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Ο τόπος σύγκλησης της Α' Οικουμενικής Συνόδου  
και ο ναός των Αγίων Πατέρων στη Νίκαια

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ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ  
ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

The Meeting-Place of the First Ecumenical Council and  
the Church of the Holy Fathers at Nicaea

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## THE MEETING-PLACE OF THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL AND THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY FATHERS AT NICAEA\*

There is no denying the symbolic significance of the First Ecumenical Council. To some of us it may signal the birth of the Byzantine theocracy, but to the Byzantines themselves it marked the condemnation of the mother of all heresies by the 318 ‘God-bearing’ Fathers, who thereby became the guarantors of the established moral order; which is why, I suppose, their curse was so often invoked against wrongdoers, especially those who dared pinch a book from its rightful owner.

The figure of 318, recalling the number of Abraham’s servants (Gen. 14.14) is generally recognised as apocryphal. We do not know the exact number of bishops who participated in the First General Council: estimates vary from 200 to 300<sup>1</sup>. There are other uncertainties that do not concern us here. Why, e.g., was the venue of the Council switched from Ancyra to Nicaea? Was Constantine unaware that the sitting bishop of Nicaea, Theognis, who would normally have acted as host, was an avowed Arian? One thing is clear: Constantine was determined to impose his will on the divided bishops. The sessions were held not in a church, but in the biggest hall of the imperial palace<sup>2</sup>. Constantine turned up in full regalia and himself presided over the deliberations. Of course, he got his way: only two of the assembled bishops refused to sign on the dotted line, Theognis being, embarrassingly, one of them.

The existence of an imperial palace at Nicaea need not sur-

prise us. Roman emperors maintained palaces in many provincial centres where they had occasion to stop on their peregrinations<sup>3</sup>. We do not know when the palace of Nicaea was built, but it was still standing, though “collapsed in part”, in the reign of Justinian, who ordered its complete restoration<sup>4</sup>. Its main hall must have been big enough to afford room for the 200-300 seated bishops plus the emperor’s bodyguard as well as various notables and consultants – in all a gathering of at least 400.

As time went by, the Council of Nicaea acquired mythical status as a founding assembly of the Church that had formulated the creed under the guidance of an emperor who was himself a saint. By c. 700 AD at the latest a list of 318 Fathers had been concocted, including some illustrious personages who, it was felt, ought to have been present, even if, in fact, they were not: Sylvester of Rome, Alexander of Constantinople (as bishop), Hypatius of Gangra, Nicholas of Myra, Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia, but not yet Achilleios of Larissa<sup>5</sup>. Under these circumstances it would have been natural for the meeting-place of the Council to have been turned into a shrine, and that, indeed, appears to have happened. Its first known visitor was the English pilgrim Willibald (c. 727-729) who, after mentioning the synod of 318 bishops convened by Constantine, goes on, “That church is similar to the one on the Mount of Olives, where the Lord ascended to heaven, and in that church [at Nicaea]

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\* The gist of the following argument has been stated by me, very briefly, in ‘Notes d’épigraphie et d’archéologie . . .’ *TM* 12 (1994), 356-7. I trust that George Galavaris, who was keenly interested in the history of the Orthodox Church, would have wished to follow it in greater detail.

P.S. Another version of this paper has appeared, without my prior knowledge, in a volume entitled *Ėzrik throughout History*, Istanbul, İř Bankası, 2003, 305-313.

<sup>1</sup> For a good factual account of the Council see, e.g., T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, Cambridge MA 1981, 214 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.10.1: ἐν αὐτῷ δὴ τῷ μεσαιτάτῳ οἴκῳ τῶν βασιλείων, ὃς δὴ καὶ ὑπερφέρειν ἐδόκει μεγέθει τοὺς πάντας.

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<sup>3</sup> See F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, London 1977, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Procopius, *De aedificiis*, 5.3.3. In commenting on the exceptional character of the Roman fortifications of Nicaea (AD 268), J. Crow has recently remarked that they suggest “that the city was intended as some form of imperial centre”, ‘Fortifications and Urbanism in Late Antiquity’ in L. Lavan (ed.), *Recent Research in Late-Antique Urbanism*, Portsmouth RI 2001, 91. This may provide a context for the construction of an imperial palace.

<sup>5</sup> See E. Honigsmann, La liste originale des pères de Nicée, *Byz* 14 (1939), 58 f.

were pictures of the bishops who attended the synod<sup>76</sup>. Willibald had himself visited the church of the Ascension at Jerusalem and noted the fact that it was unroofed (*illa aeclesia est desuper patula et sine tectu*) and so let in rainwater. In the middle of it stood some kind of bronze altar containing a candle under a glass cover so it could burn in any weather<sup>7</sup>. Willibald had, therefore, a good mental picture of the church of the Ascension, which had been more fully described by Arculf (679-688) as a rotunda, unroofed in the middle, surrounded by three vaulted galleries<sup>8</sup>. Arculf's sketch (Fig. 1) confirms this arrangement. Whether its central space was completely or only partially open to the sky, the church of the Ascension would have borne a generic resemblance to a type of building that had a long tradition in Roman architecture, namely the domed rotunda or octagon with a more or less large oculus at the centre. That formula had featured in temples, palaces (e.g. Nero's Golden House) and mausolea, and was later applied to a few martyria of the Holy Land. In the case of the church of the Ascension a large opening would have been particularly appropriate so as to show visually Christ's elevation to heaven from the spot marked by his footprints. That was not, however, a formula used in Byzantine church architecture<sup>9</sup>. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the shrine visited by Willibald had been converted from the palace hall in which the synod was believed to have taken place.

