Byzantium and Its Neighbours
Religious Self and Otherness in Dialogue
edited by Luisa Andriollo and Luigi D'Amelia

Writing and Reading Anti-Islamic Polemics in Byzantium

The *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios with a Saracen Philosopher* (Twelfth Century)

Luisa Andriollo
University of Pisa, Italy

Abstract The *Dialogue on the Faith*, attributed to an unknown author conventionally known as Pseudo-Euthymios, is often regarded as an unoriginal patchwork of traditional apologetic and polemical arguments against Islam, compiled in the twelfth century. A closer analysis of its textual features (linguistic register, rhetorical structure, argumentative strategies) and manuscript tradition helps to shed light on the geographical and social milieu of its production and early circulation, its audience and its possible functions. This will contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of this text and open new avenues of approach to the literary genre of anti-Islamic controversies in late Byzantium.

Keywords Byzantine Literature. Byzantine Polemics and Apologetics. Crusader States. Dialogue. Interreligious Debate. Islam. Manuscript Circulation. Medieval Palestine.

Summary 1. Introduction. – 2. The Context: Religious Debates, Polemical Writings and the Confrontation with Islam. – 3. The Text. – 3.1 Structure. – 3.2 Content and Intertextual Dimension. – 4. The Early Circulation of the *Dialogue*: Context of (Re)elaboration, Audience and Functions. – 4.1 General Remarks and Hypotheses. – 4.2 The Palestinian Connection. – 5. Conclusions.

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1 Introduction*

In his introduction to Manuel II Palaiologos' *Dialogues with a Persian*, Erich Trapp passed a severe judgement on much of the anti-Islamic polemics contained in Byzantine chronicles and heresiological treatises, which he considered "nach Umfang und Inhalt ziemlich unbedeutend und zumeist gänzlich unselbständig": rather insignificant in terms of breadth and content and, moreover, completely derivative.[1] On the whole, Byzantine polemical literature against Islam has often been regarded as conventional, repetitive and unoriginal.[2] Within this seemingly bleak panorama, the production of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has suffered from particular underestimation. Indeed, Alain Ducellier, in his study of relations between Eastern Christians and the Muslim world, deplored the paucity of polemical or apologetic works on Islam from this period: "la pauvreté des XIIe et XIIIe siècles en ouvrages polémiques ou apologétiques traitant de l'Islam".[3] Paul Magdalino, in his fundamental book on the reign of Manuel I Komnenos, also noted that the twelfth century produced "hardly any polemics against the greatest adversary of all, Islam".[4]

If, as it is generally assumed, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries really represent a low point in the production of anti-Islamic literature, the causes of this decline deserve to be investigated. In fact, the writing of treatises and dialogues against Islam in Greek did not cease completely during this period. Updated heresiological treatises were compiled, most notably the imperially commissioned *Dogmatic Panoply* of Euthymios Zigabenos, written around 1110,[5] and the later work of the same title by Niketas Choniates (also known as *Thesaurus*

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1 Trapp 1966, 14*.

2 For a discussion of the concepts of 'originality'/'unoriginality', adherence to tradition and literariness as applied to Byzantine writings, particularly to anti-Islamic polemics of the late Byzantine period, cf. Siren Çelik's study of the works and biography of Manuel Palaiologos (Çelik 2021, 4-12, 138-57); see also Fanelli in this volume.

3 Ducellier 1996, 289.

4 Magdalino 1993, 387.

5 Khoury 1969, 235-48; Rigo 2011.

of Orthodoxy).[6] In keeping with tradition, they both included chapters on the 'religion of the Ishmaelites'. What is more, two literary controversies against Islam seem to have been written between the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century: the *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, by an anonymous author long (and wrongfully) identified with Euthymios Zigabenos, and the *Refutation of a Hagarene*, attributed to a certain Bartholomew of Edessa.[7]

For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the first of these polemical texts, the *Dialogue* [Διάλεξις] *on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios with a Saracen Philosopher in the City of Melitene*. Traditionally dated to the twelfth century, it stages the confrontation between a Christian and a Muslim in the form of a dialogue. This source will be used as a case study to address some fundamental and interrelated questions. I will attempt to shed light on the contexts of its production and early circulation, and to gather evidence on the possible social and cultural profile of its author(s), copyists and readers. In parallel, I will raise questions about the mechanisms underlying the literary elaboration of this work. What degree of authorial and editorial agency can be discerned? What was its relationship to earlier anti-Islamic literature? What factors determined the choice of particular textual forms (such as the dialogue, the invective, the treatise)? What were its aims and intended audiences?

Before addressing these issues, it is worth briefly contextualising the *Dialogue* within the wider tradition of anti-Islamic polemics in Eastern Christianity, pointing out possible trends and developments. This will enable us to analyse the structure and content of the *Dialogue* with a deeper awareness of its intertextual dimension. Finally, I will consider the early transmission and circulation of this text, by focusing on the two earliest manuscripts in which it is preserved.

2 The Context: Religious Debates, Polemical Writings and the Confrontation with Islam

In the aftermath of the first Arab expansion and as early as the eighth century, Byzantium had to compete with Islam not only on the battlefield but also in the arena of theological debates.[8] However, Byzantine polemicists were not defenceless: they could draw on a centuries-old

6 Written about a century later, around 1206: Khoury 1969, 249-58; Zorzi 2012, 140-4.

7 Edited by Todt 1988; cf. also Niehoff-Panagiotidis 2011.

8 The first records of debates between Christians and Muslims may date back to the early eighth century and are preserved in Syriac sources, such as the *Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable*: Roggema 2009a; cf. also Griffith 2010; 2011, 257-61. From the first half of the eighth century date also the works of John of Damascus, in Arabic and Greek (Glei 2009).

tradition and on an arsenal of rhetorical tools that had been tried and tested against a wide range of opponents. Since the second century CE, Christians had written treatises and literary controversies against pagans, Jews, Manichaeans, Zoroastrians and fellow Christians who held conflicting doctrinal views. Recent scholarship has explored the argumentative and rhetorical strategies employed in Late Antique and Byzantine inter- and intra-religious confrontation, particularly the use of dialogue, and has attempted to identify the goals pursued by the authors of such texts.[9]

When composing polemical texts in the form of dialogues, Christian authors could draw on a variety of sources and models, such as the classical genres of philosophical dialogue and diatribe, the tradition of the *acta martyrum* and trial records, and the didactic genre of the *erotapokriseis* (question-and-answer literature). Besides the cultural background provided by the classical Greek and Roman tradition, Christian dialogues also looked back to biblical and Christian models, *in primis* the exchanges of Jesus, and later the apostles, with various interlocutors, as reported in the Gospels and in the Acts.[10] Thus, depending on their circumstances and needs, Christian disputants were equipped with a wide repertoire of dialectical weapons that could fulfil different functions. Writers could borrow and adapt them to instruct the faithful, defend themselves against detractors, and polemicise against contenders both within and outside the Christian community. The literary genre of the dialogue has rightly been described as *polymorphe* and indeed lent itself to many variations.[11] During the Byzantine Middle Ages, authors continued to write dialogues on moral or philosophical subjects, and even satirical dialogues;[12] the typically didactic and

9 Lim 1995; on doctrinal debates in the Christian East in general, see the introduction in Cameron, Hoyland 2017, xi-xlix. Cameron 2014 has devoted specific attention to the genre of dialogue in Late Antiquity. The same author has subsequently explored the subject in greater depth in a study devoted specifically to twelfth-century Byzantium (Cameron 2016) and in a volume of collected studies that takes a broader diachronic perspective (Cameron, Gaul 2017). A methodological introduction on the uses and adaptations of dialogue as a tool for theological debate by Christian authors can be found in Rigolio 2019, 1-38. A general introduction to the typologies and functions of literary dialogues in Late Antiquity and Byzantium is provided by Ieraci Bio 2006; on the use of dialogue in anti-Latin polemics, D'Amelia 2020.

10 As observed by Bertaina (2011, 20-2), "different types of dialogue texts proliferated in the Ancient Middle East and Mediterranean": Christian and Muslim authors draw on a common cultural humus and "consciously embraced existing forms of the genre".

11 Rigolio 2019, 9 (quoting a definition by Sandrine Dubel).

12 On philosophical dialogues in twelfth-century Byzantium, consider the examples mentioned by Cameron 2014, 37-48, as well as the works of Theodore Prodromos and Nikephoros Gregoras discussed by Eric Cullhed and Divna Manolova in Cameron, Gaul 2017, 153-66 and 203-19. On the reception of Lucian in twelfth-century Byzantium and his role as a model for dialogic literature, Marciniak 2016.

conceptually affine genre of question-and-answer literature (*erotapokriseis*) also enjoyed sustained success.[13] Christian authors resorted to dialogue as a pedagogical tool to facilitate the assimilation of knowledge, beliefs and behaviours. On the other hand, dialogue could also be used as a rhetorical weapon to assert cultural and/or theological superiority in contexts of intense competition – against opponents as well as in processes of internal self-definition, with the aim of strengthening the identity and cohesion of a given religious group.

In particular, scholars have pointed out that the recourse to dialogue and quasi-theatrical stylistic devices served to promote models of orthodoxy, which were thus dramatised and 'shown in action',[14] while deviant discourses and attitudes were exposed and stigmatised by comparison. In this way, Christian authors were able to propose recognisable paradigms of positive and negative behaviour and to define clear criteria of inclusion and exclusion in relation to the groups for which they acted as spokespersons. At the same time, compared to other genres of theological and dogmatic literature, they offered their audiences an entertaining and more accessible reading – one endowed with psychagogical power, capable of arousing emotions and encouraging agonistic attitudes.[15] A further element to consider is the relationship between the written text and the historical-dramatic context. The literary controversies that have come down to us may sometimes be based on debates that actually took place and are more or less faithfully reproduced. In other cases, however, we are faced with purely literary inventions or with texts that lie somewhere in between these two extremes.[16]

The subgenre of polemical dialogues between Christians and Muslims did not, therefore, develop in a *vacuum*, but represented a declination of a versatile and long-practised textual typology. When approaching these texts, it is important to bear in mind that they could have different aims, draw on multiple models and sources, and involve varying degrees of rhetorical elaboration. This type of literature

13 Papadoyannakis 2006; Efthymiadis 2017.

14 Virginia Burrus has described this cultural operation as a "performance of orthodoxy" (Burrus 1999).

15 Rigolio 2019, 16, 21, 32. Ancient and Byzantine authors were well aware of the pedagogical and rhetorical virtues of the dialogue form: Ieraci Bio 2006, 23-4; Papadoyannakis 2006, 99-100.

