, καὶ ἄπειρον αὐθις, ὡς ὑπ' οὐδενὸς περιεχόμενον· τί γὰρ τῶν κτισμάτων τὸν κτίσαντα περιέξει; 'He [sc. Aristotle] therefore also does away with the first mover being infinite [sc. in magnitude], in addition to its being finite, as a consequence of his first hypotheses and the definition of infinite. But *you* can tell both that it has no parts and no magnitude, because it has no body, and that it is infinite indeed, because it is not contained by anything. For what creation can contain the creator?' Instead of σὺ δὲ Benakis (2008: 430.18) erroneously prints Οὐδὲ. As far as I can tell, all manuscripts are at this point unanimous.

Such a confession might not have been unrelated to the contingencies of Pachymeres' own life. Pachymeres reports in his *History* that highly ranked church officials received no promotion under the patriarchate of Athanasios I.³⁹ It is therefore not unlikely that in the hostile climate which prevailed between the ascetic Patriarch and the clergy of St Sophia Pachymeres was personally blamed for negligence in his duties and for (or even because of) an unadmitted preoccupation with philosophy. In the *prooimion* of the *Philosophia*, Pachymeres says that the 'despisers' of philosophy, in other words Athanasios and his monks,⁴⁰

did not want at all to distinguish between the one who is apt for something [namely, in Pachymeres' case, philosophy] and the one who is not, but they believed that what can be produced by whom has deserved Your glorious and immortal graces can be produced by anyone.

This might suggest that there was a personal attack on Pachymeres on the grounds of his preoccupation with philosophy, considered to be useless and not to conform to pure Christian ideals.⁴¹ If so, however, Pachymeres seems not to have been affected by such claims and prejudices (being himself, we may surmise, in a state of Blemmydean *ataraxia*: 'there was nothing new or in any way strange about the fact that *he* could be the victim of an injustice'). In composing his *Philosophia*, Pachymeres wished precisely to reaffirm against the harsh monastic ideals of the Church of his time the value of the *love of wisdom* and the 'benefits' which are brought about through its study.⁴² He consequently transformed Aristotle, through his commentary on the last book of the *Physics* and its poetic epilogue, to a forerunner of Christian truth, so as to challenge the misconception of philosophy as being incompatible with the heart of Christian doctrine. Finally, by

³⁹ Cf. *Relations historiques* 13.37 (4: 721.15–16 Failler).

⁴⁰ *Parisinus gr.* 1930, f. 4^v, ll. 28–31: ... καὶ ἀναμέσον ἐπιτηδείου πρὸς τι καὶ μὴ οὐδ' ὁλως ἠθέλησαν διαστείλασθαι, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο γίνεσθαι καὶ παρὰ τοῦ τυχόντος ἐνόμισαν, ὃ δὴ καὶ παρὰ τοῦ τῶν σῶν εὐκλεῶν καὶ ἀθανάτων χαρίτων ἠξιωμένου.

⁴¹ One can get an idea of Athanasios' harsh ideals through his various *didaskaliai*, commonly sent to monks, clerks and the simple flock; see, for instance, Laurent (1971: no. 1762). There is also a letter (ibid. no. 1681; see Maffry Talbot 1975: no. 20 for the Greek text) in which the patriarch states that he returns a book which has been sent to him, because he and his associates have found it improper to keep with them such an 'object of luxury' (λογισάμενος ἀπρεπὲς τοιαύτην τρυφήν κατασχεῖν). As I argue in Golitsis (2010a), that book was sent back to Pachymeres and is to be identified with the *Philosophia*.

⁴² Pachymeres' *Quadrivium* was very probably also a part of his reaction to the predominance of illiterate monasticism. In the poem which opens the work (see above, n. 12), he speaks of 'he in whom hatred against wisdom has been instilled' (v. 5: ᾧ μῖσος ἐντέτηκε κατὰ σοφίας, inspired by Sophocles, *Electra* 1311: μῖσός τε γὰρ ... ἐντέτηκέ μοι).

turning Aristotle's appraisal into a 'hymn to the Father of everything', he became himself an example of how philosophy was to lead someone to God and to inspire devoutness.⁴³

Pachymeres' exegeses and the autonomy of philosophical studies in early Palaiologan Byzantium

That philosophy was not contrary to Christian beliefs was of course no strange conception throughout the Byzantine era. However, Pachymeres was the first, as far as I know, to base such a conception on the complete study of an ancient philosopher's text.

