Life of Mar Aba

Anonymous early writings (various dates)

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[Translated by Roger Pearse] 1. The history of the wonderful and divine struggles of the holy witness Mar Aba, the Catholicos, the Patriarch of the East. (Introduction: if we honour great men with statues, how much more then is it fitting to honour the witnesses to Christ, especially Mar Aba.) Mar Aba was originally a pagan, and surpassed most heathens in his (zeal for) paganism. He also was learned in Persian literature. Because he was very learned in literature, the nobles of his area recognised that he was very learned and perceptive, and invited him to join them, and they considered that he was suitable for the civil service and gave him an official position. And since the Blessed One listened to them, they made him an Arzabed; he went in and out with them, and was respected by many. He was a hard, bitter pagan; he reviled the Christians and taunted the Sons of the Covenant. But as he crossed the Tigris, Jesus threw his net over him and caught him in it. For the Lord is accustomed to do as he did to the blessed Paul, when he went to Damascus to persecute his followers, to chain them and deliver them to death. He transformed him from a persecutor into a persecuted; he was chained, suffered and died for him. Similarly Jesus sent to the saint, as he went from the village of Chale to his home, and sat with others in a boat (κέρκουρος), a student (σχολάριος) as teacher, a mortified ascetic, a humble and gentle man, modest and humble in his appearance (σχῆμα), named Joseph, with the surname Moses. On his rod he had the sweet and pleasant bait of the spiritual life, to entice the saint from death to life.

2. When the blessed one sat in the boat to go across, the student also got in, to go across with him. Then the saint saw his dress (σχῆμα), took him for a Son of the Covenant, beat him, and took the bag that he had with him and threw it ashore, and forced him to get out. The student said nothing in reply, but got out and sat on the bank of the Tigris. But once the blessed one and his companions had set out and had moved away a little distance from the shore, by the grace of God a violent wind blew against them; the Tigris became stormy like a zealous servant and its waves rose up against them, and it roared against the blessed one, because he had fought against the disciple of Christ and mocked him and prevented him from crossing. Fear came over him, and he ordered the boat to return to the shore.

After he landed, the wind ceased and there was a great calm. Then he got into the boat again, and the student also got in with him, and sat down with him in the boat, and again the blessed one rose against him and forced him to go ashore. And when they had gone a little way, the wind awoke again against this pagan audacity, that he did not recognised the Creator of All, and he was even more disturbed than before. And again the blessed one and his companions returned to the shore and got out. But the excellent student was sitting on the bank of the Tigris.

3. When the blessed one looked at the habit (σχῆμα), which was chaste and (not) colourful (?), he became doubtful whether he was perhaps not a Son of the Covenant, but a Marcionite or a Jew, and he asked him, ”Are you a Jew?” He said, ”Yes”. Again he spoke, ”Are you a Christian?” He said, ”Yes”. Again he spoke, ”Do you worship the Messiah?” He said, ”Yes”. The blessed one was very angry at this answer by the student and said, ”How can you be Jew, Christian and Messianist (meschîchâjâ) ?” For by ”Christian” he meant, after the local custom, the Marcionites. The student said, ”In private I am a Jew. I worship the living God and believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. I avoid idolatry and all uncleanness. I am a Christian in truth, not like those the Marcionites lead astray and call themselves Christians. Because ”Christian” is a Greek word, which means in Syriac ”Messianist”. And if you ask me, ”Do you worship the messiah?”, I worship him in truth and I avoid all evil for the sake of true life.”

4. When the blessed one heard this, he rejoiced in his spirit. He recognised the wisdom and humility of the student, the disciple of Christ. Again he got into the boat and sat down, and the student also got on. And since the blessed one stopped despising the student, the wind also ceased; the waves of the Tigris calmed; they went across and came ashore. As both got out, the student said, ”What did it cost you, that I came across with you?” The blessed one wondered at his calm, and very much regretted insulting him. He went to him and fell down before him, and said, ”I ask you by the living and true God, forgive me for this sin committed against you.” The student said, ”The Lord has commanded us Christians, to retain anger against no-one, and never to return evil for evil.” Then they drew near each other, greeted one another, and parted.

5. As the blessed one saw the virtue of this student, and thought much about his words, he decided in his heart to go and learn at the Christian college, and fasted and prayed much. He was working for a respectable man named Chudaibod, the secretary of the Finance Director of the district of Beit Aramaye, and was then in Radan. After the latter was called to Ctesiphon, the blessed one also went down with the secretary for whom he was working. He fasted daily and prayed constantly at the stone church. The secretary heard, where he was, that the blessed was being instructed in Christianity and said one day, ”Aba, have you become a messianist?” He said, ”Yes, I am a messianist.” The secretary said, ”I will say this and accuse

you before the Finance Director, and you will be put in chains." The blessed one said, "Just say it; I am willing to allow myself to be chained and to die for the name of Christ." So spoke the saint, although he had not yet received the seal of baptism.

After he had spent some time in Ctesiphon, he returned to his home and after fasting and praying constantly, he entered into holy baptism in the village of 'KD. From then on he was more eager in fasting, prayer and virtuous works. He left the secretary and his service, renounced the world, and decided to go into the desert and the mountains, there to live and to please God by his conduct. 6. Then he went up to Nisibis, and joined the local holy school, and gained the opportunity to handle the divine scriptures, dearer than his life. He learned the (Psalter) of David in a few days, and began with the contemplation of the divine scriptures. He associated with the at-peace-in-God Ma'na, the bishop of Arzon, a godly man and teacher of truth, who mainly by his good manners and through his acumen and scholarship surpassed all who were around at that time and (even) most of his predecessors. After Mar Ma'na became a bishop, he joined him and went with him and was entrusted with the authority to teach in the province of Arzon. Everyone there profited greatly from him, and he converted many heretics to the true faith.

