

THE LEGEND OF MAR QARDAGH

NARRATIVE AND CHRISTIAN HEROISM
IN LATE ANTIQUE IRAQ



JOEL THOMAS WALKER

The Joan Palevsky

Imprint in Classical Literature



In honor of beloved Virgil—

“O degli altri poeti onore e lume . . .”

—Dante, *Inferno*

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The Legend
of Mar Qardagh

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The Legend of Mar Qardagh

*Narrative and Christian Heroism
in Late Antique Iraq*

Joel Thomas Walker

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*For my parents,
Dr. Rhett P. Walker and Corinna Thomas Walker,
with love and gratitude*

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ABBREVIATIONS

JOURNALS, ENCYCLOPEDIAS, AND SERIES

- AB* *Analecta Bolladiana* (Brussels)
- AMI* *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* (Tehran)
- BJRL* *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* (Manchester)
- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London)
- CAH* *Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge)
- CHIr* *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. W. B. Fischer et al. (Cambridge, 1968–91)
- CSCO* *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Paris, Louvain)
- DOP* *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (Washington, DC)
- EI*² *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. 2d ed. (Leiden, 1960–)
- Enc.Ir.* *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshatar (London and Boston, 1982–)
- JA* *Journal asiatique* (Paris)
- J ECS* *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (Baltimore)
- JRS* *Journal of Roman Studies* (London)
- JSAI* *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* (Jerusalem)
- LCL* *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA)
- LM* *Le Muséon* (Louvain)

<i>ODB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , ed. A. P. Kazhdan and A.-M. Talbot. 3 vols. (New York and Oxford, 1991)
<i>OCP</i>	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i> (Rome)
<i>OrChr</i>	<i>Oriens Christianus</i> (Wiesbaden)
<i>OS</i>	<i>L'Orient Syrien</i> (Paris)
<i>PdO</i>	<i>Parole de l'Orient</i> (Paris)
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , ed. J. -P. Migne (Paris, 1857–66)
<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i> , ed. R. Graffin and F. Nau et al. (Paris, 1907–)
<i>RAC</i>	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der Antiken Welt</i> (Stuttgart)
<i>REArm</i>	<i>Revue des études arméniennes</i> , nouvelle série (Paris)
<i>SAA</i>	State Archives of Assyria (Helsinki)
<i>SC</i>	Sources chrétiennes (Paris)
<i>TAVO</i>	<i>Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients</i> (Wiesbaden, 1977–)
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i> (Leipzig)

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Baumstark, <i>GSL</i>	A. Baumstark, <i>Geschichte der syrischen Literatur</i> (Bonn: A. Markus und E. Webers Verlag, 1922; repr., Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968)
Bedjan, <i>AMS</i>	P. Bedjan, ed., <i>Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum</i> , 7 vols. (Paris and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890–97; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968)
Brock, <i>FER</i>	S. Brock, <i>From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity</i> (Aldershot, England; Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999)

- Brock, *SPLA* S. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984)
- Brock, *SSC* S. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature, and Theology* (Hampshire, England; Brookfield, VT: Variorum Reprints, 1992)
- Brockelmann, *LS* K. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1928; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966)
- Fiey, *POCN* J. M. Fiey, *Pour un Oriens Christianus Novus: Répertoire des diocèses syriaques orientaux et occidentaux* (Beirut and Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993)
- Graf, *GCAL* G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 5 vols. (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944–53)
- MacKenzie, *CPD* D. N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971)
- Payne Smith, *TS* R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879–1901; repr., Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 2001)
- Wilmshurst, *EOCE* D. Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318–1913* (Louvain: Peeters, 2000)

TRANSLITERATION AND TERMINOLOGY

Rather than attempting to recreate the pronunciation of the seventh-century text, I have indicated only the Syriac letters present in the written text, plus vocalization. Silent letters are always shown, usually (though with some exceptions) in brackets; the doubling of consonants is not shown. The Syriac term for “mighty strength,” for instance, appears as *ganbārūtā*, rather than *gab-bārūtā*. This system will make it easier for new readers of Syriac to recognize the forms; advanced readers of Syriac and other Semitic languages should have little trouble recognizing the corresponding roots. The letter š represents the Syriac letter shin (“sh” in English), ḥ the Syriac letter ḥeth, and ʔ the Syriac letter ʔeth. The Syriac letter ayn is represented by ʿ (note that this is the exact opposite of the standard Arabic convention; hence, Syr. ʿAbdišōʿ becomes Ar. ʾAbd Yashūʿ). All other languages, with the exception of classical Greek, have also been rendered in transliteration.

For well-known place-names, I have often used simplified forms. The Iranian city of Bīšāpūr appears, for instance, as Bishapur. ʔāq-i Būstān appears as Taq-i Bustan. For more obscure locations, I have adopted the forms used in the *Barrington Atlas of the Classical World*, and for Syriac place-names the spellings in Wilmshurst, *Ecclesiastical Organization of the Church of the East*. I use the term “northern Iraq” to designate the region on either side of the Tigris River north of the Lower Zab River and south of the Khabur River, which forms part of the modern Turkish-Iraqi border. The term is, of course, anachronistic but is nevertheless preferable to other, equally anachronistic terms for the region, such as “Kurdistan,” “Assyria,” or “al-Jazira.”

Personal names have presented more of a problem, since they come in a variety of Syriac, Persian, Greek, and Armenian forms. In general, I employ the most commonly recognized forms of the names, with minimal diacritical marks. I have simplified the transliteration of a few, frequently occurring

Syriac names: thus Qardagh's spiritual mentor appears as Abdišo ("the servant of Jesus"), in place of 'Abdišō.¹

The Christian community of the Sasanian world referred to itself as the "Church of the East" (among other titles). Historians have usually described the same community as the "East-Syrian" or "Nestorian" Church, while its modern descendants prefer the terms "Assyrian" or "Chaldean."² To describe the Christian community of late antique Iraq, I use the terms "East-Syrian" and "Nestorian" as synonyms. Although the term "Nestorian" has the advantage of being widely recognized due to its extensive use in earlier scholarship, it has come under strong criticism in recent scholarship.³ In general, therefore, I refer to the Church of the East as the East-Syrian or the Sasanian church.

1. Other individuals bearing the same name, such as the East-Syrian bibliographer 'Abdišō of Nisibis (†1318), appear with full diacritical marks.

2. For a concise and reliable overview of the history of these several names, see J. Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, and Colonial Powers* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) 1–49.

3. See S. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *BJRL* 78 (1996): 23–35.

INTRODUCTION

Christianity in Late Antique Iraq and the Legend of Mar Qardagh

The Syriac Christian legend that lies at the heart of this book was composed during the final decades of the Sasanian Empire, which spanned the period 224–642. Its anonymous author was probably a contemporary of the late Sasanian ruler, Khusro II (590–628). The legend's hero, Mar (i.e., "Saint") Qardagh, was believed to have lived some two hundred and fifty years earlier, during the reign of Shapur II (309–379), who appointed Mar Qardagh to serve as the viceroy and margrave (*paṭāḥšā* and *marzbān*) of the region extending from the frontier city of Nisibis to the Diyala River in central Iraq. While the story of Mar Qardagh's "heroic deeds" preserves few, if any, reliable details about the fourth century, the legend presents an extraordinary window into the cultural world of seventh-century Iraq. To adapt a phrase from Freya Stark, the story of Mar Qardagh enables one to "breathe" the climate of northern Iraq on the eve of the Islamic conquest.¹ Translated from Syriac into English here for the first time, the *History of Mar Qardagh* presents a hero of epic proportions, whose characteristics confound simple classification. During the several stages of his career, Qardagh hunts like a Persian king, argues like a Greek philosopher, and renounces his Zoroastrian family to live with monks high in the mountains west of Lake Urmiye. His heroism thus encompasses and combines cultural traditions that modern scholars typically study in isolation. Taking the Qardagh legend as its foundation, this book explores the articulation and convergence of these diverse traditions in the Christian culture of the late Sasanian Empire.

The district of Arbela, where the Qardagh legend originated, lies in what

1. F. Stark, *Letters*, vol. 8, *Traveller's Epilogue*, ed. C. Moorhead (Wilton, Salisbury, Wiltshire, England: Michael Russell Ltd., 1982), 45, where Stark draws a contrast between history that must be approached "from the outside" and literature that is "a sort of climate that one breathes."

is today the predominantly Kurdish region of northern Iraq. The aerial photo in figure 1 shows the great tell at Arbela (modern Erbil), created by over four thousand years of continuous urban settlement. The tell stands in the middle of an extensive, elevated plain containing some of the best farmland in all of Iraq. Early European visitors often commented on the Arbela district's dependable rainfall and "well-tilled fields" of wheat.² From the early nineteenth century, European and British travelers passed through the region with increasing frequency, often interpreting its landscape through the lens of the Greco-Roman historians they had studied in school.³ Many remarked on the fact that Alexander the Great had won his decisive victory against the Persians at Gaugamela, somewhere to the north of Arbela.⁴ The next generation of travelers, inspired by the decipherment of cuneiform and Layard's excavations at Nimrud, knew Arbela as the "sacred city of Assyria," where the kings Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal received "assurances of victory" from the goddess Ishtar.⁵ Yet these same travelers typically knew little about the Christian history of Arbela. Despite employing local Christian guides and interpreters, few travelers took a serious interest in the rich Christian heritage of northern Iraq. As one British historian observed in 1842, "Of the character of the Christians in that part of Asia, the little we know is not very favourable."⁶

European interest in the Christians of Iraq grew dramatically over the latter half of the nineteenth century, partly in response to news of massacres in the highlands northeast of Arbela. Already in the 1840s, several schol-

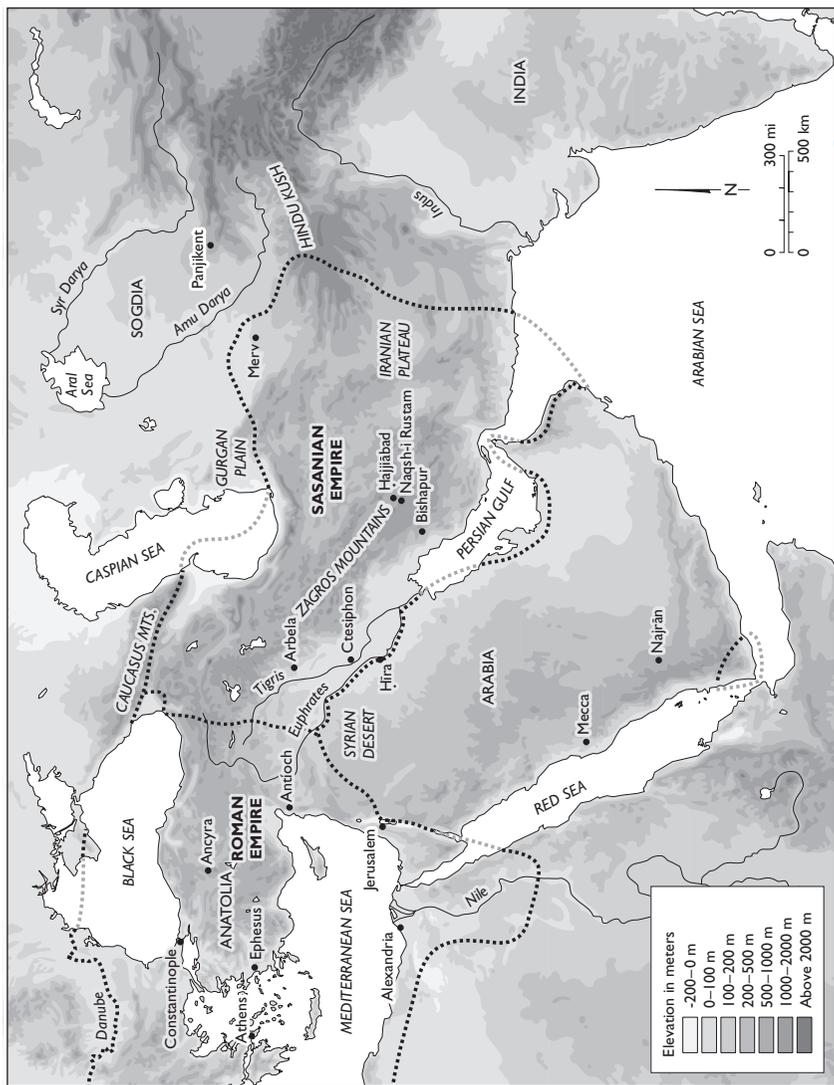
2. On the rain-fed fields of the Arbela plain, see the map in the *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients* (hereafter TAVO) by J. Härle, *Middle East: Land Utilization*, TAVO A VIII 8 (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1992). For travelers' remarks, see, for example, C. Niebuhr, *Entdeckungen im Orient: Reise nach Arabien und anderen Ländern, 1761–1767* (Tübingen and Basel: Horst Erdmann Verlag für Internationalen Kulturaustausch, 1973), 161; and K. Dannenfeldt, *Leonhard Rauwolf: Sixteenth-Century Physician, Botanist, and Traveler* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 132, for the quotation here.

3. See, for example, J. Shiel, "Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Kurdistan, via Van, Bitlis, Se'ert and Erbil, to Suleimaniyeh, in July and August, 1836," *Journal of the Royal Geographic Society* 8 (1838): 54 and 98, on the place-names used by Xenophon and Arrian.

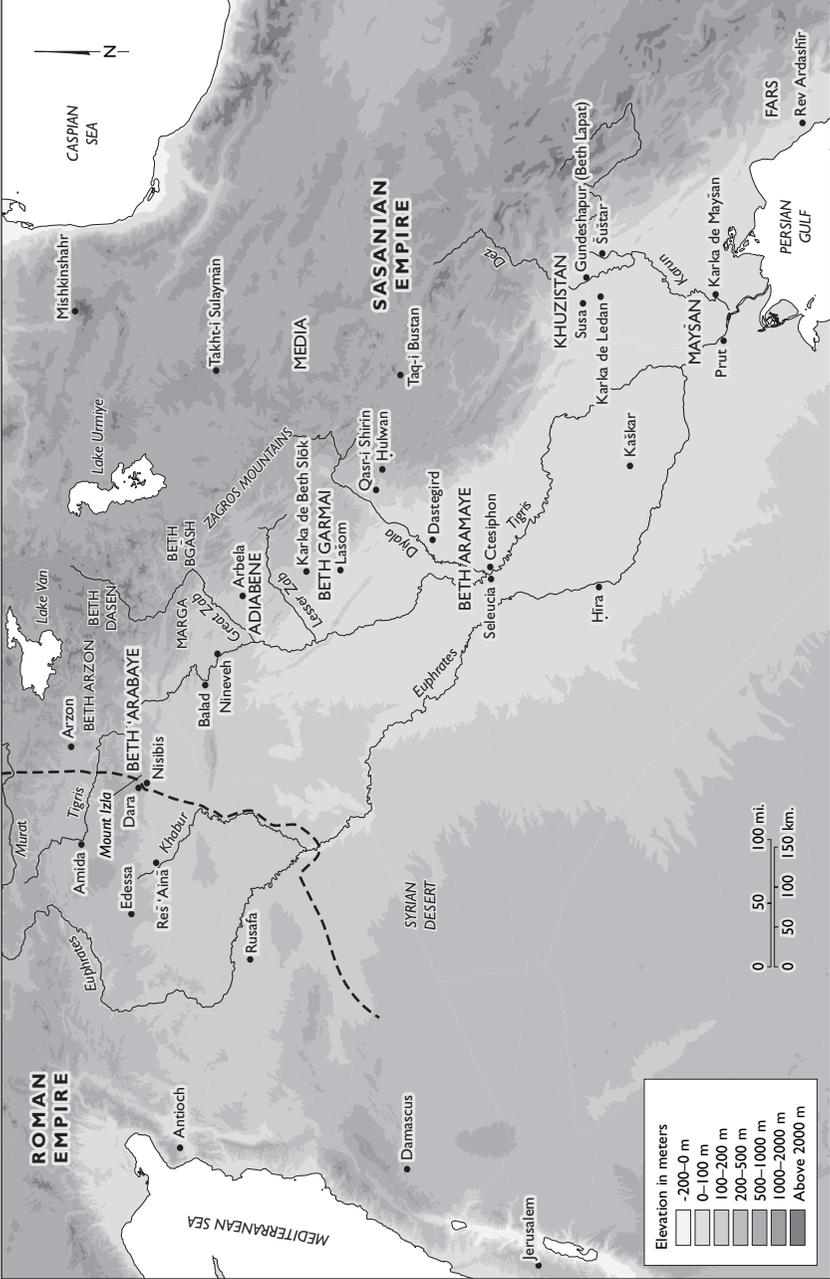
4. For recent analysis of the battlefield's probable location ca. 65 km northwest of Arbela, see A. B. Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 1: 293–94 and his map on 295; also, with further bibliography, E. Badian, "Gaugamela," *Enc. Ir.* 10 (2000): 332–33.

5. E. B. Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise, with Historical Notices of the Kurdish Tribes and the Chaldeans of Kurdistan* (Boston: Small, Maynard, and Company Publishers, 1912), 104, 108, and esp. 110 on Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal's activities at Arbela. For the excitement generated by Austen Henry Layard's excavations at Nimrud, see M. T. Larson, *The Conquest of Assyria: Excavations in an Antique Land, 1840–1860* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

6. J. Baillie Fraser, *Mesopotamia and Assyria from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd; London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1842), 322.



MAP 1. The Late Antique Near East, c. 600 C.E.



MAP 2. Major Provinces of the Church of the East, c. 600 C.E.

ars had begun to lay the foundation for serious inquiry into the region's Christian history. Building on eighteenth-century studies of the East-Syrian manuscripts in the Vatican, learned missionaries emphasized the ancient origins of the "Nestorian" Christian community.⁷ Copies of Syriac manuscripts recovered from the churches and monasteries of northern Iraq and southeastern Anatolia gradually filtered into Europe, where they supplemented collections acquired from Egypt and Syria. Publications based on these East-Syrian manuscripts between ca. 1880 and 1910 opened a bold new chapter in the history of Christianity in Asia. The manuscripts preserved dozens of previously unknown Syriac texts—a splendid variety of Christian theology and exegesis, poetry and historical prose, liturgy, philosophy, and stories of martyrs and holy men. These Syriac texts testified to the remarkable success of Christianity in the late antique Near East. Bishoprics loyal to the "Church of the East" once existed throughout the Sasanian Empire, from northern Iraq to eastern Iran, and from the southern Caucasus to the Persian Gulf (see maps 1 and 2). A remnant of this ancient church survived in the highlands of southeastern Anatolia until the massacres of the early twentieth century, and its descendants—known today as the Assyrian and Chaldean peoples—can still be found in the cities and towns of modern Iraq, as well as in a diaspora that extends across Europe, North America, and Asia. This book offers a close study of one segment of this church's history and culture. Taking as its base the martyr literature of the Sasanian Empire, it seeks to illuminate the distinctive world of late antique Iraq and its Christian community.

CHRISTIANITY IN LATE ANTIQUE IRAQ: THREE SCHOLARLY CONTEXTS

The cultural world of late antique Iraq stands at the intersection of three quite different fields of modern scholarship. To give readers some context, it may be useful to explain here this book's debt and intended contribution to each of these fields: Syriac Christianity, Sasanian-Zoroastrian studies, and the study of late antiquity.

7. Two of these early missionary accounts of northern Iraq remain notable for the depth of their historical and ethnographic research. See J. P. Fletcher, *Notes from Nineveh, and Travels in Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Syria* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850); and G. P. Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals with a Narrative of a Mission to Mesopotamia and Coordistan in 1842–1844 and of a Late Visit to Those Countries in 1850*, 2 vols. (London: Joseph Masters, 1852). Both works were heavily indebted to the pioneering study of East-Syrian manuscripts in the Vatican by G. S. Assemani (ed. and trans.), *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3, *De Syris Nestorianis* (Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1728; repr., Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 1975).

The East-Syrian martyr literature investigated in this book occupies a curious niche in the field of Syriac studies.⁸ The first editions of the Qardagh legend published in 1890 were part of a flurry of scholarship during the period ca. 1885–1910, sparked by the arrival of new Syriac manuscripts in Europe.⁹ But like many of the hagiographies published during this period, the Qardagh legend has attracted little subsequent attention beyond a small circle of specialists.¹⁰ The resurgence of Syriac studies since the late 1980s has largely bypassed East-Syrian hagiography, focusing instead on the earliest phases of Syriac literature,¹¹ and on West-Syrian hagiographers such as John of Ephesus (†588).¹² East-Syrian literature has not been ignored, but

8. A dialect of Aramaic prevalent in the district of Edessa (Şanlıurfa in southeastern Turkey), Syriac flourished as the primary literary and liturgical language of Christianity in large parts of the Middle East until the thirteenth century, and in some districts to the present. For general orientation in the field's history and bibliography, see S. Brock, "Syriac Studies in the Last Three Decades: Some Reflections," in *VI Symposium Syriacum 1992: University of Cambridge, Faculty of Divinity, 30 August–2 September 1992*, ed. Lavenant (Rome: PISO, 1994), 13–29; idem, "The Development of Syriac Studies," in *The Edward Hincks Bicentenary Lectures*, ed. K. J. Cathcart (Dublin: University College, 1994), 94–109; and A. de Halleux, "Vingt ans d'étude critique des églises syriaques," in *The Christian East, Its Institutions and Its Thought: A Critical Reflection*, ed. R. Taft (Rome: PISO, 1996), 145–79.

9. J.-B. Abbeloos, "Acta Mar Qardaghi: Assyriae praefecti qui sub Sapore II martyr occubit," *AB* 9 (1890): 5–105, with a Latin translation; and H. Feige, *Die Geschichte des Mâr Abdîsô' und seines Jüngers Mar Qardagh* (Kiel: C. F. Haesler, 1890), with a German translation. The editions were produced independently of one another. Other East-Syrian hagiographies published during this generation include the *Acts of Mar Mari* (1885), the *Acts of Mar Pethion* (1888), the *Acts of Mar Bassus* (1893), Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors* (1893), Išō'dnah's *Book of Chastity* (1896), the *Acts of Išō'sabran* (1897), the *Lives of Rabban Hormizd the Persian and Rabban Bar'Idta* (1902), and the hagiographical collections by Hoffmann (1880) and Bedjan (1890–97). For the period 1890–1910 as the "high watermark for Syriac studies in the United States," see J. T. Clemons, "Syriac Studies in the United States: 1783–1900," *ARAM* 5 (1993): 85.

10. For previous scholarship on the legend, see chapter 1 below.

11. Interest in the formative phase of Syriac literature (first century–fourth century) remains very strong, often accounting for the majority of papers at Syriac studies conferences. For recent work on the great Syriac poet and theologian Ephrem of Nisibis (306–373), see S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985; rev. ed., 1992); and S. Griffith, *'Faith Adoring the Mystery': Reading the Bible with St. Ephrem the Syrian* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997). The intensity of scholarly research on Ephrem has yielded a variety of thematic studies that often illuminate later Syriac writers as well. For their contribution to understanding the Christian imagery of the Qardagh legend, see nn. 2, 3, 57, 108, 116, 135–36, 147, and 173 to the translation.

12. See esp. three books that contributed to my own awareness of the richness of Syriac hagiography: S. A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1990); R. Doran, trans., *The Lives of Simeon Stylites* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Studies, 1992); and S. Brock and S. A. Harvey, trans., *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987). The last of these books includes some coverage (63–99, 177–81) of East-Syrian texts.

the field still lacks monograph-length studies of even the most prolific East-Syrian writers, such as Babai the Great (†628) and the patriarch Iṣō'yab III (†658).¹³ The paucity of previous scholarship on the Qardagh legend thus reflects a general tendency to favor the earlier and more western streams of Syriac Christian literature. Many categories of East-Syrian literature await new editions, translations, and historical analysis. The large and diverse corpus of East-Syrian martyr literature, outlined in chapter 1, is particularly ripe for new investigation.

Sasanian and Zoroastrian studies form the book's second academic pillar. Scholars of the Iranian world have long recognized the value of Syriac Christian sources, and particularly the martyr literature, for Sasanian history.¹⁴ Translating this recognition into practice, however, has been difficult. Research on the Sasanian Empire typically breaks down into a variety of sub-disciplines, reflecting the diversity of the empire's linguistic and religious communities.¹⁵ This fragmentation, while understandable, tends to obscure the connections among the empire's diverse communities. Too often East-Syrian literature has been studied in isolation from the rest of Sasanian history.¹⁶ In this book, I have tried to forge an interdisciplinary approach that fully integrates East-Syrian literature with other types of Sasanian sources: Zoroastrian and early Islamic literature, epigraphy, art history, and archaeology. While previous studies have taken significant steps in this direction,¹⁷

13. For recent work on these important writers, see S. Brock, *Syriac Studies: A Classified Bibliography (1960–1990)* (Kaslik, Lebanon: Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, 1996), 37–38, 153. On the evolving canon of Syriac literature, see L. Von Rompay, "Past and Present Perceptions of Syriac Literary Tradition," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3.1 (2000): 1–31.

14. In his pioneering synthesis on Sasanian history, the Danish Orientalist Arthur Christensen describes the Syriac martyr literature as "une source de haute importance, non seulement pour l'histoire des persécutions des chrétiens en Iran, mais aussi pour la civilisation de l'Iran sassanide en général" (*L'Iran sous les Sassanides* [Copenhagen: Levin and Muksgaard, 1936], 76–77). The Russian historian Nina Pigulevskaya was among the first to make extensive use of the Syriac sources for the study of Sasanian social history. See esp. her monograph *Les villes de l'état iranien aux époques parthe et sassanide: Contribution à l'histoire sociale de la Basse Antiquité* (Paris and The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1963).

15. M. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) remains the best synthesis. Despite its title, the book includes long and substantial discussion of pre-Islamic Iraq. See pp. 169–235, 265–430, where Morony surveys the major ethnic and religious communities of late Sasanian and early Islamic Iraq.

16. As Morony (*Iraq*, 620) observes, modern scholarship on East-Syrian literature, while very extensive, "deals almost entirely with issues of church history and religious thought and life, with very little attention given to how these materials could be used for comparative religion, social and economic history, or wider issues in intellectual history."

17. See, for example, P. Gignoux, "Titres et fonctions religieuses sassanides d'après les sources syriaques hagiographiques," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 28 (1980): 191–203; and further work by Gignoux, Michael Morony, and Shaul Shaked cited throughout this book.

more remains to be done. Fortunately, recent scholarship has made it easier to navigate through the various subfields of Sasanian studies. Bosworth's annotated translation of al-Ṭabarī (†932) offers a reliable guide to Sasanian political history.¹⁸ Albert de Jong and Shaul Shaked have produced important syntheses on Zoroastrianism.¹⁹ The catalogues of two major exhibitions of Sasanian art provide a stunning visual introduction to the material culture of Sasanian elites.²⁰ Information on Sasanian archaeology remains more scattered, though here too the situation is improving.²¹ For all of these categories of evidence, the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* now provides indispensable guidance.²² These tools make Sasanian history a much more accessible field than it was even one generation ago.

Finally, as its title announces, this book belongs to the field of late antiquity. The “world of late antiquity” has become the subject of vigorous in-

18. C. E. Bosworth, trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk)*, vol. 5, *The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). Bosworth's notes (cited here as “Bosworth, *Sāsānids*”) provide a detailed commentary on numerous aspects of Sasanian political and social history, including thorny issues of chronology. As such, Bosworth's translation constitutes a worthy successor to Theodor Nöldeke's annotated translation of al-Ṭabarī, which essentially laid the foundation for the modern study of Sasanian history. See T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879; repr., Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1973); I. Shāhid, “Theodor Nöldeke's *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden*: An Evaluation,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 8 (1977): 117–22.

19. See esp. A. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 5–63, a lucid introduction to the historiography of Zoroastrianism and current methodologies for its investigation. Despite its title, the book is by no means limited to the Greek and Latin sources. S. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1994), though more difficult, focuses explicitly on the Sasanian period.

20. P. O. Harper, *The Royal Hunter: Art of the Sasanian Empire* (New York: The Asia Society, 1978); and the multi-author catalogue *Splendeur des Sassanides: L'empire perse entre Rome et la Chine [224–642]: [Exposition] 12 février au 25 avril 1993* (Brussels: Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1993). Older surveys of Sasanian art by K. Erdmann (1936–43), R. Ghirshman (1962), A. Godard (1962), and G. Herrmann (1977) have also been helpful.

21. For specific types of artifacts, the essays collected in *Splendeur des Sassanides* provide a good starting point. Reports on recent fieldwork appear in a wide range of regional journals. The launch in 2001 of a new bilingual journal, *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān: The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies*, printed in Tehran, should improve access to the results of current fieldwork in Iran. As discussed in chapter 5, the Sasanian archaeology of northern Iraq remains severely underdeveloped.

22. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshatar (London and Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1982–). Ten complete volumes (A–Gindaros) are currently in print, averaging over eight hundred pages in length. Coverage of pre-Islamic, especially Sasanian, topics is extensive. For a useful review of the first seven volumes, see T. Daryaee, “Sasanian Persia (ca. 224–651 C.E.),” *Iranian Studies* 31 (1998): 431–62. See also in the same volume (333–48, 417–30, 503–16, 661–81) the review essays on the entries for pre-Islamic archaeology (B. A. Litvinsky), history (P. Husyē), languages (W. W. Malandra), and religions (J. Choksy).

terdisciplinary study over the past thirty years.²³ In principle, the field has always included the Sasanian and early Islamic Near East, together with the Mediterranean and Europe. The new handbook *Late Antiquity Guide* assumes the inclusion of the whole of the Near East.²⁴ But in practice, for a variety of reasons, the field has often been reduced to the later Roman Empire and the post-Roman kingdoms of early medieval Europe. I have discussed elsewhere the detrimental effects of this truncation.²⁵ Modern political geography has exacerbated the marginalization of Sasanian studies, obscuring, for instance, the development of Christian and Jewish architecture in the late Sasanian Empire.²⁶ This study approaches the history of late Sasanian Iraq as an integral part of the late antique Near East. My use of the term “late antique Iraq” is thus deliberate, signaling the book’s interdisciplinary approach to Sasanian history.²⁷ In the words of one recent study, the Sasanian Empire was the other “Great Power” of the late antique world.²⁸ The chap-

23. P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Mohammad* (London: Thamesand Hudson, 1971) was foundational. For its impact, see now T. Hägg, ed., “SO Debate: *The World of Late Antiquity Revisited*,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 72 (1997): 5–90, with essays by eleven prominent scholars in the field, including a valuable autobiographical essay by Brown (5–31).

24. G. Bowersock, P. Brown, and O. Grabar, eds., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), x, which places the chronological horizons of late antiquity at 250–800 C.E.

25. J. Walker, “The Limits of Late Antiquity: Philosophy between Rome and Iran,” *Ancient World* 33 (2002): 45–69, esp. 47–51, 67–68. Cf. the more restricted version of late antiquity assumed by, for example, P. Garnsey and C. Humphreys in *The Evolution of the Late Antique World* (Cambridge: Orchard Academic, 2001), a fine survey, but one that largely ignores regions east of the Euphrates.

26. On the weakness of Christian archaeology in former Sasanian lands, see Walker, “Limits of Late Antiquity,” 54–56. Iran, Iraq, and most of the countries bordering the Persian Gulf remain totally closed to the type of Christian archaeology that has become well established in Jordan, Israel, Syria, and Turkey. Modern political geography also explains why we know virtually nothing about the archaeology of Babylonian Judaism. See Walker, “Limits of Late Antiquity,” 54–55; and I. Gafni, “Synagogues in Babylonia in the Talmudic Period,” in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, ed. D. Unnan and P. V. M. Flesher (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 223.

27. Scholars of Zoroastrianism and Sasanian history are also moving in this direction. See, for example, G. Gnoli, “L’Iran tardoantico e la regalità sassanide,” *Mediterraneo antico: Economie, società, culture* 1 (1998): 117, arguing for the extension of “il concetto storiografico di tarda antichità” to include the Iranian world. See also Gnoli, *The Idea of Iran: An Essay on Its Origin* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1989), 162–63, for an earlier version of this suggestion. The “Sasanika project,” recently launched by Professor Touraj Daryaee, has identified greater integration of Sasanian history with the field of late antiquity as one of its chief goals. The project is slated to include a new series of conferences and publications on Sasanian history, art history, and archaeology.

28. J. Howard-Johnston, “The Two Great Powers in Late Antiquity: A Comparison,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 3, *States, Resources, and Armies*, ed. A. Cameron (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995), 157–226, provides an excellent systematic comparison of the geography, political structures, and military resources of the Roman and Sasanian empires.

ters that follow will hopefully make plain the intellectual advantages of this framework.

Part I of this book presents an annotated translation of the *History of Mar Qardagh*. Although many of the legend's episodes are quoted or summarized in the chapters that form part II, the translation itself has a narrative charm and coherence that is best experienced directly before proceeding to the analysis presented in part II.

Part II consists of five chapters and an epilogue that employ the Qardagh legend as a foundation to explore the cultural history of Christianity in late antique Iraq. Chapter 1 sketches the historical and literary background of the legend. It opens with a geographic survey of the Church of the East as represented by the East-Syrian synod of 605. Readers unfamiliar with Sasanian geography may want to read this chapter with copies of maps 1 and 2 before them.²⁹ The synod of 605 also serves to illustrate the influential position of Christians in the late Sasanian Empire. Qardagh's hagiographer lived in an era when many Christians—not least the East-Syrian bishops—were prepared to declare their fealty to the “victorious and merciful King of kings,” Khusro II (590–628).

The *Acts* of the Sasanian martyrs, introduced in the second half of chapter 1, offer a much less sanguine vision of Christian-Sasanian relations. The prosperity of the late Sasanian church was only achieved after many generations of chronic persecution. The “Great Massacre” under Shapur II (309–379), two and a half centuries prior to Khusro II's reign, took a heavy toll on the Christian communities of Mesopotamia and southwestern Iran. Further, more restricted outbreaks of persecution occurred under Bahrām V (420–438), Yazdegird II (438–457), Khusro I (531–579), and even under Khusro II (590–628). Over time, stories about these “Persian martyrs” developed into a burgeoning corpus of East-Syrian martyr literature. The second half of chapter 1 briefly surveys previous scholarship on this martyr literature, with particular attention to the “Great Massacre” under Shapur II. Although modern study of this literature extends back to the mid-eighteenth century, much of the scholarship has been limited to issues of historicity and dating. This is especially true for the largely (or completely) fictive martyr narratives, such as the Qardagh legend. The definition of the Qardagh legend's provenance hinges on a cluster of approximate indicators discussed in the notes to the translation and the chapters that form

29. There is, to the best of my knowledge, no comparable survey in English of the ecclesiastical geography of the Church of the East. The abundant bibliography in the notes to chapter 1 is thus designed as a resource for readers interested in the historical geography and archaeology of specific Sasanian provinces.

part II. In brief, these indicators suggest that the Qardagh legend originated in the region of Adiabene, near Arbela, during the late Sasanian period. An anonymous East-Syrian author gave the legend its definitive written form, the *History of Mar Qardagh*, during the early decades of the seventh century.

The next four chapters each begin with a scene from the legend of Mar Qardagh. Each scene introduces a major theme of the Qardagh legend. These themes, in turn, introduce and embody various facets of the cultural world of late antique Iraq. In the court scenes at the beginning of the legend, young Qardagh displays his “mighty strength” before the Persian King of kings. Chapter 2 uses evidence from Persian literature and art—including the Middle Persian *Chronicle of Ardashīr* (ca. 600), the *Shāhnāma* of Firdowsi (†1018), and the late Sasanian cliff reliefs at Taq-i-Bustan—to illustrate the Sasanian narrative models behind the court scenes of the Qardagh legend. Previous scholarship, while noting the existence of these parallels, has largely overlooked their significance. The “heroic deeds” of Mar Qardagh represent an adroit recasting of the epic traditions of the Sasanian world. Few, if any, Syriac Christian texts betray a comparable fluency in the imagery and underlying ideals of Sasanian epic. Qardagh’s hagiographer artfully combines Sasanian epic motifs with scriptural models of “holy war” to portray his hero as a Sasanian Christian warrior. The chapter thus highlights a rarely considered component of Syrian Christian tradition.

Chapter 3 explores a more familiar and well-documented aspect of East-Syrian Christian tradition—namely, its engagement with Aristotelian philosophy. The Qardagh legend includes a long disputation scene between Qardagh (still, at this point of his story, a fervent Zoroastrian) and a Christian hermit named Abdišo.³⁰ The language of their debate bears a clear affinity to similar formal debates described in both Byzantine and Sasanian sources. Previous scholarship has not fully recognized the cosmopolitan scope of this tradition of disputation. In the era of Justinian (527–565) and Khusro Anūshirvān (531–579), Christians, Zoroastrians, and polytheists all participated in a tradition of formal debate grounded in the rules of Aristotelian logic. The content of the Qardagh legend’s debate scene is equally revealing. To refute the alleged eternity of the sun, moon, and stars, the hermit Abdišo employs arguments that can be traced to the insights of John Philoponus, the most distinguished Christian philosopher of sixth-century Alexandria. The hagiographer’s debt to Philoponus, while perhaps indirect, offers intriguing new evidence for the influence of Byzantine philo-

30. As explained in “Transliteration and Terminology” above, I have simplified the transliteration of the hermit’s name from ‘Abdišo’ (“the servant of Jesus”) to Abdišo. For the etymology and significance of the name, see the translation, §9, n. 26.

sophical models on the intellectual life of the late Sasanian Empire. The language of the Qardagh legend reflects the formation of a genuine philosophical *koiné* shared between the rival empires of early Byzantium and Sasanian Iran.³¹

In a cluster of scenes near the end of the Qardagh legend, the future martyr rejects a series of supplicants who congregate outside his fortress and beg him to surrender and renounce his newly found Christian beliefs. These supplicants include the saint's wife, father-in-law, and other noble relatives. Qardagh's forthright rejection of his kith and kin brings dramatic closure to a narrative thread that runs throughout the legend: as Mar Qardagh discovers his new spiritual family defined by Christian fellowship, he must sever all of the traditional kinship ties that bind him to his "pagan" family. Chapter 4 explores the nuances and significance of this theme as it is developed in the Qardagh legend and across the larger corpus of Sasanian martyr literature. The depiction of family relations in this literature displays an enormous variety of narrative strategies, ranging from tales of Christian familial solidarity to stories of prolonged and violent conflict between martyrs and their non-Christian families. Charting these narrative patterns clarifies the place of the Qardagh legend in the overall tradition of East-Syrian hagiography and underscores the harshness of the hagiographer's rhetoric of ascetic renunciation. East-Syrian synodical and monastic legislation, examined in the final section of the chapter, suggests the disparity between this hagiographic rhetoric and actual social patterns among the Christians of late antique Iraq.

The final chapter examines the origins and evolution of Mar Qardagh's principal cult site, at a village named Melqi on the outskirts of Arbela. Neo-Assyrian cuneiform records (not previously linked to the Qardagh legend) indicate that the festival temple of the goddess Ishtar of Arbela once occupied this cult site. Unfortunately, there is not a shred of literary documentation for the cult site between ca. 600 B.C.E. and ca. 600 C.E., so the Zoroastrian phase of occupation described by the Qardagh legend remains unsubstantiated. According to the *History of Mar Qardagh*, Qardagh, while *marzbān* of northern Iraq, constructed a fortress on top of the "tell" at Melqi, and a Zoroastrian fire temple at its base. The saint's hagiographer also details, in his epilogue, the eventual construction of an entire ecclesiastical complex at Melqi. Later East-Syrian writers of the ninth to twelfth century confirm the longevity of this shrine, which came to be known as the "monastery" (*dayrā*) or "place" (*baytā*) of Mar Qardagh. Two writers, independently of one another, attest to the monastery's use by the metropolitan bishops of Arbela. The final demise of the shrine appears to have coincided

31. An earlier version of this argument appears in J. Walker, "Against the Eternity of the Stars: Disputation and Christian Philosophy in Late Sasanian Mesopotamia," in *La Persia e Bisanzio*, (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2004), 509–37.

with the upsurge of anti-Christian violence in the Arbela district during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

A brief epilogue considers the annual trading fair at Melqi, where Christians gathered during the final week of summer to buy, to sell, and to honor Mar Qardagh. The saint's hagiographer claims that the "*souk* at Melqi" was a direct outgrowth of the annual commemoration of Mar Qardagh on the site of his martyrdom. As we shall see, the opposite is more likely true: the cult of Mar Qardagh developed around the site of a pre-Christian festival. The story of Mar Qardagh, narrated during the annual festival at Melqi, explained and justified Christian veneration for a site once dedicated to Ishtar, the "lady of Arbela." Set into writing in the late Sasanian period by a skilled hagiographer, the legend of Mar Qardagh became part of the Syriac Christian literary tradition. This textual account ensured the survival of the Qardagh legend long after the saint's shrine at Melqi had been abandoned and forgotten.

PART ONE

The *History of Mar Qardagh*
in English Translation,
with Commentary

Introduction to the Text

In 1890 two scholars, working independently of one another, each published an edition and translation of the *History of Mar Qardagh*. The Belgian Bollandist J.-B. Abbeloos based his edition on a copy (made in Mosul in 1869) of an East-Syrian manuscript sent to him by the Chaldean archbishop of Diyarbakir, E. G. Khayyath. The original manuscript (MS Diyarbakir syr. 96), which Khayyath dated rather optimistically to the “seventh or eighth century,” contained the *Acts* or *Histories* of martyrs from every phase of Sasanian persecution between the fourth and the seventh centuries c.e.¹ Sadly, this medieval manuscript, which had been stored in the church of St. Pethion in Diyarbakir, was later displaced during the turmoil following the First World War. Transferred to Iraq, its condition today is unknown. Its disappearance heightens the importance of the copy published by Abbeloos and now held in Berlin. That same year, a second edition of the *History of Mar Qardagh* was published in Berlin by Hermann Feige, a student of Georg Hoffman, whose book on the Persian martyrs in 1880 had done much to stimulate interest in the field.² The distinguished Orientalist Theodor

1. For a brief description of the manuscript’s content, see J.-B. Abbeloos, “Acta Mar Qardaghi, Assyriae Praefecti, qui sub Sapore II Martyr Occubuit,” *AB* 9 (1890): 5–8; J. Assfalg, *Syrische Handschriften: Syrische, Karšūnische, Christlich-Palästinische, Neusyrische, und Mandäische Handschriften* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1963), 53–56 (no. 26). A full study of the manuscript tradition, though desirable, will not be attempted here.

2. H. Feige, *Die Geschichte des Mâr ‘Abdâšô’ und seines Jüngers Mâr Qardagh* (Kiel: C. F. Haesler, 1890), with a German translation. Feige’s principal manuscript was a mid-eighteenth-century East-Syrian manuscript from the town of Rustaqa in northern Iraq, with variants drawn from two other late manuscripts produced in the town of Alqōš and in the nearby Monastery of Rabban Hormizd.

Nöldeke published a meticulous review of these two editions the following year.³

The translation that follows is based upon Abbeloos's edition of the *History of Mar Qardagh*. Although Paul Bedjan (on whom see further below in chapter 1) published a third edition of the text in 1891,⁴ Abbeloos's edition remains preferable for its accessibility and clarity of organization. Variants marked "A" and "B" in my translation and notes refer to the variants printed in the notes to Abbeloos's edition. As Abbeloos explains in his preface (8), these variants come from another Mosul manuscript containing assorted martyr literature (MS A) and a second manuscript of unspecified provenance acquired from Bedjan (MS B). I translate here only the more significant variants that expand or clarify Abbeloos's principal text. Let us turn now to this text and consider the story of Mar Qardagh's "heroic deeds."

3. T. Nöldeke, "Abbeloos' *Acta Mar Qardaghi* und Feige's *Mâr 'Abdššō*," *ZDMG* 45 (1891): 529–35.

4. P. Bedjan, ed., *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* (Paris and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890–96; repr., Hildesheim: Gerog Olms, 1968), 2: 442–506. As he explains in his preface (x), Bedjan employed Abbeloos's edition as his base but also consulted two nineteenth-century manuscripts: the 1869 Mosul manuscript used by Abbeloos (see n. 1 above) and a second manuscript acquired from M. Salomon, a missionary in the Lake Urmiye region.

The History of the Heroic Deeds of Mar Qardagh the Victorious Martyr

1. Dearly beloved, the histories of the martyrs and saints of our Lord Christ are banquets (*būsāmē*) for the holy church! They are spiritual nourishment for the holy congregations of the Cross. They are an ornament to the lofty beauty of Christianity that is bespattered with the blood of the Son of God. They are a heavenly treasure for all the generations who enter the holy church through the spiritual birth of baptism.¹ They are a polished mirror in which discerning men see the ineffable beauty of Christ.² They are the possessions of righteousness for the children of the church who are invited to the heavenly kingdom, and [they are] the fire of the love of Christ flaming in the souls of believers. Whoever longs for their reading and constant company is a beloved son of the saints, through whom the saints' divine virtues will be proclaimed.

2. Therefore, my beloved, I long to tell you about the marvelous heroic deeds (*neṣḥānē*) and great contests of that athlete of righteousness, the holy

MS B includes an introductory scribal prayer: "By the Divine Power, [I], a sinful servant, begin to copy the noble history of Mar Qardagh of good name, who was from the Assyrian land and from the race of Nimrod. Strengthen me by Your strength, O Lord, that it may be finished." On Qardagh's royal Assyrian lineage, see n. 4 below.

1. For baptism as a second birth in Syrian Christian tradition, see E. Beck, "Le baptême chez Saint Ephrem," *OS* 1 (1956): 116; G. Winkler, "The Original Meaning of the Prebaptismal Anointing and Its Implications," *Worship* 52 (1978): 24-45, esp. 40, on the contrast with Greek tradition, which increasingly, from the fourth century, presented the entire baptismal ritual within a Pauline framework of death and resurrection in Christ.

2. Qardagh's biographer transfers an image normally applied to scripture to the "histories" (*taṣē'yātā*) of the saints and martyrs. For scripture as a polished mirror in which the viewer sees his own virtue or defects, see S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 39-40, 74-77; E. Beck, "Das Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephraem," *OCP* 19 (1953): 5-24.

martyr Mar Qardagh.³ Angels marveled and men were amazed at the great contests of his martyrdom.

3. Now holy Mar Qardagh was from a great people (*gensā*) from the stock of the kingdom of the Assyrians (*ʿātōrāyē*).⁴ His father was descended from the renowned lineage of the house of Nimrod, and his mother from the renowned lineage of the house of Sennacherib. And he was born of pagan parents lost in the error [var. B] of Magianism, for his father, whose name was Gušnōy, was a prominent man in the kingdom and distinguished among the *magi*.⁵ And holy Mar Qardagh was handsome in his appearance, large in build and powerful in his body; and he possessed a spirit ready for battles. He vigorously embraced the error of paganism, and was praised for his devotion through all the territory of the Persians.

4. And when Qardagh was about twenty-five years old, Shapur, king of the Persians, heard about his reputation and mighty strength (*ganbārūteh*).⁶ And Shapur sent orders summoning him to the gate [of his palace] with great honor. And when Shapur gave the order and Qardagh entered before him

3. *Mār(i)*, literally “my lord,” is a standard honorific in Syriac; prefaced to the names of saints, prophets, and bishops, it parallels the use of the honorific *hagios* in Byzantine Greek. For the etymology of the name Qardagh (Syr. *qardāg*) see P. Gignoux, *Noms propres sassanides en moyen-perse épigraphique* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986), 2: 105 (no. 496a). See also F. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch* (Marburg, 1895; repr., Hildesheim: G. Olms Verlag, 1963), 156; and chapter 5 below for other attestations of the name in East-Syrian texts.

4. Late antique hagiographies often begin with the identification of a saint’s “ethnic origin” (*gensā*). For the origin of the *topos*, see Athanasius’s *Life of Anthony*, 1 (Bartelink, 130): *γένος . . . Αἰγύπτου*; and the parallel passage in the Syriac *Life of Anthony*, 1 (Draguet, 4; Syr. 6). For the significance of Mar Qardagh’s Assyrian lineage, see chapter 5 below; and, in more detail, J. Walker, “The Legacy of Mesopotamia in Late Antique Iraq: The Christian Martyr Shrine at Melqi (Neo-Assyrian Milqia),” *ARAM* 18(2006), in press.

5. The *magi* (Syr. *mgūšē*; from Gr. *μάγος*; from the Old Persian root *magu-*) were a hereditary class of Zoroastrian priests in Sasanian society. For their administrative functions, see P. Gignoux, “Die religiöse Administration in sasanidischer Zeit: Ein Überblick,” in *Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte der Achämenidenzeit und ihr Fortleben*, ed. H. Koch and D. N. MacKenzie (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 251–66; idem, “Pour une esquisse des fonctions religieuses sous les Sasanides,” *JSAI* 4 (1983): 93–108. For their origins and ritual functions, see A. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 387–403, with extensive bibliography.

Like many Syriac writers, Qardagh’s biographer employs the same term to designate both the *magi* themselves and members of the wider Zoroastrian community. For the sake of consistency, I translate the term throughout as “magi,” but here and in several places below (§§44 and 48), one could translate the same term as “Magians” where context implies reference to the larger Zoroastrian community.

6. Shapur II, Sasanian king of kings, 309–379 C.E. The biographer introduces here a key component of Qardagh’s heroism, his *ganbārūtā*, “mighty strength” (from *gabrā*, “a strong or mighty man”; cf. Lat. *virtus* from *vir*). The adverbial form of the same term appears in the previous line to describe Qardagh’s “vigorous” promotion of Magianism.

and Shapur saw the comeliness of his appearance and the powerfulness of his body, he rejoiced (*hdi*) in him greatly.⁷ And he ordered him to play in the stadium before all the nobles of the kingdom [var. B] and to shoot an arrow at a small target fastened to the top of a high pole. And they brought a bow and five arrows from the royal armory. And when he shot the five arrows at the target, they all stuck to the same spot, and the king and his nobles praised him.⁸ And on the next day, the king ordered him to come to the stadium and to play with him on the polo field together with the rest of his nobles. And the king and his nobles marveled at him.⁹

5. And on the third day, the king was going out for the hunt with one hundred forty horsemen.¹⁰ And he ordered that Qardagh should ride on a royal mount and go before him at the head of his armed guard. And as they were approaching the entrance of a dense forest, they saw before them a deer running away swiftly together with her fawn. And immediately the king called out, saying, “Lift your hand strongly to the bow, young Qardagh, and show your good fortune (*kūšārāk*)!”¹¹ Then he quickly took a single arrow and placed it [to his bow] and drew it with strength; and with that one arrow he brought down both the deer and her fawn. Then the king called out in a loud voice and said, “May you prosper, Qardagh! May you prosper and rejoice in your youth! We rejoice in your heroic deeds!”

7. The king’s joyous reception of Qardagh recalls many similar court scenes in the Persian epic tradition. See, for example, the parallel scene in the late Sasanian *Chronicle of Ardashīr, Son of Papak (Kārnāmag-i Ardašīr-i Pābagān)* (Sanjana, 6–8; Nöldeke, 39), where young prince Ardashīr performs at the court of the last of the Parthian kings. For full discussion of this and other Sasanian epic themes in the Qardagh legend, see chapter 2 below.

8. For archery as a defining feature of Sasanian royal valor, see esp. D. N. MacKenzie, “Shapur’s Shooting,” *BSOAS* 41 (1978): 499–511, discussing a rock-cut inscription at Hājjiābad in southwestern Iran. In this inscription, Shapur I (ca. 239–270) commemorates his great bow shot made “before the kings and princes and magnates and nobles.”

9. The hagiographer calls the field where the Sasanian noblemen play an *’asprīsā*; the term is a loan from the Pahlavi *asprēs* (from *asp*, “horse”). T. Nöldeke corrected the initial readings of this passage in his review of the two 1890 editions of the Qardagh legend: *ZDMG* 45 (1891): 532. K. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1928; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966), 36, citing Nöldeke, renders the term “hippodromus.” Another episode in Qardagh’s story (§11) confirms that these equestrian arenas were used for an early form of polo.

10. MS B has the king set out with “a hundred nobles and three hundred horsemen.” On the hunt in Sasanian culture, see P. Gignoux, “La chasse dans l’Iran sasanide,” in *Orientalia Romanica: Essays and Lectures*, vol. 5, *Iranian Studies*, ed. G. Gnoli (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1983), 101–18; and P. O. Harper, *The Royal Hunter: Art of the Sasanian Empire* (New York: The Asia Society, 1978).

11. MS A has only “Raise your hand to the bow, Qardagh!” In the longer version of the king’s exclamation, the biographer renders the concept of “good fortune” with the noun form of the verb *kšar*, “to prosper.” Other Syriac writers describing the “good fortune” associated with the Persian king employ the term *gadā*, “fortune, luck, or success.” See, for example, the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, II, 4 (Budge, 74; 133–34); Brockelmann, *LS*, 104.

And as soon as the king returned from the hunt,¹² he ordered that Qardagh should be given great gifts, and made him *paṭaḥšā* of Assyria and appointed him *marzbān* [over the land] from the Tormara River up unto the city of Nisibis.¹³ And he sent him off with a retinue, sending also at the same time great gifts and honors for his father.

6. But when Qardagh arrived in the lands under his authority, the Christian people were very scared of him for they knew of his intemperate zeal for the error of Magianism.¹⁴ And the entire church offered up a great prayer before God concerning him so that He, being all-powerful, would abate Qardagh's vehemence and prevent a persecution from being set in motion against the Christians—for they had been much persecuted in the kingdom of Shapur, who thirsted for the blood of the saints.¹⁵ And when Qardagh entered his home in the city of Arbela of the Assyrians,¹⁶ he made a great fes-

12. The hagiographer again uses a loan word from Persian (*nahširā*, from Phl. *naxšir*, "the chase" or "hunt") to describe Qardagh's athletic pursuits. For the Persian term, see D. N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 58.

13. The Tormara corresponds to the Diyala River in modern central Iraq. Nisibis lies today in southeastern Turkey just north of the Syrian border. In reality, this huge swath of territory was always divided between two or more Sasanian provinces. See R. Gyselen, *La géographie administrative de l'empire sassanide: Les témoignages sigillographiques* (Paris: Groupe pour l'étude de la civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 1989), 77–78; M. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 126–34.

Both of Qardagh's titles allude to his command over a frontier region. For *paṭaḥšā* (from Phl. *bitaxš*; Gr. *βιτάξης*, *πιτάξης*; Lat. *vitaxa*, "viceroy," see N. G. Garsoian, trans., *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awlos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut 'iwnk')* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 516–17. For the origins and evolution of the office, see E. Khurshudian, *Die parthischen und sassanidischen Verwaltungsinstitutionen nach den literarischen und epigraphischen Quellen 3 Jh. v. Chr.–7 Jh. n. Chr.* (Yerevan: Verlag des Kaukasischen Zentrums für iranische Forschungen, 1998), 19–53. *Marzbāns* were high military officials (the title is often translated as "lord of the marches" in charge of a frontier zone). See Garosian, *Epic Histories*, 544; Khurshudian, *PSV*, 19–53; and P. Gignoux, "L'organisation administrative sassanide: Le cas du *marzbān*," *JSAI* 4 (1984): 1–27. In the late Sasanian court tale *Khusro, Son of Kavad, and the Page (Xusrōn i Kavātān ut Rētak)*, a noble-born youth (*rētak*), having won the king's favor, is appointed *marzbān* over a "large territory" (Monchi-Zadeh, §120 [86]).

14. "Magianism" (*mgošūtā*) is the standard name for Zoroastrianism among Syrian Christian writers. For a selection of the Syriac sources, see J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspes d'après la tradition grecque* (Paris: Société d'Éditions "Les Belles Lettres," 1938), 2: 93–135.

15. For the "Great Persecution" under Shapur II (ca. 340–379), see chapter 1 below. J. Rist, "Die Verfolgung der Christen im spätantiken Sasanidenreich: Ursachen, Verlauf, und Folgen," *OrChr* 80 (1996): 17–42, provides a reliable overview with full bibliography.

16. Arbela (modern Erbil in northern Iraq) has a continuous urban history extending back at least to the Ur III period (ca. 2100 B.C.E.). For the city's prominence in the religious topography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, see M. Nissinen, "City as Lofty as Heaven: Arbela and Other Cities in Neo-Assyrian Prophecy," in "Every City Shall Be Forsaken": *Urbanism and Prophecy in Ancient Israel and the Near East*, ed. L. L. Grabbe and R. D. Haak (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,

tival (*‘ē’ dā*) for the pagan gods, honored Magianism greatly, and gave fine gifts to the fire temple.¹⁷

7. And after a few days, he began to build a fortress and house (*hesnā w-baytā*) upon a certain hill called Melqi.¹⁸ And in two years, he built and completed a strong fortress and beautiful house. At the foot of the hill he built a fire temple at great expense.¹⁹ And he appointed *magi* to it for the service of the fire.²⁰ But while he was building that fortress, one night while he was sleeping, he saw in his dream a certain young knight (*parāšā*), standing over him, clad and girded with armor, and mounted upon a horse.²¹ And the knight stabbed him in his side with the tip of his spear and said to him, “Qardagh.”

He replied, “It is I.”

And he said to him, “Know very well, that in front of this fortress you will die in martyrdom on behalf of Christ.”²²

2001), 172–209, with further discussion in chapter 5 below. During the Sasanian period, Arbela served as the administrative capital of the province Nodh-Ardashirkan. See J. F. Hansman, “Arbela,” *Enc. Ir.* 1 (1987): 277–78; and chapter 1 below.

17. For the placement of Zoroastrianism within a broader Christian category of “paganism” (*hanpūtā*), see esp. Morony, *Iraq*, 292 n. 74. On Zoroastrian festivals, see de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 367–83 with bibliography. See nn. 19–20 below on Zoroastrian fire temples.

18. For the place-name Melqi (Akkadian ^{URU}Mil-qi-a), see S. Parpola, *Neo-Assyrian Toponyms* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), 248; Nissinen, “Arbela,” 183–86; and Walker, “Legacy of Mesopotamia.”

19. Fire temples (Syr. *bēt nurwātā*) of the Sasanian period were usually enclosed buildings with a central fire altar attended by Zoroastrian priests, who performed daily rituals before the fire in honor of Ahura Mazda and other divine entities (*yazdān*). For orientation, see de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 343–50; Morony, *Iraq*, 283–84. For the archaeological and literary testimonies, see the comprehensive study by K. Schippmann, *Die iranischen Feuerheiligtümer* (Berlin and New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1971), esp. table 3. The complex described here consists of a fortified residence with an adjacent fire temple at the base of the hill. For the closest archaeological parallels, see Schippmann, *Feuerheiligtümer*, 142–53 (Bishapur in Fars), 430–37 (Atašküh near Isfahan); with further discussion in chapter 5 below.

20. J.-P. de Menasce, *Feux et fondations pieuses dans le droit sassanide* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1964), 51–55, assembles the sparse information on such fire-temple personnel that can be gleaned from the *Sasanian Law Book* (*Mātigān I Hazār Datistān*). For key passages in Pahlavi and English, see Farraxvmar t Vahrāmān, *The Book of a Thousand Judgements (A Sasanian Law Book)*, ed. and trans. A. Perikhanian; English trans. by N. Garsoïan (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1997), 1, 7–10 (26–27), A39, 8–11 (318–19).

21. Qardagh’s patron saint appears here in the guise of a mounted Sasanian warrior, an armed horseman (*parāšā*), or knight. The same term is used in §5 above to describe the “horsemen,” who accompany King Shapur on the hunt. For the famous image of the heavily armed Sasanian knight in the royal reliefs at Taq-i-Bustan, see H. von Gall, *Das Reiterkampfbild in der iranischen und iranisch beeinflussten Kunst parthischer und sasanidischer Zeit* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1990), 38–47; and figure 8 in this book.

22. The Syriac construction (*‘it lāk da-tmōt*) implies a sense of necessity or duty. R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), 1: 172; J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 14–15.

And Qardagh said to him, “Who are you that you can predict these things about me?”

And the blessed one said to him, “I am Sergius, the servant of Christ. But it is not by augury, as you suppose, that I make this prediction about you, but I have come ahead to inform you of what will be, just as my lord Christ has announced it to me.”²³

8. When Qardagh awoke from his sleep, he was very frightened, and he told his mother in confidence about the dream.²⁴ And his mother said to him, “My son, I knew that you should not trouble the Christian people, because it has been proven to me that they worship the one true God. And their God revealed this dream to you.”²⁵

But he [Qardagh] did not take [her words] to heart.

9. And there was a certain blessed man, whose name was Abdišo, living [var. B] in a mountain cave of Beth Bgāsh.²⁶ He was a man of great discipline, delighting in divine revelations.²⁷ And the Lord spoke to him in a vision, “Rise, go and show yourself to Qardagh the *marzbān*, because through

23. The “blessed” Sergius is careful to explain that his knowledge of Qardagh’s fate comes not through any form of augury (*nehšā*), i.e., not by some form of divination, but by revelation from Christ. For the spread of the cult of Sergius in the late Sasanian Empire, see E. K. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999), 120–29; also J. M. Fiey, “Les saints Serge de l’Iraq,” *AB* 79 (1961): 110–13.

24. Dreams serve as a prominent medium for spiritual instruction throughout the Qardagh legend. See also §§28, 30, 34, 39, and 53. In contrast to the pattern in many other Syriac hagiographies (e.g., the Syriac *Life of Symeon Stylites*), most of the visions in the Qardagh legend take place at night. Cf. P. Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1977), 122–27, on the paucity of dream visions in Theodoret’s presentation of Syrian ascetics.

25. For Qardagh’s relationship with his family, see chapter 4 below. Christian hagiographies of late antiquity often dwell on the intimate bonds between saints and their mothers; see R. Browning, “The ‘Low Level’ Saint’s Life in the Early Byzantine World,” in *Byzantine Saint*, ed. Hackel, 121. Of all his family members, only Qardagh’s mother shows signs of sympathy for Christianity. The motif of dream interpretation by the hero’s mother appears in a wide variety of epic literature. See, for example, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, tablet II, lines I.244–98 (George, 10–11).

26. The name Abdišo’ (simplified to Abdišo above) means literally “the servant of Jesus.” Compound names beginning or ending with Išo’ became common in the Church of the East from the late Sasanian period: e.g., Išo’yab I (“Jesus-gave”), elected Catholicos in 585. The mountainous highlands of Beth Bgāsh lie north and east of Arbela, between the upper reaches of the Great Zab River and Lake Urmiye, overlapping the modern Iran-Iraq border. On the region’s topography and ecclesiastical history, see map 2 and chapter 1 below.

27. Revelations played an important, and sometimes controversial, role in East-Syrian monastic spirituality. Ample precedent for this doctrine can be found in Syriac translations of Theodore of Mopsuestia and other writers. See, for example, G. J. Reinink, “A New Fragment of Theodore of Mopsuestia’s *Contra Magos*,” *LM* 110 (1997): 63–71, on the “divine revelations” (*gebyāne ʾalahāye*) granted the prophets and apostles.

you I will capture him for My household. For he will suffer greatly for the sake of My name.”²⁸

Then the blessed Abdišo stood up and grasped his staff in his hand, and he carried in a small satchel a holy Gospel.²⁹ And he went down just as he had been commanded.

10. And one day when Qardagh was going out to the stadium to play ball, behold, holy Abdišo came to meet him, cut off his path, and crossed before him. And when Qardagh saw that Abdišo had crossed before him, he burned with anger,³⁰ and he said to those accompanying him, “This man is an evil omen.” And he ordered two soldiers to strike the holy one upon his face.³¹ And after they had beaten him savagely, he ordered that Abdišo be guarded until he should give an appropriate order concerning him.

Qardagh then returned to his house. And after staying a little while, he arose and again mounted to go to the stadium. Then holy Abdišo, burning with the zeal of God, raised his hand and traced the sign of the Cross and said, “Mighty Lord God, show him Your glory, and reveal to him Your power that he may know that You are the true God, and there is no other except You—just as You showed me in the revelation.”

11. And when they arrived at the stadium and began to strike the ball while racing along on horses, the ball stuck to the ground. And they were unable to move it from its place. And immediately [Qardagh] ordered one of his soldiers to dismount and take the ball in his hand and hurl it far away. But

28. The Syriac construction (*ʔit leh d-neḥaš*) again implies a sense of necessity or duty. See §7 above, where Sergius tells Qardagh of his destiny to die as a martyr in front of his fortress at Melqi. The biographer seems to pun on the contrast between “augury” (*neḥšā*) and Qardagh’s actual destiny to suffer (*neḥaš*) on behalf of Christ.

29. Cf. 1 Sam. 17:40, where David, setting out to meet Goliath, takes his staff (*ḥuṭreh*) in his hand and five stones in his satchel (*tarmāleh*). The imagery also echoes Mark 6:8 (Matt. 10:10), where Jesus instructs the apostles to carry only a staff (*ṣabīā*) with them, but not a satchel (*tarmālā*). Use of the less common term *ḥuṭrā* may reflect the influence of the Old Syriac version of the Gospels. For discussion of these passages in the Syrian exegetical tradition, see J. Rendel Harris’s introduction to *The Commentaries of Ishoʿdad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c. 850 A.D.)*, ed. and trans. M. D. Gibson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 1: xxiii–xxv.

The tradition of using small and thus portable copies of the Gospels can be traced to the origins of the church in the Roman Empire. See M. McCormick, “The Birth of the Codex and the Apostolic Life-Style,” *Scriptorium* 39 (1985): 150–58; and H. Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 54–56, 231–37, on the physical characteristics of the early Christian book.

30. He “burned with anger” (*ʔeḥamat ṭāb*). For the Syriac diction, extremely common in martyr narratives, see Payne Smith, *TS*, 1: 1299; and §§14 and 23 below. For similar scenes of dramatic public confrontation between Christian holy men and the “visible rage of imperial officials,” see P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 143, on Shenoute of Atripe.

31. “Soldiers”: *pālḥē*. The Syriac term can also mean “servants,” but the military connotation is more common in martyr literature and other non-biblical texts: Payne Smith, *TS*, 2: 3151.

when he took the ball from the ground and threw it with force, the ball fell before his feet. And all of his soldiers did this one after the other, but accomplished nothing. Then in their astonishment they said, “Surely that man who encountered us is a sorcerer, and by his enchantments he has bound our ball and put a stop to our pleasure (*hadūtan*).”³²

But one of them replied and said, “When we were getting ready to mount, I saw that man raise his right hand, and he made the shape of the cross of the Christians, and his lips were moving like someone who is murmuring an incantation.”

12. Then the *marzbān* returned and entered into his house, astonished and amazed at what had happened, [as were] all of his retinue.³³ And as soon as he took his seat, he ordered that they bring the holy Abdišo into his presence. And he questioned him sharply and said to him, “Where are you from, man? And what is your profession?”

But the blessed Abdišo answered and said to him, “As it was told to me by my parents, they were from Ḥazza, a village in the lands of the Assyrians. But because they were Christians, they were driven out by impious pagans, and went and settled in Tamanon, a village in the land of the Kurds.³⁴ But I have no fixed place nor special abode to live in, because I heard from my Lord Christ who came and redeemed us by His holy death that *There was no place for him [the Son of man] to lay down his head*,³⁵ although verily heaven and earth and the things above and below are His, and He possesses and guides and preserves them.

[13.] “But my ‘work’ (*bād[i]*) [as you call it] is to offer ceaseless praise and

32. The Latin *ludus* of Abbeloos’s translation captures the dual connotation of the Syriac term as “game” and “pleasure.” The same root appears above (§§4–5) to describe how the Persian king “rejoices” (*hdi*) and takes “pleasure” (*hadūtā*) in Qardagh’s heroic deeds at his court. For the widespread belief in sorcery in late antique Iraq, see Morony, *Iraq*, 388–94.

33. Literally “all of them who (were) with him.” Cf. §5 above, where the Persian king sends Qardagh back to Arbela “with a retinue” (*b-zawhā*). In later sections (§§16 and 42), the biographer refers simply to Qardagh’s “companions” (*ḥabre*).

34. The town Ḥazza, 12 km southwest of Arbela, had a Christian community from at least the early fourth century and preceded Arbela as the metropolitan see of Adiabene. J. M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne: Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastiques et monastiques du nord de l'Iraq* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1965–68), 1: 166–67. The village Tamanon lies just north of the modern Iraqi-Turkish border, at the base of Jebel Ġudi, the mountain where Noah’s ark landed according to Syrian Christian tradition. On the Kurdish population of this region, see n. 157 below. Although Tamanon itself is not attested as a bishopric until the eleventh century, there were important monasteries in the vicinity from the seventh century. See J. M. Fiey, *Nisibe, métropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origines à nos jours* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1977), 179–82.

35. Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58. MS A makes the quotation exact by omission of the verb “was” (*hwa*). For roaming Syrian ascetics as heirs of the apostles, see D. Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and

to pay thanksgiving to God our Maker and Provider,³⁶ He who created us in His own image and called us in His own likeness and saved us through His only Begotten, who clothed Himself in our body.³⁷ And He gave us knowledge and understanding, lest we should reckon creatures to be gods, and lest we give, as you impious pagans give, the adoration that is due to Him alone to the creatures He fashioned.”

14. And when Qardagh heard [this] he burned with anger, and he ordered that they strike the holy one upon his mouth. But while the blessed Abdišo was being savagely beaten, his eyes were gazing up into the heaven, and secretly he prayed to God that He might bring to completion in deed that which He had told him by revelation.³⁸

And Qardagh said to him indignantly, “Why do you call us worshippers of creatures, stupid old man?”

15. But the blessed Abdišo was silent and did not give him an answer.³⁹

And Qardagh said to him, “Will you not answer me? Do you not know that I have power over your life and death?”⁴⁰

But the blessed Abdišo said to him, “Sir, I believe that a person who is struck upon the mouth is being taught that it is not right for him to speak; and because of this I have not answered your excellence (*rabūtāk*). But what

London: University of California Press, 2002), 50–82; also S. Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” *Numen* 20 (1973): 10 n. 30. Despite sharp criticism by the church hierarchy, some East-Syrian monastic legislation continued to tolerate long absences from the monastery. See, for example, the early seventh-century *Rules of Dādišo*, 5 (Chabot, 94; Vööbus, 169) (Dādišo †604).

36. The Syriac puns on the root *ʿbad*, “to do, make, or work.” Abdišoʿ (literally “the servant of Jesus”) declares his profession (*bādā*) to be the celebration of God his Maker (*ʿābodā*). This declaration places him in the company of Sergius and other “servants of Christ” (*ʿabdawhi damšihā*); see §§7 and 15.

37. The description of Christ as God’s “only Begotten who clothed Himself in our body” (*iḥideh d-lbeš pagran*) is typical of Syrian Christological language. See S. Brock, “Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition,” in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, ed. M. Schmidt (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1992), 11–38, here 26 (repr. in Brock, *SSC*, XI), on the East-Syrian creeds of 544, 576, and 680.

38. “Bring to completion in deed” (*negmor ba-bādā*) extends the pun of the root *ʿbad*. On Abdišo’s initial “revelation” (*gelyānā*), see n. 28 above.

39. The hagiographer has perhaps been influenced here by the popular story of Secundus the “silent philosopher.” See S. Brock, “Secundus the Silent Philosopher: Some Notes on the Syriac Tradition,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 121 (1978): 94–100 (repr. in Brock, *SSC*, IX), esp. 96, on the circulation of the Syriac *Life of Secundus* in East-Syrian monastic circles of the seventh century. Cf. also Mark 14:61 and Matt. 26:63, on Jesus’s silence before the high priest.

40. Cf. John 19:10. Other details in Qardagh’s interrogation of Abdišo also recall John’s depiction of Pilate’s interrogation of Christ. Note the *marzbān*’s initial question, “Where are you from, man?” (§12), and the hermit’s refusal to give an answer (*peṭgāmā*) (§15), both echoing John 19:9.

you have said about having power over my life and death is not true.⁴¹ You have the power to kill the body, but we who are servants of Christ and worshippers of the Cross do not consider this to be death, but true immortal life!⁴² And over my soul and my life in Christ you do not have any power. Our Lord exhorts and commands us in His Gospel when He says, *‘Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul. But fear Me, who am able to destroy both the body and the soul in Gehenna.’*⁴³ If, however, you desire me to speak with you, calm your wrath and control yourself. Kindly give me your attention and order them not to strike me again.”

16. Then Qardagh swore to him saying, “Speak as you please. No one will strike you again.”

Then the holy Abdišo replied and said to him, “Do you agree that everything that is an eternal entity (*ʿityā*) and has not been made is a true god (*ʿalāhā šarivā*)?”⁴⁴

The *marzbān* said to him, “I agree.”

The blessed one said to him, “And do you acknowledge that everything that has been made and is not an eternal entity is a creature?”

The *marzbān* said to him, “I acknowledge that it is so.”

And again the blessed one said to him, “And you know that it is not right to worship creatures and that everyone who worships creatures angers God their Creator?”

The *marzbān* said to him, “Sir, you have spoken truly. It is thus. But, show me, who worships creatures?”

The blessed one said to him, “You and all your heathen companions. You are worshipping creatures!”

17. The *marzbān* said to him, “If you [can] show me that I worship creatures and anger God, gladly will I agree with you and follow your teaching. And I will hold you in the highest favor. But if you [can]not show me, be aware that you are making a grievous insult against me.”

The blessed one said to him, “Do you not worship the sun and the moon, fire and water, air and earth, and call them gods and goddesses?”

41. Cf. the similar phrasing in the *History of Secundus the Silent Philosopher* (Brock, 100; Sachau, 87, ll. 23–24).

42. The phrase “worshippers of the Cross” (*sāgōdaw[hi] da-zqipā*) introduces a second word for “Cross”: *zqipā*, literally “crucifixion.” See §44 below, where the same term is used to describe fragments of the True Cross.

43. Cf. Matt. 10:28: “Do not fear those . . . but fear Him . . .”

44. On the philosophical components of the lengthy dialogue that begins here, see chapter 3 below. The dialogue opens with a series of short exchanges in which the “blessed” Abdišo forces the *marzbān* to agree to a set of premises affirming the difference between creatures (*beryātā*) and that which is “eternal” (*ʿityā*) and therefore divine. For an alternative translation of §§16–23 based on the Syriac text of Bedjan, *AMS*, 450–54, see P. Gignoux, *Man and Cosmos in Ancient Iran* (Rome: Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 2001), 119–21.

Qardagh said to him, "Yes, I worship them because these things are eternal entities and have not been made."⁴⁵

The blessed one said to him, "Now from what have you deduced that the luminaries are eternal entities and have not been made?"

Qardagh said to him, "From their constant course, and because of the [var. B] immutability of their nature, and from the fact that they endure by the strength of their nature and are not changed like other things, and are set on high above."⁴⁶

18. The blessed one said to him, "These things about which you have spoken they have received from their Creator as part of their constitution (*butūqānhōn*). The credit does not belong to their essence. That they [the luminaries] are not eternal entities is evident from the fact that they are not even alive. And if you say that these things are alive, I beseech you to tell me, indeed what kind of life do they possess? That of animals? Then why are they not nourished like animals?⁴⁷ Or are they rational and capable of perception (*mlilē w-pārōšē*)?⁴⁸ And if you say that they are rational and capable of perception, then why do they not store up their warmth at times and rest from their course? For if the sun were rational, in winter it would dissipate the intensity of the frost and in summer it would not [var. A] increase its heat. And it would grow warm in the region that is colder than its neighbor, and where it is hot it would restrain its rays. And from its constant course it would grow weary and suffer.

For everything that lives and belongs to the perceptible world⁴⁹ and is in

45. For Zoroastrian reverence for the luminaries, see de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 304–10; Morony, *Iraq*, 286–90.

46. Qardagh's defense of the immutability and transcendence of the celestial bodies echoes the position advocated by the leading polytheist philosophers of late antiquity. On the views of Simplicius of Athens (writing during the 530s), see P. Hoffmann, "Sur quelques aspects de la polémique de Simplicius contre Jean Philopon: De l'invective à la réaffirmation de la transcendance du ciel," in *Simplicius—Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie (Actes du colloque international de Paris 28 sept. — 1er oct., 1985)*, ed. I. Hadot (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 183–221; English translation in *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, ed. R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1987), 57–83.

47. For debate among the Aristotelian commentators of late antiquity over the precise nature of celestial souls, see the introduction to *Simplicius of Athens, On Aristotle's On the Soul 1.1–2.4*, trans. J. O. Urmson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 2–10.

48. For philosophical conceptions of the celestial bodies as animate, rational entities, see esp. W. A. Wolfson, "The Problem of the Souls of the Spheres from the Byzantine Commentaries on Aristotle through the Arabs and St. Thomas to Kepler," *DOP* 16 (1965): 67–93 (repr. in Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Religion and Philosophy* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973], 1: 1–59). The anathemas of the Council of Constantinople (553 c.e.) specifically condemn "anyone who shall say that the sun, moon and the stars are rational beings." *ACO* 4/1, 248, 14–16 (full citation and discussion in chapter 3 below, n. 102). A. Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) offers useful background and commentary.

49. Literally "can be seen" (*methzē*), i.e., belonging to the arena of sense perception.

motion of its own accord also grows weary. And everything that does not live and does not grow weary has been set into motion by something else. A stone or an arrow or a cart is set into motion by something else, and they do not grow weary, since they also are not alive. Birds and animals move of their own accord and grow weary. If then the luminaries together with the elements move of their own accord, they should also grow weary and suffer, because they belong to the world of the senses. But because they do not move of their own accord, just so it is also evident that they are mute and soulless. And because of this they do not grow weary. And they are moved by the power of other things in the manner of a stone or an arrow or a cart. The former are moved by God; the latter by us.⁵⁰

19. The *marzbān* said to him, “Why do they [the luminaries] possess a constant motion greater than these things on earth, and light and power that are exempt from change, corruption, or hindrance?”⁵¹

The blessed one said to him, “Because they are in rank like the principal organs of the body: the brain, the liver, and the heart.⁵² For example, if someone removes a fingernail or hair or tooth from a body, the damage is partial. But if someone removes the brain or heart or liver, together with such things the whole animal would be destroyed.⁵³ Just so, if one of those parts that are small in the constitution of the world, such as animals or seeds, perishes, the damage is partial. But if the Creator allowed the luminaries to perish, the whole world would be destroyed. For the luminaries are the bond of the whole body of Creation, for they are the chief members and eyes and brain of the world. And from them comes all the warmth that is in bodies and plants and the order of times and the numbering of the years, months, weeks, and days.⁵⁴

50. Cf. John Philoponus, *In Aristotelis Physicorum*, IV, 8 (Vitelli, 639.3–642.9) on projectile motion, where the examples of the arrow and stone also appear. For the influence of Philoponus’s arguments on Qardagh’s biographer, see chapter 3 below. For orientation, R. Sorabji, “John Philoponus,” in *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, ed. R. Sorabji, 1–40; C. Wildberg, “Philoponus,” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 7: 371–78.

51. Here again the *marzbān*’s position recalls the views of Simplicius and other early Byzantine commentators on Aristotle’s *De Caelo*. See Wolfson, “Souls of the Spheres,” 34–40; Hoffmann, “Simplicius contre Jean Philopon,” *passim*.

52. “Rank”: *ṭaksā* (from Gr. *τάξις*). For the trio of the heart, brain, and liver in Syriac and Iranian medicine, see Gignoux, *Man and Cosmos*, 37–46, esp. 42, on the role of the liver. The selection of a medical analogy underscores the hagiographer’s familiarity with the discursive methods of late antique philosophy. For the nexus between medicine and Aristotelian philosophy in late antiquity, see chapter 3 below, n. 139.

53. Gignoux (*Man and Cosmos*, 46) identifies parallel passages in Nemesius of Emesa, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Pahlavi medical book known as the *Anthology of Zādspram*.

54. A paraphrase of Gen. 1:14. In contrast to other Christian apologists, Qardagh’s biographer eschews direct scriptural citation in his refutation of “Magian” error. For Christian polemics against astral religion grounded in explicit scriptural proofs, see chapter 3 below, e.g., Eznik of Kolb, *On God*, trans. M. J. Blanchard and R. D. Young (Louvain: Peeters, 1998), 146 (§ 266).

20. But they do not possess these qualities chiefly of their own accord. Rather, they receive them from the power and wisdom of their Creator, while [they themselves] are neither alive nor sentient. Just as if there are ten men in one house, and one of them is blinded, he alone suffers in darkness, while those others escape his affliction. But if you [extinguish] the lamp that is inside the house or shut the door, the experience of the chastisement overtakes all of them in the house. Just as in the case of the loss of these [men in the dark house], so also [it would be for us] in the case [of the loss] of the luminaries.⁵⁵ And from this, it is evident that the luminaries are not eternal entities but have been made. They are neither alive nor sentient, and anyone who worships them angers God their Creator.

The same applies also to the elements.⁵⁶ Earth, I mean, and water and fire and air are created entities (*'bidē*). They are neither alive nor sentient. How can they be called eternal entities when each one is dissolved or corrupted by its companion, and the victory of each of them is the rout of the other? For earth is dissolved and even carried away by water. And water is absorbed by earth and perishes, and also vanishes into the air. Fire is extinguished by water and perishes. And air is enclosed in a wineskin and heated by the luminaries, and staleness and stench are mingled together with it. In sum, each one of them is the destroyer of everything, even of its fellow (element).⁵⁷

21. [The elements] are also dissolved or changed or in need of each other. And everything that has needs has an origin.⁵⁸ And everything that does not have an origin has no needs. For just as the origin-less thing is completely without needs, so also everything that has an origin has needs.⁵⁹ Reality itself testifies

55. The diction is highly compressed, but this final sentence of the analogy appears to mean that if the luminaries were extinguished, everyone would suffer from the affliction of their loss. For an alternative translation of this and other difficult passages, see Gignoux, *Man and Cosmos*, 120–21.

56. For a richly documented overview of Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian conceptions of the *στοιχεῖα* (Syr. *'estūksē*), see A. Lumpe, “Elementum,” *RAC* 4 (1959): 1073–1100. Polemic against the veneration of the *stoicheia* became a staple of Christian apologetic. For the Latin and Greek patristic tradition, see Lumpe, “Elementum,” 1092–97, citing, among others, Aristides of Athens, Firmicus Maternus, Lactantius, Augustine, and the pseudo-Clementines. For discussion of the elements in the Syrian tradition, see U. Possekkel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writing of Ephrem the Syrian* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 79–112.

57. For variations on this theme in Christian apologetic, see chapter 3 below, discussing the Syriac version of Aristides of Athens and the fifth-century Armenian polemicist Eznik of Kolb. For Zoroastrian concerns over the mutual destructibility of the elements, see Gignoux, *Man and Cosmos*, 50–54, on key passages from ninth- and tenth-century Pahlavi texts.

58. Literally “has come into being” (*hwāyā hū*).

59. The comparison is framed by Syriac clauses (*'akznā ger . . . hākanā ger*) that may reflect the influence of Greek philosophical prose. The conjunction *ger* (from Gr. *γάρ*) appears nine times in the short space of §§21–22. I translate, following the logic of the argument, “for . . . also . . . for . . . for . . . for . . . but . . . for . . . whereas . . . indeed.”

to the neediness of the elements. For none of them, without its companion, can support its own internal parts. For earth needs water for germination. And water needs air to make it ascend and pour down. And fire also, without the wood that grows from earth, water, and air, cannot perform its activity.⁶⁰

22. Therefore, it is evident that the elements have needs, and if they have needs, they also have an origin. For what has no origin has no needs, neither with respect to its essence nor another [entity]. Being without origin, it is alive and also rational. But the elements are neither alive nor rational. For everything that lives and belongs to the perceptible world moves of its own accord and suffers, whereas the elements are not only irrational, they are not even alive or sentient. Indeed plants, together with animals, have life. For these things, because they grow and [var. A] send up sprouts, [there is] also for them movement and change together with sense perception. The elements have not one of these things.⁶¹ But they are silent like rocks.⁶² And whoever worships these things and reckons them to be eternal entities angers God their Creator. Rightly, therefore, I have called you creature-worshippers and strangers to God.⁶³

23. When the *marzbān* heard these things, he burned with anger, because [his] error did not allow him to be persuaded by the words of the blessed one. And he ordered that the holy Abdišo be bound with heavy chains and imprisoned in a dark place,⁶⁴ and that each evening he be given a little bread, but no water at all. And the holy one was bound and imprisoned, while he was rejoicing, singing, and saying, “*Lord, my helper, I do not fear what man does to me.*”⁶⁵

60. For the beneficial mixing of the elements, see, for example, Eznik of Kolb, *On God*, 2 (Blanchard and Young, 36–37): “Thus the four elements are corrupting to one another when single, while they are useful and profitable to one another when mingled with their companion.”

61. For the elements’ lack of the three characteristics shared by all animate creatures (including plants), see John Philoponus, *De Opificio Mundi*, V, 1 (Scholten, II, 454, ll. 16–23). See also Eznik of Kolb, *On God* 302–3 (Blanchard and Young, 162) on the hierarchy of human, animal, and plant life.

62. *šatiqē . . . ba-dmūt k’ipē*. For mute idols, cf. 1 Cor. 12:2; Hab. 2:18. For verbal parallels to the diction used here by Qardagh’s biographer, see Payne Smith, *TS*, 2: 4357.

63. A triumphant closure to the disputation. See the beginning of the disputation scene at §14: “And Qardagh said to him indignantly, ‘Why do you call us worshippers of creatures, stupid old man?’”

64. “Imprisoned in a dark place”: *’etḥbeš b-bayta ḥešōkā*. Cf. the Syriac *Acts of Judas Kyriakos* (Guidi, 82; 91), where the “tyrant” Julian orders Judas to be “imprisoned in a dark place” prior to his execution.

65. Ps. 118:6. This is the first of a long series of quotations from the Psalms by the hermit Abdišo. For the Psalms in Syrian monastic culture, see A. Vööbus, ed. and trans., *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism* (Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1960), 41, 71, 92, 112, 125, 202–3; idem, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1958–88), 1: 289–91. Later East-Syrian tradition advised monks to recite the entire Psalter each day, according to the ninth-century *Expositio Officiorum Ecclesiae* (Connolly, I, 169, 178–81).

24. On the next day, the *marzbān* went out for the chase (*naḥšīrā*) and hunt. And he stretched his bow to shoot an arrow, but it dropped before his feet. And this same thing also happened to the soldiers who were with him. And although they tried many times, the air refused to support the arrows they were shooting. And when this happened, they were all very afraid. And the *marzbān* replied and said to those who were with him, “I think that old man whom we bound is a man of God. And by his prayers this marvel has occurred, and our weapons have been taken captive because we have provoked him.”

And immediately he returned and entered his house in a state of great depression. And having neither food nor drink he went to bed.⁶⁶ He decided that in the morning he would release the blessed Abdišo.

25. Now in the middle of the night, the house in which the blessed Abdišo was imprisoned was filled with a splendid light. And a great crowd of spiritual beings (*rūḥānē*) appeared before him, chanting in a high voice and saying, “*The righteous have called out, and the Lord has heard them, and set them free. The Lord is near [var. A] those who call Him in truth, and He does the will of those who fear Him. He hears their request and redeems them.*”⁶⁷

While the blessed Abdišo was chanting together with them and rejoicing, great fear fell upon all those who were nearby, surrounding the house in which the blessed one was imprisoned. And suddenly all the doors were opened.⁶⁸ And an angel of the Lord touched the chains of the blessed one, and the chains fell off his hands and his feet. The angel grasped him by his hand and pulled him and led him out from the prison. And having led him outside, he released him from his hand and said to him, “Come after me.” And the angel went before him in resplendent garments (*lbūšē maprge*)⁶⁹ until he led him to his cave. Then he released him and departed.

26. And when it was morning, the *marzbān* ordered that they release the holy one and bring him into his presence. And when those men who had been sent opened [the doors] and entered [the prison], they found only the chains lying there. And the fragrance of fine incense (*besmē*) was wafting

66. The omission of dining after the hunt completes the utter disruption of the *marzbān*'s customary aristocratic pursuits. For the intimate connection between feasting and the hunt among Sasanian elites, see chapter 2 below.

67. The chant of the “spiritual beings” combines Ps. 34:17 and 114:18–19. For Ephraem's occasional use of the same terminology, see W. Cramer, *Die Engelvorstellungen bei Ephrām dem Syrer* (Rome: PISO, 1965), 66, 116–17. The East-Syrian poet Narsai († ca. 507) emphasizes the “spiritual” (rather than fiery) composition of angelic bodies. See P. Krüger, “Die älteste syrisch-nesotorianische Dokument über die Engel,” *Ostkirchliche Studien* 1 (1952): 284–85.

68. Cf. the prison-release scenes of Acts 5:19–20, 12:7–8.

69. The angel's “resplendent garments” (*lbūšē maprge*) reflect the glory of his celestial home. For visual evidence, see the Ascension scene from the Rabbula Gospel, completed in 586, where two angels, standing on earth and instructing the apostles, wear fine gilded robes. Cf. the “splendid, majestic, and excellent clothing” worn by the crowd of angels in a vision of the Syriac *Life of Symeon Stylites*, 59 (Doran, 138; Assemani, 315, 11.5–6); and §39 below.

through the entire house. And when they searched for the blessed one and could not find him, they marveled and were very afraid. And they ran swiftly and informed the *marzbān*, saying, “Sir, we went and entered [the prison], and we found these chains lying there, and the house full of the fragrance of spices.⁷⁰ But we did not find the man.”

And when the *marzbān* heard these things, he fell into great dread and depression. Striking his face and weeping bitterly, he said, “Woe is me! Woe is me! Woe is me, who has harassed a man of God. Truly, great is the God of the Christians. And He is the true God who made the heaven and the earth and everything in them. And there is no God other than Him.”⁷¹

27. And rising immediately he entered his bedchamber and drew on the east wall the sign of the Cross.⁷² And he fell upon his face on the earth, and he prayed before it and said, “Christ, God of the Christians, answer me and seek me and do not reject me. Make me worthy to be numbered among Your worshippers, and to be sealed with the holy mark (*rūšmā*).⁷³ I have believed and confessed, and I confess that You are the true God, just as Your worshippers, the Christians, confess and teach. If, therefore, that one who appeared to me in the form of a man and spoke with me in Your name and whom I in my ignorance provoked, is [indeed] a man, make me worthy to see him again and to seek from him pardon for my offenses. And through him I may approach Your doctrine and Your household. And if it was one

70. For the “fragrance of sanctity” in Syriac tradition, see S. A. Harvey, *Scenting Salvation* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, forthcoming, 2006). Syriac narratives of the discovery of the Holy Cross contain similar expressions. See, for example, the London MS of the *Judas Kyriakos Legend* (Drijvers and Drijvers, 67; 21 r [47]); and the *Soghitha on the Finding of the Cross*, 25 (Brock, 67 and n. 56).

71. Here, in his first speech as an admirer of the “God of the Christians,” Qardagh speaks in a language rich with scriptural resonances. See, for example, Gen. 2:4 or Acts 14:15 for the phrase “God who made heaven and earth.”

72. The hagiographer is careful to specify the eastern orientation of Qardagh’s prayer. For a trenchant exposition of this theme, see E. Peterson, “Das Kreuz und das Gebet nach Osten,” in *Frühkirche, Judentum, und Gnosis: Studien und Untersuchungen* (Rome: Herder, 1959), 16,, on this passage from the Qardagh legend. Both early Syriac texts (e.g., the *Didascalia Apostolorum*) and late Sasanian writers (e.g., Dādīšōʿ Qatrāyā) place similar emphasis on eastward orientation for prayer. See §§ 54 and 60 below. For the bedroom (here *qīṭōnā*, from Gr. *κοιτών*) as a space for private ritual activity, see E. Peterson, “Die geheimen Praktiken eines syrischen Bischofs,” in *Frühkirche, Judentum, und Gnosis*, 337.

73. In early Syrian tradition, this “mark” (*rūšmā*) referred to the pre-baptismal anointing of the head (Winkler, “Prebaptismal Anointing and Its Implications,” 27–28). Here, as often in later Syriac literature, the *rūšmā* signifies post-baptismal anointing and, by synecdoche, the entire baptismal ritual. For the origins and symbolism of the *rūšmā*, see S. Brock, “The Transition to a Post-Baptismal Anointing in the Antiochene Rite,” in *The Sacrifice of Praise: Studies on the Themes of Thanksgiving and Redemption in the Central Prayers of the Eucharistic and Baptismal Liturgies in Honour of Arthur Hubert Courtain*, ed. B. D. Spinks and M. Melrose (Rome, C.L.V.—Edizioni Liturgiche, 1981), 215–25, esp. 223–24; see §§34 and 42 below for further instances of the same terminology.

of Your holy angels who appeared to me in the form of a man, let him appear to me again and teach me what is right for me to do.”⁷⁴

And as soon as he had completed his prayer and sealed himself with the sign of the Cross, behold, he heard a pleasant and gentle voice saying, “*Everyone who asks will receive and everyone who seeks will find. And for the one who knocks, for him will it be opened.*”⁷⁵

And when he heard that voice, he was consoled and he rejoiced greatly. His soul exulted, and he praised God. And he went out and sat upon his pillow-bed (*tešwītā*) and took nourishment and was refreshed.⁷⁶ But the *magus*, who performed Magian rites for him whenever he ate, and also his wife and all of his household were amazed and bewildered at him, that he ate bread without performing Magian rites over it.⁷⁷ But no one dared to question him for he was very hard and severe with his household.

