

New wine in old wineskin

Byzantine reuses of the apocryphal revelation dialogue

Péter Tóth

‘What praise can a dialogue gain, if it cannot be attributed either to Plato or to Lucian’, asks George Scholarios in his fifteenth-century anti-Latin dialogue.¹ His question is simple and straightforward: is a dialogue without an obvious tribute to these two most important classical models of dialoguing inevitably doomed to be ‘praiseless’ and unworthy of record? The present paper addresses and challenges this question from a specific angle, when it focuses on a particular type of Byzantine dialogues, which may best be termed ‘apocryphal revelation dialogues’. These disputations between divine and human discussants, who converse in the form of a miraculous revelation in a typically biblical context – although they do not show an obvious indebtedness to Scholarios’s Platonic and Lucianic models – were still found worthy enough to be recorded and transmitted in many Byzantine manuscripts. This may mean, therefore, that, despite their non-classical, ‘apocryphal character’, they were still considered to be heirs of the classical dialogues whose ‘democratic’, ‘open-ended’ use is said to have disappeared in Christianity.² But they can also represent another, new type of dialogue or even a completely different literary genre that just happens to be in dialogue form, but has nothing to do with ‘real dialogues’. A satisfactory classification of these texts, however, can only be possible after we know a bit more about this under-studied realm of Byzantine literature. One of the most important aims of this paper, therefore, is to call attention to their existence and to (re-)vindicate a place for them in the history and corpus of Byzantine dialogues. By drawing a preliminary survey of the available texts, their contents, techniques and strategies, I would like to urge and also to initiate the systematic exploration of this literature.

The apocryphal revelation dialogue as a distinct literary form

The term ‘apocryphal revelation dialogue’ originates in German scholarship. It was probably Kurt Rudolph who first observed that one of the main generic peculiarities of the gnostic writings in the second to fourth centuries was that they communicate in a special dialogue format he termed revelatory discourse (*Offenbarungsdiskurs*) or

¹ Scholarios, *Neophron, or Aeromythia*, ed. Jugie, Petit and Siderides, 3:12: καὶ πῶς τις λοιπὸν ἐπαινέσεται τὸν διάλογον τουτονί, μήτε Πλάτωνι προστιθέναι, μήτ' εἰς Λουκιανὸν ἀναφέρειν δυνάμενος;

² Clark, ‘Can We Talk?’, 132–3: ‘Christianity closed down open-ended discussion among equals of a range of options’.

revelatory instruction (*Offenbarungsvortrag*).³ The nature of this dialogue type is aptly illustrated by the beginning of the work known as the *Letter of Peter to Philip*.⁴ The text depicts how the apostles gather on the Mount of Olives and experience a supernatural revelation of Christ.

Then Peter gathered the other (apostles). They went upon the mountain which is called 'the (mount) of Olives,' the place where they used to gather with the blessed Christ when he was in the body ... Then a great light appeared so that the mountains shone from the sight of him who had appeared. And a voice called out to them saying: 'Listen to my words that I speak to you. Why are you asking me? I am Jesus Christ who am with you forever.'⁵

At this point a long discussion begins between the miraculously appearing divine figure and the amazed human characters, touching upon a number of doctrinal, cosmological and moral issues, which the *Letter of Peter* introduces as follows:

Then the apostles answered and said: 'Lord, we would like to understand the deficiency of the aeons and their fullness.' And: 'How are we detained in this dwelling place?' Or: 'How have we come to this place?' Also: 'In what way shall we leave?' Also: 'How do we possess the authority of boldness?' And: 'Why do the powers fight against us?'⁶

These queries, then, get their detailed treatment by Christ who, after finishing the instruction of his disciples, bids them to spread his words in the world and, again with lightning and thunder, disappears from their sight.

It was this scenario, systematically recurring in a number of gnostic texts,⁷ that Rudolph termed 'revelatory' discourse or instruction in his 1968 study. Later, in her 1980 monograph on this dialogue form, PHEME PERKINS reviewed Rudolph's arguments and amended the term as 'revelation dialogues' and distinguished a whole range of common

³ Rudolph, *Gnostische 'Dialog'*.

⁴ The text is preserved in Coptic in the Nag Hammadi Codex VIII and the newly discovered Codex Tchacos; it was edited by Marvin Meyer.

⁵ *Letter of Peter to Philip*, 132.12–17 and 134.10–18, ed. and trans. Meyer, 18–21.

⁶ *Letter of Peter to Philip*, 134.19–135.2, ed. and trans. Meyer, 21.

⁷ In addition to the *Letter of Peter*, the same pattern occurs in works such as the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (CPG 1189); *Apocryphon of John* (CPG 1180); *Gospel of Mary* (CPG 1223); *Hypostasis of the Archons* (CPG 1183); *(First) Apocalypse of James* (CPG 1192); *Apocalypse of Peter* (CPG 1205); *Pistis Sophia* (CPG 1225); *Book of Thomas the Contender* (CPG 1186); *Dialogue of the Savior* (CPG 1190); *First and Second Books of Jeu* (CPG 1226).

characteristics, which these dialogues share in both their framework and their dialogic material.⁸

Before and parallel to Perkins's book, however, gnostic dialogues have been frequently described by others, such as Fallon, Puech, Vielhauer and Schneemelcher,⁹ as 'pseudo' or 'parabiblical' texts: 'apocryphal apocalypses' or 'gospels' and more recently, by Helmut Koester and Judith Hartenstein as 'dialogue-gospels' (*Dialogevangelien*) or 'appearance-gospels' (*Erscheinungsevangelien*).¹⁰ It is on the basis of this twofold tradition, the one that regards these texts as a special type of dialogue-literature on the one hand, and the other that considers them 'parabiblical' or 'apocryphal' writings on the other, that I apply the term 'apocryphal revelation dialogue' to describe a corpus of texts that contain a pseudo-biblical visionary discussion between a divine and a human character conversing in a recognizably scriptural time and space.

Notwithstanding its striking popularity in the gnostic writings, apocryphal revelation dialogue as a genre is not a specifically gnostic phenomenon. Its use is attested in a number of orthodox, non- or explicitly anti-gnostic texts, too. An excellent example of a polemical use of this form against gnostic doctrines is preserved in the second-century *Epistle of the Apostles*.¹¹ This work also contains a characteristic revelation dialogue, exactly in the tone of the gnostic writings, with an explicit intention to rebut gnostic views with their own weapons.¹² Another work, the *Questions of the Apostle Bartholomew to Christ*, seems to be uninfluenced by the gnostic controversies and was popular enough to be translated into Latin and Slavonic in the Middle Ages. It also records a revelatory discussion between the resurrected Christ and the Apostle Bartholomew on the incarnation, the devil and human salvation.¹³ Yet another piece

⁸ Cf. Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 26–31.

