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"God-box" – the figure of intoxicated, mad old hag in the writings of St John Chrysostom*

Abstract. The article deals with the meaning and function of the figure of an old, drunken, and foolish woman in the writings of St. John Chrysostom. The issue is discussed historical, social, cultural, theological, and rhetorical levels. My point of departure is the figure of old, drunken hag making amulets and performing healings. Subsequently, I move to the analysis of wine and madness significance, as well as their theological dimension in early Christian authors. This consequently enables me to reconstruct the rhetorical function of the figure of *anus ebria et delirans* in the homilies of St John Chrysostom, including its role as the antithesis of Christ and personification of the pagan world.

Keywords: St John Chrysostom, old hag, drunkenness, madness, paganism, trickster.

Pi'a atua 'god-box' – Eric Dodds uses this Polynesian term to describe the phenomenon of people driven by demons or spirits (Dodds, 2004, p. 58). With all the awareness of cultural differences we will also employ this term in order to discover and pinpoint the meaning and function of the motif of the old hag – a drunkard,[1] which is a unique feature of the writings of St John Chrysostom (350–407). The reason why this Doctor of the Church invokes such an eccentric figure, which

* The text of the article is founded on the findings of a study published in the chapter I authored, titled: *Anus ebria et delirans oraz vetula: IV – X w.* (Borowicz, 2016, pp. 77–104) and research conducted in 2023 at the Warburg Institute, University of London as part of the Excellence Initiative – Research University programme.

[1] PG 55, 665.71 ("*haec ebriarum vetularum sunt deliramenta*"); PG 57, 127 ("*aniles fabulas ebriorum esse inventa*"); PG 57, 353.38 ("*Itaqae anicularum ebriarum hæc verba sunt et puerorum terricula*"); PG 60, 234.18 ("*Haec mulieris verba sunt vetulae ebriae et indecorae, eorum qui forum frequentant, lenonis*"); PG 61, 380.34 ("*ebriae aniculae inter se susurrant*"); PG 61, 434.50 ("*ac temulentis vetulis digna*").

'remembers' the times of the Greek comic poets, was extremely important for the new faith. A winding path leads to the discovery of the complex structure of this leitmotif taking the traveller to explore the situation of old women – village witch-healers and healing magic against the background of early Christian reality, the important social problem of excessive drinking in those times, the *theology of inebriation* and rhetorical inventiveness of St John Chrysostom.

Quacks and healers – old women

At the end of antiquity, many Christians were still relying on the services offered by old women - village witch-healers and quacks. Their popularity was due, among other things, to the widespread beliefs of Christians, pagans and Jews in the existence of various intermediaries - demons and spirits and the false worship of angels. St John Chrysostom writes about the latter in *Homilia IX in Epistolam ad Colossenses 3, 16* using the following words:

> If thou have said, "In the Name of Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost," with faith, thou hast accomplished everything. So, when used in commanding diseases, terrible is The Name. Therefore the devil introduced those of the Angels, envying us the honor. Such incantations are for the demons. Even if it be Angel, even if it be Archangel, even if it be Cherubim, allow it not; for neither will these Powers accept such addresses, but will even toss them away from them, when they have beheld their Master dishonored. "I have honored thee," He saith, "and have said, Call upon Me"; and dost thou dishonor Him? If thou chant this incantation with faith, thou wilt drive away both diseases and demons, and even if thou have failed to drive away the disease, this is not from lack of power, but because it is expedient it should be so." (PG 62, 392; NPNF I, 13, p. 545)

False worship of angels, false, deceptive words, superstitious formulas, magical incantations uttered by witch-healers and quacks are praises of false gods and the sin of idolatry. In this context St John Chrysostom introduces the figure of the drunken old hag in his *Catechesis II ad illuminandos* (5). The homilist addressed the Antiochians awaiting their baptism (*illuminatio*) in the following words:

> Thou dost not only have amulets always with thee, but incantations bringing drunken and half-witted old women into thine house, and art thou not ashamed, and dost thou not blush, after so great philosophy, to be terrified at such things? and there is a graver thing than this error. For when we deliver these exhortations, and lead them away, thinking that they defend themselves, they say, that the woman is a Christian who makes these incantations, and utters nothing else than the name of God. On this account I especially hate and turn away from her, because she makes use of the name of God, with a view to ribaldry. For even the demons uttered the name of God, but still they were demons […]. (PG 49, 231-240; NPNF I, 9, p. 238)

It is a stern admonition to Christians-to-be that they should get rid of their former habits, practices and improper rituals. One of these was to invite to their homes old hags – drunken and half-witted village witch-healers using amulets and incantations. In *Contra Judaeos* (8, 6), the homilist exhorts:

> Lazarus wrestled all his days with hunger, disease, and poverty, […] Yet he did not search for a soothsayer, he did not tie tokens around his neck, and he did not resort to the charm-users, he did not call in those skilled in witchcraft, nor did he do anything he was forbidden to do. (PG 48, 937; see: Baron, 2013, p. 81)

