In this article, I will present and edit one of the last works of the patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople (1289–93, 1303–09): the testament to his disciples. In addition I will comment on parts of another unpublished letter of his, addressed to the emperor Andronikos II, in which Athanasios defended the views he had expressed in his testament.

The only manuscript that preserves the patriarch’s testament, that is Vaticanus gr. 2219, bears exactly the following title: “(A work) of the same (Athanasios) to his own disciples.” The title does not repeat Athanasios’ name and ecclesiastical dignity, but includes the phrase Τοῦ αὐτοῦ as the only indication of the author. It accords with the title of another unpublished monastic work, probably also a late product of his pen that starts at the beginning of the same quire of the codex and includes the name of the author. This quire was inserted in the codex and was copied by a scribe different from the one responsible for the previous and the following part of the manuscript. The term φοιτητάς,
referring to the disciples of the patriarch, was also used several times by Theoktistos the Studite in his hagiographical texts about Athanasios. These usages make us suspect that maybe Theoktistos was the composer of the title of this work and perhaps he also played a role in the compilation of the main codex Vaticanus gr. 2219.

Even if we do not find the word testament (διαθήκη) in the title, we can confirm the genre in a phrase that exists further down in the text edited here, couched in a strong figura etymologica: “I devise these to you as a testament.” The composition of such an admonishing text, when death was approaching, was not unusual for patriarchs in the Late Byzantine period. Testaments bequeathing a spiritual rather than a material property mainly aimed to justify patriarchal policies or to declare what they regarded to be their posthumous inheritance to the contemporary church.

The testament of Athanasios attempts above all to summarize significant truths from the New Testament which could be applied by his subordinates according to his proposed model of monastic life. The main quotations contain the theoretical background: the major point comes from the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 7:13–14), that is the ideal of the narrow and strait road as opposed to the wide one, that is repeated several times in the testament (l. 3–9, 26, 30, 34–37, 54–55, 61, 71, 92, 106, 108, 111). In particular in the most important admonitory passage of the whole work, in l. 89–92, the patriarch presents this ideal as central in his testament:

Hashikawa from Waseda Institute for Advanced Study (WIAS), Japan, has discussed in several papers of his, which I have read in an English summary kindly provided by the author, issues that also deal with the main codex and the whole manuscript tradition of Athanasios’ works.

6 Papadopoulos-Kerameus (1905) 17.17–18, 47.30, 49.6, 50.28 and Fusco (1997) ch. 15, 122.9.

7 A further similarity exists between the introductory title of the whole collection of Athanasios’ letters to the emperor, Τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀθανασίου πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ἐπιστολαὶ πρὸς τε τὸν αὐτοκράτορα καὶ πρὸς ἑτέρους, πολὺν τὸν θείον ζῆλον ἐμφαίνουσαι, as edited by Talbot (1975) 2, and a similar comment by Theoktistos on the corpus of the patriarch’s letters: καὶ μαρτυροῦσιν αἱ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν αὐτοῦ βίβλων, ὡν αἱ μὲν πρὸς τὸν κρατοῦντα πεπόμφαται, αἱ δὲ πρὸς τοὺς παραδυναστεύοντας. ζῆλου πλήρεις οὕσαι τοῦ θείου καὶ ἀδικίαν ἔλεγχουσαι καὶ στηλιεύουσαι: Papadopoulos-Kerameus (1905) 24.17–20. See Patedakis (2004) 141.

8 Cañellas (1994) 447.

9 See in this edition, Testament, l. 91–92: εἰς διαθήκην ὑμῖν διατίθημι.