

# Remarks to Nicephoros Blemmydes

## Understanding of Imagination

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### **Introduction**

The aim of my paper is not to present a schematic overview of the internal senses in late Byzantine thought. What I examine here is how Byzantine intellectuals dealt with the classical sources on the internal senses. I shall devote special attention to significant historical facts which influenced the Byzantine intellectual community, and differentiated it from the Latin West. In the second part of the paper, particular attention is paid to Nicephoros Blemmydes, the most important exponent of Aristotelianism in late Byzantine thought.

### **The internal senses in Byzantine thought**

The term „internal sense“ was not widely in use in antiquity.<sup>1</sup> It comes from the Medieval Islamic and Latin tradition. By the term „internal senses“ the philosophers designate the post-sensory faculties of the soul, which Aristotle differentiates as a class from the five senses, called „external senses“. The internal senses controlled various relations between the five external senses and the intellect. Although there were different attitudes among medieval authors concerning the number or function of the internal senses, in general there was a consensus that it was necessary to describe the psychological sphere in which various activities of the human soul con-

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on internal senses is vast. See E. Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, London, 1975; Simon Kemp and Garth J. O. Fletcher, «The medieval theory of the inner senses», *American Journal of Psychology*, 106 (1993): 559-576. [To the literature on the common sense in Aristotle, see Pavel Gregorić, *Aristotle on the Common Sense*. Oxford, 2007. To the literature on memory in the Aristotelian tradition, see David Bloch, *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection*. Leiden, 2007. The literature on imagination in Aristotle is vast. For the commentators, see Henry Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity: Interpretations of the De Anima* (London, 1996)]

nected with bodily functions took place.<sup>2</sup> The term itself names a complex of psychological faculties and activities, connected with the imagination, memory, and dreams. In general, the internal senses included three faculties: imagination (φανταστικόν), cogitation (διανοητικόν) and memory (μνημονευτικόν).<sup>3</sup>

The description of the mental faculties situated in the brain, and particularly in its ventricles, was among the central issues of medieval psychology.<sup>4</sup> The term „internal senses“ was a generic term which included faculties situated in several cerebral ventricles.<sup>5</sup> Although opinions differed as to which functions belonged to each of the three ventricles, the idea of ventricular localization was accepted for well over a thousand years. The theory of the internal senses was grounded in anatomical knowledge, and the decline of this theory came after a new, revolutionary theory of brain anatomy was developed by Andreas Vesalius.<sup>6</sup>

In comparison with the Latin, Arabic or Hebrew medieval tradition, little attention has been paid to description of the nature and classification of the „internal senses“ in Byzantine thought. Examination of Byzantine philosophical treatises on this subject (Michael of Ephesus, Gennadios Scholarios) still remains to be carried out. One possible reason for the lack of scholarship is the fact that there is still limited familiarity with Byzantine philosophical texts. Another reason may be that Byzantine philosophy has been stereotyped as concerned with preserving ancient texts and not

<sup>2</sup> Bundy, M. W., *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought*, University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, XII, 2-3, Urbana, Ill., 179-180. *Intellect et imagination dans la philosophie médiévale = Intellect and imagination in medieval philosophy = Intelecto e imaginação na filosofia medieval: actes du XIe Congrès international de philosophie médiévale de la Société internationale pour l'étude de la philosophie médiévale, S.I.E.P.M., Porto, du 26 au 31 août 2002*, eds. Pacheco, M. C. and Meirinhos, J. F., Rencontres de philosophie médiévale 11. Turnhout, Brepols, 2004; *Immaginario e Immaginazione nel Medioevo: Atti del convegno della Società Italiana per lo Studio del Pensiero Medievale (S.I.S.P.M.), Milano, 25-27 settembre 2008*, eds. Bettetini, M. and Paparella, F. D., Textes et Études du Moyen Âge 51, Turnhout, Brepols, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *De anima*, II, 3, 414a 32, *De anima* III, 4.6. [Even if it may be argued that Aristotle treats these faculties as a 'complex', he certainly does not call them 'internal senses'.]

<sup>4</sup> The localization of the mental faculties in the ventricles of the brain is characteristically medieval. Pagel, W., «Medieval and Renaissance Contributions to Knowledge of the Brain and its Functions», *The History and Philosophy of Knowledge of the Brain and its Functions, An Anglo-American Symposium*, London, July 15th-17th, 1957, ed. F.N.L. Poynter, Oxford, 1958, 96. [see also C. D. Green, «Where Did the Ventricular Localization of Mental Faculties Come From?», *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 39(2), 131-42, (2003) with bibliography]

<sup>5</sup> Sudhoff, W., «Die Lehre von den Hirnventrikeln in textlicher und graphischer Tradition des Altertums und Mittelalters», *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 7 (1913), 149-205.