Despite the growing evangelisation and christianisation at the time of St John Chrysostom, St Augustine and St Caesarius of Arles, magical practices were still extremely vibrant (Hamman, 2007, col. 2971–2973; Dickie, 1995; Fögen, 1995; Ożóg, 2015). The anonymous author of the *Constitutiones Apostolorum* (2, 62, 2) written in the Antiochian milieu quotes the following words from the *Book of Exodus* (22, 17): "You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live" ('φαρμακοὺς οὐ περιποιήσετε') (see also: Deut. 18, 10–11).[2] The figure of the old woman – village witch-healer can probably be related with the type of magic referred to as *γοητεία* and *magia nocens*, i.e. primitive magic with elements of medical knowledge. Those practising it were called φαρμακός ('sorcerer', 'witch-healer'), γόης ('sorcerer', 'witch'), or *praecantator* ('sorcerer', 'enchanter', 'healer', 'quack'). The latter is most often visited by mothers when their child is ill, as St Caesar of Arles mentions in his sermons (*Sermo* 52, 5). What's more, these figures were often regarded as fitting into the Christian model of faith, as they cast their charms with the invocation of God's name. Old women sang 'incantations' ('*excantamenta*'), used 'amulets' ('*ligamina*', '*ligaturas*'), and often forced expulsion of foetuses ('*mulieres interfectores infantum*'[3]). In this half-Christianised, half-pagan world of late antiquity, the differences between the sign of the cross and amulets, the chanting of psalms and incantations, pagan magic and Christian miracles were not yet entirely clear. For the Christian, as we read in Homilia VIII in *Epistolam ad Colossenses 3*, *5–7*, the only true weapon against evil, the only medicine and remedy should be faith:

> Nothing is holier than that tongue, which in evils giveth thanks to God; truly in no respect doth it fall short of that of martyrs; both are alike crowned, both this, and they. For over this one also stands the executioner to force it to deny God, by blasphemy; the devil stands over it, torturing it with executioner thoughts, darkening it with despondencies. If then one bear his griefs, and give thanks, he hath gained a crown of martyrdom. For instance, is her little child sick, and doth she give God thanks? this is a crown to her. What torture so bad that despondency is not worse? still it doth not force her to vent forth a bitter word. It dies: again she hath given thanks. She hath become the daughter of Abraham. For if she sacrificed not with her own hand, yet was she pleased with the sacrifice, which is the same; she felt no indignation when the gift was taken away. Again, is her child sick? She hath made no amulets [*ligamina*]. It is counted to her as martyrdom, for she

[2] It should be stressed here that the world of late antique magic was extremely vibrant and diverse. The Synod of Narbonne (589) mentions, among other things, mulieres divinatores ('witches', 'diviners'), who were performing lustration of houses. Synod of Narbonne, canon 14: "*si qui uiri ac mulieres diuinatores, quos dicunt esse caragios atque sorticularios…*" ("if any men or women engaged in divination, who are called sorcerers and diviners …"), (Wygralak, 2011, pp. 100–101, fn. 407. Saint Gregory of Tours, in one part of his *History of the Francs* titled: *De muliere phitonissa* (7, 44) writes about a woman: "who had a spirit of divination and won great gain for her owners by prophesying […] And if any one suffered from theft or any wrongdoing she would at once tell where the thief had gone, to whom he had given the property, or what he had done with it" (Brehaut 1916, p. 185). After an unsuccessful exorcism, the Bishop of Verdun, Ageric, let her go.

[3] They are mentioned, as well as men called *herbarii viri*, by the penitential of Raban Maur and the penitential of Fleury.

> sacrificed her son in her resolve. For what, even though those things are unavailing, and a mere cheat and mockery, still there were nevertheless those who persuaded her that they do avail: and she chose rather to see her child dead, than to put up with idolatry. As then she is a martyr, whether it be in her own case, or in her son's, that she hath thus acted; or in her husband's, or in any other's of her dearest; so is that other one an idolatress. For it is evident that she would have done sacrifice, had it been allowed her to do sacrifice; yea, rather, she hath even now performed the act of sacrifice. For these amulets [*ligamina*], though they who make money by them are forever rationalizing about them, and saying, "we call upon God, and do nothing extraordinary," and the like; and "the old woman [*vetula*] is a Christian," says he, "and one of the faithful"; the thing is idolatry. Art thou one of the faithful? sign the Cross; say, this I have for my only weapon; this for my remedy [medicamentum]; and other I know none. Tell me, if a physician [*medicus*] should come to one, and, neglecting the remedies [medicamentis] belonging to his art, should use incantation, should we call that man a physician [medicum]? By no means: for we see not the medicines [*pharmaca*] of the healing art; so neither, in this case, do we see those of Christianity [*christianismi*]. Other women again tie about them the names of rivers, and venture numberless things of like nature. Lo, I say, and forewarn you all, that if any be detected, I will not spare them again, whether they have made amulet, or incantation, or any other thing of such an art as this. What then, saith one, is the child to die? If he have lived through this means, he did then die, but if he have died without this, he then lived. But now, if thou seest him attaching himself to harlots [*meretricibus*], thou wishest him buried, and sayest, "why, what good is it for him to live?" but when thou seest him in peril of his salvation, dost thou wish to see him live? Heardest thou not Christ saying, "He that loseth his life, shall find it; and he that findeth it, shall lose it"? Believest thou these sayings, or do they seem to thee fables? Tell me now, should one say, "Take him away to an idol temple [*templum idolorum*], and he will live"; wouldest thou endure it? Why? "Because," she saith, "he urges me to commit idolatry; but here, there is no idolatry, but simple incantation […]". (PG 62, 357-358; NPNF I, 13, p. 526–27)

