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ABSTRACT

This paper critically deals with a Silentium written by Michael Psellos, edited as no. 4 by A. R. Littlewood in *Oratoria minora* Teubner volume. Although this is the edition of reference, it presents several errors, especially in reading the manuscript L (unique witness of this work). The purpose of this paper is to review previous editorial approaches by Littlewood, advocating for a comprehensive analysis of all manuscript's readings; by proposing corrections and insights derived from L, the author underscores the need to reconsider Psellos' manuscript tradition.

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Critical Notes to a Psellian *Silentium*

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ABSTRACT

*This paper critically deals with a *Silentium* written by Michael Psellos, edited as no. 4 by A. R. Littlewood in *Oratoria minora* Teubner volume. Although this is the edition of reference, it presents several errors, especially in reading the manuscript L (unique witness of this work). The purpose of this paper is to review previous editorial approaches by Littlewood, advocating for a comprehensive analysis of all manuscript's readings; by proposing corrections and insights derived from L, the author underscores the need to reconsider Psellos' manuscript tradition.*

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I. THE PSELLIAN TRANSMISSION

Among the thirty-eight orations by Michael Psellos collected in the first Teubner volume dedicated to him,¹ the fourth one is a σελέντιος λόγος² speaking about the fasting (νηστεία), containing also a brief reference to a situation of war and alliance with “the people beyond the Danube – τὸ ὑπὲρ τὸν Ἰστρον ἔθνος” (l. 142).³ Since the two critic editions are full of gaps and wrong reading from the manuscript, these failings must be filled by basing upon both the studies on Byzantine scholarship developed in the last

twenty years and a new careful reading of the manuscript. The text was handed down only by the Laur. 57.40 (L in Psellos' traditions),⁴ at. fols. 198v-202v; both the editions did not take into account manuscript's peculiarities and their apparatus are incomplete.

The first problem is the date of L: all the editors took for granted the date by Bandini, *i. e.* the beginning of the 15th century; only recently the actual date (the end of the 11th century) emerged.⁵ This dating mistake caused a poor consideration of L and its *variae lectiones*, although it is one among the most important witnesses of Psellos' texts.

Littlewood⁶ considers L among the *codices deteriores* and says that their “lectiones ... quamvis fortasse sint Pselli ipsius, in apparatus relegavi.” Leaving aside that he reports in apparatus just less than the half of what could be reported, this method is entirely wrong for the *constitutio textus*: it is a contradiction to say that some variants maybe deriving from the author himself are not considered. On the other hand, if the main idea is to publish a new critic edition,⁷ then its readers would expect to see what the variants are, what the previous editors innovated, what they got wrong.⁸ In particular, the idea of

¹ A. R. Littlewood (ed.), *Michaelis Pselli Oratoria minora* (Leipzig 1985), [898]ORA.4 in the catalogue by P. Moore, *Iter Psellianum* (Toronto 2005) 342.

² Littlewood, *Pselli Oratoria* 10-16, firstly edited by E. Kurtz and F. Drexl (eds.), *Michaelis Pselli Scripta minora I* (Milan 1936) 335-342.

³ As Littlewood, *Pselli Oratoria* 10 says, it is not clear if they are the Pechenegs or the Uzes; therefore, the emperor pronouncing the discourse is in the one case Konstantinos IX Monomachos (see also Dölger in Kurtz and Drexl 510), in the other Konstantinos X Doukas. I suggest that this is the first: there is a similar situation described by Psellos in an oration to Monomachos, cf. *Or. pan.* 4, 176-185 (G. T. Dennis [ed.], *Michaelis Pselli Orationes panegyricae* [Stuttgart/Leipzig 1994] 63).

⁴ Diktyon 16409, described by A. Bandini, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Mediceae Laurentianae* (Florentiae 1778) 398-418. See also the accurate description by P. Gautier, “Deux manuscrits pselliens: le Parisinus graecus 1182 et le Laurentianus graecus 57-40,” *RÉByz* 44 (1986) 45-110, at 89-101.

⁵ Cf. D. Bianconi, “Età comnena e cultura scritta. Materiali e considerazioni alle origini di una ricerca,” in A. Bravo García and I. Pérez Martín (eds.), *The Legacy of Bernard of Montfaucon: Three Hundred Years of Studies on Greek Handwritings* (Turnhout 2010) 75-96, at 94-96.

⁶ Littlewood, *Pselli Oratoria* XIV.

⁷ What I am saying can be also found in the review to Dennis, *Pselli Orationes* by I. Polemis, *Parnassós* 36 (1994) 498-501.

