

Life of St. Markella of Chios



St. Markella of Chios, 14th Century

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Markella, [1] the blessed and pure bride of Christ, was born at the end of the 15th century [2] on the sweet-scented island of Chios, in a village on its hinterland, called Volissos.

Her parents were among the wealthiest people of the town, and they were Christians. From a young girl, Markella's mother had a great devotion for the Virgin Mary. When Markella's mother married and moved to her own home, she prayed before the icon of the Theotokos beseeching for a child. When she conceived and brought forth Markella, the infant brought much joy to the family. Though the mother was devout and reverent, the father was cynical about the Church.

When Markella was about twelve years old, her mother spoke more at length to her about Christ and His love. In simple language that the child could understand, Markella's mother spoke to her about the incarnation of the Son of God, born of the Virgin. She impressed upon her daughter the importance of emulating the purity of the Panagia [3] She explained how Christ would come and dwell in them also.

At other times, she spoke joyfully about the heavenly teachings of the Lord Jesus. She recounted the miracles of His love. With pain and tears, she spoke of His Passion, but with a triumphant voice, she taught her about the Resurrection. The mother also did not neglect to narrate the lives and contests of the martyrs. She related the stories with all her soul and heart, so that little Markella thought she was actually present. Markella then exclaimed, "I like very much what you are telling me mommy,...but tell me more. Thou dost seem as beautiful as an angel then!" Her mother answered, "As thou wilt mature, I shall explain more about our Lord. I will also tell thee about Panagia and the saints at the appropriate time."

Markella's mother was an angel of peace, a faithful guide, and a guardian of the maiden's soul and body. Markella deemed her mother to be the best mother in the world. Every day, she learned more about the Faith and grew to love the Lord, the Virgin Mother, the saints, and the struggle for virtue. However, Markella's mother was visited with a terminal disease. The mother understood that her earthly sojourn was coming to a close.

One day, she called Markella to her bedside, and said, "Tell me, Markella, what happened after the Crucifixion and burial of the Lord Jesus?" She answered, "His Resurrection!" Continuing, the mother asked, "And what does this mean for people?" Markella said, "They, too, shall rise." Her mother then added, "He told the people that "I am going to prepare a place for thee in heaven and I shall come and take thee to My Father's house." [4] Markella said, "Yes, mommy." Her mother then asked, "Where, therefore, are Christians going after earth?" The maiden answered, "To heaven, mother." Continuing, the mother added, "However,...however, my little girl, this separation, which is a temporary separation, brings sorrow to loved ones..." Markella then said, "To whom, mommy?" She said, "To a mother and daughter, let's say. I was sad when my mother left, my Markella, just as we are sorry whenever some loved one goes on a far away trip." Markella said, "She was a grandmother." The mother replied, "But not only grandmothers are called by the Lord. He calls mothers also, my love." Markella, gazing intently, said, "And mothers?" The mother answered, "Certainly." Markella then asked, "And what do children do then?" Her mother calmly answered, "If they are little girls who believe and love very much the risen Lord Jesus, Who is now with His Father, His all-holy Mother, and all the saints rejoicing in heaven, then...then, what do those little girls do, my joy?" Markella then asked, "Do they cry, mommy?" She said, "Cry...Bring me a little water, my Markella." Markella answered, "Yes, mamma."

Her mother then turned in prayer, uttering, "If it is possible for this cup to pass from me or the child...How shall I leave her as she is? But if this be Thy will, sanctify her that I might rejoice eternally in heaven. Hearken unto me, my God. A Christian mother supplicates Thee. Hearken unto her, O God and Father!" Markella then brought in water, and her mother hugged and kissed her. It would be the final farewell. Then her mother said, "Go into the drawing-room and read now, my Markella. I have to sleep...but remember everything that will keep thy soul and body pure as a lily, as the all- immaculate Virgin who is full of grace." Then Markella's mother looked up, and said, "I am coming, O Lord. It is Markella for whom I beseech." Then a voice was heard, "Leave her to my love. Thou wilt glorify me together with her." Receiving joy, the mother, from the depths of her heart, said, "I thank Thee, O Lord Jesus!" Then, as she looked upon Markella from afar, she reposed in the Lord.

Later, her husband found her. All of Volissos attended the funeral of that noble lady who was conspicuous for her philanthropic deeds. Markella was then sent

temporarily to stay with her aunt.

With the upbringing left to her father, life was difficult for Markella, but she bore his cantankerous moods patiently and cheerfully. Markella, at length, assumed the complete running of the house. However, father and daughter never prayed together.

Once, after Markella said her evening prayers, her father said brusquely, "Make thy Cross and go to sleep!" She asked, "Do I not have time to light the oil lamp and burn incense before the icons?" Her father replied, "Those things are done by the church sacristan. My house is not a church with candles, incense and oil lamps. Leave that! Thou hast exceeded thy mother of blessed memory!" Markella then asked, "Are prayers and icons, or the Lord Jesus, the Panagia, and the saints, excessive?" Again he answered, "I told thee, my house is not a church. Attend to thy chores and study thy lessons." Markella did not challenge his authority.

Her father was so different than her mother. He lacked her sensitivity, logic, faith, and love. He did not have her warmth, joy and optimism. Markella thought, "What shall I do now? My mother is in heaven watching me from on high. I shall do as she taught me...I shall speak my troubles in prayer. My father does not want me to light the oil lamp and cense the icons, as my mother was wont to do. Therefore, I will light them both in my soul."

