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# Many Romes

Studies in Honor of Hans Belting

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/Abstract/ In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a number of new relics and other holy objects enriched the cultic landscape of Venice. The many pilgrims gathering at the lagoon before embarking for the Jerusalem and Palestine regarded these sacred items as foreshadowing the devotional experience they expected to have in the Holy Land. San Marco came to figure in this expectation only gradually: even if many visitors manifested their admiration for the basilica's beauty and its sacred treasures, not until the fifteenth century did San Marco's specific "holy topography", an internal network of holy attractions, take shape. Based on recent evidence, the present article describes the emergence of new forms of worship for a number of holy icons, namely the *Cristo del Capitello*, the Virgin *Aniketos*, and the *Nicopea*.

/Keywords/ Venice, Medieval pilgrimage, Holy topographies, San Marco, Cultic icons, Images painted by Saint Luke, Beirut blood

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# A Power of Relative Importance: San Marco and the Holy Icons\*

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## Constructing San Marco's Holiness

One of the most inspiring passages in Hans Belting's *Bild und Kult* is, in my view, his extensive description of the sacred topography of San Marco in chapter 9. The latter deals basically with an analysis of the ways in which, in post-Iconoclastic Byzantium, the previously separated spheres of the liturgy and the cult of images happened to be combined and to complement each other: images were not only arranged into a standardized pattern of monumental decoration (Otto Demus' "classical system"), but also contributed, alongside with relics, to transform Byzantine sacred spaces into holy sites. Icons, identified with those celebrated in a number of legends promoted by the Iconodules, were permanently exhibited to public devotion in the most prominent churches of Constantinople, such as Saint Sophia, the Pharos chapel, and the Blachernae, and elicited new forms of pilgrimage which, in some ways, replaced or surrogated a trip to the Palestinian *loca sancta*. Perceptively enough, Belting indicated San Marco as the only extant medieval church where this peculiarly Byzantine strategy for the enhancement of the sacredness attributed to a ritual space can still be recognized and appreciated<sup>1</sup>.

Indeed, it is a matter of fact that the Doges' chapel made a deliberate use of Byzantine patterns of church décor. It also holds true that Venetians made efforts to rival the sumptuousness of Constantinople

on political, rather than on religious grounds. The reconstruction of San Marco, previously built up on the model of the Jerusalem Holy Sepulchre, in forms reminiscent of the Constantinopolitan church of the Holy Apostles – a foundation of Emperor Constantine and a most illustrious funerary space for the most important rulers of Byzantium – is something unprecedented and unique in Western Europe. Its extraordinarily extensive mosaic decoration also immediately hinted at visualizing a Byzantine connection and its coloristic effects never failed to impress viewers, as witnessed by many travel accounts of the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, which often established a parallelism with the mosaics of the Nativity church in Bethlehem<sup>2</sup>. Some of them went so far as to declare that such a beauty could have never been made without God's grace and mentioned some prophetic images of Saint Francis, Saint Dominic

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1 Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich 1990, pp. 220–235.

2 See, among others, Rhenish anonymous (1473): *Vier rheinische Palaestina-Pilgerschriften des xiv. xv. und xvi. Jahrhunderts*, Ludwig Conrady ed., Wiesbaden 1882, pp. 72–181, sp. p. 77; French anonymous (1480): *Le voyage de la sainte cite de hierusalem*, Charles Schefer ed., Paris 1882, pp. 12–13; Pierre Barbatre (1480): "Le Voyage de Pierre Barbatre à Jérusalem en 1480. Édition critique d'un manuscrit inédit", in *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de la France (1972–1973)*, Pierre Tucoo-Chala, Noël Pinzuti eds, pp. 73–172, sp. pp. 97–100.

and many more “new” saints, allegedly made well before the latter’s birth<sup>3</sup>.

Many sculpted and painted images, some of which transferred from Constantinople, embellished the exterior and interior walls of the basilica in a way that immediately reminds us of the icons dotting the churches of Constantinople: as stressed by Belting, visitors could pay their devotions to a relief copy of the Hodegetria – now known as *Madonna del Bacio* – and another one displaying the Virgin Orant as in one of the most famous icons worshipped in the Blachernae complex, whereas the *Aniketos* or “invincible” icon /Fig. 3/ echoed the stories about the palladium-like defenders of the city during the Avar and Arab sieges evoked in the *Akathistos Hymn*. Finally, the *Crocifisso del Capitello* /Fig. 2/, known to have bled after being stabbed with a knife, reminded of the bleeding icon of the Saviour worshipped next to the relic of the Samaritan’s well in an annex of Saint Sophia and the *Nicopea* /Fig. 10/ played the role of an authentic palladium of the Doges and the Republic of Venice.

With their location in liminal spots within the Basilica – close to some of the most important entrances, in the middle of the nave, in annexes and side-chapels – such icons were probably perceived as sanctified objects included in the architectural body of the Doges’ chapel and shaping a network of local holy sites meant to be visited by believers in a sort of diminutive pilgrimage itinerary, not unlike that taking place in the churches of Constantinople. Given that many of such images have been traditionally considered to be spoils from the Byzantine capital, it is normally assumed that their transfer to Venice should have taken place after the sack of the city in 1204, which was basically an outcome of Venetian anti-Greek policy. If we agree with this hypothesis, we should then imagine that thirteenth-century Doges intentionally promoted the imitation of the peculiarly Byzantine practice of promulgating the holiness attributed to a ritual space by inserting precious icons in its walls and by providing the latter with a prestigious legendary pedigree. In this paper, I would like to propose an alternative reading of this process, by laying emphasis on a much later, yet very distinctive, phenomenon, namely the gradual transformation of Venice, from the fourteenth century onwards, into the first holy site visited by Western European pilgrims during their trip to the Holy Land.

### The Holy Blood and the *Cristo del Capitello*

Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that the available sources do not bear witness to an extensive translation of sacred objects from Constantinople to Venice in the aftermath of the Fourth crusade: this probably implies that Venetian chroniclers of the thirteenth century did not consider icons and other ornaments as especially worth mentioning, even if it is a matter of fact that many of them – starting with the majestic bronze horses from the Hippodrome – reached the lagoon in that period. On the contrary, much emphasis was laid on the precious relics that the Doge Enrico Dandolo and other Venetians managed to obtain when the conquerors shared their booty: namely, a piece of the Holy Cross, an *ampulla* containing the Saviour’s holy blood, an arm of St George and a fragment of the skull of St John the Baptist were sent to San Marco<sup>4</sup>, whereas the bodies of Sts Lucy, Simeon the Prophet, and Helena became the most prominent attractions in the churches consecrated after the latter’s names (*Santa Lucia*, *San Simeon Grande*, *Sant’Elena*)<sup>5</sup>. A tradition reported in the fourteenth century describes also the later arrival, in 1258, of St Barbara’s body, which was set in *Santa Maria Assunta dei Crociferi*<sup>6</sup>. The relics of prominent early Christian saints integrated the already rich cultic landscape of the lagoon, where the body of St Mark and those of Eastern prophets, like Zacharias, confessors, like Nicholas, and martyrs, such as Isidore of Chios, were preserved<sup>7</sup>. The acquisition of Christological mementoes made the difference, inasmuch it enabled the Doges to constitute a collection of holy objects rivaling the most famous treasuries of the Christian world – namely the Pharos chapel in Constantinople and the *Sancta sanctorum* in Rome.

Admittedly, the original collection included only two important reminders of Christ’s passage on earth, one of which – the miraculous blood – was not exactly a Passion relic. As Roberto Polacco has shown, the *ampulla* described in the most ancient sources does not correspond to the more famous Byzantine reliquary known as that of the *Preziosissimo Sangue* and housed within a Gothic monstrance, yet to a smaller reliquary, made in Fatimid Egypt in the eleventh century, which was originally meant to house some drops of the so-called blood *ex imagine Beritensi*<sup>8</sup>. The latter hinted at a widespread legend, originally diffused

by Iconodulic authors, telling the story of an icon of the Saviour that should have poured blood after being stabbed by some Jews in the town of Beirut in the seventh century. According to many influential theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, the only genuine blood relics were those manifested by God’s will through miraculous images, given that all liquids poured by Christ’s body on the cross (“*sanguis e latere*”) were thought to have been involved in his bodily Resurrection. The veneration for such relics, originally associated with the annual commemoration of the restitution of icon worship after the defeat of Iconoclasts, was mediated by now vanished liturgical usages – namely the annual feast of the *Passio imaginis* or *Festum Salvatoris* on November 9<sup>th</sup> – and had been especially strong in the Lateran church in Rome prior to the eleventh century, when the church reformers encouraged its substitution with the purely Roman solemnity of the Dedication by Saint Sylvester of the *basilica Salvatoris* on the Lateran hill<sup>9</sup>.

