



## THE MIRACLES OF SAINTS COSMAS AND DAMIAN: CHARACTERISTICS OF DREAM HEALING

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In antiquity, dreams were regarded everywhere as a means of contact with the supernatural, and while they were made a frequent theme in philosophical and scientific speculation they remained an everyday experience. Among the Greeks, two major fields existed for the operation of dreams in the framework of religion: divination and dream healing. One common type of dream healing took a form called *incubatio* in Latin and *enkoimesis* in Greek, in which the believer went to a specific place (temple, church, tomb, or cave) to sleep there either to obtain a cure or receive oracular advice. The fact that the medium of each was the same, a dream sent by a god, enhanced the similarities between dream healing and the oracular dream. In antiquity, incubation was an important element of worship and played a major role, above all in the cult of Asclepius the healing god.<sup>1</sup> We have a great number of testimonies relating to the practice of incubation in his cult, both from *ex votos* placed in the temple, inscriptions compiled by priests, and from personal experience, e.g. Aelius Aristides' autobiography, in which he records his dreams received from Asclepius, who directed his life for decades.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the intertwined nature of the cult's healing practices and the oracle, dream-responses frequently involve word-games, riddles, or indirect prescriptions. The mechanism of a healing dream and an oracular dream was often the same. A famous example will help to illuminate the phenomenon. When Alexander the Great was besieging the city of Tyre, he saw a satyr, *satyros*, in his sleep and his dream-interpreters were happy to inform him that the dream meant *sa Tyros*, Tyre is yours. He then redoubled his attack and took the city: the point was that he had to chase the satyr for a long time, but finally managed

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<sup>1</sup> An overall picture is given about ancient healing deities in the excellent monograph of W. A. Jayne, *The Healing Gods of Ancient Civilizations*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925). On pagan and Christian incubation see L. Deubner, *De incubatione capita quattuor* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1900); M. Hamilton, *Incubation. The Cure of Disease in Pagan Temples and in Christian Churches* (London: W. C. Henderson, 1906).

<sup>2</sup> Emma J. and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius. Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*. 2 vols. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Hereafter all the references with "T" are taken from their collection; C. A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and Sacred Tales* (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1968).



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to catch him.<sup>3</sup> This type of wordplay functioned in a similar way in medical prescriptions: a man seeking health dreamed that Asclepius stretched out his fingers (*daktyloi*) as a sign that he should eat dates (*daktylos*).<sup>4</sup> Playful prescriptions and riddles were closely connected with Asclepius' well-attested sense of humour. My favourite example is the spontaneous cure of a blind man who received a sealed letter from the god. While he struggled to decipher the text his eyesight returned. The words he read were: "two thousand gold pieces."<sup>5</sup> Sometimes solving a riddle or understanding a pun brought an immediate cure; in other cases, especially in punishment miracles, when the god wished to teach a good lesson to the incredulous or the unjust, we meet with "bad jokes." The strangeness of the remedy works on the patient in another way, too: "The god tells him to do things which would make end of an ordinary man. The sick man not only survives these things, but thrives on them. The more unheard of the treatment is, the more the patient is convinced that the god is interested in his case, that his case is a special one, and that he is the most privileged being on the face of the earth."<sup>6</sup>

As early Christianity confronted the cults of the old gods and especially the activities of the healing deities, it had to meet the challenge and to integrate such curative practices into its own system of beliefs by modifying genuine pagan rituals. This happened also in the case of incubation, where the working of the divine healers found a new expression in the cult of the saints, since they embodied and transmitted the power of Christ, the *solus medicus*.<sup>7</sup> Although Christianity in this way gave unofficial recognition to dream healing, it treated oracles and oracular dreams in a different manner. Foretelling the future or unfolding the will of God was regarded as the privilege of a restricted number of divinely-inspired men and, in general, dream divination was forbidden. The examination of these two processes—the toleration of incubation for healing purposes and its prohibition in the case of oracles—would shed light on how

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<sup>3</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 24.8.

<sup>4</sup> Oberhelman, S. M. Dreams in Graeco-Roman Medicine. In *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II Principat 37.1.: Ed. Wolfgang Haase. 121–156. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980); and "The Interpretation of Prescriptive Dreams in Ancient Greek Medicine." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 36 (1981): 416–424.

<sup>5</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece* X. 38

<sup>6</sup> A.-J. Festugière, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 86.

<sup>7</sup> On the confrontation of the two healers see Rüttimann, R. J. *Asclepius and Jesus. The Form, Character and Status of the Asclepius Cult in the Second Century CE and its Influence on Early Christianity*. (PhD dissertation: Harvard University, 1986).



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the clerical attempt, in the words of Pierre-André Sigal to “control the miracle” worked in practice.<sup>8</sup>

Certain features of ancient incubation survived and changed in the early Christian dream healing miracles. On the basis of the Epidaurian miracle corpus, the *Iamata*<sup>9</sup> and the Byzantine miracle collection of the physician saints, Cosmas and Damian,<sup>10</sup> I analysed and compared the two miracle collections and tried to classify the miracles by establishing a typology of the miraculous. I was interested what *topoi* continued to be narrated in a Christian context and why and how others disappeared. To the Christian part I added some examples of other dream healer saints, whose recorded miracles are more or less contemporary to those of Cosmas and Damian: St Cyrus and John,<sup>11</sup> St Artemius and Febronia,<sup>12</sup> neglecting for a while others like St Thecla or St Therapon.

Here I will discuss *topoi* that continued to persist in the Christian context, giving some examples from the collection of Saints Cosmas and Damian, emphasizing, however, that these hints would receive meaning only in comparison with the Asclepian miracles. To facilitate evaluation of the cases, *Table 1* summarizes the miracles.

The hagiographic tradition on these saints is contradictory: three pairs of Cosmas and Damian are attested and their attributes are confused. It is likely that as their cult spread, new elements (names of historical persons and places) were amalgamated into their *vita* and a stock of miracles attributed to them was divided among the three pairs, but they nevertheless remained interchangeable.

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<sup>8</sup> P.-A. Sigal, *L'homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale (XI–XII siècle)* Paris: Édition du Cerf, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> Its latest and most complete edition: Lynn R. LiDonnici, *Tale and Dream: The Text and Compositional History of the Corpus of Epidaurian Miracle Cures* (PhD dissertation: University of Pennsylvania, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> L. Deubner, *St. Kosmas und Damian. Texte und Einleitung* (Leipzig: L. Deubner, 1907). In French: A.-J. Festugière, *Sainte Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien, Saints Cyr et Jean (extraits), Saint Georges* (Paris: Edition A. et J. Picard, 1971). I use Deubner's and Festugière's identical numbering. Quotations from the miracles are given in my translation, without quotation marks I give only the summaries of the miracles. The oldest account on their life is the so called Codex Londonicensis: Ernst Rupprecht, ed. *Cosmae et Damiani sanctorum medicorum vita et miracula e codice Londoniensi*. (Neue Deutsche Forschungen 20. Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1935).

<sup>11</sup> Fernandez Marcos, *Los Thaumata, Contribucion al estudio de la incubatio cristiana* (Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> V. S. Crisafulli and J. W. Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios. A Collection of Miracle Stories by an Anonymous Author of Seventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997).



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Finally they formed three pairs with three *Passiones* and three dates in the Greek canon.<sup>13</sup> The problem of this multiplicity is not the topic of my analysis relating to the miracle collection. Ludwig Deubner has discussed it extensively and Michael van Esbroeck<sup>14</sup> has summarized the different versions of the *Vitae*. It is important to note that Deubner claims the three pairs to have been originally one: “*Consentaneum est a principio non nisi unum par martyrum exstitisse, quod postea in tria paria distractum est.*”<sup>15</sup>

The Arabian pair can be identified with the pair of the miracle collection<sup>16</sup>: Cosmas and Damian were trained physicians, already famous during their lives, but their great career as healers started after they suffered martyrdom in 287 or 297. They probably originated in Syria, from a town near Cyrus; in all accounts they emphasise that they are of Arabian origin. They died in Aegeae<sup>17</sup> in Cilicia, and according to tradition their bodies were transferred by their family to Cyrus.

Being twins, in Constantinople they were associated with the Dioscuroi<sup>18</sup> and in Rome with both Castor and Pollux and Romulus and Remus. The *Acta Prima*<sup>19</sup> introduces them saying “*ex genere sumus praestantissimo, medici instituto,*” the *Acta Tertia* attributes their medical knowledge to the Holy Spirit (*artem medicine a spiritu sancto edocti*), while according to the *Codex Londoniensis* they had studied medicine, but refused the “human ways of healing,” surgery, cauterisation,

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<sup>13</sup> October 17: *Passio Arabs* November 1: *Vita Asiatica*, July 1: *Passio Romana*.

<sup>14</sup> M. van Esbroeck, “La diffusion orientale de la légende des saints Cosme et Damien,” in *Hagiographie, Cultures et Sociétés IV–XII. siècles*. Actes du Colloque organisé à Nanterre et à Paris. (2–5 mai 1979) (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985), 61–77.

