On Easter

Ananias of Shirak (c. AD 610–685)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

On Easter

[Translated by F. C. Conybeare] Ananias of Shirak the counter, his discourse on the Lord's Zadik.) The feast of the holy Zadik we learned from Moses and from the exodus of Israel out of Egypt. For it is thus written: 'The Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, and said: This month shall be unto you a beginning of months, shall be unto you first among the months of the year' (Exod. 12). And antecedently he says: 'On the tenth day of this month let each of you take a lamb house by house, or, if not, then according to the houses of [your] clans, sharing together because of poverty.' |575 And in the same context he says: 'And it shall be kept until the 14 of this month; and they shall slay at eventide and sprinkle the lintel and the two posts with blood', which was to protect the first-born from the Destroyer. But however this way a shadow of what was to come, even as the divine apostle reckons it, and a pattern of Christ. For Christ himself entered on the tenth day of the first month into Jerusalem on the day of the Palms and lasted until the 14 day of the month; on the evening of which did he give his quickening body to his holy apostles to eat, and accomplished the mystery (i. e. sacrament) concerning it. But on the present occasion I am concerned not to interpret, but to give the history of Zadik; and would tell you whence it is and from whom.

The Lord fixed the holy feast of Zadik by the moon. Hear the word which says, 'the 14 day of the month', because the moon is then full. As also Philo says. For he reckons the month to be the lunation (lit. days of the moon) and the first day to be the. beginning of the moon's growing full. For the Hebrews had no months previously to Moses; nor on that occasion was anything established afresh, which was not. But as we said, it is lunar months of which he speaks. Look at the words. He did not say: This month shall be for you a beginning of months, anew, which [it] was not; but this: This month shall be for you a beginning of months, shall be first among the months of the year. It is clear that the months were lunar. But the [? + solar] year was not as yet established for the Hebrews, since they were using the Chaldaean year and months: and he [i. e. Moses] defined not the fullness [of the moon] to be the [completed] orbit, as being something secondary and accidental; but the moon as it was at its original creation, this is what he meaned. For on the day of its creation the moon was a 14 days one; and although there was as yet but

one day of the moon's existence, yet the fullness of its orb appeared to be that of 14 days. For it was impossible for the moon to be imperfect and half-complete on the day of its coming into existence. For all creation was full and complete as first fashioned. For instance the herbs were not undevelopt, but ripe, and the trees complete and full of fruit; and man was 30 years of age, though he was only one day as yet alive.

In the same way the moon also was a 14 days one in its fulness and completeness of light. And this the Doctors of the Hebrews considered to be so, when they represented the moon on the day of its coming into being to be a 14 days moon. For the months were fixed by reference to it, and they were to be discerned in reference to it, |576 just as the year from the sun. For the Doctors of the Hebrews assert that the sun and moon were (17) fashioned on the fourth day. For this reason they fix that day as the date of the equality (= ἰσημερία) in length of day and night; declaring that the creation was in the mid firmament. And on the sixth day they say man came into being. And they make a regular computation of the number of months) and reckon twelve months to be the full tale of the year; five days more being reckoned in, which elapsed before the creation of man. It is clear then that we know the year by the sun and the months by the moon; even as the divine utterance testifies, saying: Let them be for signs and seasons and days and years. And in the same context he says: And god made the two great lights. The greater luminary to rule the day, and the lesser luminary to rule the night, and the stars.

And he placed them in the firmament of heaven to give light to the earth, and to rule the day and night and separate between the light and the darkness. But about the dimensions and fixt positions, and powers and limits and order of the: other stars and their natures I am prevented from speaking just now, [and shall not] until I have finished my account of the mystery of the holy Zadik and of the calendar of all peoples. And then I shall relate whatever either outsiders or church-writers have to say on these points.

Let us however return once more to the Lord's command to Moses, which says: 'This month.' By saying this he indicates the priority of its creation. 'Shall be for you a beginning of months': 'Shall be first for you among the months of the year'. He refers to the sum of full moons (lit. of fullnesses of the moon) in the cycle of its course. Again, 'taking a lamb on the tenth day of the month.' A period of ten days includes 240 hours; by which we must understand that which is like the day, like the sun, like the dawn. For it is a type of Christ. And it is 'kept till the 14'. He clearly commands us to wait for the full moon. For not only is the victim in itself a type of Christ, but the moon is itself as well; as was the unanimous opinion of the holy fathers, among whom is my own winner of the wreath of Christ and confessor, saint Gregory the Father of us Armenians, who declared, that the second luminary ruling

the night comes fraught with a type of the only born son of God ---- is shrouded, is buried, an earnest in its burial of the resurrection from the dead.

