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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Death and Assumption of the Mother of God: Renewed Interest?

Two of the works published in this volume 9 of *MARIAN LIBRARY STUDIES* deal with questions in which interest has declined in recent years: the death and the assumption of Mary. The third study is an iconographical research on a theme which was abandoned in Marian art, but which propounds several problems: the "Schreinmadonna", a statue of the Mother of God fashioned so as to permit it to be opened into a sort of triptych. It is introduced by a special foreword.¹ The purpose of the first two studies is to resume research on certain problems presented by the death and the assumption of Mary. Father Gonzalo Gironés is interested in the "origins of the mystery of Elche", a religious drama dealing with the death and the assumption of Mary, performed annually on August 15, in Elche, near Valencia (Spain). The text is based essentially on the apocryphal accounts of the Virgin's Assumption that were known in Spain; it was necessary to establish similarities and differences among these documents, to reconstruct the original text, and to analyse the choice of elements that were retained in the *Misterio de Elche* throughout its history. Father B. De Margerie attempts to explore "The Mystery of the Death (only) of Mary in the Economy of Salvation: Beyond Faith, Meaning", a study based on the patristic tradition. Both these authors spent a sabbatical year at the *MARIAN LIBRARY*, availing themselves of the possibilities offered by the University of Dayton to those who want to utilize the resources of this center of studies². They offered to *MARIAN LIBRARY STUDIES* the works which we now publish.

The interest of these two studies stems primarily from the fact that the death and the assumption of the Virgin Mary did not evoke too much attention³ after the "assumptionist" period: before and around 1950, year

¹ See p. 239.

² See indications given on the cover.

³ The bibliographies indicate a certain number of studies; cf. G. M. BESUTTI, *Bibliografia Mariana* 1958/66 and 1967/72 (Marianum, Rome); see the index at *Assunzione*.

STUDIES REFERRING TO THE BIBLE: SPEDALIERI, Fr., "L'assunzione di Maria nella Sacra

of the dogmatic definition of Mary's Assumption by Pius XII. Yet at the end of the bull *Munificentissimus Deus*, the Pope had expressed the