<sup>15</sup> Deubner, *De Incubatione*, 68. This unity is confirmed by the fact that not only the mother but some of the miracles are attributed to more than one pair, for example the miracle of the Ethiopian leg, which is listed by Deubner both in relation with the Romans and the Arabs in their basilica in Rome, but he also places it among the *in vita* miracles performed by the Arabs in Nicomedia.

<sup>16</sup> Although Festugière attributes it to the Roman pair; as the collection mentions Cyrus as the place of the saints’ relics and Mir. 48 (which also has a Roman version) takes place here in the East, I do not see any reason to refuse Deubner’s opinion, that the saints of the miracles are the *Arabes*. Also the *Acta Sanctorum* lists these miracles under the Arabian pair.

<sup>17</sup> Asclepius had a famous incubation cultplace in Aegeae, see Mary Hamilton, *Incubation*, 120.

<sup>18</sup> Deubner arrived to this conclusion mainly on the basis of Mir. 9, where a Greek mistook Cosmas and Damian for Castor and Pollux. In Byzantium the Dioscuroi had a famous incubation shrine. See: Deubner 77–79; Hamilton, *Incubation*, 120.

<sup>19</sup> *Acta Sanctorum* Sept. VII. 27, p. 469.



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talismans, and magic. As for their martyrdom, their bodies remained unhurt despite the tortures and attempts to execute them. The miraculous reaction of their bodies to fire, water, and spears was strongly connected with their later healing activity, in exercising supernatural power on others' bodies and overcoming (and helping to overcome) painful physical conditions.<sup>20</sup> Lysias the prefect wanted to learn the secret of this "magic", in the Greek text *mageuēin*, in Latin *artem magicam* (*Acta Prima*) or *maleficia* (*Acta Altera*), but the saints refused to be called *malefici* or *magi*. Their church in Constantinople was a major centre of Byzantine incubation, and the majority of the miracles I will mention were performed there. The saints in many of their characteristics are related to pagan healing deities, and there are direct reminiscences of Asclepieian healing practices in both the narration and the mechanism of the cures.

The miracle collection reconstructed by Deubner from thirty-six different codices contains forty-eight miracles performed in Constantinople in the church called the *Cosmodeion*. Their date is uncertain: the earliest part of the collection is probably from the fifth century, the common opinion tends to regard them as dating to the seventh century.<sup>21</sup> Deubner organised the miracles in chronological order and distinguished six series, of which the last was written in the thirteenth century.

Below I will describe miraculous incubation as practised by the saints, outlining some points of interest. First, the features necessary to describe the practice and then the characteristics of the dynamics of the miracle. Finally I will summarize briefly the basic results.

### The Sick: Their Illnesses, Social Status, and Their Way to the Saints

The first two series of the miracle collection (Mir. 1–19) are not very detailed in describing the sick. They sometimes mention that the patient was old, more often that he or she was pious—with the formula "a man of great faith." There are some cases where the illness is not indicated, the narrator only speaks about "a very painful disease." The general impression received from the narrative is quite different from the exact data of the Asclepieian tablets, where the name, disease and provenance of the person are always given. The latter part of the collection contains more information in this respect, but it is still not ordered systematically. I have the impression that the writers rather aimed at story-

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<sup>20</sup> On the bodies of saints and their thaumaturgic power in relation to martyrdom see Sofia Boesch Gajano, *La santità* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1999), 19f.

<sup>21</sup> For the dating of the first two collections see: Ernst Kitzinger "The Cult of Images in the Age before the Iconoclasm" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 83–151.



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telling, often with an aspiration to higher style literature, and they considered the step by step introduction of the events more appropriate to affect the readers than listing data.

Hamilton assumed that the patients were wealthy and of high social status, while Festugière emphasised the simplicity of the clientele. I think the notion of high rank appears when it was exceptional and the higher officers of the Palace represented the prestige of the Cosmodeion, at the same time showing the impartiality of the saints, who make no distinction between the rich and the poor. This concern is demonstrated in Mir. 39, where a friend of the emperor sleeps between two poor patients and they need each other in order to be cured. The ending of this miracle stresses the saints' care for relieving the poverty of the poor, tempering the pride of the rich, and curing the illnesses of both groups. Beyond doubt, staying in the church (and in Constantinople) was not cheap. Those of the city were not necessarily rich, since they lived there and supported themselves anyway. Servants or companions of the sick are often mentioned but mostly in the cases of paralysis or other serious conditions when one needed help regardless of financial state. In Mir. 12 a well-to-do woman received and fed poor female patients at her place while she stayed in the church.

It is noted in a considerable number of the miracles that the patient followed the advice of his friends or pious family members in seeking a cure in the Cosmodeion or that the fame of the saints' healing was so widespread that the sick turned to them quickly. Another reason for choosing to visit the saints was the helplessness of physicians or the sick person's fear of undergoing surgical operations. It also happened that a physician advised the sick to practice incubation, and in one case a physician accompanied a sick man and took care of him in the church. The last and most important motive for visiting the Cosmodeion was having received an invitation from the saints in a dream, often strengthened with the promise of cure.

#### **The Circumstances of Incubation: Place, Preparations, Offerings and Time**

Those who went for a cure slept in the church; within which was a more popular place, the *catechumenion*<sup>22</sup> (Mir. 3, 12, 21, 23) and a marginal incubation

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<sup>22</sup> The *catechumenion* could denote both the upper-gallery in the interior church and an open-air atrium on the left and right side of the portico. There were probably porticos on two levels. In Mir. 12 the patients stayed between the columns of the porch.



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place, the *narthex*.<sup>23</sup> In Mir. 21 the patient stayed in the *catechumenion* during the day but slept near the altar hall. Having decided to leave, since he has waited for a cure in vain, he had to sleep inside the church because it was already too late to go home, and here he had the dream he had long waited for. In Mir. 10, a pagan and a Christian went together, the former sleeping in the *narthex*, the latter in the smaller baptistry near the *diaconion*. Mir. 12 tells the story of a wealthy woman who probably stayed for a long time installing herself in the colonnade and separating her “apartment” with curtains, while in other stories the rich and the poor lie in the same place. Inside the church there was a place called *tholos*;<sup>24</sup> the same word denoted the most sacred part of the Epidaurian precinct.

In Mir. 30 the saints carried their patient to a nearby hospital in his dream, performed the operation there and brought him back to the church. In Mir. 28 a physician was ordered to perform an operation on the sick in the way indicated by the saints in his dream, but by the time he arrived at the church his patient has already been operated on. It shows that a real operation could take place inside the church. A valuable remark in Mir. 14 states that there was a curative bath near the church that was frequented by the sick and formed part of the curative process, and once (Mir. 27) was recommended by the saints.

*Healing outside the church:* As with some Asclepian patients, in many cases Cosmas and Damian appear in a place other than the church: in the house of the patient,<sup>25</sup> on the way to or back from the church or near a building belonging to the saints.<sup>26</sup> The special feature of the saints’ daytime appearance outside the church is that they occurred in disguise: “*omnino extra templum figuram suam mutare solent.*”<sup>27</sup>

Mir. 13 shows how divine power operates at a distance, emphasising that the man of the story would have gone to the Cosmodeion if he had been in Constantinople. Precisely this faith caused the saints to appear to the man’s sick wife in Laodicea and cure the woman in the same way as in the cases of incubation. They even left proof of their presence, a piece of wax-salve under

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<sup>23</sup> Mir. 10; 17 – the patients were both pagans and Mir. 17 mentions that the man did not dare to sleep in the appropriate place, only in the *external narthex*. Mir. 10 speaks about the fear of the dreaming man and gives its cause in the following custom: in the orient if a heathen was found in a Christian church, the believers had the right to burn him on the spot). Open-air narthex: Mir. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Mentioned in Mir. 14, see Deubner, *De incubatione*, 70.

<sup>25</sup> In Mir.13, 27, 29, 30, 36, 47.

<sup>26</sup> Mir. 1, 18, 41, 42, 43.

<sup>27</sup> Deubner, *De Incubatione*, 73.





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the pillow. The miracles of the sixth series (39–47) form a separate group: with the exception of Mir. 39, both the healing miracles (40, 41, 42, 47) and the help in shipwreck (44, 45, 46), as well as the punishment miracle (43) were performed at a distance. These are not incubation miracles, but their presence in the collection follows the same line as in the case of Asclepius: divine help has many aspects, saving in shipwreck, healing in other ways, strengthen the function of the healer and attest the extension of his power.

### *Preparation*

Prayer was regarded as a means to induce dreams; the saints sometimes postponed a cure so that the faith of the patient could develop. Incessant supplication and tears were the starting point of many cures,<sup>28</sup> often not only from the patient, but from a pious relative,<sup>29</sup> friend<sup>30</sup> or foreigner.<sup>31</sup> We know about one case when an indirect method was applied to obtain the saints' help: in Mir. 30 the sick person prayed in front of the image of the saints depicted with Mary and he asked for her intervention, which indeed took place. The delayed cures of pagans and heretics show most vividly how important faith was as the indispensable condition to obtain health.

