

Scent of Sanctity: Pilgrimage to the Tombs of Myroblyte Saints in Medieval Peloponnese

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Abstract:

This paper examines the role of *myroblyte* saints—holy figures whose relics were believed to produce a fragrant, oily exudation—as focal points of pilgrimage in the medieval Peloponnese, focusing on three case studies: Nikon the ‘Metanoieite’, Peter of Argos, and Athanasius of Methone. Drawing primarily on hagiographical narratives, it explores how references to miraculous liquids, fragrance, and physical interaction with relics shaped the sensory dimensions of devotional experience. While the Middle Byzantine period witnessed an increased association between sanctity and the production of perfumed substances, the evidence from the Peloponnese suggests that the miraculous exudation of holy fluid, the *myroblysia*, was neither a stable nor a decisive factor in the long-term development of local cults. In some cases, the phenomenon appears only fleetingly or remains ambiguous, while in others it is replaced by alternative ritual substances such as oil from lamps or moisture from relics. Rather than offering an exhaustive historical account, the article highlights the variability of *myroblyte* traditions and argues that the pilgrim’s overall religious experience in the region was shaped more broadly by multisensory engagement with sacred matter than by the presence of *myron* alone, contributing to the formation of local sacred landscapes and patterns of religious mobility.

Keywords: *myroblyte* saints; pilgrimage; medieval Peloponnese; hagiography; relic cult, religious experience

I. Introduction

In Byzantine religious culture, devotion was experienced not only through belief or visual contemplation but through the full engagement of the senses. Participation in liturgical and devotional life involved seeing icons and sacred spaces, hearing chants and prayers, smelling incense and perfumed substances, touching relics and holy objects, and occasionally even tasting blessed materials associated with sanctity. As recent scholarship on the sensory dimensions of Byzantine worship has demonstrated, these embodied forms of interaction were central to the way believers encountered the sacred (Caseau, 2013, pp. 55-77). Yet these sensory registers rarely operated in isolation. Recent work in sensory studies has distinguished mere polysensoriality—the simultaneous activation of several senses by a given stimulus—

from synaesthesia, understood here not in its narrow neurological sense but as the culturally conditioned process through which such combined sensory stimuli are consciously perceived and invested with meaning by a given community (Grand-Clément, 2021, pp. 141–159). Byzantine devotional experience, as the case studies below will suggest, is better approached through this second, synaesthetic register: sight, smell, and touch did not merely co-occur but were apprehended together as facets of a single encounter with the sacred. Physical contact with holy objects—kissing icons, touching reliquaries, or receiving substances believed to convey divine grace—formed an essential part of devotional practice. Within this sensory environment, the cult of saints played a particularly important role. The tombs and relics of holy figures functioned as privileged points of contact between the earthly and the heavenly, attracting pilgrims seeking healing, protection, or spiritual benefit.

The interaction between pilgrims and saintly remains often involved material substances believed to carry the saint's power: dust from tombs, oil from lamps burning before relics, water used in ritual contexts, or other liquids associated with miraculous intervention (Caseau, 2013, pp. 69-77). These substances could be touched, applied to the body, smelled, or sometimes ingested, thereby transforming pilgrimage into a deeply multisensory experience. Among the senses engaged in pilgrimage, touch occupied a privileged position. As Krueger (2014, pp. 1-20) has argued, bodily contact with sacred matter was not incidental to Byzantine devotional life but constitutive of the self's formation through liturgical and ritual practice. The act of touching a reliquary, kissing a tomb, or receiving an anointing was not merely gestural but transformative, enacting a form of embodied communion with the saint. The production and circulation of contact relics and *eulogiai*—objects that had touched holy remains and were thereby imbued with sanctifying power—further extended the reach of this haptic piety beyond the shrine itself (Vikan, 1982, pp. 9-25).

