

I might quote more than one contemporary of our own, who in his novels has affected the knowledge of a specialist in certain technical details. Will posterity be forced to conclude that his stories possess a foundation of truth and that he has merely made a free use of original documents?

No doubt Le Blant has done good service by showing "that frequently the information furnished by secondary texts is in agreement with that supplied by classic documents,"<sup>1</sup> but he was mistaken in supposing that "if these latter had not come into our hands we should have obtained much useful information from the rest concerning the principal features in the history of the persecutions". On the contrary, it must be obvious to all that if we had not the check provided by the classic texts, we should have no means of discerning the really primitive elements in documents without intrinsic value, and that we should be building up the history of the persecutions upon a foundation of sand.

This, however, is no reason for giving up the idea of supplementing Ruinart, after having taken much away from him. But, as we have seen, the first thing to be done is to realise clearly the place to be given to every document in the hierarchy of hagiographic records. The new Ruinart which we should like to compile would only contain the historical records belonging to the first three categories set out at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>1</sup> *Les Actes des martyrs*. p. 279.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE "DOSSIER" OF A SAINT.

Documents concerning St. Procopius of Cæsarea—Account given by Eusebius — Monuments testifying to the cultus — The three legends of St. Procopius—Analysis of the three legends—The Synaxaries—Latin Acts of St. Procopius—Adaptations to St. Ephysius and to St. John of Alexandria—Conclusions.

It is often an arduous task to establish the claims of a saint of the first centuries to the honours of public worship. Where historical documents are not entirely lacking they have sometimes undergone such marked modifications under the combined efforts of legend and legend writers that one can only make use of them with extreme caution. Nor is it all plain sailing when, by rare good fortune, the cause of a saint is founded on a comparatively well-furnished record. One must know how to classify the documents, to interpret them at their proper value, to weigh evidence, and to establish the degree of credibility to which each witness is entitled. It is a long and infinitely delicate task in which the inexperienced critic, unfamiliar with hagiography, meets with many a disappointment.

A providential accident has preserved for us an exceptionally complete series of documents concerning a saint of the persecution under Diocletian. Contemporary records, narratives derived from them and revised more than once, entries in the martyrologies, historical

proofs of the existence of a local cultus, the distant echoes of legend, everything that tradition is in the habit of distributing with niggardly hand between several saints is here united round a single name. The saint in question is St. Procopius, the "great martyr," honoured by the Greek Church on 8th July, and inscribed on the same date in the Roman Martyrology. In following step by step the traces of his cultus in literary monuments we shall arrive at an exact appreciation of the value of the documents concerning him. It will then be easy to extend to analogous cases the conclusions to which this examination will have led us.<sup>1</sup>

St. Procopius is the first of those martyrs of Palestine, of whom Eusebius, at once historian and eye-witness of the great persecution, has related the valiant resistance and the intrepid calmness in the face of death. Two versions have come down to us of Eusebius's tractate. The shortest and best known is usually read between the eighth and ninth book of the *Ecclesiastical History*. The other, more developed, has only come down to us in its entirety in a Syriac translation. Of the Greek text there only remain fragments and abstracts. The chapter concerning Procopius in the longer recension has not been found, like other chapters of the same work, in the Greek menologies. But the Latin Passionaries have preserved this fragment of Eusebius's book, the only fragment, so far as is known, to penetrate to the West. The following are the words in which the Bishop of Cæsarea relates the history of Procopius and his martyrdom.<sup>2</sup>

"The first of the martyrs of Palestine was Procopius,

<sup>1</sup> Concerning all this see *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xvi., pp. 113-22.

<sup>2</sup> *Bibl. hag. lat.*, n. 6949.

a man filled with Divine grace, who, before his martyrdom, had ordered his life so well that from childhood he had been vowed to chastity and to the practice of all the virtues. He had reduced his body until he had given it so to speak the appearance of a corpse, but his soul drew from the Word of God so great a vigour that the body itself was refreshed by it. He lived on bread and water, and only ate food every two or three days; sometimes he prolonged his fast during a whole week. Meditation on the Divine Word so filled his being that he remained absorbed in it day and night without any sense of fatigue. Filled with goodness and gentleness, regarding himself as the least of men, he edified every one by his discourses.<sup>1</sup> The word of God was his sole study, and of profane sciences he had but a mediocre knowledge. Born at Elia, he had taken up his residence at Scythopolis where he filled three ecclesiastical functions. He was reader and interpreter in the Syriac language, and cast out evil spirits by the imposition of hands.

