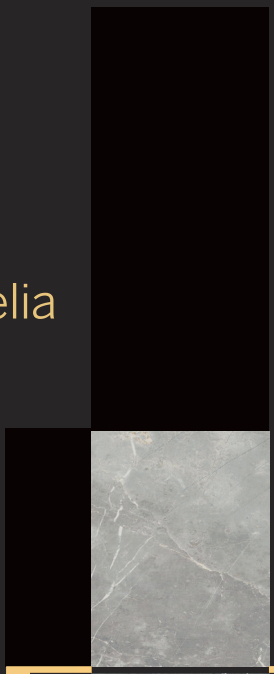
Byzantium and Its Neighbours

Religious Self and Otherness in Dialogue

edited by
Luisa Andriollo and Luigi D'Amelia



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Byzantium and Its Neighbours

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Abstract

The volume is partly inspired by the papers presented during the thematic session "Byzantium and Its Neighbours: Religious Self and Otherness in Dialogue" at the 24th International Congress of Byzantine Studies held in Venice and Padua in August 2022. Its primary focus lies in Byzantine polemics against religious others, especially Muslims, Jews, Armenians and Latins. The contributions cover a wide range of themes, including the repertoire of *topoi* and arguments developed by Byzantine polemicists against various opponents, the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed in the works analysed, and questions of authorship and audience. The volume helps to elucidate aspects of the political and socio-cultural context in which this significant body of Byzantine literature was produced or received, while at the same time opening up new ways of approaching this typology of sources.

Keywords Alterity. Armenian Church. Audience. Byzantine literature. Byzantine polemics and apologetics. Collective identity. Dialogue. Ethno-religious stereotypes. Interreligious debate. Latin Christianity. Medieval Islam. Medieval Judaism. Rhetoric.

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Preface

Antonio Rigo
Editor-in-Chief

> There can be no doubt that Orthodoxy was an important form of the cultural identity in Byzantium, and has remained so in all the countries that originated the "Byzantine Commonwealth"
>
> (Paul Magdalino, 2010)

The present volume, edited by Luisa Andriollo and Luigi D'Amelia, offers a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationships between Byzantium and its different neighbours, with a particular focus on the religious dimensions of these interactions. This collection of essays presents a range of scholarly perspectives that elucidate the processes through which religious identity was constructed, negotiated, and contested within the context of the Byzantine world and its external relations.

Byzantium, with its rich tapestry of cultural and religious influences, serves as a critical case study for understanding the dynamics of self and otherness. The contributors to this volume engage with various aspects of Byzantine religious life, examining the impact of the empire's interactions with neighbouring cultures on its own religious identity. These interactions are explored in relation to Christian, Muslim and Jewish cultures, with contributions from G. Strano on the Armenians, L. Andriollo and M. Fanelli on Muslims and V. Déroche on Jews. By means of a series of illustrative examples, the essays examine the intricacies of dialogue and conflict, elucidating the manner in which religious beliefs and practices served as a conduit for both unity and division.

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A key theme of the volume is the concept of religious selfhood in Byzantium. The essays examine how the Byzantines defined themselves in relation to their surrounding communities, frequently utilising religious criteria to delineate the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. This self-definition was not static; rather, it evolved in response to changing political landscapes, cultural exchanges, and theological debates. The volume emphasises that the Byzantine understanding of self was inextricably linked with perceptions of the 'other', resulting in a dynamic interplay of dialogue and confrontation.

Moreover, the volume addresses the role of religious institutions and figures in mediating these interactions. The contributions emphasise the pivotal role of ecclesiastical and monastic authors in influencing the discourse on religious identity. By examining specific texts/'speeches' (see D'Amelia's essay) and historical episodes, such as the interactions between Byzantium and the Islamic world or the relationships with the Jews or the various Christian groups (Armenians, Latins), the authors reveal the multifaceted nature of religious dialogue and its implications for broader socio-political contexts.

In addition to its historical focus, *Byzantium and Its Neighbours* also engages with contemporary theoretical frameworks, drawing on concepts from postcolonial studies, identity theory, and interreligious dialogue (see in particular the editors' Introduction). This interdisciplinary approach enhances the analysis and prompts readers to consider the continued relevance of Byzantine religious dynamics in the contemporary globalised world, where issues of identity, otherness and dialogue remain pressing.

The present volume is an exemplar of the spirit and goals of the new series, Alterum Byzantium. It views Byzantium as a meeting space of culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse worlds. At the same time, it traces themes that span the entire millennium and also characterise the modern dimensions and realities *après Byzance.*

In conclusion, the inaugural volume of the new series, *Byzantium and Its Neighbours. Religious Self and Otherness in Dialogue*, represents a significant contribution to scholarship. It encourages readers to rethink the boundaries of religious identity and the potential for dialogue in a world characterised by diversity and difference. This volume is essential reading for anyone interested in the intersections of religion, culture, and history in the Byzantine era and beyond.

Venice, December 2024

Byzantium and Its Neighbours
Religious Self and Otherness in Dialogue

Byzantium and Its Neighbours
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edited by Luisa Andriollo and Luigi D'Amelia

Introduction

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Summary 1 Byzantium and the Religious Other in Dialogue: A Research Background. – 2 Methodological Approaches and Open Questions. – 3 Acknowledgements.

1 Byzantium and the Religious Other in Dialogue: A Research Background

Byzantium – Bridge Between Worlds: the 'motto' of the 24th International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Venice-Padua, 22-27 August 2022) gave pride of place to the position, at once central and liminal, of the Eastern Roman empire, situated at the heart and crossroads of traditional historiographical periodisations, geocultural boundaries, and disciplinary divides. It was under the auspices of this event – in which "reflections on the connection between Byzantium and other cultures and peoples" took centre stage –,[1] that the idea of exploring new hermeneutic approaches to the question of inter- and intra-religious interactions in the Byzantine cultural space first emerged.

The object of inquiry itself is not new, and indeed there is no shortage of studies on theological debates and religious polemics in Byzantium throughout the ages. Scholars have extensively discussed controversies over Christian dogma in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, which led to the dialectical formation of competing

1 Rigo 2022, XII.

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orthodoxies, as well as the long-standing confrontation with non-Christian religious communities, such as Jews and Muslims. However, most analyses have focused on individual religious challengers to Byzantine orthodoxy, often without extending beyond the specificities of each single debate. A comparative and broader methodological perspective has been less frequently adopted.[2] The thematic session of the Venice-Padua Congress, from which this volume of collective studies takes its title, aimed to foster such collaborative efforts and methodological reflection. The papers in this book build upon some of the subjects raised and the variety of approaches presented on that occasion.[3]

With regard to the thematic and chronological scope of this volume, we have chosen to privilege the middle and late Byzantine periods – approximately from the seventh to the fourteenth century. We have also decided to concentrate on the primary religious Others with whom the Byzantines – both intellectuals and ordinary believers – engaged, specifically Jews, Muslims, Latins, and Armenians. While a wider diachronic span is not excluded when warranted by the subject matter – such as in the case of anti-Jewish polemics –,[4] we have deliberately left aside the first Christian centuries. This choice is not only dictated by the research background and interests of the volume's editors. Our primary intention is to explore how the literary forms of religious confrontation sedimented within a cultural and political space durably and cohesively defined by its Eastern Mediterranean gravitation and adherence to Constantinopolitan orthodoxy.[5] However, it should be borne in mind that this very connotation of medieval Byzantium is itself a cultural construct, shaped by converging views of the post-classical

2 Averil Cameron's studies on the use of dialogue and possible forms of debate in late antiquity and twelfth-century Byzantium are an exception to this trend (Cameron 2014; 2016; cf. also Cameron, Gaul 2017). In the past, two volumes have accounted for Byzantine perspectives on various Christian heresies and non-Christian religions (Eleuteri, Rigo 1993, on abjuration formulas, and Rigo, Ermilov 2010, on heresy and orthodoxy in Byzantium). Additionally, in the field of Eastern Christian and Islamic studies, several collective works have taken a comprehensive approach to issues of interreligious debate: e.g. Lazarus-Yafeh et al. 1999; Cameron, Hoyland 2011; Ruani 2016.

3 Due to various reasons, it was not possible to obtain the written versions of some papers delivered in Venice for inclusion in this volume. Nevertheless, we wish to thank the colleagues who participated in the session for their valuable contributions to the debate. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Marie-Hélène Blanchet for her presentation "Labelling the Orthodox Unionists 'Latinophrones', 'Greco-Latins', or 'Latins': A Making Process of 'Otherness'?", Joe Glynias for "Asceticism Across Religious Barriers on the Black Mountain Outside Antioch", and Manolis Ulbricht for his participation in the joint paper with Marco Fanelli, "A Diachronic Evaluation of the Islamic Rites in Byzantine Anti-Islamic Literature from the 7th to the 15th Century".

4 See the chapter by Vincent Déroche in this volume.

5 On orthodoxy as a form of cultural identity in Byzantium, cf. Magdalino 2010; additional bibliography in D'Amelia's paper in this volume.

Eastern Roman empire. These views include the East Roman self-conscious claim to right belief and a role of spiritual leadership within Christianity; Western perceptions of the empire's 'Greekness' and cultural alterity; and our modern understanding of Byzantium as a space of imbrication and entanglement between East and West, geographically, politically and culturally.

Despite the ambiguities that these overlapping understandings of Byzantium may entail, they serve our purpose insofar as, during the period under consideration, the Eastern empire emerges as a distinct cultural subject through processes of exclusion, differentiation, and opposition to neighbouring cultural and religious communities. The latter included Christian Churches not in communion with the patriarchate of Constantinople, such as the non-Chalcedonian Church of Armenia and the Latin Christianity loyal to the papacy, as well as non-Christian groups like Jews and Muslims.[6] This chosen focus thus enables us to observe tendencies and practices in both intra- and inter-religious debate from a *longue durée* perspective, spanning linguistic divides and constantly shifting geopolitical boundaries. Within this range of cross-cultural interactions, which can be considered significant though not exhaustive, we sought to highlight the following two main issues.

On the one hand, it is significant to observe how parallel processes of self-definition and 'othering' operated at conceptual, logical, and discursive levels, and in relation to various interlocutors. Broadly speaking, collective identities are constructed through the acceptance of and adherence to a set of values that are typically aligned with the interests and ideologies of a dominant social and cultural elite.[7] These factors of collective self-identification become clearer and more effective when placed in dialectical relationship to alternative or conflicting worldviews and beliefs. As Paul Magdalino has noted, consensus around models of correct doctrine is both exclusive and reactive: "it must exclude dissent, but it depends for its existence on the continued presence, within or beyond its territorial boundaries, of the dissenters or their proxies".[8] The confrontation with competing religious traditions provided the Byzantines with 'negative' touchstones for self-definition: it allowed them to reinforce or redefine group identity by pointing to instances of conformity and nonconformity with the upheld religious norm.

6 The relationship on the ground between Constantinopolitan orthodoxy and the Eastern Christian Churches – the Nestorian Church of the East and, notably, the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) Church and the Egyptian Coptic Church – would deserve further investigation: for some references, see Andriollo's paper in this volume.

7 On the conceptual connection between the notions of collective identity and dominant ideology, see D'Amelia in this volume.

8 Magdalino 2010, 21.

On the other hand, it is worth considering how this dialectical relationship was translated into discursive forms and textual typologies. Which literary genres, rhetorical tropes, and linguistic registers were employed to articulate the relationship and communication (imaginary or real) with religious Others into writing? Under what circumstances, and for what reasons, were certain linguistic and textual modes prioritised over others? Simon Goldhill and Averil Cameron have respectively questioned and defended the possibility of a genuine debate and open-ended dialogue in post-classical culture and Christian literary production.[9] We might ask, following Cameron, whether Christians truly engaged in dialogue; but, more importantly, we should ask why Christians continued to compose polemical and apologetic dialogues addressed to a variety of religious interlocutors, even when these texts appear to be little more than fictional and repetitive rhetorical exercises. Was this 'thinking (and writing) with the Other' – in the form of dialogues, letters, and treatises – merely "a cognitive exercise of Christian self-definition", in the words of Averil Cameron,[10] or did it serve other needs and functions as well?

In addressing these questions through a selection of case studies or by outlining specific research paths, our aim was not primarily to provide a further review of the themes and arguments used in debates with particular religious groups. Rather, we sought to shed light on the cross-cutting conceptual dynamics and recurring rhetorical structures that underpin different instances of interreligious confrontation. While these were the initial questions that prompted our initiative, the studies collected in this volume raise a number of additional, related issues.

2 Methodological Approaches and Open Questions

The case studies or research avenues discussed in this volume provide examples of possible approaches to the sources under consideration and address fundamental methodological problems. These approaches pertain both to the texts as literary objects and to the contexts in which they were written and read.

A first question concerns the definition and classification of literary debates within specific genre categories. The sources examined in the following chapters demonstrate that different textual typologies could express a fundamental dialogical impulse. For instance, texts styled as dialogues could include sections that are closer to short treatises or invectives, as shown in the examples studied by

9 Cf. Goldhill 2009; Cameron 2013; 2014.

10 Cameron 2016, 130.

Luisa Andriollo and Marco Fanelli. Vincent Déroche discusses typical polemical dialogues *adversus Ioudaeos*, but also texts that resist easy labelling, such as the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*. Gioacchino Strano reconstructs the negotiations and debates between the Armenian and the Byzantine Churches, which unfolded through the exchange of diplomatic letters, the writing of dogmatic treatises, and the recording of actual historical debates. While we can still wonder why a specific textual format, especially the dialogue, was chosen over other literary alternatives, it may be methodologically and heuristically useful to adopt a broad understanding of dialogue literature and to regard it as a "discursive matrix" open to generic contamination and variation.[11] What Luigi D'Amelia, building upon Ioannis Polemis' considerations on Byzantine invective, contends about the linguistic expressions of hate speech could also apply to dialogue broadly defined: without denying the existence of canonical model texts, generic labels most often amount to theoretical abstractions,[12] whereas what is found in literary practice is the application of more flexible textual and linguistic 'modes'.

This observation raises two further issues. On the one hand, it is worth considering the relationship of Byzantine inter- and intra-religious polemics to tradition and the meaning of 'originality' in this context. On the other hand, the potential 'openness' of these texts invites us to reconsider notions of authority and authorship in relation to them.

In his chapter, Marco Fanelli discusses Adel-Theodore Khoury's widely accepted interpretation of the historical development of Byzantine anti-Islamic polemical literature. He questions a concept of 'originality' that largely overlaps with ideas of cultural identity and adherence to a tradition untainted by external (especially Western) influences. Fanelli argues that changing historical contexts may leave discernible marks on Byzantine anti-Islamic polemics, resulting in novel interpretations of Muslim practices and new arguments. Yet even when our sources seem to rehearse familiar *topoi* and traditional themes, innovation can emerge through the variation, selection, recombination, and resemantisation of inherited material.[13] Vincent Déroche illustrates a wide range of possibilities for such selective reuse of anti-Jewish arguments, showing that even the most 'timeless' and trivial ones can be decontextualised and find renewed relevance when circumstances allow. Thus, anti-Jewish *topoi* can be sharpened as weapons against the iconoclasts and, similarly, derogatory

11 Cf. Papadoyannakis 2006, 98.

12 Agapitos 2003, 10-11.

13 For such an understanding of innovation, which seems a more appropriate concept than the anachronistic one of originality, cf. Agapitos 2003, 9-11.

epithets and expressions already applied to Muslims can be reused against other enemies. As Luigi D'Amelia recalls, examples of such a process of 'cross-fertilisation of hate words' could extend further, being directed at different polemical targets at various times.

If, as we have seen, polemical literature stands at the crossroads of multiple genres and textual forms, the structural connection between polemical dialogues and question-and-answer literature[14] may help elucidate the mechanisms underlying the narrative construction of these texts and their subsequent reworkings. Notably, both types of texts seem to share a "loose structure and add-on nature".[15] Thus, a significant portion of the anti-Jewish literature discussed by Vincent Déroche, as well as the anti-Islamic *Dialogue* analysed by Luisa Andriollo, appears open to the recombination of arguments from earlier works, to rephrasing, rewriting, and the inclusion of more or less discernible additions. The pseudepigraphic attributions under which many of these texts circulated may account for their survival and continued transmission. However, this did not prevent significant editorial interventions, so that polemical works often appear as stratified textual constructions; in such cases, we might aptly resort to the concept of a 'distributive authorship'.[16]

Of course, it is not enough to identify recurring structural features in our sources. Interpretations are needed that relate the production of these works to the historical circumstances and social contexts in which they were written and read. It is crucial to identify the audiences initially addressed by this literature, as well as its subsequent *milieux* of circulation and reception. Indeed, geographical, social and chronological factors played a fundamental role in determining the aims and functions of these texts, and how they could be updated or reinvented over time. The studies collected in this volume clearly demonstrate, if further proof were needed, that context shapes meaning: gaining insight into the concerns and interests of the readers enables us to look beyond the often repetitive and conventional surface of much Byzantine theological polemics, thereby revealing its significance and urgency for its Byzantine audiences.

14 Papadoyannakis 2006; Efthymiadis 2017.

15 Papadoyannakis 2006, 94.

16 Toth 2014, 101-2, and Andriollo in this volume, 15-92.

3 Acknowledgements

To conclude this brief introduction, we would like to express our gratitude to the scientific board of the newly founded Venetian series "Alterum Byzantium", for which we are honoured to present this volume as its inaugural issue. We would also like to thank our colleagues Marco Bais, Luca Farina, Martin Hinterberger, Johannes Pahlitzsch, Michel-Yves Perrin, Davide Scotto, Roman Shliakhtin, Chiara Tommasi, David Zakarian, and Niccolò Zorzi, for accepting and diligently fulfilling their roles as reviewers.

We are also indebted to the administrative offices of the Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Antichità of Sapienza University of Rome and to the staff of Edizioni Ca' Foscari for their exceptional professionalism and support throughout the publication process. Finally, a special acknowledgment is due to the Italian Ministry of University and Research and to the European Union-NextGenerationEU, for their financial support to this work.

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Hate Speech, Ethnoreligious Prejudices, and Stereotypes in Byzantine Literature
Outline of an Ongoing Research Project

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Abstract In this article, the Author presents the theoretical framework for the research project *LiDoBIPH: A Linguistic Dossier of Byzantine Interreligious and Interconfessional Prejudice and Hatred*. The project examines Greek derogatory verbs and epithets used by Byzantine writers to describe Muslims and Latins. It focuses on terms found in Byzantine literature from the seventh to the mid-fourteenth century (anti-Islamic) and from the ninth to the early thirteenth century (anti-Latin). The framework includes an overview of the historiographical debate on identity and alterity in Byzantine studies and evaluates the concept of hate speech and its socio-psychological implications. It also proposes a distinction between literary invective and hate speech in Byzantine texts. Furthermore, the article discusses related studies, the adopted methodology, and the criteria for selecting the literary corpus, highlighting the project's potential contribution to Byzantine studies.

Keywords Alterity. Byzantine literature. Collective identity. Derogatory labels. Ethnic and religious stereotypes. Greek language. Hate speech. Interdisciplinarity. Invective. Latins. Methodology. Muslims. Theory.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 A Theoretical Framework. – 3 Hate Speech and Derogatory Language. – 4 Hate Speech in Byzantine Literature. – 5 Some Notes on Methodology.

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1 Introduction

The present essay provides a theoretical framework for the research project entitled *A Linguistic Dossier of Byzantine Interreligious and Interconfessional Prejudice and Hatred* (hereinafter referred to as LiDoBIPH), which I am currently carrying out at Sapienza University of Rome.[1] The LiDoBIPH project consists of a linguistic and philological-literary investigation into Greek derogatory verbs and epithets – many of which can be classified as outright insults – employed by Byzantine writers to describe or refer to Muslims and Latins, that is to say, two of the major adversaries of the Byzantine empire in a religious context. Regarding the chronological frame, the study examines this specific typology of terms in Byzantine literature from the seventh to the mid-fourteenth century – as for the anti-Islamic dossier –, and from the ninth to the early thirteenth century –, as for the anti-Latin dossier.[2] These derogatory terms do not solely convey religious-based issues, nor are they limited to explicit religious polemics (e.g., theological-controversistic writings). Instead, they are deeply rooted in, while also emphasising, the widespread perception of cultural, ethnic and 'ethical' differences between the Byzantines and the Others. Byzantine writers crafted the representations of Muslims and Latins through derogatory labels that conveyed identity-related concerns and aligned with political agendas. In Byzantine literary sources, ethnic, ethical, linguistic, religious aspects frequently intertwine and overlap, manifesting themselves in a rich array of words and expressions that recur with varying degrees of standardisation across works of all genres and periods.

This kind of language entirely fits within the sociological phenomenon known today as 'hate speech'. Moreover, the cyclical and persistent nature of such 'vocabulary' of prejudice and hatred unveils a deeply ingrained and widespread repertoire of stereotypes regarding Muslims and Latins, and it demonstrates how Byzantine authors moulded the Greek language to convey and perpetuate such stereotypes.

1 This essay develops a specific topic discussed in the paper "Language and (Hate) Speech in Byzantine Literature: Towards a Linguistic Dossier of Religious Prejudice", which I presented at the 24th International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Venice-Padua, 22-27 August 2022).

This project was awarded the 'Seal of Excellence' from the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions in both 2021 and 2022. In 2023, it was ultimately granted the Marie Skłodowska-Curie European Fellowship for Horizon 2022 (Call: HORIZON-MSCA-2022-PF-01). However, it is currently funded by the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) (Missione 4 'Istruzione e ricerca' Componente 2 'Dalla ricerca all'impresa' – Investimento 1.2 – Finanziamento di progetti presentati da giovani ricercatori – Avviso n. 247 del 19/08/2022).

2 For the rationale behind the choice of these chronological boundaries, see infra, § 5.

Each lemma of this peculiar vocabulary, predominantly made up of insults, possesses its own etymology and historical trajectory, allowing for examination of both diachronic and synchronic perspectives. This approach highlights not only its morphological and semantic evolution over time but also its nuanced variations across different contexts of usage, as explored within the framework of Historical Semantics. In relation to contexts of usage, it is relevant to consider how several actors and dynamics involved in literary communication come into play, thereby opening the door to the application of hermeneutical tools of Discourse Analysis. It becomes evident that exploring this specific aspect of Byzantine works through an interdisciplinary approach can enrich our understanding of the rhetorical mechanisms employed to shape the literary image of Muslims and Latins as 'collective identities'. Moreover, it sheds light on the psychological and sociological implications of certain rhetorical strategies within Byzantine literature, aimed at both stigmatising adversaries and fostering consensus among literary and political elites.

2 A Theoretical Framework

As is well known, since the very beginning of the Byzantine era, literature has always been a powerful and effective *instrumentum* for disseminating the political, social and religious ideology of the emperor, as well as the cultural values of the ruling class. Indeed, in societies that pre-date the emergence of printing and typically modern forms of large-scale propaganda, strategies of persuasion gained momentum through the art of literary rhetoric and writing.[3] While literary works were crafted by cultivated individuals, who constituted a distinct minority in Byzantine society, their intended audience was not always equally exclusive or confined. For instance, while readers of Byzantine historiography may be identified in "a small highly educated and self-contained cultural elite around the

3 Although "Byzantine propaganda was ubiquitous, embodied in objects, actions and words" – being enacted through different tools such as coinage, ceremonies, iconography, the use of colours, and so forth – "the word was certainly the most important means" (Kazhdan 1983, 13, 18). Koutrakou 1994 examined, among other things, the texts, themes, and impact of Byzantine imperial propaganda on 'public' opinion, with a special focus on two key audiences: the populace of Constantinople on the one hand, and the army on the other. For an examination of imperial propaganda through rhetoric during the empire of Nicaea, cf. Angelov 2007, 29-77. For some selected case studies on imperial propaganda through literary works, cf. e.g. Luzzi 1991; Odorico 2001; Paidas 2006; Koder 2008; Andriollo 2011; Spanos 2014; Kantaras 2021; Antonopoulou 2022. In close alignment with the reflections and approach outlined in my MSC proposal, Rotman 2022, esp. 201-8, 226-7, highlights the significance of rhetorical devices within Byzantine literature in shaping 'public' consensus and channelling the audience's animosity towards religious adversaries.

court and government at Constantinople",[4] in contrast, hagiographical writings,[5] hymns, and homilies[6] were primarily performed within monastic or public liturgical offices, being addressed to a much broader and diverse audience.

As predictable, when discussing the ideology propagated by a culturally or politically dominant group, one cannot overlook the notion of identity, which, albeit overused and contentious, remains readily understandable to everyone in its most prevalent meaning. Over the last decades, historians have vigorously debated the concept of identity in Byzantium. This includes enquiries into whether a singular or multiple Byzantine/Roman identity/ies existed, the manner in which it/they changed across centuries, the essential components thereof, the identities accessible to us through extant sources, and those that remain obscured; and still, whether Roman identity had a 'national', ethnic or social character, whether it was confined to a small elite in Constantinople or socially pervasive among the vast majority of the empire's population.[7] However, these questions have turned into a fashionable academic dispute, yielding a plethora of studies, which unveil a multifaceted narrative, intermittently intricate and at times perplexing, marked by a scarcity of certainties, scant coherence, and a profusion of nuances and exceptions. Nonetheless, in general terms, it can be stated that Byzantine identity is no longer regarded by scholars as a fixed and immutable conglomerate of characteristics and modes over time. Instead, it is seen as a dynamic phenomenon sensitive to contexts and contacts, whose 'ingredients' can vary in their balances and mutual (sometimes, hybrid or contradictory) relations.

In this paper, I shall refrain from engaging in such a heated historiographical debate, opting instead to initiate the discussion from a self-evident premise, namely that, in general, Byzantine literates consistently espoused certain ideals and widely acknowledged certain ideological or cultural stances – often linked to, or influenced by, the imperial office. This array of common beliefs, attitudes, and

4 Croke 2010, 53. On audiences and functions of Byzantine historiography, cf. also Lilie 2014, 201, 209; Neville 2018, 17-21.

5 On the socially differentiated audience of Byzantine hagiographical literature, cf. Efthymiades, Kalogeras (2014), with further bibliography.

6 Cf. e.g. Antonopoulou 2022, 101-2, 120. Various contributions are dedicated, among other topics, to the recipients of Byzantine homilies in Cunningham, Allen 1998.

