



EDITED BY
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VENICE AND THE VENETO DURING THE RENAISSANCE

THE LEGACY OF BENJAMIN KOHL



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**Venice and the Veneto during the
Renaissance: the Legacy of Benjamin Kohl**

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Storm, suicide and miracle: Venice, 1342*

by Trevor Dean

1. *The story*

In the year 1342 on 5 February, a certain school-master gave his body and soul to the devil and hanged himself by the neck. As soon as he was dead, a huge storm rose up, such that it seemed that Venice itself would be submerged. And the water rose so high that the like had never been seen in Venice. And it seems that an old man went to Terra Nova where he found a fisherman who had tied up to a boat at a landing-stage, and this to escape the storm. And the old man asked the boatman to take him to San Giorgio; he replied that this was impossible because of the great storm and that not even the biggest boat in Venice would be able to get there. The old man was able with good words to persuade him, promising also a good reward, and so they went to San Giorgio, where the old man disembarked and went to the church and after a while came out with a young man. Both stepped into the bark and went in the direction of San Niccolò di Lido, even though the fisherman refused to go there out of fear of the great storm. When they arrived at San Niccolò, both men disembarked and went into the church and after a while came out with another man, so that they were now three. And they re-embarked, and they asked to be rowed towards Castelli.

Once beyond Castelli, they saw a ship coming towards them. Approaching the ship, they began to curse and make the sign of the cross; and at once the ship sank. And after it had sunk the weather began to improve and the water to calm. When this took place, they said to the boatman that he should return to San Niccolò, which they did, with the boatman more dead than alive both out of fear of the storm and because he had seen them send the ship to the bottom.

Once they arrived at San Niccolò, the man from there disembarked and went to the church. They left and went on to San Giorgio, where the young man disembarked and went to the church. And the boatman then returned to the spot where he had taken on the old man. Once he had disembarked, the boatman asked him for the generous payment that had been promised, and the old man replied that he did not have any money, but that the boatman should go to the Procurators of St. Mark for them to give him remuneration, and that he should tell them what he had seen, and that the boat that had sunk was full of devils who were coming to submerge the city of Venice, and that this was due to happen on the night of Wednesday at about the 7th hour. But that almighty god had not permitted such damage to occur. The boatman replied that the Procurators would not believe him, so the old man said, "Look, I am the body of St. Mark, and those we took on board were St. George and St. Nicholas. And in order that they believe what you tell them, take this ring", taking it from his finger, "and present it

* All translations are the author's own except where otherwise noted.

to the Procurators, and say that my body is in such-and-such a place in the church, which no one knows but them"¹. Having said this, he disappeared.

The boatman was totally stupefied and amazed, but once he had come to himself, he presented himself to the Procurators and told them all that had happened. When they made fun of him, he showed them the ring and showed them where the body of St. Mark was, and they saw that he was telling the truth and rewarded him. Then the Procurators went to the Doge and Signoria and reported what had happened, and it was agreed that there should be a *festa* and procession for this apparition, which is still held in Venice to this day².

2. Introduction

This is not the only version of the miraculous tale of St. Mark and the boatman. The version usually referred to by historians is that by the sixteenth-century chronicler and diarist Marin Sanudo (1466-1536) in his "Lives of the Venetian Doges"³. Earlier re-tellings include those by Giorgio Dolfin (1396-1458), drawing on an earlier chronicle, and omitting reference to suicide and festival⁴, and by the humanist and official historian of Venice, Marcantonio Sabellico (1436-1506), also lacking any reference to suicide⁵. The account quoted above comes from an anonymous, undated chronicle, which narrates Venetian history up to 1427 in a fifteenth-century or sixteenth-century script, and can be assumed to have been written in the early fifteenth century.

