

Anonymous
The Tax Miracle of Nicholas of Myra
(Praxis De Tributo),
Recension 1¹
BHG 1351

¹ This translation was commissioned by Roger Pearse in 2016 and kindly made for us by Dr David J. D. Miller. The notes are by Roger Pearse. The translation is placed in the public domain. The critical edition used is that of G Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos*, vol 1, 1913, pp.98-102. The text was composed some time between the 5-10th centuries: see Michael Zeltov, "The Moment of Eucharistic Consecration in Byzantine Thought" in: M.Johnson, *Issues in Eucharistic Praying in East and West*, 2011, 263-306; 294, n.102. Two recensions are given by Anrich: this is a translation of Recension 1, based on two manuscripts. This text is not listed in the CPG, and has no historical value: it is a medieval legend.

The miracle performed by our holy father Nicholas, archbishop of the metropolis of Myra.

Translated by David J. D. Miller

1 In the days of our most pious Sovereign Constantine, an order was issued from the tax-gathering office for the metropolis of Myra to pay 10,000 gold pieces. That was ratified, and the imperial official went out there. When he arrived in the city, along with his entire staff, his dais was set up, and he spent the whole evening, and on through the night, pondering how he should proceed next day; when next day came, he took his seat on the dais, and began to put violent pressure on everyone in the city.

2 This action of his reduced the people to a state of terrible sufferings; they began to fall into utter destitution, so much so that they were wasting away with starvation. In this state the whole population of that city, in a body, appealed to our vigilant father Nicholas, who was widely acclaimed and pre-eminent; they fell at his feet in supplication, begging him to send a letter to the most pious Sovereign describing the people's abject condition, with all that had happened to them and to the city. **3** In view of their straits and of the oppressive treatment inflicted on the city, our holy father Nicholas made them a promise: "My beloved children," he said, "I shall do this, but not merely by letter: I shall travel in person to bring this matter before our Sovereign, the Emperor, as an eye-witness. I shall beg him unceasingly, in gentle language, to be gentle, and to cancel, by an order of his own, this great burden of tax-payments which they have been induced by arrogant malevolence to inflict on us."

4 Determined on that purpose, our man of God had provisions made for the journey, started on his way, and completed all that long distance of travel, under God's command. On his arrival, late one evening, he waited in the highly revered holy great church in Blachernae, dedicated to our Lady, the mother of our Lord Jesus, Christ and God of all.² There he offered up evensong to God, and then prayed unceasingly throughout the night till dawn, together with the local bishop and monks resident in the monastery, for the Lord God to soften the Sovereign's heart over the wicked act that had taken place. **5** At daybreak, all the bishops of that holy city learnt of the arrival of the celebrated Nicholas, distinguished throughout the world for his angelic nature; they assembled with prayer and acclaim, accompanied by candles and incense, at the great church of our highly revered Lady, the Mother of God. On seeing our holy father they fell at his feet in supplication, beseeching him to give them his blessing, and absolution from their sins. The saint embraced each one of them, neck to neck, and gave them the kiss of peace, not stopping until he had done so to them all. They then sat down, and he explained to them the outrageous, wicked wrong that had been done to his city and all its people.

6 Greatly distressed at hearing this, they invited our holy father to celebrate the liturgy with them, and render them worthy of the precious body and blood of our Lord and God, at his holy hands. The saint complied, and performed the divine mystery with them, offering up the chant to God in his most holy words. When he came to the breaking of the bread, and the words "Holy things to the holy ones", something like a flash of fire came out from his lips; those standing nearest him were greatly alarmed at the sight, but glorified God for working His miracles through His servants. When the breaking of the bread was complete, he and the bishops with him received it; they prayed, and then the whole congregation also received it wholeheartedly from his precious hands, as if it were from an angel. **7** Once the divine liturgy was perfectly complete, and he had distributed what was left unused, that is of the consecrated

² The church of Our Lady at Blachernae was built in 451 AD by the emperor Marcian and his wife Pulcheria.

bread, he dismissed the congregation as a whole, while the archbishops, the deacons and all the clergy stayed there with him, and enjoyed the whole day in his company. When the time came for evensong, they attended the service and joined him in prayer. That done, they sat down; then, when it grew late, they again stood up for prayer, after which they laid their heads down and slept till dawn. Once again they stood up, and sang; then finally sat down again.