Contrary to what is quite often assumed in the historiography of Byzantine philosophy, teaching the *Physics* or other treatises of Aristotle from their beginning to their end by means of an exegesis was something of a novelty in Byzantium.⁴⁴ Only about half a century before Pachymeres' exegeses of Aristotle, Blemmydes himself, the eminent philosopher of the empire of Nicaea (1204–61), was describing the scope of the first book of his philosophical opus magnum Εἰσαγωγικὴ ἐπιτομή (the so-called *Epitome logica*) as follows:

Since the science of logic is not of insignificant usefulness to <the comprehension of> the Holy Scripture and of all the Words of Truth, we judged it necessary to leave for the

⁴³ If Pachymeres was indeed accused by Athanasios of defective faith in Christ, it may be argued that the last verses of the poem were conceived by Pachymeres in a rather apologetical manner. Written, however, in a difficult literary style at the end of a philosophical commentary, it could hardly be expected to reach any people outside Pachymeres' own intellectual milieu.

⁴⁴ It has to be noted that in pre-Palaiologan Byzantium philosophy (often limited to logic) was primarily taught through various synopses and epitomes, which were intended mainly as a replacement of the ancient philosophical text(s); see also above, n. 4. An early and a late example of this are the Συνοπτικὸν σύνταγμα φιλοσοφίας (a widespread school handbook, where philosophy simply means logic) of the beginning of the eleventh century and Blemmydes' Εἰσαγωγικὴ ἐπιτομή (dealing with both logic and physics) of the middle of the thirteenth century. Notable exceptions, of course, are the various exegeses produced by Michael of Ephesus and Eustratios of Nicaea under the patronage of Anna Komnene in the first half of the twelfth century. It must be said, though, that this exegetical production constituted a rather isolated phenomenon, which barely reflects the overall teaching of philosophy at that time. Their contemporary, Theodore of Smyrna, who bore the title of 'consul of the philosophers' and was thus responsible for the teaching of philosophy in Constantinople, still produced an Ἐπιτομή τῶν ὄσα περὶ φύσεως καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν ἀρχῶν τοῖς παλαιοῖς διείληπται (contained in ms. *Vindobonensis theol. gr.* 134).

students of the Word of <God> Who Is⁴⁵ and for those initiated to the Truth some small comments that we have made on this science of logic.⁴⁶

Logic is here subordinated by Blemmydes, explicitly and *a priori*, to Christian truth.⁴⁷ It has a value not in itself, but as a profane discipline helping us to understand the true meanings of the Holy Scripture.⁴⁸ The same author later made clear in his *Autobiography* that in the second book of the Εἰσαγωγικὴ ἐπιτομή (the so-called *Epitome physica*) he dealt with those subjects of natural philosophy ‘which are the more appropriate’ (τὰ καιριώτερα) and ‘which are not far from what is useful’,⁴⁹ presumably not far from Christian doctrine. For Blemmydes, philosophy (including astronomy) had to be taught selectively and the epitome was the ideal form for his teaching.

Such a concise, theologically oriented fashion of teaching philosophy could not respond to the intellectual needs which arose in the Palaiologan era. This is aptly illustrated by George Akropolites (1217–82), a disciple of Blemmydes who later assumed the direction of the restored imperial school

⁴⁵ Blemmydes taught logic (and physics) in the monastery that he founded near Ephesus, dedicated to ‘God Who Is’ (Θεοῦ τοῦ ὄντος).

⁴⁶ *Epitome logica* 688C Wegelin: Ἐπειδήπερ ἡ λογικὴ ἐπιστήμη πρὸς τὴν ἱερὰν Γραφήν καὶ πάντα τοὺς τῆς ἀληθείας λόγους οὐκ ὀλίγον φέρει τὸ χρήσιμον, δεόν ἐκρίναμεν τοῖς τοῦ λόγου φοιτηταῖς τοῦ ὄντος καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας μύσταις μικροῦς τινας ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ λογικῇ λιπεῖν ἡμετέρους ὑπομνηματισμούς.

⁴⁷ The ‘words of truth’ (οἱ τῆς ἀληθείας λόγοι), which Blemmydes refers to, are not to be understood in a philosophical sense; they are in fact inspired from Saint Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 2:15.