Among these practices, the phenomenon of *myroblyte* saints—holy figures whose relics were believed to exude *myron* (a miraculous, fragrant and oily exudation believed to emerge from the relics or tombs of certain saints)—occupied a special place in Byzantine devotional culture (Lequeux, 2023, pp. 123-137). Although references to miraculous *myron* are not entirely absent in earlier centuries, the period from the ninth to the eleventh century witnessed a growing association between sanctity and the production of perfumed liquids emerging from relics or tombs. Such substances were understood not merely as symbolic signs of holiness but as tangible vehicles of divine grace, capable of healing the sick and mediating the saint's presence to the faithful. The fragrance, texture, and ritual use of these liquids

contributed significantly to the sensory experience of pilgrimage and to the devotional reputation of the shrines where they appeared.

Against this broader background, regional cults offer particularly valuable evidence for understanding how sensory forms of devotion were experienced in specific local contexts. The Peloponnese offers an ideal setting for the examination of such phenomena, as the historical conditions prevailing from the ninth to nearly the mid-twelfth century contributed decisively to the emergence of holy figures of local significance (Lambropoulou *et al.*, 2004, p. 266). Available evidence indicates that the tombs of some of these saints evolved into pilgrimage centres, frequently acting as a pole of attraction for devotees from the wider region and, more rarely, from further afield, who flocked to these sites primarily on the saint's feast day, occasionally with the expectation of a miraculous healing.

The thaumaturgic properties of a local saint's relics were instrumental in establishing and spreading their cult, transforming their tomb into a pilgrimage site of typically local or, less frequently, regional scope. As broader work on the relationship between holy places and sensory experience has emphasised, the material setting of a shrine—the arrangement of nave and narthex, the placement of a reliquary, the interplay of light, sound, and movement—was never a neutral backdrop to devotion, but actively shaped, and was shaped by, the sensory expectations pilgrims brought with them (Dyas, 2021, pp. 23-51).

In this sense, the Byzantine shrine functioned less as a static monument and more as a dynamic sensory environment that 'stage-managed' the encounter between the pilgrim and the sacred, integrating sight, touch, and smell into a single, culturally conditioned experience. The three shrines examined below illustrate this interplay in different ways, even where the surviving evidence for their physical setting remains fragmentary. The association of such a shrine with the tradition of the gushing of holy *myron* from the sacred relics could further enhance and propagate the cult, a phenomenon attested in at least several cases of saints active in the Peloponnese from the early ninth to the mid-twelfth century.

The present study focuses on three specific cases of saints from Middle Byzantine Peloponnese: Nikon 'the Metanoite', Peter, Bishop of Argos, and Athanasius, Bishop of Methone. These are the only figures from this period for whom there are testimonies—or, in one case, merely suspicions—regarding the gushing forth of miraculous *myron* from their tombs. While the hagiographical texts concerning these three saints inevitably employ literary *topoi*, they preserve valuable data on ritual practices and pilgrim expectations at their shrines. This study explores whether references to fragrant *myron*, various sacred liquids, and the

physical interaction between pilgrims and relics in these hagiographical narratives illuminate the sensory dimensions of pilgrimage. Rather than attempting to reconstruct the historical evolution of these shrines, the aim of this paper is to highlight how sensory practices and material substances contributed to their devotional appeal and the formation of local pilgrimage traditions.

2. Nikon the Metanoite and the Multisensory Shrine of Lacedaemonia

St Nikon the Metanoite, born in Polemoniac Pontus around 930, left his monastery of profession, Chryse Petra near Amaseia (Kountoura-Galake, 1999, pp. 69-75), under paternal pressure to wander through the southern regions of the Byzantine Empire, including Crete and the southern Peloponnese. He preached repentance and strengthened the Christian faith in areas where it appears to have faltered due to various historical circumstances (Anagnostakis, 2018). His life and activities are documented in detail through his *Vita*, which survives in two codices—the older Vaticanus Barberinianus gr. 583 (third quarter of the fourteenth century) and the Koutloumousiou 210 (1630)—as well as in his *Testament* (Lampsides, 1982, pp. 273-281 and pp. 241-249 respectively). The codices preserving the *Vita* of St Nikon belong to the same branch of the manuscript tradition established one hundred and fifty years after the saint's death. They contain the same *Vita*, which was seemingly composed in three stages: the first by a disciple shortly after his death (c. 1005), the second around 1025, and the final part, likely by the abbot of the monastery founded around the saint's original church, in 1149, when a comprehensive redaction of the *Vita* took place (Lampsides, 1982, pp. 377-380).