No purification rites were performed before incubation as in the Asclepieia, only general rules had to be observed, for example, no eating of meat during Lent or refraining from blasphemy. Meanwhile, the secondary result of divine intervention was that the patients gave up their previous indecent habits such as horse-racing or keeping a concubine. Before the incubation practised at St Artemius' relics, patients had to dedicate a lamp, which was regarded both as a preparation and an offering. (See, for example, Mir. 4: "Arriving at the church of the Forerunner, he made in the name of his son a votive lamp, according to the prevailing custom with wine and oil." or in Mir. 10: "In one of the baths where they lived, she prepared a votive lamp in the name of St Artemius." In more general terms: "Sergios sent him the obligatory offering" (Mir. 17).<sup>32</sup>

### *Offerings*

Because of the saints' refusal of payment we only have scarce evidence for offerings: Mir. 3 mentions that there were *ex votos* placed on the walls of the

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<sup>28</sup> Mir. 1, 2, 3, 4, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Mir. 4, 13, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Mir. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Mir. 31.

<sup>32</sup> Crisafulli – Nesbitt. *The Miracles of St. Artemios*, 85, 97, 109.





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church, which the sick man of this miracle consulted; the same miracle states that the sheep that provided the sick with medicine was also an offering. A scene is described in Mir. 18 between the greedy tutor and the disguised saints: Cosmas and Damian—dressed as clerics—asked the man what sum he would give to them if they fulfilled his wish. The bargain started from one gold piece and ended with ten obols, but when the man was still reluctant to give them any money, the saints disappeared. Having his wish fulfilled and recognising the miracle, the man offered incense<sup>33</sup> of ten obols every Friday in the Cosmodeion. The painting of Mir. 30, with its unknown figure called Leontinos, was probably also an offering, as well as the painting mentioned by Festugière at the end of the story that depicted the miracle.<sup>34</sup> The rich officer of Mir. 40, for the cure of his daughter, wore until his death a peplos embroidered with gold, showing the figures of the saints, the father and the cured daughter, with a text on it to commemorate the miracle. A unique way of paying for the cure is told in Mir. 39, in which the relatively poor actor had to give his only cloak to the even poorer beggar, while the rich man had to pay a considerable sum to the actor for the slaps that cured him. What recurs instead of offerings, are the ubiquitous thanksgiving songs expressing the person's gratitude and commemorating the events that had happened to them.<sup>35</sup> In case of rich patients, St Artemius also accepted thanksgiving gifts: "So immediately he took some necessities for making a meal and an offering and disembarked in order to make the trip to the saint." (Mir. 5)<sup>36</sup> A thanksgiving meal with the invitation of all who were present in the church is mentioned in his Mir. 35.

### *Time*

The time spent in the church varied, sometimes in order to enhance faith (Mir.1), sometimes to test the devotion of the sick; it also happened that the

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<sup>33</sup> For the significance of incensation in the cult of the healing saints see Fernandez Marcos, *Los Thaumata*, 38–39 and G. Vican, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984), 70–71.

<sup>34</sup> Deubner had chosen the version without the painting, Festugière found the mention of the picture more interesting, see Festugière, *Sainte Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien...*, 172. It is not unlikely that the author who closed the miracle with inserting the picture, was rather influenced by the presence of the other painting in the story.

<sup>35</sup> To the importance of thanksgiving songs and the link formed by singing between the ancient and Christian rituals see Fernandez Marcos, *Los Thaumata*, 37–38 and Edelstein, *Asclepius*, II. 206. n. 28.

<sup>36</sup> Trans. Crisafulli – Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios*, 87.



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saints agreed that the person has spent enough time there already, so they appear to him (Mir. 3).

In some cases (Mir. 10, 12) we read about regular incubation: the believers went to sleep in the church every Friday, in the first case before, in the second after, obtaining the cure. The Saturday night vigil, the *pannychis*, was considered the best time to encounter the saints<sup>37</sup> and to receive the *kéroté* (holy wax) distributed by the priests. A ceremony called *pannychis* was attached to the cult of Asclepius in Athens, a night ceremony with torches; as a Christian ceremony it contained three antiphons and five prayers. The miracles of St Artemius (Mir. 33) provide a more detailed description of it: “It was already the hour for accomplishing the midnight rites and the occasion for the holy wax-salve to be dispensed upon adoration of the life-giving cross.”<sup>38</sup> That was the time to tell and retell the miraculous cures: “those who had received a cure from the Saints related how they had obtained it and there was truly just cause for delight and for building of morale in these stories, each person imagining more than hearing what someone said.”<sup>39</sup> Not only the actual cures, but probably the recorded miracles were recited at this time, both in the Cosmodeion and in the Forerunner’s church, where Artemius healed.

*Kéroté* was wax that had been blessed, purchased in the Cosmodeion either from the candle-wax or obtained from the lamp-oil. It was the most important type of eulogy distributed in the church (and at several other churches as well) and it served in the majority of the miracles to provide or to complete the cure. According to the illness it could be applied externally, sometimes melted and used as balm on scars, sometimes dissolved in water to be drunk. Festugière takes it as a mixture of wax and lamp-oil. Many miracles testify that it was a rather disgusting remedy.<sup>40</sup>

After being cured many patients stayed, to recover wholly, to pray, or following the saints’ order as in Mir. 30, where the healed man had to spend six years in the church, while the cured butcher of Mir. 34 remained in the church for the rest of his life and made his living as a barber. After healing a heretic

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<sup>37</sup> Mir. 10, 20, 26, 30.

<sup>38</sup> see L. R. Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), 239, who refers to IG 2. add. 453b). The quotation is in Crisafulli – Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios*, 177 (cf. also p. 23) For the magical hour of twelve (midnight and midday) see Fernandez Marcos, *Los Thaumata*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Transl. by Crisafulli – Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> For the types and working of eulogies see G. Vican, “Art, Medicine and Magic,” 70–73.



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(Mir. 17), the saints found him the following day still in the church and still a heretic; they told him to leave so as not to deny the place to believers.

### The Appearance of the Saints

The likeness of the saints to their images is an important element in the stories. Images of the saints in the church or those which the patients possessed played a decisive role in recognising or obtaining the miracle. Three miracles refer to images as means of divine intervention: in Mir. 13 a soldier, devoted to the saints, stationed with his troop in Laodicea, married a woman who soon became ill. The desperate husband, not knowing anyone at the place, spoke to his wife about the power of the saints to whom they could turn if they were in Constantinople. Cosmas and Damian, noticing the faith of the man, appeared in a dream to his wife and assured her of their assistance. She related the dream to her husband, not knowing who had paid the night visit. When her husband took out a small image of the saints that he carried with him everywhere, the woman recognised the figures, who later cured her. In the closing lines the narrator concludes: “You have seen, my friends in Christ, how—in accordance with the faith of those who invoke them—the wise saints are found everywhere, not only through their activity, but by their mere presence.”

Ernst Kitzinger<sup>41</sup> and Gary Vican<sup>42</sup> take this image to be identical with the *kéroté*, which the saints have hidden under the pillow of the wife to ensure her further health. Although in this case the miracle speaks about two separate objects (the icon carried by the husband and the wax-salve), the image-bearing wax-seal or clay token were common eulogies, endowed with healing power.<sup>43</sup>

Another account (Mir. 30) narrates the misery of a man, who had been waiting for the saints for a long time. Once he discovered a painting of Christ, Mary, St Cosmas and Damian, and a certain Leontinos. He “was praying in front of it, weeping bitterly for several hours,” and the following night the saints appeared in a dream together with Mary, who ordered the saints to heal

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<sup>41</sup> Kitzinger, “The cult of images,” 107.

<sup>42</sup> Vican, “Art, Medicine and Magic,” 73.

<sup>43</sup> E. g. such type is recorded among the miracles of St. Artemius (Mir. 16): a golden coin was given to a man in dream, but when he woke up, he found that it was a wax seal bearing the image of the saint. For the clay tokens with images of St. Symeon and St. George, and Mary see: Vican, “Art, Medicine and Magic,” 72–73 and fig. 2, 3, 5, 19, 20.



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the man. Mir. 15 is an exceptional source; Henry Maguire<sup>44</sup> describes its importance in contrast to iconoclasm: “at the seventh ecumenical council, of 787, a passage from the sixth- or seventh-century *Miracula* of Saints Cosmas and Damian was quoted. It told of a certain woman with the colic, who was cured by the scraping plaster from the images of the saints which were on the wall of her bedroom, and drinking the resulting powder with water. As a consequence, we are told, ‘she immediately became healthy, her pains having ceased by the *intervention* of the saints.’”

#### *Appearance in a dream*

Cosmas and Damian often came in disguise, sometimes as physicians<sup>45</sup> or priests,<sup>46</sup> sometimes resembling their depicted image and often recognised only after a considerable time. Concerning their appearance, it is peculiar that when they came in disguise, in a form different from their usual appearance, it usually took place outside the church. In Mir. 29 they appeared on the same night both to the husband of the sick woman as her physicians, threatening an operation, and to the wife, probably in their usual guise, giving the prescription. The most striking thing is the effect they produced in the patients: they mostly evoked fear and uneasiness; the patient often lost courage before or after the dream. There are cases where they appeared to the sick while making their medical visits around the church, but did not pay attention or ask for certain acts to be performed or they wanted proof of obedience and faith. These medical turns are peculiar: the sick (in his/her dream) sees the saints going around the church, witnesses that they heal others, sometimes speaks to them and begs to be cured.

