

**The philosophical contribution of a *homo byzantinus*:  
The *De omnifaria doctrina* of Michael Psellus (1017/1018-1078 AD)**

**La contribución filosófica de un *homo byzantinus*:  
La *De omnifaria doctrina* de Miguel Psellos (1017/1018-1078)**

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**Abstract:** Michael Psellus was one of the most erudite and prolific thinkers of the Byzantine Middle Ages. His *oeuvre* includes historical writings, philosophical treatises and commentaries, theological writings, poems, speeches, legal, geographical, military, and medical works as well as works on music. Psellus taught all branches of philosophy, by closely reading and commenting on the works of ancient philosophers, and especially on Aristotle's logical treatises. At the same time he had a strong preference for Plato and the Neoplatonists, and especially for Proclus, whom he considered an authority among ancient authors. In this paper I will present the *De omnifaria doctrina*, a treatise which deals with various issues, such as Philosophy, Theology, Psychology, Ethics, Metaphysics, Biology, Cosmology, etc. The author attempts to present a worldview through the prism of Christian Theology and Ethics. Although Psellus depends on the scientific tradition, i.e. philosophy and theology, of both Classical and Late Antiquity, the *De omnifaria doctrina* constitutes an original work. A second feature by which one can speak of originality in *De omnifaria doctrina* is how to address the content: the Byzantine polygraph scientifically demonstrates a solvent and precise knowledge in his understanding of that. Lastly, the paper will attempt to present a synthesis of both science and philosophy in 11<sup>th</sup> century Byzantium.

**Key Words:** Michael Psellus, Byzantium, Platon, Proclus, John Damascene, Metaphysics.

**Resumen:** Miguel Psellos fue uno de los pensadores más eruditos y prolíficos de la Edad Media bizantina. Su obra incluye escritos históricos, tratados filosóficos y comentarios, escritos teológicos, poemas, discursos, obras jurídicas, geográficas, militares y de medicina, así como obras sobre música. Psellos enseñó todas las ramas de la filosofía, mediante lecturas y comentarios muy afinados sobre las obras de los filósofos antiguos, y especialmente sobre los tratados lógicos de Aristóteles. Al mismo tiempo tuvo una marcada preferencia por Platón y los neoplatónicos, y especialmente por Proclo, a quien consideraba una autoridad entre los autores antiguos. En este artículo voy a exponer *De omnifaria doctrina*, un tratado que se ocupa de diversos asuntos, tales como Filosofía, Teología, Psicología, Ética, Metafísica, Biología, Cosmología, etc. El autor busca presentar una visión del mundo a través del prisma de la teología y la ética cristianas. Aunque Psellos depende de la tradición científica, es decir, la filosofía y la teología, tanto de la Antigüedad clásica como de la tardía, *De omnifaria doctrina* constituye una obra original. Una segunda característica por la cual se puede hablar de originalidad en *De omnifaria doctrina* es la forma de abordar el contenido: el polígrafo bizantino demuestra científicamente un conocimiento solvente y preciso en su comprensión de eso. Por último, el artículo tratará de presentar una síntesis de la ciencia y de la filosofía en el Bizancio del siglo XI.

**Palabras Clave:** Miguel Psellos, Bizancio, Platón, Proclo, Juan Damasceno, Metafísica

**Summary:** 1. Introduction. 2. Psellus' preference for Neoplatonism. 3. The philosophical treatises of Michael Psellus. 4. *De omnifaria doctrina*. 5. Conclusion. Sources and Bibliography.

