

# Holy Women of the Syrian Orient



Sasanika  
Sources

Translated, with an introduction, by  
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## - 3 - *Persian Martyrs Introduction*

The origins of Christianity in the Persian Empire are shrouded in obscurity, but by the mid-third century, there were sizable Syriac-speaking Christian communities in many towns. However, it was not until the early 340s, under Shapur II (339-79), that widespread persecution broke out. During the fourth and fifth centuries Christians in the Persian Empire tended to come under suspicion of favoring the enemy, their coreligionists, and it is significant that the major outbreaks of persecution under the Sasanids belong to periods when the two empires were in open conflict with each other.<sup>1</sup>

On 17 April 341 (the year is not quite certain) Simeon, bishop of Seleucia- Ktesiphon, the winter capital (to the south of Baghdad), was executed on the grounds that he had refused to levy from his flock an extra tax to help the war effort. His was but the first of a whole series of martyrdoms. Among the early victims was the Shapur II's (339-79) own master craftsman, Posi (or Pusai), a member of the Christian community deported from Roman territory and settled at Karka d-Ledan, a new town built by Shapur. In his new home Posi had married a Persian wife and converted her to Christianity; their daughter Martha evidently undertook a vow of virginity (something particularly abhorrent to Zoroastrian mores), and shortly after her father's martyrdom she too was arrested and eventually put to death (see 3A below).<sup>2</sup>

The martyr bishop Simeon had two sisters; one was married, while the other, Tarbo (see 3B below), had undertaken a vow of virginity and become a *bath qyā mā*, conventionally translated "daughter [i.e., member] of the covenant,"<sup>3</sup> along with her maid. The three women are arrested on suspicion of having cast a spell upon the queen (who had fallen sick) in revenge for their brother's death. Their weird and gruesome fate perhaps reflects the

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<sup>1</sup> Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, trans., *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Los Angeles: University of Berkeley, 1998; © 1987), 64.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-5.

<sup>3</sup> On the *bnay qyā mā*, "son's (i.e., members) of the *qyā mā*," see especially G. Nedungatt, "The Covenanters of the Early Syriac Speaking Church," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973): 191-215, 419-44. The precise sense of *qyā mā* in this context is disputed: it could mean covenant, vow (especially of virginity, probably made at (adult) baptism), stance, position, or even (unlikely) resurrection.



punishment for witches in the Zoroastrian law code.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting that the accusation of sorcery is a recurrent one in the hagiographical texts emanating from Sasanid Iran.<sup>5</sup>

This the first of two short pieces (see 3D below), taken from a list of the martyrs of Karka d-Beth (modern Kerkuk), and since it probably represents an early state in the hagiographical process, there is little more than a mere commemoration of names, with only sparse information on the circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

Thekla and her companions belong to Adiabene, a part of the country further to the north (modern Irbil area). They too are “daughters of the covenant,” and this is clearly the main reason why they catch the attention of Narsai Tahmshabur and are arrested alongside their local priest, Pawle. When the priest’s unexpected apostasy foils Narsai’s hope of getting hold of Pawle’s not inconsiderable property, the poor women are turned into pawns in Narsai’s subsequent maneuvers to lay his hands on this wealth.<sup>7</sup>

Two further short periods of fairly widespread persecution are also associated with times of hostilities between the two empires. That under Yazdgard I (right at the end of his reign) and Bahram V, lasting from about 420 to about 422, has produced a small group of martyrdoms of considerable historical interest; none, however, concerns women. The main literary monument of the second period, the persecutions (ca. 446-48) under Yazdgard II (438-57), is a cycle of three martyrdoms that have taken on somewhat legendary proportions; they concern Pethion, a hermit, and his two aristocratic converts, the Mobed Adurhormized and his daughter Anahid. Their story in fact begins a generation earlier: a Magian called Mihryar, of considerable local repute in the Balashfarr region,<sup>8</sup> had two sons, Yazdin and Dadgushnasp. Yazdin is sent to a Zoroastrian school, but he persistently runs away. His father, therefore, entrusts him to a tutor, and sends his brother to the school instead. The tutor, Jacob, happens to be a Christian, and Yazdin goes with him regularly to church; eventually he asks to be taken to the local priest to be baptized, but Jacob, out of fear for the consequences from Yazdin’s father, tells him he must wait until his father’s death. Yazdin, in disappointment, runs away yet again and manages to be baptized at Karka d-Beth Slokh . After thirty-two years living as an ascetic, he returns home to find his father dead; he manages to convert his brother Dadgushnasp (who alters his name to Didisho , “Jesus has given”), and he takes into his cell as a pupil one of his brother’s children, Pethion. Pethion and his uncle Yazdin live an ascetic life together for fourteen years, until the latter’s death. During these years, they gain a great reputation for their healing miracles, and it is in connection with these gifts that the Mobed Adurhormizd first goes to Pethion for help in healing his daughter Anahid (see 3F below). In this first extract from the Pathion cycle translated here, we learn of Anahid’s conversion, followed eventually by that of her father. In the Syriac text there follows the account of Adurhormized’s own trial and martyrdom (not translated here), and only after that is the narrative concerning Anahid resumed.<sup>9</sup>

The Pethion-Adurhormized-Anahid cycle reflects a later phase in the history of the

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<sup>4</sup> Denkart VIII. 42.1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, trans., *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 65.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-6.

<sup>8</sup> The region to the east of Beth Garmai, spanning the Iraqi-Irani border, and centered on the town of Hulwan; cf. J.-M. Fiey, *Communauté s syriaques en Iran et Iraq des origines à 1552* (London, 1979), 4:360-68).

<sup>9</sup> Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, trans., *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 66-7.

relationship of Christians to the Zoroastrian state. By now, the mid- fifth century, Christianity has become a recognized minority religion, and only converts from high-born Magian families were in serious danger from the Zoroastrian authorities. It is interesting that very often the shah himself tried to restrain the zeal of the Zoroastrian clergy.<sup>10</sup>

### *A. The Martyrdom of Martha, Daughter of Posi who was a Daughter of the Covenant*<sup>11</sup>

Now the glorious Posi also had a daughter called Martha who was **233** a “daughter of the covenant.” She too was accused, and at the third hour on the Sunday of the great feast of the Resurrection she was arrested.<sup>12</sup> They brought the blessed Martha, daughter of the glorious Posi, into the presence of the chief Mobed,<sup>13</sup> who then went to inform the king about her. The king bade him to go out and interrogate her, saying, “If she abandons her religion and renounces Christianity, well and good; if not, she should be married off. If, however, she fails to follow either of these courses, she should be handed over to be put to death.” So the chief Mobed went out and started to interrogate the glorious Martha as follows: “What are you?” To which the blessed Martha replied derisively, “I am a woman, as you can see.” Those who happened to be there in the presence of the chief Mobed blushed and bent down their heads when they heard the wise Martha reply to his question. The Mobed’s face became green with anger and shame, but he **234** controlled his feelings and said, “Reply to my question.” To which the wise Martha said, “I did reply to the question I was asked.” The Mobed then said, “What did I ask you, and what reply did you give?” Martha said, “Your honor asked ‘what are you?’ and I replied, ‘I am a woman as you can see.’”

“I asked you what is your religion,” said the Mohed. The glorious Martha replied, “I am a Christian, as my clothing shows.”<sup>14</sup> The Mobed went on, “Tell me the truth, are you the daughter of the crazy Posi who went out of his mind and opposed the king, with the result that he was put to an evil death?” To this the blessed girl replied, “Humanly speaking, I am his daughter, but also by Faith I am the daughter of the Posi who is wise in his God and sane in the firm stand he took on behalf of the Kings of kings, the King of truth, the Posi who yesterday acquired everlasting life by means of dying for his God. If only God would hold me worthy to be a true daughter of this blessed Posi, who is now with the saints in light and eternal rest, while I am still among sinners in this world of sorrows.” The Mobed then said, “Listen to me, and I will advise you what is your best course: the king of kings is merciful and he does not desire anyone’s death, but in his goodness he wishes all his friends to become fellow-religionists of his and so be honored by him. So it was in the case of your father: because the king liked him, he honored him and gave advancement; but your father

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>11</sup> Marginal numbers refer to pages in P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2 (Paris and Leipzig, 1890-97; repr. Hildersheim, 1968).

