



ASIA/TURKEY - The campaign to regain the relics of St. Nicholas of Myra restarts

Antalya (Agenzia Fides) - The Turkish archaeologist Nevzat Çelik, responsible for the excavations at the archaeological site of Mira-Andriake, re-launched during the Christmas holidays the request to return the relics of St. Nicholas of Myra to Turkey, at the moment venerated at the Basilica of San Nicola in Bari.

This time the recipient of the request is not - as in the past - the Italian Government, but the Vatican. And the initiative - as reported in the Turkish press - is in line with the orientations of the current leaders of the Ministry of Turkish culture and tourism, which - as reported for example by the daily Hürriyet on 24 December - are aiming at returning works of art, archaeological artefacts and relics stolen from the current Turkish territory and taken abroad in the past.

In Antalya the imminent opening of a museum on the ancient and mysterious civilization Lycia is expected, also intended to house the finds from the archaeological sites of Mira and Andriake. A section of the museum will be dedicated to the first centuries of Christianity and the life of St. Nicholas of Myra, the Bishop of the fourth century who due to his charity and generosity towards men and children is also considered as the inspiration for the character of Santa Claus.

In the eleventh century the saint's relics were stolen and transferred to the capital of Puglia due to a shipment of sailors from Bari.

The Turkish claims on the relics of St. Nicholas have been known for some time. But only recently they have found significant institutional support, coinciding with the tourist development of the region. "If we build a Museum in Demre (near the archaeological ruins of Myra, ed), of course the first thing we will ask for are the remains of St. Nicholas. These bones should be exposed here and not in a city of pirates" the Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism Ertugrul Günay said two years ago. Now, the academic settings to which Professor Çelik belongs call into question also the Vatican. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 04/01/2013).