

Original scientific article

UDC: 616.98:579.842.1/.2(495.02)"7/8"

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3733165

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MEMORIES OF PLAGUE IN LATE 8TH AND EARLY 9TH CENTURY BYZANTINE HISTORIOGRAPHY

Abstract: In the late 8th and early 9th century two historical works, the Short history of Nikephoros of Constantinople, and the Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor, give evidence about the plague which appeared in Sicily and Calabria in 745/6 and spreading to the east, erupted in Constantinople in 747/8 during the reign of Emperor Constantine V. In this paper, we analyze the narratives offered by the two historians and place their historical representation of the plague in the context of the religious controversy over icons which shook Byzantium in the 8th and 9th centuries. It appears that both historians, themselves engaged in the controversy over icon worship, Nikephoros in the capacity of the patriarch of Constantinople, and Theophanes as a hegumenos of an orthodox monastery, utilized the description of the plague to portray the emperor Constantine V's rule as irreligious and devastating for the Byzantine state and church.

Keywords: Plague, historiography

Non MeSH: orthodoxy, icons, Constantinople, Constantine V

Ending his 1947 novel "The Plague", French philosopher and writer Albert Camus, while relying much on Procopius's description of the plague in Constantinople, concluded: "He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city." [1 p278]

The Mediterranean world of Classical and Late Antiquity, up to the early Middle Ages, experienced several epidemics of plague, which were embedded in the

memories of the Mediterranean civilization. We know of historical and medical descriptions of contemporaries such as Thucydides who portrayed vividly the plague in Athens (430 B.C.) during the Peloponnesian war [2 §48-§54], while physician Galenus of Pergamon offered an eye-whiteness account of the pestilence in the Roman world during the reign of emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180), and Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in North Africa, delivered a sermon (*De Mortalitate*) in the time of the plague of 249-270 which coincided in its beginnings with the reign of Emperor Trajan Decius – persecutor of Christians, of which certain mention is later found in the Chronicle of George the Monk in late 9th century Byzantium. [3,4,5,6,7 p465,13-466,15] In the 6th century, Procopius relied on the description by Thucydides to portray the plague which ravaged throughout the Roman empire in the days of Justinian the Great (starting in 541). [8 §22-§23] In fact, according to some researchers, the so-called Justinian's plague lasted more than two centuries, sporadically appearing in various parts of the Mediterranean in eighteen outbreaks until the year 749. Thus, the plague which hit Constantinople in 747/8, which is attested in the Short History of Nikephoros of Constantinople, and the Chronicle by Theophanes the Confessor was one of the last outbreaks of the great plague of Late Antiquity. [9] In this paper, we aim to offer an analysis of these reports by the two prominent Byzantine historiographers of the late 8th and early 9th century and to investigate whether their accounts of the plague had a more engaged purpose in the general complexity of their histories.

During the years 747 and 748, an abrupt and violent epidemic of plague devastated the population of Constantinople - the capital of the Byzantine empire. The plague appeared in the first years of the iconoclast emperor Constantine V's reign (741-775). Son and heir to the throne of the emperor Leo III (717-741) who officially proclaimed the Edict against icon-worship [10 p78-91; 11 p. 70 et passim], Constantine V had a troublesome start to his imperial rule. Namely, he had to face a rebellion by his brother-in-law Artabasdos in the first years of his rule which provoked a civil war in the Empire. In 746 the emperor managed not only to confirm his imperial legitimacy, but also to successfully recapture the city of Germanikeia in the region of Euphratesia from the Arabs, an event which foretold his future military victories by the way which Constantine V managed to stabilize the borders of the Roman empire towards the Arab invasions in the East, and Bulgarian offensive against the imperial lands in the Balkans. In other words, he proves to be an emperor who managed to successfully deal with many issues threatening to endanger the survival of the Byzantine state. Nevertheless, he was an iconoclast emperor, portrayed as a rootless and impious ruler in later iconophile histories, chronicles, and hagiographies. He conveyed the first iconoclast Council of Hierea in 754 when for the first time iconoclastic dogma was proclaimed official imperial orthodoxy and creed of the Church of Constantinople, at the same time anathematizing the leaders of iconophile party, John of Damascus, the former patriarch Germanus of Constantinople, and George of Cyprus [11 p189-97]. Constantine V's firm grip upon the Church of Constantinople was evidenced by his proclamation of the iconoclast patriarch Constantine II in 754

and his later disgrace, deposition, and execution by the order of the emperor, an act which was criticized even by the iconophile Nikephoros of Constantinople in his *Short history* who displayed certain sympathy towards the deposed and executed iconoclast patriarch Constantine II. [12 p214-22] However, all these events regarding the establishment of official iconoclast dogma by the intervention of the emperor, and his policy towards the Church of Constantinople occurred after the plague which hit Constantinople in 747/8. Nonetheless, it doesn't seem plausible to conclude that the outbreak of the plague triggered the emperor's iconoclastic policy. [13] Both Nikephoros and Theophanes, blame the impious emperor for the outbreak of the deadly disease. The descriptions of the plague of Constantinople during Constantine V's reign had the notion of iconophile argumentation of their authors, which points to the conclusion that they wrote their historiographical works intending to promulgate specific iconophile argumentation in the ant-iconoclast polemic of their time.