16 Griffith 2011, 178-9 (limited to the case of dialogues in Syriac); Rigolio 2019, 13-16 (with respect to late antique sources); Menéndez Sánchez 2023 (for a case of anti-Manichaean literary debate whose historicity is disputed by scholars). An interesting example of an openly fictional dialogue with an anti-Islamic polemical function is the later *Dialogue between Faith and Unbelief* by Alexios Makrembolites (fourteenth century): here, the speaking characters are personifications of abstract concepts (Fanelli 2018).

provides a wealth of material for cultural history, but it also raises a number of methodological and interpretive questions. So far, however, Byzantine anti-Islamic controversies have been studied mainly as sources for reconstructing what Christians and Muslims knew about each other and have often been analysed from a purely theological and philological point of view. Theodore-Adel Khoury, in particular, has carried out extensive *Quellenforschungen*, pointing to possible *realia* in relation to beliefs and practices of contemporary Islam and highlighting the conventional nature of many polemical texts, as well as their dependence on earlier works.[17]

Important and useful as this kind of research may be, it does not address the motives that led Byzantine polemicists to assemble old arguments in seemingly repetitive pamphlets, and their audience to read such texts. Nor does it explain why, in certain circumstances, authors chose dialogue over alternative literary forms, such as treatises or letters. The awareness that the primary audience of interreligious polemics did not extend beyond the community in which they were produced, and that these texts contributed to the elaboration of identitarian discourses for the benefit of an internal readership, calls for a different approach.[18] To begin with, we can consider how frequently the literary form of dialogue was used within the broader *corpus* of Byzantine-Muslim polemical and apologetic writings in Greek between the eighth and twelfth centuries. A preliminary survey, based on Brill's *Bibliographical History* of Christian-Muslim relations,[19] highlights some possible trends.

A first remark concerns the chronological distribution of attestations. The use of dialogue in a polemical function seems to have been more frequent in the eighth and early ninth centuries, during the initial phase of encounter and conflict with Islam. The writings of John of Damascus (d. around 750 in Saint Sabas, Palestine) and Theodore Abu-Qurrah, bishop of Harran (mid-eighth century-early ninth century), date from this period. John of Damascus has long been credited with the authorship of a dialogue between a Saracen and a Christian,[20] while Theodore Abu-Qurrah wrote numerous apologetic

17 Khoury 1969; 1972; 1982.

18 This is notably the case for Christian-Muslim dialogues in Syriac (Griffith 2011, 178). Dialogic instances in late antique rabbinic literature raise comparable problems, and analogous considerations can be made for *adversus Iudaeos* literature (Rigolio 2019, 11-12, 14-15).

19 Thomas, Roggema 2009; Thomas, Mallett 2010; 2011; 2012. See also the brief presentation of anti-Islamic polemics according to textual typology, and specifically the section on dialogues, by Trapp 1966, 25*-8*.

20 This attribution is, however, a matter of debate among scholars: Khoury 1969, 68-82; Schadler 2009; cf. also Le Coz 1992, 80-7, 136-82, 198-203, 228-51 and Glei, Khoury 1995, 59-63, 167-83.

and polemical *opuscula* in the form of questions and answers.[21] Abu-Qurrah is also reported to have engaged in actual historical debates with Muslim interlocutors, allegedly recorded by one of his disciples, John the Deacon.[22] Around the same time, the first traces of apologetic and polemical treatises and letters in Greek appear, two genres that became increasingly popular in the centuries that followed.[23]

Indeed, between the ninth and eleventh centuries, the compilation of systematic apologetic and polemical treatises and the exchange of diplomatic letters with a more or less polemical tone seem to have been preferred to the writing of dialogues. One may think of the works of Niketas Byzantios, who in the ninth century wrote a refutation of the Qur'ān and two polemical replies to the letters sent by the Abbasid court to the emperor Theophilos (829-42),[24] or of the correspondence of the patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos (852-925) with the emir of Crete and the caliph of Baghdad;[25] the letter to the emir of Damascus attributed to Arethas of Caesarea (d. around 932)[26] or the one written by Michael Psellos to Malik Shah on behalf of emperor Michael VII Doukas (1071-78).[27]

The examples given call for a consideration of the geographical and cultural contexts in which this literature was produced. The dialogues written in the eighth and ninth centuries convey the voice of the still hellenised eastern territories that had recently come under Arab rule and that of the local Christian communities. These texts represent only a fraction of a large and similar literary production, also preserved in Syriac and Arabic. In the same period, the halting of the Arab advance in Anatolia and the stabilisation of the border between the caliphate and the empire led to mutual political recognition and the establishment of regular diplomatic relations, albeit in a climate of ideological and military competition.[28] One gets the

21 Khoury 1969, 83-105; Lamoreaux 2009, 476-91; Glei, Khoury 1995, 50-2, 89-165. A new edition of Abu-Qurrah's *Theological Pamphlets* (*Opuscula Theologica*) is being prepared by Pietro D'Agostino, based on his doctoral dissertation (D'Agostino 2019, publication expected in 2025).

22 Glei, Khoury 1995, 85-9; Lamoreaux 2005, 211-27; 2009, 474-6.

23 Consider, for example, the section on Islam in John of Damascus' *On Heresies* (ch. 100; Khoury 1969, 60-5; Glei 2009, 297-301) or the pseudepigraphic correspondence between emperor Leo III and the caliph Umar II (Khoury 1969, 200-18; Greenwood 2009 and Roggema 2009b). The latter is preserved in Arabic and Armenian, and possibly circulated also in Greek.

24 Khoury 1969, 110-62; Rigo 2009. On the life and writings of Niketas Byzantios: Rigo 2006; Ulbricht 2021; 2023.

25 Vaiou 2010, 176-83.

26 Khoury 1969, 219-34; Förstel 2009, 11-12, 21-41.

27 Lauritzen 2011, 158-9.

28 As attested, among other sources, by the fiercely polemical correspondence in Arabic

impression that the debate on matters of faith increasingly became a state affair: it was part of the diplomatic skirmishes and cultural competition that accompanied the successful resistance to Arab attacks, then the gradual Byzantine recovery and expansion in the East. As a result, the emperors of Constantinople and their court intellectuals seem to have taken the initiative and assumed a more prominent role in the theological confrontation. No surviving dialogue in Greek can be dated to the period between the mid-ninth and early twelfth centuries.[29]

At the end of the eleventh century, the Turkish invasions of Anatolia and then the arrival of the Crusaders ushered in a new phase of instability, both on the frontier and at the heart of the empire. The political fragmentation resulting from the establishment of Latin states, Turkmen potentates, and the Seljuk sultanate of Rum/Ikonion combined with the religious diversity that had characterised the former Byzantine eastern provinces, now increased by the presence of the Latin clergy. Various territories and populations changed hands multiple times between Byzantines, Turks and Latins.[30] In Constantinople, the accession of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) and the establishment of the Komnenian dynasty were accompanied by an intensification of theological debates. This phenomenon was stimulated by developments in Byzantine intellectual life, most notably the revival of Platonism promoted by Michael Psellos and John Italos in the eleventh century,[31] but also by the increasingly frequent and often conflicting contacts with the Latins and the cultural interactions that this entailed. Byzantium thus found itself a participant, *bon gré mal gré*, in the Western medieval culture of disputation described by Alex Novikoff.[32] For the new dynasty, which had come to the throne through a *coup d'état* and was threatened by military and political rivals on all fronts, the defence of orthodoxy against internal and external enemies became a source of legitimacy and a political priority. It was in this historical and cultural context that the text we are going to focus on, the *Dialogue* of the monk Euthymios, was written.

between an anonymous author, allegedly writing on behalf of Nikephoros II Phokas and the court of caliph al-Muṭīʿ (AD 966: Thomas 2010a; 2010b; El Cheikh 2004, 173-7).

29 A possible exception may be the fictional controversies embedded in the hagiographical account about the martyrs of Amorion by the monk Evodios: Rigo 2006.

30 Cf. Vryonis 1975 and Beihammer 2017. On the Byzantine-Arab frontier between the rise of Islam and the establishment of Seljuk Turks in Anatolia: Beihammer 2023.

31 A general discussion of education and intellectual life in the Komnenian age can be found in Magdalino 1993, 316-412. On Byzantine Platonism, Michael Psellos and John Italos, and the enforcement of orthodoxy in Komnenian Byzantium, see the seminal study by Browning 1975, as well as more recent analyses: Smythe 1996; Shepard 2010; Trizio 2017; Kraft 2021. On the writing of polemical dialogues in this context, Cameron 2014, 48-55.

32 Novikoff 2017; cf. also Cameron 2014, 74-95.

3 The Text

3.1 Structure

We have a relatively recent critical edition of the *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, published by Erich Trapp in 1971; it is based on the five manuscripts known to the editor, dating from the late thirteenth to the sixteenth century.[33] Here is a list of the *codices* inspected by Trapp, with the *siglae* attributed to them in his edition:

- A = Jerusalem, Πατριαρχική Βιβλιοθήκη, Αγίου Σάββα 697, ff. 87*r*-106*r*, late thirteenth century[34]
- B = Jerusalem, Πατριαρχική Βιβλιοθήκη, Αγίου Σάββα 223, ff. 222*v*-230*v*, fourteenth century[35]
- C = Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Theol. gr. 252, ff. 43*r*-48*v*, second half of the sixteenth century[36]
- D = Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ottob. gr. 333, ff. 163*r*-176*r*, sixteenth century[37]
- E = Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 952, ff. 147*r*-153*r*, late fourteenth/early fifteenth century[38]

33 Trapp 1971, 111. Trapp also reports the existence of a witness from the late eighteenth century, which he did not use in establishing his edition: Jerusalem, Πατριαρχική Βιβλιοθήκη 231 [*sic*], ff. 217*r*-228*r*.

34 Diktyon: 34954. Trapp proposes to date the manuscript to the fourteenth century (Trapp 1971, 111) but this dating should be rejected: see infra, § 4.2. Descriptions in Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1894, 651-3; Aulisa, Schiano 2005, 161-3. From f. 31 (*recte* 30), the page numbering as it appears in the manuscript is incorrect; I report the correct numbering, checked against the microfilm (in Papadopoulos-Kerameus the numbering is correct up to f. 169).

35 Diktyon: 34479. Descriptions in Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1894, 332-7; Munitiz 1979, XIII-XV. As Munitiz points out, the page numbering in the manuscript is incorrect. I give the numbers as they appear on the folios.

36 Diktyon: 71919. Description in Hunger, Lackner 1992, 178-82. Among the hands recognisable in the manuscript, Rudolf Stefec identifies that of an anonymous copyist, perhaps a collaborator of Symeon Kabasilas during his stay in Italy (late sixteenth century: Stefec 2013, 323 fn. 96). Trapp proposes to date the manuscript to the fourteenth century (Trapp 1971, 111), but this dating should be rejected.

37 Diktyon: 65576. Description in Feron, Battaglini 1893, 174.

38 Diktyon: 67583. Descriptions in Zuretti 1927, 149-52 (who dates the manuscript to the sixteenth century); Andrist 2016, 258-67; Gioffreda, Rhoby 2020, 128.

Two further copies of the *Dialogue*, preserved in late manuscripts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, are reported in the *Pinakes* database:[39]

- Patras, Μονή Αγίων Πάντων 4, ff. 156*v*-158*v*, sixteenth century
- Oxford, Christ Church, Wake 49, ff. 119*r*-134*v*, early seventeenth century

At first sight, the *Dialogue* fully adheres to the negative characteristics generally ascribed to the genre of Byzantine-Islamic controversies. Khoury observed that this text *un peu pale* follows the blueprint of the most common tradition, without any significant innovation.[40] As is often the case with this kind of texts, scholars have been mainly interested in identifying the *Dialogue*'s sources and establishing its relationships with comparable works, especially the roughly contemporary *Dogmatic Panoply* of Euthymios Zigabenos and the *Refutation of a Hagarene* by Bartholomew of Edessa. Based on internal textual criteria, it is now generally accepted that the author of our text is different from Euthymios Zigabenos and that the *Dialogue* is later than the *Dogmatic Panoply*. On the other hand, the *Dialogue* may predate the work of Bartholomew of Edessa, who seems to have known it. Based on these observations, the writing of the Pseudo-Euthymian text has been tentatively dated between 1111 and 1146.[41]

Not surprisingly, intertextual comparisons within the tradition of anti-Islamic polemics and *Quellenforschungen* have so far provided the main elements for dating a piece of literature in which historical references and *realia* are conspicuously absent. The *Dialogue* lacks a narrative introduction: it begins *in medias res*, with the verbal fencing. The only vague reference to the dramatic context is found in the title, which varies slightly in all the manuscripts. It mentions the identity of the two characters involved: the Christian Euthymios – referred

39 https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/oeuvre/id/4570. Two of the manuscripts listed as witnesses to the *Dialogue* in the Pinakes database – i.e., Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. gr. 35 and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Grec 1191 – do not contain the *Dialogue*'s text, but two different anti-Islamic controversies in the form of *eratopokriseis*.

