

St. Nikon of Sparta

*The Patron Saint of Lakedaimon, the Expulsion of the Jews, and the
Anatomy of a Canonization*

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Revised and expanded draft

October 19, 2026

Abstract

This essay examines the career of St. Nikon the Metanoieite (c. 930–c. 1000), patron saint of Sparta, and above all the episode that made his name there: the expulsion of the Jewish community of Lakedaimon in the early 970s. The *Life of Nikon* and the saint's Testament both link the removal of the Jews to the end of a plague, and both treat the sequence as miraculous. Reading these texts against Byzantine law, against Greek and Western scholarship on the tenth- and eleventh-century Peloponnese, and against the little we know of the Jewish community itself, the essay argues three things.

First, the expulsion was an extralegal act carried out by the citizens under the pressure of a charismatic monk, and it was not carried out without resistance. Second, the sanitary explanation sometimes offered for it, that Jewish trades had made the city unhealthy, is a modern conjecture that the sources neither state nor can bear; the charge in the texts is ritual pollution, not contagion and not well-poisoning. Third, Nikon's sanctity was built in a local world of competing magnates, imperial officials, a cooperative bishop and a monastery in need of protectors, and the expulsion served that world as a founding act.

The essay closes with the afterlife of the cult, from the writing of the *Life* to the dedication of the cathedral of St. Nikon in 1893, and with the unsettled question of where his first church stood.

1. Introduction: The Topography of Memory in Laconia

The city of Sparta, for the modern traveler, presents a curious layering of times. The ancient acropolis, with its scattered Roman theatre and Byzantine ruins, sits in quiet tension with the bustling modern town below. At the heart of that town stands the structure that anchors the religious imagination of Laconia: the Church of St. Nikon. To the casual visitor it is the parish church of a provincial Greek city. To the historian it is the end point of a thousand years of veneration, a monument to a tenth-century monk whose actions reshaped the demographic and spiritual landscape of the region.

The presence of Jews in Laconia is not a medieval footnote. The relationship between Sparta and Judea reaches back into the Hellenistic age. A letter ascribed to the Spartan king Areios I, preserved in the First Book of Maccabees and in Josephus, greets the high priest Onias as a brother and says that Spartans and Jews alike descend from Abraham. A century or so later the Maccabean leader Jonathan wrote to the Spartans and renewed that old kinship, and the deposed high priest Jason, running from Jerusalem, sought refuge in Lakedaimon on the strength of it.¹ The kinship was a fiction, and the people who used it may well have known as much, but it was remembered, and it gives the story of Nikon a longer shadow than the tenth century alone would give it.

By the time Nikon arrived, a Jewish community had long been established in Lakedaimon, the Byzantine name for Sparta. The only source that speaks of it, the Life of the saint, mentions it chiefly as the object of the expulsion and says little about how its members lived. We have no synagogue, no list of names, no estimate of numbers, and no reliable account of their occupations. The silence is itself a fact about the evidence, and anyone who writes about this expulsion has to say so at the start, because nearly everything that follows is seen through the eyes of the people who carried it out and remembered it as a triumph.

It is into this world that Nikon stepped, a missionary monk from the East whose zeal left an indelible mark on the city. The central episode of his career, the expulsion of the Jews, is no marginal detail in his Life. Greek scholarship treats it as a hinge: Nikos Oikonomides, in the best short account of Nikon's Laconian mission, says the saint agreed to settle in Sparta for good only after he had forced the inhabitants, and not without difficulty, to drive the Jews out of the town.² This essay tries to untangle the threads of that event. It looks at how the hagiographer built the

miracle, at the legal and social facts of tenth-century Byzantium, at the scholarly attempts to explain the plague, and at the modern afterlife of a saint whose actions are still a matter of both historical inquiry and civic pride. Throughout, I try to keep three things apart: what the sources say, what scholars reasonably infer from them, and what is only conjecture, my own included.

2. The Sources and Their Problems

Everything we know of Nikon's life and work comes from two texts. The first is the *Life*, which survives in two variants and has two modern editions, the Greek text with commentary by Odysseus Lampsides (Athens, 1982) and the text, translation and commentary by Denis Sullivan (Brookline, 1987).³ The second is the *Testament*, a document in which Nikon gives instructions for his church and its commemorations. Both belong to the memory of one institution, the monastery that grew around his church in Sparta, and that fact shapes how far each can be trusted.

