

THE SAINT PEREGRINE PROJECT

Peregrine's sore. An analysis of the hagiographical reports on the leg disease of Saint Peregrine Laziosi of Forlì (1256–1345)

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Abstract Saint Peregrine Laziosi of Forlì (1265–1345), healed in slumber by the Christ from a fatal leg lesion at the age of sixty, is considered in the Catholic tradition as the patron Saint of people suffering from incurable malignancies. On the basis of later sources relating his miraculous healing, both Roman Church and contemporary medical literature have hitherto endorsed various diagnostic interpretations of Saint Peregrine's disease, either to ascertain its incurability and therefore the truthfulness of the miracle described by the sources, or, on the contrary, aiming to provide a complete naturalistic account of his lesion and instant healing. Albeit conflicting, both perspectives rest upon a literal reading of the available texts about Peregrine's life. Medical scholarship on the subject, in particular, taking hagiographical reports as reliable sources to establish the 'clinical' truth of the matter, ends up neglecting the religious nature and the edifying purposes of extant written witnesses. I propose in this article to tackle this problem through a narratological lens, stressing

on the literary templates and the medical terminology which shape the most ancient and authoritative report about Peregrine's lower limb pathology. A retrospective diagnosis of venous varicosity complications may indeed appear convincing, although not beyond every doubt: notwithstanding its terminological accuracy, consistent with ancient and medieval medical accounts of infected leg ulcerations, this text builds strongly on a traditional scriptural and hagiographical background, ranging from the Old Testament and the Gospels to early Byzantine Lives of Saints. The impossibility to clearly distinguish the literate convention from the historical account prevents us from stating with certainty the originality of Peregrine's pathological history, and hence the reliability of our sources as clinical reports.

Keywords Saint Peregrine Laziosi, Hagiography, Orthostasis, Asceticism, Varicose ulcer

Beatified by Paul V in 1609, and venerated as Saint since the canonization consistory convened by Benedict XIII in 1726, Peregrine Laziosi (1265–1345) is considered in the Catholic tradition the patron saint of people suffering from every kind of severe and chronic malignancy, in particular from lower limb pathologies and skin diseases, cancer, AIDS, and depression. The worship of Peregrine began well before the official acknowledgement by the Roman Church, and arose quite spontaneously – as far as we can tell – from the numerous miracles attributed to him among his fellow citizens immediately after his death^[i].

Later sources and iconographic witnesses relate a selection among the episodes handed down by former hagiographical traditions, whose narrative appears to be strongly shaped by renowned evangelic models: the restoration of sight to a blind beggar, the exorcism of a possessed woman, the healing of a man fatally injured after having fallen from a tree, the resurrection of a dead man, the multiplication of wheat and wine during a famine^[ii]. Peregrine's cult, originally spread in virtue of these *post-mortem* miracles, is firstly attested in the basilica of his religious order, the Friar Servants of Mary (*Ordo Servorum Mariae*) in his own city,

Forlì (Romagna, Northern Italy), where his body was buried and venerated as a relic immediately after his decease. The transfer of his mortal remains in a new shrine within the basilica in 1639 confirmed in the eyes of the Holy See the previous approbation of his cult, thus paving the way to his later sanctification: Peregrine's body – according to coeval sources – was found to be incorrupt, and still lies in that location in a glass urn, re clothed in silk and exposed for veneration. The lower legs and feet, the arms, skull, neck and chest are covered with flesh residues^[iii].

Saint Peregrine's life

Peregrine Laziosi did not spend his whole life in sanctity. Until about his twenties, the young Laziosi – the only child of an aristocratic family of Forlì – fervently supported the Ghibelline leanings of his town. Forlì had been charged with heresy and therefore excommunicated by the Pope Martin IV in 1282 because of its resolute political opposition to the temporal ambitions of the Vatican. According to a later chronicle, written by the Servite Friar Michele Poccianti in 1567, the Florentine Philip Benizi (1233–1285), General Superior of the order of the Servants of Mary and future saint, visited the city aiming at bringing its inhabitants back to obedience to Pope Martin. This unfortunate attempt produced the hostile reaction of the Forliviens, who heavily offended the papal legate Benizi and expelled him from their city after having manhandled him^[iv]. The *Annals* of the Servite order, whose first edition dates back to 1618^[v], add an important detail omitted by previous sources. The eighteen-year old Peregrine – described as a furious (*vecors*), unrestrained (*effrenis*), and reckless (*audax*) adolescent –, having joined the crowd surrounding Benizi, publicly attacked the friar who therefore left the city invoking forgiveness for his persecutors. Poccianti's account explicitly constructs this anecdote upon an analogy with the Scriptures: just as in the *Acts of the Apostles*, whereby the protomartyr Stephen's prayer causes the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (*Act. Ap.*, 7, 60; 9, 1), the orison of Benizi immediately provokes Peregrine's calling. Having repented, the young man joined the clergyman outside the walls of Forlì, knelt at his feet and asked him to be accepted in the Servite order^[vi]. Benizi's affirmative response marked the beginning of Peregrine's religious turn. The pronouncements of the Second Council of Lyon (1275) – forbidding all the mendicant orders founded after the Fourth Council of the Lateran (1215) to receive new novices – probably delayed his actual

The sources report that Saint Laziosi, struck at the age of sixty by an incurable disease in his right leg, was miraculously healed by Christ, thus avoiding the limb amputation scheduled by a physician on the following day. In current scholarship, no agreement has been reached on the exact nature of this pathology. Through a selection of the sources relating Peregrine's life, this paper will discuss this problem by focusing on the theological and hagiographical frameworks in which the disease and the healing of the saint are presented, so as to question the possibility of an exclusively medical understanding of this topic.

admission among the Servants of Mary to the years 1290–1295, when the Pope Nicholas IV restored the rights of the congregation. Most likely, Laziosi and Benizi fled from Forlì finding shelter in the Servants' convent in Siena, where Peregrine started his new life as friar perhaps waiting for his official admission among the Servants^[vii]. Neither Benizi's intervention nor Laziosi's conversion could hence have any impact on the broader political situation. A short time after their escape, the French commander Jean d'Eppe (1240–1293) laid siege to the city on behalf of the Pope, leading his army against the Forlivan ranks headed by Guido da Montefeltro (1223–1298). After this fight, known as the battle of Forlì, the eighteen thousand soldiers of the Guelf alliance were reduced – in Dante's famous words – to the «bloody heap» (*sanguinoso mucchio*) mentioned in the *Divine Comedy* (*Inf.*, XXVII, 43–44 – transl. Mandelbaum). Only one year later, on May 1283, after having defeated Guido da Montefeltro and his army in Forlimpopoli and Meldola, the Papal forces were able to bring Forlì back under the control of the Pontifical State. These clashes, however, did not end with the thousands of dead of 1282–1283. When, at the age of thirty, Friar Peregrine came back to his city from Siena (around 1295), Forlì was about to challenge again the papal authority with the rebellion lead by the Ghibelline Scarpetta Ordelaffi († 1315). For the next fifty years, until Peregrine's death, the House of Ordelaffi strengthened its authority to the detriment of the Popes, expanding its possession beyond Forlì and repeatedly clashing against the Pontifical army and its allies^[viii]. In short, regardless of the details of Poccianti's hagiographical account, Peregrine's conversion and his charitable engagement in Forlì are easily understandable against the historical background of the ferocious political circumstances of 13th–14th century Romagna.

Peregrine's asceticism and his disease: a withheld connection

The oldest document available about Peregrine's life is the *Vita Beati Peregrini Foroliviensis ordinis servorum Sanctae Mariae*, written before 1483 by the Sienese humanist Niccolò Borghese (1432–1500)^[ix]. Healed from

a recurrent disease by the intercession of the Blessed Giacomo Filippo Bertoni (1454–1483), a member of the Servants, Borghese made the vow to edit several *Vitae* of Saints affiliated to this Order as a thanksgiving for the

grace received. In the Servite monastery of Faenza, where he worked at his compilations, Borghese had available an ancient manuscript recording a *Legenda Beati Peregrini de Forlivio*, a hagiographical text written a few years after the Saint's death (around 1350) by a confrere who probably knew him directly. This older manuscript, unfortunately, was lost between 1525 and 1528. But – as shown by former studies^[x] – Borghese's *Life* is nothing but an elegant and polished Renaissance adaptation of the harsh medieval Latin of his 14th century source. Although it omits the 'scandalous' particulars about Peregrine's Ghibelline youth, this text is therefore the most authoritative source of information about the main events of his adult life as well as the most faithful witness of the first hagiographical narrative ever written about him. Because of its chronological priority over other texts and witnesses, it is also the most suitable lens through which to examine the first description available of Peregrine's ailment and to attempt to enlighten the meaning attributed to it among his contemporaries^[xi]. According to Borghese's account, Friar Peregrine, once back in his hometown – when, we are told, he was already an example of virtue and holiness for other people (*virtutis and sanctimoniae ceteris exemplum erat*) – dedicated himself to severe ascetic practices such as staying awake in prayer during the night (*vigiliis*), fasting (*ieiuniis*), bodily mortifications (*corporis afflictionibus*). Borghese also reports that the saint stood *steadily* for three decades:

Barely credible as it may be, for thirty years he had never been seen sitting: he stood all the time when he was eating; he prayed on his knees; sometimes, overcome by strong fatigue and sleep he leant on a rock, or, if he was in the choir, on benches. He did not sleep in his bed during the night, but spent almost all of it reading hymns and psalms. He meditated continuously on the law of God, and – through the examples of the Christ – he desired to progress as far as he could. He daily examined his actions, mourning the faults and the errors he thought to have committed^[xii].

