

## Transformations of the Edessa Portrait of Christ

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August 15<sup>th</sup> 944 was a day of great jubilation and excitement for the citizens of the capital of the Byzantine Empire, for on it one of the most precious relics, the famous mandylion bearing the imprint of the face of Christ, came to the end of its long journey from Edessa, to be escorted in solemn procession into Constantinople; the following day the relic was taken in procession to the great church of the Holy Wisdom, and then finally found its resting place in a chapel of the imperial palace. An annual commemoration of the image, on 16<sup>th</sup> August, was inserted into the liturgical calendar.<sup>1</sup> Earlier in the year of 944 the Byzantine Emperor, Romanos I, had managed to reach an agreement with the Muslim authorities that they would be willing to hand it over in exchange for 200 Muslim prisoners and 12,000 pieces of silver.<sup>2</sup> Probably not long after its arrival in Constantinople, the mandylion was portrayed on an icon that is still preserved in the Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai.<sup>3</sup> The icon is divided up into four fields: on the top right King Abgar is seated, and in his hands he holds the mandylion with the face of Christ clearly visible to the viewer; to the left is a smaller figure who stands and makes a gesture; he is, of course, Hannan, Abgar's messenger who conveyed his letter to Christ in Jerusalem. In the top left panel is another seated figure, clothed in white, and alone: this will be Addai (or Thaddaios in the Greek tradition), the apostle of Edessa. On the panels below are

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<sup>1</sup> Thus a long account (largely based on the *Narratio*, for which see note 2) is found in H. Delehayé (ed.), *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Bruxelles, 1902), cols 893-901 (for August 16<sup>th</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> The details are given in section 56 of the *Narratio* ("account"), written shortly after the transfer to Constantinople; the text is edited by E. von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder* (Texte und Untersuchungen XVIII; Leipzig, 1899), pp.39\*\*.-85\*\*. This work, which includes a collection of most of the relevant texts, remains of fundamental importance. (Two relevant texts have been published subsequently, both in the *Revue des études byzantines* 55 (1997): a homily by the Archdeacon Gregory (perhaps dating from 945), and a late twelfth-century text on the mandylion). The recent bibliography on the history of the Edessa portrait is extensive; of particular importance are: A. Cameron, "History of the image of Edessa", in her *Changing Cultures in Early Byzantium* (Aldershot, 1996), ch. XI, and H.J.W. Drijvers, "The image of Edessa in the Syriac tradition", in H.L. Kessler and G. Wolf (eds), *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation* (Villa Spelman Colloquia 6; 1998), pp.13-31; this volume contains a number of other contributions of relevance.

<sup>3</sup> An illustration can be found in S.P. Brock and D.G.K. Taylor (eds), *The Hidden Pearl*, II. *The Heirs of the Ancient Aramaic Heritage* (Rome, 2001), p.49. (A section on the image is to be found on pp.122-5). On this icon, see K. Weitzmann, "The mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos", *Cahiers archéologiques* 11 (1960), pp.163-84.

two pairs of standing saints, St Paul of Thebes and St Antony on the left, and St Basil and St Ephrem on the right.

The mandylion remained in Constantinople until 1204, when it was part of the spoils seized by the Crusaders who infamously sacked the capital. Its subsequent fate is totally unknown, a situation that has left ample room for speculation, with among the modern claimants are icons in the church of St Bartholomew degli Armeni in Genoa, and in the Vatican Museum (formerly in San Silvestro in Capite, in Rome), and even the Turin Shroud.<sup>4</sup> That a similar relic was in Rome by 1208 is indicated by the fact that Pope Innocent III instituted a ceremonial procession and liturgical office for it.<sup>5</sup> Eighty years later the monk Rabban Sauma, who had travelled all the way from the region of (modern) Beijing in China as an ambassador for Argun, the Mongol Ilkhan, saw in St Peter's 'the piece of pure linen on which our Lord had impressed his own image in order to send it to King Abgar of Edessa'.<sup>6</sup> Although it seems that Abgar's connection with the relic was subsequently largely forgotten in Rome, being replaced by the legend of Veronica, nevertheless in the middle of the sixteenth century the Syrian Orthodox priest Moses of Mardin, who assisted in the production of the first printed edition of the Peshitta New Testament (published in Vienna in 1555), records that when he was in Rome he saw with his own eyes 'the *mandila* which was sent by our Lord to Abgar', specifying that this was in the church of the Apostles Peter and Paul.<sup>7</sup>

