

Not. Romuald's Seal



Basilica Archives a. 1107

St Nicholas News

A paper sent free to the St Nicholas' friends
all around the world,
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May the 5th, 2014

SUNDAY MAY THE 9th 1087

BARI WELCOMES ST NICHOLAS' BODY

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THE FEAST IN EUROPE THE MEDIEVAL DOCUMENTATION

The most
ancient
image in
Bari on the
translation.

→
The Divine
Office in the
so called
**Charles II
Anjou's
Breviarium
Parvum** of
St Nicholas'
Archives (ms
10), first half
of the XIV
century.



In Bari (like in Russia, Ukraine, Bjelorussia and other Slavic Orthodox nations) **St Nicholas day is celebrated twice**: the 9th of May in memory of his arrival to Bari (translated from Myra), and the 6th of December as his *dies natalis*, the universal feast (with all its Santa Claus implications).

In this issue of the **St Nicholas News** I give the translation from Latin of a chapter of one of the most important sources, **the French compiler** (the Gand code that goes back to the XIII century), who is the most detailed on the arrival of the relics to Bari. To give an idea of how widespread was this feast of the Translation in Western European Middle Ages till the end of the XV century, I add a list of about fifty references. I do not deal in this issue with the celebration of this feast in Russia and other Eastern countries.

MAY the 9th 1087

**THE BARIANS
WELCOME
WITH
UNRESTRAINED
JOY
ST NICHOLAS'
BODY**

THE FRENCH COMPILER (chapters 33-36): Heartened by this second St Nicholas' apparition, the sailors finally reached the port of **St George**, the glorious athlete of Christ and blessed martyr. Here they prepared a wooden casket, then chose the **most beautiful among the fabrics** bought in the market of Antioch and with it they adorned the casket inside and outside.



The transfer of St Nicholas' relics from the ships to the St Benedict's monastery, Silver Altar (1684).

NICEPHORUS. Soon after the arrival to St George, Nicephorus, interrupting the story, praises to the city of Bari, calling the Barians for virtues, penance and harmony. He differs from the Gand code where he reports the sailors very words about their promise to build a church in the Catepan's court, and abbot Elias' very words to convince the captains to entrust the relics to him.

The sailors told to the Barians: *You should know, brothers, that when taking from Myra the sacred relics, we agreed all together that we should have built to our holy Father a venerable temple in the Royal Court of this city. We ask you to adhere to the solemn promise we made.*

The abbot Elias said to the captains: *I came to ask you, who are wise men, to entrust this Saint worthy of love to me. We have to show our devotion to him. Therefore, till the moment the people will adhere to your promise to the Saint as you have requested, it is convenient that the Public Court be the house of the great St Nicholas.*

Then, they took the very sacred body out of the urn and, kissing it in tears, with the due honor and reverence layed it in the casket they had prepared. Afterwards, let some of them go down from the ship and sent them **to give the announcement** to the clergy and to the people of the city, thereby learning the joy and glory of this new marvelous and unexpected event. They had not yet reached the harbor when they saw their **relatives and friends** coming to meet them from everywhere. Soon throughout the city, in the narrow streets and in the large squares, spread the news of the great and marvelous things God had made through them. To their fellow citizens they passionately narrated all the things the Angel of the great Counsel had made in profit of their souls. Really the presence of the beloved servant of God Nicholas was for the neighbours as well for the people living far away, a sure means of health and life. No eloquence or command of the written word could convey how sweetly and excitingly was received such a news. Everybody was surprised, as if it was a Lord's thunder from the sky. They were taken by such elation that couldn't express all their joy.