In the light of modern medical knowledge, Borghese's statement about Peregrine's continuous standing is hardly believable. In such an ongoing standing position, the heart could not pump properly the blood throughout the body, so that serious cardiac and vascular complications (chiefly varicose veins) inevitably take place as consequences of its weariness. The other information contained in the passage is also at risk of inconsistency: prolonged sleep deprivation is a well known source of various disorders, such as hypertension, cardiac attacks, depression and anxiety, brain damages, weakened immune system. It is therefore highly problematic to take the text literally: according to modern medicine, Peregrine's thirty-year nearly continuous orthostatic posture would be plainly impossible. A less stringent reading of these lines, nevertheless, may suggest that Borghese (and hence the unknown author of the *Legenda Peregrini*) could simply have described (maybe with some exaggerations) a real spiritual practice that Saint

Peregrine seems to share with other Christian holy men, as well as with some pagan philosophers and other mystics from different spiritual traditions. This practice is known as 'renunciation of the bed', and consists in a steady mental and physical exertion to control hypnic states, by developing – by means of prayer, meditation, philosophical instruction – a constant mood of concentration as part of a sober and genuine way of life. Such conceptions and practices are as ancient as widespread. Since the Pythagoric tradition, as far as we can tell from later sources, sleep and dreams are considered among the things philosophers need to control^[xiii]. In Plato's *Republic*, the habit of lying on couches is mentioned as an unnecessary comfort, characteristic of «luxurious cities» (*Resp.*, 372e). Marcus Aurelius, in compliance with Stoic precepts, used to sleep on rigid wooden planks^[xiv]. In Greek Patristic writings, this kind of ascetic practice is called *chameunia* (literally «lying on the ground»^[xv]). Christian *chameunia* joins and renovates the philosophical tradition of spiritual exercises and finds its evangelical foundation in two twin passages from the Gospels of Matthew (8, 20) and Luke (9, 58): «Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head»^[xvi]. One may also think of the parable of the ten bridesmaids (*Mt*, 25, 1–13), five of which – the «foolish» ones – were excluded from the wedding banquet for having fallen asleep instead of waiting for the bridegroom («Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour», Jesus says to them). Or even to the Gethsemane episode, especially as it is recounted by Matthew (*Mt*, 26, 36 ff.), in which Jesus, aware of Judas' imminent betrayal, leaves his disciples at the foot of the Mount of Olives after having asked them to stay awake and pray while he withdraws in prayer on the top of the hill; having come back to the disciples, he found them sleeping and reprimands them harshly («So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak», 26, 40–42). Remaining awake and watchful (Lat. *vigilare*) is therefore at once one of the duties of the believer, whose attention must not disperse into vain thoughts, and a central feature of the imitation of Christ, who spent his earthly life in perfect vigilance even until its last hours. Quite unsurprisingly, such attitudes can be attested from the very beginning of Christian asceticism: the *Life of Saint Antony* – the founder of Christian monasticism – written in the 4th century by Athanasius of Alexandria, suggests that the custom of sleeping on the ground already existed in Egypt among early Christian ascetics before Antony's organization into regulated communities^[xvii]. In medieval times, one may think of Saint Francis's 'bed' in the Tuscan Sanctuary of La Verna, a narrow rocky surface on which the friar from Assisi took some rest during the night. Hagiographical accounts of all epochs are full of saints almost continuously

awake, seated or leaning in the most uncomfortable and anomalous positions^[xviii], not without some risk (as for the 4th century anchorite Macarius of Alexandria, whose prolonged sleep deprivation cost him the ‘desiccation’ of his brain and drove him to distraction)^[xix]. Peregrine, in sum, far from being an exceptional case among ascetics, represents a quite typical example of what scholars of Christian mysticism call *absence of sleep*, i.e. a prolonged sleep deprivation which has no negative consequences on the subject’s physiological, psychic, and moral strengths. This phenomenon is openly considered as an exception to natural laws. However, it is not necessary to appeal to a continuous miraculous intervention of God to give reason for it. In Christian theology, absence of sleep is deemed to express a state of perfect communion with God, which prefigures the condition of perennial contemplation of the saved after the end of time, and it is therefore seen as an eschatological fulfillment of the human person already during his earthly existence. The inability to sin and a complete *capacitas Dei* characterize the purity and the perfection of the Saints’ acts^[xx]. Borghese’s *Vita Peregrini* is not explicit on this point, but it is nonetheless likely that the Friar’s standing position was functional – in addition to prayer, contemplation, and examination of conscience – also to a constant commitment in favor of poor, sick, and needy persons in Forlì^[xxi]. His ceaseless almsgiving was recorded in the chapel of the old hospital of the town (*Ospedale Maggiore* or *Casa di Dio*, no longer existing), where a mural painting of the saint as an example of holiness and spirit of service was still visible in 1696–1697, during the first phases of the canonization process^[xxii]. A later source about the history of the Servite order, the *Dialogus de origine Ordinis Servorum ad Petrum Cosmae*, written by the Friar Paolo Attavanti around 1465^[xxiii], describes the support provided by Laziosi to the most indigent classes of Forlivan society (presumably during the famines that struck Romagna between 1316 and 1330). Since 1928, the Servite community of Forlì have followed this traditional portrait of Peregrine’s charitable activity by serving in the city hospital ‘Giovanni Battista Morgagni’^[xxiv]. A number of sources thus suggest that the saint could have maintained a steady orthostatic position at least since his return to Forlì until the age of sixty. None of

them, nevertheless, links this attitude to the severe lesion he developed in his leg. Once again, it will be useful to come back to Borghese’s account :

God, excellent and merciful, who is wont to test those who kindle with supernal love so to strengthen them in the trial, sent a very harassing kind of disease to Peregrine. Since indeed, one of his legs was so swollen and consumed that all those who met him as a matter of duty could not hold back their tears. To the decaying and extraordinary swelling of the leg was added the terrible disease called cancer, from which such an intolerable stench spread to those who assisted him. For this reason, he was soon abandoned by his brethren; he had indeed become loathsome even to himself. The people called him the new Job, debilitated and wretched as he looked. However, being in such great and troublesome suffering, he did not mourn his fate with lamentations; but he bore such an illness and suffering with an unalterable spirit, relying on the apostolic tradition which says: in infirmity, virtue is brought to perfection^[xxv].

In this passage, the absence of any explicit mention of the ailment’s natural cause may appear astonishing, to the point of suggesting the lack of any awareness, on behalf of the author, of the physical causation of the friar’s lower limb lesion. Still, even if we consider Borghese’s description of Peregrine’s habits as a conscious exaggeration of actual practices somehow akin to *chameunia*, it would be rather unconvincing to state that no relationship was recognizable in his eyes (or, generally, at his time) between such austerities and some sorts of ailments. As mentioned above, the most obvious complication arising from prolonged standing is the development of venous varicosity in lower limbs. It is often accompanied by venous insufficiency and hence accountable for the onset of leg ulcers, which in turn – particularly when they are not properly cured – are exposed to bacterial colonization and excessive exudation. As we will see, this kind of sequence does not need specific devices to be appreciated and can be recognized from a purely observational point of view, even ignoring the exact functioning of the vascular system. Why then is this connection withheld by Peregrine’s hagiographer? As we are dealing with a religious text – not with a medical report –, the information of clinical interest has to be primarily examined against its theological background. The description of the onset of the disease, the friar’s endurance of pain, the fetid odor spreading from his lesion, rather than mere clinical facts, firstly reflect scriptural and hagiographic concerns which deserve specific attention.