The relic that was brought to Constantinople from Edessa was clearly a piece of clothe on which the image of Christ's face had been impressed. What has happened to the portrait of Christ which, according to the Syriac Teaching of Addai (dating from the early fifth century), Ḥannan, King Abgar's emissary to Jesus, painted when he was in Jerusalem? In the Teaching of Addai we are told that, after Christ gave an oral reply to king Abgar's letter,

<sup>4</sup> For the Turin Shroud, see below, note 35.

<sup>5</sup> A cloth (*sudarium*) with the holy face imprinted on it, but described as the "Veronica" (< *vera icona*?) is already recorded as being in St Peter's in Rome c.1160 (von *Dobschütz*, p.285\*). The two relics are often confused in the sources; for the dominance of the "Veronica" image in Rome, see especially I. Ragusa, "Mandylion-Sudarium: the translation of a Byzantine relic to Rome", *Arte Medievale* II.v.2 (1991), pp. 97-106; H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: a History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago, 1994), pp.208-24 ("The 'Holy Face': legends and images in competition"); and G. Wolf, "From mandylion to Veronica", in Kessler and Wolf (eds), *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, pp.153-79.

<sup>6</sup> Ed. P. Bedjan, *Histoire de Mar Jab-Alaha, patriarche...* (Leipzig/Paris, 1895), p.63 (p.58 in his earlier edition of 1888).

<sup>7</sup> He gives this information in a marginal note to Michael the Syrian's Chronicle which he copied c.1560; the text is given by J-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien I* (Paris, 1899, repr. Bruxelles, 1963), p. xxxix.

Because (Ḥannan) was the royal artist, he took up (paints) and depicted the image (*ṣalmeh*) of Jesus with choice paints, and brought (it) with him to king Abgar his master. And when king Abgar saw that image he received it with great joy and placed it in great honour in one of the rooms of his palace.<sup>8</sup>

As is well known, the earliest account of Abgar's correspondence with Jesus, dating from about AD 300 and in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, in fact has no mention at all of such a portrait, and the western pilgrim Egeria, who visited Edessa about 385, still only knows of the correspondence, and not the portrait. But what is of concern here is the transformation, over the course of time, of what was originally understood to have been a painted portrait into a piece of cloth with Christ's face imprinted on it. As always in such cases, it is essential to look at the sources in chronological sequence, and to observe closely the specific terms used in connection with the portrait. As it will emerge, there are four main stages in the tradition over the portrait:

- (1) No mention in any source before early fifth century.
- (2) A portrait of Christ is painted by Abgar's emissary, Ḥannan: thus the Teaching of Addai (probably dating from about the third decade of the fifth century).
- (3) The portrait (evidently painted) is a miraculous one, not made by human hands. Evagrius Scholasticus, at the end of the sixth century, is the witness to this development.
- (4) It is no longer question of a painted portrait, but of an impression of Christ's face on a cloth: it proves impossible to paint a portrait, so Christ washes his face and wipes it with a towel, on which the impression of his face is left, for Abgar's emissary to take back to Edessa. This version is found in Syriac in the Acts of Mari and the anonymous Chronicle to the year 1234, and in Greek first in John of Damascus and the Acts of Thaddaios, as well as in most later texts.

