

AN EGYPTIAN DOCTOR AT THE COMNENIAN COURT

The king bestowed a great honour upon Saba,
so that he rode a horse at daytime in Constantinople¹

One of the attractions of studying the history and culture of Byzantium is the chance to come across texts which have gone almost unnoticed and which ask for further interpretation. New knowledge about artefacts and historical facts contribute to a better understanding of Byzantium in all its facets, including its position amidst its many neighbours.

Byzantium was part of a world that comprised the Mediterranean. In the sixth century the Eastern Roman empire had dominated the Mediterranean and the countries that bordered it. The Arab conquest had changed the situation and Western Europe had developed in its own way, eventually creating a number of merchant city states in Italy with their own networks all over the Mediterranean, including Byzantium, Egypt and, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Crusader States in the Eastern Mediterranean. All these contacts were alternately friendly or hostile. Despite the Arab conquest of Egypt the Orthodox patriarch of Alexandria had remained in office. The city remained the place of residence of the Melkite (Orthodox) patriarchs whereas the Coptic patriarch left Alexandria at a certain moment. For certain periods information on the patriarchs of Alexandria is almost non-existent, even if they had to go to Constantinople for their consecration. The list of patriarchs, including the dates of their election and consecration, is therefore incomplete. The same goes for their contacts with the Byzantine capital. Greek and Coptic sources often remain silent about the Orthodox patriarchs of Alexandria and their flock².

¹ ABU AL-MAKAREM, *History of the churches and monasteries in Lower Egypt in the 13th Cent.*, ed. Bishop SAMUEL, transl. MINA AL-SHAMAA', revised by Mrs. ELIZABETH, Cairo 1992 [abbr. *Lower Egypt*], p. 239 (Bishop SAMUEL, I, pp. 140-141, f. 99b). See note 5 below for the complete Arabic text, from which, for convenience sake, the folio numbers (referring to two different manuscripts!) are sometimes given.

² V. GRUMEL, *Traité d'Études Byzantines*, I: *La chronologie*, Paris 1958, pp. 442-444, for the list of Melkite patriarchs of Alexandria. Between 1062 and 1117 the patriarchs

In the early thirteenth century the Coptic writer al-Makarim wrote, in Arabic, a compilation about churches and monasteries in Egypt and neighbouring countries. He did not pay much attention to the Melkites in Egypt, apart from mentioning a number of their churches, especially in Cairo and in Alexandria. This paucity of information may be due to tension between the various Christians in Egypt and possibly to unfamiliarity with the world of the Melkites. At the end of the nineteenth century the description of Upper Egypt, then considered to be the work of Abū Ṣāliḥ the Armenian, was published with an English translation³. Al-Makarim's compilation offers a complicated history to scholars who are interested in this work. The compilation may be the result of al-Makarim's collection of source material and the activities of a scribe or secretary who reworked and modelled it after his instructions. However, the process of redaction is not clear yet⁴. More recently the descriptions of Lower Egypt and neighbouring countries were published in their Arabic version of which only the first part, the description of Lower Egypt, has been translated into English⁵. The rest of the compilation awaits a good translation and commentary.

John IV, Eulogius II, Cyrillus II and Sabas were in office but no specific dates are known. See *ibid.*, p. 444, where Eulogius is in function around the year 1100 and, apart from a reference to Sabas in 1117 (see also below), his successor Sophronius III is mentioned only in 1166 when he visited Constantinople to attend the marriage of the emperor Manuel Comnenus with Maria of Antioch.

³ *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and some neighbouring countries, attributed to Abū Ṣāliḥ, the Armenian*, ed. and transl. by B.T.A. EVETTS, Oxford 1895, reprint 1969, and 2001, Piscataway, NJ (abbr. as EVETTS, *Upper Egypt*), index IV, pp. 378-379, s.v. Melkite, Melkites.

⁴ *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. A.S. ATIYA, I-VIII, New York-Toronto etc. 1991, I, p. 23; U. ZANETTI, *Abū l-Makārim et Abu Salih*, in *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 34 (1995), pp. 85-138; cf. *id.*, *Matarieh, la Sainte Famille et les baumiers*, in *Analecta Bollandiana* 111 (1993), pp. 21-68: 32, 39; J. DEN HEIJER, *The composition of the History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt: some preliminary remarks*, in *Actes du V^e Congrès International des Études Coptes*, II, Rome 1993, pp. 209-219; *id.*, *The influence of the History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria on the History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt by Abū al-Makārim (and Abū Ṣāliḥ?)*, in *Parole de l'Orient* 19 (1994) [= *Actes du 4^e Congrès International d'Études Arabes Chrétiennes (Cambridge, September 1992)*, II, ed. S.K. SAMIR], pp. 415-439.

⁵ For the complete edition of the Arabic text of al-Makarim see Bishop SAMUEL, *Ta'riḥ al-kanā'is wa-l-adyura fī l-qarn al-tānī 'aṣar al-mūlādī li-'Abī al-Makārim, allaḍī nusiba ḥaṭa'an ilā 'Abī Ṣāliḥ al-Armanī, i'dād wata'liq al-rāhib Ṣamū'il al-Suryānī*, I-IV, Cairo 1984 (for the passage quoted here, I, pp. 140-141, ff. 99a and 99b); for the translations see notes 1 and 3 *supra*. The translation of the passage discussed here can be found in *Lower Egypt*, p. 239. I am very grateful to Clara ten Hacken and Han

Al-Makarim's compilation is a text with several historical layers, which have to be «detected» and set in their historical context. The last word on the origins of the compilation and the sources used has not yet been said. A translation of the section of the compilation which describes the Christian world outside Egypt is of great interest to those interested in the history of the Mediterranean world, including the Byzantine Empire, the Armenian kingdom in Cilicia and the Crusader States, not to mention modern Iraq, Syria, Palestine and other areas. The source material for this part of the compilation has not been exploited widely, although the Arabic text has been available since 1984. So far few scholars have drawn from its rich sources⁶. The Arabic text offers problems as to its translation and, consequently, its interpretation⁷.