"Sent with companions from Scythopolis to Cæsarea he had scarcely passed the city gates when he was conducted into the presence of the governor, and even before he had had a taste of chains or prison walls he was at once urged by the judge Flavian to sacrifice to the gods. But he, in a strong voice, proclaimed that there are not several gods, but one alone, the creator and author of all things. This answer made a vivid impression on the judge. Finding nothing to say in reply, he tried to persuade Procopius at least to sacrifice to the Emperors. But the martyr of God despised his entreaties. 'Listen,' he said, 'to this verse of Homer:

<sup>1</sup> The condition of the text renders the sentence very difficult to translate. We can only give the general sense of the passage.

It is not good to have several masters ; let there be one single chief, one single king.'

Οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη· εἰς κοίρανος ἔστω  
εἰς βασιλεύς.<sup>1</sup>

At these words, as though he had uttered imprecations against the emperors, the judge ordered him to be led to the place of execution. They cut off his head, and he passed happily to eternal life by the shortest road, on the 7th of the month of Desius, the day that the Latins call the nones of July, in the first year of our persecution. This was the first martyrdom that took place at Cæsarea."

Comment would but weaken the impression made by this noble and sober narrative, and, in our own day, no one would dream of putting it into a better style, as the process was called in the Middle Ages. We shall see directly the sort of success it achieved.

It was not long before St. Procopius was in the enjoyment of all the honours accorded to martyrs. It is perhaps scarcely right to quote in evidence the inscription of his name in the Eastern martyrology, which has come down to us in the pseudo-Hieronymian compilation. He figures on 8th July, under the formula, *In Cæsarea Cappadociæ, Procopi*. The value of this evidence is not actually lessened by the erroneous reference to Cæsarea in Cappadocia, instead of to Cæsarea in Palestine. This is a mistake which runs through the Hieronymian martyrology and was wholly attributable to the editor. But the Oriental annals depended, in the case of the Palestine martyrs, on Eusebius's book. They do not therefore in themselves testify to the existence of a living cultus.

Happily, so far as St. Procopius is concerned, we

<sup>1</sup> *Iliad*, ii., 204.

have other proofs establishing the antiquity of the honours rendered him. Pilgrims journeyed to Cæsarea to venerate his holy remains,<sup>1</sup> over which they erected a basilica. In 484 it was restored by the Emperor Zeno.<sup>2</sup> Scythopolis, the home of the martyr, also set up a shrine in his honour the existence of which was attested in the sixth century.<sup>3</sup> Devotion to St. Procopius must soon have become popular and have spread far beyond the boundaries of Palestine. In proof of this we find the blossoming of legends which early developed around the memory of the martyr of Cæsarea, and of which we shall attempt to trace out the principal phases.

There are in existence a whole series of different versions, for the most part unpublished, of the legend of St. Procopius, for the detailed study of which there is no room here. On some other occasion we propose to discuss from a technical point of view and to classify the various texts in their relations to one another. But the following are the results to which this work of classification has led us.

Three main versions of the legend must be distinguished. The first, and the most ancient, is represented by the text of the Paris manuscript, 1470,<sup>4</sup> and by a Latin Passion which has come down to us in a manuscript belonging to Monte Cassino.<sup>5</sup> The Latin version presupposes a Greek version varying somewhat from the one that we still possess. We shall, however, restrict ourselves to a study of this latter, as

<sup>1</sup> *Antonini Itinerarium*, 46, Geyer, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> *Chronicon paschale*, ed. Paris, p. 327.

<sup>3</sup> Cyrilli Scythopolitani, *Vita S. Sabæ*, c. 75, Cotelier, p. 349.

<sup>4</sup> *Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum græcorum bibliothecæ nationalis Parisiensis*, p. 149. [publ. in *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires*, p. 214-27.]

<sup>5</sup> *Bibl. hag. lat.*, n. 6950.

from our immediate point of view the divergences are of no importance. The group thus composed of the two texts will henceforth be referred to as the *first legend* of St. Procopius.

The *second legend* is to be met with in a large number of manuscripts, in various more or less developed versions. M. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus has published the one which is most widely spread, printed from a manuscript in the convent of Vatopedi on Mount Athos.<sup>1</sup> Unhappily this particular copy is abridged, and in order to analyse the legend we have made use of the Greek manuscript Paris, 897.