<sup>6</sup> Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (1514-1564); Pagel, W., «Medieval and Renaissance Contributions to Knowledge of the Brain and its Functions», *The History and Philosophy of Knowledge of the Brain and its Functions*, op.cit., 100.

with original ideas. Even in Byzantinology, more attention has been paid to history, literature, archeology, art, and science than to philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

First of all, a few remarks to help focus on the issue of internal senses in its specifically Byzantine form. The Byzantines did not lose contact with the Neoplatonic commentaries to Aristotle, and the Neoplatonic commentaries on *De anima* played an eminent role in the Byzantine tradition of Aristotelian interpretation. Philoponus' commentary<sup>8</sup> in particular was extremely influential in Byzantium, and most late Byzantine thinkers, including Michael Psellos, John Italos, Nicephoros Blemmydes, Sophonias, and Theodoros Metochites adapted his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* to their anthropological treatises.<sup>9</sup>

The second important historical fact which I consider crucial for the understanding of the internal senses in Byzantium is the "absence" of influence from Arabic philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Whereas Latin medieval thinkers were influenced by Arabic commentaries on *De anima* from the 12th century, we have no evidence for the influence of these Arabic thinkers on Byzantine thought. The division and classification of the internal senses in late medieval thought was the result of medical and psychological analyses which were carried out especially by Arabic thinkers (Avicenna, Rhazes, Averroes).<sup>11</sup> Avicenna's *Liber de anima* gave an almost definitive frame

<sup>7</sup> Fryde, E., *The early Palaeologan Renaissance* (1261-c.1360) [The medieval Mediterranean: peoples, economies and cultures, 400-1453, vol. 27], Leiden, 2000, ch. 10, 183-212; Benakis, L., «Epilogue: Current Research in Byzantine Philosophy», in *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, ed. by Katerina Ierodiakonou, Oxford, 2002, 283-288; Trizio, M., «Byzantine Philosophy as a Contemporary Historiographical Project», *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales*, vol. 74, issue 1 (2007), 247-294. Ierodiakonou, K., Zografidis, G., «Early Byzantine Philosophy», *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ed. Gerson, L., vol. 2, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 843-868; Kapriev, G., *Philosophie in Byzanz*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2005; *Die Philosophie des Mittelalters. Band 1, Byzanz, Judentum*, Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, eds. Brungs, A. Kapriev, G., and Mudroch, V., Basel, Schwabe Verlag, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Philoponus' commentary is in CAG XV, ed. M. Hayduck (Berlin, 1897)

<sup>9</sup> Hayduck's edition of Philoponus at pp.xiv-xix. Bydén, B., *Theodore Methochites' Stoicheiosis Astronomike and the Study of Natural Philosophy and Mathematics in Early Palaiologan Byzantium*, *Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia* 66, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborg, 2003, 80, 106n. More on Philoponus' Commentary on the Third Book of the *De Anima* see Golitsis, P., «John Philoponus' Commentary on the Third Book of Aristotle's *De Anima*, Wrongly Attributed to Stephanus», *Aristotle Re-Interpreted: New Findings on Seven Hundred Years of the Ancient Commentators*, ed. Sorabji, R., London, Bloomsbury, 2016, 393-412.

<sup>10</sup> See the fundamental works on this topic: Gutas, D., «Arabic into Byzantine Greek: Introducing a Survey of the Translations», *Knotenpunkt Byzanz: Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen*, eds. A. Speer and P. Steinkrüger, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 36, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2012, 246-262; Mavroudi, M., «Byzantine Translations from Arabic into Greek: Old and New Historiography in Confluence and in Conflict», *Journal of Late Antique, Islamic and Byzantine Studies* 2, no. 1-2 (September 2023): 215-288.

<sup>11</sup> Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de Anima seu sextus de naturalium* I, lib.1-3, II, lib. 4-5, ed. by S. van Riet, Louvain/Leiden, 1972; Introduction by G. Verbeke, *Science de l'âme et perception sensible*, 1-90.

for the Peripatetic theory of the human soul, especially in the systematic structuralization of functional anatomical brain theory, and in the classification of various psychological activities of the soul.<sup>12</sup>

The situation in Byzantium was quite different.<sup>13</sup> Although Byzantine medical education was supplemented by Arabic material, Arabic philosophical treatises were not sufficiently known.<sup>14</sup> Avicenna's opinions concerning the character and nature of the internal senses could have come to Byzantine philosophical awareness indirectly, through the translations of the Latin authors (Thomas Aquinas) into Greek in the 14th and 15th centuries.<sup>15</sup> However, there is no evidence that any philosophical text was translated directly from Arabic into Greek.<sup>16</sup> For instance, Pletho's knowledge of Averroes was limited, and his criticism of Averroes was mediated through Aquinas' criticism, which Pletho probably knew from Demetrios Cydones.<sup>17</sup> The Byzantines' knowledge of Avicenna and Averroes was derived mostly from Latin translations, such as Thomas Aquinas' *Summa contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*. However, the question of whether Arabic philosophy was available only through Latin authors or independently separately in Late Byzantium has yet to be investigated in a more detailed way.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Avicenna is one of the most important figures in the history of the theory of internal senses as he completed the classification of the internal senses, and his theory contains all the psychological functions that are attributed to the internal senses. Hasse, D. N., *Avicenna's De Anima in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic. Philosophy of Soul 1160-1300*, Warburg Institute studies and texts 1, London, 2000, 350. See also Deborah L. Black, «Imagination and Estimation: Arabic Paradigms and Western Transformations», *Topoi* 19, (2000) 59–75.

