

The Equestrian Deliverer in Eastern Iconography

by

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During the past few years special attention has been focused upon the various iconographical representations of the equestrian Warrior-Saints in general¹ and the theme of the equestrian St. George with the small figure riding behind him in particular². Several theories have been advanced to solve the puzzle with respect to the identity of this small person, who is mounted behind the Saint. Interesting and instructive as some of the proposed interpretations are, it is my feeling, however, that they do not relate fully to the message which the mediaeval Eastern Orthodox churches tried to convey through this particular iconographical image.

For many years, Western theologians, historians and students of Byzantine art were either unaware of the small person who appears riding behind some of the Warrior-Saints, or they were unable to properly identify him. Thus, for example, an eminent and notable iconographer and archaeologist like Adolphe-Napoléon Didron noted "the presence of the slave, but could not hear of any explanation"³. He had inquired among the Greek monks at the monasteries of Meteora and of Mount Athos about the significance "of this child with the ewer of which the legend does not speak", but apparently no one could enlighten him⁴. In his study on *The Icons of Cyprus*, D. Talbot Rice discusses three Cypriot icons, which portray the Saint (St. George) riding to the place of combat with a small figure mounted behind him. In these icons, the position of the small person even varies. Thus, for example, on a processional icon at Pano Panaghia the small person appears below the Saint's right arm⁵, while on a primitive icon "of quite early date" in the same

¹ Hoddinott, R. F., *Early Byzantine Churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia*. London, 1963, pp. 50ff.

² Aufhauser, Joh. B., *Das Drachenwunder des Heiligen Georg in der griechischen und lateinischen Überlieferung*. Leipzig, 1911. Howell, D. R., "Al-Khadr and Christian Icons," *Ars Orientalis* VIII, 1968, pp. 41-51. Rice, D. Talbot, *The Icons of Cyprus*. London, 1937, p. 83. Idem, "The Accompanied St. George," *Actes du VI^e Congrès International d'Études Byzantines Paris*, Juillet 27 — Aout 2, 1948, Paris, 1951, vol. II, pp. 381-386.

³ Didron, A. M., *Manuel d'Iconographie Chrétienne*. Paris. 1845, p. 372.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Rice, D. T., *The Icons of Cyprus*, p. 83, No. 84, pl. 33.

church⁶, and on another icon at Korakou of 1617⁷, the Saint's arm passes round the figure, as if to hold him in position. Although Professor Rice recognized the need for identifying this person, he felt — at the time of the writing of his book — that neither meaning nor origin of the figure were certain, and that the suggestions which were advanced in his text should be regarded as being preliminary.

C. Enlart was of the opinion that the small figure seated behind St. George represented the donor of the wall-painting or icon⁸. True, donors of icons, ecclesiastical objects and churches have been iconographically represented in diminutive sizes. Generally speaking, however, these donors are either shown presenting the object in question to Christ or the Holy Virgin, or they are portrayed in the orans position. Since neither posture is applicable in our case, we can readily dismiss C. Enlart's suggestion. D. T. Rice mentions that the person mounted behind St. George might possibly be the princess, whom the Saint is taking home after having rescued her. This hypothesis fails to explain the coffee-pot or ewer and the towel, which are carried by the small person associated with St. George. Moreover, in the case of most icons, the figure shows very clearly masculine characteristics, and there are only few exceptions to this rule, when this small person is depicted in female garb. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note, that Professor Rice would publish the idea of seeing in the small figure a woman, a thought that was current in Cyprus at the time of his research. On a recent visit to Cairo (1972) I commented to Mr. Isaac Fanus, one of the most distinguished Coptic iconographers of our generation, about the small female person that he had placed behind the equestrian St. George. His reply indicated that he saw in this figure the very princess who had been delivered from the dragon as it is recorded in the Coptic Synaxarium⁹. In fact, the most recent Coptic representations of the equestrian St. George portray the Saint spearing a dragon with a young princess mounted behind him.

Another explanation about the identity of this small person is that he represents the Saint's squire, and that this combination influenced by Western chivalry was introduced into Eastern iconography after the Crusades. In this context, it is stressed that this theme is particularly frequent in the Eastern portions of the Byzantine world which were subjected to Crusader influence¹⁰.

On the occasion of the Sixth International Congress of Byzantine Studies

⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 83, pl. 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 81, pl. 33.

⁸ Enlart, C., *L'Art Gothique en Chypre*. Paris, 1899, vol. I, p. 248, fig. 141.

⁹ St. George is commemorated on the 23rd of Barmûdah (1st of May gregorian.)