We shall first deal with the account of the plague given by Nikephoros of Constantinople in his *Short history*. The work was composed between 787 and 806, forty or sixty years after the event. Nikephoros was a born Constantinopolitan. He was educated at the imperial court where his father officiated the duty of an *asecretis*, imperial secretary, but was later expelled from the court due to his iconophile belief. Nikephoros later officiated the same duty at the court of the empress Irene, while Tarasios, the future patriarch of Constantinople was *protasecretis*. [12 p19-26, 14 p54-61] According to a passage in the *Synaxarium Constantinopolitanum*, where it is said that Nikephoros died in the thirteenth year of his exile (from Constantinople as a patriarch in 815) after completing his seventieth year, it appears that he was born in 758, during the reign of Emperor Constantine V. From his historical account it does not appear that he had personal memories of the plague in Constantinople in 747/8, which affirms the chronology of his life given by the *Synaxarium*, but his parents must have experienced the event, and Nikephoros himself might have listened about the disease from his parents' or other witnesses' narration. [14]

In the *Short history*, his only historical work, covering Byzantium's history from 602 to 769, Nikephoros mentions three different events concerning the plague in Byzantium. The first mention is from the account about the reign of the emperor Herakleios (610-641). Nikephoros says that in 619, as a result of Persian invasion on the eastern provinces of the Empire, first a severe famine developed in the state since Egypt was no longer providing grain, then he states that "Furthermore, a plague fell on the inhabitants of the City and a multitude died of it. On account of these circumstances, the emperor was overwhelmed by despondency and despair and decided accordingly to depart to Libya." [15 §8, 1-16]¹ Nikephoros proceeds to explain that it was the patriarch Sergios of Constantinople who persuaded the emperor Herakleios

1 ἐν τούτοις καὶ νόσος λοιμώδης τοῖς ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐνσκήψασα θανάτῳ τὰ πλήθη τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ διέφθειρεν. ὡν ἀπάντων ἕνεκεν πολλὴ δυσθυμία καὶ ἀπορία τῷ κρατοῦντι περιεκέχυτο. καὶ οἷχεσθαι διὰ ταῦτα πρὸς Λιβύην βουλομένῳ ἦν.

to give an oath that he will not abandon Constantinople. It was a certain turning point in Herakleios's imperial rule.

The second mention of plague in the Short history by Nikephoros is when he narrates about the circumstances in which the emperor Leontios was overthrown by the army previously sent to liberate Carthage from the Arabs. As a result, the rebelled Roman fleet elected the drungarios Apsimaros whom they proclaimed emperor in 698, under the name Tiberius. Nikephoros says that: "In the meantime, a plague fell upon the City and destroyed a multitude of men within four months." [15 §41, 1-34]² As a result, Tiberius Apsimaros was able to besiege and conquer Constantinople and overthrow the former emperor Leontios.

From these two accounts we can conclude that in his authorial act in composing the text of the Short history and creating a historical remembrance of the past, following his source material, Nikephoros composed two narratives in which plague plays a historical role in the events which marked the history of Byzantium in the 7th century. Nikephoros is rather concise in his description of the plague in the time of the emperor Herakleios (619), and the plague which occurred during the shift in power between the emperor Leontios to Tiberius Apsimaros in 698. On the other hand, he realizes the role which the plague had on the political events which he describes. In both accounts, the plague is in direct relation with the position and action of the emperor, and Nikephoros in both cases describes its effects on the population of the imperial city - Constantinople. In the case of Herakleios, the plague of 619 was a grave event that only added to other misfortunes which had befallen the Empire: Persian invasion of Palestine, Syria, and Egypt, famine, and lack of financial funds which affected the state economy. The portrayal of Herakleios faced with this multitude of obstacles was an image of a weak emperor. Nikephoros clearly states that Herakleios was distressed and even planned abandoning the Imperial City. It was the patriarch of Constantinople who managed to force the emperor to remain in the City and thus prevent the internal collapse of the state. This is one of the most negative images of the emperor Herakleios which can be read in Nikephoros's Short history in an overall positive description of his imperial rule [12 p99-134]. The second mentioning of the plague, in the year 698 is also linked with political events that took place in the Empire and Constantinople during the turbulent last decade of the 7th century. Unlike in the first account, Nikephoros here provides us with the information that the disease lasted for four months in Constantinople. But what is of greater significance in this account, although not explicitly mentioned by Nikephoros, is that as a result of the plague, the proclaimed emperor Tiberius Apsimaros managed to take the imperial city and depose the emperor Leontios. [16 p77-86, 10 p74-76] In general, we can conclude, up to now, that in Nikephoros's historiographical writing,

2 διὰ τοῦτο Λεόντιον μὲν δυσφημοῦντες ἀθετοῦσι, ψηφίζονται δὲ Ἀψίμαρον ὄνομα, στρατοῦ ἄρχοντα τῶν Κουρικιωτῶν τυγχάνοντα τῆς ὑπὸ Κιβυραιωτῶν χώρας, ὃν δρουγγάριον Ῥωμαίοις καλεῖν ἔθος, Τιβέριον αὐτὸν ἐπονομάσαντες. ἐν δὲ τῷ μεταξὺ νόσος λοιμικὴ τῇ πόλει ἐπέσκηψε καὶ πλῆθος λαοῦ ἐν μῆσὶ τέτρασι διέφθειρεν.

plagues shaped events in the turbulent times of state crisis, influencing and directing certain political events.