⁴⁸ Such a conception of the value of philosophy, and especially logic, can be seen in Byzantium as early as in the writings of John of Damascus (died c. 749): the first part of his tripartite Πηγὴ γνώσεως (*Fons scientiae*), entitled Φιλόσοφα κεφάλαια, is merely a compendium of logic which serves as a clarifying introduction of terms used in the treatises Περὶ ἀρέσεων and Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως which come next. Logic played sometimes an important role within the theological controversies in Byzantium (see, for instance, Ierodiakonou 2002b on the role of logic in the Hesychast debate). Blemmydes himself wrote several short treatises on Christological and Trinitarian questions, and we may assume that, by teaching logic in his monastery, he wished to produce good theologians who would be able to defend the true meaning of the Scriptures.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Autobiographia* 2: 75.1–8 Munitiz: Ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ τὴν συλλογιστικὴν καὶ τὰ πρὸ ταύτης ἐν ἐπιτομῇ θέσθαι φθάνομεν, ἥπερ ἰσχύς σαφηνίσαντες. τὰ τε τῆς φυσικῆς καιριώτερα καὶ τὰ τῆς μετεωρολογίας ἀναγκαϊότερα, καὶ τῶν διττῶν καὶ ἀντιστρόφων περιφορῶν καὶ τῆς τῶν αἰθερίων σωμάτων κινήσεως καὶ τῶν ταύταις ἐπομένων, ὅσα μὴ πόρρω τοῦ χρησίμου, τὸν ὅμοιον τρόπον περιοδεύομεν ‘We have been able to put syllogistic in an epitome, as well as what precedes it, clarifying these subjects as far as it was possible. And we went in a similar way through the most appropriate subjects of the physics and the most necessary ones of the meteorology, and through the double and inverse rotations and the movement of the ethereal bodies and what follows them, anything which is not far from what is useful’

of higher studies in the reconquered Constantinople. In one of his letters, he enthusiastically speaks of his personal study of 'the most divine Plato' and the Neoplatonic philosophers that enabled him to understand the precise meaning of a difficult passage of Gregory of Nazianzus, on which his teacher Blemmydes had been unable to help him.⁵⁰ What Akropolites had learned in his Nicaean youth was obviously not sufficient any more.

With the return of the empire to Constantinople, a renewed interest in ancient philosophy began somehow to develop. A need was felt to read texts which the previous generation had ignored (as the case of Akropolites studying Plato on his own illustrates) or to study extensively texts which had previously been known mainly through synopses and epitomes, as Pachymeres' various Aristotelian exegeses suggest. Now, studying Plato or Aristotle for their own sake (and through their own texts) is, of course, a proper philosophical activity. Furthermore, it had important consequences for the interaction between philosophy and theology in Byzantine thought. For undertaking an exegetical enterprise presupposes that the text studied is considered to have a value in itself and,⁵¹ thus, paves the way for a close interaction with it. Therefore, even though philosophical positions more or less incompatible with Christian doctrine could easily be left unmentioned or superficially treated in an epitome, the framework of an exegesis necessitated that they be taken seriously into account. Aristotle's conception of the first unmoved mover, for instance, which lacks a detailed exposition in Blemmydes' *Epitome physica*, found in Pachymeres' exegesis its way to identification with Saint Paul's 'blessed and only Sovereign'. Overtly

