

## ST. NICHOLAS CHURCHES IN ANATOLIA AND THRACE

This paper contains a brief presentation of some of the monasteries and churches dedicated to St. Nicholas in Anatolia and Turkish Thrace. Our work on the subject was based mainly on previous research and a number of travel journals published between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The main areas of interest in this connection are Bithynia, Mysia, Cappadocia and Thrace in each of which we have carried out surveys<sup>1</sup>.

As concerns the other regions, we shall contend ourselves with briefly citing some striking examples. This paper, which will constitute the basis of an extensive future study, will hopefully shed some light upon the development of the St. Nicholas cult in Anatolia and Thrace.

*Central Anatolia (Galatia, Lycaonia and Cappadocia:* Fifteen St. Nicholas churches or monasteries are located in Central Anatolia. The oldest among these is the monastery of Germacoloneia, which is today a ruinous site situated near Sivrihisar<sup>2</sup>. H. Dernschwamm, who visited Germacoloneia between 1553-55 quotes the contents of the inscription in his journal<sup>3</sup>. The inscription states that the monastery was founded in 897 by the Great Strategos and Drungarios Gregoras during the reign of Emperor Leon VI and his son Alexandros and was dedicated to Saints Nicholas of Myra, Basileios of Caesarea and Hypathios of Gangra.

It is of interest to note that eleven out of the fourteen Nicholas churches in Cappadocia are located around Niğde, namely in Güzelyurt, Uluğağaç, Akyamaç, Helvadere, Kılağaç, Küçükköy and Sivrihisar - Aksaray<sup>4</sup>. The remaining three are to be found at Kayseri, Başköy and Mustafapaşa. The monastery of Mustafapaşa (Sinassos), the oldest dating example, consists

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1. This study is a revised and updated version of the paper "St. Nicholas Churches in Anatolia" read at the Second International St. Nicholas Symposium in Antalya in 1987. The surveys were carried out between 1975 and 1980 in Cappadocia, 1982 and 1989 in Bithynia and Mysia, 1987 and 1988 in Thrace.
  2. For the historical background of Germacoloneia see, K. Beike, *Galatien und Lykaonien*, TIB 4: *Denkschr. ÖWW. phil. hist. Kl.* 172, Wien 1984, 168-69.
  3. F. Babinger, *H. Dernschwam's Tagebuch einer Reise nach Konstantinopel und Kleinasien* (1553-55), München-Leipzig 1923, 179. Furthermore for the inscriptions see, S. Mitchell, *Regional epigraphic catalogues of Asia Minor II. The Ankara district. The inscriptions of North Galatia*, Oxford 1982, 97.
  4. For the churches and monasteries of St. Nicholas in Cappadocia see, Y. Ötügen, *Kappadokya Bölgesinde Bizans Mimarisi Araştırmaları*, Ankara 1980.

of four rock churches dedicated to Saints Barbara, Sabas, Nicholas and Menas<sup>1</sup>. The feasts of all four saints are celebrated during December. The exact date of the foundation of the Monastery, which also contains a hagiasma and two wall churches dedicated to John the Baptist and John the Theologist, has not been established, but the church of the Theologist contains an inscription dated 848. According to another inscription in the church of the Baptist we know that a certain Bishop Bartholomew of Damsa restored the building during the fourteenth century. The books by A. Lebides and N.S. Rhizos introduce two other Nicholas monasteries in the Niğde region. Several researchers point out that one of these, the monastery in Küçükköy (İlimason, Dylmisun), which has undergone restoration in 1834, was originally a Byzantine church<sup>2</sup>. This is supported by a map of the Konya region drawn by Kyriilos, the Metropolitan of Konya, in 1812<sup>3</sup>. The other monastery located at Kıçiağaç was visited in the early 1900's by H. Rott, who observes that it was in a ruinous state<sup>4</sup>. The St. Nicholas monastery in Kayseri is known to have existed in the nineteenth century<sup>5</sup>.

