

## STUDII ŞI ARTICOLE

### ARTICLES

#### Early Christian Philanthropy in the Peloponnese

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**Abstract:** Philanthropy, often referred to as mercy (ἐλεημοσύνη) in late antique sources, was an essential characteristic of ancient and late antique Christianity. The practice known today in the Western world as *caritas* or *diakonia* should accordingly also have left strong traces in the history of Christianity in the Peloponnese. In my contribution, I would like to look for such traces, which have hardly been considered in the secondary literature so far. The search will be conducted in various directions. First of all, I will look for philanthropic ideals in ancient Christian sources. The focus will be on the 1st Letter of Clement and the corpus of letters of Dionysios of Corinth. In a further step, archaeological sources will be evaluated. Inscriptions of individual as well as institutional philanthropic practice will be examined. Ultimately, the question of the transformation of ancient pagan institutions, which, like hospitals, had a kind of philanthropic character, is important.

**Keywords:** Philanthropy, Christian hospitality, diaconia, ancient Rome, Peloponnese

An important question for the study of ancient and late ancient Christian philanthropy is that of the continuity of ideals and institutions. In older research since Gerhard Uhlhorn, the exclusivity of ancient "*diakonia*" was usually emphasised. According to this, it was with Christianity that love, or more precisely charity, and thus also philanthropy in the narrower sense, first came into the world. In the following, I will try to make it clear that even in the Peloponnese, earlier ideas and ideals were at least

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terminologically linked. This becomes clear when one examines, among other things, the semantic field of *euergesia*.

Late antique philanthropy also included the establishment of charitable institutions. These include in particular the so-called *diakoniai*, places for the distribution of food. In Rome, but also in numerous other places along the Mediterranean, there were such *diakoniai*. In Rome in particular, they took up the old urban Roman practice of distributing grain, the *annona*. The question arises as to whether such institutions also existed in the Peloponnese. Furthermore, hospitals and sanatoriums are an important place of late antique philanthropy. Hospitals, which represent an indirect further development of the Roman valetudinaries, did not exist in the Peloponnese. It needs to be investigated whether ancient healing places, especially the *asklepieia*, underwent a Christian transformation there. *Asklepieia* can be found in abundance on the peninsula. Elsewhere, corresponding sanatoriums have certainly been transformed into Christian healing centres, as can be proved in Constantinople, among other places, but also in Athens, which is close to the Peloponnese. In a final section of my paper, I will therefore focus on the ancient *asklepieia* in a special way and explore the question of whether Christian use can be observed there. But first, let us look at philanthropic ideals in ancient texts that originated in the Peloponnese or were addressed to communities on the peninsula.

### 1. The philanthropic ideal in 1 Clement

The oldest literary evidence of Christian philanthropy in the Peloponnese outside the biblical writings is the 1st Letter of Clement. It was probably written between 80 and 140 AD, more likely towards the end of this period.<sup>2</sup> This letter of the Roman bishop to the Corinthians reminds the Corinthian community again and again of ideals that had been cultivated in it. It is not clear how strongly the Roman Clement projects his own ideas of philanthropic action onto the Corinthian community. The custom of hospitality (φιλοξενίας ἦθος) is particularly conspicuously emphasised. Already in the preface Clement emphasises this in particular alongside the faith, piety and knowledge of the congregation.<sup>3</sup> Apparently, the marked hospitality that was particularly in vogue in a port city like Corinth had<sup>4</sup> waned in the Corinthian community by the time of Clement. He accordingly rebukes inhospitality (ἀφιλοξενία) not only as a deviation from the way of truth,<sup>5</sup> but also highlights three Old Testament examples of hospitable behaviour in

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cavan W. Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity. Trade, Networks, and the Letters of Dionysios of Corinth*, Cambridge, 2017, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 1 Clem. 1, 2, ed. Joseph A. Fischer, *Die Apostolischen Väter*, Schriften des Urchristentums 1, Darmstadt, <sup>10</sup>1998, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Fischer (cf. fn. 2), 39, note 73, points out that the ideal of hospitality was often called for in the New Testament writings, cf. Rom 12, 13; 1 Tim 3, 2; Tit 1, 8; Heb 11, 11, 17; 6, 12-15.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 35, 5.

particular: Abraham had been given his son because of his faith and hospitality (διὰ φιλοξενίαν).<sup>6</sup> Lot was saved from Sodom because of his hospitality and piety,<sup>7</sup> and Rahab<sup>8</sup> the "harlot" for similar reasons.