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between Arabic and Byzantine writers see Mavroudi, M., «Late Byzantium and Exchange with Arabic Writers», *Byzantium, Faith and Power (1261-1557). Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, ed. by S. T. Brooks, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia, New Haven, CT, 2007, 62–75.

<sup>14</sup> I would like to express my thanks to Maria Mavroudi and Dimitri Gutas for valuable comments on Arabic sources in Byzantium. French, R., *Medicine before Science: The Business of Medicine from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment*, Cambridge, 2003, 100.

<sup>15</sup> Παπαδοπουλος, Σ., Ελληνικά μεταφράσεις θωμιστικών έργων: φιλοθωμιστάι και αντιθωμιστάι εν Βυζαντίω: συμβολή εις την ιστορίαν της Βυζαντινής Θεολογίας, Βιβλιοθήκη της εν Αθήναις Φιλεκαπαιδευτικής Εταιρείας ; 47 ). - Διδακτορική Διατριβή, Εν Αθήναις, 1967, 69n.

<sup>16</sup> Avicenna's De anima (Fi n-nafs), Book IV contains his theories about the internal senses.]

<sup>17</sup> Woodhouse, C. M., *George Gemistos Plethon: the last of the Hellenes*, Oxford, 1986, 71; Masai, F., «Plethon, l'Averroisme et le probleme religieux», *Colloques Internationaux de Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Sciences humaines, Le Neoplatonisme*, Royaumont 3-13 Juin 1969, Paris, 1971, 435–446; Lohr, Ch., «Georgius Gemistus Pletho and Averroes: the Periodization of Latin Aristotelism», *Sapientiam Amemus: Humanismus und Aristotelismus in der Renaissance. Festschrift für Eckhard Kessler zum 60. Geburtstag*, Herausgegeben von Paul Richard Blum mit Constance Blackwell und Charles Lohr, Wilhelm Fink, München, 1999, 39–48; Evangeliou, Ch., «Pletho's Critique of Aristotle and Averroes and the Revival of Platonism in the Renaissance», *Skepsis* 8 (1997): 146–170.

<sup>18</sup> Steiris, G., Lyckoura, N., «La perception et valorization de la philosophie arabe dans le Résumé de la Somme théologique de Saint Thomas d'Aquin de Georges Gennade Scholarios: les cas d'Avicenne et Averroès», ed. Arabatzis, G., *Marges de la Philosophie Byzantine*, Kardamitsa, Athenes 2013, 51–74.

In Byzantine thought, some of the most fertile inquiries into psychology were through Aristotle's *De anima*, Galen's works, and later on through commentaries on *De anima*. Galen adopted Aristotle's basic three-fold classification of the internal senses or mental faculties (imagination, cogitation, memory), and he was clear in asserting these mental faculties were located in the brain's substance rather than in its ventricles. Although Galen posited that sensation, intellect, and volition were situated in the brain, he did not consider them to be located in the ventricles.<sup>19</sup> Each cerebral ventricle, a fluid-filled chamber, was the seat of a specific function, and contained a unique type of spirit with the power to perform that function.<sup>20</sup> The ventricular-pneumatic theory proposed by Galen underwent revision by early Byzantine medical scholars and subsequently disseminated through their works into medieval Latin philosophical and medical treatises. Familiarity with Galen's medicine was found in several Byzantine medical scholars (Aetius of Amida, Alexander of Tralles, Theophilus Protospatharius, Paul of Aegina).<sup>21</sup> Galen was regarded by the Byzantines as the greatest medical authority they had inherited from the Roman Empire, and Byzantine transcriptions of his work survive in large numbers.<sup>22</sup>

The most influential ideas about psychology in the late Byzantine period seem to have come from Nemesius of Emesa and John of Damascus<sup>23</sup>. Nemesius of Emesa was an important figure for the development of the theory of internal senses. He attributed all the soul's faculties to the ventricles. His systematic attempts to harmonize medical philosophy (Galen) and Christian anthropology are found in his extensive treatise *On human*

<sup>19</sup> Wolfson, H. A., «The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew Philosophical Texts», in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, edited by Twersky and Williams, Cambridge Mass., 1973, 250-274. Galenos, *De loci affectis*, III.9. Rocca, J., Galen on the Brain: *Anatomical Knowledge and Physiological Speculation in the Second Century AD*, Studies in Ancient Medicine 26, Leiden, Brill, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Tullio Manzoni reviews the early history of brain localization of function and evolution of the «ventricular-pneumatic doctrine» in Byzantine, Arabic and Latin tradition. This theory evolved in the 4th-5th centuries A.D. into the «three-cell theory». Manzoni, T., The cerebral ventricles, the animal spirits and the dawn of brain localization of fiction, *Archives italiennes de biologie*, vol. 136, no2, 1998, 103-152.

