

Literary Forgery and the Monothelete Controversy: Some Scrupulous Uses of Deception

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LITERARY FORGERY has regularly been defined by students of antiquity and the Middle Ages as the falsification of a literary work with the intent to deceive.¹ An examination of the sources, however, suggests that late antique and early Byzantine Christians understood differently the problem of forgery. By studying discussions about forgery found in conciliar acts, this paper attempts to revise the traditional definition of literary forgery that most scholars have brought to bear upon this complex phenomenon.

The only legislation condemning forgery that has survived from Byzantium is canon sixty-three from the Council in Trullo (A.D. 692), which decreed that all forged histories of the martyrs

¹ The authoritative treatise on forgery is that of W. Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum: Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung* (Munich 1971). Speyer argues (13) that the condition for forgery has been met only if the intent to deceive is present. B. M. Metzger, "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," in *New Testament Studies* (Leiden 1980) 2: "A literary forgery is essentially a piece of work created or modified with the intention to deceive." G. Constable generally agrees: "forgers attribute their own work to some one else and plagiarists pass off some one else's work as their own, but both intend to deceive. Neither term is commonly used for unintentional deceptions," *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe* (Aldershot 1996) 3. This view of scholars follows the general contours of the law of forgery in western nations. See, for example, H. C. Black, ed., *Black's Law Dictionary*⁵ (St. Paul 1979) 585. For an overview of forgery in the West see A. Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton 1990). On forgery in early Christian texts, G. Bardy, "Faux et fraudes littéraires dans l'Antiquité chrétienne," in *RHE* 32 (1936) 5–23, 275–302.

should be burned, and that those who continued to read them be anathematized.² Unlike modern western statutes against forgery, the canon did not state a punishment for the forgers themselves. Instead, it punished the fraudulent work's audience by singling out for anathemas those who continued to read or listen to it.³ In refusing to punish the forgers, the church was not being lenient. The ecclesiastical authorities had probably failed to uncover the identity of the forgers and were therefore implicitly recognizing the futility of trying to punish them. From the Acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (680/1) we learn that the conciliar members were indeed willing to punish a forger by anathematizing him once they had firmly established his identity.⁴ That authorities at the Council in Trullo, in the absence of a perpetrator, punished the *audience* for the forged work suggests that they believed, unlike modern scholars, that an ecclesiastical offense had been committed if the audience was deceived by the forgery, regardless of the intent of the author.

The Acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council provide information that helps elucidate the mind and intent of those who altered religious texts. Summoned by the emperor Constantine IV in 680, the council evaluated the doctrine of Monothelism, by

² P.-P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique. Les canons des conciles oecuméniques* I.1 (*Fonti* IX [Rome 1962]) 200, τοὺς δὲ τὰντα παραδεχομένους, ἢ ὡς ἀληθέσι τούτοις προσανέχοντα, ἀναθεματίζομεν. Cf. G. A. Rhalles and M. Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων* II (Athens 1852) 452–453; G. Nedungatt and M. Featherstone, edd., *The Council in Trullo Revisited* (Rome 1995); I. Rochow, "Zu 'heidnischen' Bräuchen bei der Bevölkerung des Byzantinischen Reiches im 7. Jahrhundert," *Klio* 60 (1978) 483–497; J. Williams, "Use of Sources in the Canons of the Council," *Byzantion* 66 (1996) 470–488.

³ The commentaries of Balsamon and Zonaras support this interpretation of the canon. Balsamon wrote that the holy fathers passed this canonical decree because those who read the false martyrologies were incited to blaspheme the saints by laughing at them and by becoming incredulous; Zonaras wrote, "If, however, some Christians use them [the false martyrologies], putting their faith in them as if they were true, the canon decrees that they should be anathematized": Rhalles/Potles (*supra* n.2) 452–453.

⁴ ACO SER. 2 II.2 648.

which the Chalcedonians had attempted to forge a union with the non-Chalcedonian or Oriental Orthodox churches,⁵ conceding that Christ had one divine will while maintaining the Chalcedonian position that Christ had two natures.⁶ The Chalcedonian bishops and priests gathered passages culled from the corpus of patristic texts that they accepted as orthodox, compared those texts with passages that the so-called Monothelites adduced to support their views, and, finally, decided whether the passages put forth by their opponents were authentic expressions of their understanding of Chalcedonian orthodoxy or whether they had been forged. In doing so, they recorded in the transcripts of the conciliar proceedings the processes by which religious texts were determined to have been forged and the motives of those who had allegedly committed the act of falsification. Consistent with canon sixty-three, we learn from these conciliar Acts that the common scholarly definition of forgery as the intent to deceive does not adequately describe the minds of the alleged forgers, whose acts of falsification were meant to support their view of the orthodox conception of truth.

