VOYAGE TO THE HOLY LAND BY THE 17TH CENTURY ITALIAN PILGRIM GIOVANNI BENEDETTI

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Abstract - Italian pilgrim literature provides readers with a number of important data about the Christians of different communities in the Holy Land, as well as their monasteries and shrines. Among Italian pilgrims one should distinguish Giovanni Benedetti Maronita, who left a vast description of Jerusalem and its surroundings, as well as of Jordan, Lebanon and Cyprus. The present paper deals with his work, special attention is dedicated to his accounts on the Georgians and their properties in the Holy Land. The itinerary by Giovanni Benedetti is kept in two manuscripts, one of them in Venice and another in Munich. Unfortunately, we have not got much information about the author. He traveled in the Holy Land in 1667-8. The paper is based on both of them.

I. INTRODUCTION

The relations of the Republic of Venice with the East have been studied in a number of works, comprising diplomatic, political and economic aspects. The works have been written in Art History as well, dealing with painting and architecture. Venice was a kind of "gate", which connected Europe with Palestine. The majority of European pilgrims left for the Holy Land just from this city. Especially interesting is Italian pilgrim literature, it should be marked out, that alongside the published sources there are still many manuscripts which have not been published yet. Venice was an important port which dominated in the Mediterranean; it became responsible for the transfer of the Crusaders and pilgrims to the East. The Senate was constantly facing the issue to allow or forbid to take commercial goods by pilgrimage ships, the question was often solved in the favour of merchants. According to the rationalistic approach to such problems, in the epoch if the Enlightment European scholars discussed the commercial side of the relations between Venice and the East quite well. One can find it in the works of the 19th century. We mean the monograph by Fabio Mutinelli about the commercial activities of the Venetians, published in 1835 in Venice [16]. Besides, there were many pilgrims, who were interested in visiting the Holy Land and to travel in the East because of their spiritual interests. By the way, among them were the merchants as well, alongside the consuls who were sent to the East from the Republic of Venice. In 1966 in Milan was published the voyage of Santo Brasca to the Holy Land [19]. The author remarks: "Any person must be ready to travel [to Jerusalem] for one purpose, to visit these holy places, reflex deeply and adore with tears these shrines, so that Jesus the Saviour can forgive him his sins, not for seeing the world and ambitions and emotional exclamations: I have been, I have seen, ect."[1] There were the cases when some members of pilgrims' groups stayed for longer periods in Jerusalem, in order to visit the shrines alone and to concentrate on their prayers in their solitude. For example, the Italian pilgrim Barbone Morosini, who was a Consul of Venice in Damascus, left for Jerusalem together with his compatriots, but he was not content with such collective pilgrimage and stayed in the Holy Land much longer, in order to have his own experience of those "divine and holy places", as he remarks in his works ('questi devotissimi et sancti lochi').

It becomes evident, that Venice was important from both points of view, spiritual and commercial. It was not only a convenient port from which it was easy to depart for the East. The politics, economics, culture and spiritual life of Venice was widely connected with the East. The relations with the Holy Land were especially important. Those relations were supported by the Vatican, in 1420 the Pope created a commission for the study and support of the activities of the Franciscans in Jerusalem. Venetian noblemen donated large amounts to this order. There are many works dealing with this important issue, we can name some of them here, for example, the treatises by Francesco Suriano, the articles by David Jacoby and other researchers[12,14,17].

II. VENICE AND PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

From the above review it is obvious that Venice had good relation with the Vatican, which supported the

[1] "videlicet che, primo, dispona l'homo fare el viagio solamente ad intentione de visitare, comnemplare et adorare con gran effusione de lachrime queli sanctissimi misterij, adciò che Ieso benigno gli perdona li suei peccati et non ad intentione de vedere del mondo e per ambitione e per exaltatione de dire: io sono stato, io ho veduto, etc."[19].

