

# “Anoint Your Chest and Eat Some of the Wax-Salve”: The Non-Liturgical Use of Holy Oils in the Early Byzantine East

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THE NON-LITURGICAL USE of holy oils<sup>1</sup> is perhaps best summarized by John Chrysostom’s *Homily on Martyrs*. In one of the passages, John Chrysostom criticizes people who, having visited martyrs’ shrines, stopped by taverns and got drunk. He suggests other ways of celebrating martyrs’ feasts that are more connected to the martyrs themselves:

Embrace the coffin, attach yourself onto the sarcophagus. Not only the bones of the martyrs, but also their sarcophagi brim with plenty of blessing. Take holy oil and anoint your entire

<sup>1</sup> For the state of the matter see M. T. Canivet, “Le reliquaire à huile de la grande église de Huarte (Syrie),” *Syria* 55 (1978) 153–162; P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d’Orient* (Paris 1985); W. Gessel, “Das Öl der Märtyrer. Zur Funktion und Interpretation der Ölsarkophage von Apamea in Syrien,” *OC* 72 (1988) 183–202; Z. Kiss, *Les ampoules de Saint Ménas découvertes à Kôm el-Dikka* (Warsaw 1989); B. Caseau, “Parfum et guérison dans le Christianisme ancien et byzantin,” in V. Boudon-Millot et al. (eds.), *Les Pères de l’Église face à la science médicale de leur temps* (Paris 2005) 141–191; M. C. Comte, *Les Reliquaires du Proche-Orient et de Chypre à la période proto-byzantine* (Turnhout 2012), with important comments in the review by C. Vandereyde, *JRA* 28 (2015) 941–945. All these contributions advanced our knowledge mainly of material sources, focusing on hydraulic installations and ampullae for making and carrying holy oils. However, a gap remained in the scholarship regarding the actual function of holy oils among visitors to martyrs’ shrines and performative practices that employed holy oils.

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body, your tongue, lips, neck, eyes, and you will never fall into the wreck of drunkenness.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the more obvious bones of the martyrs, John Chrysostom also draws attention to the sarcophagi. These are presented as special objects where one can pray, obtain oil, and anoint the whole body.<sup>3</sup> Such bodily interactions with holy oils, as presented in the Eastern miracle collections and the lives of saints, are the subject of this article.<sup>4</sup> It will explore the use of

<sup>2</sup> *PG* 50.664.45–665.6, transl. E. Rizos, The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity Database, <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02628> [last access 16 May 2023]: περιπλάκηθι τὴν σορόν, προσηλώθητι τῇ λάρνακι οὐχὶ τὰ ὀστέα μόνον τῶν μαρτύρων, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ τάφοι αὐτῶν, καὶ αἱ λάρνακες πολλὴν βρύουσιν εὐλογίαν. Λάβε ἔλαιον ἅγιον, καὶ κατάχρισόν σου ὄλον τὸ σῶμα, τὴν γλῶτταν, τὰ χεῖλη, τὸν τράχηλον, τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς, καὶ οὐδέποτε ἐμπεσῆ εἰς τὸ ναυάγιον τῆς μέθης.

<sup>3</sup> A similar description of the sanctity of a saint's tomb is presented in the *Encomium on Theodoros* by Gregory of Nyssa: “And, having so much pleased the eyes with these visible masterpieces, one then longs to approach the coffin (*thēkē*) itself, regarding its contact as sanctification and blessing. And if someone gives us to take away some of the dust (*konis*) lying on the surface of the resting place, that soil (*chous*) is received like a gift, and the earth (*gē*) is treasured like a valued possession. But to touch the relics themselves, should, at some point, such a great fortune provide an opportunity to do so—those who have experienced it, and have been granted such a great wish, know what a highly desirable thing this is, the granting, indeed, of the loftiest of prayers! For those who behold it embrace it like a living and blooming body, offering their devotion with their eyes, mouth, and hearing, and all their senses” (transl. Rizos, <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E01748>). In this passage there is no statement about holy oils coming from either the relics or the tomb. Instead, Gregory mentions the dust lying on the tomb. However, the experience of such visits to the tomb and the presence of the sacred is similarly shown as an activity involving parts of the body associated with the senses: the eyes, ears, and mouth.

<sup>4</sup> Obviously oil was a key element of ancient daily life in preparing food and anointing the body. Perhaps this is why it gained use in more official applications connected to religion such as coronation ceremonies, where it was used to anoint the king's body. In addition to this, oil was used to anoint baetyls (sacred stones) and divine statues. Oil was also employed in Hip-

holy oils in the *Miracles of Saint Artemios*, the *Miracles of Saints Kosmas and Damianos*, the *Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John*, the *Miracles of Saint Menas*, the *Miracles of Saint Thecla*, the *Life of Saint Theodore of Sykeon*, the *Life of Saint Nicholas of Holy Sion*, the *Life of Saint Auxentios*, the *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, the *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, and the *Life of Peter the Iberian*.<sup>5</sup>

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pocratic medicine: see Caseau, in *Les Pères de l'Église* 151–163. Moreover, cerate also appears as a medical term in the works of Hippocrates and Galen: Hp. *Off.* 12, *Art.* 14; Gal. XI 391 K. However, these applications of oil and its probable roots in ‘pagan’ medicine are outside the scope of this article. I will also focus only on the non-liturgical use of oil by those seeking saints’ help. By liturgical I mean its use in the sacraments (such as baptismal rites) or the consecration of the altar and the church. On the liturgical use of oil see E. Segelberg, “The *Benedictio Olei* in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus,” *OC* 48 (1964) 268–281; M. Dudley et al. (eds.), *The Oil of Gladness. Anointing in the Christian Tradition* (London 1993); J. Day, *Baptism in Early Byzantine Palestine 325–451* (Piscataway 2009).

<sup>5</sup> *Miracula Artemii*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Keramaeus, *Miracula xiv sancti Artemii*, in *Varia Graeca sacra* (St. Petersburg 1909); transl. V. S. Crisafulli, *The Miracles of Saint Artemios* (Leiden 1997). *Miracula Cosmae et Damiani*, ed. L. Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian* (Leipzig 1907); transl. A.-J. Festugière, *Collections grecques de miracles* (Paris 1971). Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Miracula Cyri et Iohannis*, ed. N. F. Marcos, *Los Thaumata de Sofronio* (Madrid 1975); transl. J. Gascou, *Sophrone de Jérusalem* (Paris 2006). Timothy of Alexandria, *Miracula Menae*, ed. I. Pomialovskii, *Житие преподобного Паисия Великого и Тимофея патриарха Александрийского повествование о чудесах св. великомученика Мины* (St. Petersburg 1900). *Miracula Theclae*, ed. and transl. S. F. Johnson and A. M. Talbot, *Miracle Tales from Byzantium* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2012). *Vita Theodori Syceotae*, ed. and transl. A.-J. Festugière, *Vie de Théodore de Sykeon* (Brussels 1970); transl. E. Dawes and N. H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (Oxford 1948). *Vita Nicolai*, ed. and transl. I. Ševčenko and N. Patterson Ševčenko, *The Life of St. Nicholas of Sion* (Brookline 1984). *Vita sancti Auxentii*, PG 114. *Vita Danielis*, ed. H. Delehaye, *Les Saints stylites* (Brussels 1923); transl. Dawes/Baynes. *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* (Leipzig 1939); transl. R. M. Price, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine by Cyril of Scythopolis* (Kalamazoo 1991). John Rufus, *Vita Petri Iberi*, ed. and transl. C. B. Horn and R. R. Phenix, *John Rufus: The Lives of Peter the Iberian, Theodosius of Jerusalem, and the Monk Romanus* (Atlanta 2006).