The description of Lower Egypt, translated into English, offers a passage in which the visit of a certain Anba Sabas Ibn al-Layth to Constantinople is described and which is of interest to Byzantinists. In a passage where various Melkite churches of Alexandria are described we read:

The visit of Anba Sabas to Constantinople*

f. 99a / «It was referred to that those churches [i.e. the Melkite churches in Alexandria] owned / f. 99b / gold and silver and crystal and furnishings^a among which were a garment and a prospherine^b with threads of golden embroidery, on which [there was] the image of Our Lord Christ and the emperor and the empress^c, and a wine red chal-

* I have added a title because the Arabic text does not give headings. With the help of Han den Heijer some corrections of the English translation have been made.

^a The Arabic *kasāwī* does refer to textiles, which means that «furnishings» should be preferred to «furniture».

^b The Arabic *abruzfān* may be an erroneous rendering of the Greek *προσφῆρειν*.

^c In Arabic the same word is used for king/emperor and for queen/empress.

den Heijer for having checked the Arabic text of the compilation and for commentary on some of the terms used in the translation.

⁶ D. BARAZ, *The incarnated icon of Saidnaya goes West. A re-examination of the motif in the light of new manuscript evidence*, in *Le Muséon* 108 (1995), pp. 181–191: 189, where the author refers to the recent edition by Bishop SAMUEL, cit., III, pp. 47–48, ff. 142r–143r; K. CIGGAAR, *Byzantine Self-Identity in the context of Byzantine-Latin relations during the period of the Crusades*, in *Constructions of Greek Past*, ed. H. HOKWERDA, Groningen 2003, pp. 109, 112; C. TEN HACKEN, *Abū al-Makārim and the History of the churches and monasteries of Egypt and some neighbouring countries. Description of Antioch and its immediate surroundings*, in *The Principality of Antioch*, eds. V.A. VAN AALST – K.N. CIGGAAR – M. METCALF (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, Leuven, in the press).

⁷ E.g. ZANETTI, *Abū al-Makārim* cit., p. 124 n. 82.

ice with serpents carved on its handle^d, and a golden paten with a *cross carved on it and set with jewels and precious stones, and a golden icon*^e, on which a portrait of The Lady and The Lord in her bosom was painted. All those vessels and furnishings were brought^f by Anba Sabas Ibn al-Layth in the caliphate of al-Āmir and the vizierate of al-Afdal Shahinshah. It was denoted that their value is 10.000 Egyptian dinars. That Saba was a doctor and when he found the emperor sick, he treated him and the emperor was healed. The emperor bestowed a great honour upon Saba, so that he rode a horse at day time in Constantinople and had a lighted candle in his hand⁸.

The message of this passage is clear. A certain Anba Sabas, a Melkite doctor, visited Constantinople where he successfully treated the Byzantine emperor who was ill. For one of the Melkite churches in Alexandria he brought *liturgica* for the Eucharist⁹. While he was in the Byzantine capital the Greek emperor bestowed a great honour upon him and gave him the privilege to ride a horse and hold a candle in his hand by day time.

He must have had a great reputation as a doctor to be invited to come to the imperial court to treat the emperor or he must have had a special position to have access to imperial circles. Unfortunately al-Makarim does not refer to such a reputation.

The journey of Anba Sabas took place during the reign of al-Āmir (1101–1130) and his vizier al-Afdal Shahinshah (1089–1121). Taking into consideration these dates we may conclude that Sabas' visit to Byzantium took place between 1101 and 1121. Two Byzantine emperors reigned during that period: Alexius I Comnenus (1081–1118) and his son John I

^d Handle, the singular form, is here the only possible translation.

^e This passage is absent from the printed Arabic edition, but was apparently present in the copy available to the translator.

^f In the translation the term «bought» is probably a printing error for «brought».

⁸ The folio numbers refer to the folios as given in the edition of Bishop Samuel.

⁹ *Liturgica* were regularly offered by secular and religious rulers. The empress Melisende of Jerusalem sent a «capella» to the Premonstratensian abbey of Prémontré (Northern France): see R. HIESTAND, *Königin Melisendis von Jerusalem und Prémontré*, in *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 71 (1995), pp. 77–82. St Theodora of Arta, wife of Theodore Comnenus Doukas, ruler of the exile empire of Epiros, did the same for a monastery which she had founded: *Holy Women of Byzantium*, ed. A.M. TALBOT, Washington 1996, p. 332.

Comnenus (1118–1143). One of them was Anba Sabas' patient. During the period under discussion not many inhabitants of Egypt are known to have visited Constantinople.

Before trying to identify the emperor and his Egyptian doctor it may be useful to have a look at the objects brought by Sabas from Constantinople, which were worth ten thousand Egyptian dinars. What strikes immediately is their luxurious and exceptional character and their great value¹⁰. These *liturgica*, the Holy Vessels for the Eucharist and other furnishings, constituted the essential part of the Orthodox Liturgy: a paten, a chalice, an icon, a liturgical garment and a prospherine, a cover for the Holy Vessels¹¹. The compilation also mentions objects of crystal, silver and gold without giving further details. The preciousness and the exclusive character of all these objects becomes even more clear if we set them in their historical context and try to find parallels for them.