Minor rock churches are to be found at Akyamaç (Kanatola), Başköy (Katabassos), Sivrihisar, Uluğaç and Güzelyurt (Karbalı)<sup>6</sup>. Several of these were used as healing centres or votive places. An example is the underground church at Akyamaç, visited specially by malaria patients in search of cure.

1. For the monastery in Sinasos see, G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantin. Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce II. 1*, Paris 1936, 118-19, furthermore N.S. Rhizos, *Kappadokika, etoi dokimion historikes perigraphes tes erkhatas Kappadokias kat idios ton eparkhton Kaisareias kat Ikoniou*, Constantinople 1856, 92; A. Lebides, *At en monolithois monai tes Kappadokias kat Lykaonias*, Constantinople 1899, 122; I.S. Archelaos, *Sinasos*, Athens 1899, 38-42; H. Rott, *Kleinasiatische Denkmäler aus Pisidien, Pamphylien, Kappadokien und Lykien*, Leipzig 1908, 238-39.
2. Rhizos, *ibid.* note 5, 106; Lebides, *ibid.* note 5, 110.
3. H. Kiepert, *Memoir über die Construction der Karte von Kleinasien und Türkischen Armenien in 6 Blatt von v. Vincke, v. Moltke, Kiepert*, Berlin 1854.
4. Rott, *ibid.* note 5, 114; Lebides, *ibid.* note 5, 110.
5. Rhizos, *ibid.* note 5, 56; Lebides, *ibid.* note 5, 53-54.
6. For the churches in Akyamaç, Sivrihisar and Güzelyurt see, D. Pétropoulos -H. Andréadis, "La vie religieuse dans la région d'Akséray- Ghelveri", *EKMS* 12, Athens 1970, 9, 72-73, 75-76. For Başköy see, Rott, *ibid.* note 5, 151 and Jerphanion, *ibid.* note 5, 247-48. For Uluğaç see, Lebides, *ibid.* note 5, 110 and Rott, *ibid.* note 5, 112.

The existence of no less than five Nicholas churches in Güzelyurt is evidence of the extent of the St.Nicholas cult in the Hasan Dağı region. The fact that is gained particular strenght during the nineteenth century is evidenced by extensive restoration and construction activities carried out at that time. In this context, the St.Nicholas churches at Kūçūkkōy, Helvadere and Sinasos have undergone restoration in 1834, 1858 and 1868 respectively<sup>1</sup>. The feast of St.Nicholas was celebrated in Helvadere till early twentieth century. On that day, the church rite was followed by a colorful parade in which the local Muslims as well as the Christians took part, with the donator of the largest sum to the church carrying the famed icon of the Saint<sup>2</sup>.

*Thrace*: The most important religious complex dedicated to the saint is the Monastery in Midye (Medeia). An article written on the subject by S.Eyice and N. Thierry dates the complex to the period between the seventh and ninth centuries<sup>3</sup>. It is not known, however, when and why the monastery was dedicated to St. Nicholas. French traveller Hommaire de Hell, who visited the site in 1846, uses the term "Byzantine crypt" for the monument and does not comment on its name<sup>4</sup>. In 1912 K.Skorpil mentions a Nicholas icon and various other religious objects as having originated from this church<sup>5</sup>. F.Dirimtekin, without citing a source, states that the church apse formerly contained the representation of a "perspiring St. Nicholas" and that the sacred water of the Hagiasma was distributed to visitors on special days<sup>6</sup>. Pointing out that Hell had not seen the icons and the religious objects in 1846, Eyice stated that this