7 To offer an overview of the extensive literature dedicated to this topic, hereafter, I will list publications from the 2000s onwards, while other select studies will be cited as needed throughout this article: Vryonis 1999; Koder 2000; 2003; 2011; 2012; De Boel 2003; Kaldellis 2007; 2017; 2019; Page 2008; Rapp 2008; Malatras 2011; Malamut 2014; Papadopoulou 2014; Stouraitis 2014; Smarnakis 2015; Vashcheva 2016; several Byzantine papers in Pohl et al. 2018; Durak, Jevtić 2019a; Steiris 2020; Müller 2022; Stewart et al. 2022.

political, ethnic, or cultural 'markers' is evidenced within literary compositions and, presumably, was embraced by both the authors and their target audience. Besides, this set of elements was not exempt from diachronic changes, and we may rightly understand it as an expression of a dynamic 'collective identity'.[8] Indeed, this communication act through literature involved, at a minimum, two indispensable participants. Firstly, the Byzantine 'literate elite', denoting with this the whole cohort of learned writers and readers.[9] Secondly, a variable spectrum of recipients, occasionally confined to a select audience, while, at other times, encompassing even the illiterate masses. As mentioned earlier, even the latter could enjoy certain literary pieces through oral performances during liturgical ceremonies and public speeches. However, whether such a collective identity holds a real or fictional character is a separate consideration: rather than objective, it appears to reflect an intellectual construct, with a discernible degree of intentionality and self-consciousness.[10] In this case, the notion of collective identity approaches that of (dominant) ideology, if we understand the latter as:

> particular programmatic sets of values and assumptions, bundles of ideas that evolved in order to legitimate and justify a particular order of things – usually a political order. In this context, ideology becomes entangled with 'identity' – that is, collective attachment to a politically organised community which is the outcome of people's adherence to a set of dominant operative ideas and values.[11]

8 One of the earliest scholarly works to examine how Byzantines portrayed themselves and their collective identity was Koder 2011. A theoretical elucidation of the contemporary concept of collective identity, drawn from sociology and applied to Byzantine studies, can also be found in Papadopoulou 2014, 161-2. This paper examines the self-concept of the Byzantines during the first half of the thirteenth century as delineated by the names Ῥωμαῖος, Ἕλλην, and Γραϊκός. For a thorough exploration of Byzantine collective identity in literary sources from the middle-Byzantine period, cf. Papadopoulou 2015, 11-59 (detailed analysis of contemporary theories of 'collective identity' and 'nation'); from the late-Byzantine period, cf., e.g., Steiris 2020. On the employment of these categories in modern and contemporary historiography on the European, Byzantine, and Arab Middle Ages, cf. Mavroudi 2022, translated into German and further developed in Mavroudi 2023. The category of collective identity offers greater suitability when compared to the more specific and contentious concept of 'national identity', cf. e.g. Papadopoulou 2014, 158-9, 162; Steiris 2020, 2-3; Jovanović 2023, 298; Stouraitis 2023.

9 In referring to the 'literate elite' here, I am consciously alluding to one of the many elites identifiable in Byzantium, which can sometimes overlap with one another, cf. Kaldellis 2017, 177. For example, in the eleventh century, the intellectual elite partly overlapped with the social elite, as many of its members held privileged positions and exerted political influence, even over the emperors, cf. e.g. Bernard 2014, 175.

10 Cf. e.g. Smythe 1996, 29.

11 Haldon, Stouraitis 2022, 9.

A dominant discourse of identification becomes apparent in those passages where Byzantine writers depict the Byzantines and the Others within the framework of a formalised, if not stereotyped, polarity.[12] The issues of otherness and alterity in Byzantium have been explored in political, legal, and socio-economic terms, as well as through the lens of ethnography,[13] but, overall, to a lesser extent if compared to the theme of Roman/Byzantine identity. On the other hand, many authors have focused on Byzantine literary views and perceptions of their neighbours/adversaries, especially on Muslims (Arabic or Turkish as well, depending on chronology)[14] and Latins.[15] Nevertheless, the dynamics of identity construction "as a response to the Other and the process of 'othering'" have not yet received much attention.[16] Therefore, one of the objectives of the LiDoBIPH project is precisely to analyse a still underexplored process of 'othering': the practice of hate speech in Byzantine literature against Muslims and Latins, when perceived as Others on religious grounds and beyond.

For our purposes, it is noteworthy that Dion C. Smythe was among the first to employ sociological theories of 'deviancy' in order to analyse the depiction of outsiders (by gender, religion, ethnicity or social position – *taxis*) in the works of some prominent Byzantine authors between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries.[17] In Smythe's studies, literature is interpreted as a reflection of the prevailing Byzantine elite ideology, fervently engaged in constructing or defending models of conformity against instances of non-conformity (both within and beyond Byzantine society), where non-conformity also represents one facet of otherness. Such an interpretation of Byzantine literary works underpins LiDoBIPH's approach to its sources.

12 As pointed out by Koder 2011, 69, a "separation of auto- and heterostereotypes is impossible, because the self-sight of individual or collective identity becomes clear-cut only by comparison with the 'Other', be it in similarities or in contrasts; it is formed in reaction to the behaviour or the policy of others"; cf. also Müller 2022, 6-9; Durak, Jevtić 2019b, 10-21.

13 Cf., e.g., the various articles by Angelike E. Laiou from the 1990s, posthumously collected in Laiou 2012; Kaldellis 2013.

14 For the perspective relevant here, I confine myself to citing, e.g., Jeffreys 1986; 2004; Koutrakou 1993; 2009; Letsios 2009; Sahas 1997; 1998; Ducellier 2001, 136-8, 272-6 (on Byzantine stereotypes regarding Muslims); Stavrakos 2013; Leszka 2019; Hassan 2013.

15 As for the image of Latins in Byzantine literature, cf. e.g. Hunger 1987; Schreiner 1992; Hörandner 1993; Gounaridis 1994; Schmitt 1997; Kazhdan 2001; Jeffreys, Jeffreys 2001; Kolbaba 2001; Spadaro 2008; Koder 2002; Kislinger 2008; Messis 2011; Tounta 2010 (limited to the period from 1017-18 until 1086); Hinterberger 2011; 2022; Papadopoulou 2012; Cupane 2015; Mitsiou 2015; Pełech 2016; Neocleous 2020; Szegvári 2020; Müller 2022.

16 Durak, Jevtić 2019b, 9.

17 Smythe 1992; 1996; 1997.

The efficacy of these narratives of the Self and the Others, and the extent to which they were received and embraced by all subjects of the empire beyond the literate elite centred around the capital and the imperial court, can be a matter of discussion. Similarly, one should not assume that Byzantine literate elite had any real intention or interest in promoting its worldview outside its own narrow circle.[18] Nonetheless, the collective identity surfacing in Byzantine literature, although hardly representative of the entire Byzantine society, clearly embodies a self-perception – or, at least, a desire for self-representation – of the literate elite.

At this juncture, one might also wonder about the extent to which the ideological propaganda disseminated in Byzantine literature effectively guided the thoughts of its readers and listeners, influencing events and behaviours. To this question, a possible answer comes from a recent essay by Dionysios Stathakopoulos on violence and the formation of collective identity in late twelfth-century Byzantium.[19] The implicit assumption from which the scholar initiates his enquiry is that one of the key components of Byzantine collective identity is undoubtedly the Christian (Orthodox) faith, although, as underlined by several scholars, the 'religious marker' was neither sufficient on its own, nor the most important one for every Byzantine in every period.[20] From the late eleventh century onwards, in the formation of a Byzantine collective identity, a substantial role is accorded to the dynamic of interactions and conflicts with Westerners, notably the Normans and the Crusaders: "Despite (or perhaps as a result of) close proximity, the self-perception of each side [*scil.* Greeks and Latins] crystallised into a form that was unlike, or even the polar opposite of, that Other".[21] Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that the Byzantine identity discourse within the political-intellectual elite began to emphasise ethno-cultural connotations, alongside religious divergences, as a result of the escalating conflictual relations with the Venetians and, more broadly, the Latins. Naturally, this emphasis gained even greater significance – at times taking on a mythologised character – after the events of 1204.

18 Cf. Smythe 1992, 15, 20-1; 1996, 34-6; 1997, 230-1; Stouraitis 2014, 197, 204, 212; Müller 2022, 7-8, 42-3. On this topic, cf. also Koder 2022.

19 Stathakopoulos 2022.

20 The role of the Christian religion, particularly in comparison to Islam, and that of orthodoxy – in contrast, for example, to the Latin faith – in shaping Byzantine identity, is a topic naturally addressed in nearly all the publications listed in fn. 7. According to Paul Magdalino, "[t]he Orthodox faith certainly meant more to the majority of Byzantines than the other components of their identity, their Roman imperial tradition and their Hellenic culture" (Magdalino 2010, 22). However, as recently highlighted by Jovanović 2023, 299, in late Byzantium, "religion gradually stopped being one of the fundamental criteria for distinguishing Byzantines from other (above all, Western) Christians"; cf. also Steiris 2020, 10 (references to Trapezuntius' statements); Müller 2022, 23-4.

21 Stathakopoulos 2022, 269.

In tackling this combination of ethnoreligious differences between Greeks and Latins, Stathakopoulos has drawn inspiration from the theoretical and methodological reflections of sociologist Rogers Brubaker and political scientist David D. Laitin on ethnic violence.[22] Focusing on two bloody events preceding the sack of Constantinople in 1204 – namely, the massacre of the Latins in Constantinople (1182) and the sack and occupation of Thessalonike by the Normans (1185) – Stathakopoulos has examined the relationship between (actually perpetrated) violence, as described in the sources (Eustathios of Thessalonike and William of Tyre, the latter providing an account only for the massacre of the Latins), and the process of collective identity formation.[23] Stathakopoulos emphasises that these two pivotal events – which are often linked together and seen as a precursor of the fourth Crusade in scholarly literature – are, in fact, quite different.[24] The massacre of the resident Latins in Constantinople, instigated by the usurper Andronikos Komnenos, is interpreted by Stathakopoulos as "a case of violence meted out to a minority group with a distinct ethnic and religious background […] by a mercenary force and an urban mob representing the dominant ethnic group of the empire".[25] Conversely, Thessalonike was primarily targeted for strategic reasons and as a lucrative urban centre for looting.[26] Nevertheless, bringing into focus the ethnoreligious 'veining' of such enacted violence offers valuable insights into its process and manifestations.[27] According to Stathakopoulos,

> we are confronted with a wide range of violent acts that transcend the usual repertoire of violence in warfare. They constitute instances of ritualized violence encompassing the violation or desecration of sacred spaces, times, or objects, as well as the manifestation of power through disrespect and humiliation, including upon the bodies of the ethnoreligious Other.[28]

Indeed, in comparing the sacrilegious acts of violence committed by both the Byzantines against the Latins and the Normans against the inhabitants of Thessalonike, Stathakopoulos highlights the

22 Brubaker, Laitin 1998.

23 For insights into why the scholar finds the acts of violence described in the referenced sources credible, cf. Stathakopoulos 2022, 274.

24 Cf. Stathakopoulos 2022, 270, 272. On the accounts on the massacre of the Latins in Constantinople in 1182, cf. also Müller 2022, 113-20.

25 Stathakopoulos 2022, 272.

26 Cf. Stathakopoulos 2022, 273, 277-8.

27 Cf. Stathakopoulos 2022, 277-8.

28 Stathakopoulos 2022, 276.

ethnoreligious manifestations of prejudice, if not outright hatred. As he suggests, some of these acts, despite arising from opposite perspectives, "clearly echo items found in the popular literature of prejudice, for example, the lists of errors of the Latins circulated in Byzantium".[29] It is as if "the discourse leapt off the page and into the streets".[30] Naturally – cautions the scholar –, the correspondence between the acts of violence and the motifs found in the literature of prejudice cannot be definitively linked in a direct cause-and-effect relationship. Nonetheless, such literary motifs might be regarded "as a narrative strategy to reinforce the discourse of difference".[31] Indeed, the culturalist analyses of ethnic violence generally characterise the latter as "culturally constructed, discursively mediated, socially saturated, and ritually regulated".[32] This issue pertains to the cultural construction of fear, a theme widely discussed, for example, in social psychology. As explained by Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin:

> one major focus of attention [of culturalist analyses] has been on the cultural construction of fear, on rhetorical processes, symbolic resources, and representational forms through which a demonized, dehumanized, or otherwise threatening ethnically defined 'other' has been constructed. […] Once such ethnically focused fear is in place, ethnic violence no longer seems random or meaningless but all too horrifyingly meaningful.[33]

Moreover, the culturalist approach to ethnic violence has acknowledged the crucial role of elites "in engendering ethnic insecurity through highly selective and often distorted narratives and representations, the deliberate planting of rumors, and so on".[34]

At this juncture, beyond the effective capacity of the discourse of difference to transcend written texts and impact historical events, it is crucial to recognise the presence of another type of violence, which resides within language, words, and literature. Whether such verbal violence preceded, accompanied, or followed physical acts of violence, thereby mutually reinforcing each other, is a distinct and

29 On the Byzantine lists of Latin errors, cf. Kolbaba 2000.

30 Stathakopoulos 2022, 279.

31 Stathakopoulos 2022, 280.

32 Brubaker, Laitin 1998, 441.

33 Brubaker, Laitin 1998, 442.

34 Brubaker, Laitin 1998, 442. On the cultural establishment of 'Islamophobia' in Byzantine society, cf. Merantzas 2013. Regarding the purported 'endemic' Byzantine animosity against the Latins, cf., e.g., Garland 1992, esp. 34-8; Simpson 1999, 64-82; Neocleous 2013; 2020; Müller 2022, 450-61.

challenging question. This question involves the so-called performative and 'perlocutionary' dimension of hate speech,[35] a topic extensively debated in contemporary societies across diverse fields of study, both theoretically and in relation to dramatic acts of violence stemming from intolerance and hatred. Therefore, it is worth considering the potential insights and contributions that adopting the interpretative perspective of hate speech could provide to this specific aspect, which, as previously noted,[36] embodies a process of 'othering'.

3 Hate Speech and Derogatory Language

Hate speech is a topic extensively investigated across diverse disciplines including sociology, law, psychology, and philosophy of language. Its notion encompasses a diverse array of verbal or non-verbal manifestations of hatred – words/phrases, as well as images, symbols, caricatures, and gestures –, intentionally wielded in any language to strike, wound, ridicule, or humiliate the Others. However, hate speech can also be practised unintentionally. Such linguistic devices frequently serve to virtually confine the Others to a state of inferiority, control, or subordination. It goes without saying that the most direct and conspicuous manifestation of hate speech takes shape through insults.[37]

Hate speech is primarily directed towards collective entities (e.g., ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender, sexual groups) or individuals who are seen as representatives of those entities. It specifically concerns, therefore, the social dimension of verbal violence. The identification of social groups often coalesces into an entrenched litany of ideas, stereotypes and prejudices, i.e., characteristics of the groups that are either real or perceived as such. In this framework, language plays a fundamental role in creating, shaping, and modifying identities, both individual and collective, and can thus be extensively employed in constructing or consolidating the discourse of difference.

35 See infra, § 3.

36 See supra in this section.

37 For a discussion of the various definitions, forms and effects of hate speech, cf. e.g. Neu 2008, 153-61 and passim; Waldron 2012; Brown 2017a; 2017b; Mihajlova et al. 2013; Kareem al-Utbi 2019, esp. 21-3; Bianchi 2014b; 2015; 2021; Cepollaro 2015; Brambilla, Crestani 2021, 86-98; Fronzi 2023. Vergani et al. (2024) underscore, among other things, how definitions and measurement tools within the research on hate speech tend to focus more on ethnic and religious identities (e.g., racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia) compared to sexual, gender, and disability-related identities. Finally, when discussing hate speech, one cannot overlook the seminal work of Butler 1997.

As is known, in contemporary society hate speech represents one of the foremost plagues afflicting social networks.[38] An emblematic example is provided by the former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's tweet about Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz, and Mario Draghi's visit to Zelensky on 16th June 2022: "European fans of frogs, liverwurst, and spaghetti love visiting Kiev". Medvedev's post resorted to short and pointed labels, based on ethno-cultural trivial commonplaces concerning alleged eating habits. This episode naturally needs to be placed in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has exacerbated the dichotomy between East and West (presented as a political, military, and cultural threat), Russian orthodoxy vs. Catholicism or other Orthodox Churches. However, in a certain way, it apparently echoes the typical Greek-Byzantine way of crafting a verbal attack against the Others, in this case, the Westerners. French, German, and Italian people are treated as 'unified entities', as 'blocks of people who are unlike' Russians, to paraphrase, respectively, Alexander Kazhdan's and Dionysios Stathakopoulos' remarks on Byzantine-Latin relations in the twelfth century.[39]

Returning to the notion of hate speech, as philosophers of language point out, language goes beyond merely mirroring reality (descriptive function). Rather, it can actively shape and mould it (performative function).[40] The performative function becomes more effective when, through speech acts, language is utilised by a dominant elite or a group of power.[41] In this case, it can also assume a 'normative' character, ordering reality according to specific patterns and labels, which reflect the dominant ideology.[42]

Words have the potential to inflict harm, akin the stones thrown to cause injury, and not infrequently they trigger acts of violence. This represents the primary and most obvious goal of hate speech. Nonetheless, there is a second dimension, more relevant to our purposes, which could be defined as 'propagandistic'. It emerges when language is aimed at affirming a specific identity – be it political, cultural, ethnic, or religious – and allegiance to the dominant group

38 Studies on this matter are plentiful. Restricting ourselves to those published in more recent years, cf., e.g., Nazmine Khan et al. 2021 (on religious or gender-based attacks); Castaño-Pulgarín et al. 2021; Paasch-Colberg 2021; Pacelli 2021 (with several articles focused on this topic); Sheth et al. 2022; Gracia-Calandín et al. 2023; Lupu et al. 2023; cf. also the monographs by Bromell 2022 and Ermida 2023.

39 Cf. Kazhdan 2001, 86; Stathakopoulos 2022, 269.

40 A classical reference is Austin 1962; cf. also Bianchi 2014a.

41 Cf., e.g., Weiss, Wodak 2003, 14.

42 From this perspective, the words expressing hate speech can also be considered within the semiotic category of 'ideologems', understood as "words that convey ideological marks" (Segre 1988, 119) as well as "segnali o indizi della presenza di una posizione ideologica o discorsiva [nel testo]" (Bernardelli 2010, 12); cf. also Smythe 1992, 101.

vis-à-vis a discriminated or marginalised counterpart. In this case, hate speech clearly assumes the role of propaganda, because it 'publicises' discriminatory assertions by presenting them as widespread and objective, thereby legitimising them. Consequently, hate speech is employed not solely for the purpose of injuring the Others, but also to relegate them to roles of inferiority and subordination, stigmatising and dehumanising them. In such performative effect, hate speech goes beyond the mere expression of hostility, derision, or contempt towards the Others: it undertakes a form of 'proselytism', inciting discrimination and fostering violence.

In this regard, some empirical studies have shown how hate speech directed towards a particular social group can also affect individuals who do not belong to the targeted group. When these individuals witness hate speech – as bystanders, listeners, or readers –, both their perception of the 'victims'[43] and their self-conception and behaviour can be altered.[44] Hence, the use of hate speech can be aimed at directly harming the targeted group, as well as at encouraging others to share a certain derogatory or discriminatory perspective on that group. As a result, hate speech reinforces individuals' adherence to the dominant viewpoint, strengthens their own identity, widens the gap between them and the Others, and fosters polarisation.[45] From this perspective, hate speech can certainly – and most of the time does – tell us more about the speaker than the target of hatred.[46] The philosopher Lynne Tirrell, known for her research on the utilisation of denigratory epithets during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, where the Hutu targeted the Tutsi minority ethnic group, elucidates the mechanisms (especially violence acts) that such terms can trigger, when directed at human beings. She asserts that

> using such terms helps to construct a strengthened 'us' for the speakers, weakens the targets, and thus reinforces or even realigns social relations [...]. Such speech acts establish and reinforce a system of permissions and prohibitions that fuel social hierarchy.[47]

As earlier mentioned, hate speech is pervasive in the realm of social networks, where it takes on a special emphasis due to two phenomena which data scientists have termed the 'confirmation bias'

43 Cf. e.g. Greenberg, Pyszczynski 1985; Kirkland 1987.

44 Cf. e.g. Carnaghi et al. 2011; Fasoli et al. 2012; 2015.

45 Cf. Bianchi 2018, 192-6.

46 In light of this, one could speak of 'forms of hatred in the first-person plural', cf. Moss 2003.

47 Tirrell 2012, 174-5. Cf. also Tirrell 2013.

and the 'echo chamber effect'. In disseminating and selecting information on the web, the confirmation bias represents the innate human inclination to seek out information that reaffirms pre-existing beliefs.[48] Indeed, despite the vast array of available information on the internet, online users tend to segregate into 'bubbles', each characterised by its own narrative and perspective. Such 'bubbles' are commonly referred to as 'echo chambers'.[49] Within the latter, individuals who share the same interests converge, selectively consume information, engage in discussions, and bolster their beliefs around a collectively accepted worldview. The dissemination of information is steered by both confirmation bias and 'homophily', the tendency for individuals to associate and create connections with those who are like them. Consequently, users gravitate towards polarised groups whose members share a common narrative, and within these echo chambers, they assimilate information that aligns with their worldview.[50]

At this point, one might venture to enquire whether these concepts, drawn from other disciplinary domains and concisely presented here, could find applicability, or suggest parallels within our own research context, potentially offering a valuable interpretative framework. Let us start with the initial observation that gave rise to the idea for this project. The present research focuses on the extensive use of derogatory nouns, adjectives, and verbs by Byzantine authors against two specific targets: Muslims and Latins. These lexical elements are recurrent and pervasive within the Byzantine 'literary system', where citations, allusions, metaphrases, and other re-writing techniques engender an endless interplay of linguistic and lexical echoes.[51] Consequently, derogatory terms often con-

48 Cf. e.g. Nickerson 1998; Oswald, Grosjean 2004.

49 Cf. e.g. Del Vicario et al. 2016; Cinelli et al. 2021b.

50 On the behavioural tendencies of online users within toxic debates and in relation to hate speech on the Internet, cf. e.g. Cinelli et al. 2021a; Dyda, Paleta 2023; Avalle et al. 2024.

51 Interestingly enough, Kareem al-Utbi (2019, 33), focusing specifically on hate speech against Muslims on Facebook, has demonstrated the difficulty in accurately assessing the extent of posts published by online users against Islam, precisely because they are "being overused again and again on many other pages on Facebook". Furthermore, Kareem al-Utbi has noted that recurrent issues in the hate posts against Muslims pertain to their beliefs and religious and disciplinary practices (e.g., the Quran, the mosque, veiled women, prayer performance, and *halal*). Should such a juxtaposition appear daring to some, I would draw attention to the study by Palermo (2020). In this paper, the author compares the linguistic expression of insults in medieval Tuscan texts with selected examples of hate speech from an online case study. The analysis underscores, among other things, the enduring stability of semantic domains related to offense. According to the author, such stability would illustrate the persistence of premodern cultural elements and their resurgence through the remediation offered by social media platforms.

tribute to the formation of a formulaic and standardised language that, alongside rarer or less conventional words, constitutes a vocabulary of hatred.

Without intending to draw forced and anachronistic parallels, one might enquire as to the purpose or, at the very least, the unintended effect of this pervasive hateful language within Byzantine works. Referring back to the aforementioned discussion, it can be inferred that the primary objective of Byzantine hate speech was not to 'harm' the polemical targets, namely Muslims or Latins. In fact, the vast majority of such writings were intended to be read/heard – and could only be understood – by other Byzantines. Therefore, one might then consider whether the propagandistic function of hate speech comes into play, as well as the effect of consciously or unconsciously solidifying the readers'/listeners' allegiance to a dominant group, namely the Byzantine intellectual elite and its particular viewpoint. In this respect, and to make what may seem a rather bold analogy, but which I believe will prove effective, it can be argued that the Byzantine 'literary system' functioned in a similar way to the echo chamber described above.

Lastly, it would be beneficial to offer a brief additional clarification, or rather, to articulate a desideratum for future research. In general, the study of hate speech in Byzantine literature against Muslims and Latins (but also against other polemical targets, such as Jews or Armenians) would greatly benefit from the application of various methodological approaches and interpretative perspectives offered by Discourse Analysis, including, among others, Historical Discourse Analysis (HDS, also termed 'New Philology')[52] and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).[53] The application of these perspectives and method-

52 The Discourse Analysis has been employed across diverse fields of ancient studies, undergoing a significant development in the domains of Biblical exegesis and linguistics, cf., e.g., Porter, Carson 1995; Porter, Reed 1999; Lee 2010; Runge 2010; Varner 2010; Stovell 2012, 137-52, 183-98, 224-41, 258-68, 281-93; Scacewater 2020; Starwalt 2020; Kurschner 2022; Porter, O' Donnell 2024. Furthermore, there are instances of theoretical reflections on and attempts to apply Discourse Analysis to patristic texts, cf., e.g., Perdicoyianni-Paléologou 2002; Osseforth 2017; Gomola 2018; Hovorun 2020, as well as to the *Acts* of the Councils, cf. e.g. Amirav 2015. In this respect, I also highlight the still unpublished doctoral thesis by Gaetano Spampinato, *Les pratiques rituelles comme marqueurs d'identités: la construction de la 'ritualité hérétique' dans le Panarion d'Épiphane de Salamine* (Université de Fribourg, 2023). This work analyses how late antique heresiologists, particularly Epiphanius of Salamis and his *Panarion*, constructed the image of heretics through their descriptions of (real or imagined) rituals from the fourth century onwards. This enquiry into ritual practices as presented in heresiological texts has revealed, according to Spampinato, the development of a "heresiological model", which influenced both late antique and later authors in how they portrayed Otherness (e.g., John of Damascus and the Ishmaelites – the Muslims).

53 Cf., e.g., Gee 2011, 8-10, 68-9; Brinton 2001; Van Dijk 2001; cf. also Wodak, Reisigl 2009. Particularly interesting in this context is the usefulness of a socio-cognitive

ologies would facilitate the analysis of units of language higher than single (hate) words or sentences, considering how authors used those units of language to accomplish communicative purposes. In essence, it would contribute to establishing a more profound comprehension, across various levels, of how Byzantine writers employed writing to carry out actions, construct collective identities, and influence related perceptions. For instance, from the realm of CDA, the analytical model developed by Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl could be beneficial, describing types of discursive strategies employed for both positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.[54]

However, a single scholar could conduct such an analysis on a single work or, at most, on a limited corpus of writings, for which there may already be, ideally, a modern translation (a circumstance not at all guaranteed in Byzantine studies). Instead, as previously stated, LiDoBIPH aims to catalogue and analyse minimal units of language (lexemes), which are relatively easier to identify within a much larger corpus of sources among those digitised and lemmatised in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (*TLG*) *Online*. It goes without saying that such words need to be examined in their semantic context, paying attention to recurring phrases, manners of speech and argumentative patterns. The *TLG*, indeed, facilitates the investigation of co-occurrences and, consequently, makes the study of multi-layered concepts particularly fruitful. Consequently, historical-semantic analysis will be complemented by quantitative investigation.[55]

4 Hate Speech in Byzantine Literature

The understanding of hate speech has also evolved in the modern debate on the dangers associated with unbridled and reckless freedom of speech.[56] Nonetheless, the question itself is not novel, paralleling concerns such as those surrounding the practice of παρρησία

approach to critical discourse studies, when analysing collective identities, highlighted by Koller 2012.

54 For example, Wodak and Reisigl (2001, 585) distinguish, among other things, 'nomination strategies', which "construct and represent social actors […] via membership categorization devices, including making reference by tropes, such as naturalizing and depersonalizing metaphors and metonymy, as well as by synecdoche", and 'predicational strategies', realised, for instance, "as stereotypical attributions of negative and positive traits in the linguistic form of implicit or explicit predicates".

55 For some experimental computational approaches to Historical Semantics and History of Concepts, cf., e.g., Cimino et al. 2015; Wevers, Koolen 2020; Perrone et al. 2021. For some case studies focused on single words, cf., e.g., Schwandt 2015; Geelhaar 2015; Keersmaekers, Van Hal 2021.

56 For example, on the relationship between freedom of speech and religious hate speech within European anti-Islamic rhetoric, cf. Howard 2018.

