

remembrance of death and what was profitable for the souls of all. Let us imitate, for the love of Christ, how Arsenius united himself to Christ, so that he no longer lived but Christ lived in him.⁵³

“But let all those, then, who have provoked God’s wrath by their continual sins but who wish to repent—even as I, the unworthy one—make provision to obtain a mediator, such as this great Arsenius, before the man-befriending God. For the thrice-blessed one endured martyrdom—and not for one month or one year. But rather, he persevered for fifty-five whole years, harshly chastening his flesh. He, therefore, is counted worthy of many crowns.” Though in life he loved to be forgotten, in death he is not forgotten. Through Saint Arsenius’ intercessions may we be vouchsafed the forgiveness of sins and the kindness and love of God, to Whom is due all glory, honor, and veneration to the ages of the ages. Amen.”

On the 8th of May, the holy Church commemorates our venerable Father MELES the Hymnographer, who reposed in peace.

On the 8th of May, the holy Church commemorates a whole COMPANY OF SOLDIERS who were slain by sword.⁵⁴

On the 8th of May, the holy Church commemorates the accomplishment of a supernatural wonder by the most holy THEOTOKOS and EVER-VIRGIN MARY, wrought through her august Icon at Kassiope, in behalf of Stephen who was unjustly blinded but then received orbs (oculi) in an extraordinary and mysterious manner.⁵⁵

The most holy Theotokos performed this miracle which we will speak of today. It occurred during the governorship of Simon Leone Balbi (Bayilos) on the Ionian island of Corfu or Kerkyra, in the year 1530 after Christ. During that time there was a youth named Stephen. He was returning to his village

⁵³ Gal. 2:20.

⁵⁴ The Greek word *speira* (σπεῖρα) is a word that describes a tactical unit in the Ptolemaic army. The word was often used to translate the Roman *manipulus* (a company of soldiers, one-third of a cohort). The standard of the latter originally bore a wisp of hay. It is revealed to us in the introductory two-line or couplet verses (*distichon*) given in the *Synaxarion* and *Synaxaristes* that the warriors of this Christ-minded company of soldiers were beheaded on account of their refusal to imitate other companies of soldiers who were Christ-slayers, that is, under orders to slay Christians.

⁵⁵ This miracle was taken from the published divine office, entitled *Hymologidion* (Venice, 1724), and incorporated in *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek).

from the city, after attending wayfarers with whom he wall from the city, they encountered mill carrying flour. Those trav and ill-disposed, said to one a flour and dividing it among or

But Stephen, as one attempted, as much as he wa check their proposed deed. contriving to do is a beastly ac malefactors, shall not escape and stop their ears,⁵⁶ would n to incite Stephen to cooperate would consent. The perpetrat the mill. They seized the flour with themselves. The youths own homes, weeping and wi how they were accosted and r them to learn the identity of t

Stephen, therefore, v came about only because the with the perpetrators. They contrary, had attempted to hi them in the crime. Those concealed themselves lest punishment by the criminal ju innocent, went about with approached him, inasmuch ; cast him into prison. Followi for an examination. When I place and affirmed that all stated, “with those who cor with them in the deed. I have in vain. The words of his te: the judge, who thought that

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from the city, after attending to some matter. On the road he met with other wayfarers with whom he walked in company. As they distanced themselves from the city, they encountered certain youths who were returning from the mill carrying flour. Those travelers in Stephen's company, being wicked men and ill-disposed, said to one another, "What prevents us from snatching their flour and dividing it among ourselves? No one is going to see us."

But Stephen, as one righteous, as soon as he heard their words, he attempted, as much as he was able, with exhortations and admonitions, to check their proposed deed. He addressed them, saying, "What you are contriving to do is a beastly act. If you should carry it out, you, as thieves and malefactors, shall not escape just punishment." But they, as asps that are deaf and stop their ears,⁵⁶ would not listen to counsel. Much rather, they preferred to incite Stephen to cooperate as an accomplice in the robbery. He, in no wise, would consent. The perpetrators, therefore, attacked and beat the youths from the mill. They seized the flour from them and went to their homes quite pleased with themselves. The youths who were assailed and robbed returned to their own homes, weeping and with empty hands. They recounted to their kinfolk how they were accosted and robbed. This resulted in a diligent investigation by them to learn the identity of the thieves and refer the matter to the governor.

Stephen, therefore, was accused together with the other thieves. This came about only because the victims of the crime had seen Stephen walking with the perpetrators. They did not realize, however, that Stephen, on the contrary, had attempted to hinder their assailants and that he refused to assist them in the crime. Those guilty of the theft, knowing they were liable, concealed themselves lest they should be apprehended and subjected to punishment by the criminal justice system. Stephen, nevertheless, since he was innocent, went about without any fear. When the governor's soldiers approached him, inasmuch as he was recognized, they apprehended him and cast him into prison. Following this, he was bound and led before the governor for an examination. When he was questioned, Stephen explained what took place and affirmed that all he said was the truth. "I had been walking," he stated, "with those who committed the theft," he admitted, "but I did not join with them in the deed. I have been wrongly accused." Whatsoever he said was in vain. The words of his testimony were deemed to be false in the opinion of the judge, who thought that Stephen must have participated with the others.

Consequently, he was wrongly convicted by the governor. Balbi imputed a crime to him of which he was guiltless. (Harsh were the penalties of the Middle Ages, involving various forms of corporal punishment that included mutilation, branding, flogging, amputation for theft, as well execution.)

⁵⁶ Cf. Ps. 57:4.

Stephen was then permitted to choose which penalty he preferred: either the loss of his eyes or the severance of his hands. Since the privation of his eyes seemed to him to be the lighter sentence, he chose that punishment. He was taken to the customary execution site. The innocent youth bewailed his plight as they escorted him. His both eyes were gouged out in the presence of a considerable crowd. His mother kept weeping and lamenting aloud, even after he was blinded. She then led him forth to the Church of Saint Lazarus for the sake of seeking alms.

Now most of the inhabitants of that place scorned and reproached Stephen, saying, "Justly hast thou suffered punishment; for, as a thief, thou hast seized that which was not thine." As it happened, very few folks were pitying him. He, therefore, thought, at the prompting of divine providence, to go with his mother to the Church of the Theotokos in the city of Kassiope (Cassiope),⁵⁷ which had a harbor some eighteen miles distant from the capital city, Corfu. Within that church there was housed the wonderworking icon of the most holy Theotokos, known as the Unfading Rose.⁵⁸ The icon depicted the Theotokos holding a rose in her right hand and the infant Christ in her left. Since the church was by the sea and possessed a suitable harbor, the ships, out of reverence for the most holy Theotokos, secured their boats by mooring there. In that place Stephen thought to abide and seek alms from those entering the church to venerate the holy icon of the Theotokos. His mother agreed.

Mother and son, therefore, went to the Church of the Mother of God. After they offered the customary veneration, they recounted to the monk residing there what had occurred. Bewailing themselves and sighing heavily, they described the unjust misfortune that they had undergone. They also told

⁵⁷ The town of Kassiope, situated thirty-seven kilometers north of the capital city (also called Corfu), has a population of 1,200 inhabitants. It is built upon the cape of Kassiope, opposite the Albanian coast. Kassiope's inhabitants are occupied mainly with sailing and fishing. According to history, the town was founded by Pyros who transferred Epirotians there from Kassiope in order to solve the problem of the scarce population on the island. According to another tradition, the town was founded by the Epirotians after the destruction of Epiros by the Romans. It is said that in the current location of the Church of Panagia Kassiopitissa, during the Roman years, stood the Temple of Cassius Zeus after whom the town was named. During antiquity, Kassiope was the second largest town on the island, and it thrived during the Roman years. From the walls (preserved until the 17th C.) and the medieval castle, built by the Andegaves, only ruins are currently called Pirogos. Apart from the beach of Kassiope, the surrounding area is characterized by developed beaches of unique natural beauty, attracting a multitude of tourists in the summer. Taken from <http://www.hri.org/infopenios/english/ionian/corfu/towns.html>.

⁵⁸ This appellation addressed to the Virgin Theotokos is derived from the Service of the Saturday of the Akathist during the Great Fast, Canon, Ode One.