In addition to hospitality, the modesty and the generosity of the congregation associated with it is also particularly emphasised in the 1st Letter of Clement. Referring to the Lord's saying "It is more blessed to give than to receive" quoted in the Acts of the Apostles (Act 20, 35), the Roman bishop emphasises that the Corinthians were also more joyful in giving than in receiving because of their modesty.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, mercy (ἔλεος) and intra-congregational solidarity would also have played an important role among the Corinthians.<sup>10</sup> According to Clement, such mercy is in keeping with God, and his mercy and gentleness encourage us to be kind to one another.<sup>11</sup> God is the *euergetes*, the beneficent Father (εὐεργετικὸς πατήρ),<sup>12</sup> and it is precisely his beneficence (εὐεργεσία) that is to be imitated.<sup>13</sup> Such action, according to the 1st Epistle of Clement, is indispensable for concord (ὁμόνοια) in the community, which is its central theme. God, according to the Roman bishop or Psalm 11, 4 ss., has the plight of the poor (τῶν πτωχῶν) and the groaning of the needy (τῶν πενήτων) in mind and promises salvation.<sup>14</sup> At several points in his letter Clement therefore also calls for the support of the strong by the weak and of the poor (τοῦ πτωχοῦ) by the rich. But then harmony equally involves the weak respecting the strong and the poor praising God for giving to the rich to help him.<sup>15</sup> Philanthropy therefore also serves above all to establish a balance between the needy and the supportive, to promote harmony in the community and also in this respect – in reference to Lk 6, 36 – not only to be merciful but also to find mercy.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 10, 7, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 11, 1, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 38.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 12, 1, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 38. Clement here even refers to Rahab as φιλόξενος.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 2, 1, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 26. The church would have been satisfied with the gifts of Christ (τοῖς ἐφοδίσις τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἄρκου).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 2, 4, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 14, 3, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 42, where Clement encourages: „Let us be kind to one another (χρηστευσώμεθα ἑαυτοῖς), according to the mercy and mildness of our Creator (κατὰ τὴν εὐσπλαγγίαν καὶ γλυκύτητα τοῦ ποιήσαντος ἡμᾶς).”

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 23, 1, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 56.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 21, 11, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 52.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 15, 6, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 42.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 38, 2, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 72.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. 1 Clem 13, 2, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 40.

Ultimately, Clement impressively traces all philanthropy in the church back to God himself. He also seems to act through the members of the congregation. Accordingly, he formulates in the extensive closing prayer at the end of his letter:

"We beseech thee, O Lord, to be our helper and protector; save our afflicted, raise up the fallen, shew thyself to them that pray, heal the sick, set the erring of the people in the right way; feed the hungry, deliver our captives, raise up the weak, comfort the fainthearted; let all nations know thee, that thou art the only God, and Jesus Christ thy servant, and we thy people and sheep of thy pasture."<sup>17</sup>

With this prayer, the author of the letter also addresses many aspects of philanthropic activity in the early Christian communities. It is certainly not only about the effect of philanthropy towards non-Christians, but also about the ideal of the unity of a congregation so invoked by Clement. Even if this does not paint a historical picture of the ecclesia of Corinth, the theme of philanthropy clearly emerges as a central one for this community.

## **2. Dionysios of Corinth and the philanthropic ideal of a bishop of Corinth**

The correspondence of Dionysios of Corinth (around 170 AD)<sup>18</sup> with numerous cities in the Roman Empire is preserved only in a few fragments in the Church History of Euseb of Caesarea.<sup>19</sup> Most of the letters of Dionys are mentioned only very summarily, the correspondence with Soter of Rome is also quoted at least briefly. These quotations probably reflect not only central ideals of Euseb, but also of Dionysios himself. A closed doctrine of the Corinthian cannot be reconstructed from the fragments. The same applies to his intention, which can at best be worked out hypothetically. Most recently, Cavan W. Concannon has dealt intensively with the correspondence of Dionysios and tried to understand it detached from the framing and the intentions of Euseb.<sup>20</sup> In doing so, he has made it clear that the bishop, comparable to other confreres, engaged in extensive networking, which could have been of massive benefit to the community, especially in times of need. In any case, the congregation possibly received support from the Roman community during the Antonine plague.<sup>21</sup> The way in which Dionysios thanked the Romans for this may not only have corresponded to the rhetorical

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<sup>17</sup> 1 Clem 59, 4, ed. Fischer (cf. fn 2), 101.

