Myths & Tales: St.

Historians have debated the exact details of the birth of Saint George for over a century. The Catholic Encyclopedia takes the position that there seems to be no ground for doubting the historical existence of Saint George, but that no faith can be placed in some of the fanciful stories about him.

The work of the Danile Paperbroch, Jean Bolland and Henschen in the 17th century was one of the first pieces of scholarly research to establish the historicity of the saint's existence and paved the way for other scholars to dismiss the medieval legends. Pope Gelasius stated that George was among those saints *whose names are justly reverenced among men, but whose actions are known only to God*. Edward Gibbon argued that the figure was probably based in whole or in part on George of Cappadocia, a corrupt Arian Bishop whose pursuit of wealth was infamous.

It is likely that Saint George was born to a Christian noble family in Nicomedia, between c. 275 and 285 AD, and he died in Lydda, Palestine. His father, Gerontius, was a Roman army official from Cappadocia and his mother was from Palestine. They were both Christians and from noble families, so George was raised as such. At the age of 14, George lost his father; a few years later, George's mother, Policronia, died. Eastern accounts give the names of his parents as Anastasius and Theobaste. Then George decided to go to the imperial city of Nicomedeia and present himself to Emperor Diocletian to apply for a career as a soldier. Diocletian welcomed him. By his late 20s, George was promoted to the rank of Tribunus and stationed as an imperial guard of the Emperor at Nicomedeia.

In AD 302, Diocletian issued an edict that every Christian soldier in the army should be arrested and every other soldier should offer a sacrifice to the Pagan gods. But George objected, and, with the courage of his faith, approached the Emperor and ruler. Diocletian was upset, not wanting to lose his best Tribune and the son of his best official. George loudly renounced the Emperor's edict, and he claimed to be a Christian and declared his worship of Jesus Christ. Diocletian was left with no choice but to have him executed for his refusal. Before the execution, George gave his wealth to the poor and prepared himself. After various torture sessions, George was executed by decapitation before Nicomedia's city wall, on April 23, 303. His body was returned to Lydda for burial, where Christians soon came to honor him as a martyr.

George & The Dragon!

The episode of St George and the Dragon was a myth brought back with the Crusaders and retold with the courtly applications belonging to the genre of Romance. The earliest known depiction of the myth is from early eleventh-century Cappadocia, (in the iconography of the Eastern Orthodox Church, George had been depicted as a soldier since at least the seventh century); the earliest known surviving narrative text is an eleventh-century Georgian text.

In the fully-developed Western version, which developed as part of the Golden Legend, a dragon makes its nest at the spring that provides water for the city of "Silene" (perhaps modern Cyrene) in Libya or the city of Lydda, depending on the source. Consequently, the citizens have to dislodge the dragon from its nest for a time, in order to collect water. To do so, each day they offer the dragon at first a sheep, and if no sheep can be found, then a maiden must go instead. The victim is chosen by drawing lots. One day, this happens to be the princess. The monarch begs for her life to be spared, but to no avail. She is offered to the dragon, but there appears Saint George on his travels. He faces the dragon, protects himself with the sign of the cross, slays it and rescues the princess. The grateful citizens abandon their ancestral paganism and convert to Christianity.

The dragon motif was first combined with the standardized Passio Georgii in Vincent of Beauvais' encyclopedic *Speculum historale* and then in *Jacobus de Voragine, Golden Legend*, which guaranteed its popularity in the later Middle Ages as a literary and pictorial subject.

The parallels with Perseus and Andromeda are inescapable. In the allegorical reading, the dragon embodies a suppressed pagan cult. The story has roots that predate Christianity. Examples have led a number of historians to suggest that George is a Christianized version of older deities in Indo-European culture. In the medieval romances, the lance with which St George slew the dragon was called Ascalon, named after the city of Ashkelon in Israel.

St. George is most commonly depicted in early icons, mosaics and frescos wearing armor contemporary with the depiction, executed in gilding and silver color, intended to identify him as a Roman soldier. After the Fall of Constantinople and the association of St George with the crusades, he is more often portrayed mounted upon a white horse. *[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_George]*