The third mention of the plague by Nikephoros of Constantinople is by far the most detailed, lengthiest, and in terms of Orthodox ideology most engaged account in the Short history, which is linked to the practice of icon worship and the heresy of iconoclasm. As a historian, Nikephoros is thus personally engaged in creating a specific historiographical account which will directly address the main issue of the day at a time when he composed his work. It is an event that took place only ten years before his birth, an event to which his parents were most probably witnesses, and as we will see, an event which he directly attributed to the iconoclasm of Constantine V.

Nikephoros's account of the plague of 747/8 comes after his narration how Constantine V succeeded Leo III as emperor of Byzantium, and after the account of the civil war between Constantine V and his brother-in-law Artabasdos, during whose short reign over the Imperial City in 741, Nikephoros doesn't fail to mention it, an official restoration of icon worship in Constantinople occurred. This last point is the only reference to Constantine V's iconoclasm before the description of the plague which occurred in 747.

“(Now a great plague) fell upon the Imperial City and the surrounding lands, and wherever this destructive disease prevailed it consumed and entirely annihilated all human beings. Only those who fled as far away as possible from those parts were able to be saved, surely by God's will. The pestilence was particularly intense in Byzantium. Frightful portents were suddenly to be seen: cruciform markings appeared on men's garments and holy cloths, upon doors and doorposts, and these phenomena aroused in everyone great fear and consternation as if they were foreshadowing an instant doom. Being out of their wits through terror and subject to hallucinations, men imagined that they were being accompanied by certain hideous strangers, whom they addressed as if these were known to them and later recounted to others the words that had been spoken on the way. Others, terrified by phantasms, saw certain people striking one another with swords. And, indeed, most of (these visions) were fulfilled. Nor were the survivors able to inter the bodies of the deceased and conduct their funerals, so few were they in carrying out so many to burial. For which reason they invented a device, namely, to lay planks upon harnessed beasts of burden and, after making this construction very wide, they heaped upon it the corpses without decorum and in whichever way. And as the beasts did not suffice, they used hand-borne wagons to carry out the multitude of the dead. The tombs gave out altogether, so that empty cisterns were filled with dead bodies. Fields were plowed up, vineyards and orchards dug up to serve the novel purpose of burying the immense number of bodies. As a result, most of the houses were completely shut up. The pestilence lasted for a year, after which time it gave way for the most part and, as in the beginning it had increased, so now it gradually abated. Those who were able to think aright judged that these (misfortunes) were inflicted by God's wrath inasmuch as the godless and impious ruler of the day and those who concurred with

his lawless purpose dared to lay their hands on the holy images to the disgrace of Christ's Church." [15 §67, 1-43]³

After the concluding remark that the plague was due to the emperor's irreligion and his iconoclastic policies, Nikephoros stated that as a consequence, Constantinople became almost deserted. Surprisingly, he doesn't avoid to mention Constantine V's measures to populate the City "from the lands and cities subject to the Romans". Furthermore, he proceeds to narrate about a successful naval battle near Cyprus against the Saracens from Alexandria in which the Byzantine fleet destroyed enemy ships with fire, and returned to Constantine V, thus admitting the emperor's military and political measures beneficial to the Byzantine state. [15 §68, 1-11] In a wider sense, Nikephoros's account of the 747/8 plague is an introduction to his storytelling about Constantine V's iconoclasm. In the next chapters, he will narrate about the First iconoclastic council in 754, and the martyrdom of St. Stephen the Younger and numerous other lay and monastic individuals who were true to Orthodox icon-worship and were thus martyred by the orders of Constantine V. In such a manner, the plague of 747/8 in Nikephoros's Short history clearly differ from previous descriptions of plague in his work, not only by its vividness and detail (these also have the purpose of argumentation, especially when compared with the two previous concise mentions in the work) but also as being an iconophile argument in criticizing the reign of Constantine V and his iconoclastic measures.

If the first two mentions of plague in the Short history were mentioned by Nikephoros as being of certain significance and influence upon political events in