I will begin by explaining my understanding of the phrase holy oils. This will be followed by presenting some remarks on their smell and establishing a typology of their use through an examination of three types of interaction: first the practice of drinking holy oils, next the eating of cerate (κηρωτή), and then the practice of anointing the body. I will discuss who anointed pilgrims, which parts of the body were anointed, and where this took place. Furthermore, the practice of anointing the body was made more complex by the additional gestures and praying which often accompanied it. I will argue that descriptions of the practices associated with holy oils depend on the genre of the source and are presented differently in the miracle collections and in the lives of saints. This article will also employ the perspective of ‘lived religion’, which is particularly useful in researching holy oils, given its emphasis on neglected religious actions, sensory experiences, and ordinary people (in this case, pilgrims).<sup>6</sup>

*What were holy oils?*

By holy oils I mean organic liquids which gained sanctity through either direct or indirect contact with a saint or a holy object. For instance, holy oils could come from lamps hanging next to a saint’s tomb, from relics of the True Cross, and from a reliquary or a tomb with hydraulic installations.<sup>7</sup> This umbrella term also includes cerate (κηρωτή), or wax-salve—a solid substance derived from holy oils. There is no scholarly con-

<sup>6</sup> On the ‘lived religion’ approach in studying antiquity see A. Janico et al., “Religion in the Making: The Lived Ancient Religion Approach,” *Religion* 48 (2018) 568–593; V. Gasparini et al. (eds.), *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History, and Classics* (Berlin 2020); N. D. Lewis, “Ordinary Religion in the Late Roman Empire: Principles of a New Approach,” *SLA* 5 (2021) 104–118.

<sup>7</sup> The provenance of holy oils is not the main subject of this article. Instead, I look at the ways of using them.

sensus on what cerate was and whether it was the same substance in all miracle collections. Virgil S. Crisafulli, the translator of the *Miracles of Saint Artemios*, simply translated it as “wax-salve”<sup>8</sup> or even sometimes as “wax.”<sup>9</sup> But wax in Greek is κηρός, so cerate must have contained wax while not consisting only of it. Other scholars such as Jean Gascou, the translator of the *Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John*, noticed an ambiguity in the term “cerate” and described it as a balm made from a mixture of oil and wax.<sup>10</sup> However, it seems that cerate probably contained more oil than wax since in the *Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John* it appears a few times in the context of burning alongside oil in the saints’ lamps: “for the stomach there was clear oil and cerate, which both shine upon their coffin with flashing fire”;<sup>11</sup> “the saints took oil and cerate which feed the flame which lights up their coffin.”<sup>12</sup> According to the sources, therefore, cerate was a mixture containing oil and wax, probably prepared according to a specific recipe, as in the case of mixtures of liturgical oils and censers.

It is interesting to see that these two products were obtained by pilgrims in different ways, which is useful in reconstructing models of sanctuary management. Pilgrims usually obtained oil themselves in sanctuaries which allowed them greater freedom. The majority of cases, therefore, concern people obtaining oil from saints’ lamps. There were no special requirements to ob-

<sup>8</sup> *Mir.Artem.* 3, 15, 16, 24, 33.

<sup>9</sup> *Mir.Artem.* 13, 43. Ludwig Deubner also favored the interpretation of cerate simply as “wax”: Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian* 232.

<sup>10</sup> Gascou, *Sophrone de Jérusalem* 28 n.113, as well as Festugière, *Collections grecques* 100 n.5; Maraval, *Lieux saints* 223, 229; Caseau, in *Les Pères de l’Église* 164–165.

<sup>11</sup> Sophr. *Mir.Cyr. et Jo.* 1.12: καὶ τοῦ μὲν στομάχου ἔλαιον ἦν καὶ κηρωτὴ τὸ καθάρσιον, ἅπερ αὐτῶν τὴν σορὸν πυρὸς μαρμαρυγῆ καταλάμπουσι.

<sup>12</sup> Sophr. *Mir.Cyr. et Jo.* 22.4: λαβόντες οἱ ἅγιοι ἐλαίω καὶ κηρωτῇ τοῖς τὸν πυρσὸν τὸν τὴν ἀγίαν αὐτῶν σορὸν φωτίζοντα τρέφουσιν.

tain oil in this way (occasionally a limited time span for accessing the tombs was imposed or pilgrims had to ask for oil).<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the process of obtaining cerate involved carefully controlled distribution and was probably undertaken by sanctuary staff.<sup>14</sup> As depicted in the *Miracles of Saint Artemios* (15, 33) and the *Miracles of Saints Kosmas and Damianos* (30), distribution of cerate took place during all-night Saturday vigils. The difference in obtaining oil and cerate could have arisen for practical reasons, as cerate was a mixture requiring preparation. Presumably there was also a need to control how much cerate was given to pilgrims to make sure there was enough for everyone who needed it.

#### *Smelling holy oils*

The miracle collections and the lives of saints examined in this article almost never specify whether holy oils are scented.<sup>15</sup> Only one example of fragranced holy oils can be found in the *Miracles of Saint Thecla* (7). Bishop Dexianos was advised by Thecla to use oil from lamps in her sanctuary as a remedy; the oil is described as “perfumed/fragranced with myrrh,” τῷ ἐλαίῳ μυρωθέντι.<sup>16</sup> Thanks to the excavations at Abu Mina we

<sup>13</sup> This is suggested by *Mir.Artem.* 21 and *Mir.Theclae* 40.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to the distribution of cerate during all-night vigils it seems that at Kosmas and Damianos’ sanctuary cerate could sometimes be taken from the saints’ lamps (“cerate of the lamp of the candelabrum,” τὴν κηρωτὴν τοῦ λύχνου τοῦ ἄπτου, *Mir.Cosm.Dam.* 16).

