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THE RELICS OF ST. SPYRIDON
AND THE MAKING OF SACRED SPACE ON CORFU:
BETWEEN CONSTANTINOPLE AND VENICE

Although one of the most interesting aspects of Christian piety is that of the cult of relics, it has not been studied sufficiently, above all the cult of the relics in the Orthodox world. The least studied cults remain those of a number of local saints, which appear relatively late and which are still active today.

For the purposes of our presentation we have chosen a Greek saint, probably familiar to most of you, namely, St. Spyridon. First, because the cult of St. Spyridon's relics at Corfu (Kerkyra) offers an interesting and, perhaps, a unique example of the structuring of a sacred space, both in the very capital of the Ionian islands and in the region as a whole. Second, because, thanks to the Onassis Foundation we were lucky to be able to participate last year in the Palm Sunday procession on Corfu with the relics of St. Spyridon. One aspect of our study, that which involves the creation of sacred space, owes a lot to the current interests of Alexei Lidov.

This cult of Saint Spyridon began initially on Cyprus, where Spyridon was the bishop of Trimythos in the 4th century; he participated in the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325¹. This is why he is mentioned in the

¹ *Delehaye H.* Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae. Bruxelles, 1902 (Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum, Novembris), col. 303; *Idem.* Saints de Chypre // *Annalecta Bollandiana*, XXVI, 1907, p. 204 sq.; *Georg J., Herzog zu Sachsen.* Der Heilige Spyridon. Seine Verehrung und Ikonographie. Leipzig–Berlin, 1913; *Van der Ven P.* La légende de St. Spyridon, évêque de Trimithonte. Louven, 1953; *Walter Ch.* L'iconographie des conciles dans la tradition byzantine. Paris, 1970, p. 256, fig.121; *Bakalova E.* Cypriot Saints in Medieval Bulgarian Painting // *Πρακτικόν του πρώτου διεθνούς Κυπριολογικού Συνεδρίου*. Τόμος Β. Λευκωσία, 1972, p. 175–211; *Walter Chr.* Icons of the first Council of Nicaea // *Δελτίον της χριστιανικής αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*. Περ. Δ, τ. ΙΣΤ. Αθήναι, 1992, p. 217–218; *Βίος, θαύματα και ακολουθία του αγίου Σπυρίδωνος*. Κέρκυρα, 1993. About the cult of St. Spyridon in Bulgaria see: *Βακαλόβα Ε.* Св. Спиридон в православната църковна традиция и фолклора // *Медиевистика и културна антропология*. Сборник в чест на Д. Петканова. София, 1998, с. 319–325.

Ecclesiastical Histories of Socrates, Sozomen and Rufinus². According to H. Delehayе's and P. Van der Ven's studies the Vita took shape relatively early composed by authors such as Theodore, Bishop of Paphos in Cyprus (7th century), Leontius of Naples and others³. The texts of the lives emphasize the fact that St. Spyridon was a shepherd; even after he became a bishop he continued to go about with a shepherd's crook and wear a hat made of willow twigs. The name of his hat — σπυρίς — meant 'a round crochet-work basket'⁴ and could be seen as a possible etymon of the Saint's name. In fact this hat served to differentiate him from other bishop figures who, like him, are depicted wearing a phelonion and omophorion.

In the 7th century his relics were transferred to Constantinople, which led to the spread of his cult in the entire Orthodox world. According to various sources the relics of the saint were placed in a nunnery which, according to the Synaxarion of Constantinople was the monastery of the Holy Virgin Kecharitomene⁵ although there are reports of the presence of relics of St. Spyridon in other churches in the Byzantine capital such as the Holy Apostles and the Holy Virgin Hodegitria⁶.

When did the images of St. Spyridon appear in Byzantine art? We cannot offer a precise answer to this question. Some of the earliest images to have reached us are frescoes in several churches in Cappadocia, dated to the 10th century⁷. It is necessary to recall that at this time the life of the saint had spread widely, and his commemoration was noted in the menologion of one of the oldest Glagolitic works from the second half of the 11th century — the Gospel of Assemani (Codex Vaticanus slavicus 3 glagoliticus)⁸. In the course of the 10th century other saints, venerated hitherto only in some regions of the Orthodox world were added to the calendar.

² Delehayе H. Op. cit. 240 sq. Cf. The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia, Books 10 and 11 / Transl. by Philip R. Amidon. S. J. New York, Oxford, 1997, 10.5, p. 12–13.

³ Beck H.-G. Kirche und theologische Literatur im Byzantinischen Reich. München, 1959, S. 463; Van den Ven P. La Légende de St. Spyridon, évêque de Trimithonte. Louven, 1953.

⁴ Глацинская Л. Пережитки дохристианских верований в Новгородском искусстве XIV века // Новгородский исторический сборник, вып. III–IV, Новгород, 1938, с. 127–134.

⁵ In 1200 Antonios of Novgorod is testifying that the head of St. Spyridon was to be seen at the Church of the Holy Apostles, but the hand and the other relics were to be seen at the Church of the Virgin Hodegitria. Janin R. Le géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire Byzantine. Première partie. Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarchat oecuménique. T. 3. Les églises et le monastères. Paris, 1969, 1960.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ On the dating of C. Jolivet-Levy: Église N 4, Saint-Jean de Gülü dere, region de Cavuşin, Chapelle sud, 913–920; Tokali 2 (Nouvelle église de Tokali), couloir transversal, 10th century; Göreme 29, Kiliclar kilisesi, abside centrale. 10th c. see: Jolivet-Levy C. Les églises Byzantines de Cappadoce. Paris, 1991, p. 39, 105, 139.

⁸ Иванова-Мавроудинова В., Джурова А. Асеманиево Евангелие. Старобългарски глаголически паметник от X век. Факсимално издание. София, 1981.

Their integration is noted in the Menologion of the Byzantine Emperor Basil II, where an image of St. Spyridon already appears. The image also is found in some of the illustrated menologia of Metaphrastes⁹. Throughout the 11th century the image occurs in the calendar icons from Sinai, and in the murals of the church of St. Sophia in Ohrid and in many other churches. His portrait — a broad face, with a short sharp beard, white hair and his characteristic headgear — were the iconographic features which did not change until the end of the 19th century¹⁰.

This is the place to note that in the very formation of the cult of St. Spyridon the day he was venerated — 12th of December — was linked with the pagan celebration of the winter solstice. In Novgorod this feast is known as *Спиридонов поворот* ('Spyridon's turn'). In Medieval Novgorod the veneration of St. Spyridon was connected with the veneration of the sun and the awakening forces of nature. For this reason, and also because of the fact that St. Spyridon was a shepherd, in the Novgorod icon painting he is depicted together with St. Blaise as a protector of fertility in an icon from the 14th century¹¹.

Depicted among the bishops in the apse, St. Spyridon is also depicted as one of the participants of the First Ecumenical Council in miniatures, murals and icons. Usually he can be only identified by his characteristic headgear. However in later images, after the 16th century, the images of the First Ecumenical Council are often presented together with the miracle of St. Spyridon with the tile. This episode is drawn from a later variant of the life of the saint, and was spread through Agaprios Landos of Crete's book 'New Paradise' (1641), where the participation of the saint in the Council is explained through the story of the miracle performed by St. Spyridon during the dispute with the Arians. He had explained the Christian concept of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit unified but distinct) by using a piece of pottery. He said that pottery is made of three elements of earth, fire and water, and yet is unified into a single object. During this lesson, water flowed from the bottom of the shard as fire miraculously billowed from the top: "...And the saint took a tile, turned to the east, made the sign of the cross and with two hands pressed the tile. O miracles, water dropped

⁹ Patterson-Ševčenko N. Illustrations of the Metaphrastian Menologion (Studies in Medieval Manuscript illumination). Chicago and London, 1990, p. 109, 131.

¹⁰ On the iconography of the saint see: Lexicon der christlichen Ikonographie. Rom–Freiburg–Basel–Wien, 1976, col 387–389; Cf. Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine / Ed. K. Manafis. Athens, 1990, fig. 17, p. 148–149.