3 εἰσπίπτει δὲ κατὰ τὴν βασιλεύουσαν καὶ τὰς κύκλῳ χώρας, καὶ καθ' οὓς τόπους τὸ φθοροποιὸν ἐπεφύετο πάθος, ἅπαν ἀνθρώπων γένος ἐπινεμόμενον διώλλυε τε καὶ ἄρδην ἐξηφάνιζε. διεσώθη δ' ἂν τις θεῖα πάντως βουλήσει, ὅστις ὡς πορρωτάτω τούτων τῶν χωρῶν ἀπέδρα. ἐπετείνετο δὲ τὰ τῆς φθορᾶς μάλιστα περὶ τὸ Βυζάντιον. τεράστια δ' οὖν καὶ δειμάτα ἐξαπίνης ἐφαίνετο· (τύποι σταυροειδεῖς ἔν τε ταῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων στολαῖς καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ἐσθημάτων ἐπανατέλλοντες, θύραις τε ὡσαύτως καὶ τοῖς τῶν θυρῶν σταθμοῖς,) ἃ δὴ φαινόμενα φρίκην μεγάλην καὶ ἀπορίαν πᾶσιν ἐνέτικτεν ὡς παραχρήμα τὸν ὄλεθρον μνηύοντα ἔσε-σθαι. ὡσπερ δὲ ἐξεστηκότες τῷ δέει οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ φαντασιούμενοι ἐδόκουν αὐτοῖς ὡς ξένοις τισὶ συνοδεύειν καὶ εἰδεχθῆσιν ἀνθρώποις, καὶ εἶτα ὡς γνωρίμοις δῆθεν τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσι προσαγορεύοντες, καὶ τὰ πρὸς τὴν ὁδὸν ὠμιλημένα ἐτέροις ἔπειτα ἀφηγοῦμενοι· καὶ ἄλλοι φάσμασί τισιν ἐκδειματούμενοι ἐώρων ξίφεσιν ἀλλήλους τινὰς βάλλοντας, καὶ δὴ οὕτω τὰ πλείστα ἐξέβαινον. οὐδὲ οἷοί τε ἦσαν οἱ περιωζόμενοι τῶν ἀποικομένων ταφῇ παραδιδόναί τὰ σώματα καὶ τὴν ὅσιν ἐπ' αὐτοῖς ποιῆσθαι, ὀλιγοστοὶ μάλᾳ πλείστους ἄγαν ἐκκομίζοντες. διὸ μηχανὰς ἐκ τινος περινοίας κατεσκεύαζον, σεσαγμένοις τοῖς ἀχθοφόροις ζῶεις σανίδας ἐπιστρωννύοντες καὶ ἐπὶ μέγα τι χωρίον ἀπευρύνοντες τὸ μὴχάνημα, οὕτω τε τὰ πλείστα τῶν πτωμάτων ἀκόσμως καὶ ὡς ἂν ἔτυχεν ἐπετίθεσαν. ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἄμαξι πρὸς τὴν ἐκφορὰν τοῦ πλήθους τῶν νεκρῶν φορούμεναι ὑπηρέτου, τῶν ὑποζυγίων αὐτοῖς μὴ ἐπαρκεῖν ἔτι δυναμένων. ἐπιλελοίπασιν δὲ εἰς ἀπαξ καὶ οἱ τάφοι, ὥστε καὶ τὰς ἀνδρῶν τῶν δεξαμενῶν νεκρῶν ἐμπλησθῆναι σωμάτων. ἄρουραι δὲ ἀνετέμονοντο καὶ ἀμπελῶνες διωρῦσσοντο καὶ κῆποι διεσκάπτοντο πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀπέιρων σωμάτων ταφὴν καινοτομούμενοι. ἐξ ὧν συνέβαινε τοὺς πλείονας τῶν οἰκῶν κατακλείστους πάμπαν γίνεσθαι. παρέτεινε δὲ τὰ τῆς θραύσεως μέχρις ἐνιαυτοῦ, καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνου ἐνεδίδου τὰ πλείστα, καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν, ὡσπερ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἠϋξάνεν, οὕτω δὴ καὶ ἐλώφηνεν ἡ φθορά. ταῦτα ἐκρίνετο τοῖς ὀρθὰ φρονεῖν εἰδόσιν ἐκ θεῖας ἐπισκήπτειν ὀργῆς, ἠνίκα ὁ τότε ἀθέως καὶ δυσσεβῶς κρατῶν, καὶ ὅσοι αὐτῷ συνήγουν τῷ ἀθέσμῳ φρονήματι, τὰς χεῖρας ἐπαφείναι κατὰ τῶν ἀγίων ἀπεικονισμάτων εἰς ὕβριν τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκκλησίας τετολμήκασιν.

the Empire, the third mention of plague was utilized in a personal interference of the iconophile author in his historiographical narration of events to display his notion of historical processes and the role of individuals in history. In other words, the plague in the time of Constantine V was brought upon the citizens of the Imperial City and the Empire by God's wrath due to the impiety of the emperor. Further in his work, Nikephoros proceeds to portray iconoclastic measures of Constantine V and to strengthen his interpretation of the causes due to which the plague occurred. This is additionally corroborated by Nikephoros himself. Namely, later on, as a deposed iconophile patriarch of Constantinople, he will once more return to the issue of plague in the time of Constantine V to designate his reign as heretical in his *Third Antirrheticus*. Writing in exile, sometime between 818 and 820, Nikephoros took as his task to represent the reign of Constantine V as full of troublesome events that foretold his heresy. Among earthquakes and strange heavenly portents, the plague was mentioned as well, with many details mentioned previously in the *Short history*: numerous victims, people escaping far from Constantinople into the countryside, shortage of graves where victims could be buried, strange visions of the victims which foretold them near death. However, Nikephoros adds several details not mentioned in the *Short history*. We find out that the emperor Constantine V did not reside in Constantinople, but in the neighboring land around and in Nicomedia during the pestilence. He was informed about the situation in the City by letters sent to him by those appointed to govern Constantinople in the emperor's absence. [17 p496A et passim] Thus, both as a historian, before his patriarchal office (from 806 to 815, later until his death in 828 as patriarch in exile), and during his career as the patriarch of Constantinople, Nikephoros utilized the notion of plague in Byzantium, in both his secular – historical, and theological works, to create a specific image of historical past in which plague had a mean of the portrayal of the good or bad nature of one emperor's reign.

