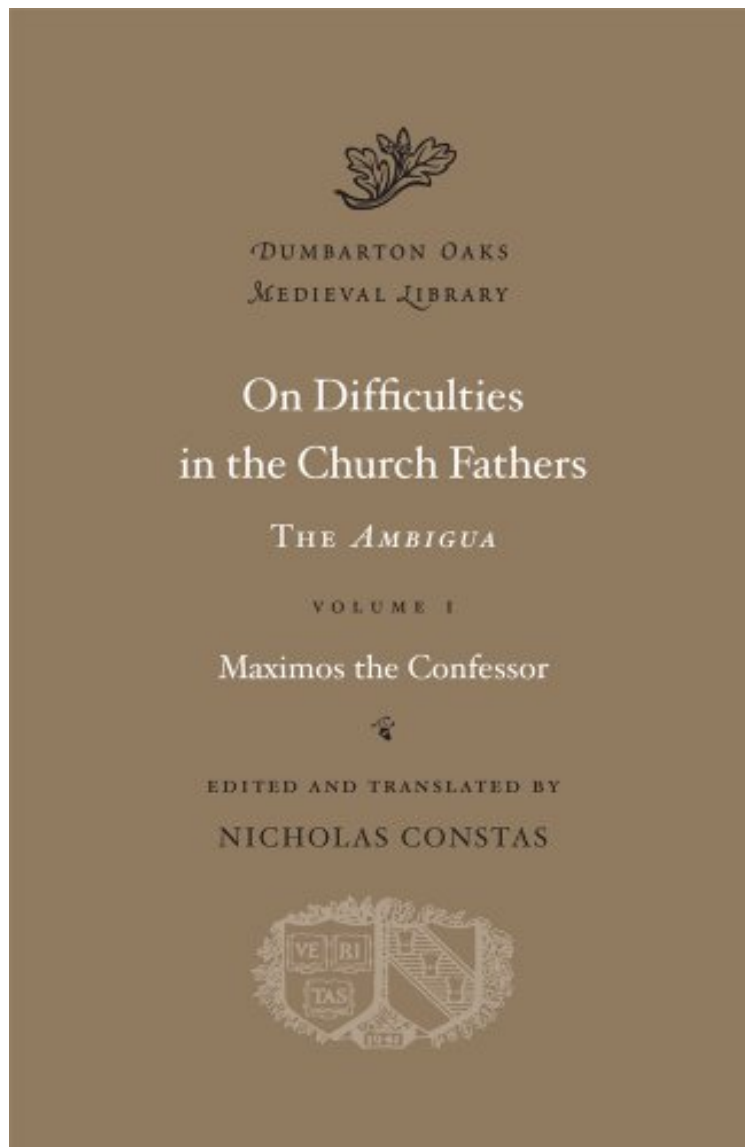


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Maximos the Confessor : On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, Vol. 1: The Ambigua, (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, Vol. 1: The Ambigua, (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library:

36 of 36 people found the following review helpful. A long overdue edition and a stellar translation by Allotrios. This is the first volume in a two volume set published by Harvard University Press as part of the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library. It features, for the first time ever, a critical edition of Maximos the Confessor's *Ambigua* along with facing English translation. These books are a handsome addition to any library, and they offer both scholars and laymen an important and long-awaited resource for the study of patristic and Byzantine theology.

THE TRANSLATOR Nicholas Conostas is the secular name of Fr. Maximos of Simonopetra, a patrologist and Byzantinist known for his previous work on Proclus of Constantinople, Symeon of Thessaloniki, Mark Eugenikos, and a variety of theological issues. He is an authority on Maximos and has been the keynote speaker at several symposia related to this Church Father.

THE EDITION The Greek text presented here is a long overdue critical edition of one of the most important theological texts of the early Byzantine period. Although a critical edition of the Greek text of the *Ambigua* to Thomas (*Ambigua* 1-5) was released in 2002, the much longer *Earlier Ambigua* to John (*Ambigua* 6-71) has hitherto been accessible only in Migne's reproduction of Oehler's 1857 edition. (A critical edition was announced by Corpus Christianorum in the 1980s, but has yet to appear). Oehler's text was known to contain a series of significant and unfortunate problems, and this new edition presents us with a much improved and more reliable text. Of the many examples (see, e.g., pp. 465, n. 6; 468, nn. 9, 11, 15, 17, 21, 22, and 90) one of the more intriguing for theologians, which serves to prove the necessity of a modern edition, is the correction of PG's to the more accurate (and meaningful). This, along with a lengthy list of substantial changes, makes the present volume a welcome and important contribution. Although this new edition does not represent an exhaustive collation of all extant manuscripts, Conostas has put us all in his debt by establishing a reliable edition of this important text (and doing so in a timely manner). To accomplish this he has made use of the most important witnesses, such as Angelicus gr. 120 and Vaticanus gr. 504. But most importantly, his edition incorporates the Latin translation of John Scottus Eriugena (9th c.). This version of the *Ambigua*, which time and again preserves the readings found in the best Greek manuscripts (e.g., *factus et transformatus est* for the above-cited example), is the oldest extant witness to the original text of St. Maximos. We all owe Fr. Maximos our gratitude for supplying us with this important resource.