On account of such developments, it may seem odd that worship for a Beirut relic was promoted in Venice in the thirteenth century, when its popularity and liturgical use were starting to decline. Indeed, a late twelfth century or early thirteenth century lectionary from San Marco includes the readings intended for the *Passio imaginis* feast, which, oddly enough, was not performed on November 9<sup>th</sup>, yet on another solemnity in honour of the Holy Saviour, the Transfiguration of the Lord on August 6<sup>th</sup><sup>10</sup>. The *ampulla* itself was involved, until as late as the nineteenth century, in specific liturgical solemnities: it is noteworthy that one of the two public ostensions – that on Maundy Thursdays – seems to echo the liturgical practice of the Lateran church, where the Pope was accustomed to exhibit the Beirut relic to the people on exactly the same moment of the year<sup>11</sup>.

Undoubtedly, the extraordinary event of January 13, 1231, when the blood and the Holy Cross survived a terrible fire in the sacristy of San Marco, enabled the Doges to invest their relics with an unprecedented miraculous status. In 1265 Ranieri Zen entrusted his ambassadors to inform the Pope and request his official recognition. His letter specified that, by God’s will, the fire had even spared the small slip of paper containing the authentication of the relic, which was described as “Christ’s true blood”, with no special hint at its being *ex imagine* or *e latere*<sup>12</sup>.

Somewhat later a relief representing the *ampulla* as the most important item in the Venetian relic collection was displayed over one of most important passageways linking the *Palazzo Ducale* to the south transept of San Marco<sup>13</sup>. The earliest inventories of San Marco, drawn up in 1283 and 1325, listed the

3 Felix Fabri (1483): *Evagatorium in Arabiae, Terrae Sanctae et Aegypti peregrinationem*, Konrad D. Hassler ed., Stuttgart 1843–1849, vol. III, p. 420. On the alleged role of Joachim of Fiore in the “prophetic” images at San Marco see Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice*, Chicago/London 1984, vol. I, pp. 256–259.

4 Andrea Dandolo, *Chronica extensa*, Ester Pastorello ed., *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, XII/1, p. 280. On the relics of San Marco see Antonio Pasini, *Il Tesoro di San Marco*, Venice 1886, pp. 23–50; Paul de Riant, *Exuviae sacrae Constantinopolitanae*, Geneva 1877, vol. II, pp. 290–302; Rodolfo Gallo, *Il Tesoro di San Marco e la sua storia*, Venice/Rome 1967, pp. 9–13.

5 In general on Byzantine relics in Venice see Agathangelos Bishop of Fanar, Chrysa Maltezou and Enrico Morini, *Ἐπεὶ λείψανα τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς Ἀνατολῆς στή Βενετία*, Athens 2005, pp. 153–159 (Helena), pp. 241–248 (Lucy) and pp. 329–337 (Simeon); Renato D’Antiga, *Guida alla Venezia bizantina. Santi, reliquie e icone*, Padova 2005, pp. 44–45; Holger A. Klein, “Die Heiltümer von Venedig: Die ‘byzantinischen’ Reliquier der Stadt”, in *Quarta crociata: Venezia-Bisanzio-Impero latino*, Gherardo Ortalli, Giorgio Ravegnani, Peter Schreiner eds, Venice 2006, vol. II, pp. 789–824; *Idem*, “Refashioning Byzantium in Venice, ca. 1200–1400”, in *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myth of Venice*, Henry Maguire, Robert S. Nelson eds, Washington D.C., 2010, pp. 192–225. More specifically on St Lucy’s cult in Venice see Giovanni Musolino, *Santa Lucia a Venezia*, Venice 1961; Antonio Niero, *Santa Lucia vergine e martire*, Venice 1965.

6 Agathangelos of Fanar/Maltezou/Morini, *Ἐπεὶ λείψανα* (n. 5), pp. 114–118.

7 *Ibidem*, pp. 171–179 and 191–197. More specifically on St Isidore see Michele Tomasi, “Prima, dopo, attorno alla cappella: il culto di sant’Isidoro a Venezia”, *Quaderni della Procuratoria*, (2008), pp. 15–23.

8 Renato Polacco, “I reliquiari del sangue di Cristo nel tesoro di San Marco”, in *De lapidibus sententiae. Scritti di storia dell’arte per Giovanni Lorenzoni*, Tiziana Franco, Giovanna Valenzano eds, Padua 2002, pp. 307–319.

9 Michele Bacci, “‘Quel bello miracolo onde si fa la festa del santo Salvatore’: studio sulle metamorfosi di una leggenda”, in *Santa Croce e Santo Volto. Contributi allo studio dell’origine e della fortuna del culto del Salvatore (secoli IX–XV)*, Gabriela Rossetti ed., Pisa 2002, pp. 1–86; *Idem*, “Le Majestats, il Volto Santo e il Cristo di Beirut: nuove riflessioni”, *Iconographica*, XIII (2014), pp. 43–64.

10 Giulio Cattin, *Musica e liturgia a San Marco: testi e melodie per la liturgia delle ore dal XIII al XVII secolo. Dal graduale tropato del Duecento ai gradualini cinquecenteschi*, Venice 1990–1992, vol. II, p. 327.

11 On the ostensions in Venice see the witness by Giovanni Giacomo Pisani, *Notabile historia del miracoloso sangue uscito di una santa imagine di Nostro Signor Giesù Christo, fatta per man di Nicodemo, martirizzata da Giudei, nella città di Baruti, scritta da Santo Athanasio vescovo alessandrino*, Venice 1602 [1595], p. 3: “l’ampolla col suddetto sangue miracoloso (...), la qual ampolla si mostra il Giovedì Santo agl’huomini, e la vigilia dell’Ascensione alle donne, con gran solemnità, e si tiene tra le più preziose reliquie nel Santuario”. See Pasini, *Il tesoro* (n. 4), p. 25; Polacco, “I reliquiari” (n. 8), pp. 318–319.

12 Gallo, *Il tesoro* (n. 4), pp. 13–15.

13 Staale Sinding Larsen, *Christ in the Council Hall: Studies in the Religious Iconography of the Venetian Republic*, Rome 1974, pp. 211–212; Debra Pincus, “Christian Relics and the Body Politic: A Thirteenth-Century Relief Plaque in the Church of San Marco”, in *Interpretazioni veneziane. Studi di storia dell’arte in onore di Michelangelo Muraro*, David Rosand ed., Venice 1984, pp. 39–57; Renato Polacco, “Proposte per una chiarificazione sul significato e sulla funzione del ‘bassorilievo delle reliquie’ dell’andito Foscarini in San Marco a Venezia”, in *Hadriatica. Attorno a Venezia e al Medioevo tra arti, storia e storiografia: scritti in onore di Wladimiro Dorigo*, Ennio Concina, Giordana Travabene, Michela Agazzi eds, Padua 2002, pp. 133–137; Karin Krause, “Immagine-reliquia: da Bisanzio all’Occidente”, in *Mandylion: intorno al Sacro Volto, da Bisanzio a Genova*, Gerhard Wolf, Colette Dufour Bozzo, Anna Rosa Calderoni Masetti eds, Genoa 2004, pp. 209–235, sp. p. 216; Klein, “Refashioning” (n. 5), pp. 212–215.

*ampulla* as the first among all the relics preserved in the church, and the room where it was enshrined with the most precious items of the treasury was currently known after it, as the "*chamera del sangue miracoloso de Cristo*"<sup>14</sup>.

It is much possible that Ranieri Zen deliberately omitted to specify the precise nature of the blood in his possession, whereas he laid emphasis on its status as a "true" relic, whatever this may have meant. By the way, blood relics had often been described in ambiguous terms, so to leave open if they had to be interpreted as liquids poured directly by Christ's body or by a pictorial surrogate of the latter: recent studies speculated that even the most famous relics *e latere*, such as those in Mantua or Weingarten, may have been originally conceived as blood *ex imagine*, and vice versa<sup>15</sup>. Nonetheless, the identity of the Venetian main Christological memento as a Beirut relic never happened to be forgotten, even when the legend had become old-fashioned. In the late fourteenth century it had become as famous as the one venerated in the basilica of the Holy Blood in Bruges and both relics were described as parts of the same Beirut blood, in 1384, by the Florentine pilgrim Simone Sigoli, who probably heard of this during his visit to the Franciscan convent in the Lebanese town: according to him, the relic had been transferred from Beirut to Venice by a gentleman from Bruges, who was then requested to leave one half of the liquid in San Marco:

"(...) and it is exhibited there twice a year with great solemnity: on the Ascension day and on Holy Fridays"<sup>16</sup>.