The title of *third legend* will be reserved for the group consisting of two closely allied versions of which one has been published in Greek by the Bollandists,<sup>2</sup> and the other in Latin by Lipomani,<sup>3</sup> and after him by Surius.<sup>4</sup>

We need not at this point take into consideration the various panegyrics of the saint, which are usually derived from one or other of the preceding categories.

We shall begin by summarising the first legend of St. Procopius. As far as bulk is concerned, it is seven or eight times as long as Eusebius's narrative: of its literary qualities the reader must judge for himself.

The narrative opens with an imaginary edict by Diocletian, a violent attack upon the faithful. The persecution breaks out, and the judge, Flavianus, a monster of cruelty, arrives at Cæsarea. The Blessed Procopius was a native of Elia and performed the functions of lector and exorcist. His ministry met

<sup>1</sup> *Ἀνάλεκτα ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς σταχυολογίας*, vol. v., St. Petersburg, 1898, pp. 1-27.

<sup>2</sup> *Acta SS.*, July, vol. ii., pp. 556-76.

<sup>3</sup> *Tomus sextus vitarum sanctorum patrum*, Rome, 1558, ff. 107-15v.

<sup>4</sup> *De probatis sanctorum vitis*, for 8th July.

with so much success that the attention of Flavianus was quite naturally drawn to him. Accordingly Flavianus summons him to his presence.

The judge is seated on the judgment-seat when Blessed Procopius is led in. As soon as he appears the people are unable to restrain their fury and roar like wild beasts: "There is the man who despises our gods, and tramples under foot the decree of the emperor". Flavianus, inspired by the devil, asks the martyr: "What is your name?" The martyr replies: "I am a Christian. My name is Procopius." The judge: "Are you alone ignorant of the divine commands of the Emperor, in accordance with which those who refuse to sacrifice to the gods must themselves be tortured and put to death? I cannot express my astonishment at seeing you, at your mature age, acting with such madness. How can you teach others, when you yourself have lost your senses? How dare you pretend that God was born of a woman and was crucified! Who would not scoff at such an invention? I warn you, therefore, to forsake this foolish error and to sacrifice to the gods and respectfully adore the image of the emperor, if you do not wish to suffer death. It is to be hoped that the tortures undergone by those who have preceded you may teach you a little sense."

This harangue by Flavianus is followed by a long speech from the martyr, who exhorts him to recognise God the Creator. Among the arguments he brings forward are the views of the philosophers, Hermes Trismegistus, Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Galen and Scamandrus, who all proclaimed the unity of God. After various arguments in favour of Christianity the orator is interrupted by the judge who mingles threats with his exhortations.

The martyr replies, but this time with less calm, nor is he sparing of insults. The invectives fade away into a lengthy dissertation, after which the judge orders the tortures to be begun. The martyr is strung up, his body is scraped, his wounds are made more painful by being covered with salt and rubbed with a rough hair-cloth. The executioners tear the flesh on his face with iron hooks till he is past recognition, and they break his bones.

Then the judge commands a certain person named Archelaus to cut the martyr's head off, but the man's hands are suddenly paralysed and he falls down dead.

The exasperated Flavianus sends Procopius to prison, loaded with chains. There the martyr recites a long prayer. Christ appears to him in the guise of an angel and heals his wounds. Three days later there is a second interrogatory, in the course of which Flavianus reproaches him for having had recourse to magic in order to kill Archelaus and to efface the scars of his own wounds. Then he orders him to be hung up and whipped with thongs of ox hide; the executioners apply burning coal to his back and reopen all his wounds by driving red-hot nails into his flesh. The saint does not cease speaking and overwhelms the judge with reproaches and insults, to which the judge replies by fresh tortures. The dialogue continues while more red-hot skewers are driven into the martyr's flesh. At length Flavianus invents a fresh ordeal. He orders a little altar to be set up. The martyr is made to stretch out his hand filled with burning coal, and incense is flung upon it. "If you throw the burning incense on the altar," declares Flavianus, "you will have sacrificed to the gods." Procopius remains resolute and his hand never moves. He weeps, but it

is not his own sufferings that draws tears from his eyes, but the obstinacy of Flavianus. Thunderstruck, Flavianus at length pronounces sentence of death. The Blessed Procopius is led outside the town to be executed. He begs for an hour's reprieve, and offers up a lengthy prayer, after which he submits to the fatal blow. The Christians carry off his body and give it decent sepulture.