<sup>21</sup> Oribasio di Pergamo, Aezio d'Amida, Alessandro di Tralle, Paolo d'Egina, Leone medico, in *Medici bizantini*, A cura di A. Garzya, R. De Lucia, A. Guardasole, A. M. Ieraci Bio, M. Lamagna, R. Romano Utet, Torino, 2006; Nutton, V., «Galen in Byzantium», in *Material Culture and Well-Being in Byzantium (400-1453)*, ed. by Grünbart, Michael, Kislinger Ewald, Muthesius Anna, Stathakopoulos Dionysios Ch., Wien, 171- 176.

<sup>22</sup> Fryde, E., *The early Palaeologan Renaissance (1261-c. 1360)* op. cit., 337-356; Timplalex, P., *Medizinisches in der byzantinischen Epistolographie (1100-1453)*, Frankfurt/M., 32.

<sup>23</sup> Parry, K., «Locating Memory and Imagination: From Nemesius of Emesa to John of Damascus», *Dreams, Memory and Imagination in Byzantium*, ed. Bronwen Neil and Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides, Leide, Brill, 2018, 35-56.

*nature*.<sup>24</sup> This was the source of the pattern of ventricular localization of functions adopted by the later Byzantines and by the Arabs, and then transmitted to Western Latin scholars.

One of the most puzzling internal senses in Aristotle's *De anima* is imagination (*φαντασία*).<sup>25</sup> When using the term *φαντασία* the Byzantines referred to the ancient usage of this word, which was preserved in patristic doxography (Nemesius of Emesa, John of Damascus), reflecting the continuity of ancient philosophy in Byzantium.<sup>26</sup> In Byzantine ascetic writings, imagination appears in various contexts. In theological Byzantine anthropology the internal senses were considered to be among the basic cognitive abilities of man.<sup>27</sup> The natural function of imagination was to allow man to represent sensual things as they are,<sup>28</sup> and therefore the Church Fathers connected it directly with sensation.<sup>29</sup> Imagination is the ability to transform perceptions into images and reproduce them when memory is not able to remember them. In sum, imagination is a faculty which produces images, reproduces images. In this tradition, imagination is understood as something positive, as a faculty which brings images before the mind or forms a mental image.<sup>30</sup> Imagination is connected with questions of to what extent the human being is dependent on external influences, and whether the human soul and its faculties are governed by passions, demons, dreams or prophetic visions.

In Byzantine ascetic writings (John Climacus, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas, Isaac the Syrian, Ephraim the Syrian), the role of imagination is often addressed with caution and ambivalence. Ascetic

<sup>24</sup> Nemesius, *De natura hominis*, ed. g. Verbeke et J.R. Moncho, Brill, 1975, cap. V., 70-73: De imaginativo scilicet de sensu. Jaeger, W.W., *Nemesios von Emesa. Quellenforschungen zum Neuplatonismus und seinen Anfängen bei Poseidonios*, Weidmannsche Buchhandlung 1914, 4-26. [See also R. W. Sharples and P. J. van der Eijk, *Nemesius: On the Nature of Man*, Liverpool, 2008]. Philip Van Der Eijk, «Nemesius of Emesa and Early Brain Mapping», *The Lancet* 372 (2008): 440-441.

<sup>25</sup> Some classical studies on Aristotle's phantasia: Schofield, M., «Aristotle on the Imagination», In *Aristotle on the Mind and the Senses*, ed. by G.E.R. Lloyd & G.E.L. Owen, Cambridge, 1978, 99-140; Labarriere, J.-L., «Imagination humaine et imagination animale chez Aristote», *Phronesis* 29 (1984): 17-49; Watson, G., *Phantasia in Classical Thought*, Galway, 1988.

<sup>26</sup> Benakis, L., «Phantasie», in *Historisches Wörterbuch de Philosophie*, Band 7 (P-Q), hrsg. Von Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Grunder, Basel, 524-526.

<sup>27</sup> Nicethas Stethatos, *De anima*, ch. 37; Gregory of Palamas, *Triads*, II., 3, 59. See further Larchet, J.-C., *Terapia delle malattie spirituali: un' introduzione alla tradizione ascetica della Chiesa ortodossa*, traduzione dal francese di Luigi Borriello, Milano, 2003, 107-117.

<sup>28</sup> Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *Centuria*, 69.]

<sup>29</sup> Gregory of Nyssa was aware of its necessity and he postulated the necessity of a synthesis of the data from the internal senses. Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis officio*, cap. 10, PG XLIV, col. 151-154; John of Damascus, *De Fide orthodoxa*, II, 17; Nicethas Stethatos, *De anima*, 65; Gregory Palamas, *Triads* II, 3, 59.