In 727, i.e. shortly before or after Willibald's visit, Nicaea was besieged by a strong Arab army. This event – the only recorded siege of Nicaea in the course of the centuries-long Arab-Byzantine conflict<sup>10</sup> – is known to us from two accounts in Syriac and two in Greek. Arabic sources are silent, probably because the attack ended in failure. The Syriac *Chronicle of 1234*, giving an incorrect date of AD 729, merely reports that Mu'awiya, son of the Caliph Hisham, besieged Nicaea for forty days and withdrew when a Roman army had come into the city on ships, i.e. across lake Asca-

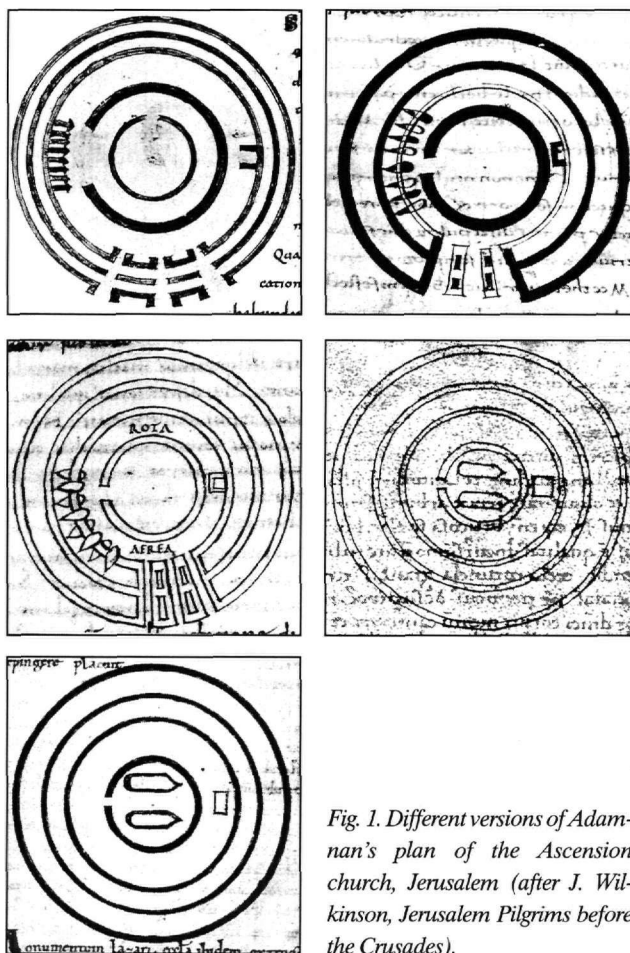


Fig. 1. Different versions of Adamnan's plan of the Ascension church, Jerusalem (after J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*).

nius<sup>11</sup>. In the chronicle of Michael the Syrian the story is garbled and the date shifted further to 731: the Arabs under Mu'awiya attack the city and destroy its walls. The Romans flee on boats. The Arabs gain possession of Nicaea and devastate it<sup>12</sup>. We shall see that some destruction of the walls did take place.

<sup>6</sup> *Vita Willibaldi*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH*, Script. XV, 1887, 101.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>8</sup> *De locis sanctis*, 1.23, ed. L. Bieler, *CC*, ser. lat. 175, 1965, 199-202. Versions of Arculf's sketch-plan as reproduced by Adamnan may be found in J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, Warminster 1979, pl. 2 (whence our Fig. 1); cf. 193-4. They are all fairly similar, showing three concentric galleries, a triple entrance on the south, an altar to the east and eight lamps to the west. The imprint of Christ's feet at the centre appears to have been protected by a brass railing (*rota aerea*). For the excavations of 1959 see V.C. Corbo, *Ricerche archeologiche al Monte degli Ulivi*, Jerusalem 1965, 97-104.

<sup>9</sup> With the possible exception of the central octagon of St. Symeon Stylites (Qal'at Siman), the problem of whose roofing is still under debate. Its function, however, was not at all comparable to that of the shrine that concerns us.

<sup>10</sup> Agapius of Menbidj, ed. A. Vasiliev, *PO* VIII, 1912, 501, speaks of Maslama taking many captives at Nicaea in 716, but that is not confirmed by other sources. If true, it may refer to the surrounding area.

<sup>11</sup> *Chronicon anonymum*, trans. J.-B. Chabot, *CSCO*, Ser. syri, 3rd ser. 14, 1937, 241-2.

<sup>12</sup> Trans. J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, II, Paris 1901, 501.