The latter two sections of the *Vita* record various posthumous miracles (Lampsides, 1982, p. 377). The study of these miracles reveals that Nikon's reputation, already widespread in the southern Peloponnesian region during his lifetime, remained vibrant after his death, as evidenced by the veneration of his tomb in his church in the market of medieval Lacedaemonia, present-day Sparta, in the south-eastern Peloponnese (Lambropoulou et al. 2004, pp. 267-272). This church, founded at a site still unidentified today near the marketplace (Kourinou-Pikoula, 2004, pp. 55-61, providing a summary of proposed locations), became the core of a monastery. As the cult expanded, it evolved into a pilgrimage centre attracting hundreds of devotees to venerate Nikon's miraculous relics (Lambropoulou et al. 2004, pp. 267-268). Most pilgrims, according to the accounts, came from Lacedaemonia and its environs, with some from southwestern and Central Peloponnese (Lampsides, 1982, p. 98ff). There is even a

recorded case of a possessed individual from Corinth being healed after visiting the tomb (Lampsides, 1982, p. 100).

The shrine thus served as a pilgrimage hub, particularly during the saint's feast in late November. According to the *Vita*, pilgrims entered the spacious narthex where the saint's reliquary, his *acheiropoietos* icon (i.e. an image not made by human hands), and personal items (his staff, cup, and chain) were displayed for veneration (Lampsides, 1982, *passim*). This gathering of reliquary, icon, and personal effects within a single, spacious threshold space was itself part of the shrine's sensory choreography, allowing the pilgrim to apprehend the saint's material presence—visual, tactile, and, once anointed, olfactory—as a unified encounter rather than a sequence of discrete impressions. A monk, identified in one miracle as a sacristan (*νεωκόρος*), supervised the reliquary and assisted pilgrims (Lampsides, 1982, p. 104, lines 34-39, and p. 134, lines 1-7). He would anoint pilgrims with *myron* or oil from the lamp burning above the tomb and bind them with the chain the saint once wore against his skin (Lampsides, 1982, p. 134, lines 1-7). He also publicly announced the miracles by sounding the wooden *semantron* and displaying tokens of divine intervention to those gathered in the courtyard (Lampsides, 1982, pp. 104–106).

Many pilgrims sought miraculous healing from incurable diseases that physicians of the time could not treat. Those healed often publicised the miracle with the monk's help (Lampsides, 1982, p. 104) and dedicated precious vessels, such as a silver censer, in gratitude (Lampsides, 1982, p. 136). Miraculous healings occurred in five of the first seven recorded miracles through the anointing of the afflicted with the *myron* that miraculously gushed forth from the saint's body immediately after his death (Lampsides, 1982, pp. 98-104). Consequently, the *Vita* in the Barberinianus Codex explicitly identifies the saint as a *myroblyte*, though this designation is absent in the later Koutloumousiou manuscript (Lampsides, 1982, pp. 366-367, p. 394, and p. 442). The miraculous exudation of holy fluid, the *myroblysia*, was common among local saints of the Middle Byzantine period, a time when even earlier figures like St Nicholas of Myra and St Demetrius of Thessaloniki were reimagined as *myroblytes* (Foskolou, 2016, pp. 174-175; Mentzos, 1994, pp. 120-129; Konstantakopoulou, 1996, pp. 92-93; Russell, 2010, *passim*). Such miraculous exudations are rare in *Vitae* prior to the seventh century, possibly to avoid associations with secular medicine or vernacular practices (Caseau, 2005, pp. 141-191). Furthermore, the *myron* is not mentioned consistently, suggesting it eventually ceased to flow (Foskolou, 2016, pp. 174-175). This appears to be the case with St Nikon, as miracles recorded in the mid-twelfth century section of his *Vita* no longer mention *myron* (Lampsides, 1982, p.

