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## *THE WORSHIP OF THE VIRGIN MARY AT EPHESUS.*

### I. GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE SITUATION.

THE recent discovery of the so-called House of the Virgin at Ephesus, where the mother of the Saviour spent the latter part of her life, and where she died and was buried, forms a curious and interesting episode in the history of religion—not indeed the history of the Christian religion, for it hardly touches even the fringe thereof, but certainly the history of Anatolian religion or religiosity. Briefly put, the story is that an uneducated woman in a German convent saw in a vision the place in the hills south of Ephesus where the Virgin Mary had lived, and described it in detail, immediately after she had the vision; that her vision was printed and published in Germany; that after the lapse of about fifty years the book came into the hands of some Roman Catholics in Smyrna, by whom the trustworthiness of the vision was keenly discussed; that a priest in Smyrna who took a leading part in controverting the authority of the vision made a journey into the mountains in order to prove by actual exploration that no such House existed; that he found the House exactly as it was described in the published account of the vision, amid surroundings which were also accurately described therein; and that he returned to Smyrna convinced of the truth against his previous judgment. A Roman Catholic festival has since the discovery been arranged annually. Though the justifi-

ability of this festival is warmly disputed by other Catholics outside of the neighbourhood of Smyrna and Ephesus, it may perhaps gradually make its way to general recognition and receive ultimately official authorization.

What seems to be the most real point of interest in this story is that through this strange and round-about method the permanence of Anatolian religion has asserted itself. Those Catholics who maintain that this is the House of the Virgin have really restored the sanctity of a locality where the Virgin Mother was worshipped thousands of years before the Christian era, and have worked out in perfection a chapter in the localization of Anatolian religion. We do not mean by this that there has been any deception in the gradual evolution of the "discovery." When the story was first told to the present writer at Smyrna in 1901, the highest character was attributed by quite trustworthy and unprejudiced informants to the Catholic priest who finally made the discovery of the House. He was described as an engineer, a man of science and education, who had entered the priesthood in mature years after a life of activity and experience, and also as a man of honour and unimpeachable veracity; and his original attitude of scepticism and strong disapproval in face of the statements narrated in the vision, at the time when the book first became known in Smyrna,<sup>1</sup> was said to have been a public and well authenticated fact. There seems to be no reason (apart from the fixed resolve to disbelieve) for doubting his good faith and his change of opinion when he went and saw for himself.

Equally improbable is it to suppose that there can be any bad faith or deception in the earliest stages of the evolution of this modern legend. The earliest pub-

<sup>1</sup> This was in November, 1890. The "discovery" was made on Wednesday, 29 July, 1891, the Feast of Saint Martha, the third day of continuous search in the mountains.

lication of the visions of the German nun, Anne Catharine Emmerich, is not accessible to the present writer, and Professor A. Souter finds that it is not in the Bodleian Library; but a translation in English was published long before the actual discovery took place; and any person may with a little trouble satisfy himself of the existence of the printed record of this and other visions in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Nor is it a reasonable supposition that Anne Catharine Emmerich had access to any careful description of the localities south of Ephesus. Those hills have been unexplored and unknown. Although the sacred place is not far from the site of the ancient city, yet the scanty population of the modern village Ayassoluk (Hagios Theol6gos, St. John) have no interest or knowledge in such matters; and western explorers had never penetrated into the hill country, which was extremely dangerous as a resort of brigands until a quite recent date. Moreover, the nun is described as having had little education: she was the daughter of poor peasants of Westphalia, who is said to have had an aversion to reading, and rarely to have touched a book. Her visions, so far as we know them, confirm this account, and are the products of a simple mind, trained in the popular Roman Catholic ideas and