Passing from the late 8th to the early 9th century, at the time when Nikephoros of Constantinople was in his seventh year of patriarchal office, we encounter another significant Byzantine historiographer whose *Chronicle* presents one of the most influential historiographical works in the entire Byzantine tradition of history writing. Theophanes, a born Constantinopolitan of aristocratic ancestry, in family relation to the iconoclast emperor Leo IV, later abbot of the monastery of Megas Agros on the southern shore of the Propontis, he composed a *Chronicle* from 284 to 813 as a continuation of the *World Chronicle* by George the Synkellos. [18 p38-77] Like Nikephoros, Theophanes participated at the Seventh ecumenical council of Nicaea in 787. All of this indicates that he was a historiographer of iconophile position and that his historiographical outlook was directed by such notions.

In his *Chronicle*, Theophanes mentions the Justinianic plague of 541 twice. He fails to mention the plague of the year 619 during emperor Herakleios's reign, obviously using different source material for that period, than Nikephoros before him, and mentions the plague of 698 in the time of the emperor Tiberius Apsimaros and

the plague of 747/8 in the reign of the emperor Constantine V. Unlike Nikephoros, it appears that Theophanes did not point to the causal connection between the plague and political or social issues of its time. Thus, he gives a rather restrained mention of the outbreak of plague in the year 541 during emperor Justinian's reign: "In this year, in October of the 5th indiction the great plague broke out in Byzantium. In the same period, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord was first celebrated in Byzantium on 2 February. On 16 August of the same 5th indiction, a great earthquake occurred in Constantinople, and churches, houses, and the city wall collapsed, especially the part near the Golden Gate. The spear held by the statue which stands in the Forum of the holy Constantine fell down, as well as the right arm of the statue of the Xerolophos. Many died and there was great fear." [19 p222, 22-30]⁴ Obviously, in Theophanes's historical outlook, the plague is only one among many omens or events which announce misfortune or tribulations in the Byzantine state. In the same manner, he mentions the plague under Justinian's rule but under the year 560/1: "In December there was a large fire in Julian's harbor, and many houses were burned as well as churches from the edge of the harbor as far as the quarter of Probus. There was also a big plague at Anazarbos and (elsewhere) in Cilicia and Great Antioch, as well as earthquakes. The orthodox and the supporters of Severus clashed with one another and there were many murders. The emperor dispatched Zemarchos, comes Orientis, and checked the troublemakers, many of whom were punished by exile, confiscation of property and mutilation." [19 p235, 7-115]⁵ Theophanes mentions an event from the reign of emperor Maurice (582 - 602) in which God punished the Avars who raided the shrine of the martyr Alexander with the plague which fell upon them. His account is based on the narrative by Theophylactos Symocatta's History. [19 p279, 10-26]

Theophanes, like Nikephoros, become a more engaged historiographer of plague as he reaches the time of Iconoclasm in Byzantium. Thus, his report on the plague in 747/8 is both more detailed and ideologically nuanced. Unlike Nikephoros, Theophanes is displaying a strict Orthodox iconophile position in portraying Constantine V's rule in general. He is critically disposed towards Constantine V from the outset of the narration about his reign. Thus, according to Theophanes, it is due to the sins of the Romans, that God had brought Constantine, "subverter of our ancestral

4 Τούτω τῷ ἔτει μηνὶ Ὀκτωβρίῳ, ἰνδικτιῶνος ε', γέγονεν ἐν Βυζαντίῳ τὸ μέγα θανατικόν. καὶ τῷ αὐτῷ χρόνῳ ἢ ὑπαπαντῆ τοῦ κυρίου ἔλαβεν ἀρχὴν ἐπιτελεῖσθαι ἐν τῷ Βυζαντίῳ τῇ β' τοῦ Φεβρουαρίου μηνός. καὶ τῷ Αὐγούστῳ μηνὶ ις' τῆς αὐτῆς ε' ἰνδικτιῶνος ἐγένετο σεισμός μέγας ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει, καὶ ἔπεσον ἐκκλησίαι καὶ οἶκοι καὶ τὸ τεῖχος, μάλιστα τὸ κατὰ τὴν Χρυσὴν πόρταν. ἔπεσε δὲ καὶ ἡ λόγχη, ἦν ἐκράτει ὁ ἀνδριάς ὁ ἐστὼς εἰς τὸν φόρον τοῦ ἁγίου Κωνσταντίνου, καὶ ἡ δεξιὰ χεὶρ τοῦ ἀνδριάντος τοῦ Ξηρολόφου· καὶ ἀπέθανον πολλοί, καὶ ἐγένετο φόβος μέγας.

