

Georgios Gemistos Plethon

The Byzantine
and the Latin Renaissance

Edited by

Jozef Matula

Paul Richard Blum



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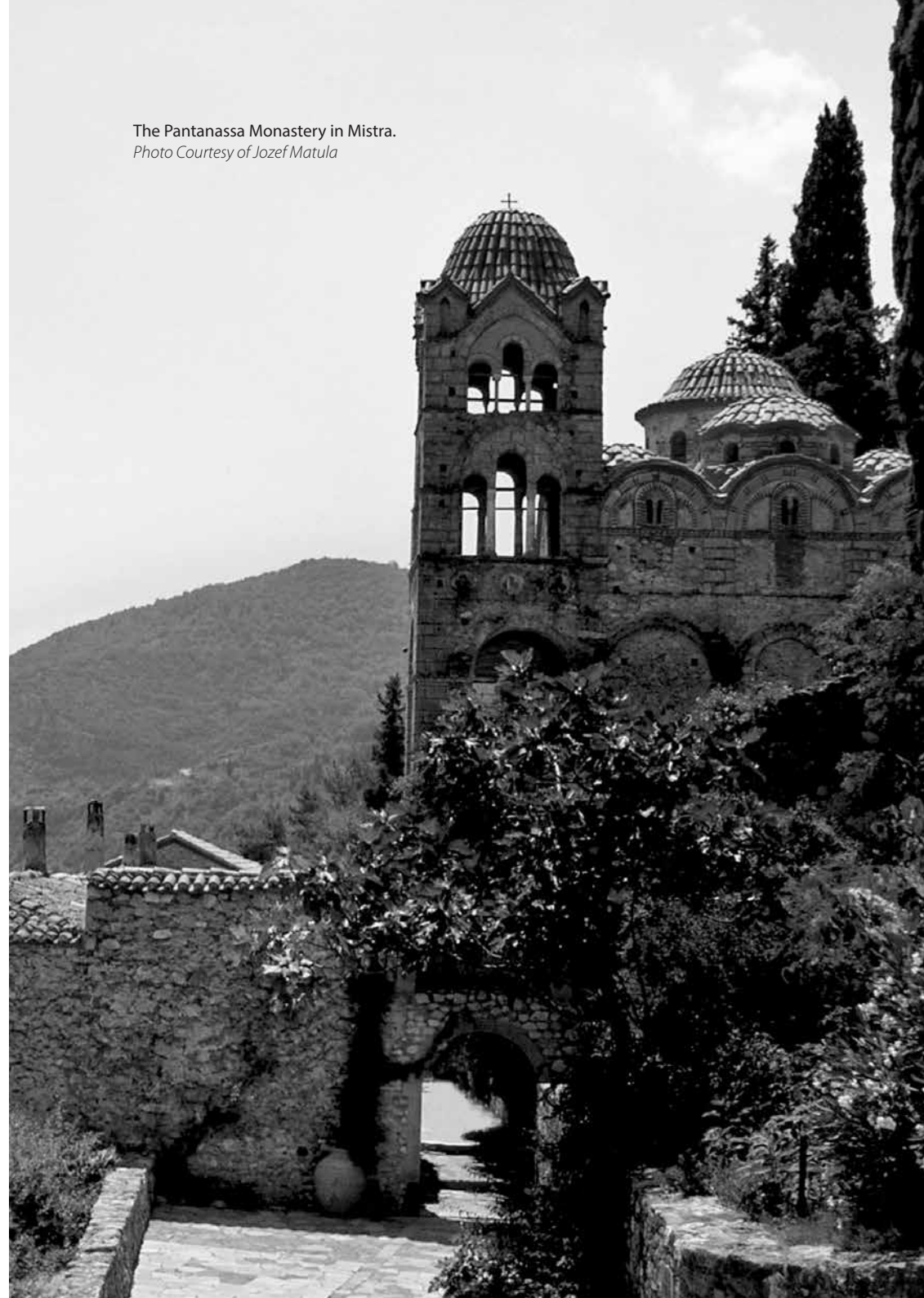
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The Pantanassa Monastery in Mistra.
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Content

Preface	9
An honorary paper	
Wilhelm Blum München, Germany Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (1417–1468): Stadtherr von Rimini, Neuheide und Verehrer Plethons	11–38
Plethon's philosophy in the Byzantine context	
László Bene Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary Constructing Pagan Platonism: Plethon's Theory of Fate and the Ancient Philosophical Tradition	41–71
George Arabatzis University of Athens, Greece Plethon's Philosophy of the Concept	73–111
Sergei Mariev Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany Plethon and Scholarios on Deliberation in Art and Nature	113–142
John A. Demetracopoulos University of Patras, Greece Hermonymos Christonymos Charitonymos' <i>Capita decem pro divinitate Christi</i>: A Posthumous Reaction to Plethon's Anti-Christianism	143–259
Plethon and the Latin Renaissance	
Mikhail Khorkov Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russian Federation How to Make a New Philosophy From an Old Platonism: Plethon and Cusanus on <i>Phaedrus</i>	261–272
Vojtěch Hladký Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic From Byzantium to Italy: "Ancient Wisdom" in Plethon and Cusanus	273–292
Jozef Matula Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic & Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, South Korea The Fate of Plethon's Criticism of Averroes	293–322
Davide Amendola Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Italy Plethon's <i>Opuscula de historia Graeca</i> and Bruni's <i>Commentarium rerum Graecarum</i>: Rewriting Greek History Between the Byzantine and the Latin Renaissance.	323–351
Walter Seitter Wien, Austria Plethon in Duplicate, in Triplicate ... The Question of Portraits	353–373

Post-Byzantine Plethon

Brigitte Tambrun-Krasker CNRS, Paris, France	
Are Psellos's and Plethon's <i>Chaldaean Oracles</i> Genuine?	375–389
Paul Richard Blum Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic & Loyola University Maryland, USA	
Plethon the First Philhellene: Re-enacting the Antiquity	391–413
Niketas Siniossoglou Athens, Greece	
Plethon and the Philosophy of Nationalism	415–431
Jacek Raszewski Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw, Poland	
George Gemistos Plethon and the Crisis of Modern Greek Identity	433–456
Index	457–462

Preface

Georgios Gemistos Plethon (1352–1452) was a representative of 14th/15th-century Byzantine thought, which manifested itself in three basic forms: Greek Christian Orthodoxy, interchange with the western European strains of thought (e.g., translation of scholastic works into Greek, but also evident in the Council of Ferrara-Florence), and a revival ("renaissance") of Greek culture, which has been variously named proto-nationalism in the 19th century, paganism from the Christian standpoint, and Hellenism for its parallels with 19th-century Greek nostalgia.

This volume contains contributions from the international conference that explored those facts: "Georgios Gemistos Plethon: The Byzantine and the Latin Renaissance," which took place at the Center for Renaissance Texts at the Palacký University, Olomouc (Czech Republic), from the 10th through the 12th of May, 2013. The Center is supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Czech Republic. The organizers and participants express their gratitude for this generous support.

The editors decided to publish the first article, *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (1417–1468): Stadtherr von Rimini, Neuheide und Verehrer Plethons*, by Dr. Wilhelm Blum, despite the fact that Dr. Blum could not participate in the conference. The editors are delighted to include his article in the volume, as he is a leading scholar within the area of Plethon's thought. His study on Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta is a valuable paper and the editors decided to publish it in its original length and style, without any changes.