And the feast of Zadik is called (18) by the Hebrews Phaska in |577 their tongue, which is by interpretation the 'passover', which was from Egypt into the land of Canaan. This also the blessed Gregory the Divine, states as follows: 'Some have thought that this name implied the passion of the Saviour, and proceeded to Hellenise the word and changed ph into p, and k into ch, calling the Saviours day Pascha, to suit the word of Moses, who in Deuteronomy saith as follows: 'Seven days shall, thou eat unleavened bread with it, for it is the bread of tribulation.' The Doctors of the Hebrews assert that Moses instituted three feasts of Zadik in the desert; and afterwards when the congregation opposed him, all divine precepts and constitutions were forsaken and in abeyance, until the day on which the sons of Israel passed over the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. Tenth, not of the month, does he call it, but of the moon, for it was the 18 of the first month which is called by the name Nisan, and tenth of the moon. This tenth, on which they took the lamb involves a great mystery, and it is a type of the baptism, [that upon it was] the passing over the Jordan, and the coming of Christ into Jerusalem on the day of Palms. And Joshua kept the Zadik on the 22 day of the first month. But he names the 14, according to the days of the moon; and he then renewed the constitutions which in the desert were abolished, and made as if. were a fresh beginning of constitutions and of laws. As also did Moses at the departure out of Egypt. For he also calls the passing over river Jordan an exodus from Egypt. As we also have explained in our canon appointed for the occasion of the afore described festival.

In the days of Hezekiah also it is said that it was kept by some others (? in a somewhat different way). But as that was not in the first month, but in the second, and not according to the law, it was not adhered to.) For it was indiscriminate and unclean. And the feast was in abeyance until the 18 year of king Josiah, and then it was kept. And after that it was in abeyance till the days of Zorababel and the building of the temple. And after that Ezra renewed it and appointed (19) the nineteenth of the the moon for the Hebrew race, and it was kept without break until the Saviour's crucifixion, when the full moon fell on the 14 of Nisan on the fifth day of the week after the type presented in the exodus from Egypt. For we too were saved by the precious blood, and truly went forth from lower to higher things, eating the true body of the lamb of god. And after that the holy apostles came every year to Jerusalem, and in |578 commemoration kept the day of the Saviour's passion, and feasted the day of the resurrection. And by their divine miracles they converted many to Christ and baptised until the second year of Vespasian, when there occurred the very last destruction of the temple, and the siege, capture and laying waste of Jerusalem. And on this occasion it was commanded by the holy spirit that no one of the Christians should be there at that festival, in order to their

being saved from the evils which befell Jerusalem. So they assembled outside in various places to keep the feast of the holy Zadik.

And after that Aristides merry), philosopher of Athens, a companion and pupil of Kodratus the apostle, constructed the period of 19 [years] of the moon for the Romans; and using the following analogy argued thus, that the first day of april is the beginning of creation; and since the moon was created on the fourth day, therefore he fixed the 14 day of the moon on the fourth day of april. And he arranged that day to be the starting point (or head) of the period (or cycle); because on the same day fall according to the Hebrews the 14 of Nisan, the full moon and the anepact.) ; After whom Leontios (lege Leonidas), father of Origen, constructed the period of 19 [years] of the moon for the Egyptians and Ethiopians; after which Origen, son of the same, made the 19 years cycle of the moon for the Arabs and Macedonians, according to an analogous scheme (= καθ' ὁμοιότητα σχήματος), having regard to the [feast] of the Hebrews. After whom Anatolius, bishop of Laodicea, made the period of 19 [years] of the moon, having regard to the [feast] of the Greeks.

But although all these had long before arranged [the calendar]; yet the whole world did not learn of the arrangement, because of the stress of persecutions directed against the Christians. But they kept the feast simultaneously with the Jews, ---- a miscellaneous and unclean least, ---- until the days of the blessed (20) Constantine and the holy council of Nice. And then it was prescribed by the emperor that they should not any longer after that keep a feast in impure agreement with the Lord-slaying race of Jews. So he issued an edict that they should adopt the nineteen years lunar cycle of Easters, which had been drawn up by the above mentioned persons; and that they should take pupils from among all Christian nations and teach them the calendar; and so separate the Christians from the Jewish [observance]. |579 And though the business was put through agreeably to the emperor's edict, yet it was not a way of settling it quite free from perplexities. And after that in the days of Constantius, son of Constantine, Andreas), brother of Magnus the bishop, arranged a calendar of 200 years. And yet this was not void of perplexities. Then at the expiration of Andreas' calendar of 200 years, in the days of the emperor Justinian, there was a great deal of research on the part of learned philosophers, because the cycle of 19 did not bring the order exactly, which in 95 years comprised a period of revolution round to the same point. It seemed to all a drawback that in the course of many years there was according to the days of the cycle a want of sequence after the Bissextus.

