

The Two *Epistulae* III of Palamas to Akindynos: The Small but Important Difference between Authenticity and Originality

Katharina HEYDEN, University of Berne, Berne, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

This article discusses some counterarguments to Meyendorff's theory that Palamas' *Epistula* III in the version edited by Meyendorff/Chrestou is the authentic version received by Akindynos before the synod of June of 1341 and falsified later on by the same Akindynos in order to accuse Palamas of ditheism. The article firstly examines the arguments in favour of the authenticity of the version edited by Chrestou, and then draws attention to the evidence from other works of Akindynos. Taking into consideration the small but important difference between authenticity and originality, I argue that both versions are authentic in the sense that Palamas is the author of both of them: The first version of *Epistula* III, written to Akindynos personally in the beginning of the year 1341 from Thessaloniki, caused a theological discussion between Akindynos and Palamas on the eve of the first synod in Constantinople. The second version was written in Constantinople in the summer of the same year 1341, probably shortly after the first synod. In this version, which was edited by Meyendorff/Chrestou, Palamas revised and elaborated his letter to Akindynos and presented it to a public audience, taking into consideration the theological objections that his student and friend had raised during their face-to-face dispute.

Theodoros Alexopoulos has more or less presented and defended John Meyendorff's opinion, that Palamas' *Epistula* III edited by Chrestou is the authentic version, received by Akindynos before the synod of June 10th of 1341, which condemned Barlaam and his followers.¹ Meyendorff combined this suggestion with the suspicion that Akindynos, after his own condemnation as a Barlaamite during the second synod in the summer of 1341, falsified the third letter of Palamas in order to accuse him of ditheism.² In this article, I will discuss some

¹ See the article of Theodoros Alexopoulos, 'The Problem of the Distinction between Essence and Energies in the Hesychast Controversy. Saint Gregory Palamas' *Epistula* III: The Version Published by P. Chrestou in Light of Palamas' Other Works on the Divine Energies', in this volume, pp. 521-533.

² Johannes Meyendorff and Panhagios Chrestou, *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ Συγγράμματα τόμος Α'* (Thessalonich, 1962), 196-9; Jean Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, Patristica Sorbonensia 3 (Paris, 1959), 92-4.

counterarguments to this viewpoint, suggesting that the original – that is: the first – version of *Epistula* III is transmitted in Codex Monacensis graecus 223.³ My aim however, is not to simply turn the tables on Palamas accusing now him of falsifying the works of Akindynos, as Juan Sergio Nadal, Meyendorff's counterpart in research on Akindynos, has done.⁴ Rather, I would like to offer an alternative version, by reconstructing the events and documents of the year 1341 and thus avoid to accuse one or the other of falsification, thereby increasing the awareness of the small but important difference between authenticity and originality. In doing so, I will argue that both versions of *Epistula* III are authentic in the sense that Palamas is the author of both of them, but that the version transmitted in Codex Monacensis graecus 223 and edited by Nadal⁵ was the first and therefore in the chronological sense the original one, sent to Akindynos in the spring of the year 1341. The version edited by Meyendorff and Chrestou,⁶ on the other hand, can then be seen as a revised edition composed probably in the same year but after the first synod and facing a wider audience. To prove this assertion, I will first examine the arguments in favour of the authenticity of the version edited by Chrestou, and then draw attention to the evidence from other works of Akindynos.

Historical data

One of the obvious differences between the two versions is that Codex Monacensis graecus 223 lacks the historical annex, in which Palamas gives some information about the course of events, names some of his own works in the context of the controversy, and refers to ecclesiastical and political authorities, namely the bishop of Hierissos, the great commander of Thessaloniki and the emperor himself, who acted in support of Palamas.⁷ Theodoros Alexopoulos has interpreted this as strong evidence that this letter was written before the synod of 1341. I doubt, however, that the detailed reconstruction of the events in a letter to Akindynos is plausible if we consider that Akindynos was personally

³ For more information on this codex see the article of Renate Burri, 'The Textual Transmission of Palamas' *Epistula* III to Akindynos: The Case of Monac. gr. 223', in this volume pp. 535-546.