The date of the *Life* is disputed. Oikonomides speaks of a biographer writing in the middle of the eleventh century. Lampsides, as Maria Gerolymatou reports, puts the writing of the *Life*'s third section about the middle of the twelfth, and Orthodox tradition names an abbot Gregory and the year 1142; Gerolymatou herself places the abbot Gregory's journey to Constantinople in the first half of the eleventh century.⁴ What matters for us is the range. Between the events of the 970s and the earliest possible writing lies at least two generations, and perhaps nearly two centuries. The *Life* is therefore not a report by an eyewitness. It is the monastery's account of its founder, shaped by what the monks of a later age needed him to have been.

The *Testament* is a harder case. It survives only in a demotic Greek version, because by the time it was recopied the monks no longer understood the Greek in which Nikon had written. Gerolymatou calls it a problematic text for which no full study exists, though she notes that its authenticity is generally accepted.⁵ One argument for authenticity is its resemblance to the foundation provisions of a church built on the Eurotas bridge in 1027 by the monk Nikodemos, who put his church under the care of the strategos and the judge of the theme and kept the local bishop out of it. Zakythinos and, later, Gerolymatou compared the two documents, though neither can say which copied the other.⁶ The sober conclusion is that the *Testament* may preserve Nikon's wishes faithfully, or it may have been worked over to serve the monastery. It should not be read as the saint's own first-person account; it is better read at one remove.

This matters because the *Life* and the *Testament* do agree on the point that concerns us. Oikonomides observes that the *Testament*, like the *Life*, ties Nikon's settlement in Lakedaimon and the expulsion of the Jews to the city's deliverance from the plague.⁷ Two texts agreeing is not the same as two independent witnesses agreeing. Both come from the same house, and both want

the same saint. As far as I know, no Jewish source mentions the event at all, so the story comes to us entirely from the side of the expellers.

3. The Making of a Saint: Nikon's Early Career and the Turn to the Peloponnese

According to his biographer, Nikon was born in Pontus around 930. His early life followed the classic path of a Byzantine holy man: a rejection of wealth, entry into the monastery of Chryse Petra, the “Golden Stone,” near Amaseia, and extreme ascetic discipline. The biographer says he began to cry out “Metanoieite,” “Repent!”, while he was still living there.⁸ His field of work, however, was never the quiet of a cell. After the Byzantine reconquest of Crete in 961, Nikon went to the island and stayed about seven years, founding churches and trying to win back a population that had lived under Arab rule for a century and a half. To avoid the violent reactions his open-air preaching provoked, he turned to speaking to small groups in private.⁹ That experience on a frontier, where orthodoxy was a tool of imperial consolidation, shaped his later approach.

From Crete he moved to the mainland and traveled through a long list of places: Epidaurous and the region of Damala, then Athens, Euboea, Thebes, Corinth, Argos and Nauplion, where his preaching was received easily and did not take long, since the people were already good Christians. Then he turned south and west through Mani, Kalamata, Koroni, Methoni, Messene and Kyparissia, was tonsured into the great habit at Moros, and passed through Nikli, the modern Tegea, before coming to Sparta. The Testament says two years had passed since he first reached the Peloponnese. Gerolymatou puts that arrival around 970.¹⁰

Why Laconia? Oikonomides gives a persuasive answer. Two large Slavic groups lived there in the tenth century, the Milingoi on the western slopes of Taygetos and the Ezerites at Helos on the lower Eurotas, and they had last rebelled in the first quarter of the century and been put down by force. Mani was baptized only under Basil I. The Life's own word for the Milingoi is “ethnikoi,” which for a Byzantine means first of all pagans, and Oikonomides suggests that in the eleventh century the word carried both meanings, pagan and foreigner. In such a country of religious ambiguity and perhaps of syncretism, a preacher of repentance had a place.¹¹ Nikon's mission was in essence an act of internal colonization: bringing the nominal Christians of a region into line with the ecclesiastical and imperial center. His weapon was the sermon, and his nickname Metanoieite comes from it.