⁹ Fallon, 'Gnostic Apocalypses'; Puech, 'Gnostische Evangelien'; Vielhauer, *Geschichte*, 680–82; Schneemelcher, 'Dialoge des Erlösers', 189–91.

¹⁰ Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 173–5 and idem, 'Überlieferung und Geschichte', 1474–5; Hartenstein, *Zweite Lehre*, 27–31 and eadem, 'Erscheinungsevangelien'.

¹¹ Cf. the synoptic edition of the extant Coptic and Ethiopic version by Schmidt, *Gespräche Jesu*, and their English translation by Taylor, 'Epistle of the Apostles'.

¹² The long discussion is formatted as a continuation of the first encounter between the resurrected Christ and his apostles in Lk 24:38–41 that the text introduces as follows (*Epistle of the Apostle* § 12; cf. the edition by Schmidt, *Gespräche Jesu*, 42–5 and the English translation by Taylor, 'Epistle of the Apostles', 563): 'we touched him, that we might learn of the truth whether he were risen in the flesh; and we fell on our faces confessing our sin, that we had been unbelieving. Then said our Lord and Saviour unto us: Rise up, and I will reveal unto you ...' For the anti-gnostic content of the text, see the analysis by Hartenstein, *Zweite Lehre*, 97–126.

¹³ The discussion in the earliest Greek version of the text is placed, characteristically, between the resurrection and ascension of Christ and begins with the apostle's question saying. *Questions of the Apostle Bartholomew* § 1, ed. Wilmart and Tisserant, 170: μετὰ

from the fifth century, the so-called *Testament of the Lord*, is even further from the gnostic heritage, as it contains liturgical regulations and instructions of canon and secular law embedded in a revelation imparted to the apostles by Christ, again on the Mount of Olives.¹⁴

Given this ubiquitous presence of the revelation dialogue in almost all languages and layers of early mediaeval literature – used and employed for the most diverse authorial purposes, from the dissemination of gnostic ideas to their systematic refutation or simple Christological, moral or legal argumentation – it is no wonder that the ‘biblicity’ of these dialogues and their very pertinence to what is usually called the ‘apocrypha of the New Testament’ has nowadays been doubted.

In regard of the gnostic texts, Rudolph already questioned the pertinence of apocryphal revelation dialogue to the biblical or gospel genre. He rather viewed revelation dialogue as a Hellenistic literary form that developed from late antique question-and-answer manuals, the *Erotapokriseis*, which – on the hands of the gnostics – was ‘biblicised’ and transformed into ‘apocryphal revelation.’¹⁵ Although in the light of later research, focusing on the ‘apocryphicity’ of these texts, Rudolph’s views have been marginalised, nowadays revelation dialogues are being reconsidered. Instead of viewing them from a strictly biblical angle as special gospels or apocalypses, most recent scholarship is more inclined to re-assess the connections between gnostic revelations and the literature of questions-and-answers and view these revelations as a distinct literary, but not necessarily biblical, genre.¹⁵

Extirpating a genre in Byzantium

Parallel to the systematic suppression of the gnostic writings in the third and early fourth centuries, the production of new and the transmission of earlier revelation dialogues seems to have ceased drastically. The gnostic pieces, thoroughly indexed and stigmatised by the heresiologists, were condemned to general oblivion and, had their

τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀνάστασιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, προσελθὼν ὁ Βαρθολομαῖος τὸν κύριον ἐπερωτᾷ λέγων· ἀποκάλυψόν μοι, κύριε, τὰ μυστήρια τῶν οὐρανῶν, trans. Elliott, 655: ‘After the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ, Bartholomew came unto the Lord and questioned him: Lord, reveal unto me the mysteries of the heavens’.

¹⁴ Cf. the beginning of the Syriac version, *Testamentum Domini*, ed. Rahmani, 2–4, trans. Cooper and Maclean, 49–50: ‘After our Lord rose from the dead and appeared unto us ... falling on our faces we blessed the Father of the new world and being held in very great fear, we waited prostrate as infants that speak not, but Jesus lifted us up, saying: “Why has your heart thus fallen” ... and we started to question him saying: “Lord, what is the Holy Spirit, what is his power...?”’ ¹⁵ Cf. Rudolph, ‘Gnostische Dialog’, 86–90.

¹⁵ Cf., for example, such recent studies as Kaler, ‘Just How Close’, or Piovanelli, ‘Entre oralité et (ré)écriture’.

Coptic translations not been brought to light, they would certainly have been lost for good.

Curiously, however, together with the gnostic pieces, even the 'orthodox' revelation dialogues seem to have fallen out of favour. Despite their doctrinal 'innocence', none of the above-mentioned pieces have come down to us in their original Greek versions. The explicitly anti-gnostic dialogue of the *Epistle of the Apostles*, for example, was preserved only in Coptic and Ethiopic and in one tiny Latin fragment.¹⁶ The Greek original of the *Questions of Bartholomew* survived also very fragmentarily, as later insertion on the flyleaves of three interrelated manuscripts,¹⁷ whereas the *Testament of the Lord* is extant only in Syriac, Arabic and Ethiopic translations with one single fragment of its original Greek recently discovered.¹⁸

Whether it was the gnostics' predilection towards this literary form or some other reason that made it so suspicious in the eyes of Byzantine theologians, their mistrust resulted in a complete extirpation of this once-so-popular literary form. There is only one branch of pseudo-biblical revelations that survived extinction: the eschatological revelation dialogue, represented by an all-time favourite, the *Apocalypse of Paul*.

The vision of Paul, which relates the apostle's rapture and subsequent encounter with the Archangel Michael, who shows him around in Heaven and Hell, was probably composed in Greek in the third century CE. This Greek *Apocalypse* was an apparent best seller, as it was translated into almost every language of the late antique Christian ecumene.¹⁹

From the eighth century onwards, however, even the *Apocalypse of Paul* was becoming more and more suspicious in Byzantium. It was frequently denounced and indexed by Byzantine church authorities as harmful and 'apocryphal'.²⁰ It was probably the distinguished intercessory power of the Archangel Michael on behalf of the sinners in hell that Byzantines found so disturbing with the *Apocalypse* that, by the middle Byzantine period, the Greek version of the apocalypse seems to have been completely

¹⁶ For the various versions, see Schmidt, *Gespräche Jesu*, 4–22.

