Part 5: **Discourse-Analytical Approaches to Marginals in Hagiographic Literature**

Julie Van Pelt

On the Margins of Sanctity: Prostitutes, Actors, and Tavernkeepers in Greek Hagiography

In recent decades, scholars have shown that hagiography often reflects Byzantine society.[1] It should not surprise us, then, that the professional groups that are scrutinized in this book are well represented in the genre.[2] In the short hagiographical vignettes from the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*,[3] for instance, we encounter several prostitutes. In one story, a prostitute is denied entrance into a church by both the local subdeacon

1 E.g. Julia Seiber, *The Urban Saint in Early Byzantine Social History* (Oxford, 1977); Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius' Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley, 1996); Michael Kaplan and Eleonora Kountoura-Galaki, "Economy and Society in Byzantine Hagiography," in *Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, vol. II: Genres & Contexts*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Burlington, VT, 2014), 389–418; and Helen G. Saradi, "The City in Byzantine Hagiography," in *Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, vol. II: Genres & Contexts*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Burlington, VT, 2014), 419–453.

2 Hagiography is the common umbrella term used for a variety of religious narrative texts that focus on Christian holy men and women. Its conceptualization as a genre has reasonably been problematized (e.g. Marc Van Uytfanghe, "L'hagiographie: un 'genre' chrétien ou antique tardif?," *AB* 11 (1993): 135–188 and Martin Hinterberger, "Byzantine Hagiography and its Literary Genres: Some Critical Observations," in *Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, vol. II: Genres & Contexts*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis [Burlington, VT, 2014], 25–60). A useful terminological overview is found in Danny Praet, "*Legenda aut non legenda*? The Quest for the Literary Genre of the Acts of the Martyrs," in *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Paul Middleton (Hoboken, NJ, 2020), 151–183, at 152–153. In this chapter, I deal with martyr accounts, *Lives* of saints, miracle stories, and so-called *récits édifiants* or edifying stories (λόγοι ψυχωφελεῖς). Despoina Ariantzi, "Byzantinische Prostituierte: Zwischen Marginalisierung und Reintegration in die Gesellschaft," *Byz* 91 (2021): 1–45 demonstrates the value of hagiography as a socio-historical source for our knowledge of Byzantine prostitutes. In this chapter, I analyse the position of prostitutes, as well as tavernkeepers and actors, in hagiography primarily from a narrative point of view.

3 The *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (or *Apophthegmata Patrum*, hereafter *Sayings*) refers to early monastic literature in the form of short edifying stories that first developed in oral form in the monastic settlements in the Egyptian desert from the 4thcentury onwards and were later recorded in writing (probably in 5th-century Palestine): see Jean-Claude Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des* Apophthegmata Patrum, Subsidia Hagiographica 36, 2nd ed. (Brussels, 1984) and William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford, 2004), 165–273.

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and bishop.[4] The discrimination she experiences from these religious officials makes her abandon her way of life and repent for her sins. The *Sayings* also feature actors. A story about a mime called Gaianus depicts the actor mocking the Theotokos in the theater. When he continues to perform his satirical play even after having been warned by the Theotokos multiple times in a nightly vision, he is punished: the Theotokos appears again, but this time she does not speak and cuts off his hands and feet.[5] Tavernkeepers are mentioned as well in Greek early monastic literature. In the *Life of Marcianus* from Theodoret's *Historia Religiosa* (BHG 1031), the great monk compares himself to a tavernkeeper in an ironic utterance that is clearly meant to stress the *difference* between a man of his own position and someone of that profession, calling such a man, moreover, "profligate."[6] These three hagiographical anecdotes illustrate that the professional groups under scrutiny do not just belong on the margins of Byzantine society but are also typically considered marginal in a religious and spiritual sense.

These two angles—being social as well as religious outcasts—represent two sides of the same coin. The professions of such figures made them sinners[7] and, being sinners, they were excluded from both social and religious communities. At the same time, Christianity has always entertained a special relationship with social outcasts and sinners. In the Gospels, Jesus shares his table with prostitutes and tax collectors,

4 *Sayings*, ed. Jacques P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca)* 65 (Paris, 1857–1866), col. 233, lines 25–43 ("Περὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Ἰωάννου τῶν Κελλίων α'"). Cf. *Sayings*, ed. Migne, *PG* 65, col. 413, line 50–col. 416, line 35 ("Περὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Σεραπίωνος α'"); *Sayings*, ed. François Nau, "Histoires des solitaires égyptiens," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 12 (1907): 171–181, ch. 43 (about an anonymous monk); and *Sayings*, ed. Migne, *PG* 65, col. 217, line 15–col. 220, line 16 ("Περὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Κολοβοῦ μ'"). The latter three stories are discussed by Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (London, 1987), ch. 5. They tell of monks who visit prostitutes and convert them. They present a similar vein to the *Lives* of holy harlots such as Thaïs, Pansemne, and Mary the niece of Abraham, which are discussed later in this chapter.

5 *Sayings*, ed. Panteles B. Paschos, *Νέον Μητερικόν. Ἄγνωστα καὶ ἀνέκδοτα πατερικὰ καὶ ἀσκητικὰ κείμενα περὶ τιμίων καὶ ἁγίων Γυναικῶν* (Athens, 1990), ch. 77 ("Περὶ μίμου, τοῦ ὀνομαζομένου Γαϊανοῦ").

6 *Hist. Rel.* III, ch. 12, line 30: ἄσωτον, eds. Pierre Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen, *Théodoret de Cyr. L'histoire des moines de Syrie,* 2 vols., SC 234, 257 (Paris, 1977–1979).

7 This is rather straightforward in the case of prostitutes and tavernkeepers, since their activities violate the Christian ideals of chastity and temperance. In Byzantine society, actors were also considered sinners and they were even excluded from participation in the liturgy and from entering churches (see Ruth Webb, *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity* [Cambridge, MA, 2008], 53). This is related to the fact that Christian leaders denounced the late antique theater as the special province of the Devil, a place of delusion and sin. For more discussion, see Christine C. Schnusenberg, *Das Verhältnis von Kirche und Theater: Dargestellt an ausgewählten Schriften der Kirchenväter und liturgischen Texten bis auf Amalarius von Metz (a.d. 775–852)* (Frankfurt am Main, 1981); Timothy D. Barnes, "Christians and the Theater," in *Roman Theater and Society*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor, 1996), 174–180; Costas Panayotakis, "Baptism and Crucifixion on the Mimic Stage," *Mnemosyne* 50/3 (1997): 302–319; Leonardo Lugaresi, "Ambivalenze della rappresentazione: Riflessioni patristiche su riti e spettacoli," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 7 (2003): 281–309; and Webb, *Demons and Dancers*.

often to the consternation of members of mainstream society.[8] His example propagates the Christian message of equality, inclusion, and forbearance, according to which all are welcome in God's kingdom, social status is irrelevant to an individual's moral integrity, and sin is secondary to the soul's spiritual disposition. In the context of a Christian genre such as hagiography, then, we might somehow expect that prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers would not (or not only) suffer from marginalization, as in the three examples above, but would be eligible for inclusion—namely, into the Christian spiritual community. Consequently, from a spiritual point of view, these professional groups find themselves in a paradoxical position between exclusion and inclusion, being both straying sinners and potential penitents.[9]

In this chapter I discuss the complex and often contradictory ways in which such figures are depicted in Greek hagiography. Specifically, I focus on the complex relation between social and spiritual status and between these characters' outsider positions and their potential as religious in-crowd. The chapter addresses the narrative mechanisms by which these figures are sometimes placed on the margins, while in other ways they become central. By 'spiritual status' I mean the rank an individual has acquired in the eyes of God. In other words, it is the level of piety one has attained. Unlike social status (or ecclesiastical rank, which is also a form of social status), spiritual status does not depend on social interaction or inter-human acknowledgement (at least ostensibly). As the monk Zosimas in the *Life of Mary of Egypt* remarks, "grace is not manifested by official rank" but "is usually indicated by spiritual attitudes."[10] It is ultimately known only to God, and it was even experienced as problematic when one's spiritual status became known to and recognized by others. The fundamental problem of virtue was that it could lead to praise, fame, and, consequently, pride, by which virtue is undone again.[11] Symeon Salos, discussed below, is an illustration of this paradox, since he avoids social recognition for his virtuous

8 E.g. Luke 7:36–50 (about a sinful woman), John 4:7–39 (about a Samaritan woman), or Luke 19:1–9 (about Zacchaeus the tax collector). For further discussion I refer to Otfried Hofius, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaft mit den Sündern* (Stuttgart, 1967).

9 This tension is illustrated by a story from John Moschus' *Leimon*, discussed by Ariantzi, "Byzantinische Prostituierte," 14, where a monk, who scolds at a prostitute for approaching him, is reminded by the woman of his duty to give her a chance, after Jesus' example.

10 *Life of Mary of Egypt*, ch. 13; trans. Maria Kouli, "Life of St. Mary of Egypt," in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington D.C., 1996), 65–93.

11 On this problem, see Peter Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity: A Study of Late Antique Spiritual Literature* (Burlington, VT, 2012), 104–108; Andrew Thomas, "The City Became a Desert: Forcing the First Holy Fools into a Context," in *Holy Fools and Divine Madmen: Sacred Insanity Through Ages and Cultures*, eds. Albrecht Berger and Sergey A. Ivanov (Neuried, 2018), 5–28, at 9–12; and Rowan Williams, "Holy Folly and the Problem of Representing Holiness: Some Literary Perspectives," *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 1/1 (2018): 3–15, at 3–6 (who specifically addresses its relevance in the context of holy folly).

deeds by acting like a madman, thus circumventing the problem of praise and pride.[12] Nonetheless, it was far less problematic to depict spiritual status in stories about characters who had already secured their exceptional position and had passed on. Hagiography was about revivifying the memory of their spiritual journeys as examples to others. As we will see, these narratives could sing a character's praise while (and often through) underlining his/her humility.[13]

In what follows, I look at a number of hagiographical texts from the early and middle Byzantine periods featuring characters belonging to one of the three professional groups mentioned above.[14] These texts were chosen because they offer rich and varied material for discussion. This chapter does not claim exhaustiveness in its presentation of the presence of these character types in the Greek hagiographical corpus overall. In the first part of the chapter, I look at narratives in which prostitutes/actors/tavernkeepers appear as side characters. In the second part, I turn to hagiographies in which the saint him-/herself belongs to one of these professions.

1 Prostitutes, Actors, and Tavernkeepers as Side Characters: the *Life of Symeon Salos*

In a discussion about prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers in Greek hagiography, the *Life of Symeon Salos* (BHG 1677) quickly comes to mind.[15] It features side characters from all three professions.[16] It therefore becomes the focus in this part of the chapter.

12 For more in-depth discussion, see Thomas, "The City Became a Desert," 24–27.

13 Naturally, there are limits to the efficiency of such retrospective processes of narrativization, as Williams, "Holy Folly and the Problem of Representing Holiness," 4 remarks with regard to the holy fool. Derek Krueger, "Hagiography as an Ascetic Practice in the Early Christian East," *The Journal of Religion* 79/2 (1999): 216–232 discusses how the demand for humility in the image of the saintly character spills over into the hagiographer's self-presentation.

14 The texts discussed in this chapter are all dated between the 5th and 10th centuries. Specific information on the (approximate) time of composition of each text is provided in the footnotes below.

15 I follow the edition from André J. Festugière, *Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre, en collaboration avec L. Rydén* (Paris, 1974), and I cite the translation from Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*. The *Life of Symeon* is dated to the 7thcentury.

16 I chose to exclude the *Life of Andrew Salos* from my discussion (BHG 115z; ed. Lennart Rydén, *The Life of St Andrew the Fool, Vol. II: Text, Translation and Notes*, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 4/2 [Uppsala, 1995]), because the presence of the three professional groups is slightly more prominent in the *Life of Symeon*. Nevertheless, they are similarly part of the urban landscape in which Andrew operates. For instance, as noted by Saradi, "The City in Byzantine Hagiography," 434: "there are indecent mimes on the street performing buffooneries, and these are included among the sinners" (see lines 2007–2010 and 2377–2378). Taverns and brothels are depicted as well (e.g. lines 232–244, 298–340, and 1407–1409).

Of course, this is not to say that prostitutes, actors, or tavernkeepers are not found as side characters in other Greek hagiographical accounts (some of which I will briefly touch on as well). Symeon's narrative roughly consists of two parts. The first is set in a monastic/anchoretic environment, the second in the city of Emesa, where he plays the fool to hide his holiness and secretly lead the citizens on a virtuous path. Unsurprisingly, it is in the latter, urban setting that the characters of interest to us come to the fore.[17] However, it is not just that the urban setting invites the depiction of prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers (indeed typically urban figures). Socially marginal figures play an important role in this text primarily because the saint himself, on account of his fool's act, frequents the margins of society. As a result, he is considered a tramp and a lunatic himself, and he suffers all sorts of verbal and physical abuse and humiliation.[18]

While the focus of hagiographical studies has long been on the saint, secondary characters in hagiography have lately received increased attention.[19] At the same time, they are usually studied in their capacity as foils for holy protagonists. It is true that, in many cases, the characters appearing alongside saints have little-developed roles or represent a generic category (e.g. bystander, monk, noblewoman, servant, eparch). Sometimes they do not even receive a proper name. Often, acting as the hagiographer's source, their function is to guarantee the narration's trustworthiness, since their reliability is ensured by their personal involvement in the depicted events

17 For a discussion of the urban landscape depicted in the *Life of Symeon* and its reflection of the society of 7th-century Neapolis (Cyprus) to which its author, Leontius, belonged, see Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*; Kaplan and Kountoura-Galaki, "Economy and Society in Byzantine Hagiography," 396–397; and Saradi, "The City in Byzantine Hagiography," 424–425. The ideological opposition between the desert and the city (on which see also below, p. 334 and n. 193) propagated in this text is widely commented: John Saward, *Perfect Fools: Folly for Christ's Sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality* (Oxford, 1980), 19; Vincent Déroche, *Études sur Léontios de Néapolis*, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 3 (Uppsala, 1995), 109–111; Vincent Déroche, *Syméon Salos. Le fou en Christ* (Paris, 2000), 61; and Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, 45–47.

18 For more discussion of the holy fool as a 'liminal' figure on the margins of society, I refer to José Grosdidier de Matons, "Les thèmes d'édification dans la vie d'André Salos," *TM* 4 (1970): 277–328, at 302–311; Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, ch. 6; Sergey A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* (Oxford, 2006), 108–120; and Christopher Johnson, "Between Madness and Holiness: Symeon of Emesa and 'the Pedagogics of Liminality,'" in *From the Fifth Century Onwards (Greek Writers): Papers presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2011*, ed. Markus Vinzent, Studia Patristica 68 (Leuven, 2013), 261–266.

19 E.g., Flavia Ruani, "Thecla Beyond Thecla: Secondary Characters in Syriac Hagiography," in *Thecla and Medieval Sainthood: The Acts of Paul and Thecla in Eastern and Western Hagiography*, eds. Ghazzal Dabiri and Flavia Ruani (Cambridge, 2022), 142–174; and Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Saints and Secondary Heroes in Byzantine Hagiography," in *Constructing Saints in Greek and Latin Hagiography: Heroes and Heroines in Late Antique and Medieval Narrative*, eds. Koen De Temmerman, Julie Van Pelt, and Klazina Staat (Turnhout, 2023), 33–56.

