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Pilgrimage for dreams in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium: continuity of the pagan ritual or development within Christian miracle tradition?

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Abstract

In Late Antiquity the Greco-Roman religions were replaced by Christianity, which developed from a small movement to the leading religion of the whole Mediterranean. Inevitably some old traditions were incorporated into the new religion, but one should not assume that the processes of syncretism were simple and straightforward. In some cults of the martyrs, pilgrims and locals sought healing by sleeping in their churches and seeking visions of the holy figures in their dreams (the phenomenon is called “incubation”). This article argues against Early Christian incubation being a ritual that was copied and taken over from the pagan incubation ritual, as has been stated in previous research, and shows that many different factors served to create this somewhat unorthodox Christian healing ritual.

Introduction

Incubation is a ritual where a help-seeker comes to a sanctuary to enquire the god, hero, or saint of the sanctuary for assistance. Ritual preparations are made before lying down to sleep in the sanctuary, or, in the Christian tradition, the church.¹ During the sleep the divinity or saint

¹ I would like to thank Ewa Balicka Witakowska and Arja Karivieri for a thorough and insightful reading of the manuscript, as well as Gunnel Ekroth, James Kelhoffer and

appears to the worshipper, either, apparently, curing him or her from illness directly while sleeping, or giving advice on what to do in order to get well, or answering any type of question the enquirer has put. In the Greek world incubation is first attested in Herodotus, who writes about the hero Amphiaraos being consulted concerning the future.² Incubation performed primarily for healing purposes appeared first in the cult of Asklepios, a son of Apollo, known from the *Iliad* as a master surgeon and administrator of medicinal herbs.³ In his sanctuary at Epidauros, incubation is first attested in the *iamata*, a collection of miracle stories from the fourth century BC (the stories themselves may be older). In 420 BC the cult of Asklepios was imported from Epidauros to Athens, and at this time incubation was the key feature of the cult.⁴ After this, the cult soon spread to all parts of the Greek world, and also to Rome.⁵ The ubiquity of the type of religious healing that the cult of Asklepios offered can be witnessed in the over 300 sanctuaries to Asklepios found all over the Mediterranean area.⁶ Among the most important and frequently visited were, in addition to Epidauros, Kos, Lebena, Pergamon, Aegae, Kyrene and the sanctuary of Asklepios on the Tiber island.⁷

Ingela Nilsson who invited me to present this article at their seminars and for the many helpful comments I received there. This article developed from my article on pagan and Early Christian incubation, published in *Proceedings of the Danish Institute at Athens* in 2009. After I had sent this article in for publication, an excellent article by Fritz Graf appeared. Although we treat the same topic, the relation between pagan and Early Christian incubation, these are two individual articles with different approaches and treating different source material.

For an analysis of the archaeological evidence for pagan and Early Christian incubation, see Ehrenheim 2009. It is important to distinguish institutionalized incubation from spontaneous miraculous dreams with a healing result which were had in any locale and not one designed especially for the purpose: see e.g. Cox Miller 1994: 148-183, 205-249; for the important distinction, see Ehrenheim 2009: 253, nn. 123-125 and Graf 2014: 138-140. These are related phenomena, which may overlap, but are best studied as separate categories.

² Hdt. 8.134.

³ *Il.* 2.729-731, 4.194, 4.219 and 11.518.

⁴ As seen on the Telemachos stele: Beschi 1982: 39-40; Beschi 2002: 21-22.

⁵ Wickkiser 2008; Edelstein & Edelstein 1945.

⁶ Riethmüller 2005, vol. 1: 75-77.

⁷ See Riethmüller 2005 on the Asklepieia.

With the coming of Christianity, Epidauros, Pergamon and Aegae were no longer active by the end of the fourth century AD. The last inscription at Epidauros is dated to AD 355.⁸ The Athenian Asklepieion, though, was in use as late as the fifth century, when the neoplatonist philosopher Proclus (d. AD 485) went there to pray.⁹ There is evidence for rebuilding at former Asklepieia in Christian times, but based on the archaeological evidence it cannot be said if the purpose was always religious, or to what extent the buildings were reused.¹⁰

Incubation in the Christian tradition appears in an organized way for the first time in the cult of Thekla in Cilicia, Asia Minor, in the fifth century AD.¹¹ Later on, in some cults of martyrs, as testified by miracle collections, incubation became the primary and eagerly sought method for obtaining a cure. Incubation miracles are preserved in several cults. Apart from the cult of Thekla we find them in the cults of Kosmas and Damianos as well as Artemios in Constantinople, and Kyros and Johannes in Menouthis outside of Alexandria.¹² Incubation miracles are also attested from the cult of Demetrios in Thessalonike.¹³

⁸ Trombley 1993, vol. 1, 119 (Epidauros in use until at least the middle of the fourth century); and Eusebius of Caesarea, *De vita Constantini* 3.56 (testimonium 818 in Edelstein & Edelstein 1945: Asklepieion at Aegae destroyed by Constantine in 326. In Syria the cult of Asklepios was eradicated by the authorities in the fourth century but Theodoretus (393-466) feared that the populace still worshipped Asklepios with libations and sacrifice (Theodoretus, *Graecarum Affectionum Curatio* 8.19-23 [testimonium 5 in Edelstein & Edelstein 1945]).

⁹ Marinus, *Vita Procli* 29 (testimonium 582 in Edelstein & Edelstein 1945). See also Trombley (1993, vol. 1: 294, 308-309 and 323) and Price (1999: 169) on the Athenian Asklepieion.

¹⁰ Vaes 1984-86: 333, n. 79.

¹¹ See the miracle stories of Thekla, written down by the mid fifth century (Dagron 1978: 17-19).

¹² *Life of S. Thekla*, ed. Dagron 1978; *Kosmas und Damian*, ed. L. Deubner. Leipzig and Berlin 1907; N. Fernandez Marcos, *Los thaumata de Sofronio. Contribución al estudio de la incubatio cristiana*, Madrid 1975; *The miracles of St. Artemios. A collection of miracle stories by an anonymous author of seventh-century Byzantium*, eds. V.S. Crisafulli & J.W. Nesbitt, Leiden, New York and Köln 1997. On the structure of Byzantine dream-healing miracle stories, see Constantinou 2014. See further Csepregi 2007 (non vidi).

¹³ *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint Démétrius*, vols. 1-2, ed. P. Lemerle,

These miracles have been composed or collected by different authors with different motives for narrating these events.¹⁴ Some miracle stories were part of an oral culture, where miracles might be told and retold similarly to tales. Some stories may reappear in miracle collections belonging to different cults.¹⁵ Most of these stories, however, give a detailed description of the churches themselves in which the worshippers incubated. Moreover, several of the stories provide us with such detailed information on names and the geographical provenience of the worshippers that it has been argued that they were written down from accounts of healings recorded by each church and read aloud at services for newcomers.¹⁶

In this article, the miracle stories are used to locate the cult geographically, and to seek out information on the ritual surrounding the sleeping itself. The information on ritual is most often given in passing, and serves as a backdrop for the miraculous events about to follow. It might thus be expected that information about the ritual falls back on actual events in the churches. Otherwise the stories, often read aloud in the church, would not make sense to their listeners.

In previous research, the general assumption is that there existed a direct continuity between the pagan ritual and incubation as practised in the cult of the Early Christian saints.¹⁷ It has been claimed that the Christian church consciously and at an official level wanted to eradicate paganism by “taking over” pagan cults, and that the ritual of incubation was included in the bargain, more or less without changing the ritual.¹⁸

Paris 1979-1981.

¹⁴ See e.g. Crisafulli & Nesbitt 1997: 25-27, and Csepregi 2013.

¹⁵ As for example the story of the lame man and the mute woman, found as mir. 24 of Kosmas and Damianos' collection, cited in mir. 30 of Kyros and Johannes and also found in the collection of miracles attributed to St Menas (Delehaye 1927, 147), as well as a similar story in the miracles of Colluthus (*ABoll* 98, 1980: 363-380 [P. Devos]).

¹⁶ Festugière 1971: 85-86; Crisafulli & Nesbitt 1997. 27.

¹⁷ Deubner 1900: 57, 97-98, *passim*; Hamilton 1906: 110-111; Becher 1970: 255; Stewart 2004, *passim*; Markschie 2007: 177-178; Oberhelman 2008: 53. Contra, though, recently: Wiesniewski 2013 and Graf 2014.

¹⁸ On the phenomenon of divine healing traditions being transferred directly: MacMul-

It seems, however, that a simplistic case for a direct local and ritual continuity from pagan to Early Christian incubation cannot be made. I have pointed this out in a previous article, mainly focused on the archaeological evidence, and it was also excellently argued by Fritz Graf in his article of 2014. The main argument of Graf is that Christian theology had a problem with oracular dreams in general and dreams perceived as oracular by the laity especially, given the hierarchical structure of the Church.¹⁹ He also argues that pagan incubation must have effectively died out with Theodosius decree in 393 prohibiting public sacrifice.²⁰ Essentially, he sees dream healing as a universal occurrence, possibly kept alive at the site of Menouthis, but in its essence specific to the world of Christianity.²¹

In this article I will try to give a further background to the complex processes that made incubation appear as a prominent feature in some of the Early Christian martyr cults.

