

## RECEPTIONS OF JOHANNINE MIRACLE STORIES IN HAGIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** Der Beitrag bietet eine Reihe von Beispielen hagiographischer Literatur, in denen Wunder eines oder einer Heiligen in Bezug zu johanneischen Wundererzählungen gebracht werden; oft an nur kurzen Zitaten oder Anspielungen erkennbar werden die Erzählungen über Wunder von Heiligen so zu Teilen narrativer Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums. Dabei geht es den Texten meist nicht nur um eine Nachahmung der Wunder Jesu allein, sondern darum, dass Christus selbst in den durch die Heiligen vollbrachten Wundern - und damit jenseits seines irdischen Wirkens in neue Zeiten und Welten hinein – weiterhin wirksam bleibt. Gleichzeitig kann die Tatsache, dass die hagiographischen Erzählungen in anderen Zeiten und Welten spielen, auch zu Transformationen der Wunder führen: Aus dem Weinwunder zu Kana etwa wird ein Bierwunder zu Kildare oder ein Eucharistiewunder.

**Keywords:** Hagiographic Literature, Johannine Miracle Stories, Narrative Reception of the Gospel of John.

When the future and reorientation of the *Novum Testamentum Patristicum* project was discussed about 20 years ago,<sup>2</sup> some of its founders and long-time collaborators argued that it was sufficient for the documentation of the reception history of New Testament writings to concentrate on the literally patristic writings, i.e. interpretations of the most important "fathers" of the Church. According to their view the value of (partly narrative) receptions in para-biblical or hagiographic writings was to be neglected. Of course, I fully understand: the abundance of material from literatures starting with the early Church and going to the transition from late antiquity to the Middle Ages is so unmanageable that - depending on the topic - decisions have to be made about the right selection of the material to be dealt with. However, a pure concentration on the literature of the so-called "fathers",

<sup>1</sup> Dear Stelian: ad multos annos!

<sup>2</sup> For a good introduction to the project and its overall goals see A. MERKT in collaboration with T. NICKLAS and J. VERHEYDEN, „Das Novum Testamentum Patristicum (NTP): Ein Projekt zur Erforschung von Rezeption und Auslegung des Neuen Testaments in frühchristlicher und spätantiker Zeit“, in: *Early Christianity* 6 (2015) 573-595.

as we often find in decisive treatises on the history of dogma,<sup>3</sup> is in danger of omitting material which, at least in its time, may have had a greater influence on many believers than many a treatise composed by an intellectual. Even if there are works of inferior theological quality among para-biblical and hagiographical writings, we must not simply ignore them if we want to understand the history of Christianity in an adequate manner.<sup>4</sup> This also applies to important aspects of the reception history of New Testament writings. I am well aware, for example, of the weighty influence that key passages in John's Gospel had on the development of Christian dogma - e.g. in the question of appropriate Christological and Trinitarian theological statements. It remains important to explore this further and more deeply than before.<sup>5</sup> But even forms of reception that seem insignificant at first glance can have far-reaching impact for our understanding of developments in early church thought. In the following contribution I will point to a pattern of narrative receptions of Johannine miracle narratives in hagiographic writings of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, illustrate its range with various examples and try to interpret their functions. This in turn may help to explain why at least parts of hagiographical literature confront us with a multitude of miracle narratives, some of which seem to us today to be historically and theologically largely irrelevant.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11)**

The *Life of Saint Brigida*, probably written in the middle or second half of the seventh century by a certain Cogitosus, will serve as the starting point for the

- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, the magisterial volumes on the history of Christology by Alois Grillmeier. The first volume, A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche 1: Von der Apostolischen Zeit bis zum Konzil von Chalcedon (451)* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, <sup>3</sup>1990 [1979]) has 829 pages – only some 20 of which are devoted to the witness of apocryphal writings. For a different approach showing the various possibilities of Christologies in extracanonical literature see J.-D. DUBOIS, *Jésus apocryphe* (Paris: Mame-Desclée, 2011) and P. JENKINS, *The Many Faces of Christ: The Thousand-Year Story of the Survival and Influence of the Lost Gospels* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).
- <sup>4</sup> And, of course, we should acknowledge that not all parts of the so-called patristic literature are of the same quality – some of them even (like many anti-Jewish homilies and tractates) highly problematic!
- <sup>5</sup> The first NTP volume on the Gospel of John – concentrating on its passion accounts – is currently prepared by Hans-Ulrich WEIDEMANN, Andreas HOFFMANN and Nestor KAVVADAS.
- <sup>6</sup> Regarding the impact of miracle stories on apocryphal and hagiographical writings see, for example, J.E. SPITTLER, “The Development of Miracle Traditions in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles”, and T. NICKLAS, „Absonderlich und geschmacklos? Antike christliche Wundererzählungen zwischen ‚kanonisch‘ und ‚apokryph‘“, both in: J. FREY, C. CLIVAZ & T. NICKLAS (eds.), *Between Canonical and Apocryphal Texts: Processes of Reception, Rewriting, and Interpretation in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (WUNT 419; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019) 357-380 & 415-440.

following short foray through various hagiographic writings.<sup>7</sup> Brigid is an Irish saint, probably a historical figure, who lived in County Kildare between the second half of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century. Cogitosus's *Vita* is not only interesting because it sometimes incorporates elements of early Irish sagas (e.g. the miraculous recovery of a silver brooch in a fish or the quenching of the hunger of the giant Lugaid) and (subtly) places Brigida in the place of a fertility goddess. The text was certainly also of political significance – as it was concerned with emphasising the importance of Kildare alongside Armagh, which until today is associated with the work of the fifth century Saint Patrick.<sup>8</sup> In the text itself we read of a number of Brigid's miracles - particularly many have to do with animals, including cows, dogs, wild boar, wolves and wild ducks. Others deal with Brigid's care for the poor and needy. The following passage shows that at least in individual passages the story is not told without a certain wink:

*Mirabili quoque eventu ab hac venerabili Brigida leprosi cervisiam petentes, cum non haberet illa, videns aquam ad balnea paratam, cum virtute fidei benedicens in optimam convertit cervisiam, et abundanter sitientibus exhaustit. Ille enim, qui in Cana Galilaeae aquam convertit in vinum per hujus quoque beatissimae feminae fidem aquam mutavit in cervisiam.*

*In another miraculous event by the honorable Brigida, lepers asked her for beer, but she had none. But seeing that water was prepared for the bath, she blessed it with the power of faith and turned it into the best beer. She drew abundantly for the thirsty. For he who in Cana of Galilee had turned water into wine, through the faith of this most blessed woman also turned water into beer.*

What is interesting about this short narrative is not only that the lepers mentioned do not ask for healing, but that the text, unlike the New Testament parallels (cf. Mark 1:40-45 par.)<sup>9</sup>, is obviously not concerned with questions of purity or cleansing. Instead, the narrative even seems to play with the motif of the bath water. This does not serve for cleaning or even purification, but now is used to quench the apparently excessive thirst of those asking - not with water, but with "best beer". *Brigid is good for you!* The decisive point of our story, however, is

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the Brigid traditions see O. DAVIES (in collaboration with T. O'LOUGHLIN), *Celtic Spirituality* (New York – Mahwah: Paulist, 1999) 31-34. – I have dealt with this text also in T. NICKLAS, „Das Bierwunder von Kildare und andere spätantike Transformationen biblischer Wundererzählungen“, in: U. EISEN & H. MADER (eds.), *Talking God in Society. Multidisciplinary (Re)constructions of Ancient Con(texts) Festschrift Peter Lampe* (NTOA 120/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020) 383-398. Some of the following observations can already be found in that contribution.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of texts related to Patrick see P. FREEMAN, *The World of Saint Patrick* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) but also DAVIES, *Celtic Spirituality*, 27-31.