(John the Deacon in the *Life of Symeon* is an example).[20] Alternatively, their presence serves as a mirror for the reader, who is compelled to mimic the side characters in their reactions to the saint and narrative events.[21] Nevertheless, in what follows, I discuss the side characters in their own right. Naturally, the saint cannot be excluded from such a discussion. Yet, rather than looking at the side characters as another way of studying the saint, I investigate in turn how the image of the saint reflects on the prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers found by his side.

Before turning to these characters, however, I wish to make one more preliminary observation regarding the narrative framework in which they appear. Already before Symeon's arrival in Emesa, the text signals the complex relation of social and spiritual status. After spending two years as an anchorite in the desert, Symeon appears to his old mother, whom he abandoned to become a monk, to console her regarding himself. He tells her not to grieve, "for we are well, lord John and I, and we are healthy, and we have entered service in the emperor's palace, and behold we wear crowns which the emperor placed upon us and glorious robes."[22] Symeon draws on traditional symbols of social status (imperial connections, crowns and glorious robes) as metaphors for the spiritual status that he has acquired through his new, monastic life.[23] Interestingly, the life he abandoned was one of wealth, luxury, and (we may assume) social status.[24] It was also one of delusion and sin.[25] Symeon exchanges

20 A hagiographical device termed "la fiction littéraire du témoin bien informé" by Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Brussels, 1966), 182–183. For more about John the Deacon in the *Life of Symeon* as an example, see Julie Van Pelt, "The Hagiographer as Holy Fool? Fictionality in Saints' Lives," in *The Hagiographical Experiment: Developing Discourses of Sainthood*, eds. Christa Gray and James Corke-Webster, Vigiliae Christianae Supplements 158 (Leiden, 2020), 63–92, at 73–75.

21 See Christodoulos Papavarnavas, "The Role of the Audience in the Pre-Metaphrastic Passions," *AB* 134/1 (2016): 66–82 on how this works in pre-Metaphrastic passions. On Zosimas' role in the *Life of Mary of Egypt*, see Stavroula Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women*, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 9 (Uppsala, 2005), 63.

22 *Life of Symeon*, p. 72, line 26–p. 73, line 3.

23 By choosing these sartorial embellishments, the hagiographer draws on a common Christian trope that marks clothing as symbolic and as connoting identity. Moreover, as Georgia Frank, Susan R. Holman, and Andrew S. Jacobs remark, "garment imagery often helped decode visionary experiences," and in the case of saints, royal robes particularly signal imitation of Christ's ascension and enthronement ("Introduction. Dangling Bodies, Robes of Glory: The Garb of Embodiment in Ancient Christianity," in *The Garb of Being: Embodiment and the Pursuit of Holiness in Late Ancient Christianity*, eds. Georgia Frank, Susan R. Holman and Andrew S. Jacobs [New York, 2020], 1–12, at 4). The connection between the problem of spiritual status, the paradox of holiness, and *imitatio Christi* is highlighted by Marco Formisano, "Text, Authenticity, and Imagination: The Example of the *Martyrium Polycarpi*," in *For Example: Martyrdom and Imitation in Early Christian Texts and Art*, eds. Anja Bettenworth, Dietrich Boschung, and Marco Formisano (Leiden, 2020), 123–142. Cf. n. 35 below.

24 See *Life of Symeon*, p. 58, line 22–p. 59, line 1: ἵππους / εὔποροι / δούλοις and p. 63, lines 13–14: σώματα ἁπαλὰ / ἱματίοις μαλακοῖς / τρυφηλοῦ βίου.

25 *Life of Symeon*, p. 63, line 15 mentions "ἀπάτη."

his well-to-do environment for a position as a solitary monk and, later, as a complete outcast in the city of Emesa. Nevertheless, this social degradation involves a significant increase of spiritual status: his selfless performance as village lunatic, designed to save others while avoiding praise, makes him exceptionally virtuous. In short, Symeon trades high social status for low social status, but by the same token, low spiritual standing is replaced with high spiritual standing. The narrative thus broadcasts that being on the margins of society does not necessarily imply religious marginality. In Symeon's case, it ensures his spiritual centrality, which is revealed to the other citizens after his death. The inverse correlation between social and spiritual status resonates with the late antique Christian ideal of flight from the world.[26] The question is whether it also applies to the side characters, whose professions anchor them in society and whose marginal positions are thus not a matter of detachment from the world. What is the relation of social and spiritual status in their case? As we will see, their situation proves to be more complex.

Symeon associates with all sorts of people in Emesa. Among them are prostitutes[27] and actors or *dêmotai*.[28] It should be noted, moreover, that there is often no clear difference between women of the stage and prostitutes in the Byzantine context.[29] For instance, it is mentioned that Symeon has the habit of playing with "dancing-girls"[30] in the theater, who "threw their hands into his lap, fondled him, poked him, and pinched him."[31] He also regularly works for a tavernkeeper[32] and a phouska-seller,[33] a profession comparable to that of tavernkeeper in terms of social standing. The *phouskarios* sold vinegar-soup, baked beans, and boiled lentils in the market-place, which, according to Krueger, must have been humble fare.[34] That Sy-

26 On this hagiographical *topos*, see Thomas Pratsch, *Der hagiographische Topos* (Berlin, 2005), ch. 6 and 7.

27 E.g. *Life of Symeon*, p. 79, lines 11–13, p. 89, lines 14–18, and p. 90, line 14.

28 I.e. "members of circus factions;" e.g. *Life of Symeon* p. 81, lines 13–14, p. 84, lines 7–19, and p. 97, line 16–p. 98, line 13, where he shares a meal with them.

29 As explained by Dorothea R. French, "Maintaining Boundaries: The Status of Actresses in Early Christian Society," *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998): 293–318, at 296: "according to Roman law actresses were classed with prostitutes as *humiles abiectaeque personae* as it was assumed that both prostitutes and actresses earned money by selling sexual favors." See Claudine Dauphin, "Brothels, Baths and Babes: Prostitution in the Byzantine Holy Land," *Classics Ireland* 3 (1996): 47–72, at 54–55; Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, 49; Ruth Webb, "Female Entertainers in Late Antiquity," in *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, eds. Pat Easterling and Edith Hall (Cambridge, 2002), 282–303; and Ariantzi, "Byzantinische Prostituierte," 3–4, who offers further references.

30 The word used is θυμελική.

31 *Life of Symeon*, p. 88, line 29–p. 89, line 3.

32 κάπηλος: *Life of Symeon*, p. 81, line 8–p. 82, line 10.

33 φουσκάριος: *Life of Symeon*, p. 80, line 5–p. 81, line 4.

34 Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, 151, n. 31 and 34. See also Ewald Kislinger, "ΦΟΥΣΚΑ UND ΓΛΗΧΩΝ," *JÖB* 34 (1984): 49–53, at 50. Note that in the *Life of Andrew* the term φουσκάριον (line 235) is used for an establishment that sells wine, hence a kind of tavern.

meon is not ashamed to share the company of these characters is certainly an example of *imitatio Christi*, which, as scholars have noted, contributes in important ways to Symeon's characterization.[35] But instead of thinking about how Symeon's acquaintance with these figures shapes the saint's image, I propose thinking about how it impacts the image of the members of these groups themselves.

The fact that the members of these professional groups share the company of a holy man positively affects their image. At the level of the story, their social standing is initially not improved by it, given that the citizens do not understand Symeon's virtue. However, being associated with the saint boosts their image at a different level, namely in the mind of the reader, who *is* aware of Symeon's true identity. The whole point of the story is that Symeon, even though he may come across as marginal and despicable to the ignorant citizens, is discovered to be a spiritual hero at the end. He is therefore often cited as an example of 'secret sanctity,' a popular narrative scheme in late antique hagiography.[36] This also raises the status of the ones who share his marginal position. It invites the audience—the extra-textual as well as (eventually) the intra-textual—to wonder who else might be worthier than their appearances suggest, for there is more than meets the eye.

This point is illustrated by a scene involving the phouska-shop. Two monks looking for answers to a theological question are told to go see Symeon in Emesa. When they find the saint in the phouska-seller's shop, eating beans, they immediately lose their respect for the man. One of them sarcastically comments, "truly we have come to see a great sage; this man has much to explain to us."[37] In other words, the monks

35 For elaborate discussions, see Ewald Kislinger, "Symeon Salos' Hund," *JÖB* 38 (1988): 165–170, at 165; Déroche, *Syméon Salos*, 70–71; Jan Hofstra, *Leontios von Neapolis und Symeon der heilige Narr: Ein Pastor als Hagiograph*, PhD Thesis (Groningen, 2008), 301–339; Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, 108–125; and Derek Krueger, "From Comedy to Martyrdom: The Shifting Theology of the Byzantine Holy Fool from Symeon of Emesa to Andrew," in *Holy Fools and Divine Madmen: Sacred Insanity Through Ages and Cultures*, eds. Albrecht Berger and Sergey A. Ivanov (Neuried, 2018), 31–49, esp. 32–36. On *imitatio Christi* in general, see Anja Bettenworth, Dietrich Boschung and Marco Formisano, eds., *For Example: Martyrdom and Imitation in Early Christian Texts and Art* (Leiden, 2020).

36 On secret sanctity in hagiography, see Wilhelm Bousset, "Der verborgene Heilige," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 21 (1922): 1–17; Bernard Flusin, "Le serviteur caché ou le saint sans existence," in *La vie des saints à Byzance: genre littéraire ou biographie historique? Actes du deuxième colloque international philologique « EPMHNEIA »*, eds. Paolo Odorico and Panagiotis Agapitos, Dossiers Byzantins 4 (Paris, 2004), 59–71; Britt Dahlman, *Saint Daniel of Sketis: A Group of Hagiographic Texts Edited with Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 10 (Uppsala, 2007), ch. 2; and Klazina Staat, "Emplotting Total Devotion: Secrecy, Fame, and Imitation in Late Antique *Lives* of Christian Ascetics," *Religion* 53/1 (2023): 135–160. On its relevance in the context of holy folly, see among others Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, ch. 4; Sergey A. Ivanov, "From 'Secret Servants of God' to 'Fools for Christ's Sake' in Byzantine Hagiography," *Византийский временник* 55 (1998): 188–194; and Williams, "Holy Folly and the Problem of Representing Holiness," 3–4, who points to its relevance for the problem of pride (cf. above).

37 *Life of Symeon*, p. 87, line 7.

quickly dismiss Symeon's spiritual authority based on his social environment. It demonstrates that the *phouskarios*' shop was generally held in very little esteem. Nevertheless, Symeon's response turns the tables around. He subtly reproaches them —"have you found fault with my beans?"[38]—suggesting that the fault is with those who judge solely on the basis of (humble) appearances.[39] The two monks are accordingly revealed to be spiritually inferior to the one eating beans in the phouska-shop. The conclusion is that social standing matters not when it comes to spiritual worth.

There is, however, another side to the medal. Seeking the company of prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers/phouska-sellers is a deliberate choice for Symeon, motivated by two things. These correspond to the twofold goal of his mission, i.e., to remain hidden and to lead others to virtue. First, it is part of his cover. Associating with people from the social margins effectively places himself there too. It is therefore instrumental to his main goal of disguising his true identity as a holy man. That this strategy has the desired effect can be gathered from the reaction of a certain village headman as he meets Symeon (the two monks in the phouska-shop present another example). After hearing rumors about him, the village headman travels to Emesa to find out whether Symeon is truly a madman or only pretending. Encountering Symeon "by chance while one prostitute was carrying him and another was whipping him," he concludes, scandalized, that he is truly an idiot. Hence, it is (at least in part) due to the prostitutes' company that Symeon's secret identity remains undetected. This has a marginalizing effect on these women. If it is by seeking their company that Symeon can successfully pass for a lunatic and a tramp, the implicit assumptions about those in their position are ultimately unfavorable. This means that these assumptions do not just exist in the eyes of the citizens inhabiting the story world: if we assume that the narrative aims to adhere to a certain level of plausibility, they must be shared by the narrative's author and audience as well.[40]

38 *Life of Symeon*, p. 87, lines 10–11.

39 As noted by Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 121: "the vita ends with a passionate plea not to judge (p. 103, line 14–p. 104, line 4)."

40 The historicity/fictionality of much hagiography remains open to debate. While it seems certain that hagiography is often fiction in the sense that it is the product of creative invention to large extents, it is unsure whether hagiography is comparable to modern fiction in the sense of a game of make-believe in which author and audience both recognize but agree to ignore the non-historicity of (part of) what is depicted; for further discussion, see Claudia Rapp, "Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of *Diegesis*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6/3 (1998): 431–448; Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity*; Charis Messis, "Fiction and/or Novelisation in Byzantine Hagiography," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, Volume II: Genres and Contexts*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Burlington, VT, 2014), 313–342; and Van Pelt, "The Hagiographer as Holy Fool?" Either way, it can be safely assumed that plausibility was an important criterion in hagiographical narrative writing, as it is in most narrative writing, whether fiction or not. For more on the standard of plausibility in hagiography, see Roger Ray, "The Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions in Pre-Carolingian Historiography," in *The Inheritance of Historiography 350–900*, eds. Christopher Holdsworth and Timothy Peter Wiseman (Exeter, 1986), 67–84, at 72–74;

The second reason why Symeon seeks the company of socially marginal figures is that these people are particularly in need of edification and religious reform. This is self-evident in the case of prostitutes. Creating a disreputable image for himself is only part of the reason why Symeon mingles with them. His main intention is to turn these women away from their sinful lifestyles. He does this by paying them to be his girlfriends and to be chaste.[41] (Note that this only elevates their spiritual standing, but it does not actually elevate their social position: their bodies are still controlled by a paying customer, and in the eyes of the other citizens, who believe Symeon is a regular customer, nothing about their situation has changed.) Symeon also turns his attention to stage performers. They are also in need of reform based solely on the nature of their profession.[42] Regarding a juggler, for instance, we read that "the righteous one wanted to put a stop to such an evil thing—for the juggler mentioned had done some good deeds."[43] This exposes the paradox in the juggler's position: his profession, referred to as "such an evil thing (τὸ τοιοῦτον κακόν)," corrupts his spiritual condition but does not prevent him from demonstrating a certain moral worth. Finally, Symeon aims to set straight the phouska-seller and the tavernkeeper as well. They, too, live morally reprehensible lives. The phouska-seller is a heretic of the Acephalic Severian sect and the tavernkeeper a heartless and avaricious man.[44]

We encounter the stereotype of the greedy and violent tavernkeeper elsewhere, e.g. in the miracle story of saint Nicolas of Myra regarding the couple John and Thamaris.[45] The couple is wealthy and devoted to Nicolas' cult. After losing everything (including their children and slaves) to a Saracen raid, their only concern is how they will contribute to the celebration of Nicolas' memory. Thamaris decides to sell a family heirloom to a tavernkeeper. They agree on a price of five coins. At that point, the saint appears in the guise of a monk and demands to buy the goods. The *kapêlos* now demands a price of seven coins, even though he was willing to pay only five himself. Then he reaches over to smack the saint to the ground. As punishment, his hand is shriveled. All ends well as the saint grants Thamaris her belongings and seven coins, and he later returns the couple's slaves and children. Another example is the *Life and Martyrdom of Stephen the Younger* (BHG 1666), where the martyr's body is mutilated

and Rapp, "Storytelling as Spiritual Communication." General discussion on the standard of plausibility in narrative may be found in *Recherches sémiologiques: Le vraisemblable*, Communications 11, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Paris, 1968).