<sup>18</sup> For dating, cf. Concannon, Dionysios (cf. fn. 1), 3, where he states that Dionysios was bishop in Corinth in the late 160s and early 170s.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Eus. h.e. IV 23, 1-13, ed. Eduard Schwartz, Eusebius Werke II 1, GCS 9, 1, Leipzig 1903, 374-378.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Cavan W. Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity. Trade, Network, and the Letters of Dionysios of Corinth*, Cambridge, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Concannon, *Christianity* (cf. fn. 19), 155-163; 175.

intentions of the Corinthian analysed by Concannon,<sup>22</sup> but also reflected his own philanthropic ideals.

The bishop, of course, does not report on the philanthropic practice in Corinth, but rather praises the ideal of such in Rome. Literally, this longest quotation from Dionysios in Euseb reads:

"From the beginning you had the custom (ἔθος) of helping all the brethren in manifold ways (εὐεργετεῖν) and of sending supports (ἐφόδια πέμπειν) to many communities in all cities.<sup>23</sup> By the gifts which you have sent from time immemorial, since as Romans you hold fast a traditional Roman custom (πατροπαράδοτον ἔθος Ῥωμαίων), you relieve the poverty of the poor (τὴν τῶν δεομένων πενίαν ἀναψύχοντας) and you support (ἐπιχορηγοῦντας) the brethren living in the mines (ἐν μετάλλοις). Your holy bishop Soter has not only kept this custom, he has extended it, inasmuch as he both distributes rich gifts (τὴν διαπεμπομένην δαψίλειαν) to the saints and comforts (παρακαλῶν) the brethren coming (to Rome) like a loving (φιλόστοργος) father comforts his children with pious words."<sup>24</sup>

It is remarkable in this text that Dionysios regards philanthropy, which he describes with the ancient *terminus technicus* εὐεργετεῖν, as an old Roman custom, thus by no means as an innovation of Christianity. In my opinion, the passage is to be understood in such a way that this custom already existed in pre-Christian times in Rome, i.e. that the capital took on a patronage function for the provinces as clients.<sup>25</sup> However, philanthropy is not only the support of other regions or communities, but also the care for the poor and prisoners and even the consolation of the afflicted. Care for the poor did not exist in the patronage system of pagan antiquity, nor did the other charitable activities of the Roman community mentioned by Dionysios. Concannon therefore

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. on Concannon's so-called „kinship diplomacy”, *ibid.* (cf. fn. 19), 178-208. In doing so, he opposes the older research position that saw Roman support of Corinth as a pure act of proto-Catholic imperialism and Dionysios as an extended arm of Roman foreign policy in the Greek East (*ibid.*, 178). The support must have been requested by Corinth (*ibid.*, 179f.). Concannon sees two steps in the rhetorical argumentation *ibid.*, 196 f.: „First, Dionysios constructs an ancient and characteristic Roman ethos (ἔθος) of benefaction as a means of justifying their financial gift to the Corinthians. Second, Dionysios invokes an ethnic and familial affiliation between the Roman and Corinthian collectives through resource to metaphors of kinship and the possession of a shared history.”

<sup>23</sup> Concannon, *Christianity* (cf. fn 19), 185, sees this as a monetary gift. This was a collection of smaller individual contributions.

<sup>24</sup> Eus. h.e. IV 23, 9, ed. Schwartz (cf. fn. 18), 376.

<sup>25</sup> Concannon, *Christianity* (cf. fn. 19), 184 states that economic support across geographical distances was „quite out of the ordinary in the ancient world”. However, it would have to be asked here whether Dionysios was not thinking of the special support of the provinces in times of crisis by the capital.

interprets the statements as internal Christian, which in my opinion does not really fit the term *πατροπαράδοτον*.<sup>26</sup> Concannon suspects a certain rhetoric behind this statement: on the one hand, Dionysios wanted to express his gratitude for support, but on the other hand, he did not want to express any concrete dependence on an equally venerable apostolic foundation<sup>27</sup> or even subordination of the Corinthians to the Romans.<sup>28</sup> After all, the Romans also had family ties with Corinth.<sup>29</sup> And on top of that, the gift was anchored in the Roman ethos, thus something normal.<sup>30</sup> The conclusion of the fragment in particular, on the other hand, emphasises Soter's patriarchal role<sup>31</sup> so strongly that the assumption of a rhetorical strategy on the part of Dionysios cannot be taken from the fragment as clearly as Concannon has attempted to do. Nevertheless, Concannon is certainly right when he sees in Soter less a classical patron than a good example of what Gerd Theissen calls "love-patriarchalism".<sup>32</sup>

It remains unclear to what extent the Corinthians oriented themselves on the Roman model or the ideal held by Dionysios. What is clear, however, is that the Corinthian bishop clearly formulated corresponding ideals in the 2nd century AD.