After the passage in the Teaching of Addai it is not until the sixth century that we next have references to the portrait. The first is in the Life of Jacob of Galash, by Jacob of Serugh (d.521); there it is mentioned in passing that Daniel and a fellow monk went to Edessa where they 'were blessed by the portrait of Christ'.<sup>9</sup> Much more specific information is to be found in the account of the Persian siege of Edessa in 544, as written up by Evagrius Scholasticus in his Ecclesiastical History, a work he completed in 593/4. Evagrius tells of how the citizens of Edessa "brought the divinely created image, which human hands had not made, the one that Christ the God sent to Agbar [sic!] when he yearned to see Him", and with its aid they managed to set fire to Persian siege mound from a passage dug underneath it. At first they had not managed to ignite the fire, but

<sup>8</sup> G. Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai the Apostle* (London, 1876), pp.5\*-6\* (Syriac), p.5 (tr.); G. Howard, *The Teaching of Addai* (Chico, 1981), pp.8-11 (text and tr.).

<sup>9</sup> Paris, syr. 235, f.166r.

once “they brought the all-holy image (*eikon*) into the channel they had created .... at once the timbers caught fire.”<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps from about the same time as Evagrius, though it could be somewhat later, is the first mention of a linen cloth; this is to be found in the Acts of Mari, the Apostle of the Church of the East.<sup>11</sup> Mari is presented as a disciple of Addai, and after recounting Abgar’s correspondence with Christ (taken mainly from Eusebius, but with a few details derived from the Teaching of Addai), the author presents an account of the portrait of Christ that is considerably different from that in the Teaching of Addai:

The Letter (of Christ) came to King Abgar and he received it with great joy. When they told him of the miracles that were being performed by Him in the land of Judaea, he was full of astonishment at the power of God. Because he was not worthy to see this, he was in a state of great grief. What then did King Abgar do? He saw some skilled artists and ordered them to go with his emissaries and depict (Him), and bring back on an image (*yuqna*) the face of our Lord, so that he might take pleasure in his image (*salmeh*), just as if he had met Him. The artists arrived, along with the King’s emissaries, but they were unable to paint a portrait (*ṣurta*) of the venerable humanity of our Lord. Our Lord perceived in them, with the knowledge of His divinity, the love that Abgar had for Him: on seeing how the artists had toiled in their attempt to portray the image as it was, but had not succeeded, He took a linen cloth (*sedona*; from Greek *sindon*), and the Saviour of the World imprinted it with His face - and it was (exactly) like Him. And the linen cloth was brought and placed as a source of assistance in the church of Edessa, up to today.<sup>12</sup>

A passing reference to “the *eikon* (*yuqna*) that Christ impressed with his face and sent to Abgar, the king of Edessa” is found in a Syriac Dispute between a monk of the monastery of Beth Hale and a follower of the Emir Maslama (d.737).<sup>13</sup> In Greek a similar narrative which introduces the linen cloth is to be found in the Acts of Thaddaeus (Thaddaeus was Eusebius’ name for Addai), a

<sup>10</sup> Evagrius, Eccl. Hist. IV. 27, English tr. M. Whitby, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus* (Liverpool, 2000), p.226; in his Appendix II (pp.323-6) Whitby convincingly refutes the view of J. Chrysostomides [see n.15] that the passage was an interpolation of the eighth century, intended to bolster the position of the opponents of iconoclasm.

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately the date is uncertain (as in the case of several of the other key documents!): C. Jullien and F. Jullien, *Les Actes de Mari, l’apôtre de la Mésopotamie* (Turnhout, 2001), p.53, think the late sixth or early seventh century is the most likely.

<sup>12</sup> Acta Sancti Maris, section 4, ed. J-B. Abbeloos, *Analecta Bollandiana* 4 (1885), pp.43-138. Note that the image is only acquired on a second visit to Jerusalem: this is paralleled in the Greek *Epistula Abgari*, but not in the Acts of Thaddaeus or the *Narratio*.

