

< 225 > **the night of 14/23 December 557 ●Constantinople, ●Nicea?,
●Nicomedia?, ●Rhegium, ●Illyria**

- sources 1 Mal. 488-90; Ioh. Eph. 328-9; Theoph. 231; Agath. 5.3.1-11; *Anon. Eccl. Hist.* 114;
The Great Chronogr. 11.231; *Vita Sym. Stil. Iun.* 106; *Leont. hom.* 1 and 7
- sources 2 [Dion. Tellmahr.] 131-2; *Typicon of the Great Church*, ed. Mateos (1962, I, p.130, 13 f.);
Hymns in Follieri (1966, p.301); Cedren. 676-7; (see 677, on the St.Sophia collapse);
Mich. Syr. 310; Glyc. 269
- literature Kumaniecki (1930); Downey (1961); McCail (1967); Van den Ven (1962, 1970); Dagron (1974);
Allen and Datema (1991)
- catalogues Ligorio [1574-7]; Bonito (1691); von Hoff (1840); Mallet (1853); Capelle (1924); Downey (1955);
Grumel (1958); Shebalin *et al.* (1974); Comninakis and Papazachos (1982);
Papazachos and Papazachos (1989); Guidoboni (1989)

A number of sources report this disastrous earthquake as having struck Constantinople and the surrounding area.

Agathias writes: "Not long before these events [Theodorus' victory over the Tzani] Constantinople was once more almost completely razed to the ground by a terrible earthquake. A convulsion of unparalleled magnitude and duration, its horror was further accentuated by the time of year and by the fateful and harrowing events that followed in its wake. It was in fact that time of year when autumn was drawing to a close and the traditional Roman Festival of the Names was being celebrated. The cold weather had already set in [...] Then towards midnight when all the citizens were sleeping peacefully in their beds disaster suddenly struck, and every structure was instantly shaken to its foundations. The tremors, which were violent to start with, kept growing in intensity as though rising to a catastrophic climax. Everybody was awakened and shrieks and lamentations could be heard, accompanied by the usual pious ejaculations that spring spontaneously to the lips in such moments of crisis. Each successive tremor was followed by a deep, growling sound like thunder issuing from the bowels of the earth, which doubled the general sense of terror and alarm. The surrounding air grew dim with the vaporous exhalations of a smoky haze rising from an unknown source, and gleamed with a dull radiance. Panic-stricken, the people poured out of their houses, filling the streets and alleyways, as though destruction could not overtake them just as easily out of doors as indoors. The fact is that every quarter of the city is so heavily built up that wide open spaces entirely free of obstructions are an extremely rare sight. Nevertheless their fear and anxiety of mind seemed to subside gradually at the mere possibility of somehow turning their eyes towards heaven in an attempt to propitiate the Deity. They got a slight wetting from a shower of sleet and suffered greatly from the cold, but even so they did not take shelter, with the exception of those who took refuge in the churches, prostrating themselves before the altars. Large numbers of women, and not just the members of the lower classes but even persons of breeding and distinction, roamed about and mingled freely with the men; the ordered structure of society with its due observance of decorum and respect for privilege and the proper distinction of rank was thrown into wild confusion and trampled underfoot. Slaves, in the grip of the present and more compelling fear, showed contempt for their masters and, disobeying their instructions, congregated in the places of worship. Men in authority and men of no consequence were placed on an equal footing owing to the common danger and the general prospect of imminent annihilation. During that night many houses were destroyed, particularly in the district of Rhegium, which is the port of Constantinople. Many amazing and incredible events occurred too in the course of that night. In one locality the roofs of buildings, and this was true of stone and wooden structures alike, came apart, disclosing through yawning gaps a clear vista of sky and stars, and then suddenly fell back again into place. Elsewhere pillars on an upper floor were catapulted by the force of

the convulsion and shot through the air over the tops of the nearby houses, travelling a long way before they eventually came crashing down and smashed into pieces whatever they landed on. In other places there were other still more horrifying things happening, and, though these followed an oft-repeated pattern which will recur time and again as long as this imperfect world of ours remains, yet their impact was on that occasion more shocking because they all occurred simultaneously. Large numbers of ordinary people perished in the disaster. Of the persons of rank and of those who were members of the senate the only one to lose his life was Anatolius”.

