

The Woman with the Flow of Blood in the Homily of Pseudo-Chrysostom and the Kontakion of Romanos the Melodist

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Abstract: The piece considers the story of the woman with the flow of blood (*haimorrhousa*) in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as it is represented in two works: the homily of Pseudo-Chrysostom (PG 59, 575–578) and *Kontakion* 12 (in the Oxford edition) of Romanos the Melodist. Interpretations of this episode from the gospels touch upon the issue of ritual purity in the Jewish law as well as the attitude of Christian authors toward female menstruation. The texts mentioned above are examined, along with statements from the Fathers of the Church on menstruation, in an attempt to answer the question of whether Christian authors embraced the idea that menstruating women should be excluded from social and religious life. The article shows that the attitude of Christian authors towards menstruating women was in fact generally positive.

Keywords: Haimorrhousa, menstruation, Romanos the Melodist, Pseudo-Chrysostom, Greek patristic tradition, ritual purity, illness, Mt 9:20–22, Mk 5:25–34, Lk 8:43–48

One of the most common themes in the literature from the first centuries of Christianity is illness for which miraculous healing is obtained through God's grace. The Scriptures already abound in descriptions of healing, both physical and spiritual. Often, illness in Christian texts should be understood not only in a literal sense but also as a metaphor of sin and spiritual enslavement. One of the most characteristic instances of healing in the Gospels is in the pericope of Christ's healing of the woman with a blood flow, a story presented in Matthew 9:20–22, Mark 5:25–34 and Luke 8:43–48.¹ The scene is associated with the raising of Jairus's daughter because in each of the Gospel readings, the narrative of the hemorrhaging woman is inserted in that story. Such a compositional technique emphasizes the huge change in

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¹ A list of similarities and differences between representations of this scene in the Gospels, see Zwiep, "Jairus," 351–353. Most scholars assume that the bleeding of the women of this pericope was vaginal, see Haber, "A Woman's Touch," 180–181; Wassen, "Jesus and the Hemorrhaging Woman," 643.

the life of the woman who is healed: it is as if she also is raised by Jesus.² Additionally, the ancient audience would have perceived the death of Jairus' daughter as associated with a woman's disease because she was just entering sexual maturity.³

The Gospel passages presenting the healing of the woman with the blood flow and their subsequent reception in the Christian literature touch upon two important issues: 1) the ritual impurity resulting from the blood flow and 2) sin as a possible cause of illness. Among Greek Fathers of the Church many authors mentioned the woman.⁴ I chose two texts focused on this figure that offer an extensive presentation on this biblical thread: a homily attributed to John Chrysostom⁵ and *kontakion* 12 of Romanos the Melodist.⁶ These sources allow to analyze insightfully the way of presentation of the figure of the woman and different aspects of this Gospel scene. They can be treated also as sources portraying the attitude of this patristic authors to menstruation, as well as their perceptions of ritual purity in Jewish law. Did their authors regard the hemorrhaging woman as impure? Was she rightly afraid of being revealed to Jesus? In connection with these texts, the question arises whether the woman's illness was related to sin or if it was seen only as a physical ailment without consideration of the possible spiritual causes of the illness. In this article, I present the current state of research on these issues in the Byzantine world, analyze the text of Pseudo-Chrysostom and Romanos the Melodist and attempt to answer preceding questions.

1. Blood Flow and Menstruation in Christian Authors

According to the rules of the Old Testament, the blood flow, which the woman of the Gospels had, was a source of ritual impurity⁷; however, scholars do not agree on the importance of this impurity nor on the attitudes that both the authors of the Gospels and their audience held toward it.⁸ According to Barbara Baert and

² Cf. Robbins, "The Woman," 502.

³ Cf. D'Angelo, "Power, Knowledge," 96; D'Angelo, "(Re)presentations of Women," 143; Levine, "Woman," 424, 443; Haber, "A Woman's Touch," 187–189. About symbolic similarities between the woman with the blood flow and Jairus' daughter, see Kubiś, "The Hemorrhaging Woman," 359–383.

⁴ Among the Greek authors who mention the woman are e.g. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus haereses* 1, 3, 3; Origen, *Homiliae in Leviticum* 4, 8. Another homily on this figure, see Asterius Amazenus, *Homilia in* (PG 104, 221–224).

⁵ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium indictionis novi anni* (PG 59, 575–578).

⁶ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 88–93.

⁷ Lev 15:19–30. Cf. Viljoen, "The Law and Purity," 447; Baert – Kusters – Sidgwick, "An Issue of Blood," 665–666.