This narration is different from Sanudo's at many points. Sanudo's *récit* is constructed using analepsis, deferring all mention of the suicide until near the end; it dramatizes the dialogue between the boatman and the saint; it acknowledges variants and sources; and it makes the Doge rather than the Procurators the first recipient of the news. Sanudo's date for the event also differs: 25 February 1340 *more veneto*, that is 1341. However, the nature and purpose of the story are the same: it is aetiological, to explain the origin of a solemn procession. Its formal differences from Sanudo's re-telling are also signs that this tale was one that had been told and retold in different versions over the decades. The purpose of this paper is not, however, to examine the variants, but to investigate the particular character of this story as a piece of chronicle reportage. The story is unique in Venetian and even Italian late medieval chronicling for its precise location of a saintly apparition into a historical context and its connection of suicide, weather and demons. This paper demonstrates that uniqueness, evaluates the narrative genre of this

¹ St. Mark's relics were brought to Venice in the ninth century, but subsequently misplaced; on their rediscovery in the late tenth century, they were reburied and the location was kept secret among the Doge, his chaplain and the Procurators of St. Mark: Muir, 86; Labalme, 244.

² British Library, Add. MS 27431, *Cronaca di Venezia*, fols. 147-48.

³ Sanuto, 608-09. Molmenti took his account from Sanudo: Molmenti, 25-26.

⁴ Dolfin, 2:20-21; Zannoni, 524, 526.

⁵ Sabellico, 98-99.

story, explores in a novel way the recounting of suicide, and suggests both how and why devils were added to the memory of a real but unremarkable storm.

3. *Historiography*

The existing scholarship on this story tends to view it as a strange appendage to some other, larger corpus: it has been used by historians of the cult and festivals of St. Mark⁶, by a historian of suicide⁷, and by historians of art, in relation to depictions of the miracle by Palma Vecchio (1480-1528) and Paris Bordone (1500-1571) in an early-sixteenth-century cycle of paintings of the deeds of St. Mark in the Scuola Grande di San Marco⁸. Each in their different ways treats this story as eccentric. For the history of the cult of St. Mark, it is an addendum to the main festival days for this saint, who was physically and ideologically central to the Venetian state: St. Mark's martyrdom commemorated on 25 April, the translation of his relics celebrated on 31 January and the rediscovery of those relics (*inventio*) celebrated on 25 June⁹. In his history of suicide, Alexander Murray treats the story of the storm as an oddly late and Italian version of a type of report found more typically earlier and in Germany, with the suicidal despair induced by the devil having its counterpart in disturbed weather¹⁰. And art historians have stressed how unique this subject is in Venetian painting, with no representation before the sixteenth century, while it has been suggested that the saving of Venice from submersion by devils was an allegory for Venice's survival in the War of the League of Cambrai¹¹. By viewing the story instead as a particular cultural artefact, it is possible to arrive at new perceptions of its themes and its significance.

The story has not been much used by historians of the weather or the climate. Though this storm is listed in Camuffo's list of sea surges in Venice, there is no close examination of the event or the text¹². Alexandre's great catalogue of chronicle references to major weather events in medieval Europe omits it (mainly as too ephemeral), and in any case contains no weather in Venice for the whole of the fourteenth century, hardly using Venetian chronicles at all¹³. But this points to a peculiar feature of fourteenth-century

⁶ Tramontin, 57-58; Labalme, 248; Urban, Romanelli, Gandolfi, 23-25. But the episode and its associated festival are not mentioned by Renier Michiel or by Mazzarotto.

⁷ Murray, 1:112-13.

⁸ Bailo and Biscaro, 174-79; 41-46; Puppi, 95-108; Rylands, 243-44; Fortini Brown, 237-39.

⁹ Muir, 76-88. Muir's source is Tramontin, and he implies (*ibid.*, 89) that the miracle story was contemporaneous with the storm.

¹⁰ Lederer, 1089-90. Separately, for suicidal despair and demons' power over weather: Minois, 9, 32-34; Clark, 163, 186.

¹¹ Rylands, 244.

¹² Camuffo, 9. Also: Camuffo, Secco, Brimblecombe and Martin-Vide, 213, 215.

¹³ Alexandre, 425-539. Andrea Dandolo's chronicle is used once, for an event in 1114: *ibid.*, 240.