This article will examine, first, the evidence for a direct local continuity of incubation, where a pagan practice of incubation would have been introduced in a Christian cult established for the same group of worshippers, it having been stated in previous research that such a direct and officially driven continuity exists. Second, the question of ritual continuity between pagan and Early Christian incubation will be analysed, it having also been argued in previous research that such continuities can be shown. Third and last, the phenomenon of Early Christian incubation will be analyzed in its historical context; to be highlighted are the emergence of the cult of the martyrs from the perspective both of the laity and of the officials of the church, and the different miracle traditions that developed in these cults.

len 1997: 127. On the official instating of Christian incubation at Menouthis, see Leipoldt 1957: 40-44; Takács 1994: 503-506; Merkelbach 1995: 200, 327-328 and Frankfurter 1998: 165. On Thekla, as well as incubation in general terms, see Cox Miller 1994: 117, "Asclepius lived on in Christianity in the cult of the saints".

¹⁹ Graf 2014: 120, 124 and 127. He builds this argument on his previous article on the topic (Graf 2010), as well as the work of Le Goff (1988: 193-231) and Stroumsa (1999: 189-212).

²⁰ Graf 2014: 121.

²¹ Graf 2014: 141-142.

THE QUESTION OF LOCAL CONTINUITY

The first step when investigating continuity of the practice is to find out if a local continuity can be shown, that is, whether there existed nearby pagan incubation cults preceding the Early Christian ones. Deubner argues that the continuity of the incubation phenomenon into Early Christian times can be seen directly on each site, and tries to find a pagan predecessor in the vicinity of every Early Christian incubation cult.²²

Thekla and Sarpedon in Cilicia

According to legend Thekla was a disciple of the apostle Paul and followed him on his journeys dressed as a man.²³ Her *vita* was very popular, and among other places she was venerated in her main sanctuary near Seleucia, called Hagia Thekla, on the border between Cilicia and Isauria.²⁴ A collection of miracles was written by an anonymous writer, with some position of authority within the Church, in the middle of the fifth century AD.²⁵ The majority of the miracles noted down involved incubation.²⁶ Some scholars have suggested that the cult of Thekla replaced a nearby cult of the hero Sarpedon, stating that incubation was also the main feature in this pagan cult.²⁷ The miracles tell of an oracle

²² Deubner 1900: 65-103.

²³ *Life of S. Thekla*, ed. Dagron 1978.

²⁴ See e.g. Kötting (1950: 140-160) and Dagron (1978: 55-139) on her cult.

²⁵ Dagron 1978: 17-19 and *ODB* 3, 1991: 2033-2034.

²⁶ Graf (2014: 134) states that the fact that curative dreams occur all around the sanctuary and not only in the church, serves to disqualify the cult of Thekla as an incubation cult. This is of course a matter of definition. I have argued previously (Ehrenheim 2009:254-255), that the cult is an incubation cult, and that the focus of it is not as uniquely the church, as Thekla did not have a grave there, but was believed to have disappeared miraculously in the rock. It is also one of the earliest Christian incubation cults, showing their close kinship with martyr cults and Early Christian miracles in general.

²⁷ Deubner 1900: 101-102; Cox Miller 1994: 117; Nissen 2001: 124. Dagron (1978: 81-82) is of the opinion that the temple of Sarpedon was replaced by a community of monks.

to Sarpedon acting as a competitor to the Christian cult.²⁸ Thus, the two cults co-existed for a time. Also Stephen Hill, documenting the architectural remains of Hagia Thekla, puts forward the hypothesis that the *temenos* wall of the basilica, which may be of a pre-Christian date together with some re-used Doric columns in the rock-cut church (one of the churches in the sanctuary) indicate that Hagia Thekla might be built on the site of an ancient pagan sanctuary.²⁹ Even if there exist remnants of buildings at Hagia Thekla that are older than the Christian sanctuary, these remains do not necessarily indicate cult and need not have come from a pagan sanctuary. Hill postulates a religious use of a wall possibly dating to pagan times, since the place later became the sanctuary of Thekla. Many explanations might be put forward as to why a Christian sanctuary was located there, apart from it being the site of a previous pagan cult. The availability of water and the site being a node in the trade roads going from the interior of Anatolia down the Cilician pass may be part of the explanation. In any case, the lack of excavations on the site make it impossible to draw any definite conclusions.

Concerning the historical background of the cult it has been stated that the cult of Thekla had to suppress a number of pagan cults in the area in order to establish its supremacy, and that the ones that the ones most difficult to get rid of were those of Sarpedon and Athena.³⁰ The cult of Thekla used epithets characteristic of these two pagan gods, *παρθε/νο* (Athena/Thekla) and *ξένο*ς (Sarpedon) / *ξένη* (Thekla). Since this is the only testimony to a cult of Athena in the area and since incubation was never practised in the cult of Athena, the likelihood of a previous cult of Athena contributing to the emergence of incubation in the cult of Thekla is very small. The term Parthenos was furthermore also used as an epithet of the virgin Mary, so the connotation need not be pagan. To argue for a direct continuity between a pagan incubation cult and the cult of Thekla, it must first be proved that the cult of Sarpedon used incubation as its oracular technique. There is no archaeological site which might be connected with the cult of Sarpedon in Cilicia. The only source

²⁸ *Miracles of Thekla* nos. 11, 18 and 40.

²⁹ Hill 1996: 213.

³⁰ Davis 2001: 73-80.

speaking of dream-oracles in the cult of Sarpedon is Tertullian (d. ca AD 240), *De anima* 46. In this text he gives a list of dream-oracles of the ancient world. As was often the case with ancient writers, his account was not based on first hand knowledge of these cults, but according to the editor the dream oracles were copied from texts by Origen, Philo and Clement of Alexandria.³¹ Tertullian thus builds his argument on older authors who had never visited Cilicia. The miracles of Thekla, written while the cult of Sarpedon must have been in existence, is a more reliable source for the oracular technique being used in the cult of Sarpedon. One of the miracles of the collection tells of a woman who went to the oracle of Sarpedon to heal her grandson. Sarpedon however did not help, the author comments, “either he kept quiet altogether, or he, as he usually does, fooled the woman and sent her away without any benefit after having given some worthless riddle, a fable, or after not having opened his mouth at all”.³² Thekla then appeared to the grandmother and gave a prescription on how to cure the boy.

As for these techniques, the first sentence, that Sarpedon kept quiet, does not indicate whether it was the worshipper or an oracular priest who contacted Sarpedon. The second item of information, to sending away of the worshipper with a worthless riddle, may indicate some form of adjustment of the answer, made by authorities at the sanctuary. It may, however, also indicate that the answer was given directly to the enquirer by some form of visual or auditory vision, but that it was incomprehensible.

To turn now to the early history of Hagia Thekla, the sanctuary attracted many pilgrims already in the time of the pilgrim Egeria (who lived in the fourth century), but she, a diligent observer of miraculous phenomena, never mentions incubation.³³

³¹ Tertullianus, *De anima*, ed. J.H. Waszink, Amsterdam 1947: 497.

³² “... οὐδ’ αὐτὸς ἔσχεν εἰπεῖν τρόπον θεραπείας, ἢ καθάπαξ ἀποσιωπήσας, ἢ καὶ – ὡς σύνηθες αὐτῷ – τὸ γύναιον ἀπατήσας καὶ ἀνόνητον ἀποπέμψας, ἢ γρίφον ἢ μῦθον ἢ οὐδ’ ὄλως ἀποφηνάμενος. ...”. In the translation of Dagron (1978: 313, mir. 11): “lui non plus ne sut indiquer le moyen de guérir, soit qu’il se fût tout à fait tu, soit que (comme c’est son habitude) il eût trompé la femme et l’eût renvoyée sans profit après avoir proféré une énigme, une fable, ou n’avoir pas du tout ouvert la bouche”.

³³ *Egeria, Itineraria* 23.2-7, ed. Maraval 1997: 226-231. Egeria stayed in Jerusalem from

Not all of the anonymous miracles of Thekla written down in the fifth century involved incubation.³⁴ It may be that incubation in the sanctuary of Thekla was not practised at first, her miracles being performed in the same way as most miracles in Early Christianity, by prayer at the tomb of the martyr; and incubation as a technique may have spread gradually over the century. At least in part Christian incubation may have been influenced by the healing techniques of the cult of Sarpedon, using visions of some sort. Other examples are known from the fourth century in nearby Cappadocia, where local Christianity bore decidedly syncretistic traits.³⁵

One might postulate that the cult of Thekla sought to replace the cults of Sarpedon and Athena, but it need not be the case that incubation was initially incorporated into the Christian cult in order to make it a better competitor. The evidence at hand on a cult to Sarpedon neither refutes nor proves that he gave dream-oracles directly to his worshippers. In miracle 40, a man coming to Hagia Thekla believed that Sarpedon had sent him there in order to get healed with the help of the holy oil hanging above her shrine. This gives us no information on the technique of healing used in the cult of Sarpedon, but confirms the co-existence of a pagan and a Christian religious resource in the mind of an ordinary person in late antiquity.

Kyros and Johannes (and Isis) at Menouthis

Kyros and Johannes were according to the legend martyred in Alexandria under Diocletian, and at least one of them was considered to be a doctor.³⁶ Due to there being a larger amount of substantial source ma-

381-384: see the edition of Natalucci.

³⁴ Miracles effected by prayer alone (no incubation): 20, 23 and 24. Thekla interfering in a storm, helping seafarers: 15. Thekla helping against robbers: 16 and 28. The saint appears in a waking vision: 19 and 31.