⁴ Juan Serge Nadal, 'La rédaction première de la Troisième lettre de Palamas à Akindynos', *OCP* 40 (1974), 233-85, 234-7 and 280-5; *id.*, *La résistance d'Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas. Enquête historique, avec traduction et commentaire de quatre traités édités récemment*. Volume II: *Commentaire historique*, *Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense. Études et documents* 50-1 (Leuven, 2006), 276-85.

⁵ Edition and french translation by Juan S. Nadal, 'La rédaction première' (1974), 233-85.

⁶ I. Meyendorff and P. Chrestou, *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ Συγγράμματα τόμος Α'* (1962), 296-312.

⁷ Gregory Palamas, *Epistula III ad Akindynum* 18-20, ed. I. Meyendorff and P. Chrestou, *Συγγράμματα τόμος Α'* (1962), 309,25-311,14.

involved in all these events and knew all these details better than anyone else could. Thus, it is more plausible to assume that Palamas tries to present *his* version of the conflict in this historical annex to a larger audience.

Secondly, the tone of this passage is very selfconfident; Palamas seems to be sure to be able to overcome Barlaam. Such selfassurance, however, would have been very naive in the beginning of the year 1341. At this stage of the conflict, the supporters of Barlaam had prevailed at the court of Constantinople, and Palamas, acting in isolation from Thessaloniki, had to fear condemnation in his absence. It was only due to the effort of Akindynos that Palamas was finally invited by the patriarch to come to the capital and to personally defend his theology of divine energies.⁸

Finally, some phrases in this annex seem to be in regard to Akindynos more than in regard to Barlaam. As Theodoros Alexopoulos argued, when Palamas was writing this letter, he was already aware that Akindynos had begun to falter. The first hint, however, that Akindynos entertains doubts regarding the Palamite theology on the divine energies, is found only in his reply to Palamas' *Epistula* III. In the time before the synod of June, the antagonists were Palamas and Barlaam; and only after the condemnation of the latter Palamas turned against his former student and friend Akindynos. Formulations such as 'In any case I myself wonder how he (Barlaam) managed to deceive you'⁹ sound like an anticipated condemnation of Akindynos. This is virtually impossible in the period before the synod of June, but matches very well with the situation in between the two synods of the summer of 1341.

In the letter's version of Codex Monacensis no historical information is found. On the contrary, it begins very directly with the words: 'Well done, you're fighting for the truth! Now I omit any blame, even if it would be justified, because the moment (of criticism) will come, particularly if it emanates from love'.¹⁰

This ambivalent praise regards Akindynos' mediation attempts in Constantinople. Palamas does not explain anything here, obviously assuming that Akindynos understands without any explanation what he is talking about. Therefore, in my view it is plausible to suppose that this was the original beginning of *Epistula* III, while the detailed historical annex edited by Chrestou was composed later.

⁸ On the mediation efforts of Akindynos see Juan Nadal Cañellas, *La résistance d'Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas* (2006), 177-87; Katharina Heyden, 'Gregorios Akindynos: Der verkannte Vermittler im Streit um die göttliche Energie (nicht nur) im 14. Jahrhundert', *OS* 62 (2013), 193-218.

⁹ Palamas, *Epistula* III 20, ed. I. Meyendorff and P. Chrestou, *Συγγράμματα τόμος Α'* (1962), 311,18-9: Παντὸς μέντοι μᾶλλον ἐπεισὶ μοι θαυμάζειν ἀρτίως πῶς ἐξεπάθησεν ὑμᾶς.

¹⁰ Palamas, *Epistula* III *ad Acindynum*, ed. J. Nadal, *OCP* 40 (1974), 250: Εὐγέ σοι τῆς ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας ἐνστάσεως πᾶσα δὲ μέμψις ἀπίτω νῦν, κἄν ἢ δικαῖα· καιρὸς γὰρ καὶ ταύτης, καὶ μάλιστα εἴπερ ἐξ ἀγάπης ὁρμᾷται.

