

**Echoes of ‘Orphic-Bacchic’ Lamellae**  
**in the *Life and Martyrdom of SS. Galaktion and Episteme*?**\*

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**Περίληψη:** Το άρθρο υποστηρίζει ότι ο Βίος και πολιτεία και μαρτύριον τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐνδόξων μαρτύρων Γαλακτίωνος καὶ Ἐπιστήμης, στη διασκευή που μας ἔχει παραδοθεῖ με το ὄνομα του Συμεῶν του Μεταφραστή, πιθανῶς φέρει ἴχνη μιας προγενέστερης, χαμένης σήμερα εκδοχῆς του Βίου, ἡ οποία με τη σειρά της ενδεχομένως διέσωζε κεντρικά στοιχεία ἀπὸ το λεξιλόγιο των «ορφικοδιονυσιακῶν» μυστηρίων, ὅπως αποτυπώνεται στα λεγόμενα «ορφικά/διονυσιακά» ελάσματα. Στην εκδοχή του Συμεῶν, το ὄνομα του πρωταγωνιστῆ Γαλακτίωνα συνδέεται με την ἰδέα της καθαρότητας ὅπως εκφράζεται στη λογοτυπική φράση ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρός. Ἐξω ἀπὸ το ἔργο του Συμεῶν, ἡ σύνδεση αὐτὴ μαρτυρεῖται μόνο στα «ορφικοδιονυσιακά» ελάσματα. Εάν ἡ υποθετικὴ πρόωμη εκδοχὴ του Βίου στην οποία εικάζω ὅτι βασίστηκε ὁ Συμεῶν διέσωζε πράγματι ἀπηχῆσεις ἀπὸ τα ελάσματα, τότε αὐτό ἴσως σημαίνει ὅτι τα ὅρια ἀνάμεσα στον γεννῶμενο Χριστιανισμό και στα ελληνικά μυστήρια εἶναι λιγότερο ἀδιαπέρατα ἀπὸ ὅ,τι συνήθως θεωρεῖται.

**Abstract:** This paper argues that Symeon Metaphrastes’ *Life and Martyrdom of SS. Galaktion and Episteme* may preserve traces of a much earlier, now-lost version of the *Vita*, which in turn may have been informed by the discourse of the so-called ‘Orphic’/‘Bacchic’ lamellae. In Symeon’s version of the *Vita*, the name of the protagonist Galaktion (‘the Milky One’) is associated with ideas of purity encapsulated in the formula ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρός — an association otherwise found only in the ‘Orphic’/‘Bacchic’ lamellae. If the putative earlier version of the *Vita* on which Symeon drew did in fact preserve echoes from the ‘Orphic’/‘Bacchic’ lamellae, then this may suggest that the boundaries between a nascent Christianity and pagan rites were considerably more porous than is often imagined.

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\* To the distinguished honoree of this volume I offer this paper, in friendship and admiration, as a small *antidoron* for his longstanding and enlightening researches into the world of Late Antiquity and, more specifically, into the interactions between Paganism and Christianity. It is a very small detail of these interactions that my paper attempts to explore. I offer my thanks to the editors for inviting me to contribute to this *Festschrift*, and to my colleague Professor Stephanos Efthymiadis, a leading specialist in hagiographic texts, for his help and advice. Translations from Greek sources are mine, unless otherwise indicated, as are all errors.

**Λέξεις κλειδιά:** *Βίος και πολιτεία και μαρτύριον τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐνδόξων μαρτύρων Γαλακτίωνος καὶ Ἐπιστήμης· Συμεῶν Μεταφραστής· «ορφικοδοιονυσιακά» ἐλάσματα· αρχαία ἐλληνικά μυστήρια*

**Key words:** *Life and Martyrdom of SS. Galaktion and Episteme; Symeon Metaphrastes; ‘Orphic’/‘Bacchic’ lamellae; ancient Greek mysteries*

## I. The Debate on the Influence of Pagan Mysteries on Christianity: A Brief Overview

The debate on the influence pagan mysteries may have exerted on Christian ritual, language, and imagery is a long-standing one. As is well known, early Christian authors appropriate the vocabulary of pagan mysteries in order to communicate key concepts of Christian religion; prominent elements in this vocabulary are such terms as μυστήριον, φωτισμός, τελετή, ἐπόπτης etc.<sup>1</sup> In the modern era, serious study of the subject was initiated and facilitated by Christian August Lobeck’s *Aglaophamus* (1829), which was the first systematic effort to assemble and critically discuss ancient evidence on the pagan mysteries.<sup>2</sup> This provided the basis for attempts, late in the nineteenth century, under the influence of the so-called *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, to seek the origins of Christian symbolism in pre-existing pagan religions. For instance, Edwin Hatch, in formulating his view on Christianity’s conceptual and linguistic debts to pagan mystery cults, laid especial stress on such verbal similarities as those mentioned above, especially with regard to the Christian sacraments of eucharist and baptism.<sup>3</sup> Similar arguments, though on a more radical note, were advanced by Alfred Loisy, who subsequently became the target of much criticism by the advocates of the Judaic origins of Christianity.<sup>4</sup> In a discussion of a specific case, Albrecht Dieterich argued that the ‘Apocalypse of Peter’ discovered in the famous ‘Akhmim codex’ (*PCair* 10759) displayed influences of Orphic doctrines, especially of ‘orphische Hadesliteratur’.<sup>5</sup> More cautiously, Franz Cumont spoke rather of the possibility of ‘exchanges’ between Christianity and rival Oriental

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<sup>1</sup> For parallels between Christian and pagan vocabulary in this respect see Cumont (1929), viii-xiv, 66–7 = (1911), xvii-xxiv, 70–1; Herrero de Jáuregui (2010), esp. 1–11, 262–5, 344–61; cf. Wiens (1980), 1249. Especially on the distinction between pagan and Christian μυστήρια see bibliography in Metzger (1968), 12 with n. 3; on μυστήριον in the New Testament (chiefly in the Pauline writings) see Wiens (1980), 1260–2.

<sup>2</sup> Lobeck (1829). Cf. also the assessment of Metzger (1968), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Hatch (1897), 283–309, esp. 292–309. For a summary of Hatch’s parallels see Wiens (1980), 1268–71. For other scholars belonging to, or influenced by, the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* see Metzger (1968), 1–10, esp. 3–4 with nn. 3–13; cf. also Wiens (1980), 1253 n. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Loisy (1919), esp. 231–363. For criticisms see, e.g. Lagrange (1937), 191–221.