dominating role of the city in the development of pilgrimage to the Holy Land. A number of indulgences were given to pilgrims at St. Mark's Church. Departure of the pilgrims was very well organized in Venice. Starting from the 20ies of the 13th century especially many ships departed from Venice for the East. This process was not ceased after the fall of Jerusalem to the Moslems. It was caused by the good relations of the Republic of Venice with the Mamluk governors. They guaranteed the peace for the Italian pilgrims, there was a special agreement about it. That's why Venice controlled the process of pilgrimage from Europe to the Holy Land. From the 13th to the 15th century each year 2, 3 or 4 special pilgrimage ships set off for the Holy Land. In the 16th century at least one, more often two ships left the Venetian port for Palestine each year. All the pilgrims, who described their voyage, speak of Venice, for example, Santo Brasca, Barbone Morosini, Francesco Suriano, Nicolo da Poggibonsi, Giovanni Benedetti, ect. They mark out, that Venice was the most convenient place to start the pilgrimage, because it was easy to find a ship, which was departing for the East, there were a number of guides, who had perfect knowledge of the holy shrines, as well as there were very good interpreters, who spoke Arabic and Turkish, Venetian sailors were the most experienced, the navigation was safe and the peace was guaranteed by the agreements between Venice and the Moslem governors. An anonymous English pilgrim remarks: "The Venetians know the Holy Scriptures perfectly. Even one Christian can not complain anything about them. They are the lords of the Greek Sea as well as the King of England is the lord of England's seas" [8].

The pilgrims had two main routs, those, who wished to visit the Sinai before going to Palestine, first reached Alexandria, as for those, who desired to see Syria, they arrived in Beirut. Actually Venice itself was a destination of pilgrim tours; because the believers visited the tomb of St. Mark, as well as many other shrines and saints' tombs, their number was at least 50 there [6].

The role of Venice in the development of pilgrimage was mainly studied from the economic point of view; the classical works are by E. Ashtor [1]. J. Hyde gave a very interesting review of Italian pilgrimage literature; their aesthetic side was studies by D. Howard [9,11].

III. GIOVANNI BENEDETTI'S VOYAGE

As it was already mentioned, Giovanni Benedetti was an Italian pilgrim in the 17th century and his work is preserved in two manuscripts: 1) Ms. Marciana It. VI, 41 (in Venice); 2) Bayerische Staatsbibl. Cod. Ital. 801, 43 (in Munich). The appropriate research has shown that neither of them can be considered the autograph of Benedetti. Besides, it is obvious that the manuscript of Munich is not copied from that of Venice, where there are some lacunas. Both of the manuscripts derive from an older archetype.

One can get the information about Giovanni Benedetti in his own writing. He mentions, that he is a Maronite, he cites Gabriel Rolay four times and gives the reader a very precise and vast characteristic of the Maronites, describes their history and traditions. It is obvious, that he knew Arabic quite well, for example, one can notice it in the episode, when he speaks with a boy in Bethany. The boy was a Moslem and wanted to become a Christian. Giovanni Benedetti says that his knowledge of the Arabic language and the local traditions helped him to contact the Moslems, who allowed him to visit the places where the Christians normally could not enter in that period (17th c.).

Giovanni Benedetti does not mention it directly, but we can understand that he is a merchant. He informs the reader that he departed for the Holy Land after he had finished his commercial issues. Each time he describes any place, he pays special attention to the goods, markets etc. From this point of view he looks like earlier pilgrims, who also left very interesting descriptions of the Holy Land, we mean Francesco Suriano and Barbone Morosini in the 16th century, they also were commercants, before becoming, respectively, Franciscan Guardian of the Holy Land and Consul of Venice in Damascus. They all left important economic information alongside many other interesting and important aspects of their writings (political, ecclesiastical, cultural).

A question rises: if Giovanni Benedetti was a Maronite, how can be explained his totally Italian name? In fact, Giovanni Benedetti's actual family name is Mubarak, that means "blessed" in Arabic. Benedetti is an Italian translation of just this word, with the plural ending, which is quite frequent in Italian family names. Benedetti / Mubarak was Lebanese. He was young when the Maronites sent him to Rome, where he studied at the famous Maronite College, but he did not return to his home country, he stayed in Venice, where he married an Italian woman. He became a successful commercant.

As it becomes evident from the archives of the Maronite Bishop al-Aquri, in 1639 the Patriarch Girgis Amira sent 15 young Lebanese men to Rome. One of them, Yuhanna, later was called Giovanni in Italy. He was the son of Elija Mubarak. Giovanni did not return to his home land, he remained in Venice. He had a son, Elijah, called after his Lebanese Grandfather. Unlike his father, he continued his ecclesiastical studies and became a priest; he devotedly served the Christians in the monastery in Italy.