We now come to the Greek sources. The Patriarch Nicephorus, as usual, is extremely brief: an Arab force, commanded by Mu'awiya and a certain 'Amr, besieges Nicaea for some time, then departs without having accomplished anything<sup>13</sup>. A fuller account is given in the Chronicle of Theophanes and may be rendered as follows:

“At the summer solstice of the same 10th indiction [June 727] ... a multitude of Saracens was drawn up against Nicaea in Bithynia: 'Amr with 15,000 scouts led the van and surrounded the town, which he found unprepared, while Mu'awiya followed with another 85,000 men<sup>14</sup>. After a long siege and a partial destruction of the walls, they did not overpower the town thanks to the acceptable prayers addressed to God by the Holy Fathers who are honoured there in a church (wherein their venerable images are set up to this very day and honoured by those who believe as they did)<sup>15</sup>. A certain Constantine, however, who was the groom of Artabasdos<sup>16</sup>, on seeing an image of the Mother of God that had been set up, picked up a stone and threw it at her. He broke the image and trampled upon it when it had fallen down. He then saw in a vision the Lady standing beside him and saying to him, ‘See, what a brave thing you have done to me! Verily, upon your head have you done it’. The next day, when the Saracens attacked the walls and battle was joined, that wretched man rushed to the wall like the brave soldier he was, and was struck by a stone discharged from a siege engine, and it broke his head and face, a just reward for his impiety. After collecting many captives and much booty the Arabs withdrew. In this manner God showed to the impious one [Leo III] that he had overcome his fellow-countrymen<sup>17</sup> not on account of his piety, as he himself boasted, but for some divine cause and inscrutable judgment, whereby so great an Arab force was driven away from the city of the Holy Fathers thanks to their intercession – on account of

their most exact likenesses that are honoured therein – and this, too, in reproof and unanswerable condemnation of the tyrant [again Leo III] and in vindication of the true believers<sup>18</sup> ... From that time on he impudently harassed the blessed Germanus, patriarch of Constantinople, blaming all the emperors, bishops and Christian people who had lived before him for having committed idolatry in worshipping the holy and venerable icons, unable as he was to grasp the argument concerning their ‘relative’ veneration (σχετικῆς προσκυνήσεως) because of his lack of faith and crass ignorance.”<sup>19</sup>

My translation does not adequately convey the incoherence of the Greek text. Instead of rewriting the whole passage, Theophanes seems to have interpolated his source without regard for proper syntax. Exactly what the source said cannot now be determined, but it probably made no mention of images and may have stated that the deliverance of Nicaea, coming after the defeat of the Helladics, was seen by Leo as a vindication of his religious policy; which is why “from that time on” he increased pressure on the Patriarch Germanus. Unable to explain the success of the ‘impious’ emperor, Theophanes could only invoke “some divine cause and inscrutable judgment” and, of course, the presence of the Fathers’ images.

The failed siege of 727 is commemorated by an inscription that is still extant a short distance west of the Istanbul gate on the city side of tower 71 (Fig. 2)<sup>20</sup>. Carved in raised letters and pompously, if somewhat ungrammatically worded, it may be translated as follows:

“At the place where, with divine help, the insolence of the enemy was put to shame, there our Christ-loving emperors Leo and Constantine restored with zeal the city of Nicaea, having erected in demonstration of their deed a trophy of victory by setting up a *kentinarion* tower<sup>21</sup>, which Artabasdos,

<sup>13</sup> *Short History*, ed. C. Mango, *CFHB* 13, 1990, ch. 61.

<sup>14</sup> These figures are certainly greatly inflated.

<sup>15</sup> The Greek is almost incomprehensible as it stands: οἱ [the Arabs] μετὰ πολιορκίαν πολλὴν καὶ καθαίρεσιν τῶν τεχνῶν μερικῆν τῶ τῶν τιμωμένων ἁγίων πατέρων αὐτόθι τεμένει ταύτης μὲν οὐ περιγεγόνασι διὰ τῶν εὐπροσδέκτων εὐχῶν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ἔνθα καὶ σεβάσμοι αὐτῶν χαρακτῆρες ἀνεστήλωντο μέχρι νῦν ὑπὸ τῶν ὁμοφρόνων αὐτῶν τιμώμενοι. Anastasius changes the order: «Et particularem eversionem murorum hanc non optinuerunt, bene acceptis sanctorum precibus patrum ad deum directis et sanctificatione faciente venerabilis templi,» etc. On this basis de Boor proposed to move <ἐν> τῶ τῶν τιμ. ἁγ. πατ. αὐτόθι τεμένει after θεόν. It would be simpler to insert παρὰ

after μερικῆν, but that would introduce a localization that may appear arbitrary even if it happens to be true.

<sup>16</sup> Son-in-law of Leo III and future emperor.

<sup>17</sup> Referring to the defeat of the Helladic revolt described in the previous paragraph.

<sup>18</sup> Another confused sentence.

<sup>19</sup> Ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig 1883, 405-6. Cf. trans. by C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, Oxford 1997, 560-1.

<sup>20</sup> Photograph reproduced by me, ‘Notes d’*épigraphie*’ (as in n.\*), fig. 6. In my transcription (ibid., 352) *κεντηναριῶ* should be corrected to *κεντιναριῶ*.

<sup>21</sup> The meaning of this term is unclear to me.