³⁵ Trombley 1994 vol. 2: 120-121. A local deacon, Glykerios, arranged a festival with a decidedly pagan style of dancing in 372, and the matter gave rise to some scolding from Basil of Caesarea.

³⁶ *ODB* 2, 1991: 1164. See Gascou 2007, esp. 262-263, for the legendary character of the vitae.

terial than for the other Early Christian incubation cults, much has been written about a possible replacement of a cult of Isis at Menouthis, a village close to Alexandria, by the cult of the martyrs Kyros and Johannes. The site itself is today most probably under water.³⁷

The earliest mention of a cult to Isis at Menouthis is in a papyrus from the second century AD.³⁸ Here Isis in Menouthis is given the epithet ἀλήθιναν, and one might guess that this implies her giving oracles at this site.³⁹ Since incubation was offered in the cult of Sarapis located close by at Kanopos,⁴⁰ and since incubation was a key feature in other

³⁷ The temple of Isis as well as the ancient healing shrine of the martyrs Kyros and Johannes were situated at the modern site of Abuqir three kilometres east of Kanopos, about nineteen kilometres east of Alexandria. Stephanos of Byzantium (first half of the sixth century AD) and Zacharias the Orator (writing between 511 and 518) refer to Menouthis as a village lying close to Kanopos (cited and translated in Bernard 1970: 207-208). The temple of Isis is further to have also served as a pharos for incoming ships (McGuckin 1993: 292), so it would seem probable that the medieval fort, still standing, was on the same spot. According to Bernard the site is mainly identified by aerial photographs and underwater surveys suggest that it lies mainly under water at the bay (Bernard 1970: 292-293). This fits well with the evidence of Sophronios (born c. 550, bishop in Jerusalem 634-638), who described the sanctuary of Kyros and Johannes at Menouthis as lying just by the sea-shore (Sophronios of Jerusalem, *Laudes in SS. Cyrum et Ioannem*, *PG* 87, 3416. Translation in Bernard 1970: 216-217). The excavations made by Albert Daninos at Abuqir in 1917 were unfortunately never published, and those finds that were noted consisted mainly of pre-Christian monumental sculpture. The remains visible on the site have been described by Breccia (Breccia 1914: 134-138; Breccia 1926: 35-50, See also the maps of the *Expédition en Égypte 1830-31*), none however have been identified as either the temple of Isis and the church of Kyros and Johannes (Empereur 1998: 180. See further the website of Franck Goddio, who has made underwater surveys in the area (www.franckgoddio.org), and the reports of Paolo Gallo at www.archaeogate.org on excavations at Nelson Island).

³⁸ In the *Pap. Oxyrh.* XI.1380.63 (second c. AC), on Isis: “... ἐν Μεν[ο]ύθι ἀλήθιναν...”. The by-name suggests that she is present in Menouthis and that she gives true oracles. For the presence of Isis in Menouthis see also Vidman 1969, no. 403 (*IG* XIV.1005) (time of Antoninus Pius) and no. 556a (possibly of the time of Alexander Severus). In general on incubation in the cult of Isis, see Dunand 1973, vol. 2: 102-103.

³⁹ Frankfurter writes that the attribution of “truth” to Isis of Menouthis is likely to refer to her true oracles (Frankfurter 1998: 163).

⁴⁰ Strab. *Geogr.* 17.1.17, “Canope est une ville située à cent vingt stades d’Alexandrie, si l’on prend la route de terre; elle tire son nom de Canope, pilote de Ménélas, qui

cults of Isis, it may be assumed to have been offered in the cult at this time.⁴¹ It has been argued in previous research that the later events, i.e. cultic takeover, at Menouthis would not make sense unless Isis appeared in dreams.⁴²

The cult of the martyrs was according to a text ascribed to bishop Kyrillos established by the same. In the text he claims to have found the bones of the martyrs in Alexandria in a miraculous manner and transferred them to Menouthis some time before 429.⁴³ If this were true, the

mourut ici même; eller possède le sanctuaire de Sarapis, objet d'une grande vénération, car il s'y opère des guérisons, en sorte que les gens de la haute qualité y ajoutent foi et viennent s'endormir là pour leur propre guérison, ou bien d'autres s'endorment à leur place; certains consistent même par écrit ces guérisons, d'autres, des preuves de l'efficacité des oracles qui y sont rendus. ...” (translation Bernard 1970: 183).

⁴¹ E.g. Diod.Sic. *Hist.* 1.25.3-7; Cic. *De divin.* 1.58.132. This general remark on the cult of Isis made by Diodorus Siculus, argued by Frankfurter (Frankfurter 1998: 162-163) to have its information primarily from the cult of Isis at Kanopos. (Diod. Sic. *Hist.* 1.25.3, 5 (stayed in Egypt 60-56 BC), translation by Oldfather (Loeb Classical Library) vol. 1, 81: “Isis ... finds her greatest delight in the healing of mankind and gives aid in their sleep to those who call upon her, plainly manifesting both her very presence and her beneficence towards men who ask her help. ... For standing above the sick in their sleep she gives them aid for their diseases and works remarkable cures upon such as submit themselves to her; and many who have been despaired of by their physicians because of the difficult nature of their malady are restored to health by her, while numbers who have altogether lost the use of their eyes or of some other part of their body, whenever they turn to this goddess, are restored to their previous condition.”)

⁴² Sansterre 1991: 72.

⁴³ Kyrillos of Alexandria, *Oratiunculae tres in translatione reliquiarum SS. Martyrum Cyri et Joannis*, PG 77, 1099-1106. The story is also retold in Sophronios, *Alia vita acephala sanctorum martyrum Cyri et Joannis*, PG 87, 3689-3696, translated in Bernard 1970: 214-216. Previous researchers in favor of Kyrillos establishing the cult: Delehay 1911: 448-450; McGuckin 1993: 291-292; Monserrat 1998: 262-263; Grossmann 2002: 218. Delehay thinks that the *translatio* of the relics is alluded to in a text of Eunapius (d. after 414), written before Petros Mongos. They argue that even though Zacharias (see below) does not mention a shrine to the martyrs, this is not a valid argument that it did not exist. Among other things, McGuckin argues that the church was indeed actively seeking to christianize Menouthis before 429, something which renders the hypothesis of Kyrillos' speech being a forgery less likely.

A church to the Evangelists was built beside this official temple of Isis by Kyrillos' uncle, Theophilus of Alexandria, at the end of the fourth century (Bernard 1970: 200-

official temple of Isis was probably destroyed by Kyrillos at this time, although there is no evidence for this.⁴⁴ According to Zacharias the Orator, writing between 511 and 518 but relating events that took place sometime between 485 and 487, a private sanctuary of Isis remained on the same site, in which cult dream epiphanies were given, until it was destroyed by the bishop Mongos in the years 485-487.⁴⁵ Zacharias mentions a church near the private sanctuary, but does not say to whom it was dedicated. This has led some researchers to believe that the speech of Kyrillos upon founding the cult of Kyros and Johannes at Menouthis is in fact a forgery and that the cult to Kyros and Johannes may have been established by Petros Mongos, or even later.⁴⁶

Cultic reappropriations at many other sites are known to have taken place gradually. The important point when establishing possible cultic continuity of incubation is, however, not who founded the cult of the two saints officially, but how incubation came to be included in the Christian cult. Was it introduced by an official founder, or was it gradu-

205, 214-217, 321-323; Thélamon 1981: 246-259). See further Gascou 2007 with a helpful discussion.

⁴⁴ Bernard 1970: 322-323.

⁴⁵ Bishop of Alexandria 477-490: *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* 2, 1992, s.v. Peter Mongus. The events were testified by Zacharias the Orator, a student in Alexandria at the time of these events: Herzog 1939: 121; Sansterre 1991: 73. According to Monserrat 1998: 261, ca 489 AC; Zacharias the Orator, *Vita Severi*, PO 2, 1907: 7-115, esp. 14-35. The text was written between 511 and 518 and is cited in Bernard 1970: 207-213). Zacharias tells of a man, Paralios, who was disappointed with an ineffective cure and led the bishop to a private sanctuary hidden in a house where there was a blooded sacrificial altar and several pagan cultic statues, apparently saved from many different destroyed sanctuaries. They took the statues to a nearby church (the text does not reveal which church) and prayed all night in fear of the idols they were guarding. In the morning, they all emerged safe and sound from the church, much to the surprise of the pagans. The account does not say what happened to the idols, but probably they were taken to Alexandria and destroyed.

⁴⁶ This has been argued by Duchesne (1910: 10-12), Wipszycka (1988: 142) and Frankfurter (1998: 165). Frankfurter thus believes in a translation of the relics after the destruction of the Isis shrine in 484, at the time of the narration of Zacharias. Gascou (2007: 279-280) disbelieves the historical accuracy of the text of Zacharias the Orator, hypothesizing that the cult was established later in the sixth century, but before Sofronios wrote his text of course.

ally included in the Christian cult, because this was the healing method that the people living in the area wanted and expected?