<sup>15</sup> Oil is rarely described more specifically in the sources, most often being referred to as the “oil of the saints” (ἐλαίον τῶν ἁγίων), e.g. *V.Aux.* 18, 20, 21, 37, 60. In contrast, the recipes in *Papyri Graecae Magicae* generally mention the specific type of oil used (such as rose oil, *PGM I* 42–195).

<sup>16</sup> This suggests a link with myrrh (μύρον), a substance associated with some saints, such as Anastasios the Persian, Demetrios, and Theodora of Thessalonike. A miracle of myrrh flowing from an icon is described in *V.Theod.Syc.* 108. For further information see S. Efthymiadis, “Collections of Miracles,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography II* (Farnham 2014) 115–125; S. A. Harvey, “Fragrant Matter: The Work of

know that the oil used in Menas' sanctuary was also perfumed.<sup>17</sup>

This lack of information on the smell of holy oils is puzzling and raises the question of how common the use of perfumed oils in sanctuaries was.<sup>18</sup> It is possible that perfumed oil was an obvious element of sanctuaries and therefore not worth mentioning. But it is more likely that fragranced oils were expensive and not every sanctuary could afford them.<sup>19</sup> Another plausible explanation is that written sources focused on the other properties of holy oils, mainly their healing qualities which employed the senses of taste and touch. In this case the olfactory sensations of pilgrims would not be the central message to be conveyed.<sup>20</sup>

Even if holy oils were unperfumed, visiting a sanctuary would nevertheless have been an olfactory experience, in particular owing to the smell of censers.<sup>21</sup>

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Holy Oil,” in *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls. Sense Perceptions in Byzantium* (Washington 2017) 153–166, at 159–163.

<sup>17</sup> P. Grossmann, *Abu Mina I Die Grufkirche und die Gruft* (Mainz am Rhein 1989) 65.

<sup>18</sup> This is even more surprising when compared with descriptions of the discovery of saints' bodies. In those cases the sweet fragrance of the holy body was almost always mentioned as a marker of sanctity. See R. Wisniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics* (Oxford 2018) 110; S. Evans, “The Scent of a Martyr,” *Numen* 49 (2002) 193–211. The smell of oil is mentioned in the homilies of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia as an important element of baptismal rites (Harvey, in *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls* 155).

<sup>19</sup> Beatrice Caseau, in *Les Pères de l'Église* 149–150, holds that despite their cost scented oils were widely used in sanctuaries, mainly to avoid the smell emitted by burning oil. However, it is worth considering that the olfactory experience of burning oil as perceived by people in late antiquity may have differed from our own.

<sup>20</sup> Harvey, in *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls* 159–160.

<sup>21</sup> See Lewis, *SLA* 5 (2021) 114. For more on incense in the context of pilgrimage see G. Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art* (Washington 1982) 27–31.

*Drinking holy oils*

As to a typology of the use of holy oils, drinking them was an unusual practice, appearing only a few times in the sources.<sup>22</sup> In one story in the *Miracles of Saint Artemios* we encounter four pilgrims who suffered from hernias in their groins. When they were sleeping, Saint Artemios came and gave them small flasks filled with olive oil:

Artemios held little flasks, which are called *anaklastaria*, and, in another vessel, very clear olive oil made from unripe olives. And Artemios filled four little bottles, and giving one to him said: “Drink this.” And Zontos drank it in his sleep.<sup>23</sup>

As soon as Zontos drank, he felt the need to relieve himself and did so without any difficulty. Other men, after examining their testicles, also discovered that they were restored to health. This story provides a detailed description of the oil given to pilgrims: it was very clear olive oil (διαυγέστατον) made from unripe olives (ὄμφάκιον).<sup>24</sup> It can be assumed that the oil used in this story was obtained in a distinct manner and was indeed clearer than normal, which might have made it better to drink. Moreover, the oil in the story was not only clear, but also made from unripe olives. Such oil could have been superior in some way, but it is also possible that specifying the type of oil was required in order to perform this procedure properly.<sup>25</sup>

The mention of small flasks called *anaklastaria*, used instead of

<sup>22</sup> *Mir.Artem.* 16, 30; *V.Aux.* 21, 60; *V.Dan.Styl.* 59; Cyril Scyth. *V.Euthym.* 54, 60.

<sup>23</sup> *Mir.Artem.* 30: κατέχων ρογία σεμνά, ἃ καλεῖται ἀνακλαστάρια, καὶ ἔλαιον εἰς ἄγγος ἄλλο διαυγέστατον, ὄμφάκιον· καὶ ἔγεμεν τέσσαρα. καὶ τὸ ἐν ἐπιδοῦς αὐτῶ λέγει· “Πίε αὐτό.” καὶ ἔπιεν αὐτὸ καθ’ ὕπνου.

<sup>24</sup> This term also appears in the Hippocratic corpus: *Diaet.Acut.* 65, *Mul.Aff.* 2.189.

<sup>25</sup> This would resemble the practices found in the magical papyri, as magical recipes often emphasize the nature and special qualities of the ingredients. In fact, oil from unripe olives is mentioned: *PGM* I 222–231; IV 228–229, 3008.

cups for drinking the oil, is unusual, as there are not many descriptions of storing or transporting oil in written sources, not to mention pilgrims' ampullae themselves.<sup>26</sup> However, archaeological finds have shown that it was a common practice of pilgrims. The most popular ampullae are those linked to Saint Menas. In the excavations conducted between 1961 and 1981 at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria, 142 ampullae connected with Saint Menas were found.<sup>27</sup> Ampullae have also been found in other parts of the Roman Empire. Flasks could be made of clay or metal and contain either oil, water, or in some cases dust. We know they were produced locally since the kilns used to bake them have been found.<sup>28</sup> Saint Menas' flasks are of varied sizes, volumes from 30–50 cm<sup>3</sup> to 250–500 cm<sup>3</sup>.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, this miracle is exceptional in comparison to other stories in Saint Artemios' collection, since in most cases, hernias were cured by anointing the testicles with oil or wax-salve. The author of the *Miracles* was probably aware of this curiosity and felt the need to explain the situation by addressing three issues. First, he wondered why the hernia was cured with olive oil; second, why it was applied through the mouth; and third, whether the miracle was still real even though it was accomplished during sleep.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For example, in the Artemios stories there are only two mentions of transporting something in a vessel. One is about delivering the remnants of a lamp (τὸ ἀπόκαυμα τῆς κανδήλης) in a vessel (ἄγγος) to a suffering boy in Africa (*Mir.Artem.* 4); the other mentions little flasks called ἀνακλαστάρια (30).

<sup>27</sup> Kiss, *Les ampoules de Saint Ménas* 14.

<sup>28</sup> Maraval, *Lieux saints* 212.

<sup>29</sup> J. P. Sodini, "La terre des semelles: images pieuses ramenées par les pèlerins des Lieux saints," *JSAw* (2011) 87–88. The biggest flasks, with their large quantities of liquid, were probably to serve the needs of groups rather than individuals.