Scrittura", in *Renovatio* 7, 1972, 111/121; SQUILLACI, D., (same title) in *Miles Imm.* 3, 1967, 14/23. - STUDIES ON THE TRADITION: BERTETTO, D., "S. Modesto di Gerusalemme († 634) dottore dell'Assunzione", in *Mater Eccl.* 8, 1972, 154/62. - GRÉGOIRE, R., "L'homélie d'Antipater de Bostra pour l'Assomption de la Mère de Dieu", in *La Parole de l'Orient* (Liban) 1, 1970, 95/122. - PENNINGTON, B., "Guerric of Igny and his sermons for the feast of the Assumption", in *Studia Monastica*, 12, 1970, 87/95. - ROSINI, R., "Il culto della B. Vergine nella lettera *De assumptione sanctae Mariae Virginis* (*Cogitis me*) dello Pseudo-Girolamo", in *De cultu Mariano saec. VI/XI*... vol. III, 433/59. - WENGER, A., "Aux origines de la croyance en l'assomption. L'homélie de Theoteknos de Livias en Palestine (fin du 6^e / début du 7^e siècle)", in *De primordiis cultus mariani*, vol. IV, 1970, 327/339; therefore in these two international congresses (Lisbon, 1967; Zagreb, 1971) there were only two studies presented on the Assumption. - LITURGY: the solemnity is explained in the books on the feasts (cf. BOBICHON M., *Marie dans la nouvelle liturgie de la parole*, Lyon, 1971/75, 2 vols.). - SPECIAL STUDIES: CREHAN, J., "The Assumption and the Jerusalem liturgy", in *Theol. Stud.* 30, 1969, 312/25. - GONZALO GIRONES, G., "Notas sobre el texto de la fiesta mozárabe de la Asunción", in *Hispania Sacra* 17, 1964, 249/58. - VALLIAN, J., "The Assumption of Our Lady in the East Syrian liturgy", in *Marianum* 30, 1968, 326/8. - *Pastoral aspects: 15. August. Aufnahme Mariens in den Himmel*. Stuttgart. Kathol. Bibelwerk, 1968 (various authors); transl. in Spanish: *Asunción de María a los cielos. 15 de Agosto*. Salamanca, 1967. - GENERAL AND SPECIAL STUDIES: BALIĆ, C., "Voraussetzungen für die Dogmatisierung einer Glaubenswahrheit, in *Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 1957, 1/20; in French, in MALO, A., *Pour le centenaire de Lourdes*, Montréal, 1958, 41/46. - BREUNING, W., "Das Mariendogma von 1950", in *Theol. Prakt. Quartalschr.* 118, 1970, 209/17. - GALOT, J., "L'Assomption de Notre Dame", in *MARIA* (du Manoir) VII, 1964, 153/237. - Card. HEENAN, J. C., *The Dogma of the Assumption*, published in the series of the Catholic Truth Society (London) 1967. - GIACCHETTI, V., *L'Assunta*, Milano 1968. - Dom R. J. HESBERT, E. BERTAUD, *L'Assomption de Notre Dame*. Textes choisis et présentés par... Plon 1962, vol. 1 (till the 16th cent.); the publication was not continued. - *Iglesia-Mundo* 1975 no. 101/103: various articles for the 25th anniversary of the definition (R. Laurentin notes that it seems to be the only periodical that made such a commemoration: *Revue des sc.ph.th.* 60, 1976, 331). - DE KONINCK, Ch., *La piété du Fils. Etudes sur l'Assomption*. Québec, 1954. - MARTINEZ SIERRA, A., "Reflexión teológica sobre la Asunción", in *Sal Terrae* 57, 1969, 563/72. - *Miles Immaculatae* 4, 1968, 84/90: SCIAMANINI, R., "Un ipotetico santo in luogo dell'Assunta"; 6, 1970, 32/40: RIZZI, E., "Un dogma mariano e un po' di scienza e di filosofia". - ROSCHINI, G. M., "Due antichissime testimonianze assunzionistiche", in *Diakonia pites*, Granada, 1969, 279/93. - SCHULZE, W. A., "Die Himmelfahrt Mariens bei C. J. Jung", in *Theol. Zeitschr.* 25, 1969, 215/7. - ECUMENICAL ASPECTS: BOECKLER, R., *Der moderne römischkatholische Traditionsbegriff. Vorgeschichte, Diskussion um das Assumptio-Dogma*, Göttingen, 1967. - In the Greek *Ekklesia*: 47, 1970, 413/6 on the "Dormitio" by BONIS C. G.; 48, 1971, 480/2 on the Assumption, by KALAMARAS, M. - CHARITOS Minas, *The Repose of Our Most Holy and Glorious Lady the Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary and Her Translation to Heaven*, Chicago, 1963. - CORR, G. M., "Gli ostacoli

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hope that the definition would cause a spiritual renewal through faith in a resurrection of our entire human race, a victory over this unrelenting death which makes one generation after another disappear:

... while the errors of materialism and the corruption of the morals resulting from this threaten to extinguish the light of virtue and to destroy human lives through wars, the sublime end to which our soul and body are destined will be brought out to full light in a magnificent way for everyone to see; so that after all, belief in the Assumption of Mary to heaven may strengthen and enliven belief in our own resurrection.⁴

During the postconciliar period there has been a liturgical renewal that has stimulated the proclamation of faith in the resurrection of Christ, particularly through the eucharistic celebration. However, this was not the case for that faith in the resurrection of the dead which Pius XII hoped to reawaken in our times, through the dogmatic definition of the Assumption