Incubation in the church of Kyros and Johannes is first attested from 610, when bishop Sophronios of Jerusalem wrote a collection of miracle stories, giving elaborate evidence on the cult of Kyros and Johannes.⁴⁷ More than 100 years after the destruction of the private sanctuary of Isis by Petros Mongos, Sophronios writes that pagans still existed in Menouthis and came to the church expecting to experience miracles, although, according to Sophronios, the temple of Isis with its altars had vanished under the sands.⁴⁸

The text ascribed to Kyrillos describes the events of the alleged cultic takeover just before 429 “ οὐδείς γάρ ἡμῖν ὄνειράτα πλάττεται· οὐδείς λέγει τοῖς ἐρχόμενοις· Εἴρηκεν ἡ Κύρα· Ποιήσον τὸ καὶ τό·” (“Nobody falsifies dreams for us. No one says to those who come: the lady has spoken: do this and that!”).⁴⁹ One gets the impression, as has been observed by McGuckin, that the priests of Isis dream for the suppliants, who then receive instruction on what to do in order to get well.⁵⁰ It is probable that the cult of Isis at Menouthis, like so many ancient

⁴⁷ Edition by Fernandez Marcos (1975) and in the *Patrologia Graeca*: Sophronios, *Narratio miraculorum SS. Cyri et Joannis*, PG 87, 3423-3676. On the date, see Sansterre 1991: 69. Pages in the *Patrologia Graeca* cited below from Sophronios, *Narratio miraculorum SS. Cyri et Joannis*, PG 87, 3423-3676.

⁴⁸ For pagans coming to the saints, see miracle 32 (PG 87, 3523-3532). For the temple of Isis having vanished under the sands, see miracle 66 (PG 87, 3649C).

⁴⁹ Kyrillos of Alexandria, *Oratiunculae tres in translatione reliquiarum SS. Martyrem Cyri et Joannis*, PG 77, 1099-1106, esp. 1105 (my translation). For the translation of πλάττεται as “falsifies” rather than “invents”, cf. Lampe s.v. πλάσσω, B. Cf. translations by Herzog 1939: 120 and Sansterre 1991: 72, using “invents” instead. Cf., from the same text attributed to Kyrillos: (PG 77, 1102, translation MacMullen 1997: 123-124): “These districts were in need of medical services from God, ... those who had no martyr shrine went off to other [i.e. Isis’] places, and, being Christians, thus went astray; so, out of necessity, for this reason we sought out the remains of holy martyrs.”

⁵⁰ MacGuckin 1993: 292. One objection could be made to what McGuckin writes: he takes it as a fact that offerings were always made in order to receive an oracle from the priests of Isis. One has to bear in mind that the Church had a reason for describing the cult of Isis as greedy, in contrast to the martyrs who worked for free.

oracle cults, used a variety of oracular techniques, here based on dream oracles and dream healing.

There is evidence, though, that Isis appeared in dreams to worshippers at Menouthis in the sixth century AD. Zacharias the Orator tells a story of a man who wanted a child and allegedly stayed at Menouthis for some time and offered numerous sacrifices.⁵¹ He was visited by Isis in his dreams, and turned to the priests of Isis to interpret the dream. Later in the text, it is made clear that Isis regularly showed herself in dreams.⁵² The same man, having sacrificed without result and being disappointed with the cult of Isis, reveals to ecclesiastics where in the house the “idols” and the altar of Isis at Menouthis were hidden, as well as the identity of the pagan priest.⁵³ This leads to the search and subsequent destruction of the “idols” and altars. Even if the text does not present a truthful account of actual historical events, the notion of Isis showing herself in dreams fits well with the historical context of the region.

Many scholars, commenting on the takeover of the pagan cult of Isis, have argued that Christian incubation at Menouthis was part of the replacement strategy.⁵⁴ There can be little doubt that some local worshippers of Isis gradually came to turn to Kyros and Johannes instead, but was incubation as such transferred directly and by official means from the cult of Isis to the cult of the saints?

Now, what does Kyrillos (or the author of the *Oratiunculae*) really mean by “Nobody falsifies dreams for us”? Generally this has been taken to be evidence that he says “We in the cult of Kyros and Johannes give true dream oracles”, thus promoting Christian dream-healing over the old dream-healing of Isis.⁵⁵ This view has however been questioned by Sansterre (followed by Monserrat, Knipp and Graf), who writes that

⁵¹ Zacharias the Orator, *Vita Severi*, PO 2, 1907: 14-44, esp. 18. Cf. Bernand 1970: 208. See further Gascou (2007: 278-280), on the doubtful historicity of the events of this text.

⁵² Zacharias the Orator, *Vita Severi*, PO 2, 1907, 14-44, esp. 20. Cf. Bernand 1970: 209.

⁵³ Zacharias the Orator, *Vita Severi*, PO 2, 1907, 14-44, esp. 27. Cf. Bernand 1970: 211.

⁵⁴ Leipoldt 1957: 40-44; Takács 1994: 503-506; Merkelbach 1995: 200, 327-328; Frankfurter 1998: 165.

⁵⁵ Deubner 1900: 89-98 and Herzog 1939: 121.

contrary to showing a will to substitute the pagan rites with Christian rites of the same contents, Kyrillos expresses his dislike, attested elsewhere in his writings, for pagan dream-visions and incubation: he hoped that the mere presence of the relics themselves, without incubation, would procure miraculous healings.⁵⁶ The fact that Christian incubation was *not* established by Kyrillos explains, according to Sansterre, why pagan incubation was still flourishing in the years 485-487 when the shrine to Isis at Menouthis was (allegedly) destroyed by the bishop Mongos.⁵⁷ This interpretation of the text attributed to Kyrillos makes more sense in its contemporary context: the position of the Alexandrian Church at this time was not favourable towards rituals with pagan parallels. Possibly this attitude changed later on once Christianity was more firmly rooted.⁵⁸

It may thus be assumed that incubation was not present in the Christian cult from the very beginning. Usually it is found that the *longue durée* type of rituals and beliefs tend to be better preserved in popular religion, which explains why incubation might reappear possibly prompted by spontaneous visionary dreams by the laity at Menouthis.⁵⁹

Other influences favourable to incubation in the cult of Kyros and Johannes in the seventh century could be their having been copied from incubatory practices in the cult of Kosmas and Damianos in Constantinople, or their having originated from a tradition of dream-healing in late antique Egypt rather than (only) pagan incubation at Menouthis.⁶⁰ The presence on site of a pagan incubation cult cannot, however, be ignored as a source of influence for the Early Christian incubation.

⁵⁶ Sansterre 1991: 72; Monserrat 1998: 261-266; Knipp 2002: 1; Graf 2014: 135; Kyrillos of Alexandria, *Contra Julianum* (PG 76, 1024-1025, esp. 1024C-D). See also idem, *In Iesaiam* 18, ed. M. Adriaen (= CC Ser.Lat. 73A, Turnhout 1963), 747, for more hostilities against incubation, which is practised “in fano Aesculapii usque hodie.”

⁵⁷ Sansterre 1991: 74.

⁵⁸ Maraval 1985: 224-229, on “re-admittance” of incubation in the fifth century.

⁵⁹ Braudel 1972-73; for other *longue durée* continuities of pagan cult see e.g. Poulsen 1993; Lalonde 2005.

⁶⁰ See McCoull 1991: 127, for the theory that Christian incubation in Egypt, as attested in later literary sources, was indeed common in late antiquity, having arisen from Egyptian dream-interpretation.

In sum, continuity of dream-healing, introduced gradually on the site, is a likely hypothesis, given the importance locally of popular demand and longstanding tradition.

Kosmas and Damianos (and Kastor and Polydeukes) in Constantinople

Kosmas and Damianos were according to legend two brothers, doctors who did not charge their patients, martyred under Diocletian.⁶¹ In one of their six churches in Constantinople incubation is known to have been practised. It was probably built during the first half of the fourth century, and made famous when the emperor Justinian (527-565) incubated there.⁶² An anonymous collection of miracles exists.⁶³ It is of unknown date, but was read by Sophronios, bishop of Jerusalem in 560-638, which gives a terminus *ante quem*.⁶⁴ Festugière argues that the miracles of Kosmas and Damianos were committed to writing and read aloud in the church, whereby historical accuracy was maintained as to the immediate surroundings, description of the church, names and proveniences of the help-seekers.⁶⁵

According to Deubner the cult of Kosmas and Damianos in Constantinople had taken over a previous cult of Kastor and Polydeukes. His argument is based firstly on how in miracle 9 of the collection a pagan man is admonished by his relatives to go to the temple of Kastor and Polydeukes, but ends up in the church of Kosmas and Damianos, believing that they are the same. While the man is sleeping there, the saints reveal his mistake and promise to cure him should he convert to Christianity. Festugière argues that even if one or two worshippers that came to Kosmas and Damianos believed that the brothers were Kastor and Polydeukes, surely the majority of Christian worshippers would not have had this notion.

⁶¹ *ODB* 2, 1991: 1151; Deubner 1907: 40-52; Frey 1979: 49-50 and 64-66.

⁶² Festugière 1971: 87.

⁶³ Edited by Deubner 1907.

⁶⁴ The collection was composed during different periods, only miracles 1-26 are according to Festugière (1971: 85-85, 191, n. 1) surely edited in the time of Sophronios.

⁶⁵ Festugière 1971: 85-86, Prologue 3 of the collection, and the beginning of the fifth series, ed. Deubner 1907:179 (518).

As discussed above, the miracle stories are fiction and should not be given too much weight as historical documentation, even though background details may be accurate. The Christian writer may simply have wanted a story of a conversion, and felt that Kastor and Polydeukes resembled to Kosmas and Damianos, being a pair, in order to make a good story.