41 *Life of Symeon*, p. 89, lines 14–18. This aspect of Symeon's behavior finds a parallel in the behavior of Vitalius in the *Life of John the Almsgiver*, also written by Leontius of Neapolis. For more discussion, see Grosdidier de Matons, "Les thèmes d'édification," 310–311; Krueger, *Symeon the Fool*, 30, 33, n. 46, and 67; and Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 126–129.

42 See above, n. 7, for more on the reason why.

43 *Life of Symeon*, p. 84, lines 7–9.

44 Cf. *Life of Symeon*, p. 80, line 21 and p. 81, lines 9–10 respectively.

45 *Miraculum de navibus frumentariis*, ch. 7–10, ed. Gustav Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos: Der Heilige Nikolaos in der griechischen Kirche. Texte und Untersuchungen*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1913), 288–299.

by a by-standing *kapêlos* when the corpse is dragged through the city.[46] Thinking the saint is still alive, he grabs a firebrand from the fire on which he is frying fish and knocks it against the saint's head, cracking his skull. Both stories illustrate that *kapêloi*, on top of their reprehensible professional activity (the tavern was a place of licentiousness and sin), had a reputation of unrighteousness.[47]

Symeon's concealed efforts to correct the prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers he meets inevitably counter the positive effect of his association with them (which I discussed above). His efforts are hidden to most characters in the story, but they are known to the reader. Consequently, to the other citizens there may be no difference between Symeon and the rest of the underclass, yet to the reader there is: one (the saint) is in a position of spiritual power and authority, whereas the other (the prostitute/actor/tavernkeeper) is in a position of subordination and learning. The need for religious reform reaffirms the inferior position in which these characters, on account of their professions, find themselves. The holy man may share their company, but ultimately he is not one of them.[48] Hence, though they may occupy the same social space, spiritually these characters are marginal vis-à-vis the saint.

Above I suggested that the *Life of Symeon* plays with an inversion of social and spiritual status: low social status equals high spiritual status and *vice versa*. However, it turns out that this inversion applies only to the protagonist. It does not hold true for the side characters who belong to professional groups that are traditionally marginalized, both socially and spiritually. Their position proves to be more complex. By attesting to the idea that social and spiritual status are disconnected, the narrative redeems characters who suffer from low social esteem. Symeon dwells with tavernkeepers and prostitutes, but he also clowns around in the houses of the wealthy.[49] He reproaches members of each social class: those at the bottom of society, but also merchants, monks, and important men.[50] This undermines the difference between the top and the bottom of the social ladder. All are held to equal spiritual standards before God. As Despoina Ariantzi suggests, Symeon thus becomes a middle-man between the socially marginalized and the respected but equally morally depraved elite.[51] Moreover, the notion of 'secret sanctity,' embodied by the saint, constructs a positive image for characters on the margins. At the same time, the characters in question do not emerge liberated from their social stigma. In a way, the stigma is even reinforced because

46 *Life of Stephen the Younger*, ch. 71, lines 1–6, ed. Marie-France Auzépy, *La Vie d'Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre* (Aldershot, 1997).

47 As discussed by W. C. Firebaugh, *The Inns of Greece & Rome: A History of Hospitality from the Dawn of Time to the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1928), 63–67, the bad reputation of tavernkeepers can be traced back to antiquity.

48 Cf. *Life of Symeon*, p. 96, line 16: Symeon dwells with demoniacs, but they chase him away, recognizing that he is different ("οὐκ εἶ ἐξ ἡμῶν").

49 Cf. *Life of Symeon*, p. 85, lines 10–11.

50 E.g. *Life of Symeon*, p. 99, line 15–p. 100, line 4.

51 Ariantzi, "Byzantinische Prostituierte," 33.

their marginal positions are instrumental to the plotline of disguise. Secondly, even if the narrative subverts the ideal of social standing, it still portrays these professional groups as belonging manifestly on the spiritual margins. A juggler who does good remains a sinner who must be reformed. In conclusion, the portrait that emerges is characterized by contradictory tendencies, highlighting these characters' spiritual potential on the one hand, yet corroborating their outsider positions on the other.

2 Prostitutes, Actors, and Tavernkeepers as Saints

I now turn to hagiographical texts in which prostitutes, actors, or tavernkeepers feature as the narratives' protagonists. These saints epitomize the contradictions that characterize the figures discussed above: they combine socially and spiritually contemptible professions with holiness itself. They therefore challenge and subvert the *topos* of holy men and women descending from noble and wealthy families.[52] Their narratives exemplify the possibility of advancing from the margins to the center. However, as we will see, they often do so in ways that both elevate and marginalize members of these professional groups.

The following discussion is organized into two parts. First, I discuss figures who start out as practitioners of one of these professions but change their lives, repent, and continue on to becoming saints. I am specifically concerned with repentant prostitutes, also known as 'holy harlots.' Second, I will discuss examples of characters who never abandon their professional activities but are virtuous Christians (and indeed saints) while maintaining active professional lives. The first of these examples features a tavernkeeper, while two others concern men from the theatrical world.

2.1 From Sinner to Saint

Stories about repentant prostitutes who became holy women were quite popular in Byzantium.[53] Greek hagiography knows a handful of them. These include the *Lives* of Mary the niece of Abraham (BHG 5),[54] Eudocia (BHG 604–605), Mary of Egypt (BHG 1042), Pelagia (BHG 1478), Thaïs (BHG 1695), and Theophanes and Pansemne (BHG

52 See Pratsch, *Der hagiographische Topos*, ch. 2A.

53 I exclude from my discussion the many female saints who are admitted to a brothel against their will, often as punishment by an evil pagan governor (examples are found in the *Martyrdom of Agnes*, the *Life of Theodora and Didymus*, the *Life of Alexandra and Antoninus*, the *Martyrdom of Lucia of Syracuse*, and the *Martyrdom of Irene, Agape and Chione*).

54 Mary's story is embedded in the *Life* of her uncle, Abraham. However, the part dealing with Mary also circulated separately in medieval manuscripts (e.g. Escorial (El-), Real Biblioteca, Ω. IV. 32, fol. 102r–108r). This suggests that it was read as a self-contained narrative as well. Mary's character is

2447).[55] They have been discussed in a number of recent studies.[56] As Karras remarks, holy harlots embodied the message that confession and penance "could wipe out the worst of sins" in the most dramatic way.[57] She also notes that the harlot's professional life usually takes up only a small portion of the narrative: it constitutes the background for the central story of her conversion from sin and her repentance. This is true in a number of cases (Eudocia, Pelagia, Thaïs).[58] However, in other cases, it seems the story's attraction partly lies in the juicy details about the saint's life before her conversion (Mary of Egypt) or in the sexually charged scene in which a male monastic figure visits the prostitute in order to trigger her repentance (Mary Abraham's niece, Pansemne). In those cases we are presented with a fuller image of the protagonist as prostitute, which clashes dramatically with her later image as holy woman. It is the spectacular reversal from one to the other that was probably experienced as particularly inspiring and entertaining.[59] It is also this reversal—present in all holy

strongly developed and carries much of the narrative and emotional focus. It is therefore not unjustified to say that she is presented as a saint and a protagonist alongside her uncle.

55 The list is not necessarily exhaustive, but these may be considered as the most important ones. Monastic literature also features brief stories about prostitutes converted by monks, as discussed in n. 4 above. In these brief stories, the women arguably do not take on the role of holy protagonist.

56 Notably: Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*; Ruth M. Karras, "Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1/1 (1990): 3–32; Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia, 1997), ch. 4; Patricia Cox Miller, "Is There a Harlot in This Text? Hagiography and the Grotesque," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33/3 (2003): 419–435; Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia, 2004), ch. 4; Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, ch. 2; and Christopher M. Flavin, *Constructions of Feminine Identity in the Catholic Tradition: Inventing Women* (Lanham, MD, 2020), 32–37. See Ariantzi, "Byzantinische Prostituierte," 13–16 for further examples and discussion of repenting prostitutes in hagiographical literature.

57 Karras, "Holy Harlots," 3.

58 While the Greek *Life of Thaïs* follows the same pattern as the *Lives* of Mary Abraham's niece and Pansemne, i.e., the monastic rescuer infiltrating the brothel, the episode in the former is not spun out into a scene of (ostensible) seduction (see Alice G. Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* [Hanover, 1987], 129, and Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints*, 134–135 for more discussion on the seductive nature of the scene in the *Life of Abraham*; see Julie Van Pelt, "The *Life of Thaïs* and the *Life of Abraham and His Niece Mary*: An Intertextual Connection," *Vigiliae Christianae* 71/4 [2017]: 402–416 on the difference with Thaïs' narrative). Even if Thaïs' life as a prostitute before her conversion is described in some detail at the beginning of the narrative, the large majority of the text focuses on her conversion and repentance. The same is true for the narratives of Eudocia and Pelagia. Their lives contain phrases or passages alluding to or describing their sin/spiritual outsider position (see Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 82–83 on Pelagia). Nevertheless, in other texts this occurs more elaborately, which is why I focus on those.

59 Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 102 and Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints*, 128 comment on the popularity of holy harlot narratives. See Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, 62 on possible reasons for it. She also shows that the reversal from sinner to saint in holy harlot narratives is articulated in a threefold (rather than a twofold) scheme: the harlot moves from a state of sin to a state of holiness through a phase of repentance.

harlot stories but arguably more dramatically articulated in the latter three—which is responsible for the narratives' contradictory image of prostitutes.

It should be noted that Mary of Egypt was a promiscuous woman before her conversion, but she was technically not a prostitute, since she did not take payment when she had intercourse with men.[60] She was poor and lived from begging and spinning.[61] Nevertheless, she slept with men entirely out of "insatiable passion and uncontrollable lust."[62] This may actually worsen her position from a spiritual point of view.[63] According to Karras, prostitutes were associated with lust.[64] Mary fits the bill in that respect. Moreover, because she has no money, she pays with her body for a sea voyage to Jerusalem and is therefore involved in an economical transaction resembling prostitution (be it only a one-time event and not a professional activity). In any case, she certainly led men into sin with her lifestyle, which made her comparable to the other holy harlots.[65] Here, I have so far used 'prostitute' and 'harlot' as interchangeable terms. Although there are nuances, all the women known as 'repentant prostitutes' or 'holy harlots' represent the same image of a loose woman whose lifestyle is character-

60 The point is emphasized in the Greek text attributed to Sophronius (dated to the 7th century), which I follow here (ed. Migne, *PG* 87, col. 3697–3726). The transmission history of the *Life of Mary of Egypt* is, however, notoriously complex (see Anne Marie Sargent, *The Penitent Prostitute: The Tradition and Evolution of the Life of Saint Mary the Egyptian*, PhD Thesis [Ann Arbor, 1977], 6–9) and such details may vary across versions. As Karras, "Holy Harlots," 8–9 shows, it changes in later medieval traditions about Mary of Egypt, where she has become a prostitute working for money. For an elaborate discussion of the diachronic transformation of Mary's (and Zosimas') character in the legend's Byzantine and medieval Western traditions, see Andria Andreou, "Many Faces, a Single Pair: Rewriting Mary and Zosimas in the Legend of Mary of Egypt," in Metaphrasis: *A Byzantine Concept of Rewriting and Its Hagiographical Products*, eds. Stavroula Constantinou and Christian Høgel, The Medieval Mediterranean 125 (Leiden, 2020), 107–138.

61 Note that prostitutes were not always poor. The *Life of Martinianus* (discussed below; ed. Paul Rabbow, "Die Legende des Martinian," *Wiener Studien, Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie* 17 [1896]: 277–293) attests to the fact that prostitutes were sometimes quite wealthy (ch. 7, lines 5–7: ἔχω γὰρ καὶ οἰκίαν καὶ χρυσὸν καὶ ἄργυρον καὶ κτῆσιν λαμπρὰν καὶ παῖδας καὶ παιδίσκας). The same is demonstrated in the *Life of Thaïs*, p. 98, lines 4–6, ed. François Nau, "Histoire de Thaïs: publication des textes grecs inédits et de divers autres textes et versions," *Annales du Musée Guimet* 30 (1902): 51–113. According to Karras, "Holy Harlots," 6, prostitutes were not just associated with lust in the Middle Ages, but also with greed.

62 *Life of Mary of Egypt*, ch. 18.

63 Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 86 notes: "By classical standards, Mary was the worst kind of harlot because she engaged in intercourse not from financial need but to satisfy lust."

64 Karras, "Holy Harlots," 6.

65 Cf. *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne*, p. 321, lines 6–7, ed. E. de Stoop, "La vie de Theophane et de Pansemne," *Le musée belge: revue de philologie classique* 15 (1911): 313–329: πολλὰς ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων ἀπώλεσεν καὶ ἔτι ἀπόλλει; and *Life of Thaïs*, p. 88, line 18–p. 90, line 2 (ed. Nau, "Histoire de Thaïs"): οὕτως παγὶς πολλοῖς καὶ βόθρος θανάτου τυγχάνουσα, τήν τε αὐτῆς ψυχὴν καθ' ἑκάστην ἐβαράθριζε, καὶ πάντων τῶν πλησιαζόντων αὐτῇ. See Karras, "Holy Harlots," 6 on prostitutes (and women in general) as the mechanism for male downfall, and see Ariantzi, "Byzantinische Prostituierte," 8 for similar observations.

ized by deep sexual immorality (and who may or may not benefit financially from her lovers).[66]

The story of Mary's promiscuous life leaves little to the imagination. It describes at length Mary's insatiable lust and her many sexual escapades.[67] Nevertheless, we hear it from the mouth of Mary herself, when she meets the monk Zosimas towards the end of her life and tells him in a strong apologetic tone of her shameful past.[68] As Constantinou remarks, "Mary's 'I' is divided into an 'I' of the past and an 'I' of the present, differing from each other bodily, morally and mentally."[69] Hence, this particular narrative set-up (namely, Mary the ascetic as narrator of the story of Mary the harlot) adds to the stark contrast between the two conflicting images of the protagonist. Moreover, the contradictory position of the holy harlot is highlighted by the central event in Mary's story, the event which triggered her repentance. In Jerusalem, Mary wanted to join the crowd entering the church during the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Yet, whenever she tried to make her way in through the church's entrance, she was pushed back by an invisible force.[70] Just as the prostitute from the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Mary was literally excluded from the church (though the specific means are different). Interestingly, however, it was on this very threshold denying her entrance that "a salvific word touched the eyes of her heart" and awakened in her the will to change and the strength to repent, initiating her inclusion in the Christian spiritual community. Next, Mary was able to physically enter the church thanks to the intercession of the Theotokos. The scene substantiates the harlot's position on the borderline between exclusion and inclusion, on the threshold between sinner and repentant saint.

The same contradictory image emerges from the first meeting between Zosimas and Mary (narrated before the story of Mary's sinful life but taking place later in the chronology of the *fabula*). While he sees grace in her,[71] she asks him why he has come to see "a sinful woman, (. . .) deprived of every virtue," subordinating herself to his priestly rank.[72] At the same time, the very fact that she still regards herself as a sinful woman after so many years of solitude in fact confirms her humility and spiritual accomplishments. Her words turn around any immediate assumptions one may have regarding these characters: the one with a priestly rank (Zosimas) appears spiritually

66 See Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, 57 for the nuances. At 65, Constantinou furthermore notes that the harlot's sin also lies in the extravagant care for her body (the opposite of the typical Christian disregard for it). For Byzantine terminology for prostitutes, I refer to Ariantzi, "Byzantinische Prostituierte," 2–3.