### 3 Christian inscriptions as evidence of philanthropy

In the inscriptions of the Peloponnese, phrases repeatedly appear that suggest that the corresponding buildings they adorned were charitable institutions. However, this is by no means always clearly the case. For example, the 6th century basilica in the Baths of Argos bore an inscription asking an apostle to help anyone in need (ICG 3440):

Ἀπό[στολε ----- βοή]θι τῶ χρωμένῳ, ἀμήν.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Concannon, *Christianity* (cf. fn. 19), 188. He sees Soter as a „minister of external affairs“ who provided support in the traditional way from a communal treasury and an additional collection: „Soter spearheaded a special collection effort that expanded on the 'foreign add' budget of the Roman collectives but did so by mobilizing the charitable actions of a large number of unnamed Romans.“

<sup>27</sup> Cf. on the rhetorical reference to the importance of Petros and Paulos for the Corinthian community Concannon, *Christianity* (cf. fn. 19), 206 f.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Concannon, *Christianity* (cf. fn. 19), 191; 195; esp. 197 f. On the relationship between the Corinthian and Roman congregations, cf. among others Karl Leo Noethlichs, „Korinth – ein Außenposten Roms? Zur kirchengeschichtlichen Bedeutung des Bischofs Dionysius von Korinth“, in: *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband 34 (2002), 232-247.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Concannon, *Christianity* (cf. fn. 19), 199.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Concannon, *Christianity* (cf. fn. 19), 200: „Dionysios thus praises the Romans and their bishop while also suggesting that such economic interdependencies should remain a normal and regular function of Roman identity among the various Christian collectives.“

<sup>31</sup> On Soter cf. a. Concannon, *Christianity* (cf. fn. 19), 186 with recourse to Peter Lampe: „[...] far from being the sole bishop of 'orthodox' Roman collectives, Soter was something like a minister of external affairs for the largest network of collectives in the city.“

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Concannon (cf. fn. 19), *Christianity*, 200.

Apostle, ---- help the one who is in need (of help)! Amen.

Whether the needy person is thought of as an "object" of philanthropy is no longer clear from the inscription. It is quite conceivable that a charitable institution was housed in the three-nave basilica. However, this can no longer be clearly discerned.

The same applies to inscriptions with mostly liturgical formulas from the city of Phleious near modern Nemea. Some of them are now in the museum there, some are lost. One of them is an inscription that quotes Psalm 112:7:

"Who raiseth up the lowly from the dust, and exalteth the poor from the dung."  
(ICG 2889)

Only a fragment of it has survived, which can be found on one edge in rather careful writing: ἀπὸ γῆς πτωχὸν κὲ ἀπὸ. It's a quotation of Psalm 112,7. An exact context of the find can no longer be determined. However, it is quite conceivable that it was in an institution of a philanthropic character. Comparable Psalm quotations at early Christian *diaconias* are documented – this applies in particular to the *diaconia* in Gerasa.<sup>33</sup> The placement of the verse in a church cannot be ruled out, but it is also no longer possible to prove it unequivocally and is probably not probable. It would be quite possible to locate a late antique *diaconia* in Phleious – the inscription is in any case dated to the period between 400 and 600 AD.

Whereas "*diaconiae*" were initially perceived by researchers primarily in Rome and Gaul,<sup>34</sup> there are now also detailed studies on the "*diakoniai*" in Constantinople and even in such remote desert cities as Gerasa.<sup>35</sup> Recently, a late antique *diakonia* has been identified in Ephesus.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore astonishing that comparable institutions have not yet been found in the Peloponnese. It remains to be said, however, that the assumption of a *diakonia* in Phleious on the basis of only a quotation from a psalm is a very uncertain hypothesis.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Andreas Müller, „Die Christianisierung staatlicher Wohlfahrtsinstitutionen im spätantiken Rom am Beispiel von S. Maria in Cosmedin“, in: *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 120 (2009), 160-186, 178s.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Henri Irénée Marrou, „L'origine orientale des diaconies romaines“, in: *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 57 (1940), 95-142; Thomas Sternberg, *Orientalium more secutus*, Räume und Institutionen der Caritas des 5. bis 7. Jahrhunderts in Gallien, Münster 1991.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. in generally for the deaconies Raimund Hermes, „Die stadtrömischen Diakonien“, in: *Römische Quartalsschrift* 91 (1996), 1-120; for the deaconies in Constantinople s. Müller, *Christianisierung* (cf. fn. 32), 177s.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Dimitrios Boulasikis and H. Taeuber, „Die Diakonie in der Insula M01 von Ephesos“, in: *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie* 14 (2008), S. 53-70; Verena Fugger, „Die älteste archäologisch nachweisbare Diakonie? Neue Überlegungen zum Baubefund der Insula M/1 in Ephesus“, will be published in *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie* 2022.