⁸ From this perspective, Littlewood seems to be writing a ‘remake’ of Kurtz and Drexl, just by changing some subtleties.

codices deteriores in Psellos' transmission must be completely forgotten: his texts are often handed down by *codices unici*, whose almost all derived from what Psellos himself called "my personal register— τὰ ἡμέτερα σχέδια δελτάρια."⁹ This was available at the Palaiologan era's beginning yet;¹⁰ it means that the 'original' texts had been reading at least for two centuries after Psellos' death, and sometime the same text circulated in different versions.¹¹

It can therefore easily be inferred that each single Psellos' work needs to be examined on its own. Nothing must be overlooked, nor should the possibility be excluded that supposed later innovations might derive actually from the author himself.

In this way, I will try to accomplish this purpose on *Or. min.* 4, by adopting the following criteria: the text by Littlewood will be transcribed as it is in a list form, accompanied by a critical comment, by providing corrections or suggestions of them; the lines not written in Littlewood's apparatus are followed by an asterisk. The purpose of this paper, and it is worth pointing out here, is not to replace the previous edition: it merely aims to provide, through the list that follows in the next pages, a point of reflection for anyone wishing to prepare a new critical or commented edition of the text in the future.

II. NOTES

3 (ἀπό δύσεων): L has ἀποδύσεων, which the editors silently corrected. Although this operation is not wrong, it does not consider what the language evolutions are: for instance, as scholars well know, it is very frequent in the manuscripts to read διαταῦτα instead of διὰ ταῦτα.¹² It would

be better, in my opinion, to keep the *lectio* of L, since it testifies a different usage from both the ancient and the modern one.

5* (ἐπὶ τὰς ἡλιακὰς ταύτας ἀκτίνας περιφερόμεθα): L has ἀκτίνας, which the editors silently corrected like the previous one. In Byzantine orthography, there is frequent interchangeability between properispomenon and paroxytonon:¹³ this reflects, as at 3, a mere graphical evolution, which does not imply significant morphosyntactic changes; so, the correction can be avoided.

10-12* (ἀνεφρόσι τοίνυν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς τὸ τῆς νηστείας ὑποδεξώμεθα φῶς, ἵνα τὴν θείαν ἰδόντες καὶ παθόντες λαμπρότητα φωτοειδεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ τοῖς ὀρῶσι φαινοίμεθα): The last verb is written as φαινόμεθα in L, corrected as φαινώμεθα by Drexl (Kurtz kept as L) and as φαινοίμεθα by Littlewood. The L scribe is clear to make a mistake by writing the present indicative;¹⁴ and the present optative by Littlewood cannot be accepted, since the main verb is not a past-tense indicative. Thus, with Drexl, I prefer to read it as present subjunctive.

14* (ὄση τε πρακτικῆ): L has τὲ, which the editors likely did not notice; cf. ἀκτίνας at 5.

53 (-54) (πῶς δὲ φείσομαι τοῦ προπάτορος αἰδοῦ τῆς πλάσεως ...): The verb is conjectured by Kurtz, but L clearly has φήσομαι (it is not "in rasura," as Littlewood says: the ink is just faded). Obviously, this conjecture assumes that φήσομαι is a mistake because of iotacism, but it does not consider this is a *lectio difficilior*: the future indicative at *vox media* is extremely rare compared to the *vox activa*.¹⁵ It would be better, therefore, to preserve the manuscript: there is no

⁹ J. F. Boissonade (ed.), *Michaelis Pselli De operatione daemonum* (Nürnberg 1838) 116, on which see R. Anastasi, "Sulla tradizione manoscritta delle opere di Psello," *Quaderni del Siculorum Gymnasium* 2 (1976) 61-91, at 61.

¹⁰ Cf. I. Pérez Martín, "The Transmission of Some Writings by Psellos in Thirteenth-Century Constantinople," in A. Rigo (ed.), *Theologica minora. The Minor Genres of Byzantine Theological Literature* (Turnhout 2013) 159-174.

¹¹ Cf. Psell. *Ep.* 539a-b (S. Papaioannou [ed.], *Michaelis Pselli Epistulae* [Berlin/Boston 2019] 966-970).

¹² Examples can be found in D. R. Reinsch (ed.), *Michaelis Pselli Chronographia* (Berlin/Boston 2014) XXXII-XXXIII;

see also Papaioannou, *Pselli Epistulae* CLVII-CLIX, or I. Polemis and E. Kaltsogianni (eds.), *Theodori Metochitae Orationes* (Berlin/Boston 2019) XVII-XVIII.