There is a point in Oikonomides's argument that I think is important for the story of the expulsion. He notes that Nikon's preaching was aimed at Christians whose faith had weakened,

that Nikon ignored the non-Christian populations altogether, and that his successors took a defensive posture toward them.¹² His remark concerns chiefly the Slavs, and I do not want to stretch it. But it points the right way. The Jews of Lakedaimon were not a mission field for Nikon. They were a condition of his settlement, something to be removed so that the work among the Christians of the city could begin. That is how the Life itself arranges the story, and it is why the expulsion sits so near the beginning of his Spartan career.

4. A City of Archontes: Nikon among the Powerful

To see how Nikon could demand and get such an act, one has to see the city he walked into. The best guide is Gerolymatou's study of Peloponnesian monasteries and power in the tenth and eleventh centuries, which reads the *Life* and the *Testament* for what they reveal about local society. Her picture is of a country dominated by the powerful, the *dynatoi*. The *Life* names a patrician, John Malakenos, a man of the first rank not only in Sparta but in all Greece and the Peloponnese, who was accused of treason before Basil II and taken to Constantinople.¹³ It names Michael Choirosphaktes, who held second place to none in honor, glory, property and power in the Laconian country, and whose people beat the abbot of Nikon's monastery and burned the wooden fences of its farm.¹⁴ Basil II's famous novel of 996, aimed at protecting small peasant property against the appetite of the powerful, belongs to the same world.

Nikon's relations with these men were not smooth. The *Testament* says that when he arrived and claimed a place for his church, a quarrel broke out with the local archontes over the site and over his use of building stone from older structures. It ended in a compromise, but Gerolymatou's overall impression is one of tension.¹⁵ His relations with the representative of the central government were warmer. The strategos of the Peloponnese, Basil Apokaukos, consulted him and called him to Corinth in what Gerolymatou dates probably to 997, during the Bulgarian threat that ended at the battle of the Spercheios; Nikon went and told him he would escape the danger.¹⁶ Even here the *Life* records friction. Another strategos, Gregory, staying in Sparta, annoyed the saint by playing *tzykanion*, the horseback game we would call polo, during vespers.¹⁷

The bishop of Lakedaimon, Theopemptos, was no obstacle. Gerolymatou stresses the harmony between the two men: as soon as Nikon reached the city they held a procession in the agora together, and later Nikon invited Theopemptos to consecrate the new church.¹⁸ In the *Testament* Nikon ordered that the emperor, the strategos and the judge of the theme be commemorated in his church, and that after his death the strategos and the judge act as its guardians, receiving each year five measures of wine and a basket of apples. That is a monk making friends with the officials of the state against the grasp of the local great.¹⁹ The emperor himself is absent from the whole story: no imperial money built the church.²⁰

Place the expulsion in that setting and it looks different. A community that has been persuaded to expel its Jews has been persuaded to give something up. Oikonomides's phrase, "not

without difficulty,” shows that the tradition itself admits resistance, and it is reasonable to suppose, though the sources do not say so, that some of it came from members of the local elite who had dealings with the Jewish community. The monk had to overcome that resistance, and he did. The expulsion is, among other things, a demonstration of power by a newcomer who had no imperial money, a modest following and a quarrelsome set of archontes to deal with. It was the founding act of his authority in the city, and the Life tells it as such.

5. The Plague, the Expulsion, and the Conditions of Miracle

What the Texts Say

The core of the Spartan episode is told in the *Life* with a clarity that leaves little doubt about the sequence. A plague had struck Lakedaimon. The citizens sent a delegation to Nikon, who was then in the region. He promised that the epidemic would cease if they expelled from their town the people of the Jewish race who lived among them, whom the text describes as polluting the city with disgusting customs and with the pollution of their religion. The citizens complied. After the Jews were removed from the town, the plague disappeared.²¹ The Testament agrees on the order of events: the settlement in Lakedaimon and the expulsion are linked, in both texts, with the miraculous end of the epidemic. In the *Life* that is followed by the procession with Bishop Theopemptos in the agora, the laying of the first stones of the church, and, in time, its consecration.

The sources thus agree about the order of events, and a critical historian should say so plainly. What they cannot give us is an explanation of why the plague ended. That is where the temptation to go beyond the evidence begins.

