On the Council of Nicaea

Maruthas of Martyropolis (d. c. AD 420)

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE. In a recent Hugoye (http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol9No2/HV9N2Depuydt.htm there was a list of Syriac Mss at Yale. I noticed this item in it: 8. Maruta of Maiperqat, On the Council of Nicaea Rn/M36. — A paper booklet consisting of two quires (Clemons, "Checklist," No. 241). The hand is the same as No. 12. Contents: Maruta of Maiperqat, On the Council of Nicaea. Baumstark, Geschichte, 53,27-54,10. One quire contains the text, the other a handwritten English translation. Now unpublished English translations are something which I think should appear online, where they can promote interest among the general public. So I wrote to Yale and found that this was just a modern booklet of some 14 pages. I did ask them if they could just run a digital camera over it -- it wouldn't take long to press a shutter 28 times, after all -- but they've been saddled with a rogue supplier of reproductions and wanted $216 (!) to do this. However they did kindly supply me with a rather terrible printoff from a microfilm, albeit very slowly.

This contained the Syriac text, in the East Syriac hand, followed by the following translation. The microfilm contained a book-plate indicating that the booklet was given by a certain A.H.Wright to the American Oriental Society. There were also two footnotes in a different hand, marked with an asterisk and a cross, rather than a number. These were signed AHW, and I would infer from this that he did not make the translation but acquired it from elsewhere. A google search revealed this reference to a book, Bâb und seine Secte in Persien, written by a Dr. A. H. Wright of the American Mission at Urúmiyya, Persia, which was contributed by J. Perkins, also of the aforesaid Mission, to the German Oriental Society, and published in Vol. v of the Z. D. M. G. (Leipzig, 1851, pp. 384-385). This would appear to be our A.H.Wright: Austin H. Wright, who in 1852 assisted Justin Perkins to publish an edition of the OT Peshitta at Urmiah.

David G.K. Taylor added in the Hugoye list that there is also an extensive German translation of the whole of this text by Oscar Braun, De Sancta Nicaena Synodo. Syrische Texte des Maruta von Maipherkat nach einer Handschrift der Propaganda zu Rom Übersetzte, (Muenster 1898), iv, 128pp. (What we have in the newly available English translation is only a part of the whole work.) There are some illuminating notes regarding the problematic Syriac manuscript base of Braun's translation in Robert Murray's indispensable 'Symbols of Church and Kingdom' (p.34 and esp. n.2). Roger PEARSE May 2007 (Translation)

A brief account of the council (of Nice), as given by Marutha of Meparkat by direction of the Patriarch Isaac.

The blessed Apostles, when they went forth to proclaim the glad tidings of the glorious Gospel of Christ, did not establish creeds and confessions, but their main care was to turn men from the worship of idols to the worship of the holy cross *; and that those, who were discipled should keep themselves from fornication, from the uncleanness of things offered to idols, from strangled and from blood. But when their message went forth into all the world and their words into all the earth, and the faith of Christ was spread abroad in every country through their instrumentality and Jews [21] and Gentiles received and became subject unto it, Satan showed his wickedness and his servants became manifest and clothed themselves with disgrace and shame; and since the evil one gained nothing in his first war but reproach, he set his forces in battle array again with more bitterness than ever, and spread wide dissentions, controversies, and confusion among those who were invited to Heaven, and introduced numerous heresies into the church. So that the number of heresies equalled the number of bishops and right was oppressed and the truth was persecuted. True believers diminished and heretics increased.

Then, like the rays of the Sun in the midst of dark clouds, was seen the faithful crown of the pure kingdom of the blessed Constantine, the holy emperor and [20] worthy of immortal honor, who, being stimulated by zeal from the true faith, wrote to the most excellent and orthodox Bishop of Jerusalem, Alexander, to wit, "I have learned from the Holy Scriptures that out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. You will then immediately upon the reception of this my royal epistle, come to my presence, for it is necessary to the Holy Church, that the true faith of Christ should issue from those sacred temples (of Jerusalem). I have two Bishops who give me trouble daily, and by their controversies produce confusion and irregularity. It has not been practicable for me hitherto to give attention to this subject in consequence of the many wars which we have been prosecuting against our enemies, and especially against Jews and Heathens who are without [(unnumbered)] the Christian fold. But now that we are at peace with all around, and both friends and enemies are subject to our authority, I have no other care than to settle the disputes which have arisen in the church. We now wait for your arrival in order that we may learn from you the truth and then proceed to action. You will of course do as we have directed, and we desire your prayers in behalf of our kingdom.