### 3.1. Church offices with philanthropic tasks

In any case, another element of early Christian philanthropy can be more clearly identified in the Peloponnese: The institute of the deaconess. I do not want to talk here about Phoebe from Kenchreae, of whom there is no evidence of charitable activity and whose diaconate in the 1st century AD also seems to have had other emphases. Deaconesses, or rather female deacons, are also frequently attested in ancient and late antique inscriptions from the Peloponnese. The female ministers mentioned here in late antiquity by no means only had liturgical but also philanthropic tasks. The Syriac Didascalia from the 3rd century in particular testifies to this. In the Peloponnese, references to women deacons can be found in at least four places. In Elis, a gravestone was found of the daughter of a deaconess whose name cannot be precisely identified, who died at the age of 23. She was married to a Herennianos and became a widow at an early age (ICG 3371). With the relatively detailed text from the time between 300 and 500 AD. in which the expectation of Herennianos is documented that the daughter should provide for her mother in old age, several pieces of information about family structures of deaconesses in Late Antiquity are attested. Accordingly, the text is also significant beyond the Peloponnese. A deaconess is probably also attested in Corinth, more precisely in Kraneion (ICG 2706). She probably bore the name Oikoumene and is described as very respectable (κοσμιωτάτη). Her funerary inscription, which is found on a reused stone, dates from between 400 and 600 A.D. A deaconess (διάκονος) is also attested by name in Patras (ICG 3455). The *diakonos* Agrippiane is given the interesting attribute θεοφιλεστάτη, which was also possible for deacons until the 6th century.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, unlike in other places in Achaia, in the Peloponnese the other attested deaconesses are not known by name.<sup>38</sup>

We receive more information about the office of the deaconess, for example, from a Middle Greek inscription now in the museum at Delphi. Accordingly, the deaconess Athanasia was appointed to her office by the bishop Pantamianos (κατασταθῆσα), i.e. she was not ordained at all (ICG 4054). An ordination is not attested, at least in this inscription. Such detailed information about the office of deaconess or female deacon is not offered in the Peloponnese, but about their family ties. Possibly the explicit designation as deaconess and not διάκονος on the tombstone of Athanasia, which was produced between 400 and 500 AD, is intended to indicate that she was unmarried? Even with this observation, however, we are absolutely in the realm of speculation.

A possibly Christian office is recorded on a gravestone in Lerna. There, an inscription dated between 400 and 600 AD mentions a gravedigger (δεκάνος) named

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<sup>37</sup> Literally, the text reads: Ἡ θεοφιλεστάτη διάκονος Ἀγριππιανὴ ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς αὐτῆς ἐποίησεν τὴν μούσῳσιν. For this still see Ute Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen im frühen Christentum. Epigraphische und literarische Studien*, FDKG 61, Göttingen 1996, 176.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. differently Andromacha from Ag. Leonidas in Klavsi, ICG 4026.



Georgios. He is even described as extremely blessed (ICG 2647). The inscription does not make clear whether this gravedigger was employed by the Christian community. In any case, however, it can be stated that Christians could work as gravediggers and receive extreme spiritual respect in the process. In this sense, the term *δεκάνοος* is also used by Justinian, among others.<sup>39</sup> As is well known, the burial of the dead was an important part of early Christian philanthropy.

### ***3.2. Late Antique euergesia in Epigraphic Evidence***

Charities and benefactors are by no means always documented in inscriptions with clearly Christian vocabulary. Even after the so-called Constantinian turn, there were still philanthropists in the classical sense in the Peloponnese anyway. Thus, between 353 and 358 AD, the proconsul Flavius Hermogenes is referred to as *εὐεργέτης* and also as *κτίστης* of the port of Lechaion (ICG 2531).