principali all'unione dei cristiani sono i dogmi dell'Immacolata Concezione e dell'Assunzione", in *Miles Imm.* 6, 1970, 215/6. - NEMECK, Fr. Kelly, *The Anglican Reaction to the Definition of the Assumption. A Study of the Reaction and Its Causes.* (thesis presented at the Univ. of Ottawa), mimeogr. 1962. - In the Russian *Bogosi Trudy* 10, 1972, 67/89: SOROKIN, V., "An Orthodox Point of View on the Dogma of the Assumption Proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church." - Recently the Anglican theologian J. SAWARD, in the article "The Assumption of Our Lady": *Sobornost* 7, 1977, 343/357 sees in "Munificentissimus Deus" the right doctrine which comes from the living tradition of the Church. - ESCHATOLOGY: McELWIN, H. M., "Christian Eschatology and the Assumption", in *Marian Studies* 18, 1967, 84/102. - FLANAGAN, D., "L'eschatologie et l'Assomption", in *Concilium* 1969, n. 41, 121/32. - MONTAGUE, G., "Eschatology and Our Lady", in *Marian Studies* 17, 1966, 65/85. - Meo, Salvatore M., "Riflessi del rinnovamento della escatologia nel mistero e la missione di Maria", in *Sviluppi teologici post-conciliari e Mariologia* (Simposio mariologico, Marianum, Roma, Ottobre 1976), 1977, 103/27. - ARCHEOLOGY AND APOCRYPHA: BAGATTI, B., PICCIRILLO, M., PRODOMO, A., *New Discoveries at the Tomb of Virgin Mary in Gethsemane*, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum: Coll. minor n. 17, Jerusalem, 1975. - BAGATTI, B., "S. Pietro nella Dormitio Mariae", in *Bibbia e Oriente* 13, 1971, 42/8; "Ricerche sulle tradizioni della morte della Vergine", in *Sacra Doctrina* nn. 69/70, 1973, 185/214; "Le origini della Tomba della Vergine a Gethsemani", in *Riv. Bibl.* 11, 1963, 38/52. - METHODOLOGY. In *Marian Studies* 28, 1977, 47/100, "Criteria for Doctrinal Development in the Marian Dogmas: An Essay in Methodology", W. H. MARSHNER criticizes (p. 14) the position of E. J. Yarnold on the Assumption ("The Marian Dogmas and Reunion" in *The Month* 13, 1971, p. 179). Fr. JELLY also judged it "reductionist" (*Marian Studies* 27, 1977, 39 in "Marian Doctrine within Vatican II's Hierarchy of the Truths") to see in the Assumption (Yarnold, p. 179) merely the eternal transformation of all our human values.

⁴ Pius XII; *Munificentissimus Deus*. AAS 42, 1950, 770. - This modern insight was illustrated by R. SPIAZZI in *Il dogma dell'Assunzione e il mondo contemporaneo* (Studi Mariani 6), Roma, 1952.

(or anticipated resurrection) of the Mother of God. But the "hierarchy" of revealed truths has a logic which is primarily that of the Spirit, and which animates our own rationalizations, our inductions and our deductions. Nowadays, there is a manifestation of a renewed interest in eschatological problems. The doctrine of the theological area classically designated as "the end times" is being reconsidered. Thus we may wonder if the final destiny of Mary could not provide some elements toward an explication, or at least stimulate research. Father Salvatore M. Meo dedicated his address—presented at the symposium held at the MARIANUM in Rome, October 1976—to the opposite question: possible influence of eschatological renewal on the mystery and mission of Mary.⁵ This subject had been previously discussed twice by the American Society: in 1966 with Fr. G. Montague's address: "Eschatology and Our Lady", and in 1967 with Fr. H. M. McElwain's study: "Christian Eschatology and the Assumption". Again, "Eschatology and Assumption" were treated, in *Concilium* 1969, by D. Flanagan.⁶ Further, we can also see in the bibliography that ecumenical research itself has inspired some studies from the Catholic as well as Protestant and Orthodox points of view. Although the Oriental Churches celebrate the feast of the Dormition, certain Orthodox theologians do not dare to affirm the anticipated bodily glorification of the Theotokos. On the other hand, in England, the Anglican Pastor John de Satgé estimates, in his beautiful book, *Mary and the Christian Gospel* already pointed out last year,⁷ that the glorifying grace of the Assumption falls within the divine plan defined by Saint Paul (*Rom. 8,30: those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified*). The power of this grace is revealed in the Theotokos, because her conformity with the Son of God, our brother, is full, ahead of ours.⁸ The study of the Apocrypha related to the death and ultimate destiny of Mary is finally attracting attention again. Father Arras published an Ethiopian text (with Latin translation): a "Book of Rest" of the Virgin, in the Corpus (CSCO) of Louvain, in 1973. Despite the late date of the Ethiopian manuscripts (15th and 18th centuries), the text, of very ancient composition,

⁵ MELO S. *Riflessi* . . . , o.c. 104: "Tali questioni sono riducibili a due enunciati fondamentali: 1. Il significato personale ed ecclesiale del mistero escatologico di Maria; 2. Le ipotesi d'una risurrezione immediata dei morti e l'assunzione di Maria".