If only one of the saints appeared, which one is usually not specified, the narrator tells only in one case (in Mir. 22) that it was Cosmas who came to the help of the patient; otherwise they are not distinguished.<sup>47</sup> In Mir. 21 “someone” comes in the dream to direct the sick to the church, and in Mir. 19 a woman was cured by an unknown foreigner who has no medical skill, but following the suggestions of the saints he made an incision in their name.

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<sup>44</sup> H. Maguire, “Magic and Christian Image,” in H. Maguire, ed. *Byzantine Magic* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 66.

<sup>45</sup> In Mir. 27, 29, 30 they take the form of the doctors of the patient.

<sup>46</sup> Mir. 18. In this case the appearance of the saints varied: first they came as priests (daytime), but when the person became ill, they are shown in their usual dream-appearance.

<sup>47</sup> See Mir. 21 and 23.



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### *Real appearance*

Mir. 1 tells the story of a daytime appearance, which is not a vision but the real presence of the saints as travellers; in Mir. 14 one of the saints helped a paralytic as a bath attendant and as he disappeared, the paralytic was cured. Then he wished to give a tip to the bath attendant and it was only when he did not find the one among the personnel that he discovered the saintly intervention. In Mir. 18 they appeared as priests who accompanied a man on the street and provided him with a job (which he was looking for) but later, when he became ill, they appeared in their usual saintly form at night in a dream to cure him. In Mir. 32 they appeared to the physician of the sick and this doctor had to order his patient to go to the church of the saints.

### **Miracle patterns**

#### *Delay of the cure*

Unlike the speedy healer Asclepius, “out of divine wisdom” the saints did not always succour immediately to the sick. A common motive for this attitude was to test or enhance the patient’s faith:

A man of old age with dropsy arrived at the honourable church and begged with tears the famous saints and the servants of Christ, Cosmas and Damian to set him free of an incurable disease, which tormented him. But after a couple of days had passed and no attention was paid to him by the saints (because the servants of Christ are endowed with divine wisdom and they measure the intention of the suppliants and examine in advance the outcome of their faith) and many and great healings of the sick incubants took place everyday in front of the eyes of the dropsical, he—losing courage or rather giving up his own life—left for his home. (Mir. 1)

Elsewhere (Mir. 3) it simply took some time before the saints agreed to heal the patient. In the case of the heretic (Mir. 17) and that of the pagan (Mir. 9), they delayed the cure while waiting for the patient’s conversion.

The patient could also delay a cure, when he (Mir. 11) or she (Mir. 16) was reluctant to apply the indicated medicine; in these cases, the saints reappeared to convince or force the sick to comply. This delay evoked two kinds of attitudes: the patients either lost courage and considered themselves unworthy of the saints’ attention and were ready to leave (Mir. 21) or burst out in anger, cursing the saints (Mir 1, 6, 16, 18, 37). Besides the general terms, the narrator occasionally quotes the reproach in direct speech, together with the answer of the saints: “It is not even a week[?]s] time that my husband has been cured and



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that I arrived at your house without any ailment, oh saints, and now I am dying and you neglect me.” “Why are you raging and why cry against us heedlessly?” (Mir. 16) or: “You are impostors...” (Mir. 18); in Mir. 12 the basis of reproach is said to be the patient’s familiarity with the saints. In Mir. 5 the delay gives way to the physicians’ interference, who—of course—only worsen the patient’s condition and are helped by the saints to complete the cure.

#### *Repetition of dreams*

The repetition of dreams is a characteristic phenomenon of Cosmas and Damian’s healing process. The frequency of these attracts the reader’s attention, whether it served as a narrative device to make the stories longer and more spectacular, to create tensions and raise expectations, or whether it was an inseparable part of the curing process. At first sight the idea of repetitive appearance instead of a sudden cure diminishes the efficacy of the saintly power—but not in the case of Cosmas and Damian. Here two aspects of saintly providence are expressed: the saints take notice of the sick before the patient turns to them and often appear first to exhort the sick to go to their church for a promised cure. This is mirrored in cases of *invitation dreams*, when the saints appeared either to the patient (Mir. 13) or to his physician (in Mir. 20, 32) and calmed them by securing their aid or, for the physicians, forbidding any other treatment. Repetitions of saintly appearances were essential in the case of *partial cures*. In Mir. 20 and Mir. 27, the aim of a partial cure is to impress physicians who have already started to treat the sick and to give them time to reconsider the saints’ power and to look forward to their reappearance. In Mir. 12 a partial cure is justified by a parallel cure of the soul: the patient has to get rid of the attacks of a demon first, who prevents complete healing.

#### *Orders as conditions or means of a cure: the theological grotesque*

This emphasis on the saints’ healing not only the body but the soul, shows another aspect of their “gradual” healing: it was generally expressed by giving orders and setting conditions for the cure. In most of the cases the orders were repeated, and their nature explains why. Cosmas’ and Damian’s requests or conditions in exchange for health were often embarrassing or contrary to the patient’s will. One phenomenon that most resembles the style of the classical oracles is the prescription given in the form of a riddle. In Mir. 3 a patient was given the following prescription by St Cosmas and Damian in a dream: in order to be healed, he is to cut some pubic hair of Cosmas, burn it, throw it into water, and drink the liquid. The patient was puzzled by such a blasphemous act and helpless about what to do. In vain he consulted the votive tablets placed in the church. He was aided when “the help of God came through the prayers of



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Saints Cosmas and Damian, so that their visit would not be regarded as pure imagination, and he revealed the solution to the sick [man].” A lamb, probably a votive gift, approached the man in the church, looked at his face and started to bleat until the church attendants noticed it and called the sheep by the name “Cosmas”. The riddle being solved, they quickly called for a barber and the patient was cured. Within framework of the narration the lamb is placed in the context of the symbolism of the Lamb; Christ and his followers are depicted as a flock.

Another dream-riddle also points towards theological symbolism: in Mir. 10 the pagan “patient” who seeks not a bodily cure but an improvement of his faith sees in his dream three children eating bread and feels a passionate desire to get a share. The saints appear and explain that he has witnessed the “secret mysteries” of the Eucharist. This brings him to conversion. Similarly, in Mir. 38 the sufferer received three beans (in a story concerning another healing saint, St Artemius, three jujube berries<sup>48</sup>) and he was advised to take them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

One of the best-known miracles of the collection (Mir. 24) illustrates how a rather questionable order proves the patient’s faith, while the story-teller is fully aware of the joke. A paralytic man who sought the assistance of Saints Cosmas and Damian in their church saw the saints in a dream; they told him to lie with a mute woman sleeping near him, also in attendance for a cure. He hesitated for a long time but the saints reappeared and repeated the order. He collected all his courage and strength and approached the woman. Having noticed his intentions, the mute woman cried out and the scared paralytic ran away. The popularity of this miracle in antiquity is attested by its being associated with Saint Cyrus, Saint John, and Saint Menas. Hippolyte Delehaye<sup>49</sup> calls it scandalous and (although otherwise denying the survival of ancient incubation) considers it a pagan motif and relates it to an Asclepician miracle from Epidaurus, where a paralytic man was spontaneously cured when chasing a boy who had stolen his crutch. I see this rather as a manifestation of theological grotesque, typical of many other miracle stories in the collection.

As the latter example shows, divine orders can be sinful (of course, they are usually not carried out, as only obedience matters); they can also ridicule the patient, as in Mir. 26, where a man has to pester a reputable lady in the church to believe in the saintly operation and find the remedy, a holy object hidden in

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<sup>48</sup> Mir. 45. in Crisafulli – Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios*.

<sup>49</sup> H. Delehaye, *Les Légendes hagiographiques* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1973), 147: “La donné de ce prétendu miracle n’est certainement pas chrétienne, abstraction faite de la bouffonnerie de la mise en scène.”





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the lady's bed; and they often produce reluctance or disgust. The more absurd the order, the more the saints' power is manifested, as when a poison becomes medicine (Mir. 11) or a slap in the face makes one healthy (Mir. 39). Such cases reveal the morbid humour of the saints, but this is justified by the fact that in the course of the healing no harm is done to the patient(s) and fulfilling the order leads to a cure.

