

Patron Saints of Cities and Their Relics: From Medieval Times to Modernity

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Abstract: Feasts associated with relics have occurred since antiquity. They play a major role in the life of both the Catholic and Orthodox churches. In contemporary practice, relic feasts often include both religious and secular events, which are especially significant in small cities that possess relics of a patron saint. This paper analyses the feasts associated with St Nicholas of Myra, St Euthemia of Chalcedon, and St Alexander Schmorell; two of these traditions go back to the medieval era, the third has more recent origins.

Keywords: St Mark, St Maurus, St Nicholas of Myra, St Servulus

The cult of relics is historically very typical in Italo-Byzantine and Venetian towns. The patron saint of Venice, for example, is St Mark, and his veneration is strongly connected with the presence of relics. The translation (transfer) of St Mark's relics to Venice initiated a strong symbolic identification between the city and its patron saint (Bralić 2019: 11). Venice also possessed several relics of Istrian saints, such as St Maurus, bishop and martyr of Poreč (Cornaro 1758: 210–211, 605), and St Servulus, the main patron saint of Buje and copatron of Trieste (Cornaro 1758: 488).

The cult of relics was also very important for Istrian towns. According to Bralić:

achieving political power by strengthening relic cults was an established medieval practice in 15th-century Venice. The symbolic confirmation of authority through association with cults of local saints is attested in Istrian cities as well, where the main goal was to participate in the (co) creation of local memory and identity. We can follow these developments through the Venetian officials' and bishops' commissions of holy shrines, reliquaries and liturgical books for the celebration of patron saints in Koper, Poreč, Pula and Rovinj, from the second half of the 14th to the 18th century, but particularly in the 15th century. (Bralić 2019: 11)

This paper will explore these layers of historical and symbolic significance by analysing three patron saints originating from the medieval period and from recent history: St Nicholas of Myra, St Euthemia of Chalcedon, and St Alexander Schmorell.

St Nicholas of Myra

St Nicholas of Myra was born around 280 CE in the Lycian city of Patara. His veneration goes back to at least the sixth century, as illustrated by a basilica built over his grave (martyrium) dating to this period (Peschlow, 1990: 207–258). In addition, texts dedicated to him emerge in the ninth century, suggesting that his veneration had spread throughout the Christian world. Icons depicting scenes from his life appeared in Byzantine art in the 11th century, and in the 13th and 14th centuries these icons were dispersed throughout the Balkans and southern Italy (Mircović 1961: 81).

After the death of St Nicholas in 343, his relics were placed in the church in Myra, where he had served as bishop. However, on the 9th May 1087, they were transferred to the southern Italian city of Bari. According to Cioffari, this relocation was first proposed in 1077 (Cioffari 2005a and 2005b). In the Byzantine period from 876 to 1071, Bari was the capital of Byzantine Italy, but after the Normans captured the city on the 16th April 1071, it lost its status. As a result, the transfer of the relics must have been a significant event in the revival of the city's status (Cioffari 2005: 5).

About 70 sailors participated in this transfer (Cioffari 2005b: 5). In 1087 they landed at Cape Andriake and with 47 citizens from Bari acting as pilgrims went to the church of St Nicholas. At the tomb of the saint they announced a

prophetic dream in which St. Nicholas commanded them to transfer his relics. They carried the relics to the ship, singing prayers to the saint, and on the 9th May 1087 the ship landed in Bari. The relics were initially given to Elias, the Benedictine abbot, but two days later archbishop Urson ordered the relocation of the relics to the cathedral. However, the locals refused to follow this order and so the decision was made to build a new church. The construction of the Basilica of St Nicholas began in July 1087 and finished in 1197. In 1198 “the second transfer of the relics” took place, as described by Nicephorus and John Archdeacon, two Barian chroniclers (Cioffari 2005: 5). Since that time, Bari has been the city of St Nicholas. Pilgrims of different confessions continue to travel there to this day, and in the crypt with the relics both Catholic and Orthodox services are held every week.