⁵⁰ Cf. *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* II: 71.1–13 Heisenberg-Wirth ('In Gregorii Nazianzeni sententias'): Περί τούτων καὶ γὰρ ἐν μείραξιν ἔτι τελῶν καὶ τῷ θεσπεσίῳ ἐκείνῳ ἀνδρὶ τῷ φιλοσοφωτάτῳ Βλεμμύδῃ, ἠνίκα παρ' αὐτῷ ἐφοίτων, ἐκοινολογήσαμην, ἀλλ' οὐδὲν τί μοι εἶχεν εἰρηκέναι σαφῶς, ἀλλ' ἄπερ καὶ ἄλλοι τὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐξηγούμενοι (λέγω δὲ τὸν μέγαν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις Μάξιμον καὶ τοὺς μετ' αὐτόν) εἰς πλάτος ἢ καὶ κατὰ σχολὴν διασαφοῦντες εἰρήκεσαν, ἐκεῖνά μοι καὶ αὐτὸς πρὸς τὴν ἀπορίαν ἐφθέγγετο. ἀλλ' ἐπέειπερ αὐτὸς τῶν τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἠψάμην ὀργίων τῷ τε θειοτάτῳ συνῆλθον Πλάτωνι καὶ τῷ μουσολήπτῳ Πρόκλῳ, ἔτι τε μὴν τοῖς ἐνθεαστικωτάτοις ἀνδράσιν Ἰαμβλίχῳ τε καὶ Πλωτίνῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς, οὓς οὐ καιρὸς καταλέγειν, ἐποδηγήθην πρὸς τὴν διάγνωσιν τοῦ ῥητοῦ. 'I spoke about these <two passages of Gregory of Nazianzus> to Blemmydes—this marvellous man who was most learned in philosophy—when I was still young and studied with him. But he had nothing clear to say to me; he repeated, all in all, what the other exegetes (I mean the great author Maximus [sc. the Confessor] and those who followed him) had said on the Father, explaining <his text> either in a general context or in the form of a commentary. But when I grasped by myself the mysteries of philosophy and joined the most divine Plato, the Muse-inspired Proclus and other most inspired men, such as Iamblichus, Plotinus and others whom it is not the right time to enumerate, I was guided to the comprehension of that passage.'

⁵¹ See the illuminating remarks of Karamanolis (2006).

Christian as it is, this interpretation of Aristotle was the result of the study of Aristotle's text and not a prefatory announcement of an epitome, conceived as an actual part of an account of philosophical studies as a preliminary to Christian doctrine. Against this background, the rehabilitation of exegesis in the early Palaiologan era can be legitimately regarded as a sign of a (re)-gained autonomy for the field of philosophical studies in Byzantium.⁵²

To come back to Pachymeres' poetic epilogue, it is unlikely that this sort of text could have been conceived as an epilogue to a synopsis or an epitome of the *Physics*. It is, indeed, very likely that Pachymeres found a source of inspiration for a hymn crowning his commentary on the *Physics* in Simplicius' (sixth century AD) exegesis of Aristotle's *De caelo*, which ends with the following prayer in prose:

This <commentary>, o Master of the Universe and Creator of the simple bodies in it,⁵³ I offer to You and to Your creations as a hymn, for I have desired to contemplate the greatness of Your works and to reveal it to those who are worthy (τοῖς ἀξίοις), so that we should not think of You anything cheap or human, but worship You according to Your transcendence with regard to everything which is produced by You.⁵⁴

These lines express, of course, the heathen *Weltanschauung* of a Neoplatonist, who offers his hymn equally to the Creator and to the creations (ταῦτά σοι ... καὶ τοῖς ὑπό σου γενομένοις). Moreover, they are conceived as a counterpoint to the impiety of the godless and ignorant Christians (and in particular of John Philoponus, the counter-example of the ἀξιοί), who deny the divine eternity of the heavens and prefer to venerate in the cheapest way the human relics of Christ.⁵⁵ It appears, however, that they

⁵² Such a regained autonomy would, of course, be not irrelevant to the intellectual controversies of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, during which further discussions on philosophy's content and scope were to take place.

⁵³ The simple bodies (fire, air, water, earth) of the cosmos, which are transcendently manifested in the heavens, constitute, according to Simplicius, the σκόπος of Aristotle's treatise, as it is traditionally determined in the prolegomena of the commentary.

⁵⁴ Simplicius, *In De caelo* 731.25–29 Heiberg: Ταῦτά σοι, ὦ δέσποτα τοῦ τε κόσμου παντός καὶ τῶν ἀπλῶν ἐν αὐτῷ σωμάτων δημιουργέ, καὶ τοῖς ὑπό σου γενομένοις εἰς ἕμνον προσφέρω τὸ μέγεθος τῶν σῶν ἔργων ἐποπτεῦσαί τε καὶ τοῖς ἀξίοις ἐκφῆναι προθυμηθεῖς, ἵνα μηδὲν εὐτελές ἢ ἀνθρώπινον περὶ σου λογιζόμενοι κατὰ τὴν ὑπεροχὴν σε προσκυνῶμεν, ἣν ἔχεις πρὸς πάντα τὰ ὑπό σου παραγόμενα. Simplicius also concluded with prayers his commentaries on Epictetus' *Encheiridion* and Aristotle's *Categories*. For a concise but excellent account of Simplicius' prayers, see Hadot (1978: 164–65).

