"IMAGES PAINTED WITH SUCH EXALTED SKILL AS TO RAVISH THE SENSES ...": PICTURES IN THE EYES OF CHRISTIAN ARAB TRAVELLERS OF THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

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Introduction

The discovery of western and eastern Europe by Oriental travellers also marked the beginning of their encounter with a hitherto unknown world of pictures. The European Renaissance and the rise of painting in Russia and its neighbouring countries from the fifteenth century on had produced an abundance of works of art which adorned churches, palaces and public buildings. For travellers from the Muslim world where there was an antipathy towards the public presentation of images this must have been one of the most visible dilferences between East and West. Nevertheless Muslim visitors remained mostly untouched by these expressions of cultural and religious life in Europe.[1] The reasons for that have to be seen in the aversion to images in particular, but also in an apparent disinterest in questions of European culture and art in general.[2]

It seems, therefore, worth asking whether Oriental non-Muslims who had no religious reservations against images developed another and more differentiated view of this peculiar aspect of the West.

The Arab Christians of the Levant, in particular, had from the end of the sixteenth century begun steadily to consolidate relations with Europe. The increasing personal exchange enlarged the knowledge of the other. European missionaries, merchants, diplomats and scholars came to the Near East, and Oriental Christians travelled to Europe for purposes of study and business.[3] In this regard Oriental Christians were much more active than their Muslim fellow-countrymen who still to a large degree hesitated to travel to the lands of "the infidel"[4]

Although the first aim of these journeys was not to write reports, some of these Christian travellers did leave such descriptions of their sojourns in Europe. Five of them—dedicated to journeys to western and south-eastern Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—provide the material basis for answering the question of the degree to which their authors

[1] Cf. Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*, London, 1994, 241f. and idem, *The Middle East*, New York. 1997, 14, 250. On the "abhorrence" the Ottomans felt for images see also the observations ol Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723) and especially a dispute which he "once had with a learned Turk concerning pictures" (cf. Alexandra Dutu, Paul Cernovodeanu [eds.], *Dimitrie Cantemir. Historian of South East European and Oriental civilizations. Extracts from "The History of the Ottoman Empire"*, Bucharest, 1973, 140ff.), or the words of Evliya Çelebi that pictorial descriptions are counted amongst the Muslims as a sin (cf. Milan Adamovic, "Europa im Spiegel osmanischer Reiseberichte", in Tilman Nagel [ed.], *Asien blickt auf Europa. Begegnungen und Irritationen*. Beirut, 1990 [= *Beiruter Texte und Studien*. 39], 65). It is interesting that this attitude of Muslim travellers towards painting and sculpture prevailed far into the nineteenth century (cf. Nazik Saba Yared. *Arab Travellers and Western Civilization*. London, 1996, 55).

[2] On the Muslims' limited interest in European matters, see Lewis, The Muslim Discovery', 119. 158f. (on the state of knowledge on Europe, 135ff.)

[3] Cf. Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme Catholi- que*, Rome, 1994, 183ff.; Nasser Gemayel, *Les échanges culturels entre les Maronites et l'Europe. Du Collège de Rome (1584) au Collège de 'Ayn-Warqa (1789)*. 2 vols., Beirut, 1984; Laylā al-Sabbāgh, *Al-djāliyāt al-ūrūbiyya fī bilād al-Shām fī l-'ahd al-'uthmānī fī l- qarnayn al-sādis 'ashar wa-l-sābi' 'ashar,* 2 vols., Beirut, 1989.

[4] Cf. Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery*, 61, 91, 105f., 121, 129.

were impressed by images of various kinds and the importance they accredited them in their accounts.

But before giving the word to the travellers themselves it is necessary to emphasise the following point: although images are not seen in Christianity as a taboo one has to keep in mind that these Oriental Christians came from a world that was for around 1000 years dominated by Islam, a fact that naturally exercised a certain influence on Eastern Christianity and its expressions. It should be remembered too that the several Eastern Churches developed a different tradition concerning the use and veneration of images.

The largest number of Christian subjects to the Ottoman sultan had belonged originally to the Byzantine Church. Although icons play an essential role in this tradition and Orthodox churches are well known for their rich decoration, the art of painting was in a state of nearly total neglect in the Arab lands by the middle of the seventeenth century.[5] The few European artists who are reported to have lived in the Arab lands[6] worked mainly for the foreign residents and eventually for some rich from the local nobility, and access to their artistic production was quite limited. So some mainly old icons were practically the only images known to wider circles of Christians in the East, as illuminated manuscripts were rare and precious and European books mostly unread. But the number of churches in which these icons were exposed was small, their structure modest and tiny. Thus in the middle of the seventeenth century there were only five churches for 20,000 Christians in Aleppo, one of them for the largest community, the Greek Orthodox, where some rather old images were venerated by the congregation.[7]

That means that Oriental Christians were nearly as unfamiliar with pictures as Muslims were.