The importance of this relic was further witnessed, in 1458, by the English pilgrim William Wey, who included it not only in his description of San Marco, but also in a list of the most important relics to be seen in the most eminent places located along the sea routes to the Holy Land. Yet, he provided a very innovative and unprecedented explanation about its origins and cultic qualities:

"And in that same church there is an image of Christ crucified in a linen cloth, which was stabbed by a Jew with a lance and poured blood. And they have there a glass ampulla of that blood: whoever sees that blood on the vigil of Easter at the second hour of night will receive a plenary remission of sins and the permission to eat flesh in the nighttime"<sup>17</sup>.

Reference is made here to the so-called *Cristo del Capitello*, located within a marble hexagonal ciborium leaning against the second quadrangular pilaster on the north side of the nave /Fig. 1/. This structure was probably fashioned in the late fourteenth century to house a more or less contemporary painted cross displaying the crucified Christ, with closed eyes and a bent body covered only by a light cloth (perhaps the detail observed by Wey), whereas half-figures of the Virgin Mary and John the Evangelist were represented on both ends of the horizontal arm and a similar image of an archangel was included at the top of the cross /Fig. 2/. As Beat Brenk has argued, it can be considered to be a local work made in forms reminiscent of the new images of Christ on the cross developed by Giunta Pisano and his followers in the previous decades, whereas its exhibition within a ciborium may point to the appropriation of the Byzantine use of framing the most venerated icons within stone and marble baldachins<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, the earliest Venetian sources are silent about this image and its cultic peculiarities. The first mentions occur in a number of sixteenth century texts, which set the Jew's outrage in Constantinople and trace its translation to Venice back to Enrico Dandolo and the Fourth crusade<sup>19</sup>.

These authors aimed at more explicitly associating the blood relic with the painted surrogate of Christ's body which played a role of protagonist in the Beirut legend. In doing so, they reported traditions that had started circulating from at least the second half of the fifteenth century, when they were recorded by Holy Land pilgrims: after Wey, two French travellers, in 1480, wrote that the crucifix was already said to have been transferred from the Byzantine capital and attributed its translation to Saint Louis. All of them stated that the blood poured from the image was the same exhibited on the eve of Ascension day or on Maundy Thursdays and confirmed that the injuries left by the Jew's lance were still visible on its painted surface<sup>20</sup>. The setting in Constantinople possibly introduced a hint at a further and analogous story, frequently transmitted in manuscripts in association with the Beirut miracle, relating the impious attack of a Jew against an icon of the Saviour preserved in Saint Sophia. In a subsequent version of this story, anyway, Venice itself was described as the authentic setting of the sacrilegious act<sup>21</sup>.

Yet, more probably, the worship of the Venetian cross should be understood against the background of the process of "Romanization" of the *Passio imaginis*, which took place in the twelfth through

14 Gallo, *Il Tesoro* (n. 4), pp. 20, 23, 33, 273, 276.

15 Nicholas Vincent, *The Holy Blood. King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 31–81.

16 Simone Sigoli, "Viaggio al Monte Sinai", in *Pellegrini scrittori. Viaggiatori toscani del Trecento in Terrasanta*, Antonio Lanza, Giuseppina Troncarelli eds, Florence 1990, pp. 217–255, sp. pp. 248–249. Sigoli's mistake concerning the ostension of Holy Fridays, instead of Maundy Thursdays, is probably due to his following remark about the Bruges consuetude of exhibiting the Holy ampulla on Fridays.

17 William Wey, *Itinerary to the Holy Land* (1458): *The Itineraries of William Wey, Fellow of Eton College, to Jerusalem, 1458*, George Williams ed., London 1857, p. 89. See also *Ibidem*, p. 53.

18 Beat Brenk, "Il ciborio esagonale di San Marco a Venezia", in *L'arte di Bisanzio e l'Italia al tempo dei Paleologi*, Antonio Iacobini, Mauro della Valle eds, Rome 1999, pp. 143–158.

19 Sixteenth century anonymous and Daniele Barbaro, *Cronaca veneta*, as excerpted in *Documenti per la storia dell'augusta basilica di San Marco in Venezia dal nono secolo sino alla fine del decimo ottavo*, dall'Archivio di Stato e dalla Biblioteca Marciana in Venezia, Venice 1886, pp. 210–211, no. 821–822.

20 French anonymous, *Le voyage* (n. 2), p. 17: "Il y a une ymage de crucifix peinte qui a rendu sang, à la dicte eglise, et la porta saint Loys Roy de France, de Constantinoble et la donna à Sainct Marc"; Barbatre, "Le voyage" (n. 2), p. 100. See Santo Brasca, *Viaggio in Terrasanta* (1480): *Viaggio in Terrasanta di Santo Brasca, 1480, con l'itinerario di Gabriele Capodilista, 1458*, Anna Laura Momigliano Lepschy ed., Milan 1966, pp. 45–150, sp. p. 48: "Visitai la chiesa maggiore di San Marco, bellissima et lavorata de soto, de sopra et di fuora tuta a musaico, ove la nocte de l'Assenso vien monstrato circa un palmo di sangue, quale se dice che uscite miracolosamente fuora d'uno crucifixo in questa forma: che havendo uno baratero giochato et perso li dinari, per disperatione più volte trette del culltello nel pecto de la figura del crucifixo et uscitenne questo sangue, al quale, quando si mostra, concorre tuto el populo et tute le scole de Venetia, con uno doppiero in mano; et ègli anchora el crucifixo al mezo de la chiesa, che ogniuno lo pò vedere con le ferite apertamente". Georges Lengherand of Mons, *Voyage* (1485–1486): *Voyage de Georges Lengherand, mayeur de Mons en Hainaut, à Venise, Rome, Jérusalem, Mont Sinai et de Kayre 1485–1486*, Marquis de Godefroy Ménilglaize ed., Mons 1861, pp. 42–43, describes the crucifix as part of the booty of the Fourth crusade. See also Konrad Grünenberg, *Pilgerreise ins Heilige Land* (1486): *Konrad Grünenbergs Pilgerreise ins Heilige Land. Untersuchung, Edition und Kommentar*, Andrea Denke ed., Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2011, p. 295.

21 As first witnessed in 1519 by Dietrich von Kettler: "Eine westfällische Pilgerfahrt nach dem Heiligen Lande vom Jahre 1519", Hermann Hoogeweg ed., *Zeitschrift für vaterländische Geschichte und Alterthumskunde*, XLVII (1889), pp. 165–208, sp. p. 182.



the fifteenth century: this elicited the shaping of new cult-phenomena promoting worship for material objects and images which were intentionally provided with a legendary pedigree echoing the story of Beirut yet in a local setting. In the Lateran church, where the memory of the old Beirut traditions was intentionally put into oblivion and substituted with new liturgical usages, an image of the Saviour, most probably a painted cross, which was even associated with the enthronization rites of Popes, started being regarded as a miraculous object, said to have poured blood after being stabbed by a Jew being no longer a citizen of Beirut, yet rather of Rome. In Lucca, the worship for a statue said to house an *ampulla* of the Beirut blood gradually gave birth to the cult of the *Volto Santo*, an allegedly authentic portrait of Christ made by an eyewitness of his Passion, the Pharisee Nicodemus: from the fourteenth century at the very latest, the latter was worshipped within a chapel located to the north side of the nave of the town cathedral, more or less in a spot corresponding to that of the Venetian *capitello* and to that used in the Roman basilicas for the performance of rites associated with the worship of the Holy Cross<sup>22</sup>.

The latter rituals included liturgical readings modelled on those used for the Feast of the Elevation of the Cross and were meant to be performed “*de cruce*”, i.e. in front of a Holy Cross. It is therefore plausible that the Venetian painted cross, like the *Volto Santo* in Lucca, was originally used as a visual support for the public reading of the Beirut legend on the occasion of the *Passio imaginis* feast. Its transformation into a miraculous image provided with a legendary pedigree echoing that of the Lebanese icon stabbed with a lance may be considered to be an outcome of this liturgical connection, even if it is hard to say when exactly its public worship as an autonomous cult object first became widespread in Venice: all available sources point to the second half of the fifteenth century, and there is no clear indication about the use of the marble ciborium, since its erection in the late thirteenth century, as an icon-frame, rather than as a structure associated with specific liturgical rites. In this respect, it should be remarked that, at least in 1480 when it was seen and described by the French pilgrim Pierre Barbatre, the painted cross was only one of the sacred objects housed within the baldachin:

“Leaning against the lower part of a pillar there is a fencing and a small altar above which is an image of Our Lady and, behind it, a painted crucifix on a flat surface which poured blood from the injuries that are still there: this miraculous blood is preserved in San Marco and San Zaccaria of Venice. The crucifix was translated from Constantinople and given by Saint Louis, King of France, to San Marco with some more relics”<sup>23</sup>.