The garment, apparently a liturgical vestment in this context, and the prospherine are best considered together. Both seem to have carried an image of Christ. On the prospherine, and possibly on the garment as well, the portrait of the emperor and the empress was depicted¹². Double portraits, of an emperor and empress, of an emperor with a brother or a son as co-emperor, were a typical Byzantine feature. They expressed who was the political and ecclesiastical authority. They regularly occurred on coins, and sometimes they have been preserved on mosaics, miniatures and precious artefacts, a good example being an eleventh-century reliquary of the emperor Constantine Doukas (1059–1067) and his wife

¹⁰ If we compare the 10.000 dinars «spent» in Constantinople for the *liturgica* with other prices mentioned in *Lower Egypt*, the money «spent» by Anba Sabas was considerable. Some 300 dinars were spent to repair a church and 2.155 dinars as a yearly subvention for the population of the city for having resisted a crusaders' attack (p. 58), garments interwoven [!] with gold (possibly robes of honour) had a value of 100 dinars (p. 142), a Coptic monastery was built for 11.000 dinars and 3.000 dinars were spent for a sanctuary and another 3.000 dinars for the vessels (p. 163), 350 dinars were spent for the renovation of a Coptic church (p. 199; for all the passages quoted, ff. 28a and 28b, 57a, 64b and 65a). The taxes and revenues mentioned in the compilation are not appropriate for comparison. For the dinar and its history see also *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Leiden 1954–1968², II, p. 305.

¹¹ For the Greek names of these *liturgica* see below.

¹² For the *προσφορά* see e.g. R. JANIN, *Les Églises orientales et les Rites orientaux*, Paris 1926, p. 46; breads for the Eucharist, the so-called oblations, were presented to the priest who chose one for the Eucharist, see also *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. KAZHDAN *et alii*, I–III, New York–Oxford 1991 [abbr. ODB], III, p. 1740, s.v. *prospora*.

Eudocia¹³. Double portraits on textiles are scarce. This may be due to the vulnerability of the material. Text references to such double portraits are equally scarce. The only preserved medieval textiles which preserve such portraits are liturgical vestments of silk on which the portraits have been embroidered in gold thread, the earliest known examples being an *epitrahelion*, a liturgical stole, and a *sakkos*, a sort of tunic. The stole was donated by Stephen the Great of Moldavia and his son Alexander to the monastery of Putna in Moldavia, probably between 1478 and 1480. The gold-embroidered portraits are depicted on the lowest border, their outlines being marked with small pearls. In this position, marking their «humble» place in the religious hierarchy, the donors were nevertheless visible to the believers and identified clearly as the donors¹⁴. Even more impressive is a fourteenth-century *sakkos*, which once belonged to Photius, metropolite of Moscow, and is now in the Kremlin Museum. The Byzantine emperor John VIII Palaeologus (1425-1448) and his Russian wife Anna Vasilyevna, with his parents-in-law, the Grand Prince of Moscow and his wife, are here again depicted in gold thread embroideries in the lowest border, their contours consisting of pearls. It is a costly piece of workmanship¹⁵.

It is likely that, like the abovementioned textiles, the portraits were gold embroidered on a silk background. Occasionally one finds woven fabrics of gold thread, but the pieces are rectangular and were meant for bordering garments, like imperial and other ceremonial costumes. The very nature of gold thread made the material inapt for weaving patterns of Christ and other persons into a fabric¹⁶.

¹³ A. BANK, *Byzantine art in the collections of Soviet Museums*, New York 1978, ill. 205, and p. 310. Alexius I Comnenus and his wife Irene Doukas issued a coin with a double portrait when their son John was crowned co-emperor in 1092: C. MORRISON, *Catalogue des monnaies byzantines de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, II: 711-1204, Paris 1970, p. 668, and pl. XCIII, El/03.

¹⁴ P. JOHNSTONE, *Byzantine tradition in Church embroidery*, London 1967, pp. 54, 84, 100 (for a later *epitrahelion* from Dobrovat, also with Stephen the Great, see ill. 40); G. MILLET, *Broderies religieuses de style byzantin*, Album, Paris 1939, pls. v and XXII (detail of patrons; the text volume, Paris 1947, is inaccessible, as is J. EBERSOLT, *Les arts somptuaires de Byzance*, Paris 1923).

¹⁵ The *sakkos* has more than once been published, e.g. BANK, *Byzantine art* cit., ills. 300-303, and p. 329; JOHNSTONE, *Byzantine tradition* cit., pp. 95-96, and ills. 7, 9; E. PILTZ, *Trois sakkoi byzantins. Analyse iconographique*, Uppsala 1976, pp. 31-41, esp. 31, 35 and 62.

¹⁶ A. STAUFFER, *Die mittelalterlichen Textilien von St. Servatius in Maastricht*, Riggisberg 1991, p. 82 nr. 15, a gold woven fabric of the eleventh/twelfth century, possibly used originally as border of a vestment; see also *Splendeurs de Byzance*, [Catalogue], Bruxelles 1982, p. 220, for a number of Greek terms to designate such textiles (χρυσά, δλόχρυσα, χρυσόταβλα, χρυσοπερίχλιστα).

