

# Blemmydes' Debt to Euthymios Zigabenos

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**I**N 1929 H. I. Bell pointed out that there is evidence that Nikephoros Blemmydes (1197–1272) relied heavily on the commentary on Psalms composed more than a century earlier by Euthymios Zigabenos.<sup>1</sup> Since Bell, it appears that Blemmydes' reliance on Zigabenos has been transformed into virtual plagiarism. Referring to Blemmydes' commentary, H.-G. Beck tells us that “was *PG* 142.1321–1622 bringt, ist (abgesehen von dem genannten Prooimion) identisch mit dem Psalmenkommentar des Euthymios Zigabenos.”<sup>2</sup> To the contrary, comparison of the two commentaries makes it clear that what is striking about Blemmydes' work is not the extent to which it resembles Zigabenos', but the ways in which his purported exploitation of the earlier commentary differs from it. In what follows I hope to show that Blemmydes' debt to Zigabenos was considerably smaller than either Bell or Beck represents it as having been.

To begin with, Beck should have known, if only because Bell was so very clear about it,<sup>3</sup> that Blemmydes' commentary, as it is published in Migne and as most of the manuscripts have it, is a compilation of three different versions. The first is comprised of full commentaries on Psalms 1–10 that differ significantly from those of Zigabenos on the same psalms. The second section, dealing with Psalms 11–23, is, as Bell (297) points out (and as at least one scribe seems to have noticed), copied nearly verbatim from the commentaries of Zigabenos. The third section, covering Psalms 24–150, is a set of (for the most part) brief notes, often on the same verses, phrases, or words commented on by Zigabenos, but again different from them in both scope and focus.

Yet if Beck was incorrect to suggest that Zigabenos' influence on Blemmydes was pervasive, Bell was also mistaken in many of the con-

<sup>1</sup> “The Commentary on Psalms by Nicephorus Blemmydes,” *BZ* 30 (1929/30) 295–300.

<sup>2</sup> *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich 1959) 673. Beck is somewhat less firm on p.672, where he recognizes that Blemmydes may not be the author of the entire commentary, but his statement as quoted is nonetheless misleading.

<sup>3</sup> As was A. Heisenberg in *Nicephori Blemmydae curriculum vitae et carmina* (Leipzig 1896) lxxxix–xciv. Ehrhard, in Krumbacher's *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur*<sup>2</sup> (Munich 1897) 94, is not so clear.

jectures he made about the composition—or compilation—of Blemmydes' commentary. Bell (300) suggests the following scenario: at an early date Blemmydes compiled a set of brief exegetical notes on Psalms, drawn mainly from the commentary of Zigabenos, but much compressed. Later, Blemmydes began a more ambitious commentary, “at the basis of which was the earlier commentary of Zigabenos but for which he probably used other authorities also, besides adding material of his own.” As a preliminary to either the first or the second (Bell continues), “more probably the former, he appears to have taken a ms. of Zigabenos into which he introduced some additions and a few modifications of arrangement.” That is, Blemmydes first wrote the commentary represented by what we find for Pss. 24–150; then, somewhat later, he began the commentary represented by what we have in the notes on Pss. 1–10, as a preliminary to which he began to revise and augment the commentary of Zigabenos, *i.e.*, what we have under Blemmydes' name for Pss. 11–23. For all these sections, in short, the guiding influence was Zigabenos' commentary.

Bell's scenario is not wholly implausible, but it is flawed by ambiguity and some half-truths. It is quite likely that Blemmydes did first write the commentary represented by *ad* 24–150, where the influence of Zigabenos is hard to miss, and only later that seen *ad* 1–10. But there is very little else in Bell's account that bears scrutiny. Let us consider the three sections in the order in which they were presumably composed.

(1) *The 'earliest' commentary* (PG 142.1430<sub>A</sub>–1662<sub>A</sub>). There is no question that Blemmydes made use of Zigabenos in this section of the commentary, but the degree of Zigabenos' influence is overstated by Bell. More careful comparison than Bell was able to make (he admits that his examination was cursory) bears this out. It is, in fact, rather too much to say that Zigabenos in particular was a major influence on Blemmydes.