¹⁰ Rice, D. T. *op. cit.*, p. 83.

in Paris in 1948, D. Talbot Rice presented a paper entitled: "The Accompanied St. George"¹¹. After stating that "the number of iconographical variants in the portrayal of St. George is perhaps even more considerable than that of the legends that concern him", Professor Rice relates the story which he had heard in Cyprus. It is the legend of the loyal coffee boy. "Once upon a time, St. George was sitting in a coffee-house when the news of the princess' danger was brought to him. At once, he jumped upon his horse and set out to rescue her without finishing his coffee. But the lad, who operated the coffee-shop, refused to allow the Saint to leave unrefreshed to such an encounter, and jumped onto the horse behind the Saint, coffee pot in hand." The identification of the small figure riding behind the Saint with the 'coffee boy' appears to be accepted by several Byzantinists¹².

Another explanation to the puzzle of the small figure riding behind the Warrior-Saint is traced to the realm of Iranian mythology. In Persian art, from Sassanian times onwards, Bahram Gur is said to have been habitually shown with his queen riding behind him. Can it be that the theme of the accompanied rider in Persia and the Christian East was derived from some common prototype? The identification of Braham Gur with the deity Verethragana, who was often shown mounted, has been proposed by Orbeli, who goes on to suggest that many of the attributes of this deity were identified in Asia Minor with St. George¹³. This time it is not a coffee boy, but again a female who is believed to be mounted behind the Saint, and whatever has been said above with respect to the princess is also applicable to this suggestion.

A few years ago, D. R. Howell proposed another solution to the problem of the small figure riding behind the Warrior-Saint¹⁴. In an article entitled "Al-Khadr and Christian Icons", the author described his visit to the Greek Orthodox Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai, where he had seen several icons of St. George "mounted on a horse and seated behind him a small figure carrying a pot and sometimes a cup as well, which is being offered to the saint." Apparently much intrigued by the feeling of interdependence that existed between the Greek Sinaites and the Muslim Bedouins living among and around them, Professor Howell suggests that the small figure should be identified with the Islamic al-Khadr. He argues, "that icons referring to a Muslim tradition about al-Khadr should be found in this particular monastery is not surprising when one remembers that Mount Sinai is

¹¹ Rice, D. T., "The Accompanied St. George", p. 381.

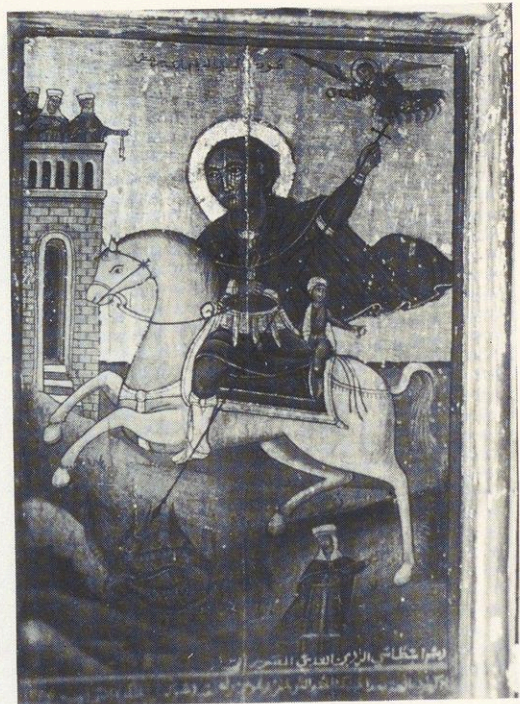
¹² E.g. the Byzantinologists Mary Burn and A. H. S. Megaw.

¹³ Orbeli, "Sasanian and Early Islamic metal work", *Survey of Persian Art*, vol. I, p. 728, quoted by Rice, D. T., *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ Howell, D. R., *op. cit.*, pp. 41-51.



