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Christian Physicians in the Roman Empire

*Benevolence and Sacrifice
in Proclaiming the Gospels*

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popular pagan healers rested with popular healing saints. We have seen in general, and in the cases of some saints in particular, that the pervasive preoccupation with healing in late Roman society made the *anargyroi* prime candidates for such substitutions.

part because of the well-established ethic of Hippocratic medicine. Patrons attended the shrines after consulting physicians who practiced with the Church's blessing and who exhibited a professional ethic resembling the saints' standards. Although the *anargyros* was depicted in the role of alter Christus, evidence supports the notion that his virtues were just as likely rooted in a pre-Christian Hippocratic ethic. Spyros G. Marketos and Constantin Papaconomou assert that in Ancient Greece, the relationship between the Hippocratic physician and his or her patients "was dictated by human, rather than religious, concepts... practiced in accordance with scientific laws and felt bound by ethical and humane precepts of his [or her] profession."⁷⁰ The implication is that the same is true for modern physicians—that is, an incompatibility exists between religious and "human" concepts, or at least that they are mutually exclusive, a conclusion seriously challenged by this study. For the Christian physicians, both religious and human concepts could dictate their course, as both concepts were in agreement.

We also have found that it is not important whether any of the specific acts of the *anargyroi* can be proven, but that evidence informs us that from the fourth century on, various communities embraced and championed the vitae of the *anargyroi*. These resumes were believable, acceptable, and commendable. The positive aspects of physicians and pagan priests were common before the advent of *anargyric* shrines. For example, the universal acceptance policy at *anargyric* shrines had precedent not only in Hippocratism but also in former pagan centers such as the Asklepieia.

Rational medicine with its unofficial ethic persisted through the religio-political transitions of the fourth and fifth centuries. During these centuries, societies under the umbrella of the Roman-Byzantine rule endorsed the general ethic of Hippocratism. Opinions, condemnations, praises and passing references about scientific healing support this supposition.

This common ethical standard spoke well of the profession but branded many physicians as "bad," a condemnation that nearly always implied avarice. For the good independent physicians, which included the *anargyroi*, this ethic was one of the only two criteria for establishing and sustaining practice in a community, the other being medical training. The behavior of both dependent and independent physicians became a matter of public scrutiny. The records of city councils even attest to the high priority of a physician's reputation. Roman society had its ideals and judged harshly those physicians and healers who transgressed them. The Christians made the parameters of ethics even more stringent and elevated the physicians who not only best represented the Roman ideal but who also provided the best contrast to errant Roman medicine.

The dynamic of martyrdom, veneration of saints, and *praesentia* significantly increased the fame of these doctors. Their veneration, attested in both private and institutional form, while promoting Christianity, also reveals an orchestrated endorsement of what was good in Hippocratic medicine. In communities whose highest prize and leading civic center was a shrine, what better compliment could have been given to Hippocratism than to venerate its ideal physicians? These physician-saints were not praised for converting from a disreputable profession to Christianity but for perfecting their profession for the cause of Christianity. People from all social backgrounds and races could identify good physicians. Thus, these legendary physician-saints came to be identified as trustworthy advocates with the divine, especially when the best physicians could not proffer a cure.

While the poor were the likely beneficiaries of Hippocratic standards, the physicians' benevolence did not escape the notice of the more fortunate. The educated citizen was familiar with medicine and held that the title "physician" itself was an honor. Medicine in the abstract, with its accompanying lofty ethic, was secondary to the practical application of a medicine couched in benevolence. The latter produced some of the most popular figures in many Late Antique communities. Christians in these communities calculated that their best chance to supplant

⁷⁰ Spyros G. Marketos and Constantin Papaconomou, "Medicine, Magic, and Religion in Ancient Greece," *Humane Medicine*, 8 (January 1992): 43.

Christian Physicians in the Roman Empire

*Benevolence and Sacrifice in Proclaiming the Gospels*¹

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INTRODUCTION

The topics of medicine and magic are deeply interwoven in Late Antiquity studies; healing serves as their prominent common thread. By the fourth-century A.D. Roman society witnessed a transition from a magical to a science based healing. In this context we find excellent examples of the interaction of faith and reason, and of religion and science—manifesting both complements and tensions.

Although this transition to science based healing was by no means complete in the fourth century, it was nonetheless the sign of a new dispensation. Among the scientific ranks were numerous physicians known for their ethic and benevolence, many of whom became canonized Christian saints of healing—the Christian *anargyroi*. The name literally means "without silver." That is, they practiced their craft for free to assist those in need during the first four centuries of Christianity.

The cult of the *anargyroi* developed during the fourth century. It continues today in the churches of Haghioi Anargyroi in Greece, and modern shrines to select *anargyroi* are found throughout the world, including a few cities in the United States.² During their lives *anargyroi* served as Hippocratic physicians. Posthumously they were venerated for their supernatural feats.

The rise and popularity of the *anargyric* shrines resulted not only from their subjects endorsement of Christianity, as propagated by hagiographers,³ but for numerous other reasons. This study demonstrates the key role of a persistent Hippocratic ethic in the cult's rise, and also rejects the theme among hagiographers that science and the Early Church were in opposition. This hagiographic *topos* is counterintuitive—the saints canonized were known Hippocratic healers—and ignores other historic evidence. Pagans and Christians alike applauded benevolent rational healers who were more concerned for their profession than with profit. The *anargyroi's* rise in popularity may be ironic, that is, canonized doctors were now celebrated for their supernatural powers, but it does not substantiate a Christian rejection of Hippocratic healing. This study also shows the lasting appeal of the *anargyroi*, and the influence of those experiencing martyrdom.