The editors are grateful to the following persons who each proofread some of the contributions: Vincent Castaldi, Kaitlyn Henry, and Steven Silvestro of Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore, David Livingstone of Palacký University, Olomouc, Andrew Bruske of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul and John A. Demetracopoulos of University of Patras, Greece.

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The Fate of Plethon's Criticism of Averroes¹

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to take part in the discussion on Plethon's interest in Averroes, a topic that is important for our understanding of the intellectual interactions between and climate in the Latin West and the Byzantine East. The research is focused on two issues. The first part deals with possible sources of Plethon's knowledge of Averroes and other Arabs. As there is no evidence in Byzantium that any Arabic philosophical text was translated directly from Arabic into Greek, Plethon's knowledge of Averroes seems to be indirect, coming from various other sources (such as Greek translations of Thomas Aquinas, Jewish intellectual communities in Byzantium, or Italians). The second issue points out Plethon's refutation of Averroes and the role this refutation played among the Byzantine émigrés and Renaissance philosophers, especially Plethon's warnings of the danger of an exaggerated admiration of Aristotle's philosophy.

Keywords: Georgios Gemisthos Plethon; Averroes; Byzantine Jews; Thomas Aquinas; Byzantine émigrés; Marsilio Ficino; Bessarion; Immortality of the Soul

Georgios Gemisthos Plethon is undoubtedly an extraordinary person in the history of Byzantine philosophy. His life and works reflect the problems and difficulties of the political and social situation of Byzantium in the middle

¹ This work was supported by Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Research Fund of 2014. I would like to express my gratitude to Paul Richard Blum, John Monfasani, John Demetracopoulos, Nicholas de Lange, Steven B. Bowman, Mickey Engel, Maria Mavroudi, Dimitri Gutas, Philippe Gardette, Richard Taylor, Vojtěch Hladký, Michael Konstantinou-Rizos and Niketas Siniossoglou for providing me with materials and inspiration for this study.

of the 15th century.² If we do not take into account those Byzantine scholars working in Italy, there is no doubt that Plethon was the last distinct personality of the final decades of the Byzantine Empire.³ Plethon's works cover a wide range of aspects of philosophy, out of which the most celebrated one is his revival of interest in the Plato-Aristotle controversy within Italian intellectual circles.⁴ The struggle between Platonism and Aristotelianism represents an important part of the history of Byzantine philosophy in which Plethon's name is connected not only with the revival of Platonism but with all of Hellenic philosophy ranging from Stoicism to Neoplatonism. It is of importance to point out that this revival of Hellenic philosophy is not directly connected to a rejection of Aristotle's philosophy. The roots of Plethon's criticism of Aristotle consist of Plethon's philosophical vision of the restoration of the Hellenic heritage and the stability and prosperity of Byzantine society.⁵ Such a vision meant a thorough re-evaluation of the intellectual climate, which also brought about criticism of those streams of scholastic teaching which had a preference for Aristotle – and his most important medieval commentator, Averroes – over Plato. Plethon's interest in Averroes would appear to be important for our understanding of the intellectual interactions and climate between the Latin West and the Byzantine East. Unfortunately, Plethon never mentions any important

² François Masai, *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra* (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1956); Christopher Montague Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Wilhem Blum, *Georgios Gemistos Plethon. Politik, Philosophie und Rhetorik im spätbyzantinischen Reich (1355–1452)* (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1988); Brigitte Tambrun, *Pléthon, le retour de Platon* (Paris: Vrin, 2006); Niketas Siniosoglou, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium: Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Vojtěch Hladký, *Philosophy of George Gemistos Plethon: Platonism in Late Byzantium, between Hellenism and Orthodoxy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

³ Deno John Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice. Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

⁴ John Monfasani, "Marsilio Ficino and the Plato-Aristotle Controversy" in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, edited by Michael J. B. Allen and Valery Rees (Boston: Brill, 2002), pp.196–199.

⁵ See note.2. See also Masai, *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra*, pp.67–8; Θεοδώρου Στ. Νικολάου, *Αι περί πολιτείας και δικαίου ιδέαι του Γ. Πλήρωνος Γεμιστού* (θεσσαλονίκη, 1974). Peter Garnsey, "Gemistus Plethon and Platonic political philosophy" in *Transformations of Late Antiquity: essays for Peter Brown*, edited by Philip Rousseau and Emmanuel Papoutsakis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp.327–40.

treatise by Averroes,⁶ and thus we can only guess what he knew about him and from whom. As the topic itself is too wide, this article only discusses two issues: the possible sources for Plethon's comments on Averroes and the role of Plethon's refutation of his thought in Renaissance philosophy.

The paths of Averroes to Plethon

"Averroism" or "Latin Averroism" as one of the main philosophical movements in the 13th century was a rather suspicious position.⁷ Although Averroes' contribution to the interpretation of the *corpus aristotelicum* was recognized and highly esteemed, he was seen as a controversial figure by Islamic, Hebrew and Christian theologians alike. Late medieval thinkers such as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas or Roger Bacon reacted strongly against Averroes' comments on Aristotle, insisting on such an interpretation of Aristotle which would be acceptable to Christian theologians. Nevertheless, the writings of Averroes remained central to many different areas of philosophy and his commentaries were widely used as a key to understanding Aristotle's thought during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.⁸ This dominance and fame of Averroes within philosophical circles could not have possibly missed the attention of Byzantine thinkers as well.

There is a question which preoccupies the mind of a historian of philosophy: to which extent was Averroes known in Byzantium? It is important to note that

⁶ Marie-Hélène Congourdeau, "Cultural Exchanges between Jews and Christians in the Palaeologan Period" in *Jews in Byzantium. Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, edited by Robert Bonfil, Oded Irshai, Guy Stroumsa and Rina Talgam (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2002), p.710.

⁷ See the database of the bibliography on Averroes and Averroism <http://www.thomasinstitut.uni-koeln.de/averroes-database.html>

⁸ The impact of Averroes was even recognized in the 17th century. Dag Nikolaus Hasse, "Arabic philosophy and Averroism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, edited by James Hankins (Cambridge, UK/ New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.113–133; *Averroismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, edited by Friedrich Niewöhner and Lorin Sturlese (Zürich: Spur, 1994); Eckhard Kessler, *Die Philosophie der Renaissance: das 15. Jahrhundert* (München: C.H. Beck, 2008), chapter IV.; Alexandre Koyré, *Scritti su Spinoza e l'averroismo*, translated by Andrea Cavazini (Milano: Ghibli, 2002); Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002); *Renaissance Averroism and its Aftermath: Arabic Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Anna Akasoy and Guido Guigliani (Springer Academic Publishers, 2012).

while Latin medieval thinkers were familiar with and influenced by Arabic commentators (Avicenna, Avempace, Averroes), the situation in Byzantium was quite different. This does not mean, however, that Byzantine intellectuals were completely untouched by the Arabic world. After the conquest of Constantinople in 1204, the Byzantines displaced from the capital were forced to make an acquaintance with the Latin and Muslim worlds.⁹ It is well-known that the Byzantines were interested in Islamic knowledge in the fields of medicine, astronomy or mathematics.¹⁰ However, Arabic philosophical treatises were not sufficiently known.¹¹ Even Plethon can serve as an example with his interest in Islam and its organization of society being sufficiently known,¹² although his knowledge of Arabic philosophy, on the other hand, remains a major unknown. There is no evidence in Byzantium that any philosophical text was translated directly from Arabic into Greek.¹³ Where did Plethon learn

⁹ Nikos Costas Constantinides, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries: (1204 - Ca. 1310)* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 1982), p.159; Edmund Fryde, *The Early Palaeologan Renaissance* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2000), p.338; Joseph Mogenet, "L'influence de l'astronomie arabe à Byzance du IXe au XIVe siècle" in *Colloques d'histoire des sciences I (1972) and II (1973)* (Louvain: Éditions E. Nauwelaerts 1976), I vol., pp.45–55.