In the excerpt quoted above, St John Chrysostom clearly contrasts the medical art (*medicinae*) with the witchcraft and idolatrous practices of old women. This antinomy places Christians on the side of Aristotelian rationalism: just as a man who uses witchcraft cannot be called a physician, neither can a woman who uses amulets be called a Christian.[4] And at this point comes the important conclusion of the homilist: the true medicine (*medicamentum*) is faith. "The Cross, even today, heals illness, casts out devils, demolishes the ghosts of superstition and sorcery," – St Cyril of Jerusalem wrote in a similar way in *Catechetes mystagogicae* (13, 40). The devilish sign used by the woman quack, an amulet, turns out to be the contradiction of the medicine she wants to administer, and therefore, at the same time, it is the contradiction of the Cross. The homilist mentions two types of such objects. The first type was made on the spot by the woman witch-healer: *ligamina* 'ties, bandages'

[4] "For if a non-medical person, and therefore unfamiliar with the art of medicine, sets about healing, then such a person destroys the patient's health. Medicines alone do not heal. It is essential that the person administering them has the necessary education. If someone considers himself a physician, it does not mean that he is one [...]. Let us assume that someone, having built a hospital in which he gathered students, collected instruments and medicines, decided to receive the diseased. Is that enough to heal? No. What is needed is education, without which not only can the diseased not be helped, but on the contrary they can be condemned to suffering." John Chrysostom wrote in *Homilia XIII De adversa Valetudine et Medicis* (PG 63, 651–656), see: Iluk (2022, p. 470).

(from the Latin word: *ligo* – 'to tie, bind, bind together'; *ligamen* – 'a tie, bandage'). They had the form of pieces of cloth on which incantations were placed and then they were tied to the patient or their belongings. The second was *ligaturas* – 'a band, ligature', 'an amulet', 'a twisting or twining' (from the Latin word *ligare* – 'to tie, bind, bind together, bind up'; *ligatura* - 'a band', 'a bunch, a cluster'). Saint Isidore of Seville, in his *Etymologiae* (8, 9, 30), describes *ligaturae* as "amulets in the form of ribbons containing cursed remedies, condemned by the art of medicine, either in the form of magic incantations, or magic signs, or any other thing hung and tied" (Wygralak, 2011, p. 89). They were supposed to manifest a healing effect.[5] The attention that St. John Chrysostom pays to the opposition between the art of medicine (and the physician) and superstition (and the woman witch-healer) stems from the fact that the only true physician is Christ himself, who casts out demons and performs healings from evil spirits and diseases (Flis, 1990, p. 135 nn).[6] The significant problem of the persistence of pagan rituals in Christian communities of the time is evidenced by the resolutions of the assembly of bishops at Ancyra in 314, which took up disciplinary measures (Kieling, 2010, p. 285 ff.). The synod enacted a number of canons offering appropriate behaviour of the 'fallen', including canon 24 proclaiming that:

> They who practice divination, and follow the customs of the heathen, or who take men to their houses for the invention of sorceries, or for lustrations, fall under the canon of five years' [penance], according to the prescribed degrees; that is, three years as prostrators, and two of prayer without oblation. (NPNF II, 14, p. 161)

The harsh, admonitory tone of St John Chrysostom's sermons thus had a practical dimension. It was, however, difficult to eradicate certain primitive beliefs in which social customs and traditions were deeply rooted, so attempts were made in western Europe to fit such pagan customs into Christian religion. Saint Martin, bishop of Dumio and Braga (sixth century), in his treatise *De correctione rusticorum* (16, 6), indicated that 'devilish incantations' should be replaced by 'holy incantations' – prayers such as *Believe in God or Lord's Prayer*, or the sign of the cross, which is the best defence against magical powers (Wygralak, 2002).

Drunkenness

[5] "A certain man, bedridden, was suffering excruciatingly. A woman comes, approaches the bed and says to the sick man: make this knot and you will be healed," St Augustine, *Sermo* (236, 7), Wygralak (2012, p. 260). Clergy were also involved in making them, the Church condemned it and fought against it. Resolutions Concilium Agathense – of the Synod of Agde (506) state that the clergy may not make magical objects: Canon 21. "For it is forbidden for altar servants or clerics to be magicians or sorcerers or to make objects called amulets." (Wygralak, 2011, p. 90). Similarly, earlier the synod of Laodicea (late fourth century).

[6] Besides, the terms 'heal', 'cast out demons' and 'forgive sins' were treated synonymously in Jesus' time (Vermes, 1984, p. 10). Help could only come through God. It should be emphasised that the use of secret practices, including healing, is already forbidden by the authors of the *Old Testament*. The only hope is Yahweh. (Ps 91, 9). He himself, or through his messengers, heals from illnesses (Deut. 32, 39). Hence, seeking help in magical practices was considered idolatry (2 Kgs 1, 1–4; 2 Chr 16, 12).

Ani and *vetulae*, in addition to 'healing', drank heavily. St John Chrysostom's combination of female old age, healing magic and drunkenness results from close observation of the society. Wine, in the general opinion of the people of the time, had a significant medicinal effect (especially when heated up), and had beneficial effect for the elderly, protecting the body from hypothermia (Borowicz & Przybylska, 2010). "Certainly, above all, this age needs wine, as it is impotent, but it needs it in small quantities" – wrote the saint in *Homilia IV in Epistula ad Titum* (2,2). Nonetheless, 'this age' has repeatedly been used as a pretext for drinking, which is why we this theme is taken up in homilies all too often.

