

Anonymous
Nicholas of Myra. VIII. Synaxarion¹
BHG 1349s

¹ This translation was commissioned by Roger Pearse in 2017 and the text was kindly translated for us by Fr Albert Iustinos, a monk of Mount Athos. The translation is placed in the public domain. The critical edition used is that of G. Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos*, vol 1, 1913, pp.205-9. The texts are the brief lives of St Nicholas found in the Greek Orthodox service book, the Menaiaon, for December 6th. The text seems to draw upon the *Vita per Michaelem*, but not upon the *Life* by Symeon Metaphrastes. This suggests a 9-10th century date.

VIII. SYNAXARION²

A. The Life in the General Synaxarion³

(*BaFaQSaS*) On the sixth of this month⁴ we commemorate⁵ our holy father Nicholas, bishop of Myra and Lycia.

He lived during the years of the tyrants Diocletian and Maximian; having excelled in his former years in the monastic way of life, he accepted the episcopacy on account of *his* exceeding virtue. Since he was advocating for the affairs of Christians and preaching to the pious with a bold voice, he was arrested by those carrying *him* away to the rulers of the city; being subjected to blows and tortures by them, he was thrown into prison with other Christians. When the kingdom of the Romans by God's providence was subjugated⁶ by the great and pious Constantine, those imprisoned in fetters were released. On account of which the great Nicholas, having been set free, arrived in Myra. Soon afterwards⁷ the synod in Nicaea was gathered together by Constantine the great, in which the wonderworker Nicholas also took part.

(*SaS = Shorter Recension*)

He performed many miracles, as the history about him shows. In great old age, having spoken to the Lord, he departed this life, leaving the faithful his honorable body

(*BaFaQ = Longer Recension*)

He performed many miracles as well, as the history about him shows. He also saved three men who were calumniated and about to depart this life unjustly. Indeed, since the time was set at which they were to be beheaded, they learned of it while being in prison, and asking the saint for help, mentioning to him such a great deed, which he did, saving the three men about to be brought into Lycia. Thus, the saint was seen in a dream by the king and also the eparch; whereas he was rebuking the eparch about the accusation against the three men

² The *Menaion*, known in Latin as the Synaxarium, is commonly a 12 volume set, one for each month, which is used in the Orthodox Church for the variable hymns in the services of Orthros and Vespers. Typically, for a great saint, such as St. Nicholas, during the commemoration of saints there is a small reading about his life, of which this text is a representative.

³ The *Life* of St Nicholas given in this type of Synaxarium is only brief. Even so there are two versions, one shorter and one longer. The opening is common; then the ending differs in different manuscripts. The Synaxarium was first printed by H. Delahaye in the *Acta Sanctorum*, as *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 1902. *Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris*. The *Life* of Nicholas is on p.281-4. Anrich edited the text from the following manuscripts, which vary somewhat:

1. *Sa* = Paris Graec. 1594 (12th century), f. 136-136v.
2. *S* = Berlin 219 (12-13 c.)
3. *Ba* = Paris Graec. 1589 (12th c.) f.149.
4. *Fa* = Paris Graec. 1590 (1063 AD), f.108.
5. *Q* = Paris Graec. 1621 (13th c.) f.60-60v.

S and *Sa* are a Constantinople-based text form. Many other manuscripts exist. (RP)

⁴ It would be understood from the book that this was taken from, the *Menaion*, that this month is December.

⁵ Literally - 'the memory of'.

⁶ ὑποζωσαμένου - the classical corpus does not contain the word ὑποζώω, which would be the logical verb. The most likely explanation, by context, is that it is a late Byzantine inflection of ὑποζεύγνυμι - put under the yoke, thus metaphorically subjugated.

⁷ οὐ πολὺ τὸ ἐν μέσῳ - the more common form is τὸ ἐν μέσῳ - what intervened or went between. In this context time is inferred.

gushing myrrh with healing properties, living on even after death through having received the grace of working miracles. Thus concludes his synaxis⁸ in the great Church.

toward the king, he was teaching the king that while being innocent they were being accused for murder in the account of high treason, and in this way he saved them from *their* pressing distress.⁹ He also accomplished many other wonderful things, and having shepherded the orthodox people in a holy manner, having spoken to the Lord he departed in great old age, not being forgetful of the flock after departing, but every hour and day, so to speak, he freely grants his good deeds to those asking.