<sup>5</sup> Dieterich (1913); cf. Herrero de Jáuregui (2010), 368–9.

sects.<sup>6</sup> It was perhaps Richard Reitzenstein who most assiduously argued for the existence of theosophic, mystic, and gnostic undercurrents behind the teachings of early Christianity, and especially of Paul, in whose writings Reitzenstein discerned multifarious influences from Hellenistic literature to concepts and practices echoed in the *Corpus Hermeticum*.<sup>7</sup>

Such claims were vigorously opposed on multiple occasions by, notably, Arthur D. Nock.<sup>8</sup> Nock argued that the linguistic correspondences so strongly emphasised by earlier scholars need suggest no more than a casual use of terms whose religious content had disappeared in everyday usage.<sup>9</sup> After all, not only did Christianity soon adopt its own peculiar vocabulary which has no correspondences with common Greek usage but also, as Bruce M. Metzger observed, ‘many ordinary, everyday words of contemporary pagan religions [e.g., μύστης, μυστικός, μυσταγωγός, καθαρμός, ιεροφάντης, ὄργια, ἐνθουσιάζειν and the like] are conspicuous by their absence from the New Testament’.<sup>10</sup> Besides, Nock observed, terms reminiscent of pagan initiation (such as φωτισμός, μυστήριον, τελετή etc.) were only applied to Christian baptism when Christianity opened up to the Hellenistic world and adopted some of its conceptual tools — that is to say, at a time when ‘the essential concept of the rite [of baptism] had substantially taken shape’.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Nock insisted, eucharistic meals evolved from proto-Christian common meals in Jerusalem rather than from the sacred meals of mystery cults.<sup>12</sup> All in all, Nock viewed

<sup>6</sup> Cumont (1929), ix ≈ (1911), xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Reitzenstein (1904), esp. 79–81; (1927), esp. 333–93 ≈ (1978), esp. 426–96. Cf. also Nock (1928), 65–7 = (1972), 60–1. On Paul’s cultural proximity to Hellenistic culture and especially to oriental mystery cults see Wiens (1980), 1262–5. *Contra* Schweitzer (1955), 1–25, who insisted on the distinctness of Pauline mysticism from Hellenistic mystery concepts.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Nock (1928), esp. 80–140 = (1972), 72–119; also Nock (1933) = (1972), 341–7; Nock (1952) = (1972), 791–820, with further arguments against detecting pagan survivals in Christian sacramental language.

<sup>9</sup> Such terms, Nock argued, ‘are not recondite words; they belonged to the everyday language of religion and to the normal stock of metaphors’: see Nock (1928), 343, endorsed by Metzger (1968), 12. On the important distinction between genealogical and analogical parallels cf. also Metzger (1968), 9–11. On Nock’s polemic see also Wiens (1980), 1259–60. For other detractors of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* see Metzger (1968), 1–3.

<sup>10</sup> Metzger (1968), 12. One should also heed the crucial methodological warnings (and directions) offered by Metzger, who, albeit not denying a certain degree of pagan influence on Christianity, carefully delineated the circumstances and boundaries of such influence: see Metzger (1968), 1–24.

<sup>11</sup> Nock (1928), 97–104 (quotation from p. 104). A famous passage enunciating this kind of appropriation is Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 120 (p. 173.1–5 Marcovich), which juxtaposes the ‘true mysteries’ of Christian religion to the mystic rites of paganism: ὁ τῶν ἁγίων ὡς ἀληθῶς μυστηρίων, ὁ φωτὸς ἀκηράτου. δαδουχοῦμαι τοῦς οὐρανοῦς . . . ιεροφαντεῖ δὲ ὁ κύριος καὶ τὸν μύστην σφραγίζεται φωταγωγῶν. ταῦτα τῶν ἐμῶν μυστηρίων τὰ βακχεύματα, ‘O verily sacred mysteries, O light immaculate, I am a torch-bearer in the heavens [...] It is the Lord who is my hierophant, and as a light-bearer He sets his mark on the initiate. These are the Bacchic rites of my own mysteries’.

<sup>12</sup> Nock (1928) 104–16. Cf. also Metzger (1968), 14–7, on the pervasive differences between Christian eucharist and pagan sacramental meals, as well as on the Judaic ancestry of the former.

the early Church as something of a cultural ghetto, conceptually and linguistically self-isolated,<sup>13</sup> largely impervious to external influence.

Early in the 20th century, *rapprochements* between pagan and Christian legends and practices in genetic terms were put even more vigorously into question. Hippolyte Delehaye assembled and meticulously discussed—and most often, though not always, disputed—a considerable number of alleged affinities between ancient folk-tale motifs, or even ritual patterns (sometimes associated with mystic ideas), and Christian hagiographic narratives.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, a number of scholars tried to shift the balance towards a realization of the wide gap separating Christian from pagan practices, and insisted on tracing the mystic discourse of Christianity back to its allegedly Judaic roots.<sup>15</sup> In particular, they set out to refute specific contentions of the ‘History of Religions School’ (such as the Hellenistic origin of the ‘Son of God’ concept),<sup>16</sup> or propounded the notion of the Church’s supreme and unique sanctification of pagan doctrines,<sup>17</sup> or offered selective criticism of some of the ‘School’s’ adherents.<sup>18</sup> There has even been talk of the reverse kind of influence: the newly arrived and quickly spreading Christianity may have influenced oriental mystery religions that were *en vogue* in about the same period.<sup>19</sup>

## II. Milk and Purity in the *Life and Martyrdom of SS. Galaktion and Episteme*

As is obvious even from this brief and extremely selective overview, the question of the influences that pagan mysteries may have exerted on Christianity is an extremely complex one. Needless to say, this paper cannot purport to offer anything remotely close to a thorough treatment of, let alone a solution to, this thorny issue. My aim here is a far more modest one: namely, to draw attention to a tiny, but suggestive, shred of evidence, which seems to have been neglected so far, but can perhaps provide a starting point for a fresh look at this vexed question.

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<sup>13</sup> The phraseology is Nock’s (1928), 344: ‘Such usages are the product of an enclosed world living its own life, a ghetto culturally and linguistically if not geographically’. For Semitic influences on the New Testament, especially from the Qumran scrolls and other Aramaic texts, see Fitzmyer (1997).