The feast of the Translation of the Relics was established in 1089 by Pope Urban II, spreading throughout Italy and then Western Europe (Meisen 1931; Otranto 2015; Musin 2015). Greeks in Sicily and southern Italy were certainly familiar with the feast (Bux 1986: 8–9; Strunk 1977: 277–285) because it is mentioned in a 13th century Menologion from the Grottaferrata monastery (Toscani 1864: 98–99), and a service in Greek was created (MSS Sinai gr. 14–71, more in Strunk 1977: 277–285; Troelsgard 2007: 425–442). Nevertheless, the Byzantine Orthodox Church never officially accepted the feast.

According to another tradition, a further collection St Nicholas’ relics hidden by emperor Basil I the Macedonian (867–886) arrived in Venice nine years after the main transfer.¹ This event is recorded in an anonymous Venetian manuscript written in around 1101, “Historical News about Churches and Monasteries in Venice and Torcello”, which was published in 1758 by Flaminio Cornaro (Cornaro 1763: 52). Only Bari is considered the city of St Nicholas, however.

In general, we can observe that the establishment of the feast of the translation of these relics occurred at a turning point for both the Latin and the Eastern Orthodox world (Legkikh 2020). The Byzantine Empire was in danger of being conquered by the Turks after its 1071 defeat at the battle of Manzikert, and after the East–West Schism in 1054, Bari, which had belonged to Byzantine Italy for nearly three centuries, represented both Eastern and Western rites. St Nicholas, archbishop of the Byzantine city of Myra, became known in the Western world, and especially in Italy, as Nicola di Bari (cf Cornaro 1758: 488–492). In the service of Italian Greeks, St Nicholas is the patron saint of two

cities, Myra and Bari: “Τὴν Μυέρων μη λιπών πρὸς Ἰταλίαν παραγέγονας πάτερ [Without leaving the city of the Myreans you have arrived in Italy]” (quoted from Troelsgard 2007: 429). Instead of provoking a protest among Orthodox Christians, the placement of the saint’s relics in a Catholic city made Bari a sacred place for both confessions.

In the contemporary world the Feast of the Translation of the Relics is one of the most important and beloved events in Bari. Even if the Dormition of St Nicholas on the 6th December is traditionally considered more important, the main feast in Bari is the commemoration of the relics; Barians call it “the true and real one”:

Ma la vera e propria festa di San Nicola è quella che va dal 7 al 9 Maggio in ricordo dell'arrivo a Bari delle reliquie del Santo trasportate da Myra da 62 coraggiosi marinai (correva l'anno 1087). La traslazione delle reliquie del Santo viene ricordata e festeggiata ogni anno in maniera importante dedicando appunto le tre giornate di Maggio che coincidono con il corteo storico, la processione a mare e la festa dei baresi.

But the real feast of San Nicola is the one that runs from the 7th to the 9th May in commemoration of the arrival in Bari of the relics of the Saint transported from Myra by 62 brave sailors (it was the year 1087). The translation of the relics of the Saint is remembered and celebrated every year in an important way by dedicating precisely the three days of May which coincide with the historical parade, the procession to the sea and the feast of the people of Bari².

Every 7th, 8th and 9th May, Bari hosts thousands of pilgrims, especially from Eastern Europe. Because the festival combines both religious and folk elements, the pilgrims are mixed with tourists. The celebration usually begins on the afternoon of the 7th at San Giorgio Bay with Holy Mass; this ritualised opening is important because Bari is considered a sacred place. In the evening a performance recounting the story of the transfer is presented (Corteo Storico); a procession of people dressed in eleventh-century costumes begins in Piazza Federico II of Swabia and arrives in Piazza St Nicholas.