## 1. Introduction

When in 1050 Michael Psellus<sup>1</sup> appeared in the Byzantine cultural scene, he has already made a qualitative leap compared to humanism of the previous era to which Photius and Arethas belonged.<sup>2</sup> The role of cultural activity represented by the imperial school of philosophy, promoted by John Mauropous and lifted up its ἀκμή by his disciple Michael Psellus, represents such a progress of philosophical activity in Byzantium, which can be characterized as a true “resurrection of Greek philosophy”.<sup>3</sup> To the extent that the preference of Platonic philosophy for Psellus was clear and manifest, one can also speak of an authentic “Neo-Platonic renaissance”. The peripatetic tendencies of Photius and Arethas, which they tried to reconcile with some recognition of the theological value of Platonism, yield, with Psellus, to a strong preference for the Neoplatonic tendency,<sup>4</sup> which remains, as has happened in Antiquity, a demure recognition of the explanatory value of Aristotelian philosophy. In his *Chronography* Psellus speaks of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, whose company he went down the path that led to the mighty harbour of the admirable Proclus.<sup>5</sup> This personal enthusiasm for Neoplatonic philosophy is, by itself, an innovative aspect, and, somewhat, transgressive, of the way in which, so far, the philosophical activity

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<sup>1</sup> About Psellus and his work see indicatively: Stratis PAPAIOANNOU, *Michael Psellos. Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013; C. BARBER, and D. JENKINS (eds.), *Reading Michael Psellos*, Leiden, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> J. DUFFY, “The Lonely Mission of Michael Psellus” in K. IERODIAKONOU (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 145; B. TATAKIS, *La philosophie byzantine. Presses Universitaires de France*, Paris 1949, p. 187, is referred to Psellus as «homme de la Renaissance»; on the recognition of a distinct humanism and promoted by Photius and Arethas, cfr. U. CRISCUOLO, *Michele Psello. Epistola a Giovanni Xifilino. Seconda edizione riveduta e ampliata a cura di Ugo Criscuolo*, (Hellenica et Byzantina Napolitana, 14), Bibliopolis, Napoli, 1990, p. 14; U. CRISCUOLO, “L’umanesimo di Michele Psello”, *Ibidem*, p. 42: «affermeremo che egli fu senz’altro un umanista, un umanista ‘bizantino’»; In this case, it is the claim of humanism as cultural renewal emanating from the study of science and ancient literature, which, in the case of Psellus, is not incompatible with humanism that he merits as a Christian humanist. About Psellus’ humanism see G. PODSKALSKY, *Von Photios zu Bessarion. Der Vorrang humanistisch geprägter Theologie in Byzanz und deren bleibende Bedeutung*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2003, pp. 23-25.

<sup>3</sup> A. LIBERA, *La philosophie médiévale*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1993, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> G. PODSKALSKY, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz. Der Streit um die theologische Methodik in der spätbyzantinischen Geistesgeschichte (14/15 Jh.), seine systematischen Grundlagen und seine historische Entwicklung* (Byzantinisches Archiv, 15), C. H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, München 1977, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Michael PSELLUS, *Chronography* 6,38: “Ἐντεῦθεν οὖν ὀρμηθεὶς αὐθις ὥσπερ περίοδον ἐκπληρῶν ἐς Πλωτίνους καὶ Πορφύριους καὶ Ἰαμβλίχους κατήειν, μεθ’ οὗς ὁδῶ προβαίνων εἰς τὸν θαυμασιώτατον Προκλον ὡς ἐπὶ λιμένα μέγιστον κατασχών, πᾶσαν ἐκεῖθεν ἐπιστήμην τε καὶ νοήσεων ἀκριβείαν ἔσπασα”.

had been faced in Byzantium.<sup>6</sup> Under the empire of Constantinus IX Monomachus (1042-1055), Psellus inaugurated the official position of «ὑπατος τῶν φιλοσόφων», position that Psellus' disciple John Italus inherited from him; Psellus had been also the teacher of the future Emperor Michael VII Ducas (1071-1078).<sup>7</sup>