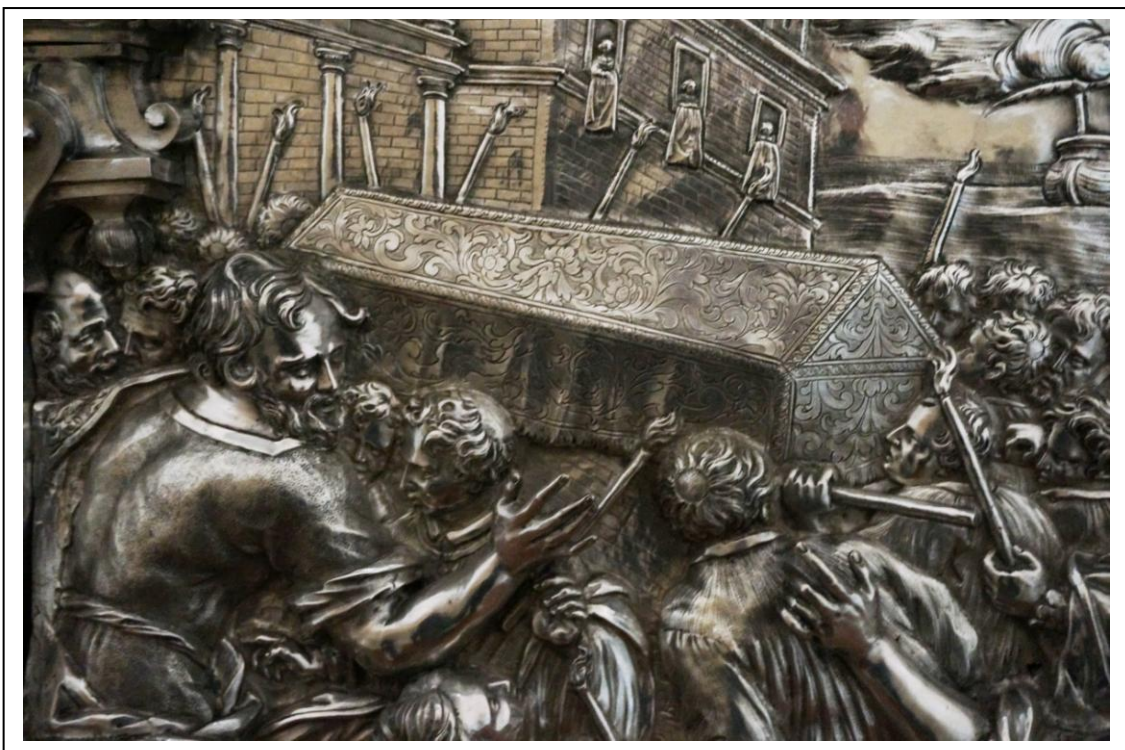
It was not only the entire city of Bari to run to welcome them, but the news flying quickly pushed **the entire province** to come running and meet them. Men and women, old and young, everybody was filled with great joy, and you could hear praising the Lord in unknown languages. Tears of joy were shed, sometimes interrupted by sobs. The devotion towards St Nicholas involved very deeply the people veneration. In fact, although it is possible to obtain graces through all the Saints, from experience it is known that **through him** it is possible to receive very **special graces**.

While from the nearby towns, villages and the castles, crowds were running towards them and greeted them from far away, keeping the eyes fastened on them, with songs and praises [the Saint's body] was brought into the port, where monks and **clerks, dressed** as they did in the solemn festivities, were waiting in prayer.

Everybody foretasted the moment in which the sacred body was about to be brought ashore, but the captains encharged some of them to inform the citizens that while in Myra they had made **a solemn promise:** if St Nicholas, by the God's will, would have allowed them to

transfer his body, they would have built a **church** in his honor **in the governor's Court**, just outside the city, where the prefect of the region had his palace. While the people were divided and discussed about [that promise] without knowing what to do, **Elia**, the venerable abbot of St Benedict's monastery of the same city, with his monks **boarded the ship** in which the Saint's body was. After a due prayer and after kissing the holy relics persuaded the sailors, who couldn't stop their tears and knew him as a man of faith, to entrust to him the relics. He said that he would have kept them in his monastery till the moment when the archbishop Urso would have been back, and with his advise it would have been decided about the most convenient place for the relics. Everybody agreed with this devout request and, with the end of the dissensions, the body of the Saint of God **was brought ashore**.

While the sailors with the abbot Elia, took it from the ship and brought it ashore, the people and the clergy kneeled down in joy and reverence, praising the greatness of God, who alone makes marvelous things, and glorifies those who praise the Most High. With tears of joy they praised and glorified together his wonders.



