The Construction of a Philosophical Textbook:
Some Remarks on Nikephoros Blemmydes’ *Epitome physica*

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Abstract

The *Compendium on Physics* (*Epitome physica*) by the Byzantine theologian and philosopher Nikephoros Blemmydes (13th cent.) was a very successful textbook on Natural Philosophy containing a summary of physics, meteorology and astronomy. This compendium was also conceived for being used as support for teaching. For his purposes, Blemmydes combined passages taken from different sources into a new text: Aristotle and his commentators as well as Cleomedes were his main sources. Since a manuscript with an earlier version of the text still survives, it is also possible to go deeper into the workshop of this Byzantine author and to investigate the use of the sources in both textual stages. This paper will therefore be devoted to analysing the inner structure of the *Epitome physica* and Blemmydes’ activity as an author.

Keywords

Nikephoros Blemmydes – Aristotle – Cleomedes – Galen – Byzantine Philosophy
most widespread examples of this scholarly practice. This philosophical textbook in two books on logic and on physics, respectively – customarily known by the Latin name Epitome logica and Epitome physica – was conceived by the author for learning purposes.

The first version of the Epitome dates to the years 1237–1239, when Blemmydes was entrusted by the Emperor John III Doukas Batazes with the education of five young men, one of whom was the later historian George Akropolites. Subsequently, Blemmydes became the teacher of the future Emperor Theodore II Doukas Laskaris. Some Byzantine manuscripts preserve traces of this first redaction, composed by Blemmydes for his teaching duties: for the book on logic, we have the proem2 and an excerpt of chs 37–38;3 on the other hand, the second book on physics is transmitted by the ms. Vaticanus gr. 434 (end of 13th century).4 During the last years of his life, in the 1260s, Blemmydes undertook a thorough revision of his textbook. This operation concerned not only the language and style, but also the structure and the content. The Vatican manuscript is therefore essential for understanding this process. In fact, it offers the rare chance to investigate how a Byzantine author composed and revised a textbook, as if one were looking over his shoulder as he sat at his desk.

2. In order to elucidate the compositional methodology and the purpose of this work, the preface to the Epitome offers valuable insights.5 As previously mentioned, this text underwent some sort of revision: in fact, Blemmydes added a dedication to the monks of his monastery to the original proem. This new incipit refers primarily to the part on logic. It reads as follows (688c2–689a4):6

επειδήπερ ἡ λογικὴ ἐπιστήμη πρὸς ἱερὰν Γραφὴν καὶ πάντας τοὺς τῆς ἀληθείας λόγους οὐκ ὀλίγον φέρει τὸ χρήσιμον, δέον ἐκρίναμεν τοῖς τοῦ Λόγου φοιτηταῖς τοῦ Ὅντος καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας μύσταις μικρούς τινας ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ λογικῇ λιπεῖν ἡμετέρους ὑπομνηματισμούς, οὗς αἰτησαμένῳ βασιλεῖ, νέοι ἔτι ὄντες καὶ πρὸς φιλοσοφίαν εἰσαγωγικοὶ καὶ ἀνεπιστήμονες, ὅποιοι καὶ εἰς τὸ

1 On Blemmydes’ life and work, see Valente 2018 with further literature. The reference edition for the Epitome is still the editio princeps by Johann Wegelin, published in Augsburg in 1605 and reprinted in vol. 142 of Patrologia Graeca. See also e.g. Lackner 1972; id. 1981; Valente 2017, 232–234.
2 See below, § 2.
3 See Ebbesen 1981, i 330–332, i 111 82–85; Lackner 1981, 363 with n. 1; Bydén 2003, 28.
4 See Lackner 1981, 335ff.; on this manuscript, see also Devreesse 1937, 162–165; Valente 2017, 233f., id. 2019, 52ff. with further literature.
5 On this proem, see also Carelos 2005, 40f.; Paidas 2007.
6 All the quotation from the Introductive epitome refer to PG 142 (see above, n. 1).
ἐξῆς ἐκ τῆς συντρόφου ρᾳθυμίας καὶ ρυπαρίας διεμείναμεν, ἐκδεδώκαμεν οὕτω προοιμιασάμενοι.

‘Since the logical science brings a not small advantage to the Holy Writing and to all the words of truth,’7 we estimated it necessary to leave some of our treatises concerning this logical science to the disciples of the Logos Who Is and to the initiated into the Truth. As we were still young, newly introduced into the philosophy,8 and ignorant – as we have remained in subsequent years due to innate laziness and sordidness –, we published them for the Emperor, on his request. The proem was the following.

