

(Ps.) Proclus of Constantinople
Encomium on Nicholas of Myra
(Laudatio S. Nicholai) ¹
CPG 5890 / BHG 1364c

¹ This translation was commissioned by Roger Pearse in 2016. A draft was made by Bryson Sewell and revised and completed by Andrew Eastbourne. The translation is placed in the public domain. The critical edition used is that of G. Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos*, vol 1, 1913, pp.429-433, based on two manuscripts, Vaticanus Gr. 2000 (10th c.), f.118v-121; and Bodleian Barroci Gr. 174 (11th c.), f.223v-224v. Proclus was Patriarch of Constantinople from 434-447, but the work is listed among the *spuria* in the *CPG*. It is one of a number of encomia published by Anrich, which are entirely derived from other hagiographies of Nicholas. See Anrich, vol. 2, p.160-161.

An Encomium on our Holy Father Nicholas by Proclus, Archbishop of Constantinople

Translated by Bryson Sewell and Andrew Eastbourne

[1] My brothers, fathers and children, a fear and a very terrible trembling and great anxiety constrain me—that while I am wanting to draw sweet water for myself, I may be going to fill myself with bitterness. Nevertheless, I have some small, or rather great, gifts from the chosen vessel,² the teacher of the churches, the light³ of the world, I mean, of course, Paul the Apostle, who says, "All things are possible that you do in the name of the Lord."⁴ He is light,⁵ therefore you, too, are children of light.⁶ For we do not want you to be ignorant of the gifts of the Holy Spirit."⁷ But the Lord himself also said in his Gospels, "Let him who is thirsty come to me and drink,"⁸ and again, "Everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened."⁹ Because I knocked, the Lord enlightened your hearts. For I am not worthy of such an undertaking.

And so I ask to draw what is mine¹⁰ from what is yours. For I am weak in speech and slow of tongue¹¹ to praise this saint. Open the treasuries of your hearts¹² to me, so that I may be able to bring some small offering to the saint. And do not disbelieve what is said, for the gift is of God and is not from me. And let us receive God as mediator and supplier for us of what we seek.

[2] Now then, let the desired light come into our midst, the morning star, the heavenly man and earthly angel, he who is called upon and comes to assist, the costly pearl, the valuable vessel, who dwells in Myra and reached the capital city,¹³ who swiftly rallied to arms at the cries of the oppressed among us—before word was brought to you.¹⁴

² Acts 9:15.

³ Gk. *phōstēr*—lit., "light-bringer." The term is used in Gen. 1:14, 16 for the sun and moon.

⁴ Cf. Mark 9:23, Col. 3:17.

⁵ Cf. John 8:12, 9:5.

⁶ Cf. Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5.

⁷ Cf. Acts 2:38.

⁸ John 7:37.

⁹ Matt. 7:8.

¹⁰ Lit. "what is ours."

¹¹ Exodus 4:10.

¹² Cf. Matt. 6:21, Luke 12:34.

¹³ I.e. Constantinople. From this point onwards, the text of the encomium makes constant reference to the story of Nicholas and the generals (*Praxis de stratelatis*). In that story, Nicholas first rescues three men from unjust execution (near Myra) in the presence of the three generals of the title. Later, in Constantinople, the generals fall victim to the intrigues of the prefect (*eparch*) Ablabius and are put in prison on suspicion of treason; but they remember Nicholas, and pray for his help and intercession. Nicholas appears in threatening visions to the emperor Constantine and to Ablabius, and the generals are released. It is on the basis of the visions that Proclus says Nicholas "reached the capital city" (i.e., he did so non-corporeally).

¹⁴ "Brought" is an allusion to the fact (in the *Praxis de stratelatis*) that he helped before any message by non-supernatural means could have been transmitted.