Here we are indeed far removed from the discreet simplicity of Eusebius and the pious enthusiasm which pervades his narrative. The *Passio Procopii*, that we have summarised, is a piece of cold and clumsy rhetoric, relying for its effect on long speeches supplemented by commonplace sentiments and descriptions of tortures.

It cannot be pretended that the hagiographer was compelled to write in this way for lack of information concerning the saint. He had in his hands, not the mere summary by Eusebius contained in the *Ecclesiastical History*, but his developed text. It was there he learned that Procopius was a native of Elia, that he lived a holy life, that he performed ecclesiastical functions—as he omits all reference to Scythopolis, the assumption is that it was at Jerusalem—that the judge was named Flavianus, that the martyr died by the sword. Everything that he adds is pure invention, as, for example, the episode of Archelaus miraculously struck down at the moment when he is about to decapitate the saint, the vision enjoyed by the martyr in prison, the instant healing of his wounds, and finally the scene of the incense which is borrowed from the life of St. Barlaam.<sup>1</sup>

It is not easy, beneath these borrowed plumes, to

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xxii., pp. 134-45.

recognise the martyr commended by Eusebius, the simple-minded Christian nourished on Holy Scripture, an entire stranger to rhetorical methods and dialectical subtlety. True, we still have the lector, the exorcist and the ascetic. In later legends the transformation is carried much farther. In them the austere figure of the clerk of Scythopolis is wholly lost, and we have in his place a mail-clad warrior, his sword by his side and his lance at rest.

We must now summarise the second legend, notably longer than its predecessor.

Diocletian initiated a terrible persecution against the Christians, despatching edicts to all parts. The contents of the copy sent to Elia are given. The emperor himself goes to Egypt where he defeats the usurper Achilles, and thence he proceeds to Antioch where he receives from the senate a sort of profession of idolatrous faith.

Now there lived at Jerusalem, at that time called Elia, a noble lady named Theodosia who had a son named Neanias, a pagan like herself. His mother brought him to Antioch in order to recommend him to the kind notice of the emperor. The latter, captivated by his good looks and by his zeal on behalf of the heathen deities, forthwith created him Duke of Alexandria, and before he started to take up his new appointment urged upon him to seek out the Christians and to punish them severely. And in order to convince him of the folly of the Christians, Diocletian gave him a summary of the life of Christ with commentaries of his own.

Thus Neanias takes his departure, like a second Saul, breathing hatred and vengeance. But he too was to tread the road to Damascus. As he was leaving

Apamea, an earthquake accompanied by lightning made itself felt, and a voice from a cloud was heard: "Whither goest thou, Neanias?" At the same time a crystal cross became visible, and he heard the words: "I am Jesus crucified, the Son of God". Neanias makes various protestations, but the voice continues, "Thou shalt be to me a vessel of election," and again, "By this sign thou shalt conquer".

The converted Neanias journeys with his soldiers to Scythopolis, and there commissions a certain Mark to make him a gold and silver cross similar to the one seen in his vision. As soon as it was completed three figures appeared upon it with the names in Hebrew, Emanuel, Michael and Gabriel. With the help of this miraculous cross Neanias put to flight a body of Agarensians, killing 6,000 of them. He then returned home to his mother and broke up all the family idols, distributing the precious metal among the poor. His terrified mother denounces her son to Diocletian, and he consoles her by giving her permission to select a new son for herself from among the senators. At the same time he despatches a letter to the governor named Oulcion, charging him to examine Neanias and put him to death with torture should he persist in his impiety. Neanias learns the contents of the emperor's letter, tears it into a thousand fragments, and declares himself a Christian. The governor orders him to be put in chains and escorted to Cæsarea.

Oulcion presides at the trial and condemns Neanias to be hung up and his flesh torn with iron hooks. When the executioners are exhausted and all the martyr's bones are exposed, he is led back to prison. There he is visited by angels, and favoured by a vision of Christ who baptises him, changes his name to Procopius and heals all his wounds.