¹¹ Малицкий Н. Древнерусские культы сельскохозяйственных святых по памятникам искусства // Известия Государственной Академии истории материальной культуры, 1932/XI, вып. 10, с. 21–26; Лазарев В. Новгородская иконопись. Москва, 1969, с. 21–22, № 23.

on the earth, fire came out in the air, a finger remained in the hands of the saint. When the pious people saw this, they were filled with great joy and happiness. The Holy Trinity was not announced through the word, but through deeds. The impious were shamed, and the true (believers) praised the Lord, while the saint was venerated by all the clergy with great honour”¹². It was precisely this episode, as Christo Vakarelsky, the Bulgarian ethnographer notes, that was the reason why the Bulgarian people venerate St. Spyridon as the patron saint of tile-makers, potters, brick-makers and coppersmiths... i. e. those crafts where fire was essential¹³.

In 1489, after the fall of Constantinople, St. Spyridon's relics were translated to Corfu (Gr. Kerkyra); this led to a further development of his cult and the appearance of new forms of veneration, lasting to the present time. According to tradition, a Greek, recorded as having been both priest and wealthy citizen, Georgios Kalochairetis, brought the relics of Saint Spyridon and Saint Theodora to Corfu from Constantinople. The relics remained the property of the Kalochairetis family and later were given to the municipality of Corfu. Georgios Kalochairetis' daughter Asimia was married into the Voulgaris family and she brought the relics as her dowry. Up to 1577 the relics of St. Spyridon were placed in the privately owned church of the Voulgaris. Following the fortification of Corfu Town, the church was demolished. The relics were transported to a newer church, which was built inside the fortifications (its present position) and became the property of the Orthodox church. Here he remains today, universally loved and respected throughout the Ionian islands¹⁴.

His popularity is so strong, that St. Spyridon is the only holy person called just “the saint” on the island, and many of the local inhabitants bear the name Spyridon. Local faith in St. Spyridon incorporates the belief that he is a holy man, who really lives in a church in Corfu Town near the people, and that he can see them, can feel their pain, and come to their aid. He could drive away the Turks, save his people from plague, and bring them grain to eat, so today the people offer him decorated slippers because he is *a walking saint*. If earlier he was a Cypriot, today he is a Corfiote, the Saint of the Corfiots. The Corfiots' constant prayer to him whenever they have difficulties, created an intimate relationship like that of a child and father.

¹² «Νέος Παράδεισος ήτοι βίοι Αγίων εκλεχθέντες εκ των βιβλίων Συμεώνος του Μεταφραστού υπό Αγαπίου Μοναχού του Κρητός, και υπ' αυτού εις την απλήν γλώσσαν μετενεχθέντες. Εν Βενετία παρά Αντωνίω τω Ιουλιανώ. 1641».

¹³ Vakarelsky Chr. Български празнични обичаи. София, 1943, с. 118.

¹⁴ On details on the translation of the relics of St. Spyridon see: Νικηφόρου Α. Δημόσιες τελετές στην Κέρκυρα κατά την Περίοδο της Βενετικής Κυριαρχίας 14ος–18ος αι // Εκδ. Θεμέλιο, 1999, 348–357 sq.

We shall try to describe what the sacred space created by the saint looks like. Actually we could outline several circles of a sacred space: *The first circle or the core of the sacred area is the church dedicated to the saint, where the relics are kept.* This church in everyday conversation is referred to as “στον άγιο” (by or at the Saint). It was built in 1590 by the Voulgaris family as their private place of worship and became world famous for accommodating the relics of the miracle working saint. Its Venetian campanile is the most impressive feature of its exterior. The belfry itself, which is visible from everywhere, marks the epicenter of the sacred area.

The ceiling, called by the Corfiots “ουρανία” was first painted in 1727 by Panayotes Doxaras, a painter and author of a manual of painting compiled from Renaissance texts, and replaced later by copies of Nicolas Aspiotis, “a well-regarded and skillful religious painter who did much work in Montenegro as well as in Corfu”¹⁵. The ceiling is divided up into thirteen scenes of the life and posthumous miracles of the Saint. The iconostasis was made from marble in the 19th century, shaped like the entrance to an Italian baroque church. The section of the sanctuary, where the relics of St. Spyridon are laid, and which actually takes the place of the diakonikon, is called “the crypt”. “Crypt” is possibly the most suitable word which Corfiots use to designate the sacred place where their greatest treasure is to be found. According to them this place is also associated with a burial chamber which was usually under the altar and contained the relics of the patron saint of the church. The view has been expressed that when the church was built, no underground chamber was made, deliberately, to allow the relics to be open to the greatest extent possible. The saint has two sarcophagi — an outer one and inner one. The outer one is made of wood, with silver and gilt decoration, while the inner one is covered by crimson velvet material. The bottom of the inner one can be removed, to allow for an easier changing of the slippers. The Corfiots call the outer sarcophagus “cassa” — a coffin, and not only clean it, but also swear oaths in its name. (“I swear on the coffin of the Saint...” is among the most common oaths on the island.) This area has a special “stage setting” made up of the specific fresco and metal decoration. Above the sarcophagus hang 53 votive censers — 35 of them silver and 18 golden. The dim light also adds to the solemn atmosphere and intensifies the sense of sacredness. Pilgrims are allowed access here. Daily veneration through the kissing of the saint's feet, the middle of his body and the head happens every day from 9 o'clock to 1 PM “while the priest, who opens the sarcophagus, reads prayers and chants”.

¹⁵ Foss A. The Ionian Islands: Zakynthos to Corfu. London, 1969, 182. Cf. Σκιαδόπουλος Ι. Δ. Άγιος Σπυρίδων. Η Ιστορία του Ιερού Ναού και του Πανιερού Λειψάνου. Κέρκυρα, 2000, p. 91–135.

The 12th of December, the feast day of the saint, was among the regular occasions when the memory of Saint Spyridon was celebrated, becoming in time one of the most important feasts of the island. The feast lasts for three days, during which the relics are taken out of the “crypt” and placed in front of the altar, before the closed doors of the so called “crypt”, for veneration. The presentation of the relics for the two 3-day-long veneration form part of the customary rules contained in the testament of Kalochairetis-Voulgaris dated 1571 and can be seen as a Constantinopolitan tradition, mentioned in the *Oktoechos* of Emmanuel Chrysaphis, who lived in the time of Constantine Palaiologos. The regular presence of the Venetian authorities at the feast, as well as the Catholic archbishop is proof of the common acceptance of the cult¹⁶. It is exactly this moment that is shown in unusual compositions, called the Relics of St. Spyridon (Λείψανον του αγίου Σπυρίδωνος), common in the Orthodox world from the 16th to the 20th century¹⁷. Vita icons of the saint, particularly popular from the 16th to the 18th century¹⁸ have as their final element the scene of the standing coffin with the relics of the saint. A similar variant appears in the icon of St. Spyridon with scenes from his Life, done in 1744 by Nikolaos Kallergis, now in the Velemezis collection of the Benaki Museum in Athens. The inscriptions on the scrolls of the angels who flank the central figure of the saint are also interesting in this icon: ΧΑΙΡΟΙΣ ΤΡΙΜΥΘΟΥΝΤΟΣ Η ΚΑΛΛΟΝΗ (Rejoice thou the Beauty of Trimythous) and ΧΑΙΡΟΙΣ ΚΕΡΚΥΡΑΣ ΩΝ Ο ΣΟΦΩΤΑΤΟΣ (Rejoice thou being, the wisest of Corfu), point to the two centres of the cult¹⁹.