'freedom of speech' in ancient democratic Athens.[57] For instance, it appears that a problem akin – but *not* identical – to our today's issue of hate speech existed and was even legally regulated in ancient Athens. This would be evidenced, for example, by the γραφὴ ὕβρεως 'suit for slander', which permitted the prosecution of individuals who had committed acts of *hybris* against another person.[58] Unlike hate speech in its technical sense, which targets a group based on shared feelings of alterity and hostility, practices such as defamation and false accusation focus on personal grievances against an individual. However, the definition of *hybris* in this kind of accusation, namely whether it encompassed solely physical harm and actions or it extended to disrespectful speech that could bring dishonour upon the victim, remains unclear.[59] Such kinds of verbal attacks abound in classical Greek literature. The Greeks referred to them using a diverse vocabulary:[60] αἰσχρολογία 'shameful speech', βλασφημία 'defamation, slander', διαβολή 'false accusation, slander, prejudice', σκώμματα 'jests, jibes', λοιδορία 'railing, abuse, reproach', κακολογία / κακηγορία 'evil-speaking, abuse, slander', ὕβρις 'deliberate affront to another's honour', or the verb κωμῳδέω 'satirise, lampoon, ridicule'.[61] Particularly interesting is

57 Cf., e.g., Sluiter, Rosen 2004; Saxonhouse 2006; Bejan 2019, esp. 98-102. However, this topic has also been investigated in relation to the Latin late antique and early medieval period, cf. Van Renswoude 2019.

58 Cf. Demosthenes, *In Midiam*, 32: Ἴστε δήπου τοῦθ' ὅτι τῶν θεσμοθετῶν τούτων οὐδενὶ θεσμοθέτης ἔστ' ὄνομα, ἀλλ' ὁτιδήποθ' ἑκάστῳ. ἂν μὲν τοίνυν ἰδιώτην ὄντα τιν' αὐτῶν ὑβρίσῃ τις ἢ κακῶς εἴπῃ, γραφὴν ὕβρεως καὶ δίκην κακηγορίας ἰδίαν φεύξεται, ἐὰν δὲ θεσμοθέτην, ἄτιμος ἔσται καθάπαξ. διὰ τί; ὅτι τοὺς νόμους ἤδη ὁ τοῦτο ποιῶν προσυβρίζει καὶ τὸν ὑμέτερον κοινὸν στέφανον καὶ τὸ τῆς πόλεως ὄνομα· ὁ γὰρ θεσμοθέτης οὐδενὸς ἀνθρώπων ἔστ' ὄνομα, ἀλλὰ τῆς πόλεως "You know of course that of the judges who sit in this court none has the name of Judge, but each has some name of his own. Therefore if a man is guilty of assault or slander against anyone of them in his private capacity, he will stand his trial on an indictment for assault or in a suit for slander; but if he assails him as judge, he will incur total disfranchisement. Why so? Because at once by the mere act he is outraging your laws, your public crown of office, and the name that belongs to the State, for Judge is not a private name but a state-title" (transl. by Vince 1935, 27).

59 Saxonhouse 2006, 28 fn. 23. On this law, cf., e.g., Fisher 1992.

60 Cf. Kamen 2020, 9-10.

61 In Christian Greek, through the verb κωμῳδέω, the noun κωμῳδία came to signify not just the theatrical genre but also 'derision, mockery', cf. Lampe 1961, *s.v.* Alternatively, see the brief but famous passage in Niketas Choniates, *History*, 19.4 (τὸ δέ γε ἀντίπαλον ἐν ἀσελγείαις ἦν καὶ τρυφαῖς, καὶ τούτων ταῖς ἀσέμνοις μάλιστα καὶ τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν ἐν κωμῳδίᾳ ἐθῶν "The enemy reveled in licentious and wanton behavior, and, resorting to indecent actions, they ridiculed Roman customs" [transl. by Magoulias 1984, 326]), ed. van Dieten 1975, 594, ll. 83-5, where κωμῳδία recounts the parody of Greek customs by the Latins during the sack of Constantinople in 1204. Additionally, the same meaning of mocking and ridiculing is also conveyed by various other verbs, such as βομβάζω, διασύρω, ἐμπαίζω, χλευάζω, μωκάομαι, σκώπτω, τωθάζω, and so forth. Some other words take on a special significance or context of usage in Christian and

the term κακολογία: κακολόγος is a 'slander', a person who speaks badly of other people.[62] The corresponding legal term, however, is κακηγόρος,[63] whose verbal root specifically implies public speech. At least in the fourth century BC, the Athenian laws prohibited to use certain words, known as ἀπόρρητα 'not to be spoken', to deliver slanderous speeches in public spaces, to disgrace the dead, and to disparage official authorities.[64]

As observed, a wide range of phenomena and topics potentially linked to hate speech have been explored in classical studies, with particular attention paid to the category of insults.[65] One can also find similar attempts to trace this phenomenon in medieval literatures.[66] However, in the field of Byzantine studies, the topic of hate speech is still understudied.[67] When examining pre-modern liter-

Byzantine Greek: among these, δυσφημέω / δυσφημία and καταλαλέω / καταλαλιά, respectively brought to my attention by Luisa Andriollo and Martin Hinterberger (whom I thank) and which I intend to investigate in another publication. However, on the semantic polyvalence of δυσφημία in ancient Greek, cf., e.g., Sandin 2018. On καταλαλέω / καταλαλιά, understood as the slandering of one's neighbour (e.g., due to envy), a sin stigmatised by the Fathers of the Desert, cf. already Wortley 2013, 732-5; cf. also Iliopoulos 2021, 71, with reference to John Klimax's list of vices, which also included καταλαλιά (John Klimax, *Ladder of Paradise*, 10, PG 88, col. 845-9).

62 Arist., *Rh.*, 1384b, also regards writers of comedy as slanderers, as they often depict the shortcomings and vices of their fellow individuals: ἐξαγγελτικοὶ δὲ οἵ τε ἠδικημένοι, διὰ τὸ παρατηρεῖν, καὶ οἱ κακολόγοι· εἴπερ γὰρ καὶ τοὺς μὴ ἁμαρτάνοντας, ἔτι μᾶλλον τοὺς ἁμαρτάνοντας. καὶ οἷς ἡ διατριβὴ ἐπὶ ταῖς τῶν πέλας ἁμαρτίαις, οἷον χλευασταῖς καὶ κωμῳδοποιοῖς· κακολόγοι γάρ πως οὗτοι καὶ ἐξαγγελτικοί "Now those who are inclined to gossip are those who have suffered wrong, because they always have their eyes upon us; and slanderers, because, if they traduce the innocent, still more will they traduce the guilty. And before those who spend their time in looking for their neighbors' faults, for instance, mockers and comic poets; for they are also in a manner slanderers and gossips" (transl. by Freese 1926, 217).

63 Cf., e.g., Dover 1997, 104-5.

64 For precise references to the sources, cf. Volt 2007, 102. On the relationship between freedom of speech and κακηγορία, cf. Guieu-Coppolani 2014.

65 In addition to Kamen 2020, which focuses on insults in daily life, some other studies have put emphasis on invective as a literary genre or trope. Most interestingly, Rosen 2007 distinguishes between the fictional essence of literary mockery and its real-life (potentially harmful) counterpart. The significance of the context (where and when an insult is delivered, by whom, and against whom) in determining the effects and degree of severity of Greek insults has been highlighted by Ressel 1998 and Bremmer 2000. Worman 2008 examines the insults directed at the mouth and its associated activities (i.e., eating, drinking, sex, talking) in classical Athens; more recently, cf. Lateiner 2017. Finally, I would like to draw attention to the oral presentation by Emiliano J. Buis, entitled "Hate Speech and its Limits in Classical Greek and Roman Sources", delivered at the conference *Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence* (Florence, 8-9 April 2022), the recording of which can be viewed online at `https://www.cilrap.org/cilrap-film/220409-buis`.

66 Cf., e.g., Pintarič 2018.

67 It is noteworthy that, although one of the eleven sessions of the second Annual International Conference on Classical and Byzantine Studies (Athens, 2019) was

atures, it should be noted that the boundary between hate speech and forms of literary invective or satire may appear unclear. Consequently, let us first attempt to better delineate and bring into focus the object of our enquiry.

In 1980, Severin Koster delineated Greek and Roman literary invective as

> eine strukturierte literarische Form, deren Ziel es ist, mit allen geeigneten Mitteln eine namentlich gennante Person öffentlich vor dem Hintergrund der jeweils geltenden Werte und Normen als Persönlichkeit herabzusetzen,[68]

a distinct literary genre tailored for the purpose of disparaging individuals within the framework of contemporary ethical and moral standards. The same definition is essentially applicable to Byzantine literary invective as well. Certain features of Byzantine invective have been recently outlined by Ioannis Polemis, who acknowledges, however, the challenges inherent to defining such a concept.[69] As Polemis observes, the rhetorical notion of invective (ψόγος) – one of the types of speech theorised among Byzantine *progymnasmata* – denotes "an autonomous type of speech, one that lays bare the magnitude of somebody's wickedness".[70] It is characterised by a narrative structure modelled on that prescribed for the *enkomia*, albeit with inverted intents. It also implies an "unequivocal verbal attack that follows the author's intention to blacken the reputation of his/her opponent(s)".[71] Closely related to the *psogos* – as Polemis pinpoints – is the concept of κοινὸς τόπος 'common topic', another kind of fictional discourse designed to criticise or support an imaginary representative of a certain category (e.g., a criminal, a benefactor, or further subcategories). In this context, flaws or virtues of the addressee

specifically dedicated to "Hate Speech in Greek Literature of the Ancient and Byzantine Period", no paper addressing Byzantine topics was submitted. In contrast, during the Tenth Conference of the Greek Byzantinists (Ioannina, 2019), Panagiotis Iliopoulos presented a paper entitled "Τα ζώα στον προσβλητικό λόγο των Βυζαντινών: Προλεγόμενα" (Animals in the invective language of the Byzantines: a preliminary study), which was later published in an extended version in Iliopoulos 2021. In this paper, Iliopoulos states that his work is part of a broader research project aimed at writing a doctoral thesis dedicated to the forms and themes of hate speech in middle-Byzantine literary sources. Unfortunately, I could not duly consider this important study in the present article, as Iliopoulos had not yet defended his doctoral thesis at the time of writing.

68 Koster 1980, 39. On this topic, cf., more recently, Papaioannou, Serafim 2021.

69 Cf. Polemis 2021.

70 Polemis 2021, 337. On the rhetorical notion of *psogos* in the late antique period, cf., e.g., Quiroga Puertas 2021.

71 Polemis 2021, 337.

are rhetorically amplified.[72] According to Polemis, however, this definition of invective, primarily based on theoretical principles, proved insufficient to establish a distinct genre in Byzantine rhetorical practices.[73] Instead, invective would rather resemble a 'mode', that is

> a discursive habit that may share some formal characteristics with progymnasmatic *psogos* (e.g., the sequential defamation of a person's origins and actions), but whose defining feature lies in the intended persuasive effect – namely, blame, defamation, and libel.[74]

The Byzantine invective examples selected by Polemis find their place within the fields of forensic rhetoric or literary lampoons. These examples reveal that Byzantine invective primarily targeted individuals who were perceived as rivals or antagonists in political, cultural, or theological-spiritual matters. In such instances, Byzantine writers expose and vehemently condemn various vices and deviations (impiety, avarice, heretical thoughts, homosexuality, and so forth). At times, invective turns into a formal accusation or charge presented before a higher authority. On other occasions, however, it could also manifest in the form of polemical pamphlets and satirical vignettes, devoid of any further purposes. In all the cases examined by Polemis, Byzantine writers frequently employ tropes that are characteristic of progymnastic invective, as well as additional rhetorical strategies, drawing, at the same time, from a well-attested repertoire of stereotypes and commonplaces. This aspect also emerges from Panagiotis Iliopoulos' study on animal metaphors and similes employed in Byzantine 'abusive speech' against an adversary, which draw upon commonplaces from Ancient Greek and Christian traditions as well as common knowledge about animals.[75]

Furthermore, Polemis also observes that invectives are often incorporated and scattered within broader compositions falling under various literary genres – such as historiography or theological-controversial literature –, whose overarching nature and objectives

72 Polemis 2021, 337. The rhetorical notion of *koinos topos* should not be confused with the modern concept of a commonplace or *topos*, whether literary, narratological, rhetorical, etc., cf. Messis, Papaioannou 2021, 150-1.

73 Polemis 2021, 337.

74 Polemis 2021, 337-8. For the Aphthonian concept of 'modes' (to be interpreted as habits and methods, rather than 'genres'), in which students should be trained, refer to Papaioannou 2021, 79 and passim. In this regard, Martin Hinterberger has aptly drawn my attention to the modern theoretical-literary distinction between 'mode' and 'kind' as elaborated, for example, by Fowler 1982, 106ff.

75 Cf. Iliopoulos 2021, esp. 99-107, regarding the use of animals in hate speech against the ethnoreligious Others, namely barbarians and heretics.

evidently differ from those of invective *stricto sensu*, as codified by rhetorical handbooks.[76] For instance, Polemis includes in such cases the invective directed against the adversaries of Byzantine orthodoxy (e.g., the Latins). In this regard, he asserts that

> it appears as if almost every Byzantine theological treatise contains elements of invective, as even texts that purport to handle theological matters in a neutral manner (e.g., hermeneutical works on the Bible) are seldom without contentious points, giving rise to brief invectives against those who advocate a different point of view.[77]

In such cases, however, we could alternatively invoke the concept of hate speech. While invective and hate speech can easily be conflated or at least partly overlap, on the other hand, we can attempt to draw some distinctions. Invective *ad personam*, namely personal attacks directed at an individual and targeting his/her own vices and shortcomings, cannot be considered hate speech, since, as observed in the preceding paragraph, hate speech solely concerns the social dimension of language and is directed either against an entire social group or an individual considered as a representative of that group. In light of this latter scenario, hate speech can also be invoked in a literary writing whose recipient or character, whether real or fictitious, is targeted through hate speech solely because, within that context, he/she represents an entire group (e.g., the Muslims or the Latins).[78]

Furthermore, it can be observed that, contrary to what one might expect, hate speech is far more widespread and vitriolic in literary genres (e.g., in historiography, hagiography, official poetry and court orations) other than theological-controversial literature. This is due to the fact that, in the latter, the debate is typically portrayed as being engaged in by 'experts' and learned men from both factions[79] and

76 Polemis 2021, 338. Numerous studies have been conducted on individual Byzantine poetic invectives: among the most recent, I will limit myself to citing Carrozza 2023. An additional example of 'disguised' *psogos* in Byzantine literature can be considered the famous anti-Photian *Life of Saint Ignatius* by Niketas David Paphlagon (*BHG* 817), as kindly reminded to me by Martin Hinterberger.

77 Polemis 2021, 338.

78 Consider, for example, the speakers of a theological-controversial work in dialogue form.

79 See, for example, how Muslim interlocutors are defined in some anti-Islamic pamphlets: Theodore Abu-Qurrah, *Pamphlet*, 18 (*Prooem.*): Πολλάκις γὰρ πρὸς τοὺς δῆθεν ἐλλογιμωτάτους αὐτῶν [*scil.* Ἀγαρηνῶν] τὰς ἀντιρρήσεις πεποιημένου ἔτυχον παρὼν ἐγώ 'For it happened that I was often present when he engaged in arguments with their purportedly greatest theologians' (ed. Glei, Khoury 1995, 88, ll. 47-8); *Pamphlet*, 21: Τῶν ἐλλογίμων Σαρακηνῶν τις θαρρῶν τῇ ἰδίᾳ τῶν λόγων εὐπρεπείᾳ συναγαγὼν τοὺς

is more focused on the rational dismantling of the doctrines and beliefs of the adversary rather than on 'emotional' defamation.[80]

In conclusion, hate speech does not coincide with any structured literary form, genre, or autonomous speech. It pervades the entire Byzantine literature, cutting across literary genres.[81] It can be correctly defined as a 'mode', in accordance with Polemis' definition of invective, and, akin to the latter, it can be practised in many ways, utilising the entire rhetorical arsenal known to the Byzantines. However, a distinctive aspect of hate speech is its placement within the space of tension between collective identities and their clashes on ethnic, religious, and/or cultural grounds. Thus, hate speech is never directed at an individual, unless the latter is synecdochically considered as a mere representative of a broader group. Finally, unlike invective, it may not even be entirely intentional, such as when it resorts to some generic derogatory epithets,[82] so common and entrenched that they became, antonomastically, mere synonyms for the name of the Others.

ὁμοθρήσκους… 'One of the learned Saracens, relying on his own eloquence, called together his fellow believers…' (ed. Glei, Khoury 1995, 102, ll. 1-2); *Pamphlet*, 32: Ἐν ἑτέρῳ συλλόγῳ τις τῶν κομψοτέρων Σαρακηνῶν ἐρωτῶν τὸν ἐπίσκοπόν φησιν… 'During another assembly, one of the more educated Saracens asked the bishop and said…' (ed. Glei, Khoury 1995, 124, ll. 1-2). On this aspect, cf. Khoury 1969, 118.

80 Cf. Koutrakou 1993, 213-15 fn. 11, 219. Koutrakou mentions a "principle of mutual respect" (213) underlying these laudatory epithets directed, in some specific contexts, by Byzantines towards eminent figures among the Muslim Arabs. This custom is said to stem from the necessities of protocol and international policy.

81 Even within hymnography, there is no lack of examples of hate speech. An interesting case is represented by a canon for the *Theotokos* attributed to John Mauropous (acr. Ὑπερμάχησον τῶν πολιτῶν σου, κόρη· ὑμνωδία Ἰωάννου, *inc.* Ὑπὸ τὴν σκέπην καὶ τὴν εὐσπλαγχνίαν σου…). This canon was published by Spyridon Lauriotes 1937, seemingly based on MS Ἅγιον Ὄρος, Μονὴ τῆς Μεγίστης Λαύρας, I 77 (Eustratiades 1161; AD 1345). In this manuscript, the canon is introduced by the following heading: Ἐπὶ προσδοκίᾳ βαρέος πολέμου κατὰ τὴν μεγαλόπολιν ἐκ διαφόρων ἐθνῶν τῆς Ἰταλῶν γλώσσης συγκροτηθησομένου (Expecting a heavy war against the Capital, about to be launched by various populations of Italian language). The most widely accepted hypothesis is to interpret the populations of Italian language as a reference to the Norman attack on Constantinople in 1082, within the context of the expedition organised by Robert Guiscard against the Byzantine empire (1081-85), cf., e.g., Lauxtermann 2022, 395. In this canon, Mauropous employs some 'traditional' Byzantine derogatory adjectives for the Latins: see, for instance, in the first troparion of the fourth ode of the canon: Νοῦς ἀλαζών (…) τοὺς σκληροτραχήλους καὶ ἰταμοὺς καὶ ὑψαυχένας (…) καθ' ἡμῶν τῶν σῶν δούλων ἐξήγειρεν 'A boastful mind… raised against us your servants the stubborn and bold and haughty' (Spyridon Lauriotes 1937, 35), or in the fourth troparion of the seventh ode: Ὑπερήφανον γένος (…) γαυρούμενον ἰσχύϊ… 'Arrogant people (…) proud of their strength…' (Spyridon Lauriotes 1937, 37).

82 Consider the classical terms ἄθεος 'godless', ἄνομος 'lawless, impious', βάρβαρος 'barbarian', παράνομος 'lawless, violent', and so forth.

5 Some Notes on Methodology

As previously mentioned, LiDoBIPH will exclusively concentrate on a specific and partial aspect of Byzantine hate speech directed towards Muslims and Latins. This aspect pertains to the derogatory language – comprising nouns, adjectives, and verbs – utilised in Byzantine literary texts to address or characterise these two groups. The identified lexical items will be compiled into a comprehensive linguistic dossier, which will be structured akin to an annotated dictionary, drawing inspiration from Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, and will include explanatory notes alongside a catalogue of the most significant occurrences of lemmas in the sources. Each lemma will be clarified through its etymology, meaning, and, where possible, early attestations in the wider hate speech perspective, documenting, moreover, any semantic shifts over time or in similar contexts. In referring to the various occurrences of a certain word in the sources, it will be specified, for example, whether it pertains to the Others as a collective entity or to an individual who represents that entity (e.g., Muhammad in the anti-Islamic dossier).

Theoretically, such words could be also categorised according to their 'stigma-typology', distinguishing, for instance, between those perpetuating ethnographic motifs, even of ancient or pre-Christian origin;[83] those condemning or mocking particular aspects of religion, from beliefs to ritual practices;[84] and those stigmatising specific psycho-physical characteristics (i.e., ethnotypes), moral vices and intellectual deficiencies.[85] Some others are mere and more generic insults.[86] However, some of these words cannot always be eas-

83 An example is the widely used βάρβαρος 'foreign, barbarian'. For semasiological and onomasiological approaches to this term, which ultimately attempt to trace the evolution of concepts over time (the so-called Conceptual History) through a 'distributional' semantic model, cf. Keersmaekers, Van Hal 2021.

84 E.g., of the Muslims, εἰκονοκλάστης 'iconoclast'; μισόχριστος 'hating Christ'.

85 E.g., of the Muslims, ἀτάσθαλος 'presumptuous, wicked'; βαρυκάρδιος 'slow of heart, obstinate'; γαστριμαργία 'gluttony'; ἐμβρόντητος 'thunderstruck, stupid'; ἐπιτωθάζω 'mock at, jeer' or κερτομέω 'taunt, sneer at', referring to their hateful sarcasm and foolish arrogance; κύων λυσσῶν 'rabid dog', metaphor alluding to their aggressive recklessness, and so forth. Of the Latins, e.g., ἀταπείνωτος 'devoid of humbleness'; ἀγέρωχος 'arrogant'; ὑψαύχην 'haughty'.

86 E.g., of the Muslims, βδελυρός 'disgusting, loathsome, blackguardly'; βλαβερός 'harmful'; δείλαιος 'wretched, paltry'; δυσώνυμος 'bearing an ill name, hateful'; ἐβδελυγμένος 'loathsome, abominable'; τελματώδης 'muddy', etc. It should be noted that among the most generic insults, several lemmas were reclaimed from the past and reused for new polemical targets, similar to what notoriously occurs in Byzantine literature with ethnonyms or designations of new heresies. In this respect, this kind of speech holds a high degree of cross-fertilisation, with many derogatory epithets, adjectives, and verbs being shared by Muslims, Latins, and other polemical targets, thus showing a considerable overlap. Besides, one might also discern a parallel between the

ily categorised within a single typology, belonging, instead, to more than one.[87] At this juncture, it is also necessary to specify that many of the insults conveyed by these words may be expressed in Byzantine texts through periphrases. The latter are much more challenging to identify and, above all, to lemmatise within an alphabetical lexicon. However, they will be recorded – not systematically, but as *per specimina* – under the equivalent or semantically closest lexical entry. Generally speaking, the decision to limit the analysis to nouns, adjectives, and verbs also has the advantage of facilitating the grouping of these elements into semantic families.

The idea of establishing a taxonomy for insults is not new. For instance, in 1910, Wilhelm Süss categorised insults found in ancient Attic oratory according to their content. He identified a series of 'tropes', namely various allegations addressed against an opponent.[88] In 2016, the Italian linguist Tullio De Mauro developed the lexicon *Le parole per ferire* for the 'Jo Cox' Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies on intolerance, xenophobia, racism, and hate phenomena. The lexicon consists of more than 1,000 Italian hate words organised along different semantic categories of hatred.[89] In Byzantine studies, Niki Koutrakou has placed significant emphasis on the use of derogatory words employed by representatives of the opposing factions in the iconoclastic struggle to refer to one another.[90] In particular, Koutrakou has stressed rhetorical strategies, dynamics of recuperation and resemantisation of pre-existing lexical heritage, as well as the semantic fields of words. Furthermore, in a previous

attitudes by which Byzantine writers utilised linguistic markers over the centuries to denote and 'otherise' various targets in an ethno-cultural sense and the 'pictorial vocabulary' employed by Byzantine artists to delineate ethnic distances through stereotypical and anachronistic portrayals of peoples and figures. On this latter aspect, cf., e.g., Gasbarri 2023.

87 E.g., when referred to the Muslims, ἀλλοπρόσαλλος 'fickle, unstable', hence, ἄπιστος 'untrustworthy, unreliable', ὀλιγόπιστος 'of little faith', etc., stemming from ethnographic prejudices toward nomadic lifestyle, as in the case of pre-Islamic Arabs – similarly, all the words evoking beastly and uncivilised nature, e.g. βοσκηματώδης or θηριώδης 'brutish, bestial'; μιαιφόνος 'bloodthirsty, murderous' or αἱματοχαρής 'delighting in blood' denote not only a beastly nature and the brutal killing of Christians, but also the practice of animal sacrifice; ἀσελγής, in the meaning of 'lascivious, lewd', or φιλόσαρκος 'loving human flesh', can encompass both a general moral connotation, inherent to their *ethos*, and allude to the practice of polygamy.

88 Süss 1910.

89 Cf. De Mauro 2016. De Mauro's lexicon has constituted the starting point for an even broader and more complex digital project, entitled *HurtLex. A Multilingual Lexicon of Hate Words*, whose main objective is to develop a lexicon of hate words that can be used as a resource to analyse and identify hate speech in social media texts in a multilingual perspective, cf. Bassignana et al. 2018. I would like to thank Niccolò Zorzi for informing me about a similar tool dedicated to insults in the Venetian dialect, edited by Panontin 2021.

90 Cf. Koutrakou 1999.

study, within some literary works of the Middle Byzantine period, she identified, for example, a small group of derogatory epithets directed at Muslims, notably observing how many of them were also employed against iconoclasts.[91]

As previously mentioned, hate speech against Muslims and Latins can be detected in numerous Byzantine works across various literary genres. Therefore, the search for hate words must necessarily be conducted within a corpus as extensive as possible of works demonstrating some relevance to Byzantines' relations with Muslims and Latins. In order to identify such works, systematic reviews or comprehensive studies on Byzantine-Islamic and Byzantine-Western relations have proven particularly useful.[92]

At the same time, however, it was necessary to define the chronological boundaries of the research. As for the anti-Islamic dossier, it was decided to examine works from the seventh century – when Byzantium first encountered Islam – until the mid-fourteenth century. The latter period is marked by the Greek translation by Demetrios Kydones of the treatise *Against the Law of the Saracens* by the Florentine Dominican Riccoldo of Monte di Croce (1243-1320), which exerted a significant influence on the Byzantine debate on Islam (e.g., on Kantakouzenos or Manuel II Palaiologos). During this period, Byzantine literature on Islam, whose 'formative stage' is situated between the eighth and ninth centuries, started to be contaminated by Western elements.[93] Regarding the anti-Latin dossier, it was decided to approximately adhere to the chronological framework (900-1204) chosen, for instance, by Nicolas Drocourt and Sebastian Kolditz for their *Companion*, starting already from the ninth century, the epoch of Photios and Niketas Byzantios, up to the drama of the Fourth Crusade, which heavily impacted on Byzantine perceptions of the Westerners.

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In conclusion, this article has sought to delineate a theoretical framework within which to situate the LiDoBIPH project, focused on a specific aspect of hate speech in Byzantine literature. While hate speech has been addressed within the study of other ancient and medieval literatures, it remains unexplored within the field of Byzantine studies, which are notoriously 'theoretophobic',[94] leaving Byzantine lit-

91 Cf. Koutrakou 1993, 216, 218-19, 222-3.

92 As for the anti-Muslims dossier, cf., e.g., Thomas, Roggema 2009; Thomas, Mallett 2010; 2011. As for the anti-Latin dossier, cf. Drocourt, Kolditz 2022, and the online database *RAP. Repertorium Auctorum Polemicorum*.

