



St Nicholas News

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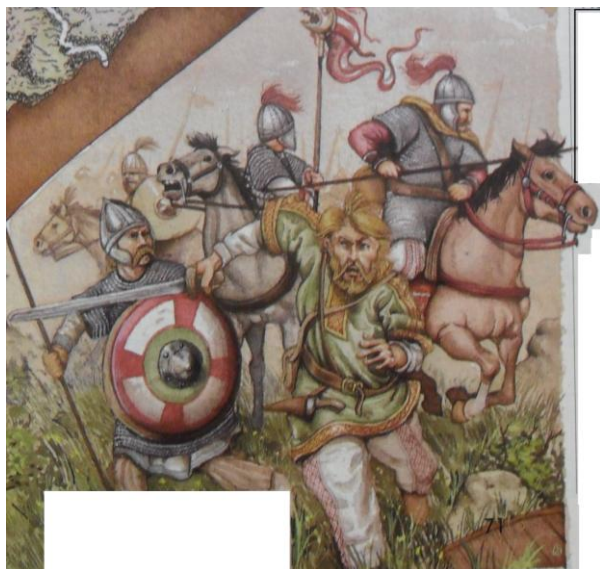
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THANKS TO THE TAIPHALES ST NICHOLAS ENTERS THE SCENE OF HISTORY

At the times of the emperor Constantine in Phrygia the Taiphales arose up in revolt.

With these words opens the most ancient (IVth century) text about St Nicholas.

THE TAIPHALES were a barbarian tribe who lived mainly in Dacia (today Rumania). Together with the Tervingi, pressed by Goths and Sarmatians, they moved from the East to enter the Roman Empire. At the time of the Emperor Constantine the Great (and St Nicholas), around the year 325 a.D., they crossed the borders of the Roman Empire.



THANKS TO THEIR REVOLT in Asia Minor (today Turkey), and precisely in Phrygia, a land close to Lycia, St Nicholas bursts onto the historical scene. The time and the circumstance of their being in **Phrygia** (far away from their land) constitutes one of the

most solid arguments in favor of the fact that St Nicholas history (*Praxis de Stratelatis*) has to be dated at the IVth century, some 10 or 15 years after his death. The details of their affair within the Roman Empire, in fact, hardly could be known by a writer who lived one or two centuries afterwards.

THEY CROSS ST NICHOLAS HISTORY because a writer, some few years after the Saint's death, wanted discharge the Roman army commander Nepotianus (who put down the Taiphales' revolt), from an accusation of conspiracy against the emperor. The first words of St Nicholas story are: *At the times of the emperor Constantine in Phrygia the Taiphales arose up in revolt.* For the writer there was **no need to say who** were the Taiphales **or why** they were a thousand km far away from their land. Factors that a writer of one or two centuries later would have certainly pointed out. For him, on the contrary, it is sufficient to say that the emperor Constantine sent to Phrygia three army

First words of St Nicholas' history

**Εν τοις καιροις του
Βασιλεωσ Κωνσταντινου
ακαταστασια εγενετο
εν τη Φρυγια
υπο των Ταιφαλων**

commanders to squash their revolt and that, on the way there, these officials became acquainted with St Nicholas and his Episcopal care. In other words, **if the Taiphales did not revolt**, Nepotianus would have not known St Nicholas, and the anonymous **would have not composed** the *Praxis de stratelatis*, **fundamental text of St Nicholas history**.

TAIPHALES WERE OF HIGHEST REPUTE exactly at the time of Constantine the Great and St Nicholas. **In the year 328** Constantine reinforced the northern borders of the Roman Empire by building bridges and fortresses (Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus*).

The fortresses in Daphne (Spantov, near Oltenita) resulted in a real thorn in Tervingi and Taiphales flesh. Therefore, they started fighting against the Roman garrisons. The emperor's son, Constantine II, succeeded in defeating them, but the Taiphales' cavalry inflicted heavy losses to the Roman army.

IN THE YEAR 332 (a year that fits perfectly with the life and old age of St Nicholas), the emperor transported the indomitable Taiphales and settled them in Phrygia (*Wolfram*, 114), the region confining with the Lycia of St Nicholas. This detail, not very known to the historians of the past, has been well underlined by the authoritative scholar Herwig Wolfram, who proceeded to an in-depth analysis of the sources (*Geschichte der Goten*, München 1979, Roma 1985; Italian edition, p. 114).



Coins made by Constantine after the victories over the Sarmatians and the Goths in the years 332 and 333.



THEIR DECLINE STARTED with the invasion of the Huns.

Saint Ambrosius (+397), as well as Zosimos (IV, 25, 1) and other writers, affirms that, after the invasion of the Huns, their fate was sealed (HW 135), and they dispersed and blended with other populations (Emilia-Romagna, Sarmatia, Aquitania, and so on).