Barbatre’s eyewitness indicates that the small chapel was not originally intended as a specific shrine for the exclusive worship of the *Cristo del Capitello*, given that it shared the same space with an icon of the Virgin Mary. Seven years later, Jehan de Tournai concluded that the altar was consecrated to Our Lady and that the crucifix had been translated in recent times, after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople<sup>24</sup>. The presence of an icon of the Virgin is hardly surprising, given that the strong Marian emphasis in Venetian devotional life, which became more and more prominent in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, is clearly mirrored by the numerous reliefs of the Mother of God inserted into the walls of San Marco. In a way, the latter introduced an alternative to the predominantly Christological and saintly relics worshipped in the ducal chapel. In this respect, it is somewhat striking that none of these Marian images happened to be invested with an autonomous legendary and cultic pedigree before the late fifteenth century, even if meanwhile the city and the lagoon had become a most attractive town for Christian pilgrims and an important pilgrimage site on its own.

### Holy Objects in the Architectural Body of San Marco

In the fourteenth and fifteenth century, pilgrims from throughout Europe were accustomed to gather in Venice, given that local ship-owners exercised a sort of monopoly in the organization of the Holy Land voyage. During their stay in the lagoon, when they were waiting to be embarked, they spent most of their time in visiting local churches and in worshipping their precious relics. Specific ostensions were organized in order to suit their wish to contemplate the local mementoes, often perceived as anticipations of the devotional experience pilgrims expected to gain in their final goals: so, for example,

the relics of Helena reminded them of the latter’s strict association with Jerusalem, whereas those of Barbara enabled them to have a first encounter with a saint whose tomb they were likely to contemplate in her church in Old Cairo<sup>25</sup>. The *ampullae* of Saint Catherine’s *myron* exhibited in *San Daniele* and *San Zaccaria* worked as an efficacious introduction to the circuit of the martyr’s holy sites they planned to make between Famagusta, Alexandria, and Mount Sinai<sup>26</sup>. In more general terms, the sight of the many Eastern relics preserved in the town churches granted them the privilege to have a preliminary experience of the holiness associated with the lands of origin of Christendom.

Indeed, the earliest descriptions of Venice included in Western European pilgrims’ travelogues focused on the saintly bodies to be seen in its churches – those of Barbara, Simeon, Christopher, Lucy, Zacharias, George, and Cosmas and Damian in town and the relics of the Holy Innocents in *Santi Maria e Donato* at Murano – as well as on prestigious contact-relics such as Saint Nicholas’ crosier, shoes, and mitre exhibited in the abbey church of *San Nicolò di Lido*<sup>27</sup>. San Marco was apparently not considered to be the most important of the many pilgrims’ goals in the lagoon: not without disappointment Lionardo Frescobaldi (1384) and Ogier d’Anglure (1395) mentioned there only the inaccessible body of the Apostle Mark<sup>28</sup> and still in 1477 the

22 See my previous studies cited *supra* (n. 9).

23 Barbatre, “Le voyage” (n. 2), p. 98: “(...) contre ung pillier bas est une cloture et ung petit autel sur lequel y a une ymage de Notre Dame et derriere ung crucefix painct en plat duquel yssit sang par les playes qui y sont et est le sang de miracle a Venise a saint Marc et a saint Zacharie, ledit crucefix fut apporté de Constantinoble et le donna Saint Loys, roy de France, avecquez aultres dignités a l’eglise de saint Marc”.

24 Jehan de Tournai (1487): *Principaux passages d’un voyage en Terre Sainte fait par Jehan de Tournay en 1487*, J. J. Voisin ed., Tournai 1863, p. 134.

25 The church of Sitt Barbara in Old Cairo was frequently visited by Holy Land pilgrims in the fourteenth and fifteenth century: see Charalambia Coquin, *Les édifices chrétiens du Vieux-Caire*, Cairo 1974, pp. 115–130.

26 See Antonio da Crema, *Itinerario al Santo Sepolcro 1486*, Gabriele Nori ed., Ospedaletto 1996, p. 138: “In Sancto Daniel: licore di sancta Katerina”; Duke Frederick of Legnica and Brieg: “Die Pilgerfahrt des Herzogs Friedrich II. von Liegnitz und Brieg nach dem Heiligen Lande”, Reinhold Röhrich, Heinrich Meisner eds, *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, 1 (1878), pp. 101–209, sp. p. 112: “(...) auch hat man alda [San Zaccaria] in einer Ampul dass öhile der Heyligen Jungfrauen Catharinae”.

27 This odd relics are documented from the 1440s onwards, see Hans Rot: “Hans und Peter Rot’s Pilgerreisen 1440 und 1453” (1440), in *Beiträge zur vaterländischen Geschichte*, August Bernoulli ed., n.s., 1 (1882), pp. 331–408, sp. p. 348.

28 Frescobaldi, “Viaggio in Terrasanta” (1387): *Pellegrini scrittori* (n. 16), pp. 169–215, sp. pp. 170–171; Ogier d’Anglure, *Le saint voyage de Jherusalem*, François Bonnardot, Auguste Longnon eds, Paris 1878, pp. 3–4.



2/ Painted cross known as Cristo del Capitello, San Marco, Venice, late 13<sup>th</sup> century



3/Virgin Enthroned, relief icon known as the “Virgin Aniketos”, San Marco, Zen Chapel, Venice, 13<sup>th</sup> century

German traveller Wilhelm Tzewers reports to have seen many gorgeous objects, but no relic at all<sup>29</sup>.

Many texts praised the church mostly for the beauty of its mosaics and marbles and those pilgrims who had a chance to see the precious items preserved in the treasury and exhibited on the main altar on the occasion of the most important solemnities did not heal their astonishment at their preciousness, quantity, and curious appearance: they manifested a special appreciation for jewels, rock-crystal objects, the doge’s hat, and the unicorn’s horn<sup>30</sup>. Another object that elicited amazement was the sumptuous *ancona* of the main altar, the *Pala d’oro*, when foreign visitors were lucky enough to see it deprived of its revetments<sup>31</sup>. In many respects, San Marco was appreciated on aesthetic, rather than on cultic grounds. Only gradually visitors started reminding their readers that the basilica also housed a number of objects deserving worship or pious interest. Symptomatically enough, one of the first such items was neither a relic nor an image, yet rather a stone, used as support for the altar located within the Baptistery, which was said to be the one on which Christ sat when speaking with the Samaritan woman: the latter was described as the only relic preserved in San Marco by the German pilgrims Hans Porner (1418), Hans Rot (1440), and Peter Rot (1453)<sup>32</sup>.

Images started to be integrated into the holy topography of San Marco only in the second half of the fifteenth century. One of them was, like the stone of Christ, an artwork inserted within the architectural body of the basilica itself: the so-called Virgin *Aniketos* /Fig. 3/, a thirteenth-century Byzantine relief displaying an enthroned Virgin Mary embracing her Child standing on her knees, located in the south porch, on the site of the present-day Zen Chapel, was said to have been made out of the rock which poured water when Moses struck it with his staff (Exodus 17). This legend was born out of a fanciful reading of the Greek epigram carved on the icon itself, where the ancient donors of the work, Michael and Irene, evoked rhetorically the Biblical miracle as forerunner of the supernatural favours they expected to receive by Christ<sup>33</sup>.

Starting with the anonymous French travelogue from 1480<sup>34</sup>, the relief is frequently mentioned as something one should not miss in the ducal chapel,

probably because it worked in pilgrims’ eyes as an anticipation of the spring of Moses, one of the holy sites they expected to visit on their path to the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai<sup>35</sup>. Even if it cannot be ruled out that some form of worship for this image did exist before the late fifteenth century, it is a matter of fact that all available sources indicate that it started enjoying a special renown among both pilgrims and local believers only in this period<sup>36</sup>. The most detailed description of the south porch and its cultic attractions is to be found in Pierre Barbatre’s account from 1480:

“Item within the porch at the bottom, to the right, there is a small chapel which is not closed. The end door is wooden. It is possible to insert one’s head into the holes: there is an image of Our Lady leaning against a small altar. Yet higher up, on the wall, there is an image of Our Lady made out of the stone which Moses struck with his staff when the sons of Israel asked him to let them drink and which poured out a fountain. In the middle of the portal there is another Our Lady which is much worshipped by the people”<sup>37</sup>.