<sup>30</sup> *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G. W.H. Lampe, Oxford, 1961, 1471.

writers of the Byzantine tradition were deeply concerned with the purity of the mind and soul, and imagination was seen as a potential source of temptation, distraction, delusion or even deception.<sup>31</sup> For demons, spoken of as the reason for their incorrect evaluation of the real good, and for man it is why images of things are wrongly identified with the things themselves. This dangerous aspect of imagination is its ability to delude and create illusions or illusory appearances (Maximos Confessor).<sup>32</sup> Michael Psellos paid attention to demonological contexts and to demons' influence on the human soul.<sup>33</sup> He explained the variability of demons by their imagination, i.e. they can change their body according to images (φαντάσματα) which differ in different demons. Imagination can lead thinking astray, it can show something that is not there and it can even become a medium through which demons influence the human soul.<sup>34</sup> Imagination is understood as a faculty of the soul through which demons can penetrate.

In the hesychast tradition, imagination is understood as an impediment to prayer. Gregory of Sinai tried to find a way of attaining prayer free of images.<sup>35</sup> He emphasized keeping the intellect free from images, stripped of concepts and thoughts.<sup>36</sup> Imagination in this context is taken as something negative, for if imagination is not restrained, the result will not be a hesychasm but a phantasm.<sup>37</sup> All images and thoughts are excluded in order that all feelings should be rejected.<sup>38</sup> Such human imagination provides material for false human notions about divine things. Therefore, imagination is un-

<sup>31</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite uses this fantasy to characterize one of the basic features of demonic beings. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, *De Divinis Nominibus*, PG 3, 725B; Corpus Dionysiacum, Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, *De Divinis Nominibus*, heraus. von B. R. Duchla, Patristische Texte und Studien 33, de Gruyter, Berlin/NY, 1990, 171; Bautier, A. M., «De l'image à l'imaginaire dans les textes du haut Moyen Age», in: *Phantasia-imaginatio, Colloquio internazionale del Lessico intellettuale europeo*, Roma 9-11 gennaio 1986, atti a cura di M. Fattori e M. Bianchi, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, Roma, 1988, 92-93.

<sup>32</sup> Maximos Confessor, *Ambigua*, PG 91, 1048C.

<sup>33</sup> The fascination of the 11th century Byzantine society with demonology is manifested in Psellos' works. Dakouras, D.G., *Die antiken Religionen bei Michael Psellos: A. Griechische Religion*, Univ., Philos. Fak., Diss., Köln, 1975, 139. Michael Psellos, *De daem. op.*, PG 122, col., Garsoian, N.G., «Byzantine Heresy. A Reinterpretation», *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 25 (1971), 85-113; *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Mavroudi and Paul Magdalino, éditions de la Pomme d'Or, Geneva, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Svoboda, K., *La démonologie de Michel Psellos*, Brno, 1927, 21, 32.; Dakouras, D.G., *Die antiken Religionen bei Michael Psellos: A. Griechische Religion*, op. cit., 136; Gautier, P., «Le De daemonibus du Pseudo-Psellos», *Revue des études byzantines* 38, (1980), 105-194.

<sup>35</sup> Gregorius Sinaita, *Περι ήσυχίας*, PG 150, 1332B.

<sup>36</sup> Gregorius Sinaita, *ibid.*, 1341D.

<sup>37</sup> Gregorius Sinaita, *Κεφάλαια δι' άκροσπηχίδος*, PG 150, 1284A.

<sup>38</sup> *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, New York, 1986, 247.

derstood as an impediment, a veil that conceals the truth.<sup>39</sup> It shapes what does not exist in reality. It is for this reason that this capacity contributes to producing myths.

### Nicephoros Blemmydes on imagination

Contrary to the hostile attitude towards imagination in the ascetic literature, Nicephoros Blemmydes, an important representative of the Byzantine intellectual world in the 13th century, was not concerned with the negative or dangerous aspect of imagination.<sup>40</sup> Blemmydes was an important person in Nicaea, and his work includes theological,<sup>41</sup> scientific (geography, medicine, alchemy, astronomy)<sup>42</sup> and philosophical treatises.<sup>43</sup> He is considered to be a representative of Aristotelian philosophy, and the influence of Aristotle is evident in his works dedicated to logic, physics and anthropology.<sup>44</sup> His extensive treatises *Epitome physica* and *Epitome logica*, which draw on a great variety of sources (e.g. Alexander of Aphrodisias, Simplicius, Philoponus), are an interesting testimony to the philosophical reception of Peripatetic philosophy in the middle of the 13th century.<sup>45</sup> For our purpose

<sup>39</sup> Lautner, P., «Philoponean Accounts on Phantasia», *Acta Antiqua Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 34 (1993), 170.

<sup>40</sup> Nicephori Blemmydes, *Autobiographia, sive, Curriculum vitae*; necnon, Epistula universalior, editit Joseph A. Munitiz, *Corpus Christianorum* 13, Turnhout, 1984, 3-83; Nikephoros Blemmydes, *A partial account*, introduction, translation and notes by Joseph A. Munitiz, *Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense* 48, Leuven, 1988, 145.