The Hippocratic ethic permeated Roman society with physicians from various backgrounds serving all levels of society. Charges of avarice lodged by pagans and Christians highlighted an assumed ethical standard among physicians. Christian physicians found little difficulty embracing this professional ethic while advocating their

¹ Presented at the Green Scholars Initiative Lecture Series, Charlotte, NC: Passages Exhibit Hall, Dec. 11, 2012. Respondent, Dr. Robert E. Cooley, President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, MA. A version was presented at the 2005 Near East Archaeological Society Conference, "Benevolent Physicians in Late Antiquity: The Multifaceted Appeal of the *Anargyroi*," Valley Forge, PA, and at the John Wesley Honors College Faculty Lecture Series, 2006, Indiana Wesleyan University (Marion, Indiana). The cover image is from the Van Kampen Collection, Luke 13, used with permission.

² M. G. Papageorgiou, "Incubation as a Form of Psychotherapy in the Care of Patients in Ancient and Modern Greece," *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 26 (1975): 35-38. Familiarity with the *Anargyroi* among 2006 audiences and societies is attested by over 15,000 website listings.

³ Peregrine Horden, "Saints and Doctors in the Early Byzantine Empire: the Case of Theodore of Sykeon," *Studies in Church History* 19 (1982): 10.

personal religion. While the Church established *anargyric* shrines, it highlighted not only the careers of its physicians, but of its endorsement of the Hippocratic ethic as well. For the Church, however, the key issue was the placement of credit for healing, not the endorsement or indictment of Hippocratism.

A Closer Look at the *Anargyroi* and their Profession

Christian writers nearly always employed the term *anargyroi* in reference to benevolent physicians who were martyred for their Christian beliefs and posthumously canonized by the Christian Church. As noted above, the term *anargyros* (singular) was derived from the Greek phrase “without silver,” and was employed in reference to physicians who performed medical service gratis. New Testament writers used *anargyros* for denoting silver,⁴ and *anargyron* as one of the words for money.⁵ The fifth section of the *Book of Painters* from Mt. Athos⁶ contains a select list of *anargyroi*, which includes: Kyros and Ionannes (Cyrus and John), Panteleimon and Hermaolaos, Sampson and Diomedes, Photios and Antiketos, and Thallelaos and Tryphon.⁷ Alternate lists survive, and some *anargyroi* though well documented in ancient sources, including church records, escape most lists, e.g., St. Colluthus of Egypt.⁸ Similar to the Menouthis scenario (described below), Late Antiquity witnessed a pervasive interest in healing. Numerous healing cults established centers that often served as the fulcrum of activity for their local communities.

Nearly every region hosted an Asklepiad, Serapeum, or one of a myriad of other pagan shrines. By the late-third century society was ripe for the founding of *anargyric* healing centers and the corresponding worship of healing saints. Peter Brown provides a good summary of both of these topics in his *Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*.⁹ In his *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Brown addresses the important issue of locality among healing cults and the role of saints in many important aspects of their communities.¹⁰ He also notes the regional differences in these roles, e.g., Syrian saints were more involved in community affairs than were Egyptian saints. Although he does not address the *anargyroi* his study certainly gives direction in measuring the importance of the historical and legendary healing figures.

Much has been written on healing and healing cults, and the treatment of the cult of Asclepius by Emma J. and Ludwig Edelstein is of particular importance.¹¹ The Edelsteins designate Asclepius as the main healing opponent of Jesus “The Great Physician.” Their respective cults were in conflict for centuries.¹² The implications of parallels between the success factors of the cult of Asclepius and the *anargyroi* are many.

Greco-Roman and Patristic sources provide rather thorough contemporary accounts of the issues related to benevolent physicians. Both prominent and obscure writers have left us an adequate basis for an interpretation

⁴ Akin to *argos* (“shining”); Matthew 10:9, Acts 17:29; James 5:3, Revelation 18:12.

⁵ Although it is used to denote money (Matthew 25:18, 27, 28:15, Mark 14:11, Luke 9:3, 19:15, 23, 22:5, Acts 8:20), *anargyron* is also used more literally to denote a piece of silver (e.g., Acts 3:6), and a silver coin (e.g., Matthew 26:15).

⁶ Athos was home to several early monastic sects, including the Iveron monastery associated with Athanasios I (1230-35).

⁷ Heinz Skrobucha, *The Patron of the Doctors* (West Germany: Aurel Bongers Recklinghausen, 1965), p. 9. The extended list in the appendix of the *Book of Painters* also ascribes the title of “gratis giver” to Sergios, Bakchos, Christophoros, Eugenios, Auxentios, Eustratios, Mardarios, Orestes, Menas Viktor, Vikentios, Akindynos, Pegasios, Aphthonios, Elpidophoros, Anempodistos, Ananias, Azaras and Misael, Kerykos, Ioulitta, Marina, Kyriake, Barbara, Paraskeve (Thaumatourgos), Thekla (Promotomartyrs), Aikaterina, Eirene, Theodora (Myroblytis), Maria Magdalena and Ana.

⁸ See Jerry A. Pattengale, “Benevolent Physicians in Late Antiquity: Ancient Precedent for Modern Health Care Reform” in *The Light of Discovery: A Festschrift for Edwin M. Yamauchi*, John Wineland, editor (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2006); and *Benevolent Physicians in Late Antiquity: The Cult of the Anargyroi*, Dissertation. (Oxford, OH: Miami University of Ohio, 1993).

⁹ Peter Brown, *Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

¹⁰ Peter Brown, *Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (University of California Press, 1982).

¹¹ Emma J. and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* (2 vols.; Johns Hopkins Press, 1945).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 132-138. See also Alice Walton, *Asklepios: The Cult of the Greek God of Medicine* (Chicago: Ares Publishers, reprint ed., 1979).

The events at the *anargyric* center were well known in the patriarchal see. Monks from Canopus and *philoponoi* from Menouthis dismembered the idols, shouting “their gods have no surgeons!”⁶⁷ a fitting epithet exclaimed by the victor in a war between healing cults.