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Stephen, however, by digging out of his eyes, was t slumber overtook him for onl most holy Lady Theotokos! against his empty sockets. I shouting and pondering alou beheld a Woman, resplenden moments. He considered it t he turned and noticed the lit c what has taken place?" After the lamps?" She, thinking th to look at him and said plain

Stephen, however, saying, "Mother, I truly see the Mother of God. What I z his mother what had taken pl she did not hear because sl "Surely, this is divine assist looked inquisitively upon St in the recently excised sock brown eyes, now they were she began to shout aloud and upon the name of the Mother hands and magnified the mc

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him the reason why they were looking for refuge at Kassiope. They sought from him a small *kellion* or cell in which to dwell. "There is a cell," he replied, "to which a certain brother monk has the key. Since he is presently absent, you may stay in the church." The mother of Stephen, very wearied from the journey by foot, thereafter, fell asleep quickly.

Stephen, however, by reason of the pains he was experiencing from the digging out of his eyes, was unable to take his ease. But at length, a very light slumber overtook him for only a short time. During the night—O thy marvels, most holy Lady Theotokos!—Stephen sensed hands touching and pressing against his empty sockets. He was awakened by the pressure that he felt, shouting and pondering aloud, "Who has touched my eyes so strongly?" He beheld a Woman, resplendent and dazzling with light, who vanished after a few moments. He considered it to be but a dream and not an actual event. But then he turned and noticed the lit oil lamps. He marvelled and wondered, "How and what has taken place?" After he awakened his mother, he asked, "Who has lit the lamps?" She, thinking that her son was digressing in his sleep, did not turn to look at him and said plaintively, "Hush, son, go to sleep!"

Stephen, however, would not keep silence. He kept insisting and saying, "Mother, I truly see the oil lamps. Indeed, I also see the holy icon of the Mother of God. What I am telling thee is not an apparition." He then told his mother what had taken place earlier. He explained that he had cried out, but she did not hear because she was sound asleep. His mother was thinking, "Surely, this is divine assistance at work." She then rose up, forthwith, and looked inquisitively upon Stephen's face. She observed that he truly had orbs in the recently excised sockets. She also noticed that while previously he had brown eyes, now they were blue. From her abundant joy and reverential fear, she began to shout aloud and weep. She kept glorifying and calling continually upon the name of the Mother of God. Together with her son, they clapped their hands and magnified the most holy Theotokos.

The shouts and clamor were certainly heard by the monk, who was the sacristan of the church, since he had arisen not long before in preparation of the coming Orthros Service. He became angry and reproved their conduct, saying from a distance, "You are disorderly and wicked people, for which you have justly suffered so wretched a plight." But Stephen and his mother began narrating the magnificent work of God. The sacristan, wondering at what was being recounted, disbelieved on account of the awesomeness of the miracle. He drew closer and entered into the main part of the church. He approached and beheld Stephen, who shortly before was eyeless. The monk, in his astonishment, now discerned that Stephen had both orbs and vision.

Filled with divine zeal, the monk departed immediately and hastened to the city. Arriving early in the morning, he was looking for Governor Balbi

in the courthouse. The monk found him and raised his voice at him, calling him a lawless man. Those standing by drove out the monk, saying to him, "This audacious act before the face of those in authority, which thou hast dared, is both unlawful and shows thee to be haughty." But the monk cried out louder, saying, "If the punishment of blinding imposed upon Stephen was not unjust, then God would not have granted him other eyeballs through the mediation of the Mother of God." The governor, hearing this statement, dispatched certain notable and trustworthy men to confirm the report. Upon their return, they confirmed the veracity of the monk's words. The governor had his small private ship, a caravel, with at least three masts, prepared. He entered the vessel with his dignitaries from Corfu. They set sail bound for the harbor of Kassiope. When they arrived and beheld with their own eyes this great miracle, they marvelled greatly as was fitting.

Governor Balbi, nevertheless, still had doubts. He was thinking, "This fellow is not Stephen or, perhaps, he was not truly blinded." Thus, he was in concert with the Jews who had not believe that the Lord fashioned eyes for the man born blind.⁵⁹ On account of the magnitude of the miracle, the governor and some others did not permit themselves to believe straightway. Balbi then returned to the capital. He summoned the executioner and questioned him, saying, "Didst thou gouge out the eyes of Stephen, even as I had ordered?" He assured the governor, saying, "Verily, I blinded him and, indeed, the eyes that I dug out are still found inside the basin." The executioner went and fetched the basin. He showed the contents to Balbi, who then believed that the miracle was true. At length, he remembered also that the eye color was different. He also brought to mind that he had seen the marks from the iron implement used for the excision; for they were still discernible on Stephen's eyelids.

This verification came to pass by divine providence, so that the miracle should be heralded and believed as indubitable. Hence, this was proved both by the sign of the iron marks and the eyes of a different hue. For if the eyes had been the same color, many would be saying, "They are the original eyes. They were not truly gouged out." On account of such incontrovertible evidence, therefore, the miracle was much talked of throughout Kerkyra; and it was generally believed. It was then that Balbi summoned Stephen and sought his forgiveness for the wrongful act, adding that "I brought it upon thee out of ignorance." The governor then thought to recompense the youth with rich gifts. He also attended him with much care and kindness. After this episode, the governor was diligent in having the courtyard of the Church of the Theotokos renovated.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See Jn. 9:1 ff.

⁶⁰ In 1537, during the failed Turkish siege of Corfu, the church, because it was situated (continued...)

Many of the people, O Lord Jesus Christ, were confirmed in their faith thus strengthened and mentioned in the divine writings. As for those who still remain in exceptional wonder, they were spoken of by the Lord through eyes to see, and see not; and

Let us all hasten, with reverence, to the light-provision of Mary and Theotokos. Let us pray for her to illumine the eyes of our hearts lest we should walk in the shadows of sins. As she is one possessed with the One born of her, let us pray for her mediation that we might be freed from every temptation of the flesh that we might be deemed worthy of the heavenly kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due glory, giving, honor, and veneration from the unoriginate Father and the Holy Spirit ever and to the ages of the ages.

Through the intercession
of Thy Saints,
O Christ God,
have mercy on us. Amen

⁶⁰(...continued)

on the coastline, suffered destruction. Venetian Admiral Nicholas Suriano came into the possession of the icon; nevertheless, sometime between 1670 and 1797, when the icon was returned to the capital, but at the Orthodox Cathedral of Tenedos, Kephallonia, and Zakynthos. In 1944, during World War II, the icon was transferred to the cathedral, which was destroyed during the war. It returned to its home at Kassiope.

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Many of the people, those who were weak in the Orthodox Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, were confirmed by means of this supernatural wonder. With their faith thus strengthened, they also came to believe in those things mentioned in the divine writings that are usually believed in the hearing alone. As for those who still remained unbelieving, not wishing to honor this exceptional wonder, they were put to shame. Such iniquitous persons were spoken of by the Lord through the Prophet Ezekiel who said that they "have eyes to see, and see not; and have ears to hear, and hear not [Ez. 12:2]."

Let us all hasten, with faith and reverence, to the light-providing Virgin Mary and Theotokos. Let us supplicate her to illumine the eyes of our understanding lest we should walk in the darkness of sins. As she is one possessed of boldness with the One born of her, let us beseech her mediation that we might be delivered from every temptation of the evil one and that we might be deemed worthy of the heavenly kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due glory, thanksgiving, honor, and veneration, with the unoriginate Father and the all-holy and good and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of the ages. Amen.

Through the intercessions
 of Thy Saints,
 O Christ God,
 have mercy on us. Amen.