40 Khoury 1969, 296-7.

41 Jugie 1912, 224 suggested that the author of the *Dialogue* was not Euthymios Zigabenos: instead he probably drew on Zigabenos' *Panoply*. Khoury 1969, 294-99 accepted this position, but considered the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue* to be later than Bartholomew of Edessa's *Refutation*, which he dated to the early thirteenth century and regarded as a model for the Pseudo-Euthymios. Trapp, on the other hand, thought that Bartholomew of Edessa knew the text of the Pseudo-Euthymios and wrote his pamphlet at a later date, probably before 1149, when the Christian community in Edessa was wiped out (and perhaps between 1129 and 1146, at the time of the Frankish rule over the city: Trapp 1966, 26, 33-4; 1971, 112). For a *mise à point* on these issues, cf. Ulbricht 2011 and Niehoff-Panagiotidis 2011.

to as 'the monk Euthymios' or 'a certain monk Euthymios' and in two cases as 'our holy father Euthymios the Great' – and an anonymous 'Saracen philosopher', also called 'Saracen' or 'Hagarene'. Furthermore, most of the manuscripts mention the city of Melitene as the geographical setting for their conversation.[42]

On the basis of these few clues, it is difficult to determine whether the Euthymios of the title was also the author of the text or (more likely) a fictional literary character. In any case, a character of this name seems particularly suited to the role of defender of orthodoxy, as he recalls illustrious namesakes. Saint Euthymios the Great, a citizen of Melitene, was in fact one of the founders of Palestinian monasticism in the fifth century;[43] in the eleventh century, Euthymios Zigabenos was the author of the *Dogmatic Panoply*.[44] Considering, as we shall see, that the oldest manuscripts preserving the text of the *Dialogue* come from the Palestinian monastic milieu, it is clear that this name must have evoked familiar models of asceticism and orthodoxy in the minds of its first readers. As for the city of Melitene, one would search in vain for its tangible presence in the text and, more generally, for recognisable geographical references. However, its mention in the title provides an appropriate setting for the action: a famous city on the eastern frontier, already home to a holy monastic leader, Melitene was a bastion of resistance to the Turkish advance in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, until it was conquered by the Danishmendids in 1101.[45] According to the testimony of Bar Hebraeus, at the end of the twelfth century several Christian communities (Byzantine-Melkite Orthodox, Armenians, Syrian Orthodox) still lived there alongside the Muslim population.[46]

42 Diplomatic transcriptions of the title as found in the manuscripts:
A διάλεξεις εὐθ(υ)μ(ίου) μοναχ(οῦ) καὶ σαρακινοῦ φιλοσόφου περί πίστεως γινομένη ἐν πόλι <μελη>τηνῆ
BD Διάλλεξις [διαἄλλεξις D] τοῦ ὁσίου π(ατ)ρ(ὸ)ς ἡμῶν Εὐθυμίου τοῦ μεγάλου κατὰ σαρακινοῦ φιλοσόφου [φιλοσώφου B] περὶ πίστεως γενομένης ἐν τῇ πόλει μελιτηνῆς
C διάλεξεις εὐθυμίος μοναχ(οῦ) καὶ σαρακηνοῦ φιλοσόφου περί πίστεως γενομ(έν)ης ἐν τῇ πόλει μελητινῇ εὐλόγεσον
E διάλεξεις εὐθύμιος με τὸν σαρακύνον
Patras, Μονή Αγίων Πάντων 4: διάλεξις εὐθυμίου μοναχοῦ καὶ σαρακίνου φιλοσόφου περὶ πίστεως γενομένης ἐν πόλη μελιτινῇ.
Oxford, Christ Church, Wake 49: Διαλέξις ἀγαρινοῦ μετὰ τινος μοναχοῦ εὐθυμίου περὶ τῆς πίστεως

43 The *Life of Euthymios* is narrated by Cyril of Skythopolis, ed. Schwartz 1939, French translation with commentary by Festugière 1962 (on Euthymios' relation with Melitene, see especially the description of his birth and early years, Schwartz 1939, 8-14; Festugière 1962, 59-64).

44 Rigo 2011.

45 Or 1102: the sources do not agree on the date (Vest 2007, 1645-51).

46 The most comprehensive study on the history of Melitene is the one by Vest 2007 (especially 1445-1656 for the period between the battle of Mantzikert in 1071 and the

Be that as it may, the apparent timelessness of the action gives the impression that the reported dialogue is fictional – a hypothesis further supported by the structure and manuscript tradition of the text. In fact, the *Dialogue* is a bipartite piece of literature. Its first (and longer) section is indeed dialogical: the anonymous Saracen philosopher questions Euthymios about various Christian dogmas and practices, and the latter patiently answers all his doubts. The second section, on the other hand, is a violent polemical monologue against Muḥammad, the prophet of Islam, and his teachings. It is noteworthy that Trapp only provided a unified edition for the first part of the text; for the second part, he identified two irreconcilable branches of tradition and edited two alternative versions. The lack of a homogeneous textual tradition; the abrupt transition between the two sections of the *Dialogue* and their contrasting registers (respectful and irenic in the first part, violent and defamatory in the second); some lexical inconsistencies (the Muslim is called 'Saracen' in the dialogue, but most often 'Hagarene' in the polemical monologue): all these elements would support the hypothesis that the text is fictional and composite,[47] and that the second section could be a later addition.[48] The epilogue also shows some variations: in two manuscripts Euthymios and the Saracen sing the glory of God;[49] in another, the Saracen asks to be baptised.[50]

3.2 Content and Intertextual Dimension

The first section of the Pseudo-Euthymian text revolves around traditional and recurring points of contention, which are addressed in a series of questions and answers.[51] The Saracen makes the usual accusation of polytheism in relation to the dogma of the Trinity; he questions the necessity of the Incarnation and the relationship between divine and human nature in Christ. He also asks the Christian to explain the meaning of certain sacramental practices (the confession, the Eucharist, the administration of the viaticum) and to justify the veneration of icons and the Christian rejection of circumcision and ritual ablutions. The Muslim also raises the problem

Muslim conquest in 1101-1102). On the presence of a Melkite 'Greek' community in the city in the 1180s, cf. Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, AD 1183, transl. by Wilmshurst 2016, 208-9.

47 Khoury 1969, 294-6; Trapp 1966, 26*; Trapp 1971, 112; Ulbricht 2011, 533.

48 Khoury 1969, 298 fn. 8; Ulbricht 2011, 531, 535.

49 In B and Oxford, Christ Church, Wake 49.

50 In D.

51 Detailed summary of themes and arguments in Khoury 1969, 299-309.

of the persistence of evil after the Incarnation and reproaches the Christians for having falsified the Gospel by removing the name of Muḥammad from it. In the polemical monologue, the Christian likewise resorts to a number of commonplaces and traditional accusations. He criticises the unreliability of Muḥammad as a prophet, due to the lack of scriptural evidence and miracles, as well as the alleged unworthiness of his social condition and conduct: he accuses him of having been a wage labourer, the disciple of a Nestorian monk, a murderous and licentious man. Euthymios also mocks the supposed absurdity of certain Muslim doctrines, especially those concerning the number of prophets in Islam and the material nature of the Muslim paradise, as well as certain Muslim practices, such as the prayer and the rites performed at the Ka'ba.

In many cases, Euthymios' explanations are mere variations on traditional and familiar arguments from Christian apologetics. For example, to illustrate the relationship between the persons/*hypostaseis* of the Trinity, Euthymios uses the analogy of the mind, word and spirit or breath of the individual human being, which goes back to Niketas Byzantios (ninth century) and can also be found in Euthymios Zigabenos:[52]

SARACEN How can you talk of Father and Son and Holy Spirit? And since you talk of three [persons], how do the three share one single essence (*hypostasis*) and power (*exousia*)? Manifestly, each one has its own nature (*physis*) and operation (*energeia*).

EUTHYMIOS Is the emperor's mind also the emperor or not?

SARACEN Yes, it is.

EUTHYMIOS And are his word and breath also emperors or not?

SARACEN Yes, they are.

EUTHYMIOS Look: according to what you say, there are three natures (*physeis*) and three operations (*energeies*) in the emperor.

SARACEN No: on the contrary, there is only one emperor.

EUTHYMIOS So, I do not divide the one God in three gods either, but I profess one God endowed with Word and Spirit.[53]

52 Khoury 1982, 46-8. The same analogy is used in the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue* to refute the persistent objections of the Saracen to the Trinitarian dogma: *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, ed. Trapp 1971, 114 ll. 5-26, and 118-19 ll. 118-22. The Christian monk also resorts to the traditional allegory of the sun as consisting of a receptacle, light and rays, adapted to explain the mystery of the Trinity and its relation to the Incarnation: *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, ed. Trapp 1971, 115 ll. 27-40; cf. also Khoury 1982, 46 for the precedents set by Leo III's letter to Umar and Arethas' letter to the emir of Damascus.

53 Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Πῶς πατέρα καὶ υἱὸν καὶ ἅγιον πνεῦμα λέγετε; Καὶ ἐπεὶ τρεῖς λέγετε, πῶς πέφυκε τὰ τρία μιᾶς ὑποστάσεως καὶ ἐξουσίας εἶναι; Δηλονότι καθὲν ἰδίαν φύσιν καὶ ἐνέργειαν ἔχει. | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Ὁ νοῦς τοῦ βασιλέως βασιλεύς ἐστιν ἢ οὔ; | Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Ναί. | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα βασιλεῖς εἰσιν ἢ οὔ; | Ὁ Σαρακηνός·

While the basic elements of the allegory are traditional, some idiosyncratic features can be observed. On the one hand, the argument is slightly personalised by the introduction of the generic character of the *basileus* – a king or, for Byzantine hellenophone readers, an emperor. As we shall see, the image of such an indeterminate and exemplary ruler is a recurrent element of what seems to be a strategy of 'narrative argumentation' peculiar to the Pseudo-Euthymian text. On the other hand, the sometimes imprecise or inconsistent use of theological terms calls for attention: hypostasis, for example, is used here in the sense of essence. Lexical hesitations of this kind can be found in the *Dialogue between a Saracen and a Christian* attributed to John of Damascus,[54] although the basic theological terminology had been fixed in canonical writings since the fourth and fifth centuries.[55] The reference to the operations or energies of the persons of the Trinity may also be reminiscent of the monoenergite and monothelite controversies of the seventh century.

