PRE-MODERN BOSOM SERPENTS AND HIPPOCRATES' *EPIDEMIAE* 5: 86: A COMPARATIVE AND CONTEXTUAL FOLKLORE APPROACH

DAVIDE ERMACORA
Joint PhD Student
Department of Cultures, Politics and Society
University of Turin
Lungo Dora Siena 100, 10124 Torino, Italy
UFR of Anthropology, Sociology and Political Science
Lumière University Lyon 2
Campus Porte des Alpes, Avenue Pierre Mendès-France 5, 69676 Bron cedex, France
e-mail: davide.ermacora@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

A short Hippocratic passage (*Epidemiae* 5: 86) might constitute the earliest Western surviving variant of the well-known narrative and experiential theme of snakes or other animals getting into the human body (motif B784, tale-type ATU 285B). This paper* aims: 1) to throw light on this ancient passage through a comparative folkloric analysis and through a philological-contextual study, with reference to modern and contemporary interpretations; and 2) to offer an examination of previous scholarly enquiries on the fantastic intrusion of animals into the human body. In medieval and post-medieval folklore and medicine, sleeping out in the field was dangerous: snakes and similar animals could, it was believed, crawl into the sleeper's body through the ears, eyes, mouth, nostrils, anus and vagina. Comparative material demonstrates, meanwhile, that the thirsty snake often entered the sleeper's mouth because of its love of milk and wine. I will argue that while *Epidemiae* 5: 86 is modelled on this long-standing legendary pattern, for which many interesting literary pre-modern (and modern) parallels exist, its relatively precise historical and cultural framework can be efficiently analysed. The story is embedded in a broad set of Graeco-Roman ideas and practices surrounding ancient beliefs about snakes and attitudes to the drinking of unmixed wine.

KEYWORDS: bosom serpent • wine-drinking snake • Greek religion • ancient folklore • Hippocrates

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Le serpent est dans l'homme, c'est l'intestin. Il tente, trahit et punit.
(Hugo 1864: 59)

INTRODUCING BOSOM SERPENTS

Folklorists and psychopathologists are familiar with, respectively, the bosom serpent story complex and internal zoopathy (Ermacora forthcoming). These are *termini technici* that refer, albeit from two very different perspectives, to the same thing: narratives, experiential themes and the delusions of men and women who believe themselves to have been penetrated by snakes, frogs, toads, lizards, spiders, insects and the like. Frequently, the alleged agent of disease is accidentally ingested in the form of an egg or embryo, which grows inside the human sufferer; eventually he or she will expel these harmful creatures, through the mouth or the digestive system. The cross-cultural medical and non-medical evidence for bosom serpents and internal zoopathy, from many periods and places, is overwhelming: "[i]n reading publications dealing with such reports, one is occasionally struck by the extraordinary belief of some authors regarding animals supposed to be able to live in man" (Hoeppli 1959: 93). Here I will, as other folklorists before me, term this belief the bosom serpent.

In my doctoral research, I have studied the pre-modern cross-cultural documentation for bosom serpents reflected in typical narrative genres like belief tales, hagiographic legends, personal experience stories, myths, folk tales, *exempla*, etc. A variety of early records offer essentially the same persistent and rather sinister theme, attributing diseases to animals entering and living in the body of the sufferer: international motif B784 'Animal lives in a person's stomach', and related sub-motifs on animals dwelling in the human body (an incomplete list can be found in Poulsen 1979: 176–179, slightly updated in Bennett 1991: 2–3). Thanks to the methodological tools developed by folklore studies, I have been better able to study the cultural ramifications and various adaptations in ancient texts of these traditional aetiologies. Bosom serpent narratives are firmly grounded in everyday medical and religious notions (medical accounts being more realistic, of course). The ideas in question have a powerful or latent emotional charge and have perhaps always figured in story-telling traditions and personal experience narratives (Ermacora 2015; forthcoming; Ermacora et al. forthcoming). In fact, there is a clear circularity operating beneath the bosom serpent story complex: tradition stems from experiential sources, experience shapes tradition, while tradition itself shapes experience. In this way tradition provides a template for bodily experiences, particularly for sickness and diseases (Hartmann 1998: 66; Bennett 2005: 39; 2006: 3). This is most apparent in an interpretative framework that is open to medical and psychological discourses and that gives space to a corporeal perspective rich in human emotions.

In 2007, Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith (2007: 115) briefly stated that "[i]n the Middle Ages and in Ancient Greece and Rome it was medical orthodoxy to believe that animals could indeed get into the human body and live there, causing pain, disease, and death". Unfortunately, they did not provide any evidence to support these claims: they probably based them on evidence presented by Jan Bondeson (1997: 26–50; I assume this on the basis of Bennett 2005: 10–11). In addition, Nigel Mortimer (1988–1989) briefly mentioned an ancient Roman variant of the bosom serpent, but the author provided

no reference to support his claim. Antiquity has been almost entirely ignored by scholars studying the bosom serpent story complex. I have tried, in my work, to correct this oversight. I analysed elsewhere a singular medical story on the bosom serpent, involving therapy by trickery, told by Galen (ca. 129–216/217) in his commentary on the Hippocratic *Epidemiae*. This story is comparable to other classical, late-antique, modern and contemporary snake- and amphibian-swallowing episodes and has a clear folklore background (Ermacora forthcoming).

Here, I will deal, instead, with another bosom serpent narrative, dating from classical Greece, one that has been seldom discussed by classical scholars and one that has been ignored by folklorists. The short text in question is the story of the *argès* serpent (Hippocrates, *Epidemiae* 5: 86):

> A youth who had drunk much neat wine was sleeping on his back in a tent. A snake called *argès* slithered into his mouth. When he felt it, not knowing what to do, he ground his teeth together and bit off part of the snake. He was seized by a great pain and brought up his hands as though choking, tossed himself about, and died in convulsions.[1] (Greek text in Jouanna 2000: 39, translation in Jouanna 2012 [1996]: 178; slightly modified by author, according to Smith 1994: 209)

AIMS AND METHOD

By adopting what I call a comparative and contextual folklore approach, I intend, in this paper, to throw new light on this problematic Greek passage through a philological-contextual study. Several investigations have demonstrated the importance, for classical scholars, of turning to anthropology and later folklore material to clarify obscure passages in ancient literature. Folklore can, indeed, provide a valuable key for a better understanding of 'oddities' in the classical world. These 'oddities' are liable to arouse feelings of estrangement in modern readers, but they deserve to be placed at the very fulcrum of interpretative tension (Bettini 2010: 256–259; see Lelli 2014; Braccini 2014; forthcoming). Using subsequent materials for developing an understanding of historically much earlier periods I hope to demonstrate the applicability and usefulness of this approach, sometimes called the retrospective method, recently resuscitated, in particular, in Old Norse studies (Sävborg and Bek-Pedersen 2014; Heide and Bek-Pedersen 2014). One of my aims here, in fact, is to show that a lot of cross-cultural similarities, hitherto considered unrelated or unexplained, belong to the same story complex. They are adaptations of the polymorphic idea of the impossible intrusion of animals into a human body. The structural adaptation and persistence of both folk beliefs and *Märchen* or legend plots and their stylistic criteria in many different societies needs, in fact, to be taken into consideration. As I shall show, it is a solid line of comparative research and it opens up many additional folkloristic and anthropological problems for study.

In so doing, I will make reference to the interpretative framework that has been built around Hippocrates, *Epidemiae* 5: 86 from early modern to contemporary times. I will also offer a critical examination of scholarly enquiries into bosom serpents, enquiries which have concentrated on recent legends. Given that the literary materials I will discuss go far back into the past, my research will home in on historical legends. I

am aware that the comparative approach has its dangers, not least the risk of losing the context of a given source; hence a priority here is the historicisation of the *argès* text. In order to avoid the dangers of a one-dimensional reading of texts, I have naturally concentrated on putting together a congruent and philologically-grounded set of documents.

I will argue that the account of the young man and the *argès* snake is modelled on a long-term legendary pattern for which interesting pre-modern, modern and contemporary parallels exist (many of which have not yet been explored). But I will also show that its historical and cultural framework can be effectively analysed. The passage in question belongs to traditional aetiologies, reflected in folk narratives, attributing the origin of disease to animals entering human bodies. What is more, a broad set of Graeco-Roman ideas and practices surrounding ancient beliefs on snakes and attitudes to the drinking of unmixed wine can inform our understanding of the episode.

PAST SCHOLARSHIP: AN OVERVIEW

In order to introduce the topic of this article, I will briefly provide a critical review of scholarly studies on pre-modern bosom serpents; a literature where traditional beliefs are woven together with the observations of writers and scientists. As William Hansen (2002: 19) has noted, the "published indices of the oral tales of different geographic regions make only rare and inconsistent reference to ancient texts". These are the same indices to which the researchers on contemporary legends make "frequent reference" (Renard 2013 [1999]: 52–53) in relation to the continuity of traditional motifs in contemporary narrative folklore. With some happy exceptions, today's medievalists and classicists know little of the tools and methods developed by folklorists. These scholars also ignore the scholarship devoted to folklore forms among non-Western peoples: as Alan Dundes (1993: xii) noted, this is "surely a serious lacuna" for any study centred on narratives.

The most sophisticated medical and folkloristic literature on the bosom serpent legend has been unable to push the legend back beyond the 16th century. An important exception is worth flagging up. In 1932 Adolf Jacoby published an essay in German, which has been almost completely ignored by subsequent scholars. Jacoby was, however, read by Ebermut Rudolph, who wrote another all but forgotten German folklore essay (1976–1977). Then Jan Bondeson (1990; 1997: 26–30; 1998: 442) employed Jacoby in the 1990s: Bondeson, as it happens, hardly acknowledged Jacoby's work, which is only listed in the general references. Another scholar who has gone back beyond the modern age is Jean-Loïc Le Quellec. In a penetrating book published in 1991, dedicated to contemporary contamination legends, Le Quellec (2012: 70–85, 221) explored several fantastic medieval stories of animal invasions in the human body.

The few authors of philological-literary works who have covered the bosom serpent story complex do not seem to be sufficiently aware of its folkloric dimension. I am thinking particularly of recent works, with many relevant examples collected from the Latin Middle Ages, by Alessandro Coloru (2008: 520–527; 2009: 103–109) and Nicolò Maldina (2011). Both articles, published a few years apart and unaware of each other, explored the vitality of bosom serpents in medieval Latin literature. The authors, trained philolo-

gists, focus not on folklore, but, instead, on historical, literary and philological questions. Other contemporary studies have, also, completely ignored the folkloric aspects of the bosom serpent story complex, while briefly indexing a range of "[h]ealing narratives dealing with the entrance of animals into human bodies that can be found in miracle collections and other hagiographical genres of different periods" (Constantinou 2010: 52). This reluctance to explore the legendary aspects of the bosom serpent is something true, sadly, even of historical linguists accustomed to the best multidisciplinary and comparative methods (for example, Ronzitti 2011: 25–26).

The standard and acclaimed reference works on the bosom serpent by Bondeson (1997: 26–30) for the history of medicine, and by Bennett (2005: 10–11, 17–18, 26–29) for folkloristics are: 1) largely interdependent (for the oldest historical materials, Bennett is mainly based simply on Bondeson's history of medical research which, as I have already noted, is possibly based on Jacoby), and 2) lacking in historical-philological substance. They limit themselves to some bosom serpent stories from Late Antiquity and the medieval world to demonstrate the antiquity of the oral folklore patterns discussed. For example, Bennett (2005: 7) is aware that "like most contemporary legends [bosom serpents] have equivalents in older traditions". But what do equivalents mean for her? How do equivalents connect with recent or relatively recent traditions? How many equivalents exist? Why are old equivalents so remarkably similar to recent stories? Bennett does not, in the end, explore these research questions. By focusing on the pre-modern evidence, it is my intention to provide here a first corrective to enquiries that have concentrated on modern and contemporary legend.