⁶⁰(...continued)

on the coastline, suffered destruction. In 1590, it was rebuilt and expanded by the Venetian Admiral Nicholas Suriano. It was about that time that the church and icon came into the possession of the Venetians who were Roman Catholics. The icon, nevertheless, sometime between 1530 and 1590, was relocated to the capital, Corfu, in the Latin church of Tenedos. The Ionian islands—Kerkyra, Paxos, Lefkas, Ithaca, Kefhalonia, and Zakynthos—were under Venetian rule until seized by Napoleon in 1797, when the icon was returned to the Orthodox. The icon still remained in the capital, but at the Orthodox Cathedral of the Archangel Michael. In 1940, during World War II, the icon was transferred to the metropolitan's residence. The 14th-C. cathedral was destroyed during the Italian bombardment. In 1967, the icon was returned to its home at Kassiope.

crifice to the gods, Mokios gathered. Those present were the Christian martyr perform the new proconsul or attend the was brought quickly to the end en: "Take this fellow and bind as an apparatus that could tear tions. As soon as Mokios was were set in motion. Mokios was and fell to the ground below. leaved. The martyr, as a result, ace, the athlete of Christ was rdinary manner.

ximos, in a rage, gave other "Make arrangements that the ; cast to the wild beasts in the er." Three days later, the holy thrown to the animals as prey. xpected the semi-starved beasts the elder, the grace of God m. The animals in no wise at- ; rather, they fawned on him. s, heeding this spectacle, cried ve off torturing the soldier of ase the punishment! Spare him!" ould do nought but oblige popu- n. He, thereupon, dispatched , Perinthos.⁴ After Mokios was tand before Prefect Philippisius. case to Byzantium,⁵ the name of the Bosphoros. At the decision of ntly Mokios quickly received the learned of his appearance in that hanksgiving to Christ. Just before

gli, 40°59'N 27°57'E) in Thrace, is ara. It is at the junction of the Via Serb. Nis). Actually Diocletian had Herakleia, since the emperor was a

stantine I would choose Byzantium as bed into Constantinople.

the valiant contestant had his head severed by the executioner's sword, he prayed that God forgive the ignorance of his persecutors and asked that they come to a knowledge of the truth. As the saint's head fell under the sword, in 304, a divine voice from on high could be heard by the bystanders, welcoming Mokios' entrance into the heavens among the choir of saints. Saint Mokios received a double crown from Christ: as a priest and as a martyr of the Lord. The hieromartyr's relics were taken by some bishops who interred them one Roman mile⁶ outside of Byzantium. His veneration, at an early date, became popular in Byzantium as a holy unmercenary healer. A part of his relics is now found at the Russian Monastery of Saint Panteleimon on the Holy Mountain Athos.

Sozomen mentions a shrine by the fifth century.⁷ Later tradition ascribes the building of the martyr's church by Constantine I, who constructed it on the site of the temple of Zeus (or Herakles). The exact location of the large church and later monastery (9th-12th C.) of Saint Mokios is not known. It is generally believed to have been situated near the cistern of Mokios that was built on the seventh hill, beyond the walls of Constantine and not far from the Golden Gate.⁸

**On the 11th of May, the holy Church commemorates
the INAUGURATION or CONSECRATION
of the divinely preserved and extolled City of
CONSTANTINOPLE, specially dedicated to the
protection of our all-immaculate Lady,
the Theotokos and Ever-virgin MARY.⁹**

⁶ A Roman mile consisted of 1,000 paces of 5 feet each, and was therefore 5,000 feet.

⁷ Sozomen, *H.E.* 8:17:5.

⁸ The church, over the years, suffered many times from earthquake damage that required rebuilding. After a section of the church was destroyed in the 9th C., it was restored to a glorious state by Basil I. The church was also the scene of important court ceremonies. It housed the relics of Saint Eftymios the Younger (commemorated the 4th of January) and Saint Samson the Hospitable (27th of June). At the beginning of the 13th C., the church was mentioned as still splendid; but it came to be in a state of ruin by the end of the 14th C. John V used its stones to repair the walls near the Golden Gate. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, s.v. "Mokios"; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), s.v. "May 10th."

⁹ The mosaic—shown herein—over the southwestern entrance of Hagia Sophia, above the vestibule bronze door, portrays Emperor Constantine proffering a model of the city to the Mother of God. The inscription reads: "Great Emperor Constantine among the Saints." He is not clad in garments of his period, but those of the making of the mosaics, between the years 968 and 984, during the reign of Basil II. On the right of

(continued...)



*Saint Constantine the Great
Presenting Constantinople
to Christ and the Theotokos*

Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, when he arrived and overtook Byzantium, planned to build a larger city. Constantine was going to build "New Rome." After his victory over Licinius, he started some construction work in the small but strategic town of Byzantium. He already knew the neighborhood well, since he lived there for ten years while in the service of Diocletian and thereafter, for a short while, of Galerius. Constantine could not help but observe the town's unique and well-situated location. The two continents of Europe and Asia were separated at that point by less than two miles, and, at some points by less than one mile. The inlet known as the Golden Horn was a

natural harbor. The small peninsula from the Golden Horn to the Propontis was surrounded by water on three sides, leaving only one side to be buttressed with strong walls. The city was also within comfortable reach of the Danube and Euphrates frontiers. Communication between the capital and all parts of the empire was far easier at Byzantium than it ever had been with Rome. In years to come, as a military base for the Striking Force, the whole history of Europe was altered by this factor.¹⁰ Constantine, therefore, laid the first stone in the foundation of the wall, which was to mark the bounds of the new city or "New Rome" on the 4th day of November, in the year 326. The intention was to call it "New Rome," but this appellation failed. Before Constantine's death, the name Constantinople had been evolved by public opinion; and it abided.

After four years of work, the city was officially opened on the 11th of May, in the year 330. The regnant party formed a procession through the city, followed by multitudes. Hymns to the Theotokos, as patroness, were chanted. It would remain the "Queen of Cities" until, after a prolonged blockade and a foolish union with the Papists, it was overrun by the Ottomans on Tuesday, the

⁹(...continued)

the Virgin there is depicted Emperor Justinian the Great (527-565)—who is not shown herein—proffering Hagia Sophia to the Theotokos.

¹⁰ D. G. Kousoulas, *The Life and Times of Constantine the Great* (Danbury, CT: Rutledge Books, Inc., 1997), p. 389; and G. P. Baker, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Revolution* (NY, NY: Cooper Square Press, 1992), p. 260.

29th of May, in the year 1453. The Byzantines could hardly believe the hands of the infidel after one

The festivities and celebrations lasted several days. During one of those festivities from Athens, was brought to Constantinople. It was skillfully removed and replaced. A statue was set upon a lofty pedestal of white marble the base of four wide steps.¹² At its feet were enclosed the following inscription: "O Christ, I dedicated this obedient city with precious nails with which Christ was crucified. At its feet were enclosed the nails after the miracle of the loaves on September, Constantine's success was on their side and with priests chosen to pay homage to the founder."

On the last day of the festival, in dress uniform, carrying a banner of Fortuna now under its Greek name, the avenue of the Hippodrome (the Hippodrome and stopped seat). Constantine rose from the multitude, ...proclaiming the inauguration anniversary. The races in the magnificent circumscribed showing Constantine's new city was a magnificent show of art from Greece and other

There was, at that time, much less the capital of a sensibilities of the pagan pop-

¹¹ The Hippodrome of Constantinople, the site of royal proclamations, triumphs, and the chariot races.

¹² The column still stands today, known as the Column of Constantine. It came crashing down to earth in 1931. Kousoulas, p. 393.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 394.

Constantine the Great, the Christian emperor, when he arrived and overtook Byzantium, planned to build a larger city. Constantine was to build "New Rome." After his victory over Licinius, he started some construction work in the small but strategic town of Byzantium. He already knew the neighborhood well, for he lived there for ten years while in the service of Diocletian and thereafter for a short while, of Galerius. Constantine could not help but observe the town's unique and well-situated location. The two continents of Europe and Asia were separated at that point by less than two miles, and, at the narrow points by less than one mile. The town known as the Golden Horn was a narrow Golden Horn to the Propontis was only on one side to be buttressed with a double stone wall to the north, the Danube and the capital and all parts of the city had been with Rome. In years gone by, the whole history of Europe before Constantine, laid the first stone in the foundations of the new city or "New Rome" in 326. The intention was to call the city before Constantine's death, the official opinion; and it abided. The city was officially opened on the 11th of May with a procession through the city, the Virgin Mary, as patroness, were chanted. After a prolonged blockade and a victory over the Ottomans on Tuesday, the

Great (527-565)—who is not shown

Constantine the Great (Danbury, CT: The American Library, *Constantine the Great and the City of Constantinople*, 1992), p. 260.