Thus, Markella prayed and took care of the house. She never forgot her mother's memory, love and noble ways. The Lady Theotokos was her mainstay. Her father was pleased with her running of the house. Moreover, by the time she was sixteen years old; Markella not only performed housework, but labored outside with her father upon their property. Once, he asked her if he had fallen short of her expectations. Answering that she had only one complaint, Markella said, "Thou hast stopped attending church. With mother thou didst go..." He interrupted, and said, "But what does it give?" Markella said, "Faith, hope, joy, peace..." He broke in saying, "It is for women with little minds..." She said, "Does that mean that the men of our village have little minds also?" He answered, "I am not saying that." Markella continued, "I tell thee, father, take heed, something is not well with thee. God is life. He gives us breath, food and everything." The father remarked, "Philosophies..." She said, "It is the truth!" He said, "Live as thou dost see..." Markella then responded, "These things I see and feel and live." Yet, her father remarked, "Youthful enthusiasm." But she said, "It is certain wisdom."

He then said, "Set the food so we can eat." She added, "from the good things which the Lord richly bestows." He then said, "Markella, stop these useless philosophies. Put out, the food. To eat and drink? That's everything!"

Since childhood, Markella received good training from her mother, as this could be seen in her character. She was respectful and pious and, most of all guarded her purity. She avoided associations with girls that were less reserved and, especially, with youths that she might not be harmed spiritually from such company. She had one goal in mind: to achieve all the virtues and become a blameless bride of Christ, so that in the end she would be made worthy of the kingdom of the heavens.

As she grew older, more so were her virtues multiplied, since she spent most of her time worshipping God. She fasted, prayed, and attended all the services. She aided the poor and constantly tried to bring others to the way of God. In short, she tried to keep all the commandments and please God. As for her father, she held him in the utmost respect and loved him dearly, mindful of the commandment: "Honor thy father and thy mother..." [5] She never ceased to win his favor and comfort him in his sorrows, saying, "I, O father, will be in the stead of mother. I will be with thee in thine old age. I will not abandon thee in thy need. I will be there in thy sickness and in all thy sorrows." Now he loved hearing these words from his daughter; and as she grew older, she took on all of her mother's characteristics.

Markella had reached the bloom of youth. By twenty years old, she grew to be an upright woman. Her beauty and shapeliness, together with her virtue and spiritual gifts, made her resemble a terrestrial angel. Her ready smile and kindness captures every fellow-villager who received her greeting or her sweet words. She considered herself fortunate and her orphaned state seemed remote. She loved everyone; but the happiness of the maiden was temporary.

All her excellent qualities did not go unobserved by the hater-of-good and common enemy of man's salvation, for he was jealous and wished to undermine her. The devil could not bear to have his power usurped by a young and sweet girl; indeed, one who was a simple villager and illiterate, only knowing the Crucified One, Jesus Christ. His jealousy made him desirous to cast her into the deepest abyss of sin (verily, the one who exceeded in virtue!). Thus, planning an immediate attack, he sought to sow evil thoughts into her pure and godly mind. Though quite young, she was possessed of a spiritually mature and strong conviction, and would in no wise hearken or take pleasure in the evil one's wily

whisperings. Therefore, the vile demon withdrew from directly contending with Markella. He was unable to lift up her mind to proud thoughts, even though she was the wealthiest and most beautiful in those parts; neither was he able to bestir in her youthful lusts, nor was he able to move her to do his will by any of the other arrows that he shot at her. What then was the most unheard of and unimaginable evil amongst the Christians? Finding her father debauched and desolate of divine grace, he pursued him and incited in him carnal thoughts of his very own daughter. Alas, the evil and wickedness of the devil! Woe to his sinister devices! He deceived Eve through the serpent and, thusly, did he wish to deceive Markella through her father, for they were together day and night, as father and child. Therefore, smitten by his daughter's comeliness, he was wounded by the enemy's venomous darts. Attend carefully, therefore, and let us proceed with his edifying life.

Suddenly, a black cloud hovered over the house. Unexpectedly, her father sunk into a deep depression. He avoided looking at Markella. He became harsh and spoke to her with bitterness in his voice. He refused to allow her to go into the garden or to converse with the neighbors. She locked herself in her room and burst out crying. Prayer consoled her greatly. "O my Virgin and Panagia, enlighten him. Deliver him from this melancholy. Restore him whole and sound; have him love me and not disdain me, O all-holy one. Thou knowest well how he raised me like an orphan, for my mother is with Thee. My father suffered troubles to rear me to this age and, now, what has happened to change him? Why does he glare at me? Why does he not love me as before? Indeed, in thee, O my Panagia, I seek refuge." Weeping thus, sleep overcame her before the icon of the Theotokos. Then she was wakened by his unrestrained shouting. She thought, "But what is happening? Why has life changed so?"

Alas, as we said, an evil spirit suggested base thoughts to his mind and polluted the mayor's soul. The old man's passions were roused and his conscience was depraved. He no longer looked upon Markella as his daughter, but gaped at her as a woman...which, for some time, he wrestled against. He suffered extremely to drive out this dark and unlawful desire. Long nights he remained sleepless and tossed and turned in his bed. The warfare was dreadful. He fought and lost. He was overcome and had thoughts, such as, that he planted the apple tree, why should someone else partake of the fruit? Such distorted thoughts would not allow him to find rest and, as we said, he succumbed.