<sup>12</sup> The town where this takes place is Karka d-Ledan, in Khuzistan (J.-M. Fiey, *Communauté s syriaques en Iran et Iraq des origines à 1552* (London, 1979), 3b: 123-30) and the year is probably 341.

<sup>13</sup> Zoroastrian priest; for the Zoroastrian clergy, see G. Widengren, *Die Religion Irans* (Stuttgart, 1965), 259-65.

<sup>14</sup> Members of the *qyāmā* evidently wore distinctive clothing.

acted **235** foolishly and said things that were quite out of place, whereupon the king of kings urged him not to be stubborn, but to no effect. This was the reason why he was put to death. And now in your case, do not act stubbornly as your father did, but do the will of Shapur, king of kings and lord of all religions. As a result you will be greatly honored, and whatever you ask for your comfort will be granted by the king.”

The glorious Martha replied, “May king Shapur live, may his graciousness never leave him, may his compassion continue; may his graciousness be preserved by his children and his compassion redound to himself and on the people who deserve it. May the life that he loves be accorded to all his brethren and friends, but let all who imitate my father meet the evil death you said my father died. As for me, a wretched handmaid, the dregs of the handmaids of God and of the king, why should any transient honor come to me? I have decided to become the object of abuse like my father for the sake of my father’s God, and I will die like him because of my faith in God.”

The Mobed said, “I am aware of the hardness of heart you Christians have - a people guilty of death. Furthermore, no obedient offspring is likely to come from a rebellious man like Posi. Nevertheless, simply so that I shall not be held guilty before God of not having done my best to warn you, I am taking all this trouble over you in order to bring you over to the religion of the excellent gods who care for the world.”

The holy Martha replied, “You have said your part, and I have said mine - unless you are quite blind and are paying no attention to the true state of **236** affairs that I have described. Otherwise you have both heard and seen which exhortation is profitable and which harmful; which leads to the kingdom of heaven, which leads to the fire of Gehenna, which provides life, and which engenders death.”

The Mobed went on: “Listen to me and don’t be stubborn and obstinate, following your own perverted wishes in everything. Instead, seeing that you are set on not giving up your religion, act as you like, but do this one thing only, and you shall live and not die; you are a young girl, and a very pretty one - find a husband and get married, have sons and daughters, and don’t hold on to the disgusting pretext of the ‘covenant.’”<sup>15</sup>

The wise virgin Martha replied, “If a virgin is betrothed to a man, does the natural law order that someone else should come along, attack her fiancé, and snatch away this girl who has already been betrothed? Or does it say that such a virgin should give herself up to marry a man who is not her fiancé?” “No,” answered the Mobed.

The betrothed of Christ, Martha, then said, “So how can your authority order me to marry a man to whom I am not betrothed when I am already betrothed to someone else?”

To which the Mobed said, “Are you really betrothed then?” And the blessed Martha replied, “I am in truth betrothed.” “To whom?” asked the Mobed. “Is not your honor aware of him?” said the glorious Martha. “Where is he?” **237** asked the Mobed. Wise in our Lord, she replied, “He has set out on a long journey on business; but he is close by and is on the point of coming back.”

“What is his name?” inquired the Mobed. “Jesus,” replied the blessed Martha.

Still not understanding, the Mobed went on, “What country has he gone to? In which city is he now?” The splendid Martha replied, “He has gone off to heaven, and he is now in Jerusalem on high.”

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<sup>15</sup> Probably a vow of virginity is meant



At this point the Mobed realized that she was speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereupon he said, “Didn’t I say at the very beginning that this was a stubborn people, not open to persuasion? I will spatter you from head to toe with blood, and then your fiancé can come along to find you turned into dust and rubbish: let him marry you then.”

The courageous Martha replied, “He will indeed come in glory, riding on the chariot of the clouds, accompanied by the angels and powers of heaven, and all that is appropriate for his wedding feast; he will shake from the dust the bodies of all those who are betrothed to him, wash them in the dew of heaven, anoint them with the oil of gladness, and clothe them in the garment of righteousness, which consists of glorious light; he will place on their fingers rings as the surety of his grace, while on their heads he will put a crown of splendor, that is to say, unfading glory. He will allow them to sit on his chariot - the glorious cloud - and will raise them up into the air, bringing them into the heavenly bridal **238** chamber that has been set up in a place not made by hands, but built in Jerusalem the free city on high.” When the chief Mobed heard this, he left her in his place and went to inform the king of everything. The king then gave orders for the impudent girl and daughter of an impudent father to be taken outside the city and immolated on the very spot where her father had been killed.

So they led the chaste virgin Martha off on the Sunday of the great feast of Christ’s resurrection, at midday. As they were getting ready the place where she was to be put to death, she fell down on her face and, as she knelt before God facing east, she said, “I thank you, Jesus Christ, my Lord, my King and my Betrothed, for preserving my virginity sealed up with the imprint of the seal-ring of your promise, and for preserving my faith in the glorious Trinity - the faith in which I was born, in which my parents brought me up, and in which I was baptized. For this confession, for which my father Posi was also crowned, I give you thanks, O Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, for whose sake the bishops, our shepherds, have been sacrificed, as have the head pastors, the priests, and along with them the members of the holy covenant; and slaughtered too have been the sheep - Guhshtazad<sup>16</sup> and Posi my father. And now it is the turn of me, the young lamb who has been fattened up on the pastures of your promises and by the springs of your declarations: here I am being sacrificed before you. At your hands, Jesus, the true High Priest, may I be offered up **239** as a pure, holy, and acceptable offering before the glorious Trinity of the hidden Being, in whose name you taught us to be instructed and baptized. Visit, Lord, your persecuted people; preserve them in true faith in the midst of their enemies, and may they be found to be like pure gold in the furnace of persecution that has been erected against your people; may they be strengthened in the worship of your majesty, fearlessly worshipping and confessing Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and always and for eternal ages, amen.”

The moment she had finished her prayer, while no one was near at hand, she rushed off and stretched herself on the ground above the pit they had dug for her. When the officer approached to tie her up, she said, “Do not tie me up, for I am gladly accepting immolation for the sake of my Lord.” When she saw the knife being brandished by the officer, she laughed and said, “Now I can say, not like Isaac, ‘Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’<sup>17</sup> but rather I can say, ‘Here is the lamb and the

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<sup>16</sup> The apostasy and subsequent repentance and martyrdom of this courtier Shapur II are related in both recensions of the martyrdom of Simeon bar Sabbā ē, bishop of Seleucia-Ktesiphon (*PatrologiaSyriaca* 2, cols. 750-58, 831-39, and 866-90).

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 22:7.



knife, but where is the wood and the fire?’ But I *do* have wood and fire, for the wood is the cross of Jesus my Lord, and I *do* have fire too - the fire that Christ left on earth, just as he said, ‘I came to cast fire on earth: I only wish it already caught alight!’”<sup>18</sup>

The thousands of spectators who stood by were astonished at the chaste girl’s courage; and everyone gave praise to the God who encourages those **240** who fear him in this way.

The officer then approached and slaughtered her like a lamb, while she entrusted her soul to Christ. Guards stayed by her corpse, and it remained there for two days, but on the night of Tuesday, thanks to a bribe handed over to the guards, it was taken away. By this time many had been slain for the sake of Christ. The blessed girl’s brother, who had earlier buried his father, provided the money and took off the corpse; he then embalmed the body and laid it beside her father’s. The blessed Martha was crowned on the Sunday of the great feast of the Resurrection. The blessed women who had helped prepare them for burial used to keep their memorial each year in her home, close by where the priests and clergy lived. This she did all her life, and after her death her house passed to her brother’s sons. He too diligently kept their memorial, following that blessed woman’s custom. When this nephew died, he left behind him two sons, and sometime after his death they had a quarrel over the saint’s bones: one of them wanted to divide them up between himself and his brother, because the house of the blessed woman had fallen to his share. The matter came to the knowledge of Sawmay, bishop of Karka,<sup>19</sup> of blessed memory, and he persuaded the two of them to let him take away the bones; whereupon he presented them to the people of the church of Karka, to serve as a fair Memento, and to be a valued treasure in the church of Christ. This was done by the holy Bishop Sawmay in the eighth year of king Barharan,<sup>20</sup> son of Yazdgard, eighty-nine years after **241** their crowning. This was what happened to Posi and his daughter.