¹⁰ For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between Arabic and Byzantine writers see Maria Mavroudi, "Late Byzantium and Exchange with Arabic Writers" in *Byzantium, Faith and Power (1261–1557). Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, edited by Sarah T. Brooks (New Haven, CT: The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia, Yale University Press, 2007), pp.62–75; Maria Mavroudi, "Plethon as a Subversive and His Reception in the Islamic World" in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium. Papers from the Forty-third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 27–29 March 2010*, edited by Dimiter Angelov and Michael Saxby (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp.177–203.

¹¹ I would like to express my thanks to Maria Mavroudi and Dimitri Gutas for valuable comments on Arabic sources in Byzantium. See also Roger French, *Medicine before Science: The Business of Medicine from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.100.

¹² Franz Täschner, "Georgios Gemistos Plethon, ein Beitrag zur Frage der Übertragung von islamischem Geistesgut nach dem Abendlande", *Der Islam*, 18 (1929), pp.236–243; Milton V. Anastos, "Pletho and Islam", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 4 (1948), pp.270–305; Felix Klein-Franke, "Die Geschichte des frühen Islam in einer Schrift des Georgios Gemistos Pletho", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 65 (1972), pp.1–8; Anna Akasoy, "Plethons Nomoi. Ein Beitrag zum Polytheismus in spätbyzantinischer Zeit und seiner Rezeption in der islamischen Welt", *Revista Mirabilia*, 2 (2002), pp.224–235.

¹³ Sten Ebbesen, "Greek-Latin Philosophical Interaction" in *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources*, edited by Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.26.

about Averroes' teachings? Since we have not found any Byzantine translations thus far, the only supposition left is that his knowledge of Averroes was *indirect*.

In the preface of *De Differentiis Platonis et Aristotelis*, Plethon regrets that his contemporaries seem to admire Aristotle more than Plato, while the ancient Greeks and Romans had wisely honored Plato above all other philosophers.¹⁴ Plethon opposed the Latin view that it was Aristotle who taught a doctrine congruent with Christian theology. In Plethon's opinion, this shift towards Aristotle was primarily influenced by Averroes. Although Plethon did not call Averroes a "mad dog" (*canis rabidus*) like Petrarch,¹⁵ he noted that "most westerners" were too much influenced by Averroes.¹⁶ This means that the misunderstandings concerning Aristotle's teaching came about due to the fact that Latin philosophers had been misled by Averroes to believe that Aristotle's work contained the sum total of human wisdom.¹⁷ From the fact that this Aristotelian commentator had advanced the doctrine of 'the mortality of the

¹⁴ Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, p.71; François Masai, "Plethon, l'Averroïsme et le problème religieux" in *Colloques Internationaux de Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Sciences humaines, Le Neoplatonisme, Royaumont 3–13 Juin 1969*, edited by Pierre-Maxime Schuhl and Pierre Hadot (Paris: Ed. du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1971), pp.435–446; Charles Lohr, "Georgios Gemistos Pletho and Averroes: the Periodization of Latin Aristotelism" in *Sapientiam Amemus: Humanismus und Aristotelismus in der Renaissance: Festschrift für Eckhard Kessler zum 60. Geburtstag*, edited by Paul Richard Blum, Constance Blackwell und Charles Lohr (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1999), pp.39–48; Christos C. Evangelidou, "Pletho's Critique of Aristotle and Averroes and the Revival of Platonism in the Renaissance", *Skepsis*, 8 (1997), pp.146–170.

¹⁵ "In Byzantium itself a line of authors who considered Plato as their master can be traced with hardly a break from the time of Psellos up until the middle of the fourteenth century, when Petrarch heard that there were theologians in Byzantium who preferred Plato, 'the divine', to Aristotle. And not more than two generations later, Plethon tried, by going back to Plato and Proclus, to reinstate Platonism as a universal system." in Raymond Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition During the Middle Ages: Outlines of a Corpus platonicum medii aevi* (London: Warburg Institute, 1939), p.21. The characterization of the followers of Averroes' teaching as atheists is exaggerated by Petrarch. Francesco Petrarca, *Invectives*, edited and translated by David Marsh (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), p.69; Kenelm Foster, *Petrarch: Poet and Humanist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987), p.155; Nancy Bisaha, "Petrarch's Vision of the Muslim and Byzantine East", *Speculum*, 76:2 (2001), pp.284–314.

¹⁶ *Patrologia Graeca*, 160, 1006B; Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, p.149.

¹⁷ Lohr, "Georgios Gemistos Pletho and Averroes: the Periodization of Latin Aristotelism", p.39.

soul, which he incorrectly attributed to Aristotle, Plethon concluded that Averroes could not have been as great a philosopher and as good a commentator of Aristotle as his admirers believed.

The source which informs us of Plethon's knowledge of Averroes is Gennadios Scholarios.¹⁸ In his letter to the Princess of the Peloponnese he mentions the Jew *Elissaios*, who was a follower of Averroes, and other Arabic and Persian commentators on Aristotle's works.¹⁹ Gennadios listed Averroes along with Proclus and Zoroaster among the three sources of Plethon's heretism. Scholarios does not seem, however, to be a reliable source because Plethon openly rejected Averroism.²⁰ Despite the fact that Plethon, in his answer to Gennadios, explicitly mentioned that he knows Averroes and says he had learned about him from the *greatest Italian sages* and from the *Jews*, he emphasized that he does not agree with his teachings.²¹ A question consequently arises: why did Scholarios name Averroes among the heretic sources? Did he mean the same Averroes we know?

In addition, who did Plethon mean when identifying the source of his knowledge as the *greatest Italian sages*? In the late Byzantium, Arabic opinions concerning metaphysics or psychology might have come to Byzantine

philosophical awareness *indirectly*,²² through the translations of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*.²³ Demetrios Cydones, who translated Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles* and *Summa theologiae*, had been friendly with Plethon before Plethon left Constantinople for Mistra in the early 15th century.²⁴ It is certain that Plethon had become familiar with Thomas Aquinas through Cydones' translations. Although Plethon knew Aquinas' *Summae*, I am not quite certain that Aquinas' arguments against Averroes are the source of Plethon's criticism. If Plethon was familiar with both Aquinas' *summas* or other works such as Prochoros Cydones' translation of Aquinas' *De spiritualibus creaturis*, where many references to Averroes occur,²⁵ why did he not use Aquinas' detailed refutation of Averroes which was based on the discussion concerning the interpretation of the human intellect?