First, it ought to be noted that the presence of verbal parallels that show an unmistakable influence on Blemmydes' treatments of Pss. 24–150 is far from pervasive. There is, to be sure, a great deal from Zigabenos in those comments, but there is as much, and in some cases far more, that is not from Zigabenos. Blemmydes depends heavily on Zigabenos, for instance, in his notes on Psalm 30 (1439<sub>C</sub>–41<sub>C</sub>) and adds little that cannot be found in the earlier commentary. So, too, with Blemmydes on, *e.g.*, Pss. 45 (1464<sub>A–D</sub>) and 55 (1476<sub>A</sub>–77<sub>A</sub>; Blemmydes seems to be working with a different text *ad* v.12, and adjusts Zigabenos' comment accordingly), Ps. 83 (1534<sub>B</sub>–39<sub>C</sub>, except *ad* v.44), and on the first ten verses or so of Ps. 138 (1605<sub>B</sub>–

08A). But the comments on the later verses of Ps. 138 are quite different from those of Zigabenos. On Ps. 148, however, Blemmydes and Zigabenos share almost nothing; and on Ps. 131 there is only one striking parallel (*ad* v.18). Blemmydes seems to have taken the first and last lines of Zigabenos' comment (*cf.* Zigabenos at *PG* 129.1224<sub>A</sub>, 1225<sub>C-D</sub>), leaving the intervening material aside. That 'parallel', however, may indicate use of a common source rather than Blemmydes' borrowing from Zigabenos, as at Ps. 24.22 (Blemmydes 1434<sub>C</sub>/Zigabenos 313<sub>C</sub>) on the etymology of *Israel*.<sup>4</sup> These are only a few examples, of course, but they are fairly representative of the uneven 'influence' exercised by Zigabenos on Blemmydes' comments in this early commentary.

Second, there is one significant class of omissions in Blemmydes. Zigabenos' commentary is distinctive chiefly in the interest he exhibits in grammatical and rhetorical matters in the language of the Psalms.<sup>5</sup> In the course of his comments on Pss. 24–43 (*i.e.*, the first twenty psalms treated by Blemmydes in this 'early' commentary), Zigabenos makes observations on syntactical peculiarities, the use of figures and tropes, and the rhetorical effects sought by the psalmist in more than seventy-five instances. Blemmydes has nothing whatever to say about half the verses commented on by Zigabenos. In some fifteen cases, Blemmydes treats the same verse as Zigabenos, but has far different questions in mind: *e.g.* *ad* 25.8, 1453<sub>B</sub>/Zigabenos (hereafter "Z.") 317<sub>B</sub>; 26.11, 1436<sub>C</sub>/Z. 325<sub>A-B</sub>; 28.1, 1437<sub>D</sub>/Z. 332<sub>B</sub>; 28.2, 1438<sub>B</sub>/Z. 332<sub>D</sub>; 37.11, 1453<sub>A</sub>/Z. 443<sub>C</sub>, *etc.*<sup>6</sup> Occasionally we see the possibility that Blemmydes has Zigabenos in mind, *e.g.* *ad* 28.6 (1438<sub>B</sub>), which appears to be a very compressed version of Zigabenos 336<sub>A</sub>; *cf.* *ad* 24.4 (1433<sub>C</sub>/Z. 305<sub>A</sub>) and 35.2 (1448<sub>C</sub>, reminiscent of Z. 405<sub>C</sub>). Only rarely do we find the sort of verbal similarity that would suggest definite influence: see, for example, *ad* 24.11 (1434<sub>A</sub>/Z. 309<sub>B</sub>), 26.5 (1436<sub>A</sub>/Z. 321<sub>C-D</sub>), 27.1 (1436<sub>Dff</sub>/Z. 328<sub>A</sub>), 41.3 (1458<sub>A</sub>/Z. 468<sub>D</sub>), *etc.*<sup>7</sup> In cases such as those in the latter two groups there is, of course, always a possibility that both Blemmydes and Zigabenos relied on the same source or sources.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Christ as *ἄνθος* is a commonplace that goes back at least as far as Hesychius of Jerusalem (*PG* 93.1461<sub>B</sub>). The etymology of *Israel* is similarly old: see n.8 *infra*.

<sup>5</sup> I have discussed this aspect of Zigabenos' commentary in an article forthcoming in *Illinois Classical Studies*.

