

Images of the Christian saints are nowadays omnipresent in our cultural milieu. From time to time we also hear of miracles and apparitions of the saints, predominantly the Marian ones; yet, it does not happen that often. Whereas the literary sources in the early ages of Christianity, in the period termed as Late Antiquity, show such apparitions, or in other words, epiphanies, as a phenomenon on a large scale in the Eastern Roman Empire. This phenomenon began in the 5th century and was connected to the emergence of shrines dedicated to saints that were famous for healing and other miracles performed by a saint whom a given shrine was dedicated to and/or whose relics it possessed. The shrines attracted crowds of those seeking to obtain healing or another kind of aid. The particular stories of individuals who were delivered from various miseries were then written down in Greek. This is how the entire collections of miracle stories appeared, such as the miracles of Saint Thekla, of Saint Artemios, as well as those of Menas, Cyrus and John or Cosmas and Damian. This literary genre yields lots of interesting sources to study the tradition of depicting and envisioning the saintly epiphanies in its very beginning, i.e. between the 5th and the 7th century. Surprisingly, this so important issue so far has not been sufficiently investigated. Meanwhile, these collections, as well as other hagiographical texts of the period, visualize the saints in a very curious way as beings who peculiarly blend both the human and the divine features. They are often dressed in ordinary garments, usually monastic ones, which, however, are unusually radiant and shining. They have supernatural powers and properties, but at the same time they are subject to very human passions and emotions, such as wrath or joy. They display sense of humor, sometimes very strange one and like appearing in various disguises too. On the one hand they seem to be discarnate beings, on the other they are able to get into physical contact with people. The project aims at examining the saintly apparitions, as well as their cultural underpinnings: beliefs, attitudes and expectations of the people of those times from the saints. The study will be based on the aforementioned collections of miracles stories, and other literary examples of the period. This cultural phenomenon will be therefore grasped in its beginnings and will allow insight into the mentality of those people. The results of the examination will fill a substantial gap in the studies on the cult of saints and thus enabling its better understanding.