The story of Paralius played out many times at various locations. While religious differences between pagan and Christian healing centers existed and ultimately ended the pagan institutions, the cultural acceptance and familiarity lingered. Following Owsei Temkin’s lead, the rise of *anargyroi* is best understood by identifying the common concerns of patients and their praises of physicians that persisted from the era of the benevolent physician to that of his *anargyric* cult.⁶⁸ Elements found in pagan healing centers which can be identified and categorized not only persisted well into the Christian era but were manifest in the *anargyric* cult itself.

Benevolence and scientific healing were applauded and inextricably linked and informed cultural expectations. In Paralius’ conversion, we find a societal disdain for fraudulence among healers, regardless of scientific endorsements by those particular healers. G. E. R. Lloyd reminds us, “It must be recognized that *but* for the ancients’ assumptions of its value-ladenness—and of its value as contributing to the good life—there would hardly have been any science then at all.”⁶⁹ Concomitantly the veneration of saints, the preoccupation with healing, the resurgence of magic, “incurable diseases,” and strong remnants of pagan healing cults were dynamics also facilitating the rise of the *anargyric* shrines in Late Antiquity.

CONCLUSION

The Multifaceted Appeal

The *anargyroi* attracted large followings for numerous reasons. The hagiographers erroneously credit their supernatural powers as their reason for popularity, while also miscasting the Church in opposition to Hippocratism. There was also no rampant competition between science and Christianity, as Nutton contends.

This study has shown several historical dynamics that shed light on understanding the *anargyroi*’s appeal. 1) We only know of the *anargyroi* because they were Hippocratic physicians, making it counterintuitive to contend the Early Church’s disdain for science. As reputable physicians, the *anargyroi* commanded respect for their skills during their lifetimes. 2) While the Hippocratic physician was committed to being fair in representing his trade, and to keep the patient’s needs as the key concern, he was not expected to do this gratis, and few did. The very term “anargyros” reveals the ancient’s recognition that they were indeed a subset of the profession. 3) The paucity of physicians created a high demand that could have exacted considerable fees. As compassionate physicians, their patrons respected their ethic. 4) As famous local physicians, they earned respect as celebrities. 5) A substantial case has been made that a wide assortment of clients venerated these physician-saints in large part because they respected physicians in general. The wide assortment of patrons, and the Church as benefactor, institutionalized healing centers, that among other things, openly endorsed the medical profession. 6) Though not addressed in detail due to its trite place in medical history, it is clear that the candid and open criticism of dishonest physicians implied a standard for the profession. 7) We saw that Christian and pagan physicians interacted even after the legalization of Christianity, a dynamic detailed in our discussion of Menouthis.

We find here a persistence of scientific healing in Christendom. The same hagiographic accounts condemning secular medicine ironically reveal the Church’s endorsement of it. Stories of gratis giving were believable in large

⁶⁷ “Surgeons”—Coptic, *karountitin*, “bone-setters.” Zacharias, *Life of Severus*, pp. 20-22. *Philoponoi* refers to energetic laymen.

⁶⁸ Owsei Temkin, *Hippocrates in a World of Pagans and Christians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). Pp. 126-145; he also edited the classic work on the history of medicine, Ludwig Edelstein’s *Ancient History*, also by Johns Hopkins Press (1967, reprint 1987).

⁶⁹ G. E. R. Lloyd, *Science and Morality in Greco-Roman Antiquity: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.3.

Nonetheless, even after the translation of the *anargyoi*, the cult of Isis managed to survive in Menouthis until the time of Paralius. While the relics of *anargyroi* were being translated, the surviving patrons of Isis seem to have transformed the crypt of an old temple into their secretive headquarters. Although the details are lacking, the general proximity can at least be ascertained: the Isis cult and that of the *anargyroi* were both in Menouthis and interacted with each other.

As the decades passed and as the Isis worship regained quasi-acceptance, disciples from both camps studied at least grammar together. Paralius and Severus had mingled freely with members from wealthy Asia Minor families, both pagans and Christians. In Menouthis, Paralius studied paganism while interacting with Christians. Perhaps he learned under descendants of Antonius; it is certain that he sat under the grammarian Horapollo (who admired “demons and magic”).⁶² It is less certain how often both Christians and pagans had enrolled with Horapollo, but both groups were well aware of the others’ daily affairs.

We need to keep in mind that Menouthis had become the host of the *anargyric* healing center, the “Church of the Evangelists,” the Church of Sts. Cyrus and John. While a core of pagans had maintained a last stronghold in this resort area, the same Menouthis phenomenon of the past centuries had persisted and had done so literally since the founding of Alexandria. That is, Menouthis had kept its magnetic appeal to the religious, but now the pilgrims were nearly all Christians rather than pagans. This phenomenon continued until the shrine was moved to Constantinople in the seventh century, after the Arab conquest of Egypt.⁶³ Ironically, a century after the “cleansing” of the pagan temples and after St. Cyril’s translation of the *anargyroi*’s relics to Menouthis, one of Egypt’s biggest collections of idols and strongest chapters of the Isis (Serapis) healing cult remained next door to one of Egypt’s most renowned Christian healing centers.⁶⁴

Zacharias recalls his youth in an attempt to acquit his teacher Severus’ testimony of pagan leanings. As a result, we have the details of the Menouthis incident as it involved Paralius, Severus’ colleague.