From the moment when St. Spyridon was declared protector saint of Kerkyra jointly with St. Mark, and then later alone, a fourth feast cycle began to take shape and became part of the calendar, alongside the existing three ones. This is the place to recall that throughout the period of Venetian rule at Corfu (Kerkyra) Orthodoxy and Catholicism co-existed; hence there

¹⁶ Karapidakis N. *Civis fidelis: l'avenement et l'affirmation de citoyennete corfiote (XVIe–XVIIe siecles)*. Frankfurt, 1992, passim; *Idem*. Corfu and the Venetians: Reading the Dynamic of the Urban Space // Corfu: History, Urban Space and Architecture 14th–19th Century / Ed. E. Concina and A. Nikifrou-Testone. Corfu, 1994, p. 41–49; *Nikifrou-Testone A.* The transformation of the Urban Landscape in Public Ceremonies during the Venetian Occupation (14th–18th century) // Corfu: History, Urban Space and Architecture 14th–19th Century / Ed. E. Concina and A. Nikifrou-Testone. Corfu, 1994, p. 59–71.

¹⁷ Судоренко Г. В. Документируя святыню. Изображения реликвий в позднесредневековой живописи // Восточнохристианские реликвии / Ред.-сост. А. М. Лидов. Москва, 2003, с. 608–627.

¹⁸ Chatzidakis M. *Studies in Byzantine Art and Archeology*. London, 1972, p. 172, n. 1–3, 5; Μπίθα Ι. Απεικονίσεις των πολιορκιών της Κέρκυρας, μικρή συμβολή στην εικονογραφία του αγίου Σπυρίδωνα // ΔΧΑΕ ΙΗ' (1995), 164 ff., figs. 1, 6–8; Βοκοτόπουλος Π. Α. Εικόνες της Κέρκυρας, Athens, 1990, no. 88, fig. 243.

¹⁹ Chatzidakis N. *Icons. The Velemezis Collection*. Athens. 1998, N 46, p. 346–354.

were Catholic, Orthodox, and mixed (common) feasts and ceremonies²⁰. A similar policy of acceptance of the cult of the local patron saint linked to the community by a particular bond reaching beyond the religious sphere into the domain of civic relations can also be observed on the island of Crete, where the cult of Saint Titus was incorporated in the church calendar of the Venetian colonists²¹. As M. Georgopoulou notes “the close link between the relics of Saint Titus and the sacred history of Crete provided a parallel to the relics of Saint Mark and their special association with Venice”²². A procession on the feast of Saint Titus in which the entire clergy of the city, both Latin and Greek, was required to participate also was held in Crete.

When the relics of St. Spyridon were moved to the island of Corfu in the 15th century, they became the principal factor in the religious life of the Orthodox population. Gradually rituals connected with the veneration of the saint’s relics, grew in importance and included a great number of participants, who joined regular and extraordinary ceremonies. In a similar way on the island of Crete “the direct association of the sacred relics with the governmental representatives of Venice transformed the old Byzantine traditions into symbols of Venetian colonial ideology” as M. Georgopoulou pointed out²³.

So, *the next larger circle, or circles of the holy space, are marked by the processions*. As A. Lidov has pointed out “Sacred space is relevant not merely to church environment but also to any urban or natural milieu that could be temporarily made sacred through religious processions, special performances and liturgical rites”²⁴. We should mention four litanies to the regular ceremonies, which established themselves over the 16th–18th centuries in memory of St. Spyridon’s intervention and deliverance of the island.

The litany on Palm Sunday comes first in the calendar (yet second chronologically). According to information from the end of 1629, an Ottoman vessel trading cloth brought the plague to the island. Day after day quick death spread among the inhabitants and the Venetian Governor was at a loss what to do. Then people began to gather and pray to the Saint for deliverance. During the night, when everyone was praying, sentries along the fortress saw a light above the church to which the relics of St. Spyridon had been moved, driving away the darkness. On the next day casualties

²⁰ Νικηφόρου Α. Δημόσιες Τελετές στην Κέρκυρα κατά την περίοδο της Βενετικής Κυριαρχίας 14ος–18ος αι. εκδ. Θεμέλιο, 1999, 110–131.

²¹ Georgopoulou M. Late Medieval Crete and Venice: An Appropriation of Byzantine Heritage // The Art Bulletin, 1995, vol. 77, p. 484.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Ibidem, p. 491.

²⁴ Lidov A. Hierotopy. The creation of sacred space as form of creativity and subject of cultural history // Hierotopy. Studies in the Making of Sacred Space. Moscow, 2004, p. 33, and in the present volume.

were fewer and on Palm Sunday they ceased altogether. The Venetian authorities immediately following the deliverance of the town from the plague ordered litany with the relics of the saint. The second and oldest procession was established in 1550 and takes place every Holy Saturday, in thanks for the relief of the island from famine. This procession traditionally takes place on Easter Saturday starting at 9 in the morning. The third commemorates the Saint's intervention in saving the island from plague a second time, and is held on the first Sunday in November. On August 11, the fourth procession takes place, in memory of the deliverance of the island from the Turks after the month-long siege in 1716. On August 9 a destructive storm created havoc in the Turkish camp. "During the confusion, the panic-stricken Turks saw a number of acolytes with lighted candles approaching them, urged forward by an elderly bishop, staff in hand, who could only have been St. Spyridon"²⁵. The departure of the Turks on August 11 was a rout and was attributed to the miraculous intervention of the saint. This was the first siege that had not cost any civilian lives. Venice legislated the establishment of the litany of St. Spyridon on the August 11 as a commemoration of the event.

The function of the processions in mapping the sacred space and spreading the protection of the saint so that the outlined area would be blessed is obvious. In this way the entire town was designated a sacred space under divine protection. The litanies with the relics of St. Spyridon re-enact the history of Corfu, so that secular history and legend become as sacred as the Christian mysteries. The dates of the annual celebrations correspond either to the feast days of the calendar or to events in the history of the island and the conception of civic time came increasingly to rely on ritual performances.

The litany on Palm Sunday, the longest procession of all, goes around the entire fortified town (leaving out only the Jewish ghetto). The procession sets out from the Saint's own church at 11 in the morning and follows the line of the old town walls from where the Saint drove out the diseases. From the church the relics of the saint are carried out to Mandraki and then to the New Fortress (the Spilia locality) and from there taken on to the church of St. Francis in the center of the town²⁶. Still following the old town walls, the procession goes to the place where the church of St. Athanasios once existed. Here the festive procession stops for a prayer, because the relics of St. Spyridon were for some time accommodated in this church. Then the litany goes down to the square called Spianada only to stop once again in front of the Gate of the Old Fortress, where the relics of St. Spyridon were also housed for a while, and return to the church.

²⁵ *Foss A.* Op. cit., p. 180.

²⁶ *Νικηφόρου Α.* Op. cit., p. 363.

Who took part in the litanies and what was their role in them? Today the first to pass are the 15 philharmonics of Kerkyra, most of whom come from all parts of the island to pay their respects to St. Spyridon. They are followed by schools and the University. The Old Band, known as *Palaia* (the Philharmonic Society of Corfu) follows and accompanies the holy relics everywhere, even in the church. The Immediate “escort” of the saint are the priests, dressed for the feast, moving in two lines respectively left and right. Next comes the Saint himself borne by four priests. Whenever the relics are taken out, four sailors carry a special canopy (or portable tent) above the sarcophagus, which is taken away only when a prayer is being said. Military honors are given on both sides of the sarcophagus. The structure of the procession is determined by the rule that the most important person walks at the end. Thus in the litany of Holy Saturday the relics of St. Spyridon are penultimate, last and most important is the Epitaphios, The Body of Christ. Immediately after the Saint come the local notables — the mayor and the deputies, and after them the “common” people. Naturally the composition of the participants over the five centuries underwent change. While Kerkyra was under Venetian, French and British rule, numerous garrisons were stationed there; they took an active part in the processions, in place of the schools. Throughout the period between the 15th and 18th century the local Venetian representatives also took part in the ceremonies, in their capacity as officials. The General Captain (Provveditore) of the Sea himself carried the canopy above the sarcophagus during the litany, and when the relics were taken back to the church he bowed²⁷. The church fraternities and the craft unions also took part. In the past, participation was strictly regulated: a fine was imposed for any refusal to take part. Sound effects are important elements of the festive atmosphere: bands took part as well as shooting cannons. It was not by chance that, as the first President of the Philharmonic Society writes in a letter of his of 1840 about “a civil band which will add splendor to religious ceremonies and great dignity to our beloved country, aiming to enable the customs of its children”. The budget of the Municipality allocated special funds for the gun-powder used at the litanies.

