THE CHURCH OF "ST." ACACIUS AT CONSTANTINOPLE

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The purpose of this note is to propose a new solution to the apparent contradiction between the so-called Syriac Breviary and later Greek and Latin sources concerning the location of the martyrdom of the soldier St. Acacius. The Syriac Breviary, which survives in a manuscript dated to 411 and is based on a Greek original which was probably written at Nicomedia about 362, seems to imply that St. Acacius was martyred at Nicomedia.1 In contrast, the Hieronymian Martyrology which was probably written in northern Italy sometime during the period 431-51 sets his martyrdom at Constantinople.2 It is generally accepted at present that St. Acacius was martyred at Constantinople, and that the Syriac Breviary errs in its apparent claim to the contrary. The best one can make of its notice in this matter is that it had been intended to record the special celebration of his feast in Nicomedia rather than his original martyrdom there.3 The two main arguments in support of his martyrdom at Constantinople rather than Nicomedia are that the ecclesiastical history of Socrates proves the existence of a Church of St. Acacius at Constantinople from an early date and that, whatever its other problems, the surviving Greek passion (BHG 13) does indeed set his martyrdom and burial at Constantinople.4 Yet closer inspection reveals that neither of these sources proves what it has been claimed to prove.

1 See J. de Rossi and L. Duchesne (eds.), Acta Sanctorum Novembris II.1 (Brussels, 1894), LII-LXV, at LVII. Their Greek translation runs: ἐν Νικομηδείᾳ Ἀκάκιος μάρτυρ. It dates his feast to 10 May.
3 So H. Delehaye, Les Origines du Culte des Martyrs (Brussels, 1933), p. 233, asks: "Avaient-ils une fête spéciale dans cette ville, ou y a-t-il erreur dans la rubrique?"
4 See H. Delehaye, "Saints de Thrace et de Mésie", Analecta Bollandiana 31 (1912), 161-291, at 228-32. The passion may be found at PG 115, cols. 217-40.

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To begin with Socrates, he claims that bishop Macedonius of Constantinople (341-60) transferred the body of Constantine I to the church in which the body of St. Acacius then lay in 359 due to the unsafe condition of the Church of the Holy Apostles at this time.\footnote{\textit{Soc. HE} 2.38.40: \textit{μεταφέρει τὸ σῶμα τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ἐν ᾗ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ μάρτυρος Ἀκακίου ὁπέκειτο.}} It is important to note, however, that this does not prove the existence of a “Church of St. Acacius” as such at Constantinople by 359, although this is how this passage is normally interpreted.\footnote{See, e.g., G. Dagron, \textit{Naissance d'une Capitale: Constantinople et ses Institutions de 330 à 451} (Paris, 1984). No source attributes the construction of a Church of St. Acacius to Constantine I before the so-called \textit{Patricia of Constantinople}, which are of late date and extremely unreliable. Eusebius of Caesarea claims only that Constantine adorned his city “with very many places of worship, very large martyr-shrines, and splendid houses” (\textit{VC} 3.48.1). Hence modern authorities, e.g. A. Cameron and S. Hall, \textit{Eusebius: Life of Constantine} (Oxford, 1999), p. 297, usually admit only that he may have been responsible for the construction of the Church of St. Acacius.} At most, it only proves that Socrates believed that Macedonius had transferred the body to a church which he himself knew as the “Church of St. Acacius” at the time that he was writing c.439, which is a rather different matter.\footnote{The \textit{Notitia Urbi Constantinopolitanae}, drawn up under Theodosius II (408-50), proves the existence of an “ecclesiam sive martyrium Sancti Acacii” at this relatively late period anyway.} It does not prove that the church had always been known by this exact title, i.e. St. Acacius, nor that it had always contained, or been alleged to contain, the body of St. Acacius. More importantly, there is nothing in the anecdote itself which requires that Macedonius must have believed that it was the “Church of St. Acacius” at the time of his action. He moved Constantine’s body there, one suspects, simply because it was the nearest available church. The same argument also applies to Socrates' second anecdote concerning a chapel (οἰκίσσως) dedicated to St. Acacius.\footnote{\textit{Soc. HE} 6.23.2-6. It is not entirely clear whether his two anecdotes refer to the same building.} According to this story, the emperor Arcadius (395-408) had once visited this chapel which was built near a walnut-tree upon which Acacius was supposed to have been hanged.\footnote{The passion of Acacius specifically records that he was beheaded with a sword (\textit{PG} 115, col. 239, ch. 22), as one would normally expect. This contradiction is puzzling. If the story is not a totally fictitious local legend, then one wonders whether it may preserve a corrupt memory of the death of another Acacius at this spot, not the military martyr.} His presence drew crowds of onlookers from the building within whose courtyard this walnut-tree lay with the result that when this building suddenly collapsed,