Macarius ibn al-Zaᶜīn and his journey to Constantinople, the Balkans and Russia (1652-1659)

The account here— since it follows a chronological sequence—begins with the travelogue of Macarius ibn al-Zaᶜīm[8]. The burden of immense debts weighing on the See of Antioch precipitated Macarius, who was from 1647 till 1672 Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, to leave his homeland Syria and seek help in "the countries of the Christians". From 1652 till 1659 he stayed abroad travelling through the whole of Moldavia, Wallachia, the Ukraine and Russia. Thanks to the efforts of his son, the archdeacon Paul of Aleppo who accompanied

[5] André Grabar, "Les Icônes Melkites", in [Virgil Cândea (ed.),] *Icônes Melkites, Exposition organisée par le Musée Nicolas Sursock du 16 mai an 15 juin 1969*, Beirut, 1969, 22.

[6] Around the year 1650 two Italian painters worked in Aleppo where they even taught their art to some Armenian students (cf. Ardavazt Surméyan, *La vie et la culture arméniennes a Alep an XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1934, 35; Laure Morgenstern, "Mural Painting", in Arthur Upham Pope [ed.], *A Survey of Persian Art, from Prehistoric Times to the Present*, vol. 2, London, New York, 1939, 1385).

[7] So Mansel remarks on the church of the patriarchate of Constantinople: "Low, and without a visible dome, the mother church of Orthodox Christianity is smaller than most English parish churches. Its principal decoration is the carved wooden iconostasis inside and the double-headed eagle of Byzantium without. The contrast with the glory of the sultans' mosques in Constantinople and of the Catholic counterpart, St Peter's in Rome, is remarkable." (Philip Mansel, *Constantinople. City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924*, Harmonds-worth, 1997, 51f.) For the unimpressive church of the "Greeks" in Aleppo in the seventeenth century see Andreas Tietze, *Sieben Jahre in Aleppo (1656-1663), Ein Abschnitt aus den "Reiß-Beschreibungen" des Wolffgang Aigen*, Wien, 1980, 74.

[8] On the life of this leading personality of Eastern Christianity in the seventeenth century see Carsten-Michael Walbiner, *Die Mitteilungen des griechisch-orthodoxen Patriarchen Makarius Ibn az-Zaᶜīm von Antiochia (1647-1672) über Georgien nach dem arabischen Autograph von St. Petersburg*, Ph.D. thesis, Leipzig, University of Leipzig, 1995, 9ff. and the literature given ther

Macarius to these foreign lands, we have a detailed account of all that happened and all the places the Eastern travellers visited.[9]

Already the Ottoman capital Istanbul offered an abundance of images which Paul found worth mentioning, some of which he even described in great detail.

So when speaking about "the Patriarchal church in Constantinople, dedicated by name to St George"[10], Paul depicts a fresco in a modern manner: the description of the painting is followed by its interpretation, and Paul reveals a good knowledge of Byzantine iconography:

> On the arch of the south tabernacle are painted the figures of Abraham and Melchisedec. The beard of the latter is white, and longer than the beard of Abraham. His head is bound with a red fillet, like Daniel the Prophet's, and his hair hangs loose. He is clothed in a vest resembling the [φελώνιον] (sacerdotal robe) of St. Gregory, bishop of Armenia, with an Armenian (*ṭaqs*) dress, and a brocade (*zīq*) collar. He carries in his hands a kind of white round loaves, with two red crosses on the top. These are the bread and wine which he offered to the Lord. Over is written [Ὁ δίκαιος Μελχίσεδεκ] (The righteous Melchizedek).[11]

Another picture in the same church resembles a modern comic and is perceived by Paul indeed as a speaking image:

> Above the altar, or place of sacrifice, are two portraits; the Patriarch of Alexandria, and the Messiah standing before him in the shape of a young man, under a cupola suported [sic] by two pillars. His garment is rent; and the Patriarch says to him, 'Lord, who rent thy garment?' The answer issuing from the mouth of our lord is: 'Indeed Arius who fell upon me. Is the mouth of Hell lower?' than what he fell.[12]

In the Hagia Sophia, despite its conversion into a mosque and the destruction of several paintings and mosaics, Paul also counted some paintings he felt unable to praise adequately amongst "the beauties" of this building.[13]

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[9] There exists up to now no complete critical edition of the *Riḥlat al-baṭriyark Makāriyūs*. The best work so far is that of Basile Radu, but his edition and French translation covers not more than one third of the whole text (*Voyage du Patriarche Macaire d'Antioche,* in *Patrologia Orientalis* XXII, fase. 1, 1-200; XXIV, fasc. 4, 201-364; XXVI, fasc. 5, 365-484; Paris, 1930, 1933, and 1949). For the following quotations I am mostly leaning on the English translation by F. C. Belfour (*The Travels of Macarius, Patriarch of Antioch: Written by his Attendant Archdeacon, Paul of Aleppo, in Arabic*, 2 vols. in 9 parts, London, 1829-36) of which two parts were available to me in Beirut (Part the First: *Anatolia, Romelia, and Moldavia*, London, 1829; Part the Third: *The Cossack Country, and Muscovy*, London, 1832). In 1932 Laura Ridding published a heavily abridged version of Belfour's translation (*The Travels of Macarius*, London, 1936) which nevertheless gives a good impression of the whole journey. For the *riḥla* as a literary monument see Y. Krachkovskii, "Opisanie puteshestviya Makariya Antiokhiiskogo kak pamyatnik arabskoi geograficheskoi literatury i kak istochnik dlya istorii Rossii v XVII veke", in *Sovetskoe vostokovedenie*, VI. 1949, 185ff. (reprinted in idem, *Izbrannye sochineniya*, vol. 1, Moscow, Leningrad. 1955, 259ff.), and Hilary Kilpatrick, "Journeying towards Modernity. The 'safrat al-baṭrak Makāriyūs' of Būluṣ al-Ḥalabī", in *Die Welt des Islams*, XXXVII/2, 1997, 156ff. On the author, the Archdeacon Paul (1627-69), see Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur. Dritter Band: Die Schriftsteller von der Mitte des 15. bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts (Melchiten, Maroniten)*, Vatican City, 1949 (= *Studi e Testi*, 146), 100ff. and Joseph Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'Eglise Melchite du Ve au XXe siède*, vol. IV/1, Louvain, 1979. 219ff.