The question which Aquinas dealt with was not so much the immortality of the human soul but rather the nature of human intellect which he saw as problematic and dangerous in Averroes' interpretation. As Plethon does not mention Avicenna or Avempace, with whom Aquinas argues in *Summa contra gentiles*, it indicates Plethon's indifference to the epistemological arguments stated in

¹⁸ George Scholarios Gennadios, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IV, edited by Martin Jugie, Louis Petit and Xenophon A. Siderides (Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1935), pp.152–162; Steven B. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium (1204–1453)* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1985), pp.135–137 and 162; George Karamanolis, "Plethon and Scholarios on Aristotle" in *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, edited by Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.253–82; Marie-Hélène Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios (vers 1400–vers 1472). Un intellectuel orthodoxe face à la disparition de l'empire byzantin* (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 2008).

¹⁹ George Scholarios Gennadios, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IV, p.152; Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, p.117. On detailed discussion on Scholarios references to Plethon and Elissaios see Niketas Siniosoglou, "Sect and Utopia in shifting empires: Plethon, Elissaios, Bedreddin", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 36:1 (2012), pp.38–55.

²⁰ Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, pp.71–72.

²¹ Masai, *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra*, p.55; Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, pp.23–5.

²² Σ.Παπαδοπουλος, *Ελληνικά μεταφράσεις θωμιστικών έργων: φιλοθωμιστάι και αντιθωμιστάι εν Βυζαντίω: συμβολή εις την ιστορίαν της Βυζαντινής Θεολογίας* (Εν Αθήναις: Διδακτορική Διατριβή, 1967); John Demetracopoulos, "Latin philosophical works translated into Greek" in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, edited by Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke (Cambridge, UK/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.822–826.

²³ John Monfasani, *George Amiroutzes the Philosopher and His Tractates* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), pp.30–31. See the substantial research on Byzantine Aquinas by John A. Demetracopoulos. For instance John A. Demetracopoulos, *Plethon and Thomas Aquinas* (in Modern Greek) (Athens: Parousia, 2004); John A. Demetracopoulos, "Georgios Gemistos-Plethon's Dependence on Thomas Aquinas' Summa contra Gentiles and Summa Theologiae", *Archiv für mittelalterliche Philosophie und Kultur*, 12 (2006), pp.276–341. John Demetracopoulos is of the opinion that the monolingual Plethon knew of Averroes' philosophy through his mentor's (Demetrios Cydones) translations of Aquinas' *Summae*.

²⁴ There is no agreement among scholars whether or not Pletho was a student of Demetrios Cydones (John Monfasani, John Demetracopoulos).

²⁵ Michael Konstantinou-Rizos (Cand. Phil., University of London) is preparing the entire transcription and translation of Prochoros Cydones' translation of Aquinas' *De spiritualibus creaturis*.

the *Summae*.²⁶ Aquinas states in his *Summa contra Gentiles* that Averroes is a destroyer of peripatetic philosophy in the question of the nature of the intellect. While in the early works (*Commentum in II Sententiarum*) he did not discuss any consequences of such a teaching, in *Summa contra Gentiles* and *De unitate intellectus* he points out its moral impact.²⁷ What he has in mind is in particular the problem of the human will which would not exist in man but only in the separated intellect.²⁸ If the Averroistic position were to be accepted, then the human person would lose the ability to “control his own actions” (*dominus suarum actionum*).²⁹ It would lead to the destruction of moral philosophy and social-political life.³⁰ Similarly to Aquinas, additional medieval (Bonaventura, Albert the Great or Giles of Rome) and Renaissance (Marsilio Ficino) philosophers also criticize the Averroistic concept of the intellect as it would lead to fatal consequences for the immortality of the human soul.³¹

²⁶ Fernard van Steenberghen, *Thomas Aquinas and Radical Aristotelianism* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1980), p.29; Bernardo C. Bazàn, “Intellectum Speculativum: Averroes, Thomas Aquinas, and Siger of Brabant on the Intelligible Object”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 19 (1981), pp.425–446; Deborah L. Black, “Consciousness and Self-Knowledge in Aquinas’s Critique of Averroes’s Psychology”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 31 (1993), pp.349–385; Antonio Petagine, *Aristotelismo difficile: l’intelletto umano nella prospettiva di Alberto Magno, Tommaso d’Aquino e Sigieri di Brabante* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2004).

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* II, cap. 60.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*, cap.3; Edward P. Mahoney, “Aquinas’s Critique of Averroes’ Doctrine of the Unity of the Intellect” in *Thomas Aquinas and His Legacy*, edited by David M. Gallagher, Studies in Philosophy and History of Philosophy 28, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), p.97n: “Historians have rightly underscored the central importance of the *hic homo intelligit* argument in Thomas’s critique of Averroes. Van Steenberghen sees a “fundamental argument” against Averroes and the Averroistas the implications of “the undeniable affirmation of consciousness”, namely, *hic homo intelligit*. Thomas demonstrates by this “principal argument”, which is of the psychological order, that the explanations of Averroes and certain Averroists are insufficient to render an account of “this indisputable fact.”

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *In II Sent.*, d.40 q.1 a.3 resp.; *In III Sent.*, d.18 q.1 a.5 resp.; *Summa contra Gentiles* II, cap.115.

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* II, cap. 60.

³¹ Bonaventura, *In II Sent.* d.18 a.2 q.1; Albertus Magnus, *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroem*, in Albertus Magnus, *Opera Omnia* 17, edited by Alfonsus Hufnagel (Aschendorff: Monasterium Wesfalorum, 1975), x-xiv, pp.1–30; Giles of Rome, *Errores Philosophorum*, edited by Josef Koch and translated by John O. Reidl (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1944), p.22; Robert J. Mullins, *The Treatise on the Unity of the Intellect against Averroes by St. Albert the Great* (PhD. thesis, Marquette University, 1948).

It is possible to claim, although it might be too daring, that the theory of one intellect leads to strict determinism in Arabic thinking which is connected to the rejection of individual free will.³² Plethon instead advocated the, in the Byzantine philosophical environment, generally accepted thesis concerning the danger of Averroism (based on Aquinas’ criticism), which leads to a denial of the individuality and immortality of the human soul. To which extent, and even whether at all, the Byzantine authors noticed Aquinas’ moral aspect of the Averroistic interpretation of the intellect remains unclear.

We can get a certain picture about the relation of Byzantine authors to Averroes from two of Plethon’s enemies, the above-mentioned Gennadios Scholarios and Georgios Amiroutzes. Gennadios Scholarios was one of the few thinkers in his age who was familiar with the Greek exegetical tradition as well as the Latin philosophical tradition from Augustine and Boethius to the scholastics and, most particularly, to Thomas Aquinas.³³ Scholarios was indeed enthusiastic about scholastic philosophy and spent many years translating, summarizing, and commenting on Aquinas’ works.³³ He views Averroes as a commentator of Aristotle in a positive way: “Everybody, I suppose, knows that Averroes is the best of the commentators on Aristotle and that, besides being a commentator, he was the author of many works worthy of serious study. The Latins, utilizing these various sources of information, made many a discovery for themselves. They have in consequence added many improvements to Aristotle’s philosophy. By questions and reflections of a high order, by distinctions of great subtlety, they have surpassed the explanations of our first commentators.”³⁴ Scholarios praised Averroes for his deeper understanding of Aristotle, but at the same time saw him as the source of Plethon’s heresy. A second enemy of Plethon, Georgios Amiroutzes, a philosopher and an imperial official at the Empire of Trebizond, also learned of Averroes’ views through his

³² Averroes did not view his theory as a perfect one and that – taking into consideration the fact that the Latin translations provide us with only a partial and incomplete picture of his thought – it is necessary to evaluate his thought with a great amount of circumspection.