<sup>9</sup> But see also the parallel in the *Unknown Gospel on Papyrus Egerton 2*.

found at the end: Brigid does not have superhuman powers that make this miracle possible. It is only through her faith that she is the mediator of what is happening here. Instead, it is God or Christ himself who works the miracle - the one who changed water into (excellent!) wine at Cana in Galilee.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the writings of the New Testament do not tell us a word about Ireland or, more specifically, the County of Kildare, is therefore not a problem: Christ's work in this narrative is not simply related to the past or to parts of the Levant, it also extends to the world into which our hagiographic text speaks.<sup>11</sup> I have shown elsewhere, on the basis of comparable observations, that many apostle narratives can also be understood as identity-forming narratives about origins, whose actual protagonist is the exalted Jesus himself, who continues to be effective as such.<sup>12</sup> Even if this cannot simply be applied to the plethora of known hagiographic literatures (which developed differently over the centuries and in different regional contexts), motifs suggesting similar things can be found there as well.

A variation of the above is found - again in explicit reception of the narrative of the wine miracle at Cana - in the *Life of Saint Columba* by Adomnán, between 679 and 704 the ninth abbot of Iona.<sup>13</sup> Adomnán who also is the author of a description of the Holy Land (*De Locis Sanctis*)<sup>14</sup> and to whom also an Irish Vision of the Otherworld (*Vision of Adomnán*)<sup>15</sup> is attributed, in this text is mainly interested in prophetic revelations to Columba (book 1), the saints' miracles collected in book 2 and visions of angels in book 3. Already in the introduction to volume 1, it becomes clear that Columba's healings take place through the power of prayer in the name of Jesus<sup>16</sup> - a motif that we already know regularly and in variations from many apostolic narratives. Adomnán describes Columba as living in an almost mythical world in which, besides historically identifiable persons, devilish beings,

<sup>10</sup> In the Johannine text Jesus performs the "sign" not because of his mother's will, but only when the "hour" set by the Father has come (John 2:4). Only then he can reveal his "glory" (2:11).

<sup>11</sup> Is this part of a broader discourse with Patrick traditions?

<sup>12</sup> For a broader discussion see T. NICKLAS, *Zwischen apokryph und hagiographisch: Spätantike Apostelerzählungen in ihrer Welt* (Tria Corda Lectures; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2023/24) [im Druck].

<sup>13</sup> For more information see, for example, R. SHARPE, *Adomnan of Iona: Life of St Columba* (London et al.: Penguin, 1995) 43-65.

<sup>14</sup> Regarding this writing see, for example, H. DONNER, *Pilgerfahrt ins Heilige Land: Die ältesten Berichte christlicher Palästinapilger (4.-7. Jh.)* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2011 [2002]) 296-311 [with an overview of other secondary literature].

<sup>15</sup> For more information see M. HERBERT & M. MCNAMARA, *Irish Biblical Apocrypha: Selected Texts in Translation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989) 137-148.

<sup>16</sup> Among the first sentences of the book we read: "By the power of prayer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ he healed those who suffered attacks of various diseases." (Translation: SHARPE, *Adomnan of Iona*, 109).

wild animals and sorcerers are at work. At the same time, angels and saints are active and the boundaries between this world and the hereafter dissolve. In addition, the narrated world of the text participates, at least in some of its parts, in the space of communication opened up by the writings of the Bible. Thus it is certainly no coincidence that the narrative of St Columba's first miracle explicitly relates to the first sign of Jesus in John's Gospel:

*Once, when St Columba was still a young man studying the Holy Scriptures with St Uinniau, the bishop, in Ireland, on a day when mass was to be said, by some mischance no wine could be found for the sacrificial mystery. Hearing the ministers of the altar complaining to one another about this problem Columba picked up a pitcher and went to the well to draw water, in accordance with a deacon's duties for the sacred service of the Eucharist. By this time he was certainly serving in the order of deacon (in diaconatus gradu administrans). He called on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who at Cana in Galilee changed water into wine, and in faith he blessed the water (invocato nomine Domini Jesu Christi, fideliter benedixit, qui in Cana Galileae aquam in vinum convertit) that he drew from the well. With Christ's help, here once again, the lowly nature of water was transformed at the saint's gesture into the more desired form of wine (quo etiam in hoc operante miraculo, inferior, hoc est aquatica natura, in gratiorem, videlicet vinalem, per manus praedicabilis viri conversa est speciem). Columba returned from the well into the church and put the full pitcher down beside the altar. 'Here you have wine,' he said to the ministers, 'which the Lord Jesus has sent for the celebration of his mystery.' When this was known, the holy bishop and his ministers gave great thanks to God, but the youthful saint ascribed it not to himself, but to the holy bishop Uinniau. And so Christ, the Lord, made this the first proof of power in his disciple, performing the same miracle that he himself had worked as the first of his signs in Cana of Galilee (Hoc itaque protum virtutis documentum Christus Dominus per suum declaravit discipulum, quod in eadem re, initium ponens signorum in Cana Galileae, operatus est per semetipsum). Let it shine like a lantern at the entrance of this book, this miracle of God manifested through our own Columba, so that we may pass forward to other miracles of power shown through him. (Life of Columba II 1).<sup>17</sup>*

Adomnán's narrative, as well as its reference to the text of John's Gospel, is clearly more complex than in the story first presented. Unlike the Brigid story, here it is really about a transformation of water into wine. That a lack of wine in late antique Ireland could actually become a problem for the appropriate celebration of the Eucharist may even suggest itself for historical reasons. Similar to the Johannine narrative, our text begins with a description of the plight - in which the ministers of the altar do not know how to help themselves. That Columba's role in this narrative does not simply correspond to that of the Johannine Jesus is already evident from the fact that he is neither explicitly confronted with the emergency or

<sup>17</sup> Translation SHARPE, *Adomnan of Iona*, 154. Text: W. REEVES, *The Life of Columba, Founder of Hy, written by Adamnan* (Dublin – Edinburgh: Wentworth, 1857 [repr. 2019]).

even asked for help. Instead, he first of all fulfils his role as a deacon who goes to the well to draw water - he, the deacon, thus does what the servants do according to John 2:7-8. And yet his role is not simply absorbed in this: obviously aware of what he is doing, he blesses the water in faith, which now - with the help of Christ - turns into wine.

The miracle continues to be Christ's miracle, it is mediated by the saint, but he does something which, in full confidence, is evidently understood as possible for every believer. While the motif of Columba attributing the miracle not to himself but to Bishop Uinniau may recall the so-called Markine *Messiasgeheimnis*, the following sentences again approach what we read in John: Columba's first miracle corresponds to the first miracle that John's Gospel reports about Christ. At the same time, the text is in a line of interpretation that relates the miracle of the Cana to the Eucharist. Is the association here also to be made that the "mystery" of the Eucharist is always and in every case to be understood as miraculous, because in it the effective presence of Christ is perceived? I think this is possible, but not clearly demonstrable. It seems much more important that with this narrative Columba's "light" should no longer be placed under the bushel of his modesty, but that this should illuminate the whole following book like a torch.

It is already apparent that for the reception of the above-mentioned miracle narratives as narrative re-enactments of the Cana Miracle, only a few motifs from the biblical text need to appear. In the first narrative, this is the transformation of a large quantity of water into another drink that is understood to be of high quality - namely beer, and in the second narrative, the transformation of water into wine with the help of a servant, who at the same time becomes conspicuous as a miracle worker for the first time. In both cases, the explicit reference not only to the Johannine parallel comes into play, but also the idea that the actual miracle worker - whether in Cana, Kildare or Iona - is always the same: namely Christ (or even God with Him) Himself.