29th of May, in the year 1453, about two and a half hours after dawn. The Byzantines could hardly believe that their God-guarded city had fallen into the hands of the infidel after one thousand, one hundred and twenty-three years.

The festivities and ceremonies for the city's inauguration lasted forty days. During one of those festive days, a colossal statue of Apollo, transferred from Athens, was brought to the Hippodrome.¹¹ The head of Apollo was skillfully removed and replaced with that of Constantine. After the parade, the statue was set upon a lofty porphyry-colored marble column in Constantine's Forum. Its height loomed eighty feet over the crowd, while it rested on a pedestal of white marble that was about nineteen feet high, which stood on a base of four wide steps.¹² At the foot of this column, we are told, there was the following inscription: "O Christ, Ruler and Master of the cosmos, to Thee have I dedicated this obedient city. Guard and deliver her from every harm."¹³ The precious nails with which Christ was crucified were placed in the statue's head. At its feet were enclosed the twelve baskets from which the fragments remained after the miracle of the loaves and fish. Every year, on the first day of September, Constantine's successors, with the Patriarch of Constantinople at their side and with priests chanting hymns, assembled in front of the column to pay homage to the founder of the city.

On the last day of the inaugural festivities, columns of pagan soldiers in dress uniform, carrying white candles, escorted a statue of the goddess Fortuna now under its Greek name "Tyche." Large crowds of spectators along the avenue of the Hippodrome acclaimed the procession. The pageant circled the Hippodrome and stopped before the imperial box, the *kathisma* (Greek for seat). Constantine rose from his seat in order to address the burgeoning multitude, ...proclaiming that a parade was to be held every year on the city's inauguration anniversary. The festivities ended with the traditional chariot races in the magnificent circus (Hippodrome). At the same time coins were minted showing Constantinople with a ship as the "Queen of the Seas." The new city was a magnificent sight. Constantine had removed statues and works of art from Greece and other parts of the empire to embellish his city.¹⁴

There was, at that time, no recognized Christian way to found a city, much less the capital of an empire. Constantine also was aware of the sensibilities of the pagan population of Byzantium and much of the military. He

¹¹ The Hippodrome of Constantinople was not only the sports arena but also the scene of royal proclamations, triumphal celebrations, and the city's public life.

¹² The column still stands today, though badly damaged by fire. The statue is long gone. It came crashing down to earth in 1105, killing a number of persons in its fall. Kousoulas, p. 393.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

felt that to some degree he needed to accommodate them. But he also wished to impress on them the fact that he had important plans for their city, for which he perceived that in order to succeed with them he would do it in terms that they could understand. Nonetheless, he would not allow them to interfere with the Christianization of the city. In some cases, a more drastic treatment was employed: the temples of Artemis-Selene, of Aphrodite, and of Apollos-Helios were all stripped of their treasures and revenues, and left with a neutralized cult. Inside of fifty years, paganism in Constantinople had no popular roots. It is generally agreed that Constantine never permitted the idolaters to offer sacrifice in his new capital.¹⁵

Constantinople was the first purely Christian city ever built. No pagan temple was open for public worship within its bounds. The old temples of Byzantium were preserved as public monuments. It is true that Constantine collected a number of important memorials of the old religion, especially those of artistic or historical interest, and preserved them in his city, where they formed a striking link with the famous past of Hellas.

At the new city's center, the emperor constructed a vast plaza—the Augusteum. It was paved in marble, adorned with classical statuary, and surrounded by imposing buildings. To the north was the ongoing construction of the Church of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom). To the east was the Senate building. To the south, overlooking the Propontis, was the imperial palace¹⁶ next to the Hippodrome. To enter the palace, one had to pass through an enormous bronze gate known as Chalke (“of bronze”). Right next to the palace were the so-called baths of Zeuxippos.¹⁷

In the Augusteum, Constantine had installed a marble column known as the Million. It was designed to display the distances of all parts of the empire from Constantine's city. There was a wide avenue, known as the *mesē*, that is “the middle street,” that connected the Augusteum with the Forum of Constantine, an elliptical plaza surrounded by colonnades. They ended at either end in two spacious porticos in the shape of a triumphal arch. In the middle—which tradition held was the exact spot where the emperor had pitched his tent when he was besieging Licinius inside Byzantium—was Constantine's porphyry column.¹⁸

The imperial palace, known as the Great Palace (*Mega Palation*), was a complex of buildings spread over a large area, with mighty walls and towers, so that it resembled a city within the city. One of the buildings, covered in

porphyry marble brought from Asia, those ladies who were pious and retreat provided them with a life of everyday life.¹⁹

Since Constantinople was the city of the citizens. Below the city, Constantinople water was brought in over the city. The colonnaded cisterns were built over the city. Two of the largest cisterns were built in the city. One of them, the cistern of the emperors, the cisterns arranged in sixteen rows, the cistern named after Philoxenos, the cistern. Indeed, Constantine had many cisterns for the construction of the city. The donors chiseled on stone. The cistern is a piece of evidence that the city was becoming a Greek city. The cistern, the Palace,” is 390-foot long and the cistern water as clear as when it was built by tourists.²⁰

Of the renowned Hippodrome world both by secular history and by the world remains today. There is an Egyptian a twisted serpent,²¹ and a crucifixion that have survived define the Hippodrome. The obelisks raced their chariots. The obelisks which followed the tradition of the Hippodrome seats were on both sides of the Hippodrome. At the northern end of the Hippodrome the storehouses for supplies of the Hippodrome, adjacent to the Hippodrome (*kathisma*) (the emperor's throne) of the throne, for the emperor's imperial box was the Church of the Hippodrome. To reach the Hippodrome down a spiral staircase. It

¹⁵ T. G. Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1996), pp. 256, 257.

¹⁶ The palace was located where the Blue Mosque is today. Kousoulas, p. 394.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 394, 395.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 395, 396.

²¹ This column was brought in to commemorate the victory of the emperor. Kousoulas, p. 396.

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Christian city ever built. No pagan statues. The old temples of the old religion, especially those dedicated to them in his city, where they were in Hellas.

Constantine constructed a vast plaza—the Forum, with classical statuary, and which was the ongoing construction project. To the east was the Senate House (Atrium Vestae), and to the west (the "Palace of the Augustus") was the imperial palace¹⁶ (the "Palace of the Augustus"); one had to pass through an archway ("the Arch of Augustus"). Right next to the palace

was installed a marble column known as the Column of Constantine, the remains of all parts of the empire were gathered here, known as the *mesa*, that is the *agostum* with the Forum of Trajan and the Forum of Augustus. They ended at either side of a triumphal arch. In the center where the emperor had pitched his tent in Byzantium—was Constantine's

Great Palace (*Mega Palation*), was a palace, with mighty walls and towers, one of the buildings, covered in

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is today. Kousoulas, p. 394.

porphyry marble brought from Rome, was set aside for women with child, that is, those ladies who were part of the imperial household. This maternity ward and retreat provided them with serenity and every comfort, far from the strain of everyday life.¹⁹

Since Constantinople had few natural springs, water was needed for the citizens. Below the city, Constantine constructed underground cisterns. The water was brought in over a long aqueduct, but it was also collected from rainfall. The colonnaded cisterns, many of them enormous in size, were costly. Two of the largest cisterns remain in good condition, even after so many centuries. One of them, the "Cistern of Philoxenos," had eighteen-foot columns arranged in sixteen rows of fourteen columns each. The cistern was named after Philoxenos, the rich Greek patron who underwrote the cost. Indeed, Constantine had many wealthy Romans and Greeks contribute lavish sums for the construction of the cisterns. In return, he had the names of the donors chiseled on stone. Practically all the names are Greek, an interesting piece of evidence that the Latin-speaking emperor's new Rome was rapidly becoming a Greek city. The second cistern, known as the "Underground Palace," is 390-foot long and 174-foot wide. This ancient cistern still supplies water as clear as when it was first opened. Both cisterns can be visited today by tourists.²⁰

Of the renowned Hippodrome—made known throughout the inhabited world both by secular history and the sermons of Saint John Chrysostom—little remains today. There is an Egyptian obelisk, a marble column in the shape of a twisted serpent,²¹ and a crumbling stone pillar. These three stone monuments that have survived define the outline of the *spina*, around which the charioteers raced their chariots. The obelisk stood in the exact center of the racetrack, which followed the traditional lines of an elongated ellipse. Tiers of marble seats were on both sides of the track, embellished with statues and works of art. At the northern end of the *spina* was a large building, housing the stables and the storehouses for supplies and chariots. At the middle point of the long side of the arena, adjacent to the Great Palace, was the imperial box containing the *kathisma* (the emperor's throne). There was a pillared platform right in front of the throne, for the emperor's standard-bearers. Immediately behind the imperial box was the Church of Saint Stephen; it, too, was part of the Great Palace. To reach the imperial box, the emperor strolled through the church down a spiral staircase. It was designed for the impressive entry of the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 395, 396.