<sup>1</sup> The fundamental authority seems to be the publication of C. Brentano on the *Life of the Blessed Virgin founded on the Visions of A. C. Emmerich* (Cotta, Stuttgart, 1841). See also the *Life of A. C. E.* by Helen Ram (London, Burns & Oates, 1874); and also various works published after the "discovery," *Panaghia-Capouli, ou Maison de la Sainte Vierge près d'Éphèse* (Oudin, Paris and Poitiers, 1896); *Éphèse ou Jerusalem Tombeau de la Sainte Vierge* (id., ib. 1897); *The Death of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Assumption into Heaven*, from the Meditations of A. C. E.: translated from the French by Geo. Richardson (Duffy & Co., Dublin, 1897). I have seen only the third and fourth of these five books; also a Greek counterblast by Archdeacon Chrysostomos, printed at Athens and published at Smyrna in 1896, under the title of *Καπουλή-Παναγία*.

[As this first half of the paper goes to print, I have the opportunity of visiting the site with a French translation of the first in my pocket.]

traditions about the Saints, Anna, Joachim, and the rest, and weaving slightly elaborated forms of the ordinary tales. There are also some evident traces of information gained from reading or hearing descriptions of Ephesus (as distinguished from the hills south of Ephesus), and this information is not always accurately worked up in the details.

One who was bent on finding deception in the incidents would seize on the circumstances in which the visions were committed to writing. The nun's fame came to the knowledge of the world when there appeared marks on her body like those on the body of the Saviour; and medical and ecclesiastical examination vindicated her personal character. Count Stolberg's letter to a friend, describing his visit to her, was published, and attracted the attention of the poet Brentano. He went to see her for the first time on September 24, 1818; and in subsequent visits he wrote down her visions, which he published. Probably the literary power of the amanuensis improved the literary quality of the visions; but we may justifiably refuse to think that Brentano invented anything or made pure additions to the words of Anne. It is, however, true that a considerable interval elapsed between his hearing the visions from Anne and his publication of them. Anne died in 1824, and Brentano's book appeared only in 1841.

But even those who would maintain that the visions are the highly idealized memory or the invention of Brentano, and not the imaginings of Anne, only put the difficulty one step away. They explain nothing. There is no reason to think that Brentano could have had access to any peculiar source of knowledge of Ephesian localities and mountains, from which he could learn anything important about the history of that nook among the hills during the Middle Ages. There is a sacred place where the House was discovered: it has been a sacred place, to which the Orthodox Greek peasants went on pilgrimage,

throughout later Christian times: in the present article an attempt will be made to prove that it was a sacred place in the remote pre-Christian times. It seems a more credible thing that the vision of a secluded and imaginative maiden should have suggested the search and the discovery of this obscure locality than that the fanciful invention of a German poet should do so.

But it is really an unimportant detail whether the nun saw in her ecstatic meditation the House among the Ephesian hills (as it seems to us most probable that she did), or the poet invented the description by reconstructing into a poetic picture with happy power the elements which he had gained from reading and study. Either of these theories is almost equally remote from the one practical fact, viz., the process whereby the unity of Ephesian religion worked itself out, turning to its own purposes certain Christian names and forms, and trampling under foot all the spirit of Christianity.

The brief reference to this subject in the present writer's *Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, p. 218, has caused some inquiries, and this episode in the history of religion seems worthy of more careful and detailed study.

## II. THE SURVIVAL OF PAGAN CULTS.

The fundamental fact, viz., the continuity of religious history in Asia Minor, is one which there is no need to prove. Yet it forms so remarkable a chapter in the history of religious ideas, that we may profitably give a sketch of the prominent facts.