In the late fifteenth century, before being transformed into a funerary chapel for the Bishop of Vicenza, Cardinal Giovan Battista Zen, between 1501 and 1521, the space visited by Barbatre and admired again by Jehan de Tournai in 1487<sup>38</sup> was known as “Chapel of Our Lady” and represented the most important place for Marian devotion in the complex of San Marco. Its denomination in some sources as *Madonna del Capitello* implicitly introduced a comparison with Christological shrine – the *Cristo del Capitello* – in the nave<sup>39</sup>. It was completely open and probably worked as one of the main and most solemn entrances to the church, as is implied by the decoration of its vaults with mosaics of the translation of Saint Mark’s body from Alexandria and the elaborate program of the portal leading to the atrium, with its alternate sculptural and pictorial images of the Old Testament prophets flanking Christ Emmanuel and the mosaic representation of the Virgin Mary with two archangels: probably initiated during the rule of Doge Sebastiano Ziani (1172–1178) and finished around the end of the twelfth century, the construction was enlarged and provided with further embellishments around the mid-thirteenth century<sup>40</sup>. The itinerary of those who entered the church from the south porch

corresponded to the chronological sequence of the Biblical events represented in the mosaics of the atrium, starting with the Genesis and going further with Noah, Abraham, and Joseph: this indirectly indicates that the south portal, presently known as

29 Wilhelm Tzewers, *Itinerarium Terrae Sanctae*, Gritje Hartmann ed., Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 80–82.

30 One of the earliest descriptions occurs in Hans Rot’s travelogue, dating from 1440: see Rot, “Hans und Peter” (n. 27), p. 347.

31 See, among others, Michele of Figline (1489): *Da Figline a Gerusalemme. Viaggio del prete Michele in Egitto e in Terrasanta (1489–1490)*, Marina Montesano ed., Rome 2010, p. 47.

32 Hans Porner, *Itinerarium* (1418): “Hans Porners Meerfahrt”, Ludwig Hänselmann ed., *Zeitschrift des historischen Vereins für Niedersachsen*, (1874), pp. 113–156, sp. pp. 131–132; Hans Rot (1440), “Hans und Peter” (n. 27), p. 345; Peter Rot (1453), *Ibidem*, p. 395.

33 On the epigram and its interpretation see Henry Maguire, “The Aniketos Icon and the Display of Relics in the Decoration of San Marco”, in *San Marco* (n. 5), pp. 91–111, and Ennio Concina, “La Madre di Dio Aniketos, l’Arcangelo e la Natività: tre sculture della cappella Zen”, *Quaderni della Procuratoria*, (2008), pp. 50–59.

34 French anonymous, *Le voyage* (n. 2), p. 17.

35 See, for example, Nicolò da Poggibonsi, “Libro d’Oltramare”, in *Pellegrini scrittori* (n. 16), pp. 31–158, sp. pp. 126–127.

36 Maguire, “The Aniketos Icon” (n. 33), pp. 99–100, suggests that the early origins of the cultic phenomenon for the Aniketos icon may be indicated by the existence of a close replica worshipped in the church of *El Puig* in Valencia. Yet, the latter’s cult took shape in the fourteenth century, but it is not clear if it was the relief Madonna or a presently disappeared object to play the role of cultic focus: see the detailed study by Amadeo Serra Desfilis, “A Brave New Kingdom: Images from the Sea in the Coastal Sanctuaries of Valencia (xiii–xv centuries)”, in *The Holy Portolano. The Sacred Geography of Navigation in the Middle Ages*, Michele Bacci, Martin Rohde eds, Berlin 2014, pp. 203–306. The visual similarities between the two images may be due to their being inspired by a similar Byzantine model, rather than to a direct cultic connection, which is not corroborated by any source.

37 Barbatre, “Le voyage” (n. 2), p. 99: “Item dessus le portail au bout, a main dextre, y a une petite chapelle laquelle ne clot point; la porte du bout est de boys; on peut bouter sa teste par les trous; la est une ymage de Notre Dame bas contre un petit autel; mais en hault, en la paroy, est une ymage de Notre Dame faicte de la pierre sur laquelle Moyse ferit de sa verge quant les enfans d’Israel luy demanderent a boyre et de laquelle issit une fontaine; au milieu du portail est une aultre Notre Dame ou le peuple a grant devocion”.

38 Jehan de Tournai, *Principaux passages* (n. 24), p. 134: “Dessoubz le portail d’icelle eglise y a une ymage de Nostre-Dame, laquelle est faicte et taillié de pierre où Moyse frappa de sa verge au désert, dont miraculeusement eue en yssit, dont les enfans d’Israel en furent rasasiés, et yssoit ladicte eue par un lieu: et se void-on à present, en ladicte ymage les un trous par où ladicte eue issit, et est ladicte image dessoubz ledict portal, à la bonne main, et se y a un autel auquel on dict messe”.

39 Lina Urban, “La chapela di Nostra Dona”, *Quaderni della Procuratoria*, (2008), pp. 10–16.

40 See Ettore Vio, “Le trasformazioni architettoniche della facciata sud e la ‘Porta da Mar’”, *Quaderni della Procuratoria*, (2008), pp. 17–25; Guido Tigler, “Il portale esterno”, *Ibidem*, pp. 26–34; Maria Da Villa Urbani, “I mosaici della volta con le storie di san Marco”, *Ibidem*, pp. 35–41; Francesca Flores d’Arcais, “Elementi decorativi dell’antica porta”, *Ibidem*, pp. 42–49.



the *Porta da mar*, played a very important role in the spatial arrangement of the basilica<sup>41</sup>. As witnessed by Barbatre, this liminal place was overcharged with objects resounding with Marian meanings: not only the *Aniketos* relief, but also another small image and the figure of the Virgin in the mosaic of the portal were perceived as worship-worthy.

#### The Nicopea Icon and the *Kyriotissa*-Type Images in San Marco

The mosaic in the semidome of the portal /Fig. 4/ was strongly altered, in ca. 1865, by Giovan Battista Meduna's restorations. Yet, a fragment of the original figure of the Virgin Mary (thought to be either part of the original twelfth century program or an early fourteenth century restoration) is still preserved in the Museum of San Marco and can be identified with that hinted at by Barbatre /Fig. 5/<sup>42</sup>. The image corresponded to the Madonna type that traditional iconographic taxonomy described as a standing *Kyriotissa*, i.e. represented in frontal pose holding the Child with both hands before her chest. Less frequent than its enthroned variant, it was fre-

quently used in contexts stressing Mary's role as the "New Tabernacle", i.e. as receptacle of the incarnated God and as allegory of the *ecclesia*: the most conspicuous examples in Byzantine tradition are the apse mosaic in the *Koimesis* church at Nicea (ninth century), the mosaic panel with John Comnenus and Irene in Saint Sophia (ca. 1118) /Fig. 6/, the apse images in the Georgian churches of Ateni (second half of the eleventh century) /Fig. 7/ and Gelati (1125–1130) /Fig. 8/, another fresco at Iprari (1096), and some Sinaitic icons displaying Mary as the Burning Bush (thirteenth century)<sup>43</sup>. The composition at Gelati

41 See the essays collected in *The Atrium of San Marco in Venice: The Genesis and Medieval Reality of the Genesis Mosaics*, Martin Büchsel ed., Berlin 2014.

42 Demus, *The Mosaics* (n. 3), vol. 1, p. 50; Ettore Vio, "Le cassine e icalchi dalla Cappella Zen e dal Battistero", in *Il Museo di San Marco*, Irene Favaretto, Maria Da Villa Urbani eds, Venice 2003, pp. 66–79; *Idem*, "Le trasformazioni" (n. 40), p. 22; Flores d'Arcais, "Elementi decorativi" (n. 40), pp. 44–45.

43 See specially Olga E. Etinhof, *Образ Богоматери. Очерки византийской иконографии XI–XIII веков*, Moscow 2000, pp. 39–66. On the Georgian examples see Leila Khuskivadze, *The Mosaic of Gelati*, Tbilisi 2005, pp. 17–20. On the Sinaitic images see the survey by Kristen M. Collins, "Visual Piety and Institutional Identity at Sinai", in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground. Icons from Sinai*, catalogue of the exhibition (Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 14 November 2006 – 4 March 2007), Robert S. Nelson, Kristen M. Collins eds, Los Angeles 2006, pp. 95–119.



4/Virgin Kyriotissa and two Archangels, San Marco, Zen Chapel, Venice, 12<sup>th</sup> century with 19<sup>th</sup> century restorations

5/Fragments of the Virgin Kyriotissa from the *Porta da mar*, Museo di San Marco, Venice, 12<sup>th</sup> century (?)





/Fig. 8/, showing the standing Virgin between two archangels, best parallels the one in San Marco, even if the specific rendering of Christ blessing with his right hand is more in keeping with the image at Saint Sophia. The type was especially popular in the Doges' chapel, given that it was used also for the image of Mary included in the oldest mosaic program, that of the main portal (probably dating from ca. 1070), where an inscription described her as a spiritual mother, in connection with the Apostles' mission /Fig. 9/<sup>44</sup>.

