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Preface, in collaboration with Adam H. BECKER

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MARTYRDOM OF MĀR GRIGOR PĪRĀN-GUŠNASP *and*
MARTYRDOM OF MĀR YAZD-PANĀH

Edition, Translation and Introduction by Florence Jullien
in collaboration with Adam H. Becker



PREFACE

The two texts presented in this volume concern Persian aristocrats put to death under Khusrō I (531–579 CE), whose reign was one of the most distinguished of the Sasanian dynasty. The Sasanians ruled over what is now Iran and Iraq from the third through the seventh centuries. The heroes of these two accounts, Grigor Pīrān-Gušnasp, who is described as the chief general of the Sasanian army, and Yazd-panāh, a Sasanian high dignitary and judge, were both Zoroastrians who converted to Christianity. The *Martyrdom of Grigor* seems to be the first work in what seems to be a narrative cycle: the story of the *Martyrdom of Yazd-panāh*, by the same hand, is directly related to it, as is the account of the confessor, the upperclass ‘Awira, which appears at the end of the latter text. Furthermore, akin to these two works is the account of Yazd-bōzēd whose life is preserved in Armenian.

The *Martyrdom of Grigor Pīrān-Gušnasp* and the *Martyrdom of Yazd-panāh* were likely written by a contemporary to the events described and, along with the better-known account of the famous Catholicos Mār Abbā (540–552), they are the only East Syrian hagiographies of that time extant in Syriac. They provide valuable information regarding the socio-religious and political situation of sixth-century Iran. These martyr acts are here translated into English for the first time, based on manuscripts from libraries in London and Berlin and at the Vatican. This work updates a French translation published in 2015 in the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* series (Louvain, Peeters Publishers). Research on these texts was a part of the international program “Ctesiphon” (Corpus of Texts and Sources about Iran: For a History of the Orient in the 6th century) funded by the National Research Agency of France from 2013 to 2015. The challenge of this project was to bring together new data on the reign of Khusrō I, to deepen our knowledge of the period, and to enable the analysis and comparison of sources by means of a cross-disciplinary database.

I want to thank Adam Becker, general editor of the “Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac” series at Gorgias Press, for his very helpful and valuable remarks, his careful readings and perceptive suggestions. I would like to express also my gratitude to my mother, Denise, and to Christelle whose comments improved this work. I also thank the CeRMI (Centre de recherche sur le monde iranien, UMR 8041, CNRS) and the INaLCO (Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales), Paris, for providing financial support.

Florence Jullien

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents

Preface

Abbreviations

Introduction

Manuscripts and Editions

Author and dates

Outline

Martyrdom of Mār Grigor Pīrān Gušnasp

Martyrdom of Mār Yazd-panāh

A hagiographic cycle

The Iranian Political and Religious Background to the Martyrdoms

Theological aspects of the texts

The defence of the East Syrian faith

Zoroastrian-Christian debates

Reworking of biblical models and identification with Christ

Note on Editorial Method

Text and Translation

Martyrdom of Mār Grigor Pīrān-Gušnasp

Preamble

Beginning of the persecution

The conversion and baptism of Mār Grigor Pīrān-Gušnasp during the festival of Frawardīgān

First imprisonment and release

Roman-Persian war

Continuing persecution and torture. Debate with Zoroastrians

Resumption of hostilities with the Romans and war against the Huns

Transfer to Dastgerd d-Bēth Balān. Wonders and torments

Delegation of bishops and other Christians at the royal court

Resumption of hostilities with the Romans. Mihrān's betrayal

Death sentence. Farewell and final threats from the magi

Execution

Panegyric of the saint

Wonders around Grigor's body

Commemoration

Martyrdom of Mār Yazd-panāh

Persecution. Portrait of Yazd-panāh

Conversion. Polemic with the magi

Imprisonment, threats, and discussion

Roman-Persian war. New debates

Exhortation to the faithful. Pressure from the magi

Execution

Removal of the body. The punishment of the wicked

'Awira the Confessor

Conclusion

Bibliography

Index

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BACK COVER

The reign of King Khusrō I (531–579 CE) was a key chapter in the history of the Persian Empire, but it was also an important period for development of the Church of the East. The *Martyrdom of Mar Grigor Piran-Gušnasp* and the *Martyrdom of Mar Yazd-panah* offer a panoramic perspective onto the social, religious, and political life of Christians in the Sasanian Empire at this time. According to these contemporary accounts, the death of Grigor, the general of the Sasanian king's armies and a convert from Zoroastrianism to Christianity, triggered the conversion of other Zoroastrian notables, including the courtier 'Awira and Yazd-panāh, a judge who also died as a martyr three years after Grigor. This volume provides a critical text and commentary, as well as the first translation into English, of these two East Syrian texts, which have received little scholarly attention, although they are among the few Syriac martyr accounts from this period. These texts demonstrate how Persian Christians, despite sporadic persecution, were able to maintain a distinct identity while simultaneously acculturating to the norms of Iranian society, even taking on significant offices within the Sasanian administration.