28. And after three days, there appeared to him in a vision of the night holy Mar Abdišo, joyful and in good spirits, saying to him, “Qardagh, my son, if you desire to see me, come to a certain cave, and there you will find me.”⁷⁸

And when he awoke from his sleep, Qardagh rejoiced greatly and his soul

74. Qardagh is uncertain whether he has seen a man or angel. For the *topos* of ascetics who resemble angels, see G. Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000), 33, 55, 160–62. For asceticism as an approach to the angelic life in Syrian tradition, see, in general, D. Juhl, *Die Askese im Liber Graduum und bei Afrahat: Eine vergleichende Studie zur frühsyrischen Frömmigkeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), 124–28, 153–59; Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 6–8, esp. n. 16. See also P. Nagel, *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche und der Ursprung des Mönchtums* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966), 34–48, esp. 34–38, on the key Gospel passages: Luke 20:34–38; Matt. 22:29–32; Mark 12:24–27.

75. An exact quotation of Matt. 7:8; the parallel passage at Luke 11:10 preserves a slightly different wording.

76. Qardagh dines here in the traditional setting of Sasanian elites. For cushions as a marker of Sasanian nobility, see S. Shaked, “From Iran to Islam: On Some Symbols of Elite Status,” *JSAI* 7 (1986): 77–79 (repr. in *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam* [Aldershot, England and Brookfield, VT: Variorum Reprints, 1995], VII). Sasanian banquet scenes regularly depict noblemen reclining on cushioned dining couches. For illustrations, see Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 75 (no. 25), 146 (no. 70), and 148 (no. 73); and figure 5 in this book.

77. This is one of several passages in which Qardagh’s biographer reveals his familiarity with Zoroastrian customs. For the solemn prayers performed before every Zoroastrian meal, see M. Boyce and F. Kotwal, “Zoroastrian *Bāj* and *Drōn*,” *BSOAS* 34 (1971): 56–75 (esp. 64–65), 298–313. The shock of Qardagh’s household that he would dine “without performing Magian rites” (*kad lā mageš*) reflects the ideal that not even a drop of water was to be drunk without performance of the *bāj* (Boyce and Kotwal, 299); the *Book of Ardā Vīrāz* 23 (Gignoux, 176–77) imagines in hell the soul of the sinner who ate “illegally and did not keep the *bāj*.”

78. Note that the hermit now begins to address Qardagh as “my son” (*ber[ʿy]*). For spiritual kinship in the ascetic tradition, see chapter 4 below. Significantly, it is also here, in the dream vision, that the biographer first assigns Abdišo the honorific title “Mar” (on which see n. 3 above). His appearance to Qardagh in a dream vision signals Abdišo’s similarity to “Mar Sergius” who likewise visits his charges through night visions (§§30, 34, and 53).

exulted. And at the break of day he arose rejoicing. And he changed his clothes and disguised himself.⁷⁹ And he took with him two of his faithful servants, whom he trusted to keep his secrets, the same ones who [later] were also made worthy together with him of the gift of baptism.⁸⁰ And he mounted [his horse] and traveled to the territory of Beth Bgāsh, to the mountain on which the holy Abdišo lived, just as Abdišo had told him in the vision.⁸¹

29. And when he was about five miles from his fortress, Satan met him in the form of an old man, agitated and angry. Holding his beard in his teeth, Satan said to him, “Where are you going, you liar and man of evil life? Why did you lie to me, abandon me, and go after that accursed, white-haired disciple of Jesus, that one whom our comrades the Jews crucified and put to death in Jerusalem?⁸² I swear and do not lie that I will stir up against you the king and all the nobles of Persia, and I will pour out your blood like that of thieves and evildoers.”⁸³

But when one of his servants heard these things, he said to his lord, “I will draw my sword and take off the head of this old dog that dares to insult our lord!”⁸⁴

Then his lord said to him, “Leave him alone because he will not fall before the sword. Behold, our Lord Jesus Christ in whom I believe will *slay him with the spirit of His mouth and will destroy him by the revelation of His Coming*.⁸⁵ For just so have I heard the Christians speak of Him.”

79. The diction used to describe Qardagh’s change of clothes (*ṣahlap m’ānaw[hi]*) foreshadows his baptism. For the terminology, see Brock, “Clothing Metaphors,” 18–19; idem, *Luminous Eye*, 90–94. Note also Qardagh’s use of a disguise (*’estagni*) to avoid recognition by his fellow Zoroastrians. For a parallel case of covert conversion in late Sasanian Adiabene, see the *Acts of Išō’ sabran*, 1 (Chabot, 510–13); cf. §31 below, where Qardagh orders his servants not to disclose his ownership of the pack animals hitched outside the monastery where he will be baptized.

80. The language is suggestively Eucharistic. The servants are *mhaymnē*, “trusted or faithful” men capable of keeping “secrets” (*’frāzē*: a standard term for the sacraments).

81. On the mountainous region of Beth Bgāsh, see n. 26 above.

82. Jewish culpability for the Crucifixion is a major theme throughout the Christian literature of late antiquity. For the virulent anti-Jewish polemics of Syrian Christian literature, see A. P. Hayman, “The Image of the Jew in the Syriac Anti-Jewish Polemical Literature,” in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner and S. Frerichs (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 423–42; and J. M. Fiey, “Juifs et chrétiens dans l’Orient syriaque,” *Hispania Sacra* 40 (1988): 933–53. The theme remains relatively peripheral to the Qardagh legend. But see §§51 and 60–65 below.

83. Satan’s threat to “pour out” (*’zōd*) Qardagh’s blood foreshadows Qardagh’s imitation of Christ through martyrdom. Cf. Mark 14:24 and Luke 22:20 for the Eucharistic “pouring out” of Christ’s blood.

84. A creative reworking of 2 Sam. 16:9: “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me cut off his head.” Cf. also the arrest of Jesus at Matt. 26:51–55. For the use of “dog” as a term of abuse, which appears two other times in the Qardagh legend (§§46 and 52), see n. 160 below.

85. An exact quotation of 2 Thess. 2:8.

Then holy Qardagh understood that it was Satan who appeared to him in the form of a man. And immediately he spat upon him and said to him, “May Christ my Lord rebuke you, He who by His grace rescued us from the darkness of error and brought me into the great light of His knowledge.”⁸⁶

And he sealed himself with the sign of the Cross. And when Satan heard the name of Christ, immediately he was transformed and became like a black serpent, and he fled and went inside the crevice of a rock.⁸⁷

30. But the blessed Qardagh traveled along his path, rejoicing and praising God.⁸⁸ And while he was at a rest house along the road,⁸⁹ there appeared to him in a dream holy Mar Sergius, the martyr, who said to him, “Qardagh, my brother, you have begun well. Struggle bravely (*ganbārāʾit*) that you may become my brother for eternity.⁹⁰ Behold, I have come [var. A] to aid you until you achieve perfection and take the crown of martyrdom.”

And on the next day in the late afternoon, as he was approaching the base of the mountain on which the holy Abdišo was living, an angel of the Lord appeared to the holy Abdišo and said to him, “Rise up, go out to meet Qardagh the *marzbān* and receive him joyfully, because the Lord says, ‘I have chosen him. He is mine, and he will suffer many things on My account.’”⁹¹

The holy Abdišo stood up, rejoicing, and took his staff in his hand and in his left arm the Gospel Book.⁹² And he sang as he traveled along, saying,

86. The opening phrase of Qardagh’s rebuke of Satan echoes Jude 1:9 (cf. Zach. 3:2), where the archangel Gabriel rebukes the devil.

87. The identification of Satan as a serpent (*hewyā*)—very common in early Christian literature—first appears in the Apocalypse of John (Rev. 12:9, 20:2). For the Syriac tradition, see, for example, Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, VI, 2 (Parisot, I, 255, ll. 4–7; Pierre, 371). See also n. 104 below on the cursing of Satan.

88. For the first time in the narrative, Qardagh now receives the epithet “blessed” (*tūbānā*), regularly applied to the martyr Sergius (§7) and the hermit Abdišo (*passim*).

89. The Christian legislation of Roman Edessa mentions such lodges (*bet bawtā*) as places to be avoided (Vööbus, *Legislation*, 24, 81). But in an era where travel was long and slow even on good roads, some use of them was inevitable. For Qardagh’s other rest-house encounter, see §35 below. Whether the Sasanian Empire also had a formal network of such travelers’ inns remains unclear. For the archaeological evidence, scattered and still poorly understood, see M. Shokoohy, “The Sasanian Caravanserai of Day-i Gachin South of Ray, Iran,” *BSOAS* 46 (1983): 445–61, with illustrations.

90. On Qardagh’s *ganbārūtā*, “mighty strength,” see n. 6 above. On the spiritual brotherhood between Qardagh and the martyrs Sergius and Stephen, see §§30, 34, and 62, and chapter 4 below.

91. The angel thus repeats, in very similar wording, the message that prompted Abdišo’s initial encounter with the *marzbān* (§9). For the ambassadorial functions of angels, see Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen bei Ephräm dem Syrer*, 138–40.

92. Cf. §9, where the hermit carries a “holy Gospel” (*ʿewangalyōn qadišā*) in a small satchel (*tarmālā*). Here, close to his ascetic retreat, Abdišo carries a larger “Gospel book” (*ktābā d-ʿewangalyōn*) in his “arm” (MS A has “in his hands”). Nestorian monastic legislation assumes the ready availability of multiple copies of the “holy book.” See, for example, the late sixth-century *Rules*

"He who carries the seed walks out weeping. But he who carries the sheaf arrives with joy (*ḥadūtā*)."93

And when he saw the blessed Qardagh from a distance, he answered him and happily said to him, "Very weak are your chains, my lord *marzbān*. They are of no account against us, since we are bound by the Holy Spirit and on the path to heaven.⁹⁴ But in this way nobles and world leaders receive guests (*'aksnāyē*) who come to visit them."⁹⁵

The blessed Qardagh answered with great joy and said to him, "Although we in our error put you in chains, you have released us from the bonds of paganism. And you induced us to come and ask your forgiveness. And like a merciful father may you ask our Lord to absolve the sins we committed before Him."

And immediately he dismounted from his horse and fell before the feet of the holy Abdišo, weeping and saying, "Forgive me, my lord, servant of God. And petition my Lord Christ to make me worthy to be perfected in His love."⁹⁶

And the blessed one took him by the hand and stood him up, and he kissed him and said to him, "Come in peace, my son, whom I have begotten through my chains.⁹⁷ Our Lord Jesus Christ awaits you. And His holy angels rejoice in you."

of *Abraham of Kaškar*, 8 (Chabot, 58; Vööbus, 161); further evidence at Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 2: 388–91; §§35 and 64 below.

93. The Psalm (Ps. 125:6) aptly expresses Abdišo's joyful reception of the spiritual son, who has been converted by the "seed" of Christian doctrine planted during his visit to Arbela. For the invocation of the same psalm in Armenian martyr literature, see R. Thomson, "Uses of the Psalms in Some Early Armenian Authors," in *From Byzantium to Iran: Armenian Studies in Honour of Nina G. Garsoïan*, ed. J.-P. Mahé and R. W. Thomson (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 284.

94. The imagery of chains holds a prominent place in the Qardagh legend. In this and other scenes (§§23–26 and 51–54), Qardagh's biographer repeatedly emphasizes the paradoxical weakness of earthly chains to bind (*lme'sar*) the Christian.

95. The hermit's explanation is ironic. True, he has come out from his home to greet the *marzbān*, but he welcomes him not as a secular guest in the manner of "nobles and world leaders," but as a fellow ascetic "stranger" or "pilgrim" (*'aksnāyā*, from Gr. ξένος). For the broader context, see esp. P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *JRS* 61 (1971): 91 (repr. with additions in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* [Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1982], 131), on asceticism as a "long drawn-out, solemn ritual of dissociation—of becoming the total stranger." Syriac monastic legislation of the late Sasanian period prominently identifies monks as "pilgrim-brothers" (*'ahē 'aksnāyē*). See, for example, the preface to *Rules of Abraham of Kaškar*, and the *Rules of Dādišo'*, (Chabot, 52, 91; Vööbus, 152, 165).

96. Contemporaries of Qardagh's biographer, such as St. Isaac of Nineveh, often stress the virtue of tears of repentance, as do also earlier Syriac writers. See, for example, the citations listed by L. Leloir, "La pensée monastique d'Éphrem le Syrien," *Travaux de l'Institut catholique de Paris* 10 (1964): 200: "L'ermite, pour saint Éphrem, est un *abilā*, un homme qui pleure." Repentance remains, by contrast, only a peripheral theme of the Qardagh legend, where weeping can also be an attribute of Satan and his minions (§§35 [twice] and 61).

97. Abdišo's salutation of Qardagh as "my Son whom I have begotten" (*ber[ly] d-yeldet*) echoes

31. Then the servants led the pack animals to a certain monastery that was in the foothills of the mountain, with orders not to say to whom they belonged. But those two [Qardagh and Abdišo] ascended to the cave in which the holy Abdišo was living.⁹⁸ And when it was evening, the blessed Abdišo stood up to sing the evening prayer service. And the blessed Qardagh was standing beside him in reverence and great joy.⁹⁹ And, behold, a hoard of savage demons appeared on the cliff above them, dancing and clapping their hands, mocking [them]¹⁰⁰ and saying, “Oh, how beautiful it is for the *paṭaḥšā* and *marzbān* leaving behind his house, his honor, and his power to pass the night in fasting on the cliffs with imposters living in caves!”

The blessed Abdišo did not pause from his prayer service but signaled to holy Mar Qardagh that he should give them a suitable response. And the blessed one replied and said to them, “You are always liars and fathers of mendacity. But this thing you said is true: it is truly beautiful for a *paṭaḥšā* and *marzbān* to delight in the spiritual nourishment that is true life together with holy men whose labors conquer your crafty schemes, and who have abandoned the earth and hasten to heaven.¹⁰¹ But while I delighted in finely sea-

Syriac baptismal formulae. See, for example, *Didascalia* XI, where the imposition of the bishop’s hand on the baptized signals the Lord’s proclamation: “You are My son. On this day I have begotten you” (Winkler, “Prebaptismal Anointing and Its Implications,” 35–36). The hermit’s kiss confirms his spiritual paternity of the man who formerly bound him with chains. For the ritual kiss in early Christian tradition, see M. Penn, “Performing Family: Ritual Kissing and the Construction of Early Christian Kinship,” *JCS* 10, no. 2 (2002): 151–74.

98. For caves and cliffs as the abode of Syrian ascetics, see pseudo-Ephrem, *Memra on Solitaries, Desert-Dwellers, and Anchorites*, ll. 69–72 (Amar, 72); Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Historia Religiosa*, I, 2 (Jacob of Nisibis); II.2, 4 (Julian Saba); VI, 1, 7–9 (Simeon the Elder); XXVII, 1: “Others embrace the [ascetic] life in holes and caves” (Price, 177). Further citations at Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 2: 170.

99. The verb *qām*, “to rise, stand,” used in this scene of ascetic training, is a key term for Syrian Christian spirituality; its connotations include not only the standing prayer of monks and angels, but also the concepts of covenant and resurrection. Qardagh’s biographer makes frequent use of the verb in his descriptions of holy men and spiritual beings (§§7, 9, 30–34 [passim], 53, 62, and 65), often in combination with expressions of joy or exultation (§§28, 30–31, and 33–34). For the rich semantic range of the root in early Syriac literature, see S. Griffith, “Monks, ‘Singles’, and the ‘Sons of the Covenant’: Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology,” in *Eulogema: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, S. J.*, ed. E. Carr, S. Parenti, and A. Thiermeyer (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1993), 148–52; and esp. G. Nedungatt, “The Covenanters of the Early Syriac-Speaking Church,” *OCP* 39 (1973): 191–215, 419–44, on Aphrahat’s use of the term.

100. Monastic literature often attributes raucous behavior to demons. For a similar scene of demonic mockery, see the Syriac *Life of Anthony*, 39 (Draguet, 40; 63), where in a passage unique to the Syriac version, Anthony describes how the demons “came to me, whistling, clapping [their] hands, and dancing.” Note that here, as often, the demons appear in a throng (*gūdā*), descending from above. See, in general, A. Guillaumont, “Démon, dans la littérature monastique,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 3 (1957): 141–238.

101. The verb tenses are significant: the holy men have already abandoned (*šbaq[ō]*) earth

soned tables and exquisite wines in accordance with your polluted will, I was deprived of the pure table of life in Christ.¹⁰² And I was a long way from God. And I was made a companion to you dark and rebellious ones [who are] being kept for the punishment that is unending.¹⁰³ But today since Christ has made me worthy of the light of His doctrine, behold, I delight in the spiritual table of His holy teaching. But you, polluted ones, depart to the outer darkness.”¹⁰⁴

And immediately they departed, wailing and crying out and causing disturbance on the mountain.¹⁰⁵

32. And when they had completed the prayer service and had sat down, the holy Abdišo said to the blessed Qardagh, “Look, my son, we have here some hummus and a little sweet juice in a gourd. Let us eat, my son, and drink water.”¹⁰⁶

And Qardagh answered and said to him, “Whatever is your desire, my father, joyfully will I fulfill it.”¹⁰⁷

And when they had prayed and begun to eat, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to them and said, “Peace be with you.” And together with his speech, he extended his hand bearing a loaf of pure bread and said to the blessed Qardagh, “When we came to you, you chained us in fetters. And you gave us bread without enough water to stay alive. But today when you have arrived before us, behold, we have given you rest in the high and majestic

and now hasten (*rhibin*) to heaven. For the “spiritual nourishment” (*tursāyā rūḥānāyā*) that Qardagh now enjoys with his ascetic mentor, see §1 above.

102. The Syriac puns on the contrast between the “pure table” (*pātōrā dakyā*) of Christ and the “finely seasoned tables” (*pātōrē mmaḏkē*) of the Persian noble banquet. Syriac writers use the same term, *pātōrā*, for a communion table or an altar in a church.

103. For East-Syrian allusions to the demons’ rebellion against God, see the *Letter of the Catholikos Sabrišo’ to the Monks of Bar-Qaiḏi* (598 c.e.) and esp. the *Letter of the Catholikos Giwargis to Mina the Priest* (680 c.e.), both in the *Synodicon Orientale* (Chabot, 466, 204; 496, 231).

104. Cf. Matt. 8:12, where Jesus teaches that the “children of the kingdom” will go to the “outer darkness” (*ḥesōkā barāyā*) where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” On cursing in general, see W. Speyer, “Fluch,” *RAC* 7 (1969): 1242–88 (1244–47, esp. 1258, on the cursing of Satan and his minions).

105. For the characteristic tumult and disorder of the demons, see J. Daniélou, “Les demons de l’air dans la *Vie d’Antoine*,” in *Antonius Magnus Eremita, 356–1956: Studia ad antiquum monachismum spectantia*, ed. B. Steidle (Rome: Orbis Catholicus, 1956), 140.

106. The hagiographer presents here an “ascetic banquet” in the high mountains along the upper Great Zab River basin. For the symbolism of communal dining in the early church, see A. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), esp. 175–98, on bread and water symbolism in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles and pseudo-Clementine literature.

107. For obedience as the path to humility in monastic spirituality, see Nagel, *Motivierung der Askese*, 16–18; D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Tradition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 113–14, 219.

mountains and have brought you pure bread and cold water that flows from the top of the mountains.¹⁰⁸ But come in peace, for there is great joy among all the legions of angels at your coming to us.”¹⁰⁹

And he [the angel] placed the bread upon the table and departed. And the blessed ones immediately stood up [from the table], and the two of them kneeled for about three hours, praying and rejoicing and glorifying God. And when they had finished their prayer, they ate that substance that had been sent to them from heaven, and for the entire night they attended closely to the service of God.¹¹⁰

33. But there was an old man of great age named Beri, and he lived in a cave that was about nine miles distant from the cave of the blessed Abdišo. He was a great and godly man, and for sixty-eight years he had been living on that mountain.¹¹¹ And the Lord said to him in a vision, “Rise, go to the cave of Abdišo and see there Qardagh the *marzbān*. Comfort him by your appearance and strengthen him by your word.”

And the old man stood up with great joy, and when the morning dawned, he approached the cave of Abdišo. And when Abdišo saw him he was stunned, for [Beri] had not been out of his cave for sixty-eight years. And the old man answered and said to Abdišo, “Behold, you have a great guest. Why have you not called me to the banquet (*būsāmā*) with him?”

Abdišo said to him, “Forgive me, our father. I told [myself] that I should not trouble your old age, something that should never be allowed.”

And the old man said to him, “Although you did not invite me, the Lord has sent me.”

And they prayed for and greeted each other. And the old man took hold

108. The angel here identifies with, and speaks for, Abdišo. See §23 above, where Qardagh orders that the captured hermit be given a “little bread, but no water.” The “pure bread” (*lahmā naqdā*) brought by the angel recalls the manna the Lord provided the Israelites in the wilderness. For the reception of “pure bread” in the wilderness, see also the *Judas Kyriakos Legend* (Drijvers and Drijvers, 66; 79v [44]), quoting Matt. 7:9. The angel’s gift of “cold water” (*mayā qarīve*) may also have a scriptural referent. Cf. Matt. 10:42, where Christ promises to reward anyone who receives one of his disciples with “even a cup of cold (water).”

109. The angels are important witnesses to Qardagh’s spiritual progress (§§2 and 30). Their joy here echoes the formulation of Luke 15:10 (“joy before the angels of God” for the sinner who repents). For Ephrem’s frequent citation of the Lukan passage, see Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen bei Ephrām*, 64. Here, according to MS A, “all the legions of angels” (*kolhein legyōnē d-malā’kē*) celebrate Qardagh’s arrival. For similar terminology in Aphrahat and the *Acts of Thomas*, see Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen bei Ephrām*, 34. MS B places the celebration simply “among angels and men.”

110. For the ideal of sleepless prayer in the Syrian Christian tradition, see Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 2: 264–65; Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 132–36, 141–43.

111. Age is an important theme of the Qardagh legend. It can serve, alternately, as a mark of ascetic distinction, as, for example, here (see also §§24 and 41), or, on the other hand, as a sign of weakness (§§37–38 and 59) and corruption (see §§29 and 35 for Satan as an “old man,” an “old Ethiopian,” and an “old dog”).

of Qardagh and kissed him and said, “Come in peace, Esau, a wild man who has changed to become a gentle Jacob living in the tent of the righteous.”¹¹² And he sat down and spoke with him the word of God until the ninth hour, and he blessed him and kissed him. And standing up, he returned to his cave.

34. And during the five days the blessed Qardagh stayed with the holy Abdišo, he beseeched him night and day that he should be deemed worthy of the mark of baptism. And during the night, as the sixth day was beginning to dawn, holy Mar Sergius the martyr appeared to Abdišo in a dream and said to him, “Why do you delay opening the gate of martyrdom before my brother Qardagh?”

And when Abdišo awoke from his sleep, he was very afraid, and he called the blessed Qardagh and said to him, “Arise, my son, and go down to the monastery where the servants are, and complete that which has been ordered of me during this night.”

And as they were coming down from the mountain, the blessed Abdišo told Qardagh about the vision that he had seen during the night. And when they arrived at the monastery the brothers assembled and prepared for the baptism. And rejoicing and exulting, he and his two servants¹¹³ received the mark of Christ. And they partook of the holy mysteries [i.e., they received Communion]. [Qardagh] then stayed with the holy Abdišo for seven days after he received [var. B] the mark of baptism. And rising, he returned to his house, exulting in the faith of Christ.¹¹⁴

35. And while he was at a rest house along the road, Satan appeared to him in the form of a man, a *magus* with torn clothes, wailing and weeping and saying, “Qardagh, my son, why have you deserted me and gone over to my enemies?”¹¹⁵

112. A quotation of Gen. 25:27, which contrasts Esau the hunter and “wild man” (*dbar*; literally “man of the open country”) and Jacob “the man gentle and living in a tent.” The phrase “tent of the righteous” may reflect the influence of Ps. 117:15; see §50, where the hagiographer quotes the preceding verses of the same Psalm.

113. “Servants”: *laymaw[hi]*; literally “young men.”

114. The career of the Persian convert and martyr Išo’sabran († ca. 620) provides a useful parallel. See the *Acts of Išo’sabran (Mahanōš)*, 1 (Chabot, 511–13), where Išo’sabran, a Persian nobleman of Adiabene, is baptized at a “small monastery located to the east of Arbela” (Chabot, 511, ll. 7–8). For adult baptism in the East-Syrian tradition, see W. de Vries, “Zur Liturgie der Erwachsenentaufe bei der Nestorianer,” *OCP* 9 (1943): 400–73; and §69 below on the baptismery included in the church of Mar Qardagh at Melqi.

115. The depiction of Satan is precise: his “torn clothes” (*mšarēn m’ānaw[hi]*) provide a stark contrast to the “resplendent garments” worn by angels (see n. 69 above); his “wailing and weeping” recall the behavior of the demons (§31) and later the assembled *magi* (§57). “Magian” conversion to Christianity, here depicted as a fourth-century event, was increasingly an actual phenomenon in late Sasanian Iraq. For an astute analysis and overview, see Morony, *Iraq*, 298–300.

But the blessed man boldly said to him, “I trust in the power of my Lord Christ, that I will snatch many away from the destruction of your jaws, and lead them to the house of the worship of my Lord Christ.”

And Satan said to him, “For you there are feeble men living on cliffs, but for me there are the kings and nobles of all of Persia. And because you have deceived me, I will go and instruct the kings and the rulers, and I will make you die a bitter death.”

But the blessed Qardagh sealed himself with the sign of the Cross and said to him, “May my Lord Christ, for whose love I am prepared to suffer and die joyfully, destroy you.”

And immediately he was transformed and became like an old Ethiopian with his hands placed on his head, wailing and weeping as he ran away.¹¹⁶ And when the blessed one arrived back at his house, he sent for a certain brother, a solitary worthy of good memory, named Isaac.¹¹⁷ He [Isaac] taught him the psalms of blessed David and read out before him from the book of the Holy Gospel.¹¹⁸ From this time, the blessed one restrained his mouth from the eating of meat; and from evening to evening he was nourished by the fixed amount (*mšūhtā*) that he prepared with heavenly seasonings.¹¹⁹

36. He opened his treasure chests and distributed enormous gifts and lav-

116. “Like an old Ethiopian”: *ʿa(y)k kūšāyā sabā*. Here, as in §29, Qardagh’s curse (“May my Lord Christ . . . destroy you”) strips Satan of the form (*ʿeskēmā*; cf. Gr. *σχῆμα*) he has assumed to deceive the saint. For the shape-shifting stratagems of the devil, see J. B. Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 168–73, on the *Life of Anthony*. The monastic literature of late antiquity often presents Satan and his demonic servants as dark or black, and hence as “Indian” or “Ethiopian,” as, for example, in the Syriac *Life of Anthony*, 6 (Draguet, 11; 16) and 36 (36; 56), where the “Adversary” appears as an “Indian” (*hindwā*). For a well-documented overview, see G. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), esp. 44–45, 77–80, 85–103. See also P. Mayerson, “Anti-Black Sentiment in the *Vitae Patrum*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 71 (1978): 308–10, on “Ethiopian” demons in the seventh-century East-Syrian translation of Palladius’s *Paradise of the Holy Fathers*.

117. The hagiographer identifies Isaac as an *iḥidāyā*, a “solitary” or monk. On the *iḥidāyē*, or “singles in God’s service,” in Syrian ascetic tradition, see Griffith, “Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology,” 142–45, 158–60; idem, “‘Singles’ in God’s Service: Thoughts on the *iḥidāyē* from the Works of Aphrahat and Ephraem the Syrian,” *The Harp* 4 (1991): 145–59; and E. Beck, “Ascétisme et monachisme chez Saint Ephrem,” *OS* 3 (1958): 273–98, esp. 294. Nestorian monastic legislation of the late Sasanian period occasionally speaks of the *iḥidāyē* as a general term for monks.

118. Note the distinction the hagiographer makes here: Isaac teaches Qardagh the psalms (from memory) but reads to him from a “book of the Holy Gospel.” See also §63 below, where Isaac reads to the Qardagh from the Acts of the Apostles. For an intriguing parallel case from seventh-century Adiabene, see the *Acts of Iṣōʿsabrasan (Mahanōš)*, 4 (Chabot, 525), where the convert and future martyr Iṣōʿsabrasan learns the psalms from memory but has difficulty learning to read.

119. For fasting in Syrian Christian tradition, see Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 2: 261–64, 294–95; Juhl, *Askese im Liber Graduum und bei Afrahat*, 144–46. The *Rules of Abraham of Kaškar*, 2 (Chabot, 54;

ish alms to the churches, monasteries, and holy convents, and to the poor and the needy and the orphans and the widows. And the crowds of the sick constantly gathered before him and at his gate.¹²⁰ But his wife and his parents and all the men of his household became deeply distressed when they saw all of his lavish spending. But the blessed one called them and said to them, “Fools, why do you mourn for the sake of [these] earthly possessions that are being stored in heaven? Listen, if you will, to the life-giving Gospel of our Savior, who proclaims, *‘Do not place for yourselves treasures in the earth where the worm and the maggot destroy, and where thieves dig and steal. But where your treasure is, there also let your heart be. If then you love me and are mine, wherever I am you also [will be]. And if you are not with me, then you are against me.’*¹²¹ Don’t worry yourselves about my possessions because I have given them to my Lord Christ, He who is the true king.”

And he became peaceful and holy, and gentle and kind toward the men of his household and toward everyone. And he ceased from the battles and contests to which he was accustomed. And he abstained from the chase and the hunt and the games in the stadium, and all the other [similar pursuits].¹²² And he engaged in fasting and in the prayer service and in the reading of books.¹²³ He became assiduous also in the hearing of lawsuits, and in free-

44; Vööbus, 156) (Abraham of Kaškar †585) lays out the scriptural foundations for the rejection of meat (on this theme, see also H. Musurillo “The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic Writers,” *Traditio* 12 [1956]: 44–48). The East-Syrian *Rules Attributed to Marūtā*, 59.2 (Vööbus, 148) forbid the eating of meat in “Nazirite” monasteries.

Qardagh’s rejection of meat marks a sharp break from Zoroastrian tradition. See P. Gignoux, “Dietary Laws in Pre-Islamic and Post-Sasanian Iran: A Comparative Survey,” *JSAI* 17 (1996): 17–20; and M. Boyce, “Zoroaster the Priest,” *BSOAS* 33 (1970): 31–32, on blood-sacrifice and meat-eating in Iranian tradition.

120. On almsgiving and care of the poor in Syrian tradition, see Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 2: 361–71; Juhl, *Askese im Liber Graduum und bei Afrahat*, 148–50; and, in general, S. A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1990). See also P. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 2002), 74–112, 137–46.

121. The first sentence quotes Matt. 6:19, 21 (with minor variations), omitting verse 20 (“But place for yourselves treasures in heaven . . .”). But cf. §1, where the hagiographer presents the stories of the martyrs as a “heavenly treasure”). The second sentence is not scriptural, though it could conceivably echo John 14:15. The last sentence paraphrases Matt. 12:30 (Luke 11:23). Such combinations suggest that the writer is quoting from memory. Here, as in §15, the hagiographer’s formulation makes Jesus’s words more direct (“And if you are not with me . . .”).

122. For the hunt and games of the stadium as key markers of Sasanian elite identity, see above §§4–5, 10–11, and 24–25, and chapter 2 below.

123. The context implies scriptural study, but the text reads simply “books.” This combination of activities appears frequently in Syrian monastic legislation. See, for example, the *Rules of Abraham of Kaškar*, 3 (Chabot, 55–56; Vööbus, 156–57) on the brothers’ duty to devote themselves to “prayer, reading, and the service (*tešmeštā*) of the hours.” See also the fifth-century *Rules Attributed to Marūtā*, 44.1 (Vööbus, 138): “The community of the brotherhood will be diligent

ing the oppressed from their oppressors, and in saving the falsely accused from their calumniators in all the lands beneath his rule.¹²⁴

37. And his father and mother were living in a certain district called Dbar Hewton, since they had abundant possessions and riches there and a certain renowned fire temple, which they had built and in which they lived.¹²⁵ [This was] the one that a little later blessed Qardagh made into the great monastery, which exists to this day and is called after his name.¹²⁶ But when his parents heard that he had become a Christian and was dividing up his possessions and distributing his riches to the churches, the monasteries, and the poor, it grieved them sorely. And his father said to the mother of the blessed one, “This is a great evil that has befallen us, and we have become a curse to our peers. And while we hoped to have a good heir, we have given birth to and raised the extirpator of our house.”¹²⁷

But his mother said to her husband, “It seems to me that we should not offend him, but leave him to his own wishes to do whatever he wants. But we have already grown old and are about to die. The riches and possessions belong to him and are beneath his control, and perhaps it is a beautiful thing he has done. If we struggle to bring it to an end, perhaps we will sin.”¹²⁸

But her husband rebuked her and said to her, “Be silent, fool! I think that you too are a Nazarene, and perhaps you made your son go out of his mind.”¹²⁹

in service, in prayer, in reading and fasting according to the custom established for them by the head of the monastery.”

124. The emphasis on the resolution of *legal* disputes hints at the strength of late Sasanian legal tradition. See Morony, *Iraq*, 364–67, on the expanding scope of Christian canon law during the sixth to seventh century.

125. For the combination of fire temple and aristocratic residence, see n. 19 above, with further discussion in chapter 5 below. Dbar Hewton is the name for the plain that lies to the northeast of Arbela, on the southern side of the Great Zab River. For its location, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 225 (map 3).

126. No other reference to this monastery survives, but it is located squarely within the region, where the name Qardagh survived among Christians. See chapter 5 below on the diffusion of the cult of Mar Qardagh.

127. Gušnōy’s despair at his son’s apostasy dramatizes the acute problem faced by Zoroastrian families whose children converted to Christianity. Such conversion threatened not only the soul of the apostate, but the spiritual well-being of the entire family. For the reciprocal religious obligations between parents and their children, see M. Boyce, “The Pious Foundations of the Zoroastrians,” *BSOAS* 31 (1968): 270–89; and chapter 4 below.

128. For the Christian sympathies of Qardagh’s mother, see §8 above, where she tells her son that the Christians worship the “one true God.” She is more tentative here in her advice to her husband: “Perhaps it is a beautiful thing he has done. . . . perhaps we will sin.”

129. For Nazarene as a term of abuse, see F. de Blois, “*Naṣrānī* (*Ναζωραῖος*) and *hanīf* (*ἕθνικός*): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam,” *BSOAS* 65 (2002): 10, arguing that “when Syriac authors depict their non-Christian opponents as calling the Christians ‘Nazoreans’, they are in fact using a literary topos, that is to say consciously alluding to Acts

38. And immediately, his father wrote to him [Qardagh] as follows: “Even if you hate yourself and despise your life and have become a Nazarene, and scorn our family and make us contemptible among our peers, you do not have the authority to distribute to the Nazarenes the possessions and riches of the fire temple.”¹³⁰

But the blessed one, when he received the letter of his father and read it, laughed greatly and said, “Our old man is a great fool and rushes to Gehenna.”¹³¹ And he wrote to him the following reply:¹³² “Behold, old man, you worship fire, because by fire you will be tortured. But I will give my possessions to Christ because together with Him I will be refreshed.¹³³ And I hope and trust in Him. And the fire temples in which you take pride soon I will make them into temples of Christ, and I will set up splendid altars in them. My lot is not with you, nor is my inheritance, because Christ has called me and brought me to Him and made me a son of His hidden Father.”

39. But the wife of the holy one could no longer bear it when she saw the distribution of possessions and division of riches, and she decided to write and inform her father, who held the rank and office of *šāher kwāst šabūr nekōrgan*.¹³⁴ After she had written the letter and prepared to send it the next morning, there appeared to her in a dream that very night a certain youth

24:5.” See also S. Brock, “Some Aspects of Greek Words in Syriac,” in *Synkretismus im syrisch-per-sischen Kulturgebiet*, ed. A. Dietrich (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975) (repr. in Brock, *SPLA*, IV), 91–95, esp. 94, on the key passage in the *Acts of Mar Pethion* (Corluy, 16). Significantly, the term appears only in the East-Syrian version of the *Judas Kyriakos Legend* (Drijvers and Drijvers, 66; 82r), where Satan denounces “Jesus the Nazarene.” See also §§38, 48–51, and 57 below.

130. This statement reveals the hagiographer’s familiarity with the Zoroastrian system of fire temple endowments. For context, see M. Boyce, “On the Sacred Fires of the Zoroastrians,” *BSOAS* 31 (1968): 52–68; also idem, “Pious Foundations,” 274–76; de Menasce, *Feux et fondations pieuses*, 25–28.

131. Qardagh’s laughter signals his ebullient defeat of his enemies, including all “Magians” destined to burn in Gehenna. See §§45, 49, and 56–57 below. For other instances of Christian sons who curse their pagan fathers, see Speyer, “Fluch,” 1252–53 (n. 104 above).

132. Although stories of father-son conflict are relatively common in the Christian hagiography of late antiquity, the use of letters to narrate this conflict is unusual. The legend’s frequent use of letters (§§38–43 and 48–51) does, however, recall the narrative techniques of the *Alexander Romance* and other pre-Christian tales.

133. Or “I will find delight” (*’it li lm’etbasāmū*), again using a term derived from the verb *bsem*, “to be fragrant, to delight.” For other forms of the same root, see §§1, 9, 31, 40, 49, and 59. For the constructions *’it li* and *’it lak*, used here to emphasize the necessity of the opposing fates awaiting Qardagh and his father, see n. 22 above.

134. This is one of the many places where the hagiographer uses Persian administrative or religious terms without any explanation. See chapter 1 below for commentary. The precise meaning of the full title, which is given only here, is obscure. See chapter 4, n. 45 below for the suggestion that the first part of the title may refer to a specific Sasanian province. In later sections (§§59 and 61), he is referred to as simply the *nekōrgan*, a well-attested high Sasanian post.

of fine countenance, clothed in white and sitting upon a golden chair at the gate of the fortress of the blessed one.¹³⁵ [He was] holding a pen of fire and writing a letter upon broad white parchment and sealing it with his signet ring. And he sent it to heaven by means of handsome youths clothed in white garments and flying by wings of the spirit. But when she saw that awesome vision and the youths ascending and descending to transmit the letters to heaven,¹³⁶ she came before him and asked him, saying, “Who are you, my lord, and what is your work? Why do you sit here with the *marzbān* unaware of you? And what are you writing?”

And that one answered and said to her, “I am the general of the Lord God who made heaven and earth. The Great King of Ages sent me that I might record in writing the gifts and alms that your husband makes and send an account of them to heaven.¹³⁷ But when you have said, ‘The *marzbān* is not aware of you,’ you tell a great lie. The *marzbān* knows me and is aware of my presence. But you do not know me, because your heart is on earth.”

40. And when she awoke from her sleep, she was in a state of great fear, and, trembling, she ran before the blessed Qardagh. And she told him what she had seen. Then she also showed him the letter she had written during the night to send to her father. But he [Qardagh] said to her, “Truly, great and awesome and true is the vision, but your heart is hardened, for our Lord said in his Gospel, *I have come to divide a man against his father, daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and [to make] the men of his household a man’s enemies. And all this up to the point that even between a man and his wife, who are of one flesh, there will be division and schism.*”¹³⁸ And

135. The imagery of the dream vision draws upon a long tradition of Christian (and earlier Jewish) depictions of a heavenly bureaucracy. See, in general, L. Koep, *Das himmlische Buch in Antike und Christentum: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur altchristlichen Bildersprache* (Bonn: P. Hanstein Verlag, 1952), discussed in detail in chapter 4 below.

136. For the depiction of angels as “youths” (*laymē*), clothed in white, flying by wings, ascending and descending from heaven, see the Ascension scene from the Rabbula Gospel (chapter 4, n. 49 below). Similar imagery occurs already in Ephrem and Aphrahat. See R. Murray, “Some Themes and Problems in Early Syriac Angelology,” in *V Symposium Syriacum 1988: Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, 29–31 août 1988*, ed. R. Lavenant (Rome: PISO, 1990), 150, on Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 16. For other instances of epistolary correspondence between heaven and earth in Syrian tradition, see Brock, “Greek Words in Syriac,” 104–6, on Jacob of Serugh (†521).

137. The image of a heavenly register in which angels record the deeds of saints and sinners is widely attested in the Christian literature of late antiquity. See Koep, *Das himmlische Buch*, 68–85; and esp. R. Lane Fox, “Literacy and Power in Early Christianity,” in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. A. K. Bowman and G. Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 133. Here the angel seated on the golden throne identifies himself as the “general” (*rab ḥaylawāteh*) of the Lord God. See Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen bei Ephräm*, 72–76, for similar descriptions (though rare in Ephrem) of chief angels in charge of “heavenly armies.”

138. Cf. Matt. 10:35; Luke 12:51. For the Syrian exegetical tradition underlying this fusion, see R. Murray, “The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows to Baptism in the Ancient Syrian Church,” *New Testament Studies* 21 (1975): 68–72; and chapter 4 below.

this He says in another place, ‘On that day on which He will be revealed in glory and make the resurrection, He will delight the just and torment the wicked. There will be two in one bed: one will be led away to the heavenly kingdom and the banquet; the other will be left behind on earth for Gehenna and torment.’¹³⁹ But I trust in my Lord Christ because after a little while I also will follow my possessions to Him.”

From that day, his wife did not dare to say anything to him, nor reveal her anger about the blessed one’s scattering of the possessions.

41. And after two years and three months had gone by, and Qardagh was walking in all the virtues that adorn true Christians, the various peoples who were in the South and in the West heard about the change in the blessed one’s habits and learned that he had withdrawn himself from battles, ceased from conflicts, and loved a life of peace.¹⁴⁰ All of them together, the Romans and the Arabs and the other peoples who surrounded them, prepared [for war], gathered like the sand on the shore of the ocean, and set out to come into the lands beneath the blessed one’s authority.¹⁴¹ But he [Qardagh] some days earlier had gone up on the mountain to his teacher, Mar Abdišo. And after he had stayed with him for a month, while the two of them were making their customary visit to the holy old man, Beri the anchorite,¹⁴² the Romans and Arabs made great pillaging raids, ravaged and laid waste all the lands beneath the blessed one’s authority from the Tormara River up to the frontier city of Nisibis.¹⁴³ And they led away into captivity also his father, his

139. Qardagh’s speech again paraphrases, rather than quotes, the Gospel passages. The final sentence (“There will be two in one bed . . .”) expands Luke 17:34 to make the text more explicit. The additions highlight the hagiographer’s themes of the heavenly “banquet” or “delight” (*bisāmā*) reserved for believers (§§1, 33, 40, and 59) and the Gehenna to which those left “on earth” will be condemned (§§15, 38, and 54).

140. For the narrative paradigm that underlies the following scenes, see the story of Bahrām Gōr’s response to an invasion of Iran in Firdowsi, *Shāhnāma* (Warner and Warner, 7: 84–92).

141. The Arab-Roman collaboration that the hagiographer imagines here accurately reflects the military alliances of the late Sasanian period. For the political context, see I. Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. 1, pt. 1, *Political and Military History* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), esp. 226–30 (on the Assyrian campaign of 541); also Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 141–43. For Arab-Sasanian relations, see esp. Morony, *Iraq*, 215–20. The entire scene that follows is suffused with the imagery and diction of Israelite holy war. For enemy troops as numerous as “sand on the seashore,” see 1 Sam. 13:5; cf. Josh. 7:12. The *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 33) uses similar imagery in its account of the Arab conquests of the 640s (“children of Ishmael . . . as numerous as the sand of the seashore”).

142. An “anchorite”: literally a “weeper” or “mourner” (*ʿābilā*). As early as the fourth century, the term had gained currency as a designation for Syrian ascetics. See esp. pseudo-Ephrem, *Memra on Solitaries, Desert Dwellers, and Anchorites*. Note that a “few” or “some days” (*yawmātā qalil*) here encompasses a period of a full month.

143. A repetition of the formulation at §5, though the hagiographer now explicitly identifies Nisibis as the city “of the frontier” (*d-bēt thūmē*).

mother, his wife, his brother, his sister, and all the men of his household.¹⁴⁴ But two hundred thirty-five horsemen from his army escaped, and they hastened to the mountain to look for the blessed one. And they went and found him in the cave of Beri the anchorite, together with his teacher Abdišo and a great congregation of priests gathered in his honor.¹⁴⁵

42. And when the blessed Qardagh saw them, he immediately came forward and said to them, “You seem to me to have escaped from a pillaging raid.”

And one of them, a man of savage habits and evil idolatry, said to him, “While *paṭahšās* and *marzbāns* live in the caves of thieves and impostors, it is only right that something like this should befall us.”

And upon his speech, the angel of the Lord struck him, and he fell dead on the spot. And when his companions saw what had happened, they were very afraid. And they all believed in our Lord Jesus Christ and received the mark of holy baptism on that day.¹⁴⁶

Then the blessed Qardagh said to the holy and blessed Beri and Abdišo, “My fathers and masters, pray for me that I may go and by the power of my Lord Christ and by your prayers bring back many captives from the raiders.” And they sealed him with the sign [var. A: of the Cross] and kissed him and sent him in peace. When he arrived at his fortress atop Melqi and saw the exposed corpses and his house plundered and abandoned,¹⁴⁷ it grieved him sorely. Immediately he sent swift messengers after them [the invaders], and he wrote to them as follows: “You suppose that I, Qardagh, have taken off my former power of warlike strength. And because of this you have dared to come into and lay waste the lands beneath my authority. But know this! I have not taken off but have donned a cloak of undefeated power. Now send me all the souls you have captured, take for yourselves the possessions, and go in peace. It will be better for you not to provoke me to battle.”

43. But when they received and read the letters, they wrote back to him insult, abuse, and words of derision. But he once again wrote to them as fol-

144. For the deportation of captives from Sasanian territory during the Roman-Persian wars of the sixth and early seventh centuries, see M. Morony, “Population Transfers between Sasanian Iran and the Byzantine Empire,” in *La Persia e Bisanzio* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2004), 170–79.

145. This is the only passage in the entire Qardagh legend that mentions priests (*kāhnē*, rather than the more common *qašišē*). MS A adds “deacons” (*mšamšānē*).

146. Instant divine punishment is a common theme throughout the apocryphal acts of the apostles and martyr literature (see, for example, Speyer, “Fluch,” 1243); so too are scenes of mass baptism. Qardagh’s biographer uses these motifs only in this one passage, a feature that also distinguishes his narrative from later Persian martyr acts (see the discussion of the *History of the Martyrs of Tur Ber ‘ayn* in chapter 4 below). When in a later scene, a *magus* attacks Qardagh for his “blasphemies against the gods,” it is Qardagh himself, rather than an angel, who smites the *magus* (§57).

147. Literally, he saw the “slain lying about and his house plundered and without a man in it.”

lows: "From when I put on Christ, the peace of the world, I did not want of my own volition to clothe myself in the rage of battles.¹⁴⁸ But send me my father, my mother, my wife, my brother, and my sister and all the men of my household and all the captives whom you led away from the lands beneath my rule. Take for yourselves the possessions, turn away, and depart from me. And do not force me to pursue you."

But when they heard these things, taking confidence in the fact that they had already arrived in the lands under their control, they cut off the head of his brother and sent it to him. And when the blessed one saw [it], he was tormented with grief, and his rage was ignited. Immediately he gave the order, and the trumpet sounded, and two hundred thirty-four soldiers and seven of his servants entered into the church of God. And he extended his hands and prayed, saying, "*Judge, Lord, my case and fight against those who fight against me. Take up the weapon and the shield and rise to my aid. Unsheathe the sword and make it flash against my pursuers. And tell my soul, 'I am thy redeemer.'*"¹⁴⁹

44. And when he finished his prayer, he took the sacred dust from in front of the sanctuary (*bēt qūdšā*), and he sprinkled it upon his arms, his horse, and his soldiers.¹⁵⁰ And he hung on his neck a cross of gold in which was fastened the Holy Wood of the Crucifixion of our Savior.¹⁵¹ And he raised his hands and extended his holy gaze on high and made a vow to the Lord, saying, "Lord God, Mighty Warrior of the Ages, if You are with me on this path upon which I set out, and with Your power and aid I overtake my enemies, conquer them, and retrieve from them the captives they led away, and return in peace from this battle that has been set before me, I will tear down the fire temples and build martyr shrines. I will overturn the fire altars, and I will establish holy altars in their places.¹⁵² And the youths, the children of

148. MS A gives Christ's epithet as the "peace of creation" (*šelyā d-britā*). The noun *šelyā*, literally "calm" or "stillness," can also refer to the quiet life of an anchorite. For baptism as the "putting on" of Christ in Syrian tradition, see Beck, "Baptême chez Saint Ephrem," 118–20; Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 18–19.

149. An exact quotation of Ps. 35:1–3.

150. On Qardagh's preparations for holy war, see chapter 2 below. The *ḥnānā* or "sacred dust" that he "sprinkles" (*bdar*) on his weapons, horse, and army would have been composed of earth from the tombs of the martyrs mixed with water or oil. The "sprinkling" of the sacred substance recalls Old Testament scenes of covenant formation and consecration. Cf. Exod. 24:8; Lev. 8:30.

151. For the relics of the True Cross received by the East-Syrian church after the Sasanian capture of Jerusalem in 614, see B. Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1992), 2: 170–72; Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 140–41; and the discussion in chapter 2 below.

152. For *adarōg* (Syr. *ʾadrōqā*), the simplest type of Zoroastrian fire altar, see Boyce, "Sacred Fires of the Zoroastrians," 52–68, with the addendum at Boyce, "Pious Foundations," 208–9; and esp. the *Sasanian Law Book*, 340–41 with references. The term is rare, but not unknown, elsewhere in Syriac literature.

the *magi*, who have been dedicated by their parents to be servants of Satan, I will give as servants to Christ and make them children of the covenant (*bnay qyāmā*).¹⁵³ And the treasures and riches that my parents dedicated and gave to the fire temples, I will distribute them to the churches and monasteries.”

And when he had finished the words of his vow and the speech of his covenant, behold, a voice was heard from the sanctuary of the Lord, saying, “Take courage. Take courage. May you be strong and mighty. Do not fear, My servant Qardagh, because I am with you and will hand over your enemies into your hands.”

And when that voice was heard, immediately he and his soldiers fell down on their faces before the ark of the Lord for about two hours.¹⁵⁴ And rising with joy, they praised God.

45. The holy one gave the order, the trumpet was sounded three times, and they mounted their horses.¹⁵⁵ Then one of his arms-bearers said, “Behold, my lord, we do not know the path by which it is right for us to pursue our enemies.”

The blessed one laughed happily and said to him, “He who pronounced the call of victory will show us the right path on which we will travel, pursue, and overtake our enemies.”

And when they had traveled about two miles, behold, there were pieces of his wife’s silk [garments] lying in the road, for she did this through great wisdom. And through all the land in which the captives traveled, every one or two parasangs,¹⁵⁶ she had secretly moved away from the captives, torn off pieces from the silk that clothed her, and laid it in the road, in order that they should be signs and a marker to her husband to come after them. For she trusted in the valor and strength and compassion of her husband that he would not neglect to follow after the captives.

153. In a practice preserved from earliest Syrian Christian tradition, pious families often dedicated one or more children to Christ as “sons” or “daughters of the covenant.” The masculine plural form used here, *bnay qyāmā*, could designate boys or children of both sexes. Qardagh’s biographer sets the term in parallel to the “children of the magi” (*bnay mgūšē*). For the *bnay qyāmā* in early Syrian tradition, see esp. Nedungatt, “Covenanters;” Griffith, “Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology,” 145–54, with extensive bibliography. In contrast to the extensive debate over the origins of this tradition, there appears to be no extended study of the role of the *bnay qyāmā* in the later Sasanian church.

154. “Ark of the Lord”: *ārōnā d-maryā*. Cf. Joshua’s prayers before the ark at Josh. 7:6, where the ark is called a *q’ibūtā*.

155. The sound of trumpets that accompanies Qardagh’s military campaign (§§43 and 45–46) underscores the evocation of Israelite warfare. See I. H. Jones, “Musical Instruments,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4 (1992): 936, on the association of the trumpet (Hebrew *sōpār*; Syr. *qarnā*) with sacred warfare. See esp. Josh. 6:4–20 on the siege of Jericho.

156. A *parasang* (Syr. *parshā*, from Phl. *farsang*) is a Persian unit of distance equivalent to about 3.5 Roman miles (6 km); it appears only here in the Qardagh legend. Elsewhere (§§29, 33, and 56), and even in this same section, distances are recorded in Roman “miles” (*mīlē*).

When the blessed one saw this, he rejoiced greatly and praised God. And they traveled by these markers until they arrived in the land of the Kurds. And he raised his eyes and looked, and, behold, there were great camps of his enemies pitched beside the Khabur River,¹⁵⁷ for they were confidently encamped [var. A] on the riverbank, eating and drinking, singing songs and rejoicing, pleased with the captives and enormous plunder in their possession.

46. Then the blessed one and his soldiers dismounted from their horses and fell upon their faces on the earth. And he prayed and said, “Heavenly King of Kings, to whom belongs an immutable kingdom and power and rule and mighty strength in heaven and on earth, by Whose power Joshua bar Nun destroyed great and mighty kings, and by Whose uplifted arm the blessed David conquered the peoples all around him, help our infirmity that Your great name may be praised through the victory of Your worshippers forever and ever, Amen.”

And all his soldiers replied with one voice, “Amen.”

And the blessed one gave the order, and they blew three great and fearful trumpet blasts. And at that moment there appeared to the holy one the blessed Mar Abdišo, his teacher, holding in his hand the glorious sign of the Cross and running before him and saying to him, “Behold, my son, the great sign of your victory.¹⁵⁸ Be strong and powerful because the Lord has handed over your enemies into your hands.”

Then [Qardagh] appeared like a terrible lightning bolt against them, triumphant (*naziḥā*) over [his] enemies, like the rising sun, and like a champion (*ganbārā*) who exults in the running of his course.¹⁵⁹ And he cried out to them three times with an angry cry and said to them, “This is the day of retribution for your insolence, impure dogs!”¹⁶⁰

157. The Khabur River here is not the major tributary of the Euphrates in eastern Syria, but the smaller river of the same name that forms part of the modern Iraqi-Turkish border near the town of Zakho in northern Iraq. Qardagh’s biographer twice identifies this region as the land of the Kurds (cf. §12, n. 34 above). For the ethnic distribution of Kurds in late antique Iraq and western Iran, see Morony, *Iraq*, 265–66; V. Minorsky et al., “Kurds,” *EI*², 5 (1986): 439–94 (439–40, 447–49).

158. East-Syrian versions of the True Cross legend envision similar battle scenes in which Constantine carries the Cross “in his hand” as a “sign of victory” (*ʿātā d-zkūtā*), *Memra on the Finding of the Cross*, ll. 129–60 (Brock, 74–75). Here, the hermit Abdišo carries the “glorious sign of the Cross” (*ʿātā šbiḥtā da-šlibā*).

159. Cf. Ps. 19:5 for the imagery of the sun and champion running his course.

160. The tone of the insult is vaguely scriptural. For the evil reputation of dogs in the Bible, and more generally in Semitic cultures, see “Dog,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6 (1992): 1143–44, and “Animals (dog),” in the *Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1 (1908): 511–13. Zoroastrian tradition, by contrast, assigns dogs an honorable role in rituals of death and dismemberment. See M. Boyce, “Dog (ii): In Zoroastrianism,” *Enc. Ir.* 8 (1998): 467–70; Gignoux, “Dietary Laws,” 26–27. For the Islamic rejection of this Zoroastrian view, see E. Yarshatar, “The Persian Presence in the Islamic World,” in *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, ed. R. G. Hovannisian and G. Sabagh (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 34.

And immediately he was burning with fever for the battle. Then all the captives ran out to meet the blessed one and hid behind him. The camps were dispersed before him, and he destroyed them like the ears of new corn in a field, and their corpses fell into the Khabur River like vile locusts.¹⁶¹ A few of them escaped on foot to the highlands, and he beat and chased them all the way into the foothills of that mountain on whose peak the ark of Noah's family (*bēt Nōh*) came to rest.¹⁶² And the holy one returned in great victory and joy, singing [hymns] and saying, "Some were mounted on horses, and some on chariots, but we shall prevail in the name of the Lord our God. Those ones bent down and fell, but we rose up and prepared ourselves, because the Lord our God is our Redeemer."¹⁶³

And turning back, he plundered the camps and took away booty and brought back all the captives. And when they had arrived at the staging post, he gave the order, and the trumpet was sounded, and all of his soldiers were gathered, and he inspected them and found that all had been preserved without harm.

47. And immediately the blessed one went to his house, and he ordered the demolition of the fire temples that had been built by his parents, and he made them into holy temples for the Highest One, and he tore down the fire altars in which the fire was carried in procession by the impious *magi* and set up shining altars to Christ.¹⁶⁴ And all that he had vowed to the Lord, he carried out and fulfilled with great joy.

48. But the *magi* who were in the lands beneath his command, when they saw all these things, wrote and secretly informed a certain *magus* who was called the *mōbadān mōbad*.¹⁶⁵ And immediately he entered before the king Shapur and said to him, "My lord King, may you live forever! Qardagh, that one who has received many honors from your kingdom, and whom you made *paṭaḥṣā* of Assyria and *marzbān* in the land of the West, has converted to the religion of the Nazarenes. And he has demolished the fire temples and built churches and monasteries. And he attracts the *magi* and makes them [become] Nazarenes. He spurns the worship of the gods and despises the great

161. The imagery again recalls scriptural scenes of Israelite holy war, though without a specific allusion. MS A has the enemy destroyed like "heaps (of hay) in the field" (*aly]k gdišē b-ḥaqlā*).

162. According to the Peshitta version of Gen. 8:4, Noah's ark landed on the mountain Jebel Ġudi (2,089 m) on the southern side of the Khabur River. On the Nestorian monasteries dedicated to Noah on and around this mountain, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 2: 749–54.

163. An exact quotation of Ps. 20:8, except for the final phrase.

164. Qardagh's actions fulfill the vow made before his military campaign (§44). For epigraphic and literary evidence of Syrian churches and monasteries built in fulfillment of vows, see Vööbus, *Asceticism*, 2: 162.

165. The *mōbadān mōbad*, or "chief of the *mōbads*," was the highest-ranking official in the Zoroastrian hierarchy of the Sasanian period. See Morony, *Iraq*, 281–82; and Gignoux, "Religiöse Administration in sasanidischer Zeit," 258–59.

teaching of Magianism. And he treats your kingdom as if it were a widow without a husband.”

When the king heard these things, he spoke sharply to him, “How can you say these things? Have you not heard of that great victory Qardagh made, when with two hundred thirty-four men he destroyed thousands of Romans and tens of thousands of Arabs?”¹⁶⁶

When the *magus* heard these things from the king, he was disturbed and frightened. He fell silent and did not speak as he departed, sad and mourning, from the presence of the king. And he went and gathered all the nobles of the kingdom and incited them by his words to come together at once to denounce the blessed Qardagh before the king. Then they all gathered together and sent a united message to the king, saying, “Our lord, King, if it pleases your gentle will that paganism should be neglected and abolished and that we all should become Nazarenes, order that your will be made known to your servants so that we may know what is right for us to do. But if this is not the case, why do you ignore insolent Qardagh, who insults the gods and tears down the fire temples and builds martyr shrines for the evil religion of the Nazarenes?”

49. When the king heard these things, it grieved him sorely for he loved the blessed Qardagh with all his soul. But because of the will of his nobles he was forced to summon the blessed Qardagh. And immediately he ordered that a royal edict be written to holy Qardagh as follows: “We have heard, my good servant, about your victory and mighty strength against the Romans and Arabs and other peoples who dared to enter our domain.¹⁶⁷ And therefore it pleases us that we should delight in your appearance and that we should repay you honor in exchange for your great victory. Therefore, when you see this, our royal edict, come to the [Royal] Gate promptly and without delay.”

The king [wrote this way] because he was afraid to tell him openly about the matter, in case Qardagh should revolt and create a rebellion and disturb the kingdom. But when the blessed one received the king’s letter and read it, he laughed softly and said to the one who had brought it, “These things are not in the heart of the king. Nevertheless, he speaks truly: I will have great honors and everlasting gifts from his hands. And I am prepared to come with great joy.”

And immediately he entered the church and opened the letter before the Lord and prayed and said, “Christ, Son of God, who by Your victorious blood purchased Your church, also make me, a sinner, worthy of Your household.”¹⁶⁸

166. “Destroyed thousands . . . and ten thousands”: *ḥrab’alpē* . . . *w-rebwātā*. The diction again recalls Israelite warfare. Cf. 1 Sam. 18:7 (repeated at 21:11 and 29:5).

167. “Your victory and heroic strength”: *neṣahñā w-ganbārūtā da-’badt*. For “edict” the hagiographer employs a loan word derived from Roman imperial tradition: *saqrā*, originally from Lat. *sacra*. See Brock, “Greek Words in Syriac,” 104–6.

168. Qardagh’s prayer retains the third-person form of address: literally “His victorious blood . . . His church . . . His household. You, strengthen . . .”

Strengthen my weakness to stand in this great contest that is placed before me. And grant me that I may return from it in victory and die for the sake of Your name, with my mouth full of Your praise and the exultation of Your holy name.”

And he sealed himself with the sign of the Cross and departed, praising God. And when he arrived at the Royal Gate, the king sent a message to him in secret and said to him, “Behold, the *magi* and all the nobles of the kingdom are threatening you and want to kill you, because they have heard that you have abandoned Magianism and the religion of the gods and have become a Christian. Therefore, when you enter before me, do not say that you are a Christian. Thus your accusers will be put to shame, and we will endow you with great honors. And when you return to your land and your domain, do as you wish.”

50. The next morning, the blessed one was ordered to enter before the king. And as he entered, all the *magi* and nobles of the kingdom assembled and rose and were assaulting him and gnashing their teeth.¹⁶⁹ But that blessed one looked at them modestly, and, singing gently, he said, “*All the peoples surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I destroyed them. They encircled me and surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I destroyed them. They surrounded me like bees, but they were extinguished like a fire of wheat stalks, and in the name of the Lord I destroyed them.*”¹⁷⁰

And when he entered before the king, the king cried out in a loud voice and said to him, “You have come in peace, victorious soldier, adornment of our kingdom. We have heard about your heroic deeds, and we commend greatly your good fortune (*kūšārāk*). We are prepared to reward you with honor. But we have heard a very awful thing, and if, God forbid (*hās*), it is so, you deserve a bitter death. For they say that you have abandoned the great religion of Magianism and scorned the gods and have joined with the Nazarenes and become a Nazarene.”¹⁷¹

And when the king had said these things to Qardagh, he signaled him with his eyes that he should reject [the accusation, saying,] “These things are not true, nor am I a Nazarene.” But the blessed one secretly called upon God to be his helper, and he repeated in his heart that answer of the blessed David, “*I will speak with righteousness before kings, and I will not be ashamed.*”¹⁷²

And he opened his mouth boldly and said to the king, “Truly, my lord

169. “Gnashing their teeth” (*mḥārḡin šenayhōn*), a common sign of rage in late antique hagiography. See, for example, the Syriac *Life of Anthony*, 52 (Draguet, 52; 85), where Satan, hearing Anthony recite the Psalms, gnashes (*hareq*) his teeth in anguish. See also §55 and §31, n. 104 above on the “gnashing of teeth” in Gehenna.

170. Ps. 118:10–12.

171. For “Nazarene” as a term of abuse, see n. 129 above. The king’s threat to hand Qardagh over to a “bitter death” (*mawtā marirā*) fulfills the promise made in Satan’s first speech (§35).

172. Ps. 119:46 (*Pešitta* 118).

King, I am a true Christian. And I have confessed and confess, secretly and in public, that I am a Christian.¹⁷³ And by the power of my Lord Christ, I vanquished the enemies and destroyed the camps of the robbers who dared to enter the lands in your possession that had been entrusted to me.”

51. And when the king heard these things, it grieved him sorely, but because of the nobles of the kingdom he changed his face to anger and rage. And he said to the holy one, “Since you have renounced before us the gods who govern heaven and earth, and confessed that man Jesus whom the Jews crucified,¹⁷⁴ we too renounce your love and erase your friendship from our mind and hand you over to bitter methods of execution.”

Then the nobles and all the *magi* raised their voice and cried out, saying, “This one deserves a myriad methods of execution (*l-rebō mawtin!*)”

But the king immediately ordered that he should be chained hand and foot and that he should be sent to his land and there be judged. He did this because he thought that Qardagh, after having been held in chains for a long time, might feel remorse, renounce Christianity, and live. But the chief *magus* petitioned that Qardagh be handed over to him, and he would judge him in proportion to the magnitude of his folly. But the king did not answer him, since he wanted to save the holy one.¹⁷⁵ Then, by the order of the king, Qardagh was handed over to a hundred horsemen, fifty foot soldiers, and twenty noblemen in order that they should take him to the lands that had been under his command to be judged there.

And he wrote a royal edict for Gušnazdad and Dadgušnasp, the *mōbads* of those regions,¹⁷⁶ as follows: “Qardagh, that self-hater, received great honors from us, as you know, and we made him *paṭahšā* and appointed him *marzbān* in those lands. Yet he has renounced the gods and despised our kingdom,

173. For the tension between public and covert conversion to Christianity in late Sasanian Iraq, see chapter 4 below. Qardagh’s proclamation of his faith repeats part of the formula spoken at his initial conversion (§27).

174. See §29 above, where Satan denounces Abdišo as a disciple of Jesus whom “our comrades the Jews crucified and put to death in Jerusalem.” For context, see Fiey, “Juifs et chrétiens dans l’Orient syriaque,” 936–38; K. E. McVey, “The Anti-Judaic Polemic of Ephrem Syrus’ Hymns on the Nativity,” in *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins Presented to John Strugnell on Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. H. W. Attridge, J. J. Collins, and T. H. Tobin (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 229–40.

175. See §49 above, where the king tries to persuade Qardagh to shame “your accusers” by denying his Christianity.

176. The *mōbads* (Phl. *maguṣpatan*; Syr. *mawhpātē*) were mid-level Zoroastrian officials responsible for the oversight of regional religious affairs. Whereas ordinary *magi* operated at the district level, the *mōbad* typically administered an entire province (*šahr*). For orientation, see Morony, *Iraq*, 281–83; J. Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia: From 550 B.C. to 650 A.D.* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 176, 186–88. Neither of the *mōbads* named here is known from other sources, and their historicity is highly suspect.

insulted our religion, and confessed Jesus, the one who was crucified, and has become a Nazarene. Behold, in harsh chains and with trustworthy guards we have sent him to you, ordering that seven months' time should be given him for reflection and repentance. If he does not forsake the evil religion of the Nazarenes within the prescribed period of time and destroy by his own hands and by the hands of the men of his household the churches and monasteries he built, and build anew the fire temples, and cleanse himself with the *magi* and take hold of the *barsom*,¹⁷⁷ perform the Magian rites for the gods, and worship the sun, moon, and fire, we order that he should be stoned at the gate of his house.¹⁷⁸ His blood [will be] upon his head, and we will be innocent of his blood."¹⁷⁹

52. When the king's written orders reached the *mōbads* Gušnazdad and Dadgušnasp, and they read the *nibištag* that was written about the holy Mar Qardagh,¹⁸⁰ they arose quickly and brought him to Burzmihr, who held authority [over the territory] from Nisibis to the West, because he was the general and resided on the border.¹⁸¹ And when they arrived at Nisibis and this Burzmihr heard [the *nibištag*], he gathered all the *magi* who were in the city, distinguished men, and they went out to meet Qardagh and brought him into [the city]. And they were all petitioning him to return to paganism and to resume his position of authority in accordance with the king's commandment.

But he said to them, "I am now a Christian. And I do not worship the sun and the moon like you."

And since they could not persuade him, they led him to the *šaherkwast*, the judge who had been given jurisdiction by the king over this business, namely, that every man who renounced Magianism should be handed over to him. And as they approached the monastery of holy Mar Yāhōb, it had become evening. But there were many pagans by the river near the monastery

177. The *barsom* is the bundle of twigs held in the hand for Zoroastrian rituals. MacKenzie, *CPD*, 17; de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 142–43. The Syriac term always appears in the plural, *būrsāmē*.

178. For stoning as a method of execution, see J. Blinzler, "The Jewish Punishment of Stoning in the New Testament Period," in *The Trial of Jesus: Cambridge Studies in Honour of C. F. D. Moule*, ed. E. Bammel (Naperille, IL: Alec. R. Allenson, 1970), 147–61; also Speyer, "Fluch," 1257–58. Christian writers of late antiquity most often associate stoning with Jewish persecution of Jesus and the apostles.

179. "And we will be innocent of his blood": *w-ḥnan mḥasanen men dmeh*. Cf. Pilate's words at Matt. 27:24: "I am innocent (*mḥasay*) of the blood of this righteous one."

180. This Sasanian administrative term occurs infrequently in Syriac literature. Brockelmann, *LS*, 412: *nibištag*, from the Phl. verb *nibištan*, "to write" (MacKenzie, *CPD*, 59). See §64 below for the hagiographer's gloss of the term.

181. Abbeloos transliterates the Syriac vocalization of the name as Burzmihar. For the Persian spelling Burz-Mihr, see Gignoux, *Noms propres*, 2: 64 (no. 244); Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch*, 74.

of the holy Mar Yāhōb and in the villages that surrounded it.¹⁸² This *šaher-kwast* dwelled there, and, being very depraved in his paganism, he employed many torments against the Christians in order to bring them back to paganism. This one came to meet the holy Mar Qardagh. And when he saw him, he said to him, “I do not greet you with honor (*lā sāgednā lāk*), because you have abandoned Magianism and have become a Christian. But be convinced by me, worship the sun and the moon, purify yourself among the *magi*, and take hold of the *barsōm* as was your custom. But if not, there will much for you to suffer from me.”

Then the blessed one said to him, “May Christ whom I confess rebuke you, impure dog!”¹⁸³

And when he [Qardagh] said this to him, that judge burned with anger, and immediately that judge ordered that chains and fetters be thrown on top of his earlier chains. And he [the judge] ordered that they bring the instruments of torture and pile them before him: pincers and searing devices and iron combs and the rest of the instruments of other tortures. And they threw an iron chain on his neck, and they inflicted many scrapings and tortures upon him.¹⁸⁴

53. And during that same night, there appeared to him the holy Mar Abdišo, his master, and Beri the anchorite and the blessed Mar Sergius the martyr, and they said to him, “Be strong and do not fear, Mar Qardagh!”

Then he was released from those chains, and, standing up, he prayed with the holy ones. And they comforted him and sealed him with the sign of the Cross and departed. But he did not cease from his prayer and supplication before God until it was morning.¹⁸⁵ He prepared to receive the crown of martyrdom in that place and prayed before God and spoke thus: “Lord God Almighty, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, make me worthy of being numbered among Your worshippers and of being joined with the throngs of those who extol You. And everyone who comes and takes refuge in this place [MS

182. Abbeoos’s edition calls this monastery “the holy monastery of Mar Yāhōb” (*dayrā d-qadišā mar[i] yāhōb* [MS A: Mar Yāhō]). Feige, the text’s other editor, suggests an emendation to read “Mar Jāqob,” on the possibility that the monastery was named after the renowned fourth-century bishop Jacob of Nisibis (Feige, *Mar Qardagh*, 11–12). For the monasteries of the Nisibis region, see Fiey, *Nisibe*, 134–59; D. Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318–1913* (Louvain: Peeters, 2000), 44–45.

183. In MS A, Qardagh calls on Christ to rebuke the *magus* as a “polluted dog” (*kalbā ṭanṭā*). Cf. the Syriac *Acts of Judas Kyriakos* (Guidi, 83–84; 92), where the “blessed” Judas and his mother Anne rebuke the “tyrant” Julian as a “loathsome” and “polluted dog” (*kalbā nāidā . . . kalbā ṭanṭā*). See also n. 104 above on the cursing of Satan.

184. Torture, which is a central theme in the acts of the early Sasanian martyrs, appears only here in the Qardagh legend.

185. For the ideal of sleepless prayer in Syrian tradition, see §32, n. 110 above. East-Syrian monastic authors of the late seventh century emphasize the virtue of sleepless prayer on the night preceding the Sabbath. See Dādišō ‘ of Qatar, *On Solitude* (Mingana, 79; 203 [5b–6a]).

B: in the place where my bones lie] and asks in prayer and remembers my name here [“here” omitted in MS B] reward him from the treasure chest of Your mercy. And every request he asks, whether concerning the sickness of men or of animals, may he find wholeness and healing from the rich abundance of Your grace.”¹⁸⁶

54. And when it became morning, all the pagans gathered and were making threats against him, saying, “If he will not worship the sun, make him die by a bitter death.”

But he said to them, “Get away from me, children of Gehenna. I worship Christ, the king, who is the God of Gods and the Lord of Lords.”

When the judge heard this, he wanted to kill him right there. But they could not transgress the king’s commandment and kill him right there, since the king had commanded that Qardagh should have the space of seven months to repent and return to Magianism, to purify himself among the *magi*, to rebuild the fire temples that he had destroyed, to take hold of the *barsom* and perform Magian rites, before he would be stoned with rocks before the gate of his house.¹⁸⁷ Although this [plan] displeased the *mōbads*, they immediately took him to his house so that, in accordance with the king’s order, he might die there.

And when the blessed one approached the appointed place, his fortress upon the edge of the village Melqi, he raised his eyes and saw his fortress and house. And he lifted his gaze to heaven and extended his mind to God on high and prayed and said, “Christ, my hope, who gave Your body (*qawmtāk*) to the Crucifixion and Your hands and feet to fastening by nails for the salvation of our race.¹⁸⁸ You loosed Adam and his descendants from the chains of death! Loose also me from these chains! And save me from the impious peoples, so that those who hate me may see and be ashamed that You are my Lord and my helper and consoler.”¹⁸⁹

186. Qardagh’s prayer underlines the bond between the martyr cult and healing, explicitly linking the invocation of his name to the healing of men and beasts, the granting of refuge and prayer (*slōtā*). MS A identifies the locus of healing as “this place . . . here,” i.e., the Monastery of Mar Yāhōb [or Ja’qob?], where Qardagh makes his prayer. According to MS B, the healings will take place “where my bones lie.” This is the only mention of corporeal relics in the Qardagh legend. For the burial of Qardagh’s body at or near Melqi, see § 67 below.

187. I have reversed the word order here for the sake of translation. Cf. Abbeloos, *Mar Qardagh*, 81, for a more strictly literal translation.

188. For adoration of the “Lord on his Cross” in the monastic spirituality of seventh-century Iraq, see Dādišō’ of Qatar, *On Solitude* (Mingana, 135–40; 242–46 [51a–54b]); Peterson, “Kreuz und Gebet nach Osten,” 18–19, esp. n. 6 for veneration of the nails of the Cross. In the Syriac Cross legends, Helena longs to recover the “nails that were fastened (*etqba’*) into His hands and feet.” *Judas Kyriakos Legend* (Drijvers and Drijvers, 61; 22v [51]). See also the *Soghitha on the Finding of the Cross*, 35 (Brock, 69).

189. Cf. Ps. 118:7: “The Lord is my helper. I will look down on those who hate me.” For the previous verse of the same psalm, see §23 above.

And at that moment, the chains fell from his hands and feet, and he turned and bowed to the East, stretched out his hands to the East toward heaven and was confessing God.¹⁹⁰ When the nobles and the pagans and the foot soldiers saw what he was doing, some of them fled swiftly and were scattered here and there, while others ran and took shelter amidst the reeds and rushes of the marsh that was next to the fortress of the blessed one.¹⁹¹ But he went up to the fortress and entered his house, rejoicing and praising God. And he consoled his wife and his sister and all the men of his household. And he ordered that guards and watchmen be placed on the wall of his fortress.

55. And when the king was informed of this he was very afraid, and he gnashed his teeth in his rage and roared like a savage lion. And immediately he wrote a royal edict to Burzmihir Shapur, the general of the West, [ordering him] to send cavalry divisions, to subdue the fortress of the blessed one, seize him, and to stone him before the gate of his fortress. And if the cavalry whom he sent did not take hold of the fortress of the blessed one, the general himself should go together with his entire army, to wage war on the fortress and subdue it. And immediately the general sent twenty companies of soldiers, and they encamped next to the fortress for a month of days, but they accomplished nothing. And many of them died in sallies, for like a powerful thunderbolt [Qardagh] flashed out against them from the wall of his fortress and laid many low with his sharp arrows. Then the general came together with his entire army, but they accomplished nothing.

56. Then they wrote and informed the king that only by guile, plots, and blandishments could Qardagh be taken; he would not be captured by force or assaults. The king ordered the withdrawal of the forces. Ten cohorts stayed on, encamped some two or three miles distant from the fortress of the blessed one. Then Qardagh's noble relatives assembled by the order of the king that they might persuade him to surrender. And if not, his parents and his brothers would perish because of him. And when they gathered and came, the blessed one went up to the fortress wall and said to them, "Why, O men, are you troubled, and why have you gathered [here]?"

Then those ones bowed to him from afar, and with one voice they all wept and said to him, "My lord, take pity on yourself and also upon us. Do not revolt against the king, and give a bad name to our illustrious family. But order that the fortress gate be opened, and come out to us. Obey the king's order, and bow down just once to the fire and sun. Save your life, and also redeem us. And afterward, do as you wish."

190. Note the emphasis on the eastward orientation of Qardagh's prayer. Cf. the earlier scene (§27), where Qardagh etches a cross into the eastern wall of his bedroom and prays before it.

191. This is the only passage mentioning the "marsh" or "pool" (*yamtā*) before Qardagh's fortress at Melqi. For the Sasanian context of the imagery, see chapter 2, n. 141 below.

But the blessed one opened his mouth and said to them, “If only you would have pity on yourselves even as I pity you! But because I have shown myself genuine pity, behold, I have snatched my soul away from the jaws of that error in which you are held, and have consecrated it to Christ, the light of the world.¹⁹² And I am prepared to suffer ten thousand deaths for the sake of His holy name. And if I [can] persuade you, you too will share my view, and we will offer a single cohort of martyrs to Christ God, and we will be raised up into heaven. And we will delight with Him in that life that does not end. And as for what you said about not revolting against the king, truly you have spoken like old women.¹⁹³ For which is more grievous, that I should revolt against a wretched man who today blooms and is full of pride, but for whom there is no tomorrow? Or to revolt against the heavenly King of Kings, whose kingdom does not pass away and whose divinity does not change? For as long as I was held in error as you are, and was ignorant of my Lord Christ, the true Hope of my life, I served a wicked pagan king and bravely fought in his wars. But now that I have come to know Christ who is the heavenly King and the true Hope, I will not serve impious and mortal kings. And I will not fear their threats.”

Those men, when they heard how he insulted the king and called him wicked and impious, all cried out and stopped up their ears and said one to another, “Retreat! Retreat! Let us not hear blasphemy against the venerable King of kings.”

Then the blessed one laughed and said to them, “Truly you are wretched, you who blaspheme against God the Creator and Provider of the worlds and turn the veneration that belongs to Him to mute creatures.”¹⁹⁴

57. And while he was speaking with them, behold, the *mōbads* Gušnazdad and Dadgušnasp and other *magi* came and approached before the fortress of the blessed one and said to him, “We do not bow down before you, because you have insulted the gods, revolted against the King of kings and become a Nazarene. But hear what the King of kings has ordered us in letters concerning you. The merciful King of kings has ordered, ‘Worship the fire,

192. Literally “If only you would have pity on your souls (*naḡškōn*) . . . just as I have truly shown pity for my soul (*bšvīrā ḡaset ’al naḡṣay*).”

193. In other words, Qardagh’s noble relations are speaking nonsense. The literal translation is preferable, since Qardagh and other characters of the legend repeatedly refer to age as a sign of senility. See §33, n. 111 above. According to MS A, the saint’s noble relatives “speak like old men.”

194. Qardagh’s denunciation of his opponents’ worship of “mute creatures” recalls the central themes of the philosophical disputation that led to his own conversion (§§13–22 above). The God whom the hermit Abdišo introduced as “our Maker and Provider” Qardagh now recognizes as the “Creator and Provider of the worlds.” The presentation of God as master of two “worlds” (*’ālmē*), i.e., of this world and the world to come, is unusual, but not without parallel. See Payne Smith, *TS*, 2: 2899.

the sun, and the moon. Rebuild the fire temples that you destroyed, and destroy the churches and monasteries that you built. Purify yourself in the assembly of the *magi*, and take hold of the *barsom*. Choose life over death, and return to your position of authority.”¹⁹⁵

But the blessed Qardagh was enraged and said to them, “Shut your mouth, impure and abominable ministers of Satan! Far be it from me that I should abandon the true God who made heaven and earth, and worship mute creatures! I regard the impure orders of your pagan king as blasphemies that wretched men rashly make against God.”

When the *magi* heard these things, they turned back wailing and crying out, “Who can listen to blasphemy against the King of kings?” One of them whose name was Sibar zad bent down and took up a clod of earth and cast it up in the air against the blessed one and said, “Woe upon that mouth that utters blasphemies against the gods.”¹⁹⁶

But the blessed one signaled to one of his servants to give him a bow and a single arrow. And secretly in the shade of one of the pinnacles of the [fortress] wall, he took his bow and placed the arrow in it. And he drew [the bow] and struck that *magus* in his mouth; and the arrow went out through the back [of his head].¹⁹⁷ And he fell down dead in his place. But the blessed one laughed and said to him, “Take for yourself the reward of your love toward your gods and your king.”¹⁹⁸

Then all the *magi* fled swiftly, wailing. And his noble relatives departed in grief.

58. But the blessed one called out to one of them whose name was Enoš,¹⁹⁹ a man who was praised for his knowledge and integrity, and said to him, “O Enoš, do you think that I stay in the fortress because I am afraid of a death on behalf of Christ? It is not so. God forbid! It is not so.”²⁰⁰ For death on

195. Literally “Live and you will not die. And stand in your position of authority” (*hyi wa lā tmūt w-‘al šūltānak qūm*).

196. It is unclear whether the *magus*’s action reflects an actual Zoroastrian practice. The terminology is as follows: he “scattered” (*drā*) the clod of dirt “against” (*lūqbal*) the blessed one. MS A preserves a different verb for the sprinkling (*bdar*).

197. For similar feats of military archery in Persian epic tradition, see chapter 2 below. For Qardagh’s own prowess as an archer, see §§4–5 above.

198. Laughing in triumph, Qardagh celebrates the punishment of his “Magian” opponents. Cf. §38 above for his laughter at his father “rushing to Gehenna.”

199. The transliteration is uncertain. Abbeloos reads it as Enoš, a biblical name that would complement the name of Qardagh’s servant Isaac. But the letters could also represent the common Sasanian name Anōš (“immortal”), as in the epithet Khusro Anūšruvān, Khurso of the Immortal Soul. See Gignoux, *Noms propres*, 2: 42–45 (nos. 101–15); Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch*, 17–18.

200. Qardagh’s lack of fear confirms that he has learned from repeated exhortations. See §§44 and 52, where first a voice from the “sanctuary of the Lord” and then his spiritual mentors Abdišo, Beri, and Sergius, instruct Qardagh not to fear. Qardagh’s confidence contrasts

Christ's behalf will be sweeter to me than the life of this world. But until Christ orders me to die on behalf of His name, I will not hand myself over to men rash in error. And I trust in the power of my Lord Christ that no one will be able to harm me. But when it pleases Christ that I should die for His sake, gladly will I come out and hand myself over to be killed."

59. When the king was informed of these things, he sent letters ordering the *nekōrgan*,²⁰¹ who was the father-in-law of the blessed one, to go and entice him to open the fortress gate and surrender. And if he did not do this, the *nekōrgan* himself would suffer the judgment of a bitter death. Then the *nekōrgan* came and stood about two arrow shots distant from the fortress of the blessed one—for he was very afraid to approach the fortress again—and he sent a request to the blessed one that he [the *nekōrgan*] might come up to the wall and speak with him. Then the blessed one went up and sat opposite him and said to him, "Approach here, old man, and do not fear." And when he approached he said to him, "Why are you troubled, O *nekōrgan*, and for what reason have you come here?"

But that one wept bitterly and said to him, "I am troubled by the evils that have befallen me, because I have lost a son-in-law who was unequaled among men, and, behold, death also threatens me if you do not open the fortress gate and surrender to me."

But the blessed one said to him, "Your mind is lost in the error of the demons, and because of this, you suppose that I have gone astray. But if your mind were not lost, you would understand that I have not gone astray but have been found by Christ, the Finder of those who are lost. You are the one who is truly lost, you who have abandoned God the Creator to worship the mute elements, which were created for your honor and pleasure."

Then the *nekōrgan* said to him, "Think what you will about me and insult me as it pleases you. Only save me from death, because, behold, the King of kings in rage threatens me because of you. Do one of these two things. Either obey the king and abandon Nazarenism, return to Magianism and worship the fire, the Sun, and the Moon, rebuild the fire temples that you destroyed, and live. Or coming out, die as the foolish Christians die, and we will not die because of you."

But the blessed Qardagh answered and said to him, "I will not obey a wicked pagan king, and I will not abandon God who made me, redeemed me, guides me, and prepares delights for me in His kingdom. And I will not worship creatures as you do. Nor will I excuse myself from death on behalf

sharply with the fear that afflicts so many of his pagan opponents: the soldiers (§24), the prison guards (§§25–26), the assembled *magi* (§42), the Persian king (§55), his father-in-law, the *nekōrgan* (§59), and esp. his own father (§65).

201. For the significance of his full title, see chapter 4, n. 45 below. He appears above in §39.

of Christ, but gladly will I die. You will not die on my behalf. Would that you had the discernment to die for the sake of your own life! When you called the Christians foolish, because they die for the sake of their Lord's name, you spoke from the depth of madness. But go away and let there be no anxiety and grief for you. And behold, I will petition my Lord Christ to show me whether it is time for me to die for the sake of His name. If it pleases the will of His divinity, and it is time to take the crown of martyrdom in completion of this struggle on His behalf, gladly will I go out and hand myself over to the executioners."

60. Then the report was heard in all the lands beneath the command of the blessed one that, behold, Qardagh is preparing to die for the sake of Christ's name. And great crowds of Christians, Jews, and pagans gathered and came from all lands and settled in huge camps surrounding the fortress of the blessed one, waiting to see the day of the crowning of the athlete of righteousness. Then his parents and his brothers also came, and there were great camps of thousands and ten thousands. And they remained (there), settled in camps for twenty-one days. Then the blessed one devoted himself to prayer and entreaty, supplicating Christ to strengthen and encourage him to complete the crowning of his martyrdom.

61. But his father, weeping with many (tears), was entreating Qardagh that he might come up onto the fortification wall and see and speak to him, so that Qardagh should hear from him (directly) what he wanted to say. [Qardagh] declined but sent him a message through one of servants, telling him, "Our Lord Christ calls out to us in His Gospel: *'Everyone who does not leave his father and mother and brothers and sisters and wife and children and follow me is not worthy of me.'*"²⁰² And because of this I do not want to see your face, because your thoughts and your words are an obstacle to the road on which I am preparing to travel."

And after this, the *nekōrgan* sent him [the following message]: "Send me my daughter Šušān because I am eager to see her."²⁰³

Then the blessed one said to his wife, "Go out to your father and see what he seeks from you. But I know that you will earn the destruction of your life from his words."

And when she went out, he said to her, "My beloved daughter, have pity on my old age. Do not exchange the love of your father for the affection of your husband. And do not sell the life of my old age for a man who rebels against the gods and from the King of kings. For it is not possible for you to acquire another father, but if your husband dies today, tomorrow you will

202. Qardagh's message conflates Luke 14:26 and Matt. 10:37 (MS A gives a shorter list of family relations: "brothers or sisters or mother"). For Qardagh's invocation of the preceding verses of Matthew and related "anti-social" saying from Luke, see §40, n. 138 above.

203. This is the only time that the narrative reveals the name of Qardagh's wife.

find one better than him. But entice him to open the gate and come out, and we will be removed from danger.”

Then immediately she turned to the blessed one and said to him, “If you are a Christian, boldly go forth and die bravely as the Christians die. Behold, why are you shut up in a fortress like a weakling and coward scared of death, while many are dying for your sake?”

But the blessed one answered and said to her, “Truly your lips speak from the fullness of the heart according to the life-giving word of our Savior, but these things you speak are the evil artifices of paganism, the fruit of evil, and the progeny of the Crafty One [i.e., Satan].²⁰⁴ But do not be troubled, daughter of destruction, for I was preparing to die even before your fraudulent appeals.”

62. And after all these things, an awesome vision appeared to the blessed one. For during the night before the dawning of Friday [the eve of the Sabbath], the blessed one rose and performed the prayer service as was his custom. And as he was completing the service near the break of dawn, he turned (and) saw standing upon a little mound before the gate of his fortress great crowds of men surrounding him and scattering pearls upon him. And as the pearls fell on his body, drops of blood were sprinkled in their places; and, changing into lamps of fire, they flew up to heaven.²⁰⁵ And a certain man dressed in resplendent garments and crowned with a crown of light was standing over him in the air and said to him, “Qardagh, my brother.”

And he said, “It is I.”

And he said to him, “Those pearls were sprinkled also upon me in Jerusalem by the children of my people and my race. Now your father will come and cast also at you one pearl. And immediately you will come up to me with joy.”

Then the blessed Qardagh asked him, “Who are you, my lord?”

And he said to him, “I am Stephen the deacon, who was stoned in Jerusalem for preaching [the Gospel] of life.”²⁰⁶

63. And immediately the blessed one awoke from his sleep and was very

204. Cf. Matt. 12:34, where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees as a “progeny of vipers” who speak evil from the “fullness of the heart” (*tawtāray lebā*).

205. For the manifold symbolism of pearls in Syriac tradition, see Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 106–8.

206. See Acts 6:8–7:59. For the cult of St. Stephen in late antiquity, see F. Bovon, “The Dossier on Stephen, the First Martyr,” *Harvard Theological Review* 96.3 (2003): 279–315; E. D. Hunt, “The Traffic in Relics: Some Late Roman Evidence,” in Hackel, *Byzantine Saint*, 171–80; and P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 91–92, 102–5. There is still no major study of the image of Stephen in Syriac tradition. For orientation in the hagiographic sources, see P. Peeters, *Orient et Byzance: Le tréfonds oriental de l’hagiographie byzantine* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1950), 53–59; I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca* (Rome: PISO, 1965), 248–49; and Bovon, “First Martyr,” 305–6.

afraid.²⁰⁷ And he called Isaac the one who was teaching him the psalms and reading the Holy Books before him.²⁰⁸ And he [Qardagh] made known to him the vision he had seen. And marveling, they considered the vision and understood that it was now time for the blessed one to die by stoning on behalf of the name of Christ. And the blessed Qardagh said to Isaac, “Where is written the story of Stephen the holy martyr?”

And Isaac said to him, “Behold, it is written in the *Acts of the Holy Apostles*.”

And the blessed one said to him, “Bring it and read it before me.”

And when he heard the history of the martyrdom of holy Stephen, he rejoiced greatly, and his soul exulted. He was greatly encouraged and fortified, and he yearned to die on behalf of Christ, like a thirsty man coming from the road in the heat of summer wants cold water.²⁰⁹

64. And immediately the blessed one rose and kneeled and prayed. And he embraced the book of the Holy Gospel and sealed himself with the sign of the Cross.²¹⁰ And he opened the gate of his fortress and went out just like a bridegroom goes out from the wedding chamber.²¹¹

And when the crowds learned this, a tumult fell upon the camps, and they all came running in haste—Christians, Jews, and pagans; great and small; men and women. And they were running to see the blessed one receive the crown of martyrdom. Then the cavalry, as they were armed and mounted, rushed [to the front], urging the crowds and saying, “Everyone take a rock and stone the blessed one.”

Then the *magi* assembled with all the nobles and sat down and were reading the text (*ṣḥāḥā*) of the judgment against the blessed one sent by the king.

207. The experience of the dream vision fills even the “blessed” Qardagh with fear. Cf. §34 above, where Abdišo awakes “very afraid” from his dream vision of St. Sergius; see also §40, where Qardagh’s wife Šusan awakes in a state of “great fear” following her dream vision of the heavenly chancellery.

208. In his capacity as Qardagh’s private religious tutor (see also §35 above), Isaac fills a position analogous to the domestic *magus* who served the *marzbān* prior to his conversion (§27). Instead of performing prayers, Isaac serves Qardagh as a teacher and reader of scripture. Significantly, he is identified simply as an *iḥidāyā*, a “solitary,” without any formal ecclesiastical title. His duties, performed in the domestic context of Qardagh’s household, mirror those performed in church by the lector (Syr. *qāryā*). For the lector’s role in the oral presentation of scripture, see Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 219–24, 326–28.

209. See §32 above for Qardagh’s receiving of “cold water” from his ascetic mentors in the mountains of Beth Bgāsh.

210. “Book of the Holy Gospel”: *ktābā d-ʿewangalyōn qadišā*. MS A has “Book of the New (Testament).” The latter is perhaps more appropriate, since it would include the Acts of the Apostles.

211. Cf. Ps. 19:5 (the second half of the verse is quoted in §46 above). For symbolism of the wedding chamber (*bēt gnonā*) in Syrian tradition, see Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 115–30. The speech of the *nekōrgan* at §59 already identifies Qardagh as the bridegroom (*ḥatnā*, literally “son-in-law”).