St. George
1752-1753



St George
1838-1839



St. Demetrius
Vatopedi Monastery
Exonarthex



St. Theodore Stratelates
1763-1764

St. Theodore Stratelates
1838-1839



Abba Gabra
Manfas Qeddus

revered by Muslims as well as by Christians and Jews... It would have been difficult for the monks isolated in the desert and dependent on their neighbours for labour and safety of their supplies, to have avoided learning a good deal about Muslim traditions and legends from their servants and visitors... One cannot help feeling that the community, which had been astute enough to invent what might be called 'The Donation of Mohammad' to ensure the monastery against the rapacity of the rulers of Egypt would choose to site a chapel dedicated to St. George at such a strategic point, namely above the entrance, trying to use the superstition of the bedouins to prevent all-out attacks on goods and pilgrims"¹⁵. Professor Howell is quite correct in pointing out the very close mythological and even functional relationship between St. George and al-Khadr. This fact has been sufficiently demonstrated by several anthropologists and theologians¹⁶. However, it is an altogether different proposition for Christians living in the Islamic context to incorporate into their iconography of St. George an Islamic theme like that of al-Khadr. Here, neither the existence of the XIIth century Mosque of 'Umar in the Monastery of St. Catherine¹⁷ nor the fabrication of what the author calls "The Donation of Mohammad" can be cited to substantiate this hypothesis¹⁸. Moreover, it is very unlikely that the small figure riding behind St. George or any other Warrior-Saint was originally invented by the monks of the Monastery of St. Catherine, who subsequently would have had to inspire their iconographers to incorporate this figure iconographically. The cult of St. George, though very prevalent among all Eastern Christians living under Islamic domination, was, in fact, not particularly emphasized at Sinai¹⁹, and the Chapel of St. George, which is referred to by Professor Howell, was constructed by Napoleon's architects²⁰. True, it is tempting to see in this small figure a kind of spirit or alter ego associated

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁶ The close relationship between St. George and al-Khadr has been the theme of numerous studies. Einssler, Lydia, "Mar Eljas, el Khadr und Djirdjis", *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, XVII, 1894, pp. 42 and 65. Friedländer, Israel, "Zur Geschichte der Khadr-Legende", *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, XIII, 1910, pp. 161 ff. Kriss, Rudolf, "St. Georg-al Hadr", *Bayerisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*. München, 1960.

¹⁷ As peculiar as it may appear to find a mosque within a Christian monastery, there are other instances of this practice. The Monastery of St. Menas at Maryût (Mareotis) south-west of Alexandria used to have a mosque in which the bedouins worshipped.

¹⁸ For an English translation of the text of this firman, cf. Meinardus, O., *Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern*. Cairo, 1965, pp. 374-375.

¹⁹ True, Canon Morison, who visited the Monastery of St. Catherine in 1697, was shown among many other relics also those of St. George. At the same time, however, the presence of some relics of a saint does not necessarily indicate the existence of a cult. Sieur A. Morison, *Relation historique d'un voyage nouvellement fait au Mont de Sinai*. Toul, 1704, p. 111.

²⁰ Meinardus, O., *op. cit.*, p. 384.

with the Saint, and it is well-known that St. George has been considered as a personification of al-Khadr. Furthermore, the depiction of the attendant might possibly fit the traditional descriptions of the Muslim Saint. Yet, it is altogether misleading to state that "these icons from Sinai are therefore remarkable and perhaps isolated examples of the voluntary illustration of Muslim themes by Christian artists."²¹ As attractive as Professor Howell's theory of seeing in the small figure al-Khadr might appear on the first sight, an examination of his arguments does show that it is really quite untenable.

Johann B. Aufhauser, who has so convincingly demonstrated the origin of the traditions of St. George's fight against the dragon, suggests that the small figure might be a servant of St. George. He considers even the possibility of seeing in him Pankratios or Pasikrates or Passekras, who at the very end of the passion of St. George appears as eye-witness and compiler of the report²².

I should like to suggest that the image of the equestrian Warrior-Saint with the small person mounted behind him illustrates the theme of the equestrian saviour-hero or saviour-saint rescuing a believer from persecution, suffering or even martyrdom. In the case of St. George, F. W. Hasluck already pointed out that "the incident so often depicted on icons (is that) of his (St. George's) rescue of a Christian slave from a Muslim master in a distant land."²³ As is well-known, equestrian gods and equestrian heroes have been objects of veneration and adoration in several Eastern Mediterranean cults from pre-Christian days onwards²⁴. Often portrayed as the heroic hunter, the Thracian Horseman dressed in a short tunic and a chlamys, which flies behind him in a wind, may be seen as a kind of mythological prototype of the Christian equestrian Warrior-Saint. This is especially evident if one considers the secondary iconographical images, namely the fact that he is shown always galloping towards a tree, around which a serpent is entwined. In his right hand, which is raised, he holds a spear or another weapon²⁵. Another mythological image which preceded our equestrian Warrior-Saint by over a thousand years is shown in the relief of the Egyptian

²¹ Howell, D. R., *op. cit.*, p. 51.

²² Aufhauser, J. B., *op. cit.*, p. 166. The Syrian text names him Hippocrates. cf. A. Billmann, "Über die apokryphen Märtyrergeschichten des Cyriacus mit Julitta und des Georgius", *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 1887, p. 354.