<sup>14</sup> See Delehaye (1927), 25–38, esp. 31–8; 140–201, esp. 175–95 (transference of pagan legends into Christian contexts). Particularly impressive is the ‘shamanic’ pattern of Epimenides’ long sleep which reappears in the famous story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (Delehaye (1927), 34 with n. 7).

<sup>15</sup> For an overview of opinions see Wiens (1980), 1251–8.

<sup>16</sup> Cf., e.g., Hengel (1976), 21–56.

<sup>17</sup> Thus, e.g., Rahner (1945) ≈ (1963).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Schweitzer’s criticism of Reitzenstein, Bousset, and Deissmann in Schweizer (1955), 26–40.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, Metzger (1968), 11 suggested that ‘hierophants of cults which were beginning to lose devotees to the growing Church should take steps to stem the tide’. Cf. also Hengel (1976), 27–8: ‘On the contrary, we should reckon rather that there is strong Christian influence on the later evidence of mysteries from the third and fourth centuries AD’ (quotation from p. 28). For a useful overview with bibliography see Wiens (1980), 1256–7. For arguable cases of mutual pollination between Christian and pagan eschatology see Herrero de Jáuregui (2010) 367–74.

The extended redaction of the *Life and Martyrdom of the Saints Galaktion and Episteme* is preserved in two versions, both edited by Hippolyte Delehaye in the *Acta Sanctorum* series.<sup>20</sup> The former version (*BHG* 665), termed *Passio prior* or *antiqua* by Delehaye, is presented in the MSS. as the work of one Eutolmios, a fictive authorial persona, who professes to have been an eyewitness to the martyrdom of Galaktion and Episteme.<sup>21</sup> The latter version (*BHG* 666), dubbed *Passio altera* by Delehaye, is the work of Symeon Metaphrastes, the late-10th-century hagiographer, who seems to have done little more than paraphrase and rhetorically expand on the ‘Eutolmian’ version,<sup>22</sup> although he may also have utilised a now-lost version of the *Passio*, as I shall argue in section IV below.<sup>23</sup>

No safe conclusions can be drawn about the date of the *Passio prior*. The fact, however, that Galaktion himself can baptise Episteme with a mere baptism of water implies an early era, in which the sacrament was not yet administered exclusively by priests, nor did it require special vessels and offerings, as was later the case.<sup>24</sup> An early date is also implied, we may add, by the use of οἱ Γαλιλαῖοι as a synonym for ‘Christians’ both in the *Passio prior* (4, 5) and in the *Passio altera* (6): the usage does not seem to extend beyond the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>25</sup> The martyrdom itself is in all likelihood pure fiction;<sup>26</sup> later synaxaria date it to the times of Diocletian or Decius but this is mere fantasy.<sup>27</sup> What is more, as Delehaye remarks, none of the proper names mentioned in the *Passio* (Secundus, Ursus, Onouphrios) can be identified with specific persons with any degree of certainty.<sup>28</sup> And there can be no doubt that Galaktion’s parents, Leukippe and Kleitophon, are fictitious characters: as has been long noticed, their names are obviously

<sup>20</sup> Delehaye (1910), 35–41 (*Passio prior*); 41–5 (*Passio altera*).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Passio prior* 1: ἀτόπιτης γέγονα [...] τῶν τῶν ἐμῶν δεσποτῶν ἀγωνισμάτων καὶ ἀθλημάτων. For an English translation of the *Passio prior* see Alwis (2011) 286–93. On the hagiographic fiction whereby the author assumes the persona of a disciple of the saint and/or an eyewitness to the events described see Delehaye (1910), 67–8.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Delehaye (1910), 33 (2). On Symeon’s method of reworking Lives of Saints into a more elevated, rhetorically embellished style see also Michael Psellus’s Ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὸν Μεταφραστὴν κῦρ Συμεῶν 156–206 (in Fisher (1994), 276–9).

<sup>23</sup> *Contra* Delehaye (1910), 33 (2): ‘Nulla alia documenta praeter Passionem antiquam Metaphrastae praesto fuisse legentibus ilico patet.’

<sup>24</sup> See Hatch (1897), 294–303; cf. also Wiens (1980), 1268.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ps.-Lucian, *Philopatris* 12 Γαλιλαῖος ... δι’ ὕδατος ἡμᾶς ἀνεγέννησεν. According to Gregory of Nazianzus, *Contra Julianum* 74 (PG 35.600A, 601B Migne), the Emperor Julian used Γαλιλαῖοι as a derogatory designation.

<sup>26</sup> The author of the ‘Eutolmian’ version calls his work an ‘edifying narrative’ (ψυχοφελῆ ἱστορίαν); cf. Delehaye (1910), 33 (3), 34 (4).

<sup>27</sup> See Delehaye (1910), 33 nn. 5, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Secundus and Ursus are supposedly local magistrates, but “[d]e *Secundo et Urso praefectis in Phoenicia nemo umquam audivit*” (Delehaye (1910) 33 (3)); cf. Alwis (2011) 297 (*ad* 44), 305 (*ad* 317). As for Onouphrios, Delehaye (1910) 33 (3) notes: “*Onuphrium, hominem procul dubio aegyptium, si nomen attendas, Emesae vitam monasticam egisse reapse mirum est*” (the *Vita* is set in Emesa). Equally fictive is Mt Publium (Πούπλιον ὄρος), where Galaktion and Episteme choose to spend their life as anchorites: its location (situated at ten days’ distance from Emesa and next to Mt Sina in *Passio prior* 11) is a geographical impossibility; Delehaye (1910) 34(4); cf. Alwis (2011) 302–3.

derived from the title characters in Achilles Tatius’ novel.<sup>29</sup> As a whole, the *Life* seems to lack any historical foundation whatsoever, and is largely modelled on novelistic *topoi* such as those found in Tatius.<sup>30</sup>

Here are the rough outlines of the plot. Leukippe and Kleitophon, both of them pagans, are an eminent couple living in Emesa. They are childless, and as a result Leukippe is regularly reviled and even violently abused by her husband. An itinerant monk named Onouphrios, who goes about disguised as a beggar, assures Leukippe that she will conceive a child only if she accepts to be baptised in the name of the Trinity. She is indeed baptised and catechised by Onouphrios, and a few days later realizes that she has miraculously become pregnant. When apprised of the miracle, her husband also accepts to be baptised by Onouphrios, despite the fact that Secundus, the local magistrate, is a ferocious persecutor of Christians. Leukippe gives birth to a male child, who is also baptised by Onouphrios and is given the name Galaktion. The boy receives an exemplary upbringing and, sometime in his early twenties, becomes engaged to a young woman of unparalleled beauty and virtue by the name of Episteme, whom he persuades to be converted to Christianity and baptised. Their marriage is a celibate one, and after giving away their possessions to the poor, they both become anchorites, together with Eutolmios, the fictive author of the *Passio prior*.<sup>31</sup> Eventually, the couple are led before Ursus, the local ruler, who has them tortured, maimed, and decapitated.