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1. For Sinasos and Kūçūkkōy see above p.124, note 5; for Helvadere see, W.J. Hamilton, *Reisen in Kleinastien, Pontus und Armentien*, Leipzig 1843, II, 222; Lebides, *ibid* note 5, 117; Pétropoulos-Andréadis, *ibid* note 10, 80-81.
  2. Pétropoulos-Andréadis, *ibid*.note 10, 124-125.
  3. S.Eyice-N.Thierry, "Le monastère et le source sainte die Midye en Thrace turque", *CArch* 20 (1970),47-76.
  4. X.Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse exécuté par ordre du gouvernement français pendant les années 1846,1847 et 1848*, Paris 1854 -60, esp. Vol.I,pl.XIII.1, 374-76, Atlas, pl.IX.
  5. K. Skorpil, "Arkeologiçeski beleški et Strance planina", *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique Bulgare* 3(1912-13), 235-62, esp.243-44, fig.141.
  6. F.Dirimtekin, "Aya Nikola kilisesi", *AMY* 5 (1963), 53-55.

material can not be dated to the Byzantine period and may have been transported to Greece in 1923 <sup>1</sup>.

We know certain Bektashi convents in the region were originally churches dedicated to St. Nicholas. Among these are the Binbırođlu Tekke to the east of Pınarhisar (Brysis) and another Tekke near Babaeski (Boulgarophygon) <sup>2</sup>. The former is known to have been existed in the first half of the nineteenth century; the latter was a well-known place of pilgrimage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and is widely covered in journals written during this period. The relics kept at the convent were revered by both Christian and Moslem population. The Christians believing them to belong to St. Nicholas, while the Moslems regarded them as the remains of the body of Sarı Saltık, a Moslem Saint believed to be identical with Saint Nicholas. A number of burrying places in Anatolia and Balkans, as well as in various European countries popularly known as the tomb of Sarı Saltık were widely-visited places of pilgrimage <sup>3</sup>.

A number of nineteenth century publications mention the existence of churches dedicated to St. Nicholas around Tekirdađ in Thrace. According to the data provided by A. Papadopoulos-Kerameos a monastery church located at the village Naıpköy or Mermer, near Kumbađ (Chrysomylon) is "on the location of an Early Christian church" <sup>4</sup>. According to the surveys we have conducted in Thrace, other currently non-existent St. Nicholas churches are located at Gazıköy (Ganos), Marmara Eređlisi (Heraklea Perinthus) and Gelibolu (Kallipolis) <sup>5</sup>.

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1. S.Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans devrine ait eserler", *Belleter* 33 (1969), 325-58, esp.343 note 28.
  2. F.W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, Oxford 1929, 54, 431, 578, 579.
  3. For the life of Sarı Saltık see, Hasluck, *ibid.* note 18, 429-33.
  4. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameos, "Archaiotes kai Epigraphai tes Thrakes", *Ellenikos Philologikos Syllogos*, Parartema to Vol. 16 (1886), 65-113, esp. 97. During the research carried out by Robert Ousterhout (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) and myself in 1987 and 1988 we failed to locate any religious monument in Naıpköy. For the results of this research see, Y.Ötügen-R.Ousterhout, "Notes on the Monuments of Turkish Thrace", *AnatSt* 39 (1989), 121-149.
  5. A. Dumont, "Inscriptions et monuments figurés de la Thrace", *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'épigraphie*, Paris 1892, 307-581, esp. (Ganos), 378 (Heraklea Perinthus), 435 (Kallipolis).

Certain sources mention another church dedicated to the Saint as being among the numerous churches ruined by a fire which occurred in Enez (Ainos) in 1867<sup>1</sup>. The "circular building", "close to the Gate of the Market Place" which forms part of the city walls in Vize (Bizye) is also a monument dedicated to St.Nicholas<sup>2</sup>.