IN THE PAST, HISTORIANS, ignoring the transportation of Taiphales in Phrygia in the year 332 (HW 114), influenced the scholars' opinion against the historicity of St Nicholas, being ironics about the Taiphales in Phrygia, instead than in Dacia.

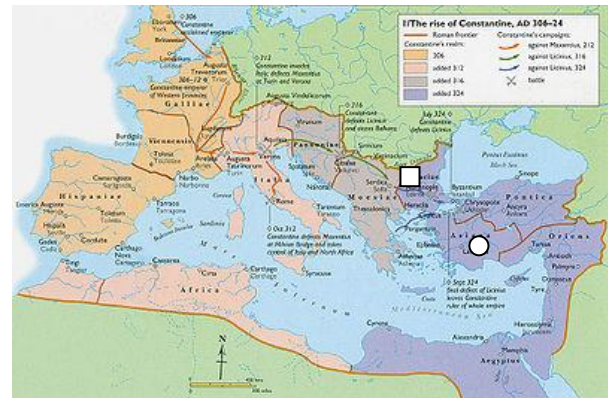
For example, the first critic of St Nicholas' history, Louis Sébastien Le Nain de Tillemont, neglecting that the Taiphales history had been written "at least" five centuries before Metaphrastes (Xth century), in 1699 criticized the Byzantine hagiographer this way: *Metaphrastes writes about a revolt in Phrygia by the Taiphales, a people of Sarmatia on the Danube. And he adds that Constantine sent the army commanders who entered the harbor of Myra. This way he let them do a trip five or six times longer than they should have* [Le Nain de Tillemont, *Mémoires*, afterwards repeated by Baillet and Falconius, p. 62].

The emperor Constantine the Great (+ 337).

St Nicholas' Episcopal activity took place during his reign.



Unfortunately, ignorance had more success than knowledge.



The white square: Dacia, where the Taiphales fought against Constantine. Often they are considered "Goths", but the ancient writers distinguish them from the Goths. **The white circle:** Phrygia, where the *Praxis de stratelatis* (St Nicholas History) puts their revolt.

GUSTAV ANRICH, who published the critical edition of St Nicholas' texts (Hagios Nikolaos, 1913/1917), being a good philologist analyzed the text taking into account the terms employed in it (like "egemon" for governor). Adding a few considerations about similar situations in the Justinian time, he inferred that the text goes back to the VIth century. A conclusion unacceptable from the point of view of critical history.

A correct philological analysis brings to this conclusion: the most ancient redaction that arrived to us goes back to the VIth century. It is not correct, on the contrary, to affirm that the story itself (the **original text**) belongs to the VIth century. In order to date the original text one should take into account the historical details and circumstances, and verify if these are more suitable for the VI rather than for the IVth century.

Philology in this case obscured, instead of lighting, history.

The rigorous historian doesn't consider the datum alone, but **carefully looks over details and circumstances.**

For example several authors write that at Constantinople there was a St Nicholas (and Priscus) Church at time of Justinian, dating it in the VIth century. This is not completely true. **Procopius** (*De aedificiis*) doesn't say that around the year 335 Justinian **built** the Church, but "**restored**". Therefore, it has to be dated at least in the Vth century.

Another example about the way to deal with history. All the critics accept that Eustratios of Constantinople in 583 affirms that he had read a Life (Bios) of St Nicholas.



The same critics go on discussing whether this Life is to be identified with the *Praxis de stratelatis* or it is a *Life* in the true sense of the word. In spite of the importance of the question, the basic point is another: *What's the place of this fragment in Eustratios' work? Why he relates the story?*

If Anrich would have put the question this way, his conclusion would have been different. In fact, *given that Eustratios' purpose is to show that the soul after the body's death is active, and that he wants to reach it by quoting authoritative patristic texts; considering, on the other hand, that an anonymous Life of the VIth century is by no means authoritative, the Praxis cannot be dated at the VIth century, but at least at the V, if not at the IVth century.*

Following Anrich's opinion, unfortunately, serious scholars too (like Hippolite Delehaye) have dated the Praxis at the VIth century, casting this way shadows on St Nicholas' history.

THE PRAXIS HAS TO BE DATED AT THE IVth CENTURY, and Anrich's thesis rejected. The author of the Praxis speaks of the Taiphales as if they were well known barbarians, giving a detail (their revolt in Phrygia) that no one a century later could know. In the VIth century well known were Goths, Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Vandals; but by no means the Taiphales. Only a writer of the IVth century (contemporary to St Nicholas) could know so well the Taiphales and their revolt in Phrygia.

Greetings from Bari
to all St Nicholas' Friends
Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants
and pre-Chalcedonians