⁸ Cf. D'Angelo, "Power, Knowledge," 81–83; D'Angelo, "(Re)presentations of Women," 140. According to Francois Viljoen ("The Law and Purity in Matthew," 444) the reading of the Gospel of Mark on the woman with the blood flow also does not reveal the interest of the author in the ritual purity. In the opinion of

Mary R. D'Angelo, it is difficult to say whether in the Jewish world of the first century A.D., touching a menstruating woman caused impurity or whether she could not enter the synagogue.⁹ Another scholar, Marla J. Selvidge, presents the Jewish regulations on purity as exceedingly restrictive and discriminatory against women.¹⁰ According to her, the Gospel of Mark reveals the rejection of Jewish legislation as oppressive against women in early Christianity.¹¹

Susan Haber discusses at length two extremely opposite opinions of feminist scholars on the attitude of the author of the Gospel of Mark to the ritual purity in this pericope.¹² Haber also presents various Jewish traditions regarding ritual purity and sources from the Second Temple period,¹³ finally concluding that although the woman is impure in the narration from Mark, the issue is not the central question in this scene.¹⁴ Cecilia Wassen argues similarly, stating that Mark does not reject Jewish regulations on purity,¹⁵ presenting the complexity of Jewish traditions concerning purity in the Second Temple period,¹⁶ and ultimately concluding that the author of the Gospel of Mark does not mention the impurity of the woman because it is not important in his narration.¹⁷

Christian authors do not wholly agree in their attitudes to menstruation. The first Christian author to express his opinion on this issue is Dionysius of Alexandria. He writes in the canonical letter ca 260 that a menstruating woman should not enter the Church: "As for women's menstruation, when it comes to entering God's house, I consider that superfluous to ask. For I think that faithful and pious woman in this state do not dare to approach the Holy Table or to touch the body and blood of Christ."¹⁸ Then the author buttresses his attitude by quoting the New Testament scene of the healing of the woman with the blood flow. However, another Syriac text from the third century, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, argues against exclusion of menstruating women from social life.¹⁹

Amy-Jill Levine ("Woman," 409, 424, 443) none of the Gospels' passages on the woman does indicate that the authors were interested in ritual purity.

⁹ Cf. Baert, "General Introduction," 3–4; D'Angelo, "Power, Knowledge," 86–87.

¹⁰ Selvidge, "Mark 5:25–34," 619–622.

¹¹ Selvidge, "Mark 5:25–34," 622–623.

¹² Haber, "A Woman's Touch," 172–173, 190–191.

¹³ Haber, "A Woman's Touch," 174–180.

¹⁴ Haber, "A Woman's Touch," 180–191.

¹⁵ Wassen, "Jesus and the Hemorrhaging Woman," 642–643.

¹⁶ Wassen, "Jesus and the Hemorrhaging Woman," 649–658.

¹⁷ Wassen, "Jesus and the Hemorrhaging Woman," 660–661.

¹⁸ Dionysius Alexandrinus, *Epistula ad Basilidem* 2: Περὶ δὲ τὸν ἐν ἀφ᾽ ἑδρῶ γυναικῶν, εἰ προσῆκεν αὐτὰς οὕτω εἰς τὸν οἶκον εἰσέναι τοῦ θεοῦ, περιττὸν καὶ τὸ πυνθάνεσθαι νομίζω. οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτὰς οἶμαι, πιστὰς οὕσας καὶ εὐλαβεῖς, τολμήσειν οὕτω διακειμένας ἢ τῇ τραπέζῃ τῇ ἁγίᾳ προσελθεῖν, ἢ τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ χριστοῦ προσάψασθαι. Cf. Morris, "Blood and Holy Communion," 195–196; D'Angelo, "Power, Knowledge," 83.

¹⁹ Baert – Kusters – Sidgwick, "An Issue of Blood," 667.

John Chrysostom is another author who discusses this issue, analyzing the encounter of the woman with the blood flow with Jesus in his Homily 31 on Matthew.²⁰ According to him, Jewish law regarded the ailment of the woman as a great impurity; thus, she had to act in secret. However, Jesus puts her forward as a model of faith for others, especially for Jairus, whose daughter Christ is going to raise. John Chrysostom praises the woman for her courage and sees nothing inappropriate in her touching Jesus, despite her affliction. He emphasizes that the woman is only considered by the Jews to be impure, whereas she was not in reality.²¹

The *Apostolic Constitutions*, a text from the fourth century, also discusses female menstruation. The text stresses that there is nothing wrong with menstruation, which seems to be corroborated by the fact that Jesus healed the biblical character: “Indeed, even the Lord in the Gospel, when the woman with the blood flow touched the saving border of garment for healing, was not angry at her and did not accuse her at all, but on the contrary, he healed her...”²²