The next day there is a fresh interrogatory. The governor attributes the healing of the martyr to the power of the gods. Procopius immediately requests to be taken to the temple. The impious judge and the people imagine that the constancy of the martyr has given way and that he is about to sacrifice to the gods. He is therefore conducted to the temple with much pomp. But far from denying his Christian faith, Neanias breaks the idols in pieces by the virtue of the sign of the cross.

Here two long episodes occur. The first is that of the conversion of the soldiers, who go to visit Procopius in prison. The martyr persuades his jailer to allow him to conduct them to the bishop Leontius who baptises them, after which the martyr returns to prison. He confirms the new converts in their faith, and later they are martyred before his eyes.

As a counterpart to this narrative concerning the soldiers we next have the history of twelve matrons of senatorial rank who, in their turn, embrace the Christian religion and die after enduring inexpressible tortures. Theodosia, the mother of Procopius, is so touched by the spectacle of their constancy that she too is converted and suffers death with them.

Not long afterwards the governor Oulcion contracts a malignant fever and dies, and Flavianus takes his place at Cæsarea. The martyr is summoned before his tribunal, and there follow almost all the scenes described in the earlier legend.

Is it necessary to bring evidence to prove that this version is of later date than that which we have entitled the first legend? It is clear that this longer story is derived from it and marks a definite step in the legendary development. Neither the setting nor the

rhetoric of the first legend went so far as to alter the physiognomy of the martyr in any essential details. It preserved at least the memory of his ecclesiastical functions. In the later version the lector and exorcist disappears entirely, and we have in his stead a young heathen soldier and magistrate miraculously converted to Christianity. His name was originally Neanias, and it required nothing less than a vision to impose the name Procopius upon him.

This detail alone should suffice to betray the methods of the hagiographer. He has joined together two histories, that of Neanias which took place under the governorship of Oulcion and that of Procopius with Flavianus as judge.

What is the origin of the Neanias legend? It is impossible to say, nor is it necessary to investigate further before relegating it among compositions of the purest fantasy. It is a medley of stock incidents and reminiscences. The conversion of St. Paul, the vision of Constantine, the Acts of St. Polycarp and many other narratives which it were tedious to recall further, have furnished the compiler of this history with the main incidents. The introduction of Neanias into the legend has completed the metamorphosis of St. Procopius. Save for his name, nothing remains of him, and of Eusebius's narrative one can recall only vague reminiscences seen in the names of Elia, Scythopolis, Cæsarea and Flavianus.

The second legend is of great antiquity. It was current in the eighth century, and inspired sufficient confidence to be produced before the Fathers of the second council of Nicæa.<sup>1</sup> The episode of the miraculous cross was quoted as evidence in favour of the

<sup>1</sup> Hardouin, *Concilia*, vol. iv., pp. 229-32.

eneration of images, as may be read in the Acts of the Council.

In its third disguise the legend has enjoyed a notoriety no less widespread. It was incorporated in the collection of Metaphrastes, and with the other documents was reproduced in a large number of copies.<sup>1</sup>

There are even in existence two versions of this recension, of which the one that would appear to be the earlier in point of date has not yet been printed. We can, however, gather a sufficient idea of it from the translation published by Lipomani.<sup>2</sup> The second provides the text of the *Acta Sanctorum*. These two versions of the third legend are not sufficiently distinct to require separate treatment here. Without any inconvenience we may pass over the details peculiar to each and restrict ourselves to the features they possess in common.

Let us admit at once that between the second and third legend there are no essential differences. The succession of incidents is the same in both cases, nor has the new editor thought it necessary to tone down the absurdities of his model. His efforts appear to have been concentrated upon the style, and all the conventions of old-fashioned rhetoric are pretentiously displayed throughout the pages in which the Passion of St. Procopius is supposed to be related in a more attractive form. I will quote only a single instance in illustration of the methods of a school of hagiographers which has enjoyed much popularity.