¹⁷ For the complicated transmission of this work, see the latest survey by Marksches, 'Bartholomaeustraditionen'.

¹⁸ Cf. the detailed analysis in Coquin, 'Testamentum Domini' on the Oriental tradition and Corcoran and Salway, 'Newly Identified Greek Fragment' on the recently discovered Greek fragment.

¹⁹ See the recent survey of the transmission of this text by Jirouskova, *Die Visio Pauli*, with a special focus on the mediaeval vernacular versions.

²⁰ Cf. Patriarch Nikephoros, *Canons*, 3 and 4, PG 100:852 and the material assembled in Fabricius, *Codex Apocryphus*, 943–53.

marginalised: there are only two, heavily reworked and abbreviated, copies of its Greek text preserved.²¹

A literature reborn

The suppression of the *Apocalypse of Paul* would probably have been the ultimate step of the gradual and complete extirpation of the earlier revelation dialogues in Byzantium if, at the turn of the eighth and the ninth centuries, the tradition had not popped up again in the form of a rewritten version of the *Apocalypse of Paul*. The new dialogue has again been set on the Mount of Olives as a conversation between the Archangel Michael and, this time, the Virgin Mary, and is entitled, accordingly, *The Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary*.²²

In her recent book on mediaeval Greek apocalypses, Jane Baun has aptly demonstrated how compilers of the Greek *Apocalypse of the Virgin* have tried to legitimise the framework and content of the *Apocalypse of Paul* by substituting the figure of the Apostle Paul with the Virgin Mary. With the Marian rewriting of the early apocalypse, they not only transformed the powerful figure of the Archangel Michael of the *Apocalypse of Paul* to that of a heavenly servant obediently answering Mary's questions but, in line with the developments of post-iconoclastic Byzantine theology, created a narrative encomium of the utmost intercessory power of the Virgin. Moreover, this new Byzantinised form of the apocalypse modernised the anachronistic moral content of the late antique apocryphon to reflect contemporary social trends. It now comprised every characteristic figure of a mediaeval Byzantine parish community: from lazy priests, corrupted stewards or unfaithful priests' wives to unforgiving bishops, merciless princes or negligent lecturers.²³

The appearance of this upgraded version of the eschatological revelation dialogue in the eighth/ninth-century *Apocalypse of the Virgin* represents not only the genesis of an extremely successful text, usually described as the most popular and influential

²¹ These manuscripts (Monacensis graecus 276, fols. 132–49 and Ambrosianus graecus C 255 inf., fols. 218–28) are edited and described by Tischendorf, *Apocalypses*, xiv–xviii.

²² The beginning of the text is very similar to the framework of the early revelations as it is also set on the Mount of Olives: *Apocalypse of the Virgin* § 1, ed. Syrtzova, 226: ἤμελλεν ἡ παναγία θεοτόκος πορεύεσθαι πρὸς τὸ ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν τοῦ προσεύξεσθαι [...] εἶπεν [...] κατεθάτω ὁ ἀρχάγγελος Μιχαήλ, ὅπως εἶπη μοι περὶ τῶν ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων καὶ κατήλθεν Μιχαήλ [...] καὶ ἡ κεχαριτομένη ἤρξατο δέεσθαι: Ἀνάγγελον μοι τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς πάντα [...]; trans. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 391: 'The Holy Mother of God was about to go to the Mount of Olives to pray and she said ... let the Archangel Michael come down that he may speak to me concerning things in heaven and earth and in the nether regions ... And Michael came down and saluted her ... And the Virgin said: Make known to me everything that is on earth ...' And thus the dialogue begins.

²³ Cf. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 79–91.

Byzantine apocryphon ever, but – and this is what interests us at the moment – it also marks the revival of the old revelatory genre in Byzantium. Although the new Byzantine *Apocalypse of the Virgin* is closely related to the eschatological branch of apocryphal revelations, especially to their manifestation in the *Apocalypse of Paul*, its structure as a genuine revelation dialogue on the Mount of Olives definitely attests to a renewed Byzantine interest in Early Christian revelations. This fascination with the revelation dialogue manifests itself in the emergence of a large and diverse group of new Byzantine apocrypha that employ this characteristic literary form to discuss not only eschatology and afterlife, but – in close accordance with the earlier tradition – a much wider range of theological, legal and moral topics. It is to this corpus of mediaeval Byzantine apocrypha that I will turn in the second half of this paper.

Byzantine revelations with eschatological scope

Byzantine revelation dialogues can be divided into two major groups, one containing visions with a more manifest eschatological scope and another comprising revelations about various non-eschatological issues. The first group, that of the texts with eschatological perspective, contains three mediaeval Greek apocalypses that are situated in a New Testament scenario. These are the so-called *First Apocryphal Apocalypse of John* (CANT 331), the unedited *Third Apocryphal Apocalypse of John* (BHG 922k) and the *Dialogue of the Apostles John and James* (CANT 269). The first and most important piece in this group is the *First Apocryphal Apocalypse of John*. This apocalypse was probably the second most popular Byzantine apocryphon after the *Apocalypse of the Virgin*. It is preserved in more than twenty manuscripts and several mediaeval translations into Arabic, Armenian and Church Slavonic.²⁴ The exact date of this text is still debated; after earlier attempts to view it as an early Christian apocalypse, it has recently been placed to the mediaeval period around the eighth or ninth centuries.²⁵ In a recent article, however, on the basis of the lack of anti-Islamic references, Jean-Daniel Kaestli argues for an earlier date around the fifth/sixth centuries.²⁶

The document, as shown by its title, is closely related to the Johannine apocalyptic tradition and contains a rewritten or supplemented version of the biblical book of *Revelations* explicating its obscurities, but the literary form whereby this is achieved is new. This apocalypse, unlike the canonical *Book of Revelation* it is commenting on, is not an allegorical vision, but a *par excellence* revelation dialogue. The discussion takes place on Mount Thabor between the miraculously appearing Christ and the terrified

²⁴ The Greek text has been published by Tischendorf, *Apocalypses*, 70–93; an English translation is available in Court, *The Book of Revelation*, 23–63, while the other versions, except for transcriptions of some manuscripts, are unedited, cf. CANT 331 and De Santos Otero, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung*, 197–209.