<sup>41</sup> Bell, H. I., «The Commentary on the Psalms by Nicephoros Blemmydes», *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 30 (1929-1930), 295-299; Stavrou, M., «Le premier traité sur la procession du Saint-Esprit de Nicéphore Blemmydès», *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 67 (2001), 39-141; Canart, P., «Nicéphore Blemmyde et le mémoire adressé aux envoyés de Gregoire IX (Nicée, 1234)», *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 25 (1959), 310-325; Munitiz, J., «A Reappraisal of Blemmydes' First Discussion with the Latins», *Byzantinoslavica*, 51 (1990), 20-26.

<sup>42</sup> Lampsides O., «An astronomical text of Nicephorus Blemmydes in the Filioque controversy (1285) - Is it plagiarism», *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, [2002], 72-83; Timplalex, P., *Medizinisches in der byzantinischen Epistolographie (1100-1453)*, op. cit., 37-40.

<sup>43</sup> Constantinides, C.N., *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries (1204-ca.1310)*, Cyprus research centre, Nicosia, 1982, 5-27.

<sup>44</sup> Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Epitome logica*, PG 142, 675-1004; Nicephorus Blemmydes, *Epitome Physica*, PG 142, 1004-1320; Nicephorus Blemmydes, *De anima*, Leipzig, 1784, 1-140; Varella, E., «Nikephoros Blemmydes – naturwissenschaftliches Porträt eines Gelehrten des späten Mittelalters», *Orthodoxes Forum*, 6 (1992), 59-69.

<sup>45</sup> Nicephorus Blemmydes, *Epitome Physica*, op.cit., 1004-1320; Bydén, B., *Theodore Methochites' Stoicheiosis Astronomike and the Study of Natural Philosophy and Mathematics in Early Palaiologan Byzantium*, op. cit., 27; Benakis, L., «Phantasie», op. cit., 526.

we need to look at a small treatise, *Περὶ Ψυχῆς*, which is a synthesis of philosophical and theological ideas concerning the nature of the human soul.<sup>46</sup>

Blemmydes occupies a special place in the history of Byzantine thought because he is the only known thirteenth-century author of a preserved monothematic treatise on the human soul. The treatise is not a commentary or paraphrase to Aristotle, like the works by Sophonias,<sup>47</sup> Theodore Metochites<sup>48</sup> and Gennadios Scholarios,<sup>49</sup> or like the theological treatises on the soul represented by ascetic writers like Nicetas Stethates.<sup>50</sup> In his anthropology and psychology, we find various concepts deriving from Greek philosophy and medicine (Aristotle, Galen, Philoponus, Simplicius), alongside the anthropological concepts of the Church Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa, Nemesius of Emesa, John of Damascus). Blemmydes' principal exposition of his understanding of the internal senses is found in passages from *Περὶ Ψυχῆς* and *Epitome Logica*. While in *Epitome Logica* we find no theological questions, *Περὶ Ψυχῆς* blends philosophical concepts with theological anthropology. At the beginning of *Περὶ Ψυχῆς* Blemmydes stresses that the treatise was written from the philosophical point of view,<sup>51</sup> and that the purpose of the examination of the soul and its faculties consists in avoiding doctrines which present unfavourable opinions of the soul.

Blemmydes derives all faculties and levels of life from the definition of the human soul, which is defined as the unique and unifying principle of all activities (vegetative, sensitive and cognitive).<sup>52</sup> In chapter III of the *Epitome logica*, Blemmydes classifies the soul's faculties into three groups: three vegetative (φυτικάι), four sensitive or appetitive (ζωτικάι, ὀρετικάι) and five cognitive faculties (γνωστικάι δυνάμεις).<sup>53</sup> Imagination is part of

<sup>46</sup> Nicephorus Blemmydes, *De anima*, Leipzig, 1784, 1-140; Verhelst, M., *Le „Traité de l'âme" de Nicéphore Blemmydes: Histoire du texte, éd. critique et analyse du contenu doctrinal*, Phd. theses, Louvain, 1976.

<sup>47</sup> Sophonias' paraphrase at CAG XXIII:1, ed. M. Hayduck, Berlin, 1883. Blumenthal, H.J., «Sophonias' Commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*», in *Neoplatonism et Philosophie Medievale. Actes de Colloque International de Corfou (6-8.10.1995)*, edit. par L.G. Benakis, Turnhout, 1997, 307-318.

<sup>48</sup> Metochites, Theodore, *Ex liber De anima*, in *Paraphrasis in Aristotelis universam naturalem philosophiam*, Stuttgart-bad Cannstatt, 1992, 183-303. Theodoros Metochites, *Paraphrase of Aristotle, »De Anima: Critical Edition with Introduction and Translation*, Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca et Byzantina 8, ed. Bydén, B., Berlin, De Gruyter, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> *In Aristotelis De Anima*, ed. M. Hayduck., CAG, vol. xiii, pt. 1, G. Reimer, Berlin, 1887. Nussbaum, M.C., «Introduction A. The Text of Aristotle's *De Anima*», *Essays on Aristotle's de Anima*, ed. by Martha C. Nussbaum, Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, Oxford, 1997, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Nicetas Stethatus, *Περὶ Ψυχῆς*, ed. G. Plexidas, Zetros, Thessaloniki, 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Nikephoros Blemmydes, *A partial account*, op. cit., 133.