The Sanitary Hypothesis, and Why It Fails

It is tempting to look for a natural cause behind the miracle. One could argue that the Jewish quarter housed trades that handled organic materials, such as slaughter, tanning and the finishing of cloth, that these trades produced waste and attracted vermin, that the plague was flea-borne, and that removing the quarter removed the source. I think this is the weakest argument on offer, and I want to say why.

First, the sources do not say it. Nothing in the texts places slaughterhouses or tanneries in a Jewish quarter, or places a Jewish quarter in any particular part of the city, and as far as I can tell they do not describe the occupations of the Jews of Lakedaimon at all. The picture of a Jewish industrial district is a modern construction laid over a very thin record, and Joshua Holo's work on the economy of Byzantine Jewry, which draws mainly on the Cairo Genizah and mostly on the eleventh century and later, cannot fill that gap for tenth-century Lakedaimon.²²

Second, the disease is not identified. The Greek word the *Life* uses, *loimos*, means pestilence in a general sense. It can describe any epidemic, and it does not tell us that this one was bubonic plague. Most historians place the end of the first plague pandemic in the middle of the eighth century and the next great wave in the 1340s. A bubonic outbreak in Laconia in the 970s

would be extraordinary, and no text allows us to establish one.²³ The theory that a flea-borne disease was fed by tannery and slaughter waste explains a disease that we cannot show was there.

Third, and most important, the argument runs in the wrong direction. It assumes the Life's accusation was in some sense correct, that the Jews and their trades really were a source of contamination. The Life offers no such claim. Its charge is ritual: the Jews are a pollution because of their religion. Turning that charge into a sanitary one, and then using the sanitary version to explain why the plague ended, looks like a rescue of the hagiographer's logic by other means. The argument can at best explain why a medieval audience might have found the sequence persuasive. It cannot show that the expulsion helped anyone survive an epidemic. If the plague did end soon after the Jews left, that is a coincidence of the kind every epidemic produces, and it was the story, not the epidemiology, that made it a miracle.

Miasma, Not Poison

What the sources also do not support is the well-poisoning accusation. No Byzantine text from this episode charges the Jews with poisoning wells. That trope belongs to the fourteenth-century persecutions that followed the Black Death, where it served as a pretext for massacre and expropriation. Modern science has long since established that plague is not waterborne, and Pope Clement VI rejected the charge in 1348.²⁴ In the Spartan case the operative charge is miasma, pollution, which the Greek world had understood for a thousand years as a matter of contact and purity before it was a matter of contagion. The distinction matters. Nikon's action was not a forerunner of the Black Death pogroms. It was a local expulsion justified by religious pollution, in a world where pollution, sin and pestilence belonged to the same family of ideas.

The Theological Construction

The hagiographer then turned a local event into a narrative of miraculous deliverance. The Life presents the expulsion not as a measure of civic order but as a condition of divine favor. The Jews are not neighbors and workers; they are a pollution whose presence offends God. The plague is not an epidemic with causes; it is a punishment for tolerating impurity. Nikon is not an official with a policy; he is a new Elijah, cleansing the land of idolatry. This transformation served the needs of a cult. A saint who merely improved the life of a town is a benefactor. A saint who expels the enemies of God and stays the hand of divine wrath is a patron worth a church, a feast and a monastery.

6. The Legal and Social Context of Expulsion

To understand how Nikon could demand and achieve such an act, one has to look at the Byzantine legal framework for Jews. The legislation going back to Justinian and the later law books allowed Jews to practice their religion but imposed disabilities. They could not hold public office or own Christian slaves, and they could not build new synagogues. Forced baptism was against the law, but it occurred from time to time, usually under pressure from a local bishop or an imperial official. The seventh-century order of Heraclius, the attempt at conversion under Basil I in the 870s, and the persecution under Romanos I Lekapenos in the 930s are the best known episodes, and between them the tenth century had periods of relative toleration, such as the legislation of Leo VI, that were followed by renewed pressure.²⁵ The tenth century in Greece was not a time of settled peace for Jews, and a monk who demanded an expulsion would not have been starting from a clean slate.