374). Instead, healings were attributed to oil from the perpetual lamp or substitutes like the moisture (*νότις*) covering the reliquary or the water used to wash it (Lampsides, 1982, pp. 368-374). Occasionally, pilgrims were also bound with the saint's chain, and some healings resulted from ingesting the lamp oil or from incubation within the shrine (Lampsides, 1982, pp. 102-106; Talbot, 2002, pp. 153-173).

One miracle involved a healing far from Lacedaemonia using *myron* that had "travelled" there. Basil Apokaukos, praetor of the Peloponnese, took *myron* from the tomb in a vessel as a phylactery. Upon returning home, he used it to heal a sick servant (Lampsides, 1982, p. 98, line 28 – p. 100, line 18). This suggests the existence of *eulogiai*—souvenirs functioning as substitutes for the holy relics (see, *inter alia*, Mitsiou, 2018, pp. 195-229, with earlier bibliography therein). These were often metal or clay flasks containing sanctified substances. If this textual evidence refers to such an object, it is the sole evidence for *eulogiai* at Nikon's shrine, likely decorated with the saint's image, reflecting the *acheiropoietos* icon in the narthex (Foskolou, 2016, pp. 163-167).

It is evident that pilgrims to St Nikon's tomb experienced a truly multisensory—and, in the synaesthetic sense outlined above, deeply integrated—journey. The pilgrimage was tied to the sight and touch of the reliquary and personal items, such as the chain used for ascetic self-mortification. When *myron* was no longer mentioned, this chain and the oil from the perpetual lamp served as tangible substitutes. Anointing—first with *myron* and later with oil or moisture—was the most common practice. The sensory dimension of the pilgrimage also encompassed taste, through the ingestion of lamp oil, a practice believed to have thaumaturgic efficacy (i.e., miraculous healing power). Particularly noteworthy is the haptic dimension of the chain. The tactile experience of wearing or touching the heavy chain bound the pilgrim's body in a way that mirrored the saint's own ascetic mortification of the flesh. In this manner, the physical weight of the iron forged a direct somatic link between the devotee and the holy man. This kind of tactile mimesis—the body of the pilgrim momentarily inhabiting the corporeal space of the saint—exemplifies what Krueger (2014, pp. 55-78) has described as the constitutive role of ritual action in Byzantine religious subjectivity: the pilgrim did not merely witness sanctity but experienced it through the skin. The *eulogiai*, including the vessel of *myron* taken by Basil Apokaukos, extended this haptic logic beyond the shrine, allowing the saint's tactile presence to travel and to act at a distance (Vikan, 1982, pp. 9-25; 2010, pp. 574-593).

3. Peter of Argos: Fragrance, Rumour, and the Limits of Myroblysia

The gushing forth of miraculous *myron* from the tomb is also attested in the *Vita* of St Peter, Bishop of Argos (BHG 1504), composed by his disciple Theodore, Metropolitan of Nicaea, a prominent figure of the tenth century (Giannopoulos, 2000, pp. 122-124). Peter, scion of an aristocratic Constantinopolitan family, settled in Corinth, in the northeastern Peloponnese, when his brother Paul was elected Metropolitan of Corinth during the first patriarchate of Nicholas Mystikos (901–907). After living for a period in a monastery near Corinth, he was elected Bishop of Argos shortly after 912. The saint provided significant aid to the inhabitants of Argos and the wider region during times of famine, contributed to the liberation of captives from Arab hands, and was credited with converting the local Slavic population to Christianity. The hierarch's multifaceted activities, combined with his strict asceticism and mild character, earned him a reputation for sanctity even during his lifetime (on St Peter of Argos and the historical accounts of his *Vita*, see, *inter alia*, Vasiliev 1947, pp. 167-192). Immediately after his death, which likely occurred around 922, the local ecclesiastical authorities appear to have worked towards establishing and maintaining his cult as a sanctified bishop. Nevertheless, his veneration seems to have eventually been restricted to the eastern coast of the Peloponnese, a fact confirmed by the few known surviving depictions of him in monumental painting (Lambropoulou et al., 2004, pp. 276-278). His tomb, however, is thought to have served as a pilgrimage site not only for locals but also for travellers passing through Argos for various reasons (Lambropoulou et al., 2004, pp. 277-278). Furthermore, the unsuccessful claim to St Peter's relics by the inhabitants of neighbouring Nafplio as early as the tenth century, as well as the translation of his relics there in the early fifteenth century (1421), underscores the longevity of the saint's memory and the thaumaturgic power of his remains (Lambropoulou et al., 2004, p. 278).