The 8th March is dedicated to religious rites. In the Basilica, eucharistic celebrations follow one another starting from 4:30 in the morning and continuing until sunset. In the morning, the statue of St Nicholas begins a procession to

the sea; it is transported through the streets of the historic city centre, and, as one participant noted, its “fabric garments sway with the movement, making it look as if San Nicola is walking above the people”³ After a brief firework display and blessing of the sea, the statue is placed aboard a boat at about 10 am at the Molo of St Nicholas and then sails escorted by a fleet of pilgrims, until it returns to land in the evening. The saint returns to the Basilica via the alleys of Bari Vecchia, which are flooded with lights and colours. The day ends with another firework display on the Molo di Sant’Antonio.

The 9th May begins in the early morning with a fireworks display, and the celebrations come to an end at about 6 pm with the Solemn Eucharistic Concelebration at the Basilica of St Nicholas and the distribution of Holy Manna, a liquid emitted from the relics. As the Eucharist concludes, the altar party, choir, and invited guests go down to the crypt that contains St Nicholas’ tomb. Meanwhile, the manna is poured into bottles in order to be distributed throughout the rest of the year.⁴ In 1925 the manna was analysed by the chemistry laboratory at the University of Bari and found to be a water of particular purity, a chemical phenomenon similar to that of a vaporous condensation.⁵

As this account indicates, the feast starts and finishes with important religious rites. For example, the relics, shut away all year, are visible on the 9th May, and the manna collected and distributed to believers. The saint’s bones are not even made available on the Dormition; the only day when the marble enclosure is opened is on the evening of the 9th May. This seemingly goes against the main tradition of the church, which prioritises the Dormition over the transfer of the relics. But because the Translation not only gave Bari the status of a sacred capital but also connected Catholic and Orthodox worlds, this feast became more important for the city and also for the many pilgrims who come to honour their most venerated saint.

Even if the basilica is Catholic, there is a possibility in cripta for all Christian confessions to have a service. For example, Thursday is a day of the Orthodox Russian church when the Orthodox can have a service in cripta instead of at the Russian church, which has an important function as a place for Russian pilgrims.

The relics of St Nicholas were the most beloved among Russian pilgrims in the 19th century (Cioffari 2005). In the second half of the 20th, and thus far in the 21st, century the attraction of this feast also increased among non-pilgrim tourists. “When we decided to go to Italy I hoped to go to Bari”, is a phrase that one can hear from almost all tourists. Normally pilgrims talk about miracles

“When my condition improved I decided to go to Bari” (women, 51). “We were completely lost. Then I saw a man who came to us and showed the way. Only afterwards did I understand that it was St Nicholas. Afterwards I decided to go to Bari” (woman, 62). Almost all informants said “St Nicholas helps everybody, you just have to ask properly”. The attraction of the city, especially for Russians, is often combined with a visit to the basilica. As an example I can mention a description of a visit to one tourist site:

Thousands of pilgrims are longing to visit the town in order to bow to the most venerated saint in Russia. You will visit the 11th century Catholic basilica, which was specially constructed in order to hold the relics of St Nicholas. I will tell you how the basilica was built and draw your attention to its interior decoration, and also tell you how, where and what it is good to ask St Nicholas the Wonderworker⁶.

Some people mentioned that after visiting Bari their life changed positively (marriage, a new pilgrimage, healing). There are even miracles, known as humerus stories, for example, one woman who asked about marriage married a man who helped her out after she got stuck between a wall and a column.⁷

Many informants talk about special feeling in the basilica We find it also in travel blogs:

Bari is an amazing and spiritually very reverent place. St Nicholas is generally quick to help: requests addressed to him are usually fulfilled quite quickly. We experienced this first hand.⁸

We entered the cathedral and went down to the relics of the Wonderworker. These are unforgettable moments... There was no service, almost no one was in the cathedral. We lit candles in the upper church, bought an icon of St Nicholas and several bottles of chrism in a shop near the church...⁹