¹³ A good panorama on the Byzantine accentuation can be read in J. Noret, "L'accentuation byzantine: en quoi et pourquoi elle diffère de l'accentuation «savante» actuelle, parfois absurde," in M. Hinterberger (ed.), *The Language of Byzantine Learned Literature* (Turnhout 2014) 96-146.

¹⁴ One may say that the scribe inverted it with the previous ὑποδεξώμεθα, but I think it undeniably a jussive subjunctive.

¹⁵ Cf. TLG online s. v. φημί.

reason to change a word which also makes sense on its own.

60-61 (ἀλλὰ σοῦ μὲν ἂν εὐλόγως φεισαίμην κλαπέντος ...): L has φησαίμην; cf. φείσομαι at 53.

62* (σοι): L has σοι; the editors had no reasons to make it enclitic.

69*-70 (προσσυφανθὲν ... καὶ προσαρτηθὲν): This is a perfect example of glaring false reading from manuscript by the editors: L (at fol. 200r) clearly has προσυφάν^θ and προσηρητή^θ, unequivocally abbreviations for προσυφάνθη and προσηρητήθη. Kurtz misread προσυφανθὲν (as did Drexel and Littlewood) and proposed an unlikely προσηρητηθὲν by analogy; Drexel restored the latter one as in L, but Littlewood followed Kurtz's mistake removing the augment. By keeping both verbs in explicit form, the text flows better; moreover, following L's punctuation, the sentence (68-71) will sound better this way:¹⁶ ὁρᾶτε γὰρ τουτὶ τὸ σῶμα ἡμῶν τὸ παχὺ καὶ ἀντίτυπον· τὸν ἐπιπροσθοῦντα ζόφον τῆς ψυχῆς ταῖς μαρμαρυγαῖς, ὕστερον προσυφάνθη ταῖς ἡμετέραις ψυχαῖς· καὶ προσηρητήθη τῇ φύσει βαρὺ καὶ βριθόν [cf. below at 70] ἐφόλκιον, ἀφ' οὗ, τοῦ ξύλου τῆς κακίας γευσάμενοι, τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς ἀπεκλείσθημεν.

70* (βριθόν): L has βριθόν; cf. ἀκτίνας at 5.

75* (δεσμῶτις ἐστίν): L has ἐστίν; the enclitic accent can be removed.

76* (ψυχὴ ὥσπερ τινὶ δεσμοτηρίῳ καθειργμένη τῷ σώματι): L has ὡς πέρ τινι; since the pronoun is indefinite, the grave accent is unnecessary.

77* (σιδηροῖ): L has σιδηροί, which was accepted by Kurtz (Drexel changed and so did Littlewood); since it is the adjective σιδήρεος and there is not any relevant morphosyntactic change, it can be accepted in the text like ἀκτίνας at 5 or, at least, written in the apparatus with *an servandum?*

88 (καταναλίσκων): The verb is written by Littlewood between the *cruces desperationis*, and

he says in apparatus that Westerink “correctly suspected – recte suspicatus est” it, and he had the doubt whether to conjecture as καταδιώκων or not. L clearly has καταναλίσκων, but basing upon what Littlewood says, without consulting the manuscript, one might think there is an empty space on the page; this is not the case, because Psellos here is speaking about “surpassing the practical and earth-related virtues – τὰς πρακτικὰς καὶ περὶ γῆν ἐρπούσας καταναλίσκων τῶν ἀρετῶν.” As Psellos himself says elsewhere,¹⁷ duty of man is to elevate himself from the virtues of the earthly level, in order to understand and contemplate those of the “exemplary level – παραδειγματικὸς βαθμὸς.” The meaning of the text, therefore, is that fasting is not meant to follow hard upon¹⁸ the earthly virtues, but to surpass them, to reach a higher stage than the human one.

91* (ταῶ): L has ταῶ; cf. ἀκτίνας at 5.

93* (ζῶόν ἐστίν): L has ἐστίν; cf. the same at 75.

94 * (πτῶξ): This is the reading in L, accepted by all the editors; Littlewood correctly suggests in apparatus to conjecture as πτῶγξ, since Psellos is listing birds in this passage. It would be better to modify the text and explain the scribe's mistake in apparatus.

100-104 (ὁρᾶς τὸν οὐρανὸν ... τῶν ἀστέρων χόρον;): Littlewood's correction to πηγὴ instead of πηγῆν L at 102 is right (the latter was preserved by Kurtz and Drexel), as it is analogous to the other nominatives in the sentence. Littlewood rightly specifies in the apparatus that πηγῆν τοῦ is addition *supra lineam*, but he forgets to mention it is *post correctionem*; simply stating it was made by an *alia manus* is not enough: the marginal sign

¹⁷ Cf. Psell. *Phil. min. II* 32 ([826]PHI.103 Moore), cf. D. J. O'Meara [ed.], *Michaelis Pselli Philosophica minora II* [Leipzig 1989] 109-11, newly edited by me in *MEG* 24 (2024) where the adjective πολιτικός is used as synonym of πρακτικός. See also Psell. *Omnif. doct.* 66-81 (L. G. Westerink [ed.], *Michaelis Pselli De omnifaria doctrina* [Nijmegen 1948] 43-49).