[10] This church was erected in 1614 by Patriarch Timotheus II (1612-1620). After several destructions by fire no traces of these paintings remained (cf. Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls. Byzantion - Konstantinupolis - Istanbul bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen, 1977, 138f.)

[11] Belfour. *Travels*, part 1, 18; Radu, *Voyage*, 91.

[12] Belfour, *Travels*, part 1, 18; Radu, *Voyage*, 91f.

[13] Belfour, *Travels*, part 1, 21f.; Radu, *Voyage.* 96f. - Although the Ottomans had removed or covered the paintings and mosaics of the Hagia Sophia after its conversion into a mosque on 29 May 1453 they became

So pictures were recognised by Paul as an important element of the churches he described, and were sometimes the only detail he saw worth mentioning.

When dealing with profane buildings Paul also devoted special interest to images. In the ruins of "the *Aslan Khanah* or House of the Lions"[14] he found "traces of mosaic paintings", depicting wild beasts which he classified exactly: "four lions, one from Algiers (or Africa); the others from our country (Asia); and four panthers from divers countries: a jackal, a fox, three wolves, a hyaena [sic], a head of an ancient elephant, an antique skeleton of a camel-panther (*"zarāfa", Girafa*), together with an ancient crocodile."[15]

That motifs seen in pictures left a lasting impression on Paul's mind is proved by the following quotation where he uses a detail from a picture to explain reality. On the fountain which gave "the Church of Our Lady (Χρυσοπηγή), or, of the Golden Fountain" in Galata its name he says: "The fountain is within the church; and is a well of water, such as they represent in the pictures of Our Lady sitting in a "*harn*" [i.e. "*djarn*" = (stone) basin]..."[16]

But although Constantinople had offered a lot of fascinating views and sights the real surprise awaited Paul and Macarius across the boarder in "the lands of the Christians", where bells were ringing, crosses were erected along the roads, on buildings and tombs, "and the hogs feed at large in the streets"[17]. The countless pictures he saw in the churches and chapels also astonished Paul for their beauty and their perfect execution, and he devoted—as he says himself—"much care and labour" to describing the various images, which he did "not by way of amusement and pastime, but in the sweat of exertion and the weariness of action"[18].

He praised the "able" and "skilful" masters who produced images "painted witch such exalted skill as to ravish the senses"[19], and he shows a certain familiarity with the technical side of painting when he reports on the churches of Russia that "the images and Iconostases displayed in them are of fine workmanship; and the materials used for them are silver, figured silks, and gold leaf or liquid gilding, all of the first quality"[20].

In the art of icon-painting Paul distinguished two principal styles: the Cretan (*iqriṭshī*)[21] and the Muscovite (*maṣkūfī*)[22]. And although the old Greek (Byzantine) painters were for him the great masters of this art, some of the Russian painters could equal them.[23] So he says on "the image of the glorious St. Nicolas"[24] in the Troitsa monastery near Brilmeloka that it is "the performance of a very skilful master, who has painted the human face with so much truth of colouring, feature, and complexion, that you might suppose his work to have been executed by [a] Grecian artist of the first eminence among the Ancients".[25]

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partly visible again after an earthquake in 1509 which caused the plaster to fall down. This remained so till 1717 when a large part of the mosaics was anew painted over (cf. Müller-Wiener. *Bildlexikon*. 91ff.).

[14] Originally built by emperor John I Tzimiskes in 971 as a church and tomb, the later on abandoned building was used by the Ottomans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as an animal-house (*Arslanhane*). Both floors contained old mosaics, partly with inscriptions. After a devastating fire the ruin was tom down in 1804 (cf. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon*, 81).

[15] Belfour, *Travels*, part 1, 23; Radu, *Voyage*, 99.

[16] Belfour, *Travels*, part 1, 27. *harn* is a misreading by Belfour, the word written is *djarn*, cf. Radu, *Voyage*, 104.

[17] Belfour, *Travels*, part 1, 42; Radu, *Voyage*, 146.

[18] Belfour, *Travels*, part 3, 252.

[19] *Ibid*., 296f.

[20] *Ibid*., 271.

[21] Belfour, *Travels*, part 1, 27; Radu, *Voyage*, 104.