The *role of jokes* and the often incomprehensible or morally dubious orders of the saints are closely connected to the mechanism of the miracle. Although in the miracle collection we often meet treatments that are in accordance with the medical practice of the times (surgery, irrigation, application of bandages), the circumstances of the healing itself are still wondrous. The fulfilment of unlikely or scandalous orders serves both as an ordeal to prove the faith of the sick and to show the power of the saints. Mir. 39 presents the following cure:

A friend of the emperor went to the saints for a cure and he slept between a beggar and an actor (also poor). On the first night the saints healed the beggar, and, appearing to the actor, threatened him that he would not be cured unless he gave his shabby tunic to the beggar. This order had to be repeated twice, but finally the beggar left happily, in health, with the tunic. Soon, the actor regretted having given away his only coat, but for a while he forgot his illness and reproached the saints because of the unbearable cold. He was quite a spectacle in the church, but he kept grumbling that he did not care whether they mocked him or not, since he had become a puppet of the saints. In the meantime, the rich man received a dream in which the saints declared that he could be cured by no other means than by asking the mime for ten slaps. The dream was repeated twice more, the actor strongly advising the rich man not to believe in it, telling how he had been fooled and ridiculed by the saints. The order was given for the fourth time, this time to both of them, indicating that the actor should receive a hundred gold pieces and two tunics for the slaps. He agreed, performed his curative function, and both of them were cured "of illness, poverty, pride."

The use of *tricks* stands close to the use of riddles and puns, but it is extended over the narrative. It has a special role in story-telling: on one hand the tricks mostly cause difficulties or danger to be overcome by the patient; on the other, they show the saints as demanding active participation and courage from the sufferer. In Mir. 11, for example, a young man, passionate for horse-racing but reluctant to drink the prescribed poison, was taken to prison despite the help of the saints and was to be executed for secret crimes committed at the hippodrome. His only chance to survive was to tell how the saints ordered him to drink cedar-oil and later to hide in the hippodrome at night. To prove the



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truth he has to drink the poison, which had an emetic effect: the man is freed both of his illness and his passion for horseracing.

In Mir. 24, 25, 26, 34, and 39, the use of a trick leads to a *double or triple cure*; it is important in other cases (Mir. 3, 11) that a certain “audience” is present during the miracle so that more people can witness the cure and even be a part of it. I have described already the case of the dumb woman and the paralytic man; a more elaborate story of the same type is Mir. 34, the cure of Victor the lawyer, suffering from cancer, and Hesperos the paralytic butcher.

The lawyer received the following prescription in a dream: “If you want to be cured, go up to that paralytic and ask him to shave you, and Christ will heal you.” The butcher tried to excuse himself, saying that not only has he never shaved anyone, but he cannot make the slightest movement with his hand. The dream was repeated two more times, and the paralytic finally started to look for the scissors he once used to patch his clothes, finding under the mat the utensils of a barber. “Without any experience, but not without great anxiety and suffering,” he shaved the lawyer, and both were cured. But the story does not end here. The saints appeared again to the lawyer and citing both a biblical and a secular example, they ordered him to give fifty pieces of gold to the butcher, who was a beggar by that time. Having received the money, the butcher also received a dream: the saints ordered him to give up his former profession and take up a job as a church barber. “He remained there all in his life, loyal to his barber’s job, having said farewell to the meat markets; all the people in the city who mattered and were of importance wanted to come and be shaved by his hands.” The final words of the story bring forth the unquestionable proof of the miracle: “And in order to prove the truth of my story, there are some who practice even today the art of barbering at that holy place; they are the disciples of our man or the disciples of his disciples.”<sup>50</sup>

The involvement of a third person or a circle of relatives, friends, and fellow-incubants provides witnesses to the miracle, but on the other hand often brings these people into confrontation, especially in cases of pagans, Jews, or heretics. Where Christian faith is not to be assumed on the part of the sick, we often meet an interesting type of miraculous cure: the condition set for the cure is the remedy itself. Both the coincidence of treatment and cure, and the above-mentioned confrontation are expressed in Mir. 2, which has its classical parallel:

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<sup>50</sup> Festugière wanders how there could have been a barbershop in the church, and suggests that it was probably in the bath-building mentioned in Mir. 14. He refers to Deubner’s observation that in Rome Cosmas and Damian are the patron saints of barbers even today. (*Sainte Thècle, Saint Côme et Damien*, 185) cf. Deubner *De Incubatione*, Introd. 74.



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the saints order a Jewish woman to eat pork, and this both symbolises her break with the ancestral law and is intended as a miraculous cure. The woman went to the saints' church and prayed for relief; the saints, wishing to cure also the "ulcers of her soul, not only of her body," prescribed pork,<sup>51</sup> but three admonitions were needed before she was willing to fulfil the order. The cure, however, was spontaneous, for the woman had to hide the meat from her husband, and when she went to eat it, she found herself cured and hurried to be baptised. We have a testimony of a similar situation in the Asclepician records: two of his supplicants receive the same prescription—i.e. eating pork. Domninus the Syrian, although his ancestral laws forbade it, was cured by eating the meat; Plutarchus the Athenian asked Asclepius "My lord, what would you have prescribed to a Jew suffering from the same illness, for certainly you would not bid him to take his fill of pork? Thus he spoke, and straightaway Asclepius spoke from the statue in a very harmonious voice, prescribing another remedy for the illness."<sup>52</sup>

An other aim of inflicting "bad jokes" on the patient was to punish him for his incredulity or blasphemy. In Mir. 1, Cosmas and Damian appear to operate on an irascible old man with a huge sword instead of a scalpel, threatening him as they go, saying one to the other: "Give him a nice incision! Why is he so insolent, being as old as he is?" Saint Artemius also appeared to a sufferer dressed as a butcher instead of in his medical costume (Mir. 25), but the most spectacular punishment cure comes from the miracles of Saints Cyrus and John (Mir. 30): Gesius, the sophist-physician who never missed the occasion to ridicule the divine healers, fell ill: his back, shoulders and neck became paralysed. He received the following advice from the saints: "By declaring that you are wise you have been proven rather a fool; fetch the pack-saddle of an ass and wear it over your pain-ridden shoulders ... and at midday walk around the church shouting aloud: 'I am a stupid fool,' and when you have done this, as we said, your body will be immediately restored to health."<sup>53</sup> As he hesitated, the prescription became more and more severe, and Gesius ended up wearing not

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<sup>51</sup> Among the miracles of Cyrus and John (55) we read about a man, bewitched by a Jew, who is ordered to eat pork's lung grilled and served with wine; Fernandez Marcos, *Los Thaumata*, 370; Deubner mentions another prescription of Cyrus and John (54), when they advised pig fat, see Deubner, *De Incubatione*, 72.

<sup>52</sup> T 427 from Suidas s.v. Domninos.

<sup>53</sup> Trans. H.J. Magoulias. "The Lives of the Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Byzantine Medicine in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries" *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 57 (1964): 130.



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only the pack-saddle but a large bell around his neck and a horse-bit in his mouth, being pulled around the church by his servant, shouting: "I am a fool!"

### The Witnesses and Mediators of the Miracle

The active presence of others is emphasised by the cases when a third party was given a decisive role as a mediator, either in receiving a dream or performing a cure. In Mir. 6, the saints appeared to a fellow-incubant to communicate their order to the blaspheming patient and, surprisingly, their indirect attention calmed the man down. In the case of the licentious man of Mir. 32, the saints presented themselves to a priest of their church to tell the condition set for the cure (to break off his relationship with a woman); here the narrator inserts his comment: the saints did not go directly to the man because of his sins. When a heretic ("who might remain incredulous forever, because that is the characteristic of heretics," Mir. 26) went to the church to celebrate the Saturday night vigil, the saints took the occasion to manifest themselves to him and make a mediator of him in the cure of a woman, both healing the faithful and convincing the sceptic. Personal care or affection for the sick is another reason for receiving the "invisible visit" of the saints: they might come to a family member (Mir. 29, 36) or they might use a friend to appear in dream and promise cure (35) or to come and help the sick in need (22). Other persons can serve to direct the sick to the church (10), and soften the saints by their piety (4, 31). The classical type of the *incubatio vicaria*, when a patient is unable to visit the saints (usually because he or she is too ill) appears only in the case of the four-year-old boy whose mother receives an invitation dream.

In the miracles where the saints appear to doctors (20, 28, 32), the rivalry with and victory over them is expressed explicitly. The more sceptical the physician is, the more likely that he has to witness or carry out the saints' treatment, reaffirming his own limited capacity (Mir. 28, 32). This leads to the question of the relationship between miraculous and secular medicine.

### Religious and Medical Healing; the Physicians in the Miracles

In almost all cases of temple cures, the inefficacy of human doctors are mentioned. The generally beneficent attitude of Asclepius is unique because of the family connections between the god and his sons, the Asclepiades, who formed the guild of the most highly trained physicians. The methods of scientific medicine had a great impact on temple curing; there was mutual influence from



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the very beginning. On the Epidaurian stelai (EMC 48) only one occasion is noted when Asclepius appeared in a dream to a patient who was to be cauterised and the god invited him to turn to divine healing instead.