The occurrence of the same type on the *Porta da mar* and the main portal indicates that this specific image, by then widespread in Byzantium, was seen by Venetians as an especially dignified and sumptuous way of representing the Virgin Mary. The same scheme characterizes the image that works presently as the most venerated icon in San Marco, the so-called *Madonna Nicopea* /Fig. 10/. As recent studies have stressed, the latter epithet, derived from the Greek word *Nikopoios*, was first attributed to it in the mid-seventeenth century, and its identification as the icon stolen by the Franks to the army of Emperor Alexios v Morzouphlos in 1204 was not formulated before 1589, when the image was

permanently exhibited in the Chapel of Saint Isidore, i. e. exactly in the same period when Giovan Battista Ramusio's translation of Geoffroy of Villehardouin's chronicle of the Fourth Crusade had started circulating in Venice<sup>45</sup>. Several scholars, fascinated by the latter legend, made attempts to corroborate its interpretation as a Comnenian work dating from the late eleventh to the mid-twelfth century, by reconstructing an hypothetical *Nikopoios* type on account of extant visual evidence about an image labelled in this way and displaying Mary holding Christ within a medallion before her chest<sup>46</sup>. Yet, the existence of a specific Constantinopolitan icon known under this name is not well documented in ancient sources and the term *Nikopoios* seems to have been used also for images of different types<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, the Venetian image has a distinctive appearance *vis-à-vis* the so-called *Nikopoios* type, as it lacks a visually prominent detail, the *imago clipeata*.

On the contrary, its scheme corresponds to that employed in Constantinople, in Georgia, and in Venice to embellish some of the most prominent parts of sacred spaces, such as doors, apses, and portions of wall located close to the iconostasis (as at Iprari): the Child's posture is identical with that displayed in

Nicea and Ateni and a special emphasis was given, as in the latter images, to the motif of the handkerchief held in Mary's left hand (now almost invisible, but known through Thomas Bathas' replica made in 1594)<sup>48</sup>, which introduced a hint at the theological notion of Mary's priesthood<sup>49</sup>. The only distinctive element of the icon *vis-à-vis* the mosaics was the half-length rendering of the Virgin Mary: this specific formula was unprecedented and never became very popular in Byzantine tradition, yet it managed to fit the type to the diminutive size and visual conventions of an icon, or, to say it better, to the appearance as *imagines dimidiatae* that Westerners tended to regard as specific to Byzantine religious imagery<sup>50</sup>. In another famous church of the Venetian lagoon, *Santi Maria e Donato* in Murano, the monumental figure displayed in the apse mosaic – a standing Virgin Orant /Fig. 11/ – was replicated in half length in a fourteenth century painted panel /Fig. 12/: even in this case the solution adopted was unprecedented, but it enabled believers to more efficaciously pay their devotions to the otherwise too distant and inaccessible image in the altar space<sup>51</sup>.

It can be assumed that at some time the present-day *Nicopea*, an old Byzantine icon, was selected

44 Demus, *The Mosaics* (n. 3), vol. 1, p. 22. On the debate about the date of the mosaics decorating the main portal see Günter Brucher, *Geschichte der venezianischen Malerei*, Vienna 2007, pp. 32–36.

45 Gallo, *Il tesoro* (n. 4), pp. 133–155; Alberto Rizzi, "Un'icona costantinopolitana del XII secolo a Venezia: la Madonna Nicopea", *Θρησκευματα*, xvii (1980), pp. 290–306; Martin Schulz, "Die Nicopea in San Marco. Zur Geschichte und zum Typ einer Ikone", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, xc1 (1998), pp. 475–501; Michele Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista. Storia delle immagini sacre attribuite a san Luca*, Pisa 1998, pp. 317–318; Stefan Samerski, *La Nikopeia. Immagine di culto, palladio, mito veneziano*, Rome 2012.

46 Werner Seibt, "Der Bildtypus der Theotokos Nikopoios. Zur Ikonographie der Gottesmutter-Ikone, die 1030/31 in der Blachernenkirche wiederaufgefunden wurde", *Byzantina*, xiii (1985), pp. 551–564; Schulz, "Die Nicopea" (n. 45), pp. 484–488. See also Mirjana Tatić-Djurić, "Bogorodica Nikopeja", *Peristil*, xxxiv (1991), pp. 39–51.

47 Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power. The Mother of God in Byzantium*, University Park 2006, pp. 79–80.

48 Manolis Chatzidakis, *Icons of Saint-Georges des Grecs et de la collection de l'Institut hellénique d'études byzantines et post-byzantines de Venise*, Venice 1962, pp. 91–93.

49 Alexei M. Lidov, "Свящество Богоматери. Образ-парадигма византийской иконографии", in *Иеротопия. Пространственные иконы и образы-парадигмы в византийской культуре*, Alexei M. Lidov ed., Moscow 2009, pp. 227–260.

50 André Chastel, "Medietas imaginis. Le prestige durable de l'icône en Occident", *Cahiers archéologiques*, xxxvi (1988), pp. 99–100; Michele Bacci, "Kathreptis, o la Veronica della Vergine", *Iconographica*, iii (2004), pp. 11–37, sp. pp. 23–24, on Western sources about the perception of Byzantine icons as representations of half-length figures.

51 On the panel see Cristina Guarnieri, "Il passaggio tra due generazioni: dal Maestro dell'Incoronazione a Paolo Veneziano", in *Il secolo di Giotto nel Veneto*, Giovanna Valenzano, Federica Toniolo eds, Venice 2007, pp. 153–201, sp. p. 169. On the mosaic, see especially Clementina Rizzardi, *Mosaici altomedievali. Il rapporto artistico Venezia-Bisanzio-Ravenna in età medievale*, Ravenna 1985, pp. 171–175.



7/Virgin Mary between two Archangels, mural painting, Sion church, Ateni, Georgia, second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century

8/Virgin Mary between two Archangels, mosaic, Katholikon, Gelati, 1125–1130

to be used as panel-version of an image-type being especially favoured in the decoration of San Marco. Most likely, it can be identified with the “big icon with a painted image of Saint Mary and decorated with silver”, listed in the inventory of the treasury of San Marco written in 1325<sup>52</sup>. The very fact that it was kept in the church sacristy indicates that it was perceived as part of the most sumptuous church furnishings and not as cult object: just on the contrary, it worked as a paraliturgical tool, meant to contribute to the periodical *mise-en-scène* of the altar space, as with the other items preserved in the treasury. In this respect, a French anonymous traveller, in 1480, states that some images were exhibited on the altar alongside with precious implements, relics, and vessels on the occasion of the major feasts<sup>53</sup>, and the exhibition of the Madonna icon on the occasion of the Assumption and other Marian feasts is well documented in the sixteenth century<sup>54</sup>. As Ettore Merkel has suggested, the embellishment of the icon with twelfth century *cloisonné* enamels probably took place during the rule of Doge Andrea Dandolo, who commissioned in 1343 the refurbishing of the *Pala d'oro*, whose stylistic features prove to be very close to those used in the frame of the *Nicopea*: this indirectly corroborates the view of the latter's original association with the festal furnishings of the main altar<sup>55</sup>.

In 1463, anyway, the status of the image had changed, given that a further inventory written in that year describes it as “a figure of the Virgin made by the hand of blessed Luke with its ornament within a silver and golden frame”<sup>56</sup>. The reason why, by that date, the icon had obtained an autonomous legendary pedigree has never been properly investigated. Indeed, this new cultic phenomenon was accurately recorded in a number of contemporary pilgrims' accounts. Already in 1453 William Wey mentioned, besides the miraculous crucifix, “an image of the most holy Mary as painted by Saint Luke the Evangelist” (“*ymago beatissime Marie ex pictura sancti Luce Evangeliste*”)<sup>57</sup>. In the 1470s, Ulrich Brunner and an anonymous German saw an image painted by Saint Luke within the treasury of San Marco<sup>58</sup>, whereas Paul Walther of Guglingen, in 1482, described San Marco as the church housing the body of the Evangelist and the “image of the blessed virgin Mary, which was painted by Saint Luke after the appearance of the Virgin Mary”<sup>59</sup>.

The multiplication of textual hints at the icon in the second half of the fifteenth century clashes with the silence of earlier travelogues and probably indicates that the image had started in those same decades to be regarded no longer only as a precious objects involved in local rituals, but also as a prestigious image painted by the Evangelist Luke. Foreign pilgrims longing for cultic attractions were especially receptive to this kind of religious object and probably played a role, even if only passive, in the shaping of the cultic phenomenon associated with the icon. Worshipping an image painted by Saint Luke in Venice surrogated, more or less explicitly, a pilgrimage to Rome, where some important holy portraits attributed to the Evangelist were preserved<sup>60</sup>. The most celebrated Lukan image, however, was the Hodegetria of Constantinople, which had been destroyed by the soldiers of Mehmet II during the sack of the city in 1453 and whose loss was frequently mentioned in a number of Venetian poems lamenting the Fall of the Byzantine capital<sup>61</sup>. As a consequence, a renovated emphasis on Venice's Byzantine roots in keeping with the project for an anti-Ottoman crusade was developed in the 1460s<sup>62</sup>. Such developments may have encouraged the San Marco clergy to promote new cultic objects echoing legendary patterns associated with the most important centres of Medieval Christianity.