Fig. 2. Nicaea, city side of Tower 71 with Artabasdos inscription (as in 1996).

the glorious patrician and *curopalates*<sup>22</sup>, completed by his toil.” The inscription marks, therefore, the very spot where the Arabs were “put to shame”. Not only tower 71, but the whole stretch of wall between towers 70 and 72<sup>23</sup> was reconstructed at this time out of re-used marble blocks and column shafts taken from ancient buildings. That was probably the stretch that was partially destroyed, as Theophanes puts it.

We are now in a position to analyse an important text that has received insufficient attention. It is a Laudation of the 318 Fathers by a certain Gregory, presbyter of the church of Caesarea in Cappadocia, expressly commissioned by an unnamed bishop of Nicaea<sup>24</sup>. It opens with the accession of Constantine and the establishment of Christianity, whereupon peace descends on the Roman Empire. Displeased by this turn of events, the Devil causes Arius to preach his foul heresy. On being informed, Constantine summons a council of bishops to meet at Nicaea. The names and sees of the participants may be found, we are told, in the ‘synodal tome’ that was set forth by them. They included a number of famous confessors who had suffered in the preceding persecu-

tion, like Jacob of Nisibis, Paul of Neocaesarea and Paphnutius, but the Devil was also able to introduce a few wolves in sheep’s clothing, among whom our author fails to mention, perhaps from a feeling of tact, Theognis of Nicaea. The venue of the council is described in the following terms: “Having detached from the palace that is there a huge hall – the fairest part (τὸν ὀφθαλμόν), as it were, of the imperial apartments, whose decorous beauty has been preserved to our days by the protection of the holy Fathers, the mighty Emperor assigned this hall, like an offering of first-fruits, to the holy synod”<sup>25</sup>.

Constantine attends the meetings. Arius is condemned and a definition of the creed is formulated. The date of Easter is established and other canons laid down. Constantine demands that the *tomos* be signed by all the participants, but two of them, Chrysanthus and Musonius, happen to die before having signed. The sealed *tomos* is brought to their tombs and, when it is opened, their signatures are found inside.

At the conclusion of the council Constantine offers a banquet and embraces the confessors. As the Fathers are about to depart and offer prayers for the safety of the city that had welcomed them, “it so happened that a fount of oil gushed out of the so-called *mesomphalon* [circular plaque in the floor] of the eastern entrance, at the very centre of the apsis [arch or vault] where the choir of the saints had assembled; which fount, still visible today, demonstrates the efficacy of the prayers offered at the time”<sup>26</sup>.

Another miracle, due to the Fathers’ providence, happened ‘in our generation’. When the ‘Assyrians’ were ravaging the Roman Empire, Nicaea was preserved unharmed, “having suffered no loss of men, women or children either by fire or sword” in spite of many enemy attacks conducted both openly and by stealth. Their commander made an attempt against the church of the Fathers and hastened “to celebrate there the detestable rites of his magic”, but was stopped by a nocturnal vision and apparitions by daylight. Indeed, he sought to propitiate God by lighting lamps and barred access to the holy church to his ‘Babylonians’. Even prisoners taken by

<sup>22</sup> The inscription omits the title *comes* of Opsikion, which appears on some of Artabasdos’ lead seals following that of *curopalates*. Nicaea, of course, was in the Opsikian theme, but I am not sure one can argue from the inscription (which, strictly speaking, is not dated) that Artabasdos was *comes* at the time it was set up, as does N. Oikonomides, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals*, Washington, DC 1986, 45.

<sup>23</sup> See C. Foss and D. Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications*, Pretoria 1986,

90, 100. A shorter stretch near the South Lake Gate, including tower 94 and the adjacent wall were rebuilt at the same time.

<sup>24</sup> The first ed. by F. Combefis (1648) is reprinted in *PG* 111, col. 420-40; second, but not very satisfactory ed. by J. Compennass, *Gregorios Lobrede auf die 318 Väter des Konzils zu Nikaia*, diss. Bonn 1908, 17-31.

<sup>25</sup> Ed. Compennass, 22.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

them escaped injury by claiming they were natives of Nicaea. The bodies of the Fathers have remained uncorrupted. The author can testify to this in the case of Leontius, bishop of Caesarea, his home town. The same applies to Gregory of Armenia, the one who discovered the relics of Ripsime and Gaiane and converted King Tiridates. “Many persons have seen his precious body along with me. It has lost neither its hair nor its fingernails and is suffused with the sweet smell of myrrh”.

Such in outline is the content of the Laudation which, as its preface makes clear, was spoken at Nicaea itself. At the time of its delivery the palace hall in which the synod had met was still standing in all its beauty. It had allegedly been set apart by Constantine himself and consecrated as a kind of memorial. It had an eastern entrance and, in front of it, a circular plaque in the pavement where a miraculous source of oil gushed out<sup>27</sup>. Significantly, our author does not allude to any images.

Passing on to the relatively recent enemy attack on Nicaea, we welcome the suggestion by X. Lequeux<sup>28</sup> that the mention of Assyrians and Babylonians echoes the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib (IV Reg. 18-19). This allusion may have had a further resonance in that it was King Hezekiah, thanks to whose piety Jerusalem was saved, who rid his kingdom of idolatry (συνέτριψεν πάσας τὰς στήλας καὶ ἐξωλόθρευσεν τὰ ἄλση καὶ τὸν ὄφιν τὸν χαλκοῦν). The parallel with Leo III may not have been lost on the audience. On the other hand, our author does make it clear that the invaders did actually enter the church of the Fathers and performed their religious rites in it<sup>29</sup>, which means, unless the church was extramural, that they broke into Nicaea.

