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O. F. A. MEINARDUS

An Examination of the Traditions pertaining to the Relics of St. Mark

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INTRODUCTION

The recent translations of several holy relics as inaugurated by the See of Rome have renewed the attention of churchmen and historians to long forgotten traditions pertaining to these relics. With genuine gratitude and jubilation Christians of the Eastern Churches have welcomed the return of the relics of their patrons. Thus, on September 26, 1964, some twenty-one metropolitans of the Greek Orthodox Church could receive the head of St. Andrew which now reposes in the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Patras. Thirteen months later, on October 24, 1965, Cardinal Giovanni Urbani, the Patriarch of Venice, handed to the Greek Orthodox delegation from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem the relics of St. Sabas. After being exposed for veneration in the Church of the Resurrection, St. Sabas was translated to the Desert Monastery in the Wâdî an-Nâr which bears his name. In May 1966, the head of St. Titus, the first bishop of Crete, arrived on board of the destroyer " Doxa " in Heraklion, where Mgr. Olivotti presented the relic to H. B. Eugenios, the Archbishop of Crete. Inspired by the goodwill caused by the return of these relics, other communities followed the example; and on April 13, 1967 the relics of St. George the New Martyr of Cyprus were translated from Acre to Nicosia in Cyprus where they repose in the Cathedral of St. John. On July 17 of the same year, the right arm of St. Isidore, which the Venetians had acquired in 1125, was returned from the Cathedral of San Marco to the Island of Chios.

It is within this context that we should place the request of Pope Cyril VI of Alexandria to Pope Paul VI of Rome to " return to the Coptic Church the relics of St. Mark which repose in the

Cathedral in Venice." On March 29, 1967, it was announced in Cairo that once these relics were returned, they would be buried with the head of the Evangelist together with the relics of forty-two popes of the Coptic Church in the Cathedral of St. Mark in Alexandria. In fact, the Copts requested the return of the whole body so as " to join the head with the body of the Evangelist as a tribute to the African Church." On June 20, 1968, a delegation of bishops and notables of the Coptic and Ethiopian churches left Cairo for Rome to receive the relics of the Evangelist. The delegation consisted of the Metropolitan Mark of Abû Tig, Tima and Tahta; the Metropolitan Michael of Asyûṭ and Dair Abû Maqâr; the Metropolitan Antonius of Sohâg; the Metropolitan Peter of Akhmîm and Saqulta; the Metropolitan Domitius of Gizeh; the Metropolitan Paul of Helwân; Bishop Gregorius, Bishop of Theological Studies; Archbishop Luke of Arussi (Asella); Archbishop Peter of Begemder (Gondar); Archbishop John of Tigre (Makale); ten priests and some seventy Coptic notables. On June 22, 1968, Pope Paul VI presented to the delegation a relic said to be of St. Mark — a small particle of a bone, which was a gift of Cardinal Giovanni Urbani, the Patriarch of Venice, to the Pope of Rome. This relic, so I was told by members of the Catholic delegation, reposed in a reliquary in the treasury of the Cathedral of St. Mark in Venice, for the martyrium of the Evangelist was not opened for this purpose.

In the late evening of June 24, the above delegation accompanied by the Papal delegation arrived at Cairo Airport. The Papal delegation consisted of Cardinal Leon Etienne Duval, the Archbishop of Algiers, Cardinal Willebrands, Secretary of the Secretariate for Christian Unity; Mgr. Olivotti, Co-adjutor of Cardinal Urbani; P. Duprey, p.b.; Abbé Teissié, and Mgr. Nicotra representing the Oriental Congregation. Upon the arrival of the plane, the relic was personally carried by Pope Cyril VI of Alexandria to the car. The same night, the relic was translated to the Patriarchate at Ezbekiah. The small particle, lying in a magnificent silver reliquary, was placed in a wooden box covered by a rich green velvet and fastened with golden cords in the form of a cross.

On June 26, the day following the inauguration of the new Cathedral of St. Mark in Abbassiyah, Cairo, a Divine Liturgy was celebrated by H. H. Cyril VI in commemoration of the nineteen

hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom of the Evangelist in Alexandria. Afterwards, Cyril VI offered the relic to H. I. M. Haile Sellassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, for veneration. Then, Cyril VI carried the relic to the crypt beneath the highaltar. Here the reliquary was solemnly lowered into a cavity of a square polished Aswân granite block. As the heavy granite lid was placed upon the cavity, the choirs of the Coptic Catholic and Coptic Evangelical Churches sang to the glory of God.

In spite of the previous pronouncements by the Coptic hierarchy, the relic was not joined to the head which is believed to repose in Alexandria. On the contrary, a new cult centre was created in Cairo. Moreover, instead of the whole body of the Evangelist, only a small particle of a relic was in fact returned. Neither the box with the head nor the reliquary containing the other relic was opened for veneration or inspection, thereby either purposely or probably even unintentionally perpetuating the mystery of the relics of the Evangelist.

On June 27, the representatives of the Vatican proceeded to Alexandria where they were received by His Most Divine Beatitude Nicholas VI, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria, the Reverend Fr. Nicholas Tenedios, the Recorder of the Patriarchate and Dr. Theodore D. Moschonas, the Remembrancer and Librarian. Then while the members of the delegations stood up reverently, Cardinal Duval offered to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch a precious reliquary of dark colour with a part of the relics of the Evangelist. " When in 1952 ", said the Cardinal, " the urn was opened, they took reverently and for a future blessing the holy fragments, and the urn of the Patron of Venice was closed. Now, on our coming to Cairo, His Holiness the Pope gave to us also the present reliquary specially for the Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria which is also a daughter of St. Mark." Having kissed the holy relics enclosed in the silver reliquary, the Patriarch thanked for it with chosen words full of brotherliness, saying: "The Church of Alexandria receives joyfully for a blessing and strengthening the reliquary of her holy founder, and she will guard it as the apple of her eye."

On July 7, these relics of St. Mark were exposed for veneration by the faithful in the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of St. Sabas in Alexandria.

While recognizing the value of the traditional piety which is expressed towards the saints of old, the church historian and hagiologist is charged to attempt to lift the veil from the ancient and venerable traditions and myths. In the light of modern scholarship it is our mandate to arrive at some form of historical understanding of such events which so often for purely non-religious purposes were shrouded with a wealth of traditions. With respect to the relics of St. Mark the Evangelist, we deal with essentially two traditions — namely the Alexandrian and the Venetian. For both communities, the relics of St. Mark were and are of great importance. For the Copts of Egypt, St. Mark is of the same ecclesiastical significance as St. Peter is for Rome or Antioch. His preaching in Alexandria led to the establishment of the apostolic See of St. Mark, the patriarchs of Alexandria are believed to be the successors of the Evangelist, and his head was used by the Copts in the Rite of Consecration of Patriarchs, at least from the XIth to the XVth century. For Venice, St. Mark is the spiritual patron of the city, whose bodily presence provided great prestige at a time when its city fathers were in the process of establishing the city's place of power and prestige under the sun. In addition to the Churches of Alexandria and Venice, some relics of the Evangelist are also said to repose in other Latin churches in Italy, France, Belgium and Germany as well as in some Byzantine churches.

In order to clarify the issues at stake, we deem it necessary to state the major traditions and to disentangle the stories. In our concluding paragraph then we shall attempt an evaluation of the merits of the respective traditions.