On closer examination it becomes clear that not only are traditional arguments adapted and varied but, as commentators have already noted, the arrangement of the arguments in the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue* does not reproduce any earlier work, not even the highly successful *Dogmatic Panoply* of Zigabenos.[56] Our text differs from earlier Byzantine apologetic and polemical works in its argumentative method and language, which is generally plain and straightforward. In his replies, the Christian monk Euthymios systematically resorts to simple analogies and allegories, or even to short narrative apologues, in which God regularly appears in the guise of a *basileus*. For example, Euthymios uses this parable to explain the causal link between the Passion of Christ and the salvation of humanity:

> SARACEN Since you say, "You have been redeemed by the precious blood", from whom have you been redeemed, and to whom did Christ give his blood? On the other hand, you say that hitherto you were slaves of the devil, and that Christ, when he came, redeemed you: and if Christ gave his blood to the devil, this would be a blasphemy on your part sufficient for your damnation.
>
> EUTHYMIOS We call sale and ransom the mercy of God and His indescribable compassion. Sale because, having leaned towards

Ναί, βασιλεῖς εἰσιν. | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Ἰδού, ὡς λέγεις, ἐν τῷ βασιλεῖ τρεῖς φύσεις εἰσὶ καὶ τρεῖς ἐνέργειες. | Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Οὐχί, ἀλλ᾽ εἷς βασιλεύς. | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Οὐδὲ ἐγὼ χωρίζω τὸν ἕνα Θεὸν εἰς τρεῖς θεούς, ἀλλ᾽ ἕνα Θεὸν λέγω μετὰ λόγου καὶ πνεύματος (*Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, ed. Trapp 1971, 117 ll. 77-87; Author's translation).

54 *Dialogue between a Saracen and a Christian* 8, ed. Le Coz 1992, 244-5 fn. 2.

55 Ulbricht 2011, 532-3.

56 Khoury 1969, 296-7.

> the enemy, we were brought back by God and removed from there; and ransom, in reference to His boundless compassion and clemency. But since this mystery is still unintelligible to you, I will tell you a parable (*homoioma*), and by analogy you will be able to understand it. There was a king who ruled over a great and wide country, and a plague struck his country, so that it was completely devastated. The king was deeply grieved, and after summoning his best physicians, he asked them what he could do for his country; and although he sent out many of these physicians, they were unable to find a cure. There were also evil men and sorcerers in the king's land. What did the king do? Although he had just one only-begotten son, he dressed him in a sheep's skin and sent his own son into his country. When the wicked children of the land saw him, they took him and killed him. The king took the blood of his son in his own hands and gave it to the people to drink, thus bringing his country back from death to life. Now imagine the same thing in relation to the awe-inspiring mystery of Christ, for no angel or prophet could free humanity from the tyranny of the devil, but only God, the source of our life and salvation, through His own body and blood.[57]

The use of parables, particularly king parables, to illustrate the truths of the faith or for exegetical purposes had a long tradition: its roots go back to rabbinic Judaism, late antique patristic literature, and, ultimately, the Gospels. As Barbara Roggema has pointed out, king parables were used by Christian apologists writing in Syriac in

57 Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Ὑμῶν λεγόντων "Ἠγοράσθητε τῷ τιμίῳ αἵματι" παρὰ τίνος ἐπράθητε καὶ τίνα ἔδωκεν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ; Καὶ πάλιν λέγετε, ὅτι δοῦλοι ἦστε πρώην τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ ἐλθὼν ὁ Χριστὸς ὑμᾶς ἠγόρασεν· καὶ ἐὰν τὸν διάβολον ἔδωκεν αὐτοῦ τὸ αἷμα, ἀρκεῖ σᾶς τοῦτο εἰς βλασφημίαν καὶ ἀπώλειαν. | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Τοὺς οἰκτιρμοὺς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ἄφατον αὐτοῦ εὐσπλαγχνίαν καλοῦμεν πρᾶσιν καὶ ἀγοράν· πρᾶσιν μέν, ὅτι κλίναντες εἰς τοὐναντίον ἀπερρίφημεν ἀπὸ Θεοῦ καὶ ἀπέστημεν, ἀγορὰν δὲ τὴν αὐτοῦ ἄπειρον εὐσπλαγχνίαν καὶ συγκατάβασιν. Εἴπω σοι δὲ καὶ ὁμοίωμα, ὅτι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο οὐκ ἐχώρησεν, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοιώματος δυνήσει καταλαβεῖν τοῦτο. Βασιλεύς τις ἔχων χώραν πολλὴν καὶ μεγάλην, καὶ εἰσῆλθεν νόσος εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ χώραν, ὥστε παντελῶς ἀφανισθῆναι. Περίλυπος οὖν γενόμενος ὁ βασιλεύς, προσκαλεσάμενος τοὺς ἀρίστους αὐτοῦ ἰατροὺς ἐπυνθάνετο παρ' αὐτῶν τί ἂν πράξειεν εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ χώραν, καὶ πολλοὺς τῶν ἰατρῶν ἐξαποστείλας, οὐκ ἠδυνήθησαν θεραπεῦσαι. Ὑπῆρχον δὲ εἰς τὴν χώραν τοῦ βασιλέως χαιρέκακοι ἄνθρωποι καὶ γόητες. Τί οὖν ποιεῖ ὁ βασιλεύς; Ἕνα υἱὸν ἔχων μονογενῆ ἐνέδυσεν αὐτὸν προβάτου δορὰν καὶ ἐξαπέστειλεν τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ χώραν· ἰδόντες δὲ τοῦτον οἱ χαιρέκακοι παῖδες τῆς χώρας ἐκείνης, λαβόντες τοῦτον ἀπέκτειναν. Καὶ λαβὼν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐν ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσὶν τὸ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ αἷμα καὶ ποτίσας τὸν λαὸν ἐζωοποίησεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τὴν ἑαυτοῦ χώραν. Τὸ αὐτὸ νόει μοι καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ φοβεροῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι οὔτε ἄγγελος οὔτε προφήτης ἦν δυνατὸς ἐξελέσθαι τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐκ τῆς τυραννίδος τοῦ διαβόλου εἰ μὴ αὐτὸς ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας Θεὸς διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος καὶ αἵματος (*Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, ed. Trapp 1971, 124-5 ll. 243-63. Author's transl.).

response to Islamic criticism, both in the tradition of the West Syrian Church and the Church of the East; this type of allegory is also particularly common in Melkite apologetic literature in Arabic.[58] The Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue* provides a representative sample of the possible forms and different degrees of elaboration that this *topos* could take, ranging from simple similes to more developed allegorical narratives. As Roggema observes, the strength of such a device lies not in its logical but rather in its rhetorical power: because the narrative unfolds in a generic yet recognisable and realistic setting, the action described can be regarded as not contrary to reason. This impression was further projected onto the symbolic and theological levels of meaning alluded to by the narrative. The king imagery was powerful because it drew on widespread cross-cultural conceptions of the relationship between the divine and humanity, modelled on that between earthly rulers and their subjects. This provided a common language for Christians, Jews, and Muslims. In the quoted passage, the description of the king's son as disguised in a sheep's skin alludes to the incarnate Logos as the Lamb of God and builds on a variation of the 'incognito king' parable; the latter was commonly used to justify the necessity of the Incarnation and met with considerable success in Melkite apologetics.[59]

These stylistic features seem to point to the Eastern – and more specifically the Melkite – Christian tradition as a fundamental cultural background for the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue*. Other aspects of content and style, however, may be in tune with the exegetical tradition in Greek and the literary tastes of a contemporary Byzantine audience. Actually, while most of the images and allegories used in the *Dialogue* are based on earlier models, some of them appear to be less common, at least in the Byzantine apologetic and polemical tradition. This is the case with the allegory of the pearl, the perfectly spherical object that was thought to be formed when lightning passed through water and entered the oyster. This image was invested with symbolic meaning and used to explain the mystery of the Incarnation and the union of the divine and human natures in Christ.

SARACEN Tell us a parable (*homoioma*) about the divinity and the humanity of Christ, so that I may understand this.
EUTHYMIOS Where does the nature of the pearl come from?
SARACEN From the lightning, the sun and the shell.
EUTHYMIOS Does the lightning undergo any alteration once united to the shell?
SARACEN No.

58 Roggema 2004.
59 Roggema 2004, 124-31.

> EUTHYMIOS Just as the lightning that enters the shell grows fleshy without confusion and becomes a pearl, and we say that the brightness belongs to the nature of the light while the tangibility belongs to the nature of the shell's flesh, so the divine nature, having taken flesh, became God and man.[60]

This passage is also notable for the attitude of the two interlocutors, who show a genuine desire to understand and convince each other. As far as the allegory of the pearl is concerned, to my knowledge it is not often used in anti-Muslim polemical literature in Greek; on the contrary, it is quite common in Byzantine homiletics and hymnography.[61] The same metaphor, again used in reference to the mystery of the Incarnation, appears in dedicatory epigrams of the Komnenian period, with the function of asserting and enhancing both the material and symbolic value of precious liturgical offerings. It is found, for example, in an epigram written by Nicholas Kallikles for an icon of the Virgin adorned by an emperor, most probably John II Komnenos (1118-1143), with a golden revetment, pearls and gems:

> But, as I said before, Urn, Bramble, Lamp,
> accept the pearls, the gold, and the glitter of stones
> as a token, not as an ornament:
> for, a pearl or the beauty of a stone will not beautify
> the one who was adorned with the Son conceived without a seed,
> and this is the solution for the enigmas.
> Indeed, the beautiful pearl, source of honour,
> dwelled in you, the pure gold,
> and the stone binding the two extremities,
> having received from you the bodily garment,
> [unites the [two] natures.[62]

60 Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Εἰπὲ ἡμῖν ὁμοίωμα τῆς θεότητος καὶ τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος, ὅπως γνώσομαι τοῦτο. | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος·Ἡ φύσις τοῦ μαργάρου πόθεν ἐστίν; | Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Ἐξ ἀστραπῆς καὶ ἡλίου καὶ ὀστράκου. | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Καὶ ἀλλοιοῦται ἡ ἀστραπὴ ἑνωθεὶς τῷ ὀστράκῳ; | Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Οὐχί. | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Ὥσπερ ἡ ἀστραπὴ εἰσερχομένη εἰς τὸ ὄστρακον σαρκοῦται ἀσυγχύτως καὶ γίνεται μάργαρος, καὶ τὴν μὲν λαμπρότητα λέγομεν εἶναι τὴν φύσιν τῆς ἀστραπῆς καὶ τὸ ψηλαφητὸν λέγομεν εἶναι τὴν φύσιν τῆς σαρκὸς τοῦ ὀστράκου, οὕτω καὶ ἡ θεία φύσις σαρκωθεὶς γέγονε Θεὸς καὶ ἄνθρωπος (*Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, ed. Trapp 1971, 122-3 ll. 202-11; Author's translation).

61 Kalavrezou 2012. The image of the pearl as a metaphor for knowledge, religious truth and spiritual enlightening was traditional: it draws its origins in the gnostic tradition and was used by theologians and apologists of the Church of the East, cf. the *Hymn of the Pearl* in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas (text with translation and commentary by Poirier 2021) and the parable of the pearl in the letter 59 of the East-Syrian patriarch Timothy I (d. 823), which report his debate with the caliph al-Mahdī (Heimgartner 2009; Poorthuis 2005, 281-4).