5 τῷ δὲ Δεκεμβρίῳ μηνὶ γέγονεν ἐμπυρισμός μέγας ἐν τῷ λιμένι Ἰουλιανοῦ, καὶ πολλοὶ οἶκοι ἐκάησαν καὶ ἐκκλησίαι ἀπὸ ἀρχῆς τοῦ λιμένος ἕως τῶν Πρόβου. γέγονε δὲ καὶ θανατικόν μέγα ἐν Κιλικίᾳ καὶ Ἀναζαρβῷ καὶ ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τῇ μεγάλῃ, καὶ σεισμοί. καὶ συνέβαλον κατ' ἀλλήλων οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι καὶ οἱ Σευηριανοί, καὶ πολλοὶ φόνοι γεγόνασιν. καὶ ἀποστείλας ὁ βασιλεὺς Ζήμαρχον, τὸν κόμητα τῆς ἀνατολῆς, ἐκώλυσε τοὺς ἀτάκτους καὶ πολλοὺς ἐξώρισε καὶ ἐδήμευσε καὶ ἠκρωτηρίασεν.

customs” to rule over them. In his description of the civil war between Constantine V and Artabasdos, the later is described as “orthodox and defender of divine doctrines” since he restored icons in Constantinople. [19 p 415] In this manner, Theophanes has set the stage for his narration about the great plague.

“In the same year, a pestilence that had started in Sicily and Calabria traveled like a spreading fire all through the 14th indiction to Monobasia, Hellas and the adjoining islands, thus scourging in advance the impious Constantine and restraining his fury against the Church and the holy icons, even though he remained unrepentant like Pharaoh of old. This disease of the bubonic plague spread to the Imperial City in the 15th indiction. All of a sudden, without a visible cause, there appeared many oily crosslets upon men’s garments, on the altar cloths of churches, and on hangings. The mysteriousness of this presage inspired great sorrow and despondency among the people. Then God’s wrath started destroying not only the inhabitants of the City, but also those of all its outskirts. Many men had hallucinations and, being in ecstasy, imagined to be in the company of certain strangers of terrible aspect who, as it were, addressed in friendly fashion those they met and conversed with them. Taking note of their conversation, they later reported it. They also saw the same men entering houses, killing some of the inmates, and wounded others with the sword. Most of what they said came to pass just as they had seen it.

In the spring of the 1st indiction the plague intensified and in the summer it flared up all at once so that entire households were completely shut up and there was no one to bury the dead. Because of extreme necessity a way was devised of placing planks upon animals saddled with four paniers each and so removing the dead or piling them likewise one upon the other on carts. When all the urban and suburban cemeteries had been filled as well as empty cisterns and ditches, and many vineyards had been dug up and even the orchards within the old walls to make room for the burial of the human bodies, only then was the need satisfied. When every household had been destroyed by this calamity on account of impious removal of the holy icons by the rulers, straight away the fleet of the Hagarenes sailed from Alexandria to Cyprus, where the Roman fleet happened to be. The strategos of the Kibyraiots fell upon them suddenly in the harbor of Keramaia and seized the mouth of the harbor. Out of 1000 dromones it is said that only three escaped.” [19 p422, 29 - 424, 7]⁶

6 Τῷ δ' αὐτῷ ἔτει λοιμώδης θάνατος ἀπὸ Σικελίας καὶ Καλαβρίας ἀρξάμενος οἷόν τι πῦρ ἐπινεμόμενον ἐπὶ τὴν Μονοβασίαν καὶ Ἑλλάδα καὶ τὰς παρακειμένας νήσους ἦλθε δι' ὅλης τῆς ἰδ' ἰνδικτιῶνος προμαστιζῶν τὸν ἀσεβῆ Κωνσταντῖνον καὶ ἀναστέλλων τῆς κατὰ τῶν ἁγίων ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ τῶν σεπτῶν εἰκόνων μανίας, εἰ καὶ ἀδιόρθωτος ἔμεινε, ὡς Φαραὼ τὸ πάλαι. ἡ δὲ αὐτῇ λοιμικῇ νόσος τοῦ βουβῶνος ἀνέδραμε τῇ ε' ἐπινεμήσει ἐν τῇ βασιλίδι πόλει. ἤρξατο δὲ αἴφνης ἀοράτως γίνεσθαι ἐν τε τοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἱματίοις καὶ εἰς τὰ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν ἱερά ἐνδύματα <καὶ εἰς τὰ βῆλα> σταυρία ἔλαιώδη πλείστα. ἐγένετο οὖν ἐντεῦθεν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις λύπη καὶ ἀθυμία πολλὴ τῇ τοῦ τοιοῦτου σημείου ἀπορία· κατέλαβε δὲ καὶ θεομηνία ἀφειδῶς ὀλοθρεύουσα οὐ μόνον τοὺς ἐν τῇ πόλει, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ τῇ περιχώρῳ αὐτῆς. ἐγένοντο δὲ καὶ φαντασίαι εἰς πολλοὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ ἐκστάσει γενόμενοι ἐνόμιζον ξένοις τισίν, ὡς ἐδόκουν, καὶ βριαροῖς προσώποις συνοδεύειν, καὶ τοὺς ἀπαντῶντας αὐτοῖς ὡς δῆθεν φίλους προσαγορεύοντας καὶ διαλεγομένους. σημειούμενοι δὲ