The veneration of St. Spyridon on Corfu and the specific rites connected with his relics have been considered a major feature of the island by all visitors throughout the 16th–19th century. The impressions of various travelers and visitors to the island provide such evidence. This is what Pietro della Vale, an Italian who visited the island, wrote in 1614: “Our vessel arrived at the port of Corfu; about which the Venetians have constructed, on roads which frown defiance, some very strong fortresses... The only thing that I found remarkable was the fortress, which is defended more by nature than by

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 365.

art, and is impregnable. *Here, the defunct human body is preserved so perfectly, that, in the instance of one in particular, although he lived in the time of the First Council, his flesh appears yet lively and fresh; that of his leg, when touched, rising again from the pressure...*²⁸

Rev. S. I. Mahoney, late a Capuchin Friar in the convent of the Immaculate Conception at Rome, provides valuable information on the practice of the Spyridon cult in the 19th century²⁹. The author was Irish, a former Roman Catholic clergyman who after several years in the Capuchin monastic order in Rome not only left the order but abandoned Catholicism and Christianity, firmly convinced of the fallacy of the system of religion. His views are Socinian. (The Socinians were sect which started in Italy in the 16th century. They hold Unitarian views, including denial of the divinity of Jesus.) This is important to know with regard to the views and attitudes he expresses as he observes and describes: “At Corfu, one of the Ionian islands, there is also another lot of sanctified bones, christened ‘the body of Saint Spy-ri-done’, which are worshipped most idolatrously by the Greeks, as well as the Latins of this island. The body, made up in the manner before described, is deposited in a massive chest of solid silver, which requires, on account of its great weight, the strength of four men to support it, when carried in procession, as it frequently is, through the streets of Corfu. Its shrine is in the Greek church, called after the saint, with whose putrid bones it is honoured, ‘Spiridione’. This body has been the apple of contention between the followers of the eastern and western churches of this island for many years. Very few knew who or what Spiridione was, yet all affirm that he was a great saint. It is equally unknown how his body found its way to the island, or what wind drove it there; for all confess that he was not a Corfuote. This mystery, in which the knowledge, or rather no *knowledge* of his country, tended to increase the people’s devotion to him. The Latins, taking advantage of the obscurity in which his history is involved, affirm that he was a bishop of their own church, and a most zealous adherent of the pope’s: they paint him accordingly, with a miter and a crosier, and, under such a form, his picture is adored by them. The Greeks, on the other hand, assert, that he was the friend and companion to Photius, patriarch of Jerusalem, who, in the middle of the 9th century, caused the Greek church to separate from the Latin, on the account of the errors of the latter; and that he was waylaid and murdered by emissaries from the pope, by whom he had the honour of being excommunicated.

²⁸ *Jervis-White H.* History of the island of Corfu, and of the Republic of the Ionian Islands. London, 1852, p. 126–127.

²⁹ Special thanks are due to Dimitri Gondicas who recommended this author to us as well as to Todor Todorov for the excerpts of the text and information on the author.

He is, therefore, placed by the Greeks in the number of their martyrs, and painted by them with blood issuing from a wound in his breast, which he is in the act of receiving from two grim-looking villains, dressed in the habit of Latin monks. The Latins, when Corfu was under the Venetian dominion, having the force on their side, took the liberty of transporting Spiridione — case and all, which very probably the priests coveted more than the bones, as being of greater value — from the Greek church into their own cathedral, pleading in excuse for this act of violence, the sin of permitting a Roman Catholic saint to be worshipped in a schismatic church. This excited a rebellion, on the part of the Greeks, against the tyranny of the Venetians, which was not suppressed without the loss of many lives — sacrificed, no doubt, to appease the bones of the contested saint. Some thirty years after, a new governor being sent from Venice, he thought it would be a good way to gain popularity, and propitiate the affections of the Greeks, or, perhaps, — which is more likely — being bribed thereto by a good sum of money (the Venetian governors of the Ionian islands were proverbially venal), to use his influence with the Doge and senate to have Spiridione restored to his former owners. With much difficulty, and after surmounting the obstacles placed in the way by the Latin side, he at length succeeded, and Spiridione changed masters again, or rather returned to his former ones, and was triumphantly replaced in his former shrine... Spiridione remains in possession of the Greeks down to the present time, nor is there any likelihood of their again losing him, till, guided by the Spirit of Truth, and by His precious Word, they throw aside, of their own accord, his degrading worship, and convert his silver case into something of real service to their island, leaving his body to return to the dust from which it was created, if, indeed, the bones that are shown as his ever formed the part of a human body; a thing, in itself, a matter of doubt. The worship of Spiridione, as now practiced in Corfu, is idolatrous in the extreme — perhaps Vincenzo Ferreri is not more idolatrously worshipped at Valentia, nor St. Peter at Rome, that he is in that island; for certainly the superstitious and idolatrous rites practiced at his shrine can hardly be surpassed. It is remarkable, and at the same time surprising, how England allows her policy to get the better than of her religion. *The British soldiers quartered in this island have positive orders from their general to present arms to the bones and images of this saint, as they are carried along in procession through the streets; the bones by the Greeks, the images and pictures by the Latins. Nor is this all: a guard of honour, commanded by a commissioned officer, is always in attendance on every solemn occasion, and draw up in front of the church, to do honour to the relics of this idol: thus is a British soldier obliged to sacrifice his duty to God to his duty as a soldier.*

This may be good policy, but very bad religion, and serves to confirm that other continental nations in their ideas of English religion; for it is no uncommon thing for an Italian, when he wishes to express his opinion of the want of religion in one of his acquaintances, to exclaim '*Quello la di religione quanto un Inglese*' — *He has as much religion as an Englishman*; meaning to say, he has none at all"³⁰. And further: "I have already, in former part of this work, given a sketch of the state of religion at Corfu. The idol Spy-ri-done is the god of the island, and from him are expected all the blessings, spiritual and temporal, which its inhabitants pray for. The Greek priests are proverbially ignorant and illiterate; and, consequently, bigoted in the extreme to their own superstitious form of worship. Their supine ignorance is so well known, that the Latin inhabitants, when they wish to express a more than usual degree of that *mother* of *devotion*, say one of their acquaintances 'Egli è piu ignorante, che un papa Greco'. (He is more ignorant than a Greek priest.)"³¹.

Rituals specific for Corfu had their models. It is hardly necessary to recall that imperial and ecclesiastical processions in Byzantine Constantinople played an important role in the public life of their time. As for the processions, where relics are carried, they are known only when the relics are moved from one place to another. Thus on the day of St. Stephen (August 2) the procession started on the Golden Horn shore and went to the aqueduct where the saint was buried in his church. The special route of this procession was explained by the fact that it reproduced the original route of the translation of St. Stephen's relics (the ship that transported the relics to Constantinople landed at the Zeugma on the Golden horn)³². A similar case is the procession in memory of St. John Chrysostom on January 27, during which the translation from the church of St. Thomas of Amantos to the Holy Apostles was repeated. However the relics of the saint together with the shrine are not borne at the annual processions at the feast day of the saint³³. As far as we know there is a tradition of litany processions in the Orthodox world for some saints, but they are usually restricted to going around the monastery (as

³⁰ Rev. Mahoney S. I. Six years in the monasteries of Italy, and two years in the islands of the Mediterranean and in Asia Minor: containing a view of the manners and customs of the Popish clergy in Ireland, France, Italy, Malta, Corfu, Zante, Smyrna, &c. With anecdotes and remarks, illustrating some of the peculiar doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. Philadelphia, 1836, p. 264–267.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 368.

³² Berger A. Imperial and ecclesiastical processions in Constantinople // Byzantine Constantinople: monuments, topography and everyday life / Ed. Nevra Necipoglu. Leiden; New York; Köln: E. J. Brill, 2001, p. 73–85.

