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Introduction

The Greek text *Questions and Answers to Antiochus the Duke* (hereafter referred to as “the *Questions*”) has existed as both an anonymous text and a pseudonymous one. Its attribution to Saint Athanasius (c. 296-373), the archbishop of Alexandria, guaranteed it an immense circulation in the Middle Ages: in fact, two-hundred and thirty-three manuscripts of it survive in Greek, as well as translations of it into Armenian, Arabic, and Slavonic.¹ Although scholarly opinion now unanimously rejects this traditional ascription (for reasons that will be presented below), the *Questions* constitute no less fascinating a document. In addition to shedding light on the popular beliefs and practices of Christians during the time of its composition, many of the questions themselves, such as the answer to Question 72 (on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit), and the florilegium of Messianic proofs in Question 137, represent veritable tours-de-force of theological exegesis.

1- Structure of the Text

The *Questions* are an erotapokrisis² text, a Byzantine literary genre that lists questions and their responses. Originally used

¹ Ilse De Vos, “The Manuscript Tradition of the Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem,” *On Good Authority: Tradition, Compilation and the Construction of Authority in Literature from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Brepols: 2015), p. 43; Caroline Macé, “Les Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem d’un Pseudo-Athanase (CPG 2257). Un état de la question,” *La littérature des questions et réponses dans l’Antiquité profane et chrétienne: de l’enseignement à l’exégèse* (Brepols : 2013), p. 121 n3.

² Literally “question-answer.” *Erotapokrisis* is a portmanteau of the Greek words ἐρώτησις (“question”) and ἀπόκρισις (“answer”). The plural form is *erotapokriseis*.

by Greek philosophers, this genre was later adopted by Christian theologians for exegetical and catechetical purposes. Among non-Christian authors, we find precedents to it in the *Problemata* ascribed to Aristotle, the *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus* of the Hellenistic Jew Philo, and the *Homeric Questions* of Porphyry; Christian examples include Eusebius' *Gospel Problems and Solutions*,³ the *Canonical Answers* of Timothy of Alexandria,⁴ and the *Questions and Answers to the Orthodox* (formerly ascribed to Justin Martyr, but most likely composed by Bishop Theodoret of Cyrus in the first half of the fifth century).⁵ Saint Maximus' *Responses to Thalassius* and Photius' *Amphilochia* also follow this format.

There are one hundred and thirty-seven questions in the version of the *Questions to Antiochus* that has been translated below, which is based on the Greek text in the *Patrologia graeca*,⁶ itself a reprint of the 1698 edition by Montfaucon.⁷ It should be noted that of the surviving Greek manuscripts, only forty-six per cent contain all one hundred and thirty-seven questions, the first question being the only one that is present in every manuscript without exception.⁸ Questions 136 and 137 stand

³ PG 22: 879-958.

⁴ PG 33: 1295-1308.

⁵ PG 6: 1249-1400. See Peter Toth, "New Questions on Old Answers: Towards a Critical Edition of the Answers to the Orthodox of Pseudo-Justin," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, 65.2 (2014), pp. 550-599.

⁶ PG 28: 597-700.

⁷ *Sancti Patris nostri Athanasii Archiep. Alexandrini Opera omnia quae extant*, Vol. 2, Opera et studio monachorum Ordinis S. Benedicti e Congregatione Sancti Mauri (Paris: 1698), pp. 268-306.

⁸ William R. Veder, Псевдо-Атанасий Александрийски: Въпроси и отговори [Pseudo-Athanasius of Alexandria: Questions and Answers], vol. 1: Introduction and Indices. Universitetsko izdatelstvo Episkop Konstantin Preslavski: 2016, p. 16.

out from the rest of the collection for their style and length, leading some editors to suspect that they are later additions, although manuscript proof for this is admittedly lacking.⁹ Question 49, due to its absence in many Greek manuscripts, is also thought to be a marginal note that was incorporated into the text during its transmission.¹⁰ Often, the order of the questions will vary between versions, and some manuscripts will include only a selection of the total questions.¹¹ Nevertheless, as noted by Ilse de Vos, who has undertaken the most in-depth study of the text to date, the manuscript tradition of the *Questions to Antiochus* is “relatively stable.”¹² A clearer picture of the *Questions’* textual history will undoubtedly have to wait until the publication of a critical edition.¹³ As they stand, the *Questions* are structured as follows:

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 1: | The Holy Trinity |
| 2: | Baptism |
| 3-15: | Angels and demons |
| 16-36: | Human souls |
| 37-45: | What distinguishes Christianity
from other religions |
| 46-55: | Creation and Paradise |
| 56-66: | Questions on the Old Testament |
| 67-71: | Inopportune deaths |

⁹ Caroline Macé and Ilse De Vos, “Pseudo-Athanasius, Quaestio ad Antiochum 136 and the Theosophia,” *Studia Patristica* 66 (2011), pp. 320-21. Question 137 also circulated in manuscripts independently (e.g. the Vaticanus graecus 2518).

¹⁰ De Vos (2015), p. 54.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹³ At the time of writing, Dr. De Vos is reviewing one hundred and two copies of the *Questions* as a basis for an edition for the *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca*.

72-80:	Sin
81-92:	Almsgiving
93-94:	Humility and repentance
95-98:	Fornication and polygamy
99-100:	Dreams and divination
101-102:	The soul after death
103-104:	Plagues
105-107:	Miscellaneous questions
108-110:	The Antichrist
111-112:	Heretics
113-114:	Predestination and the resurrection
115-116:	The fate of infants and the unbaptized
117-123:	Miscellaneous questions
124-126:	Sorcerers
127-129:	Miscellaneous questions
130-132:	Oaths and devising plans
133:	The soul after death
134-135:	The nature of death
136-137:	How to persuade Pagans and Jews

2- Dating and Authorship

A prima facie reason for rejecting Athanasian authorship of the *Questions* is the presence of anachronisms within the text. Notably, Questions 70 and 72 depend on the forty-first homily on the Gospel of Matthew by Saint John Chrysostom (d. c. 404), and Question 125 is inspired by Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus (d. c. 466). In Question 39, there is a reference to an episode found within the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschus, who wrote in the second half of the sixth century.¹⁴

¹⁴ See the footnotes to the translation below.

*Our Father among the Saints Athanasius, Archbishop of
Alexandria*

To the Duke Antiochus, concerning very many and
necessary perplexing questions in the divine
Scriptures, which all Christians ought to know

Question 1: *Since we believe and are baptized in the consubstantial Trinity, and we say that the Father is God, and similarly that the Son is God, and likewise that the Holy Spirit is God, how is it that we do not say that there are three gods, but One and Only God? And if we worship One God, it is evident that, believing in a unity, we Judaize; but if in turn we worship three gods, it is clear that we imitate the pagans, bringing in multiple gods, and do not piously worship only One God.*

Answer: The ways and manner of religion are inscrutable; only by faith, not investigation, is it known and honoured.¹⁰⁴ For a God Who is comprehended is not God.¹⁰⁵ For if we are unable to comprehend the angels or our own souls, how much more incomprehensible must their Creator be?¹⁰⁶ For a mystery that

¹⁰⁴ Saint Anastasius, *Hodegos* XIV.1.25-33: "If one of the unbelievers should wish to exact from us natural proofs for the divinity of Christ, and what kind of nature this is, and whence it is clear that the Creator of all things was in His flesh, to the one curiously asking these things we are unable to answer but in the following way: 'By faith alone are the matters related to divinity transmitted, by inscrutable faith and not by investigation, nor comprehension, albeit we believers have been assured of the truth of His divinity through divine signs.'"

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 117.5: "Si comprehendis, non est Deus."

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Saint Athanasius, *In Illud*, 6: "Let them tell us their own nature, if they can discover how to investigate their own nature. Rash they are indeed, and

is known is no longer marvelled at. Therefore, the faith of the Christians and their tripersonal God is not a single hypostasis in the form of a man, as the children of the Greeks¹⁰⁷ teach, nor are there three gods, as if these were distant from one another. Away with these Greek myths! For the divinity of the one essence is indivisible in three Persons. But know that the human mind is incapable of understanding or describing things about the Godhead in either words or thoughts.¹⁰⁸ But those who have rushed to understand the things of God have chased their own shadows; and those who have wished to say anything concerning the essence of God have sought to measure the abyss with their own hand.¹⁰⁹ And those who have thought to penetrate into it fell into grievous heresies.