Unfortunately we do not know which sort of garment al-Makarim describes. *Sakkoi* and stoles were both vestments, which could show the portraits of the donors to the believers. Stoles were worn by priests and bishops¹⁷. The *sakkos*, originally part of the imperial costume, was reserved for patriarchs, at least until the thirteenth century, as we learn from the canonist Theodore Balsamon, patriarch of Antioch in exile (ca. 1189–ca. 1195 or later). Patriarchs wore the *sakkos* at Easter, Pentecost and Christmas. During the twelfth century the *sakkos* was clearly the prerogative of patriarchs¹⁸.

The prospherine is equally difficult to identify. In the Coptic church a prospherine was one of the covers of the altar, and more in particular a veil, smaller than the two other altar cloths used in the Coptic church for the Eucharist, which was placed over the oblations after the prayer of thanksgiving and was left there for some time. Its function was thus to cover chalice and paten. Separate veils to cover the paten and the chalice also existed in the Coptic Church. The use of veils to cover the bread and wine of the Eucharist was universal. Every Greek Orthodox and Melkite church or chapel needed such veils. The Arabic text gives the term *abruzfan*, which may render a combination of the Greek verb προσφέρειν and the Greek noun προσφορά in the accusative (προσφοράν). Al-Makarim used the term to describe a veil covering both the chalice and the paten. In the Greek Orthodox/Melkite Church separate veils were sometimes used to cover the paten or the chalice and occasionally a great veil covered both. And it is not clear if the author refers to a single or plural form of the prospherine. This leaves us in the dark as to which veil is meant here. It may be an ἀήρ (*aēr*) to cover both the chalice and the paten, a Great Aēr, or a Little Aēr to cover only one of them, i.e. a δισκοκάλυμμα (*diskokalymma*) for the paten, and a ποτιροκάλυμμα (*potirokekalymma*) for the chalice. It seems likely that one large cover is meant here¹⁹.

¹⁷ For the stole in general see *ODB*, I, p. 725, *s.v.* Epitrachelion, and for liturgical garments, *ibid.*, II, p. 1240, *s.v.* Liturgical vestments; JOHNSTONE, *Byzantine tradition* cit., pp. 16–18.

¹⁸ For THEODOROS BALSAMON, in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca*, accurate J.-P. MIGNE (abbr. *PG*), CXXXVIII, Lutetiae Parisiorum 1904, col. 989 and 1028; PILTZ, *Trois sakkoi* cit., p. 17; JOHNSTONE, *Byzantine tradition* cit., pp. 95–96, is less clear on the privilege; for Balsamon's career, see GRUMEL, *Traité d'Études* cit., p. 448.

¹⁹ For προσφέρειν and προσφορά see e.g. E.A. SOPHOCLES, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine periods (from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)*, Cambridge, Mass. 1887 (repr. New York, n.d.), or G.W.H. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961–1968, *s.v.*; for the Coptic ritual see *The Coptic Encyclopedia* cit., IV, p. 1063.

We are ill informed about the great veil. Small veils are better known since two sets are found in Western Europe. A set of two gold embroidered silken veils for the Eucharist found its way to Halberstadt as *spolia* after the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204. Both depict Christ with his disciples to whom he offers wine and bread. The contours of the head of Christ are still visibly marked by pearls. After their arrival in the West the two veils for the Bread and Wine (measuring respectively 49×42.5 cm and 47×40 cm) were stitched on a silken background and used as processional banners. Embroideries were sometimes used in the form of *appliqués*. The embroidered inscription gives the *sebastos* Alexios Palaiologos as the donor. He lived in the late twelfth century and was related to the imperial family²⁰. Another pair of *kalymmata* has been preserved in the collegiate church of Castell'Arquato (Piacenza, Northern Italy) where they arrived some time before 1314. They are larger than the veils in Halberstadt, measuring 74.5×73 cm and 74×73 cm. These veils are also gold-embroidered and have the same iconography as the Halberstadt pair. Their inscriptions refer to the Eucharist without naming a donor. Occasionally they have been dated around the year 1100²¹. With the examples from Halberstadt and Castell'Arquato we have an idea what the Melkite «prospherine» brought to Egypt by Anba Sabas, whether great or small, may have looked like. Expensive and precious gold-embroidered *liturgica* were certainly produced in the imperial workshop and Anba Sabas was apparently allowed to have some exclusive products from these ateliers. The preparation of such elaborate fabrics must have taken a certain amount of time, and they were probably kept in reserve for important visitors.

The chalice and paten must also have come from an imperial workshop or another atelier where good craftsmen were active making objects of an exclusive character, or from a treasure room. Al-Makarim described the chalice as being «a wine red chalice with serpents carved

²⁰ F. DÖLGER, *Die zwei byzantinischen «Fahnen» im Halberstädter Domschatz*, in *Geisteswelt des Mittelalters. Studien und Texte Martin Grabmann zur Vollendung des 60. Lebensjahres von Freunden und Schülern gewidmet*, II, Münster 1935, pp. 1351-1360 (repr. in ID., *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt*, Darmstadt 1976, pp. 116-127); JOHNSTONE, *Byzantine tradition* cit., p. 54; J. FLEMMING, *Byzantinische Schatzkunst*, Berlin 1979, ills. 49-52, and pp. 83-85.