Psellus was a polymath whose enormous *oeuvre* encompasses historical, philosophical, rhetorical, theological, and legal texts as well as a collection of letters. As a philosopher Psellus emphasized the role of nature as *physis*, which, created as it was by God, functions according to its immanent laws, leaving a very limited place for the miraculous. We must have in mind that his philosophical *oeuvre* is the literary expression of his teaching and exegetical issues arising out of his profession as a “court philosopher”.<sup>8</sup> In this regard, it is appropriate to draw attention to the fact that philosophical activity, which Psellus performed as a teacher and interpreter of classical and Hellenistic philosophy, within the officer corps of the higher educational institutions of the Byzantine Empire, represents, already, a “historic landmark”.<sup>9</sup> In his writings Psellus addresses the most natural controversial issues which could result from a dogmatic interpretation of Christian Orthodoxy, the relative autonomy of the laws of nature and the difficulty that it is entirely subordinate to divine Providence and anthropological pessimism, and yet he remained faithful to the basic guidelines of Christianity,<sup>10</sup> following the guidelines of his contemporary

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<sup>6</sup> I. PÉREZ MARTÍN, “Miguel Pselo y el neoplatonismo en el s. XI”, *Debats* 90 (2005), pp. 94-101, at 95: “Miguel Pselo y el neoplatonismo en el s. XI”, *Debats* 90 (2005) 98: “El propio Pselo afirma el carácter excepcional de su actividad en distintas ocasiones, aireando una inmodestia que constituye uno de los rasgos de su personalidad más llamativos y opuestos a una civilización como la bizantina, en la que priman la humildad intelectual y el anonimato”.

<sup>7</sup> The Byzantine historian Michael ATTALEIATES (1020-1085) is the principal source of knowledge of that office by the Emperor Constantinus IX Monomachus: «οὗτω καὶ τὴν μάχην κατορθώσας ὁ βασιλεὺς ἤσυχίαν ἤγε καὶ τῶν πολιτικῶν πραγμάτων ἡδέως ἀντείχετο, μουσεῖον τῆς νομοθετικῆς ἀναγείρας καὶ νομοφύλακα προστησάμενος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ τῆς φιλοσοφίας οὐρανοβάμωνος ἐπεμελήθη μαθήματος, πρόεδρον τῶν φιλοσόφων προχειρισάμενος ἄνδρα τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς διαφέροντα γνώσει, καὶ τοὺς νέους πρὸς ἄσκησιν τῶν σοφῶν λόγων καὶ μαθημάτων προὔτρεψατο σὺν τῷ εὐμαρεῖ τῶν διδασκάλων καὶ γέρων τούτους ἐν τῷ δημεγορεῖν βασιλικῶν ἀξιῶν».

<sup>8</sup> A. KAZHDAN, “Michael Psellus”, *ODB*, vol. 3, p. 1754.

<sup>9</sup> About the teaching character of Psellus, cfr. D.J. O'MEARA, “Aspects du travail philosophique de Michel Psellus (*Philosophica minora*, vol. II)”, in: C.-F. COLLATZ, J. DUMMER, J. KOLLESCH, M.-L. WERLITZ (Hrsg.), *Dissertatiunculae criticae. Festschrift für Günther Christian Hansen*. Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 1998, p. 433. About Psellus, as a “historic landmark”, see TATAKIS 1949, pp. 197, 209.

<sup>10</sup> About the Christian character of Psellus, see Alberto del CAMPO ECHEVARRÍA, *La teoría platónica de la ideas en Bizancio (ss. V-XI): Principios, desarrollos e inversión final de la ontología clásica*, PhD thesis submitted at the Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, 2010, p. 447, footnote 10. Unfortunately, I could not have access to the edition of the above thesis: Alberto del Campo Echevarría, *La teoría platónica de las Ideas en Bizancio (siglos IX-XI)*, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, 2012.

theologian Nicetas Stethatos (11<sup>th</sup> c.).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, one of the general features which must be taken into account as a historical and doctrinal contribution of Psellus is his sense of scientific responsibility, which himself as Greek completes.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Psellus' preference for Neoplatonism