> "That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate […]". For there are many things which at this period make men otherwise than vigilant […] For there are, indeed there are, among the old, some who rave and are beside themselves, some from wine, and some from sorrow. For old age makes them narrowminded. […] "The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness." That is, that in their very dress and carriage they exhibit modesty. "Not false accusers, not given to much wine." For this was particularly the vice of women and of old age. For from their natural coldness at that period of life arises the desire of wine, therefore he [St Paul - author's note] directs his exhortation to that point, to cut off all occasion of drunkenness, wishing them to be far removed from that vice, and to escape the ridicule that attends it. For the fumes mount more easily from beneath, and the membranes (of the brain) receive the mischief from their being impaired by age, and this especially causes intoxication. (NPNF I, 13, p. 920)

Here we have an attempt at a medical explanation of women's excessive drinking: it is senile frigidity that triggers the thirst for wine, which makes old women talkative and say inappropriate things. By bursting into laughter, they are lewd, since laughter implies promiscuity, as already mentioned by Clement of Alexandria in his treatise *Paidagogos* (2, 5, 46). Similarly, St Basil the Great, in his treatise *Against Drunkenness*, wrote that drunken women have 'shameless look' and a 'licentious smile'. Nevertheless, the medical aspect of drunkenness becomes only a pretext for attributing moral defects to old women, taking us from the physiological sphere into the rhetorical and ethical dimension. In the case of the theme of *anus ebria et delirans*, the well-established in culture relationship between drunkenness, madness and foolishness and between drunkenness and lewdness is relevant here.[7] St John Chrysostom treats drunkenness as a disease, especially a disease of the mind, lack of reason, and cause for lewdness and other sins associated with impurity, moral decay, and, finally, possession (Szczur, 2013). In *Homilia LVII in Mathaeum* (17, 10, 5) he warns using the words of the evangelist: "Use little wine, for thy fornications, thy frequent filthy talking, for the other wicked desires to which drunkenness is wont to give birth" (PG 58, 557-566). In *Homilia I de Statuis ad populum Antiochiae* (11):

> […] For the immoderate drinking of wine produces not fewer diseases of body and of soul […] bringing in as it does upon the mind the war of the passions, and a tempest of perverse thoughts, besides reducing the firmness of the body to a relaxed and flaccid condition. […] For wine was given us of God, not that we might be drunken, but that

[7] "And do not get drunk with wine, in which lies debauchery" – St John Chrysostom writes in *Adversus ebriosos et de resurrectione*, quoting the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph 5, 18), PG 50, 434–442.

> we might be sober; that we might be glad, not that we get ourselves pain. "Wine," it says, "maketh glad the heart of man," […] for wine is the work of God, but drunkenness is the work of the devil. Wine maketh not drunkenness; but intemperance produceth it. (NPNF I, 9, p. 460–61)[8]

Drunkenness, beyond its strictly medical, ethical (moral)[9] and aesthetic[10] dimensions, is thus inscribed in a three-tier antinomy:

God – the good – Christianity vs evil – evil – paganism.

Gaining religious and theological sanction, it becomes an element of Christian dialectic and rhetoric. An analogous process applies to madness. Both states allow the homilist to stigmatise not only the reprehensible behaviour of Christians (idolatry), but also directly the pagans themselves, e.g. by combining in the figure of *anus ebria et delirans* old hags – healers and "Christian babooshkas" with the Dionysian old bacchantes known to us from ancient comedy, characteristic wine flasks, numerous epigrams, the writings of Clement of Alexandria or Nonnus of Panopolis (Borowicz, 2010, pp. 93–225; 2016, pp. 65–75).

The dialectic of drunkenness: the good and bad drinking cup

Let us now turn to the theological and rhetorical dimensions of drunkenness. In his Good Sunday sermon Adversus ebriosos et de resurrectione *Domini nostri Iesu Christi*, St John Chrysostom wrote:

> Don't be drunk with wine, which is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit "(Eph. 5:18). For this is a good kind of drunkenness. […] Fill your mind with the Spirit as a cup is filled up to the brim, so that the devil will no longer be able to pull you down. For it's necessary not just to partake of the Spirit, but to be filled with the Spirit – "with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19; cf. Col. 3:16), as you are filled today. […] There is a drinking cup that's good, a drinking cup that produces prudence. It's a spiritual drinking cup, the cup filled with the immaculate Blood of the Master. This cup does not induce drunkenness; it does not induce dissipation. […] And lest you immediately have

[8] See *Homilia LVII in Mathaeum* (17, 10, 5): "Use little wine, for thy fornications, thy frequent filthy talking, for the other wicked desires to which drunkenness is wont to give birth." […] Not the wine, but the intemperance of such as take an evil delight in it. […] do not find fault with the wine, but with the drunkenness […]. Wine was given, that we might be cheerful, not that we might behave ourselves unseemly; that we might laugh, not that we might be a laughingstock; that we might be healthful, not that we might be diseased; that we might correct the weakness of our body, not cast down the might of our soul. […] For wine was given for gladness, "Yea, wine," so it is said, "maketh glad the heart of man:" (Ps. 103). (NPNF I, 10, p. 621)