By comparing Nikephoros's account of the plagues from the late 8th and Theophanes's from the early 9th century, it is evident that both were writing while relying on the same source. Theophanes's account has more detail concerning the plague. Thus, unlike Nikephoros, he tells that the "bubonic plague" (Nikephoros calls it pestilence or disease), came from Sicily and Calabria, spreading towards Constantinople through Monemvasia and Hellas. Like Nikephoros, Theophanes also portrays the events in Constantinople and omits to mention that Constantine V fled to the region around Nicomedia. This we know from Nikephoros's Third Antirrheticus. Both authors share the information that the number of deceased people in Constantinople overwhelmed the city's capacity to bury the dead and that various other means of burial had to be found. Both Nikephoros and Theophanes blame Constantine V's iconoclasm for the appearance of the plague. Unlike Nikephoros, Theophanes avoids mentioning Constantine V concerning the successful battle of the Roman fleet near Cyprus when the Arabs from Alexandria were defeated. Theophanes also avoids mentioning that soon after the plague Constantine V engaged into repopulating Constantinople with people from the surrounding regions. It is thought that both historiographers shared a common source. The mentioned differences could be since maybe Theophanes had a fuller version of the common source, unlike Nikephoros. However, it is evident that Theophanes is unrestrained in his adversity towards Constantine V, and that, if they shared a common source, then it would appear that Theophanes was the one having the more detailed one, but carefully chose only the details which helped him create an account fully blameful of Constantine V's iconoclasm, and on the other hand, carefully avoiding the data which point towards Constantine V's positive measures of repopulation of the Imperial City and the naval victory of the Roman fleet which could be ascribed to the emperor. If at all he utilized an abbreviated version of the common source, Nikephoros chose to mention the positive aspects of Constantine V's rule after the plague, while attaching the responsibility to the outbreak of the disease to the emperor's policy towards the Church and icon worship.

τὰ παρ' αὐτῶν λαλούμενα ἔσχατον ἐξηγοῦντο. ἐώρων δὲ τοὺς αὐτοὺς καὶ εἰς οἴκους εἰσερχομένους, καὶ τοὺς μὲν τοῦ οἴκου ἀναιροῦντας, τοὺς δὲ ξίφει τιτρώσκοντας. συνέβαινε δὲ τὰ πλείστα τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς λεγομένων γίνεσθαι οὕτως, καθὼς εἶδον. τῷ δὲ ἑαρινῷ καιρῷ τῆς α' ἰνδικτιῶνος ἐπέτεινε μειζόνως, καὶ τῷ θερινῷ ἐξεκαύθη εἰς ἅπαξ, ὥστε καὶ ὀλοκλήρους οἴκους κλεισθῆναι παντελῶς, καὶ μὴ εἶναι τοὺς ὀφείλοντας θάπτειν τοὺς νεκροὺς. ἐκ πολλῆς οὖν περιστάσεως ἐπενοήθη διὰ ζῶων σαγματουμένων ὑποτετρακανθήλους σανίδας ἐπιτίθειν, καὶ οὕτως ἐκφέρειν τοὺς νεκροὺς, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ εἰς ἀμάξας ἐπάνω ἀλλήλων τούτους ἐπιτίθειν. ἐν δὲ τῷ πληρωθῆναι πάντα τὰ τε ἐνάστεια καὶ προάστεια μνήματα, ἔτι μὴν καὶ κιστέρνας ἀνύδρους καὶ λάκκους, καὶ πλείστους ἀμπελώνας διασκαφῆναι, οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἔνδον τῶν παλαιῶν τειχῶν κήπους εἰς τὴν τοιαύτην προχωρῆσαι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων σωμάτων ταφήν, καὶ οὕτω μόλις ὑπαντήσαι εἰς τὴν τοιαύτην χρεῖαν. παντὸς δὲ οἴκου ἐκ τῆς τοιαύτης συμφορᾶς διαφθαρέντος διὰ τὴν ἀσεβῶς γενομένην εἰς τὰς ἱεράς εἰκόνας ὑπὸ τῶν κρατούντων κατένεξιν, αὐτίκα ὁ τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν στόλος κατέλαβεν ἀπὸ Ἀλεξανδρείας ἐν Κύπρῳ, ἔνθα ἦν καὶ ὁ Ῥωμαϊκὸς στόλος. ὁ δὲ στρατηγὸς τῶν Κιβυραιωτῶν ἐπιπεσὼν αὐτοῖς αἴφνης ἐν τῷ λιμένι τῶν Κεραμαῖα καὶ κρατήσας τὸ στόμιον τοῦ λιμένος, χιλίων δρομῶνων ὄντων τρεῖς μῶνους ἐξειλησάι φασιν.