It is remarkable that also in the Peloponnese the transition from pagan to Christian *euergetism* seems to have been fluent. Accordingly, in Olympia, for example, a benefactor named Kyriakos is found who had worked for the new flooring of the basilica in the workshop of Pheidias (*ἐκαλλ(λ)ιέργησεν τὴν στρῶσιν*; ICG 3360). Although the attribute *εὐεργέτης* is not literally used here, Kyriakos is nevertheless cast in the role of the one who is a benefactor for public buildings in Olympia between 450 and 550 AD. However, Kyriakos is also seen as responsible for the building, i.e. the church. Literally, he is called the *emphyteutes* of the building (*ἐμφυτευτής τῆς κτήσεως*). What is noteworthy about his commitment is the final destination – for his salvation, not for the reputation towards the community or the public. This justification of charity does not correspond to the ancient concept of *euergesia*, but is by no means new in late antiquity. A Christianisation of ancient *euergetic* practice can be found as early as the time of Cyprian of Carthage. It found particular expression in his writing *De opere et eleemosynis*. The justification of charity with the prospect of eternal salvation is thus a well-known motive for philanthropy. In donor inscriptions on churches, this motif is now also found in building activity, which was an essential element of pagan *euergesy*. Here, too, epigraphy in its Christian guise takes up ancient traditions. There is further evidence of this in the Peloponnese. For example, under the otherwise unknown bishop Epiphanius of Hermione, the basilica there in the courtyard of the gymnasium was restored in the 6th century (*ἀνανεώθη τὸ ἔργον*; ICG 3446). As in many other churches, a mosaic inscription in the floor refers to this. In a church in Leukai, 3 km north-east of Molaoi, there is even an inscription from the 6th century, which – following the anaphora of Basileios and others – asks God for mercy for all those who

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Just. nov. 43 proem and 1, ed. Rudolf Schoell, *Novellae*, Corpus Iuris Civilis 3, Berlin 41912, 270.3f, 271.8, *ib.* 59.2, 319. For further inscription evidence, see G.H.W. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford, 1961, 336.

do something good for the church (ICG 3357). There exists a similar inscription also in Sikyon:

[Κύριε, μνήσθητι τοῦ δούλου σοῦ – - καὶ] ἁπάντων <τῶν> καλλιεργούν[των  
"Lord, remember all and have mercy on those who do good in your Holy Church!"  
it literally says (ICG 2882).

Here again, in the second inscription at least in Orlandos' reconstruction, euergetism is associated with eternal salvation in favour of the Church. What is particularly interesting about this inscription is that euergetism is paraphrased with liturgical language.

### **The Christians' dealings with ancient healing centres in the Peloponnese**

In the Peloponnese, there have been pagan healing centres in several places, most notably the most important Asclepius sanctuary of antiquity in Epidauros. Such healing centres, as already mentioned, often received a Christian transformation elsewhere in the Roman Empire in late antiquity. In the neighbourhood of the Peloponnese, the best-known example of this is the sanctuary of Asclepius below the Acropolis of Athens. There, the ancient cult was transformed into the worship of the Anargyrians Cosmas and Damian, but only in the 6th century A.D.<sup>40</sup> Such transformations would also be expected in the Peloponnese. Surprisingly, however, they did not occur in the area of healing cults. At best, churches arose in the vicinity of healing centres in late antiquity.

Let us look at the development of the Asklepieia in detail, starting in Corinth.<sup>41</sup> According to the finds of coins and lamps, the Asklepieion there was probably destroyed in the late 4th century.<sup>42</sup> According to the considerations already made by Carl Roebuck, not only Alaric's troops are to be held responsible for the destruction of the building, but also – after the Gothic attacks – the Christians, who removed the building material of the Asklepieion to erect other buildings. The destruction of the building therefore took place much earlier than in Athens. This may also be one reason why a Christian transformation of the building did not take place. In the 4th century, the potential pagan opposition may still have been too great to allow a transformation of the sanctuary to take place without opposition. In any case, it was also excluded from Christian use. Not even the Christian cemetery on the hill of the Asklepioin extended to the temple area

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. i.a. Arja Karivieri, „The Christianization of an Ancient Pilgrimage Site: The Case Study of the Athenian Asklepieion”, in: Ernst Dassmann and Josef Engermann, *Akten des XIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Christliche Archäologie Bonn 22.-28. September 1991*, t. 2, Münster, 1995, 898-905.

<sup>41</sup> On the Asklepieion in Corinth, see Carl Roebuck, *The Asklepieion and Lerna. Based on the excavations and preliminary studies of F.J. de Waele, Corinth: Results of excavations conducted by the American School of Classical studies at Athens 14*, Princeton 1951. Also Concannon, *Christianity* (cf. fn. 19), 163-165.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Roebuck, *Asklepieion* (cf. fn. 39), 360.

itself.<sup>43</sup> A church was definitely not built on the temple plateau. Thus, no cult continuity took place here. A church was also not built at the neighbouring Lerna spring until more than three centuries after its destruction.<sup>44</sup> This also does not speak for a transformation of the old cult, but rather for a new beginning.