Paralius frequented the fugitive Isis sanctuary, a building covered with hieroglyphics and whose patronage also included pagan professors and students. Like the patrons over in the Church of the Evangelists, Paralius exhibited confidence in incubatory revelation; he slept in the sanctuary of Isis in order to benefit from dreams. Both the *anargyric* center and the makeshift Serapeum had incubatory sanctuaries similar to those of other *anargyric* centers like that of St. Colluthus in Antinoe. In one instance at the *anargyric* shrine, a patron from Damascus was only “fully” cured after dreaming that the patron saint of his hometown assisted in the miracle.⁶⁵

After revealing a fraudulent “fertility” miracle bestowed upon an impotent couple from his own hometown and following contradictory advice from the priestess of Isis while supposedly dreaming, Paralius turned against the cult.⁶⁶ The Christian students in Menouthis rescued him from the ensuing scuffle and near-fatal blows from pagan classmates. An anti-pagan conflagration ensued. This clash resulted in the razing of the Isis center, which uncovered a secret treasury of idols, including several that had been salvaged from the Iseum in Memphis. The Christians routed the pagans and then carted twelve camel loads of idols to the Alexandrian public square for a ritual burning.

⁶² G. Fowden, “The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society,” *Journal of Hellenistic Studies* (1982): 33-59.

⁶³ P. Peeters, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 25 (1906): 233-40.

⁶⁴ For the vestiges of pagan shrines in Roman North Africa, see David Riggs, “Pagans and Christians in Central North Africa: Reconsidering the Growth of Christianity from Cyprian to Augustine,” dissertation for Oxford University (2005); also see Riggs forthcoming work with Oxford University Press on the same (in press, working title is “Divine Patronage in Late Roman and Vandal Africa: Reconsidering a Local Narrative of Christianisation”). See also Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.5.6; and Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, IV.39.

⁶⁵ *Miracula Sanctorum Cyri et Hohannis*, PG 87, 3664B ff.

⁶⁶ The Isis priestess gave the couple her own newborn child, but the “new” mother failed to produce milk, disproving the “miraculous” origin of the baby.

⁶⁶ The Isis priestess gave the couple her own newborn child, but the “new” mother failed to produce milk, disproving the “miraculous” origin of the baby.

of these physicians’ roles in their society and profession. Such authors include Apollonius of Tyana, Aretaeus, Aristides, Basil, Cassiodorus, Celsus, Cicero, Eusebius, Galen, Hippolytus of Rome, Isidore of Pelusium, Jerome, John Chrysostrum, Josephus, Largus, Libanius, Macarius the Egyptian, Palladius, Procopius of Caesarea, Scribonius Gelasius, Seneca, Socrates, Sophrinus, Soranus of Cos, Tatian, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Theodore of Sykeon, and Valentinian I. An important and interesting aspect of this ancient dialogue is the evaluation of the medical profession and the religious healing centers (some of which employed medicine, or at least systematic treatment). Weighing the physicians’ self-evaluation against that lodged by their contemporaries provides a critique of fourth and fifth-century medicine. A clear distinction can be made between the physician and pagan healing priest, and the benevolent physician and his later *anargyric* status.

The Christian physician emerged in a world in which science and ethics had already been fused. The economic chasm between the masses of Romans and the elite was ever increasing, and the need for health services for the poor was never more pronounced. Christian apologists, along with some pagan factions, were continually evaluating the moral and ideological basis of Roman society—and usually finding it wanting. Roman institutions, even buttressed by imperial decrees, were failing to provide basic public services, including health programs. State-funded doctors were only a token expression of concern from euergetic politicians. Euergerism was an unofficial political arrangement between patron and client. The benefactor (*euergetes*) funded projects not in a spirit of benevolence, but for the sake of public recognition. The title of *euergetes* “did not simply state a fact but conferred a status, indicating that the person on whom it was conferred was in credit, as it were, in respect of the balance of friendly acts.”¹³

Medicine, with its Hippocratic ethic, at least gave the average citizen hope for treatment. While some physicians threw ethics to the wind and pursued money, most Hippocratic physicians, like devoted Christians, operated under a mandate to assist the poor, or at least not to ignore them. With the physician-patient ratio, any reputable physician could devote him or herself to wealthy clients. For most physicians, Christian and pagan, generosity to the poor involved taking time to serve them and then accepting whatever remuneration followed. It is little wonder that when practitioners of an art in such demand dedicated themselves to helping the poor, and that when the *anargyroi* did so freely, that they gained Rome’s attention. It is one thing not to ignore the poor, yet quite another to devote a life serving them. If Edward Gibbon is correct, the latter devotion was a major factor in the eventual triumph of Christianity over paganism. On a somewhat different note, if I am correct, the former attitude was manifest in the average Roman physician (and Asclepiada priests), which made the commitment of the *anargyroi* a logical extension of their profession and religion, a commitment which could thus be appreciated by both pagans and Christians. Veneration of the *anargyroi* reflected praise from equally diverse factions of society.

The Case of St. Colluthus, or Abu Colta

Among the physician martyrologies, one of the more reliable historic accounts is that of St. Colluthus from Egypt, commonly referred to as Abu Colta.¹⁴ Like many of the Christian physicians, he also died under Emperor Diocletian¹⁵ (A.D. 304). Jennifer Hevelone-Harper (Gordon College, MA), translator of select Coptic sources associated with St. Colluthus, embraces the historical accuracy of his martyrology. “The narrative has several internal ingredients which seem to indicate that the text is an eyewitness account. There is no hint of stock legendary material. This account may have been obtained by bribing an official or from a private transcription of the public trial.”¹⁶

¹³ A. R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 36.

¹⁴ W. E. Crum, “Colluthus, the Martyr and His Name,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 30 (1964): 323-327.

¹⁵ E. A. E. Reymond and J. W. B. Barns, *Four Martyrdoms from the Pierpont Morgan Coptic Codices* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 11-13.

¹⁶ Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, “Saint Colluthus and Coptic Christian Syncretization of Greco-Roman healing Cults in Egypt,” NEH paper, 1991.