³³ Ibidem.

is the case with the relics of Hosios Loukas at his monastery in Phokis) or the church itself (for instance the relics of St. John the New of Suceava, at the church of St George in Suceava, Romania)³⁴.

On the other hand Venice played an important role in religious life on Corfu. It is well known that in 1386 the Council of Corfu asked for the protection of Venice. This is known as the Second Period of Venetian rule and it lasted until 1797. This was probably the most important period for the island, not only because of the economic progress and the building that went on but also because it was during this period that the rest of Greece fell under Ottoman domination. The island became a fortress and the base of the admiral of the Venetian fleet.

This is the place to note that Venice was known as "The Republic of Processions"³⁵ and especially in Venice can we find close parallels to a number of elements in the litanies with the relics of St. Spyridon. As E. Muir pointed out "There had been a marked increase in the number of obligatory processions since the beginning of the century and especially after the 1540^s, a remarkable extension of pageantry display in connection with the ducal processions. Consequently, solemn processional observances were becoming, if anything, a more popular and more important characteristic of Venetian life"³⁶. It is interesting to note that particularly towards the end of the 15th century the major fraternities took the decision to represent the greatest episodes in their history. It suffices to recall the procession in St. Mark's Square on 25 April, the feast day of the Holy Apostle Mark, represented in a painting by Gentile Bellini of 1496 (Galleria dell'Academia, Venice). As E. Crouzet-Pavan observes "...la Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista décide d'exalter l'objet principal de sa dévotion, le reliquaire offert par Philippe de Mesières où est enchâssé un fragment de la Vraie Croix"³⁷. Passing directly in front of us the white-robed members of the Scuola of San Giovanni hold aloft their renowned relic of the True Cross, encased in a special reliquary resting on a gilded platform. Four confratelli support a baldacchino (a canopy) above it, flanked by others who carry twelve heavy processional candles. Together they provide an honorable frame for the relic. (On the left above the procession a profusion of oriental carpets hangs from the windows and in most of the arches women appear.)³⁸ We can also cite the engraving

³⁴ See: *Бакалова Е.* Цамблаковото "Мъчение на св. Йоан Нови Сучавски" в румънската монументална живопис от XV–XVII век // *Paleobulgarica / Старобългаристика* XV (1991), 4, с. 56–77.

³⁵ *Muir E.* Civic ritual in Renaissance Venice. Princeton, 1981, passim.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 212.

³⁷ *Crouzet-Pavan E.* "Sopra le aque salse": espace, pouvoir et société à Venise à la fin du Moyen Age. Rome, 1992, p. 645.

³⁸ *Fortini-Brown P.* Art and Life in Renaissance Venice. New York, 1997, 56. On G. Bellini's picture see pp. 83, 86, fig. 57.

of Matteo Pagan representing the Procession of the Doge on Palm Sunday (Venice, Museo Correr). It is a valuable visual source allowing direct comparisons between the participants of these processions and their counterparts on Corfu. This is how E. Muir describes it: “First to emerge from the Ducal Palace were eight standard-bearers carrying the banners with the Lion of Saint Mark. Commanders were second and behind them walked six musicians whose long silver trumpets were carried on the shoulders of small boys. Then came the squires of the visiting ambassadors etc. ... The third segment of the procession consists of the most important office-holders each placed according to the rank of his office and the Doge himself”³⁹.

It is not difficult to see that the processions of St. Spyridon on Corfu were organized in a similar manner, while their participants were organized according to their rank. Here we find almost all elements characteristic of Venetian processions, including a brass band and windows decorated with red carpets (in Venice these were imported carpets from the east) along the route of the procession⁴⁰. However the fact that relics are carried in some of the annual processions in Venice is particularly important. Besides the above-mentioned procession on the 25th of April with the relics of the Holy Cross, the processions on the feast of Corpus Christi, a new Eucharistic feast, established in the mid-thirteenth century, and disseminated from the early years of the next century⁴¹ were especially of relevance to the processions with the relics of St. Spyridon. Here too the procession included both clergy and laity, the consecrated host was kept in a precious vessel, and the heart of the procession is the vessel containing it. Visual representations of Corpus Christi processions often show the eucharistic vessel or tabernacle carried by one or more priests and there is often a canopy (an important symbol of dignity) stretched above the group, usually on staves, carried by four laymen or priests⁴². This feast was widely spread in Western Europe from the 14th century on and was associated with spectacular effects. The procession consisted of Scuole Grandi members, guildsmen, members of the scuole piccoli dedicated to the Eucharist, the regulars, and congregations of scholars⁴³. Corpus Christi attracted thousands of spectators from Venice and the terraferma to watch a sumptuous parade under a canopy of white cloth erected in the Piazza for the event. This is how the Venetian Sansovino describes it in his book “Venetia citta

³⁹ Muir E. Op. cit. p. 190–198.

⁴⁰ On the Venetian models of the processions on Corfu see between others: Νικηφόρου Α., op. cit., p. 30–38 and passim.

⁴¹ Rubin M. Corpus Christi. The Eucharist in Late medieval Culture. Cambridge, 1991. Especially “Corpus Christi processions”, p. 243–271.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 252–256, fig. 12 and 14.

⁴³ Muir E. Op. cit., p. 224.

nobilissima et singolare” (first published in 1581): “With so much greater solemnity (than the other processioners) because they all are pompously turned out with decorated robes, with silver-plate, *with relics in their hands*, and with scenes on platforms so rare and beautiful that it is a worthy thing to see”⁴⁴. Particularly important for us is the practice of displaying relics in these processions. Théodulf of Orleans was the first to note that the sacred relics, owing to their ‘intimate’ link with the saints and martyrs, also possess a mystic link with God. The relics are also like the holy gifts of the Eucharist; their blessing makes them Holy and includes them in the sacraments⁴⁵. This is the place to recall that Corpus Christi was also introduced by the Venetians on Corfu⁴⁶. This is why we can emphasize the influence of this procession on the formation and regulation of the processions with St. Spyridon whose relics in the precious coffin replace the tabernacle with the Host.

It is interesting to note how sacred space organized around the relics of St. Spyridon compares with the sacred spaces of other relics in the town, for instance those of St. Theodora, the Empress associated with the Restoration of the Holy Images. Yet the relics of St. Theodora are taken out only once, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy (the first Sunday in Lent), the feast which celebrates the official end of Iconoclasm in 843. Moreover, the ritual is new, introduced in 1984. The route of the procession is quite different from that of the route followed by the procession of St. Spyridon. Clearly the cult of St. Spyridon dominates; a certain hierarchy exists, as well as a strictly regulated order of feasts and processions with relics.

The rituals, connected with the veneration of the relics of St. Spyridon and the belief in the might of the protection of the saint can to a certain extent be compared with the rituals in the Greek lands connected with the veneration of the miraculous icons of the Holy Virgin. Such for example was the case with the miraculous icon of the Holy Virgin Evangelistria on the Aegean island of Tinos. On March 25th (Annunciation) and August 15th (Dormition) the miraculous icon was taken out in a procession which included sailors, and representatives of the National Government always attend the ceremonies. It is sailors who form the procession to carry the icon, and their battleships are near the shore during the ceremony. “Military symbolism also figures in religious celebrations at the church,” J. Dubish emphasizes, “particularly as it is related to naval power... In addition, since August 15 has been designated a national Day of Military Strength, the association between

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 227.

⁴⁵ Appleby D. Holy Relics and Holy Image: Saints Relics in the Western Controversy over Images in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries // Word and Image, 8: 4 (1992), p. 337.

⁴⁶ Νικηφόρου Α. Op.cit., p. 130.

the shrine, militarism, and patriotism is made at the national level in posters displayed for the event⁴⁷.

In its social significance and functions, the veneration of miraculous icons can only be compared with the cult to relics — a subject of cults much more popular in western European tradition. H. Belting emphasizes in many places⁴⁸, that in Byzantium and Russia (and I would add here Bulgaria!), as well as in Italy of all countries in Western Europe, icons are endowed with the same miraculous qualities that characterize sacred relics. If in the early Middle Ages in the Orthodox world the trend was from relics to images, “*des reliques aux icônes*”⁴⁹, in the Late Middle Ages (which is equivalent to the Post Byzantine period), as today, relics and “sacred images in Byzantium seem to have performed many of the same functions and enjoyed similar status”⁵⁰.