³³ Christopher Livanos, *Greek Tradition and Latin Influence in the Work of George Scholarios: Alone Against All of Europe* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006); Marie-Hélène Blanchet, *Georges-Gennadios Scholarios (vers 1400–vers 1472). Un intellectuel orthodoxe face à la disparition de l’empire byzantin*.

³⁴ Joseph Gill, “East and West in the Time of Bessarion. Theology and Religion”, *Rivista di Studi Byzantini e Neellenici*, 5 (1968), p.6n.

reading of Thomas Aquinas (in Greek translation).³⁵ In his *Tractates XI and XII* Amiroutzes deals with the unity of the human being and the accompanying assertion that the soul is the form of the body, which is clearly Aquinas' argument against Latin Averroists.³⁶ As Aquinas was well-known in the Byzantine environment, his criticism of Averroes is the most probable source through which the Byzantines gained an acquaintance with this Arabic thinker.³⁷

Could Plethon have meant the Italian humanists when referring to the *greatest Italian sages*? Plethon knew that Averroism was fashionable in Italy at that time. Moreover, he met Ugo Benzi, who was a teacher of Averroes in Italy.³⁸ Plethon could have become acquainted with Benzi's attitude towards Averroes but to which extent Ugo Benzi could have taught Plethon about Averroes remains another mystery.

The second possible direction of Plethon's knowledge of Averroes comes from Jewish intellectual circles (Adrianople, Constantinople, Crete). The Jewish track seems to be an important source for understanding of Arabic thought in Byzantium, because Jews were capable of providing a channel through which Persian and Arabic philosophy could reach the Byzantine Greeks.³⁹ The enigmatic figure of Elissaios from Adrianople has often aroused the curiosity of researchers and scholars. Their discussion leads us to assume that Elissaios

might have been a teacher of the early Plethon.⁴⁰ There are scholars who claim that Elissaios was a carrier of Iranian mysticism and became for Plethon what Ammonius Saccas had been for Plotinus⁴¹ or that Elissaios presumably taught Gemistos some of the doctrines of Judaism.⁴² However, no one has found any proof of Averroes being present in Elissaios' teachings. Elissaios, due to his support for mysticism, might have mediated the danger of averroistic rationalism to Plethon, however, we still lack any textual evidence for this claim. Although Elissaios is important as he mediated Zoroaster to Plethon, I believe it rather improbable that he was a key figure in developing Plethon's relationship to Averroes.

Let us now turn to the evidence of Averroes' manuscripts present among Jewish communities in the Late Byzantium as Arabic philosophy possibly penetrated into Byzantium through Jewish communities in Adrianople, Constantinople or Candia (Crete).⁴³ It is not possible, however, to provide a full account of this subject, because the research on the Jewish influence on the Byzantine intellectuals is still insufficiently explained.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the study of Hebrew philosophical manuscripts copied in Byzantium provide us with

³⁵ Recent research on George Amiroutzes reveals that he refuted the Themistian-Averroistic interpretation of Aristotle's psychology and based his argument on Book 7 of the *Metaphysics*. See Monfasani, *George Amiroutzes the Philosopher and His Tractates*, p.23.

³⁶ Amiroutzes follows the Byzantine Aquinas, but did not stress the ethical dimension of the Aquinas dispute with Averroes.

³⁷ Monfasani, *George Amiroutzes the Philosopher and His Tractates*, p.26.

³⁸ Ugo Benzi was a renowned physician, scholar and teacher of medicine at several universities in Italy. On the restoration of Benzi's study of Averroes see Dean Putnam Lockwood, *Ugo Benzi, Medieval Philosopher and Physician, 1376-1439* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) p.25; Plinio Pioreschi, *Medieval Medicine* (Omaha: Horatius Press, 2003), pp.416-420; Brian Lawn, *The Rise and Decline of the Scholastic 'Quaestio Disputata': With Special Emphasis on Its Use in the Teaching of Medicine and Science* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), pp.77-80. On Plethon and Ugo Benzi see also John Monfasani, "George Gemistos Plethon and the West: Greek Emigres" in *Renaissance Encounters. Greek East and Latin West*, edited by Marina S. Brownlee and Dimitri Gondicas (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p.25.

³⁹ Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, p.25.

⁴⁰ Masai, *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra*, pp.55-59; Polymnia Athanassiadi, "Byzantine Commentators on the Chaldean Oracles: Psellos and Plethon" in *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, edited by Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.248; Vasile-Adrian Carabă, "What is known about Elissaeus (14th century), a teacher of Georgios Gemistos Plethon (*ca.1355-†1452)?", *Études Byzantines et Post-Byzantines*, VI (2011), pp.171-185; Niketas Siniossoglou, "Sect and Utopia in Shifting Empires: Plethon, Elissaios, Bedreddin", pp.38-55.

⁴¹ Michel Tardieu, "Pléthon lecteur des Oracles", *Métis*, 2 (1987), p.142; Luc Brisson, "Pléthon et les Oracles Chaldaïques" in *Philosophie et sciences à Byzance de 1204 à 1453*, edited by Michel Cacours and Marie-Hélène Congourdeau (Leuven/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006), pp.127-142.

⁴² Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, p.65.

⁴³ On the physical background of Jewish communities (demography, occupations, etc.) see Nicholas D. Lange, Alexander Panayotov and Gethin Rees *Mapping the Jewish Communities of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, 2013): available at <http://www.byzantinejewry.net>; Congourdeau, "Cultural Exchanges between Jews and Christians in the Palaeologan Period", pp.709-721.

⁴⁴ Nicholas de Lange, "Hebrew Scholarship in Byzantium" in *Hebrew Scholarship and the Medieval World*, edited by Nicholas de Lange (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.23-37; Golda Akhiezer, "Byzantine Karaism in the Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries" in *Jews in Byzantium. Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, edited by Robert Bonfil, Oded Irshai, Guy Stroumsa and Rina Talgam (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2002), pp.723-760.

at least a small picture of the presence of Averroes and therefore supplies us with more evidence about Averroes than Elissaios.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Plethon explicitly stated that he had learned about Averroes' doctrine of the human soul from the "Jews" (plural).⁴⁶

The Byzantine Karaites received a rich intellectual heritage which they sought to harmonize with Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*, Ibn Ezra's commentaries and additional rationalistic Rabbanite works.⁴⁷ Elissaios would also presumably have introduced him to Moses Maimonides.⁴⁸ I believe that Plethon could have known something about Averroes from those Jewish intellectuals who studied Maimonides.

Between the 12th and the 17th centuries, a small Jewish community in Candia produced a great number of scholars (Shemaryah ha-Icriti, Elias Del Medigo, Shabbetai Cohen Balbo, Elijah Capsali, Yoseph Shlomo Delmedigo) whose glory spread beyond Crete.⁴⁹ The above-mentioned Elias Del Medigo (born 1460) was a renowned Averroist and Aristotelian who left for Italy at around 1480. It has become clear that Del Medigo came to know at least some of the works of Averroes while he was still in Candia.⁵⁰ Mickey Engel, who works on Del Medigo's philosophical roots, has compared sections from Del Medigo's work with certain Hebrew manuscripts of Averroes in Jerusalem, and there is no doubt that Del Medigo was familiar with these works. Since it is unlikely

⁴⁵ de Lange, "Hebrew Scholarship in Byzantium", pp.12–13.