<sup>30</sup> This passage addresses the issue of incubation in sanctuaries. For general information on incubation sanctuaries see e.g. G. Renberg, *Where*

What doctor in the whole world cured hernias with olive oil, and with this administered through the mouth? But merciful God, Who loved the race of mankind, has deemed those in need and those who faithfully entreat Him worthy of this charity through His most faithful martyr. For let us concede that it was not exactly as in the vision, but the olive oil that was dispensed for the cure was not imaginary but the real thing; even if the cured men did not see the vision, still another man Zontos was entrusted with having assisted the miracle.<sup>31</sup>

Among our other sources, only one story in the *Miracles of Saints Kosmas and Damianos* (16) depicts pilgrims drinking holy oils, in this case cerate diluted in water. This was used to heal three people: a man suffering from an anal affliction, as well as his sister-in-law and his wife who each had a sore throat. The man and the sister-in-law followed the instructions given to them by Saints Kosmas and Damianos, but the wife would not drink the cerate because of its terrible taste. Eventually, the saints made her smell and swallow the wick of the lamp containing cerate and so she was cured. What is striking in this story is the unwillingness of the woman who found cerate disgusting to drink. Even if the story may be patterned on such topoi as the stubbornness of the wife of Lot, the sin of Eve, or the general hostility of ancient authors towards women, it is still plausible that it correctly identifies the reason for the woman's reluctance to submit to the saints' orders, namely the disgusting

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*Dreams May Come. Incubation Sanctuaries in the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden 2017), especially the chapter "Incubation in Late Antique Christianity" (745–807); R. Wiśniewski, "Looking for Dreams and Talking with Martyrs: Internal Roots of the Christian Incubation," *Studia Patristica* 63 (2013) 203–208.

<sup>31</sup> *Mir.Artem.* 30: τίς ἰατρὸς ἐν κόσμῳ κήλας ἐλαίῳ, καὶ τούτῳ διὰ στόματος ληφθέντι, ἐθεράπευσεν; ἀλλ' ὁ ἐλεήμων θεός, ὁ ἀγαπήσας τὸ γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ταύτης τῆς ἐλεημοσύνης διὰ τοῦ πιστοτάτου αὐτοῦ μάρτυρος τοὺς χρῆζοντα καὶ πιστῶς αὐτὸν δυσωποῦντα ἠξίωσεν. δῶμεν γὰρ λέγειν, ὅτι οὐχ ὡς ἐν ὄραματι, ἀλλ' ἔλαιον ἦν οὐ νοητὸν τῆς ἰάσεως τὸ ἐπιδοθέν, ἀλλὰ τὸ φύσει καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἔλαιον, εἰ καὶ οἱ ἰαθέντες οὐκ εἶδον τὸ ὄραμα, ἀλλ' ἕτερος ἐπιστεύθη ὑπουργῆσαι τῷ θαύματι.

taste of cerate.

Yet another example of drinking holy oils comes from the *Life of Euthymius*. We are informed that a woman possessed by a demon drank holy oil for three days:

Since no woman enters within, the woman remained for three days and nights in front of the monastery: fasting and praying continuously; each evening she took holy oil from the tomb of the saint and drank the liquid from his inextinguishable lamp. In consequence, she was freed from the demon by the saint appearing to her in the third night and saying, “See, you are well! Return to your home.”<sup>32</sup>

From this translation we would deduce the availability there of drinkable holy oils. This would be even more probable because Euthymius’ tomb had a special installation that most likely enabled the distribution of oil. In another passage it is described as *χώνη*, thus some sort of a funnel installed in the lid of the saint’s tomb through which oil could be taken.<sup>33</sup> However, in the story of the woman who was freed from a demon, “oil” here rendered *ἀγίασμα*, which is not a very common term for oil, usually just *ἔλαιον*. In fact, the term *ἀγίασμα* has a variety of other meanings (see Lampe s.v.)—from a general designation of “holiness” to that of a “holy water font” (which prevails in modern Greek). One can therefore imagine the translation as either “each evening she took sanctification from the tomb of the saint” or even “each evening she took holy water from the tomb of the saint.” The latter meaning is even more tempting

<sup>32</sup> Cyril Scyth. *V.Euthym.* 54: καὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ εισέρχεσθαι γυναῖκα ἔνδον ἔμεινεν ἡ γυνὴ τρία νυχθήμερα ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ μοναστηρίου νηστεύουσα καὶ προσευχομένη ἐκτενῶς καὶ καθ’ ἑσπέραν λαμβάνουσα ἀγίασμα ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ ἀγίου θήκης καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ τῆς ἀσβέστου αὐτοῦ κανδήλας πίνουσα. καὶ οὕτως ἠλευθερώθη ἀπὸ τοῦ δαίμονος φανέντος. αὐτῇ τῇ τρίτῃ νυκτὶ τοῦ ἀγίου καὶ εἰπόντος “Ἴδε ὑγιῆς γέγονας: πορεύου εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου” (transl. Price).

<sup>33</sup> In the story about the translation of the saint’s remains (42) we are informed that “This crucible, from then till this day, pours forth every kind of benefit for those who approach with faith.”

as the “liquid” (as translated) from the saint’s lamp is ὕδωρ, which suggests water. It remains uncertain whether the woman could in fact have drunk water from the saint’s lamp. There is a similar story of water in lamps in the *Life of Peter the Iberian* where the saint used water instead of oil to light lamps.<sup>34</sup> However, since this is a miracle story, it would suggest it was rather unnatural to light lamps with water.

What is also clear in this story is the presence of the saint’s lamp. Lamps were common in every sanctuary and were usually used as a source of holy oils. Sadly, not much can be concluded about them from written sources. Most of the time they are described only as “saint’s lamps” or “sleepless lamps.”<sup>35</sup> The sources do not even agree about whether to use singular or plural when describing lamps. However, this would be explained if the pilgrims took oil from lamps such as polycandela which could cater for many pilgrims at once.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Eating cerate*

Eating cerate was not a popular method of using holy oils. It was probably more intuitive to make a poultice from it rather than to eat it. There are only two examples of eating cerate in the sources and both come from Artemios’ collection.<sup>37</sup> One story is about a certain Theognios who came to the saint’s

<sup>34</sup> Joh. Rufus *V.Petri Ib.* 27: “When the evening of the vigil came, he furnished all the lamps with water alone instead of oil [and] lit [them]. Once lit, they remained [burning] night and day without ceasing during the seven days of the holy feast.”

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Sophr. *Mir.Cyr. et Jo.* 3.3, 50.6; *Mir.Artem.* 15; *V.Theod.Syc.* 68; Cyril Scyth. *V.Euthym.* 54.