67 See Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, 62–63, referring to Gaunt, for further discussion.

68 Cf., e.g., *Life of Mary of Egypt*, ch. 18: συγχώρησον, and ch. 17: αἰσχύνομαι.

69 Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, 77.

70 *Life of Mary of Egypt*, ch. 22.

71 *Life of Mary of Egypt*, ch. 13.

72 *Life of Mary of Egypt*, ch. 14.

inferior to the one with no rank (Mary); the former prostitute has become a saintly model. The narrative plays with the idea of a role reversal. Nevertheless, the hierarchy between the two ultimately remains ambiguous. Zosimas is called a "holy man" at the beginning of the tale,[73] and, as Coon remarks, "even though the woman walks on water, travels at supernatural speed, and prophesies, at the end of her life she depends on a male priest to cleanse her sins, administer the eucharist to her, and bury her in orthodox fashion."[74] Furthermore, in the way Mary is portrayed after the initial meeting, she appears somehow still bound to her past. Mary levitates during prayer, and when Zosimas sees it, the thought crosses his mind that she might be a demonic spirit who is only pretending to pray.[75] It is not made explicit why the thought entered Zosimas' mind (after all, he does not yet know anything about Mary's identity at this point). It appears therefore that Zosimas' hesitation betrays a bias regarding Mary's background that is located at the highest narrative level, for it is not explained as part of Zosimas' character. She, being a former prostitute, must somehow convince others of the legitimacy of her spiritual status.[76] Burrus compares Zosimas to a "a doubting Thomas" and calls his attempt to learn more about the saint's life as an ascetic a "cross-examination."[77] The scene captures the paradox of the holy harlot's being: she is always in a state of overcoming sin.[78] It is in this 'overcoming' that we simultaneously perceive her worth and her weakness. The very essence of the holy harlot, her 'overcoming,' is the reason why her story is instructive: the harlot advances from the spiritual margins to the center. Yet, this transformation also means that Mary the prostitute will always appear marginal in relation to Mary the saint.

73 *Life of Mary of Egypt,* ch. 1.

74 Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 89.

75 *Life of Mary of Egypt*, ch. 15. The text alludes to a familiar scenario from early Christian narrative, in which an impostor figure poses as a holy man/woman, using demonic force to perform extraordinary deeds that resemble miracles. A famous example is Simon Magus, e.g. in the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostle Peter*; for discussion, see among others Gerard Luttikhuizen, "Simon Magus as a Narrative Figure in the Acts of Peter," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles and Gnosticism*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (Leuven, 1998), 39–51; and Dominique Côté, *Le thème de l'opposition entre Pierre et Simon dans les Pseudo-Clémentines* (Paris, 2001).

76 Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 91 interprets Zosimas' hesitation rather in the context of the hierarchy of genders: because Mary is a *female* saint, Zosimas is inclined to see her as a demonic apparition seducing monks. Her interpretation is compatible with mine, since the idea of the female as sexually burdened and the blame on prostitutes as vessels of sin are naturally connected. For discussion of prostitutes as vessels of universal human sin and redemption, see Karras, "Holy Harlots," 32 and Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 74–77 and 93.

77 Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints*, 152 and Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 88.

78 Ariantzi, "Byzantinische Prostituierte," 21 and 28 describes the difficulty with which former prostitutes could lose their stigma. French, "Maintaining Boundaries," 304–317 describes similar difficulties for professional actresses, despite late 4th-century edicts through which actresses had the opportunity to become legally respectable by leaving their profession in the name of Christianity.

While the same general conclusion applies to the other harlots as well, the *Life of Mary the niece of Abraham* and the *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne* both put their own particular spin on the formula.[79] Both tales feature two protagonists and follow the same basic outline: the male protagonist sets out to rescue the female protagonist from her sinful lifestyle to save her soul.[80] The editor of the *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne* points to certain other resemblances between the two narratives.[81] There are also differences. Specific to the *Life of Abraham and Mary* is that the two protagonists are relatives, which means they already knew each other before Abraham's intervention. Moreover, Mary was not always a prostitute: in fact, she was living a chaste life under her uncle's care until she was seduced by the Devil, fell into sin, and ran away to a brothel overwhelmed by guilt. These specific elements have two main implications. First, Mary's career as a prostitute is presented as a mere interlude to her life as an ascetic. Her story is not about spiritual advancement from the margins to the center but about a (temporary) lapse by a person of good standing. Second, disguise is an important theme in this narrative. In the *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne*, the male rescuer also wears a disguise: he changes his hair shirt (a typical monk's garment) for costly garments to support his role as Pansemne's lover.[82] Nevertheless, as I discuss elsewhere, Abraham's disguise (he dresses as a soldier to visit the brothel) is more dramatic and it carries more weight precisely because Mary might recognize her uncle, which would cause the mission to fail.[83] Of interest to us here is that the overall theme of disguised identity also becomes relevant for Mary's character. She changes her appearance before leaving for the brothel,[84] trading her monastic habit for a prostitute's guise.[85] These references to appearance and the parallel with Abra-

79 The *Life of Mary the niece of Abraham* is relatively well-studied; see, e.g., Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*; Sebastian P. Brock and Susan A. Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley, 1987); and Sergey A. Ivanov, "A Saint in a Whore-house," *BSL* 56/2 (1995): 439–445. The Greek translation of the original Syriac *Life* is hard to date but may have appeared as early as the 6th century (Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women*, 28). I follow the edition by Konstaninos G. Phrantzolas, "In Vitam Beati Abrahamii et Eius Neptis Mariae," in *Ὁσίου Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου ἔργα, ΤΟΜΟΣ ΕΒΔΟΜΟΣ* (Thessaloniki, 1998), 356–394. The *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne* has received much less scholarly attention thus far. It is edited by De Stoop, "La vie de Theophane et de Pansemne." Again, its date is unsure. All we find is that, according to De Stoop, it was written in the "Byzantine period" (318–319).

80 A storyline also present in the *Life of Thaïs* (see above, n. 58).

81 De Stoop, "La vie de Theophane et de Pansemne," 317–318.

82 *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne*, p. 321, line 20: ἱμάτια πολυτελῆ. Cf. *Life of Thaïs*, p. 90, lines 14–15, ed. Nau, "Histoire de Thaïs."

83 *Life of Mary Abraham's niece*, p. 382, lines 7–9: ἐνδυσάμενός τε τὸ στρατιωτικὸν σχῆμα, καὶ καμηλαύκιον βαθὺ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ, κατακαλύπτον τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ. See De Stoop, "La vie de Theophane et de Pansemne," 317 and Van Pelt, "The *Life of Thaïs* and the *Life of Abraham*," 411 for discussion.

84 *Life of Mary Abraham's niece,* p. 380, line 9: ἀλλάξασα τὸ σχῆμα αὐτῆς.

85 Those are referred to at p. 387, line 1 (τὸ σχῆμα τὸ ἀγγελικόν) and p. 383, line 12 (τὸ πορνικὸν σχῆμα) respectively.

ham's disguise invite us to interpret the image of the harlot as a temporary and misleading facade, clouding Mary's true character as a virtuous woman. Again, it marginalizes the saint's career as a prostitute by presenting it as an erroneous interlude that does not represent her true being. As a result, it is hard to see her story as one that promotes spiritual advancement for characters traditionally on the margins.

Turning to the *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne*, we encounter yet another variation on the holy harlot's story. Pansemne, as Mary the Egyptian, has always lived a life of great sin. She leads many men astray, until she goes through a remarkable conversion and completely turns her life around. Just as the famous holy harlot Pelagia, she is in fact introduced as an actress[86] who enjoyed certain fame, wealth, and therefore social acclaim. Pelagia and Pansemne thus differ from Mary of Egypt, whose initial position combines both social and spiritual exclusion. The difference attests to the diverging social status of prostitutes in Byzantium.[87] Moreover, both are again examples that actresses were regarded as women with loose sexual morals, considered *pornai* even if they did not take payment from their lovers (although their wealth suggests that they did benefit financially).[88] De Stoop demonstrates that the *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne* and the *Life of Pelagia* display textual resemblances (in addition to resemblances between the former and the *Life of Mary Abraham's niece*).[89] The most striking parallel is in the scene depicting Pansemne parading through the city while seated on a horse, followed by a large group of servants.[90] This is when the virtuous Theophanes first lays eyes on her. His reaction to the sight of her is revealing, both concerning his own character and hers: he is upset.[91] This illustrates Theophanes' deep concern for others and it prepares the events to follow, namely the plight he faces in order to save her soul. It also signals Pansemne's low spiritual status (whereas the parade itself suggests her social centrality, which she will abandon when she repents). Nevertheless, her name (literally 'all-virtuous') paradoxically already alludes to her inner worth. Moreover, Pansemne is portrayed as having quite a temperament. She twice bursts out in rage when Theophanes makes her an unex-

86 *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne*, p. 321, line 2: μιμάς.

87 On which see Dauphin, "Brothels, Baths and Babes," 54–60, and above, n. 61.

88 It is not mentioned in either case that the protagonist takes payment for sex. Their loose sexual morals are, however, made abundantly clear in both texts. Pelagia is also explicitly called *pornê*, e.g. at ch. 12; ed. Bernard Flusin, "Les textes grecs," in *Pélagie la Pénitente: Métamorphoses d'une légende. Tome I: Les textes et leur histoire*, ed. Pierre Petitmengin et al. (Paris, 1981), 39–131.

89 De Stoop, "La vie de Theophane et de Pansemne," 313–314. Both stories are also set in Antioch.

90 *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne*, p. 321, line 27–p. 322, line 1. Cf. *Life of Pelagia*, ch. 4–5, ed. Flusin, "Les textes grecs."

91 *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne*, p. 322, lines 1–2: ἰδὼν ὁ ἅγιος ἐταράχθη ἐν ἑαυτῷ. Compare also the reaction of a group of bishops to the sight of Pelagia as she passes them by in the *Life of Pelagia*, ch. 6, ed. Flusin, "Les textes grecs:" they turn their heads away as if from a terrible sin. Their public gesture is an even clearer sign of the marginalization of the harlot.

pected proposal,[92] even if she then quickly complies with it. She is primarily portrayed as a passionate creature. When Theophanes visits her house with a plan to convert her, she is immediately attracted to him because of his handsome looks and falls head over heels in love. The rest of the narrative lends a strong erotic overtone to the conversion story.[93] Theophanes' course of action is to make Pansemne a marriage proposal (hence sacrificing his own monastic goals to save her from promiscuity). In a next phase, however, he adds a condition: in order to marry him, she must convert to Christianity. Agreeing to both the initial marriage proposal and, later, the extra condition, Pansemne begins to study the scriptures and learns about the Christian faith. Eventually, her heart is so touched by faith that she no longer wishes to marry Theophanes and becomes deeply ashamed of her many sins.[94] She spends the rest of her life in great asceticism to repent for them. Eventually, she even performs healing miracles, which demonstrate her holiness. Interestingly, then, Theophanes' marriage proposal and Pansemne's passionate love for him are what lead her to the Christian faith and to sanctity. Therefore, this narrative complicates the position of the repentant prostitute even further, since the vehicle of her conversion is her sin.

Before concluding this section on holy harlots, I wish to discuss the *Life of Martinianus* (BHG 1177), a little-studied text.[95] It also features a prostitute. It would probably go too far to call her a protagonist (she is never even given a name), but she plays an important role in the first part of the *Life*.[96] The reason this narrative is of interest to us here is that it inverts the pattern of the harlot rescued by a holy man. In this story, a prostitute[97] overhears a conversation about the holy Martinianus and his incredible chastity, after which she sets out to find and seduce him. She reasons that his continence is not so admirable, given that he lives secluded in the desert and never lays eyes on a woman. She intends to put him to the test. She even disguises herself by taking off her usual splendid attire and changing into old rags,[98] which is the reverse of what Theophanes does before approaching Pansemne. Next, she appears at Martinianus' cell and convinces him, feigning great distress,[99] that she has lost her way and

92 *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne*, p. 323, line 2 and p. 324, line 3: μετ' ὀργῆς.

93 De Stoop, "La vie de Theophane et de Pansemne," 315 comments on the narrative's "forme romanesque."

94 *Life of Theophanes and Pansemne*, p. 325, line 15–p. 326, line 10.

95 The text is edited by Rabbow, "Die Legende des Martinian." Translations in this chapter are my own. A critical edition and Italian translation of a Syriac version of this *Life* are by Guido Venturini, "La tradizione manoscritta della *Storia di Martiniano* e le sue versioni siriache," *Le Muséon* 134/3–4 (2021): 283–323.

96 The text consists of two narrative sections that each present a fairly self-contained episode in Martinianus' life. The first (ch. 1–12) features the prostitute. The second (ch. 12–23) also features an important female side character (though she is not a prostitute). In both cases, the episode closes with the death of the virtuous woman, which indicates their importance as characters.

97 *Life of Martinianus*, ch. 3, line 14: τις γυνὴ πόρνη.

98 *Life of Martinianus*, ch. 4, lines 8–9.

99 *Life of Martinianus*, ch. 4, line 19: μετ' ὀδυρμῶν καὶ κλαυθμῶν.

is in need of help.[100] After being admitted by Martinianus, she dresses up during the night and appears splendidly adorned before the monk in the morning, ready to seduce him.

At first glance, the narrative paints a stereotypical picture of a prostitute: a promiscuous woman who is out to destroy souls and deceives and seduces men (think of Mary of Egypt, who is described as "hunting after the souls of young men").[101] However, as the narrative develops, the prostitute's character acquires an extra dimension. While trying to convince Martinianus to share her bed, she takes examples from the Bible and from the Holy Fathers to support her argument.[102] "Did the apostle Paul not say that 'Marriage is honorable and the bed undefiled'?" she insists.[103] Or "likewise, were not Abraham and Isaac and the noble Jacob and the lawgiver Moses, as well as David and Solomon and all those like them—were they not granted a place in the heavenly kingdom while being married?"[104] The prostitute thus demonstrates her knowledge of the Scriptures, even if she uses it for the wrong purposes. Her unexpected familiarity with Christian doctrine suggests her inherent (yet hidden) virtue. Hence, just as the juggler from the *Life of Symeon*, a sinner who had done good deeds, she represents a paradox.

Her virtuous nature soon gains the upper hand when she witnesses how Martinianus, who has a sudden change of heart, deliberately burns his feet to remind himself of the eternal fires of hell to which he is about to deliver himself. Taking inspiration from his example, she decides to repent of her sins. She spends the rest of her life in a convent, practicing the most severe asceticism.[105] Just as Pansemne, she even performs a healing miracle.[106] The anonymous woman from the *Life of Martinianus* is then arguably also a holy harlot. Moreover, her image is as conflicted as that of the others. The moment of her conversion is described as a sudden awakening and as a

100 Cf. the *Life of Macarius the Roman*, where the Devil visits the monk disguised as a beautiful woman and persuades him with a similar act. Rabbow, "Die Legende des Martinian," 262–266 notes the similarity and discusses further examples of the motif.