Τούτων δὲ οὐ πολλῶ ἔμπροσθεν πάλιν ἐν Βυζαντίῳ ἐξαίσιόν τι σειμοῦ χρῆμα ἐνέσκηπεν, ὡς μικροῦ ἅπασαν ἀνατετράφθαι καὶ διαρρηῆναι τὴν πόλιν. γέγονε μὲν γὰρ καὶ καθ’ αὐτὸν μέγιστος ἡλικὸς καὶ ὁποῖος, οἶμαι, οὐπόποτε πρότερον, τῆ τε τραχύτητι τοῦ βρασμοῦ καὶ τῷ μονίμῳ τοῦ σάλου. ἔτι δὲ αὐτὸν φρικωδέστερον ὁ καιρὸς ἀπείδεξε καὶ ἡ τῶν ἐπισυμβάντων ἀνάγκη. ἠνίκα γὰρ ἐκείνου τοῦ ἔτους ἢ τοῦ φθινοπόρου ἔληγεν ὥρα ἔτι τε τὰ ὑπὲρ τῶν ὀνομάτων συμπόσια ἐτελεῖτο, ἤπερ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις νενόμισθαι, κρυὸς μὲν ἤδη ὑπῆρχεν [...] τότε δὲ ἀμφὶ μέσην τῆς νυκτὸς φυλακὴν ὑπῆν μὲν οἱ ἀστοὶ εἶχοντο καὶ ἡρεμία, ἐνέπεσε δὲ ἐξαίφνης τὸ δεινόν, καὶ ἅπαντα εὐθύς ἐκ βάθρων αὐτῶν ἐδονεῖτο· ἢ τε κινήσεις βιαιότατα κατ’ ἀρχὰς εἰσβαλοῦσα ἐπὶ μείζον ἔτι ἠϋξάνετο καὶ ἐπηξάνετο, ὥσπερ ἐς ἐπιδοσίαν τινα καὶ ὑπερβολὴν τοῦ πάθους χωροῦντος. οὕτω δὴ οὖν ἀπάντων ἀφυπνισθέντων κωκυτὸς ἠκούετο πάντοθεν καὶ ὀλολυγὴ καὶ ἡ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ἀναβοᾶσθαι αὐτομάτως ἐν τούτοις εἰωθυῖα φωνή· ἐπεὶ καὶ ἠγὸς τις βαρὺς καὶ ἄγριος, ὥσπερ χθόνια βροντή, ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἀναπεμπομένη ἐπηκολούθει τῷ κλόνῳ καὶ ἐδιπλασιάζε τὰς ἐκπλήξεις. ὁ τε περιγίσιος ἀὴρ ὀμίχλη καπνώδει οὐκ οἶδα ὅθεν ἀναχθείση κατεμελαινέτο· καὶ ἦν ἅπας ζοφερὸς καὶ οἶον γεγανωμένος. τοιγάρτοι ἀλόγῳ τινὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπειον καὶ ἀνεξετάστω. ὑπὸ τοῦ δείματος ἐχόμενοι γνώμη ὑπεξήεσαν τῶν οἰκημάτων. καὶ αὐτίκα αἱ τε ἀγυαὶ καὶ οἱ στενωποὶ ἐνεπίμπλαντο τοῦ ὀμίλου, ὥσπερ οὐχὶ καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἐνόν, εἰ οὕτω τύχοι, διαφθαρέναι. ξυνεχεῖς γὰρ ἀπανταχοῦ αἱ οἰκοδομαὶ τῆς πόλεως καὶ ξυνημμέναι ἀλλήλαις καὶ σπανιαιότατα ἴδιοι τις ἂν χωρίον ὑπαίθρον καὶ ἀναπεπταμένον καὶ παντάπασιν ἐλεύθερον τοῦ ἐπιπροσθούντος. ὁμῶς τῷ ἄνω τὰς ὄψεις ἰθύνειν καὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀμωσγέπως ἐπιθεᾶσθαι