52 Gallo, *Il tesoro* (n. 4), pp. 146, 279.

53 French anonymous, *Le voyage* (n. 2), pp. 12–13.

54 Samerski, *La Nikopeia* (n. 45), pp. 19–23.

55 Ettore Merkel, “La Nicopeia costantinopolitana della Basilica di San Marco: la stratificazione degli interventi di oreficeria”, in *Oreficeria sacra a Venezia e nel Veneto. Un dialogo tra le arti figurative*, Letizia Caselli, Ettore Merkel eds, Venice 2007, pp. 35–55.

56 Gallo, *Il tesoro* (n. 4), p. 146.

57 Wey, *Itinerary* (n. 17), p. 53.

58 Ulrich Brunner (1470): “Die Jerusalemfahrt des Kanonikus Ulrich Brunner vom Haugstift in Würzburg”, Reinhold Röhrich ed., *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, xxix (1906), pp. 1–50, sp. p. 13; Rhenish anonymous, *Vier rheinische* (n. 2), p. 77.

59 Paul Walther da Guglingen (1482): *Fratris Pauli Waltheri Guglingensis Itinerarium in Terram Sanctam et ad Sanctam Catharinam*, Matthias Sollweck ed., Tübingen 1892, pp. 52–53.

60 Gerhard Wolf, *Salus populi romani. Die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter*, Weinheim 1990; Bacci, *Il pennello* (n. 45), pp. 250–280; Giulia Barone, “Immagini miracolose a Roma alla fine del Medioevo”, in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Erik Thuno, Gerhard Wolf eds, Rome 2004, pp. 123–133.

61 See for example, “Questo è 'l lamento de Costantinopoli”, in *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, Agostino Pertusi ed., Milan 1990, pp. 307–308.

62 Ennio Concina, *Tempo novo. Venezia e il Quattrocento*, Venice 2006, pp. 182–183.



### Venice and the Marian Icons Worshipped in Padua

Yet, there is another factor to take into account. In late Medieval Italy icons said to be by the hand of Saint Luke were no longer an exclusively Roman phenomenon. Several towns had started promoting public worship for analogous objects as supernatural defenders on some extraordinary circumstances and especially on the event of calamities associated with water, such as floods or long periods of draught. In Florence the Madonna of Impruneta's help was invoked to avert the overflowing of the Arno river<sup>63</sup>. In Bologna, the same role was attributed, in 1433, after weeks of unceasing rains, to a thirteenth century image of the Virgin and Child preserved in the church of Saint Luke on Mount La Guardia: a local juriconsult named Graziolo Accarisi had the sudden intuition that an old panel preserved in a church dedicated to Saint Luke should be one of the works painted by the Evangelist and could be used in the same way as the rain-compelling image used by the Florentines<sup>64</sup>. In order to activate the Virgin's protection of a community against the dangers of excessive water the icons of Florence and Bologna were solemnly transported in the town streets with solemn rites evoking the supplicatory processions with Lukan icons of Rome and Constantinople, celebrated by many ancient texts.

In the area of the Veneto, the earliest known cases of images worshipped as works of the Evangelist

Luke are to be found in Padua. One such image was kept, at the beginnings of the fifteenth century, in the treasury of the town cathedral and, not unlike the Venetian icon, was periodically exhibited on the main altar (especially at Christmas) and brought in procession for the sake of stopping rain. A tradition dating back to the local writer Michele Savonarola (ca. 1445) seems to imply that the fourteenth century painter Giusto de' Menabuoi had made a copy of this now vanished image: still preserved nowadays, it displays the Virgin half-length, holding the standing Child with both hands on the right side. This may have been, as Andrea Nante has suggested, a free interpretation of a *Kyriotissa* image<sup>65</sup>. Be this as it may, at the end of the fifteenth century the icon ceased to work as an essentially ceremonial tool and was transformed into a cultic object: on the initiative of Bishop Piero Barozzi, it was permanently exhibited within a dedicated chapel in the south transept<sup>66</sup>. In 1495, few months after its consecration, it was seen and venerated by Count Alexander of Palatinate-Zweibrücken before embarking in Venice for his Holy Land pilgrimage<sup>67</sup>.

This shift from a basically ritual to a "locative" form of worship is indicative of the changing status of Marian images in the fifteenth century and of their increasing perception as civic symbols, identity markers, and miracle-working objects. In



Padua itself, this process was accelerated by the cultic competition of the cathedral with the Benedictine abbey of *Santa Giustina*. The latter preserved a number of precious relics, including the body of Saint Luke, included within a stone sarcophagus in a chapel erected in the fourteenth century and decorated in 1433–1441 by Giovanni Storlato with a cycle displaying the legendary translation of the relic from Constantinople to Padua<sup>68</sup>. A thirteenth century icon preserved in the church and exhibited, at least from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, on the wall above the tomb of Saint Luke, started to be regarded as an authentic work by the Evangelist. First mentioned by Michele Savonarola in ca. 1445 and further recorded in a number of local literary sources, it was said to be involved in processions meant to beseech God against either draught or excessive moisture. The attribution to the Evangelist, in this case, was a corollary of the public worship for his holy body and the exhibition of an old image in the same space as the saint's sarcophagus possibly introduced a visual hint at a miracle of the Constantinopolitan Hodegetria mentioned in the hagiographic texts concerning the translation<sup>69</sup>.

Starting from approximately the same period, pilgrims, who visited Padua during their stay in Venice, describe the icon in *Santa Giustina* as one of the most important cultic attractions of the city.

The earliest reference is to be found in Girnard von Schwalbach's travelogue, dating from 1440:

"Item on the altar, where lays Saint Luke the Evangelist, there is a big tabernacle, housing an image. This is the image of Our dear Lady with her beloved Child. The

63 Richard Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image", *Studies in the Renaissance*, xix (1972), pp. 7–41; Bacci, *Il pennello* (n. 45), pp. 301–309; Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, New Haven/London 2013, pp. 110–141.

64 Diana Webb, *Patrons and Defenders: The Saints in the Italian City-States*, London/New York 1988, p. 182; Bacci, *Il pennello* (n. 45), pp. 310–313.

65 Andrea Nante, "La Madonna di Giusto de' Menabuoi per la cattedrale di Padova", *Arte lombarda*, n.s., cliv (2008), pp. 35–40. Savonarola's text (see *infra* n. 69) hints at the icon preserved in *Santa Giustina*, but Nante suggests that he may have confused the two Paduan icons attributed to St. Luke. See also Giordana Mariani Canova, "La 'Madonna di Giusto'", in *Luca Evangelista. Parola e immagine tra Oriente e Occidente*, catalogue of the exhibition (Padua, Museo diocesano, 14 October 2000–6 January 2001), Giordana Mariani Canova ed., Padua 2000, pp. 408–409.

66 Nante, "La Madonna di Giusto" (n. 65), p. 36.

67 Alexander of Palatinate-Zweibrücken (1496): *Die Reise Herzog Alexanders von Pfalz-Zweibrücken und Graf Johann Ludwigs von Nassau-Saarbrücken ins Heilige Land, 1495–1496, nach dem Bericht des Johann Meisenheimer*, Jürgen Karbach ed., *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Saargegend*, xlv (1997), pp. 11–118, sp. p. 42.

68 Francesco G. B. Trolese, "Il culto di san Luca in Santa Giustina di Padova", in *Luca Evangelista* (n. 65), pp. 123–129; Alberta De Nicolò Salmazo, "Le reliquie di san Luca e l'abbazia di Santa Giustina a Padova", *Ibidem*, pp. 155–186; Elena Necchi, "Reliquie orientali e culto di martiri a S. Giustina di Padova", *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, xlii (2001), pp. 91–118; *Eadem*, *I "Sanctissimi Custodes" della Basilica di Santa Giustina a Padova*, Florence 2008.

69 See Michele Savonarola, *Libellus de magnificis ornamentis regie civitatis Padue, Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, xxiv, Città di Castello 1902, p. 14, and the sources listed in Necchi, "Reliquie orientali" (n. 68), pp. 103–104. On the image see Michele Bacci, "La 'Madonna costantinopolitana' nell'abbazia di Santa Giustina di Padova", in *Luca Evangelista* (n. 65), pp. 405–407.



image was painted by Saint Luke with his own hands and made after Our dear Lady and Her beloved Child. They maintain that whoever sees this image once, will never separate from God's grace"<sup>70</sup>.