⁴⁶ Hava Tirosch-Rothschild, "Jewish philosophy on the eve of modernity" in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1997), p.487: "Crete was an important center of Jewish philosophical activity during the late Middle Ages, especially after the persecution of 1391. With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Byzantine scholars used Crete as a stop-off point on the way to Italy, making it a center for the study of philosophy."

⁴⁷ Daniel J. Lasker, *From Judah Hadassi to Elijah Bashyatchi: Studies in Late Medieval Karaite Philosophy* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008).

⁴⁸ Daniel J. Lasker, "Byzantine Karaite Thought" in *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*, edited by Meira Polliack (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), pp.505–528.

⁴⁹ Isaac Barzilay, *Yoseph Shlomo Delmedigo (Yashar of Candia). His Life, Works and Times*, (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp.20–21.

⁵⁰ Dr. Mickey Engel from Cambridge University provided me with a great deal of useful information on Del Medigo's stay in Candia and on Hebrew philosophical manuscripts copied in Byzantium.

that Del Medigo encountered these Hebrew works for the first time in Padua, Engel assumes that Del Medigo came to know them earlier in Candia. Moreover, it is highly likely that Del Medigo also came to know some of the Latin translations of Averroes in Candia, since immediately upon his arrival to Italy he showed a great familiarity with Averroes' Latin works. Thus, it is most likely that he had teachers who were familiar with Averroes in Candia.

The intellectual debates within the Jewish community in Candia or Constantinople (after the fall of Constantinople) can also provide us with an impression of the presence of Averroes in Byzantium. It is a well-known fact that the teachings of Averroes and Avicenna, were part of the intellectual debates in the controversy between Michael ha-Cohen Balbo and Rabbi Moshe ha-Cohen Ashkenazi around 1466.⁵¹ Aleida Paudice in her work on Elia Capsali (ca 1485–ca 1555) quotes manuscripts of Jews from Crete listed in the catalogs of libraries there which contain the works of Averroes.⁵² The corpus of work of a renowned and leading personality from Constantinople and later from Adrianople, Mordechai ben Eliezer Comtino (Comatiano) (1402–1482)⁵³ includes copies of Averroes' commentaries of Aristotle and also Gersonides' commentaries of Averroes.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Aviezer Ravitzky, "The God of the philosophers and the God of the Kabbalists: a controversy in fifteenth century Crete" in *Studies in Jewish Manuscripts*, edited by Joseph Dan and Klaus Herrmann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), pp.139–170; Brian Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth. Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp.41–101.

⁵² Aleida Paudice, *Between Several Worlds: the Life and Writings of Elia Capsali: the Historical Works of a 16th-century Cretan Rabbi* (München: M.-press, 2010).

⁵³ Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium (1204–1453)*, pp.161–162; Jean-Christophe Attias, "Intellectual Leadership: Rabbatine-Karaite Relations in Constantinople as Seen through the Works and Activity of Mordekhai Komtino in the Fifteenth Century" in *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry: Community and Leadership*, edited by Aron Rodrigue (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Turkish Studies Series, 1992), pp.67–86; Congourdeau, "Cultural Exchanges between Jews and Christians in the Palaeologan Period", pp.712–714.

⁵⁴ Phillipe Gardette, "Pour en finir avec Plethon et son maitre juif Elisee" in Phillipe Gardette, *Etudes imagologiques et relations interconfessionnelles en zone byzantino-ottomane* (Istanbul: Editions Isis, 2007), pp.147–164.

The fate of the Plethon-Averroes dispute in the Latin West

Let us now move on to the fate of Plethon's criticism of Averroes among the Byzantine émigrés and Italians. Although the Byzantine exile to Italy is a wider phenomenon concerning not only teaching and learning, historians of philosophy are primarily interested in the transmission of ideas, concepts, translations and commentaries of ancient texts.⁵⁵ Byzantine émigrés and some of Plethon's pupils were forced to leave the Byzantine Empire. They primarily went to Italy and brought a greater interest in Plato's and Aristotle's works to their new country. A Byzantine émigré, who is connected to Averroism, is John Argyropoulos, an important translator of ancient texts.⁵⁶ Argyropoulos, together with other significant Byzantine scholars, such as Demetrius Cydones, Georgios Scholarios, George of Trebizond or Cardinal Bessarion, was a student of Latin Scholasticism.⁵⁷ Argyropoulos in his lectures *De anima* (1460) became engaged in the discussion about the nature of one intellect which was going on continually since the middle of the 13th century.⁵⁸ He rejected the opinion of Alexander of Aphrodisias that the soul was mortal as well as the Averroist doctrine of the unity of the intellect.⁵⁹ He followed the Christian tradition in his belief that the soul exists after death and also that there must be many intellects which correspond to individual persons. However, there are varied opinions on the question of Argyropoulos' relationship to Averroes as both aspects can be found in his works – those that are averroistic and

⁵⁵ Deno John Geanakoplos, "Italian Renaissance Thought and Learning and the Role of the Byzantine Emigres Scholars in Florence, Rome and Venice", *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi*, 3 (1984), pp.129–157; Nigel Guy Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy: Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (London: Duckworth, 1992); Jonathan Harris, *Greek Emigres in the West, 1400–1520* (Camberley, Surrey: Porphyrogenitus, 1995).

⁵⁶ Stephen Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.120.

⁵⁷ John Monfasani, *Bessarion Scholasticus. A Study of Cardinal Bessarion's Latin Library* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), p.71.

⁵⁸ Jill Kraye, "The philosophy of the Italian Renaissance" in *The Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Rationalism: The Renaissance and Seventeenth Century*, Volume 4, edited by George Henry Radcliffe Parkinson (London: Routledge, 1993), p.21.

⁵⁹ *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition: Sources, Constitution, and Reception of the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd (1126–1198)*, edited by Gerhard Endress, Jan Aertsen and Klaus Braun (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 1999); Orlando Todisco, *Averroè nel Dibattito Medievale: Verità o bonità?* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1999).

those that are not (John Monfasani, James Hankins).⁶⁰ Argyropoulos' attitude to Averroes arises from his extensive knowledge of Latin scholastic commentaries during his stay in Padua.⁶¹

Another important figure, who deals with Averroes' philosophy, is Cardinal Bessarion, undoubtedly one of the most famous disciples of Plethon. It is interesting to note that Bessarion does not cite Plethon in his discussion on the immortality of the soul in *In calumniatorem Platonis*.⁶² The question of the human soul is connected in Bessarion not only with the apologia of Plato's philosophy, but also with medieval discussions of the soul, in which Averroes, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Wylton, and John Duns Scotus dominate. Bessarion's library clearly shows that he had a great number of works by these authors, including Averroes.⁶³ Bessarion cites the scholastic authors when he demonstrates the impossibility of harmonizing Aristotle's opinions with the acceptance of the immortality of the individual human soul. He states that the Averroistic and Alexandrian interpretations of Aristotle dealing with the immortality of the human soul are opinions, which we need to accept since it is extremely difficult to demonstrate the immortality of the soul in Aristotle. He adds that this cannot be overcome by any rational reasons. Bessarion's quote from John Duns Scotus and his reference to Thomas Wylton partly support this stance: the question of the immortality of the human soul cannot be

⁶⁰ James Hankins believes that, "[Argyropoulos]...if not a declared Averroist, was at least willing to mention with approval Averroes' interpretation of Aristotle's psychology." See James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, vol.I. (Leiden: Brill, 1990), pp.275–6; John Monfasani attempts to prove that John Argyropoulos became an Averroist. See John Monfasani, "The Averroism of John Argyropoulos and His Quaestio utrum intellectus humanus sit perpetuus", *Villa I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*, 5 (1993), pp.157–208.