Patristic quotations

Another difference between the two versions concerns the number and the extent of patristic quotations. While the version edited by Chrestou is full of extent quotations by several fathers, as Theodoros Alexopoulos has argued, the Monacensis is very much shorter even in this aspect. Two explanations are possible: Either certain quotations were omitted for Codex Monacensis, or Palamas revised the original letter at a later moment extending and rendering more precise certain quotations and adding others. Which explanation is more plausible? According to the correspondence of Akindynos, his main and frequently repeated accusation against Palamas was that his doctrine of divine energies was not in harmony with the patristic tradition. From a report that Akindynos wrote to patriarch Kalekas in 1343 we know that in a personal discussion held immediately after Palamas' arrival in Constantinople on the eve of the synod of June 1341, Akindynos confronted Palamas with this accusation.¹¹ It seems therefore likely that Palamas revised the original letter in order to disprove this criticism.

This hypothesis becomes even more plausible if we examine and compare the arguments and pragmatic function of the quotations in the two versions. While in the version of the Monacensis they serve to support the idea that divine energies are uncreated, in the version edited by Chrestou the function of the patristic quotations is to prove that the doctrine of divine energy does not risk falling into di- or polytheism. This was, however, the ultimate question in the course of the controversy raised by Akindynos, while the problem whether divine energies were created or not was discussed before between Barlaam and Palamas. Thus, it seems clear that the two versions refer to two different stages of the controversy.

Coherence with previous works

Alexopoulos' third argument in favour of the authenticity of Chrestou's version was the coherence of this text in style and content with previous works of Palamas. According to him, *Epistula III* in the version edited by Chrestou 'is a small summary of what Palamas developed in the treatise *Pro Hesychastis* and most especially in the *Third Triad*'.¹² I agree completely, but I would like to ask whether this observation is really suited to prove that this version is the original and actually the first version of *Epistula III*. The crucial sentence of *Epistula III* is, according to the version of the Monacensis:

¹¹ Akindynos, *Report* § 4, ed. J. Nadal Cañellas, *La résistance* (2006), 257-314, 260, 87-100.

¹² Theodoros Alexopoulos, 'The Problem of the Distinction', in this volume, p. 528.

Ἔστιν ἄρα θεότης ὑφειμένη κατὰ τοὺς θεοσόφους θεολόγους, δῶρον οὐσα τῆς ὑπερκειμένης.

There exists, then, an inferior Deity according to the theologians who are wise in the things of God, which is a gift of the transcendent one.

In dogmatical terms, this sentence is unclear, if not problematic, because the speech of an inferior Deity and the lack of a nomen that specifies the adjective ὑπερκειμένης can easily provoke the suggestion of ditheism.

Now, in the version of Chrestou the sentence is as follows:

Ἔστιν ἄρα θεότης ὑφειμένη κατὰ τοὺς θεοσόφους θεολόγους, ὡς κἀνταῦθ' εἶπεν ὁ μέγας Διονύσιος, ἡ θέωσις, δῶρον οὐσα τῆς ὑπερκειμένης οὐσίας τοῦ θεοῦ.

There exists, then, an inferior Deity according to the theologians who are wise in the things of God, as Dionysios has said on this point; namely, the deification which is a gift of the transcendent divine essence.

Here, inferior Deity (θεότης ὑφειμένη) is explicitly identified with Theosis, which is defined as a gift of the divine Ousia. The suspicion of ditheism is therefore refuted. In the context of this formulation, the term 'deity' (θεότης) simply seems to indicate that the Theosis is uncreated, but not to suppose an entity.