However, the Translation of relics of St Nicholas is not only a religious feast. Many tourists visit Bari in this period in order to participate in the events. Since Bari is situated on the coast, many tourists try to combine a holiday with a pilgrimage, (or “the beach and the pilgrimage”¹⁰), with the feast of relics seen as a perfect moment to achieve both. One can hear this from the majority

of travellers and pilgrims and can also find the same sentiment expressed in travel blogs:

The city of Bari was a must-visit place in our excursion tour of southern Italy. So, on the 22nd May, we went there. It turned out that 90% of our group purposefully went there, since that day was a major religious feast called the Spring Transfer of Relics. Thus, we saw the festive liturgy, and the service was even conducted in Russian.¹¹

It should be noted that secular events are also part of the celebration of the saint. Every second year, for example, features a special show called the Feast of the Tricolour. This is an air show presented in honour of San Nicola and the city of Bari by the National Aerobatic Team of the Italian Air Force; planes paint the sky with trails of smoke in the three colours of the Italian flag. On these days the city is closed to traffic, although every pilgrim is still welcome. As the Baresi say, Bari is a cosmopolitan city, and St Nicholas loves foreigners: “*San Nicola è amante dei forestieri*”. One traveller even called him a kind of “touristic brand”. Since during the feast there are different types of procession it is possible for both tourists and pilgrims to participate. Mainly pilgrims are Italians or Russians, Ukrainians and Georgians. When Apulians come to venerate their patron saint the scene is especially interesting and picturesque. One Russian traveller describes it as follows:

Each group of pilgrims entered the Basilica singing. These were folk songs dedicated to St Nicholas. The songs were simple, melodic, and the choir followed the leader. The pilgrims began their journey from the square. Their passage into the Basilica was supervised by a planner, there was a queue. In front of each group the most respected person (perhaps the headman of the village) walked... He was also a leading singer.¹²

St Euthemia of Chalcedon

The second case examined in this paper is St Euthemia of Chalcedon. St Euthemia was born at the beginning of the 4th century in Chalcedon. She was the child of the senator Philophron and his wife Theodorisiana. She refused to

participate at the feast of Ares and proconsul Priscus tied her to a torture wheel, but the wheel did not hurt her; she was also impervious to fire and wild animals in the arena refused to attack her, except for one that only scratched her, but the wound led to her immediate death. Christians from Chalcedon preserved the body of the martyr until 620 CE when the Persians captured the town. The sarcophagus was then transferred to Constantinople and placed in a magnificent church erected in her honour. The saint's most well-known miracle took place during the Fourth Ecumenical Council. According to tradition, participants in the council wrote the dogmas of the Orthodox church and their opponents the Monophysites down and placed them in St Euthemia's tomb. They reopened the tomb four days later and the list of Orthodox doctrines were in her hand, that of the Monophysites was under her feet.

St Euthemia is a pan-Christian saint, with many churches in Italy dedicated to her, the most famous being in Rome, Milan, Brescia, Verona, and Bologna. She is prominent in the work of Church writers such as Prudentius († after 405), St Peacock the Merciful, Paulinus of Nolan († 431), and St Venantia Fortunata († before 610). Ennodius, bishop of Pavia († 521), also dedicated a lengthy poem to St Euthemia with a detailed description of the torments referred to in the Martyrdom (BHG 619), indicating this text was compiled and translated into Latin no later than the first quarter of the sixth century.