⁶ See Bibliography in note 3 above.

⁷ DE SATGÉ, John, *Mary and the Christian Gospel*. London, 1974. - Cf. *Marian Library Studies* 8, 1976, 15.

⁸ DE SATGÉ, J., o.c. 79.

opens the way to an unexpected hypothesis: we could have a faithful version of the famous writing of that Leucius whom pseudo-Melito quoted as a dangerous heretic, and whose text he claimed to have corrected.⁹ For

⁹ The most important *Transitus* texts now available and translated in modern languages are the following:

- I. The so-called homily—probably a pastoral letter on the feast of the Assumption—of John of Thessalonica (in 630) published by M. Jugie (*PO* 19, 344ff.) with 11 different endings; it is a Greek presentation of the *transitus*, well known in the Byzantine literature.
- II. *Transitus B* (cf. ed. Tischendorf, *Apocalypses apocryphae*. Lipsiae, 1866, 124 ff.) called "Transitu of the Pseudo-Melito" (from its prologue): Latin version of a Greek text attributed to Melito, bishop of Sardes (2d c.). With the studies of Monika HAIBACH-REINISCH, in *Ein neuer "Transitus Mariae" des Pseudo-Melito. Textkritische Aufgabe und Darlegung der Bedeutung...* (Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, Rome, 1962), we must distinguish a *Transitus B*¹ and a *Transitus B*². The latter seems to be the most ancient; its critical edition is given by M. Haibach-Reinisch (pp. 63/87): according to 15 Mss (the oldest one being from the 11th c.). Both texts come from an older document no longer available; perhaps because of similarities with the homily of John of Thessalonica, we can admit one Greek source (Haibach-Reinisch, p. 29). The Pseudo-Melito was the most known *Transitus* in the Occident. Beda (8th c.) quotes it in his *Liber retractationis in Actibus Apostolorum* (*PL* 92, 1014 f).
- III. *Transitus A* (Ed. Tischendorf, *Apocalypses apocryphae*, 113/123): Latin text which derives from the *Transitus B*.
- IV. *Transitus Colbertianus* (Bibl. nat. Paris: Lat. 2672) published by B. Capelle in *Anal. Boll.* 67, 1949, 21/48: a Latin summary.
- V. Pseudo-John the Evangelist: Greek text in Tischendorf (pp. 95/112); with the theme of the body kept uncorrupted in paradise (Eden).
- VI. A fragment of a Coptic text: 16th fragment of an apocryphal "gospel of the 12 apostles" (*PO* 2, 174/183, with a French transl.: published by E. Revillout)—to be compared with texts given by R. A. W. Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, London 1913 (p. 179/230: *Book of the Resurrection of the Lord, by the Apostle Bartholomew*)—cf. also *PO* 2 193/194.
- VII. Apocalypse or vision of the Virgin Mary: Ethiopic text published by M. Chaine (with Latin transl.) in *CSCO* vol. 39-40 (Aethiop. ser. 22-23).
- VIII. *Transitus R* (:Romanus): Vat. Gr. 1982. This Greek text was studied and given out in a critical edition by A. WENGER in "L'Assomption de la T. S. Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VI^e au X^e siècle. Etudes et documents" (Paris, 1955). Wenger studied this manuscript with 20 other *transitus* and concluded that this account (11th c.) goes back to the 6th c. and supposes a source in Greek, of the 5th c. The publication of the *Liber requiei* (see next *transitus*) could bring us back to an earlier origin.
- IX. *The Liber requiei Mariae* (Book of Mary's Repose) was published by Father Victor Arras in *Corpus script. christ. orient.* (*CSCO*) vol. 342 (Aeth. ser. t. 66) in 1973, with