2. The Homily of Pseudo-Chrysostom

The *Patrologia Graeca* already presents this first text as spurious. Benedikt Marx attributed it to Proclus of Constantinople.²³ In view of the foregoing, this homily is earlier than the kontakion of Romanos the Melodist. Its content presents a biblical pericope in dramatic form with a moral instruction arising from it. Only the first part of the homily contains the praise of martyrs, and the circumstances of its delivery are given—the beginning of the year (τῇ τοῦ ἔτους εἰσόδῳ)²⁴—but the content does not indicate whether it is the liturgical, calendar, or civil year.

The instance of the woman with the blood flow is presented only later in the text. The narrator praises martyrs for their faith, then cites examples from the Old and New Testament of people receiving graces because of their strong faith. One such person is the woman that Jesus healed from the blood flow. The narrator uses numerous rhetorical figures to portray the persistent suffering of the character. Among them appear hyperbole: “there spilled out from the woman’s abdomen, there was a cease-

²⁰ Joannes Chrysostomus, *Homilia XXXI* (PG 57, 369–376). Cf. Morris, “Blood and Holy Communion,” 197.

²¹ Joannes Chrysostomus, *Homilia XXXI* (PG 57, 371).

²² *Constitutiones Apostolorum* VI, 28, 7: Οὐ μὴν δὲ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ Εὐαγγελίῳ ὁ Κύριος, τῆς αἱμορροούσης ἀψαμένης τοῦ σωτηρίου κρασπέδου ὑγείας χάριν, οὐκ ἠχθέσθη ἐπ’ αὐτῇ, οὔτε μὴν ὅλως ἡτιάσατο, τοῦναντίον δὲ καὶ ἰάσατο αὐτήν. Cf. Morris, “Blood and Holy Communion,” 197–198.

²³ Marx, *Procliana*, 59–60, n. 54; cf. Maisano, “Romanos’ Use,” 265, n. 23.

²⁴ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 575).

less stream of blood”²⁵; paradox: “What an unhappy and happy woman at the same time!”²⁶; and parallel syntax: “Her mind was still stricken by pains and concerns, how to break the fetters of serious illness, how to shake off the twelve years of suffering.”²⁷

The text is highly rhetorical with long passages meant to illustrate the difficult situation of the woman and the fact that only Christ can heal her. In one of them the author personifies the illness, which boasts of the fact that the medicine is not able to conquer it: “Why do you fight with a stronger beast? Such a long time has not deprived me of preying upon this flesh; I do not surrender to the knowledge of those who treat; [...] only the one doctor born of the virgin will drive me away.”²⁸ The narrator adds enumerations of the drama of the situation: “The period of time, the ceaseless pains, the useless loss of property, the suffering of an exhausted body, the reason wasted on vain hopes.”²⁹ The narrator contrasts the woman’s sufferings to her strong faith that she can be healed by Jesus and presents her hope in an extended way: “The perishing saw the one who saves, the enchained saw the Redeemer, the tossed by storms saw the anchor of the world, she saw the king of sufferings coming from above, she saw unexpected hope on joy...”³⁰

The homily later presents the woman’s thoughts as well. She expresses a strong desire to experience healing, but at the same time, she is afraid of difficulties from the crowd and a possible lack of acceptance from Jesus because of her impurity: “How I will approach the doctor of the nature? But I am afraid of him as a king. How I will be received as a beggar?”³¹ However, when the woman finally manages to touch Jesus’s garment, the author, using exclamations, shows the accomplished miracle as a paradox, metaphorically referring to the deed as theft: “What a theft, which is praised by the one who avenges thefts!”³²

After the healing of the woman, Jesus asks his disciples who touched him, initially suggesting, in accord with the Gospel accounts, that he does not know about

²⁵ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 575): ἐπήγαγεν ἄρα τῆς γυναικὸς ἡ γαστήρ, κρουνὸς τις αἱμάτων ἀνελλιπὴς κατεφέρετο. Translations from the Greek are my own, unless otherwise stated.

²⁶ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 575): Ὡ γυναικὸς ἀθλίας καὶ μακαρίας ὁμοῦ.

²⁷ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 575): Ὁδύναις ἔτι καὶ φροντίσιν ἐκόπτετο τὴν διάνοιαν, πῶς τὸν δεσμὸν διαρρήξει τοῦ χαλεποῦ ἀρρώστηματος, πῶς τὸ δωδεκάετες ἀποτινάσσεται πάθος.