At first, he would stare at her intently, speaking and treating her in a rough

manner. Afterwards, he changed. He began to speak to her with sweet words; he wanted to have her near him; he would stroke her hair and gaze into her eyes. All the while, Markella was unaware of her father's motives. She believed that it was her prayer that caused him to have a change in heart. She held his head and kissed his hands. She repeated over and over again with tears of joy, "To thee, I attribute this miracle, O holy Virgin; for thou hast hearkened to my prayer, and I thank thee." Her father, however, was possessed by the devil.

Though the maiden, at first, did not perceive this, not much time passed when she understood his true intentions. Markella was struck with horror, and thought, "But how is it possible? How can one conceive such a thing?" Nevertheless, it was true. Her knees trembled from such a revolting thought. She would call out constantly, "O Panagia, my Panagia!" One would say that the eyes of the Theotokos in the icon now appeared to look upon her with pity and, filled with compassion, she spoke inside of Markella's heart, saying, "Do not be afraid, my child. I am the protectress of all the afflicted. None who take refuge in me depart ashamed...I will protect thee."

Every day that passed was agonizing and oppressive for Markella. Her father made an open show of his feelings with audacious and shocking words. She realized now how much Satan mastered her father, so she avoided him as much as possible. The house took on the atmosphere of a cemetery. The neighbors detected that something was awry with the cantankerous old man, so they stopped greeting him.

It was a quiet morning. After the catch, the small fishing boats returned from Psara, [6] to Volissos. Obviously, no one imagined the heinous act that would take place by the little harbor of this village in just a few short hours. The holy maiden only desired to emulate the Virgin Panagia in both spiritual and physical beauty. Prepared to accept death, Markella entrusted herself to the Theotokos. She then decided to leave home.

Markella ran toward the mountain. Her father chased her as a maddened tiger. Fortunately, by reason of his age, he was out of breath quickly. As he leaned up against a tree trunk, with his eyes he searched but could not find her. He then began to speak as though she were before his eyes, and said, "Where wilt thou go? I will find thee and tear thee apart!" Then he fell to the ground and kicked his feet as a madman into the dirt. Markella, meanwhile, reached the summit and hid among the foliage. At that location, without being seen, she could espy her father from afar. She then sat upon a rock, sensing a black cloud within her that

seemed to cover the earth. However, she said to herself, "God, the Father and Creator, will not leave me. I will stand up and, with the help of God, I will win. I will either live or die a champion...as God permits. Yes, honor or death. Death on earth and life eternal in heaven with the saints who were victoriously triumphant against wickedness. There, I will find the All-holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and my mother." Where she would abide and what she would eat were not of concern to her. She thought she would dwell and eat as the birds. Calling to mind the words of the Lord that we are of more value than the sparrows [Mt. 10:31], she was strengthened. Thus, Markella remained there until nightfall.

As it darkened, she thought upon how she would see her father's advance. With faith, she said, "God the Father shall help." A full moon then revealed itself, lighting up the countryside. Markella then made the sign of the Cross, and kept vigil until midnight. Then Markella heard the clanging bells of a flock. She thought to herself, "I will not hide. Everyone knows and loves me; and I love all in Volissos." Then a shepherdess appeared, and Markella called out with all her heart, "Marouso!"

Marouso caught a glimpse of Markella and followed her voice in the night. She asked, "Is it thee, Markella? The holy maiden answered, "Yes, it is I." Marouso continued, "At such an hour, here?" Markella replied, "A great evil threatens me and I came to escape." Marouso said, "What evil? Who Markella?" Continuing, Markella answered, "Neither can I tell thee, nor canst thou hear it. Thou wilt learn it later." Marouso then asked, "And wilt thou remain here all night?" The saint replied, "Yea, and many nights and days, till I see what will happen." Marouso said, "And I with thee!, O beloved Markella, who has given so much help to me and my family. Indeed, who hast thou not helped in Volissos? Throughout all of Chios, thy kindness and graciousness are known. I shall be with thee now and in thy difficult days. Fortunately, it is summertime.

"We shall lay out branches and sleep." Markella replied, "No sleep, Marouso. 'Watch and pray' [Mt. 26:41], days of mine when I must stand guard, lest the evil one come? Marouso volunteered, saying, "We shall take turns my Markella. Thou wilt watch and I will sleep. Then thou wilt sleep I will keep watch. However, thou must eat something. I have bread and cheese in my bag. I have water too. Come and eat, beloved sister." Markella then ate, drank, and was strengthened. Marouso then said, "Lay down and sleep, Markella. I prepared some bedding. I will keep watch." Markella, from both bodily and mental exhaustion, slept. Before morning, however, she was at her observation post.

Now the people of Volissos noted Markella's absence, and they missed her. They went to her father's house, and asked him, "Where is Markella?" Sarcastically, he answered, "She went to become a saint..." Persisting, they asked, "Where did she go?" With his face darkened and wild, he shouted, "Do not ask. Leave me alone. Go. Get out!" Hence, the villagers turned and left him.

Nevertheless, they spoke amongst themselves, asking, "Where did she go? She was a 'saint' already, having such faith and love in God. She was a benefactress to all. What is her father saying? It is the first time we have ever seen a man so dark and gloomy." Hence, the villagers supplicated, "God, keep our Markella safe!"

Markella's father gnashed his teeth and howled like a ravenous wolf, thinking to himself, "Where wilt thou go from me? I will leave thee a few days, that thou might hunger, and become weak and unable to run. Then I shall come and tear thee apart. I will not rest till I see thee a lifeless carcass, food for dogs!"