Psellus' overall philosophical program constitutes an appreciation of the more direct and objective Neoplatonism, than the one Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor and John Damascene, as also Philoponus and Stephen of Alexandria have adopted.<sup>13</sup> Psellus also goes beyond the attitude that their immediate predecessors had adopted in relation to philosophy. If, on the one hand, Photius had restored the habit of writing Neoplatonic commentaries to the works of Aristotle and if, on the other hand, Arethas had contributed to that with a copy of some Alexandrian commentaries, Psellus reinforces this trend, as he was devoted to comment not only the logical works of Aristotle, but also he does the same with his *Physica*; and, what is even more important from this point of view, Psellus restores the habit of writing comments to Platonic works, as the platonic dialogue of *Timaeus*.<sup>14</sup> The fact that Aristotelian philosophy occupies a prominent position in the exegetical treatises of Psellus, especially in regard to the examination of the soul and the theory of knowledge, in addition to biological and physical issues, this shall not prevent the discovery of pamphlets dedicated to analysis and exegesis of Platonic philosophy *per se*. The titles of the Psellus works devoted to this purpose are the following:<sup>15</sup>

- a) *Εἰς τὴν ψυχογονία τοῦ Πλάτωνος.*
- b) *Ἐξήγησις τῆς ἐν τῷ Τιμαίῳ τοῦ Πλάτωνος μαθηματικῆς περὶ ψυχῆς ὑπάρξεως καὶ γενέσεως .*
- c) *Ἐτέρας πλατωνικῆς διανοίας ἐξήγησις ἀπὸ Τιμαίου.*
- d) *Ἐξήγησις τελεωτέρα τοῦ λείμματος.*
- e) *Ἐξήγησις τῆς πλατωνικῆς ἐν τῷ Φαίδρῳ διφρείας τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ στρατείας τῶν θεῶν.*
- f) *Περὶ τῶν ἰδεῶν, ἃς ὁ Πλάτων λέγει*<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> F. LAURITZEN, "Psello discepolo di Stetato", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 101(2008), 715-725, at 725

<sup>12</sup> Tatakis 1949: p. 196.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Psellus, *Opuscula logica, Physica, allegorica, alia* § 3, 210-213; J. M. DUFFY(2002), p. 11: "Ἑλλήνων δὲ οὐ πᾶσι τοῖς λόγοις διαβεβλήμεθα, ἀλλ' ὅσα μὲν περὶ φύσεως εἰσεδεξάμεθα, τοῖς δὲ περὶ τῆς ὕλης ὡς ἀγεννήτου λόγοις ἀπέπαμεν".

<sup>14</sup> Duffy 2002: p. 153.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. L. BENAKIS, *Βυζαντινά κείμενα καὶ μελέται. Texts and Studies on Byzantine Philosophy*, Παρουσία, Αθήνα, 2002, p. 425, n. 1. For a complete list of Psellus' philosophical treatises, cfr. Paul Moore (ed.), *Iter Psellianum. A Detailed Listing of Manuscript Sources for All Works Attributed to Michael Psellos, Including a Comprehensive Bibliography*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 2005, pp. 233-340. In this above study of Moore (pp. 626-684), the author cites a bibliographical appendix along with the studies on Psellus in general.

<sup>16</sup> L. BENAKIS, "Μιχαὴλ Ψελλοῦ, *Περὶ τῶν ἰδεῶν, ἃς ὁ Πλάτων λέγει*. Εἰσαγωγή, κριτικὴ ἔκδοσις, καὶ νεοελληνικὴ μετάφρασις", *Φιλοσοφία* 5-6(1975-1976), 393-423. The same edition,



g) *Τίνα τρόπον ὁ Πλάτων οἶται εἰσοικίζεσθαι τὰς ψυχὰς τοῖς τῶν ἀλόγων ζώων σώμασι*<sup>17</sup>.

h) *Τίνος χάριν τριμερῆ τὴν ψυχὴν οἱ περὶ Πλάτωνα καὶ Ἀριστοτέλην εἰρήκασι*<sup>18</sup>

This activity of commenting and exegesis has made Psellus a promoter of the study of ancient philosophy as a whole; he does not only deal with Plato and Aristotle, but also from the Presocratics to the Neoplatonists, to Stoicism and the Church Fathers. A program of such historical and philosophical dimensions, which requires the foundations of a rationalist attitude,<sup>19</sup> could not be carried out only with the accentuation of the pedagogical nature of his treatises and the consequent absence of systematic coherence.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. The philosophical treatises of Michael Psellus