For God the Father is not like me, a created father who begot a created son like me; and neither is the Son begotten like every carnal son;¹¹⁰ and neither is the Holy Spirit like the

self-willed, not trembling to form opinions of things which angels desire to look into, who are so far above them, both in nature and in rank;” and Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius’ Second Book*: “Whosoever searches the whole of revelation will find therein no doctrine of the divine nature, nor indeed of anything else that has a substantial existence, so that we pass our lives in ignorance of much, being ignorant first of all of ourselves, as men, and then of all things besides. For who is there who has arrived at a comprehension of his own soul?” (PG 45: 945D; *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. Jaeger, I: 257-258).

¹⁰⁷ That is, the pagans.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Saint Athanasius, *First Letter to the Monks*: “For although it be impossible to comprehend what God is, yet it is possible to say what He is not.”

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Isaiah 40:12.

¹¹⁰ Saint Anastasius, *Hodegos* I.1.44-48: “Prior to any discussion at all, we must condemn however many false notions about us the opponent entertains, as when we set out to converse with Arabs we have first to condemn anyone who says, ‘Two gods,’ or anyone who says, ‘God has

circumscribed spirit of man, but the mystery of the Holy Trinity is ineffable and indescribable. And do not say, "How?", for this is beyond "how;" neither say, "In what way?", for the divine way is beyond any way; nor say, "For what reason?", for the divine reason is beyond reason. But believe in the Father: do not investigate the matter; worship the Son: do not be a busybody about His generation; praise the Holy Spirit, not scrutinizing the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Come to the Jordan, and behold clearly in deed the power of the Holy and consubstantial Trinity: the Father witnessing from above, the Son being baptized below, and the All-Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove.¹¹¹ To Him be the glory, and the power, and the worship, together with the Almighty Father and the Only-Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

***Question 2:** How does a man know that he has really been baptized and received the Holy Spirit, seeing as he was an infant in holy baptism?*

Answer: The prophet Isaiah said unto God, "Because of Your fear, O Lord, we have been with child, we have been in pain, and we have given birth; we brought forth the spirit of Your salvation."¹¹² Therefore, just as a woman understands unfailingly from the stirring of the infant in her womb that she has conceived a child, so does the soul of a true Christian know,

carnally begotten a son.'" On Anastasius' anti-Islamic polemics, see Sidney H. Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the Hodegos, and the Muslims," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 37.4 (1987), pp. 341-358 and Paul Ulishney, "New Evidence for Conversion to Islam in Anastasius of Sinai's Hodegos," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 78 (2024), pp. 29-48.

¹¹¹ Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:21-22.

¹¹² Isaiah 26:17-18, LXX.

not through the testimony of his parents, but through the workings and stirrings of his heart, and above all from the joy of his soul at the time of illumination and communion of the holy Body and Blood of Christ, that he received the Holy Spirit upon being baptized.

Question 3: When, and whence, and how were the angels made?

Answer: Where or how the angels were made, human nature cannot say. All we can say is that they were made out of nothing by the Word of God. But as for when, some say on the first day, and some say before the first day. [Our Father among the saints and wonderworker Epiphanius the Archbishop of Cyprus, in his book against Paul of Samosata in the *Panarion*, explains more fully that they were created simultaneously with the heaven and the earth, and not before, refuting by syllogisms those who maintain this. He also asserts this in another book of his.]¹¹³

*Question 4: Where is it evident that the angels are created? For nothing about this is mentioned in the book of Genesis.*¹¹⁴

Answer: God knew the idolatry and polytheism of men, and especially of the Jews, and hid this information concerning the angels from the book of Genesis, so that they would not deify them like they deified the calf and other things as gods.¹¹⁵ But that the angels are created, hear the Holy Spirit speaking through the prophet: “Praise the Lord, all you His angels; Praise

¹¹³ *Panarion* II.45: 4.8-5.4; Cf. *Anchoratus* 24.5-6; 74.6. Macé (2013) notes that this reference to Epiphanius is missing from two early manuscripts and so is likely an interpolation.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Theodoret, Q.3-4 on Genesis.

¹¹⁵ Exodus 32.