¹⁸ See LSJ s. v. καταδιώκω.

¹⁶ I adopt here the punctuation criteria by Reinsch, *Pselli Chronographia* XXXIV.

at fol. 200v likely indicates that the scribe himself suggested to another one to correct.¹⁹

114 (πάντα δὲ τῆ ἀκολακεύτω γαστρὶ χαριζόμενοι): Kurtz doubtfully suggested to change ἀκολακεύτω into ἀκολάστω. I honestly do not understand the meaning of this conjecture: the passage is speaking about the gratitude to fasting; so, how could fasters be “totally grateful for the undisciplined paunch?”²⁰

128* (κάκεινός μοι): L has κάκεινος; it is very frequent in Byzantine manuscripts to find a properispomenon word followed by an enclitic without the second accent.

131* (ἐκ θεοῦ τε): L has τὲ; cf. the same at 14.

132* (αἱ χεῖρές μου): L has χεῖρες; cf. κάκεινος at 128.

133 (οἱ δάκτυλοί μοι): It is part of a quotation from Ps. 151, 2; Littlewood indicates in apparatus that in the biblical text there is μου instead of μοι (so did not notice Kurtz and Drexl). I honestly do not know how useful it is to highlight only this difference: would it be better to add this might be a *lapsus scribae* or a quotation from memory by Psellos himself?

136* (ἐκεῖνός μοι): L has ἐκεῖνος; cf. κάκεινος at 128.

142 (-143) (... πρόην καθ’ ἡμῶν ἐντεῖνον τὰ τόξα ... νῦν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὸ βέλος ἀφίησι): L has ἐντεῖνων (so did Kurtz); the imperfect tense is by Drexl, very interesting but not necessary in my opinion. Keeping L’s participle better conveys the metaphor for war first and alliance later by Psellos, especially if intended as an adversative or concessive clause: “ ... while / although they aimed the bows against us until yesterday ... now they shoot the arrow for us.”

156* (Φαραῶ): L has Φαραῶ; cf. ἀκτίνας at 5.

164* (σοι): L has σοι; cf. the same at 62.

167* (αὔλαξ): L has αὔλαξ (so did Kurtz); cf. ἀκτίνας at 5.

168* (δοκοῦσί μοι): L has δοκοῦσι; cf. κάκεινος at 128.

176(-177) (τεσσαρακονθήμερον): L has τεσσακονθήμερον, silently corrected by Kurtz.

177* (τεσσαράκοντα καὶ ὀκτώ): L has μ’καὶ ἧ’; the editors did not indicate it. While it is legitimate for an editor to write numbers in word rather than using their numerical symbols, it would be better to specify in the apparatus if they are written differently in the manuscripts.²¹

178* (τεσσαράκοντα): L has μ’; cf. the previous above.

178-184* (αἱ μὲν γὰρ ... καὶ κατάλυτον): The whole sentence is partially copied, partially synthesized (very roughly in both cases) in Vat. Chis. R.IV.12,²² at. fol. VIIr; it is likely just a selection of *lemmata* without any ecdotic value.²³

¹⁹ The sign I am referring to is very common in Greek manuscripts to note or annotate texts: it is the one like the modern % symbol.

²⁰ Moreover, this adjective had not a positive use in the ancient authors, cf. *e. g.* the commentary by C. W. Willink (ed.), *Euripidis Orestes* (Oxford 1986) 82.

²¹ So did *e. g.* O’Meara, *Pselli Philosophica II* 110.

²² Diktyon 65199, described by P. Franchi de’ Cavalieri, *Codices Graeci Chisiani et Borgiani* (Città del Vaticano 1927) 15-21. The manuscript contains also *Phil. min. I* 19, 136 (J. M. Duffy [ed.], *Michaelis Pselli Philosophica minora I* [Stuttgart/Leipzig 1992] 73) and the Μέθοδος τῶν μηνῶν, cf. R. Kunze, “Die anonyme Handschrift (Da 61) der Dresdner königlichen Bibliothek,” *Hermes* 34 (1899) 345-62, at 361-362.

²³ Cf. Moore, *Iter Psellianum* 257, 305 and 342.