For those who were going to be deprived unjustly¹⁵ of life said in loud voices, “Even if you are far from us, nevertheless come! Be present and hasten to free us from the suffering and falsehood that constrain us.” We remember that “the Lord is near to those who call upon Him in truth.”¹⁶ You were wholly present to those who yearned for you. You delivered the captives from a terrible trial. Nobly you helped the helpless. You deprived the sword of an unjust beheading. You terrified the king¹⁷ with dreams and with threats of death and war, showing that you made intercession with the one who enlightened you and crowned him. For you became a victory-bringing warrior, walking through the air <more swiftly> than a swift-running horse. You became a light to those who received a bitter sentence during the night. You announced punishment by worms and the destruction of the ruler’s house. By visions you shook the soul of the prefect, saying to him, “O you who are disabled¹⁸ in soul and thought, release those who were to be unjustly punished by you. For if you disobey me, you will not escape the punishment that was given to you through my lips, but you will receive these things from heaven. For you received vessels of silver and gold through your willingness to deprive these people of life and light.”¹⁹

[3] O the infinite power of God, which invisibly encompassed the saint!²⁰ He is truly worthy to receive praises from us, too. It is truly fitting for the saint to have a sweet fragrance given to him from our lips; yet we first reverence the implanting²¹ of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit made with the saint, [a grafting] pleasing by virtue of the gift itself,²² then [reverencing] also the holy maiden and mother of God, Mary, in company with the archangel Gabriel—“Greetings, you who are favored, the Lord is with you,”²³ and, coming forth from you, he enlightened all things²⁴— let us come, finally, to the feast²⁵ of this saint. Greetings, Nicholas, the leader of Myra. Greetings, Nicholas, who

¹⁵ The text as edited literally means, “of their unjust life,” but this cannot be the right idea. Anrich suggests (in the *app. crit.*) that the reading is wrong, perhaps to be explained by references to “unjust *death*” in the text of the *Praxis* (e.g. 17, 24). The people in danger of death here are the generals. It is not clear (as Anrich notes) where their prayer ends, and voice of the encomiast picks up again.

¹⁶ Psalm 145:18 (144:18 LXX).

¹⁷ I.e., Constantine.

¹⁸ As in the *Praxis* 21, this term (*beblammene*, “having been harmed”) is a play on the prefect’s name, Ablabius (“harmless”). In this encomium, Ablabius is given the title *hyparchos* rather than *eparchos*, but both can be the equivalent of Lat. *praefectus*.

¹⁹ The point being that he was bribed (*Praxis* 11, 14).

²⁰ i.e., it was not the saint’s personal power but rather God’s power that was operative.

²¹ Gk. *emphuteusis*. While more common as a legal term of land tenure, Proclus is using the term in its basic etymological sense of “implanting / engrafting.” Cf., a few lines below, “Nicholas, who has God completely in himself with the Son and Holy Spirit.”

²² Anrich: “Text unsicher” (“text uncertain”). The text seems to be corrupt, the meaning uncertain. The translation above attempts to render the Greek as printed by Anrich (αὐτῷ ἀρεστὴν τῷ δῶρῳ). Possible corrections might rest on the probability that the “gift” is the same as the “implanting”: “...the implanting of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit made with the saint—the gift that was pleasing to him (αὐτῷ ἀρεστὸν τὸ δῶρον)”; alternatively, the saint might be referred to as made pleasing by the gift: “...the saint—himself [made] pleasing by the gift (αὐτὸν ἀρεστὸν τῷ δῶρῳ).”

²³ Luke 1:28.

²⁴ Cf. John 1:9.

²⁵ Gk. *euôchian*; Anrich suggests a possible correction to *euôdian* (“sweet fragrance”).

has God as a whole in himself, along with the Son and Holy Spirit. Greetings, Nicholas, who dwells in Myra and reached the capital city. Greetings, Nicholas, who, without leaving your home, redeem the captives.²⁶ Greetings, Nicholas, who appear to the king in dreams and terrify him that he would be delivered over to a hostile sword and to the birds. Greetings, Nicholas, who appeared to Ablabius in visions, and announced to him a death-bringing life and destruction with all his household. Greetings, Nicholas, victor over the tyrant and evil demon. Greetings, Nicholas, who are called upon by everyone and heed all of them. May you rejoice,²⁷ Nicholas, who are far away and heed the pitiful cries of the oppressed. May you rejoice, Nicholas, who are the precious treasure of the city of Myra. May you rejoice, Nicholas, who even out of a death-bringing night gave life to those who were sitting in a prison. May you rejoice, Nicholas, who with inexpressible joy....²⁸ Come, just as the Lord says in the Gospels, "Enter into the joy of your Lord."²⁹ For even if you were not present in body, the utterance of David has been fulfilled in you: "I spoke in the presence of kings and was not ashamed."³⁰ Who does not marvel at the daring of the saint? Who does not feel awe at the mysteries of God? Who is not amazed at this great and incredible wonder? In visions the sun and moon, together with the stars, bowing down to that wise Joseph, foretold [his] reign.³¹ But you, fully possessing the fear of God, convicting this man— threatening the death of the one man [i.e., Constantine], and handing over the life and regimen of the other man [i.e., Ablabius] to the consumption of worms—you drove [him] away.