101 *Life of Mary of Egypt*, ch. 22.

102 *Life of Martinianus*, ch. 6, lines 13–21.

103 *Life of Martinianus*, ch. 6, lines 14–15: οὐχὶ Παῦλος ὁ ἀπόστολος εἶπεν "τίμιος ὁ γάμος καὶ ἡ κοίτη ἀμίαντος;" (quoting Hebrews 13:4). Note that the prostitute deliberately pulls the phrase out of context to fit her argument.

104 *Life of Martinianus*, ch. 6, lines 18–21: ὁμοίως καὶ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακὼβ ὁ γενναῖος καὶ Μωυσῆς ὁ νομοθέτης Δαυίδ τε καὶ Σολομῶν καὶ πάντες οἱ κατ' αὐτοὺς οὐχὶ γάμῳ συζευχθέντες ἠξιώθησαν τῆς τῶν οὐρανῶν βασιλείας;

105 A comparable narrative scheme is present in the Latin *Passion of Chrysanthus and Daria* (BHL 1787–1788), where Chrysanthus' father, out of disapproval of his son's chastity, sends him women to seduce him and the latter ends up converting one of them. For more on this *Passion*, see Danny Praet and Annelies Bossu, "A Marriage of Equals? Characterization in the *passio Chrysanthi et Dariae*," *Philologus* 159/2 (2015): 301–326. I thank Koen De Temmerman for bringing this parallel to my attention.

106 *Life of Martinianus*, ch. 11, lines 12–19.

remembrance.[107] Again, this suggests that she always possessed inner virtue, even if she developed a strong inclination to sin at the same time. Similarly, the image of the ruthless seductress is balanced by a tendency to exonerate her from blame. The narrator mentions twice that she was inspired by the Devil to execute her plan.[108] And when Martinianus finally finds the strength to turn the woman down, he remarks that "not she is to blame but the one who compelled her to hinder those on the path of virtue."[109]

To conclude, in Greek hagiography, prostitutes represent icons of conversion and repentance. Their function is to remind Christians that there is always a way into God's kingdom, no matter how far one has strayed from the path of virtue.[110] However, being icons of repentance, they are necessarily also icons of sin. The picture that emerges is ultimately multi-layered and complex. By pulling these women into the spiritual center, the narratives inevitably also acknowledge the margins which they formerly inhabited.

This is different in the case of the final text discussed in this section. Apart from repentant harlots/actresses, there are a number of hagiographical narratives about male mime actors who convert and become Christian martyrs. Scholars usually cite the Martyrdoms of Gelasius, Ardalion, Porphyrius, and Genesius as examples.[111] Of these four, only the *Martyrdom of Porphyrius* has been preserved in Greek (BHG 1569).[112] The mime is miraculously converted in the middle of a stage performance mocking Christian rituals. Hence, Porphyrius is guilty of the same offence as Gaianus,

107 *Life of Martinianus*, ch. 9, lines 1–2: ὥσπερ ἐξ ὕπνου βαθυτάτου ἀναστᾶσα καὶ εἰς ἑαυτὴν γενομένη, and ch. 9, line 4: εἰς μνήμην ἐλθοῦσα τῶν ἑαυτῆς κακῶν πράξεων.

108 *Life of Martinianus*, ch. 3, line 15 and ch. 7, lines 9–10.

109 *Life of Martinianus*, ch. 8, lines 8–9: οὐ γὰρ αὐτή ἐστιν αἴτιος ἀλλ' ὁ αὐτὴν παρακινήσας εἰς ἐμπόδιον τῆς ἀγαθῆς ὁδοῦ.

110 See Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, esp. ch. 1 and Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, esp. 94.

111 See Claudia Ludwig, *Sonderformen byzantinischer Hagiographie und ihr literarisches Vorbild: Untersuchungen zu den Viten des Äsop, des Philaretos, des Symeon Salos und des Andreas Salos* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), ch. 6, esp. 376–380; Panayotakis, "Baptism and Crucifixion;" Juan Antonio J. Sánchez, "Les saints mimes: À propos des conversions miraculeuses des acteurs sur les scènes," in *Controverses et polémiques religieuses: Antiquité – Temps modernes*, eds. Ralph Dekoninck, Janine Desmulliez, and Myriam Watthee-Delmotte (Paris, 2007), 29–38; and Cornelia Horn, "The Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes* and the Performance of Biblical Recitation: Questions of Power and Contexts," in *Syriac Hagiography: Texts and Beyond*, eds. Sergey Minov and Flavia Ruani, Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity 20 (Leiden, 2021), 135–159.

112 Edited by Charles Van der Vorst, "Une passion inédite de s. Porphyre le mime," *AB* 29 (1910): 258–275. Another version of this *Martyrdom* is found in *AASS* Nov. II tom. 1, pp. 231–232. I follow the first version, as it is more elaborate and more ancient according to Van der Vorst, "Une passion inédite," 264. The memory of Ardalion is preserved in a brief entry in the Synaxarion of Constantinople (18 April). Gelasius is merely mentioned by name in the Synaxarion (26 February) without any narration. On the Syriac Martyrdoms of Gelasius and Ardalion, see Horn, "The Syriac *Martyrdom of the Mimes*." On the Latin *Martyrdom of Genesius* (BHL 3320), see Werner Weismann, "Die 'Passio Genesii mimi' (BHL 3320)," *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 12 (1977): 22–43.

the actor who is punished by the Theotokos and whom I briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It may therefore come as a surprise that Porphyrius, unlike Gaianus, is never portrayed in a negative light.[113] What little we learn about the mime's background and life before his conversion is neutral in tone.[114] In fact, although he is at the center of the action, Porphyrius is not at the center of the narration in the conversion story.[115] The narrator's account feels impersonal and portrays Porphyrius as a passive player. It focuses on the experience of the spectators who watch him as he undergoes the miraculous conversion. His perspective becomes more prominent only in the second part of the narrative,[116] when he converses with the governor. At this point, the transformation is completed and Porphyrius is depicted in a traditional martyr's role. While this text is of interest to scholars for a number of different reasons, the *Martyrdom of Porphyrius* does not offer new perspectives when it comes to the depiction of the social and spiritual status of actor-saints, for the simple reason that it does not actively address these issues. Indeed, the narrative does not revolve around the internal experience of the converting saint because that is not the point of the story: rather than an individual's spiritual strength in the context of repentance, it exemplifies the external force of Christian symbols.

2.2 Professionals as Saints

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to saints whose virtuous lives do not succeed but are embedded within their professional activities. The first example of such a saint is found in the *Martyrdom of Theodotus and the Seven Virgins* (BHG 1782).[117] The

113 Cf. *Sayings*, ed. Paschos, *Νέον Μητερικόν*, ch. 77, line 8: μετὰ πολλῆς ἀναιδείας, and ch. 77, line 13: ὁ δείλαιος. The actor-martyr Genesius is also characterized negatively: see Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, 125. Nevertheless, I find the gendered division observed here suggestive: while all actors, both male and female, were socially and religiously marginalized (cf. n. 7), it is in stories of female actors' conversions that hagiographers seem to focus on this, while they depict male actors' conversions for other purposes, e.g. to exemplify the power of Christian symbols.

114 *Martyrdom of Porphyrius*, p. 270, lines 9–18.

115 *Martyrdom of Porphyrius*, ch. 1–4.

116 *Martyrdom of Porphyrius*, ch. 5–9.

117 I follow the edition by Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, *I martirii di S. Teodoto e di S. Ariadne*, Studi e Testi 6 (Roma, 1901), 61–84, which improves the text offered in the *Acta Sanctorum* (Maii IV, pp. 149–165). According to Franchi de' Cavalieri, the text postdates the reign of Julian the Apostate (22–24). Stephen Mitchell, "The Life of Saint Theodotus of Ancyra," *Anatolian Studies* 32 (1982): 93–113, at 112–113 argues for an early date, before A.D. 370. An English translation of the text can be found in Arthur J. Mason, *The Life & Martyrdom of St. Theodotus of Ancyra by Nilus* (Waterford, 2019 [1876]). However, this translation is grossly outdated and does not always offer an accurate rendering of the Greek. In this chapter, translations from the *Martyrdom of Theodotus* are my own.

martyr celebrated in this account is a tavernkeeper from Ancyra. The *Martyrdom* not only presents a compelling story,[118] it is also written in a sophisticated style. Judging by his work, the author had certain literary aspirations.[119] The text therefore deserves wider attention from modern scholars than it has hitherto received.[120] In the following analysis, I concentrate on the prolog (ch. 1–3) and the first section of the narrative (ch. 4–12),[121] since these develop the theme of tavernkeeping.

From the beginning, the narrator (who identifies himself as Nilus at the end) presents Theodotus' profession as a prominent characteristic and distinguishing feature of the martyr. Far from obscuring the fact that Theodotus worked as a tavernkeeper, the hagiographer announces it clearly in the opening lines when, after stereotypical disclaimers regarding his own ineptitude as an author,[122] he introduces his subject: he will tell of the life and martyrdom of Theodotus,[123] and "how from a young age and in what way he carried out the profession of tavernkeeper."[124] The martyr's profession is mentioned immediately after the central and generic aim of relating the saint's life and death as a martyr.

118 Briefly, the story goes as follows: Theodotus meets a priest called Fronto and promises that, if he builds a sacred martyrion, the relics of a holy martyr will be provided. Later, seven old virginal nuns are captured and delivered to youngsters. However, the eldest one, Thecusa, can persuade them to respect their chastity. After they are martyred, their bodies are thrown into a pond, which is guarded to prevent anyone from fishing up their sacred remains for burial. Theodotus contrives a plan and, with miraculous help, retrieves their bodies from the water and buries them. This leads to his own martyrdom. His remains are also guarded, but the priest Fronto succeeds in stealing the body by getting the guards drunk on wine. He buries the remains in a sanctuary that he prepared on the designated spot upon the martyr's own request. Thus, the promise has been fulfilled. For a more detailed summary of the story, see Mitchell, "The Life of Saint Theodotus," 94.

119 See as an example the digression at the beginning of ch. 11, where the narrative paints a detailed picture of the beautiful countryside setting in which the events take place. The scene recalls the classical *topos* of the *locus amoenus*. For more discussion of this passage, see Mitchell, "The Life of Saint Theodotus," 97.

120 There are few studies of this text. They all focus on the question of the narrative's historicity: Hippolyte Delehaye, "La Passion de Saint Théodote d'Ancyre," *AB* 22 (1903): 320–328; Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, "Osservazioni sopra alcuni atti di martiri da Settimio Severo a Massimino Daza," *Nuovo bullettino di archeologia cristiana* 10 (1904): 5–39, at 27–37; Henri Grégoire and Paul Orgels, "La passion de s. Théodote, oeuvre du Pseudo-Nil, et son noyau montaniste," *BZ* 44 (1951): 165–184; Mitchell, "The Life of Saint Theodotus," and David Potter, *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian* (London, 1999), 151–153.

121 In the *Acta Sanctorum*, the text is helpfully divided in a prolog and four chapters. Franchi de' Cavalieri does not retain this division.

122 For more on this *topos*, see Krueger, "Hagiography as an Ascetic Practice" and Pratsch, *Der hagiographische Topos*, 22–33.

123 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 61, lines 10–11: τὸν βίον καὶ τὴν ἄθλησιν τοῦ ἁγίου μάρτυρος Θεοδότου.

124 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 61, lines 11–12: πῶς ἐκ νεαρᾶς ἡλικίας καὶ τίνι τρόπῳ τὸ τῆς καπηλείας μετήρχετο πρᾶγμα.

However, it soon becomes evident that the hagiographer must also somehow defend and justify his subject (not just his own writing), and that the martyr's profession has something to do with that. After more reflections on his own inability to do the martyr justice, he concedes that some have, in fact, voiced objections against the martyr's former way of life as a layman[125]—a life that, it has been specified only moments before, consisted of tavernkeeping. More specifically, the hagiographer admits there were concerns that the martyr would have partaken of a life of worldly pleasures (ἡδονῶν).[126] His marriage appears to have been a problem as well,[127] and lastly his profession is mentioned as a source for doubt: he made a living as a tavernkeeper.[128] The narrative's opening thereby suggests that tavernkeeping was not an expected occupation for a saint or martyr. It implies that it was not a very respectable business either, whether from a social or a religious perspective.

Whether or not the martyr's profession was known to the text's prospective audience and potentially blemished his reputation is a question we will probably never be able to answer with certainty. The historicity of the depicted events is debated.[129] Yet, whatever the case may be, the hagiographer chose to feature the martyr's profession prominently but clearly also felt obliged to justify his subject on account of it. In fact, while acknowledging the criticism, the hagiographer's discourse appears designed to implicitly neutralize it at the same time. That Theodotus had a wife, for instance, is hardly something that should discredit a saint. While celibacy and chastity (even in marriage) were always preferable, there are numerous examples of saints who had been or were married.[130] Moreover, the addition that the martyr was connected to the woman through *lawful* marriage (γάμου νομίμου) aims to refute the charge immediately. It might well be that the hagiographer threw this concern into the mix to detract from the real problem—the martyr's profession—since it could easily be dismissed anyway. Indeed, the martyr's marital status is not mentioned again, whereas the hagiographer makes continued efforts to refute the other charges, as we will see. That Theodotus' profession is mentioned only lastly could also be a strategy to mitigate the allegation while it is being raised. Certainly, the idea that the martyr would have par-

125 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 61, lines 20–21: τινὲς μὲν τὸν μάρτυρά φασιν ὡς πρότερον τὸν κοινὸν καὶ ἀδιάφορον ἐπανήρητο βίον.

126 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 61, line 21: τὴν ἀπόλαυσιν τῶν ἡδονῶν μετεδίωκεν.

127 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 61, lines 21–22: ὅτι γυναικὶ συνεβίου γάμου ζευχθεὶς νομίμου.

128 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 61, line 22–p. 62, line 1: καὶ τῆς καπηλείας δὲ τὴν μέθοδον ἐνεπορεύετο συλλογῆς ἕνεκεν χρημάτων.

129 See Mitchell, "The Life of Saint Theodotus," and above, n. 120. According to Mitchell (111), the *Life* presents an historically accurate account for a local audience. If that is correct, then it might indeed be that the martyr's profession was known to the audience and formed a blemish to his reputation that had to be wiped out.

130 Examples are Galaktion and Episteme, Theodora of Alexandria and Mary the Younger. For more discussion, see Alexander Kazhdan, "Byzantine Hagiography and Sex in the Fifth to Twelfth Centuries," *DOP* 44 (1990): 131–143, at 132–134.

taken of life's pleasures (ἡδονῶν) already recalls the setting of the tavern, where wine and female company make for a place where such pleasures abound.[131] Yet, by postponing the explicit mention of the tavern business, the hagiographer successfully makes it seem like an afterthought.

As a first explicit response to these issues, the hagiographer points out that Theodotus' heroic death embellishes his questionable background.[132] In addition, having been a close friend of the martyr, he presents his own personal experience to weigh in on the matter.[133] "Say what you want" about the martyr, he therefore declares.[134] The message is that the narrative will present a trustworthy testimony justifying the celebration of the saint and defending his holiness despite his background and particularly his profession. The first paragraph thus introduces the idea that the martyr occupies a place on the margins, from which the hagiographer needs to rehabilitate him through the present writing. This paradox—Theodotus was both a tavernkeeper and a great martyr—seems to be of central interest to the hagiographer, since it is treated so prominently at the beginning of the narrative.