Giovanni Benedetti describes in detail the Maronite Colleges in Rome and Ravenna. He mentions that the

Catholics sent many young people to these colleges to study Latin, Italian, also their own languages, Arabic and Syriac, so that they can use them in their country, when they return there. They have a very good subsidy for their studies and stay in Italy. All this becomes possible as a result of charity. Benedetti mentions, that later only the Maronite College in Rome remained, unfortunately, they were obliged to close the college in Ravenna. Many educated and kind people graduated from the colleges in Rome and Ravenna. They did much charity and good affairs for the society. Giovanni Benedetti himself graduated from the College of Rome. That's why he speaks with such sympathy about the activities of the Catholics in the East. The text of the voyage shows us that Giovanni Benedetti was really fluent in Italian and he had very strong command of this language, his writing is really perfect.

The Venetian manuscript of Benedetti's voyage is kept at the collection of Amadeo Svajer. This group of manuscripts is very interesting. It was unknown until the collection was transferred to St. Mark's library. Amadeo Svajer is a Latinized form of German Amadeus or Gottlieb Schweyer. He was born in Venice on 12 December, 1727 and died on 28 December 1791. He was a rich merchant. Their family migrated from Nurnberg to Venice in the 17th century. They were Lutherans. Like the children of other rich German families, Amadeo also received an expensive private education. His teacher was Johann Konrad Hoffman (1701-1756). He transmitted to his pupil great love of history and literature. Svajer developed his activities in the Lutheran parish of Venice. He gathered many interesting manuscripts and printed books. In 1794 his collection was purchased by St. Mark's library. Just this collection contains the voyage by Giovanni Benedetti.

As for the Manuscript in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibl. Ital. 801, 43, it consists of many works, it is a large codex. One can get information about it from Catalogus Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Regiae Monacacensis, Tomus VII Gallicos, Hispanicos, Italicos, Anglicos, Suecicos, Danicos, Slavicos, Esthonicos, Hungaricos Complectens, Monachii 1858. The title of this huge codex is "Relationi, Discorsi Politici". The work by Benedetti covers the pages 433-539. We have prepared the critical edition of the text. Once again we would like to mention, that the manuscript of Munich is not copied from that of Venice. But as a basis of our edition we use just the manuscript of Venice, although it has some lacunas, it is more precise and accurate; there are no mistakes, while such mistakes can be observed in the manuscript of Munich. We have not totally neglected the latter one. We intend to publish the text from the Venetian manuscript, constantly looking into that of Munich as well, for getting the critical version with the apparatus criticus. We also would like to mention that a copy of Venetian manuscript is kept at the Franciscan center in Cairo. Giovanni Benedetti left for the East in late 1666; he traveled there in 1667-8. He visited Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Cyprus. In this paper we pay special attention to his accounts about the Georgians in the Holy Land, which he described especially precisely, as he performed his pilgrimage. He mentions that in the given period the Georgians had their own altar at the tomb of Mary, Mother of God. As for the Church of Resurrection, Giovanni Benedetti only generally points, that among the other Christians during the holidays there are also the Georgians, besides, when he describes the city of Jerusalem, and among the other inhabitants he names the Georgians. Unfortunately, he doesn't mention, that the Golgotha belonged to the Georgians, or the fact that they had their own Monastery of the Cross, all this is well documented in the Italian sources of the 16th century, for example, in the voyage by Barbone Morosini (1514), who says, that the Georgians owned the place on the Golgotha, where Jesus was crucified, as well as they had their own monastery near Jerusalem. They say that just there grew the tree, which was used for the Holy Cross and the inscription, that was placed on the Cross above the Saviour. Morosini also mentions that the Georgians owned the place of circumcision in Bethlehem, as well as they celebrated the holy mass together with the Greeks in the central part of the church.

IV. RESULTS

From the data given above, we can conclude, that the Georgians had quite strong position in the Holy Land, as it becomes evident, for example, in the work of Morosini. But in the 17th century the situation changed great deal. One can judge about it according to the description, given by Giovanni Benedetti. After the appearance of the Ottomans in the Holy Land the privileged conditions of the Georgians came to an end, what is well documented in the Italian pilgrimage literature.

Giovanni Benedetti's work is interesting from many other points of view as well, it describes the relations between the Western and Eastern Christians, gives detailed data about Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Cyprus, deals with many religious, cultural and economic issues.

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