For this reason an investigation was made at Alexandria, which is the metropolis of all sciences; and there was found a cycle free from inaccuracies of 532 years, which accurately shews the 14 days; of the Pascha. But they did not go so far as to give a new form to and efface the canon previously fixt and written down; but they exactly fixed the same 14 days adhering to the same method over nineteen times

nineteen (? read twenty eight years), in order that the results arrived at might be quite clear and give offence to none. And the sum of these was calculated by philosophers, namely by Aeas of Alexandria, who associated with himself the Jew Phineas from Tiberias, Gabriel of Syria, John from among the Arabs, and Abdiah from the Ethiopians, Sergius from the Macedonians, Eulogius from the Greeks, Gigas from the Romans. And Aeas had with him others also, from among the same Egyptians, whose names we have not mentioned in this history. In fact it is said that in all there were employed 30 persons.

(21) Here, it is said, intervened Iron), a doctor of the royal court in the city of Constantinople, but who was by race a stranger and not a citizen, and who was by some said to be an Alexandrine. He, it is said, was offended with the committee of philosophers in Alexandria, because not being invited to join them he thought that he was flouted; and accordingly he set to work to oppose the truth, and depreciated their calculation. And the same with the results of earlier sages ---- you might say, because he reckoned them to be ignoramuses; and he constructed a new fangled chronology, opposed to divine writ and to all other chronologers; as also a calendar. And he changed |580 the 19 years cycle of the moon from the sixth of april, and fixed instead the fifth of April, and made that the starting point (or wellhead) of the period. And he based his system on the tenth Pharmuti according to the Egyptians, which among us is sounded Pharmaphiur. And he placed this day at the head of the cycle, full moon and anepact), contrary to the ancients. As also they had regard to the Hebrew [date] in forming their scheme, so he in the same way took the Egyptian method, as if to prove to the savants of Alexandria that they were extremely ignorant. You, he said, who do not understand your own country, how can you arrange the calendar of other countries?

And for the Romans in this way he set the fifth of April at the head of the cycle; and he appointed for it an epact) [of] eight [days], because he declared the moon to have been 13 days old on the day of its creation, adding together 8 and 5, that is to say he reckoned the epact and the full moon for a mystery thereto. But he also reckoned the cycle (lit. the taking in turn) of 13 lunar numbers in connexion with the solar ones for a mystery withal. And he added in upon the epact a number 11x11, until the period of nineteen and the cycle were completed.

(22) And then he counted 12 for the epact according to the order in which the cycle of 19 was completed, and up top of the completion (lit. filling) of it he counted 20. And he took away 12 and 11 until the end of the period of 19 and of the cycle. And then he took away 12x12, because of the completion of the period of 19, and moved [it] on revolving. Though he prided himself on his own skill and cleverness, yet he outraged and violated the writings of the ancients; and by means of the overpowering force of the emperor’s edict he established his method all over the world. But heaven forbid that we should assent to the confused time-reckoning

of Iron, especially as it goes far outside holy writ; or that we should accept his fallacious calculation of the calendar, and so fall under the anathema of the holy fathers. For it is written as follows. Cursed be he who keeps Zadik after the manner of the Jews who slew the Lord, or of the Samaritans or of the Pauliani. Cursed he that keeps Zadik on the 13 of the moon. But Iron, although he esteemed himself myriad-fold clever, yet does not escape these anathemas. For a man who flees from the one and withal sullies himself in the other, is like to |581 the man who prays a little and blasphemes much. For when the fifth of April falls on a sabbath according to Iron's calculation, they reckon it full moon;

and celebrate Zadik on the sixth of April, which falls on the 16 Nisan. Here and below should we not read 14? And so they keep the feast at the same time as the Jews, offending the anathema of the fathers. For the Jews have never celebrated the festival of Zadik on the 15 Nisan; but always celebrate it on the 16 Nisan, both they and the Samaritans. For the Samaritans keep it more surely than they, although they learned from them. But the Pauliani also keep it on the same day, and whichever day chances to be that of the full moon, they call the Lord's day, just as the Jews name it sabbath, although it is not the sabbath.