93 Cf., e.g., Rigo 1998, 214; Fanelli 2017, 42 and passim; 2022.

94 Stathakopoulos 2022, 270 fn. 8.

erature 'undertheorised'.[95] Therefore, the reflections articulated so far may, hopefully, contribute to constructing an additional and different perspective or interpretative lens on literary production in Byzantium. Furthermore, LiDoBIPH aims at providing a useful tool for scholars to navigate, from a historical-linguistic perspective, the derogatory vocabulary attested in selected sources to represent the ethnoreligious Others, thus contributing to the debate on the concept of identity in Byzantium. Finally, such a study could also integrate with other research strands, such as the history of emotions and certain negative sentiments (e.g., hatred or anger).[96] Certainly, the same approach could be applied in future research to hate speech directed towards other targets based on ethno-cultural and/or religious alterity, such as Jews, Armenians, 'heretics' of different kinds, Slavs, and so forth.

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95 Cameron 2014, 111.

96 See, for example, the following publications, albeit almost exclusively dedicated to the sentiment of anger: Dombrowski 1998; Rosenwein 1998; Zagacki, Boleyn-Fitzgerald 2006; Nikolaou, Chrestou 2008; Crislip 2011; Kalimtzis 2012; Spencer 2019, Part 3 ("Anger and its Management"); Saputo 2022.

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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)

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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.

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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, Ἁγίου 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] Ἁγίου 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] Ἁγίου 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. Ἁγίου Σάββα 697, for instance, opens with a series of ascetic admonitions

91 A note of ownership states that Ἁγίου 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). Ἁγίου 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 Ἁγίου 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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Byzantium and Its Neighbours
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Turkish-Islamic Customs and Rites in the Byzantine Apologetical-Polemical Literature (Fourteenth Century)
A Preliminary Survey

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Abstract Adel Theodor Khoury critiqued the anti-Islamic literature of the Palaiologan era as lacking in originality, arguing that it deviated from earlier Byzantine models by incorporating Western influences. Concurrently, studies on the processes of Islamisation and Turkification in Anatolia have variously emphasised episodes of coexistence and the mutual exchange of religious practices. In this paper, the Author aims to reassess Khoury's assumptions by analysing several case studies in which the direct encounter by the Byzantines with Turkish and Islamic practices enabled Palaiologan writers to introduce novel polemical arguments – arguments that were neither rooted in earlier traditions nor derived from Western sources.

Keywords Byzantine anti-Islamic literature. Late Byzantium. Ottoman studies. Palaeologan literature. Polemical literature. Turkish customs.

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1 State-of-Art: Khoury's Thesis

In his studies on Byzantine apologetical and polemical literature, Adel Theodor Khoury excluded works produced from the thirteenth century onward.[1] This exclusion is predicated upon his contention that the anti-Islamic literature of the last centuries of Byzantium exhibits a discernible decline in originality and innovation. Khoury argued that, in the Palaeologan period, authors simply rehashed ideas and arguments from earlier works, without introducing innovative and significant contributions to the ongoing Byzantine debate on Islam. To sum up, he addressed the issue, asserting:

> Au début du XIV^e^ siècle paraît un ouvrage latin sur l'Islam écrit par le dominicain florentin Ricoldo da Monte Croce. […] L'ouvrage de Ricoldo fut apprécié à Byzance, il exerça en particulier sur Jean Cantacuzène une influence que celui-ci reconnaît expressément. […] L'influence de Ricoldo ne détermina certes pas un bouleversement dans le jugement des Byzantins sur l'Islam, mais désormais la littérature byzantine relative à l'Islam ne peut plus être considérée comme absolument originale. […] D'autre part, dans leurs relations politiques avec les musulmans, les Byzantins adoptent une attitude plus conciliante que celle de leurs devanciers des siècles précédents.[2]

In essence, Khoury delineates two factors contributing to the emergence of a new trend of anti-Islamic literature during the Palaeologan period. Firstly, the scholar underscores the influence of Riccoldo's *Against the Law of the Saracens*,[3] translated into Greek by Demetrios Kydones (c. 1320-1398),[4] on the intellectual milieu engaged in disputations on Islam in the middle of the fourteenth century. Secondly, Khoury highlights the impact of political-military relations with the neighbouring Turkish emirates – especially during the years of the second civil war (1341-47) – on Byzantine perception of Islam. Consequently,

1 Cf. Khoury 1969; 1972; 1982.

2 Khoury 1969, 43. It should be noted that Norman Daniel (1960) also pointed out a lack of originality in Western anti-Islamic literature from the fourteenth century onwards. In my opinion, however, Khoury's and Daniel's observations are not overlapping, since they imply a different meaning of the term 'originality'. Daniel observes, in fact, that Western authors from the fourteenth century onwards re-propose arguments and themes that are characteristic of the previous tradition; differently, Khoury notes that Byzantine literature against Islam from the same period partially departs from its own models, opening up to contaminations that mostly come from the West.

3 Cf. Mérigoux 1986.

4 Demetrios Kydones, *Translation of Friar Riccardo's Book Against Muḥammad's Followers* (*Libri fratris Richardi contra Mahometem asseclas translatio*), *PG* 154, coll. 1035-170.

Khoury argues that the convergence of these two factors, diminishing the degree of 'originality', deviated the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature from the distinctive Byzantine tradition, and aligned it closer with analogous genres in neighbouring cultural milieus.

In my view, Khoury's thesis warrants only partial endorsement. Firstly, his definition of 'originality', based solely on adherence to traditional argumentations, overlooks the nuanced historical and social contexts in which the anti-Islamic works were written. Khoury's thesis appears to be consistent with the writings composed during the eleventh and twelfth century. It can be observed that the heresiological collections (*panopliae*), such as those compiled by Euthymios Zigabenos (eleventh-twelfth century)[5] and Niketas Choniates (c. 1155-1217),[6] drew upon apologetic and polemical materials from earlier texts composed by John of Damascus (670/80-749),[7] Theodore Abu-Qurrah (c. 750-829),[8] and especially Niketas Byzantios (ninth century).[9] This was done in order to accomplish two distinct functions. Zigabenos' and Choniates' texts not only provided concise summaries for comprehending Islam, but also equipped scholars with tools for engaging in controversial debates and for describing foundational Islamic principles. In this framework, the concept of 'originality', defined as adherence to cultural perception model, intersects with tradition. In regard to the aforementioned texts, it can be posited that Khoury's thesis is acceptable because it legitimises the notion of *taxis* as the principal criterion for evaluating the merit of Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, disregarding any attempt at innovation or departure from the initial model. In this way, Khoury establishes a correlation between cultural 'identity', 'tradition' and 'originality'.

The veracity of this assertion is arguably less apparent when one fails to consider the cultural and social consequences of the Latin conquest of Constantinople after the Fourth Crusade (1204-61). The stable presence of Westerners, the frequency of diplomatic exchanges, and notably, the establishment of Franciscan and especially Dominican communities in the capital and in the territories of the empire[10] facilitated direct and regular interactions. This interaction

5 Euthymios Zigabenos, *Dogmatic Panoply*, *PG* 130, coll. 20-1360 (= Förstel 2009, 44-83).

6 Niketas Choniates, *From the Twentieth Book of the Thesaurus of Orthodox Faith. About the Superstition of the Hagarenes* (*Ex libro XX Thesauri Orthodoxae Fidei. De Superstitione Agarenorum*), *PG* 140, coll. 105-22.

7 John of Damascus, *On Heresies* (ed. Kotter 1981).

8 Theodore Abu-Qurrah, *Pamphlets Against Heretics, Jews, and Saracens* (*Contra haereticos, judaeos et saracenos varia opuscula*), *PG* 97, coll. 1461-1602; Graf 1910; Glei, Khoury 1995.

9 Niketas Byzantios, *Refutation* (ed. Förstel 2000).

10 Cf. Tsougarakis 2012.

extended beyond the general populace progressively to encompass the intellectual elite.[11] Consequently, this cohabitation produced a burgeoning interest in Western culture, particularly in scholastic theology.[12] This receptivity to Western culture led to a profound reassessment of Byzantine identity and opened a debate that took on conflicting forms between the ecclesiastical and monastic hierarchies, which remained loyal to tradition, and some intellectual circles interested in exploring Latin culture.[13] In this regard, the case of Demetrios Kydones stands out as paradigmatic.[14] After learning Latin, around the mid-fourteenth century he dedicated himself to translating the *Summa Against the Gentiles* and the *Summa of Theology* of Thomas Aquinas under the guidance of the Dominican friar Filippo Bindo de Incontris.[15] Concurrently, he completed the Greek translation of Riccoldo's anti-Islamic pamphlet. The availability of these texts, as well as other translation proofs made by the Greek scholar, confirms the depth of contacts and exchanges between the Dominican community of Pera and members of the Byzantine elite. Significantly, Kydones' translations – as well as those of his colleagues in the following decades – transcended the realm of private exercise, experiencing rapid spread and manuscript circulation. Noteworthy is the case of the translation of *Against the Law of the Saracens*: the emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (c. 1292-1383), who was engaged in the drafting of his four orations *Against Muḥammad*,[16] drew upon materials, argumentations and Qur'ānic quotations from Kydones' translation, thus enriching the now-frustrated traditional Byzantine arsenal.[17] It is noteworthy that Kantakouzenos' case was not an isolated one. The emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (1350-1425),[18] by his own admission, drew upon information and arguments presented by Kydones and Kantakouzenos while composing the 26 *Dialogues with*

11 The writings published by Antoine Dondaine and Raymond-Joseph Loenertz remain fundamental testimonies of contacts between Western monastic communities and the Constantinopolitan milieu in the thirteenth century; cf. Dondaine 1951; Loenertz 1936a; 1936b; 1959; 1960. Cf. also Congourdeau 1987a; 1987b. For the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, cf. Delacroix-Besnier 1997.

12 The most recent collective volume on this topic is Athanasopoulos 2022.

13 Regarding the openness of Byzantine intellectuals in the latter half of the fourteenth century towards Thomistic thought, Mercati 1931, although dated, remains a seminal work.

14 Cf. Ryder 2010.

15 Cf. Loenertz 1978.

16 John Kantakouzenos, *Apologies*, *PG* 154, coll. 371-584; John Kantakouzenos, *Orations*, *PG* 154, coll. 583-692 (= ed. Förstel 2005).

17 The subject is widely discussed in my forthcoming study, dedicated to John Kantakouzenos' entire anti-Islamic corpus.

18 Cf. Çelik 2021.

a Persian.[19] In our assessment, this underscores that the hybridisation between Latin and Byzantine traditions in anti-Islamic matters during the second half of the fourteenth century represents not a diminishment and impoverishment of the genre, but rather its revitalisation. Key elements, such as criticism of the figure of Muḥammad, negative judgment on the Qur'ān and its theological contents, condemnation of Islamic practices, defence of the divinity of Jesus and the trinitarian doctrine, teleological significance of the Holy Scriptures, remain foundational. However, authors of this period also incorporate new tools, borrowed from the Western tradition, when necessary.

Returning to Khoury's thesis, I argue that a second aspect should be considered when evaluating the level of 'originality' in the anti-Islamic literature of the Palaiologan period. Although there were conflicts in the Byzantine Anatolian border regions before the late thirteenth century that necessitated confrontations between Byzantium and the advancing Turkish groups,[20] a notable escalation of these encounters occurred towards the end of the century. This intensification was driven by the emergence of new semi-independent emirates (Aydın, Menteşe and Ottoman), which established themselves permanently in the provinces of Byzantine Western Anatolia and the Aegean, thereby posing a direct threat to the core regions of the Byzantine empire. The Ottoman emirate emerged as the dominant force among these groups, who quickly occupied Byzantine cities and territories. Following the earthquake in Kallipolis in the spring of 1354, the Ottomans initiated the conquest of the Western territories of the empire, marking the beginning of their expansion into the Balkans. However, the political-military events may obscure the actual extent of the phenomenon that took place between the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth century. Until that date, Byzantium had always had to face the Islamic threat, initially from Islamised Arabs and later from Turks. Thus, coexistence with Muslims or Islamised peoples remains a frontier issue until the thirteenth century,[21] with few exceptions, such as the case of the conquest of Nicaea at the beginning of Alexios I's reign (1081-1118).[22] It was from these contact zones that authors emerged, particularly in the eighth and ninth centuries, who initially presented and debated the foundations of Islam during the first Arab expansion, which encroached upon the Eastern provinces of the Byzantine empire. Their writings, such as Chapter

19 Manuel II Palaiologos, *Dialogues* (ed. Trapp 1966, 6 ll. 11-17).

20 For this period, cf. Cahen 1968, a seminal monograph, and recently Peacock's (2014) and Beihammer's (2015; 2020; 2022; 2023) studies.

21 On the phenomenon of conversions, cf. Beihammer 2016, 83-99.

22 Cf. Foss 1996, 41-9.

100 of John of Damascus' *On Heresies* and the dialogues of Theodore Abu-Qurrah, served to cultivate a knowledge of the Islamic phenomenon, including its dogmatic and ritual aspects. Moreover, the cultural milieu of the border regions, where daily coexistence and mutual understanding between communities are actively experienced, is central to the creation of the mythical figure of *Digenes Akritas*, who is celebrated in the eponymous epic poem.[23] The accumulation of knowledge and information about Islam contributed to the delineation of arguments and the development of argumentations useful for its doctrinal and canonical refutation, culminating in the comprehensive and synthesised formulation in Byzantine *Abjuration Formula* (*Ritus abjurationis*).[24]

2 The Islamisation and Turkification of Asia Minor Since the Late Thirteenth Century: Some Interpretations of a Crucial Phenomenon

From the late thirteenth century onward, we observe that prominent figures of Constantinople's religious and political life are directly engaged in polemical writings against Islam. During these years, the Turkish advance into the Western regions of Asia Minor represents the culmination of the process of 'Islamisation' and 'Turkification' that has been underway in Byzantine Anatolia since the battle of Mantzikert (1071).[25] I assert that the proper evaluation of this phenomenon is crucial for understanding the trajectory of Byzantine polemics against Islam. I consider the phenomenon of Islamisation and Turkification of Byzantine Anatolia as a pivotal theme, essential for contextualising the changes that Byzantine polemical literature underwent during the Palaiologan period. This topic has been the subject of numerous analyses and interpretations, each highlighting various causal factors.

The first studies on this subject date back to the early twentieth century. Firstly, Albert Wächter,[26] basing his analysis essentially on the study of patriarchal registers and the *Lists of bishoprics* (*Notitiae episcopatuum*), attributed the crisis of the Christian presence in Anatolia to the collapse of the organisational structures of the local

23 Cf. Jeffrey 1998; Argyriou 1991.

24 Montet 1906; Eleuteri, Rigo 1993, 53-7; Niketas Choniates, *Abjuration Formula* (*Ordo qui observatur super iis qui a Saracenis ad nostram Christianorum puram veramque fidem se convertunt*), *PG* 140, coll. 123-36.

25 On this topic, cf. first Vryonis 1971a; this will be discussed further below.

26 Cf. Wächter 1903.

Church, thus justifying the progressive de-Christianisation and de-Hellenisation of the area.

Secondly, Frederick W. Hasluck[27] approached the problem from a different point of view: he saw the Turkification and Islamisation of Byzantine Anatolia and the Balkans as the result of a process of interaction and convergence of cult and ritual (beliefs, habits, magical rites, especially among the lower strata of the rural and provincial populace), which generated syncretic forms that,[28] in turn, led to a gradual conversion of large sectors of the Christian communities. The reasons for this process have been identified in the proselytist action practised by the Sufi brotherhoods (Mawlawī and Bektaşi) well rooted in the territory and in the worship of their own saints, often practised in the same Christian worship centres. The very existence of these 'ambiguous sanctuaries' has been recognised as the cause of a religious blending that would have prompted the conversions to Islam of a large part of the Christian communities of Anatolia.

Thirdly, I mention Paul Wittek's Ghazi theory although widely surpassed by subsequent studies.[29] Wittek argued that the *ghazawat* (holy war) was the main motivation for the conquest of Turkish groups (and, therefore, also of the Ottoman emirate) against the Christian people of Western Anatolia.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Byzantine studies on the topic of Islamisation and Turkification of Asia Minor have focused on two opposing solutions that can be summarised in the dichotomy of 'confrontation'-'conciliation'. Spiros Vryonis,[30] in a monumental and fundamental study, greatly expands Wächter's results and identifies the nomadisation of large regions of Byzantine Anatolia as a second factor of depopulation and demographic (and cultural) decline in the area, as well as of progressive economic collapse for Byzantium. In this perspective, Vryonis considers the relationship

27 Cf. Hasluck 1929. For a recent criticism of Hasluck's thesis, cf. Krstić 2013.

28 For a more accurate evaluation of the properly 'syncretic' value of the testimonies mentioned by Hasluck, cf. Krstić 2013, 247-9 and Lubanska 2015, esp. 40-54. In accordance with Krstić's argument, I believe it is essential to use the term 'syncretism' with caution when describing and interpreting episodes reported in contemporary sources. There is a tendency to overuse this term, applying it even to simple instances of the mixing and coexistence of rites. I define syncretism, however, as any form of systematic fusion of mythology, dogma, and rituals between two faiths or religious beliefs, cf. Colpe 1997, 40-3. Although intertwined with political and cultural considerations, only the cases of Sheikh Bedreddin (1358/59-1416) and George of Trebizond (1395-1484) can be considered well-developed syncretic theories (Balivet 1980; 1995; Lowry 2003, 137-9; Khoury 1987).

29 Cf. Wittek 1938. Wittek's thesis has been criticised by several studies. A brief list includes: Lindner 1983; Imber 1986; Jennings 1986; Beldiceanu-Steinherr 2002; and Lowry 2003.

30 First of all, cf. Vryonis 1971a, 498-501; 1976; 1981. For the reception of Vryonis' thesis, cf. Savvides 1981; Werner 1985; Bryer 1975.

between the Byzantine and Christian communities and the Turkish invaders as a conflict, played on a military, ethnic, political and cultural level, which had a devastating outcome for Hellenism in Asia Minor. According to Vryonis, however, it was a complex conflict because the invaders found themselves having to subdue and absorb a vital society, such as the Byzantine Anatolian society. The very nature of the Turkish conquest, its prolongation from the eleventh to the fifteenth century and the settlement of Turkish communities led to the disintegration of Byzantine society, since they generated on the one hand a permanent state of war and, on the other, a corrosion of the Greek identity sentiment. Such causes acted on the stability of the Byzantine administrative system and, in particular, on the ecclesiastical organisation of the Anatolian provinces. Under Turkish pressure and Islamic hegemony, the Christian society found itself progressively isolated from the heartbeat of the empire and deprived of provincial ecclesiastical leadership. In this way, the proselytising action of the Sufi brotherhoods, together with the great military disasters suffered by the Byzantines during the Turkish conquest, created the conditions for the conversion of the local communities. However, this conversion did not produce the total disappearance of the Greek element, since, according to Vryonis, Byzantine culture (political, administrative and above all religious) played a determinant role in Turkish folk culture.

In the 1990s the research line and the results collected from Hasluck's investigations were further developed by Michel Balivet.[31] He focused on the study of individual episodes and opportunities for cultural exchange between the Byzantine population and the Turkish conquerors, narrowing the field of investigation to limited areas. In this way, Balivet conceptualises the Anatolian region as an "éspace d'imbrication" in which a reciprocal exchange occurred between the two communities: while Greek populations transformed Turkish customs and traditions, at the same time the Turkish presence would have exerted a profound impact on the Greek-Byzantine cultural substratum, producing a corresponding change in popular culture and everyday practices. According to Balivet, episodes of religious and cultural blending produced a multi-ethnic lifestyle.

The value of Balivet's research is undeniable, but together with Rustam Shukurov and Tijana Krstić,[32] I also observe the limits of this proposal to solve the issue of the Turkification and Islamisation of Byzantine Anatolia. First of all, the cases examined by Balivet are limited to a fragmented microcosm that emphasises the value of the

31 Cf. Balivet 1994; 1999; 2002; 2005.

32 Cf. Shukurov 2016, 6 and Krstić 2011, 16-18. On the same topic, cf. also Beihammer 2023.

episodes themselves but it does not justify a broader view. Secondly, Balivet's proposal does not reach an explanation of the true crux of the matter, namely the fact that the result of this cultural encounter produced the marginalisation and subsequent disappearance of the Greek-Byzantine element to the advantage of the Turkish-Islamic one.

Finally, there is one last aspect that justifies the writing of this paper. As Krstić has already noted, emphasis on episodes of religious blending in the contact zones leads to theorising a coexistence based on the concept of 'toleration'.[33] This conclusion, however, risks ignoring or at least diminishing the dynamics of conquest and resistance that contemporary sources clearly report. In other words, it gives us a distorted picture of the Turkish and Ottoman advance as an inclusive and tolerant movement. On the ther hand, emphasis on religious blending practices opens the way for new strands of investigation and interpretation. By this I mean that the focus on these kinds of practices can instead be very useful in capturing more hidden cultural phenomena. Firstly, it draws the Ottomanists' attention to the existence and action of Sufi communities, and opens up questions about their ability and way of converting Christian communities to Islam, and at the same time their relationship with the Sunni religious establishment.[34] Secondly – and this concerns us directly –, it is necessary to remark that instances of religious blending practices and, more generally, of mutual exchange of knowledge are not only the basis for conciliation and tolerance; at the same time, they become a stimulus for harsh expressions of a polemical nature.[35] Precisely, where the two religious traditions (Christian and Islamic or Islamised) share practices and places, and generate overlaps, they simultaneously stimulate rivalries that take shape in the polemical genre. In this context, Krstić presents two examples involving Sarı Saltuk (?-1298/99), a dervish and saint of the Bektaşi brotherhood. His preaching to Christians about the Gospel and the figure of Christ, as recounted in the *Book of Saltuk* (*Saltukname*), transforms themes that might initially seem syncretic into distinctly anti-syncretic ones. The Gospel (*Injil*) that Christians are persuaded to embrace through Saltuk's eloquent discourse is one that explicitly mentions the Prophet. Furthermore, Jesus (*Mesih*) is portrayed with the attributes of the Qur'ānic 'Isa, the apocalyptic figure who presides over the final judgment.[36]

33 Cf. Shaw, Steward 1994; Viswanathan 1995.

34 The thesis about proselytising dervishes as primary actors of conversion is based on Köprülü's (2006; 1922-23) and Barkan's (1942, 279-91, 303-4) studies. Krstić (2013, 250, 254-8) provides a critical reconsideration on this subject.

35 In addition to Balivet's studies, Norris 1993 also deserves to be mentioned, even though he focuses his attention on the Balkan region.

36 Cf. Krstić 2013, 253-4.

In other words, far from denying the existence of episodes of religious blending and mutual knowledge of lifestyle and practices through intermarriage and professional networks, we believe that it was precisely in the fourteenth century that the contact zones, now so close to the centre of the Byzantine empire, provided the conditions for a revitalisation of Byzantine polemics against Islam. Indeed, unlike in previous centuries, the shifting of the contact line ensured that Byzantine cultural elites (both religious and secular) were variously involved in episodes of encounter and exchange, as they lived in a state of direct contact with individuals and Turkish groups.

Mapping and studying episodes or details of Turkish-Islamic practices and customs contribute to a two-fold objective: on the one hand, they provide first-hand knowledge of customs that are still alive among the Turkish groups in a phase in which there are few written sources in Turkish;[37] on the other hand, they become proof of the transformation taking place within the genre of anti-Islamic literature, determining a factor of 'new originality' that is grafted onto traditional models.

3 A Preliminary Survey: Some Cases

Polemical literature is the individual and intellectual result of a collective perception, codified according to argumentative mechanisms. This is even more true in particular from the fourteenth century onwards, when this genre is driven by the urgency to answer the pressing question about the survival of the Christian faith and its ethical and dogmatic values in the face of the affirmation of Turkish military superiority and the Islamic religion. Therefore, polemical writings are the point of arrival and confluence of information and themes that have been produced on the ground of the co-existence of different religious cultures, perceived as irreconcilable.[38]

Given this assumption, the investigation we propose must necessarily address a multiplicity of sources. In my view, the initial stage of research should focus on historical works (chronicles, *mémoires*, etc.) produced between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Indeed, these works contain a plethora of episodes and simple details that document instances of cohabitation and record the customs and practices of the Turkish invader. The value of the testimonies contained in these works lies precisely in the collective character of the episodes reported. By this I mean that the persistence of ancient

37 On daily life customs (clothes, food), cf. Çelik 2024.

38 Cf. Sahas 2022.

historiographical models (Herodotean[39] and Thucydidean[40]) is evidenced in the respect afforded them by authors over time and their occasional adaptation to suit the purposes of each author. These models guarantee the impartiality of the information presented, while at the same time configuring the reported episode or particular behaviour as distinctive and well recognisable for the public addressed by these works.

A second level of research should instead be directed towards the analytical assessment of epistolary production. Despite the apparent lack of impartiality and objectivity in comparison to historiography, the letters offer valuable insights into practices and beliefs of Turkish-Islamic communities. These insights are often based on first-hand and eyewitness accounts. Furthermore, the epistolary collections of the Palaiologan period allow us to trace the circulation of information on Islamic and Turkish customs and practices within restricted circles of intellectuals and prominent religious and secular figures in the society of the time, often responsible for properly polemical writings.

Thirdly, it is my contention that the mapping should be applied to religious works. In addition to homiletics, which in the act of cursing the behaviour of the invaders sometimes reveals information of some relevance, particular attention should be paid to hagiography, and especially to martyrological texts.[41] Although in the lives of saints and martyrs we often witness a 'mythification' of the historical context in which they operated, these kinds of sources often provide us with information and details about the customs of the Turkish and Islamic communities among which the protagonists lived. The significance of this kind of sources is also linked to their dissemination and to the audience to which they are addressed. They often contain, in an embryonic form, episodes of contradiction and debate on controversial issues that find an echo and further elaboration in the great polemical writings.

In my view, the mapping of these sources, coupled with an appropriate contextualisation of the examined passages, can provide a consistent database on the actual knowledge and the real degree of cohabitation that both the intellectual elite of the great centres (primarily Constantinople and Thessalonike) and the Greek-Byzantine communities still active in the contact zones had of the Turks. This data collection will then allow us to identify which themes and which examples connected to them have found space in the polemical and

39 Cf. Kaldellis 2014.

40 Cf. Miller 1976.

41 Cf. Fanelli 2019; 2021; Bayrı 2020.

apologetic literature of this period. The present paper will provide a few examples only.