<sup>36</sup> A polycandelon is a lamp itself but at the same time carries smaller lamps shaped as bowls which are filled with oil. For a catalogue of polycandela see M. Xanthopoulou, *Les lampes en bronze à l’époque paléochrétienne* (Turnhout 2010).

<sup>37</sup> *Mir.Artem.* 33, 43. We cannot be sure that eating holy oils is described in the second story because the cake that was placed in the child’s mouth probably melted, making it an example of drinking holy oils.

sanctuary with his friend and his friend's child. Theognios suffered from a cough and the child from a hernia in his testicles. Having fallen asleep during the Saturday vigil, Theognios received help from Artemios:

And then he fell asleep and saw the one who is quick to help—the glorious servant of Christ Artemios speaking to him: “Get up, and take some of the prepared wax-salve and anoint your chest and eat some of it. Also anoint the testicles of the child reclining with you and both of you will be well.”<sup>38</sup>

After accomplishing these tasks, both pilgrims were restored to health. It is possible that eating was advised only to Theognios because his problem (a cough) was deemed internal and more ‘invisible’ than a hernia. According to this belief, applying cerate both internally (through the mouth) and externally (directly to the affected area) would strengthen the healing process and help prevent both a cough and a hernia.

It is puzzling that Theognios anointed his friend's child while the child's father was also present in the sanctuary. However, it can be explained by the practices of dream visions and incubation. People who received commands in dreams were usually supposed to perform them themselves immediately, not to rely on sanctuary staff or friends.

*Anointments with holy oils: who anointed pilgrims?*

Self-anointing is the most common method described in the sources.<sup>39</sup> It usually was performed by locals who lived in the

<sup>38</sup> *Mir. Artem.* 33: καὶ ἐτράπη εἰς ὕπνον καὶ ὄρᾳ τὸν σύντομον πρὸς βοήθειαν, τὸν ἔνδοξον τοῦ Χριστοῦ θεράποντα Ἀρτέμιον λέγοντα αὐτῷ· “Ἀνάστηθι, καὶ ἐκ τῆς γενομένης κηρωτῆς λαβὼν ἄλειψαί σου τὸ στήθος καὶ φάγε ἐξ αὐτῆς· ἄλειψον δὲ καὶ τοὺς διδύμους τοῦ σὺν σοὶ ἀνακειμένου παιδίου, καὶ καλῶς ἔξετε.”

<sup>39</sup> See *Mir.Artem.* 3, 13, 16, 19, 33, 37; *Sophr. Mir.Cyr. et Jo.* 1.8, 3.3, 7.3, 22.4–5, 50.6, 51.8, 70.10; *Joh. Rufus V.Petri Ib.* 34; *Mir.Theclae* 7, 40; *V.Theod. Syc.* 87, 88, 91, 102.

same city or even close to a sanctuary.<sup>40</sup> With self-anointings, practicality could also be a factor, at times practiced by pilgrims travelling from far away who had no one around to perform the procedure for them. For example, in the *Life of Saint Theodore of Sykeon* we find self-anointments performed by a sailor and a bishop from a distant region (87, 102); in both cases Saint Theodore gave them oil and told them to anoint themselves. In the *Life of Peter the Iberian* (34), Peter and John, his companion, while travelling, used oil produced by the relics of the True Cross to anoint themselves:

This piece of the cross let oil flow forth in abundance continually for a whole week on the journey, to such an extent that they would receive [it] in their hands and anoint their faces and their bodies and yet again more oil would gush forth.

Of course, oil was not used to heal but rather to strengthen them during their journey. In other stories in the miracle collections pilgrims usually received a command to anoint themselves while sleeping. Those who received such commands in dreams were usually supposed to perform them themselves, not to rely on sanctuary staff or friends. This duty, individual response, is consistent with the general practice in dream visions in incubation shrines. Self-anointing is presented differently in the lives of saints, where the practice of incubation and receiving commands through dream visions is absent.

Cases of pilgrims anointing each other most often deal with children and persons who were not capable of anointing themselves.<sup>41</sup> These cases give insight into the day-to-day life of sanctuaries, since usually other pilgrims are silent figures in the sources and the narrative focuses on the protagonist being

<sup>40</sup> This provides an interesting insight into the topography of cities such as Constantinople. Miracle collections can sometimes serve as 'itineraries' where pilgrims and visitors describe their journeys to the sanctuary through the city. See for example *Mir.Artem.* 13, 21 (with details of a candle shop).

<sup>41</sup> *Mir.Artem.* 15, 33; *Sophr. Mir.Cyr. et Jo.* 28.9–11.

healed by a saint. Mentions of pilgrims anointing each other appear almost exclusively in the miracle collections. Their absence from the lives of saints could also be a result of generic differences between miracle collections and saints' lives. In the lives there is usually not room for such interpersonal contact among pilgrims as was presented in the miracle collections, where the healing process usually took place in front of other pilgrims, gathered together in a sanctuary and waiting for help. A story from the *Miracles of Saint Artemios* depicts Narses, a pilgrim who used to mock Saint Artemios. He experienced a hernia in his groin and decided to seek help at the saint's shrine since Artemios specialized in genital problems. While descending to the tomb of the saint, Narses fell.

Those present lifted him up, carried him to his bed, washed his legs and wound with warm water and sponges and applied the holy martyr's salve like a plaster and in this way the ailing Narses recovered.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to the fact that it was other people who anointed Narses, a lot can be discerned about the infrastructure of sanctuaries such as the presence of beds for pilgrims and instruments of care such as warm water, sponges, and anointments.

All in all, while there are examples of saints anointing pilgrims in the miracle collections, the practice of anointing by saints is more common in the lives and can therefore be seen as their specific, generic feature. For example, Saint Artemios in his miracle collection rarely anointed his pilgrims, but at the same time he frequently touched their genitals and even performed minor surgeries (24, 33). Saints Cyrus and John are also portrayed as reluctant to anoint their pilgrims.<sup>43</sup> On the con-

<sup>42</sup> Sophr. *Mir.Cyr. et Jo.* 28.11: βαστάσαντες δὲ αὐτὸν οἱ παρόντες ἤγαγον εἰς τὴν στρωμνὴν, ὕδασιν τε χλιαροῖς καὶ σπόγγοις καθάραντες αὐτοῦ τὰ σκέλη καὶ τὸ ἔλκος, δίκην ἐμπλάστρου τὴν κηρωτὴν τοῦ ἁγίου μάρτυρος ἐπέθηκαν, καὶ οὕτως ὁ ἀσθενῶν ὑγιῆς ἐγένετο.

