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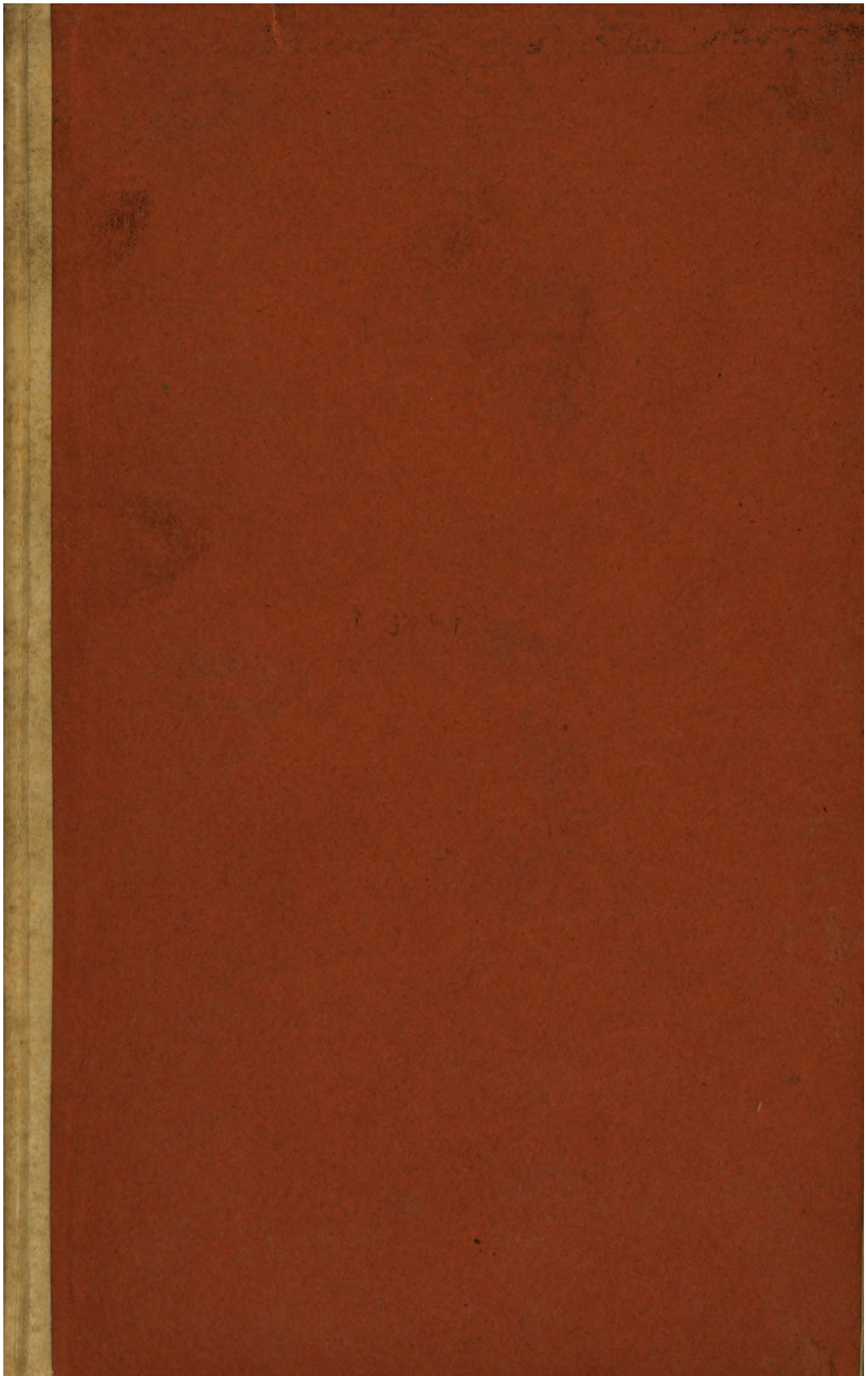
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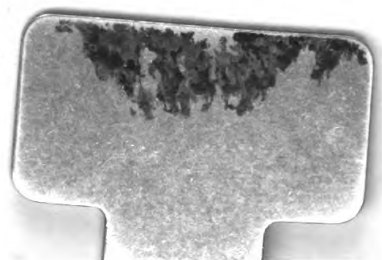
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Die Mosaic Werkstatt ^{St. Mark}
by G. J. Williamson Venice

O. A. T. S. S.
Copied
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1705



ON AN EARLY MOSAIC IN ST. MARK'S, REPRESENTING THE REMOVAL OF THE BODY OF THE EVANGELIST TO VENICE.

