An imaginative reconstruction of a Late Antique religious festival can be found in the fifth-century *Life and Miracles of Saint Thekla*. The miracle in question involves a group of Cypriot pilgrims who had sailed to Thekla's shrine at Seleukia to attend the saint's festival (ἕορτή). While on shore their boat – along with the two youths left aboard to guard it – is swept out to sea by a sudden storm. The saint appears, calms the waves, and leads the boat back into the harbor. What interests us, however, is not the miracle itself but the introduction to the tale, which describes the pilgrims' arrival in Isauria:

Τῶν γάρ τις εὐπατριδῶν καὶ πιστῶν ἑπιβάς ποτε ὁλκάδος παρὰ τὴν μάρτυρα ἡπείγετο, προσεύξομενός τε αὐτῇ καὶ τὴν ἑορτήν θεάσασθαι βουλόμενος ἣν ἄγουσι μὲν ἑκάστου έτους οἱ καὶ πολῖται καὶ σύνοικοι τῆς μάρτυρος, τιμῶσι δὲ πάντες ἀνθρώποι. (*Miracles of Saint Thekla* 15.1)

A man of a noble and believing family embarked once on a merchant vessel and hastened to come to the martyr in order to pray to her and with

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the desire to witness her festival (προσεύξομενός τε αὐτῇ καὶ τὴν ἕορτὴν 
θεάσασθαι βουλόμενος), which is organized each year by the citizens and 
co-inhabitants with the martyr and which everyone holds in honour.

Our Cypriot pilgrims allude through their actions to the famous introduction 
to Plato’s Republic (327a1–b1):

Κατέβην χθές εἰς Πειραιᾶ μετὰ Γλαύκωνος τοῦ Ἀρίστωνος προσεύξομενός τε 
tῇ θεῷ καὶ ἅμα τὴν ἑορτὴν βουλόμενος θεάσασθαι τίνα τρόπον ποιήσουσιν ἄτε 
vὸν πρῶτον ἄγοντες. Καλὴ μὲν οὖν μοι καὶ ἡ τῶν ἐπιχωρίων 
πομπὴ ἔδοξεν εἶναι, οὐ μέντοι ἥττον ἐφαίνετο πρέπειν ἣν 
οἱ Θράκες ἐπεμπον.

I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Ariston’s son Glaucon to offer 
my prayers to the goddess and also because I wanted to watch the festival 
(προσεύξομενός τε αὐτῇ καὶ τὴν ἕορτὴν βουλόμενος θεάσασθαι) and see 
how they would perform it, seeing that this was the first time they were 
holding it. I must say that I thought that the procession of the local 
people was quite excellent, but the one put on by the Thracian contin-
gent seemed no less impressive.3

The Cypriot family went on pilgrimage in order to pray to Thekla and watch 
her festival, just as Socrates went down to the Peiraeus to pray to the goddess 
Bendis and watch the festival celebrated in her honour, the Bendideia. The 
phrasing, as highlighted above, is carefully modelled on the Republic passage.4 
Moreover, the author of the Life and Miracles develops the Platonic allusion 
even further by preserving the differentiation between local celebrants of the 
cult and visiting pilgrims. This is not just a studied example of late antique 
Platonic mimesis, in which the author of the Life and Miracles has produced 
a point-for-point imitation of the opening scene of the Republic. We must note 
that the author of the Life and Miracles has identified and then translated into 
a Christian setting precisely the constituent elements of the Platonic account 
of pilgrimage: prayer, the production of a religious spectacle, the ritual contem-
plation thereof, and the presence of foreign pilgrims who have travelled to join 
the native celebrants of the cult. Now, this introductory scene has been famous 
since antiquity; perennially cited is the anecdote of how after Plato’s death

3 For text and translation I use here Plato: Republic, ed. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy 
4 Though Dagron in Vie et miracles, p. 157 does not include this passage in his list of the text’s 