THE ALEXANDRIAN TRADITION

According to the tradition of the Coptic Church, St. Mark was commissioned by St. Peter to proceed from Rome to Egypt where he founded the Apostolic See of Alexandria (1). "The

(1) We must recognize that the Coptic tradition is somewhat late. Early authorities such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen make no mention of St. Mark in connection with the See of Alexandria, a fact

Copts pride themselves on the apostolicity of their national church, whose founder was none other than St. Mark, the author of the oldest canonical Gospel used by both St. Matthew and St. Luke, and probably also by St. John. John Mark is regarded by the Coptic hierarchy as the first in their unbroken chain of 116 patriarchs" (1). The dates pertaining to the arrival of the Evangelist in Alexandria vary between 48 and 75 (2). The *Acta Marci* (3) record that setting sail from Cyprus he came to the Pentapolis and from there proceeded to Alexandria; other sources inform us that he went first "to the land of Egypt" before he began his missionary work in Alexandria (4). The chronology of the apostolic age is so uncertain that no final decision as to the travels of St. Mark can be offered.

The Coptic tradition states that the first Egyptian to be converted by the Evangelist was Anianus, and the story of his conversion is told by the various Coptic sources with almost no variance (5). As the Evangelist entered Rakote (6) and walked

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which has led numerous scholars to doubt the veracity of the Coptic tradition. Cf. UNNIK, W. C. v., *Evangelien aus dem Nilsand*. Frankfurt, 1960, p. 55, states "the tradition that Mark preached the Gospel in Egypt is highly uncertain". In fact we have no documents prior to Eusebius to support the Coptic tradition, though Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* II, xvi, xxiv) gives his account as a tradition which he had heard. Besides the later Coptic texts, the tradition is also found by Jerome (De Vir. Illst. viii, *P.L.* XXIII, 622), Epiphanius of Salamis (Haer.li, 6, *P.G.* XLI, 899), the Apostolic Constitutions (VII, xlvi), and the Martyrologium Romanum, April 25 (LE QUIEN, *Oriens Christianus II*, Paris, 1740, 344).

(1) ATIYA, Aziz S., *A History of Eastern Christianity*. London, 1968, p. 25.

(2) An excellent discussion on the various dates for the missionary activity of St. Mark in Alexandria is found in NAHED AL-GAMAL, *The Tradition of St. Mark in the Coptic Church*. Cairo, 1957 (unpubl. thesis, American University in Cairo). Also, Kâmil Sâlih NAKHLA, *Târîkh al-Qiddîs Mar Murqus al-Bašîr*. Cairo, 1952, pp. 57-58.

(3) For the *Acta Marci*, cf. H. G. Evelyn WHITE, *New Texts from the Monastery of St. Marci*. New York, 1926.

(4) CRUM, W. E., *Theological Texts from Coptic Papyri*. Oxford, 1913, no. 15.

(5) *Cf.* Coptic Synaxarium, *Patr. Orient.* XVI, p. 347. This narrative is identical to that in the History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church. (EVETTS, B. T. A., HPCC, *Patr. Orient.* I, pp. 37-50).

(6) Rakote or fortress of Ra was an Egyptian fishing-village near Alexandria.

along its stony paths, the strap of his shoe was torn, and he went to a cobbler by the name of Anianus to have it fixed. When the cobbler took an awl to work on it, he accidentally pierced his hand and cried aloud: " God is one ". St. Mark rejoiced at this utterance, and after miraculously healing the cobbler's hand, preached the Gospel to him and his whole household. They were ignorant of the Old Testament prophecies which St. Mark quoted, and the only books they knew were those of the Greek philosophers (1).

Anianus and all his household believed and were baptized. The Christians in Egypt multiplied in number and the pagans took notice of them and sought to lay hands on the Evangelist. Scenting danger, St. Mark ordained Anianus bishop together with three priests and seven deacons (2). Afterwards, he seems to have undertaken a missionary journey to Rome, from where he proceeded to Aquileia (3) and later went to visit the Pentapolis where he spent two years performing miracles, ordaining bishops and elders, and winning more converts. When at last he returned to Alexandria, he was overjoyed to find that the church had increased in numbers.

Rumors that the Christians threatened to overthrow the pagan deities infuriated the people of Alexandria. On the 29th of Barmûdah, which happened to be Easter Sunday of the year 68 A.D. (4), the pagans celebrated the festival of Serapis. Searching for the Evangelist, they found him in the Church at Baucalis (5)

(1) Anianus is sometimes said to be an Alexandrian Jew (HARDY, E. R., *Christian Egypt: Church and People*. New York, 1952, p. 13). If he were a Jew, he would neither have been ignorant of the One God nor of the Old Testament books.

(2) Eutyches, however, maintained that St. Mark ordained twelve presbyters to be successors to the See. When one of the twelve was elected to be patriarch, the eleven would lay their hands on him and then select one to become presbyter in place of the one who was advanced to be patriarch, thus there were always twelve presbyters.

(3) ATIYA, A. S., *op. cit.*, p. 27.

(4) These dates are somewhat incorrect since the 29th of Barmûdah corresponds to the 24th of April (jul.) or the 7th of May (gregor.). In 68, however, Easter fell on the 10th of April (gregor.).

(5) The Church at Baucalis is said to have been built by the Christians of Alexandria prior to the return of St. Mark to the city. It was situated near the shore of the Eastern Harbour, beside a rock from which stone is hewn. Some Vth century marble capitals with decorations of flowers and trellis work are in the Cairo and the Alexandrian Museum.

where the Christians celebrated the Easter Service. St. Mark was seized, dragged with a rope around his neck in the streets, and then he was incarcerated for the night. About midnight, an angel appeared to him strengthening him and promising him the crown of martyrdom. On the following day, the 30th of Barmûdah, the idolatrous populace of Alexandria dragged him again through the streets until he finally gave up the ghost. But they were not satisfied, and prepared for lighting a great fire where they placed the body for burning. But nature would not allow to deal irrespectfully with the body of the saint, for it thundered and rained heavily and the fire was put out. Then the faithful assembled and took the body of St. Mark from the ashes, and nothing in it had been changed (1). And they carried it to the church in which they used to celebrate the liturgy, and they enshrouded it and prayed over it according to the established rites (2). And they dug a place for him and buried his holy body there that they might preserve his memory. And they placed him in the eastern part of the church, on the day on which his martyrdom was accomplished (3).

According to Coptic tradition, the body of the Evangelist still reposed in the Church of St. Mark at Baucalis in 311 at the time of the martyrdom of St. Peter, the 17th Patriarch of Alexandria. There is no question that this site was highly venerated by the Christians of Alexandria. Patriarchs were here enthroned and pilgrims from all over the ancient world repaired to the holy relics of St. Mark (4). Subsequent to the schism which separated

(1) The description of this aspect of the martyrium corresponds to that of St. Polycarp and many other early martyrs, who remained untouched by the forces of nature. The prototype of this phenomenon is found in the story of the Three Confessors in the fiery furnace. Cf. MEINARDUS, O., " Mystical Phenomena Among the Copts ", *Ostkirchliche Studien*, XV, 4, 1966, pp. 147-153.

(2) The reference to the " established rite " betrays a rather late date for this part of the tradition.

(3) EVETTS, B. T. A., HPCC, *Patr. Orient.*, I, p. 50.