<sup>13</sup> I quote from H.J.W. Drijvers, “The image of Edessa in the Syriac tradition”, p.27; the text has not yet been published.

work also of uncertain date.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the situation portrayed in the Acts of Mari, Abgar instructs Ananias (=Hannan) at the very outset to “describe Christ accurately, what sort of appearance he has, his age, his hair, in brief, everything”. Ananias then goes off with the letter, hands it to Christ, gazes carefully at him, but is unable to take anything in: “Realizing this, He who knows hearts asked to wash. He was given a cloth folded in four; once he had washed, he wiped his face. His image (*eikon*) was imprinted linen cloth (*sindon*), and he gave it to Ananias”, telling him to take it to Abgar, along with his (oral) reply to the king’s letter. Basically the same form of the narrative was known to John of Damascus, writing shortly before the middle of the eighth century.<sup>15</sup>

Since the term *eikon* is used in the Acts of Thaddaeus for the imprinted portrait of Christ on the linen, one cannot be sure exactly what was implied by the phrase “shrine of the *eikon* (*yuqna*) of our Lord”, which features in the colophon of a Melkite manuscript written in Edessa in 723: the ‘eikon’ could be either painted on wood, or refer to an image on linen.<sup>16</sup> An indication that, at least in some circles, the image of Christ was understood as having been painted is shown by an account in the Chronicle of Patriarch Michael the Great (d.1199), which derives from the lost Chronicle of Patriarch Dionysius of Telmahre (d.845), in which

The Edessans owed part of the taxes they had to pay and had nothing with which to pay it. A crafty man...advised the collector of taxes, ‘If you take the portrait they will sell their children and themselves rather than allow it [to be removed]. When he did this, the Edessans were in consternation.... They came to the noble Athanasius (bar Gumoye) and asked him to give them the 5,000 dinars of the taxes, and to take the portrait to his house until they repaid him. He gladly took the portrait to his place and gave the gold. Then he brought a clever painter and asked him to paint one like it. When the work was finished and there

<sup>14</sup> Greek text in R.A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* I (Leipzig, 1891; repr. Darmstadt, 1965), pp.273-8; French translation by A.N. Palmer in A. Desreumaux, *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus* (Turnhout, 1993), pp.138-45. Unfortunately the date is very uncertain; Palmer (p.137 note 1) suggests that it dates from the latter part of the reign of Heraclius (611-641).

<sup>15</sup> On Orthodox Faith IV.16 (89) (ed. Kotter, II, p.208). Here he specifies that it was the luminosity of Christ’s face that prevented the painter making a portrait (the cloth is termed *himation*, whereas in his treatise On Images he calls it *rakos*, ed. Kotter, III, p.145-6). According to Chrysostomides, these passages too are later iconophile interpolations (in J.A. Munitiz, J. Chrysostomides, E. Harvalia-Crook, Ch. Dendrinis, *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs to Emperor Theophilus and Related Texts* (Camberley, 1997), pp.xxiv-xxxvii); in view of the Syriac texts, this seems rather unlikely.

<sup>16</sup> R.W. Thomson, “An eighth-century Melkite colophon from Edessa”, *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 13 (1962), pp.249-58.

was a portrait as exactly as possible like [the original] because the painter had dulled the paints of the portrait so that they would appear old, the Edessans after a time returned the gold and asked him for the portrait. He gave them the one that had been made recently and kept the old one in his place. After a while he revealed the affair to the faithful [i.e. his fellow Syrian Orthodox], and built the wonderful shrine of the baptistery. He completed it at expense great beyond reckoning, spent in honour of the portrait, because he knew that the genuine portrait sent through Yohannan [sic] the *tabellara*, had remained in his place. After several years he brought it and put it in the baptistery.<sup>17</sup>

This story would imply that the Melkite priest who was looking after “the shrine of the *eikon* of our Lord” was actually just looking after its recent copy! It also helps to explain why there were evidently three different portraits in Edessa (one being in “the church of the Nestorians”) at the time when one of them was transported to Constantinople in 944.<sup>18</sup> Reference to a painted portrait is found as late as the second quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century in Agapius of Mabbug’s *Kitab al`Unwan*, where Ḥannan is said to have painted the portrait on “a square tablet (*luḥ*)”.<sup>19</sup>