THE TRANSLATION The translation which faces the Greek was made from the critical edition and is a boon to both scholars and everyday readers. DOML has continued the legacy of the Loeb Classical Library with this series, and we should all be grateful that professional scholarship is extending its labors to the benefit of non-specialists. Volume 1 contains *Ambigua* 1-22, which are less than half of all the *Ambigua*. Because these are substantially longer and more involved than the subsequent forty nine, vol. 1 is still over a hundred pages longer than vol. 2. Until now, English readers were able to access select *Ambigua*, either in whole or in part, in the translations of Fr. Andrew Louth (*Ambigua* 1, 10, 41, 71; Routledge) and of Paul Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (*Ambigua* 7, 8, and 42; SVS Press). These translations of course lacked the contextualization of the present volumes, where they now profit from the broader conversation taking place around them. Because these texts are extremely dense and complex, this is not an insignificant point. Many will find that even the *Ambigua* they already knew are now opened up and clarified by their original context. Yet it is not only the context that adds to this translation's merits. Upon close comparison, it immediately becomes clear that Fr. Maximos's translation possesses greater fluidity, clarity, and nuance than past versions. Two examples, *Ambiguum* 7 (previously translated in the *Popular Patristics Series*) and *Ambiguum* 10 (in the *Early Church Fathers series*) illustrate this well. These are arguably among the most important *Ambigua*, the one treating the subject of the *logoi* and the other of deification. Here the translator's ability to penetrate and extrapolate the syntax and flow of arguments is on full display. In these complex and intricate *Ambigua*, Conostas shows his skill as a reader of Maximos's extremely difficult Greek and as a theologian of the highest calibre, for the beauty and density of these *Ambigua* are not easy to convey in English. It is clear that Fr. Maximos is a conscientious translator who has put a tremendous amount of labor into this project. We all benefit from his efforts.

THE BOOKS As previously noted, these books are handsomely produced. They have the standard binding and design of all DOML volumes, of which these are numbers 28 and 29. They are heavy, with sewn binding, and use an attractive typeface. DOML has stated that this series is "aimed at a global audience," and they have remained faithful to that claim. In one of their most praiseworthy moves, they have made this book accessible to all readers, and not just specialists, by offering it at a very reasonable price. Especially when one compares this volume to other scholarly publications, it is clear that the price tag is a true bargain. Biblical references are cited only in the Greek text, while PG numbers are cited in the translation. This really should have been the other way around, since a text like this will doubtlessly attract readers who are focused solely on the English, while PG numbering loses its precision when accommodated to an English equivalent, since the word order is changed. Because the bulk of this text is taken up by the *Earlier Ambigua*, Christology and anti-monothelite polemics play less of a role than some readers might expect. We have all come to know St. Maximos as "the Confessor," a man who suffered exile and ill-treatment for his faith in Christ's two energies and two wills. But this book, and its Introduction, introduce St. Maximos the Byzantine mystic and the philosopher, a man with a deep grounding in late-antique philosophy, whose construction of the contemplative life was to leave a mark on future generations. Conostas does an excellent job introducing this less familiar side of the Confessor in his Introduction and connecting him to the broader context of Byzantine theology. One wishes Fr. Maximos had provided an even longer Introduction, although this appears to be the standard

length for DOML volumes. In the same way, I found myself wishing the theological commentary in the footnotes was more extensive. But these too seem to have been kept to a minimum following the standards of DOML. We all owe Fr. Maximos our gratitude for this exemplary edition and translation, and to DOML for making it available. These are destined to be a historic contribution to the field of patristics. The field of Maximos studies will never be the same again. 7 of 9 people found the following review helpful. a classic By Gregory M. Moshnin A very decent translation of a central and difficult text made even more valuable and useful with the Greek facing English format. A singular reminder of the depth and breath of Orthodox resources in very involved problems. 0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Patrick Perfect.

Maximos the Confessor (580-662) occupies a unique position in the history of Byzantine philosophy, theology, and spirituality. His profound spiritual experiences and penetrating theological vision found complex and often astonishing expression in his unparalleled command of Greek philosophy, making him one of the most challenging and original Christian thinkers of all time. So thoroughly did his thought come to influence the Byzantine theological tradition that it is impossible to trace the subsequent history of Orthodox Christianity without knowledge of his work. The *Ambigua* (or "Book of Difficulties") is Maximos's greatest philosophical and doctrinal work, in which his daring originality, prodigious talent for speculative thinking, and analytical acumen are on lavish display. In the *Ambigua*, a broad range of theological topics--cosmology, anthropology, the philosophy of mind and language, allegory, asceticism, and metaphysics--are transformed in a synthesis of Aristotelian logic, Platonic metaphysics, Stoic psychology, and the arithmetical philosophy of a revived Pythagoreanism. The result is a labyrinthine map of the mind's journey to God that figured prominently in the Neoplatonic revival of the Komnenian Renaissance and the Hesychast Controversies of the Late Byzantine period. This remarkable work has never before been available in a critically based edition or English translation.

About the Author Nicholas Constatas, formerly Associate Professor at the Harvard Divinity School, is a monk at the Simonopetra Monastery, Mt. Athos, Greece.