The proem of the first version of the compendium follows. According to a convention, Blemmydes opened it with a celebration of the Emperor’s political and philosophical merits.9 What is important for the present investigation is that some features of this treatise are mentioned at the end of this text (689c12–d5):

ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ ἡμᾶς τοὺς μικροὺς μικράν τινα καὶ πρόχειρον αὐτῷ συνεισενεγκεῖν τοῦ σπουδάσματος ἐκέλευσεν (scil. ὁ ἐμὸς αὐτοκράτωρ) ἀφορμήν, ἀποπληροῦντες τὴν κέλευσιν τοὺς ὑποτεταγμένους εἰσαγωγοὺς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ κατ’ ἐπιτομὴν συνετάξαμεν ὁλίγους ὑπομνηματισμοὺς.

‘Since [our Emperor] commissioned a small and accessible subsidiary work even to us, who are of little consequence, we fulfilled his command and composed the following short treatises as an introduction to philosophy, redacted in the form of an epitome’.

Blemmydes composed this work to support his teaching activities, on the request of the Emperor (αἴτησαμένῳ βασιλεί). The author was still young and had

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7 Also in his Autobiography, Blemmydes remarks the benefits of logic in religious controversies: see in particular II 67,13–16 Munitiz and, more in general, II 67–74. See also Ierodiakonou 2012.
8 The adjective εἰσαγωγικός, ‘introductive’, is peculiar when used to refer to a person, as in this case. Wegelin translates this phrase as follows: cum adhuc ad philosophiam introduc eremur.
9 This is the beginning of the first proem (689a5f.; see also Carelos 2005, 401): Βασιλείας καὶ φιλοσοφίας πολύ τὸ συγγενὲς καὶ ὁμοιότροπον κτλ. (‘Royal power and philosophy share many akin and analogous features etc.’). On this proem, see recently Angelov 2012, 37 and, more generally, 34–45. In many manuscripts of the Epitome logica, and especially in the oldest ones, the participle προοιμιασάμενοι that closes the second proem is followed by a strong punctuation mark (‘:–’) and the letter beta in βασιλείας is rubricated: see e.g. Monac. gr. 225, fol. 41r; Bodl. Holkh. gr. 71, fol. 2r (on these two manuscripts, see Valente 2019, 522f. and 524f. with further bibliography).
recently been introduced to philosophy, as he remarks with a certain under-
statement (... ἀνεπιστήμονες, ὥποιοι καὶ εἰς τὸ ἐξής ἐκ τῆς συντρόφου ὁμολογίας καὶ
ῥυπαρίας διεμείναμεν κτλ.). As the author stresses, these introductory treatises
to philosophy (ὑπομνηματισμοῖ) are written in the form of an epitome (κατ’
ἐπιτομήν). This formulation also occurs in a passage of ch. 6 (Περὶ γενέσεως καὶ
φθορᾶς). Roughly in the middle of the chapter, Blemmydes concludes the dis-
cussion on generation and corruption in general (ἀπλῶς) with these words
(1084b13–15):

περὶ μὲν οὖν τῶν κατ’ ὰισίαν μεταβολῶν, ἤγουν τῆς ἀπλῶς γενέσεως καὶ
φθορᾶς, εἰρήσων τοσάῦτα κατ’ ἐπιτομὴν ὑπομνήσεως.

‘Thus, let so much be said about the changes in relation to substance, that
is in relation to generation and corruption in general, in the form of an
epitomized investigation’.

In this case, the source Blemmydes uses in compiling this passage is Simplicius’
commentary on Aristotle’s Physics (cag ix 908,15–909,1 Diels). Such an op-
eration of abridging and reshaping the sources is typical of the whole work.10
More in general, Blemmydes’ goal is to compose a useful textbook for teaching
and learning. This intention also emerges from a passage in the second book of
his Autobiography, in which Blemmydes resumes his own activity as an author.
Here, he lists the treatises he composed during his life, also outlining their con-
tent (ii 75,1–8 Munitiz):

ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ τὴν συλλογιστικὴν καὶ τὰ πρὸ ταύτης ἐν Ἐπιτομῇ θέσθαι φθάνο-
μεν, ἣπερ ἰσχὺς σαφῆνες. τά τε τῆς φυσικῆς καιριώτερα καὶ τὰ τῆς με-
tewologiας ἀναγκαίτερα, καὶ τῶν διττῶν καὶ ἀντιστρόφων περιφορῶν, καὶ
tῆς τῶν αἰθερίων σωμάτων κινήσεως καὶ τῶν ταύταις ἑπομένων, δόμα κη
πάρρω τοῦ χρησίμου, τόν ὥμοιον τρόπον περιοδεύομεν, γύμναμα τὴν πρᾶξιν
οἰκείον ποιούμενοι.

‘For my part, I set about writing an Epitome of syllogistic and the parts
[of logic] that precede it, trying to be as clear as I possibly could. I also
described the most important parts of physics and what is basic in ‘me-
teorology’, the double revolution in opposite directions, and the other

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10 See Valente 2017 with further bibliography. It is also common to other treatises by this au-
thor: for instance, see Nic. Blemm. De virt. et asc. 648f. (p. 29 Gielen) τοσάῦτα κατ’ ἐπιτομὴν
eιρήσων περὶ ἀρετῆς πρακτικῆς καὶ καθαρτικῆς κτλ.
movements of the bodies that are in the heavens, also the consequences that follow from them, adopting throughout the same method and omitting all that was not really useful. For me this activity was my personal training.'