Afterwards he returned to Nisibis and made great strides every day, in dealing with the explanation (of the scriptures) and spiritual studies. Then he felt obliged to go even into the Roman empire, in order to see the longed-for places of the saints, to receive the blessing of their prayers and then about a man named Sergius, who had linked the Arian ideas with paganism, with whom he wanted to dispute and establish the true faith. 7. When he came to Edessa, he was joined by a brother named Thomas, who had been instructed (in the faith) from a young age. And thus he surpassed most people in his knowledge, which he acquired from the blessed one in the many years that he was with him. After wandering about a lot teaching, because he had been instructed in the Greek language also by him, he went into the Egyptian desert and enlightened many with his teaching and virtues. He went into distant lands with great effort and by difficult ways of travel. In Alexandria he expounded the holy scriptures and converted many who held pagan opinions. He refuted those who dealt in magic, and put down the heretics (αἱρεσιώτης), in which he put them in a state of admiration by his attractive conduct. Everyone was amazed at his mortification and enlightened by his teaching. From there he went to Athens, and chastised the Athenians who believed that they were something great because they had been busy from the start with pagan knowledge and he converted many to the knowledge of the truth by signs and wonders, which were done by him there and in Corinth. We would like to recount a double miracle.

8. In a holy nunnery the Superior had long been ill with lower abdominal pain and dysentery, and was near to death. In the same nunnery was a heretic woman who was arrogant towards the Superior and embittered her with her blasphemies.

When the Superior, a large, excellent woman, heard of the learning and virtue of the blessed one, she believed that, if he would send her a blessing on her food, she would instantly be healed. She sent to ask. Because she ate only peas, on which she lived, he sent her some, because she had nothing else. When the Superior, who was near to death, ate the peas, she became well and immediately the dysentery stopped, although peas are harmful for this disease. But the divine providence wills what it will. And as through the blessed Moses with bitter wood, or through the prophet Elisha with salt, bitter water was made sweet, so did it here through this blessed one.

And the Superior pleaded with God, through the prayer of the blessed one, because of the blasphemy of that woman in the monastery, and in the night, she died, because she blasphemed God and the blessed one, because the Superior had recovered through his blessing. 9. Some sophists (σοφιστής) who were well-known for their paganism, were impressed when they listened to his erudition and knowledge of the truth and burned their books of fables. The news of this spread throughout the whole land of Achaia, and became known and God was praised. The heretics who were there were stirred up by his erudition, because he competently solved their objections and refuted their arguments, and they therefore sought to kill him. He got into a ship, travelled to the imperial capital Constantinople, and there he taught the true faith for about a year. Many brought him some gold and costly clothing; but he did not condescend to take it. He supported himself by the work of his own hands, so far as his livelihood necessitated, by weaving baskets (σπυρίς) and selling them and living thereby, so that in the land of Cilicia (?) five loaves (? φοῦρνος) of bread and a little green plant were enough to support him and his disciple for seven months.

What can I say about the thieves who left off their robberies and returned to the cities and villages, repented of their wrongdoing and became friendly to strangers (ξένοι)? One day when he was in the Thebaid, which is full of robbers, he took a road which looked dangerous, and he encountered (some) who said, ”Take off and put down everything you have.” He did so, and they saw that he had nothing other than his textbook. The robbers wept, fell at his feet and begged him to forgive them for troubling him and said to him, ”Take gold and silver from us, as much as you want.” But he would not. They turned away from their work and gave what they possessed to the poor. 10. Such things and more did he work in the west, so that even the emperor of the west desired to see him because of the reputation of his teaching and piety. When the blessed one heard this, he went away to Antioch. And when he came to Nisibis, and saw the schism in the hierarchy, he desired to hurry away into the desert. But when the bishop of the province (ὑπαρχία) heard this, he forbade him to leave under threat of ecclesiastical penalties. He now remained for a long time as a teacher and delighted in intellectual pursuits more than in all the blessings of this world.

Of his works then I will tell you of just one. There was a brother studying there who was tormented by an evil devil. The blessed one fasted and prayed with the brothers, in which he said, "I trust in God, that the evil spirit will depart rapidly from him." As he spoke, it did. After three days that spirit went out of the brother and came to him no more. All who heard and saw this knew it and praised God. 11. Afterwards without his knowledge he was elected by the metropolitans and bishops and all the clergy and believers of the (two) cities to the high office of the Catholicate. The king sent horsemen after him, although he did not suspect this, and he was elevated to the patriarchate without having thought about it. He inherited the throne of the catholicos Mar Simon (bar Sabbâ'ê), of splendid witness, and of his blessed companions, and he inherited also their beloved struggle (ἀγών).

He brought peace to the churches, extirpated the hostility that the devil had introduced at the time of the schism, sowed peace in the remote, inaccessible provinces and cities, in which he bore much heat (and cold), renewed the old man, lightened the darkness, and established the canons of the apostles in the east. After he had held a consultation in the provinces of Hûzâjê, Pârsâjê and Maischânâjê, which reconciled the divided churches and brought peace, and had dismissed the accompanying metropolitans and bishops to their homes, he went to meet the King of Kings, stood before him and was received by him. Afterwards he returned to his cathedral and his cities of residence. At night he worked on the letter which he sent regarding church government in the provinces; by day (he worked) until the fourth hour on the explanation of the scriptures and from then until evening on legal matters and resolving disputes between believers, as well as between them and the pagans. The servants of Christ were pleased with him, and the churches of all the provinces of his patriarchate rejoiced.