οὕτω τε τὸ θεῖον ἰλάσκεσθαι, ταύτη γοῦν αὐτοῖς ἡρέμα ὑποχαλᾶν ἐδόκει τὸ δεδιὸς τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ ταραττόμενον. καίτοι νιφετῷ τε ὀλίγῳ ὑπερραίνοντο καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κρύους ἐπιέζοντο· ἀλλ’ οὐδ’ ὡς ὑπορόφιοι ἐγίγνοντο, πλὴν εἰ μὴ ὀπόσοι ἐν ἱεροῖς ἔρκεσι καταφεύγοντες ἐκαλινδοῦντο. γύναια δὲ πολλὰ, μὴ ὅτι τῶν ἡμελημένων, ἀλλ’ ἤδη πού καὶ τῶν ἐντιμοτάτων, ξυνηλάτο τοῖς ἀνδράσι καὶ ἀνεμίγνυτο· τάξις τε ἅπασα καὶ αἰδῶς καὶ ἡ τῶν γερῶν μεγαλαυχία καὶ ὁ τι ἐνθένδε ὑπερανέχον καὶ ἀποκεκριμένον, ἀνετετάρακτο ἐν τῷ τότε καὶ ἐπελάτητο. οἱ τε γὰρ δούλοι τοὺς κεκτημένους περιεφρόνουν καὶ τῶν ἐπιταγμάτων ἀνηκουστοῦντες ἔς τὰ ἱερά ξυνήεσαν, ὑπὸ τοῦ μείζονος νικώμενοι δέους· οἱ τε ἐλάττοντες πρὸς τοὺς ἐν τέλει ἔς ἰσοτιμίαν καθίσταντο, ὡς δὲ κοινοῦ ἐπιπεσόοντος κινδύνου καὶ ἀπάντων οἰομένων οὐκ ἔς μακρὰν ἀπολείσθαι. συχναὶ μὲν οὖν ἐκείνης τῆς νυκτὸς οἰκίαι καταβέβληνται, καὶ μάλιστα ἐν τῷ Ῥηγίῳ, ἐπίνειον δὲ τοῦτο τῆς πόλεως· πολλὰ τε καὶ ἄπιστα θαύματα ξυνηνέχθη. πῆ μὲν γὰρ αἱ ὀροφαί, εἴτε λίθοις εἴτε ξύλοις ἐτύγχανον ἐσκευασμένοι, διέστησαν ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων, ἀρνησάμεναι τὴν ξυνέχειαν καὶ διαχανοῦσαι, ὡς τὸν τε ἀέρα καὶ τοὺς ἀστέρας καθάπερ ἐν ὑπαίθρῳ χωρίῳ διοραῖσθαι, καὶ αὐθις ἀθρόον ἔς τὴν προτέραν ξυνήεσαν ἀρμονίαν· πῆ δὲ κίονες ἐν ὑπερώῳ τινὶ δωματίῳ ἰδρῦμενοι ἀνηκοντίζοντο τῇ βίᾳ τοῦ βρασμοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἐχομένους οἴκους ὑπεραλάμενοι ἐπὶ τοὺς πορρωτέρω, καθάπερ διασφενδονηθέντες, ἐκ τοῦ μετεώρου κατεφέροντο καὶ ἅπαντα διερρήγνυν· πῆ δὲ ἄλλα ἄττα φρικωδέστερα ξυνέβαινε, γεγόμενα μὲν πολλάκις πρότερον καὶ ἀεὶ ἐσόμενα, ἔστ’ ἂν γῆ τε ἢ καὶ φύσεως ἀμαρτήματα, τότε δὲ κατὰ τὸ μᾶλλον ἅπαντα ἅμα ξυνηνημένα. συχνοὶ δὲ ἄνθρωποι τεθνήκασιν τῶν πολλῶν τε καὶ ἠγνοημένων· τῶν γε μὴν δυνατῶν καὶ ἐν τῇ συγκλήτῳ βουλῇ ἀναγεγραμμένων Ἀνατόλιον μόνον διαφθαρῆναι ξυνέβη.