In the *Epitome*, the selection of learned materials concerning logic and physics is based on the criteria of clarity and utility. Blemmydes' approach is consistent with the cultural milieu of his age, as is testified to by, among others, a passage from the proem of Joseph Rakendytes' *Synopsis variarum disciplinarum*. This latter scholar lived between 1260 and 1330, that is, in the years immediately after Blemmydes lifetime. His encyclopedic work is of particular interest because Rhakendytes borrowed entire passages not only from the *Epitome*, but from Blemmydes' *opera omnia*, often word for word. Blemmydes' passages were also expanded by inserting extracts from other treatises, for instance, from John of Damascus and George Pachymeres. In the proem, Rhakendytes explains the methodology he employed:

\[\text{ὃ γοῦν τέως κατεπράχθη μοι, τοῦτό ἐστιν· ἐνέκυψα βίβλοις σοφῶν διαφόροι πραγματείαι ἐςχολακότων [...]. ταῦτα δὴ πάντα διεξοδίως ἐγώ μετὰ τὰς διεξοδικὰς ἄνελίξεις τῶν μαθημάτων θέλων ἐκφυγεῖν τὸ κενὸσπουδὸν ἐνθέν μὲν τούτο, ἐκείθεν δὲ ἐκεῖνο, ἄλλοθεν δὲ ἄλλο, καὶ αὔτος ἄλλαχοθεν ἔτερον συνερανισάμενος καὶ συνθεὶς ὀστέα εἰποὶ τις προφητικῶς πρὸς ὀστέα καὶ ἁρμονίαν πρὸς ἁρμονίαν, ὁλομέλειαν τινα μίαν καὶ συνεχὴ ἐκ πολλῶν καὶ διαφόρων πραγματειῶν μίαν ταύτην συνεστησάμην καὶ ἀλλ' αὐτόθεν ἔξει τὸ χρήσιμον.}\]

'\(\)This is what I have made so far: I studied books of wise men who had dealt with various topics [...]. I treated all these things in accordance with the detailed expositions of (each) discipline because I wanted to avoid what is worthless: I took over a point from one text, another from another one, again another from another one, and then again another from another one. Connecting bone to bone – to speak according to the prophet – and joint to joint, I put together from many different treatises

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11 Translation by Munitiz 1988, 132f. For the phrase γύμνασμα τὴν πρᾶξιν οἰκεῖον ποιούμενοι, see also Nic. Blemm. *De virt. et asc.* 694f. (p. 31 Gielen) ... τὴν πρᾶξιν ὄχημα ποιουμένη (scil. ἡ θεωρία) καὶ ταύτης ἐπιπρεπῶς ἐπιβαίνουσα.
12 See Treu 1899; Gielen 2013, ed. 2016, LXXI–LXXIV with rich bibliography.
13 See Gielen 2016, LXXIV–LXXIX.
14 The Greek text is quoted according to Treu 1899, 37,5f. and 24–32.
this present one, the result of which is uniform and coherent. Thus, I erected this book as a monument on a column, as a representation of philosophy and the sciences. Looking at it whenever one wants to, one will not search for long, or run around in vain, rather one will find what is useful promptly'.

The prophet that Rhakendytes is alluding to is Ezekiel (37,7), as Erika Gielen rightly stresses (2013, 266 n. 41):

καὶ ἐπροφήτευσα καθὼς ἐνετείλατό μοι. καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ἐμὲ προφητεύσαι καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμός, καὶ προσήγαγε τὰ ὅστα ἑκάτερον πρὸς τὴν ἀρμονίαν αὐτοῦ.

’So I prophesied as I was commanded: and while I prophesied, there was a shaking that put the bones together, each in its own place’.

The allusion is of particular relevance: just as the prophet rejoined and gave new life to the dispersed bones of the Israelites with the help of God, so Rhakendytes collected different treatises from well-defined sources and gave them new life in a new body, that is his Synopsis. For his part, Blemmydes adopted a similar methodology based upon the combination of different source texts, but on a more complex and refined level: he selected some passages from his source texts and copy-pasted them anonymously but in an original way, combining them for creating a new work. By doing this, the Aristotelian tradition was actively reinterpreted and updated.15

3. Wolfgang Lackner (1981) was the first scholar to systematically engaging the identification of the sources of Blemmydes’ Compendium on Physics:16 Aristotle and his commentators, such as Simplicius, Philoponus and Alexander of Aphrodisia, constitute the core material, especially up to the middle of ch. 24 (Περὶ οὐρανοῦ).17 From that point on, the astronomical treatise of Cleomedes turns out to be the main source, in addition besides Aristotle.18 In this context,
the introduction of Cleomedes, a Stoic philosopher, is particularly significant but, at the same time, is also quite typical for the early Palaeologan age, when there was a revival of his astronomic treatise. Moreover, occasional excerpts from other source works can be identified thanks to verbatim citations. In order to illustrate this methodology, I will discuss some examples from the *Epitome physica*, as the Vatican manuscript allows us to compare different compositional stages of the compendium.