In order to understand the broader context for the discussions of forgery that took place at the Sixth Ecumenical Council, I shall first briefly discuss Cyril of Alexandria's use of the Apollinarian forgeries that circulated in the fifth century which ignited the doctrinal controversies discussed in the councils that followed, including the Appeal of the Trial of Eutyches in 449

⁵ Meaning the Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Ethiopian Orthodox, and Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. See D. W. Winkler, "Miaphysitism: A New Term for Use in the History of Dogma and in Ecumenical Theology," *The Harp* 10.3 (December 1997) 33–40.

⁶ ACO SER. 2 II.1 2–10. Apart from the excellent critical edition of Riedinger in ACO (1990), there has, to my knowledge, been very little scholarly work on the Sixth Ecumenical Council. For that reason it is worth setting forth in some detail the discussions on forgery that took place there. Although Speyer (*supra* n.1: 276–277) gives a comprehensive taxonomy of forgery, his discussion of forgery in the Monothelite controversy is brief.

(recorded in the Robber Synod and in the Acts of Chalcedon), and the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, which had similarly introduced the problem of forgery into theological discussions concerning questions of doctrine.⁷

The consequences of the Apollinarian forgeries

Cyril, bishop of Alexandria from 412 to 444, in developing his christological doctrines relied on texts the Apollinarians had forged. The Apollinarian forgeries, which circulated under the name of Athanasius (bishop of Alexandria from 328 to 373), stated the christological views that Apollinaris (bishop of Laodicea from 360) had developed in his polemics against the Arians. He believed that there was one composite nature of the divine and human natures in Christ, and that in Christ the human soul was replaced by the Logos, a view that he expressed with the christological formula “one nature of God the word enfleshed.” He later revised this opinion to say that Christ had a human body and soul but a heavenly $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ or reason. For both views, the Council of Constantinople in 381 condemned him.⁸ Cyril unwittingly used the problematic formula “one nature of God enfleshed” to explain the relationship between the human and divine natures of Christ because he mistakenly believed that Athanasius had written them. The name of Athanasius carried particular weight for Cyril because throughout his early episcopacy he had been intent on establishing himself as the new Athanasius in order to secure his own

⁷ ACO II.1.1 100–147 and IV.1.

⁸ Baldwin and Kazhdan, *ODB* I 136. For a discussion of the Apollinarian forgeries see generally A. Tuilier, “Remarques sur les fraudes des Apollinaristes et des Monophysites,” in J. Dummer, ed. *Texte und Textkritik, Eine Aufsatzsammlung* (Texte u. Unters.z.Gesch.d.altchr.Lit. 133 [Berlin 1987]) 581–590. See also E. Mühlberg, *Apollinaris von Laodicea* (Göttingen 1969); C. E. Raven, *Apollinarianism* (Cambridge 1923); H. Lietzmann, ed., *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule* (Tübingen 1904).

position in the orthodox hierarchy.⁹ Indeed, having secured his victory in the christological debates at the Council of Ephesus in 431, Cyril was thereby elevated to the status of being one of the orthodox church fathers. While he was being acclaimed as a father of the church, we now know that Cyril became aware that he had relied on Apollinarian forgeries as early as 430, when one of his opponents, Theodoret, brought it to his attention. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 clearly rejected the “one nature” formula as the correct way of understanding Christ, fully aware that Cyril had been deceived when he relied on it, and that, even after learning that he had been deceived, he continued to rely on it. The Council found that Cyril and his writings were, nonetheless, orthodox.

The Council’s embrace of the formula that was based on writings known to be forged made the formula a continuing source of contention. Cyril’s most zealous supporters, the monks of Egypt, whose representatives were present at Chalcedon, cared little that the “one nature” formula had derived from treatises that the Apollinarian heretics had forged. Convinced that the formula was a genuine expression of Cyrillian orthodoxy—for the simple reason that Cyril had used it—the monks continued to embrace it and refused to accept the decrees of Chalcedon to the contrary. The strict Cyrillians were unwilling to excise even the Apollinarian forgeries from the writings of Cyril.