From a philosophical point of view, the *oeuvre* of Psellus can be, considering the format and style, divided into two groups. The first group is represented by two hundred and one paragraphs which consist of *De omnifaria doctrina*; the

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with an appendix of *Addenda et corrigenda*, part of L. BENAKIS, “Μιχαὴλ Ψελλοῦ, *Περὶ τῶν ἰδεῶν, ἃς ὁ Πλάτων λέγει*. Εἰσαγωγή, κριτική ἔκδοση, καὶ νεοελληνικὴ μετάφραση”, *Βυζαντινά κείμενα καὶ μελέται. Texts and Studies on Byzantine Philosophy*, Παρουσία, Αθήνα, 2002, 425-461. The work was reedited in *Michaelis Pselli philosophica minora*. Ediderunt J.M. DUFFY et D.J. O’MEARA. Vol.II. *Opuscula psychologica, theologica, daemonologica*. Edidit D. J. O’MEARA, Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, Leipzig, 1989, pp. 111-115.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, pp. 114-116.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 107.

<sup>19</sup> To assess properly the rationalism of Psellos not only do we have to take into account the way in which renews the interpretation of Neoplatonism from its predecessors, but also that such a positive assessment of this philosophical trend indicating a net opposing currents of mystical theology represented by his contemporaries as Symeon the New Theologian and Nicetas Stethatos. Cfr. G. KAPRIEV, *Philosophie in Byzanz*, Königshausen & Neumann, 2005, p. 201; B. TATAKIS, *La philosophie byzantine*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1949, p. 139; U. CRISCUOLO, “L’umanesimo Michele Psello. *Epistola a Giovanni Xifilino*. Seconda edizione riveduta e ampliata a cura di Ugo Criscuolo, (Hellenica et Byzantina Napolitana, 14) Bibliopolis, Napoli, 1990, p. 33,35 and note 18 draws attention to the fact that Psellus rejected irrationalism, originated from Christian monastic asceticism or a certain decadent Neoplatonism. D.J. O’MEARA, “Aspects du travail philosophique de Michel Psellus (Philosophica minora, vol. II)”, C.-F. COLLATZ, J. DUMMER, J. KOLLESCH, M.-L. WERLITZ (hrsg.), *Dissertationunculae criticae. Festschrift für Günther Christian Hansen*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 1998, pp. 431-439, at p. 439 recognizes a rationalist attitude in the rejection of popular superstitions.

<sup>20</sup> On the non-systematic character of Psellos, cfr. PODSKALSKY 1977, p. 112, affirms Plato as a promoter and therefore denies both his originality and his systematic character. D. JENKINS, “Psellos’ Conceptual Precision”, C. BARBER – D. JENKINS(eds.), *Reading Michael Psellos*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2006, p. 133, repeats the opinion of Podskalsky; in any case, P. ATHANASSIADI, “Byzantine Commentators on the Chaldean Oracles: Psellos and Plethon”, in K. IERODIAKONOU(ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, pp. 237-252, at p. 246, recognizes a pretense of system in Psellus’ interpretation of *Oracula Chaldaica*.

second group, much larger, consists of tracts of greater length and greater thematic autonomy, than the treatise mentioned above.

#### 4. *De omnifaria doctrina*

The *De omnifaria doctrina* is, overall, a very rich work, from the philosophical point of view. Having being dedicated to the emperor Michael VII Dukas (1071-1078), who, as noted above, was a pupil of Psellus, we do find within the work several interpellations to him. This is an aspect that gives to the work the pedagogical nature of a deferred dialogue, complementary to that is implied in the form of ἐρωταποκρίσεις of Psellus' philosophical treatises;<sup>21</sup> at the same time the Byzantine philosopher allows to read more lightly, densely and concisely the amount of knowledge on different subjects reflected in the work.<sup>22</sup>

The various paragraphs are arranged thematically in the following order: Theology (§§1-20), Psychology (§§ 21-61), Ethics (§§ 62-81), Metaphysics (§§ 82-107), Biology (§§ 108-119), Astronomy (§§120-150), Cosmology (§§ 151-162), Geophysics (§§ 163-193), again Psychology (§§ 194-197), a second group of treatises on Metaphysics (§§ 198-201) and three appendices on Theology and Metaphysics, among which one is of utmost importance to us about how the author, on the one hand, accepts and, on the other hand, criticizes the Platonic theory of Ideas.