⁶¹ In light of these controversial opinions there should be a deeper examination of Argyropoulos' teaching. As *syncretism* can be seen in his philosophy, there can in all probability be found both aspects that are averroistic and aspects that are not. Jozef Matula, "John Argyropoulos and his Importance for Latin West", *Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis, Facultas Philosophica, Philosophica VII* (2006), pp.45–62.

⁶² Bessarion pays special attention to Plato's arguments on the origin, immortality and preexistence of the human soul in book II. Chapter 8: *De anima quid senserit Plato* and book III. 22: *Platonis de animae immortalitate argumenta probationibus Albertus approbat et de Aristotelis*. See Bessarion, *Bessarionis in calumniatorem Platonis libri IV*, edited by Ludwig Mohler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1927), pp.365–393.

⁶³ Bessarion possessed 6 volumes of Averroes' commentaries to Aristotle. See Monfasani, *Bessarion Scholasticus. A Study of Cardinal Bessarion's Latin Library*, p.17.

proved by rational means as it is instead a question of faith.⁶⁴ Bessarion, on the other hand, following Aquinas and Albert the Great, does not agree with Averroes' theory of one intellect because he wants to maintain the individuality of human thinking and acting.⁶⁵

Neither Argyropoulos nor Bessarion explicitly proceed from Plethon's criticism of Averroes. Both the Byzantine émigrés developed their opinions of Averroes on the background of scholastic discussion which Plethon himself was not particularly familiar with (Duns Scotus, Thomas Wylton). The similarity to Plethon lies in their identical persuasion of the dangerousness of Averroes in the question regarding the immortality of the human soul. This attitude was common to all Byzantine authors (Gennadios Scholarios, George Amiroutzes, John Argyropoulos, Bessarion).

Apart from the above-mentioned Byzantine émigrés, there were also Italians who were interested in Plethon's thought.⁶⁶ Although Plethon wrote *De Differentiis Platonis et Aristotelis* for the benefit of the humanists, none of them can be named that would have read it in Plethon's lifetime.⁶⁷ The only known immediate reaction to Plethon's treatise after the Council came from the Venetian humanist Lauro Quirini at Padua in 1440.⁶⁸ Although Quirini

⁶⁴ This aspect of Bessarion was noticed by Pietro Pomponazzi, who very carefully read Bessarion's treatise. Laurence Boulègue, "À propos de la thèse d' Averroès. Pietro Pomponazzi versus Agostino Nifo" in *Pietro Pomponazzi entre traditions et innovations, Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie 48*, edited by Joël Biard and Thierry Gontier (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: B.R. Grüner, 2009), p.44n: "Pomponazzi connaissait bien le traité de Bessarion *In calumniatorem Platonis*".

⁶⁵ Bessarion also possessed more manuscripts of Thomas Aquinas than of any other Latin author, although this does not mean that Bessarion adhered to all of Aquinas' theories. Although he was not a Thomist, he greatly appreciated Aquinas' thought, even calling him "divus Thomas." Monfasani, *Bessarion Scholasticus. A Study of Cardinal Bessarion's Latin Library*, pp.61–81.

⁶⁶ Monfasani, "George Gemistos Plethon and the West: Greek Emigres", pp.19–34; Albrecht Berger, "Plethon in Italien" in *Der Beitrag der Byzantinischen Gelehrten zur abendländischen Renaissance des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Evangelos Konstantinou (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2006), pp.79–89.

⁶⁷ Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, p.217.

⁶⁸ On Lauro Quirini see Marwan Rashed, "Der Averroismus des Lauro Quirini" in *Wissen über Grenzen. Arabisches Wissen und lateinisches Mittelalter*, edited by Andreas Speer and Lydia Wegener (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2006), pp.700–714, John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond. A Biography and a Study of His Rhetoric and Logic* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp.204–205.

is a fascinating but still somewhat obscure person, he nevertheless provides us with a small piece of information on the intellectual atmosphere both in Italy and at Crete. He was especially familiar with Candia in Crete, the above-mentioned important center of education and a flourishing Jewish community.⁶⁹ Although Quirini admired Aristotle so much that he wanted to translate all his works into Latin, he was extremely generous to Plato as well; he demonstrates Plato's superiority over Aristotle on the subject of the soul's immortality. Quirini therefore agrees with Plethon in this matter. On the other hand, while Plethon attacked Averroes in general, Quirini was an admirer of this Arabic philosopher and praised him as a great commentator.

Marsilio Ficino is the most important person, and perhaps the only one who directly quotes Plethon's negative attitude to Averroes. In his principal work, *Theologia Platonica* (1474) he used various Platonic as well as scholastic arguments to combat the Averroists.⁷⁰ After a long period during which the doctrines of the philosophers influenced by Averroes had reigned at Italian universities, Ficino revived attempts to establish rational proofs for the immortality of the soul.⁷¹ Ficino refuted Averroes for impiously denying the immortality of the human soul. The question of the soul's immortality was perhaps the most hotly debated philosophical issue of the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Ficino

⁶⁹ Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204–1571: The Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1978), p.131. On Lauro Quirini see *Lauro Quirini umanista*, edited by Konrad Krautter and Vittore Branca (Firenze: Olschki, 1977) and Hans-Veit Beyer, "Lauro Quirini, ein Venezianer unter dem Einfluß Plethons", *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 44 (1994), pp.1–20.

⁷⁰ The question of the soul's immortality was perhaps the most hotly debated philosophical issue of the later 15th and early 16th centuries. For an account of Averroes' wider influence in the Renaissance see for instance Charles Burnett, "The second revelation of Arabic philosophy and science: 1492–1562", in *Islam and the Renaissance*, edited by Charles Burnett and Anna Contadini (London: The Warburg Institute, 1999), pp.185–98; Craig Martin, "Rethinking Renaissance Averroism", *Intellectual History Review*, 17 (1) (2007), pp.3–19; Dag Nikolaus Hasse, "Averroes in the Renaissance," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales, Bibliotheca*, 4 (supplement to) 69 (2002), pp.xv–xviii.

⁷¹ Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Theory of Immortality in Marsilio Ficino", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1:3 (1940), pp.299–319; Paul Richard Blum, "The immortality of the soul" in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, edited by James Hankins (Cambridge, UK/ New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.211–233.

quotes Plethon several times in his works.⁷² The first time was in the *Platonic Theology* in a passage written at the earliest in the 1470s or at the latest in 1482. He states that at the beginning of *De Differentiis Platonis et Aristotelis* Plethon condemned Averroes for claiming that Aristotle denied the immortality of the human soul when in fact the opposite was true. Marsilio Ficino reacts systematically to the Averroistic understanding of the intellect in book 15 of *Theologia platonica*, although his letters demonstrated his general interest in Averroes. In the letter (*Contra Averroem, scilicet, quod non sit unicus hominum intellectus*) from 1492 Marsilio Ficino complained about the presence of the "sect" of Averroists.⁷³ In another letter (*Quod divina providentia statuit antiqua renovari*) he states that Averroists together with Alexandrians equally undermine the whole of religion.⁷⁴ Ficino conveys worries that Averroes' understanding of the intellect is dangerous for religious matters. The individuality of the human being as a unity of body and soul would be destroyed with the theory of one intellect. Ficino paid attention to those tendencies in Averroes' interpretation of Aristotle which led to a dangerous separation of the divine and the earthly spheres.