Which formulation was the earlier one? If we assume that the phrase we found in the edition of Chrestou was part of the original letter to Akindynos, the only possible conclusion we can draw would be that either Akindynos or one of his supporters, maybe the scribe of the Monacensis, falsified it on purpose to accuse Palamas of ditheism. On the other hand, if we consider the formulation in the Monacensis to be the original one – and I for one tend to do so – the most plausible explanation would be that this formulation provoked the protest of Akindynos and that Palamas therefore revised the letter with regard to a wider audience and that he reformulated this crucial passage, because he realised that it was actually not in coherence neither with the patristic tradition nor with his own other works, especially the *Third Triad*. In fact, at the synod of 1351, on which the Palamite theology was ultimately confirmed, Palamas proclaimed that absolute correctness in formulations was needed only with regard to confessions of faith and dogmatical decrees, but not in theological controversies.¹³ I understand this as a pleading for the legitimacy of trial and error and for a certain freedom of research within theological discourse. Why should Palamas not make use of that right himself?

¹³ See § 7 of the *Tomos* of the Synod of 1351 (PG 151, 723b): ἕτερον ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐσεβείας ἀντιλογία, καὶ ἕτερον ἡ τῆς πίστεως ὁμολογία. καὶ ἐπὶ μὲν τῆς ἀντιλογίας οὐκ ἀνάγκη περὶ τὰς λέξεις ἀκριβολογεῖσθαι τὸν ἀντιλέγοντα. See also Kallistos Ware, 'The Debate about Palamism', *ECR* 9 (1977), 45-71.

Evidence from Akindynos' answer on *Epistula* III and the report to Kalekas

The answer of Akindynos to Palamas is very probably his *Epistula* 11 in the edition of Angela Constantinides Hero.¹⁴ It is a very short letter that contains, however, useful information that helps us reconstruct the course of events and discussions in the spring of 1341. Akindynos' main concern is to inform Palamas, that the patriarchal invitation to Constantinople was a result of his (Akindynos') own conciliatory efforts in favour of Palamas. Apparently, Akindynos supported his teacher and friend at the patriarchal court, and persuaded the patriarch not to condemn Palamas *in absentia* but to invite him to come to the capital in order to defend his hesychast theology against the criticisms of Barlaam. In the second paragraph of this short letter, Akindynos refers to *Epistula* III by Palamas. I quote the relevant passage in the translation of Angela Constantinides Hero:

As for the long and excellent letter that you sent me, it has been here for some time; but it did not reach my hands before this second patriarchal letter was also written. I read it with attention and great admiration, and if I did not expect to see your dear face before long, I would have replied to what you write to the best of my ability. But since it is absolutely necessary for you to come here, I shall make clear to you my opinion on this matter at that time. Come then with the aid of the inaccessible light of the light-transcending Trinity, you who are most dear to God and most wise and a most beloved father to me!¹⁵

The meaning of the Greek: διελθὼν δὴ ταύτην ἐπιστατικῶς καὶ πάνυ θαυμαστικῶς is ambiguous. Hero in her translation suggests a positive connotation, but it is also possible to translate: 'I read it with attention and great astonishment'.¹⁶ According to this reading, Akindynos would have already indicated some objections against certain ideas and formulations of Palamas.

Furthermore: Why does Akindynos emphasize that he only read Palamas' letter after having supported him in front of the patriarch? Is it to suggest that he would not have done so if he had read the letter beforehand? Obviously, Akindynos did not agree with all of the statements in Palamas' letter. Therefore,

¹⁴ Angela Constantinides Hero, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*. Greek text and English translation, CFHB XXI (Washington, 1983), 54-7.