Venetian chronicles, not to any failing on Alexandre's part: they are unusually spare in their references to the weather, partly because of their biographical structure around the lives and deeds of each successive Doge: election, character, actions in peace and war, death¹⁴. "The narration of facts is summary, seen from above, with little or nothing of the interior life of the city", and with "no space for miracles"¹⁵. So it is not surprising that there is little weather in the chronicle by Raffaino de' Caresini, apart from mentions of sea storms during the War of Chioggia¹⁶. The only weather event in the *Cronaca A Latina* is precisely the storm of 25 February 1342, but narrated very briefly: the water rose so ferociously in Venice, it says, that no living person had seen water so high¹⁷. Piero Giustinian's "History of Venice", covering the period from the foundation of the city to 1358, reports only two floods from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: this one in 1342, and a previous one in December 1284, both described in similarly formulaic and spare terms¹⁸. The other major fourteenth-century chronicle, by Enrico Dandolo, is similarly concise in its reporting of this same event, noting the date and time ("nocte"), the scale of the storm ("grandissima") and subsequent flooding ("the water rose one pace above usual") and the damage to merchandise¹⁹. None of these chronicles suggest that there was anything supernatural in the flooding of 1342: unusual because of its height, but not warranting anything beyond formulaic reportage. Nor were there any detectable ripples in the records of the Venetian Senate²⁰.

By the fifteenth century, Venetian chronicle-writing had overcome and jettisoned the dogal structure and the focus on civic glories alone: in Carile's words, narration became more extended and more curious, and the chronicles became diaries, with their attention on the picturesque and their neglect of explanation²¹. Thus in Domenico Malipiero's annals for the second half of the fifteenth century there is a record of the weather similar to that found, but much earlier, in the chronicles of other Italian cities: flooding, wind storms, ice, rain, lightning and drought, with their accompaniment of damage to ships and merchandise, to roofs and *campanili*, and their infliction of human casualties, drowned in wind-storms or burned by lightning²². For the event of 1342, the

¹⁴ Carile, 87-88.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁶ *Raphayni de Caresinis*, 42, 44, 54. On this chronicle: Arnaldi and Capo, 291-96.

¹⁷ "Anno Domini 1341 die 25 februaryii in nocte crevit aqua tam vehementer in Venetiis quod aliquis vivens non vidit suo tempore aquam ad unum cubitum tam magnam": *Cronaca "A Latina"*, 154.

¹⁸ "Die xxv februaryii, sub noctis taciturnitate aque II pedibus in Veneciis fuerunt ultra solitum altiores": *Venetiarum historia*, 224 (cf. the 1284 flood, *ibid.*, 192: "sub noctis silentio aque maritime fuerunt in Veneciis multo solito altiores").

¹⁹ "Corando MIII^cXLI, di XXV de fevrer, de nocte fu grandissima fortuna in Venesia et crescé l'aqua preso un passo plù ch'al modo uxado, unde molte merchadantie se guastone": *Cronica di Venexia*, 120.

²⁰ *Records of the Venetian Senate*.

²¹ Carile, 104-10.

²² "Annali veneti", 654, 665, 681, 686, 696, 700, 707, 709.

brevity of contemporary reportage had already given way to extended myth-making by the 1390s, it seems: an anonymous chronicle of 1396, transcribed in 1464, contains the miraculous story (without, however, any reference to a suicide, and mis-dating the event by one year)²³.

4. *Another effect of the War of Chioggia?*

At some point between fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this note of a storm and flood evolved in two ways: its precise dating was lost²⁴, and it had a major civic miracle attached to it. It is tempting to look for some crisis in Venetian public life to explain this accretion. Between 1342 and the early fifteenth century, the largest crisis in Venetian life, apart from the Black Death, was the war between Venice and Genoa known as the War of Chioggia, 1378-1381, which, as Varanini has suggested, had consequences of the largest scope: financially, socially and in terms of Venetians' sense of security²⁵. The war had "demonstrated the vulnerability of the lagoon", as Venice was blockaded by Hungarian forces to the north and by combined Paduan and Genoese forces in and around the lagoons²⁶. The town of Chioggia fell to the Genoese in August 1379, "a stunning blow"²⁷. In this context, demons sailing into the Venetian lagoon could easily stand as proxies for invading Genoese ships. Moreover, a sense of hostile forces irrupting into and degrading the old order perhaps persisted after the war, as Jewish moneylenders were first admitted, then expelled, as citizenship was granted to foreigners, as Venetian private wealth was consumed and as a group of *popolani* was admitted to the patriciate²⁸. Could the demonic invasion have resonated with anti-semitic, xenophobic, classist sentiment?