Let us consider the *incipit* of ch. 31, dedicated to the concept of ‘void’ (*Περὶ κενοῦ*: 1300b1–1301d12). Together with some passages from Aristotle’s *Physics*, Book 4 (6–9, 213a12–217b28), Blemmydes’ main source is Cleomedes. As is often the case, Aristotle inspires the beginning of the chapter. In the following table, Blemmydes’ sources are quoted in the left column, the Vatican version of the *Epitome* is printed in the middle, the final version on the right:

| Sources | Vat. gr. 434: Epitome physica, first version | Epitome physica, final version (1300b2–6) |
|---------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Ar. Cael. i 9, 279a12–14 | ἐν ἄπαντι γὰρ τόπῳ δυνατὸν ύπάρξαι σῶμα· κενὸν δ’ εἶναι φασίν ἐν ὃ μὴ ἐνυπάρχῃ σῶμα, δυνατὸν δ’ ἐστὶ γενέσθαι. | ἐνθα μὴ ἔστι τι τῶν σωμάτων διὸς, δύναται δὲ γενέσθαι σώματος τόπος, ἓκεῖνον τινὲς τῶν φυσικῶν κενὸν ὀνομάζουσιν· κενὸν γὰρ ἔσται τόπου ἐστερημένον σώματος. |
| Ar. Ph. iv 1, 208b25–27 | ἐνθα μὴ ἔστι τοῦ κενοῦ φάσκοντες εἶναι τόπον λέγουσιν· τὸ γὰρ κενὸν τόπος ἄν εἶναι εστερημένος σώματος. | ἐνθα μὴ ἔστιν ὅλως τῶν σωμάτων διὸς, δύναται δὲ γενέσθαι σώματος τόπος, ἓκεῖνον κενὸν ὀνομάζουσιν οἱ φυσικοὶ. τὸπὸν γὰρ ἐστερημένον σώματος οἴδασι τὸ κενὸν. |

The first sentence of this chapter contains a general definition of ‘void’: according to Bydén’s paraphrase (2003, 163), ‘the natural philosophers call void a place where there is no body, but a body can be (place deprived of body)’. This

19 See e.g. Todd 1990, xxix.
20 See also Golitsis 2007, 244–246 (on ch. 1), 246–248 (on ch. 4), 248–251 (on ch. 7), 251f. (on ch. 9); Valente 2017, 234–246 for an analysis of ch. 17, its sources and the methodology of compilation.
21 Bydén 2003, 163–168 studied this chapter in detail.
22 Following the suggestion of an anonymous peer reviewer, I have changed the Byzantine punctuation and accentuation of the Vatican manuscript (and of the final version of the *Epitome*) here and below, according to the conventions used for classical texts.
beginning seems to result from the combination of two Aristotelian passages, one from the treatise *De caelo*, the other from *Physics*.

The relevant information has been selected, reworked and simplified. In this case, the final redaction of the *Epitome* shows only stylistic changes.

Immediately after this sentence, Blemmydes added a doxographic digression, including Christian content, while revising his treatise. In fact, the following passage is not present in the *Vaticanus*, but in all the manuscripts of the final version (1300b7–c2):

> τινὲς μὲν οὖν ὄνομα μόνον κενόν τε καὶ ἀνύπαρκτον λέγουσι τὸ κενόν· τινὲς δὲ τὸ ἐξω τῆς κυρτῆς ἐπιφανείας τοῦ πρώτου καὶ κατ’ ἀλήθειαν ἀπλανοὺς οὐρανοῦ κενὸν ἀποφαίνονται· κενὸν σώματος, οὐ Θεοῦ· τὸ πᾶν γάρ, ἢτοι τὸν κόσμον, καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ τὸν κόσμον ἐφασαν τὸ κενὸν· ὃ μάλιστα καὶ τόπον ἰδίως εἶπον εἶναι μόνου Θεοῦ· ἀπείρου ἄπειρον καὶ ἀσωμάτου ἀσώματον καὶ αἰωνίου αἰωνίου.

“So, some say that *void* is just a void and non-existent name. Others assert that what is beyond the convex surface of the first and truly fixed heaven is void: i.e. void of body, not of God, since God fills the Whole, that is the Cosmos, and what is beyond the Whole, that is what is beyond the Cosmos. They called this supramundane *void*, and they said that it is indeed the place especially and uniquely designated for God, an infinite, incorporeal, and eternal place for an infinite, incorporeal, and eternal God.”

The source of this doctrine is still unknown. It may be an addition by Blemmydes himself, at least with respect to the theological part. As Bydén (2003, 164) remarks, “[...] he [scil. Blemmydes] tries to show (*EP* 31.2) that extracosmic void is consistent with Christian faith [...]. My efforts to trace a Patristic source of the statement reported in *EP* 31.2 have been in vain.”