²¹ This column was brought in from Delphi where it was erected centuries ago to commemorate the victory of the Greeks over the Persians at Plataea in 479 B.C. Kousoulas, p. 396.

emperor. Around the *kathisma* were seats for his high-ranking dignitaries. The first tier of seats, reserved for the more distinguished spectators, was some thirteen feet above the arena with several more tiers rising behind. Above and behind the seats at the top was a wide promenade which ran all around the arena, a spacious avenue of some 2,740 feet above ground, with a magnificent view of the Bosphorus. People walking on it were protected from falling off by a solid marble railing reaching almost to a man's breast.²²

Eusebius writes in his *Life of Saint Constantine* that the emperor "consecrated Constantinople to the Christian martyrs' God. He gave favorable and special treatment and attention by embellishing it with numerous sacred edifices, buildings, and memorials on the largest scale. He determined to purge the city from idolatry of every kind."²³

It is true that Constantine spent large sums for the construction of churches. One of them, as mentioned earlier, was Hagia Sophia. Another important church was dedicated to the Holy Peace (Hagia Irene), the Peace of God. It, too, was half-finished at the time of the city's inauguration. One church that was finished was that of the Holy Apostles, initially dedicated to the Holy Trinity.²⁴

Eusebius tells us that "Constantine, ever the builder for Christ, erected a magnificent church to the holy apostles in Constantinople. It was of a vast height, its walls encased from the foundation to the roof with marble slabs of various colors. He also formed the inner roof of finely fretted work, and overlaid it throughout with gold. The external covering was of brass, and splendidly and profusely adorned with gold, and reflected the sun's rays with a brilliancy which dazzled the distant beholder. The dome was entirely encompassed by a finely carved tracery, wrought in brass and gold."²⁵

Now buried under the great altar of the Church of the Holy Apostles were the relics of Saints Timothy, Andrew, Luke, Matthias, Iakovos the brother of the Lord, and the head of Saint Ephemina. Around a rotunda inside the church stood the memorials of the Twelve Apostles; and in their midst Constantine had placed the sarcophagus where his body was to be placed after his death. In later years, the Church would accord him the title *Isapostolos* (Equal-to-the-apostles), since, by his actions, he had lifted the Christian Faith

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The City's Patroness

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²² Ibid., pp. 395, 396.

²³ Eusebius, *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, Book III, Ch. XLVIII, *Logos Research Systems* on CD-ROM.

²⁴ Kousoulas, p. 397.

²⁵ Eusebius, Bk. IV, Ch. LVIII.

²⁶ Kousoulas, loc. cit.; Eusebius,

²⁷ Baker, pp. 266, 267.

²⁸ Kousoulas, p. 398.

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from obscurity and persecution. He now made it the dominant religion in the Roman Empire.²⁶

What was the emperor's intent in being buried in this way among such august company as the Lord's apostles? In the 330s, when the church was being built, the main attraction in it for most of the population of Constantinople was going to be the coffin of Constantine. The emperor, perceiving the spiritual level of the populace, took this into account. He knew that anyone visiting the church to see the emperor's tomb would necessarily find himself surrounded by the tombs of the apostles. This was Constantine's intention. But with the passage of time, and the further Christianization of the city, Constantius II (Constantine's son) built the imperial mausoleum adjacent to the church and had his father's coffin moved into it.

There was another problem that Constantine needed to deal with squarely. This city was going to be the empire's capital, but not many people lived in it. "To bring people to his city, Constantine used every practical inducement. To the poor, he promised handouts of food and clothing; to the rich, tax relief. He required all the officials in the imperial administration to reside within the walls of the city. He invited old patrician families from Rome to move to his new city and receive large tracts of land in Asia Minor, but not many responded at first. At length, a multitude of the emperor's friends from Rome and Milan came. They were soon to find that the new capital was flourishing rapidly. It offered openings for the investment of capital and for commercial enterprises. While Rome continued in the imposing grandeur of a dying city, Constantinople was growing into an active and progressive commercial capital. Thus, Constantine succeeded in transferring the center of the empire to the east."²⁷

He created a new aristocracy, the class of *clari*, and elevated new senators for his Senate. Within a short time, many Christians, especially from Asia Minor and the Balkans, moved to the city on their own to live in a place where the emperor and the majority of the residents shared their religious beliefs. Using the Greek language, Constantine named the city after himself, Constantinoupolis, the "City of Constantine." It, eventually, simply came to be called "The Polis," that is, "The City." Even when the Turks changed the name to Istanbul, they still used, somewhat distorted, the Greek words *is tin poli*, meaning "to the city."²⁸

The City's Patroness

On the birthday of the city, it was dedicated to our Lady Theotokos. New Rome's patroness has, oftentimes and in diverse ways, preserved and

²⁶ Kousoulas, loc. cit; Eusebius, Bk. IV, Ch. LVIII.

²⁷ Baker, pp. 266, 267.

²⁸ Kousoulas, p. 398.

protected her city from perils. Among these many inspiring events demonstrating her care and solicitude, we shall cite three stunning incidents.

I. In 626, the icon of the Theotokos dispersed the hordes of Avars (western Huns) and Persians who had come against Constantinople. This took place during the reign of Herakleios, when Chosroes ruled over the Persians, and Sergios was Patriarch of Constantinople. Saint Theophanes, in his *Chronographia*, writes: "With God's help, by the mediation of the all-praised Theotokos, when engaged in battle, a storm of hail fell unexpectedly on the barbarians and struck down many of them, whereas the soldiers of the Rhomaioi enjoyed fair weather. So the Rhomaioi routed the Persians and slew a great multitude of them.... When the Avars approached the city by way of Thrace, with a view to capturing it, they set in motion many engines against it. They filled the gulf of the Horn with an immense multitude, beyond all number.... But they were vanquished by God's might and help, and by the intercession of the immaculate Virgin, the Mother of God. Having lost great numbers, both on land and on sea, they shamefully returned to their country."²⁹

When the icon of the Theotokos was reverently borne aloft on the city's walls, the Theotokos herself defended Constantinople. If Judith proved to be a citadel for the city of Bethulia, how much more is the city of Constantinople kept by the most holy Theotokos? In the Song of Songs, we find: "I am a wall, and my breasts are as towers [Song 8:10]." From this event, that is, the lifting of the Avar siege of Constantinople, did the Church commence chanting the Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos and unwedded bride, the champion leader of the Orthodox. The Akathist Hymn consists of twenty-four stanzas, during which the congregation stands (since *akathistos* means "not seated").

II. In 716/717, during the reign of Leo the Isaurian, when Germanos was Patriarch of Constantinople, the Saracens had laid siege to the city for many months, but "God brought to nought the counsel of Caliph Souleiman through the intercession of the all-pure Theotokos."³⁰

Saint Theophanes comments that "the winter proved very severe in Thrace, so that for a hundred days the earth could not be seen beneath the congealed snow. In the meantime, the enemy Suphiam arrived with a fleet, that is, four hundred transports laden with corn, as did Izid with another fleet with three hundred and six transports, a store of arms, and provisions. When some of the Egyptian crew of the enemy sought refuge in the city, the emperor was informed that the two fleets were hidden in the bay. With God's help, thanks to the intercessions of the all-pure Theotokos, the adversaries were sunk on the spot. The Arabs suffered a severe famine, so that they ate all of their dead

²⁹ *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, ed. by Mango & Scott (Clarendon's Press, Oxford), AM 6117 (A.D. 624/625), p. 446, 447.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, AM 6209 (A.D. 716/717), pp. 541-545.

animals, namely horses, asses and killed an infinite number made war on them and massacred them at that time and made the Virgin, the Mother of God, protect those who call upon God in chastised for a short time on :

III. On the 18th day capture the capital, came down emperor and the army were a in warding off the Arabs. Patriarch Photios spoke later wrath of God comes upon invading nation has given clear was obscure, insignificant, a us.... They have ravaged the the town, they have harshly have become the plaything of of an eye, like a wave of the : devours the inhabitants of the nothing from man to beast... rivers was turned into blood.