12. Satan, the enemy of our race, could not look on, but writhed threateningly. He worked on the chief magian, the Mobedan Mobed, named Dadhormizd, and his companions, the chiefs of the magians, so that they went to the King of Kings and stirred him up with their accusations, so that they said, "The Catholicos Aba, the leader of the Christians, does not respect you as King and Lord, and he does not honour these, your great and glorious majesty. When he came to Pars and into the eastern provinces of your realm, they received him with great honour. The religion of the magians, which Hormizd was given by God, who ruled in your realm, he attacks as reprehensible and destroys it. He has converted many magians to Christianity. Our religion he harms; his own he promotes. We, the chiefs of the magians, he treats as nobodies. In short, he is a friend of the emperor and an enemy of your majesty."

The peaceful and benevolent King of Kings did not accept their accusations. But after they came often before him and talked, he gave over the matter to them. When they found an opportunity (to carry out) their desire, the magians sent a

message to the blessed one and called him before their assembly, when the king, in the twelfth year of his reign, set out from the royal quarter (ôstân) in order to go into the northern district of the Armenians and Gûrzânâjê and make war with the Khazars. After he had come, everyone acted as very angry and gnashing their teeth against him in great bitterness. The holy one did not allow himself to be frightened, but he made the cross of Christ on his forehead, which reinforced him with every invincible shield, and he rejoiced and exulted to be tried for the sake of Christ.

13. When the chief magian and his companions saw that he was not afraid of their threats, they marvelled at the courage of the champion of Christ and released him the same day without asking him anything. The chief magian did the same on the second and third days. On the fourth day they clamoured violently against him, shouting, ”Whoever is against our religion will be swept off the earth.” Then two noble magians got up; one was Shahrdawer, named Adorpareh; the other was the Rad of Pars, and they accused him, ”When this one came down into the region of Pars, he caused many magians of the religion (dên) of Hormizd to alienate and he made them Christians. Many Christians in Pars, who ate the flesh of the mutterings now consider it anathema to eat. When the magians heard this, they clamoured more violently still and said, ”This man shall be killed, because he is an opponent of magianism.” Although it was the duty of the chief magian as judge to evaluate the words, and to ask the accused about the accusation, and then to pronounce judgement (ἀπόφασις) as the legal code (κανών) and case-law require, he did not do so because he was an enemy of truth. Instead, as if overcome with horror, he also howled and screamed, ”If this man had a hundred heads, they would have to be cut off.”

Then the soldier of Christ made the sign of the cross on his forehead, raised his voice and said, ”In everything wherein I am accused by the magians concerning the true faith of Christ, O Mobedan Mobed, I am full of great joy that I have been honoured to defend it in your assembly. But only by the order of the King of Kings, when others are joined with you — then I will answer.” 14. When the chief magian and his companions heard these words of the blessed one, they grew even more enraged. They went to the King of Kings and complained to him, ”This man, the leader of the Christians, must not live, because he is destroying the religion (dên) of Hormizd.” Since they now pressured the King of Kings strongly, the latter allowed the blessed one to be taken to the PSNIK’ DRWSPN , to appear before the Mobedan Mobed, that PSNIK’, and to explain himself to the magians who were accusing him.

When the blessed one heard this message, he threw himself down, turned to the east, made the sign of the cross on his face, stood up boldly and said, ”There is one God, the Creator, Lord and ruler of all, and he is in three persons without beginning and end. To believe in and confess him is available for any man who of his own free

will takes him as his Creator, and believes and confesses his Lordship. No-one can use that belief in God, of which anyone who confesses Him is guilty, to say, ”He is mine alone,” as other, pointless religions do. And, like the air that we breathe, which all men have in common, and like the light of the sun, the moon, the stars, and millions more, Christianity is not just mine, but for all rational people, past, present and future, who want to believe it. I say before men, what I learned from the holy scripture. Anyone who listens, accepts and does, I commend, honour and praise, and I do not push him out of the church. Because he knows his Creator, and believes in His Providence. The holy scripture does not tell me to bind someone, beat them, or take something from them. But we pray and implore God for those who err, that he will lead them to the knowledge of truth; but I would warn the Christians to guard against the uncleanness of sacrificial victims.”

Then the Mobedan Mobed, and all those present gave the verdict: He is worth of death. 15. At the meeting where they were negotiating with the blessed one was also a respected believer from Bet Ardashir, named Abrodak, a man who was very close to the king and his nobles. When he heard the words of the Catholicos, he was filled with divine zeal and said to the Mobedan Mobed, ”You too, you who are the chief magian, will agree with the Catholicos, if you listen to his teaching, and will desire to become a Christian, and we Christians will not push you out of the church.” The Mobedan Mobed and the magians were very angry at this, but because the believer was an important man, they could do nothing to him. However the chief magian and his companions arose and came in great anger to the king, and complained bitterly of these words, ”A Christian has said to the Mobedan Mobed, ’If you become a Christian, we will receive you with joy.’” The King of Kings said, to appease their anger, ”Why didn’t you prosecute him without delay?” When they were gone from the king, they sought to catch him, but they did not find him, because he had gone at the king’s command on official business to the (capital) cities. Thus he escaped the hands of the magians.

16. After this the blessed one went daily into the assembly of the magians, who were negotiating with him and asking him about all sorts of things. And the Mobed of Bet Aramaje got up and said, ”Often, when Christians bring a prosecution, and obtain a written (judgement) from the Mobedan Mobed, he sends for them, takes them out of the court house and tears up the written (judgement). All the cases that come to us are actually decided by him, and we suffer much violence through him.” The Catholicos said, ”If a Christian maliciously accuses his brother, I will not allow him to come into the church.” Then a man from Samarra (?) named Dendad got up, who had put on the name of Christian, but in this, as in many other accusations, he had joined with the magians, and since he had exchanged God’s truth for a lie, after a few days his body was swollen up, by God’s punishment. Then he stood up publicly before the magians and said, ”I have maliciously accused the Catholicos.” But he died mid-sentence.