INTRODUCING TALE-TYPE ATU 285B*

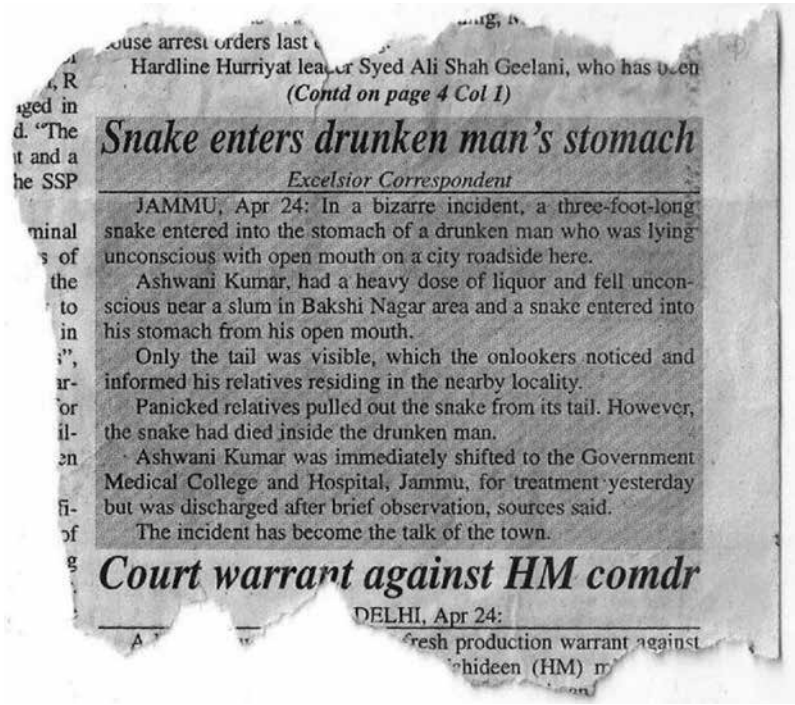
Epidemiae 5: 86 is, to my knowledge, the first recorded reference for international tale-type *The Snake Stays in the Man's Stomach* (ATU 285B*). There is a very brief but effective description of the tale-type 285B* (more a migratory legend than a proper international folk tale) in the latest edition of *The Types of International Folktales*:

> A man (woman) sleeps under a tree with his mouth open. A snake crawls unnoticed into his body, and he feels sick. In some variants the snake leaves the body with its young. Sometimes the snake is enticed out of the body with milk. (Uther 2011: 166–167)

Here is a variant of this tale-type from India, published April 24, 2009, in the *Daily Excelsior*, the oldest and most widely circulating newspaper of Jammu and Kashmir (according to the newspaper's website). It is strikingly similar to the Hippocratic passage and can, therefore, stand here as the most recent in a long line of narrations on ATU 285B* (Figure 1):

> *Snake enters drunken man's stomach* (from the *Excelsior* correspondent). In a bizarre incident, a three-foot-long snake entered into the stomach of a drunken man who was lying unconscious with open mouth on a city roadside here. Ashwani Kumar, had a heavy dose of liquor and fell unconscious near a slum in Bakshi Nagar area and a snake entered into his stomach from his open mouth. Only the tail was visible, which the onlookers noticed and informed his relatives residing in the nearby

locality. Panicked relatives pulled out the snake from its tail. However, the snake had died inside the drunken man. Ashwani Kumar was immediately shifted to the Government Medical College and Hospital, Jammu, for treatment yesterday but was discharged after brief observation, sources said. The incident has become the talk of the town. [Author's italics]



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(Contd on page 4 Col 1)

Snake enters drunken man's stomach

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Apr 24: In a bizarre incident, a three-foot-long snake entered into the stomach of a drunken man who was lying unconscious with open mouth on a city roadside here.

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Court warrant against HM comdr

DELHI, Apr 24:

...fresh production warrant against ...hideen (HM) ...

Figure 1. Excerpt from Daily Excelsior *(see Razdan 2009).*

These two texts – the Greek and the Indian – stand at the chronological extremes of the bosom serpent tradition: they are bookends to this paper. There are scores of chronologically intermediate variants, including medieval texts, illustrating the entry of the snake through the mouth into the sleeping body, often as a result of excessive drinking. In all these cases, the animal is, according to the storyteller, attracted by the smell of the wine (the predilection of snakes for wine will be discussed below). For example, the *Vita S. Symeonis Iunioris Stylitae* 136 (version BHG 1689), written by an anonymous monk at the very end of 6th or the beginning of the 7th century, informs us of how Simeon Stylites the Younger (521–592) helps a Georgian man, who fell asleep in the fields at harvest time, after having drunk too much. A snake entered the Georgian's mouth, tempted by the smell of wine and with Simeon's help the man expelled the bosom serpent anally,[2] the snake being still alive when it was removed from the body:

> At the time of harvest, a Georgian had plunged into the deepest sleep following an excessive drinking spree, and since he was lying out in the countryside, he was running the greatest danger, because a snake having come into contact with his open mouth, was attracted by the smell of wine, and slithered into his intestines.

> The man went to the saint and asked, in tears, for the help of God through prayer. The servant of God took pity on [the man] and, after marking his belly with the sign of the cross, using a holy stick, ordered him to leave the monastery. The man, having left, immediately expelled the live snake from his anus, and healed, he left glorifying God with all present that witnessed the miracle.[3] (Greek text and French translation in van den Ven 1962a: 128; 1962b: 153)[4]

These remarkably similar texts – the Greek, the Indian, and the Byzantine ones – are magnificent variants of tale-type ATU 285B* and of bosom serpent stories more generally. None have received much attention. The fundamental story remains the same: each text describes, though in a different manner, the serious consequences of a bosom serpent entering through the open mouth of a drunk. In the Greek text, the man died in a tent; in the Indian text, the man survived first out on a road, then in a hospital (the snake, instead, died inside the victim's body). In the Byzantine text, the man was healed in a monastery thanks to the intercession of the saint. Indeed, pre-modern 'contemporary' legends are rarely exactly the same as the legends of today. They are narrative equivalents strained through the tensions and concerns of their own societies. As I will show below, a bosom serpent could be interpreted as a demon and/or as a medical condition; the bosom serpent may be extracted through a surgical procedure rather than by tempting it out of the body with milk. This kind of variation is, of course, typical of any antique legend with contemporary analogues. As Timothy Tangherlini (2002: 241) has stated:

> […] legends from medieval texts are 'updated' to fit the demands of modern culture in contemporary tradition. This process of variation can be referred to as 'historicization', and it requires a modification of the Grimm's original characterization of legend. Legend is not a historical narrative but, rather, a historicized narrative.

HIPPOCRATES AND PRESENT-DAY COMMENTATORS

The focus of this paper is, however, the Hippocratic *argès* text. This text is indexed, without discussion, in the pioneering essay on pre-modern bosom serpents by Jacoby (1932: 18, 25; from there it reached Rudolph 1976–1977: 198). The passage is then briefly mentioned by Bondeson (1997: 27; 1998: 442) who does not, though, quote his source (he is probably drawing on Jacoby, who is listed in his bibliography). Bennett (2005: 10) and Rina Knoeff (2009: 39) evidently depend on Bondeson. Jean-Bruno Renard (1998: 223), too, fails to quote his source. I should note again that this is probably the oldest surviving example of the bosom serpent story complex in the West, even if this claim is recurrent in the literature on bosom serpents.[5] Already Arnold Adolph Berthold (1850: 3, 11–12), discussing medical cases of amphibians and reptiles living inside the stomach, wrote that the Hippocratic story was "[t]he oldest known case". It appears in the Greek *Corpus Hippocraticum* in Book V of Hippocrates' *Epidemiae*. Scholars have argued that this ancient Greek medical collection was written in two distinct phases by two unnamed itinerant Greek doctors between 358 and 348 BC (Jouanna 2000: XLII–XLV).

The passage in question is a Hippocratic text that has certainly never received the attention it deserves. Jacques Jouanna (2001) dedicated an essay to this passage and its

lexicographical and philological framework (see also Gessner 1587: 27v–28r), but the author unfortunately neglects all specifically semantic aspects of the story. Moreover, Jouanna (2000: xxxi, xxxviii) in his fine edition of the *Epidemiae*, and Simon Byl (2003: 18), both conclude that the young man actually dies of convulsions because he was bitten in his mouth by the *argès* snake. The text has been included, thus, in studies on venomous snakes or human deaths from snakebites in ancient times. Byl even puts the episode in the context of snake activity and symbolism in the classical world.

There is, however, no poisonous bite in our text: it is the man, in fact, who bites the snake, and not vice versa.[6] Even if there had been a bite, it would have been an unusual internal bite as a consequence of the animal's annoyance at finding itself inside a human body. Bosom serpent variants are known in which the snake, while entering through the mouths of sleepers, bites the throat during the efforts of the awakened man or woman to get it out. This idea is reflected, for example, in the 11th-century Grimaldus, *Vita Dominici Exiliensis* 3: 32 (Latin text in Valcárcel 1982: 19, 509, translation in Lappin 2002: 107; see Ermacora et al. forthcoming), or in Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's 1880s *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None*; translation in Parkes 2005: 137–138; see the allegorical interpretation of this scene in Loeb 2010: 148–172). The young Greek man's overwhelming sensation, together with convulsions, seems, in fact, to be suffocation, though admittedly in *Epidemiae* 3, 2: 5 we find convulsions (*σπασμοί*) among the symptoms (acute fever, shaking of the head, hallucinations, etc.) of patients intoxicated after heavy drinking (Greek text and translation in Jones 1923: 226–227; see Gourevitch and Demigneux 2013: 80).[7] Suffocation, moreover, is well-documented among the many possible symptoms following snake bites (Sordi 2003: 246).

However, according to the text, death, the feeling of suffocation and the man's convulsions (note the detail of his hands moving to his throat: "and brought up his hands as though choking") were certainly a result of the reptile entering or attempting to enter the laryngotracheal tube and its fright when the man bit it. This simple fact was fully understood by Renaissance writers and humanist commentators on Hippocrates. Before turning to some of these old authors, however, I will quote three contemporary versions of the bosom serpent legend in which the intruding animal slips inside the mouth and suffocates the young host. This is in line with the retrospective method I have adopted in this paper, in which even very late bosom serpent legends and certain 'everyday' snake beliefs can help to decipher much earlier sources. Unfortunately, these folklore sources have been ignored by classical scholars who have written of the *argès* snake in the past century.

For example, the aforementioned Nietzsche's work tells of a black snake which crept into a young shepherd's throat, while he was sleeping, and choked him until he was able to bite off and spit out the head of the animal (see also Ermacora forthcoming; Ermacora et al. forthcoming). Another story collected in 1975 in Sweden states that "worms crawled into the larynx which had swelled, thereby causing the child [who ate a banana infested with worms] to choke to death" (af Klintberg 1985: 277). A variant of ATU 285B*, registered on May 19, 1931 in the Italian daily newspaper *Gazzetta del Popolo*, relates an event which occurred the night of May 18 near Bucharest. The similarities with the Greek story and the death of the young man through suffocation due to an intruding snake need no comment.

> [Swallows a snake during sleep]. A young shepherd boy who was sleeping in a hut in the village called Popesti suddenly woke up: he felt he was suffocating. He found that a snake had slipped into his trachea. All attempts by the peasants, rushing to free the child from the unwanted guest, failed. He had to be taken to the hospital, where he underwent surgery. (Bermani 1991: 187)

HIPPOCRATES AND POST-MEDIEVAL INTERPRETATIONS

In 1568, the great physician, philosopher and astrologer Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576) mentioned the *argès* snake in his *In Hippocratis coi prognostica...commentarii* 1: 20–21 (Latin text later published in Spon 1663: 613–614), a vast commentary to the *Corpus Hippocraticum* (a commentary which he never brought to completion). Cardano added methods for getting snakes out in such cases; together with an anatomical discussion based on Galen and contemporary Flemish anatomy scholar Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) on the muscles that open and close the mouth (Siraisi 1997: 137). Another relevant Renaissance text is *Observationum medicarum, rararum, novarum admirabilium et monstrosarum* [etc.] 1, 3: 95, by Johannes Schenck von Grafenberg (1530–1598) (expanded to seven volumes between 1584 and 1597). Schenck von Grafenberg includes a section dedicated to snakes, lizards and other venomous animals that find their way into the ventricles through the mouths of sleepers. He provides, in passing, a very useful list of bosom serpent cases extracted from the medical literature available at that time (with scrupulous bibliographical references). This section opens, suitably enough, with the story of the *argès* snake (Latin text in Schenck von Grafenberg 1600: 595).

François Rabelais (ca. 1494–1553), in the fourth book of his *La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel*, published in 1552 (*Le quart livre des faicts et dicts héroïques du bon Pantagruel* 44: 58–62; French text in Marichal 1947: 187), has Pantagruel and Frère Jan discuss hanging an individual up by his or her feet over a bowl of milk to get a snake out. Scholars who have briefly written on this passage from Rabelais noted parallels collected by contemporary folklorists: international motifs B784.2.1 'Patient fed salt: animal comes out for water'; B784.2.1.1 'Snake (frog) in human body enticed out by milk (water)' (Renard 1998: 223–224; Postic 2000: 34; Bennett 2005: 27–29; Le Quellec 2012: 76–77). Rabelais wrote:

> "On the advice of our specialists, the Mezarims", said the Podestat, "at the season when [the giant called Bringuenarilles] normally appears we concealed a great many cocks and hens inside the windmills. The first time that he swallowed them he all but died, for they went on cackling inside him and fidgeted about in his stomach, at which he fell into a lipothymic fit with heart pains and horrific and dangerous convulsions as though snakes had slipped into his stomach via his mouth". "That though is most inappropriate and out of place", said Frère Jean, "for I heard tell some time ago that if a snake gets into your stomach it causes no discomfort whatsoever and will come out at once if you hang the patient up by his feet and place a bowl full of warm milk close to his mouth." (Screech 2006: 779, slightly modified by author)

Noting the oral origin of this belief, Pantagruel refutes it unequivocally, responding to the friar thus:

> "You", said Pantagruel, "have heard tell, and so had those who told it to you, but no such remedy has ever been seen or heard of. Hippocrates (in Book 5 of the *Epidemics*) writes of a case which occurred in his times: the patient died in a trice in spasms and convulsions." (Ibid.)

Whether Rabelais's repudiation of this traditional cure is a "clear and demonstrative [...] refutation of the legend [which shows] a critical spirit higher than that of most doctors or scholars of his time" (Antonioli 1976: 307), a mere "parade of erudition" (Smith 1918: 211) or a demonstration that "popular belief has no value compared to the warnings of ancient scholars, above all when they are supported by the evidence of the facts" (Bellot-Antony and Demerson 1990: 150), is a matter for interpretation. It is important to note, however, that rather than denying the truth of the *argès* serpent, Rabelais refutes the legendary cure: the event took place, and led to death, as Hippocrates clarified. Certainly, in Hippocrates' account there is no mention of a patient hung upside down, as Fiola Berry (2000: 95, 99) mistakenly thinks. What interests us here is the acknowledged closeness of Hippocrates' story to the many folklore stories on the bosom serpent that were current in the Renaissance.