The church is accustomed to call [this text] a *qataresis*, while the Persians call it a *nibištāg*.²¹²

65. Then the blessed one, when he saw the crowds of pagans and Jews who were carrying rocks and running forward to stone him, gazed to heaven and sealed himself with the sign of the Cross. And he prayed in a loud voice and said, “Our Lord Jesus Christ Son of God. Help me in this hour. Make me worthy that I may confidently join with the throngs of Your holy ones.”

And straightaway he kneeled down. And when a pile of stones rose on top of him, he shook them off and arose valiantly.²¹³ And he did this also a second time. And while the cavalymen and *magi* were urging the crowds to throw the rocks hard, the blessed one answered and said to them, “I will not die until my father throws a stone against me.”²¹⁴

Then his father, who was drunk with the error of Magianism and was afraid of death and sought favor with the king and the nobles, took his robe [var. B] and bound it around his face and threw the rock for the stoning of his son.²¹⁵ And immediately the soul of the athlete of righteousness departed to eternal life.²¹⁶

66. And at that hour the odor of spices filled the air throughout the entire region in which the blessed one was stoned. And, behold, a voice was

212. This is the only place where the hagiographer defines Sasanian administrative terminology (cf. §52, where he employs the same term without any gloss). The Syriac term (*qataresis*, from Gr. *καθαίρεσις*) usually refers to deposition from ecclesiastical office, especially the bishopric. The paired Greek and Persian terms appear in a similar context in the *Acts of Yazdīn, Adorhormizd, His Daughter Anahid, and Mar Pethion* (Bedjan, 569; Brock and Harvey, 85).

213. “Arose valiantly”: *qām ganbārā’it*. Cf. the *Soghitha on the Finding of the Cross*, 26 (Brock, 67): “Judas arose valiantly like some general.” In the East-Syrian prose version of the legend, Judas “valiantly girded his loins” (*‘esar ḥašō[hi] ganbārā’it*) after invoking the memory of “my brother Stephen who triumphed with the twelve apostles.” *Judas Kyriakos Legend* (Drijvers and Drijvers, 66; 81v [46]).

214. The Mosul manuscript (MS A) preserves a series of substantial variants or additions to this final scene and epilogue of the *History*. MS A: “[The blessed one] said to them, ‘O, hard-hearted followers of error (*tā ‘ayā ‘aqlay leb*), do you think to yourselves that I will die by your stones? Only if my father comes to throw a stone against me [will I die]!’”

215. MS A identifies the object used to blindfold Qardagh as a *gūšmūhūrak*. This probably represents another loan word from Middle Persian, although the word is otherwise unattested. Cf. MacKenzie, *CPD*, which gives *pardag* and *čādur* as the standard Pahlavi terms for a veil. A marginal note in the Mosul manuscript glosses the term with the Syriac *sōšepā*, which signifies a veil, mantle, or robe, often with liturgical or baptismal associations (Payne Smith, *TS*, 2: 4345–46). Although the referents for the pronominal suffixes are ambiguous, context implies that it is Qardagh’s own robe (*sōšepēh*) that Gušnōy uses to blindfold his apostate son.

216. Qardagh’s identification as an “athlete of righteousness” (*‘atliṭā d-zadiqūtā*) here near the end of the *History* (see also §§59–60 and 67) reintroduces the athletic imagery invoked in the preface (§2).

heard saying,²¹⁷ “You have fought well and bravely conquered, glorious Qardagh. Go joyfully and take up the crown of your victory.”²¹⁸

67. Holy Qardagh was then crowned in the forty-ninth year of King Shapur on a Friday.²¹⁹ And during the night before the dawning of the Sabbath, compassionate men came together and snatched the body of the holy one from its guards and buried it with great honor.

68. And each year on the day on which the blessed one was crowned, the peoples gathered at the place of his crowning. And they made a festival and a commemoration for three days.²²⁰ But because of the size of the crowds, they also began to buy and sell during the days of the saint’s commemoration. And after some time had passed, a great market was established on the place in which the blessed one was stoned. It continues this day. And the commemoration of the holy one lasts three days, and the market six days. And it is called the souk of Melqi from the name of the fortress of the blessed one.²²¹

69. Later a great and handsome church was also built at great expense in the name of the holy one by believing men worthy of good memory. It was built on that hill on which the holy Mar Qardagh was stoned. May we be made worthy to be aided by his prayers in this world full of wretchedness; and in that new world that will not pass away may we find mercy by his prayers and

217. Note the careful avoidance of anthropomorphic imagery. Though the message comes from God, He is not the speaker. Instead, “a voice was heard” (*qālā ʿestmā*). Cf. §27, where Qardagh hears a disembodied voice, “pleasant and gentle,” reciting to him Matt. 7:8; cf. also §44 for the voice “heard from the sanctuary of the Lord.”

218. The Mosul manuscript expands the commendation of the heavenly voice: “And there was a mighty voice, and it was heard saying, ‘Come in peace, blessed one, you who have struggled beautifully on behalf of my name. Behold, I will make your bones a font of assistance for those in illness and pain, and for the cultivated fields, lest there should fall upon them the locust and the cankerworm, the field mouse and the maggot. You have bravely conquered, Qardagh, victorious athlete. Come joyfully and take the crown of your victory, athlete.’”

219. The forty-ninth year of Shapur II’s reign corresponds to 358/359 C.E. Many of the Sasanian martyrs were believed to have died, like Christ, on a Friday. See S. Stern, “Near Eastern Lunar Calendars in the Syriac Martyr Acts,” *LM* 117 (2004): 455.

220. The Mosul manuscript gives a more precise date for this “festival and commemoration” (*ʿēḏā w-dūkrānā*): “And every year, at the end of the seventh [week] of summer on the Friday on which the blessed one was crowned.” For the dating of Qardagh’s commemoration in the Syrian church calendar, see Feige, *Mar Qardagh*, 5, 12; and chapter 5 below. Syriac monastic and synodical legislation repeatedly warns ascetics to stay away from such martyr festivals. See, for example, Vööbus, *Legislation*, 64, 96.

221. The Syriac term *šūq* (cf. Arabic *souk*, whence the English derives) signifies any kind of open-air market, bazaar, or place of assembly. Qardagh’s biographer explains the souk at Melqi as an outgrowth of the saint’s commemoration. For the reverse hypothesis, i.e., that the annual market at Melqi preceded the emergence of the cult of Mar Qardagh, see chapter 5 below. P. Peeters (“La ‘Passionnaire d’Adiabène,” *AB* 43 [1925]: 300–301) was the first to make this suggestion, but his etymology for the name Melqi (which he derives from Arabic) is demonstrably incorrect. Cf. n. 18 above on the Neo-Assyrian origins of the toponym.

delight together with him through the grace and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him, His Father, and the Holy Spirit glory and honor and exaltation forever and ever, Amen.

Thus ends the martyrdom of Mar Qardagh, the holy and victorious martyr.

[The Mosul manuscript preserves a slightly longer version of the epilogue (§69).²²²]

Later, believers brought gold and silver and built for him [a church with] four naves, another nave as a martyrion, an altar, vaulted chancels, and a baptistery.²²³ And it was consecrated toward the East, and pious men worthy of good remembrance made great expenditures upon it in the name of the blessed one. And may everyone who commemorates him on that day on which he was stoned be made worthy to have a blissful portion and end together with that blessed one. And may he [the one who commemorates the saint] be helped in this world. And may we find mercy in the new world that will not pass away through his prayers. May the poor reader and the scribe and the crowd who hears the history of the blessed one²²⁴ find enjoyment with him and be made worthy of love and mercy on the day of trial and judgment through the grace of Christ, praise and confession to Him, and to His Father and the Holy Spirit, glory, honor, exaltation, and possession now and for all time, forever and ever, Amen.

Thus ends the history of the martyrdom of blessed Mar Qardagh. Praise to God, Amen.

222. For the significance of this second epilogue, in conjunction with later references to the “strong monastery” built at the site of Qardagh’s martyrdom, see chapter 5 below.

223. The passage requires slight emendation, but the pronominal suffixes make it clear that the donors built a single church with four naves (*hayklē*) and other common architectural features, rather than four separate churches. For other examples of tetraconch or four-nave churches, see chapter 5 below, citing the sixth-century tetraconch church of St. Sergius at Rusafa and the great pilgrimage shrine of Qa’lat Se’mān, both in northern Syria.

224. This important reference confirms the oral presentation of the *History of Mar Qardagh* during the days of his annual commemoration.

Matthew

8:12	31	12:30	36
8:20	12	26:51-5	29
10:28	15	26:63	15
10:35	40	27:24	51
10:37	61		

Mark

6:8	9	14:61	15
14:24	29		

Luke

9:58	12	15:10	32
12:51	40	17:34	40
14:26	61	22:20	29

John

17:24	36	19:9-10	12, 15
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Acts

5:19-20	25	12:7-8	25
6:8-7:59	62	14:15	26

2 Thessalonians

2:8	29
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Jude

1:9	29
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FIGURE 1. Aerial view of the modern city of Erbil (ancient Arbela). The photo, taken by an unidentified British pilot probably during the 1920s, shows the massive tell beneath the modern city rising nearly thirty meters above the surrounding plain. The tell represents the accumulation of at least four thousand years of continuous urban settlement at Arbela. (Royal Air Force official photograph.)



FIGURE 2. The rugged highlands of southeastern Anatolia were the traditional home of the so-called mountain Nestorians, the East-Syrian Christians who settled in the region in the wake of the Mongol conquest of Iraq. Transhumance routes link the Hakkari district, depicted here in a photo from the 1890s, with the fertile plain and pastures surrounding Arbela. (Reproduced from H. A. G. Percy [Lord Warkworth], *Notes from a Diary in Asiatic Turkey* [London: Edward Arnold, 1898], 146.)



FIGURE 3. The boar-hunt panel at Taq-i Bustan details the elaborate ritual of the royal hunt during the late Sasanian period. Here, in the central scene of the panel, the Sasanian King of kings prepares to slay a giant boar charging through the reeds. The Qardagh legend artfully mimics and appropriates these and other motifs of the Sasanian epic tradition (see chapter 2). (Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire.)



FIGURE 4. This splendid silver plate, allegedly found at Qazvin in northern Iran, depicts the king Kavad I (488–497, 499–531)—or possibly his predecessor Peroz (459–484)—hunting mountain rams. As discussed in chapter 2, similar scenes were often depicted in the banquet halls of Sasanian provincial elites. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1934 [34:33]. Photograph ©1995. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.)



FIGURE 5. This seventh-century silver plate from eastern Iran shows a royal Sasanian couple at a domestic banquet, with a fire altar beside their dining couch. The three boars' heads depicted at the bottom of the plate signify the martial prowess of the king. Persian converts to Christianity often revealed their new religious identity by refusing to perform Zoroastrian prayers before dining (see chapter 4). (The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.)



FIGURE 6. Mr. Yona Gabbay, a well-known Jewish storyteller from the town of Zakho in northern Iraq, died in Jerusalem in 1972. In his prime, Mr. Gabbay entertained audiences in three languages—Aramaic, Kurdish, and Arabic—drawing upon a wide repertoire of material of Jewish, Kurdish, and general Near Eastern origin. Studies of the “oral literature” of the Kurdistan Jews support the hypothesis that the Christians of late antique Iraq also possessed a rich and diverse oral culture, including, perhaps, Sasanian-inspired tales of epic heroism (see chapter 2). (Photograph by Stephanie Sabar.)



FIGURE 7. The prophet Joshua at the battle of Gibeon, where God halted the sun and moon in their courses to prolong the Israelite victory (Josh. 10:12–15). The miniature (15.5 × 5 cm) is preserved in a finely illustrated, complete Syriac Bible of the late sixth or early seventh century. The author of the Qardagh legend uses philosophical proofs, rather than scripture, to show that the sun, the moon, and the other luminaries are inanimate objects set in motion by God like “a stone or an arrow or a cart” (*History of Mar Qardagh*, 18; see chapter 3). (Bibliothèque Nationale de France.)



FIGURE 8. The late Sasanian reliefs at Taq-i Bustan in western Iran, carved late in the reign of Khusro II (590–628), include this stunning image of a fully armed Sasanian warrior. His appearance recalls the Qardagh legend’s description of the Christian warrior saint, Mar Sergius, who appears to Qardagh in a dream vision as a “young knight . . . clad and girded with armor, and mounted upon a horse” (*History of Mar Qardagh*, 7). (Reproduced from K. Erdmann, *Die Kunst Irans zur Zeit der Sasaniden* [Berlin: Poeschel and Schulz-Schomburgk, 1943; repr., Mainz: Florian Kupferberg Verlag, 1969].)



FIGURE 9. This twelfth-century manuscript depicting the martyrdom of the Maccabees was produced in a West-Syrian monastery of northern Iraq. Shmuni, the mother of the Maccabees, stands in a great purple cloak with six of her sons huddled behind her raised arm, while the seventh son kneels blindfolded before the Seleucid monarch Antiochus. The story of the Maccabees, which achieved great popularity in Syrian Christian tradition, parallels the stories of Christian familial solidarity explored in chapter 4. (Metropolitan Mor Clemis Eugene Kaplan.)



FIGURE 10. The goddess Ishtar of Arbela, depicted here on an eighth-century B.C.E. stone relief from northern Syria, was worshipped in the Neo-Assyrian period as the patron goddess of war. The Sasanian shrine at Melqi, which appears to have given birth to the Qardagh legend, may have stood directly over the ruins of Ishtar's festival temple on the outskirts of Arbela (see chapter 5). (Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, N.Y.)



FIGURE 11. The early Islamic fortress at Pūskān in southwestern Iran typifies the tradition of elite residential architecture that flourished during the Sasanian and early Islamic periods. The “strong fortress” at Melqī, described in the Qardagh legend, probably looked something like this mud-brick residential fortress built atop a low, sloping hill. For the topography at Melqī, see chapter 5. (Dr. Bruno Overlaet, Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, Brussels, Belgium.)

PART II

Narrative and Christian
Heroism in Late Antique Iraq

ONE

The Church of the East and the Hagiography of the Persian Martyrs

In early spring of the year 605, the metropolitan bishop of Adiabene instructed his staff to prepare for a journey. The Sasanian King of kings Khusro II (590–628) had summoned all of the bishops of his domain to Ctesiphon to elect a new patriarch of the Church of the East. Yonadab of Arbela, metropolitan bishop of Adiabene, was among those summoned to the synod. Accompanied by four of his suffragan bishops, Yonadab and his staff set out for Ctesiphon during the month of Nisan (April), a good season for travel along the royal road that linked Arbela to the Sasanian capital.¹ In the official documents prepared at the synod, Yonadab and his episcopal colleagues lavished praise on the “victorious and merciful King of kings” for his unprecedented aid in convening the synod:

For concerning the father governors of the Church, that is the bishops of every place, he ordered that those who were far away should come via the royal transport system [literally “on the royal beasts of burden”], with honor and at the kingdom’s expense, to the revered Gate of the King of kings. And he urged those who were near to come quickly to the Gate to elect a chief and governor for the Catholic Church under whose administration and authority (*pūrnāsā d-rēšānūteh*) are all the altars and the [clerical] ranks of all the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ in the realm of the Persians.²

1. The timing of the synod probably reflects a decision to convene the bishops as early as possible after the winter of 604/605. The month of Nisan (April) had the advantage of being late enough to avoid heavy snow in the mountains, but early enough to escape the scorching summer heat. A general study of travel and communication in the Sasanian world is much needed. For the Persian sources, see B. Geiger, “Zum Postwesen der Perser,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 29 (1915): 309–14.

2. *Synodicon Orientale* (Chabot, 471; 208, ll. 1–7), cited hereafter as *Synodicon*. (All primary-source citations in this book list translations first, then original texts by page number; line numbers

The bishops assembled at Ctesiphon welcomed such signs of royal favor. Khusro's protection of his Christian subjects had begun to show signs of wavering since the death of his sworn ally, the Roman emperor Maurice, in 602.³ Two years before the synod, in the spring of 603, Khusro's armies had marched against the Roman cities of northern Mesopotamia.⁴ The East-Syrian bishops anxiously watched these events. Even during the reign of Khusro II, who surrounded himself with Christian advisors, war against Constantinople placed the church in a precarious position. During previous phases of Roman-Sasanian warfare, more than one East-Syrian bishop had been accused of collaboration with the Romans.⁵ In the synod's acclamations, Yonadab and his colleagues tried to erase any doubts about their allegiance to Khusro's "glorious kingdom, the master of empires."⁶

During these same years, ca. 600–630, a story circulating among the Chris-

are included only in the case of the *Synodicon* and other large-format texts.) In East-Syrian sources, "catholic" (*qatūliqi*) usually refers to the general or universal church of the Sasanian Empire.

3. Deposed from the throne in 590, Khusro fled to Roman Syria, where he was welcomed by the emperor Maurice (against the advice of the Senate); he regained the Sasanian throne the following year with the help of Roman troops. For the chronology of Khusro's flight and restoration, see E. K. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999), 136; M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and His Historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 297–304; and esp. J. Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, pt. 2, *Historical Commentary* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 169–73.

4. In a break with recent Sasanian tradition, Khusro himself led his troops into battle, ending a fourteen-year period of largely amicable relations between the empires. See M. Whitby, "The Persian King at War," in *The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East*, ed. E. Dabrowa (Krakow: Drukania Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1994), 227–63. According to the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 15–16; Guidi, 20), Khusro crowned the alleged son of Maurice in a ceremony in Ctesiphon before setting off on campaign. The Roman city of Dara fell in the summer of 604 after an exhausting nine-month siege. See Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 2:197–98.

5. Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, V.9 (Whitby, 266–67; Bidez and Parmentier, 204–5) describes one incident involving the East-Syrian bishop of Nisibis, who sent reports of Sasanian troop movements to the emperor Justin II (565–579). For commentary, see A. D. Lee, "Evagrius, Paul of Nisibis, and the Problem of Loyalties in the Mid-Sixth Century," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (1993): 569–85.

6. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 471; 208, ll. 8–9). Compiled during the patriarchate of Timothy I (780–823), the *Synodicon* preserves the records of thirteen East-Syrian synods convened between 410 and 775. A source of fundamental importance, it will be cited frequently below. Citations refer to the edition and translation by J.-B. Chabot (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1902). Also useful is the annotated German translation by O. Braun, *Das Buch der Synhados* (Stuttgart and Vienna, 1900; repr., Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1975). For the *Synodicon's* structure and transmission, see esp. W. Selb, *Orientalisches Kirchenrecht*, Bd. 1, *Die Geschichte des Kirchenrechts der Nestorianer (von den Anfängen bis zur Mongolzeit)* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), 59–66.

tians of the Arbela district articulated a less sanguine view of Christians' position in the Sasanian Empire. Following a long tradition of martyr literature, the story of Mar Qardagh places its Christian hero in open revolt against "pagan" royal authority. In a speech to his Zoroastrian relatives, Qardagh contrasts the limited authority of earthly monarchy with the absolute authority of the heavenly King of Kings:

For which is more grievous, that I should revolt against a wretched man who today blooms and is full of pride, but for whom there is no tomorrow? Or to revolt against the heavenly King of Kings, whose kingdom does not pass away and whose divinity does not change? For as long as I was held in error as you are, and was ignorant of my Lord Christ, the true Hope of my life, I served a wicked pagan king and bravely fought in his wars. But now that I have come to know Christ who is the heavenly King and the true Hope, I will not serve impious and mortal kings.⁷

Qardagh's speech emphatically denounces the legitimacy of any form of non-Christian monarchy. Comparison with earlier Sasanian martyr literature underscores the sharpness of his tone. The fifth-century acts of the *catholikos* Simeon bar Sabba'ē (†344) explicitly affirm the duty of Christians to obey and pray for worldly rulers.⁸ Qardagh's hagiographer leaves no room for such compromise. His strident attack on service to "impious and mortal kings" presents a mirror image of the roughly contemporaneous acclamations of the synod of 605, where the bishops proclaimed their loyalty to the "magnificent, beneficent, our good and kind Lord, Khusro, King of kings."⁹

This chapter offers a general introduction to the Church of the East in the era of Khusro II. Taking as its foundation the synod of 605, it surveys the institutional structure and geographic range of the Sasanian Empire's Christian community on the eve of the Islamic conquest. The East-Syrian church of this generation was no longer the scattered and persecuted sect it had been during the reign of Shapur II (307–379). Under the late Sasanian monarchy,¹⁰ Christians formed a large and influential component of

7. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 56.

8. *Acts of Simeon bar Sabba'ē*, 5 (Braun, 10; Kmosko, 796–97), where Simeon, the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, cites the scriptural injunctions to obey "governing authorities" (Rom. 13:1–2) and to "pray for kings and nobles" (1 Tim. 2:2). Note that this passage occurs only in the long version of the *Acts*, included in Kmosko, 789–960. See O. Braun, trans., *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer, mit einem Anhang: Ostsyrisches Mönchsleben* (Kempten and Munich: Verlag des Jos Kölschen Buchhandlungen, 1915), xvii.

9. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 471; 207, l. 18), in the initial dating formula for synod.

10. The designation "late Sasanian" in this book refers to the period extending from the restoration of Kavad in 499 to the fall of Ctesiphon to the Arabs in 637. This period included the reigns of the Sasanian rulers Kavad (499–531), Khusro I Anūshirvān (531–579), Hormizd IV (579–590), and Khusro II Aparvez (590–628).

Sasanian society with powerful allies at court. Bishops and monks moved freely throughout the empire. A Christian born in the Persian Gulf region in what is today Kuwait or Bahrain might end his career as a bishop, or abbot, in northern Iraq or western Iran. Although the Qardagh legend was composed in northern Iraq, its author lived in a cultural world that extended throughout the western Sasanian Empire. The chapter considers, therefore, all six of the metropolitan provinces of Mesopotamia and the earliest two highland provinces of western Iran (see map 2). It also introduces, and explores in more detail, the region of Adiabene and its capital, Arbela, where Christianity was firmly established by the early third century C.E. (and possibly earlier).¹¹ Modern travelers' descriptions of this region provide a sense of the diverse subregions of Adiabene (encompassing both northern Iraq and southeastern Anatolia), where specific episodes of the Qardagh legend unfold.

The final third of the chapter turns from Sasanian geography to the Qardagh legend's historical and literary context. In a persecution that lasted nearly forty years, from ca. 344 to Shapur's death in 379, Zoroastrian authorities vigorously oppressed the Christians of the Sasanian Empire. In the words of Qardagh's hagiographer, King Shapur "thirsted for the blood of the saints."¹² The persecution fell heavily on the Christian community of Adiabene. Syriac martyr texts composed during the late fourth and fifth centuries record the execution of two successive bishops of Arbela, six priests and deacons, and several laymen from various districts of Adiabene.¹³ Their stories became part of the large and diverse corpus of Sasanian martyr literature that developed in Syriac, Greek, and Armenian. Modern scholarship on this literary corpus, intense during the late nineteenth century, has lagged since the 1960s. Previous scholarship on the Qardagh legend, reviewed below, exemplifies this pattern, since it has seldom probed beyond issues of historicity and dating. Comparison with other martyr legends suggests that Qardagh's hagiographer wrote during the late Sasanian period, ca. 600–630 C.E. While his name and exact identity remain elusive, he was probably a monk living in one of the late Sasanian monasteries of Adiabene.

11. The question of Christian origins at Arbela hinges on the testimony of the controversial and deeply problematic *Chronicle of Arbela*, a narrative account of the first twenty bishops of Arbela attributed to an East-Syrian church historian named Mšīhā-Zkā. For its original publication, see Alphonse Mingana, ed., *Sources syriaques* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1907), 1: 1–170. The most recent edition is P. Kawerau, ed. and trans., *Die Chronik von Arbela* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1985). For reasons outlined in the appendix, I remain unconvinced by recent efforts to defend the *Chronicle's* authenticity.

12. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 6.

13. See n. 102 below.

THE CHURCH OF THE EAST
IN THE AGE OF KHUSRO II (590–628)

The anonymous author of the Qardagh legend belonged to one of the largest Christian communities of the late antique world. Although smaller in absolute population than the early Byzantine church, the East-Syrian church at the turn of the seventh century sprawled across a vast geographic area, encompassing the whole or portions of at least eleven present-day countries: southeastern Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Kuwait, the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Iran, southern Turkmenistan, and western Afghanistan (see map 1).¹⁴ By Yonadab of Arbela's generation, the church's institutional structure had been established for nearly two hundred years. At a series of synods convened under royal patronage during the early fifth century, East-Syrian bishops had hammered out an ecclesiastical organization that recognized the primacy of the *catholikos* of Seleucia-Ctesiphon as "father and chief and director of all the bishops of the East."¹⁵ Invoking the imagery of Matthew 16:18 ("On this rock I will build my church"), the East-Syrian bishops acclaimed the *catholikos* as "our own Peter."¹⁶ With the support of allied bishops from the Roman Empire (especially Marutha of Maipherkat, on whom see further below), the *catholikos* gradually expanded his authority. The process was not without controversy, as provincial bishops

14. In a long series of impressive studies, Jean Maurice Fiey, a Dominican priest resident in Iraq from 1939 to 1973, and thereafter in Beirut until his death in 1995, mapped the ecclesiastical geography of the Church of the East. See the autobiographical essay and full bibliography of his work in the *Annales du Département des Lettres Arabes (Institut de Lettres Orientales)* 68 (1991–92): 5–15, 17–74. The list of countries here is a composite based on evidence of the mid-sixth to mid-seventh century. For the Persian Gulf region, see n. 62 below. For southern Turkmenistan and western Afghanistan, see J. M. Fiey, "Chrétientés syriaques du Horāsān et du Ségestān," *LM* 86 (1973): 75–104 (repr. in Fiey, *Communautés syriaques*, VI).

15. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 286; 44, ll. 1–2), from the synod of 424. J. M. Fiey, "Les étapes de la prise de conscience de son identité patriarcale par l'Église syrienne orientale," *OS* 12 (1967): 3–22, charts the incremental growth of its bishop's power; here p. 16. See also W. F. Macomber, "The Authority of the Catholicos Patriarch of Seleucia Ctesiphon," in *I patriarchati orientali nel primo millennio: Relazioni del congresso tenutosi al Pontificio Istituto Orientale nei giorni 27–30 Dicembre 1967* (Rome: PISO, 1968), 179–200. For the court's strong ties to the church under Yazdegerd I (399–420), see J. Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide (224–632)* (Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1904), 87–97, focusing on the synod of 410; and esp. C. E. Bosworth, *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk)*, vol. 5, *The Sāsānids, the Byzantine, the Lakhmids, and Yemen* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 71–72 n. 191.

16. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 294; 48, ll. 7–16; quotation from the synod of 424 at p. 294; 50, l. 2). On the authority of the *catholikos*-patriarch, see in general W. de Vries, *Der Kirchenbegriff der von Rom getrennten Syrer* (Rome: PISO, 1955), 39–67, which provides extensive documentation, albeit with a strong apologetic emphasis; see 43–45 on the *catholikos* as the successor of St. Peter. For related imagery in Aphrahat and Ephrem, see R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 212–18.

fought to maintain their traditional privileges and authority.¹⁷ But the *catholikos*'s position in the Sasanian capital gave him an inexorable advantage.¹⁸ By the mid-sixth century, the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was recognized not only as the *catholikos*, but also as the "patriarch" of the Church of the East.¹⁹

The authority claimed by the *catholikos*, and indeed by the Sasanian church as a whole, hinged on the conviction that they in the East preserved the true apostolic faith.²⁰ One tradition linked the dissemination of the Gospel in Mesopotamia to Addai, the apostle of Edessa.²¹ Another, ultimately more popular set of stories attributed the region's evangelization to Addai's disciple, Mar Mari, "the apostle of truth, who was the first to teach the East the knowledge of the one God."²² Bolstered by these apostolic connections, the

17. The late third-century conflict between Papa bar Aggai, *catholikos* of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and Miles, the bishop of Susa, exemplifies the tensions sparked by the centralizing tendencies of the Sasanian hierarchy. C. Jullien and F. Jullien, *Apôtres des confins: Processus missionnaires chrétiens dans l'empire iranien* (Paris: Groupe pour l'étude de la civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 2002), 241–42, emphasizes the conflict's regional dimensions, which pitted the *catholikos* of the Mesopotamian heartland against the bishops of Iran, Khuzistan, and Mesene ("la sphère iranienne"). M.-L. Chaumont, *La christianisation de l'empire iranien des origines aux grandes persécutions du IV^e siècle* (Louvain: Peeters, 1988), 137–47, attempts to resolve the problematic chronology of Papa bar Aggai's career.

18. For the dramatic expansion of Seleucia-Ctesiphon during the Sasanian period, see J. Kröger, "Ctesiphon," *Enc. Ir.* 6 (1993): 446–49. The bishops at the synod of 410 already hailed Ctesiphon as the "great city, chief of all the cities of the East." *Synodicon* (Chabot, 257; 19, ll. 18–19).

19. Most often amalgamated into a single title as the "*catholikos*-patriarch" (*qatūliqā patriarkis*). Fiey, "Les étapes," 16–22, places this development between ca. 450 and ca. 540, arguing persuasively that earlier attestations of the title in the section headings of the *Synodicon* are interpolations by a later editor. The titles are first used interchangeably at the synod of 544 convened by Mar Aba the Great. See, for example, the *Synodicon* (Chabot, 318–19; 68–69). J. M. Fiey, *Jalons pour une histoire d'Église en Iraq* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1970), 66–84, recapitulates and slightly expands the argument of "Les étapes."

20. The claim is present, though somewhat muted, in the East-Syrian synods. The synod of 497 speaks of the "apostolic throne" of Seleucia-Kokhe, while the synod of 544 boasts of the patriarchal see's foundation "according to apostolic tradition." *Synodicon* (Chabot, 313; 64, ll. 2–3; 319–21; 69, ll. 12–13, and 70, ll. 14–19). For the transmission of the "apostolic" canons in conjunction with the *Synodicon*, see J. Dauvillier, "Chaldéen (Droit)," *Dictionnaire de droit canonique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1942), 3: 292–388 (here 296–99); Selb, *Orientalisches Kirchenrecht*, 103–4, 108.

21. For the earliest datable attestation of this tradition, see the *Synodicon* (Chabot, 581; 564, ll. 2–4), where the Nestorian bishops appearing before Khusro II in 612 boast of the pure origins of their faith received from the "blessed apostle Addai, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ." For the links between Edessa and Adiabene ("Assyria"), see n. 80 below. Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 67–71, gathers further references linking Addai to southern Mesopotamia, though none earlier than the eighth century.

22. For a brief overview of the various traditions about Mar Mari, see C. Jullien and F. Jullien, *Les Actes de Mar Mari: L'apôtre de la Mésopotamie* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 22–26. The formulation quoted here comes from the thirteenth-century metrical *Life of Rabban Bar 'Idā* (Budge, 205; 138, ll. 607–8). The *Acts of Mar Mari* appear to have been composed ca. 600–650 C.E. in

catholikos of the late Sasanian church claimed an authority that was, in many respects, comparable to papal authority over the Western church.²³ The “ancient Fathers” had found perfect expressions for the Christian faith at the ecumenical councils at Nicaea and Constantinople. In the words of the doctrinal formula endorsed by the Sasanian bishops in 585:

This is [the True Faith] which Our Lord first preached and transmitted through His nourishment to all who embraced and became disciples of His Gospel, [the Faith] which the ancient Fathers preached and taught in their generations perfectly and without anything removed, [the Faith] which those 318 holy fathers who assembled at Nicaea and those 150 who assembled at Byzantium proclaimed, taught, wrote, and affirmed in perfect words and in succinct profound formulae for the churches of every region. . . . This catholic faith has been preserved and preached without any corruption also among us (*ʿūp baynātan*) in all the churches of God forever.²⁴

Yonadab of Arbela and his contemporaries believed that it was their duty to protect this orthodox faith against the dangers of schism and heresy. This is not the place to review the development of East-Syrian theology, a topic well explored by others.²⁵ Two points, however, deserve emphasis, as they anticipate themes explored in subsequent chapters, particularly chapter 3. First, the East-Syrian clergy always strove to enforce doctrinal orthodoxy, despite their lack of access to the instruments of state power used by Roman bish-

the monastery of Mar Mari at Dayr Qōni, near Seleucia-Ctesiphon. For the circumstances of the legend’s composition, see J. Tubach, “Die Akten des Mari und ihre Intention,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 20 (1995): 1232–58; Jullien and Jullien, *Actes de Mar Mari*, 53–54; idem, “Les Actes de Mār Māri: Une figure apocryphe au service de l’unité communautaire,” *Apocrypha* 10 (1999): 177–94. For the CSCO edition of the Syriac text with French translation, see *Les Actes de Mār Māri*, ed. C. Jullien and F. Jullien (Louvain: Peeters, 2003).

23. The comparison with St. Peter is made explicit in the eighth canon of the apocryphal *Arabic Canons of Nicaea* (Braun, 68). Macomber, “Authority of the Catholicos,” 182–92, details the extensive powers of the late Sasanian patriarchs. These powers included, in brief, “practically all the powers that the Bishop of Rome has traditionally exercised in the Church Universal . . . the powers to make laws, to command obedience, to organize the Church, to appoint bishops, to regulate monasteries and the liturgy, to teach, to censure books, to judge, to impose ecclesiastical censures, and to absolve” (189).

24. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 394; 132, ll. 23–29, and 133, ll. 1–2). For the confession of faith endorsed by the synod, see S. Brock, “The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials,” in *Aksum-Thyateira: A Festschrift for Archbishop Methodios*, ed. G. D. Dagrás (London: Thyateira House, 1985), 136–39 (repr. in Brock, *SSC*, XII).

25. For an excellent overview, see D. Miller, “A Brief Historical and Theological Introduction to the Church of Persia to the End of the Seventh Century,” in *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* (Boston: The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), 481–541. For more detail, see Brock, “Christology”; and the texts and commentary in L. Abramowski and A. E. Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). For the Christological language of the Qardagh legend, see the translation, §13, n. 37.

ops to enforce orthodoxy. This policy led to bitter rivalries, at every level, between the dominant “Nestorian” church and their Christian rivals, above all the “Monophysites.”²⁶ Second, the refinement of the East-Syrian theological position under the leadership of Babai the Great (†628) hardened the division between the Christians of the Sasanian world and their Western neighbors. East-Syrian writers of the late Sasanian period increasingly present the East as the homeland of Christian orthodoxy, uncorrupted by heretical influences from the Roman Empire.²⁷ In their formal doctrinal statement presented to the Sasanian court in 612, Babai and his East-Syrian colleagues suggest that all the major heresies, even Manichaeism, had arisen in the Roman Empire before infiltrating Persia, a land where “no heresy has arisen.”²⁸

THE CHURCH OF THE EAST: A BRIEF GEOGRAPHIC SURVEY

The duty to defend the unity and integrity of Sasanian church fell primarily upon the shoulders of its metropolitan bishops. During the generation of Yonadab of Arbela, there were eight of these metropolitans, each in charge of a metropolitan province, or eparchy, containing on average six or seven suffragan dioceses. The six core metropolitan provinces were all centered in the lowlands and hill country along the eastern side of the Tigris River

26. The synods of the late Sasanian period include frequent prohibitions against mixing with “heretics.” See, for example, *Synodicon* (Chabot, 459; 198, ll. 21–24), where the participants of the synod of 596 agree that “if anyone dares to cause a schism and not receive this definition of the true faith, we will treat him as alien, excommunicated (*taridā*), abandoned, and removed from all participation with Christians, until he corrects his ways and adheres to this true faith of the Church.” For the broader conception of heresy in the Church of the East, see de Vries, *Kirchenbegriff*, 122–35, with full documentation from the *Synodicon* and other texts. I explore some aspects of these sectarian divisions in chapter 3 below.

27. The Sasanian bishops’ endorsement of the teaching of Theodore of Mopsuestia (†428) as the touchstone of orthodoxy deepened their distance from the Roman (i.e., Byzantine) church, where Theodore’s works—together with those of Theodoret of Cyrillus and Ibas of Edessa—were banned at the Council of Constantinople in 553. Sasanian bishops affirmed their commitment to the theology and exegesis of Theodore, the “blessed Expositor,” at the synods of 540, 585, and 596 but omitted any *specific* reference to heresy among the Romans. De Vries, *Kirchenbegriff*, 122–30, emphasizes the lingering tendency to view the Romans as orthodox, or at least potentially so.

28. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 585; 567, ll. 18–23): “In the land of the Persians, from the time of the apostles to this day, no heresy has arisen, causing schisms and divisions. In the land of the Romans, by contrast, from the time of the apostles to the present, there have been numerous and diverse heresies, which have contaminated many people. When they were chased away from there, following their flight their shadows arrived here. These include the Manichaeans, Marcionites, and also the Severan ‘Theopaschites’ with their malicious doctrine.” S. N. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester and Dover, NH: Manchester University Press, 1985), 95, notices the irony of attributing the origins of Manichaeism to the Roman Empire.

and its major tributaries.²⁹ Traveling from southeast to northwest, these ecclesiastical provinces were as follows (see map 2):

- Khuzistan (present-day southwestern Iran),³⁰ with its capital, Beth Lapat Mayšan (Kuwait, southern Iraq), with its capital, Prut, near present-day Basra
- Beth Aramaye (southern and central Iraq), with its capital, Seleucia-Ctesiphon
- Beth Garmai (central Iraq), with its capital, Karka de Beth Slōk, present-day Kirkūk
- Adiabene (northern Iraq), with its capital, Arbela, present-day Erbil
- Beth ʿArabaye (northern Iraq, southeastern Turkey), with its capital, Nisibis

Each of these metropolitan provinces possessed a distinct geography and Christian history, in many cases three to four centuries deep by the era of Mar Qardagh's hagiographer. The easternmost province, Khuzistan (Syr. Bēt Hūzāyē), was among the most fertile agricultural zones of the empire.³¹ Merchants with contacts in northern Mesopotamia introduced Christianity to the region a full generation or more before the rise of the Sasanian dynasty in 224.³² Captives from Roman Syria, resettled in Khuzistan as part of an ambi-

29. For orientation, see E. Sachau, "Zur Ausbreitung des Christentums in Asien," *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 1 (1919): 3–80, esp. 14–20. The ecclesiastical geography outlined in this chapter overlaps with, but is by no means identical with, the administrative geography of the Sasanian state reconstructed by R. Gyselen, *La géographie administrative de l'empire sassanide: Les témoignages sigillographiques* (Paris: Groupe pour l'étude de la civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 1989), 70–94.

30. The correspondence with the modern countries named in parentheses is inexact, but useful for orientation. Medieval Islamic geographers offer detailed descriptions of these same regions. For an introduction to the sources, see G. Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia from the Moslem Conquest to the Time of Timur* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1905; repr., Lahore: Al-Biruni, 1977).

31. For the region's physical and historical geography, see P. Christensen, *The Decline of Iran-shahr: Irrigation and Environments in the History of the Middle East, 500 B.C. to A.D. 1500* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 1993), 105–14; and R. McAdams, "Agriculture and Urban Life in Early Southwestern Iran," *Science* 136 (1962): 109–22; both emphasize the scope and complexity of the Sasanian irrigation program. Even Roman authors were aware of the region's superb agricultural yields; see, for example, Strabo, *Geography*, 15.3.2–3 and 11). For the continuing prosperity of Khuzistan under Islamic rule, see Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, 6 ("This country was extremely rich . . . its lands being plentifully irrigated were most productive"), 232–47.

32. For the merchants of Khuzistan as carriers of the Gospel, see the *Acts of Mar Mari*, 31 (Jullien and Jullien, 48–49; 43), with the commentary of C. Jullien and F. Jullien, "Porteurs de salut: Apôtre et marchand dans l'empire iranien," *PdO* 26 (2001): 127–43; expanded in idem, *Apôtres des confins*, 215–24. For the later traditions linking the apostle Aggai and Syncrios, "one of the seventy-two," to Khuzistan, see Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 74 n. 7.

tious Sasanian policy of urbanization initiated under Shapur I (239–270), established or expanded local churches at Beth Lapat, Šuštar, and other regional cities.³³ Three of the five bishops from Khuzistan attending the synod of 410 represented cities where Roman captives had been resettled. Beth Lapat earned its rank as the province's metropolitan see through its association with the Persian court.³⁴ Shapur II and his predecessors had adopted the city as a summer residence, adorned it with the work of captive Roman engineers, and renamed it V ēh-Antiōk-Šāpūr, literally “the Better Antioch of Shapur.”³⁵ Residents later truncated this official name into Gundeshapur, the appellation the city retained throughout the early Islamic period, when it earned fame for its medical school staffed with Christian doctors.³⁶

Bordering Khuzistan to the southwest, at the mouth of the Tigris-Euphrates river system, was the province Mayšan (Hellenistic Mesene), a prosperous ter-

33. E. Kettenhofen, “Deportations (ii): In the Parthian and Sasanian Periods,” *Enc. Ir.* 8 (1998): 297–308, provides a richly documented survey of the general Sasanian policy, which affected not only Khuzistan, but many provinces of the empire. The literary evidence in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, and Islamic sources is extensive. On the role of the deportations in Sasanian agricultural expansion, see Christensen, *Decline of Iranshahr*, 69–72. See now Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 153–77, which reexamines the integration of the deportees into the Sasanian church (with the map on 263, building on the pioneering work of Paul Peeters).

34. For the ecclesiastical history of Khuzistan (also known as “Elam,” or in Greco-Roman texts, “Susiana”), see, in general, J. M. Fiey, “L’Élam, la première des métropoles ecclésiastiques syriennes orientales,” *Melto* 5 (1969): 221–67 (repr. in Fiey, *Communautés syriaques*, IIIa), 227–49 on Beth Lapat, with a useful sketch map on 222. For the traditions linking the captive patriarch of Antioch to Beth Lapat (Gundeshapur) see Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 167–70.

35. M. Morony, “Beth Lapat,” *Enc. Ir.* 4 (1991): 187–88, persuasively dates the city’s foundation and naming to the reign of Shapur I. On at least two occasions, it served as an imperial capital, under Bahrām I (271–274) and Shapur II (309–379). The color relief map in the *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*, ed. R. Talbert (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 92 (D4), nicely illustrates the city’s advantageous physical position, on the edge of the plain beneath the Karun River watershed. For the work of Roman engineers at Gundeshapur and other Sasanian cities (especially Bishapur in Fars), see Kettenhofen, “Deportations,” 303–4 (n. 33 above); E. J. Keall, “Bišāpūr,” *Enc. Ir.* 4 (1991): 287–89 (though noting the tendency of some Western archaeologists to exaggerate the degree of Roman artistic and technical influence). Cf. D. Huff, “Bridges (i): Pre-Islamic Bridges,” *Enc. Ir.* 4 (1991): 449–53, esp. 450 on the Roman-style engineering of the Sasanian bridges at Firuzabad and other sites. For a contemporary Sasanian depiction of the Roman captives at Bishapur, see A. Godard, *The Art of Iran* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1962), 192–93 (pl. 106).

36. For the compound toponym Vēh-Antiōk-Šāpūr, see Gyselen, *Géographie administrative*, 17–19, which lists a variety of place-names formed with Sasanian royal names. For the Christian doctors of Gundeshapur, see G. J. Reinink, “Theology and Medicine in Jundishapur: Cultural Change in the Nestorian School Tradition,” in *Learned Antiquity: Scholarship and Society in the Near-East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, M. W. Twomey, and G. J. Reinink (Louvain, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2003), 163–74; G. L. Richter-Bernburg, “Boḳtīšū,” *Enc. Ir.* 4 (1991): 333–36. For medical debates at late Sasanian Gundeshapur, see chapter 3, n. 82 below.

minus for trade with the Persian Gulf and Asia, as well as a productive agricultural zone.³⁷ Here, too, Christianity emerged under the combined influence of long-distance commerce and the Sasanian policy of deportation. The *Hymn of the Pearl*, an early Syriac hymn preserved in the *Acts of Thomas*, describes Mayšān as a hub of international commerce, the “meeting place of merchants of the Orient.”³⁸ The region’s first bishop, a supporter of the *catholikos* Papa bar Aggai, was reputed to have quit his episcopal see to become a missionary in India.³⁹ In doing so, he followed a well-established route for the diffusion of new faiths. A century before him, the apostle Mani had converted the Sasanian “Lord of Mayšān” (*Mesun-Khwadāy*) prior to his journey to India.⁴⁰

The Mesopotamian heartland of central Iraq was administered under the ecclesiastical province of Beth Aramaye. Like Mayšān, this part of Iraq is extremely arid. In contrast with the Arbela region (on which see further below), central Mesopotamia receives on average less than 165 millimeters (6.5 inches) of annual precipitation (significantly less than El Paso, Texas, for ex-

37. M. Schuol’s *Die Charakene: Ein mesopotamisches Königreich in hellenistisch-partischer Zeit* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 2000) is a model regional study; see Schuol, *Charakene*, 400–408 and 427–52, on Mesene’s intensive trade contacts with the Persia Gulf, India, and China (with historical maps on 552–53). For the region’s arid climate (108–172 mm average annual rainfall), alluvial soils, and shifting coastline, see Schuol, *Charakene*, 284–90, with the map on 554; M. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 593; and Christensen, *Decline of Iranshahr*, 62–63, which emphasizes the “hydrological consequences” of Greek colonization. The relief map in the *Barrington Atlas*, 93–94, clearly shows the topographic continuity between Mayšān and western Khuzistan.

38. *Acts of Thomas*, §18 (Wright, 239; Syr. pagination, 275, 1.5); Jullien and Jullien, “Porteurs de salut,” 131–33. The cultural contacts accompanying this trade made Mayšān, together with the neighboring region of southern Beth Aramaye (Babylonia), a tremendously fertile zone for religious innovation and missionary expansion. See the seminal study by E. Peterson, “Urchristentum und Mandaismus,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 27 (1928): 56–58, on the region’s religious and ethnic diversity. For the Judeo-Christian baptizing sects of Mayšān and southern Khuzistan, see Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 137–51, esp. 147–49.

39. The story survives in two late sources: the early eleventh-century *Chronicle of Se’ert*, I (I) (Scher and Périer, 292–93) and Barhebraeus (†1286), *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 27 (Lamy and Abbeoos, 9–11). For David of Mayšān’s connection to Mar Papa, see Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 240. The local church of Mayšān seems to have retained some modicum of its Syrian cultural heritage. See J. Tubach, “Ein Palmyrer als Bischof der Mesene,” *OrChr* 77 (1993): 138–50; Schuol, *Charakene*, 377–78. J. M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne: Contribution à l’étude de l’histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastiques et monastiques du nord de l’Iraq* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1965–68), 3: 263–82, reconstructs the region’s broader ecclesiastical history.

40. S. N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), 5–6 (coauthored with J. Lieu), citing a Manichaean missionary narrative in Parthian recovered during the German excavations at Turfan. For an English translation, see J. P. Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature: Representative Texts Chiefly from the Middle Persian and Parthian Writings* (Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975), 20. On the identity of the “Lord of Mayšān,” as a close relative, perhaps the brother, of Shapur I, see Schuol, *Charakene*, 374.

ample); and summer temperatures routinely hover above one hundred degrees Fahrenheit.⁴¹ With irrigation, though, the region's rich alluvial soils are capable of excellent agricultural yields. Arabic geographers described this part of Iraq as the *Sawad*, literally the "black (land)," and here, as in Khuzistan and Mayšan, Sasanian royal policy encouraged a systematic expansion of agriculture through the excavation and maintenance of a complex system of canals.⁴² The region's ethnic composition was mixed, with Arameans forming the clear majority (hence the name Beth Aramaye, "Place of the Arameans"), but significant concentrations of Arabs west of the Euphrates and Persians and other ethnic groups (including deportees) in and around Ctesiphon.⁴³ Jews knew the region as the "land of pure lineage" in recognition of the fact that their ancestors had lived here for nearly a thousand years. The great rabbinic academies of Pumbedita and Neharda lay along the Euphrates only two days' journey northwest of Ctesiphon.⁴⁴ In com-

41. Intense summer heat is characteristic of all the lowland areas of Mesopotamia. For convenient tables, see N. W. Al-Any et al., *Area Handbook for Iraq*, 2d ed. (Washington, DC: The American University, 1971), 17, where table 2 lists the maximum average temperatures for January and July at seven cities across Iraq; the average highs for July range between 102 and 111 degrees Fahrenheit; see also table 1 for average annual precipitation figures.

42. Most of the literary documentation for this canal system dates from the early Islamic period, when a reduced version of the entire system continued in use. See Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, 26–31; Christensen, *Decline of Iranshahr*, 82–104, with the map on 53. Christensen (82) explains the contraction primarily as a demographic consequence of the bubonic plague, which afflicted Mesopotamia with "terrifying regularity and, apparently, undiminished virulence" for centuries, extending from ca. 562 to the latter half of the eighth century.

43. On the region's ethnic composition, see Morony, *Iraq*, 167–73, 593–94, emphasizing the interpenetration of Aramaic, Persian, and Mesopotamian cultures as revealed, for instance, by the personal and divine names employed in the late Sasanian "magic" bowls excavated at Nippur. On the same theme, see now Morony, "Magic and Society in Late Sasanian Iraq," in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, ed. S. Noegel, J. Walker, and B. Wheeler (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 94–95.

In 542, Khusro I settled thousands of captives from Roman Syria at Weh-Andiyok, a new city 5 km south of Ctesiphon. The city's name, literally "[Khusro's city] Greater than Antioch," indicates his deliberate emulation of Shapur's foundation at Gundeshapur. John of Ephesus reports that an additional 292,000 captives were settled here in 573, following the Sasanian victories at Dara, Apamea, and other cities of Roman Syria. While John's numbers may be distorted, the general picture of large numbers of deportees resettled in the region is credible. See Christensen, *Decline of Iranshahr*, 70.

44. On the Jews of late antique Iraq, see Morony, *Iraq*, 306–31, which offers an excellent overview, with full bibliography on 613–20. As Morony (306–7) observes, the historical formation of the region's Jewish community, originally composed of Judean captives transported to Babylon during the sixth century B.C.E., remains "one of the most significant and least understood transformations in the history of Iraq. . . . This process was most likely the result of a demographic increase among the descendants of the exiles, the conversion of their neighbors and slaves, and possibly intermarriage." For the geography of Jewish settlement in Iraq, see A. Oppenheimer, with B. Isaac and M. Lecker, *Babylonia Judaica in the Talmudic Period* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1983), largely superseding the earlier studies (Neubauer, Streck,

parison to Jews and polytheists, Christians were relative upstarts in the religious landscape of this part of the Iranian world.⁴⁵ They were, however, well-organized upstarts, with a hierarchy of local bishops and dioceses that can be partially reconstructed from the *Synodicon*.⁴⁶ In his capacity as the metropolitan of Beth Aramaye, the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon had the authority to convene provincial synods, in addition to the grand all-inclusive synods he convened as the *catholikos*-patriarch over “all the churches of Persia.”

The territory north and east of Beth Aramaye fell within the ecclesiastical province of Beth Garmai, a region that encompassed both Mesopotamian lowlands and, on its eastern side, the snowcapped peaks of the central Zagros Mountains.⁴⁷ Its capital, Karka de Beth Slōk (contemporary Kirkūk), claimed a Christian heritage extending back to the apostles Addai and Mari. While the apostolic connection remains dubious, it is clear that several cities in the region possessed significant Christian communities by the beginning of the fourth century.⁴⁸ Despite sporadic persecution by Zoroastrian authorities, these local churches steadily grew during the mid-late Sasanian Empire. The Christian villages and cities of Beth Garmai produced some of the leading episcopal and lay figures of Khusro II’s reign. The *catholikos* Sabrišōʿ I (596–604) was reputed to be the son of a shepherd from the mountainous region of Siarzur in the eastern portion of Beth Garmai; rising through the clerical ranks, he became bishop of Lašom and then patriarch.⁴⁹ The pow-

and Obermeyer) cited by Morony, *Iraq*, 591. As Petersen, “Urchristentum,” 56, observes, the Babylonian rabbis scorned the Jews of Mesene as corrupt descendants of Palmyra.

45. There is very little reliable evidence for Christianity in Beth Aramaye prior to the fourth century. For the tradition linking the apostle Addai to the region, see Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 70 n. 68.

46. Five dioceses for Beth Aramaye are attested already at the synods of 410 and 420. These included Kaškar, the oldest see of the region, located near the border of the neighboring province Mayšan; Ĥira, the future capital of the Lakhmid Arab dynasty; and Dayr Qōni, where the *Acts of Mar Mari* were likely composed (see n. 22 above). For the evolution of these and the remaining dioceses of Beth Aramaye, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 147–261, here 148.

47. For the geographical boundaries of Beth Garmai, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 11–16, with the sketch map on pl. I (note that Fiey’s map shows a mixture of ancient and modern place-names; see 17–145 for the identification and history of the individual dioceses).

48. For the origins of Christianity in this part of Iraq, we depend primarily on the *History of Karka de Beth Slōk*, an anonymous Christian civic chronicle of the late Sasanian period. For the Syriac text, see P. Bedjan, ed., *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* (Paris and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890–97; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), 2: 507–35. J. M. Fiey, “Vers la réhabilitation de l’*Histoire de Karka d’Bêt Slōh*,” *AB* 82 (1964): 189–222, remains the most comprehensive analysis of the text (see 190 n. 3 on the text’s sixth-century provenance). See also Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 132–33, 164, on the possible historicity of the refugee Roman bishop Ṭuqrāite (Theocritus), who settled in Karka during the late second century.

49. For Sabrišōʿ’ s career, see M. Tamcke, *Der Katholikos-Patriarch Sabrišōʿ I. (596–604) und das Mönchtum* (Frankfurt, Bern, and New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 17–23, 29–31; Fiey, *Assyrie*

erful Yazdin, chief financial officer at Khusro's court, was a native of Karka de Beth Slök.⁵⁰ When Sabrišōʿ died in 604, Yazdin accompanied the corpse in a formal procession up the Diyala River valley for burial in a monastery near the city of Karḥ Ğuddān.⁵¹ All three of the major cities of Beth Garmai—Karka de Beth Slök, Lašom, and Karḥ Ğuddān—benefited from their position on (or near) the royal road, which ascended from Ctesiphon and skirted the foothills of the Zagros Mountains en route to the Roman frontier. Following this same road north from Beth Garmai, Sasanian travelers passed through Adiabene, crossing the Little and Great Zab rivers, before arriving in the last of the “core” provinces of the Church of the East, Beth ʿArbaye.

Beth ʿArbaye, with its capital, Nisibis, encompassed a wide swathe of territory on either side of the upper Tigris, including all five of the so-called Transtigritanian regions ceded by the Romans to Persia in the treaty of 363. These five principalities—Beth Arzon, Beth Moksāye, Beth Zabdaï, Beth Rahaimāi, and Qardu—situated along the Tigris and its northern tributaries, straddled the frontier between Mesopotamia and Armenia.⁵² All five regions possessed bishoprics by the beginning of the fifth century, although their position in the Sasanian church hierarchy was balanced by continuing contacts with the semi-autonomous church of Armenia.⁵³ Armenian influence

chrétienne, 3: 56–58, esp. 56 n. 8 on the chief sources: the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 10–13, 16–18; Guidi, 17–22); Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, I, §25 (Budge, 86; 49, ll. 17–20); the *Chronicle of Séert*, II (II), chap. 65 (Scher and Griveau, 474–504); and the biography by one of Sabrišōʿs disciples, Syriac text in Bedjan, ed., *Histoire de Mar-Jabalaha*, 288–331. For the diocese of Lašom, ca. 50 km due south of Karka de Beth Slök, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 54–60; idem, *Pour un Oriens Christianus novus: Répertoire des diocèses syriaques orientaux et occidentaux* (Beirut and Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), 105 (cited hereafter as Fiey, *POCN*).

50. For Yazdin's career, see B. Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VIIe siècle*. (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1992), 2: 246–52; Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 23–38, with earlier scholarship cited at 24 n. 1. Yazdin's wealth and power derived directly from his position at the Sasanian court. In the words of one chronicler, “He [Yazdin] was loved by Khusro as much as Joseph by Pharaoh, and even more, so much in fact that he became famous in the kingdoms of both the Persians and the Romans.” *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 22; Guidi, 23).

51. *Chronicle of Séert*, II (II), chap. 71 (Scher and Griveau, 503–4); Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 25–26. Yazdin was also responsible for the transport of the body of Mar Yahb, a cave-dwelling ascetic of northern Iraq, whose corpse was reburied in the “tomb of the martyrs” in Karḥ Ğuddān. See the *Chronicle of Séert*, II (II), chap. 53 (Scher and Griveau, 458–59).

52. For orientation, see R. W. Hewson, “Introduction to Armenian Historical Geography, IV: The *Vitaxates* of Arsacid Armenia.” *REArm* 21 (1988–89): 271–319. For the region's physical and historical geography, see L. Dillemann, *Haute Mésopotamie orientale et pays adjacents: Contribution à la géographie historique de la région, du Ve s. avant l'ère chrétienne au VIe s. de cette ère* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthier, 1962), 48–50, 110–12, 121–23, 210–11, with the maps in figs. 3–4 (pp. 39 and 42).

53. N. Garsoïan, “Quelques précisions préliminaires sur le schisme entre les églises byzantine et arménienne au sujet du concile de Chalcedoine: III. Les évêchés méridionaux limotrophes de la Mésopotamie,” *REArm* 23 (1992): 39–80, skillfully reconstructs the region's eccle-

was especially strong in the piedmont zone and highland valleys that fell within the dioceses of Arzon (Arm. Aljnik^ϥ), Beth Moksāye (Mokk^ϥ), and Qardu (Korduk^ϥ). The Sasanian church hierarchy attempted to govern this region from Nisibis, the official frontier post between Rome and Persia, perched at the top of the Mesopotamian plain.⁵⁴ The preeminence of Nisibis was secured by two factors, both important for understanding the world of Qardagh's hagiographer. First, the theological school at Nisibis, founded in the late fifth century (after the emperor Zeno closed the "School of the Persians" at Edessa), served as the nerve center of a powerful East-Syrian educational network. As the flagship institution of this system of "Christian *madrasas*," the School of Nisibis trained hundreds of future bishops, deacons, and monks during the late Sasanian period.⁵⁵ As suggested in chapter 3 below, Qardagh's biographer probably studied at Nisibis or in one of its satellite schools. Second, the highlands above Nisibis, the Ṭur ʿAbdin, known in East-Syrian tradition as Mount Izla, were the heartland of the East-Syrian monastic revival movement initiated by Abraham of Kaškar (†588).⁵⁶ By the end of the Sasanian period, dozens of monasteries, convents, and hermitages dotted the highlands of Arzon and Qardu, as well as the neighboring districts of the Great Zab River basin that fell under the jurisdiction of Adiabene.⁵⁷ The impact of these East-Syrian institutions extended well beyond

siastical history, revising and expanding on the foundation laid by J. M. Fiey, *Nisibe, métropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origines à nos jours* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1977).

54. G. Widengren, "Arbāyestan," *Enc. Ir.* 2 (1987): 276–77; Dillemann, *Haute Mésopotamie*, 191–92, with stunning aerial photos of the plain surrounding Nisibis at pls. I (p. 32) and VII (p. 80). The Roman-Persian treaty of 562 reaffirmed Nisibis's designation as an official center for transborder commerce, a status originally conferred in the treaty of 297. For an insightful sketch of the city's history, see N. Pigulevskaia, *Les villes de l'état iranien aux époques parthe et sassanide: Contribution à l'histoire sociale de la Basse Antiquité* (Paris and The Hague: Mouton and Co, 1963), 49–59.

55. A. Vööbus's *History of the School of Nisibis* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1965) presents a comprehensive narrative history but should be used with caution. For more recent bibliography, see chapter 3, n. 49 below. A. Becker, "Devotional Study: The School of Nisibis and the Development of 'Scholastic' Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2003), provides a much-needed reevaluation. A revised version will soon appear as Becker, *The Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). Garsoïan, "Quelques précisions," 66–68, documents the School of Nisibis's impact on the regions of Arzon, Qardu, and Adiabene. For its influence at the court of Justinian and beyond, see chapter 3, n. 33 below.

56. For visual orientation, see H. Hollerweger, *Lebendiges Kulturerbe, Turabdin: Wo die Sprache Jesu gesprochen wird* (Linz: Freunde des Turadbin, 1999), trilingual (German, English, Turkish), with contributions by A. Palmer and S. Brock, and numerous color plates of the region's landscape and architectural remains; see esp. the map on 56–57; also *Barrington Atlas*, 89 (D3).

57. The expansion of East-Syrian monasticism throughout northern Iraq is richly documented in East-Syrian literary sources, esp. Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors* and the *Book*

the borders of Beth ʿArbaye. As Nina Garsoïan has shown, the southern districts of Armenia often felt the gravitational pull of the Sasanian church.⁵⁸

EARLY HIGHLAND PROVINCES OF THE CHURCH OF THE EAST: FARS AND MEDIA

In addition to these six core metropolitan provinces, further eparchies were created as the Church of the East expanded across Iran and Central Asia. It will suffice to mention here the two earliest of these highland provinces, Fars (southwestern Iran) and Media (west-central Iran). As the homeland of the empire's ruling dynasty, the mountainous district of Fars held a special place in the conceptual geography of the Sasanian Empire. Sasanian kings and high officials ordered that the records of their deeds be carved here at sites associated with their ancient Achaemenid predecessors.⁵⁹ The region abounds with castles and fire temples constructed during the Sasanian period (see chapter 5). But even here, in the heartland of the Sasanian dynasty, the East-Syrian church had a substantial presence. By the early fifth century, Fars had a Christian community that included Syrians, Greeks, and Persians.⁶⁰ By the latter half of the fifth century, Persian-speaking Christians had begun to translate and compose ecclesiastical literature in Middle Persian.⁶¹ By the

of Chastity by Išō'dnaḥ of Basra. Garsoïan, "Quelques précisions," 66 nn. 110–11, provides a concise list of the major primary sources and modern scholarship, esp. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 162–63, 255–56, 271, 308; 2: 823–24.

58. On the temporary defection of the bishops of southern Armenia during the early 550s, see Garsoïan, "Quelques précisions," 69–74. It appears that the Armenian church accepted the secular authority of the Sasanian throne, even as the Armenian *kat'olikos* doggedly defended his ecclesiastical independence from the patriarchal see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. See N. Garsoïan, "Secular Jurisdiction over the Armenian Church (Fourth to Seventh Centuries)," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983): 235–50.

59. For the physical and historical geography of Fars, see X. De Planhol, "Fars (i): Geography," *Enc. Ir.* 9 (1999): 328–33; and J. Wiesehöfer, "Fars (ii): History in the Pre-Islamic Period," *Enc. Ir.* 9 (1999): 333–37 (336 on the "special significance of Fars for the history of Zoroastrianism"). D. Huff, "Fars (v): Monuments," *Enc. Ir.* 9 (1999): 351–56, offers a concise, reliable survey with full bibliography. For the evolution of Fars under Sasanian and Islamic rule, see Christensen, *Decline of Iranshahr*, 163–77; Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, 248–98.

60. For the origins of the Christian community in Fars, once again the combined result of deportations and local conversion, see Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 36–39, 62–65, 105–10, 160–62, 240–45, 253–60.

61. The near complete loss of Middle Persian Christian literature has long obscured this important component of the Church of the East. For the fragmentary Pahlavi Psalter recovered during the German excavations at Turfan in Chinese Turkestan, see F. C. Andreas and K. Barr, "Bruckstücke einer Pehlevi-Übersetzung der Psalmen," *SPAW, Phil.-hist. Klasse* (1933): 91–152; with the commentary in P. Gignoux, "L'auteur de la version pehlevi du Psautier: Serait-il Nestorien?" in *Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis, 1898–1968, Fondateur et directeur de l'Orient syrien, 1956–1967*. (Louvain: Imprimerie orientale, 1969), 233–44.

mid-sixth century, the metropolitan see of Fars, the coastal city of Rev Ardashir, administered multiple dioceses along the shores of the Persian Gulf, known collectively as the region of Beth Qatrāyē.⁶²

Finally, the Church of the East extended its administration over the local highland churches of west-central Iran. The creation of the ecclesiastical province of Media (Syr. Bet Madāyē), with its capital, Ḥulwan, owed its status to its position along a major communication artery of Sasanian royal administration. During the fifth and sixth centuries, Sasanian rulers established their summer palaces on the western slopes of the central Zagros, at Dastegird (Syr. Dasqarta d-Malkā), Qasr-i-Shirin, and Ḥulwan. Each of these summer capitals lay close to the great trunk road that connected central Mesopotamia to the Iranian plateau and the empire's northeastern frontier.⁶³ The significance of this lowland-highland corridor was self-evident to later Islamic geographers. In the words of al-Mas'ūdī (†956), himself a native of Baghdad,

those [Persian] rulers, in the wisdom of their views, established their summer residence in the Jibal [i.e., the highlands of the central Zagros] to escape the hot winds of 'Irak, its mosquitoes and countless reptiles, and [established] their winter residence in 'Irak to escape the intense cold of the mountain, its snows and heavy rains, its mud and filth.⁶⁴

Medieval Islamic travelers ascending from Baghdad to Hamadan could still see the “splendid and magnificent” ruins of Khusro II's palace at “Daskarta” (Dastegird).⁶⁵

62. For the ecclesiastical geography of Fars and the Persian Gulf, see J. M. Fiey, “Diocèses syriens orientaux du golfe Persique,” in *Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis*, 177–219 (repr. in Fiey, *Communautés syriaques*, II), with the map on 181. For individual dioceses, see also Fiey, *POCN*, esp. 124–25, on Rev Ardashir, whose second attested bishop, Ma'nā, became *catholikos* in 420. Beth Qatrāyē briefly became an independent metropolitanate during the 660s.

63. See Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, 227–28, on this traditional route, ascending the Diyala River valley to reach the Iranian plateau. For the elevation gain, see the relief maps in the *Bar-ington Atlas*, 94 (F4–G3).

64. Al-Mas'ūdī, *Book of Notification and Review (Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa'l-Ishrāf)* (Carra de Vaux, 58). For Mas'ūdī's place in the Islamic geographic tradition, see S. M. Ahmad, *A History of Arab-Islamic Geography (9th–16th A.D.)* (Amman: Al al-Bayt University, Mafrāq, 1995), 61–65; A. Scholten, *Länderbeschreibung und Länderkunde im islamischen Kulturraum des 10. Jahrhunderts: Ein geographiehistorischer Beitrag zur Erforschung länderkundlicher Konzeptionen* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1976), 57–65.

65. Al-Yā'qūbī (†897 or 905), *Book of the Countries (Kitāb al-Buldān)* (Wiet, 67): “Pour aller de Bagdad à Ḥulwān, on prend à gauche après avoir franchi le pont de Nahrawān, et on passe à Daskarat Malik, où l'on trouve des palais des rois Perses, constructions extraordinaires, splendides et magnifiques.” For Yā'qūbī, see Ahmad, *Arab-Islamic Geography*, 60–61; Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, 12–13. Another traveler quoted by al-Yāqut (†1229) describes the wonderful domed building he saw at “Dastegird Kisrawiyah” (i.e., “Dastegird belonging to Khusro”). Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, 62.

Khusro maintained a second summer palace farther up the trunk road at Ḥulwan. While Dastegird remained part of the province of Beth Aramaye, and thus under the jurisdiction of the Sasanian capital, Ḥulwan became the capital of the independent metropolitan province of Media.⁶⁶ The Roman army of Heraclius would wreak havoc in these mountains during its campaigns of 624 and 627–628 (see chapter 2).

The synods of the Church of the East brought representatives from all of these regions together under the aegis of the *catholikos* and the Sasanian court. The signature list of the synod of 605 nicely illustrates the geographic breadth and interregional ties of the East-Syrian church in the generation of Yonadab of Arbela and Mar Qardagh's hagiographer.⁶⁷ Twenty-nine bishops, including three metropolitans, participated in the synod.⁶⁸ Gregory of Pherat, the alleged favorite of Queen Shirin, presided as the newly appointed *catholikos*-patriarch—a position he had acquired only after acrimonious controversy.⁶⁹ The delegation from the patriarch's native region of Mayšan consisted of four bishops, including one revered as a "performer of miracles."⁷⁰

66. The region of Media possesses less geographic coherence than, for example, Fars and has often been partitioned by administrative divisions. This variability is reflected in the region's complex and shifting ecclesiastical geography. See J. M. Fiey, "Médie chrétienne," *PdO* 1 (1970): 357–84 (repr. in Fiey, *Communautés syriaques*, IV), esp. 358–60. The eparchy of Ḥulwan was created at the very end of the Sasanian period, sometime between 628 and 646. See Fiey, "Médie chrétienne," 364–65; idem, *POCN*, 92–93.

67. See below for my arguments dating the completion of the Qardagh legend to the reign of Khusro II (590–628). The chronology of Yonadab's episcopacy can only be partially reconstructed. He attended the synod of 605, where he was the second bishop to sign. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 478; 213, l. 24). In 609 he was among the three metropolitan bishops who appointed Babai the Great as overseer of the church following the death of Gregory of Pherat. According to the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 20–21; Guidi, 23), he also participated in the formal theological debate held at the Sasanian court in 612 (see chapter 3). For the full range of his known (or postulated) activities, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 55–56, 77, 107, 230, 331–32, 769, 788.

68. The participating bishops ratified the synod not by signatures, but "with our seals" (*b-ṭab'ayn*). *Synodicon* (Chabot, 478; 213, l. 22). Their names alone, an amalgam of Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, and Persian onomastic roots, underscore the linguistic and cultural diversity of the late Sasanian church. I have followed Chabot's convention in excluding the *catholikos* from the numbering of the synod's participants.

69. Gregory's election was secured through the support of the Christian court physicians Abraham and Yuhannā as-Saduri of Nisibis, the court astrologer Mar Aba, and Queen Shirin, after the deposition of the previous candidate, Gregory, metropolitan bishop of Nisibis. For a concise summary of these events, see Morony, *Iraq*, 349–50. Gregory's tenure as patriarch would prove to be notoriously corrupt.

70. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 478–79; 213, ll. 23, 29; 214, ll. 1, 5), where Joseph, bishop of Prut and metropolitan of Mayšan, is the first to ratify the synod. His attending bishops included Gabriel of Karka de Mayšan (ancient Charax, and formerly the metropolitan seat of the province) and John of Rima. For these dioceses, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 272–75, 277–82; idem, *POCN*, 100, 125–26. On Gabriel of Nehargour, a "great man and worker of miracles," see the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 20; Guidi, 22); Fiey, *POCN*, 114.

Three bishops represented the province of Beth Aramaye, including the bishop of Kaškar, who had been a key figure in the entourage of the previous patriarch.⁷¹ Seven bishops, led by the metropolitan Boktišō^c of Karka de Beth Slōk, represented Beth Garmai.⁷² Yonadab of Arbela headed the party of five bishops who arrived from Adiabene. Finally, three provinces were represented only by suffragan bishops: four from Khuzistan, three from Media, and two from unidentified dioceses.⁷³ Only a single bishop attended from the frontier region of Beth ʿArbaye, where Roman and Sasanian armies were again at war.⁷⁴ The absence of the metropolitan bishops of Beth ʿArbaye, Khuzistan, and Fars is indicative of the recurrent political divisions within the Church of the East. The tension between these metropolitan sees and Seleucia-Ctesiphon is a leitmotif of Sasanian church history (see n. 17 above). Behind such tensions lurked the danger of schism. Yonadab and his fellow bishops had to guard carefully against any sign of

71. The bishop of Kaškar traditionally held first rank in the province of Beth Aramaye behind the *catholicos*-patriarch. The venerable position of his see is reflected in the placement of the seal of Theodore, bishop of Kaškar, fourth overall and immediately after those of the metropolitans of Mayšan, Adiabene, and Beth Garmai. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 478; 213, l. 26). On the see of Kaškar, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 151–87; idem, *POCN*, 102–3. A brief anecdote preserved in the eleventh century by Mārī ibn Sulaymān, *De Patriarchis* (Gismondi, 52; 51) places Theodore in Sabrišō^c I's entourage.

72. The metropolitan's name means literally "Saved by Jesus"; similar compound names, composed with Syriac or Persian elements, were popular during the late Sasanian period. Boktišō^c's suffragan bishops represented the dioceses of Hrbath Glal, Šeharqart (Persian Šahrgard), Mahoze d' Arewan, Tahal, and Tirhan. For the history of these various dioceses of Beth Garmai, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 82, 89–93, 104–9, 130–38; idem, *POCN*, 92, 106–7, 136, 139–40. A sixth suffragan bishop, Nathaniel of Šiazur (Šahrzur), represented the mountainous district east of Karka de Beth Slōk (Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 68–71; idem, *POCN*, 131), where the patriarch Sabrišō^c of Lašōm (n. 49 above) had grown up. For Nathaniel's martyrdom as an apostate from Zoroastrianism, see n. 106 below.

73. Bishops of Khuzistan: *Synodicon* (Chabot, 478–79; 213, ll. 27, 31; 214, ll. 3, 9). Their names are Pusai of Karka de Ledan, Pusai of Hormizd-Ardashir (Ahwaz), Ahišma of Šuštār, and Jacob of Susa. For the history of their dioceses, see Fiey, *POCN*, 45–47, 99–100, 133, 135; idem, "L'Élam," *passim*. The three bishops from Media were Hnanišō^c of Azerbaijan, Barḥadbšabba of Hūlwan, and Yazdkwast of Beth Madāye (Hamadan). Their signatures were nos. 25, 27, and 28 in a list of 29. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 479; 214, ll. 16, 18–19). The placement of their signatures indicates the relatively low rank of these highland dioceses, despite the fact that all three bishoprics were established by the first decades of the fifth century. On Hūlwan and Hamadan, whose bishops attended the synod of 410, see Fiey, "Médie chrétienne," 360–72; idem, *POCN*, 87, 92. On the diocese of Azerbaijan and its capital, Ganzak (in modern northwestern Iran), see Garsoïan, "Quelques précisions," 68–69 n. 126; Fiey, *POCN*, 56. I have been unable to locate the dioceses of Šenna and Barhis (cf. Fiey, *POCN*, 59).

74. See n. 4 above on the Persian offensive launched in the spring of 603. Maruta, bishop of Qardu, was the only bishop at the synod representing the entire province. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 478; 214, l. 4). For the diocese of Qardou (Greco-Roman Corduene), see Fiey, *Nisibis*, 161–84; idem, *POCN*, 120; and Garsoïan, "Quelques précisions," 54–55, esp. n. 66. As explained below, the region forms the northern frontier of the Qardagh legend's narrative geography.

sectarian division or heresy that might threaten the health and unity of their church.⁷⁵

ARBELA, ADIABENE, AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE QARDAGH LEGEND

When Yonadab was consecrated metropolitan bishop of Adiabene ca. 585, he assumed leadership of a Christian community that was already four hundred years old. Christianity had filtered into Parthian Adiabene and taken root among the region's Jewish community by the end of the second century.⁷⁶ As a client kingdom under Parthian rule, Adiabene had developed wide-ranging commercial and cultural contacts across the Near East. Its royal house grew wealthy and cosmopolitan from this trade.⁷⁷ In a well-known incident described by the historian Josephus, a Jewish merchant of Mayšan succeeded in converting several members of the royal family of Adiabene.⁷⁸ Unless one accepts the authenticity of the *Chronicle of Arbela* (see the appendix), there is no comparable record of the early stages of the Christianization of Adiabene. Two features of this process, however, are undisputed. First, commercial and cultural contacts with the Roman city of Edessa were very influential in the evangelization of Adiabene and neighboring Sasanian provinces.⁷⁹ Later legends about the apostolic origins of the Sasanian church frequently acknowl-

75. The thirty-one canons appended to the synod of 595 indicate the wide range of controversial issues discussed by the participating clergy. See the *Synodicon* (Chabot, 393–423; 132–64). Problematic issues included the canonical status of Theodore of Mopsuestia's teaching, itinerant monks, and intermarriage with "heretics" and "pagans."

76. Chaumont, *Christianisation de l'empire iranien*, 52–53; contra J. Neusner, "The Conversion of Adiabene to Christianity," *Numen* 13 (1966): 144–50, which proposes a still earlier date. For the earliest history of the church of Adiabene, see, in general, Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 41–43.

77. In the absence of a definitive study of the kingdom of Adiabene, see the following brief surveys: J. F. Hansman, "Arbela," *Enc. Ir.* 2 (1987): 277–78; Dillemann, *Haute Mésopotamie*, 112–13; J. Oelsner and E. Badian, "Adiabene," *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike* (Stuttgart, 1996), col. 112. J. Teixidor, "The Kingdom of Adiabene and Hatra," *Berytus* 17 (1967–68): 1–11, describes the inscribed statue of a king of Adiabene found at Hatra, though the identification of the depicted king as the Jewish convert Izates II (ruled ca. 36–60) is tenuous.

78. For Judaism in Adiabene, see Oppenheimer, *Babylonia Judaica*, 20–24 (Adiabene), 38–41 (Arbela); J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 1, *The Parthian Period* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 58–72. For the incident described by Josephus, see L. Schiffman, "The Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene in Josephus and Rabbinic Sources," in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. L. H. Feldman and G. Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 293–312; and on the legend's Iranian context, M. Frenschkowski, "Iranische Königslegende in der Adiabene: Zur Vorgeschichte von Josephus: *Antiquitates* XX.17–33*," *ZDMG* 140 (1990): 213–33.

79. The Byzantine historian Sozomen, writing during the mid-fifth century, attributed the spread of the Gospel in the Sasanian Empire to the Persians' regular contacts with Edessans ("the people of Osrhoene") and Armenians. See Sozomen, *Church History*, II, 8, 2 (Bidez and Hansen, 61); Chaumont, *Christianisation de l'empire iranien*, 1.

edge the importance of this Edessan connection. The late Sasanian *Acts of Mar Mari* describe, for instance, how Addai, the apostle of Edessa, dispatched Mar Mari to the “region of the East, to the land of Babel,” where among other miracles, he healed the leper king of Arbela.⁸⁰ Second, the church of Adiabene attracted many of its converts from the region’s substantial Jewish population. Other early converts presumably came from among the polytheists and Zoroastrians of Adiabene, although this process is poorly documented.⁸¹ By the late Sasanian period, Christians probably formed the majority of the region’s population, with smaller pockets of Zoroastrians and Jews.

The narrative geography of the Qardagh legend centers on the region of Adiabene, which the saint’s hagiographer always refers to as “Assyria.”⁸² He places the village of Melqi, where Qardagh builds his fortress and is later martyred, in the vicinity of “Arbela of the Assyrians.”⁸³ The hagiographer never specifies the distance from Arbela to Melqi, nor does he provide topographic detail on the various districts of northern Iraq associated with particular episodes of the legend. All of the places he names, though, can be identified on the basis of other Syriac texts. The district of Dbar Hewton, where Qardagh’s parents lived in a “certain renowned fire temple they had built,” lies north of Arbela on the southern side of the Great Zab River.⁸⁴ The parents of Qardagh’s ascetic mentor Abdišo originally lived at “Ḥazza, a village in the land of the Assyrians,” on the plain twelve kilometers southwest of Arbela.⁸⁵ Uprooted by “impious pagans,” they resettled at “Tamanon,

80. *Acts of Mar Mari*, 6, 8 (Jullien and Jullien, 72, 75). This episode, like many others in the Mari legend, recalls parallel episodes in the story of King Abgar, the apostle Addai, and the Christianization of Edessa. A brief passage in the fifth-century *Teaching of Addai*, §72 (Desreumaux, 98; Howard 74) represents an earlier version of this tradition. It attributes the evangelization of Adiabene to anonymous “easterners in the guise of merchants,” who received ordination from Addai and thereafter spread the Gospel in “their own land, that of the Assyrians.” Cf. n. 32 above on another passage from the *Acts of Mar Mari*, where these merchant-apostles are identified as coming from Khuzistan and Fars.

81. On Zoroastrians in Sasanian Iraq, see, in general, M. Morony, “The Effects of the Muslim Conquest on the Persian Population of Iraq,” *Iran* 14 (1976): 41–59; Morony, *Iraq*, 280–305. For polytheists (“pagans”), see Morony, *Iraq*, 384–96. Most of Morony’s evidence, particularly on polytheists, is associated with southern Iraq. For the poorly documented history of Zoroastrianism and Sasanian polytheism in northern Iraq, see chapter 5 below.

82. For Qardagh’s appointment as “*paṭahša* of Assyria,” see *History of Mar Qardagh*, 5, 48. For “Assyria” (*ator*) as a geographic term in East-Syrian texts, see J. M. Fiey, “‘Assyriens’ ou araméens,” *OS* 10 (1965): 144–45.

83. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 6, which is the only mention of Arbela in the legend. Melqi appears frequently and is identified four times by name. See §§7, 42, 54, and 68. For references to the monastery of Mar Qardagh at Melqi in later East-Syrian texts, see chapter 5 below. For the Neo-Assyrian sources on Melqi (Akkadian ^{URU} Mil-qi-a), see the translation, §7, n. 18.

84. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 37, discussed below at chapter 4, n. 16 and chapter 5, n. 99.

85. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 12. See the translation, §12, n. 34, on Ḥazza, which served as the metropolitan capital of Adiabene prior to Arbela.

a village in the land of the Kurds," in the piedmont zone near the modern Turkish-Iraqi border.⁸⁶ In this same region, Mar Qardagh later slaughters his enemies on the banks of the Khabur River.⁸⁷ Finally, the "high and majestic mountains" of Beth Bgāsh, where Qardagh engages in his ascetic training, can be identified with Hakkari district of southeastern Turkey, between the upper reaches of the Great Zab River and Lake Urmiye.⁸⁸

Modern accounts by European travelers provide some sense of the actual physical topography and climate of this landscape. The region of Adiabene is roughly shaped like a parallelogram, with the Tigris River forming its southwestern boundary, the Greater and Lower Zab rivers its sides, and the Zagros Mountains its northeastern border. The lowlands of western Adiabene are very hot and fairly arid, and thus similar to the corresponding alluvial plain of Beth Garmai and Beth Aramaye. The terrain rises and becomes steadily less arid as one moves to the northeast. Arbela owes its long-standing political importance to its position on a particularly fertile elevated plain in the middle of Adiabene. The district's deep soils and regular rainfall have long made this a productive agricultural zone.⁸⁹ The great thirty-meter tell at Arbela (see figure 1) attests to the city's millennia-long history as a major administrative center. Although slightly cooler than the alluvial plain of western Adiabene, the Arbela district can still be brutally hot in summer.⁹⁰ North

86. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 12. For the location of Tamanon at the base of the mountain associated in Syrian tradition with Noah's ark, see the translation, §12, n. 34.

87. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 45–46, describing Qardagh's routing of the Roman-Arab camp on the banks of the "Khabur River." As explained in the translation, §45, n. 157, this passage refers to the Khabur River, which forms part of the modern Iraqi-Turkish border and flows into the Tigris. It should not be confused with the larger Khabur River of eastern Syria, which is a tributary of the Euphrates.

88. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 9, 28, 30–34. The quotation here appears in §32, where Abdišo welcomes Mar Qardagh to dwell with him in the mountains. For the district's location, see map 2. For its ecclesiastical history, see Fiey, *POCN*, 61–61; idem, "Proto-histoire chrétienne du Hakkari turc," *OS* 9 (1964): 448–54. First attested at the synod of 410, the diocese appears regularly in East-Syrian synodical records. Its bishops participated in the synods of 424, 486, 497, 544, 585, and 605.

89. For the climate and topography of northern Iraq, see N. Hannoun, "Studies in the Historical Geography of Northern Iraq during the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1986), esp. maps 1–3. Map 2 places Arbela at the 600 mm isohet. In the early twentieth century, the regional British administrator described the Arbela district as "probably the finest wheat-producing area in Mesopotamia." W. R. Hay, *Two Years in Kurdistan: Experiences of a Political Officer, 1918–1920* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1921), 96. Hay's thorough account of the geography, climate, and agriculture of Adiabene remains one of the most evocative and informative descriptions of the region.

90. W. O. Von Henig, *Heim durch Kurdistan: Ritt und Reise zur Ostfront, 1914* (Potsdam: Ludwig Vögelin Verlag, 1944), 82: "Dort herrschte die glühendeste Hitze, die ich je erlebt habe." As Jewish émigrés from northern Iraq would later explain to anthropologists, "Life in the Kurdish mountains was hard. The winter was very cold, the summer extremely hot." D. Feitelson, "Aspects of the Social Life of Kurdish Jews," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 1 (1959): 202.

and east of Arbela, the land merges into the foothills of the Zagros Mountains, a piedmont zone where precipitation in winter is often heavy. In the words of a nineteenth-century Latvian rabbi, who traveled through northern Iraq in the 1820s, “in winter, there is snow, frost, and ice, like in Russia.”⁹¹ Beyond this piedmont zone lay the high mountain valleys of Beth Bgāsh, along the upper reaches of the Great Zab River. Early European travelers regarded these highlands in what is today the Hakkari region of southeastern Turkey, as “wild” and “savage.” As the photograph in figure 2 shows, travel through these mountains has always been arduous.⁹² The ruggedness of the terrain, however, should not be mistaken for isolation. As the events of the Qardagh legend indicate (and modern travel writers confirm), there were always points of contact between the nomads of these highlands and the towns of the Arbela plain.⁹³ The physical geography of Adiabene provides the topographic context for the story of Mar Qardagh. We must now consider the legend’s historical and literary context, as part of the larger corpus of Syriac martyr literature describing the “Great Massacre” of Christians during the reign of Shapur II (309–379).

“THIRSTY FOR THE BLOOD OF THE SAINTS”:
THE GREAT PERSECUTION UNDER SHAPUR II

Christians in the age of Khusro II were well aware that their ancestors in Persia had lived in more difficult times. From its foundation in 224, the Sasanian dynasty allied itself closely with the Zoroastrian priesthood and promoted the “good religion” of Ahura Mazda over all other faiths.⁹⁴ Sasanian rulers

91. D. d’Beth Hillel, *Unknown Jews in Unknown Lands: The Travels of Rabbi David D’Beth Hillel*, ed. W. J. Fischel (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973), 75, in a passage referring to the town of Zakho. See also 79, on the nearby town of Amadiya, where the rabbi encountered “as much snow as in the north of Poland.”

92. The photo of a mountain crossing in the Hakkari district, illustrated in figure 2, comes from H. A. G. Percy (Lord Warkworth), *Notes from a Diary in Asiatic Turkey* (London: Edward Arnold, 1898), 146. See also the narrative and photos in F. Stark, *Riding to the Tigris* (London: John Murray, 1959), which chronicles a journey by horseback through the Hakkari mountains.

93. On the linguistic and cultural connections between the Arbela plain and the highlands of the Great Zab River basin, see the end of chapter 2, esp. n. 174.

94. For Sasanian royal patronage of the Zoroastrian priesthood, see the introductory narrative in M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 101–44. Recent scholarship has cautioned against exaggerating the power of the *magi*. For this revisionist perspective, see J. Wiesehöfer, “‘Geteilte Loyalitäten’: Religiöse Minderheiten des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. im Spannungsfeld zwischen Rom und dem sāsānidischen Iran,” *Klio* 75 (1993): 362–82; also Z. Rubin, “The Sasanid Monarchy,” *CAH* 14 (2000): 647–51, esp. 650: “The truth may well have been that although the early Sasanid kings had found Zoroastrianism, as represented and propounded by the estate of the *magi*, the most potent religious factor in many of their domains, they were not always prepared to allow it to be the sole officially dominant state religion.”

proclaimed their dedication to Zoroastrian divinities on the dynasty's remarkably stable coinage; Sasanian mints replaced the Hellenic coin types of the Parthians with a new design, consisting of a royal bust on the obverse and a Zoroastrian fire altar on the reverse. This design, with variations in detail, endured to the end of the empire.⁹⁵ Literary sources and Sasanian seals confirm that the empire's administration was entrusted almost exclusively to Zoroastrians.⁹⁶ While members of minority religious groups, such as Jews, Christians, and Manichaeans, sometimes gained influence at court, the Zoroastrian clergy consistently strove to suppress what they saw as unclean and hence threatening minority religions. This streak of intolerance in Sasanian Zoroastrianism was most pronounced during the early Sasanian period. In a well-known set of Pahlavi inscriptions carved during the reign of Bahrām II (274–291), the empire's chief *mōbad*, Kirdīr, boasts of his persecution of Jews, "shamans," "Brahmins," "zandiks" (i.e., Manichaeans), and two distinct groups of Christians: "Nazareans" (*nāsrāy*) and "Christians" (*krīstiyān*).⁹⁷ East-Syrian literary sources preserve only garbled memories of this earliest phase of Sasanian persecution, apparently because the persecution predated the development of a mature Syriac martyr literature.⁹⁸

The history of Christianity in Adiabene and other regions of the Sasan-

95. See R. Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics* (Braunschweig: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1971), 17–19, on the essential stability of the fire altar design. For orientation, see D. Sellwood, P. Whitting, and R. Williams, *An Introduction to Sasanian Coins* (London: Spink and Son Ltd., 1985).

96. For the role of the Zoroastrian clergy in imperial administration, see S. Shaked, "Administrative Functions of Priests in the Sasanian Period," in *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies*, pt. 1, *Old and Middle Iranian Studies*, ed. G. Gnoli and A. Panaino (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990), 261–73, quoting (261) Agathias's observation that nothing "is held to be lawful or right among the Persians unless it is ratified by a *magus*." *Histories*, II, 26:5 (Cameron, 70; 87). See also the studies by Gignoux cited in the translation, n. 5.

97. There has been extensive debate over the precise identity of the various religious groups named in Kirdīr's inscription. I accept here the argument of F. de Blois, "*Našrānī* (*Ναζωραῖος*) and *hanīf* (*ἔθνικός*): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *BSOAS* 65 (2002): 7–8, that the terms in question refer to two types of Christians. For other interpretations, see Chaumont, *Christianisation de l'empire iranien*, 111; and C. Jullien and F. Jullien, "Aux frontières de l'iranité: "*Nāsrāyē*" et "*krīstiyōnē*" des inscriptions du *mōbad* Kirdīr: Enquête littéraire et historique," *Numen* 49 (2002): 282–385. For the full text of the inscriptions with French translation, see P. Gignoux, ed. and trans., *Les quatre inscriptions du mage Kirdīr, textes et concordances* (Paris: Union académique internationale: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 1991).

98. For the unique martyr text associated with the persecution under Bahrām II, see S. Brock, "A Martyr at the Sasanid Court under Vahran II: Candida," *AB* 96 (1978): 167–81 (repr. in Brock, *SPLA*, IX). Brock dates the text's composition to the fifth century. For scattered accounts of Bahrām's persecution in later East-Syrian sources, see Chaumont, *Christianisation de l'empire iranien*, 105–11, 117–20.

ian Empire becomes more clearly focused in the mid-fourth century. Constantine's efforts to protect the Christians of Persia left them vulnerable to accusations of disloyalty to the Sasanian throne.⁹⁹ With the renewal of Roman-Sasanian armed conflict under Constantius II (337–361), the position of the Sasanian Christians became untenable.¹⁰⁰ Zoroastrian officials of Shapur II deliberately targeted the clergy and ascetics of local Christian communities to deprive the church of its leaders. From Ctesiphon, the persecution spread quickly to other regions of the empire. A Syriac manuscript compiled in Edessa in 411 preserves the names of dozens of martyrs (sixteen bishops, fifty-six priests, twenty-six deacons, and an indeterminate number of laymen) executed in various regions of the western Sasanian Empire.¹⁰¹ In Adiabene, the victims of Shapur's persecution included two successive bishops of Arbela, six priests and deacons, several laymen and female ascetics.¹⁰² The psychological effect of these losses on the local Christian communities of the Sasanian Empire must have been profound.

Persecution of Christians was renewed on a more limited scale during the reigns of later Sasanian kings. Throughout the fifth century, the Zoro-

99. For Constantine's letter to Shapur II, announcing his solicitude for the "people of God" in Shapur's empire, see Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, IV, 8–13. For the dating and context of the letter, see T. D. Barnes, "Constantine and the Christians of Persia," *JRS* 75 (1985): 126–36; G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 94–99. Fowden's dating of the letter to the 330s seems more plausible than Barnes's very early date (October 324).

100. See, in general, S. Brock, "Christians in the Sasanian Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties," in *Religion and National Identity*, ed. S. Mews (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1982), 1–19 (repr. in Brock, *SPLA*, VI). On the disputed date for the outbreak of the persecution, see R. W. Burgess and R. Mercier, "The Dates of the Martyrdom of Simeon bar Sabba'e and the 'Great Massacre,'" *AB* 117 (1999): 9–66, which dates the martyrdom of the *catholikos* Simeon bar Sabba'e to 344. Although S. Stern, in "Near Eastern Lunar Calendars in the Syriac Martyr Acts," *LM* 117 (2004): 447–72, rejects Burgess and Mercier's core argument that the dates of the Syriac martyr acts were reckoned according to the Jewish lunar calendar, he accepts (454 n. 23) the dating of the "Great Massacre" to 344.

101. For the martyr catalogue compiled in Edessa in 411, see F. Nau, ed. and trans., *Un martyrologue et douze ménologies syriaques*, in *PO* 2 (1): 8–10, 23–26. The final section of the catalogue, listing Christian laity martyred during the Great Persecution, is too fragmentary to count names. For the dating and form of the catalogue, see R. Aigrain, *L'hagiographie: Ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire* (Poitiers: Bloud and Gay, 1953), 23–26. For the broad outlines of the Great Persecution under Shapur II, see Labourt, *Christianisme*, 43–82; Fiey, *Jalons*, 45–65, 85–99; and J. Rist, "Die Verfolgung der Christen im spätantiken Sasanidenreich: Ursachen, Verlauf, und Folgen," *OrChr* 80 (1996): 30–31.