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23 See also Ar. *Ph.* iv 7, 214a16–19 ἐπεὶ δὲ περὶ τόπου διώρισται, καὶ τὸ κενὸν ἀνάγκη τόπον εἶναι, εἰ ἔστιν ἀπειροτόπως σύμμορφος, τόπος δὲ καὶ πῶς ἢτοι καὶ πῶς οὐκ ἢτοι εἴρηται, φανερὸν δὲ ὅτι σύνω μὲν κενὸν οὐκ ἢτοι σύνω, οὔτε κεχωρισμένον οὔτε ἀχώριστον. Bydén 2003, 163 n. 141 confers Ar. *Ph.* iv 6, 213b30–34 and Cleom. i 1,20–24.

24 The article τὸ is missing in the printed edition by Wegelin, but it is unanimously transmitted in the manuscripts.

25 Translation by Bydén 2003, 163 with some changes.

26 See also Bydén 2003, 163 with n. 142.

27 On this point, see Lackner 1981, 357ff.

28 In the final version, Blemmydes also adds this section (1300c3–10): τοιούτων μὲν οὖν οὐκ ἢτοι ἢτοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ κενὸν. σωμάτων καὶ γὰρ σωμάτων ἀλλήλοις ἃπασα ὁ κόσμος πεπληρώθη. τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ κόσμος ἢτοί τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς καὶ τῶν ἐν μέσῳ, πυρὸς καὶ (κ.-om. Wegelin)
Cleomedes appears to be the main source for the remainder of this chapter.29 The following §§ 3f. (1300c11–d11) offer a good example for visualizing how the source text is used and reshaped. The absence of void within the Cosmos is rejected on the basis of the phenomena:

### Source: Cleom. i 1,68–78 Todd

τοιούτων δὲ ύπάρχον τὸ κενὸν, ἐν μὲν κόσμῳ οὐδὲ ἄλως ἐστὶ. δῆλον δὲ ἐκ τῶν φαινομένων.

εἰ γάρ μὴ δι’ ὅλου συμφυῆς υπῆρχην ἡ τῶν ἄλων οὐσία, οὔτε ἂν ὑπὸ φύσεως οἶνον τ’ ἂν συνέχεσθαι καὶ διοικεῖσθαι τὸν κόσμον, οὔτε τῶν μερῶν αὐτοῦ συμπάθεια τις ἂν ἦν πρὸς ἄλληλα, οὔτε, μὴ ύφ’ ἑνὸς τόνου συνεχομένου αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ πνεύματος δι’ ὅλου ὄντος συμφυῶς, οἶνον τ’ ἂν ἦν ἢ μήν ὁρᾶν ἢ ἀκούειν.

μεταξὺ γὰρ ὄντων κενωμάτων, ἐνεποδίζοντο ἂν ὑπ’ αὐτῶν αἱ αἰσθήσεις κτλ.

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### Vat. gr. 434: Epitome physica, first version30

οὐκ ἐστὶν ὦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ κενὸν οὐδέν.

εἰ γάρ ἦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ κενὸν,

οὔτε ἂν συμπάθεια τι καί δημιουργοῦνναι πανσοφοὺς καὶ παντοδυνάμου δημιουργὸν: ὑφ’ οὗ κἀκ τοῦ μηδαμῶς ἔκτισεν καὶ διακεκόσμηται. See Bydén 2003, 163 (with nn. 143f.): “Such a kind of void does not exist within the world. For the latter is entirely filled by a continuum of bodies. For this is the world: a continuous, well-fitted system of heaven, earth and the things in between, fire, air and water, such as is worthy of being created by an omniscient and omnipotent Creator, who created it out of nothing”. See also Psellos’ treatise Περὶ τῶν ἰδεῶν ὡς Πλάτων λέγει (Opusc. 33, p. 112,10–13 O’Meara): οἱ οὖν οὕτως λέγοντες ταῦτα πρῶτον μὲν τιθέασι τὸν δημιουργὸν τοῦ παντός, ἐπεί οὐδὲ τὰς ἰδέας, τὰ ἔκτισεν πρωτοφυλάκα ἐννομήματα, καὶ μετὰ ταύτας τὸν τῇδε κόσμον, τὸ εἰς οὐρανόν καὶ γῆς καὶ τῶν ἐν μέσῳ σύστημα τε καὶ σύγκριμα. The same definition also occurs in some Byzantine lexica: see e.g. Suda κ 2147 A. κόσμος· τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς καὶ τῶν ἐν μέσῳ σύστημα τε καὶ σύγκριμα κτλ. (see also Ecl. Anecd. Ox. 11 382,25 Cr; EM 532,14 s.v. κόσμος; [Zonar.] 1234 s.v. κόσμος).