Julius of Aqfahs allegedly positioned assistant scribes (or biographers) at numerous sites in Egypt to capture the details of martyrdoms, one of which included Colluthus.¹⁷ Another reason for recognition of the account's historicity is the controversy which stemmed from the would-be martyrs. Two apostate bishops had stood with St. Colluthus—Apollonius and Plutarch. Both leaders recanted their Christian beliefs, and had the dubious distinction of being labeled *lapsi*.¹⁸

Hevelone correctly notes the difference between Julius of Aqfahs' account, and the more laudatory and dramatized later tradition. The latter exhibits the common hagiographic *topos* of decapitation, "Because this tradition would insure the preservation of relics, unlike death by burning."¹⁹ When Colluthus' brother-in-law, Governor Arianus, failed to convince him to fall in line with the apostate bishops, he lost his patience with the stubborn physician:

It is the governor who is pleading with you and advising you! The governorship has humbled itself for you.... There was a man here on a charge of murder. This man wants to live; but as for you, Colluthus, something evil possesses you, to make you destroy yourself with murderers.²⁰

Arianus had him burned at the stake. Two encomia attest to St. Colluthus' martyrdom. The earliest is by Phoebammon, an early sixth-century bishop of Panopolis, and the later one Isaac, Bishop of Antinoe (ca. 861).

Another attestation of Colluthus' legacy came during a research project at Gordon College, under the auspices of the former Scriptorium: Center for Christian Antiquities (co-directed at the time by the author and Scott Carroll).

²¹ Imagine these students' excitement when from a pile of fragments they successfully pieced together a full page of a fourth-century Coptic text, reconstructing for the first time in nearly 1600 years a fourth-century vellum page of Luke's gospel (beginning with Luke 13:23). However, the excitement grew as the infrared light brought to the front a marginal note, "To be read during the feast day of Abu Colta [or Abba Kelthi, commonly understood as Father Colluthus]." This is the very passage by Luke "the physician" that talks about the difficulty of entering Heaven ("through the narrow door") and which references "the last who will be first, and the first who will be last." It was fitting that two or three generations after Colluthus' martyrdom, an Egyptian community likely from the same area wanted to venerate him with this passage—a saint, an anargyros, who paid the ultimate sacrifice, while others with him did not.

This community thrived until the seventh-century Muslim invasions. Palladius of Galatia informs us that the area had 12 "monasteries of women" and over 1,000 monks, including many anchorites who lived in the rock caves (A.D. 419-420, *Lausiac History* 58.1; 59.1). This area was in the region of Oxyrynchus, the site of the famous papyri dump that produced most of our earliest Christian papyri.²²

¹⁷ Sh. 138 R 27 ff.; Reymond and Barns, *Four Martyrdoms*, pp.8-10.

¹⁸ Recanting of one's beliefs was considered a lapse in one's faith, unlike retreating during persecution; cf. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, pp. 192-193; note the discussion of Bishop Cyprian.

¹⁹ Hevelone-Harper, "Colluthus," p. 14. However, decapitation was widely used during the persecutions, e.g., Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 8.8, "others [Christians under attack in Egypt] voluntarily offering their own heads to the executioners..."

²⁰ Reymond and Barns, *Four Martyrdoms*, p. 146.

²¹ Dr. Scott Carroll was a history professor at Gordon College prior to founding the Scriptorium in Grand Haven, Michigan, joined by Jerry Pattengale who directed the academic initiatives. After their departure, the Scriptorium moved to Orlando, Florida. Jennifer Hevelone-Harper was one of the students working on the Coptic project, which Dr. Carroll began while still a professor.

²² Dr. Dirk Obbink, Lecturer in Papyrology and Greek Literature at Oxford University (Christ Church) and head of the Oxyrynchus Papyri Project, also serves as the GSI Senior Scholar for the Papyri and the Codex Climaci Rescriptus.

Rather, they would invoke the more deserving and powerful personage of the martyr St. Cyrus (*Kyros*).⁵⁷ In A.D. 414, he translated the last sanctuary of Isis into their reliquary.⁵⁸

St. Cyrus' local heritage undoubtedly factored significantly in the sudden popularity of this healing cult. He was a physician of renown in Alexandria before his conversion and was martyred near Alexandria in A.D. 303 after offering his medical services to Christian women facing martyrdom in Canopus. Along with St. John, another physician who joined him on his medical mission, he was initially buried at St. Mark's Church in Alexandria. These *anargyroi* had already developed a significant following before their translation to Menouthis. The legendary accounts of St. Cyrus boast that St. Cyrus "healed not only the bodies of the sick but also precious souls from whatever diseases had befallen them."

The Alexandrian doctor Gesius challenged the miraculous status of cures credited to Sts. Cyrus and John only to suffer an embarrassing prognosis himself. Gesius charged that these cures were all natural and were actually found in the Hippocratic corpus (thus discrediting divine intervention). But then an unknown incurable disease reportedly struck him, forcing his request of the saints' healing power. His penance was public. Wearing a bell around his neck, and with a packsaddle on his back and a horse's bit in this mouth, he circled the church, exclaiming, "I am a fool!"⁵⁹

We see in the historic and legendary accounts of St. Cyrus the interplay between faith and reason. During his lifetime, his reputation as a Hippocratic practitioner preceded his reputation as a Christian and his missionary zeal. After translation, we find his popularity on the rise, with his historical Hippocratic reputation now inextricably linked with his supernatural healing powers. Whether supernatural healing took place at his shrine is an issue beyond the scope of this discussion, but the societal belief in such occurrences, like earlier with Asclepius and Isis centers, reflects the endorsement of "magical" healing. In the case of Cyrus the physician, a respected scientist and a vibrant Christian faith are manifest in the same person. The exclamation point for his personal alignment is found in his willingness to practice both openly and paying the ultimate sacrifice. There was no conflict for Cyrus in how he practiced, but in why he practiced.

At the same location we learn of a relative peace between students of both the pagan and Christian healing shrines—that is, before the explosive story of Paralius.