### *B. The Martyrdom of Tarbo, her sister, and her Servant*

At this time it so happened that the queen fell ill. Since she was favorably inclined to the enemies of the cross, the Jews, they told her, making their **254** customary false accusation: “The sisters of Simeon have put spells on you because their brother has been put to death.” Once this reached the queen’s ears, Tarbo, a “daughter of the covenant,” was arrested together with her married sister, who was living in continence,<sup>21</sup> and her servant, who was also a “daughter of the covenant” and who had been instructed by Tarbo in the excellent teaching of Christ.

They brought the women to the queen’s residence for interrogation. The head Mobed and two officers were sent for so that they could adjudicate their case. When the women were introduced into their presence, these men **255** saw the valiant and holy Tarbo’s beautiful looks and her fine appearance, excelling that of all other women. Straightaway all three of

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<sup>18</sup> Luke 12:49.

<sup>19</sup> He was a signatory of the Synod of Yabballaha I in 420; on him, see Fiey, *Communautés* 3b: 127-28.

<sup>20</sup> I.e. Bahram V (420-38).

<sup>21</sup> *mqaddashtā*; this and the terms *qaddishā* or *qaddishuthā* (lit. ‘holy, holiness’) are often used in the technical sense of abstinence from marital intercourse in early Syriac literature; the usage was suggested by Exodus 19:10 taken in conjunction with verse 15.



them conceived the same filthy thought and disgusting intensions concerning her,<sup>22</sup> though none of them revealed anything to the others. They proceeded to speak harshly to the women, saying, “You deserve to die, seeing that you have brought these evil effects upon the person of the queen, the mistress of the entire orient.”

The holy Tarbo replied, “What false charges are you bringing against us, charges that are quite out of keeping with our way of life? What wrong have we done you that you falsely accuse us of something quite alien to the truth for which we stand? Are you thirsting after our blood? If so, what prevents you from drinking it? Are you aiming at our death? Your hands are already befouled by killing us Christians every day: we may be put to death, but we will not renounce our religion. It is written down for us that we should serve one God alone, and not consider alongside him any likeness in heaven or on earth.”<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the following is written down for us: ‘If a sorcerer should be found, he is to die at the hands of the people.’<sup>24</sup> How, then, could we perform sorcery? Sorcery is in the same category as the denial of God; in both cases the sentence is death.”

Those evil judges sat there listening to her in silence, enjoying the occasion - that is, in their own bitter way, stunned as they were by her **256** astonishing beauty and exceptional wisdom. Each one of them said to himself in the vain hope conjured up by his evil thoughts concerning her, “I’ll rescue her from death so that she can be my wife.”

The Mobed then spoke to the women: “In your anger over your brother being put to death you have gone so far as to transgress your own law, performing sorcery on the queen, despite the fact that you are not allowed to do this, as you yourself have said.” The glorious Tarbo spoke: “What bad or hateful thing has been done to my brother Simeon so that a result we should risk losing our salvation at God’s hands? For even though you may have killed him out of hatred and jealousy, he is nevertheless alive in the Kingdom on high - the Kingdom that will make your kingdom down here on earth pass away, and that will dissolve your position of authority and render useless this honor of yours that does not last.”

After this they sent the three women off to prison, to be detained there. The next day the Mobed sent a message to Tarbo, saying, “I will intercede with the king and I will save the three of you from death - on the condition you become my wife.” On hearing this the glorious woman was greatly and greatly shaken, replying, “Shut your mouth, you wicked man and enemy of God; **257** don’t ever again utter anything so disgusting. Your filthy words make no impression on ears that are pure, and your foul proposition does not have any effect on my mind, which is chaste and holy; for I am betrothed of Christ. In his name I am preserving virginity, and upon my hope in him I am hanging my sure conviction. I entrust my life to him since he is able to deliver me from your impure hands and from your evil intentions concerning me. I am not afraid of death or alarmed at the thought of being killed, seeing that you are marking out a path for me whereby I shall travel to behold my beloved and dearest brother Simeon, the bishop. In this way I shall receive consolation for all my pains and sufferings, as I follow on his footsteps.”

The two officials likewise sent messages to her on the same lines, each concealing the matter from the other. With indignation and great anger she gave them an adamant refusal. The three of them then decided together on a stratagem that would bear bitter fruit. Bringing totally false testimony, they gave a wicked verdict, saying that they were indeed

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<sup>22</sup> For this motif, see Susanna, I: 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Exodus 20: 3-4.

<sup>24</sup> Leviticus 20:27.



witches. The king then sent word to the effect that, if they worshipped the sun, they need not to be put to death, on the grounds that they might really not know how to cast spells. When the women heard this, they cried out, “We will not exchange our God for something created by him; we will not worship the created sun in place of our Creator, nor will we abandon our Savior Jesus just because of your threats.”

The Magians immediately started making an uproar: “These women should perish from beneath the face of the heavens; they have cast spells **258** on the queen and she has fallen ill.” Permission was then given to the Magians to employ on the women whatever means of execution they liked. Now they said that their bodies should be cut in two and that the queen should pass between the two halves, after which she would be healed.<sup>25</sup>

Once again, as the women were being taken out for execution, the Mobed sent a message to the glorious Tarbo to the effect that, if she listened to his proposal, neither she nor her companions would be put to death. The chaste women, however, cried out with a loud voice, reviling him: “Foul and perverted man, why do you crazily rave after something that is neither proper nor permissible? I shall die a heroic death, for thus shall I obtain true life; I will not live in an ignominious way and then eventually die.”

They took the three holy women outside the city and drove into the ground two stakes for each woman, and they stretched them out, attaching them by their hands and feet, like lambs about to be shorn. Thereupon they sawed their bodies in halves, cut them up into six portions, placing them in six baskets, which they suspended on six forked pieces of wood; these they thrust into the ground, three on each side of the road. Hung upon them were fruits that blind those who pluck them, and they bore produce that is bitter to those who **259** pick it.

This was a bitter spectacle that spoke for itself, girt with suffering; grievous sight, carrying with it groans and lamentation. If anyone cannot weep, let him come here and bath himself in tears; if anyone’s eyes are dry, let him come here and wash himself in weeping, as he recalls the groans uttered by the pure and chaste bodies of those holy women. In their lifetime they were modestly dressed while in their rooms, but in their death they were naked by the roadside. These are women who did not betray their freedom for a life of shame, whose chaste nature was handed over to be abused. How silent and quiet is Justice, who is normally not lenient or forgiving when she exacts the penalty. How daring and bold is Pride, which, once shattered does not normally recover! These were merciless men, deprived of any pity or compassion; they resembled ravening wolves that tear out living flesh. The men who cut in half and strung up these women are cannibals who eat people alive; as it is written, “They swallowed us up alive.”<sup>26</sup>

Who got any joy out of this lugubrious spectacle? Who took any pleasure in this awesome sight? Who could look on with dry eyes? Who could steel himself to turn round and look upon them? If any such person exists, his nature is not the same as our nature, and he cannot belong to the race of Adam.

They conveyed the queen along that road and made her get out in between the bodies. The entire entourage came out after her, for it was the **260** time when the king was moving up to his summer residence.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Denkart VIII. 42.1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Palms. 124:3.

<sup>27</sup> I.e., Karka d-Ledan, in the mountains.





The glorious women were crowned on the fifth of the lunar month Iyyar.<sup>28</sup>

### *C. From the Martyrs of Karka d-Beth Slokh*

Ba utha, a noble laywoman from Karka d-Beth Slokh,<sup>29</sup> was put to **288** death outside her castle at the orders of the Mobed Adurgushnasp. Thekla and Danq, both “daughters of the covenant,” were put to death at the orders of the Mobed Adurgushnasp.