Both versions of the *Passio* contain language which evokes ideas central to pagan mysteries, as well as to Christianity. In the *Passio prior* 5, Leukippe is catechised by Onouphrios ‘in the mysteries of the Christians’ (διδαχθεῖσα δὲ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ τὰ μυστήρια τῶν χριστιανῶν).<sup>32</sup> And when Kleitophon is persuaded by his wife to convert to Christianity, he asks her: ‘who will teach us and initiate us into the mysteries?’, τίς ἡμᾶς διδάξας μυσταγωγήσει; (*Passio prior* 5). In the *Passio altera* (5), Leukippe, prior to her baptism, is catechised by Onouphrios, who also performs ‘all the rites that are permitted to Christians’, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα θέμις χριστιανοῖς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ τελεσθέντων — a statement containing two terms (ὅσα θέμις, τελεσθέντων) that are redolent of mystic initiation.<sup>33</sup> The idea of catechism as a revelation of ‘unutterable’ (i.e., secret) knowledge

<sup>29</sup> Brinkmann (1905), 633; Dörrie (1938). All *Passio prior* MSS., save cod. Marc. 349, give the mother’s name as Γλευκίππη; the correct form Λευκίππη is found in all *Passio altera* MSS.

<sup>30</sup> For an extensive list of thematic and verbal parallels between the *Life* and Achilles Tatius’ novel see Yiatromanolakis (1990), 745–7; Alwis (2011) 39–44. For ancient novels as templates for hagiographic texts see, e.g., Messis (2014), 316–20 with earlier literature.

<sup>31</sup> On the celibate marriage motif in hagiographic texts see Alwis (2011).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *1 Cor.* 4:1, where ‘the mysteries of God’ refer to secret knowledge that needs to be explained to Christian initiates; Alwis (2011) 298 (*ad* 115).

<sup>33</sup> For τελεῖν ‘to perform (mystic) rites’, ‘to initiate into the mysteries’ see LSJ s.v., III 1a, 3. For θέμις in relation to secret knowledge revealed to initiates cf. Empedocles 31 B 3.3–4 Diels-Kranz καὶ σέ, πολυμνήστη λευκώλενε παρθένε Μοῦσα, | ἄντομαι, ὧν θέμις ἐστὶν ἐφημερίοισιν ἀκούειν. For θέμις in connection with τελεῖν in mystic contexts cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 250b ἐτελοῦντο τῶν τελετῶν ἦν θέμις λέγειν μακαριωτάτην; ‘Hippocr.’, *Lex* 5 τὰ δὲ ἱερὰ ἐόντα πρήγματα ἱεροῖσιν ἀνθρώποισι δείκνυται· βεβήλοισι δὲ, οὐ θέμις, πρὶν ἢ τελεσθῶσιν ὀργίοισιν ἐπιστήμης; Diod. Sic. 3.62.8 κατὰ τὰς τελετάς, περὶ ὧν οὐ θέμις τοῖς ἀμύητοις ἱστορεῖν τὰ κατὰ μέρος. The translation by Papaioannou (2017, 93), ‘after every other appropriate

resurfaces, in the *Passio altera* (6), in the context of Kleitophon's conversion and baptism: καὶ τὰ τῆς εὐσεβείας ἀπόρρητα ἐδιδάσκετο, 'he was taught the unutterable elements of piety'. The term ἀπόρρητα is, crucially, a technical term used in pre-Christian sources to refer to mystic initiation; e.g., [Eur.] *Rhesus* 943 μυστηρίων τε τῶν ἀπορρήτων.<sup>34</sup>

In view of this sustained use of terms evocative of pagan mysteries, a noteworthy passage is chapter 7 of the *Passio altera*, which describes the baptism of the new-born Galaktion:

Ἦδη δὲ ὥραν τόκου τῆς Λευκίππης ἐχούσης, παῖδά τε γειναμένης ἄρρενα, εἰσκαλεῖται καὶ αὖθις Ὀνούφριος, ἡ συνήθης ὠφέλεια, τὸ θεόπεμπτον ἀγαθόν· καὶ τὸ γεννηθὲν ἀνεγεννᾶτο δι' αὐτοῦ πάλιν τῷ μακαρίῳ βαπτίσματι, καὶ τὴν κλήσιν ἐλάμβανε παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ Γαλακτίων κατωνομάζετο. Καὶ ἦν ἡ κλήσις τῶν ἐσομένων ἀσφαλῆς προαγόρευσις· ἐκ καθαρῶν γὰρ καθαρὸς καὶ οὗτος ἀπέβη καὶ ἐξ εὐγενῶν ὄντως εὐγενὲς βλάστημα.

Leukippe had already reached the hour of parturition and gave birth to a male child; whereupon they sent again for Onouphrios, the customary benefit, the god-sent blessing. And it was through him that the new-born was reborn again by means of the blessed baptism and was also christened by him and named Galaktion. And this name was indeed a sure foretelling of the future; for the boy turned out to be pure as indeed he was of pure parentage, and a truly noble scion growing out of noble stock...<sup>35</sup>

The γάρ-clause that ends the above quotation implies that the boy's future development bore out the promise held by his name, 'Galaktion'; for he turned out to be (ἀπέβη) 'pure' and 'noble', as indeed his parentage was pure and noble. But why is the name Galaktion, 'the Milky One', thought to foretell the protagonist's 'pure' and 'noble' future? How are milk and purity connected? An obvious reply would be that milk is sometimes used in Christian texts as a symbol of immaculate goodness and unsullied integrity.<sup>36</sup> It is to be

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Christian rite was performed by Onouphrios', does not do justice to what I see as the mystic connotations of the passage.