The details of a battle between the last remnant of the pagan healing cult at Menouthis and the patrons of the *anargyroi* come to us through the conversion experience of Paralius, recorded by Zacharias Scholasticus in his *Life of Severus*, circa 512-518. The *Life of Isidoris* by Damascus also corroborates portions of this account.⁶⁰ Menouthis was located in the resort area of Canopus, where thousands of Alexandrians and other Egyptians traveled annually for both religion and relaxation. Numerous pagan temples dotted the landscape of this city known for its Canopic funeral vases.⁶¹

Over a century earlier, one of Alexandria's last great pagan teachers, Antoninus, had taken refuge in Canopus and immediately attracted throngs of pagans. In turn, this was a significant factor in the ensuing wrath of St. Cyril.

⁵⁷ St. Cyril, "Anargyroi," PG, 77.1104. For various examples of miracles credited to Sts. Cyrus and John, see Bollandists, *Les recueils antiques de miracles des saints* (Brussels, 1925), pp. 8-73.

⁵⁸ O. Meinardus, "A Coptic Anargyros: St. Colluthus," *Studia Orientalia Christiana* 14 (1970-1971): 357; online at <http://brepols.metapress.com/content/vh621541xh2qtj00/> (posted May 27, 2010). Sophronius claimed to have been cured by Sts. Cyrus and John, and claimed that the temple of Isis sank into the sand, see "Kyros and John," *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, p. 1164. St. Cyril of Alexandria [became patriarch in 412], "Anargyroi," Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 77.1100-1105. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, pp. 116-142.

⁵⁹ H. G. Magoulaia, "The Lives of the Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Byzantine Medicine in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 57 (1964): 130-131.

⁶⁰ P. A. Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, translated by B. Archer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 111; see p. 170, n. 14.

⁶¹ These are beautifully crafted jars (for containing viscera), usually with animal heads such as the one found in King Tut's tomb.

the power associated with martyrria. In this city, the prolific bishop Theodoret certainly offered cooperation between scientific and faith healing, not an opposition.⁴²

Nutton concedes that “a compromise” between religion and medicine was reached by the fourth century onward “by most Christian writers.”⁴³ However, evidence is found among the Patristic fathers that doesn’t suggest a need for such a compromise. They showed a marked difference of attitude from that of hagiographers toward physicians. It was the Church Fathers who were “foremost” in the effort “to keep alight the torch of Greek science” and “who became the guardians of the medical tradition.”⁴⁴

Church Fathers integrated science in their presentation and defense of biblical truths, with at least one major representation in every century of Late Antiquity: Tertullian (*ca.* 160-230) and in a qualified sense, Clement of Alexandria (*ca.* 200) in the second century;⁴⁵ Origen (185-254) in the next century,⁴⁶ an era which was less favorable to scientific integration,⁴⁷ but nonetheless also witnessed the practical application (“pastoral medicine”) of Cyprian (*d.* 258) during an African epidemic;⁴⁸ Lactantius⁴⁹ and Methodius of Olympia (*ca.* 311) in the fourth century,⁵⁰ followed by Jerome (*ca.* 347-420),⁵¹ Ambrose,⁵² and Augustine.⁵³ In the works of Isidore of Seville, we find a collection of many early Christian manuscripts in his science-faith integration.⁵⁴

The Case of Menouthis: The Conflicts between St. Cyrus and Gesius and the Conversion of Paralius

Before proceeding with a discussion of the Hippocratic persistence among Christian physicians and the interplay between faith and science, let us consider first the healing centers near Alexandria. In the case of St. Cyrus and Gesius, both were rational (Hippocratic) physicians from the same area, but by Gesius’s time, Cyrus had *anargyric* status. And in the case of Paralius (*ca.* 485-487), his conversion affords a look at the interplay between the pagan and Christian incubatory sites.

Near Canopus, only twelve miles east of the fallen Alexandrian temples, was an academy of sorts for both Christian and pagans.⁵⁵ This small town of Menouthis was very much involved with the events both in Canopus and Alexandria and would later host the *anargyric* shrine of Saints Cyrus and John.⁵⁶ Bishop Cyril of Alexandria informed the Menouthis residents that they would no longer be invoking the name of “the lady,” the *Kura*, i.e., Isis.

⁴² Theodoret, Epistles, 13, 112-115. Cf. *Indem*, Dialogues, 3.

⁴³ Nutton, “Lay Attitudes,” (in Porter) p. 49.

⁴⁴ Charles Singer and E. Ashworth Underwood, *A Short History of Medicine*. Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 67. Cf. Frings, *Medizin und Arzt bei den Griechischen Kirchenvatern bis Chrysostomos* (Dissertation, University of Bohn; Durk: Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms, 1959), pp. 8-24; Frings’ dissertation thesis is that the Patristic Fathers embraced Hippocratic medicine.

⁴⁵ “In a qualified sense,” this integration can be found in some hygienic treatises of a contemporary unknown to Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, along with select statements from the latter’s colleagues at the Alexandrian Christian college (the Didasalion).

⁴⁶ Origen declares that there is “no doubt” about the use of rational medicine, and what better example of “knowledge from God” could exist than that pertaining to health? (Origen, *In Numeros homiliae* 18.3; Migne PG, I12: col. 715B).

⁴⁷ Stephen d’Irsay, “Patristic Medicine,” *Annual of Medical History* 9 (1927): 368.

⁴⁸ Pontius the Deacon, *The Life and Passion of Cyprian, Bishop and Martyr* 9 (in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, p. 270).

⁴⁹ Cf. his endorsement of the physician Diocles in *De officio Dei*.

⁵⁰ Cf. *The Resurrection (De resurrectione)*.

⁵¹ Jerome, *Adversus Iovinianum* [the monk Jovinian] 6.6-12.

⁵² St. Ambrose, *Hexaem* 6.9 (Migne, *Patr. Lat.* XIV, cols. 264-271).

⁵³ St. Augustine, *Sermons* 243.6-7; 249.4; *The Animal* 2.4.