Among Christian healers there were degrees of hostility towards scientific medicine, although it must be stressed that these attitudes reflected the practice of the individual healers not the official opinion of the church, which has never been hostile to medicine.<sup>54</sup> For extreme outbursts it is enough to recall the story of Gesios, from the miracles of Saints Cyrus and John, who asked the philosopher-physician on their last visit prescribing the punishment cure: “Tell us, where did Hippocrates set down the medications for your infirmity? Where does Democritus prescribe anything?”<sup>55</sup> The narrator of the miracles of Saint Artemius is not friendly to physicians, either: “So, where are the fine-sounding Hippocrates and Galen and the countless other quacks?”<sup>56</sup> he asks, but there is a supposed reason behind his hostility, probably being a physician himself and as such know too well his lay colleges and viewing them as rivals. In contrast, KDM 47 speaks about a sick monk, to whom the physicians applied all the treatments of Hippocrates and Galen that were believed to be useful.

In the miracle collection, the examination the miracles where physicians are involved shows the relationship between secular and divine healing. In Mir. 5, the patient went first to the Cosmodeion to practice incubation, but having waited for the cure in vain, he turned to his usual physician, who performed an operation in the church. However, the patient only got worse, as his healthy organs also became infected. The intervention of the saints averted the danger of death and the doctors were put to shame.

In Mir. 16, a rich palace officer consulted his physicians first, who were helpless. “The doctors who were treating him were overcome by his illness, and he reached the house of the saints.” The invisible way of the saints’ healing activity is contrasted to the nature of the wound, incurable by human means, and the medicine of the saints, the *kéroté* is described as “admirable,” “striking,” and “holy.”

In Mir. 20, the formulaic expression returns: “the physicians were overcome by the illness and they despaired about the sick.” Elsewhere the father of

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<sup>54</sup> See D. W. Amundsen, *Medicine, society and faith in the ancient and medieval worlds*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) ch. 1. “Body, Soul, and Physician”, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Transl. by Magoulias, “The lives of the saints...,” 131. Another outburst against physicians from the patient at Cyrus and John: “Hippocrates and Galen and Democritus, the bastard brothers of nature, and together with them, all those who boast in their words...” Mir. 13, Magoulias, 129.

<sup>56</sup> Mir. 24 transl. Crisafulli – Nesbitt, 143.



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the sick person (again a wealthy man) entrusted his son to the care of the saints but asked one doctor to stay with his son in the church. Tortured by pains, the young man asked the physician for medicine and the doctor was troubled about what to do. He was discouraged, but helped by the saints, who forbade him to give anything to the man and promised a cure on their part. After the doctor told his dream to the young man, the pains were relieved and the saints soon fulfilled their promise by restoring the man's health entirely.

In Mir. 21, we also read about a well-to-do man who had been treated by physicians for many years. On the verge of death he turned to the saints and was healed, but after being cured—maybe due to his sufferings since his childhood—he wanted special guarantees that he would not fall ill again. The saints taught him a prayer against all kinds of illnesses! When the state of the (probably also rich) deacon of Mir. 23 worsened, he called for the most famous and skilled doctor, the “prince of physicians.” This miracle is an important source for learning about the organisation of health care in Constantinople. It shows that the physicians formed a guild whose leader was called *archiatros*, or the “prince of physicians.” The reputation and superior knowledge of this doctor are contrasted with the incurable disease. (“He showed himself as inferior to the illness as he believed himself superior to the other physicians.”) Despite his reputation, the doctor had to give up his patient, who—greatly discouraged—sought the help of the saints.

The other cleric of Mir. 27 called his doctors and we read that he calls “specialists,” but since he is pious and admires Cosmas and Damian, he asked the doctors to mix *kéroté* into the medicine they apply. The saints appeared to him because in this request they recognise his faith and came to him in a dream as his physicians, performed a partial cure, and unfolded the bandages in an experienced and correct way. The next day the doctors declared that none of them would have had the courage to do this if not in the presence of all the physicians. They were frightened and dared not touch the sick man any more.

The two women in Mir. 28 and 29 (both with pains in the breast) showed themselves to doctors first, but when they were to be operated on, both preferred to turn to Cosmas and Damian. The saints appeared in a dream as physicians in Mir. 29, and to the physician in Mir. 28 to indicate the treatment.

The story of the man in Mir. 30 is the most amusing: his doctors withdrew, declaring that “no human hand can heal him” and so he went to the Cosmodeion, relying on the advice of many of his friends and encouraged by the saints in an invitation dream. Seeing the saints in a second dream and believing that they were his familiar physicians, he refused to be operated on, but Cosmas and Damian completed the treatment against his will. In the end, the patient, unsatisfied with the whole business, gave instructions to the saints



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on what to apply to the wound, saying that “my illness has lasted for a long time, and with continuous operations I have learned this.”

### **The Modes of Cures in the Miracles**

People in antiquity and late antiquity had a different relationship and understanding of medicine; self-cure or cure by non-professionals was common, but the treatments of the professional medical practice were unknown to ordinary people. The treatment or advice received in dream is an imprint of the already existing medical knowledge of the patient. The therapeutic content of the dream was also shaped by the information about previous healings, the stories told in the church, the *ex-votos*, the specialisation of healers, and the cures witnessed by the patient.

Four main groups can be distinguished in the miracle collection. First, the cure is obtained immediately through the direct intervention of the saints using *medical or miraculous surgery*; second, when the cure is the result of *prescriptions* (either medical or in the form of orders, often endowed with moral character); third, the cure is *spontaneous* (which can also be the result of orders, but not involve the intervention of the saints); fourth, the cure is effected by performing *sacred acts*, either by the saints or the patients or both of them.

#### *Surgery*

Byzantine physicians were famous for their practice of delicate surgery. The patient in many miracles turned to the help of the saints when the much-feared operation was threatened by secular doctors; it is no wonder that Cosmas and Damian applied similar treatments. Two types of surgery were applied: “medical” and “miraculous” or a peculiar mixture of the two. In Mir. 1, they opened the belly of the patient with a sword and evacuated the pus; in Mir. 20 a foreigner, who would never have dared to perform an operation, made an incision on the belly with a razor “in the name of the saints.” Elsewhere (in Mir. 28), the saints appeared to a physician in a dream and showed him where and how he should make an incision on the breast of a woman, but when the doctor arrived at the church where the patient was lying he found her operated on precisely at the point indicated in the dream. Cosmas and Damian had some peculiar methods of miraculous surgery: with one finger removing something from the mouth or head of the patient, occasionally through the nostrils (12, 13, 16, 20, 34); and from time to time they did not hesitate to apply violence (1,





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30, 37). In this latter case, the resistance of the sick person was caused by the saints appearing as physicians, whom the patients usually wanted to escape by turning to the saints, and they even mention that they want to be cured by the saints not by a medical operation.<sup>57</sup> In Mir. 27 the saints appeared to the sick woman's husband as physicians and asked: "Do you know that your wife will be operated on today?" The man protested, explaining that "exactly to avoid this I have sent her to the saints, you know it yourselves, because no scalpel can touch her, for she could not bear it." The same night the saints appeared to the wife and prescribed her millet instead of the operation.

It is worth noting how accurately the tools of surgery are described: the tools (scalpel,<sup>58</sup> needles,<sup>59</sup> tampons,<sup>60</sup> lancet,<sup>61</sup> an operating room with pharmacy,<sup>62</sup> and the methods applied: fastening bandages,<sup>63</sup> massage,<sup>64</sup> irrigation,<sup>65</sup> and removal of accumulated blood or pus.<sup>66</sup> Much attention was paid to the treatment of scars; the saints often suggested (or gave) a separate medicine for follow-up care.

### *Prescriptions*

Dream prescriptions present a more colourful image of divine healing; although the number of cases when the treatment suggested had real medical value is not insignificant (curative bath, balm on scars, herbs of medical value), the secondary importance of the medicine is always underlined, and in most cases they were completed by the additional application of the sacred wax or other thaumaturgic objects such as three muscat seeds (21) or three beans (38) received

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<sup>57</sup> KDM 30: "...they [the saints] prepared themselves to operate him. But he, in the belief that they were his usual physicians who wanted to perform again an operation, tried to prevent them, swearing that he would not let them do, because he sought the help of the saints and he does not need any operation.[...]St. Cosmas said: 'Stop! I will make him silent.'" and he inserted the man's kicking legs into some rail and "then he took the scalpel and operated him in spite of his howling."

<sup>58</sup> KDM 19, 30, 42.

<sup>59</sup> KDM 11.

<sup>60</sup> KDM 23.

<sup>61</sup> KDM 47.

<sup>62</sup> KDM 30.

<sup>63</sup> KDM 17, 23, 27, 30.

<sup>64</sup> KDM 22.

<sup>65</sup> KDM 23.

<sup>66</sup> KDM 1, 13, 20.



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from the saint;<sup>67</sup> in the last case the patient is told to take the beans in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. A jealous husband is “cured” in Mir. 25 by having heard that the saints prescribed milk prepared by a faithful woman to a blind man. Moral and medical counsels were given together to the indecent man (Mir. 6): he should refrain from cursing the saints, eating meat during Lent, and taking food beginning with the letter A. The medical and the miraculous are entwined also in Mir. 22 when the saints teach massage to the patient and apply the blessed wax.

*Spontaneous cures* also figure in the saints’ healing activity. As was also dominant in the cases of Asclepician healing, such immediate cures usually occurred in a waking state. Interestingly, they overlap with the performance of sacred acts or carrying out the saints’ orders.