*Marmara region:* Byzantine sources mention two Nicholas monasteries at Mount Olympos (Uludağ) in Bithynia. A small hermitage dedicated to the Saint, first mentioned in 844, is known to have existed at the south of Bursa (Prusia ad Olympum) known today<sup>3</sup>. Another monastery situated around the present village Gümüştepe (Misi); B.Mention and R.Janin places it on the stream Nilüfer at a point 500 meters east of the monastery of St.Andreas<sup>4</sup>. We were able to find during a survey in 1986 the foundations of one of the three monasteries located to the east of Nilüfer; an excavation would enable to locate this monastery exactly, which is mentioned in Byzantine sources in 1327<sup>5</sup>.

An edict dated 1349 and signed by the Emperor John Kantekuzenos the Sixth makes mention of another Nicholas church in the region<sup>6</sup>. The Emperor recognizes the church as being the property of a certain monastery in Vatopedi. According to the source the church is located at Pylopythion, which is identical with the present day village Sölöz to the south of İznik Lake. Today the village contains no medieval monuments at all.

A document dated 1272 records the Metochion of St. Nicholas belonging to the Church of St.Demetrios in Istanbul, which was built during the reign of Michael Paleologos the Eighth<sup>7</sup>. R.Janin places the church in the

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1. For the church in Enez see, G.Lambakes, *Periegesis*, *DChAE* 8(1908), 3-41, esp. 6 note 2; B.A.Mystakides, *Thrakika IV-V*, *Thrakika* 3(1932), 44-71, esp. 49; G.Lampauiades, "Odolphorikon", *Thrakika* 15(1941), 99-134, esp. 131. For the existing byzantine monuments in Enez see, Eytce, *ibid.* note 17. For the monasteries and churches near Enez, see Ötügen-Ousterhout, *ibid.* note 20.

2. C.Mango, "The Byzantine Church at Vize (Bizye) in Thrace and St. Mary the Younger", *Zograf* 11(1968), 9-13, esp. 10 note 6.

3. R.P.B.Mention, *L'Olympe de Bithynie*, Paris 1935, 118; R.Janin, *Les églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins*, Paris 1975, 140-141, 151.

4. Mention, *ibid.* note 24, 50, 92; Janin, *ibid.* note 24, 19, 138.

5. For the monasteries see Mention, *ibid.* note 24, Carte du Mont Olymp.

6. Janin, *ibid.* note 24, 99.

7. Janin, *ibid.* note 24, 97-98.

vicinity of the Nicholas Haglasma in Arnavutköy, the present-day Muradiye district of Armutlu, at the south of Izmit Bay. F.W. Hasluck visited an Haglasma at Bozburun (Kap Poseidon) to the west Arnavutköy, but does not mention any remains of a church<sup>1</sup>. T. Corsten describes in a recent study a "single-aisle church" among the ruins of a monastery, located at a distance of "2-3 hours on foot to Arnavutköy" but fails to give any information about the dedication<sup>2</sup>.

A small Nicholas chapel built in Post-Byzantine era has survived intact; it adjoins the southern side of the eighth century church of the Archangels in Sige (Syge)<sup>3</sup>. The complex was a religious centre of some importance and has for centuries constituted an extensively visited place of pilgrimage for the sick people. It was especially known for its miraculous power to cure the mentally disturbed.

A St. Nicholas Monastery on the Island of Marmara (Proconessos) was recorded in a source dated 1264; it was visited in the latter half of the nineteenth century by M.J. Gedeon<sup>4</sup>. According to F.W. Hasluck, a Nicholas church existed in the early twentieth century in Darica (Aritzion) to the south of Gebze<sup>5</sup>. C. Friedrich, who visited the Island of Imroz (Imbros) also in early twentieth century briefly describes two Nicholas churches on the island<sup>6</sup>.

*Black Sea region:* Our information relating to the two Nicholas churches constructed in Trabzon (Trebisond) between 1204-1461 is based on written sources<sup>7</sup>. The first of these was located near the Chrysokephalos church, known

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1. Hasluck, *ibid.* note 18, 466.