HANGING UPSIDE DOWN OVER A BOWL OF MILK

There is an extraordinarily realistic woodcut reproducing the colourful treatment, described by Rabelais, for expelling serpents and other 'worms' living in a human body through the mouth. The woodcut is contained in Hieronymus Brunschwig's *Dis ist das Buch der Cirurgia* [etc.], published in Strasbourg in 1497, one of the first illustrated medical treatises on surgery in the vernacular (Figure 2). The woodcut has been noted by several historians of medicine: unusually as most pre-modern bosom serpent iconography has been ignored (see, for example, Guthrie 1945: plate XXVI; Elliott 1964: 27; Christianson 1993: 66). In order to show the widespread diffusion in medieval medicine of the belief that snakes can enter the human body, Walter Artelt (1954: IX) even mentioned comparatively, together with Brunschwig, the Hippocratic story of the *argès* snake and the bosom serpent miracle of Sts. Cosmas and Damien (see below).

Already in 1858, it was noted that the image, composed of two juxtaposed woodcuts, is only present in some copies of Brunschwig's treatise (Choulant 1858: 80; see also Sudhoff 1907: 49; 1908: 57, 60). The woodcut is absent, for example, from the two copies of *Dis ist das Buch der Cirurgia* kept in the Bavarian State Library, which I checked. The image was added later on (but still in 1497), together with the anatomical compendium (*Von der Anathomi*), probably from the desire of Brunschwig to add a visual explanation in a successive imprint of his handbook (Benati 2010: 13). In general, it might also be worth bearing in mind that some of the woodcuts of the handbook were 'recycled' from other works; thus, they "were not quite at the level of the specialized content of the text: they bore no captions and were more picturesque than informative" (Pantin 2014: 27).

Brunschwig's woodcut carefully refers, however, to a portion of text written in High German (I was not able to find the passage in the translation of Brunschwig's work

Figure 2. The woodcut from Brunschwig (1497), also reproduced in Guthrie 1945: plate xxvi. The accompanying title reads: "Das vij capitel dis(s) fierden tractates würt dich leren so ein mensch slange(n) oder and(ere) würm des glychen würm in dem lybe hat on schaden von dem menschen zu bringen" *(The seventh chapter of the fourth treatise will teach you how a man has a snake or other similar worms in the body and how to remove them without damaging the host).*

dated 1525). The physician explains that animals like serpents, lizards and frogs can get into the body while men are sleeping in the open air, or when men drink these animals' bodily fluids from contaminated water. Emaciation, yellowing of the face, a swelling stomach, a gnawing and biting in the belly, Brunschwig claims, are symptoms of a resident bosom serpent (see also Sudhoff 1915–1916, who compares an interesting German source in Latin dated 1440). Then, Brunschwig continues:

> If you have recognised these signs, then help [the patient] in the following manner: get a winch of the measure of the one above and bind the patient's hands behind his back, so that he cannot grab the snake when it will crawl out if the patient wants

> to do that, because otherwise the snake will return. Hang [the patient] as is shown here so that the head hangs down with the mouth open and put under his mouth a bowl or a pot with a little of warm goat's milk, so that the flavour of the milk goes into his mouth. Order your people to leave except the man in charge at the winch. You must not say any word because through suction the snakes slide down: its desire is aroused by the presence of milk and they want milk. Then the person tied to the winch feels in the mouth the need to let them get the milk and you see that the snake has its snout in the milk, let him stick his nose into the milk and let him drink a little. Then order the man on the winch to pull himself up carefully so that the snake will continue to have the nose in the milk and do so before it is satisfied. Then you have to detach [the man] from the winch and leave him resting. In the eventuality he had more than one snake, do as I have taught you and then if you realize that thanks to that [the patient] has no snake in his body [...].[8] (High German text in Sigerist 1923: 256–259)

This folk remedy is to be found, a century before, in the anti-Semitic tale no. 219 of the *Le trecento novelle*, a collection of short stories in prose set in Florence written by the merchant and poet Franco Sacchetti (1335–1400) at the very end of the 14th century. Although today unknown to folklorists, the tale of Sacchetti was already indexed by Thompson (1955–1958) in the few notes that accompany motifs B784.2.1 and K115.3 'Pseudo-magic potion to induce pregnancy. Found to contain snakes'.[9] I summarise here the story (according to Marucci 1996: 774–775; Puccini 2004: 635–639; Zaccarello 2014; see also Salgarolo 1991: 109–111):

> Two young sisters-in-law, wives of two brothers, unable to have children, buy a miracle potion from a Jew. He puts serpent eggs inside the remedy. One sister takes the remedy; the other hides it in a box. After some time serpents are born in the belly of one and the box of the other. Physicians, therefore, hang the afflicted woman upside down, placing a bowl of milk on the ground to ensure that the snakes come out of her body.

According to other authors from the same period, similar strategies were employed in the case of a patient swallowing a living frog. Many examples might be provided. See, for instance, the *Sertum papale de venenis*, a *compendia* of poisons probably written by the Paduan doctor Gulielmus de Marra in 1362: in the case of a patient swallowing a live frog he "advises [the doctor] to shake warm water near the mouth of the patient who should lean over, 'since the frog very often moves towards such a noise' (*ad talem rumorem rana sepissime gradiatur*)" (Thorndike 1934: 530). To discharge the parasitic frog with vomiting, head bent or suspension of the patient by his feet are needed, according to the treatise on poisons *Problemata de venenis* written towards the end of the 14th century by Christophorus de Honestis (ibid.: 540). Giovanni Lippi da Arezzo's medical work on the heart, *De procuratione cordis* 3: 13, written at Florence sometime before 1464, recommended bosom serpent victims be suspended, head down, over a basin of cold water (for frogs) or milk or sweet warm wine (for lizards and small snakes). Lippi da Arezzo explains that the bosom serpents got into the bodies of those who had drunk milk and who then fell asleep outside with their mouths open (see also Collard 2013: 37).

The tempting out of a bosom serpent with milk was indeed a very widespread and "surprisingly old idea" in popular medicine (Bennett 2005: 27, referring to Brunschwig).

It is also to be found in various 13th-century encyclopaedic sources on snakes. These sources usually rely on Dioscorides, even if the reference still needs to be traced: this might be a Latin version (perhaps translated from Arabic) of Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica* or, less likely, the pseudo-Dioscorides' *De venenis eorumque praecautione et medicatione*. One might note here Bartholomeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum* 18: 8 (ca. 1249; see Ermacora 2015: 273), and Juan Gil de Zamora's *Historia naturalis* 2, 7 (ca. 1275–1295). Here is Gil de Zamora's passage:

> Snakes are very fond of wine and milk and because of that they can be extracted from men's belly with the smell of milk, as Dioscorides says.[10] (Latin text in Domínguez García and García Ballester 1994: 1710)

I noted above that scholars have pointed, for later times, to many equivalents of this fabulous cure in oral folklore. Sometimes, these equivalents are given by the narrator as a personal experience story. The familiar remedy of suspending the patient upside down over a bowl of milk was, for example, according to a passage by French physician Augustin Belloste (1654–1730), successfully employed by him to cure a young man afflicted with a bosom serpent (Belloste 1716: 538–540). This is, however, a classic version of ATU 285B* (see Folet 1905: 441, who accuses Belloste of being gullible; Blanchard 1906). Folklorists and psychologists have long maintained that the cultural context of narrative tradition can shape individuals' personal experiences and autobiographical memories (Bahna 2015). The milk remedy is well attested in modern and contemporary European and American anthelmintic therapies: a cup of milk, a rag soaked in milk, or a plate of food, had to be put in front of the patient's mouth, nostrils or anus in order to tempt worms out. Tapeworms are regularly believed to be greedy for milk or food (see, for example, Napoli 2008; Pizza 2010: 128; 2012: 177, for Southern Italy; for North-America, see Bennett 1997: 232; Tambongco 2004; Tucker 2012).[11]

In any case, it is difficult to judge whether Lippi da Arezzo, Brunschwig and other learned colleagues relied on folklore or if milk was ever really used against bosom serpents. Think, for example, of Sacchetti's folktale. The subtle boundary between fiction and truth and between popular and learned medicine, taken together with the great resilience of folk narrative themes seems, however, to have confused modern commentators. In his book on popular medicine in modern France, Matthew Ramsey (1988: 228) quoted a "widely known story" from the 19th-century French Hautes-Alpes about a parish priest who healed a man from a worm after hanging him upside-down above a bowl of milk. Colin Jones (1990: 382; see also Brockliss and Jones 1997: 18, 275), commenting on Ramsey, recalled Brunschwig's woodcut in their effort to create "an impeccable ancestry in learned culture" for the practice of suspending a patient above a bowl of milk. But this is a classic error of perspective based on the privilege accorded to the (supposed) oldest source, with the static view that popular medicine depends on the literate culture of elites (see the similar concerns in Williams 1998: 350). Brunschwig and others certainly, there can be no question, drew heavily on bosom serpent folklore while creating medical orthodoxy.

A surprising number of later early modern authors, discussing bosom serpents, referred to the Hippocratic story of the *argès* snake. In 1675, a letter was published in the German journal *Miscellanea Curiosa; sive, Ephemeridum Medico-Physicarum Germanicarum*. The author, a physician, had spent much effort trying to heal an epileptic woman suffering from a snake inside her body. Wondering how the snake had got there, the author noted that "Hippocrates observed that snakes sometimes enter the body of sleeping people through the mouth; this is what happened to the young man [about whom Hippocrates] tells the story, he fell asleep after drinking a lot of wine" (Frommann 1755). In 1701, the French father of parasitology Nicolas Andry de Bois-Regard (1658–1742) published his famous treatise on intestinal worms, *De la géneration des vers dans le corps de l'homme* [etc.]. Andry briefly recalled the Hippocratic story in relation to animals that enter the body through the mouth: "there are many similar events in the books of doctors" (Andry de Bois-Regard 1701: 72).[12]

In addition, the little known book by Casimiro Anino (1762) deserves attention. This short study details the clinical story of a ten-year-old Italian from Tortona, who became seriously ill in 1762, vomiting a few worms and two salamanders whose corpses were preserved. After some months of suffering, the boy finally died. Anino, a royal Piedmontese surgeon, performed an autopsy, without finding traces of animals inside the corpse. Relying on similar bosom serpent cases narrated in the old medical literature (among which Anino 1762: 23, briefly quotes, as the oldest case recorded, the Hippocratic story of the *argès* serpent), the surgeon concluded that the boy really ingested some salamander spawn or, alternatively, a small salamander that then grew in the boy's stomach (on this curious but very serious book, see also the description given in Parona 1899).

In the 19th century, learned doctors did not necessarily avoid the issue either. For example, the famous French naturalist, physician and politician François-Vincent Raspail (1794–1878) discussed the bosom serpent in his 1843 book on snakes. He did so because "[b]ooks are full of cases on the introduction of these reptiles into the different mucous cavities". He also cited Hippocrates' text noting that "[t]he odour of the wine, in this case, attracted the serpent; with children, the smell of the milk has the same effect" (Raspail 1844: 211; this is an essay that translates Raspail 1843: 246). Raspail's direct source, I believe, is to be found, in turn, in an excerpt (which has the same bibliographical references) from an edition of the encyclopaedia of the zoologist Bernard-Germain-Étienne de Laville-sur-Illon count of Lacépède (1756–1825) that was published after his death (de Laville-sur-Illon de Lacépède 1839: 364). Well into the 1800s, therefore, a celebrated doctor Raspail could believe in the objective truth of the bosom serpent; he listed a series of cases with meticulous notes and believed that it was possible to give birth to a snake or a reptile that had previously entered the womb.

The *argès* snake is included by slightly later authors, discussing cases of bosom serpents and animals of all sorts that live in the human digestive tract. One such author was the French physician Jean-Christian-Marc-François-Joseph Boudin (1806–1867) who compiled an enormous encyclopaedia. More scientific in tone than Raspail's contemporary work, he also noted that "[i]n the 16th century, the fear of swallowing amphibians and in particular, snakes had become widespread [...]. Since then, the medical literature

has been flooded with observations of amphibians coming up thanks to vomit" (Boudin 1857: 360–361). A detailed analysis of historic and contemporary cases followed. The Hippocratic story was also briefly mentioned in the enormous (and still extremely useful) repertory of cases by George Milbry Gould and Walter Lytle Pyle (1897: 636), among modern cases of animals living in the digestive system.

The gullible Raspail has been all but forgotten by modern researchers. But I cannot agree with Kraig Adler (2007: 69) that after 1849 "no serious scientist ever supported the claims" that animals (like frogs) reside for a long time in a person's stomach. In Adler's opinion, this rejection was due to the publication of rigorous experiments conducted by Arnold A. Berthold (1850), included in a study first read at the meeting of the German Royal Scientific Society, November 10, 1849, and published one year later (a short version of the study was published as Berthold 1849). Such experiments clearly demonstrated the impossibility of this 'mythical' condition, which had been declared factual by many authors (Blanchard 1899: 475–476; Bondeson 1997: 41–42, 46; 1998: 445–446; Hartmann 1998: 63–64).