But heaven forefend that we should feast with them and fall under the anathema. For the holy fathers took every trouble to separate our feast from theirs; unto which end we Armenians go so far as to truly name it 'the Lord's Zadik', so seprating it from all heathen and Jewish feasts, and making it holy as the festival of the Lord's festivals and the congregation of congregations.

Even as Gregory the Divine was pleased to say: "For this cause also the Fathers enjoined us not to keep festival on the full moons of the (23) Hebrews, but on whatever sabbath days the 14 of this moon may fall, to fast during the week (= sabbath), in order that the resurrection of the Lord may come on the Sunday); that so the mystery be fulfilled and the sabbath of the passion be kept as a fast. And this is why they called it pascha, which being translated is 'passion'. But if Sunday happen to be the 14 day of the moon, it is passed over; so that we may not be feasting along with Jews, but that it may come the following week. Nor is there any loitering or hesitation in keeping it six days later, but we fast. For we believe and trust that on the sabbath he fulfils the mystery of his passion and on the Sunday that of his resurrection. But if the 14 day of the moon fall on a sabbath, we skip one day, that the least be kept not with the Jew. And in order to change from the false Sunday to the true Sunday (i. e. Lord's day). [Not] as the Pauliani dare to do, but in order that the sabbath may remain the sabbath; nor as the Jews do, changing the sabbath with Gôlôn, or as the Pauliani do with the Sunday. But the church of God does not change Sunday with Sunday, nor sabbath with sabbath; but after the true sabbath will come the great day of the resurrection." |582

Let us then not be deceived by the sophistry of Iron; for if we investigate, none of his results are found true. To say nothing of his being under an anathema, his scheme at any rate is cleverly arranged to please his own whims and not to fit the truth. For in his time reckoning he asserts that 5500 years elapsed to the birth of the Saviour. And he takes as his model the measurements of the ark of testimony which was live cubits and a half. But what connection had this ark with the period of time? or what probability is there in the statement that the moon was a 13 days one on the day of its creation, seeing that all creatures were created complete and full. Why then should the moon have been imperfect and only in part full? For we know that the herbs were created, perfect, and perfect also the animals; in order that the moment they came into existence, there might be found before them crop's all ready to feed and sustain them. Just as for animals born to-day, there is found by the providence of God milk ready from the breasts of their mothers; so from the beginning the trees were full grown and laden with fruit for man to eat. So also the divine voice testifies saying: Let the (24) Earth send up the herb of grass and the tree bearing fruit, whose seed is in itself. But if all creation was at its fullest when created, then the moon cannot have been imperfect and half-full, but a perfect round of full-orbed light.

Iron however did not speak the truth, nor are his words reliable. And what evidence is there that the full moon and epact coincide with a 13 days growth of the moon? For the eleven other full moons and their epacts are in no way whatever fraught for any one with the mystery of creation (lit. coining to be). And how is the number 13 of the period (lit. taking in turn) of lunars along with solars an image (or likeness) of the days of creation. For neither do the 30 or the 60 numbers of the moon convey to anyone the thought of creation. So then if we are to judge between two bad men, we must consider the assertions of Hcrmogenes more pertinent than those of Iron; though both strayed from the truth. For Hermogenes asserts the following: that the moon was made one day old, because there was then of course only one day of its existence. And it was created along with the sun in one place in the centre of heaven on the side of the dawn, as even now it is called the first day of the moon when the moon comes across the sun. Now although he too is wrong, he is at least nearer to truth and sense than Iron. But let us keep away from both of them. But as Iron thought himself so much cleverer than all other men, why did he accept the 500 years, cycle fixt by Aeas? Why did |583 he not invent a different cycle himself? It is clear that he could not build on any other foundation than the 500 years cycle laid down, by Aeas. But what a superstructure does he build on this foundation? Such rubbishy matter will be at last detected by its tiresomeness and lengthiness by any one who reckons for nothing mere cleverness divorced from truth.

But why need we dwell upon Iron or oppose him? Let us rather leave his results to his pupils and admirers. And let us keep our feast not in a worldly, but in a godly manner; not in an earthly but in a supramundane way; not as the shadow of

what shall be, but as the real. And in whatever appertains to us, and still more to the Lord, let us follow the holy fathers, lest we fall under their anathemas. Let us not feast in the 12 month, before the day and night become equal, but let (25) us keep our feast in the first month. For in the first month Christ suffered after the equinox; just as in the beginning man was created first after the equinox. Likewise also after the equinox in the first month he went up out of Egypt, was delivered from Pharaoh, was saved from the plot. On the same, day also were we saved from the invisible tyrant and from his cruel instruments, and were liberated from the mire of sin by the sufferings of Christ.