62 Ἀλλ' ὃ προεῖπον, στάμνε, βάτε, λυχνία, | μάργαρον ἢ χρυσίον ἢ στίλψιν λίθων | ὡς σύμβολον μέν, ἀλλὰ μὴ κόσμον δέχου· | ἦν γὰρ καθωράϊσεν ἄσπορος τόκος, | οὐ καλλυνεῖ

The metaphor of the pearl, like the apologue of the king and his disguised son, and the analogy of the hook hidden in the bait, which also appears in the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue*,[63] allude to the image of the garment of the flesh, which Christ assumed through the Incarnation, and through which His divinity was both concealed and made visible.

As Barbara Roggema has argued, the metaphor of the 'veiling' of the divinity to signify the Incarnation was particularly favoured by Christian apologists living under Islamic rule, not least because it proved suitable for conveying Christian dogma to Muslim interlocutors. Indeed, the Qur'ān itself refers to the divine revelation as God communicating with human beings as 'from behind a veil'.[64] In Christian Arabic apologetic literature, the insistence on the concealment of God/Christ in the flesh served to justify the Incarnation by presenting it not as a debasement of the divinity but as an essential moment in the divine soteriological plan, aimed at deceiving and humbling the devil. The same concern is evident in our *Dialogue*.[65] On the other hand, this imagery had an illustrious tradition in Greek patristic literature, which can be traced back to the fourth and fifth centuries and to the figures of Gregory of Nazianzos, Gregory of Nyssa and Proklos of Constantinople.[66]

Other examples could be given of this way of explaining the Christian mysteries "through images and stories", which appears to be a characteristic feature of the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue*. One thinks of the image of fire uniting with the metal in the act of forging, which Euthymios invokes to explain the coexistence of humanity and

μάργαρος ἢ κάλλος λίθου, | αἰνιγμάτων δὲ ταῦτα τυγχάνει λύσις. | Ὁ τίμιος γὰρ καὶ καλὸς μαργαρίτης | ᾤκησεν ἐν σοί, τῷ καθαρῷ χρυσίῳ, | ὁ συνδέτης ἀμφοῖν δε τοῖν ἄκροιν λίθος | ἐκ σοῦ λαβὼν πρόσλημμα συνδεῖ τὰς φύσεις (Nicholas Kallikles, *Poems*, 15 ll. 44-53, ed. Romano 1980, 89-91; translation with introduction and commentary in Andriollo 2022).

63 *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, ed. Trapp 1971, 116 ll. 55-60.

64 Roggema 2004, 130.

65 Cf. the following passage: SARACEN And couldn't God stay in Heaven and defeat the devil by sending an angel or by his word, even if God hadn't become man? Besides, how was it possible for a man to wrestle with the devil? | EUTHYMIOS If God had fought the devil, the devil would have considered this a source of praise, glory and honour. In fact, he was cast out of Heaven because he wanted to be equal to God, and if he had been defeated by God, it would not have come as a surprise; instead, he was baited with the flesh (Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Καὶ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ὢν ὁ Θεὸς οὐκ ἠδύνατο ἐξ ἀποστολῆς ἀγγέλου ἢ ὑπὸ λόγου καταλῦσαι τὸν διάβολον, εἰ μὴ Θεὸς ἄνθρωπος γενόμενος; Καὶ πῶς ἦν δυνατὸν ἄνθρωπον πολεμῆσαι τῷ δαίμονι; | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Ἐὰν ὁ Θεὸς ἐπολέμησε τὸν διάβολον, εἰς ἔπαινον ἂν καὶ δόξαν καὶ καύχημα εἶχεν τοῦτο ὁ διάβολος, ἐκεῖνος γὰρ τῇ ἐλπίδι τῆς θεότητος ἀπερρίφη καὶ οὐ θαῦμα, εἰ ὑπὸ Θεοῦ ἐνικήθη· ἀλλ' ἐδελεάσθη ὑπὸ τῆς σαρκός, *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, ed. Trapp 1971, 116 ll. 50-5; Author's translation). Cf. Roggema 2004, 128-30.

66 Constas 1995; Roggema 2004, 128.

divinity in Christ and their respective operations;[67] or of the analogy between the veneration of Christian icons and the reverence customarily shown to imperial images.[68] In the latter case, it is noteworthy that the Christian does not resort to the usual counter-example of the Muslim veneration of the Kaʿba, but responds on the merits, providing a real justification based on everyday experience and analogical reasoning. If the *Dialogue* is to be dated to the Komnenian age, could this reflect contemporary debates on the status and treatment of sacred images, rekindled by Leo of Chalcedon's criticism of Alexios I Komnenos' melting down of sacred objects and church treasures in the early years of his reign?[69]

4 The Early Circulation of the *Dialogue*: Context of (Re) elaboration, Audience and Functions

4.1 General Remarks and Hypotheses

In the past, the editor of the *Dialogue* and scholars interested in this text have made very general assumptions about the social and cultural profile of its author and readers. Assuming the precedence of the Pseudo-Euthymian text over the work of Bartholomew of Edessa, and its relationship of influence or inspiration on the latter, and

67 SARACEN Yes. And how was it possible for God to become perceptible to our senses without undergoing any change? | EUTHYMIOS Just as the fire is united to the iron, and on the one hand the nature of the fire does what is proper to the fire, on the other hand the nature of the iron does what is proper to it; likewise the spirit operates in the body what is divine, and the body does what is proper to the body. So it was with Christ: as God he worked that which was divine, and as man he worked that which was human, and both properties were preserved (Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Ναί. Καὶ πῶς ἦν δυνατὸν ψηλαφητὸν γενέσθαι τὸν Θεὸν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ μὴ ἀλλοιωθῆναι; | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Ὥσπερ γὰρ ἑνοῦται τῷ σιδήρῳ τὸ πῦρ καὶ πῇ μὲν ἐνεργεῖ ἡ φύσις τοῦ πυρὸς τὰ τοῦ πυρός, πῇ δὲ ὁ σίδηρος τὰ οἰκεῖα, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐν τῷ σώματι πῇ μὲν ἐνεργεῖ τὰ θεῖα, πῇ δὲ τὸ σῶμα τὰ τοῦ σώματος, οὕτω δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ Χριστοῦ γέγονεν· ὡς Θεὸς ἐνήργει τὰ θεῖα καὶ ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐνήργει τὰ ἀνθρώπινα καὶ συνετηροῦντο ἀμφοτέρων τὰ ἰδιώματα. *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, ed. Trapp 1971, 118 ll. 111-17; Author's translation).

68 SARACEN And why do you pay the reverence due to God to images carved in wood and icons? | EUTHYMIOS Whoever worships and adores the image of the king in his portrait, does he do so to honour the king or to dishonour him? | SARACEN To honour him. | EUTHYMIOS So we venerate the holy icons to honour the saints, and we do not deify them, as you say (Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Καὶ διὰ τὶ γλυπτὰ ξύλα καὶ εἰκόνας προσκυνεῖτε θεοπρεπῶς; | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Ὁ τὸν καραχτῆρα τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ βασιλέως τιμῶν καὶ προσκυνῶν εἰς τιμὴν τοῦ βασιλέως ποιεῖ ἢ εἰς ἀτιμίαν; | Ὁ Σαρακηνός· Εἰς τιμὴν | Ὁ Εὐθύμιος· Καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς τιμὴν τῶν ἁγίων προσκυνοῦμεν τὰς ἁγίας εἰκόνας καὶ οὐ θεοποιούμεθα ταύτας, ὡς ὑμεῖς λέγετε. *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*, ed. Trapp 1971, 119 ll. 123-8; Author's translation).

69 Angold 1995, 46-8; Ryder 2017; Trizio 2017, 465-7.

given the apparently strong connection with the social and cultural environment of northern Syria that emerges in Bartholomew's *Refutation of a Hagarene*, Erich Trapp has considered the region of Melitene as a plausible geographical context for the composition of our *Dialogue*.[70] On the basis of its linguistic register, rhetorical strategies and content, it has also been suggested that this text was not intended for an audience with a solid theological education, and that its author may not have been particularly well versed in the subject. The recurrent explanation of Christian dogmas "through stories and images", the simple and direct language and the sometimes imprecise use of theological vocabulary point in this direction.[71] Nevertheless, Trapp has emphasised that the *Dialogue* was written in *hochsprachlich* Greek, and was probably intended for an averagely cultured readership, although vernacular traits can occasionally be found in the morphology and lexicon.[72]

A closer reading of the text and the observation of its specific internal features may allow us to formulate additional hypotheses. As we have seen, the choice of dialogue form and the conciliatory attitude that pervades the first part of the text, as well as the argumentative strategies and rhetorical motifs used, are reminiscent of the literary controversies produced in Arabic or Syriac by Eastern Christians under Muslim domination. The parables and apologues used in the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue* show striking affinities with those found in Eastern Christian – and especially Melkite – apologetic writings. For example, a comparable use of parables such as that of the sun, with its rays, light and receptacle, or that of the fire and the iron – to explain the Trinitarian dogma and the Incarnation or the work of the Spirit in physical matter – can be found in a roughly contemporary Melkite apologetic dialogue, the *Disputation of George the Monk with Three Muslims in the Year 1207*.[73] In contrast, no Byzantine-Muslim

70 Trapp 1966, 26*; cf. Niehoff-Panagiotidis 2011 on hints at local northern Syrian realities in Bartholomew of Edessa.

71 Ulbricht 2011, 532-3.

72 Trapp 1971, 112-13. Trapp stresses that the considerable textual variability associated with the tradition of this work makes it necessary to be very cautious in assessing its linguistic features.

73 Nicoll 1820, 417 (allegory of the sun), 406, 416, 419-20 (allegory of the fire and the steel). The same Melkite text also contains a series of short apologues in which the protagonist is a generic caliph or king, as well as the traditional explanation of the Trinity by analogy with the intellect, word and spirit of the human being. This source is commented by Roggema 2004 and Bertaina 2011, 234-6 (who considers the debate to have taken place in 1217). The author of a more recent edition and English translation of the text, based on a Garshuni manuscript, places the debate in 1165 AD: Johnson 2007, 14. For earlier uses of the analogy with the sun and with fire and iron in Eastern Christian authors, see also Bertaina 2011, 140-1, 148-9. This metaphor had a long tradition in Byzantine theological literature and was also used in polemics against the Armenians: see Strano in this volume (141-58).

apologetic or polemical text in dialogue form can be identified with certainty as having ever been produced in Constantinople or within the borders of the empire until the Palaiologan period.[74]

David Bertaina notes that the production of interreligious dialogues in Arabic also peaked in the ninth century, with fewer such texts being written in subsequent centuries until the Crusades. Nevertheless, some examples of apologetic and polemical works in Arabic that adopt the dialogue or question-and-answer format are known for the period between the early eleventh and early thirteenth centuries. The *Book of Sessions* or *Dialogues* by the eleventh-century East Syrian patriarch Elias of Nisibis,[75] the *Response to the Arabs* by the Syrian Orthodox metropolitan of Amida Dionysios Bar Salibi (written before 1171)[76] and the anonymous *Disputation of George the Monk with Three Muslims*, mentioned, above enjoyed remarkable popularity among Eastern Christian readers. Such texts seem to have served catechetical purposes: they aimed to promote the orthodoxy, cohesion and steadfastness of the authors' communities in the face of the challenges posed by Islam, not least the inducement to conversion and apostasy.[77] This literary production may have provided inspiration or models for the *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios*; however, other evidence suggests that the Pseudo-Euthymian text was not a mere adaptation of such models, intended to circulate in the same social and cultural milieu.