The introduction of Christianity into the country broke the continuity for the moment. But the old religious feeling was not extirpated: it soon revived, and took up the struggle once more against its new rival. Step by step it conquered, and gradually destroyed the real quality of

Christianity. The old local cults took on new and outwardly Christianized forms; names were changed, and outward appearance; a show of Christian character was assumed. The Iconoclasts resisted the revival for a time, but the new paganism was too strong for them. The deep-seated passion for art and beauty was entirely on the side of that Christianized paganism, into which the so-called Orthodox Church had degenerated; and architecture together with the painting of images (though not sculpture) was its chosen servant. Where the rhetorician Aristides in the second century had invoked in his sickness the guidance and healing power of Asclepius of Smyrna, the emperor John Vatatzes, in the thirteenth century, when he was afflicted by disease, went to invoke the Christ of Smyrna.<sup>1</sup> The old Greek sailors and Roman merchants, when voyaging or about to voyage in the changeable weather of the Black Sea (where dangerous and sudden storms might occur at almost any season of the year and where there was no sure season of fair weather, such as could be calculated on with confidence in the Aegean or the Mediterranean), had appealed to Achilles Pontarches, the Lord of the Sea (Pontus), to protect and guide them. The sailors of the Christian period appealed to St. Phocas of Sinope, to aid them. Similarly the sailors of the Levant, who had formerly prayed to the Poseidon of Myra, afterwards invoked St. Nicholas of Myra. There is little essential difference in

<sup>1</sup> "Ὁπως τῷ ἐκείνῳ προσκυνήσῃ Χριστῷ, *Acrop.*, p. 91. See *Histor. Geogr. of Asia Minor*, p. 116, *Church in R. Emp.* p. 466. I know no other case in which the person of Christ is degraded into a mere local deity. As a general rule, some saint takes the place of the old local impersonation of divine power, and the figure of the Saviour stands apart on a higher plane; but here (and perhaps in other cases unobserved by me) the analogy of Asclepius the Saviour has been seductive. Zeus the Saviour would also be a tempting analogy.

<sup>2</sup> *St. Paul the Traveller* (1895), p. 298. Add to the remarks there given a reference to *Mélanges Perrot* (1902), p. 25, where M. Bourguet remarks that

religious feeling between the older practice and the new : paganism is only slightly disguised in these outwardly Christianized cults.

Examples might be multiplied. They occur in all parts of the country, as exploration enables us to gather some conception of the religious history of the different districts. Local variety is inevitably hostile to the Christian spirit, because Christianity is unity, and its essence lies in the common brotherly feeling of the scattered parts of a great single whole. In the centre of Cappadocia one of the greatest sanctuaries of the land was that of Zeus of Venasa (where the name Zeus is the Hellenization of a native Cappadocian divine idea); his annual progress through his own country was one of the greatest festivals of the year; and it may be taken for granted that in the usual Anatolian style the chief priest wore the dress and even bore the name of the god. In the fourth century, when we find that a Christian deacon at Venasa takes the leading part in a festival of somewhat orgiastic character accompanied by a dancing chorus of women celebrants, and that this leader does not appear in his own character, but wears the dress and plays the part of the Patriarch, we recognize the old pagan elements in a slightly varied garb. This particular manifestation of the reviving paganism was put down by the strict puritan spirit of Basil the Great; but it was rare that such tendencies, which broke out broadcast over the land, found a champion of Christian purity to resist them. The feeling of the mass of the Cappadocian Christians seems rather to have been against Basil in this case, though his energy and intense fervour of belief, combined with his authority as supreme bishop of the Province, swept away all opposition, and converted lukewarm friends the existence of a Church of St. Nicholas at Castri would alone have been a sufficient proof that Poseidon had a worship there in ancient Delphi, but that now epigraphic proof has been discovered of the existence of a shrine of Poseidon called Poteidanion.



or even opponents into his agents and servants in resisting the new paganism.<sup>1</sup>

On the frontier of Pisidia and Phrygia there is a fine fountain of cold water beside the village of Yassi-Euren. The village is purely Mohammedan; but the Christians once a year come on pilgrimage to it as a sacred fountain, or Ayasma, and this Christian name is applied to it even by the Mohammedan villagers. Finding there a Latin inscription dedicated to Hercules Restitutor, we cannot doubt that Hercules (who is often known as the god of medicinal, and especially of hot, springs) was regarded as the divine power who restored health to the sick by means of this healing spring, Hercules being, of course, merely a Latinized expression for the native Anatolian god of the healing power.