102. P. Peeters, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1910), 12, 138, 372, 423, 426, 500. For the Syriac texts, see P. Bedjan, ed., *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* (Paris and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890–97; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), 2: 307 (the priest Jacob and his sister the nun Mary), 314–16 (the deacon Barhaddsbabba); 4: 128–30 (Bishop John bar Mariam and the deacon Jacob the zealot), 130–31 (Bishop Abraham), 131–32 (the layman Hanania), and 137–41 (the priest Jacob and the deacon Azad).

astrian elites who controlled the empire continued to view Christians with enmity and distrust. Even as the church itself grew and increasingly assimilated to the political and cultural rhythms of the Sasanian Empire, there remained a significant threat of persecution, particularly during times of war against Rome. The reign of Yazdegird I (399–420), whom Christians initially lauded for his wisdom and tolerance, ended with a period of imprisonments and executions that continued into the early years of the reign of Bahrām V (420–438).¹⁰³ There were further sporadic executions under Yazdegird II (438–457) and his successor Peroz (459–484). There was severe persecution in Armenia during the fifth century, although this region represents, in many respects, a special case, because of its strategic importance on the Roman frontier and the adoption of Zoroastrianism by some Armenian elites.¹⁰⁴ In general, the position of Christians in the Sasanian Empire continued to improve, despite the official policy that forbade evangelization among Zoroastrians and sporadic persecution of ethnic Persian converts. Royal recognition of the need for tolerance is epitomized in the famous story about the Persian king Hormizd IV (579–590), preserved by al-Ṭabarī. Asked by the Zoroastrian clergy why he tolerated the Christians, the king replied, “Just as our royal throne cannot stand upon its front legs without its two back ones, our kingdom cannot stand or endure firmly if we cause the Christians and adherents of other faiths, who differ in belief from ourselves, to become hostile to us.”¹⁰⁵ Late Sasanian persecution of Christians was thus fundamentally different in scale from that of the mid-Sasanian period. When accused before local Zoroastrian officials, individual Persian converts to Christianity could be, and sometimes were, imprisoned and executed for apostasy.¹⁰⁶ But large-scale, systematic persecution as in the time of Great Persecution under Shapur II had long since ceased.

103. For analysis of several of the martyr acts associated with this period, see chapter 4 below. For a general overview, see L. von Rompay, “Impetuous Martyrs? The Situation of the Persian Christians in the Last Years of Yazdgerd I (419–20),” in *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective: Memorial Louis Reekmans*, ed. M. Lamberigts and P. Can Deun (Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1995), 363–75; and Rist, “Verfolgung,” 32–34.

104. See, in general, J. R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). The revolt led by Vardan Mamikonean in 451 triggered a major persecution of Christian Armenians, richly documented in the Armenian sources. See esp. Elishē, *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, trans. Robert Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

105. Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 991 (Bosworth, 298). The anecdote may be apocryphal, but it accurately reflects late Sasanian policy of toleration toward the empire’s Christian community.

106. On the late Sasanian martyrs executed for apostasy from Zoroastrianism, see esp. Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse*, 118–27; Morony, *Iraq*, 334, 612. See below for bibliography on the individual martyrs executed under Khusro II: George of Izza (†614), Išō’sabran of Arbela (†620), Nathaniel of Širazur († ca. 625), and Anastasius (†628).

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP ON THE
HAGIOGRAPHY OF THE PERSIAN MARTYRS

Memory of the Great Persecution under Shapur II was preserved in, and created by, a vigorous tradition of martyr literature that developed in subsequent centuries. The corpus of martyr acts associated with the Great Persecution of the Sasanian church numbers close to eighty texts in Syriac, Greek, Armenian, and Sogdian (an East-Iranian language widely used in medieval Central Asia). The style, length, and historical value of these martyr acts vary tremendously. Some of the earliest martyr acts (Syr. *taš' yālā*) are built around a solid core of authentic historical information.¹⁰⁷ Other accounts, including the text at the heart of this book, are essentially pious fictions set in the time of "King Shapur" but composed during subsequent centuries. Modern scholarship on this martyr literature has been surprisingly limited in scope. Despite the publication of the majority of the Syriac texts before World War I, the present book is only the second full-scale monograph devoted to any part of East-Syrian martyr literature.¹⁰⁸ Investigation of this literature has been hampered by the paucity of previous translations. The only major collection of Sasanian martyr literature in any modern European language is Oscar Braun's *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, published in Munich in 1915. In English, there are currently only the excerpts published by Susan Harvey and Sebastian Brock in 1987, and an earlier article by Brock.¹⁰⁹

Modern scholarship on the acts of the "Persian martyrs" began with the work of the great Maronite scholar, Stephanus Evodius Assemani, whose *Acta Sanctorum Martyrum Orientalium et Occidentalium*, published in 1748, included the Syriac texts of most of the historical martyrs of Shapur's persecution.¹¹⁰

107. Syriac Christian writers usually designate these accounts as *taš' yālā* (sing. *taš' itā*); the word can refer to the story, history, or acts of a particular saint. For a survey of the Syriac material, see P. Devos, "Les martyrs persans à travers leurs actes syriaques," in *Atti del convegno sul tema: La Persia e il mondo greco-romano* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1966), 213–25. Devos identifies eighteen Syriac martyr narratives associated with Shapur's reign, which appear to be based on a solid historical core.

108. For the first monograph, see G. Wiessner, *Untersuchungen zur syrischen Literaturgeschichte*, Bd. 1, *Zur Märtyrerüberlieferung aus der Christenverfolgung Shapurs II* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967), discussed below. See also S. Brock, "Review of G. Wiessner's *Zur Märtyrerüberlieferung*," *JTS* 19 (1968): 309: "While the martyr literature of the church within the Roman Empire has been the object of numerous studies, that of the 'Church of the East', in the Sasanian Empire, has received remarkably little attention." Brock's observation remains true today, thirty-five years later.

109. S. Brock and S. A. Harvey, trans., *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1987), 63–99. For the earlier article by Brock, see n. 98 above.

110. S. E. Assemani, ed. and trans., *Acta Sanctorum Martyrum Orientalium et Occidentalium* (Rome: Collini, 1748; repr., Westmead, Farnborough, Hants, England: Gregg International

A full century, however, would pass before Assemani's work on this branch of Oriental Christian scholarship was reinvigorated. At the end of the nineteenth century, Paul Bedjan, a Chaldean priest working in Belgium, used Assemani's edition, in conjunction with new manuscripts from the Middle East, to publish a giant compendium of Syriac martyr texts.¹¹¹ Bedjan's work remains the standard edition of the majority of the Syriac martyr acts today.¹¹² During the late 1800s, the texts of other East-Syrian martyr acts began to appear in the *Analecta Bollandiana*, always with an accompanying Latin translation.¹¹³ During the first decade of the twentieth century, the Bollandists Hippolyte Delehaye and Paul Peeters initiated study of the Greek and Armenian versions of the Sasanian martyr acts.¹¹⁴ Braun's *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer* provided the first complete translation of many of the late Sasanian martyr acts.¹¹⁵ His work complemented that of his teacher, Georg Hoffmann, who

Publishers Ltd., 1970). Assemani based his edition on two tenth-century East-Syrian manuscripts (Vatican syr. 160 and 161) acquired in Egypt during the 1880s. On their acquisition from the Monastery of the Syrians in Egypt, see J.-B. Chabot, *La littérature syriaque* (Paris: Bloud and Gay, 1934), 10–12. On Assemani, see S. Brock, "The Development of Syriac Studies," in *The Edward Hincks Bicentenary Lectures*, ed. K. J. Cathcart (Dublin: Department of Near Eastern Languages, University College, Dublin, 1994), 99, 111 n. 26.

111. P. Bedjan, ed., *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, 7 vols. (Paris and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890–97; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), cited hereafter as Bedjan, *AMS*. See also the useful index in I. Guidi, "Indice agiografico degli *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* del P. Bedjan," *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche* ser. 5, 27 (1918): 207–29; and on Bedjan's career, H. Murre-van den Berg, "Paul Bedjan (1838–1920) and His Neo-Syriac Writing," in *VI Sym. Syr. 1992*, ed. R. Lavenant (Rome: PISO, 1994), 381–87.

112. The acts of the Sasanian martyrs appear primarily in volumes 2 and 4. On Bedjan's work as an editor, see I. Guidi, "Bemerkungen zu den syrischen *Acta Sanctorum et Martyrum*," *ZDMG* 46 (1892): 750. Bedjan also published in 1895 a separate edition of the *Vitae* of key figures in the late Sasanian church, including the patriarchs Mar Aba the Great (†552) and Sabrišō' of Beth Garmai (†604) (see n. 49 above). See P. Bedjan, ed., *Histoire de Mar-Jabalaha, de trois autres patriarches d'un prêtre et de deux laïques nestoriens* (Paris and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1895).

113. The *Analecta Bollandiana* is published annually by the Société des Bollandistes, a small order of Jesuit scholars founded in the seventeenth century. Published since 1882, the *AB* is devoted entirely to the study of the acts and cults of Christian saints. East-Syrian martyr texts published in the journal between 1885 and 1891 include the *Acts of Mar Mari*, the *Acts of 'Abd al-Masih*, and the *Acts of Mar Qardagh*.

114. H. Delehaye, ed. and trans., *Les versions grecques des actes des martyrs persans sous Sapor II*, in *PO* 2 (2): 405–500. For the Armenian material, see P. Peeters, "Une passion arménienne des SS. Abdas, Hormisdas, Sahin, et Benjamin," *AB* 28 (1909): 399–415, and n. 119 below.

115. O. Braun, trans., *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer* (Kempten and Munich: Verlag des Jos Kölschen Buchhandlungen, 1915). Braun (17–21) based his translations on the texts published by Assemani, Bedjan, and M. Kmosko, "Simeon Bar Sabba'e," *Patrologia Syriaca* 2 (1907): 659–1055. Braun's translations are, on the whole, reliable, although he not infrequently omits the most rhetorical sections of the late Sasanian martyr acts.

had probed the Syriac martyr literature for useful geographical and historical details.¹¹⁶

Much subsequent scholarship on the Sasanian martyr literature has continued in the tradition established by Hoffmann and the Bollandists. A steady stream of publications in the *Analecta Bollandiana* (at least twenty articles since 1900) has sorted out many of the textual problems associated with the earlier and more reliable acts.¹¹⁷ Refuting the traditional attribution to Marutha of Maipherkat, Gernot Wiessner has shown that the earliest Syriac martyr acts arose from a dual textual tradition, centering on Khuzistan and Adiabene.¹¹⁸ In addition to passing into Greek, some of these early East-Syrian martyr narratives were eventually translated into Armenian and Sogdian.¹¹⁹ Their broad geographic distribution contrasts with the relatively restricted diffusion of the late Sasanian and post-Sasanian martyr legends—such as the legends of Mar Qardagh, Mar Behnam, and the martyrs of ʿTur Berʿayn—which survive only in Syriac versions.¹²⁰ Of all the Sasanian martyr texts, these legends have been the most neglected.

PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP ON THE *HISTORY OF MAR QARDAGH*

As noted in the introduction, previous scholarship on the *History of Mar Qardagh* has largely focused on issues of historicity and dating. In a short but

116. G. Hoffmann, *Auszüge aus syrischen Akten persischer Märtyrer* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1880; repr., Nendeln: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1966). Hoffmann's study includes paraphrases of several of the Syriac martyr legends (though not the *History of Mar Qardagh*), together with abundant historical and philological notes.

117. For a full review of the pertinent scholarship up to 1967, see Wiessner, *Zur Märtyrerüberlieferung*, 7–39.

118. Wiessner, *Zur Märtyrerüberlieferung*, 39; Rist, "Verfolgung," 23.

119. For the Armenian tradition, see M. van Esbroeck, "Abraham le confesseur (V^e s.), traducteur des passions des martyrs perses: À propos d'un livre récent," *AB* 95 (1977), 169–79; also L. Gray, "Two Armenian Passions from the Sasanian Period," *AB* 67 (1949): 306–76, with full bibliography on all seven of the Armenian martyr acts associated with Shapur's reign. The recurrent conflict between Christians and Zoroastrians in Armenia during the late Sasanian Empire created an atmosphere in which the histories of the Persian martyrs had great resonance. For the Sogdian material, see N. Sims-Williams, ed. and trans., *The Christian Sogdian Manuscript C 2* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 32–50, 137–47, which publishes fragments of the acts of Mar Šahdost, Tarbo, Barbašmin, and the "120 martyrs," all executed during the Great Persecution.

120. For these "acta legendaria," see I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, 2d rev. ed. (Rome: PISO, 1965), 198. Several of these legends are preserved in both East-Syrian and West-Syrian manuscripts, but there appears to be no evidence of Greek, Armenian, Sogdian, or even Arabic translations. For a modern Arabic translation of the entire corpus of East-Syrian hagiography based on Bedjan, *AMS*, see A. Scher, *Sīrat shuhadā' al-mashriq* (Mosul, 1900–1907).

penetrating review of the two independent 1890 editions of the *History*, Theodor Nöldeke argued in favor of a factual core for the legend.¹²¹ Nöldeke reasoned that it was entirely plausible that a rebellious Sasanian viceroy of northern Iraq would associate himself with the Christians in the hope of acquiring Roman imperial support. Qardagh's death in the "forty-ninth year of the reign of Shapur, king of the Persians" corresponds to the year 358/359, placing his martyrdom securely within the chronological boundaries of the Great Persecution under Shapur II. Though he remained skeptical of Qardagh's strident Christianity, Nöldeke discerned in the distance behind the Mar Qardagh of legend a historical fourth-century *marzbān* and local hero of northern Iraq. The Bollandist Paul Peeters took a diametrically opposed position, arguing that the story of Mar Qardagh was pure legend. Peeters's systematic study of the larger corpus of the martyr literature of Adiabene enabled him to draw a sharp distinction between Qardagh's story, in which "le merveilleux déborde sans mesure," and the more sober, historical *Acts*, such as those of the bishops of Arbela, John and Abraham, the layman Ḥanania, the virgin Thecla, and others.¹²² Peeters pointed, for instance, to the absence of any correspondence between the Sasanian officials named in the Qardagh legend and the officials named in the earlier more historical acts of Adiabene.¹²³ Finally, Peeters dismissed as insignificant the similarities between Qardagh and figures described in the *Chronicle of Arbela*. Arguing against the grain of contemporary scholarship, he strongly challenged the reliability of this East-Syrian chronicle published by Alphonse Mingana in 1907.¹²⁴

Only two other scholars have written on the Qardagh legend in any detail in recent decades. In his investigation of ecclesiastical geography of northern Iraq, Jean Maurice Fiey confirms that the monastery of Mar Qardagh was a real place, known to later East-Syrian writers (see chapter 5 below). He also defends the possibility of a real historical Qardagh behind the creative fictions of the saint's legend ("les affabulations fantastiques de sa légende").¹²⁵

121. T. Nöldeke, "Abbeloos' *Acta Mar Qardaghi* und Feige's *Mār 'Abdišō'*," *ZDMG* 45 (1891): 529–35.

122. P. Peeters, "Le 'Passionnaire d'Adiabène,'" *AB* 43 (1925): 261–304 (298–301 on Qardagh). As Peeters notes, Qardagh's name is absent from the list of Persian martyrs compiled at Edessa in 411.

123. Recent scholarship has confirmed Peeters's observation. See P. Gignoux, "Éléments de prosopographie de quelques *mōbads* sasanides," *JA* 270 (1982): 257–69, with a cumulative table on 268.

124. Peeters, "'Passionnaire d'Adiabène,'" 303: "Il faudra que la *Chronique d'Arbèle* soit examinée de nouveau à la lumière de tous les documents parallèles. La faveur dont elle joit présentement n'est pas le dernier mot de la critique." For the parallels between the *Chronicle of Arbela* and the Qardagh legend, see the appendix.

125. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 205: "Il semble que l'authenticité du personnage et de son martyre ne fasse pas de doute, bien que les affabulations fantastiques de sa légende tardive ten-

In a separate article, Gernot Wiessner rightly emphasizes, but fails to explain, the Qardagh legend's appropriation of Persian epic motifs.¹²⁶ In a new twist on Nöldeke's search for the "historical Qardagh," Wiessner proposes a mid-fifth-century *marzbān* of Nisibis as the saint's historical model. In a pair of letters composed during the winter of 485/486, Baršauma of Nisibis praises a "glorious and illustrious *marzbān*" named "Qardagh the *nekōrgan*" for resolving a border dispute involving the raids of pro-Roman Arab tribes.¹²⁷ The connection between this fifth-century *marzbān* and the hero of the Qardagh legend, though not utterly implausible, is tenuous.¹²⁸ This is, however, perhaps as close as one can come to recovering a historical Qardagh behind the legend. This book, as explained in the introduction, focuses instead on the social and cultural world of Mar Qardagh's hagiographer.

GENRE AND PROVENANCE OF THE *HISTORY OF MAR QARDAGH*

The genre of the *History of Mar Qardagh* is difficult to define beyond the observation that its account resembles other martyr legends associated with the reign of Shapur II.¹²⁹ There are no simple and absolute rules to distinguish these martyr legends from the "passions épiques," which are part of the same general tradition of Syriac martyr narrative.¹³⁰ There are, however, important thematic links between the martyr legends and the acts of the late Sasanian martyrs, such as Mar Aba. Both groups of texts share a discursive focus on the conversion of high-ranking, Persian Zoroastrians. But there is also a key distinction, which may be even more important than the obvious dif-

dent à provoquer des soupçons sur son existence même." Cf. idem, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 45, where Fiey endorses Peeters's low opinion of the Qardagh legend's historical value.

126. G. Wiessner, "Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Christentum und Zoroastrismus in Iran," *ZDMG*, Supplementa 1, Teil 2 (1969), 411–17. For a thorough analysis of the significance of these Iranian narrative themes, see chapter 2 below.

127. For the Syriac text with French translation, see the *Synodicon* (Chabot, 532, 536; 526, 549).

128. Baršauma's biographer, S. Gero, *Baršauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century* (Louvain: Peeters, 1981), 35 n. 51, dismisses the identification outright. But legends have a way of combining diverse material, and some connection between the Qardagh legend and this fifth-century *marzbān* and *nekōrgan* is possible.

129. For the *History of Mar Qardagh* as one of the "acta legendaria" transmitted in the Syriac tradition, see Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 198, which places in the same category the legends of Mar Guberlaha, Mar Dadu, Mar Mu'ain, Mar Saba/Pirgušnasp, and Mar Saba/Gušnjazdad (the double names indicate elite Persian converts, who took Christian names upon baptism).

130. For examples of the "passions épiques" in the East-Syrian tradition, see Devos, "Martyrs persans," 223–24. Like many of the Bollandists who have published on the Persian martyrs (with the notable exception of Paul Peeters), Devos's analysis rests upon the literary categories

ferences in setting and historicity. The biographers of the late Sasanian *Acts*, such as Babai the Great (†628) and the patriarch Išoʿyab III (†658), composed in a complex and sometimes florid style of Syriac aimed at a highly educated reading audience.¹³¹ The majority of the martyr legends, by contrast, are written in clear and simple prose, the *sermo humilis* of Syriac hagiographic tradition.¹³² Designed for oral presentation (and possibly indebted to earlier oral narrative), East-Syrian martyr legends would have been accessible to a wide audience of readers and listeners. As we shall see, this does not mean that the legends were naïve or simpleminded.

Previous scholarship has consistently, and with good reason, dated the *History of Mar Qardagh* to the late Sasanian or early Islamic period (ca. 600–700).¹³³ A wide range of thematic features, analyzed in subsequent chapters, support an earlier date within this range, probably during the reign of Khusro II (590–628). The hagiographer’s command of Sasanian administrative and religious vocabulary is, for instance, indicative of the legend’s late Sasanian origin. The legend’s author refers not only to the high Sasanian offices of *marzbān* and *mōbadān mōbad*, but also to the more specialized offices of *paṭaḥšā* and *nekōrgan* and even once the *šāher kwāst šabūr nekōrgan* (the full title of Qardagh’s father-in-law).¹³⁴ The contrast with post-Sasanian martyr legends is instructive. The *History of the Martyrs of Tur Berʿayn*, a text composed ca. 650–700 by an abbot of the distinguished monastery of Beth ʿAbhe in northern Iraq, employs a much more limited range of Sasanian administrative terminology.¹³⁵ Qardagh’s hagiographer also demonstrates a better under-

established by H. Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1921).

131. For Babai the Great’s *Life of George*, see Braun, *Auszüge*, 221–77. For the story of the convert and martyr Išoʿsabran of Arbela, (†630) by the future patriarch Išoʿyab III, see J.-B. Chabot, *Histoire de Jésus-Sabran* (Paris, 1890), with a French summary (487–500) of the Syriac text (503–81).

132. As Nöldeke, “Acta Mar Qardaghi,” 531, observes, the language of the Qardagh legend is very simple (“Die Sprache der Legende ist durchweg sehr einfach”).

133. Nöldeke, “Acta Mar Qardaghi,” 530, suggests that the text was written “during the sixth or at the beginning of the seventh century.” Peeters, “Passionaire d’Adiabène,” 298–99, favors a post-Sasanian date, but the etymologies he offers as evidence are unacceptable. See chapter 5 below for the Neo-Assyrian origins of the name Melqi.

134. For the use and significance of these titles in the Qardagh legend, see the translation, §39, n. 134; §48, n. 165; §51, n. 176. The frequent use of the term *marzbān* is one of many signs that indicate a post-fifth-century composition date. See P. Gignoux, “L’organisation administrative sasanide: Le cas du *marzbān*,” *JSAI* 4 (1984): 1–27, esp. 23–24, on the use of the term in Syriac sources.

135. See the references to King Shapur’s messengers in the *Martyrs of Tur Berʿayn*, 70, 72, 83 (Bedjan, 25, 26, 30). For the legend’s author, Gabriel of Sirzō, see Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 147; and chapter 4, n. 119 below. Other Sasanian martyr legends use even fewer genuine Sasanian terms. See, for example, the *History of Maʿin the General* (BHO 783), which employs only the

standing of basic Zoroastrian institutions and terminology. His story alludes, for instance, to the private endowment and staffing of fire temples, the keeping of a domestic Zoroastrian priest for the blessing of meals, and the ritual use of the *barsom* for purification.¹³⁶ He also employs technical terms derived from Pahlavi to identify, for example, the “fire altars” (Syr. *ʾadrōqē*, from Phl. *ādarōg*), which Mar Qardagh promises to destroy, and the “royal edict” (Syr. *nibištāg*, originally from the Phl. verb *nibištan*, “to write”) issued by King Šapur.¹³⁷ East-Syrian martyr legends of the post-Sasanian period evince a decisively more muddled view of Persian administration and religion. The hagiographer of the martyrs of ʿTur Berʿayn depicts, for instance, a “Magian” king threatening to burn the bodies of his Christian subjects—a most un-Zoroastrian form of execution.¹³⁸ The Qardagh legend’s depiction of “Magian” customs, while polemical, lacks the kind of cruder distortions that became common in the post-Sasanian martyr legends. Other thematic features, discussed in the chapters that follow, likewise link the Qardagh legend to the late Sasanian period.¹³⁹

This chapter began by contrasting the political language used in two very different types of Christian documents from the late Sasanian Empire. The acclamations of the East-Syrian bishops at the synod of 605 underline the degree to which Christianity had become enmeshed in the political and social fabric of the Sasanian world. The vast geographic breadth of the late Sasanian church is perhaps the strongest testament to the fruits of this union. Our survey of the chief provinces of the Church of the East, ca. 600, highlights the institutional strength and ethnic and linguistic diversity of the East-Syrian church. Study of any one diocese of this church inevitably overlaps with the ecclesiastical history of neighboring provinces. The region of Adiabene, where the Qardagh legend was born, was an integral part of the western Sasanian Empire. Its metropolitan bishop, Yonadab of Arbela, was among the leaders of the Church of the East during the reign of Khusro II

title of *marzbān*. The legend of Mar Saba/Pirgušnasp (Bedjan, *AMS*, 4: 222–49) is completely devoid of genuine Sasanian terminology.

136. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 6–7, 27; 51–52. For commentary, see the translation, nn. 19–20, 77, 177.

137. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 43, 52, with commentary at translation, nn. 152 and 180.

138. *History of the Martyrs of ʿTur Berʿayn*, 84. This threat becomes common, perhaps under the influence of Greek martyr literature, in later Syriac martyrology. See, for example, the similar scene in the thirteenth-century *Acts of Behnam* at Bedjan, *AMS*, 2: 421.

139. These features include the prominence of St. Sergius (chapter 2); the use of relics of the True Cross (chapter 2); the influence of the ideas of the sixth-century Byzantine John Philoponus (chapter 3); and the probable chronology of ecclesiastical architecture at Melqi (chapter 5).

(590–628). And like other bishops of his generation, he openly vowed his submission to the “merciful, beneficent, peaceful, gentle, victorious” ruler of the Sasanian Empire.¹⁴⁰

The Qardagh legend reveals a very different side of the Christian culture of late Sasanian Adiabene. Its anonymous East-Syrian author presents a local hero, the scion of royal “Assyrian” blood, who defies his family and rejects the entreaties of their pagan king. The hagiographer’s story taps into a long tradition of Christian narratives about the “Great Massacre” under Shapur II (309–379). While many of these martyr texts have been published (beginning with the work of S. E. Assemani in the mid-eighteenth century), the Sasanian martyr literature as a whole has not received the attention it deserves. Late Sasanian and post-Sasanian martyr legends have been particularly overlooked, perhaps because, as one historian puts it, they are “difficult to date or to use except as examples of pious fiction.”¹⁴¹ This study hinges on the premise that pious fictions can be among the most revealing historical sources, when one systematically explicates their narrative structure, diction, and imagery. As studies of Christian hagiography from other regions have amply demonstrated, the story of a saint can offer a superb platform for examining the culture and society of that saint’s hagiographer.¹⁴² Using the Qardagh legend as their central point of reference, the next four chapters introduce readers to the world of Mar Qardagh’s hagiographer. The chapters offer four quite different, but complementary, perspectives on the Christian culture of late antique Iraq.

140. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 386; 110, ll. 6–7), in the preface to the synod of 576, where attending bishops declared their fealty to Khusro I (531–579).

141. Morony, *Iraq*, 612, referring to the Qardagh legend and the *Acts of Mar Bassus*. For the latter, see J.-B. Chabot, ed. and trans., *La légende de Mar Bassus, martyr persan suivie de l'histoire de la fondation de son couvent à Apamée d'après un manuscrit de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1893).

142. My methodology has been influenced, in particular, by French scholarship on Byzantine hagiography, such as B. Flusin, *Saint Anastase le perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1992); and P. Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1977). These and similar studies are notable for their rigorous analysis of both the literary and the historical contexts of specific hagiographers and their saints.

TWO

“We Rejoice in Your Heroic Deeds!”

Christian Heroism and Sasanian Epic Tradition

In the opening scenes of the *History of Mar Qardagh*, the legend’s hero distinguishes himself before the Persian King of kings through a series of remarkable athletic feats. First, in an archery performance at the royal court, he successfully shoots five arrows into a small target attached to the top of a high pole, a deed for which he is praised “by the king and his nobles.”¹ The next day, King Shapur orders Qardagh to enter the stadium and play on the polo ground (*’asprā*) together with the rest of the nobles. The king and his nobles “marvel” (*thar*) at his performance there. And on the third day, Shapur invites Qardagh to accompany him on a hunting expedition together with one hundred and forty horsemen. During the hunt, Qardagh again demonstrates his skill by an extraordinary display of marksmanship:

As they were approaching the entrance of a dense forest, they saw before them a deer running away swiftly together with her fawn. And immediately the king called out, saying, “Lift your hand strongly to the bow, young Qardagh, and show your good fortune!” Then that one quickly took one arrow and he placed it [to his bow] and drew it with [great] strength. And with that one arrow he brought down both the deer and her fawn. Then the king called out in a loud voice and said, “May you prosper Qardagh! May you prosper and rejoice in your youth! We rejoice in your heroic deeds!”²

The king’s enthusiastic praise acknowledges the fact that young Qardagh has now proven his excellence in three of the most cherished pursuits of the Sasanian aristocracy—archery, polo, and the hunt. As a reward for his per-

1. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 4.
2. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 5; literally “There is joy for us in your heroic deeds (*w-lan ḥdā b-neṣhānayk*).”

formance, Shapur appoints Qardagh to become the Sasanian “viceroys” (*paṭahšā*) and “margrave” (*marzbān*) over northern Iraq.³

The enormous physical strength, athletic prowess, and warlike demeanor attributed to the youthful Qardagh unmistakably recall the epic traditions of Sasanian Iran. Qardagh’s “heroic deeds” on the hunt and on the polo field link him to the epic tradition made famous by the *Shāhnāma* of Firdowsi of Tus (†1029). The resemblance is intriguing, as it presents a Christian variant of a phenomenon that affected the cultural history of much of south-western Asia. From northern Arabia to the Caucasus, from Mesopotamia to Afghanistan, regional elites of the Sasanian Empire and its frontiers became familiar with epic traditions celebrating the kings and heroes of ancient Iran. By adopting Sasanian cultural and artistic models, provincial elites claimed these epic traditions as their own. Stories about Iranian kings on the hunt, on the polo field, and in battle provided a heroic ideal that could be translated into a wide range of narrative media. As a cultural language of power, Sasanian epic traditions endured long after the fall of Ctesiphon to the Arabs in 637. Art historians have skillfully demonstrated the utility of the epic traditions all along the “Silk Road.”⁴

This chapter investigates the reception and adaptation of Sasanian epic traditions among the Christians of late antique Iraq. The *History of Mar Qardagh* provides rare, and therefore particularly intriguing, evidence for this process. Although previous studies have sometimes noted the prominence of “*Shāhnāma* motifs” in the Qardagh legend, there has been little substantive analysis of their form, function, and significance.⁵ The author of the Qardagh legend was not only familiar with Sasanian epic tradition; he de-

3. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 5: “[H]e ordered that Qardagh should be given great gifts, and made him *paṭahšā* of Assyria and appointed him *marzbān* [over the land] from the Tormara River up unto the city of Nisibis.” The Tormara corresponds to the Diyala River in central Iraq today. As explained in the translation, §5, n. 13, the large swath of territory here assigned to Qardagh would normally have been divided into three distinct administrative regions: Arbayestān, Nōd-Ardaxšīragān, and Garmegān. See Gyselen, *Géographie administrative*, 78–79; Morony, *Iraq*, 126–34, esp. the map on 127.

4. See, for example, B. I. Marshak, *Legends, Tales, and Fables in the Art of Sogdiana* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2002), esp. 28–54, on the “Rustam room” at Panjikent in western Tajikistan. For the broader context of Sasanian cultural and artistic legacies, see R. Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthes et Sassanides* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1962), 317–23 (suggestive, but uneven); and K. Schippmann, “L’influence de la culture sassanide,” in *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 131–41, esp. 136–37, on the Sasanian-inspired wall painting at Panjikent, Bamiyan (Afghanistan), and other “Silk Road” settlements.

5. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 205, lumps the Qardagh legend with other hagiographic narratives in which “Sapor parle comme le *Livre des Rois*.” Fiey includes in this category of “épopeés naïves” the legends of Behnam of Assyria, Abai of Qullet, and Gufrašnasp of Adiabene. As argued in the appendix to this book, the last of these saints is probably a doublet based on the character of Mar Qardagh. For the thematic links between the Qardagh legend and the late Sasanian *Chronicle of Ardaxšēr*, see Wiessner, “Christentum und Zoroastrismus,” 411–17.

liberately responded to and rewrote its conventions and ideals. The legend's anonymous author adroitly integrates epic themes into a Christian narrative framework. The "mighty strength" (*ganbārūtā*) displayed by young Qardagh at Shapur's court proves futile when confronted by the prayers of a Christian hermit. Only much later in the narrative, after becoming a baptized Christian, does Qardagh reclaim the epic strength needed to defend his homeland against foreigner invaders. Scriptural and epic models of martial heroism are then fused to tell the story of Qardagh's victory over the "impure dogs" who have invaded northern Iraq: "And he cried out to them three times with an angry cry, and said to them, 'This is the day of retribution for your insolence, impure dogs!'"⁶

The presentation of Mar Qardagh as a holy warrior strongly echoes parallel developments in Byzantine and Armenian Christian tradition. Recent scholarship by Byzantinists has underlined the importance of the "holy war" ideology forged in association with Heraclius's Persian campaigns of 624–628.⁷ But most have assumed that this ideology was restricted to the Roman side of the border. In fact, the Christians of the Sasanian Empire produced their own narratives of sacral warfare, combining scriptural and Iranian models of martial heroism. The work of Nina Garsoïan has superbly illuminated this "Iranian substratum" in early Armenian literature.⁸ But there has been no comparable work on the Syriac Christian literature of the Sasanian world. Gernot Wiessner's article comparing the Qardagh legend to the late Sasanian *Chronicle of Ardashīr* rightly emphasizes the thematic parallels between the texts but does little to explain them.⁹ Elucidating the Sasanian features of the Qardagh legend requires a broader range of *comparanda*. It will be useful to sketch first, therefore, the general contours of Sasanian epic tradition as revealed in Zoroastrian and Islamic literature and in a wide range of Sasanian and post-Sasanian art.

6. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 46.

7. M. Whitby, "A New Image for a New Age: George of Pisidia on the Emperor Heraclius," in *The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East*, ed. E. Dabrowa (Krakow: Drukarnia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1994), 197–225, esp. 198; T. Kolbaba, "Fighting for Christianity: Holy War in the Byzantine Empire," *Byzantion* 68 (1998): 194–221.

8. N. Garsoïan, "The Iranian Substratum of the 'Agat'angelos' Cycle," in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, ed. N. Garsoïan, T. F. Matthews, and R. W. Thomson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 151–74; idem, "The Locus of the Death of Kings: Iranian Armenia—The Inverted Image," in *The Armenian Image in History and Literature*, ed. R. G. Hovannisian (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1981), 54–64; and esp. idem, "The Two Voices of Armenian Medieval Historiography: The Iranian Index," *Studia Iranica* 25 (1996): 7–44.

9. See Wiessner, "Christentum und Zoroastrismus in Iran"; and idem, "Christlicher Heiligtum im Umkreis eines sassanidischen Grosskönigs," in *Festgabe deutscher Iranisten zur 2500. Jahrfestfeier Irans*, ed. Wilhelm Eilers (Stuttgart: Höchswacht Druck, 1971), 152–55, on the relationship between Qardagh and St. Sergius.

SOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING
THE SASANIAN EPIC TRADITION

The roots of Sasanian epic narrative lay in a tradition of oral secular poetry performed with musical accompaniment. In a pivotal article published fifty years ago, the English historian of Zoroastrianism Mary Boyce highlighted the breadth and strength of this oral poetic tradition celebrating “the worthiness of kings and heroes of old.”¹⁰ As Boyce and others have shown, Zoroastrian scholars first transposed this oral narrative tradition into written form during the late Sasanian Empire. Working under royal patronage, Zoroastrian scholars compiled the *Xwadāy-Nāmag*, or “Book of Kings,” a massive epic cycle tracing the history of the Iranian royal house from its semi-mythical origins under the Kayanid dynasty to the late Sasanian period.¹¹ This Pahlavi text (or series of texts) does not survive directly, but versions of it circulated widely during the early Islamic period. Translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ († ca. 760),¹² this Middle-Persian “Book of Kings” served as the foundation for the early Islamic historiography of the Sasanian Empire. The *History of Prophets and Kings* by al-Ṭabarī (†923), the *Shāhnāma* by Firdowsi of Tus (†1029), and the *History of the Kings of Persia* by Thaʿālibī (†1037) all drew upon it or its derivative translations.¹³ These Islamic accounts provide indirect, but nonethe-

10. M. Boyce, “The Parthian *gōsān* and Iranian Minstrel Tradition,” *JRAS* (1957): 10–45, surveying both the Iranian minstrel tradition and Christian responses to it. The quotation about the “kings and heroes of old” (*hsyngʿn šhrdʿrʿn ʿwd kwʿn*), cited at Boyce, 11, comes from a Manichaean Parthian text of the fourth or fifth century. While Boyce has a tendency to lump diverse elements of oral and musical performance into a single broad stream of tradition (her comparative material ranges from the Achaemenid Empire to ethnographic studies of modern Kurdish and Afghan bards), the general picture she sketches of the strength of Iranian oral epic tradition is convincing.

11. Later Islamic sources envision this development as a single event accomplished by royal fiat, either under Khusrō I (531–579), Khusrō II (590–628), or Yazdagird III (633–651). A slower, incremental compilation of epic traditions is more probable. For Sasanian royal interest in and patronage of the epic tradition, see esp. T. Nöldeke, *The Iranian National Epic or the Shahnamah*, trans. L. Bogdanov (Bombay: Executive Committee of the K. R. Cama Institute, 1930; based on the 2d ed.: Berlin and Leipzig, 1920), 7–9, 22–25. On the *Xwadāy-Nāmag* in particular, see M. Boyce, “Middle Persian Literature,” *Handbuch der Orientalistik* 4:2:1 (Leiden and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1968), 57–60; and A. S. Shahbazi, “On the *Xwadāy-Nāmag*,” *Acta Iranica* 30 (1990): 208–29.

12. On this key figure in the development of early Arabic prose literature, see J. Derek Latham, “Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and Early ‘Abbasid Prose,” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. Julia Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 48–77, with additional bibliography in E. Yarshatar, “The Persian Presence in the Islamic World,” in *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, ed. R. G. Hovannisian and G. Sabagh (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 57 n. 207.

13. Nöldeke, *Iranian National Epic*, 17. For useful overviews of Islamic sources on the Sasanians, many of them dependent on the *Xwadāy-Nāmag*, see M. Abkaʿi-Khavari, *Das Bild des Königs in der Sasanidenzeit: Schriftliche Überlieferungen im Vergleich mit Antiquaria* (Hildesheim, Zurich, and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2000), 23–30; and E. Yarshatar, “Iranian National History,” in

less essential, evidence for the content and themes of Sasanian epic tradition.¹⁴ Only one Sasanian historical treatise, the *Chronicle of Ardashūr, Son of Papak* (*Kārnāmag-i Ardašīr-i Pābagān*), has survived in its original Pahlavi form. Its importance as a unique exemplar of unadulterated, Sasanian epic prose has long been recognized.¹⁵ The *Chronicle of Ardashūr* also presents, as argued below, the most compelling parallels to the epic themes of the Qardagh legend.

Art and epigraphy offer additional resources for understanding the heroic ideals of Sasanian elites. The royal cliff reliefs at Taq-i Bustan and other sites in western Iran preserve an extensive, datable record of royal iconography, complementing the literary tradition of the “Book of Kings.”¹⁶ While royal ideology evolved significantly over the course of the dynasty, the monuments often anticipate and correspond to the thematic content of the late Sasanian *Xwadāy-Nāmag*. Engraved Sasanian silver vessels, now held in diverse museum and private collections across Europe, North America, and Asia, provide further insight into the epic tradition.¹⁷ In conjunction with Sasanian stamp seals, these silver vessels preserve our best evidence for the re-

CHI 3 (1) (1983): 359–64. For recent critiques of the assumption that the *Xwadāy-Nāmag* was indeed a single, unitary work, see, for example, M. Omidšalar, “Could al-Tha’ālibī Have Used the *Shāhnāma* as a Source?” *Der Islam* 75 (1998): 344 n. 4.

14. Boyce, “Middle Persian Literature,” 58. For the filtering effect of Islamic translation and adaptation of Sasanian epic tradition, see J. Howard-Johnston, “The Two Great Powers in Late Antiquity: A Comparison,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 3, *States, Resources, and Armies*, ed. A. Cameron (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995), 170–72. According to Bosworth, *Sāsānids*, xix, some of the Sasanian material is restored in the Persian version of al-Ṭabarī’s *History* made by Ba’āmī (fl. 963). For this Persian version of al-Ṭabarī, see C. F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 110.

15. See esp. the translation, introduction, and commentary by T. Nöldeke, *Die Geschichte des Artachshir-i Pāpakān* (Göttingen: R. Peppmüller, 1879), repr. from *Bezenbergers Beiträge* 4 (1878): 22–69. I base my citations of the *Kārnāmag* on the Pahlavi text and English translation by D. D. P. Sanjana, *The Kārnāme ī Artakshīr ī Pāpakān* (Bombay: Education Society’s Steam Press, 1896). I was not able to acquire the new edition and translation by F. Grenet, *La geste d’Ardashīr fil de Pābag* (Paris: A. Die, 2003). For the historical figure behind the romance, see H. Luschej, “Ardašīr I,” *Enc. Ir.* 2 (1987): 371–80.

16. For an introductory survey, see L. Vanden Berghe, *Reliefs rupestres de Irān ancien (vers 2000 av. J.C.–7^e s. après J. C.)* (Brussels: Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, 1983), 54–108, 125–54, with a full catalogue of the royal reliefs and map (54) of their locations. See also idem, “La Sculpture,” in *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 71–94, with color photographs and further bibliography, esp. 88 for the publication of individual reliefs in the series “Iranische Denkmäler.” For Sasanian royal epigraphy, see the editions and translations in M. Back, *Die sassanidischen Staatsinschriften* (Tehran: Bibliothèque Pahlavi; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).

17. O. Grabar et al., *Sasanian Silver: Late Antique and Early Medieval Arts of Luxury from Iran* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Art Museum, 1967). See also P. O. Harper, “Sasanian Silver,” in *CHI* 3 (2) (1983): 1113–29; and idem, “La vaisselle en métal,” in *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 95–108, esp. 95–97, on the historiography of the field. For the Russian contribution, see B. I. Marshak, *Silber Schätze des Orients: Metallkunst des 3–13. Jahrhunderts und ihre Kontinuität*, trans.

ception and reconfiguration of epic themes in provincial contexts. The hunting stories starring King Bahrām Gōr (420–438) offer the clearest instance of narrative material depicted in both artistic and literary forms.¹⁸ The Qardagh legend, as we shall see, appears to draw upon this same pool of narrative tradition to describe Mar Qardagh's heroic archery.

THE QARDAGH LEGEND
AND THE *BOOK OF ARDASHĪR*

The young hero introduced in the opening scenes of the Qardagh legend bears a striking resemblance to the royal heroes of the Sasanian epic tradition. The hagiographer immediately draws his audience's attention to his hero's physical beauty, strength, and warlike spirit: "[H]oly Mar Qardagh was handsome in his appearance, large in build, and powerful in his body (*w-rab [h]wā b-gūšmeh w-ḥayltān b-pagreh*); and he possessed a spirit ready for battles (*w-nafšā mhirat ba-qrābē qnē [h]wā*)."¹⁹ While many hagiographers describe their heroes as beautiful, the imagery here is distinctly Iranian in flavor. Sasanian epic narrative frequently emphasizes the strapping build and massive physical strength of its heroes. Qardagh's muscularity brings to mind the physique of the popular Iranian hero Rustam, whom Firdowsi describes as *tamatan* ("huge-bodied") and *pillan* ("with the body of an elephant").²⁰ The hagiographer repeatedly draws attention to the brawny strength of his hero. As soon as Qardagh arrives at court, King Shapur marvels at his handsome appearance and the "powerfulness of his body" (*ḥayltānūtā d-pagreh*).²¹

In Sasanian epic narrative, the arrival of a young hero at court often constitutes a kind of heroic epiphany. The mere sight of an Iranian hero was

L. Schirmer (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann Verlag, 1986), with over two hundred and twenty black-and-white photographs and drawings.

18. See R. Ettinghausen, "Bahram Gur's Hunting Feats or the Problem of Identification," *Iran* 17 (1979): 25–31; and on the literary sources, W. L. Hanaway, "Bahrām V Gōr in Persian Legend and Literature," *Enc. Ir.* 3 (1992): 519.

19. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 3.

20. For these epithets for Rustam, see J. Clinton, trans., *The Tragedy of Sohrāb and Rustām from the Persian National Epic, the Shahname of Abol-Qasem Ferdowsi* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 183 n. 18; see also n. 4 above for the depiction of Rustam in Sogdian art. For other texts celebrating the physical beauty and strength of Iranian heroes, see W. Knauth and S. Nadjamabadi, *Das altiranische Fürstenideal von Xenophon bis Ferdowsi* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1975), 93–96. Despite the methodological problems created by its sweeping diachronic approach, the study by Knauth and Nadjamabadi convincingly documents long-term continuities in Iranian conceptions of valor.

21. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 4. The repetition of the root *ḥayl*, here in the nominal form *ḥayltānūtā* (cf. the intensive adjectival form *ḥayltān* at §3) underscores the extremely "powerful" build of the legend's hero.

deemed sufficient to spark wonder in the eyes of a noble audience. The late Sasanian *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, for instance, tells of the dramatic first appearance of the future king Ardashīr at the court of the last Parthian king, Artabanos IV (213–224). Comparison of this vignette with the parallel scene in the *History of Mar Qardagh* illustrates just how closely the Qardagh legend imitates Sasanian narrative models:

A. The Persian king hears of the excellence of a young nobleman.

When Ardashīr attained the age of fifteen years, information reached [King] Ardavan that Papak [Ardashīr's adopted father] had a son proficient and accomplished in learning and riding.

When Qardagh was about twenty-five years old, Shapur, king of the Persians, heard about his reputation and mighty strength.²²

B. The king invites the young hero to court to compete among a worthy set of peers.

[King Ardavan] wrote a letter to Papak to this effect: "We have heard that you have a son, who is accomplished and very proficient in learning and riding; our desire (has been) that you should send him to our court, and he shall be near us, so that he will associate with our sons and princes."

And Shapur sent orders summoning Qardagh to the gate [of his palace] with great honor . . . and he ordered him to play in the stadium before all the nobles of the kingdom.²³

C. The king, looking upon the youth, recognizes and rejoices in his excellence.

When Ardavan saw Ardashīr, he was glad, expressed to him his affectionate regard, and ordered that he should every day accompany his sons and princes to the chase and the polo-ground.

And when Shapur gave the order and Qardagh entered before him, and Shapur saw the comeliness of his [Qardagh's] appearance and the powerfulness of his body, he rejoiced in him greatly.²⁴

D. The young hero amazes the court by his performance in athletic competitions.

22. *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, I, 24 (Sanjana, 5; 6; Nöldeke, 39). Note that Sanjana's edition has separate pagination for text and translation. Here, as always, I cite the translation first, then the Pahlavi text (the third citation refers to the pagination of Nöldeke's German translation). For the second quotation, see *History of Mar Qardagh*, 4.

23. *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, I, 25 (Sanjana, 6; 6; Nöldeke, 39); *History of Mar Qardagh*, 4.

24. *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, I, 28 (Sanjana, 6; 7; Nöldeke, 39); *History of Mar Qardagh*, 4. For the "princes" (*vāšpuhragān*) of the Sasanian court, a class that included the sons of both the King of kings and the empire's subordinate regional kings, see A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen: Levin and Muksgaard, 1936; 2d rev. ed., 1944), 363.

Ardashir acted accordingly, [and] by the help of Providence he became more victorious and warlike than them all, on the polo and the riding ground, at games of chess, and in other arts.

And on the next day, the king ordered him to come to the stadium and to play with him on the polo-field together with the rest of his nobles. And the king and his nobles marveled at him.²⁵

E. The king awards the youth with a high royal post in recognition of his innate virtue.

King Ardavan declares his intention to appoint Ardashir to “a position according to the learning which he possesses.”

And as soon as the king returned from the hunt, he [Shapur] ordered that Qardagh should be given great gifts, and made him *paṭahšā* of Assyria and appointed him *marzbān* . . . [and] sent him off with a retinue.²⁶

Though composed in different languages with very different religious content, the *Chronicle of Ardashir* and the Qardagh legend clearly tap into a common narrative tradition. Although one could posit direct literary influence (i.e., the author of one text read the other), the more probable explanation is that both writers were familiar with the conventions of a shared epic tradition. The Islamic sources dependent on the *Xwadāy-Nāmag* confirm the popularity of similar stories about other Iranian heroes. In several cases, the drama of a young hero’s debut is heightened by the secret of royal lineage. According to al-Ṭabarī, for example, the elderly king Ardashir immediately recognized his grandson Hormizd when he saw the “sturdy youth” on the polo field “crying out after the ball.”²⁷ The youth’s performance sparked “joy” in the heart of his royal grandfather, who admired his “handsome face, stout physique, and other bodily features.”²⁸

25. *Chronicle of Ardashir*, I, 29–30 (Sanjana, 6–7; 7; Nöldeke, 39); *History of Mar Qardagh*, 4.

26. *Chronicle of Ardashir*, I, 25 (Sanjana, 6; 6; Nöldeke, 39). In this case, the Parthian king (not a member of the “true” royal dynasty of the Sasanians) reneges on his promise, after Ardashir outperforms him in archery during the royal hunt. In other stories based on the *Xwadāy-Nāmag*, young heroes usually receive the high royal posts they deserve. See, e.g., *History of Mar Qardagh*, 5. Wiessner, “Christentum und Zoroastrismus,” suggests further parallels between the *Chronicle of Ardashir* and the Qardagh legend, some more convincing than others.

27. Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 831–33 (Bosworth, 40–43; here 41). The entire segment concerning the future King of kings Hormizd I (270–271) accentuates physical might as a marker of royal blood. Ṭabarī introduces Hormizd as “outstanding for his fortitude in battle, boldness, and massive build” (40). Even the king’s mother possessed “great physical strength” (41), as her royal suitor, Hormizd’s father, Shapur I, discovered to his chagrin when he attempted to take her by force.

28. Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 832 (Bosworth, 41–42), noting explicitly the young prince’s possession of “Kayanian” heritage, the semi-mythical dynasty of ancient Iran, claimed as ancestors by the late Sasanian dynasty. There has been extensive debate among Iranists over the precise

The Qardagh legend presents an immediately recognizable, but reduced version of this epic ideal. While described as a zealous “Magian,” young Qardagh possesses few of the cultural and religious attributes assigned to the Zoroastrian heroes of the epic tradition. As Ehsan Yarshater observes in his analysis of the narrative traditions of the *Xwadāy-Nāmāg* (as preserved in the *Shāhnāma* and other Islamic texts), the heroes of Persian epic tradition typically possess a significant range of physical *and* cultural skills.²⁹ So, for instance, in the *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, the youthful Ardashīr earns the attention of the Parthian king Ardavan by his proficiency in both “learning and riding.”³⁰ He impresses the king with his expertise in chess (Phl. *čatrang*), as well as polo, riding, and hunting.³¹ Similarly, according to al-Ṭabarī, the Persian tutors of Bahrām Gōr at Hīra taught the future king not just archery and riding, but also law, writing, and oral history.³² The late Sasanian treatise *Khusro, Son of Kavad, and the Page* preserves a full catalogue of the diverse skills expected of a noble Sasanian youth. In this delightful short text, a noble Iranian page (*redāk*), desirous of royal gifts, presents himself before King Khusro and boasts of his impeccable training in a wide range of areas:

In time [the page explains] I was entrusted to a school, and in learning I was strong and quick. I memorized the *Yast*, *Hādōxt*, *Bagān*, and *Videvdāt* [various Zoroastrian prayers and scripture] like a *herbād* [a type of Zoroastrian priest]; I listened to the oral commentary on them passage by passage. And my literacy is such that I am skilled in calligraphy and swift writing, desirous of subtle

nature and significance of this claim. In addition to the references cited in Bosworth, *Sāsānids*, 41–42 n. 127, see G. Gnoli, *The Idea of Iran: An Essay on Its Origin* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1989), 137–38; *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, I, 6–7, 18–20 (Sanjana, 2–3; 2; Nöldeke, 37).

29. Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” 407: “Though much emphasis is placed on physical skills (handling weapons, riding, playing polo, and hunting), moral discipline, cultural attainments, and proper etiquette are not ignored.”

30. *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, I, 25 (Sanjana, 6; 6; Nöldeke, 39): *pat frahang ud aswārīh*. For horsemanship (Phl. *aswārīh*) in Iranian epic tradition, see Knauth and Nadjamabadi, *Altiranische Fürstenideal*, 97–103.

31. *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, I, 30 (Sanjana, 7; 7; Nöldeke, 39). Introduced from India during the late Sasanian period, chess achieved considerable popularity among the elites of the Iranian world. For a brief history with bibliography, see B. Utas, “History of Chess in Persia,” *Enc. Ir.* 5 (1993): 394–96. M. Abk’i-Khavari, “Schach im Iran,” *Iranica Antiqua* 36 (2001): 329–59, includes a translation and commentary on the Pahlavi treatise on chess, the *Mātikān-i Čatrang*.

32. Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 856 (Bosworth, 84): “Bahrām devoted his skills exclusively to learning everything that he had asked to be taught. . . . He firmly comprehended everything he heard and quickly grasped everything he was taught with the minimum of tuition.” For Bahrām Gōr’s alliance with the Lakhmid court at Hīra, see O. Klima, “Bahrām Gōr,” *Enc. Ir.* 3 (1992): 518–19. Later Islamic tradition greatly expanded the story of Bahrām’s education among the Arabs. For the parallel passages in al-Dīnawarī (†891), al-Ya’qūbī († ca. 900), and the Persian version of al-Ṭabarī’s *History* (completed ca. 963), see Bosworth, *Sāsānids*, 84 n. 225.

knowledge, skillful in work, and wise in speech. My horsemanship and archery are such that one must regard as lucky the opponent who can escape me on horseback. My skill with a lance is such that one must regard as unlucky the knight who advances for duel and combat against me with horse, lance, and sword. On the playing field, I am adept at polo, upending my opponent at the right time. With a spear from horseback, I accurately strike the target's face; my hammer and my arrow are seen to hit the same spot. I am expert on the vina, the lyre, lute, and zither and in voicing either the response or the verse in any song. I have gone into the subject of the stars and the planets to such an extent that those who are expert in that profession are base compared with me. In playing chess, backgammon, and "eight foot" I am more advanced than my peers.³³

This aspiring young nobleman claims the same physical skills attributed to Mar Qardagh: he brags of his ability in archery and polo, his zeal for battle, and his horsemanship. But he also describes his cultural attainments: "learning . . . [and] swift writing," memorization of the religious texts taught by the Zoroastrian *herbād* priests, musical talent, and knowledge of the "subject of the stars and the planets." Each of these skills had a respected function in Sasanian society.³⁴ The page also boasts of his precocious skill at chess, backgammon (Phl. *nēwardaxšīr*), and other board games.³⁵ The impressive range of the page's skills exposes the relatively limited repertoire of talents attributed to Mar Qardagh. The saint's hagiographer had little interest in these intellectual and artistic dimensions of Sasanian culture. He focuses exclu-

33. D. Monchi-Zadeh, "Xusrōn i Kavātān ut Rēlak: Pahlavi Text, Transcription, and Translation," in *Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 2: 64–65 (§§8–15). My translation follows C. J. Brunner, "Selected Texts from Pre-Islamic Iran," *Special Supplement to the Grapevine* (undated typescript), with minor variations based on the more literal translation by Monchi-Zadeh. The treatise, cited hereafter as *Khusro and the Page*, is one of a very small number of late Sasanian court prose texts (the *Chronicle of Ardashīr* is another) to survive in its original Pahlavi form. On its date and transmission, see Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature," 62–63; S. Shaked, "Andarz and Andarz Literature in Pre-Islamic Iran," *Enc. Ir.* 2 (1987): 11–16 (15).

34. "Swift writing" was difficult to achieve given the complexity of the Pahlavi writing system. See, for example, the anecdote in al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 830–31 (Bosworth, 38–39, with n. 121 on the "notoriously difficult and ambiguous Pahlavi script"). For the memorization of the texts taught by the *herbād* priests, see M.-L. Chaumont, "Recherches sur le clergé zoroastrien: Le *herbad*," *RHR* 158 (1960): 58–80, 161–79; A. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 72–75, 450–51 (citing this passage). For "musical talent" as an aristocratic virtue, see Boyce, "Parthian *gōsān*," 27–31. For the "subject of the stars and planets" in Sasanian Iran, see S. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1994), 88–89; and chapter 3, n. 82 below.

35. For chess, see n. 31 above. For backgammon (Phl. *nēwardaxšīr*; NP *nard*), see P. O. Harper, *The Royal Hunter: Art of the Sasanian Empire* (New York: The Asia Society, 1978), 75–76 (no. 25), discussing the backgammon scene on the Sackler bowl (dated by stylistic criteria to the seventh century); MacKenzie, *CPD*, 59.

sively on his hero's athletic excellence, particularly his skill in archery, polo, and the hunt. This emphasis is deliberate, since his physical skills prove essential to Qardagh in his later guise as a mounted Christian warrior and archer. To grasp the significance of this continuity, one must consider the prestige assigned to these particular athletic activities in the Sasanian cultural sphere.

ARCHERY, POLO, AND THE HUNT IN THE SASANIAN WORLD

Zoroastrian and Islamic sources are unanimous in their praise of archery, polo, and hunting as fundamental elements of the "good life" of Sasanian elites. The epic tradition is full of stories of Iranian kings and heroes who excel on the battlefield, the polo field, and, most often of all, on the hunt. Such stories reflect an understanding of athletic performance that is dramatically different from the Roman tradition, where elites typically *paid for* public displays of athletic excellence.³⁶ The aristocracy of the Sasanian Empire cherished outstanding individual feats of athletic excellence achieved before an audience of one's noble peers. Elites themselves, rather than professional athletes, were the star performers in this social and cultural model. During the early Sasanian period, even the King of kings was expected to provide periodic displays of his superior might.

Take archery, the first sport in which Qardagh engages at the court of King Shapur. In Persian tradition, a superior bowshot proved more than just great physical strength; it demonstrated that the archer possessed divine favor enabling him to shoot farther, more powerfully, and more accurately than ordinary men. The royal inscription of Shapur I (239–270) etched into a cliff at Hājjiābad in southwestern Iran exemplifies this conception of heroic archery. In this bilingual Pahlavi-Parthian text, the successor of Ardashīr commemorates his own remarkable royal bowshot performed before his court:

This is the range of the arrow shot by Us, the Mazda-worshipping god Shapur, King of kings of Eran and Non-Eran, whose descent is from the gods; . . . we shot it before the kings (*šahrdārān*) and princes (*vāspuhragān*) and magnates (*vuzurgān*) and nobles (*āzādān*). And we put [our] foot in this cleft and we cast the arrow beyond that cairn. . . . Whoever may be strong of arm, let them put

36. On the Roman tradition of public games funded by imperial and civic elites, see P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, trans. B. Pierce (London: Harmondsworth, 1990), 208–14; K. Hopkins, "Murderous Games," in *Death and Renewal*, vol. 2 of *Sociological Studies in Roman History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–30. Although individual emperors and aristocrats chose to perform in athletic competitions before the masses, this was the exception, rather than the rule. As Veyne (385–86) emphasizes, it was most often the "bad emperors" like Nero and Commodus who appeared in person in the arena.

[their] foot in this cleft and let them shoot an arrow toward that cairn. Whoever shoots an arrow [as far as] that cairn, they are [indeed] strong of arm.³⁷

Shapur's magnificent bowshot demonstrates his possession of the divinely endowed good fortune that adorned all true Iranian kings.³⁸ The inscription commemorating his royal bowshot specifies that the event took place before a worthy audience of "kings and princes and magnates and nobles." Shapur openly challenges others ("whoever may be strong of arm") to equal his feat.³⁹ Later literary sources dependent on the *Xwadāy-Nāmag* often reiterate the intimate connection between archery and royal identity. When, for example, in the *Shāhnāma*, the arrow shot of the disguised Bahrām Gōr "destroys the target," the king of India immediately recognizes Bahrām's royal lineage. No "mere ambassador," he exclaims, could make such a shot, "'twere well I call him brother."⁴⁰

It is striking how well the Qardagh legend preserves Sasanian models of heroic archery. Like Shapur I at Ḥajjiābad, and the heroes of the *Shāhnāma*, Qardagh performs before a worthy audience of his peers. When his five arrows all strike the target, the "king and his nobles" applaud his excellence.⁴¹ His five-arrow volley against the target mirrors similar feats of archery in the

37. D. N. MacKenzie, "Shapur's Shooting," *BSOAS* 41 (1978): 499–511, reprinted in MacKenzie, *Iranica Diversa*, ed. C. G. Cereti and L. Paul (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 1999), 1: 73–82. For the Pahlavi text with German translation (which I have used to modify MacKenzie's translation), see Back, *Sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, 372–78. For the location of Ḥajjiābad in Fars, see the *Barrington Atlas*, 3 (F4), 94 (C3). As MacKenzie (40) notes, a shorter bilingual inscription of very similar content was discovered at Tang-i Burāq in central Fars. For a general account of heroic archery in Iranian tradition, see Knauth and Nadjamabadi, *Altiranische Fürstenideal*, 104–12.

38. Middle Persian texts use several different terms to describe the "good fortune" (Phl. *bayōbaxt*, *farroxih*, and esp. *xwarrah*) possessed by Iranian kings and heroes. See MacKenzie, *CPD*, 16, 32, 96. On the last of these concepts (Phl. *xʷarnah*, or *xwarrah*; NP *farr*), see de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 299–301, esp. n. 185. Morony, *Iraq*, 30, succinctly defines the term as the "divine glory or fortune, which was limited to members of the [Sasanian] dynasty, [and] was the supernatural source and symbol of their legitimacy."

39. One might note, again, the essential divergence from Greco-Roman tradition. To cite one prominent example, the obelisk base of Theodosius I (379–95), erected in the hippodrome of Constantinople (where it stands still today), shows the emperor presiding over the chariot races, not riding in them. For analysis, bibliography, and illustrations, see B. Küllerich, *The Obelisk Base in Constantinople: Court Art and Imperial Ideology* (Rome: G. Bretschneider, 1998), 46–55.

40. My citations of the *Shāhnāma* are based on the only complete English translation, that by G. Warner and E. Warner, *The Shahnama of Firdausi* (London: K. Paul, Trench and Co., 1905–25); here, 7:118. The Sasanian sections of Firdowsi's work have not yet appeared in the new critical edition by D. Khalegi-Motlagh, ed., *The Shāhnāma (The Book of Kings)*, 5 vols. (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988–). Yarshater, "Iranian National History," 407, discusses a similar court archery performance in the story of Rustam's father, Zal.

41. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 4. The "target" (*nišā*) was apparently a flag or small banner attached to the top of a high pole.

epic tradition.⁴² Finally, and perhaps most decisively, the hagiographer explicitly links Qardagh's archery to his possession of good fortune. "Lift your hand strongly to the bow," the king orders Qardagh, "and show your good fortune (*kūšārāk!*)"⁴³ Although the hagiographer shuns the more technical diction for this concept of royal glory,⁴⁴ the Iranian flavor of the vignette is manifest. Sasanian and post-Sasanian art and literature abound with stories of similar archery feats by King Bahrām Gōr. In one episode, preserved in the *History* of al-Ṭabarī, Bahrām likewise kills two beasts with a single arrow.⁴⁵ In another episode frequently depicted in Sasanian and post-Sasanian art, Bahrām pleases his flute girl with a whimsical display of his archery.⁴⁶ Qardagh's bowshot, killing a hind (*'ayltā*) and its fawn (*breh*) with a single arrow, belongs squarely within this narrative tradition.

Polo, the second game in which Qardagh participates at the royal court, holds a similar niche in Persian epic narrative. First developed in Central Asia, early polo featured two teams of mounted players who used long, curved sticks to strike the ball beyond the post of the opposing team.⁴⁷ Although

42. See, for example, al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 955 (Bosworth, 257, and n. 600), on the five-arrow volley (*bi-al-banjākān*) shot by the Persian general Wahriz. In the passage of *Khusro and the Page* quoted above (n. 33), the noble youth boasts of his ability to strike a target with any combination of weapons: "[M]y hammer and my arrow are seen to hit the same spot." (following Brunner's translation).

43. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 5. See also §50, where the Persian king again commends Qardagh for "your heroic deeds" (*neshānāyk*) and "your good fortune" (*kūšārāk*).

44. The legend's author renders the concept of good fortune with a noun derived from the Syriac verb *kšar*, "to prosper," whereas other East-Syrian writers regularly employ the term *gaddā*, "fortune, luck, or success" in passages describing the "good fortune" of Persian kings. See, for example, the Syriac *Alexander Romance*, II, 7 (Budge, 74; 132, l. 12), with additional references cited in Budge's index of Syriac terms (209). *Gadā* is also well attested as an ideogram (*GDH*, from Aramaic), representing the Iranian concept of *xwarrah*, "(royal) fortune, glory, or splendor," in both literary and epigraphic Middle Persian. See MacKenzie, *CPD*, 96; Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, 148–49; P. Gignoux, *Noms propres sassanides en moyen-persé épigraphique* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986), 9–10.

45. Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 857 (Bosworth, 85–86), where Bahrām kills a lion and a wild ass with a single arrow. In the Qardagh legend, perhaps significantly, the prey consists of a female deer and its (male) offspring. Although the hunting of deer and antelope was common among the Sasanians, it is curious that the hagiographer depicts Qardagh slaying innocuous beasts, whereas Sasanian silver plates more often show fierce, dangerous prey (lions, wild boars, bulls). See, for example, Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 38–39, 58–59, 113–14 (nos. 6, 17, 46).

46. See, for example, *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 192 (no. 51), for the depiction of Bahrām and his flute girl Azadeh on the seventh-century, Sasanian silver dish discovered in the Viatsk region of central Russia. For further examples, see (in addition to the bibliography listed in n. 18 above) D. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Āzāda," *Enc. Ir.* 3 (1989): 589; and Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 48–50 (no. 12), quoting Firdowsi's version of the story.

47. In Persian the game is known as *čāwgān*, from the Phl. *čaw(la)gān*, "polo stick," and by metonymy the game itself. The English name for the game is of Central Asian origin (from the Tibetan *bolo*), despite the fact that the English adopted the game from the Persianized elites of

the exact parameters of the game during the late Sasanian period remain uncertain, it was evidently a rough and tumble affair, both dangerous and intensely competitive. The ambitious page at Khusro's court boasts of his ability to trample his opponents on the field.⁴⁸ Literary sources beginning with the *Chronicle of Ardashīr* commonly cite excellence in the game as a distinguishing mark of elite identity. The princes and heroes of the *Shāhnāma* are avid players at both the Persian and foreign courts.⁴⁹ In the *Shāhnāma*'s version of an ancient Persian love story, Gushtasp, the legendary patron of Zoroaster, earns the hand of Caesar's daughter by a display of his polo and archery skills.⁵⁰ While the extent to which these polo matches of the *Shāhnāma* mirror actual Sasanian practice is debatable,⁵¹ the cumulative evidence—including now the Qardagh legend—suggests that polo was well established as a court game by the end of the Sasanian period.

The royal hunt, the final athletic activity in which Qardagh excels at Shapur's court, represented the definitive expression of Sasanian epic tradition. Combining the skills of archery and horsemanship, hunting provided the ideal setting for Sasanian elites to display their athleticism and courage. Closely associated with military valor, the hunt typically involved the deployment of large numbers of retainers and noble companions.⁵² Sasanian

colonial India. For the popularity of polo in the medieval Islamic world, see H. Massé, "Čawgān," *Enc. Islam* 2 (1965): 16–17; and Abka'ī Khavari, *Bild des Königs*, 185–86 (K.9.4–5).

48. *Khusro and the Page*, §12 (Monchi-Zadeh, 65). Later Persian texts emphasize the physical dangers of the game. See, for example, the description of the one-eyed polo player in the mid-eleventh-century etiquette book by Kej Kāwus, *The Qābusnāma*, 19 (Levy, 85–86; Najmabadi, 129).

49. See, for example, Firdowsi, *Shāhnāma* (Warner and Warner, 7:224), with additional references at F. Wolff, *Glossar zu Firdosis Schahname* (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1935; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965), under *čawgān*.

50. Firdowsi, *Shāhnāma* (Warner and Warner, 4:350). A version of the legend (without the polo and archery) appears already in the Hellenistic writer Chares of Mytilene (late fourth century B.C.), as quoted by Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, 13, 35 (Gulick, 575). M. Boyce, "Zariadres and Zarēr," *BSOAS* 17 (1955): 463–77, attempts to prove that the legend is of Median origin, and not part of the Kayanian material characteristic of the *Shāhnāma*.

51. For the legendary portions of the *Shāhnāma* as a mirror for Sasanian social practices, see Yarshater, "Iranian National History," 402–11; Abka'ī Khavari, *Bild des Königs*, 13 n. 4. Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 825 (Bosworth, 26–27) describes a polo match at Ardashīr's court, during which the king immediately recognizes his son Shapur amidst a crowd of one hundred identically dressed youth.

52. P. Gignoux, "La chasse dans l'Iran sasanide," in *Orientalia Romana: Essays and Lectures* 5: *Iranian Studies*, ed. G. Gnoli (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1983), 101–18, synthesizes the abundant evidence. See also Abka'ī Khavari, *Bild des Königs*, 87–90; Knauth and Nadjamabadi, *Altiranische Fürstenideal*, 112–19; and Harper, *Royal Hunter*, passim. The association of the hunt with martial valor was common throughout the ancient world. For a reliable survey of the Greco-Roman evidence, see J. K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985). For the imperial hunt in Byzantium, see E. Patlagean, "De la chasse et du souverain," *DOP* 46 (1992): 257–63.

kings, following a long tradition in Near Eastern monarchy, made hunting a central part of their court ritual and royal ideology. The monumental cliff reliefs at Taq-i Bustan in western Iran richly document the sumptuous ritual of the royal hunt during the late Sasanian period.⁵³ The panels carved on either side of the Taq-i Bustan grotto show royal hunting expeditions in pursuit of, respectively, wild boar and stags. Two points about these late Sasanian panels are worth reiterating.⁵⁴ First, in both panels, a large retinue, including troops of female harpists, accompanies the king. The panels confirm the reports of later literary sources that musical accompaniment constituted an essential element of the royal hunt, and more broadly the court culture of the late Sasanian Empire. Several episodes of the *Shāhnāma* suggest that the minstrels' repertoire included, among other types of songs, stories of ancient Iranian heroes.⁵⁵ Such narratives complemented the songs performed at banquets to honor the martial victories of contemporary Sasanian rulers.⁵⁶

Second, both of the hunting panels at Taq-i Bustan depict the bow as the king's weapon of choice. As in the famous Neo-Assyrian reliefs from Nineveh, heroic archery during the hunt constitutes the ultimate sign of the king's mastery over both man and beast. In the central vignette of the boar hunt panel, the king, standing in a boat, draws his bow with great strength and deadly ac-

53. The site, located 4 km north of the modern city of Kirmanshah, lies in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains, northeast of Khusro's palace at Dastegird. For initial description and attribution of the reliefs to Khusro II, see F. Sarre and E. Herzfeld, *Iranische Felsrelief: Aufnahmen und Untersuchungen von Denkmälern aus alt- und mittelpersischer Zeit* (Berlin: E. Wasmuth, 1910), 199–212 (pls. 36–39). Although K. Erdmann and other scholars challenged this identification, arguments for an early seventh-century date have prevailed. See esp. E. Herzfeld, "Khusrau Parwez und der Tāq i Vastān," *AMI* 9 (1938): 91–158 (arguing for a date of 612–628); and now H. Lushey, "Taq-i Bostan," in *Bisutun: Ausgrabungen und Forschungen in den Jahren 1963–1967*, ed. W. Kleiss and P. Calmeyer (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1996), 121–28.

54. The entire set of reliefs has been documented in splendid detail in the (unfortunately rare) black-and-white photo catalogue by S. Fukai, K. Horiuchi, et al., *Taq-i Bustan*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Tokyo, 1969–84). For representative color images, see *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 51, 77–78, 85–86, 91, 93 (figs. 28, 61, 63, 73–74, 78, 80).

55. See Boyce, "Parthian *gōsān*," 26, citing *Shāhnāma*, 10, 64; 42, 1710 (without identification of the edition). In the first passage, Zal tells Rustam that since he is too young to fight, he should content himself with banquets and heroic song (*pahlavānī surūd*). Later in the poem, Khusro II's rival, Bahrām Čōbin, restores his zeal for battle by listening to songs of the heroic deeds of Isfandiyar. Boyce (21–27) proves the high status of minstrels at the late Sasanian court, esp. Bārdad of Fars (or Merv), the beloved court minstrel of Khusro II.

56. The Greek historian Theophylact Simocatta, writing ca. 629, observed that it was "customary among the Persians" (ὡς ἔθος Πέρσας) to perform such songs at victory banquets. To celebrate his defeat of Bahrām Čōbin, Khusro invited his Roman allies to a banquet, where "he spent time on his couch, while songs were sung in his honor to the accompaniment of lyre and flute." Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, V.11.6 (Whitby and Whitby, 147; de Boor, 209). See D. Frendo, "The Early Exploits and Final Overthrow of Khusrau II (591–628): Panegyric and Vilification in the Last Byzantine-Iranian Conflict," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 9 (1995): 209.

curacy (see figure 3).⁵⁷ Two giant boars lie dead before him, while a second boat, carrying five female harpists, floats nearby. The composition, which later Islamic tradition associated with the mythical Iranian hero Fardād, memorably evokes the potent symbolism of the Sasanian royal hunt.⁵⁸ In the words of a medieval Armenian historian, Khusro was the “terrible hunter, the lion of the East, at whose roar alone distant people shook and trembled.”⁵⁹

The exquisite silver hunting plates recovered from various parts of Iran, Central Asia, and Russia likewise testify to the centrality of the royal hunt in Sasanian and post-Sasanian conceptions of heroic valor.⁶⁰ The silver dish illustrated in figure 4, acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in 1934, offers one of the finest examples of these royal hunting scenes.⁶¹ Its balanced, symmetrical composition depicts either King Peroz (459–484) or his successor, Kavad, during his second reign (499–531) sitting upright on his royal horse at full gallop in pursuit of two mountain goats (two other rams, already slain, are sprawled beneath the horse). The fluttering ribbons

57. The image has been frequently reproduced: Vanden Berghe, *Reliefs rupestres*, 206–7 (pls. 38–39); Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthes et Sassanides*, 195 (fig. 236); G. Herrmann, *The Iranian Revival* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1977), 133; and Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 121. For the Neo-Assyrian royal reliefs, see R. D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (688–627 B.C.)* (London: British Museum Publications Ltd., 1976).

58. For the interpretation of the Taq-i Bustan reliefs in Islamic tradition, see P. P. Soucek, “Farhād and Ṭāq-i Būstān: The Growth of a Legend,” in *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East in Honor of Richard Ettinghausen*, ed. P. J. Chelkowski (Provo: The Middle East Center, University of Utah; New York: New York University Press, 1974), 27–52.

59. Moses Daskhurants'i, *History*, II. 13 (Dowsett, 90; Arak'elyan, 146). I accept here Howard Johnston's argument that a late seventh-century source (the “682 History”) underlies this portion of Moses's tenth-century chronicle. See J. Howard-Johnston, “Armenian Historians of Heraclius: An Examination of the Aims, Sources, and Working-Methods of Sebos and Movses Daskhurants'i,” in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. G. J. Reinink and B. H. Stolte (Louvain, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2002), 59. The identification of royalty with lions became pervasive in subsequent literary tradition. See W. L. Hanaway, “The Concept of the Hunt in Persian Literature,” *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts* 69 (1971) 21–34; Gignoux, “La chasse,” 110.

60. P. O. Harper, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period*, vol. 1, *Royal Imagery* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981), 40–86, pls. 8–32, 37–38. These dishes are perhaps the most intensively studied category of Sasanian art. See the foundational studies by K. Erdmann, “Die sasanidischen Jagdschalen: Untersuchungen zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der iranischen Edelmetallkunst unter den Sasaniden,” *Jahrbuch des Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 57 (1936): 192–232; idem, “Zur Chronologie der sassanidischen Jagdschalen,” *ZDMG* 97 (1943) 239–83; Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 33–36, 38–41, 48–50, 58–59 (nos. 3–4, 6–7, 12, 17); and Gignoux, “La chasse,” passim, with examples illustrated at figs. 1, 8–15, 18, 21. For superb color reproductions, see *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 188–205 (nos. 49–60).

61. Harper, *Silver Vessels*, 64–66 (pl. 17), 172, for P. Meyer's analysis of the plate's technical features; Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 40–41 (no. 7). The dish is 22 cm in diameter, 3.5 cm high, and weighs 721 grams. It was allegedly found at Qazvin in northern Iran, though here (as is true for nearly all the Sasanian silver vessels found in Iran) the archaeological context is unknown. For the criteria for the vessel's dating, see the following note.

behind his head, together with his halo, visibly symbolize the royal glory (Phl. *xwarrah*) that blesses the king's bowshot. This particular dish was probably produced during the late fifth or early sixth century, but the production of similar vessels continued until the end of the empire and indeed far into the post-Sasanian period.⁶² After the fourth century, victory over beasts, rather than human opponents, became the preeminent theme for the articulation of the dynasty's royal glory.⁶³ As Oleg Grabar has observed, scenes of the royal hunt outnumber all other themes depicted on Sasanian and post-Sasanian silver vessels.⁶⁴

The production history of these silver dishes underscores the political significance of large-game hunting in the Sasanian world. Like other medieval monarchies, Sasanian rulers attempted to restrict the glory of large-game hunting to the court. Beginning with the reign of Shapur II, the production and distribution of silver vessels was tightly controlled by the court.⁶⁵ Distributed as presents, the silver vessels apparently served to affirm political and cultural bonds between the court and its domestic and foreign allies. By the late Sasanian Empire, though, this centralizing strategy showed signs of attenuation. After ca. 550, noblemen reappear on silver vessels, a medium in which the Sasanian court had exercised a virtual monopoly since the third century. One silver-gilt vase from seventh-century Iran depicts Sasanian courtiers hunting in a mountainous landscape.⁶⁶ The Sackler bowl, already mentioned above (n. 35), illustrates the feast of an aristocratic, but nonroyal, household. While the provenance and dating of individual vessels remain debatable, the general trend is clear. Heroic activities cultivated by the Sasanian court, such as hunting and feasting, increasingly filtered into the artistic repertoire of regional elites.

62. The dating of individual vessels hinges on the defensible, though not foolproof, hypothesis, that the royal crowns depicted on the vessels correspond closely to the iconography of crowns depicted on Sasanian coins (thus Erdmann, "Zur Chronologie"). Other iconographic details can also be significant. Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 41, points, in this case, to the position of the king's bowstring hand, his belt buckle, and the "pronounced ridge on the upper arm of the bow" as indications of a fifth- or sixth-century date. For the closest parallel, the fragmentary Pereshchepina plate in the Hermitage Museum, see Harper, *Silver Vessels*, 81–82 (pl. 28).

63. The iconography of Sasanian royal reliefs mirrors this trend. While images of victory over human enemies (esp. Roman emperors) figure prominently in the cliff reliefs of the early Sasanian Empire, the early seventh-century reliefs at Taq-i Bustan show only an enthronement scene, a mounted warrior without an opponent, and the two hunting panels on either side of the grotto. For the hypothesis that the hunting panels were added late in the reign of Khusro II, see Lushey, "Taq-i Bostan," 122–23.

64. Grabar, *Sasanian Silver*, 47.

65. For the argument that silver production became an "instrument for royal propaganda," see Harper, *Silver Vessels*, 39; idem, *Royal Hunter*, 25: "From the time of Shapur II (309–379) until late in the sixth century, no human figures other than the kings were represented on Sasanian silver."

66. Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 65–67 (no. 22).

This process is best understood not simply as a “trickle down” of royal artistic models, but rather as a dialogue in which provincial elites developed their own versions of the Sasanian epic tradition. As Prudence Harper has noted, the hunt of the courtiers depicted on the silver-gilt vase in the Iranian National Museum in Tehran is “far removed from the formal hunting scenes of the royal silver plates.”⁶⁷ While willing to imitate royal behavior, provincial elites were not bound to the restrictive canon of court-based artists. Sasanian stamp seals, produced and used throughout the empire, provide excellent evidence for this process of creative imitation.⁶⁸ A number of seals—often without inscriptions and thus difficult to date—show Sasanian noblemen on the hunt, slaying lions, mountain goats, deer, or other wild beasts.⁶⁹ The Pahlavi inscriptions etched on the back of some of these seals preserve the voices of Sasanian aristocrats, boasting of their accomplishments. A bearded nobleman stabbing a bear announces, “It’s me, Vemen, son of Samb-Ram!”⁷⁰

Following the Islamic conquest of the 640s, the emulation and appropriation of Sasanian models became pervasive among the provincial elites of the former Sasanian Empire. Both literary sources and archaeology attest to the ubiquity of Sasanian royal models as a benchmark for aristocratic behavior. Etiquette handbooks composed under ‘Abbasid patronage, such as the *Book of the Crown* attributed to al-Jahīz (†868), specify the rules governing interactions between kings and courtiers. The activities recommended by the *Book of the Crown* are precisely those described in late Sasanian sources

67. Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 66: “The small hunting scenes on this silver vase have considerable charm. Figures ride camels. Archers shoot at camels and goats. A standing male lassos a wild bull. A kneeling hunter prepares to release a falcon. Scattered in the field are birds of prey, onagers, an antelope, a lion confronting a camel, and a stag.”

68. For orientation in the subfield of Sasanian sigillography, see Morony, *Iraq*, 545–48; R. Gyselen, “La glyptique,” in *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 123–26; and R. Frye, “Sasanian Seal Inscriptions,” in *Beiträge zur alten Geschichte und deren Nachleben: Festschrift für Franz Altheim zum 6. 10. 1968*, ed. R. Stiehl and H. E. Stier, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970), 2: 77–84, 433–38. Gyselen, *Géographie administrative*, xvii–xx, provides a bibliography of material published up to 1989. The chronology of Sasanian seals remains problematic due to the relative paucity of material from controlled excavations.

69. See, for example, P. Gignoux and R. Gyselen, *Catalogue des sceaux, camées et bulles sasanides de la Bibliothèque Nationale et du Musée du Louvre* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1978–93), 1: 41–42, esp. n. 153; 2: nos. 4.32 (pl. X), 6.79 (pl. XXI); idem, *Bulles et sceaux sassanides de diverses collections* (Paris: Association pour l’avancement des études iraniennes, 1987), 164: AMO 13.1–3 (pl. V), 223: IBT 13.1 (pl. XIV), 245: MCB 13.3 (pl. XVII); Gignoux, “La chasse,” 113–14.

70. P. Gignoux and R. Gyselen, *Sceaux sasanides de diverses collections privées* (Louvain: Peeters, 1982), no. 13.9 (pl. VI), an agate seal; the reading of the name is uncertain. Similar scenes of noblemen defeating wild beasts include Gignoux and Gyselen, *Sceaux sasanides*, nos. 13.5–10 (pl. VI: standing hunters), 13.12–18g (pl. VII: equestrian hunters); idem, *Catalogue des sceaux*, II, 6.79 (pl. XXI), 9.10 (pl. XXVI); and C. J. Brunner, *Sasanian Stamp Seals in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), 74–75 (type 2f.: hunting or combat scenes between man and animal).

(including the Qardagh legend): “the game of ball, the hunting of game, archery at a fixed target, the game of chess, and other similar activities.”⁷¹ The archaeological evidence is more scattered and difficult to interpret. Two points, though, deserve notice. First, nonroyal elites in various parts of Iraq and Iran often embellished their mansions with decorative cycles evoking the glory of the royal hunt.⁷² Stucco plaques excavated from early Islamic mansions at Chal-Tarkhan near Tehran depict a boar hunt in a marshy landscape and the story of Bahrām Gōr and his flute girl.⁷³ If these plaques are based on Sasanian “prototypes” (as the art historian Deborah Thompson has convincingly argued), they illustrate the vigorous appropriation of epic themes by the provincial aristocracies of the late Sasanian Empire.

The second point regards the chronology and geography of these developments. Most of our evidence for the artistic elaboration of the Iranian epic tradition comes from the early Islamic period, often from the eastern periphery of the former Sasanian Empire. The Russian excavations at Panjikent in western Tajikistan have produced extraordinary evidence for the depiction of Iranian epic themes by the local elites of a modest Sogdian town. As one of the chief excavators explains, the fragmentary frescoes of Panjikent reveal the “aspirations of an urban elite to be the equal of kings and gods.”⁷⁴

71. *Book of the Crown* (Pellat, 101). G. Schoeler, “Verfasser und Titel des Ġāhiz zugeschriebenen sog. *Kitāb at-Tāġ*,” *ZDMG* 130 (1980): 217–25, convincingly attributes the work to al-Jāhiz’s contemporary Muḥammad b. al-Ḥārīt at-Taġlibī († ca. 864). The “game of ball” here presumably refers to polo. For a list of similar Arabic texts preserving Sasanian material, see Shaked, “Andarz,” 15 (n. 33 above).

72. For orientation, see J. Kröger, “Sasanian Stucco,” in Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 101–18 (nos. 31–50); Kröger, “Décor en stuc,” in *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 63–65; and Abka’i Khavari, *Bild des Königs*, 38 n. 137. Most of the evidence comes from just a few sites: Kish and Ctesiphon in central Iraq, and Chal-Tarkhan near Tehran. The diverse iconography of these stucco cycles included images of Sasanian kings, the goddess Anāhitā, geometric patterns, and a variety of wild (and occasionally mythical) beasts. For color images, see *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 144–60 (nos. 1, 3–18). As Kröger, “Sasanian Stucco,” 103, suggests, images of boars and bears may have been used to signify, by metonymy, the hunt—as they do, for example, in the late Sasanian silver plate illustrated in figure 5 of this book.

73. D. Thompson, *Stucco from Chal-Tarkhan-Eshqabad near Rayy* (Warminster, Wiltshire, England: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1976), 9–24 (pl. II), provides a thorough stylistic analysis of both sets of plaques. Thompson concludes that the plaques are based upon Sasanian prototypes: “fourth to fifth century in the case of the boar hunt, seventh century for the Bahrām Gōr plaques” (19). The details of the boar-hunt plaque closely recall the great royal boar hunt depicted at Taq-i Bustan (nn. 53–54 above). For illustrations, see Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 113–15 (nos. 46–47); Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthes et Sassanides*, 187 (fig. 229).

74. Marshak, *Art of Sogdiana*, 15. See also G. Azarpay et al., *Sogdian Painting: The Pictorial Epic in Oriental Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1981), 95–108, on the Rustam cycle. For the relationship between Sasanian and Sogdian art, see the sage remarks of B. I. Marshak, “New Discoveries in Pendjikent and the Problem of Comparative Study of Sasanian and Sogdian Art,” in *Convegno internazionale sul tema: La Persia e l’Asia*

By decorating their mansions with narratives from the “Book of Kings,” the urban elites of seventh- and eighth-century Sogdia claimed a portion of the semi-divine glory associated with the heroes and kings of ancient Iran. It would be misleading, though, to assume that such claims were limited to the eastern Iranian world, or that this process of cultural diffusion began only after the fall of the Sasanian dynasty. Allied to the royal court by political patronage, the provincial elites of the late Sasanian Empire created regional mini-courts, in which they mimicked the heroic lifestyle of Iranian kings. The imaginative world of the Qardagh legend takes for granted this process of royal emulation. After his “heroic deeds” at Shapur’s court, the *marzbān* of Arbela seeks to establish the same traditions in his native region of “Assyria.” Let us return now to the Qardagh legend to see how and why the *marzbān* fails in this endeavor.

UNRAVELING THE SASANIAN EPIC IDEAL

The epic ideal evoked so vividly in the opening court scenes of the Qardagh legend soon begins to unravel. The hero’s return from the capital (presumably Ctesiphon, though this is never specified) to Arbela sends panic through the local Christian community, which knows of his reputation as a zealous “Magian.”⁷⁵ Their prayers are answered by the arrival of the hermit Abdišo, an ascetic born in the nearby village of Ḥazza.⁷⁶ Significantly, the first encounter between hermit and *marzbān* occurs not at a moment or location linked to Zoroastrian devotion, but rather in the preparation for athletic performance. The hermit arrives in Arbela just as the *marzbān* is “going out to the stadium to play ball.”

And when they [the *marzbān* and his soldiers] arrived at the stadium and began to strike the ball, while racing along on horses, the ball stuck to the ground. And they were unable to move it from its place. And immediately [Qardagh] ordered one of his soldiers to dismount and take the ball in his hand and hurl it far away. But when he took the ball from the ground and threw it with force, the ball fell before his feet. And all of his soldiers did this one after the other

Centrale da Alessandro al X secolo (Roma, 9–12 novembre 1994) (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1996), 425–38, esp. 426–28, on the hunting scenes in the Sogdian frescoes.

75. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 6: “And the entire church offered up a great prayer before God concerning him [Qardagh] so that He, being all-powerful, would abate Qardagh’s vehemence and prevent a persecution from being set in motion against the Christians—for they had been much persecuted in the kingdom of Shapur, who thirsted for the blood of the saints.”

76. As explained above (p. xviii), I have simplified the transliteration of some Syriac and Pahlavi names. The full and proper transliteration of the hermit’s name would be ‘Abdišō’, a compound name built on the popular East-Syrian pattern of incorporating the name “Jesus” (Išō). On the village of Ḥazza, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 165–67; Bosworth, *Sāsānids*, 16–17 n. 65.

but accomplished nothing. Then in their astonishment they said, “Surely that man who encountered us is a sorcerer, and by his enchantments, he has bound our ball and put a stop to our pleasure (*hadūtan*).”⁷⁷

The miracle of the frozen polo ball abruptly curtails the *marzbān*’s efforts to recreate in Arbela the aristocratic lifestyle he learned at the Persian court. Qardagh’s soldier identifies the problem precisely when he observes that the Christian “sorcerer” has prohibited “our pleasure.” Pleasure, here rendered by the Syriac *hadūtā*, has a special resonance in the Qardagh legend’s court scenes. The hagiographer uses the verbal form of the same root in the earlier scene in which King Shapur “rejoices” (*lan hadā*) at Qardagh’s expertise in archery, polo, and the hunt.⁷⁸ What seems to underlie these passages is the distinctive Iranian concept of “joy” or “delight” (Phl. *farroxīh*; *šādīh*) linked in the epic tradition to the performance and recognition of “heroic deeds.”⁷⁹ The nature of the miracle is also significant. Whereas the heroes of the *Shāhnāma* strike the polo ball high into the sky,⁸⁰ Qardagh’s polo ball remains stuck to the ground. The narrative pointedly subverts the expectations of the epic tradition.

When Qardagh attempts to resume his heroic pursuits the following day, he encounters similar difficulties on the hunt.⁸¹ The air refused “to support the arrows they were shooting.” Qardagh, the mighty archer, watches his arrows fall “before his feet.”⁸² This second miracle reinforces the lesson of the frozen polo ball. When challenged by the prayers of a true Christian, the *marzbān*’s heroic strength proves feeble. Stunned by what he has seen, Qardagh realizes that the hermit from Beth Bgāsh must be “a man of God.”

77. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 11.

78. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 5.

79. MacKenzie, *CPD*, 32, 78, on *farroxīh*, “fortune, joy, happiness,” and its adjectival form *farrox*, “fortunate, blessed, happy.” Also (78), *šādīh* and its adjectival form *šād*, “happy, joyful.” See, for example, the *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, I, 28 (Sanjana, 6; 7; Nöldeke, 39), quoted above, where the Parthian king “rejoices” upon Ardashīr’s arrival at court.

80. Knauth and Nadjmabadi, *Altiranische Fürstenideal*, 101–2. See, for example, Firdowsi, *Shāhnāma* (Warner and Warner, 4:350), where the heroic Iranian prince Gushtāsp plays on the polo grounds of the Roman court: “He came to Caesar’s riding-ground and watched the polo, then asking for stick and ball, he cast the ball amid the throng and urged his steed; the warriors paused, not one could see the ball; his stroke had made it vanish in thin air!” According to Massé, “*Čaugān*,” 16 (n. 47 above), the medieval polo game began by one of the players “throwing the ball as high into the air as possible.”

81. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 24. The *marzbān*’s abortive hunting party takes place immediately after the long philosophical debate (§§14–23) in which Abdišo challenges Qardagh’s belief in the eternity of the stars. On this entire debate scene and the miracles that frame it, see chapter 3 below.

82. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 24. The hagiographer’s diction underscores the parallel between this “marvel” and that of the unmovable polo ball. Both objects fall “before the feet” of the *marzbān* and his attendants.

His speech to his companions makes explicit the reversal that has taken place: the captive who stands in chains before him has paradoxically “taken captive” his weapons: “And the *marzbān* replied and said to those who were with him, ‘I think that old man whom we bound is a man of God. And by his prayers this marvel has occurred, and our weapons have been taken captive (*’ethed[o]*) because we have provoked him.’”⁸³

The miserable conclusion to the *marzbān*’s hunting party completes the unraveling of the epic ideal. After the miracles curtailing his hunt and polo game, Qardagh “immediately returned and entered his house” and retired to bed, “having neither food or drink.”⁸⁴ Here again, the hagiographer upends the expectations of Sasanian heroism. Hunting and banqueting formed a symbiotic pair in the epic tradition. Diners at a Sasanian banquet need only look around them to be reminded of the glories of the royal hunt. As the Roman historian Ammianus observed, Persian houses were fully embellished with scenes (*picturas*) of the king “killing wild beasts in various kinds of hunting.”⁸⁵ According to al-Ṭabarī, Bahrām Gōr ordered that the story of his hunting expedition at Ḥīra—during which he slew a lion and a wild ass with a single arrow—be “put down in picture form in one of his court chambers.”⁸⁶ A fine silver plate, now in the Walters Gallery in Baltimore (see figure 5), epitomizes this bond between hunting and feasting in Sasanian culture. The plate, attributed to an east-Iranian workshop of the sixth or seventh century, depicts a royal couple reclining atop a banqueting couch. Beside the couch stands a fire altar, and beneath it, at the very bottom of the plate, three boars’ heads. The heads, placed in the usual position of drinking vessels, signify the king’s skill as a hunter.⁸⁷ The abortive conclu-

83. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 24.

84. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 24.

85. Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, 24.6.3 (Rolfe, 456–57). Engaging perhaps in a bit of hyperbole, Ammianus claims that such images were painted through “every part of the house (*per omnes aedium partes*) . . . for nothing in their country is painted or sculptured except slaughter in diverse forms and scenes of war (*praeter varias caedes et bella*).” Excavations at Susa during the late nineteenth century uncovered a modest fragment of one such hunting scene in polychrome fresco. See Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthes et Sassanides*, 183 (fig. 224).

86. Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 857 (Bosworth, 86). For the stucco plaques depicting another of Bahrām Gōr’s hunting adventures, see n. 73 above.

87. *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 211 (no. 65). For similar designs on other Sasanian and post-Sasanian plates, see R. Ghirshman, “Notes iraniennes V: Scènes de banquet sur l’argenterie sassanide,” *Artibus Asiae* 16 (1953): 63–66. Analogous scenes combining elements of the banquet and hunt appear occasionally on Sasanian seals. See, for example, Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 148–49 (no. 73), a superb fifth- or sixth-century agate seal in the British Museum. The seal shows a Sasanian aristocrat on a pillowed banqueting couch, beneath which are depicted a fire altar and a drinking vessel in the shape of an antelope’s head. The vessel apparently alludes to the hunting skills of the seal’s owner. For Sasanian rhytons in the shape of antelope and gazelle heads, see Harper, *Royal Hunter*, 36–38 (no. 5); Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthes et Sassanides*, 221 (fig. 263a).

sion of Qardagh's hunting party at Arbela presents a sharp reversal of this ideal. A Persian nobleman could hardly imagine a more humiliating conclusion to a day in the field.

Initially, neither the abrupt curtailment of his athletic pursuits nor the philosophical arguments of the hermit Abdišo are sufficient to persuade Qardagh to abandon his "Magian" rituals and beliefs. But when he learns that the Christian hermit has been miraculously released from prison, Qardagh falls down "in great dread and depression" and prays to Christ to make him worthy of the "holy mark" of baptism.⁸⁸ His decision to seek baptism opens a new ascetic phase of Qardagh's career in which he abandons the possessions and activities that had previously defined his status as a Sasanian nobleman. Traveling into the mountains of Beth Bgāsh, he seeks out the hermit whom he had once ordered beaten and imprisoned. In a dramatic expression of his newly found humility, the *marzbān* dismounts and falls before the feet of his future ascetic mentor.⁸⁹ Further acts of renunciation follow. After his ascetic education and baptism in the mountains of Beth Bgāsh, Qardagh returns to Arbela, where he spends the next two years crafting a lifestyle more suitable to a Christian. Assuming a "gentle" (*basimā*) spirit, the *marzbān* forsakes the aristocratic pursuits in which he has excelled since his youth: "the battles and contests, . . . the chase (*naḥširā*) and the hunt and the games in the stadium."⁹⁰ This catalogue of Qardagh's abandoned habits functions as a retrospective device, reminding the audience not only of his earlier "heroic deeds," but also of the miracles that have curtailed them. Qardagh at this stage adopts an alternative form of heroic behavior, one based on piety and asceticism: "And he engaged in fasting and the liturgy and in the reading of books."⁹¹ Qardagh's adoption of a "peaceful" (*nyāḥā*) life is not, however, permanent. After less than three years of "walking in all the virtues that adorn true Christians," Qardagh finds new uses for his old epic strength.⁹²

88. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 26–27. For the language of sealing in Syriac baptismal ritual (here *rošmā qadišā*), see n. 73 to the translation; also V. van Vossel, "Le terme et la notion de 'sceau' dans le rituel baptismal des syriens orientaux," *OS* 10 (1965): 237–60.

89. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 30. His dismounting clearly signals his renunciation of his nobility. For horses as a key marker of noble status in the Sasanian Empire, see Abka'i Khavari, *Bild des Königs*, 71–72; and Garsoïan, "Iranian Armenia—The Inverted Image," 47–49. King Shapur, we may recall, first honors Qardagh by ordering him to ride on a horse from the royal stables (*History of Mar Qardagh*, 5). For the removal of the horse as a sign of abrogated nobility, see the *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, I, 38 (Sanjana, 8; 9; Nöldeke, 40).

90. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 36. The hagiographer uses two terms for hunting: *ṣaydā* and *naḥširā*. The latter, though not uncommon in Syriac, is originally a loan word of Persian origin (Phl. *naxšir*). For the Pahlavi term, see MacKenzie, *CPD*, 58; Gignoux, "La chasse," 114 n. 57.

91. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 36.

92. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 41.

ARABS, ROMANS, AND ADIABENE

In the post-ascetic phase of his career, Mar Qardagh reconciles his identity as a pious Christian with the epic strength that had initially earned him his office as a Sasanian *marzbān*. The narrative sequence describing this transformation reflects the military realities of late Sasanian Iraq, as well as scriptural and epic models. Before we examine the narrative composition of these episodes, it will be useful to consider briefly the political and military conditions behind the story of Mar Qardagh's military campaign.

The region of Adiabene, where the Qardagh legend was formed, lay less than 200 kilometers from the Roman-Sasanian border at Nisibis (see map 2). Although this was sufficiently distant from the frontier to avoid the type of recurrent destruction inflicted on the villages of Beth 'Arbaye,⁹³ the region was by no means immune to danger. During the droughts of summer, Adiabene's western flank lay open to Arab raiding parties crossing the Tigris and Euphrates. The Great Zab River provided some protection along the region's northern border, although it too could be forded during late summer and (with difficulty) winter. On at least three occasions during the late Sasanian Empire, Roman armies descending from the north threatened or entered Adiabene. The first of these incursions in 541 consisted of a joint Arab-Roman army under the leadership of the Ghassānid Arab phylarch al-Arethas.⁹⁴ The historian Procopius, our sole source for the campaign, describes the events from the perspective of the central Roman army:

Accordingly he [the Roman general Belisarius] commanded Arethas with his troops to advance into Assyria, and with them he sent twelve hundred soldiers, the majority of them from among his own guard, putting two guardsmen in command of them, Trajan and John who was called the 'Glutton', both capable warriors. He directed these men to obey Arethas in everything they did, and commanded Arethas to pillage all that lay before him and then return to the camp and report on the military strength of the Assyrians. So Arethas and his men crossed the Tigris River and entered Assyria. There they found a goodly land that had long been free from plunder and was also undefended. And mov-

93. For Roman and Arab attacks in the frontier zone of Beth 'Arbaye, see the discussion in chapter 1 of the defensive activities of the late fifth-century *marzbān* named Qardagh. For the more general threat posed by the region's desert nomads, see C. F. Robinson, "Tribes and Nomads in Early Islamic Northern Mesopotamia," in *Continuity and Change in Northern Mesopotamia from the Hellenistic to the Early Islamic Period*, ed. K. Bartl and S. R. Hauser (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1996), 431–36.

94. The "Assyrian" campaign of 541 formed just one episode in the larger Roman-Persian war of 540–545, which was ignited by the so-called *Strata* dispute between the Ghassānid and Lakhmid tribal confederations—the Arab allies, respectively, of the Roman and Sasanian empires. On this conflict, see I. Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. 1, pt. 1, *Political and Military History* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 209–18.

ing rapidly they pillaged many of the places there and secured a great amount of rich plunder.⁹⁵

Procopius's narrative of this joint Arab-Roman campaign is frustratingly vague in its geography, so it is unclear how far south the raid extended. In Greco-Roman sources, "Assyria" can correspond to Adiabene but may also signify territory north of the Great Zab in the region of Beth 'Arbaye.⁹⁶ In either case, the passage is revealing as evidence for the vulnerability of the Sasanian territory in northern Iraq. Upon penetrating beyond the frontier at Nisibis, Roman armies found a densely populated countryside with minimal defenses against invaders: "a goodly land that had long been free from plunder (*μακροῦ χρόνου ἀδῆλωτον*) and was also undefended (*ἀφύλακτον*)."⁹⁷ Apparently, it made little difference to the Romans that many villages in this land were Christian and had been so for over one hundred and fifty years. The nature of Roman-Persian warfare allowed the land to be looted and pillaged.

Fifty years later, in the summer of 590, Roman troops penetrated more deeply into "Assyria," as part of the campaign to reinstall Khusro II upon the throne seized by the general Bahrām Cōbīn.⁹⁸ Unfortunately, the details of this campaign remain sketchy. The Greek historian Theophylact Simocatta, who is our chief source, provides a rather "confused" account of the progress of Khusro's army through Adiabene.⁹⁹ The joint Roman-Persian force led by Khusro appears to have passed directly through Arbela, though we hear

95. Procopius, *History*, II, xix, 15–18 (Wirth, 233–34), translation by Dewing (423) with minor adjustments. For an ambitious, sometimes speculative, reconstruction of the campaign, see Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 226–30. Shahīd's commentary persuasively exposes the bias and omissions of Procopius's account, which he characterizes (220) as "disingenuously selective" in its portrayal of the Ghassānid king al-Arethas and Arab participation in the Roman-Persian war of 540–545.

96. Shahīd does not discuss the issue of geography, perhaps wisely given the absence of specifics in Procopius's account. As Shahīd (*Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 222) notes, there is a second, brief mention of the campaign in Procopius, *Anecdota*, II, 23 (Haury, 16), where the embittered former aide to Belisarius claims that Arethas's army "accomplished nothing worthy of mention" and that Belisarius himself had advanced "not even one day's march from the Roman border."

97. The deployment of large numbers of Sasanian troops in the northern Caucasus, where the Persians attempted to conquer the region of Colchis (western Georgia), appears to have weakened the empire's Mesopotamian frontier. For the growth of Persian military involvements in the Caucasus during the 540s, see D. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia, 550 B.C.–A.D. 562* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 292–99; Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 227.

98. See above chapter 1, n. 3; Whitby, *Emperor Maurice and His Historian*, 297–308.

99. Whitby, *Emperor Maurice and His Historian*, 302, on Theophylact's "confused account of Khusro's moves between the Zab Rivers." See Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, V.7.10–8.1 (Whitby and Whitby, 142; de Boor, 202–3), where Theophylact refers to Arbela as "Alexandria" and alludes to Alexander of Macedon's victory over the city's "barbarian" (i.e., Achaemenid) garrison.

nothing about the campaign's effect on the region's indigenous population. The Persian campaigns of the emperor Heraclius (610–641) posed a much more serious threat to the Sasanian provinces of northern Iraq. Whereas previous Roman invasions had advanced through the low-lying territory of the Mesopotamian plain, Heraclius led his army in 624 through the heart of Armenia and descended along the eastern side of Lake Urmiye, sacking the great Zoroastrian sanctuary at Takht-i Sulaymān (see map 2).¹⁰⁰ Three years later, Heraclius returned with a much larger army, this time passing along the western side of Lake Urmiye, before turning southwest to descend from the Zagros Mountains into Adiabene. After a dangerous winter crossing of the Great Zab River, the Roman forces won a critical victory on the plain of Nineveh on 12 December 627.¹⁰¹ The official panegyrists of Heraclius's court lauded the victorious emperor as a new Alexander, a new David, and a new Constantine.¹⁰² The propaganda associated with his campaign arguably represents the earliest fully articulated ideology of a Christian "holy war."¹⁰³

100. For a detailed reconstruction, see J. Howard-Johnston, "Heraclius' Persian Campaigns and the Revival of the East Roman Empire, 622–630," *War in History* 6 (1999): 1–44 (focusing on issues of chronology, strategy, and Caucasian geography); idem, *Armenian History*, 1: xxii–xxv; 2: 214–16, 218–20. For this first campaign, see W. Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 127 and map 3 (p. 123). For the Zoroastrian shrine of Ādur-Gušnasp (Takht-i Sulaymān), sacked and desecrated by Heraclius's army during the summer of 624, see Bosworth, *Sāsānids*, 95 n. 245; M. Boyce, "Ādur-Gušnasp," *Enc. Ir.* 1 (1985): 475–76; with illustrations in Herrmann, *Iranian Revival*, 113–18.

101. For the route, see Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 159–60, maps 3–5. Cf. Howard-Johnston, "Heraclius' Persian Campaigns," 25–26; idem, *Armenian History*, 2: 219–20 and maps 4–5. The precise movements of Heraclius's army during the fall and winter of 627/628 remain murky. The Romans stayed a week in early October in the region of "Chaemetha" (50 km northwest of Arbela) apparently after passing through the Rowundūz Pass. They bypassed Arbela to avoid the approaching Persian army. Neither Theophanes—the ninth-century Greek historian, who may have had access to Heraclius's war dispatches—nor the *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos* provides details on Heraclius's interactions with the region's indigenous Christian (and non-Christian) population.

102. For the evocation of Constantine in Heraclius's court propaganda, see J. W. Drijvers, "Heraclius and the *Restitutio Crucis*: Notes on Symbolism and Ideology," in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. G. J. Reinink and B. H. Stolte (Louvain, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2002), 181–84. For the comparison with David and other biblical figures, see S. S. Alexander, "Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology, and the David Plates," *Speculum* 52 (1977): 217–37; Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 198–99, 220 n. 108. See also M. Whitby, "Defender of the Cross: George of Pisidia on the Emperor Heraclius and His Deputies," in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. M. Whitby (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1998), 247–73, esp. 254, on George of Pisidia's constant conflation of "mythological, Biblical, and historical paradigms."

103. Kolbaba, "Holy War"; M. Whitton, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 136–37. For the opposing view, see G. Dennis, "Defenders of the Christian People: Holy War in Byzantium," in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. A. E. Laiou and R. P. Mottahedeh (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2001), 31–39, a minimalist interpretation. Kaegi,

How the Christians of Adiabene and other regions reacted to the arrival of this massive foreign army remains less clear. Did the East-Syrian bishops, who just twenty years earlier vowed their fealty to Khusro's "glorious empire" (see chapter 1), rally to support the Roman emperor? While the strategists of Heraclius's circle clearly *wanted* the emperor to be seen as the savior of the Christians of Persia, it is by no means clear that the Sasanian church, in turn, welcomed him as "God's agent of salvation."¹⁰⁴ Writing from his monastic cell near Nisibis, the future *catholikos* Iṣō'yab of Adiabene spoke darkly of the "storm of war" (*kimūnā d-ḥarbā*) brought by the Roman invasion.¹⁰⁵ Heraclius soon established a working relationship with key Sasanian Christians, in particular the family of Yazdin at Karka de Beth Slōk (Kirkūk).¹⁰⁶ Ordinary Christians in Adiabene and elsewhere may have felt less sanguine about their self-proclaimed liberator.

MAR QARDAGH, THE CHRISTIAN WARRIOR

The invasion scenes of the Qardagh legend reproduce, in approximate form, the conditions of Roman-Sasanian warfare during the sixth and early seventh centuries. The hagiographer envisions a joint Arab-Roman raid from the north, focusing on Arbela but extending from Nisibis to the "Tormara" (i.e., Diyala) River. He presents this invasion as an indirect consequence of Qardagh's new ascetic lifestyle. When the neighboring peoples hear that the *marzbān* has withdrawn from battles and embraced a "life of peace" (*ḥayē d-šelyā*),

Heraclius, 126, emphasizes the "multi-dimensional" character of the campaigns, "in which religious zeal was only one component."

104. Cf. J. W. Watt, "The Portrayal of Heraclius in Syriac Sources," in *Reign of Heraclius*, ed. Reinink and Stolte, 71. Watt emphasizes the favorable portrayal of Heraclius in the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 28; Guidi, 24), but the passage is too brief and late to be decisive. The author of the *Chronicle*, writing ca. 660–680, composed with the advantage of hindsight following Heraclius's final victory and the deposition and execution of Khusro by his own court in February 628. For a contemporary East-Syrian perspective on the invasion, see the following note.

105. Iṣō'yab of Adiabene, *Letter 8* (Duval, 13–14; 10–11; Scott-Moncrieff, 9). The letter, addressed to his friend Sergius, describes the tumult of this period in elliptical, metaphorical terms. Even those who escaped the storm were broken to pieces on the "shoals of fear" (*ba-sāpē d-qentā*). For the dating of the letter to the period of Heraclius's invasion, see J. M. Fiey, "Iṣō'yaw le Grand: Vie du catholikos nestorien Iṣō'yaw III d'Adiabene (580–659)," *OCP* 35 (1969): 319. There is an English summary of the letter in P. Scott-Moncrieff, ed., *The Book of Consolations, or the Pastoral Epistles of Mār Ḍshō-Yahbh of Kūphlānā in Adiabene* (London: Luzac and Co., 1904), xxxii–xxxiii. Note that Scott-Moncrieff's numbering of the letters falls one behind the numbering of Duval's edition. I cite both texts here, but in general Duval's edition is preferable.

106. After crossing the Lower Zūb River on 23 December 627, Heraclius spent Christmas at Yazdin's familial residence in Kirkuk. Yazdin had died between 620 and 627, but his family remained prominent at the Sasanian court. For the emperor's alliance with them during and after Khusro's downfall, see Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 170–71.

[a]ll of them together, the Romans and the Arabs and the other peoples who surrounded them, prepared [for war], gathered like the sand on the shore of the ocean, and set out to come into the lands beneath the blessed one's authority. . . . The Romans and Arabs made great pillaging raids (*gaysē*), ravaged and laid waste all the lands beneath the blessed one's authority from the Tormara River up to the frontier city of Nisibis. And they led away into captivity also his father, his mother, his wife, his brother, his sister, and all the men of his household.¹⁰⁷

The incursion takes place during one of Qardagh's periodic retreats to study with his ascetic mentors in Beth Bgāsh. The survivors of the raid find the ascetics in their mountain lair, where one soldier, a man of "savage habits and evil idolatry," angrily rebukes the *marzbān* for neglecting the duties of his station.¹⁰⁸ Although the soldier is miraculously struck dead, his news stirs Qardagh into action. The hagiographer clearly signals this critical transition in his hero's behavior. In a series of two letters sent to the invaders by "swift messengers," Mar Qardagh reclaims the epic strength of his pre-Christian career. Despite his earlier renunciation of "battles" (*qrābē*), Qardagh now boldly asserts the continuity between his "former power of warlike strength," which earned him his titles, and the "cloak of undefeated power," which he has assumed as a Christian.¹⁰⁹

The hagiographer softens the apparent paradox of this claim by emphasizing Qardagh's reluctance to fight. In his letter to the invaders, Qardagh explains that since he has "put on Christ, the peace (*šaynā*) of the world," he has tried to avoid the "rage of battles."¹¹⁰ He urges the invaders to "depart in peace (*b-šelmā*)," an expression echoing the language of ascetic communal affection used in the mountains of Beth Bgāsh.¹¹¹ But this offer of peace

107. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 41, where the invaders are introduced as "the various peoples who were in the South and the West." For enemy troops as numerous as "sand on the seashore," see 1 Sam. 13:5 or the similar passage at Josh. 7:12. The *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 33; Guidi, 30) uses the same metaphor in its account of the Arab conquests of the 640s ("children of Ishmael . . . as numerous as the sand of the seashore").

108. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 42: "While *paṭahšās* and *marzbāns* live in the caves of thieves and impostors, it is only right that something like this should befall us."

109. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 42: "You suppose that I, Qardagh, have taken off my former power of warlike strength (*'ūšnā qadmāyā d-tūqpā da-qrābā*). And because of this you have dared to come into and lay waste the lands beneath my authority. But know this! I have not taken off but have donned a cloak of undefeated power (*malbeš lbāšat 'ūsānā d-lā mezdakā*). Now send me all the souls you have captured, take for yourselves the possessions, and go in peace. It will be better for you not to provoke me to battle."

110. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 43. The imagery of "putting on Christ" alludes to Syriac baptismal liturgy. See Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 18–19; and n. 148 to the translation.

111. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 30 (Abdišo to Qardagh: "Come in peace, my son"), 32 (the angel of the Lord to Qardagh: "Peace be with you"; "come in peace"), 33 (Mar Beri to Qardagh: "Come in peace, Esau, a wild man who has changed to become a gentle Jacob").

proves short-lived. Qardagh's letters to the invaders effectively set the stage for his transformation into a fearsome Christian warrior.

The story of Qardagh's victory on the battlefield is replete with Old Testament language and imagery. The hagiographer explicitly acknowledges and foregrounds his scriptural models. The campaign begins with a solemn gathering of Qardagh's troops in a church. His prayer consists simply of the opening lines of Psalm 35: "Judge, Lord, my case and fight against those who fight against me . . ." ¹¹² A voice from the sanctuary acknowledges his vow, and Qardagh and his soldiers fall down for two hours "before the ark of the Lord." ¹¹³ In his pre-battle prayer, Qardagh calls upon God to aid him, just as He had aided "Joshua bar Nun" and the "blessed David" in their wars. ¹¹⁴ When the fighting commences, Qardagh advances against his enemies "like the rising sun, and like a champion (*ganbārā*) who exults in the running of his course" (Ps. 19:5). He slaughters his foes "like the ears of new corn [at the harvest]." Their bodies fall "into the Khabur River like vile locusts." ¹¹⁵ The sound of trumpets accompanies his every move. ¹¹⁶ Returning from battle, Qardagh chants aloud the words of Psalm 20:

Some were mounted on horses, and some on chariots, but we shall prevail in the name of the Lord our God. Those ones bent down and fell, but we rose up and prepared ourselves, because the Lord our God is our Redeemer. ¹¹⁷

The scriptural models used here to depict Qardagh as a holy warrior were mostly well established among the Christian panegyrists of the late Roman Empire. Eusebius and subsequent ecclesiastical historians often describe the prayers and devotional practices of emperors before battle, likening imperial exploits on the battlefield to the victory of Old Testament figures. As noted above, the panegyrists of Heraclius's Persian campaign vigorously promoted the emperor's likeness to David, Joshua, and Moses. ¹¹⁸ What dis-

112. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 43, citing Psalm 35:1. We are told that Qardagh's military retinue included "two hundred thirty-four soldiers (*palhē*) and seven of his servants." The hagiographer's use of precise numbers helps convey a sense of historical verisimilitude.

113. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 44. Cf. Josh. 7:6.

114. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 46.

115. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 46. For the imagery and geography, see nn. 161–62 to the translation.

116. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 43, 45–46, where trumpets are mentioned four times. On the association of the trumpet (Hebrew *sōpār*; Syr. *qarnā*) with Israelite warfare, see I. H. Jones, "Musical Instruments," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4 (1992): 936. See esp. Josh. 6:4–20 on the siege of Jericho. For the depiction of the siege of Jericho, complete with trumpet blowers, on a Christian silver dish found in the Ural mountain region near the Russian town of Bolschaja Anikowa, see Marshak, *Silber Schätze*, 395–400 (figs. 208–12). Marshak (321–24) identifies the dish as a ninth- to tenth-century copy produced under Turkish Christian patronage in the Semiretschje region.

117. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 46. Cf. Psalm 20:7–8.

118. Alexander, "Heraclius," passim; and n. 102 above. Heraclius's invocation of David as

tinguishes the portrait of Mar Qardagh as a holy warrior is its exuberant combination of these scriptural models with Syrian Christian and Iranian themes.

Qardagh's preparations for battle involve two significant (Syrian) Christian motifs. During his prayers before the sanctuary, Qardagh hangs round his neck a golden cross containing "the Holy Wood of the Crucifixion of our Savior."¹¹⁹ Relics of the True Cross discovered by Constantine's mother circulated widely in the late Roman Empire.¹²⁰ But it was not until the reign of Khusro II that Christians in Persia received ready access to the True Cross, following the Persian capture of Jerusalem in 614.¹²¹ Khusro's Christian minister, Yazdin of Karka de Beth Slōk, organized a "great festival" (*'ē'dā rabā*) to celebrate the precious relic's arrival in Ctesiphon and sent a piece of the True Cross to the "Great Monastery" on Mount Izla near Nisibis.¹²² The description of the "cross of gold" worn by Mar Qardagh strongly suggests a temporal connection to these events. Qardagh's golden cross containing "the Holy Wood of the Crucifixion of our Savior" bears a conspicuous resemblance to the bejeweled golden cross containing a piece of the "Lordly Wood of the Crucifixion of our Savior," which Yazdin entrusted to Mar Babai and his congregation on Mount Izla.¹²³ The real-life relic sent by Mar Yazdin to the lead-

an exemplum for imperial behavior follows fifth-century precedents beginning with the emperor Marcian in 451. Earlier panegyric tended to place more emphasis on Moses as a model combining political, military, and religious leadership. See C. Rapp, "Comparison, Paradigm, and the Case of Moses in Panegyric and Hagiography," in *Propaganda of Power*, ed. Whitby, 286, 295–96; see also 282–83, 292–93, for the ecclesiastical historians' depiction of imperial devotional practices before battle.

119. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 44: "a cross of gold (*šlibā d-dahbā*) in which was fastened (*d-qbi'ā beh*) the Holy Wood of the Crucifixion of our Savior (*qaysā qadišā da-zqīpēh d-pāroqan*)." On the "sanctuary" where Qardagh makes his vows, see below n. 125.

120. For a guide to the primary sources, see A. Frolow, *La relique de la Vraie Croix: Recherches sur le développement d'un culte* (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1961), 155–82.

121. For the Persian capture of Jerusalem, see the *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 115–16, chap. 34 (Thomson, 68–70), with the historical commentary by J. Howard-Johnston in 2: 206–9. Frolow's definitive study of the cult of the True Cross includes only one reference to True Cross relics in Persia before 614 (*Relique de la Vraie Croix*, 184). According to the eleventh-century *Chronicle of Séert*, II (II), chap. 67 (Scher and Griveau, 493), the emperor Maurice sent the *catholikos* Sabrišō' I (596–604; see above chapter 1, n. 49) a fragment of the True Cross, which Khusro II intercepted and gave to his Christian wife Shirin. I see no reason to doubt the historicity of this gift; thus also Tamcke, *Sabrišō'*, 30; and Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 140–41.

122. For Yazdin's reception of the True Cross, see *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 25; Guidi, 25, ll. 14–21); Frolow, *Relique de la Vraie Croix*, 188; and Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse*, 2: 170–72.

123. *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 23; Guidi, 24, ll. 13–15): "a cross of gold (*šlibā d-dahbā*) . . . containing [literally "in its middle" (*ba-mša'tā*)] the Lordly Wood of the Crucifixion of our Savior (*qaysā mārānāyā da-zqīpā d-pāroqan*)." The diction is very close to that of the Qardagh legend quoted in n. 119 above.

ing monastery of northern Iraq may well have inspired the True Cross relic imagined by Qardagh's hagiographer.

Qardagh's battle preparations also include use of *hnānā*, sacred dust taken from the tombs of the martyrs. Although there is ample evidence for the use of *hnānā* in the East-Syrian church,¹²⁴ this passage constitutes a rare testimony to its application in a military context. Before donning his "cross of gold," Qardagh blesses his military venture, by sprinkling "his arms, his horse, and his soldiers" with *hnānā* from the "sanctuary."¹²⁵ One wonders whether the East-Syrian patriarchs who accompanied the King of kings on military campaigns were expected to perform similar blessings.¹²⁶

Given the prominence of these Christian and scriptural motifs, it would be easy to overlook the Iranian dimension of Mar Qardagh's martial heroism. Yet many aspects of Qardagh's military activity evoke the narrative rhythms of Sasanian epic tradition. His boasting on the battlefield and single-handed slaughter of the enemy would be equally at home in the *Shāhnāma*.¹²⁷ His systematic review of his troops after the battle anticipates al-Ṭabarī's de-

124. For the multiple uses of *hnānā* in East-Syrian liturgical texts, see I.-H. Dalmais, "Mémoire et vénération des saints dans les Églises de traditions syriennes," in *Saints et sainteté dans la liturgie*, ed. A. M. Triacca, A. Pistoia, and C. Andronikof (Rome: C.L.V.-Edizione Liturgiche, 1987), 81–82. Stories of Christian ascetics using *hnānā* to heal and bless are common in East-Syrian hagiography. See, for example, the *Life of Rabban Bar-Idtā*, ll. 564–69 (Budge, 202; 136); 288–90 (183; 124); or the *Life of Rabban Hormizd*, 7 (Budge, 73; 48), 8 (82–83; 55). For the use of *hnānā* to fight locusts, see the *Life of Abraham of Kaškar* (Nau, 164; 170). For the patriarch Sabrišō's attempt to reform the practice and bring it under patriarchal control, see, briefly, Tamcke, *Sabrišō*, 23. The topic deserves further investigation.

125. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 44. The narrative is unclear on the location of this "sanctuary" (*beit qūdšā*), which appears to be separate from the "church of God" (*'idteh d-'alāhā*), where Qardagh makes his initial prayer. Did Qardagh and his troops step outside the church to complete their preparations for battle? In this whole scene, the hagiographer seems to describe an ideal, composite setting, rather than a specific ecclesiastical complex at or near Arbela.

126. For Christian (and Jewish) leaders in the retinue of Sasanian monarchs, see Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 110–11 n. 57. After his victory over Bahrām Čōbin, Khusro II reprimanded the patriarch Išō'yab I for his failure to accompany him during his flight to the Roman Empire and to pray for his subsequent victory. Roman authorities remained hostile to Išō'yab, in retaliation for his reports concerning Roman troop movements during his tenure as bishop of Arzon. See the sketch of Išō'yab's career in the *Chronicle of Se'ert*, II (II), chap. 41 (Scher and Griveau, 438–42).

127. For his boasting, see *History of Mar Qardagh*, 46, quoted in n. 6 above. The rest of the passage focuses on Qardagh's individual role in the battle: "And immediately *he* was burning with fever for the battle. . . . *He* destroyed them like the ears of new corn. . . . *He* beat and chased [the remnants of the Roman-Arab army]. . . . And turning back, *he* plundered the camps and took away booty and brought back all the captives" (emphasis added). Sasanian epic tradition credited its heroes with analogous, individual feats on the battlefield. See, for example, the account of Ardashīr's rout of the Parthian king and his troops as described by al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 819 (Bosworth, 14–15): "It is said that Ardashīr dismounted and trampled Ardavān's head with his foot." See n. 132 below on Bahrām Gōr's routing and pursuit of an army of Turks.

piction of Sasanian military practice.¹²⁸ Most important, the overall narrative structure of the invasion and retaliatory campaign resembles a parallel episode in the career of Bahrām Gōr.¹²⁹ In both stories, a foreign army prepares to invade, encouraged by rumors of the protagonist's neglect of his administrative duties. In the case of Bahrām Gōr, Turks threaten to invade Persia, when they hear that the young king devotes himself to a life of sport and entertainment.¹³⁰ Deputies sent to plead with the protagonist rebuke him for his negligence and withdrawal.¹³¹ Roused to action, the hero leads a punishing campaign against the foreigners, reclaiming his martial virtue and massacring the enemy. In the Bahrām Gōr narrative, the king makes a surprise attack on the Turkish army, killing their ruler "with his own hand and spreading slaughter among Khāqān's troops."¹³² The two stories even cite similar numerical combinations to describe the hero's military entourage.¹³³ Having secured the safety of the empire's frontiers, the protagonist returns in triumph and dedicates his booty to an appropriate shrine—Takht-i Sulaymān in the story of Bahrām Gōr; the local churches of Adiabene in the Qardagh

128. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 46: "And when they had arrived at the staging post (*bēt bawtā*), he [Qardagh] gave the order and the trumpet was sounded and all of his soldiers were gathered, and he inspected (*s'ar*) them and found that all had been preserved without harm." For the formal review of Sasanian troops by Sasanian kings, see, for instance, Abka'i Khavari, *Bild des Königs*, 175 (h.2.3); and al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 963–64 (Bosworth, 262), with parallels cited in Bosworth's lengthy annotation at 263–64 n. 633.

129. I paraphrase from al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 863–65 (Bosworth, 93–97), citing in the notes the parallel passages from the *Shāhnāma*. As indicated above, both texts inherit much of their material from the (now lost) Middle Persian *Xwādāy-Nāmag*. For the corresponding sections in al-Dīnawarī (†891) and al-Ya'qūbī (†ca. 905), see Bosworth, *Sāsānids*, 93–94 n. 234.

130. Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 863 (Bosworth, 93). See also the verse account in the *Shāhnāma* (Warner and Warner, 7: 85): "Anon news came to Hind, Rum, Turkestan, Chin, and all parts inhabited: 'The heart of Shah Bahrām is given up to sport. He takes no account of any one. He has no outposts, no men on guard, and on the marches are no paladins. For love of sport he allows all to drift, and knows nothing of the world's affairs.'"

131. Compare the rebuke of the evil soldier at *History of Mar Qardagh*, 42 (quoted above in n. 108) with the angry words of Bahrām's nobleman in the *Shāhnāma* (Warner and Warner, 7:85): "Thy glorious fortune has turned its back. The heads of kings should be intent on fighting, but thy heart is intent on sport and feasting." For the prose version of the noblemen's rebuke, see al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 863–64 (Bosworth, 94–95).

132. Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 865 (Bosworth, 96), detailing Bahrām's assiduous hunting down and massacre of the remnants of the Turkish forces. The invasion by Turks during the reign of Bahrām is an anachronism of the type common in the epic tradition. See Bosworth, *Sāsānids*, 94 n. 224, on the title of Bahrām's opponent (Ar. *khāqān*, from Turkish *qagan*). For Heraclius's alliance with the Turks during the early seventh century, see Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 2: 187–89.

133. According to al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 864 (Bosworth, 95), Bahrām's hunting party consisted of seven nobles, "plus three-hundred mighty and courageous men from his personal guard." In the Qardagh legend (*History of Mar Qardagh*, 43), the saint's retinue consists of seven servants and two hundred thirty-four of his soldiers (*palhe*).

legend.¹³⁴ The Qardagh legend seems to preserve the narrative rhythms of the epic tradition even as it recasts them in a Christian idiom.

MAR QARDAGH AS DEFENDER OF HIS FAMILY

Ultimately, the story of Qardagh's military campaign defies simple categorization. In a motif that is neither scriptural nor part of the epic tradition, the entire narrative of Qardagh's martial accomplishments hinges on his resolve to rescue the captives seized by the invaders. Before setting out on campaign, the saint beseeches his ascetic masters, Mar Beri and Mar Abdišo, to pray "that I may go and by the power of my Lord Christ and by your prayers bring back many captives from the raiders."¹³⁵ On the surface, this motif might be interpreted as reflecting the real-life concerns of a late Sasanian community for which capture and enslavement was a genuine and terrifying possibility. As Michael Morony has recently emphasized, the seizure, deportation, and enslavement of prisoners remained a regular feature of Roman-Sasanian warfare during the sixth and early seventh centuries.¹³⁶ Qardagh's hagiographer does not, however, simply replicate the conditions of his own era. Rather, he presents the story of the captives as a drama of familial separation and restoration.¹³⁷ Each stage of Qardagh's campaign emphasizes the bonds between the saint and his family. In his initial letter to the invaders, Qardagh demands the return of "my father, my mother, my wife, my brother, and my sister and all the men of my household," foremost among the captives taken from his lands.¹³⁸ His brother's severed head, sent by the invaders, fills Qardagh with "grief and rage."¹³⁹ He tracks and surprises the

134. Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 864 (Bosworth, 95); *History of Mar Qardagh*, 47. For Qardagh's conversion of the Zoroastrian shrines of Adiabene into Christian churches and chapels, see the translation, §47, n. 164.

135. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 42.

136. M. Morony, "Population Transfers between Sasanian Iran and the Byzantine Empire" in *La Persia e Bisanzio* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2004), 170–79.

137. This aspect of the Qardagh legend likens it to earlier Syrian Christian narratives in which family relations play a central role. For the theme of familial separation and reunion in, for example, the pseudo-Clementine literature, see K. Cooper, "Mathidia's Wish: Division, Reunion, and the Early Christian Family in the Pseudo-Clementine *Regonitiones*," in *Narrativity in Biblical and Related Texts / La narrativité dans la Bible et les textes apparentés*, ed. G. J. Brooke and J.-D. Kaestli (Louvain: Louvain University Press, 2000), 243–64; Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 232, for the Syriac versions. For the origins of the *topos* of familial separation and reunion in the Greek novel, see J. Winkler, "Lollianus and the Desperadoes," in *Innovations of Antiquity*, ed. R. Hexter and D. Selden (London: Routledge, 1992), 18–24.

138. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 43. Cf. §41, where the initial list of captives taken from Arbela includes each of the family members listed here.

139. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 43. For severed heads in late Sasanian tradition, see al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 1007 (Bosworth, 328), where the Persian general Farukhān (here mistakenly identified as a separate individual from Shahrbarāz) dreams that Khusrō II has sent a letter demanding his

army of Roman and Arab invaders by following the strips of silk clothing dropped by his wife, who “trusted in the valor and strength and compassion of her husband.”¹⁴⁰ In his new identity as a Christian warrior, Qardagh acts as the stalwart protector of his family and of all the captives taken from his lands. Qardagh’s protection of his family in these scenes is sharply at odds with the legend’s dominant rhetoric, which celebrates the dissolution of biological familial bonds (see chapter 4). This disjunction may indicate the hagiographer’s use of a separate source, such as an oral tradition about the saint’s military campaign. The only significant narrative lapse in the legend appears in this section. The folkloric motif of the trail of dropped cloth in §45 ignores the fact that Qardagh has already corresponded with the invaders in §§42–43. Whatever his sources for these episodes, Qardagh’s hagiographer combines them with aplomb to create a saint who protects his family as a Christian warrior but ultimately rejects them in his search for spiritual perfection.

Qardagh’s martial spirit and epic strength resurface even in the final scenes leading to his martyrdom. The depiction of the saint’s last stand at Melqi, his fortress outside Arbela, presents a curious blend of Sasanian and scriptural motifs. After his interrogation and torture at Nisibis, Qardagh is transferred back to Arbela for execution. As his Zoroastrian guards lead him before his castle at Melqi, Qardagh beseeches God to release him from his chains; his prayer is heard, his chains fall from his limbs, and Qardagh retreats into his fortress, placing “guards and watchmen” on the walls.¹⁴¹ Secure behind his fortress walls, Qardagh scorns the entreaties of his family and the *magi* who plead for his surrender. Though he can pity his family, he has no patience with the “impure and abominable ministers of Satan” who exhort him to “worship the fire, the sun, and the moon.”¹⁴² His punishment for their impiety is swift and decisive:

head. See also al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 818 (Bosworth, 11–12), for Ardashīr’s boast that he will dedicate the severed head of the Parthian king to his new fire temple at Ardashīr Khurrah in Fars. For additional late Sasanian examples, see Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, V.1.16–2.4 (Whitby and Whitby, 134; de Boor, 190) on the early stages of the war to reinstall Khusro II on the throne.

140. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 45.

141. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 54. His captors meanwhile scatter, taking shelter “amidst the reeds and rushes of the marsh (*yamtā*) that was next to the fortress of the blessed one.” The reference to a marsh near Arbela is puzzling and could refer to some form of protective ditch filled with water. More likely, though, as in his description of Qardagh’s prayers before the “ark” (§44), the hagiographer has chosen his imagery for its associations. The flight of the saint’s enemies into the “reeds and rushes” echoes a standard theme of the Sasanian hunt, in which wild boars—a common quarry in scenes of the royal hunt—are depicted as fleeing into the reeds. See, for example, the boar-hunt reliefs from Taq-i Bustan and Sasanian stucco plaques already discussed above (nn. 72–73).

142. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 57.

But the blessed one signaled to one of his servants to give him a bow and a single arrow. And secretly in the shade of one of the pinnacles of the [fortress] wall, he took his bow and placed the arrow in it. And he drew [the bow] and struck that *magus* in his mouth; and the arrow went out through the back [of his head]. And he fell down dead in his place. But the blessed one laughed and said to him, “Take for yourself the reward of your love toward your gods and your king.”¹⁴³

The prowess in archery with which Qardagh once impressed the King of kings now serves him in the defense of his faith. His powerful arrow shot is worthy of the finest Persian warriors.¹⁴⁴ His taunting shout recalls his battlefield boasting against the Roman and Arab invaders. Even in his last moments, as he prepares to submit to martyrdom, Qardagh preserves some vestiges of his customary power. Twice he shakes off the rocks thrown upon him.¹⁴⁵ A heavenly voice commends him for having fought “bravely” (*ganbārāʾit*) until the end.¹⁴⁶ The diction highlights the shift that has taken place. Qardagh’s service as a Sasanian *marzbān* hinged upon his possession of *ganbārūtā*.¹⁴⁷ The same terminology has now come to signify Qardagh’s ability to fight “bravely” as a Christian.

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY IN LATE ANTIQUE IRAQ AND ARMENIA

The Qardagh legend is unusual, and possibly unique, in Syriac literature for the depth of its dialogue with the Sasanian epic tradition. While one can dispute the “Iranian” character of this or that narrative detail, the general picture is clear. Qardagh’s biographer, and probably also his audience, was fully

143. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 57. For a visual comparison, see the Christian silver dish from Bolschaja Anikowa (n. 116 above), which depicts an archer perched behind the ramparts of the walls of Jericho. For the hagiographer’s use of laughter as a sign of mockery, see the translation, §§38, 57, nn. 131, 198.

144. For similar feats of archery in combat, see al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 877 (Bosworth, 116) and 949 (Bosworth, 241), where the Persian general Wahriz shoots an arrow straight through the head of the Ethiopian regent in Yemen. In Nöldeke’s translation (*Geschichte der Perser*, 226): “Der Pfeil drang ganz in der Kopf hinein und kam hinten wieder heraus.”

145. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 65: “he shook them off and arose valiantly (*ganbārāʾit*).” See n. 213 of the translation for the verbal parallels with the *Judas Kyriakos Legend*.

146. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 66. The heavenly voice confirms that Qardagh has fulfilled his duty to “struggle bravely” (§30: an exhortation by St. Sergius) and to “die bravely as the Christians die” (§61: the challenge from his non-believing wife).

147. The Persian king explicitly acknowledges its role in Qardagh’s victory over the foreign invaders: “We have heard, my good servant, about your victory and mighty strength (*ganbārūtā*) against the Romans and Arabs and other peoples who dared to enter our domain.” *History of Mar Qardagh*, 49. See also §46, where Qardagh boasts of how “bravely” he had fought in the king’s wars.

conversant with the heroic ideals promoted by the late Sasanian court. At one level, this level of cultural interchange should come as no surprise. The synodical records, discussed in chapter 1, make it clear that the clerical hierarchy of the Sasanian church maintained close relations with the Persian court. Christians of Persian origin formed an important and growing component of the Sasanian Christian community not only at court, but also throughout the empire.¹⁴⁸ Even in Adiabene and northern Iraq, where the Persian population was never large, Persian-speaking Christians played a significant role in the development of local monastic institutions. The career of the monk and translator Job of Revardašir exemplifies this process.¹⁴⁹ In some cases, Persian Christians seem to have adopted Aramaic Christian culture in its entirety, completely abandoning the traditional trappings of Sasanian aristocratic life. The late Sasanian martyr literature discussed in chapter 4 below strongly advocates this model of total conversion. More often, though, it appears that Persian Christians developed modes of self-expression that merged the cultural vocabularies of Christianity and Sasanian culture.

Stamp seals combining Sasanian iconography with Christian symbols, names, or inscriptions provide the most striking evidence for this phenomenon.¹⁵⁰ In one type of image, a Sasanian nobleman stands beside an altar in a traditional pose of Zoroastrian prayer; but over the altar, in place of fire, hovers a cross.¹⁵¹ Other seals are more ambiguous, since they combine what appears to be Judeo-Christian imagery with the popular Zoroastrian formula

148. As noted in chapter 1, n. 61 above, the almost complete loss of Middle-Persian Christian literature has obscured the one-time vitality of Persian-speaking Christianity in the Sasanian world. See Brock, "Divided Loyalties," 17.

149. See the mini-biography of Mar Job in the *Chronicle of Se'ert*, II (I), chap. 31 (Scher, 174–75). The son of a wealthy pearl merchant, who made his fortune during the reign of Khusro I, Job "renounced the world" in accordance with a vow made during a severe illness. Traveling to Adiabene, he apprenticed himself to the distinguished ascetic Abraham of Nethpar and then lived for some years in the Monastery of Mar Abraham of Kaškar on Mount Izla. He later returned to Adiabene, where he established a monastery at the site of Abraham of Nethpar's cave and introduced the monastic rules of Mount Izla. During his leadership of this monastery, he translated both the *Rule of Mar Abraham of Kaškar* and the ascetic discourses of Abraham of Nethpar from Syriac into Pahlavi.

150. See the catalogue by J. A. Lerner, *Christian Seals of the Sasanian Period* (Istanbul: Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1977), with depictions of crosses (nos. 1–14), processional crosses (nos. 16–19), *orans* figures (nos. 22–23), the sacrifice of Isaac (nos. 31–35), and Daniel in the lions' den (nos. 56–65). For corrections, additions, and a sensible critique of Lerner's methodology, cf. P. Gignoux, "Sceaux chrétiens d'époque sasanide," *Iranica Antiqua* 15 (1980): 299–315; also S. Shaked, "Jewish and Christian Seals of the Sasanian Period," in *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, ed. M. Rosen-Ayalon (Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977), 17–31.

151. Lerner, *Christian Seals*, 34 (no. 20), illustrated at pl. II (fig. 14). See also Gignoux and Gyselen, *Sceaux sasanides*, pl. III (10.17 = Lerner, no. 20), pl. VI (11.4). For seals with explicit Christian inscriptions (e.g., "I am the servant of the God Jesus"), see Gignoux, "Sceaux chré-

“Trust in the Gods” (*abestān ō yazdān*).¹⁵² A number of seals employ Christianized versions of such traditional formulae, producing phrases like “Trust in Jesus” or “Trust in God.”¹⁵³ Finally, many seals combine traditional Zoroastrian iconography with small crosses.¹⁵⁴ The hybrid content of these seals, used by Sasanian Christians to mark private documents, provides the material counterpart to the fusion of Christian and Iranian epic narrative in the Qardagh legend. Their Pahlavi inscriptions testify to the steady expansion of Persian-speaking Christianity in the late Sasanian Empire.¹⁵⁵ The presence of Persophone Christians in Adiabene and adjacent Sasanian provinces raises the possibility that Qardagh’s hagiographer himself came from a family of Persian Zoroastrian origin. As noted in chapter 1, he had a reasonably accurate knowledge of Sasanian administrative terminology and was familiar with Zoroastrian institutions such as fire temple endowments. But neither of these factors necessitates assuming a Persian ethnic origin for the legend’s author.

How then should one explain the prominence of Sasanian themes in the Qardagh legend? The Christian literature of Sasanian Armenia may hold the key to this question. In a magisterial series of articles begun in 1981, Nina Garsoïan has demonstrated the powerful impact of Iranian narrative models on Armenian conceptions of heroic valor.¹⁵⁶ Iranian epic themes such as

tiens,” 310–12 (nos. III.1–2, 4, 7). Seals with biblical names written in Pahlavi script are usually interpreted as Christian, since Jews appear to have preferred Hebrew. See Shaked, “Jewish and Christian Seals,” 24–26, for eleven examples of such Jewish-Sasanian seals in Hebrew script, with corrections and additions in idem, “Jewish Sasanian Sigillography,” in *Au carrefour des religions: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Gignoux*, ed. R. Gyselen (Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l’Étude de la Civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 1995), 239–56.

152. Shaked, “Jewish and Christian Seals,” 21, argues that the term *yazdān* may have been understood as indicating God in the singular and was thus “perhaps . . . unobjectionable to Christians.” Cf. Gignoux, “Sceaux chrétiens,” 302–3, n. 29, on the use of this inscription “typiquement mazdéene.”

153. Gignoux, “Sceaux chrétiens,” 310–11 (no. 3.1). For the latter phrase, see Shaked, “Jewish Sasanian Sigillography,” 248, a finely engraved aniconic seal with the following Pahlavi inscription: “Mārē. Confidence in God (*ʾpst’n ʾL yzdty*), who created the sky and the earth and all that is in them.” A small cross appears at the beginning of the inscription.

154. For the various types of crosses that appear on Sasanian seals, see Gignoux and Gyselen, *Sceaux sasanides*, 185. A marriage seal in the Bibliothèque Nationale shows, for instance, a small cross with fluttering ribbons placed at the center of the scene between the couple. See Lerner, *Christian Seals*, 35 (no. 24), illustrated at pl. III (fig. 17). The same seal also appears in Gignoux and Gyselen, *Catalogue des sceaux*, 7.2 (pl. XXIII).

155. Naming patterns provide another measure of the growth of the Persian Christian community from the fifth century. On this phenomenon, see P. Gignoux, “Sur quelques noms propres iraniens transcrits en syriaque,” *PdO* 6–7 (1975–76): 515–23, on the creation of compound Persian names, such as *Išōʾbōxt* (“Saved by Jesus”) and *Išōʾdād* (“Given by Jesus”).

156. See Garsoïan, “Iranian Substratum”; idem, “Iranian Armenia—The Inverted Image”; and esp. idem, “Two Voices of Armenian Medieval Historiography.” Cf. Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 1: xiv, on the “unusually particularist” behavior of the Armenian nobles

the hunt, banqueting, and tremendous feats of individual strength can be found on nearly every page of the Agatʿangelos cycle and the late fifth-century *Armenian Epic Histories* attributed to “Faustus of Byzantium.”¹⁵⁷ Garsoïan’s analysis shows that the integration of Iranian epic and scriptural themes was already well established by the fifth century. The *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, composed ca. 655 by an anonymous Armenian cleric, confirms the vitality of this Armenian narrative tradition in the era of Qardagh hagiographer.¹⁵⁸ The Armenian aristocrats extolled by Sebeos exhibit a form of martial heroism closely analogous to that of Mar Qardagh. Consider the career of the nobleman Smbat Bagratuni († ca. 617), whom Sebeos introduces in terms strikingly similar to the portrayal of Mar Qardagh. Smbat, we are told, was a “man gigantic in stature and handsome in appearance, strong and of solid body. . . . a powerful warrior who had demonstrated his valor and strength in many battles.”¹⁵⁹ Within a generation of his death, Smbat had become a figure of legendary dimensions, whose enormous physical strength and courage enabled him to perform exceptional deeds. Arrested and condemned to the arena by the Roman emperor, Smbat defeated with his bare hands a series of three wild beasts—a bear, a bull, and a lion—released against

(*nakharars*), whose culture was deeply influenced, but not wholly determined, by Persian models. On the close geographic and cultural ties between northern Iraq and southern Armenia, see above chapter 1, nn. 52–53.

157. See, in addition to the articles listed in the previous note, N. Garsoïan, trans., *The Epic Histories Attributed to Pʿavostos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmutʿiwnkʿ)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), with a three-hundred-fifty-page commentary and indices (cited hereafter as Garsoïan, *Epic Histories*). For a concise overview of the early Armenian historians, see Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 1: xl–xlii; vol. 2: 289–95, with full bibliography of editions and translations.

158. For the problems of dating and attribution, see Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 1: xxxiii–xxxix. (Pseudo-)Sebeos’s chronicle focuses on the military achievements of the chief Armenian clans—the Mamikoneans, the Bagratunis, and the Rštumis—in alliance with, and against, the neighboring empires of Rome and Iran between 451 and the death of Khusro II. The chronicle also includes extensive material on the early Islamic conquests and their impact on Armenia. For a comprehensive analysis of the text and its sources, see now T. W. Greenwood, “Sasanian Echoes and Apocalyptic Expectations: A Re-evaluation of the Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos,” *Le Muséon* 115 (2002): 326, 392–94. To avoid excess punctuation, I refer to the text’s author as Sebeos, without quotation marks. The traditional attribution to the bishop Sebeos who participated in the Council of Dvin in 645 is, however, as Greenwood (326) insists, incorrect.

159. *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 92, chap. 20 (Thomson, 39). Cf. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 3: “And holy Mar Qardagh was handsome in his appearance, large in build and powerful in his body; and he possessed a spirit ready for battles” (quoted at n. 19 above). For the identification of the Armenian general Smbat, who served in the Roman army under the emperor Maurice and was temporarily exiled to North Africa, with the Smbat who commanded Sasanian armies in eastern Iran and won honors at Khusro’s court, see Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 1: 270 n. 43.

him: "Now it happened that when the bear attacked him, he shouted out loudly, ran on the bear, hit his forehead with his fist, and slew it on the spot."¹⁶⁰ Pardoned by the emperor, Smbat returned to Armenia and offered his services to the Persian throne (ca. 599). His military victories in Iran earned him the highest honors at Khusro's court, including the official epithet Xosron Šum, "the Joy of Khusro."¹⁶¹

Recent work on the *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos* has rightly emphasized the composite character of these episodes. Sebeos's depiction of Smbat Bagratuni represents a tradition of Christian biography that merged epic narrative traditions with scriptural models of sacral warfare. This Christianized version of Sasanian epic tradition is especially pronounced in Sebeos's depiction of the martial triumphs of individual Armenian noblemen.¹⁶² In the service of his patron Khusro II, Smbat smashed the rebellion that had broken out in the Sasanian provinces of northern Iran:

At that time, the lands called Amal, Rōyeān, Zrēdhan, and Ṭabaristān had rebelled against the Persian king. He [Smbat] defeated them in battle, smote them with the sword, and brought them into subjection to the Persian king. . . . When the next year came round, all the forces of the enemy gathered together and went and camped in the province of Ṭabaristān [on the south coast of the Caspian Sea]. Smbat also gathered his own troops and attacked them in battle. The Lord delivered the enemy's army into Smbat's hand. He put them all to the sword, and the survivors fled to their own regions.¹⁶³

In this and similar scenes throughout his work, Sebeos presents the martial valor of Armenian noblemen as a form of sacral warfare. Much of his scrip-

160. *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 93, chap. 20 (Thomson, 39), with Howard-Johnston's commentary at 2: 179. Smbat disposes of the wild bull and lion in similar fashion. For scenes of wild animal combat on Sasanian seals, see above nn. 69–70. Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, III, 8, 7–8 (Whitby and Whitby, 84; de Boor, 126) confirms that Smbat was condemned to the arena, but attributes his survival to appeals from the crowd. The Armenian source(s) used by Sebeos has clearly augmented the story of Smbat's survival. For a similar tale of the young emperor Heraclius's battles in the "arena," preserved by the Latin historian Fredegarius (writing ca. 656), see Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 26–27, n. 18.

161. *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 96–104, chaps. 23–29 (Thomson, 43–54), with Howard-Johnston's commentary at 2: 181–89. Several details of the court scenes, in which Khusro welcomes Smbat to his palace at Dastegird, recall epic motifs already discussed above. See, for example, the king's gift of a "fine horse from the royal stable" and his "joy" upon Smbat's arrival (103; Thomson, 53). During a previous visit (101; Thomson, 49–50), Khusro's gifts to Smbat included, in addition to his title, a "robe of silk woven with gold" and "silver cushions" for his banqueting couch.

162. See Greenwood, "Sasanian Echoes," 347–58, on the "heroic biographies" of Smbat Bagratuni and other Armenian noblemen incorporated into Sebeos's history.

163. *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 96, 99, chaps. 24, 27 (Thomson, 44, 47). Khusro's appointment of Smbat may partly have been designed, as Howard-Johnston (2: 181–82) suggests, to weaken the resolve of the Armenian contingent of the rebel army led by Khusro's uncle Bistam.

tural imagery is indirect, rarely offering explicit quotations. His tendency to embellish battle scenes with oblique references to scripture recalls the rhetorical strategies of the *Armenian Epic Histories*, whereas the Qardagh legend articulates a more explicit scriptural foundation for Christian warfare.¹⁶⁴ In most respects, though, the Armenian heroes of Sebeos's narrative are very much akin to Mar Qardagh. The historical figures of Sebeos's narrative operated in a Sasanian cultural and political environment closely analogous to that imagined by the Qardagh legend. Both reflect, in their depictions of sacril warfare, the atmosphere of the seventh-century Near East. Like Mar Qardagh, Smbat Bagratuni rejoices in his possession of a "large fragment" of the True Cross.¹⁶⁵ He too demonstrates his care for Christian captives and church-building in the Sasanian territory under his administration.¹⁶⁶

Sebeos's depiction of Roman-Sasanian warfare in the era of Heraclius and Khusro II thus highlights how much the Christians of northern Iraq had in common with their Armenian neighbors. Both were deeply influenced by an Iranian epic tradition that assigned the highest prestige to skills that ensured victory on the battlefield—great physical strength, boldness, horsemanship, and prowess with weapons, especially the lance and bow. Both Christian communities longed for heroes who could combine these "epic" virtues with decisive protection and patronage of the church. The Christians of seventh-century Armenia found such heroes in the chieftains of the great clans that dominated Armenian society, individuals like the Sasanian general Smbat Bagratuni († ca. 617) or the Roman ally Mushkel Mamikonean (†598). The Syriac-speaking Christians of Adiabene looked deeper into the past for their warrior hero, inventing the story of a powerful Sasanian *marzbān* in the

164. For the similarities between Sebeos's use of the Bible and the *Armenian Epic Histories*, see Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 1: xlix–l, and liii, esp. n. 72. For floating scriptural formulae integrated into Armenian epic diction, see Garsoïan, *Epic Histories*, 589–90 ("put to the sword"), 594–95 ("like the sands on the seashore"). The campaign scenes of the Qardagh legend include many allusions of this sort (see the translation, §§44–47, nn. 154–55, 160–61), but also several explicit and lengthy quotations from the Psalms (§§43–46, nn. 149, 159, 163).

165. *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 98–99, chaps. 26–27 (Thomson, 46–47). Smbat receives this precious relic from a man named Yovsēp who discovered it in a silver reliquary attached to a corpse after the battle. Ironically, this was a battle (the battle of Kmosh, ca. 600), in which the Persian-Armenian army led by Smbat had suffered a serious defeat. See Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 2: 182. Rather than wear the relic into battle (as Qardagh does), Smbat entrusts its care to his personal servant, who keeps it in the Armenian church, "which the priests of his house served" (99; Thomson, 47).

166. *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 97, chap. 24 (Thomson, 44), where Smbat ensures the appointment of a priest for the Armenian deportees living in eastern Iran (for other reports on this community, see Thomson, 44 n. 276). For his reconstruction of the cathedral of Dvin, which had been destroyed by the Persians in 572, see §100, chap. 27 (Thomson, 48). For its architecture, see Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 2: 182–83.

era of the Great Persecution under Shapur II. The hero of the Qardagh legend engages in an explicit, purposeful, and triumphant form of holy war. His victory is ensured not only by the relic of the True Cross he wears into battle, but by his vow before the campaign, his careful blessing of his armor and troops, and the prayers of his ascetic teachers.¹⁶⁷ Preceded by the sound of trumpets, he is—like the emperor Heraclius in contemporary Byzantine panegyric—a new David, a new Joshua, and perhaps (though this is never explicit) a new Constantine.¹⁶⁸ The legend's celebration of Christian warfare confirms that the "crusading" ideology, which previous scholarship has sometimes interpreted as peculiar to Heraclius's Persian campaign, was in fact part of a broader seventh-century trend.

The hagiographer's depiction of sacral warfare appears to have drawn upon a combination of written and oral sources. In addition to the Bible, he seems to have read (or heard) Syriac texts on the emperor Constantine and the True Cross; in several places his presentation of the Qardagh legend echoes the imagery of East-Syrian poems on the True Cross.¹⁶⁹ The epic features of his narrative meanwhile may have been inspired by oral traditions in Syriac or other regional languages. Immediately to the north of Adiabene, in Armenia, Christian historians like Sebeos readily drew upon an oral epic tradition that fused Iranian and Christian models of epic heroism.¹⁷⁰ While

167. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 44; also §42, where Qardagh's ascetic mentors Abdišo and Beri "seal" him with the sign of the Cross, kiss him, and send him off "in peace" (*b-šelmā*). For other instances of this language, see n. 111 above. Here the old men's blessing of "peace," paradoxically, sends Qardagh on the path to war.

168. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 46, for the saint's battlefield prayer invoking Joshua and David as models. In the same passage, Qardagh has a vision of the "blessed Mar Abdišo, his teacher, holding in his hand the glorious sign of the Cross and running before him and saying to him, 'Behold, my son, the great sign of your victory (*'ātā d-zkūtāk*).'" The cross imagery of these scenes of the Qardagh legend has parallels with East-Syrian versions of the True Cross legend, in which the emperor Constantine rides into battle, carrying in his hand the "sign of victory." For the citation, see the following note.

169. S. Brock, "Two Syriac Poems on the Invention of the Cross," in *Lebendige Überlieferung: Prozesse der Annäherung und Auslegung*, ed. N. el-Khoury, H. Crouzel, and R. Reinhardt (Beirut and Ostfildern: Friedrich-Rückert Verlag, 1992), 55–82 (repr. in Brock, *FER*, XI). Brock dates these East-Syrian poems—the *Soghitha on the Cross* and *Memra on the Cross*—to "around the seventh or eighth century" (59, 62–63) and demonstrates their dependence on earlier prose versions of the legend. Both poems take as their starting point Constantine's vision of the cross. For verbal parallels with the Qardagh legend, see the translation, §27, n. 70; §46, n. 158; §54, n. 188; and §65, n. 213.

170. On Sebeos's oral sources, see Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 1: liii n. 72. This feature of Sebeos's work links it closely to the late fifth-century *Armenian Epic Histories*. On the oral epic tradition in Armenia, see Boyce, "Parthian *gōsān*," 12–15; and Garsoïan, *Epic Histories*, 529, with bibliography. For the argument that early Armenian historians "unmistakably, if unconsciously" tapped into the folk memory preserved by the *gōsāns*, see Garsoïan, "Two Voices of Armenian Medieval Historiography," 10.

there is no reason to assume a comparable oral tradition in Syriac, it is entirely possible that the Syriac-speaking Christians of northern Iraq would have been exposed to the epic traditions circulating in other regional languages, such as Armenian, Persian, and Kurdish. The ethnography of religious communities in present-day northern Iraq lends some support to this hypothesis. Figure 6 shows a photo of Mr. Yona Gabbay, a well-known Jewish storyteller from the town of Zakho in northern Iraq, who died in Jerusalem in 1972.¹⁷¹ In his prime, Mr. Gabbay was accustomed to entertain audiences in three languages—Aramaic, Kurdish, and Arabic—drawing upon a wide repertoire of material of Jewish, Kurdish, and general Near Eastern origin.¹⁷² A historian, with access only to the written records of Mr. Gabbay's community, would have little inkling of the breadth of this oral culture.¹⁷³ The ethnography of the region's Christian community, while more limited in scope, seems to indicate a similar disjuncture. Before ca. 1900, the Christians of northern Iraq were often multilingual. While their written archives were in Syriac (and to a lesser extent, Arabic), their oral culture included secular songs in Kurdish and Turkish.¹⁷⁴ These modern analogies are useful, as they highlight the extent to which secular oral traditions typically remain invisible to the written record.¹⁷⁵ The Qardagh legend, with its vigorous appropriation of Sasanian epic narrative, hints at the existence of an oral

171. For what follows, I am indebted to the study of Y. Sabar, *The Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews: An Anthology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982). The photo of Mr. Gabbay appears at plate 1 (p. 100).

172. Prior to their emigration to Israel during the 1950s, the Jews of Kurdistan often spoke three to four languages: Aramaic, Kurdish, Arabic, and sometimes Turkish. For multilingualism among the Jews of Arbela, see G. Khan, "The Neo-Aramaic Dialect Spoken by the Jews from the Region of Arbel (Iraqi Kurdistan)," *BSOAS* 62 (1999): 216.

173. For the contrast between the oral and written traditions, see Sabar, *Folk Literature*, xxxii–xxxiii: "The oral folk literature [of the Kurdistan Jews] is predominately secular and its contents and sources are Kurdish or general Near Eastern. . . . On the other hand, the preserved written literature is mainly religious, and its contents and sources are specifically Jewish, except for local embellishment or recomposition." Their written literature consisted largely of texts written and preserved in Hebrew, or Neo-Aramaic translations from Hebrew or from (in a few cases) Judeo-Arabic.

174. For Christians' use of Turkish or Kurdish for "secular songs" before the end of the nineteenth century, see John Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, and Colonial Powers* (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 2000), 92. In 1920, the region's British administrator found that the local Christians spoke "a tongue of their own [i.e., the modern dialect of Syriac], but all know Kurdish." Hay, *Two Years in Kurdistan*, 88.

175. For another intriguing example from the same region, see C. Allison, *The Yezidi Oral Tradition in Iraqi Kurdistan* (Richmond, Surrey, England: Curzon, 2001). As Allison (10) emphasizes, oral traditions were rarely exclusively oral, but typically in dialogue with textual accounts on related themes. This may also have been the case for Christian narratives (oral and written) about the Sasanian martyrs.

secular culture, which the Christians of late antique Iraq may have shared with their non-Christian neighbors.

Imagery and narrative motifs of the Iranian epic tradition permeate the legend of Mar Qardagh. The court training scenes, with which Qardagh's story begins, mimic with remarkable precision the narrative cycles of Persian epic, even down to the details of court archery and scenes of "heroic epiphany." The athletic pursuits (archery, polo, and the hunt) cultivated by Mar Qardagh prior to his conversion are precisely those most favored by late Sasanian elites. The campaign scenes, later in the legend, while laced with scriptural allusions, recall a story about the renowned royal hero of the epic tradition, Bahrām Gōr. Like the heroes of the *Shāhnāma*, the protagonist of the Qardagh legend displays his might on the battlefield, slaughtering a foreign army and chasing its remnants into the hills. Even in the final scenes leading to his martyrdom, there are glimmerings of Qardagh's old epic strength. He defiantly defends his castle at Melqi with his archery and "bravely" (*ganbārā'it*)—literally "like a *ganbārā*," that is, "like a giant" or "hero"—shakes off the rocks thrown against him. From beginning to end, the heroism of Mar Qardagh echoes the conventions of Iranian epic narrative even as it seeks to subvert and rewrite them.

The epic themes of the Qardagh legend highlight a complex and still understudied dimension of the history of Christianity in Asia. As the church expanded across the Sasanian Empire, it entered a cultural world in which patterns of aristocratic behavior were deeply influenced by Sasanian royal models. Public and private art, oral tales and written literature, all contributed to the transmission of this epic tradition celebrating the "kings and heroes of old." While there were numerous regional variants, the relative coherence and stability of these epic traditions are remarkable. Stucco plaques excavated near Tehran resemble silver plates produced in eastern Iran or Central Asia. The portraits of heroism sketched by Armenian historians recall vignettes in al-Ṭabarī's account of Sasanian kings and generals. The Qardagh legend provides new and unexpected evidence for this epic tradition among the Christians of northern Iraq. The legend's memorable portrait of Mar Qardagh shows how a community at one end of a vast empire seized upon this empire's epic tradition and made it their own.¹⁷⁶

176. For analogous developments in the narrative traditions of the Jews and Muslims of Iran, see V. B. Moreen, "The 'Iranization' of Biblical Heroes in Judeo-Persian Epics: Shahin's *Ardashīr-nāmah* and 'Ezrā-nāmah,'" *Iranian Studies* 29 (1996): 321–38; and S. S. Soroudi, "Islamization of the Iranian National Hero Rustam as Reflected in Persian Folktales," *JSAI* 2 (1980): 365–83.

THREE

Refuting the Eternity of the Stars

Philosophy between Byzantium and Late Antique Iraq

The “heroic deeds” of Mar Qardagh examined in the previous chapter provide memorable evidence for what one might describe as the Persian-Sasanian component of Christian culture in late antique Iraq. These scenes of the Qardagh legend prove that the ideals and imagery of Sasanian epic traditions were not unknown to the Christians of late antique Iraq. The philosophical debate between the legend’s hero, Mar Qardagh, and his Christian mentor, the hermit Abdišo, reveals a very different side of Sasanian Christian culture.¹ In this debate, the hermit Abdišo proves first that the luminaries—the sun, the moon, and the stars—have been created and are not “eternal entities” (*’ityē*). He then demonstrates that the elements—earth, air, fire, and water—are likewise non-eternal substances created by God. Abdišo spells out the religious principle underlying these arguments in his response to the *marzbān*’s demand that he identify himself and his profession:

But my “work” (*bād[i]*) [as you call it] is to offer ceaseless praise and to pay thanksgiving to God our Maker and Provider, He who created us in His own image and called us in His own likeness and saved us through His only Begotten, who clothed Himself in our body. And He gave us knowledge and understanding, lest we should reckon creatures to be gods, and lest we give, as you impious pagans give, the adoration that is due to Him alone to the creatures He fashioned.²

1. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 16–22. The debate takes place near the *marzbān*’s residence at Melqi, where Qardagh has summoned the old man whose “enchantments” (*ḥaršē*) have curtailed his polo game.

2. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 13. For the significance of the Christological language, see the translation, §13, n. 37.

Abdišo here identifies the failure to distinguish between God the Creator and His “creatures” (*beryātā*) as the root cause of idolatry. The hermit’s argument strikes a familiar chord of early Christian apologetic; much of its terminology already appears, for instance, in the scriptural commentaries of Ephrem of Nisibis (†373).³ Yet this is not a timeless piece of Christian apologetic. As we shall see, Abdišo’s systematic and finely tuned refutation of “creature worship” echoes the specific intellectual debates of the sixth- and seventh-century Near East. Overlooked by previous studies, this section of the Qardagh legend provides new insight into the practical applications of Christian philosophy in late antique Iraq.

Using the debate scene of the Qardagh legend as its base, this chapter explores the functions of disputation and Aristotelian philosophy among the Christians of the late Sasanian Empire. The author of the Qardagh legend lived in a society accustomed to a variety of forms of oral and written debate. Young men trained in East-Syrian monastic schools employed the “sternly impartial” tool of Aristotelian logic to spar against both Christian and non-Christian opponents.⁴ Formal public debates organized by the Sasanian court attracted the participation of laymen and clergy alike. Such disputations (Syr. *drāšā*; pl. *drāšē*) also loomed large in the imaginative world of Christian literature, where accounts of Christian victory in debate provided a powerful tool for religious controversy, instruction, and entertainment. The Qardagh legend offers an intriguing variant of this literary genre, integrating a fictive disputation into a martyr narrative designed for oral presentation. The verbal contest imagined by Qardagh’s hagiographer pits a hermit from the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan against the Sasanian *marzbān* of northern Iraq. Yet the “exotic” backdrop of this debate belies its cosmopolitan nature. Both the form and substance of Abdišo’s argument could have been heard in contemporary disputations conducted in Constantinople, Nisibis, Ctesiphon, or Hira. The debate scene of the Qardagh legend points to the emergence of a truly international tradition of late antique philosophy. Forged in the era of Justinian (527–565) and Khusro Anūshirvān (531–579), this philosophical *koine* was eagerly adopted by Christians, polytheists, and even by some Zoroastrians. Previous scholarship on Byzantium and the Sasanian world has rarely recognized the vitality and breadth of this shared intellectual tradition.

3. See, for example, Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis and Exodus*, 1 (Tonneau, 1; 3), where Ephrem explains how the children of Israel, while “lost” in Egypt, had repudiated the commandments established for human nature and declared “natures that had come into being from nothing to be eternal entities (*ʿityē*) and named previously composed creatures as gods.” See below for analogous arguments in the work of Aristides of Athens (fl. ca. 125) and the Armenian apologist Eznik of Kolb (fl. ca. 445).

4. P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 173. In this chapter only, I cite from the first edition of Brown’s book, which preserves a slightly longer account of the East-Syrian School of Nisibis.

The substance of the Qardagh legend's debate scene provides further evidence for the philosophical exchange between Byzantium and the Sasanian world. To refute the alleged divinity of the stars, Qardagh's hagiographer marshals arguments derived from the thought of John Philoponus († ca. 570s), the leading Christian philosopher of sixth-century Alexandria. The discovery of echoes of Philoponus embedded in the middle of an anonymous martyr legend of northern Iraq has significant implications for how we understand the reception of late antique philosophy. Although Philoponus wrote for a very limited and elite audience, the reverberations of his ideas, filtered through Syriac translations, echoed widely through Christian, and later Islamic, debates about the structure of the universe. Qardagh's hagiographer recognized the importance of these ideas for his own polemic against Zoroastrian astral religion. His reworking of Philoponus's concept of projectile motion exemplifies the confidence and finesse with which Christians of the late antique Near East appropriated the philosophical legacy of Hellenism.

DISPUTATION IN THE QARDAGH LEGEND

Conventional images of martyr literature frame the debate scene in question. Summoned before Qardagh, the Sasanian viceroy of northern Iraq, the hermit Abdišo responds to the *marzbān*'s interrogation with the forthright speech expected of a Christian holy man: he proclaims his own faith and immediately denounces the idolatry of his accusers.⁵ The viceroy, in turn, orders his soldiers to beat the Christian hermit for his insolence and "burns with anger" at his words.⁶ Until this point, the scene could come from a martyr legend written anywhere in the medieval world. The distinctive quality of the Qardagh legend's debate scene becomes apparent when the Christian hermit refuses to answer the Sasanian viceroy. The transition into a formal disputation begins, ironically, with a moment of dramatic silence:

And Qardagh said to him indignantly, "Why do you call us worshippers of creatures, stupid old man?"

But the blessed Abdišo was silent and did not give him an answer.

And Qardagh said to him, "Will you not answer me? Do you not know that I have power over your life and death?"

But the blessed Abdišo said to him, "Sir, I believe that a person who is struck upon the mouth is being taught that it is not right for him to speak; and be-

5. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 12, quoted above.

6. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 10: "He burned with anger" (*'ethamat fāb*). For the common use of this phrase in martyr literature, see Payne Smith, *TS*, 1: 1299. The phrase recurs in §§14, 23, and 52.

cause of this I have not answered your excellence (*rabūtāk*). But what you have said about having power over my life and death is not true. You have the power to kill the body, but we who are servants of Christ and worshippers of the Cross do not consider this to be death, but true immortal life! And over my soul and my life in Christ you do not have any power. . . . If, however, you desire me to speak with you, calm your wrath and control yourself. Kindly give me your attention and order them not to strike me again.”⁷

Abdišo’s refusal to answer Qardagh signals that he, and not the *marzbān* who has arrested him, will control the debate that follows. The description of his silence alludes to Christ’s refusal to answer Pilate.⁸ But it also recalls the stoic composure of Secundus, the “silent philosopher,” the hero of a short Christian legend that circulated widely in the late antique Near East. The allusion to the “silent philosopher” is too subtle to establish direct literary dependence, but a connection is plausible, since other East-Syrian writers of the seventh century cite the example of Secundus.⁹

The hermit’s insistence that he not be struck again indicates the transition into a more formal and dignified verbal contest. Physical violence is unacceptable in the debate he now proposes to his Zoroastrian captor. As soon as the *marzbān* agrees to this ground rule,¹⁰ Abdišo secures his consent to a set of further premises.

Then the holy Abdišo replied and said to him, “Do you agree that everything that is an eternal entity (*’ūtyā*) and has not been made is a true god?”

The *marzbān* said to him, “I agree.”

The blessed one said to him, “And do you acknowledge that everything that has been made and is not an eternal entity is a creature?”

The *marzbān* said to him, “I acknowledge that it is so.”

And again the blessed one said to him, “And you know that it is not right to worship creatures and that everyone who worships creatures angers God their Creator?”

The *marzbān* said to him, “Sir, you have spoken truly. It is thus. But show me, who worships creatures?”¹¹

7. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 14–15.

8. Cf. John 19:9–10, for Christ’s refusal to give an “answer” (*petgāmā*). See also the parallel scenes at Mark 14:62 and Matt. 26:63 for Jesus’s silence before the high priest.

9. See S. Brock, “Secundus the Silent Philosopher: Some Notes on the Syriac Tradition,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 121 (1978): 94–100, esp. 96 (repr. in Brock, SSC, IX), for the reference in Isaac of Nineveh, who wrote during the latter half of the seventh century. For the Syriac text, see E. Sachau, *Inedita Syriaca: Eine Sammlung syrischer Übersetzungen von Schriften griechischer Profanliteratur* (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses in Halle, 1870), 84–88 (Syriac pagination).

10. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 16: “Then Qardagh swore to him saying, ‘Speak as you please. No one will strike you again.’”

11. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 16.

Abdišo forces his opponent in this initial exchange to acknowledge the fundamental difference between “creatures” (*beryātā*), that is, all entities created by God, and an “eternal entity” (*ʿityā*)—a designation that Syrian Christian writers reserve for God alone.¹² After Qardagh concedes this distinction, Abdišo proceeds to show his Zoroastrian captor how veneration for the celestial bodies and the *stoicheia* constitutes a form of “creature worship.” Before examining the substance of these arguments, it is necessary to analyze the scene’s rhetorical structure.

The debate between Abdišo and Qardagh is composed of a series of eighteen verbal exchanges in which the hermit and *marzbān* alternately pose and attempt to answer questions about eternal and created entities. In simple rhetorical terms, this is a dialogue embedded within a hagiographic narrative. The hagiographer’s use of dialogue to attack “pagan” cosmology places the Qardagh legend within a long, dynamic tradition of Christian apologetic literature.¹³ As early as the second century, Justin Martyr († ca. 165) and other apologists had begun to write dialogues that simulated oral debates between Christians and their religious adversaries.¹⁴ Invariably these literary debates conclude with the triumph of the Christian debater, after he has systematically refuted the doctrines of his religious opponent, whether a Jew, a Manichaean, or a Christian “heretic.” An invaluable tool for exposing the errors of religious rivals, such “disputations” became one of the most popular genres of Christian literature during the early Byzantine period.¹⁵ The debate scene of the Qardagh legend has demonstrable links to this genre of

12. For a lucid discussion of the term’s significance in early Syriac literature, see U. Possek, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 55–59. As Possek explains (59), “Ephrem understands *ʿityā* or *ʿitūtā* as a name for God’s divine being. The words imply an uncreated, everlasting existence that can neither be changed or destroyed.” For the role of the *ʿityā* in the cosmology of Bardaisan of Edessa, see J. Teixidor, *Bardaisane d’Édessa: La première philosophie syriaque* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992), 75–85, 106.

13. G. Bardy, “Dialog (Christlich),” *RAC* 3 (1957): 945–55, offers a good overview; see also P. L. Schmid, “Zur Typologie und Literarisierung des frühchristlichen lateinischen Dialogs,” in *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l’Antiquité tardive en Occident*, ed. A. Cameron and M. Fuhrmann (Geneva and Bern: Fondation Hardt, 1977), 101–80, with discussion on 181–90. Schmid’s essay reviews and usefully annotates two earlier surveys: M. Hoffmann, *Der Dialog bei den christlichen Schriftstellern der ersten vier Jahrhunderte* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966); and B. R. Voss, *Der Dialog in der frühchristlichen Literatur* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1970).

14. There has been extensive and often inconclusive debate over the alleged reality and literary models of specific debates. For a fresh assessment of the origins of the genre, downplaying the significance of Platonic models, see T. J. Horner, *Listening to Trypho: Justin Martyr’s Dialogue Reconsidered* (Louvain, Paris, and Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2001), 66–93.

15. For an introductory overview, see A. Cameron, “Disputations, Polemical Literature, and the Formation of Opinion in the Early Byzantine Period,” in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East: Forms and Types of Literary Debate in Semitic and Related Literatures*, ed. G. J. Reinink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout (Louvain: Peeters, 1991), 91–108. As Cameron notes (99), eastern Christian writers produced a “truly enormous output of prose controversies, dis-

Christian polemical literature; the passage quoted above, which comes at the beginning of the legend's debate scene, closely corresponds to the language and rhythm of Byzantine disputation texts. Compare, for instance, the diction of Qardagh's hagiographer with parallel passages from an early Byzantine "Disputation" (*Διάλεκσις*) attributed to a certain "John the Orthodox."¹⁶ In this Greek treatise, probably composed in 530s or 540s, a Manichaean debater concedes each of the points made by his Christian interlocutor with formulae that are virtually identical to those used in the *History of Mar Qardagh*:

- The Manichaean says, "We acknowledge that it is so" (*Ὁὕτως γὰρ ὁμολογοῦμεν*);
 The Zoroastrian concedes, "Yes, I acknowledge that it is so" (*'in hākanā mawdā' enā*).
 The Manichaean says, "Yes, I agree to this" (*Ναί, τοῦτό φημι*);
 The Zoroastrian concedes, "Yes, I agree" (*'in šālem enā*).
 The Manichaean says, "It is thus" (*Ὁὕτως ἔχει*);
 The Zoroastrian concedes, "It is thus" (*hākanā 'iteyh*).¹⁷

The stock verbal formulae illustrated by this juxtaposition are indicative of the cosmopolitan tradition of disputation that developed on both sides of the Byzantine-Sasanian border. Although the excerpted texts were written in different languages (Greek and Syriac) and purport to represent the speech of different types of opponents (Manichaean and Zoroastrian), they derive from a common tradition of Christian disputation literature.

As early as the fifth century, East-Syrian Christian writers composed controversial texts against a wide range of religious opponents: Jews, Manichaeans, Zoroastrians, and, not least, other Christians. Unfortunately, little of this literature survives from the pre-Islamic period. Titles preserved by the East-Syrian bibliographer 'Abdišo' of Nisibis († 1318) provide some sense of what has been lost, although it is unclear how many of the *Disputations*

putations, and debates in the fifth to eighth centuries, especially the sixth and seventh centuries. . . . Usually, perhaps even always, they wrote on religious topics, such as doctrinal controversy, or in debate with Manichaeans, Samaritans, Jews, and later of course Muslims." Systematic study of this disputation literature is still at an early stage. The most promising analyses to date have focused on disputations aimed against specific types of opponents. See, for example, A Külzer, *Disputationes Graecae contra Iudaeos: Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen antijüdischen Dialogliteratur und ihrem Judenbild* (Stuttgart and Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1999).

16. Text edited by M. Aubineau in *Johannis Caesariensis Presbyteri et Grammatici Opera Quae Supersunt*, ed. M. Richard (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977), 108–28. Richard (introduction, xlv–liv) argues in favor of identifying the text's author with the enigmatic John of Caesarea, a sixth-century Palestinian (or Cappadocian) theologian. W. Klein, "Der Autor der Joannis Orthodoxi *Disputatio cum Manichaeo*," *OrChr* 74 (1990): 234–44, emphasizes the insufficiency of Richard's arguments but ultimately supports his conclusion.

17. John of Caesarea, *Disputation with a Manichaean*, 10, 12, 16 (Aubineau, 118–19); *History of Mar Qardagh*, 16.

and related texts listed in ‘Abdišō’s *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers* were framed as prose dialogues in the style of Byzantine disputation literature. Possible candidates include: (1) Mari the Persian (fl. mid-fifth century), [*Treatise*] *against the Magi in Nisibis* (*lūqbal magūšē d-ba-Nšibin*); (2) Išo‘yab of Arzon (†595), *Disputation against a Heretical Bishop*; and (3) Nathaniel of Širzor (†618), *Disputations against the Severians, Manichaeans, Cantāye, and Māndrāye*.¹⁸ Such examples could be multiplied, but the titles alone are insufficient to chart the formative stages of the genre in Syriac. To gain a clear sense of the shape and vigor of the prose disputation in Syriac, one has to consider the full flowering of the tradition during the early Islamic period. Between the seventh and tenth century C.E., Iraqi and Syrian Christians produced an abundance of dialogic controversy texts in both Syriac and Arabic.¹⁹ Perhaps the best known of these texts is the patriarch Timothy I (780–823)’s autobiographical account of his religious discussions with the caliph al-Mahdī in late eighth-century Baghdad.²⁰ Sidney Griffith, Michael Cook, and other scholars have shown the generic kinship between these Christian-Muslim disputation narratives and early Islamic dialectic theology (Ar. *‘ilm al-kalām*, “knowledge through speech”).²¹ Their studies, mentioned often in the notes of this chapter, provide a useful benchmark for investi-

18. ‘Abdišō of Nisibis, *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers*, 98, 72, 154 (Assemani, 172, 109, 224). For the catalogue’s author, see S. Griffith, “‘Abdišō bar Berikā,” *ODB* (1983): 1: 4; W. Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1894; repr., Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2001), 285–89.

19. I confine my attention here to the Syriac sources. For an introduction to the major texts, see S. Griffith, “Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: From Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286),” in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. B. Lewis and F. Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 251–73 (repr. in idem, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* [Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002], V); idem, “Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Halê and a Muslim Emir,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3.1 (2000), 1–23.

20. For an excellent analysis of the political and cultural context of Muslim-Christian dialogue at the ‘Abbāsīd court, see D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Greco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsīd Society (2nd–4th / 8th–10th Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998), 61–69; also U. Pietruschka, “Streitgespräche zwischen Christen und Muslimen und ihre Widerspiegelung in arabischen und syrischen Quellen,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 89 (1999): 153–58, on the relationship between the Syriac and Arabic versions of Timothy’s treatise, which is preserved under different titles. ‘Abdišō of Nisibis, *Catalogue* (§86; Assemani, 162), refers to the Syriac version as a “Disputation” (*drāšā*). Cf. Griffith, “Disputes with Muslims,” 264.

21. Under the patronage of the ‘Abbāsīd court, dialectical disputation (Ar. *al-gadaliyyin*) became the foremost method of intellectual inquiry, not only for discussions among Christians, Jews, and Muslims, but also for intra-Muslim debate. See the fundamental article by J. van Ess, “Disputationspraxis in der islamischen Theologie: Eine vorläufige Skizze,” *Revue des études islamiques* 44 (1976): 23–60; and idem, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 4: 726–30. For Christian debate literature as a form of *kalām*, see the articles collected in Griffith,

gating the earliest phases of disputation literature among the Christians of late antique Iraq.

The debate scene of the Qardagh legend represents a creative variant of the disputation genre. The scene's effectiveness lies in its subtle integration of two closely related types of narration. On the one hand, as indicated above, the dialogue between Qardagh and Abdišo has clear affinities with the disputation literature that circulated in multiple languages in the late antique Near East. On the other hand, the scene belongs to a well-established tradition of martyr literature in which scenes of interrogation become a platform for extended dialogue and Christian apologetic.²² The gradual devolution of the interrogation scene in the Qardagh legend into a lopsided dialogue dominated by the Christian speaker (Abdišo) mirrors a tendency found in numerous Greco-Roman martyr acts. In his pioneering survey of Christian dialogue literature, Manfred Hoffmann noted the resemblance of some interrogation scenes with the genre of disputation ("Religionsgespräch").²³ Hoffmann's observation disregards, however, the fundamental difference in tone between the martyr literature and disputations. Dialogue in martyr literature is usually interspersed with threats of physical violence and torture. Disputations, by contrast, are ostensibly contests "on level ground" in which interlocutors speak before an audience or authority who has convened the contest. By combining the genres, Qardagh's hagiographer transforms a scene of interrogation into a narrative space for systematic philosophical discourse. This bold tactic appears to be unique in Sasanian martyr literature. While many East-Syrian martyr narratives include substantial passages of dialogue, not one contains a scene of comparable philosophical content.²⁴ Lit-

Beginnings of Christian Theology, passim. In a brief, insightful article responding to the work of van Ess, M. Cook, "The Origins of *kalām*," *BSOAS* 43 (1980): 32–43, insists on the importance of Syriac intermediaries between Greek and Arabic forms of dialectical disputation.

22. For the origins of this tradition in Christian literature, see Hoffmann, *Dialog bei den christlichen Schriftstellern*, 41–56. The identification of Qardagh by his title (*marzbān*) and Abdišo as the "blessed one" fits squarely within the conventions of martyr literature (Hoffmann, 46–47). Christian "apologetic"—as it is commonly identified in the secondary literature—is in reality an intensely polemical genre. The excerpts from the legend of Mar Pethion discussed later in this chapter offer another good example of an "apologetic" refutation of Zoroastrian doctrines integrated into a scene of interrogation.

23. Hoffmann, *Dialog bei den christlichen Schriftstellern*, 48, esp. n. 4. For other examples of disputation embedded in hagiographic scenes of interrogation, see the prescient remarks of P. Peeters, "La Passion de S. Michel le Sabaïte," *AB* 48 (1930): 91–92.

24. Even Simeon of Beth Arsham, a West-Syrian bishop renowned for his fearsome skills of disputation (see the next section of this chapter), keeps the dialogue scenes short in his account of the martyrs of Najrān. For text, translation, and bibliography for Simeon's *Letter on the Hymyarite Martyrs*, see I. Shahīd, *The Martyrs of Najran: New Documents* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971). On the other hand, the earliest Syriac disputations of the early Islamic period are often framed as interviews with Islamic authorities. See Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims," 257–64.

erary models alone cannot account for this innovation. To understand this aspect of the Qardagh legend, we must also consider the ongoing tradition of oral disputation that thrived in the monasteries and courts of the late antique Near East.²⁵

DISPUTATION IN THE AGE OF JUSTINIAN AND KHUSRO ANŪSHIRVĀN

In an innovative study, Richard Lim has charted the social and cultural development of public disputation in late antiquity.²⁶ Lim shows how expert debaters trained in Aristotelian dialectic became renowned, even feared, for their ability to reduce their opponents to silence in public debates. The Manichaeans were especially notorious for their expertise in such debates, and Christian writers reveled in stories of their defeat, as for instance in the fourth-century legend describing a debate between Mani himself and the bishop of Harran.²⁷ The frequency of such public debates declined after the fourth century as the growing emphasis on creeds and written affirmations of orthodoxy diminished the sphere of acceptable public debate. As Lim demonstrates, fifth-century accounts of the Council of Nicaea illustrate this new mood.²⁸ Lim interprets the carefully orchestrated debates against Manichaeans at the court of Justinian as the culmination of this trend in which “self-chosen ignorance” and piety replaced an earlier tradition of dialectical debate.²⁹ Lim’s conclusion seems valid for the age of Theodosius II

25. For a call to approach the study of Byzantine disputation texts in a similar fashion, see A. Cameron, “New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature: Seventh-Eighth Centuries,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 1, *Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1992), 98–99.

26. R. Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995).

27. The legend is preserved in a Latin version of its Greek prototype. See Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai*, ed. C. H. Beeson (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1906); idem, *Acts of Archelaus*, trans. M. Vermes, S. N. C. Lieu, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001); Lim, *Public Disputation*, 75–78. For another notable Christian victory over Manichaean opponents, see, for example, Philostorgius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.14–15 (Bidez and Winkelmann, 44–47), on the career of the “Neo-Arian” debater Aetius the Syrian; Lim, *Public Disputation*, 86–88, 112–18.

28. Sozomen, *Church History*, I.18.1–4 (Sabbah and Festugière, 1: 198–201), describes how the pagan philosophers at Constantine’s court briefly took control of the council until “a simple old man, esteemed as a confessor . . . although unskilled in logical refinements and wordiness” silenced them with his plain words of truth. Lim, *Public Disputation*, 182–216, with full bibliography.

29. Lim, *Public Disputation*, 103–8, for the Christian-Manichaean debates at Justinian’s court; 208, for “self-chosen ignorance” as a mark of piety in the conservative Christian consensus forged in the immediate aftermath of the Arian controversy. See also the account of these debates in *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, Part III* (Witakowski, 70; Chabot, 75–75): “When they [the Manichaeans] were arrested the emperor gave orders to bring them before him, since he

(408–450), but the tradition of formal disputation looks dramatically less moribund when one considers the persistence of intra-Christian debate in sixth-century Constantinople. In his relentless efforts to establish doctrinal conformity, the emperor Justinian convened multiple formal doctrinal debates.³⁰ Meanwhile, informal theological debates thrived around the margins of the imperial palace.³¹

Indeed, a sequel to Lim's work, which would include the Sasanian world, might well begin at the court of Justinian and Theodora. As Antoine Guillaumont emphasized twenty-five years ago, teachers and clergy from the Sasanian world repeatedly participated in theological debates at the early Byzantine court. Greek sources discuss only one of these debaters: "Paul the Persian," the victor of a three-day debate against a Manichaean opponent organized by Justinian himself in 527.³² Justinian's chief legal officer, Junillus Africanus, warmly acknowledges his debt to this same man, "Paul, a Persian by origin," a graduate of the renowned East-Syrian theological school at Nisibis.³³ The Byzantine sources neglect to mention that Justinian also in-

hoped to be able to admonish them and to convert them from their pernicious error. Thus when they were brought he debated (*dreš [h]wā*) with them on many (issues), admonished and showed them from the Scriptures that they were caught up in the error of paganism."

30. For the best documented of these debates, see S. Brock, "The Conversations with the Syrian Orthodox under Justinian (532)," *OCP* 47 (1981): 87–121; with full bibliography at Cameron, "Disputations," 102–3; idem, "New Themes," 98. For references to other debates, for which no transcripts survive, see, for example, the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, Part III* (Witakowski, 121–22; Chabot, 136), on Justinian's effort to convert the leading grain-merchants of Alexandria in 559/560.

31. For the popular theological debates conducted in front of the Royal Stoa, see Agathias's acerbic portrait of the Syrian doctor Uranius and his followers. Agathias, *Histories*, II.29.5 (Frendo, 63; Keydell, 78); A. Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 104–5. I have argued for a less hostile interpretation of Uranius's activity in "The Limits of Late Antiquity: Philosophy between Rome and Iran," *Ancient World* 33 (2002): 65–67.