The variety of topics and the art of synthesis and concision with which it is presented to us make us assume that we are dealing with a work of encyclopedic character, an epitome or a manual of the most important physical, biological, metaphysical and theological issues that every cultivated man should know. Psellus follows closely John Damascene and Maximus the Confessor, in Theology,<sup>23</sup> and several authors of Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, in Cosmology, Psychology, and Metaphysics, among whom we should mention Aetius, Plutarch, Plotinus, Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.<sup>24</sup> Among them Proclus occupies a prominent place, philosopher especially

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<sup>21</sup> Y. PAPADOYANNAKIS, "Instruction by Question and Answer: The Case of Late Antique and Byzantine Erotapokriseis" in: S. FRITZGERALD (ed.), *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity. Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism*, Ashgate, Aldershot-Burlington, 2006, pp. 91-105, at 99-100.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. L. G. WESTERINK (ed.), *Michael Psellus. De omnifaria doctrina. Critical Text and Introduction* Centrale Drukkerij, Nijmegen 1948, pp. 2-4, where the editor cites the variant titles of the manuscript tradition.

<sup>23</sup> CRISCUOLO 1990, p. 34 has emphasized, moreover, the strong dependence Psellus maintains with respect to John Damascene, who, in addition to Logic, has played a key role in guiding the confession of faith of 1054 -year of the Great Schism between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, after the allegations of Patriarch Cerularius. According to the author, the importance of John Damascene in the work of Michael Psellus is even higher than that recognizes to Basil of Caesarea or to Gregory Nazianzenus.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Psellus uses John Damascene as a *fons unicus* in §§ 2-5; he follows with Maximus the Confessor in § 6. The presence of Neoplatonic authors is constant throughout the whole treatise, although Psychology takes precedence, i.e. in §§ 21-61.

nominated by Psellus, who sometimes “uses” him as a single source in the writing of a single treatise. Moreover, the absence of references to Neoplatonic authors of the Alexandrian school casts further to see into the absence of reference to the universal triple Alexandrian classification.

Although Psellus depends on the scientific tradition, i.e. philosophy and theology, of both Classical and Late Antiquity, the *De omnifaria doctrina* constitutes an original work, once we estimate that from the historical point of view of the scientific and philosophical thought, since, retreating in time, we find no theoretical synthesis of such magnitude into the *oeuvre* of the philosophically respectable John Damascene. A second feature by which one can speak of originality in *De omnifaria doctrina* is how to address the content: the Byzantine polygraph scientifically demonstrates a solvent and precise knowledge in his understanding of that. Psellus compares with wit and ease the different views that several authors of Classical or Late Antiquity have on the same subject, boasting of his own criteria at making personal judgment to the worldview of Orthodox Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

The attitude that explains the interest of Psellus at thematizing a matter, or indicating the different solutions that have been proposed, leaving a margin of freedom to the reader that he choose which, in his opinion, could be closer to the truth, or simply to be informed of a culture that should not be ignored on pain of falling irresponsibly in the pit of ignorance. Many of the issues addressed in the first instance from the solutions proposed by Plato and Aristotle, philosophers that Psellus values as the two greatest philosophers of the Hellenic culture, using several expressions: “οἱ δὲ τελεώτεροι τῶν φιλοσόφων, Πλάτων καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης”.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, it can be said that these philosophers are the two main pillars of the *De omnifaria doctrina*. However, in no way can be said, therefore, that there is dogmatism. On the contrary, Psellos exerts an acute, deliberate and forceful criticism on the content, who, as a Christian thinker, can