Frequently the same saint is, through some natural and obvious association, selected in widely different localities to be the Christian embodiment of a pagan deity. The choice of St. Nicholas at Delphi, already quoted, may be a case of transference and imitation. But the choice of St. Demetrios in place of the goddess Demeter in various parts of Greece was probably suggested separately and independently in several different places; and the cause must have been pure resemblance of name, since the sex differs and there is no other apparent correspondence. Moreover, in Anatolia, the Great Mother, the Meter, experiences the same transformation, and, beyond all doubt, the same reason caused the selection of this particular Christian substitute; thus, for example, the holy Phrygian city, Metropolis, the city of the Mother goddess, was transformed into the Christian Demetrioupolis.

<sup>1</sup> On the whole episode see *The Church in the Roman Empire*, chap. xviii. p. 448 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The proof seems now fairly complete and convincing that the site of

For a totally different reason the correspondence of the goddess Artemis to the Virgin Mary was equally striking and widely recognized. In both cases the virgin nature was a fundamental principle in the cult, and yet in both cases motherhood was an equally, if not more, deep-seated element of the worship on its mystic side. For reasons that have been fully explained often elsewhere<sup>1</sup> the Virgin Artemis was the divine mother and teacher and guide of her people. It will not be difficult to show that there was a similar thought underlying the worship of the Virgin in Anatolia.

The *locus classicus* as to the early stage of the worship of the Virgin Mother of God at Ephesus is in the Acts of the Council held there in A.D. 431 (on which see below, § iii.). A sermon delivered in A.D. 429 by Proclus, bishop of Cyzicus, apparently at Constantinople, forms a sort of introduction to the Acts of the Council. The occasion and sacred ceremony at which the sermon was delivered is there formally entitled "The Panegyris of the Virgin" (*παρθενικὴ πανήγυρις*).

The subject of the sermon is "celebrating the glorification of the race of women"; it is "the glory of the Female,"<sup>2</sup> due to her "who was in due time Mother and Virgin." "Earth and Sea<sup>3</sup> do honour to the Virgin." "Let Nature skip in exultation: women are honoured. Let Humanity dance in chorus: virgins are glorified. The sacred Mother of God, Mary, has brought us here together." She is called, in terms hardly distinguishable

this Metropolis was a few miles further north than I formerly placed it. It was the city centre of the territory in which were the great monuments of early Phrygia, the tombs of Midas and the other kings of the archaic dynasty, the true metropolis of early Phrygia.

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Hastings' *Dictionary*, art. *Diana*, and *Religion of Greece and Asia Minor*.

<sup>2</sup> Τοῦ γένους τῶν γυναικῶν καύχημα τὸ τελούμενον and δόξα τοῦ θήλεος.

<sup>3</sup> Capitals are needed here to express the strong personification which approximates to the Pagan conception of Gaia and Thalassa as deities.

from the language of paganism, "the fleece very pure, moist from the rain of heaven, through whose agency the Shepherd put on him the (form and nature of) the sheep,<sup>1</sup> she who is slave and mother, virgin and heaven, the sole bridge by which God passes to men."

It seems impossible to mistake or to deny the meaning implied in this language. The Anatolian religious feeling desiderated some more clear and definite expression of an idea dear to it, beyond the expression which was otherwise contained in the rites and language of Christianity. That idea was the honour, the influence, the inevitableness in the world, of the female element in its double aspect of purity and motherhood. "Purity is the material,"<sup>2</sup> but purity that is perfected in maternity. The Virgin the Mother, the purity of motherhood, was to the popular Anatolian religious sentiment the indispensable crown of the religious idea. This beautiful and remarkable sentiment shows on what a real and strong foundation the worship of the Virgin in Anatolia rested, and how the Iconoclast movement was weakened by its opposition to a deep-seated Anatolian sentiment. Perhaps in the West the worship of the Virgin rests on a different basis. So far as I am aware her character has been regarded in the West rather as a mere adjunct or preparation for the divine nature of her Son, while in the Anatolian cult (if I am right) it has been looked at and glorified for its own sake and as an end in itself, as the divine prototype of the nature and duty of womanhood in its most etherealized form.