32. For the Greek transcript of this debate, see *Disputationes Photini Manichaei cum Paulo Christiano*, in *PG* 88 (1864): 529–52, with the commentary by G. Mercati, "Per la vita e gli scritti di 'Paolo il Persiano': Appunti da una disputa di religione sotto Giustino e Giustiniano," in *Note di letteratura biblica e cristiana antica* (Rome: Tipographica Vaticana, 1901), 180–206. Since Paul's Manichaean opponent appears in chains (*Disputationes*, 533D), Lim (*Public Disputation*, 106) sees this "debate" as the nadir in the long Hellenic tradition of public disputation.

33. Junillus Africanus, *Handbook of the Basic Principles of Divine Law (Instituta Regularia Divinae Legis)*, preface. Latin text with English translation in M. Maas, *Exegesis and Empire in the Early Byzantine Mediterranean: Junillus Africanus and the Instituta Regularia Divinae Legis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 118–19. For the probable identification of Junillus's "Paul the Persian" with the "Paul the Persian" who defeated Phontinus the Manichaean in debate in 527, see Maas, *Exegesis and Empire*, 17–18. Junillus's debt to Paul, prominently announced in the preface to his treatise, typifies the kind of intellectual interchange among Persian, Syrian, and Greek-speaking Christians explored in this chapter. Maas, however, cautions (11–12) against understanding Junillus as "a passive translator of Paul the Persian" or the mouthpiece of the School of Nisibis.

vited East-Syrian clergymen to Constantinople to defend their theological views.³⁴ Shortly after the signing of the Byzantine-Persian peace treaty of 561, a delegation of prominent East-Syrian clergy traveled to Constantinople for a three-day series of theological debates.³⁵ The delegation's leader, Paul of Nisibis—who should not be confused with the other Pauls discussed in this chapter—published an account of this event under the title *The Disputation against Caesar* (*drāšā d-lūqbal q'esar*).³⁶ A bibliographic citation by a fourteenth-century scholar of Christian literature indicates that Paul dedicated this treatise to the Persian Christian doctor of Khusro I.³⁷ The one fragment of Paul's treatise to survive indicates that it was framed in the form of a dialogue between Paul and the emperor. Its purpose was no doubt to affirm the triumph of East-Syrian orthodoxy over the "heretics" of Byzantium.³⁸

The Sasanian bishops who traveled with Paul to the Justinianic court were

34. The invitation near the end of Justinian's reign was part of the emperor's last-ditch efforts to resolve long-standing divisions in the church. For the context, see J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church, 450–680 A.D.* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 245–46; and esp. K.-H. Uthemann, "Kaiser Justinian als Kirchenpolitiker und Theologe," *Augustinianum* 39 (1999): 77–79. For Justinian's earlier efforts to convert "Monophysite" clergy and laymen through formal doctrinal debates, see n. 30 above.

35. For a late sixth-century account of this delegation, see Barḥadbšabba ʿArbaya, *Ecclesiastical History* (Nau, 628–30). A. Guillaumont, "Un colloque entre orthodoxes et théologiens nestoriens de Perse sous Justinien," *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1970): 201–7 (partially revised in idem, "Justinien et l'Église de Perse," *DOP* 23–24 [1969–70]: 50–52), shows that this was the same delegation described in more detail in the eleventh-century *Chronicle of Se'ert*, 2:(I), chap. 32 (Scher, 187–88). Five of the six members of the delegation were clergy or teachers from northern Iraq. For their identities, see Guillaumont, "Justinien et l'Église de Perse," 51 n. 63.

36. On Paul, the metropolitan bishop of Nisibis († 571), see Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 126–29; Baumstark, *GSL*, 120–21; Maas, *Exegesis and Empire*, 18; and chapter 1, n. 5 above. ʿAbdišōʿ of Nisibis, *Catalogue*, §65 (Assemani, 87–88) preserves the work's title. According to the same source, Paul also composed a scriptural commentary and "various types of letters."

37. On Khusro I's Christian physician, Qiswai, see the *Ecclesiastical History Attributed to Zachariah Rhetor* (Hamilton and Brooks, 331; Brooks, 217). The Coptic Christian historian Abū al-Barakāt († 1363)'s *Book of the Lamp* (Riedel, 683), a catalogue of Arabic Christian authors, identifies Paul's treatise as a "letter" dedicated to "Qiswai, the king's doctor." Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 2:632, cites the Arabic text with Latin translation of the passage.

38. The fragment survives because of its incorporation into an anti-Nestorian tract of the ninth century. See W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1870–72; repr., Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), 2: 798 (MS no. 798), folio 16b, where the text is identified as the "Disputation that the Emperor Justinian Made with Paul the bishop of Nisibis, who was a Nestorian." For the manuscript's editor, who considered the emperor "orthodox" and Paul a "Nestorian," see S. Brock, "A Monothelite Florilegium in Syriac," in *After Chalcedon: Studies in Theology and Church History Offered to Professor Albert Van Roey for His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. C. Laga, J. A. Munitz, and L. Van Rompay (Louvain: Peeters, 1985), 35–45 (repr. in Brock, *SSC*, XIV). For the Syriac text with French translation, see Guillaumont, "Justinien et l'Église de Perse," 62–69; Uthemann, "Kaiser Justinien," 77, supports the attribution of the original treatise to Paul of Nisibis.

no strangers to sectarian controversy in their own land. The aggressive promotion of Antiochene Christology by Barṣauma of Nisibis (435–496) had sown the seeds for bitter ecclesiastical conflict in Iraq between the advocates of the dominant “Nestorian” theology and their “Monophysite” rivals.³⁹ These divisions hardened with the emergence, during the early decades of the sixth century, of the West-Syrian or “Jacobite” church—so named after their chief bishop, Jacob Baradeus (ca. 490–578).⁴⁰ Persecution of Monophysite bishops by the emperors Justin (518–527) and Justinian provoked the Jacobites to expand their missionary efforts throughout the Near East. Exiled from their episcopal sees in Byzantine Syria and northern Mesopotamia, Jacobite bishops joined forces with indigenous opponents of the Nestorian hierarchy to spark a new wave of doctrinal controversy across the western Sasanian provinces.⁴¹ John of Ephesus’s account of Simeon of Beth Arsham, the “Persian debater” (*darāšā parsāyā*), preserves a memorable portrait of the most combative of these roving Jacobite bishops:

This holy Simeon was even before the period of his episcopacy . . . deeply versed (*mdaraš*) in the Scriptures, and he was also ardent in practicing debate (*b-drāšā*), beyond (in my opinion) any other man, even the ancient fathers; because besides the gift of God this other fact too summoned him to it, because he was also a Persian, and he lived in Persia, and it is in this country that the teaching of the school of Theodore and Nestorius is very widespread, so that believing bishops and their dioceses are few there. . . .

Against these [Nestorians] therefore the blessed Simeon was always strongly armed and ceaselessly contending; and wherever he came victory was given him by God, and he was made a closer of the mouth to all heretics, until their chiefs and doctors (*malḥānāyḥōn*) dreaded to open their mouth and speak in a district in which his presence had been reported. . . .

And the blessed Simeon was more incited against the heretics, and warmed with zeal for debating against their leaders and doctors, insomuch that, wher-

39. On Barṣauma’s episcopal career, see Fiey, *Jalons*, 113–19; Gero, *Barṣauma of Nisibis*, 110–19, presents a sensible revisionist account, which takes a more critical view of the hostile image of Barṣauma in Monophysite sources.

40. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) remains the best general account. For the post-Sasanian period, see W. Hage, *Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche in frühislamischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1966), with useful annotated lists of the Jacobite ecclesiastical hierarchy and monasteries. I include under the term “Jacobite” the formative phases of the church prior to Jacob Baradeus’s ordinations during the period 541–578.

41. For the Monophysites in the Sasanian Empire, see Labourt, *Christianisme*, 217–31; and Fiey, *Jalons*, 127–31; with the revisions of Morony, *Iraq*, 372–76, emphasizing the significant indigenous element in the expansion of the “Monophysite” presence in Persia. Key primary texts for these developments include John of Ephesus’s *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, the anonymous *History of Aḥudemmeḥ*, the East-Syrian *Chronicle of Se’ert*, and the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius, Part III* (based on the *Ecclesiastical History* of John of Ephesus).

ever they asked him to debate, he would debate (*dāreš*) with them before an audience and would set up umpires to hear the discussion between them, and so he would debate and would refute them and put them to shame, so that on no single occasion was he defeated by them in debate.⁴²

It is, to be sure, a highly stylized portrait. Although John, a native of Amida on the upper Tigris River, had met Simeon in person and had access to Simeon's writings, his portrait of the "Persian debater" emphasizes the exotic setting of Simeon's career. John, a Roman citizen by birth, depicts "Persia"—that is, the whole of the Sasanian Empire—as a land teeming with well-trained, argumentative heretics, home both to the Nestorians and the "school of Mani and Marcion and Bardaisan."⁴³ As a fellow "Monophysite," John probably exaggerates Simeon's success; but his account still offers valuable evidence for the emerging culture of disputation in the late Sasanian Empire. Simeon "the Persian debater" challenged the Nestorians at their own game. Traveling incognito with the beard and hair of a layman, Simeon would suddenly appear at disputations organized by the Nestorians, "even if he were five or ten days' journey away."⁴⁴ In his greatest victory, Simeon defeated the East-Syrian *catholikos* Babai (†502/503) in a debate staged before a Sasanian *marzbān*.⁴⁵ To counter the Nestorians' dominance in Iraq, Simeon deliberately cultivated his links to the Sasanian border zones: the Arab kingdom of

42. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Brooks, 138–40, 143–44). John of Ephesus, a native Syriac speaker from Amida (modern Diyarbakir), composed the *Lives* in Constantinople during the late 560s. For orientation, see S. A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1990), 28–42. On Simeon of Beth Arsham, see Wright, *Syriac Literature*, 79–81; Baumstark, *GSL*, 145–46; Fiey, *Jalons*, 120–27 (the most comprehensive study to date); also Harvey, *John of Ephesus*, 97–98, 184–85, esp. n. 13.

43. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Brooks, 138–39). Early Islamic historians continued the tradition of grouping this trio of heresiarchs. See, for example, Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 65, on the caliph al-Mahdi's campaign against "heretics and apostates" corrupted by reading the books of "Mani, Bardaisan, and Marcion."

44. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Brooks, 140; see also 145 for Simeon's disguise, leaving his hair and beard "like that of a layman" in the Persian style). Simeon himself was apparently a Syriac-speaking native of Iraq, although the location of his home village, Beth Arsham, remains uncertain. For its location "near Seleucia," i.e., Ctesiphon, see Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical History* (Abbeloos and Lamy, 3: 85–86); Gero, *Barṣauma of Nisibis*, 10 n. 49. But cf. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 2: 389 on the village of "Arsham" near Mosul, which is also mentioned in the East-Syrian *Life of Rabban Hormizd*, 15 (Budge, 115; 78).

45. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Brooks, 147–52). On Simeon's opponent Babai (†502/503), who served as the secretary of the *marzbān* of Beth 'Arbaye, see Morony, *Iraq*, 348; Baumstark, *GSL*, 113. As Fiey (*Jalons*, 124) observes, John's assertion that Simeon's performance earned him promotion to the episcopate (Brooks, 152) is problematic, given that Armenian sources still identify Simeon as a priest during his participation in a delegation to Armenia in 506.

Ḥira, Armenia, and Byzantine Syria.⁴⁶ The impressive geographic range of Simeon's activity, from the district of Arzon on the upper Tigris to Ḥira in south-western Iraq, testifies to the development of a broadly diffused tradition of intra-Christian debate in the sixth-century Near East.⁴⁷ His use of Sasanian officials as "umpires" (*meš'āyē*) or "judges" (*dayānē*) supports the testimony of other sources that even "Magians" were familiar with the rules of disputation.⁴⁸

While there is no evidence to link Qardagh's hagiographer directly to these Jacobite-Nestorian debates of the sixth century, it is plausible to assume that he would have heard or read about similar verbal contests during the course of his own education. The towns and monasteries of northern Iraq, which provide the setting for the Qardagh legend, witnessed an intense flurry of doctrinal controversies during the late sixth and seventh centuries. The controversy over the teaching of Ḥenana of Adiabene, chief interpreter at the School of Nisibis (572–610), caused an especially painful rift.⁴⁹ Together with

46. Simeon's *Letter on the Martyrs of Najrān* in southwestern Arabia, written on the basis of oral reports gathered at Ḥira and dedicated to an abbot in northern Syria, epitomizes the ambitious horizons of his ecclesiastical vision. For orientation in the rather complex textual history of Simeon's *Letter(s)*, see J. Beauchamp, F. Briquel-Chatonnet, and C. J. Robin, "La persécution des chrétiens de Nagrān et la chronologie Ḥimyarite," *ARAM* 11–12 (1999–2000): 19–23. The breadth of Simeon's travels anticipates the career of another itinerant Christian debater, Theodore Abū Qurrah (fl. 785–829), who traveled widely between Alexandria and Armenia, defending Chalcedonian doctrine in debates with Jacobites, Nestorians, and Muslims. See S. H. Griffith, "Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah," *PdO* 18 (1993): 143–70.

47. While Simeon's connection to Ḥira is well documented, there is still some uncertainty about the chronology of his activities in Arzon and/or Armenia. The reference to the "great *catholikos* of Arzon" in John of Ephesus's account (*Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 145) is presumably a disparaging epithet for the East-Syrian patriarch. But Michael the Syrian (IX, 9; Chabot, II, 165–67) places the same debate in "Armenia," which seems to conflate the debate's actual location (Arzon) with Armenia, where Simeon was also active. See N. Garsoian, *L'Église arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 186 n. 136. For Simeon's distinguished reputation in the Armenian sources, see Fiey, *Jalons*, 121–24, esp. n. 47; and the documents at Garsoian, *L'Église arménienne*, 438–50.

48. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 144 (continuing the passage quoted above): "[H]e would often set up the Magians themselves as judges, and thus before them as judges plead the cause of the faith, and they themselves would adjudge the victory to him, and laugh at these men [i.e., the Nestorians]." As an example of this strategy, John describes Simeon's debate with the patriarch Babai, in which an unnamed *marzbān* served as an "umpire" (*meš'āyā*). John's account of the *marzbān*'s role in this debate is too tendentious to be credible (the Persian "umpire" openly sides with Simeon) but is still revealing for its portrayal of the conventions of disputation. Simeon tells his Nestorian opponents: "If you want to debate with me, we need umpires and an audience (*šām'ā*) [to hear the discussion] between us." John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Brooks, 147).

49. For the career of Ḥenana, the fifth director of the School of Nisibis in a direct line of succession from Narsai, see Vööbus, *School of Nisibis*, 234–317; Tamcke, *Sabrišō'*, 31–36; and G. J. Reinink, "'Edessa Grew Dim and Nisibis Shone Forth': The School of Nisibis at the Transition

the continued growth of the Jacobite church, the rapid emergence of a powerful Ḥenanite party created ample opportunity for intra-Christian strife and doctrinal debate.⁵⁰ In his hagiography of the Zoroastrian apostate George of Izla, executed in 615, the East-Syrian theologian Babai the Great (ca. 550–ca. 628) vividly evokes the combative atmosphere of the Sasanian church during these years. As chief interpreter at the monastery of Mount Izla near Nisibis during the late sixth century, George (Syr. Giwargis) seems to have been surrounded by “heretics” yearning for debate. When the students of Ḥenana, “the heretic, Chaldean, and Origenist,” came and challenged him with the “false teachings of the cursed one,” George answered them “not only by speech (*meltā*), but also in writing.”⁵¹ Babai’s praise for George confirms the complementarity of oral and literary forms of disputation in the struggle to define and enforce orthodoxy in the Sasanian church.

The use of disputation as the primary medium for intra-Christian debate was even recognized and accepted by the late Sasanian court. West- and East-Syrian sources alike tell of official disputations convened by royal officials at Ctesiphon. According to John of Ephesus, Khusro Anūshirvān took a personal interest in the debates of his Christian subjects. In his mini-biography of the Persian king, John presents the following vignette of a debate involving the Jacobite “bishop of the Persians” Aḥudemmeḥ:

In our time, the *catholikos* of the Nestorians, who was constantly by the [king’s] side, accused those few orthodox [i.e., Jacobite] bishops who were in Persia—for all the bishops in the whole of Persia are Nestorians and few orthodox are found among them. When the *catholikos* made these harsh accusations, the king ordered these [men] to come and debate with one another (*nedrašōn’am ḥedarē*) before him about their faith, that he also might understand and personally examine (*nbahen b-napšeh*) those things that were being said by them and between them, and that he might judge their words and decide which were most according to reason (*mlilin*).⁵²

of the Sixth-Seventh Century,” in *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, ed. J. W. Drijvers and A. A. MacDonald (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1995), 77–89.

50. Conflict between the different factions was not restricted to verbal confrontations. See the disturbing tale of book burning, sorcery, vandalism, and attempted murder in the *Life of Rabban Hormizd*, 13–15, 21–22 (Budge, 106–16, 71–79; 138–45, 92–98).

51. Babai the Great, *Acts of Mar George*, 40 (Braun, 246–47; Bedjan, 495–96). For Babai’s polemical depiction of Ḥenana as an “Origenist,” see Reinink, “School of Nisibis,” 80 n. 11, and further below. Chabot provides a French translation of this section of Babai’s hagiography in the *Synodicon Orientale*, 626–34.

52. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History, Part III*, VI, 20 (Brooks, 240; 316; Payne Smith, 418–19). For Aḥudemmeḥ’s career, see the primary sources collected by F. Nau in his introduction to the *History of Aḥudemmeḥ* in *PO* 3 (1): 7–13 (8–9 for the Syriac text from John of Ephesus). J. M. Fiey, “Aḥoudemmeḥ: Notule de littérature syriaque,” *LM* 81 (1968): 155–59.

John's picture of Khusro's involvement in the debate serves his own apologetic purposes. After listening to the debate, Khusro declares himself persuaded by the arguments of the Jacobites ("These men know what they say, and can establish and prove their words, and their arguments seem to me to be very true") and guarantees their protection within his empire.⁵³ The historicity of this declaration is dubious. By the time John wrote his account in the late 580s, Aḥudemmeḥ, who had led the Jacobites in the debate, had died in a Persian prison (in August 575), after having been arrested for his missionary work among the Zoroastrians.⁵⁴ Khusro's goodwill toward the Jacobites was certainly of a more limited scope than John's narrative claims. The apologetic finish of this vignette, though, should not lead us to overlook its basic value; the debate itself was a real event. In a move that recalls the behavior of Justinian, Khusro I brought opposing Christian parties to his court and invited them to engage in formal theological disputation.⁵⁵

Khusro Anūshirvān's policy of inviting competing Christian parties to debate appears to have established an important precedent. His grandson Khusro II (590–628) would host further doctrinal debates under the aegis of his court. Babai's hagiography of George of Izla describes the most prestigious of these debates, which was organized by Khusro's court doctor, Gabriel of Sinjar. Summoned to the court at Ctesiphon in 612, George led the Nestorians in a series of disputations, again in both written and oral form, against Gabriel and his Jacobite allies. The *Synodicon Orientale* preserves the East-Syrian doctrinal confession produced for the occasion.⁵⁶ Sectarian dis-

corrects Nau's conflation of the Jacobite bishop with one or more East-Syrian figures who share his name. For Aḥudemmeḥ's association with Takrit, see J. M. Fiey, "Tagrit: Esquisse d'histoire chrétienne," *OS 8* (1963): 300–304 (repr. in *Communautés syriaques*, X).

53. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History, Part III*, VI, 20 (Brooks, 241; 317; Payne Smith, 419).

54. For the story of these events, see the *History of Aḥudemmeḥ*, 5–9 (Nau, 33–47); also Barhebraeus, *Ecclesiastical History* (Abbeloos and Lamy, 99–101), reprinted in Nau's introduction (10–11) to the *History of Aḥudemmeḥ*.

55. John excuses himself from presenting a written transcript of the debate, since the "arguments brought forward upon the two sides were lengthy and not easy to write down." John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History, Part III*, VI, 20 (Brooks, 241; 317; Payne Smith, 419). Michael the Syrian claims that the debate consisted of "arguments both from Scripture and nature" (*taḥwiyātā ktibātā wa-kyānāyātā*). Quoted by Nau, *Histoires d'Ahoudeḥmeḥ et de Marouta*, 11. It is unclear, however, whether Michael had access to any source beyond John of Ephesus as a basis for this description. Neither John of Ephesus nor Michael the Syrian mentions the language of the debate. If the debate was conducted in Syriac (as seems most probable), the Persian king may have used a translator. The anonymous *History of Aḥudemmeḥ* completely omits mention of the debate—a possible argument against its historicity, although the evidence from John of Ephesus is, in my view, conclusive.

56. For the disputation, see Babai the Great, *Acts of Mar George the Priest*, 49 (Braun, 255–56 and n. 2; Bedjan, 513–14); the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 20–21; Guidi, 23); and Morony, *Iraq*, 626. For the East-Syrian doctrinal document drafted by the bishops of Persia "in the twenty-

putations such as those described by Babai, and before him by John of Ephesus, have a dual significance. At one level, they highlight the sharpness of the conflict between the major ecclesiastical factions of the late Sasanian church. Yet the frequency of these debates and the wide area of their diffusion also suggest the development of a shared academic language of proof and persuasion acceptable to all the competing parties. This common language, the philosophical *koine* of the sixth and seventh centuries, was grounded in the study of Aristotelian logic.

ARISTOTLE IN EAST-SYRIAN CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Scholars have long recognized the leadership of the Syrian Christians in the transmission of Greek philosophical traditions into the Islamic world.⁵⁷ During the 'Abbāsīd caliphate, Syrian Christian scholars churned out a huge corpus of translations and commentaries on ancient medicine, astronomy and astrology, Aristotelian logic, physics, and other fields.⁵⁸ Modern studies generally trace the roots of this ninth-century translation movement to the work of a small cluster of sixth-century Syriac scholars associated with the school of Alexandria. While one should be cautious not to exaggerate the range of these early translators, there is a tendency to view this "first wave" of Syrian

third year of Khusro, son of Hormizd, when Gabriel the chief physician (*drustbad*) incited the king to call us for a disputation (*drāṣā*) with the heretics, his [Gabriel's] partisans," see *Synodicon Orientale*, appendix to the synod of 605 (Chabot, 562–80; 580–98; here, 580; 562, ll. 4–6).

57. For the older scholarship, see esp. R. Duval, *La littérature syriaque des origines jusqu'à la fin de cette littérature après la conquête par les Arabes au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Librairie Victor LeCoffre, 1907), 246–65; and the influential study by M. Meyerhof, "Von Alexandrien nach Bagdad: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des philosophischen und medizinischen Unterrichts bei den Arabern," *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 23 (1930): 389–429. Recent surveys include G. Troupeau, "Le rôle des syriaques dans la transmission et l'exploitation du patrimoine philosophique et scientifique grec," *Arabica* 38 (1997): 1–10; E.-I. Yousif, *Les philosophes et traducteurs syriaques: D'Athènes à Bagdad* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997); and the most substantial, H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Les traductions du grec au syriaque et du syriaque à l'arabe," in *Rencontres de cultures dans la philosophie médiévale: Traductions et traducteurs de l'Antiquité tardive au XIV^e siècle*, ed. J. Hamesse and M. Fattori (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d'études médiévales de l'Université catholique de Louvain, 1990), 131–47.

58. On the preponderance of bilingual (and trilingual) Christian translators under the 'Abbāsīds, see Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 136 and passim. For individual scholars, see the very useful "Register of Arabic Logicians" in N. Rescher, *The Development of Arabic Logic* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), 93–143. For the earlier West-Syrian translators Severus Sēbhōkht (†666) and his student Jacob of Edessa (†708), see L. I. Conrad, "Varietas Syriaca: Secular and Scientific Culture in the Christian Communities of Syria after the Arab Conquest," in *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honor of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers*, ed. G. J. Reinink and A. C. Klugkist (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 85–105.

Christian philosophers as only a precursor to the Greco-Arabic translation movement of the 'Abbāsīd period.⁵⁹ The Christian philosophers of the late Sasanian Empire deserve more attention in their own right. Studies of East-Syrian monastic schools and Sasanian court culture have each acknowledged the importance of Aristotelian studies in late antique Iraq, but the links between them remain poorly understood.⁶⁰ My goal here is more modest: namely, to explain the East-Syrian and Sasanian contexts for the Aristotelian interests of Mar Qardagh's hagiographer.

Three overlapping routes of cultural exchange contributed to the diffusion of Aristotelian studies in the world of Qardagh's hagiographer. The first of these routes might be described as the "internal" route within the Syrian Christian tradition: that is, the dense network of epistolary and social contacts between Syrian Christian scholars of Byzantium and their colleagues in the Sasanian Empire. As might be expected, many aspects of Greek philosophical culture entered the East-Syrian tradition through West-Syrian intermediaries. Consider, for example, the work of the most prolific of the West-Syrian translators, Sergius of Reš 'Ainā (†536).⁶¹ A medical doctor (*archiatros*) from northern Syria, Sergius was trained at Alexandria, where he seems to have studied philosophy as well as medicine.⁶² He established his reputation

59. Gutas, for instance, emphasizes the limitations of the pre-Abbāsīd translators: "Before the 'Abbāsīds, relatively few secular Greek works had been translated into Syriac: other than the eisagogic and logical literature (Porphyry's *Eisagoge* and the first three books of the *Organon*), there were essentially medicine and some astronomy, astrology, and popular philosophy; the bulk of the Greek scientific and philosophical works were translated into Syriac as part of the 'Abbāsīd translation movement during the ninth century." Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 22.

60. For Aristotelian studies at the late Sasanian court, see nn. 69–70 below. For Syrian Christian absorption of the Greek philosophical tradition, see the fundamental study by S. Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning," in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, ed. N. Garsoian, T. Matthews, and R. W. Thomson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 17–34 (repr. in Brock, *SPLA*, V).

61. For a critical introduction to Sergius's work, see H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Aux origines de l'exégèse orientale de la logique d'Aristote: Sergius de Reš'ainā (†536), médecin et philosophe," *JA* 277 (1989): 1–17; and esp. idem, "Note sur Sergius de Reš'aina, traducteur du grec en syriaque et commentateur d'Aristote," in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, ed. G. Endress and R. Kruk (Leiden: Research School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies, 1997), 121–43. The second article includes a valuable bibliographic guide to Sergius's work in the fields of philosophy, medicine, and theology. See also Baumstark, *GSL*, 167–73; and Yousif, *Philosophes et traducteurs syriaques*, 47–53, on the various unedited philosophical and alchemical works attributed to Sergius. See, for example, Wright, *Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3: 1154–60 (MS no. 987), a seventh-century compilation containing twenty-six treatises and excerpts by Sergius and other writers.

62. Hugonnard-Roche, "Note sur Sergius de Reš'ainā," 122. Few details about Simeon's career are known. Although he was an ordained priest in the Monophysite hierarchy, he maintained close ties outside his church. For his association with Ephrem, the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch, and his embassy to Pope Agapetus of Rome (before 526), see the *Ecclésiastical*

with Syriac versions of Aristotelian treatises on logic and cosmology, such as the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo* (*Περὶ κόσμου*) and *On the Causes of the Universe According to the Doctrine of Aristotle*.⁶³ He also produced Syriac versions of a large number of Galenic medical treatises.⁶⁴ Although Sergius dedicated many of these treatises to colleagues and patrons, few of these individuals can be identified. The most frequent of his correspondents, whom Sergius addresses as “our brother Theodore,” is of particular interest for the distribution of Sergius’s work in the Sasanian Empire.⁶⁵ Until recently, almost all the secondary literature identified Sergius’s “brother” as Theodore of Merv, a correspondent of Mar Aba the Great and author of a commentary on the Psalms.⁶⁶ This identification overlooked, however, the testimony of Ḥunein

History Attributed to Zachariah Rhetor, IX, 21 (Hamilton and Brooks, 266–67). For other aspects of his biography, see Wright, *Syriac Literature*, 88–93; Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 110–11; and A. Baumstark, “Lucubrationes Syro-Graecae,” *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie*, Supplementa, 21.5 (1894): 353–524.

63. Hugonnard-Roche, “Note sur Sergius de Reš‘aina,” 126–28. For the Syriac text of the *De Mundo*, see P. Lagarde, *Analecta Syriaca* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1858; repr., Osnabrück: Zeller, 1967), 134–58. Sergius’s treatise *On the Causes of the Universe* appears to be based on a treatise by Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. 198–211), for which the original Greek is now lost. See D. R. Miller, “Sargis of Reš‘aina: On What the Celestial Bodies Know,” in *VI Sym. Syr. 1992*, ed. R. Lavenant (Rome: PISO, 1994), 221–33.

64. Ḥunain ibn Ishāq, *On the Syriac and Arabic Translations of Galen* (trans. Bergsträsser), lists thirty-one Greek medical treatises translated in part or whole by Sergius. For an annotated list of the surviving treatises, see Hugonnard-Roche, “Note sur Sergius de Reš‘aina,” 123–25. For the complete list, including treatises that survive only in Arabic translations based, in part, on Sergius’s Syriac translations, see R. Degen, “Galen im Syrischen: Eine Übersicht über die syrische Überlieferung der Werke Galens,” in *Galen: Problems and Prospects*, ed. V. Nutton (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1981), 131–66 (nos. 5–8, 10–12, 15, 32–38, 47, 49–56, 59–61, 65, 67, 76, 80, 84, 104–5, 122).

65. For a French translation of the long dedicatory preface to Sergius’s treatise on the *Categories*, in which Sergius thanks Theodore for refining the Syriac style of his earlier translations of Galen, see H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Comme la cigogne au désert: Un prologue de Sergius de Reš‘aynā à l’étude de la philosophie aristotélicienne en syriaque,” in *Langages et philosophie: Hommage à Jean Jolivet*, ed. A. de Libera, A. Elamrani-Jamal, and A. Galonnier (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1997), 80–83 and 86. Other treatises dedicated to Theodore include Sergius’s translations of the *De Mundo* (n. 63 above) and the botanical section of Galen’s *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis et facultatibus*. See Hugonnard-Roche, “Note sur Sergius de Reš‘ainā,” 124, 126, 128, and 131.

66. For the earlier identification, see, for example, Brock, “Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning,” 22; Duval, *La littérature syriaque*, 248; and Baumstark, *GSL*, 122. Hugonnard-Roche, “Note sur Sergius de Reš‘ainā,” 124 n. 13, traces this hypothesis back to Assemani’s note to the catalogue entry on Theodore of Merv in ‘Abdišō’ of Nisibis, *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers*, §87 (Assemani, 147): “Theodore, Metropolitan of Merv, composed a verse history (*tas‘itā*) of Mar Awgin and the Greeks, and a commentary on [the Psalms of] David, and other treatises: a solution of ten questions of Sergius, and a book of assorted [matters] about which Mar Aba the *catholicos* inquired.” Assemani’s note hinges on the dual assumption that the “Sergius” mentioned

ibn Ishāq, who explicitly identifies Sergius's correspondent as Theodore of Karḥ Ğuddān, a small city on the Tigris in central Iraq near the site of the later 'Abbāsīd capital Sāmarrā. ⁶⁷ The correct identification confirms Sergius of Reš 'Ainā's extensive collaboration with a Sasanian Christian colleague, who shared his interest in both Aristotelian logic and Galenic medicine. How and when Sergius met his "brother" Theodore remains a mystery. Like other Sasanian Christians of his generation, Theodore may have studied philosophy in Alexandria during his youth. ⁶⁸ Sergius's dedications to Theodore imply a close ongoing collaboration between the two men, but we do not know when or where this collaboration took place.

Sasanian royal patronage opened a second major route for the diffusion of Aristotelian studies in sixth- and early seventh-century Iraq. Khusro Anūshīrvān's patronage of philosophers and doctors is amply documented. ⁶⁹ The journey of the so-called seven sages of Byzantium—a group that included the distinguished Aristotelian commentators Damascius, Simplicius of Athens, and Priscian of Lydia—to Ctesiphon ca. 532 reflects the inauguration of a new phase of Sasanian court culture. Damascius and his companions were drawn to Persia by the reports circulating in the Byzantine Empire that Khusro was a "lover of literature and a profound student of philosophy." ⁷⁰ The Greek historian Agathias, who preserves the unique account of this fa-

here is Sergius of Reš 'Ainā, and that "Mar Aba the *catholikos*" is Mar Aba the Great (540–552), rather than Mar Aba II (740–751).

67. Hugonnard-Roche, "Note sur Sergius de Reš'ainā," 124 n. 13, citing the Arabic text of Ḥunain ibn Ishāq's Galen bibliography. Unfortunately, this new identification raises as many questions as it answers, since Sergius and Ḥunain ibn Ishāq are the only writers to mention Theodore, and we know very little indeed about the history of Christianity in Karḥ Ğuddān, which never became an episcopal see. For scattered references to the town during the tenth and eleventh centuries, see Fiey, *POCN*, 100; idem, *Communautés syriaques*, II: 192, III: 264; idem, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 2: 652.

68. See, for example, the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 25; Guidi, 25–26), which tells of one Peter of Qatar who studied philosophy at Alexandria "during his youth" and later (ca. 616) helped the Persian army capture the city.

69. For orientation in the diverse literary sources (in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Pahlavi, and Persian), see M. Tardieu, "Chosroës," in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, ed. R. Goulet (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1994), 2: 309–18; also J. Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia: From 550 B.C. to 650 A.D.*, trans. A. Azodi (London and New York: I. B. Taurus, 1996), 216–21, with extensive bibliography at 298–99.

70. Agathias, *Histories*, II.28.1–2 (Frendo, 62; Keydell, 77): "Chosroës has been praised and admired beyond his deserts not just by the Persians but even by some Romans. He is in fact credited with being a lover of literature and a profound student of our philosophy (λόγον ἐραστήν καὶ φιλοσοφίας τῆς παρ' ἡμῶν ἐς ἄκρον ἐλθόντα). . . . It is rumored moreover that he has absorbed the whole of the Stagirite [i.e., Aristotle] more thoroughly than the Paeanian orator [i.e., Demosthenes] absorbed the works of the son of Olorus [i.e., Thucydides], that his mind is filled with the doctrines of Plato the son of Ariston and that not even the *Timaeus* . . . would elude his grasp."

mous episode, bristles at the suggestion that a “barbarian” king could be a legitimate patron of Hellenic culture:

Personally I could never bring myself to believe that he [Khusro] was so remarkably well-educated and intellectually brilliant. How could the purity and the nobility of these time-honored writings [Aristotle and Plato] with all their exactitude and felicity of expression be preserved in some uncouth and uncivilized tongue?⁷¹

Unfortunately, modern scholars have often followed Agathias in his cultural chauvinism, assuming that the brevity of the philosophers’ stay in Persia illustrates the superficiality of Sasanian philhellenism.⁷² Such a perspective gravely underestimates the Persians’ ability to absorb external intellectual currents. Within the context of late Zoroastrian theology, such translation could be understood not as the acquisition of foreign knowledge, but as the *restitution* of ancient Iranian knowledge, which had been transferred to Greece, during the Macedonian domination of Iran.⁷³ Agathias’s hostile portrait of “barbarian” philosophers sharply contrasts with other sources that offer a more positive assessment of Khusro’s policies. John of Ephesus, for example, describes Khusro in his *Ecclesiastical History* as an “astute and wise man [who] throughout his life was assiduous in his reading of philosophy (*b-qeryānā d-pilōsōpūtā*).”⁷⁴ While one can question whether Khusro understood as much philosophy as his admirers claimed, Sasanian court patronage—which continued under Khusro’s successors—clearly promoted the study and translation of Greco-Roman philosophy. Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the importance of one “Paul the Persian,” an Aristotelian philosopher who

71. Agathias, *Histories*, II.28.3 (Frendo, 62; Keydell, 77). As a historian of the Greco-Arabic translation movement, Gutas (*Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 188 n. 3) finds “magnificent . . . irony” in Agathias’s denial that Greek philosophy could ever be adequately expressed “in an uncouth and uncivilized tongue” (*ἀγρία τινὲ γλώσση καὶ ἀμουσοσάτη*).

72. For the fault lines in the modern historiography, see Walker, “Limits of Late Antiquity,” 56–65. J.-F. Duneau, “Quelques aspects de la pénétration de l’hellénisme dans l’empire perse sassanide (IV^e–VII^e siècles),” in *Mélanges offerts à René Crozet*, ed. P. Gallais and Y.-J. Riou (Poitiers: Société d’études médiévales, 1966), 1: 13–22, was one of the first studies by a Hellenist to recognize the extent of Sasanian philosophical patronage.

73. For the absorption of Hellenic learning in Zoroastrian tradition, see Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 25–26; and S. Shaked, “Paymān: An Iranian Idea in Contact with Greek Thought and Islam,” in *Transition Periods in Iranian History, Actes du Symposium de Fribourg-en-Brisgau (22–24 mai 1985)*, ed. P. Gignoux (Paris: Association pour l’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 1987), 217–40, esp. nn. 1–2 (repr. in idem, *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam* [Aldershot, England; Brookfield, VT: Variorum Reprints, 1995], VIII]). For medical texts transmitted through Syriac Christian intermediaries, see esp. P. Gignoux, “L’apport scientifique des chrétiens syriaques à l’Iran sassanide,” *JA* 289 (2001): 217–36.

74. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History, Part III*, VI, 20 (Brooks, 240; 316; cf. Payne Smith, 417).

dedicated his *Logic Book* to “Khusro, kings of kings, best of men.”⁷⁵ Were it not for the author’s name and a few subtle scriptural allusions, it would be difficult to recognize this *Logic Book* as the work of a Christian.⁷⁶

Contemporary observers of the late Sasanian court recognized the intimate connection between such Aristotelian scholarship and the practice of disputation. John of Ephesus’s depiction of Khusro’s “assiduous reading of philosophy” immediately precedes and introduces his account of the Jacobite-Nestorian debate in which Aḥudemmeḥ participated.⁷⁷ As John recognized, both trends—Khusro’s patronage of philosophical translations and his convening of religious disputations—were augmented by the Sasanian court’s international contacts. The patronage of the Persian court attracted a steady traffic of individual philosophers and teachers from the Roman Empire. The *Histories* of Agathias includes a brilliant caricature of one of these teachers, the Syrian doctor Uranius, who accompanied the Roman ambassador Areobindus to the Sasanian court during the early 530s.⁷⁸ Writing ca. 580, nearly a half-century after Areobindus’s embassy, Agathias preserves a disparaging but nonetheless informative account of the formal debate at the Sasanian court in which Uranius participated:

75. Paul’s treatise consists of an abridgment of Porphyry’s *Eisagogue* (an introduction to the *Categories* of Aristotle) and a literal translation of Aristotle’s *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, and *Prior Analytics*. For the text, see Paul the Persian, *Logic Book*, in J. P. N. Land, *Anecdota Syriaca IV* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1875; repr., Jerusalem: Raritas, 1971), 1–30 (Syriac), 1–32 (Latin). J. Teixidor, “Les textes syriaques de logique de Paul le Perse,” *Semitica* 47 (1997): 117–38, reprints Land’s Syriac text (except pp. 1–4) with an annotated French translation. For an analysis of Paul’s debt to the Aristotelian tradition of late Roman Alexandria, see D. Gutas, “Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle’s Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Baghdad,” *Der Islam* 60 (1983): 231–67; and H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Le traité de logique de Paul le Perse: Une interprétation tardo-antique de la logique aristotélicienne en syriaque,” *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica* 11 (2000): 59–82. Earlier scholarship often and probably incorrectly conflates this Aristotelian translator with either or both of the following: (1) Paul the Persian, who debated Photinus the Manichaean at the court of Justinian (n. 32 above); (2) Paul of Nisibis (†571), author of the *Drāsā* against Caesar (n. 36 above).

76. For the echoes of Prov. 8:19, Eccl. 2:14, and 1 Cor. 13:12 in Paul’s treatise, see Hugonnard-Roche, “Paul le Perse,” 60 n. 5.

77. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Part III, VI, 20 (Brooks, 240–41; 316–18; Payne Smith, 417–19). Here, too, John’s narrative serves to promote the Jacobite position; Khusro’s wisdom and philosophical acumen allow him to discern the superiority of the Jacobites’ arguments. In the same passage, John tells of Khusro’s effort to collect, study, and read the “religious books of all creeds” and his praise for the books of the Christians “above all others.”

78. Agathias, *Histories*, II.29–30.3; 32 (Frendo, 63–65, 67; Keydell, 78–80, 82–83). Agathias’s portrait of Uranius, which immediately follows his attack on Khusro’s translation project quoted above (n. 70), functions as a polemic illustrating the fallacy of the Persian king’s alleged philosophical expertise. On Uranius and his participation in the embassy of Areobindus, see Walker, “Limits of Late Antiquity,” 45–46.

After giving him [Uranius] a most cordial reception he [Khusro] summoned the *magi* to join with him in discussing such questions as the origin of the physical world, whether the universe will last forever and whether one should posit a first principle for all things. Uranius had not one relevant idea to contribute to the discussion, but what he lacked in this respect he made up for by his glibness and self-confidence. . . . In fact the crazy buffoon so captured the king's imagination that he gave him a huge sum of money, made him dine at his own table and accorded him the unprecedented honor of passing the loving cup to him. He [Khusro] swore on many occasions that he had never seen his equal, in spite of the fact that he had previously beheld real philosophers of great distinction who had come to his court from these parts [i.e., the Roman Empire].⁷⁹

Agathias's contempt for Uranius should not distract us from the significance of this passage. Like the passage of John of Ephesus discussed above, it attests to Khusro's personal involvement in the organization of formal religious and theological debate at court. Moreover, the participants in the debate included, as Agathias specifies, Zoroastrian religious authorities. The *magi*'s debate with Uranius addressed fundamental philosophical issues: namely, whether the universe is eternal or was created, and whether there is a "first principle" (*ἀρχή*) operative in its existence.⁸⁰ According to Zachariah Rhetor (†518), polytheists and Christians were debating much the same issues in Alexandria and Beirut during the 480s.⁸¹ Uranius's debate with the *magi* illustrates the cosmopolitan intellectual atmosphere created by Sasanian court patronage during the sixth and early seventh centuries. This was an

79. Agathias, *Histories*, II.29.10–30.3 (Frendo, 64–65; Keydell, 79–80). Throughout this section, Agathias calls Uranius a "medical practitioner" (*ιατρικὴ*), using the term as a kind of belittling epithet, but he also openly acknowledges that others, both in Constantinople and Ctesiphon, accepted Uranius as a true philosopher and master of Aristotelian doctrine. See esp. Agathias, *Histories*, II. 29.1 (Frendo, 63; Keydell, 78) on the close connection between Uranius's alleged "encyclopedic knowledge" of Aristotle and his fondness for engaging in philosophical debates.

80. Agathias, *Histories*, II.29.11 (Frendo, 64; Keydell, 79). Frendo's rendering of the passage is somewhat free. Literally, Khusro summoned the participants to debate about the "generation and nature (*γενέσεώς τε καὶ φύσεως*) [of the universe]."

81. Such, at least, is the picture Zachariah paints in his treatise *Ammonius*, named after his teacher, the Neoplatonist Ammonius of Alexandria. For the Greek text with Italian translation, see *Zacaria Scolastico, Ammonio: Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione, commentario*, ed. M. M. Colonna (Naples: Tipolitographia "La Buona Stampa," 1973). The text is composed of five dialogues in Platonic style between Ammonius, his students, and colleagues. The unnamed "Christian" in the dialogues is perhaps Zachariah himself. In the words of its editor (p. 33), "Il problema dell'assoluta eternità di Dio e della corruttibilità dell'universo costituisce infatti il fulcro e, al tempo stesso, il *leitmotiv* dell'opera." While it is plausible to assume that this text reflects the type of debate current in the school of Ammonius, I am not persuaded by the arguments of P. Merlan, "Ammonius Hermiae, Zacharias Scholasticus, and Boethius," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968): 193–203, in favor of the "essential historicity" of Ammonius's position as depicted in the dialogues.

era in which Christians and Zoroastrians could agree, at least in principle, on a language of disputation grounded in Aristotelian logic.⁸²

The third and final route by which Aristotelian studies entered the Sasanian Empire was through the East-Syrian educational system. Under the leadership of the patriarch Mar Aba (540–552), the East-Syrian clergy vigorously promoted the study and translation of Aristotelian logic.⁸³ By the generation of Babai the Great († ca. 628), Aristotelian logic and dialectic had earned a central place in the curriculum of the monastic schools of northern Iraq. The influence of the renowned Christian academy at Nisibis appears to have been decisive in this respect. Under the direction of Abraham of Beth Rabban (ca. 510–ca. 569) and his successors, hundreds of students—many of whom would later become teachers and bishops—were trained in a Christian curriculum that augmented its core scriptural education with Aristotelian logic and even Galenic medicine for some.⁸⁴ In the words of one recent study, “the austere neutral skills of logic and medicine . . . provided [the Nestorians with] the ‘secular’ knowledge necessary for controversy and exegesis.”⁸⁵ Education in

82. For other philosophical disputations under the aegis of Sasanian royal authority, see Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia*, 218, with a translation of Ibn al-Qifī’s account of the medical disputation held at Gundeshapur in 610. For the disputation on Greek and Indian astrology in 556, celebrating the twenty-fifth year of Khusro Anūshirvān’s reign, see A. Panaino, *Tessere il cielo: Considerazioni sulle tavole astronomiche, gli oroscopi e la dottrina dei legamenti tra induismo, zoroastrismo, manicheismo e mandeismo* (Rome: Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 1998), 25. For the involvement of multiple religious communities in disputations under the Umayyads, see, for example, Cook, “Origins of *kalām*,” 41–42.

83. Brock, “Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning,” 22; and Hugonnard-Roche, “Prologue,” 87–88. On Mar Aba, see Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 124–26; Baumstark, *GSL*, 119–20; and esp. W. Wolska-Conus, *La topographie chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustes: Théologie et science au VI^e siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 63–73. For his biography and correspondence, see Bedjan, *Histoire de Mar-Jabalaha*, 206–87; P. Peeters, “Observations sur la Vie syriacque de Mar Aba, catholicos de l’Église de Perse (540–552), in *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, vol. 5, *Storia ecclesiastica, Diritto* (Rome: Città del Vaticano, 1946), 69–112 [repr. in P. Peeters, *Recherches d’histoire et de philologie orientales* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1951), XXV], offers the most extensive study of his career.

84. Vööbus, *School of Nisibis*, 191–92, 203–9. On medical studies at Nisibis, see the *Statutes of the School of Nisibis* (Vööbus, 101–2; Nestle, 228): “Canon nineteen: The brothers who have come because of instruction are not allowed to live together with physicians (*‘āsawātā*), lest the books of a worldly craft be read in the same [place] with books of holiness. Canon twenty: The brothers who have departed from scholarship and taken themselves to medicine, if lacking a good witness for themselves, are not allowed to hear [i.e., attend lectures] in the School, with the exception of the doctors [who are] sons of the city.” The canons are dated to 590 C.E. by their preface (note that the older translation by Nestle is often preferable to Vööbus’s rendering of the Syriac).

85. Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 173. This study of Aristotelian logic had a fundamental impact on East-Syrian theology. As Arthur Vööbus (*School of Nisibis*, 21) has observed, the curriculum taught at Nisibis and its satellite school made Aristotelian philosophy the “lasting foundation of the theological thought of the Syrians.” For the Aristotelian commentary tradition in

this system seems to have involved thorough training in “Question and Answer” literature designed to prepare students for debates against heretics, Jews, and pagans.⁸⁶ Two distinguished teachers of the School of Nisibis, Eliša‘ bar Qūzbāyā († ca. 500–510) and John of Beth Rabban (†566/567), are known to have written controversy treatises in this vein.⁸⁷ Too little of this East-Syrian controversy literature survives to be certain of its contents, but the titles suggest substantial overlap between the “Question and Answer” genre and disputation narratives.⁸⁸ Both types of literature depended on the techniques of Aristotelian dialectic, possibly compiled in educational handbooks, for the dismantling of opponents’ questions and positions.⁸⁹

Syriac, see H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Sur les versions syriaques des *Catégories* d’Aristote,” *JA* 275 (1987): 205–22; idem, “Traductions”; and S. Brock, “The Syriac Commentary Tradition,” in *Glosses and Commentaries on Aristotelian Logical Texts: The Syriac, Arabic, and Medieval Latin Traditions*, ed. C. Burnett (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1993), 3–10 (repr. in Brock, *FER*, XIII).

86. See the overview of this “Question and Answer” literature by Herrmann Dörries, “Eratopokriseis (Christlich),” *RAC* 6 (1966): 347–70. On the genre’s origin as an educational tool for the exegesis of Homer and Plato, see Heinrich Dörrie, “Eratopokriseis (Nichtchristlich),” *RAC* 6 (1966): 342–47, esp. 345, on Porphyry’s adaptation of the genre for the investigation of Aristotelian logic. For its use by early Byzantine writers as a tool for controversy against Jews and heretics, see Dörries, “Eratopokriseis (Christlich),” 355–65; and Maas, *Exegesis and Empire*, 20–23 (by E. G. Matthews, Jr.), discussing among other writers Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Maximus the Confessor, and Anastasius of Sinai.

87. For Eliša‘’s career and literary works, see Vööbus, *School of Nisibis*, 122–33, with 127 on his polemical works against heretics and Zoroastrians. Barḥadbešabba’s *Ecclesiastical History* (Nau, 620) specifies that Eliša‘ “resolved those questions the magi raised against us (*šwā zīḫimē d-’azi’ o mgūšē hānaw den luḡbalan*).” (Pseudo-) Barḥadbešabba’s *Cause of the Foundation of the Schools* (Scher, 387–88) calls Eliša‘ “a great man trained in all the ecclesiastical and profane books.” For John of Beth Rabban, see Vööbus, *School of Nisibis*, 211–22, with 215 on his polemical works (*drāšē*) against Jews, Zoroastrians, and Monophysites (“Eutychians”). ‘Abdišō’ of Nisibis’s *Catalogue* calls the first of these treatises a “[Book of] Inquiry (*zīḫimā*) against the Jews” (§56; Assemani, 72). For the use of the “Question and Answer” format in East-Syrian exegetical literature, see Maas, *Exegesis and Empire*, 22–24 (by E. G. Matthews, Jr.).

88. For the somewhat porous border between the genres, see Dörries, “Eratopokriseis (Christlich),” 368. The tenth-century Nestorian lexicographer Abū I-Ḥasan bar Bahlūl distinguishes among four types of *drāšē*, including one type composed in the “academic” (*malpānāyā*) style. For a prominent later example of this literary form, see S. Griffith, “Chapter Ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore bar Kōni’s Apology for Christianity,” *OCP* 47 (1981): 158–88 (the citation from Bar Bahlūl appears on 170).

89. Recent scholarship on Christian-Muslim disputation narratives has sought to identify the educational handbooks used by Syrian Christians to prepare for their debates against Muslims. See Pietruschka, “Streitgespräche,” 138–40, 159–62. The results, at present, remain fairly meager, at least in comparison with Muslim handbooks on disputation from the late eighth and ninth centuries. On the Islamic handbooks, see Van Ess, “Disputationspraxis,” 31–33. Cook, “Origins of *kalām*,” 34–40, discusses the Aristotelian features of similar handbooks excerpted in West-Syrian and Maronite manuscripts. See, for example, the practice exercise for the refu-

Qardagh's hagiographer probably had some formal academic training in one of the monastic schools of northern Iraq, either at Nisibis or in one of its satellite foundations. The arguments and analysis he places in the mouth of the hermit Abdišo are too sophisticated to be those of an unschooled man. Perhaps like Gabriel Taureta, an abbot of Beth 'Abhe during the mid-seventh century, he too "toiled in the learning of many books and diligently trained his mind in controversy and disputations against heretics."⁹⁰ His anonymity hides from our view both his precise academic credentials and contacts. The reconstruction of his intellectual horizons thus depends on a careful analysis of the substance and structure of his arguments against the eternity of the celestial bodies.

In the continuation of the disputation scene introduced above, the hermit Abdišo systematically breaks down Qardagh's assertion that the heavenly bodies are eternal and therefore divine:

The blessed one said to him, "Now from what have you deduced that the luminaries are eternal entities (*'ityē*) and have not been made?"

Qardagh said to him, "From their constant course, and because of the [var. B] immutability of their nature, and from the fact that they endure by the strength of their nature and are not changed like other things, and are set on high above."

The blessed one said to him, "These things about which you have spoken they have received from their Creator as part of their constitution. The credit does not belong to their essence. That they [the luminaries] are not eternal entities is evident from the fact that they are not even alive. And if you say that these things are alive, I beseech you to tell me, indeed what kind of life do they possess? That of animals? Then why are they not nourished like animals? Or are they rational and capable of perception (*milē w-pārōšē*)? And if you say that they are rational and capable of perception, then why do they not store up their warmth at times and rest from their course? For if the sun were rational, in winter it would dissipate the intensity of the frost and in summer it would not [var. A] increase its heat. And it would grow warm in the region that is colder than its neighbor, and where it is hot it would restrain its rays. And from its constant course it would grow weary and suffer."⁹¹

tation of sun-worshipping "pagans" (*hanpē*) preserved in an eighth-ninth century collection of patristic texts against heresies. Wright, *Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 2: 967–76 (no. 859), here 971 (fol. 138b). I am not convinced by Cook's hypothesis ("Origins of *kalām*," 40) that the East-Syrians had less need for these techniques of argumentation.

90. Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, II, 18 (Budge, 211; 90–91). Cf. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Brooks, 157–58), where John recalls his own careful studies of the controversial treatises on Simeon of Beth Arsham. On Gabriel Taureta, see Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 147. For his alleged authorship of the legend of the martyrs of Tur Ber'ayn, see below, chapter 4, n. 119.

91. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 17–18. The variants (marked "var." in brackets) correspond to the apparatus in Abbello's edition of the text.

In this exchange, the hermit Abdišo insists that the *marzbān* define exactly which characteristics of the luminaries he sees as indicative of an eternal nature. First, he makes the *marzbān* state the ostensible evidence for his position: “Now from what is it deduced . . . ?” He then breaks down the components of Qardagh’s proposed explanation (“Indeed what kind of life do they possess? That of animals?”) and raises objections to each possible explanation (“Then why are they not nourished like animals? . . . And if you say that they are rational . . . , then why do they not store up their warmth?”)⁹² Abdišo concedes that the luminaries possess a “constant course” (*rehtōn ’aminā*) and an “immutable nature” (*lā šūhlāpā da-kyānhōn*) but attributes these qualities to the constitution (*tūqānhōn*) given them by their Creator. The hagiographer’s articulation of this argument reveals an unmistakable debt to sixth-century cosmological debates. Abdišo’s explanation of the “constant course” of the luminaries echoes the arguments forged by the Christian Aristotelian commentator John Philoponus in what S. Sambursky has described as “one of the great dialogues in the history of ideas.”⁹³ To appreciate the precise quality of the hagiographer’s arguments, it will be useful to revisit this debate between two of the most influential philosophers of late antiquity.

DEBATES IN SIXTH-CENTURY BYZANTIUM OVER THE ETERNITY OF THE HEAVENS

Writing during the reign of Justinian, when imperial legislation increasingly narrowed the discursive space for non-Christians, Simplicius of Athens, the leading Aristotelian commentator of his generation, defended traditional Greek views of the eternity and divinity of the heavenly bodies.⁹⁴ Simplicius built his argument around the same textual authorities that Greek in-

92. For useful comparanda, see, for example, Cook, “Origins of *kalām*,” 38–39; van Ess, “Disputationspraxis,” 41, on the “bounded questions” (“Entscheidungsfragen”), which force the interlocutor to choose between two possible answers, either of which leads to his refutation.

93. S. Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 156.

94. See, in general, I. Hadot, “The Life and Works of Simplicius in Greek and Arabic Sources,” in *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, ed. R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1990), 275–301. See also the articles collected in I. Hadot, ed., *Simplicius — Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie*, Actes du colloque international de Paris (28 sept.–1er oct. 1985) (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987). Sambursky, *Physical World of Late Antiquity*, 154–75, is useful for orientation. Originally a native of Cilicia in southeastern Asia Minor, Simplicius appears to have composed most of his work during the decade after 532. On the controversial question of where Simplicius wrote his commentaries, see I. Hadot, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur le Manuel d’Épictète: Introduction et édition critique du texte grec* (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1996), 8–50.

tellecuals had studied for centuries.⁹⁵ By harmonizing the views of Plato and Aristotle on the celestial bodies, Simplicius sought to reaffirm the divinity, transcendence, and eternal nature of the heavens.⁹⁶ Any disagreement between Aristotle and Plato on these questions was simply a matter of misinterpretation:

If somebody asks, how, on the one hand, nature (*φύσις*) moves the heaven and how, on the other, soul (*ψυχή*) moves it, it is not to be said as Alexander [of Aphrodisias] has said, namely, that nature there [in the heavens] is the same as soul. . . . [One must conclude] rather that the same motion is initiated by both (soul and nature), that is to say by soul, as by something which causes motion from without, and by nature as by a principle inherent (*ἀρχὴν ἐνυπάρχουσαν*) in that which is moved.⁹⁷

Simplicius thus argues that the heavens are moved *both* by the nature of their composition (being composed of the purest parts of the four elements) and by virtue of their individual souls. His argument, which hinges on the definition of the causes of motion, supports the common non-Christian belief that the luminaries must be alive. The only question for Simplicius and his colleagues was what kind of life-giving soul the celestial bodies possess: whether nutritive like those of plants, perceptive like those of animals, or rational like those of men.⁹⁸

From the perspective of men like Simplicius, Christian attacks on the di-

95. The conception of the celestial bodies as living entities appears in many classical Greek texts, but most importantly in Plato's *Timaeus* and in the *De Caelo* of Aristotle. In the *De Caelo*, Aristotle repeatedly affirms his belief that the stars are alive, but departs from Plato in his explanation of how these celestial bodies move. Whereas Plato attributes part of the movement of the heavenly bodies to the souls dwelling inside them, Aristotle views astral motion as the result of the stars' position within the rotating celestial spheres. Both the stars and spheres in which they turn, Aristotle argues, are composed of *aether*, a fifth element unique to heavenly bodies, which leads them, by its natural inclination, in their circular course. For orientation, see A. Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3–38.

96. See esp. P. Hoffmann, "Sur quelques aspects de la polémique de Simplicius contre Jean Philopon: De l'invective à la réaffirmation de la transcendance du ciel," in *Simplicius—Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie*, ed. Hadot, 183–221; English translation in *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, ed. R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1987), 57–83.

97. Simplicius of Athens, *In de Caelo*, II, 2 (Heiberg, 387, ll. 12–19). For analysis and translation of this and other key passages, see H. A. Wolfson, "The Problem of the Souls of the Spheres from the Byzantine Commentaries on Aristotle through the Arabs and St. Thomas to Kepler," *DOP* 16 (1965): 67–93 (repr. in idem, *Studies in the History of Religion and Philosophy* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973], 1: 1–59). My citations (here, Wolfson, 32–33) follow the pagination of the reprint. The "Alexander" whom Simplicius cites here is the commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. 198–209).

98. Wolfson, "Souls of the Spheres," 34–40, provides a clear summary of Simplicius's position. For the debate over the nature of the souls possessed by the celestial bodies, see Urmson's

vinity of the heavens were pure madness. Although such attacks had been a central part of Christian (and earlier Jewish) doctrine for centuries, it was not until the sixth century that Christian writers challenged traditional Hellenic conceptions of astral life from *within* the philosophical tradition. This marks the originality of John Philoponus, a Christian trained in Alexandria under the same teacher as Simplicius.⁹⁹ Beginning in the late 520s, Philoponus gradually constructed a full-scale philosophical refutation of traditional Greek theories of astral life. Philoponus (“that famous grammarian” as Simplicius contemptuously calls him) first developed his critique of the traditional Aristotelian position in his treatise *On the Eternity of the World against Proclus* and in a longer second work (published sometime after 529), *Against Aristotle*. Though Philoponus accepts in these early treatises the traditional view that the heavenly bodies are animate and ensouled,¹⁰⁰ he vigorously attacks the idea that the same celestial bodies are ungenerated and eternal. Philoponus drew particular attention to the question of how the luminaries moved, since both popular and philosophical opinion took the constant course of the celestial bodies as proof of their eternal nature. Adamant in his conviction that the luminaries had been created and were not eternal, John Philoponus proposed other explanations for astral motion:

If the celestial body moves with a circular locomotion not by nature but by the agency of a soul (*ὑπὸ ψυχῆς*), as in the case of living beings, or by the agency of some other superior force (*τινὸς ὑπερέρας δυνάμενος*), it is not possible to infer from its motion either that the heaven is generated or that it is ungenerated.¹⁰¹

introduction (2–10) to Simplicius’s *On the De Anima (of Aristotle)*. Though Urmsom assigns the treatise to Simplicius’s companion, Priscian of Lydia, the attribution remains unresolved according to Hadot, “Life and Work of Simplicius,” 290–91.

99. For an excellent overview, see R. Sorabji, “John Philoponus,” in *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, 1–40. See also C. Wildberg, “Philoponus,” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998) vii, 371–78, with more recent bibliography. For the Alexandrian context, see H. J. Blumenthal, “Alexandria as a Centre of Greek Philosophy in Later Classical Antiquity,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 18 (1993): 307–25; and H.-D. Saffrey, “Le chrétien Jean Philopon et la survivance de l’école d’Alexandrie au VI^e siècle,” *Revue des études grecques* 67 (1954): 396–410, though Saffrey’s interpretation of Philoponus’s sobriquet as mark of his Christianity must be rejected. On the teacher whom Philoponus and Simplicius shared, see K. Verrycken, “The Metaphysics of Ammonius Son of Hermeias,” in *Aristotle Transformed*, ed. R. Sorabji, 199–231, esp. 223–31.

100. John Philoponus, *Against Aristotle on the Eternity of the World* (Wildberg, 76), frag. 61* (= Simplicius, *In de Caelo*, 91, ll. 17–19): “Yet, it is worth knowing that in contrast to others, his comrades [i.e., other Christians], <the Grammarian> wants the heavens to be animate (*ἐμβυχοῦ*) as well.”

101. John Philoponus, *Against Aristotle* (Wildberg, 67), frag. 50 (= Simplicius, *In de Caelo*, 199, ll. 27–30).

Philoponus thus contends that the motion of the astral bodies *cannot* be taken as proof of their eternal nature, since the impetus for their motion could arise either from an internal soul *or* from some external “superior force.” By questioning the customary link between astral motion and eternal existence, Philoponus laid the foundation for a bold reappraisal of classical Greek notions of the heavens.

In his later works, Philoponus fully repudiates the traditional polytheist conception of the celestial bodies as divine entities. In his exegetical magnum opus, *On the Creation of the World (De Opificio Mundi)*, Philoponus explicitly rejects the idea (which he had conceded in his Aristotelian commentaries) that the heavenly bodies are ensouled or rational.¹⁰² This new direction in Philoponus’s thought coincides with a broader current of anti-Origenism during the decade leading up to the ecumenical council at Constantinople in 553. The anathemas against Origen attributed to that council include explicit condemnation of the idea that the luminaries are rational or ensouled.¹⁰³ In presenting his revisionist cosmology, Philoponus was also determined to refute the archaic scriptural-based cosmology favored by many Syrian Christians.¹⁰⁴ Philoponus’s contemporary, a merchant named Cosmas, had crafted an influential exposition of this Antiochene cosmology in his treatise *Christian Topography*. Drawing upon the exegetical commentaries of Theodore of Mopsoestia (composed ca. 400), Cosmas asserted that God had appointed “invisible powers” (αἱ ἀόρατοι δυνάμεις), that is, angels, to guide the celestial bodies.¹⁰⁵

102. For the Greek text with German translation, see C. Scholten, *Johannes Philoponus, De Opificio Mundi: Über die Erschaffung der Welt* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 3 vols., with extensive commentary. For the dating, see J. Schamp, “Photios et Jean Philopon: Sur la date du *De Opificio Mundi*,” *Byzantion* 70 (2000): 134–54, *contra* Scholten (I, 66), who places the work after the Council of Constantinople in 553. For Philoponus’s rejection of the idea that the heavenly bodies are ensouled (ἐμψυχὰ) or rational (λογικὰ), see *De Opificio Mundi*, VI, 2 (Scholten, 3:500–507, esp. 502, ll. 10–14).

103. *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (hereafter *ACO*), ed. E. Schwartz and J. Straub (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1914–82), vol. 4/1, 248, ll. 14–16, *Anathemas against Origen*, III (Percival, 318): “If anyone shall say that the sun, the moon and the stars are also rational beings, and that they have only become what they are because they turned toward evil: let him be anathema.” The condemnation is repeated in almost identical language in the *Anathemas of the Emperor Justinian against Origen*, 6 (*ACO* 3 [1940], 213, ll. 27–28; Percival, 320). For the broader context of anti-Origenism during the 540s and 550s, see F. X. Murphy and P. Sherwood, *Konstantinopel II und III* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1990), 67–68, 88–91, 132–33.

104. For a lucid survey of early Christian cosmologies, see H. Inglebert, *Interpretatio Christiana: Les mutations des savoirs (cosmographie, géographie, ethnographie, histoire) dans l’Antiquité chrétienne, 30–630 après J.-C.* (Paris: Institut d’études augustiniennes, 2001), 27–72, 59–61, for Philoponus’s attack on what Inglebert aptly calls the “archaic model of the cosmos” prevalent in Syrian Christian tradition.

105. Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography*, IX, 3 (Wolska-Conus, 3:206; with additional citations at 3:403). For the articulation of Cosmas’s position in opposition to Philoponus, see W. Wolska-Conus, *Théologie et science au VIe siècle*, 168, 179–81, and *passim*.

Philoponus caustically dismissed such a simplistic explanation of astral motion. In the *De Opificio Mundi*, he asks whether the angels would pull the stars from in front like beasts of burden or push them from behind like men rolling pieces of cargo or perhaps carry the stars on their shoulders. “What,” he exclaims, “could be more ridiculous than this?”¹⁰⁶ Building on his critique of the traditional Aristotelian theory of motion, Philoponus advanced a beautifully concise explanation of the movement of the luminaries. The “motive force” (*κινητική δύναμις*) impressed upon the luminaries came directly from God. This impetus imparted at the time of creation, rather than propulsion by some external “invisible power,” explained the regular motion of the sun, moon, and stars through the heavens.¹⁰⁷

REFUTATION OF THE ALLEGED ETERNITY
OF THE LUMINARIES IN THE QARDAGH LEGEND

The disputation scene of the *History of Mar Qardagh* closely echoes the themes of these sixth-century philosophical debates. In the continuation of the passage quoted above, Qardagh explains his belief in the eternal nature of the astral bodies by pointing to their possession of “constant motion” greater than mundane objects and “light and power that are exempt from change, corruption, or hindrance.”¹⁰⁸ His defense of the luminaries’ immutability and transcendence recalls the standard polytheist view of the heavens articulated by (among others) Simplicius of Athens. Abdišo’s response echoes even more clearly the arguments developed by John Philoponus to debunk the polytheist model of the cosmos. Speaking here through his character Abdišo, the hagiographer focuses on the principle of motion to explain the qualitative difference between the inanimate luminaries and creatures possessing souls. The “constant motion” of the luminaries, which his adversary posits as evidence for their eternal nature, is, in fact, a sign of their *inanimate* nature. Their motion, he argues, resembles the motion of ordinary, mundane objects:

For everything that lives and belongs to the perceptible world [literally “can be seen,” i.e., belongs to the realm of sense perception] and is in motion of its own accord also grows weary. And everything that does not live and does

106. John Philoponus, *De Opificio Mundo*, I, 12 (Scholten, 1:124, ll. 16–21).

107. For a useful summary of Philoponus’s argument, see Sorabji, “John Philoponus,” 7–13. For the quotation here, see John Philoponus, *De Opificio Mundi*, I, 12 (Scholten, 1:126, ll. 1–2). For the depiction of angels in the *De Opificio Mundi*, see C. Scholten, *Antike Naturphilosophie und christliche Kosmologie in der Schrift “De Opificio Mundi” des Johannes Philoponos* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 146–52.

108. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 19: “The *marzbān* said to him, ‘Why do they [the luminaries] possess a constant motion (*zū’ā’ aminā*) greater than these things on earth, and light and power (*nūhrā w-ḥaylā*) that are exempt from change, corruption, or hindrance?’”

not grow weary has been set into motion by something else. A stone or an arrow or a cart is set into motion by something else, and they do not grow weary, since they also are not alive. Birds and animals move of their own accord and grow weary. If then the luminaries together with the elements move of their own accord, they should also grow weary and suffer, since they belong to the world of the senses. But since they do not move of their own accord, just so it is also evident that they are mute and soulless. And because of this they do not grow weary. And they are moved by the power of other things in the manner of a stone or an arrow or a cart. The former are moved by God; the latter by us.¹⁰⁹

The hagiographer carefully distinguishes here between the different types of motion characteristic of animate creatures as opposed to inanimate objects. Whereas animate creatures grow weary from their self-induced motion, inanimate objects do not tire, since they are not alive. So, too, the luminaries never tire, since their motion is not “of their own accord” (*men yathōn*).¹¹⁰ The absence of self-induced motion attests, in turn, to the luminaries’ lifeless state. The hagiographer thus counters not only the “Origenist” position that the celestial bodies possess rational souls,¹¹¹ but also the more subtle Aristotelian theory that the luminaries possess sentient souls analogous to those of animals.¹¹² He seals his argument with a set of analogies concerning projectile motion, likening the motion of the celestial bodies to that of ordinary objects such as “a stone or an arrow or a cart”—objects set in motion by the “power of other things” (*b-ḥaylā d-’ehḥrānē*).¹¹³ These examples corroborate the hagiographer’s debt (though probably mediated through another source) to Philoponus, who employs two of the same examples in his

109. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 18.

110. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 18. For the categorization of souls that underlies this distinction, see I. Hadot, *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin: Hiéroclès et Simplicius* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1978), 167–81.

111. See n. 103 above. For the Syriac version of Justinian’s anathemas against Origen, which survives in an eighth-century collection of patristic catenae, see I. Lannoo, “Version syriaque de dix anathèmes contre Origène,” *LM* 43 (1930): 7–15, here no. 6, which anathematizes anyone who believes “that the heaven (*šmayā*) or the sun or the moon or the other stars, or the waters above heaven are some kind of ensouled and rational powers (*ḥaylē medem mnapšē wa-mlilē*).” For the manuscript, see Wright, *Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 2: 921–55 (no. 857), here 936 (fol. 106b). For accusations of “Origenism” in the late Sasanian church, see A. Guillaumont, *Les ‘Kephalaia Gnostica’ d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’origénisme chez les grecs et chez les syriens* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962), 186–96; and n. 51 above.

112. See, for example, Simplicius, *In de Caelo*, II, 8 (Heiberg, 463, ll. 6–12), where Simplicius suggests that the celestial bodies may possess only the “most accurate” (*ἀκριβεστάτας*) of the senses, i.e., vision and hearing, but not the passive senses of taste and smell. For the pertinent sections of the *De Anima* commentary, see Wolfson, “Souls of the Spheres,” 34–40 and n. 93, on similar views expressed by another of Ammonius’s students, the Athenian Platonist Olympiodorus.

113. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 18.

commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*.¹¹⁴ In short, this section of the Qardagh legend presents a much abbreviated, diluted, but still recognizable version of Philoponus's theory of projectile motion. God, the hagiographer concludes, has set the luminaries in perpetual motion, just as we set in motion everyday objects such as a stone, an arrow, or a cart.

The refutation of the alleged divinity of the celestial bodies leads directly to a corollary attack against worshipping the elements, the *stoicheia* (Syr. ʿesfūksē, from Gr. στοιχεῖα).¹¹⁵ The hermit Abdišo opens his attack with multiple examples of the transience and corruptibility of the elements, emphasizing the destructive interactions among them. Earth absorbs water; water extinguishes fire; the luminaries heat air enclosed in a wineskin until the air is filled with "staleness and stench."¹¹⁶ The hagiographer presents the interdependence of the elements as evidence of their fundamental weakness. He points to their lack of rationality, sentience, or even growth as indications of their inanimate nature:

But the elements are neither alive nor rational. For everything that lives and belongs to the perceptible world moves of its own accord and suffers, whereas the elements are not only irrational, they are not even alive or sentient (*rgūšē*). Indeed plants, together with animals, have life. For these things, because they grow and [var. A] send up sprouts, [there is] also for them movement and change together with sense perception. The elements have not one of these things.¹¹⁷

Here too, the hagiographer adopts philosophical language that appears to be indebted to the insights of John Philoponus. In the *De Opificio Mundi*, Philoponus uses the comparison with plants to illustrate the elements' inanimate nature. Even plants, Philoponus observes, "live, die, and are said to have a plant's soul (*ψυχὴν* . . . τὴν φυτικὴν). Seeing none of these things in the elements, we rightly say that they are without souls (*ἀψυχα*)."¹¹⁸ Qardagh's hagiographer (speaking still through his character Abdišo) uses the same comparison to demonstrate the elements' lack of life, growth, and sentience. Having demonstrated that neither the elements nor the luminaries are alive

114. John Philoponus, *In Aristotelis Physicorum*, IV, 8 (Vitelli, 639–42). For the key passage in English translation, see M. R. Cohen and I. E. Drabkin, *A Source Book in Greek Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 221–23. Philoponus concentrates on the example of the arrow and mentions the stone only briefly.

115. For Greco-Roman and early Christian views of the elements, see the translation, §20, n. 56. Christian polemics against Zoroastrianism constantly rebuke the "Magians" for their reverence toward fire and the other elements. For the Zoroastrian position, see de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 304–10.

116. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 20.

117. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 22.

118. John Philoponus, *De Opificio Mundi*, V, 1 (Scholten, 2:454, ll. 23–25). For Philoponus's extensive discussion in the *De Opificio Mundi* of the elements and their characteristic forms of motion, see Scholten, *Antike Naturphilosophie und christliche Kosmologie*, 185–234.

or eternal, the hermit Abdišo closes the disputation scene with a declaration of triumph: "Rightly, therefore, I have called you creature-worshippers and strangers to God."¹¹⁹ The hermit, or rather the hagiographer, has now proven that the "Magians," by paying reverence to the sun, moon, fire, and earth, worship mere "creatures," instead of God their Creator.

QARDAGH'S HAGIOGRAPHER AS A CHRISTIAN APOLOGIST

Despite his manifest debt to Philoponus, Qardagh's hagiographer eventually slips into a less nuanced form of philosophical discourse. An obscure analogy between the luminaries and a lamp or light source in a dark house serves to illustrate the "punishment" that would afflict the world if the luminaries were destroyed. The analogy, which describes the "chastisement" that overtakes ten men in a certain house when the house's only light source is removed, seems more akin to a New Testament parable than to the preceding Aristotelian arguments.¹²⁰ Toward the end of the disputation scene, prophetic tones also break through. Not only are the elements neither alive nor ensouled, they are "silent like rocks."¹²¹ Such slivers of biblical imagery remind us that Qardagh's hagiographer was building upon a long, vigorous tradition of Judeo-Christian apologetic. The core themes of this polemical tradition were forged in Judeo-Christian attacks on Near Eastern and Greco-Roman polytheism. The *Apology* of Aristides of Athens, for example, which was addressed to the emperor Hadrian in 125 C.E., focuses its argument around many of the same themes.¹²² Like Qardagh's hagiographer, Aristides lambastes his religious adversaries for their impious worship of the elements and the sun.

119. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 22. Cf. the beginning of the disputation scene at §14: "And Qardagh said to him indignantly, 'Why do you call us worshippers of creatures, stupid old man?'"

120. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 20: "Just as if there are ten men in a certain house, and one of them is blinded (*naqbel nekyānā ba-ḥzāteh*), he alone suffers in darkness, while those others escape his affliction. But if you [extinguish] the lamp that is inside the house or shut the door, the experience of the chastisement (*nesyānā d-mardutā*) overtakes all those in the house. Just as in the case of the loss of these [men in the dark house], so also [it would be for us] in the case [of the loss] of the luminaries."

121. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 22: *ṣatiqē . . . ba-dmūt k'ipē*. For mute idols, cf. 1 Corinthians 12:2; Habakkuk 2:18. For verbal parallels to the diction used here by Qardagh's hagiographer, see Payne Smith, *TS*, 2: 4357.

122. For the Greek, Syriac, and Armenian versions of the text, see *Aristide, Apologie: Introduction, texts critiques, traductions et commentaire*, ed. B. Pouderon and M.-J. Pierre (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2003). I quote here from the Syriac version with facing-page French translation (181–251). The unique copy of the Syriac version of the *Apology*, translated from the Greek original ca. 400, survives in an eighth-century manuscript at Mount Sinai. For the manuscript's contents and the circumstances of its discovery in 1889, see 137–41; and the *editio princeps* by J. R. Harris and J. A. Robinson, *The Apology of Aristides on Behalf of the Christians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891; repr., Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint Limited, 1967).

He too catalogues various signs of the “corruptible and mutable” nature of the *stoicheia*.¹²³ But Aristides’ attack on “Chaldean” error (“barbarian” error in the Syriac version) reveals no trace of the Aristotelian arguments about motion presented by Qardagh’s hagiographer. Aristides’ contemplation of the regular motion of the heavens leaves him “amazed.”¹²⁴ While recognizing God’s agency behind these motions, he makes no attempt to explain them.

The Armenian apologist Eznik of Kolb provides a closer parallel to the polemical strategies of Qardagh’s hagiographer. In a three-part treatise composed ca. 445 and based in part on Syriac sources, Eznik catalogues the errors of the “heathen Greeks,” the “heretics,” and the “Magians.”¹²⁵ His attack covers many of the same themes as those found in the Qardagh legend. Like Qardagh’s hagiographer, Eznik denounces the erroneous belief that the motion of the luminaries indicates that they possess “intellectual and rational life.”¹²⁶ He also understands motion as a key indicator in the differentiation among human, animal, and plant life.¹²⁷ And he too cites the elements’ interactions as proof of their created nature. But his examples form a mirror image of the arguments used in the Qardagh legend. Whereas the hermit Abdišo asserts that each of the elements “either destroys or is destroyed by each of its companions,”¹²⁸ Eznik emphasizes the “pernicious and corrupting” effect of the elements when “alone in a single state without any mixing of its companion.”¹²⁹ The sun, for example, is “scorching and drying” when

123. Aristides of Athens, *Apology*, III.1–VII.2 (Pouderon and Pierre, 190–203). See esp. III.2 (192–93) for the description of the elements (*ʿestüksē*) as “corruptible and mutable” (*methablāmītā w-meštahlāpnītā*).

124. Aristides of Athens, *Apology*, I, 1 (Pouderon and Pierre, 182–85; Harris, 35): “Having contemplated the heavens and earth and seas, and beheld the sun and the rest of orderly creation, I was amazed (*ʿetdamaret*) at the arrangement of the world; and I comprehended that all that is therein are moved by the impulse of another (*men ʿašinā d-ḫyrānā*), and I understood that He that moveth them is God.”

125. Eznik of Kolb, *On God*, trans. M. J. Blanchard and R. D. Young (Louvain: Peeters, 1998); for the Armenian text with French translation, see Eznik of Kolb, *De Deo*, ed. L. Mariès and C. Mercier, in *PO* 28 (3–4): 409–538 (1–238). See also the annotated Italian translation: Eznik di Kolb, *Confutazione delle sette (Elc Alandoc)*, trans. A. Orengo (Pisa: Edizione ETS, 1996). On the treatise’s author, apparently the bishop of Bagrewand (in the Ararat region) who attended the Council of Artašat in 449/450, see Blanchard and Young, 11–16; and Orengo, 11–12. For Eznik’s sources, see L. Mariès, “Le *De Deo* d’Eznik de Kolb connu sous le nom ‘*Contre les Sectes*’: Études de critique littéraire et textuelle,” *REArm* 4 (1924): 113–205; 5 (1925): 12–130, which documents Eznik’s use of an extensive library of Greek and Syriac patristic texts, including the *Apology* of Aristides, Ephrem’s *Hymns against Heresies*, and various *Acts* of the Persian martyrs.

126. Eznik of Kolb, *On God*, 224 (Blanchard and Young, 130–31), and more broadly §§3, 222–26, 304–6 (37–40, esp. n. 6, 130–31, 162–63).

127. Eznik of Kolb, *On God*, 302–3 (Blanchard and Young, 162).

128. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 20.

129. Eznik of Kolb, *On God*, 2 (Blanchard and Young, 36–37).

not mixed with air.¹³⁰ This contrast underscores the fluidity in the apologetic strategies that could be used to attack “Magian” religion. The comparison with Eznik of Kolb also calls attention to the standard features of Christian apologetic that are *absent* from the Qardagh legend.

The most obvious omission is the avoidance of scriptural proofs. In contrast to Eznik and other Christian apologists, Qardagh’s hagiographer does not turn to scripture to prove God’s power over the luminaries. Nor does he cite scriptural prohibitions against worship of the celestial bodies.¹³¹ The disputation scene of the Qardagh legend contains only a single biblical allusion. To illustrate the functions of the celestial bodies, the hermit Abdišo paraphrases, but does not quote, Genesis 1:14.¹³² Eznik, by contrast, cites the same passage directly, quoting “Moses” to explain why God created the “great luminaries.”¹³³ Eznik and, before him, Ephrem of Nisibis invoke the miracles of the prophets as evidence of God’s power over the celestial bodies.¹³⁴

The most famous of these miracles, Joshua’s prayer that halted the sun and moon at the battle of Gibeon (Josh. 10:12–15), would certainly have been familiar to Qardagh’s hagiographer. The Rabbula Gospels, completed in northern Syria in 586, include a corner miniature of the scene, showing the sun and moon frozen in the sky above the well-labeled figure of Joshua.¹³⁵ Another late sixth-century Syriac Bible—MS Syr. 341 of the Bibliothèque

130. Eznik of Kolb, *On God*, 2 (Blanchard and Young, 37).

131. For a scripturally based repudiation of worshipping the celestial bodies, see, for instance, Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, XVII.6 (Pierre, 734; Parisot, 1: 793), where the fourth-century poet directly quotes Deut. 4:19: “You must not adore the sun, nor the moon, nor any of the powers (*haylē*) of heaven.” For the repudiation of Sasanian royal ideology implied in this stance, see I. Ortiz de Urbina, “Christen im Perserreich Berichten und Urteilen über die Anbetung des Kaisers,” in *III Symposium Syriacum 1980: Les contacts du monde syriaque avec les autres cultures (Goslar 7–11 septembre 1980)*, ed. R. Lavenant (Rome: PISO, 1983), 193–202.

132. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 19, on the luminaries’ maintenance of the “order (*tūkāsā*) of the times and the numbering of the years, months, weeks, and days.” Cf. Gen. 1:14.

133. Eznik of Kolb, *On God*, 266 (Blanchard and Young, 146): “Moses said: ‘God created the great luminaries, and He put them in the firmament of heaven to illuminate the earth.’ Whence it is clear that they were created only for the purpose of illuminating, and also as signs of the hours and days, months and years—not as living beings.”

134. Eznik of Kolb, *On God*, 271 (Blanchard and Young, 149), quoting Josh. 10:12. Ephrem of Nisibis, *Hymns against Heresies*, IV.3–4 (Beck, 15–16; [Syr.] 14). For the literary and historical context, see S. Griffith, “Setting Right the Church of Syria: Saint Ephraem’s *Hymns against Heresies*,” in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, ed. W. E. Klingshirn and M. Vessey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 97–114.

135. C. Cecchelli, G. Furlani, and M. Salmi, eds., *The Rabbula Gospels: Facsimile Edition of the Miniatures of the Syriac Manuscript Plut. 1, 56 in the Medicean-Laurentian Library* (Olten and Lausanne: Urs Graf Verlag, 1959), fol. 4a and 54; J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures conservés dans les bibliothèques d’Europe et d’Orient: Contribution à l’étude de l’iconographie des églises de langue syriaque* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste P. Geunther, 1964), 139–97, here 141. For an accessible

Nationale—preserves a splendid, half-page miniature of the scene (see figure 7).¹³⁶ The disputation scene crafted by Qardagh's biographer omits any mention of this well-known proof of God's power over the luminaries, despite the fact that he elsewhere alludes to the book of Joshua.¹³⁷ Nor does he refer to another frequently cited example of the created nature of the luminaries, the eclipse at the Crucifixion.¹³⁸ Instead, the hermit Abdišo explains the luminaries' place in the universe with an anatomical metaphor. The celestial bodies, he suggests, are like "the brain, liver, and heart" of the world.¹³⁹ Just as the removal of one of these organs from an animal would cause death, so also "if the Creator allowed the luminaries to perish," it would bring the "destruction of the whole world."¹⁴⁰ The medical analogy, used here in lieu of scriptural proofs, offers a further indication of the hagiographer's

visual introduction to the Rabbula Gospels, see K. Weitzmann, *Late Antique and Early Christian Book Illumination* (New York: George Braziller), 97–106 (figs. 34–38).

136. R. Sörries, *Die syrische Bibel von Paris: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, syr. 341, Eine frühchristliche Bilderhandschrift aus dem 6. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1991), 31–33, 83 (fig. 7), with compelling visual parallels illustrated on 96–97 (figs. 38–42). See also Weitzmann, *Early Christian Book Illumination*, 17–18 (fig. 13); and Leroy, *Manuscrits syriaques à peintures*, 208–19. Sörries (*Syrische Bibel*, 68–73) persuasively dates this lavishly illustrated Bible, on stylistic grounds, to the late sixth or early seventh century, making it almost exactly contemporary with the Qardagh legend. He also attributes the Bible to a monastic scriptorium in northern Mesopotamia. An East-Syrian origin is plausible, since the manuscript later came to rest in the library of the East-Syrian bishop of Se'ert (Sörries, 9–10) in the mountainous Hakkari district of southeastern Turkey.

137. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 44, where Qardagh and his soldiers pray before the "ark of the Lord" in a scene paralleling Josh. 7:6.

138. Matt. 27:45, Mark 15:33, and Luke 23:44 agree that upon the Crucifixion "a darkness fell over the whole land, which lasted until three in the afternoon." Luke alone specifies that the "sun's light failed." Beginning in the sixth century, Christian depictions of the Crucifixion often showed both the sun and the moon in eclipse. See M. Wallraff, *Christus Verus Sol: Sonnenverehrung und Christentum in der Spätantike* (Münster Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlungen, 2001), 165–66, pl. VIII (17), for the Crucifixion scene in the Rabbula Gospel. For the color image, see Cecchelli et al., *Rabbula Gospels*, fol. 13a. In the fifth-century *Acts of Simeon bar Sabba'e* 19 (Braun, 27; Bedjan, 164), the *catholikos* Simeon reminds King Shapur that the "sun, which you now order me to worship, was eclipsed when he [Christ] was crucified."

139. For the trio of the brain, liver, and heart as the body's chief organs, see P. Gignoux, *Man and Cosmos in Ancient Iran* (Rome: Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2001), 37–46. The *Syriac Book of Medicines*, XIV (Budge 287–88; 253) likewise identifies the heart, brain, and liver as the "chieftains" (*ršē*) of the body but argues that only the heart is absolutely essential to life. For the disputed date of this anonymous work (twelfth century or earlier), see P. Gignoux, "Le traité syriaque anonyme sur les médications," in *Symposium Syriacum VII (11–14 August 1996)*, ed. R. Lavenant (Rome: PISO, 1994), 725–33.

140. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 19. For parallel passages in Nemesius of Emesa, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Zoroastrian medical book known as the *Anthology of Zādspram*, see Gignoux, *Man and Cosmos*, 46. As indicated in the previous note, the *Syriac Book of Medicines* recognizes that failure of the brain or liver does not entail immediate death, "but if one depriveth the heart of

interest in choosing neutral philosophical language. Medical thought formed a vital corollary to other forms of philosophical training in the curriculum of late antique Aristotelianism.¹⁴¹

Two other omissions further highlight the starkly philosophical tone of the debate scene presented by Qardagh's hagiographer. First, the disputation scene in the Qardagh legend makes absolutely no reference to the problem of astrology or astral fatalism, prominent themes in Eznik and most other patristic authors who address the problem of "pagan," "barbarian," or "heretical" reverence for the celestial bodies.¹⁴² This omission is particularly notable, given that contemporary East-Syrian sources explicitly accuse their opponents of teaching astral fatalism. In his *Life of George*, Babai the Great vilifies Ḥenana of Adiabene as an "Origenist and Chaldean" who taught about fate.¹⁴³ Other Christian writers, close to Qardagh's hagiographer in both time and region, make astrology a central theme in their polemics against Zoroastrianism. John bar Penkāyē, an East-Syrian writer of late seventh-century northern Iraq, denounces the Zoroastrian *magi* as latter-day Chaldeans who attribute the "entire governance (*mdabrānūtā*) of God to the stars and signs of the zodiac."¹⁴⁴ Second, and equally notable, the Qardagh legend's refutation of "pagan" error never mentions Zoroastrian mythology. Aristides in the second, Eznik in the fifth, and John of Fenek in the seventh century all turn to the stories of the gods to expose the corrupt foundations of non-Christian

breath, the man is destroyed immediately (*bar sātēh methabel*)." *Syriac Book of Medicines* XIV (Budge, 288; 253).

141. On the integration of medicine and philosophy in sixth-century Byzantium, see W. Wolska-Conus, "Stéphanos d'Athènes et Stéphanos d'Alexandrie: Essai d'identification et de biographie," *Revue des études byzantines* 47 (1989): 5–89, esp. 59; L. G. Westerink, "Philosophy and Medicine in Late Antiquity," *Janus* 51 (1964): 169–77 (repr. in idem, *Texts and Studies in Neoplatonism and Byzantine Literature* [Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1980], 83–99); and R. B. Todd, "Philosophy and Medicine in John Philoponus' Commentary on the *De Anima*," *DOP* 38 (1984): 103–10.

142. For the Greek evidence, see E. Amand de Mendieta, *Fatalisme et liberté dans antiquité grecque: Recherches sur la survivance de l'argumentation morale antifataliste de Carnéade chez les philosophes grecs et théologiens chrétiens des quatre premiers siècles* (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1945) 191–479. For Eznik and the sources of his attack on astrology, see C. J. F. Dowsett, "On Eznik's Refutation of the Chaldaean Astrologers," *REArm* 6 (1969): 46–65. There is at present no Syriac equivalent to the fine study by R. W. Thomson, "Let Now the Astrologers Stand Up: The Armenian Christian Reaction to Astrology and Divination," *DOP* 46 (1992): 305–12 (repr. in idem, *Studies in Armenian Literature and Christianity* [London: Variorum Reprints, 1994] XI).

143. Babai the Great, *Acts of Mar George*, 30 (Braun, 238–40; Bedjan, 476–79). For the characterization of Ḥenana as a "Chaldean," see n. 51 above. Reinink ("School of Nisibis," 80 n. 11) rightly advises caution in evaluating this accusation.

144. For the passage in question, see J. de Menasce, "Autour d'un texte syriaque inédit sur la religion des mages," *BSOAS* 9 (1938): 588.

cosmologies.¹⁴⁵ Polemic against Zoroastrian mythology also appears elsewhere in the hagiography of the Persian martyrs. Scholars of Zoroastrianism have long been interested in the disputation scene of the fifth-century *Acts of the Anahid and Adorhormizd* because of its detailed polemic against Zoroastrian cosmology.¹⁴⁶ The disputation scene in the Qardagh legend contains, by contrast, not a word about Zoroastrian myth. The absence of such standard apologetic themes is unlikely to be accidental. Other sections of the *History of Mar Qardagh* contain enough information about “Magian” religious activities to suggest that Qardagh’s hagiographer had a basic familiarity with the Zoroastrian traditions.¹⁴⁷ The limitation of his apologetic to more philosophical themes reflects a conscious rhetorical decision. Within the self-imposed restrictions of the disputation scene, Qardagh’s hagiographer refutes “Magian” doctrines in spare Aristotelian style without recourse to miracles or explicit scriptural proofs. His choice attests to the popularity of the philosophical *koine* that had developed in late antiquity between the rival empires of Rome and Iran.

Despite the frequent hostilities between the Roman Empire and Persia, the Christian community of late Sasanian Iraq maintained close intellectual ties to Mediterranean centers of learning. The work of translators, such as the West-Syrian polymath Sergius of Reš ʿAinā (†536), made possible the development of a philosophical *koine* shared by a wide range of ethnic and religious groups across the late antique Near East. Khusro Anūshirvān (531–679) encouraged, by his patronage of both Christian and non-Christian philosophers, the diffusion of this intellectual *koine* within his empire.¹⁴⁸ The

145. Aristides, *Apology*, 8–13 (Pouderon and Pierre, 202–33), on the myths of the Greek and Egyptian gods; Eznik, *On God*, 145–211 (Blanchard and Young, 101–27), on Zoroastrian creation myths; John bar Penkāyē, *Riṣ Melle* (de Menasce, “Autour d’un texte syriaque,” 589–90) also on Zoroastrian creation myths.

146. See T. Nöldeke, “Syrische Polemik gegen die persische Religion,” in *Festgrüß an Rudolf von Roth zum Doktor-jubiläum 24. August 1893* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1893), 134–38; reprinted with further commentary in both Mariès, “Le *De Deo* d’Eznik de Kolb,” 153–59, and J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d’après la tradition grecque* (Paris: Société d’Édition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1938), 2: 107–11. For the Syriac text, see Bedjan, *AMS*, 2: 565–603; partial English translation in Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 82–99. The text’s full title is the *Acts of Yazdān, Adorhormizd, His daughter Anahid, and Mar Pethion*.