A *sacred act* can be performed by the patients, such as eating pork as a sign of accepting Christianity (2), singing the Trishagion (7), drinking the wall-painting of the saints (15). This category underlines the importance of prayers as a means for both promoting the cure and giving thanks for it. The saints also performed sacred acts; touching the patient, especially the diseased part of the body, was present among the *lamata* cures, here they were slightly transformed to a Christianised form, the laying-on of hands (4, 9, 42) and making the sign of the cross (27). However, these sacred acts can be performed by both of the parties, sometimes in a symbolic form; in Mir. 10 the patient took part in the Eucharist, the saints revealed its mystery and offered bread to the pagan, or in the concrete sense: in Mir. 21 the laying-on of hands and making the sign of the cross were carried out by the patient, holding the hand of the saint. A magic-like method is presented in Mir. 23, when the saints, having cured their patient, were requested to guarantee his future health. They taught the man a prayer that could be recited against every kind of illness. In the case of the Laodicean woman (Mir. 13), healed at distance, the saints “put” a little piece of wax-salve under the pillow of the sick, to be applied every night in order to ensure health, but they also intended to reward the faith of the husband and give proof of their operation.

### **The Proofs of the Miracles**

Lest the cure itself should not be enough, the saints often left behind visible signs of their interference, which also played a role in the miracle as a tangible object to marvel at. As healers, they naturally produced proofs of a medical

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<sup>67</sup> In Mir. 45 of St. Artemius, a woman similarly receives for the pains of her son three jujube berries.



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character, originating from the nature of the illness or the operation: scars, bandages, evacuated liquid. Moreover, what a secular healer would not have done, the saints make real: the bandage disappears when touched or the miraculous medicine is found in the patient's bed or the wick is missing from the lamp that the saints used in the dream.

### Conclusion

#### *The topoi of the incubation miracle. The development of the motifs of miraculous healing*

In the fifth-century narratives of the martyrdom of Saint Artemius, one finds an interesting discrepancy between the two preserved versions. In the earlier of the two, the Emperor Julian demands of Artemius that he perform a sacrifice to Apollo, but in the later version Asclepius and Zeus take Apollo's place.<sup>68</sup> Clearly, this alteration is closely bound up with the saint's powers as a healer, for which he had become famous by the time the *Passio* was written. The Christian author of the *Passio* hence used the Greek god whom the martyr denied, who by virtue of his function stood closest to the figure of Saint Artemius, also an incubation-healer, as a foil for Artemius, a negative type of healer.

The intention of the hagiographer clearly demonstrates that at this date they were still aware of the effectiveness of Asclepician healing, and of the fourth-century popularity of the cult. Therefore they and felt the necessity of establishing similar Christian counter-examples, that worked with the same powers and in the same ways. Edelstein is convinced that the hagiographers who composed the stories of Christian incubation miracles knew the Asclepician inscriptions, and "some of the reports obviously were written in competition with the miracles of Asclepius,"<sup>69</sup> which I am convinced is not subject to proof nor even of primary importance. It is probable that the fame of the Pergamon and Epidaurus sanctuaries long survived their destruction and that the sick pilgrims who came to the churches of the healing saints behaved in similar ways to the patients of the old pagan sanctuaries, especially since the practice of incubation itself remained essentially unchanged.

Through a reading of the Epidaurus texts and the miracle stories connected with St Cosmas and Damian, I have tried to demonstrate that there are certain recurring motives in the unfolding of the miracle itself, in the modes of

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<sup>68</sup> For the account on the *Passiones*, see Crisafulli – Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios*, "Introduction", 1–7.

<sup>69</sup> Edelstein, *Asclepius* II, 169.



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healing, and on the level of the narrative as well. Through a comparison of the sources, it has proved possible to establish certain groups of motifs that occur only in the ancient epigraphic tradition and some that appear only in connection with Christian healing miracles, and, finally, a number of themes that are common to both.

The primary aim of both the Classical and Christian miracle texts is the demonstration of the supernatural power of the healer. Their tone—despite the different religious backgrounds—is fundamentally similar, and this is, for the most part, a consequence of the basic motives common to all incubation miracles.

The elements that occur only in the pagan inscriptions belong naturally in a context of religious thought, a world-view germane to the Greek paganism of the fourth century BC, in which Asclepius functioned as an autonomous healer, a god in his own right with a range of responsibilities and forms that belonged only to him. The incubation narratives attached to his cult are marked by a universal tendency: *the miraculous cure is at once the epiphany of the god*. Hence, the attributes that played a part in his cult (cult statue, snake, dog) also appeared as part of his dream epiphany, and occasionally could stand by themselves for the power of the god. Another important aspect of Asclepieian dream healing is the way in which, by virtue of the practice of incubation, it stands in close relation to another religious use of dreams, *divination*. As a chthonic god, Asclepius was both healer and diviner; his sphere of influence intersected with that of Apollo, the prophetic god par excellence. I am not thinking primarily of their mythic relationship as father and son, but of cases like the one in Epidaurian miracle corpus, when the opinion of Delphi was asked as part of the process of giving a home to the miraculous healing snake of Asclepius. This points us to the next important aspect: the tendency in Greek religion *for the gods' worship and their functions, to intersect*.

#### *The ancient and Christian topoi of dream-healing*

There is a group of recurrent motives common to both sources. The double human-divine nature of the healers is expressed in both antique and Christian healing miracles in similar ways. The *punishment miracle*, incurred for offending the healer, for incredulity, or for failure to perform a promised service, is common to both. This rough pedagogy stood closely connected to the curative function, either through the fact that the sceptical patient falls so that he may be cured again, or that a patient already cured but having behaved wrongly is smitten with his original illness, and after having made amends, is healed. In the case of Asclepius, there is only one case where only punishment took place; in the practice of Cosmas and Damian it was quite common for some unpleasant



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or painful event to speed the healing. Edelstein stresses that Asclepius, in contrast with the healing saints, did not expect his patients to believe in him, and took care even of those who did not pay him proper respect. One should not forget, however, that in the case of Asclepius, it seems rather that the demonstration and recognition of his power was not a condition of the cure, but that, regardless of the propitious or unpropitious conclusion of the story, his power was inevitably confirmed. The inclusion of the punishment miracles in the Epidaurian corpus was motivated precisely by the intention to demonstrate that, beyond a certain point, one cannot make light of the god. The punishment miracle, as a motif, here intersects with the theme of *incredulity*, but the latter does not always attract retribution, since it can also occur in a context of confirmed faith, when the sufferer recognises, through his cure, the power of the god. At other times, others than the patient can question the powers of the healer: friends, lay doctors, or family members. In the Cosmas–Damian collection, there are a number of cases in which the unbeliever became the tool of divine healing; either because the saints appeared to him in a dream and made a prescription for another patient, or the unbeliever took an active part in the healing of another person.

*The involvement of a third person* in dream-healing can occur independently of this; the role of mediator made it possible, for example, for someone to practice incubation instead of a family member; in many cases, however, sanctuary personnel or even strangers became the unwitting instruments of the dream or the cure.

A different kind of proof of divine involvement is provided by those cases where other supernatural elements are bound up with the cure, such as healing from a distance, simultaneous appearances in different places, events outside the sanctuary, spontaneous or daytime healing. In these situations Asclepius and the physician-saints behaved in remarkably similar ways, and the narratives emphasise the same circumstances.

The same thing can be said about the *question of proof*, since in both ancient and Christian narratives, alongside the fact of the cure itself, the presence or absence of certain material objects is emphasised as a powerful tie binding the dream-vision to the real-world changes that took place in the body of the patient. These proofs, in the majority of cases, were the objects from the patient's body that caused the illness or the means used by the healers (from medicines to a barber's razor), and, most frequently of all, the wounds, bandages, or blood from the surgical intervention itself.

On the healing practices themselves, it can be said that they were connected more or less to the normal *medical practice of the time*, despite the colourful wondrous additions. The fourth century BC and the seventh century AD were



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periods of great interest in techniques of surgery, and this defined the character of patients' dreams and the methods chosen by the healers. Healing founded on a dream-reality analogy is present in both cases to differing degrees; sometimes in the form of a miraculous metaphor, sometimes as a dream-vision based on methods of scientific medicine.

The *experience of the sacred*, and the use of certain sacred practices was present in Asclepician cult, but took on real importance only in the cult of the Christian healers. Asclepius could also cure by the laying on of hands or a kiss, but the use of certain sacred objects is entirely missing. However, the use of sacred space was similarly present, its division by its thaumaturgic value and taboo character.

In our discussion of shared motifs we must finally emphasise the *response of the patient to the miracle*: in both cases we find that thanksgiving and a form of remuneration are expected in exchange for healing. These votive dedications, in the case of Asclepius, at the same time preserve a memorial to the miracle; they alternate between expensive dedications of cult objects, large sums of money, and simple or symbolic gifts. The most impressive punishment miracles always avenged failure to deliver a promised dedication. The physician-saints were greatly limited by the fact that they were *anargyroi*, healers who do not accept payment; the giving of thanks to God and Christ is, for them, the necessary end and closure of the cure.