In the history of this same controversy, the charge of forgery was at times sufficient to remove the disputed text or conciliar record from the body of orthodox writings. Eutyches, the archimandrite of a large monastery in Constantinople, accused

⁹ Pope Celestine compared Cyril to Athanasius in his letter to the clergy and people of Constantinople (*ACO* I.1.1 88). Cyril in his treatise against the Arians, *Thesaurus de Trin.* (*CPG* 5215: *PG* 75.9–656), largely borrowed from and paraphrased Athanasius’ *Orationes adv. Arianos* (*CPG* 2093: *PG* 26.11–468).

Flavian, the bishop of Constantinople, and others of following the teachings of Nestorius, the former bishop of Constantinople whom the Council of Ephesus had condemned in 431. Nestorius had taught, against Cyril, that there were not only two natures but two hypostases that combined to make the one Christ. To deal with Eutyches' charges of Nestorianism against those who, following the Formula of Union of 433, confessed two natures after the Incarnation, bishop Flavian of Constantinople decided to hold a synod at Constantinople in 448 to examine whether Eutyches himself was orthodox. Under questioning, Eutyches said that he believed, along with the teachings of Athanasius and Cyril, that Christ was composed of two natures before the union, but of only one nature after the union. The synod thereupon deposed and excommunicated him for having followed the one-nature formula of Apollinaris.

Eutyches disputed this decision by filing a petition in 449 with the emperor Theodosius II to reexamine the Acts of the synod. The reason Eutyches gave for petitioning the emperor was that the Acts of the synod of Constantinople (I, in 448) had been falsified, and that the notaries and clerics who had prepared them should be examined in an official inquiry.¹⁰ That examination revealed to the new synod (Constantinople II, April 449) several discrepancies in the Acts. Among the more significant omissions, the Acts failed to record that Eutyches, when asked to anathematize all persons who did not confess two natures after the Incarnation, had replied that he would never anathematize the holy fathers.¹¹ Some bishops claimed that the Acts of the synod had also failed to record that Eutyches had at one point appealed to Rome, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Thessaloniki to judge his orthodoxy (175 ¶818).

¹⁰ ACO II.1.1 77–195, at 152–153 ¶572; see also C. J. Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church I–V* (Edinburgh 1872–96: hereafter HEFELE) III 211f.

¹¹ ACO II.1.1 172–173 ¶788; 174 ¶804.

Another bishop testified that Eutyches had agreed to whatever Rome and Alexandria ordered him to say (175 ¶820). Although both alleged omissions in the Acts could be liberally construed as providing evidence that Eutyches was willing to conform to the views of the patriarchal sees, the statements did not present new evidence that he had revised his one-nature doctrine, the view for which the first synod of Constantinople had condemned him. To the contrary, that Eutyches had refused to anathematize the holy fathers suggests that he believed that the holy fathers consisted only of those church fathers who confessed one nature after the union. Implicitly finding that the acts of Constantinople had been falsified, the new synod, partly on technical grounds, overturned the judgment against him, a finding that the Robber Synod (Ephesus II) confirmed in August 449. Asterios, the presbyter and notary (presumably) responsible for the transcripts, testified that he had no knowledge that the notaries and clerics who recorded the Acts had distorted the conciliar record when they allegedly omitted these statements (178–179 ¶846).

For the first time in a synodal gathering, therefore, small discrepancies in a conciliar record, made without the complicity of the notary in charge, were sufficient to support the charge of forgery and falsification, and therefore to challenge the authority of the conciliar transcripts being used to convict someone of heresy.

By the mid-fifth century, Christians were thus becoming aware of the historical and cultural processes by which saints were canonized and heretics anathematized. In order to convict one's opponent of heresy and to secure one's position among the orthodox, it was necessary to collect evidence from the writings of the church fathers, to present that evidence before an official ecclesiastical gathering, to use stenographers to record

what happened, and, when that record did not support one's views, to declare the record to have been forged or falsified.