### **The healing of the paralytic (John 5:1-7)**

Comparable examples can be found related to the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Betesda/Betzata (John 5:1-7).<sup>18</sup> § 11 (*Miracle 2*) in the *Life of St. Thomaïs of Lesbos*, an anonymous Byzantine writing probably going back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>19</sup> compares the situation of a paralytic eunuch named Constantine

<sup>18</sup> I exclude quotes of John 5:14 – that is, requests not to sin any more, as we find them, for example, in Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, § 47 (the chapter about Chronius and Paphnutius) or the *Life of St Thomaïs of Lesbos*, § 13.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the arguments regarding the text's date and provenance see Translation: P. HALSALL, "Life of St. Thomaïs of Lesbos", in: A.-M. TALBOT (ed.), *Holy Women of Byzantium*.

with the suffering of “the man who was paralyzed for thirty eight years” (John 5:5).<sup>20</sup> A more general parallel to Jesus’ different healings of paralytics is drawn by the *Miracles of Gregory Palamas*, a fourteenth century bishop of Thessaloniki.<sup>21</sup> Chapter 21 of this text reports the healing of a woman with menstruation problems which at the same time was bedridden (and thus considered paralyzed) for two years. According to the text the witnesses of the miracle “considered it not inferior to the one previously performed by Christ himself in supernatural manner with regard to the paralytic, whether one means the one in Capernaum, or the one in the Sheep Pool.” The decisive difference to the previous examples, however, can be seen in how the text goes on: “except *in those cases* it was Christ himself who performed them by himself, while in this case it was through Gregory, his disciple and friend, that he raised the sick woman suddenly from her bed and lengthy affliction in a similar way”.<sup>22</sup> Unlike in the previous narratives, the miraculous power here is attributed to the saint himself, who, however, is at least brought close to Christ through the designation as μαθητής and φίλος (cf. possibly John 15:15).

An only vague, but arguably much more exciting parallel can probably be seen in *Life and Miracles of Saint Thecla*, an influential writing from the reception history of the ancient *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.<sup>23</sup> This anonymous text was once wrongly attributed to Basil of Seleucia (died after 458); the quite precise dating of the second part, i.e. the *Miracles of Thecla* (which only take place after Thecla’s death) to the period between 468 and 475 CE can be secured with the help of numerous references to datable events and otherwise known persons.<sup>24</sup> The aim of the miracles is to show how, even after the death of the apostle, her presence in the region around Seleucia on the Kalykadnos (in Cilicia) proves beneficial. Different from many other apostle narratives, however, the idea of Christ’s presence is largely relegated to the background. At the same time, the text offers a reinterpretation of the

*Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996) 291-322, esp. 291-292.

<sup>20</sup> Translation: HALSALL, “Life”, 297-322. Greek text BHG 2454: *Acta Sanctorum Novembris 4* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1925) 234-42.

<sup>21</sup> The text also may go back to the fourteenth century around the time when Palamas was acknowledged as a saint by the Orthodox Church. For more information see A.-M. TALBOT – S. FITZGERALD JOHNSON, *Miracle Tales from Byzantium* (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012) xviii-xxiii.

<sup>22</sup> English translations: TALBOT – JOHNSON, *Miracle Tales*, 379 and 381.

<sup>23</sup> Editions: G. DAGRON (ed.), *Vie et miracles de Sainte Thècle. Texte grec, traduction et commentaire* (SHG 62; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1978) and B. KOLLMANN & B. SCHRÖDER (eds.), *Pseudo-Basilii von Seleukia: Vita et Miracula Sanctae Theclae. Leben und Wunder der Heiligen Thekla* (Fontes Christiani 93; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, KOLLMANN & SCHRÖDER, *Pseudo-Basilii*, 73-75.

space by overcoming the earlier cults in the region:<sup>25</sup> thus, the first chapters are concerned with showing how the woman apostle silences, overcomes and renders ineffective the "demons" that once dominated the area, such as Apollo Sarpedonios, Athena (with a sanctuary on Mount Kokysion), Aphrodite and finally Zeus himself. Different than in all other cases, the parallel between John 5:1-7 and one of the *Miracles of Thecla* does not consist in the fact that both Thecla and Jesus healed a paralyzed person. Instead, in both cases an older healing cult which functions – but does not function very well – is overcome. Chapter 25 of the *Miracles* speaks of an epidemic eye disease that could not be treated with usual measures, an "inhuman affliction" that "affected so many". In this emergency situation, the saint, who continues to be present in Seleucia even after her death, reacts. Unlike the previous examples, the human miracle worker does not simply represent the action of Christ - it is Thecla herself who takes the place of the ancient deities. And, unlike the previous examples, the reference to the Gospel of John is not made explicit. The text reads:

"But the martyr, the true healer of human nature, considered with pity this inhuman affliction that affected to many, and she opened the healing shrine in her sanctuary and summoned all together to herself. She gave the instruction during the night to one of the afflicted people and then proclaimed it to everyone through him, that all who had fallen victim to this affliction should make use of her bath. For this bath was the place of healing which was able to combat the eye disease, from the very beginning, but when stirred up by the power of the martyr it became the greatest remedy to the entire city together. From then on, the highway overflowed with those who went up with lamentation and tears, and those who came down full of joy and praise: for they ascended with their eyes shut, but descended with their eyelids opened again. For it was not the grace of that poor and miserable pool, which could save only one person – and hardly that – but the grace of an abundant and exceedingly generous fount."<sup>26</sup>

Already due to the fact that we are dealing here with the healing of people who (as the further course of the text shows) were in danger of going blind, but also because every explicit reference is missing, the text may be only an echo of the Gospel of John. Also, with the place of salvation mentioned here - a "holy district" after all! - and the nightly communication of the saints with the sick, one

<sup>25</sup> Following Andreas Merkt, one could speak about "augmented space" here: Regarding this concept see A. MERKT, "The Hetero-Topography of the Forum Romanum: How Late Antique Peter Traditions Generated an Augmented Reality of Public Space", in: T. NICKLAS, J.E. SPITTLER & J.N. BREMMER (eds.), *The Apostles Peter, Paul, John, Thomas and Philip with their Companions in Late Antiquity* (Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha 17; Leuven et al.: Peeters, 2021), 21-54.

<sup>26</sup> Translation slightly adapted from TALBOT & JOHNSON, *Miracle Tales*, 101 (who make the relation to John 5 clearer as it really is).

might think of the practices of an Asclepius sanctuary. Talbot and Johnson see a parallel between John 5:7 (ταραχθῆ)<sup>27</sup> and the idea that the water of the bath was “stirred up” (ἀνακραθέν) by Thecla’s power. Even more striking is the fact the text speaks about the “poor and miserable” κολυμβήθρα (cf. John 5:2 as well as the text-critically disputed v. 3b), which “could save only one person – “and hardly that” – a parallel to (the also probably secondary) John 5:4, where we read that only the first of the sick who reaches waters of Bethesda/Bethzata moved by an angel is healed. Instead the saint which remained in connection with the place even when the “flow of the water into the pools slowed down”<sup>28</sup> has to be seen as the actual source of the healing.

### **The Healing of the Man Born Blind (John 9:1-12)**

The miracles attributed to Severinus of Passau in the *Vita Sancti Severini* by Eugippius (ca. 465 – 533 CE)<sup>29</sup> are also modelled on biblical miracle narratives - both from the Old and New Testaments. But even combinations of motifs that go back to different narratives are possible. The best example can be seen in the story about the healing of a member of the people of the Rugians who was paralyzed due to a gout. Theodor Nüsslein's edition of the text simply recognizes a parallel to the synoptic healings of paralysed people (cf. Mark 2:1-12 par.)<sup>30</sup>, but there is clearly more to be discovered: after all, the paralytic is brought by his mother, a *widow*, on a chariot to Severinus, who is described here as a "man of God" (*vir dei*). After several days of fasting and fervent prayer, Severin heals the paralytic and sends him back – a combination of motifs that naturally recalls Elijah's miracle with the widow of Sarepta (1 Kings 17:17-23), and perhaps also Jesus' raising of the young man of Nain, also the son of a widow (Luke 7:11-17). For our question, however, the scene after the return of the healed man is of interest (§ 6.4):

“When he later appeared in a crowded weekly market, he demonstrated an astonishing miracle to all who saw him. Some said, ‘Look, this is the one who was rotten all over.’ Others denied altogether that it was he himself, and a pretty battle of words emerged.”