"At that time, denuded were spiritually upheld by holy our God. We urged her to in our sins. We sought her inter impregnable wall. We begged crush their insolence, to defend flock."³⁴

Addressing his flock. has come to have recourse to refuge. Imploring, let us cry O Lady!' Let us set her up as

³¹ *The Great Synaxaristes* (in C thousand. By reason of disease flight.

³² *The Chronicle of Theophanes*

³³ "Homily IV, Departure of the (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, pp. 96-99.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

inspiring events demonstrating incidents.

versed the hordes of Avars at Constantinople. This took over a century. The Persians ruled over the Persians, Saint Theophanes, in his mediation of the all-praised city fell unexpectedly on the Persians as the soldiers of the Persians and slew the Persians and reached the city by way of many engines against it. These multitude, beyond all might and help, and by the aid of God. Having lost great ground returned to their country.²⁹

It is borne aloft on the city's walls. If Judith proved to be the city of Constantinople, we find: "I am a wall, in this event, that is, the lifting of the wall commence chanting the psalm, the champion leader of the psalm forty-four stanzas, during the psalm "not seated").

Isaurian, when Germanos laid siege to the city for the counsel of Caliph Souleiman.³⁰

The siege proved very severe in that it could not be seen beneath the walls. It arrived with a fleet, that it aided with another fleet with provisions. When some of the city, the emperor was

With God's help, thanks to the Persians were sunk on the walls they ate all of their dead

& Scott (Clarendon's Press,

animals, namely horses, asses, and camels. A pestilence fell upon them also and killed an infinite number of them.³¹ Furthermore, the Bulgarian nation made war on them and massacred 22,000 Arabs. Many other calamities befell them at that time and made them learn by experience that God and the all-holy Virgin, the Mother of God, protect this city and the Christian Empire; and that those who call upon God in truth are not entirely forsaken, even if we are chastised for a short time on account of our sins."³²

III. On the 18th day of June, in the year 860, Russians, hoping to capture the capital, came down from the north in two hundred ships. Both the emperor and the army were absent from Constantinople. They were engaged in warding off the Arabs. Hence, the inhabitants offered no resistance. Patriarch Photios spoke later of the appalling slaughter and destruction: "The wrath of God comes upon us for our transgressions;...the assault of the invading nation has given clear proof of the abundance of our sins. That nation was obscure, insignificant, and not even known until the incursion against us....They have ravaged the environs, they have laid waste the approaches to the town, they have harshly destroyed those who fell into their hands....We have become the plaything of a barbarous tribe....Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, like a wave of the sea poured over our frontiers, and as a wild boar devours the inhabitants of the land like grass, or straw, or a crop,...they spared nothing from man to beast....Everything was full of dead bodies; the flow of rivers was turned into blood."³³...

"At that time, denuded of all help and deprived of human alliance, we were spiritually upheld by holding fast to our hopes in the Mother of the Logos our God. We urged her to implore her Son, invoking her for the expiation of our sins. We sought her intercession for our salvation and her protection as an impregnable wall. We begged her to break the boldness of the barbarians, to crush their insolence, to defend the despairing people, and to fight for her flock."³⁴

Addressing his flock, the patriarch continued: "Beloved ones, the time has come to have recourse to the Mother of the Logos, our only hope and refuge. Imploring, let us cry out to her, 'Save thy city, as thou knowest how, O Lady!' Let us set her up as our intermediary before her Son our God. Let us

³¹ *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek) reports that a deadly plague slew two hundred thousand. By reason of disease and hunger, the barbarians were compelled to take flight.

³² *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, AM 6209 (A.D. 716/717), p. 546.

³³ "Homily IV, Departure of the Russians," *Homilies of Photius*, trans. by C. Mango (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Dumbarton Oaks Studies Three, 1958), pp. 96-99.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

make her the witness and surety of our compact. It is she who conveys our requests and rains down the mercy of her Offspring, scattering the cloud of enemies and lighting up for us the dawn of salvation."³⁵

Patriarch Photios and the inhabitants of the city then carried the Virgin's garment (*maphorion*) about the walls. Upon this occasion, the holy Photios said: "As the whole city was carrying with me her raiment for the repulse of the besiegers and the protection of the besieged, we offered freely our prayers and performed the litany." Continuing, he says, "Thereupon, with ineffable compassion, she spoke out in motherly intercession: God was moved, His anger was averted, and the Lord took pity on His inheritance. Truly is this most holy garment the raiment of God's Mother! It embraced the walls, and the foes inexplicably showed their backs;...for, immediately, as the Virgin's garment went round the walls, the barbarians gave up the siege and broke camp, while we were delivered from impending capture and were granted unexpected salvation. Thereupon, the Lord looked not upon our sins but upon our repentance. He did not remember our iniquities [Ps. 78:8], but looked on the affliction of our hearts, inclining His ear [Ps. 114:2] to the confession of our lips.³⁶...

"Since we have been delivered from the threat, and have escaped the sword, and the destroyer has passed by us, who have been covered and marked out with the garment of the Mother of the Logos, let us all, in unison with her, send up songs of thanksgiving to Christ our God Who was born of her.... Indeed, those to whom a common destruction was impending ought to consecrate and offer to God and His Mother a common hymn. We have enjoyed a common deliverance: let us offer common thanks. With rectitude of mind and purity of soul, let us say to the Mother of the Logos, 'Unhesitatingly, we keep our Faith and our love for thee. Do thou save thy city, as thou knowest how and willest. We put thee forward as our arms, our rampart, our shield, and our general: do thou fight for thy people. We shall take heed to the best of our strength to make our hearts pure before thee, having torn ourselves away from filth and passions. Do thou dispel the plots of them who rise up arrogantly against us. For even if we are amiss in the commandments made unto us, it is thine to set us straight; it is thine to proffer a hand to us who are kneeling and to raise us up from our fall.' Thus, let us address the Virgin, and let us not speak falsely."³⁷ After the Russian ships departed they were destroyed by a storm, and only a few escaped total wreckage. Saint Photios, enlightened by God, thought it prudent to Christianize these pagans. Indeed, this is what he did.

³⁵ "Homily III, The Russian Attack," *The Homilies of Photius*, p. 95.

³⁶ "Homily IV, Departure of the Russians," loc. cit.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 110.

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Kyriel (Cyril) and M They were two of the seven Kyriel, was born ca. 815. His Constantine (Konstantin). His brother's baptismal name or This well-known Thessaloni served as *droungarios*, a high men under his command. M: The family was also known

Constantine, the young toward study and the virtuous a heaven-sent dream. He beh show, from whom Constantine beauteous and notable maiden drawn to the most beautiful She was arrayed in splendid: He, therefore, chose for his Greek language means "wise would choose Wisdom as his

³⁸ In other books, such as the Dioscorides, perhaps by way distinguish him from the older holy Church on the 13th of Oct

On the 13th of May, the holy Church commemorates the venerable JOHN of Iveron, the kinsman of Saint Efthymios the New, who reposed in peace.

On the 13th of May, the holy Church commemorates the venerable GEORGE of Iveron, the kinsman of Saint Efthymios the New, who reposed in peace.

On the 13th of May, the holy Church commemorates the venerable GABRIEL of Iveron, who reposed in peace. He had heard a divine voice and went into the sea to retrieve the wonderworking Portaïtissa Icon (Keeper of the portal).