Secondly, Deubner sees likenesses between the two cults in attributes: Kosmas and Damianos just as Kastor and Polydeukes were brothers and sometimes envisaged as horsemen.⁶⁶ The depiction of a saint as *equus* is very general and needs not fall back on a pagan identification: many Early Christian martyrs were envisaged as horsemen.⁶⁷

Festugière convincingly argues against a direct continuity with a pre-existing cult of Kastor and Polydeukes.⁶⁸ He argues that the pagans coming to the church might have believed that the saints were in fact Kastor and Polydeukes, but that it was their pagan imagination that was at play, mistaking the names of the saints for the names of pagan heroes. Further he argues that visionary dreams had a tradition also within Judaism and early Christianity and that all ancient healing cults, pagan as well as Christian, picked up on the ubiquity of human misery and need not be explained by earlier cultic precedents.

Asklepios at Athens and a possible replacement with saints

Incubation was practised in the Asklepieion at Athens as late as AD 484.⁶⁹ The stoa identified as the incubation dormitory was later rebuilt into a church, and different hypotheses have been put forward on which saint was venerated there: St Andrew⁷⁰ or Kosmas and Damianos.⁷¹ However, the lack of sources on a possible practice of Christian incubation inside

⁶⁶ Deubner 1900: 77-79; Deubner 1907: 52-54.

⁶⁷ Walter 2003.

⁶⁸ Festugière 1971: 91-95.

⁶⁹ Damask. *Vita Isidori* fr. 218 [Zintzen].

⁷⁰ Gregory 1986: 238.

⁷¹ Gregory 1986: 238 (St Andreas); Dillon 1997: 80 n. 129 (Kosmas and Damianos). Dillon, *ibid.*, also suggests that a cult of Kosmas and Damianos in Piraeus replaced the previous cult of Asklepios in Piraeus. See also Karivieri 1995.

the church makes it an interesting, though speculative, possibility.⁷² Graf has further argued that the additional aisle of the Early Christian church, overlapping the incubation stoa, is not likely to have had a special function for incubation, as Christian incubation was mostly practised in the church and as close to the saint's gave a possible.⁷³

Cosmas and Damian in Santa Maria Antiqua and Iuturna on the Forum in Rome

Deubner also suggested that incubation was practised in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome, where Cosmas and Damian had a shrine.⁷⁴ He sees the spring of Iuturna with its renown for healing powers as the pagan precedent. Recently, David Knipp has argued from the architecture of the church that the Byzantine community living near the church incubated in the “Chapel of the Physicians”. Graf has discussed the evidence, and concludes that even though it is likely that incubation did occur in the chapel from the seventh century, there is nothing to show that it occurred earlier, or that pagan incubation was practised in the vicinity and gave rise to the Christian habit⁷⁵.

The archangel Michael and Kalchas and Podaleirios on Monte Gargano, Apulia

In the cult of the archangel Michael in Coptic Egypt, incubation is attested in some of his miracles. The different miracles and tales from the Egyptian tradition relating to the archangel are dated to between the mid-fourth and the mid-seventh centuries AD.⁷⁶

⁷² The same argument is relevant for the basilica at Dor, and the remains of an ancient temple it was built upon (Dauphin 1999): without written sources the functional analysis of the architecture remains interesting possibilities.

⁷³ Graf 2014: 132.

⁷⁴ Deubner 1902, followed by Tea 1937 and Osborne 1987: 207. See Graf 2014: 132-133 and n. 54 for discussion on this.

⁷⁵ Graf 2014: 132-133.

⁷⁶ The date: Amélineau 1888, xliv. For the incubation, or dream, miracles, see Amélineau 1888, vol. 1: 73-74, 78, 80 and 84: miracles 4, 6 (set in Rome), 7 (also set in Rome) and 10. In miracle 8 (set on Cyprus), the suppliants are cured just by staying in the

Deubner has argued for a continuity of incubation as practised in the cult of the archangel Michael on Monte Gargano in Apulia and the oracular cult of Kalchas and Podaleirios on the same mountain.⁷⁷ As incubation has not been attested in the cult of the archangel Michael on Monte Gargano, but only in his Egyptian cult (and there not in a systematized manner), the case cannot be made for a continuity of incubation in Apulia.

Summary

Following this analysis of possible local continuities, it may be concluded that what happened at the site of Menouthis has formed a model for how the takeover process of incubation from a pagan into a Christian cult came to be envisaged by modern scholars. A process of direct takeover, where an official, Kyrillos, establishes incubation in a Christian cult, has been presupposed at Menouthis even though the evidence for this act builds, I would say agreeing with Sansterre and Gascou, on an erroneous interpretation of the words of attributed to Kyrillos. This supposed continuity process has then been transposed on to other Early Christian incubation cults, even though good candidates for previous pagan incubation cults are not very obvious at these sites. In the cult of Kosmas and Damianos there is in fact very little substance to the argument since the only piece of evidence for a pre-existing pagan cult offering incubation in the area is a miracle story of legendary character. As for the possible takeover of incubation practices in the church built over the Asklepieion at Athens and the shrine of the archangel Michael on Monte Gargano, there is no evidence that incubation was ever offered in these Christian cults and thus no argument on continuity can be made.

Looking at the cult of Thekla, there is evidence from the miracle collection that there was a pagan cult of the hero Sarpedon, to which worshippers turned for healing. It is uncertain what sort of healing meth-

church overnight, the saint does not appear in a vision. In miracles 2 and 5 ill suppliants receive dream visions of the angel at home (a sort of extended incubation, seen in also other incubation cults) (Amélineau 1988: 70 and 75). Miracle 9 is a waking vision in the middle of a sermon (Amélineau 1988: 82-83).

⁷⁷ Deubner 1900: 65-68.

od the pagan cult offered, but the evidence points to some visionary technique. An historical process where Thekla eventually gains supremacy appears likely, incubation not having been part of the cult at first (as seen in the account of Egeria).

For many local worshippers what mattered was no doubt finding a helper with enough “power” to assure a good result from the worshipper’s efforts, not whether the healer was a pagan god or a Christian martyr. This is illustrated in the incubation miracles involving pagans who were not helped by pagan healing divinities but instead resorted to the local Christian martyr.⁷⁸ The recounting of such miracles would not have served to convert pagans unless suppliants were simply looking for the most helpful power within reach. Here, syncretistic religious habits might well have played a role among the laity.

THE QUESTION OF RITUAL CONTINUITY

There is presently a scholarly debate on whether it can be shown that in addition to sleeping in a holy place other ritual similarities can be shown between pagan and Early Christian incubation. Deubner points out likenesses in the rituals between pagan incubation, as he defines it, and incubation rituals in the cult of Kyros and Johannes.⁷⁹ These are the closeness to a source, the martyrs appearing in dreams, the possibility of incubation by proxy, and the fact that sometimes the incubants are reported to have slept on the ground (i.e. not inside a building). All the other examples of likenesses with pagan practices that Deubner puts forward concern the appearance of the martyrs and their ways of healing. In my view, the proximity of a source is not a likeness in ritual between pagan and Christian incubation. Pagan incubation was surrounded by the normal rituals of Greek and Roman cults (purification, prayer, sacrifice of animals or cakes, wearing special clothes, thanksgiving),⁸⁰ and Christian incubation was surrounded by the rituals of the Christian religion (eucharist, prayer, thanksgiving).⁸¹ There is no ritual continu-

⁷⁸ Thekla miracle 40; Kosmas and Damianos, miracle 9.

⁷⁹ Deubner 1900: 80-89, esp. 87-88.

⁸⁰ Ehrenheim 2011, ch. 2 and 2015, ch. 1.

⁸¹ The miracle stories do not say much about rituals, but mainly take the form of a pres-

ity apart from the sleeping in a holy place. Thanksgiving does appear in both pagan and Early Christian incubation, but still, it would seem more like a general rite, common to most religions, than a feature taken up from the pagan incubation ritual into the Christian. The basis of Deubner's argument is that incubation in a Graeco-Roman context was a Chthonian feature, practised in the cults of Chthonian deities (earth cults, hero-cults), and characterized by Chthonian rites.⁸² He believes that incubation re-appeared in the cult of the martyrs because they were buried in the earth, i.e. found by the newly converted Christians to be, in effect, associated with the Chthonian sphere.⁸³ Recent research has, however, shown that there is in fact nothing particularly "Chthonian" about pagan incubation rituals, in the way Chthonian is defined by this school of research.⁸⁴

Contrary to Deubner, Hippolyte Delehay, on a general note on pagan versus Christian incubation, does not believe in a direct continuity between the two, since there were no set forms of incubation in the Christian churches, except for rules in the cult of Artemios on lighting candles, a rite that may be seen as being of universal occurrence.⁸⁵ He might envisage some form of continuity in the east, but as far as the western miracles go (Martin of Tours), practice is disorganized. The cures often do come in sleep, but many times without any accompanying vision. Pierre Maraval argues that even though special preparatory rites before incubation are not apparent at a first reading of the miracle collections, this is not necessarily evidence that they did not exist and that a thorough investigation of the texts might produce new evidence.⁸⁶

In 1970 N. Fernandez Marcos made an attempt at this thorough type

entation of the help-seeker, his or her ailment, and the curative dream. Where rituals appear, they are most often told of in passing, as they no doubt were an obvious part of the activities of the churches where incubation was practised. See e.g. Kosmas and Damianos, miracles 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 14. Moreover helping the poor was seen as a step towards obtaining a miracle (Kosmas and Damianos miracles 5 and 12).

⁸² Deubner 1900: 56.