29 See Wegelin 1606, 368 (= PG 142 1299 n. 30); Todd 1990, 86; Bydén 2003, 163f. with nn. 143–147.

30 This is the text of the final version: κενὸν οὖν κατὰ τὸν κόσμον οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ολοκληρωμένον. εἰ γάρ ἦν ἄλως ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ κενὸν, οὔτε ἂν συμπάθεια τις ἐφαίνετο τῶν τοῦ κόσμου μερῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα,
These passages reveal that Blemmydes usually adopts the text of his source, sometimes changing the wording, sometimes simply reproducing it verbatim. Furthermore, he also expands the source text in order to better explain his own opinions. For instance, in this last passage, Cleomedes introduces the examples of seeing and hearing to clarify what would happen in case of void, while Blemmydes concentrates only on seeing, explaining the consequences the void would cause if it existed, i.e. the impossibility of perceiving the firmament. Such an innovation is likely due to Blemmydes’ aim to offer a clearer exemplification to the users of his philosophical compendium.

Source: Cleom. i 1,68–78 Todd

‘Since the void exists in this way, it is also not present at all within the cosmos. This is clear from the phenomena. For if the substance of the whole cosmos were not naturally linked throughout, then: (a) the cosmos could neither be held together and administered throughout by Nature, nor could its parts have any sympathy relative to one another; (b) we would also be incapable of seeing and hearing, if the cosmos were not held together by a single tension (that is, if the pneuma were not naturally linked throughout); for if there were intervening void spaces, our senses would be impeded by them (etc.).’

Vat. gr. 434: Epitome physica, first version

‘So it is not possible that void is present in the cosmos. For if there were void in the cosmos, there would not be any sympathy relative to one another nor, furthermore, the perceptions, and particularly sight, would not be active. In fact, how would it be possible for the eyes to reach the firmament if the air were not a continuous connection in itself and united to the heaven through an uninterrupted natural continuity. For if there were intervening void spaces, our senses would be inactive and impeded by the void spaces.’

31 Transl. Bowen-Todd 2004, 25f.
32 My translation takes account of those by Bowen-Todd 2004, 25f. and Bydén 2003, 163.
4. In general, the Vatican redaction is closer to the wording of the sources than the final version of the *Epitome*. It is therefore essential for understanding Blemmydes’ relationship with – and use of – his sources. Moreover, it is also fundamental in some other cases, in which the presence of marginal annotations allows us to imagine the workshop of the author. For example, let us consider ch. 9, which is dedicated to place and time (*Περὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου*).

In the *Vaticanus*, the beginning of this chapter deals with the explanation of different kinds of motion (κίνησις). Concluding the first section, Blemmydes writes (cf. 1100a11–b2):

τὰ μὲν οὖν τῶν ὄντων, ώς εἴρηται, κινήσεις εἰσī, τὰ δὲ ἀρχαὶ κινήσεων, τὰ δὲ κινούμενα, ώς τὰ σώματα, τὰ τε Ἀπλὰ καὶ τὰ σύνθετα· τὰ δὲ διὰ (sic) τὰ κινοῦμενα, ώς τόπος καὶ χρόνος.

‘So, as it has been said, some of the things that are are motions, some others are origins of motions, some others are things being moved (such as bodies both simple and compound), some others are through [sic] things being moved (such as space and time).’

The reading of the *Vaticanus* διὰ τὰ κινούμενα is wrong, but it can be explained on the basis of the source of this passage, in this case Simplicius’ commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics* (CAG ix 397,15–18 Diels):

ἔτι δὲ πάντα τὰ ὄντα ἢ κινήσεις εἰσίν ὡς γένεσις καὶ ἀλλοίωσις, ἢ ἀρχαὶ κινήσεως ώς θεὸς ψυχὴ φύσις, ἢ κινούμενα ώς τὰ σώματα τὰ τε Ἀπλὰ καὶ τὰ σύνθετα, ἢ δι᾽ ἃ τὰ κινοῦμενα ώς χρόνος καὶ τόπος.

‘Also all the things that there are are either motions, such as coming to be and alteration, or are origins of motions, such as god, soul and nature, or things being moved, such as bodies both simple and compound, or the media of their change, such as time and place.’

It is interesting to note that the incorrect reading διὰ τὰ κινούμενα of the Vatican manuscript is also shared by the ms. *Marcianus gr. Z. 227* (end of 13th century), which transmits Simplicius’ commentary, as Hermann Diels reports in his critical apparatus. Furthermore, this is the common reading of all the manuscripts

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33 See Lackner 1981; Valente 2017, 235–238.
34 My translation takes that by Urmson 2002, 14 into account.
35 Transl. Urmson 2002, 14 with few changes.
with the final redaction of the *Epitome physica*: it must therefore be considered as the original text written by the author, even if it is wrong. The mistake can be ascribed to the manuscript source used by Blemmydes when compiling his compendium.\(^{36}\)

Moreover, in the margin of the above mentioned passage of ch. 9, the *Vaticanus* transmits the following note, written in red ink (fol. 169r):

\[
σχόλιον· τὸ μὲν σῶμα ἐν τόπῳ ἐστί, ἡ δὲ κίνησις ἐν τῷ σώματι, ὁ δὲ χρόνος ἐν τῇ κινήσει.
\]

‘Comment: the body is in a place, the motion in the body, the time in the motion’.