BY SIR GARDNER WILKINSON, F.R.S.

[Reprinted from the Journal of the Archæological Association.]

AMONG the many interesting records connected with Venetian history, preserved in the mosaics of St. Mark's, is one which is particularly deserving of notice, as it relates to the original foundation of that building, and to the adoption of St. Mark as the patron saint of Venice.

The Christians of Alexandria had preserved the body of the evangelist in the magnificent church dedicated to him in that city; and the miraculous cures believed to be performed by it attracted many devout persons to the tomb; but the sanctity of Christian churches was not always respected by the Moslems; and the lieutenant of the caliph, who governed Egypt for the Abbaside prince, El Mamoon, being engaged in building a palace in Alexandria, or, as others say, having received orders to send marbles and columns for the caliph's palace at Bagdad, was not scrupulous in his mode of obtaining materials for its embellishment. The story related in the histories of

Venice dignifies the governor with the title of "king"; and one chronicle describes him under the strange name of "the emperor John the Armenian"; all, however, agree that the removal of the body of St. Mark to Venice took place during the dogeship of Giustiniano Partecipazio, about 828 A.D., and that it was "the only event of importance which graced the reign of that obscure and sickly prince".

Many churches of Alexandria having been despoiled, and rich marbles being daily carried off by command of the Moslem governor, the priests who had charge of the sanctuary of St. Mark, Theodorus and Staurgius, foresaw that, from its well-known richness, their church would not long escape the general spoliation. Two Venetian vessels happened at the time to be in the port of Alexandria, and one day as the captains (one called, in the Venetian histories, Buono of Malamocco, the other, Rustico of Torcello) paid their usual visit to the patriarchal church, they perceived the downcast looks of the priests, and on inquiring the reason, were told of the impious proceedings of the Moslems, and of the apprehensions they felt for their own church. The captains endeavoured to console the holy men; but hearing them confess that the place would no longer be a safe asylum for the precious relics, they bethought themselves that the opportunity was favourable for obtaining possession of the body of the saint. They began to tempt their fidelity by many flattering offers, promising them the highest favours on the part of the republic; but the priests fearing to commit a sacrilege, refused their assent; until one day, as the Venetian captains were repeating their request, a number of workmen, headed by the governor's agents, entered the church, and proceeded to remove many valuable marbles and columns for the use of the new palace. The sight of this outrage induced the priests to yield to persuasion; and by adroitly substituting the body of St. Claudian they prevented the Christian devotees from perceiving the removal of the more holy relic. The most difficult part, however, remained to be done, which was to guard against discovery while transporting the body to the Venetian ship; and as every thing on leaving the town was (according to long established custom) most rigorously examined, it



became necessary to adopt some stratagem for eluding the vigilance of the Moslem guards of the port. The priests and the two captains, therefore, having deposited the body in a large *basket*, and covered it with fresh grass, overlaid the whole with a quantity of pork; well knowing that the sight of this would deter the most rigid inquirer, and having given orders that the sailors who helped to carry it should cry, as they traversed the streets, "Khanzээр! khanzээр!" "pork! pork!" they were enabled to reach the ship without molestation. Still another scrutiny awaited them from the custom-house, before leaving the port; the sight of the unclean meat, however, once more released them from examination;—the Moslems shrank back with horror, and quickly put off again in their boat for the shore. And now, to prevent further inquiry, the body was enveloped in a sail until the moment of departure; and on the first favourable wind the ship left the port with its precious booty. But they had scarcely reached the open sea when a storm overtook the Venetians; they were driven back from their course, and they only owed their safety to the miraculous interposition of the saint, whose advice to the captain Buono enabled them to avoid shipwreck on the rocky coast.