Each time the editor comes across an historical or geographical name he uses it as a text on which to build up an erudite little dissertation into which he

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xvi., pp. 311-29.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 130.

drags all the reminiscences that the name recalls to his mind. Thus, when he relates that Diocletian arrived at Antioch, it reminds him that at Daphne, near the town, there was a celebrated sanctuary of Apollo. He therefore hastens to add that the Emperor went there to make solemn sacrifice to the God. Nor was it possible for him to forget that Antioch played an illustrious part in the history of the primitive Church, and that it was there the disciples of the new faith first received the title of Christians. The writer has no idea of passing the fact over in silence.<sup>1</sup>

A few lines farther on the question arises as to the native town of Theodosia, the mother of Procopius. In all earlier texts the town had been said to be Elia. This is how the new editor deals with the theme: "Theodosia occupied a leading position in the city. This city had previously borne the names of Jerusalem and of Sion. But after it had been taken by the Romans as a punishment for its crime towards Christ, Hadrian, who then wielded the imperial sceptre, renamed it Elia."<sup>2</sup>

The mention of Cæsarea furnishes yet further occasion for a display of erudition. Unfortunately in this instance the editor's learning is at fault, for he confuses Cæsarea Paneas or Philippi with Cæsarea Stratonica in Palestine, and he flounders in his error. "The judge commanded that the saint should be conducted to Cæsarea, where he was busy with the construction of a temple. We refer to that town of Cæsarea which we are accustomed to call of Philip, and which was formerly called Tower of Straton. The Phœnicians named it Paneas, a title derived from the neighbouring

<sup>1</sup> *Acta SS.*, July, vol. ii., p. 55, n. 5, 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 7.



mountain range Paneos. And as we have recalled that town, we should reproach ourselves were we to pass over in silence an interesting story that has reference to it" . . . and he proceeds to relate, in the words of Eusebius,<sup>1</sup> the well-known legend of the sculptured group representing, according to tradition, Christ and the woman who suffered from an issue of blood.<sup>2</sup>

We need not proceed further with the accumulation of proofs of the pedantry of our author. It has not diminished the popularity of his narrative. It is of this third legend that there still exists the greatest number of copies, and it served definitely to instal St. Procopius for all future ages in the character of a warrior martyr.

The inevitable result of transforming Procopius lector into Procopius soldier has been to duplicate the individual. In certain synaxaries one may read, under the date 8th July, the passion of the great martyr Procopius, that is to say the officer of the second and third legend, followed by the commemoration of Procopius, exorcist, martyred at Cæsarea.<sup>3</sup> This latter is further celebrated on 22nd November, and on that occasion a slightly abbreviated version of Eusebius's account is read.<sup>4</sup>

In some copies the commemoration of St. Procopius is repeated on the following day, 23rd November. But there he no longer bears his own name "Procopius of Palestine," but is styled Procopius "who suffered in Persia".<sup>5</sup>

Whence comes this qualification? We know of no

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. Eccl.*, viii., 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Acta SS.*, July, vol. ii., pp. 563-64, n. 27-29.

<sup>3</sup> *Synaxarium ecclesie Constantinopolitanæ*, pp. 805, 808.

<sup>4</sup> *Synaxarium ecclesie Constantinopolitanæ*, p. 245.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 247, 249.

Persian martyr of the name of Procopius. It is obvious that we are here in the presence of a blunder, but it is impossible to ascertain its origin in any very precise way, and we can but chronicle another of the many aberrations of the compilers of synaxaries. Those who are in the habit of handling this class of volume will entertain no doubt whatever that it is the one and only St. Procopius who is made to figure in these various disguises.<sup>1</sup>

The synaxaries of recent date and the menæa which have borrowed their historical sections, only inscribe St. Procopius the officer, and add commemorations of his mother Theodosia, of the twelve matrons put to death with her, and of the officers Antiochus and Nicostratus, who, according to the legend, were in command of the soldiers converted by Procopius.

The Latins<sup>2</sup> have also studied the Acts of St. Procopius, and we have seen that the original narrative of Eusebius has been preserved as a separate document in their passionaries alone. From it is derived the very exact commemoration contained in the historic Latin martyrologies.<sup>3</sup> We have explained further that the

<sup>1</sup> The Vatican MS. 679 contains an *ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὸν ὅσιον μάρτυρα Προκόπιον τὸν Πέρσην*, of which the author is Hesychius, a priest of Jerusalem. There is nothing in this document by which one may distinguish Procopius the Persian from Procopius of Cæsarea. See *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xxiv., pp. 473-82.

<sup>2</sup> I will not discuss here the cultus of St. Procopius in Slavonic countries. The literary monuments all have their origin in Greek sources. The others are of comparatively recent date. Concerning the cultus of the saint in Servia see C. Jirecek, *Das Christliche Element in der topographischen Nomenclatur der Balkanländer in the Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. cxxxvi., 1897, n. xi., pp. 36-37.