The author of St Peter's *Vita* records that the saint's tomb, located in the north aisle of the Church of the Theotokos in Argos, gushed forth *myron* with miraculous properties, which healed the possessed and those suffering from various ailments, though without providing detailed accounts of the ritual performance of these miracles (Polemis and Mineva, 2021, p. 50, lines 21-23). It is reasonable, however, to assume that pilgrims flocking to the tomb of St Peter followed similar devotional practices to those observed in the case of St Nikon the Metanoieite in medieval Lacedaemonia. We may therefore surmise that, beyond venerating, touching, and kissing the tomb, pilgrims had the opportunity to offer ex-votos and be anointed with oil from the perpetual lamp burning near the saint's resting place.

Regarding the specific information about the gushing forth of miraculous *myron* from his tomb, no further details exist, and it is indeed striking that not a single miracle performed specifically through this substance is recorded. However, the oldest hymnographic service of the Saint, known today from its republication in 1727 by the painter Georgios Markos from Argos (1690–1770), mentions in a single passage that the Saint's miracles were performed through the scent of the gushing *myron* (Papaoikonomou, 1908, p. 52). The attribution of miraculous healings to the fragrance emanating from the saint's tomb by the author of the hymnographic service certainly aligns with the widely accepted Christian tradition regarding the fragrance exuded by the relics of saints. This serves both as a confirmation of the relics' sanctity and as evidence of the activation of the thaumaturgic powers possessed by the remains as 'vessels of God's grace' (Harvey, 2006, pp. 222-240). Such notions are traced in numerous hagiographical and hymnographical works, demonstrating their widespread dissemination as standard motifs in ecclesiastical literature. In the case of St Peter of Argos, however, they may also reveal a hitherto unknown aspect of the local lore developed by the ecclesiastical authorities managing his shrine in Argos. For these authorities, the fragrance emanating from St Peter's tomb constituted an indisputable confirmation of the Saint's status as a *myroblyte* and, by extension, of his thaumaturgic powers. A faithful pilgrim visiting the tomb could perceive this ineffable fragrance and thus hope for a miraculous healing, as it originated from relics that were unquestionably sanctified and myrrh-gushing. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the authors of the short chronicles recounting the translation of the Saint's relics to Nafplio during the fifteenth century record, among other things, a prevailing rumour that an earthquake occurred the moment the tomb was opened, from which a bright light and a wondrous fragrance poured forth, performing a multitude of miracles (Schreiner, 1975, p. 235, no. 32/36, and p. 248, no. 33/31).

4. Athanasius of Methone: A Conjectured Myroblyte and a Forgotten Cult

Miraculous results were also attributed to the approach of the faithful to the tomb of St Athanasius, Bishop of Methone. Based on the *Funeral Oration* (BHG N. Auct. 196) composed and delivered in his honour likely by the aforementioned St Peter of Argos (Polemis and Mineva, 2021, p. 48, lines 15-17), it is conjectured that his tomb also gushed forth *myron* (Lambropoulou et al., 2004, pp. 286-287). St Athanasius, born and raised in Catania, Sicily, was forced to flee his homeland due to Arab raids and took refuge with his family in Patras, in the