It is true that some scientists and great parasitologists, like Rudolph Leuckart (1852: 200), discussing later cases of imaginary parasitism and pseudo-parasitism, expressly referred to Berthold's work and rapidly dismissed bosom serpents as fables. The fact remains, though, that there were many other subsequent instances of doctors taking bosom serpents as a real medical condition. For example, there was the interesting case of Thankful Taylor from Tennessee. In 1869, the woman apparently drank a snake from a spring, falling sick with severe convulsions and painful movements in her abdomen. A 23-inch reptile was extracted, five years later, from her stomach, through the mouth, by a local doctor. The case appeared in the local press and two medical associations investigated Taylor's snake, between 1875 and 1877, reaching opposite conclusions in their committee reports: there were allegations of political and financial bias (Murphree 2005; Tucker 2010). Bondeson (1997: 42) asserted that the last case of an amphibious animal believed to dwell in the stomach occurred in Europe in 1882 and that bosom serpent legends continued in the United States. Bennett (2005: 21–22), on the other hand, claimed that in Europe the bosom serpent survived for (at least) another 20 years. Bondeson referred only to scientific discussions of medical cases. But even on those grounds there are many later instances from the 20th and even the 21st century (Ermacora forthcoming; see also Shorter 1992: 53–55 for clinical cases including two from Poland in the 1920s).

A PROBLEMATIC PASSAGE

Let me return to Hippocrates and Jouanna's linguistic discussion, and to the fact that the snake is called *argès* in the Hippocratic text, the only time that this word is used in the whole Hippocratic corpus. It is a rare archaic Greek term, with variable accent marks, which can be interpreted either as an adjective (an adjectival form with a meaning similar to 'brilliant white' or 'dazzling white') or as a noun ('shining white one'). Both of these refer, in Jouanna's opinion, to a now unidentifiable species of poisonous snake; he prefers to see *argès* as a noun (Jouanna 2000: 171; see also Irwin 1974: 215–217).

Jouanna restricts himself to Greek and does not extend his semantic-linguistic research to other Indo-European cultural domains. Nor does he examine the fairly widespread snake chromonyms within European languages. For example, according to the *Litauisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Fraenkel 1965: 1288, s.v. *žaltys*), in Lithuanian (*žaltỹs*) and Latvian (*zal(k)tis*) the snake is possibly 'the green one' (compare with Lithuanian *žãlias* and Latvian *zaļš* for 'green, raw'; see also Teijeiro 1983; 1999: 303; Luven 2001: 82). Comparative research might be worthwhile here. Certainly, in Indo-European languages there are 'white' snakes or 'white' worm-like creatures. There must, in fact, be some sort of semantic and linguistic link between Greek *argès* ("obscure word for a kind of snake": Petrosyan 2002: 108, 111) and the alternating Indo-European root **arg'-* (**$h_2$érǵ-/*h_2rǵ-)*, sometimes connected to symbolic-cultural representations concerning *canidae*. One should also consider that the base meaning of all of these cognate words "probably suggests both speed and brightness" (Kajava 2012: 26, compare with Méndez Dosuna 2012, for whom the original meaning must have been 'white'; see also Repanšek 2014: 246). This had already been noted by the late Conrad Gessner, in 1587, discussing Greek *argès* and the Hippocratic passage: *ἀργῆς circum flexum significat album et candidum, item velocem* 'ἀργῆς circumflex means white and bright, in the same way quick' (Latin text in Gessner 1587: 28r). In some Old English texts, the ambiguous adjective *fāh/fāg*, which can mean 'bright, shining, gleaming/stained' or 'hostile', denotes various species of snake monsters (for example the phrase *fah wyrm* 'hostile/shiny snake'), for the quality of their skin or that of their weapons, in particular a sword blade (di Paolo Healey 2006: 85–86; Szőke 2009: 60). Already Calvert Watkins (1995: 383) compared Greek *argès* to "the formulaic Old Norse phrase *enn fráne ormr* 'the speckled worm', of the dragon Fafnir".[13] A look at the main Indo-European and Greek etymological dictionaries, with reference to Watkins' (1995: 383–384) remarks, would also be useful.[14]

Again and again in these instances there is the idea of a sparkling reptile, probably due to the iridescent quality of the reptile's skin. There is an old hypothesis (which is discussed with reference to Latin *baculum* 'stick, staff') mentioned in the *Dizionario etimologico italiano* (Battisti and Alessio 1950: 504), the *Lessico etimologico italiano* (Pfister 1994), and the *Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana* (Cortelazzo and Zolli 1999 [1979]: 136), for *biàcco* (*Hierophis viridiflavus*). *Biàcco* is a kind of dark-coloured non-poisonous country snake and has, according to the authorities, the same root as the chemical compound *biacca* (white lead, containing a carbonate and a hydroxide portion), both derived from Lombardic **blaih* 'faded' (compare with Old High German *bleich* 'pale, faded').

To add to these lexical difficulties, there is an important textual problem with the *argès* passage. The *argès* snake (chapter 86) is unique in the second part of Book V of the *Epidemiae*: the section which covers chapters 51 to 106, each of which corresponds to a single medical case, with a few additional comments on treatment and two small 'constitutions'.[15] Chapter 86 is unique as it lacks a corresponding text in Book VII. The two books have a lot of material in common: 55 clinical cases in mostly random order, with the significant exception of chapters 80–87 of Book V of the *Epidemiae*, which are, instead, arranged in the same order in the seventh book of the *Epidemiae* VII, to cover numbers 85–91, except 86 (the *argès* snake). On the basis of this anomaly, Jouanna (2000: xix, xxxi, xxxviii–xxxix; 2001: 165–166) argues that the description of the death of the young man does not belong to the oldest strata of the *Epidemiae*, like the rest of Books V and VII. Rather, claims Jouanna, it was added at an unknown date in antiquity (see also

Demand 1994: 42; Craik 2015: 80). The *argès* serpent, it might be noted, is mentioned in a 2nd-century Galenic glossary of Hippocratic terms (*Linguarum seu dictionum exoletarum Hippocratis explicatio* 19, 85: 10: ἄργης· ὄφις τις οὕτως ὀνομαζόμενος '*argès*: a serpent called in this way'; Greek text in Kühn 1830), and in another similar gloss perhaps from Erotian's 1st-century glossary *Vocum Hippocraticarum collectio* (Jouanna 2000: 122; 2001: 169, 171).

Jouanna does not draw any conclusions about this possible addition. Given the passage's evident folkloric background, I would suggest that in Book V we have a later insertion of a 'spurious', oral bosom serpent source. In addition, Elizabeth M. Craik (2015: 80) has recently observed that "[i]t seems that a passage of quite alien origin has crept into *Epidemiae* 5". This source was inserted into a series of cases on altered mental states and fatal convulsions (*Epidemiae* 5: 80–87 = 7: 85–91), as part of a series of homogeneous medical episodes. Chapter 85, immediately prior to that of the *argès* serpent, tells, for instance, of a sick woman. She has a headache, subsequently loses her reason, cries and groans and dies 40 days later, after being wracked by convulsions for the last ten days of her life: she was also unable to speak in those last days.[16] Chapter 87, meanwhile, records the death of a male servant, who passed away from a melancholic condition.

BOSOM SERPENTS AND INCUBATION

A number of ancient and medieval stories about a snake approaching a sleeping body have been alleged to involve incubation. A basic definition of incubation is provided by Fritz Graf (2014: 138), who challenges the traditional assumption of continuity between pagan and Christian incubation practices:

> Incubation is a ritually clearly defined act of intentional sleep in sacred space in order to be healed by a superhuman healer in a dream – either to be healed by some action in a dream, or by receiving a prescription.

Snakes certainly appeared in a classical pre-Christian context in the dream incubation practices of ancient temple medicine. Asclepius, it will be remembered, could take the form of a snake: an actual zoomorphic epiphany of the god or a symbol of his presence (Petridou 2014: 294). However, there has been speculation that there were ritual incubation therapies for medieval Christians affected by bosom serpents and taken to church "to obtain healing from hydrophobia or venomous snakebites" (di Nola 1976: 151). In Alfonso Maria di Nola's classic monograph on St. Dominic's snake-handling in Abruzzo, Italy, there is, perhaps, the beginning of the 'healing incubation' theory which is found in some scholarly literature on tale-type ATU 285B*.

The connection of bosom serpents to Christian dream incubation is, in fact, reasonable. It is exemplified by a very well-known *exemplum* told by the archbishop of Genoa, Jacobus de Varagine (1228–1298) in his much-read *Legenda aurea* 143 (Latin text in Maggioni 1998: 979; 2007: 1097, translation in Ryan 1993: 197)[17] and the Dominican friar Vincentius Bellovacensis's (ca. 1190–1264) *Speculum historiale* 13: 44.[18] These are both borrowed, almost word for word, from Jean de Mailly's *Abbreviatio in gestis et miraculis sanctorum* 149: 30–32 (first redaction written after 1225, while the last dates to 1243;

Maggioni 2013: VII–IX). A snake entered the body of a peasant sleeping in a field and the animal was afterwards expelled by the intercession of Sts. Cosmas and Damian. A short version of this miracle was also given in 1245 in Bartholomew of Trent's collection of lives of the saints, *Liber epilogorum in gesta sanctorum*, which was another source of Jacobus de Varagine: "A snake entered the belly of a young man while he was sleeping; writhing in pain, he took refuge in the church of the saints and, after having invoked them, he was freed from the snake"[19] (Latin text in Paoli 2001: 297). Bartholomew of Trent, Jean de Mailly, Vincent of Beauvais and Jacobus de Varagine were all Dominicans, which is certainly relevant for the history of the bosom serpent tradition.

Some scholars have tentatively interpreted this "old incubation miracle" (Schouten 1967: 74) of Sts. Cosmas and Damian as a mythical description of a parasitic disease (Maggioni et al. 2005: 38), rapidly evoked the Greek medical legends of Epidaurus (Steiner 1983: 160) or compared the cure with other medieval bosom serpent sources (Artelt 1954: IX and Hunger 1978: 81, using Sudhoff 1915–1916; Wittmann 1967: 58; Coloru 2008: 520–527; 2009: 103–109; Maldina 2011: 153–154). The version of the miracle given in the *Legenda aurea*, however, is classified as ATU 285B* by Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich (1996: 312). Jean de Mailly's version follows on:

> While a peasant after working at harvest was sleeping in the field with his mouth open, a snake slipped into his belly. The man felt nothing; he woke up and went home. But while he was lying in the bed, after dinner, gravely tormented by the snake, he, as loudly as possible, invoked the aid of Cosmas and Damian. But the pain grew worse and he ran to the church of the Saints and he was given satisfaction; immediately falling asleep, the snake came out through his mouth as it had slipped in.[20] (Latin text in Maggioni 2013: 408)

Giovanni Vacca (2004: 63) stressed the tripartite nature of the story: isolation (in the cornfield), tension and torment, then liberation in sleep. The healing of the peasant from the snake became famous in medieval times thanks to the many vulgarisations of the *Legenda aurea* and the Latin *Vitae* of Sts. Cosmas and Damian.[21] But the bosom serpent miracle dates back centuries before Jean de Mailly's 13th-century redaction. It was already included in:

> 1) the short Byzantine *Vita Asiatica* 2, usually dated to the 4th century (the oldest manuscript is from 8th century). This is the earliest *Vita* and one of the three main sources of the hagiography of saints Cosmas and Damian (version BHG 372; Greek text in Deubner 1907: 91–93). The miracle of the serpent told in later Latin hagiographic texts (for example *Acta tertia*, BHL 1969, in the Bollandists' *Acta Sanctorum*, or the popular *Acta* edited by 16th-century German hagiographer Laurentius Surius, BHL 1970) derives from the *Vita Asiatica* (Luongo 1997: 55–56; Harrold 2007: 60–62). Interestingly, the miracle of the serpent figures here as an *in vita* miracle (see also Csepregi 2007: 175);
>
> 2) the 10th- or 11th-century Greek *Codex Londoniensis* 1 (London Codex, version BHG 373b, which comes from an older tradition) (Greek text in Rupprecht 1935; see Csepregi 2007: 175; Harrold 2007: 41, 60).