<sup>34</sup> See further Liapis (2012), *ad* [E.] *Rh.* 943–5. Cf. the translation by Papaioannou (2017) 97: 'He [...] was taught the mysteries of Christianity'.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the translation by Papaioannou (2017) 97: 'As the time quickly arrived for Leukippe to be in labor, she gave birth to a boy, and Onouphrios, the benefit for all, the divine-sent good, was again summoned. The newborn was reborn with the blessed baptism by Onouphrios, received his name from him, and was called Galaktion. It was a name that securely predicted his future: for coming out of pure parents, Galaktion too became pure, a truly noble offspring of noble origins.'

<sup>36</sup> E.g., Hippol. *De antichristo* 13 τὸ δὲ εἰπεῖν 'καὶ λευκοὶ οἱ ὀδόντες αὐτοῦ ἢ γάλα' ἐξ ἁγίου στόματος Χριστοῦ τὰς ἐκπορευομένας ἐντολὰς ἐσήμανεν, καθαρὰς οὐσας ὡς γάλα; Amphil. *Or.* 6 τὸ καθαρὸν τῆς εὐαγγελικῆς διδασκαλίας ἐπιχεθῆ γάλα; Anast. Sin. *In Hexaem.* 12.6 (455–6) τὸν σὸν μοι τοῦ καθαρῶ καὶ ἀδόλου τοῦ λόγου γάλακτος ἐπιδιδοῦσα πλουσίως μαζόν. See also Robiano (2009), 152–5, who places the

noted, however, that Galaktion is qualified not simply as καθαρός but as ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρός, ‘pure of pure parentage’ — a formula employed elsewhere, in both Christian and non-Christian contexts, to indicate the kind of heightened ritual purity that is required of those holding sacerdotal offices, or of those partaking of the sacraments, etc.<sup>37</sup> The status for which Galaktion’s purity is required is, undoubtedly, that of a future saint, as implied in Onouphrios’ post-baptismal prophecy in the *Passio prior* (6): ‘this child will lead a celestial existence and will look down upon things earthly, with no regard for his own life’. What is more, in the *Passio altera* (3), Onouphrios predicts that Leukippe’s baptism will guarantee that her offspring too will possess piety as a sort of hereditary gift (ὡς τινα κληῖρον εἰς αὐτοὺς παραπέμπουσα τὴν εὐσέβειαν) — a prediction that evidently paves the way for Galaktion’s being qualified as ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρός. An essential presupposition for Galaktion’s future status as a celestial citizen is, of course, baptism, which is conceived, as we saw in the *Passio altera*, not only as a means of attaining purity but also as a process of *regeneration*, whereby the neophyte is born again into his identity as a Christian (cf. καὶ τὸ γεννηθὲν ἀνεγεννᾶτο [...] πάλιν τῷ μακαρίῳ βαπτίσματι).<sup>38</sup>

The figure of Galaktion, ‘the Milky One’, is thus the nucleus of a ritual-symbolic complex involving ideas of purity, initiation into the Christian ‘mysteries’, spiritual rebirth, and the anticipation of a blessed afterlife. Remarkably, the concurrence of all of these ideas (together with the symbolism of milk and the formula ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρός) seems to be extremely rare. In fact, its only occurrence outside of the *Passio* is in the context of the so-called ‘Orphic’ or ‘Bacchic’ gold plates that have been discovered in a number of burial sites over the last 100 years or so.<sup>39</sup> In these tablets, both milk and the ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρός formula are used at the critical moment of an initiate’s entrance into the Underworld — a moment that was conceived as a process of rebirth and prefigured a blessed afterlife. As we shall see in section III below, milk is a persistent symbol of rebirth not only in the gold plates but also in mystic ritual and, crucially, in the imagery of the Christian baptism.

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semantics of ‘Galaktion’ in a complex nexus of intertextual allusions to ideas of whiteness in the novels of Tatius and Heliodorus.

<sup>37</sup> Cf., e.g., Hermogenes, *On Issues* 4.38 (p. 66 Rabe): a priest must be pure and of pure parentage (τὸν καθαρὸν καὶ ἐκ καθαροῦ ἱερᾶσθαι); Philo Judaeus, *De ebrietate* 66 (people who hold priestly offices are, in fact, murderous criminals,) οὗς ἐχρῆν καθαρὸς καὶ ἐκ καθαρῶν, μηδενὸς ἄγους προσασαμένους; *De specialibus legibus* 1.101 ὁ ἱερεὺς [...] γάμον αὐτῷ μνᾶται παρθένου καθαρᾶς καὶ ἐκ καθαρῶν γονέων καὶ πάππων καὶ προγόνων. Cf. also Andreas of Crete (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c. CE), *Homilia de exaltatione S. Crucis* (BHG 434f) 50r, line 437: (of those partaking of holy communion) ἂν καθαροὶ καθαρῶν ὄντες ἄπτωνται τῶν θεῶν δώρων (ed. pr. in De Groote (2007), 477).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Galaktion’s words to Episteme, whom he refrains from approaching because he considers her ‘unclean’, since she has not been baptised (*Passio altera* 8): ἀνόσιον γὰρ ἄντικρυς ἔλεγεν εἶναι τὸν κεκαθαρμένον ἀκαθάρτῳ συνάπτεσθαι, ‘for it would be simply sacrilegious, he said, if a purified person were joined with an impure one’ (trsl. Papaioannou (2017), 99).

<sup>39</sup> The ‘Orphic’ gold plates will be cited according to the edition by Graf and Johnston (2007). Important earlier studies include Zuntz (1971); Cole (1980); Pugliese Carratelli (2001); Tsantsanoglou and Parássoglou (1987); Graf (1993); Riedweg (1998); Edmonds (2004); and many others.



### III. Milk, Mystic Rebirth, Baptism

The primary function of the so-called ‘Orphic’ or ‘Bacchic’ gold plates, which were meant to accompany their bearers to the next life, was to provide tokens of initiation to Dionysiac mysteries as a means of ensuring that the deceased would be admitted into the company of the Blessed.<sup>40</sup> On three such gold plates from the Timpone Piccolo in Thurii, dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE, the defunct initiate implores the Queen of the Dead to grant her safe passage on account of her purity:

ἔρχομαι ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρὰ, χθονίων βασίλεια

O Queen of the Nether Realm, I come pure, of pure ancestry.<sup>41</sup>

One of the aforementioned three Thurii plates ends with the following *makarismos*:

ὄλβιε καὶ μακαριστέ, θεὸς δ’ ἔσ|ηι ἀντι βροτοῖο  
ἔριφος ἐς γά|λ’ ἔπετο|ν 10

Fortunate and blessed one, you shall be a god instead of a mortal  
A he-goat, I fell into milk.<sup>42</sup>

The striking image of an animal falling into milk is also attested in another Thurii gold tablet, again dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE:

χαῖρε παθῶν τὸ πάθη|μα τὸ δ’ οὔπω πρόσθε ἐπεπόνθεις.  
θεὸς ἐγ|ένου ἐξ ἀνθρώπου· ἔριφος ἐς γά|λα | ἔπετες. 4

Rejoice, for you have experienced the experience that you had never experienced before.