(4) Antoninus Martyr, who visited Alexandria between 560 and 570 stated that there reposed the relics of SS. Athanasius, Faustus, Epimachus, Antonius, Marcus and the bodies of many other saints. " Of the Holy Places Visited ", *Palestine Pilgrims Text Society*. II, p. 35. It was by the side of St. Mark's tomb in the Church at Baucalis that the election of the Patriarchs took place. NEALE, J. M., *A History of the Holy Eastern Church*. London, 1847, vol. I, p. 9.

the Chalcedonians or Melkites from the non-Chalcedonians or Copts in 451, the church in which the body of the Evangelist reposed remained in the hands of the former (1). At the time of the Arab Conquest, the Church of St. Mark escaped destruction (2). It was only during the recapture of Alexandria from Manuel and his Roman troops in the summer of 646, that the Arabs destroyed, plundered, and burned a great part of Alexandria including the Church of St. Mark (3). The account in the History of the Patriarchs describes the event as follows: "In the year 360 A.M. (4) the Muslims captured Alexandria, and they burned the Church of St. Mark which was built by the sea where his body was laid, and this was the place to which the father the patriarch Peter the Martyr went before his martyrdom and blessed St. Mark. At the burning of said church a miracle took place which was performed and that was that one of the captains of the ships, namely the captain of the ship of the duke Sanutius, climbed over the wall and descended into the church, and came to the shrine, where he found that the coverings had been taken, for the plunderers thought that there was money in the chest. But when they found nothing there, they took away the covering from the body of St. Mark, but his bones were left in their place. So the captain put his hand into the shrine and there he found the head of the holy Mark, which he took. Then he returned to his ship secretly and told no one of it, and hid the head in the hold among his baggage... The ship in which the head of the Evangelist was hidden was miraculously prevented from leaving the harbour of Alexandria (5). Therefore, the duke returned the head of St. Mark to Benjamin the Patriarch, and as soon as he had received the pure head, the ship got under sail at once and departed in a straight course. The patriarch returned to the city, carrying the head in his bosom and the priests went before him with chanting and singing as befitted the reception of that sacred and glorious

(1) ATIYA, A. S., *op. cit.*, p. 28.

(2) BUTLER, Alfred J., *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion.* Oxford, 1902, pp. 115.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 475.

(4) 360 A.M. or 644 A.D. This date should be 646 A.D.

(5) This is a well-known theme in early mediaeval hagiology. When the relics of St. Bishoi were to be translated by boat, it refused to sail because those of Paul of Tammûah, St. Bishoi's spiritual brother, were left behind.

head. And he made a chest of plane wood with a padlock upon it, and placed the head therein, and he waited for a time in which he might find means to build a church" (1).

There is little doubt that the narrative of this miracle should be assigned to a date considerably after the theft of the body of the Evangelist by the Venetians in the IXth century. The account seems to indicate that the body perished with the destruction of the church and that the head was saved from destruction by being stolen and later returned, not to the original owner, the Melkites, but to the Coptic Patriarch Benjamin I. The narrative of the manufacture of the wooden reliquary for the head reflects a period in the history of the Coptic Church when, indeed, the head was carried from person to person and was used for the ceremony of consecration of the Coptic patriarchs. In this context it is interesting to note that in the year 700 a tradition was still maintained that the body (apparently the whole body) of the Evangelist reposed in Alexandria. Bishop Arculf's account written from his dictation by Adamnan, abbot of Iona, states explicitly that "there (in Alexandria) is a large church in which St. Mark the Evangelist is interred. The body is buried in the eastern part of the church, before the altar, with a monument of squared marble over it" (2).

The story of the translation of the body of St. Mark by the Venetian noblemen from Venice to Alexandria is omitted in the early documents of the Coptic Church. Neither the Xth century Bishop of al-Ašmunain, Sawîrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, the author of the first part of the History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church, nor the compiler of the Coptic Synaxarium refer to the theft of the relics of the Evangelist. At the same time, we cannot defend their silence by excusing it with the argument of ignorance. The translation of the body of St. Mark from Alexandria to Venice was a well known fact in Alexandria in the IXth century as is evident from the report of Bernard the Wise, who visited the city in 869 and records his impressions by saying: "The city of Alexandria is adjacent to the sea. It was here that St. Mark,

(1) EVETTS, B. T. A., HPCC, *Patr. Orient.*, I, pp. 494-500. The same narrative is found in the Coptic Synaxarium, *Patr. Orient.*, X, pp. 561-563 under the 8th of Tubah, and by VANSLEB, J. M., *Histoire de l'Eglise d'Alexandrie*. Paris, 1677, pp. 168-169.

(2) WRIGHT, Thomas, *Early Travels in Palestine*. London, 1848, p. 11.

preaching the Gospel, bore the episcopal dignity, and outside the eastern gate of the city is the monastery of the saint, with the church in which he formerly reposed. But the Venetians coming there obtained his body by stealth, and carrying it on shipboard, sailed home with it " (1).

Neither Bernard the Wise nor the Venetians refer to the translation of a body without a head. We must assume, therefore, that the tradition pertaining to the severance of the head from the body developed at a time when a relic of the Evangelist became important for functional or liturgical purposes, in this case probably the consecration of the patriarchs of the Coptic Church who used to take the Apostolic Head of the divinely inspired Mark in their bosoms at the end of the Rite of Consecration (2). From the History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church, we learn that from the XIth to the XIVth century the head of St. Mark played an increasingly important part in the history and the tradition of the Coptic Church. It is into this period, therefore, that we should place the emergence of the tradition of the above mentioned miracle of the manifestation of the head.

Later tradition even confused the miracle story of the theft of the head in the VIIth century with the translation of the relics of the saint by the Venetians in the IXth century. Thus we read in the note to the 30th of Bâbah of the 1912 edition of the Coptic Synaxarium that " the time of the manifestation of the head of St. Mark is not known exactly, but it may be said that it was in the year 827, that is, the time of the manifestation of his holy members and their translation to the City of Venice in Italy, as some think. As regards the story which is common among people, some foreigners came especially to Alexandria, and they took the body and they placed it in a vessel which they had prepared for this purpose, but the ship remained and did not

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 24.

(2) BURMESTER, O. H. E. KHS-, *The Rite of Consecration of the Patriarch of Alexandria.* Cairo, 1960, p. 83. According to Vansleb, *loc. cit.*, " since the Arab Conquest, all the patriarchs newly consecrated observe the custom to embrace the head and cover it with a new veil, and present it to the people to be kissed, but today (1672) no longer having this head, they cannot perform this ceremony ". Cf. V. MISTRIH, *Yûhannâ ibn Abî Zakarîâ ibn Sibâ'*: *Pretiosa Margarita de Scientiis Ecclesiasticis.* Cairo, 1966, pp. 284-287, 541-543.

move, and they returned the head to its place and then the ship moved. Although it may be accepted by the mind as a fact, we cannot be assured of its truth exactly, since we do not find any of the historians of the time or others who mention it '' (1).

The XIth century Bishop of Tinnis and compiler of the biographies of the patriarchs from Khâîl III (880-907) to Šenute II (1032-1046), namely Michael (2), implies that during the XIth century, the head of the Evangelist reposed in the Desert of the Wâdî 'n-Naṭrûn, undoubtedly in the Monastery of St. Macarius (3). Shortly after the retirement of Zacharias (1004-1032), the 64th Patriarch of Alexandria, to the Wâdî 'n-Naṭrûn, a Turkish amîr obtained the head of St. Mark. It was said to him: ' The Christians will pay to thee whatsoever thou desirest for it '. Then he carried the head to Misr (Cairo) (4). When Buḳairah ar-Rašîdî, the Cross-bearer, was informed of this, he took the head from the Turk for three hundred dinars and he carried it to the father, the patriarch, who was at that time in the Monastery of Abba Macarius, and most of the bishops were dwelling with him there (5). In the middle of the XIth century, the head of the Evangelist was translated from the Monastery of St. Macarius in the Wâdî 'n-Naṭrûn to Alexandria. During the patriarchate of Christodoulus (1047-1077), the 66th Patriarch of Alexandria, the head of St. Mark was in Alexandria. Here it reposed in the house of Abû Yaḥyâ Zakaryâ, who was a favourite of the Sultan and his wazîr, 'Alî ibn Aḥmad al-Girğânî (6). When Abû Yaḥyâ Sakaryâ fell sick and his pain became intense, several Christian notables of Alexandria assembled and debated about the future of the head of Mark, for they feared in case of his death that his house would be seized and with it the head of the Evangelist. After the death of Abû

(1) *Kitâb as-Sadîk al-Amîn.* Cairo, 1912, vol. I., p. 167.