A certain number of days passed and the father was filled with uncontrollable wrath in his soul and heart. He took up a knife, and a bow and arrow. Mounting his horse, he left to find her. With a fiery countenance and foaming at the mouth, he declared, "Today thou wilt not elude me!"

Markella, from her position, caught sight of her father from afar, and called out emotionally, "Marouso, he is coming!" Her friend asked, "Who, my Markella?" She answered, "Thou wilt see him shortly. Hide me somewhere, lest he see me." Marouso said, "There is a cave close by us. Come, go inside and I will skillfully cover it with branches." Markella, with a pounding heart, went inside, saying, "Guard me, my God; save me, my Panagia!"

The father found Marouso, and said, gruffly, "What art thou doing here?" She answered, "As thou seest, I am shepherding my flock." He said, "Hast thou not seen Markella?" She answered, "I saw her ascend the mountain days ago." He said, "and where did she go?" Marouso replied, "She ascended the summit. I was further down." The father demanded, "And then." She continued, "Then she went about her business." He retorted, "Thou hast not said it right." She said, "I am telling it very well. What shall I say if someone, perchance in a little while asks me about thee? Shall I not say, 'I saw him; he passed by here and went about his business?'" How is it that I am not saying it correctly?"

Pointing northward, he then asked, "Possibly she went in that direction?"

Marouso said, "Perhaps." He then said, "Where will she go from me? I will find her and we will talk about it then!" She asked, "What evil has she done thee, sir? Markella is the best of Volissos." He then told her, "Hush up, lest I whip thee!." The dogs that were tending her flock then began barking and snarling at his horse, in a threatening manner. To get away from the dogs, the father withdrew and went northward. Marouso followed him with her eyes till he was out of sight. Marouso then turned to Markella, and said, "My Markella, he went northward. Thy father, my good friend, was fiercer than my dogs when they go wild. What has happened? What wilt thou do? Wilt thou remain here or dost thou wish to go further south, to a safer place?" Markella answered, "I will go south further away." Marouso said, "Whatever thou dost deem best, my Markella." the holy maidep then said "Look about and tell me, does he appear anywhere?" Marouso replied, "Nowhere." Markella then said, "I am going then."

Markella then ran southward, amid shrubs and thorns. She ran without heeding her torn dress and wounded feet from the branches and thorns. She only thought about escaping her father.

Near the beach, by the area of the promontory, a shepherd was leading his flock of sheep into the pen to shelter them from the burning July sun. All night, the poor sheep tried to satisfy their hunger in vain. Due to the barren and rocky terrain, the flock had now gathered under the branches of the great plane tree nearby the little well. The shepherd was just getting ready to lie down when he heard a sound and turned looking northward.

He caught sight of a young woman running like a lost lamb about to be torn apart by a wolf. Barefooted, with disheveled hair and torn dress, she approached nearby him and hid inside a huge bush, disregarding its thorns. He thought out loud, "What has happened to her? Who is pursuing this poor girl? Where was she all night, to find herself, at this hour, at such a desolate spot where only flocks and shepherds roam?" coming closer, surprised, he exclaimed, "It is Markella, the young noblewoman!"

Then, he heard a galloping horse and in no time, it was Markella's father who was before him (for he was known to all being the leading citizen of the village). With fiery eyes and foaming mouth, he abruptly asked, without a greeting, "perhaps, thou hast seen my daughter? Has Markella passed by here?" Petrified, the shepherd shuttered, "Markella..." The father shouted, "I said Markella!" Then, drawing a knife, he added "Tell me quickly, lest I slay thee!" The shepherd,

scarcely able to speak from his terror, replied, "See...uh, no, I did not see her? The wretched shepherd, wishing to gain his favor, all the while pointed with his finger at the bush where she was concealed. [7] Thus, out of fear, the shepherd surrendered the lamb to the ravenous and wild wolf.

Immediately, her father dismounted and ran to the bush, shouting, "Markella, come out of the bush!" However, she refused, and said, "I do not want a dishonorable life. Honor or death! An honorable death that ushers in the blessed life of heaven." The father, losing his temper, then shouted, "From where shall I enter to take hold of thee? How hast thou gone among thorn bushes? Come out!" This time, the pure maiden kept silent, and only prayed, uttering, "Strengthen me. O Lord, to fight for Thy sacred law, for the Most-holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and for the yearning and blessing of my mother."

Howling with rage, that monster yelled, "Come out!" Yet, Markella, with out breaking silence, continued to pray with all her heart. That beastly man then roared, "I shall burn thee alive!" Markella remained quiet. What could she say? He continued to bellow, and said, "Thou wilt not speak? I am starting a fire. Now I will see thee!" At this point, her savage father kindled a fire to force her out. The fire spread quickly and encircled the holy maiden. When the flames enveloped the unfortunate girl, oblivious to the thorns before her eyes, she escaped for the other side and, before her father could seize her, she again took flight towards the jagged rocks dotting the shoreline.

She screamed, "My Christ!, My Panagia!" Blood was streaming down her face, hands, and all over her body, but she continued to run frantically. Setting an arrow in his bow, he angrily cursed, and said, "May this, O dishonorable one, find thy heart!" Indeed, is the pure lamb of God dishonorable and the bloodthirsty wolf honorable? Is the angel of God dishonorable? Is the pure and fragrant white lily dishonorable, and he who is filthy and foul-smelling, darkened with sodomy, honorable?