Even so, what Nikon did was not a sanctioned act of the state. It was an extralegal measure carried out by the citizens under the pressure of a charismatic holy man. The *Life* makes the citizens themselves the agents: they sent a delegation, they heard his condition, and they carried it out. In the sources as they stand, no official orders the expulsion. This tells us something about Byzantine provincial life: a determined holy man with a following and good connections, among them the strategos of the theme, could produce a result that the formal law did not provide for and had not forbidden. The bishop, Theopemptos, is shown as working in harmony with Nikon from the day he arrived, and he should not be described as absent from the story. What can be said is that the texts give no formal role in the expulsion either to the bishop or to any other official.

The language of the *Life* is telling. The Jews are a “pollution” and their customs are “disgusting.” This is the vocabulary of ritual purity, not of jurisprudence. The expulsion is framed as a purification needed before the city could be restored to divine favor, and this rhetorical strategy lifts Nikon from preacher to prophet. The result of the expulsion, in practice, was a coerced migration. Where the Jews of Lakedaimon went, whether they returned, and what happened to their property, the sources do not say, and that silence is the most unsettling thing about the whole story.

7. The Construction of Canonization

The word canonization has to be used with care. In the Byzantine church of the tenth and eleventh centuries there was no formal procedure like the later Western one. Sanctity was recognized by popular acclamation, confirmed in time by the local bishop and eventually by liturgical commemoration, and the Life was the main instrument of that recognition, to be read aloud on his feast, the twenty-sixth of November. The cult did not stay in Laconia. Rosemary Morris has traced its spread across the Orthodox world, and the saint appears in the mosaics of Hosios Loukas.²⁶

The monastery was not merely the guardian of a memory. It was an institution with property and enemies, and its cult was one of its assets. The Life shows the abbot Gregory traveling to Constantinople to ask the emperor for a chrysobull that would secure the house against every plot, and coming home with a pound of gold. During his absence an imperial cubicularius, in Laconia to collect a levy, put the monks under guard and tried to look into the monastery's finances. Nikon, as the Life tells it, appeared to the official in a dream; the official released the monks, asked the saint's forgiveness, forgave the city of Sparta the tax he had collected, and gave the house seventy-two gold coins, a pound of gold. Gerolymatou's analysis suggests the more mundane process behind the miracle: the emperor, who had met Gregory in the meantime, ordered his officer to waive the tax and hand over the gold. The abbot spent the money on liturgical vessels that were still in use when the Life was written.²⁷

The posthumous miracles tell the same story. When a Slavic official named Antiochos tried to camp on the monastery's farm at Slavochori and was struck down in the night, his body, carried to Sparta, was consumed by a fire whose source no one could name. Oikonomides's reading is that the Milingoi may have kept the old Slavic custom of cremation, which the monks took as divine punishment.²⁸ The example shows how the hagiographer read the world: an unexplained fact was a sign, and the sign always pointed to the saint. The same habit of mind is at work in the plague story.

The expulsion plays a central part in this narrative economy. It shows Nikon's power over nature, in the plague, and over people, in the city's submission. It also gives his intercession a civic benefit: a city in danger was saved. In a world where epidemics were a constant threat, a saint who could stop one was invaluable. That the cure involved the removal of a vulnerable minority was, to the hagiographer and his audience, a price they did not count. By casting the Jews out, Nikon also

enacted in physical space the theological separation of Church and Synagogue. Lakedaimon was to be a Christian city, and the saint became its patron in large part because he had settled who belonged in it.

The modern history of the cult is a second act of canonization. The Life of 1142, or whichever date one prefers, kept the saint in the Orthodox memory. Under Ottoman rule he was largely forgotten except in Sparta. After the Greek Revolution of 1821 a new service was composed by Father Daniel Georgopoulos, and in 1893, when the cathedral of Sparta was dedicated to him, he was recognized as patron saint of the diocese of Monemvasia and Lakedaimonia.²⁹ A nineteenth-century nation-state building a new Sparta on the ruins of the old found in Nikon a Christian, Hellenic and local founder. The expulsion had been a founding act in the tenth century; in the nineteenth it was part of the founding story of a modern city, and the people who told it no longer asked what had happened to the Jews.