When the blessed Alexander received the letter, ordering hum to proceed to the Capital, he immediately made preparations for his journey and fearing to go by land on account of the heretics that he would meet with, he selected a ship to go by sea. The very day that he went on board, a man appeared unto him in a dream and said to him, "You will not see the face of [(unnumbered)] the earthly king, for you will be taken speedily to behold the face of the heavenly king. He then wrote a letter in relation to the true faith of Christ, that the emperor desired to learn, which he sealed and committed to Priest Makaris to carry by land to the Capital. Alexander then proceeded by sea and arrived at an island called Pataia. There he

was seized by the heretics, who made him large promises if he would join himself to their party. But as he did not listen to their alluring words, they sent his soul to the presence of the Lord, with excruciating torture. He was thus honored with the crown of martyrdom for the sake of the words of Christ, and departed from this world of sorrow. When the Emperor Constantine received the news of his death, he was overwhelmed with grief, and when the letter of Alexander [19] which was brought by Priest Makaris reached hum, he burned with divine zeal and wrote the following order to all the Bishops in the world; viz.

Constantine Augustus Caesar, Constantine Autocrat and king, to every church under heaven, obedient and not obedient to Christ our king, be peace. Give heed all of you to this order, and delay not to assemble in General Council at the city of Nice in the province of Bithynia for the investigation of the true Christian faith. Let not any delay to come either of those who agree in sentiment or of those who disagree, and let no man prevent another's coming that he may declare his faith in the council in the presence of all the Bishops, in order that there may be one mind and one bond of faith and perfect unity, and that the whole church may stand in one body with an undivided faith [18] with one perfect will, and that no man may transgress or despise the command of the church or state. We will allow one year and two months which will be sufficient time for all to assemble from every quarter. In the month of October let all the Bishops be found in Nice, a city of Bithynia, which is in the neighborhood of our Christian Capital. May you all be prospered in the Lord."

As the presence of all Bishops whether in the dominions of Constantine or not of them was desired, Mar Shimeon, Bar Sabae, Patriarch of Seleucia and Ctesiphon was desired to be present, but on account of the disturbed state of the surrounding countries he was prevented from going. He wrote a letter, which he forwarded by the hand of Priest Shahdost, of the following purport: "If it were not that [17] the heathen are thirsting for my blood, I should by all means attend and be blessed by the ecclesiastical council and by the pure state of Constantine. But whatever the Bishops in council assembled who have been persecuted for the sake of the true faith may do, I shall gladly agree to."

When the Bishops had assembled according to the royal command, the king read the declaration of faith, which Alexander, Bishop of Jerusalem had written and forwarded by the hand of Priest Makaris. It was read in the presence of 2048 Bishops, but only 318 of these assented to it. The king then took his ring, sceptre and sword and gave them into their hands, saying, Here is given to you authority over the whole church, over ecclesiastical and civil affairs, and over all the orders in church and state. [16] Do whatever you please, and God will require at your hands an account of the sons of the church. The General Council having thus received authority from the king, the fathers directed that there should be gradations in the assembly and that each Bishop should sit in his place according to his rank. Chairs were there made for all and the king entered and sat with them. He kissed the spots which were the marks of Christ in their bodies. Of the 318 fathers, only 11 were free from such marks, whose name were Absalom, Bishop of Edessa, and son of Mar Ephrem's sister,

Jonah of Raikson, Mara of Dora, George of Shegar, Jacob of Nisibis, Marouta of Mepairkat, John of Goostia, Shimon of Diarbekir, Adai of Agal, Eusebius of Caesarea and Joseph of Nicomedia. But all the others were more or less maimed in their persecutions [15] from heretics. Some had their eyes taken out; some had their ears cut off.

Some had their teeth dug out by the roots. Some had the nails of their fingers and toes torn out; some were otherwise mutilated; in a word there was no one without marks of violence; save the above-named persons. But Thomas, Bishop of Marash was an object almost frightful to look upon; he had been mutilated by the removal of his eyes, nose and lips; his teeth had been dug out and both his legs and arms had been cut off. He had been kept in prison 22 years by the Armanites [Armenians] who used to cut off a member of his body or mutilate him in some way every year, to induce him to consent to their blasphemy, but he conquered in this fearful contest to the glory of believers and to the manifestation of the unmercifulness of the heretics. The fathers took him with them to the Council and when [14] the king saw him, he fell down upon the ground and worshipped + him saying, "I worship thee, O thou martyr of Christ, who art adorned with many crowns."

To describe the doings of the Council from the beginning to the end is a great task, for the fathers were in sessions three years engaged in discussions about every kind of heresy. Protracted controversies took place between the fathers and the heretics, once party giving their views in writing and the other answering them in the same manner. The following Confession of Faith was agreed upon by the 318 holy fathers, who assembled in Nice a city of Bithynia in the time of the Emperor Constantine, on account of the blasphemous doctrines of the accursed Arius. We believe [13] in one God, Father Almighty, maker of things visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only Begotten and first born of all creatures; who was born of the Father before all worlds and was not created; true God, of the true God, of the nature of the Father, and by whom the worlds were made and all things created, and who for our sakes and for our salvation descended from Heaven, took a bodily form by the power of the Holy Ghost, and became man; was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate, was buried and rose again the third day as it is written, ascended to Heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the dead and the living; and in the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth that proceedeth from the Father, a life giving [12] Spirit and in one holy Apostolic Catholic church; and in one Baptism for the remission of sins; and in the resurrection of the body, and in life everlasting.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them,

and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.