A later Syriac account which introduces a portrait imprinted on linen, instead of a painted one, features in the anonymous Chronicle to the year 1234, no doubt taken from an earlier source.<sup>20</sup> After giving the text of Abgar’s Letter to Jesus in a shortened form (based on Eusebius), there is a section entitled “Concerning the *yuqna* or depiction (*ṣurta*) of Christ which is on the towel (*shushpepa*)”. Then comes the following narrative:

Because king Abgar had previously instructed Hananya the *tabellara* that, if Christ was not going to come with them (back to Edessa), by all means they should bring up on a piece of wood (*dappa*) the *yuqna* of his portrait (*d-ṣurteh*) so that he might see it. Now when they reached Jerusalem and met Christ, they

<sup>17</sup> XI.16 (ed. Chabot, pp.448-9); I quote from J.B. Segal’s translation, in *Edessa, ‘the Blessed City’* (Oxford, 1970), p.214; another translation can be found in A.N. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993), pp.203-4. Athanasius bar Gumoye was active in the reign of Abdalmalik (685-705). The account is said to go back to Dionysius’ maternal grandfather.

<sup>18</sup> This is mentioned in the *Narratio* (47) concerning the bringing of the relic to Constantinople in 944.

<sup>19</sup> Ed. A. Vasiliev, *Patrologia Orientalis* 7 (1911), pp.18-19 (474-5). Eutychius (Sa`id ibn Bitriq), patriarch of Alexandria (933-40), however, already uses the term *mandil* in a passing reference in his *Book of Demonstration/Kitab al-Burhan* (ed. P. Cachia, tr. W. Montgomery Watt, CSCO Scr. Arab. 20-21, 1960, p. 207 (text), p.162 (tr.)).

<sup>20</sup> Ed. J-B. Chabot, *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, I (CSCO Scr. Syri 36, 1920, repr, 1953), pp.121-2. Drijvers, “The image of Edessa”, p.23, suggests the passage goes back, by way to Dionysius of Telmahre, to the lost chronicle of Theophilus (late 8th cent.).

gave him the letter and he read it. He wrote a reply to the letter on the spot, and knowing hidden things, he asked for water and washed his face. He (then) took a towel (*shushepa*) as if to wipe his face, and straightaway by some great wonder the *yuqna* of his face was portrayed on that towel, in his likeness and resemblance. And he gave the towel, along with the reply to the letter, to Abgar's emissaries.

The Chronicler then gives the text of Jesus' letter, again based on Eusebius rather than the Teaching of Addai, though it ends with the blessing of Edessa and promise that no enemy would have dominion over it (found in the Teaching, but not in Eusebius). There follows a completely new episode (pp.122-3), headed "Concerning the return of Abgar's emissaries". It reads as follows:

Once the emissaries had received the letter and the towel, or *mandila*, they set off to return to their master. They reached as far as the town of Mabbug, and stayed in a certain place outside the town. Since they were concerned about the *mandila*, they went up to the roof of the place where they were staying, and placed it between two tiles (*keramidia*), in a clean spot. While they were asleep at night a great light descended from heaven over the place where it had been placed. When the local inhabitants saw that great sight, they came in droves to the place. The emissaries, being unable to conceal the matter, related the whole story, just as it was. Once the citizens understood what was the cause of the light, they demanded to be blessed by the *yuqna*, for they had seen this great wonder that had taken place. When Hananya the *tabellara* stretched out his hand to take the *mandila*, he found that the portrait (*surteh*) of the Saviour had been marked on the tiles. When the local inhabitants saw this second miracle, they were once more fired with a desire for it, and they urged Hananya to give them the tiles, to be a source of blessing and protection for their region. Once they had received the tiles they placed them in honour in a splendid location in their place of worship. In this way many miraculous healings were performed by them, up to the time when the Apostle Philip came to them; it was he who converted them and built a large church, in which he placed the holy tiles. When the holy apostle died in martyrdom for Christ, his holy body was placed there.