All of a sudden, she felt acute pain in her thigh. She paused a little, pulled out the arrow shot by her father, drew a deep breath and took to her heels. Her virginal blood ran from the wound like a river, dyeing the nearby rocks. She felt any moment that her strength would fail. Meanwhile, her vicious father was near approaching. She heard the heaving of his accursed breath. Terror gripped her with the thought that within moments she would be violated by her father. She would preserve the holy command. Yes, she said, and she stood straight. Her countenance, appearing mild and sweet, was then filled with light. As she looked ahead and elevated her eyes she uttered filled with the Spirit, "Yes, honor or

death, with the help of the Ever-Virgin, and the prayer and blessing of my mother!” Thus, the blood-stained lily appeared more beautiful than before, as the heroine of honor. Markella then commenced running along the rocky shoreline. She incessantly supplicated, “My Panagia, come with me. Come with me, O Ever-Virgin maiden!” Her father was gaining ground; he was now nearly a hand-breadth away. The virgin-martyr then uttered, “My Christ, hear my prayer! Save my honor! Work Thy miracle; I beseech Thee with all my soul!” Then, she cried aloud, “My Mother, I can no longer endure...better that the earth open and swallow me...O my Christ, hearken to my prayer!” The blessed one closed her eyes and fell to her knees, not having an ounce of strength to go forward even one step. Straightaway, a miracle occurred. The rock upon where she collapsed split open and received the pure maiden’s body up to her waist.

Now her father was foaming at the mouth, his eyes were darkened and possessed. With wild joy he shouted, “I caught thee! Where wilt thou flee now?” He desperately attempted to pull Markella out of the fissure. Indeed, that senseless rock clasped at her stubbornly, as directed by God, thereby showing more compassion than the pitiless heart of her

At this point, her miserable father despaired. Tired, sweaty and exasperated, he drew out his knife. Crying, she besought him, saying, “Do not, father...” In a fury, he cut her breasts and cast them onto rocks. His mind was so deranged that he no longer knew what he was doing. His daughter’s blood sprayed him from head to toe. Intoxicated with his bloodthirsty crime, he desired to execute the final blow. Markella then gazed upward, and said, “My Lord, Ever-Virgin Panagia maiden, and mother, with the grace of God, I kept the holy command. I am coming to you now to the beds of lilies of Paradise!”

Her father then took hold of her locks, struck off her head, and cast it into the sea. Within that same hour, nature reacted fiercely. The calm sea became wild with crashing waves up to the child slayer’s feet. He thought that the sea strove to drown him for his atrocities. He ran, as one possessed, to flee the sea and escape the scene of the crime. History has not mentioned the end result of this sinful father.

The head of the virgin-martyr floated upon the waves, emitting an extraordinary brilliance. In accordance with tradition, a passing ship took up the precious head and conveyed it to Old Rome.

Thus, righteous Markella received from Christ the crown of martyrdom, as a reward and gift for her prudence and ardent desire for her Bridegroom Christ. Certainly, it was possible for divine power to preserve her and to accept her holy soul in peace; but, He permitted her to receive a violent death, so that she might be presented to Him not only adorned with the pure robe of her virginal blood. Whereupon, the holy one entered the heavenly bridal chamber with the wise virgins, as a martyr together with the other martyrs.

The Shrine

Many years passed since the fearful event of her martyrdom. On the spot where the bush with the thorns was located, the Christians erected a church in the name of the virgin-martyr Markella. At the site where the crime was committed, God revealed a miracle-working shrine that is about fifteen minutes walking distance from the church. It is called by the natives, "The Martyrdom of St. Markella," because this is where her beheading took place. The rock that covers her virginal body is also present; and for reasons known only to God, it conceals her relics to this day. It is by the surf of the sea and not a part of the bedrock, for it appears to have rolled down the mountain and landed there. On the landward side, soil and gravel have fallen from the mountain and have covered this site. On its other face, that is, by the seashore, it extends about one meter above the water. There is a slight protrusion on the rock, wherein a small opening, about the size of a finger, allows warm and clear salty water to run out. It streams forth miraculous water to this day, known to cure and dissolve every ailment.

This strange occurrence in nature causes one to wonder how the water exudes out of the rock when it is in no way connected to the mountain; for, if it was part of the mountain one would surmise that the water originates therefrom. However, if the water came from the sea, then when the tide recedes, it would stop altogether, for the spring would be dry. But, on the contrary, water springs from the rock independently and spontaneously.

Though the water is clear, certain of the black rocks, indigenous to this area, on the surrounding beach, have been changed to a reddish-yellow. Not only rocks on shore have this coloration, but those in the water as well, to the depth of three meters. It is this site that the natives call "sacred blood." The author of the martyr's service refers to the rock from which the healing water pours forth as *soros* (a vessel for holding human remains). According to tradition, the saint's relics are concealed in this rock and are the source where the water emanates.

Indeed, the most remarkable thing is not the warmth of the water, nor the phenomenon that it dyes the rocks - for this has also occurred in other places in the world - but, immediately, when the priest begins to read the Service of the Blessing of the Waters, a small trace of steam rises from the sea near this rock, and soon the entire seaside is covered with this steamy mist (similar to that of an open boiling cauldron). At the completion of the service, the vapor emissions cease altogether and nature returns to her normal state. "This, I," the author of this extract in Greek, [8] Bishop Matthew Langes, "witnessed with my own eyes."