¹⁵ Akindynos, *Epistula 11 ad Palamam*, ed. A. Constantinides Hero, CFHB 21 (Washington, 1983), 54s: 'Ἦν δέ μοι μεγάλην ἐπιστολήν καὶ γενναίαν ἀπέστειλας, πάλαι μὲν ἦν ἐνταῦθα, οὐ πρὶν δὲ εἰς τὰς ἐμὰς ἦκε χεῖρας ἢ καὶ τὰ δεύτερα γεγράφηαι πατριαρχικὰ ταῦτα γράμματα, διελθὼν δὴ ταύτην ἐπιστατικῶς καὶ πάνυ θαυμαστικῶς. εἰ μὲν μὴ προσεδόκων ὀφθῆσεσθαι μοι μετ' οὐ πολὺ τὴν ἐμὴν κεφαλὴν σου, ἀπέδωκα ἄνσοι τὸν δυνατόν μοι λόγον πρὸς τὰ ἐπεσταλμένα· ... ἐπεὶ δὲ σε ἀνάγκη πᾶσα παρ' ἡμᾶς ἀφικέσθαι, τότε δὴ σοι σαφῆς ἡ περὶ τούτων ἡμέτερα καταστήσεται γνώμη. Ἰθὶ δὴ μετὰ τῆς ὑπερφώτου Τριάδος τοῦ ἀπροσίτου φωτός, θεοφιλέστατε πάτερ καὶ σοφώτατε καὶ ἡμῖν ποθεινότητε.

¹⁶ See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1996), sv. Θαυμαστικός, 786.

he looked forward to Palamas' arrival in Constantinople to give him the chance to discuss certain theological issues face to face.

From the report that Akindynos composed for the patriarch Kalekas two years later we know that this conversation was actually held on the eve of the synod.

According to this report, Akindynos confronted his former teacher and friend Palamas with his objections against certain theological statements on the divine energies that in Akindynos' view contradicted the theology of the fathers and ran the risk of ditheism. In view of the forthcoming synod, however, they entered into a pragmatic alliance against Barlaam and the enemies of hesychasm. After having defeated Barlaam, the two friends would reactivate their theological discussions. Akindynos emphasizes that Palamas promised to answer then all his questions and to clear all doubts:

And after a couple of days also Palamas came and lodged in my house. When asked about the charges brought against him by Barlaam and about which Palamas himself had sent to me a letter a little while ago, which were in accordance with the charges against him of that Barlaam, he admitted to say some of the phrases which Barlaam said against him, but tried to instruct me that nothing was out of place <about it> and that we should not get troubled nor disturbed considering that these were mysteries of the contemplative men/persons.¹⁷

In my view, it is very likely that the version of *Epistula* III published under the name of Palamas and edited by Chrestou is a testimony to the theological effort that Palamas made in the summer of 1341 after the synod of June, to fulfill the promise he made to Akindynos during their conversation on the eve of the synod. With regard to the general public, Palamas presented his theory of the uncreated divine energies in this version bearing in mind Akindynos' arguments: By specifying certain theological phrases and quoting several patristic passages Palamas proved that his teaching did not risk falling into ditheism and was completely in harmony with patristic tradition.

In conclusion, two authentic *Epistulae* III of Palamas exist: The first one, written to Akindynos personally in the beginning of the year 1341 sent from Thessaloniki and received with a certain delay. This letter caused the theological discussion between Akindynos and Palamas in Constantinople. This is the version of Codex Monacensis graecus 223. The second *Epistula* III of Palamas to Akindynos, was written in Constantinople in the summer of the same year

¹⁷ Akindynos, *Report* § 4, ed. J. Nadal Cañellas, *La résistance* (2006), 260, 87-95: Καὶ μετὰ τινος ἡμέρας ἤκει καὶ ὁ Παλαμᾶς καὶ καταλύσας εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν οἰκῆσιν, ἐρωτώμενος περὶ τῶν κατηγορουμένων αὐτοῦ παρὰ τοῦ Βαρλαάμ καὶ ὧν αὐτὸς ἦν μοι προβραχέος ἐπιστείας ὁ Παλαμᾶς, συμφωνούντων τοῖς κατ' αὐτοῦ κατηγορήμασι τοῦ Βαρλαάμ ἐκείνου, ὁμολογεῖ μὲν τινὰς λέγειν φωνάς, ὡς ὁ Βαρλαάμ κατ' αὐτοῦ λέγων ἤλθεν, ἐπειράτο δὲ με διδάσκειν οὐδὲν ἄτοπον εἶναι, μὴ νοοῦντας δὲ ἡμᾶς ὡς μυστήρια ὄντα τῶν θεωρητικῶν ἀνδρῶν θορυβεῖσθαι τὲ καὶ ταράττεσθαι.