²⁵ For an earlier dating, cf. Bousset, *Antichrist Legend*, 42–3 and for a more recent one Whealey, ‘The Apocryphal Apocalypse of John’.

²⁶ Kaestli, ‘La figure de l’Antichrist’.

John, who – after his first astonishment – addresses a series of questions to the divine figure asking him to reveal the exegetical message of his own *Book of Revelations*.²⁷ A large portion of John’s questions, however, has almost nothing to do with eschatology. He enquires about the number of angels and humans, or analyses the interesting epistemological problem of whether it was possible for the resurrected human soul to recognise others and remember its own past. The wording of these questions and especially Christ’s answers to them stand very close to the style and the content of another, rather earthly dialogue-work, the *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem* from the seventh century.²⁸ This collection of questions and answers, attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria, contains a query about the recognition of the soul after the resurrection, which is formulated and answered in a strikingly similar way in both the *Quaestiones* and the *Apocalypse*.

Apocalypse

Lord, is it going to be possible in that world to recognize one another – a brother his brother, a friend his friend, a father his own children, or the children their own parents? The voice, which I heard said: Listen, John, for the righteous there is recognition, but definitely not for sinners.²⁹

Quaestiones ad Antiochum

So we will not recognize each other there and brothers to brothers, parents to children, friends to friends will all remain unrecognizable? ... I speak only about the souls of the sinners, they will not recognize each other. Whereas God has

²⁷ Cf. the characteristic ‘revelatory’ beginning of the *Apocalypse of John* § 1, ed. Tischendorf, 70: μετὰ τὴν ἀνάληψιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ παρεγενόμεν ἔγὼ Ἰωάννης μόνος ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος τὸ Θαβώρ, ἔνθα καὶ τὴν ἄχραντον αὐτοῦ θεότητα ὑπέδειξεν ἡμῖν, καὶ μὴ δυνηθέντος μου στήναι ἔπεσα ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ ἠξάμην πρὸς κύριον καὶ εἶπον· κύριε ὁ θεός μου [...] διδάξόν με περὶ τῆς ἐλεύσεώς σου· ὅταν μέλλῃς ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τί μέλλει γενέσθαι; ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ καὶ ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη τί μέλλουσι γενέσθαι ἐν τοῖς καιροῖς ἐκεῖνοις; ἀποκάλυψόν μοι πάντα; trans. Court, 33: ‘After the ascension (resurrection in Slavonic) of our Lord Jesus Christ, I John found myself alone on Mount Thabor. There he showed us the undefiled fullness of his divinity. I was unable to stand but fell on the earth and prayed: Oh Lord, teach me about your coming. What will happen when you are to come? How will heaven and earth be affected? Reveal everything to me ...’ For the text as a ‘dialogic commentary’ on the Book of Revelations, see Valeriani, ‘L’artefice di inquit’, 93–6.

²⁸ The dating of this extremely influential collection preserved in hundreds of manuscripts and dozens of translations all over the mediaeval world is still debated. Recent research, however, tends to place it to the late seventh century, cf., for example, Macé, ‘Les Quaestiones ad Antiochum’ and, most recently from a different angle, Roggema and De Vos, ‘Ps. Athanasius of Alexandria’.

²⁹ *Apocalypse of John* § 12, ed. Tischendorf, 79: Κύριε, ἔστιν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐκεῖνῳ γνωρίσαι ἀλλήλους, ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφόν, ἢ φίλος τὸν φίλον, πατὴρ τὰ ἴδια τέκνα; ἄκουσον

given recognition as a gift to the souls of the righteous.³⁰

The interesting view that the souls of sinners cannot recognise each other after the resurrection is a unique idea that has not been paralleled for in any other text. Equally striking is the coincidence in the treatment of another question about the number of angels and humans that comes up in a very similar wording in both the *Apocalypse* and the *Quaestiones*.

And I said again: Lord, how great is the number of the angels? Which are more numerous, angels or human beings? The voice I heard told me: The human race is as numerous as the angels, just as the prophet said: He fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of God's Angels (Deut 32:8).³¹

What is the number of the angels, is it larger than the number of humanity? ... Some say that angels and humans are exactly the same number, and they refer to the testimony saying He fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of God's Angels (Deut 32:8).³²

This close relationship between the seventh-century *Quaestiones* and the *First Apocryphal Apocalypse of John*, observed first by Vassily Mochulsky in the nineteenth century, later in the Slavonic versions by Yavor Miltenov, and most recently in the treatment of the biblical citations by Laurance Vianes³³ has wide-reaching implications. It affects not only the dating of the revelation dialogue which, as it seems to borrow its material from the seventh-century *Ad Antiochum*, should perhaps be related to the

Ἰωάννη· τοῖς μὲν δικαίοις γνωρισμὸς γίνεται, τοῖς δὲ ἀμαρτωλοῖς οὐδαμῶς; trans. Court, 37.

³⁰ Ps.-Athanasius, *Quaestiones ad Antiochum*, QA 22 = PG 28:610–12: οὐκ ἐπιγινώσκουμεν ἀλλήλους ἐκεῖ, ἀλλὰ ἀγνώριστοι ἀδελφοὶ ἀδελφοῖς, καὶ πατέρες υἱοῖς; Ψυχῶν τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν, ὅτι ἑαυτὰς οὐκ ἐπιγινώσκουσι. Ταῖς γὰρ τῶν δικαίων ψυχαῖς ὁ Θεὸς ἐπιγνωρισμὸν ἔδωρήσατο; my trans.

³¹ *Apocalypse of John* § 26, ed. Tischendorf, 91: καὶ πάλιν εἶπον· Κύριε, πόσον ἐστὶν τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἀγγέλων; καὶ ποῖόν ἐστιν πλεόν, τῶν ἀγγέλων ἢ τῶν ἀνθρώπων; ὅσον ἐστὶν τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἀγγέλων, τόσον ἐστὶν τὸ γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καθὼς εἶπεν ὁ προφήτης· ἔστησεν ὅρια ἐθνῶν κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ. trans. Court, 45.

³² Ps.-Athanasius, *Quaestiones ad Atiochum* QA 6 = PG 28:601–3: πόσος δὲ ἄρα τῶν ἀγγέλων ὁ ἀριθμὸς ὑπάρχει ὑπὲρ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος; ἰσαριθμούς λέγουσι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους, φέροντες εἰς μαρτυρίαν τό· ἔστησεν ὅρια ἐθνῶν κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων· Θεοῦ; my trans.