17. Because the blessed one had given himself over to the commandments of the Lord and the apostles, he warned the bishops and priests, their flock, all the time to warn all ranks of the Christian community not to break the canons of the apostles and marry their stepmother, niece, wife of their uncle, or to approach two (sisters). Anyone who did otherwise he expelled from the church with bindings and anathemas. Then the rad and the Mobed of Bet Aramaye arose and accused him also of this. The Mobedan Mobed said to the blessed one, ”Those who, before you were Catholicos, married such men or women, allow them into the church because it did not happen in your time.” The Catholicos said, ”I will not transgress the command of my Lord, and to those who do, whether they have transgressed or are transgressing, I will refuse entry to the church, so that they do not contaminate the people of the Lord.”

The chief Magian said, ”Those who did so in your time should not enter.” The Catholicos said, ”Whether the devil entered someone before or during my Catholicate, should he leave him or not?” The chief Magian said, ”He should leave him.” The Catholicos said, ”In the same way should also those who have transgressed the divine commandment be freed, so that they are not delivered with Satan and the devils to eternal hell. ” 18. As the Mobedan Mobed and the magians recognised that they had been refuted by the blessed one with these words, they sought out another method to link the issue with the command of the king. The Mobedan Mobed said, ”If in your (holy) scriptures it says, ’If you do this, you do rightly’ and if is it written in another text, that you should not do it because it is not right, and if the King of Kings says to you, that this, which you are commanded to do, you shall not do, and to do what it says not to do, will you obey the orders of the King of Kings and do his will, or will you transgress his command?”

The Catholicos said, ”Far be it from the King of Kings that he, with respect to the good which is commanded of me, and the evil, which is forbidden to me, shall order me not to do good and to do evil.” The Mobedan Mobed and the magians said, ”But what if he does?” The Catholicos said, ”He does not.” And as they pressured him so much, he said, ”If he commands it, I will at that time answer, ’God the Creator and Lord of all things must be obeyed rather than men.’” They said nothing in reply. 19. A few days later, the King of Kings saw the blessed one on the road; he spoke to him and accepted the salutation which the godly one made him. This excited the envy of the magians and they again brought him before their assembly. When he appeared before them, one arose as prosecutor and said, ”This one used to be a pagan and the son of a pagan, and later became a Christian.”

Then they all clapped their hands and said, ”This man is deserving of death.” Then they drew up a document of the investigation and read it to each other. They showed him the piece of writing, which they had drawn up against him, and said, ”If you do our will, and write and sign with us, that you do not forbid those who

have married their stepmother, sisters and stepdaughters, as well as those others who (have contracted marriages) forbidden by your scripture, do not come before the court, do not bring any magians and pagans into Christianity, and do not forbid the Christians to eat the flesh left over from magian sacrifices, then we will leave you free and we will not throw you into prison. Go into your house and manage your Catholicate. But if you do not listen to us, then we will draw up an indictment (purschaschnâmag) against you and throw you in prison."

The Catholicos said, "God, whom I serve, forbids me to transgress the true Christian faith, which I hold and teach, and to do you will in any of the above matters. For anyone who does something like this denies Christ and is no Christian." After they heard this, they sealed the indictment and ordered that he be thrown into prison. 20. But since the Christians at court clamoured violently and shouted because of the blessed one, the King of Kings ordered that he should not be thrown into prison. He was handed over to the Rad of Azerbaijan, named Dad(d)en, a man evil and hardened against everyone, but who through God's grace was gentle, friendly and peaceful to the blessed and his disciples. On the advice of the devil, the enemy of truth, the Mobedan Mobed and the noble magians secretly arranged to send down the holy one into his custody in the province of Azerbaijan, which is eclipsed by error , in a district (rûstâkâ) darkened by paganism named PRHRWR, in a village named SRSCH by the magians, which is the birthplace of magianism.

There the magians of the whole Persian realm gather together in order to learn the foolish mutterings of Zardusht bar Spidtahman , people who are the enemies of all truth. They wander about in droves and bands, follow their masters, talk and argue in the nonsense of their errors, stuttering and yelling and gnashing their teeth like wild pigs. The blessed one had to endure the sight and sound of the wildness and pugnacity of the people, who had never heard the name of Christian, faced them with his greeting and attempted to talk rationally to them. They placed a watch on him. And because of Satan's influence, they did not allow him the slightest relief from his pains, which they made him endure so that he would quickly depart from this life. 21. When the holy one heard this, he praised God: "I praise you, Lord Christ, Lord of all kings and King of all lords, that you have done me, a weakling, this great honour, that I am persecuted and reviled, because I confess you in truth as God, your Father and the holy, life-giving Spirit, and that I, for the sake of your great and terrible name, have been handed over by your persecutors to prison and imprisonment. Show your mercy, O Lord, to me and to all your holy church, which is useful and profitable for the glory and increase of your holy name."

Then he said to the Mobedan Mobed, "The earth in all its fullness, the world and all its inhabitants, belong to the Lord." Boldly he took the Rad of Azerbaijan by the hand and said, "Come, take me wherever you have been ordered to take me; see, I am pleased with you." The vigorous fighter (ἀγωνιστής) went to the field of combat

in the strong power of Christ, and after his struggle had lasted seventy days, by the power of Christ he had not been overcome by the magians, but was strengthened by the struggle. The lamb of Christ emerged victorious, so that he might go and battle with the young lions. After the Rad handed him over to the captain (Ainbed) and the policemen of the province, the Christians at the court of the King of Kings arose; they went with the blessed one and accompanied their spiritual father, who was being sent by his enemies to prison. They remembered the spiritual milk, which they had drawn constantly from his teaching, and the good shepherd, who taught and pastured them on the meadow of his spiritual words, and of which they were deprived. Some wept and sobbed, others tore their clothes and hair, others kissed his tortured feet and took grace from his footsteps.