²⁸ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 576): Τί μάχεσθε δυνατωτέρῳ θηρίῳ; χρόνος με τοσοῦτος τῆς ἐν σώματι νομῆς οὐκ ἐσύλησεν, ἰατρευνόντων ἐπιστήμαις οὐκ εἴκω· [...] εἰς με μόνος ἐκ παρθένου γεννηθεὶς ἰατρὸς φυγαδεύσει.

²⁹ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 576): χρόνου μῆκος, ἀληθδόνες ἀνένδοτοι, δημεύσεις ἀνωφέλῃτοι, μαραινόμενου σώματος λύπη, λογισμὸς κεναῖς ἐλπίσι δαπανηθείς.

³⁰ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 576): Εἶδεν ἡ ἀπολλυμένη τὸν σώζοντα, εἶδεν ἡ δεδεμένη τὸν λυτρωτὴν, εἶδεν ἡ χειμαζομένη τοῦ κόσμου τὴν ἄγκυραν, εἶδε τὸν ἀνωθεν ἐλθόντα τῶν παθῶν βασιλεῖα, εἶδεν ἐλπίδα χαρᾶς ἀπροσδόκητον...

³¹ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 576): Ὡς ἰατρῷ προσδράμω τῆς φύσεως; Ἄλλ’ ὡς βασιλεῖα φοβοῦμαι. Ὡς ἱκετεύουσιν δέξεται;

³² Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 576): ὦ κλοπῆς, ἦν αὐτὸς ἐπήνεσεν ὁ τὰς κλοπὰς τιμωρούμενος!

the woman. Finally, however he states: “Who touched me? I will learn from you or I will tell you.”³³ Thus, the homily presents Jesus as aware of healing the sick woman after she had touched his robe. In this place, however, the Savior’s statement ends, and the author places the summary of the homily. The main character is praised for her faith and courage, and the congregation is instructed that they should treat her as an example to imitate: “Let’s not be worse than one foreign woman.”³⁴

The author of the homily does not introduce any major changes in this scene from how it is presented in the Gospels, but he tells the story in a strongly rhetorical form. The work abounds in rhetorical figures, mainly iterations and exclamations, which are intended to build dramatic tension and to highlight the miracle of the woman’s healing in opposition to her long-term suffering. The woman is portrayed as perceiving herself as ritually impure: she expresses fear that “they will chase her away as impure”³⁵ and she calls herself “abominable,”³⁶ but the author does not elaborate on this aspect of the biblical scene.

3. *On the Woman with an Issue of Blood, a kontakion of Romanos the Melodist*

This kontakion of Romanos the Melodist, “On the Woman with an Issue of Blood” (Εἰς τὴν αἰμόρρουν), was intended for Wednesday of the sixth week after Easter.³⁷ It, too, presents the poet’s own interpretation of the New Testament scene. In the work of Romanos the Melodist, as with the first source text, we do not find any essential differences in relation to the Gospels, but the theme is deepened both in the story layer and in the interpretation of the biblical scene.

The kontakion of Romanos the Melodist consists of 21 strophes preceded by a short introduction. Each strophe ends with a short refrain that has a strong emotional overtone: “Savior, save me” (Σῶτερ, σῶσον με).³⁸ These words repeated throughout the whole hymn associate the biblical scene with the liturgy in a manner typical for a kontakion. The narrator announces the content of the work by comparing himself to the main character of the pericope and ends with a prayer:

Like the woman with the issue of blood, I fall down before Thee, Lord,
So that Thou wilt deliver me from distress, O Lover of man,

³³ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 578): Τίς μου ἥψατο; Ἡ μάθω παρ’ ὑμῶν, ἢ διδάσκω.

³⁴ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 578): μὴ γενώμεθα χεῖρους μᾶς γυναικὸς ἀλλοφύλου.

³⁵ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 576): Διώξουσιν ὡς ἀκάθαρτον.

³⁶ Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In principium* (PG 59, 576): ἀναίσχυντος.

³⁷ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 88.

³⁸ The translation of this hymn that I used in this article is that of Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos*, I, 121–126.

And grant to me forgiveness for my failures,
In order that I may cry out to Thee with contrition of heart,
“Savior, save me.”³⁹

Not only does the narrator utter this refrain but also the faithful pray these words by joining the singing, and in the following stanzas it becomes the call of the sick woman addressed to Jesus. Thus, although the author does not directly link illness to sin, he asks for deliverance from both suffering and sin, suggesting the existence of a relationship between the two. The first stanza of the work also expresses a request from the narrator for forgiveness of sins and for “forbearance” (μακροθυμία) and not “contempt” (καταφρόνησις),⁴⁰ which may be regarded as analogous to the situation of the woman with the blood flow.