According to the popular belief, a tradition had been current ages before at Venice, how St. Mark himself, while sailing along the coast of Aquileia, had touched at the islands where the city afterwards stood, and had heard a voice proclaim to him in a vision, that one day his bones should repose in one of those yet uninhabited spots; and a proportionate degree of joy is said to have been manifested when the Venetians witnessed the fulfilment of the prophecy:—the people all exclaimed that "Heaven protected the republic!" songs, prayers, and invocations to the saint resounded on all sides, beseeching him to take the city under his protection; and a grand ceremony was held to welcome the landing of the holy relics. All the dignitaries of the state marched bare-foot to the quay to receive them, and, with great solemnity, they were deposited in the chapel of the ducal palace. The two captains who had made this precious acquisition for the republic were loaded with presents, and conducted in triumph through Venice; and the doge Partecipazio dying soon after, bequeathed

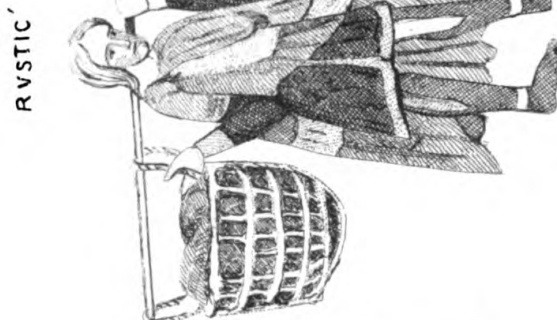
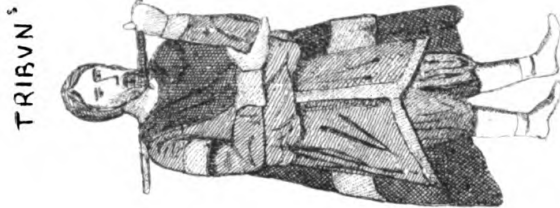
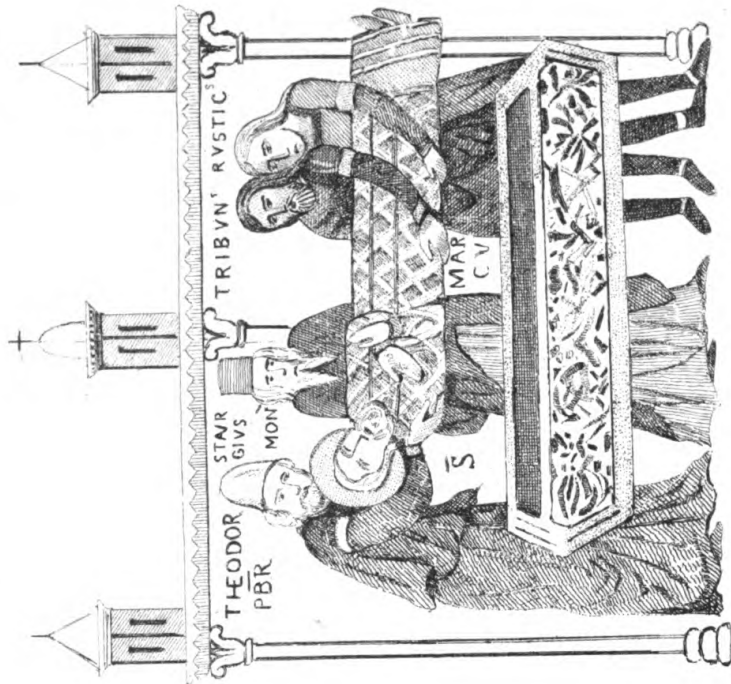
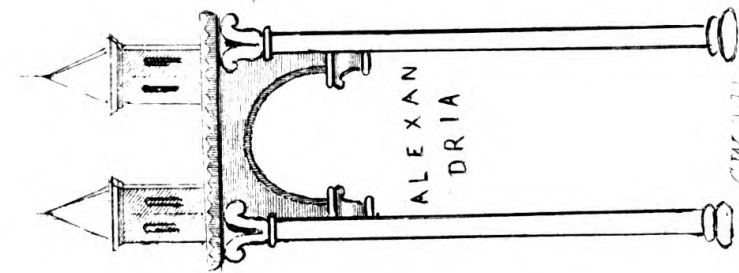
a large sum of money for the foundation of a church worthy to receive the body of the saint, whose transfer to Venice had reflected so much honour on his reign.

