Passion of St. Saturninus

Anonymous early writings (various dates)

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On the Passion and Translation of Saint Saturninus, Bishop of the City of Toulouse and Martyr

[By Andrew Eastbourne] [English translation of the critical text of P. Cabau, "OPVSCVLVM DE PASSIONE AC TRANSLATIONE SANCTI SATVRNINI, EPISCOPI TOLOSANAE CIVITATIS ET MARTYRIS: Édition et traduction provisoires," Mémoires de la Société archéologique du Midi de la France 61 (2001) 59-77. Many of the notes are indebted to Cabau's.][1] We revere with due admiration the most blessed sufferings[2] of those who, as we have heard and believe (through the good service of the fame that reports the information), have been sanctified by a happy martyrdom. We honor with vigils, hymns and even solemn[3] sacraments those days on which they were crowned with [God's] gift after victory, striving as they bore witness to the name of the Lord, and by their blessed death being reborn in the heavenly realms of the same Lord, who helped them with his own power in their struggle—[and we do this] so that we may ask for their protection and support before the Lord by praying, and deserve it by honoring [them]. With what solemnity, then, shall we revere, with what joy shall we observe that day, on which the most blessed Saturninus, bishop of the city of Toulouse and martyr, earned in that same city a double crown (as God is my witness)—the rank of bishop and the honor of martyrdom—so that his suffering sanctified one whose life had already made him worthy of reverence!

At that time (after the bodily coming of the Savior) the true Sun of Righteousness had risen in the darkness and had begun to illuminate the Western districts—for gradually, little by little, the sound of the Gospels went out into the whole world, and the preaching of the Apostles in its slow advance shone forth in our regions. A few churches were being built in some cities, through the devotion of a small number of Christians, while numerous temples in all places were sending up the disgusting smoke [of sacrifices], through the lamentable error of the pagans. Then (truly quite a long time ago, that is, during the consulship of Decius and Gratus,[4] as the faithful report tells), the city of Toulouse had received Saturninus as its first and supreme priest of Christ.[5] By his faith and virtue, the oracles of those demons who were worshipped in this same city began to cease; their fabrications were laid bare; their machinations uncovered; all their power among the pagans, all their deceit, began to decrease, as the faith of the Christians increased. Since the aforementioned bishop, in his going to and from the church, which was quite small at that time, often went past the Capi-

tol, which was between his house and the house of God, the deceitful crowd of demons was not able to stand the holy man's presence; and the statues (mute as they were), overshadowed by no apparitions, remained in silence [as their only response] to the impious worship and the customary prayers of those who came to consult them.

All the priests of impious superstition, disturbed by the novelty of such a great thing, began to ask themselves whence this muteness (not usual for such a long time) had suddenly come upon their gods, and who had shut their ever-babbling mouths, so that they, not moved by the prayers of those who called upon them, nor charmed by the shed blood of bulls and so many sacrifices, refused to give any response to those who consulted them—[were they] angry or absent? They heard from a certain enemy of our religion that some sect hostile to pagan superstition had arisen, which was called Christian, and that it was striving to destroy their gods; also, the bishop of this faith was Saturninus, who passed by the Capitol frequently—it was at the sight of this man that the mouths of their gods were terrified and fell silent; they could not easily be re-opened unless an accelerated death took that bishop away.