1341, probably shortly after the first synod. In this version, Palamas revised and elaborated his letter to Akindynos and presented it to a public audience, taking into consideration the theological objections that his student and friend had raised during their face-to-face dispute. The result was a very precise and well elaborated theological treatise that was in perfect coherence with his previous works and punctuated with a lot of patristic quotations, in the context of an historical annex that informed the readers about the course of the controversy. This is the version of *Epistula* III that Palamas and his supporters circulated and that was edited by Meyendorff and Chrestou.

With this suggestion of two authentic *Epistulae* III, both written by Palamas at various stages of the controversy and addressed to various audiences, the differences between the two versions can be sufficiently explained without assuming that either Palamas or Akindynos intentionally falsified the works of the other. By the way, it was absolutely common among byzantine scholars to revise and re-publish one's own letters.¹⁸ This act of revision of one's own work can therefore be considered as readiness to think and rethink seriously about serious theological problems. In my view, this does not point to the weakness but rather to the excellence of a theologian.

The great question, however, is: Why did Akindynos not respond, why did he not acknowledge this effort made by Palamas? Why did he reduce the whole controversy to the one and crucial sentence of the first and original *Epistula* III of Palamas: 'There exists, then, an inferior Deity which is a gift of the transcendent one?' ('Ἐστὶν ἄρα θεότης ὑφειμένη κατὰ τοὺς θεοσόφους θεολόγους, δῶρον οὕσα τῆς ὑπερκειμένης'¹⁹) repeating it again and again in his correspondence and works? In my view, two answers are possible: The first explanation would be that Akindynos could not react suitably, simply because he did not know the revised version of the letter.

The second, and perhaps more probable explanation would be that Akindynos did not want to deal with the revised version of Palamas' letter after he was personally condemned as a Barlaamite at the second synod in the summer of 1341. Psychologically, such a refusal would be understandable, if we bear in mind that Akindynos had tried to mediate between Palamas and Barlaam and then struggled for Palamas and the hesychast movement with great emphasis for many years. I think the tragedy of the hesychast controversy appears in the fact, that after his personal humiliation in July 1341, Akindynos fought against a Palamite theology on the divine energies that was already obsolete, that he

¹⁸ See Christian Hogel *et al.* (eds), *Medieval Letters between Fiction and Document. Proceedings of the conference held in Siena in 2013*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 33 (Turnhout, 2015), esp. the contributions by Michael Grünbart, 'From Letter to Literature: A Byzantine Story of Transformation' (*ibid.* 291-306) and Sylvie Lefèvre, 'La lettre et ses adresses (*ibid.* 335-58).

¹⁹ Akindynos, *Epistula* 40, ed. A. Constantinides Hero (1983), 154,80-1; see also *Epistulae* 21, 27, 30, 56.

persisted in certain phrases that Palamas wrote to him in his first version of *Epistula* III. Actually, the reason is to be found less in theological issues, but much more in political intrigues, namely the civil war that broke out in the aftermath of the synod of 1341,²⁰ and in personal interests, especially the ambition of Palamas and his supporters to override all persons who had to do with Barlaam.

As far as theology is concerned, Palamas made an offer to Akindynos as well as to an interested public with the revised *Epistula* III that in my opinion is also a result of the personal dispute between Palamas and Akindynos on the eve of the synod. Unfortunately, Akindynos withdrew into a rigid conservatism after his first condemnation of 1341. But probably, it is due to him and his reaction to the first *Epistula* III that Palamas revised certain formulations about the divine energies and formulated his doctrine in a way that allows one to think of plurality and God and to speak of manifold and effective divine energies without the risk of polytheism. It would be not the first and only time in Christian history that orthodoxy owes so much to so-called heretics.

²⁰ See J. Meyendorff, *Introduction* (1959), 95-128; J. Nadal Cañellas, *La résistance* (2006), 198-274.