This way, it was taken from the ship with the help of the monks and the clergy, who with burning love stretched their arms in support. After pouring various perfumes on it and **sprinkling incenses** with their sweet scents, they lined up in rows with **crucifixes** and a great number of **candles** in order to precede it in an ordained procession of white dressed choristers and clergy with decorated vestments. Before and behind them came a great multitude of men and women who were praising God saying: *Blessed he who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace on earth and glory in the heavens.*

And this way St Nicholas, meaning the people's victory, **entered the city of Bari** according the will of Jesus Christ, our very benevolent Lord, coming from the Royal houses, while the bells were ringing and pealing out, in honor and glory of his friend Nicholas, who entered the fortresses of the **Roman dignity**.

The **processions** formed by the clergy, accompanied by an unending number of people of all ages who are on earth and who had come running to see this celestial event, all together and with equal love went to the St Benedict monastery, which is in this same city. When they reached the place unanimously decided that the same **Elia**, abbot of the monastery, should have been the guardian of the casket containing the relics.

With solemnity and decorum they put the case containing the sacred body **on the altar of the great St Benedict**, while psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles were sung. After it was put on the altar, with all their heart they gave glory, honor and benediction to the living God, who divinely donated such a bishop, and by prostrating themselves to the earth, put themselves in adoration. Meanwhile, those who had brought the body from Myra, **with arms in their hands**, lined up around the monastery. In fact they were ready to die rather than to allow a violence on the part of those citizens and magnates who did

not agree with their solemn promise to the Saint.

In the meantime a **delegation** was sent **to the lord archbishop** Urso, who at that time was between Canosa and Trani, cities belonging to the archdiocese of Bari. Within two days **he should have left**, together with his archdeacon John, toward **Jerusalem**. As soon as he heard the extraordinary news, he at once renounced to the projected trip, and as quickly as possible he took the way back, regretting that he was not present in the city to rejoice with the population when the relics arrived. Then he thanked and prayed the Lord Jesus, our great God, who heads the existing things and calls to being those who are not, because He had chosen his time to give to his city the grace of such a prince and defense attorney. Quickening his walk, with great joy and exultation, he went **back to his metropolis**.

As soon as he arrived in the city he directed himself with burning desire **to the St Benedict's** monastery. **With him** was the **archdeacon John** and all his family. Once inside, he prostrated for long before the very holy body and wept tears of joy. After the prayer he stood up and with great devotion blessed the servant of God Nicholas, and with all those present sung the hymn: *Glory be to God on high in the heavens.*

JOHN THE ARCHDEACON, who tries to belittle the role of the abbot Helias, and reduces to few lines the festive welcome of the Barians, underscores archbishop **Urso's role**: *When the ships entered the harbour of Bari, those who had brought such a great treasure did not know to which ecclesiastic or religious person entrust it. In fact, Urso, the archbishop of the Barians, a pious man and worthy of God, very much known and close friend of many Italian Lords, was not there. At that time he was **in Trani, and that day I was with him**. A ship was ready and the day after he would have gone aboard to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.*

Then, as soon as he was back to his palace, he **gave the order** that the celestial daisy would be accompanied with songs of praise and glory **to his Episcopal palace**. The **captains** of the ships, the moment they heard about this order, gathered all those that in the city agreed with their solemn promise, **took the arms**, and without delay prepared themselves to face the archbishop in a **battle**.

NB. A FEW NOTES. It was exactly “thanks” to this armed fight (with dead and injured people) that we have such an amount of documentation. In fact, the tragedy compelled Curcorius (who entrusted the writing to Nicephorus) on the one hand, and the archbishop Urso (who entrusted the history to the experienced writer John the archdeacon) on the other, with the purpose to lay the blame on the opposite party. Two or three months after the fight the two *Historiae Translationis* were ready. It seems that the **French compiler wrote shortly afterwards**, because he seems to ignore that two years later the abbot Helias became archbishop and that pope Urban II came to Bari September 30 1089 to put the relics under the altar of the crypt.

THE KIEV LEGEND (SLOVO O PERENESENI), written in the context of the institution of the Feast of the Translation in Russia (1095) and in a **pure ecumenical spirit**, leaves out dissensions and fights among the Barians. It includes the laying of the relics under the altar of the crypt by pope Urban II:

*The third year from the Translation they sent an **embassy to the pope** of Rome, German (mistake for Urban), that invited him to come with his bishops and all the clergy to lay St Nicholas’ body under the altar. In fact, they came, took St Nicholas’ relics and put them in a silver urn.*

*After this, the bishops with their dignitaries transferred them in his new wide church. They put them under the altar... The **pope of Rome** German, the bishops and all the citizens fixed for **May the 9th** a solemn **feast** in honor of the Saint, and they observe it every year till today. They **ate and drunk** and the whole town celebrated the event in those days, and many **gifts** they gave to the **poor**.*

Pope Urban II lays St Nicholas’ relics under the altar of the crypt. Silver Altar. Detail.