[22] *Ibid*., 61 (Arabic text): Radu, *Voyage*, 189.

[23] On Russian iconography and its development, see Nikodim Pavlovich Kondakov, *The Russian Icon*, Oxford, 1927 and V. Svanov, *Das große Buche der russischen Ikonen*, Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 1988.

[24] On the depiction of this saint in Russian iconography, see Kondakov, *The Russian Icon*, 47f.

[25] Belfour. *Travels*, part 3, 251.

Some of these masters used their skills for a more profane end as Paul reports on Kiev: "in this city are found many excellent Cossack painters, skilful masters of their art, who have many ingenious inventions for taking exact portraits of the human face"[26].

But beside this craftsmanship and beauty there was something else that attracted Paul's attention. In the "magnificent and lofty church" of Vaslui[27] in Moldavia Paul saw beside "pictures and images of all the Saints"[28] also the following:

> Upon the gate, above the lowest wall, is a picture of the Last Judgment, in gold azure, with Moses leading Hanna and Caiaphas, and the other Jews, towards our Lord. They are depicted with woeful countenances. Behind them is another troop: they are Turkish figures, with their white shawls and turbans; their large flowing green caftans, with long sleeves, hanging behind; and their harims, or inner festive dresses, of yellow woollen. They are accompanied by their Dervishes. Behind them, and in the midst of them, are Devils driving them on, and mocking them. The Kashidbari[29] is at the front of them, in his cap; and one of the wicked Devils is climbing on his shoulder, and upsetting his cap from his head.[30]

Such open ridicule of the Ottoman authorities must have been something new and incredible for Paul[31], but it seems that he was not too shocked by the treatment meted out to the poor official by "one of the wicked devils".

Although Paul as an Orthodox was used to the veneration of icons by believers, what he saw in Russia exceeded all he had seen before:

> Here all, both at the doors of their houses and of their shops, and also on the public streets and roads, set up holy images; to which every person, as he enters or goes out, turns his face and crosses himself. So, likewise, whenever they come within sight of a church-door, they bow to the images from a distance. Over the gates of their cities too, and of their castles and forts, they always have an image of Our Lady withinside, and an image of Our Lord without, inclosed [sic!] within a latticed alcove, with lamps burning day and night: and to these the passengers bow as they go in and out. They have likewise crosses erected on the tops of their towers. This is indeed a blessed country, and here the Christian faith is preserved in its undoubted purity.[32]

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[26] *Ibid*., 240. For the admiration Paul showed for the skills and inventions of the Cossack painters see also infra note 34. On Ukrainian iconography in general, see Ludmilla Miljaeva. *Die ukrainische Ikone (11.-18. Jahrhundert). Von den byzantinischen Quellen bis zum Barock.* Bournemouth, 1996.

[27] On Vaslui, a small provincial town south of Yassi in Moldavia, which was in the time of Macarius' visit one of the residences of the ruler of Moldavia, see Dimitrie Cantemir, *Beschreibung der Moldau*, Bucharest, 1973 (facsimile of the edition Frankfurt, Leipzig, 1771), 55.

[28] On mural paintings in Moldavia, see I. D. Ştefanescu, *L'art byzantin et l'art lombard en Transylvanie. Peintures murales de Valachie et de Moldavie*, Paris, 1938, and idem. *Arta feudala in tarile Române. Pictura murala şi icoanele de la origini pîna în secolul al XIX- lea*, Timişoara, 1981.

[29] Title of uncertain meaning. Radu gives as a variant to *al-Kashīdbārī: al-Kashīdyārī* (Radu, *Voyage*, 154), a form that is later on used by Belfour in the description of another painting too (*Travels*, part 3. 230; Radu, *Voyage*. 478).

[30] Belfour, *Travels*, part 1, 47; Radu, *Voyage*, 153f. On this common feature of the last judgement in Eastern Christian art, see Joseph von Hammer, *Constantinopolis und der Bosporos*, vol. 1, Osnabrück, 1967 (reprint of the edition 1822), 450, and B[eat] Brenk, "Weltgericht", in Engelbert Kirschbaum (ed.), *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 4: *Allgmeine Ikonographie*: *S-Z, Nachträge*, Rom, Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 1994, coll. 513-523, especially 513-516, 522.

[31] Such a surprising appearance of Turkish figures in Christian paintings was also observed by Paul at other occasions (cf. Belfour, *Travels*, part 1, 59 [Arabic text], Radu, *Voyage*, 185; Belfour, *Travels*, part 3, 230, 242, Radu, *Voyage*, 478). On the depiction of Turks in Christian iconography, see A. Lengyel, "Türken", in Kirschbaum, *Lexikon*, vol. 4, coll. 391-93.

[32] Belfour, *Travels*, part 3, 273.