²¹ C. DIEHL, *Manuel d'art byzantin*, Paris 1926, pp. 888-889, and ill. 441; DÖLGER, *Zwei byzantinischen «Fahnen»* cit., p. 1356 (122); W.F. VOLBACH, in *Byzantine art, a European art*, [Catalogue], Athens 1964, p. 466, dates them to the fourteenth century, see also *ibid.*, nr. 583, p. 476.

on its handle». The chalice was probably made of agate (or onyx?) and its handle had been cut out of the same block of stone, a technique that needs great expertise. The treasury of San Marco preserves a possibly seventh-century ewer of agate that may have been part of the *spolia* of 1204. The presence of hard stone ewers and other objects of hard stone in church treasuries, like the treasury of San Marco, are proof of their value and the appreciation of such objects. Their zoomorphic handles contributed to their exquisiteness²². Handles of precious metalwork, gold, silver or gilded silver were sometimes added to an already existing recipient, which was occasionally an antique piece of work. D. Alcouffe assumed that the craft of hard stone carving with handles out of the same material was no longer practised in Byzantium. He was surprised to find in San Marco a possibly twelfth-century serpentine chalice with cheetahs carved on its stone handle²³. Al-Makarim may corroborate the renewal of stone carving in Byzantium in the eleventh/twelfth century, unless Anba Sabas brought home an antique recipient. The accompanying paten (Greek *δίσκος*) was equally a precious artefact, made of gold (or gilded silver?) and engraved or embossed with a cross in the middle, its borders being set with jewels and precious stones. One should like to know what the author meant by «jewels». Were they (antique) gems like cameos, enamels or decorations of goldsmith work?²⁴ Several Byzantine patens of the eleventh and twelfth centuries have been preserved. A finely decorated gilded paten, dated to the middle of the eleventh century, also found its way to the Cathedral treasury of Halberstadt²⁵. The treasury of San Marco contains a few contemporary Byzantine patens but all of a different shape and of different decoration²⁶.

²² *The treasury of San Marco, Venice*, [Catalogue], London 1984 (also published in French, Paris 1984), e.g. nr. 5, p. 90 (a seventh-century [?] Byzantine agate ewer), see D. ALCOUFFE, *Classical, Byzantine and Western hard-stone carving*, *ibid.*, pp. 73-76; for an agate chalice in the Hermitage, St Petersburg, see BANK, *Byzantine art* cit., ill. 153 and p. 300.

²³ *The treasury of San Marco* cit., nr. 42, pp. 286-290.

²⁴ Bookcovers, Western and Byzantine, so-called *Prachtbände*, were often decorated with enamels, ivories, jewels, gems etc.

²⁵ FLEMMING, *Byzantinische Schatzkunst* cit., pp. 69-70, and ills. 42-46; *Byzantinische Kostbarkeiten aus Museen, Kirchenschätzen und Bibliotheken der DDR. Ausstellung Spätantike-Byzanz-Christlicher Osten im Bode-Museum 1977*, Berlin 1977, pp. 59-60 (with bibliography) and ill. 31. The paten in Halberstadt is mistakenly described as a bronze paten, cf. D. TALBOT RICE, *Byzantine art*, Harmondsworth 1954 etc., p. 181 and ill. 55b.

²⁶ *The treasury of San Marco* cit., e.g. nr. 18, pp. 168-170; nr. 25, pp. 194-195 (and, less certainly used as ewers, nrr. 26 and 27, pp. 195-200).

The golden icon with the Virgin and Child that Anba Sabas must have brought from Constantinople was certainly to play an important role in the Orthodox Liturgy. Twelfth-century golden icons of the Virgin do not seem to have survived²⁷. The Mother of God was held in high veneration in Greek Orthodox churches and many sanctuaries were dedicated to her, also in Alexandria. One wonders what this «golden icon» was like. Was the icon painted on a background of gold paint or was it covered with a metal mount of gold or gilded silver? Contemporary golden icons made in Byzantium are scarce. The treasury of San Marco has a few «golden» icons of St Michael that are gold enamelled representations of the saint and are framed in a border of gold decorated with more gold enamels, precious stones and ornaments of goldsmith work²⁸.

After having considered what Anba Sabas probably brought home from Constantinople one may conclude that the doctor moved in imperial circles and in ecclesiastical circles of the highest rank. He probably did not just pay an occasional visit to the emperor, since he was allowed to procure for his church such very exclusive and exquisite *liturgica* for the Eucharist, some of them with the portrait of the imperial couple. Could these facts help us to find more information on Anba Sabas and identify him?

We have seen that al-Makarim gives a succinct description of the doctor. Egypt had qualified doctors some of whom were appreciated in Byzantium and by Byzantine scholars. Examples are Ibn Butlan, who eventually took up residence in Antioch, and Ibn Ridlan, with whom he was in correspondence. The emperor Manuel Comnenus (1143–1180), son of John I Comnenus and grandson of Alexius I Comnenus, was served by a Jewish doctor from Egypt²⁹. The presence of an Egyptian doctor in Constantinople need not surprise us. Professionals like doctors were used to travel. What surprises us is the easy access that Anba Sabas seems to have had to the imperial court.

²⁷ The well-known example of Our Lady of Vladimir, a twelfth-century gold painted icon representing the Virgin and Child, is exceptional for having survived the centuries, BANK, *Byzantine art* cit., ills. 235, 236, and p. 316.

²⁸ *The treasury of San Marco* cit., nr. 12, pp. 141–147, nr. 19, pp. 171–175.

²⁹ For Ibn Butlan see J. SCHACHT – M. MEYERHOF, *The medico-philosophical controversy between Ibn Butlan of Baghdad and Ibn Ridwan of Cairo: a contribution to the history of Greek learning among the Arabs*, Cairo 1937, pp. 54–55, and D. JACQUART – F. MICHEAU, *La médecine arabe et l'Occident médiéval*, Paris 1996, p. 233; *The itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, critical text, translation and commentary by M.N. ADLER, London 1907 (repr. New York, n.d.), p. 14.