5. *Uniqueness*

The contrast between the spareness of fourteenth-century reports of the storm and the length and detail of fifteenth-century versions conforms to a general evolution in Italian chronicle writing between thirteenth and fifteenth

²³ Bailo and Biscaro, 178. The fourteenth-century chronicles agree that the year was 1341 (m.v., i.e. 1342).

²⁴ All the later sources, except the one translated and transcribed here, agree on the day and the month, but vary the year. There remains the possibility that the later sources refer to a separate storm, but this seems unlikely: what would the sources have been?

²⁵ Varanini, 201-02.

²⁶ For the Paduan involvement: Kohl, 205-18.

²⁷ Lane, 192.

²⁸ Mueller, 34-39; Romano, 154-55, who writes of "greater status consciousness" and an "accelerating sense of social exclusivity" among patricians after the war.

centuries, which increasingly gave greater narrative space to severe weather events²⁹. But the particular contours of this tale are unique: though religiosity is often associated with the reporting of storms and floods in chronicles, this mostly takes the form either of attributing causation to God's anger, or of praying to God to withhold further punishment. The combination of elements in this tale – demonic intervention triggered by a suicide and repulsed by a saintly apparition – is found nowhere else in Italian medieval chronicles. The two connections, between suicide and storms and between storms and demons, were not generally evident. Suicide is usually treated in a matter-of-fact manner by chroniclers: they give the date, and they state the name, occupation and situation of the person, they sometimes suggest a cause, they specify the means of self-killing, and they mention how or where the body was disposed of. None of them make any connection to storms or demons³⁰. Even though it is said, on the basis of an early-fourteenth-century sermon, that hail storms “were regarded” as the work of demons who lived in the “middle air”³¹, it is difficult to find traces of such a belief in reports of actual weather events.

There is one exception, and that too is Venetian. It comes in a chronicle description of a human incident during a great storm dated (perhaps misdated) to August 1410. The chronicle first records the intensity of the storm and the range of damage that it caused: boats sank returning from Mentone and people drowned, chimneys and *campanili* were brought down, damaging houses below. And then, during the storm, “many monstrous forms” were seen in the air, “ugly creatures”, which put all the people in shock and was interpreted as an omen of some great evil. It was said that the wife of one Zuè de Cattaro bavearol, who was possessed (*insperitada*) uttered great cries to stop her husband from going to Mestre, because she said that she could see in the air many demons, naming many spirits, even though at that moment the air was quiet and serene. Her husband was not stopped by her words ... and was drowned with all the others in his boat³².

The closest to this that any chronicle from other cities comes is the report in 1498 by a churchman of Orvieto when he saw during a storm a black-red cloud which seemed to contain the face of a man, “ugly and dishevelled”, shouting thunderously³³. Only Venetian chroniclers see the forms in the air as demons.

²⁹ Dean, 2011.

³⁰ Ferrarini, 230, 236, 264; Giovanni di Maestro Pedrino, 2:315; Conforto da Custoza, 23; *Chronicon estense*, 98; “Diario di Ser Tommaso di Silvestro”, 56; Landucci, 56.

³¹ Frugoni and Frugoni, 44-45. Delcorno, 1989: 115, reported that this ‘doctrine’ had been traced to the Church Fathers.

³² “molte forme mostruose in aire ... brutti criadori”, “cosa che messe in spavento tutto il populo e fu interpretato per augurio di qualche gran mal. Fu dito che la moglie d’un Zuè de Cattaro bavearol ch’era insperitada messe gran gridi per impedir el dicto suo marido che non andasse a Mestre perche la diceva veder l’agiere pien di demoni nominando molti spiriti nientedimeno in quel ora l’agiere era tranquillo et seren. Il dicto suo marido non restò però per le sue parole”: British Library, Add. MS 8582, fols. 141v-42.

³³ “Diario di Ser Tommaso di Silvestro”, 125.