The scriptural references of Peregrine’s disease

In Christian thought all sorts of illness and suffering are a consequence of original sin and of the fall of mankind from its original perfection^[xxvi]. God is not ultimately responsible for evil. The author of the *Book of Genesis* states since the first lines of the Bible that God’s creation was entirely good at its very beginning (*Gen.*, 1, 31), thus providing the foundations for Christian theodicy. God is not the author of sufferings: «illness is not created,

neither it is the work of God», says Basil of Caesarea^[xxvii]. Just as God is the creator of the human soul but is not responsible for sins, so He made the body, not illness and death^[xxviii]. In Eden, as affirmed by Augustine in the *City of God*, «there was not a sign or a seed of decay (*corruptio*) in man’s body that could be a source of any physical pain (*molestias... eius sensibus*). Not a sickness (*morbis*) assailed him from within [...]. His body was perfectly

healthy (*summa in carne sanitas*)»^[xxix]. It is hence the primordial separation from the divine perfection, intervened by means of human free will, that causes the loss of the good coming from the previous communion with God. The hagiographical account of Peregrine's illness is therefore to be placed into this precise theological framework, although it presents – at least apparently – a macroscopic incongruity with God's unaccountability for evil. Peregrine's *morbus*, indeed, is said to have been sent *directly* by God as a concession of a trial, in order to strengthen his faith. Yet, in strictly theological terms, the nuances in this statement need to be recognized. Men can indeed be considered responsible for their illnesses in two senses. Firstly, because of their own choice to separate themselves from God – what could be called *individual* sin. The Psalms express this possibility through the image of sinners 'digging their own grave'^[xxx], an idea that obviously does not correspond to Peregrine's virtuous portrait. But men are sinners, and therefore exposed to every kind of weakness, even because of the genealogical transmission of Adam's fault – as Saint Paul says in the *Letter to the Romans*. The consequences of the ancestor's fault laid «even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam»^[xxxi], i.e. even over the righteous, who nonetheless share with all other men the condition of fallen mankind^[xxxii]. In this case, illness is an evil only in appearance, as asserted by several Christian authors^[xxxiii] whose texts were probably available in the monastery of Forlì where the anonymous author of the *Legenda Beati Peregrini* worked^[xxxiv]. According to John Chrysostom, for example, bodily illness can in no way harm men if their soul is in good health^[xxxv]. Quite the contrary, it can even represent a «blessing»^[xxxvi] because, if the sufferers engage with it appropriately, they may draw from it great spiritual benefits, making of what was originally a sign of mortality an instrument of salvation and spiritual progression^[xxxvii]. Paradoxically, illness can sometimes be deemed as a higher good than health and thus as preferable to it^[xxxviii].

It is within such a spiritual landscape that it seems advisable to read the account of Peregrine's attitude towards his sickness. His condition, as it is described by Borghese, is clearly comparable to this Patristic image of the pained believer. Borghese describes him as «debilitated» (*corruptus*), «wretched» (*afflictus*), «self-loathing» (*ipse sibimet magno erat taedio*), as if the impact with such a great suffering was too hard to bear even for someone who had spent half of his life in austerities. Following a quite common convention in Christian literature, the hagiographer tells that the friar's entourage likened him to the biblical character of Job (*alter Job vulgo dicebatur*), on which Satan – with the permission of God, according to the Old Testament – «inflicted

loathsome sores (*ulcere pessimo*) from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head» (*Jb.*, 2, 7). These comparisons aim to provide a concrete declination of the biblical theme of the 'suffering of the righteous', and show further interesting analogies with some widespread theological conceptions. For Job – «a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil» (*Jb.*, 1, 8) –, after all the disgraces that struck him, is tempted to swear and to curse God, or to abandon himself to sins. But God actually wants him to overcome his trials, so that he could recognize the soundness of His providential design and attain sanctity. Job is therefore the very image of the believer who never loses his faith, even when the deity does not seem to reward him for the piety he showed during all his life. In this regard, the main novelty shown by Christian literature is the conceptual assimilation of the sores of Job to biblical leprosy – more *qua* theological construct than as a precise pathological entity^[xxxix]. This evokes the revolutionary attitude towards the sick shown by Jesus, who defies the Jewish laws in touching and miraculously cleansing the lepers, whose disease was usually considered as a proof of their sins^[xl]. The theological overlapping of these two images dates back at least to the Greek Fathers, which stress at once on the pitiful condition of the sick and on their capacity to be compassionate even with the most miserable human suffering. Gregorius of Nazianzus appealed for admiration for «those who are victorious through their suffering, recognizing that a Job may be hidden among the sick»^[xli]. John Chrysostom presents the example of Job – covered with sores and sitting on a dunghill outside his city (*Jb.*, 2, 9), and still preserving his faith – as a solace to the sick: «if some people, because of a mutilation or a foul smell, are overcome with shame, let them think of this hero. What could be more nauseating than him? What could be more hideous? What could be more repulsive?»^[xlii]. The juxtaposition of Job's sores with the wounds of lepers in Christian thought thus involves the attribution to the former vetero-testamentary character of some features typical of leprosy, namely the strong stench propagating from infections. Peregrine's description fits particularly well in this frame of reference: in the *Vita*, the motive of his endurance is expressed through a loose reference to the Second *Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*^[xliii] shaping his motto «in infirmity, virtue is brought to perfection»; as Job, he provokes the pity and the tears of his entourage (*Jb.*, 2, 11); as the lepers of the Bible, he is abandoned by everyone because of his repugnant aspect and the stench spreading from his sores. Sanitary and religious reasons lay behind such behavior: before the discovery of microorganisms and of their role as infectious agents, fetid odors were considered not only a sign, but also the first, perceivable cause of epidemic diseases. Since the Classical antiquity, the notion of *miasma* (literally «stain», «defilement») is related to moral guilt and divine punishment, and it is

deemed to be transmittable from an individual to another (one may think to the plague striking the city of Thebes in Sophocle's *Œdipus Rex*, ultimately related to the *miasma* spreading from the king's faults). In Ancient medicine, the word *miasma* is devoid of such religious connotations, and it is employed – without any idea of contagion between living beings, considered as a superstitious conviction – to designate the 'miasmatic' vapors contaminating the air and thus causing pestilences^[xLxiv]. It is in Christian contexts that the religious and the medical concepts of *miasma* (Lat. *infectio*, from *infectere* «to imbue», «to stain») tend to match. While the pagan Oribasius (4th century) – the personal physician of the Emperor Julian – omits to write of the contagiousness of plagues, his Christian contemporaries Basil of Caesarea^[xLv], John Chrysostom^[xLvi], and Evagrius Ponticus^[xLvii] strongly supported the idea of the transmissibility of pestilential epidemics^[xLviii]. Regardless of any eventual clinical acquirement, such conviction was founded on a precise

theological framework in which perfumed scents were often deemed as images of virtue^[xLix] or even as an attribute of the Christ^[L]. While God is «the perfect fragrance», in Athenagoras' words^[Li], stench is generally linked to decay and deterioration, hence to mortality and to the fallen condition of mankind. In a word, to sin. Foulness spreading from an holy man is therefore a peculiarity which contradicts the so-called 'odor of sanctity', a condition that reveals the future incorruptibility of the saint's body after his death, and prefigures at the same time the advent of the everlasting life after the second coming of Jesus. If hence a saint does not smell like a saint – as is the case for Peregrine –, some justification is needed. The theological insight of our text, in conclusion, is not the sign of the ignorance of natural causality of illness. Rather, the physical features of Peregrine's illness are set within a conception of nature ultimately depending on divine providence, and thereby on a divine will not immediately comprehensible in the eyes of men.

The stylite's sores: a late-antique hagiographical model for the 'Vita Peregrini'?

On closer inspection, the details about Peregrine's disease are not fully original in hagiographical literature. Such particulars may indeed suggest the persistence of a narratological frame shaping Borghese's *Vita* and, presumably, the former *Legenda*. The traits of the Lives of Saint Laziosi are indeed very similar to the late-antique hagiographical depictions of 'stylites', the anchorites who lived unsheltered on the top of a high pillar (Gr. *stylos*). The initiator of this hermitic tradition was Simeon the Elder († 459), who lived for thirty-seven years on a small platform on the top of a column in Syria, in the surroundings of Aleppo. His life was thoroughly recorded, some years before or immediately after his death, by three different hagiographers^[Lii]. These sources relate, with some variations^[Liii], two interesting anecdotes about Simeon's ascetic practices and his spiritual attitude toward suffering. In the first, Simeon, some time after his first admission in a monastery, in an excess of corporal mortification severely blamed by the other monks, tightly wraps a rough rope made of intertwined palm leaves around his waist, keeping it for more than a year. The bandage produced a deep wound that the monk refused obstinately to cure, so that the resulting infection, longtime neglected, stank so strongly that his brethren could not stay near him, and asked the archimandrite to oblige Simeon to undergo an inspection. The sight is horrific: Simeon's injury was completely rotted and full of worms. At the end of his visit, the archimandrite – following the same convention we already noticed in Patristic literature and in the *Vita Peregrini* – compares the monk to «the new Job» (*néos Iōb*)^[Liv]. It is all the more worthy to mention another anecdote related by the sources. In summary, the

central event related by all the authors is the onset of an ulceration in Simeon's lower left limb. According to Theodoret, bishop of Cyrhus (393–457 ca.), «as a result of his *standing* (Gr. *stásis*), it is said that a malignant ulcer^[Lv] has developed in his left foot, and that a great deal of puss oozes from it continually»^[Lvi]. The *Life* by Antonios adds other details to Theodoret's concise account. They report that a putrid and worm-infested sore affected Simeon's leg as he stood on his pillar, and go on to say that the ulcer healed, but without specifying how this could happen. The Syriac *Life*, the richest of available sources, follows implicitly the *Book of Job*'s theodicy and states that it was Satan who sent the malignant sore on the stylite's leg:

Towards morning it burst open and stank; it swarmed with worms and putrid matter was oozing from the saint's foot (...). The stench was so strong and foul that no one could go even half-way up the ladder without great affliction from the severe rankness of the smell. Even those who served the saint could not go up to him until they had put cedar resin and perfume on their noses. The saint was thus afflicted for nine months until all he could do was breathe^[Lvii].