An Asklepieion has also been excavated in the Arcadian town of Pheneos and was excellently documented by Konstantinos Kissas and Torsten Mattern.<sup>45</sup> This sanctuary was not mentioned in ancient sources, not even by Pausanias.<sup>46</sup> The cult images that clearly confirm the use of the excavated building as an Asklepieion, as well as its base and a floor mosaic in front of it, date from the second half of the second century BC, but a predecessor building of the complex from this period is archaeologically probable.<sup>47</sup> The Asklepieion in Pheneos was probably destroyed by an earthquake in the 2nd century AD and rebuilt and used as a sanctuary for the god.<sup>48</sup> Ceramic finds make it likely that the complex was used until the 5th or 6th century. It is possible, however, that the building was used more as a farmstead than as a place of worship. In any case, there is no evidence of Christian use here either.<sup>49</sup> At most, a cemetery was laid out at the Asklepieion, but its gravestones have not yet been precisely dated.<sup>50</sup>

One of the largest asklepieia in an urban context in the Peloponnese was excavated in Messene. The complex is also likely to have been built in the Hellenistic period. Its beginnings are dated to around 215 BC. The enormous complex not only had large assembly halls, but also places of worship for other gods such as a sanctuary for Artemis and, from Roman times, two temples for Roman emperors. Although this provided good architectural preconditions for Christian use, a transformation of the sanctuary into a Christian sanctuary cannot be observed here either – a Christian settlement was rather to

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Roebuck, *Asklepieion* (cf. fn. 39), 161.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Roebuck, *Asklepieion* (cf. fn. 39), 161; 169.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Konstantinos Kissas/ Torsten Mattern, „Das Asklepieion von Pheneos“, in: Martin Bachmann u.a. (edd.), *Bericht über die 49. Tagung für Ausgrabungswissenschaft und Bauforschung vom 4. bis 8. Mai 2016 in Innsbruck der Koldewey Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart 2017, 106-113.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Kissas, *Asklepieion* (cf. fn 44), 106.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Kissas, *Asklepieion* (cf. fn 44), 107.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Kissas, *Asklepieion* (cf. fn 44), 110.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Kissas, *Asklepieion* (cf. fn 44), 111.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Konstantinos Kissas/ Torsten Mattern/ Zoi Spyrinti, „Das Asklepieion im arkadischen Pheneos: Alte und neue Forschungen“, in: Heide Frielinghaus/ Jutta Stroszeck (ed.), *Kulte und Heiligtümer in Griechenland. Neue Funde und Forschungen*, Möhnesee 2017, 115-131, 127.

the east<sup>51</sup> and also the large early Christian basilica in Messene to the west outside it. According to the extensive research of Petros Themelis, there does not seem to have been any cult continuity in the Asklepieion of Messene.<sup>52</sup> From the second half of the 4th century onwards, there was no further cultic use of the Asklepieion in Messene.<sup>53</sup>

The most famous Asklepieion in the Peloponnese, and indeed in the ancient world, was in Epidauros. There, too, an immediate Christian transformation cannot be observed. Little is known about the end of cult practice in Epidauros. Bernhard Kötting already suspected less a violent Christian intervention that would have led to the end of the sanctuary than the severe earthquake of 375 AD and the Gothic invasion of 395 AD as the reason for the discontinuation of cult practice. Kötting also assumes that the edicts of Theodosios I and Valentinian II also contributed to the end of the Asklepieion.<sup>54</sup> However, there is no clear evidence for this. Pilgrimage does not seem to have ceased completely with the end of the sanctuary. This may also have been one reason why a large five-nave basilica 60 m long and 45 m wide was built to the east below the sanctuary. This was located directly next to the *propylon* of the sanctuary. Sotiriou dates the construction to the 4th century, but without further evidence. The basilica was later reduced in size. It was dedicated to St. John.<sup>55</sup> It is striking that the actual sanctuary in Epidauros was not transformed into a Christian site. A further Christian use of the sanctuary, which was at least considered by the excavator Panagiotis Kabbadias, cannot be clearly proven and, to my knowledge, has not been discussed further in later literature. Another problem in stating such a continued use is that almost exclusively spolia were used in the buildings from the 5th century AD onwards, which makes dating considerably more difficult.<sup>56</sup> In any case, Kabbadias assumes that the Christians