⁵⁴ St. Isidore of Seville [Bishop of Seville not son and disciple of the Gnostic Basilides], *Etymologiae* 4, 10.2.

⁵⁵ Herbert G. May, editor et al, *Oxford Bible Atlas*, third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 89-91.

⁵⁶ T. Nissen, “De SS. Cyri et Iohannis Vitae formis,” *Analecta Boliandiana* 57 (1939): 68-70.

The Financial Practices of Healers in Late Antiquity

Were the *anargyroi* similar to many other physicians? Were their actions unique to themselves or merely reflections of the medical ideal? Ludwig Edelstein contends:

For in regard to every craft it is necessary to distinguish between its common characteristics and those which belong to the individual [or small group] practicing it. Failure to make this distinction is bad logic, irreconcilable with the tenets of Plato and Hippocrates alike.²³

The *anargyroi* were not preceded by a rich medical heritage in Rome. Tradition holds that in 219 B.C., Arcagathus, the first doctor (*medicus*), arrived in an appreciative city. However, he was soon rejected because of his ill-fated surgeries. As Pliny notes, he was branded as *carnifex*, or “executioner,” and driven from the city.²⁵ The next physician in Rome was also Greek (Asclepiades, *ca.* 100 B.C.), as were many of their successors through the end of Roman Antiquity.

Epigraphical and literary sources attest to the Greek dominance of the profession. During the first three centuries A.D., over ninety percent of the doctors in Rome were Greek (or Greek pretenders). For the same period, around seventy percent of the doctors from the rest of Italy, Spain, and Provence were Greek.²⁶ When Julius Caesar banned foreigners from Rome, he exempted physicians.

The influx of Greek physicians undoubtedly propagated the Hippocratic ideal. Hippocratic doctrines accompanied the migration to Rome, and subsequently, the Roman medical world known to the *anargyroi* was dominated by Hippocratism. Although several sects of Hippocratism surfaced alongside non-humoralistic schools, in the late second century, Galen developed Roman medicine into a unified science.²⁷ Adaptations of the Hippocratic humoralism and the Hippocratic medical ethic found a new defender and propagator in Galen and likewise became part of the medical curriculum of Stephanus of Athens in the sixth century. Thereby, a form of Hippocratism persisted in medical training throughout the Middle Ages. Stephanus claimed to be a practitioner and also branded all non-Hippocratic physicians as lacking professional knowledge (literally, “*idiotai*”).²⁸

Classifying physicians by their means of subsistence may be of the most assistance in clarifying the profile of Roman medical personnel in which the *Anargyroi* surfaced. Four general types of Roman physicians were in the mainstream of society: the public physicians, those attached to the emperor’s retinue, those serving wealthy families, and the independent practitioners. The priest-physician served a different role from the rational physician (*medicus*); nonetheless, he or she was commonplace in most Roman cities, i.e., on the outskirts of the city. A vast network of military, sports and gladiator medical personnel also existed. But these physicians, however important, were usually inaccessible for service to laypersons, and are therefore excluded from this study.

The first three categories may be classified as “dependent physicians,” setting them apart from the independents, the vast majority of practitioners. Legitimate doctors may be defined as those who were perceived as being trained in rational medicine and who conducted themselves in accordance with the Hippocratic ethic. A definition more

²³ Ludwig Edelstein, “The Professional Ethics of the Greek Physician,” in *Ethics in Medicine: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Concerns*, edited by Stanley Joel Reiser et al (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), p. 44.

²⁴ Arcagathus (“a good beginning”) was known for his surgery, and initially referred to as Rome’s *vulnerius*; John Watson, *The Medical Profession in Ancient Times* (New York: Baker and Godwin, 1956), p. 13.

²⁵ Pliny, *Natural History*, XXIX, 6.

²⁶ H. Gummerus, “Der Arztstand im romischen Reiche,” *Soc. Sci. Fennica, Comment, hist. et litt.* 3.6, Helsinki, 1932. See also Vivian Nutton, “Murders and Miracles: Lay Attitudes Towards Medicine in Classical Antiquity,” in *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, edited by Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 44.

²⁷ Vivian Nutton, “Portraits of Science: Logic, Learning, and Experimental Medicine,” *Science* 1 (February 2002) Vol. 295, no. 5556, pp. 800-801. See also Nutton, “God, Galen and the Depaganization of Ancient Medicine” in Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler, editors, *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Boydell and Brewer, Ltd.), 2001.

²⁸ Stephanus of Athens, Commentary on Hippocrates’ Aphorisms 1.27, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* XI 1,2.

stringent than what the Romans themselves employed is both unnecessary and undesirable. Unless the inscriber qualified the “physician” as a quack, we can only assume that the *medicus* in question was “legitimate,” according to the foregoing definition.

The need for independent physicians was apparent enough; the public physicians simply could not pretend to care for all of their city’s inhabitants. The patient-to-*archiatros* ratio can be estimated at higher than thirty thousand to one! For example, according to the decree issued by Valentinian I (A.D. 366), Rome assigned an *archiatros* to each of its fourteen districts. At that time 500,000 people lived in the city, which amounts to a 35,000-patient load. The same load may be true of Constantinople, though the evidence only substantiates that civic physicians did exist.²⁹

We can conclude that a Hippocratic-Galenic medical ethic pervaded Late Antiquity, transcending socioeconomic barriers, even within the profession of medicine. During the selection of the *archiatroi*, ethics were as crucial as skill. Both imperial and personal physicians were esteemed only if their successful treatments were complemented by trustworthiness and *philanthropia*. Independent physicians took great measures to establish a good reputation, often serving gratis.

It is important to note that when people turned to Asclepius priest-physicians, they had usually looked earlier to a physician, whether a public, household or independent practitioner. While the method of Asclepieion healing changed with the progression of technology, the remuneration practices did not. Patients gave according to their ability, and those healers associated with Asclepieia expressed concern first for the patients, not the purse.