In all the manuscripts of the final version of the *Epitome physica*, this marginal note appears as main text.\(^{37}\) It is likely that this sentence originates from an addition made by Blemmydes himself to the text of the first redaction of the compendium. When revising it, he possibly considered this remark as necessary and thus added it. In fact, in the final redaction, the marginal note of the *Vaticanus* appears in the main text, introduced by a connective particle οὖν (1100a11–b2, § 1):

\[
τὰ μὲν οὖν τῶν ὄντων κινήσεις εἰσί, τὰ δὲ ἀρχαὶ κινήσεων, τὰ δὲ κινούμενα, ώς τὰ σώματα, τὰ τε ἀπλὰ καὶ τὰ σύνθετα· τὰ δὲ, διὰ (sic) τὰ κινούμενα, ώς τόπος καὶ χρόνος. τὸ μὲν οὖν σῶμα ἐν τόπῳ ἐστίν, ἡ δὲ κίνησις ἐν τῷ σώματι, ὁ δὲ χρόνος ἐν τῇ κινήσει.
\]

Another marginal note in the *Vaticanus* is of pivotal importance for identifying a source for a given passage and thus for understanding Blemmydes’ working methodology. The case in point is in ch. 27 (§ 7), which deals with the Moon (*Περὶ σελήνης*). In the Vatican manuscript, the passage in question reads as follow (fol. 193c–v):

36 For similar cases, see Golitsis 2007, 252–256.

37 As the notation σχόλιον indicates, this note should not be interpreted as a correction by the scribe in order to supplement a sentence that he had skipped while copying the main text: in such cases, he uses the conventional abbreviation κεί(μενον) or just a sign linking the addition in the margin to the right place in the text.

38 It should be noted that the words ώς εἴρηται, present in the Vatican redaction, have been suppressed.
'Conjunction (sýnodos) is therefore said to be when the Moon is located at the same degree as that of the Sun; coming forth (génna), when it is at a distance of 15 degrees from the Sun; first appearance (anatolḗ), when it appears new for the first time. On the first day, the Moon moves over the Earth until the moment when the light of the Sun, after setting, still prevails, so that the Moon sets on this day together with the light of the Sun, but it often sets before this. The Moon appears bright for the first time on the second day, sometimes more, sometimes less. And this very thing happens in respect to the measure of the distance from the Sun. The measure itself of the distance is a consequence (i) of the Moon's own movement (in fact, it does not always move in the same way), (ii) of the change of the orbit, (iii) of the setting of the signs of the Zodiac, which does not always happen in the same time, (iv) of the moment of the conjunction that occurred before. Therefore, there is not always only one time when the Moon appears bright.'

The source of the first sentence is a passage on the lunar phases from John Damascenus' *Expositio fidei* (21,201–203 Kotter): τὰ σχήματα τῆς σελήνης. σύνοδος, ὅτε γένηται ἐν τῇ μοίρᾳ, ἐν ᾗ ἔστιν ὁ ἥλιος· ἄνατολή, ὅτε φαίνεται πρώτον φαύνα (and 9,16 as well).

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39 Also see Gemin. 8,1 ἔστι δὲ σύνοδος μὲν, ὅταν ἐν τῇ ἀυτῇ μοίρᾳ γένηται ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη· τούτ' ἐστι περὶ τὴν τριακάδα σελήνης (and 9,16 as well).
Concerning the following part of the passage quoted above, the *Vaticanus* transmits a precious piece of information in the margin:

[τα]ῦτ(α) Γαληνὸς ἐν τῷ τρίτῳ τοῦ περὶ [κρ]ισίμων ἡμερῶν καὶ [σ]κεπτέον περὶ αὐτῶν.

‘Galen writes these things in the third book of *De diebus decretoriis* and one should consider them with attention.'
In this marginal note, a passage of Galen’s De diebus decrætoriis is identified as the direct source (the relevant sentences are in italics):