(2) GRAF, G., *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur.* Città del Vaticano, 1947, vol. II, p. 302.

(3) Evelyn WHITE H. G., *The Monasteries of the Wâdî 'n-Naṭrûn.* New York, 1933, vol. II, pp. 345-346.

(4) This statement presumes that the head of the Evangelist was in the desert.

(5) Aziz Suryal ATIYA, Yassa 'Abd al-Masîh, O. H. E. KHS-BURMESTER, *The History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church.* (HPEC) Cairo, 1948, vol. II, ii, p. 201.

(6) Abû Yaḥyâ was the representative of the Patriarch Šenute II (1032-1046) and a friend of al-Mustansir (1036-1094).

Yaḥyâ Zakaryâ, they took the box in which was the head, and they carried it to the house of Gabriel ibn Ḳuzmân, since his house was near to that of Abû Yaḥyâ Zakaryâ. Then when it was night, they carried the box into the house of Manṣûr ibn Mufarrağ. But when they arrived with the box, Manṣûr ibn Mufarrağ stood in the corridor and he swore that the head should not enter his house for fear of the Sultan, because he hald already experienced such difficult matters as confiscation and fines. Then Surûr ibn Maṭrûḥ took the head and went with it to his house, and his house was opposite to the aforesaid house. Then the priest Simon, who later became Bishop of Tinnis, said to him: " I will transfer the head from thy house to my house, and I and my brother will serve it ", and they went and took it. (1). Some time later, the head of the Evangelist reposed in the house of Mawhûb ibn Manṣûr, where an incident occurred which is recorded. Abû'l-'Alâ, the brother of Mawhûb ibn Manṣûr, entertained doubts about the authenticity of the relic. One night, St. Mark appeared to Mawhûb and informed him that his brother had doubts about him (St. Mark). When Mawhûb told this story to his brother, he marvelled and was freightened, and he went to where the head of St. Mark was and he prayed and besought pardon from him (2).

The association of the head of St. Mark with Mawhûb ibn Mufarrağ al-Iskandârânî, a deacon in Alexandria, ought to be placed into the latter part of the XIth century. Mawhûb ibn Mufarrağ is a well known person to the church-historian for his long list of relics which appear in the biography of Cyril II (1078-1092), the 67th Patriarch of Alexandria. What happened to the holy relic after the XIth century is rather uncertain, although the relic continued to be transferred from house to house rather than being placed in any of the major churches or shrines of Alexandria. A very significant reference with respect to the head of the Evangelist appears in the biography of Cyril ibn Laqlaq (1235-1243), the 75th Patriarch of Alexandria, where it is stated that the head reposed in the house of Ibn as-Sakurî. " And it is said that it was the head of Peter the beatified martyr (3), because

(1) *HPEC*, II, iii, p. 265.

(2) *HPEC*, II, iii, pp. 275-276.

(3) Peter I, the 17th Patriarch of Alexandria. Cf. BEDJAN, P. *Acta martyrum* et sanctorum. Paris, 1895, V, p. 543. HYVERNAT, H., *Les*

the head of the Apostle, the Evangelist, was with his body when the Greeks (ar-Rûm) transported him to Venice (al-Bundukiah). And it was brought out for him (Cyril) according to the custom; as regards this head, it was forty-eight years (that) it had not been taken out, the period of the occupation (of the Throne) of Abba John (1), twenty-eight years, and the period of the delay (in making a new patriarch) after him (which was passed) in falsehood and discord and contrivings twenty years, and it (the head) was placed in a room, and he (the patriarch) enveloped it in a new covering according to the custom " (2).

This, in fact, is the one and only reference in Coptic sources which states that the head was translated together with the body to Venice. Forgotten is the narrative of the miraculous manifestation of the head at the time of Benjamin I; forgotten or unknown is the miracle caused by the head in the house of Mawhûb ibn Manṣûr. Undoubtedly Venetian merchants must have spread in Alexandria their local tradition that the whole body reposed in Venice. And yet, a head did exist, a head which had been used for some time or " according to the custom " in the Rite of Consecration of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church. It is interesting that the chronicler should include the tradition that " it was the head of Peter ". The possibility of this being the head of the beatified " Seal of the Martyrs " is increased by the tradition which states that his martyrdom in 311 took place at Baucalis near the tomb where St. Mark was beheaded (3).

Mawhûb, who in the latter part of the XIth century had recorded all the relics which he could possibly identify, omitted the relics of St. Peter and merely stated that he had seen the blood of Peter the Martyr, the 17th Patriarch of Alexandria (4).

The uncertainty with regard to the head of the Evangelist which is reflected in the biography of Cyril ibn Laqlaq is supported by the silence of Abû'l-Makarim, commonly known as Abû Sâlih

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actes des martyrs de l'Egypte. Paris, 1886-1887, I, p. 263. François NAU, " Les martyres de saint Léonce de Tripoli et de saint Pierre d'Alexandrie d'après les sources syriaques ", *Analecta Bollandiana*, XIX, 1900, pp. 9-13.

(1) This was John VI, who served as patriarch from 1188-1216.

(2) *Ms. Arabe* 302, Bibl. Nationale de Paris, fol. 319 verso.

(3) O'LEARY, DE LACY, *The Saints of Egypt*. London, 1937, pp. 224-225.

(4) *HPEC*, II, iii, pp. 358-362.

the Armenian. This author, who provides us otherwise with a great deal of information about the relics which were venerated by the Copts during the latter part of the XIIth century, omitted any reference to this most important Coptic treasure in his famous study on *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt* (1). Moreover, Ludolph von Suchem (1350), who mentions the relics of many saints in the churches of Alexandria, omits any reference to St. Mark (2). Should we assume that the reason for this silence was because the head reposed in a private house or because there existed some uncertainty as to its authenticity? Yet, doubt and uncertainty about this so important relic for the liturgical life of the Coptic hierarchy had to be dispelled. Numerous stories and traditions must have circulated in Cairo and Alexandria and some of the more thoughtful theologians must have wondered about the truth. In the XIVth century, Abû'l-Barakât ibn Kabar, the most distinguished of the mediaeval Coptic theologians, wrote an account pertaining to the head of the Evangelist, which was to become the standard version for the Coptic Church, often repeated and believed to this day (3). "And his martyrdom (Mark's) was at the end of Barmûdah, the 27th Nisan, in the reign of Tiberius, and it is said that his body was burned with fire, and it is said that it was still buried in the eastern church on the shore of Alexandria up to the time when it was taken by craft by some Franks (al-Farang), those of Venice. They stole the body and they left the head. And they went with the body to Venice, where it is now. And it (the head) was transferred to a house in Alexandria known as that of the Sons of Sukrî (aûlâd as-Sukrî), and it is in it till now" (4). With respect to the locality of the relic, Abû'l-Barakât merely confirms the statement of the biographer of Cyril ibn Laqlaq, otherwise he clearly assigns the body to Venice, the head to Alexandria!

(1) EVETTS, B. T. A. (ed.), Oxford, 1895.

(2) "Description of the Holy Land", *Palestine Pilgrims Text Society*, XII, p. 46.