²³ Hasluck, F. W., *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*. Oxford, 1929, vol. I, p. 323, n. 2.

²⁴ Cf. the relief carvings of Artemis and the equestrian Dioscuri of Pisidia now in the Kunsthistorischen Museum, Vienna, or the Thracian Horsemen in the Beany Institute Museum in Canterbury and in the Archaeological Museum in Thessalonica.

²⁵ Most of the Thracian Horsemen monuments are either funerary or votive. Hoddinott, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

equestrian Horus spearing Seth, the god of the underworld, who is depicted in the form of a crocodile²⁶. Again, the horseman incorporates the Good, who overcomes, defeats and destroys the Evil One. In fact, mythologically speaking, the horse is often understood as the symbol of immortality, and the horseman is seen as the protector, and even as the saviour of both the living and the dead²⁷. Within the Christian cult, the equestrian Saint as such appears already in the Vth or VIth century in the Upper Egyptian city of Panopolis (Akhmîm), about the same time, when on the west-bank of the River Nile in the Monastery of St. Shenute (White Monastery) Christians chiselled out of limestone an equestrian Christ attended by two angels²⁸.

The equestrian Warrior-Saint fighting against the dragon, however, does not appear in either literary or iconographical forms before the XIIth or XIIIth century, which clearly excludes the idea of any direct or immediate cross-fertilization from any of the ancient mythological images. What did survive throughout the centuries was the desire to place the most important saviour-saint upon horseback so as to enable him to confront more dramatically the dreadful beast, the dragon.

It has been pointed out that the theme of the equestrian Warrior-Saint with the youth riding behind him can be traced to the post-Crusader period. D. T. Rice mentioned that the earliest example is an icon which was formerly in the Greek church at Alexandropol; it was taken thither from Erzerum, and it is said to bear the date of 1327. It has undergone considerable repainting. The additional rider is of an extremely diminutive size, but the princess and spectators are also very small²⁹. From the XVth century onwards, examples where the additional rider appears become more and more numerous. A rather interesting XVth century illustration of this theme is a wall-painting at Harlau in Rumania, which is mentioned by Myslevic³⁰. When Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, the imperial ambassador to the Porte, visited southern Turkey in 1555, he noticed how the "Turks shake with laughter when they see in the Greek churches pictures of St. George whom they

²⁶ Clermont-Ganneau, Charles, "Horus et Saint Georges", *Revue d'Archéologie*, XXXII, 1876, pp. 196 ff., XXXIII, 1877, pp. 23 ff. Scott-Moncrieff, P. D., *Paganism and Christianity in Egypt*. Cambridge, 1913, pp. 137-140.

²⁷ For further reading on this subject, cf. Salin, E., *La civilisation mérovingienne*. Paris, 1959, vol. IV, pp. 148-149.

²⁸ Wessel, Klaus, *Koptische Kunst. Die Spätantike in Ägypten*. Recklinghausen, 1936, p. 21.

²⁹ Lynch, H. F. B., *Armenia, Travels and Studies*. London, 1901, vol. I, pp. 128-129. This is a very strange story, for normally XIVth century icons do not bear a date!

³⁰ Myslevic, Josef, "Saint Georges dans l'art chrétien oriental", *Byzantinoslavica*, V, 1933-1934, p. 373.

declare to be their own Chederle³¹ with a boy sitting on the haunches of his master's steed mixing wine and water for him, for this is the manner in which St. George is painted by the Greeks."³² By the XVIth century, therefore, the theme of St. George with the small person riding behind him was well established. The famous XVIth century icon of St. George adorned with precious pearls, which is in the possession of the monks of the Mount Athos Monastery of Hagiou Pavlou, shows the equestrian Saint with a small person mounted behind him, who is clothed in Turkish dress and wearing a turban³³.

D. Talbot Rice correctly pointed out that the small figure does not seem to appear on paintings of the more accomplished "court-style" in the Byzantine world, nor is he known in the West³⁴. This means, that the small person was introduced to the Eastern iconography of the equestrian Warrior-Saint through the popular cult, which had always venerated St. George and has always seen in him the celestial protector of the faithful against the Muslim infidels. One might say, therefore, that the small figure represents the Christian believer, who has turned to the Saint in his misery, anxieties, troubles and distress, and who is subsequently delivered by being transported to a safer state of being. This, of course, was and still is one of the principal spiritual functions of the Saints in general and the Warrior-Saints in particular, and Eastern Orthodox hagiology and folklore record many incidents of the merciful intervention of the Saints.