The emissaries took the *mandila* and came to Edessa. On hearing of this, king Abgar went out to meet them with all the town; he received them with great ceremony. He was blessed by the holy *mandila*, and received relief from his illness, until the Apostle Addai came to him, after our Lord's ascension: (Addai) then baptized him and healed him completely from his sickness. The citizens of Edessa were also converted and they were all baptized, becoming Christians.

This episode is also found in the Greek *Narratio* (section 14) composed shortly after the transfer of the image to Constantinople in 944. A similar account also features, but in a shorter form, in the Greek *Epistula Abgari* (section 5), composed around 1032. The Syriac account is by no means a translation of either

of these Greek accounts; rather, it represents a separate, though related, tradition that circulated in Syriac.<sup>21</sup>

The same Chronicle has one further passage concerning the image. After describing the arrival of Zengi in Edessa (1145), the Chronicler has a section entitled “Concerning the well of the lepers outside Edessa” (I, pp.134-5).<sup>22</sup> This reads as follows:

We shall indicate here the story of this well. Because we have already written about the *mandila* of Christ our Lord which was sent to Abgar, king of Edessa, and how he was healed of his sickness, we will indicate here about this well that we have just mentioned,<sup>23</sup> how and whence it acquired the power of healing. We mentioned earlier that there was in this place a renowned monastery, named after the glorious Cosmas, the true confessor and martyr, who was a healer of bodies in Edessa, along with his companion and spiritual brother, Damian (Dumyana): they used to heal everyone free with their medicaments, as is described in their History. Cosmas’ (body) was laid in this place, and over it this monastery was built. Damian was placed high up on the mountain, and over him another splendid monastery was built. Healings and miracles were performed by their bones.

Now there was at a certain time an Oriental who was present in Edessa. He cunningly waited for a time when he could find an opportunity to steal from the church the *mandila* which had been sent by our Lord to Abgar, which was preserved in a church in Edessa. Once he had taken it, he left by the south gate in the evening and passed the night in this monastery of St Cosmas. The *mandila* filled his lap as it were with fire, burning him. In anguish he removed it from his lap, and in his fright he threw it into this deep well in the monastery. All at once there was seen above it a column of fire coming down from heaven into the well. People thronged to see what had happened. Peering into the well they saw that something looking like the ball of the sun was shining out in the water.

Descending into the well, they found the *mandila* and brought it up. All the sick who were in the monastery were healed after washing in that water. Report (of this) spread everywhere, and many people - especially those with various kinds of leprosy and everyone who had the same disease as Abgar - poured along, washed in the well’s water and were healed. It was especially people who do not belong to our Christian religion who were speedily healed.

The next paragraph tells how Zengi, on learning about the well’s healing parts, had said “I believe that Christ’s blessing can perform miracles”, and when one of his officers was healed he wanted to build an endowed hostel for the sick, but this did not come to fruition. The Chronicler adds the information that by

<sup>21</sup> The image (on a *shushepa*) was still commemorated liturgically in Edessa in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, to judge by an *Enyono* mentioning it in British Library Add. 14697, f.168r (Syrian Orthodox); the passage is quoted in *The Hidden Pearl*, II, p.124.

<sup>22</sup> Segal refers to this episode in *Edessa, ‘the Blessed City’*, p.250.

<sup>23</sup> It was mentioned in the previous paragraph of the Chronicle.



Zengi's day the monastery had been in ruins "for a long time"; however, the reference in the passage quoted to non-Christians being healed suggests that it did not fall into ruin until some time after Arab rule.