When a miracle is about to take place, such as when someone is about to be cured, then the column of steam arises even higher, thereby giving a favorable indication. The priest who observed this many times informed me of it. Not too great a distance from the spot where the righteous one was beheaded, the rocks are colored red beneath the waters. It is said that her father struck her there and the martyr's blood was shed on that spot, dyeing the rocks red. "Truly, I," Bishop Matthew Langes, "saw this with my own eyes and noticed that the rocks do not assume this color elsewhere, except on that particular spot." The color is not natural, for when abraded it wears off and the natural black shading of the rock becomes evident. Many, invoking, with faith, the grace of St. Markella, have partaken of the water which acts as a cure for every illness.

Miracles

The miracles that are performed at the shrine of our saint are so numerous that it is impossible to describe them all. Pilgrims flock there from other parts of Chios and Psara and receive healing from their ailments. During the celebration of the feast of the undefiled bride of Christ, which is on the 22nd of July, a great multitude gathers. Whereupon, the natives have renovated her church as of late and enlarged it. We wish to relate to our readers some of the many miracles that have occurred through the saint's intercession.

1. In the year 1782, a certain priest from Volissos had a sick child and wished to take him to be washed at the shrine of St. Markella, but he did not believe that the child could be cured, because the disease was grievous. He was in a state of despair and indecision, succumbing to the thought that even the grace of the martyr could not cure his child.

What did the saint do? Wishing to show the boldness she possessed before God and the grace to do miracles, suddenly, that night, as the priest slumbered, it seemed to him that he was on the spot where she was martyred, that is where the water springs forth. The holy one appeared to him, chastising his lack of faith, saying, "Thy child most certainly will be cured and do not doubt that I have received grace from God to work miracles!"

When the priest heard this, he was so frightened that he awoke terrified and was unable to speak for a long time. After he repented for his skepticism, he vowed in the presence of all that he would honor the saint henceforth. At that moment, as he spoke, the child was also cured. By what he had seen and

experienced, he was assured of the saint's grace. Thus, he glorified God and His great martyr and bride, Markella.

2. During the same year, another priest, Fr. Michael, of the same village, had a child named Nicholas who was ill for a long time. The time passed and the child never regained his health, so he called upon the saint's aid. Two days later, lo the miracle! Saint Markella appeared to him in a dream, as she was depicted in an icon.

The priest beheld the saint going to the house where the sick child lay. At dawn, the priest awoke and went to visit the child and, lo the miracle! Nicholas had recovered completely. Whereupon, Fr. Michael glorified God (Who is wondrous in His saints!) and his martyr, Markella.

3. It was wintertime in 1785, when a group of people from another area attempted to come to the village of Volissos. Due to inclement weather, they underwent great hardship. It snowed and rained intermittently when one of the women in their group fainted. Not being able to proceed any further, for the terrain was rugged and the location remote, she lay on the ground as dead. The others could not revive her, so they carried her to the cell of a nearby church, named in the honor of St. George, located in the mountains at a place called Flori. Leaving her there in an unconscious state, they continued their journey until they reached Volissos.

Upon their arrival, they related the matter to her husband. Learning this, he began to pray to St. Markella, so that among her other miracles, she might perform this one too, and rescue his wife from death. Thus, when he supplicated the saint for this, the sympathetic miracle worker hearkened to his prayer.

The blessed maiden appeared to the woman and succored her. It seemed to the woman that St. Markella took her by the hand and led her to the corner of the room where there was a crib. It then appeared to the woman that she received water from the saint and drank. This took place as the storm raged; thus, the villagers could not rescue her for another nine days. They presumed that she expired. When they went there to bury her, they found her safe and sound. She had regained her strength from the water given to her by the saint. Thereafter, she told everyone that she had seen and heard St. Markella, to the glory of God and in gratitude to the martyr.

4. Another man had a child that went blind. He took him to the site of her martyrdom and washed the child with the sacred water. After invoking the grace that the saint possessed, he attained his desire. The child regained his eyesight and, thereafter, could see as before.

5. Another individual, whose legs were paralyzed, went to the church with faith and requested that his name be commemorated at the Divine Liturgy, so he might regain his health. Lo, the miracle! As he lay prostrate on the floor at the time of the great entrance, when the holy gifts are offered, he stood upright and glorified God and his virgin-martyr, Markella.

6. A woman from the island of Psara, which is adjacent to Chios, had a lesion in her mouth which prevented her from eating, drinking, and even speaking. Seeking to cure the terrible sore, she visited several physicians. Instead of a remedy, no improvement was made. The malady worsened and created great problems for the poor woman. Grieved over this, she wept as the pain tormented her daily. In 1780, a group of other women decided to go and venerate St. Markella. They said to the ailing one, "Why dost thou not accompany us, so that she might show thee mercy?" She consented and went with great piety and faith to the church of the saint. She attended the Liturgy and, afterward, went with the other priest to the site of the miraculous spring, where he performed the Service of Blessing of Waters. At the conclusion, they washed themselves with it and drank thereof. Suddenly, behold a miracle! The grace of the virgin-martyr Markella cured the ailing woman, enabling her to speak without impediment and to eat and drink without discomfort. She remained in good health thereafter and glorified God, while, at the same time, she proclaimed the miraculous grace of the virgin-martyr.

7. The son of a Volissian suffered with swollen legs for three years. During that entire period, he never ceased taking medicines and handing large sums of money to physicians. Nevertheless, not only had he not recovered, but his condition deteriorated. By 1785, as he awaited death, he placed all his hopes in St. Markella. Though it was impossible for him to go alone to her church and shrine, others bore him aloft. After the dismissal of the Divine Liturgy, they carried him to the shrine. After he washed with holy water, lo! he attained his health.