Different opinions have been expressed concerning the date of the Laudation. Combefis, its first editor, thought that the Assyrians or Babylonians referred to the Persians, and consequently dated the text to the reign of Heraclius<sup>30</sup>. That was not an unreasonable suggestion: the Persians twice advanced as far as Chalcedon, the first time probably in 615, the second time in 626. The reference to ‘magical rites’ would also fit the Persians. On the other hand, there is no evidence that they ever attacked Nicaea. The next editor, Comperness, dated the Laudation to the tenth century for linguistic and stylistic reasons, i.e. for no objective reasons at all. More recently the late A. Kazhdan argued that the attack on Nicaea was made by Paulician heretics shortly before 869 and that the text was written after that date<sup>31</sup>. That, however, can hardly be right, seeing that the Paulicians merely carried out a number of marauding raids, extending as far as Nicomedia, Nicaea and Ephesus<sup>32</sup>, whereas the Laudation speaks of a full-scale invasion of the Roman Empire. A date of 727-787, which I suggested on a previous occasion, has been endorsed by X. Lequeux<sup>33</sup>. Perhaps we can narrow it a little further to 727-740 for reasons that will soon become apparent.

Other possible clues prove elusive. A Gregory presbyter was also the author of a well-known Life of St. Gregory Nazianzen, but it is very unlikely that they were one and the same person. The reference to the uncorrupted body of St. Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia leads nowhere in view of the extremely confused traditions concerning that Saint’s relics<sup>34</sup>. Nor do we get very far by identifying the textual sources consulted by our Gregory. These were the Ecclesiastical History by Theodoret, perhaps the Life of the Emperor Constantine

<sup>27</sup> The existence of this source is confirmed by the legend of Achilleios, bishop of Larissa, which appears to have been concocted in the ninth century. Achilleios, too, is represented as attending the Council and confounds the heretics by causing a stone or rock to exude oil. See ed. of his Life by D.Z. Sophianos, *Μεσαιωνικά καὶ νέα ἑλληνικά* 3 (1990), 142. I owe this reference to Dr. Olga Karagiorgou.

<sup>28</sup> *Gregorii presbyteri Vita S. Gregorii Theologi*, CC, ser. gr. 44 = Corpus Naz. 11, 2001, 11-13.

<sup>29</sup> Comperness, 30, prints κατατολιμῆσαι τοῦ ναοῦ τῶν ἁγίων, but the original reading may have been τοῦ ἀδύτου τοῦ ναοῦ in view of the variants τοῦ ἀδύτου ναοῦ and ἀδυνάτου.

<sup>30</sup> PG 111, col. 419, n. 1. Attention should be drawn to a curious passage (Comperness, 29-30), which speaks of the ingratitude of the ‘Assyrians’ for the help they had received from the Roman Empire: τῶν γὰρ Ἀσσυρίων τρόπῳ χρησαμένων ἀγνώμονι καὶ δι’ ἧς ἐσώθησαν τῶν Ῥωμαίων βασιλείας ταύτην [rather than ταύτην] λυμνηγαμένον, etc. If

the Persians were meant, the reference could be to the help given by the emperor Maurice to place Chosroes II on the throne, but it is more likely that the author is thinking of the removal of the Mardaites from the Lebanon mountains by Justinian II (Theophanes, 363).

<sup>31</sup> Constantin imaginaire, *Byz* 57 (1987), 206-8.

<sup>32</sup> Genesisius, ch. 35, ed. A. Lesmueller-Werner and I. Thurn, 1987, 86. For the circumstances see P. Lemerle, L’histoire des Pauliciens d’Asie Mineure, *TM* 5 (1973), 97, 103.

<sup>33</sup> As in n. 28 above.

<sup>34</sup> See M. van Esbroeck, Témoignages littéraires sur la sépulture de S. Grégoire l’illuminateur, *AnBoll* 89 (1971), 387-417. Leontius of Caesarea was said to have ordained Gregory the Illuminator bishop. The alleged participation of both of them in the Council of Nicaea is affirmed in a letter of one George, bishop of the Arabs, of the year 714. See ed. and trans. by G. Garitte, Documents pour l’étude du livre d’Agathange, *ST* 127 (1946), 411, 414.