³³ Cf. Mochulsky, *Следы народной Библии*, 202–4, Miltenov, 'Апокрифният апокалипсис' and Vianes, 'Les citations bibliques'.

seventh/eighth centuries, as originally suggested, but also, and much more importantly, its literary evaluation. The close dependence of the *Apocalypse* on the *Quaestiones* seems to indicate a certain permeability between the two literary forms. The dry and impersonal series of questions and answers could easily be turned into a more lively dialogue form resulting in a, so-to-say, ‘apocryphised’ version of the *erōtapokriseis*.

Non-eschatological revelation dialogues

This impression is further supported by the pieces of the second, non-eschatological group of apocryphal revelation dialogues which, according to the present stage of my survey, contains four documents: *The Second Apocalypse of John* (CANT 332), the *Revelation on the Lord’s Prayer* (BHG 821x–y), the *Didascalia of the Lord* (BHG 812a–e) and *The Dialogue of Mary and Christ on the Departure of the Soul*.³⁴

The first of the four, the so-called *Second Apocryphal Apocalypse of John*, is preserved in a considerable number of manuscripts disguised as a homily by John Chrysostom; hence, it is sometimes referred to as the *Apocalypse of John Chrysostom*.³⁵ The text describes an apocryphal encounter between Christ and the Apostle John, who, just as in the *First Apocryphal Apocalypse*, is constantly being addressed as, ‘oh, my just John’.³⁶ In sharp contrast to that one, however, it is not the afterlife that interests the Apostle here.

The first part of the *Apocalypse*, right after the miraculous appearance of Christ before John, contains a list of sins and their penances, while the second part is a short commentary on the symbolic meaning of the church and the liturgy in a traditional question-and-answer format. Even the layout of the text, repeating, ‘Now, oh Lord, tell me about: the church,’ ‘the liturgy’ and ‘the antiphons’ reminds of the style of the short *erōtapokriseis*-collections of late Byzantine manuscripts, where the questions are usually introduced by short rubrics containing exactly the same headings as the questions of John in the *Apocalypse*.³⁷ A further look at the content of the text confirms

³⁴ This latter piece is not registered yet; I have identified it in two manuscripts: Athens, *Εθνική Βιβλιοθήκη της Ελλάδος*, MS 2187, fols. 155v–156r (fifteenth century); Dresden, *Sächsische Landesbibliothek*, MS A 187, 243–4 (sixteenth century).

³⁵ See the short survey in its first edition by Nau, ‘Deuxième Apocalypse’ and Court, *Book of Revelation*, 67–73.

³⁶ Cf. the characteristic beginning of the text in *Second Apocalypse of John* § 1, ed. Krasnoseltzev, 98: προσελθὼν Ἰωάννης ὁ θεολόγος τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, εἶπεν· Κύριε, ὑπέ μοι πόσε ἁμαρτία ἦστιν, καὶ πεία ἁμαρτία ἀσυγχώριτος ἐστὶν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις; my trans.: ‘Saint John the Theologian stepped forth and seeing the Lord he prostrated himself before him and said: Oh Lord, tell me how many sins there are and which remain unforgivable in the world? And the Savior started to speak as follows ...’

³⁷ Cf. John’s questions asking about the liturgy, the altar, the antiphons, etc. in the *Second Apocalypse of John* §§ 22–30, ed. Krasnoseltzev, 99: εἰπέ μοι, Κύριε, καὶ περὶ τῆς λειτουργίας [...] Κύριε, εἰπέ μοι καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀντιφώνων, τίνες εἰσὶν; ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης εἶπεν·

this impression. The wording of John’s liturgical questions, and especially Christ’s symbolic explanations of the church building and the liturgical actions therein, come up in a very similar form in some liturgical *erōtapokriseis*.³⁸

Apocalypse

Erōtapokriseis

John said: ‘Lord, what are the symbols of the church?’ The Lord said: Listen, righteous John, the gates are the head of God, the sanctuary is the tomb of the Lord, the holy table is the Lord’s breast, the ambo is the stone that was rolled away from the entrance of the tomb.³⁹

What is the church; what is the sanctuary, what is the holy table? The church is the house of God, the sanctuary is the Lord’s tomb, the holy table is the guarding of the tomb, the ambo is the stone that was rolled away from the entrance of the tomb.⁴⁰

Even this very short analysis of the liturgical material in the *Second Apocryphal Apocalypse of John* seems to corroborate the observation we previously made regarding the *First Apocryphal Apocalypse* that these apocryphal revelation dialogues appear to be dialogised or ‘apocryphised’ versions of *erōtapokriseis*, of which many different versions are preserved in later Byzantine manuscripts.

Another revelation dialogue of this group, the apocryphal discussion between Christ and the Apostle Peter on the interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer, also confirms this

εἰπέ μοι, Κύριε, καὶ περὶ τοῦ προκειμένου, which stand very close to the wording of a liturgical *erōtapokriseis* in Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Plut. 56.13, fol. 19v having rubrics in the very same format like περὶ τοῦ κιβωρίου, τί ἔστιν; περὶ τοῦ βήματος, τί ἔστιν βῆμα etc.

³⁸ Although Byzantine commentaries on the liturgy have been analysed in works such as Bornert, *Les commentaires*, their later re-use in collections of questions and answers, apart from some preliminary research by Mochulsky (*Следы народной Библии*, 138–40), and the recent work on the Slavonic versions by Afanasieva (*Древнеславянские толкования*), has not yet been explored systematically. So all I could rely on was some Greek manuscripts and their nineteenth-century transcripts published by Krasnoseltzev, *Addenda*, 73–5.

³⁹ *Second Apocalypse of John* § 20, ed. Krasnoseltzev, 99: ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης εἶπεν· Κύριε, τὰ ἀντίτυπα τῆς ἐκκλησίας. ὁ δὲ Κύριος εἶπεν· ἄκουσον, δίκαιε Ἰωάννη, οἱ κοχοὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐστὶν ἡ κορυφὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸ βῆμα ἐστὶν τὸ μνήμα τοῦ Κυρίου, ἡ τράπεζα τὸ στήθος τοῦ Κυρίου, ὁ ἄμβων ὁ λίθος ὁ ἀποκυλισθεὶς ἐκ τῆς θύρας τοῦ μνημείου; my trans. Nau’s text has a lacuna at this place.