8 After daybreak, he went up to the Palace, to go before our most pious Sovereign. Just as he came up to it, the rays of the sun came through the doors where the Sovereign was seated; he threw his cloak towards the sun-ray, and it stayed suspended there, hanging on the ray! The Sovereign, on seeing the miraculous way in which the cloak stayed there without any support, stood up trembling, and greeted our holy father Nicholas. The Sovereign then invited him to sit next to him, where he had been sitting, and talked to him. “What is it,” he said, “that brings Our holy father Nicholas to visit Our humble self?”

9 “My lord Emperor,” said our holy father Nicholas, “the whole Christian church is directed by your Majesty; it is as it were a chapel, with you as its unseen owner and controller. It nestles under you, for you to rescue it and its chicks from the hawk and other predators – that is, from barbarian peoples of other faiths, and from every distressing misfortune. That being so, I thought this should apply to my own country too, and be effective there; but it seems not to be so.”

“And what has happened to your country, father?” replied the Sovereign, in considerable alarm.

“My lord Emperor,” he said, “some persons, out of arrogant hostility and a strong grudge against either myself or someone who lives in our city, have raised the tax-assessment on the metropolis of Myra to 10,000 gold pieces, and its population has been reduced to utter penury. People have died, and are still dying, from starvation; and to this day they are being harassed by the imperial official with demands which they are too poor to meet. That is why I am pleading with your Majesty.”

10 On hearing him say this, the most pious Sovereign was speechless. He then summoned his chief notary, the secretary Theodosius. “Bring Us a piece of papyrus,” he told him, “for Us to do the saint’s bidding.” Theodosius hurried off and brought the sheet.

“To what amount do you want the tax reduced, father?” the Sovereign asked him.

“Do what God impels your Majesty to do,” he replied.

“Put down ‘100 gold pieces’,” said the Sovereign.

11 The secretary did so; the saint was given the document, and left the Palace, after praying.

12 He then found a reed, tied the document to it, and threw it into the sea; **13** and that very hour, by God’s command, the reed with the papyrus reached Andriake, the port of the metropolis of Myra.

14 Some fishermen saw it, and took it to the most distinguished men of the city. **15** They looked at it, and then went to see the imperial official and showed it to him. Looking at it in his turn, he recognised the Sovereign’s seal on it, and no longer dared to say anything in opposition; on the contrary, he was in fact apprehensive: he accepted the document, and filed it away.

16 Three days later, when our holy father and archpriest Nicholas was still in Constantinople, some people went to our pious Sovereign, blazing with what purported to be religious indignation. “My lord Emperor,” they said, “it was from the metropolis of Myra that the Palace received its largest revenue, but you have made an enormous reduction in it.”

17 Their point struck the Sovereign as telling, so he sent for the saint, who readily appeared before him. The Sovereign was glad to see him, invited him to sit next to him, and said:

“Holy father, give Us the papyrus, so that We can make a slight addition, because the reduction We have made in the city’s tax-assessment is too big.”

“My lord,” he replied, “long life to your Majesty; your letter of instruction reached the city three days ago!”

Astonished at hearing him say this, the Sovereign said: “But, Nicholas, how can you say that? Is it not just three days since We wrote it?”

“My lord Emperor,” he replied, “send a messenger out to the city, at your direction; if it is not as I said, let Your Majesty do as Your Majesty commands.”

18 The Sovereign did summon a messenger, and sent him out, with the instruction: “Hurry out to the metropolis of Myra, and find out exactly the date and time the document arrived there: on what day of the week, and of the month.” The messenger took ship that very day, and it left harbour with a steady calm and a fair wind. They sailed on under God’s command, and reached the metropolis of Myra, where he disembarked, entered the city and went to see the imperial official. On enquiring the date and time at which the document arrived, he was assured that it had reached the city on the very day that the Sovereign had written it. He re-embarked next day; they set sail, and, again by God’s command, and through the saint’s intercessions, they reached the holy city safely. He went before the Sovereign and explained that it was quite true that the document had reached its destination on the actual day. **19** At that, the Sovereign said: “The saint’s document is to be ratified as We made it out”, and the tax was ratified, thanks to the saint’s intercession and to his ability. Furthermore, to the glory and praise of our holy father, archpriest Nicholas, it has been ratified at the same sum ever since.

20 After praying for all the Palace and for the whole holy city, the blessed one returned to the city of Myra, honoured and praised by all its inhabitants for the deliverance he had brought about for them and for the country as a whole. Glory be to our God, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and always, and for ever and ever. Amen.