northwestern Peloponnese, around 827/8. Shortly thereafter, he became a monk in a monastery near the city. He soon retired to a hermitage where he remained for nearly fifteen years, later becoming the abbot of his monastery of profession. Subsequently, he was ordained Bishop of Methone, in the southwestern Peloponnese, likely during the second half of the ninth century. His death is estimated to have occurred after 879/80, as he is known to have participated in the Council (879/80) that restored Photius to the patriarchal throne (see Panagiotopoulos, 2021, pp. 253-257, providing an extensive bibliography on the saint's life). Local ecclesiastical authorities seem to have attempted to invest him with a reputation for sanctity and worked towards promoting his cult, though without significant success, judging by his absence from the official *menologion* of the Church of Constantinople and the lack of his depictions even in churches within the wider region of Methone (Lambropoulou et al. 2004, pp. 275-276). It is not known whether his tomb, the location of which remains undiscovered, had become a pilgrimage centre. If so, it was a pilgrimage of a strictly local and short-lived character, as it seems to have been forgotten long before the early twelfth century. At that time, when local authorities introduced the cult of a new local saint, St Leo the Younger from Calabria, an attempt was apparently made to revive the forgotten cult of St Athanasius (Lambropoulou et al., 2004, pp. 275-276; Lambropoulou and Kollyropoulou, 2022, p. 124). This effort seems to have succeeded, at least symbolically, given that the skull of St Athanasius, along with the relics of St Leo, were placed as patron saints in the Cathedral of St John the Theologian within the castle of Methone. There, Western pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land who stopped briefly at Methone would hasten to venerate the relics of these two saints (Dermitzaki, 2022, p. 137, with further bibliography therein). However, the fact that some pilgrims were under the impression they were venerating the skull of the famous Patriarch of Alexandria of the same name, rather than a local saint, indicates that his cult remained essentially unknown and strictly limited to Methone (Dermitzaki, 2022, pp. 137-138).

The *Funeral Oration* in honour of St Athanasius mentions that the saint's tomb had become a site from which miraculous healings gushed forth for those who approached it with faith, even from afar (Polemis and Mineva, 2021, p. 48, lines 15-17). The use of the participle of the verb 'to gush' (αναβλύζω) by the encomiast strongly suggests that the associated miracles were performed with *myron* welling up from the saint's tomb. It cannot, however, be ruled out that this is a simple metaphor, implying nothing more than the thaumaturgic capacity of the relics, which was manifested so abundantly as to resemble a gushing spring. Nonetheless, the fact that pilgrims visiting the Cathedral of St John in Methone during the fifteenth century

make no reference to *myroblysia* or a wondrous fragrance indicates that the sacred relics were not promoted as myrrh-gushing, at least during the Late Byzantine period. In any case, the available evidence does not reveal any specific practices of popular piety regarding the pilgrimage to the Saint's skull, suggesting that devotees followed standard liturgical and devotional customs, such as lighting candles, venerating and kissing the sacred skull, and potentially being anointed with oil from the lamp burning nearby.

It is well known that the tradition of miraculous exudation from the tomb of a new saint constituted one of the primary means for the dissemination and preservation of their memory. It is reasonable, therefore, to ask whether the reputation regarding the *myron*-gushing properties of these saints indeed functioned beneficially in establishing their tombs as pilgrimage centres—noting that Athanasius of Methone does not seem to have possessed this attribute directly. The answer to this question, however, does not seem to be straightforward, as on the one hand, the available evidence is scarce, and on the other, it is certain that the rumoured exudation of *myron* remained a purely transient element in the cult of these two specific saints. This is most evident in the case of St Peter, Bishop of Argos, as not even a single miracle is recorded as having been performed by the miraculous *myron* alleged to have gushed forth from his tomb. Furthermore, if we consider the limited reach of the saint's cult, it is reasonable to assume that the thaumaturgic property of his relics did not play a particularly significant role in the expansion of his veneration.