3.1 Athanasios I Patriarch

The first case I propose is taken from the correspondence of patriarch Athanasios I (1289-93 and 1303-09).[42] In his letters, often addressed to the emperors under whose reign he worked (Michael VIII Palaiologos and Andronikos II Palaiologos), the patriarch, a fierce opponent of the Union with the Latins, dwells on several occasions on the consequences of the Turkish advance in the provinces of Asia Minor. In the sins of Christians he identifies the underlying cause of the Turkish military assertiveness and expresses hope for a moral conversion that might avert the imminent danger to the Empire (and to Christianity) posed by the Turks (*Epistles* 36-7, 82 and 40). Athanasios is aware of the consequences of the Turkish occupation on Byzantine territories, and in this regard, he directs the pastoral activity that distinguishes his patriarchate. In fact, on several occasions, he complains about the resistance of some metropolitans and bishops to take possession of and return to their assigned seat because it is occupied by the Turkish invaders. He asks for the support of the emperor so that he can put pressure on the reluctant prelates (*Epistles* 30-2, 48, 61-2 and 79). On the other hand, Athanasios is concerned about the social emergency due to the presence of refugees from Asia Minor in the city (*Epistle* 22), requiring that the emperor urge the notables and officers so that they provide money to the needy.[43]

In addition to these passages, special attention deserves what he denounced in *Epistle* 41. Athanasios begins by inviting emperor Andronikos to behave like king Hezekiah, who tore his clothes and donned sackcloth when the Assyrian general Rhapsakes dared to speer forth words of insult against God.[44] The patriarch alleges that the sovereign is excessively lenient towards non-Christian communities: he cites the 'deicide' Jews, who openly sneer at the Christian faith and customs (worship of Christ, veneration of images and celebration of the mysteries). Furthermore, he asserts that the Armenians perpetrate every kind of outrage against their neighbouring orthodox Christians, enjoying the meetinghouses granted to them. However, the passage that is of direct relevance to us concerns the conduct of the Muslim community in the city:

42 Cf. Talbot 1975.

43 Greek text of the passage: εὑρίσκονται δὲ καὶ ἐντὸς τῆς πόλεως αἰχμάλωτος λαὸς πολύς, καὶ ἔνι δέον νὰ συναντιλήψωνται οἱ δυνάμενοι, ἕκαστος καθὼς προαιρεῖται.

44 4 Kgdms (2 Kgs) 18:13-36, and 4 Kgdms (2 Kgs) 19:1-35.

> Ὅτι δὲ καὶ διὰ τὰς ἐμὰς ἁμαρτίας τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἄρξαντες πόλεων Ἰσμαηλῖται οὐδὲ σημαντῆρος ἦχον παραχωροῦσι Χριστιανοῖς, οὐδεὶς ἀγνοεῖ· ἡμεῖς δέ, καὶ ταῦτα χάριτι Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ βασιλείαν πλουτοῦντες, κατεφρονήσαμεν οὐ μόνον ποιεῖν ὅσα ἐποίησαν οἱ τῶν Ἰσμαηλιτῶν πρέσβεις – καὶ ταῦτα οὐδαμηνοὶ καὶ παρὰ τοιούτων ἀπεσταλμένοι – ἀλλὰ καὶ φανερῶς ἐφ' ὑψηλοῦ ἀναβαίνοντες ὡς ἔθος ἔχουσιν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ αὐτῶν, τὰ μυσαρὰ αὐτῶν ἐκφωνοῦσι μυστήρια. Ταῦτα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα τολμώμενα συσκιάζουσιν οἱ ὁρῶντες καὶ οὐ γυμνῶς ἀναφέρουσι τῇ βασιλείᾳ σου, ἵνα τὸ ἔνθεόν σου ζῆλον ἐνδείξῃς.
>
> Everyone knows that <those> Ishmaelites, who on account of my sins rule Christian cities, do not even allow Christians to strike the *semandron* there. But although we are endowed with this Christian Empire through the grace of Christ our God, not only have we neglected to do what the envoys of the Ishmaelites did (good-for-nothings that they are, and sent by no better masters), but the openly climb up on high, as is the custom in their land, and shout forth their abominable mysteries. Witnesses of these and similar outrages conceal them and do not report the bald facts to your majesty, so that you might demonstrate your zeal inspired by God.[45]

Athanasios informs us of the existence of an Islamic place of worship within the walls of Constantinople.[46] In addition, in this paper I am interested in highlighting the exploitation of this information in a polemical key. Athanasios observes with bitterness how Muslims living in the city are allowed what is not allowed to Christians living in the occupied territories. While the infidels have no qualms about shouting their "abominable" prayers from the top of a minaret, Christians are not even allowed to call to prayer by striking the *semandron*. In this passage, it becomes apparent how the occasions of cohabitation – in this case, within a contact zone that is even the capital of the empire – offer polemical cues. The call to prayer is potentially a point of contact between the religious practices common to the two faiths, but Athanasios employs it to mark a clear asymmetry of treatment between the Muslims living in Constantinople and the oppressed Christians in the areas of conquest, with the clear objective of marking the brutality of the adversaries and, indirectly, the weakness of the Byzantine authority, which he judges unable to manage order and respect for local customs.

45 Athanasios I patr., *Epistles* 41 ll. 19-28 (ed. and transl. Talbot 1975, 82-5).

46 Cf. Reinert 1998, esp. 144, and Di Branco 2013, 119-20.

3.2 Nikephoros Gregoras

The *Byzantine History* by Nikephoros Gregoras (c. 1295-1360) is a monumental work that, together with the *mémoires* of John VI Kantakouzenos, provides us with a complete, but complex, picture of the historical events of the mid-fourteenth-century Byzantine empire, of which Gregoras was an eyewitness and, at the same time, a protagonist, as a learned man. He remained loyal to the Palaiologos dynasty during the reign of Kantakouzenos, with whom he came into open conflict, in relation to his theological positions contrary to the affirmation of Palamism.

Among the recurring themes in Gregoras' historical work, there are obviously the role played by Turkish mercenaries in the events of the civil war (1341-47) and their advance in the Anatolian provinces of the empire. Although from a different position than his opponent Kantakouzenos, Gregoras denounces the brutality of the conquerors and the dramatic conditions in which the communities of Asia Minor and Thrace live, heavily hit by Turkish pirate incursions.

Among the numerous passages in which the author lashes out against the impious invader, often attributing the freedom of action of the conquerors to the inability and connivance of the usurper Kantakouzenos, we present a very interesting passage that deserves careful analysis:

> Καὶ μὲν δὴ πρῶτον ἔστω σοι, θεία μοι κεφαλή, πρὸς ἀκρόασιν τὸ περὶ τῶν βαρβάρων ἐκείνων, οἳ διηνεκῶς καὶ ὅτε βούλοιντο μετὰ πολλῆς κωμάζουσι τῆς ῥαστώνης εἰς τὰ βασίλεια, μυσταγωγοὶ καὶ πρόεδροι τῆς ἀσεβοῦς θρησκείας ὄντες, καὶ βίον μέν, ὡς φασίν, ἄσκευόν τε καὶ ἄζυγα βόσκοντες, γαστρὶ δὲ πάντων μάλιστα δουλεύοντες καὶ ἀκρατοποσίας ἡττώμενοι, καὶ ὅσα τὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας ἀκόλαστον ἀναφλέγει. Οὗτοι τοίνυν μελλούσης τῆς ἱερᾶς τελεῖσθαι μυσταγωγίας ἐν τῷ τῶν βασιλείων ἐκτὸς ἱερῷ τεμένει, χοροὺς ἱστῶντες ἐκεῖνοι παρὰ τὰς βασιλείους αὐλὰς ἀντᾴδουσί τε τὴν γυμνικὴν ἐκείνην ὀρχούμενοι ὄρχησιν, καὶ ἀσήμοις κλαγγαῖς τὰς τοῦ Μωάμεδ ἀναβοῶσιν ᾠδὰς καὶ τοὺς ὕμνους, δι' ὧν καὶ ἀνθέλκουσιν πρὸς τῆς ἑαυτῶν μᾶλλον ἀκρόασιν ἢ τῆν τῶν θείων εὐαγγελίων ποτὲ μὲν πάντας ἁπλῶς ποτὲ δ' ἐνίους τῶν ἠθροισμένων ἐκεῖ. Τὸ δ' αὐτὸ καὶ περὶ τὴν βασίλειον τράπεζαν δρῶσιν ὡς τὰ πολλὰ μετά γε δὴ κυμβάλων καὶ θυμελικῶν ὀργάνων καὶ ᾀσμάτων, ὁπόσα τοῖς ἀσεβέσιν εἴθισται.[47]
>
> First, my dear friend, listen to what concerns those barbarians, who, continuously and when they want to, with great laziness go in procession in the halls of the palace, to preside over and initiate

47 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Byzantine History* 28.41 ll. 12-14 (ed. Bekker 1855, 202-3).

> into the mysteries of the impious superstition, and lead an existence, as they say, sober and chaste, but in reality, more than anything else they are slaves of the belly and victims of wine and of what the incontinence of desire burns. These, moreover, while the divine liturgy is being celebrated in the chapel outside the palace, in the royal halls, while they stand in groups, sing in unison and dance that acrobatic dance and sing loudly and with trinkets odes and hymns to Muḥammad, with which they force those who have gathered there to pay attention to them rather than to the divine Gospels. In addition, they do this spectacle also on various occasions in the reception hall of the palace with cymbals, stage instruments and warbling, as is customary among the impious.[48]

This text contains a puzzling account. The episode is reported by Agathangelos, the interlocutor of Gregoras, whose identity is a matter of debate.[49] Setting aside this issue, we recall that the events narrated took place in the winter of 1352-53, based on the context. Gregoras employs this episode to launch his criticism in several directions. Despite being largely ignored by modern commentators and scholars,[50] the quoted passage documents the presence of an unorthodox Islamic group at court. The terms *mystagogoi* and *proedroi* suggest that they were members of a Sufi brotherhood, active in practising their rituals within the imperial palace with the consent of the emperor/usurper John VI Kantakouzenos. The latter, by his own admission and with the confirmation of his opponents, had distinguished himself during the years of the civil war for having established military cooperation and personal bonds first with the emir Umur of Aydın (?-1348) and then with Orhan I (c. 1281-1362). Therefore, it seems not implausible that members of Sufi communities, active in the territories conquered by the Ottomans, were present in the capital and even welcomed to the palace.

At first glance, the description of collective dance rituals accompanied by musical instruments appears to be a clear reference to the practice of the *sema*, a spectacular mystic ritual distinctive to the adherents of the Mawlawī. This hypothesis is plausible, especially considering that since the time of Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī (1207-1273), the founder of the order, the relations between the Mevlevi Sufis and Christian circles, especially the monastic ones, both in the Byzantine provinces and in the capital, were intense and well documented by the hagiographical sources of the order itself.[51]

48 Author's translation.

49 Cf. Van Dieten 2003, 10-31; Kaldellis 2013, 148-54.

50 Cf. Van Dieten 2003, 357; Shukurov 2016, 375-6.

51 Cf. Rigo 1995.

However, Gregoras/Agathangelos, when presenting the customs of this group, with a scornful tone accuses its members of indulging in the abuse of wine (alcohol)[52] and food, even though they preach abstinence. This detail does not fit well with the practices in use in the Mawlawī, in whose literature there is a metaphorical reference to wine as a tool for initiation and encounter with the divine, and the communal meal has the function of an opportunity for socialisation and group cohesion.[53] In light of this detail, it cannot be ruled out that the author is referring to a different brotherhood. As I said, during its initial expansion phase in the territories of Western Anatolia and the Balkans, the Ottoman emirate supported the proselytising and rooting action on the territory of numerous Sufi groups. In this regard, the case of Geykli Baba (thirteenth-fourteenth century), a member of the Vefāi order and active in the conquest of Bursa, is significant. To Geykli Baba Orhan I donated some territories in the area between Inegöl and Sogut, that is, in the area of origin of the Osmanli family.[54]

Returning to the text, the charge regarding the abuse of food and wine, in my view, could be the voluntary distortion of a rite in use in the Bektaşi brotherhood, which played a pivotal role in the colonisation of the Ottoman Balkans.[55] The presence of members of that community in Constantinople is a plausible hypothesis, based on two elements. Firstly, there is a strong bond between the community and the Ottoman court circles. Secondly, the Bektaşi rites are syncretic in nature, bringing them closer to Christian cult practices. This latter element, in particular, was a significant factor in the widespread diffusion of the rites in the Balkan area during the fifteenth century. In this regard, it is worth noting two significant examples: the confession of sins and ritual ablutions similar to Christian baptism. With regard to the consumption of alcohol and food, I believe that here Gregoras is referring to the rite of the *sofra*.[56]

The ceremony often takes place at the end of the *meidan*, which is an initiation rite that can only be attended by members of the order. The *sofra*, on the other hand, is an open rite. It is structured

52 The accusation of alcohol abuse, a particularly stigmatising charge for a Muslim, is well-documented in Byzantine sources. For instance, Anna Komnene (1083-1153) emphasises this aspect in her account of Jalāl al-Dawla Abū l-Fatḥ Malikshāh's death (1092), cf. *Alexiad* 6.12.6 (ed. Kambylis, Reinsch 2001, 196); similarly, Manuel II Palaiologos also denounces sultan Bāyezīd I (1359-1403) as a drunkard (cf. Trapp 1966, 50 l. 5; Çelik 2021, 134, 248-9).

53 Cf. Özkök et al. 2017.

54 On Vefāi brotherhood, cf. Ocak 2006; Karakaya Stump 2012-13; on Geykli Baba in particular, cf. Ocak 2006, 129.

55 Cf. Mélikoff 1998.

56 Cf. Elias 2020.

according to a ceremonial cadenced by the *baba*. The latter recites some invitation prayers (*gulbang*, *terceman*), including some verses from the surah *al-Mā'idah*. The participants respond with the cry *Hüüü*. The salt ritual follows, which, in its allegorical-metaphorical interpretation, indicates the balance for moderate and ordered experiences, or the means through which excess is spiritualised and becomes a condition for the experience of unity with the divine. Prayer and the rite for the *dem* follow. The latter is the mixing, managed by the *saki*, of alcohol (wine or, more often, *raki*). In this phase, the *baba* continues to pronounce prayers. Once the ritual mixing is complete, the *lokma*, or meal, follows, accompanied by readings, stories, and sermons by the *baba*, while the *saki* continues to pour drinks according to a strict ceremonial. From here the last phase of the ceremony begins, which is marked by singing and dancing (*sema*) to the sound of *nefes* ('hymns'), with instrumental accompaniment. After the prayer of the *saki baba*, the rite ends.

The description of Gregoras, given the underlying polemical intent, prevents us from asserting with certainty that he attended or became aware of the celebration of the Bektaşi *sofra* rite, but the details provided make this hypothesis, at least, reasonable.

In light of the aforementioned observations, it can be seen that, in this case as well, the Byzantine author, rather than emphasising the similarities between the Sufi banquet and the Eucharistic rite, launches into a harsh condemnation of the perceived vulgarity and baseness displayed by the Muslims. Once again, the opportunity for contact turns into an opportunity for polemics. Here, however, the polemical aggression does not limit itself to the Muslim adversary. In a surreptitious way, Gregoras seizes the opportunity to launch his barbs also against the emperor and the newly elected patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos (c. 1300-1379), mentioned a few lines earlier. Gregoras denounces the weakness of the political authority, now completely subservient to the will and exotic practices of the Turks. At the same time, he also accuses the religious authority of passively accepting these impious ceremonies taking place at the court and, even worse, in conjunction with the celebration of the sacred mysteries. Gregoras' vehemently anti-Palamite position is at the root of his denunciation: indeed, he believes that it is precisely the supporters of Palamism, and first and foremost Palamas himself, who harbour a dangerously conciliatory attitude towards the atheist conquerors.

3.3 Gregory Palamas

Gregory Palamas occupied a pivotal position in the religious and political scenario of the early fourteenth century. Beyond his role in the theological dispute that pitted him against Barlaam the Calabrian

and his direct support for the political action of John VI Kantakouzenos, what is of interest here is an episode that occurred during his captivity among the Ottoman Turks (after March 2, 1354-spring 1355). The events of the first part of his captivity (until July 1354) are told in a letter addressed to his community in Thessalonike. This text, which is also handed down to us in a shorter version,[57] stands as an extraordinary autobiographical testimony, as well as a historical account of the condition of the Christian communities in the cities of Asia Minor that Palamas had the opportunity to visit during the transfers imposed upon him by his prisoner officers.[58] The importance of the figure, soon recognised, also gave him the opportunity to meet numerous prominent members of the Ottoman court. First of all, the emir himself, Orhan I, who resided during the summer months in a mountain village along the route to Nicaea (*yayla*). Here, the emir organised a debate between the prisoner and a group of wise men, called *Chionai*.[59] We have a report of this dispute, witnessed by the Greek physician Taronites, which completes the dossier on Palamas's period of captivity.[60] In this mountain village in June 1354, before the dispute with the *Chionai*, Gregory also encountered Ismael, Orhan's grandson, with whom he stopped to talk.

Palamas describes the meeting in great detail, and the setting appears realistic when compared to a similar situation described by the traveller Ibn Battuta a few years earlier.[61] In a meadow, Ismael brings fruit to the archbishop, while he eats sheep meat, brought by servants, in accordance with Qur'ānic restrictions. Here the very fair discussion begins. Ismael wonders if the Christian has ever eaten meat before. Palamas does not answer, perhaps he presumes his readers are familiar with this practice, but this is a prime example of the daily events that can spark such discussions.[62]

Soon after, a servant arrives, apologising to Ismael for his delay: he was busy providing charity. Ismael takes the opportunity to ask Gregory whether Christians also help the poor. Here is the passage that directly interests us:

> Ὁ δὲ Ἰσμαήλ, οὕτω γὰρ ὁ τοῦ μεγάλου ἀμηρᾶ ὑϊδοῦς ἐκαλεῖτο, "σπουδάζεται", φησὶ πρὸς ἐμέ, "καὶ παρ' ὑμῖν ἡ ἐλεημοσύνη;" Ἐμοῦ δὲ εἰπόντος τὴν ὄντως ἐλεημοσύνην γέννημα εἶναι τῆς πρὸς τὸν

57 Cf. Philippidis-Braat 1979, 186-90.

58 Cf. Arnakis 1951.

59 Cf. Wittek 1951; Arnakis 1952; Meyendorff 1966; Prokhorov 1972; Philippidis-Braat 1979, 214-18; Balivet 1982; Miller 2007; Retoulas 2018.

60 Cf. Philippidis-Braat 1979, 109-84.

61 Cf. Gabrieli 1961, 278-9.

62 On meal in this episode, cf. Çelik 2024, 419-21.

> ὄντως θεὸν ἀγάπης, καὶ τὸν μᾶλλον ἀγαπῶντα τὸν θεὸν καὶ μᾶλλον ἐλεήμονα εἶναι καὶ ἀληθῶς, ἐκεῖνος ἤρετο πάλιν εἰ δεχόμεθα καὶ ἀγαπῶμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς τὸν προφήτην αὐτῶν Μεχούμετ.[63]
>
> So, Ismael – that's what the grandson of the great emir was called – asked me: "Is almsgiving also practised among you?". And when I had told him that true almsgiving is the daughter of love for the true God and that the more we love God, the more we are truly merciful, he asked again if we also accept and love their prophet Muḥammad.[64]

The comparison between Islamic *zakāt* and Christian charity/almsgiving is a topic that is not discussed in Byzantine anti-Islamic literature. Some polemicists merely give a passing mention to the ritual practice of *zakāt*.[65] Palamas responds by drawing upon the witness of the New Testament, and at the same time downplays the value of Islamic almsgiving. He states that Christian charity stems from love for God because, in the believer, love for God and love for neighbour are balanced. From this perspective, the customary almsgiving in Islam, driven by the search for salvation and material duties, cannot be compared to the theological nobility of Christian charity. Therefore, Palamas disapproves of Islamic almsgiving, judging it as an ostentation of material wealth.

After a long debate on the figure of Muḥammad and the veracity of the Crucifixion, Ismael quickly changes the subject and he asks for a justification of the worship that Christians reserve for the cross. Here is the passage:

> […] ἐκεῖνος πάλιν ἠρώτα λέγων· "Πῶς τὸ ξύλον ὑμεῖς καὶ τὸν σταυρὸν προσκυνεῖτε;" Ὡς δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ἀπολογίαν ἐποιησάμην, ἣν ὁ θεὸς ἔδωκε, πρὸς αὐτόν, προσθεὶς ὡς· "Καὶ αὐτὸς ἀποδέξῃ δήπου τοὺς τὸ σημεῖον τὸ σὸν τιμῶντας, τοῖς δὲ ἀτιμάζουσιν ἐς τὰ μάλιστα δυσχερανεῖς, Χριστοῦ δὲ τρόπαιον καὶ σημεῖόν ἐστιν ὁ σταυρός" […].[66]
>
> […] he questioned me again, saying: "How can you prostrate before wood and the cross?". When I had also provided him with the

63 Gregory Palamas, *Epistle to his own Church* (*Epistula ad suam ecclesiam*) 14, ed. Philippidis-Braat 1979, 147 ll. 1-5.

64 Author's translation.

65 Cf. Niketas Byzantios, *Refutation* 1.382-4 (ed. Förstel 2000, 60) and Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronicle* A.M. 6119 (ed. de Boor 1883, 334 ll. 26-7). For a discussion on this topic, cf. Khoury 1972, 281-2.

66 Gregory Palamas, *Epistle to his own Church* (*Epistula ad suam ecclesiam*) 14 (ed. Philippidis-Braat 1979, 149 ll. 12-16).

> justification for this, which God inspired me with, adding: "You too will surely approve of those who honour your symbol, while you will be extremely angry with those who dishonour it; now, the trophy and symbol of Christ is the cross" […].[67]

Ismael asks why Christians worship the cross. This is a sneaky accusation of idolatry. At this point, Palamas withholds the answer he gave to his interlocutor. Given the reticence of the text, it is impossible to definitively ascertain which symbol Palamas is referring to. It cannot be excluded that Palamas is referring to the *tuğ*, a pole with circularly arranged horse or yak tail hairs of varying colours at the top. Employed by Turkic tribes during the period of the Mongol empire, the *tuğ* was later adopted by Ottoman troops. It is highly probable that Palamas, without knowing its name, encountered examples of it in Orhan's summer camp, where his meeting with Ismael occurred. This interpretation lends considerable significance to the encounter. Both interlocutors reveal a lack of understanding regarding the recognition symbols of their respective communities. Nevertheless, Palamas appears to use the occasion to assert the superiority of the cross, imbued with religious, cultural, and theological meanings. For him the cross represents the memory of the divine sacrifice and, as such, it is not an object of veneration but a medium of adoration.

Before the debate is interrupted by a downpour, Ismael asks about the divine conception of Jesus, a traditional topic of the Christian-Muslim debate. The dialogue ends at this point.

The two passages I have commented on, albeit brief, offer the vivid image of a dialectical exchange and its themes. Specifically, unlike the other topics discussed during the meeting, here I witness how the argument starts or is enriched through a comparison between practices, customs and beliefs that apparently have elements of affinity. Palamas – and in part also Ismael –, instead of exploiting these arguments to reach a point of reconciliation, employs them in order to better anchor his argumentative path, which is all directed to the defence of his own faith and to the demolition of the principles of the opponent.

3.4 John VI Kantakouzenos

The *Four Apologies Against Mahomeddanism* (*Contra sectam Mahometicam apologiae quattuor*) and the *Four Orations Against Muḥammad* (*Contra Mahometem orationes quattuor*), composed by the monk Ioasaph, more commonly known as John VI Kantakouzenos,

67 Author's translation.

are probably the most important writings against Islam from the Byzantine fourteenth century. In these treatises, the author addresses all the most relevant topics that divide Christians and Muslims. Two elements of innovation stand out when compared with the traditional argumentations: firstly, John adopts a historical approach to downplay Muḥammad's preaching, often comparing it to Jewish rituals; secondly, especially in the *Orations Against Muḥammad*, John makes extensive use of Qur'ānic quotations that he could read in Kydones' translation of a Latin anti-Islamic work, namely the *Against the Law of the Saracens* by the Dominican friar Riccoldo of Monte di Croce, as previously mentioned.

Here, I will examine selected passages of the large corpus where John includes information that is either elaborated in a different manner or completely unknown to the preceding anti-Islamic discourse, and that he derives from his personal experience and knowledge of Islam and its practices.

a. Circumcision

The topic of the circumcision had been briefly discussed since the time of John of Damascus,[68] but Niketas Byzantios stated the difference between the Jewish and Muslim rituals: for Jews, circumcision is a sign of obedience to God, while for Muslims it is only the ablation of flesh.[69]

John talks about circumcision in *Apologies* 1 and 4. In the first text, he situates this Islamic practice within the religious rituals shared by Jews and Muslims, such as monarchy, dietary taboos, polygamy, and so forth.[70] He further notes that Jesus' preaching has already superseded all of these. In this way, as he reiterates during the discussion, in highlighting the similarities between Jewish and Muslim ritual practices, John intends to argue that Muḥammad's preaching is directly derived from Jewish beliefs, and as a consequence it is superseded by the Gospel of Christ.