Taton, Mama, Mezakhya, and Anna, all “daughters of the covenant” from Karka d-Beth Slokh, were put to death outside Karka in a place called Hawra (White Polar) at the orders of the Mobed of Karka. A fig tree grew up on the **289** spot where their blood was shed, and it was a source of miraculous healing for many years until the despicable Manichaeans uprooted it out of envy. As a result a spirit of elephantiasis was sent upon them, to their discomfort, whereupon they acknowledged the reason why this had happened to them, and a mighty miracle witnessed in them.<sup>30</sup>

Abyat, Hathay, and Mezakhya, all “daughters of the covenant” from the region of Beth Garmay, were put to death at the orders of King Shapur when he was in the region.

### *D. From the History of Karka d-Beth Slokh*

In the time of Ma ne, bishop and glorious martyr, there was persecution against the Christians, and the church was uprooted . . . The persecution **513** consisted not just of killing, but also looting of property, imprisonment, and cruel tortures, so that even some “daughters of the covenant,” who had made promises of virginity, who had come from the Royal City (i.e., Seleucia- Ktesiphon) because of the persecution and were living in our town, were accused before the commadant by some Manichaeans who were in town. The accursed man gave orders that they be put to death outside the town in a place called “White Polar.” after the holy women had been crowned, there **514**

sprung up on the site of their martyrdom a fig tree, which provided healing for all who took refuge in it. When, however, the Manichaeans saw the miracle that had taken place, they cut down the tree and set fire to the spot. But God, who does not allow his friends to be despised by foes, allowed the disease elephantiasis to torment them, until they entirely disappeared from the town. This spot where the holy women were victorious is called to this day the “place of the fig tree,” and now it has become a sanctuary for all believers: each year, when they keep the memorial of the great day of the Crucifixion, the entire community of the church

- the pastor and his flock in all its ranks - go up to the great Martyrion, with the cross in front of them and behind them, and they turn aside to the “place of the fig tree” in solemn

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<sup>28</sup> Approximately May.

<sup>29</sup> Capital of Beth Garmai, modern Kerkuk; see J.-M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3 vols. (Beirut, 1965-68), 3: II-53

<sup>30</sup> See the parallel tradition in text D.



procession, accompanied by praises and sacred songs of thanksgiving befitting to God, the Lord of all, to the shaming of renegades and the pride of believers.

### *E. The Martyrdom of Thekla, a Daughter of the Covenant, and of Four Other Daughters of the Covenant with Her*

At this time an impious man named Pawle, nominally a priest in the **308** Village of Bekhashaz,<sup>31</sup> was accused before Narsai Tahmshabur. Narsai Tahmshabur was told, “He is very rich and has a lot of property”; so straightaway he sent some men to surround his house and arrest him. They ransacked the house and took away a great deal of money that they found there. Because of him, they also arrested along with him the “daughters of the covenant” of his village, whose names are Thekla, Mary, Martha, and Emmi. These were all brought bound, together with Pawle, to the village of Hazza<sup>32</sup> and taken into the presence of the accursed Tahmshabur. He told Pawle, “If you do the king’s will, by worshipping the sun and eating blood,<sup>33</sup> I will return to you everything that has been confiscated from you.” Whereupon this impious son of Gehenna, hungering after his riches, and yearning for his money (which would result in his burning in Gehenna), did everything he was told to do.

When Tahmshabur realized that he no longer had any pretext for **309** putting him to death, he thought up the following plan: he would tell him to kill the “daughters of the covenant,” in which case he might feel ashamed, and this would provide an excuse for putting him to death. Thus he would be able to confiscate the belongings that had been seized from Pawle’s house. Tahmshabur at once ordered the women to be brought into his presence and told them menacingly, “Do the king’s will, worship the sun, and get married. If you do this, you will avoid beating, and you will save yourself from the sentence of death by the sword, which has been decreed for you. If you fail to obey, I will carry out my orders and no one will be able to deliver you from my hands.”

The holy women cried out in a loud voice, “You proud and insolent man, don’t try to frighten or beguile us with these deceiving words; no, put into effect what you have been ordered to do without any further delay: far be it from us to turn away from our God and our Creator to take advantage of anything that you have urged us to do.”

Tahmshabur gave orders that they be taken out of the place where he was sitting, and he had each one of them thrashed with a hundred strokes of the rod, while they confessed with a loud voice, saying, “We will not exchange God for the sun; we will not become foolish and senseless like you who have abandoned the Creator and worshipped instead what he has created.”

Their sentence of death was immediately given, and the impious Pawle was told, “If you kill these ‘daughters of the covenant,’ you can have back **310** all that has been taken from you.” Satan, who had entered and breathed upon Judas Iscariot, likewise entered him and won him over by enticing and seducing him with the thought of gold and silver. In this way he destroyed his own soul as a result of his greed, just like the traitor. In the end he too met his

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<sup>31</sup> Unidentified.

<sup>32</sup> Some 12 kilometers southwest of Arbela (modern Irbil): Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, I: 166.

<sup>33</sup> Evidently local Christians kept the Jewish law in this matter, ensuring that the blood was drained from slaughtered animals.

lot and, like his mate, inherited the throttling noose. Maybe he too, like Judas, burst asunder and his entrails pooped out:<sup>34</sup> perhaps the thief left him this inheritance too? The one killed Jesus, the other killed Christ who was in the virgins. For those who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ.<sup>35</sup> What will be the judgement and punishment for these two men? What will be the heavier, which the more bitter? Is the one more fearsome, or the other more severe? Justice will mete out punishment to them in boundless measure since they committed a crime that is beyond measure or restraint.

Lured by his possessions (which he did not manage to keep) and trusting in the wicked Tahmshabur's enticements, the grasping Pawl hardened his heart and put on a brazen face, took the sword and had the audacity to lift it against the holy women. In unison they cried out, "O base shepherd, are you **311** beginning your own sheep, slaughtering the lambs of your own flock? In your greed have you turned into a wolf, destroying the lambs in your own sheepfold? Is this the holy and saving Bread that we used to receive at your hands? Is this the life-giving Blood that you offered our mouths? But now the sword in your hands is indeed our salvation and deliverance: we go now to Jesus, our true possession and eternal inheritance. As for the possessions and inheritance you love so much, you will not even get the benefit of them. We shall reach the place of judgement before you, and with us will come accusation of you; it will not stay behind, but God's judgement will overtake you at once. As for the money for whose sake you are killing us, you will not stay alive to enjoy it. You are committing a sin, but for the sake of what you are doing so? We are to die, but for whose sake are we doing so? Woe, however, to the man at whose hand we die. Approach at once, grasping man; let the consummation of your sins find their limit in us, let the beginning of the harsh punishment due to you be called forth in us. Get on with it quickly, shameless man, save us from having to behold you when you burst asunder throttled by the rope, when your hands and **312** legs flay each other as you are strung up and dying a cruel death."

The audacious man, doomed to destruction, raised up the sword (which sent him to Gehenna) and struck the five of them *0*in turn, thus dispatching them, taking off their heads as though he was skillful and well practiced as an executioner. Did not the impious man's arm get tired, seeing that he was not experienced at beheading people? Did not his sword get blunt, seeing that it was not in the hands of a professional warrior? Had he just been waiting with his fangs sharpened in expectation for just such an opportunity? Did not the traitor's hand tremble as he raised the sword and brought it down? Maybe it was the love of his money that gave him strength; perhaps he was fortified by his lust for gold. Was not the shameless man afraid, seeing that he was not accustomed to grasping a sword? Was not the vicious man terrified, seeing that he had never tasted human blood? In his brazenness, was he not ashamed of the people who stared at him at the time as if he was someone utterly accursed? Nevertheless, Satan, who not so long ago had manifested murder upon earth by means of Cain, quickly trained him and made him used to such things. "You are children," Scripture says, "of him who was from the beginning a murderer."<sup>36</sup>

The holy women met a brave death; valiantly did these chaste ladies depart this life to become a sweet savor before their Lord who has doubly rewarded them for their excellent course with glory that surpasses the **313** suffering they underwent. The glorious women were

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<sup>34</sup> Acts 1:18.

<sup>35</sup> Galatians 3:27.