We shall now illustrate the particular iconographical characteristics which are associated with the different equestrian Warrior-Saints who are portrayed with the small person mounted behind them. Because of his universal recognition and veneration, we shall commence our presentation with St. George, to be followed by that of St. Demetrius, St. Behnam, St. Theodore, and Abba Gabra Manfas Qeddus.

St. George

If any Saint embodies the virtues of being the saviour, redeemer and deliverer from the beast, the dragon, the devil, in short the Evil One, it is St. George, who is venerated by all Eastern Orthodox Christians, both, Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians. He is the only universally accepted Warrior-Saint, whose popular iconography represents him together with the

³¹ Possibly Khird Ilyas! For the relationship of St. Elias with al-Khadr, cf. Einssler, L., *op. cit.*

³² Forster, C.H. and F.O.B. Daniel(eds), *The Life and Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq.* London, 1881, vol. I, p. 151.

³³ Huber, Paul, *Athos, Leben, Glaube, Kunst.* Zürich, 1969, pl. 167.

³⁴ Rice, D. T., *loc. cit.*

small person mounted behind him. Icons of St. George with the small figure riding behind him are found among the Greeks, Melkites, Armenians, Copts, Jacobites and Ethiopians.

In his important study on the Greek and Latin traditions of St. George's fight with the dragon, J. B. Aufhauser refers to several miracles of St. George in which the equestrian Warrior-Saint delivers an imprisoned youth. There is the story of the youth of Paphlagonia who served in the Church of St. George. When the Agarenes³⁵ or Saracens fought against the Paphlagonians, they captured among others also this handsome youth whom they degraded to the services in the kitchen. In his despair, the youth prayed to St. George. One day he saw an equestrian knight who turned to him and put him on his horse. The following day, one of the Christians was frightened when he saw the youth in the clothes of a Saracen, but the youth recognized the man as a monk who returned him to the Church of St. George³⁶. A similar story is related about a youth of Mytilene. On the feast day of St. George when all the people had gathered in the Church of St. George, certain Cretan corsairs sacked the island, and all those people who had stayed at home were captured, including the young and handsome son of a widow. Following his capture he was forced to serve the emir of Crete. The widow, however, turned to St. George in her trouble. One day, as the youth served as cupbearer, St. George appeared and transported him to his mother³⁷.

According to Aufhauser, these stories originated between the XIth and XVIth century, and undoubtedly they provided the iconographical inspiration for the theme of the young lad with his coffee-pot mounted behind the Saint. That these stories were slightly changed and adapted according to need and circumstances is evident from the account told by Captain T. A. B. Spratt, who visited the rock-grotto of St. Niketas near Cape Sudsuro in Crete in the middle of the XIX century.

The following story is said to have occurred about four or five centuries ago:

“The church was crowded with Christians from the adjacent villages on the feast of their patron saint Agios Niketas so as to be ready for the matin service at day-break. But the fires which the assembled party had lighted near it, having been observed at sea by a Barbary corsair then cruising off the island, guided his approach to the spot, and under darkness of the night he landed his crew in a neighbouring cove ... All

³⁵ *I.e.* the children of Hagar.

³⁶ Aufhauser, J. B., *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 4 & 16. From a collection of miracles of St. George (XIth cent.) in cod. Paris 1604.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9 & 117.

the parishioners in the church, who had uplifted their voices in a general prayer to St. Niketas were saved, since the Saint had shown them a way of escape, through the back part of the cavern, by opening a small aperture there. Through this aperture, they all silently crept, unseen and unheard by their captors, except one little girl that had fallen asleep in a corner of the chapel. When daylight came, therefore, and the church was opened, she alone was left as a prize for the Barbary corsair, and in consequence of her remarkable beauty she was made the domestic slave of the chief of the crew. It happened that on that anniversary, whilst the poor girl was in attendance on the corsair with his early cup of coffee, she suddenly remembered that it was the anniversary of her captivity, and burst into tears. Being pressed to state the cause, she did so, but received an angry reproof from the barbarian for her folly in not having long ere this forgotten her home and her family. Before the harsh pirate had finished his anger the damsel disappeared from his sight, for St. Niketas, who in the Greek calendar is revered as a sort of Bellerophon, having the power of aerial flight on a white-winged steed, had taken her up, and the girl was restored by the saint then and there, whence she had been taken, to the arms and joy of her family”³⁸

In this story it happened to be the equestrian St. Niketas, who intervened and rescued the faithful from captivity and the hands of the infidel.