If the hagiographer's first argument is that Theodotus' martyr's death makes up, so to speak, for the life he led earlier, he next goes one step further and discusses the intrinsic worth of the saint's life preceding his martyrdom and specifically his tavernkeeping business. Indeed, in Theodotus' case, the problem is not so much that he *used* to be a tavernkeeper. As we have seen in the previous sections of this chapter, there are many saints who start out as laymen/laywomen or even have a highly questionable course of life but then repent and reach holiness. Theodotus, on the other hand, never abandoned his profession. The rehabilitation of the martyr from the margins is thus not only a matter of showing where Theodotus stepped into normative/acclaimed behavior, leaving the margins behind (in his case: his physical struggles in defense of his faith). More than that, it seeks to question the marginal status of the position he previously occupied.

Therefore, the hagiographer reinvigorates his apology of the martyr's life in the rest of the prolog. Theodotus battled the desires of the flesh,[135] was in no way a slave

131 As we will see below with regard to the *Story of Sergius the Dêmotês*, the tavern was typically a place where prostitutes dwelled; Sergius himself is portrayed in a tavern in the company of prostitutes. See also Dauphin, "Brothels, Baths and Babes," 51 on the tavern as a place of promiscuity.

132 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, lines 1–3: ἀλλ᾽ ὁ τελευταῖος ἀγὼν τοῦ μαρτυρίου καὶ τὸν ἔμπροσθεν βίον ἐπίσημον παρεσκεύασεν γενέσθαι, κοσμήσας τοῖς τελευταίοις τὰ πρῶτα.

133 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, lines 3–5: ἡμεῖς δὲ λέγομεν ὡς ἐξ ἀρχῆς συνόντες τῷ μάρτυρι ἅπερ καὶ ἔγνωμεν καὶ ὄψεσιν αὐταῖς ἐθεασάμεθα. Since the text's historicity is debated, it is also uncertain whether we should believe the hagiographer's claim of having known the martyr personally. As I remark above, n. 20, the "témoin bien informé" was a common literary construction in hagiography. More discussion is offered by Mitchell, "The Life of Saint Theodotus," 112, who argues in favor of the historicity of the claim.

134 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, line 3: λεγέτω οὖν τις ὅπερ βούλεται.

135 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, line 9: πρὸς τὰς σαρκικὰς ἐπιθυμίας πόλεμον πρῶτον ἀνείλατο.

to lust,[136] and lived an ascetic lifestyle of temperance and fasting.[137] The hagiographer thus refutes the first allegation cited earlier (ἡδονῶν). In addition, by mentioning that he was inclined to poverty and charity,[138] the hagiographer nods to the specific problem of Theodotus' financial gain through his profession (the last of the allegations: τῆς καπηλείας (. . .) συλλογῆς ἕνεκεν χρημάτων), a topic that he returns to in more explicit terms shortly thereafter.[139]

Indeed, the third paragraph is explicitly preoccupied with the martyr's profession. Similarly as with prostitutes, one may expect that a tavernkeeper not only entertains sinful passions in his personal life but also introduces and sustains those in the lives of others, namely, his customers.[140] However, with Theodotus it is rather to the contrary: he led many away from sin.[141] What is more, it was his profession that enabled him to do so. The hagiographer inverts his audience's expectations by suggesting that a tavernkeeper is actually well-placed to look out for the spiritual well-being of others, because he finds himself at the source of sinful behavior. Theodotus used that opportunity to the betterment of his customers: "The tavern, trading its usual business for another, fulfilled a surveillance function under the guise of lowliness."[142] The idea that Theodotus would be in the tavern business for the sake of financial profit is thus successfully undermined. He even exerted himself to keep those who indulged in wine away from their drinking habits.[143] This flips the script on the typi-

136 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, lines 10–11: οὔτε ἡδοναῖς ἐδούλωσεν ἑαυτὸν ἢ ἑτέρῳ λογισμῷ ῥυπαρῷ.

137 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, line 12: οἱ καρποὶ τῆς ἀσκήσεως, lines 13–14: τῶν ἄλλων κατορθωμάτων ἁπάντων πρώτην ἀρχὴν τὴν ἐγκράτειαν ἐποιήσατο, and line 21: πρὸς τρυφὴν νηστείαν εἶχεν θεράπαινα.

138 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, lines 16–17: [νομίσας] πλοῦτον δὲ καὶ δόξαν τὸ ἀνδρείως ἐγκαρτερεῖν τῇ πενίᾳ, and p. 62, lines 22–23: τὰ ὄντα τοῖς δεομένοις παρέχειν.

139 See Karras, "Holy Harlots," esp. n. 7 on the problem of profit in relation to virtue and for further references on the general difficulty of how to behave morally in a money economy, an issue that is relevant both for tavernkeepers and prostitutes. Cf. Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 105.

140 Indeed, as Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 80 notes and as we saw above (n. 65), the prostitute's sin does not only pertain to herself; her lifestyle is also dangerous to others.

141 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, line 26: Πολλοὺς γοῦν ἀπὸ κακίας ἀπήλλαττεν.

142 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, lines 31–32: ἡ γὰρ καπηλεία τὴν μέθοδον ἐναλλάξασα ἐπισκοπῆς ἔργον ἐπλήρου ἐν εὐτελεῖ προσχήματι. I believe that the word ἐπισκοπῆς in this particular sentence must be understood metaphorically. The Latin translation provided in the *Acta Sanctorum* (Maii IV, p. 150) renders ἐπισκοπῆς ἔργον as *munere Episcopali*. The same meaning was reiterated in Mason's translation (at 9; "office of a Bishop") and in later studies (e.g. Mitchell, "The Life of Saint Theodotus," 102). However, this obscures that a more general meaning of ἡ ἐπισκοπή is probably meant here; cf. G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), 532: "A. *care, oversight, supervision*."

143 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 63, line 2: ἄλλους δὲ οἴνῳ πολλῷ προσέχοντας ἀπέστρεφεν τῆς μέθης. Interestingly, drunkenness and alcohol (abuse) continue to be thematized in the narrative. The pagans who violently persecute the Christians, for instance, are said to revel in drinking-parties (p. 64, lines 1–2: ἐν εὐωχίαις τε ἦν καὶ παροινίαις καὶ κώμοις) and wreak havoc while drunk with malice as if with strong wine (p. 64, lines 3–4: τῇ ὑπερβολῇ μεθύοντες, ὥσπερ ἀκράτῳ, τῆς κακίας). While such drunk-

cal image of the greedy tavernkeeper who is interested in selling as much wine as possible to the detriment of his customers' personal well-being. It is an image we are already familiar with from the *Miracles of Nicolas of Myra* discussed above. Granted, the *kapêlos* in the latter story eventually betters his ways: at the end, his mutilated hand is miraculously cured, triggering his edification, and he devotes the rest of his life to the saint's cult. However, this also means abandoning his profession. Not so for Theodotus, who is leading the life of a model Christian as *kapêlos*. Theodotus' philanthropy,[144] which manifested itself in many ways, stands in stark contrast to the greedy and violent *kapêlos* from Thamaris and John's story.

The question of the martyr's profession, and particularly his financial profit, is revisited in the narrative's first section (ch. 4–12). After painting a stark picture of the terrible persecution that hit the region under Theotecnus, the hagiographer now takes to explaining the merit of Theodotus' tavern in the context of the violence. Assuring the reader once more that the allegation regarding Theodotus' desire for financial gain is unfounded,[145] he illustrates his claim by narrating how the martyr turned his tavern into a safe haven for persecuted Christians.[146] He thus argues again for the intrinsic worth in this occupation and (implicitly) justifies why the martyr had never given up on his business. He may have been a *sitopoios* and an *oinochoos*, but he was one to those who suffered from extreme poverty as a result of the persecution.[147] This turns his occupation into a worthy cause that even saved lives. Hence, in addition to his many other good deeds (which include supporting the imprisoned Christians, taking care of the sick, emboldening the ones who were on trial to withstand the tortures, and burying the dead at the risk of severe punishment), he was a rescuer through his profession.

Finally, we learn that Theodotus was able to come up with a solution to a particular problem thanks to his profession. Theotecnus had concocted a plan to defile all bread and wine, so that no Christians would be able to offer a pure oblation. Theodotus therefore began to buy up goods from Christians and supplied them to other Christians to use for oblations or to give to the needy.[148] His virtuous business model is praised by the hagiographer in an elaborate *simile*, comparing Theodotus' tavern to Noah's ark:[149] just as there was no salvation outside the ark at the time of the flood,

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enness is condemned, being in the business of wine is not: the priest Fronto turns out to be a wine farmer at the end (ch. 32/33). The narrative seems to advocate a distinction between selling alcohol and using it, or between use and abuse.

144 Cf. *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, lines 34–35: πάνυ ὑπάρχων φιλάνθρωπος.

145 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 64, lines 26–27: οὔτε γὰρ τὴν καπηλείαν, ὥς τινες ἔφασαν, κέρδους ἕνεκα μετήρχετο ἢ συλλογῆς χρημάτων.

146 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 64, lines 28–29: ἐπενόησεν ὥστε τῶν διωκομένων τὸ καπηλεῖον λιμὴν σωτηρίας γενέσθαι.

147 Cf. *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 65, line 8: σιτοποιὸς δὲ καὶ οἰνοχόος τοῖς ὑπ᾽ ἐνδείας κακοχουμένοις.

148 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, ch. 7.

149 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 65, lines 24–25: ἦν τὸ καπηλεῖον αὐτοῦ ὅπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ κατακλυσμοῦ ἡ κιβωτὸς Νῶε τοῖς ἐν αὐτῇ διασωθεῖσιν ἐγένετο.

there was no salvation for Christians outside his tavern at the time of the persecution. The tavern is celebrated as a place of rescue, where Christians could flee to, just like sailors would flee to shore as their boats are being tossed in a storm.[150] This anecdote offers a third illustration of the intrinsic value of the martyr's occupation. The hagiographer rests his case: "Such were the benefits (κέρδη) of the tavern business of the righteous one, these were the profits (πλεονεκτήματα) of the martyr's commerce."[151] Note that the terminology used by the hagiographer ironically plays on the idea of financial profit and inverts it, suggesting religious/moral benefit.

In brief, the prolog and the first chapter successfully depict Theodotus' business as a virtuous occupation, taking away any doubt about the martyr's character and his life as a layman engaged in a profitable business. The hagiographer's apology therefore rehabilitates the tavernkeeper from his position on the social and spiritual margins. Being a philanthropist and a pivotal figure in the local community of Christians, he appears to be neither socially nor spiritually marginalized. Towards the end of the narrative, moreover, we find another detail to the same effect. It turns out that the priest Fronto, who plays a role in the translation of the martyr's relics, is a wine farmer.[152] This is an obvious nod to the martyr's profession and further helps normalize it.

If we dig for deeper layers of meaning, however, the constructive view of the tavernkeeper does not remain intact. There is still a sense that tavernkeeping is a base occupation when taken at face value. The narrator suggests so, for instance, by declaring that Theodotus' beneficence was shrouded "under a guise (προσχήματι) of lowliness," as we saw above.[153] Similarly, that his aid to the Christians during the persecution went unnoticed (ἀνύποπτος) is credited to the fact that he had the "pretext (πρόφασιν)"[154] of his tavern. Twice the implication is that the martyr's profession made him appear of lower social/spiritual standing than he was in reality. Even if that appearance proved to be false, it arguably reflects poorly on the tavern business

150 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 65, lines 31–32: οὕτω γὰρ πάντες ἐκεῖ κατέφευγον, ὡς ναυτικοὶ σκάφην κατάγοιεν χειμαζομένην. The image of a storm at sea has been used before by the hagiographer to describe the cruel persecution (p. 63, line 37–p. 64, line 1: τὰ μὲν τῆς ἐκκλησίας, ὡς ἐν σάλῳ καὶ κλύδωνι χειμαζομένου πλοίου, εἶδες ἂν πάντα στρεφόμενα, ὁμοῦ περ πάσης ἐκδεχομένης, ὥσπερ κύματι, τῷ διωγμῷ καλυφθήσεσθαι). It ties in with the *simile* of Noah's ark.

151 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 65, lines 32–33: ταῦτα τῆς καπηλείας τοῦ δικαίου τὰ κέρδη, ταῦτα τὰ πλεονεκτήματα τῆς ἐμπορίας τοῦ μάρτυρος. Although it is not mentioned explicitly, the story offers another demonstration of the fact that the martyr used his money for the good of the Christians when Theodotus travels to the countryside. As he meets some Christians, it is mentioned in passing that he had set them free earlier at great financial cost (p. 67, lines 25–27: τούτους ὁ δίκαιος περιδρομαῖς παντοίαις καὶ χρημάτων δόσεσιν μόλις ἦν ἐκ τῶν δεσμῶν ῥυσάμενος). This further appeases the problem of Theodotus' financial gain through his business, since it is a precondition for his philanthropic deeds, and it proves that he has no trouble parting with his wealth to use it for good causes.

152 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 81, lines 8–9.

153 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 62, line 32.

154 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 65, lines 4–5.

in general. We may note a similarity with the dynamics discussed above regarding the *Life of Symeon* the holy fool, whose holiness likewise remained undetected due to the pretext of marginality, and where this category included tavernkeepers as well.

In other words, it is the particular way in which Theodotus interprets his profession that deserves praise and makes him rise above an ordinary tavernkeeper. The marginal position of tavernkeepers is thereby not denied. Indeed, the narrative exploits that reputation to promote this particular tavernkeeper through an effect of surprise and contrast: Theodotus' virtuous life and death become even more remarkable given that he was 'just' a *kapêlos*. This double standard also comes to the fore during Theodotus' martyr trial. Even if he has proven himself exceptionally heroic (both by withstanding the most horrible tortures and through his bravery to help others before his own martyrdom), the governor seizes on what he misinterprets as a first sign of weakness to claim superiority over the martyr, insulting him on account of his profession: "I advise you, who are merely a tavernkeeper and an ordinary man, not to speak up in such a fashion against rulers."[155] Nonetheless, before subjecting him to tortures, Theotecnus was prepared to honor this ordinary tavernkeeper with the greatest honors in an attempt to win him over and make him reject his faith.[156] Theotecnus' inconsistency towards the martyr is symptomatic of the discrepancy between his social reputation as a tavernkeeper and his actual social impact as a pivotal figure in the Christian community. Moreover, after having successfully withstood the first round of tortures, Theodotus showcases his wounds to the public and declares, echoing the governor's previous insult, that God's incredible power "enables ordinary men to disdain rulers' threats."[157] This time, the marginal position of tavernkeepers is exploited by the martyr himself to rhetorically underline his own position in the *spiritual* center, implicitly contrasting it, of course, with the governor's position on the spiritual margins.

In conclusion, Theodotus' image is complex and unique. Despite his low-brow profession, he is an extraordinary character of high social and particularly spiritual standing who manages to turn his occupation into a virtuous cause. This central paradox is captured in the rhetorical question posed by the hagiographer while defending Theodotus' virtue: "Who would have suspected that such godliness lay hidden in a tavernkeeper?"[158] The implied answer is: no one. And that is why Theodotus is so exceptional. His uniqueness adds to his own personal glory as a Christian martyr, as the narrator intends to communicate with his narrative. However, it also underlines the

155 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 78, lines 11–12: πείσω δέ σε οἰνοπώλην ὄντα καὶ ἄνθρωπον εὐτελῆ τοιαῦτα κατὰ ἀρχόντων μὴ λέγειν.