The version contained in the *Legenda aurea* was, for example, briefly traced by di Nola (1976: 131–132, 158) to an "anti-serpent cult" involving incubation, because of the peas-

ant's nap in a church – probably the old basilica of Sts. Cosmas and Damian in Rome (Wittmann 1967: 57). Note that sleep is also to be found in both the aforementioned *Vita Asiatica* and the *Codex Londoniensis*, which expressly place the miracle in the Cilician city of Pheremma (Syria) at the church built upon the tomb of the saints (David-Danel 1958: 43; Luongo 1997: 48; Csepregi 2007: 175). It is important to point out that as early as the 13th century, the bosom serpent miracle of Sts. Cosmas and Damian was demonised and the intruding snake was regarded as Satan (see, for example, the longer novelised version documented in Justinus Diaconus' *Vita et Passio sanctorum martyrum Cosme et Damiani*; BHL 1976; Latin text and Italian translation in Novembri 2002: 168–171).[22]

There are several medieval and early modern iconographic depictions of the "quite frequently represented" (Hunger 1978: 81) miracle of the serpent of Sts. Cosmas and Damian, the majority belonging to a Byzantine Orthodox setting, and the same goes for similar miracles performed by other eastern and western saints. All these representations deserve to be considered within a comprehensive historical-artistic study on the medieval and post-medieval iconography and material culture of the bosom serpent (a study by the present author is in preparation). We often find this 'incubation' element in the topos of the holy healer (female or male) who, in medieval Byzantine and western hagiographic literature, extracts or exorcises bosom serpents. Striking in this regard, are the words of Stavroula Constantinou (2010: 52) who is aware of several medieval Byzantine stories

> […] in which various creatures, such as leeches, worms, snakes, and frogs, are incorporated into human bodies. In most cases, they enter when the protagonists unknowingly swallow them. Once within a human body, these creatures bite the victim's internal organs, producing great pain. Through the healing saints' intervention, the swallowed creatures exit alive either by the mouth, when the victim vomits or sneezes, or through the anus, when the victim defecates. In most cases, both the vomiting and defecation take place after the suffering individual eats or drinks what the saint has ordered.[23]

The 'incubation' interpretation, centred on the chthonian cult of the Greek god Asclepius, has been evoked for the Hippocratic story. Nancy Demand (1994: 42) and Lee T. Pearcy (2012: 105–106) dealt with the *argès* serpent and dream incubation by which this god intervenes, employing, *inter alia*, the *iamata* from the Asklepieion of Epidauros. A *iamata* (*ἰάματα*) is a healing miracle known through inscriptions or votive records made to commemorate helpful divine intervention at shrines of Asclepius. In addition, Craik (2015: 80) has recently noted that "[t]he [Hippocratic] story has elements (especially the snake) suggestive of customs in healing cults". Demand notes the formal resemblance between the Hippocratic case, and elements of sleep and snakes in narratives of Asclepian healing:

> This case (except for its unfortunate conclusion) bears a striking resemblance to the procedure of dormition cure used in the temples of Asclepius: patients slept overnight in the temple and during their dreams they were visited by the god who either prescribed for them or treated them; sometimes the companions of the god, a snake or dog, healed the patient by licking. Was the story of v 86 perhaps intended to suggest that those who resorted to the god Asclepius and his snake for a cure might find death instead? Perhaps, but if we consider it in the context of some of

> the other cases in v and vii, it seems rather to be a case of inversion, possibly reflecting further influence of the philosopher Heraclitus, which we first noted in Book vi, where it was limited to aphoristic style. (Demand 1994: 42)

She then cited two other Hippocratic cases (*Epidemiae* 5: 9; 5: 74 = 7: 36) writing that "[these other cases] that exhibit the trait of inversion follow a pattern in which the same object has opposite effects" (ibid.), where the elements of life 'water' (of the baths) and 'anchor' (of a ship) become in some way instruments of death. I find it quite hard to follow Demand's line of thought here: how is water and the anchor relevant to a snake? The medieval incubation cure, as we have seen, always freed the body from the serpent. In contrast, according to Demand, the pre-Christian incubation cure ended in the young man's death at the hands of the healer god Asclepius. This interpretation has a certain internal logic, but there are, to the best of my knowledge, no other cases of Asclepius killing a patient. As Jouanna (2001: 167) noted ironically, the *argès* serpent "was not as sweet as the sacred serpent of Asklepios at Epidaurus"![24]

Moreover, ill-defined processes of inversion do not much help to clarify the sense of the story. The same considerations are true regarding the work of Pearcy (2012: 105), for whom the Hippocratic story "seem[s] to respond to the kind of narrative inscribed at Epidaurus" as there is sleep and a snake which "combine in an unsettling, and ultimately fatal, way". The author adds that "[i]t is not necessary to suppose that the author of *Epidemiae* 5 was parodying this specific text [a typical story of healing from a *iama* from Epidaurus]", doubtfully concluding that the story of the *argès* serpent "show[s] the author of *Epidemiae* 5 responding to Asclepian case histories in the conflict for authority over healing".

VARIATIONS ON THE DEATH

I will now examine the episode of the death of the young Greek on its own terms. The natural interpretative key is to be found in ancient medical thinking about heavy drinking and drunkenness. There is evidence in Greece for death from the excessive consumption of unmixed wine. Among various instances of alcohol abuse that led to death, there is the Spartan king Cleomenes going mad as a result of heavy drinking (Dalby 2003: 178; Carney 2007: 139–140; Fortenbaugh 2011: 706–707). In Philodemus, *De morte* 32: 35 unmixed wine is also considered potentially fatal, which would be in line with the Hippocratic story (Greek text and translation in Henry 2009: 73–74). But Philodemus' later source refers to the *topos* of the death of ancient Epicurean philosophers after drinking a cup of unmixed wine, as Epicurus himself did according to Diogenes Laërtius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* 10: 15–16 (Greek text and translation in Warren 2006: 9–10, with additional thoughts). On the basis of the detail of the tent, in which the young man passes out, Jouanna (2012 [1996]: 178) considered the possibility that the youth was on the battlefield doing military service. Certainly, military service was an occasion in which companionship and drunkenness occurred, as other sources demonstrate.

Danielle Gourevitch and Gilles Demigneux (2013: 75–80) analysed two other cases of heavy drinking in antiquity that resulted in the death of the young. According to a Greek funerary epigram dated 200–150 BC – an inscription on a grave stele, found in

Chalkis (Euboea) – a 22-year-old man, Asclepiades of Ephesus, suffocated to death after ingesting an excess of pure wine (SEG 27: 251; updates SEG 32: 850; SEG 38: 865; SEG 56: 1026):

> Asclepiades of Ephesus, son of Anaxippos, lived for 22 years: I drank a great quantity of undiluted wine, spat blood and choked to death [without taking a breath]. I am dead, the son of Anaxippos, my name was Asclepiades and the race of my ancestors from Ephesus.[25] (Greek text and translation in Gourevitch and Demigneux 2013: 77, both modified by author according to Knoepfler 2007: 683; BÉ 330).

Gourevitch and Gilles Demigneux (2013: 78) have stated that "accusing the dead man of being the cause of his own death is a *unicum*" in terms of the corpus of ancient inscriptions. But, according to SEG (32: 850), we have an epitaph of a three-year-old boy who possibly died from too much wine (presumably alcohol poisoning?), and another case of a young man perhaps killed by the excess consumption of alcohol. Thus, Asclepiades' epitaph would not be the only one to give a dishonourable gloss to death by wine. However, in the Greek inscription from Chalkis there are four elements in common with the story of the *argès* serpent: a young drunk, undiluted wine, suffocation, and, of course, the fatal conclusion. The similarity is rather generic. The unfortunate end of Asclepiades was probably due to "a very special case" of Mallory-Weiss syndrome: a young man who dies while inhaling his vomit and blood after bingeing on alcohol. Knoepfler (2007: 683), instead, in regards to Asclepiades, saw a clear reference to a digestive "esophageal or stomach haemorrhage", a possibility also suggested by other authors and rejected by Gourevitch and Demigneux (2013: 77–78: "[t]he trouble with such a diagnosis is that patients suffering from it are generally inveterate drinkers, while the dead man was in fact young"). I will now explore, instead, a different scenario, linked to Greek religious sensibility.

Wine was qualified in the Hippocratic text of the snake *argès* with the adjective *akratos* (*ἄκρητον*): it was, unusually for the ancient world, 'unmixed'. Now Greeks might also describe diluted wine as *akratos*, but this was not typical: the process of mixing the proportions might vary but according to Zinon Papakonstantinou (2012: 17), "1 part water to 2 wine is the strongest mixture we encounter in archaic textual sources". From a social, anthropological and cultural-religious point of view, the lexeme *akratos* had quite negative connotations in the post-Homeric and post-Hesiodic period: it was customary for wine to be drunk by males in moderation and mixed in the *krater* with water before being served during banquets. While wine was indeed reserved for male adults, milk was for women and children. *Akratos* (neat wine) marked barbaric excess or was linked to ritual practices related to disorder and madness, notably to Dionysian practices; the gods, interestingly, drank unmixed wine (Graf 1980; Lissarrague 1990: 6; Longo 1991: 44; Dalby 2003: 353–354; Carney 2007: 153–157). The sick young man is, moreover, a *neaniskos* (*νεηνίσκον*), a young adult, a kind of partial citizen between 20 and 30 years of age who is not yet fully part of the community of men (Brulé 1996: 18). It, therefore, makes sense that undiluted wine would have a more serious effect on a *neaniskos* than it would have on an adult. This could help to explain why the story ends in the death of the young man. It could be that the youth's act of *hýbris* in drinking unmixed wine, destined to gods, was punished with death.

This fatal ending is very infrequent in medieval bosom serpent legends where, as we have seen above, the patient is typically healed by a saint. Death does, however, sometimes features in modern and contemporary accounts in which, according to Bennett (1997: 233), "very few deaths are recorded". As regards, at least, the early modern period, I suspect, however, that there are many more instances of fatal bosom serpents waiting to be discovered by scholars.[26] In addition, there are various cross-cultural narratives in which serpents are said to enter a human body and kill the host.[27] A similar 'directed' bosom serpent is found in a unique Old Norse source, the 12th-century Oddr Snorrason, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 58 (taken up in various later *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*). This describes a bosom serpent execution, when a snake is forced into a victim's mouth (Icelandic text in Halldórsson 2006: 282–283, translation in Andersson 2003: 106; see Ermacora et al. forthcoming).

Thus, drunkenness has its own special meaning in the Hippocratic tale. Indeed, it is possible that this episode was straightforward to, say, a 4th-century BC reader or listener: a young man pays for a foolish act.

PRE-MODERN THIRSTY SNAKES

Many sources, some of which are very old and ritual- or myth-based, show that in the ancient world snakes were permanently thirsty: there is a symmetry with the unquenchable thirst that they inflict with their venomous bites (Trinquier 2012; see also Sordi 2003: 245–248). These texts might be used to decipher the story of the *argès* snake and the motif of a snake attracted by the smell of wine from a human mouth.

The complex of ideas relating to the ancient wine-loving snake can be seen in iconographic scenes on drinking vessels or symposia from the Ancient Near Eastern, Minoan and Mycenaean Bronze Age; and, most likely, in enigmatic linear B tablets from Thebes, setting out the cultic offer of small quantities of wine to sacred snakes or to deities in the shape of serpents (*e-pe-to-i*; compare with Greek *ἑρπετόν*: see Duhoux 1997: 187, 195–196; Trinquier 2012: 192; Varias García 2014).[28] For example, we can see the standardised iconography of a snake drinking from a banqueter's *kantharos* and its appearance in heroic imagery in Laconia in the first half of the 5th century BC (Krumholz McDonald 1994; Salapata 2006; Trinquier 2012: 191–195). This iconography already attracted the attention of sir James George Frazer (1914: 87–88), who amassed documents on the close relationship between the snake (as a dead soul) and milk offerings.

There are many instances of this conviction that serpents loved wine in classical, and then medieval, written sources. These are to be intended as part of the scientific knowledge common at that time. The *loci classici* are Aristotle, *Historia animalium* 8: 4, 594a, and Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 10: 198, 22: 106. Aristotle recorded that vipers can be caught, after drinking themselves to intoxication, on wine laid out on pottery shards in stone walls (Greek text and translation in Balme 1991: 109–111). Pliny mentions, twice, the fondness of snakes for wine (Latin text and translation in Rackham 1940: 418–419; Jones 1951: 368–369). For later periods, a reference to the *Quaestiones super de animalibus* 7: 17–19, dated to 1258, may suffice (even if Aristotle's influence is in evidence). These questions on Aristotle's compilation *De animalibus* are associated with the great Dominican theologian and philosopher Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200–1280). They were

composed by Albert's student, Conrad of Austria, as notes to his master's Cologne lectures. This is an 'indirect work', then, that chronologically precedes the very same information discussed in Albert's enormous encyclopaedia *De animalibus* 7: 42, composed between 1258 and 1262 (Latin text in Stadler 1920, translations in Scanlan 1987: 384 and Kitchell and Resnick 1999: 604; see also Tugwell 1988: 29). Quoting Aristotle and trying to explain why serpents have a special appetite for milk and wine, Albert cites a personal experience. After he returned to Cologne in 1257, he got a common garden snake and a container of wine. He, then, confirmed, to his own satisfaction, that snakes can become intoxicated (Latin text in Filthaut 1955, translation in Kitchell and Resnick 2008: 2243–2245).

It was, therefore, widely believed in antiquity (Trinquier 2012) and the middle ages (much additional evidence could be provided) that snakes – and, in Greek eyes, particularly vipers – were attracted to milk and wine and, to a lesser extent, to other liquids, including blood. These ideas were embedded in a structural system of vernacular beliefs. Snakes, in general, were, according to literary references spanning at least two millennia, sometimes considered to be dry – and thus extremely hot – and, sometimes, cold creatures. And this was also true of snake venom. Wine, too, was held to be hot and dry, much like blood, and, therefore, had a natural affinity with the hot and dry, canicular viper (Sordi 2003: 245; Trinquier 2012: 196–198). Any understanding of antique wine-drinking snake beliefs must depend, then, on an understanding of these biological notions about snakes from the Graeco-Roman and medieval world.

In the context of the broader theoretical framework just outlined, too much 'heat' in the body due to an abuse of pure wine logically led to a 'cold remedy': the *argès* snake. I thus agree with Jean Trinquier (2012: 196) who has briefly written on the "rather unusual story" of the *argès* serpent in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. He claims that the passage should be incorporated into a cultural context in which the neat (and thus very 'hot') wine drunk by the youth attracted the 'cold' snake. Vipers, as noted above, had a penchant for wine: Trinquier even wonders whether the *argès* serpent might not have been a viper.

PRE-MODERN WINE- AND MILK-LOVER BOSOM SERPENTS

Later narratives back up this contextual approach to the *argès* serpent story. How can animals possibly end up inside humans? There is a rich series of medieval bosom serpent stories from Western and Arab worlds (and modern and contemporary rural legends) in which serpents make their way into human stomachs, attracted by the smell of recently drunk milk. We have already seen this idea in Lippi da Arezzo's late-medieval medical treatise. (For a different medieval tradition that sees the bosom serpent attracted by body heat, rather than by milk or wine, see Ermacora 2015: 273–274.) For instance, a bosom serpent appears in the twelfth-century *Vitae abbatum et monachorum* 3: 23, a *Vita* of the 11th-century St. Eldrado, Abbot at the Italian Benedictine abbey of Sts. Pietro and Andrea in Novalesa (Torino). The Saint posthumously cures, through incubation therapy, a shepherd boy with a bosom serpent, which had been tempted into the shepherd's stomach by the smell of milk while the boy slept outside.