The iconographical message of the theme of St. George with the young lad mounted behind him seems clear. At a time when many young Christians were forcefully abducted by the Muslims, the image of the saviour-saint was of great importance and comfort. Whatever the saint could perform in his life-time, this he could always do. If he could return the Paphlagonian youth to the Church of St. George or the son of the widow to his mother, he could do the same under the present circumstances. It is understandable, therefore, that especially mothers would attach great value to icons of St. George which portrayed him rescuing the Christian youth in Turkish clothes.

There are two iconographical postures, which we can differentiate. Firstly, the youth holds his coffee-pot or ewer and towel in his right hand, swinging the vessel over the hindquarters of the horse; secondly, he also holds the coffee-pot or ewer in his right hand, though he rests the vessel on his right thigh. On almost all XVIIIth and XIXth century icons of the equestrian St. George, the lad is portrayed wearing baggy pants and a tarbush on his head.

Among the Greek Arabophone Christians of the Middle East the iconography of St. George with this youth mounted behind him is even more

³⁸ Spratt, T. A. B., *Travels and Researches in Crete*. London, 1865, vol. I, pp. 345-345.

common than in Greece. Thus, for example, in the Greek Orthodox Church of St. George which is built over the traditional tomb of the Warrior-Saint in Lydda (Lod), the iconostasis-icon of St. George shows the small lad riding behind him³⁹. But not only the Arabophone Greeks and Melkites, but also the Armenians have incorporated the small figure in their iconography of St. George. Thus, for example, an Armenian XIXth century icon of St. George with the youth riding behind the Warrior-Saint adorns the west-wall of the Coptic Church of the Holy Virgin in the Hârat ar-Rûm in Cairo. Among the Ethiopians, the equestrian St. George accompanied by 'the little squire' is quite popular, although, as S. Chojnacki correctly points out, "the squire seems rather to be a servant, and in the Ethiopian context he bears the name of Sekoras, Sokratos or Sekratos, or anything of that sort."⁴⁰

The two illustrations of St. George with the rescued youth are Coptic icons⁴¹. The icon of St. George of Melitene (Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ ΠΙΜΑΛΙΤΩΝ) has the following Arabic inscription: "My master, the king, Marî Ğirĝis al-Malatî, Star of the Morning." Painting of the miserable Ibrahîm and Yûhanna the Armenian, 1469 A.M.⁴² The icon shows the small rider clothed in a striped galabiyah. In his right hand he holds an ewer, which rests on his right thigh⁴³. The second icon of St. George belongs to the XIXth century and adorns the Church of the Holy Virgin in the Hârat ar-Rûm in Cairo. The Arabic inscription reads: "Icon of the great martyr Marî Ğirĝis"— "Designed by Astâsî (Eustathius) ar-Rûmî al-Qudsî, the painter. Remember, O Lord, the provider for this, Thy slave the miserable priest Bakhûm (Pachomius), and reward him who toiled and make him a partner in the kingdom of the heavens. 1555 A.M."⁴⁴

St. Demetrius

The theme of the deliverer or saviour was also applied to the greatest cultic competitor of St. George, namely to St. Demetrius, the Patron-Saint of Thessalonica and the protector of the city from the threat of the infidel

³⁹ The statement that St. George and the young lad appear only on Greek icons is certainly erroneous. Cf. Aufhauser, J. B., *op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁴⁰ Correspondence from S. Chojnacki, Haile Sellassie University, Addis Ababa, Dec. 29, 1971.

⁴¹ For some reason or another D. T. Rice remarked that he had found no Coptic examples of St. George and the small figure mounted behind him. Rice, D. T., "The Accompanied St. George", *op. cit.*, p. 386.

⁴² Mulock, Cawthra, and Langdon, Martin Telles, *The Icons of Yuhanna and Ibrahim the Scribe*. London, 1946, p. 31, pl. 5.

⁴³ The date appears in Coptic cursive numerals. 1469 A.M.-1752/53 A.D.

⁴⁴ 1555 A.M.-1838/39 A.D. For the works of this iconographer, cf. Meinardus, O., "The Iconography of Astâsî ar-Rûmî", *Studia Orientalia Christiana : Collectanea*, XIV, 1970-1971, pp. 377-397.

Avars. There exist numerous iconographical portrayals of the equestrian St. Demetrius with a small clergyman mounted behind him. This is the Bishop Cyprianus, whom the Warrior-Saint delivered from captivity by breaking his chains. Subsequently he carried him on his horse to Thessalonica. Apart from two XVIIIth century Melkite icons of St. Demetrius with Bishop Cyprianus⁴⁵, there is a well preserved wall-painting of the equestrian Warrior-Saint with the Bishop on the northern part of the outside wall of the exonarthex of the Catholicon in the Mount Athos Monastery of Vatopedi.