Portaïtissa Icon

Gabriel, the venerable priest-monk from Iveron, was conducting the ascetic life on the Holy Mountain of Athos. He lived during the same time of our holy Father Efthymios, whom we also commemorate today. Our Father Gabriel hewed a cell out of rock not far from Iveron Monastery. The Elder Efthymios, oftentimes, visited and discussed spiritual matters with the Elder Gabriel whom he respected. Now the Virgin Theotokos had a special commission in store for Gabriel. However, we must first preface the account of the miraculous icon of Iveron with the following background information.

During the iconoclast period, when Emperor Theophilus reigned (829-842), a dire persecution raged against the Orthodox. Many of the faithful were subjected to punishments and tribulations. The icons were discarded from the sacred temples and eradicated by fire. Throughout the empire, the emperor dispatched spies to uncover the icons and destroy them.

In the Bithynian city of Nicaea (mod. Iznik of Turkey), there was a wealthy, pious, and virtuous widow. She had one child, a son. This widow also possessed a wonderworking icon of the Mother of God. She cherished an extraordinary faith and devotion toward the Theotokos. Nearby her home, she erected a small chapel and placed the holy icon therein. She continually went to this chapel and offered up fervent entreaties before the icon. In the meantime, the imperial spies entered her house and observed the small temple through the window. In a threatening manner, they said, "We want money. If thou dost refuse, we will quickly execute the imperial decrees and punish thee

till death overtakes thee!" required—but the following

After the soldiers d the chapel. After many ho raised heavenward, the gr completing her prayer, she icon and brought it to the se; heavenly Queen and said, "(hast authority over all creat wrath and thy holy icon fro these words, she cast the hol The icon did not sink benea upright upon the crests of tl

The widow was he unto the Lord and His all-in loss of her treasure. The M her, saying, "I will send m languages may honor it thr also. As for thee, I shall tak icon." The widow then turn desire and hope. For our pie not prove to be in vain. Be hands of the tyrant! But I de this place. I, however, besc Greece." The son hearkene blessing, he left immediatel repaired to the Holy Mountai a monk, lived a God-pleasir living on Athos was by d disclosed to the hermits, wit the most holy icon. The mor Where this wonderworking all-seeing One.

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After the soldiers departed, the widow, by night, went with her son to the chapel. After many hours of prayer on her knees, with eyes and hands raised heavenward, the ground about her became soaked with tears. Upon completing her prayer, she arose trembling. With reverence, she took up the icon and brought it to the seashore. Again, she prayed with compunction to the heavenly Queen and said, "O Mistress of the universe, thou, as Mother of God, hast authority over all creation. Thou art able to deliver us from the imperial wrath and thy holy icon from sinking into the sea!" Straightway, after uttering these words, she cast the holy icon into the deep. Behold the marvellous result! The icon did not sink beneath the waves or float on the waters. Nay, it stood upright upon the crests of the waves, making a straight line toward the west.

The widow was heartened by this sight, and gave exceeding thanks unto the Lord and His all-immaculate Mother. Nevertheless, she lamented the loss of her treasure. The Mother of God then appeared to her, and consoled her, saying, "I will send my icon to a monastery, so that people, races, and languages may honor it through the centuries; and I will send thy son there also. As for thee, I shall take thee with me that thou mayest see me and not my icon." The widow then turned to her son and said, "Lo, my child! Fulfill our desire and hope. For our piety and reverence for the most-holy Theotokos shall not prove to be in vain. Behold, I am prepared—for her love—to die at the hands of the tyrant! But I desire not to witness thine own death. I cannot leave this place. I, however, beseech and entreat thee to depart for the regions of Greece." The son hearkened to his mother's counsel and, after receiving her blessing, he left immediately for Thessalonike. Once there, guided by God, he repaired to the Holy Mountain of Athos, nearby present-day Iveron. He became a monk, lived a God-pleasing life, and reposed in peace. Without a doubt his living on Athos was by divine providence, because, during his stay, he disclosed to the hermits, with the utmost detail, his mother's actions regarding the most holy icon. The monks noted the date and recorded the entire history. Where this wonderworking icon was hidden for decades is known only by the all-seeing One.

Then, in April of 1004, a column of fire, with a flame that reached from the sea to heaven, was espied by the monks of Iveron Monastery. Taken aback at this dread sight, they remained motionless and only cried out, "Lord, have mercy!" This phenomenon occurred during a number of successive days and nights. Consequently, the monks of the surrounding monasteries gathered at the beach; for they were astounded at beholding a fiery column rising above the icon of the Theotokos that stood upright upon the waters. Some put to sea in small skiffs that they might take hold of the icon. Though each besought the

Theotokos to allow him to receive her icon, yet, as each approached, the icon drew away.

Father John, abbot at Iveron, then summoned the brotherhood into the church. With tears, they conducted prayers and vigils, beseeching the Lord to vouchsafe their monastery the priceless treasure of the icon of His immaculate Mother. This continued for three days, until the Lord hearkened to their heartfelt entreaties and supplications. At that time, the Monk Gabriel dwelt at Iveron. He was of Georgian descent and distinguished for his discernment and austere conduct of life, together with his guilelessness and unaffected manner. During autumn, he would depart for the summit of the mountain where he found quietude in a rough and untrodden place. During wintertime, he came down and stayed either by the shore or inside the monastery. He always wore a hair shirt, and partook only of vegetables and drank simple water. In a word, he was as an earthly angel and a heavenly man.

The most holy Theotokos chose to honor the elder when she manifested



*Saint Gabriel, on Bended Knees,
Retrieves the Icon from the Sea*

herself unto him. Appearing in rays of heavenly light, she uttered, "Say unto the abbot and the brethren that I wish to give them my icon, as a protection and help for them. Enter the sea and walk upon the waves, so then all shall know my will and good pleasure for thy monastery. I have chosen thee because thou dost bear the name of my annunciation archangel, Gabriel. Thus, thou shalt

retrieve my icon." The Elder Gabriel then related this vision to the abbot.

The following day, according to the command of the abbot, all the monastery brethren proceeded to the seashore praying, chanting, censing, and bearing candles. Gabriel, out of profound reverence, entered the sea upon his knees and, miraculously, he hastened upon the waters as on dry land. Indeed, he was counted worthy to embrace the august icon in his arms. With extreme reverence and joy, the monks met the icon at the shoreline. When Father Gabriel placed the icon upon the shore—O Thy glorious wonders, O Lord!—a spring flowing with pure water gushed forth from that place. Even today, one may behold this wondrous phenomenon where fresh water springs forth within twenty feet of the briny sea. This miraculous spring also proved to be a source of healing for those suffering from diverse diseases. Straightway, the Iveron

monks, chanting a doxology Theotokos' icon to the main church. At length, it was installed

On the following day for Orthros as was his custom church. Now he and the brethren icon. Finally, the brothers Hence, with tear-filled eyes same place inside the main church they found the icon by the miracle of the icon and returned it repeated three times. Finally Gabriel and said, "Say to the Theotokos. Because I do not wish to be blessed only in this life but even in the life to come, live virtuously, piously, and with the compassion of my Son and Mother from Him for the sake of the brethren: behold my icon in the monastery and depart from you." When the monks were filled with inexpressible joy, they built a chapel for the wonderworking icon in an isolated place.

To this day, the icon is kept in a chapel. It has been named Portaitissa. She chose to be placed by the abbot, an assigned priest-monk, called Portaitissa. His office and prayer in this church were close to the old one, through which wrought boundless miracles, the blind, and those suffering from various ailments. (Directress)-type icon has been brought from Russia, and embellished with precious stones.

The Iveron monks have never first touched land. Annually, the holy icon of Portaitissa is taken to the sea made around the monastery church and seaside church where *agiasmata*

³⁹ The account of the Portaitissa

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monks, chanting a doxology and bearing many candles, escorted the Virgin Theotokos' icon to the main church of the monastery. Then, for three days and nights, they offered prayers of thanksgiving and supplication before the holy icon. At length, it was installed inside the bema of the main church.