8. Another woman, paralyzed in the lower part of her legs, went through a great deal of travail attempting to find a cure, but to no avail. She lost all hope in human assistance and turned to St. Markella. She asked certain people to bring her some of the sacred water from the saint's shrine. That night, the saint appeared to her in her sleep, saying, "Do not grieve; I will send thee a cure." The next day, they brought the sacred water to the paralyzed woman. She washed her feet with it and, then, lo the miracle! She was healed by the saint, through whose intercessions may the Lord have mercy on us and save us, for He is good and the only philanthropic One!

9. In c. 1850, Maria George Anagnostou-Sotrapa, an adult from Lithi in Chios, during the night hours, took up a pitcher to fetch water from the village fountain. Suddenly, she slipped nearby and had to be carried home. Then, for seven years, she remained bedridden in her house due to paralysis. The pious mother of Maria, in a vision during sleep, saw herself at the small Church of St. Markella. However, the place and the church were unknown to her. The mother then beheld a young woman, who said, "Thy daughter, if she comes to my house, shall be well." The mother then asked, "And where is thy house?" The young woman answered, "There, close to Volissos." When the God-fearing father of Maria heard the vision, he understood immediately the identity of the young woman. Whereupon, both parents took up their daughter as she lay abed. Then they took a boat and went along the shore till they reached the chapel of the saint. They left Maria underneath the icon of the saint, as the paralytic was once left at the feet of Jesus.⁹ After forty days and nights of prayer and fasting the feast day of St. Markella arrived. During the Great Entrance of the Divine Liturgy, a motionless Maria suddenly stood straight and went to kiss the holy icon. Observing her walk, all the congregation was emotionally moved and joyful. The parents, until their repose, annually prayed at the saint's church and offered bread for consecration. They were always accompanied by their daughter Maria, who lived another forty years, only dying from old age. This particular miracle was confirmed by the Protosyngellos, Kyrillos Trechake (1915), who spoke with Maria's parents, his relatives by marriage.

10. A soldier from Vrontados in Chios served at Skra during 1917. Amid the smoke and blood of the battle, he beheld a young woman hastening towards the battleground. The soldier besought her to flee the battle and save herself. She answered, saying, "I am Markella. My house is by the seashore, near Platanos. I came to save my children." Though high-explosives shells spread fire and smoke, the sweet smile of the virgin-martyr, St. Markella, never left, as she kept her promise to save her children, the Chiotes. Before the soldier, however, could get a good look at her, the saint disappeared. Saint Markella has gone with her children, that is fellow-islanders who sought her protection in war. The soldier then wrote his wife at Vrontados, to have a divine liturgy performed at the Church of St. Markella. The wife became indignant at the request, since it required a tiresome trip. However, she complied. When she arrived with her three-year old daughter, the child became lost. The mother sought the child in every quarter of the village and beyond. The following day, the child was found at Nevtaki, by the church sacristan of St. Markella. The child said that some aunt gave her toys. When the mother returned to the saint's church, the child noticed her icon, and shouted aloud, "This is my aunt who gave me toys!"

11. It was March, 1942, in Greece, during the German occupation. An oil tanker, with thirty-six officers on board, departed Lavrio for Asia Minor. When they were between the islands of Chios and Mytilene, they encountered exceedingly high and rough seas. The hull of the ship could not be steered. One of the officers was swept away into the sea.

Amid this tragedy, all raised their hands unto the almighty God and prayed for their salvation. One of the passengers, Lieutenant Kreon Talios, in a vision, beheld a dark cloud suddenly shine brightly over the raging sea. Inside the cloud, he saw a magnificent building which, from one moment to the next, changed into an imposing and stately church. He then beheld a young and comely woman exit. With her right hand, she motioned for the elements to calm down. Then the miracle took place! The storm abruptly ceased. Before day break, the vessel was near the holy waters (aghiasma) of St. Markella where it was serene and safe.

12. From Lithi, Chios, a child named Stamati who, today, is a pharmacist, suffered from a certain bone disease, which caused the sinews to weaken, thereby leaving one leg shorter than another. The doctors fitted the leg with a special mechanical device, but the child could only walk with crutches.

Every year, the child's mother, Mrs. Angelike Nicholas Demides, went to the Church of St. Markella, seeking a cure for her son. Then, in 1957, a miracle took place which also appeared in the Chios newspaper, *Progress*:

On the eve of the saint's feast I (Mrs. Demides), with tear-filled eyes offered up thanks and supplications to the saint that she might work a miracle. The child also prayed with me. Then, I heard, "Mama, I wish to get up." I helped him and he went to kiss the icon.

Afterwards, he went outside on his own, by the power of our God and the saint. He walked freely - just look at him now. Here is the leg brace which I hung before the candelabrum of her holy icon, so those of little faith may see.

13. The same newspaper, *Progress*, also reports that, in 1957, a twelve-year old boy from Siderouta in Chios was paralyzed for a year from acute rheumatism. The boy's mother prayed during the hour of Supplicatory Canon to the saint, as her son was lying before the wonder-working icon of the virgin-martyr. Beseeking the saint, the mother prayed, "Make well, my little child, my saint! help the unfortunate one! Vouchsafe him to go with his feet to our village, Siderouta! Pity us also, for we are poor people, and bring laughter to our lips!"

As she knelt in prayer, her child turned and said to some other children standing about him, "If I take to the road, can you catch me?" Straightway, after uttering the challenge, he ran outside. Meanwhile, the other children began chasing him around the church.