#### *Christian incubation-topoi*

The survival and textual formation of the miracles of the healing saints was heavily influenced by the contradictory attitude of the Church towards the cult of the saints, the *question of relics*, and the thaumaturgic experiences connected with both. Cosmas and Damian's cult was not attached to relics (only later, after their earthly remains had been transferred westwards, did relics become an important element of their cult, e.g. in Rome or Tours); this is, however, quite exceptional among places of Christian incubation pilgrimage (Artemius, Febronia, Thecla, Cyrus, and John, etc.). The miracle writer had, therefore, to emphasise that the healing power was not to be sought in the saints themselves, the icons, or the lamp-oil, but alone in Christ, "the one true Medicus."

Still, among the methods of healing these *sacred objects and activities* made up the majority: the *kéroté*, that universal tonic; the Saturday vigil, held to be especially auspicious for incubation; the laying on of hands; the sketching of the Cross on the sick part of the patient's body; the experience of the Eucharist or even an extreme case in which the flakes of wall-plaster scraped off a fresco of the saints brings on the miraculous cure. Icons as mediators are present in three miracles, and one of these, the miracle of the fresco, was read as an argument in



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favour of icons at the Council of Nicea in 789, naturally emphasising that the image itself was not the healer, but rather mediated the cure.

The intermediary, *mediating function of the saints*, is, for the most part, strongly stressed (e.g. “it is not we who have healed you, it is Christ; give thanks to God, not to us”). At times, however, this motif is strangely repressed, when the writer compares the saints to the Apostles or to Jesus. The use of biblical metaphors brings to light the never-ending contradictions that divided the early Church over the cult of saints: they are at once like Christ and different from him. The same can be said of the way in which, going beyond their strictly defined medical prerogatives, the saints involved themselves in preserving *the health of the soul*: the meaning of *salus*, at once salvation and health, helps to explain the unique, and at times absurd, aspects of the activities of the physician-saints. As a condition or result of healing, the patient attained faith, and frequently underwent a radical re-evaluation of his earlier values and habits, which then did not suit the character of a recipient of divine grace.

Similar to these problems resulting from the intermediary status of the saints are those issues of a *theological or ecclesiastical nature* in which the recorder of the miracle narrative was compelled to take sides in order to clearly demonstrate that the practices going on in the Cosmodeion were compatible with the most stringent demands of orthodoxy. He included for this reason the stories in which the saints encountered heretics, Jews, or pagans. The treatment meted out differed from case to case: either conversion was the condition of healing, or else the patient converted as a result of the cure; in a single case the heretic, having regained his health, remained a heretic, and with this incurred the anger of the saints, who expelled him quickly from the church.

All of these, together, explain why the healing miracle did not any longer stand on its own as a sign of divine activity or the power of the saints, but was built into the liturgy of a given sanctuary. It is clear from the Cosmas-Damian collection who heard of the miracles and how: it is likely that they were read to the congregation at the Saturday *vigilia*, but freshly-healed patients also told those awaiting their turn what had happened to them. The author of the fourth part of the collection is a former patient, who, during the time he spent at the church wrote down the stories of the miraculous cures that had befallen his companions, and of which he heard through the oral tradition of the place. The inclusion of more general theological remarks as part of the interpretation of the miracle as the corpus widened is proof that the miracle was on the way to becoming an exemplar, or parable, to strengthen the faith of believers.

The further study of early medieval collections of the miracles of healing saints would contribute to understanding the development of the incubation practice over its entire course and would shed light on the changing concept of





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the wondrous in Christianity, which is different from, although not totally incompatible with ancient views.

*Table 1. The miracles of Saints Cosmas and Damian*

Patient	Specification	Illness	Characteristic of the miracle	Type of contact	Type of cure
1. man	very old, irascible, probably rich	dropsy	blasphemy, punishment cure	daytime appearance + dream	surgery in dream
2. woman	Jew	cancer	conversion as condition	dream (implied)	prescription, spontaneous
3. man	palace officer	retention of urine	word game	dream	prescription miraculous
4. man	young son of a palace officer	paralysis (by a demon)	parallel to John 5:8	not specified, prob. dream	laying-on of hands
5. man		abscess in the stomach	operated on first by doctors	not specified	surgical intervention
6. man	old, irascible	vomiting blood	blasphemy, order as condition	dream to another person	prescription miraculous - moral
7. woman	great faith	deaf and dumb	no incubation	sacred act	spontaneous
8. woman		pain in the womb	—	vision	medical prescription
9. man	pagan lawyer or scholar	not specified	took the saints Castor & Pollux conversion	dream	laying-on of hands
10. man	pagan merchant	seeking faith	conversion, regular incubation	dream	witnessing the Eucharist
11. man	passion for horse-racing	abscess in the breast	punishment cure	repeated dreams	prescription miraculous



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12. woman, Martha	wife of a clergyman, ex-prosti- tute rich, beautiful	pain in the skull (by a demon)	order, partial cure	repeated dreams	surgical intervention
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Patient	Speci- fication	Illness	Characteristic of the miracle	Type of contact	Type of cure
13. woman from Laodicea	wife of Constantin the soldier	abscess in the jaw	mediation of image of the saints	repeated dreams (not sought)	surgical intervention + prescription
14. man	very old priest	paralysis	saint as bath boy	daytime appearance	spontaneous
15. woman	of great faith	colic	mediation of image of the saints	drinking plasters of the image	spontaneous
16. a man, his wife and sister-in- law	faithful man, (palace officer) incredu- lous wife	rectal wound; pain in the throat (2)	orders, bad joke, punishment cure	repeated dreams	prescription; medical intervention by force
17. man	heretic (Arian)	paralysis	no conversion angry saints	repeated dreams	surgical intervention
18. man	old tutor	poverty; illness unspecified	pray also to Mary	daytime appearance + dream	not specified
19. woman	—	dropsy	a stranger heals in the name of the saints	daytime appearance	surgical intervention
20. man	young, son of man of great faith	vomiting blood	mediation of the father	dream to another person	surgical intervention
21. man	illustrious palace officer (?)	pain in the stomach and heart	order to stay longer	repeated dreams	prescription + laying-on of hands
22. man	rich, high church officer	chime and sarcosis on the testicles + bad eyesight	mediation of a friend	dream	prescription + surgical intervention
23. man of Constantin- ople	deacon	colic + inflamma- tion on the pubis	rivalry with physicians	repeated dreams	surgical inter- ventions



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Patient	Speci- fication	Illness	Characteristic of the miracle	Type of contact	Type of cure
24. man + woman	noble lady	paralysis; dumbness	blasphemious order, double cure	repeated dreams	spontaneous
25. couple + man	husband jealous, wife faithful	not spec; blindness	double cure	dream	prescription miraculous
26. man + woman	heretic priest of high rank, noble lady	incredulity; pain in the breast	double cure	dream to another person	prescription miraculous
27. man	of great faith priest or church servant	broken leg (caused by the devil)	partial cure	repeated dreams	surgical + sacred acts
28. woman	—	tumour in the breast (demon)	—	dream to another person	miraculous surgery
29. woman	after the first childbirth	milk clotted	mediation of the husband	dream + dream to another person	prescription
30. man	“of great qualities”, ill for 15 years	fistula at the hip	Mary’s intervention, mediation of an image	repeated dreams	surgery + prescription
31. man	beggar	paralysis	mediation of a stranger	prayer of another	not specified, partial cure
32. man	lawyer with a concubine	abscess in the jaw	moral order as condition	dreams to other persons	prescription
34. men Victor; Hersperos	lawyer; butcher	cancer; paralysis	joke; double cure	repeated dreams	spontaneous
35. man	mercenary soldier	tube in the breast (?)	sick refers to Luc. 7:38	repeated dreams	miraculous surgery

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Patient	Speci- fication	Illness	Characteristic of the miracle	Type of contact	Type of cure
36. child	four-year- old	blindness (by the devil)	mediation of the mother	dream to another person (not sought)	prescription
37. man	lieutenant	intestinal disease	punishment cure	dream	miraculous surgery
38. man	priest	dropsy		dream	prescription miraculous
39. three men	friend of the emperor; actor; beggar	not specified	orders&jokes triple cure	repeated dreams	prescription miraculous,
40. a young girl, Theodora	daughter of admin- istrator of public funds	“all kinds of illnesses”		not specified	not specified
41. man, Gregorios	choir master	wound on the head	performed at the yearly feast of the saints	not sought dream	surgery
42. man, Blemmides	surveyor	anthrax on the hand	near the monastery of the saints	not sought dream	surgery
43. man	herd of the cattle	no illness	near the monastery of the saints	real appearance	punishment miracle: inflicting blindness
44. boy	deck boy	no illness	shipwreck	invocation of the saints	
45. men on the ship	—	no illness	shipwreck	daytime vision	
46. a log	—	no illness	shipwreck	—	
47. man, Makarios	monk from the Pelo- ponnesus	diarrhoea	in the monastery of the saints	daytime appearance	medical prescription



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