⁴⁰ *Various Questions and Answers On Priests*, ed. Krasnoseltzev, 74: διὰ τί ἐκκλησία, καὶ διὰ τί βῆμα, διὰ τί τράπεζα; ἡ μὲν ἐκκλησία ἐστὶν ὁ οἶκος τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸ δὲ βῆμα ἐστὶν τὸ μνήμα Κυρίου [...] ἡ τράπεζα τοῦ τάφου ἡ ἀσφάλεια, ὁ δὲ ἄμβων ὁ ἀποκυλισθεὶς λίθος ἐκ τῆς θύρας τοῦ μνημείου [...].

view.⁴¹ The repeated questions of the apostle in the text, asking ‘what is *thy kingdom come?*’, ‘what is *hallowed be thy name?*’, etc. are also standard features of the ‘erotapokritic’ genre, where the Lord’s prayer was very frequently discussed.⁴² An important characteristic of these ‘Our-Father *erōtapokriseis*’ is that they explicate the prayer by dissecting it into short blocs, which are re-formulated as questions, such as διὰ τί τὸ ἁγιασθήτω, to be ‘answered’ in the following paragraph.⁴³

The revelation dialogue between Peter and Christ follows the very same pattern. The Apostle’s questions divide the prayer into the same textual units as the *erōtapokriseis*. These blocs, formatted as Peter’s questions to Christ, are explained similarly in the form of ‘answers’ that now come from Christ himself. But the connection between the two genres becomes even more explicit in the dramaturgical mistakes of the text. In one of the answers, for example, the compiler makes Christ refer to himself in first person plural and at another place even in third person as ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’.⁴⁴ The most telling case, however, is probably when, instead of naming the speakers of his dialogue, the author simply introduces the speeches as ‘question’ and ‘answer’ and entitles the whole text as ‘*erōtapokriseis on Our Father*’.⁴⁵ This close structural overlap between the

⁴¹ The text has been published by Krasnoseltzev (*Addenda*, 90–8) from two manuscripts at the monastery of Koutloumousiou, yet another manuscript has been identified by the Bollandists in BHG 812y. Krasnoseltzev’s first version of the revelation (*Addenda*, 90) begins as ὅτε κατήλθεν ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μετὰ στρατιᾶς ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐμφανίσθη ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων [...] καὶ ἤρξατο διδάσκειν αὐτοὺς καὶ λέγειν τὸ ἅγιον Πατερ ἡμῶν; my trans.: ‘When our Lord Jesus Christ has descended from heaven accompanied by the angelic hosts and appeared before his disciples, he started to teach them the *Our Father* ...’. The other recension of the work places the scene, characteristically, to the Mount of Olives, cf. Krasnoseltzev, *Addenda*, 94.

⁴² Cf. the short survey by Mochulsky, *Следы народнои Библии*, 140 and the detailed discussion in Miltenova, *Erotapokriseis*, 123–50.

⁴³ This is the usual layout of the *erōtapokriseis* in the manuscripts, such as Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Plut. 7.19, fols. 72r and 73r; Plut. 59.13, fols. 70v–72r and Monacensis graecus 252, fols. 220v–221r. The blocs are always the same, but they are termed either as ‘question and answer’ (ἐρώτησις—ἀπόκρισις) or ‘text and explanation’ (κείμενον—ἐρμηνεία).

⁴⁴ He answers Peter’s request with saying that ‘oh beloved brothers, we all have to amend our lives’ (cf. Krasnoseltzev, *Addenda*, 92: καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἀδελφοί, ἤδη, σωφρονισθῶμεν) and at another place he explicates the phrase ‘hallowed be thy name’ by a reference to the liturgy where ‘they can partake the venerable body of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Krasnoseltzev, *Addenda*, 91: λαμβάνουσιν τοῦ τιμίου σώματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

⁴⁵ Here Peter’s name is missing and his question is formatted simply as ‘*Question*: Our daily bread?—*Answer*: Listen, o my beloved Peter’ (Krasnoseltzev, *Addenda*, 96–7: ἐρώτησις· τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον;—ἀπόκρισις· ἄκουσον, ἀγαπητὲ μου Πέτρε [...])

revelation dialogue and the 'Our-Father *erōtapokriseis*' reflects not only a close conceptual link between the two, but also and more importantly a direct dependence of the revelation on the *erōtapokriseis* as its rewritten, 'apocryphised' version. It reveals a literary process, whereby the impersonal questions and answers of the *erōtapokriseis*-collections were recast and 'animated' as pseudo-biblical dialogues.

The other two revelations of the non-eschatological group illustrate this same development. The first text, entitled as *Teaching or Constitution (Didascalia) of the Lord*, contains another typical example of a revelation dialogue.⁴⁶ It begins as the twelve apostles gather at the valley of Josaphat and encounter a luminous angelic being, whom they soon recognise as Christ and immediately start questioning about Sunday observance, the Eucharist and the retribution of sins.⁴⁷ Although a full examination of the lengthy conversation that follows afterwards requires more thorough comparative work, the Saviour's detailed list of sins and penances, which constitutes the main part of this dialogue, seems to have its closest parallels in legal *erōtapokriseis* that often contain such registers.⁴⁸

and the whole text begins as 'questions and answers about the Our Father' (Krasnoseltzev, *Addenda*, 94: ἐρωταποκρίσεις περὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πάτερ ἡμῶν).

⁴⁶ The text was first edited by Nau, 'Didascalie' from two manuscripts, one in Paris (Parisinus graecus 929,480–501) and another in the Vatican (Vaticanus graecus 2072, fols. 179r-182v). Another manuscript was found on the Mount Athos by Krasnoseltzev, *Addenda*, 84–90 (St Andrew's Skete, No 96.) and a new one on Patmos (St John's Monastery, 379) by Jagič, 'Отчет'. I have identified four others from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries that would necessitate a new critical edition of the text (Atheniensis 1021, fols. 145v-155v; Oxoniensis Rawlinson 64, fols. 123v-132v; Ambrosianus G 63. Sup., fols. 174v-176v; Parisinus graecus 930, fols. 37v-46r).

⁴⁷ The framework of the discussion is set (as edited by Jagič, 'Отчет', 272) 'in the days following the resurrection – in other versions (Nau, 'Didascalie,' 230), ascension – of the Lord and his appearance before his holy disciples and Apostles and also after his ascension to [*sic*] the Mount of Olives, when the twelve disciples descended into the valley of Josaphat where, after they were fasting for forty days, they got an ecstasy of ten days. At the dawn of the upcoming Friday, the angel of the Lord stood before them saying: 'Be confident' ... But Andrew said: 'Lord, I recognize you, you are our teacher, your words betray you to be Christ, the Son of the Living God, but you appeared unto us in the form of an angel'... . When the Lord heard this he revealed himself completely unto them and they started to question him ...'