There is an anonymous legend about St Euthemia (BHL, N 2715) according to which fishermen in the city of Rovinj (on the Istrian peninsula, now in Croatia) found a sarcophagus with the imperishable relics of the saint washed up on the shore. Since then she has been the patroness of the city, where the main cathedral is dedicated to her. Texts connected with St Euthemia and her relics are in the Rovinj illuminated codex, a hagiographical manuscript from the fifteenth century also known as *Translatio corporis beate Euthemia*. The legend of receiving the relics is described in f. 24 in *Translatio corporis Alme martiris (et) virginis Euphemie ab inclita urbe Veneta Rubinum et inpropria archa depositi* (Translation of the Body of the Holy Virgin and Martyr Euphemia from the Famous City of Venice to Rovinj and Laying in Her Sarcophagus).¹³ According to this legend, the marble sarcophagus drifted to the coast of Rovinj after a big storm at dawn on 13th July, 800 CE. It is said that many of the city's citizens tried to haul the sarcophagus to the Church of St George, but no one succeeded. Finally, answering St Euthemia's call, a small boy with two little cows managed

to haul the sarcophagus up the hill. The people of Rovinj considered it a miracle and they proclaimed St Euthemia patron saint of the town.

Restitution of the saint's relics was decreed by the Senate on the 6th May 1401, as confirmed by archival research by Visnja Bralić. According to Bralić, this is a rare, documented, case in Venetian political and religious practice: "As in the case of St. Nazarius in Koper, the revival of the cult of Euphemia was realised in interaction between the local community and the Venetian authorities. Both restitutions prompted a series of events and artistic commissions" (Bralić 2019: 17).

The day of commemoration of St Euthemia is the main annual festival in the town, held on the 16th September. The grand celebration has an extensive program that takes place in the main square and draws many visitors to Rovinj. On St Euthemia's Day people traditionally eat mutton with sauerkraut (*ovca z kapuzom*) and *fritule*, an Istrian delicacy.

As was the case for the St Nicholas celebration in Bari, the festival spreads over several days, starting on the 14th September. The majority of events are secular and connected with the community, including music, a performance by majorettes, dancing, a regatta, and sporting events (for example a basketball tournament and a swimming marathon). The main feast on the 16th September begins with Holy Mass in Croatian and Italian and continues with other events, culminating in another mass at 6:00 pm. During this day the relics of St Euthemia are open for viewing all day. Events take place in all the squares and there is music for all tastes: Croatian, Italian, folk, pop, classical. Visitors can also try traditional food and hear songs devoted to St Euthemia everywhere.

This is the event schedule for 2013¹⁴

Saturday, September 14th

MONVI-CUVI

11 am – Basketball tournament

VILLAS RUBIN

11 am – 15th Swimming marathon

Victoria Legkikh

SPORTS HALL

11 am–6 pm – Volleyball tournament

ROVINJ WATERS

11 am – Sailing regatta

SUMMER TERRACE OF THE ITALIAN COMMUNITY – MULTI-MEDIA CENTRE (MMC) IN CASE OF RAIN

7 pm – Rovinj guidebook presentation – Rovigno d'Istria, Guida storica artistica e culturale, written by Gabriele Bosazzi
Organised by the Pino Budicin Rovinj Italian community

M. TITO SQUARE

5 pm – Santa Eufemia brass festival

Organised by the Rovinj brass band

8 pm – Concert: various Rovinj artists

Shock Treatment, Feedback, No Limits, Big Wave

Sunday, September 15th

ŠTANGA

9 am – 10 pm – the St Euphemia Cup, traditional Bocce tournament

M. TITO SQUARE

10:30 am – A Fisherman and the Sea dance performance by GC Roxanne

11 am – Dance performance: Zumba “Leiras”

ROVINJ MULTIMEDIA CENTRE (MMC)

12:00 – From One Point to Another by Sea and Land marathon – arrival at approximately 4:30 pm at the MMC

4:15 pm – Brass band and Rovinj majorette parade

4:30 pm – Welcome to the finish line for marathon runner Sandy Mužina (Pula–Rovinj)

4:45 pm – Rovinj majorette performance
5 pm – Formal session of the town council

M. TITO SQUARE

2 pm – 11th bicycle tour on town day
7:30 pm – Concert: various Rovinj artists
Folk Band Batana, Sergio Preden Gato and Ricky Bosazzi Quintet, Biba, Vlado, Ligio Trio, Midi pjevači and Solisti di Biba from the Rovinj Italian community, Pino Budicin, Duo On Line, Party Band