⁸³ Deubner 1900: 6 and 56-57.

⁸⁴ Ehrenheim 2011, chs. 4.1.1 and 5.2; Ehrenheim 2015, chs. 2.1.1 and 3.2.

⁸⁵ Delehay 1927: 143-147. Gessler (1946. 664) agrees with him.

⁸⁶ Maraval 1981: 224-229.

of ritual analysis of a set of incubation miracles. In a critical edition and study of the miracle stories of Kyros and Johannes written by Sophronios about 610,⁸⁷ the author compares the Christian miracle stories to the *iamata* of Epidauros and other pagan incubation rites and point to resemblances in rites between the saint's cult at Menouthis and *any* pagan incubation cult.⁸⁸

In the 70 miracle stories, incubation is attested as the means par préférence by which to obtain healing. Generally, Sophronios only tells us that the ailing person comes to the sanctuary of the saints and how the cure takes place. The saints are described as appearing to the incubants in their sleep, often in a friendly and unassuming manner, giving them instructions on what to do in order to obtain a cure. The style of Sophronios is elaborate and the cures related do not give the impression of a compendium of cures noted down at the site. There are many pointers on how to act as a good Christian, with a number of biblical references, which in itself points to the cures rather being literary creations than actual cures reported on the site. According to Maraval, the miracle stories were written to be read to the pilgrims coming to the church of Saints Kyros and Johannes, mostly for pedagogical reasons, that is, to enhance their faith.⁸⁹

Fernandez Marcos divides the rites surrounding the cult of Kyros and Johannes into three categories: 1) preparation before incubation with prayer and possibly purificatory baths, 2) application of prescribed unguents accompanied by the reading of special psalms, and 3) thanksgiving hymns.⁹⁰ He writes that hymns indeed existed within the cults of Asklepios and Isis, and that this practice connects to Early Christian liturgy. Also, he shows how incense was used both in the cults of Asklepios and Isis and in the cult of Kyros and Johannes. I would argue, that prayer and hymns are such general features in any religion that they cannot show a ritual continuity of the incubation ritual. Even though

⁸⁷ Edition by Fernandez Marcos 1975. Pages in the *Patrologia Graeca* cited from Sophronios, *Narratio miraculorum SS. Cyri et Joannis*, PG 87, 3423-3676.

⁸⁸ Fernandez Marcos 1975: 37-42.

⁸⁹ Maraval 1981: 384, 392.

⁹⁰ Fernandez Marcos 1975: 34-39.

the argument of Fernandez Marcos is more detailed than that of Deubner, the same reason applies why it does not hold. There are too many dissimilarities between the pagan and the Early Christian ritual to make an argument for ritual continuity. The basic ritual pattern of Christian incubation is just that, Christian.

Furthermore, in his search for similarities to pagan rituals, Fernandez Marcos disregards some Early Christian ritual elements that appear in the text of Sophronios. Since Sophronios stayed at the sanctuary for quite some time, curing his eye-disease, the items of information of the routines at the site, given us mostly in passing (he focuses on the didactic elements of the cures related), are probably reliable evidence as to what was happening there around 610.⁹¹ As an example of routines at the sanctuary revealed by Sophronios, there is the custom of opening the gate to the area just around the tomb of the martyrs once a day,⁹² praying there and acquiring the wax or oil from the candles or lamps closest to the tombs, believed to have healing capacities.⁹³ This may be compared to the use of *kerote* in other Early Christian incubation cults, a special mixture of oil and wax, believed to have healing powers.⁹⁴ Anointment with holy oil occurs several times as a method of healing in the miracles of Kyros and Johannes.⁹⁵ Occasionally an offering to the treasury is mentioned.⁹⁶

These actions do not correspond to the ritual pattern at pagan incubation sanctuaries, neither do they make for a standardized ritual of incubation in any way similar to the rituals of pagan incubation. The essence of the pagan rituals was purification, prayer and by making a sacrifice the opening of communication with the god that the incubant aspired to meet in his or her sleep.⁹⁷ These preparatory steps were ob-

⁹¹ As is related in the miracle 70 of his miracle stories.

⁹² As testified in the miracles 36 (*PG* 87, 3553B) and possibly miracle 19 (*PG* 87, 3480B-C).

⁹³ E.g. Kyros and Johannes mir. 1, 3, 7, 22, 33, 50 and 53; cf. Thekla mir. 7 and 40.

⁹⁴ Kosmas and Damianos mir. 1, 13, 16, 22, 30 and 33.

⁹⁵ Kyros and Johannes mir. 1 (3428C), mir. 3 (3429D), mir. 7 (3436C), mir. 22 (3485C), mir. 36 (3553B).

⁹⁶ Kyros and Johannes mir. 40 (= *PG* 87, 3577D-3580A), mir. 49 (= *PG* 87, 3605A).

⁹⁷ Ehrenheim 2011, ch. 2 and 2015, ch. 1.

ligatory and alike for all incubants at a given sanctuary. The Christian customs as described by Sophronios are centered on coming as close as possible to the holy remains of the martyrs (a custom shared with all other cults of the martyrs): so many wanted to enter the tomb of the martyrs that visits were organized once a day and then a large crowd would gather. There is no obligation to approach the tomb, but the cure must have been considered more certain if this proximity was obtained. In the same manner, the candle wax and lamp oil from the lights by the tomb were considered to be imbued with the holiness of the relics, making for a more secure cure. There is a fundamental difference here between the pagan and the Christian ritual - a difference concerning not only the enactment of the ritual elements, but also the purpose of the ritual: there was no grave of Asklepios to approach, whereas the cult of the martyrs was dependent on the existence of their physical remains.

According to Fernandez Marcos the same technical terms are used for incubation in the miracle stories as in pagan incubation.⁹⁸ He argues that the verb καθεύδω (“to sleep”) or κοιμάομαι (“fall asleep”), when used in the miracle stories of Sophronios, followed by the preposition ἐν (“in”, e.g. he slept in the martyrion) is in fact the same term as ἐγκαθεύδω⁹⁹ or ἐγκοιμάομαι¹⁰⁰ used by the pagans. A typical development in Greek compound verbs with prepositional prefixes was that they tended to become more and more complex, with more and more prefixes. The idea that ἐγκαθεύδω was replaced by καθεύδω ἐν contradicts the direction in which the language actually developed.¹⁰¹

To sum up, regarding the question of ritual continuity, a case can be made neither from the actual rites surrounding the sleeping, nor from the terminology applied to the sleeping itself.

⁹⁸ Fernandez Marcos 1975: 34.

⁹⁹ 1. Sleep among, 2. Lie abed, 3. Sleep in a temple (to effect a cure).

¹⁰⁰ 1. Sleep in (a place), esp. sleep in (a temple to seek prophetic dreams or to obtain cure for a disease), 2. Sleep upon (or) after a meal.

¹⁰¹ Blass & Debrunner 1961:63,§116.

INCUBATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CHRISTIAN MIRACLE TRADITION

The notion that miracles could be effected by the relics of the martyrs was denied at first in Early Christianity, as it was believed that miracles only occurred in the New Testament, performed by Jesus.¹⁰² During the second and third centuries, miracles were not comfortably acknowledged (though prayed for and believed to occur by common Christians), the belief gaining ground among the Church Fathers that miracles simply ceased after the New Testament time.¹⁰³

At the end of the fourth century, these attitudes among the church fathers were about to change. Not too long after the Church Peace in 312, the Christian faith manifested itself in a number of cults at the graves of the martyrs and in a spate of holy men and women, anachorites and cenobites, all of these effecting miracles.¹⁰⁴ Following this flowering of cults producing miracles, a fierce debate was conducted among the different officials of the Church. The defenders of the miracles of the martyrs included Ambrose of Milan, Pope Damasus and Jerome. A stout adversary of the cult of the martyrs can be found in the priest Vigilantius from Gaul, who argued that the saints' cults had many pagan characteristics.¹⁰⁵

Augustine came to change his opinion of the cults of the martyrs over time. At first, he was of the firm belief that the miracles of apostolic times, necessary to make the people believe in the "invisible mir-

¹⁰² Aug. *De vera relig.* 25.47 (= CC Ser.Lat. 32, pp. 216-217); Aug. *Sermo* 83.3.3 (=PL 38, 540); van Bavel 1995: 360; de Vooght 1939: 5-16.

¹⁰³ van Uytfanghe 1981: 210. The exception being Irenaeus, who believed that miracles kept on being produced: Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 2.32, cited in Eusebius of *Caesarea, Hist. eccl.* 5.7 (SC 41).

¹⁰⁴ Delehay 1933: 119-123; Saxer 1980, *passim*; van Uytfanghe 1981, 211; Brown 1981, *passim*. An early example of a cult of martyrs is the cult to Saints Giovanni and Paolo in the Casa Caelimontana in Rome, a private house, of the fourth century, see Karivieri 1998. The Theodosian Code prohibits the trade in relics, *Cod.Theod.* 9.17.7, attesting to the existence of the practice. See MacMullen 2009, *passim* and esp. 60, on how the cult of the martyrs developed from private commemoration rituals at graves.