[9] Clement of Alexandria, *Paidagogos* (2, 5, 48): "[…] in liquor crafty men's characters are wont to be seen through, stripped as they are of their mask through the caitiff licence of intoxication, through which reason, weighed down in the soul itself by drunkenness, is lulled to sleep, and unruly passions are roused, which overmaster the feebleness of the mind." (ANF 2, p. 536)

[10] "[…] Drunkenness! that root of all evils. […] For what is a more wretched thing than drunkenness! The drunken man is a living corpse. Drunkenness is a demon self-chosen, a disease without excuse, an overthrow that admits of no apology; The drunken man […] breath being stench. The belchings, and gapings, and speech of the intoxicated, are at once unpleasant and offensive, and are utterly abhorrent to those who see and converse with them," John Chrysostom, *Homilia I de Statuis ad populum Antiochiae* (12). (NPNF I, 9, p. 461)

> fear upon hearing the word "intoxicated," thinking he's referring to something causing enfeeblement, he adds that it's a source of power and strength. For this is a new kind of drunkenness, providing strength, making one strong and powerful; for it flows from the spiritual Rock. Its role is not to divert one's thoughts from the right way, but to increase one's spiritual thinking. So let us become inebriated with this kind of drunkenness. (PG 50, 433 ff; trans. Ford)

The very title introduces an interesting juxtaposition hinting at a particular kind of connection between inebriation and eternal life. It is grounded in the saint's re-definition of the concept of drunkenness itself. In the sermon, he makes a rhetorical juxtaposition between two types of drunkenness, two 'drunkards' – the spiritual and the real. This division, at first glance, seems strange and incomprehensible, since drunkenness usually meant explicitly negative states for the Christian of the time, such as possession, madness, ecstasy, lewdness and even debasement comparable to animal-like behaviour.[11] This set of pejorative behaviours accompanying drunkenness makes up a state which is a far-reaching deviation from the norm, an utterly negative figure, which, however, St John Chrysostom inverts and redefines in a way by exploiting the potential it contains for binding extreme states. Such an extreme state situated at the opposite end is presented as being filled with the Spirit. It is the good drunkenness that the homilist strips away from its physiological and literal aspect, understanding it metaphorically as intoxication, not so much with wine, but with the Spirit. Here, the state of arousal induced by wine acquires a positive and even desirable dimension, resulting not in promiscuity but in temperance. The intoxication takes on features that are not ecstatic, but restraining and calming: "It does not cause infirmity [...] but awakens strength [...] strengthens [...] brings sobriety". The mind--cup filled with the Spirit is the opposite of the wine-filled mind of the drunkard, who, "having buried his soul in his body as in a grave, moves his dead body around" (PG 50, 434–442). Intoxication and excessive drinking – a kind of bewilderment and holy inebriation with the Spirit, became a desirable state, gaining theological sanction. 'The good cup of drunkenness', 'the spiritual cup', 'the immaculate cup', 'the cup of the blood of the Lord', 'dreadful to demons' was already something quite different from drunkenness leading to madness and promiscuity.[12] This spiritual intoxication found its special dimension in its transposition into the literal nature of material culture. From the mid-third to the end of the fourth century, glass vessels bearing the inscription ΠΙΕ ΖΗΣΗΣ – 'drink, and you shall live'[13] were produced in the Roman world (including Rome, Palestine, Alexandria and Colonia). Some of the vases, decorated with scenes from the Old Testament, hunting scenes or the Good Shepherd motif, use the aforementioned phrase in its evangelical meaning: "ANIMA DVLCIS. PIE ZESES IN DEO", where the Greek ΠΙΕ in the Latin transcription acquires a second meaning - 'devoutly' (Auth, 1996, p. 110). A glass plate from the Kalabsha in lower Nubia bears the inscription: ΠΙΕ ΖΗΣΗΣ ΔΙΑ ΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΑΕΙ;

[11] The subject of drunkenness was taken up in a similar tone by Basil the *Great in Homilia XIV* in ebriosos.

[12] See 'cup of the Lord' and 'cup of demons', *Sermo de sacrilegia* 26; 1 Cor 10, 21: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons".

[13] Glass flask from Prague with a view of Puteoli (today's Pozzuoli), inscription: "f*elix pie zesaes cum tuis*" (Cooley, 2012, p. 108, fig. 1.34).

a *chrismon*, the monogram of Christ, is placed in the centre of the vessel (Auth, 1996, p. 107). Pagan and Dionysian in its nature, the idea of intoxication, of salvation through wine (Greek: αἰώνιος μέθη, Latin: *perpetua ebrietas*), becomes thus embedded into the repertoire of Christian symbolism.[14]

The dialectic of madness: *sancta insania* and *deliratio*

An analogous process concerned the categories of madness and foolishness. It had both a positive sanction ('holy madness' – *sancta insania*) and a negative sanction (madness as the exercise of magic). According to St John Chrysostom, the adherents of pagan religions were not only debased and stupefied drunkards, but precisely madmen and fools – sorcerers practising magic and selling devilish amulets. In *Adversus ebriosos et de resurrectione Domini nostri Iesu Christi*, he writes:

> Drunkenness is a voluntary madness, a betrayal of one's reasoning; it's a tragedy worthy of ridicule and scorn, a disease that mocks the one having it; it's a self-chosen demon, more grievous than mental derangement. […] And the drunkard suffers the same kinds of things as does the one who's demon-possessed. (PG 50, 434-442; trans. Ford)