⁵⁵ In the course of the commentary, Simplicius refers to the relics of Christ as 'rubbish more worthless than excrement' (κοπρίων ἐκβλητότερα). The whole passage is worth quoting, since it anticipates in many regards the content of the final prayer (*In De caelo* 370.29–371.4 Heiberg): "Ὅτι δὲ συμφυῆς ἐστί ταῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ψυχαῖς τὰ οὐράνια θεῖα νομίζουσιν, δηλοῦσι μάλιστα οἱ ὑπὸ προλήψεων ἀθέων πρὸς τὰ οὐράνια διαβεβλημένοι.

could still inspire a Christian intellectual like Pachymeres. For precisely the idea of a hymn as an epilogue of an Aristotelian exegesis as well as some of the introductory expressions are to be found in Simplicius.⁵⁶ And if we leave their rather secondary theological divergences aside—due to Simplicius' being a pagan philosopher and Pachymeres a Christian one—the two hymns are pretty much motivated by the same sentiment of religious faith.

No doubt Pachymeres was devoted to Christ, just as he stated in the poetic epilogue to the commentary on the *Physics*. What deserves our attention, however, is that Pachymeres felt free to find inspiration in a fervent pagan like Simplicius, who was moreover outspokenly sacrilegious with regard to Christ. This is a manifestation of a 'humanist' attitude—which has long been detected in Pachymeres' historical work—towards ancient philosophy: it acknowledged its value and was therefore able to learn from it and to renew its content.

Concluding remark

The poetic epilogue which crowns Pachymeres' commentary on the *Physics* can be seen as an illustration of Pachymeres' belief that, contrary to implicit monastic claims of his time, true devoutness to God could be prepared and duly expressed through philosophy. We may justifiably assert that, albeit in a different context and with a different content, philosophy was thus finding anew in Byzantium its Platonic origins as a method of assimilation to God; as such, it was thought to be certainly worthy of serious and engaging study. Pachymeres' synopsis of the Aristotelian corpus (the *Philosophia*) and his

καὶ γὰρ καὶ οὗτοι τὸν οὐρανὸν οἰκητήριον εἶναι τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ θρόνον αὐτοῦ λέγουσι καὶ μόνον ἰκανὸν εἶναι τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δόξαν καὶ ὑπεροχὴν τοῖς ἀξίοις ἀποκαλύπτειν· ὧν τί ἂν εἴη σεμνότερον; καὶ ὅμως, ὥσπερ ἐπιλανθανόμενοι τούτων, τὰ κοπρίων ἐκβλητότερα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τιμώτερα νομίζουσι καὶ ὡς πρὸς ὕβριν τὴν ἑαυτῶν γενόμενον οὕτως ἀτιμάζειν φιλονεικοῦσιν. 'That it is innate in human souls to think of celestial realities as being divine is made clear by those who, influenced by their atheistic prejudices, slander the Heavens. As a matter of fact, even they say that the Heavens are the residence of the divine and its throne, and that the Heavens only are capable of revealing to those who are worthy of it the glory and the transcendence of God. Could one find more venerable conceptions? However, as if they forget all this, they consider that some rubbish more worthless than excrement is more venerable than the Heavens, and they quarrel between themselves about which one of them will outrage the Heavens better, as if the Heavens were born only to give rise to their insolence.' On these passages and more generally on the intellectual background of Simplicius' polemics against Christians, see the classic study of Hoffmann (1987).

⁵⁶ Simplicius: ταῦτά σοι, ὦ δέσποτα ... καὶ ... δημιουργέ ... εἰς ὕμνον προσφέρω. Cf. Pachymeres (vv. 25–26): πλεῖον ἔχων ἢ σύ, ὕμνον αὔειν πατρὶ ἀπάντων. Ταῦτ' ἄρα σοι ...

running commentaries on Aristotle (as well as on Plato) were precisely the literary fruition of such an approach to philosophy, which was now opened to many uses and assessments. Pachymeres interpreted philosophy, we can schematically say, within a Christian humanist context, combining profound knowledge of classical literature, anti-monastic ideals, and religious inspiration. But in later Byzantine intellectual history, someone like Plethon was to go so far as to dismiss Christianity in favour of a renewed religion inspired by ancient philosophy and pagan beliefs.

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