(3) "The Venetians stole the headless body of St. Mark in 828". ATIYA, A.S., *op. cit.*, p. 28.

(4) ABÛ'L-BARAKÂT IBN KABAR, *Misbah az-Zulmah li' 'Idah al-Khidmah* (The Lamp of Darkness for the Intelligence of the Service) Cairo, 1950, p. 67.

THE VENETIAN TRADITION

The tradition of the translation of the relics of St. Mark from Alexandria to Venice must be evaluated in terms of the political and ecclesiastical tensions which existed between the emerging city of Venice (1) and the much older city of Aquileia, especially since by the IXth century both sees claimed apostolic origin based on the preaching of St. Mark. Moreover, the translation of the relics of the Evangelist served as a demonstrative means for the gradual secession of Venice from Byzantine domination. Whereas the former tutelary saint of the dogate had been St. Theodore, a Byzantine warrior-saint, the acquisition of the relics of St. Mark served as an unequivocal sign of Venice's movement towards independence. In fact, " the gradual transition from Byzantine sovereignty to independence follows a course parallel to the gradual disappearance of the original Greek Patron Saint of the dogate " (2).

Latin manuscripts of the VIIIth century inform us that as a disciple of St. Peter, St. Mark was commissioned by him to preach the Gospel in Aquileia (3). Moreover, after founding a church in this ancient Adriatic city, St. Mark is said to have written his Gospel for the use by the north Italian Christians of Aquileia prior to his journey to Egypt. Before his departure from Aquileia, St. Mark designated St. Hermagoras, his pupil, to be his successor, whom he took with him to Rome for consecration for this newly founded bishopric. St. Hermagoras is said to have suffered martyrdom in his city. Aquileia had adopted St. Mark as its founder and patron in or after the Vth century, certainly before the Venetians ever thought of acquiring the spiritual protection from the Evangelist. The reason for Aquileia's interest

(1) In the year 726 the Dux Ursus was for the first time elected by the tribunal and the clergy, and not appointed by the Byzantine emperor. This date then, which coincides with the promulgation of Leo III's iconoclassic policy, can be regarded as the beginning of the national history of Venice.

(2) DEMUS, Otto, *The Church of San Marco in Venice*. Washington, 1960, p. 21.

(3) The earliest datable reference to St. Mark in connection with Aquileia is in Paulus Diaconus' *Gesta episcoporum Mettensium*, MIGNE, *P.L.* XCV, p. 699, to be dated between 783 and 786.

in St. Mark is evident from its concern to be recognized as one of the patriarchal sees of the Church. " Aquileia, in fact, aimed at supplanting Alexandria as the Markian patriarchate on the strength of the assertion that Mark had founded the Church of Aquileia prior to that of Alexandria " (1).

Aquileia played a significant role in the ecclesiastical history of the north-Italian churches (2). During the Vth and VIth century, the diocese of Aquileia included all of north-east Italy with Illyria, Noricum and Rhaetia; and Verona, Trent, Pola, Belluno, Treviso, Padua were among its suffragans. Its Bishop Macedonius (535-556) had refused to acknowledge the decisions of the Vth Oecumenical Council at Constantinople (553) and thus seceded from Rome, assuming in 557 the title of Patriarch, which had been accorded to him by the barbarians. Soon after, however, Northern Italy was over-run by the Lombards, and the patriarch fled to Grado, six miles away. In 606 the Metropolitan Candidian of Aquileia in Grado submitted to the pope, though his Lombard suffragan did not follow him and there were for a long time rival patriarchs of both Aquileia and Grado (3). The Aquileian schism led both patriarchs to claim to be the legitimate successors of St. Mark. While the patriarch of Aquileia retained his title, the bishop of Grado styled himself patriarch of Nova Aquileia. On June 6, 827, a synod was convened in Mantua which was presided over by representatives of the Pope of Rome and the Frankish Emperor. The purpose of this gathering was to restore the old patriarchate of Aquileia and to reduce the See of Grado to the rank of a suffragan bishopric, a " plebs " of Aquileia. This, however, was an indignity to the Doge of Venice and even threatened his independence from the Frankish kingdom. It was, therefore, opportune that just at this crucial moment in the history of Venice the Doge Justinian Partecipacius should acquire the relics of the very saint, who had been held in highest esteem by his principal opponents, namely the city and the church of Aquileia. The translation not only worked against Aquileia, it also supported

(1) DEMUS, O., *op. cit.*, p. 31.

(2) DE RUBEIS, M. B., *Monumenta ecclesiae Aquilejensis*. Strasbourg, 1740. Aquileia, a former city of the Roman empire and a mediaeval western patriarchate at the head of the Adriatic is now a village with a population of 2,000.

(3) One of the twelve townships of Venice.

Grado, and played a not insignificant role in the secession from Constantinople. It is into this context that we should also place the origin of the tradition of the preaching of St. Mark in Venice (1).

In the *Vite de' Santi spettani alle Chiese di Venezia* we are informed how "St. Mark after departing from Aquileia sailed in a small boat to the marshes of Venice. There were at that time some homes built upon a certain high bank called Rialto, and the boat driven by the wind was anchored in a marshy place, when St. Mark, snatched into ecstasy, heard the voice of an angel saying to him: 'Peace be to thee Mark, here shall thy body rest'" (2).

With respect to the historicity of the translation of the relics which were believed to be those of St. Mark from Alexandria to Venice during the administration of the Doge Justinian Partecipacius (827-830), there can be little doubt, although we have to recognize that the narrative did not acquire its final form much before the end of the XIth century. In fact, "the oldest of the extant manuscript versions of the translation are of the XIth century, and for intrinsic reasons it must be assumed that the final form took place shortly after 1050" (3). In more than one way, the narrative follows the model of other translations.

The story of this peculiar translation commences with a lengthy introduction in which the author tries to demonstrate the divine right of the Venetians to the possession of the relics of the Apostle. Although Leo the Armenian (813-820), the Byzantine Emperor, had strictly prohibited any trade with Alexandria since it was in the hands of the infidels, two Venetian noblemen and merchants, Bonus a tribune of Malamocco (4) and Rusticus

(1) We may legitimately assume that the tradition of the translation of the holy relics of St. Mark to Aquileia as recorded by Ordericus Vitalis (1141) is older than the Venetian tradition. The Aquileian tradition spread at the time when the Patriarch of Aquileia regained the primary position in Italy after the Pope of Rome in 964. LIPSIUS, Rich. A., *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden*. Braunschweig, 1883, vol. III, p. 353.

(2) Venice, 1761, vol. I, p. 126, cited by RUSKIN, John, *The Stones of Venice*, London, 1925, vol. II, p. 52. This tradition should be assigned to the XIIIth century.

(3) DEMUS, O., *op. cit.*, p. 9.

(4) Malamocco, one of the twelve townships of Venice was an important political centre which later was swallowed up by the sea.

of Torcello (1) sailed to Alexandria. Having received word that the Muslims had ordered the removal of marble columns and slabs from Alexandria, they felt justified to safeguard the bodily remains of the Apostle from the hands of the infidels. In fact, Alexandria had just suffered severely from the violent clashes between the Andalusians (2) and the troops of the Caliph al-Mâ'mûn (813-833).