The Fifth Ecumenical Council (A.D. 553) provides further evidence, along with Appeal of Eutyches in 449, that the charge of forgery could be used to defend oneself against charges of heresy or to rehabilitate someone who had fallen under the taint of heresy.¹² Ibas of Edessa, the fifth-century church father who had written a letter criticizing the one-nature doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria, came under scrutiny once again, this time posthumously, at the Fifth Ecumenical Council. The strict Chalcedonians believed that his letter unfairly criticized Cyril and promoted the doctrines of Nestorius, and so should be condemned as being contrary to the teachings of Chalcedon. In contrast, the Diphysites claimed that the letter was indeed an orthodox expression of the two-nature doctrine, having been fully accepted by the Council of Chalcedon. To examine that claim, the council considered not only the contents of the letter, which it determined to be heretical, but its authenticity as well. Since the author of the letter, Ibas of Edessa, was long dead, they relied on the testimony he gave at the Council of Chalcedon a little more than one hundred years earlier. From their examination of the evidence contained in the Acts of that council, they determined (incorrectly) that the letter was a forgery.

In reaching that decision, they relied on several tests. First, they tested the consistency of the author's beliefs: the Council of Chalcedon had demanded that Ibas acknowledge Ephesus and anathematize Nestorius, which he did, but this was contrary to the beliefs expressed in the letter. Next, they examined a more complete body of evidence: the testimony of the papal legates, which the bishops omitted, declared that Ibas was harmless, and his doctrines orthodox. Finally, they reviewed the testi-

¹² See generally P. Gray, "Forgery as an Instrument of Progress: Reconstructing the Theological Tradition in the Sixth Century," *BZ* 81 (1988) 284-289.

mony of the alleged author: the council looked at the record of the cross-examination of Ibas himself, who, when charged with blaspheming against Cyril, claimed he had done nothing of the sort.¹³ Although the Fifth Ecumenical Council used logical criteria to evaluate the authenticity of the letter, they nevertheless reached what we now know to be the wrong conclusion, and it is not unfair to argue that they themselves knew it to be wrong. There is very little evidence from the Acts of Chalcedon to suggest that the letter had been forged or that the council in 451 had even seriously considered that possibility. What the record presents is a bishop, Ibas of Edessa, desperately trying to maintain his ecclesiastical position in the face of accusations that he had slandered the orthodox Cyril. But by rejecting the letter as a forgery, and by claiming that the council of Chalcedon had done the same, the bishops of the Fifth Ecumenical Council were pursuing their deeply held purpose of preventing their Diphysite opponents from appropriating this letter to support their doctrinal claims.¹⁴

Truth and deception in the Acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council

At the Sixth Ecumenical Council more than one hundred years later, the charge of forgery was similarly used by the Chalcedonian bishops to defeat their opponents, the Monotheletes. There, at Constantinople in 680, the doctrine of Monotheletism was vigorously debated. The emperor Heraclius and his bishop Sergius of Constantinople had proposed the doctrine half a century earlier as a compromise with the non-Chalcedonian Miaphysites.¹⁵ Emperor Constantine IV and the Chalcedonian

¹³ ACO IV.1 144–146.

¹⁴ ACO IV.1 137–138. The synod said that some persons, in an attempt to vindicate the letter of Ibas to Maris the Persian, claimed that it was received by the Council of Chalcedon, invoking what was said by one or two of the bishops there.

¹⁵ Winkler (*supra* n.5) 33–40.

bishops gathered to determine whether, in their opinion, the doctrine was simply a heretical innovation or was consistent with the traditions of the fathers. To make that determination, Constantine IV said that proof was needed from the appropriate books, which he ordered to be brought from the patriarchal library. Among the many patristic texts the emperor and bishops examined was a letter purportedly written by the patriarch Menas of Constantinople to pope Vigilius, around the time of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, which stated that Christ had only one will. If the letter were proven genuine, it would have supported their view that the one-will doctrine was not a recent innovation but a well-established doctrine, the orthodoxy of which was confirmed by an orthodox bishop of Constantinople and by the pope of Rome. The papal legates present at the council immediately objected to the letter. Standing up, they shouted their agreement when one of their number declared, "The present book of the Fifth synod has been falsified (ἐφασεύθη). Don't let the letter of Menas to pope Vigilius be read, because it has been forged (πλαστός)!"¹⁶

The letter they referred to was found in a parchment (σωμάτιον) codex which George, the chartophylax, had taken from the Patriarcheion of Constantinople. Divided into two books, the manuscript contained the Acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council. Having acquired the necessary book, the emperor, along with his officials and a few bishops, examined it closely and proceeded to evaluate the claim of forgery. They found that someone had inserted three unpaginated *quaterniones* into the beginning of the book, but neglected to number properly the pages that followed: the fourth *quaternio* was marked as the first, and after it followed the second and third. Their suspicions of forgery were confirmed, in their view, when they discovered that the handwriting in the first three *quaterniones*, in