¹⁰⁵ Cited in Hieron., *Contra Vigilantium*, PL 23, 339-352.

acles”, had now ceased.¹⁰⁶ Subsequently he argued that if miracles did occur at *memoriae*, they had nothing to do with the relics as such, but with the strength of the prayer.¹⁰⁷ Later on in his life, Augustine came to acknowledge miracles performed at the graves of the martyrs, and primarily those of the martyrs in Nola and Milan. Milan was the bishopric of Ambrose, the teacher of Augustine, and there the cult of the martyrs differed from the North African martyr cult, which was part of the Donatist movement fiercely opposed by Augustine. Before acknowledging the cult of the martyrs, Augustine writes that even though North Africa was “full of the bodies of holy martyrs” miracles did not occur at their graves, hereby denying the teachings of Donatus.¹⁰⁸ This all came to change with the transferral of the bones of St Stephen to Carthage and the cult of the martyrs in North Africa “made catholic”.¹⁰⁹ Augustine now accepted miracles of martyrs, and also had them written down in *libelli miraculorum*, to be read aloud in connection with sermons.¹¹⁰

Contributing to this initial hesitancy towards incubation in the Christian context was a theological hesitancy towards dreams as bearers of divine truths. Graf has eloquently expounded the Christian theological ambivalence regarding dreams, recognizing a possible true content in the dreams of bishops and kings, but not in the dreams of the laity.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Aug. *De vera religione* 25.47 (= CCSL 32, pp. 216-217); Aug. *Sermo* 83.3.3 (=PL 38, 540). For the development of Augustine’s views on the cult of the martyrs, see further de Vooght 1939: 5-16 and Courcelle 1968: 141-153 and Frend 1982.

¹⁰⁷ Aug. *Epist. ad catholicos fratres de secta Donatistarum* 19.49 (= CSEL 52, pp. 295-296).

¹⁰⁸ Aug. *Epist.* 78.3 (=CSEL 34.2, pp. 335-336); Frend 1982.

¹⁰⁹ Aug. *De Civ. Dei* 22.8; Frend 1982.

¹¹⁰ Delahaye 1910: 427-434; Delehay 1925: 72-85; de Vooght 1939: 5-16; Courcelle 1968: 141-153. Van Bavel (1995: 360-361) on the other hand argues that St. Augustine was always concerned with the theology of miracles performed, and that his stance on this did not change, but rather that he learned to accept these events as having been sent by God when miracles came to be reported more and more often by the graves of the martyrs in his own lifetime.

¹¹¹ Graf 2010; Graf 2014: 120, 124-128; Le Goff 1988: 193-231, 271-277. To compare, in the Archaic period in Greece the dreams of kings and priests were seen as more likely to be god-sent than the dreams of common people (Ehrenheim 2011, ch. 5.3.4 and 2015, ch. 3.3.4). See further Keskiaho (2015) on dreams and visions in early

The laity might, however, have had this belief nonetheless, even though it was considered unorthodox.¹¹²

There is no trace of incubation before the emergence and official approval of the cult of the martyrs, which placed Early Christian incubation within a religious framework where the veneration of the relics of holy men and women is the focus of the cult, their prayers being sought and considered more effective than those of the worshippers. There were indeed sacred places in Christian world before the establishment of the cult of the martyrs, for instance, Golgatha and the Church of the Nativity,¹¹³ but there are no reports that ordinary Christians slept there and had dreams in which Christ appeared to them.

Because of the lack of established martyrs' cults, one might argue, there was no Christian incubation before the fifth century. Incubation needed some extra planning and personnel to assist, as the suppliants were to stay and sleep inside the church. Amply attested in the incubation miracles are questions such as who is to sleep where and for how long, and how to make sure that only incubants stay in the church at night.¹¹⁴

In "normal" cults of the martyrs, methods varied, the common denominator being that the closest possible proximity to the relics might be ensured (a factor also present in the Early Christian incubation cults). Incubation on the other hand, as it appears in the cults of Thekla, Kosmas and Damianos, Kyros and Johannes, and Demetrios at Thessalonike, is a standardized feature of these cults, and the expected procedure for meeting the martyr and being healed. It might be expected that such a specialization of particular martyrs' cults took some time to develop.

medieval thought.

¹¹² See Wiesniewski 2013: 205 and nn. 12-13 with further references concerning the Messalians and Donatists.

¹¹³ Cf. Soz. *Hist.eccl.* 2.1 (SC 306, pp. 226-233).

¹¹⁴ E.g. miracles of Kosmas and Damianos: miracles 10, 12, 17, 21, 25, 34 and 35 (on the big crowd of sleepers and spaces allotted to them) and the miracles of Artemios: mir. 30 (guard making sure the church paraphernalia are not stolen), mir. 17 and 25 (the incubants are locked inside a cancel of one of the naves, so that thieves cannot enter at night and steal their belongings), mir. 31 (a rich woman is accommodated in lodgings in a special room in the upper gallery of the church). See further Ehrenheim 2009.

Decidedly, Christian incubation also needed some extra time to gain acceptance from church officials, considering its pagan precedence.¹¹⁵ Jerome, for instance, finds it abhorrent that Jews were reportedly incubating in the shrines of pagan gods.¹¹⁶ One must remember that when Egeria writes about the cult of Thekla in the fourth century, there is no incubation in her report. Augustine's account of the miracles of St Stephen are among the earliest collections of miracles, describing those that occurred after the translation of the relics in 418.¹¹⁷ The earliest collection of incubation miracles are those of Thekla, dated to the mid-fifth century.¹¹⁸ When one recalls that Egeria in the fourth century wrote nothing about how miracles were obtained at the sanctuary of Thekla, it might be presumed that she found nothing out of the ordinary in the way worshippers venerated the saint. Incubation might have developed later on the site, from a combination of factors, possibly including pagan reminiscences, but also drawing from the Early Christian tradition of miracles. Thus when incubation first appears in the Christian church it is set and develops within the cult of the martyrs.

There existed many ideas in late antiquity about what types of supernatural resources could help with healing, and how the suppliants might acquire this help. Incubation was not the only healing method, whether in pagan or in Christian sanctuaries. For instance, in the cult of Simeon the Stylite, the most common method of healing was to anoint the suppliant with holy earth.¹¹⁹ A common denominator seems to have been the proximity of the relics of the martyrs.¹²⁰ Local traditions surely played a large role in the formation of each individual healing cult.

¹¹⁵ Maraval 1981: 225.

¹¹⁶ Hieron. *Ad Iesaiam/In Isaiam commentaria* 18.65.4 (Edelstein & Edelstein testimonium 294; *PL* 24, 632C-633A), "habitans in sepulcris [populus Israel], et in delubris idolorum dormiens, ubi stratis pellibus hostiarum incubare soliti erant, ut somniis futura cognoscerent." .

¹¹⁷ Aug. *De civ. Dei* 22.8; on the date see Delehaye 1910: 427-430.

¹¹⁸ Dagron 1978: 17-19.

¹¹⁹ *Syriac version of the vita of St. Simeon Stylites*, e.g. miracles 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 72, 88, 89 and 91. But, on the genre of the miracle story itself: Festugière 1973: 70-73.

¹²⁰ Maraval 1985: 222-224.

As the cult of the martyrs was, at least at first, a movement among the laity of the church,¹²¹ the development of various healing techniques in these different cults might be surmised to have been partly a result of the expectations of the laity. These spontaneous dream-visions of worshippers in the Early Christian church might in some cults have developed into specialized incubation in the fifth century. As visions of martyrs and saints were reported in many Christian miracle collections, night-time visions might have occurred in this context among those worshippers staying in the churches for a long time. It need not have been a conscious seeking out of dream visions at first but rather a natural development of different ways of seeking miracles. It is known that followers of the Donatist movement in North Africa had dream-visions telling them to set up altars to the martyrs.¹²² This practice was forbidden by the part of the church later labelled catholic, but still it shows a proneness among the laity to accept dream-visions as true.

Dream-healings also occurred in cults of martyrs that did not specialize in incubation (see below), but offered the majority of their healings through the more common means of daytime visions and spontaneous miracles through touching the relics or objects that had come into contact with the relics. This shows that dream-healings were perceived as one of many ways of obtaining miracles. Most of the evidence of non-organized dream-healing in the context of other miraculous techniques is later than the fifth century, simply because the organized custom of writing miracle collections is later. There exist, though, some records of spontaneous, and not deliberately arranged, dream miracles. In the church of Michael Anapλους at Hestiae close to Constantinople, one incubation miracle is attested around AD 440.¹²³ The worshipper

¹²¹ By laity I mean those who were not clergy, although the definitions of such two groups and their power to form the doctrines of the Church are not evident in the Early Christian church, see e.g. *The Oxford handbook of Early Christian studies*, eds. S. Ashbrook Harvey & D.G. Hunter, esp. chapter 19, Clergy and laity, by K. J. Torjesen. See also MacMullen 2009, *passim*, esp. 60, examining the archaeological evidence and arguing that the cult of the martyrs grew forth on a private, or popular, initiative.

¹²² *Concilia Africae*, ed. C. Munier, (CC Ser.Lat). 149: 204 no. 83.

¹²³ Sozomenos, *Hist.eccl.* 2.3, 9-13 (SC 306: 238-239, 242-245). On the location of Hestiae, see Janin 1964, map 9.

slept inside the church and received instructions on how to get healed by a “divine power” (θεία δύναμις). This cannot be called an incubation cult, but the miracle was, rather, a variant of miraculous techniques developed in the cult and might point to a development within some cults where these types of miracles came eventually to form the major and expected part of the healings.