<sup>6</sup> *Cf.* *ad* 38.13, 1445<sub>A</sub>/Z. 448<sub>A</sub>; 42.1f, 1459<sub>B</sub>/Z. 476<sub>B</sub>.

<sup>7</sup> See also *ad* 37.4 (1452<sub>A</sub>/Z. 429<sub>C</sub>) and 39.5 (1455<sub>B</sub>/Z. 449<sub>C</sub>).

<sup>8</sup> Blemmydes and Zigabenos undoubtedly had access to commentaries on the order of that published by V. Jagič in *Supplementum Psalterii Bononiensis* (Vienna 1917), which gives, *e.g.*, the same etymology for *Israel* that appears at 24.22. *Cf.* on Ps. 88.6 Blem-

Zigabenos' influence, in short, appears to be a good deal less pervasive than either Bell or Beck suggest.

(2) *The 'middle' commentary* (1376<sub>B</sub>–1430<sub>A</sub>). Here the influence of Zigabenos is obvious and, one might say, total. Where Bell might be misleading is in his contention that Blemmydes used Zigabenos, but “introduced some additions and a few modifications of arrangement.” In some fifty pages of commentary I find only five additions, all of them puzzling. *Ad* 18.2 (1410<sub>A–B</sub>) and 18.7 (1412<sub>D</sub>) we find two ἄλλως entries that Zigabenos does not have. Both could come from the same source, as both introduce further interpretation that brings in the Holy Spirit. But in neither case is it clear how the verse being commented on could prompt the entries in the text of Blemmydes. Another addition is found at 1417<sub>D</sub>–18<sub>A</sub>, *ad* 20.7, where Blemmydes seems to add a comment on εὐλογία. It adds little, in fact, to Zigabenos' comment (which Blemmydes repeats at 1418<sub>A–B</sub>) except some clarification of the allusion Zigabenos makes at 269<sub>B</sub> to 2 Kings 4.4 (the conversation between Elisha and Gehazi). The fourth addition, the interpolated ἀρχιεπίσκοπος εἰς αὐτόν (1422<sub>C–D</sub>), is quite mysterious, particularly since it is printed in Migne as though it were a line being commented upon. It adds nothing to the interpretation of Zigabenos. The remaining addition purportedly made by Blemmydes is at 1400<sub>A–B</sub>, *ad* 17.12: αὔσατε . . . οἰκοδομήσω αὐτόν· κύκλω δὲ αὐτοῦ, at which point Blemmydes continues ὅτι ἐν αὐτῇ . . ., as in Zigabenos. But the addition (or substitution) not only distorts Zigabenos' comment (*cf.* 228<sub>C</sub>), but makes no sense besides. Its syntax is—to echo observations made by both Blemmydes and Zigabenos from time to time—*adiaphoros*. The additions add nothing of substance, in short, and detract from intelligibility.

As for “modifications” to which Bell refers, the half-dozen I have noticed (including four noted by Bell) are more likely indicative of the ignorance or sloth of a copyist than of actual modifications made by the erudite Blemmydes. The differences in Blemmydes *ad* 13.3 and 13.7 (1382<sub>D</sub>–83<sub>A</sub>) are the results of inconsistent punctuation, and the difference in arrangement between Zigabenos 293<sub>D</sub> and Blemmydes 1429<sub>B–C</sub> (*ad* 22.5) is probably due to a scribe's inability to divide paragraphs properly. The omissions *ad* 18.7 (Z. 256<sub>A–B</sub>, omitted by Blemmydes 1411<sub>C</sub>) and *ad* 23.7–9 (Z.'s third lemma, omitted by Blemmydes) are due either to sloth or to carelessness. The inversions

mydes 1535<sub>A</sub>/Z. 904<sub>C</sub> with *Suppl.* 178a20ff, on 88.11 1535<sub>B</sub>/Z. 905<sub>D</sub> with *Suppl.* 179a10f, on 88.13 1535<sub>C–D</sub>/Z. 908<sub>D</sub> with *Suppl.* 179b4f, *etc.* There is a great deal to be done in this general area.