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<sup>25</sup> In the *De omnifaria doctrina* Psellus is referred to Christianity repeatedly. Sometimes, he is referred to his doctrine with the expression “καθ'ἡμᾶς”, as in § 156,1, or in § 157,1: “οὔτε ἀγέννητος παρ' ἡμῖν ὁ κόσμος δοξάζεται οὔτε ἄφθαρτος”. Sometimes, he uses other other expressions: “ὥσπερ γὰρ ἡμεῖς οἱ τῷ ἀποστολικῷ λόγῳ”. In the comparison of pagan and Christian authors, who are represented in the case of Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius, he does make clear his preference for the version of the processional reditus of the Divine beings of the last author mentioned above, cfr. § 101, 9-11: “τοῦτο δὲ τὸ φιλοσόφημα καὶ ὁ φιλόσοφος Πρόκλος ἐν τοῖς κεφαλαίοις αὐτοῦ τίθησι καὶ διευκρινεῖ, καὶ πρὸ τούτου ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης Διονύσιος σαφέστερον τούτου διακριβοῦ”. Other times again, he is referred to the Hellenes, § 49, 7-8: “Ἕλληνας δὲ ποικιλώτερον περὶ τούτου διεξίασιν”.

<sup>26</sup> For the evaluation of Plato and Aristotle, cfr. *De omnifaria doctrina*, § 156, 1-2. Compare this evaluation of with that of Proclus, in which the Byzantine polymath is referred to him as the great Hellenic philosopher: Michael PSELLUS, *Theologica* I § 22, 38-39, ed. P. GAUTIER (1989): “οἱ τοίνυν θεολογικώτατοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων, ὃν δὴ Πρόκλος κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ψῆφον τὸ κεφάλαιον”; Idem, *Historia syntomos*, ed. W. J., AERTS (1990), § 52: “Πρόκλος ὁ μέγας ἦνθαι φιλόσοφος, ὃν ἐγὼ μετὰ γε Πλάτωνα τίθημι”.

not tolerate.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, *De omnifaria doctrina* represents a proof that, after theological systematization efforts of John of Damascus, following the troubles of Photius to recover the cultural awareness of all the Greek literary tradition and following the progress of Aretas, both in transmitting Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophy, as well as in the recovery of the genre of commentary on the Aristotelian logic, Byzantine culture lives with Psellus a renaissance and even a fullness in regards to skill in the use of concepts and the learning of science in a broad sense and philosophy in particular.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the writing of the *De omnifaria doctrina*, is, by itself, a sufficient fact to speak of a vigorous flourishing of science in Byzantine culture of 11<sup>th</sup> century, that, by making the holistic and systematic conception, has no precedent comparable before John Damascene and that unlike what happens with other Psellus' pamphlets; one should share the impersonal tone of treatises such as *Institutio elementaris*, *Dialectica* and *Expositio fidei*, and gets more expositional clarity than that which characterizes these treatises.<sup>28</sup> In particular, philosophy meets in this philosophical treatise of Psellus all its relevant content, expressed concisely and accurately, and it is presented with a systematic organization and discipline that makes each part acquire its significance in relation to the place that occupies in the whole.

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<sup>27</sup> Cfr. *De omnifaria doctrina* § 59, 1-2: “ὁ μὲν τὴν θεολογίαν μέγας Γρηγόριος ἀσαφῆς ἐστὶ περὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος”; *ibidem* § 45, 12-13: “Ἀναξαγόρας δὲ οὐ σαφῶς ψυχὴν λέγει τὸν νοῦν, ὃν πρῶτον κινεῖν τίθεται”.

<sup>28</sup> In the case of Michael Psellus, *De omnifaria doctrina* § 14; ed. L. G. WESTERINK (1948), p. 43; in this paragraph we should refer the two senses of λόγος, as φύσις and as ὑπόστασις, according to which one should say that in the Incarnation of Christ there was or there was no flesh passions, Psellus is based on John Damascene, achieving, by the effort of synthesis, a relative expository clarity.



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