> A certain father sent an errand boy to look after his sheep on Moncenisio. Here it so happened that the boy and other friends of his fell asleep in the sun while the sheep were grazing. A certain snake, having noticed how the boy was sleeping with his mouth wide open, as people usually do, attracted by the sweetness of the milk that the boy had drunk entered his mouth and went down as far as his belly. However, it so happened that one of the boys woke up and saw the tail of the snake hanging from his friend's mouth and he cried so loud as to wake his companions. They woke up and became aware of the horrible events that had happened. They saw their friend's suffering grimace caused by his horrible pains so they brought him to his mother. She brought her son to St. Eldrado the Christ's confessor. Here, as they were praying on the floor, they fell asleep as they were tired. After a while, at the time when the monks use to ring the early morning bells at Matins [i.e. at 6 am], the mother woke up and saw the snake curled, as serpents usually do, over her son's mouth, amidst blood and pus. Having quickly got hold of the boy she brought him to the monks. The monks then went to St. Eldrado's church, giving thanks for the Saint's delivery from the diabolical plague through his timely favours. Following such events, it would look as if St. Eldrado was deemed worthy of admission amongst the Holy Apostles to whom our Lord told: "Drive off snakes and expel demons".[29] (Latin text in Cipolla 1898: 395–396)[30]

Omar Coloru (2008: 523–524; 2009: 106–107) has explained the resemblance of this episode with the post-mortem miracle of the Sts. Cosmas and Damian contained in Jacobus de Varagine's *Legenda aurea* 14 (see above) through a "recourse to [hagiographical] stereotypes". In his opinion, the narrative demonstrates that the anonymous monk who compiled St. Eldrado's *Vita* was aware of the version of ATU 285B* told in an unknown redaction, in circulation at the time, of Sts. Cosmas and Damian's *Vita*, and that the compiler took inspiration from it. For Coloru, there are only "some slight differences". What is more, Coloru compared St. Eldrado's miracle legend to another bosom serpent variant described in *Chronicon Novaliciense* 5: 45, a monastic chronicle composed at the Novalesa abbey in the early 11th century. A snake got into a shepherd's stomach through his mouth, while the shepherd slept: the shepherd was then cured, at home, after having taken communion in front of an altar to St. Peter. Interestingly, the detail of the healing sleep, here, occurs after, and not during the visit to the church:

> We are going to tell the episode of the cowherd of that monastery, who was freed from the poison of a snake. He, while guarding the cattle on the Moncenisio, fell asleep. A snake that was hiding there, seeing his mouth open, entered the body. Feeling near the anxiety of death, he shouted complaining, and he was shouting very much! Here you can hear the work of the deity. After having him circle around St. Peter's altar, he was given the body and blood of Christ. He was taken home. Immediately he fell asleep. Then the snake could not continue to stay in the body, where the divine gift had already entered. A creature cannot oppose its creator. Therefore, from the open mouth, the slimy snake went out. Another person participating, seeing the fact, killed the snake and showed everyone what wonderful things divine power could do.[31] (Latin text and Italian translation in Alessio 1982: 306–307, modified by author)

Thus, we have here two healing episodes which come from the very same area, the Piedmontese abbey of Novalesa, but with two different saints: as far as I know, this is rare for medieval bosom serpent legends. Coloru (2008: 523–524; 2009: 106–107) considered St. Peter's story as "a striking example [...] in which is reported, in a shorter form, the same miracle present in the later life of St. Eldrado". He then speculates that "[t]his [fact] seems to suggest that the allocation of the liberation from snake by St. Eldrado would be the result of a later addition made by the monks to increase the prestige of the saint" (ibid.). In my opinion, however, these narratives involving Sts. Cosmas and Damian, St. Peter and St. Eldrado must be understood as three independent variants of ATU 285B*. Their similarity is not at all decisive – the differences are as many as the similarities – and the resemblances are best explained simply in terms of their drawing on widely disseminated folklore themes.[32] This is also true of the 'incubation' element. We have seen how the connection of bosom serpents to Christian dream incubation therapies is grounded in many comparable instances from the Western and Eastern middle ages. Moreover, in medieval times hagiographical *topoi* tended to be copied slavishly rather than 'adapted' in a creative way. So, thinking of a relevant example, the bosom serpent miracle attributed in the *Vita Sancti Anselmi Maeonensis* [etc.] 9 to St. Anselm, 6th-century bishop and patron of Bomarzo, was taken word-for-word from Sts. Cosmas and Damian's life in the *Legenda aurea*: the only change was the name of the patron saint of the church, St. Anselm (Latin text in Vittori 1846: 153).

But what about the detail of the milk-loving bosom serpent in St. Eldrado's *Vita*? As I wrote above, I am aware of several other medieval bosom serpent legends that connect milk and intrusive animals. Certainly, we have ample evidence from antiquity that reptiles also love milk and were known to be galactophagous: as with their fondness for wine, this was another truly 'impossible biology' for these animals. After all, the early documentary evidence for reptiles drinking milk was often associated with the (Indo-European?) pattern of the breast-sucking reptile (Ronzitti 2011: 13–42).[33] Did milk replace wine as the beverage of preference for medieval bosom serpents? I know only a few medieval textual exceptions in which wine shows up, such as the Byzantine version of the life of Simeon Stylites the Younger discussed above. Historically, milk and wine are two liquids that are known to oppose, and that prove incompatible with, one another (Graf 1980; Sordi 2003: 259). But this is a hypothesis which needs to be carefully researched and, possibly, challenged, as my knowledge of the sources is, as yet, incomplete. Why and when this apparent change from wine to milk took place, in regards to pre-modern bosom serpents and their agricultural and pastoral setting, certainly need to be better considered.

EMOTIONS, LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE BOSOM SERPENT

As I said when introducing this paper, in Graeco-Roman times there is, even ignoring the *argès* serpent, strong medical evidence for bosom serpent narratives and beliefs (Ermacora forthcoming). One might also observe that Virgil, *Georgica* 3: 425–439, looks like an 'incomplete' 1st-century BC variant of ATU 285B*: the text ends with the explicit warning not to fall asleep when an unnamed Calabrian serpent, tormented by thirst,

is roaming in the long grass. Note that this is not an original suggestion. Already in 1762, Casimiro Anino (1762: 24), suggestively compared the passage to several medical bosom serpent stories: among them, the *argès* snake. There is the dangerous amphibious snake that roams the fields and the poet's nap in the countryside during the dry heat. But there is no mention of the snake entering a human body: seeking, as the passage suggests, moisture or liquid (Latin text and translation in Rushton Fairclough and Goold 1916: 206–207; for the Nicandrian echoes of this text of Virgil, see Trinquier 2008: 178–189).

Interestingly, I found a similar snake warning tale against sleeping alone in isolated places in a grotesque folklore text in the anonymous Buddhist anthology of tales *Konjaku monogatari shū* 29: 40 (Anthology of Tales from the Past), probably written at the beginning of the 12th century. The story, which seems to have drawn on the Buddhist conception of the impurity of semen (Tonomura 1994: 148–149), had a married monk, having fallen asleep outside in an isolated place during a summer afternoon. He dreamed that he had sex with a beautiful young woman and woke up to discover that a five-foot-long snake had sucked on his member and that the snake's mouth was full of the man's semen. The comment of the compiler was as follows: "Well then, you shouldn't take naps alone in remote, empty places. But, no other strange things happened to this monk afterward" (translation in Osterfeld Li 2009: 108, slightly modified by author, with an important commentary; Osterfeld Li does not acknowledge, however, the folkloric value of the story).[34] In Kyōkai's early 9th-century *Nihon ryōiki* 2: 41 (Miraculous Stories from Japan, taken up in the *Konjaku monogatari shū* 24: 9), the author recorded a Buddhist tale dated to 759, about a young woman who was penetrated by a vaginal serpent while she was lying unconscious on the ground. The girl was treated by a physician who removed the snake and its eggs, pouring litres of brew into the vaginal opening. It is said, then, that the girl died after three years due to a second serpentine penetration (translations in Motomochi Nakamura 1973: 213–215 and Watson 2013: 124–12; see Ermacora 2015: 275–277 for 15th- and 16th-century Western folklore parallels).[35] Thus, we also find in pre-modern Japan the concept of "snakes entering people's bodies as devils of disease" (de Visser 1911: 320, who affirmed the contrary comparing ancient Japan and China), though it is an exaggeration to claim, on the basis of this evidence alone, that "[s]tories of lustful snakes attracted by women's genitalia [we]re frequent in Japanese Buddhist collections of tales" (Faure 1998: 88).[36] Commentators of these early snake stories have stressed the symbolism of phallic penetration (Faure 2003: 318–319, 397), or gender and social issues reflected in the Buddhist view of female behaviour and bodily imagery (Dumas 2013: 264–266). Both the Japanese monk and the woman were unconscious when they were violated: as we have seen, the association between harmful bosom serpents and the loss of consciousness is typical in worldwide variants of ATU 285B*.

This fact has led me to search for the unifying logic that underlies so many pre-modern animal intrusion stories. In my research on bosom serpents I have never encountered strong mythological traits, relevant to an archaic, opaque animal symbolism. In other words, there is no 'veiled meaning' in bosom serpents: the creature dwelling in the human body is a lived experience without the powerful ambiguities inherent in myth.[37] As was shown by Edward Forrest Clements (1932) in his seminal study on primitive disease concepts, the corporal beast that torments people's bodies is always

undesirable and needs to be removed: the anxiety and fear of generally unwished for occupation permeates the lives of the protagonists. Loudell F. Snow (1983: 826) once wrote, in relation to African-American spells involving bosom serpents, sent into a victim through food and drink: "[t]he thought of eating or drinking something evil that can then literally exist in the body must be psychologically devastating". On the basis of the texts I have examined in this paper, it would be difficult to disagree. As happened in the story of the *argès* snake, the bosom serpent can even kill. The feelings of repulsion and exhaustion are certainly the most common emotions in stories of bosom serpent infestations, stories told with such consistency through time and space.

As it happens, negative emotions are inhibited during deep sleep or any state of loss of consciousness, when awareness of self and the environment is lost. It is during these absences from the world that bosom serpents often get inside human bodies in narratives and personal experience stories (Ermacora forthcoming). In this context, I can usefully mention the innate human fear of reptiles and spiders (another animal well represented in fantastic pre-modern animal contamination stories) and the psycho-biological factors inherent in the evolution of the human brain, such as those flagged up in neurobiology. Here reference is made to the psychological and ecological experiences of primates and hominid ancestors in regards to threatening snakes and spiders. Spiders, obviously, have provided considerably less of a predatory threat for mammals than venomous snakes, and are less fear-relevant from an evolutionary perspective (Soares et al. 2014; Van Strien et al. 2014). But these phylogenetic fears may explain the nearly ubiquitous presence, in pre-modern cultures, of dragon and snake myths and folklore.

Could the folklore stories of animal contamination and the general anxiety, feelings of disgust and horror have their basic foundations here? We are quite possibly dealing with so-called 'ancestral animal phobias', whose backgrounds have not yet been fully elucidated (see Isbell 2006; 2009; Van Le et al. 2013; Soares et al. 2014; Van Strien et al. 2014 on the 'Snake Detection Theory'). I would maintain that the primal fear element influenced extraordinary cross-cultural ideas of human physiology in which creeping animals come to represent, in different epochs, the painful experience of disease inside the body. The real experience of parasitic worm infestation, as it has been noted many times, also possibly contributed to the basic foundations of this universal complex. I hope to discuss this elsewhere.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper has been to show that the folkloric background of *Epidemiae* 5: 86, has not been seriously considered in the last century. In order to demonstrate this I have: 1) presented an overview of contemporary scholars who have written on *Epidemiae* showing flaws in their interpretative assumptions; 2) demonstrated that the meaning of the story was, instead, understood by Renaissance and 19th-century commentators: the *argès* snake was interpreted, by them, as a bosom serpent; 3) placed the passage under discussion in the broader context of the Greek medical treatises in which it is found, with reference to ancient Greek religion and mentalities; and 4) insisted on the text under consideration being seen as an inseparable part of its historical and cultural-mythological environment. I explored its cultural framework and, consequently, that of

the Greek audience, based on ancient vernacular beliefs about snakes as 'drinkers' of liquids, especially wine and milk.

In medieval and post-medieval rural folklore, sleeping out in the field was dangerous: snakes and other small animals could, it was assumed, crawl into the sleeper's body through the ears, eyes, mouth, nostrils, anus and vagina. Comparative material demonstrates that it was believed that the thirsty snake entered the sleeper's mouth because of its love of milk and wine. This is what happened, I have suggested, with the *argès* snake: the reptile had been attracted by the smell of recently ingested wine in the young drunk's stomach. The Hippocratic bosom serpent story has, thus, a coherent identity and meaning. The idea of an invasive amphibious or serpentine creature living within the human body is a well-attested (even if little noted) ancient international migratory legend, classed as tale-type ATU 285B*. Moreover, its morphological and functional traits remain substantially unaltered despite the passing of the best part of two and a half millennia; oral tradition has retained, with great stability, tale-type ATU 285B* and related bosom serpent narratives from the classical world up to 'urban' or contemporary legends collected in more recent times.