<sup>3</sup> The following is the text of Adon: "In Palæstina natalis sancti Procopii martyris, qui ab Scythopoli ductus Cæsaream, ad primam responsionum eius confidentiam, irato iudice Fabiano (read Flaviano) capite cæsus est". The same account occurs in Usuard, *Ed. Sollerius*, pp. 388-89.

first legend of St. Procopius was probably known to the West through a Latin version made in Southern Italy. The portion of the second legend that was read at the Council of Nicæa was translated by Anastasius the librarian. But it is almost certain that a complete translation must also have existed.

We are justified in inferring this from a study of the Latin adaptations of the Acts of St. Procopius. For the illustrious martyr has not been spared a single one of the indignities to which clumsy hagiographers have subjected those saints on whom they have bestowed special attention. Not satisfied with composing on his behalf a history in which facts are completely travestied, and the character of the saint perverted, they have further transformed his history into a sort of *passé-partout*, a specimen biography which has been made to fit the lives of various obscure saints concerning whom all information is lacking.

The second legend of St. Procopius served in the first place to furnish Acts for St. Ephysius of Cagliari.<sup>1</sup> Apart from a few petty incidents clumsily tacked on to the text, and a few names of places designed to connect the saint with Sardinia, the story such as we know it has scarcely been revised, and in particular nothing has been done to give it a greater appearance of probability.

There is of course no question of a mission to Alexandria in the legend of Ephysius, but the name of the city has become that of the mother of the martyr who, in the original legend, was called Theodosia. Both are equally described as noble ladies of Elia and as having for husband a Christian named Christopher. Like Procopius,

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta Bollandiani*, vol. iii., pp. 362-77.

Ephysius is taken to Antioch by his mother and introduced to Diocletian, who entrusts him with the duty of persecuting the Christians, not indeed of Egypt, but of Italy. The vision occurs at a place called Vrittania, and it is at Gaeta that a silversmith named John supplies him with a crucifix. By the power of the sign of the cross Ephysius scatters the Saracens and then sets sail for Sardinia. He lands at Arborea, and in a short time makes himself master of the whole island. It is from Cagliari that he writes to Diocletian and to his mother to announce his conversion.

The emperor despatches to him one of his officers named Julicus, who, on Ephysius's refusal to apostatise, subjects him to cruel tortures. Like Oulcion in the original legend, Julicus is shortly struck down by a fatal fever. His place is taken by Flavianus, whose acquaintance we have already made. This savage judge does not forget to inflict on the martyr the ordeal of St. Barlaam, after which he condemns him to have his head cut off. The sentence is carried out *apud Caralitanam civitatem in loco qui dicitur Nuras*.

The history ends with a short narrative concerning a St. Juvenalis, Archbishop of Cagliari, an entirely unknown personage,<sup>1</sup> and with the following declaration, which however does not enable us to believe for a moment in the good faith of the biographer: *Cuius passionem ego presbyter Marcus, dum a principio usque ad finem oculis meis vidissem, oratu ipsius beati martyris Ephysi fideliter veraciterque descripsi presentibus atque posteris profuturam.*<sup>2</sup>

[<sup>1</sup> *Acta SS.*, May, vol. vi., 732. 3d ed.]

<sup>2</sup> "And seeing that I, Mark, the priest, had beheld his passion with my own eyes from the beginning unto the end, at the request of the blessed martyr Ephysius himself, I have faithfully and truly recounted it in the hope that it will be profitable alike to our contemporaries and to posterity." [*Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. iii., p. 377. 3d ed.]

At Venice, in the church of St. Daniel, there is preserved the body of a St. John, martyr (*sancti Johannis ducis Alexandrini martyris*), which was brought there from Constantinople in 1215.<sup>1</sup> For this unknown martyr some history some needed, and no better plan was forthcoming than that of despoiling St. Procopius for his benefit, and applying to him the legend in all its details and in its most complete and fabulous form. In this case also the martyr was called Neanias in his pre-Christian days and his mother was born at Elia, while it was the Emperor Maximian who entrusted to him the duty of exterminating the faithful of Alexandria. The two prefects who successively summoned him before their tribunal bore the names of Oulcion and Flavianus; the conversion of the soldiers, of the twelve matrons and of the mother of the martyr all recur. Leontius, instead of being Bishop of Cæsarea, figures on this occasion as Bishop of Alexandria, and it is in the latter city that John meets with his death.<sup>2</sup>

It is now time to summarise the preceding pages. Thanks to the testimony of Eusebius, the existence of the martyr St. Procopius is fully established together with the main outlines of his life and the manner of his death. Of itself this narrative would not be sufficient to establish the fact of a traditional cultus, and the same is true, as has been already explained, of the inclusion of the saint in the Hieronymian Martyrology. The existence, however, of the shrines at Cæsarea and at Scythopolis supply an incontrovertible proof of veneration.