A madman is someone with a special connection to magic, sorcery, demons and devils.[15] Many early Christians professed and understood the new religion precisely in a magical way which was inappropriate from the point of view of Church teaching. Hence Caesarius of Arles wrote in the *Sermo* (52, 3) that people who indulge in magic and witch-healing are 'fools' – *stulti homines*.[16] Saint John Chrysostom thus uses the notion of madness and magic as a rhetorically useful tool to define social boundaries, stigmatising and denying counterexamples. In this way, true religion (Christianity) is contrasted with insane paganism with its characteristic witch-healing and magic, for "magic […] is simply the religious practices of one group viewed with disdain by another. […] the concept of 'magic' serves to distinguish 'us' from 'them' […] Your religion is my magic […]" (Ritner, 2001, p. 44). Witchcraft, magical practices, the use of spells and amulets (considered foolish, clownish and superstitious) evoked at the same time the problem of idolatry. The old hag witch-healer in the writings of St John Chrysostom is therefore half-witted and insane because her behaviour is wicked. She is a *vetula scelera* – 'clownish, wicked, blasphemous woman', she is *anus delirans* – 'mad old hag'. Her madness is *deliratio* - 'foolishness, madness', 'delirium, lunacy', having nothing to do with 'holy madness'; it is confusion, inability to discern reality resulting from intoxication not with the Spirit, but with wine.

[14] On the eschatological dimension of 'eternal intoxication' in ancient culture, see: Borowicz (2011).

[15] On the connection of magic, astrology and divination with the devil, see the writings of St Augustine: *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (26, 2, 19), *In Johannis Evangelium tractatus* (7, 7) and *De catechizandis rudibus* (27, 55), see also: Caesarius of Arles *Sermo* 53 (1).

[16] Pagan customs are described as foolish and the villagers practising them as ignorant, Martin of Braga wrote alike in: De correctione rusticorum (11, 1).

Faith vs philosophy: the drunken mad old hag as a figure allegorising paganism

We can now turn to the essential part of our considerations, i.e. the rhetorical function of the figure of *anus ebria et delirans* in the homilies of St John Chrysostom. We already know that the early Christian, drunken, mad old hag is a trickster usurping actions proper to God such as healing or curing. It is thus a situation of conflict between two parties, one of which is false and the other true. Skilled in magic tricks, and acting witOn the connection of magic, astrology and divination with the devil, see the writings of St Augustine: *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (26, 2, 19), *In Johannis Evangelium tractatus* (7, 7) and *De catechizandis rudibus* (27, 55), see also: Caesarius of Arles *Sermo* 53 (1).pretends her skills are genuine.[17] Nevertheless, from the point of view of the Fathers of the Church, the deceptions of the witch-healer serve, by negation, to define what is true. Here we enter the field of rhetoric, where the 'deception of the mages' (τὸν μάγον πανουργία) did not mean only charlatanry. In polemical discussions, it was an accusation of a rhetorical nature intended to stigmatise and condemn the opponent – to prove that his arguments and evidence are not true, but twisted, false.[18] In *Adversus haereses* (1, 13–15) by St Irenaeus of Lyons, his opponent in the dispute, Mark the Gnostic, is precisely someone 'experienced in magical deception', able to deceive by the power of his false arguments (Dekert, 2012). Saint Paul, in his *Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, also links the 'deception of the mages' to beliefs concerning the signs of the coming of the Antichrist. In this context, the real dimension of the figure of the drunken mad old hag – the real threat she posed in the eyes of the Fathers of the Church to the Christianity that was forging its identity – was very quickly transferred into a didactic and paideutic dimension. She was moved from the real world to the sign world, governed by completely different laws. At the same time, the inherent mechanisms of stereotyping that framed the thinking of the time about womanhood, old age, madness and drunkenness were involved in this process. Thus, the authentic figures of old women present in the life of early Christian communities were subsumed into symbolic imagery. The result of this process of sublimation – the shift from reality to text – was the nomination of the 'textual object' as *anus ebria et delirans* ('drunken old madwoman') or *vetula ebria et titubantes* ('drunk and staggering old hag'). It was by means of the perspective of these nominations that the phenomenon itself then began to be conceptualised, i.e. perceived, by projecting the created image onto reality (resublimation); early Christian reality was perceived, named, described and categorised through its meaningful structure. The coupling of the categories of drunkenness and madness (foolishness) with female old age resulted in a highly suggestive figure. It should be emphasised here that preachers' literature, aimed at large groups of people, is governed by its own laws and rules, in which various – sometimes peculiar – toposes play a significant

[17] They were used most likely according to the principle of homeopathic magic ("the similar removes the similar").