147. See, for example, *History of Mar Qardagh*, 44, for the saint’s oath to overturn fire altars (*ʿadrōqē*) and convert the youth dedicated to the fire temples upon his return. For the Zoroastrian term, infrequent in Syriac usage, see MacKenzie, *CPD*, 5: *ādarōg*, “the simplest kind of sacred fire.” Brockelmann, *LS*, 6. For fire temple personnel like those described also at *History of Mar Qardagh*, 7, see J.-P. de Menasce, *Feux et fondations pieuses dans le droit sassanide* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1964), 51–55. For the primary evidence, see the *Sasanian Law Book (Mātīgān I Hazār Datistān)*, XVI, 1–10 (Perikhanian, 26–27), LIV, A39, 8–11 (Perikhanian, 318–19).

148. See esp. the prosopography at Tardieu, “Chosroés,” 312–18 (n. 69 above).

well-known sojourn of the Neoplatonic philosophers at Khusro's court ca. 532 seems much less odd when their visit is recognized as part of a much larger network of intellectual exchanges between the rival empires. Damascius, Simplicius, and their companions were not alone in receiving a warm welcome at the Sasanian court.¹⁴⁹ Syrian Christians, who played a prominent role in this network, used their training in Aristotelian dialectic to debate both Christian and non-Christian rivals throughout Mesopotamia. As in contemporary Byzantium, philosophy provided a common language of proof and persuasion that was, in principle, acceptable to all. Jacobites and Nestorians held formal public debates before local *marzbāns*. Sasanian bishops and laymen traveled to Constantinople where they participated in doctrinal disputations at Justinian's court. Eighty years later, Khusro II (591–628) hosted similar doctrinal debates between Jacobites and Nestorians at his court.

The legend of Mar Qardagh offers new evidence for the popularity of this philosophical *koine* in seventh-century Iraq. Here in a text designed for oral presentation, we meet a hermit and Sasanian *marzbān* who debate the eternity and divinity of the celestial bodies in language echoing the high philosophical discourse of sixth-century Byzantium. Their debate reveals, in particular, the influence of John Philoponus's thought. How and when Philoponus's ideas reached northern Iraq remains unclear; investigation by other scholars may clarify this issue.¹⁵⁰ But the impact of Philoponus's work is manifest in the arguments and examples used by Qardagh's hagiographer to prove the inanimate nature of the luminaries and elements. A simplified version of Philoponus's theory of projectile motion holds a central place in the hermit Abdišo's demonstration that the celestial bodies are "neither alive nor sentient."¹⁵¹ Most remarkable of all, Qardagh's hagiographer places this learned disputation in the middle of a fictive martyr narrative that otherwise reveals no hint of his philosophical training. The combination may seem disjointed

149. For the extensive modern debate over where Damascius and his companions settled after their departure from the Sasanian court, see R. Thiel, *Simplikios und das Ende der neuplatonischen Schule in Athen* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999); Walker, "Limits of Late Antiquity," 56–67; P. Hoffmann, "Damascius," *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, 2: 541–93, here 548–64.

150. Sixth-century contacts between the School of Nisibis and Byzantine centers of learning offer the most likely route for transmission. For the importance of these contacts, see Wolska, *Théologie et science au VI^e siècle*, 63–85; Reinink, "School of Nisibis," 77–78 n. 4. Other textual routes are also possible, perhaps through excerpts or summaries of Philoponus's Aristotelian commentaries or his *De Opificio Mundi*. Although several of Philoponus's theological works survive in Syriac translations, I know of no evidence that these were read in the Church of East where Philoponus's Christology would certainly have been condemned as heretical. On the Syriac manuscripts of Philoponus's most important theological works, see now U. M. Lang, *John Philoponus and the Controversies over Chalcedon in the Sixth Century: A Study and Translation of the Arbitr* (Louvain and Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2001), 15–20.

151. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 20.

to modern sensibilities, but the hagiographer moves without any sense of contradiction between the technical language of Aristotelian physics and the standard vocabulary of Christian martyrology. As soon as Abdišo concludes his lecture (for this is what his disputation with Qardagh turns into), Qardagh “burns with anger” and orders that the old Christian be thrown into chains.¹⁵²

The pair of miracles that frame the disputation scene further accentuate the hagiographer’s distinctive intellectual style. Whereas other hagiographers illustrate God’s power over the celestial bodies with explicit didactic miracles,¹⁵³ the miracles chosen by Qardagh’s hagiographer convey a more nuanced message about the principles of motion. In the miracle immediately preceding the disputation, the *marzbān*’s polo ball repeatedly drops to the ground, although each of his soldiers in succession hurls it “with force” (*b-ḥaylā*).¹⁵⁴ The futility of their efforts demonstrates the inadequacy of any motion imparted solely by human force. As the hermit Abdišo explains in the disputation, God alone is able to set an object into “constant motion.” The miracle that closes the disputation scene seems to reiterate this message. On the next day, Qardagh attempts to resume the aristocratic leisure activities interrupted by the hermit’s arrival. But when he and his companions set out on the hunt, the air “refused to support the arrows they were shooting.”¹⁵⁵ Mistakenly worshipped by the “Magians,” the air rejects the arrows designed to fly through it. The two miracles thus reinforce the central theme of the disputation: namely, that one must not confuse, as “impious pagans” do, the inanimate objects of the natural world with the God who created them. Stunned by the second “marvel,” Qardagh realizes that the old man locked up in his prison must be a “man of God” (*gabrā d-ʿalāhā*).¹⁵⁶

152. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 23. See n. 6 above on “burning with anger” as a hagiographic motif.

153. See, for example, the *Life of Mar Serapion* (Sims-Williams, 64), where Mar Serapion’s prayer saves a shipload of sailors from an ominous star-like object hovering above the ship: “When the sailors saw it they were greatly afraid, because they knew that it was a very fearful sign, and said to Serapion: ‘My lord, we are lost!’ But when the man of God saw it, he said: ‘In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, cease from further motion!’ And Serapion extended his right hand; and immediately it departed and there was a great calm. The sailors said to him: ‘Indeed, my lord, even the stars in heaven are subject to Christ!’ But he said to them: ‘Indeed, my sons, all things in creation are subject to Christ, for they are His creatures.’” I omit here the brackets from N. Sims-Williams’s translation, which delineate his reconstruction of the fragmentary Sogdian version of the hagiography. For the Syriac text on which the Sogdian version was based, see Bedjan, *AMS*, 5: 263–341, here 289–90. For stories of Egyptian ascetics whose prayers stopped the motion of the sun, see D. Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002), 31–33.

154. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 11.

155. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 24.

156. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 24.

The juxtaposition of such different modes of proof within the Qardagh legend challenges the instinctive tendency of modern scholarship to separate the philosophical and monastic components of Syrian Christian tradition. Such fragmentation, while understandable, needs to be avoided. One must remember, for example, that Sergius of Reš ʿAinā composed, in addition to his works on medicine, logic, and Aristotelian cosmology, a long *Memra on the Spiritual Life*, thoroughly illustrated with scriptural exempla.¹⁵⁷ The same East-Syrian monk who translated Palladius's stories of the Egyptian desert fathers also painted the walls of his cell with the "definitions and divisions" of Aristotelian logic.¹⁵⁸ Qardagh's hagiographer was a less analytical thinker than either of these writers, but he shared with them a comparable breadth of vision. All three men participated in the formation of a Christian culture that cherished, with equal vigor, the scalpel of Aristotelian logic and the prayers of "men of God."

157. For the Syriac text with French translation, see P. Sherwood, "Mimro de Serge de Rešayna sur la vie spirituelle," *OS* 5 (1960): 433–57; 6 (1961): 95–115, 121–56. The *Memra* served as preface to Sergius's translation of Pseudo-Dionysius, on which see P. Sherwood, "Sergius of Reshaina and the Syriac Versions of the Pseudo-Denis," *Sacris Erudiri* 4 (1952): 174–84; Hugonnard-Roche, "Note sur Sergius de Reš'ainā," 125; Brock, *Syriac Studies: A Classified Bibliography (1960–1990)* (Kaslik, Lebanon: Université Saint-Espirit de Kaslik, 1996), 72–73. The forthcoming study by Istvan Percel (Central European University, Budapest) on the Syriac version of Pseudo-Dionysius may clarify Sergius's role as a translator. Sherwood's edition and translation of Sergius's *Memra on the Spiritual Life* awaits a commentary.

158. On ʿAnanišōʿ of Adiabene, who traveled to Egypt before settling in the Monastery of Beth ʿAbhe in the region of Marga during the mid-seventh century, see Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 149–50; Baumstark, *GSL*, 201–3. The quotation here comes from Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, II, 11 (Budge, 174: 78).

FOUR

Conversion and the Family in the Acts of the Persian Martyrs

In the final triumphant scenes of the *History of Mar Qardagh*, the legend's hero, besieged in his fortress outside Arbela, rejects a series of supplicants who plead with him to "obey the order of the king" and "worship the fire, the sun, and the moon."¹ Among these supplicants is Qardagh's own father, a Sasanian nobleman named Gušnōy. "Weeping with many (tears)," Gušnōy stands beneath the walls of Qardagh's fortress and entreats his son to heed his last plea. Qardagh sends one of his servants to communicate the following reply:

Our Lord Christ calls out to us in His Gospel that *Everyone who does not leave his father and mother and brothers and sisters and wife and children and follow me is not worthy of me*. And because of this I do not want to see your face, because your thoughts and your words are an obstacle to the road on which I am preparing to travel.²

Qardagh's rejection of his father signals one of the key themes of the legend. To be worthy of his Lord Christ, the future martyr must "leave" or "abandon" (*šbaq*) not only his aristocratic lifestyle as viceroy of Assyria (chapter 2), but also all of the familial bonds in which his pre-Christian life was rooted.³ Qardagh's hagiographer handles this theme with characteristic finesse. As

1. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 56–57.

2. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 61, conflating Matt. 10:37, 19:29, and Luke 14:25–26. The variant reading in Abbeloos's MS A omits mention of wife and children.

3. By "family," I refer to the relations of kinship and marriage as defined by Syrian Christian and Sasanian society. The precise shape of the "family" in Sasanian Christian literature varies but generally includes (in approximate order of importance) the parent-child relationship, the marital bond of husband-wife, siblings, and other forms of kinship based on blood, marriage, or adoption.

the story unfolds, Qardagh severs his relationship with each and every member of his family, often rebuking them explicitly for their efforts to thwart his charitable redistribution of the family's wealth. In their place, Qardagh discovers a new spiritual family composed of saints and holy men who support and guide him on his path to martyrdom.

The Christian literature of late antiquity abounds with stories of saints who "abandon" their worldly families to "follow Christ." The theme achieved great popularity not only in the Christian Orient, but also in Byzantium and the Latin West; the Gospels provided hagiographers from Ireland to Ethiopia with ready proof-texts for this ideal.⁴ A few examples from the hagiography of early Christian Ireland will suffice to illustrate the motif's popularity at the opposite end of the Christian world of late antiquity. In the earliest Latin *Vita* of St. Brendan of Clonfert (i.e., "St. Brendan the Navigator"), the narrator justifies Brendan's rejection of his parents by quoting Matthew 19:29—the very same passage that Mar Qardagh recites to his father. In a later version of the *Vita*, Brendan's disciples remind their spiritual father that they too rejected their parents and inheritances to follow "you and God."⁵ Many hagiographies invoke the Gospel verses on familial renunciation in dramatic scenes of tearful departure. St. Columbanus, for instance, invokes Matthew 10:37 as he steps over his wailing mother (*eiulans et pavimento prostrata*) to leave for self-imposed exile in Europe. "Have you not heard," Columbanus asks his mother, "*He who loves his father and mother more than me is not worthy of me?*"⁶ Time and again, in scenes like these, Christian hagiographers explore the tension between familial bonds and the demands of Christian discipleship. Ironically, the sheer ubiquity of this "rhetoric of renunciation" has sometimes caused this central theme of Christian hagiography to be taken for

4. In addition to the passages cited in n. 2 above, see esp. Mark 1:16–20, 3:31–35, 13:12–13; Matt. 8:18–22. G. Theissen, *The Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 11–12, sees these passages as evidence for a tradition of radical itinerant spirituality in first-century Palestine. For a more cautious interpretation, see S. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); idem, "The Relativisation of Family Ties in the Jewish and Greco-Roman Traditions," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. H. Moxnes (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 81–100, which emphasizes the Jewish and Greek antecedents for the Gospels' rhetoric of family abandonment.

5. *Life of St. Brendon of Clonfert* (Heist, 56); *Long Version* (Plummer, 1:107). On the provenance of the short *Vita*, see R. Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives: An Introduction to the Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 390–91. For the "rhetoric of rejection" in Irish hagiography, see L. Bitel, *Isle of the Saints: Monasticism and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 101–2.

6. Jonas, *Life of Columbanus*, 3 (Krusch, 157; Munro, 4), quoting Matt 10:37; cf. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 56–57, quoted above. Note that Munro's translation is based on Mabillon's 1773 edition of the Latin text. For context, see Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 225–28; and on Jonas's goals as a hagiographer, Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 251–52.

granted. An earlier generation of scholarship, influenced by the methodology of the Bollandists, tended to dismiss such passages as “mere” hagiographic *topoi*, the product of a cut-and-paste style of composition in which the hero’s abandonment of his family was simply a prerequisite to sainthood. Though few scholars of hagiography today would accept this model, there is still a need for careful new studies of the narrative patterns and strategies of this ever-popular genre.

In this chapter, I examine the rhetoric of family relations in Sasanian martyr literature, focusing on the legend of Mar Qardagh. Familial strife is a critical leitmotif of the Qardagh legend, yet there has been no previous commentary on this aspect of the legend. En route to his martyrdom, Qardagh separates himself from the obligations invoked by his parents, wife, father-in-law, and other “noble relatives,” only to be executed by his own father.⁷ Both the historical and the narrative dimensions of these events require explanation. The fierce clash between Qardagh and his father assumes a familiarity with the traditions of Sasanian patriarchy, revealed for instance in Zoroastrian law. The hagiographer understood, and expected his audience to recognize, the normative family structures of the Persian (and “Persianized”) elites of late Sasanian Iraq. Identifying and defining these Sasanian elements clarifies the hagiographer’s distinctive rendition of the *topos* of familial renunciation.

To understand the legend’s “rhetoric of rejection,” it is also useful to be aware of the alternative literary models rejected by Qardagh’s hagiographer. The East-Syrian martyr literature introduced in chapter 1 illustrates the wide range of narrative options on this theme. In the earliest Sasanian martyr literature, familial bonds most often assist, rather than impede, the martyrs’ determination to defend their faith. Christian mothers, sisters, and brothers support their sons or siblings on the path to martyrdom. This paradigm of supportive family relations seems to reflect the specific concerns and historical development of a Christian community increasingly absorbed into the political and cultural structures of a non-Christian empire. The paradigm recurs in later Syriac hagiography, but where it appears (for instance, in John of Ephesus), the natural family is typically redefined as an ascetic community. In such contexts, where blood kinship converges with spiritual kinship, the language of familial bonds becomes not only legitimate, but also essential.⁸

7. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 65. At §56, the saint’s “noble relatives”—a group that includes “his parents and brothers”—beseech him to abandon his Christianity. For Qardagh’s relations with his father, Gušnōy, his wife Šušan, and his father-in-law, the *nekōrgan*, see further below in this chapter.

8. On the redefinition of the family in Christian ascetic contexts, see A. Jacobs and R. Krawiec, “Fathers Know Best? Christian Families in the Age of Asceticism,” *JECs* 11, no. 3 (2003): 257–63. Several recent studies have elucidated how early Christian writers deployed scripture in support of the ascetic ideal of familial renunciation. See, among others, E. Clark, *Reading*

The martyr literature of the late Sasanian period tends to present a more negative model of family relations. Sasanian martyr texts of the sixth and seventh centuries—whether in Syriac, Greek, or the Christian languages of the Caucasus—focus on the careers of Zoroastrian converts whose “Magian” families employ a variety of strategies to avert the apostasy of their sons or daughters. This narrative pattern is most prominent in the acts of female converts from Zoroastrianism, such as St. Shirin (†559). The martyr literature of the late Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods often elaborates on this theme of familial strife. In the legends of Mar Qardagh (ca. 600–650), the martyrs of ʿTur Berʿayn (late seventh century), and ʿAbd al-Masih (late eighth century), young converts to Christianity encounter ferocious opposition from their pagan fathers. The popularity of this narrative paradigm, which can also be found in Byzantine, Coptic, and Latin martyr literature, reveals a deeply rooted tension in the Christian cultures of the medieval world. Stories of sons and daughters persecuted by their own fathers expose the tension between the traditional patriarchal structures, which most Christian families maintained, and the ascetic ideal of total renunciation. Comparison of the Qardagh legend with this final category of Syriac martyr texts underlines the severity of the hagiographer’s views on marriage and biological kinship. Whereas other Syriac and Byzantine martyr legends typically allow for a partial restoration of biological family bonds, Qardagh’s hagiographer calls for the abandonment of any kinship not grounded in Christian fellowship.

How this rhetoric of renunciation relates to actual social patterns in the Christian community of late antique Iraq remains a thorny question. Modern historians have no algorithm to calculate from a society’s imaginative literature its actual social structures. This chapter is not, therefore, a history of the Christian family in late antique Iraq, a goal for which our sources are wholly inadequate.⁹ Non-hagiographic sources do, however, provide some useful perspective on the ascetic ideals promoted by the martyr literature. Canonical collections, such as the *Synodicon Orientale*, attest to the resilience of traditional Sasanian marriage patterns, while monastic legislation hints at the constant vigilance that was necessary to limit contacts between monks

Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 196–203; and A. Jacobs, “‘Let Him Guard *Pietas*’: Early Christian Asceticism and the Ascetic Family,” *J ECS* 11, no. 3 (2003): 265–81, on the exegesis of Luke 14:26.

9. Even in the case of the Roman Empire, for which documentary material is far more abundant (esp. tombstones and papyri), there has been serious debate about the adequacy of the demographic data for reconstructing the Roman family. See the debate between D. Martin, “The Construction of the Ancient Family: Methodological Considerations,” *JRS* 86 (1996): 40–60; and R. P. Saller and B. Shaw, “Tombstones and Roman Family Relations in the Principate: Civilians, Soldiers, and Slaves,” *JRS* 74 (1984): 125–56; and now B. Shaw, “The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine,” *Past and Present* 115 (1987): 3–51.

and their worldly families. Stories of violent familial strife and heroic acts of renunciation may have appealed to East-Syrian audiences, both lay and monastic, precisely because the abrogation of biological family bonds was so difficult to achieve in reality. In the stories of the saints, Christian audiences found heroes who needed no guidance on this issue. When they decide to join the church, the heroes of Sasanian martyr legends commit themselves to a radical redefinition of the family. Severing the traditional bonds of blood kinship linking them to their pagan families, the saints join new spiritual families united in their love of Christ.

FAMILY RELATIONS AND ZOROASTRIAN IDEALS IN THE QARDAGH LEGEND

The theme of family relations in the Qardagh legend revolves around the saint's relationship to his Zoroastrian parents, particularly his father. The hagiographer introduces Qardagh as the scion of royal "Assyrian" blood, descended on his father's side from the "renowned lineage of the house of Nimrod" and on his mother's side from the renowned "house of Sennacherib."¹⁰ This royal lineage is complemented by religious qualifications that identify the future martyr and his father as devout pagans. Qardagh's father, Gušnōy, is introduced as a "prominent man in the kingdom and distinguished among the *magi*."¹¹ Following in his father's footsteps, young Qardagh "vigorously embraced the error of paganism, and was praised for his devotion through all the territory of the Persians."¹² Political loyalties reinforce the shared "paganism" of father and son. When Shapur appoints Qardagh "*pa-taḥšā* of Assyria," he sends with him "great gifts and honors for his father."¹³ This image of gift exchange accompanying the ceremony of royal appointment probably reflects actual Sasanian practice. In a society where most royal appointments were based on hereditary succession, invitations to the court served to renew the bonds of allegiance between the Sasanian king and each new generation of provincial administrators. Gifts to and from the court affirmed these political loyalties.¹⁴ Here again, Qardagh's hagiographer reworks a theme found in Sasanian epic narrative (see chapter 2). In the *Chron-*

10. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 3. For the significance of this royal Assyrian genealogy, see Walker, "Legacy of Mesopotamia"; abbreviated in chapter 5 below.

11. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 3.

12. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 3. For Syrian Christian identification of "Magianism" as a form of "paganism," see n. 17 to the translation.

13. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 5.

14. J. Wieschöfer, "Gift Giving (ii): In Pre-Islamic Iran," *Enc. Ir.* 10 (2001): 607–9, is useful, but brief. A more comprehensive and in-depth study of the topic, incorporating the iconographic evidence, would be most welcome. The use of gift exchange as the marker of investiture constituted an enduring feature of Persian systems of royal administration. As late as the

icle of Ardashīr, when the young hero is invited to appear at court, his father sends “many marvelous, magnificent, and suitable things” to the Parthian king (Ardawan IV).¹⁵ In the story of Qardagh’s appointment, his father Gušnōy receives “great gifts and honors” from the Sasanian court. These royal gifts highlight the bond between the pagan king and pagan father, against whom young Qardagh will rebel.

Qardagh’s conversion to Christianity threatens the political, economic, and spiritual health of his parents’ household. News of their son’s apostasy reaches Gušnōy and his wife at their estate in Dbar Hewton, northeast of Arbela, where they had built a “renowned fire temple . . . in which they lived (*beh ‘āmrin hwaw*).”¹⁶ Their residence in a fire temple provides literary support for a pattern well documented in the archaeology of Sasanian Iran.¹⁷ Such details suggest the hagiographer’s familiarity with the critical role of fire temple endowments in the transmission of Sasanian familial wealth. Fire temples associated with particular Zoroastrian families received substantial tracts of inalienable property in the late Sasanian Empire.¹⁸ The hagiographer explicitly links the wealth of Qardagh’s family to their fire temple and surrounding estates in Dbar Hewton.¹⁹ While both parents are “sorely grieved” by the news of Qardagh’s apostasy, it is his father, who articulates their fears:

And his father said to the mother of the blessed one, “This is a great evil that has befallen us, and we have become a curse to our peers. And while we hoped

nineteenth century, provincial governors of Qajar Iran waited anxiously to receive the robe that would confirm their reception of royal office.

15. *Chronicle of Ardashīr*, I, 26–7 (Sanjana, 6; 6–7; Nöldeke, 39). As noted in chapter 2, the *Ardashīr Romance* is one of the few works of Sasanian court literature to survive in its original Pahlavi form.

16. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 37: *bēt nūrwā had mšamhā haw d-ēbnī menhōn w-beh ‘āmrin hwaw*. The hagiographer notes that this was the same fire temple “that a little later blessed Qardagh made into a great monastery.” His parenthetical comment anticipates Qardagh’s seizure and conversion of the family property. For the location of Dbar Hewton, see chapter 5, n. 99 below.

17. Note that Qardagh’s building complex at Melqi (*History of Mar Qardagh*, 7 and passim) also combines a fire temple with an aristocratic residence. For the archaeology of fire temple/palace complexes in late Sasanian Iran, see chapter 5.

18. Sasanian fire temples are the predecessors, in this respect, of the *waqf* foundations of the medieval Islamic world. See, in general, Boyce, “Sacred Fires of the Zoroastrians,” 52–68; idem, “Pious Foundations,” 270–81. For their similarity to *waqf* foundations, see M. Macuch, “Pious Foundations in Byzantine and Sasanian Law,” in *La Persia e Bisanzio* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2004), 183 with bibliography.

19. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 37: “They had abundant possessions and riches there.” The depiction of Dbar Hewton as a Zoroastrian stronghold is plausible, given that no bishop is attested for the region before the late eighth century. See Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 198–202; idem, *POCN*, 89–90.

to have a good heir, we have given birth to and raised the extirpator of our house.²⁰

Gušnōy sees his son's apostasy as a disastrous inversion of the normal expectations of an elite Sasanian household. As with the miracles at the stadium discussed in chapter 2, the advent of Christianity precipitates the reversal of traditional Sasanian values. Instead of a son who will care for his properties and his soul after his death, that is, a "good heir" (*yārūtā*), Gušnōy has raised a son who has become "the extirpator (*ʿāqūrā*) of our house." Gušnōy's fears are justified. Upon the eve of his departure for battle, Qardagh vows to "overturn" (*ʿāqar*) the fire temples, if the Lord aids him against his enemies.²¹ After his victory, Qardagh promptly fulfills his vow by ordering the "demolition (*ʿetʿāqar[o]*) of the fire temples that had been built by his parents."²² The repetition of the verbal root *ʿaqar*; "to overturn, uproot, extirpate," underlines the fateful progression from Gušnōy's fears to Qardagh's actions.

When Gušnōy attempts to reassert patriarchal control over his son, Qardagh's conflict with him intensifies into open hostility. In a narrative technique borrowed from earlier Syriac hagiography, Qardagh's hagiographer uses an epistolary exchange to recount the confrontation between father and son.²³ In his letter, Gušnōy chastises his son and challenges his authority to give away the "riches and properties" his family has invested in the local fire temple.²⁴ Qardagh responds to this chastisement by emphatically rejecting his father's claims to patriarchal authority:

And he wrote to him the following reply: "Behold, old man, you worship fire, because by fire you will be tortured. But I will give my possessions to Christ because together with Him I will be refreshed. And I hope and trust in Him. And the fire temples in which you take pride soon I will make them into temples of Christ, and I will set up splendid altars in them. My lot is not with you, nor is my inheritance, because Christ has called me and brought me to Him and made me a son of His hidden Father."²⁵

20. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 37.

21. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 44.

22. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 47.

23. The inspiration may ultimately derive from Christian versions of the ancient Greek novel. Letters play an important role, for example, in the *Alexander Romance*, which circulated among the Nestorians in multiple Syriac versions. For other instances of epistolary exchange in the Greek novel, see T. Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1983), 26, 126–27.

24. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 38: "And immediately, his father wrote to him [Qardagh] as follows: 'Even if you hate yourself and despise your life [literally "your soul"] and have become a Nazarene, and scorn our family and make us contemptible (*hesdā*) among our peers, you do not have the authority to distribute to the Nazarenes the possessions and riches of the fire temple.'

25. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 38.

Qardagh's letter hinges on a set of deliberate antitheses: spiritual as opposed to earthly inheritance (*yārtūtā*); the paternity of God in place of the paternity claimed by his earthly father; temples of Christ instead of temples of fire. Qardagh's break from his earthly father is thus total and irreconcilable. His pursuit of the truth of Christianity allows no concession to filial piety. He rebukes his father in the same fashion in which he rebukes demons, since both are destined to burn in the "outer darkness" of Gehenna.²⁶

The full significance of Qardagh's rebellion must be gauged against the expectations of Sasanian patriarchal norms. From their youth, children of Zoroastrian elites were exhorted to obey their parents without question.²⁷ Upon meeting, a son was expected to kiss his father's hands and feet, while the father touched his son's head and face.²⁸ Such reverence was predicated upon the Zoroastrian affirmation of the father-son bond as one of the principal channels for the transmission of religious knowledge. Ideally, boys learned the *yashts* and other sacred prayers of Zoroastrianism directly from the mouths of their fathers and other male relatives.²⁹ As one Persian apostate, a native of Ganzak (Iranian Azerbaijan), explains his upbringing, "My father was a Magian, and he instructed me also in the religion of the Magians."³⁰ In return for this instruction, the sons of Sasanian elites were expected to perform sacrifices for the souls of their fathers during the annual

26. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 38: "Our old man is a great fool and rushes to Gehenna." In an earlier passage, Qardagh rebukes the demons that will likewise suffer hellish torments: "But you, polluted ones, depart to the outer darkness." *History of Mar Qardagh*, 31, drawing upon the language of Matt. 8:12.

27. See, for example, the anonymous *Duties of a Schoolboy* (*X^w eškārī ī rēdaka*), 13 (Darmesteter, 363; 359), which advises Zoroastrian youth (*redahān*): "Upon entering the house, place yourself in front of your father and mother with your hand(s) under your armpits in a stance of obedience. Everything which they order you to do, do it with acumen just as they instruct you." The text is preserved only in a Pazend translation (Middle Persian transcribed in an Avestan script). For context and bibliography, see Shaked, "Andarz," 13 (chapter 2, n. 33 above). For the production of Pazend texts among the Parsees of northwest India, see Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 168–69. For an illustration of the recommended gesture, see *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 206–7 (no. 61), a sixth-century Sasanian bowl now in the Hermitage, depicting four men standing with folded arms before the enthroned King of kings.

28. D. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Etiquette (I): In the Sasanian Period," *Enc. Ir.* 9 (1999): 45–48, here 45.

29. M. Boyce, "Zoroaster the Priest," *BSOAS* 33 (1970): 23, though citing here only Parsee sources. For the tradition of father-to-son religious instruction among the Zoroastrians of fourth-century Asia Minor, see de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 68–69, on Basil of Caesarea's *Epistle* 258.4. The Pahlavi sources, reflecting priestly interests, emphasize training in formal institutions. See Morony, *Iraq*, 293–94; de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 72–75, 450–51. For the education of Zoroastrian women, see n. 113 below.

30. *Acts of St. Eustathius of Mtskheta*, in *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, trans. D. Lang (1956; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 96; see also 101, where Eustathius (†545) again emphasizes his father's direct involvement in his religious education: "By day my

Zoroastrian Feast of All Souls, the Fravardigān, “(the ten days dedicated to) the Fravašis,” when the spirits of pious men would return to earth and dwell among their families, eating and drinking the provisions laid out for them on the rooftops.³¹ Paternity also had specific eschatological dimensions arising from the special role of the Iranian people in the cosmic battle against evil. As Ali-Akbar Mazaheri writes in his important study of the pre-Islamic Iranian family:

Paternity is, in a way, the principal duty of man during his mission on earth. To battle against Evil, to contribute to the progress and final victory of Good, that is, to aid Ahura Mazda in the great combat he wages against Ahriman. In this struggle between the Light and the Shadows, between the entities of Ahura Mazda and the malice of the Demon, man, who was created by Ahura Mazda, must play an active role in propagating the race of God.³²

Zoroastrian doctrine thus mandated the propagation of male progeny as an essential religious duty for all believers. The levirate marriages (Phl. *čakarīh*) widely practiced among the Sasanian aristocracy ensured that even a husband who died childless would become the “father” of a son born to his widow and another man after his death.³³ Believers who failed to produce a male

father would instruct me in the Magian religion, but at night when the Christians rang the bell, I used to go and listen to their liturgy and observe the service which the Christians performed in honor of God.”

31. For Al-Biruni’s description of the Fravardigān as it was still celebrated among his Zoroastrian neighbors in tenth-century Transoxiana, see M. Boyce, trans., *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Manchester and Dover, NH: Manchester University Press, 1984), 68. W. W. Malandra, “Fravardigān,” *Enc. Ir.* 10 (2001): 199; Boyce, “Fravaši,” *Enc. Ir.* 10 (2001): 195–96, on the assimilation of *fravašis* to the *urvans*, i.e., the souls of the dead.

32. A. Mazéhiri, *La famille iranienne aux temps anté-islamiques* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve, 1938), 160: “La paternité est en quelque sorte le principal devoir de l’homme pendant sa mission sur terre. Lutter contre le Mal, contribuer au développement et à la victoire finale du Bien, c’est aider Ohrmazd dans le suprême combat qu’il livre à Ahriman. Dans cette lutte entre la Lumière et les Ténèbres, entre les êtres ahuriens et l’engeance du Démon, l’Homme, qui est créé par Ohrmazd, doit jouer un rôle actif, en propageant la race de Dieu.” Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) and Ahriman are, respectively, the supreme good and evil divine powers of the universe in Zoroastrian theology.

33. M. Shaki, “Čakar,” *Enc. Ir.* 4 (1992): 647–48, concisely surveys the extensive literary evidence. For the legal sources, see the glossary of the *Sasanian Law Book* (trans. Perikhanian), 346; also 387–88, on the more general tradition of the *stūr*; the “person (woman or man) upon whom is laid the obligation to provide a successor for a dead man who has left no male issue” (387). A. Perikhanian was the first to clarify the nature of the institution, in “On Some Pahlavi Legal Terms,” in *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, ed. M. Boyce and I. Gershevitch (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), 353–57. The late Sasanian *Letter of Tansar* (Boyce, 46–47) affirms the absolute legitimacy of the heirs born from such unions, reviling opponents of such proxy (*stūr*) unions as having “slain innumerable souls” and “cut off the dead man’s race and memory to the end of time.”

heir could be denied passage over the Činvat Bridge leading into the land of the blessed.³⁴ While it is unlikely that Qardagh's hagiographer understood the finer points of Zoroastrian doctrine, his narrative poignantly evokes the horror that any Zoroastrian father would have felt at the apostasy and rebellion of his son.

Qardagh's relationship with his mother is more ambivalent. Although she is, like her husband, a pagan "lost in the error of Magianism,"³⁵ Qardagh's mother (we never learn her name) initially reacts to her son's conversion with considerable sympathy. She, rather than Qardagh himself, first recognizes the meaning of the dream sent to him by the "one true God."³⁶ Her sympathy leads her to propose a more lenient response to her son's redistribution of the family wealth. She tells Gušnōy:

It seems to me that we should not offend (*kšal*) him, but leave him to his own wishes to do whatever he wants.³⁷ We have already grown old and are about to die. The riches and possessions belong to him and are beneath his control, and perhaps it is a beautiful thing he has done. If we struggle to bring it to an end, perhaps we will sin.³⁸

The words of his mother anticipate Qardagh's more radical rejection of patriarchal authority. Her suggestion that the "riches and possessions belong to him" supports Qardagh's own claim to legitimate control of the family wealth ("Behold, old man. . . . I will give *my possessions* to Christ").³⁹ Her admission that "we have already grown old" (*sā'bān lan*) foreshadows Qardagh's derisive epithet for his father as an "old man" (*sābā gabrā*).⁴⁰ Indeed her words raise the possibility that she too will become a Christian, a danger that her husband explicitly acknowledges in his angry rejection of her advice.⁴¹ Significantly, though, the narrative makes nothing more of her potential to convert. When she appears again at the end of the *History*,

34. Mazéhiri, *La famille iranienne*, 85–86; A. Tafazzoli, "Činwad Puhl," *Enc. Ir.* 5 (1993): 594–95. Possibly for this same reason, Zoroastrian clergy vigorously opposed the practice of infanticide. The *Book of Ardā Virāz*, 23 (Gignoux, 185–86) tells of the souls of abandoned children in Hell: "These are the souls of those whose father made them in [the womb of their] mother, but did not claim [them] and now they cry out without ceasing for [their] father."

35. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 3.

36. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 8: "My son, I knew that you should not trouble the Christian people, because it has been proven to me that they worship the one true God. And their God revealed this dream to you."

37. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 37, possibly echoing Matt. 18:6–10.

38. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 37.

39. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 38, already quoted above.

40. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 38. Cf. also §61, where the *nekōrgan*, the father of Qardagh's wife Šušan, begs his daughter to have pity on "my old age."

41. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 37: "Be silent, fool! I think that you too are a Nazarene, and perhaps you made your son go out of his mind."

Qardagh's mother acts in concert with the larger family group, who stubbornly adhere to their paganism.⁴² The legend's narrative momentum seems to preclude the conversion of *any* member of the saint's biological family.

Qardagh's relationship with his wife Šušān exposes similar tensions between the duties of kinship and Christian identity.⁴³ Together with Qardagh's parents and their entire household, she too is "deeply distressed" by his squandering of the familial wealth on Christian charity.⁴⁴ In her anger she turns to her own father for help, preparing a letter to send him. The narrator identifies Šušān's father not by name, but by his official Sasanian title as the *šāher kwāst šabūr nekōrgan*. While the inclusion of Persian titles is common in Sasanian martyr legends, the long version of the *nekōrgan*'s title used here is unique.⁴⁵ The hagiographer's use of the title to identify Šušān's father draws attention to the mutually reinforcing layers of political and familial allegiance within the Sasanian system of government. Later in the narrative, when King Shapur learns of Qardagh's apostasy, he writes directly to Qardagh's father-in-law, the *nekōrgan*.⁴⁶ But the ultimate inconsequentiality of such royal correspondence is revealed by the vision sent to the *nekōrgan*'s daughter on the night after she has written, but not yet sent, her letter protesting Qardagh's dissipation of the family wealth. In this dream vision, Šušān sees an angel seated on a golden throne before the gate of Qardagh's castle, sending official letters to heaven "by means of handsome youths

42. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 56, where "his parents and his brothers" beg Qardagh to surrender his fortress.

43. Qardagh's wife remains anonymous through most of the text (§§27, 36, 39–41, 43, 45, and 54) but is identified by name in §61.

44. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 36: "But his wife and his parents and all the men of his household became deeply distressed when they saw all his lavish spending."

45. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 39 (cf. §§59 and 61). Philippe Gignoux (personal correspondence, July 2003) suggests that the first part of the title may refer to a Sasanian administrative district named Šahr-xwāst-Šābur, still unknown at the time of publication of Gyselen, *Géographie administrative*, 92, fig. 92, a map of the districts (*šahr*) mentioned in late Sasanian glyptics. For the more general office of *nekōrgan* (Phl. *naxwāragān*), well attested in the literary sources (Greek, Arabic, Persian, and Armenian), see T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879; repr., Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1973), 152–53 n. 2. It is, however, often unclear in the Islamic sources whether the term signifies an office or family name. Cf. Bosworth, *Sāsānids*, 147 n. 377; Morony, *Iraq*, 151, 192–93.

46. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 59. The etymology of the *nekōrgan*'s title offered by Abbeles, "Acta Mar Qardaghi," 53–54 n. 1, as the "provincial chief of royal correspondence" fits the sense of the passage, but unfortunately not the philology (see n. 45 above). Other sources emphasize the financial and military powers of the *nekōrgan*'s office. See, e.g., the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (Nöldeke, 12; Guidi, 18–19), for the *nekōrgan* sent by Khusro II with "a great army and elephants" to suppress the revolt at Nisibis.

clothed in white garments and flying by wings of the spirit.”⁴⁷ The vision thus gives Qardagh’s wife (and the legend’s audience) a glimpse of a royal chancellery far more powerful than the one that links her father to the Persian king. In this heavenly chancellery, angels record the “gifts and alms” of her husband.⁴⁸ The hagiographer’s description of this heavenly chancellery offers a curious blend of conventional Christian imagery and details from contemporary Sasanian administration. The letter writer “holding a pen of fire” and “the handsome youths clothed in white garments” and flying to heaven “by wings of the spirit” belong to the common visual repertoire of late antique visionary literature.⁴⁹ The signet ring (*‘ezqtā*) used by the divine letter writer, on the other hand, could reflect contemporary Sasanian practice.⁵⁰ The hagiographer melds these various elements to create an “awesome vision,” but even this is not enough to save the saint’s wife from her paganism. Šušān fails to heed the vision sent to her: “You tell a great lie,” the archangel tells her, “because your heart is on earth.”⁵¹ Like his mother, Qardagh’s wife misses the opportunity for conversion that briefly opens before her.

Qardagh accepts his wife’s failure with equanimity. In his view, God has already ordained schism between the believer and his family. In words that echo the prophecy of the archangel, Qardagh tells his wife that her heart has already been “hardened” to the Gospel:

Truly, great and awesome and true is the vision, but your heart is hardened, for our Lord said in his Gospel, “*I have come to divide a man against his father, daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in law, and [to make]*

47. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 39: “But when she saw that awesome vision and the youths ascending and descending to transmit the letters to heaven, she came before him and asked him [the letter-writer], saying, ‘Who are you, my lord, and what is your work? Why do you sit here with the *marzbān* unaware of you? And what are you writing?’”

48. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 39: “And that one [the angel] answered and said to her, ‘I am the general of the Lord God who made heaven and earth. The Great King of Ages sent me that I might record in writing the gifts and alms that your husband makes and send an account of them to heaven.’” The idea of a heavenly register in which angels record the deeds of saints and sinners is widely attested in the Christian literature of late antiquity. For other examples, see Koep, *Das himmlische Buch*, 68–85; with further bibliography and parallels cited above in §39 of the translation, nn. 136–37.

49. See, for example, the angels depicted in the Ascension scene of the Rabbula manuscript, reproduced in Weitzmann, *Early Christian Book Illumination*, 36; and again in J. Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London: Phaidon, 1997), 93 (fig. 51).

50. For the proliferation of stamp seal use during the late Sasanian period, see Frye, “Sasanian Seal Inscriptions,” 79; Gyselen, *Géographie administrative*, 3–5. On the other hand, there is nothing that rules out a direct scriptural model, as, for example, the scenes of royal administration at Esther 3:10–12; 8:2, 8–10; further references at Payne Smith, *TS*, 2: 2854–55.

51. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 39. Cf. the proper acceptance of revisions in §§9, 33, and esp. 66, where Qardagh and his servant Isaac correctly interpret the vision prefiguring Qardagh’s martyrdom.

the men of his household a man's enemies. And all this up to the point that even between a man and his wife, who are of one flesh, there will be division and schism."⁵²

Though based on scripture, Qardagh's explanation of his wife's fate depends upon a peculiar conflation of verses. The passage from Matthew 10:35 with which he begins predicts only intergenerational division; there is no mention of conflict between husbands and wives. Qardagh adds to the verse, therefore, a trailer ("And all this . . . division and schism") that uses language culled from the parallel passage in Luke.⁵³ Qardagh then appends a further apocalyptic verse, Luke 17:34 ("There will be two in one bed, and one shall be taken and the other left behind"), and presents the whole as proof-text for the destruction of his marriage. Qardagh even reinterprets *negatively* Genesis 2:24 ("Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother, and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh"), the same passage that Jesus cites at Matthew 19:3–6 to *defend* the sanctity of marriage.⁵⁴ This conflation of scripture owes a strong debt to the exegetical strategies forged by early Syrian ascetics. In this "enkratite" tradition of exegesis represented, for instance, by Aphrahat, even Genesis 2:24 becomes a warning against the dangers of marriage.⁵⁵

The simmering conflict between Qardagh and his noble Sasanian family comes to a head in the closing scenes of the legend. In a vignette implicitly modeled on Matthew 12:46 (Jesus's rejection of his family), the saint's parents and brothers approach beneath the wall of Qardagh's castle, imploring him not to leave "a bad name for our illustrious family."⁵⁶ Although he would like to persuade them, Qardagh cannot tolerate his family's heathenism. And he steadfastly refuses to follow them back into "the bondage of a wicked pagan king."⁵⁷ Their error is simultaneously religious and political. Since they shudder at his "blasphemy" against King Shapur, Qardagh treats them with

52. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 40, quoting Matt. 10:35–36 (cf. Luke 12:51).

53. Cf. Luke 12:51: "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division (*pelgūtā*)."

54. Cf. Matt. 19:4–6, Jesus's condemnation of divorce before the Pharisees.

55. Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 18:10–11 (Pierre, 761–62, esp. n. 35; Parisot, 839–42), where the fourth-century poet interprets the father and mother of Gen. 2:24 as God the father and the Holy Spirit (always feminine in Syriac). For the broader exegetical tradition underlying this interpretation, see R. Murray, "The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows to Baptism in the Ancient Syrian Church," *New Testament Studies* 21 (1975): 68–72, revising the conclusions of the fundamental study by A. Vööbus, *Celibacy: A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (Stockholm: The Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1951).

56. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 56. In the Gospel scene (Matt. 12:46), it is Jesus's "mother and brothers" who come to see him. The hagiographer deliberately mentions the presence of both the saint's parents, since his father will soon play a key role in Qardagh's death.

57. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 56, where Qardagh laments his family's failure to "have pity on yourselves even as I pity you."

the contempt they deserve.⁵⁸ Ultimately, they are no better than the Zoroastrian *magi*, who are the next supplicants to approach the castle walls at Melqi. When Qardagh shoots an arrow straight through the head of the chief *magus*, “his noble relatives” depart in grief closely on the heels of “all the *magi*.”⁵⁹

The final individuals to approach the fortress wall are Qardagh’s father, Gušnōy, and his father-in-law, the *nekōrgan*. The parallelism is deliberate. In the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Qardagh refuses his father an audience, citing Matthew 10:37. His wife proves more pliable when her father comes and pleads with his “beloved” daughter to “have pity on my old age.”⁶⁰ Moved by this dramatic appeal, Šušan turns against her Christian husband and prods him with deceptive words to surrender his fortress. An audience familiar with the conventions of hagiography would have no difficulty recognizing the significance of her failure. Šušan’s capitulation presents an inverse image of the pious resolution of female saints, who staunchly resist the blandishments of persecutors addressing them in the language of paternal affection.⁶¹ By obeying the treacherous advice of her worldly father, Šušan has, in effect, accepted the spiritual paternity of Satan. The genealogical language Qardagh uses to respond to his wife underlines this correspondence. Qardagh rebukes his wife as “the daughter of destruction” (*barteh d-’bdānā*), whose words are “the fruit of evil and of the progeny of the Crafty One, that is, Satan.”⁶² He also foresees her failure; even before she leaves the fortress to meet the *nekōrgan*, Qardagh informs his wife that by listening to her father’s plea she will earn her “destruction.”⁶³

The degeneration of Qardagh’s worldly family is compensated by the formation of his new spiritual family, a brotherhood of saints and hermits who oversee his spiritual development. Chief among these “fathers” and “brothers”

58. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 56: “Then the blessed one laughed and said to them, ‘Truly you are wretched, you who blaspheme against God the Creator and Provider of the worlds.’”

59. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 57.

60. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 61.

61. See, for example, the Syriac *Acts of Febronia*, 22 (Brock and Harvey, 164–65; Bedjan, 594), where the heroine rejects the advances of the pagan judge who offers to treat her as “my own beloved daughter.” Brock and Harvey suggest a late sixth- or early seventh-century Edessan provenance for the legend. For a Sasanian example, see the dialogue between the chief *magus* and the martyr Anahit in the East-Syrian *Acts of Mar Pethion* (Brock and Harvey, 90; Bedjan, 590). Here, in the Qardagh legend, it is Šušan’s biological father who makes the appeal in language strangely reminiscent of one of the most famous martyr scenes from the Latin West. See the *Acts of Perpetua*, 5 (Musurillo, 112–13), with the commentary of B. Shaw, “The Passion of Perpetua,” *Past and Present* 139 (1993): 22–23, on the “four traumatic meetings” between Perpetua and her father.

62. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 61. Cf. §35, where Satan bewails his loss of paternal control over Mar Qardagh: “Qardagh, my son, why have you deserted me and gone over to my enemies?”

63. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 61: “Go out to your father and see what he seeks from you. But I know that you will earn the destruction of your life from his words.”

in Christ is the hermit Abdišo, who first proves to the *marzbān* the error of his “Magianism” through a combination of philosophical argumentation and miracles (see chapter 3). Ascending to the mountains of Beth Bgāsh to seek the hermit’s forgiveness, Qardagh immediately addresses his new spiritual mentor in the language of filial piety. He greets Abdišo “like a merciful father, who has released us from the bonds of paganism.”⁶⁴ Abdišo, in turn, employs the same respectful language of paternity, when he greets his own “father” and spiritual mentor, the anchorite Beri.⁶⁵ In the Christian ascetic community Qardagh now joins, the language of paternity serves as a legitimate expression of love and submission. These scenes of the Qardagh legend hint at the long tradition of desert spirituality that underlies the measured asceticism of the late Sasanian church. The *Apophthegmata of the Fathers*, translated into Syriac during the late sixth and seventh centuries, provided Sasanian Christian readers with stories of the Egyptian desert that asserted the priority of ascetic discipleship over all other forms of spiritual training. As one elder told a “brother” who could find no peace in his cell, “Go attach yourself to a man who fears God, humble yourself before him, give up your will to him, and then you will receive consolation from God.”⁶⁶ During the period of his ascetic retreat, Qardagh forms precisely this kind of relationship with the hermit whose miracles have revealed him to be a “man of God.”⁶⁷ Following their simple communal meal, Qardagh volunteers his total obedience to his new Christian mentor: “Whatever is your desire, my father, joyfully will I fulfill it.”⁶⁸

The Christian family Qardagh acquires upon his conversion extends into the spiritual world. Appearing to Qardagh as a young knight “clad and girded with armor,” Mar Sergius directs and strengthens Qardagh on his path to martyrdom.⁶⁹ The equestrian warrior carved in the grotto at Taq-i Bustan (see figure 8) gives an approximate idea of what Mar Sergius must have looked like as he stood over Qardagh and “stabbed him in his side with the

64. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 30: “Although we in our error put you in chains, you released us from the bonds of paganism. . . . And like a merciful father (*ʿabā mraḥmānā*), may you ask our Lord to absolve the sins we committed before Him.” Abdišo acknowledges his paternity by repeatedly addressing Qardagh as “my son” (§§28, 30, 32, and 46)

65. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 33: “Abdišo said to him, “Forgive me, our father. I told [myself] that I should not trouble your old age, something that should never be allowed.”

66. I. Hausherr, *Direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois* (Rome: PISO, 1955), 162; D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Tradition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 77, on the pedagogy of spiritual direction, with further bibliography at 26 n. 18.

67. For spiritual obedience in the ascetic retreat of Beth Bgāsh, see the scenes depicted at *History of Mar Qardagh*, 33 and 35.

68. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 32.

69. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 7. See also §§30, 34, and 53. All of these visions take place at night, whereas in other hagiographies, saints often receive diurnal visions. For references, see the translation, §8, n. 24.

tip of his spear.⁷⁰ The depiction of Sergius taps into both Iranian and Syrian Christian traditions of imagining spiritual beings. On the one hand, Sergius's appearance as an equestrian warrior links him to Iranian notions of the *fravašis*, the ancestral spirits that "inhabited the upper air, and could, if duly venerated, swoop like birds to aid their living kinsmen, fighting invisibly beside them in battle."⁷¹ The equestrian warrior depicted at Taq-i Bostan has, for instance, sometimes been interpreted as the *fravaši* of Khusro II.⁷² On the other hand, Sergius's similarity to Qardagh echoes the Syrian Christian tradition of the "spiritual twin," a prominent feature of early Syriac and Manichaean literature.⁷³ Whatever the underlying concepts, the saints' similarity is defined here as a type of spiritual fraternity. During his second appearance, Mar Sergius makes explicit Qardagh's opportunity to achieve this higher and truer form of kinship: "My brother Qardagh" he says, "you have begun well. Struggle bravely that you may become my brother for eternity."⁷⁴ Qardagh's spiritual family continues to grow throughout the legend. He finds another fraternal patron even as he prepares to be stoned by his own father. When St. Stephen appears to Qardagh in a final vision before his martyrdom, his first words are "Qardagh, my brother."⁷⁵ Although Qardagh has lost one family because of their ignorance and obstinacy, he has gained another, and a far superior, family as a Christian.

70. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 7. The term used for Sergius's weapon, *nayzkā*, is a loanword based on the Pahlavi term for a lance or spear, *nēzag*. Brockelmann, *LS*, 427. For the Pahlavi term, see MacKenzie, *CPD*, 59; A. Tafazzoli, "A List of Terms for Weapons and Armor in Western Middle Iranian," *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 3 (1993–94): 190.

71. M. Boyce, "The Absorption of the *Fravašis* into Zoroastrianism," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 48, nos. 1–2 (1995): 26, paraphrasing the imagery of the Avestan hymn, *Yašt* 13. See also J. H. Moulton, "Fravashi," in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh, 1913; repr., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 5: 116–18; and M. Boyce, "Fravaši," *Enc. Ir.* 10 (2001): 195–99.

72. The Zoroastrian *Bundahišn* lends support to this identification with its description of the *fravašis* as "valiant horsemen, [carrying] lance (*nēzag*) in hand." Some scholars of Zoroastrianism, however, have rejected this hypothesis. See, for instance, J. Kellens, "Les frauuašis dans l'art sassanide," *Iranica Antiqua* 10 (1973): 133–38 (134 for the passage from the *Bundahišn* quoted here). According to Boyce, "Fravaši," 198 (n. 71 above), there is no definite figural representation of the *fravašis* in Iranian art.

73. See, for example, the *Acts of Thomas*, 39 (Klijn, 108; Wright, 180; Syr. pagination, 208, 11. 8–9), where the apostle Thomas is described as the "twin" of Christ. Elsewhere in the same text, the Lord identifies himself as Thomas's "brother." *Acts of Thomas*, 11–12 (Klijn, 51–52; Wright, 155; Syr. pagination, 181, 1.2). On the origins of twin imagery in Syrian Christian tradition, see R. Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London and New York: T. and T. Clark, 2003), 10–11, 19–22, 94–97.

74. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 30. Note also §34, where Sergius chastises Abdišo for delaying "opening the gate of martyrdom before my brother Qardagh."

75. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 62. The dialogue between Qardagh and St. Stephen echoes Qardagh's initial dialogue with St. Sergius.

CHRISTIAN FAMILY BONDS IN THE
HAGIOGRAPHY OF THE PERSIAN MARTYRS

Early Sasanian martyr literature provides an instructive contrast to the story of familial strife in the Qardagh legend. The earliest hagiography of the Persian martyrs—composed during the late fourth and fifth centuries C.E.—typically emphasizes the solidarity of Christian family bonds in the face of persecution. Consider, for instance, the *Acts of Mar Pusai and His Daughter Martha*, two well-documented martyrs of the “Great Persecution” under Shapur II.⁷⁶ Pusai’s hagiographer opens his narrative with a detailed account of his hero’s Christian family. A descendant of the Roman captives in Fars, Pusai lived “peacefully” as a Christian under Sasanian rule; he married a local Persian woman, “taught her, baptized his children, and raised and instructed them in Christianity.”⁷⁷ Royal policy, we are told, actively encouraged such intermarriage so that the deportees, “chained (by the bonds) of family and love,” would be unable to flee back to their homeland.⁷⁸ Pusai’s hagiographer warmly describes the unexpected consequences of this policy. What Shapur had invented “in his craftiness . . . God in His Mercy used it for good.” By the intermixture of the descendants of the captives with the native Persian population, God “captured the gentiles for the true doctrine.”⁷⁹ The hagiographer thus frames Pusai’s story as the history of an entire Christian family. “Blessed Mar Pusai, his wife, children, brothers and sisters and entire household” were moved as a group when Shapur ordered the transfer of settlers to Karka-d-Ledan, the new royal foundation fifteen kilometers north of Susa on the Karkeh River.⁸⁰

76. For the Syriac texts, see Bedjan, *AMS*, 2: 208–33, 233–41; German translation in Braun, *Auszüge*, 58–82; English translation of the *Acts of Mar Martha* in Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 67–73. On the textual history of the *acta*, see Wiessner, *Märtyrerüberlieferung*, 94–105; Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 187. Although no exact date can be given for the texts, they probably date to the early to mid-fifth century.

77. *Acts of Mar Pusai*, 2 (Braun, 58; Bedjan, 208–9). My section numbers for the *acta* correspond to the divisions in Braun’s translation. Unless another English translation is noted, all translations of the Syriac *acta* in this chapter are my own, based on the texts in Bedjan, *AMS*. Pusai’s hagiographer appears to have compressed the chronology of two separate deportations, conflating Shapur I (239–270) with Shapur II (309–379); so argues Braun, *Auszüge*, 58 n. 2. Note the specificity of the text: Pusai is said to be “from the stock (*tawledtā*) of the captives whom Shapur [I] transported from Roman territory.” Cf. Kettenhofen, “Deportations,” 298–99, 302–3 (chapter 1, n. 33 above), for the deportations to Khuzistan under both Shapur I and Shapur II.

78. *Acts of Mar Pusai*, 2 (Braun 59; Bedjan, 209), literally “the captives would be chained (down) by their families and their love (*b-šarbāthōn wa b-hūbhōn*).” The hagiographer’s language is deliberately ironic. For real chains used during the deportation of some groups of captives, see Kettenhofen, “Deportations,” 303.

79. *Acts of Mar Pusai*, 2 (Braun, 59; Bedjan, 209).

80. *Acts of Mar Pusai*, 2 (Braun, 59; Bedjan, 209). The Syriac reads literally “his wife, his children, his brothers and his sisters, and his entire household.” For the city of Karka-d-Ledan (Phl.

Despite his acquisition of great honors in this new city, where he was appointed head of the royal weavers' guild, Pusai never forgets his Christian family roots. Arrested and interrogated by the grand *mōbad*, Pusai adamantly refuses to betray "the religion of my parents."⁸¹

The *Acts of Mar Martha, Daughter of Pusai* develops more explicitly this theme of the unity of the Christian family under Sasanian Zoroastrian persecution. In her dialogue with the *mōbad* who oversees her trial, Martha forcefully asserts her ambition to imitate her father's example. Asked if she is the "daughter of that crazy Pusai who went out of his mind and opposed the king," Martha describes the dual genealogy that binds her to her father. She is already his daughter "in human terms" (*[ʔ]nāšā'yit*); she hopes by her confession to become also his "true daughter" (*banat šīrātā*), that is, his spiritual daughter as a fellow Christian.⁸² By her martyrdom, Martha achieves her desire to die "like my father for the sake of my father's God."⁸³ She thanks God for preserving her in the faith "in which I was born, in which my parents brought me up, and in which I was baptized."⁸⁴ Even the rites of burial serve to confirm the unity of their Christian family. After the martyrdom of his sister, Martha's brother embalms her body and lays it next to her father's grave.⁸⁵ Christian audiences of early fifth-century Mesopotamia needed such stories. As persecution receded under the rule of Yazdegird I (339–420), the fledgling Church of the East increasingly assimilated into the political and social structures of the Sasanian Empire. Stories of Christian heroism during the "great slaughter" reminded the community of its origins as a half-foreign and persecuted minority. Martyrs whose faith was founded on the bedrock of Christian family bonds were appropriate heroes for a generation whose sons (and perhaps daughters) had new opportunities for social advancement within the fabric of Sasanian society.

The redeeming power of Christian family bonds also constitutes a significant theme of the mid-Sasanian martyr literature composed during the

Erānšahr-Šapur), see Kettenhofen, "Deportations," 299; Fiey, "L'Élam," 123–30, for its ecclesiastical history. For its location (*contra* Fiey, 122), see the *Barrington Atlas*, 92 (D4).

81. *Acts of Mar Pusai*, 4 (Braun, 61; Bedjan, 212). For Pusai's career as indicative of the critical economic contribution of skilled foreign craftsmen in Sasanian Mesopotamia, see Pigulevskaya, *Les villes*, 159–61; Kettenhofen, "Deportations," 304–5.

82. *Acts of Mar Martha*, 1 (Brock and Harvey, 68; Bedjan, 234): "To this the blessed girl replied, 'Humanly speaking, I am his daughter, but also by faith I am the daughter of Pusai. . . . If only God would hold me worthy to be a true daughter of this blessed Pusai, who is now with the saints in light and eternal rest, while I am still among sinners in this world of sorrows.'"

83. *Acts of Mar Martha*, 1 (Brock and Harvey, 69; Bedjan, 235).

84. *Acts of Mar Martha*, 3 (Brock and Harvey, 71; Bedjan, 238). It is significant in this context that Marta had been consecrated as a "daughter of the covenant." Her oath of virginity ensured that her father would remain her closest male relative.

85. *Acts of Mar Martha*, 4 (Brock and Harvey, 72; Bedjan, 240).

mid- to late fifth century. The story of Jacob of Beth Lapat, an official in the court of Bahrām Gōr (420–438), exemplifies the rhetorical structure of this second wave of Sasanian martyr literature.⁸⁶ Jacob's career illustrates how the new opportunities open to Christians in the fifth-century Sasanian Empire heightened the danger of apostasy. Forsaking the faith of his parents, Jacob converted to Zoroastrianism "because of the flattery of the king and ephemeral gifts and donations."⁸⁷ Jacob's hagiographer tells of the immediate response by the apostate's closest female relatives. When his mother and wife learn of Jacob's apostasy, they send him a letter informing him that "henceforth, we will have nothing to do with you, and you will have no portion or inheritance with us."⁸⁸ Stung by this rebuke, Jacob remembers his Christian identity, repents, and ultimately earns the crown of martyrdom (the gruesome narrative of his dismemberment by the royal torturers accounts for his epithet "the Sliced"). The same narrative pattern structures the *Acts of Mar Peroz*, another Christian nobleman of Khuzistan, executed in 421, early in the reign of Bahrām Gōr.⁸⁹ When his parents and wife learn of Peroz's apostasy under torture, they send him a letter "full of pain and suffering," which shocks Mar Peroz back to his senses:

When my father and my mother and my brothers and my wife write to me in the this way and decree, "You have no more portion with us, because you have departed from the truth, you are no longer our son, nor are we your parents,

86. For the Syriac text of Jacob's *acta*, see Bedjan, *AMS*, 2: 539–58; German translation in Braun, *Auszüge*, 150–78. The saint is most often identified by his epithet Mar Jacob "the Sliced" (*m̐pasqā*), captured well in Braun's translation "Jacob der Zerschnittene." Jacob is one of the few Persian martyrs for whom a pictorial tradition of representation survives. For the cult of "Saint James the Persian" in Byzantium, see H. C. Evans and W. W. Wixom, eds., *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 127–28 (no. 75), on a late twelfth-century processional icon from Cyprus.

87. *Acts of Mar Jacob "the Sliced,"* 1 (Braun, 150; Bedjan, 540). See n. 14 above on the reception of gifts upon accession to a Sasanian royal post. Jacob's appointment as a "high and distinguished [official]" at the court was apparently the occasion for his conversion to Zoroastrianism. Commenting on the later cult of "James the Persian," Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, 128, suggests that the saint would have been an "especially appropriate model" at a time when the Greek Christians of Cyprus were under intense political pressure to convert to the Latin faith of the island's Frankish rulers. Jacob's status as an Oriental (he is depicted with a Phrygian cap, earring, and a shield bearing pseudo-Kufic script) also made him a useful bridge figure, attractive to both Latin and Greek Christians during the period of the Crusades.

88. *Acts of Mar Jacob "the Sliced,"* 1 (Braun, 150; Bedjan, 540). There is no mention of Jacob's father or other family members.

89. For the Syriac text of the *Acts of Mar Peroz*, see Bedjan, *AMS*, 4: 253–62; German translation in Braun, *Auszüge*, 163–69. Mar Peroz's hagiographer apparently wrote during the latter half of the fifth century, since he reports (§2) that some of the confessors persecuted under Yazdegerd II (438–457) were still alive in his own generation, while others had passed away.

nor is your consort your wife,” what shall I do after my parents have disowned me? Where shall I go? Where should I hide? What will give me joy?⁹⁰

Peroz’s anxiety highlights the central role of familial bonds in defining social identity in the Sasanian world. Without his family, Peroz is a social pariah with nowhere to go and no source of solace. As in the story of Mar Jacob “the Sliced,” sharp criticism from his Christian family provides Peroz with the impetus he needs to become a true witness to his ancestral faith. In these martyr portraits of the mid- to late fifth century, familial bonds and Christian identity are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Recent studies of West-Syrian hagiography provide useful context for this narrative pattern in which pious mothers encourage their sons to achieve the crown of martyrdom. West-Syrian martyr narratives present multiple examples of mothers, most often widows, who join their sons or daughters in defense of the faith. Building on her previous work on John of Ephesus, Susan Harvey has illuminated the special significance that the “convergence of familial bonds and ascetic vocation” could have for women.⁹¹ Focusing on relationships between mothers and daughters, Harvey argues that the distinctive features of Syrian Christian tradition—including the institution of the “daughters of the Covenant” in which girls consecrated to virginity remained within the household—created an atmosphere in which the adoption of ascetic forms of piety reinforced the affective bonds of the biological family. Extreme examples of this pattern can be found in the family martyrdoms at Najrān in southwestern Arabia. In his letter describing the Najrān persecutions of 523, the West-Syrian debater Simeon of Beth Arsham (chapter 3) describes how female martyrs rushed to join “our parents and brothers and sisters who have died for the sake of Christ our Lord.”⁹² In one exchange, reminiscent of the *Acts* of Marta and her father Pusai, a freeborn

90. *Acts of Mar Peroz*, 4 (Braun, 166; Bedjan, 257–58).

91. S. A. Harvey, “Sacred Bonding: Mothers and Daughters in Early Syrian Hagiography,” *J ECS* 4, no. 1 (1996): 27–56, here 28. For similar patterns in late Roman and Coptic hagiography, see R. Krawiec, “‘From the Womb of the Church’: Monastic Families,” *J ECS* 11, no. 3 (2003): 283–307. The hagiography of medieval Europe likewise preserves many stories of pious mothers who assist their daughters, and on occasion sons, to enter the monastic profession. See the broad synthesis by J. T. Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500–1100* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 219–21, 254–57, and 256, on pious mothers.

92. Simeon of Beth Arsham, *Second Letter: Syriac text with English translation* in I. Shahīd, *The Martyrs of Najran* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971). Simeon’s letters served, in turn, as the foundation for a more elaborate retelling of the martyrdoms at Najrān known as the *Book of the Himyarites*, ed. and trans. A. Moberg (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1924). For excerpts from both works, see Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 105–21, with further bibliography at 190–91. The quote here, from the *Book of the Himyarites* (Brock and Harvey, 117; Moberg, 33), describes the martyrdom of Ḥabsa and her two daughters, “believing freeborn women” of Najrān. For the complex nexus of texts arising from the persecution at Najrān, see

woman of Najrān named Ḥabsa taunts the Jewish king of Ḥimyar with the memory of her father:

Ḥabsa told him, "I am the daughter of Ḥayyan, of the family of Ḥayyan, the teacher by whose hand our Lord sowed Christianity in this land. My father is Ḥayyan who once burned your synagogues."

Masruq the crucifier [i.e., Dhu Nuwas, the king of Ḥimyar] said to her, "So, you have the same ideas as your father? I suppose that you too would be ready to burn our synagogue just as your father did."⁹³

Christian familial bonding is thus used as a mechanism to express the narrator's visceral hostility toward the Jews, a recurrent theme of West-Syrian literature. Simeon of Beth Arsham's *Second Letter* preserves another memorably gruesome episode. After seeing her Christian kinsmen burned alive, Ruhm, a great noblewoman of Najrān, brings her daughters before the Ḥimyarite king and instructs him: "Cut off our heads, so that we may go join our brothers and my daughters' father."⁹⁴ The executioners comply, slaughtering her daughter and granddaughter before Ruhm's eyes, and forcing her to drink their blood. Simeon's letter uses the language of familial solidarity to transform the recollection of these horrific tortures into a narrative of Christian triumph. "How does your daughter's blood taste to you?" asks the king. The martyr replies, "Like a pure spotless offering; that is what it tasted like in my mouth and in my soul."⁹⁵ While the clan-based social structure of Arabia may account for the heavy emphasis on familial honor and loyalty in the Najrān martyr narratives,⁹⁶ their paradigm of familial solidarity under persecution reflects a broader current of hagiographic narrative.

Syrian hagiographers found in the story of the Maccabees a powerful model for familial bonding under persecution.⁹⁷ As Witold Witakowski has

Beauchamp, Briquel-Chatonnet, and Robin, "La persécution des chrétiens," 15–83 (esp. 16–29 on the hagiographic sources).

93. *Book of the Himyarites* (Brock and Harvey, 117; Moberg, 32).

94. Simeon of Beth Arsham, *Second Letter* (Brock and Harvey, 113; Shahid, 25). Ruhm presents her daughters before the king "all dressed up (as if) for a wedding feast," emphasizing their status as consecrated virgins and thus brides of Christ. For commentary, see Harvey, "Sacred Bonding," 32, 41–43.

95. Simeon of Beth Arsham, *Second Letter* (Brock and Harvey, 114; Shahid, 26).

96. On this aspect of the Najrān texts, see esp. N. V. Pigulevskaya, "Les rapports sociaux à Nedjrān au début du VI^e siècle de l'ère chrétienne," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 3 (1960): 113–30; 4 (1961): 1–14. A significant indicator of these tribal loyalties is the risks taken by male relatives to recover the corpses of their executed female kin. See the *Book of the Himyarites* (Brock and Harvey, 120; Moberg, 35–36) on the corpse of the freewoman Ḥabsa; and Simeon of Beth Arsham's *Second Letter* (Brock and Harvey, 106–7; Shahid, 9–10), on the recovery of the corpse of Elizabeth, sister of the bishop Paul of Zafar.

97. For the Syriac text with English translation, see *The Fourth Book of Maccabees and Kindred*

demonstrated, the cult of the seven Maccabee brothers and their mother, Shmuni, achieved tremendous popularity in both East- and West-Syrian tradition, not least in northern Iraq.⁹⁸ A twelfth-century illustrated Gospel produced in a West-Syrian monastery of northern Iraq preserves an arresting image of the martyrdom of the last of the Maccabee brothers (see figure 9). Their mother, dressed in a brilliant purple coat, extends her right arm to welcome her seventh son, who is about to be beheaded by the executioner wielding a giant scimitar high above his head. Although later in date than the martyr literature discussed in this chapter, the miniature powerfully evokes the principle of familial solidarity in martyrdom lauded by the hagiography of Najrān and the early Sasanian martyrs. Significantly, the mother of the Maccabees makes a brief appearance in the *Acts of Jacob the Notarius*, a minor Sasanian official in the reign of Bahrām Gōr. Jacob's mother greets the news of her son's arrest by bravely rising "like the heroine Shmuni" to bring the bishop of Karka de Beth Slōk to see her son's "wedding."⁹⁹ For a late Sasanian audience, even this concise allusion drew attention to the spiritual bond formed between Jacob and his mother. A widow who controlled some portion of her family's wealth, Jacob's unnamed mother built a charitable foundation in memory of her son, who had defended the "Christian belief . . . in which also my fathers stood."¹⁰⁰ As in the *Acts of Mar Peroz and Jacob "the Sliced,"* here again in the story of Jacob

Documents in Syriac, ed. R. L. Bensly (Cambridge: The University Press, 1895). For a general introduction, see R. D. Young, "The 'Woman with the Soul of Abraham': Traditions about the Mother of the Maccabean Martyrs," in "Women Like This": *New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. A.-J. Levine (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991), 67–81.

98. W. Witakowski, "Mart(y) Shmuni, the Mother of the Maccabean Martyrs, in Syriac Tradition," in *VI Sym. Syr. 1992*, ed. R. Lavenant (Rome: PISO, 1994), 162–66, on the vitality of their cult in East-Syrian tradition. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 2: index, 870, lists fifteen churches dedicated to Shmuni and her sons in fourteen villages of the Mosul region.

99. For the Syriac text of the *Acts of Jacob the Notary*, see Bedjan, *AMS*, 4: 189–200; German translation in Braun, *Auszüge*, 170–78; here §16 (Braun, 177; Bedjan, 199). Note the shift that has taken place with this analogy. Jacob's mother is not herself a martyr, but nonetheless a crucial supporter of her son's martyrdom.

100. *Acts of Jacob the Notary*, 9 (Braun, 173; Bedjan, 193). As Jacob's hagiographer notes in an earlier passage (§7), the twenty-year-old *notarius* was "firm and strong in his faith, because he was of Roman descent" (*genseh men bnay rhūmāyē*) (Braun, 172; Bedjan, 192). Like Pusai in this respect, Jacob triumphs by standing firm in the ancestral faith of a community at risk of losing contact with its roots as a diaspora. For the charitable foundation built by Jacob's mother with the money she had initially set aside for her son's earthly wedding, see *Acts of Jacob "the Sliced,"* 17 (Braun, 178; Bedjan, 200). It is significant in this context that Jacob's mother had been "since many years" a widow (§16). Analogy with the late Roman Empire suggests the prominent role widows could play in church finance and charity. See J.-U. Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich*, Bd. 4, *Witwen und Waisen im frühen Christentum* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), 93–108.

the Notary the heroism of the martyrs is predicated on the strength of Christian family bonds.

CONVERSION AND FAMILIAL STRIFE
IN LATE SASANIAN HAGIOGRAPHY

The hagiography of the late Sasanian martyrs generally presents a much more pessimistic view of family relations. The difference in tone indicates a fundamental shift in the nature of persecution within the Sasanian Empire. As noted in chapter 1, persecution of Christianity under Khusro I (531–579) and Khusro II (590–628) diminished to sporadic prosecution of high-profile Zoroastrian apostates. Court officials, holding positions equivalent to those of Peroz and Jacob the Notary, were no longer in danger unless they were of Persian origin. The martyrs of the late Sasanian Empire were thus almost exclusively from “Magian” families. Late Sasanian hagiographers handled this theme in a variety of ways. In the *Acts* of male martyrs of the late Sasanian Empire, families tend to play, at most, a marginal role after the hero’s “pagan” upbringing. The future patriarch Mar Aba (540–552), for instance, was raised in his youth as a “bitter, hard pagan” (i.e., Zoroastrian).¹⁰¹ But we learn virtually nothing about his “Magian” family. Mar Aba’s hagiographer reports at length the future patriarch’s travels—his education at Nisibis and in the Roman Empire, his years of activity in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and his exile in Persian Azerbaijan—without a single mention of his family. This silence suggests (but cannot prove) that Mar Aba’s conversion led to the cessation of all contact with his Zoroastrian family. The monasteries and Christian schools of sixth-century Mesopotamia provided an alternative social world that could “swallow up” adult converts like Mar Aba, leaving few specific memories of their pre-Christian identity. It was only many years later, after his arrest and interrogation by the *magi*, that Mar Aba’s apostasy was invoked as one of the accusations leading to his execution.¹⁰²

Other late Sasanian hagiographers take obvious pleasure in recounting

101. For the Syriac text of the *Acts of Mar Aba*, see Bedjan, *Histoire*, 206–74; partial German translation in Braun, *Auszüge*, 188–220. Braun’s translation omits the lavish rhetorical introduction. See here *History of Mar Aba*, 1 (Braun, 188; Bedjan, 210–11), comparing Mar Aba’s conversion to that of the “blessed” Paul on the road to Damascus. On the eve of his conversion, Mar Aba was crossing the Tigris to reach the “place of his fathers” (*bēt ’abāhaw[hi]*) in the diocese of Lašom. He later returned to this region to be baptized in a village (ʿAkad) near his home. *Acts of Mar Aba*, 5 (Braun, 191; Bedjan, 216). For commentary, see Peeters, “Observations sur la Vie syriaque de Mar Aba,” 122–23.

102. *Acts of Mar Aba*, 28 (Braun, 211; Bedjan, 254); Peeters, “Observations sur la Vie syriaque de Mar Aba,” 137–38. See also the insightful remarks of Morony, *Iraq*, 299, on Christian converts from Zoroastrianism who made a “complete break with their families” and fled “to start a new life elsewhere, usually in a monastery.”

the “pagan” family credentials of their heroes. The biography of the martyr George of Izla, executed near Ctesiphon on 14 June 615, offers a good example of this rhetorical pattern. The saint’s hagiographer, Babai the Great (+628), provides the following detailed account of the homeland, ancestry, and “Magian” education of his hero:

The homeland of this blessed one was in the Orient, in Ur of the Chaldees, in Babel the confused, [the land] worshipping creatures and pouring libations to the demons, from a region (*rawstākā*) named Ḥištār and a village called Paqōryā d-Benšbail. And in accordance with the rank of the nobles, they [his family] had finely decorated houses in Maḥoze [across the river from Ctesiphon] where the king was accustomed to pass the winter. His father, whose name was Babai, held the rank of *’ōstandārā* for the protection of the border at the city of Nisibis. His father’s father, whose name was *’Abā*, was from royal stock and was prefect of New Maḥoze. His mother’s father was a *mōbad* [Syr. *mūhpātā*]. The pagan name of Mar George was Mihrmāgušnasp. He had a sister whose pagan name was Hazārwi. After their parents died as pagans and they were left behind as orphans, they moved in with their grandfather until they were grown. Mihrmāgušnasp, who later became the martyr George, was trained in Persian literature from his youth and instructed in Magianism, so that even before the age of seven he could fluently perform the offering in Magian error and held the *barsom*.¹⁰³

Babai’s account of George’s youth combines a high degree of topographic specificity (the martyr’s home was in the village Paqōryā d-Benšbail in the region Ḥištār) with scriptural allusions (Ur, Babel) that suggest the generic quality of his pagan origins.¹⁰⁴ The mention of “Ur of the Chaldees” symbolically links the future martyr to the patriarch Abraham, who also left behind his paternal household, people, and land. Other East-Syrian hagiographers make this Abraham typology more explicit.¹⁰⁵ Here, the hagiographer, Mar

103. Babai the Great, *Acts of Mar George*, 9 (Braun, 223; Bedjan, 435–36). For Babai’s goals as a hagiographer, see G. J. Reinink, “Babai the Great’s *Life of George* and the Propagation of Doctrine in the Late Sasanian Empire,” in *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium, and the Christian Orient*, ed. J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Watt (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 1999), 171–93.

104. Cf. Gen. 11:8–9 on Babel; and Gen. 11:31 on the city of Ur.

105. Cf. Gen. 12:1, where Yahweh commands Abraham to leave “your country, your family and your father’s house, for the land I will show you.” Christian exegetes in both East and West often cite Abraham’s departure from Ur as a model for ascetic renunciation. See, for example, Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 108–9, 197, on passages in Jerome, John Cassian, and Basil of Ancyra. As one might anticipate, the Abraham typology is particularly well developed in the hagiography of Abraham of Kaškar, the “father” of the late Sasanian monastic revival. See Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, I, 4 (Budge, 38; 23) on the “spiritual man, worthy of Abraham in name and country, and deed, whom He [God] established to be the father of an army of virgins and men of abstinence (*nziwē*).” See also the prologue of the later composite *Life of Abraham of Kaškar*, 2 (Nau, 162; 169).

Babai, heightens the drama of family renunciation by recording the name or rank of each of his hero's male progenitors (father as well as both grandfathers). The audience learns of the intensive training in "Magian" literature and ritual that George received under the tutelage of his paternal grandfather. Such details are typical of the late Sasanian martyr acts. Another Persian martyr, St. Anastasius (†628), is reported to have received thorough indoctrination from his father, a "magus named Bau."¹⁰⁶ Such reports of rigorous "Magian" training, while perhaps historically accurate, also serve a narrative function. Late Sasanian martyr literature revels in the progress of its heroes as they gradually break away from their "Magian" families to establish new Christian families. George (formerly Mihrmāgušnasp) takes a new Christian wife and gradually informs her and her brothers of his plan to be baptized.¹⁰⁷ Anastasius (formerly Magoundat) finds his new family in a monastery near Jerusalem.¹⁰⁸ Neither hagiography mentions familial opposition beyond the initial phase of conversion. Indeed, George succeeds in converting his sister Hazārwi, who takes the baptismal name of Maria.¹⁰⁹ Here again, the details reflect broader patterns of hagiographic narrative, and probably also actual social patterns of conversion. When the Persian martyrs find reconciliation with their biological families, it is most often with their mothers, sisters, or other female relatives.¹¹⁰

The hagiography of female martyrs of the late Sasanian Empire places, by comparison, much greater emphasis on the theme of familial strife. Their stories anticipate in this respect the tales of violent family clashes that figure prominently in the martyr legends of the late Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods. Their heroines struggle against the machinations of "Magian" fathers and husbands. The *Acts* of St. Shirin, the teenage daughter of a noble Zoroastrian family of Beth Garmai, executed in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in

106. *Acts of Anastasius the Persian*, 6 (trans. Flusin) on the martyr's father Bau, "who taught the doctrine of the *magi*, and also instructed his son from his childhood in the same religion." Flusin's commentary in *Saint Anastase le Perse*, 2: 222–26, discusses some of the same texts cited here.

107. Babai the Great, *History of Mar George*, 12 (Braun, 226; Bedjan, 441).

108. On the diverse ethnic and geographic origins of the monks of the Judean Desert, see Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse*, 2: 15–27, 34–43; Y. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 10–16, esp. map 4.

109. Babai the Great, *History of Mar George*, 13 (Braun, 227–28; Bedjan, 443–44).

110. Male relatives, by contrast, usually remain peripheral or hostile. So, for example, when Iṣō'sabran of Arbela (†620) joins the church and becomes an apostate from Zoroastrianism under the influence of his new Christian wife, his brother accuses him before the local "Magian" authorities. For the Syriac text with French paraphrase, see J. B. Chabot, "*Histoire de Jésus-Sabran*," in the *Nouvelles Archives des Missions Scientifiques et Littéraires* 7 (1897): 503–84, here *Acts of Iṣō'sabran*, 1–2 (Chabot, 510, 516; also 520 on the just death of the martyr's impious brother; French summary on 488–89).

559, typify this rhetorical pattern.¹¹¹ Shirin's hagiographer emphasizes the heathen family origins and intensive "Magian" education of the future martyr. Born into a noble Persian family that had "always brought forth fruit for the devil," Shirin was raised under the close protection of her father, a Zoroastrian *mōbad* "perfectly versed in the doctrines (*διδασκαλίαν*) of Zoroaster."¹¹² In an effort to shield his daughter from the influence of the Christian villagers of Beth Garmai, Shirin's father entrusts her to a Persian foster mother who instructs her in the Zoroastrian *yashts*.¹¹³ Shirin's conversion at the age of eighteen places her in open revolt against her "Magian" family. The hagiographer meticulously chronicles the abortive efforts of Shirin's extended family to bring her back to her "paternal religion" (*πατρικῆν θρησκείαν*).¹¹⁴ Shirin's family calls first on her foster mother as the "one most able to persuade her." Masquerading as a Christian, the Persian woman urges Shirin to have consideration for "her own brothers" and at least to restrict her Christianity to private worship.¹¹⁵ Instead the young convert grows bolder in her rejection of pagan error; her desecration of the domestic fire altar forces her brothers and other relatives to confine her to the house. In a scene reminiscent of the Qardagh legend, Shirin's relatives threaten and implore her not to "do offense to their family" by abandoning their ancestral faith.¹¹⁶ Eager for confrontation, Shirin insists on professing her Christianity before her father, the *mōbad*. In a rage, he invokes his full patriarchal authority over his daughter, ordering her to be bound, tortured, and shut up without food or drink in the company of

111. For the Greek text, see P. Devos, "Sainte Sirin, martyre sous Khosrau I^{er} Anosarvan," *AB* 64 (1946): 87–131 (text on 112–31). Devos (91–92) argues convincingly in favor of a Syriac original from the 560s or 570s; the Greek version dates to the reign of Khuro II (590–628). For a French translation and commentary, see P. Devos, "La jeune martyre Perse Sainte Širin (†559) [*BHG* 1637]," *AB* 112 (1994): 1–31.

112. *Acts of St. Shirin*, 2 (Devos, 17; 113), where Shirin's father is also identified as a *dekhan*. The section divisions appear both in Devos's Greek text and his French translation.

113. *Acts of St. Shirin*, 2 (Devos, 18; 114). Her father's solicitude for Shirin's education may reflect a general trend toward increased religious education for women among late Sasanian elites. For the Pahlavi evidence, see esp. *The Herbedestān and Neragangestān*, vol. 1, *Herbedestān*, ed. and trans. F. M. Kotwal and P. G. Kreyenbroek (Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 1992), 38–41: "on male and female candidates." The *Book of Ardā Virāz*, 68 (Gignoux, 198–99) tells of a woman in Hell who severely rebukes her husband for failing to ensure her religious education. The story of St. Shirin suggests that the challenge posed by Christian proselytizing may have been a factor in encouraging Zoroastrian religious training for women.

114. *Acts of St. Shirin*, 8 (Devos, 21; 117). Cf. §6 (Devos, 20; 116), where the devil, appearing to Shirin in dream vision, rebukes her for having taken the "clothes of a priest" and abandoning her "paternal tradition" (*πατρῶν παράδοσιν*).

115. *Acts of St. Shirin*, 8 (Devos, 21; 117).

116. *Acts of St. Shirin*, 11 (Devos, 22; 119).

magi.¹¹⁷ Neither this torture ordered by her father nor the appeals of her relatives succeed in separating Shirin from her new Christian faith. The narrative of her triumph draws attention to the ultimate weakness of “pagan” family bonds.

The martyr legends of the post-Sasanian period lay still greater stress on the motifs of renunciation and domestic conflict. Though little studied by modern scholars, these legends illustrate the persistent creativity of hagiographers interested in the tension between asceticism and biological family ties. For the sake of simplicity, I focus here on just two legends (in addition to Mar Qardagh): the late seventh-century acts of the martyrs of ʿTur Berʿayn, and the late eighth-century legend of ʿAbd al-Masih.¹¹⁸ The first legend is particularly valuable, since the manuscripts identify its author as a known individual, Gabriel of Sirzō, an East-Syrian abbot of the mid- to late seventh century.¹¹⁹ Gabriel announces the theme of familial conflict at the very outset of his work. The persecution under Shapur, the abbot writes, was a time when

parents were persecuted by their own children for the sake of faith in our Lord, and likewise children were killed by their own parents, while brothers were handed over to tortures and fearsome deaths by their own brothers.¹²⁰

Like the author of the Qardagh legend, Gabriel explains this acute intrafamilial strife as the fulfillment of “the words of our Lord”:

And thus the words of our Lord uttered beforehand to his (close) associates, that *Children will rise up against their parents and put them to death* and *They will be hated by everyone for the sake of My name* took effect in actual deeds, and all over

117. For comparable violence inflicted on another female convert from Zoroastrianism, see P. Peeters, “Sainte Golindoucht, martyre perse († 13 juillet 591),” *AB* 62 (1944): 82, where Golindoucht is savagely beaten by her Persian husband.

118. I pass over here one of the most popular East-Syrian martyr narratives, the legend of Mar Behnam and his sister Sarah. For the complex chronology of the legend’s development, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 2: 564–78; and H. Younansardaroud, “Die Legende von Mār Behnām,” in *Syriaca: Zur Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie, und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirche: 2. Deutsches Syrologen-Symposium (Juli 2000, Wittenberg)*, ed. M. Tamcke (Münster, Hamburg, and London: LIT Verlag, 2002), 185–96.

119. The attribution, though unconfirmed by outside sources, seems perfectly credible. Thomas of Marga identifies Gabriel as a late seventh-century abbot of the famous monastery of Beth ʿAbhe. Before joining the community at Beth ʿAbhe, Gabriel studied at the School of Nisibis. His only other known work is a hymn on the washing of the feet for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (unedited in MS Dijarb 70, 26). See Baumstark, *GSL*, 222; Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 147. For the Syriac text of the *History of the Martyrs of ʿTur Berʿayn*, see Bedjan, *AMS*, 2: 1–39. I cite from an unpublished translation by Sebastian Brock, with minor changes based on Bedjan’s text. See also the German summary in Hoffman, *Auszüge*, 9–16.

120. *Martyrs of ʿTur Berʿayn*, 2 (Bedjan, 2–3); my section numbers correspond to Brock’s unpublished translation.

the place, in every town, it was possible to behold the interpretation of this prophecy that was being put into effect in very deed.¹²¹

Following the Gospel of Matthew, Gabriel presents familial strife as a central component of the persecution faced by Christians during the missionary expansion of the church.¹²² He frames the reign of Shapur as an age of apostolic wonders, when God was “still openly performing miraculous signs . . . through the hands of the priests and leaders of the Church.”¹²³ Gabriel’s story then launches into a theme of enduring popularity in medieval religious narrative—the conversion of the young son or children of a persecuting monarch.¹²⁴ In this case, the narrative’s heroes are the two sons and daughter of “King Pōlar,” a fictive Zoroastrian king of central Iraq.¹²⁵ Ordered by Shapur to persecute the Christians, King Pōlar discovers to his horror that his own children have renounced their ancestral faith and become Christians.

The plot of the *Martyrs of Ṭur Berʿayn* draws upon many of the same narrative conventions found in the acts of the late Sasanian martyrs. The future martyrs Mihr-Narseh, Adarpawa, and their sister Mahdukht receive a thorough “Magian” education. Their father, King Pōlar, then sends them to Karka

121. *Martyrs of Ṭur Berʿayn*, 2 (Bedjan, 3), citing Matt. 10:21–22 (cf. Mark 13:12–13).

122. The Gospel verses cited by Gabriel appear first in the “mini-apocalypse” at Mark 13:12–13, where Jesus informs his disciples that the propagation of the Gospel “to all nations” must precede the woes of the end-time. Matt. 10:21–22 places the same verses in Jesus’s instructions to the twelve apostles. See Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties*, 111–13, 161–62, esp. 112 n. 226, on the theme of kinship enmity in Jewish apocalyptic and the prophets. On the ascetic interpretation of apocalyptic Gospel verses in the early church, see, in general, Nagel, *Motivierung der Askese*, 20–34.

123. *Martyrs of Ṭur Berʿayn*, 1 (Bedjan, 1–2); the hagiography is set in the “ninth year of the reign of the Persian king Shapur.”

124. The Christian tale of Barlaam and Josaphat, which originated as a Buddhist legend in Sanskrit, exemplifies this narrative pattern. See A. Kazhdan (in collaboration with L. F. Sherry and C. Angelidi), *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–850)* (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 1999), 96–195, here 100. As Toni Brām observes in his overview of the legend’s development, the motif of conflict between a cruel king and his virtuous son—while common to all the Christian versions of the legend—is absent from the Indian original. T. Brām, “Barlaam et Josaphat,” *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* 2 (1994): 63–83, here 72.

125. Gabriel explicitly links this king’s name to a biblical genealogy: he sets his story in the reign of “King Pōlar” (the vocalization is uncertain), “whose family was traced back to Arioch, the person who went with Kardal’amar and his fellow kings in order to fight against Sodom and Gomorrah in the time of the blessed patriarch Abraham.” *Martyrs of Ṭur Berʿayn*, 4 (Bedjan, 3), paraphrasing Gen. 14:1–7. The narrative, though fictive, preserves a few plausible Zoroastrian elements. Two of the king’s children, Mihrnarseh and his sister Mahdukht, bear genuine Zoroastrian names, while their older brother, Adarpawa, has a name built on the very common Zoroastrian element “Adur” (Fire). For the etymologies, see Gignoux, *Noms propres*, nos. 648 (Mihr-Narseh), 510–56 (various names using the prefix “Mah”), 22–87 (various names using the prefix “Adur,” e.g., Adur-duxt). For the contrast with the Qardagh legend, which preserves a much fuller knowledge of Zoroastrian institutions, see chapter 1.

de Beth Slök, hoping to impress Sasanian royal officials there with the learning and physical beauty of his children.¹²⁶ During their return journey from the court, the younger son falls from his galloping horse and breaks his thigh-bone. His injury sets in motion the chain of events leading to the children's conversion. After the arrival of the local bishop, the boy is healed, and the royal children are baptized and take up residence in a nearby cave. Their dialogues with the visitors who then come to the cave make explicit the substitution of kinship created by their conversion. While their worldly father is "tortured by anxiety" for his lost sons and daughter, the children eagerly greet the local bishop "like children rejoicing in their true father (*'abāhōn šrivā*)."¹²⁷ Their new Christian family grows with the arrival of further converts. When the royal messenger of King Shapur professes Christ, he too immediately becomes the royal children's "true brother" (*'ahā šrivā*).¹²⁸ In a last-ditch effort to reverse their apostasy, King Pōlar comes in person to retrieve his "beloved children" from the cave. In language that recalls the pleas made by the families of other martyrs, the "Magian" king reminds his children of his love, his solicitude for their education, and the public shame that their conversion has brought upon him:

My children, why won't you come to your father? Were you not well brought up and trained in doctrine as part of an excellent education? Didn't I tell King Shapur about you, so that he might show honor to you in his realm? Why have you offended your father, O my beloved children. . . . Why have you made your father infamous and a laughing stock (*matlā wa gūhkā*) throughout the whole Persian empire?¹²⁹

The king's appeal, like that of Qardagh's family, falls on deaf ears:

The glorious ones answered him kindly, saying, "We have another father whose fatherhood is more excellent than yours; it was He who told us, '*Everyone who does not leave (šabeq) father and mother and follow me is not worthy of me.*'"¹³⁰

Here again, a hagiographer has pared down Matthew 19:29 to fit his narrative design. As announced in his prologue, Gabriel's concern is to de-

126. *Martyrs of Tur Ber'ayn*, 6 (Bedjan, 4–5).

127. *Martyrs of Tur Ber'ayn*, 34–36 (Bedjan, 15–16); also 37–38 (Bedjan, 16), with explicit recognition of the bishop's status as the "spiritual father" (*'abā rūhānā*) of the holy children. Note the contrast with the Qardagh legend, where clergy hardly appear. For the episcopal see of Herbath Glal, which appears regularly in the synodical lists of the East-Syrian church between the years 410 and 605, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 136–38; idem, *POCN*, 92.

128. *Martyrs of Tur Ber'ayn*, 95 (Bedjan, 34): "The saints greatly rejoiced over him, embracing him and kissing him as a true brother."

129. *Martyrs of Tur Ber'ayn*, 56 (Bedjan, 21–22).