In fact, the second section of our *Dialogue*, the polemical monologue, displays an aggressive attitude that is generally absent from analogous writings – earlier or contemporary – in Syriac and in Arabic. Moreover, the Pseudo-Euthymian text does not display an up-to-date and solid familiarity with Islamic scriptures, practices and arguments; on the contrary, this is typical of Christian apologetics produced under Muslim rule.[78] Although it has been suggested that

74 On the late Byzantine revival in the production of literary dialogues as rhetorical tools in the confrontation with the Muslim world, see Fanelli 2018 (especially 172ff.) and his paper in this volume. On the famous *Dialogues with a Persian* by Manuel II Palaiologos (1391-1425), see the edition by Trapp 1966 and Çelik 2021, 139-57. On the possible exception represented by the hagiographical writings of the monk Evodios, see supra, § 2 fn. 29.

75 On Elias of Nisibi: Monferrer Sala 2010, especially 730-2. A complete edition of the *Book of Sessions* has been recently published by Seleznyov 2017-18; on this work, Seleznyov 2018.

76 Ed. Amar 2005. On Dionysios Bar Salibi: Teule 2011, especially 667-70.

77 Bertaina 2011, 231-4.

78 Bertaina 2011, 236-9. Interestingly, the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue* refers to a Nestorian monk and astrologer as the teacher of Muḥammad: Byzantine polemists usually mention an Arian monk, with the only exception of the Letter of Leo III to Umar and Bartholomew of Edessa. On the contrary, the legend of the Nestorian monk Baḥīrā is recurrent in Syriac and Melkite polemical texts: Khoury 1972, 76-88; Bertaina 2011, 124-30.

the polemical attack against Muḥammad and his teachings may be an addition to the dialogue, all extant copies of the text contain this polemical section. In fact, the two branches of tradition identified by Erich Trapp for the second part of the *Dialogue* are already attested by the earliest known witnesses, dating from the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (manuscripts A and B according to Trapp classification). We have no evidence to speculate about earlier stages in the composition and circulation of the text. Another obvious point to consider is the fact that our *Dialogue* was written in Greek and was therefore addressed to a hellenophone audience. Moreover, as we have seen, some of the motifs and themes that appear in the text may be in keeping with the tradition and tastes of a Byzantine readership. Thus, while substantial internal evidence points to a strong influence of eastern (Syriac or Christian Arabic) models, other elements suggest that the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue* was not intended for circulation among Arabic-speaking Melkite readers. It is worth considering where and when the conditions for the production of such a 'hybrid' literary product might have been met.

The geographical reference in the title of the *Dialogue* and Trapp's assumption would lead to consider the Euphrates region and, more generally, Mesopotamia and Syria as a plausible setting for the elaboration of the text. From about the middle of the tenth century, this gradually reconquered territory had provided a space for the interaction of a Greek Orthodox minority of clergy and administrators with Melkite, Syrian Orthodox and non-Chalcedonian Armenians, and for the confrontation with the neighbouring Islamic world.[79] Byzantine, Armenian and Syriac chronicles, together with ecclesiastical documents, shed light on the relations between the local Christian communities, whose confessional identities were reinforced and complicated by the linguistic and ethnic divide. In the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the advance of the Turks and the establishment of a permanent Turkish political and military presence in Anatolia, as well as the arrival of the Crusaders, added to the religious and cultural polyphony of these regions.[80]

These circumstances undoubtedly favoured the translation into Greek and the circulation among the empire's elite of literary works

79 Melitene was reconquered in 934 by the *domestikos* John Kourkouas, Antioch in 969, during the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas; Edessa was taken in the 1030 by George Maniakes. Relations between the Chalcedonians and the Syrian Orthodox on the one hand, and the non-Chalcedonian Armenians on the other, fluctuated between the open hostility and persecution advocated by the hierarchy of the imperial Church, especially in the first half of the eleventh century, and the down-to-earth tolerance shown by most Byzantine administrators: Gyllenhaal 2021; Andriollo 2017, 279-84.

80 For a detailed description of the events between 1071 and 1124 in the region of Melitene, cf. Vest 2007, 1143-713; Beihammer 2017, 198-385.

that expressed a 'frontier culture', exposed to multiple linguistic and cultural influences. A significant example comes precisely from Melitene, where Gabriel (d. 1101 or 1102),[81] an Armenian of Chalcedonian faith and the last Byzantine *doux* of the city, commissioned the translation of the *Book of Syntipas* from Syriac into Greek, an undertaking carried out by the *grammatikos* Michael Andreopoulos.[82] But the growing interest of Byzantine readers in eastern narratives, observed in the second half of the eleventh century, was not confined to the Greek-speaking elites of the eastern territories. Symeon Seth, a native of Antioch who studied in Cairo and worked at the court of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) as an expert in medicine and astrology, dedicated to the emperor his translation into Greek of the Arabic collection of fables *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, known under the title *Stephanites and Ichnelates*.[83] The interest in these collections of stories and their widespread circulation reveal an appreciation for allegorical stories (παραβολικαὶ ὁμιλίαι)[84] with a didactic character, which is also evident in the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue*. Interestingly, while *historiae animae utiles* and *eratopokriseis* such as those contained in the *Book of Syntipas* were not unfamiliar textual formats for Byzantine readers, these translations presented the Greek-speaking audience with unusual narrative and rhetorical structures (notably the ring narrative structure). At the same time, these collections of translated tales retained a perceptible 'oriental flavour' in terms of imagery and style, which seems to have been appreciated.[85]

Greek as a liturgical and ecclesiastical language was well established in Mesopotamia and in the region of Antioch until the Turkish conquest, but it remains to be seen to what extent and for how long a hellenophone readership existed thereafter, when lay representatives of the Byzantine authority and Church officials were no longer present on the ground.[86] In any case, the example of Symeon

81 Vest 2007, 1645-51.

82 Toth 2014; 2023.

83 A biographical outline in Bouras-Vallianatos 2015, 436-42. On Symeon Seth see also the essays collected in Cronier, Guardasole, Pietrobelli 2023. On the *Stephanites and Ichnelates* and its recensions, especially the so-called 'Eugenian' recension, cf. Lauxtermann 2019 and the edition with English translation by Noble 2022.

84 Toth 2014, 97.

85 Toth 2014, 99-100; 2023, 106.

86 On Greek ecclesiastical and monastic presence in the late tenth and eleventh centuries and then under Frankish rule, particularly in Antioch and the surrounding region: Weltecke 2006; Hamilton, Jotischky 2020, 328-33. On the status of Greek and its relationship to other languages of Christian communities in the region of Antioch: Flusin 2015. Saint Nikon of the Black Mountain might have fled to a monastery in the region of Melitene or Edessa after the Seljuk capture of Antioch in 1085 (Hamilton, Jotischky 2020, 331). Under Crusader rule, the Greek Orthodox patriarchs of Antioch spent most of their tenure in exile in Constantinople, and the presence of the

Seth and his *Stephanites and Ichnelates* shows that oriental texts and models could travel, along with intellectuals and clergymen, between the former Byzantine territories of the eastern frontier and Constantinople.[87] The case of Bartholomew of Edessa's *Refutation of a Hagarene* may provide further clues to the movement of people and texts at the time of the Crusades. A note written in 1640 by Gkinos, the copyist of an Iviron manuscript that preserves a partial vernacular rewriting of Bartholomew's text, echoes indeed the tradition that the author was a monk of Edessene origin who had retired to Sinai.[88]

Although the reliability of this information may be questionable, the monasteries of Palestine were certainly renowned centres of Greek culture and book production in the Middle Ages. They constituted a cosmopolitan and polyglot network particularly suited to the circulation and mutual contamination of texts and cultural traditions belonging to different linguistic and ethnic communities within the Orthodox world.[89] Indeed, it is not implausible that the Holy Land and the Palestinian monastic milieu played a role in the early stages of the elaboration and circulation of the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue*. The presence in the text of an allusion to the monoergite/monothelite controversy, the opposition to which was crucial in shaping the Orthodox identity of the Church of Jerusalem and in consolidating its authority within Melkite Christianity, may hint at a local doctrinal tradition.[90] The provenance of the two earliest manuscripts containing this text also points in this direction.

Greek-speaking Orthodox clergy must have diminished. The activity of monasteries and ascetics is still attested in the twelfth century: they certainly acted as a point of reference for the local Melkite population, but the language of communication was most probably Arabic.

87 Glynias 2019, 15-22, provides significant examples of how books (and even 'heretical' texts) travelled with their monastic carriers between Syria, Lebanon and Sinai in the period from the twelfth to the fourteenth century.

88 Hagion Oros, Μονή Ιβήρων, Mss. 395 (Lambros 4515), ff. 220*r*-236*r* (text), in particular f. 235ν (annotation, as reported in Todt 1988, xv): Ταῦτα συνεγράψατο Βαρθολομαῖος ἱερομόναχος ὁ Αἰδεσινὸς ἐκ τὸ ὄρος τοῦ Σινᾶ. ὁ ὁποῖος παρατυχὼν ἐκεῖ πλησίον καὶ διὰ νὰ ἐξεύρη τὴν γραφὴν τῶν Ἀρράβων καὶ βιβλία τους [*sic*] ὅλα ἀνέγνωσεν εἰς ἄκρως καὶ ἐλέγχει τὰς φλυαρίας αὐτῶν… In the thirteenth century, the role of Saint Catherine monastery as a place of refuge is known, when it welcomed monks from Syria and Palestine fleeing the Mongol invasions and the recurrent wars between the Crusaders and the Mamluks: Hamilton, Jotischky 2020, 321.

89 Hamilton, Jotischky 2020, 365-9, and *infra*.

90 Griffith 2006, 182; Griffith 2015, 163-4 fn. 89.

4.2 The Palestinian Connection

All extant copies of the *Dialogue* are found in miscellaneous codices copied on paper. The two earliest witnesses, Αγίου Σάββα 967 and 223, are now in the Patriarchal Library in Jerusalem; according to Papadopoulos-Kerameus, both are part of a collection of books coming from the Lavra of Saint Sabas.[91] Αγίου Σάββα 697 (codex A of Trapp's edition) is a codex of small dimensions (134 × 102 mm, 210 ff.), acephalous and mutilated at the end. According to the description by Papadopoulos-Kerameus, it was copied in the late thirteenth century, while Trapp suggested to date it to the fourteenth century.[92] More recently, scholars have proposed a dating to the twelfth or thirteenth century, based on a reference to events of 1191/2 contained in the book.[93] Αγίου Σάββα 223 (codex B of Trapp's edition) is a composite codex[94] of larger size (276 × 190 mm, 390 ff.), mutilated at the end. According to Papadopoulos-Kerameus, it was formed by the assembly of three τεύχη (independent codicological units or booklets), which were copied in the fourteenth century.[95] A review of the texts collected in these two miscellaneous books may allow us to make some assumptions about the tastes and interests of the particular community of readers who perused them at the time they were copied.

Unsurprisingly, these monastic books contain a significant proportion of ascetic, patristic, liturgical and hagiographic texts. Αγίου Σάββα 697, for instance, opens with a series of ascetic admonitions

91 A note of ownership states that Αγίου Σάββα 223 was kept in the library of Holy Sepulchre at the end of the sixteenth century (Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1894, 333). My observations are based on the description given in Papadopoulos-Kerameus' catalogue and on the examination of the microfilm (digital reproduction available online).

