

CARMELO NICOLÒ BENVENUTO, *Refutationes theologicae doctrinae Latinorum: introduzione, testo critico e traduzione* (Akribos anaginoskein 3). Potenza: Basilicata University Press 2024. 196 pp. – ISBN 978-88-31309-36-3 [open access](#)

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The *Refutations of the Theological Doctrine of the Latins* (RAP [G19831](#)) by the mid-12th century writer Nicholas bishop of Methone has proved a challenging and confusing text to edit on account of the multiple forms in which it is transmitted: it appears on the one hand as a series of some 35 chapters or syllogisms, and on the other, as a series of 59 chapters or syllogisms, while elsewhere it is found in various forms that are to a greater or lesser extent reworked, reordered, truncated, or interpolated.

The immediate reception of these syllogistic arguments against the *Filioque* is evidenced by other works which incorporate them in whole or in part. The shorter series of 35 syllogisms is found appended to a text by Nicholas Muzalon (1070–1152) entitled *Περὶ τῆς τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐκπορεύσεως* (RAP [G3656](#)); the same set of syllogisms is included in the *Thesaurus Fidei Orthodoxae* (RAP [G13013](#)) compiled by Nicetas Choniates (1155–1217); three of these syllogisms, moreover, are to be found in Latin translation in the *Tractatus contra Graecorum errorem negantium Spiritum Sanctum a Filio procedere* that Gerhoh of Reichersberg wrote in 1162.

As for the longer series, ten of the syllogisms are incorporated into the ‘Syllogism’ section of Andronicus Camaterus’ *Sacrum armamentarium* (RAP [G11349](#)), compiled c. 1173. For the Latin West, Hugo Etherianus (1110–1182) quotes some of the syllogisms in his *De sancto et immortali Deo* of c. 1176, and Nicholas-Nectarius (1155–1235), abbot of the Monastery of Saint Nicholas of Casole in Otranto, prepared a full Latin translation with the Greek text in parallel. Such was the standing of the *Refutationes* that official disproof of the arguments presented by Nicholas of Methone was regarded as an essential prerequisite for the establishment of the pro-union policy of Michael VIII, and in the latter part of the 13th century, the pro-Latin Patriarch John Beccus set out the text of the Methonian syllogisms along with a detailed refutation, first of the ten syllogisms to be found in Camaterus (Οἱ τοῦ Καματηροῦ συλλογισμοὶ μετὰ τῶν ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς ἀντιρρήσεων RAP [G12024](#)), then of a further forty-one not included in the

Camaterian collection (Ἑτεροὶ συλλογισμοὶ μετὰ τῶν ἐπ' αὐτοῖς ἀντιρρήσεων RAP G20639).

The first editor of this text was the infamous 19th-century forger CONSTANTINE SIMONIDES.¹ He undertook to edit two of Nicholas of Methone's works, *Refutationes theologicae doctrinae Latinorum* (1857) and the *Adversus Latinos de Spiritu sancto* (1858), wishing to offer these and other anti-Latin writings as 'a gift to his mother Church', the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in her attempt to counter increasing Western theological and missionary influence in the still young Kingdom of Greece. Equally, however, SIMONIDES sought to present himself thereby as a serious textual editor in order to dispel the clouds of scandal that his forgeries had evoked. For the *Refutationes*, he claims to have had access to four manuscripts: an (unknown) one from the Athonite Monastery of Dionysiou dated to 1447, one in Paris dated 1537 (Grec 1261 / Diktyon 50870), and two in Munich (Codd. graec. 65 and graec. 66 / Diktyon 44509 and 44510), both dated c. 1550. He states that he has chosen to print the text of the Dionysiou ms., the earliest of his witnesses, exactly as he found it, making no corrections of any kind πρὸς ἀποφυγὴν σκανδάλων, while relegating the variants he noted in the other three mss. to his extensive *apparatus*. He prefaced his edition with a prolix but entirely imaginary biography of his anti-Latin hero.

ANDRONIKOS DEMETRAKOPOULOS, the author of what remains the most comprehensive overview of Greek anti-Latin writings from the 9th to the 18th century and of a history of the Latin schism, included an idiosyncratic form of the text in his *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη* (1866). For this he drew on SIMONIDES and on the Bavarian mss. mentioned above (Diktyon 44509 and 44510). The two mss., however, not only presented different forms of the text, but were also not infrequently corrupt. DEMETRAKOPOULOS' edition contains no *apparatus* and so the rationale behind his readings, numberings, and omissions is not clear. Nevertheless, his became by default the text of reference, even though it was very palpably 'uncritical'.

In recent years an ambitious project led by ALESSANDRA BUCOSI, *Repertorium Auctorum Polemicorum* (RAP), has been launched to provide a conspectus of the entire literature of Latin-Byzantine polemics ranging from the 9th to the 15th century with a view to producing reliable modern editions of the texts on either side of the dispute. In this context, CARMELO

1. C. SIMONIDES, Ueber Nikolaos, Bischof von Methone. Memnon: archäologische Monatsschrift 3 (1857) pp. 78–96.

NICOLÒ BENVENUTO has undertaken the daunting task of re-editing Nicholas of Methone's short but widely disseminated and influential work.