More interesting is what he asserts in the fourth *Apology*. It should be noted that this section, unlike the others, contains numerous passages with a distinctly polemical intent. Moreover, Kantakouzenos addresses the theme of circumcision with a different nuance. He approaches the subject from a historical perspective. He explains that the Jews, during the Egyptian captivity, circumcised their children

68 John of Damascus, *On Heresies* 100 (ed. Kotter 1981, 67 ll. 152-6).

69 Niketas Byzantios, *Refutation* 26 (ed. Förstel 2000, 136-8 ll. 26-40).

70 John Kantakouzenos, *Apologies* 1, *Argumentum* (*PG* 154, col. 373B-C = ed. Förstel 2005, 2-3 ll. 37-47).

in order to distinguish themselves from the Egyptians. Furthermore, this ablation was meant to exert self-control in the face of passions. Jesus cancelled this practice and replaced it with baptism. Here follow some considerations that deserve attention:

> Ὅτι δὲ ἐλθόντος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἤργησεν ὁ νόμος καὶ οὐδὲ περιτομή ἐστιν, ἀφ' ὧν μέλλεις ἀκούσειν, πρόσσχες. Τὸ μὲν βάπτισμα παρὰ Θεοῦ δοθὲν ὀρθοδοξίας χάριν ἐδόθη καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πάντες ἄνδρες καὶ πᾶσαι γυναῖκες βαπτίζονται· ὁ δὲ μὴ βαπτισθεὶς οὐκ ἔστιν ὀρθόδοξος. Ἡ δὲ περιτομὴ οὐχ οὕτως, ἀλλὰ μόνοι οἱ ἄνδρες περιτέμνονται, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες οὐχί. Ἔοικε γοῦν, ἵνα οἱ μὲν ἄνδρες ὡς περιτετμημένοι ὦσιν ὀρθόδοξοι, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ὡς ἀπερίτμητοι ἀσεβεῖς.
>
> Βλέπεις, πῶς ἄλλος ἐστὶν ὁ τῆς περιτομῆς λόγος καὶ ἄλλως ποιοῦσιν Μουσουλμάνοι; Οἱ γὰρ αὐτοὶ πάντα ἀπερίτμητον ἀσεβῆ λογίζονται. Καὶ ἰδοὺ αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοῖς μάχεσθε καί, ἅπερ ὀρθοδοξίας χάριν τιμᾶτε, ταῦτα ἀπὸ μέρους ἀτιμάζετε. Καὶ οὐ μόνον εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἀναφαίνονται οἱ Μουσουλμάνοι ἐναντιοφωνοῦντες πρὸς ἑαυτούς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ἑτέροις πολλοῖς, ἅπερ οὐκ ἔστιν τις χρεία κατὰ τὸ παρὸν λέγειν περὶ ἐκείνων.
>
> Ὅμως περὶ ἑνὸς εἴπωμεν. Λέγει ὁ Χριστὸς ἐν τῷ Εὐαγγελίῳ, ὅτι "Ἐὰν μή τις βαπτισθῇ, οὐκ ἔστι τοῦ θεοῦ οὐδὲ τῆς σωτηρίας".[71] Ὁ Μωάμεθ μαρτυρεῖ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον ἅγιον καὶ τέλειον καὶ εὐθές. Οἱ Μουσουλμάνοι τοὺς περιτετμημένους λογίζονται ὀρθοδόξους, τοὺς δὲ βεβαπτισμένους ἀσεβεῖς. Εἰ μὲν οὖν στέργετε τὸν Μωάμεθ, ὅτι ἀληθῶς λέγει, πῶς ὀνομάζετε τοὺς βεβαπτισμένους ἀσεβεῖς καὶ οὐκ ἀκολουθεῖτε τῇ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου διδασκαλίᾳ καὶ λογίζεσθε τοὺς μὲν περιτετμημένους κακῶς ποιοῦντας, τοὺς δὲ βεβαπτισμένους εὐσεβεῖς; Ἀλλὰ τἀναντία φρονεῖτε. Οὐκ ἔστι πρόδηλον, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοῖς μάχεσθε καὶ αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοὺς ἀνατρέπετε;[72]

With the coming of Christ, the law was abolished and there is no circumcision. Pay attention to the rest of our discourse. Baptism was established as a gift from God for a right faith and for this reason all men and women are baptised. Whoever does not receive baptism is not right in the faith. This is not the case for circumcision, since only men are circumcised and women are not. It therefore seems that men, since they have been circumcised, are right in the faith, while women, since they are not circumcised, are impious. Do you understand then how much circumcision is quite different and how Muslims practise it differently? In fact, they judge

71 Mark 16:16.

72 John Kantakouzenos, *Apologies* 4.2 (*PG* 154, coll. 537C-540A = ed. Förstel 2005, 180-2 ll. 114-35).

> anyone who is not circumcised to be impious. And behold you fight against yourselves and end up despising in part what you judge to be the signs of the true faith. But not only in this do the Muslims seem to contradict themselves, but also in many other questions that it is not necessary to discuss now. We will only cite this: Christ in the Gospel says: "Whoever is not baptised does not belong to God and to salvation". Muḥammad considers the Gospel to be holy, complete and correct. Muslims judge those who are circumcised to be right in the faith and those who are baptised to be impious. If you follow the preaching of Muḥammad that you believe to be true, how can you call those who are baptised impious and not follow the teaching of the Gospel and not think that those who are circumcised act badly, while those who are baptised instead are pious? You think the opposite. Is it not clear that you are fighting against yourselves and misleading yourselves?[73]

The passage is undoubtedly polemical. What I am keen to underscore is that, despite beginning with a well-known theme developed in earlier treatises, John introduces new considerations aimed at demolishing the entire meaning of the Muslim practice of circumcision. Starting from a historical observation, he inserts an argument, I would say, of social and theological character at the same time: circumcision excludes women from full membership of the community, and this, on the contrary, exalts Jesus' introduction of baptism, capable of embracing the entire humanity beyond gender distinctions. As we will see shortly, Kantakouzenos will return to the topic of the role of women. Here as elsewhere, he does not position himself as a supporter of a 'social emancipation' of the female figure, but aims to highlight the asymmetry that, perhaps through personal experience, he observes in the religion of his opponents. Recalling the background role that women have in Islamic religious practice and in its foundational models, John exalts the novelty of Christianity, which, starting from the universal message spread by Jesus, overcomes the Jewish law to which, according to him, Islam conforms. Not by chance, in the passage quoted here, John continues and lingers on quotes from the Gospel of Mark to highlight the inherent contradiction in Muḥammad's preaching, who praises the value of the Gospel but seems not to follow its fundamental teachings.

73 Author's translation.

b. Human Sacrifices

In the fourth *Apology*, another highly unconventional topic concerning ritual practices is broached. It pertains to human sacrifices. Kantakouzenos charges Muḥammad with imposing his new faith upon others by means of "sword and knife". Thus, John denounces the murders and raids carried out by Muslims against people of other faiths. Then, he asks how God could send a prophet who promotes submission through violence and oppression. Additionally, he contends that the natural law, as demonstrated by animals, does not endorse such actions. Moreover, he adds:

> Οὐ μόνον δὲ μέχρι τούτου ἡ κακία ἔστη, ἀλλὰ καὶ περαιτέρω προέβη. Τί γὰρ τῆς τοιαύτης ὠμότητος καὶ μισανθρωπίας χεῖρον γένοιτ' ἄν, ὥστε φονεύειν μηδὲν ἠδικηκότας; Καὶ γάρ, ὁπόταν ἀπέλθωσι Μουσουλμάνοι πρὸς πόλεμον καὶ ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ πέσῃ τις ἐξ αὐτῶν, οὐ λογίζονται ἑαυτοὺς ἀξίους μέμψεως ὡς αἰτίους τοῦ πολέμου, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὸ νεκρὸν σῶμα τοῦ πεπτωκότος σφάττουσι ζῶντας, ὅσους ἂν δυνηθῇ ἕκαστος, καί, ὅσον πλείους κτείνει, τοσοῦτον λογίζεται ὠφέλειαν τῆς τοῦ τεθνεῶτος ψυχῆς. Εἰ δ' ἴσως οὐκ ἔχει ἀνθρώπους εἰς ἐξουσίαν αὐτοῦ ὁ βουλόμενος βοηθῆσαι τῇ τοῦ τεθνεῶτος ψυχῇ, ἐξωνεῖται Χριστιανούς, εἴπερ εὕροι, καὶ ἢ ἐπάνω τοῦ νεκροῦ σώματος σφάττει αὐτοὺς ἢ ἐπὶ τῷ τάφῳ αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ὁ ταῦτα νομοθετῶν πῶς ἀπὸ Θεοῦ;[74]
>
> But the wickedness did not stop there, but rather went far beyond. For what is worse than such inhumanity and hatred for mankind than to kill those who have committed no evil? And in fact, whenever the Muslims go to war and one of them falls in battle, they do not consider themselves worthy of reproach as the cause of the war, but on the dead body of the deceased they sacrifice as many living prisoners as each one is able: and the more of them they slaughter, the more they believe that they will be of benefit to the soul of the deceased. And if then there are no men available, the one who intends to help the soul of the dead buys Christians, if there are any, and kills them on the body of the dead or on his grave. And how can he come from God who legislates in this way?[75]

John goes on to mention a practice that he claims is associated with Islam: the sacrifice of living prisoners on the graves of dead warriors. He says that this practice is carried out under the belief that it

74 John Kantakouzenos, *Apologies* 4.5 (*PG* 154, col. 545A-B = ed. Förstel 2005, 190 ll. 277-87).

75 Author's translation.

will benefit the dead. If there are no prisoners available, the Muslims will buy Christians to be killed. This passage has been analysed by Vryonis, who links it to other accounts of human sacrifice in Turkic Central Asia communities dating back to the sixth century, related by Menander Protector and Theophanes.[76]

The reliability of Kantakouzenos' account seems to be confirmed by an episode mentioned by the historian Chalkokondyles,[77] but this does not necessarily mean that the practice of human sacrifice was widespread in Islam. It is possible that this was an isolated incident, or that it was only practised by a small minority of Turkish Muslims, still tied to forms of worship characteristic of Turkic-Mongol communities. Overall, there is no clear evidence to support the claim that the sacrifice of living prisoners is a uniquely Islamic practice. More research is needed to determine the extent to which this practice was actually carried out, and whether it was motivated by religious beliefs or other ethnographical factors. It is significant that Kantakouzenos mentions this practice in order to denounce the brutality of Muḥammad's followers. I believe we are facing a case of flattening of the historical-cultural perspective, which however has the merit of returning to us the depiction of Muslim customs contemporary to the text's composition, although fragmented and episodic, and limited to Turkish groups that were not entirely Islamised, of which John had direct knowledge.

c. Female Condition

John devotes special attention to the status of women, using this topic as a polemical argument. While he is partly influenced by Kydones' translation, it is crucial to highlight that the discourse on this topic is located in the last of the *Apologies*, which include minimal quotes from the translation of the Greek scholar. John criticises the Qur'ānic indication stating that whoever lies with a prostitute or seduces a consenting virgin or a captive woman is not a sinner.[78] However, the real target of John's polemical attack is the practice of polygamy, which he judges shocking. He does not find any case in the Scriptures where this practice is accepted, and blames Muḥammad for allowing and encouraging sexual practices in this world as in the afterlife. John says:

76 Vryonis 1971b.

77 Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *Demonstrations of History* 7 (ed. Darkò 1926, 118 ll. 1-4).

78 John Kantakouzenos, *Apologies* 4.5 (*PG* 154, col. 545B-C = ed. Förstel 2005, 190 ll. 294-8).

> Ἔτι περὶ τῶν ἀνδρῶν μόνον μέλει τῷ Θεῷ ὡς πλασμάτων αὐτοῦ, περὶ δὲ τῶν γυναικῶν οὐδαμῶς διὰ τὸ μὴ εἶναι αὐτοὺς πλάσμα Θεοῦ; Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οἱ μὲν ἄνδρες μέλλουσιν ἀπολαύειν τῶν παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τοιούτων ἀγαθῶν, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες οὐδ' ὅλως; Ἢ, ἐπεὶ μία φύσις ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς καὶ εἷς ἄνθρωπός ἐστι πᾶς ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁμοίως μέλλουσι κριθῆναι οἱ πάντες καὶ ὁμοίως μέλλουσιν ἀπολαβεῖν, οἱ μὲν καλῶς πολιτευσάμενοι ἀγαθά, οἱ δὲ κακῶς ὀργὴν Θεοῦ καὶ ἀποστροφὴν καὶ κόλασιν, πάντως που παντί που δῆλον, ὅτι πάντες ἄνθρωποι ὁμοίως μέλλουσι κριθῆναι ἄνδρες τε καὶ γυναῖκες, ἐπεὶ καὶ μία καὶ ἡ αὐτὴ φύσις ἐστὶ καὶ ὁμοίως μέλλουσιν ἀπολαβεῖν, ὡς ἕκαστος αὐτῶν ἔπραξε κακά τε καὶ ἀγαθά.[79]
>
> And again, does God only care about men, since they are his creation, and not about women, since they are not his creation? And for this reason, are men destined to enjoy such blessings from God and women absolutely not? Or, since the nature of man and woman is unique and one is the human being and in the same way all human beings will be judged and in the same way they will receive some goods because they have lived in righteousness, others God's wrath and disruption and punishment if they have lived badly, obviously to all clearly, because all human beings will be subjected to judgment, men and women, since one and the same is their nature and they will receive in the same way according to what each one did of good and evil.[80]

In the development of his reasoning, John shifts the focus from the topic of polygamy to the reward in the afterlife. He emphasises the presence of an unjustified and unacceptable predominance of the male element in Muḥammad's preaching. In Kantakouzenos' view, the woman is relegated to a marginal role, existing solely for the pure pleasure of the man both in this life and in the hereafter. The same configuration of the Islamic Paradise, which denies salvation and any form of enjoyment for women, appears to Kantakouzenos absurd rather than impious. However, at this point a clarification is essential. John, however, should not be regarded as a feminist *avant la lettre*. In his treatment of this topic, Kantakouzenos begins by comparing polygamy and monogamy. He follows John of Damascus and especially Theodore Abu-Qurrah, who believed that the purpose of marriage is pleasure and procreation, and that this is best achieved in a monogamous relationship. This is why God created the original

79 John Kantakouzenos, *Apologies* 4.6 (*PG* 154, col. 552A-B = ed. Förstel 2005, 196 ll. 407-17).

80 Author's translation.

monogamous couple.[81] On this basis, Kantakouzenos considers polygamy absurd and inappropriate, as it constitutes a kind of injustice against women, who have equal dignity to men in the divine economy.

d. Saint George and the Miracle of the Three Lamps in Jerusalem

The real *Leitmotif* in Kantakouzenos' anti-Islamic corpus lies in the statement of the superiority of Christianity in order to convince his opponent. This superiority, he says, is not justified by the conquered lands and the submission of people, but by Jesus' preaching, which is the fulfilment of the messianic promises contained in the Scriptures. John says that, while Jesus' words appear so simple and unadorned, they actually contain a supernatural message. Jews and Muslims are like a drop in the sea, because all of the *oikoumene* trusts in Jesus as God. The reliability of Christ's message lies in the direct witness of his disciples, his apostles, and especially of the martyrs who paid their faith with the sacrifice of their lives.

In this context, John mentions the case of George, a saint martyr, who is also worshipped by Muslims as Cheter Eliaz (Χετὴρ Ἠλιάζ) or Khiḍr-Ilyās.[82] Here is the related passage:

> Καί, ὅτι μὲν πάντες οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μάρτυρες θαύματα ἐνήργουν ἄπειρα, ἅτινα διὰ τὸ πλῆθος εἰάθησαν, τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν. Ὅμως δὲ ἐκ τῶν πολλῶν συνεγράψαντο οἱ τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ εὑρισκόμενοι οὐκ ὀλίγα, ἐξ ὧν ἕν ἐστι τοῦτο. Ὁ παρ' ἡμῶν τῶν Χριστιανῶν τιμώμενος μάρτυς τοῦ Χριστοῦ Γεώργιος, ὃς καὶ παρ' αὐτῶν τῶν Μουσουλμάνων τιμᾶται, ὀνομάζεται δὲ παρ' αὐτῶν Χετὴρ Ἠλιάζ, βασανιζόμενος καὶ πειραζόμενος παρὰ τῶν ἀσεβῶν καὶ εἰδωλολατρῶν, ἵνα τὸν μὲν Χριστὸν ἀρνήσηται, σεβασθῇ δὲ καὶ προσκυνήσῃ τοῖς ἐκείνων θεοῖς –· ὁ δὲ προείλετο μυρίους θανάτους καὶ μυρίας βασάνους ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἢ ὅλως ἀθετῆσαι τὴν εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν πίστιν αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ἐποίησαν αὐτῷ τιμωρίας μεγάλας καὶ πειρατήρια.[83]
>
> Although all the martyrs of Christ performed incalculable miracles, so many that it was impossible to record them all, this is an example. George, the martyr of Christ, honoured by Christians and also respected by Muslims, who call him Cheter Eliaz, was tortured and tempted by the wicked and idolatrous to deny Christ,

81 Theodore Abu-Qurrah, *Pamphlet* 24, *PG* 97, coll. 1556A-57D. For a summary of this topic, cf. Khoury 1972, 260-3.

82 Vryonis 1971a, 485; Wolper 2000, esp. 315-16.

83 John Kantakouzenos, *Apologies* 3.6-8 (*PG* 154, coll. 512D-13A = ed. Förstel 2005, 152 ll. 294-304).

> to venerate and worship their gods, but he preferred a thousand times death and a thousand torments in the name of Christ rather than renounce his faith in Christ. They attacked him with great tortures and trials.[84]

This is a very astonishing record of overlapped and shared worship. But even more important is that John employs this worship as a polemical argument to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity. This brief passage confirms what has been theorised in the first pages of this article, that is, how situations of cohabitation in contact zones and cases of religious blending, instead of favouring a reconciliation between different faiths, produce, within a polemical context, arguments and examples useful for the demolition of the opponent.

To confirm this, I mention another example a few paragraphs later. Here, Kantakouzenos inveighs against those who do not trust in God because they are blinded by the devil, and there he mentions the miracle of the three lamps in Jerusalem (Ἅγιον Φῶς).[85] He says:

> Οἶδας πάντως, ὅτι κρίμασιν, οἷς οἶδε Θεός, κατεξουσιάζουσιν οἱ Μουσουλμάνοι καὶ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου τούτου καὶ κατὰ τὸν δηλωθέντα καιρὸν τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀναστάσεως πολλὴν καὶ μεγάλην ποιοῦνται τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ φροντίδα, ὥστε μηκέτ' εἶναι τὸ παράπαν λυχνιαῖον φῶς. Ἐνεργεῖται τοιγαροῦν τοῦτο οὕτως ἀπαραιτήτως κατὰ τὴν τούτων ἐπιμέλειαν. Ἐν δὲ τῷ καιρῷ, καθ' ὃν ᾄδουσιν οἱ ἐκεῖσε εὑρισκόμενοι Χριστιανοὶ τὸν τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὕμνον, κατέρχεται φῶς οὐρανόθεν ἀνάπτον τὰς εἰς τὸν τοιοῦτον τάφον τοῦ Χριστοῦ εὑρισκομένας τρεῖς λαμπάδας ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἐκεῖσε εὑρισκομένου τηνικαῦτα κατὰ καιρὸν ἄρχοντος τῶν Μουσουλμάνων.
>
> Τί γοῦν σοι δοκεῖ; Ψευδῶς ἔλεγεν ὁ Χριστός, ὅτι Θεός ἐστι καὶ Θεοῦ Υἱός; Ψευδῶς δὲ πιστεύουσι καὶ οἱ Χριστιανοί; Καὶ πῶς τῇ ὥρᾳ ταύτῃ, καθ' ἣν ἀνυμνοῦσιν οὗτοι, ὡς εἴπομεν, τὸν Χριστὸν Θεὸν καὶ Θεοῦ Υἱὸν καὶ ποιητὴν πάσης κτίσεως, εἰς πλείονα δῆθεν πίστωσιν καὶ δήλωσιν τοῦ θαύματος μαρτυροῦντος τοῦτο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὥστ' εἶναι τοῦτ' ἀληθές, κατέρχεται οὐρανόθεν φῶς ἐξάπτον τὰς εἰς τὸν τάφον αὐτοῦ δὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὡς δεδήλωται, λαμπάδας;
>
> Ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῇ Ἰορδάνῃ ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ τῆς αὐτοῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ βαπτίσεως κατῆλθεν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ φωνὴ λέγουσα, ὅτι "Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός",[86] τουτέστιν ὁ Χριστός, οὕτω καὶ κατὰ τὸν ῥηθέντα καιρὸν κατέρχεται τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ φῶς πιστούμενον καὶ μαρτυροῦν πᾶσι πιστοῖς τε καὶ ἀπίστοις, ὅτι αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστὸς

84 Author's translation.

85 Canard 1965; Auxentios of Photiki 1999.

86 Matt. 3:17; cf. Mark 1:9; Luke 3:22.

ὁ Υἱὸς καὶ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ ἀληθὴς Θεός τε καὶ ἄνθρωπος. Τίς γοῦν οὕτως ἄθλιος, ὃς οὐ προσκυνεῖ καὶ ὁμολογεῖ αὐτὸν Θεὸν καὶ Υἱὸν καὶ Λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ;[87]

You know that, by God's inscrutable will, the Muslims also control that place, holy to him, and in the days of the Resurrection of Christ [Holy Week] they take great care and caution that no light is lit. Yet this happens inexorably in spite of their scruples. At the moment when the Christians who live there sing the hymn for the Resurrection of Christ, a light descends from heaven, which lights the three lamps that are placed in the aforementioned tomb of Christ under the eyes of the Muslim governor, who is present on that occasion. What do you think? Did Christ lie when he said that he is God and Son of God? Perhaps the Christians falsely believe? And how is it possible that precisely at the moment they chant, as stated, that Christ is God and the Son of God, the creator of all creatures, as a further proof and confirmation of the prodigy which testifies that this comes from God, i.e., that it is true, a light descends from heaven that turns on the lamps of his tomb, that is, of Christ, as recounted? As indeed at the moment of the baptism of Christ at the Jordan, a voice descended from heaven that proclaimed: "This is my beloved Son", that is, Christ, so also in the aforementioned moment the heavenly light descends that assures and testifies to all the faithful and to the unbelievers that this is Christ, the Son and Word of God, true God and man. Who then is so petty as not to worship him and profess him as God and Son and Word of God?[88]

It is evident that the passage aims to present a miraculous event as irrefutable evidence of the truth of the Christian message and the divine nature of Christ. What merits emphasis is the contrast with previous examples. In those instances, the polemicist drew inspiration from the situations, customs, and practices of the opposing faction that could be compared with those of Christians. In this case, however, Kantakouzenos introduces a miraculous phenomenon observed by Muslims, who have controlled the Holy Land for centuries. The direction is therefore reversed: rather than correlating an Islamic practice with a Christian one, the polemicist utilises a well-known phenomenon from a well-established contact zone to assert the superiority and truth of Christianity.

87 John Kantakouzenos, *Apologies* 3.8 (*PG* 154, col. 517AC = ed. Förstel 2005, 156-8 ll. 389-412).

88 Author's translation.

4 A Preliminary Conclusion

In this essay, I have presented a selection of passages from the works of prominent authors of Palaiologan literature. Through these excerpts, I aim to demonstrate the emergence of a new trend in the anti-Islamic literature of that period. Alongside the traditional themes of theological and ethical issues, the close interactions within the contact zones with Turkish Islam provide Byzantine polemicists with fresh points of criticism, examples, and controversial tools derived from everyday practices they directly experience. The incorporation of these elements and the exploitation of their apologetical-polemical potential represent the most significant 'originality' in the polemical literature of the Palaiologan period, setting it apart from the long-standing Byzantine tradition on this subject.

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

À qui s'adressait vraiment la polémique antijudaïque à Byzance ?

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Abstract The identification of the 'real' audience for any given anti-Jewish treatise often remains elusive due to a perplexing blend of lengthy, a historical theological sections and much briefer allusions to the time of the writing. It seems more expedient to determine for each text what it is not rather than to speculate about what it 'might be', and to admit that long segments of some texts are actually 'dead pages', included for the sake of genre conventions or out of adherence to authoritative precedents, but of little significance even to the author. In some cases, these passages are a *camouflage* for the insertion of seemingly more relevant topics at the margins of the text. From the eleventh century onwards, anti-Jewish sections of general theological encyclopaedias and even of dedicated works have more of a protocol function: authors cannot dispense with the time-honoured practice of anti-Jewish polemics, albeit with little genuine urgency. From the fourteenth century onwards, however, a new wave of anti-Jewish writings appears more as a by-product of the increasingly intense polemics against Islam: the two genres mirrored each other, and anti-Jewish discourse was strategically instrumentalized for anti-Muslim arguments.

Keywords Anti-Jewish. Audience. Byzantine. Islam. Polemic.

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Il est reconnu* de longue date qu'on ne comprend vraiment un texte ancien que lorsqu'on a pu identifier le ou les publics qu'il vise ; ce principe est excellent, mais dès qu'on essaie de l'appliquer à la polémique antijudaïque, le sol se dérobe sous les pas du chercheur : tout comme pour le rapport entre la réalité des controverses religieuses et la construction littéraire des textes conservés, des hypothèses très diverses ont pu être proposées parce que les 'données' qui se dégagent des textes sont plus de l'ordre de la probabilité que du fait positif, et souvent semblent pointer dans des directions opposées pour le même document.

Faute de certitude, on peut essayer de réduire l'incertitude en cataloguant les points sur lesquels il y a de fortes probabilités et ceux où domine plutôt l'incertitude. Dans cette quête, le grand risque est bien sûr de projeter sur la source ce qui n'y est pas : dans le temps, de projeter notre présent et ce que nous croyons spontanément être vraisemblable, dans l'objet, de projeter sur la polémique antijudaïque des savoirs et des argumentaires élaborés dans d'autres genres littéraires, en particulier l'homilétique et la théologie – même si certains cas attestent bien la porosité entre ces domaines, on ne peut en faire une règle générale. La polémique antijudaïque semble à première lecture être un objet figé dans l'essentiel de son propos, et donc difficile à saisir dans son *Sitz im Leben* sur lequel il donne bien peu d'indices. Les textes semblent flotter en l'air. Depuis Adolf von Harnack,[1] on sait bien que les textes de polémique antijudaïque sont au moins en partie des constructions littéraires, et non une photographie ou un procès-verbal de vrais débats, mais une fois ceci posé il est bien difficile de l'appliquer à un texte concret.[2]

Pour donner une idée de la tendance dominante du consensus actuel, la traduction commentée récente du *Dialogue de Timothée et Aquila*[3] offre un point de départ commode. Résumons le commentaire de Sébastien Morlet : 1) le texte vise plusieurs usages et plusieurs cibles ; 2) la cible principale est la communauté propre de l'auteur, donc les chrétiens : la construction de l'identité collective se fait par l'exclusion de l'autre sur certains critères, 3) le texte a une valeur catéchétique, à la fois en interne (énoncer la foi chrétienne d'une façon simple, par les différences avec d'autres religions) et en externe (pour des gens extérieurs, en train de se convertir ou tentés de le faire). Pour l'ancêtre du genre, le *Dialogue avec Tryphon*

* Une version orale de cette contribution a été présentée au 24ème Congrès International des Études Byzantines de Venise et Padoue en 2022.

1 Cf. Harnack 1883.

2 L'étude récente d'Averil Cameron sur le discours byzantin face aux juifs et aux hérétiques dans la longue durée est une synthèse très utile : Cameron 2022.

3 Morlet 2017.

de Justin dans les années 160, Olivier Munnich a démontré que ce texte est en réalité bien mal informé sur le judaïsme et ne peut donc guère avoir visé la conversion des juifs de son temps : le texte est produit pour un public strictement chrétien et a perdu le contact avec la polémique réelle de l'époque antérieure ;[4] Patrick Andrist interprète de même le *Dialogue d'Athanase et Zacchée* comme d'abord une forme de catéchèse apollinariste aux environs de 400.[5] Mais après le cinquième siècle, l'objectif essentiel ne peut plus être catéchétique lorsque le christianisme est dominant, donc bien connu, et bien structuré avec une ou plusieurs 'orthodoxies' élaborées.

Il faut donc procéder à une falsification systématique au sens poppérien du terme, non pas tant démontrer la ou les visées que tel ou tel texte peut avoir que celles qu'il ne peut pas avoir. Or, le problème des interprétations des textes polémiques antijudaïques comme texte seulement *ad intra* (pour sa propre communauté) ou comme simple moyen d'autopublicité est qu'elles évacuent le lien avec un conflit réel avec les juifs, pourtant bien attesté dans certains cas. Il suffit de se tourner vers les *Catéchèses* de Cyrille de Jérusalem[6] ou les homélies *Contre les Juifs* de Jean Chrysostome pour trouver des textes qui se soucient explicitement de donner des arguments commodes contre les juifs à des chrétiens ébranlés dans leurs convictions par des discussions réelles au jour le jour. Certains textes se présentent explicitement non comme des procès-verbaux de discussions réelles, mais comme des manuels pour des controverses à venir : c'est le cas du *Débat contre les Juifs* (*Disputatio adversus Iudaeos*) du Pseudo-Anastase[7] et des *Kephalaia epaporètika*.[8] C'est aussi implicitement le cas de textes comme les *Trophées de Damas*,[9] qui mettent en scène une controverse fictive qui utilise des textes qui semblent plus théoriques.