These Andalusian refugees banished from Spain by the 'Umayyad prince al-Hakam were allowed to land, but not to enter Alexandria. Soon, however, they became a factor in the political situation, and having leagued themselves with the powerful Arab tribe of Lakhm, they seized Alexandria in 815. Here they fought and treated alternately with the government and with malcontents of the Hawf (3). Finally, al-Mâ'mûn sent 'Abd Allâh ibn Tâhir, one of the most famous generals, to Egypt in 826. With an army officered by trustworthy veterans from Khurâsân he besieged the city in 827, and the Andalusians embarked on their ships (4). The extent of the fighting and the threat to Alexandria are described by Sawîrus ibn al-Muqaffa'. The scene of the disturbances was at Alexandria, and fighting the Spaniards, 'Abd al-Azîz was beating upon the walls with catapults in order to demolish them, and it was his intention to destroy all the inhabitants of Alexandria with the sword; and the Patriarch Ya'qûb (819-830) was praying and weeping over the devastation of the land and the long continuance of the war and the fighting (5).

Whether the Venetian noblemen were aware of the situation in Alexandria or not, their arrival did coincide with one of the many temporary persecutions of the Christians by the Muslims. Upon his arrival in Egypt, 'Abd Allâh ibn Tâhir had appointed an amîr as governor of Alexandria, and he was Elias ibn Yazîd.

(1) Torcello, one of the twelve townships of Venice, was a notable commercial centre.

(2) These Andalusians had staged a rebellion at Cordova which had gone near to over-throwing the Islamic monarchy.

(3) The Ḥawf or the eastern part of the Nile Delta between Bilbais and Damietta.

(4) LANE-POOLE, Stanley, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages*. London, 1925, pp. 35, 36.

(5) EVETTS, B. T. A., "History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church", *Patrologia Orientalis*, X, pp. 451-457.

Elias began to act harshly towards the Patriarch Ya'qûb in demanding taxes when he had nothing with which he could pay. Thus the Patriarch brought forth the vessels of the church to give them to the miscreant tribe (1).

Upon their arrival in Alexandria, the two Venetian merchants repaired to the Church of St. Mark which belonged to the Melkites, where they engaged in lengthy arguments with the Greek custodians of the holy relics, namely with the Alexandrian monk Stauracius and priest Theodorus. The narrative presents the arguments in the form of a tetralogue between the two Venetians and the Alexandrian custodians, the principal point of the Venetians being that St. Mark had been bishop of Aquileia (2) prior to his episcopal office in Alexandria and that a removal to Venice would merely constitute the return to his old home (3). Moreover, employing the hearsay of the caliph's design to destroy the church in which the relics were kept, they succeeded in convincing the custodians to hand the relics over to them. They found little difficulty in removing the stonelid from the sarcophagus in which the body of the Evangelist reposed on its back, wrapped in a silk shroud, the edges of which were fastened together with many seals down the front. The Alexandrian custodians turned the saint on his face, cut the shroud down the back, removed the body of St. Mark and placed in the shroud the body of St. Claudia (4) that lay nearby, and then sewed up the seam and reversed the body, so that the unbroken seals would be shown to anyone who again opened the tomb. When the saint's body

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 467.

(2) There is little doubt that the tradition of St. Mark's episcopacy of Aquileia preceded that of his preaching in Venice. The latter tradition developed only after the successful translation of the relics from Alexandria to Venice!

(3) The first patron of Venice, however, was St. Theodore in whose honour the Venetians have built a church.

(4) It is not easy to identify this saint. St. Claudia is commemorated in the Ethiopian Church on January 2. She does not appear in the Coptic Synaxarium and her relics are not mentioned in the XIth century inventory of relics by Mawhûb ibn Muffariğ al-Iskandarânî, a deacon in Alexandria. The relics of St. Claudius reposed in the XIth century in the Church of St. Victor in Asyût. MEINARDUS, O., " An Inventory of the Relics of Saints in the Coptic Church in Egypt ", *Ostkirchliche Studien*, XVII, 2-3, 1968, pp. 134-173.

was brought out again into the church, so great a fragrance spread through the church and the town (1), that the neighbours came running together and a suspicion was whispered that the Venetian strangers might be stealing the saint. But the seals on the shroud dispelled the suspicion. The Venetians had meanwhile placed the body in a great chest and covered it with vegetables and pork. The harbour officials did in fact insist on looking into the chest to see what goods were being exported, but seeing the pork, they cried out in disgust. So the chest was taken on board of one of the ships, and then the saint's body was wrapped in one of the sails and slung up to the yard-arm till their departure. Then it was placed with due honour on the deck, with candles and incense before it, and the flotilla sailed amidst a succession of miracles to the Adriatic. The crew of another ship, doubting the authenticity of the relic, was punished in so far as the ship with the bodily remains of the Evangelist rammed the other ship and did not move away until the unbelieving sailors acknowledged the genuineness of the relics. The sleeping sailors were then warned by the Evangelist himself that they were approaching the coast.

Upon their arrival in Venice, Bishop Ursus (2) and his clergy received the relics and conducted them in solemn procession to the palace of the Doge Justinian Partecipacius. While being carried to their temporary resting place, the holy relics became so heavy that they could hardly be lifted up (3). The Doge vowed to build a church for the bodily remains of the Evangelist, but he died before he could keep his promises. Immediately after the translation of the relics, Justinian recalled his brother John,

(1) The "odour of sanctity" is a well known phenomenon, and the belief that exceptional virtues are accompained by a pleasant odour was widespread (cf. *II Cor.* 2:15). Cf. the *vitae* of SS. Simeon Stylites, Theresa of Avila, Clara Marie of the Passio Christi, Giovanna Maria della Croce, Maria Francescana, Maria degli Angeli, *et al.*

(2) He was the fourth bishop of Venice. In 775 with the consent of Adrian I and the Patriarch of Grado, an episcopal see was established on the island of Olivolo, later Castello. The first bishop nominated was Obelerius who was invested and enthroned by the doge and consecrated by the patriarch.

(3) This is a common phenomenon in the narratives of translations of relics, indicating that the relics should not be moved further. Cf. the Translation of St. Menas from Alexandria to the Shrine of Abû Mînâ at Maryût.

who for many years had lived in exile in Constantinople, and proclaimed him co-regent and his successor. After the death of Justinian, John II Partecipacius fulfilled the vow of his brother to build a church in honour of the relics of the Evangelist (1).

August F. Gfrörer is quite correct in his assumption when he states that the two Venetians were not in Alexandria by accident, but rather on a mission from the Doge to acquire the body of St. Mark. In fact, there was hardly a more demonstrative method to impress the ancient world of the apostolic claims of the Venetian Republic than by pronouncing the "return" of the Apostle to what they maintained to have been his first see. It is significant that upon the return from Alexandria, Buono of Malamocco and Rustico of Torcello deposited the relic not at Grado, hitherto the religious centre of the islands, but at Rialto, where it was undoubtedly safer in view of any possible claims of the Church of Aquileia. Furthermore, in Rialto the presence of the holy body would also impart some of its sanctity upon the Doge Justinian, thus making him a spiritual personage, and possibly cause the Patriarch of Grado to transfer his see as a spiritual servant of the Evangelist to Venice! The ecclesiastical significance of the translation of the relics of St. Mark can hardly be overrated. The move contained an unmistakable spike against the church and city of Aquileia, which had just succeeded in gaining recognition as the legitimate See of St. Mark, as well as against the local patriarch, whose transfer to Venice would greatly enhance the status of the city (2).

However, the political designs of the doge were crossed by the machinations of Pope Gregory IV (827-844) who had bestowed upon Venerius of Grado the pallium so as to let it be known that he would not tolerate a transfer of the patriarchal see from Grado to the city of Venice. The papal interference in the political and ecclesiastical emergence of Venice may also explain the rather secretive developments with respect to the relics of the Evangelist.

(1) *Acta Sanctorum*, Aprilis, III, pp. 353-355. HODGSON, F. C., *The Early History of Venice*. London, 1901, pp. 82-84. DEMUS, Otto, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9. Lipsius, R. A., *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 353. GFRÖRER, A. F., *Geschichte Venedigs von seiner Gründung bis zum Jahre* 1084. Graz, 1872, p. 164.