⁴⁸ Cf. the question by the Apostle Paul in the *Didascalia* (ed. Jagic, 'Отчет', 273) when he 'stepped forward and asked the angel about the adulterers and homosexuals. And the angel said: "They have no excuse. All have to go to the fiery river where the worm never sleeps, unless they repent. In that case homosexuals must hold a fast of 12 years, adulterers 3 years, harlots 8 years, those who masturbate 9 years... ." A very similar list

The importance of the *Didascalía*, however, stands not only in its conceptual overlap with Byzantine questions-and-answers collections, which we have observed in many other texts already, but rather in its special historical framework, which provides another important insight into the genesis of these revelations, as it has a very close parallel in the rich literature on the Virgin's dormition. The various accounts on the translation of Mary's body to Paradise describe how the twelve apostles gather beside her tomb in the valley of Josaphat waiting for Christ to appear and take his mother's body with him. As they are sitting at the entrance of the Virgin's grave, they have a lengthy debate about the most efficient way of preaching the gospel, whereby they criticise Paul for his indulgent approach towards pagans. Suddenly, Christ appears before them and, reproaching the others for their remarks, approves Paul's mission to the heathens and elevates the body of the Virgin, together with the Apostles, in a cloud and shows them the secrets of heaven and hell.⁴⁹

It is this particular scene that the *Didascalía* appears to reuse when it sets the dialogue between Christ and the twelve disciples in the valley Josaphat after Christ's Ascension. In one of its manuscripts, the *Didascalía* even contains a tour of hell, which is very similar to the one described in the *Ethiopic Dormition*, as it also depicts the torments of a sinful priest, deacon, reader and steward in hell, exactly as related by the Ethiopic text.⁵⁰ So the Byzantine revelation, just like the *Apocalypse of the Virgin* or the Johannine texts, appears to be reusing an earlier biblical, 'apocryphal' scenario to frame its peculiar doctrinal and legal message, and it may even preserve traces of the now-lost Greek version of this portion of the Dormition.

The last non-eschatological revelation is a short text I found in two manuscripts of the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries.⁵¹ It records a post-resurrection discussion between Christ and the Virgin Mary on the Mount of Olives about the departure of the soul from the body, attributed to the Apostle John.⁵² The conversation between Mary and Christ

can be found in the so-called *Canons of St. Basil the Great* (Potles and Rhalles, *Σύνταγμα*, 404–6).

⁴⁹ The fullest form of this narrative is preserved in the longest and possibly earliest Ethiopic book of the Virgin's dormition, called the *Liber Requiei*, §§ 78–136, but its abbreviated form is known in Syriac, Greek, Latin and Irish, too. For a synoptic presentation of this material, see Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 332–50 and the comparative table on 415–18.

⁵⁰ It is MS Parisinus graecus 929, fols. 499–501 as published by Nau, 'Une didascalie', 242–3 which parallels the condemned reader, deacon and priest of the Ethiopic (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 344–5) and the teacher, priest, elder and judge in the Irish version (Herbert and McNamara, *Irish Biblical Apocrypha*, 130).

⁵¹ For the manuscripts, see n. 53 and 62 below.

⁵² The text begins, characteristically as a dialogue on the Mount of Olives, as, 'The Question of the Most Holy Mother of God to our Lord Jesus Christ when he appeared unto her on the Mount of Olives regarding the just and the sinners [recorded] by John

before her departure from the world on the Mount of Olives is well attested in the rich literary tradition of the Virgin's dormition. Its fullest version has been preserved in the Ethiopic *Book of Dormition*, the *Liber Requiei*. Here Christ reveals a number of secrets to his mother regarding their life in Egypt, Galilee and also about the fate of the souls after death, traces of which are preserved in the Greek and Georgian versions of the narrative alike.⁵³ As shown by the following comparison, it is this tradition that the newly discovered revelation dialogue seems to be related to.

<i>Ethiopic Dormition</i>	<i>Georgian Dormirion</i>	<i>Greek Dormition 1</i>	<i>Greek Dormition 2</i>	<i>Revelation Dialogue</i>
And Mary said to him, 'O my Lord, with what sign will you come to them, and what is the sign of those who will be brought? Do they offer a sweet-smelling sacrifice, and thus you come to them, or when you pass among the just, and they have come, do they call your name, and you	And Mary said to him, 'O my Lord, in what manner do you come to them, or whom do you lead? Those to whom you are [coming], do they offer you their aromatic sacrifice, and thus you will come to them? Or rather, do you come to the just? Or does he send [you] to the good? Or do you not come only to the	Mary said to him, 'Lord, how do you come to them, or who are those that you transfer? Do they distinguish themselves and offer sweetsmelling sacrifices, and thus you come to them? Or rather do you come to the righteous or to the elect? Or, when you are sent, do you come to those who call upon	Mary said to him: 'Lord, in what form do you come to the elect. Please tell me how it is.' ⁵⁷	'The Question of the Most Holy Mother of God to our Lord Jesus Christ when he appeared unto her on the Mount of Olives regarding the just and the sinners [recorded] by John the Theologian. <i>Question:</i> The angels, who are sent for the souls, oh Lord,

the Theologian. *Question:* The angels, who are sent for the souls, oh Lord, what is their number? ...' (Atheniensis 2187, fol. 155v and Dresden A 187, 243: 'ἐρώτησις τῆς ὑπεραγίας θεοτόκου πρὸς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ὅτε ἐφάνη αὐτῇ εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν περὶ δικαίων καὶ ἀμαρτωλῶν. Ἰωάννου τοῦ θεολόγου. ἐρώτησις· οἱ ἐπὶ τῶν ψυχῶν πεμπόμενοι ἄγγελοι, κύριε ποταποὶ εἰσὶ?'; my translation.)

⁵³ For a synoptic presentation of the Mount-of-Olives dialogue in the various traditions, see Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 415 and more recently Norelli, 'Premières Traditions'.

⁵⁷ Jugie, *Homelies mariales*, 380: Τότε λέγει αὐτῷ Μαρία· Κύριέ μου, ποίῳ τύπῳ ἔρχῃς πρὸς τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς; my trans.