2. T. Corsten, *Die Inschriften von Apameia (Bithynien) und Pylai*, Bonn 1987, 159; in 1986 we came upon the existence of a church near Arnavutköy, when we were told, by the Director of the Gemlik Public Library, of a letter he had received from a villager informing him of the destruction of its floor mosaics.

3. H. Buchwald, *The Church of the Archangels in Sige near Mudania*, Wien-Köln Graz 1969.

4. M.J. Gedeon, *Prokonnesos*, Constantinople 1895, 113-14. See further F.W. Hasluck, *Cyzicus*, Cambridge 1919, 34; Janin, *ibid.* note 24, 211.

5. P.A. Baphefades, *To Riston (Aretsou)*, Athens 1926, 17.

6. C. Friedrich, *Imbros, Athen. Mitt.* 33(1908), 81-118, esp. 97, fig. 1 (Map).

7. For the churches and monasteries in the Black Sea region see, A. Bryer - D. Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos*, Washington 1985, for the monuments in Trabzon see, *ibid.* 229 no. 103-104 and 250.

today as the Ortahisar Mosque. The church and the founder's house were sold before 1426 by the nun Makrina Debalatissa to the Empress Theodora, who gave the property to the monastery of Pharos<sup>1</sup>. The second, a chapel from the nineteenth century "in the parish of St. Marina near Leontokastron", has drawn the attention of scholars due to the two inscriptions. One inscription built into the south wall dated 1281 suggest an earlier foundation<sup>2</sup>.

The Nicholas churches in the village Başar (Staman) and Ünye (Oinalon) near Maçka have also vanished<sup>3</sup>. The basically single-apsed St. Nicholas chapel located on an islet in Ünye was visited by many travellers in the nineteenth century<sup>4</sup>. Dated to Byzantine era, the chapel was restored in 1629 and again between 1836-38.

*Other regions* : We shall now make brief mention of a number of other Nicholas churches in Anatolia. Probably the oldest among these is the famous church in Demre (Myra)<sup>5</sup>. This church which owes its existence to the tomb of St. Nicholas was first constructed in the sixth century. It was rebuilt in the eighth, probably extended in the eleventh century with the addition of the annexes and restored in the nineteenth century. In his guide to Turkey published in the nineteenth century C.Wilson mentions two Nicholas churches in Muğla (Moballa) and Izmir (Smyrna)<sup>6</sup>. The St. Nicholas church in Isparta

1. Janin, *ibid.* note 24, 281-82. The autor states that the property was given to the Pantocrator monastery in Pharos in the year 432. On the other hand Bryer-Winfield, *ibid.* note 35, 229 no.103 claimed that it is the Metochion of the Pharos monastery in Trabzon.

2. Bryer-Winfield, *ibid.* note 35, 229. no.104.

3. Bryer-Winfield, *ibid.* note 35, 295. no. 48 (Başar), 103, pl. 27 b (Ünye).

4. For references see, Bryer-Winfield, *ibid.* note 35, 103.

5. For the history of the church see, U.Peschlow, *Die Architektur der Nikolaoskirche in Myra, eine lykische Metropole in antiker und byzantinischer Zeit*, ed.J.Borchardt, Berlin 1975, 303-360, esp. 341-348. For the life and cult of St.Nicholas see, G.Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos. Der hl. Nikolaos in der griechischen Kirche; Texte und Untersuchungen*, 2 vols., Berlin 1913-17

6. C.Wilson, *Handbook for Travellers in Asia Minor, Transcaucasia, Persia*, London 1895, esp. Map of Izmir.

(Baris) first visited by J.Arundell in 1834 and described by H.Rott in his book <sup>1</sup>. He notes the "single apse", the "vault and dome" and dates the church according to its architectural features to the early Middle Ages.

Ankara

Yıldız Ötügen

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1. F.V.Arundell, *Discoveries in Asia Minor including a Description of the Ruins of Several Ancient Cities and especially Antioch of Pisidia*, London 1834, I, 349; Rott, *ibid.* note 5, 8