Even though the healed man does not resolve the problem or reveal his identity, from now on the Rugians (even though the text avoids speaking of their conversion or baptism) regularly turn to Severinus, the “servant of God” and

<sup>27</sup> TALBOT – JOHNSON, *Miracle Tales*, 423 n. 85 also point to John 5:3b-4.

<sup>28</sup> TALBOT – JOHNSON, *Miracle Tales*, 101.

<sup>29</sup> For more information see P. BROWN, *The Rise of Western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, rev. ed. 2013 [1996]) 125-126.

<sup>30</sup> Eugippius, *Vita Sancti Severini. Das Leben des heiligen Severin*, ed. and transl. by T. NÜSSEIN (Stuttgart: Ph. Reclam, 21999 [1986]) 130 n. 59.

“soldier of Christ”. The scene itself, of course, not only emphasizes the greatness of the “astonishing miracle”, but also recalls John 9:8-12. It is not the neighbors but the visitors of the market who see the healed one (cf. John 9:8), some recognize him as the one who was once seriously ill, others deny this – the result is what John 9:16 calls a *σχίσμα* (cf. also 7:43 and 10:19; Vulgate 9:16: *scisma*), and what is described here somewhat less specifically as *contentio*. Thus the hagiographic text at least offers an echo of the healing of the man born blind, without offering elements of the specific theology of this passage.

In contrast, the connection between the healing of the man born blind and the first of the *Miracles of the Pege*, a fascinating Mariological writing, is much more complex.<sup>31</sup> The church of *Our Lady of the Life-Giving Spring* still exists today in the Balikli district of Istanbul. Although the present building, located a few hundred meters west of the spring gate of the Theodosian city walls, dates back to 1833, traditions about a miraculous, healing presence of Mary, the Mother of God, at this site date back to the 5th century. While the *Ecclesiastical History* of the Byzantine historian Nikephoros Kallistu Xanthopoulos (1267/68 - after 1328) traces the origins of the church to an initiative of Emperor Marcianus (450-457 CE) and his wife Aelia Pulcheria, the 10<sup>th</sup> century anonymous collection *Miracles of the Pege* - perhaps composed around the end of the reign of Emperor Konstantin VII. (913-959 CE) or his successor Romanos II. (959-963 CE) – offers a different story about the origins of this sanctuary. In Chapter 2 of the text - after a lengthy preface - these are described as follows: Apparently shortly before his rise to Emperor, the later Leo I (457-474 CE) encounters a blind man and leads him along the path “out of a spirit of compassion”. When the blind man asks for a drink, a voice addresses the later emperor and reveals him that he is at the site of a (muddy) spring. “Out of pity for the poor man”, the future emperor looks for water but cannot find any. Then the voice speaks to him again:

“Emperor Leo, if you take some of this mud and slimy water and smear it on the blind man’s eyes, you will discover who I am who dwell in this place so that afterward you may prepare a dwelling for me to live in, and I will help everyone who comes to it.”<sup>32</sup>

Several aspects of this passage are interesting. While the narrator himself still calls Leo the “future emperor”, the mysterious voice addresses him Λέων βασιλεῦ and thus already anticipates his later rank. At the same time, clearly echoing John 9:6 and 11 (ἐπίχρισον τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τοῦ τυφλοῦ), it commands him to take mud from the water of the spring and anoint the eyes of the blind man

<sup>31</sup> For an introduction to this writing see TALBOT – JOHNSON, *Miracle Tales*, xiv-xviii.

<sup>32</sup> Translations: TALBOT – JOHNSON, *Miracle Tales*, 209-211.

with it. After this, he would understand who dwelt at this spring - namely, the Blessed Theotokos herself - and should erect a dwelling place for her. Then she would help everyone who came to this place. The description of Leo's reaction shows even more clearly that the scene of the healing of the man born blind is in the background:

“Immediately obeying the injunction of the Mother of God, he then restored the blind man's vision with the mud that she indicated, so that everyone glorified God, who had previously given sight to the man blind from birth (ἐκ γενετῆς τυφλόν; cf. John 9:1) and a second time granted healing to this man as well.”