Such is the general account in Darù, and other writers. It is repeated by Lecomte in his *Venezia*, and the chronicler he quotes (who wrote in the fourteenth century), defends himself from the accusation of having invented the story, by saying that a painting in the church of St. Mark existed in his time, commemorating the scene he describes. This painting is the mosaic here represented. For though the subject is noticed by several writers on Venice, the mosaic they mention is not of early time, but is that on the façade of St. Mark's, described by Lecomte "on the right, in the lower division", copied from the designs of Pietro Vecchio, and dating only two centuries ago, about A.D. 1650; and all the mosaics on the façade were executed after the fifteenth century, except that which represents the church itself, which is the only one figured in the great picture of Gentile Bellini, painted in 1496. The old and original mosaic is in the interior of the church, and occupies one side of the dome, above the organ gallery; and the reason of its being seldom seen is, that the gallery is kept locked, except on fête days, and the organ effectually screens it from the view of those below. It appears to date between 1000 and 1071.

The cathedral of St. Mark was first begun in 829-830, at the death of the doge Giustiniano Partecipazio. Its site had till then been occupied by the small church of St. Theodore, the original patron saint of the city, whose statue on one of the two columns in the Piazzetta, still records the honours he received at Venice; and the position close to the ducal palace, which had just been founded, was thought particularly suited to the new cathedral. It was nearly finished, when, in 976, a fire reduced it to ashes, and a finer building was then projected. Artists were sent for from Constantinople, and the bishop of Venice laid the first stone in the presence of the doge, Pietro Orseolo, in 977. It was finished in 1071, though the embellishment of the building continued for many centuries, during which time all kinds of precious marbles were collected from various countries visited by that commercial people; and a law was passed that all ships