8. The Physical Legacy: From Basilica to Cathedral

The material traces of Nikon in Sparta are both tangible and elusive. According to the Life he built churches and a monastery in the city. The Life says that when he came to the agora he laid down the stones and declared that God had decided a church should be built there, for the help and salvation of the whole city.³⁰ Where exactly the basilica stood is disputed. Eleni Kourinou-Pikoula has devoted two studies to the problem, and Gerolymatou, who accepts that the church grew into a monastic community only after the saint's death, notes the uncertainty.³¹ Some have identified a Byzantine basilica excavated on the acropolis with the church of St. Nikon, but Greek scholarship treats the site as an open question, and I do not want to settle it by assertion.

The monastery's landed support is better documented. The Testament and the Life name estates at Slavochori, which is the modern Amyklai, at Paroria and at Perisos, and the first of them bordered a Slavic settlement.³² The cathedral that stood on the site of the old foundation, like the city around it, has changed beyond recognition. The modern town of Sparta was laid out on a grid after the Greek War of Independence, and it bears little resemblance to the medieval Lakedaimon. The memory of the saint's first church lives mainly in the texts and in scattered architectural fragments.

The modern Church of St. Nikon is the parish and spiritual center of the city. Each year the feast on the twenty-sixth of November is preceded by a great vespers on the evening of the twenty-fifth, with visiting hierarchs, and the relics of the saint are venerated there.³³ The passage from the medieval foundation to the modern church is a symbol of the larger change in Spartan society. The expulsion of the Jews created, in the tradition of the city, a Christian space, and the modern church is a monument to national and religious identity, a place where the memory of Nikon is celebrated not only as a local ascetic but as a symbol of Orthodox Hellenism.

9. Conclusion: The Saint and the City

The story of St. Nikon and the Jews of Sparta is a case study in the meeting of hagiography, history and violence. The Life presents the expulsion as a miracle, a divine order carried out by a holy man. A critical reading finds something more ordinary and more troubling. A monk with a modest following and good friends in the provincial government persuaded a city, over resistance, to expel a community that had lived there for a long time. The people who did so linked the act to the end of a plague and, with the help of the monastery that kept the memory, turned it into the founding legend of a cult. The sources agree on the order of events. They do not tell us why the plague ended, and the attempt to find a hidden sanitary cause in the Jewish quarter goes beyond what they can bear.

Nikon's canonization was the product of this process. By setting the expulsion in the saint's Life, the monastery fixed a story that served the needs of a house with property to defend and powerful neighbors to hold off. The saint became the patron of a city that had been cleansed, and his feast became, among other things, the celebration of that cleansing. Nine centuries later a new state gave the cult a new purpose and a new church.

The modern visitor who stands before the Church of St. Nikon meets a complex legacy. It is a place of faith and community, and it is also a monument to a moment when a vulnerable minority was driven out of a city and the expulsion was remembered as a miracle. The historian's task is not to judge the past by the standards of the present but to understand it on its own terms, and that includes understanding what its writers chose not to record. In the tenth century the removal of the Jews was seen as a victory of orthodoxy over pollution, of life over death. Today it stands as a reminder that the line between public health and persecution is thin, and that the sources tell us only that the plague ended after the Jews were gone. What ended with them, and at what cost, they do not say.