The motif of Christ as a doctor, which is the most frequently appearing motif in the poetry of Romanos the Melodist,⁴¹ is portrayed as early as the second stanza:

Now Thou didst walk upon the earth with feet of incorruption, dispensing healing to all.⁴²

As a reminder of Jesus’s activity, the narrator introduces the figure of a woman who approaches Christ to find help (προσῆλθε σωθῆναι).⁴³ It is worth drawing attention to the ambiguity of the verb σώζω and the noun σωτήρ associated with it. Σώζω means both “save, preserve (e.g., from sickness)” and the act of salvation.⁴⁴ Consequently, the woman’s search for salvation can be read in two ways: she seeks both healing and salvation in the religious sense.

At the end of the second stanza, we read about the woman:

She came to Thee to be saved, silent in speech,
But crying out earnestly to Thee with her hand:
“Savior, save me.”⁴⁵

³⁹ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, Pr., 1–5:

Ὡς ἡ αἰμόρρους προσπίπτω σοι, κύριε,
ὅπως τοῦ ἄλγους με ῥύσῃ, φιλάνθρωπε,
καὶ πταισμάτων μοι παράσχῃς συγχώρησιν,
ἵνα ἐν κατανύξει καρδίας κραυγάζω σοι·
‘Σῶτερ, σῶσον με.’

⁴⁰ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 1, 4–5. This is according to my own translation, whereas Marjorie Carpenter uses *conversion* and *presumption*.

⁴¹ Schork, “The Medical Motif,” 357.

⁴² Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 2, 1: Ἀφθαρσίας ποσὶν γῆς ἐπέβης νῦν πᾶσι καταμερίζων ἰάματα.

⁴³ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 2, 4.

⁴⁴ Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1361–1362.

⁴⁵ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 2, 4–6:

σοὶ προσῆλθε σωθῆναι σιγῶσα φωνῇ
τῇ παλάμῃ δὲ κράζουσα σοὶ ἐκτενῶς,
‘Σῶτερ, σῶσον με.’

The metaphor of “crying with the hand” appearing here is repeated many times in this *kontakion*. It is evidence of Romanos the Melodist’s poetic artistry and the sophistication of his poetry. The silence of the woman emphasizes her powerlessness, and the call to the Savior with her hand, her determination to obtain healing.

Later in the work, the hymnographer introduces elements of Christology to his sung homily, which in the time of Justinian was still the subject of serious disputes, dividing the Church and the Empire:

Unnoticed she came to Thee, Savior, for indeed she considered Thee only a man,
But when she was cured, she was taught that Thou art God and man.⁴⁶

The healing power of Jesus is here an opportunity to remind the faithful of the doctrine of the Church, as in many hymns from Romanos the Melodist, who was a fervent defender of orthodoxy.

Another metaphor constituting a central motif in the hymn is an allusion to theft. The ill woman approached Jesus because “she thought that she would rob (ἀποσυλᾶν)”⁴⁷ him; however, it was “she [who] was robbed (ἐσυλήθη).”⁴⁸ The character’s act of faith is therefore portrayed through an image of an action contrary to Christian morality. This literary device emphasizes the belief, often present in Byzantine hymnography, that God acts through paradox and that human logic is not always consistent with God’s intentions, which is also shown later in this *kontakion*.

As we see in the third stanza cited above, the woman approaches Jesus “unnoticed” (λανθανόντως). The reason she acts secretly is her fear of “the enemy” (ἐχθρός), who would prevent her from obtaining healing.⁴⁹ Without doubt, Satan is “the enemy.” However, another reason the woman tries to touch Jesus’s garment secretly is her fear that he will spurn her because of her impurity. Thus, Romanos the Melodist, according to the Jewish law,⁵⁰ depicts the woman as perceived by the society as impure. At the same time, her own words indicate a metaphorical sense of impurity when she speaks about herself:

I come bearing the shame of my sins.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 3, 1–2:
Λανθανόντως, σωτήρ, σοὶ προσήρχετο· καὶ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον μόνον ἐνόμιζεν·
ιωμένη δὲ ἐξεπαιδεύετο ὅτι σὺ θεὸς ἅμα καὶ ἄνθρωπος.

⁴⁷ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 3, 4.

⁴⁸ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 3, 5.

⁴⁹ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 4, 3–4.

⁵⁰ Cf. Lev 15:19–30.

⁵¹ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 5, 2: φέρουσα τὴν αἰσχύνην πταισμάτων ἐμῶν.