B. Synaxaria of Class M¹⁰

1. Though there are many great miracles of our holy father, both well known and not so distinguished, I would like to make mention of one. Though the much beloved stories¹¹ necessarily honor the superiority of the miracle, they are in no way to be doubted by considering such a marvelous thing as impossible in our days. For nothing is impossible with God. Since God at one time brought about the transfer of the prophet Habakkuk; and for the girl thrown into the tomb by the Goth, in one night she was found *transported* to Edessa from Rome through the holy confessors; and for the young boy apprehended in the land of the Agarenes¹² and safely transferred from prison in one night to Byzantium by the great martyr Theodore of Tyre; for the apprehended youth brought from Crete by the all glorious martyr George, still possessing a cup of wine in hand, and plucked up while bringing it forth to the luxurious dinner to which he had been called. The day was not yet shrouded in darkness and he was set in his homeland Mytilene and presented the cup of wine as evidence - He is the same God both then and now, and those seeking help from Him with unwavering faith are not few in number. And if there are certain people who have received the power to work miracles such as these, and even greater ones, it is nothing strange, should such a thing happen also by our thrice-blessed father Nicholas.

2. (*The Miracle of Demetrios*) There was a certain pious man in Byzantium, both faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and extremely affectionate toward and beloved by our father Nicholas. This man on one occasion desired to depart by boat to another land, as some necessary job was pressing him. Going forth to the temple of the saint he prayed according to custom and after embracing his beloved family and friends he embarked upon the boat. It was around the ninth hour of the night, and since a contrary wind was blowing against us, they arose to change the sails. This most pious man himself also

⁸ Synaxis - An ancient monastic term originating from fourth century Egypt which originally denoted a gathering of monks, either for purposes of discussion or performing a service.

⁹ ἐπικειμένης ἀνάγκης - lit. 'urgent necessity'.

¹⁰ Other manuscripts contain a much longer *Life* of St Nicholas. The first editor, Delahaye, labelled these the "group M" manuscripts. There is a brief discussion of these in vol. 2 of Anrich. (RP)

¹¹ φιλήκοοι ἀκοαὶ - the literal meaning is closer to 'loved to be heard stories', i.e. a story which one loves to hear.

¹² Ἀγαρηνῶν - A people of unknown origin not attested to in the classical or early Byzantine sources.

arose to relieve himself.¹³ While all were occupied with the changing of the sails, having been tangled in a net, which is apt to happen, he was cast into the deep in the middle of the sea. And there, since it was dark and the wind was forcing them onward ever more violently, they - not being able to do anything - were lamenting the most miserable death of the man. And he, since he was thrown into the sea fully clothed and his garments were becoming heavy with water, while drowning in the depths of the open sea, cried out 'St. Nicholas, Help me!' The very moment the cry sounded - oh the miracle, for your wonders are incomprehensible Lord - he was found in the middle of his house, supposing that he stood in the depths.

3. The neighbors, since they heard the cries, arose. In like manner, those in the house lit the lamps, and the neighbors assembling together outside, saw him standing and crying out in the middle of the house, and they also saw the garments which he had been wearing, soaked in sea water. They were confounded and made speechless. But he said, 'Oh brothers, what is this marvel? For I know most certainly, that having bid farewell to all of you at the ninth hour, after embarking upon the boat I sailed away. Since an opportune wind was blowing, we managed setting sail upon an agreeable course. Around the second or third watch of the night, having stood up on the boat for a need of nature, I was thrown into the sea by the sailors. I called upon St. Nicholas for help. How I am here now, I do not know. You then tell me, seeing that I am dumbfounded and have become as one out of his mind.'¹⁴ Thus, listening to what was said with understanding and seeing the sea water dripping from the garments, they were amazed while contemplating the greatness of the miracle. Both rejoicing and weeping together with him, they were crying out many times 'Lord have mercy!' But he, having disrobed and put on other clothes, hurried to the church of St. Nicholas and passed the rest of the night there, all the while falling to the ground with tears, praying earnestly, and calling upon *the saint* he offered thanks with wonder. And so, when early morning arrived and the usual people gathered, after all of them had sent forth the sweet smelling aromas of praise offered in thanksgiving to the saint for the man. When full daylight was seen in the church, they were inquiring as to what the reason was for the commotion. And learning they were amazed, glorifying God and praising the saint.

4. This extraordinary event and truly supernatural marvel, circulating in the ears in all the byroads of the great city of Constantine and then coming to the ruling emperor and to the one administering on the archiepiscopal throne in the great Church of God, they were persuaded to call the man to a council. Therefore this very man was present and set out in detail in the presence of many gathered together, both how and in what manner this extraordinary and truly incomprehensible miracle happened to him. All were crying out, 'great you are, Lord, and marvelous are your miracles, and there is no word which suffices to praise your wonders'. A whole crowd of the people went out, gathering in the temple of the saint, saying prayers and keeping vigil all night, glorifying and blessing God and giving thanks for His faithful servant.

¹³ χρείαν ὕδατος - A figure of speech, much like those of our modern day, which literally means for need of water.

¹⁴ ἄλλος ἐξ ἄλλου - lit. one from another.