This episode of the theft of the mandylion and its being thrown into a well seems not to be known from any other source. The motif of the hiding away of a precious object can be traced back to the hiding of the sacred vessels of the Temple by Jeremiah after Nebuchadnezzar's capture of the Jerusalem in BC 587, a tradition which goes back to 2 Maccabees 2:5. More intriguingly, an episode involving the hiding of the mandylion in a well is depicted in a Latin manuscript perhaps written in Rome in the second half of the thirteenth century. This manuscript (now Paris, Lat. 2688) contains an extended cycle of 22 miniatures illustrating the story of Abgar and the *sudarium* (as the cloth with the image is here called).<sup>24</sup> Towards the end of the cycle, when the sacred image is on its journey back to Abgar, there is a scene where it is being brought up out of a well.<sup>25</sup> Such an episode seems to be completely without parallel in the other later texts on the history of the image, and this makes the counterpart in the Syriac Chronicle all the more striking, even though the narrative context is quite different. As it happens, there is another intriguing link, albeit again remote, between our Syriac Chronicle and this Latin text: the Latin text identifies the gentiles who approach Philip, "wanting to see Jesus" (John 12:21-3), with king Abgar's emissaries. This too, seems to be something without parallel in other accounts; Philip, however, does feature in the Syriac Chronicle's account, though again in a different context, the conversion of the people of Mabbug (something not mentioned in either the *Narratio* or the *Epistula Abgari*).

The Latin manuscript provides a unique ending to the story. After describing how Abgar's son reverted to paganism, instead of having the bishop of Edessa hiding the image (as the *Narratio* and *Epistula Abgari* relate it), Abgar's widow takes it off for safety to Jerusalem.<sup>26</sup> The motivation behind this is clear: in the *Narratio* and *Epistula Abgari* the image has to be hidden so that it can be rediscovered at the siege of Edessa in 544, as related by Evagrius (and expanded in The Letter of the Three Patriarchs, where bishop Eulalios is

<sup>24</sup> On this see I. Ragusa, "The iconography of the Abgar cycle in Paris ms lat. 2688 and its relationship to Byzantine cycles", *Miniatura* 2 (1989), pp.35-51. (The cloth is evidently also called *sindon* in the text). The visit to Hierapolis/Mabbug (but in the Latin corrupted to Menpente) on the return journey to Edessa indicates a general relationship to the Greek accounts in the *Narratio* and *Epistula Abgari*; the latter text was provided with a cycle of illustrations on a Greek scroll of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (M 499): for this see, S. Der Nersessian, "La légende d'Abgar d'après un rouleau illustré de la bibliothèque Pierpont Morgan à New York", in *Actes, IV congrès international des études byzantines*, II (Sofia, 1936), pp.98-106; Ragusa, "The iconography", also gives several illustrations.

<sup>25</sup> Illustrated in Plate IV.

<sup>26</sup> Plate III in Ragusa, "The iconography".

introduced for the first time); furthermore, the image has to remain in Edessa so that the genuine article is still there in 944, to be transported to the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. Rome, however, where Paris Lat. 2688 was probably written, had no interest in Constantinople, and indeed was happy to undermine its claim to have the Edessa relic by neatly removing the image from Edessa only shortly after Abgar's death!

It is striking that an interest in the return journey from Jerusalem to Edessa only begins to feature in texts that are subsequent to the transfer of the image to Constantinople in 944. Thus it is only with the *Narratio* and the *Epistula Abgari* that the Hierapolis (Mabbug) episode (providing the origin of the image being impressed on two tiles) and the healing of a man outside Edessa, first appear. These would seem to have been introduced as counterparts to episodes on the journey in 944 from Edessa to Constantinople, when miracles are performed on the way at Samosata, and a demoniac is healed at a monastery of the Virgin in the theme of the Optimates.<sup>27</sup> That Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (who became emperor on 16 December 944, replacing Romanos) sought to have himself portrayed as the new Abgar is suggested by the fact that on the Sinai icon Abgar's face bears Constantine's features.<sup>28</sup>

Although there are indications in the *Narratio* that the Christian population of Edessa were - not surprisingly - extremely unwilling to give up their treasured image of Christ,<sup>29</sup> its removal to Constantinople did at least ensure that the Abgar story gained a great deal of publicity that it would otherwise not have had. Although in the west, outside the remarkable Paris manuscript, the Edessan image was largely forgotten, being replaced by the Veronica tradition, the correspondence between Abgar and Christ became known far and wide, with translations of Christ's letter into many different languages. It was in the Byzantine east, however, that the Edessan image on cloth came to be reproduced again and again.<sup>30</sup> The mandylion was portrayed already in the eleventh century churches in Cappadocia<sup>31</sup> and even further afield, in Georgia,<sup>32</sup> where two

<sup>27</sup> Whose capital was Nikomedia.