You have become god instead of man; a he-goat, you fell into milk.<sup>43</sup>

The image is repeated in a slightly later (late 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE) tablet from Pelinna in Thessaly:

νῦν ἔθανες | καὶ νῦν ἐγ|ένου, τρισόλβ|ιε, ἄματι τῶιδε.  
εἰπεῖν Φερσεφόν|αι σ’ ὅτι Β<άκ>χιος αὐτὸς | ἔλυσε.

<sup>40</sup> See esp. the Hipponion tablet (no. 1 in Graf and Johnston (2007), 4–5), where the defunct is promised to ‘walk on the sacred road which is also trodden by other famed initiates and *bakkhoi*’ (cf. Bernabé and Jiménez (2008) 52–3); and the Pelinna tablet (nos. 26a–b in Graf and Johnston (2007), 36–7), where the defunct is instructed to tell Persephone that he was released by Bacchus himself.

<sup>41</sup> Lamellae nos. 5–7 in Graf and Johnston (2007), 12–15. The line is transmitted in the three tablets with variant readings, which are immaterial for my argument.

<sup>42</sup> Lamella no. 5 in Graf and Johnston (2007), 12–13. Here and in the following item, I translate ἔριφος as ‘he-goat’ rather than as ‘kid’ (*pace* Graf and Johnston (2007), 9, 13). As pointed out by Graf (1993), 246, Homeric formulae regularly couple ἔριφοι with ἄρνες (e.g., ἀρνῶν ἠδ’ ἐρίφων, ἐρίφους τε καὶ ἄρνας) as ‘a collective expression for “sheep and goats” that does not denote only young goats.’

<sup>43</sup> Lamella no. 3 in Graf and Johnston (2007), 8–9. *Pace* Graf and Johnston (2007), 9, the meaning of τὸ πάθημα does not seem to be ‘the painful thing’ but simply ‘that which happens to someone’, an ‘experience’; so rightly Bernabé and Jiménez (2008), 97.

τα{ι}ῦρος | εἰς γάλα ἔθορες,  
αἰψα εἰς γ<ά>λα ἔθορες,  
κριὸς εἰς γάλα ἔπεσ<ε>. 5  
οἶνον ἔχεις εὐ|δ<α>ίμονα τιμή<ν>  
κάπιμένει σ’ ὑπὸ | γῆν τέλεα ἄσσαπερ ὄλ|βιοι ἄλ|λοι.|

Now you died and now you were born, o thrice-blessed one, on this same day.

Tell Persephone that Bacchus himself released you.

A bull, you jumped into milk,  
swiftly, you jumped into milk,  
a ram, you fell into milk.

You have wine as your fortunate honour,  
and, below the earth, the same consummate achievements [or: the same rites] wait for you as for the other blessed ones.<sup>44</sup>

Here, the deceased Bacchic initiate<sup>45</sup> is explicitly envisaged as being re-born on the day of his/her death: ‘Now you died and now you were born, o thrice-blessed one, on this same day’. The initiate is subsequently compared to a bull or a ram jumping or falling into milk — just as in the Thurii plates no. 3 and 5 Graf/Johnston (above), the deceased person is compared to an ἔριφος falling into milk. Now, bulls and rams are not suckling animals, who would naturally rejoice in milk; likewise, the ἔριφος is probably to be imagined as a grown he-goat rather than as a kid (cf. n. 42 above). Grown beasts basking in milk make for an incongruous image,<sup>46</sup> until one realizes that the act of falling or leaping into milk does not refer to suckling but suggests the idea of rejuvenation, or even regeneration — an idea which, as we saw, is explicitly present in the opening of the Pelinna text as quoted above (νῦν ἔθανες | καὶ νῦν ἐγ|ένου).

What is implied here is not some form of Orphic or Pythagorean reincarnation<sup>47</sup> but the actual beginning of a new existence in the initiate’s happy afterlife.<sup>48</sup> The idea is

<sup>44</sup> Lamella no. 26a in Graf and Johnston (2007), 36. My translation seeks, ineffectually, to preserve part of the ambiguity of τέλεα in line 7: if τέλη is intended, then ‘rites’, ‘achievements’ or (Graf) ‘prizes’ are possible translations; if τέλε(ι)α is intended, then ‘perfect things’ is perhaps more germane. See also Graf (1993), 242 n. 10. A truncated version of the same text is also preserved in Tablet 26b (Graf and Johnston, *l.c.*).

<sup>45</sup> The case for placing the Pelinna tablets in the context of Bacchic mysteries seems incontrovertible: see Graf (1993), 242–4; Johnston in Graf and Johnston (2007), 131–3; Bernabé and Jiménez (2008), 71–6.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the perplexity of Tsantsanoglou and Parássoglou (1987), 13, or of Johnston in Graf and Johnston (2007), 128–9. For earlier interpretations of the image see Bernabé and Jiménez (2008), 76–83.

<sup>47</sup> One of the Thurii tablets (no. 5 in Graf and Johnston (2007), 12–13 excludes any idea of reincarnation: κύκλῳ | δ’ ἐξέπταν βαρυπενθέος ἀργαλέοιο, ‘I flew away from the painful, grievous circle’. The ‘circle’ is surely the cycle of metempsychosis: see, e.g., Kingsley (1995), 267 n. 59 with earlier bibliography; Bernabé and Jiménez (2008), 117–21.

<sup>48</sup> Thus Burkert (1990), 85: ‘der reale Tod [wird] als eine Geburt gefaßt, Beginn einer neuen Existenz; das Ende ist mit dem Anfang verknüpft, wie es schon Pindar ausgesprochen hat’ (the allusion is to Pind. fr. 137 Snell, which seems to suggest that initiates gain insight into the essential unity of life and death). Cf.

clearly suggested in one of the 4<sup>th</sup>-c. BCE Thurii tablets mentioned above,<sup>49</sup> in which the image of an ἔριφος falling into milk is explicitly associated with that of the deceased initiate, now presumably re-born, being ‘immersed into the bosom of the Lady, the Queen of the Underworld’, much as new-born babies might curl into their mother’s bosom:

Δεσσοί|νας δὲ ὑπὸ κόλπον ἔδυν χθονί|ας βασιλείας.  
[ . . . ]  
ὄλβιε καὶ μακαριστέ, θεὸς δ’ ἔσ|ηι ἀντὶ βροτοῖο.  
ἔριφος ἐς γάλ’ ἔπετο|ν.