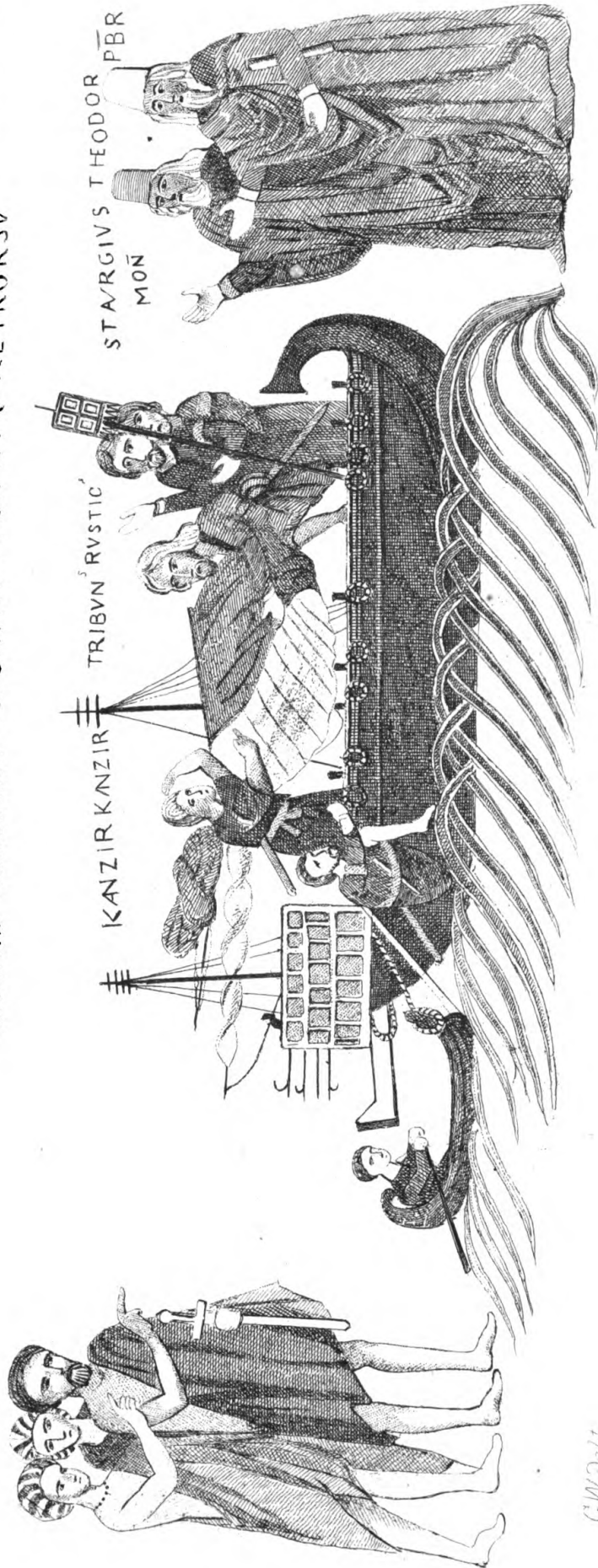
∴ MARCVM FVRANTVR . KANZIR . HII VOCIFERANTVR



G.W. Dyer

G.W. Dyer

CARNIB' ABSCONSŪ QVERVNT FVGIVNTQ-RETRORSŪ



STARIGIVS THEODOR PBR
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trading with the Levant should bring back columns, marbles, or any monuments that might tend to beautify the church of St. Mark. (*D'Agincourt*, vol. ii, p. 154.)

The representation of the removal of the body of the saint (see plates XXI and XXII) in the old mosaic, agrees very well with the accounts given in the histories of Venice; it only differs in the name of one of the captains, who is called *Tribunus* instead of *Bonus*; for *Tribunus* and *Rusticus*, as well as the two Alexandrian priests, "*Theodorus the presbyter*" (or priest), and *Staurgius the monk*", figure more than once in the picture. On the left of the upper part is the town of Alexandria, indicated by an archway having the name "*ALEXANDRIA*" within it; above the colonnade, representing the church, is this line: *MARCVM FURANTUR, KANZIR HII VOCIFERANTUR*"; and the priests, with the two captains, are engaged in removing the body of the saint from its coffin. Beyond, to the right, the latter are seen carrying it away in the *basket*, and each has his name inscribed above.

In the lower part (see plate XXII), to the left, stand the Moslems of the port of Alexandria, who appear to have sent their boat to examine the ship's cargo; and the same exclamation of "*KANZIR! KANZIR!*" is written over the sailors who assisted the captains in carrying the body on board. The sudden retirement of the Moslems to their boat on finding the pork is also portrayed, to which the inscription above makes allusion: "*CARNIBUS ABSCONSUM QUÆRUNT, FUGIUNTQUE RETRORSUM*"; and the final concealment of the body in a sail is also represented. On the right, stand the priest *Theodorus*, and the monk *Staurgius*, who are thereby shewn not to have accompanied the captains to Venice, nor is any reference made to the quantity or quality of their rewards. The expression, "*MARCVM FURANTUR*", suffices to show that there was then no scruple in admitting that the body was "*stolen*"; though some Venetians, in later times, have thought fit to deny that fact, and have attempted to justify the proceeding in the same manner as captain *Tribunus* and his companion, by urging the necessity of securing for it a safer asylum at Venice, since not a stone now remains to mark the site of the once rich and spacious church of St. Mark at Alexandria.

The festival commemorating the removal of the body, and its transfer to Venice, was kept up till a late time ; and annually, on the 31st January, a solemn mass was performed, when the doge and the signory were always present, and all Venetians united in the praise of their patron saint, with a firm persuasion that "divine interposition" had enabled them to obtain those relics, which had contributed so much to the glory and the welfare of the republic.