Unlike the other versions, we are told here that the healing of the stylite from his sore was a miraculous one: reached by a shining angel, Simeon was afterward found by his followers in perfect health, whereas the «unbearably foul stench [was] replaced by a fragrant odor»^[Lviii]. Both Theodoret and Antonios stress over the continuous standing position adopted by the saint on his pillar, a custom which reflects quite clearly the knowledge available about Syrian monasticism: Gregory of Nazianzus, for instance, reports on the Syrian monks who fasted for twenty days, chained to the bare ground and standing almost steadily in prayer in every climatic condition^[Lix], with particular regard to

stylites, we are informed enough to affirm that, most of the time, they stood in prayer on their narrow platforms, endeavoring to never abandon such a stance except for severe illnesses preventing them from holding it^[Lx]. The three sources agree on this point, but they differ – at least apparently – with respect to the etiology of the disease. While in the Syriac *Life* the devil is deemed to be directly responsible for it, Theodoret and Antonios follow a different perspective, by establishing a causal link between the constant maintenance of upright posture and the onset of ulcer on Simeon's leg (or foot, depending on the source). On the grounds of the theological orientations of these authors, the two accounts are not ineluctably conflicting, at least in as much as every sort of weakness is considered as a consequence of human failure toward evil. Admitting the action of the devil behind the inception of a disease is therefore basically tantamount to pushing back its causal chain to the first free acts of Adam and Eve. Theodoret and Antonios, to sum up, do not obliterate this intellectual background. Rather, they bring back the genesis of the saint's pathological episode to its first *sensing* cause, i.e. his continuous standing. In doing this, Theodoret gives also evidence of his medical knowledge. His acquaintance with the works of Greek physicians as Hippocrates, Herophilus, Erasistratus, and Galen is proved for instance by the references of his *Cure of Greek Maladies*^[Lxi], in which the medical analogy serves to render the image of the Christ as a spiritual healer of the vices and the weaknesses of the pagan civilization. Thus it is not particularly surprising that, in describing Simeon's disease, Theodoret employs a locution which is undeniably borrowed from technical literature. He writes of a *Cheirōnion hélkos*, a «sore like Cheiron's», i.e. like the wound accidentally inflicted by Herakles to the centaur Cheiron with an arrow previously tipped with the Hydra's blood. The term is a literary allusion to indicate an incurable wound: since Cheiron was immortal and the venom sprinkled on Herakles' weapon was deadly, the centaur ended up in a vicious circle of interminable pain^[Lxii]. But *Cheirōnion hélkos* reflects nonetheless some technical notions, as attested in several passages of Galen, who gives reason of it in more clinical terms. The most complete account is to be found in his treatise *On swellings that are contrary to nature*:

All sores (*hélkē*) which attack what is nearby and feed on it, eating the surrounding healthy body, are called *phagedenic*. They call what is composed of both the sore itself and the surrounding swellings *phagedena*. Herpes also feeds and erodes the surrounding parts, but it is only an ulceration (*hélkōsis*) of the skin. *Phagedena* also attacks the underlying part along with the skin. It is superfluous to call sores 'Chironia' and 'Telephia': it is sufficient to call all them by the common term, malignant^[Lxiii].

According to Galen, such mythological labels hinting at the stories of Cheiron and Telephus^[Liv] are therefore extravagant terms to designate concrete clinical realities.

Following a usage which dates back at least to the 5th century BC, he prefers to put stress on the image of the *devouring disease*^[Lxv] – as suggested by the root *phag-* («to eat», «to devour») – employed to indicate particularly aggressive kinds of sores. The clinical descriptions of these diseases have remained pertinent for centuries, to the point that 'phagedenic sore' and 'phagedena' (or 'flesh-eating disease') are still employed today to refer to syndromes affecting the skin and the underlying tissues^[Lxvi]. Their etiology in ancient medicine, nevertheless, differs essentially from actual knowledge. The very term *hélkos* (plur. *hélkē*, cfr. Lat. *ulcus,-eris*, whence our 'ulcer'), generally translated as «sore», is employed in ancient Greek to designate every kind of wound, chronic or recent, especially those with no detectable external or apparent causes (as it is for ulcers, varicose ulcers, eschars), or even for the infective complications of injuries^[Lxvii]. The onset of *hélkē*, in the view of ancient physicians – completely ignorant of the action of external infectious agents and unaware of the circulatory movement of the blood –, appears to be related to the etymology of the word, which intertwines the Sanskrit *ársas-* («hæmorrhoids») with the Greek verb *hélkō* («to draw», «to pull»)^[Lxviii], as to suggest the origin of the sores in the 'drawing' of inner humors (namely black bile and blood) onto the body's surface^[Lxix]. Nevertheless, even in the absence of any notion of blood circulation, a link between prolonged standing and lower limb ulcers is already attested in the hippocratic treatise *De ulceribus (Peri hélkōn)*, dating to 5th–4th century BC («for the patient to stand up [*estānai*] is least beneficial for these lesions [*hélkesi*], especially if the lesion is in a leg»^[Lxx]). Theodoret's mention of Simeon's prolonged standing as a cause of his leg disease (*apò tēs stáseōs*) is therefore well grounded in ancient medical knowledge.

The lack of any express connection between Peregrine's austere habits and the inception of his lesion in the *Vita Peregrini* is not therefore to ascribe to an overall unawareness of a link between prolonged standing and the development of leg sores. This connection – attested both in ancient medical writings and Eastern hagiographical tales – is obviously an empiric one, which cannot take into account the fundamental role of blood circulation in these kinds of syndromes. It would rather be more cautious to state that such an *explicit* link is missing (at least in extant texts) with regard to varicose veins. Varicosity (Gr. *kirsós*), a phenomenon already known by the Hippocratic authors^[Lxxi], develops in ancient medicine as a consequence of an unnatural concentration of black bile and 'thick' blood in the veins^[Lxxii]. The possibility of varicose ulceration is taken into account in the Hippocratic and Galenic corpus with reference to the chronicisation

and the incurability of the resulting sore^[Lxxiii]. In humoral medicine, even without the exact knowledge of the venous valvular insufficiency causing the reflux of blood, it seems therefore possible to recognize a link, established on the basis of practical experience, between a weakness of the veins degenerating into varicosity and the impact of frequent standing on their eventual ulceration. The *Lives* of the Stylites that put emphasis on this connection are hence in line with the medical lore of their time: denying its acknowledgement at the epoch of Peregrine would be unjustified. Rather, Borghese's silence on this matter has to be contextualized in the same theological frame of Simeon's *Lives*, which set the etiology of the stylites's chronic sore – even when naturally explainable – as a result of the action of evil upon every mortal being.

As the fame of Simeon and his cult as a saint spread quite quickly (Theodoret, for instance, wrote of him fifteen years before the saint's death), his model was

soon followed by other ascetics, among which Simeon the Younger († 592) and Theodor of Sykeon († 613), whose infections deriving from neglected sores are described by the sources in the same terms of their predecessor's^[Lxxiv]. The strong analogies between the stories about the eastern saints and what can be grasped about Peregrine through Borghese's *Vita* might thus reveal the influence of the *Lives* of the Stylites (whose Latin translations were quite popular in the West^[Lxxv]) on the unknown author of the *Legenda Peregrini*, or, more generally, of the literary typification of a certain kind of pathological history within some authoritative and widespread hagiographical patterns. Obviously, this does not imply the utter dissolution of every relevant clinical 'fact' in an endless net of textual cross-references. Rather, such a persistence of former models in our sources permits a better understanding the hagiographer's description of Peregrine's disease and allow us to highlight the medical references it contains.