I snuggled down beneath the bosom of the Lady, the Queen of the Underworld.

[ . . . ]

O blessed and happy one, you will be a god instead of a mortal.

A he-goat, I fell into milk.<sup>50</sup>

As a number of scholars have pointed out, Persephone is here envisaged in her role as a kourotrophic deity protecting the initiate by enfolding him/her in her bosom.<sup>51</sup> This, in conjunction with the image of the animal rushing into milk, in all likelihood symbolizes ‘the infancy of the deceased’s new life after death’, or even his/her rebirth into divine status.<sup>52</sup>

There is some late evidence supporting the idea that a new ‘birth’ after death was an important mystical notion. In the 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, Salloustios (*On Gods and the World* 4.10) writes, in connection with the mysteries of Attis, that after a period of mourning and fasting, initiates are given milk, as if they had just been born again (γάλακτος τροφή ὡσπερ ἀναγεννωμένων); this detail is followed, in Salloustios’ account, by images of post-mortem bliss, including rejoicing, wreaths, and a sort of return to the gods.<sup>53</sup> About a century earlier, Porphyry (*On the Grotto of the Nymphs* 28, p. 75–6 Nauck) reports the Pythagorean idea that milk and honey are typically offered by *psychagogoi* to the spirits of the departed because they are thought to be appropriate food for babies, and as such they are suitable for the reborn souls of the blessed:

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Johnston in Graf and Johnston (2007), 129, 133; Bernabé and Jiménez (2008), 79, 81–2. See also Faraone (2011), 311–12, although I am sceptical of his general thesis, according to which ‘rushing into milk’ mimetically reproduces landmark moments of Dionysism (notably, Dionysus’ springtime entry into the milk of herd animals or his escape from destruction by falling into the sea).

<sup>49</sup> Lamella no. 5 Graf/Johnston; see p. 10 with n. 42 above.

<sup>50</sup> Lamella no. 5 in Graf and Johnston (2007), 12. For the translation of ἔριφος as ‘he-goat’ see n. 42 above.

<sup>51</sup> See, with different emphases, Kingsley (1995), 267–8; Edmonds (2004), 88–91; Johnston in Graf and Johnston (2007), 128. My interpretation of the material follows, largely, Kingsley (and, to a lesser extent, Edmonds), who sees the references to milk and to Persephone’s cradling of the initiate as implying the latter’s (non-metempsychotic) rebirth after death. As κόλπος may be a euphemism for the female genitals, the idea behind the image may be that of the initiate entering the goddess’s womb in order to be reborn into a higher form of existence; see Bernabé and Jiménez (2008), 129–32.

<sup>52</sup> See Edmonds (2004), 88–9 (quotation from p. 88).

<sup>53</sup> See the comments of Nock (1926), liv–lv, with nn. 70–1, 73; cf. also Reitzenstein (1927), 329–30 = (1978), 417; Kingsley (1995), 265–8 with n. 52.

δημος δὲ ὄνειρων κατὰ Πυθαγόραν αἱ ψυχαί, ἃς συνάγεσθαι φησὶν εἰς τὸν γαλαξίαν τὸν οὕτω προσαγορευόμενον ἀπὸ τῶν γάλακτι τρεφομένων, ὅταν εἰς γένεσιν πέσωσιν. ᾧ καὶ σπένδειν αὐταῖς τοὺς ψυχαγωγοὺς μέλι κεκραμένον γάλακτι ὡς ἂν δι’ ἡδονῆς εἰς γένεσιν μεμελετηκυῖαις ἔρχεσθαι, αἷς συγκυεῖσθαι τὸ γάλα πέφυκεν.

According to Pythagoras, ‘region of dreams’ [*Odyssey* 24.12] means the *psukhai* (souls) which, as he says, assemble in the Galaxy, thus named after those that feed on milk, when they are subjected to the process of birth. This is why [according to Pythagoras] conjurers of *psukhai* (souls/spirits) offer them libations of milk mixed with honey, so that they [sc. the *psukhai*], who are naturally gestated together with milk, may come to their birth having been accustomed to pleasure.

The Pythagorean association of *psukhai* with the Galaxy was surely facilitated by the popular belief that people become stars after death,<sup>54</sup> and may thus easily be brought into contact with the Galaxy, or ‘Milky Way’. The statement that souls ‘are naturally gestated together with milk’ appears less easy to explain at first sight but seems to echo actual prescientific lore. Two passages from Aristotle’s *Generation of Animals* (729a11–14, 739b21–2) show that the gestation of the foetus could in fact be thought of in terms of the curdling of milk:

οἶον ἐν τῇ τοῦ γάλακτος πήξει τὸ μὲν σῶμα τὸ γάλα ἐστίν, ὁ δὲ ὀπὸς ἢ ἡ πυετία τὸ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχον τὴν συνιστάσαν, οὕτω τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄρρενος ἐν τῷ θήλει μεριζόμενον. [. . .] ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ ἄρρενος γονῆς, παραπλήσιον ποιούσης ὡσπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ γάλακτος τῆς πυετίας.

[The formation of the foetus] is comparable to the curdling of milk: the [female] body corresponds to the milk, while the fig-juice or the rennet is the coagulating agent; it is likewise with the male [sperm] splitting itself up in the female body. [. . .] by the male sperm, which has an effect comparable to that of the rennet in milk.

This notion, it seems, was simply transferred, in Pythagorean doctrine, from the physiology of the foetus to that of the unborn souls. The comparison of the formation of the foetus to the curdling of cheese is also found, famously, in the words Job addresses to his creator: ‘Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?’ (Job 10:10).<sup>55</sup>

The association between milk and mystic rebirth survived in Christian contexts too. In the first epistle of Peter, after the recipients have been told twice (1:3, 1:23) that they

<sup>54</sup> For the belief cf. Aristophanes, *Peace* 832–3; Plato, *Republic* 621b; Plutarch, *Moralia* 591d–f. See further Liapis (2006), 209.