Yet even in Venice this perception was not always made. Compare the account of the 1410 Venetian storm to another account of a wind-storm in that city in 1409 (possibly the same event), this one from a nunnery³⁴. The description is similar in initial structure: the intensity (“so terrible that old men said they had never seen its like”), and the extent of human and material damage (the boats submerged and people drowned, the corpses found in the canal, the ruined houses, the collapsed *campanili* and chimneys), but then, instead of reporting an “it was said”, the nuns’ chronicle continues a trajectory from the broader picture to the particular, from effects on others to effects on selves: “God willed that we had part of this tribulation”, as the top of their own *campanile* collapsed, along with a chimney, and the wall of their vineyard fell down, such that any lay person could enter the monastery, and this required the nuns to mount guard at night for fear of thieves. The damage is interpreted as god-sent, but is not over-interpreted (sent by god as punishment, or test, or warning); it is not seen as demonic. And the author quickly passes from the light-touch of the divine hand to the very practical, non-spiritual consequences: the exposure of the nuns to the risk of thieving because of the gap in the vineyard wall. There is no suggestion here of a devotional lesson being drawn by either the nuns or the chronicler, as the nuns, perhaps typically, focus on their internal world and on emblems of their vulnerability to men³⁵.

6. Genre

The tale of the boatman and the three saints seems to belong to some other, non-historical branch of literature, and it is worth exploring its relation to biblical templates, folk tales, saints’ lives and didactic-pastoral *exempla*. First, the element of a nameless traveller who turns out to be holy or divine has analogues in Tobias’ experience on the road to Rages (a story that also included the dispelling of a demon) or the Christian disciples on the road to Emmaus (as well as roots or analogues in classical myth). More broadly, the tale follows some of the basic rules of folk-tale construction. The heroes arrive unrecognised. They set a difficult task, a test of endurance and obedience for the boatman. After their victory over the villain, their identity is revealed. Their human helper is rewarded³⁶. Yet the tale is located in a specific historical time, starts with a real historical event, and ends with a real historical consequence. Thirdly, as hagiography, the tale has numerous analogues. The saint who saves the city is a common topos, whether it be St. Nicholas feeding the starving city of Myra through the miracle of the replenished grain cargos³⁷, or the Virgin

³⁴ Riccoboni, 274-75. And see *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent*.

³⁵ Lowe, 37, 40, partly suggests this. The sacred and contested value of the nunnery wall is addressed by Dean, 2008, 1-9.

³⁶ Propp, 60-61; Thompson.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

Mary defending Siena in battle against the Florentines in 1260³⁸, or St. Clare saving the city of Assisi from attack by Frederick II's Saracen troops³⁹, or St. Leo saving Rome from Attila, with the persuasive aid of a great, ghostly warrior menacingly visible only to Attila himself⁴⁰. But none of these examples involved saintly apparitions: Leo, Nicholas and Clare were all alive when they performed these acts of rescue, while the Virgin Mary, who did make apparitions, did not do so in Siena in 1260. Nor did any of them involve devils: when Mary intervened to fight off a devil, her aim was to save an individual soul, not a whole city⁴¹.

So, if not history, the tale of St. Mark and the boatman is not clearly folk tale or hagiography either. Can the tale be considered as part of exemplary literature? In general, the miracle of 1342 conforms to Le Goff's classic definition of an *exemplum*: "un récit bref donné comme véridique et destiné à être inséré dans un discours ... pour convaincre un auditoire par une leçon salutaire." The tale is certainly presented as true, and the pull towards a salutary lesson is evident in the version quoted above, which locates the origin of the demon-ship in the schoolmaster's suicide. Moreover, the tale is set in historical time, and reports a fact from the daily life of anonymous, lower class people ("a certain schoolmaster", "a fisherman"), two of the further characteristics of *exempla* noted by Peter van Moos⁴². And in its treatment of disaster, this tale follows the pattern traced by Jacques Berlioz, in which *exempla* replace natural reasons for disaster with moral and theological ones: the action of the devil and demons, and divine punishment⁴³. This can be seen in thirteenth and fourteenth collections of *exempla*, in which witnesses report seeing angry or dancing demons at the sites of disaster; disasters reveal sins; lightning strikes those who mix the sacred and profane (blasphemers, those who dance or have sex in church, those who fornicate at Easter, priests who keep concubines), and demons who force their ways into sacred spaces and hit people as they flee, can be stopped in their tracks and put to flight by the sign of the cross or by a saving formula ("Salve regina")⁴⁴. The visibility and malevolence of demons in the tale of St. Mark conforms to their prominence in *exempla*.