92 See *supra*, § 3.1 fn. 34.

93 Pahlitzsch 2001, 350-1 no. 18; Hamilton, Jotischky 2021, 468; see also the commentary below. As Claudio Schiano has pointed out, the chronological extract reporting these events could have been copied from a lost antigraph; nevertheless, Schiano is inclined to confirm a dating to the thirteenth century (Aulisa, Schiano 2005, 162).

94 It is a 'pluriblocco' miscellaneous codex, according to Filippo Ronconi's classification, i.e. a book composed of several codicological units that could be disassembled and reassembled. A 'monoblocco' codex, on the other hand, consists of a single physical and codicological unit that can never be further divided (Ronconi 2008, 20-7). Αγίου Σάββα 697 may belong to the latter codicological typology and be a pluritextual 'monoblocco' codex. As far as the microfilm available online allows us to judge, it seems to have been copied by similar and contemporary hands (or the same hand?); moreover, textual caesuras often do not correspond to codicological ones. Pahlitzsch notes that the handwriting of Αγίου Σάββα 697 corresponds to the 'style epsilon à pseudo-ligatures basses' described by Paul Canart, which is characteristic of Cypriot and Palestinian manuscripts of the twelfth century (Pahlitzsch 2001, 350-1); Schiano agrees with this interpretation (Aulisa, Schiano 2005, 162).

95 Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1894, 332.

(ff. 1*r*-4*v*); it also contains a *florilegium* of short passages from various Byzantine authors, such as John of Damascus, Theodore of Studios, John Klimax, and others (ff. 8*r*-10*v*), and the "*logoi* in the form of a *typikon*" addressed by the patriarch of Constantinople Nicholas III Grammatikos (d. 1111) to the *hegoumenos* of Mount Athos (ff. 10*v*-39*r*). There are also extracts from patristic texts of a dogmatic nature – a selection of scriptural proofs of the Trinity and the Incarnation (ff. 53*r*-60*v*); the *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer* by John Chrysostom (*Homily in Matthew* 6,1-16; ff. 60*v*-61*v*); a treatise *On the Holy Trinity* by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (ff. 197*v*-204*r*); Augustine's *Dogmatic Treatise against Felicianus* (in the manuscript: Αὐγουστίνου ἐκ δογματικῶν, ff. 204*r*-*v*) –, along with a list of liturgical chants according to festivities (ἐξαποστειλάρια, ff. 188*r*-191*v*).

Besides the *Thesaurus* of Theognostos, which largely occupies its first codicological unit (ff. 1*r*-162*v*), Αγίου Σάββα 223 contains other readings for spiritual edification:[96] Basil of Caesarea *On Honouring Parents* (Περὶ τιμῆς γονέων καὶ γέρως καὶ νεότητος, ff. 164*v*-166*v*); the *Chapters on Temperance and Virtue* by Hesychios of Sinai (Πρὸς Θεόδουλον λόγος ψυχωφελὴς περὶ νήψεως καὶ ἀρετῆς κεφαλαιώδης, ff. 166*v*-180*v*); Anastasios of Sinai's *On the Holy Synaxis* (ff. 180*v*-190*v*); *On the Necessity of Remembering the Day of Our Death*, attributed to a certain Symeon Potaminos (Λόγος Συμεὼν Ποταμινοῦ [*sic*] περὶ τοῦ ἐν νῷ ἔχειν τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς ἐξόδου τῆς ἐκ τοῦδε τοῦ βίου, ff. 191*r*-192*v*);[97] and ascetic writings of Maximos the Confessor (Λόγος ἀσκητικὸς κατὰ πεῦσιν καὶ ἀπόκρισιν, ff. 193*r*-219*r*; Λόγος περὶ τῆς κατὰ Θεὸν λύπης, ff. 219*r*-222*v*). A significant part of the codex is devoted to hagiography, including the *Lives* of Pachomios (ff. 231*r*-299*r*; *BHG* 1400-1400bb, *Vita altera*), Auxentios of Bithynia (ff. 299*v*-350*r*; BHG 0202) and Athanasios of Athos (351*r*-390*r*; *BHG* 0188-0188b), as well as a *logos* on Saint Gerasimos by Constantine Akropolites (ff. 390*v*; *BHG* 0696). A short story set in the time of the emperor Herakleios (610-41) may also be regarded as a morally instructive tale (ff. 162*v*-164*v*).

Besides ascetic and theological writings, both codices include texts that reveal an interest in apologetic and polemical literature. In addition to our *Dialogue*, Αγίου Σάββα 697 contains the *Dialogica Polymorpha Antijudaica* (i.e. the *Dialogue of the Jews Papiskos and Philon with a Monk*; title in the manuscript: Ἀντιβολὴ Χριστιανῶν καὶ Ἰουδαίων, ff. 61*v*-87*r*),[98] as well as chapter 100 of John of Damas-

96 The numbering of the folios in the manuscript is incorrect: see the description in Munitiz 1979, XIII-XV. I give the numbers as they appear on the folios. The titles (in red ink) are often almost illegible on the microfilm.

97 *Recte* Ephrem the Greek.

98 Ed. Aulisa, Schiano 2005; on this work cf. Andrist, Déroche 2013.

cus' *On Heresies*, which is dedicated to Islam (ff. 106*v*-113*v*). In Αγίου Σάββα 223, the *Thesaurus* of Theognostos gathers together texts of various genres (narratives, treatises, dialogues, series of questions and answers) in a voluminous anthology with catechetical intentions, which also includes an apologetic section against Jews and Muslims (ch. 11).[99] These books includes also a number of texts in the form of questions and answers, a format applied to a variety of subjects: answers to canonical questions (Αγίου Σάββα 697: Petros Chartophylax, *Canonical Responses*, ff. 4*v*-7*v*); *erotapokriseis* in the proper sense, in which various subjects are treated (as in Αγίου Σάββα 697, ff. 39*r*-46*v*; cf. also Αγίου Σάββα 223, ff. 193*r*-219*r*); isolated questions and answers (Αγίου Σάββα 697, f. 51*r*-53*r*;[100] Αγίου Σάββα 223, f. 180*r*); and imaginary or pseudo-epigraphic dialogues, such as a dialogue between Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzos (Αγίου Σάββα 697, ff. 191*v*-197*v*) and the Pseudo-Gregorian *Dialogue of the Sea and the Land* (Αγίου Σάββα 697, ff. 46*v*-50*v*).[101]

Finally, the presence of two apocalyptic texts in Αγίου Σάββα 697 is noteworthy: the visions of Daniel (ff. 117*r*-188*r*) and a brief chronological catalogue (ff. 114*v*-116*r*) from Adam to the time of the Nicaean emperor Theodore I Laskaris (1204-21). The latter text mentions the reigns of Constantine X Doukas and Romanos IV Diogenes, the battle of Mantzikert and the Turkish invasions. The text ends with the reference to a defeat suffered by the "impious sons of Ishmael" in 1191-92 and the prediction of the imminent victories of the orthodox emperor Theodore: with the help of the "blond people" (μετὰ ξανθογήρου ἔθνους) and with Saint Michael as his ally (σύμμαχος), he will exterminate the race of the godless Ishmaelites and restore the situation of the Orthodox Christians.[102]

The inclusion of a text referring to the turmoil caused by the Turkish invasions of Anatolia and to the hopes raised by the success of the Crusaders have led Johannes Pahlitzsch, and after him Bernard Hamilton and Andrew Jotinschky, to date the copy of Αγίου Σάββα 697 to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century; on this basis, Pahlitzsch has also argued for an Anatolian provenance of the manuscript.[103] While the book, or its copyist, might have wit-

99 On the *Thesaurus* see the exhaustive introduction in Munitiz's edition.

100 This is Anastasios of Sinai, *Questions and Answers*, no. 65, ed. Richard, Munitiz 2006, 115-17.

101 The latter is a school exercise in rhetoric in the form of ἀνασκευή-κατασκευή, i.e., refutation and confirmation, dated to the ninth or tenth century: Ieraci Bio 2006, 33.

102 Partial transcription in Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1894, 652-3. The Christian victory of 1191-92 to which the text alludes must be the recapture of Acre and Jaffa during the third crusade.

103 Pahlitzsch 2001, 350-1; Hamilton, Jotischky 2020, 468. Cf. also Aulisa, Schiano 2005, 163.

nessed the events described (or at least some of them), these were fateful enough for their knowledge to reach Palestine and their consequences to be clearly felt even there. In fact, the order in which some of the texts are copied may indicate the presence of a thematic section within this manuscript, revealing a compelling interest in polemical literature and relations with Muslims:

- ff. 61*v*-87*r*: *Dialogica Polymorpha Antijudaica* (Ἀντιβολὴ Χριστιανῶν καὶ Ἰουδαίων)
- ff. 87*r*-106*r*: *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios with a Saracen Philosopher* (Διάλεξις Εὐθυμίου μοναχοῦ καὶ Σαρακηνοῦ φιλοσόφου)
- ff. 106*v*-113*v*: John of Damascus, *On Heresies* chapter 100 (Λόγος περὶ τῶν Ἰσμαηλίτων)
- ff. 113*v*-114*r*: deleted text
- ff. 114*v*-116*r*: chronological catalogue
- f. 116*v*: ornamental bands and filler text
- ff. 117*r*-188*r*: *Visions of Daniel*

Αγίου Σάββα 697 and 223 differ in size – ms 697 is a small, handy format, while ms 223 is larger, roughly double the size – and in the accuracy of the copy – ms 697 bears small marginal drawings and scribbles, filler texts in an irregular cursive writing, and some erased pages; by contrast, ms 223 was copied by clear and careful hands, with only occasional (but dense) marginal annotations.[104] Nevertheless, both were compiled for a monastic audience: they fit well into a typology of monastic anthologies, handbooks and *compendia* that was common in the monasteries of the Holy Land between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.[105] They offered their readers instruction in a variety of fields – first and foremost in doctrinal and spiritual matters, but also incidentally in canon law and rhetoric. The selection and arrangement of the texts that make up these collections reflect a taste for dynamic, varied and accessible communication. These books were aimed at the average educated reader, with the purpose of instructing him in the faith without being "too long or too difficult", but, as Joseph Munitiz wrote of the *Thesaurus* of Theognostos, "comprehensive enough and pleasant to read".[106]

104 Αγίου Σάββα 697 seems to have been written by one same hand, with the possible exception of some filler texts; Αγίου Σάββα 223 results from the assembly of several booklets by different hands.