That pictorial art could also be a subject of heavy dispute and church policy were matters that the Oriental travellers were to learn during their stay in Moscow. The Russian patriarch Nicon, who tried to carry out a reform of the Russian ecclesiastical and liturgical rites and customs according to what he thought to be the true Greek tradition, made icon-painting one target of his activities. Kondakov describes it thus:

> In connexion with Nicon's reform of the Slavonic service-books which began in 1655, were published fresh demands for a strict watch against novelties in icon-painting.
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> Paul of Aleppo gives us very interesting information as to Nicon's attack upon 'new icons drawn after the fashion of Frankish and Polish pictures', and his own comments are valuable. He says that Nicon was devoted to Greek models but at the same time exceedingly self-willed. He ordered all newfangled icons to be collected and brought to him from wherever they might be, even from the houses of high officials. He put out the eyes of the icons and the *strêltsy* (Tsar's bodyguard) bore them round the town proclaiming that any one who should henceforward paint such icons should suffer exemplary punishment.
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> 'As the Muscovites have the very greatest affection and love for icons, they do not consider the beauty of the picture nor the skill of the artist: for them all icons, beautiful or ugly, are on a level; they reverence even an icon which is nothing more than a sketch on paper. Every soldier has upon his breast a beautiful icon in the form of a triptych from which he will never be parted: wherever he stops, he puts it up in a conspicuous place and bows to it. When the Muscovites saw how the Patriarch [Nicon] was treating the icons, they thought him to be wrong, were offended and disturbed and regarded him as an iconoclast. At this time there happened to be a pestilence and the sun was darkened just before sunset on the second of August [1655]. The Tsar, the Patriarch, and the great people left the city. When the plague abated began the council about the new icons. The Patriarch anathematized and excommunicated all who should make or keep such icons. He took one icon after another in his right hand, showed it to the people and dashed it down to shatter it upon the iron floor-slabs; then ordered that they should be burnt. The Tsar was standing close to us with bared head, silently listening to the sermon, but as he was very pious and devoted he quietly begged the Patriarch, 'No, Father, do not burn them. Let them be buried in the ground'. And this was done.'[33]

This hard position concerning artistic questions was surely something new to the guests from the Arab lands who had had while being in the Ukraine nothing but praise for the skilful Cossack painters who were able to depict portraits according to the European manner and even made use of their skills for the painting of Orthodox icons.[34]
Up till the mid seventeenth century before entering a stage of decadence and simple imitation Russian icon-painting saw the production of artistic products of original value which were highly esteemed and sought after by Oriental visitors to the Muscovite Empire.[35]

During his stay in Russia Macarius received several icons as presents;[36] these he took back home to Syria and they may have had an influence on ideas about iconography there. Macarius became furthermore familiar with the custom of painting portraits of honoured visitors from abroad. While being in the Ukraine he saw portraits of the patriarchs Joachim of

[33] Kondakov, *The Russian Icon*. 189f.; cf. also Paul Meyendorff. *Russia, Ritual, and Reform. The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century,* Crestwood, NY, 1991, 51.
[34] Radu, *Voyage*, 433
[35] Kondakov, *The Russian Icon*. 143.
[36] Ridding, *The Travels of Macarius*, 53, 69, 74, 90.

Antioch[37] and "Theophanus of Jerusalem and others too"[38], and finally his own likeness was captured on canvas by a Russian painter.[39]

So the world of religion in "the countries of the Christians", but especially in Russia with its visible expressions in liturgy and art marked a sharp contrast to the expressions of Orthodox belief practised in the Arab lands, a fact that prompted Paul to see himself and his flock as "we poor Syrians".[40] But Macarius was a man of activity and it is more than likely that he encouraged with the money and ideas he brought back to his homeland new artistic activities there. Accordingly Leroy sees a direct connection between the journey of Macarius and the revival of icon-painting in Syria,[41] a movement that started in the seventeenth century and in which Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir—a close friend of Macarius—played an important role as the founder of what became known as the Aleppan school.[42]

Raᶜd from Aleppo - Impressions of Venice (1655)

At the time when Macarius and Paul were visiting the Balkans one of their fellow-countrymen, a certain Raᶜd, went on a business trip to Venice. He left an interesting description of his travels and his sojourn in Venice, and as he had to stay there idle for one year he had plenty of time to visit its churches and public buildings.[43]

But Raᶜd was far from being as talented an observer and reporter as Paul. So his descriptions of the abundant paintings and mosaics of Venice are limited and superficial. It seems that Raᶜd was more interested in numbers than in images. In a "description of the Church of St Mark the Evangelist" which introduces his report Raᶜd proves to be an obsessive counter who gives exact information on the numbers of arches, pillars and steps as well as the height, width and length of the different parts of the church. In his description of paintings this exactness is missing. He merely relates the depicted story in a rather colourless and detached way. His description of the mosaic cycle on the front side of the cathedral may serve as an example:

> Over the right door is painted the apostle Marcus, how they take him out of the grave in Alexandria, put him in a basket, cover him with pork and carry him out of the city-gate.

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[37] Patriarch Joachim ibn Ḍaw of Antioch (1580-92) who visited the Ukraine and Russia in the years 1584 till 1586. The portrait was drawn in 1584 in Kiev (Ridding, *The Travels of Macarius*, 92).

[38] Radu, *Voyage*, 669. Theophanes was patriarch of Jerusalem from 1606 to 1644.