It's difficult to say whether this Slovo (historical sermon) and the connected Služba (Divine Office) that exalt Bari have some link with a news contained in the **Nikonovskaja Letopis'** (ПСРЛ, IX, 116) that at the year 1091 writes: *This year came the Greek metropolitan Theodore from the Pope of Rome and brought many relics of Saints* [Того же лета прииде Феодор Грек митрополичь от папы из Рима и принесе много мощей святых]. The chronological closeness between Urban II's coming to Bari (1089) and the year of the gift of Saints relics to Russia (1091) seems to offer a positive answer (as the historian V. G. Vasil'evskij suggested).

**THE FEAST
OF THE
TRANSLATION
MAY THE 9TH
IN WESTERN
EUROPE**

The *Historia Translationis* by **John** the Archdeacon, with all its ecclesiastic **universal afflatus**, won the running with the one of **Nicéphorus**. This latter was **superior as chronicler**, but John was superior as man of the Church, therefore its text became the basis for the lectures of the divine office in many monasteries. The Archdeacon had invited all the christians of Europe to feast the 9th of May in the same way as December the sixth. His call for the celebration was favoured by three circumstances: the coming through Bari of famous knights of the **First Crusade** (1096), the **Council of Bari** (1098) and the insertion of his text by the Norman **Orderic Vitalis** into his *Ecclesiastical History* (about 1130).

Pilgrims to and from Jerusalem enriched the Basilica with precious relics. And they became the medieval "Internet". **Within few years all Europe knew** the arrival to Bari of St Nicholas' relics. Furthermore, the most famous warrior of the first Crusade, **Bohemond**, was the lord of Bari, and through him all the "Norman Commonwealth" was involved. Contemporary chronicles, hagiographical texts and Papal bulls spoke about the translation.

The feast is mentioned the first time in 1089 in the pope Urban II's bull addressed to the archbishop Helias. There the pope writes that Helias can wear the pallium, among others, in the feast of the Translation (October 1st).

In the divine offices Bari is very present with the repetition: **Gaude Barum**. In all of them it is underlined the fact that Bari alone had succeeded in this feat.



**St Nicholas' feast of May (XIII-c)
in the Book of Hours of the duchess of
Burgundy. XV cent. Musée of Chantilly**

Among the ancient codes of St Nicholas Basilica in Bari, only the ***Breviarium Parvum*** (about 1330) mistakenly called “The Breviary of Charles II of Anjou” contains the *translatio* from Myra to Bari, with a miniature.

Till today we have no **inventory** about liturgical books and documents witnessing the **Feast of the translation throughout western Europe**. But it can be useful to gather the elements at our disposal. It is true that the research is far to be completed, but the elements already established are meaningful. In general we can say that, even limiting ourselves to what is documented, more than 40 European cities celebrated the feast till the end of the XV century. Referring to **K. Meisen** as our main source, here it is a provisional list:

1. Missale plenum Ordinis Minorum (XIII cent., Ebner, p. 120)
2. Missale plenum of the Roman area (XIV cent., Ebner, p. 235).
3. Sacramentarium of Saint Evroult (XI cent., Leroquais, 1924, I, p. 176)
4. Missal of Saint Amand (XII cent., Leroquais, 1924, I, p. 259).
5. Missal of St Nicholas church in Amiens, solemnity. (Leroquais, 1924, p. 279).
6. Missal of Anchin near Douai (Dip. Nord), text of the mass (XII cent., Leroquais, p. 352).
7. Missal of St Remi in Reims, text of the Mass (XII cent., Leroquais, p. 362).
8. Missal of Reims. Added into the Calendar at side of the 9 of May (XIII cent., Leroquais, p. 129).
9. Missal of St Nicholas’ church in Furnes. In the Calendar (Leroquais, 1924, p. 13)
10. Missal of Laon. In the Calendar (Leroquais, 1924, p. 90)
11. Ordinary of the Cathedral of Laon. Vespers with three lessons (XII-XIII sec., Leroquais, , 218; Ul. Chevalier, 1897, p. 276).
12. Parisian Missal: prayers of the Mass (Leroquais, p. 49; Id., 1929, pp. 77, 135, 209.
13. Missal of St Pierre le Vif (Leroquais, p. 84).
14. Parisian Missal with the *Orationes de translacione s. Nicolai Conf.* (XIV cent., Leroquais, 1924, p. 344).
15. Missal of Chalons sur Marne, with text of St Nicholas’ Mass (Leroquais, 1924, p. 187).
16. Missal of Beauvais (used at Senlis), with the text of the Mass (Leroquais, 1924, p. 233).
17. Missal of Angers (XV secolo), with the text of the Mass. Leroquais, *Sacramentaires*, III, p. 168.
18. Missal of Le Mans, with the text of the Mass (Leroquais, III, p. 181).
19. Missal of Bordeaux, with the text of the Mass (Leroquais, III, p. 190).
20. Missal of Lyon (XIII cent.); news added in the XIV or XV cent. (Ebner, p. 324).
21. The Book of Hours of the count Petere II of Brittany (1450-1457) referring to the church of Nantes writes: *Le jour de Saint Nicolas IX jour de Mai* (Leroquais, 1927, I, p. 77).
22. Market in Bricquebec, Dip. Manche in the days around the 9th of May (Seguin, p. 110).
23. Feast of the children in Avranches the second Sunday of May (Seguin, 109).
24. St Nicholas’ feast (of the sailors) toward the end of May in Saint Nicolas de Brem, Vandée (see *L’Intermédiaire* XXXIX, Paris 1926, p. 806).
25. Missal of the female monastery of Essen (Germany), at the 9th of May. XII century (see Zilliken, p. 68). It is lacking in a *Liber ordinarius* (XIV c.) of the same Church (see the Franz Arens edition, p. 184).
26. At Oignies (diocese of Lüttich) the feast is documented in the XIII c. (*Acta SS Junii*, Venezia 1743, p. 661/b e 660/b).
27. At Augsburg the feast is documented in the XIV c. (see Hoeynck, p. 248; Lechner, p. 251).
- 28-40. In the Germany of that time in the XV century St Nicholas’ feast of the Translation is

celebrated in the following dioceses: Basel, Erfurt, Genf, Gnesen, Konstanz, Lausanne, Mainz, Metz, Sitten, Toul, Trier, Verdun e Worms (see Grotefend, II, p. 146).

41-46. In Halberstadt the feast is postponed to May the 10th because the 9th is feasted the arrival of St Stephen's relics, while to the 9th of July is postponed in the following dioceses: Brixen, Freising, Passau, Regensburg, Salzburg and is called *Festum s. Nicolai aestivalis* (see Lechner, III, p. 120, 160, 199, e 243; Leroquais, 1927, I, p. 314).

47-48. Other feasts: *Adventus reliquiarum Nicolai* October 20th in the church of St. Bonifacius in Halberstadt; and *Initium signorum s. Nicolai* the 26 of May in Worms (see. Grotefend, a. a. O.) .

The route followed by the *Fame with his fast wings*, to speak with John Archdeacon's words, in order to spread the Translation Feast throughout Europe soon after 1089, is not easy to determine. It's chronological and geographic spreading is linked to some events that followed one another with no letting up within very few years.

The most important among these circumstances was the fact that **Bari** was an almost **staging post** in the ***Ruga Francigena*** and many people used to come from France, Flanders, Spain and Germany. **St Anselm's** secretary **Eadmer** reminded the English people that his Master was in Bari in the Council of 1098. The authors of the Lives of St **Teotonius** of Coimbra, St. **Erik** the Good, St. Vincent the Martyr, St **Juan de Ortega** and **Godfrey of Amiens** reminded it to the Portuguese, Danish, Spanish and French people.

In general we can say that the most sensible areas of St Nicholas' cult between XI and XIV centuries have been the **regions between the Rhine and Seine rivers**. More in particular, well attested is this cult in Northern France (Ile de France, Normandy, Piccardy, Artois, Alsace and Lorena, with main center the Bec monastery), Flanders (both Belgian and Dutch), and Germany (Hildesheim, Mainz, Trier), as well as in Switzerland (Basel, Luzern, Fribourg, Geneva).