<sup>36</sup> John 8:44.



crowned on the sixth of the lunar month Haziran.<sup>37</sup>

Had this mindless man never read or heard the Gospel words about the rich man whose lands produced large crops, and how, when he said, “My soul, eat, drink and enjoy yourself,” he was told, “Senseless man, this night your soul will be required of you; what will happen to all your preparations?”<sup>38</sup> The same thing happened to Pawle: imagining that they would restore to him his ill-gotten gains (for whose sake he eventually died), his life was in fact taken that very night, the reason being that the judge was afraid lest, in his impudence, Pawle would complain to the king and get back what had been taken from him; he accordingly sent some men who were in collusion with him to the prison, where they threw a rope around his neck and hanged him. His death was kept a secret.

How similar were the deaths of these two grasping men. Maybe Judas was not as bad as Pawle, for Judas actually repented and then hanged himself, whereas Pawle never felt any shame and was hanged by others. Because his eyes satisfied themselves with the innocent blood he shed, no sentence or punishment that might come upon him was too small or short as his due reward.

## *F. Anahid*

At the time there was a Mobed in the region of Belashfarr<sup>39</sup> whose **565** name was Adurhormizd; he originated from Behshabur<sup>40</sup> in Fars. He was renowned for his great learning in Magian affairs, and at the same time he was a just and upright man. He had an only daughter called Anahid, of whom he was extremely fond, seeing that he had no other children beside her.

One day Anahid was sore tried by an evil spirit that did not leave her alone or cease troubling her day and night. Numerous Jews, Manichaeans, and Magian sorcerers came from all over the place, but none was able to help her; indeed she was tormented all the more.

Then those who attended on the Magian Adurhormizd told him about the blessed Pethion, the holy man: if he came and prayed, as he laid hands on **566** her she would recover at once. They also recounted to Adurhormizd the names of a large number of people who had been healed thanks to Penthion through his prayer.

The Mobed gave orders and had her sent to the blessed man. When the party began to approach the blessed man’s cell, the accursed demon began to cry out, “I am not going to that evil and murderous sorcerer.” Only by using considerable force did they manage to bring her to him. When they had brought her in to his presence, the evil demon started shouting, “What have I got to do with you, the hateful opponent of our number? You have chased us out like your Master, you have caused us a great deal of trouble just as did your Lord. I have not done you any wrong, sir, so do not drive me out of my house where I live.”

When the evil demon had spoken like this, the holy man addressed it, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have no authority to stay any longer in her; shut your mouth and get

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<sup>37</sup> Approximately June.

<sup>38</sup> Luke 12:19-20.

<sup>39</sup> The region to the east of Beth Garmai, spanning the Iraqi-Irani border, and centered on the town of Hulwan; cf. J.-M. Fiey, *Communauté s syriaques en Iran et Iraq des origines à 1552* (London, 1979), 4: 360-68

<sup>40</sup> See Fiey, *Communauté s 2*: 199-200.

out of her, quickly.”

Thereupon the girl fell down on the ground as though dead and the blessed man ordered everyone out. Only the son of her tutor was allowed to stay. Then the holy man fell down and prayed. Finishing his prayer, he laid his hand on her, and immediately the demon departed from her, complaining loudly. She herself recovered and stood up, whereupon she ran and prostrated herself before the holy Pethion, kissing his feet as she said, “You have restored to me my lost life.” She inquired what was the cause, both of her illness and of her healing, and on learning she said, “If this is so, I shall not leave for anywhere else.” 567

When her father had been informed of his daughter’s recovery, he set off that very night and came to the blessed man. “If you are able to make the girl immune to this kind of illness,” he said, “I will give you whatever you like: quantities of gold and silver, and valuable presents.” To this the holy man replied, “I will have nothing to do with gold or silver, for they only lead to perdition; nor with any transient possessions that would alienate me from our Lord and his kingdom.

Nevertheless, if you want your daughter to be healed, give upright judgment, do not show any favoritism, and do not take bribes because (as our Scriptures say)

‘they blind the eyes of the wise in judgment.’<sup>41</sup> Liberate the exploited from those who oppress them; ease the lot of the needy as far as your means allow.” Instead of being angered by these and many other such words of admonishment and rebuke, the man promised, “I will do as you say.”

He took away his daughter fully recovered and she remained with him for two years after her healing. Her father had it in mind to marry her off, but subsequently she was smitten by a further scourge - a serious case of leprosy. On seeing the girl thus, he was stricken with grief. He sent her once again to the blessed man to be healed of this, just as she had been of her former affliction. After she had been with him some three months, she recovered and the blessed Pethion told her, “If you want to be healed of all your sicknesses, **568** then confess Christ: he will protect you from every evil. For what profit is there in these transient possessions: they do not endure and they only store up torment at the end of the lives of those who possess them. Instead endeavor to acquire heavenly wealth that does not fade away, for this acts as a good companion in both this world and the next to all those who desire it.”

As he gave her this admonition and instruction, our Lord opened up her heart so that she gladly received his teaching.

One day as she was asleep she dreamt that she was standing before a mighty and awe-inspiring king, someone of quite exceptional splendor and majesty; he summoned her, saying, “Hanna”<sup>42</sup> “Here I am, my Lord,” she replied. “Why are you not listening to the words of my servant Pethion who is urging you not to give your life over to perdition? Twice have I invited you to bliss, which is promised for those who are worthy; do not be stubborn, otherwise you will find yourself in bad company in Ghenna.” Then she saw him take a crown from in front of him and place it upon her head.

When she awoke from her sleep, she was on fire with love for Christ who had allowed her to know the secret of his will. When it was morning, she went in to the blessed Pethion and told him the vision she had seen. She showed extreme eagerness to receive as soon as

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<sup>41</sup> Duet. 16:19.

<sup>42</sup> Perhaps this was to be her baptismal name.



possible the baptismal “mark”<sup>43</sup> of Christ who had chosen her to be an associate of his. And so, in accordance with the will of God, she was baptized, full of joy and praising God.

Her father sent for her to have her brought home on numerous **569** occasions, but she would not come. In the end her father came himself and took her off against her will. She refused to eat in the presence of her parents in case they would thereby discover that she was now a Christian. When her father eventually became aware that this was indeed the case, he rebuked her and tried to frighten her with threats, “Where have you ever seen Mobeds’ children become Christians?”

When all failed to make her change her mind, he went off to the blessed Pethion and said, “What is this that you have done to me, separating me from my only daughter? I had originally intended to honor you in some way, but now that you have done me this great wrong I will be your out-and-out enemy and bring your life to an end; I will have you put in prison and beaten cruelly.”

He gave orders that Pethion be bound tight at once; oblivious of all benefits he had previously conferred upon his daughter. A man who was well known in the area took Pethion in, and told Adurhormizd, “Whenever you require him I will bring him along to you.” So Adurhormizd gave orders that his written deposition<sup>44</sup> be made.

That very night while Adurhormizd was asleep in his own home there appeared to him a resplendent man dressed in fine linen and wrapped in purple; in his hand he held a scepter, and in front of him was a large crowd. The man ordered one of his attendants to strike Adurhormizd on the shoulders with the baton he was holding, whereupon Adurhormizd woke up from his sleep trembling with fright. He found he was unable to turn over on his back because of the **570** blow he had received, and he was crying out in anguish from the pain.

The same night he sent for the blessed Pethion, and on his arrival Adurhormizd said to him, “I beg you, servant of God who performs his will, have pity on me; I have sinned against you, and I realize that it is because of you that this severe punishment has come upon me.” Whereupon the blessed man opened his mouth and begun to tell him about the true faith and the good things that have been prepared for believers after their death. Then he laid his hand on the wound and it was healed.

It was at that point that Adurhormizd realized quite clearly that his chastisement had taken place because of the holy man, and he asked him to instruct him in his beliefs and to tell him about his faith. Receiving these orders, the blessed man spoke as follows, “God, who made the world and all it contains, is one, and all

Adurhormizd, they soon started inquiring after his daughter. Some people had spoken in their presence of the girl’s beautiful looks and high intelligence. They had said, furthermore, that her parents had left her a considerable fortune.

When those gathered around Adurfrazgard heard things of this sort, many of them, on discussing the matter, were desirous of seeing whether they might succeed in converting her back from the religion of the Christians and returning her to themselves.