It would be an interesting and useful task to investigate how far the view which was taken in the West can be traced as guiding the writings of the great writers and

<sup>1</sup> Ὅτι οὐδ' ἐξ οὐρανῶν ἑστέου καθαρῶτατος πρόκος, ἐξ οὗ ὁ Ποιμὴν τὸ πρόβατον ἐνεδύσατο.

<sup>2</sup> Ἐχει γὰρ ἀγγελίας ὑπέθεσιν.

theologians who championed the worship of the Virgin in the Eastern Church. There was, certainly, a marked diversity in the East between the popular view and what may be called the sacerdotal view, held by the educated theologians. The former was much more frankly pagan. The latter took on a superficial adaptation to Christian doctrine, and for this purpose the person of Christ had to be made the central, governing thought and the Mother must be regarded only as subsidiary. But this subject lies outside the scope of this article, and beyond the powers and knowledge of the present writer. It may be added, however, that the divergence can probably be traced down to the present day in the cult of the Virgin Mother at Ephesus. The Greek sacerdotal view seems never to have been that the Virgin Mary lived or died at Ephesus, though it recognized the holiness of the sacred place and regarded it as specially devoted to the person of the Virgin and as a special abode of her power. The popular view desired her personal presence there during her life, and clung to the idea in a half-articulate fashion that she came to Ephesus and lived there and died there. The sacerdotal expression seems in some cases to have shrunk from a frank and pointed contradiction of the popular view, while it could not formally declare it in its thoroughgoing form. In the Acts of the Council of Ephesus this intermediate form of expression seems to rule. As we shall see in § iii. there is nothing said there which can be taken as proving that the belief in the real living presence of the Virgin Mary at Ephesus was held. But the opponents of Nestorius relied on the popular support; and, in the Council which was called to judge and condemn his views, they were unwilling to say anything that could be seized on by Nestorius and his followers as telling on their side, or might tend to alienate popular feeling.

It is equally impossible to overlook the fact that some-

thing approximating to that idea was peculiarly characteristic of Anatolian religion and society in all ages and variations of the common general type. The idea was not so beautifully expressed in the older religion; the ritual form was frequently allied to much that was ugly and repulsive; it was often perverted into a mere distortion of its original self. But in many cases these perversions allow the originally beautiful idea to shine through the ugliness that has enveloped it, and we can detect with considerable probability that the ugliness is due, at least in part, to degradation and degeneration. The article "Diana of the Ephesians" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, suffers from the failure to distinguish between earlier and later elements in the Anatolian ritual; the writer attained to a clearer conception of the subject in preparing the article in the same work on the *Religion of Greece and Asia Minor*, though even there it is not expressed with sufficient precision and definiteness.

Closely connected with this fundamental characteristic in Anatolian religion is the remarkable prominence of the female in the political and social life of the country. Many of the best attested cases of *Mutter-recht* in ancient history belong to Asia Minor. Even under the Roman rule (when Western ideas, springing from war, conquest, and the reign of violence and brute strength were dominant), the large number of women mentioned as magistrates and officials in the most "advanced" cities of the whole country strikes every student of the ancient monuments as an unusual feature. It can hardly be explained except through the power of that old native belief and respect for the mother and the teacher. The mother goddess was merely the religious prototype and guarantee and enforcement of the social custom. A young French scholar, who collected with much diligence from inscriptions examples of the custom surviving in the Roman time, advanced the

theory as an explanation that these magistrates were rich women whom the people wanted to wheedle out of their money; and there is no evidence in his book that he felt himself to be perpetrating an elaborate archaeological joke; but that would be the best justification for advancing such an opinion on a professedly historical or antiquarian treatise.