The title Anba given to Sabas by al-Makarim may be a clue to the mystery. Whenever the Arabic compilation speaks of a person who is qualified as Anba, mention is made of a bishop, an archbishop or a patriarch. Anba was a title of reverence. Is it a coincidence that another Sabas came to Constantinople in the early twelfth century? In April 1117 a synod was held in Constantinople to discuss and condemn the heresy of Eustratius of Nicaea. This was after Easter, which fell in March. Patriarch Sabas of Alexandria and patriarch John of Antioch attended the synod and are mentioned in the report on the heresy³⁰. This is the only reference to a patriarch Sabas of Alexandria. It is not known when he was consecrated patriarch of Alexandria, a ceremonial which had to take place in Constantinople and for which the consent of the ruler of Egypt was required, thus implying contacts between the court of Constantinople and the ruler of Egypt. The Byzantine emperor had a say in the «election» of the patriarch of Alexandria. It is my hypothesis that Anba Sabas in the text of al-Makarim and the patriarch Sabas who was in Constantinople in 1117 were the same person. If so, the consecration as patriarch of Alexandria may have been meant to take place at the time of the synod. This could at the same time explain that a *sakkos* or a liturgical stole were laying in wait for him. And even if Anba Sabas was a homonymous contemporary of patriarch Sabas of Alexandria, he may have been member of the official delegation coming to Constantinople on that occasion, or of an earlier official mission, and may have played a role in the transfer of precious *liturgica*³¹. Apart from necessary contacts concerning the consecration of a new patriarch of Alexandria, there were the normal and regular diplomatic contacts between Byzantium and Egypt, sometimes of a more special character. The Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus ransomed Western prisoners who had been

³⁰ V. GRUMEL, *Les Regestes des Actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*, I: *Les Actes des Patriarches. Les Regestes de 1043-1206*, Paris 1947, nr. 1003, pp. 82-83 (the revised edition by J. DARROUZÈS, Paris 1989, is inaccessible). The date is given as 26 April, 1117, Easter fell that year on 25 March. For the text see I. SAKKELION, in *Ἀθήναιον* 4 (1875), p. 229, or J. and P. ZEPOS, *Ius Graecoromanum*, I-VIII, Athens 1931 (repr. Aalen 1962), I, p. 651. Elsewhere in the compilation of al-Makarim (III, p. 77, f. 166r) mention is made of the death of John Oxeites in 1121 on the island Oxeia in the Sea of Marmara, which gives new information on the later life of the patriarch who had left Antioch shortly after the arrival of the crusaders. For the title Anba see *The Coptic Encyclopedia* cit., I, pp. 152-153, s.v. Apa.

³¹ H.-G. BECK, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, München 1959, pp. 93-94.

captured by the sultan during the crusades. Some of them had been sent to prisons in Cairo, as we learn from Byzantine and Western sources. At the same time the Byzantine emperor had contacts with the sultan about the approaching Western armies and their military position in the Crusader States after the various conquests. Raymond of Aguilers accuses the Byzantine emperor of having had secret contacts with the sultan in order to resist the Latin advance. A political «friendship» between the leaders of Byzantium and Egypt is logical, since both had their enemies in the area. According to Raymond of Aguilers the Egyptian envoys mentioned the good treatment of the Christians in their country, which may even hint at the presence of Christian envoys in their delegation³². In any case the patriarch of Alexandria must have had a prominent position during the synod. The patriarch of Antioch was a patriarch in exile, the patriarch of Jerusalem (if there was a Greek patriarch of Jerusalem at the time) was not present and the pope of Rome was out of sight. Apart from the patriarch of Constantinople, John IX Agapetos (1111-1134), the patriarch of Alexandria was the only other patriarch in full function³³.

When reading the compilation of al-Makarim one seems to find a few relatives of Anba Sabas, who was the son of al-Layth, a name which does not sound Greek; but among the Melkites there were people of Egyptian, i.e. of Coptic origin. In the description of Upper Egypt a certain Abu al Barakat Ibn Abi al-Layth al-Malaki («the Melkite») is found in the diwan of al-Afdal, where he had the function of *metwalli*, i.e. *chargé*

³² *Anne Commène, Alexiade*, ed. B. LEIB, I-III, Paris 1937-1945, (with French transl.; repr. Paris, 1967), see e.g. III, pp. 33-34 (Book XI, vii, 3), pp. 54-55 (Book XII, i, 3); Engl. transl. by E.R.A. SEWTER, *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, Harmondsworth 1969, pp. 352-353, 370. For 1105 see EKKEHARD, *Chronicon*, ed. G. WAITZ, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores* (abbr. MGH SS), VI, Hannover 1844, p. 230 (for these embassies see also F. DÖLGER, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*, 2. Teil: *Regesten von 1025-1204*, München-Berlin 1925, p. 48, nr. 1220, 1221. For the prisoners see ALBERT OF AIX, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, IX, vi, and X, xxxviii, in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina*, accurante J.P. MIGNE, CLXVI, Lutetiae Parisiorum 1894, col. 628 and 670 (a new edition by Susan Edgington is in the press); ORDERIC VITALIS, *Ecclesiastical History*, edition and translation by M. CHIBNALL, V, Oxford 1975, pp. 350-353; *Le «Liber» de Raymond d'Aguilers*, edition by J. HUGH - L.L. HILL, Paris 1969, pp. 59, 110 (French translation by J. HUGH - L.L. HILL, *Raymond d'Aguilers Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem*, translation with introduction and notes, Paris 1968, pp. 40-41, 89).

