

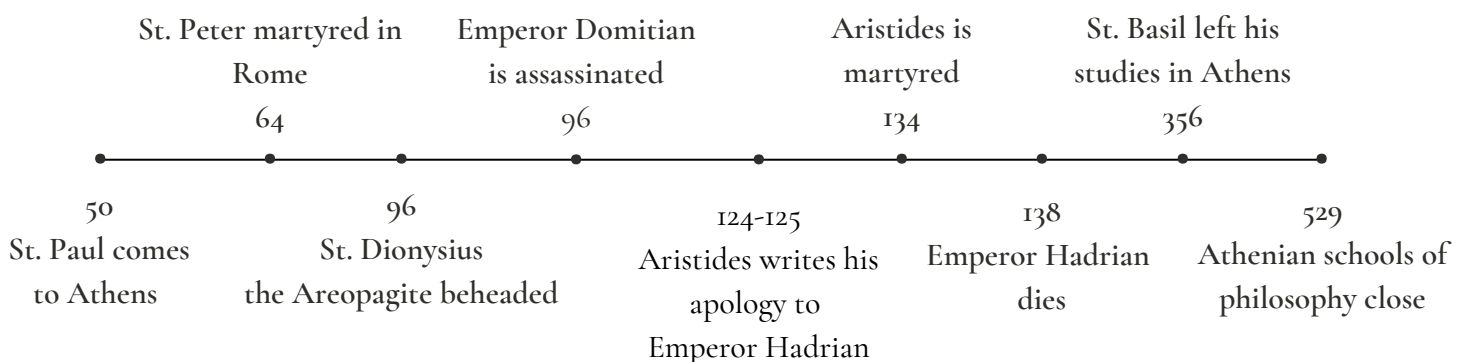


History

Christianity was introduced to Athens by St. Paul around AD 50. Silas and Timothy accompanied him in his missionary endeavor, and together they worked to find men in the city who were interested in hearing the Gospel since there were already Jews in Athens. They frequented the *agora* and preached at the Areopagus—a sermon mentioned in Acts 17 was the message that converted St. Dionysius the Areopagite. Together St. Dionysius and his two friends, Damaris and Thamar, stayed in Athens to continue to spread the message of Christianity when St. Paul moved on to Corinth. St. Dionysius the Areopagite eventually became the bishop of the city, building the community there until he was martyred in AD 96, ordered to be beheaded by the

Emperor Domitian. Another Athenian who defended Christianity in the city after St. Dionysius's death was Aristides, who wrote an apology directed at Emperor Hadrian. In the second century the Church in Athens grew to the point that the Bishop of Rome wrote a letter to them in AD 139. While Athens was decidedly pagan and Christians were few and far between, their persecution was often social and scholastic and did not lead to outright death. By the fourth century, many famous Christians including St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nazianzus studied at schools of philosophy there. In 529 the schools of philosophy closed, and Christianity was established as the primary religion of the city.

Timeline



Leading Characters

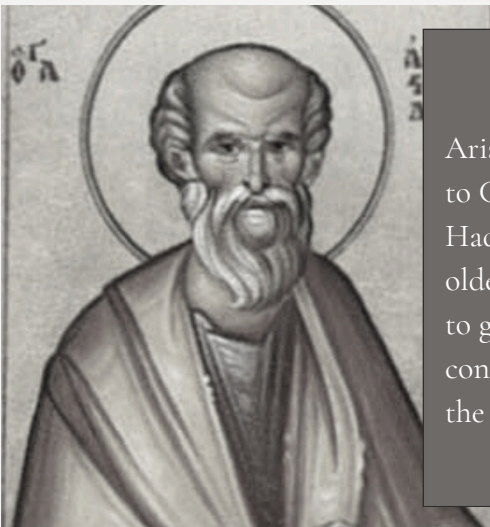
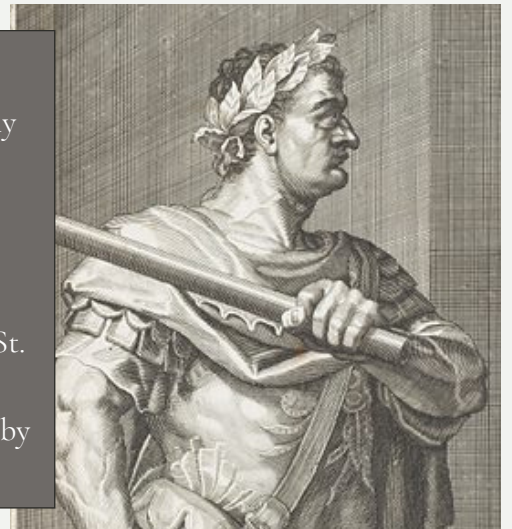


ST. DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

One of the first recorded converts of the Athenian Church listened St. Paul during his sermon on the Areopagus in Acts 17. He was said to have witnessed the darkness of Good Friday during his travels to Egypt, later remembering the event as part of his conversion. He visited Mary, the mother of Jesus, in Jerusalem, writing down his conversations with her and producing many other written works throughout his life. He was appointed by St. Paul to be Bishop of Athens before being beheaded by Emperor Domitian in 96 AD.

EMPEROR DOMITIAN

Domitian was Roman emperor from 81 to 96 AD. His extremely authoritarian style of ruling put him at odds with other politicians who often plotted to kill him. Domitian believed in the traditional Roman religion, establishing many temples for various gods throughout his rule. Christians were heavily persecuted towards the end of Domitian's reign, evidenced by St. Dionysius's death. Domitian himself was assassinated in a conspiracy enacted by court officials. He was stabbed to death by a man who concealed a dagger in a fake arm bandage.



ST. ARISTIDES OF ATHENS

Aristides of Athens practiced philosophy before his conversion to Christianity. He addressed an apology of the faith to Emperor Hadrian, probably written around 124-125 AD. The apology is the oldest surviving Christian apologetic text. He traveled to Rome to give his defense before going back to Athens, where he continued to preach the Gospel despite persecution. He died at the gallows in Athens on September 13, AD 134.

Sources

Quinn, D. "Christian Athens." In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. 1907.

Aristides G. Theodoropoulos. "Saint Aristides and His Veneration in Greece." September 13, 2021. <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2021/09/saint-aristides-and-his-veneration-in.html>

IMAGES:

The Acropolis at Athens, Leo von Klenze, Germany, 1846.

Dionysius the Areopagite, Andre Thevet, France, 1584.

Domitian Emperor of Rome, Bernardino Campi, Italy, ca. 18th century.

St. Aristides of Athens, Unknown.