The earthquake is also recorded by Malalas: "In the month of December of the sixth indiction another most tremendous earthquake occurred at midnight. The two walls of Constantinople suffered, both the old one which had been put up by Constantine and the one built by Theodosius, and parts of churches collapsed; especially those on the far side of the Hebdomon. The column which was in the Secundianai was brought down, together with its statue. At Rhegium [a small town some distance west of the capital] a very large number of those who had been trapped in the rubble were rescued alive. Many parts of outlying cities also collapsed. This tremendous disaster lasted for ten days. For a time people were conscience-stricken and continued to offer prayers and supplications in the church. The emperor Justinian did not wear a crown for 30 days".

Μηνὶ δεκεμβρίῳ ἰνδικτιῶνος ς' γέγονεν ἕτερος σεισμὸς ἐν μεσονυκτίῳ φοβερός πάνυ, ὥστε παθεῖν τὰ δύο τεῖχη Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, τό τε παλαιὸν τὸ γεγόμενον ὑπὸ Κωνσταντίνου καὶ τὸ κτισθὲν ὑπὸ Θεοδοσίου, καὶ ἐκκλησιῶν δὲ μέρη κατέπεσον, ἐξαιρέτως δὲ τὰ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ Ἑβδόμου· καὶ ὁ κίων δὲ ὢν ἐν Σεκουνδιαναῖς σὺν τῇ στήλῃ κατηνέχθη· τοῦ δὲ Ῥηγίου πάνυ πολλὰ κατέπεσον. πολλοὶ ἀπέθανον ἐν τοῖς συμπτώμασι· τινὲς δὲ καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας ἐκ τῶν καταληφθέντων ὑπὸ τῶν συμπτωμάτων διεσώθησαν. ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ φόβῳ καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἔξω πόλεσι πολλοὶ τόποι πεπτώκασιν. ἡ δὲ αὐτὴ φοβερὰ ἀπειλὴ ἐπεκράτησεν ἐπὶ ἡμέρας δέκα· καὶ πρὸς ὀλίγον κατενύγησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι λιταῖς καὶ δεήσεσι προσκαρτεροῦντες ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ. ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς οὐκ ἐφόρσε στέμμα ἐπὶ ἡμέρας τριάκοντα.

Theophanes describes the earthquake as follows: "In this year [of the world 6050, i.e. 557], on 14 December, another utterly terrifying earthquake took place, with resulting damage to both walls of Constantinople: those erected by Constantine and the others by Theodosius. Churches and other buildings beyond the Hebdomon were equally destroyed, as was St.Samuel and the church of the Theotocos at Petala and that of St.Vicentius, and many church altars and their canopies from the Golden Gate to the Gate of Rhegium. There was no place or suburb that was not reduced to ruins as a result of this terrible earthquake, and Rhegium was razed to the ground, with the result that it was unrecognisable, and the churches of St.Stratonicus and St.Callinicus at Rhegium collapsed, as did the porphyry column which stood in front of the palace of the Jucundianae. It fell with the stele on the top and penetrated 8 feet into the ground, and the column of the emperor Arcadius also fell down — the one that stood on the shield of the Taurus, and the one on the left. Many people were injured by collapsing buildings, and others who had been struck by falling buildings were rescued two or three days later. And it was reported that the same thing had happened in other cities. No such great and terrible earthquake had ever occurred on earth within living memory".

Καὶ τῷ δεκεμβρίῳ μηνὶ ιδ' γέγονεν ἕτερος φοβερός πάνυ, ὥστε παθεῖν τὰ δύο τεῖχη Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, τό τε Κωνσταντιναικὸν καὶ τὸ ὑπὸ Θεοδοσίου κτισθὲν. κατέπεσον δὲ ἐν ἐξαιρέτῳ ἐκκλησίαι καὶ τὰ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ Ἑβδόμου καὶ ὁ ἅγιος Σαμουὴλ καὶ ἡ ἅγια Θεοτόκος τῶν Πεταλαῶ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Βικεντίου καὶ πολλὰ θυσιαστήρια ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ κιβώρια, ἀπὸ τῆς Χρυσῆς πόρτης ἕως τοῦ Ῥησίου· καὶ οὐκ ἦν τόπος ἢ προάστειον, ὃ οὐκ ἔπεσεν ἀπὸ τῆς φοβερᾶς ἀπειλῆς τοῦ σεισμοῦ. τὸ δὲ Ῥηγίον οὕτως ἔπεσεν ἕως ἐδάφους, ἔστε μὴ γνωρίζεσθαι αὐτό. ἔπεσε δὲ καὶ ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ ἁγίου Στρατονίκου καὶ Καλλινίκου ἕως ἐδάφους, αἱ οὖσαι ἐν τῷ Ῥηγίῳ. καὶ ὁ κίων δὲ ὁ πορφυροῦς, ὁ ἐστὼς ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ παλατίου Ἰουκουνδιανῶν μετὰ τῆς ἐπικειμένης αὐτῷ στήλης ἔπεσε καὶ ἐπάγη εἰς τὴν γῆν πόδας ὀκτώ. ἔπεσε δὲ καὶ ἡ στήλη Ἀρκαδίου τοῦ βασιλέως ἢ εἰς τὴν ἀψίδα τοῦ Ταύρου, ἢ εἰς τὸ ἀριστερὸν μέρος ἐστῶσα. καὶ πολλοὶ ἔπαθον ἐν τοῖς συμπτώμασι, ἕτεροι δὲ καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας ἐκ τῶν καταληφθέντων ὑπὸ τῶν συμπτωμάτων διεσώθησαν μετὰ δύο καὶ τρεῖς ἡμέρας.