SMALL PIER

6 pm – midnight
Rovinj wine festival traditional grape processing demonstration, bare-foot grape treading competition, tasting of best Istrian wines from 8 pm, tasting of original Istrian prosciutto fish stands with fresh sardines for citizens on

Monday, September 16th

MALA VALDIBORA CAR PARK

8 am – Fair

BRODOGRADILIŠTE SQUARE

Small antiques fair

ST EUPHEMIA CHURCH

8 am – Holy Mass with Milan Zgrablić
9 am – Holy Mass in Italian with don Lino Ninchele

M. TITO SQUARE

10 am – Dance performance: Rovinj majorettes
11:30 am – Children's tennis tournament
11:30 am – Mini basketball tournament for women
12:00 – Aikido demonstration

12:30 pm – Mini Handball Town Cup

ST EUPHEMIA CHURCH

11 am – Holy Mass with Dražen Kutleša

ST EUPHEMIA CHURCH

6 pm – Holy Mass with Ivan Milovan

M. TITO SQUARE

7 pm – Concert: masterband

9:30 pm – Concert: opća opasnos

The feast of St Euthemia is more secular than the feast of St Nicholas in Bari: there are several masses, but on the streets St Euthemia is celebrated with music and dance. Nevertheless, St Euthemia is very important for the city's inhabitants as the church is situated at the top of the hill and is the main centre of the town. The statue of the saint at the top of the church has even become a barometer for many citizens who "ask St Euthemia about the weather". There is also a song called "Santa Euthemia" written by M. Di Capua, D. Načipović, and A. Baša that is devoted to her. Famous Croatian singer Tony Cetinski also recorded this local song, making it known not only to locals but also to the general public. It is clear that St Euthemia is the main patron of the town and is thought to help all of its inhabitants. In contrast to the previous case, the feast of St Euthemia is more oriented towards inhabitants than tourists. Even if during the feast one can see a lot of small stands with souvenirs, visitors mainly come from neighbouring villages. Since during the feast the relics are open all day pilgrims also come to venerate the saint. Many Rovignesi, even those who are not particularly religious, see the saint as a helper and the patron of the town. "We are under the patronage of St Euthemia", as inhabitants often say. Since the statue of St Euthemia at the top of the church is also a barometer, inhabitants often answer questions about the weather by saying "look at St Euthemia". This feast is not as well-known and popular as the feast of St Nicholas, although the Rovignesi and visitors celebrate her commemoration as the main day of the year. This day is also considered the end of the season. One hears many fewer

stories about modern miracles or recommendations to visit the feast, although it is still seen as a 'homey' festival devoted to a beloved saint who is part of the town and always participates in the life of inhabitants with her patronage.

St Alexander Schmorell

The last example surveyed in this paper is that of Alexander Schmorell. Schmorell was a student of medicine who belonged to the White Rose resistance circle (Die Weiße Rose) during the Nazi period in Germany. At its head there were six people from Munich, students Hans Scholl (1918–1943) and his sister Sophie Scholl (1921–1943), Christoph Probst (1919–1943), Alexander Schmorell (1917–1943), Willi Graf (1918–1943), and Professor Kurt Huber (1893–1943). The movement wrote six pamphlets against Nazism in 1942–1943. On 18th February 1943 Hans and Sophie Scholl distributed copies of the sixth pamphlet in the atrium at the entrance to the University of Munich. On 22nd February the Nazis arrested the Scholls and Christoph Probst and executed them by guillotine just hours after the conclusion of their trial. Alexander Schmorell, Kurt Huber, and Willi Graf were subsequently arrested, tried, and sentenced to death on 19th April. Schmorell and Huber were executed three months later, on 13th July, and Graf on 12th October, 1943. Today Germany honours all the members of the White Rose. The University is situated in Geschwister-Scholl Platz, and at the University there is a White Rose Foundation. In Kassel there is also the Schule Alexander Schmorell.¹⁵