Pour certains textes, le problème est aggravé par l'état de la transmission : ils ne nous sont transmis que par fragments cités dans des florilèges ou d'autres textes, et évaluer leur rapport à leur public est du coup très délicat. Ainsi, un texte qui semble avoir été à un carrefour de la genèse de beaucoup de textes anti-judaïques, l'*Apologie contre les Juifs* de Léontios de Néapolis au septième siècle, ne nous est conservé que par deux séries parallèles d'extraits découpés au huitième siècle par Jean Damascène puis le concile de Nicée II, et deux

4 Cf. Munnich 2013.
5 Cf. Andrist 2001.
6 Cf. Andrist 2013.
7 Cf. Dumont 2021.
8 Cf. Déroche 1991b.
9 Cf. Bardy 1920.

autres extraits secondaires.[10] La lecture de ces extraits et la comparaison avec des mentions des Juifs dans les autres œuvres conservées de Léontios ne permettent pas de juger de leur rapport au réel. Mais l'*Apologie arménienne* contre des iconoclastes chrétiens au septième siècle, conservée entièrement,[11] montre de nombreux parallèles avec ces extraits ; or, le texte arménien, sous forme de traité et non de dialogue, renvoie certainement à une polémique réelle avec un groupe 'hérétique' contre lequel il met en garde : pour l'auteur arménien, l'*Apologie contre les Juifs* de Léontios (ou sans doute plutôt sa source) n'était pas coupée du réel de son propre temps, ou trouvait dans ce contexte arménien une nouvelle pertinence qui n'y était pas à l'origine. L'exemple le plus connu est l'utilisation au concile de Nicée II d'un bon nombre de textes anti-judaïques bien antérieurs auxquels l'iconoclasme donne une actualité inattendue ; les pères conciliaires développent ici l'intuition du patriarche Germanos au début du huitième siècle, qu'il y avait une similitude entre lutte contre l'iconoclasme et lutte contre certains aspects du judaïsme.

Cela renvoie à une impression générale des lecteurs modernes de ces textes, une dichotomie flagrante entre ce qu'on pourrait appeler des 'pages mortes' où le texte, monotone, n'est souvent que le recopiage d'un argumentaire convenu avec son florilège, et des 'pages vivantes' où l'on sent le contexte de la rédaction et une vraie implication de l'auteur. Dans le cas de l'*Apologie contre les Juifs* de Léontios, les extraits utilisés contre l'iconoclasme, coupés de toute mise en scène, sont pourtant bien plus vivants que ceux transmis hors de cette thématique spécifique : on sent qu'au temps de Léontios le débat avec les Juifs sur les images et les reliques était bien une affaire d'une actualité brûlante. Le contraste entre développements théoriques assez plats et passages très concrets atteint bien entendu son maximum dans la *Doctrina Jacobi*, qui met en scène des juifs baptisés de force à Carthage en 632 et se laissant convertir au christianisme par l'un d'eux, Jacob, qui a eu une révélation ; le texte montre clairement qu'il a en fait été écrit par un chrétien en Palestine dans les années 630.[12] L'essentiel du texte des séances de catéchèse-débat de Jacob avec les Juifs de Carthage n'a guère d'originalité et pourrait figurer dans des dialogues polémiques connus par ailleurs, mais autour de ces grands pans de texte assez fades sont insérés de brefs aperçus extraordinairement vivants sur les décennies précédentes en Palestine et ailleurs dans l'empire, avec même un bref portrait de Mahomet et de l'Islam. Mais il convient de se rappeler que la *Doctrina Jacobi* est, justement, atypique et inclassable parce qu'on ne peut la

10 Cf. Léontios de Néapolis, *Apologie contre les Juifs*, éd. Déroche 1993.

11 Éd. Der Nersessian 1944.

12 Cf. *Doctrina Jacobi*, éd. Déroche 1991a.

ramener à une simple œuvre polémique : en même temps catéchèse, témoignage et apocalypse, elle vise certainement un public juif hellénophone autant que le public chrétien (même si elle n'a sans doute guère atteint sa première cible).

Prenons un document plus conforme au modèle général, la *Theognosia* : son premier éditeur, Michiel Hostens,[13] avait correctement repéré que ce texte, assez peu original de contenu, se situait vers la fin du neuvième siècle ou le début du dixième, et que plusieurs passages témoignaient d'une focalisation surprenante sur la sexualité. Peter Van Deun[14] a montré récemment que l'auteur est Métrophane de Smyrne, bien connu par ailleurs comme opposant à Photius et à la tétragamie – et ce dernier point révèle le vrai enjeu des passages sur les normes sexuelles, qui s'inscrivent dans une polémique entre clercs byzantins et non contre les juifs. Que vise donc la *Theognosia* ? L'aspect antijudaïque n'est pas insincère (ce sont des lieux communs du genre auxquels tout clerc de l'époque aurait pu souscrire), mais est sans doute un prétexte (au sens littéral du terme) pour insérer en marge des critiques dont il aurait été dangereux de faire le sujet principal d'un ouvrage : l'avantage tactique de prétendre écrire d'abord contre les juifs est que c'est un motif insoupçonnable ; la crainte de la censure explique qu'on se donne la peine d'écrire tant de 'pages mortes' qui servent surtout de paravent. Pour nous modernes, écrire un texte où l'essentiel de l'intérêt tient à une très faible portion de texte est absurde, mais dans une société très normée où le moindre écart avec la *doxa* officielle est très signifiant, ce peut être une tactique pertinente. Le public visé est donc bien sûr essentiellement chrétien, et l'antijudaïsme est plutôt une posture.

Mais la date du texte n'est pas indifférente : après la curieuse tentative de conversion des juifs par Basile Ier au neuvième siècle,[15] on n'a pratiquement plus d'attestation de débat réel avec les juifs – sauf en hagiographie, mais ce peut être un *topos* emprunté à des textes plus anciens.[16] Or, après cette période, les rares textes antijudaïques connus sont remarquablement artificiels : les recueils 'panoramiques' contre toutes les dissidences comme la *Panoplie dogmatique* d'Euthyme Zigabène ou le *Trésor de la foi orthodoxe* de Nicétas Choniate ne consacrent aux juifs que des extraits recopiés de textes antérieurs, et la présence de ces passages antijudaïques ne s'explique que par l'impossibilité de prétendre dresser un panorama

13 Cf. Hostens 1986.

14 Cf. Van Deun 2008.

15 Cf. Grégoire de Nicée, *Contre le baptême des juifs*, éd. Dagron 1991.

16 Voir récemment sur les Juifs dans l'hagiographie de cette époque De Ridder 2022, qui pointe à juste titre la circulation de motifs entre littérature polémique et hagiographie ; ce bilan aurait gagné à la comparaison avec Ivanov 2003. Voir aussi Déroche 2010.

des hérésies et fausses religions sans y inclure le judaïsme. Lorsque le moine Joasaph, ex-empereur Jean Cantacuzène, écrit au quatorzième siècle un livre de polémique contre le judaïsme,[17] il est difficile d'imaginer qu'il vise sérieusement à ébranler les convictions des juifs de son temps.[18] Le plus vraisemblable est qu'il veut se donner la posture d'un champion de l'orthodoxie, après avoir défendu l'empire orthodoxe par les armes pendant son règne, et après avoir présidé le synode de 1351 qui établit le palamisme comme orthodoxie, et les textes polémiques contre les adversaires du palamisme, contre l'Islam et contre les juifs (pour l'essentiel du recopiage de textes antérieurs) ne font que compléter le tableau. D'autres textes inédits du quatorzième siècle, dus à Matthieu Blastarès, Andronic Comnène et Théophane de Nicée, restent inédits,[19] alors que le simple fait de leur surgissement parallèle laisse penser à une actualité retrouvée de la 'question juive'.

Pour mieux comprendre cette évolution, il faut se tourner vers un genre parallèle, les textes antimusulmans. Ceux-ci connaissent un premier essor au huitième et au neuvième siècle à Byzance, avec la notice de Jean Damascène sur l'Islam dans son livre sur les hérésies (ch. 100) et le traité de réfutation du Coran par Nicétas de Byzance,[20] puis se répètent sans trop d'innovations. Les choses changent néanmoins au quatorzième siècle, avec le traité de Jean Cantacuzène contre les musulmans[21] et le dialogue antimusulman de l'empereur Manuel Paléologue.[22] Le contenu des textes n'est pas innovant, sauf l'usage par Cantacuzène du traité antimusulman du dominicain Riccoldo da Monte Croce dans sa traduction grecque par Démétrios Kydonès. Le point nouveau est un contexte historique radicalement modifié, où la progression turque fait de l'Islam une réalité concrète pour beaucoup de Byzantins, avec des discussions théologiques bien attestées entre autres par la captivité de Grégoire Palamas (trois entretiens avec des interlocuteurs musulmans) et la discussion de Manuel Paléologue avec un érudit musulman qui est à la base de son texte, mais aussi quelques rares conversions de Turcs au christianisme (les *Apologies* de Cantacuzène sont censées répondre à des critiques de musulmans contre leur ex-coreligionnaire devenu moine sous le nom de Mélétios). Contrairement aux textes antijudaïques,

17 Jean Cantacuzène, *Écrits contre l'Islam*, éd. Soteropoulos 1983.

18 Cf. Todt 1992.

19 Cf. Bowman 1985, 251-2 (Andronic, ca. 1325), 262 (Blastarès, mi-XIV^{e} s.), 290 (Théophane, avant 1380).

20 Cf. Nicétas de Byzance, *Écrits sur l'Islam*, éd. Förstel 2000.

21 Jean Cantacuzène, *Écrits contre l'Islam*, éd. Förstel 2005.

22 Manuel Paléologue, *Dialogue avec un Musulman*, éd. Förstel 1993 (cf. aussi l'édition de Trapp 1966).

nous avons ici des cas fascinants d'enracinement dans le concret. Cantacuzène reproduit en tête de son ouvrage la brève lettre en grec vernaculaire d'un musulman d'Ispahan, adressée à Mélétios, et le consensus tend à la reconnaître comme authentique ; l'empereur rétorque par quatre apologies répondant aux critiques musulmanes, puis quatre discours (*logoi*) attaquant l'Islam, le moment où il utilise Riccoldo da Monte Croce ; d'une occasion concrète, le Byzantin tire un traité livresque. Le point de départ du long texte de Manuel Paléologue est une série d'entretiens à Ankara avec un *mouterizis* (μουτερίζης, sans doute la transcription de *mudarris*, professeur) musulman dans l'hiver 1391, lorsque les Byzantins durent fournir un contingent pour les campagnes de leur 'allié' Beyazit I^{er} ; la correspondance de Manuel confirme la réalité de cette campagne. Les notations concrètes abondent – la présence des deux fils du *mouterizis*, la froidure de l'hiver anatolien, la nécessité d'un interprète, la vénération des musulmans pour la personne même de Mahomet ; la meilleure analyse est celle de Trapp.[23] La qualité littéraire de la mise en scène évoque les dialogues de Platon, sûrement le modèle visé. Mais la longueur des développements est très inégale : les propos de Manuel sont au moins six fois plus longs que ceux de son interlocuteur, selon une disproportion bien connue des dialogues antijudaïques, et les développements théoriques de Manuel ne cherchent même pas à garder l'apparence de l'oralité, récupérant des éléments précédents de Jean Damascène, Nicétas de Byzance et d'autres ; la forme dialogique n'est qu'une fiction pour le plus clair du texte. Comme par hasard, sur les vingt-six séances, les neuf premières sont toutes consacrées à la polémique contre des thèses musulmanes jugées intenables par Manuel, et les dix-sept autres à l'apologétique, une défense des points essentiels de la foi chrétienne : la construction littéraire est flagrante. Le texte est sans doute inachevé, car il s'interrompt brutalement après la dernière séance sur l'eucharistie, sans donner de dénouement à la mise en scène. Là encore, il y a sans doute eu des échanges réels, dont des traces semblent subsister dans les propos du *mouterizis*, mais le texte écrit ensuite à Constantinople n'a presque plus de contact avec ce qui a pu se passer à Ankara en 1391 : la réalité est une fois de plus fermement tenue à distance. Le public visé ne peut être que byzantin : s'il est vrai que beaucoup de musulmans pouvaient connaître le grec à l'oral ou à l'écrit sous une forme vernaculaire, il est pratiquement exclu qu'ils aient pu lire le grec littéraire archaïsant de Manuel ; le même raisonnement s'applique au traité de Cantacuzène. Le réel des frictions et échanges entre chrétiens et musulmans ne réapparaît que de façon triangulaire : à défaut d'une image réaliste de dialogues ou contacts entre

23 Cf. Trapp 1966.

les deux groupes, les lecteurs chrétiens peuvent reconnaître des éléments de langage de la partie adverse (des passages parmi les plus vivants, comme par hasard), suivis d'une réfutation scolaire complètement improbable dans la prétendue mise en scène ; l'auteur chrétien rassure le public chrétien en passant par la figure d'un tiers, un musulman 'reconstruit' pour les besoins de la cause.

Le traité de Cantacuzène présente une autre caractéristique : des passages et raisonnements sont presque identiques dans le texte antijudaïque et dans le texte antimusulman, de propos délibéré ; la supériorité du christianisme sur la Loi juive entraîne celle du christianisme sur l'Islam a fortiori, et on retrouve chez Manuel Paléologue cette dialectique de trois 'lois', où le judaïsme devient un levier contre l'Islam (la supériorité de Moïse sur Mahomet fonde la victoire de la partie chrétienne). Autrement dit, la lutte contre l'Islam et celle contre le judaïsme ne peuvent être vraiment pleinement séparées. Or, on a déjà signalé que cette triangulation au quatorzième siècle entre christianisme, judaïsme et Islam en rappelle une autre aux septième et huitième siècles ; plusieurs des premiers textes antimusulmans évoquent l'appui apporté par des experts juifs à la partie musulmane, les iconodoules byzantins évoquent des influences perverses du judaïsme et de l'Islam (et du judaïsme sur l'Islam) pour expliquer l'hérésie iconoclaste. L'exemple cité plus haut des *Trophées de Damas* peut être rapproché du traité de Manuel Paléologue : la mise en scène de l'ensemble du texte des *Trophées de Damas* est remarquablement vivante, sur une place de la ville avec un public très varié dont bon nombre de musulmans, et l'auteur décrit des réactions de ce public souvent pris à partie, alors que c'est bien le judaïsme qui est la cible (et le fond des raisonnements antijudaïques de l'auteur n'a guère d'originalité pour l'époque) ; dans le traité de Manuel, la cible est bien le musulman dans le raisonnement et dans la mise en scène, mais le judaïsme joue un rôle crucial dans le raisonnement. Les trois partenaires sont bien sûr les mêmes, mais les rôles ont évolué : dans la période haute, l'Islam était souvent évoqué comme témoin du débat, comme allié objectif du judaïsme, mais aussi comme peu capable de s'autodéfinir théologiquement, comme en retrait par rapport au judaïsme ; au quatorzième siècle, l'Islam est l'adversaire principal, celui qu'on met au cœur de la mise en scène, celui dont la présence est vivante, tandis que la réfutation du judaïsme paraît scolaire et artificielle par comparaison – mais le judaïsme reste très présent dans les raisonnements comme enjeu conceptuel, instrumentalisé contre l'Islam. La production de polémique antijudaïque semble donc se prolonger au quatorzième siècle pour des raisons assez étrangères à un débat entre juifs et chrétiens à l'époque – faire un tour d'horizon complet des oppositions religieuses au christianisme, appuyer une polémique antimusulmane autrement plus pressante à l'époque. En dernière analyse, le fait que ces deux périodes de production de textes

polémiques soient dans l'histoire événementielle des périodes de succès de l'Islam et de doute pour les chrétiens n'est sûrement pas un hasard, mais ce *Sitz im Leben* très plausible ne se retrouve dans les textes que d'une façon très partielle et comme assourdie.

Après ce bref tour d'horizon, nous retrouvons l'impossibilité d'énoncer un modèle général des visées de la polémique antijudaïque, et même la difficulté de le faire pour un texte singulier : malgré le caractère répétitif d'une bonne partie de son contenu, la polémique antijudaïque est comme un couteau suisse qu'un auteur peut utiliser pour des visées très différentes au moyen d'adaptations assez légères. Les philologues auront encore de quoi débattre sur les textes du quatorzième siècle qui restent à éditer.

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Byzantium and Its Neighbours
Religious Self and Otherness in Dialogue
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Theological and Political Reasons in the Anti-Armenian Polemics in Byzantium (Ninth-Twelfth Centuries)

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Abstract Byzantium had an ambivalent attitude towards the Armenians. On the one hand it aimed to condemn the alleged Monophysitism of the Armenian Church, based on theological considerations consolidated by polemical writings. On the other hand, however, Byzantium sought points of conciliation also due to the importance of the Armenian ethnic element, both within the empire and on its borders. My contribution aims to highlight the evolution of the Byzantine positions towards the Armenian Church, from the time of Photios until the twelfth century. Byzantium was careful to affirm its orthodoxy, but also to avoid increasing the reasons for friction and disputes with the Armenians. In the twelfth century, however, the tendency to find points of contact and conciliation emerged, in order to affirm the ties between Byzantium and the Armenians both of Cilicia and Greater Armenia.

Keywords Armenian Church. Byzantine Church. Official Epistles. Polemical Treatises. Political Reasons. Theological Debates.

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1. The polemics against the Armenians was a characteristic feature of Byzantine religious identity. Armenians were predominantly pre-Chalcedonian Christians (or 'Monophysites'),[1] and while on the one hand Byzantium bowed to *Realpolitik* and admitted liturgical and religious differences, on the other, it did not fail to underline the need for Armenians to accept the Chalcedonian creed and adopt Greek liturgical customs (such as using leavened bread or adding water to wine at Eucharist).[2]

An echo of this controversy is found during the age of patriarch Photios, and later on in the ninth-tenth centuries.[3] For example, in the letters addressed to the Armenians, Photios, consistent with the topical themes used by Byzantines in the polemics against this Eastern Church, constantly targets its alleged monophysitism, although he especially insists on the elements of agreement and above all on the φιλία 'friendship' that binds him to the Armenian princes of the Bagratuni dynasty.[4] In the *Epistle* 284,[5] written during his first patriarchate (858-67), Photios addressed Ashot – the *princeps* who would be later nominated by Basil I ἄρχων τῶν ἀρχόντων (Arm. *išxanac' išxan* 'prince of princes')[6] – with a series of *Anreden* of classical ancestry, designating him as μεγαλοπρεπείας καὶ γενναιότητος ἄγαλμα 'image of magnificence and nobility',[7] or even as βέλτιστε 'excellent'.[8] At the same time, the patriarch refuted all the objections of Armenian theologians opposed to the adoption of the dogma of Chalcedon. Interestingly, Photios employs a whole series of scriptural *exempla* and quotations borrowed from Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzos, and above all from Cyril of Alexandria, which he had already collected in two *codices* of his *Bibliotheca*, namely 229 and 230, dedicated to the writings of Ephraim of Antioch and Eulogios of Alexandria.[9] He also writes to the Armenian *katholikos*, to whom he addresses the *Epistle* 285.[10] In his letter, he points out that an incongruity would follow if the first three councils were accepted while rejecting the fourth. As a matter of fact, he states that the latter was intimately

1 Cf. Garsoïan 1996.

2 In the Mass, Armenians used unleavened bread, like the Latin Church, cf. Kolbaba 2013; 2020, 124-5.

3 Cf. Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 87-91; Greenwood 2006; Stopka 2016, 93-7.

4 Cf. Shirinian 2010.

5 Photios, *Epistle* 284, ed. Laourdas, Westerink 1985, 1-97. Kolbaba 2020, 131.

6 Ashot became king of Armenia in 885, as Ashot I, cf. Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 82.

7 Photios, *Epistle* 284, ed. Laourdas, Westerink 1985, 4 l. 26.

8 Photios, *Epistle* 284, ed. Laourdas, Westerink 1985, 4 l. 32.

9 Photios, *Bibliotheca* 229, ed. Henry 1965, 126-74; *Bibliotheca* 230, ed. Henry 1967, 8-64.

10 Photios, *Epistle* 285, ed. Laourdas, Westerink 1985, 97-112. Kolbaba 2020, 130.

connected to the preceding three as it constituted, so to speak, their *sphragis*.[11]

These two epistles were written, at least according to the chronology established by Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev,[12] during the first patriarchate of Photios, and provide a testimony of the negotiations that should have led, in the intentions of the interlocutors, to the reunification of the two Churches. In the *Epistle* 2, Photios acknowledged that the Armenians had abandoned τὴν μακρὰν ἐκείνην πλάνην 'that great deviance',[13] but apparently, the *quaestio* was still not solved, since during the second patriarchate (877-86) he wrote to Ashot in order to resume the knot of the negotiations interrupted by his exile. In the *Epistle* 298, which has been transmitted to us only through an Armenian translation,[14] on the one hand, he reaffirms the bonds of friendship with the sovereign, expressing gratitude for the support shown to him during his exile, on the other hand, he emphasises the elements of unity, even when he speaks of differences:

> Hence, we have carefully undertaken teaching you the truth, especially having discovered that your country is guarded by divine grace and is united with the universal holy church in everything, except for one, that is, because you considered the fourth Council adverse to God and contrary to the truth.[15]

This exchange of letters shows that, in its renewed expansionist drive, Byzantium makes use of religious themes in order to reaffirm its cultural superiority as well as its right, in the name of respect for orthodoxy, to provide indisputable guidance to all Christian peoples. It is worth noting that Armenia had been the first Christian nation of the world,[16] and was an important bulwark in the sub-Caucasian provinces, as well as across extensive areas of eastern Anatolia, predominantly inhabited by Armenians. It should also not be forgotten that Armenians constituted a prominent ethnic group within the Byzantine empire,[17] and provided it with several emperors

11 Photios, *Epistle* 285, ed. Laourdas, Westerink 1985, 104 ll. 197-205.

12 Cf. Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 87-91.

13 Photios, *Epistle* 2, ed. Laourdas, Westerink 1983, 41-2.

14 As for the Armenian text, cf. Akinean 1968. A Latin translation by Bernard Outtier is found in Photios, *Epistle* 298, ed. Laourdas, Westerink 1985, 167-72. For a French translation, cf. Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 25-32. In general, cf. Kolbaba 2020, 129.

15 Author's translation, based on the Latin version. Cf. Akinean 1968, 443-4. Photios, *Epistle* 298, ed. Laourdas, Westerink 1985, 169 ll. 67-9; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 28. Cf. Kolbaba 2020, 132.

16 Cf. Thomson 1997; van Esbroeck 1982.

17 Cf. Garsoïan 1998.

and many aristocratic γένη 'families'.[18] Establishing and maintaining favourable relations with Armenian princes and rulers was therefore crucial for Byzantium, particularly from an anti-Arabic perspective. All of which explains the attitude of Photios, who was resolute in affirming orthodoxy, but also careful to avoid increasing the reasons for friction and contention with the Armenians.[19]

2. The periods of intense dialogue that had occurred during the ninth and tenth centuries under the patriarchate of Photios, and then during that of Nicholas I Mystikos (901-07, 912-25),[20] already from the mid-eleventh century and later under the Komnenoi gave way to conflicts and mutual suspicions,[21] which arose on account of doctrinal themes, but also – as one might surmise – from factors of a distinctly political and cultural nature.[22]

In this regard, sources are numerous, on the Greek as well as on the Armenian and Syriac side. We might start from the testimony of Anna Komnene, daughter of Alexios and author of the most famous *Alexias*. However, we should also consider a polemical anti-Armenian treatise written by the emperor Alexios I Komnenos himself.[23] Anna Komnene dwells on the Armenians in a passage of the tenth book of the *Alexias* when she recounts the trial against the Calabrian monk Neilos.[24] The latter had arrived in the Capital and dedicated

18 Cf. Charanis 1963; Kazhdan 1983. Cf. also Brousselle 1996; Shirinian 2010; Augé 2017.

19 Cf. Kolbaba 2020, 137.

20 Cf. Strano 2005a; 2005b.

21 The Byzantine anti-Armenian polemical literature, and more generally, against Christians of other 'confessions', becomes particularly abundant under the Komnenoi. As regards the age of Alexios, who himself was the author of an anti-Armenian treatise (for which see *infra*, fn. 23), notable is the work known as *Dogmatic Panoply* by Euthymios Zigabenos (*PG* 130, coll. 20-1360; *RAP* G11348). This compilation, commissioned by Alexios, constitutes a patristic anthology against the numerous heresies within the empire. The anti-Armenian section is found in coll. 1173-89. We must also recall the treatise of Eustratios of Nicaea, edited by Demetrakopoulos 1866, 160-98. In the *inscriptio* (160), it is mentioned that the work ἐξεδόθη δὲ μετὰ τὴν γενομένην διάλεξιν παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως Κυρίου Ἀλεξίου τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ πρὸς Ἀρμένιον τὸν Τιγράνην 'was published after the debate between the emperor *kyr* Alexios Komnenos and the Armenian Tigranes': see *infra*, fn. 26. Regarding the literature on religious controversy in the Komnenian age, cf., among others, Augé 2001. However, it is important to note that the period of the Komnenoi witnessed the final major attempt at reconciliation between the Byzantine Church and the Armenian Church, spearheaded by the emperor Manuel and the *katholikos* Nersēs Šnorhali. On this topic cf., among others, Zekiyan 1986. See also *infra*.

22 Cf. Bartikian 1986.

23 Edited by Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1891, 116-23.

24 *Alexiad* 10.1.1-5, ed. Kambylis, Reinsch 2001, 281-2. For details regarding the Neilos *affaire* including its chronology and doctrinal contents, cf. Gouillard 1967, 202-6; cf. also Buckler 1929, 324-30; Angold 1984, 477-8; Smythe 1996, 249-53. Gautier 1980, 123-4 and 365, suggests the identification of Neilos with the homonymous monk who is

himself to the study of the Sacred Scriptures, but he had completely misunderstood the meaning, since, she writes, he "ignored the Hellenic culture" and "the art of reasoning".[25] Neilos' error concerned the mystery of hypostatic union in the Person of Christ, and he had come to decidedly heretical positions. Anna takes care to inform us that in Constantinople a significant number of Armenians resided, among whom Neilos had become a stimulus to impiety, also due to his continuous talks with two eminent representatives of the Armenian community in Byzantium, Tigranes and Arsakes.[26] Realising the expansion of heresy, Alexios decided to put an end to it by convening a synod to condemn Neilos and his followers. This synod, in the presence of the patriarch himself, Nicholas Grammatikos, "cast on Nilus an eternal anathema and solemnly proclaimed the hypostatic union in accordance with the tradition of the saints".[27]

In the Neilos *affaire*, two aspects emerge as particularly noteworthy:

1) the fact that Anna tells us that he had gathered a group of disciples of notable standing, and that he had integrated into prominent families as a teacher;

2) the attempt at persuasion made upon Neilos directly by Alexios who, refuting him, "taught him exactly what constituted the hypostatic union between the humanity and the divinity of the Word, and demonstrated the way of mutual communication of their properties, and taught with grace coming from above how the assumed human nature had been deified".[28]

In this context, it is pertinent to point out the elements which precisely link the accusations made in the *Alexias* against Neilos and the

the recipient of a poem by Theophylaktos of Ohrid, in which the archbishop requests his intervention with the *sebastos* (perhaps John Komnenos, duke of Dyrrachion) against Michael Antiochos. However, it is likely that this monk was simply – a conclusion Gautier himself eventually seems to accept – a monk from the region of Illyricum.

25 *Alexiad* 10.1.1: ἀμύητος δὲ πάσης ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας ὢν καὶ μηδὲ καθηγητήν τινα ἐσχηκὼς ἀρχῆθεν τὸν ὑφαπλοῦντα τούτῳ τὸ τῆς θείας γραφῆς βάθος ἐνεκεκύφει μὲν τοῖς τῶν ἁγίων συγγράμμασιν, ἄγευστος δὲ πάσης παιδείας λογικῆς ὢν ἐπεπλάνητο περὶ τὸν νοῦν τῶν γραφῶν, ed. Kambylis, Reinsch 2001, 281 ll. 8-12.