Oh unhappy error and blind madness! They heard that the man was a terror to their own gods, and that the demons went into exile from their temples and their habitations when he passed by. Not only did they hear—they also understood! And they would prefer to kill this man, who was terrifying to the idols they worshipped even without making any threats, rather than to honor him. Miserable people—who did not consider that they ought to worship no one more than him whose servant had given orders to their own divinities! For what is more foolish than to fear those who are afraid, and not to fear that one who rules over the rulers? In the midst of this eager questioning and astonishment, as little by little a great multitude of people had gathered and they were all eagerly wanting to find out something certain regarding all this talk, and (a bull having been prepared as a victim) they were desiring either to bring their gods back or propitiate them, by the sacrifice of such a tremendous victim—see! the holy Saturninus himself, coming to a solemn service, was recognized by one of that malicious crowd, who said: "Look! the adversary of our worship himself, the standard-bearer of the new religion, who preaches the destruction of temples, who despises our gods by calling them demons, whose constant presence, finally, prevents us from obtaining oracles! And so, since the end he deserves has presented the very man to us at the opportune time, let us take vengeance for the injury to ourselves and to our gods at the same time! And now, through our compulsion, may he either be pleasing to them, by sacrificing, or make them joyful, by dying!"

With the urging of such an impious voice, the whole crowd of lunatics surrounded the holy man and, once a priest and two deacons who had accompanied him had fallen away in flight, he was brought alone to the Capitol. As they were trying to force him to sacrifice to the demons, he bore witness in a clear voice: "I know only one God, the true God. I will offer to him the sacrifice of praise. I know that your gods are demons; and you honor them (in vain) not so much by the sacrifice of cattle as by the deaths of your own souls. Now, how is it

that you want me to fear those by whom, as I hear, you say I am feared?" At these words of the holy bishop, the whole boisterous, impious multitude was inflamed, and used that bull, which had been prepared as a sacrificial victim, in the service of their savagery, tying a rope around its flanks and leaving it loose in back: they bound the holy man's feet with the end of the rope that was hanging down behind the bull, and drove the bull with rather sharp blows to rush down from the upper part of the Capitol onto the plain. Without delay, during the first part of the descent of that slope, his head having been dashed [against the rocks], his brain having been scattered, and his body having been mangled in every part, his soul, worthy of God, was received by Christ—so that after the victory he [i.e., Christ] might crown with his own laurels [the soul] that pagan fury had wrenched out with torments while he was fighting faithfully for Christ's name.

The dead body, however, now exposed to no one's affronts, was led by the bull in its frenzy to that place where, the rope having snapped in two, it received burial in a mound at that time. For since at that time the Christians themselves were afraid to bury the body of the holy man, on account of the pagans' agitation, only two women, overcoming the weakness of their sex by the power of their faith, braver than all the men, and encouraged by the example of their bishop, I believe, to endure martyrdom, put the body of the blessed man into a wooden coffin and, after making deep trenches, placed it as far underground as possible. And so, they seemed not so much to be burying the sacred remains[6] (so worthy of reverence in their eyes) as to be hiding them, for fear that people of impious mind, perchance, if they saw any honors being paid to the buried body's grave, might immediately dig up the body and tear it to pieces, and even take away the modest tomb. But the Lord took up his martyr in peace—to him belong honor and glory, power and might for ever and ever. Amen.

The body of the martyr remained for a certain amount of time under the common turf, not honored by any [human being], but honored by God—until Saint Hilarius, ordained bishop in the city of Toulouse much later,[7] learned about the death and merit of his predecessor, had the earth dug up as far as the wooden coffin itself. Since he was afraid to move the holy remains, he carefully had a vault built above it with many bricks, and to a place of prayer of the same size, he added a quite small basilica made of ordinary timber[8]—keeping the body hidden, of course, so that faithless people would not dig it up and rip it apart. As time wore on, the remains of many people who were departing from the world were faithfully brought to this little basilica, for comfort, on account of the body of the martyr resting there; and the whole place was filled with a great number of interred bodies. Then the bishop, Saint Silvius, who had attained the episcopacy of the aforementioned city,[9] was preparing a beautiful and fine-looking basilica at great cost, in order to transfer the remains of the venerable martyr there—but he departed from the world before the completion of the work he had begun.