Most visitors mentioned only the icon in *Santa Giustina*, but some of them remarked with some astonishment that Padua housed two images painted by Saint Luke: "there be two tables of our blesyd Lady", so wrote Sir Richard Guylford in 1506, "which seynt Luke paynted with his awne hands at Padowa"<sup>71</sup>. In 1470, Ulrich Brunner acknowledged that the two panels did not only share the same authorship, but also the same use as processional icons in rain-compelling rituals:

"There [in *Santa Giustina*] there is also a panel, where Saint Luke has painted an image of Our Lady holding the Child in her arm. There is a similar image also in the cathedral, and when there is bad weather in Padua, or when it does not rain, then they make a procession and bring those images all around. When I was in Padua it had not rained for a long time, so they made three processions and transported the images in the streets. Immediately afterwards it started raining and lasted eight days. I have really seen these images"<sup>72</sup>.

The diaries of Marin Sanudo reveal that analogous functions were attributed to the icon made by the hand of Saint Luke, which was preserved in San Marco and was much less frequently mentioned

70 Girnand von Schwalbach (1440): *Fünf Palästina-Pilgerberichte aus dem 15. Jahrhundert*, Randall Herz, Dietrich Huschenbett, Frank Sczesny eds, Wiesbaden 1998, p. 138: "Item vff dem altar, da Sent Lucas der ewangelist yn liget, dar vff ist eyn große schanck, da yn stet eyn bylde. Daz ist vnser lieben Frauen bylde mit yrm lieben kynde. Daz bylde hait Sent Lucas der ewangelist selbs mit siner hant gemalet vnnnd conterfet nach vnser lieben Frauen vnnnd yrem lieben kynde, vnnnd man saget vor war, wer der selben bylde eyns sehe, der solle nummer von den gnaden godis gescheyden werden". In Middle High German, *schanc* is a form of *schranc*, here hinting at a tabernacle or monstrance: see Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig 1876, vol. II, cols 655 and 785. See also the later mentions by William III of Thuringia (1461): *Pilgerfahrt des Landgrafen Wilhelm des Tapferen von Thüringen zum heiligen Lande im Jahre 1461*, Johann Georg Kohl ed., Bremen 1868, p. 79; Sebald Rieter (1479): *Das Reisebuch der Familie Rieter*, Reinhold Röhrich, Heinrich Meisner eds, Tübingen 1889, p. 40; Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium* (n. 3), p. 393; Alexander of Palatinate-Zweibrücken, *Die Reise* (n. 67), p. 41; Hans Schuerpff (1498): *Luzerner und Innerschweizer Pilgerreisen zum Heiligen Grab in Jerusalem vom 15. bis 17. Jahrhundert*, Josef Schmid ed., Luzern 1957, p. 187; Frederick of Legnica and Brieg, "Die Pilgerfahrt" (n. 26), p. 113.

71 Richard Guylforde (1506): *The Pylgrimage of Sir Richard Guylforde to the Holy Land*, A.D. 1506, Henry Ellis ed., London 1851, p. 6.

72 Brunner, "Die Jerusalemfahrt" (n. 58), p. 11: "Dosebst ist auch ein Tafel, dor an sanctus Lucas unser frauen bilde gemolet, als sie jesum am arm hot, derselben bilde ist auch eins im thüme dosebst, und wenn zu Badua ungewitter ist oder nit reget, so machen sie process und tragen die selben pilde umb, und do ich zu Badua was do het es in langer zeit nit gereget, also machten sye drey processionen und trugen die pilde umb, alzbalde warde es regen, und reget bey acht tagen, die selben bilde hon ich eigentlich gesehen".



10/Virgin Nicopea, icon, San Marco, Venice, 11<sup>th</sup> century

11/Virgin Orant, mosaic, Santi Maria e Donato, Murano, late 12<sup>th</sup> century

12/Venetian painter, Virgin Orant, painted panel, Santi Maria e Donato, Murano, ca. 1340

by pilgrims than the other works by the Evangelist worshipped in Padua. Apart from a procession that took place regularly on the Assumption day, the image was brought around the Piazza on the event of natural calamities, such as earthquakes and long periods of draught<sup>73</sup>. Such uses paralleled those of Florence and Bologna, echoed the archetypal processions of Rome and Constantinople, and probably aimed at rivalling the much more rooted ritual habits of nearby Padua.

The general picture provided by the data discussed in this paper is not in keeping with the scholarly assumption that icons made for public worship were integrated into the décor of San Marco in the aftermath of the Fourth crusade in order to imitate features associated with Saint Sophia of Constantinople. Just on the contrary, the available evidence indicates that only gradually, in the course of the fifteenth century, a number of images started being perceived as worship-worthy objects, provided with an autonomous cultic identity. Such a process was engendered by both political and religious factors: namely, the diffusion of Marian devotion, the wish to evoke and appropriate

the legendary icons associated with the major centres of Christianity, Venice's self-perception as heir to Constantinople, and the cultic competition with other Italian towns – and especially with nearby Padua.

Pilgrims, who looked at both Venice and Padua as repositories of holy mementoes, probably played an important, if indirect, role in promoting the re-fashioning of both towns' sacred landscapes: in their tours, they selected the holy sites and objects which, in their perspective, enabled them to have a special, not ordinary devotional experience. At the same time, their visits added a new, international dimension to cultic phenomena that would have been otherwise restricted to a pretty local function. The emphasis on some universal and recurring characteristics, such as the attribution to Saint Luke, may have been enhanced by the wish to suit these foreign visitors' quest for exceptionally worship-worthy relics and images, which could be regarded as anticipations of the unparalleled attractions they expected to see in the Holy Land.

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73 Samerski, *La Nikopeia* (n. 45), pp. 24–28.

## Summary/Moc relativní důležitosti: San Marco a svaté ikony

Jak Hans Belting poukázal, vystavení prestižních ikon a předmětů v interiéru chrámu San Marco v Benátkách je na území Itálie jedinečné a zdá se být přímo inspirované specifickým uspořádáním chrámu Hagia Sofia v Konstantinopoli. Předložená studie však zdůrazňuje, že dříve než v 15. století nebyly konkrétní obrazy v San Marco vnímány jako hodny uctívání a nebyly obdařené vlastním kultovním rodokmenem. Autorův výzkum bere vůbec poprvé v úvahu dosud zanedbávaný zdroj informací, jímž jsou poutnické cestopisy obsahující popis Benátek, které byly sepsány od počátku 14. století do prvních desetiletí 16. století. Analýza takovýchto textů naznačuje, že poutníci z celé Evropy, kteří se shromáždili v Benátkách k plavbě do Sváté země, zaznamenali nejen vznik nového kultovního fenoménu, ale měli také důležitý, i když nepřímý podíl na jeho pozdějším rozvoji. Role, jakou hrály Benátky coby výchozí místo při plavbách do Palestiny, povzbuzovala lokální instituce k lepšímu využívání jejich náboženských pokladů, zvláště těch ukazujících spojení se zámořskými svatými místy, a k podpoře nových kultovních zvyků. Ve srovnání s ostatními chrámy v Benátkách byl San Marco do tohoto procesu zapojován jen velmi pozvolna. Návštěvníci ve 14. století byli zasaženi krásou chrámu, jeho mozaikovými dekoracemi i podivuhodnými obřady, které se zde odehrávaly. Dokonce i popisy pokladnice relikvií se zakládaly

spíše na estetickém dojmu z množství relikviářů než na kultovních přednostech jednotlivých předmětů.

V 15. století však došlo ke změně. Během 50. let 15. století byl malovaný kříž ze 13. století považován za představitele připomínky zázračné legendy o bejrútské ikoně pobodané nožem, která byla spojovaná s jednou z nejvíce uctívaných relikvií v San Marco – ampulkou svaté krve *ex imagine*. Byzantská mramorová vyobrazení obsažená v architektonické struktuře baziliky byla přidána teprve později v souvislosti s utvářením autonomní kultovní fyziognomie počínající tzv. Pannou Marií *Aniketos*. Ta se nachází v dnešní kapli kardinála Zena, původně v jednom z nejdůležitějších vstupů do baziliky, a bývá často popisována v poutnických cestopisech od 80. let 15. století.

Poslední část studie pojednává o raném kultu tzv. ikony *Nicopea*. Na základě nových důkazů je možné tvrdit, že veřejné uctívání této ikony bylo zavedeno v polovině 15. století a že byla od počátku považována za dílo vytvořené evangelistou Lukášem. Vznik tohoto fenoménu je pochopitelný v kontextu soupeření s kulty rozvíjejícími se v Padově od počátku 15. století. Zvláště obrazy připisované evangelistovi v tamější městské katedrále a v benediktinském klášterním kostele *Santa Giustina* vynikaly velkou atraktivitou v očích poutníků, kteří pravidelně navštěvovali Padovu během pobytu v Benátkách.