in the comments *ad* 18.10 (Z. 257<sub>D</sub>, Blemmydes 1413<sub>B-C</sub>) are inexplicable. The difference between Zigabenos and Blemmydes *ad* 22.23 (285<sub>A</sub>/1425<sub>A</sub>) lies in the way the text in Blemmydes skips over Zigabenos' quotation of John 17.6 to the citation of Matthew 28.10, clearly a scribal error. Finally, Blemmydes 1394<sub>C-D</sub> and Zigabenos 213<sub>C-D</sub> *ad* 16.14 differ in that the text in Blemmydes omits the last third of Zigabenos' comment (from *δεικνύς ὅτι* through *τῶν ἀπὸ γῆς*). The substitution of *ἦ καί* in Blemmydes for Zigabenos' *ὁ καί*, of *ὀξίαν ἀπαιτηθήσονται* for *ἀξίαν ἀποτίσονται*, and of *εἰ γὰρ πλείους* for *οἱ γὰρ πλείους* are obviously mistakes made by a copyist, or even (especially in the case of *ὀξίαν/ἀξίαν*) misprints in Migne. In no case, however, can we seriously consider these differences to be *modifications* made by Blemmydes.<sup>9</sup>

Given the number and nature of what Bell calls “additions and modifications,” then, it is hard to see how they can amount to any more than extraneous marginalia that somehow found their way into the text or mere scribal mistakes. I have not seen the manuscripts in question, so I say this with some trepidation. But the impression one gets from examination of the text *ad* 11–23 is that what we are dealing with is a somewhat contaminated version of Zigabenos' commentary on those psalms, not a set of revisions Blemmydes made prior to his own major commentary as represented, presumably, by the section on Pss. 1–10. How this part of Zigabenos found its way into the MSS. of Blemmydes as early as the thirteenth century (Bell's dating, 296f, of BM Add. 39589) is, of course, something we may never discover.

(3) *The 'later' commentary* (1321<sub>D</sub>–76<sub>B</sub>). Not much need be said here about Zigabenos' influence on Blemmydes' rather full commentaries on Pss. 1–10 because no such influence is perceivable. The easiest way to demonstrate the extent of Blemmydes' dependence is to look for traces of the feature so distinctive in Zigabenos, his interest in grammatical and rhetorical matters. It happens that a similar interest also characterizes Blemmydes' commentaries on these Psalms: more than forty times Blemmydes calls attention to the Psalmist's use of metaphor, catachresis, hyperbaton, periphrasis, and other syntactic and figurative devices.<sup>10</sup> But on only four occasions is there

<sup>9</sup> Compare Bell 296, who notes similar corruptions at 1381<sub>A</sub> (pref. to Ps. 13), 1358<sub>B</sub> (*ad* 14.3), and 1378<sub>C</sub> (*ad* 15.4).

<sup>10</sup> Blemmydes calls attention to these devices in his Proemium, 1325<sub>Cff</sub>. Zigabenos and Blemmydes seem to be alone among Byzantine exegetes in devoting such attention to grammatical and rhetorical matters; both were active in times of scholastic reconstruction and re-assimilation of ‘pagan’ learning. A thorough study of grammar and rhetoric in Byzantine exegesis is long overdue.

anything in Blemmydes that actually looks as though it could have been taken from Zigabenos:

BLEMMYDES	ZIGABENOS
<i>ad</i> 2:4 (1332D): τὸ “ἐγελάσεται” καὶ τὸ “ἐκμυτηριεῖ” κατ’ ἐπίτασιν εἴρηται τῆς “ἐκ” προθέσεως . . . .	81D: “ἐγελάσεται” . . . “ἐκμυτηριεῖ” . . . ἐπίτασιν γὰρ ἐμφαίνει ἢ πρόθεσις.
<i>ad</i> 3:8c (1338c): καὶ τοῦτο δὲ μεταφορικῶς ἀπὸ τῶν θηρίων τῶν ἐν τῷ δάκνειν ἐχόντων τὴν δύναμιν . . . .	93B: δηλαδὴ τὴν ἰσχὺν ἐκ μεταφορᾶς τῶν θηρίων . . . .
<i>ad</i> 8:5b (1362B): τὸ δὲ “υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου,” καὶ αὐτὸ περιφραστικῶς ἀντὶ τοῦ “ἀνθρώπος” εἴρηται.	133D: “ἄνθρωπος” δέ, καὶ “υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου,” τὸ αὐτὸ δηλοῦσιν ἐκ παραλλήλου· καὶ σύνηθες . . . περιφρασις . . . .
<i>ad</i> 9:34 (1372A): κατ’ ἐρώτησιν ὁ λόγος . . . .	161B: σφόδρα δεινοπαθήσας ἐπὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις τῶν πονηρῶν τολμημασιν, εἰς ἐρώτησιν . . . .