<i>Ethiopic Dormition</i>	<i>Georgian Dormirion</i>	<i>Greek Dormition 1</i>	<i>Greek Dormition 2</i>	<i>Revelation Dialogue</i>
come to them? ⁵⁴	elect? Or do they call on your name in prayers, and they come to you? ⁵⁵	your name while praying? ⁵⁶		what is their number? ⁵⁸

This query in the Dormition narratives about the fate of the soul after death and the arrival of the Christ-Angel to transfer it to heavens stands very close to what Mary asks in the revelation dialogue about the fate of the souls of the dying.⁵⁹ The answers she obtains from Christ, with a detailed description of the look and number of the angels and of the way they carry the soul through the gates of Paradise, however, have no parallel in the Marian apocrypha.⁶⁰ Given the context of this dialogue in its two extant manuscripts, surrounded by a massive collection of *erōtapokriseis*,⁶¹ together with the

⁵⁴ Arras, *De transitu*, 11, trans. Shoemaker, 297.

⁵⁵ Esbroeck, 'Apocryphes géorgiens', 71, trans. Shoemaker, 297.

⁵⁶ Wenger, *L'Assomption*, 212: Κύριε, ποίῳ τρόπῳ πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἔρχῃ ἢ τίνας μεταφέρει; Μὴ οἱ διαφέροντες ἐν αὐτοῖς θυσίας προσφέρουσιν εὐωδίας καὶ οὕτως ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἢ μᾶλλον ἐπὶ τοὺς δικαίους ἔρχῃ ἢ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς, ἢ ἀποστελλόμενος οἱ εὐχόμενοι ἐπικαλοῦνται τὸ ὄνομά σου καὶ ἔρχῃ ἐπ' αὐτούς; trans. by Shoemaker, *Ancient traditions*, 355.

⁵⁸ MS Athenienis 2187, fol. 155v and Dresden A 187, 243: ἐρώτησις τῆς ὑπεραγίας θεοτόκου πρὸς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ὅτε ἐφάνη αὐτῇ εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν περὶ δικαίων καὶ ἀμαρτωλῶν. Ἰωάννου τοῦ θεολόγου. ἐρώτησις: οἱ ἐπὶ τῶν ψυχῶν πεμπόμενοι ἄγγελοι, κύριε ποταποὶ εἰσὶ; my trans.

⁵⁹ After the first question of the Virgin about the number of angels sent to the dying (οἱ ἐπὶ τῶν ψυχῶν πεμπόμενοι ἄγγελοι, κύριε ποταποὶ εἰσὶν), her second query is about the way the angels lead the souls from the body (Κύριε μοῦ Ἰησοῦ· ὅταν ἐξάγουσι ψυχὰς ἐκ τῶν σωμάτων οἱ ἄγγελοι, ποίαν ὁδὸν πορεύονται); for the manuscripts, see n. 53 above.

⁶⁰ In contrast to the Virgin's questions in the apocryphal Dormition-narratives, where Christ's answers concentrate on the personal fate of the Virgin herself, the revelation dialogue depicts a more general view. It reveals that sixty black angels surround the dying and carry the soul through the gate of Paradise. This gate, as Christ argues in the text, is situated exactly at the Mount of Olives, where they converse, and is not identical to the twelve gates through which the sun and the hours travel. It is at this point that the discussion ends abruptly with a doxology.

⁶¹ Both the Athens and the Dresden manuscripts are devoted to *erōtapokriseis*, only, containing a very wide selection of liturgical, eschatological and exegetical collections. Cf. their descriptions in Politis, *Κατάλογος*, 213–18, who mistakenly connects the

fact that even the text itself is structured and entitled as a series of questions and answers between Christ and the Virgin,⁶² it may not come as a surprise if its closest doctrinal parallels would also be found in ‘erotapokritic’ texts. If this assumption is right, the *Dialogue of Mary and Christ on the Departure of the Soul* would constitute another example of the literary process documented above, whereby various series of questions and answers are transformed into pseudo-biblical revelations that are modelled on earlier biblical and apocryphal dialogues.

Concluding with the beginning?

Drawing such wide-reaching conclusions from a short and preliminary survey of the rich Byzantine material of revelation dialogues may perhaps look a bit premature, but even on the basis of the observations hitherto gained, there certainly are a number of common patterns and tendencies that these revelations share.

As observed in the case of the Johannine material, the *Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary*, the *Didascalia* and the *Dialogue of Mary and Christ*, Byzantine revelation dialogues obviously tend to set themselves in an already existing scriptural and/ or apocryphal framework. The Johannine writings rely on the canonical *Apocalypse of John*, whereas other dialogues make use of the *Apocalypse of Paul* and the *Dormition of the Virgin Mary*. They systematically reuse these earlier texts, expanding and filling their structure with new content and meaning. In this sense, therefore, Byzantine revelations are ‘apocryphal’ as they may and probably do preserve traces of early ‘apocryphal’ traditions and works that have not come down to us.

Even more important, however, is the close structural and conceptual relationship between Byzantine revelations and the various ‘erotapokritic’ collections. As often emphasised above, the dialogues of the biblical protagonists in these revelations have not only been influenced by but probably even borrowed from various collections of *erōtapokriseis*. In the light of this interdependence, then, revelation dialogues appear to form a distinct stage in what seems to be a special Byzantine way of restructuring and transferring knowledge. At the beginning of this process, information is extracted from longer argumentative texts and restructured as concise series of general and/ or thematic sets of questions and answers. Later, these collections were, as observed above, ‘animated’ by being rephrased as human questions and divine answers of pseudo-biblical revelation dialogues. Why, when and how this process started, who were its initiators, what their purposes and targeted audience may have been, are questions that can only be answered after a thorough systematic study of this material

dialogue to the *Apocalypse of the Virgin*, and the study on the Dresden codex by von Dobschütz (‘Sammelhandschrift’), who compares it to the *Dialogue of the Apostles John and James* (CANT 269).

⁶² The dialogue is entitled in both manuscripts as *the ἐρώτησις* of the Virgin Mary, and the sequence of the questions and answers are clearly marked on the margin in the usual way as ἐρώτησις – ἀπόκρισις.

is carried out. What we can certainly conclude, however, is that the ‘new wine’ of middle and late Byzantine theology and argumentation has obviously not burst the old wineskin of apocryphal revelation dialogues. Instead, it brought a Byzantine revival of this ancient dialogue form resulting in the appearance of a number of new dialogic texts that still await their full literary and historical evaluation.

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