And let us not keep our feast along with the Jews who slew our Lord; lest we share their sin and suffer their curse. And let us not keep it on the thirteenth of the moon, lest we be reckoned among the ignorant and among the breakers of the law; and go forth outside the pale, and hear the words 'I know you not'. And let us not alter the definitions of the fathers. And let us not admit the 14 of the moon on the 5 April, but only the date appointed by the holy fathers. Nor must we set any other full moon to be head of theperiod, save that one prescribed by the Lord ---- the 14 Nisan, or the dates which correspond thereto among other nations. But the followers of Aeas although they set the 3 Nisan at the head of their cycle, yet did not impugn the more ancient date. Only because the calendar of Andreas of 200 years ended on the third of Nisan, was the beginning of the cycle of 500 years placed on the third of Nisan. This was why that date was fixt on to head the cycle. It had not done so originally at the exodus and crucifixion, and it was only for this cycle of 500 years. But they admitted the 14 Nisan to be the head of the cycle, as prescribed by the Lord, whom we also will follow.

And now what have we left to do, except to set forth in orderly fashion the calendar of the several nations, beginning by arranging |584 first the calendar of the Hebrews, since it is the chief one and the model for all races. For as much as the tradition of the church teaches us to fast year by year the day of unleavened bread. And when the 14 of the moon [falls] the fourth of the intercalaries), we put off to the 28, that is of April, our fast and celebration of Zadik. But if it be the fourth of the intercalaries, then the twelve numbers of the moon will be accomplished outside the month Adar, and we add another month to the twelve months, which is called an intercalated month. For in this year, because the number of lunations falls short of the solar number, this was so arranged as that there should be an intercalation in the years; in order that the number of lunar courses may catch up the solar courses. For if this were not done, there would fall from time to time two Zadiks in one year. But the intercalated months prolong [the time] and carry us on. For we shall always keep Zadik after the equinoxes, since it is by these we arrive at the first months. And it is quite right to make this addition and it is necessary. For it was prescribed of old that we should make the type and image in the first month.

For the church has no authority to hold Zadik in the 12 month; as the divine apostle saith: The old order hath passed away, and all things have been renewed through Christ. And now therefore let us too clothe ourselves in the fast with the same sorrow year by year with which the apostles clothed themselves; and let us rejoice in the resurrection of the only born, participating in the body and blood of the true lamb, which is the heavenly bread. And this is why the church year by year of necessity celebrates the Zadik of unleavened bread, in order that the memory of the Saviour's passion may be fixt in us and abiding.

And for as much as not many are skilled in numbers, especially those who are given to edifying, ---- and the teaching of our Lord has been spread over and has taken possession of all the world, ---- for this reason compute a period of 532 years according to the reckoning of the Alexandrians from the 828 year up to the year 1360; for those who shall be on the earth, I Ananias, son of John of Shirak, have constructed [this cycle] and have put down separately one by one the whole 532 years, in 8) canons, in which I have included the entire number, 532 sequences (or rules) and have divided off each separate rule to each separate year. Oxford. Fred. C. Conybeare. [Footnotes moved to the end and renumbered] 1. 1) i. e. Easter 2. 1) The Armen. of this sentence is obscure. 3. 1) So I turn the verb angaretzav.

4. 1) So the Armenian. 5. 2) The Arm. anveradruthiun = ἀνυπέρθεσις, of which the sense may be the day beyond which Easter cannot be deferred. The Arm. veradruthiun is used to render epact: hence my rendering, for an in arm. is privative. 6. 1) Dulaurier, Recherches sur la Chronologie Arménienne, Paris 1859, adduces from Armenian sources some extracta which cover the same ground with what follows in Ananias and which seem to be ultimately derived foom this tract. 7. 2) Dulaurier (op. cit.) calls him Irion. 8. 1) = ἀνυπέρθεσις, see note on p. 578. 9. 2) = ὑπέρθεσις, see note on p. 578. 10. 3) The Arm. = id est epactum et plenitudinem in cogitationem ei numerauit. 11. 4) Cum solaribus in cogitationem (or mysterium) eidem numerauit. 12. 1) = κυριακή in the Arm. 13. 1) = e0pago&menai or render 'onfour of the intercalaries'. 14. 2) or 28

Source. English translation: an out-of-copyright translation as transcribed, or commissioned and given to the public domain, by Roger Pearse for his collection *Early Church Fathers – Additional Texts* (tertullian.org/fathers). SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Footnotes are left out, and Greek or Latin words, square brackets and any transcription error are as the source prints them. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.

Licence. published 1897.