[39] This happened in 1668 in Moscow during his second visit there (cf. Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt, "Muqaddimat kitāb riḥlat al-baṭriyark Makāriyūs ilā 1-bilād al-masīḥiyya li-l-shammās Būlus al-Zaᶜīm al-maᶜrūf bi-l-Ḥalabī", in *al-Mashriq*, 5, 1902, 1011; here between pages 1010 and 1011 also a reproduction of the portrait.

[40] Belfour, *Travels*, part 3, 273.

[41] Jules Leroy, "L'illustration du manuscrit syr. 5/14 de Deir Charfet", in *L'Orient Syrien*, IV, 1959, 63 and idem, "L'icône des Stylites de Deir Balamend (Liban) et ses sources d'inspiration", in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, XXXVIII, fasc. 15, Beirut 1962, 358. Cf. the remarks of Virgil Cândea ("Messages de l'icône", in idem, *Icônes Melkites*, 4If.). Kondakov (*The Russian Icon*, XXVI) enclosed the second journey of Macarius through Russia (1666-68) in a "Summary of Russian History so far as it concerns Icon-painting".

[42] On the revival of icon-painting in Aleppo and the Muṣawwir family, see Sylvia Agémian, "Introduction à l'étude des icônes Melkites", in Cândea, *Icônes Melkites*, 101ff.; idem, "Yūsuf al-Ḥalabī, peintre melkite du XVIIe siècle", in *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art*, XVIII, 1981, 55-65; idem, "Ne'meh al-muṣawwir et l'art de la miniature", in *Anuales d'histoire et d'archéologie de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 2, 1983, 74-86; Virgil Cândea, "Messages de l'icône", in idem, *Icônes Melkites*, 41ff.; Ilyās al-Zayyāt, "Anṭākiya al-iqūniyya", in *Tārīkh kanīsat Anṭākiya li-l-Rūm al-urthūdhuks: ayya khuṣūṣiyya?*, Balamand (Lebanon), 1999, 263f.; idem, "Essor de ia tradition iconographique chrétienne en Syrie (XVIl-XIXᵉˢ s.)", Colloque *Les Chrétiens du monde arabe*, Paris, IMA, 1996.

[43] The account on his travel with a preceding detailed description of the cathedral of St Mark is preserved in Ms. Rome, Apostolic Library, Collection Sbath, 89, foll 1b-19b. An edition and a French translation will become part of a forthcoming volume of the *Beiruter Texte und Studien* series on real and fictive descriptions of Italy by Christian Arabs (ed. by Carsten Walbiner et al.). On Raᶜd and his journey, see the sparse information in Graf, *Geschichte*, 157 and Nasrallah *Histoire*, 231.

> The beadles inspect the basket and they show them that in the basket is pork. And the body of the saint is on the bottom of the basket, over and under him is straw. And the beadles cut off the pork at which they feel disgust. And from a rock peak they let him down to a ship ...[44]

The different pictures merge and nothing is said about their execution. So the reader is not told that the scenes described are depicted as mosaics and nor is there any intellectual consideration of the contents. That Ra^{c}d was at least capable of being emotionally touched by some of the images he saw is borne out by expressions like "[a thing] that amazes the view"[45] or "an artistic skill that enraptures the mind"[46] or when he confesses that in front of one of the mosaics he was astonished "because of the shining of the painted wall"[47].

Within the account of his stay in Venice Ra^{c}d speaks only casually of some icons which he regards as a kind of relic.[48] The masterpieces of Bellini, Veronese, Tintoretto, Titian and all the others he must have seen remain unmentioned.

Elias from Mosul in Western Europe and South America (1668-83)

Venice was also the first European spot to be entered in 1668 AD by one Elias from Mosul, a Chaldean priest who went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In order to collect alms he then continued to western Europe where he travelled the following seven years through all of Italy, France, Spain and Portugal. In 1675 AD with the special permission of the Spanish king he even set off for the New World. Thus he became probably the first Arab to write as an eyewitness on America. In 1683 Elias finally returned to the East.[49]

In his report[50] he pays no attention to buildings let alone to their interior design. The two most impressive churches of western Christendom are barely mentioned. Of St Mark's cathedral in Venice he says that the wealth he saw in it "is a thing beyond description"[51], and of St Peter's in Rome he remarks that it is unique in the inhabited world because of its beauty[52]. The churches of Mexico city are also mentioned for being indescribable (*shay lā yūṣaf*) for him.[53] The only place of worship in the new world about which he says a few words is the church of Guadeloupe near Mexico City.[54]

Elias does not mention a single image in his account of western Europe and the Americas. This visible reservation might be explained by the East-Syrian (Nestorian) tradition he was coming from. In Heiler's classic on the Eastern Churches *Urkirche und Ostkirche* we read:

> In den heutigen nestorianischen Kirchen fehlen die Bilder; doch scheinen die Nestorianer in früheren Jahrhunderten, zumal in der Zeit vom 12.-14. Jahrhundert, unter