his part, the well known Franciscan archeologist, Father B. Bagatti—professor at the *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* of Jerusalem—was able to carry out a systematic study of the Church of the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in Gethsemani, on occasion of the restoration required by the flood of February 7, 1972. The tomb is really an ancient Jewish sepulchre. The archeological discoveries seem to confirm the apocryphal writings.¹⁰ Father Bagatti was particularly interested in the text published by Fr. Arras and attributed to Leucius. The latter is a contemporary of the apostles, according to pseudo-Melito. Saint Augustin¹¹ and Photius¹² quote him as author of writings on the apostles; the *Acta Joannis*¹³ are attributed to him. Therefore, the original text of the Apocrypha on the death and the assumption of the Theotokos could go as far back as the 2nd century and could belong to the literature of Judeo-Christians¹⁴ who, at that time, were living separated from the Gentile Church, because they remained attached to Jewish traditions and did not accept Greek “contamination” (shall we say). These Judeo-Christians were not heretics; though they disappeared slowly, some of their beliefs were handed down in the general traditions: among others, those related to Mary’s tomb in Jerusalem, her death, her assumption.

In studying the origin of the text utilized in the *Misterio de Elche*, Father G. Gironés ascertains the way in which the apocryphal themes have been

a Latin translation in vol. 343 (Aeth. ser. 67) and with explanations in vol. 352 (published in 1974 with other texts useful for various comparisons). This critical edition is based on a 15th c. Mss (Brit. Mus. Orient. 692) and on an 18th c. Mss (B.N. Paris, Abbadie 158) and fragments. Arras identified it as the famous work of the so-called heretic Leucius.

The Italian collection *Classici delle religioni* (Torino) published *Apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento*, a cura di Luigi Moraldi, in 2 volumes (1971, reprinted in 1975). The transitus literature is given in vol. I, pp. 807/926: general study and special introductions, translations, notes, bibliography. It is one of the best presentations.

¹⁰ B. BAGATTI, see bibliography (at the end) in note 3 (above).

¹¹ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *De actis cum Felice Manicheo*. PL 42, 539. Leucius is the author of an apocryphal book of the *Acts of the Apostles*, accepted by the Manicheans.

¹² PHOTIUS, in his *Bibliotheca* (PG 102, 389) notes the name of a Loukios Charinos who wrote about the travels of the apostles.

¹³ Cf. TH. ZAHN, *Acta Joannis*, Erlangen, 1880: LX-CLXXII. Zahn thought that the name Leucius became a label for apocryphal accounts on the history of the apostles.

¹⁴ The question is summarized by L. CIGNELLI, in *Studia Hierosolymitana* II, *Studi esegetici*, 1975, 259/277: “Il prototipo giudeo-cristiano degli apocrifi assunzionisti”. R. LAURENTIN wishes scientific studies done by scholars knowing the original languages of the various *Transitus*. (“Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie”, in *Rev. Sc. Ph. Th.* 62, 1978, 111).

handed down in a tradition which inspired not only a religious drama, but an actual paraliturgy connected to the feast of the Assumption. The Latin doctrinal tradition has undoubtedly reacted against the apocryphal writings, even to the point of finally ignoring them, retaining only the faith in the anticipated resurrection of the Mother of God, as we can see in the bull *Munificentissimus Deus*. Gironés insists on the fact that the *Misterio de Elche*, like all the apocryphal writings, deals primarily with the death of Mary. We know that this death is not mentioned in the dogmatic definition of 1950; Pius XII knew the theological discussions on this subject, and the position of those who favored an immediate assumption of the Virgin, without death. He preferred to avoid that problem. Gironés does not value the legends of the Apocrypha, but rather a common tradition represented by the *Transitus* of Mary, among other texts. Father de Margerie, on the other hand, analyzes the importance of patristic (mainly Saint Ambrose, Saint Augustine) and liturgical texts, which either affirm or suppose the death of Mary. In this way, the author returns to a strict analysis of the texts, an analysis which has become rare, but is indispensable. However, it is evident that he goes beyond the texts pursuing what he thinks to be their internal logic, an implicit harmony with the subsequent developments of the tradition. Patrologists will make the distinction which remains (and the author realizes it), between that which an Augustine wrote concerning the mystery of salvation (he saw Mary present there) and the syntheses and relations which our modern theology could elaborate. Most important of all is the fact that through different areas (Apocrypha, Patristics and Liturgy), Gironés and De Margerie arrive at the same conclusion: the Virgin's death is a dogmatic fact; it could fit within a definition by the Church. In any case, according to Father de Margerie's suggestion, the Latin rite could find again a celebration of Mary's death and of her entombment, as in the Oriental liturgies.