St. Behnam

In the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem Professor D. R. Howell noticed a rather interesting icon showing an equestrian St. Behnam and sitting behind him a woman, whom he identified as the female lutanist Âzâda⁴⁶. It is well known that St. Behnam has played and still plays a very important role both as deliverer and as intercessor in the piety of the Syrian Christians, both Orthodox and Catholic⁴⁷, while Muslims have identified him with al-Khadr. As Father Fiey says: "Mâr Behnam se place ainsi dans la lignée des grandes achétypes du genre: le Tammouz des Babyloniens, l'Osiris des Egyptiens, l'Adonis grec et même la Hidra d'Ascalon."⁴⁸ John Carswell, who interviewed several Syrian Orthodox Arabs in Jerusalem, informs us that they felt that St. Behnam is always accompanied by Sarah, his sister, and this interpretation he found to be the most convincing⁴⁹. The theme of the rescue can also be applied to Sarah, St. Behnam's sister, who was healed by Matthew the Hermit, as well as to any Christian who was saved by the Saint either from the wrath of Julian the Apostate or *post mortem*.

St. Theodore Stratelates

The theme of the equestrian Warrior-Saint, who is accompanied by a smaller person, is also found in tattoo designs. John Carswell has published altogether nine different tattoos of "a saint with a child on a horse."⁵⁰ In these

⁴⁵ *Icones Melkites*. Exposition organisée par le Musée Nicolas Sursoek, 1969. Beirut, 1969, p. 186, No. 26 (XVIIIth cent.), No. 47 (1727). Another icon of St. Demetrius with the bishop (1835) is exhibited in the Byzantine Museum in Athens under No. 772.

⁴⁶ Howell, D. R., *op. cit.*, ill. no. 3.

⁴⁷ The problems regarding the legends around St. Behnam are discussed by Father J. M. Fiey, *op. cit.*, *Assyrie Chrétienne*. Beirut, 1965, vol. II, pp. 566-578.

⁴⁸ Fiey, J. M., *op. cit.*, p. 576.

⁴⁹ Carswell, John, *Coptic Tattoo Designs*. Beirut, 1958.

⁵⁰ Carswell, J., *op. cit.* Nos. 9, 16, 62, 63, 66, 106 A, 110, 116, 130.

tattoo designs, the Saint holds the reins in his right hand, the other person, having the appearance of a child—since he is so much smaller—is mounted behind him. According to Carswell, the person riding behind the Saint “is bearded, wears Turkish-style trousers and holds a sceptre in his left hand.”⁵¹ “Both, Saint and child have ray-halos, the child wears a simple tunic.”

The Copts in Jerusalem⁵², so Carswell informs us, maintain that “it represents Mar Corios, a soldier born in Shoud bil Hamra at the time of King Dacladianus. The child is his servant also martyred with him.” Well, Mar Corios, of course, is undoubtedly St. Mercurius or Abû’s-Saifain, the Father of the Two Swords, a very popular Saint among the Copts, who suffered martyrdom in the days of Julian the Apostate and not during the Diocletian persecutions. The only well known Coptic equestrian Warrior-Saint born in the town of Shutb in Upper Egypt is St. Theodore Stratelates, who, indeed, is often portrayed with a small person riding behind him.

We shall illustrate this Egyptian theme with two Coptic icons of the XVIIIth and XIXth century. The XVIIIth century icon is the work of Ibrahim the Scribe⁵³. The various Arabic inscriptions relate the story. To the left of the widow: “I am, my master, a wretched Christian woman.” Behind the mounted small figure: “Son of the widow.” Between the horse and the widow: “The great Martyr Marî Tâdrus, son of Yûhannâ of Shutb (as-Shatbi), slayer of the dragon and saviour of the son of the widow.” Above the person tied to the tree: “Son of the widow.” Below the tail of the dragon: “The miserable painter made it for the Church of the Holy Virgin ad-Damshiriah.” The subscription: “Remember, O Lord, Thy slave Tâdrus and his son Yûsif, son of Hinnis the priest, in the kingdom of the heavens. 1480 A.M.”⁵⁴

Clearly, the son of the widow is clothed in a typical Turkish striped suit, wearing on his head a turban. As in the case of St. George and St. Demetrius, also this story reflects the period of the Turkish domination. St. Theodore is shown killing the dragon, while, at the same time, rescuing the son of the widow, who may well have been abducted to serve in the troops of the janisaries.