The blessed one was very sad, and worried about what he saw his flock do, more than a wet-nurse; and they wept more than children if their mother is taken into captivity. Lastly he prayed in great anguish, blessed them, and handed them over to God and the words of his grace, and so they parted.

22. Then the blessed one came to the village which is the centre of magianism. When he came to them, they said, ”It has never happened, that a Christian came into this village and spent the night here. But now the leader of the Christians has been sent to us, so that we must give him a house and he live with us.” Those who were gathered there from the various provinces were at once angry, and boasted at once, ”We will dispute with him and convert him to magianism.” But God altered their feeling against him, and they came to greet him. And when they heard the divine wisdom that was in him, they came constantly with their arguments to him and disputed with the holy one, and through God’s grace he dissolved their objections, countered their arguments and refuted their errors. Often also they sought to kill him; but God limited their wickedness and confined them to peace. When they stopped disputing with him and just asked him about God and the world, good and evil, the resurrection, the judgement to come and the life ever after in Christ, the Master spoke with them and taught them about all this. They marvelled at his spirit-filled words and closeness to God. Some disputed about this with each other, some with their teachers. Also many magians came from other places, to hear the teaching of the Master and to see how he behaved. For everywhere they called him the god of the place because of his spirit-filled teaching, his compassion for the poor and his care for the sick. But he had no financial dealings with any of them, and although the local Rad and the gentleman of the place said that he might satisfy his needs from them, he would not do so. Many believed in him. For thus did God turn their evil into good.

23. There was at that place a plague, and those who saw it trembled and those who heard about it were terrified. The blessed one was asked to leave; but he would not, and said, ”Death and life are in God’s hand; wherever I am, I am his in

life and death. It is necessary only that we believe in him and walk in good works according to his will. Believe in him, and stay." And many remained and were not struck down by that harsh plague. But if anyone was hit, he blessed oil and gave it, and they anointed him and, depending on his faith, he recovered from that disease. A woman from that village, whose husband, named Arwândâd (?), was the judge, was tempted by the evil spirit. She came and with her husband threw herself for a long time at the door of the blessed one, to get him to come and put his hand on her head. But he would not, but blessed oil and sent it to her. She anointed herself and the devil departed from her and she was tempted no more. All who knew her previously saw what had happened and praised God.

24. He turned the house in which he lived into a church. He set up there an altar of Christ, and every day gave himself with his disciples to fasting and prayer. What in the beginning was the dwelling of Satan became then a house of prayer to the true God. From the provinces Metropolitans, bishops, priests, deacons and believing men and women came together there, in fact, to pray and to receive his blessing. Some were standing at his door in sackcloth and ashes, for their sins, and received remission. Some received the blessing of the spiritual dignity of the episcopate. Some received the dignity of the priesthood, diaconate or other ecclesiastical ranks (τάξις). All the houses of the persecutors and blasphemers became offices of the saints and houses of prayer and praise to God. Crowds of bishops met and the sound was heard of their songs of the Holy Spirit. A stream of priests came to the offices of their comrades and told each other of the great and wonderful things that they had seen and heard. The mountains and heights of Azerbaijan became like cities, wherever the feet of the Saint went. Old men who came to see the Saint forgot their age and sprang up like deer, and those struck down by disease recovered when they were carried to him to seek his blessing.

25. After the saint had spent seven years in this way, without ever crossing the threshold of the house in which he lived, being constant in fasting, prayer, and writing letters excellent in every way, which he sent out in order to govern his subordinate provinces, Satan became full of envy and could not endure these magnificent things. He caused a second Judas, unworthy of the name of Petrus Gurganara, who from a spiritual pastor had become a ravening wolf, to deny Christ and embrace the error of magianism, because the purity and integrity of the church expelled him from its womb because of his many abominations and immoralities, like a splinter from the eye, and, with the traitor, his associates. He went to the chief magian and at the command of the king obtained a order of apostasy , that any of the bishops, priests and deacons ordained by the blessed one who did not resign should be thrown into prison, and that no-one should refer to him as Catholicos, because he only became a Christian in later life.

26. When this command was broadcast by the machinations of the apostate and his associates, some fearful people were influenced, and all prayed to God that he would have mercy on his church and not deliver it into the hands of the destroyer. But when the traitor got this order and took it to Azerbaijan and convinced the Mobed of the area to prosecute the disciples of the blessed one before him and, because of his murderous ambition, to treat the blessed one in the same way as his disciples, the Lord did not fulfil his wicked desire. Instead he inspired the Mobedan (Mobed) and the magians to call him before them and to question him in the way he wanted. And the Mobed said, ”I do not have the authority to question him.” Some of the magians mentioned said, however, ”He shall come before us as we are very determined to see him.”

And because he was persuaded to, he came before their assembly and they let him seat himself in great honour.” And because they heard sound thinking from his mouth, they reviled and beat the apostate, so that he hid himself from them. When he saw his hopes come to nothing, he sought another way to kill the saint. He hired some rascals and came with them to the place where the godly one lived, to murder him and give as an excuse that he was escaping from custody. But God, who knew the thoughts of the traitor, did not allow it. For when the traitor arrived secretly at night with his men, entered and searched for his disciples, he heard the voice of the blessed one, and from fright and shame became weak and trembly and could not lay a hand on him. The men of the house found out, and the people of the village, and they came, beat the apostates, and drove him away, together with the magians that he had brought with him.