<sup>43</sup> There are only two examples: Sophr. *Mir.Cyr. et Jo.* 53.3–5, 65.6.

trary, in the lives of saints there are many examples attesting to this practice.<sup>44</sup> In most cases it is a male saint anointing a male pilgrim. For instance, John the Hesychast anointed a boy possessed by a demon.<sup>45</sup> Cyriacus, in the same way, restored an epileptic boy to health,<sup>46</sup> and Sabas anointed a man who fell from an animal while ascending a mountain.<sup>47</sup> Such patterns therefore reveal more about the narrative appropriate to specific literary genres than the real characteristics of the cults of saints.

Surprisingly, some male saints also used to anoint female pilgrims, as in accounts of Peter the Iberian or Sabas.<sup>48</sup> But in one source, the *Miracles of Saint Artemios*, we do encounter a gendered practice.<sup>49</sup> When a woman came to the sanctuary with her daughter who suffered with a hernia, Saint Artemios did not himself anoint the girl, but sent Saint Febronia, his female counterpart who was also residing in the sanctuary, to do so.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See *V.Aux.* 18, 20; *V.Theod.Syc.* 18, 68, 85, 107, 112; *V.Nic. Sion* 26, 33, 40, 73, 74; Cyril Scyth. *V.Euthym.* 60, *V.Jo.Hes.* 21, *V.Cyriac.* 9, *V.Sab.* 45; Joh. Rufus *V.Petri Ib.* 99.

<sup>45</sup> Cyril Scyth. *V.Jo.Hes.* 21.

<sup>46</sup> Cyril Scyth. *V.Cyriac.* 9.

<sup>47</sup> Cyril Scyth. *V.Sab.* 45.

<sup>48</sup> These examples will be considered below in discussion of where anointments could take place.

<sup>49</sup> Such situations are not common in the sources I have examined. In most cases Saint Febronia merely accompanies Saint Artemios. There are only two situations when she actively helps visitors at the sanctuary. In addition to the story presented here, there is one (*Mir.Artem.* 45) in which a suffering mother comes to the sanctuary with her new-born child whose testicles were sore. Febronia cured the woman by giving her jujube berries to eat. The mother then touched her son's genitals and he was thus restored to health.

<sup>50</sup> A. Busine, "The Dux and the Nun. Hagiography and the Cult of Artemios and Febronia in Constantinople," *DOP* 72 (2018) 93. See also M. Kaplan, "Une hôtesse importante de l'Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste de l'Oxèia

This very night the same mother of the girl once again saw a most attractive woman dressed in monastic garb, making a plaster from wax-salve and applying it to the girl's genitals.<sup>51</sup>

I have found only one example of higher sanctuary staff anointing pilgrims. Sanctuary staff are generally background characters in these sources, not described nearly as much as saints or pilgrims. This case appears in the dramatic story of a woman who decided to visit Menas' sanctuary. While she was staying at an inn, the innkeeper attempted to rape her. During the assault, she prayed to Saint Menas and the saint paralyzed the attacker's arms. The woman escaped to Menas' shrine and became a nun. The man who tried to assault her also went to the sanctuary and begged the saint for forgiveness and for his arms to be cured. Eventually,

The man went down to the saint's crypt where is the tomb of the saint. Going down, the archipresbyter took oil from the saint's lamp and anointed the man's arms.<sup>52</sup>

It is perhaps puzzling that the only example I have found of anointing by a member of higher staff is the anointing of a

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à Constantinople: Fébronie," in E. Fisher et al. (eds.), *Byzantine Religious Culture: Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot* (Leiden 2012) 31–52. According to Febronia's *Passions*, she was a nun tortured under Diocletian because of her faith and refusal to marry a Roman soldier. Busine's article provides more information on Artemios and Febronia's cult (especially on the replacement of the cult of Artemis by these saints).

<sup>51</sup> *Mir.Artem.* 24: ἐν αὐτῇ οὖν τῇ νυκτὶ ὄρᾳ πάλιν ἡ αὐτὴ τῆς παιδὸς μήτηρ γυναῖκα εὐοπτοτάτην, μοναχικὴν περιβεβλημένην ἀμφίασιν, ποιήσασαν ἔμπλαστρον ἐκ τῆς κηρωτῆς καὶ ἐπιθεῖσαν τῷ κρυφίῳ τῆς παιδός. It is not surprising that Febronia also healed genitals, in light of the way in which she was tortured; it is stated that her breasts were removed during torture. This could explain the belief that she had gained special abilities in healing female organs; see A. Busine, *DOP* 72 (2018) 109.

<sup>52</sup> Tim. Alex. *Mir.Men.* 6: κάτελθε εἰς τὴν κατὰβασιν, ὅπου ἡ θήκη τοῦ ἁγίου. Κατελθὼν δὲ ἔλαβεν ὁ ἀρχιπρεσβύτερος ἔλαιον ἐκ τῆς κανδήλας καὶ ἐσφράγισεν τοὺς βραχίονας αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὑγιής.

criminal.<sup>53</sup> But it is at the same time a case of a repentant sinner, hence an excellent figure for a moralizing story.<sup>54</sup>

*Which parts of the body were anointed?*

We have some instances of anointing the entire body, for example in the *Life of Auxentios* the case of two men suffering from elephantiasis: “he took holy oil and anointed them from head to feet.”<sup>55</sup> It is possible that this method was applied because elephantiasis affects the entire body. A similar method of healing can be found in the *Miracles of the Archangel Michael*: many lepers and those suffering from elephantiasis were healed by immersing themselves in fishponds, where the fish licked the whole body of the sick persons and helped them recover.<sup>56</sup>

However, most of the cases in the sources concern diseases that affected specific parts of the body, which were anointed directly. Thus, if someone had a leg disease, the legs were anointed. Such a practice brings to mind Jesus’ healing of a blind man, who regained his sight through saliva mixed with mud (Jn 9:6). In the *Miracles of Saints Kosmas and Damianos* there

<sup>53</sup> In the classical world there is a hierarchy of anointings—persons of lower status (servants) perform it for their superiors (see Jn 12:1–8).

<sup>54</sup> It is also possible that the saint did not want to appear himself to the criminal but acted through his representative.

<sup>55</sup> *V.Aux.* 18: ἔλαβεν ἔλαιον τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἤλειψεν αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ κορυφῆς ἕως ποδῶν.