An indubitable example of the Virgin Artemis transformed into the Christian Mother of God is found at the northern end of the great double lake, called Limnai in ancient times, and now known by two names for the two parts, Hoiran-Göl and Egerdir-Göl. Near the north-eastern corner of the lakes there is still said to be a sacred place of the Christians, to which they come on pilgrimage from a distance, though there is no Christian settled population nearer than Olu-Borlu (the ancient Apollonia). A large body of inscriptions has been collected from the neighbourhood, showing that there was here a peculiar worship of the goddess Artemis, which preserved the native Anatolian character unimpaired through the Greek and Roman periods, and to which strangers came from great distances. Her worshippers in her home by the Limnai seem to have been united in a fraternity whose members recognized one another by some secret sign (*τέκμων*, an old poetic term, reintroduced in this artificial Greek as spoken by a non-Greek people).

Our view is that the similar Virgin Artemis of Ephesus, who in the mystic ritual was set before her worshippers as the mother, nurse, governor and leader of her swarming people, the great Queen-Bee, was transformed into the Ephesian Mother of God; and that the same change was made independently all over the Anatolian land.

There is, therefore, in this popular tendency a real cause, continuously and effectively operative, in many, doubtless in all, parts of the Anatolian country. It was strenuously

opposed by a party in the Church. The conflict between the two opinions lasted for many centuries; but finally the popular opinion was victorious and established itself as the "Orthodox" principle, while the more purely Christian opinion became the "heretical" view and its supporters were proscribed and persecuted; and the ill-feeling and division indubitably seriously weakened the Eastern Christian Empire in its struggle against Mohammedanism.

The view which this paper is intended to support is that the establishment of the cult of the Virgin Mother of God at Ephesus is a critical, epoch-making date in the development of Byzantine government and religion. The whole process by which it was established is a page in the history of the Empire. Ephesus, which had long been the champion of a purer faith,<sup>1</sup> and the touchstone of error, as both John and Ignatius emphatically declare, was now made the stronghold of an Anatolian development, a recrudescence of the old religion of the Divine Mother.

But the question may be asked whether the view advocated in this article is not prejudiced and one-sided. Are we not advocating too strongly the Anatolian element and neglecting the possibility of development within the bounds of Christianity? The dogmatic side may safely be left to others. There are plenty of able advocates always ready to discuss matters of dogma and systematic theology, and the present writer never has presumed to state an opinion on such lofty matters. But there are some historical points which may be briefly noticed in the following § iii.

At the last moment, before sending this part to the printer, while sitting looking out over the site of the Temple of the Ephesian goddess, I may add that, in the excavations now going on amid the ruins of that famous Temple, a small terra-cotta image has been found, somewhat archaic in style, representing the goddess sitting and

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 239-242.

holding an infant in her arms. This rather rudely formed expression of popular belief was taken at the first moment of discovery by some of those who saw it as a mediæval image of the Madonna and Child, though more careful contemplation showed that it must have been made several centuries before the time of Christ. It is a complete proof, in its startling resemblance to the later Christian representation, of the perfect continuity of Anatolian religious sentiment amid outward differences.

W. M. RAMSAY.

*(To be continued.)*

*SURVIVALS OF ANCIENT SEMITIC RELIGION IN  
SYRIAN CENTRES OF MOSLEM AND CHRIS-  
TIAN INFLUENCE.*

WHEN I speak of ancient Semitic religion, I mean the earliest form of religion among the Semites concerning which we can secure any information; a religion which antedates Islam, Judaism, or the representations found in the Old Testament; a form of religion which presents its sacrifices without an altar and without the use of fire.

In characterizing the religion as Semitic I do not thereby raise the question whether it is essentially different in its primal features from the manifestations of religion to be found among other peoples. This is not probable. As men of all races have essentially the same physical and mental characteristics, but with marked differences, so a study of comparative religion must doubtless show that the simplest religion differs among various peoples in its manifestations rather than in its essence. Hence we may well find some of the same manifestations of religion everywhere in the world.