After his death, Saint Exuperius, who had been elected into the highest priesthood—a man entirely free of [the desire to do] harm to any of his forebears, entirely free of envy towards any of those who were seen to be ruling the churches at that time; not only second to none,

but even worthy of comparison with the blessed martyr himself, in the merits of his virtues—most industriously completed the basilica that his predecessor had faithfully begun, and auspiciously dedicated it. While he was hesitating to transfer the remains of the holy martyr there—not for any disbelief of his own, but for the honor of that man himself—he was admonished in a dream not to neglect faithlessly what he had believed faithfully: no injury was done to spirits either by the diminution of their ashes or the transportation of their bodies, since it was a manifest fact that what had fostered the salvation of believers was [also] conducive to the honor of martyrs. Straightway, bolstered by such a vision, he sent a request to the pious emperors[10]—and without any delay, attained what he had asked so devoutly, so that the remains of the holy man, [now] transferred to the basilica that had been prepared with all zeal, would not be violated by reckless audacity, but rather honored by the deference of one who showed quite attentive reverence.

Now as to what remains for this little work: Let all who read it, let all who hear it, understand that the source of our salvation stands in faith; and that the Lord did not without reason say in the words of the Gospel:[11] "Do you believe this?"—and when the answer was given, "I believe," he said: "Let it be done for you according to your faith"—not because the Lord, who examines the heart and mind,[12] was ignorant of that their state of belief, but in order to remind us not to believe doubtfully what is said about the Lord's virtues, or [believe doubtfully] in what we ask to be granted to us. For this reason the Savior himself said about such men: "If you carry out my will, I shall no longer call you servants, but friends";[13] and the same [Savior] bore witness through the voice of the prophet: "To me, however, your friends are greatly honored, O God";[14] and again: "These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation, who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, who follow the Lamb"[15]—about their blessedness it was said: "Planted in the house of the Lord, they flourished in the courts of our God"[16]; and again: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"[17]; and again: "The saints will exult in glory, they will rejoice in their beds";[18] and again: "This glory belongs to all his saints."[19] To them, it was granted not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for Christ and be with Christ immediately after the dissolution of their bodies.

Let us not neglect the friends of God and the well-beloved of God as being dead; rather, let us honor them as living—for it is certain, by indubitable faith, that if we should faithfully request their favor, we shall happily feel their support, because even if their enthusiasm ceased, he would supply our desires, [he] who not only examines present thoughts, but also knows future thoughts. When requests are made to him in his own [people],[20] he understands that he [himself] is being honored. Under the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ,[21] to whom belong honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. [1]Translated by Andrew Eastbourne, commissioned by Roger Pearse, September 2013. This translation is public domain: copy freely for any purpose, personal, educational or commercial. [2] Lat. passiones—frequently implying (as here) specifically martyrdom; the English word "passion" (cf. e.g. Christ's "passion) derives from the Latin term. [3] The original meaning of the Latin term (sollemnis)—"celebrated yearly at a set time"—is probably at least partly in view here; i.e.,

not only are the celebrations of the martyrs full of religious feeling, they are also annually recurring.

[4] A.D. 250. [5] I.e., bishop. [6] Lat. reliquiae—the origin of the Eng. word ”relics.” [7] Probably in the late mid-4 cen. [8] Or, ”cheap materials” (Lat. vilibus tignis). [9] Probably in the late 4 cen. [10] Honorius and Arcadius; this event took place sometime in the first decade of the 5 cen, when Exuperius is attested as bishop of Toulouse. [11] Mt. 9:28-29. [12] Lit., ”heart and kidneys.” [13] Jn. 15:14-15. [14] Ps. 139[138]:17. [15] Rev. 7:14; 14:4. [16] Ps. 92[91]:14. [17] Ps. 116[115]:15. [18] Ps. 149:5. [19] Ps. 149:9. [20] Lat. dum rogatur in suis—i.e., when he is asked through his own [saints]. [21] This phrase (Lat. regnante...Christo), apious parody of secular dating formulas, and is found in a number of martyrdom accounts.

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