<sup>56</sup> “For he who is ill descends with fervent faith and admission of his sins into those miraculous waters and, submerging himself up to his beard, stands there wholly entreating almighty God and His holy archangel Michael; and forthwith by God’s command the fishes in the waters there come together and lick all round the entire body of him who is ill; and straightway he comes up healthy in soul and body, cured of chronic and recent diseases, both hidden and obvious, glorifying God and His commander Michael. For many lepers and sufferers of elephantiasis have been cleansed, and those with withered hands and feet healed, and a great many other illnesses of all sorts cured contrary to expectation.” Transl. M. J. Featherstone, in P. Niewöhner et al., *Germia 2010. The Byzantine Pilgrimage Site and its History* (Ankara 2012) 100–101.

are several examples of such direct anointment, e.g. cerate directly applied to wounds (1, 30) and eyes (22). In the *Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John* there is a story about a certain Photeinos who had an eye disease but eventually regained his sight:

Nemesion prayed for a long time, shedding tears, and after touching the coffin in which the relics and the probe of the saints (ἡ μήλη τῶν ἁγίων) were kept, he put his hands on the eyes of Photeinos, who was standing there. The latter, as soon as he felt the contact of his hands, immediately recovered his sight.<sup>57</sup>

In this case, sight was restored through contact with the tomb of the saints and their probe. It is interesting to wonder what ἡ μήλη was; in keeping with Hippocratic medicine, it may have been a spatula, dedicated to applying ointments. The same term also appears in the *Life of Euthymius*, where it is used to apply a substance from a jar to Cyril of Scythopolis, author of the *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*.<sup>58</sup>

This brings us to the topic of special constructions in saints' tombs or reliquaries that enabled the dispensing of oil.<sup>59</sup> These reliquaries usually resembled a small sarcophagus. Their structure included two crucial elements: one hole to pour ordinary oil in and another to obtain sanctified "holy" oil. The oil became holy by going through the channel and gaining contact with the relics inside or with small capsules containing the

<sup>57</sup> Sophr. *Mir.Cyr. et Jo.* 28.11: καὶ πολλὰ μετὰ δακρῶν εὐξάμενος, τῆς τε σοροῦ τῶν λειψάνων, καὶ τῆς μήλης τῶν ἁγίων ἀψάμενος, οὕτω τὰς χεῖρας ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς Φωτεινοῦ παρόντος ἐπέθηκεν. Ὁ δὲ τῆς ἀφῆς τῶν ἐκείνου χειρῶν μόνον ὡς ἤσθετο, εὐθέως ἀνέβλεψεν.

<sup>58</sup> Cyril Scyth. *V.Euth.* 60: "The great Euthymius consented; taking from his bosom a silver ointment-jar with a probe, he dipped in the probe and three times ministered from the jar to my mouth. Of the substance inserted by the probe the texture was that of oil but the taste was sweeter than honey and truly a proof of the divine saying, How sweet to my throat are thy sayings, beyond honey to my mouth."

<sup>59</sup> For a catalogue of such reliquaries from the Near East and Cyprus see Comte, *Les Reliquaires*.

relics. Such reliquaries are frequent in the material evidence but are not often mentioned in written sources. The same is true for special tomb constructions.<sup>60</sup>

However, since there is no explicit information about either oil or cerate being used in the story about Photeinos, the probe was possibly a stick like the one found stuck in the lid of a reliquary in the southern pastophorium of the North-West Church at Hippos in Palestine.<sup>61</sup> A stick or something similar may have been placed somewhere on the tomb of the saints and used to heal pilgrims.

*Where did anointments take place?*

The location where anointing took place is another aspect which clearly depends on the narrative patterns of the genre. Generally, in miracle collections, anointing took place in the sanctuaries themselves and had a stronger link to the space of the sanctuary. These anointings seem to have been public, taking place in front of everyone else, both other pilgrims and sanctuary staff. In the lives of saints, anointings could also take place in sanctuaries, but there is rarely information about other pilgrims being present. Sometimes they could happen outside of a sanctuary, for example in a house as in the *Life of Peter the Iberian* (99): “Commanding that all those [who] were superfluous should go outside, he took oil and anointed the girl.” It was also common for a saint to take the afflicted somewhere else, for example to a garden as in the *Life of Sabas*: “Taking the girl and her father into a garden apart and telling her to undress, he anointed her whole body from tip to toe, front and back.”<sup>62</sup> The option of going somewhere more private reflects

<sup>60</sup> In the West, we have a description of Felix of Nola’s tomb: Paulinus of Nola *Natalicium* 13.583–642; cf. Frances Trzeciak, *Cult of Saints*, <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E05123> [last access 3 June 2023].

<sup>61</sup> See discussion in P. Nowakowski, *Cult of Saints*, <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02968> [last access 19 May 2023].

<sup>62</sup> *V.Sab.* 63: λαβὼν αὐτὴν καὶ τὸν πατέρα αὐτῆς παρὰ μέρος ἐν τῷ κήπῳ καὶ

the literary convention of depicting the protagonist saint as a humble person who wishes to hide these miraculous deeds from the world. Thus, he or she prefers to perform such miracles in secret. The imitation of Jesus, who forbade his disciples to spread the word of his miracles, is also a good explanation.<sup>63</sup> Finally, the taboo of nudity or of physical contact with the opposite gender could also play a role—in both cited cases a male saint applies holy oils to a girl, and so the presence of spectators is not welcome.<sup>64</sup>

*A more complicated procedure?*

The practice of anointing the body did not consist only of applying oil to a sore spot: it cannot be separated from prayers and gestures performed at the same time.<sup>65</sup> Among the most popular actions were prayers, sentences aimed at expelling demons, or invoking Jesus' name. The prayers themselves were also accompanied by meaningful gestures. To “pray over somebody,” a phrase popular in the sources, was a well-attested practice of laying hands on a person, seen both in Jewish tradition and in the New Testament: for example, it was an element of the curing practice of Jesus and the apostles. Other gestures included making the sign of the cross and more ‘mobile’ actions such as going three times around the altar with a pilgrim.

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ἐκδυθῆναι αὐτὴν κελεύσας ἤλειψεν αὐτῆς ὅλον τὸ σῶμα ἀπὸ ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω, ἔμπροσθέν τε καὶ ὀπίσθεν.

<sup>63</sup> J. John, “Anointing in the New Testament,” in *The Oil of Gladness* 46–76, at 55.

<sup>64</sup> However, physical contact with the opposite gender was not a problem when it came to baptismal rites. Therefore, this behavior can probably be explained by the reluctance of the saint to perform the miracle in the presence of others.

<sup>65</sup> It resembles magical procedures (like those found in the magical papyri), in which the person performing procedures had to make special gestures, often at a certain time during the day or night.

The most common practice was making the sign of the cross,<sup>66</sup> as for example in a story in the *Life of Saint Theodore of Sykeon*:

Theodore, the child of God, took some oil from the lamp and touched the boy's head and with the sign of the Cross rebuked the demon saying, "Come out then, you most wicked spirit, and do not talk so much nonsense!"<sup>67</sup>

We also have examples of invoking Jesus' name, as it was a well-known element of healing practice in the New Testament.<sup>68</sup> The saints using this phrase presented themselves only as intermediaries in the process of healing.