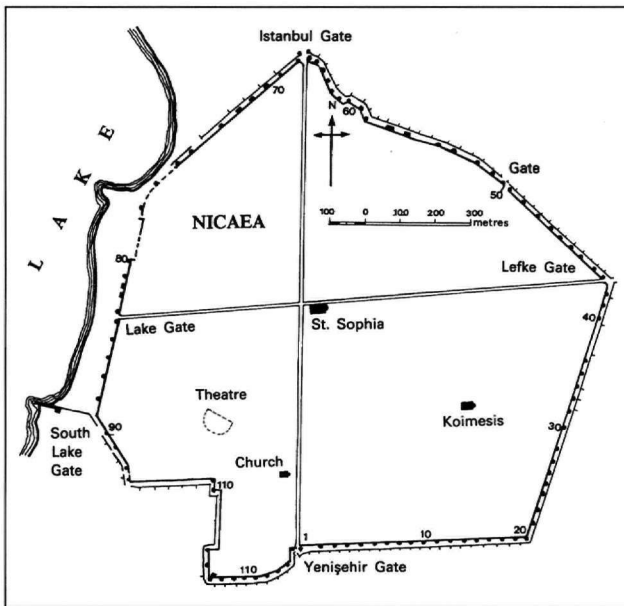


Fig. 3. City plan of Nicaea (after Foss and Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications*).

edited by Guidi (or something like it)<sup>35</sup> and the catalogue of the Nicaean Fathers, which he calls the ‘synodal tome’. The last was not a genuine document of 325, but the interpolated list of 318 names we have already mentioned. It is interesting to note that the list in question contains the names of the two bishops who allegedly died during the synod, Chrysanthus and Musonius, with the comment: “He was buried in the church of Nicaea”, and “He, too, was buried in the church”<sup>36</sup>. It is possible, therefore, that two such tombs actu-

ally existed and were inscribed with the names Chrysanthus and Musonius, thus giving rise to the legend about them<sup>37</sup>. In the absence of other evidence it is reasonable to conclude that the foreign attack described in the Laudation was that of 727. Theophanes speaks of a partial destruction of the city walls; Gregory has the enemy entering the church of the Fathers. In both texts a miraculous intervention takes place. Hence the Laudation was composed not long thereafter, under iconoclast rule, which is why it says nothing about images. If that is granted and it is true that the Arabs managed to reach the church of the Fathers and offer Muslim prayer in it (which our author calls ‘detestable rites’), it would follow that the church in question was close to the breach, i.e. probably a short distance west of the Istanbul gate (Fig. 3)<sup>38</sup>. That provides a location for the imperial palace and the venue of the council of 325. The palace’s eastern gate would have opened onto the main north-south street. One can only hope that archaeological findings may one day confirm this conclusion.

In 740 Nicaea was shaken by a terrible earthquake which “spared only one church”<sup>39</sup>. That may be an exaggeration or it may mean that all the city’s churches save one sustained some damage. The Laudation does not mention the earthquake, hence may be earlier than 740. Actually, the church of the Fathers did survive, as we shall see, but it may not have been in very good shape, seeing that the Council of 787 met in St. Sophia, although it would have been highly symbolic if it had assembled in the same place as the First Council<sup>40</sup>. Indeed, the resemblance of Iconoclasm to Arianism was often stressed on rather shaky doctrinal grounds, and somewhat later the Patriarch Photius was to preach a whole series of sermons on that topic<sup>41</sup>. In this context the images of the Fathers came in handy. On the assumption, which no one could dispute at the time, that they had been set up by

<sup>35</sup> See P. Heseler, *Zum Logos auf das Konzil von Nikaia ...*, *BNJb* 5 (1927), 59-62. It is not clear to me whether the Laudation borrows from the Guidi Life, which also speaks of Chrysanthus and Musonius, or vice versa. The latter text is certainly later, perhaps considerably later than the reign of Heraclius.

<sup>36</sup> Honigmann, *La liste* (as in n. 5), 59. Not knowing our text, he comments: ‘Il semble s’agir d’une tradition locale de Nicée, qui n’est pas connue par ailleurs’. The fact that the sees of the two bishops are not specified gives some support to an epigraphic source.

<sup>37</sup> The name Chrysanthus does occur in the onomastic of Nicaea. See S. Şahin, *Katalog der antiken Inschriften des Museums von İznik (Nikaia)*, I (= *Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien 9*), Bonn 1979, no. 555.

<sup>38</sup> This localization is endorsed with regard to the church of the Fathers by C. Foss, *Nicaea. A Byzantine Capital and its Praises*, Brookline 1996, 114.

<sup>39</sup> Theophanes, 412.

<sup>40</sup> Strangely enough, the *Life of St. Stephen the Younger*, written in 809 by a patriarchal deacon, states that the First Council took place in the church of St. Sophia at Nicaea: ed. M.-F. Auzépy, *La Vie d’Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le diacre*, Aldershot 1997, 145, 242. I assume that the author, who was anxious to prove that all ecumenical councils had met in churches, confused the First with the Seventh. St. Sophia was the episcopal church (Theophanes, 463) and is usually identified with the standing ruin of a basilica at the centre of the town, although there is no explicit proof of that. See Foss, *Nicaea*, 102.

<sup>41</sup> Iconoclasm likened to Arianism: see, e.g., Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus* I, *PG* 100, col. 244-5; id., *Apologeticus*, *ibid.*, col. 561-4; id., *Refutatio et eversio definitionis synodalis a. 815*, ed. J.M. Featherstone, *CC*, ser. gr. 33, 1997, ch. 5.5, 8.39, 19.78, etc. Photius: see *Homilies* 15 and 16 and my comment on them, *The Homilies of Photius*, Cambridge MA 1958, 239 f.



Constantine himself, one could assert that the first Christian emperor had given his sanction to the practice of sacred painting.