These memories of the past plagues provided by the examples given by Nikephoros and Theophanes, fall in the long line of memorizing and narrating about the plague which sporadically, more often than seldom, appeared in Classical and Late Antiquity and during the Middle Ages. In the renewed Byzantine historical writing of the late 8th and early 9th century, the two most prominent historiographers did not avoid to narrate about the plague. [20] But they often, and especially Nikephoros in his Short history, attached the storytelling about the plague to political and ecclesiastical events that shaped the history of the Byzantine empire. Theophanes only did so in the account of Constantine V, but not in the part of the Chronicle dealing with the reign of the emperor Justinian who was generally considered a pious and orthodox emperor in Byzantine tradition. These historians were later succeeded by mid-ninth century Megas Chronographos, [21 p85-6] and late 9th century chronicler George the Monk who drew upon earlier accounts of the plague to create their own. [18 p114-20]

Rezime

Vizantijske predstave o kugi krajem VIII i početkom IX veka nalaze se u dva istorijska dela, Kratkoj istoriji Nikifora Carigradskog, budućeg patrijarha Konstantinopolja (806-815), i Hronici Teofana, igumana jednog od manastira na južnoj obali Propontide i kasnijeg ispovednika za svete ikone (oko 815. godine). Dva autora su poznata kao predvodnici stranke ikonopoštovatelja za vreme drugog talasa ikonoborstva (od 815. do 843. godine), ali koji su imali značajne karijere i pre izbijanja drugog talasa ikonoborstva, kada su i napisali svoja dela. Njihove predstave o kugi u Vizantiji koje su ostavili u svojim delima otkrivaju nam njihov autorski postupak kao istoriografa. Naime, obojica su sastavili dela koja se bave istorijom Vizantije u prošlosti. Nikiforova Kratka istorija pokriva period od 602. do 769. godine i nastala je između 787. i 806. godine, dok Teofanova Hronika pokriva period od 284. do 813. godine, odnosno vremena samog Teofana. U Nikiforovoj Kratkoj istoriji pominje se kuga u doba cara Iraklija (610-641) koja se pojavila u Carigradu 619. godine uporedo sa persijskim osvajanjima istočnih provincija, Sirije, Palestine i Egipta, usled čega je prestonica bila lišena isporuka pšenice i novčanih prihoda od poreza. Sve je ovo, prema kazivanju Nikifora, nateralo cara Iraklija da abdicira i povuče se iz Carigrada u Kartaginu. Patrijarh Sergije Carigradski je uspeo da obaveže cara da ne napušta presto i na taj način je spasio unutrašnje jedinstvo i poredak Carstva. Drugi slučaj opisa kuge u Kratkoj istoriji je u vezi sa Nikiforovim pripovedanjem o građanskom ratu u Vizantiji krajem VII veka kada je pretendent na carski presto, Tiberije Apsimar 698. godine upravo zahvaljujući kugi koja je izbila u Carigradu i trajala četiri meseca, uspeo da osvoji prestonicu i svrgne dotadašnjeg cara Leontija, domogavši se carskog prestola. Iz ovih opisa se vidi da je Nikifor epidemije kuge uvek dovodio u vezu sa političkim dešavanjima u Carstvu i sa postupcima vizantijskih careva, da li kao posledicama epidemije, ili uticaja epidemije na tok događaja. Njegov opis kuge koja je

izbila u Carigradu 747/8. godine za vreme vladavine ikonoboračkog cara Konstantina V je međutim nešto drugačiji. On se izdvaja pre svega po opširnosti i detaljima u opisu, kao i u piščevom otvorenom iznošenju sopstvenog stava da je do epidemije kuge i velikog stradanja stanovništva Carigrada došlo zbog careve jeresi i progona ikonopoštovatelja. Zapravo, u Nikiforovoj naraciji opis kuge u vreme Konstantina V predstavlja ujedno i početak piščevog opisa carevog ikonoborstva. Teofanova Hronika najpre daje opis kuge koja je izbila u Rimskom carstvu za vreme vladavine cara Justinijana (527-565). Teofanov opis kuge je uzgredan, i pisac prelazi preko ovog događaja sasvim površno, navodeći epidemiju kao jednu od pošasti uz zemljotrese, gladi i nebeska znamenja koja su zabeležena u tom dobu. Međutim, kada pominje kugu u doba vladavine cara Mavrikija, on je dovodi u vezu sa Božijim gnevom na avarskog Kagana i njegovu vojsku koja je u jednom od svojih pljačkaških pohoda u Trakiji opustošila svetilište jednog od lokalnih svetitelja mučenika. Teofan koristi priliku da kugu poveže sa Božijim gnevom koji je kaznio varvare za svetogrđe i uopšte, za napad na Rimsko carstvo. Kada opisuje kugu iz 747/8. koju u Kratkoj istoriji opisuje i Nikifor, on je znatno detaljniji u prikazu zaraze. Jasno je da su dva vizantijska istoričara u opisima ove kuge imali na raspolaganju isti izvor. Premda Teofan daje izveštaj koji sadrži podatke koje ne donosi Nikifor. Kao i Nikifor, Teofan je iskoristio prikaz kuge u vreme cara Konstantina V da naglasi carevu jeres i progon Crkve i ikonopoštovanja u Vizantiji, te da pojavu kuge protumači kao izraz Božijeg gneva. Iz poređenja dva opisa, koje pružaju Nikifor i Teofan, proizilazi da su obojica narative o kugi u Vizantiji 747/8. godine iskoristili kao literarno sredstvo koje je trebalo da podupre njihov ikonopoštovateljski stav, odnosno kritiku ikonoborstva cara Konstantina V.

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Received: 17/11/2019

Reviewed: 29/11/2019

Accepted: 10/12/2019