This desire brings us back to the *mystery of Elche*. We certainly have there a purely local tradition. However, this type of dramatization of liturgical feasts was much more common in the Middle Ages; we still find an echo of this in the participation of the congregation in chanting or in the reading of the Passion during Holy Week. So in Elche, on the 14th of August in the afternoon, the eve of the Assumption, the chanting of Vespers inaugurates the solemnity. Upon concluding this liturgical office, the mystery of Elche begins with the entrance of Mary through the main portal of the basilica; she is accompanied by angels and by the two other Marys. The first day of the mystery ends with the death of the Virgin, surrounded by

the apostles. Then the statue of Our Lady of Elche is laid on the bier; a small image represents Mary's soul which is taken up to heaven (by means of a special mechanical device—called *aracoeli*—which moves between "heaven" and "earth"). The soirée ends with the *Salve Regina*. On the 15th, Assumption Day, the mystery continues in the afternoon after the chanting of Vespers and Compline. Then the funeral and the entombment take place; the little image of Our Lady (symbol of her soul), is brought down again on the *aracoeli*, and is replaced by the big statue of Our Lady of Elche which is then lifted up to "heaven" where she is crowned. The religious drama ends with a last chant: the *Gloria Patri* . . .

Thus we are rediscovering important fields of research: myth and revelation, liturgy and symbolism, ecumenism . . .

Revelation comes to us through Tradition. The canonical writings are fundamental, guaranteed by a direct inspiration of the Spirit, and recognized as such by a Church which herself is always guided by the Spirit. What is the role of non-canonical writings? particularly the apocryphal ones which are often denounced as erroneous or at least dangerous by the ecclesiastical authorities? The Church has retained the authority of the Fathers, while discarding what could not be the common belief of all the faithful. A similar selection has taken place in the domain of the Apocrypha, and in general in the so-called popular literature. Father Gironés has followed suit in his work on the origins of a paraliturgical drama.

The mystery of Elche is not "paraliturgical" in the strict sense of the word as when we talk of "services of the Word" or of "Benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament". But in some ceremonies like the "Way of the Cross", we can discover how the prayer of the Church opens up to many other "paraliturgical" expressions. The mystery of Elche testifies to a type of celebration which is no longer well-known. The chants, the prayers, the actions which constitute this drama, are excellent illustrations of the efforts of a constant pastoral work in the Church for arousing and building up the people's piety. We can certainly find everywhere forms of devotion that have become obsolete. In the *Misterio de Elche*, the representation of the Jews attacking the bier of Mary and their subsequent conversion are scenes that have already been shortened; they could be suppressed in response to our ecumenically sensitive times.

The problems which the analysis of the Apocrypha bring out are those of Christian myth and symbolism. For instance, the Byzantine liturgy of the Assumption recalls the presence of the apostles, who witnessed the death and glorification of the Theotokos. What matters is the testimony

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going back to the time of the apostles, and not so much the literary genre (travels, acts of the apostles), which flourished at that time. The Christian approach to death (the agony, union with Christ in Gethsemani), the faith in the beyond, the description of a descent of Mary to the "underworld" like that of Christ: all these elements converge in the Apocrypha, to form an imagery borrowed both from the Jewish apocalypses and from certain pagan accounts (as we can see in the *Dies irae*). The *Misterio de Elche* retains only the "pilgrimage" of Mary to the garden of Gethsemani. There is a purification of the elements transmitted through the Apocrypha. It allows us to rediscover, not the mythologies, but the myths in the true sense of the word: our immediate approaches to some basic human realities, such as life, death, survival.

Dayton, June 30, 1978