27. Afterwards the blessed one reflected, ”Perhaps the murderer will find an opportunity to fulfil his murderous desire upon me, and then spread the rumour that I have run away.” Then he gave himself up to death in the open, got up in the night with his disciple, named Jacob, and, trusting God, left the village accompanied by the zealous, stout and God-loving bishop of Azerbaijan, Mar Johannan. He travelled in the winter, in cold, frost and snow, over the mountains and hills, to the royal court, entered and went to the HRPDKA. When the King of Kings heard of his arrival, he was greatly astonished, that he had not gone elsewhere, but had come there, where everybody was afraid of ending up in the HRPDKA. The Christians of the (two) cities and everywhere arose and came to see the blessed one, and everyone awaited the outcome of this unfortunate business. But the magians rejoiced and said, ”Now that he has ignored the command of the King of Kings, the latter will at once command his execution and rid us of him.”

Since everyone was watching and waiting to see what would happen, the King of Kings sent to the blessed one by means of Ferruchdad Hormizd DZ’DGW, ”What is the judgement on he who transgresses the command of his lord?” The Catholicos said, ”If he is a serf, his food and clothing shall be taken; if he works for pay, he

will not receive his pay." Hormizd DZ'DGW said, "What is your judgement, when you have ignored the command of the king of kings and come here against his command?" The Catholicos said, "I have not ignored the command of the king of kings, but I am his friend and obey his command. Because a renegade came against me, to murder me secretly, I left there and came to his court, so that no-one would think that I had run away. If I have done wrong, let him execute me openly." Then Hormizd DZ'DGW went and reported this to the King of Kings.

28. Then the King of Kings told him: "That you ignored our command and come here, we forgive you. But the four very serious accusations that the magians make against you are as follows: that you make magians leave their religion (dên) and into Christians; that you do not let your people marry many women as they wish; that you subvert the legal processes of the magians; that you were originally a heathen and only later became a Christian. Add to this that when you were interned, you appointed bishops, priests and deacons and ordered them to teach and convert people to Christianity as you do. All this we forgive you in our benevolence. Only the fact that you became a Christian later, must you account for, if the Mobedan Mobed requires it from you. Now go home and be at peace." Then the Saint worshipped and praised God; he blessed the King of Kings, and went out of the HRPDKA with great joy. But because of the crush of the crowd accompanying him he could not get through the city gate, but went over the city moat. At this the aforementioned magians were amazed and upset; they went and woke the King and said: "The man, who is the enemy of the religion (dên) of Hormizd, you have let go free and he is going to his house!"

29. On the morning of the (following) day, when the blessed one in the company of the Christians went to the court in order to thank the King of Kings, the aforementioned magians sought for a way to kill him. They were afraid to seize him openly on account of the number of believers accompanying him, in case there should be an uproar when they approached him, and decided to send the Rad and the Ainbed to arrest him secretly. That day there was heavy rain, and so they went into the hunting lodge at a place called the Birdhouse, near the (palace of) the King of Kings. The magians send to him, as if they wanted to speak to him. After he entered, they closed the door so that no-one could follow him and said to the blessed one: "Ever since you became a Christian, you have converted many magians into Christians, and you cannot be allowed to live (longer)." Some said, "He should be thrown to the lions." Some said, "He should be strangled." Others said, "We'll throw him into a well so that he dies there, without the Christians knowing."

30. While they devised these things, the Christian people came up and went about everywhere in the belief that he had been crowned , or that he was about to be crowned. But God in his mercy delivered him from their hands. By his secret work he inspired one of the great men of the empire to stand up before the King and say,

”King of Kings, best of men, may you live in eternity and may your majesty reign forever. The Christian people who are in your empire are a strong, great people, an innumerable multitude, and also useful for the service of the government. If this man, their leader, is put to death, it injures them greatly and your empire suffers no small damage.” When the King of Kings in his benevolence heard this from this man, it pleased him and his whole court, so that they would not hear the petition (τάγμα) of the Magians, and he ordered that the holy one of Christ must not be killed.

31. Then they bound the saint hand and foot and neck with heavy iron fetters, and covered his face so that no-one would know him and no rebellion would break out, placed him on a mule and handed him over to the mobed who had oversight of the prison at court. The mobed did as he was commanded and the house in which the blessed one was was guarded by horsemen and foot soldiers. When the saint heard that zealous believers were hanging about, looking to break open the house, he was very worried and forbade them to remain in the vicinity of the house. Immediately they left at his command; but the saint stayed in the prison guarded by God, who had said, ”With the righteous am I in distress; I will strengthen and honour him and show him my salvation.” And although fettered, he consecrated bishops, priests and deacons, strengthened them with blessings and prayers, and sent them out to the provinces.

32. At the time of the journey, when the King of Kings set out to go to Azerbaijan, the saint was led with him in his fetters, in great discomfort, over mountains and hills, in heat and drought, in thirst and hunger, in much prayer with his disciples. Wherever they came, the believers welcomed him with great joy and everyone went to his tent as a means of grace and blessing. Wherever the king camped, believers came from place and asked that the Saint should be released from these harsh restraints. When the King of Kings came to Azerbaijan and the magians of the place where the Blessed One had been in custody, hearing that he was at court, all came to honour and greet him, weeping that by the removal of the Noble One they had been robbed of such a blessing. Everywhere they went, wherever the great ones of the Kingdom were, they spoke of his wisdom and manner of life. The leaders of the magians at court forbade them to say such things about him, until, of the leaders of the magians, Kardag the Ainbed, and Shahrdawer, and Azadsad the Mobedan Mobed, calmed down in their anger against him, because they became ashamed of themselves through the beautiful things which people said about him. So they told him through a Mobed, ”We hear from many people that you are a good and an upright man, and we are anxious that you should be released from your bonds. Just state publically that you are not opposed to magianism and will not convert (anyone) else to Christianity, and we will immediately release you and you can go wherever you like.”