Ficino's objections to Averroism are more sophisticated than the superficial refutations of Averroes by the early humanists. With the help of scholastic philosophy, Ficino elaborates his arguments against Averroes' denial of the possibility of proving the immortality of the soul by reason. Although Ficino's attitude to scholastic thought is a question of debate, in his criticism of Averroes he used and modified the arguments from Thomas Aquinas, whose work he

considered a glory of Christian theology.⁷⁵ Brian Copenhaver emphasizes that in rendering Averroes' ideas about the soul's immortality, Ficino leans heavily on Aquinas' refutation of Averroes in the *Summa contra Gentiles*.⁷⁶ Aquinas is the most influential thinker of the Middle Ages who criticized Averroes and his understanding of the intellect springs from the metaphysical argument that the human soul is a form of the body. This metaphysical statement necessitated the acceptance of the individuality of the intellect. It had important consequences, not only regarding the immortality and incorruptibility of the soul, but also in ethical spheres. Ficino follows Aquinas' statement that the individual unity of the human soul is necessary because without substantial unity it would be impossible to think about individual rewards and punishments.⁷⁷ Since Ficino supplied his *Theologia Platonica* with the subtitle *de Immortalitate Animae*, Plethon's criticism of Averroes was a useful bit of ammunition in arguing that Aristotle agreed with Plato on the immortality of the soul.

Conclusion

The presence of Arabic philosophy in the Byzantium is still shrouded in mystery due to the lack of clear evidence and sources which would help us understand the relationship of Byzantine thinkers to Arabic philosophy. Unfortunately, the discussion of the direct influence of Arabic philosophy in Byzantium is based on speculations rather than facts. Whatever knowledge of Averroes, and other Arabs such as Avicenna, the Byzantines had, it came via translations of Latin works and Jewish intellectual circles. Whether there were any other routes has yet to be investigated in a more detailed way.

⁷² See the detailed analysis of the presence of Plethon in Ficino's manuscripts in John Monfasani, "Marsilio Ficino and the Plato-Aristotle Controversy" in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, edited by Michael J.B. Allen and Valery Rees (Boston: Brill, 2002), pp.196–199. See also Paul Richard Blum, "Et Nuper Pletho'-Ficino's Praise of Georgios Gemistos Plethon and His Rational Religion" in *Laus Platonici philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and His Influence*, edited by Stephen Clucas, Peter J. Forshaw and Valery Rees (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp.89–104.

⁷³ Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, vol. IV, translated by the Language Department of the School of Economic Science (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1988), pp.82–83; Dag Nikolaus Hasse, "Averroica secta: Notes on the Formation of Averroist Movements in Fourteenth-Century Bologna and Renaissance Italy" in *Averroes et les Averroismes juif et latin*, edited by Jean-Baptiste Brenet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp.312 and 316.

⁷⁴ Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, vol. IV, pp.82–83; James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, p.274.

⁷⁵ Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Florentine Platonism and Its Relations with Humanism and Scholasticism", *Church History*, 8:3 (1939), pp.201–211; James Hankins, "Marsilio Ficino as a Critic of Scholasticism", *Vivens Homo*, 5 (1994), pp.325–34.

⁷⁶ Brian Copenhaver, "Ten Arguments in Search of a Philosopher: Averroes Advanced Search Ten Arguments in Search of a Philosopher: Averroes and Aquinas in Ficino's Platonic Theology", *Vivarium*, 47.4 (2009), pp.444–479; Ardis B. Collins, *The Secular is Sacred: Platonism and Thomism in Marsilio Ficino's Platonic Theology* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974); Jozef Matula, "Marsilio Ficino as a Critic of Averroes" in *Festschrift: Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, edited by Machtelt Israëls and Louis A. Waldman (Florence: Villa I Tatti – The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, 2013), pp.432–437.

⁷⁷ Christopher Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism: The 'Post-Plotinian' Ficino" in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, edited by Michael J. B. Allen and Valery Rees (Boston: Brill, 2002), p.89.

In spite of the lack of preserved materials it can be argued that Plethon left a small but important reference about the knowledge of Arabic philosophy in Byzantium. He was not a critic of Islam, the target of his criticism was Averroes and his interpretation of Aristotle regarding the immortality of the human soul. Averroes can serve as a certain symbol of the radical interpretation of Aristotle by which scholastic philosophy diverted from the spiritual heights of the Platonic tradition. Plethon saw the danger of this scholastic Aristotle which meant a turning away from the spiritual and divine sphere. His knowledge of the medieval controversy with Averroes, supported by his knowledge of Aquinas and probably also of the discussion among the Jewish thinkers, helped Plethon boldly attack the Arabic thinker.

On the basis of the available materials, it is not possible to overestimate Plethon's influence on the criticism of Averroes because the Latin West and Byzantine Thomists had a thorough knowledge of the fundamental arguments against Averroes' teaching. Plethon was not such an important person that his remarks on Averroes would make the Renaissance philosophers study this significant commentator of Aristotle in a deeper way. I am not aware of any evidence that authors who inclined to Averroism, such as Nicoletto Vernia, Agostino Nifo, John Argyropoulos or Lauro Quirini, would mention Plethon's criticism. The most important figure to deal with Plethon's criticism of Averroes is in all probability Marsilio Ficino, who explicitly warns us of the danger of an exaggerated admiration of Aristotle's philosophy. This is why Plethon supported the efforts of such thinkers as Marsilio Ficino, which led to the criticism of strict Aristotelism and spiritual corporealism.

Taking into account Averroes' manuscripts present among Jewish scholars in the 14th – 15th century in Byzantium, it can be assumed that Arabic philosophy penetrated into Byzantium through Jewish communities. Plethon might have known about Averroes from the Jewish intellectuals (Elissaios in Adrianople or Jewish communities in Constantinople and Crete). There is textual evidence about the study of Averroes in Jewish communities in the Late Byzantium which can be a solid foundation for further research regarding the reception of Averroes in Byzantium.

The Renaissance thinkers were well aware of Averroes whose commentaries on Aristotle substantially shaped the thought paradigm between the 13th and 16th centuries. They viewed Plethon as a promoter of Platonism rather than as a critic of Averroes. We cannot deny, however, Plethon's charisma with which he influenced his followers who contributed to the flourishing of

Renaissance thinking in Italy in the 15th century (Bessarion, John Argyropoulos). Byzantine thinkers (Scholarios, Bessarion, Amiroutzes, Argyropoulos) admired Averroes' mastery in his comments on Aristotle. Their admiration for Averroes arose from their solid knowledge of the Latin scholastic tradition. The moderate view on Averroes among the Byzantine émigrés was a result of their familiarity with Averroes' Latin commentaries on Aristotle. The various medieval scholastic sources and the Italian academic spirit helped them appreciate Averroes more than their teacher in Mistra did. In summary, Plethon did not know Averroes that thoroughly and his knowledge of Averroes seems to be very limited. He used this Arabic thinker as good ammunition to support his own efforts to revive Plato. Plethon's criticism of Averroes mediated from various sources uncovers the fact that in Byzantium Averroes was viewed as an important but dangerous commentator on the most important pupil of the divine Plato.

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