³³ GRUMEL, *Traité d'Études* cit., pp. 444, 455. Sabas, patriarch of Jerusalem, was not yet in function in 1117. He arrived in Constantinople after August 1117 or in 1118, the Byzantine year beginning in September, *ibid.*, pp. 124-128: 127. Confusion between the two homonymous patriarchs therefore does not seem likely.

d'affaires, a high rank in the administrative hierarchy of the sultan. Later he was exiled to Alexandria and was put to death in 1134 after a conflict. In Cairo he had restored the church of St Sabas with the help of his brother Abu' al-Fadâ'il ibn Abî' al-Laith, the scribe. Barakat is also said to have restored the church of St Nicholas in Cairo, together with his brother: «Abu al Barakat Ibn Abi al-Layth and his brother and his sect and the Catholics of Cairo, during the caliphate of al-Āmir». In the anonymously described brother we recognize an ecclesiastic, and it is not to be excluded that this brother may have been Anba Sabas himself, being then in charge of the Melkite community in Cairo, as bishop or otherwise. In the same passage the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria is mentioned, again anonymously³⁴. Was Anba Sabas pursuing an ecclesiastical career by then, not yet having reached the ultimate goal of becoming patriarch of Alexandria? A sister of the abovementioned benefactors was married to a cousin who converted to Islam, but she has also remained anonymous. They are all described as Melkites, were contemporary with Anba Sabas and seem to have belonged to a wealthy and influential family that restored and reconstructed churches. Sooner or later a member of such a family, with a good education and a reasonable fortune, may eventually have succeeded in becoming patriarch. Taking into consideration the fact that at least one member of the family had a position of high rank in the administration of the country and the fact that the ruler of Egypt had to confirm the election and consecration of a Melkite patriarch, one may imagine that all conditions were fulfilled to «promote» a member of such a family to the see of Alexandria.

One wonders if in Constantinople more clues may be found to corroborate Anba Sabas' identity as the patriarch or future patriarch who visited Constantinople in 1117. It is a well-known fact that the emperor Alexius I Comnenus, born in 1057 and at the time of the synod of 1117 in his sixties, had long suffered from bad health. Gout was one of his troubles, as his daughter Anna Comnena describes in the *Alexiad*. Her father led a painful life and his suffering was increased by all sorts of stress, such as the arrival and presence of the crusaders in the East, heresies in the church and threats from various enemies like the Turks. Doc-

³⁴ EVETTS, *Upper Egypt*, pp. 5 (he wrote verses on Melkite churches), 129, 150, 152 (ff. 2v, 40v, 50v, 51v), and *ibid.*, index III, pp. 360, 362; *Lower Egypt*, pp. 8-9, 40-41 (ff. 5v, 20r). Occasionally al-Makarim refers to Melkite patriarchs without giving their name, see e.g. EVETTS, *Upper Egypt*, p. 33 (ff. 13v and 14r).

tors were asked for advice, and it is very likely that the emperor had periods of relief of the pain, due to medical help and to temporary absence of stress factors. Anba Sabas may have played a successful role during a less stressful period³⁵. The emperor's son, John Comnenus, was born in 1087, and is not known to have suffered bad health in his younger days.

However, a direct relation between Sabas' role as successful doctor and the privilege of riding a horse in Constantinople remains doubtful for a stranger who was not a resident of standing in Constantinople. Not every visitor to Constantinople was allowed to enter the city and circulate on horseback. Western prelates and secular leaders are known to have made their entry into the city on horseback, although there are exceptions, like Liutprand, the bishop of Cremona. When he arrived at Constantinople in 968, for his second mission after an earlier very successful journey, he had to wait and was not allowed to enter the city riding the horse that had been given to him by the emperor Otto I³⁶. But as an influential representative of the Melkite clergy in Egypt, witness the reverential title of Anba suggesting that Sabas was a bishop, an archbishop or even a patriarch, the Egyptian Sabas must have enjoyed such a privilege *de iure*.

³⁵ In the last part of her work (book XIV, for the period 1108–1115, and book XV, for the period 1116–1118) Anna Comnena is very specific about the suffering of her father, LEIB, *Anne Comnène, Alexiade* cit., see e.g. III, p. 177 (book XIV, vii, 9), p. 187 (book XV, i, 1); SEWTER, *The Alexiad* cit., pp. 462, 471 («the gout prevented Alexius not merely from putting his plan into operation [campaign against the Turks], but even from walking at all. He was confined to his bed. He was not worried so much by the anguish he was suffering physically, however, as by the deferment of the campaign»); see also G. BUCKLER, *Anna Comnena*, Oxford 1929 (repr. 1968), e.g. pp. 15 n. 3, 252, 426–427, and *passim* (index, p. 529, «illnesses»).