The second illustration shows the small figure sitting behind the Warrior-Saint wearing boots and clothed in grey pants, a vest and wearing a cap. The Arabic text at the bottom of the icon reads: “Designed by Astâsî ar-Rûmî al-Muqadsî, the painter. Remember, O Lord, the provider for this Thy slave

⁵¹ Undoubtedly, this sceptre is the ewer which the youth associated with St. George holds in his hand.

⁵² Meinardus, O., *The Copts in Jerusalem*. Cairo, 1960.

⁵³ Mulock, C. and Langdon, M. T., *op. cit.*, p. 33, pl. 6.

⁵⁴ The date appears in Coptic cursive numerals. 1480 A.M.-1763/6† A.D.

Bakhûm (Pachomius), and reward him who toiled and make him a partner in the kingdom of the heavens. 1555 A. M.⁵⁵

Abba Gabra Manfas Qeddu

In the case of this late XIIIth century Ethiopian Saint, the small rider mounted behind Abba Gabra Manfas Qeddu holds on to the hair-coat of the thaumaturgos as he rides on the back of a rooster probably to the Seventh Heaven. In the traditional vitae of Abba Gabra Manfas Qeddu no reference to this young naked lad can be found⁵⁶. There are numerous stories of this Saint, however, that relate to his miraculous translations from one place to another as well as to his visitations to the celestial abode; though in all of these journeys he employed the divine wind-chariot in which he travelled in company with his lions and leopards rather than being mounted on a rooster. The icon, the original of which is in the possession of the Augustinian Friars of the Ostkirchlichen Institut in Würzburg⁵⁷, appears to be a unique iconographical composition, for in all my studies of the iconography of this Saint either on Mount Zequala or in Addis Ababa I have not found this particular theme represented. In the words of S. Pierre Petrides of Addis Ababa "this painting may be simply a whim of a contemporary artist."⁵⁸ And yet, there is a possibility of seeing in this Ethiopian icon an artistic reflection of the Twelfth Miracle of Abba Gabra Manfas Qeddu which is read in the Ethiopian Church on Sanê 5th or June 12th (gregor.). According to this miracle-story, a thief robbed a poor man of his only property, which he had wanted to sacrifice in honour of Abba Gabra Manfas Qeddu, namely a rooster. After his theft he ate the bird, but at midnight the cock began to crow in his body, and after the thief had died and was buried, the cock flew out of the lacerated body and the opened tomb towards the church where he stayed for the period of three years⁵⁹.

The icon portrays the Saint with the poor man, sitting behind him and riding on the rooster towards the Seventh Heaven. The idea of this Saint saving a mortal and transporting him to a safe place may well have been inspired by the images of the Warrior-Saints with the small rider mounted

⁵⁵ 1555 A.M.-1838/39 A.D.

⁵⁶ Budge, E. A. W., *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*. Cambridge, 1928, vol. III, pp. 755-772. Bezold, C., "Abba Gabra Manfas Qeddu," *Nachrichten der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, 1916, pp. 58-80. Rossini, C., *Gadla Margorewos*. Paris, 1904, p. 24.

⁵⁷ I want to thank Fr. Ernst Chr. Suttner, OSA, for his kindness in supplying me with a copy of this unusual representation of the Saint.

⁵⁸ Letter by Mr. S. P. Petrides of Addis Ababa of March 4, 1972.

⁵⁹ Bezold, C., *op. cit.*, p. 78.

behind them, whose function and rôle within their ecclesiastical cult are not unlike those of Abba Gabra Manfas Qeddus in the Church of Ethiopia. Is this perhaps a case of a thematic transfer?

It is my contention that the widespread lack of knowledge and understanding of this theme as such may well be related to the message, which the Eastern Orthodox churches tried to convey by portraying the small figure mounted behind the Warrior-Saint. It is significant that this particular theme is found only among Christian communions who lived under Islamic domination. In the West, the equestrian Warrior-Saint with the youth riding behind him is unknown, and the fact, that we happen to find this particular theme in Ethiopian art should not surprise us, since late mediaeval Ethiopian art has always borrowed to some extent from other art-forms. Is it possible, that the iconographical message of the equestrian Warrior-Saint with the lad is one of steadfastness and loyalty for Christians living under an Islamic administration? Is the reason for the obvious lack of our knowledge, understanding and appreciation of this theme perhaps due to the fact that for more than three or four generations the Eastern Orthodox Christians have lived under more enlightened circumstances? Is it conceivable that this might be the reason why so many people have forgotten the message contained in this image? There is no doubt that the Eastern Orthodox Christians of the XIVth to the XIXth century, who lived in a basically hostile world, had no difficulty in understanding the message, which to them provided supreme comfort, when their sons were forcibly taken from them.