¹⁶ ACO SER. 2 II.1 40.

which the letter of Menas to Vigilius was found, differed from that of the rest of the first book.¹⁷ Alerted to this deception, the emperor asked Peter, the secretary, to read into the conciliar record the second book of the Acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, presumably because he feared that additional forgeries would be found there. He came upon two letters that Vigilius was said to have written, one to the emperor Justinian and the other to his wife Theodora.¹⁸ In it, pope Vigilius was made to confess that Christ is one hypostasis, one prosopon, and one operation, a doctrine related to Monotheletism, known as Monenergism. The papal legates again protested, saying that Vigilius had not taught that doctrine, and that, like the first, the second book of the Acts had also been falsified.¹⁹ They demanded that the council conduct a full examination into the matter by searching the entire Acts of the Fifth Council for any indication that they taught either one will or one activity. The legates believed that the Acts taught neither, a belief that the conciliar bishops confirmed after they read the entire Acts of the Fifth Council.

The bishops of the Sixth Council wished to examine additional evidence, and so they asked the chartophylax George to search the library of the Patriarcheion for another manuscript, a so-called authentic papyrus (χαρτῶον αὐθεντικόν) codex containing only the Acts of the Seventh Session of the Fifth Council.²⁰ While searching the patriarchal library, George discovered another papyrus codex which contained the entire Acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council. At the request of the conciliar bishops, George, having sworn that he himself had not altered

¹⁷ ACO SER. 2 II.1 40, 42. See also Hefele IV 290.

¹⁸ ACO SER. 2 II.2 638.

¹⁹ Upon hearing this Monenergist confession, the legates protested that "If Vigilius had taught one operation and had it been accepted by the synod, then the phrase 'one operation' would have been included in the definition" (ACO SER. 2 II.1 42).

²⁰ ACO SER. 2 II.2 640. See also Hefele IV 290–291.

the manuscripts, introduced all three codices into the conciliar record. The bishops compared the three manuscript collections, along with several other papyrus volumes, and made several discoveries that they believed corroborated the earlier findings of the council. Someone had added three *quaterniones* (one *quaternio* equals four *bifolia* or sixteen pages) in the first book of the initial codex, the parchment codex. In these *quaterniones* the disputed letter of Menas was found. In the second book of this codex, someone had mutilated the fifteenth *quaternio*, adding four unpaginated leaves before the sixteenth *quaternio*, in which were contained the two disputed letters of Vigilius. Someone had similarly mutilated the “authentic” papyrus codex of the Acts of the Seventh Session. The three disputed letters were not contained, however, in the papyrus codex found by George or in the additional papyrus manuscripts (644, 646). On the basis of these findings, the council decided that someone had forged the three disputed letters, which were thereupon struck from the conciliar record (648). Having marked the forged letters with an obelus, the council proceeded to anathematize the forgers.

Seeking to uncover their identity, the council inquired into the manuscripts’ history of textual transmission. Macrobius of Seleuceia testified that he had received a book of the Fifth Council that had been given to him by Philip, the magister militum. There he found the Seventh Session to have been falsified. “I asked Philip, ‘To whom did you give this book?’ He replied, ‘I gave it to Stephanus the monk, a disciple of Macarius.’ The falsified passages were written in the handwriting of the monk George, who was also a disciple of Macarius. When Macarius was patriarch, I visited his house and I often observed George the monk writing, and so I know that this was written in his own hand. Thus, I ask the synod to bring George in for questioning.” Having examined the book, George said:

The book that Macarius, the most holy metropolitan of Seleucia, brought and gave to me belonged to Philip, commander of the imperial retinue (τοῦ στρατηλάτου τοῦ βασιλικοῦ ὀψικίου). He was a neighbor of the father, Stephanos, who followed the heresy of Macarius. When Theodore, the patriarch of the Imperial City (which God watches over), and the aforementioned Macarius were in negotiations concerning the faith, they took from the Patriarcheion (as Stephanos and Macarius said) a copy of the pamphlets of Vigilios. We added them into *quaterniones* and they gave them to the most pious emperor ... Philip brought this book [*i.e.*, of pamphlets] to Stephanos, the heretic, for inspection, and said, "I have come from the East with a book of the Fifth Synod. See whether it is good." This book [from the East] did not contain the aforementioned pamphlets of Vigilios. The heretic Stephanos said that there was something missing in it. Philip said, "if you know what is missing, fill it in." Stephanos told me that I should copy these same pamphlets. So I made copies of the pamphlets and gave them to Stephanos. Truly these [were written] in my own hand and I recognize them. Stephanos and Macarius added the pamphlets of Vigilios not only to the present book, but to many other books of the Fifth Council that came to them, books which did not [originally] contain the pamphlets of Vigilios.²¹

Although the bishops of the Sixth Council were unable to discover the identity of the person(s) who they believed had altered the pamphlets of Vigilios by interpolating a Monenergist confession, they nonetheless attempted to trace the means by which these pamphlets were inserted into the Greek version of the Acts of the Fifth Council.

Stephanos and Macarius discovered another book containing the Acts of the Fifth Council, which they claimed to have bought from the wife of the patrician (πατρικίος) Innocent for six *nomismata*. The bishops called upon Constantine, the Latin grammarian, to testify concerning the contents of that book. He said that when Paul was patriarch of Constantinople (641–

²¹ ACO SER. 2 II.2 650. See also Hefele V 170.

654), bishop Fortunatus of Carthage, a Monothelete, came to Constantinople. The question arose whether he should take his seat before or after the other metropolitans present. While searching the patriarchal library for the Acts of the Fifth Council, in order to learn from them the answer to their question, they found, among other things, a Latin translation of the Acts of that Council. They commissioned Constantine to compare this manuscript (its Seventh Session) with the so-called authentic Greek copy of the Acts, and to insert from there what was missing from it. Working with deacon Sergius, who was considered to be a good writer, Constantine added the two letters of pope Vigilius, which they translated from Greek into Latin.²²

From this testimony we learn not only *how* a Latin manuscript of the Fifth Council may have been falsified from the Greek, but that this early Latin manuscript, purchased from the wife of Innocent more than thirty years earlier, was considered to be more accurate than the Greek. It was probably a copy of the Latin translation that had been made for pope Vigilius in Constantinople while he was living there (547–554). That the Latin text did not originally contain the two disputed letters of Vigilius suggests either that the letters were forged, since they do not appear in this early Latin translation, or that the letters are genuine but that a Monenergist had falsified them by adding the phrase “one activity.” Hefele is probably correct in holding the latter theory plausible because the disputed letters expressed views that were otherwise consistent with what we know of Vigilius, namely that he had refused and then promised to anathematize the Three Chapters at the very time the letters were said to have been written.²³ Although the council decreed

²² ACO SER. 2 II.2 652. Hefele V 171; IV 291. See E. Chrysos, Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ πολιτικὴ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ (Thessaloniki 1969) 180f.

²³ Hefele IV 292. The Three Chapters were certain writings that the Miaphysites had opposed for criticizing Cyril of Alexandria. They included the writings of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, who at the Council of Ephesus had written against Cyril of Alexandria; the letter of bishop Ibas of Edessa to Maris the

that all three letters inserted into the Acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council had been forged, we can now safely say that only one of the unearthed letters, that of Menas to Vigilius, which is no longer extant, was a complete fabrication.²⁴

The forger chose to fabricate this letter because he wished to create an orthodox lineage for the phrase “one activity.” He did so by producing a Monenergist letter that purported to have been written by a Chalcedonian pope to an orthodox patriarch, and then by inserting it into the Acts of an Ecumenical Council. The relationship between Menas and pope Vigilius was a stormy one, Menas having struck Vigilius’ name from the diptychs for refusing to condemn the Three Chapters. By forging such a letter between them, the Monenergist wished to show that even a pope who was well known for being reluctant to appease the Miaphysites had eventually agreed to support their views. But that very fact also told against the forger. His deception was discovered even in ancient times, at least partly because the Monenergist phrase “one activity” seemed so implausible in a letter that was received without protest by an anti-Miaphysite, pro-Chalcedonian pope. The physical evidence of course also testified against the letter’s authenticity.