The veneration of this new saint began before official canonisation. The Church of the New Martyr in Munich makes a procession to his tomb every year, with ensuing *panikhida* (memorial prayers) on the 12th July, which is also the day of Peter and Paul in the Russian Orthodox calendar. Schmorell was executed on the 13th July; the day of apostles Peter and Paul was an ideal fit. As was often the case, the Orthodox Church of Russia eventually accepted this local veneration and on the 4th February 2012 officially canonised Alexander Schmorell as a locally venerated saint for the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia's Diocese of Berlin and Germany. St Alexander became the first New Martyr glorified since the reestablishment of canonical communion between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. Mark, the Metropolitan of Berlin and Germany, wrote the canonisation service.

The canonisation took place in 2012 at the Cathedral of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia¹⁶ in Munich, beginning on the afternoon of Saturday 3rd February, with the icon of Alexander Schmorell brought in advance. The icon shows a young brown haired man with a cross, a red cross armband and a white rose. The armband indicates that he was a student of medicine, and the white rose symbolises his membership in the anti-Nazi organisation. The procession started at 4:00 pm. Along with Archbishop Mark,¹⁷ five other bishops participated in the ceremony: Metropolitan Valentin of Orenburg (the Russian city where Schmorell was born), Metropolitan Onufriy of Czernowitz in Ukraine, Archbishop Feofan of Berlin, Bishop Michael of Geneva, and Bishop Agapit of Stuttgart. The procession arrived at the grave of Alexander Schmorell and a bunch of white roses was placed there. The procession was followed by a final *panikhida* because Alexander would henceforth be recognised as a saint. At 5:00 pm a vigil service began that culminated in the official canonisation.

A journalist described this event:

The high point of the day came during the Saturday evening Vigil, which began at 5 PM and lasted three-and-a-half hours, by which time an almost full moon was shining through the windows. In the middle of the service, several icon stands were placed in the center of the church with candle stands behind. At least a hundred candles were lit, forming a curtain of light. Finally, a procession of bishops, clergy and altar servers poured out of the sanctuary carrying an icon of Saint Alexander Schmorell followed by another icon crowded with images of New Martyrs of the twentieth century. Next came a huge silver-bound Gospel book, a copy that had been a gift from Russia's last czar, Nicholas II, to Russian Orthodox Christians in Germany. The two icons and the Gospel book were solemnly placed side by side on the stands, then incensed. Finally, everyone in the church, beginning with the six bishops, venerated the icon of the newly recognized saint.¹⁸

After the canonisation Alexander Schmorell immediately became a patron saint of the Russian Orthodox Church in Munich: in the service he is called Alexander of Munich. Since he was a student of medicine he also spontaneously became a patron of doctors.

“He was a doctor, so he is our patron”, a woman of 50 said. Many members of the parish of Munich talk about the importance of his veneration, giving comments like, “he is our saint, he died for us, so now we venerate him even if his relics are still in the cemetery”. Since he was half German and half Russian many people also see him as a bridge between the Eastern and the Western world, which somehow connects him with St Nicholas, who also became a patron of the Catholic city. But if St Nicholas became a patron of one Orthodox and one Catholic city, with St Alexander Schmorell we can talk about a patron of Orthodox people in the Catholic world. His veneration is not widespread, although since he is known in the German world as a hero of protest during the Second World War we can say of his importance for both worlds that for Germans he is an important historical personage while for Russians he is a saint.

St Alexander’s commemoration on the 13th July became a patronal feast of the church. Since he was half German the relics were not taken from the grave, rather the grave itself became a place of veneration. The service on the 13th July always closes with a procession to the cemetery. Children of the church school also come to his grave every Saturday.¹⁹ This is a church feast and does not include secular events, although Russian believers have already participated in it and its traditions, which started only recently, are still to be formed.