Straightaway Adurfrazgard gave orders to Tahmin Ayenbed<sup>45</sup> to go out quickly with eighty

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<sup>43</sup> This was the baptismal anointing (*rushmā*) in the form of a cross on the forehead; see G. Winkler, “The Original Meeting of the Prebaptismal Anointing and Its Implications,” *Worship* 52 (1978): 24-25, and Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, chap. 5,2

<sup>44</sup> Both Greek and Persian terms are employed (*kathairesis*, *nbs tg*).

<sup>45</sup> For this official, see A. Christensen, *L’Iran sous les sassanides* (2d ed., Copenhagen, 1944), 300.

horsemen in search of the girl. “Take with you,” he said, “some local landholders,<sup>46</sup> three hundred men, and take control of all the roads into and out of the region; see to it that she does not escape and get away from the area. Once you are in control of all the roads into the area, then go out with the horsemen in search for her; do not cease until you have her standing before me. By the life and mighty destiny of Yazdgard the king of kings, if you fail to do this I will crucify you and the eighty horsemen along with you; I will hand over your corpse to corruption and your property shall go to the king; your name will I make into an object of cursing throughout the world: the very mention of it will instill horror into future generations, with the result that everyone who **585** curses an enemy of the king, his crown, and his person, will use your name and no one else’s in his curse.”

Tahmin and his horsemen left immediately. He assembled a considerable number of local people and took them with him. He then took control of all the roads and tracks that led into and out of the region and entrusted them to his men to guard while he and his horsemen began their search, entering villages and houses, combing mountains, valleys, and woods in search of her.

When they reached the vicinity of the holy Pethion’s cell, they intended to enter and search the place in case she had taken refuge with him and hidden there, seeing that he had instructed both her and her father. . When they came to the entrance of the holy man’s cell, they saw, close by it and a little above where they were, another cell that had not previously been there. Straightaway some of the horsemen raced to it, and on entering it, they came upon the virtuous Anahid on her knees in prayer and supplication, sobbing and groaning as she called upon God.

These were the words of her prayer: “Mighty God who existed before the world did, establisher, provisioner, and guide for all that is in it; you gave to human beings intelligence and a discerning mind more than to any other corporeal creature, you gave them authority to enjoy all the delightful things that you have made; but when they went astray from knowledge of you and strayed from your dominion, erring after all sorts of evil idols, you did not act toward them as their wickedness deserved, but instead you sent your beloved Son, **586** our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Power who issues from you, the image of your divinity, and though your life-giving illumination he gathered together, leading them away from all sorts of idols and false beliefs into a knowledge of you; through the grace of the Spirit given in baptism you made them worthy of illumination and heavenly glory, and you held me worthy, too, Lord, although I was a worshipper of demons who poured libations to the created elements in the sky and on earth, who was brought up in utter wickedness, who luxuriated in every evil; for you brought me into the blessed sheepfold of your flock, into the sacred fold of your sheep, by means of the watchful and true shepherd, Mar Pethion, the teacher whom you provided in your grace. Now, Lord, that I have become aware of the way of your dominion and the path to salvation, and know how to travel along them toward those treasures of yours in heaven, may I not desist from the course as I accompany my father, the aged Adurhormizd; rather, just as in the past I worshipped and poured libations at evil pagan alters, so may I now, Lord, find a place along with him in your great bridal chamber, among the flock of your sheep. May I not hold back from joining in his wedding feast, but instead let me provoke the mind of these voracious and destructive wolves; yes, let them quickly snatch me up as prey in their fangs, thus

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<sup>46</sup> The Persian term *dehkān* is employed.

fulfilling their rebellious intentions upon me as they did upon my father who brought me up.” Such were the words of her doleful supplication as the band of **587** horsemen rushed in uttering threats. When they caught sight of her, they stopped in amazement, and for a while they were unable to speak to one another. Then the girl modestly turned to them and said, “What do you want, sirs? If it is me you are looking for, here I am, a sinful lamb ready to be sacrificed. Have no fear, I will go with you gladly.”

She spoke gently as she urged them on, but at the sight of her, their hearts were pricked, and as they stood looking at each other, they said, “How can someone with such noble looks and such distinguished appearance be allowed to meet a violent end so soon at the hands of the Magians and their associates?” They even tried to devise amongst themselves some way of saving her, but though they racked their brains, they could not hit upon any means of effecting her safety. In the end they started to reproach one another, “Would that we had never come here in the first place; as it is, whether we take her off or leave her, both actions are fraught for us.”

As they argued amongst themselves in this sort of way, the modest girl, wrapping herself in her cloak, stood up and came out of her cell toward them. “Do not hesitate any longer to come in, my lords, otherwise you may come to some harm and be punished for delaying over me out of respect for my person. Come, sirs, let us go on our way confident in the power of Jesus, the life-giving physician.”

So they started off at once and came to the place where the Magians **588** were all assembled. But their hearts were dazed and their eyes were full of tears at the thought of having to hand over the virgin into the grasp of such destructive wolves.

On reaching the nobles gathered in Adurfrazgard’s presence, Tahmin entered and announced the arrival of the chaste girl. Adurfrazgard and the notables who were with him were overjoyed when they heard this, and most of the people present pushed their way outside to take a look at Anahid. “This is indeed Anahid the mistress,”<sup>47</sup> they shouted; “more beautiful and desirable than any other woman!”

The chaste girl did not raise her eyes in the slightest to look at them, but in her mind she addressed God on high: “O God, mighty and powerful, you perform the wishes of those who fear you and of all those who call upon you in upright fashion; please look upon your wretched servant, Lord, and may I not abandon my course on the path governed by you. Let not this cup of salvation pass by me, for it is the cup that your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, drank for our sakes, and after him so did countless tens of thousands of those who believe in you, the first of whom was your friend Stephen. Confirm the minds of my persecutors, Lord, so that they do not disregard me and I perish, having been left behind from the flock and herd.”

Such were her thoughts when the Magian ordered that she be brought before him. Both he and his attendants gazed at the girl in their amazement **589** at her beauty and fair appearance. Everyone’s anger disappeared and they ceased from their menacing threats. The chief Magian then addressed her pleasantly and gently, supposing that she would be the more easily ensnared by his coaxing her. But when she paid no attention to his cajolements, he looked hard at her and said, “Wretched Anahid, daughter of Mahdukht,

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<sup>47</sup> The Persian word *bānûg*, “lady” or “mistress,” is used; this is a regular title of the goddess Anahid, and it is evident that the ordinary people take her to be an apparition of the goddess. See N. Sims-Williams, *The Christian Sogdian Manuscript* (Berlin, 1985), p.56, and (for the cult of Anahid “the lady”), M. Boyce, “Bibi Sharbānū and the Lady of Pars,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 30 (1967): 30-44, esp. 36-37.

daughter of Mahadurfarreh Zardusht, head Desqeshan,<sup>48</sup> from whom issues the entire light of the Avesta, and by whom the Magian religion<sup>49</sup> was henceforth illumined, from whom have issued - and still do so - all who become Desqeshan on the dais,<sup>50</sup> and those again who belong to the aristocratic stock of Mahadurfarreh, the father of Mahdukht your mother; your family is held in great honor by the king of kings and by everyone in the realm. What then happened to you that such utter folly and ridiculousstupidity has overtaken you? Even though your father Adurhormizd, having spent night and day unceasingly in the performance of Avesta, Yasht, and Drōn,<sup>51</sup> has gone out of his mind, his brain having dried up and been filled with nonsense with the result that he has gone off after the magic practices of the Christians so that he needed to be healed of his sickness and to recover - what, my pretty girl, has happened to you? I hear that you too are **590** wanting to go off after the magic practices of the utterly despicable Christians. Is not whomsoever you should want to marry from among all the Magians and nobles held great favor and honor? No, my daughter, do not pay any attention to the misguided opinions of your distracted father; do not lose the position of great honor and reputation that your noble birth holds. If you are willing to accept me, I will raise you above all the noble women in the realm; if, however, you refuse me, here is my son, Adursroshay, who is the king's own *dronya*;<sup>52</sup> he has 170 special soldiers. Marry him and do not destroy your life, led astray by Ahriman.<sup>53</sup> I too will honor you above all my sons and daughters, making you mistress in charge of everything in my household."