³⁶ A. GRABAR – M. MANOUSSAKAS, *L'illustration du manuscrit de Skylitzès de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Madrid*, Venise 1979, p. 158, mention a «formule iconographique» for the patriarch on horse; BENJAMIN OF TUDELA cit., pp. 13, 14, described the Byzantines as riding «their horses as princes», and the privilege given to the Jewish doctor Salomon to ride a horse; LIUTPRAND OF CREMONA, *Legatio*, in A. BAUER – R. RAU, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Sächsischen Kaiserzeit*, with German translation, Darmstadt 1977, pp. 526–527. Bishop Arnulf of Milan made his entry in Constantinople in 1002 on horseback, after having shod the horse with golden horse-shoes, *Landulfi Historia Mediolanensis*, ed. L.C. BETHMANN – W. WATTENBACH, in MGH SS, VIII, Hannover 1848, pp. 55–56. Fictional literature speaks of Western rulers visiting Constantinople on the back of a mule, like Robert of Normandy who came to the Greek capital in 1035, see WACE, *Le Roman de Rou (Geste des Normands)*, ed. A.J. HOLDEN, Paris 1970, I, p. 275, l. 3061, «A la mule ke il chevauchout», after having shod the mule with «gold», see e.g. G. PARIS, *Sur un épisode d'Aimery de Narbonne*, in *Romania* 9 (1880), pp. 515–546: 524, for Norman literary traditions.

More problematic is his carrying a candle by daytime. The patriarch of Constantinople imitated the imperial court ceremonial by walking around with lighted candles. Whether his colleague patriarchs, when visiting Constantinople, enjoyed the same privilege and carried candles themselves, was sometimes a matter of discussion, as we learn again from Balsamon, the patriarch of Antioch in exile. The right of the Patriarch of Constantinople to carry lighted candles was an expression of his primacy over his colleague patriarchs. The Arabic text is not very clear in this respect. It is possible that the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem enjoyed the same privilege at certain times, since in the absence of the patriarch of Constantinople, his Alexandrian colleague had to replace him during certain ceremonies³⁷. At the same time one has to realize that the ceremonial of a patriarchal consecration implied that the patriarch came to the church of Saint Sophia on horseback for the ceremony of his consecration. The text of Pseudo-Codinus, a text compiled in the late fourteenth century, suggests that exactly the same ceremony was followed for the consecration of the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, implying that these patriarchs carried a candle, at least on that occasion³⁸. From al-Makarim's statement one may conclude that, just as their co-religionists, members of the lower ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Melkite and other Christian churches in Egypt were not allowed to ride horses. The same seems to apply to carrying lighted candles at daytime. Generally speaking, Christians and Jews under Muslim rule were forbidden to ride horses³⁹. Taking all this into consideration, one has to admit that Anba Sabas enjoyed very special privileges.

The journey to Constantinople of Anba Sabas leads to a few conclusions. The privileges accorded by the emperor to Anba Sabas, the right to ride a horse and hold a candle by daytime, may have been part of his high clerical status. A recent consecration in Constantinople as patriarch of Alexandria, rather than success in treating the emperor for his illness, may have been the reason for obtaining such privileges. The

³⁷ For THEODOROS BALSAMON in *PG* 138, esp. col. 1016 (see also *supra*, n. 18); R.F. TAFT, *The Pontifical Liturgy of the Great Church according to a Twelfth-Century Diataxis in Codex British Museum Add. 34060*, in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 46 (1980), pp. 107-110; see also *ODB*, I, pp. 371-372, *s.v.* Candles.

³⁸ PSEUDO-KODINOS, *Traité des offices*, Introduction, texte et traduction par J. VERPEAUX, Paris 1966, pp. 220, 280-282.

³⁹ This was expressly stated by al-Makarim, EVETTS, *Upper Egypt*, p. 154 (f. 52r), where he says that Christians were not allowed to ride horses in Egypt; see also J.C. RISLER, *La civilisation arabe*, Paris 1955, p. 75.

gratefulness of the emperor, most likely Alexius I Comnenus, for a successful medical treatment may have been widely advertised by the Egyptians when they returned home. The text of al-Makarim, however, does not suggest a direct link between the privileges and the medical treatment by Anba Sabas. If the latter is to be identified as the patriarch Sabas, he was a qualified doctor and thus pursued two different careers, as a doctor and a church leader⁴⁰. Equally interesting is the list of *liturgica* acquired in Constantinople. It gives us interesting details about the luxury industry in Byzantium. Although the artefacts seem to have gone lost, the text references to these artefacts, incomplete as they are, are unique. The description of these *liturgica* suggests that they had the stature of a sanctuary where a member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, a bishop, an archbishop or even a patriarch performed his ecclesiastical duties. It is conceivable that a newly consecrated patriarch brought home the precious and essential *liturgica* for the Liturgy which we have discussed here, while donating a number of other *liturgica* to the churches in his resort⁴¹. If the identification is right, one could conclude that Anba Sabas' journey to Constantinople took place in 1117 in order to attend a synod and possibly to be consecrated as patriarch of Alexandria at the same time. It was no surprise for him to find the emperor in bad health. He must have known that the emperor had been suffering for a long time and he did what he was asked to do by taking care of the emperor's health.

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⁴⁰ *Histoire de Yahya-Ibn-Sa'id d'Antioche, continuateur de Sa'id-Ibn-Bitriq*, ed. and French transl. by I. KRATCHKOVSKY - A. VASILIEV, Paris 1924 (*Patrologia Orientalis*, 18/5), p. 713.

⁴¹ The treasury of the cathedral of Antioch in Latin times, which may have contained *liturgica* of the Greek patriarchate, shows similar exquisite *liturgica*, C. CAHEN, *La Syrie du Nord à l'époque des croisades et la principauté franque d'Antioche*, Paris 1940, p. 317 and n. 31 (for a French translation); *Le Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers de St. Jean de Jérusalem*, ed. J. DELAVILLE LE ROULX, Paris 1897, II, nr. 1336 (A.D. 1209), p. 112, gives the Latin document where a number of *liturgica* is enumerated which had temporarily been entrusted to the Order of Saint John.