Πταῖσμα in the language of the Fathers of the Church is a synonym for ἁμάρτημα—sin.⁵² However, the author does not elaborate upon this aspect, nor does he indicate clearly that sin has caused the illness of the woman; nonetheless, her own words imply such. Therefore, an extension of the relationship between physical illness and sin is indicated in the first stanza.⁵³

The author of the kontakion introduces another collective character in the form of the crowd, whose presence is mentioned in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, but it does not actively participate in the course of the events. In the hymn of Romanos, the woman complains:

On seeing me, all the people pushed me away; ‘Now where are you going?’ they cried to me.
[...]
‘Go away and purify yourself of your filth.’⁵⁴

The crowd prevents the woman from reaching Jesus; hence, she must oppose the multitude accompanying him. She begins a dispute with the crowd and tries to persuade the gathering to let her go. However, they justify their conduct in the following way:

You do not know what you ask, woman, go away so that we shall not all come under blame;
If we allow you to go, we shall all be considered guilty of His dishonor.⁵⁵

The crowd does not want to allow the woman in a condition of impurity to touch Jesus. The reason for the behavior of the gathered people is the Jewish custom. Indeed, it is the woman that wants to act in opposition to the law. But it does not discourage her that people try to drive her away; she remains determined to realize her aim. She accuses them:

It is you, wretches, who have been ruled by jealousy; and that is why you do not wish me
to be saved.⁵⁶

⁵² Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1203.

⁵³ Similarly Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oratio* 40 (PG 36, 405B), mentions the woman with the blood flow in the context of sin. However, he addresses the listener, comparing his sin to the woman's issue of blood. Cf. Lefteratou, “From Haimorrhousa”, 1094, n. 21.

⁵⁴ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 6, 1 and 3:
Συνωθοῦσι με πάντες ὀρώντες με, ‘ποῦ νυνὶ σὺ προσέρχῃ;’ βοῶντες μοι
[...]
‘ἄπιθι καὶ καθάρτητι ἀπὸ ρύπου’.

⁵⁵ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 8, 1–2:
Οὐ νοεῖς τί αἰτεῖς, γύναι· ἄπιθι, μὴ ἡμεῖς ὑπὸ μέμψιν γενώμεθα·
ἂν ἐάσωμεν σέ, πάντες αἴτιοι τῆς αὐτοῦ ἀτιμίας δεικνύμεθα.

⁵⁶ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 9, 1: Ὑμεῖς, δύσμοροι, φθόνῳ κεκράτησθε, ὅθεν ἐμὲ σωθῆναι οὐ βούλεσθε.

She does not accept the reasoning of the crowd. Additionally, she persuades these people that they will regret their conduct:

But if He saves me from my disease,
You will feel shame.⁵⁷

The statement of the woman presented in the tenth and eleventh stanzas is strongly emotional. The many verbs in the second person plural addressed to the crowd are what make the speech intensely dynamic. The poet also poses many rhetorical questions. The accumulation of these figures undoubtedly was intended to influence the congregation strongly, and the words of the woman were meant to evoke tension and compassion. She brings serious accusations against the crowd:

You breathe forth a breath of jealousy, of murder;
That is why you prevent me from crying out:
“Savior, save me.”⁵⁸

Finally the woman secretly touches Jesus’ garment. Although he knows who did it (“He who knows all things before their origin”),⁵⁹ he asks his disciples about it and reproaches them for not preventing this situation. Eventually Christ himself decides to reveal the truth to them and teach them. He tells the apostles:

But she, in touching my visible robe,
Clearly grasped my divine nature,
And took possession of health.⁶⁰

Thus, the poet indicates at the same time that the divine nature of Christ is the source of his healing power.

⁵⁷ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 9, 4–5:

ἀν δὲ σῶσθι με νῦν τῆς πληγῆς τῆς ἐμῆς
τὴν αἰσχύνην κομίσησθε.

⁵⁸ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 11, 4–5:

φθόνου, φόνου δυσομίαν πνέετε·
διὰ τοῦτο κωλύετε μὲ τοῦ βοᾶν·
‘σώτερ, σώσον με’.

⁵⁹ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 13, 1: Ὁ τὰ πάντα εἰδὼς πρὶν γενέσεως.

⁶⁰ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 15, 3–5:

αὕτη ψάυσασα δὲ στολῆς ὀρωμένης
θείας φύσεως σαφῶς ἐδράξατο
καὶ ὑγίαν ἐκτήσατο.