Imperial decrees rarely matched reality, but at the very least, attention to the medical needs of the poor was addressed at the highest level. Although no objectives were put into place to make such medical care a reality, the intention was still known to the body politic. The provisions for *archiatroi* to treat the poor—alongside but not the exclusion of the rich—reflected the spirit of Hippocratism, a preoccupation also among Christians and their physicians.

The *anargyroi* surfaced in a society sorely needing medical help—aware of the benefits of medicine but short of physicians. These saints saw both the affluent and dependent embrace rational medicine. The former paid their practitioners’ bills, and the latter afforded them the opportunity to acquire the reputation for character that attracted such patrons. *Anargyroi*, their medical colleagues, and even their pagan-priest counterparts were part of professions that embraced the notion of assisting the poor.

The Early Church’s Reaction to Physicians

The same hagiographical texts venerating the *anargyroi* present a rather negative view of secular physicians. “The despair of doctors, in cases where the saint eventually triumphs, becomes a *topos* of hagiographical invective.”³⁰ The hagiographers’ intent to venerate the holy man in opposition to pagan philosophies explains such *topoi*.

Their view of secular medicine is the same negative perception of medicine attributed to the early Church by Vivian Nutton, a view I find inconsistent with the sources. Though appreciative of his remarkable contribution to the study of the history of medicine,³¹ I find his conclusions on this particular matter problematic. He begins his argument:

The early apologists of Christianity laid stress on the effectiveness of Christian cures, and their message of hope to the sick was a major factor in the eventual triumph of Christianity over other cults.³²

²⁹ Vivian Nutton, “Archiatry and the Medical Profession in Antiquity,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 45 (1977): 210-212.

³⁰ Horden, “Saints and Doctors,” p. 10.

³¹ For this appreciation, one need look no further than his *Ancient Medicine* (London and New York: Routledge Press) 2004. See also the important review by John Scarborough in the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2005.07.74.

³² Vivian Nutton, “Murders and Miracles: Lay Attitudes Towards Medicine in Classical Antiquity,” in *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perception of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, edited by Roy Porter. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): pp. 23-53.

With less support, he conjectures that:

...from its inception Christianity offered itself as a direct competitor to secular healing. In Christ, God incarnate, it had the saviour on earth, the great physician, whose help was available to all believers, and at no monetary cost.³³

This logic is faulty. The existence of (and/or strong faith in) supernatural healing is not mutually exclusive with confidence in secular (or rational) medicine.³⁴ Were priests at the Asclepieia in direct competition with Hippocratic physicians? No.³⁵ Following this rationale, the Tiber Asclepieion would have been competition with the Roman physicians, which, as we have already observed, simply was not the case. Incurable patrons commonly sought Asclepius on Tiber Island as a last resort.

Nutton cites as a proof text Mark 5:6: “The woman with the issue of blood had spent all her savings on doctors and drugs, yet she was not cured by them, but by merely touching the hem of Christ’s robe.”³⁶ Nutton fails to cite the variation of the Marcan passage, which is found in the synoptic account of Luke 8:43. The latter records that the woman “could not be healed by anyone,” i.e., “all sectors of the health care system.”³⁷ In this case, no competition with physicians took place, nor with the entire array of healers. The woman simply had an incurable illness, that is, outside of miraculous intervention.

Most of Christ’s cures were for otherwise incurable ills, which is another obstacle in accepting Nutton’s thesis of competition. The pivotal role of “miracle cures” in Christian proselytizing is a familiar assessment, long established by Edward Gibbon, “perhaps the only English writer [at least through 1845] who has any claim to be considered an ecclesiastical historian.”³⁸ Healing miracles were one of the key contributing factors in the rapid expansion of Christianity,³⁹ but the stampede to the new religion was not an exodus from Hippocratic healing. Gibbon, himself an “unbeliever” and rationalist, finds it puzzling nonetheless that such a display of supernatural healings did not evoke more of a response from the philosophers. Gibbon claims they remained indifferent, a far cry from Nutton’s “competitor” status.⁴⁰

Nutton also cites the lives of *anargyroi* Cosmas, Damian and Artemius in support of third-century laypersons choosing Christianity over secular physicians.⁴¹ This is a false opposition. With these *anargyroi*, they were choosing both, not either-or. The later legends predictably highlight miraculous cures of desperate cases, but along with the earliest sources, they also note the (“secular”) profession of *anargyroi*. The bishop of Cyrrhus, protector of one of the chief healing shrines for Cosmas and Damian, recruited numerous physicians to his city while openly embracing

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Gary B. Ferngren, *Medicine and Healthcare in Early Christianity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), and endorsement of the view, John M. Riddle’s review, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, vol. 65, no. 2 (April 2010): 253-255.

³⁵ J. Neusner et al, *Religion, Science, and Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 125.

³⁶ Nutton, “Lay Attitudes,” (in Porter) p. 48.

³⁷ John J. Piltch, “Sickness and Healing in Luke-Acts,” in Jerome H. Neyrey, ed. *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), p. 193.

³⁸ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 35.

³⁹ Cf. Jarslov Pelikan, *The Excellent Empire* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), pp. 15-40 passim; Pelikan qualifies Gibbon’s statements on the disinterest of adherents of science in supernatural events.

⁴⁰ Nutton and Gibbon cannot both be correct. Ironically, Gibbon, the more “popular” writer, sides more closely with the facts in this instance, while it is Nutton, whose reputation is firmly established in the rigors of primary research, who is mistaken. See also Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, edited by J. B. Bury, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1896-1900), chapter 15 (Bury: 2:69-70).

⁴¹ Nutton, “Lay Attitudes,” (in Porter) p. 50, text to not 91. Cf. Stephen D’Irsay, “Christian Medicine and Science in the Third Century,” *Journal of Religion*, pp. 536-527, 534-535, 543-544.