(2) GFRÖRER, A. F., *op. cit.*, p. 168. KRETSCHMAYR, Heinrich, *Geschichte von Venedig*. Gotha, 1905, vol. I, p. 65.

For after the successful translation of the holy relics one would have expected great festivities in Venice. Instead, according to the will of the Doge Justinian, John II, his successor, placed the relics in a chapel in a corner of the ducal palace. We may guess, therefore, that the Pope, perhaps expecting certain revolutionary claims from the Venetians, had conveyed to them an ultimatum either to transfer the relics to the Cathedral of Grado, which still served as the acknowledged ecclesiastical centre, or to promise not to exploit the possession of the relics for any political or ecclesiastical purposes (1). Apparently, Justinian and his successors selected the second alternative and kept the relics hidden from the people. Thus, the holy of holies of the emerging state of Venice rested in obscurity!

Whereas the Venetian Christians did not immediately profit by the acquisition of the body of St. Mark, the Doge had nevertheless proved an important point. Moreover, the fact that the place of the holy relics of the saint remained a highly guarded secret, known only to a few who were initiated, served even more than one useful purpose, especially also in the interest of the Venetians. For we must remember that just as the Venetians acquired the body of the Evangelist from Alexandria, others, especially the clergy from Aquileia, could have attempted to steal the body of the saint from the Venetians. That this thought was not completely unfounded is evident from the claim of the Benedictine monks of Reichenau, who maintained to have acquired the body of the Evangelist from the Venetians and taken it to their island in the Untersee of the lake of Constance in 830 (2).

Nevertheless, the Doge John II built a church in honour of the relics of St. Mark, which was consecrated in 836. This church, however, was not a separate building, but rather a part of the ducal palace, probably a chapel. In 976 this chapel was burned along with the ducal palace in the insurrection against the Doge Candianus IV, and it is very probable that the body of the Evangelist perished in the conflagration. But since the revenues of the church depended heavily upon the devotion excited by these relics, it would have been unwise to permit the confession

(1) St. Mark's Church in Venice became a cathedral only in 1807!

(2) Cf. Martyrology of Reichenau, April 9, translatio corporum St. Marci evangelistae et S. Senesii martyris in Augiam anno DCCCXXX.

of their loss, and thus another miracle entered the Venetian tradition pertaining to the relics of the Evangelist.

The Doge Pietro Orseolo rebuilt the church, though the place in which the body of the Evangelist reposed had been altogether forgotten so that the Doge Vitale Falieri (1082-1094) was entirely ignorant of the place of the venerable deposit. At last moved by confidence in the Divine Mercy, they determined to implore with prayer and fasting the manifestation of so great a treasure, which did not now depend upon any human effort. A general fast was proclaimed and a solemn procession appointed for the 25th of June, and while the people assembled in the church interceded with God in fervent prayers, they beheld with much amazement and joy a slight shaking in the marbles of a pillar, near the place where the altar of the cross is now, which presently falling to the earth, exposed to the view of the rejoicing people the chest of bronze in which the body of the Evangelist was laid. When the sarcophagus was discovered, St. Mark extended his hand out of it with a gold ring on one of the fingers which he permitted a noble of the Dolfin family to remove (1). However, eight days after the occurrence of the manifestation of the sacred body, the holy relics were hidden again. According to Andrea Dandolo, the XIVth century chronicler of Venice (2), only the Primicerius of the ducal chapel, the Procurator of St. Mark and the Doge had any knowledge of the site of the relics. " In order, however, that the faith of those who have not seen it should not be shaken, I, Andreas Dandolo, who administered for a longer time the office of the Procurator, and now serve through the grace of Christ as Doge of Venice, declare with the words of the Evangelist St. John, ' and he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe ' " (3). In addition to the body of the Evangelist, San Marco had also acquired the relics of the disciples of the Evangelist.

(1) RUSKIN, John, *op. cit.*, p. 55. Kretschmayr states that on October 8, 1094 at the occasion of the rededication of the Church of St. Mark, the body of St. Mark was placed into the vicinity of the high-altar. *Op. cit.*, p. 153. Acta Sanctorum, Aprilis III, p. 352.

(2) Dandolo (1307-1354) was the last Doge who was buried in the Church of St. Mark.

(3) MURATORI, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* cited by GFRÖRER, A. F., *op. cit.*, p. 168.

During the dogate of Pietro Polani (1130-1148) the relics of Anianus, St. Mark's successor in Alexandria, were translated to Venice. About the same time, also those of SS. Hermagoras and Fortunatus, St. Mark's Aquileian disciples, entered the possession of the Venetians. In terms of secondary relics associated with the Evangelist, there was the *Cathedra Sancti Marci*, the gospel and the ring of the Evangelist which were treasured by the Venetians (1).

During the Middle Ages, the pilgrims to the Holy Land who embarked in Venice were normally prevented from seeing the relics of the Evangelist. Was it a matter of genuine fear of the authorities that they might be stolen or was it a matter of sheer ignorance? We don't know. Bertrandon de la Brocquière (1432) was shown in Venice several relics, and he mentions the body of St. Helena as well as several bodies of the Holy Innocents, though he is silent about the relics of the patron of the city (2). Bernhard von Breydenbach (1483-84) merely stated that the body of St. Mark is recorded as being in the church dedicated to him (3), and Felix Fabri was shown the treasury of St. Mark where he saw the tomb and the body of St. Isidore (4). " The body of St. Mark, however, which the Venetians brought from Alexandria to their city ", he did not see, because it is said that a monk stole it and carried it away into Germany to Owia Major. In fact, all that he was shown of the Evangelist in Venice was a finger (5) of the saint (6).

(1) DEMUS, O., *op. cit.*, p. 16.

(2) WRIGHT, Thomas, *Early Travels in Palestine*. London, 1848, p. 285.

(3) DAVIES, H. Wm., *Bernhard von Breydenbach and his Journey to the Holy Land*. London, 1911, p. xii.

(4) Felix FABRI, " The Book of the Wanderings ", *Palestine Piligrims' Text Society*, VII, p. 102.

(5) The reference to St. Mark's finger is interesting especially in view of the fact that since the IIIrd century, the Evangelist is known as the stumpfingered or the one whose finger is mutilated, ὁ κολοβοδάκτυλος. cf. HIPPOLYTUS, " Philosophumena " VII, xxx, P. G. VI, 3334. Another tradition asserts that St. Mark after he embraced the Christian Faith cut off his thumb to unfit himself for the Jewish priesthood; others said that his fingers were naturally stumpy!

(6) *Die Pilgerfahrt des Bruders Felix Faber ins Heilige Land, Anno MCDLXXXIII*. Berlin, 1964, p. 12.

OTHER RELICS OF ST. MARK

In the inventory of the Treasury of San Marco in Venice we find listed a tooth, a thumb and a ring of the Evangelist (1). An arm and several bones of St. Mark are also claimed by the parish-church of Limours near Paris (2). In Cologne, there are five churches which claim parts of the body of St. Mark, namely the Church of St. Gereon, the Church of the Holy Virgin, the Church of St. Severin, the Church of St. Cunibert and the Church of St. Pantaleon. A small part of the relic of the Evangelist is also claimed by the Church of St. Mark in Rome. Another arm of St. Mark is said to repose in the Church of St. Autbertus, a VIth century bishop, in Cambrai, northern France, while a large part of another arm and a hand of the Evangelist were believed to be in the Monastery of Laetiens (Laetiensi coenobio) in Belgium. An additional arm is claimed by the congregation of Maricoles (3) and three bones are said to repose in the Cathedral of Tournai in Belgium (4).