Even in the case of St Nikon—the only one among the Peloponnesian saints who is identified as a *myroblyte* as late as the fourteenth century, and for whom at least five miraculous healings attributed to this phenomenon are recorded—it did not constitute an enduring miraculous attribute of his relics. This fact undoubtedly contributed to the decline of the saint's cult, which is attested to have occurred before the mid-twelfth century (Lambropoulou *et al.*, 2004, p. 290), judging by the grievance expressed by the author of the section of the *Vita* composed at that time that the pilgrimage flows from the region of Kalamata, in the southwestern Peloponnese, had significantly decreased (Lampsides, 1982, p. 106, lines 25-33). It is plausible to assume that if the exudation of *myron* had remained a constant parameter of St Nikon's cult, a reduction in pilgrimage flows might not have been observed, at least during the days of the saint's feast in late November. This is further indicated by the biographer's effort to present various substitutes for *myron* as miraculous, namely the oil from the perpetual lamp and, primarily, the moisture (νότις) that covered the saint's reliquary. Perhaps even the binding with the saint's chain was intended to serve a similar purpose. Nevertheless, the

administrators of St Nikon's shrine were unable to reverse the decline of his cult, a reversal that would only take place during the thirteenth century, albeit under entirely different conditions and in relation to the need of local societies to confront the Latin conquest (Lambropoulou et al., 2004, p. 272, p. 290).

5. Conclusion: Sacred Matter, Sensory Experience, and Local Pilgrimage Traditions

In any case, the experience of pilgrims who sought refuge at the tomb of any of the saints who emerged in the Peloponnese during the Middle Byzantine period remained tied to devotional and cultic experiences that are widely prevalent in the Orthodox Christian world even today. These are practices which, even when not explicitly attested by available sources, were expected to have taken place in these sacred centres of the Peloponnese. Similar practices were likely applied in other shrines existing in the Peloponnese at that time, even if relevant documentation is not always extant. However, the expectations of pilgrims were magnified in the case of a *myroblyte* saint, as the exudation of *myron* constituted an indisputable testimony to the saint's holiness and, by extension, to their capacity to serve as a medium for the transmission of divine grace to anyone approaching the tomb with sincere spiritual preparation. Thus, pilgrimage to the tombs of *myroblyte* saints attracted more devotees compared to other shrines that could offer nothing more than a miraculous icon or sacred but non-exudative relics.

The examples presented here suggest that pilgrimage in the medieval Peloponnese was shaped not only by narratives of sanctity or the reputation of individual saints, but also by the sensory experiences associated with their shrines. Fragrant *myron*, sacred liquids, and the possibility of physical interaction with relics allowed pilgrims to encounter holiness in tangible ways, engaging the senses of smell, touch, sight, and sometimes taste. In this context, the phenomenon of *myroblyte* saints functioned as a powerful medium through which divine grace was perceived as materially present and accessible. Although the evidence is uneven and preserved only in hagiographical texts, the traditions surrounding Nikon the 'Metanoieite', Peter of Argos, and Athanasius of Methone reveal how such sensory practices could enhance the devotional reputation of local cults and attract pilgrims to specific sites. Through these interactions, shrines were not merely commemorative spaces but active loci of embodied religious experience. The circulation of holy *myron* and other sacred substances thus contributed to the creation of a regional sacred landscape in which sanctity was experienced

through the body as much as through belief, reinforcing the role of Peloponnesian saints within broader patterns of Byzantine pilgrimage and devotional practice. Of the senses involved, touch emerges as perhaps the most theologically charged: it was through tactile contact—with the reliquary, the chain, the anointing *myron* or oil—that pilgrims most directly enacted their relationship with the saint, crossing the boundary between corruption and incorruption. More broadly, the evidence surveyed here confirms the synaesthetic model proposed at the outset of this article: sight, smell, and touch did not operate as parallel, discrete channels of perception but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single devotional encounter, one in which the perceived materiality of divine grace depended precisely on this sensory integration. This haptic dimension of Byzantine pilgrimage, which recent scholarship has begun to illuminate more fully (Krueger, 2014; Vikan, 2010), deserves to be placed at the centre of future analyses of regional devotional culture, not only in the Peloponnese but across the Byzantine world.

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