ἠκούσθη δὲ ὅτι καὶ ἐν ἑτέραις πόλεσι τὸ αὐτὸ γέγονεν· τοιοῦτον γὰρ μέγαν καὶ φοβερὸν σεισμὸν οὐ μέμνηται ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ ἐκείνῃ.

The *Life of St.Symeon the Stylite the Younger* tells how, nine days after Syria was struck by a seismic sea-wave, St.Symeon appeared in Constantinople, where he had a vision of an impending earthquake: “Six days later, during the night, there was a great earthquake at Constantinople. In some districts a large number of houses partly collapsed, and many people were killed. Nicomedia was also destroyed, as well as the place called Rhegium, part of Nicea and the other cities of Illyria. There was great dismay at Antioch when the news was heard, and people prayed day and night”.

Καὶ μεθ’ ἡμέρας ἕξ ἐγένετο ἐν νυκτί σεισμός μέγας ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει, καὶ κατὰ ρεγεῶνας κατεστράφησαν ἐν μέρει οἴκοι πολλοὶ καὶ ἀπόλετο πολὺς λαὸς ἐν αὐτῇ κατεστράφη δὲ καὶ Νικομήδεια καὶ τὸ λεγόμενον Ῥήγιον, Νίκαια δὲ ἀπὸ μέρους καὶ αἱ λοιπαὶ πόλεις αἱ πλησίον τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ. Ἐγνώσθη δὲ ταῦτα ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τῇ πόλει καὶ ἐγένετο πένθος ἐν αὐτῇ, καὶ ἐλιτάνευον νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας.

The reference to Nicomedia and Nicea might suggest that the Constantinople earthquake was the one which occurred in 554 (see entry < 219 >), but that leaves the references to Illyricum unexplained. Moreover, as Van den Ven (1970, p.107) has pointed out, reference to the small town of Rhegium is found in both Agathias and Malalas, and would suggest dating the earthquake to 557.

Cedrenus records a destructive earthquake at Constantinople in the thirty-first year of the reign of Justinian I [557]: “In the thirty-first year [of the reign of Justinian] there were various other earthquakes, which affected the two walls of Constantinople to east and west, and many churches and houses collapsed. So did many outlying districts and Rhegium, with the result that they were rendered unrecognisable. Other cities were also affected by this earthquake, which was the strongest within living memory, and the earth was shaken continuously by day and night for ten days. The emperor, too, was plunged into grief by the disaster, and appeared on Christmas Day and Epiphany without his crown”.

Καὶ τῷ λα’ ἔτει ἐγένοντο πάλιν σεισμοὶ διάφοροι, ὥστε παθεῖν τὰ δύο τεῖχη Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, τὸ ἀνατολικὸν καὶ τὸ δυτικὸν, καὶ πολλὰ ἐκκλησίαι καὶ οἴκοι ἕως ἐδάφους κατέπεσον. ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ τὰ προάστεια καὶ τὸ Ῥήγιον. ὥστε μὴ γνωρίζεσθαι. καὶ ἐν ἄλλαις δὲ πόλεσιν ἐγένετο ὁ σεισμός οὗτος, οἷον οὐκ ἐμνημόνευσεν ἄνθρωπος ἐν ταῖς γενεαῖς ἐκείναις. καὶ ἐσειέτο ἡ γῆ μετὰ φιλανίας ἐν νυκτί καὶ ἡμέρα ἐπὶ ἡμέρας δέκα. διὸ καὶ λυπούμενος ὁ βασιλεὺς εἰς τὰ γενέθλια καὶ θεοφάνια χωρὶς στέμματος προῆλθε.

One of the delayed effects of this earthquake was the sudden collapse of the dome of St.Sophia in May 558. The occurrence is reported by Malalas, the *Anonymous Ecclesiastical History*, The Great Chronographer, Pseudo-Dionysius of Tellmahre (who dates it to 555/556), Theophanes and Cedrenus.

A monody was composed on the occasion of this earthquake. The text was published by Kumaniecki (1930), and the author may have been Procopius. Allen and Datema (1991) have suggested that there are allusions to this earthquake in *Homily 1* and *Homily 7* by Leontius of Constantinople.

Capelle (1924, col.347) dates the earthquake to 559. Downey (1955, p.598) uses the *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* 308.29-32 to confirm the date of the earthquake as 14 December. He also thinks (1961, p.558) that the walls of Antioch collapsed as a result of this earthquake rather than in 551 (see entry < 218 >); but he does not seem to have given sufficient consideration to the problems of handling a hagiographical source.