33. After the Mobed spoke thus to the Lordly one, the latter instructed him extensively from the Holy Scriptures on the true faith, the permanence of Christianity, the greatness of the economy of God, about the resurrection and the judgement, about the blessings which are prepared for the righteous in heaven, and the punishments which are prepared for the wicked in eternal hell with Satan and the devils. When the Mobed heard this, he was seized with amazement and fear; he clapped his hands together at the great manysidedness and invincibility of these thoughts, and he stood up and recognised and praised God. Then the Lordly one said, "Go and tell them: I am the servant of God and I do not transgress the command of my Lord, who says, 'Go into all nations and baptise them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.' I shall not go to eternal Hell with Satan and the devils; I am not afraid of the long agony of passing time, and I do not confuse the true life and eternal blessings with the corruptible (blessings) of this impermanent world." When the Mobed went and said this to the Magians, they marvelled at the courage of the Lordly one and said, "You see that he does not obey us and does not give way so that we might release him from his fetters. Now he can only blame himself." After a few days, when he was exhausted from his heavy fetters and the effort of (walking) the difficult paths, and had come to a stop in order to rest from the rigours, the Magians brought two pairs of thick, new fetters, took the old ones away, and left him bound with them hand and foot, so that he could no longer get up because of their weight. He received these joyfully and confessed and praised God.

34. After the Saint had been dragged along in these fetters in the wake of the king for about 400 parasangs, until the King of Kings went down to the (two) cities, he went down also and lived in fetters with his disciples in a house, where by the power of Christ he managed the patriarchate and all its obligations. Then the King of Kings commanded, in his goodness, that he should be freed; but the Magians persisted in their usual hostility and left the Saint in his fetters. Once the King of Kings departed from the (two) cities, he was taken in chains in the wake of the court to a place named PS'I. After they had tortured and tormented him in these hard fetters and the wonderful beauty of his patience in the fear of God had been revealed, then almighty God, the Lord of All, in his wonderful power, through his inexpressible works, gave an irresistible hint to the mind of the King of Kings, so that he sent and by a miracle loosed the athlete (ἀθλήτης) of Christ from all his fetters. Then there was great joy in the whole people of God and they offered praise and worship.

35. While the King of Kings intended that he should remain a few days after his release, and then go to the cities of his throne, Satan stirred up unrest and rioting through the actions of the heathen in Bet Huzaye. The Magians accused the Blessed One before the King of Kings: "If the Catholicos had wanted, the rioting would not have broken out." Immediately he was chained to a foot-soldier (paig)

by a strong chain to the neck, and brought to the court of the King of Kings, and everyone believed that he would be executed immediately. The King of Kings, exasperated through the slander of the Magians, sent word to him by means of his commissioner (Farruchdâd Hôrmîzd) DZ'DGW: "You are an enemy of Our Majesty, and the Christians have become arrogant because of you. In many cities they have risen up against the noble Magians, beaten and robbed them, and even now are rioting. You chose bishops and priests and sent them into the provinces, even though you are in prison; but myself you treat as nothing. Therefore I command that in the morning you will be taken and thrown into a pit, so that you will die there."

36. The Catholicos boldly raised his voice and said, "Once the King of Kings has made such a decision about me, because of the whisperings of my enemies, (further) words are unnecessary. He orders my immediate death, and with great joy do I accept death for the truth of Christ. The Magians persecuted me, an innocent, and imprisoned me for seven years in the power of my persecutors, and sent a renegade to murder me. But God in his invincible power rescued me, after I came to the court of his Majesty the King of Kings, and they did violence on me and the people of God, although they fettered me hand and foot and neck as a malefactor, and God the almighty knows that I was dragged away by them by force. The King of Kings said that he would release me from the fetters, and after he retracted this, and they slandered me before his sublime Majesty, and he finally decided against me, so let him now demand my immediate execution."

The PSNIK' went and reported these words to the king. Then the King of Kings left the Saint alone and said to him in a friendly way, "Go and write letters to the Christians of each province, that, if the insurgents do not settle down peaceably, the sword, bow and arrows will be drawn against them, they will be attacked, and any found fighting will be killed, be they Magian, Jew or Christian." After the PSNIK' brought the message, he undertook to write it. After this was done, God worked on the King of Kings, and it was suggested to him that he should release the Saint. And when the King of Kings went into (winter) quarters near the (two) cities, the Saint went with him. 37. Some time later, the chief of the Hephthalites (haftarân chudâ) sent a priest to the King of Kings, and many Christian Hephthalites sent a letter to the Saint [Mar Aba] to ask him to consecrate the priest as a bishop for the whole Hephthalite realm.

After the priest had come before the King, and set forth the business of his mission, [the King] wondered at what he heard, and marvelled at the great power of Christ, that the Christian Hephthalites also considered the Lordly One [Mar Aba] as their chief and regent, and he said to him that he should go and adorn the church as was custom, and should go into his church and house and collect the bishops according to custom, and ordain the man sent by the prince of the Hephthalites. When the people of the Lord heard this message, and the Saint came out of prison and into the

cathedral of his apostolic seat, what joy was like that joy, that the Lordly One had returned to his blessed flock after nine years, which he had spent in combat with lions and panthers for his beloved flock, and returned victorious. What shepherd loves his flock like our father, the master of the holy flock, who bore every trouble and persecution for it, and gave himself over to death? As the good shepherd led his blessed sheep into the holy sheepfold, so the sheep and lambs of Christ ran in to him from all sides, when they heard his beloved voice, surrounded him, sought refuge with him, and kissed his hands and feet and whole body, which was torn and mangled by the claws and fetters. And they waited to hear the sound of his sweet hymns and to suck spiritual milk from his beloved teaching. Because the sheep heard the voice of the blessed shepherd, they were very happy about this, and only with difficulty could he enter his blessed appartment because of the crush of people.