The misunderstanding about Peregrine's 'cancer' and its healing

The *Vita Peregrini* reveals indeed the persistence of a cluster of accurate medical references that the author must have drawn from the medieval *Legenda*. Rather than on a purely autoptic report, the chapters of the *Vita* devoted to Peregrine's sickness are based on a quite complex organization of clinical data and literary templates, in which the onset, the development, and the healing of the disease are described in accordance with the marked hagiographical trends we have already pointed out. Not considering this background would expose the analysis of the literary evidence to the risk of a serious misunderstanding of the saint's clinical story. This is indeed what has happened with regard to Borghese's ambiguous mention, quoted above, of *cancer* (chap. 5, cfr. *supra*), described as a terrible disease (*morbus... asperrimus*) developed after the decaying and extraordinary swelling of Peregrine's leg (*tabidae... mirae cruris tumefactionis*). It was in fact this cancer at the origin of the stench that pushed away all those who assisted the friar: how then to understand this word? Some clues may be provided by the subsequent paragraphs of Borghese's text, whereby this term recurs again with other relevant expressions in relation to the medical examinations Laziosi underwent before and after his miraculous healing. At an advanced stage of his disease, Peregrine was visited by a Forlivan doctor, Paolo Salaghi (*Paulus Salatius*), a figure whose real existence is historically attested by various documents, and who must have been well known in the Forli of his time^[Lxxvi]. After having examined the leg, Salaghi concluded that no remedy could help the friar to recover his health (*nulla iam ad salutem remedia suppetent*) and that the disease would have spread until it had contaminated the whole body, unless the swollen limb was promptly amputated (*morbumque ipsum in dies amplioem futurum universumque tandem infecturum corpus, nisi*

crus festine turgidum amputetur^[Lxxvii]). Worried by the doctor's decision, Peregrine, during the night, dragged himself into the Chapter house of his monastery, where he addressed in prayer a crucifix – the same early 14th century fresco still visible today in the hall – asking the Christ to be healed from his malignancy. He suddenly fell asleep and, in slumber, saw the Christ descending from the cross and freeing him from his disease^[Lxxviii]. When he woke up, he realized that his leg was as healthy and strong as if it had never been sick (*curatum crus atque ita firmum sese habere sensit, ac si nulla unquam antea adversa valitudine laborasset*^[Lxxix]) and withdrew in prayer in his cell. When the doctor Salaghi arrived at dawn in the monastery, equipped with the surgical tools and unguents needed for the scheduled procedure, he found the leg perfectly healed (*liberum*) and healthy (*validum*), without any sign of the great swelling (*nulla tanti tumori signa*) or of his «gnawing» (*edacis*) *cancer*. Interestingly, such a terminology mostly recurs as a sort of second-hand information (as for «the disease they call *cancer*» in chap. 5) and with reference to the Salaghi's medical reports, as to suggest a quite technical sense according to the *coeval* medical vocabulary. But – as an anachronistic reading of the Latin words *tumor* and *cancer* has been largely adopted in recent times – this passage has been often misleadingly understood on the grounds of contemporary medical terminology. This is the reason why both Roman Church and current oncological research speak of a 'Saint Peregrine cancer', a label adopted today in order to – respectively – state the miraculousness of Peregrine's healing or, on the other hand, reduce it to a spontaneously regressing oncological disease. In scientific literature, it is quite common to find the description of the

alleged cancer of the tibia afflicting the friar, whose size grew to a point where it broke through the skin producing a serious infection and from which he would have recovered without any medical (or preternatural) intervention^[Lxxx]. In the Catholic cult of Peregrine – «the saint who had cancer»^[Lxxxii] – such an inaccuracy appears instead to be less significant, in so far as the venous origin of the friar's leg lesion is at times mentioned^[Lxxxiii] and somehow suggested by iconography^[Lxxxiii]. Moreover, the cult of saints mostly follows an analogical thinking rather than a

strictly ratiocinative one (Saint Columban, just to give an example, the 6th–7th Irish missionary who spent his life traveling far and wide in Europe, was declared in 2011 the patron saint of motorcyclists, even if he probably never rode anything but a mule). However, Peregrine is considered the patron saint of incurable patients more by reason of the divine intervention that is said to have produced his healing than in relation to his actual pathology. The question nonetheless still remains: is there a (consistent) medical diagnosis in the saint's *Vita*? How do we explain Peregrine's 'cancer'?

Conclusions

The ambiguity of the medieval Latin word *cancer* is rooted in its usages in ancient medical writings. It is an umbrella-term, in which the power of metaphor appears to be more decisive than the concern for definition. Its literal meaning, as is well known, is 'crab', and it connects the ideas of a 'grabbing' and 'scampering' disease to the visual evidence of abnormal swellings (Lat. *tumor*, Gr. *ónkos*) within the humoral explanation of severe inflammations. Neoplasms in the current acception are considered as subsequent and harsher phases of the same inflammatory process^[Lxxxiv]. In the encyclopedic work of the 1st century AD medical author Celsus, for instance, *cancer* and *carcinoma* are often employed to refer to infected dermatological lesions, without any oncological implication in the current sense of the term^[Lxxxv]. «*Cancer* – it is said in the fifth book of Celsus' *De medicina* – whatever its species, corrupts not only the part it attacks, but it also spreads (...). At times the wound is black because its flesh has become corrupted, and this is still more intensified by putrefaction when the wound is moist, and from the black wound is discharged a pallid humor, which has a foul odor (...). Sometimes there arises what the Greeks call *gangrene*»^[Lxxxvi]. As such terminological fluctuations were still present in medieval medicine^[Lxxxvii], it is therefore clear what has to be the correct meaning of the word in Borghese's account. Rather than with a *cancer* in the current sense of the word, our text is describing a pernicious form of *canker* (to employ a word whereby the etymological link with Latin is still evident), a kind of severely infected sore which – as Celsus makes clear – often sets in «on account of old age, or of a bad habit of body» (*quia corpus aut senile aut mali habitus est*)^[Lxxxviii]. One further correspondence between Greek medical and hagiographical literature and the *Vita Peregrini* will definitively elucidate Borghese's depiction of Saint Laziosi's disease. As noticed above, one of the terms employed in describing Salaghi's second consultation of his patient is *edax cancer* ('gnawing', 'devouring' canker – from *ed#re*, «to eat», hence again «to devour», «to consume»). This denomination – of which it is not possible to find further occurrences in ancient Latin literature –

perfectly overlaps the meaning of the Greek *phagedaina* (it could even be an attempt of translation of it), and reveals a high degree of acquaintanceship with medical terminology. Borghese, or the author of the *Legenda Peregrini*, must have employed it with some technical awareness.

In conclusion, the outcomes of this survey allow us to strongly corroborate the hypothesis of a venous etiology of Peregrine's sore. The informations obtainable from our sources, namely the friar's thirty-year-long *chameunia*, his ceaseless engagement in charitable activities, his steady concentration in prayer and reading, are anamnestic elements which suffice to give account of Peregrine's disease as a complication of a neglected varicosis connected with his habit of prolonged standing. This condition, which may involve chronic venous insufficiency, can produce venous bullæ in the skin which may rupture even after micro-traumas^[Lxxxix]. If neglected, such small lesions easily degenerate into venous ulcers^[xc], which in turn go septic and may produce cankerous sores – a situation in which it is easy to recognize Peregrine's case. But it should not be forgotten that this picture can be reconstructed uniquely from written sources, whose marked analogies with late-ancient and medieval religious writings, whilst confirming the medical consistency of the oldest available account of the friar's disease, cast some doubts on the general reliability of our sources. Some details seem to be unknown to other hagiographical texts and – regardless of any literary convention – might perhaps indicate some real situations, as, for example, the description of the state of advanced and extensive infection contaminating the whole limb, and the extreme urgency of the amputation. On the other hand, however, it is impossible to determine precisely to what extent the accuracy of Borghese's text reflects the clinical exactness of the medieval *Legenda Peregrini*, or its faithful dependence from a cumbersome hagiographical tradition: it is certainly an immeasurable combination of clinical and literary writing patterns which shapes the accounts of the friar's disease. This picture remains unchanged even if we turn to other types of evidence. Sixty years ago, after having re-examined the corpse of Saint Laziosi, the Italian physician M. Loreti

stated the compatibility of the hypothesis of a severe and extensive suppuration provoked by venous ulcers, as is reconstructible through written sources, with an unnatural flexion noticed in the right foot of the saint, explainable as a trace of the antalgic gait probably adopted in consequence of his pathological condition^[xci]. Obviously, the state of the remains six hundred and thirteen years after Peregrine's death have made impossible to ascertain his pathology beyond all doubt (perhaps only a histological analysis could add some further information). But, even if the re-examination of the saint's body may confirm the data suggested by our reading of the sources, it still remains that this clinical picture – unlike spontaneously remittable oncological diseases – is not compatible with the miraculous healing narrated by the *Lives* of the saint. Considering the lack of antiseptic measures of the time,

the severity of Saint Peregrine's condition and the alleged extension of his infection, he could neither have healed in one night nor probably over a longer time span. The unnatural arched position observed in his right foot, moreover, may imply that the saint kept his antalgic gait even *after* the alleged healing (hence from the age of sixty to his death, twenty years after). Was it due to the persistence of his sores, or to the inveterateness of his gait even in absence of pain? No answer can be provided for these questions: every attempt to discuss rationally Saint Peregrine's healing would put significantly in doubt the data related by the tradition – the only available data. Aprioristically excluding the friar's instant healing, of course, is possible and licit. But it would nullify the reliability of all our sources, depriving us of any consistent support for further hypothesis.