[44] Ms. Sbath 89, foll. 2b-3a. On these mosaics depicted by Ra^{c}d. see Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice, part 2: The Thirteenth Century, vol. 1: Text*. Chicago, London, 1984. 199ff.
[45] Ms. Sbath 89, foll. 5a, 7a.
[46] *Ibid*., fol. 7b.
[47] *Ibid*., fol. 5a.
[48] *Ibid*., foll. 15b, 18a.
[49] On Elias and his travel to America see Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur. Vierter Band: Die Schriftsteller von der Mitte des 15. bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts (Syrer, Armenier, Kopten, Missionsliteratur, Profanliteratur),* Vatican City*,* 1951 (= *Studi e Testi*, 147), 97ff.; Y. Krachkovskii, *Izbrannye sochineniya*, vol. 4, Moscow, Leningrad, 1957, 682-688; Richard van Leeuwen, *Een Arabier in Zuid-Amerika (1675-1683)*, Amsterdam, 1992; Marina Montanaro (ed.), *Il primo Orientale nelle Americhe*, Mazara del Vallo, 1992.
[50] Antūn Rabbāṭ (ed.), "Riḥlat awwal sā'iḥ sharqī ilā amirkā (1668-1683)", in *Al-Mashriq*, 8, 1905, 821-34, 875-81, 974-83, 1022-33, 1118-29.
[51] *Ibid.,* 827.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *Ibid.,* 1120.
[54] *Ibid.,* 1121f.

byzantinischem Einfluß da und dort Bilder Christi und der Heiligen in den Kirchen aufgestellt zu haben. Eine eigentliche Bilderverehrung blieb jedoch der nestorianischen Kirche immer fremd.[55]

Khiḍr from Mosul on Rome (1725-35)

Another Chaldean who, like Elias, also hailed from Mosul was Khiḍr al-Mawṣilī. Because of his Catholic faith he had to flee from his home, and after a long journey he finally ended up in Rome in 1725. Here he stayed for the next 30 years till his death in 1755. Khiḍr was an educated priest, well versed in Italian, who worked as a scholar and author. His *magnum opus* is a large trilingual (Arabic, Aramaic and Turkish) dictionary in three volumes.[56] By the time Khiḍr wrote his account of his travels to Rome and his first ten years there[57] he was well familiarised with the Italian way of life. As a cleric he naturally devotes special attention to the different churches of Rome. He counted icons and images of the saints amongst the relics. So he mentions especially some antique images, not so much because of their artistic value but for their venerable origin: two images of the Virgin Mary painted by Luke the Evangelist,[58] an image of Christ also attributed to Luke,[59] an image of SS Peter and Paul which Constantine saw in a dream,[60] the picture of Christ which spoke to St Brigit[61] and so on. But real relics which he enlists at length[62] had more significance for Khiḍr. That pictures aroused his interest and exercised a certain impression on him can be learnt from Khiḍr's description of the image of the Virgin in the church of Regina coeli:

> On the feast of the Lady in the middle of August I set out and visited the church Regina coeli, and in it I saw the image of the Lady. She is painted like an empress, and they vested her with the garments of the queens. In her hand is the sceptre of the kings [made] of gold, and on her head [is] a crown which is composed of twelve stars. She sits on a throne that is surrounded by light, and the moon and the stars [are] under her feet. Around her are twelve angels who wear the garment of the angels. It is a thing beyond description, strange to the mind. When men see it their mind is surprised and confused.[63]

But Khiḍr then came across an even more touching picture in the convent of the Jesuits on Monte Cavallo.[64] Here in the cell of St Stanislaus he saw an image of the saint, "a lovely

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[55] Friedrich Heiler, *Urkirche und Ostkirche*, München, 1937, 445.

[56] On his life and work see, Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. 4, 105ff.; Albīr Abūnā, *Adab al-lugha al- ārāmiyya*. Beirut, 1996, 481ff.

[57] Luwīs Shaykhū (ed.), "Rihlat al-qass Khiḍr al-Kaldānī min al-Mawṣil ilā Rūmiyya wa-mā djarā lahu fī ṭarīqihi wa-fī I-madīna al-muqaddassa", in *Al-Mashriq*, 13, 1910, 581-92, 656-68, 735-44, 835-43.

[58] *Ibid*., 656.

[59] *Ibid*., 658.

[60] *Ibid*., 661f.

[61] *Ibid*., 662.

[62] *Ibid*., 660ff., 841f.

[63] Ibid., 664. There is evidence of two churches in Rome which were dedicated to Regina coeli. One was situated at Piazza San Pietro and its existence is documented till the middle of the sixteenth century. The other one stood in Trastevere at the Via Lungara. It was built in 1654 and was finally destroyed in 1870. Cf. M. Armellini, *Le chiese di Roma dal secolo IV al XIX*, Rome, 1891, 655 (for the church in Via Lungara), 780 (for the church at Piazza San Pietro). So Khiḍr speaks most probably about the church in Via Lungara. For a description of the interior of that church see L. Gigli (ed.), *Guide rionali di Roma, Rione XIII: Trastevere,* vol. 1, Rome, 1977, 32, where three altars are mentioned but nothing is said on the picture described by Khiḍr. I have to thank Dr. Alexander Koller from the German Historical Institute (DHI) in Rome who was kind enough to provide me with the information given in this footnote.