The following morning the church was adorned with throngs of believers; the Saint ordained the Hephthalite priest as bishop for the land of the Hephthalites, and in the people of the Lord joy grew over the arrangements of divine providence. 38. Afterwards the King of Kings sent him [Mar Aba] into the province of Bêt Hûzâjê, and by God's work and his care many priests were saved from death and their blood was not shed. He encouraged them and filled their hearts with the words of spiritual teaching. Then he returned to the court of the King of Kings, who allowed him to reside wherever he wanted. The captain of the foot-soldiers (paig) who guarded him was ordered to leave him in peace. He took up his dwelling next to the church of Bêt Narkôs. There he lived and concerned himself with divine instruction, and every day he said wonderful things to those who came to him, and converted many from heresy who had come with the King of the Arabs to pay homage to the King of Kings and that made pilgrimage to him.

When he became ill for some time because of his imprisonment, the King ordered that doctors should be sent to him to heal him; but they could not. The Saint slept from his holy struggle on the Friday of the second week of Lent. 39. Then the magians made so much fuss, that nobody dared to bury him until the King commanded it. When he was laid on the bier (λεκτίκιον) and brought out, with great difficulty because of the crowd of believers, who threw onto it many handkerchiefs (σουδάριον) or coats and took them back again, as means of grace and blessing, until it reached the cathedral of Koke, the magians ordered that he should be thrown to the dogs. Then the believers in droves shouted, "If anyone approaches the body of the saint, we will begin a bloodbath." They came en masse seized the litter (? BSPK') and took it as a relic, and left nothing except the coffin (γλωσσόκομον) in which was the body of the saint.

40. He was honoured for seven days in the cathedral, day and night, with scripture readings, hymns, sermons and spiritual songs, and all the hosts of believers from

all the provinces took the blessings home, by means of small towels (ὠράριον) and garments, that they laid on his body. Then the King of Kings and the Mobedan Mobed sent the Mobed (of the province?) and the judge and other magians to see whether it was the saint or not, because, out of fear and terror, they didn't believe in his death. After these delegates had seen him, the body of the saint was placed on another bier (λεκτίκιον) and buried with great honour while spiritual songs were sung. Countless multitudes eagerly honoured him with perfumes and lamps all the way through the city to the monastery of Seleucia. Likewise the judges and magians who had been sent went before the litter (? BISPK'), in which the saint's body was, and after he had been honoured through God's almighty power, the magians returned, amazed and astonished at what they had seen and heard, to those who had sent them.

Thus the multitude applauded and praised God because of the wonderful things that happened at the death of the saint. 41. In order to avoid wearying you, through hearing too much, let us pass over what God soon did through him and for his sake in many distant countries, through arbitrating disputes which Satan, the enemy of our nature, had aroused; then in the imprisonment, which he endured for seven years in Azerbaijan; then in the fetters which he wore for three years around his neck, hands and feet at the king's court. There is much of this, and in many parts; the mouth is unable to tell it all, and you already know much of it. So we end our words with the words of the blessed David, and say: "Blessed is the people that has such a man, and blessed is the people at whose head stands such a man, to feed the flock of our Saviour Jesus Christ."

1. This group (Syriac bnay qyāmâ) were a monastic-like group who combined asceticism with an politically and socially active life. See also Wikipedia article. 2. German "Kalkkirche". 3. It was illegal in the Sassanid realm for Zoroastrians to convert to Christianity, and the convert could be executed. 4. This name is given in this unvocalised form in the BKV. 5. Justinian may have desired to see him for various reasons; but Mar Aba's refusal and quick exit across the frontier suggests that the invitation was of a threatening kind, where he might be asked to anathematise Nestorius. 6. I.e. as Nestorian patriarch. 7. The Roman emperor. 8. Flesh of animals offered in sacrifice. 9. According to J. Labourt, Le christianisme dans l'empireperse sous la dynastie Sassanide, Paris, 1904, p.181 n.3, this is the pasaniqarusphan, the director of prisons, although he doesn't seem that sure about it. 10. "die durch den Irrtum verfinstert ist" — I am not sure that I have rendered this correctly.

11. I.e. Zoroaster. 12. Not sure about this sentence at all: "Welchen Anblick und welches Anhören der Wildheit und Streitsucht von Leuten, die nicht einmal den Christennamen hören, seinen Gruß annehmen und mit ihm wie Menschen reden mochten, vermochte der Selige auszuhalten." 13. I.e. that wherever he is, God is

with him. 14. The writer seems to mean that the order itself indicated that the person brandishing it was an apostate. 15. Mar Aba. 16. Mar Aba. 17. Petrus Gurganara. 18. Is this ”question” as in ”being put to the question”, i.e. torture? 19. Mar Aba. 20. Not an experienced conspirator, it seems. 21. The BKV text gives no clue as to what this is. It would seem to be a rather grim prison. 22. The HRPDKA is clearly close to the court. 23. I.e. martyred 24. Also known as the White Huns; a serious military threat to the Persian state located in the north.

25. The ”lions and panthers” no doubt refers to his battles with the Zoroastrian clergy.

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