Endnotes

[i] Cfr. Davide M. Montagna, *Tracce di culto al Beato Pellegrino Laziosi anteriori al 1567*, in «Studi Storici dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria», 56, 1–2 (1993), p. 52–57 and *Id.*, *Il culto dei Servi di Maria da Forlì nel periodo della controriforma*, *ivi*, p. 59–60.

[ii] Cfr. Aristide M. Serra, *S. Pellegrino Laziosi dei Servi di Maria (1265 c. – 1345 c.). Storia, culto, attualità*, Edizioni Santuario di San Pellegrino, Forlì 1995, p. 112–114.

[iii] Cfr. Joan Carroll Cruz, *The Incorruptibles. A Study of the Incorruption of the Bodies of Various Catholic Saints and Beati*, TAN Books, Charlotte, North Carolina 1977, p. 197–200.

[iv] Michele Poccianti, *Chronicon rerum totius sacri Ordinis Servorum Beatae Mariae virginis, in quo illustrium patrum, qui sanctitate, doctrina et dignitate in eo floruerunt, vitae atque actiones continentur. His additae sunt indulta pontificia eidem sacrae Religioni concessa et omnes sanctiones in comitiis generalibus habitae ab anno 1233 usque ad 1566*, Florentiae 1567.

[v] See Arcangelo Ciani, *Annales Ordo Servorum Mariae*, I, ex Typographia Cosmi Iuntae, Florentiae 1618, p. 45 v (2nd edition Typi Marescandoli, Lucae 1719, I, p. 130). For its reliability, see Franco Andrea del Pino, *I Frati Servi di S. Maria dalle origini all'approvazione (1233 circa – 1304)*, III voll., Publications Universitaires de Louvain, Louvain 1972, p. 1123.

[vi] On the historical reliability of this report see Franco Andrea Del Pino, *I Frati Servi di S. Maria dalle origini all'approvazione (1233 ca. – 1304)*, 3 voll., Presses Universitaires de Louvain, Louvain 1972, p. 1123.

[vii] See A. M. Serra, *S. Pellegrino Laziosi dei Servi di Maria...*, *cit.*, p. 43 and p. 212 ff.

[viii] For an overview of the Forlì political situation during Peregrine's life, see Gian Michele Fusconi, *La situazione politica in Forlì ai tempi di S. Pellegrino*, in: Elio Peretto (ed.), *Un amico del Crocifisso e dei sofferenti: San Pellegrino da Forlì (1265–1345 ca.). Atti del convegno di studio nel 650° anniversario della morte. Roma, 9–11 ottobre 1996*, Edizioni Marianum, Roma 1998, p. 9–32.

[ix] Borghese, one of the most important personalities in 15th-century Siena, taught rhetorics in the university of his city and took an active part as an ambassador in the political events of his time. Cfr. Ludovico Zdekauer, *Lo Studio di Siena nel Rinascimento*, Hoepli,

Milano 1894, p. 20 and *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Treccani, Roma 1960-, vol. 12 (1971), s.v. Borghese, Niccolò (by Gaspare De Caro), p. 605–609.

[x] See A. Serra, *Niccolò Borghese e i suoi scritti agiografici servitani*, Edizioni Studi Storici O.S.M. (*Scrinium Historiale*, VI), Roma 1966, and Davide Montagna, *La «Legenda Beati Peregrini de Forlivio»: perdita e ricostruzione*, «Studi Storici OSM», 43 (1996), p. 35–50.

[xi] The *Vita* by Borghese was edited by Pérégrin M. Soulier (*Vita Beati Peregrini Foroliviensis Ordinis Servorum Sanctae Mariae a Nicolao Burgensio equestri clarissimo edita*, in: *Monumenta ordinis servorum Sanctae Mariae*, Tomus IV, Société Belge de Librairie, Bruxelles 1900-1901, p. 58-62). An Italian translation by Pacifico M. Branchesi was published in: A. Serra, *Il Santorale antico dei Servi della provincia di Romagna*, Centro Studi O.S.M. (*Bibliotheca Servorum Romandiola*, 2) Bologna 1967, p. 109-119. – The first manuscript transcription of Borghese's drafts is still conserved in Rome, in the *General Archives of the Servants of Mary (Pontificia Facoltà Teologica «Marianum»*, Trastevere).

[xii] N. Borghese, *Vita Beati Peregrini...* (ed. Soulier, *cit.*, p. 59), par. 4: *Quodque vix credibile est, per triginta annos sedere visus est numquam; stabat semper, dum comedebat; orabat genibus flexis; si forte aliquando lassitudine aut somno victus esset, aliquantisper saxo nitebatur, aut subselliis, si fuisset in choro. Noctu non dormiebat in lecto, sed totam fere noctem hymnis psalmisque legendis consumebat. Semper Dei legem meditabatur. Per exempla Christi, quoad posset, gradi gestiebat.* – Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine.

[xiii] *Carm. Aur.*, v. 40–50; *Iamb.*, *De vita Pythagorica*, III, 13.

[xiv] Cfr. Lanfranco Rossi, *I filosofi greci padri dell'escicismo. La sintesi di Nikodemo Aghiorita*, Il Leone Verde (*Lumina mundi*), Torino 2000, p. 97.

[xv] See Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon. With a Revisited Supplement*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996⁹, s.v. *chameunia*. – Cfr. also M. Viller, F. Cavallera, J. de Guibert, Ch. Baumgartner, M. Olphe-Galliard (eds.), *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique. Tome II. Première partie : doctrine et histoire*, Beauchesne, Paris 1953, s.v. «Chameunie» (by Irénée Hausherr).

[xvi] See Guidalberto Bormolini, *La veglia e la Kameonia. L'arte spirituale di affrontare la notte e il dormire*, «Rivista di ascetica e

mistica», 2 (2005), p. 207-236. – All the translation from Bible are from: Michael D. Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom (eds.), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New Revised Standard Version*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2018.

[xvii] Athanasius Theol., *Vita Antonii (Patrologia Graeca [= PG]*, 26, p. 845, 18).

[xviii] For a more complete account of similar examples, see at least Antonio Royo Marin, *La teología de la perfección cristiana*, Biblioteca de autores cristianos, Madrid 19624 (1st ed. 1954 – english translation by Jordan Aumann, *The Theology of Christian Perfection*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene [Oregon] 2012), vol. II, p. 846–848.

[xix] Cfr. Evagr., *De octo vitiosis cogitationibus*, 8 (PG 40, p. 1276 A).

[xx] Cfr. on these topics Luigi Borriello, Edmondo Caruana, Maria Rosaria Del Genio, Raffaele Di Muro (eds.), *Nuovo dizionario di mistica*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, s.v. «assenza di sonno» (*absence of sleep*), p. 196–198.

[xxi] Cfr. A. M. Serra, *S. Pellegrino Laziosi di Forlì...*, cit., p. 88–93.

[xxii] Cfr. *Sacra Rituum Congregatione... Domino Cardinali Barberino Foroliviensis Canonizationis Beati Peregrini Latiosi... Positio super dubio an constet de virtutibus theologalibus...*, Typis Reverendae Camerae Apostolicae, Romae 1719, p. 16, 20, 109, 113, 127, 128, 129.

[xxiii] See the edition by P. M. Soulier (in: *Monumenta Ordinis Servorum Sanctae Mariae*, XI, 1, J. de Mestee, Roulers 1910, p. 72-82), and A. M. Serra, *Memoria di Fra' Paolo Attavanti (1440 circa–1499)*, in «Studi Storici O.S.M.», 21 (1971), p. 47–87.

[xxiv] Cfr. Amadio Bighetti, *Continua la tradizione della carità verso i malati. Pellegrino e gli ultimi*, «Il Momento», 15–16 (27th April 1985), p. 8.