[4] And *he* [i.e., Constantine] ordered that the detained be released, telling in detail what he had seen in an ecstasy from the holy man, and he spoke in the midst of all the people and Senate, calling these people sorcerers and saying, "How is it that you have sent a certain Nicholas to punish me?" But they bowed their heads and, with pitiful and poor voices, (they) said, "We have committed no wrong against your happy reign." But then, taking heart, and [this section needs serious revision], they began then to lift up one voice to God who oversees all things, saying, "Advocate³² of the oppressed, and supplier of life, through your venerable Nicholas we bring a prayer before your compassion. Have mercy, we ask, and deliver us from death and appoint us to be partakers of life." From here the king began to speak with pretended words: From where and from what city was the saint, and "What is his so great severity towards me?" Then indeed, then, drawing up a sweet word and one mixed with all sweetness, they replied to him, "King of the whole world, we are setting forth words in your ears which are true. For we are unable, admirable king, to pass over in silence what we saw with our own eyes, especially since the Lord has said, 'What you hear in your ear, proclaim it on the house-tops. And what you see in the darkness, speak of it in the light.' This saint, always in possession of the fear of God and boldness, with beautiful and swift-running feet gave life, with God's

²⁶ I.e. appearing not in body but in threatening visions.

²⁷ "May you rejoice" is simply a slight re-wording of the repeated "Greetings" (*chaire*—lit., "rejoice") in the foregoing sentences.

²⁸ Text is corrupt; something has dropped out. Anrich suggests a supplement such that the phrase would read, "Nicholas, who filled the prisoners with inexpressible joy."

²⁹ Matt. 25:21, 23.

³⁰ Psalm 119:46 (118:46 LXX).

³¹ Gen. 37:9.

³² Gk. *ekdikos*; alternatively, "champion / avenger."

help, to those who were going to die at the fatal hour, and, taking control of the two-edged sword that was held in the hand of the man who was about to cut off [their heads], he cast it away, and unbinding the captives he released them and restored them to their own homes. Remembering these good deeds of his which he performed towards those people, we, too, called upon him to come to us in haste and deem us worthy of salvation.”

[5] And so he whose head was adorned with precious stones, who was dressed in a purple robe and who possessed all ornament,³³ replied, “It is not I who grant you temporary life, but he who is called upon by you. Hasten, then, and when you reach his feet, kiss them, telling him to make mention of me, too, to God. After receiving, then, these small blessings, bring them to him, telling him not to repay anger [with anger], but to ask for forgiveness for what I have done toward God. But you too, just as you have received this temporary life, do not rob yourselves of the life there:³⁴ deprive yourselves of hair and adornment,³⁵ taking no thought for anything of the things in life.”³⁶ At any rate, they set out on their journey to the saint on November fourth and arrived April thirteenth, making prayers and giving thanks to God, distributing their own possessions to the poor, serving the Lord, laying open their souls to God, to whom be glory and power forever. Amen.

³³ Or, "ruled the whole world." (The reference is to Constantine.)

³⁴ I.e. in heaven.

³⁵ Cf. *Praxis* 25; Anrich there notes parallels with the cutting of hair as an act of religious thanksgiving, but in the current text it seems well on the way toward becoming the monastic *tonsure*.

³⁶ I.e. worldly goods; for similar language and thoughts see 1 Tim 2:9, 1 Peter 3:3, 1 John 2:15.