The images of the Fathers that were seen by Willibald in the 720's were certainly a group representation, hence a historical rather than a devotional picture. There is a possible reference to it in the *Admonition of an Old Man Concerning the Holy Icons* of c. 750, but the text is incomplete and unclear<sup>42</sup>. Theophanes, as we have seen, refers to it as still extant in c. 813. A few years later (820-828) the Patriarch Nicephorus, who had certainly visited Nicaea, speaks twice of the same composition. The church built in honour of the Fathers, he says, preserves to this day, in addition to other holy representations, the images of the Fathers and of Constantine in brilliant mosaic. The iconoclasts, he claims, tried to remove them, but did not succeed in doing so<sup>43</sup>. It is difficult to imagine that the iconoclasts, who saw themselves as standing in the tradition of Nicaea I<sup>44</sup>, would have wanted to do such a thing.

Representations of church councils are recorded in the Byzantine world from c. 700 onwards, but had probably existed earlier. The best known example was in the vault of the Milion at Constantinople. Here were represented the first five Councils, i.e. down to 553. The Sixth (680/81), also represented in the guards' quarter (Scholae) of the Imperial Palace, was added to the Milion series some time after 713. Pictures of all six councils were displayed in St. Peter's, Rome, in 712<sup>45</sup>. Such images forming a series were propagandistic rather than commemorative: they served to underline the adherence on the part of the emperor or the Pope to Christian dogma as defined by the councils and the rejection of such heresies as had been condemned by them. The mosaic at Nicaea appears on the other hand to have been commemora-

tive: it represented an event that had taken place at that very spot. We do not know when it was set up nor what it looked like, i.e. whether it followed what was to become traditional Byzantine iconography, of which the earliest preserved representative, depicting the Second Council, is in the Paris. gr. 510 of c. 880. A slightly earlier example (second quarter of the ninth century) is, however, preserved in a Carolingian manuscript and represents precisely Nicaea I<sup>46</sup>. Its iconography is a little different: Constantine, surrounded by his bodyguard, is on the left, a group of bishops on the right, while in the foreground a heap of books is being burnt. The copyist of the manuscript understood this act of incineration to depict the destruction of heretical writings (witness the label *Heretici Ariani damnati*), but it may show instead a famous incident of the Council: presented with denunciations of certain bishops, Constantine ordered them to be burnt unopened.

We shall not be concerned here with the subsequent history of the church of the Fathers, which was shaken down, along with St. Sophia, by the earthquake of 1065<sup>47</sup>. It was probably repaired and re-appears later as a monastery<sup>48</sup>. Two intriguing references are, however, worth mentioning. An ecclesiastical council met at Nicaea in 1232 "in the domed *oaton*" of what was then the Greek Patriarchate in exile<sup>49</sup>. The name *oaton* (*ovatum*, egg-shaped) was also applied to a hall in the Imperial Palace at Constantinople. It was there that both the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680/81) and the Quinisext (692) assembled. Could the *oaton* of Nicaea have been the patched up rotunda of Constantine's palace? Two years later (1234) a Latin delegation came to Nicaea and were shown the church in which the First Council had purportedly met. In it they saw a painting representing that assembly<sup>50</sup>. Was it the mosaic we have been discussing or a later substitute for it?

<sup>42</sup> Ed. B.M. Melioranskij, *Georgij Kiprijanin I Ioann Ierusalimljanin*, St. Petersburg 1901, xv. The iconoclasts, argues the Old Man, are opposing the great Constantine by calling Christ's image an idol, ἦν αὐτὸς ἐν Νικαίᾳ τῇ πόλει μεγάλως ἰστόρησεν δεῦρο καὶ ἶδε τὴν ἁγίαν . . . πρὸς τὴν σύνοδον, ἦν αὐτὸς τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ κελεύσει συνήθροισεν . . . καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ εὐλαβέστατος βασιλεὺς δεχόμενος ἄνωθεν στέφος ὑπὸ ἁγίου ἀγγέλου, τῇ πνευματικῇ χρωματουργίᾳ [lacuna] καὶ παρέδωκεν αὐτὰ τῇ καθολικῇ . . . ἐκκλησίᾳ. The author appears to be saying that Constantine was depicted in the act of receiving a crown from an angel (a flying victory?), but an image of Christ would not normally have been part of the same composition. On p. xxxv of the same text is a reference to a mosaic representing the Second Council.

<sup>43</sup> *Refutatio et eversio*, ch. 16.38 ff., 74.1 ff.

<sup>44</sup> See *Horos* of 754, Mansi XIII, 233B ff.

<sup>45</sup> On this subject see esp. Chr. Walter, *L'iconographie des conciles dans la tradition byzantine*, Paris 1970. On the political message conveyed by images of councils cf. A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin*<sup>2</sup>, Paris 1984, 65 ff.

<sup>46</sup> Chr. Walter, *Les dessins carolingiens d'un manuscrit de Verceil*, *CahArch* 18 (1968), 99-107.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Attaliates, Bonn ed., 90.

<sup>48</sup> As shown by the inscription discussed by me in 'Notes d'épigraphie' (as in n.\*), 354 ff.

<sup>49</sup> V. Laurent, *Les régestes des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*, I/4, Paris 1971, no. 1261. Cf. Foss, *Nicaea*, 111.