156 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, ch. 23.

157 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 78, line 37–p. 79, line 1: [τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ μου τὸ παράδοξον] παρασκευάζει τοὺς εὐτελεῖς καταφρονεῖν ἀρχοντικῶν ἀπειλῶν.

158 *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, p. 65, lines 1–2: τίς γὰρ ἂν καὶ ὑπονοήσειεν ἐν καπήλῳ τοιαύτην κρύπτεσθαι θεοσέβειαν;

marginal position of 'ordinary' tavernkeepers, who stand in his shadow. Indeed, their marginal position is exploited to rhetorically enhance the portrait of Theodotus. On the one hand, tavernkeepers could be proud to have such a great paragon of Christianity counted among their ranks. On the other, the narrative process of rehabilitating the saint from the margins once again inevitably draws attention to the very marginality it seeks to overcome.

Finally, I wish to discuss a pair of texts in which men associated with the theater (but also with the tavern, as we will see) are revealed as virtuous men and indeed as saints. I begin with the *Story of Sergius, the Dêmotês of Alexandria*.[159] It features a complex structure of embedded tales. The central story is presented as the testimony of an old monk, Pyrrhus, who told it to another monk named Elpidius as they encounter each other in the inner desert. Elpidius' journey is in turn presented as a tale found in an ancient book by a certain monk Ambakoum, who is the primary narrator's source. The structure of the narrative can thus be summarized as follows: primary narrator < Ambakoum < book < Pyrrhus (to Elpidius).[160] Pyrrhus' story revolves around his meeting with a *dêmotês* called Sergius. It is as part of Pyrrhus' testimony that we listen to Sergius himself, who tells Pyrrhus of events from his past life. Hence, the structure can be expanded as follows: primary narrator < Ambakoum < book < Pyrrhus (to Elpidius) < Sergius. Sergius the *dêmotês* is located at the very heart of the Chinese box structure which shapes the narrative. This suggests that he is the true protagonist of the entire tale.[161]

The *fabula* of the central testimony by Pyrrhus initiates when he, after spending many years in the desert, falls prey to thoughts of vainglory: "Some time ago my heart was puffed up by the machinations of the perverse demon into thinking that I had attained a stature superior to that of all the fathers leading the ascetic life in the des-

159 It is found in the *Sayings*, ed. Paschos, *Νέον Μητερικόν*, ch. 42 ("Περὶ Σεργίου τοῦ δημότου καὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Πύρρου"). However, it is also included in the edition of the *Spiritually Beneficial Tales* by Paul of Monembasia, ed. John Wortley, *Les récits édifiants de Paul, évêque de Monembasie et d'autres auteurs* (Paris, 1987), 126–137 under the category of related tales by other authors. An English translation is available in John Wortley, *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales of Paul, Bishop of Monembasia and of Other Authors* (Kalamazoo, 1994), 119–126. In what follows, I quote Paschos' edition and cite Wortley's translation.

160 Note that not each frame is resumed at the end. After Pyrrhus' testimony, the story about Elpidius is briefly resumed, but the narrative does not climb back up to the level of Ambakoum or the primary narrator. Moreover, the narrative framework of Elpidius' tale is not entirely consistent: at the beginning, Elpidius is referenced in the third person, whereas at the end, when his story is resumed, he appears as a first-person narrator.

161 A comparable structure is found in the *Life of Theoctiste of Lesbos*, where the saint, Theoctiste, indeed appears at the heart of the narrative. On the intricate structure of the latter, see among others Ingela Nilsson, "The Same Story, but Another: A Reappraisal of Literary Imitation in Byzantium," in *Imitatio – Aemulatio – Variatio: Akten des internationalen wissenschaftlichen Symposions zur byzantinischen Sprache und Literatur (Wien, 22.-25. Oktober 2008)*, eds. Andreas Rhoby and Elisabeth Schiffer (Vienna, 2010), 195–208, at 203–205.

ert," he admits to Elpidius.[162] Indeed he wondered whether he might find anyone on earth who was his spiritual match,[163] and he prayed fervently to God to reveal such a man to him. The implication is that Pyrrhus was hoping that he might be found on equal standing with a great and important ascetic.[164] In a word, he was looking to flatter himself. When a divine voice revealed that his equal was a certain Sergius, a *dêmotês*, Pyrrhus was clearly disheartened by this outcome: "Miserable Pyrrhus!" he whined to himself, "Look at all those years you have spent in the service of God (. . .) only to be set in the same rank as a *dêmotês*!"[165] Although he does not know Sergius at all, the mere fact that he is a *dêmotês* is enough for Pyrrhus to think so lowly of him that he is even tempted to disbelieve the revelation.

At this point, a remark about the meaning of the term *dêmotês* is in order. While it usually has the meaning of "member of a circus faction,"[166] in this story, as Wortley observes, it seems to denote the commissioner of the city's prostitutes.[167] As we have seen above, the contexts of the theater and of prostitution are often conflated. Therefore it does not seem unreasonable that the *dêmotês* (traditionally a circus fan) has now become a sort of pimp.[168] For the same reason, it is not unlikely that Sergius' character would have called to mind the theatrical world.

But let us return to Pyrrhus. When the revelation has been repeated a second time, he resolves to personally seek out this *dêmotês* to see what kind of man he really is. Sergius then tells the monk two anecdotes which prove his great virtue and selflessness. According to the first, he once met a noblewoman in a tavern who was working for wages after her husband had been imprisoned due to an unrepaid debt. Although he initially wanted to sleep with her, Sergius, after learning her story and seeing her plight, respected her chastity and gave her the money she needed to set free her husband without recompense. According to the second, he saved seventy nuns from sexual defilement by a lecherous pagan eparch by secretly moving them to a different location and dressing up seventy prostitutes as nuns to take their place in the monastery. I will return to these stories in more detail below. When Sergius is done telling Pyrrhus about these events, the latter, humbled, must recognize his spiritual superior in the *dêmotês*.

162 *Story of Sergius*, lines 25–27.

163 *Story of Sergius*, line 29: εἰ ἆρά γε καὶ ἔστι τις ἐπὶ γῆς ἐπ' ἴσοις μου.

164 Alternatively, he might even have hoped that no such man would be found, which would point to his spiritual superiority. However, by the same token, it would mean his falling prey to extreme pride and his spiritual downfall.

165 *Story of Sergius,* lines 32–34.

166 This is the way in which it is used in the *Life of Symeon*, for instance (e.g. p. 81, line 14).

167 Sergius' function and responsibilities are quite specifically described at lines 43–46. See John Wortley, "The Spirit of Rivalry in Early Christian Monachism," *GRBS* 33 (1992): 383–404, at 192 and Wortley, *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales*, 196.

168 However, as explained by Giuseppe Schirò, "Un significato sconosciuto di 'Δήμοτης,'" *Rivista di cultura Classica e medioevale* VII (1965): 1006–1016, the *dêmotês* appears to have been an official function and would have fulfilled a more sophisticated role than ordinary pimps.

John Wortley observes this story's basic pattern in a number of hagiographical tales.[169] Such stories of monastic rivalry often feature a figure of humble standing,[170] with whom the central monastic figure is urged to compare himself only to find that he falls short, as the character in question turns out to be well ahead of the monk in holiness. (In fact, the *Life of Mary of Egypt* also displays this pattern, since Zosimas' journey is triggered by thoughts of vainglory.)[171] As part of this plot-type and the lesson in humility it conveys, Sergius' profession is a key element.

The same is true for a lute-player, featured in the *Life of Theodulus the Stylite* (BHG 1785).[172] This little-known *Life* of a pillar saint consists of three chapters. The third depicts the saint asking God to reveal to him with whom he has his lot.[173] The response is Cornelius the lute-player (πάνδουρος). The narrator is explicit that "he was told this in order that he would not be overcome by pride and, exalted, would be ensnared by the Devil."[174] What follows echoes the Story of Sergius the *dêmotês*. First, Theodulus' reaction to the revelation is comparable to that of Pyrrhus: despair.[175] His reaction ensues likewise from his prejudice vis-à-vis the *pandouros* and, in particular, the theatrical scene to which he belongs (this time, indeed, the context is straightforwardly theatrical).

> μετὰ πανδούρου, Δέσποτα, ὁ σὸς δοῦλος κληρονομεῖ; μετὰ πανδούρου, Δέσποτα, ὁ ἐν τοσούτοις ἔτεσι κοπιάσας καὶ μοχθήσας; (. . .) μετὰ πανδούρου, Δέσποτα, ὁ ἐν τῷ κίονι ἐστηλωμένος; μετὰ τοῦ ἀπὸ σκηνῆς, ὁ ἐν νηστείαις καὶ ἀγρυπνίαις; μετὰ αὐλητοῦ δαιμόνων, ὁ ἐν ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις ἄϋπνος διατελῶν; (ch. 13)
>
> With a lute-player, Lord, am I, your servant, to be compared? With a lute-player, Lord, does the one who struggled and suffered hardships for so many years have his lot? (. . .) With a lute-player, Lord, the one who stood on a pillar? With a man of the stage, the one devoted to fasting and vigils? With a demon-flutist, the one who passes sleepless nights singing psalms and hymns?

For Theodulus, too, being put on a par with a 'mere' flute-player is experienced as degrading—he calls it *atimos*, dishonorable.[176] Nevertheless, Theodulus does not fall

169 Wortley, "The Spirit of Rivalry."

170 However, not every story fits this pattern, as Wortley, "The Spirit of Rivalry," 388 notes with regard to the tale of the Emperor Theodosius II and a Jordanite Monk.

171 *Life of Mary of Egypt*, ch. 3: "He was disturbed, as he said, by certain thoughts, namely, that he had become perfect in all practices and did not need anyone else's teaching at all." See also Cox Miller, "Is There a Harlot," n. 14.

172 I follow the edition in *AASS* Maii VI, pp. 756–765. Translations are my own. For more discussion on this text, see Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les saints Stylites* (Brussels, 1923), cxviii–cxx and Wortley, "The Spirit of Rivalry," 393–394.

173 *Life of Theodulus*, ch. 12: σύν τινι μέλλω κληρονομεῖν τὴν σὴν βασιλείαν;

174 *Life of Theodulus*, ch. 12: Τοῦτο δὲ ἐῤῥέθη αὐτῷ, ἵνα ἔπαρσις αὐτῷ μὴ γένηται, καὶ ὑψωθεὶς παγιδευθῇ ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου.

175 *Life of Theodulus*, ch. 13: δακρύσας / Οἴμοι τῷ ἀθλίῳ καὶ ἀπεγνωσμένῳ!

176 *Life of Theodulus,* ch. 13: ἡ ἄτιμος αὐτὴ συγκαταρίθμησις.

into disbelief upon hearing the revelation, as Pyrrhus does, but assumes that he must have sinned unknowingly.[177] The *Life of Theodulus* therefore goes less far in its depiction of the monk's initial arrogance. This is not surprising, since Theodulus is the holy protagonist of this narrative, whereas, as we have seen, Pyrrhus arguably is not. Still, even if he recognizes that God's ways are inscrutable,[178] Theodulus remains afflicted by the idea that he has his lot with a *pandouros* and decides to seek him out, just as Pyrrhus did with Sergius.

Moreover, when asked what good he has done in his life, Cornelius tells a story that is almost identical to the first anecdote told by Sergius.[179] He met a noblewoman whose husband was imprisoned due to unrepaid debt. Whereas the noblewoman from Sergius' tale was doing handwork to gain money, this noblewoman resorted to begging. In the first tale, it was Sergius who then proposed to sleep with the woman for money, a proposal to which the woman only reluctantly agreed and from which Sergius himself eventually refrained. In this story, it was the noblewoman's own decision to prostitute herself, since begging did not turn the profit she needed. The woman from Sergius' tale not only lost her husband but also her children, who were sold into slavery. In this tale, no children are mentioned. Despite these small differences, the two tales run mostly parallel. Cornelius, like Sergius, respects the woman's chastity and gives her the money she needs.

The two narratives develop complex and interesting dynamics regarding social and spiritual status, similar to those that have been discussed above in the context of other narratives. Sergius and Cornelius live on the social margins, yet are revealed to be spiritually central figures, to everyone's surprise (even their own). The theme of secret sanctity is here particularly relevant and once again forms a point of compari-

177 *Life of Theodulus*, ch. 13: Ἐν τίνι ἄρα πλημμελήσας παρήκουσα ἐντολήν σου; Μὴ ἄρα ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ ἐκηλιδώθην;

178 *Life of Theodulus*, ch. 13: ἀνεξερεύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ.

179 This is not the place to present a detailed discussion of the relation of the two texts. According to Wortley, "The Spirit of Rivalry," 393, the *Story of Sergius the Dêmotês* should be regarded as a late exponent of the genre and be dated to the 10th century. The *Life of Theodulus* certainly postdates the 4thcentury but is otherwise difficult to date. It is not unlikely that both derive from a common source. Moreover, Wortley, "The Spirit of Rivalry," 393 and 399–401 points out that there is a resemblance with yet another story, belonging to the so-called Paphnutius-cycle from the *History of the Monks in Egypt*, or *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, dated to the late 4th century; see Andrew Cain, *The Greek* Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*: Monastic Hagiography in the Late Fourth Century* (Oxford, 2016). There, the Sergius/Cornelius-figure is a flute-player as well. Due to limited space, I will not offer a more detailed analysis of the latter story here, but some of the general observations I make regarding Sergius/Cornelius apply to it as well. Finally, the Talmud also features a strikingly similar story about a man called Pentekaka ('five sins') who both engages prostitutes and works at the theater, yet who turns out to be virtuous: see Martin Jacobs, "Theatres and Performances as Reflected in the Talmud Yerushalmi," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture,* vol. I, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen, 1998), 327–347, at 341–343.

son with the *Life of Symeon the fool*.[180] Indeed, the one who may seem socially and spiritually superior at first (the monk) is humbled and turns out to be inferior to these hidden saints. The entire story revolves around this role reversal. As we have seen, the elements of role reversal and surprise are also part of Theodotus' characterization as a virtuous tavernkeeper. Moreover, despite the differences, the positions of these figures are not entirely dissimilar to those of repentant harlots either, where role reversal takes place through a radical transformation from sinner to saint. On the one hand, the reversal promotes the *dêmotês*/*pandouros* from his marginal position. On the other, they are somehow belittled at the same time: the whole point is precisely that such spiritual centrality is *unexpected* of a person of their position. Their professional lives, once again, remain peripheral to their spiritual identities.

Both narratives enhance the theme of role reversal and the element of surprise in several ways. First, this is achieved in the initial meeting between the monk/saint and the *dêmotês*/*pandouros*. Pyrrhus finds Sergius drinking in a tavern with a prostitute on his lap,[181] while Cornelius is found in the hippodrome, with his musical instrument in one hand and a prostitute in the other:

> (. . .) γυμνοκέφαλον κοσμοφοροῦσαν ἀτάκτως καὶ ἀσέμνως, ἥτις περιερράπιζεν αὐτὸν καὶ περιετρύχιζεν[182] μετὰ ἀπρεποὺς γέλωτος. (ch. 14)
>
> (. . .) who [the prostitute] was bare-headed and wore indecent and scandalous adornments, and lashed round about him and disheveled his garments with improper giggling.