<sup>52</sup> Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Περὶ Ψυχῆς*, par. 34 (Verhelst, 29, 1-14).

<sup>53</sup> Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Epitome Logica*, op. cit., col. 711 B. Marthe Verhelst shows that the division and enumeration of the soul's faculties in *Epitome Logica* is very similar in *Περὶ Ψυχῆς*.

the cognitive faculties. The intellect (νοῦς), along with the faculty of (discursive) knowledge (διάνοια), are pure rational faculties, while imagination (φαντασία) and sensation (αἴσθησις) are irrational faculties. Opinion (δόξα) is situated between the rational and the irrational faculties.<sup>54</sup> According to Marthe Verhelst, the classification of five cognitive faculties does not come from Aristotle, but from Hermeias of Alexandria.<sup>55</sup> This seems questionable. It is true that the classification is found in Hermeias' commentary on the Phaedrus, but this is based on Syrianus' lectures. A Syrianan origin for the is also suggested by the fact that it is found in Proclus.<sup>56</sup>

Blemmydes' remarks about imagination follow the Byzantine tradition, which seems to be influenced by the Neoplatonist commentators of Aristotle's works. Most of Blemmydes' statements on imagination in *Epitome Logica* come from David's *Prolegomena*, Ps.-Philoponus' *In De anima*,<sup>57 58</sup> Blemmydes also relies on early Byzantine psychological sources, especially Nemesius of Emesa and John of Damascus. Nemesius of Emesa understands imagination (τὸ φανταστικόν) as the first faculty of the irrational soul (τῆς ἀλόγου ψυχῆς), whose activity springs from the sense organs. φαντασία is an activity, it is an affection of the irrational soul caused by the φανταστών. According to John of Damascus, imagination is a faculty belonging to the irrational part of the soul, which acts through the sense organs. Imagination is an affection of the irrational part of the soul arising from some imaginable objects.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Epitome Logica*, *ibid.*, col. 711 D: Γνωστικαὶ δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεις εἰσὶ νοῦς, διάνοια, δόξα, φαντασία καὶ αἴσθησις. Καὶ λογικαὶ μὲν τούτων νοῦς καὶ διάνοια. Ἄλογοι δὲ φαντασία καὶ αἴσθησις. Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Περὶ Ψυχῆς*, par. 20 (Verhelst, 19, 7-8): Γνωστικαὶ δὲ δυνάμεις τῆς ψυχῆς αἰ πάσαι λέγονται πέντε νοῦς, διάνοια, δόξα, φαντασία καὶ αἴσθησις. *Ibid.*, par. 21 (Verhelst, 20, 7-8): Νοῦς μὲν οὖν καὶ διάνοια δυνάμεις λογικαὶ καθαρῶς, φαντασία καὶ αἴσθησις ἄλογοι, μεταξὺ δὲ πως ἡ δόξα καὶ οἷον ποτὲ μὲν μετὰ λόγου, ποτὲ δ' ἄνευ λόγου συνίσταται.

<sup>55</sup> Verhelst, M., *Le Traité de l'âme de Nicéphore Blemmydes*, Histoire du texte, éd. critique et analyse du contenu doctrinal, Ph.D. thesis, Louvain, 1976, 89: «C'est par Hermeias que la série des cinq puissances cognitives aurait été introduite dans l'école platonicienne d'Alexandrie».

<sup>56</sup> Hermeias, On Plato Phaedrus 227A-245E. *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle*, trans. Dirk Baltzly and Michael John Share, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, 66.

<sup>57</sup> Verhelst, M., *ibid.*, 92n.

<sup>58</sup> Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Epitome Logica*, *op. cit.*, chapter 3. 14; Bydén, B., *Theodore Methochites' Stoicheiosis Astronomike and the Study of Natural Philosophy and Mathematics in Early Palaiologan Byzantium*, *op. cit.*, 301.

<sup>59</sup> Louth, A., *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, Oxford, 2004, 136; Payton, J.R., «John of Damascus on Human Cognition: an Element in His Apologetic for Icons», *Church History*, 65/2 (1996), 173-183. Damascus expressed a positive attitude towards imagination in the context of iconophile theology. Imagination is an important faculty in the defence of icons, because imagination receives images in the human mind (*On the Divine Images*, i. 11). The defence of imagination became a part of the defence of images and confirmed the Areopagitean tradition, it is by images that we 'ascend to intellectual contemplations', we are led to the divine vision by sensible images. Theodore of Studios, *Antirrheticus* 3. 1. 15-21, PG 99, col. 396C-400C.