The similarity between relics and miraculous icons is above all functional. While it is not possible here for us to examine this issue, we shall only note some common functions. Both function as protectors of states, capitals, towns, monasteries and separate individuals. In “the imaginary world of the Middle Ages” (*l’imaginaire médiévale* — the term was coined by Jacques Le Goff) the emphasis is on their ability to intervene in the course of real events, especially in situations of a impending danger, a serious threat to society as a whole or to separate smaller communities. Both play an equally important part for *the structuring of the sacred area*. Relics and miraculous icons alike are the object of a marked interest and pilgrimages.

Thus, according to preserved historical sources, greeting the arrival of a miraculous icon (or a copy of a famous miraculous icon), coming from afar is similar to the greeting the arrival of relics brought from afar. In both instances this is an exceptionally important event, in which the entire population of the respective town (or the respective monastery complex) participates. In both cases at the head of the procession of those that have come out is taken by either the rulers or the representatives of the high clergy (or both). In both cases a special church is built for the arriving holy relic or icon. It is interesting to note, that just as a special genre “A narrative for the translation of relics” exists, there are similar ones for the translation (or meeting) of miraculous icons. The translation of the relics of a given saint (or of other relics) is not only especially noted in hagiography; this is not

⁴⁷ Dubish J. In a different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine. Princeton, 1995, p. 173–174.

⁴⁸ Belting H. Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst. München, 1990, passim.

⁴⁹ Grabar A. Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l’art chrétien antique. Paris, 1972, passim.

⁵⁰ Brubaker L. The Sacred image // The sacred Image East and West / Ed. R. Ousterhout and L. Brubaker. Urbana and Chicago, 1995, p. 12.

only a special occasion for the composition of liturgies and other hymnographic works, but a day is marked as a separate day in the church calendar. Such a transfer is always presented in the illustrated cycles of the respective saints. In this way the story of the translation and arrival of some miraculous icon, which is most often described in a text composed on this occasion, is also visualized, in particular in the late Middle Ages. The content of the narrative is also similar, for example the descriptions of visions given to particularly righteous persons in connection with the discovery of relics or the arrival of a miraculous icon.

In fact the functional similarity between miraculous icons and relics stems above all from their *miraculous powers*. Or, to be more precise, the similar manifestation of this miraculous power. The ‘type of miracle’ found in the numerous legends regarding each specific miraculous icon and each relic, are quite the similar. From a practical point of view, one which cannot be altogether excluded, both relics and miraculous icons could be useful in the event of danger or misfortune. This is why they were venerated with similar honors, expressed in similar rituals⁵¹. Both play an equally important part in *the structuring of the sacred area*.

And if the processions with miraculous icons no doubt continue Byzantine traditions, processions with relics are definitely linked to western influences. In the processions with the relics of St. Spyridon on Corfu we find beyond doubt the realization of a possible conflict-free unification of the two confessions. Besides the important political reasons for such a unification, as we see it, a certain significance should also be attributed to the circumstance that St. Spyridon was also known in the west from Late antiquity, above all as a participant in the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea. This is what Rufinus of Aquileia, the Church historian, writes, especially emphasizing that St. Spyridon was one of the most eminent Church fathers ‘present at the Council’: “If any of their number would have been more outstanding, it is said to have been Spyridon, a bishop from Cyprus, a man belonging to the order of prophets, so much have we learned from what was said by those who saw him. *He remained a shepherd even after he was appointed bishop...*”⁵² The fact, that St. Spyridon is the Augustinian type of saint (as prof. Peter Brown would have said) — possessing total obedience, the “gift of perseverance”, and above all — humility (as St. Augustine says in one of the sermons he preached in Carthage: “...For our way is humility”)⁵³.

⁵¹ On details on the functional similarity between relics and miraculous icons see: *Bakalova E.* La vénération des icônes miraculeuses en Bulgarie: aspects historiques et contemporaines d’un pèlerinage // *Ethnologie française*, 2001/2, p. 261–275.

⁵² Cf. *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia*, Books 10 and 11 / Transl. by Philip R. Amidon, S. J. New York, Oxford, 1997, 10.5, p. 12–13.

⁵³ *Brown P.* *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000, p. 459.

Yet the influence of St. Spyridon, who is one of the most popular miracle-working saints today, spread not only over Kerkyra, but over the other Ionian islands. Comparable as miracle workers on other Ionian islands are St. Dionysios (born in 1547 on the island of Zakynthos) and St. Yerasimos (on the island of Cephallonia).

The cult of Yerasimos of Cephallonia deserves special attention. It was here that the saint lived as a hermit and performed miracles. Two holy feasts with processions of the saint's remains are held on August 16 — the anniversary of Saint's death in 1579 — and on October 20 — the date of his beatification, attracting pilgrims from all over Greece. Yerasimos was born in Trikala, Corinthia, belonged to the noble Notaras family who had distinguished themselves in Constantinople during the reign of the Palaiologoi. Very early he decided on the monastic life and lived on Mount Athos, in Crete and in the Holy Land for 12 years before becoming a hermit on Zakynthos for 5 years⁵⁴. He came to Cephallonia in 1560 and lived in a cave in the place called Spilia, near Argostoly. Later he founded the Omala convent, known as "New Jerusalem". In 1582 the monastery was declared stauropegial-patriarchal, in all matters related to the monastery its representatives turned directly to the Ecumenical Patriarch⁵⁵.

Saint Yerasimos was officially canonized in July 1622 and became the patron saint of the island and every other Cephalonian man is named after him. The saint was seen as an intermediary and patron between the Cephalonians and local and foreign sailors, and God. The monastery is a place of pilgrimage for the faithful of the Greek Orthodox Church. The rituals connected with the veneration of his relics have much in common with the rituals on Corfu. As with St. Spyridon, the relics are kept in two caskets. The interior casket is known as the coffin "cassa", and is made of wood, gilded, with three glass sides. The body of the saint is lying on its back and attached by belts. This small casket with the relics is placed standing on feasts and is carried in processions. The large casket placed on the grave of the saint was covered in 1940 with silver relieves on the front and on the right side, from the top to the bottom, as these are the sides visible to the pilgrims. At the bottom left, on the base, are images of people cured by the saint. At the middle of the base is a procession with the relics. A small silver embossed dome was made for the Litany of the saint. The small casket is placed vertically and left in front of the southern gate of the altar for veneration on the eve of the feasts on the 16th of August and the 20th of October⁵⁶. After the liturgy a

⁵⁴ *Πρωτοπρ. Κωνστ. Γ. Γκέλης*. «Ο Άγιος Γεράσιμος Κεφαλληνίας», Δ' εκδ., Ι. Μονής Αγ. Γερασίμου «Νέα Ιερουαλήμ». Αθήνα, 1991, p. 13–27.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 107.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 120–125.

procession is made to the plane tree. At the end of the litany the casket is once again placed vertically in front of the southern door of iconostasis, where it remains throughout the duration of the feasts, i. e. 23rd of August and the 26th of October. After the liturgy at the end of the feasts the relics are taken around the monastery to the threshing floor and then the saint is returned lying in the large casket⁵⁷. St. Yerasimos (Gerasimos) is so famous for his healing gifts and to such a degree inseparable from the thinking of the inhabitants of the island, that it is described together with the rituals related to the relics, in the famous novel “Captain Corelli’s Mandolin” which later is made into a film. Here is what the author writes about the saint: “St. Gerasimos, withered and blackened, sealed inside his domed and gilded sarcophagus by the reredos of his own monastery, dead for five centuries, rose up at night. Decked in scarlet and golden robes, precious stones and ancient medals, he rattled and creaked his way discreetly amongst his flock of sinners and the sick, visiting them in their homes, sometimes even going abroad to his native Corinthia, there to visit the bones of his fathers and wander amongst the hills and groves of his youth. But the dutiful saint had always returned by morning, obliging the garrulous nuns who attended him *to clean the mud from the golden brocade of his slippers* and resettle his emaciated and mummified limbs into a posture of peaceful repose. He was a real saint, a genuine holy man with nothing in common with the imaginary and doubtful saints of other faiths... *Like St. Spyridon of Corfu, Gerasimos had lived an exemplary life and left his entire mortal shell as an inspiration and as evidence*”⁵⁸.