On account of Jesus's words the woman decides to reveal herself. She ceases to be afraid, because she knows that her deed came from the will of the Savior and that she had acted with faith:

What He willed, this I did;
For, in faith I came crying out to Him.⁶¹

She indicates also that divine inspiration was in her conduct:

For before I considered doing this deed,
Thou wert there preparing me for it.⁶²

The woman believes that Jesus himself wanted her to be healed. Her determination—manifest in her facing down the crowd, which did not want to let her go—turns out have its source in God's will, even though she did not want to act according to Jewish customs. Because of her persistence, Christ praises her and holds her up as an example:

But you, when you touched me with much faith,
Gained for yourself health; and hence I have brought you
Before all.⁶³

The end of the hymn stresses the moralizing aspect of the work. Jesus himself praises the woman for her faith in his healing power. Although her touching of Jesus's garment and the grasping of his divine nature is depicted by the image of theft, the deed is consistent with God's will. For that reason, Jesus does not accuse the woman but says, "I rejoice" (χαίρω).⁶⁴ However, she manages to achieve her aim because she is not discouraged by the conduct of the crowd and has decided to face them. Nor does she accept their arguments, considering them false, but she shows the hypocrisy of the crowd.

⁶¹ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 16, 4–5:
ὁ ἠθέλησε, τοῦτο καὶ ἔδρασα·
ἐν γὰρ πίστει προσήλθον βοῶσα αὐτῷ.

⁶² Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 18, 3–4:
πρὶν λογίσωμαι γὰρ ποιῆσαι τὸ δρᾶμα,
σὺ ὑπῆρχες συμβιβάζων με πρὸς αὐτό.

⁶³ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 20, 3–5:
σὺ δὲ πίστει πολλῇ ἐμοῦ ἀψαμένῃ
τὴν ὑγείαν ἐδρέψω, ὅθεν σε νῦν
ἐπὶ πάντων προσήγαγον.

⁶⁴ Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion* 12, 19, 3.

The work of Romanos the Melodist focuses not only on the illness of the woman but also on her struggle for healing. Most of the text consists of her dialogues with the crowd and then Jesus's words. The poet expresses his appreciation for the strong attitude of the woman who strives to meet Jesus in spite of the opposition of other people. The author presents her as courageous in accusing the crowd of hypocrisy and continuing to believe that her behavior is right. The main character of the hymn thus turns out to be a distinctive person who is undoubtedly meant to add color to the scene and strengthen the overtone of the text. Christ is portrayed as a doctor who heals physical illness, as well as possessing the power to cleanse from sin. The hymn implies a spiritual dimension to the illness of the main character, but because this issue is not elaborated upon, it cannot be said that sin was the immediate cause of her suffering. Romanos the Melodist significantly develops the scene in relation to the Gospels, portraying Jesus as fully aware of the woman's touching his garment. Above all, the hymnographer's goal was to shape the spirituality of the faithful by teaching them that they should entrust their concerns to God because he has a power to perform miracles. He instructs them also that as Christians, they should always be guided by the faith, even if it requires facing difficulties and opposing other people.

Conclusion

The literary works analyzed here describe the New Testament scene wherein Jesus healed the woman with the blood flow and present an extended interpretation of this biblical thread: the homily of Pseudo-Chrysostom and kontakion 12 of Romanos the Melodist. The texts show some similarity to each other, but there is no evidence of the direct dependence of Romanos on the anonymous homily.⁶⁵ Both works present the scene from the woman's point of view, revealing her internal monologues. She feels uncertainty about whether she will succeed in reaching Jesus. In both texts the woman perceives herself as being impure, and in the kontakion the crowd emphasizes this aspect as well. The homily presents the long-term suffering of the woman in a strongly rhetorical form, contrasting it to her healing obtained later. Romanos the Melodist devotes significant space to the dialogue of the woman with the crowd, which is an impediment in her struggle to touch Jesus. Both works emphasize that it was the strong faith and courage of the woman that enabled her to obtain the healing, and because of that she is held up as a model for listeners. At the same time, the texts criticize the legalistic attitude toward the blood flow. In the kontakion it

⁶⁵ According to José Grosdidier de Matons ("Hymne de l'Hémorroïsse," 81, n. 1), Romanos' the Melodist dependence on the homily cannot be proved, but perhaps both texts had a common source.

is represented by the gathered crowd, whereas in the homily, the woman herself is afraid of violating the law. In all of these works, we find no assertion that it was sin that caused the illness of the woman. There is a hint of such in the kontakion, but it is not developed. In Homily 31 on Matthew, as in the two texts analyzed above, John Chrysostom praises the woman of this pericope for her faith and determination in striving to obtain healing. This author also emphasizes that the Jews considered the woman impure but that in fact her illness should not exclude her from social and religious life.