A few years later Leo actually became emperor and thereupon erected above the spring the so-called Καταφύγιον, apparently the nucleus of the later church.

More than all previous examples, this text seems to participate in the ambiguity of the Johannine text. It is already interesting how many qualities of the future ruler the text juxtaposes: It is true that the text introduces Leo with his later epithet Leo “the butcher” (ὁ ... καλούμενος Μακέλλης) – a name attributed to him because in 471 he ordered the murder of his Alan *magister militum* Aspar (400-471) and his son Ardabur. That it was Aspar who had contributed decisively to Leo's rise is of course concealed. According to the *Miracles*, it is the Mother of God herself who gives him “an entire empire in return for his humanity and compassion” and on whose behalf he built the shrine. In his dealings with the blind man and in his obedience to the voice from the source, Leo has proven himself to have the qualities needed by a future emperor. Thus, without coming from an imperial family, he can justify his rule on the basis of the election by the Mother of God - of particular importance in Constantinople, the city of the Mother of God.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, it is striking that the text is hardly interested in the healed blind man and his future fate – this figure is only needed to put Leo in the right light. Thus, one could perhaps go one step further: without this being explicitly stated, the Leo of this passage is also a blind man who is healed. He knows nothing of the fate that awaits him, and he does not recognize who is calling him from the source. But because he acts in the right way even without this knowledge, he becomes not only a seeing person (at least in a figurative sense), but the one to whom Mary entrusts the kingdom.

### Conclusion:

Already the few examples I have been able to briefly touch upon show how diversely Johannine miracle narratives could be used in hagiographic literature. It

<sup>33</sup> For more information see, for example, L. BRUBAKER & M.B. CUNNINGHAM (eds.), *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium. Texts and Images* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies; London Routledge, 2016 [2011]).

is already interesting that in the vast majority of cases only a few signal motifs or basic structures of the Johannine accounts become the basis of what is told. This probably means that the hagiographical receptions do not expect its readers to know the written texts. They are rather based on something like “virtual narratives” that could be evoked from the “social” or “cultural memory”<sup>34</sup> of the addressees without having to presuppose too many details.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the function of the quotations, allusions and echoes varies. A recurring basic motif, however, is to establish a relationship between the narrated worlds of Bible and hagiographical texts. The hagiographical writings thus participate in a space of communication opened up by the biblical writings and connect them with other narrated worlds, like the ones created by the mythology of pre-Christian Ireland or Greco-Roman religion. In many cases, the goal of these stories is to make recognizable the presence of Christ, the Mother of God, God himself or at least of apostles and saints. At the same time, the reference to Johannine miracle stories - and not only to these - makes it possible to establish continuity with the origins of Christianity even at places and in historical contexts which are not represented in the New Testament writings. The new texts thus want to offer perspectives of how to read the real world in new ways.

Finally, it is unclear whether and in which cases there was initially a narrative about a saint, which later editors artfully connected with Johannine miracle narratives. In some cases even the reverse may have happened: the development of a narrative out of Johannine motifs. I think both possibilities are conceivable. Where the allusions to John's Gospel seem rather vague (as in the *Miracles of Thecla*) or are only a marginal motif (as in Eugippius's narrative of the healed Rugian), the former may seem likely. But even in the narrative from the *Miracles of the Pege*, where the motif of the healing of the man born blind is decisive in the present version, it is conceivable that this developed from a simpler narrative in which the Mother of God appeared to the later emperor at the spring sanctuary and legitimized his rule.

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<sup>34</sup> Regarding this term see J. ASSMANN, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, <sup>3</sup>2000 [1997]).

<sup>35</sup> Regarding the idea that the New Testament can be seen not only as a written text but as a kind of “virtual entity” see A. MERKT, „Novum Testamentum Patristicum (NTP)“.

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