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. V. Bardani, „Παλαιοχριστιανικές επιγραφές Μεσσήνης,” in: Πέτρος Θέμελης/ Βούλα Κόντη (ed.), *Πρωτοβυζαντινή Μεσσήνη και Ολυμπία: Αστικός και αγροτικός χώρος στη Δυτική Πελοπόννησο*, Athens, 2002, 82-98, 92.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Πέτρος Θέμελης, „Υστερορωμαϊκή και πρωτοβυζαντινή Μεσσήνη”, in: Πέτρος Θέμελης/ Βούλα Κόντη (ed.), *Πρωτοβυζαντινή Μεσσήνη και Ολυμπία: Αστικός και αγροτικός χώρος στη Δυτική Πελοπόννησο*, Athens 2002, 20-58, 34-38.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. a. [http://ancientmessene.gr/ancientmessene.gr/monuments\\_articles\\_en6e03.html?id=13](http://ancientmessene.gr/ancientmessene.gr/monuments_articles_en6e03.html?id=13), viewed on 29.7.2021.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Bernhard Kötting, Art. „Epidauros”, in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 5 (1962), 531-539, 538.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Kötting, „Epidauros” (cf. fn. 53), 538f. Still reviewing: Georgios Sotiriou, „Αἱ παλαιοχριστιανικαὶ βασιλικαὶ τῆς Ἑλλάδος”, in: *Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς*, 1929, 162-248, 198-201.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Kötting, *Epidauros*, 533 (cf. fn. 53), who, however, only assumes a further use of the tholos, with erroneous reference to P. Kabbadias, *Τὸ Ἱερόν τοῦ Ἀσκληπίου ἐν Ἐπιδαύρῳ καὶ ἡ θεραπεία τῶν Ἀσθενῶν, Βιβλιοθήκη τῆς ἐν Ἀθῆναις Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἐταιρείας* II, Athens, 1900, 171. Kabbadias records *ibid.*: Οἱ Χριστιανοὶ γενόμενοι ὕστερον κύριοι τοῦ Ἱεροῦ, κατὰ τὸ

destroyed all the pagan statues, but left the central ancient buildings of the sanctuary unchanged. Christian facilities would therefore have been built elsewhere in the sanctuary.<sup>57</sup> This may also have to do with the fact that the central buildings were so dilapidated by earthquakes and Gothic invasions that it no longer seemed sensible to rebuild them. But it may also have to do with the fact that the Christians in the Peloponnese did not dare to build over the Christian sanctuaries out of reverence for the ancient ones. We will hardly be able to go beyond hypotheses here. In any case, it is remarkable that, unlike in many other places in the late antique world, Christian healing cults are not to be observed in the Peloponnese. At most, after the Slavic invasions, the veneration of Cyrus and John can be observed at Monemvasia, which points to a Christian healing cult in the Byzantine Peloponnese. In any case, I am not aware of any patron saints as Cosmas and Damian who were associated with a healing cult and represented important evidence of early Christian philanthropy.

### **Conclusion**

Even though it is difficult to draw a complete picture of philanthropy in the Peloponnese, some traces of it can be found there. The surviving early Christian epistolary literature makes it clear that philanthropy was certainly a topic in the Corinthian community and that philanthropic ideals were formulated in this context. The examination of the inscriptions not only reveals tendencies towards the transformation of ancient *euergetism*, but also provides evidence of institutions and, above all, charitably active individuals. It is astonishing that the ancient healing centres that are relatively common in the Peloponnese, on the other hand, did not receive any transformation through Christianity. This may be due to the fact that the sanctuaries were destroyed too early by natural disasters and that after the Slavic invasions of the Peloponnese, a transformation of the healing sites was no longer in order.

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πρῶτον ἤμισυ τῆς Ε' μ. Χ. ἑκατονταετηρίδος (ἴδε σ. 23), κατεσκεύασαν ὡσαύτως κτίσματά τινα ἐν ταῦτα ὅμως διέ-[172]φερον τοῦ περὶ οὗ ὁ λόγος τείχους, διότι ἦσαν μὲν καὶ ταῦτα κατεσκευασμένα διὰ παντοίων λίθων ἐξ ἀρχαίων μνημείων, ἀλλ' ἐν αὐτοῖς ἦσαν ἐνετειχισμένα καὶ γλυπτὰ, τεμάχια ἀγαλμάτων καὶ ἀναγλύφων. Cf. a. *ibid.*, p. 23f. There Kabbadias explicitly states concerning the Tholos and the temple of Apollo: Ὁ ναὸς τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ καὶ ἡ θόλος τοῦ Πολυκλείτου, τὰ δύο τοῦλάχιστον ταῦτα οἰκοδομήματα, διετέλουν τότε ἀνέπαφα- κατέπεσαν, ὡς φαίνεται, ταῦτα καὶ διεσεισθη τὸ θέατρον διὰ τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα, κατὰ τὰ ἔτη 522 καὶ 551, γενομένων, ὡς γνωστόν, ἐν Ἑλλάδι καὶ ἰδίως ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ φοβερῶν σεισμῶν.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Kabbadias, *Ἱερὸν* (cf. fn. 55), 23.