105 Hamilton, Jotischky 2020, 462-7.

106 Munitiz 1979, CXXII: "un exposé, ni trop long ni trop difficile, mais assez complet et agréable à lire".

The Palestinian monasteries of the late Byzantine period, where these manuscripts were probably copied and certainly read, and in particular the monastery of Saint Sabas, provided a receptive environment for the production and circulation of Greek books of this kind, one potentially interested also in the polemical and apologetic material they contained. The *coenobia* and *laurae* of the Holy Land traditionally enjoyed great prestige within the orthodox world for their proximity to the Christian holy places and for the role they had played in the development of the monastic life. A sojourn in the monasteries of the Judean desert was often seen as a fundamental preparatory step on the path to spiritual perfection for monastic leaders and founders.[107] This was true in Late Antiquity as well as in later Byzantine times, and even more so from the eleventh century onwards, when the Byzantine emperors began to take consistent diplomatic steps to act as protectors, patrons and guardians of the Orthodox Church and the Christians of Palestine.[108] While the monastic population of the Holy Land was by definition ethnically and linguistically diverse, due to the historical connection between local monasticism and the practice of pilgrimage, the eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed the growing presence of clergy and monks from Byzantium and a revival of Greek as the language of the Church.[109] After more than a century of severe decline in the production of Greek books, from the eleventh century onwards manuscripts in this language were again copied in significant numbers, and circulated in Jerusalem and the monasteries of the Palestinian desert.[110]

The biographies of prominent Byzantine monastic founders, such as Lazaros of Mount Galesion and Christodoulos of Patmos in the eleventh century, and Neophytos of Cyprus in the twelfth, as well as the accounts of Orthodox and Latin pilgrims, describe the Palestinian monasteries as polyglot centres, home to different national communities. The *Life* of Lazaros of Galesion (*BHG* 979), for example, refers to the dealings between the monks in the *laura* of Saint Euthymios and their Muslim neighbours, implying that both Greek- and Arabic-speaking brothers lived there.[111] The *typikon* of Saint Sabas, dating from the twelfth century, mentions the existence of different

107 Pahlitzsch 2019; Hamilton, Jotischky 2020, 365-6.

108 Pahlitzsch 2001, 40-6.

109 Griffith 2006, 176-7, 186-7; Pahlitzsch 2015. On the 'byzantinisation' of the liturgy in the Church of Jerusalem see Galadza 2018, 136-9 and passim.

110 Mango 2015 considers that the practices of Greek dies out in Palestine during the ninth century; according to Griffith 2015, 155, no Greek work was composed in Mar Saba after the early ninth century. On the circulation of Greek books in the eleventh century, cf. Pahlitzsch 2001, 219-20, and the catalogue at 330ff.

111 *Life of Lazaros*, transl. Greenfield 2000, 97-8 fn. 92; Hamilton, Jotischky 2020, 366.

'national' churches or chapels within the monastery, where Iberians, Syrians (i.e. Arabic-speaking monks) and Franks were allowed to perform the liturgy of the hours and the reading of the Scriptures in their own language. The Eucharist, however, was to be celebrated in the Great Church by the whole assembled community.[112] Syriac was also known and spoken by an important minority of Chalcedonian monks, at least at Sinai: a considerable number of manuscripts in this language were produced at the monastery of Saint Catherine between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.[113]

Contacts between individuals trained in different linguistic and cultural traditions certainly facilitated the process of circulation, translation and hybridisation that we can glimpse behind the production and transmission of the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue*. But the Palestinian monastic communities had other compelling reasons for cultivating an interest in polemical literature. The geographical context in which these monks lived exposed them to inevitable and constant interactions with the Muslim society. To ensure their security and prosperity, Palestinian monasteries had to negotiate with the ruling authorities, be they Muslim or, between 1099 and 1187, Latin. At the same time, as the *Life* of Saint Lazaros of Galesion shows, they had to deal with neighbouring Muslim settlers on a regular basis. In such circumstances, and especially in times of hardship, the temptation to convert and the danger of apostasy must have been bitterly felt, not only by the laity but also by the monks. The *Life* of Lazaros of Galesion reports a telling episode: in the early eleventh century, during the persecution unleashed against Christians by the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim, the *kanonarches* of Saint Sabas converted to Islam and refused to return to the Christian faith. Saddened by his behaviour, Paul, one of Lazarus' companions, bitterly recalled having warned him "not to make friends with the Saracens".[114] During the Komnenian period, the issue of conversions to and from Islam was a

112 *Typikon of Saint Sabas*, ed. Kurtz, Dimitrijevskij 1894, 169 ll. 12-16; English transl. by Fiaccadori 2000, 1316. Cf. also Galadza 2018, 97.

113 Hamilton, Jotischky 2020, 368, reporting the hypothesis that the production of Syriac manuscripts at the Sinai in the thirteenth century was stimulated by the arrival of monks from Syria fleeing the wars opposing Mamluk and Mongols. Joseph Glynias has shown that the production of Syriac manuscripts at Sinai flourished in the late thirteenth century, and that Syriac monks, carrying their books and liturgical traditions, were a constant presence between the 1220s and the late thirteenth century; interestingly, non-Chalcedonian books in Syriac also happened to reach the Sinai monasteries (Glynias 2019). On the small Syriac-speaking Chalcedonian communities from Palestine, known to have survived in the Jordan Valley, the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt, cf. Nasrallah 2015, 510-14. On the use of Syriac in liturgy and liturgical manuscripts, Galadza 2018, 98-9.

114 *Life of Lazaros*, transl. Greenfield 2000, 103-5. On al- Ḥākim's persecution, cf. Galadza 2018, 117-19. On religious antagonism and conversion at the time of the first Seljuk conquests, Beihammer 2011; 2016.

matter of concern and discussion also in Constantinople. While members of the court aristocracy and the imperial family itself defected to the enemy, going as far as renouncing the Christian faith, Manuel I Komnenos attempted in 1180 to modify the abjuration formula to facilitate conversions from Islam to Orthodox Christianity.[115]

It is quite possible that the echo of these events reached Jerusalem and the Palestinian monasteries, and had an impact on the tone and form of literary interreligious debates. Indeed, between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries a stronger Byzantine influence on Palestinian ecclesiastical and monastic life can be discerned. From the late tenth century, and more conspicuously from the reign of Constantine IX (1042-55), the Byzantine emperors acted consistently to extend their patronage and control over the Christian population and the Church of Palestine. As early as the eleventh century, they had the right to appoint the patriarch of Jerusalem, a prerogative vocally claimed and exercised by the Komnenian emperors.[116] Under the Frankish rule, when the Melkite patriarchs of Jerusalem spent most of their tenure in exile in Constantinople, Manuel I Komnenos patronised the restoration of monasteries and churches in the Holy Land and occasionally insisted on reinstating his patriarchs in their sees, with mixed fortune.[117] The Greek-speaking monks who came from the Byzantine empire to the monasteries of the Holy Land for a period of spiritual training or to stay there, and the high clergy appointed by the emperor (even when in exile), maintained an extensive network of relations between the Levant, Cyprus and Constantinople, acting as political and cultural *agents de liaison*. This may have raised local awareness of issues that were the subject of theological controversy in Constantinople, while giving a more militant – and ultimately more Byzantine – twist to literary exercises in interreligious debate circulating in Palestine.[118] If the aggressive tone of the monologue contained in the second section of the Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue* is at odds with the cautious and irenic attitude found in earlier controversies written under Muslim rule, it certainly finds its place in the Palestinian monastic milieu of the Crusader period.

115 On cases of defection and conversion in the Komnenian period and their meaning, Beihammer 2011; on the controversy concerning the abjuration formula and its alteration, Høgel 2011.

116 Pahlitzsch 2001, 43 fn. 112, 138 and *passim*; on the restauration of the Anastasis in the eleventh century, Galadza 2018, 120-3.

117 Pahlitzsch 2001, 160-71 (with reference to the case of Leontios II of Jerusalem); Galadza 2018, 125-8; Hamilton, Jotischky 2020, 351-2.

118 Interestingly, in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries two Melkite patriarchs of Jerusalem, Symeon II and John VIII, wrote polemical dialogues against the Latins (Pahlitzsch 2001, 50-9, 109-31): this testifies to the local vitality of this textual typology within the broader genre of apologetic and polemical literature.

5 Conclusions

Reconstructing the exact geographical and historical context in which the *Dialogue on the Faith of the Monk Euthymios* was written may prove to be a hazardous and perhaps pointless exercise in historical and literary speculation. This is all the more so since this text, like so many others in the field of Byzantine 'popular' educational and edifying literature, defies our notions of authorship and authority.[119] Circulating as an anonymous work or under a pseudo-epigraphic attribution, the *Dialogue* was a stratified and relatively malleable text, open to editorial reworking in the form of additions, rephrasing, and manipulation of its linguistic and rhetorical register. However, by reading through its compositional layers, we can attempt to disentangle the literary models and cultural substrata that merged to form this work as it stands, and trace some of the stages in its reception and circulation.

The Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue* undoubtedly draws on Syriac and especially Melkite models of apologetic and polemical literature. However, while a Mesopotamian provenance of the text cannot be ruled out, such a reconstruction must remain highly speculative in the absence of any conclusive evidence. Moreover, its relationship to the regions of the collapsing Byzantine eastern frontier can be understood in terms of a travelling cultural heritage, rather than as a precise geographical and historical setting for the writing of the text.

What seems certain, instead, is the role played by the Palestinian monastic milieu in the early circulation, if not in the elaboration, of the text. The Palestinian social and cultural environment of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries certainly provided fertile ground for an active and transformative reception of the text, which contributed to shape it and left recognisable traces. The *Dialogue* bears witness to doctrinal concerns that were inherently tied with the Palestinian orthodox identity, or may reflect the close relationship of this ecclesiastical province with Constantinople and the wider Orthodox world. The linguistically and culturally diverse environment of the Palestinian monasteries not only allowed for the encounter, reformulation and hybridisation of different traditions, but also provided a Greek-speaking audience and practical purposes for a piece of polemical literature such as the *Dialogue*.

As is usually the case with this type of literature, the text does not have to reproduce an actual historical debate. Fictional as it may be, the *Dialogue* refers to a reality – the relationship with the Muslims – that was certainly not unfamiliar to its readers. In this context,

119 The notion of distributive authorship, invoked by Ida Toth with reference to the *Book of Syntipas*, may be appropriate in this case (Toth 2014, 101-2).

it may have fulfilled a didactic function, providing arguments against possible Muslim contenders, and even more against the inner hesitations and doubts of those exposed to deviant teachings and the temptation of apostasy. As Stephanos Efthymiades has observed, literature in the form of dialogues or questions and answers, however conventional and repetitive, usually implies the existence of uncomfortable "niches of doubt" and uncertainty[120] – feelings that the military success and political supremacy of the infidels could certainly help to arouse.[121] It thus served to confirm believers in their faith by extolling the excellence of the Christian religion through a literary performance of triumphant orthodoxy. This helped to strengthen the loyalty and sense of confessional belonging of communities living in a condition of political uncertainty and subordination.

The Pseudo-Euthymian *Dialogue* may well constitute what Averil Cameron has called "a cognitive exercise of Christian self-definition".[122] Yet despite the apparent timelessness of the reported debate, such an exercise was neither divorced from historical reality nor entirely self-referential: on the contrary, it was meaningful and urgent to its thirteenth- and fourteenth-century readers in the monastery of Saint Sabas. It was the eye of the reader that loaded a simple and plainly written text like our *Dialogue* with meaning – and perhaps the hand of the copyist, who could easily adjust it to his needs when he felt it necessary. It is probably this very simplicity and adaptability that enabled the Pseudo-Euthymian dialogue to travel westward and be appreciated by later readers in Constantinople and the Balkans.[123] Their profiles, motives and interests would also deserve further investigation, but this is the matter for another story.

120 Efthymiadis 2017, 61-2.

121 At a later time, Alexios Makrembolites' *Demonstration on the Resasons for the Victories of Foreign Peoples* provides a telling example of the questions and doubts inspired by the Muslim success: Fanelli 2018.

122 Cameron 2016, 130.

123 Ms. Vat. gr. 952 (labelled E in Trapp's edition) was likely copied in Constantinople, as it includes copies of notary documents apparently coming from the capital and dated to 1367-71: Andrist 2016, 263; Falkenhausen 1991, 92. The Oxford manuscript (Christ Church, Wake 49) comes from Epirus: cf. the description by Brendan Osswald at `https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-09/MS-49-Description.pdf`.

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