It is easy to see that even in these instances Zigabenos’ influence on Blemmydes is marginal at best. It is important to note, however, that on other occasions where Blemmydes has a grammatical or rhetorical observation to make on lines where Zigabenos also makes such remarks, Blemmydes either chooses a different word or phrase for comment or provides a different explanation of the same word or phrase noted by Zigabenos. Compare, for example, *ad* 2.1f, 1332A (καθ’ ὑπερβατὸν καὶ ἀσυνδέτως ἢ σύνταξις) and Zigabenos 80D (ταῦτα γὰρ σημαίνει τὸ “ἐφρύαξαν” οἱ τὸ Ἑβραϊκὸν ἐλληνίζαντες λέγουσιν); *ad* 4.3, 1340C (“καρδίαν” φησὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, ὡς πρῶτον καὶ κυριώτερον ὄργανον), Zigabenos 93B (τὸ δὲ υἱοὶ ἀνθρώπων αὐθις περίφρασις . . . σύνηθες γὰρ τοῦτο τῇ τῶν Ἑβραίων διαλέκτῳ); *ad* 7.14, 1353D (καὶ βέλη καὶ σκευὴ θανάτου κέκληκε μεταφορικῶς), Zigabenos 125A (χρῆ δὲ γιγνώσκειν . . . ὥστε τῆς τῶν ἀκροτῶν παχύτητος καθικέσθαι), *etc.*<sup>11</sup> On twenty-seven other occasions, Blemmydes makes grammatical or rhetorical observations on words or phrases to which Zigabenos pays no attention (*ad* 1.1, 1.5, 2.3, 2.6, 2.11, 3.5, 4.5, *etc.*);<sup>12</sup> and on fourteen passages where Zigabenos makes grammatical or rhetorical observations, Blemmydes does not (*cf.*, *e.g.*, 1.4, 2.12, 4.4, 4.10, 6.2, 6.11, *etc.*).<sup>13</sup> In short, the influence of Zigabenos is all but invisible, and Bell’s contention (300) that at

<sup>11</sup> See also *ad* 7.18, 8.4, 8.5b, and 9.34.

<sup>12</sup> Also *ad* 4.8, 5.10, 6.5, 6.9f, 7.2, 7.12, 7.13, 7.16, 8.2b, 9.1, 9.13, 9.19, 9.35, 9.38f, 10.2, and 10.6.

<sup>13</sup> See *ad* 7.3, 7.5, 7.6, 9.6, 9.11, 9.28, 9.30c, and 10.1.

the basis of this section of Blemmydes was “the earlier summary of Zigabenos” is erroneous.

Given Blemmydes’ obvious interest in grammatical and rhetorical matters, it is perhaps surprising that he did not borrow more from Zigabenos, who had, as we have noted, similar interests. One obvious explanation would be that he did not have Zigabenos’ commentary on Pss. 1–10 at hand. Another, and to my mind more likely, is that Pss. 1–10 are the *ψαλμούς τινας* to which he refers in his autobiography—those psalms on which he wrote commentaries “not from second-hand knowledge, but from the experience of one who sings the psalms,” and which he characterized as “chanting monuments . . . to the glory of God.”<sup>14</sup> In any event, Blemmydes’ comments on 1–10 are quite independent of Zigabenos, perhaps in some degree original.

From what we have seen, it is clear that Blemmydes’ commentary, taken as a whole, owes far less to Zigabenos than the debt implied by Bell and Beck, and that the literary relationship between the two figures is less simple than has been supposed.

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<sup>14</sup> See Blemmydes’ *Curriculum vitae* (n.3 *supra*) 88.5–8. It might be noted, too, that Blemmydes ends each of his commentaries on the first ten psalms with *ἀμήν*.