<sup>55</sup> Further on the association between gestation and cheese coagulation (esp. in Hildegard of Bingen) see Mazzoni (2005), 36–8.

have been ‘born again’ or ‘begotten again’ in Christ, they are advised (2:2) to ‘yearn after the unadulterated milk of the word like newborn babies’ (ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα ἐπιποθήσατε).<sup>56</sup> More spectacularly, in the *Passion of St. Perpetua* (ch. IV),<sup>57</sup> the martyr Vibia Perpetua, shortly before her execution (on 7 March 203 CE), is said to have had a vision in which her soul ascended onto an immense garden, where she was warmly welcomed by an elderly, silver-haired male figure in shepherd’s attire, who milked sheep and gave her a piece of curd or soft cheese to eat. Although most scholars consider the cheese/curd image as a eucharistic symbol, it seems to symbolise the foetus and the process of its gestation, as in the passages from Porphyry and Aristotle quoted above. As Peter Dronke put it, ‘[w]hat Perpetua is given with her morsel of cheese is her destiny, her celestial birth — with its inevitable corollary of physical death’.<sup>58</sup> This brings us back to the idea of mystic initiation as a process of death followed by rebirth. As is well known, this idea is a central element in Paul’s interpretation of baptism as a sequence of death and rebirth in Christ (*Romans* 6:3–11, esp. 3–5):

|<sup>3</sup> Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death? |<sup>4</sup> Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. |<sup>5</sup> For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection [...].<sup>59</sup>

In this respect, there is a remarkable continuity between pagan and Christian mysteries: physical death is conceived not as an end but rather as a presupposition for a new birth leading into a new existence. And in both pagan and Christian contexts, milk is used as a palpable symbol of this rebirth, both because it is fed to babies and because its coagulation supposedly illustrates the formation of the human foetus.

#### **IV. Epilogue: Echoes of ‘Orphic’/‘Bacchic’ Mysteries in the *Life of SS. Galaktion and Episteme*?**

In this final section, I shall summarize my basic arguments and offer a tentative conclusion. As we saw, in both Christian and non-Christian contexts, the formula ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρὸς indicates ritual purity, especially in connection with the assumption and performance of a sacral office or with the participation in the sacraments.<sup>60</sup> In pagan contexts, the ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρὸς formula is combined with the symbolism of milk only

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Nock (1972), 101; Reitzenstein (1927), 329 = (1978), 417.

<sup>57</sup> See Heffernan (2012), 106–7 (Latin text), 447 (Greek text).

<sup>58</sup> Dronke (1984), 9.

<sup>59</sup> King James Version. Cf. also Apuleius’ account of the mysteries of Isis (*Metamorphoses* 11.21) as, again, a sequence of death and rebirth for the chosen initiates; see further Reitzenstein (1927), 220–34 = (1978), 274–88.

<sup>60</sup> See n. 37 above.

in the ‘Orphic’ / ‘Bacchic’ lamellae, where milk symbolises the rebirth of the defunct initiate into a post-mortem existence of bliss. In Christian literature, as far as I can tell, the ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρός formula is associated with the symbolism of milk only on a single occasion — namely, in Symeon Metaphrastes’ version of the *Life of SS. Galaktion and Episteme*, discussed in section II above. In Symeon, we recall, the boy Galaktion’s name (‘the Milky One’) is thought to presage his future adherence to a life of chastity, as indeed befits one who is ‘pure of pure parentage’ (ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρός). Significantly, this prediction is made at the moment of baptism, a sacrament in which the Christian ‘initiate’ is imagined as dying with regard to his earlier identity as an unbaptised sinner and as reborn into a new, blessed existence in Christ (cf. again *Rom.* 6:3–5, quoted above). In Christianity, too, milk is often a symbol of the Christian initiates’ spiritual rebirth—or, in the case of the martyrs, of a new celestial birth after physical death, as happens also in the ‘Orphic-Bacchic’ lamellae.<sup>61</sup>

Now, given that the latest ‘Orphic-Bacchic’ tablets that are known to us date from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE,<sup>62</sup> it follows that Symeon Metaphrastes, living in the late 10th c., cannot have had first-hand familiarity with the rituals alluded to in the tablets. Now, it is well known that Symeon sometimes worked from two or more different prior texts to produce his own version of the Lives of Saints; and even in the majority of cases, in which he worked from a single narrative, it is quite likely that the narrative was available to him in multiple versions.<sup>63</sup> Thus, it is conceivable that, apart from the preserved *Passio antiqua* by ‘Eutolmios’, Symeon drew material also from a now-lost early version of the *Life*, which may have been close to the ‘Eutolmian’ version but, crucially, preserved a detail missing from ‘Eutolmios’, namely the connection between milk and purity in the context of Galaktion’s baptism — a connection which might have reflected the unknown author’s acquaintance with actual practices associated with ‘Orphic-Bacchic’ initiates (specifically, with the association of milk and purity in the context of the defunct initiate’s rebirth into a post-mortem existence of bliss).

If my hypothesis is not wide of the mark, then this brief passage in Symeon’s *Passio altera* —if indeed it does derive from a much earlier, now-lost version of the text— is an infinitesimal but perhaps not negligible piece of evidence, which suggests that the boundaries between a nascent Christianity and pagan rites were considerably more porous than is often imagined. In this particular case, the pagan rites are of a kind about which we know very little, although we suspect that the surviving ‘Orphic-Bacchic’ tablets are the tip of a much larger iceberg, of which we have no inkling. More important, perhaps, is the realization that, if an early version of the *Life of SS. Galaktion and Episteme* was indeed informed by an awareness of ‘Orphic-Bacchic’ mysteries, then

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<sup>61</sup> Note that in the *Passio prior* (10), Galaktion suffers a kind of symbolic death before his actual one as a result of his extreme asceticism: ἠγρύπνει τοσοῦτον, ὥστε ὄρασθαι αὐτὸν ἐν εἶδει νεκροῦ, ‘he kept vigil for so long that to see him, he appeared corpse-like’ (trsl. Alwis (2011), 291).

<sup>62</sup> Lamella no. 9 in Graf and Johnston (2007), 18–19.

<sup>63</sup> See Høgel (2002), 102–9; Høgel (2014), 182. On Symeon’s working methods see also Peyr (1992).

there can obviously be no question of ‘reverse influence’ —i.e., of Christian notions influencing those of pagan mysteries— since the repetitive mystic formulae on the tablets seem to have become fixed centuries before the advent of Christianity.

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