Of special interest to our study is the claim of the head of the Evangelist by the city of Soissons. After the establishment of the Latin Kingdom of Thessalonica in 1205, Nivelo de Chérisy, Bishop of Soissons, who had taken an active part in the IVth Crusade, was appointed first Latin archbishop of Thessalonica by Pope Innocent III in 1206. In Constantinople he had acquired a considerable quantity of relics which included among others the heads of SS. Mark and Stephen as well as a finger of St. Thomas, a thorn of the crown and a part of the veil of the Holy Virgin. These and many other relics Nivelo bestowed upon the monasteries and churches of his former diocese, especially the Monastery of the Benedictines of the Holy Virgin of Soissons. The authenticity of these relics, however, has been disputed by many authorities. Moreover, there is no special observation for the veneration of the head of St. Mark in Soissons (5).

(1) MOLINIER, Emile, *Le Trésor de la Basilique de Saint Marc à Venise.* Venice, 1888, Nos. 37 & 38.

(2) *Acta Sanctorum*, Aprilis III, p. 353.

(3) I.e. "item de brachio ejus apud Maricolenses Benedictinos".

(4) *Acta Sanctorum, loc. cit.*

(5) Personal communication by the Very Rev. Gabriel Collangettes, prélat de la maison de sa sainteté chanoine titulaire de la Cathédrale

In the Byzantine World, some relics of St. Mark are venerated in the Monastery of Kykko in Cyprus and in the Church of St. Photine in Nea Smyrna in Athens.

CONCLUSION

According to the Venetian tradition of the translation of the relics of St. Mark, the genuineness of the body which Bonus and Rusticus acquired in Alexandria is not at all questioned. For that matter, a very detailed description of the translation is used to destroy any possible doubt about the authenticity of the relics. At the same time, the historicity of the narrative should be disputed for more than one reason. The story of the exchange of the shrouds presupposes the existence of the relics of St. Claudia, a saint whose name is unknown to the Byzantine and Coptic hagiologists. Undoubtedly, the Alexandrians had replaced the loss of the relics incurred at the time of the Arab Conquest, which explains that the Venetian noblemen did, in fact, translate a body. The question, though, still remains to be answered, whose body? Of course, we shall never know (1). The references to the odour of sanctity and the punishment of those who doubted the genuineness of the relics are part of the traditional repertoire of mediaeval translations. Their purpose is obvious; these phenomena provide additional supernatural guarantees to demonstrate the authenticity of the relics.

Yet, even those relics which were translated from Alexandria to Venice perished in the fire in 976. Thus, similarly to the miraculous preservation of the head in Alexandria in the VIIth century, this time the whole body was said to be miraculously saved from destruction, thereby bestowing upon the relics again additional supernatural qualities. The secrecy with which the Venetians have protected their relics over the centuries could give rise to various interpretations. On the whole, we may suspect that the

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de Soissons, to the autor (19. III. 1970). Cf. also *Annales du Diocèse de Soissons*, III, p. 19.

(1) Prof. Ev. BRECCIA, *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum*. Bergamo, 1922, p. 54, states that the two Venetian merchants " removed the corpse which had been considered to be that of St. Mark ".

Venetians were more interested in preserving the belief in their relics than in publicising or even exhibiting their possessions especially in view of the competitive claims of other churches.

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This is not the place to discuss at length the thorny problem concerning the historical truth of the widely held tradition of the ministry of the Evangelist in Alexandria. We have mentioned elsewhere that the IInd and IIIrd century Alexandrian authorities were silent about St. Mark's ministry in Egypt; at the same time, however, a tradition of his preaching in Alexandria was certainly known to Eusebius. We may be assured that once the tradition of St. Mark's ministry in Alexandria was firmly established, a cult with all its mythological, martyrological, liturgical, ecclesiastical and social aspects developed very rapidly. We know that the cult of relics prevailed very widely throughout Egypt during the IVth and Vth century as is evident from the severe and outspoken criticism of Šenute about the Christian villagers who invented patron saints and erected shrines for their relics which they discovered and assumed to be those of the martyrs of the church. There is no doubt, therefore, that Sawîrus ibn al-Muqaffa', the Xth century historian of the Coptic Church, used firmly established written and oral traditions for his biographies of the patriarchs, though the question remains to what an extent these traditions corresponded to the actual historical events.

The description of the martyrdom of the Evangelist clearly presupposes a cult of the relics of St. Mark, for only thus can we understand the references to the incorruptibility of the body at the time of his martyrdom and the burial of the saint according to "the established rites". Relics believed to be those of St. Mark were certainly venerated in Alexandria until the Arab Conquest of the city. The devastation of the city and the Church of St. Mark by the troops of 'Amr ibn al-'As seems to have led also to the destruction of the relics. Since, however, at the time of the compilation of this part of the History of the Patriarchs the Venetians had already acquired the body of the person believed to be St. Mark, it was imperative to camouflage the total loss by emphasizing that the most significant part of the body, namely the head, had been miraculously saved at the time of the Arab

Conquest, and, therefore, was still in the hands of the Copts. As indicated, the tradition of the miraculous manifestation of the head served at least four purposes: It established the severance of the head from the body, the loss of the body due to the destruction of the church, the miraculous preservation of the head and finally the return of the head not to its previous, but to its "rightful" owner, namely the Coptic patriarch.

By the XIth century the head became an important liturgical object, which is evident from the minute and detailed descriptions of its whereabouts. When doubts and uncertainty about its authenticity were expressed, its miraculous power rather than historical arguments were expected to convince the infidels of its genuineness. At the same time, doubt with respect to the authenticity of the head prevailed and not merely as an undercurrent among some "liberals". By the XIIIth century the Venetian claims must have increased the sense of uncertainty among the Copts to the point that the chronicler of the biography of Cyril III repeats in writing what others believed to be the case, namely that the head which had been used for the Rite of Consecration of the Patriarchs belonged to Peter I, the 17th Patriarch of Alexandria, rather than to St. Mark. Yet, unmoved by doubt the patriarch followed uncritically the established practice as prescribed in the Rite of Consecration of the Patriarch.

The liturgical significance of the head for the Copts as well as the widespread knowledge of the Venetian possession of the body compelled Abû'l-Barâkat to his compromise statement, with which he established a tradition which for centuries to come was to serve as the authoritative version of the Coptic Church. And yet in spite of this statement, doubt and uncertainty among the Copts must have increased over the years, for only thus can we explain the words by Johann Michael Wansleben that at the time of his writing (XVIIth century) "no longer having his head, they (patriarchs) cannot perform this ceremony (of embracing the head at the time of their enthronement)".

Inspired by the numerous mid-XXth century translations of relics from the West to the East, Cyril VI, the 116th Patriarch of Alexandria, rediscovered the significance of the head of the Evangelist. According to the official version, the head was said to repose in an ebony chest in the crypt beneath the altar of St. Mark in the Coptic Cathedral of St. Mark in Alexandria. For

the mid-twentieth century Copts, however, the significance of the head had dramatically changed from its original liturgical purpose, especially since none of the XXth century patriarchs had embraced the head at the occasion of their consecration. In fact, the kind of political arguments with which the Venetians justified the translation of the relics from Alexandria to Venice in the early Middle Ages was recently advanced by the Egyptian Christians when they demanded the return of the body from Venice to Alexandria with the claim: " It is not proper that the body be separated from the head, and the two should be rejoined as a tribute to the African Church and to the country in which the Evangelist lived and was martyred ".

Otto F. A. MEINARDUS