On the following day, when the sacristan prepared to light the lamps for Orthros as was his custom, he failed to find the newly-appeared icon in the church. Now he and the brethren, for a long time, looked about in search of the icon. Finally, the brothers found it by the column at the monastery gate. Hence, with tear-filled eyes and prayers, they took it and bore it back to the same place inside the main church. However, again, the following morning, they found the icon by the monastery gate. Once more, the brethren took hold of the icon and returned it to the church. Nonetheless, this incident was repeated three times. Finally, the Theotokos appeared again to the Elder Gabriel and said, "Say to the abbot and the brethren not to hinder me hereafter. Because I do not wish to be protected by you, for I wish to protect you—not only in this life but even in the future one. All the monks in this Mountain who live virtuously, piously, and in the fear of God might take hope in the compassion of my Son and Master of all; for this grace I sought and received from Him for the sake of the monks. And, lo, I give you a sign! As long as you behold my icon in the monastery, the grace and mercy of my Son shall not depart from you." When the brethren learned this message from Gabriel, they were filled with inexpressible joy. Therefore, they blocked off this entrance to the monastery, and built a chapel by the monastery gate where they placed the wonderworking icon in an icon stand.

To this day, the icon of the Theotokos has chosen to rest within this chapel. It has been named *Portaitissa*, meaning "Keeper of the portal," because she chose to be placed by the gate or portal of the monastery. A specially assigned priest-monk, called *prosmonarios*, conducts Liturgy and a special office and prayer in this church daily. The monks have also made a new door, close to the old one, through which they may enter and exit. The icon has wrought boundless miracles, so that cures are received by demoniacs, the lame, the blind, and those suffering with every manner of sickness. This Odegetria (Directress)-type icon has been adorned with gold rizas (chasings/enchasing) from Russia, and embellished with precious stones donated by the tsars.

The Iveron monks have also built a church at the site where the icon first touched land. Annually, on Bright Tuesday (the Tuesday after Pascha), the holy icon of *Portaitissa* is taken from the chapel and a procession with litany is made around the monastery. The divine Liturgy is also conducted at this seaside church where *agiasma* or holy water is found.³⁹

³⁹ The account of the *Portaitissa* icon was taken from the "Pentecostarion," pp. 86-91, (continued...)

The Keeper of the Portal and Saint Barbaros

After the time of the Elder Gabriel there took place an event, worth mentioning herein, the results of which may be seen to this day. Now a close look at the Portaïtissa icon will reveal distinct and vivid facial features. But below the Virgin's chin can be observed a wound with dried blood which was sustained as follows. An Arab infidel and chief of the pirates, named Rachai or Rahahaee, sent his men to plunder Iveron. When they returned empty-handed, he asked the reason for their failure. They explained that a woman halted their assault upon the monastery. He scoffed at their explanation. Then wielding his sword, he hastened to Iveron. When he beheld the Portaïtissa icon, he angrily struck the sublime image of the Theotokos with his sword. When blood poured forth from the cut, he was aghast and quaked with fear. He then implored her forgiveness. Moved to profound repentance, he resolved to become a monk at Iveron. He entreated the fathers not to call him by his monastic name, that is, Damaskenos, but "Barbaros" or "barbarian." Thus, he finished his life in a God-pleasing manner, and came to be known as Saint Barbaros.⁴⁰

The Keeper of the Portal and Holy Russia

In 1651, there were 365 monks dwelling at Iveron. Since they were suffering economic hardships, they entreated the Theotokos for her succor. The Mother of God also desired to deliver them from financial concerns lest they be overburdened. Hence, she wrought the following miracle. Tsar Alexei's daughter suffered from paralysis in her legs. Her condition, diagnosed as permanent, was a great grief to her parents. Amid all this sorrow, the Queen of all appeared to the maiden and uttered, "Tell thy father to bring my icon, known as Portaïtissa, from Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos; then thou shalt receive healing." As soon as the maiden disclosed her vision to the tsar, he immediately sent an embassy to Patriarch Ioannikios II of Constantinople, requesting his assistance. The patriarch, straightway, ordered the fathers of Iveron to escort the Portaïtissa icon to the royal palace in Russia.

Now the truth is that the Iveron fathers feared to send the original icon lest they should lose their spiritual treasure to the Russians. What did they decide to do? They resolved to have a copy made by the pious iconographer and Priest-monk Iamvlihos. The fathers conducted a vigil and performed the Blessing of Waters. With this same holy water, they washed the original icon. Then, with the same water, they washed the cypress wood board for the new

icon. The iconographer was colors. Then they directed the brotherhood would conduct

Upon completion, escorted by Archimandrites. When the company of Iveron the royal couple, dignitaries suffering with paralysis, a chambermaid revealed that she leaped from her bed and exclaimed, "Have they left me behind?" She sought the streets seeking the icon and she complained how they were astounded at the sight of her little princess.

As the fathers had to leave the miraculous icon for what the Iveron fathers might reply that they required also promised to pray for their request by donating the Royal Palace. From his treatise honor the Portaïtissa icon, as the divine gatekeeper and received a cure, the Russians and the Iveron monks were the God-hating Soviets con-

On the 13th of May the venerable of Iveron Monastery

During the reign of the first pro-unionist with the John Veccos (1275-1282),⁴¹

³⁹(...continued)

in the Greek series of *The Great Synaxaristes*, 5th ed., Vol. XIV (Athens: Arch. Matthew Langes, Pub., 1979), s.v. "Tuesday of the Renewal Week"; and Andrew Simonopetritis, *Holy Mountain: Bulwark of Orthodoxy and of the Greek Nation*, trans. by John-Electros Boumis (Athens: Eptalofos Co., Ltd., 1967), pp. 173-176.

⁴⁰ Andrew Simonopetritis, *Holy Mountain: Bulwark of Orthodoxy*, p. 176.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-179.

⁴² It was Michael VIII Palaiologos of Rome. In 1273, despite the Michael browbeat a council in which also decided that every church name was to be mentioned

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d., Vol. XIV (Athens: Arch. Renewal Week"; and Andrew and of the Greek Nation, trans. , 1967), pp. 173-176. 'Orthodoxy, p. 176.

icon. The iconographer was then given pulverized holy relics to mix with the colors. Then they directed the iconographer to work while fasting, whereas the brotherhood would conduct an all-night vigil every week.

Upon completion, the new Portaitissa icon was brought to Russia, escorted by Archimandrites Pachomios, Cornelios, Ignatios, and Damaskenos. When the company of Iveron fathers arrived in the capital, they were met by the royal couple, dignitaries, and the people. However, the princess who was suffering with paralysis was unaware what was taking place. When the chambermaid revealed that the Portaitissa icon arrived, the former paralytic leaped from her bed and exclaimed, "What? Has the Mother of God come? Have they left me behind?" She then quickly dressed and ran through the streets seeking the icon and her parents. When she caught sight of her parents, she complained how they left her behind. No one answered, for they were astounded at the sight of her running. Hence, the Virgin Theotokos healed the little princess.

As the fathers had expected, the tsar requested if it were possible to leave the miraculous icon for him and his people. Moreover, the tsar inquired what the Iveron fathers might ask in return for such a benefit. The envoys, replying that they required economic relief, requested a Russian estate. They also promised to pray for him and his successors. The tsar more than granted their request by donating the Church of Saint Nicholas in Moscow, near the Royal Palace. From his treasury, he also made other contributions. Wishing to honor the Portaitissa icon, the tsar built a beautiful temple near the city gates, as the divine gatekeeper and protectress of all Russia. Hence, the princess received a cure, the Russian people were endowed with a priceless treasure, and the Iveron monks were assured of a considerable yearly income. In 1932, the God-hating Soviets confiscated the Church of Saint Nicholas.⁴¹

**On the 13th of May, the holy Church commemorates
the venerable and righteous MONK-MARTYRS
of Iveron Monastery who were drowned in the sea (1280).**

During the reign of Emperor Michael VIII Paleologos (1259-1282) and the first pro-unionist with the Latins and azymite Patriarch of Constantinople, John Veccos (1275-1282),⁴² both Iveron's abbot and thirteen monks were cast

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 177-179.

⁴² It was Michael VIII Palaiologos who opened negotiations on union with the Church of Rome. In 1273, despite the protests of Patriarch Joseph (1268-1275; 1282-1283), Michael browbeat a council into admitting the full primacy of the see of Rome. It was also decided that every churchman had the right to appeal to Rome and that the pope's name was to be mentioned in the Liturgy. The following year, Michael sent a

(continued...)