Conclusion

We can observe that relic feast days still play an important role in the life of both Catholic and Orthodox Christians. These celebrations are particularly important when a saint becomes the patron of a town or city. The three cases that this paper analysed highlight three different forms of celebration. The feast devoted to St Nicholas is universal to all Christians. It combines religious and secular events with a strong emphasis on religious–historical events and, in particular, the transfer of relics. Despite the importance of the Holy Mass and the opening of relics, the festival of St Euthemia is more secular as it consists of music, dancing, competitions, and street food. The modern event does not reconstruct the historical legend, nor does it even seemingly focus on St Euthemia, although we might say that her importance is so evident for citizens that there is no need to show it during the feast. The city of Rovinj itself is less religious than Bari. The town is not considered a sacred place so there are no

pilgrims. Many tourists come to enjoy the seaside, but the feast is in September, after the high season, and so it is more oriented towards local people and as a result we see a celebration of a patron saint who is always present in the life of the town, instead of a reconstruction of historical events. The third case is special for two reasons: first, because St Alexander Schmorell is a patron saint of Munich only for the Russian Orthodox community, and second, because there are no relics: his grave remains untouched at the cemetery. The veneration of St Alexander is strictly religious and does not include any secular events. This tradition is the youngest and is still in formation, although we can already see its beginnings in the form of a procession on the day of his death and the visit to his tomb by all classes in the church school.

These three examples illustrate the continuity and importance of the celebration of relics, even in a case where they are not placed in a church. In all of the cases, the relics bestow power on a particular place, even if that place is not native to the saint or even the saint's relics. And this power leads to both religious and secular events that only increase the place's status.

Notes

¹ According to this version they are now in the church devoted to St. Nicholas in the Benedictian monastery on the island of Lido.

² <https://www.bariexperience.com/fare-esperienza-bari/giorno-festa-patronale-san-nicola-basilica-bari-puglia-tradizioni-corteo/>

³ <https://www.stnicholascenter.org/around-the-world/festivals/bari-festival>

⁴ <https://www.ninatrulliresort.it/en/blog/events/bari-celebrates-saint-nicholas-of-myra.html>

⁵ <https://www.italyheritage.com/traditions/calendar/december/san-nicola-di-bari.htm>

⁶ <https://experience.tripster.ru/experience/8335/>

⁷ https://www.tourister.ru/responses/id_23357

⁸ http://www.pravklin.ru/publ/poezdka_k_moshham_svjatitelja_nikolaja_22_maja_prazdnovanie_perenesenija_moshhej_svjatitelja_nikolaja_iz_mir_likijskikh_v_bari/8-1-0-1442

⁹ <https://dzen.ru/a/XBd8IZJlJewCqPhoF>

¹⁰ <https://forum.awd.ru/viewtopic.php?f=1538&t=359262>

¹¹ <https://www.tury.ru/otzyv/id/195384-italiya-bari-moya-progulka-po-gorodu-bari>

¹² https://www.tourister.ru/responses/id_23648

¹³ See more in Križnan, 2000b: 94-103, n. 32, 104-112; Križnan, 2000a.

¹⁴ <https://www.rovinj-tourism.com/en/calendar-of-events/events-archive/2040>

¹⁵ See Alexander-Schmorell-Schule, <https://www.bs-schmorell.de/>

¹⁶ In German – Kathedrale der Hll. Neumärtyrer und Bekenner Russlands/Russian – Kafedral'nyi sobor Sviatykh Novomuchennikov i Ispovednikov Rosiiskikh.

¹⁷ Now metropolitan of Berlin and all Germany.

¹⁸ https://sobor.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=142:a-canoni-zation-in-m

¹⁹ There are 13 classes in the Church school, and normally, every class goes once a month.

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