In another example, from the *Life of Saint Nicholas of Holy Sion*, we encounter the practice of praying over a pilgrim, accompanied by anointing, making the sign of the cross, and saying a specific formula. In light of the philosophy of language, this can be understood as an example of a performative utterance,<sup>69</sup> a set of words spoken with the aim of changing reality:

The servant of God stood praying over him. And he took oil from the lamp of Saint Theodore, and made the sign of the cross upon his eyes, and said to him: "I have faith in God that tomorrow you will see the glory of God with your own eyes."<sup>70</sup>

There are also examples of more complex gestures, such as leading a pilgrim three times around the altar, as attested in the

<sup>66</sup> See *V.Theod.Syc.* 18, 60, 68, 85, 91, 107; *V.Nic. Sion* 26, 33, 40, 73, 74.

<sup>67</sup> *V.Theod.Syc.* 18: λαβὼν ἐκ τοῦ ἐλαίου τῆς κανδήλης ὁ παῖς τοῦ θεοῦ Θεόδωρος ἤψατο τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ, καὶ τῷ σημείῳ τοῦ σταυροῦ ἐπετίμησεν αὐτῷ λέγων· "Ἔξελθε λοιπόν, πνεῦμα πονηρότατον, καὶ πολλὰ μὴ φλυᾶρει."

<sup>68</sup> John, in *The Oil of Gladness. Anointing in the Christian Tradition* 55.

<sup>69</sup> For the concept of 'performative utterances' see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford 1962).

<sup>70</sup> *V.Nicol. Sion* 33: ὁ δοῦλος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ στὰς ἠῤῥατο ἐπ' αὐτῷ καὶ ἐπῆρεν ἔλαιον ἐκ τῆς κανδήλας τοῦ ἀγίου Θεοδώρου, καὶ ποιήσας εἰς τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ σταυροῦ λέγει αὐτῷ· "Πιστεύω τῷ θεῷ, ὅτι αὐριοῦ βλέπεις τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἰδίῳ ὀφθαλμοῖς." See also *V.Theod.Syc.* 68, 85.

*Life of Saint Theodore of Sykeon:*

The servant of the Lord laid the child near the sacred altar and bending his head, began to pray for him. After anointing the child with oil from the ‘sleepless’ lamp he raised him up by the grace of God and after leading him three times round the altar he gave him back to his parents.<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps this was meant to resemble the practice of circumambulation, well documented by the ambulatories constructed behind the presbyterium in notable pilgrim sanctuaries.<sup>72</sup> It is also interesting from the perspective of ‘lived religion’ which draws attention to practices enabling the use of the altar.<sup>73</sup>

*Conclusions*

This article has examined certain behaviors attested in the non-liturgical use of holy oils by pilgrims in the early Byzantine East. Among the practices of drinking, eating, and anointing with holy oils, it can be concluded that drinking holy oils was an unusual way of using them. This was especially visible in one of the stories from Artemios’ miracle collection. The eating of cerate or wax-salve, also uncommon in the sources, may have been aimed at internal health problems such as a cough. Although both drinking and eating holy oils are not common in the sources, they fit in the general picture of what could be done with relics. The desire to touch, kiss, feel, and even eat or drink relics was at the core of belief in their power.<sup>74</sup> If holy oils

<sup>71</sup> *V.Theod.Syc.* 112: ‘Ο δὲ θεράπων τοῦ κυρίου ἔθηκε τὸ παιδίον πρὸς τὸ ἅγιον θυσιαστήριον, καὶ κλίνας τὴν κεφαλὴν ἤρξατο εὐχεσθαι ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ· ἀλείψας δὲ αὐτὸ ἐκ τοῦ ἐλαίου τῆς ἀκοιμήτου κανδήλης διὰ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ χάριτος ἤγειρε, καὶ περιαγαγὼν αὐτὸ ἐκ τρίτου τὸ θυσιαστήριον κύκλω.

<sup>72</sup> For processions and the practice of circumambulation see e.g. J. Timbie, “A Liturgical Procession in the Desert of Apa Shenoute,” in D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden 1998) 423–424.

<sup>73</sup> Janico et al., *Religion* 48 (2018) 13–14.

<sup>74</sup> See the chapter on touching relics in Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the*

were fragranced, the experience of using these relics would be even more multidimensional.

Anointing the body was decidedly the most popular practice, probably because it was natural for people in antiquity to use oil in such a way.<sup>75</sup> As to who anointed pilgrims, the most common practice was for pilgrims to anoint themselves upon receiving commands to do so through dream visions. This was an ordinary procedure in every incubation shrine. The method was popular not only with those who lived near a sanctuary, but also among those who had travelled long distances or whose occupation forced them to travel and had no one to perform the procedure for them. Other practices included pilgrims anointing each other, saints anointing pilgrims, and anointings by higher sanctuary staff. The situation in which pilgrims anointed each other usually occurred when the afflicted were unable to do so themselves. As this required the presence of other pilgrims it is more commonly met in the miracle collections. Mentions of anointings by saints were dependent on the genre of the source. Anointings performed by saints occur more frequently in the saints' lives, as their purpose was to show the saint as an active person who performed miracles. Moreover, the absence of higher sanctuary staff performing the anointings shows that religious agency should be thought of in a broader framework, not limited to professionals but open to ordinary people as actors too.<sup>76</sup>

As to which body parts were anointed, the most common practice was to anoint a sore spot on the body—if a person suffered from an eye disease it was usual to anoint the eyes. Anointing could sometimes be performed on the entire body when the whole body was afflicted. Where anointing took place

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*Cult of Relics* 121–142.

<sup>75</sup> It shows that oil was very versatile—from everyday use to practices of anointing the body that resembled baptismal rites.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Gasparini et al., in *Lived Religion* 2.

depends largely on the source. Anointings in the miracle collections were more related to the sanctuary space and were thus more public than those performed in the saints' lives. The latter could take place anywhere, from a private house to a garden or sanctuary, an interesting example of creating 'sacred space' by a religious agent.<sup>77</sup>

Anointing could include additional gestures or praying such as invoking Jesus's name, saying performative utterances, praying over a pilgrim, or marking with the sign of the cross. These practices are more commonly found in the lives of saints. Such additional gestures make the practice of anointing the body more complex and show ways of expressing religion bodily, not only through prayer.<sup>78</sup>

To sum up, descriptions of practices are strongly shaped by the literary genre and conventions. The predilection in the lives of saints to present their protagonists as hiding their miracles from the world or performing them in secret contrasts with the need to boast about publicly performed miracles in the miracle collections, which served as advertisement brochures and were meant to attract pilgrims. These needed witnesses to support their claim for a high success rate in healing. In a similar way, the lives focused on their protagonists and most often mentioned personal anointing by the saint, whereas self-anointment was preferred in incubation sanctuaries where the order usually was received directly by the ailing person through a dream.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Janico et al., *Religion* 48 (2018) 13.

<sup>78</sup> Gasparini et al., in *Lived Religion* 4.

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