BENVENUTO provides a detailed introduction on the 'state of the question', dealing with the authenticity of the attribution to Nicholas and disentangling the various threads of the textual transmission. He shows that two versions were already in circulation in the mid-12th century: the *Versio Brevis*, which constitutes an epitome of the arguments of the Patriarch Photius and which he suggests may have been compiled as a sort of handbook for use in anti-Latin debate, and the *Versio Longa*, which he calls the 'official' one. The latter adds further chapters providing a synopsis of Nicholas of Methone's own writings on the procession of the Holy Spirit, namely, his *Adversus Latinos de Spiritu sancto* (RAP G368), *Ad magnum domesticum* (RAP G19828), and *Memoriae contra Latinos* (RAP G19835). BENVENUTO then devotes more than fifty pages to a minute description of the manuscripts which he has chosen as a basis for his edition. There follows the text of the *Versio Brevis* and of the *Versio Longa* set out on facing pages with an *apparatus* indicating *loci similes* and *fontes*, textual variants, and evidence of contamination. The volume concludes with an Italian translation of the *Versio Longa*.

In view of his meticulous consideration of the manuscript tradition, BENVENUTO could have chosen to ignore the problematic 19th-century editions altogether and to proceed directly to a new edition on much sounder foundations. It seems, however, that he felt compelled to try to exorcise the ghost of SIMONIDES which continues to haunt the text. As a *prolegomenon* to the present edition, he has written a separate monograph on SIMONIDES which charts his move from forger to philologist and from counterfeiter to critical editor: *Il Metodo Simonidis. Filologia del falso-vero e nostalgia di Bisanzio* (2024). This book, which can profitably be read in conjunction with the present edition, contains chapters which examine SIMONIDES' editorial approach to the two works by Nicholas of Methone he published, namely, the *Adversus Latinos de Spiritu sancto* and the *Refutationes theologicae doctrinae Latinorum*. In both cases, the master fraudster claims to print the text exactly as found in manuscripts he had obtained from the Monastery of Dionysiou. The source for the first of these was later presented by SIMONIDES to the National Library of Greece where it is preserved as EBE 477 (Diktyon 2773), and BENVENUTO has shown that its 24 pages were indeed removed from cod. 150 (Diktyon 20188) of the Athonite monastery. Here SIMONIDES proves as good as his word: the published text coincides exactly with the reading of the manuscript. For

the *Refutationes*, however, no manuscript can be traced and no comparison made. Absence of evidence is naturally not evidence of absence, but in the course of his investigations BENVENUTO became convinced that the alleged Dionysiou manuscript was as much a figment of SIMONIDES' imagination as was his biography of Nicholas of Methone. In point of fact, he argues, the text was concocted artificially from the other three manuscripts at SIMONIDES' disposal and presented as a monstrosity of unlikely contamination.

The ghost of SIMONIDES, however, is not easily laid to rest, as BENVENUTO constantly reminds his readers, for his phantom presence hangs ominously over the entire project of critical philology where the line separating the critical reconstruction of a text and forgery can at times be difficult to discern and where the editor can never escape from the hidden hermeneutical circle which binds him to the object of his study. A work such as this by Nicholas of Methone is visible in the multiple refractions of its reception and copyings. It can be edited as it appears in Nicholas Muзалon, Nicetas Choniates, Andronicus Camaterus, Nicholas of Otranto, and in its other transformations and translations, but it is much more difficult to edit a reconstructed *Urtext* without unwittingly drifting into the dangerous waters of forgery.

One of the most important refractions of the text of the *Refutationes* is undoubtedly the attempt by Patriarch John Beccus to offer as it were an 'official' repudiation (RAP G12024 and G20639) of the arguments of Nicholas of Methone's 'official' text in order to establish the pro-union position. Strangely, however, BENVENUTO takes no note whatsoever of this still unpublished work, even though he does register references to the syllogisms in another text by Beccus, *De unione ecclesiarum* (RAP G4293).

Nicholas of Methone has emerged in recent times as a significant figure in 12th-century Byzantine intellectual history who through his engagement with Proclus' *Elements* gave renewed prominence to the philosophical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius and thereby to the question of deification and participation which was to play such a major role in the centuries to come. In this light, the theological-philosophical premises of the syllogisms invite particular attention. In the very first syllogism, for example, Nicholas announces as an axiom that τῶν ὄντων πάντων οἱ λόγοι πρόεισιν ἐν τῷ Θεῷ, κακεῖθεν εἰς τὰ ὄντα διανενέμονται. This brings to mind the ἰδέας τῶν ὄντων ἐν τῷ Θεῷ προϋφειστώσας which Nicholas discusses in Chapter 76 of his Explication of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* in relation to

Pseudo-Dionysius. BENVENUTO, no doubt very wisely, does not attempt to open the philosophical can of worms and restricts his annotation to purely philological concerns. Nevertheless, if the ‘philosophical turn’ in the 12th-century discussion of the *Filioque* is to be evaluated and its consequences understood, these issues have to be explored more deeply. Indeed, one of the driving forces behind the project to publish the writings around the *Filioque* is surely to enable a clearer understanding of the terms of the 12th-century debate, which are very inadequately defined by general references to ‘scholasticism’, or to a conflict between Plato and Aristotle / Realism and Nominalism.

BENVENUTO’s edition does not make any concessions to a non-specialist readership, but its value for serious students of Byzantine intellectual history is beyond question. His gift for detailed textual scholarship will no doubt bear many fruits in the future.

Keywords

Filioque; Nicholas of Methone; theological polemics