[xxv] N. Borghese, *Vita Beati Peregrini...* (ed. Soulier, cit., p. 60), chap. 5: *Optimus et misericors Deus, qui accensus amore superno probare et probando corroborare solitus est, molestissimus Peregrino morbi genus intulit; siquidem alterum crus ita intumuit atque contabuit, ut omnes, officii gratia Peregrinum visentes, a lachrimis abstinere nequirent. Tabidae et tam mirae cruris tumefactioni morbus, quem cancrum appellant, asperrimus accessit; ex quo tantus spirabat foetor, ut a nemine assidente tollerari posset. Qua de re a suis propinquis derelictus iam fuerat, quin ipse sibimet magno erat taedio; alter Iob vulgo dicebatur, ita corruptus, ita videbatur afflictus. In tanto tamen et tam odioso tormento constitutus, non propterea vicem suam querelis deplorabat; sed huiusmodi tabem atque cruciatum constantissimo animo perferebat, apostolica traditione fretus, qua virtutem asseritur in infirmitate consummari.*

[xxvi] For an overview on these topics from an apologetical perspective, see the 20th century classic by C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, The Centenary Press, London 1940.

[xxvii] Basil of Caesarea, *Homily IX (Quod Deus non est auctor malorum*, ed. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca [PG]* 31, par. 6, p. 344 A).

[xxviii] *Ivi*, p. 344 B and par. 7, p. 345 A.

[xxix] Aug., *Civ. Dei*, XIV, 26 (transl. by G. G. Walsh, G. Monahan, Washington DC 2008).

[xxx] Cfr. Ps., 7, 15–16: «They make a pit, digging it out, | and fall into the hole that they have made. | Their mischief returns upon their own heads, | and on their own heads their violence descends» (transl. cit).

[xxxi] *Rm*, 5, 14.

[xxxii] For these references, see Jean–Claude Larchet, *The Theology of Illness*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood (New York) 2002 (original edition: *Théologie de la maladie*, Paris 1991), p. 33–41.

[xxxiii] See for example John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the demons*, I, 5 (ed. Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF]* 1, vol. IX, p. 249–251); John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, IV, 19 (*NPNF* 2, vol. IX, p. 760 ff.); Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies*, 5 (*PG* 29, p. 90 ff.).

[xxxiv] For some hypothesis about the Servants' library in Forlì, cfr. Luigi De Candido, *Osservazioni conclusive*, in: E. Peretto (ed.), *Un amico del crocifisso e dei sofferenti. San Pellegrino Laziosi da Forlì...*, op. cit., p. 235–256, p. 250.

[xxxv] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Lazarus*, VI, 5 (*PG* 48, p. 1033)

[xxxvi] Cfr. Barsanuphius, *Letter 78 (Sources Chrétiennes [SC]* 427, p. 363–365), John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Annas*, I, 2 (*PG* 54, p. 669–676).

[xxxvii] John Chrysostom, *Conferences* VI, 6. – Cfr. Jean–Claude Larchet, op. cit., p. 56.

[xxxviii] Cfr. Barsanuphius, *Letter 189 (SC* 427, p. 606–609), 513 (*SC* 451, p.645–649), 570 (*ibid.*, p. 739–745).

[xxxix] Cfr. Andrzej Grzybowski, Malgorzata Nita, *Leprosy in the Bible*, «Clinics in Dermatology», 34 (2016), p. 3–7 («Modern leprosy [i.e., Mycobacterial leprosy or Hansen's disease] has long been thought to be the disease referred in the Bible as to *tzaraat*, but *tzaraat* differs from our present understanding of Hansen's disease and is not similar to any well-known dermatologic disease»). Cfr. also Mirko D. Grmek, *Les maladies à l'aube de la civilisation occidentale. Recherches sur la réalité pathologique dans le monde grec préhistorique, archaïque et classique*, Payot, Paris 1983, p. 227-259.

[xL] See *Mt.*, 8, 1–4, *Mk.*, 1, 40–45, *Lk.*, 5, 12–16, and 17, 11-19.

[xLi] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration XIV (On the Love of the Poor)*, 34 (transl. by Brian E. Daley in: *Id.*, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, Routledge, London-New York 2006, p. 95–96); cfr. also Barsanuphius, *Letters*, 7 (*SC* 426, p. 174–175) and 532 (*SC* 451, p. 671–677).

[xLii] John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Job*, 40, 13–15 (ed. by H. Sorlin, L. Neyrand, t. I, p. 172, *SC* 346, Paris 1988).

[xLiii] Cfr. 2 *Co*, 12, 10: «Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong» (*propter quod placeo mihi in infirmitatibus, in contumeliis, in necessitatibus, in persecutionibus et in angustiis, pro Christo; cum enim infirmor, tunc potens sum*).

[xLiv] See Jacques Jouanna, *Air, Miasma and Contagion in the Time of Hippocrates and the Survival of Miasmas in Post-Hippocratic Medicine (Rufus of Ephesus, Galen and Palladius)*, in: *Id.*, *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2012, p. 121–136. For a general view about Greek miasma see Robert P. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1983.

[xLv] Eus. Caes., *Homily* 43.

[xLvi] Johann. Chrys., *Orat.* 57.

xLvii] Evagr., *Hist. Eccl.*, IV, 29.

[xLviii] See Mirko Drazen Grmek, *Les vicissitudes des notions d'infection, de contagion et de germe dans la médecine antique*, in Guy Sabbah (ed.), *Textes médicaux latins antiques (Centre Jean Palerne, Mémoires 5)*, Publications de l'Université de Saint Étienne, Saint Étienne, 1984, p. 53–70, especially p. 66.

[xLix] See Pietro Meloni, *Il profumo dell'immortalità. L'interpretazione patristica di Cantico 1, 3*, Edizioni Studium, Roma 1975. – See on these topics Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation. Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 2006.

[L] Cfr. 2 Co, 14–16: «But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life»

[Li] Athenag., *Leg. pro Chr.*, XIII, 2.

[Lii] The three *Lives*, written respectively by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*History of the Monks of Syria*, chap. 26), by a disciple of Simeon named Antonios, and by a Syriac hagiographer (of which two recensions are preserved) are gathered and translated by Robert Doran in: *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo 1992.

[Liii] On which see S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Olfactory Knowing: Signs of Smell in the Vitae of Simeon Stylites*, in: G. J. Reinink, A. C. Klugkist (eds.), *After Bardaisan. Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers (Orientalia Lovanensia Analecta 89)*, Peeters, Leuven 1999, p. 23–34, and Béatrice Caseau, *Syméon Stylite l'Ancien entre puanteur et parfum*, «Revue des études byzantines», 63 (2005), p. 71–96.

[Liv] *Vita Graeca Symeonis Stylitae*, 7, ed. A. Lietzmann, Berlin 1908, p. 26 (cit. in B. Caseau, art. cit., p. 87).

[Lv] Literally «a sore like Cheiron's» (Cheirōnion hélkos), see *infra*.

[Lvi] Theodoret., *Hist. Rel.*, XXVI, 23, 1–6, transl. by R. M. Price (Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Cistercian Publications, Trappist [Kentucky] 1985).

[Lvii] Chapters 52–53, transl. by R. Doran, cit., p. 134.

[Lviii] *Ibid.*

[Lix] Greg. Naz., *Poemata Historica*, col. 1455 – See Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient. A contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, vol. I (*The Origin of Asceticism: Early Monasticism in Persia*), Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, Louvain 1958, p. 151.

[Lx] Cfr. Hyppolite Delehaye, *Les Saints Stylites, Subsidia Hagiographica 14*, Société des Bollandistes, Bruxelles-Paris 1923, p. CLXVIII, and S. Ashbrook Harvey, *The Sense of a Stylite. Perspectives on Simeon the Elder*, «Vigiliae Christianae», 42, 4 (1988) p. 376–394, p. 396.

[Lxi] Theodoret., *Therap.*, V, 22 and 82 and cfr. also *Id.*, *Entr. Apol.*, p. 307 ff., *Haer. Fab. Comp.*, V, 9 (PG 83, 589D) – see Pierre Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr*, Beauchesne, Paris 1977, p. 132.

[Lxii] See Jenny March, *Cassell's Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, Cassel & Co, London 1998, s.v. «Cheiron».

[Lxiii] Gal., *De tum. praet. nat.*, 13 (= Kühn VII, p. 722), transl. by Jeremiah Reedy, *Galen, De tumoribus praeter naturam: A*

Critical Edition with Translation and Indices, University of Michigan (PhD diss.), 1968 (= *Id.*, *Galen on cancer and related diseases*, «Clio Medica», 10, 3 [1975], p. 227–238). – Cfr. also Ps.-Gal., *De med.*, K. XIV, p. 779, 13 [= Petit, *CUF* 2009, XVII. 2, p. 89, 4], (where this sore is considered as a specific affection of the calf), *De temper.*, K. I, p. 664, 5 [= Helmreich, *CMG* 1904, p. 97, 12–13], *De meth. med.*, K. X, p. 83, 11–13 [= Johnston-Horsley, Loeb 2011, p. 130, 2–8], *De comp. med. per gen.*, K. XIII, p. 462, 2, p. 675, 10, p. 676, 4, p. 680, 18, p. 739, 8, p. 761, 2, p. 765, 6, p. 765, 16, p. 808, 11, p. 860, 10, p. 865, 18, p. 883, 16, *In Hipp. Aph. comment.*, XVIIb, p. 809, 4. – Cfr. also Cels., *De med.*, V, 28, 3: «There is also an ulceration which the Greeks call *therioma*. This may arise spontaneously, and at times it may supervene upon ulceration from another cause. It has either a livid or black colour, a foul odour, and an abundant mucus-like discharge. The ulcer itself is insensitive to touch and applications; there is just disturbance by itching. But around there is pain and inflammation; sometimes even fever is set up, occasionally blood is discharged from the ulceration. This also is a spreading disease. And all these signs often extend, and there results from them an ulcer which the Greeks call *phagedaena*, because it spreads rapidly and penetrates down to the bones and so devours the flesh. This ulceration is uneven, bog-like; there is a large amount of glutinous discharge; the stench is intolerable, and the inflammation is greater than accords with the extent of the ulceration» (transl. cit.).