The cult of St. Dionysios developed on the island of Zakynthos from the 18th century on. Draganigos Sigouros (St. Dionysios) was born on Zakynthos and in 1547 became archbishop, dying on the 17th of December 1622; his wish was to be buried on the Strofades. His body was buried in the church of St. George of Strofades. A few years later the grave was dug out in accordance with monastery rules and the relics were found intact. The monks moved him to the narthex of the church of the Transfiguration of Christ. When the Venetian-Turkish war for Crete began, the monks feared that the barbarians might attack their monastery and secretly moved the relics to a metochion of theirs on Zakynthos. This was the first transfer of the relics of the saint, which was also connected with many miracles.

At the end of the war the relics were returned to the Strofades. By the end of the 17th century and the early 18th century the monks from the Strofades began taking steps to declare archbishop Dionysios a saint and sent a delegation to Constantinople in 1708. Not long after that Gabriel, Patriarch

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 120–125.

⁵⁸ De Bernière L. Captain Corelli’s mandolin. London: Secker & Warburg, 1994, p. 71–72.

of Constantinople, through a Ruling of the Synod declared Archbishop Dionysios Sigouros a saint⁵⁹.

In August 1717 Turkish pirates robbed the monastery on the Strofades and cut off the hands of the saint when they left, placing the rest of the relics on a barrel with gun powder, and lit a fire. However the saint performed a miracle: the gun powder failed to explode. Mostrinos, the Chief of the pirates decided to present the hands of St. Dionysios to Bishop Akakis, who returned them to the Strofades monastery. After the attack, on August 22, 1717 the monks carried the relics once and for all to Zakynthos on a Venetian vessel. The inhabitants, the authorities and the clergy met for the veneration of the relics in the metropolitan church of “St Nicholas of the Foreigners”. Three days later came the first official procession with the relics in the town, after which the relics were moved to the church of the Nativity of the Virgin in Kalytera at the metochion of the monastery of the Strofades. They remained in this church for three years (1717–1720). Subsequently they were moved to the church dedicated to the saint at Ammos.

The translation of the holy relics from the Strofades to Zakynthos was the most important event in the history of the island, enriching it with the lasting treasure for the salvation of the souls of many generations, past and future. When the Zakynthos community declared St. Dionysios patron saint of the island is not known. According to some sources this took place in 1724. According to others the proclaiming of the saint as a patron protecting Zakynthos in place of The Virgin Skopiotissa and St. John the Forerunner must have occurred after 1758 and prior to 1763, when the Venetian authorities approved the decision of the Governor General of Zakynthos to declare the 17th of December an official yearly feast. Until then the annual feast of the Dormition of St. Dionysios was celebrated with an unofficial procession of the relics around the town and the fair. And the 24th of August, the anniversary of the translation of the relics from the Strofades to Zakynthos, was also declared an official feast. Later a litany on the 24th of August was established in 1901, when the mayor was Antonios Makris and the archbishop of Zakynthos Dionysios Plesas. Thus the Zakynthians celebrate the saint on two occasions: on the 24th of August and the 17th of December. The main feast was the winter one, the anniversary of the Dormition of the saint.

The relics of these three saints have an apotropaic function to protect the seven Ionian Islands from conquest, plague, famine and other disasters. In times of crisis there are instances when the sarcophagus of St. Spyridon and of the other two saints of the Ionian Islands cannot be opened, which is ex-

⁵⁹ *Κονόμος Ν. Άγιος Διονύσιος ο Πολιούχος Ζακύνθου // Β' έκδ., Αθήνα, 1996, Ιερά Μονή Στροφάδων και Αγίου Διονυσίου Ζακύνθου, p. 59–65.*

plained as the absence of the saint, who has gone to repulse the misfortune. Several days later, when the sarcophagus is opened, proof is found in the sea-weed on the “saint’s slippers”. The three saints are depicted side by side in the Metropolitan church of Corfu. The cults of St. Dionysios and Yerasimos emerged later and are connected with St. Spyridon only with regard to their function and their geographic location. Among the three there is the hierarchy, Spyridon being at the top. Miniature copies of his sarcophagus and relics are to be found on other Ionian islands, including Cephalonia and Zakynthos. The cults of St. Yerasimos and St. Dionysios in general repeat, on a smaller scale, that of St. Spyridon.

Thus the cult of St. Spyridon effectively creates a concentric model of sacred space, whose very center — the concentration of sanctity — is the sarcophagus with the relics of the saint in his church on Corfu. *A outer circle of sacred space includes all the Ionian Islands — a galaxy related to the relics of St. Spyridon, a global paradigm of holiness expressed through diffusion in space.* Other saints from the Ionian Islands merely enhance this power of protection.

The frequent miracles of the saint strengthen the sense of security and protection characteristic of the spiritual climate of present day Corfu. The contemporary cult practice, which indeed is an external manifestation of Orthodox cultural traditions, is in fact far from the context which shaped it. Yet contemporary life also raises complex issues, threats to individuals and the community. The idea of a free city under divine protection was so enticing that it survived even to the end of the 20th century. In contrast to the belief that modernity brought a decline in ritual and an accompanying loss of communal unity, the evidence from Corfu indicates the persistence of the elaborated popular myths. On Kerkyra an intense community life seems to have been fostered by an intricate design of both religious and civic rituals, which succeeded in melding parochialism and the tendency to hold certain offices and institutions sacred into an unusually vibrant and durable civic patriotism. In the great cycle of rituals linked with the cult of St. Spyridon may be read the story created by the citizens of Kerkyra about their own world which represents a sacred space under divine protection.

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РЕЛИКВИИ СВ. СПИРИДОНА И СОЗДАНИЕ
САКРАЛЬНОГО ПРОСТРАНСТВА НА О. КОРФУ:
МЕЖДУ КОНСТАНТИНОПОЛЕМ И ВЕНЕЦИЕЙ

Почитание реликвий св. Спиридона на о. Корфу (Керкире) — интересный и, возможно, уникальный пример структурирования сакрального пространства как в самой столице Ионических островов, так и в данном регионе в целом. Этот культ изначально зародился на Кипре, где в IV в. Спиридон был епископом Тримифунта, участвовавшим в Первом Вселенском соборе в Никее в 325 г. В VII в. его реликвии были перенесены в Константинополь, в результате чего культ святого распространился по всему православному миру. После падения Константинополя реликвии Спиридона в 1489 г. оказались на о. Корфу (Керкире), что привело к появлению новых форм почитания святого, существующих и по сей день. Популярность подвижника настолько велика, что его, единственного из всех, называют на острове просто «святым», и многие из местных жителей носят имя Спиридон. Более того, этот культ не просто определил структуру городского пространства, но и весьма своеобразно отразился в местном изобразительном искусстве. Интересна связь между поклонением святому и иконописью. На иконах иногда изображается не сам святой, а саркофаг с его открытыми мощами. Кроме того, святой изображается стоящим, именно таким его видят верующие во время городских процессий с саркофагом святого.

В посвященном святому сакральном пространстве можно выделить несколько уровней:

1. Прежде всего, конечно, следует назвать церковь, посвященную святому, в которой хранятся его реликвии. Она именуется «στον άγιο» («η φιλαρμονική πλαίνει στον άγιο»). Внутреннее пространство церкви можно разделить по крайней мере на две зоны. Первая, меньшая, вокруг раки с реликвиями — это диаконник церкви, где и находится саркофаг, «эпицентр божественной энергии». Она организована при помощи разнообразных подходов к святыне, а также «декорацией», скульптурой и фресковой живописью. В это пространство позволяется входить паломникам. Поклонение происходит ежедневно с 9 до 13 часов, верующие прикладываются к ногам святого, его телу и главе, «в то время как священнослужитель, открывающий саркофаг, читает молитвы и поет псалмы». Вторая зона — особым образом структурированное внутреннее пространство храма. В праздничные дни вход туда разрешен лишь певчим, которые воспевают святого, но и они могут находиться только в нартексе.