[18] This was precisely the nature of aretalogies, stories told by the itinerant speakers, preachers and magi about the deeds of *theoi andres* ('men of God'). Ancient Greek aretalogists were thus often called frauds and liars.

and fundamental role. They are not so much communicative as persuasive in nature. Their essence is to influence, to force one to accept a thesis; combining intellectual, moral and emotional elements, they are meant to have an appeal effect, to persuade one to do something or to convince in a pictorial and therefore more suggestive way. In this respect, 'bad images' are more powerful – their psychological effect is stronger. They are also quickly and easily absorbed. In *Homilia II in Mathaeum 1, 1* (9) John Chrysostom says:

> But as it is, whatever the devil may suggest, we speak it all, now laughing, and now speaking wittily; now cursing and insulting, and now swearing, lying, and taking false oaths; now murmuring, and now making vain babblings, and talking trifles more than old wives; […] Thus should anyone be minded to ask of you songs of devils and impure effeminate melodies, he will find many that know these perfectly, and repeat them with much pleasure. (PG 57 22-32, NPNF 1, 10, p. 37)

Aware that inappropriate images are more popular with the public, St John Chrysostom uses the figure of the drunken mad old hag in his writings to illustrate the essence of the good-evil relationship. While in the fragment of the sermon quoted in the beginning, the real dimension of the figure of the drunken old hag was not subject to any doubt (an explicit warning to those about to be baptised not to receive women witch-healers in their homes), in *Homilia VIII in Epistolam ad Colossenses 3, 5–7* (5) on idolatry, the Bishop of Constantinople already uses the figure of *anus ebria et delirans* in a slightly different sense:

> […] this is the device of Satan, this is that wiliness of the devil to cloak over the deceit, and to give the deleterious drug in honey. After he found that he could not prevail with thee in the other way, he hath gone this way about, to stitched charms, and old wives' fables; and the Cross indeed is dishonored, and these charms preferred before it. Christ is cast out, and a drunken and silly old woman [anus ebria et delirans] is brought in. That mystery of ours is trodden under foot, and the imposture of the devil dances. (PG 57, 22–32; NPNF 1, 13, p. 527–28)

Skilled in witchcraft old hag performing lustrations, is already a cliché figure, a symbolic image of evil, stupidity and superstition - signs of pagan religion. Although the real dimension of the figure is maintained, the composition and setting of individual elements indicate that we are dealing here with a discursive rather than historical construction. The persuasive nature of the message is strengthened by the use of concrete figures rather than abstract concepts – after all, simple images appeal most strongly to collective imagination. Thus, we have here the figure of an old hag, taken both from the social reality of the time and from the repertoire of ancient masks. By creating a scene based on the antinomic juxtaposition of two figures representing different traditions, two worlds: Christ (the Christian faith) and his opposite, his antithesis – a drunken, stupefied, nameless old hag (the pagan world), the message of the homily becomes almost eye-catching. On the side of Christ we have the cross and the sacrament, on the side of the drunken and stupefied old hag – witchcraft, talismans, fables, devil's snares, deception, poison, i.e. everything

that leads to debasement. The rhetorical significance of this composition is built on several levels, within which the following significant oppositions are drawn:
a) sociological, comprising elements such as:
age: youth – old age;
sex: man – woman;
social role: teacher/healer – witch-healer;
b) philosophical, comprising elements such as:
ethics: good – evil;
aesthetics: beauty – ugliness;
knowledge: wisdom – foolishness/ clownishness;
epistemology: true – false;
c) theological, comprising elements such as:
true faith – magic/superstition;
saviour – woman-trickster;
God – false idols (idols);
d) linguistic: fair, simple words (Logos) vs deceptive, perverse, twisted, deceitful, wrong words (*anus*).

All these antinomies are reified in two forms, one of which becomes the negation and reversal of the other. The old hag turns out to be a means of expression of theological categories with a negative meaning, a sign of the reversal of the correct, i.e. Christian attitude, a sign of departure from the true faith. It is a figure that negates all desirable values.

The suggestive language of St John Chrysostom's homily, which introduces – as if in a theatre – two masks, from whose setting and comparison the faithful must draw an obvious, even visual, conclusion, can be traced back to a passage from *St Paul's Letter to the Colossians* (2, 4-8), in which he wrote:

> I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible. arguments. […] See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. (NRSV-CE)

According to Paul the Apostle, true faith is contrasted with apparent and false faith, Christ with pagan elements. It is this pattern that St John Chrysostom seems to have developed, by 'bringing in' the drunken and stupefied old hag in place of the perhaps insufficiently intelligible or comprehensible notion of 'argument' (*sermo*, πιθανολογία) and 'philosophy' (*philosophia*, φιλοσοφία) he gives St Paul's words 'corporeality', clarity and intelligibility. The foolish drunken old hag is the antithesis of Christ, just as philosophy is the antithesis of faith – both can deceive and mislead. At the same time it is an interesting interpretative and translational process by which this Doctor of the Church transforms two universal, abstract concepts into downright tactile representations, into the workings of certain cultural schemas and

images comprehensible to the wider audience of his homilies.[19] Let us, however, turn our attention still further to the theme of the homily, which is the worship of idols. The sin of idolatry is understood very broadly by St John Chrysostom – it is *fornicatio* ('fornication'), *immunditia* ('impurity'), *libido* ('passion'), *concupiscentia mala* ('evil lust') and *avaritia* ('avarice).[20] Following St Paul, he compares the rejection of idolatry to "taking off the old man from us".[21] In *Homilia VIII in Epistolam ad Colossenses 3, 5–7*, (5), presenting man with sin ("et si homo sunt peccata"), he writes that the Apostle calls him old intentionally, so as to show his frailty, hideousness and foolishness.[22] The old man by his very nature is clothed with human vices, such as anger, envy, malice, lewdness. In Homilia X in epistulam ad Romanos 5, 12, St John Chrysostom writes that the soul of a sinner is the very image of an old man – like him it is wretched, repulsive, ridiculous, overwhelmed by madness, "afflicted with runny nose, stupidity, forgetfulness, sickly eyes, arouses revulsion in people, easily succumbs to devils" (PG 60, 473–484; see Szczur, 2011). Old men are lustful, covetous, impulsive, selfish, wicked, corrupt, adulterous and debauched.[23] Having a negative sanction, old age becomes one of the useful rhetorical tools. It serves as a representation of the world of Roman paganism, permeated by foolishness and all evil. The godless old hag must therefore be discarded, just as we should "take off" the old man from us „together with his deeds".[24]