[Lxiv] Telephus was the son of Achilles. Struck by his father's spear in the thigh, his wound would not have healed until the revelation made by an oracle – For more details, see again J. March, *op. cit.*, s.v. «Telephus».

[Lxv] See J. Jouanna, *Disease as Aggression in the Hippocratic Corpus and Greek Tragedy: Wild and Devouring Disease*, in *Id.*, *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen*, cit., p. 81–96 (originally published in French as *La maladie comme agression dans la Collection hippocratique et la tragédie grecque*, in: P. Potter, G. Maloney et J. Desautels [eds.], *La maladie et les maladies dans la Collection hippocratique (Actes du VIe colloque international hippocratique de 1987)*, Québec 1990, p. 39–60 [= «Métis», 3 (1988), p. 343–360]).

[Lxvi] See for instance Robert Jackson, Michael Bell, *Phagedena: gangrenous and necrotic ulcerations of skin and subcutaneous tissue*, «Canadian Medical Association Journal», 126 (1982), p. 362–368, and Irvine Loudon, *Necrotizing fasciitis, hospital gangrene, and phagedena*, «Lancet», 344 (1994), p. 1416–1419.

[Lxvii] See Marie-Paule Duminil (ed.), *Hippocrate. Plaies, Nature des os, Cœur, Anatomie*, Les Belles Lettres (CUF), Paris 1998, p. 12, and Ian Johnston, G. H. R. Horsley (eds.), *Galen. Method of medicine (Books 1–4)*, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press), Cambridge-London 2011, p. 129, n. 2.

[Lxviii] See Robert Beekes (with the collaboration of Lucien van Beek), *Etymological Dictionary of Greek (II voll.)*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2010, s.v. #λκος.

[Lxix] Cfr. M.-P. Duminil, cit.

[Lxx] Hipp., *Ulc.*, I (= Littré VI, 400, 12–14 = Duminil, 53, 2–3 = Potter, 342, 15–17), transl. by Paul Potter (*Hippocrates. Volume VIII*, Loeb Classical Library [Harvard University Press], Cambridge-London 1995).

[Lxxi] The word *kirsós* is applied to any abnormal vein dilatation. For lower limb varicosity in the Hippocratic corpus see: *Aer.*, 7, 30, *Vict. Ac.*, 12, 3, *Coac.*, 502, 2, *Ulc.*, 25, 1.

[Lxxii] Cfr. Charles R. S. Harris, *The Heart and Vascular System in Ancient Greek Medicine*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1973, p. 451–453.

[Lxxiii] Hipp., *Ulc.*, 8, 5 (= Potter, Loeb, p. 348, excess and 'putrescence' of the blood in the vein), Gal., *De comp. med. per. gen.*, IV, 2 (= K. XIII, p. 667, 11 ff., about an ulcerated varix which refused to heal after an excision) – cfr. C. R. S. Harris, cit., p. 453–454.

[Lxxiv] See B. Caseau, *Syméon Stylite l'Ancien entre puanteur et parfum*, cit., p. 90–91.

[Lxxv] Cfr. *ivi*, p. 85.

[Lxxvi] Cfr. A. M. Serra, *San Pellegrino Laziosi dei Servi di Maria...*, op. cit., p. 106.

[Lxxvii] N. Borghese, *Vita Peregrini...*, chap. 6 (ed. Soulier, cit., p. 60).

[Lxxviii] For the Patristic references alluded in this passage, see Luigi Gambero, *Il Crocifisso: Cristo medico e salvatore, tema ricorrente nel pensiero dei Padri della Chiesa*, in: E. Peretto (ed.), op. cit., p. 101–122. For an overview on this topic see also Marie-Anne Vannier, *L'image du Christ médecin chez les Pères*, in Véronique Boudon-Millot, Bernard Pouderon, *Les Pères de l'Église face à la science médicale de leur temps*, Beauchesne, Paris 2005, p. 525–534.

[Lxxix] *Ibid.*, chap. 7.

[Lxxx] See William Boyd, *The spontaneous regression of cancer*, C. C. Thomas, Springfield (Illinois) 1966, p. 8–9, and George T. Pack, St. Peregrine, O.S.M. – *The Patron Saint of Cancer Patients*, «CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians», 17, 4 (1967), p. 183–184; among recent literature, cfr: Walter Y.M. Chang, *Complete spontaneous regression of cancer: Four case reports, review of literature, and discussion of possible mechanisms involved*, «Hawaii Medical Journal», 59 (oct. 2000), p. 379–387; Vivek K. Pakhmod, *Understanding the possible mechanisms of spontaneous regression of oral cancer*, «Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology», 11 (2007), p. 2–4; Thomas Jessy, *Immunity over inability: the spontaneous regression of cancer*, «Journal of Natural Science, Biology and Medicine» (Jan-Jun; 2, 1, 2011), p. 43–49; Petra Kucerova, Monika Cervinkova, *Spontaneous regression of tumour and the role of microbial infection – possibilities for cancer treatment*, «Anti-cancer drugs», 27, 4 (January 2016), p. 1–9; Leonard F. Vernon, *William Bradley Coley, MD, and the phenomenon of spontaneous regression*, «ImmunoTargets and Therapy», 7 (2018), p. 29–34.

[Lxxxi] See Fr Paul M. Addison OSM, Máire Ní Chearbhaill, *Devotion to St Peregrine Patron Saint of People Living with Cancer*,

Catholic Truth Society, London 2015, p. 3. – Cfr. also Basil Watkins, *The Book of Saints. A Comprehensive Biographical Dictionary*, Bloomsbury, London-Oxford-New York-New Delhi-Sidney 20168, p. 581 («cancer of the foot»).

[Lxxxii] Cfr. *ivi*, p. 11 and David H. Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Oxford University Press 1978, s.v. «Pellegrino Laziosi».

[Lxxxiii] A. M. Serra, *San Pellegrino Laziosi da Forlì...*, op. cit., reproduces a number of pictorial witnesses of the Saint with a bleeding sore on his leg or with a bandaged leg, see the list p. 261–262.

[Lxxxiv] Cfr. F. P. Retief, L. Cilliers, *Tumours and cancers in Graeco-Roman times*, «South African Medical Journal», 91, 4 (2001), p. 344–348.

[Lxxxv] Cfr. André-Julien Fabre, *Le cancer dans l'Antiquité. Les enseignements de Celse*, «Histoire des Sciences Médicales», XLII, 1 (2008), p. 63–70, p. 64.

[Lxxxvi] Cels., V, 26, 31 (ed. F. Marx, transl. by W. G. Spencer, Loeb Classical Library 1938).

[Lxxxvii] See for instance Faith Wallis, *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, University of Toronto Press 2010, p. 344–351 and Luke E. Demaitre, *Medieval notions of cancer: Malignancy and metaphor*, «Bulletin of the History of Medicine», 72, 4 (1998), p. 609–637, and *Id.*, *Medieval Medicine. The Art of Healing, from Head to Toe*, p. 98–102.

[Lxxxviii] *Ibid.* – As already noticed for Greek medical writings and Early-Byzantine hagiography, Celsus recognizes the causes of the cankerous sores in damaging corporeal attitudes, thus skipping the earlier step of venous varicosity.

[Lxxxix] Cfr. Robert S. Porter, Justin L. Kaplan, Richard B. Lynn, Madhavi T. Reddy (eds.), *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy (Professional version)*, Merck Sharp & Dohme, Kenilworth 2018 (20th edition), s.v. *Varicose veins* (by James D. Douketis).

[xc] Cfr. Teresa J. Kelechi, Jan J. Johnson, Stephanie Yates, *Chronic venous disease and venous leg ulcers: an evidence-based update*, «Journal of Vascular Nursing», 33, 2 (2015), p. 36–46.

[xci] Mario Loreti, *La ricognizione del corpo di S. Pellegrino Laziosi dopo 613 anni dalla morte*, «Romagna medica», 11 (1959), p. 509–519, p. 512 ff.