Notes

1. On the Spartan–Judean “kinship,” see 1 Macc. 12:5–23 and 14:20–23; Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.225–227 and 13.164–170; and 2 Macc. 5:9 for Jason’s flight to Lakedaimon. For a modern discussion see Ory Amitay, “Some Ioudaio-Lakonian Rabbis,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 26 (2007): 131–134.
2. Nikos Oikonomides, «Όψιμη ιεραποστολή στη Λακωνία», in *Ο μοναχισμός στην Πελοπόννησο*, 4ος–15ος αι., ed. Voula Konti (Διεθνή Συμπόσια 14; Athens: Εθνικό Ίδρυμα Ερευνών, Ινστιτούτο Βυζαντινών Ερευνών, 2004), 29–35, here 30 and n. 7.
3. Οδυσσέας Λαμφίδης, ed., *Ο εκ Πόντου όσιος Νίκων ο Μετανοείτε (Κείμενα – Σχόλια)* (Athens, 1982); Denis F. Sullivan, ed. and trans., *The Life of Saint Nikon: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Brookline, MA: Hellenic College Press, 1987). Oikonomides, «Όψιμη ιεραποστολή», 29 n. 2, notes that the Life survives in two variants and the Testament in a demotic translation.
4. Oikonomides, «Όψιμη ιεραποστολή», 29, places the biographer in the middle of the eleventh century. Maria Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές και εξουσία (10ος–11ος αι.)», in Konti, ed., *Ο μοναχισμός στην Πελοπόννησο*, 37–53, here 44–45 and n. 45, dates the journey of the abbot Gregory to the first half of the eleventh century and records that Lampsides (pp. 369, 375, 377) dates the Life’s third section to about the middle of the twelfth. Later Orthodox tradition names Gregory, abbot of Nikon’s monastery, as the author and gives the year 1142; see the Orthodox Church in America, “Venerable Nikon ‘Metanoieite,’ the Preacher of Repentance,” *Lives of the Saints*, 26 November (oca.org).
5. Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 40–41 and n. 19. She calls the Testament a problematic text, preserved in demotic Greek, for which no comprehensive study exists, though its authenticity is generally not questioned. On the authenticity question see Lampsides, *Ο εκ Πόντου όσιος Νίκων*, 241–249. An English translation with a short analysis is in John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero, eds., *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000), 1:313–322.
6. The inscription is dated 1 May 1027 and was published most recently by Anne Philippidis-Braat, “Inscriptions du Péloponnèse (à l’exception de Mistra),” *Travaux et Mémoires* 9 (1985), 300–303, no. 43. It was first discussed by Δ. Α. Ζακυθινός, «Κάστρον Λακεδαίμονος», *Ελληνικά* 15 (1957), 103–105. For the comparison with Nikon’s Testament, see Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 42–44.
7. Oikonomides, «Όψιμη ιεραποστολή», 30 n. 7, who points to Testament, Lampsides, 251, and observes that the Testament, like the Life, ties the settlement in Lakedaimon and the expulsion of the Jews to the miraculous deliverance of the city from the plague.
8. Oikonomides, «Όψιμη ιεραποστολή», 29 and n. 3, citing Eleonora Kountoura-Galake, “The Location of the Monastery of Chryse Petra,” *Σύμμεικτα* 13 (1999), 69–75.
9. Oikonomides, «Όψιμη ιεραποστολή», 29–30. He adds that some historians now doubt that the Cretans had lost their Christian faith, but that the Life itself never says all of them had changed religion; the discussion is in Lampsides, *Ο εκ Πόντου όσιος Νίκων*, 413–418.

10. Oikonomides, «Ὁψιμη ιεραποστολή», 30, with the Testament cited at Lampsides, 251, for the two years since Nikon's arrival in the Peloponnese. Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 38, gives the arrival in the Peloponnese as about 970.
11. Oikonomides, «Ὁψιμη ιεραποστολή», 30–35, drawing on Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik and R. J. H. Jenkins (CFHB 1; Washington, DC, 1967), ch. 50, on the Milingoi and Ezerites and on the baptism of the people of Maina under Basil I.
12. Oikonomides, «Ὁψιμη ιεραποστολή», 35: Nikon ignored the non-Christian populations altogether, and his successors adopted a defensive stance toward them; his preaching was aimed at Christians whose faith had been shaken.
13. Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 38–39 and n. 11, citing Sullivan, *Life*, 148–150. Jenkins and Mango, “A Synodikon of Antioch and Lacedaemonia,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961), 239, appear to identify him with the protospatharios Malakenos accused before Basil II in 997 (Skylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn [CFHB 5; Berlin, 1973], 343).
14. Sullivan, *Life*, 194–200; Lampsides, 116–118. See Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 46–47, and Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris, 1990), 230.
15. The Testament, Lampsides, 252, lines 44–46, as summarized by Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 39. She notes that the quarrel concerned the site and the reuse of building material from older structures, and that it ended in a compromise.
16. Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 39–40 and nn. 14–16, with Sullivan, *Life*, 140–142. She dates the events probably to 997 and links them to the Bulgarian raid that ended at the battle of the Spercheios (Skylitzes, 341–342).
17. Sullivan, *Life*, 134–136; Lampsides, 78–80; Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 40 and n. 17, on the game of tzykanion (a kind of horseback polo), for which see Φαίδων Κουκουλές, *Βυζαντινών βίος και πολιτισμός*, vol. 3 (Athens, 1949), 139–142.
18. Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 43–44 and nn. 39–41, citing Sullivan, *Life*, 116 and 132; on Theopemptos as bishop see Jenkins and Mango, “Synodikon,” 236, 238–239.
19. Testament, Lampsides, 254–256, as summarized by Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 41–42. The strategos and the judge are to be commemorated in the church, to act as its guardians after Nikon's death, and to receive each year five measures of wine and a basket of apples; the village of Perisos, granted by the strategos, is to be free of other levies.
20. Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 48–49: nowhere in the *Life* does the emperor give money for the building of Nikon's church, and the only imperial gift named is the pound of gold given to the abbot Gregory.
21. Sullivan, *Life*, 110–112 (§33); Lampsides, 64–66 (§24); see Oikonomides, «Ὁψιμη ιεραποστολή», 30 n. 7.
22. Joshua Holo, *Byzantine Jewry in the Mediterranean Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), for the economic profile of Byzantine Jewry, which rests largely on the Cairo Genizah and dates mostly to the eleventh century and later.
23. Dionysios Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), on the vocabulary and the record of epidemics down to the eighth