Summary

At the decline of the Western Roman Empire, a great religious transformation is underway, with Christianity first becoming a religio licta and then, at the end of the fourth century, the religion of the empire under the decree *Cunctos populos* of Emperor Theodosius I. The plethora of pagan religious movements, the various philosophical schools, and the factions within Christianity itself form a mosaic in which preserving the orthodoxy and purity of the new faith proves to be one of the

[19] It should be remembered that some of them may not even have spoken Greek well, especially in traditional rural communities, see: Szczur (2010).

[20] Col. 3, 5 "Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry." (NRSV-CE).

[21] Col. 3:9 "Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices." (NRSV-CE).

[22] „*Veterem autem ipsum vocat ejus volens ostendere turpitudinem et deformitatem et imbecillitatem*" (PG 62, 381).

[23] Salvian of Marseilles (5th century) wites about the orgies of the elderly Christians of Trier at feasts in his work titled: *De gubernatione Dei* (6, 73): "[...] I saw deplorable things: there was no difference between children and old men. The same frivolity, the same fickleness. All transgressions at once: lewdness, drunkenness, indecency."

[24] See John Chrysostom, *Homilia XIII De adversa Valetudine et Medicis*: "And when, showing great contempt for the sorcerers, you chase them out of your house, then everyone who finds out about it will praise you with due admiration, saying: "Aggrieved by his illness, he paid no attention to those who repeatedly warned, urged and advised him to submit to the sorcerers' spells. He constantly repeated: it is better to die now than to betray own faith." Since you can be praised now, imagine how many wreaths you will receive when Christ, surrounded by angels and archangels, approaches you and, holding your hand, stands in the centre of the heavenly assembly. Then you and those gathered there will hear His words: "Here is a man who, disregarding the fever that was consuming him, ignored every means of recovery suggested to him. He did this for the sake of My name and out of fear of Me. Not wishing to commit sin, he drove away the pseudo-medics, regarding the remedies they recommended with contempt. For he considered that it was better to die of not having conquered the disease than to resign from the service in My retinue." (PG 63, 651–656), Iluk (2022).

most important tasks of the young Church. A task, we should add, that is extremely difficult, not only because the neophytes often live in large cosmopolitan centres with strong pagan traditions (Antioch, Constantinople), but also in traditional rural communities where knowledge of Greek, the language of catechesis and sermons – the language of the new faith – is scarce. To a certain extent, this task also needs an extremely figurative, persuasive language, as well as the repertoire of evoked rhetorical figures and tropes in the writings of early Christian authors. This is particularly true of the categories of old age, drunkenness and madness, which are clearly redefined in this period. The early Christian testimonies mentioning figures of old, drinking women must therefore be placed and considered on a much broader cultural background of late antiquity, among the various types of figures of old bacchantes, charmers, whisperers, witch-healers, as well as in the extremely elaborate network of ancient traditions and rituals. In the preaching writings of St John Chrysostom, the figures of drunken old hags become mainly didactic. They are intended to highlight the differences between the new and the old faith. They reify misconduct, foolishness, superstition, pagan philosophy, falsehood and deception – the devil's insidious activities. *Anus ebria et delirans* is thus an immoral, inverted image that is an affront to Christian morality; it is also a figure that deceives under the guise of practising what is good. Although she invokes the name of God, she turns out to be the antithesis of Christ. Juxtaposed with the figure of the Saviour, she appears even more grotesque, comical and repulsive. She is the female version of a trickster experienced in magical deceptions – the clownish equivalent of the Antichrist,[25] which ultimately turns out to be a rhetorical argument adversus gentes. Fitting into the pattern of the adversary, she is a figure of discourse designed to shape correct attitudes, to point out errors, the undesirable and the inappropriate. At the same time, thanks to the rhetorical invention of St John Chrysostom, what is on the side of reason (medical knowledge) is transferred to religious behaviour. The new faith gains the sanction of rationality (and thus unquestionability), while the old, pagan faith appears as mere madness and conduct that is by all means irrational. Ugliness, drunkenness and stupidity in the case of anus ebria et delirans thus not only represents evil and sin, but by its grotesque dimension ridicules and depreciates the pagan ideas it represents. Ultimately, she is a paradox, in its corporeal shape as a 'god-box'; she is like a phylacterium diabolicum, a box for incantations, a devil's pendant, which she herself wears and attaches to her robes while chanting magical incantations and crying out non est Deus.[26]

[25] Irenaeus wrote about comprehending an opponent (also in a dispute) in terms of understanding proficiency in magical deceptions in *Adversus haereses* (1, 13–15).

[26] Amulets in early Christian texts are usually referred to as phylacteria - a type of pouch or box to carry slips of paper with quotations from Scripture, incantations, various small items of a magical nature. They were supposed to protect from misfortune. Amulets such as 'devil's pendants' (*phylacteria diabolica*), 'mascots' (*caracteres*) or 'amber and herb beads' (*sucinos et herbas*) were usually pinned to one's robes, see: Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* (14, 4).

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