<sup>28</sup> See Weitzmann, "The Mandylion".

<sup>29</sup> Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* XIII.3 (ed. Chabot, pp.553-5) and Bar `Ebroyo, *Chronicon* (ed. Bedjan, pp.179-80) only give passing reference to the event. Both use the term *mandila*.

<sup>30</sup> The Mandylion in the mosaics of Monreale (Palermo, Sicily) in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century belongs to the Byzantine iconographic tradition: see E. Kitzinger, "The Mandylion at Monreale", in A. Iakobini and E. Zanini, *Arte profana e arte sacra a Bisanzio* (Rome, 1995), pp.575-602. Another rare western example is provided by the cycle of ten scenes from the Abgar story, largely based on the *Narratio*, on the frame of the Genoa 'Volto Santo'; these are described, with illustrations, by C. Dufour-Bozzo, "La cornice del Volto Santo de Genova", *Cahiers archéologiques* 19 (1969), pp.223-30.

<sup>31</sup> See C. Walter, "The Abgar cycle at Mateic", in *Studien zur byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte. Festschrift für H. Hallensleben* (Amsterdam, 1995), pp.221-31; that

successive translations of the correspondence between Abgar and Jesus were made. Cycles of miniatures also feature in two Gospel manuscripts, with 5 illustrations in the Alaverdi Gospels of 1054, copied on the Black Mountain, near Antioch,<sup>33</sup> and with 10 in the Gelati Gospels, of the twelfth century.<sup>34</sup>

If one works backward in time, the image on cloth of Christ's face, brought from Edessa to Constantinople in 944, turns out to be the last of several different transformations: prior to the impression on cloth, it had been an image (evidently painted) not made by human hands; then before that, it was a portrait painted by Abgar's emissary Ḥannan, prior to which it vanishes altogether into thin air. Although this makes a very unsatisfactory ancestry for those who would like to identify the famous Turin Shroud with the Edessan mandylion,<sup>35</sup> the gradual development of the story, and above all its immense influence, provide an excellent example of how a subsequent interpretation and perception of the past can prove to have a far greater historical impact than that of the historical reality (or in this case, non-reality) of the original event.

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at Sakli kilise is illustrated in M. Restle, *Byzantine Wall Painting in Asia Minor* (Greenwich, Conn., 1967), I, p.103f.

<sup>32</sup> See Z. Skhirtladze, "Canonizing the apocrypha: the Abgar cycle in the Alavardi and Gelati Gospels", in Kessler and Wolf (eds), *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, pp.69-93; in 1989 apse murals of the much earlier date, 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, with the inscription "The holy face of God", were identified at the church of the Holy Cross at Telovani (p.72).

<sup>33</sup> Tbilisi, A-484. For Syriac manuscripts (all Melkite) copied there at much the same time, see my "Syriac manuscripts copied on the Black Mountain, near Antioch", in R. Schulz and M. Görg (eds), *Lingua Restituta Orientalis: Festgabe für Julius Assfalg* (Ägypten und altes Testament 20; 1990), pp.59-67.

<sup>34</sup> Tbilisi, Q-908; the scenes are listed by Skhirtladze, pp.81-2 (and illustrations in figs. 10-16).

<sup>35</sup> E.g. I. Wilson, *The Turin Shroud* (Harmondsworth, 1979; A-M. Dubarle, *Histoire ancienne du linceul de Turin jusqu'au xiiiè siècle* (Paris, 1985).