Bennett (2005: 22–39) rightly considered bosom serpent stories as medical folklore. She also tried to distinguish bosom serpents told as contemporary legends, since the mid-1800s onwards, from older instances of witchcraft and prodigies. The criteria she used to determine modern contemporary bosom serpent legends are the following: 1) the focus of the tale is on symptoms, diagnoses and cures rather than on bosom serpent(s); 2) the story is usually secular (i.e. there is no supernatural or religious element) (ibid.: 22). The problem with this is that pre-modern bosom serpent legends – including, perhaps, the story of the *argès* serpent – often satisfy these criteria. Like their modern counterparts, pre-modern bosom serpents almost invariably appear to take on, in fact, a tripartite form, something there even in highly complex narratives: (1) the animal gets into the body, then there are (2) the symptoms and, finally, (3) a cure restores the individual to good health (ibid.: 22–24; Ermacora forthcoming).[38] Secularisation (Bennett's second point) obviously depends on the historical period, the geographical area under observation, and the particular oral or literary genre in which the bosom serpent appears. 'Contemporary' legends, with their rhetoric of truth, can have active circulation in any society (including ancient and Western societies) where medicine and sorcery/religion are or are not closely-related notions, often featuring a general demonological conception of disease.

So if we take bosom serpents as a case study we might ask ourselves: what really is 'contemporary' in a 19th- and 20th-century bosom serpent tradition? Or, in other words: what goes to make up the emergent contemporary bosom serpent legend? My suspicion is that there is no satisfactory distinction between pre-modern bosom serpents and more recent fantastic narratives about animals in the human body (I base these provisional conclusions on some research that I and two colleagues are undertaking: see Ermacora et al. forthcoming). Taken together, old and contemporary bosom serpent legends show the resilience of a tradition that continues to validate, with the same rhetoric, analogous attitudes and anxieties about the invasion and transgression of corporeal space; this is part of an 'open body' scheme (Kanerva 2014: 232) or, in Bakhtinian terms, the vulnerable 'grotesque body' (Bakhtin 1984 [1965]: 26), which is found in a very large number (if not in all) past and present human cultures. An animal

violates body boundaries through vulnerable orifices, transitional spaces between the inner and dangerous external. Remember that the *argès* snake – as well as many parallel bosom serpents – entered the body through the respiratory passages. In 1932 Clements was able to present the intrusion into the body of "small animals, such as lizards, worms, and insects" (Clements 1932: 188; see also Rogers 1944: 559, 561; Honko 1967 [1959]: 29–33) as one of the five 'visible and palpable' primary theories of pain and disease causation across the world: Clements did so on the basis of an impressive quantity of ethnological material related to the malefic disease-object intrusion concept.[39]

This fact, in my opinion, substantiates the authoritative opinions of some specialists in oral narrative (including Alan Dundes and Bengt af Klintberg) for whom "many separate legend types belonging to the oral tradition of our time appear to be, when investigated more closely, adaptations of older narratives" (af Klintberg 1985: 274, see also Dundes 1993; a critique of Dundes' view that contemporary legends are nothing more than migratory legends – and not even contemporary – is in Glazer 1995 and Simpson 1998.). Their point of view assumes a special meaning for bosom serpent legends and for certain 'every-day' snake beliefs and helps to explain their strong emotional impact. If possible, folklore scholars should consider both forms of folklore (contemporary legends and older or traditional legends) together and, of course, the cross-disciplinary contributions of religious, historical, medical and literary studies. This, at least, has been my aim in the present work.

In conclusion, the remote pieces of evidence that I have brought together allowed me to extend the folklore timeframe, hinting at cultural borrowings and parallels. Any reflections are still provisional and will depend on the satisfactory recovery and examination of all early sources: a process that I have only begun here. I hope that this work will serve as an inspiration or provocation for further research projects.

NOTES

1 *Νεηνίσκος δέ τις πολὺν ἄκρητον πεπωκὼς ὕπτιος ἐκάθευδεν ἔν τινι σκηνῇ· τούτῳ ὄφις ἐς τὸ στόμα παρεισεδύετο ἀργής. καὶ δὴ ὅτε ἤσθετο, οὐ δυνάμενος φράσασθαι, ἔβρυξε τοὺς ὀδόντας, καὶ παρέτραγε τοῦ ὄφιος, καὶ ἀλγηδόνι μεγάλη εἶχετο, καὶ τὰς χεῖρας προσέφερεν ὡς ἀγχόμενος, καὶ ἐρρίπτει ἑωυτόν, καὶ σπασθεὶς ἔθανεν.*

2 Corinne Jouanno (2004: 98) has listed Simeon Stylites' bosom serpent story along with other miracles of the *Vita* with a pronounced scatological flavour; the detail of the invasive animal expelled alive or in pieces from the anus is well-grounded in other Late-Antique and medieval Middle Eastern texts (see Ermacora et al. forthcoming for two 10th-century Byzantine episodes).

3 *Ἴβηρός τις ἐν καιρῷ τοῦ θερισμοῦ ἐκ πολλῆς οἰνοφλυγίας βαρυτάτῳ κατασχεθεὶς ὕπνῳ καὶ κατακείμενος ἐν ἁλωνίῳ, ὄφεως προσψαύσαντος τῷ αὐτοῦ στόματι ἀνεῳγμένῳ καὶ διὰ τῆς ὀσφρήσεως τοῦ οἴνου εἰσδύναντος ἐν τοῖς ἐγκάτοις αὐτοῦ, σφοδρῶς ἐκινδύνευεν. Οὗτος ἦλθε πρὸς τὸν ἅγιον, αἰτῶν μετὰ δακρύων πολλῶν τὴν παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ βοήθειαν διὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ προσευχῶν δωρηθῆναι αὐτῷ. Ὁ δὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ δοῦλος σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐπ' αὐτῷ, σφραγίσας τὴν κοιλίαν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἁγίᾳ αὐτοῦ ῥάβδῳ ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτὸν ἐξελθεῖν ἔξω τοῦ μοναστηρίου. Ὁ δὲ ἐξελθὼν παραυτὰ τὸν ὄφιν διὰ τοῦ ἀφεδρῶνος ζῶντα κατήγαγεν, καὶ ὑγιὴς γενόμενος ἀπῆλθε δοξάζων τὸν Θεὸν σὺν πᾶσι τοῖς παρατετυχηκόσι καὶ τοῦ θαύματος θεαταῖς γενομένοις.*

4 The editor Paul van den Ven lists some other medieval bosom serpent parallels. Vincent Déroche (1995: 104) briefly mentions this snake episode as a parallel for Late-Antique and

medieval hagiographic tales where a serpent poisons wine or drinking water contained in a jar. Nikephoros Ouranos, at the very end of 10th century, created a *metaphrasis* (rewriting) of the anonymous *Vita* of Symeon Stylites the Younger. The miracle of the bosom serpent is in *Vita S. Symeonis Iunioris* 20: 157 (Greek text and Latin translation in Janninck 1685: 365–366; Migne 1860: 3131–3134; BHG 1690). The snake story is not contained, however, in the short 10th-century *Vita S. Symeonis Stylitae Iunioris* by Iohannes Petrinus (a Greek manuscript was edited in Müller 1914: 9–16; BHG 1691).

5 See, for example, the study by Franch Postic (2009: 7), for whom a beautiful French variant from 1371, with a frog ingested in tadpole form "[s]eems to be the oldest known to date" (on this text, see also Cassard 1998: 78; Postic 2000), or that by Bennett (2005: 29) for whom a famous 12th-century Middle Irish tale (belonging to *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*; translation in Preston-Matto 2010: 2, 28, 34, 54–57) is "the oldest text in my collection".

6 Edward Topsell (1658: 630; largely translated from Gessner 1587: 27v) translated very loosely that "so suddenly gnashing his teeth, [the young man] devoured and swallowed down the Serpent". Bondeson (1997: 27; 1998: 47) speculated that the youth died "from an apoplectic seizure".

7 It is worth noting that, according to the parasitologist Nicolas Andry de Bois-Regard (1658–1742), intestinal worms provoke horrible convulsions similar to those of possessed men (Pouchelle 1990: 248); convulsions, in fact, frequently appear in patients afflicted both by the bosom serpent and the natural parasites described in medicine and parasitology (Bennett 2000: 14; 2005: 24, 32, 35). For convulsions and spasms provoked by alleged worms in the body in early modern Italian medical accounts, see Camporesi 1988 [1983]: 113–114.

8 *So du nun solliche zeichen erkent hast / So hylff im also / So lug daz du habest ein wind bereit in der massen wye hie vorstat vnd bint dem menschen die hennd vff den rücken das er nit nach dem wurm gryffen mach in dem usser kriechen wan der mesch ist syn begierig so flüsst der wurm wyder hinnder sich vnnd henck in vff also hie stat / also daz im daz haubt zu dalhanget mit vff gedodem mund vnnd setz im vnder synen mundt eyn becken oder einen haffen mit gesomer heisen geiß milch als daz im der schmack der milch in den mund gang vnnd heyß die lüt von dyr gonn on der do sol vff winden vnnd sol kein wort da geredet werden wan allein durch die bedüttung so kriecken die wurm her für ven der herwigkeit deß dranncke vnnd begerennt der milch / So bedunckt dem an der winden im den mundt an die milch lassen zu gon vnnd so du siehest das der wurm das mul in der milch hat so laß im das mul in die mi<l>ch thunn vnnd ein wenig drinken dan bedüt dem an der winden syttigklichen vber sich vff zu winden also das der wurm stetz das mul in der milch lygen hat vnd e er sich foul gedrinckt / dar nach solt du hybstlichen ab der winden thun vnnd laß in dan rugen ist es dan sach das er me by im hab so dun zu glicher wyß wie ich gelert hab vnd wan du merckest by dem vorgenanten zeichen daz er kein wurm by im hat dan [...].*

9 Thompson referred to motif J1115.2.3 of Dominic P. Rotunda (1942: 38). Craig R. Thompson (1997: 1047) commenting on a bosom serpent story dated 1531 of Erasmus of Rotterdam (which I have discussed in Ermacora 2015), instead, refers directly to Rotunda.

10 *Angues multum diligunt vinum et lac et ideo de ventre hominis possunt extrahi odore lactis, ut dicit Dyascorides*.

11 There is no space, here, to deal with the numerous parallels from ancient Japan, China and India.

12 See also works by Antonio Vallisneri (1710: 20, 23–32, 36–37, 41; 1721: 150–155, 163–164, 166, 169), who harshly criticises Andry and other ancient medical authors for being gullible about bosom serpents and/or the spontaneous generation in the body of frogs, scorpions, birds and lizards from helminths.

13 For Maria Elena Ruggerini (2013: 523), Snorri Sturluson lists five Old Norse adjectives and names (*heiti*) of the snake that make reference to the appearance of the animal as 'the shining one': *brainn*, *fann*, *feginn*, *frœningr*, *grábakr*. The fact is that these words do not mean 'shining': only *fránn* (cited wrongly) does.

14 See Pokorny 1959: 64–65 (s.v. *ar(e)-ĝ- (arĝ-?)*); Frisk 1960: 131–133 (s.v. ἀργής, ἀργός);

Chantraine 1968: 104–105 (s.v. *ἀργός*); Beekes and van Beek 2010: 125–126 (s.v. *ἀργής, -ῆτος, ἀργός*). Note also that Juvenal, *Saturae* 6: 535–541 has "silver snake" (*argentea serpens*), a rather cryptic allusion connected to the desecration of the marriage bed and oriental cults (probably Isis, a goddess connected with a serpent effigy; Latin text and translation in Morton Braund 2004: 284–285). There were colossal silver serpent statues in the temple of Baal in Babylon; see Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 2, 9: 5 (Greek text and translation in Oldfather 1933: 382–383; Diodorus quotes Ctesias the Cnidian).

15 A 'constitution' is a description of the relations between illnesses and climatic conditions encountered by the doctor in a specific place and moment (often spread out over a given period of time, for example, a year) (Demand 1994: 38, 231).

16 It is significant that the *argès* serpent episode was included in some modern medical treatises, among other Hippocratic tales of fatal convulsions, in dense sections dedicated to feverish convulsions. See, for example, the Venetian doctor and botanist Prospero Alpini, *De praesagienda vita, et morte aegrotantium libri septem* [etc.] 3: 8 (Alpini 1601: 294); and the great encyclopaedia of medical knowledge *A medical dictionary, including physic, surgery, anatomy, chemistry, and botany* [etc.], published between 1743 and 1745 by the English physician Robert James (1703–1776) (I consulted the early French translation James and Busson 1748: col. 913).

17 Bennett (2005: 7–8) mentions the *Golden legend* (*Legenda aurea* 84) for the medieval legend of the birth of a frog from the Roman emperor Nero (this is a widespread medieval bosom serpent story that I will investigate elsewhere). But she has not noted the variant of ATU 285B* contained in the text. Jacobus de Varagine claims to have taken the story of Nero from an apocryphal source: this is the so-called 11th- or 12th-century *Historia apocrypha* (Maggioni 1998: 1575).

18 Maldina (2011: 153) seems to erroneously report the textual references; see the very useful edition, employing a single manuscript, digitised on the site Atelier Vincent de Beauvais.