<sup>50</sup> Foss, *ibid.* J.P.A. Van den Vin, *Travellers to Greece and Constantinople*, Leiden 1980, I, 297-8, is mistaken in connecting this painting with the church of the Dormition.

In conclusion I should like to stress once again the importance of the siege of 727 in leading up to the outbreak of Iconoclasm. The event that is usually adduced as swaying Leo's mind, namely the eruption of Thera in 726, was, to use modern jargon, non-specific. The same may be said of the

defeat of the Helladics. But the deliverance of Nicaea, especially if it was seen as miraculous, carried the express blessing of the 318 Fathers, i.e. the highest authority in the formulation of Orthodoxy. Leo could now be certain that he was on the right course.

Cyril Mango

## Ο ΤΟΠΟΣ ΣΥΓΚΛΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ Α΄ ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΚΗΣ ΣΥΝΟΔΟΥ ΚΑΙ Ο ΝΑΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΑΓΙΩΝ ΠΑΤΕΡΩΝ ΣΤΗ ΝΙΚΑΙΑ

Η Α΄ Οικουμενική Σύνοδος (325) πραγματοποιήθηκε στην κύρια αίθουσα του αυτοκρατορικού ανακτόρου της Νίκαιας. Στο παρόν άρθρο υποστηρίζεται ότι πριν από τον 8ο αιώνα η αίθουσα αυτή μετατράπηκε σε ναό αφιερωμένο στους άγιους Πατέρες που έλαβαν μέρος στη Σύνοδο και κοσμήθηκε με ψηφιδωτό στο οποίο εικονιζόταν η Σύνοδος. Ο πρώτος γνωστός επισκέπτης, ο άγγλος προσκυνητής Willibald, ο οποίος επισκέφθηκε τη Νίκαια περί το 727-729, περιγράφει την αίθουσα ως ροτόντα με ομφάλιο, έναν αρχιτεκτονικό τύπο που ταιριάζει σε αίθουσα ανακτόρου.

Το 727 η Νίκαια πολιορκήθηκε από τους Άραβες, που κατόρθωσαν να καταστρέψουν τμήμα των τειχών, αλλά απέτυχαν να καταλάβουν την πόλη. Το ακριβές σημείο καταστροφής αναφέρεται σε επιγραφή του Αρταβάσδου (Εικ. 2), εντειχισμένη σε μικρή απόσταση δυτικά της πύλης της Istanbul στη Νίκαια (Εικ. 3): στην επιγραφή αναφέρεται ότι η σωτηρία της πόλης οφείλεται σε θεία παρέμβαση. Στην πληρέστερη αφήγηση αυτής της πολιορκίας από τον Θεοφάνη, τα γεγονότα παρουσιάζονται σαφώς παραποιημένα, ώστε η σωτηρία της πόλης να αποδίδεται στις απεικονιζόμενες μορφές των αγίων Πατέρων.

Σε ένα εγκώμιο των 318 Πατέρων από τον άγνωστο από αλλού πρεσβύτερο Γρηγόριο, που χρονολογείται μεταξύ των ετών 727 και 740, γίνεται επίσης αναφορά

σε μία «πρόσφατη» πολιορκία, στη διάρκεια της οποίας οι εχθροί εισέβαλαν στο ναό των Αγίων Πατέρων και τέλεσαν εκεί τελετουργίες της θρησκείας τους, αλλά εκδιώχθηκαν με θαυμαστό τρόπο. Την εποχή εκείνη το οικοδόμημα διετηρείτο ακόμη σε όλη του την αίγλη και είχε μία κρήνη ελαίου κοντά στην ανατολική είσοδό του. Ο Γρηγόριος δεν αναφέρεται στην απεικόνιση της Συνόδου.

Ο ναός των Αγίων Πατέρων πιθανότατα υπέστη καταστροφές από το σεισμό του 740 (για το λόγο αυτό η Σύνοδος του 787 έγινε στον καθεδρικό ναό της Αγίας Σοφίας επίσης στη Νίκαια) αλλά συνέχισε να υπάρχει με τη μία ή την άλλη μορφή του έως την τουρκική κατάκτηση. Συμπερασματικά επισημαίνονται τα εξής: 1. Το αυτοκρατορικό ανάκτορο με τη ροτόντα βρισκόταν πιθανότατα στο βορειοδυτικό τμήμα της πόλης, κοντά στην πύλη της Istanbul. 2. Η με θαυμαστό τρόπο διάσωση της Νίκαιας το 727 θεωρήθηκε από τον Λέοντα Γ΄ ένδειξη θείας επιδοκμασίας της θρησκευτικής πολιτικής του, γεγονός πιο ουσιαστικό και πιο σημαντικό από τη συχνά αναφερόμενη έκρηξη του ηφαιστείου της Θήρας (726), καθώς έφερε τη σφραγίδα των 318 Πατέρων που είχαν διατυπώσει το ορθόδοξο δόγμα. Οι εικονόφιλοι, από την πλευρά τους, κατέβαλαν μια κάπως αδέξια προσπάθεια (όπως μαρτυρεί ο Θεοφάνης) να παρουσιάσουν το θαύμα με τρόπο που να στηρίζει τις δικές τους θέσεις.