Thus, in general, an examination of the Greek patristic sources on menstruation and concerning the biblical thread on the woman with the blood flow reveals no negative attitude of Christian authors to the participation of woman in this state in social life and religious cult. Most of the mentioned patristic authors interpret the Gospel passages on the woman with the blood flow as indicating that she was considered impure by society. However, they criticize such an attitude as too legalistic. An exception is presented above from the letter of Dionysius of Alexandria, who excludes menstruating woman from the religious cult, but his position finds no confirmation in the other sources.

The kontakion of Romanos the Melodist indicates that there is a relationship between the woman's illness and sinfulness. At first, the narrator of the hymn compares the situation of the sinner to the woman's illness; then, she herself speaks about her sins. Such an interpretation of the New Testament scene is fully consistent with the patristic authors' perception of illness. Illness appears in the patristic literature not only as a metaphor for sin but also as literally influenced by spiritual health, revealing that the Fathers of the Church thought that a relationship exists between physical and spiritual health. Holy Scripture itself has also linked illness and sin, and in the Gospel Jesus's power to absolve sins is related to healings.⁶⁶ Therefore, the writings of the Fathers of the Church often use illness as a metaphor for sin. They point out also that illness can have a natural background; nonetheless, it can also be a result of sin – either coming from Satan or being sent by God to induce man to conversion or to punish sinners.⁶⁷ Byzantine iconography also uses representations of the sick to portray sinners in an allegorical way.⁶⁸

The Byzantines were aware of the role of medicine in treatment, so they did not consider spiritual practices a complete substitute for medical cures⁶⁹; however, health was perceived as dependent on a life lived virtuously and according to Chris-

⁶⁶ For the list of passages of Gospels, in which the healings are connected to remission of sins, see Evangelatou, "Virtuous Soul," 174, n. 9.

⁶⁷ Cf. Amundsen, *Medicine, Society and Faith*, 135–143, where the author lists statements of some patristic authors on health and medicine; Krueger, "Healing and the Scope of Religion," 120–121; Evangelatou, "Virtuous Soul," 174–178.

⁶⁸ Cf. Schroeder, "Healing the Body," 254.

⁶⁹ Cf. Evangelatou, "Virtuous Soul," 176; Krueger, "Healing and the Scope of Religion," 128.

tian teaching.⁷⁰ The Fathers of the Church thought also that in a situation wherein the background of an illness is spiritual, medicine is ineffective because it is necessary to heal the soul.⁷¹ However, even though the attitude of the Christian authors in antiquity to medicine was generally positive, they reminded their audiences that the art of medicine really comes from God and that it is God who makes healing treatments effective. Therefore a sick person who uses the help of a doctor should always have confidence in God and should not rely solely on medical practices.⁷² Romanos the Melodist, though he does not elaborate in his work on what is the source of the woman's illness, warns the audience against sin as a possible cause of illness. Thus, his way of presenting the pericope on the woman with the blood flow is consistent with how the Fathers of the Church regarded the relationship between physical and spiritual health.

Neither the author of the anonymous homily nor Romanos the Melodist focuses on medical issues, but the aim of both is to shape the spirituality of the audience. Indeed, although the miracle of healing is at the center of the texts, it is the woman's strong faith that is highlighted and held up as a model. She believes that Jesus has the power to heal; the adversities encountered, her own sense of shame, and the crowd are not able to dissuade her from touching the Savior. In his Homily 31 on Matthew, John Chrysostom also mentions the scene of the healing of the woman with the blood flow to show her faith as a model for his listeners. The mentioned works therefore present a more general teaching for which the New Testament scene is merely a starting point. Their authors want to encourage the faithful to have confidence in God in every situation and to believe in his power to deliver them from oppression. Although the Fathers of the Church did not reject medicine, they remind us that it is thanks to God that a treatment is effective and that it is a sin not to believe in God's help. The interpretations of the scene on the woman with the blood flow particularly emphasize the power of God as a healing force, but they do not limit the necessity of maintaining a strong faith only to the situation of being sick. The authors of the examined texts teach as well that living the Christian faith sometimes means facing obstacles: one's own fears, a sense of shame (especially in connection with one's own sinfulness), and external impediments.

⁷⁰ Cf. Schroeder, "Healing the Body," 253; Evangelatou, "Virtuous Soul," 175; Krueger, "Healing and the Scope of Religion," 123–124.

⁷¹ Cf. Evangelatou, "Virtuous Soul," 178.

⁷² Cf. Amundsen, *Medicine, Society and Faith*, 150–151.

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