³⁸ Webb, 251-67.

³⁹ Bartoli, 214-19.

⁴⁰ de Voragine, I, 339; Zannoni, 1236.

⁴¹ Thus the *Madonna del soccorso* in the Cappella Velluti, Florence, attributed to Domenico di Zanobi: *La chiesa e il convento di Santo Spirito*, 248.

⁴² van Moos, 76.

⁴³ Berlioz, 168-69.

⁴⁴ *Anecdotes historiques*, 169-70, 269-70, 342, 398-99; *Catalogue of Romances*, 132, 633, 664; *Caesarius Heisterbacensis*, 2:38-9; Klapper, 324. Italian *exempla* of the fifteenth century have not been well studied: fifteen years ago Delcorno called their study "presque inexistante": Delcorno, 1998: 160.

However, this Venetian tale is much longer than most *exempla*, and there is a clear disproportion between the “salutary lesson” and the narrative of the embarking of the three saints. Moreover, St. Mark is not a frequent presence in collections of *exempla*, while St. George appears only as a slayer of the dragon (which also saved a city)⁴⁵. St. Nicholas does appear more frequently, including in stories in which he saved a servant struck by lightning, and in which he saved pilgrims imperilled by the devil’s gift of oil⁴⁶. This latter *exemplum* comes, in fact, from the “Life of St. Nicholas”, and is preserved in *The Golden Legend* (I paraphrase). To stop pagan idolatry, Nicholas had a tree dedicated to Diana cut down. This infuriated the devil. Assuming the form of a nun, he came alongside a ship of people en route to visit Nicholas, and persuaded them to take his gift of oil to Nicholas. Another ship approached with a figure resembling Nicholas who asked them what the nun had said to them. “That was Diana herself”, he said, “and if you want proof, throw that oil over the water.” They did and it burst into flames⁴⁷.

This miracle story bears some similarities to the 1342 miracle in both the behaviour of its actors and the mode of its telling: human action that unleashes demonic destructive anger; the saint who takes a boat to ward off the danger; and the delayed exposure of the peril. So it may be that a story-structure based on a legend of St. Nicholas, the patron of mariners, dispelling a sea-borne demonic menace, was elaborated (the triplication of saints), refocused (the relation of command and obedience between St. Mark and the boatman) and re-framed (the suicidal opening, the festival ending) before being attached to a historical event some four or five decades earlier, in order to respond to a crisis in confidence and security brought about by the War of Chioggia.

7. Conclusion

This is an essay in extrapolation and suggestion, which raises questions for the study of Venetian medieval historiography and for the relation between stories of severe weather events and political/social contexts. Two Venetian chronicles, preserved in the British Library, contain highly unusual responses to storms: how characteristic are they of the large, and largely understudied, mass of Venetian fifteenth-century diaries? This remains a question for future research. For medieval observers, it might be argued, severe weather arrived “over-determined”, its meanings already scripted, because of its association with the devil and because of the role of saints in dispelling it, but this essay suggests a different character and mechanism to the chroniclers’ understanding of storms – those that were explicitly linked to saints or devils

⁴⁵ Tubach, 175, 182, 247.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 477.

⁴⁷ de Voragine, 1:23 (I have abbreviated and paraphrased the translation).

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were rare, and those that were so linked had gendered characteristics (told by men about women, not by women about men) or needed major political crises to transform them into multi-variant retellings, as in the case of the three saints and the ship full of demons.