Similarly, a collection of miracles generated by the cult of the archangel Michael in Egypt, dated to between the mid-fourth to the mid-seventh centuries, offers some instances of dream-visions and dream-healing.¹²⁴ A similar, but later case occurs when ill people slept at the baths of Elia at Gadara, had visions and were supposedly healed, as documented in the sixth century.¹²⁵ The same phenomenon occurred at the site of the Anastasis¹²⁶ and at the atrium of the Golgata.¹²⁷ St Menas is another holy figure, who shows himself to his suppliants in many waking visions, and also in one night-time vision.¹²⁸ Other examples, mostly of the sixth century, are the visions in sleep that too place in the funerary chapels of St Euthymius¹²⁹ and of St Ptolemy of Hermopolis Magna,¹³⁰ as well as in the martyria of St Julian,¹³¹ St John the Baptist and St Dometius

¹²⁴ Edited by Amélineau 1888: see p. xliv on the date, further vol. 1, pp. 73-74, 78, 80 and 84 (miracles 4, 6, 7 and 10). Not all of the miracles take place in Egypt, two are set in Rome and one takes place on Cyprus.

¹²⁵ Anonymous writer from Piacenza: CSEL 39, p. 163 (ed. Geyer, date: 570, Geyer in CSEL 39, xxvi).

¹²⁶ Marc the Deacon, *Vita Porphyrii*, 7 (Budé Collection Byzantine, ed. H. Grégoire & M.-A. Kugener, Paris 1930, p.7).

¹²⁷ *Mir. Bar Sauma*, 55 (F. Nau, IX. Résumé de monographies syriaques', *ROrChr* 9(19), 1914: 113-134, events dated by Nau to fifth century).

¹²⁸ Waking visions: mir. 2, 15 and 16 of the Coptic version (Drescher 1946: 112, 118 and 121). Night-time vision: mir. 3 (Drescher 1946: 111).

¹²⁹ Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii* 50-53 (=72.10-76.12) (*Lives of the monks of Palestine by Cyril of Scythopolis*, translated by R.M. Price with an introduction and notes by J. Binns, 1991: pp. 69-74). Cyril begins his account in 405, when Euthymius arrived in Jerusalem, and finishes it in 558 (Binns 1991, xi).

¹³⁰ *M. Ptolem.* 1.2 (PO 5, 780-781).

¹³¹ *Life of Daniel Scetis*, 10 (of the Greek accounts). Abba Daniel of Scetis probably lived in the sixth century, Vivian 2008: 12-17, and the Greek accounts may according to the translator be the contemporary work of a disciple, although nothing can be said for certain (Vivan 2008: 17-31).

of Antioch.¹³² Other places where nocturnal visions or miracles at holy graves were reported are the shrines of St Polyeuctos at Mytilene,¹³³ John the Baptist and St Michael at Sykeon,¹³⁴ as well as St Andrew at Patras¹³⁵ and St Peter of Athyra.¹³⁶ No doubt there were many more such occurrences than those attested by the sources.

To strengthen this tie between regular martyrs' cults and Early Christian incubation cults, the incubation miracle collections encompassed also many "ordinary" miraculous techniques, practised also in non-incubation cults of martyrs, such as the use of holy oil, special plasters prepared with wax by the priests (*kerote*), powder made from grating the walls of the sanctuary and the use of holy images.¹³⁷ Above all, intense prayer, conversion (if needed, from "heretical" sects and paganism) and closeness to the relics were of prime importance.¹³⁸ This places Early Christian incubation cults within the tradition of Early Christian saints'

¹³² *Vita Symeonis iun.* 2 (on St John the Baptist); Severus of Antioch, *Hom.* 51 (*PO* 35, fasc. 165, p. 373, on St Dometius). The vita is considered to have been written by an anonymous contemporary of St Symeon the younger, who lived 521-592 (van den Ven 1962: 102).

¹³³ Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii* 2 (=9-9.10) (*Lives of the monks of Palestine by Cyril of Scythopolis*, translated by R.M. Price with an introduction and notes by J. Binns, Kalamazoo 1991, p. 5). Cyril lived ca. 524-558.

¹³⁴ *Vita Theodoris Sykeonis*, 8 (Theodore gets cured in the chapel of John the Baptist, but has dream vision at home of St George) and 40 (worshippers stay day and night in the church to archangel Michael, with chapels to St John the Baptist and Mary mother of god). Theodore was born under Justinian and died allegedly in 613 (Festugière 1970, introduction, p. v. Festugière gives no date of the vita).

¹³⁵ Gregory of Tours, *Mir.* 30. The text is from the latter half of the 6th century.

¹³⁶ *Vita Euthycii* 24 (*PG* 86, 2301C). *Magnii et beatissimi Euthycii patriarchae Constantinopolitani, vita et conversation scripta ab Eustratio presbytero humili ejus discipulo*, *PG* 86, 2273-2392.

¹³⁷ The belief that matter (oil, earth, pieces of a building) that had been close to that which is holy (relics or living holy person) was somehow considered imbued with holiness and hence with miracle-working properties, see Maraval 1985: 222-224 and 237. Examples of these techniques in incubation cults: *kerote*: Kosmas and Damianos mir. 1, 13, 16, 22, 30, 33; wine: Thekla mir. 42; holy oil or wax: Thekla mir. 7, 40; Kyros and Johannes mir. 1, 3, 7, 22, 33, 50, 53, 65, 70; scrapings of church fence: Thekla mir. 18; holy images: Kosmas and Damianos mir. 13 and 15.

¹³⁸ E.g. Maraval 1985: 134-135 and 221-224.

cults, forming a special group of cults where visions of the saints were actively sought at night, differing from most other martyr cults where visions occurred spontaneously and were not the primary expected way of obtaining a miracle. The organized manner in which the dream miracles are sought in the Early Christian incubation cults are reminiscent of pagan incubation, but the rituals surrounding the phenomenon differ significantly.

When one reads the pagan and Christian miracle stories, it is clear that at all of the healing sanctuaries, pagan as well as Christian, there was an option of staying for a longer time and practising incubation.¹³⁹ It also appears clear from the collections of miracles that healing procedures had to be well organized, because of the great number of worshippers coming to the churches. One might envisage a first step where, as in the description Egeria makes of the sanctuary of Thekla, the crowd that has arrived after a long journey stays for a period of time at the sanctuary, praying in the church to get well, and being accommodated in the sanctuary, or, even staying inside the church all night. It would not be surprising if pilgrims, already used to daytime visions believed to be sent by God, also dreamt of the martyrs to whom they prayed during daytime. Such visions and miracles experienced by the laity would then have been picked up and systematized into a cult of dream-healings, in much the same way as many martyrs' cults became specialized in curing particular ailments.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we have seen, there is no direct takeover of pagan incubation cults. Incubation in the Early Christian world does not appear in cults where a local pagan predecessor can be shown, with the exception of Menouthis (the cult of Isis).

¹³⁹ *Miracles of Kosmas and Damianos*: Mir. 1 (a couple of days), mir. 3 (some time), mir. 10 (every Friday), mir. 11 (four visits), mir. 12 (for a longer time residing in the atrium), mir. 14 (several days), mir. 21 (many days), mir. 23 (longer than 3 days), mir. 30 ("pretty long time"), mir. 33 (seven months), mir. 38 (a couple of days); *Miracles of Kyros and Johannes*, mir. 48 (=PG 87, 3601 B12-14) (2 years) and mir. 69 (=PG 87, 3661 D2) (8 years). *Miracles of Artemios*: Mir. 5 (three months), mir. 13 (15 days), mir. 24 (15 days), mir. 35 (two years) and mir. 45 (two days).

Conversions in the countryside often took a long time, and pagan traditions were many times tenacious on the popular level. The preservation and readjustments of pagan rituals made at a popular level in late antiquity might be labelled a *longue durée* historical process.¹⁴⁰ An anthropological parallel for the religious conversion process in late antiquity can be found in South America in the transition from indigenous religions to Christianity.¹⁴¹ Sabine MacCormack has described how the indigenous religions remained through adapting a more local form (similar to the pre-Incan culture), moving away from the large temples destroyed by the Spaniards and into rural sanctuaries and private houses. In the middle of the 17th century, persecutions of the old religion became more fervent, and then the rests of the old religions transformed into healing rituals and incantations on a clandestine level in society. This account might well describe too the situation in late antiquity, especially in Egypt, where the transition from one religion to another gives ample proof of syncretism at a domestic level in society.¹⁴²

Considering the tenacity of rural religiosity,¹⁴³ it would be surprising if in these places at least a part of the pagan practices surrounding incubation were not remembered and in some way transformed into a popular expression of the new faith. This may be called a continuity of sorts, for in most Early Christian incubation cults, there is no obvious local pagan predecessor. As for the ritual and terminology of the Early Christian incubation, no pagan roots can be demonstrated. Incubation may be seen as a specialization of the cult of relics, reminiscent of pagan incubation (the sleeping in a holy place and obtaining a cure in the dream), but as concerns the surrounding rituals and recommended cures, falling within the frame of other cults of the martyrs. It appears that the cultic incorporation of incubation was not a straightforward process from pagan to Christian contexts; the different Christian practices of incubation had many different roots and influences.

¹⁴⁰ Braudel 1972-73; for other *longue durée* continuities of pagan cult see e.g. Poulsen 1993, Lalonde 2005.

¹⁴¹ MacCormack 1991: 11-14, 410-414, 418-433, esp. 432.

¹⁴² Frankfurter 1998: 131-144.

¹⁴³ Cf. Braudel 1972-73.

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