How the forger himself may have understood his act of inserting the fabricated letter into the proceedings of the council is also worth examining. Gray suggests that the forger reconstructed the past not simply to convince his opponents that his position was orthodox but to assure himself that his vision of orthodoxy as monolithic and unchanging would not be challenged by the taint of innovation, that his beliefs simply perpetuated the authentic traditions of the fathers.²⁵ From the

Persian, which had likewise criticized Cyril and the person and writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who had been the teacher of Nestorius.

²⁴ Concerning the history of the transmission of the manuscripts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, see Hefele IV 293ff; see generally Chrysos (*supra* n.22).

²⁵ Gray (*supra* n.12) 289.

Acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council we get a tantalizing glimpse into the mind of a Monothelete who admitted to having taken passages from the orthodox fathers, excised them from their original context, and collected them in a florilegium of patristic texts. When asked why he did so, the Monothelete replied, "I selected only those passages that supported my point of view (κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον σκοπόν)." ²⁶ His answer demonstrates that forgers and falsifiers of texts did not exercise their craft only to reassure themselves, as Gray's cogent analysis of the problem suggests. Instead, the Monothelete forger was fully aware that his orthodoxy depended upon his being able to fully document his doctrinal views with passages from the orthodox fathers.

The religious forgeries of early Byzantium are thus the place where the two defining characteristics of the orthodox church, authority and tradition, intersect. By the seventh century, the patristic past had become crystallized in the works of certain church fathers, and the only way to claim them was through texts, such as letters and patristic florilegia. It did not matter that the texts and florilegia were forged, falsified, or otherwise manipulated, so long as they could be made to exude authority in a conciliar setting, and so long as they could avoid being detected by one's opponents who were ready to use philological tools for the purpose of uncovering the deception.

From the Acts of the Fifth and Sixth Ecumenical Councils we learn that those who unmasked these literary deceptions were fully aware that their opponents had attempted to deceive them. Deceivers as well as their intended victims understood that any new doctrines had to be made to appear consistent with what the church fathers had said. Knowing how to manipulate the past, either by textual exegesis, rhetorical persuasion, or outright deception, the forgers could make the past

²⁶ ACO SER. 2 II.1 238 (CPG 9427).

consistent with their perception of the present. When late antique and Byzantine Christians altered the past by means of forgery, sometimes their opponents recognized the deception and uncovered it. But at other times, opponents allowed texts they knew to have been forged to be absorbed into the orthodox tradition, and the literary deception became a source of continuing controversy.

In sorting out the fraudulent from the authentic, the early Byzantines relied on their cultural assumptions that the truth is fixed and immutable, something to be discovered, not made. The notion was based on a set of assumptions about the nature of truth and falsehood quite different from our own. Writing in the third century, Origen of Alexandria understood falsehood as being a kind of veil that covered the truth, which existed, immutable, beneath it. Arising first in the soul, false teachings needed to be stripped away and purified by the Word in order to reveal the truth.²⁷ The spirit of each individual, by its very nature, desired to know that truth.²⁸ For Origen, truth, being stable and fixed, was, finally, intimately connected with God. The same was the case for Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who assigned to God the name Truth,²⁹ and for Maximus the Confessor, who said that truth, being simple, unique, one, immutable, impassive, indivisible, and all-seeing, revealed God.³⁰ The notion that truth was immutable was firmly rooted in the earliest Christian texts.³¹ Paul's second letter to the Thes-

²⁷ Origen *Hom. in Ierem.* 5.15 (CPG 1438): P. Nautin, *Origène. Homélie sur Jérémie I* (SC 232 [1976]) 318, 320.

²⁸ Origen *Princ.* 2.11.4: P. Koetschau, *Origenes Werke V* (GCS 22 [1913]) 187; PG 11.243 B–C.

²⁹ *De div. nom.* (CPG 6602): PG 3.596A.

³⁰ *Myst.* 5 (CPG 7704): PG 91.673C–D.