Appendix

British Library, Add. MS 27431, Cronaca di Venezia, fols. 147-48

Et nel anno 1342 alli 5 febraro uno certo maestro di scuola se dette al diavolo in anima e corpo et se apiccò per la gola. Morto che fu, subito se levò una grandissima fortuna a^a tale che pareva che Venetia se havesse a somergere, et le aque crescono tanto che mai in Venetia furono viste le maggiori dove parse uno vechiarelo andasse in Terra nova, ove trovò un certo pescatore che si era andato a ligar ad una nave che vi si faceva in un squero, et ciò per schifar tal fortuna. Et gionto che fu ditto vechiarelo, disse al pescatore che lo gerasse^b fino a San Zorzi, al che lui rispose che era impossibile per la gran fortuna et che a ciò non vi era bastante la maggior nave di Venetia. Il ditto vechiarelo li sepe con bone parole tanto persuadere prometendoli ancho bon premio che contentò, et così andorno a San Zorzi maggiore, et ditto vechiarelo smontato in terra andò in la giesia. Et stato che fu alquanto uscite fuori con un giovine, et ambi dui montorno in ditta barcha et andorno alla volta di San Nicolò di Lio, anchora che ditto pescator recusasse volerli andar per paura della gran fortuna che era, et gionti a San Nicolò tutti ivi desmontorno in terra et andorno nella giesia, et di poi alquanto uscirono con uno altro a tale che erano tre. Et intrati in barcha fecero vogar alla volta di Castelli, et usciti de Castelli videnò una nave che veniva a velo, et approssimandosi detta nave questi li cominciarono a maledire facendoli il segno della santa croce et ditta nave subito se sommerse. Et summersa che fu il tempo incominciò a bonazare et dar giù le aque. Et fatto ciò dissero al barcharolo che tornasse a San Nicolò de Lio, et così ritornò ditto barcharolo più morto che vivo, si per paura della fortuna come per haver visto che costoro havevano fatto andar quella nave a fondi. Et gionti che furno a San Nicolò quello che venne de li dismontò in terra e andò in giesia, et partiti de li vennero a San Zorzi et così quel altro giovine dismontò in terra et intrò in giesia. Poi detto barcharolo ritornò al loco dove havea levato quel vechiarelo, et smontato che fu de barcha ditto barcharolo li adimandò la promessa che li havea facta cioè di pagarli benissimo. Onde ditto vecchio li rispose che non haveva danari, ma che andasse da procuratori della giesia di San Marco che loro li darian una bona provision, et che li narrasse quanto havea veduto et che la nave che era summersa era piena di diavoli quali venivano a sommergere questa città di Venetia, et che ciò dovea esser il mercore di notte venendo il giovedì circa le 7 hore, ma che l'omnipotente Idio non ha voluto permetter che incorra tanto danno. Il barcharolo rispose rispose che li procuratori non ge lo crederanno, allora il vecchio li disse "sapi che io son il corpo de San Marco et quello levassimo a San Zorzi era San Zorzi, et quello da Lio era San Nicolò, et aciò habiano a dar fede questo che tu li dirai piglia questo anello et presentilo alli procuratori", cavandoselo del dito, "et oltre di ciò dilli che il mio corpo è in tal loco della giesia che niun altro che loro non lo sa", et ditte queste parole disparve. Et detto barcharolo rimase tutto stupefatto et attonito, et in se rehauto andò a presentarsi alli procuratori narrandoli tutto questo era intervenuto. Et loro facendosene beffe di lui, li mostrò l'anello et li palentò dove era il corpo di San Marco, donde vedendo che quanto diceva era la verita lo premiorno et poi andorno ditti procuratori al Dose e alla Signoria et li narrorno tutto il successo, per il che fu terminato che in sì fatto giorno si facesse festa et procession per tale apparition qual fin al di d'hoggi si costuma a fare in Venetia.

^a *thus in the text for e*

^b *thus in the text, with the meaning of 'condusse', 'portò'*

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Abstract

Starting with a previously unpublished version of the apparition of Sts Mark, George and Nicholas to quell a storm in the Venetian lagoon in 1342, this contribution investigates the uniqueness of this story as a piece of chronicled history in the context of environmental historiography. A chief aim is to investigate the development of a simple account of a storm into a major piece of hagiography, and to propose a time and reason for that development. In doing this, the contribution takes account of the evolving character of Venetian chronicle-writing, and the fuzzy borders between history, hagiography and exemplary literature.

Keywords

Middle Ages; 14th century; Venice; hagiography; chronicle; sources

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