In both cases, this sight is clearly meant to scandalize not just Pyrrhus/Theodulus but also the reader. More specifically, it serves to enhance the surprise effect incurred by the revelation of this character's virtue. In the Sergius tale, moreover, the initial situation is immediately reversed when Pyrrhus asks the *dêmotês* whether they can retreat to his home for conversation. Sergius is under the impression that the monk is making him a sexual offer and "was secretly scandalized." He wondered "how one so advanced in years (and given his way of life) could have fallen victim to such temptation."[183] This achieves two things. On the one hand, it demonstrates that Sergius likewise holds others to standards corresponding to his own image of their social and spiritual identity. On the other, the fact that, in turn, he is the one to be scandalized, hints at his own moral and spiritual integrity. In the mind of the reader, the tables

180 As is noted by Ivanov, "From 'Secret Servants of God' to 'Fools for Christ's Sake,'" 188–190.

181 *Story of Sergius*, lines 43–44: ἔδειξάν μοι αὐτὸν καθήμενον ἐν καπηλείῳ, μετὰ πορνῶν σπαταλῶντα καὶ στρηνιῶντα.

182 The *Acta Sanctorum* online reads περιετρίχισεν. I corrected this form to περιετρύχιζεν based on my consultation of the edited manuscript (Firenze, BML Plut. 09. 14, fol. 145v; available online), which clearly reads περιετρίχιζεν, presumably spelled with an iota instead of an upsilon in the fourth syllable under the influence of itacism. I consider περιτρυχίζω as causative from τὸ τρῦχος (tattered garment). I thank Klaas Bentein for his help in determining this meaning.

183 *Story of Sergius*, lines 55–59.

are already beginning to turn. Sergius starts to behave like the virtuous one, while the reader is reminded that Pyrrhus ("advanced in years" and practicing a certain "way of life") actually falls short of his reputation. Reinforcing this interpretation is the term temptation (πάθος), which, at least to the narratee, is ambiguous. It not only references the alleged lust which Sergius wrongly suspects might be the motivation behind Pyrrhus' request; it also recalls the actual temptation of pride which we know is the real reason for it.

Next, to Sergius' surprise, Pyrrhus wants to hear about his way of life and "what good you have accomplished."[184] Sergius' surprise derives not only from the fact that he first believed Pyrrhus had different motives for wanting to enter his home. It also derives from the question itself. "You found me in the tavern eating, drinking and making merry with whores," he replies, "(. . .) and you have just told me you want to hear about my life?"[185] His astonishment adds to the central theme of role reversal; Sergius himself does not expect that he—a *dêmotês*—would be the appropriate recipient of such a question. At the same time, that is (especially in the context of a tale about humility) exactly what makes him spiritually advanced. Sergius' reluctance[186] to share his good deeds is far removed from the boastfulness that characterizes the monk, who, after hearing Sergius' first anecdote, is quick to conclude that "it is indeed with justice that I was ranked with you."[187] It takes a second anecdote for Pyrrhus to realize that Sergius is not his equal but in fact his superior. Sergius, rather than taking pride in his own virtue, repeatedly admits to being a sinner.[188]

Cornelius reacts in much the same way to Theodulus' request to reveal his good deeds. He is hesitant and even ashamed to share his story,[189] clearly not realizing himself the virtue it displays. And he, too, is initially dumbstruck by the question[190] and does not seem to take it seriously: "don't mock me, who am a miserable wretch, for I am not of your standing (προσχήματός). And what shall I tell you, who are a man of God? Did you not see whence I came, and with whom, and what I was carrying?"[191] Cornelius contrasts his own status of lute-player ("whence I came" / "what I was carrying") with Theodulus' monastic status ("man of God"). The word choice of πρόσχημα is interesting. As part of Cornelius' address to Theodulus, it conveys 'character' or perhaps 'monastic character.' Yet, as we have seen above in the context of the *Martyrdom of Theodotus*, the term can also have the meaning of 'semblance' or 'false appear-

184 *Story of Sergius*, line 62.

185 *Story of Sergius*, lines 63–67.

186 Pyrrhus must press him to speak up and he consents only after learning about the divine voice: cf. *Story of Sergius*, lines 68–73.

187 *Story of Sergius*, lines 109–110.

188 *Story of Sergius*, lines 111–112 and 125.

189 *Life of Theodulus*, ch. 15: αἰδοῦμαι γὰρ εἰπεῖν ἐπί σου τὰ αἰσχρά μου καὶ ἀπεγνωσμένα ἔργα.

190 Cf. *Life of Theodulus*, ch. 15: περιεβλέπετο αὐτὸν ἄνω καὶ κάτω.

191 *Life of Theodulus*, ch. 15: μὴ παῖζέ με τὸν ἁμαρτωλόν, οὐ γάρ εἰμι τοῦ προσχήματός σου. Τί εἴπω σοι, ἄνθρωπε τοῦ Θεοῦ; οὐκ ἐθεάσω με πόθεν ἦλθον, καὶ μετὰ τίνος, καὶ τί βαστάζω;

ance.'[192] Does the text subtly signal to the reader that the superficial contrast between low and high standing, as sketched by Cornelius, hides a deeper truth which inverts that hierarchy? This deeper meaning is probably not intended by Cornelius the character in the reality of the story world. We would therefore be dealing with a form of authorial communication behind the character's back, so to speak. We cannot know whether the author indeed chose this wording to imply a deeper message based on the double meaning of πρόσχημα. Nevertheless, at the very least, we might say that this is a potential effect of the text.

Finally, in the Sergius tale, the Chinese box structure also contributes to the mechanism of unexpected role reversal. Not one but three monastic figures (Ambakoum, Elpidius, Pyrrhus) precede Sergius in this narrative. Each occupies a narrative layer that leads to the central character. As we move forward along these layers and advance deeper into the text—and, according to generic conventions, into the monastic desert—the expectation is that each figure we encounter will be holier than the previous. Double surprise, then, when at the very heart of this mechanism is found a *dêmotês*, a layman in an urban setting, and when he indeed proves to be holier than all the others. Note also that the specific detail that he was found in a tavern is not coincidental in this context and helps convey the surprise effect. As Wortley remarks, "the tavern is the very antithesis of 'the desert', because it is in a sense the epitome of all that is evil not only in 'the world', but in the world's worst aspect: the city."[193] The tavern setting thus further inverts the conventions of the ascetic desert story.

Turning to the *Life of Theodulus* again, we should finally remark that the theme of inversion is further emphasized as the saint himself, even before meeting Cornelius, remembers several biblical examples of remarkable role reversals,[194] such as the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector at whose house Jesus chooses to stay to the dismay of the people (Luke 19), that of the other tax collector in the gospels who eventually became an evangelist, Matthew, and that of the persecutor of Christians who became an apostle, referring, of course, to Paul.

All these elements contribute to the theme of role reversal, the inversion of expectations, and a deep sense of surprise. This places the *dêmotês*/*pandouros* in a straddling position: it marginalizes and de-marginalizes him at the same time. In both cases, the moral virtue of the character outweighs his reprehensible lifestyle. The message for the monk (and for the reader, by extension) is clear: if even a *dêmotês*/*pandouros* is capable of such selflessness and moral/spiritual integrity (they do not even realize their own

192 Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1185.

193 Wortley, *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales*, 196. On the *topos* of the city as a place of sin, see also Saradi, "The City in Byzantine Hagiography," 421–422 and 424–425. Nevertheless, her chapter also reveals the complexity of the hagiographical image of the city. Johnson, "Between Madness and Holiness," 264 nuances the strong distinction between desert and city in the *Life of Symeon Salos*.

194 *Life of Theodulus*, ch. 13.

virtue), then how much more should the monk/the reader.[195] The character of the *dêmotês*/*pandouros* can thus be interpreted as a device for shaming others, an idea coined by Clark in the context of female saint's *Lives* and particularly relevant to holy harlots.[196] Yet, when it comes to these figures themselves, this means, just as with Theodotus the tavernkeeper, that they somehow derive their spiritual identity from their low standing. The marginal status of these figures is integral to the lesson in humility and necessary to make the plot work. The *Life of Theodulus* is even explicit that the revelation about the *pandouros* was meant to put the saint in his place. Even if this particular *pandouros* turns out to be virtuous and was underestimated by the saint, his very status must be understood as marginal to have the desired effect of humbling the saint.

Before concluding, let me briefly dedicate a few words to the characters in the embedded stories by the virtuous *dêmotês* from the Sergius tale. In particular, the second anecdote deserves our attention here, since it features seventy prostitutes. They are procured by Sergius to take the place of seventy nuns after the pagan eparch has requested to sleep with one of the virgins every day for seventy days. The ruse is successful. Moreover, when the nuns return to the convent, the prostitutes no longer wish to leave but join their ranks, bidding their former lives goodbye. Again, prostitutes are portrayed as penitents in a conversion story. This embedded narrative therefore fits the same context as the material I discussed above in section 2.1. Playing an important role in the resolution of the story and sacrificing themselves to save others, they are depicted in a positive light.

However, there is another side to their image as well. Even if it is for a worthy cause, the ruse demands that the prostitutes' bodies are exploited in much the same way as before. Hence, the women are portrayed in a marginal position, outranked by the seventy original nuns. This is all the more so when their story is read in light of the anecdote that precedes. Whereas the body of the noblewoman from the first tale must remain undefiled at any cost, it is unproblematic to use the bodies of the prostitutes when the need arises. The noblewoman maintains her original status,[197] even if

195 Note that the readership of hagiographic literature was probably composed, at least in part, of monastic circles; see, e.g., Claudia Rapp, "Figures of Female Sanctity: Byzantine Edifying Manuscripts and Their Audience," *DOP* 50 (1996): 313–332, at 314–316. Hence, in many cases the reader might indeed have been able to identify easily with the monastic figure from the story and taken the same lesson from it.

196 Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *Church History* 67/1 (1998): 1–31, at 29. It is especially prominent in the *Life of Pelagia*: in one of the opening scenes, Nonnus interprets the harlot's devotion to her body and her lovers as a sign of his own failure to care for his soul and for God with the same dedication (for discussion, see Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, 73–74), and at the end, after the saint's death and her discovery as a woman, it is exclaimed that God has many secret servants, "not just men but also women" (*Life of Pelagia*, ch. 49, ed. Flusin, "Les textes grecs").

197 Although there is no second anecdote about prostitutes in the *Life of Theodulus*, the noblewoman in that text also maintains her status. This is signaled, for instance, by the detail that she was ashamed

she has, in reality, been reduced to total poverty and social ruin (her husband is in prison, her children sold into slavery, and she is slaving away for what little money she can get). Regardless of her actual socio-economic position, her social identity dictates her spiritual position. In this equation, the prostitutes can never fully recover from their positions on the margins, even if, comparing stories like that of Pansemne, one realizes that these prostitutes were not necessarily poor or socially isolated.[198] Nevertheless, in this text, they clearly do not attain the same rank as the socially and spiritually central figures of the story.

3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed a number of Greek hagiographical texts in which prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers appear either as side characters or as saints. While the overview is not exhaustive,[199] the dynamics found in the different narratives were often comparable and may therefore signal a general trend. In each case, the narrative portrait of the character(s) in question was found to be complex, often combining contradictory tendencies. The prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers featured as side characters in the *Life of Symeon Salos* are both spiritually promoted and degraded through the company of the saint. While they display spiritual potential, they remain marginal within society and in relation to the saint. Repentant prostitutes embody that same paradox. The hagiographical evidence attests to the fact that the social positions of prostitutes seem to have differed quite substantially from one case to the other. Nevertheless, each of the loose women discussed above is depicted as a *spiritual* outsider and, without exception, each undergoes a transformation through repentance. Moving from the spiritual margins into the spiritual center, they are presented as epitomes of both sanctity and sin. The result is a paradoxical image, expressing Christianity's mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion alike. Other saints, such as Theodotus and Sergius, combine their professions with sanctity. Their professional lives are thus not presented as sinful chapters *preceding* repentance and holiness.

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to resort to begging (*Life of Theodulus*, ch. 17: ἀποκρύπτουσα μέντοι αἰδουμένη τὸ ἀτιμασθέν μου πρόσωπον).

198 See above, n. 61 and 87, and Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, 84 and 87 for more discussion.

199 Texts I did not discuss but which could be explored as well include: *Miracles of Artemius* 17, eds. Virgil S. Crisafulli and John W. Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios: A Collection of Miracle Stories by an Anonymous Author of Seventh Century Byzantium* (Leiden, 1997), featuring an actor; *Miracles of Cosmas and Damian* 5.39, ed. Ludwig Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian: Texte und Einleitung* (Leipzig, 1907), featuring a *mimos*/*thumelikos*; and the *Life of Matrona* ch. 5, *AASS* Nov. III, pp. 790–813, featuring a converted actor called Barnabas; cf. *Sayings*, ed. Paschos, *Νέον Μητερικόν*, ch. 76: "Περὶ τοῦ μίμου, τοῦ ὀνομαζομένου Βαβύλα."

Nevertheless, their marginal status is not denied either but used to rhetorically enhance their position in the spiritual center, which they occupy in spite of their lowbrow professions. The contradictory image of these characters is ultimately not far removed from that of the repentant saint, whose life as a harlot is made meaningful through her later life as an ascetic, and whose holiness will always remain rooted in her sinful past. According to Burrus, the holy harlot—an oxymoronic expression in itself—is characterized by a profound ambivalence: they, too, point rather to the coincidence of sinfulness (or marginality) and sanctity (or centrality) than to their mutual exclusivity.[200] Moreover, Sergius the *dêmotês* is depicted as a secret saint, and so is his doublet Cornelius the flute-player. Hence, the element of role reversal, which characterizes repentant harlots, who transform from sinners into saints, is inherent in those narratives as well. This generates a similarly conflicted image, as the lowliness (both social and spiritual) of their professions is integral to the lesson in humility conveyed by the story. All in all, hagiography reserves a spot at the table for prostitutes, actors, and tavernkeepers, showcasing their potential for inclusion in the spiritual community. Yet, the narratives suggest at the same time that they do not occupy the seat of honor. It may not be a coincidence that we encountered these figures as secondary characters in the *Life* of a holy fool (Symeon) and in the *Life* of a pillar saint (Theodulus), two diametrically opposed holy types who respectively hide and showcase their virtue in spectacular ways; both therefore illustrate the paradox of holiness, which "can't lay claim to itself."[201] In the context of this paradox, the examined professions, stuck in a limbo between sin and virtue, prove fruitful to think with.

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200 Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints*, 130–131. Cox Miller, "Is There a Harlot," discusses the paradoxical quality of the portrayals of holy harlots from a gender perspective.

201 Formisano, "Text, Authenticity, and Imagination," 123. For more on the paradox of ascetic celebrity in the context of stylitism, I refer to Andrew S. Jacobs, "'I Want to Be Alone': Ascetic Celebrity and the Splendid Isolation of Simeon Stylites," in *The Garb of Being: Embodiment and the Pursuit of Holiness in Late Ancient Christianity*, eds. Georgia Frank, Susan R. Holman, and Andrew S. Jacobs (New York, 2020), 145–168. I have also highlighted the importance of secret sanctity as a context for the depiction of the examined professions in hagiography; cf. n. 36.

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