³¹ This understanding of truth also permeates early Christian ideas about what constituted the official canon. Eusebius saw ecclesiastical writings as falling into one of three categories. In the first were the writings that the church accepted as being genuine and true. He identifies others as disputed, although they were well known to ecclesiastical writers. In the third category were the

salonians (2:10) cast into eternal damnation those whom “the lawless one will deceive in the end time” because they refused to love the truth. In Corinth a few years later, Paul warned about the false apostles who had come to deceive the Corinthians by disguising themselves as servants of righteousness. Such acts of deception did little to tarnish the truth for John Chrysostom, who believed that the truth revealed itself most clearly at the very moment during which the unfaithful assailed it.³² Those who continued to wage war against it succeeded in wounding only themselves.³³

Late antique Christians thus believed that texts could bear witness to the immutable truth of orthodoxy, but texts could not alter it. However, the texts themselves could be altered, and when the forgers did so they may very well have perceived their activity as being ethical. Far from deceiving themselves, the forgers believed that truth, being stable, resided beyond the text that reflected it.³⁴ As Cyril of Alexandria put it in the fifth century, the truths of Scripture are hidden behind a veil of figurative language. Their meaning is revealed only when we

writings the church had rejected, such as the Gospels of Peter and Thomas, the Acts of Andrew and John, none of which was cited by ecclesiastical writers. Eusebius regarded works in this category as having been forged not only because they were written by persons other than the Apostles to whom they were ascribed but because their content was inconsistent with what he believed to be the immutable truth of orthodoxy (*HE* 3.25.1–7; II 104–105 Schwartz). See generally Metzger (*supra* n.1) 1–22; D. G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition* (Tübingen 1986); N. Brox, ed., *Pseudepigraphie in der heidnischen und jüdisch-christlichen Antike* (Darmstadt 1977).

³² *Hom. in Io.* 58.1 (CPG 4425): PG 59.315.

³³ *Hom. in Philip.* 2–3 (CPG 4432): PG 62.194.

³⁴ In the medieval West, it was thought that truth resided *within* the text. See for example P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford 1995) 73: “Insofar as philosophy was considered exegesis, the search for truth, throughout this period [the Middle Ages], was confounded with the search for the meaning of ‘authentic’ texts; that is, of those texts considered as authoritative. Truth was contained *within these texts*; it was the property of their authors, as it was also the property of those groups who recognized the authority of these authors, and who were consequently the ‘heirs’ of this original truth.”

look to the unchanging truth of the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection.³⁵ 250 years later, the bishops of the Sixth Ecumenical Council put it more succinctly, “Truth is constant (σθαθηρά) and remains so, but falsehood varies and adopts that which is mutually contradictory.”³⁶ By altering religious texts, it seems very likely that the early Byzantines thought they were merely attesting to this stable core of meaning that formed the basis of their beliefs.³⁷

Conclusions

In the conciliar discussions studied here, the charge of forgery was used to discredit the authority of one’s opponents (the Fifth and Sixth Councils) and even that of the conciliar record being used to convict one of heresy (Appeal of Eutyches). The Acts of the Sixth Council reveal that early Byzantine forgers and falsifiers of Christian texts did not “intend to deceive” their opponents in the way that most modern scholars believe. The forgers merely thought that they were altering or fabricating texts in order to attest to the unchanging truth of their theological views. This suggests that late antique and early Byzantine Christians understood the problem of forgery in characteristically paradoxical terms: it was both a rhetorical charge that could be leveled against adversaries to remove

³⁵ Just as a magnificent city has several public images of its king, so the figures that comprise sacred Scripture are a type (τύπος) of a greater spiritual reality. And that reality encompasses all of Christ’s mystery. See, for example, Cyril of Alexandria’s *Glaphyra in Pentateuchum* (CPG 5201: PG 69.308c): “The point of divinely inspired Scripture is to signify to us, through countless means, the mystery of Christ,” σκοπὸς τῆ θεοπνεύστῳ Γραφῆ, τὸ Χριστοῦ μυστήριον διὰ μυρίων ὄσων ἡμῖν κατασημῆναι πραγμάτων.

³⁶ ACO SER. 2 II.1 114.15–16.

³⁷ After the Sixth Ecumenical Council was concluded, however, Justinian II took precautions in 687 to make sure that the acts of that council would not be falsified. As the keeper of the “unfalsified faith of Christ,” the emperor believed that it was his duty to protect the Acts against falsification. He thus convoked the patriarchs, the papal deputy, the archbishops and bishops, and many State officials and officers of the army and commanded them to read and seal the acts. See ACO SER. 2 II.2 886–887 (CPG 9442).

certain texts from theological discussion, and simultaneously a means by which one could alter texts to make them consistent with one's most deeply held beliefs. To understand the phenomenon of religious forgery in late antiquity and early Byzantium, one should perhaps follow the implicit directive of canon sixty-three and consider whether the allegedly forged work troubled its audience and not whether the so-called forger intended to deceive.³⁸

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