<sup>1</sup> Flaminius Cornelius, *Ecclesiæ Venetæ antiquis monumentis . . . illustratæ*, vol. iv., Venice, 1749, pp. 170-71.

<sup>2</sup> *Acta SS.*, May, vol. iv., pp. 304-7.

The narrative of Eusebius was rapidly supplanted by legends throughout the East. It has left no trace in the Greek menologies in which the place which one would have liked to see assigned to it on 8th July is invariably filled by one or other of the legendary forms. Of the three legends with which we are familiar it is the most historical version that has enjoyed the least popularity.

One may say briefly that throughout the Middle Ages St. Procopius was venerated in the character attributed to him by the second legend. Even in our own day he still belongs to the category of warrior saints. It is important to remember that the type is one common to a number of well-known heroes—George, Theodore, Mercurius, Menas, Demetrius and others—and that the only literary monuments in which we can inform ourselves concerning most of them are documents of the same class as those which constitute the legend of Procopius.<sup>1</sup> Let us now see how much of them the historian must reject or retain.

The historic residue is this: a Christian named Procopius, a native of Jerusalem, was martyred under Diocletian by order of the judge Flavianus, and suffered death by the sword. We have the good fortune to be able to verify these details, and to confirm their accuracy, thanks to the single historical source which acquaints us with the personality of St. Procopius, and which a providential accident has preserved for us. On the other hand, the comparison of our legend with Eusebius's book establishes without a doubt that all the other details are a pure invention.

[Thus the names of the saint's parents, his state of life, his qualities, his life and adventures, the tortures he endured, his imprisonment, the conversions he

[<sup>1</sup> See our *Légendes grecques des saints militaires*, p. 1-119. 3d ed.]

brought about, his miracles, the visions with which he was favoured, all these are mere fabrications.] Not only must the impossible Oulcion be expunged from the list of Roman magistrates, but we must exclude from the Greek liturgical books the names of Theodosia, of the twelve matrons and of the two officers as being the simple inventions of hagiographers.

And yet the legends we have been dissecting had their origin in a historical work of the first quality.<sup>1</sup> Such are the results hagiographers are capable of producing when they have good documents to work upon. In what terms shall we qualify their productions when, in the absence of all guidance, they have felt justified in giving free rein to their imaginations?

In the *dossier* of St. Procopius, therefore, the legend fills the lowest place, and if we had no other document to add to it we should find ourselves reduced even when dealing with so illustrious a martyr to a series of notes of interrogation. The certitude at which we may arrive of the historical existence of a saint and the legitimacy of his cultus, in no sense depends on the popularity of his legend. A few lines written by a contemporary, the text of a martyrology based on the liturgical traditions of a Church, or a basilica dating from ancient times, these are elements of far greater value to the student, and one is thankful to be able to affirm that they are not wholly lacking in the credentials of some very celebrated saints, whose credit has been seriously compromised by the clumsy tactics of their biographers.

Such testimony is not to be found, alas, among the documentary evidence concerning St. Ephysius of Cagliari or St. John of Alexandria. The very exist-

<sup>1</sup> *Acta SS.*, July, vol. ii., p. 576.

ence of the former and the antiquity of the cultus paid to him are only guaranteed, as we have seen, by a title which is patently spurious. Saintship on this insecure basis is unhappily by no means without precedent in the annals of Sardinian hagiography.

As for the martyr John, it appears that his body was stolen from the chapel of a monastery in Constantinople as little known as the saint himself.<sup>1</sup> His incompetent biographer has only succeeded in accentuating our suspicions concerning his identity.

<sup>1</sup> Flaminius Cornelius, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, vol. iv., p. 171.

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# THE LEGENDS OF THE SAINTS

AN INTRODUCTION TO HAGIOGRAPHY

FROM THE FRENCH OF  
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