2. Сакральное пространство соотносится не только со средой внутри церкви, но и «с любой городской или природной средой, которая может временно сделаться священной посредством религиозных процессий, специальных действий и литургических служб» (А. Лидов). Следующая зона сакрального пространства определяется процессиями. Каждый год на Вербное Воскресенье, в субботу перед Пасхой, 11 августа и в первое воскресенье ноября реликвии святого выносятся из церкви, и торжественная процессия проходит по городу, позволяя каждому получить благословение святого. Эти процессии призваны маркировать территорию, находящуюся под защитой святого. Они складывались на протяжении 16–18 вв., возникая по разным поводам, связанным с чудотворным вмешательством св. Спиридона в судьбы о. Корфу.

3. Ритуалы, связанные с почитанием св. Спиридона на Корфу, построены по определенным моделям. Достаточно напомнить, что процессии с реликвиями имели место в Константинополе. Но не следует забывать, что с 1386 по 1797 г. существенную роль в общественной жизни Корфу, так же как и некоторых других греческих островов, играет Венеция. А именно Венецию называли «республикой процессий». По структуре и составу участников, по оформлению в целом (включая использование духовой музыки) процессии с реликвиями св. Спиридона напоминают целый ряд венецианских процессий — например, процессию с реликвиями Честного креста 25 апреля, изображенную на известном полотне Джентиле Беллини 1496 г. Но главным прообразом процессий с реликвиями является процессия на празднике Corpus Christi, совершающаяся в Западной Европе и по всему католическому миру с XIV в. и до наших дней. Именно в этой процессии участвуют все слои городского населения — представители светской и церковной власти, монахи различных орденов, ремесленники разных гильдий и все горожане по иерархии. То же самое наблюдается и на о. Корфу. Процессии с реликвиями св. Спиридона на Корфу как бы демонстрируют возможность бесконфликтного объединения обеих конфессий.

4. Сакральное пространство, организованное вокруг реликвий святого Спиридона, интересно сравнить с сакральными пространствами других городских реликвий, например, реликвий святой Феодоры, императрицы, прославившейся восстановлением иконопочитания. Реликвии Феодоры выносятся лишь раз в году, в воскресенье Торжества Православия (первое воскресенье Великого Поста) — на праздник, отмечающий победу над иконоборчеством в 843 г. Важно отметить, что этот ритуал возник недавно, в 1984 г. Маршрут процессии отличается от маршрута шествия в честь святого Спиридона, почитание которого несомненно преобладает. Существует некоторая иерархия, а также

строго установленный порядок проведения праздников и процессий с реликвиями.

5. Влияние святого Спиридона, который является одним из самых популярных чудотворцев, распространилось не только на Керкире, но и на других Ионических островах. Кроме того, существует почитание святого Дионисия (на острове Закинфос) и святого Герасима (на острове Кефалония). Культ святого Герасима, покровителя Кефалонии, заслуживает особого внимания. Именно там святой жил как отшельник и творил чудеса, поэтому остров важен как его сакральное пространство. На острове проводятся две ярмарки, во время которых устраиваются процессии с мощами святого: 16 августа и 20 октября. Реликвии трех святых наделены отвращающими зло функциями, они защищают все семь Ионических островов от завоеваний, эпидемий, голода и прочих бедствий. Есть свидетельства о том, что в тяжелые времена саркофаги святого Спиридона и двух других святых Ионических островов не могли открыть, что традиционно объяснялось отсутствием покровителей, ушедших на борьбу с напастями. Спустя несколько дней, когда саркофаг уже удавалось открыть, на сандалиях (а точнее, на тапочках) святого находили водоросли, что считалось доказательством его временной отлучки.

6. Таким образом, культ святого Спиридона создает концентрическую модель сакрального пространства, в эпицентре которой сосредоточена святость — саркофаг с реликвиями святого в его церкви на Корфу. Самая внешняя зона сакрального пространства включает все Ионические острова — своего рода «галактику», охраняемую реликвиями св. Спиридона. Речь идет о глобальной парадигме святости, выраженной через распространение в пространстве. Другие святые Ионических островов участвуют в этом процессе, усиливая защитную силу реликвий.

Частые чудеса, совершаемые святым, укрепляют чувство безопасности и защищенности, характерное для современного духовного климата Корфу. Нынешняя культовая практика, служащая внешним проявлением православных культурных традиций, на деле далека от сформировавшего ее контекста. Но в современности также существуют свои проблемы, касающиеся как всего общества, так и отдельных граждан. Образ свободного города, находящегося под божественным покровительством, был столь привлекателен, что просуществовал до конца XX в. Несмотря на сложившееся мнение, что в последнее время наблюдается упадок религиозных традиций и утрачивается ощущение общности, Корфу являет собой пример сохранения традиционной народной мифологии. На этом острове общественная жизнь выражалась в своеобразном слиянии религиозных и светских ритуалов. Стремление со-

хранить определенные религиозные традиции привело к объединению общества и необычайно ярким и устойчивым формам гражданского патриотизма. В грандиозном наборе ритуалов, связанных с культом святого Спиридона, выразились представления граждан Корфу о своем мире как сакральном пространстве, находящемся под божественным покровительством. Интересно, что сами формирующие городское пространство ритуалы восходят как к более древней константинопольской традиции, так и к венецианским процессиям, чье появление легко объясняется многовековым присутствием итальянцев на этом греческом острове.



1. The relics of St. Spyridon on Corfu island



2. The altar in the church of St. Spyridon in Corfu town



3. The outer sarcophagus of the Saint



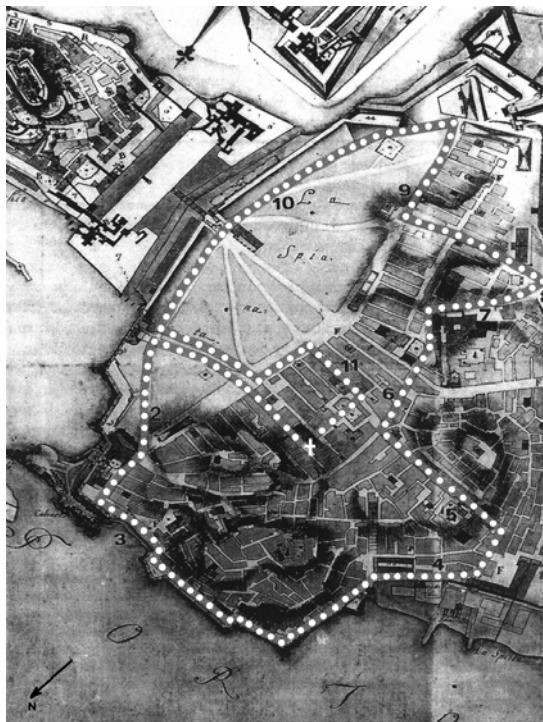
4. The 53 votive censers above the sarcophagus of St. Spyridon in the diakonikon



5. The sarcophagus with the relics presented for veneration in front of the entrance to the diakonikon



6. Icon of the relics of St. Spyridon from the church in the village Korakiana on Corfu island



7. The itinerary of the procession on Palm Sunday



8. The priests moving in two lines in front of the relics of the Saint



9. The Old Band (Η Παλαιά) in the procession with relics of St. Spyridon on Palm Sunday today on Corfu



10. Procession of the Doge on Palm Sunday in Venice, engraving of Matteo Pagan, 1556–1559 (detail)



11. Military honors are given on both sides of the sarcophagus of St. Spyridon on Corfu



12. Procession in the Piazza San Marco, Gentile Bellini, 1496 (detail)