This miracle was witnessed by hundreds of pilgrims inside the church. All then quickly glorified and thanked the saint for this miracle.

14. In 1965, Markella Basil Foteinos of Armolia in Chios, having suffering with epilepsy and cerebral disorders, was completely healed and restored to her senses.

15. In January of 1968, the Psaran gendarme, Nicholas Kontopodes, cast a package into the sea from Psara. It contained candles, two bottles of oil seventy drachmas, a list of names for commemoration, and some other articles. Outside the package, the sender addressed it to "Saint Markella." Indeed, the waves of the sea brought the package to its destination, along the seashore nearby the saint's church.

16. On July 21, 1971, the eve of the saint's commemoration, 38-year old Foteine Georgakopoulos of Athens visited the saint's church in Chios. She had suffered with poliomyelitis since she was five years old.

After Great Vespers, when the clergy left the church, Foteine approached the saint's icon, without her crutches and walked freely.

17. Another miracle which occurred recently in our times took place in Astoria, New York. Demetrios Kokotas had suffered a stroke and was paralyzed. He was awaiting a vacancy at a certain hospital in New York City for physiotherapy. He was totally disabled and could neither eat nor take care of his other personal needs without assistance. Days passed and there was still no bed available in the hospital. His sufferings increased.

One day, in great pain, he told the priest, "My dear priest, say a prayer, that the hospital might open its doors for me also, or, at least, that I might die for I cannot bear this life any longer." The priest advised him to pray to St. Markella—which he did. Afterward, he asked him, "What did you say to St. Markella?" He replied, "What should I tell her? Does she not already know what I want?" That same day, Mr. Demetrios left the church and returned to his home in Astoria, New York. Before he departed, he kissed her icon and prayed to her again. He turned to the priest and said, "I am leaving, and if the hospital should open its doors for me too, here is my telephone number, so call me."

Two days later, the hospital notified him that there was space. When he heard this, he was so glad and excited that he suffered a second stroke and lost consciousness and was taken to Astoria General Hospital in a coma. The doctors notified his relatives that he was in a comatose state, and that they should come to the hospital to await the outcome. At the point, occurred the miracle. In a vision, the bedridden man beheld the Archangel Michael on a chariot who had come to take him. At that same moment appeared a young maiden, whom he recognized as St. Markella. She prevented the Archangel from taking him. With her hand, she beckoned to the bedridden man that he would remain.

In a few days, the sick man recovered and was transferred to a clinic for physiotherapy. There was a complete reversal of his condition. He departed for Athens where he relocated to the suburb of Kifisia. Most assuredly, the saint, whom he had begged from the bottom of his heart, saved him from certain death.

This and many other miracles are performed to this day by the glorious triumphant virgin-martyr Markella, the boast of Chios.

Apolytikion*

Let us the faithful Plagal of First Tone

Thy virginity thou didst preserve incorrupt*
And now thou has been numbered among those who dwell*
In the mansions of heaven. Thou didst reject *
Thy father's advances for which *
He severed thy breasts and thy head*
O Markella; the glory of Chios!*
And now crowned as a martyr*
Thou wellest forth abundant miracles.
**by Metropolitan Petros of Astoria (1915-1997)]*

Footnotes

[1]The following Greek sources were compiled and incorporated into this English collection; in addition the The Great Synaxaristes, ΤηςΧίου το Κλέος [The Boast of Chios] (Athens, CR: Rt. Rev. Bp. Petros of St. Markella, Astoria, NY 1968); Joseph D. Agapetos, Μαρκέλλα, Ο,Ματώμενος Κρίνος [Markella, The Blood-Stained Lily] (St. Stephanos, Attike, CR: Holy Convent of St. Theodosios the Coenobiarch, 1990); Metropolitan Dionysios, Μαρκέλλης της Χιοπολίτιδος [Markella of Chios] (Volissos, Chios, CR: Shrine of St. Markella, 1990); and Bios Aghias Markella [The Life of Saint Markella (Athens, CR: Rev. Charalampos Vasilopoulos, Monastery of Petraki).

[2]There are several theories given regarding when St. Markella may have lived. Some suggest she lived during the persecution of Isidoros in Chios. Others maintain that her Roman name, her father's idolatrous persuasion, and her father's use of a bow and arrow may place the account during the persecution of the third and fourth centuries. On the other hand, many contend she lived after 55. Isidore and Matrona, the later having reposed in 1462. Saint Nikephoros of Chios, who composed her divine service, together with chroniclers, place the martyrdom c. 1500. Most theologians and scholars prefer the date after 1500, especially since no records or shrine to her memory exist before that time. (Met. Dionysios, pp. 7-8).

[3]Panagia (Παναγία): "The All-holy one" is a Greek term commonly used in reference to the Mother of God.

[4]"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" [Jn. 14:2].

[5]Ex. 20:12

[6]Psara is about 17 nautical miles to the northwest of the small western port of Volissos, Chios. Psara, 40 sq. km. in area with 36 km. of coastline, has a tiny population.

[7]Tradition states that after the shepherd pointed to the hiding place of the blessed one, she uttered: "May thou tremble as I tremble." Henceforth, he suffered from persistent tremors to his extremities. This occurred not only to him, but to his children as well. Indeed, this trait has been passed through the family from generation to generation. Descendants who claim their lineage from this shepherd survive to this day in Chios and, they too, cannot control their shaking arms and legs.

[8]The version presented in The Great Synaxaristes.

[9]Mt. 9:2; Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 5:18-25.

[10]Proodos (Πρόοδος, dated July 25, 1957).