When the Magian had addressed these words to her, she did not even look at him or give him any reply: her gaze was modestly fixed upon the ground and she bravely stood there in silence, unmoved.

Then the holy woman opened her mouth and addressed him: "I am telling you, greatest and most famed of the Magians, that I have once and for all been betrothed to Christ, and so I cannot belong to anyone else; I have already received from him the pledge of the Spirit, and I cannot leave him. Nor indeed will my Lord and my King who has betrothed me allow me to be taken off by anyone else to to marry, for he is extremely powerful and strong, and no one **591** can take anything from him. So, if you have something else to say, or if there is some other action to take, carry it out; it is no use wasting time with empty words."

"Who is this betrothed of yours, you impertinent woman, whose mighty strength no one can subdue?" asked the Magian. "The king of kings is a great warrior who has subdued both land and sea: are you saying that he cannot get the better of your feeble fiancé, who is totally unknown? Is there a single mighty man of valor in the world who is not subdued under the yoke of the king's dominion?"

The holy woman replied, "If my fiancé had been on earth, he might have listened to the king in some things, as you have said; as it is, he is resident in heaven, and so his power and authority extend over both heights and depths. What can your master - or indeed all the

<sup>48</sup> Evidently a religious title; possibly the second element represents *késh*, "dogma."

<sup>49</sup> The Persian term *dên* is used.

<sup>50</sup> The translation takes the word *drwn* to represent *ādurvān*, or "dais."

<sup>51</sup> I.e., recitation of passages of the Avesta in worship (*yasht*); *drōn* is the "consecrated bread," or the "ceremony of consecrating the bread."

<sup>52</sup> Evidently a title connected with *drōn*.

<sup>53</sup> Ahriman is the evil or destructive spirit in Zoroastrianism.

kings on earth - do that affects him or his in any way? Indeed, he has only to direct his gaze a little against them and their armies for them swiftly to meet their end, melting away like ice before fierce heat!"

At this the Magian became very angry and said, "You wicked and impertinent woman, I can see that in your folly you are traveling along the same road to perdition as your father. I am telling you not to destroy your own life by this madness of yours. Hold on to the religion of your parents, do not be led astray. Find refuge in the worship of the luminaries and fire, following after Hormizd: if you do so, you will be saved from all the terrible things you will otherwise have to endure. For I can see that your folly may bring you **592** great harm."

"Alas for old age," said Amahid, "when it grows foolish and is given to senseless speech, thus becoming the object of laughter - and here you are in your venerable old age yourself talking nonsense by introducing the subject of fire and the luminaries. O chief among Magians, do you say that these children of Hormizd were conceived and given birth to by Hormizd or by someone else?<sup>54</sup> On the basis of observation we can see that those who father children or give birth to them do so as a result of cohabitation of two persons, a male and female; a person cannot achieve this on his or her own accord. If Hormizd on his own conceived in his own belly and gave birth to children, like his father Zurvan, then he is androgynous<sup>55</sup> - as the Manichaeans say. But if he fathered from his mother, daughter, and sister, as your crazy and senseless teaching maintains, how is it he does not resemble us in everything? For God has no mother, daughter, or sister, since he is one and he alone is God, having control over all his treasure stores. But Zurvan and Khwashizag his mother<sup>56</sup> testify that Hormizd is like us, subject to a beginning, an end, and corruption: for just as they ceased from life, so too will their children and grandchildren. There is something written in our Scriptures concerning such as these: 'Do not put your confidence in man, for he is no source of confidence; rather, put your confidence in the living God.'"<sup>57</sup>

At this point Adurfrazgard lost his temper and he ordered those **593** standing in his presence to hit her hard on the mouth until all her teeth fell out onto the ground. Those ordered came up at once and hit her on the cheeks, mouth, and head, until her face was so swollen that her eyes were covered up and she had lost all her teeth. Her body was drenched with blood, which ran from her mouth and cheeks - it was as though she was swimming in it.

He gave orders that she be trussed up like a dog and thrown into prison under close guard. No one was to give her any food or anything to drink until the God of the dispersed Christians, in whom she trusted, should come and rescue her. They carried out his orders on the spot.

While she was in prison, held under close guard, during the middle of the night she was giving praise and thanks to God, making use of the psalms of David, and saying, "I will confess you, O Lord, with all my heart, and before kings I sing of your name. I will worship you in your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your grace and truth, for you have answered me on the day I called upon you, and you have given my soul great

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<sup>54</sup> N. Sims-Williams, *The Christian Sogdian Manuscript C2* (Berliner Turfantexte XII, Berlin, 1985), p. 58, translates "(and) by no one else," emending *w* to *lw*.

<sup>55</sup> See the notes in J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés* (Paris, 1938), 2: 110-11.

<sup>56</sup> Though the name is found in magic texts, her relationship to Hormizd is apparently given only here. The passage is omitted on by T. Nöldeke, "Syrische Polemik gegen die persische Religion," in *Festgrus an R. von Roth*, 34-8 (Stuttgart, 1893) and R. Zaehner, *Zuwan*, 63-65, 434-36 (Oxford, 1955); 64-5.

<sup>57</sup> A combination of Psalms 146:3 fused with I Tim. 6:17.





strength.”<sup>58</sup> With these and other such words she spent the night prasing God until morning. When morning came, the nobles assembled in the presence of **594** Adurfrazgard and sent for the holy woman. Since she could not walk because of the fetters, they had to carry her into their presence. Once she had been set down in front of them, they urged her to abandon the doctrines she clung to. Some of them used threats, others cajoled her, while one of them, a close relative of hers, went up to her and said, “My daughter Anahid, what is the matter with you, what has happened to you that you act differently from everyone else? If they have eliminated your father Adurhormizd the Christian and he has met a bad end, what demon has got hold of you? Why should Ahriman be battling with you like this? Even if you do not revert to Magianism,<sup>59</sup> at least say, ‘I am not a Christian,’ and then I can save you and carry you off to somewhere where there are Christians, and you can live there in Christianity all the rest of your life.”

The wise woman replied, “You silly and senseless man, how can I deny him in whom we live and move and have our being<sup>60</sup> - we and all created things? Where can I go where he is not there, what place is there that is not filled with him and he is there? Furthermore, our Lord Christ said that ‘whoever denies me before men, I will deny before my Father in heaven.’<sup>61</sup> As it is, I have already renounced your gods - which are not gods - and I continue to do so; **595** and I have confessed him and will continue to confess him right up to death.” When the Magian heard this, he ordered that her clothes be ripped off and that she should be stripped naked. “Bring a caning frame,”<sup>62</sup> he said, “and four pairs of men, and I will show you what to do.” they brought this as instructed, and he gave orders for her to be stripped naked. She was still trussed up like a gog, with her head between her knees. He gave orders that she be scourged on the caning frame by two men, one on either side, until the flesh on her back and thighs was cut into from every direction, reaching the bones.

The men came up to scourge her, and when they had struck the virgin only twice with the rods, her flesh was at once deeply cut into, and streams of blood began to flow, so that the place where she was lying trussed up was running like streams of water with blood. The men did not stop beating her but rather lashed out at her even more assiduously than farmers hack at uncultivated ground to soften it.

When the first pair of men grew tired, a second pair took their place to scourge her. In this manner they continued the scourging until she became silent and her tongue ceased from praising God. When her voice could no longer be heard, they imagined that she must have expired, and the Magians gave orders that she be taken off and thrown to one side. Guards were appointed to **596** watch over her, lest some Christians might snatch away her corpse.

When midnight came, she rose up on her feet and started to give praise with these words: “I will give thanks to you, Lord, for you were angry with me, but you turned away your anger and comforted me. I trusted in God my savior, and I will not be moved, for the Lord is my strength and my glory, and he will prove my salvation.”<sup>63</sup> With these and other such words she was singing and praising God. When they came to take a look at her in the morning, they

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<sup>58</sup> Psalms 138: 1-3.

<sup>59</sup> The Syriac text adds *hrmhwg*, an Iranian word of uncertain meaning, perhaps “disturber of ritual purity.”