26 *Alexiad* 10.1.4: εἶχε δὲ τότε καὶ πολλοὺς τῶν Ἀρμενίων ἡ μεγαλόπολις, οἷς τῆς ἀσεβείας ὑπέκκαυμα ὁ Νεῖλος ἐκεῖνος ἐγίνετο. Ἐντεῦθεν διαλέξεις τὲ συχναὶ πρὸς τὸν Τικράνην ἐκεῖνον καὶ τὸν Ἀρσάκην, οὓς ἐπὶ πλέον τὰ τοῦ Νείλου δόγματα πρὸς ἀσέβειαν ἠρέθιζε, ed. Kambylis, Reinsch 2001, 282 ll. 30-3. Tigranes was an opponent of Alexios and Eustratios of Nicaea during the theological debates promoted by the sovereign against the Manichaeans and the Armenians of Philippopolis, cf. Skoulatos 1980, 298.

27 Author's translation of *Alexiad* 10.1.5: ἡ σύνοδος... αἰωνίῳ τοῦτον καθυπέβαλεν ἀναθέματι καὶ τὴν καθ' ὑπόστασιν ἕνωσιν κατὰ τὰς τῶν ἁγίων παραδόσεις ἐμφανέστερον ἀνεκήρυξε, ed. Kambylis, Reinsch 2001, 282 ll. 44-7.

28 Author's translation of *Alexiad* 10.1.3: τήν τε καθ' ὑπόστασιν ἕνωσιν τοῦ θεανθρώπου λόγου τρανῶς ἐδίδασκε καὶ τὸν τῆς ἀντιδόσεως τρόπον παρίστα καὶ ὅπως ἐθεώθη τὸ πρόσλημμα μετὰ τῆς ἄνωθεν ἐδίδασκε χάριτος, ed. Kambylis, Reinsch 2001, 281-2 ll. 24-7.

polemical motives used against the Armenians by the same Alexios. Indeed, the Komnenos composed a polemical discourse in which he refuted the (alleged) Armenian monophysitism,[29] affirming that the union of the two natures of the *Logos*-Christ does not imply the annulment of human nature, since τὸ ἀνθρώπινον 'the human element' is made divine τῇ καθ' ὑπόστασιν ἑνώσει 'by the union in the hypostasis'. In order to illustrate the coexistence of the two natures in a single hypostasis, Alexios resorts to the fitting example of iron and fire, each of which has its own nature: if iron comes into the proximity of fire, it becomes fiery (σίδηρος πεπυρακτωμένος)[30] and thereby participates in the splendour and power of fire. However, this does not mean that it becomes fire, or that fire changes its nature: both natures remain unchanged while being intimately united.[31] In the same way, we can speak about the *Logos*-Christ of τεθεωμένη σάρξ 'deified flesh', without implying *ipso facto* that human nature is made divine. This is an *exemplum* with a long-standing tradition; for instance, it is used by Maximos the Confessor (*Disputation with Pyrrhos* [*CPG* 7698] 187) and by John of Damascus (*Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* [*CPG* 8043] 59), to explain the presence of two energies in the incarnate Christ: the divine and the human.[32] It is therefore reasonable to surmise that Alexios employed against Neilos exactly the same arguments (perhaps, along with the very example of the natures of fire and iron) that he would then express in his aforementioned writing specifically addressed *contra Armenos*, composed most likely in 1114. Such a reuse is certainly not an unusual aspect, as the imperial writings were destined for a wide circulation and constituted – as

29 See supra, fn. 23.

30 Ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1891, 117.

31 Ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1891, 116-17: ὅταν οὖν εἴπωμεν τὸν ἀπανθρακωθέντα σίδηρον "πεπυρακτωμένον σίδηρον", διὰ τοῦτο λέγομεν "πεπυρακτωμένον" ὅτι περιεχώρησεν ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ σιδήρῳ τὸ πῦρ καὶ μετέσχεν οὗτος τῆς τοῦ πυρὸς λαμπρότητος καὶ τῆς καυστικῆς δυνάμεως, οὐχ ὅτι δὲ φύσει γέγονε πῦρ ὁ σίδηρος, οὔτε μὴν πάλιν ὅτι τὸ πῦρ σίδηρος γέγονεν· ἄμφω γὰρ αἱ φύσεις, ἥ τε τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ τοῦ σιδήρου, ἀναλλοίωτοι μένουσι καὶ λέγομεν τὸ ὅλον σίδηρον "πεπυρακτωμένον" διὰ τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ περιχώρησιν τοῦ πυρός, ἑκατέρου τὰ κατὰ φύσιν οἰκεῖα ἔχοντος καὶ ἐνεργοῦντος διὰ τὴν τῆς φύσεως ἑτερότητα.

32 John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 59, writes: Καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς πεπυρακτωμένης μαχαίρας ὥσπερ αἱ φύσεις σῴζονται τοῦ τε πυρὸς καὶ τοῦ σιδήρου, οὕτω καὶ αἱ δύο ἐνέργειαι καὶ τὰ τούτων ἀποτελέσματα. Ἔχει γὰρ ὁ μὲν σίδηρος τὸ τμητικόν, τὸ δὲ πῦρ τὸ καυστικόν, καὶ ἡ τομὴ μὲν τῆς τοῦ σιδήρου ἐνεργείας ἐστὶν ἀποτέλεσμα, ἡ δὲ καῦσις τοῦ πυρός· καὶ σῴζεται τὸ τούτων διάφορον ἐν τῇ κεκαυμένῃ τομῇ καὶ ἐν τῇ τετμημένῃ καύσει, εἰ καὶ μήτε ἡ καῦσις τῆς τομῆς δίχα γίγνοιτο μετὰ τὴν ἕνωσιν μήτε ἡ τομὴ δίχα τῆς καύσεως· καὶ οὔτε διὰ τὸ διττὸν τῆς φυσικῆς ἐνεργείας δύο πεπυρακτωμένας μαχαίρας φαμὲν οὔτε διὰ τὸ μοναδικὸν τῆς πεπυρακτωμένης μαχαίρας σύγχυσιν τῆς οὐσιώδους αὐτῶν διαφορᾶς ἐργαζόμεθα. Οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ τῆς μὲν θεότητος αὐτοῦ ἡ θεία καὶ παντοδύναμος ἐνέργεια, τῆς δὲ ἀνθρωπότητος αὐτοῦ ἡ καθ' ἡμᾶς (ed. Kotter 1973, 148 ll. 104-15).

well as the elaborations coming from the pen of the court rhetoricians – the official point of view on religious, cultural and *sensu lato* political topics.

3. These brief considerations are intended to demonstrate once again how, under the reign of Alexios, the invectives and polemics against the Armenians took force and were strengthened. As a matter of fact, relations had become increasingly sour by the eleventh century,[33] when a free Armenia no longer existed, being now annexed to the Byzantine empire.[34] Constantine X Doukas had ordered that Armenians residing in the capital or in other parts of the empire be converted, otherwise they would be expelled.[35] The same intransigence characterised the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes, so much so as to alienate him from the support of the Armenian populations of Anatolia.[36] We might add that Alexios persecuted both Bogomils and Armenians; he was obviously able to distinguish the various heresies, but his interest was to stand as a defender of orthodoxy against all enemies of the faith, be they Armenians or Manichaeans. He went so far as to order – according to the testimony of Matthew of Edessa – that Armenians should be re-baptised before being admitted to the Orthodox Church.[37]

Such harshness, perhaps more ostensible than real, finds its motivations both in factors related to the internal order of the empire and in others that were dependent on international contingencies. Alexios became a champion of orthodoxy[38] and harshly attacked, in addition to the heretics, also the Armenians. However, this does not mean that he did not make use of their military skills or that he did not surround himself with Armenian collaborators, but it was important – especially in the eyes of the Church – to convey the image of a religious conduct marked by intransigence, which, in a period of crisis and uncertainty on several fronts, could be a factor of political and social cohesion.[39]

33 Cf. Cheynet 1996.

34 Cf. Garsoïan 1997. Cf. Hamada 2023.

35 Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 15.2 (Fr. transl.: Chabot 1905, 166-8). Cf. Mahé 1999, 545-7.

36 Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 15.2 (Fr. transl.: Chabot 1905, 169). Cf. Cheynet 1996, 68-71; Dédéyan 1975, 114-15.

37 Matthew of Edessa, *Chronicle* 3.228 (En. transl.: Dostourian 1993, 224-5). Two additional Armenian sources, Vardan the Great and Samuel of Ani, report the news of the second baptism imposed by Alexios on the Armenians, attributing, though, the responsibility to the sovereign's mother, Anna Dalassene, who, as is known, exercised a strong influence over her son, cf. Sharf 1995, 257.

38 Kolbaba 2020, 122.

39 As observed by Augé 2002, 135-6: "Si Alexis s'attaque aux chrétiens 'monophysites' de la capitale, en faisant fermer leurs églises, son fils Jean, lui, s'en prend aux Arméniens

The Armenians were dispersed across the empire's territory, but during the eleventh century, they established domains in Cilicia, a region between the Taurus and ancient Syria. Here, some of the princes declared themselves to be independent lords while others continued to be, at least nominally, obedient to Byzantium.[40] The most prominent warlord among the Armenians was Philaretos Brachamios,[41] a former general of Romanos IV Diogenes, who built between 1078 and 1085 a principality that included Cilicia and Edessa and stretched from Melitene to Antioch.[42] Among others, emerged Rouben, who was close to Gagik II, the last ruler of the Armenia's Bagratuni dynasty.[43] Thus, under the leadership of Rouben and his descendants, known as the Rupenids, the Armenian principality (and the future kingdom) of Cilicia was established.[44]

4. Armenian *katholikoi*, who belonged to powerful aristocratic families, held a special place in the Armenian society and their role inevitably assumed political relevance. Such was also the case of the *katholikos* Nersēs Šnorhali,[45] who took over as the Armenian Church's supreme authority after his brother, the *katholikos* Gregory, associated him to catholocosate.[46] Before his appointment, Nersēs encountered the nephew of the Byzantine emperor Manuel, Alexios Axouch, at Mamistra.[47] Axouch had a theological debate with Nersēs and,

de Cilicie, lors de sa première expédition en Orient, dans les années 1136-1138. […] Les empereurs, que ce soit dans leur capitale ou dans les territoires qu'ils tentent de reconquérir, usent donc de la manière forte, en fermant, voire en détruisant les lieux de culte".

40 Cf. Evans 2001.

41 Skoulatos 1980, 263-5; Koltsida-Makre 2017.

42 Cf. Yarnley 1972.

43 Cf. Toumanoff 1976, 110; Pogossian 2010, 9-10: "Moreover, to strengthen the link between this last Armenian king, Gagik II, and the Rubenids, Matthew of Edessa mentions twice in his *Chronography* that the founder of the Rubenid dynasty was a soldier in Gagik's army, while on one occasion his text, at least in some manuscripts, it states that Ruben was 'one of the sons' of Gagik. However, more than sixty years ago the Armenologist Adontz demonstrated that historically there is no hard proof for the Bagratid origin of the Rubenids and that the mention of Ruben as 'one of the sons' of Gagik is almost certainly a scribal error. More recently, it has been suggested that the homeland of the Rubenids was probably South-Western Armenia. Yet, the connection with the Bagratids survived in Armenian historical sources, such as the work of Samuel Anec'i, and was repeated with some variations by others as well, such as Vahram Rabun, Het'um Patmič' and a short anonymous history of the Rubenids, but, significantly, not by Smbat Sparapet".

44 Dédéyan 2002, 242ff.

45 Cf. Ananian 1967.

46 Strano 2022. Gregory III, however, from a formal point of view, did not resign, but associated his brother in the government of the catholicosate, and transferred to him part (or all) of his powers.

47 Magdalino 1993, 107. Alexios was the son of John Axouch, the *megas domestikos* of the Byzantine army. He married Maria Komnene, niece of Manuel.

captivated by the prelate's kindness, requested him to write down the Armenians' statement of faith.[48] The most intriguing aspect of this statement of faith is the boost to reconciliation between the Armenian and the Greek-Byzantine positions.[49] In fact, it is clear from Nersēs' formulations that Armenian monophysitism was only ostensible, and the differences with the Greek doctrinal tradition were terminological, rather than substantive, because the Armenian Church strengthened the literal acceptance of the sentence written by Cyril of Alexandria, who, in his book of comments *Against Nestorios*, proclaimed:[50] "One is the nature of the Incarnate Word, in the way the Fathers also taught us".[51]

The emperor read the letter favourably and then requested that the *katholikos* Gregory send his brother to Constantinople so that theological debates might continue.[52] However, Gregory had already associated his brother Nersēs as *katholikos*,[53] and this made it impossible for the new head of the Armenian Church to reach Constantinople.[54] The Byzantine emperor (and the synod) dispatched an embassy to the catholicosate's see at Hṙomklay on the Euphrates river, 50 kilometres north-east of Edessa.[55] The mission was led by the theologian Theorianos[56] and the Armenian abbot of Philippopolis, John Atmanos.[57]

The debates began in May 1170, and were documented by Theorianos in two treatises that are not an exact reproduction of the sessions, but do reflect the substance of the dispute as well as the terminological disparities between the two traditions.[58] At the end of

48 *Endhanrakan tʻułtʻkʻ Srboyn Nersisi Šnorhalwoy* 1871, 87-107. Italian translation with Armenian critical text by Bozoyan, Pane 2023, 40-105. A French translation is offered by Augé 2011, 95-114 (= *Epistle* 1). A Latin translation can be found in Cappelletti 1833, 173-94 (= *Epistle* 4).

49 Pogossian 2010, 32.

50 Cyril of Alexandria, *Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten*, *PG* 75, coll. 1369-412.

51 *Endhanrakan tʻułtʻkʻ Srboyn Nersisi Šnorhalwoy* 1871, 96: Ասեմք մի բնութիւն ի Քրիստոս, ոչ շփոթմամբ ըստ Եւտիքեայ, այլ ըստ Կիւրղի Աղէքսանդրացւոյ՝ զոր ի գիրս Պարապմանցն ասէ ընդդէմ Նեստորի, եթէ "Մի է բնութիւն Բանին մարմնացելոյ, որպէս և հարքն ասացին"; Bozoyan, Pane 2023, 72-5; Augé 2011, 103 (= *Epistle* 1); Cappelletti 1833, 182 (= *Epistle* 4).

52 Cf. Ananian 1967, 751.

53 Gregory died shortly thereafter.

54 Nersēs suggests that the emperor come to the East, so that they can conclude their talks: Mardoyan 2020, 125. See also Bais 2023.

55 Cf. Hellenkemper 1976, 51-61.

56 Cf. Kirmizi 2002; Augé 2008, 150-1.

57 Cf. Zekiyan 1988.

58 Cf. Ananian 1967, 751; Zekiyan 1980, 432-3. Cf. Pogossian 2010, 32: "The Byzantine theologian Magister Theorianos also made a report on the discussions that were

the first treaty, Theorianos stated that he had persuaded Nersēs to recognise the Armenians' errors.[59] The matter is, however, contentious and debatable.[60] According to Theorianos, the *katholikos* Nersēs would have accepted communion with Constantinople to the point of declaring himself *Rhomaios*, i.e. Roman (Byzantine). It is possible that Theorianos sincerely believed in Nersēs' complete allegiance to the Greek Christology, while the latter continued to be a firm believer in the orthodoxy of the Armenian Church.[61]

Theorianos and Atmanos returned a second time to Hṙomklay, delivering one letter from the Byzantine patriarch Michael III Anchialos, two letters from the emperor Manuel, and nine chapters with the conditions for the union of the Churches.[62] *Katholikos* Nersēs answered that without the Holy Synod of Armenian bishops, he could not agree to those nine points. Since it was winter, the Holy Synod would be summoned the following summer (1173).[63] It was a way to buy time and to involve the assembly of bishops, whose support the *katholikos* needed, on the theme of unity.[64] However, the negotiations were interrupted by the death of Nersēs, on 13 August of the same year.

5. After Nersēs Šnorhali died, his nephew[65] Gregory IV Tłay became *katholikos* and resumed the debates with Manuel.[66] In his letter to the

held at the catholical residence of Hṙomklay. His description equally concentrated on theological-Christological debates, first and foremost".

59 Theorianos, *Disputation with the Armenians*, *PG* 133, coll. 209-10. Cf. Stone 2005, who revisits the question in light of contemporary Greek *enkomia*.

60 Some scholars contend that the Armenian *katholikos* genuinely adhered to the Chalcedonian doctrine, cf., e.g., Tournebize 1910, 246; Ananian 1967, 752. Others argue that Theorianos' narrative is biased, tending to fully endorse the Greek point of view, cf., e.g., Ormanian 1954, 49-50: "L'ouvrage connu sous le titre de Disputations entre Théorianus et Nersés, écrit par Théorianus après son retour à Constantinople, met dans la bouche de Nersés des expressions que contredisent absolument les documents incontestables qui nous sont parvenus, ce qui prouve que Théorianus a voulu masquer sa défaite". Cf. Tekeyan 1939, 25.

61 Zekiyan 1980, 432; cf. also Stone 2005, 197-8.

62 Theorianos, *Second Disputation with the Armenian Katholikos Nerses*, *PG* 133, col. 269; cf. *Endhanrakan t'ułt'k' Srboyn Nersisi Šnorhalwoy* 1871, 156-7.

63 Tekeyan 1939, 30. Cf. Strano 2022, 152.

64 Mardoyan 2020, 127: "Catholicos Nerses, though, had no intention of conveying a meeting. He was careful enough to wait and see how things were going to develop. He sent a certain priest, named Stepannos, to inform the bishops and the honorary sees about the development of the unity efforts and the suggested nine points".

65 Cf. Frazee 1976, 177: "At the catholicate in Hromgla the aging Nerses the Gracious was ready to turn over his office to another. The nepotistic tradition that the Pahvalouni family should hold the position of catholicos was honored once more".

66 Cf. Zekiyan 1982; Mardoyan 2020, 127-8.

emperor (*Epistle* 12),[67] he referred to his predecessor Nersēs' role in the unification of the Churches, but also to his own specific desire to continue the work in this direction, despite the hostility of the clergy of Greater Armenia.[68] Gregory alluded to a (lost) letter from the *basileus*, who evidently requested a statement of faith. During the same period, the archbishop of Tarsus, Nersēs Lambronac'i, a close collaborator of *katholikos* Gregory Tłay, delivered his renowned *Synodal Discourse* (in 1175 or 1178).[69] Furthermore, in his *Chapters*,[70] he also replied that if the Byzantine sovereign were to gain the authority to designate the Armenian *katholikos*, then it would have been up to the latter to appoint the patriarch of Antioch.[71] It is also to be believed that these requirements motivated Nersēs Lambronac'i to translate, with the assistance of Constantine of Hierapolis, a Greek priest, Neilos Doxapatres' book on church hierarchy (*Order of Patriarchal Chairs*).[72] This was a Greek work dedicated in 1142-43 to king Roger II of Sicily, whose topic pertains to the origin and evolution of the five patriarchal sees (the ancient pentarchy), with specific attention to the Roman primacy and the contrast between the Latin Church and the Greek Church for ecclesiastical jurisdiction over Southern Italy.[73]

Indeed, several passages of the Armenian translation stressed the independence of the Armenian *katholikos*,[74] similar to the autocephalous Church of Cyprus. As a matter of fact, we read:

> It should also be known that there are very great lordships in the East, which we call Greater Armenia, which has many cities and many villages in the lands of various provinces. Their *katholikos* being autocephalous fills the sees of the East with bishops according to each country and city, because Saint Gregory was the autocephalous archbishop of Greater Armenia and his seat remained autocephalous until today. Receiving consecration from his [own] *vardapets*, the see of the *katholikos* succeeds. The same as the

67 Here, the Author adheres to Augé's numbering of the letters, as set by in Augé 2011, 172-3.

68 Cf. Pogossian 2010, 33: "The correspondence with the Roman and especially the Byzantine Churches raised suspicions in Greater Armenia, particularly in the celebrated monasteries of Northern Armenia – Hałpat and Sanahin. Northern monks doubted the sincerity of the other side, considering any attempts at unification of Churches as a challenge to the autonomy of the Armenian Church and an offence to its orthodoxy. They feared that their ancestral traditions were being betrayed and altered".

69 Cf. Augé 2011, 21.

70 Palčean 1878, 260-6. French translation in Augé 2011, 245-56.

71 Cf. Augé 2011, 254. Cf. Cowe 2006, 413-14.

72 Finck 1902.

73 Cf. von Falkenhausen 1992. On Neilos Doxapatres, cf. Neirynck 2014.

74 Pogossian 2010, 35.

> island of Cyprus, because it too is autocephalous and has pre-eminent bishops in the metropolis of Constantia, in Kourion, Paphos, Arsinoe, Salamis, Pithos (= Lapithos), Kyna (= Kyrenia), Basus (= Amathus), Kytnis (= Kition), Tremithus, Karpasia, and in the way Greater Armenia is autocephalous, so is the see of Cyprus. The archbishop is ordained by his *vardapets*, because was found in it (in Cyprus) the apostle Barnabas who had the Gospel of Mark in an ark on his heart. Therefore, being autocephalous, [Cyprus] did not obey the other sees.[75]

This was not a 'neutral' assertion, because it aimed to reaffirm the independence of the Armenian Church in the face of the Byzantine claims.

6. A synod of thirty-three hierarchs, including Syriac representatives and the *katholikos* of the Caucasian Albania Stepannos, finally met at Hṙomklay in 1178.[76] The affirmations and the proposals of the Greek side were considered perfectly consistent with the teachings and doctrines of the Fathers, but this 'conciliatory' attitude did not have concrete results:[77] Manuel died in 1180, and the *vardapets* of Greater Armenia chastised Gregory Tłay for accepting the Greeks' statement of faith, which they continued to regard as contrary to their tradition.[78]

75 Author's translation of the Armenian text edited by Finck 1902, 10: Գիտելի լիցի եւ այս, զի է մեծամեծ իշխանութիւնք յարեւելս, զորս կոչեմք Մեծ Հայք, որ ունի քաղաքս, աւանս բազումս ի կողմանս գաւառաց զանազանս. Սոցա կաթուղիկոսն եղեալ ինքնագլուխ լնու զաթոռս արեւելից ըստ իւրաքանչիւր աշխարհաց եւ քաղաքաց եպիսկոպոսաւք: Զի սուրբն Գրիգորիոս Հայոց Մեծաց եղեւ ինքնագլուխ արքեպիսկոպոս. Եւ մնաց ինքնագլուխ աթոռն նորա մինչեւ ցայսաւր. Յիւրոց վարդապետացն առնելով զձեռնադրութիւնն յաջորդի կաթողիկոսին աթոռոյ որպէս եւ կղզին Կիպրոսի, զի եւ սա ինքնագլուխ է. եւ եպիսկոպոսս ունի նախապատուեալն ի նմա մայրաքաղաքն Կոստանդիա, զԿիւրիոն, զՊանփոս, զԱրսենիա, զՍաւալաւլիա, զՊիթոս, զԿինա, զԲասուս, զԿիթնիս, զՏրիմիթոս, զԿարպաթուս եւ այսպէս ըստ որում եւ մեծն Հայք ինքնագլուխ է աթոռն Կիպրոսի եւ յիւրայնոցն ձեռնադրի վարդապետաց, քանզի գտաւ ի նա առաքեալն Բառնաբաս, որ ունէր ի վերայ սրտին ի տապան իւր զաւետարանն Մարկոսի. Որ եւ յաղագս այսորիկ ինքնագլուխ եղեալ ոչ հնազանդեցաւ այլ եւս աթոռոց.

76 Cowe 2006, 413-14.

77 Frazee 1976, 178: "The decisions reached at Hromgla were purposefully vague […]. Before the letters from Hromgla reached Constantinople, however, Manuel Comnenus was dead. In Cilicia the results of the council were politely ignored; in the north, several bishops broke relations with Hromgla".

78 Cf. *Endhanrakan t'ułt'k' Srboyn Nersisi Šnorhalwoy* 1871, 307-12; cf. Augé 2011, 223-7 (= *Epistle* 18). As observed by Tekeyan 1939, 43: "Ils reprochent au catholicos d'être entré en pourparlers avec les Grecs sans les avoir consultés: la tête ne fait rien sans les membres principaux. S'il y avait quelque chose à corriger dans l'église arménienne, le catholicos est suffisamment intelligent pour faire la réforme tout seul, sans recourir à l'étranger".

The *katholikos*, on his part, continued to insist[79] on the significance of the dialogue with the Greeks, arguing that it would be better to negotiate with them and resolve any potential disputes, especially since many Armenians lived in Byzantine empire's territory.[80]

All these testimonies demonstrate that the Byzantine authorities (both patriarchs and emperors) and the Armenian *katholikoi* clearly understood the historical significance of their negotiations, but also indicate that their attitude changed over time.[81] As Sirarpie der Nersessian wrote,

> one can discern certain differences between the earlier and later periods. Before the twelfth century there is a very rigid attitude on both sides, each one interpreting the doctrine of the other in its most extreme terms […]. In the second period, that is, in the twelfth century, there is a notable change. The Greeks concede that the Armenians do not follow Eutyches, but they still want them to discard the formula of one nature. The Armenians accept their explanations; they no longer accuse the Greeks of Nestorianism and avoid references to the council of Chalcedon.[82]

Actually, however,

> though the attitude of the catholicoses of Cilicia is more conciliatory and reveals a desire to reach an understanding with the Greeks, there is no change as far as their doctrine is concerned.[83]

All attempts at agreement obviously involve the problems of peaceful confrontation and the desire for unity: this unity can be achieved – as Nersēs Šnorhali hopes – while respecting liturgical and dogmatic differences, but, on the Byzantine side, it aims to guarantee the maintenance of Byzantium's superiority over other peoples and nations.[84]

79 Cf. *Endhanrakan t'ułt'k' Srboyn Nersisi Šnorhalwoy* 1871, 312-29; cf. Augé 2011, 227-43 (= *Epistle* 19).

80 Cf. Tekeyan 1939, 45.

81 Cf. Augé 2002, 149-50.

82 Cf. der Nersessian 1945, 50-1.

83 Cf. der Nersessian 1945, 50-1.

84 According to Zekiyan 1982, 336: "[L]es conditions de l'union telles qu'elles étaient envisagées par Šnorhali, Grigor Tłay et Lambronac'i offraient toutes les garanties possibles pour la parfaite conservation de l'identité ethnique, culturelle et ecclésiastique du peuple arménien, à l'exception d'éventuelles impositions violentes de la part des autres ou de capitulations trop faciles de la part des Arméniens, comme il est parfois arrivé". Cf. Bais 2023.

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The volume is partly inspired by the papers presented during the thematic session *Byzantium and Its Neighbours: Religious Self and Otherness in Dialogue* at the 24th International Congress of Byzantine Studies held in Venice and Padua in August 2022. Its primary focus lies in Byzantine polemics against religious others, especially Muslims, Jews, Armenians and Latins. The contributions cover a wide range of themes, including the repertoire of *topoi* and arguments developed by Byzantine polemicists against various opponents, the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed in the works analysed, and questions of authorship and audience. The volume helps to elucidate aspects of the political and socio-cultural context in which this significant body of Byzantine literature was produced or received, while at the same time opening up new ways of approaching this typology of sources.

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