19 *In ventrem iuvenis dormientis serpens ingressus est; qui dum nimium torqueretur, ad sanctorum ecclesiam confugit, eosque invocans, a serpente liberatur.*

20 *Cum quidam rusticus post laborem messis in campo aperto ore dormiret, serpens in uentrem eius ingressus est. Euigilans nichil sensit, sed sero domum rediens cum post cenam in lecto iaceret mox a serpente grauiter cruciatus uoce quapoterat sanctum Cosmam et Damianum in auxilium inuocauit. Sed cum paulatim grauius torqueretur ad ecclesiam sanctorum cucurrit et sic exauditus est quodipso subito dormiente serpens sicut intrauerat per os eius exiuit.*

21 On the miracle of the serpent see, for example, Wittmann 1967: 16–17 on the High German incunable *Der Heiligen Leben: Winterteil und Sommerteil***,** published in 1489, and Pagano 2004: 26, 31, 34, 41 on a *Vita* translated into Sicilian in the 15th century, itself a translation of a 14th-century Catalan vulgarisation of the *Legenda.*

22 A 15th-century translation of this *Vita* into Florentine dialect was published in Melga 1857: 25–27 (see also Harrold 2007: 191).

23 Constantinou reported, as an example, the case of a woman who swallowed a leech when she drank water from a well: this is miracle no. 5 of Joannes Lazaropoulos's *Synopsis*, a collection of St. Eugenios's miracles dated ca. 1310–1369. But Constantinou missed the animal infestation miracle no. 10 (Greek text in Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1897, translation in Rosenqvist 1996: 268–271, 283–285). She noted, meanwhile, other literary sources on the Byzantine bosom serpent that have been overlooked: we presented and discussed a 10th-century source in Ermacora et al. forthcoming.

24 There are, however, two celebrated cases from the ancient world of young men who die in completely different contexts while asking a god for the best thing for them: the case of Kleobis and Biton (at the hands of Hera; Herodotus, *Histories* 1: 31, Greek text and translation in Godley 1920: 34–37) and that of Trophonius and Agamedes (*Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 296–297, punished by Apollo; Greek text and translation in West 2003: 92–95).

25 *Ἀσκληπιάδης / Ἀναξίππου / Ἐφέσιος / Εἴ<ι>κοσι καὶ δὺ᾽ ἔτη ζήσας πολὺν οἶνον ἀπνευστεί*

/ ἄκρατον πίνων αἶμ᾽ ἀνάγων ἔθανον / υἱὸς Ἀναξίππου· κλῆζον δ᾽ Ἀσκληπιάδην <με>/ καὶ πατέρων ἦν γένος ἐξ Ἐφέσου.

26 For a list of several cases, see the useful *remarques* added by the editor François Planque (1696–1765) to de Lignac 1759 [1718]: 105–107.

27 For example, see Papua New Guinean motifs B765.5+ 'Snake kills by entering person's ulcer' and G328+ 'Snake enters boil/wound and devours victim' in Slone 2001: 119, 429–430. These motifs were elaborated on the basis of narratives current in the 1970s in local newspapers. The same numbers, however, were previously given by Thompson 1955–1958, in reference to Indian folklore, as B765.5 'Snake crawls out of sleeper's mouth' and G328 'Rectum snakes. Snakes which creep into living man and devour him'. Slone's contemporary narratives are probably to be understood as legendary variants of Oceanic Melanesian myths featuring anthropomorphic ancestors. Two tales were discussed in Brelich 2003: 202–204, *apud* Kleintitschen 1924: the extra-human beings *kaia* in the form of a snake penetrated the anus and invaded the belly of the demiurgic hero-victim. The ruse to get rid of the parasites always led to death: with the help of women, the snake was literally pulled out, but brought with it the man's liver. Note that among the Kewa of the New Guinea Highlands gender-oriented folktales involving bosom serpents were also attested (LeRoy 1985a: 77–80 provided the translation in one instance; see also LeRoy 1985b: 109).

28 The theory that e-*pe-to-i* might signify 'quadrupeds, land animals' and not snakes (Gallou 2005: 27) has been critically discussed by Varias García (2014: 183–185). On the basis of linguistic and contextual objections to this and other opinions, Varias García has claimed, with good arguments, that *e-pe-to-i* could refer to a group of snakes (alive or represented by terracotta figures) associated with the cult of a female divinity. They also had apotropaic functions. He concludes noting that "[t]he serpent as protector of the house is a familiar figure in European folklore [...] If this hypothesis is correct, we may have the first written evidence of this figure in the Thebes tablets". Unfortunately, Varias García does not consider the ancient folk beliefs on wine-drinking snakes. The domestic snake (*serpent domesticus*) living in the house as protector and *genius loci* (often seen as an ancestor: universal motif F480.2 'Serpent as house spirit') is, of course, perfectly compatible with an ophidian entity fed on milk and wine. This is well attested in both pre-modern and modern folklore.

29 *Dum ergo quidam paterfamilias puerum haberet suo iuri subditum, eum in montem Cinisium ad oves pascendas direxit, ubi illum, dum oves pascerentur, cum quibusdam aliis pueris accidit ad calorem solis obdormisse. Cumque iuxta illum dormientem serpens per arbusta oberraret, eumque aperto ore, ut plures faciunt, stertere aspexisset, dulcedine lactis, quo ipse potatus erat, allicitus, mox in eius os ingressus, usque in ventrem dilapsus est. Factum est autem cum quidam illorum post somnum evigilasset, et in eius ore summitatem caudae adhuc restantem vidisset, terribili ex clamans hiatu, socios suos cum impetu exsurgere fecit. E somno vero expergefacti, videntes quod acciderat, miserabile monstrum illud, iniqua peste gravidum, torvo vultuprae intrinseco dolore cunctos aspicientem, ad matrem usque deduxerunt. Quaeprimum, ut matrum est, dilaniata multum que confusa, ad gloriosissimum Christi confessorem perduxit Heldradum. Itaque super pavimentum orando diu fatigati, dormire coeperunt. Post aliquod vero temporis, ea hora, qua monachi e dormitione surgentes primam pulsare soliti sunt, mater evigilans, ante eius os sanguine tabeque involutum, colubrinoque more circulatum, prospexit serpentem. Veloci ergo festinatione consurgens, raptum puerum ad monachos deduxit. Illi autem ad ecclesiam supradicti confessoris venientes, pestem diabolicam eiicientes, gratias non modicas Deoet gloriosissimo eius confessori Heldrado pro suis saepissimis beneficiis reddiderunt. In quo facto beatissimus pater Heldradus sanctorum apostolorum videtur meruisse consortium, quibus dictum est: "serpentes fugate, daemones eiicite"*.

30 For the last lines of the narrative, consider also *Chronicon Novaliciense* 1: 12 on Eldrado's miraculous intervention in driving away the snakes that were infesting the property of a French monastery (Latin text and Italian translation in Alessio 1982: 43–44).

31 *De armentario illius monasterii, qui liberatus est a vire anguis satagimus dicere. Hic, dum cerneret armenta boum in monte Cinisio, somno captus est. Anguis quidam illic la-tens, videns apertum eius os,*

introivit corpus. His, cum sensit dolorem propincum mortis, clamat et vociferat: habebat unde exclamare posset. Hichic audire potes deificum opus. Dum volutaretur ante aram sancti Petri, munitus est Corpore et Sanguine Christi. Evectus est domi; extemplo obdormivit. Morari enim non potuit serpens in corpus, ubi iam introie-rat munimen divinum: dissidere non valet creatura contra Creatorem suum. Aperto igitur ore, prodivit serpens lubricus. Alius autem coevus eius, viso illum, interfecit et patefecit cunctis mira que potestas egit divina.

32 Already the editor Carlo Cipolla (1898: 378) observed, comparing St. Eldrado's and St. Peter's bosom serpent miracles: "if there is some substantial similarity, there are however considerable differences".

33 See, for example, *exempla* no. 4251 'Milk and Snakes;' no. 4281 'Serpents suckled' in Tubach (1969: 325, 327); and the motifs A2435.6.2.1 'Snake sucks milk from woman's breast;' B391.1 'Child feeds snake from its milk-bottle;' B391.1.1 'Cobra grateful to prince for milk;' B391.1.2 'Snake grateful because man feeds her young snakes milk;' B391.1.3 'Snake grateful for pouring milk into its hole;' B765+ 'Lizard drinks milk from woman's breast' in Slone 2001: 213–214; B765.4 'Snake milks cows at night;' B765.4.1 'Snake attaches itself to a woman's breast and draws away her milk while she sleeps;' B765.4.2 'Cow thought to have given birth to snake. She flees; snake pursues; traps her legs and drinks her milk. Teats and legs are blackened' in Goldberg 1998: 10; B765.6 'Snake eats milk and bread with child;' B765.6.1 'Snake drinks milk;' B766.3 'Toads suck blood;' G274.1 'Witch snared by setting out milk. Witches attracted by milk;' Q452 '(Punishment): Snake sucks woman's breasts', etc.

34 The Buddhist Japanese tale of the monk brought to orgasm by a snake was clearly patterned, though this seems not to have been noticed, on the Buddha's criticism of Sudinna, a monk who indulged in sexual intercourse with his former wife, yelding to his mother's request to continue the family line after his father's death. Expulsion from the celibate Buddhist community was, thus, mandatory. The tale is contained in the *Suttavibhaṅga* (Analysis of the *Sūtras*), an Indian Buddhist monastic code concerning monks' and nuns' rules contained in the Pāli *Vinayapiṭaka* (The Basket of the Discipline; Faure 1998: 75–76). At the end of the story, Buddha noted: "[i]t were better for you, foolish man, that your male organ should enter the mouth of a terrible and poisonous snake, than that it should enter a woman. It were better for you, foolish man, that your male organ should enter a charcoal pit, burning, ablaze, afire, than that it should enter a woman" (translation in Horner 1938: 36). In the possibly first-century BC *Aṅguttaranikāya* (Collection of Numerically Arranged Discourses) of the Pāli *Suttapiṭaka* (Basket of Discourses), Buddha similarly stated: "[i]t is better for a monk to sit next to a dangerous snake than to speak alone with a woman" (translation in Powers 2008: 222). There is no doubt that both these sayings, which contrast snakes and women, must be examined within the canon of misogynistic Buddhist female imagery.

35 The belief that a snake can crawl into the vagina of a girl sleeping in a field, and in so doing kill her, is attested in 20th-century Japanese folklore: see Opler 1945: 255–256, where the same informant interpreted the story as a sort of cautionary tale (Róheim 1950: 23 and Devereux 1976: 193–194, 174–175 remarked on its "male or phallic meaning").

36 Commenting on the vaginal serpent from the *Nihon ryōiki*, Faure (2003: 318; see also Faure 1998: 88) briefly remarked that a similar pattern "was already at work in Indian Buddhism, judging from the Vinaya injunction for nuns to close their vagina with their feet while sitting in meditation, to prevent snakes from entering". The main reason for this rule regarding the way nuns should sit was to avoid arousing desire in monks. The injunction, connected to an ancient vaginal serpent story, is contained in the *Bhikṣuṇī-prakīrṇaka* (Miscellany on Buddhist Nuns) of the *Mahāsāṃghika* (Great Congregation), one of the major schools of Indian Buddhism. Here follows the text: "[t]he Buddha was staying at Śrāvastī. At that time as a bhikṣuṇī sat in the full-lotus position through the beginning and latter parts of the night. A snake appeared, and entered her vagina. The other bhikṣuṇīs reported this to Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, who thereupon went to

inform the Blessed One of this matter. The Buddha said, 'Give her some medicine, so the snake will not die, but come out.' She took the medicine, and the snake left. The Buddha said, 'Why were you sitting with your legs crossed? From now on, it is not permissible for you to do so.' A bhikṣuṇī should sit so that she fold one leg and covers her vagina with the heel of the other. If a bhikṣuṇī sits in full-lotus position, her act constitutes a light infringement of the Vinaya rules" (translation in Hirakawa 1982: 385; there is a French translation in Nolot 1991: 339).

37 As I will demonstrate elsewhere, in some cultures, however, the bosom serpents take the forms of more ambivalent cultural metaphors: they are believed harmful, but sometimes nevertheless considered valuable for human life and the sustenance of the body.

38 For example, the simple tripartite structure of the story of the *argès* snake is: (1) damage – the snake enters the body; (2) description of the severe symptoms of the illness; (3) death.

39 The widespread "model of the penetrable body according to which illness and harm is caused by the penetration of the body from without by mythic objects or forces" (Frog 2013: 63) has also been the focus, for example, of a number of recent works of research on medieval and pre-industrial Nordic cultures. Quite often, bosom serpents show up (Heide 2006; Stark 2006: 254–380; Kanerva 2014: 231–232).

ABBREVIATIONS

ATU – Uther, Hans-Jörg, ed. 2011. *The Types of International Folktales. A Classification and Bibliography Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson* 1. *Animal Tales, Tales of Magic, Religious Tales, and Realistic Tales, with an Introduction*. (2nd edn.) *FF Communications* No. 285. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

BÉ – *Bulletin Épigraphique*, published annually in *Revue des Études Grecques*, since 1888.

BHG – Halkin, François, ed. 1895–1957. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 3 vols. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes; ibid. 1969. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca. Auctarium*. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes; ibid. 1984. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca. Novum Auctarium*. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes.

BHL – Société des Bollandiste, ed. 1898–1901. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina Antiquae et Mediae Aetatis*, 2 vols. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes; ibid. 1911. *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis. Supplementi editio altera auctior*. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes; Fros, Henryk, ed. 1986. *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis. Novum Supplementum*. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes.

SEG – Chaniotis, Angelos; Thomas Corsten, Nikolaos Papazarkadas and Rolf A. Tybout, eds. *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* Online. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/supplementum-epigraphicum-graecum/ (accessed June 20, 2015).

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