[64] The mentioned monastery on Monte Cavallo (i.e. Quirinal) was annexed to the church of S. Andrea al Quirinale. Here the later to be canonised Pole Stanislaus Kostka entered the noviciate only one year before his death in 1568. The image of Stanislaus described by Khiḍr is a sculpture of the saint. It was modelled by Pierre Legros the Younger (1666-1719) and can still be seen today in the chapel of St Stanislaus. Cf. G.

image the like of which I have never come across. It is like a sleeping man, and flowers are around him". What kind of image it was, whether a painting or a sculpture, is not clearly stated. These artistic details seem to have been of no importance to Khiḍr. Images only carried meaning in a religious sense. His primary concern was with visiting a place dedicated to a saint he respected. The image of the saint he found there and which was executed in such admirable a manner remained secondary.

The journey of Yuḥannā Naqqāsh through Northern Italy (1775-77)

The last account I want to incorporate in this short survey was also written by a man who was well acquainted with life in Europe. Yuḥannā Naqqāsh, a monk of the Greek Catholic Shuwayrite order[65], had been living for nearly a quarter of a century in Rome[66] when, in 1775, together with another monk he set off on a trip through Northern Italy and Hungary to collect alms for his order.[67] Although churches and relics were of prime interest for Yuḥannā Naqqāsh too, he also paid due attention to non-sacred attractions like the animal mummies in a museum in Parma or a printing shop in the same city where a book in twenty languages had been produced.[68] Amongst the many things both the monks saw were also "wonderful pictures": *zurnā amākin bi-lā ᶜadad minhā ṣuwar ᶜadjā'ibiyya.*[69] But Naqqāsh gives only one more detailed description of these images. Concerning a visit to the "great Episcopal church" (*kanīsa kabīra kursī al-usqufiyya*) in Siena he remarks:

> They showed us also a cell inside the church in which there were 29 breviaries for the whole year. These books were hand written on paper, and in all the writings were painted saints, flowers and figures, a thing that confuses the mind, precious art, the like of we have never seen [before]. The format of every book is one Istanbul ell[70] in length, and the width is a little bit shorter. [...] We saw painted on the wall of the cell saints, and synods, and popes, paintings on the limed wall, but their painting is wonderful, the painting of the famous Raphael D'Urbino. You see in the paintings the persons [like] real people standing upright; nobody thinks that it is a painting [...].[71]

Conclusion

The conclusion offers no surprise but confirms the expected. Contrary to their Muslim fellow-countrymen Oriental Christians showed no principal discomfort with the unknown

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Giachi, G. Matthiae, *S. Andrea al Quirinale*, Rome, 1969 (= *Le Chiese di Roma illustrate*, 107). Again I thank Dr. Alexander Koller for these details.

[65] On the history of this congregation see Athanāsiyūs Ḥādjdj, *al-Rahbāniyya al-bāsīliyya al-shuwayriyya (al-ḥalabiyya - al-baladiyya) fī tārīkh al-kanīsa wa-l-bilād*, 2 vols., Jounieh, 1974/1978.

[66] The Shuwayrites had had a monastery in Rome granted to them by Pope Clemens XII since 1734 (Ḥādjdj, *al-Rahbāniyya*, 264ff.).

[67] This account too will become part of the abovementioned (note 43) edition and translation of several travel accounts on Italy. For a summary of Naqqāsh's journey, see Michel Abras, "Le voyage de deux moines melkites, en Italie du Nord, en 1775", in Bernard Heyberger, Carsten-Michael Walbiner (eds.), *Les Européens vus par les Libanais à l'époque ottomane*, Beirut, 2002 (= *Beiruter Texte und Studien*, 74) 59-65.

[68] Ms. Ṣarbā, Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ, 261, 17.

[69] Ms. Ṣarbā, Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ, 261, 18.

[70] The Istanbul ell (*dhirāᶜ Iṣtanbūlī*) measured approximately 68 cm, cf. Walther Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte*. Leiden, 1955 in: Bertold Spuler (ed.), *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Ergänzungsband 1, Heft 1, 59.

[71] Ms. Ṣarbā, Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ, 261, 24. Naqqāsh speaks here about the famous Piccolomini Library (Libreria Piccolomini) which is situated in a room beside the nave of Siena Cathedral. The frescoes mentioned were not painted by Raphael but are the last major works of Pinturicchio (c. 1454-1513). They contain 10 scenes from the life of Pope Pius II Piccolomini and were painted between 1503 and 1508. As "in these, space, colour, and detail are handled with a crisp proficiency that may have influenced Raphael" ("Pinturicchio", in *Encydopœdia Britannica*, Multimedia Edition. 1999) the error of Yuḥannā Naqqāsh concerning the painter of the frescoes may nevertheless reveal some artistic competence.

world of images they entered while travelling through Europe. For them art was an essential element of Christian faith. So pictures were mostly seen in a religious context: made to praise God and the saints or to illustrate Christian history and hagiography, they sometimes themselves became objects of veneration. Non-sacred art is hardly recognized in these accounts, and only in one case was the name of a painter thought to be worthy of mention.

But there seems at least evidence to suggest that the images and pictures seen in Europe exercised a certain influence on the imagination of our travellers and—through their reports—also on the Christian communities in the East. They thus helped to pave the way for an active and adoptive recognition of European art in the Arab lands.