(Decret. IX 906,7–907,5 Kühn): ἀσφαλὴς οὖν ἡ κρίσις ἀποτελεῖται τῆς ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ μηνὶ γενησομένης καταστάσεως ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ τών ἡμερῶν, ἐν ᾗ πρώτῃ καὶ σαφῆς ἡ σελήνη καὶ χρόνον ἄξιολογον ὑπέρ γῆς ἣδη φαίνεται καὶ φῶς αἰσθητὸν ἀποτείχεται καὶ σκιάν ἐναργῶς δείκνυσιν. ἡ πρώτῃ δ’ ἡμέρᾳ μέχρι τοσοῦτον τὴν σελήνην ὑπὲρ γῆς ἔχει φερομένην, μέχρις ἃν ἐτί καὶ τοῦ τῆς ἡλίου φῶς ἐπέχῃ τὸ μετὰ τὴν δύσιν, ὡς’ ἐν ταυτῇ μὲν τῷ τοῦ ἡλίου συγκαταδύεται φωτί, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ προκαταδύεται. πρώτον δ’ ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ τῶν ἡμερῶν φαίνεται, καὶ ποτὲ μὲν μᾶλλον, ποτὲ δ’ ἢττον. καὶ τούτῳ δ’ αὐτῇ συμπίπτει παρά τὸ ποσόν τῆς πρὸς ἡλίου ἀποστάσεως. αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ ποσὸν τῆς ἀποστάσεως διὰ τὴν ἱδίαν τῆς σελήνης γίνεται ιδιότητι, γαρ ἦν οὐκ ἰσότητι, καὶ διὰ τὴν τῶν πλάτων ἐξάλλαξιν, καὶ διὰ τὴν τῶν ζῳδίων δύσιν ὁ φῶς ἐπεξέρχεται, καὶ πρὸς τούτοις ἐτὶ διὰ τὴν τῆς προγεγομένης συνόδου καιρόν, ὡς’ οὐκ ἐνεῖλ ὁ χρόνος ἐστὶν ἐν διὰ τοῦ τῆς σελήνης.

‘The judgement regarding the condition for the whole month is forecasted with certainty on the second day, when the Moon is also clear on the first one, shines for a remarkable length of time over the Earth, sends a perceptible light and clearly shows a shadow. The first day has the Moon moving over the Earth until the moment when the light of the Sun, after setting, still prevails, so that the Moon sets on this day together with the light of the Sun, but it often sets before this. The Moon appears bright for the first time on the second day, sometimes more, sometimes less. And this happens to the Moon in respect to the measure of the distance from the Sun. The measure itself of the distance is a consequence (i) of the Moon’s own movement (in fact, it does not move always in the same way), (ii) of the change of the orbit, (iii) of the setting of the signs of the Zodiac, which does not always happen in the same time, (iv) of the moment of the conjunction that occurred before. Therefore, there is not always only one time when the Moon appears bright.’

With regard to Galen, it should be recalled that Blemydes practised the profession of medicine for seven years when he was young, between 1214 and 1221.43

43 See Nic. Blemm. CV I 51,1–5 Munitiz: μείζονος δ’ ἐπί λόγους ἐφιέμενος ἐπιδόσεως, οὐκ εἶχον τὸν ἠγγίσμαν: ἐρ’ ἦς καὶ τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἐνεστρεφόμενον, ἀμα καὶ ἑρμηνευτικῆς ἐπιμελήματος λογικὸς τε καὶ πρακτικὸς (πατρική γὰρ ἀσκησις ἡ τέχνη κάμοι σύντροφος), ἄχρις ἑτῶν ἐπτὰ περατώσεως κτλ. For this passage, see Munitiz 1988, 15, 44.
It is likely, therefore, that he had first-hand knowledge of the medical treatise by Galen. He also mentions the princeps medicorum in some passages of both the Epitome⁴⁴ and of his treatise De corpore.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in relation to the marginal note in the Vaticanus, the precise indication of the source is striking. Even we cannot exclude the possibility of a reader who was well-versed in medical literature identifying the source of this passage in Blemmydes’ compendium and writing it down in the margin of his own manuscript – be it the Vaticanus itself or its exemplar – it may be the easiest solution to attribute this marginal note to the author himself, or to one of his pupils. Since this manuscript may thus represent quite a reliable copy of a working manuscript with the first redaction of the Epitome physica, it offers precious details for understanding how this Byzantine philosophical compendium was composed and structured.

5. In conclusion, Blemmydes’ Epitome physica is an original work within the Byzantine Aristotelianism of the 13th century. The author enriched this tradition, based upon Aristotle and his commentators, using different works, such as Cleomedes’ astronomical treatise, Galen, and John of Damascus. On this basis, Blemmydes composed a handbook to support his teaching activities. This work underwent different stages of revision, and can be considered a ‘work in progress’, until the author produced a final version in the last years of his life. The success of his Epitome as a philosophical textbook can be measured, in particular, on the basis of the number of surviving manuscripts (more than hundred): the oldest codices date to few decades after Blemmydes’ death, a huge number was produced during the Italian Renaissance, while the last exemplars were copied in Greece and Romania between the 18th and 19th centuries.⁴⁶ Thus, Blemmydes’ Epitome has significantly contributed to the spread of Greek-Byzantine thought over the centuries, and is an accomplished example of a compendium for teaching and learning (mainly) Aristotelian philosophy.

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⁴⁵ The only available edition is that by D. Boulesmas, printed in Leipzig 1784 (vol. 111, pp. 1–29).
⁴⁶ See also Valente 2016, 279f.
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