Blemmydes lists imagination (τὸ φανταστικόν) among the faculties of the soul (sensitive, appetitive, memory, locomotive)<sup>60</sup> which are situated in the brain.<sup>61</sup> He adopts the Galenic theory of the brain, and pays attention to the theory of *pneuma* – brain functions were carried out in the cerebral ventricles by the *psychic pneuma*, the animal spirit endowed with the power to perform sensory and mental activities.<sup>62</sup> According to various early and late Byzantine authors, the organ of the imagination is situated in the anterior ventricle of the brain (John of Damascus, Nicephoros Gregoras).<sup>63</sup>

Blemmydes claims that imagination is an irrational cognitive faculty. It is a particular cognition of what is absent: Τὸ μὲν αἰσθητικὸν γνωστικὴ δύναμις ψυχῆς ἄλογος τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀντιληπτικὴ. Τὸ δὲ φανταστικὸν γνωστικὴ καὶ αὐτὸ δύναμις ἄλογος ἐκ τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἔχουσα τὰς ἀρχάς. Ἄ γὰρ ἡ αἰσθησις ἐκτὸς ἐνεργεῖ, ταῦτ' ἐντὸς ἢ φαντασία διατυποῖ καὶ φέρει παρ' ἑαυτῆ, καὶ ποτὲ μὲν αὐτὰ ταῦτα, ποτὲ δὲ τοιαῦτα.<sup>64</sup> He follows the traditional view that imagination is a kind of thesaurus of images and memories substituting for absent sensitive particular cognition. Imagination differs from sensation in that sensation engages with external objects and necessitates their immediate presence. In contrast, imagination retains the impressions of sensory objects and can reproduce these impressions independently of the external objects themselves.

## Conclusion

In sum up, Blemmydes does not understand imagination as a delusive force that disturbed man's rational judgements. Blemmydes dealt especially with the positive role of imagination, as the one of the internal senses or faculties, and an integral part in the process of acquiring knowledge. The brief examination of the internal senses in Byzantine thought, particularly

<sup>60</sup> Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Περὶ Ψυχῆς*, par. 18. (Verhelst, 17, 9-13) on the difference between sensation and imagination.

<sup>61</sup> Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Περὶ Ψυχῆς*, par. 19. (Verhelst, 17, 14- 18, 7): Καθὼς δὲ τὸ θυμικὸν ἐν καρδίᾳ καὶ ἐπιθυμητικὸν ἐν ἥπατι, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ἐν ἐγκεφάλῳ τὸ γνωστικόν. Τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ πνεῦμα, πάμπολυ καὶ λεπτότατον καὶ καθαρώτατον ὄν, πρὸς αἰσθήσεις καὶ φαντασίας καὶ τὰς ἄλλας γνωστικὰς ἐνεργείας ἐπιτήδειον ὄργανον τῆ ψυχῆ. Κατὰ μὲν οὖν τὰς δύο προσθίους ἐγκεφάλου κοιλίας τὸ φανταστικὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποις, κατὰ τὴν μέσην τὸ διανοητικόν, κατὰ τὴν ὀπίσθιον, ἦν ἐπεγκρανίδα καὶ παρεγκεφαλίδα καλοῦσι, τὸ μνημονευτικόν, γνωστικῶν ἐνεργημάτων οἰοεὶ ταμειῶν καθεστηκός.

<sup>62</sup> Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Περὶ Ψυχῆς*, par. 10-13, (Verhelst, 9,4-13,1).

<sup>63</sup> John Damascene, *De Fide orthodoxa*, 2.13-24. Chapters (31-5) on the imagination, on sensation and the five senses, on the faculty of thinking, on memory, on inward reason and its expression in speech. Triantari-Maria, S., «Der Phantasia-Begriff bei Nikephoros Gregoras», *Byzantion*, LXXIII 1 (2003), 162-171.

<sup>64</sup> Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Περὶ Ψυχῆς*, par.18 (17, 9-13). Nicephoros Blemmydes, *Epitome Logica*, op. cit., col. 713 A: Φαντασία δ' ἐστὶν ἢ τοῦ ἀπόντος μερικὴ γνώσις, ὡς ὅταν χθὲς ἰδῶν ἄνθρωπον σήμερον φαντασθῶ αὐτόν, ἦγουν ἀναπολήσω τὸν τοιοῦτον.

regarding the imagination in Nicephoros Blemmydes, reveals a distinctive feature of the Byzantine philosophical tradition: its continuity with ancient and patristic theories. Although a deeper and more complex analysis is necessary, it becomes evident that Byzantine thinkers' notions on the activities and functions of the internal senses or faculties are largely derived from Aristotle, Galen, Neoplatonic commentaries, and early Byzantine figures such as Nemesius of Emesa and John of Damascus. One might confidently assert that, in contrast to Latin, Arabic and Hebrew medieval authors, who produced extensive commentaries on *De anima* influenced by Avicenna's and Averroes' treatment of the internal senses, Byzantine scholars predominantly followed earlier Greek commentators and aligned with the teachings of the Church Fathers. The extent to which Latin, Islamic, and possibly Jewish perspectives on the understanding of imagination and other internal senses influenced Byzantine thought in the 14th and 15th centuries remains still an unresolved question.