<sup>60</sup> Acts 17:28.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew 10:33.

<sup>62</sup> A Persian word, *dwtswbg*, is used.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Psalms 62:2-3, 118:14.

saw her chains lying on the ground to one side, while she herself met them, radiant with joy. On seeing that she was still alive, they threw a small piece of cloth to her, which she took and wrapped her loins to hide her nakedness. They observed that all her wounds from the previous day had healed, and that her body was without a scar. The men expressed astonishment at what they beheld, whereupon the holy woman said, “Do not be amazed at this, sirs, for the Lord has sent his angel and he has healed my wounds by laying his hands on my body. If God can raise up the dead and restore them to life, how much more can he heal my wounds?”

The guards went in and told Adurfrazgard the Magian, and he gave orders that they bring her into his presence. When she had entered and was standing before him, he looked hard at her and said, “O daughter of darkness, how long will you go astray with the magic practices of the Christians? Did **597** you like the banquet yesterday? Prepare yourself for another that I have ready for you today.”

The holy replied, “You did indeed plesse me with the banquet yesterday, and today I thank you for all your trouble.”

Then he ordered two thin threads of cobblers’ string to be brought in. this was done. He then told them to tie them into a hangman’s noose round her breasts, one thread on each. Two men were to hold on to and pull each thread until her breasts were severed and fell on the ground. As they attached the threads and the men took hold of them, the holy woman directed her gaze to heaven and said imploringly, “Lord Jesus Christ, receive my spirit - not because I am suffering at the hands of those who cause me pain, but lest they stop at letting me come to you.”

Her two breasts were quickly cut through and hung each by a mere sinew. The holy woman stretched out her hands, grabbed her breasts, and placed them in front of the Magian, with the words, “Seeing that you very much wanted them, O Magian, here they are, do with them whatever takes your fancy. If I have **598** any other limbs you would like, give the order and I will cut them off and put them in front of you. I will not hold back anything I have from your banquet.”

The Magian was furious and said, “Am I a dog, that I should want to eat human flesh?”

The wise woman replied, “A dog is better than you - and you know it: a dog guards the palace door, but you guard the door to Gehenna; just as the dog belongs to the palace, so you belong to Gehenna.”

At this he grew even more angry and gave orders that she be carried off to prison in fetters. He had a piece of wood placed under her armpits, and her hands were tied, doglike. They were to place her upside down on the wood all night in the prison. They then took her off as instructed.

The next morning he had her brought, and seeing that many people followed her and believed in her superstition, he realized that if she was left alive any longer, numberless people would go over to her faith.

When she was brought in, they saw that all the bones in her arms had been broken so that she could not move any of her limbs. He gave orders that she be conveyed at once to the hillside where she had been living. They were to smear her body with honey and stretch her out on the moutainside attached to four stakes. This was to frighten her and deter all who saw her from her superstition. He ordered Nehormizd son of Adurmahan, the Rad<sup>64</sup> of that

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<sup>64</sup> A high-ranking official in the provinces with judicial powers.

region **599** and of the entire province of Nisibis, to convey her in person, together with Tahmin the Ayenbed and the horseman. He was to ensure that the instructions were properly carried out.

As they traveled, conveying the holy woman to the place of her crowning, she was radiant with joy and gave praise to God because she had been considered worthy to follow in the smooth and narrow path of her father.

A considerable crowd accompanied the holy woman to see what would happen to her. When they reached the hillside, Nehormizd ordered that the girdle be taken from her; then they stretched her out on a flat spot on the hillside, beneath the crag there, attaching her to four huge iron stakes. They smeared her with honey and left her, stationing over her some guards from the horsemen and the local landlords, four hundred men in all, while Nehormizd went to see if there were any further instructions concerning her.

Before they had reached the lower slopes of the hill in their descent, an enormous swarm of wasps collected, such that the entire mountain in every direction was covered up by their presence. They were heaped up on one another in clusters more than an arm's span wide. So threatening were they with their stings at the ready that they prevented anyone approaching anywhere near the mountains - not just human beings and cattle, but even birds. They did not touch the pure woman's body but were heaped up on each other in swarms, some five arm's lengths thick, around the martyr's body, as though it were **600** festival, and their mass acted as it were a canopy above her body. This lasted seven days, preventing anyone from approaching the mountain.

On the seventh day the clergy of the deported community who lived a little further up from there took the gospel along with candles and incense and processed with a large crowd of the faithful, carrying scented water and clean burial garments. When the group of clergy arrived in procession, the wasps separated themselves from their swarm and settled, piling onto one another to the right and to the left, like huge heaps of rocks; they did not hurt anyone and did not make a move to fly off either to the right or to the left.

Before they reached her, the holy girl was addressing God in her prayers as follows: "O great God of every power and of all creation, who guides and controls all things, provisioner of all creation, you have chosen people out of all nations and generations to receive your life-giving utterance, and in your grace, Lord, you sent your Holy Spirit when your servants were chosen to join your flock; yes, Lord, you even brought us sinners, Adurhormizd, myself, and Pethion our teacher of truth into your sheepfold. Grant, Lord, this present supplication and request in your mercy, and to all those who call upon you in the name of **601** us your wretched servants - in whatsoever country or place they may call upon you - do you grant what their heart requests in accordance with your will. Do not reject any petition of theirs, Lord, which is good and upright, but come to their help and act as their deliverer from their afflictions. Even if there should be at any moment ten thousand thousand supplicants, more than there be lowly insects here, in your mercy, Lord, fulfill their petition, meet their needs, be their deliverer in all sicknesses and afflictions; be a succor and support in all their grief and suffering. And grant, Lord, to this place, where we are now, prosperity as long as the world lasts. Receive my spirit in your grace, and may I rest in peace with my forefathers; for to you, Lord, the Father of truth, and to your only-begotten Son, and to the Holy Spirit, be glory and thanksgiving and praise, now and always, unto eternal ages."

To this all clergy at once answered "amen" with a loud voice. As the "amen" was

pronounced, she yielded up her spirit and fell asleep.

When the clergy reached her, she was already resting in the sleep of death, as though she had already been dead for several days. They brought scented water, washed her body, and wrapped it in clean white linen **602** garments. They then laid her on a bier, and as the priests began the funeral rites, the entire swarm of wasps flew upward and took up a position above the priests and bier, as though they were a tall, many-storied house. So closely piled on top of one another were they that even the sun's light could scarcely be seen from underneath. The remainder of the wasps, either side of that "house," were like a fortified wall running up from the ground, straight up to a high level; there were others still on the road, for a mile and more, preventing any human beings, animals, or cattle from approaching the spot. If anyone did happen to pass along in that direction, he was immediately struck dead by them.

They conveyed the holy woman in great honor and laid her in the tomb of her father and the holy Yazdin.<sup>65</sup> Having said the final prayer, they returned. As they were finishing the prayers, once again these insects formed a swarm in the place where the martyr lay stretched out. They consumed all the dust there until they reached bedrock. The swarm stayed on the mountain for a further seven days and then flew off.

When Nehormizd the Rad, and those with him, saw what took place, they were full of stonishment, and in their amazement they said, "What is this prodigy? In truth neither demons nor men can effect such things as these; maybe it is from God." They then told the Magian Adurfrazgard of all that **603** had taken place. On hearing of it he said, "From what I have heard, this is the work of the sorcerer Pethion, their teacher who led the two of them astray with his spells. It was he who collected together the wasps there, to prevent the vultures and birds getting at her body. It is not the right that Pethion should escape from my hands, seeing that he is to blame for all these evils, being the person who misled these two unfortunate persons. He has cursed a disturbance throughout the whole region to the entire Magian religion. It is though the entire teaching of us Magians had disappeared, all because of him."

The crowning of the holy Anahid took place on 18 June,<sup>66</sup> on a Friday, in the ninth year of Yazdgard,<sup>67</sup> king of kings.

Entered by Natalie G. Nolt

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<sup>65</sup> Pethion's uncle (see introduction).

<sup>66</sup> Both the Syriac (Haziran) and the Persian (Spandarmad, the twelfth month) names of the month are given.

<sup>67</sup> Yazdgard II (438-57).