century. My statement about the tenth century is an inference from the absence of any securely attested bubonic outbreak between the end of the first plague pandemic in the eighth century and the Black Death.

24. Clement VI, bull *Quamvis perfidiam* (July 1348), which condemned the accusation against the Jews of spreading the Black Death.
25. Joshua Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641–1204* (Athens: Verlag der Byzantinisch-Neugriechischen Jahrbücher, 1939); Andrew Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971); Robert Bonfil et al., eds., *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). These works are cited generally, without pinpoint pages.
26. Rosemary Morris, “The Spread of the Cult of St. Nikon ‘Metanoieite,’” in *The Heroes of the Orthodox Church: The New Saints, 8th–16th c.*, ed. Eleonora Kountoura-Galake (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2004), 433–458.
27. Sullivan, *Life*, 184–188; *Lampsides*, 110–112. See Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 44–45 and 48–50. A pound of gold equalled seventy-two gold coins; the abbot used the money to buy liturgical vessels that were still in use when the *Life* was written. On the tax (*chrysoteles*) and the *cubicularius*, see Nikos Oikonomides, *Fiscalité et exemption fiscale à Byzance (IXe–XIe s.)* (Athens, 1996), 85–89.
28. Sullivan, *Life*, 190–194; *Lampsides*, 114–116; Oikonomides, «Ὁψιμη ιεραποστολή», 31–34, who reads the burning of Antiochos’s body as a trace of Slavic cremation custom that the monks interpreted as divine punishment.
29. Orthodox Church in America, “Venerable Nikon ‘Metanoieite,’ the Preacher of Repentance,” *Lives of the Saints*, 26 November (oca.org): the saint was largely forgotten under Ottoman rule except in Sparta; a service was composed after 1821 by Father Daniel Georgopoulos; and the cathedral of Sparta was dedicated to him and he was recognized as patron of the diocese of Monemvasia and Lakedaimonia in 1893.
30. Sullivan, *Life of Saint Nikon*, 116, with the Greek at *Lampsides*, 68; quoted in Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 38 n. 6. Gerolymatou concludes that the church became the nucleus of the monastic community that formed later, probably after Nikon’s death.
31. Ελένη Κουρίνου-Πικούλα, «Ο ναός του Οσίου Νίκωνος του Μετανοείτε», *Λακωνικά Σπουδαί* 14 (1998), 89–103, and «Συμβολή στη μνημειακή τοπογραφία της βυζαντινής Λακεδαιμονίας: Ο ναός του Οσίου Νίκωνος του Μετανοείτε», in Konti, ed., *Ο μοναχισμός στην Πελοπόννησο*, 55–61. Gerolymatou, «Πελοποννησιακές μονές», 38 n. 6, points to the dispute over where the basilica stood.
32. Oikonomides, «Ὁψιμη ιεραποστολή», 31; *Testament*, *Lampsides*, 255, lines 131–134. The estates at Slavochori (modern Amyklai), Paroria and Perisos supported the foundation; Slavochori bordered a Slavic settlement.
33. On the annual feast and the great vespers on its eve, see the reports of the Metropolis of Monemvasia and Sparta carried by the Orthodoxia News Agency (orthodoxianewsagency.gr), for example 26 November 2025.

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