130. *Martyrs of Tur Ber'ayn*, 57 (Bedjan, 22), conflating Matt. 10:37 and 19:29. For a similar formulation, see *History of Mar Qardagh*, 61, quoted at n. 2 above.

scribe the intergenerational conflict caused by the spread of the Gospel (“Children will rise up and kill their parents”). In his version of the Gospel text, Jesus specifically enjoins the abandonment of “father and mother.” Yet the denouement of his narrative also hints at the possibility for reconciliation across the divide. There is no vindictiveness in the saints’ farewell to their father. The young princes and princess speak to their father “kindly” (*basima’it*), instructing him of the role that he must play in their own martyrdom.¹³¹

PAGAN FATHERS, CHRISTIAN SONS,
AND SYMPATHETIC MOTHERS

The narratives discussed above suggest that both the authors and the audiences of Persian martyr literature were intrigued by dramas of renunciation and familial strife. This aspect of the Qardagh legend links it to a broad range of Christian hagiography celebrating acts of total renunciation. But the comparison with other hagiographies also reveals some intriguing points of divergence. The rhetoric of renunciation in the Qardagh legend offers no hint of reconciliation or speaking “kindly.”

In the legend’s denouement, Mar Qardagh experiences a final vision that instructs him of the pivotal role his father must play in his martyrdom. Qardagh receives the vision shortly after his rejection of the “fraudulent appeals” of his wife Šušan:

And as he was completing the service near the break of dawn, he turned (and) saw standing upon a little mound before the gate of his fortress great crowds of men surrounding him and scattering pearls upon him. And as the pearls fell on his body, drops of blood were sprinkled in their places, and changing into lamps of fire, they flew up to heaven. And a certain man dressed in resplendent garments and crowned with a crown of light was standing over him in the air and said to him, “Qardagh, my brother.”

And he said, “It is I.”

And he said to him, “Those pearls were sprinkled also upon me in Jerusalem by the children of my people and my race. Now your father will come and cast also at you one pearl. And immediately you will come up to me with joy.”¹³²

In this vision, St. Stephen of Jerusalem shows Mar Qardagh a symbolic enactment of his impending martyrdom. The vision’s imagery masks the inherent violence of the event. Instead of stones, the crowds strike Qardagh with pearls (a favorite image of Syriac writers), and the pearls, transformed into “drops of blood” upon contact with the martyr’s body, ascend to heaven

131. *Martyrs of Tur Ber’ayn*, 98–99 (Bedjan, 35). Their father obliges their request: “He then gave orders to one of the horsemen to go and kill them.”

132. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 62. Cf. Acts 6:8–15, 54–59.

as “lamps of fire” (*lampidē d-nūrā*).¹³³ Stephen’s instructions to his “brother” Qardagh underscore the fact that he, like Mar Qardagh, experienced persecution at the hands of his own people.¹³⁴ When the stoning begins, Qardagh heeds the specifics of St. Stephen’s prediction, refusing to die “until my own father throws a stone against me.”¹³⁵ The hagiographer leaves no doubt about the culpability of the saint’s father. “Drunk with the error of Magianism” and seeking the favor of the Persian king, Gušnōy blindfolds and then executes his son.¹³⁶ No family member comes to retrieve the corpse.

The denouement of the Qardagh legend thus emphasizes the irreconcilable conflict between the hero and his biological family. The harshness of this conclusion is revealed by the contrast with the “softer” rhetoric of renunciation in contemporary Greek hagiography. In numerous Byzantine texts, the break between the saint and his (or her) family proves to be ephemeral. After an initial period of conflict and withdrawal, the saint is reunited with his mother, sister(s), or other (usually female) relatives, after the death or (much less often) conversion of the saint’s father. Bernard Flusin has aptly summarized the general narrative pattern, as it appears, for instance, in the hagiography of sixth-century Palestine:

The [saint’s] bond with the father is broken by death, while that with the mother is reaffirmed by a spiritual bond. There is no longer, therefore, any contradiction between obedience to God and acknowledgement of the family bond.¹³⁷

Real patterns of female patronage certainly contributed to the formation of this hagiographic motif.¹³⁸ So, for instance, Martha, the mother of the stylite

133. The vision, with its imagery of fire and ascent to heaven, recalls the earlier vision in §39, in which Qardagh’s wife sees angels carrying letters between heaven and earth.

134. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 62: “[I was killed] in Jerusalem by the children of my people and my race” (*men bmay’am[i] w-men bmay šarbātā*).

135. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 65.

136. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 65–66: “Then his father, who was drunk with the error of Magianism and was afraid of death and sought favor with the king and the nobles, took his robe and bound it around his face and threw the rock for the stoning of his son. And immediately the soul of the athlete of righteousness departed to eternal life.” For the iconography of a veiled martyr, see the image of the Maccabees in figure 9 of this book.

137. B. Flusin, *Miracle et histoire dans l’oeuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1983), 94: “Le lien avec le père est rompu par la mort; celui avec la mère se double d’un lien spirituel. Il n’y a donc plus de contradiction entre l’appartenance à Dieu et la reconnaissance du lien familial.” Flusin refers, in particular, here to the careers of Sts. Sabas and Euthymius. Robert Browning (“‘Low Level’ Saint’s Life,” 120–21) was among the first to highlight the significance of this theme in Byzantine hagiography.

138. For influential Christian mothers, see, for example, the well-known autobiographical passages from Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Gregory Nazianzus, and Augustine discussed by P. Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1977), 39.

St. Symeon the Younger (†596), became her son's chief patron after being reunited with him upon the "Admirable Mountain" outside of Antioch.¹³⁹ Byzantine martyr literature preserves ever more imaginative renditions of this theme of mother-son reunion. The mother of St. George of Cappadocia joins her son in martyrdom after he has burnt the pagan temples built by his father.¹⁴⁰ The mother of St. Procopius of Jerusalem (Aelia) initially denounces her son before Diocletian but later converts and joins Procopius in jail. Welcoming his "blessed" mother, the martyr leads her to the bishop to be baptized.¹⁴¹ The examples could easily be multiplied. Such stories of Christian family reunion in Byzantine, Latin, and Coptic hagiography highlight the harshness of the Qardagh legend's denouement, in which even female family members—the saint's wife and mother—fail to convert.

A final example from northern Iraq illustrates how images of mother-son solidarity can appear even in narratives, similar to the Qardagh legend, where the father is directly responsible for the saint's murder. The story of 'Abd al-Masih (†389), an anonymous Syriac legend of the early Is-

139. For the Greek text with French translation of Symeon's hagiography, see P. van den Ven, ed., *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le jeune (521–592)* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962–70), with a long introductory essay on the *Vita* (*111–*191) and the architectural remains of Symeon's monasteries (*191–*221). See esp. *77–*92 on the depiction of the saint's mother, Martha. Later Byzantine artists and hagiographers greatly expanded Martha's role, frequently depicting her in Middle Byzantine frescoes, medallions, and illuminated manuscripts. On the iconography, see L. Drewer, "Saints and Their Families in Byzantine Art," *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Arxaiologikēs Etaireias* 4.16 (1991–92): 264–67, esp. fig. 7. For the composition of the *Life of St. Martha* and its importance for Georgian pilgrims to the "Admirable Mountain," see P. Peeters, *Orient et Byzance: Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1950), 160–62.

140. For analysis of the various versions of the *Life of St. George*, see H. Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard, 1909; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1975), 45–76; here 66–68, citing from the sixteenth-century manuscript of the *Acts of George* published by Veselovsky. In this version of the legend, George's father, Gerontius, a "senator" of Cappadocian origin, belatedly converts on his deathbed. George's mother, Polychronia, by contrast, emerges as her son's most loyal supporter, becoming a martyr and receiving a Christian burial beside her saintly son.

141. The long version of the Greek text is edited by M. Papadopoulos-Kerameus in *Ἀνάλεκτα ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς σταχυολογίας* 5 (1898): 1–27, with an additional passage printed at Delehaye, *Saints militaires*, 228–33. The episode involving Procopius's mother, Theodosia, appears only in this long version of the legend (no family members appear in the earliest account of Procopius's martyrdom, in Eusebius's *Martyrs of Palestine*). See Delehaye, *Saints militaires*, 82–87, and C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 111–12, for useful summary and analysis. For the scene of reunion and Theodosia's baptism by "Bishop Leontius," see the *Acts of St. Procopius* (Delehaye, 230, ll. 17–27). In the speeches that follow, Procopius twice greets his fellow Christians as his "mothers and brothers" (μητέρες καὶ ἀδελφῆγαί). Later Byzantine tradition (see Delehaye, p. 89 n. 2) honored Theodosia and twelve other matrons condemned with her as martyrs.

lamic period, describes the conversion and martyrdom of the eleven-year-old son of the Jewish community leader at Sinjar in northern Iraq.¹⁴² Shortly after his conversion by a group of Christian playmates, ‘Abd al-Masiḥ appeals to his mother to join him in his new faith. In a scene parallel to an early episode of the Qardagh legend (cf. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 8), the child saint tells his mother (who remains anonymous) of the great vision he has had while sleeping in her house. Her acceptance of his message makes possible the explicit redefinition of their biological relationship as a spiritual bond:

When his mother heard these words, her heart was troubled and she was filled with marvel (*w-’etmalyat nafṣāh tahrā*). But she kept in her heart those things that had been spoken, apprehensive lest [the news of his conversion] become known to his father and brothers. . . .

The holy one [‘Abd al-Masiḥ] said to her, “Don’t cry, my mother, nor be anxious. . . . In order to repay you the debt of parenthood (*ḥūbtā d-’abāhē*) that I owe you, I counsel you and beseech you that you might believe in Christ and be baptized in His name and be saved from the torments of those who rejected him [i.e., the Jews], so that my joy may be made complete in you, since I am your son, and also your joy be made complete in me. And in that world that will not pass away, I will delight in you, and you also in me. And you, mother, will become for me also a sister by baptism.”¹⁴³

In this remarkable speech, the future martyr ‘Abd al-Masiḥ invites his mother to look ahead to the joys they will share together in eternity. The bond between them is ostensibly redefined as that of Christian siblings (“sister by baptism”), but the emphasis remains on their relationship as mother and son.

The legend of ‘Abd al-Masiḥ offers a more troubling depiction of the martyr’s relationship with his father “Levi.” When he learns of his son’s conversion, Levi flies into a mad rage, chasing ‘Abd al-Masiḥ through the house with a table knife. He catches and murders his son on the spot of ‘Abd al-Masiḥ’s earlier baptism, a motif that underscores the identification of martyrdom as

142. For the Syriac text with Latin translation, see J. Corluy, “Acta Sancti Mar Abdu’l Masiḥ,” *AB* 5 (1887): 5–52; Bedjan, *AMS*, 1: 173–201. The *Acts* also survive in Arabic and Armenian versions dependent on the Syriac (and a Georgian version based on the Armenian). See P. Peeters, “Le passion arabe de S. ‘Abd al-Masiḥ,” *AB* 44 (1926): 270–341, which includes a Latin translation and valuable introductory essay (270–93) examining the origins and diffusion of the saint’s cult. The Armenian version of the legend was commissioned in 873 by a prince of the Artsruni clan, who instituted the saint’s feast in his territory east of Lake Van. On the Armenian context, see Peeters, *Le tréfonds oriental*, 183, 190; A. E. Redgrave, *The Armenians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 175. Peeters, “‘Abd al-Masiḥ,” 289, suggests a late eighth-century date for the Syriac original.

143. *Acts of ‘Abd al-Masiḥ*, 8 (Corluy, 22–24). The Arabic version is more concise but contains similar language (Peeters, 310): “We both, mother, will rejoice and delight in the blessing of eternal life that has been prepared for the good and just.”

a type of second baptism. After the deed is done, Levi triumphantly displays the bloody knife to the boy's grieving mother and brothers.¹⁴⁴ Yet even this frightful character finds salvation in the topsy-turvy world of hagiography. Tormented by an "evil spirit" in his old age, Levi calls out to his martyred son for forgiveness. The old man is healed and, together with his remaining sons and servants, receives baptism.¹⁴⁵ Note the striking contrast with the Qardagh legend, which ends with filicide without any hint of reconciliation. Here, even in another legend culminating in filicide, the saint achieves a postmortem reconciliation with his biological family. Spiritual and familial bonds converge. The real puzzle is why the Qardagh legend deviates from this more popular narrative pattern. Is it simply a matter of "style"? Or are there identifiable historical factors that could have contributed to the hagiographer's rather dim view of biological family relations?

MARRIAGE, MONASTICISM, AND THE FAMILY IN LATE SASANIAN IRAQ

As noted in the introduction, no easy formula bridges the divide between hagiographic narrative and actual social patterns. The relationship between a particular type of Christian narrative and that hagiography's audience remains difficult to ascertain even for relatively well-documented, late medieval Europe.¹⁴⁶ The obstacles to such audience analysis are much greater for the Christian hagiography of late antique Iraq. We simply know too little about the demography of the late Sasanian Empire. The paucity of documentary sources makes it impossible to sketch, for instance, the structure of a "typical" Christian or Zoroastrian family in late antique Iraq.¹⁴⁷ Legal sources, however, provide some insight into the social and culture matrix in which the hagiography of the Persian martyrs was written and received. In closing this chapter, I wish to stress two facets of East-Syrian Christian tradition that may

144. *Acts of 'Abd al-Masih*, 14 (Corluy, 34–35): "And when Levi announced to them the killing of Asher [the martyr's Jewish name] and showed them the knife soiled with his blood, they made great lamentation and intense mourning. And his mother, bitter and wailing, kept in her heart for herself those things that 'Abd al-Masih had told her."

145. *Acts of 'Abd al-Masih*, 24 (Corluy, 46).

146. For an excellent study of hagiographic audience and reception, see K. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 112–80.

147. On the problems in reconstructing ancient demography, even for the Roman Empire, for which the epigraphic base is exponentially larger, see n. 9 above. The growing corpus of published Sasanian "magic bowls" may offer some insights into the historical demography of southern and central Iraq, though research along these lines is still at an early stage. For a promising move in this direction, see M. Morony, "Magic and Society in Late Antique Iraq," in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, ed. S. Noegel, J. Walker, and B. Wheeler (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 83–107.

have contributed to the Qardagh legend's highly unfavorable depiction of marriage and biological family bonds.

First, the canons preserved in the *Synodicon Orientale* make it clear that many Christians of the late Sasanian Empire had adopted (or maintained) characteristically Zoroastrian forms of marriage and family life. This situation first emerged as a problem during the mid- to late sixth century as increasing numbers of Persians were integrated into the church.¹⁴⁸ The customs practiced by these Persian converts, and presumably also by "Persianized" Christians from other ethnic groups, included the formation of close-kin marriages (Phl. *xwedōdāh*) that had long been a part of Zoroastrian tradition.¹⁴⁹ East-Syrian synodical legislation of the sixth century records the determined efforts of church leaders to prohibit such unions among Christians. In conjunction with the synod of 544, the patriarch Mar Aba, himself a convert from "Magianism," published an encyclical listing thirty-four degrees of kinship within which marriage was forbidden.¹⁵⁰ The repetition of Mar Aba's legislation four decades later at the synod of 585 suggests that the practice of consanguineous marriage continued to be an issue.¹⁵¹ Some Christians were even marrying into "Magian" families. The bishops gathered at Seleucia in January 554 explicitly warned that "priests, deacons, and sons of the covenant" who took "pagan" (*hanpātā*) wives and converted them to Christianity risked the danger of apostasy for their children.¹⁵² What is most striking about this canon is the mildness of its punishment: offenders were only

148. On the growing influx of Persian converts, see chapter 1, n. 61 and chapter 2, n. 149 above. The chronology of this development is impossible to fix with precision. Although the Sasanian church attracted some ethnic Persians from at least the third century, controversy over the introduction of "Magian" customs in the Christian community is first attested at the synod of 544.

149. The testimony of the Pahlavi books is explicit on this subject, praising the marriage of one's mother, sister, or daughter as the highest virtue. For orientation in the extensive modern literature on this controversial topic, see Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 120–24; de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 424–32; and esp. M. Macuch, "Inzest im vorislamischen Iran," *AMI* 24 (1991): 141–54.

150. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 323–338; 80–85). The thirty-four degrees of kinship are listed at *Synodicon*, 335–36; 82–83. For orientation, see V. Erhart, "The Development of Syriac Christian Canon Law in the Sasanian Empire," in *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity*, ed. R. W. Mathison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 120–21. There is good reason to suspect that such unions were not limited to ethnic Persians. For consanguineous marriage among the Roman population of northern Mesopotamia, see A. D. Lee, "Close-Kin Marriages in Late Antique Mesopotamia," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 29 (1988): 403–13; A. Giardina, "The Family in the Late Roman World," *CAH* 14 (2000): 411–12.

151. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 411; 150–51), canon 14. See also the brief canon 7 of the synod of 576, denouncing illegitimate marriages (literally "the taking of a wife in an unlawful manner") as contrary to the "canons established on this subject by the ancient Fathers." *Synodicon* (Chabot, 378; 118, ll. 15–17).

152. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 359–60; 102, ll. 12–17), canon 10, warning of the danger that Zoroastrian authorities might imprison the clergy's new wives and force them to recant their

to be excluded from the priesthood. The bishops did not even attempt to punish laymen who entered into such interreligious unions, despite Mar Aba's explicit condemnation of marriage to "pagan (women)" ten years earlier.¹⁵³ These regulations hint at the resilience of traditional kinship structures among the Christian laity of the late Sasanian Empire. The strident attacks on "paganism" and "Magian" family structures in the Qardagh legend belie the complexity of actual social relations in late antique Iraq, where at least some Christian families maintained ties, by marriage or blood kinship, to their Zoroastrian neighbors.¹⁵⁴

The anti-familial rhetoric of the Qardagh legend must also be understood against the backdrop of East-Syrian monasticism. The monastic communities of late antique Iraq, like monastic communities everywhere, were based in principle upon monks' renunciation of their biological families.¹⁵⁵ But the ascetic ideals of family renunciation that underpinned the institution of East-Syrian monasticism were never easy to enforce in practice. Syriac monastic legislation suggests that constant vigilance was necessary to limit contacts and exchanges between monks and their worldly families. The monastic rule attributed to Babai (†628), for instance, insists that a monk "shall not return to his family, not even for a necessary reason . . . [nor] an emergency, and not for the sake of his bodily brother and sister and not for the sake of his aunt."¹⁵⁶ Other collections of monastic canons, difficult to date with precision, hint at the difficulty of distancing monks from the economic obligations of family life: monks must not give the property of the monastery to

Christianity (Ehrt, "Syriac Christian Canon Law," 121, misattributes the canon to the synod of 544.)

153. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 336; 83, 1.10), where Mar Aba condemns unions with "pagan" women, near the top of a long list of forbidden unions.

154. On the difficulty of minimizing Christian contacts with non-Christians in late antique Iraq, see the perceptive comments of Morony, *Iraq*, 369–72.

155. For a concise articulation of this ideal, see A.-M. Talbot, "The Byzantine Family and the Monastery," *DOP* 44 (1990): 119: "The three principal obligations of the monk or nun, chastity, poverty, and obedience, can all be seen as linked to a cessation of family ties: celibacy entailed a renunciation of marriage and the production of offspring, poverty meant the abandonment of claims to the inheritance of family property or giving away such property, while obedience to an abess or abbot replaced obedience to parents or spouse."

156. *Rules of Babai*, 11, in Vööbus, *Legislation*, 176–84 (180). Babai presumably composed the *Rules* during his period as abbot at the Monastery of Abraham of Kaškar near Nisibis, a post he assumed following the death of the abbot Dadišō in 604. For Babai's other treatises on monastic discipline (now lost), see 'Abdišō of Nisibis, *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers* (Assemani, 95). The *Rules* survive only in an Arabic version, which Vööbus prints directly above his translation. As part of this same injunction, Babai specifies that a monk must not receive gifts of clothing from his family, especially the "garments of a woman" (i.e., fine and delicate clothes), since "Satan sneaks into a monk shrewdly through the family and leads them to death through [concern for] appearance and garments."

their families;¹⁵⁷ monks must not receive deposits from their relatives;¹⁵⁸ monks must not accept inheritance, “except for that part set apart for them.”¹⁵⁹ While the most influential East-Syrian monastic rules, those composed by Abraham of Kaškar (†588) and Dadišo^c (†604), are silent on these issues, hagiographic anecdotes attest to the web of family connections that linked East-Syrian monasteries to the lay patrons that often funded their construction. By the end of the Sasanian period, the monasteries of northern Iraq had become critical institutions for the transmission of Christian family wealth. Christian families of Zoroastrian heritage, like that of Yazdin and Šamta of Beth Garmai, gave generously to local churches and monasteries.¹⁶⁰ The uncompromising ideal of ascetic renunciation depicted in Syriac hagiography disguises the growing prominence of entire Christian families in sixth- and seventh-century Iraq.

These broader patterns of Christian family life and patronage underscore the hyperbolic quality of the martyr legends. The heroes of Sasanian martyr literature behave and speak in ways not expected of ordinary Christians. Ordinary Christians were exhorted to honor, admire, and proclaim the “divine virtues” of the saints,¹⁶¹ but such admiration rarely led to a straightforward replication of the saints’ behavior. Monastic and synodical legislation suggest that few monks achieved the absolute renunciation of biological kinship attained by Mar Qardagh. East-Syrian monasticism appears to have remained, for better or worse, deeply intertwined with the traditional kinship structures of its surrounding environment. Recent studies of coenobitic monasticism in other regions have revealed an analogous pattern. In the Pa-

157. *Canons of Marutha*, 9, in Vööbus, *Legislation*, 115–49 (136): “He [the monk] shall not give something that belongs to the monastery to his relatives (*l-’nāšā bmay genseh*), nor his friends or relatives (*w-’āplā l-rahmaw[hi] w-la-qribaw[hi]*.)” The dating of such canon collections is extremely difficult, since later editors often revised or deleted individual injunctions within the canons. Vööbus defends the attribution of a portion of the so-called *Canons of Marutha* to the early fifth century, but a later date is also possible. See Vööbus, *Legislation*, 117, on the East-Syrian recension of the *Canons*, of which he translates only those canons related to asceticism.

158. *Anonymous Rules for Monks*, 14, in Vööbus, *Legislation*, 109–12 (112): “No one of the monks shall allow himself to receive a deposit (*l-rahbonā*, from Gr. ἀρραβών) from his relatives, nor from strangers, so that he may not draw scandal or guilt upon the monastery.” Vööbus tentatively dates the composite West-Syrian text of these *Rules* to the ‘Abbasid period. The text survives only in Garshuni (Arabic in Syriac script), which Vööbus prints above his translation.

159. *Rules for the Monks in Persia*, 19, in Vööbus, *Legislation*, 87–92 (92): “A monk shall not inherit from his secular family (*genseh’ālmāyā*) except if something is set apart for him (*’elā en ne’ṭpreš leh mdem*.)” The vagueness of the final clause seems to provide a significant loophole for monastic inheritance.

160. This is one of the central themes of C. J. Villagomez, “The Fields, Flocks, and Finances of Monks: Economic Life at Nestorian Monasteries, 500–850” (PhD diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1998). For Yazdin of Beth Garmai’s ecclesiastical patronage, see chapter 1, nn. 50–51.

161. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 1.

chomian communities of Egypt, kinship ties between ascetics and their worldly families proved extremely resilient. Although novice monks were required to explicitly renounce their parents,¹⁶² anecdotal evidence tells of the family bonds maintained by senior monks. As one elderly monk explained, when asked about the meaning of Luke 14:26, “Scripture has put its words high that we might attain to part (of them). For how can we hate our parents?”¹⁶³ The affective bonds of blood kinship remained a divisive issue even in the strict monastic system of Shenoute of Atripe (†464). As Rebecca Krawiec has shown, Shenoute’s strategy to transform biological family ties into spiritual bonds encountered stubborn opposition from both male and female monks.¹⁶⁴ One hopes that we will eventually have a comparable study of the familial language and dynamics of East-Syrian monasticism. When such a study is written, it may offer a powerful counterpoint to the Qardagh legend’s fierce denunciation of biological family ties.

The theme of familial strife animates and helps structure the legend of Mar Qardagh. The future martyr’s conflict with his biological family is one of several themes that link this East-Syrian legend to much broader currents of Christian discourse. From Ireland to Iraq, Christian narrators crafted stories about

162. *Precepts of Pachomius*, 49 (Veilleux, 2: 153), which orders superiors to ask the prospective monk, “Can he renounce his parents and spurn his own possessions?” Early Pachomian tradition acknowledged the difficulty of this transition. See the earliest Greek *Life of Pachomius*, 24 (Veilleux, 1: 312), where Pachomius “tests” a group of perspective monks *and* their parents about the youths’ readiness for the ascetic life. For key passages in other Pachomian documents, see, for example, the *Paralipomena*, 5 (Veilleux, 2: 26–27), where Pachomius asserts his role as the true father of a deceased monk over and against the claims of his natural parents. For my citations of Pachomian documents, see A. Veilleux, ed. and trans. *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 1, *The Life of St. Pachomius*; vol. 2, *Pachomian Chronicles and Rules* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980–81).

163. Greek *Life of Pachomius*, 68 (Veilleux, 1: 343–44), in a vignette that focuses on the abbot Theodore’s correction of this senior monk. For the increased restrictions on contacts with blood kin under the abbot Theodore, see P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 151–52; also 69–70 on Theodore’s refusal to see his own mother. Cf. H. Chadwick, “Pachomius and the Idea of Sanctity,” in *Byzantine Saint*, ed. Hackel, 11–24 (16), which interprets the same passages as indicative of a slackening of the original ascetic code that allowed monks even less contact with their biological families.

164. R. Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 161–74, 234–36, which also demonstrates the considerable degree to which biological families were incorporated into Shenoute’s monastic system. For further examples of a “profamilial” strain in late Roman monasticism, see Krawiec, “Monastic Families,” *J ECS* 11, no. 3 (2003): 283–307. For family structures within the Pachomian system, see S. Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 291–94.

saints who abandoned their biological families to find new families defined in terms of spiritual kinship. The ubiquity of such hagiographic motifs attests to the extraordinary diffusion of shared forms of Christian discourse in the world of late antiquity. What makes the modern study of hagiography intriguing is that these shared narrative motifs seldom remained stiff or formulaic. Local storytellers constantly revised and reshuffled the narrative building blocks of Christian hagiography to reflect their own cultural contexts and rhetorical agendas. For modern readers of this literature, the recognition of hagiographic *topoi* must serve not as the endpoint, but the beginning of our analysis.

Narrative analysis of the Qardagh legend reveals the finesse with which one East-Syrian writer adapted the standard hagiographic motif of the saint who abandons his worldly family to join a new spiritual family. In the hands of Qardagh's hagiographer, the *topos* of familial renunciation takes on a specifically Sasanian flavor, characterized by the hero's flaunting of "Magian" social norms. Parallels with Sasanian advice literature (*andarz*) and Zoroastrian legal texts underscore the hagiographer's awareness of the socio-cultural ramifications of apostasy in the late Sasanian Empire. The narrative plays at length on the tensions over inheritance, male progeny, and political status caused by Mar Qardagh's abandonment of his worldly family. The legend also lovingly details the simultaneous formation of Mar Qardagh's spiritual family. Encouraged and guided by this new and superior family, Qardagh embraces martyrdom in direct imitation of his "brothers" Mar Sergius of Rusafa and Stephen of Jerusalem. Ultimately, the Qardagh legend accepts as legitimate only these spiritual bonds. The one episode in which the saint aids his biological family—the capture and rescue narrative discussed in chapter 2—hints at another possibility,¹⁶⁵ but the hagiographer chooses not to pursue this option. In a motif that resurfaces in several Syriac martyr legends of northern Mesopotamia, Mar Qardagh is murdered by the hand of his own impious father.¹⁶⁶ No member of the saint's biological family, not even his mother or wife, finds salvation with him. The hagiographer insists on the total incompatibility of biological and spiritual kinship.

The idiosyncrasy of this vision of kinship becomes clear when one considers the range of alternative narrative models available to Sasanian and Byzantine hagiographers. The *Acts* of the earliest Sasanian martyrs typically emphasize the solidarity of Christian families, especially (though not exclusively)

165. See *History of Mar Qardagh*, 41–47, with my analysis at chapter 2, n. 137.

166. In addition to the *Martyrs of Tur Ber'ayn* and the *Acts of 'Abd al-Masih*, I am aware of at least two other West-Syrian examples. For the legend of Mar Behnam and his sister Sara, executed by their father "King Sennacherib of Assyria," see n. 118 above. For another example, see Hollerweger, *Turabdin*, 149, on the Monastery of Mor Abay (Mar Abai), 38 km northwest of Nisibis. Local tradition identifies the martyr in question, "Mor Abay," as a Persian. For the monastery's location, see the *Barrington Atlas*, 89 (C3).

the affective bonds between mothers and their sons. The enduring appeal of this model of supportive family relations is reflected in the popularity of the cult of the Maccabees in northern Iraq (see figure 9). The *Acts* of the late Sasanian martyrs present a totally different rhetorical model, focusing on the persecution of the daughters and wives of vociferously “pagan” families, as, for instance, in the story of St. Shirin (†559). These different narrative strains converge in the martyr legends of the late Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods. The *History of the Martyrs of Tur Berʿayn*, contains, for instance, dramatic scenes of familial renunciation and conflict. Yet these same legends also include, more often than not, scenes of reconciliation. The legends’ heroes, having abandoned the world, succeed in bringing other members of their families into the fold of Christian kinship. Even in legends featuring tyrannical murderous fathers, such as the late eighth-century *Acts of ʿAbd al-Mash*, one finds moments of reconciliation and the partial restoration of familial bonds.

The Qardagh legend presents, by comparison, an utterly uncompromising view of Christian ascetic heroism. In the end, the only social bonds endorsed by the legend’s author are the spiritual bonds linking men of faith to their spiritual guides. None of the saint’s “Magian” relatives convert to Christianity, and the saint’s own curses fall upon the heads of his wife and father. The harshness of this rhetoric may reflect, paradoxically, the ambiguity of the situation on the ground in late Sasanian Iraq. In an era when the church hierarchy was closely allied to the Sasanian court (see chapter 1), the monasteries of northern Iraq could ill afford to be completely isolated from the secular world. Many leading families of the late Sasanian church were of Zoroastrian origin, and some retained ties, by blood kinship or marriage, to their non-Christian relatives. Syriac monastic legislation suggests that many monks remained in regular contact with their worldly families.¹⁶⁷ In this sense, the Qardagh legend presents an idealized vision of conversion, probably quite different from the actual social conditions of late Sasanian Iraq.¹⁶⁸ Its powerful tale of familial conflict, though, seems to have appealed to a broad spectrum of listeners. The final chapter of this book will examine the development of the cult site near Arbela, where Christian pilgrims gathered to hear the story of the “athlete of righteousness” stoned to death by his own father.¹⁶⁹

167. As Lisa Bitel (*Isle of the Saints*, 114) observes with reference to early Christian Ireland, “Far from abandoning one family for another, most monks and nuns actually enjoyed the benefits and suffered the troubles of two.”

168. For a similar divergence between hagiographic models of family conflict and normative social ideals in late medieval England, see Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, esp. 98–99: “While writers of late medieval conduct books agreed that women should be gracious, humble, and soft-spoken, virgin martyrs [depicted in hagiography] tended to be abrasive, defiant, shrewish, and sharp-tongued. . . . [M]edieval hagiographers were well aware that, in their manner as well as their actions, virgin martyrs were everything that actual women were not supposed to be.”

169. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 66.

FIVE

Remembering Mar Qardagh

The Origins and Evolution of an East-Syrian Martyr Cult

At a village named Melqi on the outskirts of late antique Arbela, Christians gathered at the end of each summer for a six-day trading fair. The fair was convened at the base of an ancient tell crowned by the ruins of a Sasanian fortress. The origin of both the fortress and the annual fair were described in the story of Mar Qardagh, the Sasanian viceroy and Christian convert, executed at Melqi late in the reign of Shapur II (309–379). Writing ca. 600–630, some two and a half centuries after the events in question, Qardagh's hagiographer explained the annual festivities at Melqi as a direct outgrowth of Christian veneration for the site of the saint's martyrdom.

And each year on the day on which the blessed one was crowned, the peoples gathered at the place of his crowning. And they made a festival and a commemoration for three days. But because of the size of the crowds, they also began to buy and sell during the days of the saint's commemoration. And after some time had passed, a great market was established on the place in which the blessed one was stoned. It continues to this day. And the commemoration of the holy one lasts three days, and the market six days. And it is called the souk of Melqi from the name of the fortress of the blessed one.

Later a great and handsome church was also built at great expense in the name of the holy one by believing men worthy of good memory. It was built on that hill on which the holy Mar Qardagh was stoned.¹

Brief as it is, this epilogue provides important clues about the origins and early development of the cult of Mar Qardagh. Qardagh's hagiographer

1. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 68–69. The Mosul manuscript of the legend (Abbeoos's MS B) preserves a longer version of this epilogue (§69), describing the construction of further churches at Melqi. See below in this chapter for quotation and analysis of this critical variant.

claims that the annual six-day “market” (*ḥagā*) at Melqī grew directly out of the three-day “festival” (*‘ē’da*) commemorating the saint’s martyrdom. As surmised by Paul Peeters, one of the great connoisseurs of eastern Christian legends, this claim probably reverses the actual chronology of events: it is far more likely that the fair at Melqī preceded the development of the Qardagh legend.² In a pattern found in many parts of the late antique world, the story of a local saint facilitated at Melqī the Christianization of an ancient pagan shrine.

The cult of the saints, in its multitudinous forms, has held a central place in the modern historiography of late antiquity.³ Transcending conventional boundaries between urban and rural, elite and popular, Roman and non-Roman, devotion to the saints and their cult sites is a marked feature of the late antique world.⁴ From the fourth or fifth century, the cult of the saints also thrived in the Church of the East. Studies by Jean Maurice Fiey and others have amply demonstrated the richness of East-Syrian literature on this topic.⁵ Drawing upon his unparalleled command of the Syriac and Arabic literary sources and direct acquaintance with the churches of northern Iraq, Fiey untangled and traced the cults of numerous East-Syrian saints and martyrs. Beyond Fiey’s work, however, there has been remarkably little study of

2. Peeters, “Passionnaire d’Adiabène,” 301: “Est-ce bien la fête de Mâr Qardag qui a donné lieu à ce marché annuel? Ne serait-ce pas plutôt la foire de Malqāi qui s’est doublée de la fête à légende fabuleuse?” Peeters’s instincts were on track, although neither of the etymologies he proposed to support his argument is correct. Peeters interprets the name Qardagh as a corruption of the Pahlavi word *kārdāg*, “merchant” (Mackenzie, *CPD*, 49: “a traveler, migrant”). Cf. n. 95 below on the correct etymology. Peeters derives the name Melqī from the Arabic *malqa*, “place of reunion.” Though accepted by Fiey (*Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 223), this etymology too must be rejected in light of the Akkadian evidence discussed below.

3. For the modern historiography, see esp. P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Important recent studies focusing on the Near East include A. Papaconstantinou, *Le cult des saints en Égypte des Byzantines aux Abbassides: L’apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2002); and E. K. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999); and Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women’s Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

4. For the nexus between martyr cult and the emergence of Christian notions of sacred space in the late Roman Empire, see the pivotal studies by R. Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places,” *J ECS* 2, no. 3 (1994): 257–71; and S. MacCormack, “Loca Sancta: The Organization of Sacred Topography in Late Antiquity,” in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. R. Ousterhout (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 1–49.

5. Fiey’s magnum opus, *Assyrie chrétienne: Contribution à l’étude de l’histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastiques et monastiques du nord de l’Iraq* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1965–68), in three volumes, includes numerous studies of the veneration of individual saints. A posthumous work entitled *Les saints syriaques* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2004) arrived too late to be incorporated here. For relics in East-Syrian tradition, see esp. J. M. Fiey, “La vie mouvementée des reliques dans l’Orient syriaque,” *PdO* 13 (1986): 183–96.

individual East-Syrian saints. This lacuna in the modern historiography is certainly due, in part, to the badly underdeveloped state of Christian archaeology in former Sasanian lands.⁶ Whereas the historiography of martyr cult in Byzantium and the Latin world has often been led by the work of art historians, archaeologists, and epigraphers,⁷ historians of East-Syrian martyr cult must work with a more limited repertoire of sources.⁸ Despite this limitation, the cult of the saints in the Church of the East presents a promising field of research, as Fiey's seminal studies have created a solid platform on which new investigations can be built.

The veneration of Mar Qardagh offers an intriguing case study in the origins and evolution of an East-Syrian martyr cult. This investigation requires looking deep into the pre-Christian history of Melqi, the ancient shrine near Arbela that hosted the annual festival of Mar Qardagh. Qardagh's hagiographer introduces his hero as coming from "the stock of the kingdom of the Assyrians," the descendant via his father of the "renowned lineage of the house of Nimrod," and via his mother of the "renowned lineage of the house of Sennacherib."⁹ While this royal "Assyrian" lineage has attracted the notice of several previous commentators,¹⁰ this chapter introduces new evidence for its significance by demonstrating that the late Sasanian buildings at Melqi stood directly over the ruins of a major Neo-Assyrian temple, the *akītu*-shrine of the goddess Ishtar of Arbela. Cuneiform documents of the ninth–seventh centuries B.C.E. elucidate several aspects of the Neo-Assyrian rituals con-

6. As noted in the introduction (n. 26), modern political geography has severely hampered the development of Christian archaeology in the core regions of the Sasanian Empire. Most of Iraq and Iran have been off-limits to foreign archaeologists since the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. The Japanese church excavations at al-Ḥīra, for example (on which see Y. Okada, "Early Christian Architecture in the Iraqi South-Western Desert," *Al-Rafidan* 12 [1991]: 71–83), were interrupted by the Gulf War of 1991, and are unlikely to resume. Archaeological sites throughout Iraq have been ravaged by looters (and, in some cases, bombs) in the turmoil sparked by the American invasion of 2003.

7. One thinks, for instance, of the foundational studies by A. Grabar, *Martyrium: Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, 2 vols. (Paris: Collège de France, 1943–46; repr., London: Variorum, 1972); and Y. Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae: Le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IV^e au VII^e siècle*, 2 vols. (Rome: École française de Rome, 1982).

8. For reasons too numerous to discuss here, few East-Syrian churches have been identified and excavated, virtually no frescoes survive, and the corpus of East-Syrian Christian epigraphy is relatively small and late in date (mostly ninth century or later). Amir Harrak of the University of Toronto is currently preparing the first complete corpus of the Syriac Christian inscriptions of Iraq. On the stunted development of Sasanian Christian archaeology, see the brief treatment in Walker, "Limits of Late Antiquity," 54–56.

9. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 3.

10. See, for example, P. Crone and M. A. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 190 n. 71; and J. Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, and Colonial Powers* (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 2000), 27.

ducted at the site. The discovery of the Assyrian origins of the shrine at Melqi also raises questions that the literary sources alone may never be able to answer. It is, for instance, unclear whether one should trust the Qardagh legend's description of Zoroastrian architecture at Melqi. The archaeology of other Neo-Assyrian settlements indicates that some temple sites were reoccupied during the Seleucid and Parthian periods. Whether this also happened at Melqi remains uncertain. The Christian storytellers who created the Qardagh legend knew only that the fortress on top of the tell at Melqi had been built by a powerful hero of royal "Assyrian" lineage.

After its genesis at Melqi, the cult of Mar Qardagh spread through neighboring regions of northern Iraq and southeastern Anatolia. The second half of this chapter uses chronicles, liturgical calendars, and the names of places and individuals to chart the diffusion and evolution of the saint's cult. Two Nestorian texts, the *Book of Chastity* by Išō'dnaḥ of Basra (ca. 860–870) and the anonymous *Chronicle of Séert* (ca. 1000–1030), preserve substantial accounts of the Qardagh legend, which show how later audiences read and modified the story of the saint's "heroic deeds." These later versions also report the foundation of a "strong monastery" at the site of the saint's martyrdom and annual festival. New appearances of the name Qardagh imply continuing expansion of the saint's cult during the eighth and ninth centuries. Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors* (mid-ninth century) mentions several individuals named Qardagh active in the highlands of northern Iraq. The results of this survey, while useful, are necessarily incomplete. Not a single iconographic depiction of Mar Qardagh has been published, and the history of the saint's cult after the tenth century remains sketchy.¹¹ Although veneration of Mar Qardagh has continued into modern times, the location of the saint's original cult site has been lost, perhaps irretrievably. Its disappearance from the literary record coincides with the turmoil that befell the Arbela region in the generation following the Mongol conquest of Iraq in 1258.

THE TEMPLE OF ISHTAR OF ARBELA AT "MILQIA"

According to the royal correspondence and campaign narratives of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the goddess Ishtar of Arbela was worshipped at a site near Arbela named Milqia (Akkadian ^{URU}Mil-qi-a).¹² The earliest reference to this shrine (fragmentary, but persuasively reconstructed by its editor) dates from

11. I have been unable to travel in northern Iraq while writing this book. Fiey, who lived in Iraq for more than thirty years, mentions only two modern shrines dedicated to Mar Qardagh: a church at Alqōš and a chapel at Déré, near 'Amādiā. For details on these dedications, see nn. 133–34 below.

12. For what follows, see, in more detail, J. Walker, "The Legacy of Mesopotamia in Late Antique Iraq: The Christian Martyr Shrine at Melqi (Neo-Assyrian Milqia)," *ARAM* 18 (2006), in press. For the Akkadian toponym, see S. Parpola, *Neo-Assyrian Toponyms* (Kevelaer and Neukirchen-

the mid-ninth century B.C.E., when Shalmaneser III, returning victorious from his campaign in the land of Urartu (southern Armenia), made sacrifices of thanksgiving at Milqia to Ishtar, the “Lady of Arbela.”¹³ This shrine, as later sources confirm, was the *akītu*-temple, that is, the festival shrine, of the goddess’s primary temple, the Egašankalamma, in Arbela. During a biennial festival in Ishtar’s honor, worshippers accompanied the goddess’s cult-statue as it was moved from the Egašankalamma to her *akītu*-temple at Milqia, outside the city walls, where it would remain several days, prior to its ritual re-installation in Arbela.¹⁴ These ritual details are significant, because they provide the only evidence in Neo-Assyrian sources for the location of Milqia. The recent monograph by Beate Pongratz-Leisten has documented the broad range of ritual activities associated with this “festival house” of Ishtar outside the walls of Arbela.¹⁵ These rituals included prophecy and the systematic torture and execution of captured enemies.¹⁶ In the best-documented example, Ashurbanipal (668–635 B.C.E.) hauled the captured Elamite king Teu-

luyn: Verlag Butzon and Bercker Kevelaer, 1970), 248, citing L. Waterman, ed. and trans., *Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire*, 4 vols. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1930–36), letters 136, 191, 526, and 1164. See also W. Röllig, “Milqia,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 8 (1993): 207–8; and B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel: Untersuchungen zu Kult, Administration und Personal* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 1: 113.

13. On Shalmaneser III’s campaigns against Urartu (856–827 B.C.E.), see A. K. Grayson, “Assyria,” *CAH* 3.1 (1991), 264–65, with a full list of sources at n. 144. For the text and translation of the poem cited here, see A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* (Helsinki: State Archives of Assyria, 1989), 17 (pp. 44–47); the common epithet “Lady of Arbela” (*be-lit—URU* *arba.il*) appears on n. 28. The toponym is fragmentary, but Livingstone’s reconstruction as “Milqia” is credible.

14. For the origins of *akītu*-rituals in southern Mesopotamia, see M. E. Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1983), 400–6, esp. 404 on their extra-urban setting: “This is the essence of the *akītu*-house. Its main function was to serve as a temporary residence for the chief god of the city until the moment arrived for his glorious reentry into his city. . . . This is the reason the *akītu*-building had to be outside the city proper—the statue of the god had to be escorted into the city with great pomp and circumstance—and why Sennacherib chose to build outside the city [of Ashur], although, as he acknowledged, the rites for Aššur had been observed inside the walled city.” For *akītu*-rituals of the Neo-Assyrian period, see G. Van Driel, *The Cult of Aššur* (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 1969), 163–67; J. N. Postgate, “The *bit akīti* in Assyrian Nabu Temples,” *Sumer* 30 (1974): 51–74, here 60–62; and esp. B. Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina Šulmi Īrub: Die kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der akītu-Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1994).

15. Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina Šulmi Īrub*, 79–83. Cf. W. G. Lambert, “Processions to the *Akītu* House,” *Revue d’assyriologie* 91 (1997): 49–80; and A. R. George, “Studies in Cultic Topography and Ideology,” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 53 (1996): 363–95. While correcting some aspects of Pongratz-Leisten’s work, neither reviewer refutes her central thesis about the diversity of ritual activities that appear to have taken place at Milqia and other *akītu*-shrines of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

16. Oracles from the goddess, possibly delivered at Milqia, predict the king’s victory on the battlefield. As Ishtar promises Esarhaddon, “Your enemies will roll before your feet like ripe

mann along with his whole family in neck stocks before the “Lady [of Arbela].”¹⁷ Other military ceremonies, including preparatory rituals for battle, may also have been conducted at Milqia.¹⁸ The iconography of the goddess, as preserved in the Tel Barsip relief from northern Syria (figure 10), emphasizes her identity as a patron of martial conquest.¹⁹ Standing atop a lion, with crossed quivers on her back, Ishtar of Arbela looks fully prepared to “flay” the enemies of the king.²⁰

The fate of the Ishtar temple at Milqia in the post-Assyrian period is extremely obscure. There appears to be not a single literary reference to the shrine between the fall of Nineveh to the Medes in 612 B.C.E. and the descriptions of “Melqi” in the Qardagh legend, some twelve centuries later. This enormous gap in documentation is frustrating but should not lead one to assume discontinuity; the gap could simply reflect the dearth of systematic archaeological research in the Arbela region. The pattern at other major Neo-Assyrian sites where excavations have taken place, such as Ashur,

apples.” Text and translation in S. Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (Helsinki: State Archives of Assyria, 1997), 1.1, line 6 (p. 4). On the *akitu*-shrine at Milqia as the probable setting for the delivery of these oracles, see Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina Šulmi Īrub*, 81.

17. For Ashurbanipal’s execution of prisoners brought before the Ishtar temple at Milqia, see Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 31, ll. 8–9 (p. 67) (n. 13 above). The cycle of relief panels depicting Ashurbanipal’s campaigns against Elam includes detailed images, with accompanying captions, of the victory processions at Nineveh and Arbela, where the Elamite king and other captives were subjected to ritual torture and execution. For the scenes of these executions, see J. Reade, “Narrative Composition in Assyrian Sculpture,” *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 10 (1979): 52–110 (96–101); E. Weidner, “Assyrische Beschreibungen der Kriegs-Reliefs Assurbanaplis [sic],” *Archiv für Orientforschung* 8 (1932): 176–91 (183, 185; nos. 20, 34).

18. On Assyrian triumphal processions at Milqia and other Assyrian *akitu*-shrines, see Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina Šulmi Īrub*, 79–83; also K. Deller, “Neuassyrische Rituale für den Einsatz der Götterstreitwagen,” *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 23 (1992): 341–46. While the temporal and spatial settings of specific rituals remain controversial, I am not persuaded by the critique of Pongratz-Leisten’s argument by George, “Studies in Cultic Topography,” 375–77 (n. 15 above). See the supporting evidence collected in B. Pongratz-Leisten, “The Interplay of Military Strategy and Cultic Practice in Assyrian Politics,” in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995*, ed. S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting (Helsinki: State Archives of Assyria, 1997), 245–52.

19. For the Tel Barsip relief, see Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 11 (fig. 3) (n. 13 above); Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel*, 1: 8 (n. 12 above). A similar image appears on the garnet cylinder seal of a Neo-Assyrian palace official, illustrated in D. Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995), 171. For the iconography of the goddess, see, in general, U. Siedl, “Inanna/Ishtar,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 5 (1976–80): 87–89.

20. For literary depictions of Ishtar as a warrior goddess, see E. Wilke, “Inanna/Ishtar,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 5 (1976–80), 74–86 (83–84); S. Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 31–36. For Ishtar’s readiness to “flay” the enemies of the king, see Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, 1.1, line 18 (p. 4), in the continuation of the oracle quoted in n. 16 above.

Nineveh, and Nimrud, is uneven. While some cult sites were completely abandoned or converted to domestic use, others were revived under Seleucid and Parthian rule.²¹ The strongest evidence for revival of the ancient cult sites has been found at Ashur and Nineveh, in the lowlands west of Arbela. German excavations at Ashur before World War I discovered both architectural and epigraphic evidence (in Aramaic) for veneration of the ancient Mesopotamian gods. When the *akītu*-temple of the high god Aššur was rebuilt in Parthian style during the first century C.E., it still followed the alignment and orientation of the Assyrian temples that preceded it.²² Farther north at Nineveh, the evidence for continuity, though less dramatic, shows how the sacral character of Assyrian cult sites was acknowledged through new modes of religious expression. Greek inscriptions found during the excavation of the Neo-Assyrian Nabu temple attest to local Seleucid officials' concern to honor the location's "attentive gods."²³ A field survey by British archaeologists in the area northwest of Mosul, curtailed by the outbreak of the first Gulf War in 1991, suggests that the finds at Nineveh may correspond to a wider pattern of Seleucid resettlement of Neo-Assyrian sites after a prolonged period of abandonment.²⁴

21. For discontinuity at Nimrud (where houses were built over the Temple of Nabu) and the abandonment of the central temples at Ashur, see S. Downey, *Mesopotamian Religious Architecture: Alexander through the Parthians* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 174–78. Downey emphasizes the contrast with the continuity of sacral topography in southern Iraq, where some Mesopotamian temples remained open as late as the first or second century C.E.

22. A. Salvesson, "The Legacy of Babylon and Nineveh in Aramaic Sources," in *The Legacy of Mesopotamia*, ed. S. Dalley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 151–52. The original excavator marveled over this remarkable continuity in cultic architecture. See W. Andrae, *Das wiedererstandene Assur* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs Verlag, 1938; 2d rev. ed., Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1977), 254: "Es ist fast wunderbar, zu sehen, wie genau sich die alte Gestalt dieses [Assyrian temple] offenbar gänzlich dem Erdboden gleichgemachten Kultbaues wieder erhob." For the inscriptions to the god Aššur and his consort "Sherua," see B. Aggoula, *Inscriptions et graffites araméens d'Assour* (Naples: Istituto universitario orientale, 1985), 41–43 (nos. 17–20). Other finds in the Parthian level at Assur also testify to the survival of the ancient Assyrian cults. For the graffito showing a Parthian nobleman sacrificing before a statue of Nanai, "the daughter of Bel, the master of the gods," see Aggoula, *Inscriptions et graffites araméens*, 37–41; Andrae, *Assur*, 259–60 (fig. 239).

23. R. Campbell and R. W. Hutchinson, "The Excavations of the Temple of Nabû at Nineveh," *Archaeologia* 79 (1929): 103–48 (107–8, 141–42): the votive inscription was made on behalf of Apollonios, the governor (*strategos*) and president (*epistratos*) of the city. See also J. N. Postgate, "An Assyrian Altar from Nineveh," *Sumer* 26 (1970): 133–36, which discusses a ninth-century Assyrian altar, rededicated to the city (*polis*) by one "Apollonios, son of Demetrius, the Archon." For the Hellenistic period at Nineveh, see, in general, S. Dalley, "Nineveh after 612 B.C.," *Altorientische Forschungen* 20 (1993): 134–47; J. Reade, "Greco-Parthian Nineveh," *Iraq* 60 (1998): 65–83.

24. T. J. Wilkinson and D. J. Tucker, *Settlement Development in the North Jazira, Iraq: A Study of the Archaeological Landscape* (Baghdad: British School of Archaeology in Iraq; Department of Antiquities and Heritage, Baghdad, 1995), esp. 64–65. According to their work, the three-

Were there analogous developments at Milqia and Arbela? Until there are systematic excavations in the Arbela district, this is probably an unanswerable question. Recent work on the “legacy of Mesopotamia” has drawn attention to the survival of ancient temples and rituals in southern Iraq into the first two centuries C.E.²⁵ But the pattern was not the same everywhere. While the survival of the toponym Melqi (Syr. *mlqi*, from Akkadian ^{URU}*mil-qi-a*) implies some degree of continuity,²⁶ it cannot tell us whether there were subsequent phases of building or ritual activity at the site. The condition of the main Ishtar temple in Arbela is likewise unknown. Although Arbela remained an important administrative center through the Parthian period, there is little or no substantial evidence for the city’s religious history prior to Jewish and Christian activity during the first centuries C.E. (see chapter 1).²⁷ The Christian literary sources are thus of particular importance and must be interpreted carefully. On the basis of a single martyr narrative, it has recently been argued that the Ishtar temple at Arbela “probably flourished until the fourth century A.D.”²⁸ But the text in question, the East-Syrian *Acts of Aithalāhā the (Pagan) Priest and Hafṣai the Priest*, is a fiction modeled upon earlier martyr literature from Edessa.²⁹ The paucity of reliable

hundred year period between the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the Seleucid acquisition of northern Iraq ca. 300 B.C.E. remains “virtually invisible” in the archaeological record.

25. See esp. M. J. Geller, “The Last Wedge,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 87 (1997): 49–95; Dalley, *Legacy of Mesopotamia*, 35–55, with comparative material from the cities of Hatra and Palmyra. The documentation for the vitality of the ancient cults during the second–first centuries B.C.E. is well known and extensive. See Downey, *Mesopotamian Religious Architecture*, 7–50 (n. 21 above); J. Oelsner, *Materialien zur babylonischen Gesellschaft und Kultur in hellenistischer Zeit* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 1986), 87–89 (Uruk), 115–16 (Babylon); and the texts and translations in F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituel accadiens* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1921; repr., Innsbruck: Zeller Verlag, 1975), 86–118.

26. For the survival of ancient toponyms in the piedmont zone between the Tigris and the Zagros Mountains, see H. Limet, “Permanence et changement dans la toponymie de la Mésopotamie antique,” in *La toponymie antique: Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 12–14 juin 1975* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 83–115, esp. 113, citing Nisibis and Arbela as prominent examples.

27. For Seleucid and Parthian Arbela, see J. F. Hansen, “Arbela,” *Enc. Ir.* 2 (1987): 277–78; E. Fraenkel, “Adiabene,” *Paulys Realencyclopädia der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1894), 1: 360; and J. Oelsner, “Adiabene,” *Der kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike* (Stuttgart: A. Druckenmüller, 1964), 112. This dearth of evidence for Arbela could well be misleading. Were it not for the excavations at Ashur and Nineveh, we would know nearly as little about those cities’ religious history in the post-Assyrian period.

28. Dalley, *Legacy of Mesopotamia*, 38, citing the *Acts of Aithalaha the (Pagan) Priest and Hafṣai the Deacon* (Bedjan, *AMS*, 4: 133–37). The protagonist of this Syriac martyr narrative is identified as “Aithalālā (*’ēīālāhā*), the priest (*kūmrā*) of Sharbel” at Arbela. Dalley interprets “Sharbel” as an abbreviated form of “Ishtar of Arbela.” Cf. the following note on the probability of a Christian Edessan source for the name.

29. As shown by Peeters in his meticulous survey of the martyr literature of Adiabene, many details of the *Acts of Aithalāhā and Hafṣai* are demonstrably imaginary. The name of the god-

literary texts and archaeology on pre-Sasanian Adiabene amplifies the need to weigh carefully the images preserved in the Qardagh legend.

MELQI IN THE QARDAGH LEGEND

As indicated above, the narrative structure of the Qardagh legend is closely linked to a “certain hill called Melqi” near the city of Arbela. Key episodes of the legend involve the construction, demolition, or transformation of buildings on this “hill” or “mound” (Syr. *telā*). The hagiographer introduces Melqi immediately after the court scenes in which Qardagh earned the admiration of the Sasanian court:

And when Qardagh entered his home in the city of Arbela of the Assyrians, he made a great festival (*ʿēʾdā*) for the pagan gods, honored Magianism greatly, and gave fine gifts to the fire temple. And after a few days, he began to build a fortress and house upon a certain hill called Melqi. And in two years, he built and completed a strong fortress and beautiful house (*hesnā ʾāšinā w-baytā špirā*). At the foot of the hill, he built a fire temple (*bēt nūrūwātā*) at great expense. And he appointed *magi* to it for the service of the fire.³⁰

The hagiographer describes here a Sasanian building complex combining a fortress (*hesnā*), residence (*baytā*), and adjacent fire temple. He specifies the topographical layout of these buildings: the residential fortress sits upon (*ʿal*) the mound, and the fire temple at its base (*l-taḥt men telā*).³¹ Furthermore, he explicitly identifies this new complex as the site of his hero’s Christian future. As soon as it is completed, St. Sergius informs Qardagh in a dream vision that “in front of this fortress you will die in martyrdom on behalf of Christ.”³² Later episodes reinforce the position of Melqi as the locative axis of the legend. Mar Qardagh returns to “his house” (*bayteh*) after each of his initial encounters with the hermit Abdišo.³³ He returns twice more after his

dess, “Sharbel,” is apparently derived from another Syriac martyr text, the West-Syrian account of “Sharbel, high priest of the idols” at Edessa during the reign of Roman emperor Trajan (98–117). See Peeters, “Passionaire d’Adiabène,” 277–84, esp. 278, on the masculine form of the name Sharbel used in both texts. For the Edessan *Acts of Sharbel the Priest*, see W. Cureton, ed. and trans., *Ancient Syriac Documents* (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1864), 41–62; Graf, *GCAL*, 1: 530.

30. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 6–7.

31. For architectural parallels with other Sasanian fire-temple complexes, see the translation, §7, n. 19, and further discussion at the end of this chapter.

32. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 7. The heavenly powers all recognize that the fortress will become the site of the martyr’s final triumph. In a later dream vision (§39), Qardagh’s wife sees an angel seated in a golden throne “at the gate of the fortress of the blessed one.”

33. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 10 (after the hermit’s arrest), 12 (after the miracle of the frozen polo ball), and 24 (after the miracle of the falling arrows).

baptism and battle with Satan.³⁴ The sight of “his fortress atop Melqi . . . plundered and abandoned” sparks his transformation into a Christian warrior.³⁵ His military campaign to redeem the captives (see chapter 2) begins and ends at Melqi.³⁶ Finally, after seven months of captivity, Qardagh returns to Melqi to be stoned “at the gate of his fortress,” in accordance with royal orders and the prediction of St. Sergius.³⁷

His arrival at Melqi again prompts a dramatic transition in Qardagh’s behavior. Brought back to Arbela by his captors after seven months of captivity and torture at Nisibis, Qardagh is suddenly invigorated by the sight of his fortress:

And when the blessed one approached the appointed place, his fortress upon the edge of the village Melqi, he raised his eyes and saw his fortress and house. And he lifted his gaze to heaven and extended his mind to God on high and prayed. . . . And at that moment, the chains fell from his hands and feet. . . . When the nobles and the pagans and the foot soldiers saw what he was doing, some of them fled swiftly and were scattered here and there, while others ran and took shelter amidst the reeds and rushes of the marsh that was next to the fortress of the blessed one. But he went up to the fortress and entered his house, rejoicing and praising God. And he consoled his wife and his sister and all the men of his household. And he ordered that guards and watchmen be placed on the wall of his fortress.³⁸

Qardagh’s reentry into his fortress places him in an ambiguous position, protected by the walls of his castle, but also perched directly above the site where he is destined to die a martyr. Guarded by the ramparts of his fortress, he mocks the *magi* and rebukes his pagan family. Yet the audience already knows that he must surrender himself to become a martyr. In the words of the royal edict issued against him, “he should be stoned at the gate of his house.”³⁹ In other martyr stories, royal edicts often linger on the painfulness of the proposed method of execution. Here, location is more essential than method. From the beginning of the story, it is made clear that Qardagh must die at Melqi.

The epilogue to the Qardagh legend, quoted at the beginning of this chap-

34. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 34–35.

35. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 42, where Qardagh, arriving from Beth Bgāsh, finds “the exposed corpses and his house plundered and abandoned.”

36. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 44, 47. In the first passage, Qardagh performs his pre-battle prayers before the “sanctuary” (*bēt qūdšā*). Context implies that the scene takes place at Melqi, although this is never made explicit.

37. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 7, 56. For the heavenly powers’ anticipation of Qardagh’s martyrdom at Melqi, see n. 32 above.

38. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 54. Selections of this passage are quoted and discussed in chapter 2 above. See esp. chapter 2, n. 141 on the passage’s imagery and the royal hunt.

39. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 51.

ter, describes the transformation of the Sasanian building complex at Melqi after Qardagh's martyrdom into a market center with a "great and handsome" church.⁴⁰ An expanded version of this epilogue, preserved in the Mosul manuscript of the legend, describes a second, more ambitious phase of Christian architecture at the shrine:⁴¹

Later [after the establishment of the annual fair at Melqi], believers brought gold and silver and built for him [a church with] four naves, another nave as a martyrion, an altar, vaulted chancels, and a baptistery. And pious men worthy of good memory consecrated it toward the East and made great expenditures upon it in the name of the blessed one.⁴²

The "long epilogue" of the Qardagh legend thus details the construction of a very substantial church at Melqi, with four naves (*hayklē*), another "nave" (*hayklā*) functioning as a martyrion (*bēt sāhdē*), an altar, chancels, and a baptistery.⁴³ It is difficult to know how much credence this report deserves. The passage offers no specific names or titles; the writer refers to the donors only as "believers" and "pious men worthy of good memory." On the other hand, the passage (as emended) presents a church consistent with Syrian Christian architectural tradition of late antiquity, such as the late fifth-century church at Qal'at Sem'an in northern Syria.⁴⁴ While it is difficult to be certain, it appears that the hagiographer (or later editor) describes here an actual building at Melqi, which he knew by sight or reputation. This means that there were at least two, and probably three, phases of Christian architecture at Melqi: (1) the "great and handsome" church attested by the brief original epilogue, (2) the more substantial church described by the long epilogue preserved in the Mosul manuscript, and (3) the monastery of Mar Qardagh attested by four later East-Syrian writers.⁴⁵ As demonstrated below,

40. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 69; literally a "great and handsome church" (*hayklā rabā w-pa'yā*).

41. This "long epilogue" is one of a series of variant readings—designated A in the critical apparatus of Abbeloos's edition—that add details about Mar Qardagh's final hours and the subsequent development of his shrine. On the date of these additions, see below.

42. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 69.

43. As explained in the translation (§69, n. 223), an emendation, shown here in brackets, is required to make sense of the passage. For the Syriac architectural terminology used here, see Payne-Smith, *TS*, 1: 1004; and the diagram at Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1: 431 n. 1.

44. Although the hagiographer describes a church with four naves (*hayklē*), it is possible that he refers to some type of tetraconch church like those built elsewhere in Syria, Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus. See W. E. Kleinbauer, "The Origin and Function of the Aisled Tetraconch Churches in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia," *DOP* 27 (1973): 89–114, with 109 n. 109 on the aisled tetraconch churches of Armenia and Azerbaijan. For a diagram of the great pilgrim church at Qal'at Sem'an, which did in fact possess four full naves, see I. Pena, *The Christian Art of Byzantine Syria* (Reading, England: Garnet Publishing, 1996), 137.

45. There are other ways to explain the relationship between the long and short versions of the epilogue, but none is convincing. The short version does not appear to be an abbrevia-

these later East-Syrian sources can be used to chart the gradual expansion and evolution of the cult of Mar Qardagh.

IŠŌĎNAḤ OF BASRA
AND THE MONASTERY OF MAR QARDAGH

The *Book of Chastity*, composed ca. 860–870 by Išōḏnaḥ, the Nestorian bishop of Basra, is a massive biographical catalogue of all “fathers who founded monasteries in the kingdom of the Persians or the Arabs.”⁴⁶ Drawing on a variety of written and oral sources, Išōḏnaḥ records the careers of more than one hundred monastic founders active between the early fourth and mid-ninth century. In its current form, the *Book of Chastity* begins with a series of short notices on the earliest monastic founders of the East.⁴⁷ Išōḏnaḥ includes among these founders two martyrs from the reign of Shapur II, for whom Christians later constructed monasteries. Išōḏnaḥ gives the following report about Mar Qardagh:

Concerning Mar Qardagh, the martyr, in whose name monasteries have been built: In family he was from the stock of the Persians of the house of Nimrod, and his father was a man held in honor by King Shapur. And he was a warlike man in combat, and his house was in the city Arbela. He built a strong fortress in the vicinity of Arbela, on a high hill named Melqi. He was instructed by the hand of Mar Abdišo. And he was stoned at the gate of the hill that he had built (*al trā telā d-bnā*). A fortified monastery was built on it. May his prayers keep us all. Amen.⁴⁸

tion of the long epilogue; nor does it seem likely that the long version is just a fictional expansion of the brief original. The progression from a small initial church to a larger, more elaborate church is entirely plausible, given the later transformation of the shrine into a monastery associated with the metropolitan bishops of Arbela.

46. Išōḏnaḥ of Basra, *Book of Chastity*, preface (Chabot, 228; 1). On its author, see J. M. Fiey, “Ichōḏnaḥ, métropolitte de Basra, et son oeuvre,” *OS* 11 (1966): 431–50; Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 21–25; Ortíz de Urbina, *Patrología*, 217. As Fiey (“Ichōḏnaḥ,” 431) explains, his name means literally “Jesus has been revealed.” The Nestorian bibliographer ‘Abdišo of Nisibis (†1318) credits him with several other works, including a verse account of the legend of Mar Yōnān, founder of a monastery at Anbar on the Euphrates. For details and bibliography, see Fiey, “Ichōḏnaḥ,” 434–35.

47. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, the original editor of the *Book of Chastity*, argued that the surviving text was interpolated, since the Malabar manuscript, burned at the Council of Diamper in 1599, possessed a different set of chapter headings. According to Portuguese records of this manuscript, the *Book of Chastity* began not with the legendary, fourth-century founder of Nestorian monasticism, Mar Awgen (Eugenius), but with Abraham of Kaškar (†588). I accept here Fiey’s counterargument, which attributes the discrepancy to Portuguese expurgation of the original ninth-century text by the bishop of Basra. See Fiey, “Ichōḏnaḥ,” 434; idem, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 25.

48. Išōḏnaḥ of Basra, *Book of Chastity*, 11 (Chabot, 231; 6). The notice on Mar Qardagh occupies a more prominent place in the (lost) Malabar manuscript of Išōḏnaḥ’s work, appear-

This summary reduces the Qardagh legend to its bare essentials. Iṣōʿdnaḥ notes the saint's paternal genealogy, warlike disposition, religious instruction by Abdišo, and death by stoning. The only details he lingers over are those related to Melqi, where the saint built a "strong fortress . . . on a high hill." The bishop of Basra focuses on these topographical details because his real interest is in the "fortified monastery" built atop the hill at Melqi.⁴⁹ His account of another martyr of Shapur's persecution, Aithalāhā of Beth Nūhadrā, reveals a similar interest in documenting the construction of a monastery at a site made sacred by martyr's blood.⁵⁰ His observation that the monastery at Melqi was "fortified" (ʿašinā) links it to a broader pattern of defensive architecture in late antique northern Iraq. Archaeologists working in the area west of Mosul have described the proliferation of small forts and walled enclosures as a "conspicuous feature" of the late Sasanian period.⁵¹

Iṣōʿdnaḥ's précis of the Qardagh legend contains enough verbal reminiscences of the *History of Mar Qardagh* to suggest a line of direct literary dependence. His presentation of the legend does, however, present two significant variants. First, Iṣōʿdnaḥ refers to the existence of a "monastery" (*dayrā*) at Melqi, whereas the epilogue of the *History* refers only to a "church" (*hayklā*) and "market" (*sūq*). This difference is unlikely to be accidental. If the hagiographer knew of a monastery at Melqi, he would probably have noted its existence, since he often refers to monasteries in other sections of the legend.⁵² It is likewise implausible that Iṣōʿdnaḥ simply invented this monastery. While monks and monasteries are his chief interest, Iṣōʿdnaḥ

ing third after the entries on Abraham of Kaškar and the ascetic George of Adiabene, who founded monasteries in the districts of Marga and Beth Bgāsh. See Fiey, "Ichōʿdnaḥ," 445.

49. Iṣōʿdnaḥ of Basra, *Book of Chastity*, 11 (Chabot, 231; 6), where the bishop uses the same adjective, ʿašinā, "strong" or "fortified," to describe both the fortress and the monastery (Chabot's translation, "un important monastère," is misleading).

50. Iṣōʿdnaḥ of Basra, *Book of Chastity*, 8 (Chabot, 230; 4), describing how a "renowned monastery" was built at the site of Aithalāhā's martyrdom after "pagans, inspired by hate," chopped down the myrtle tree that had grown from the martyr's blood. For the healing powers of this tree in Beth Nūhadrā (in the highlands northeast of Mosul, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 2: 703–6. Peeters, "'Passionaire d'Adiabène,'" 289–98, discusses the hagiographic dossier, which must be distinguished from that of the martyr Aithalāhā of Arbela discussed above (nn. 28–29).

51. Wilkinson and Tucker, *Settlement Development in the North Jazīra*, 70. For the construction of a walled monastery over the ruins of Nineveh during the mid-seventh century, see C. F. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 70–71, where the parallel with Wilkinson and Tucker is cited.

52. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 31, 34, 36, 37 (the "great monastery" at Dbar Hewton, built in place of a fire temple owned by Qardagh's parents), 44, 48, and 52 (the monastery of Mar Jahōb, near Nisibis).

discusses several “fathers,” who founded only churches and schools.⁵³ The establishment of a “fortified monastery” at Melqi also fits into a larger pattern, since other East-Syrian sources report the existence of ten monasteries in the Arbela district by the ninth century. The other novelty in Iṣōʿdnaḥ’s presentation of the Qardagh legend concerns the saint’s ethnic origin. The bishop of Basra identifies Qardagh’s family not as “Assyrian” (*ʿātoriyā*), but Persian (*parsāyā*). He notes Qardagh’s descent only from the “house of Nimrod,” omitting his maternal lineage via the “house of Senacherib.” This omission is significant, as it exposes the distinctive regional flavor of the original legend. From his perspective in southern Iraq, Iṣōʿdnaḥ had no interest in the alleged “Assyrian” ancestry emphasized by Qardagh’s hagiographer. The *Book of Chastity* includes saints of “Roman,” “Ishmaelite,” and especially “Persian” origin, but not one “Assyrian.”⁵⁴ In this version of the legend, Mar Qardagh is simply another of the “Magian” converts who laid the foundation for the vibrant monastic tradition of Iṣōʿdnaḥ’s own generation.

THE QARDAGH LEGEND IN THE *CHRONICLE OF SÉERT*

The most substantial retelling of the Qardagh legend appears in the *Chronicle of Séert*, an anonymous East-Syrian chronicle, preserved in an Arabic translation of the tenth or early eleventh century.⁵⁵ The chapter on Mar Qardagh comes at the end of a long account of the persecution under Shapur II, which focuses on martyrs of metropolitan and episcopal rank.⁵⁶ The *Chronicle’s*

53. Iṣōʿdnaḥ of Basra, *Book of Chastity*, 56 (Chabot, 254–55: 35); 58 (Chabot, 255: 36); 66a (Chabot, 258: 39–40).

54. See, for example, Iṣōʿdnaḥ of Basra, *Book of Chastity*, 21 (Chabot, 236; 12), on Ḥnaniṣōʿ, a pupil of Mar Babai the Great, who was “an Ishmaelite by race (*b-gensā*), from the stock of Nāʿmān the King” (i.e., the Lakhmid dynasty of Ḥīra). For other saints of Persian origin, in addition to Mar Qardagh, see *Book of Chastity*, 6 (Chabot, 245; 23), 7 (230; 4); 86 (265; 48), and 88 (265; 48–49). Iṣōʿdnaḥ consistently refers to the Arbela region as “Adiabene,” rather than “Assyria.”

55. For the Arabic text with French translation printed beneath, see A. Scher et al., eds. and trans., *Chronique de Séert (Histoire nestorienne)*, in *PO* 4 (1): 215–313; 5 (2): 219–344; 7 (2): 99–203; 13 (4): 437–639. The first part of the *Chronicle* covers the years 251–422, the second part the years 484–650. The *Chronicle* takes its name from the city of Séert in southeastern Turkey, where the unique manuscript of the second half was found. The *Chronicle*, which was completed before 1036, is heavily dependent on earlier East-Syrian sources. For initial orientation, with full bibliography of editions and translations, see Morony, *Iraq*, 568; Graf, *GCAL*, 2: 195–96. For the dating, see J. M. Fiey, “Iṣōʿdenah et la *Chronique de Séert*,” *OS* 12 (1967): 455.

56. The immediately preceding sections recount the martyrdom of the *catholikos* Simeon bar Sabbaʿe and his companions, the *catholikos* Barbaṣmin, and Ṣahdost, metropolitan bishop of Beth Garmai. See *Chronicle of Séert*, I (I), chaps. 27, 29 (Scher and Périer, 296–305; 309–11); continued at I (II), chap. 31 (Scher and Dib, 221–24).

retelling of the legend, based on a text close to the *History of Mar Qardagh*, has many interesting features. It runs as follows:⁵⁷

This man was, in the days of Barbashmin, from among the great men of Persia. He was characterized by his courage. When Shapur learned of his manliness, courage, and skill with a bow, he appointed him governor (*wāli*) over the region extending from Beth Garmaï to Nisibis. He made Arbela his place of residence. The Christians feared from him a terrible affliction. On a raised hill he built a great fortress (*ḥuṣn*) and named it after himself. He was twenty-five years old.

Truly God, praised and exalted is He, loved his chosen one, for on some nights he saw in his dreams a man of beautiful form pierce his side with a lance. The man said to him, "Before this fortress is complete, you will be slain for the love of Christ."

"Who are you who predicts to me the future?" asked Qardagh (Ar. Qārdaḥ).

He replied, "I am George the Martyr, disciple of Christ, the Lord over all Rome. I have come to inform you of what Our Lord has made known to me." Qardagh became alarmed at this and did not consider the vision further.

On the mountain of Beth Bgāsh there lived a hermit (*ḥabīs*) named 'Abd Yashū'. In a vision, he saw that he should go to this man Qardagh so that he [Qardagh] would receive eternal life at his hand. But when he came before him, Qardagh ordered that he be beaten and imprisoned.

While Qardagh and his companions had for some time been playing polo in the square, the ball became stuck in the ground. They exerted great effort to remove it, but they could not. Then one of them said to Qardagh, "I saw the man whom you imprisoned raise his hand and make the sign of the Cross in front of the ball while moving his lips."

Qardagh returned distressed and astonished. He summoned the monk (Ar. *rāhib*), the hermit 'Abd Yashū' and asked him about the Christian faith. 'Abd Yashū' clearly explained it to him. Qardagh received the faith from him and was baptized.

Then 'Abd Yashū' summoned to Qardagh a monk named Isaac. He read to Qardagh the pure Gospel and translated it for him into Persian. Qardagh forbade himself to eat meat or drink wine. He divided a great sum of money amongst the churches and monasteries. His family was distressed by what they saw concerning his condition. He remained that way for two years and three months, persevering in fasting and prayer.

Rome and other [nations] perceived his reluctance for war. They invaded and devastated his territories and left them in ruins. Qardagh went out to them saying, "Do you think that I have already become weak from war? No! Rather I have donned mighty armor in Christianity." He defeated them, and they fled from before him, although they were numerous.

Qardagh returned, razing the fire temples and building churches in their

57. I am indebted to Adam Larson of the University of Washington for translation of the Arabic text. Scher's French translation is not always reliable.

places. The *magi* informed the accursed Shapur of his actions. Shapur replied to them, “You have heard that Qardagh has bound himself to Christianity and destroyed the fire temples. But you did not hear how he put to flight great numbers of those loyal to Rome with only two hundred horsemen, and how he killed the Arabs throughout his days.”

The *mobad* and the *magi* disapproved of what they heard. They said, “If you want Magianism to become obsolete and Christianity to grow stronger, then let us know. But if not, then why should we neglect the affair of this man?”

This saddened Shapur, for he admired Qardagh’s courage and strength. Therefore, he ordered that Qardagh be imprisoned for seven months so that he might be examined and persuaded to give up his cause. If he returned [to Magianism], restored the fire temples he destroyed, and drove away the Christians, he would be freed, but if not, he would be stoned at the door of his residence. Shapur dispatched for that purpose two of his generals.

When the appointed time expired and Qardagh remained steadfast, he was sent out to be stoned. Qardagh asked the monk Isaac to read to him the story of Stephen in order to strengthen his heart. They did not cease from stoning him until he was dead. A tremendous number of people gathered to watch him. During the night, the Christians recovered his body and buried it. This happened in the forty-ninth year of the reign of Shapur. When Shapur died—may God be displeased with him and may he reside in Hellfire—Qardagh’s fortress was made into a great monastery (*dayr*) where remembrance is made of him every year. May God remember us through his prayers.⁵⁸

Though less than eight hundred words in length, approximately five percent of the total length of the *History*, the *Chronicle’s* summary of the legend retains most of its key episodes: Qardagh’s performance at the royal court and subsequent return to Arbela; his construction of a “strong fortress” on a “high hill”; and his vision of a saint who prophesies his impending martyrdom “before this fortress.”⁵⁹ It cites his initial encounter with Abdišo (Ar. ‘Abd Yashu’), the miracle of the frozen polo ball, and his military campaign against “those loyal to Rum.”⁶⁰ Finally, it tells of Qardagh’s accusation by the *magi* and stoning in imitation of St. Stephen of Jerusalem.⁶¹ The *Chronicle’s* version of the

58. *Chronicle of Se’ert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 225–28).

59. *Chronicle of Se’ert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 225), recapitulating *History of Mar Qardagh*, 4–7. The *Chronicle’s* version of this prophecy adds a temporal dimension, predicting the saint’s martyrdom “before this fortress is complete.” The addition could indicate that popular tradition explained the dilapidated fortifications at Melqi as a reflection of their “unfinished” condition.

60. *Chronicle of Se’ert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 225–27), recapitulating *History of Mar Qardagh*, 9–13, 34–36, 41–47. Whereas the *History* always refers to a combined army of “Romans and Arabs” (§§41 and 48–49), the *Chronicle* makes the Romans the primary enemy, mentioning the Arabs only in the king’s speech to the *magi*.

61. *Chronicle of Se’ert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 227), recapitulating *History of Mar Qardagh*, 48–49, 51, 62, 65–68.

Qardagh legend thus matches closely, but not exactly, the narrative order and content of the *Tas̄c̄itā*. Though it is possible that the *Chronicle* uses here an intermediary source,⁶² the closeness of the verbal parallels favors a more direct line of transmission. The *Chronicle*'s author appears to have had access to the *History of Mar Qardagh*, together with other sources, for his account of the Great Persecution under Shapur II.⁶³

The *Chronicle*'s summary of the Qardagh legend, while following the general outline of the *History of Mar Qardagh*, inevitably omits many episodes. Several of the editorial choices are noteworthy. First, the entire disputation scene drops out. After the miracle of the frozen polo ball, Qardagh asks "about the Christian faith, and 'Abd Yashu' clearly explained it to him."⁶⁴ There is not even an echo left of the complex philosophical dialogue of the original Syriac version. Second, the scriptural quotations and allusions, which figure prominently in the Syriac text, disappear. The chronicler evidently saw the scriptural components as secondary and non-essential for his retelling of the legend. Third, the protracted drama of Qardagh's struggle against his pagan family (see chapter 4) is reduced to a single sentence: "His family was distraught to see him act in this way."⁶⁵ While the necessities of narrative compression may account for some of these omissions, the results also reflect the evolving cultural priorities of the medieval East-Syrian church. Consider the *Chronicle*'s excision of the disputation scene. The *Chronicle of Séert* often alludes to the convening of formal religious disputations at the Sasanian court; it describes, for instance, how the *catholikos* Simeon bar Sabba'e debated the *magi* at Shapur II's court, "without interruption and without a rude or stinging response."⁶⁶ At the same time, the chronicler shows no interest in the actual substance of these debates. His focus falls, instead, on the miraculous proofs by which Christian debaters triumphed over their rivals. In another episode, when the *magi* at Shapur's court refuse to acknowledge their defeat in debate, Mar Awgen, the legendary father of Sasan-

62. The *Chronicle* explicitly acknowledges the seventh-century church historian Daniel bar Miriam as one of his sources for the history of Sasanian Christianity. See V. E. Degen, "Daniel bar Maryam: Ein nestorianischer Kirchenhistoriker," *OrChr* 52 (1968): 45–80; idem, "Die Kirchengeschichte des Daniel bar Maryam—Eine Quelle der *Chronik von Séert*?" *ZDMG*, Supplementa, I, 2 (1969): 511–16; L. Sako, "Les sources de la *Chronique de Séert*," *PdO* 14 (1987): 156–57. S. Brock, "Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2 (1976): 17–36 (repr. in Brock, *SPLA*, VII); Brock cautions (25) against exaggerating the *Chronicle of Séert*'s dependence on Daniel bar Miriam's *History*.

63. See esp. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (I), chap. 27 (Scher and Périer, 305), where the *Chronicle*'s author justifies his decision to include only a "short account" of the martyrs under Shapur II, skipping over the stories of other martyrs from Beth Garmai, Nineveh, and other regions.

64. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 226).

65. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 226). Qardagh's father is never mentioned, and the enemies who stone the saint at Melqi are left nameless.

66. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (I), chap. 27 (Scher and Périer, 301).

ian monasticism, challenges them to a trial by fire.⁶⁷ The *Chronicle*, passing quickly over this initial debate, narrates in detail the subsequent contest by fire culminating in the immolation of the saint's impious opponents. In a later episode, the *Chronicle* credits Mar Aba the Great with a similar victory at the court of Khusro I.⁶⁸ Such stories of proof by miracle were by no means new.⁶⁹ But they figure more prominently in the *Chronicle of Séert* than in earlier hagiography. Whereas the *History of Mar Qardagh* presents philosophical and miraculous proofs as complementary, the *Chronicle* prefers miracles to systematic debate.

The *Chronicle's* account also revises or adds new elements to the story of Qardagh's career. First, it clearly identifies the saint as a Persian, dropping any reference to his royal "Assyrian" ancestry.⁷⁰ This point is made explicit in the depiction of the saint's scriptural education: "Then 'Abd Yashu' summoned before Qardagh a monk named Isaac, who read to Qardagh the pure Gospel and translated it for him into Persian."⁷¹ This formulation implies that Qardagh was ignorant of Syriac, and required a simultaneous oral translation of scripture into Persian.⁷² In the same passage, Qardagh's ascetic regimen is expanded to include the renunciation of wine.⁷³ Second, the *Chronicle* identifies Qardagh's spiritual patron not as Sergius but as "Mar George." While a simple scribal error could account for this change—the spelling of the saints' names differs only in the initial letters (GWRGS in place of

67. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (II), chap. 35 (Scher and Dib, 247–48): "Let the king order that a great fire be lit before him. We will go into it, together with *magi* who are debating with us. The one who remains there [in the fire] safe and sound, may his God be recognized as true."

68. Challenged by the *magi* to produce "a great miracle to prove the truth of your speech," Mar Aba sends one of his disciples into the middle of a bonfire that surrounds, but does not injure, the disciple. See *Chronicle of Séert*, II (I), chap. 28 (Scher, 164–66).

69. The story of Mar Awgen's victory over the *magi* was already known to Dādišō' of Qatar (fl. second half of the seventh century). See N. Sims-Williams, "Dadišō' Qatraya's Commentary on the *Paradise of the Fathers*," *AB* 105 (1995): 45.

70. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 225), where Qardagh is introduced as one of the "great men of Persia." This shift in emphasis is anticipated by Išo'dnah of Basra's presentation of Qardagh as coming "from Persian stock" (see n. 54 above). The *Chronicle of Séert* eliminates even the reference to Nimrod.

71. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 226). Cf. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 35, where Qardagh himself summons Isaac, a "solitary worthy of good memory."

72. For oral presentation of the Gospel to Persian converts, see the translation, §35, n. 118; §63, n. 208. Isaac's translation of the Gospels is mentioned only here. Though sparsely attested in Christian sources, simultaneous oral translation of scripture was a well-established practice in late antique Judaism. See S. Fraade, "Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum, and Multilingualism in the Jewish Galilee of the Third–Sixth Centuries," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 261–65.

73. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 226): "Qardagh forbade himself to eat meat or drink wine." Cf. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 35, which mentions only his renunciation of meat.

SRGS)—it is significant that the chronicler, or copyist, makes this particular switch. The substitution of George for Sergius corresponds to the shifting balance in the relative popularity of these two saints among Arabic-speaking Christians.⁷⁴ A nearby section of the *Chronicle* specifically invokes the memory of “Mar George” as an example of miraculous resurrection.⁷⁵ Third and finally, the *Chronicle of Séert* notes the conversion of the “fortress” at Melqi into a “great monastery, where remembrance is made of him every year.”⁷⁶ This passage confirms the establishment of the monastery at Melqi mentioned by Išō’dnaḥ of Basra. This monastery must have been founded sometime between the composition of the *History*, ca. 600–630, and the *Book of Chastity*, ca. 860–870.

A HOLY WOMAN OF ARBELA AT THE MONASTERY OF MAR QARDAGH

A third source, recently published by Sebastian Brock, confirms that the monastery at Melqi was dedicated to Mar Qardagh, and implies an early date for its foundation, possibly even before the death of Khusro II in 628. The source in question is a Syriac hymn composed during the twelfth or early thirteenth century and preserved in East-Syrian liturgical manuscripts.⁷⁷ The hymn honors a female martyr, identified only as the “daughter of Ma’nyo,” persecuted at Arbela during the reign of “Khusro.”⁷⁸ Despite its chronological distance from the events it describes, this hymn preserves valuable information about its heroine’s movements within Adiabene. After escaping from the “rep-

74. For the massive manuscript tradition on St. George in Christian Arabic, see Graf, *GCAL*, 1: 502–3; cf. 512 for the smaller (though still substantial) manuscript tradition concerning St. Sergius. The *Chronicle of Séert*, I (I), chap. 13 (Scher and Périer, 253–54), includes a brief account of Sergius and his companion Bacchus. According to Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 1, the two saints were often conflated. For additional bibliography, see A. Kazhdan and N. P. Sevcenko, “George,” *ODB* 2 (1991): 834–35; idem, “Sergios and Bachkos,” *ODB* 3 (1991): 879.

75. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (I), chap. 40 (Scher and Périer, 257).

76. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 230).

77. S. Brock, “‘The Daughter of Ma’nyo’: A Holy Woman of Arbela,” *Annales du Département des Lettres Arabes* 6B (1991–92): 121–28, with English translation and commentary. I have not been able to consult the Syriac text published in T. Darmo, ed., *East-Syrian Ḥudra (Ktābā da-Qdām wad-Bātar: wad-Ḥudra wad-Kaškol wad-Gazzā w-Qāle d-’Udrāne ‘am Ktābā d-Mazmūre)* (Trichur, India: Mar Narsai Press, 1960–62), a rare book in America. Brock’s dating of the hymn (125–26) is based on its diction, use of end rhyme, and the *terminus ante quem* of the destruction of the saint’s church in Arbela in 1310. For the church, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 57–58.

78. As Brock (“Holy Woman of Arbela,” 126) observes, the hymn could refer here (stanzas 7–13) to Khusro I (531–579), but the “more likely candidate” is Khusro II (590–628). For the commemoration of the “daughter of Ma’nyo” in another, twelfth-century East-Syrian hymn, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 58; and idem, “Une hymne nestorienne sur les saints femmes,” *AB* 84 (1966): 86–87, where the “blessed daughter of Ma’nyo [*sic*]” is paired with another martyr of Adiabene, “the sister of Sama, the blessed martyr.”

representative (*taḥlōpā*) of Khusro,” who pursued her with lustful intentions, the daughter of Ma’nyo fled first to the village of Hrem ca. forty-five kilometers west of Arbela.⁷⁹ From there, as her reputation as a healer spread, local believers took her to the “monastery of Mar Qardagh, the tested martyr,” where she was warmly greeted by the “Meṭrān,” that is, the metropolitan bishop of Adiabene. Two days later, she proceeded to Arbela, where she died on the “Friday following the Feast of the Finding of the venerable Cross.”⁸⁰ It is probable, as Brock argues, that this hymn preserves “genuine local traditions.”⁸¹ If these local traditions embedded in the hymn are accurate, then we have evidence for a metropolitan bishop of Arbela residing in the monastery of Mar Qardagh at Melqi during the reign of Khusro II.⁸² Alternatively, these details could reflect developments of the post-Sasanian period.⁸³ The first secure evidence linking the monastery of Mar Qardagh to the metropolitan throne of Adiabene dates to the eighth century (see below on Thomas of Marga).

COMMEMORATION OF MAR QARDAGH IN LITURGICAL TRADITION

As in Byzantium and other parts of the Christian world, East-Syrian Christians maintained liturgical calendars recording the feast days of the saints.⁸⁴

79. For the village’s location, almost due west of Arbela, see Brock, “Holy Woman of Arbela,” 126, identifying the hymn’s “Hārām” (stanza 13) with the village Hrem, 2–3 km south of the monastery of Job the Persian. See Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 157–58 and map 2 (p. 41). In the village, the daughter of Ma’nyo stayed with the “old woman who had been her governess.” This suggests that her Christian nursemaid encouraged the daughter of Ma’nyo’s conversion to ascetic Christianity. As indicated by the story of the martyr Shirin of Khuzistan (see chapter 4, n. 113), Zoroastrian parents attempted to avoid precisely this kind of “corrupting” influence by Christian nursemaids from the countryside.

80. For the date, 13 September, in the East-Syrian church calendar, see Brock, “Holy Woman of Arbela,” 125 (stanza 28). The story of the saint’s resuscitation of a girl who had fallen off the roof of her nursemaid’s house occurs in stanzas 15–18; the reference to the metropolitan bishop’s presence “inside” the monastery of Mar Qardagh appears in stanza 22.

81. Brock, “Holy Woman of Arbela,” 126.

82. Brock, “Holy Woman of Arbela,” 126–27, suggests the possibility of identifying this unnamed metropolitan during the reign of “Khusro” with the most distinguished holder of the see, Yonadab of Adiabene (see chapter 1). The construction of the baptistery at Melqi described in the “long epilogue” to the Qardagh legend (see the translation, §69, n. 223) would be appropriate for a church associated with the metropolitan bishop of Arbela. On the baptistery found in the tetraconch church at Rusafa, which, like Melqi, may also have served as an episcopal funerary church, see Kleinbauer, “Aisled Tetraconch Churches,” 97; and Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 78 n. 91.

83. I.e., the twelfth-century hymn, while based on authentic local traditions about a late Sasanian martyr known as the “daughter of Ma’nyo,” has updated or garbled the details about her last days in Adiabene. As Brock notes (“Holy Woman of Arbela,” 127), several toponyms in the hymn remain unidentifiable.

84. For orientation, see J. Noret, “Ménologies, synaxeries, menées,” *AB* 86 (1986): 21–24;

Two East-Syrian calendars preserve short notices about Mar Qardagh, confirming the date and season of the saint's annual commemoration. According to the earliest, an eleventh-century church calendar now in the British Museum, the feast of Mar Qardagh was held on the "seventh Friday [after Nausardel]," that is, on the Friday of the fourteenth week after Pentecost.⁸⁵ This date is confirmed by a thirteenth-century calendar of the British Museum, as well as by a lectionary from Amida (Diyarbakir) in southeastern Turkey.⁸⁶ All three texts thus concur with the dating for Qardagh's martyrdom presented in the Mosul manuscript of the *History*.⁸⁷ This means that the annual "festival and commemoration" (*'ē'dā w-dūkrānā*) of Mar Qardagh was held toward the end of summer, with its precise date dependent on the date of Easter. The Mosul manuscript's use of this dating system could indicate that the "long epilogue" was added to the *History* after the mid-seventh century, when the *catholikos* Išō'yab III (†658) reformed the Nestorian liturgical calendar, placing most festivals on Fridays or, less often, Sundays.⁸⁸ In this reformed liturgical calendar, the festival of Mar Qardagh fell toward the end of the cluster of saints' festivals celebrated during the summer months.⁸⁹

The liturgical evidence also suggests the relatively limited diffusion of the saint's cult. In contrast to such popular saints as Sergius, Jacob "the Sliced,"

R. F. Taft and N. P. Ševčenco, "Synaxerion (*συναξάριον*)," *ODB* 3 (1991): 1991; R. F. Taft, "Feast (*ἑορτή, πανήγυρις*)," *ODB* 2 (1991): 781–82.

85. Nausardel is an East-Syrian holiday that takes place on the seventh week after Pentecost. For its origins, see Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 407–8 n. 3, which argues that the Nestorians borrowed the holiday from the Persian New Year, hence its name Nausardel (from the Persian *Nausard*, "New Year"). For the eleventh-century synaxery, see Wright, *Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 1: 186 (MS 246, fol. 140a).

86. For this second calendar copied in 1206/1207, see Wright, *Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 1: 193 (MS 248, fol. 161a). For the lectionary, see Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 1: 581; 3: 2, CCCLXXXIV. For the use of lectionaries to reconstruct the East-Syrian liturgical calendar, see J. M. Fiey, "Le sanctoral syrien oriental d'après les évangélistes et les bréviaires du XI au XIII siècle," *OS* 8 (1963): 20–54; and P. Kannookadan, *The East Syrian Lectionary: An Historico-Liturgical Study* (Rome: Mar Thoma Yogam [The St. Thomas Christian Fellowship], 1991), 156–69.

87. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 67, which dates the saint's annual commemoration to the "end of the seventh [week] of summer, on the Friday on which the blessed one was crowned." See the translation, §67, n. 220. All manuscripts of the *History*, as well as the later liturgical tradition, agree on the year of Mar Qardagh's martyrdom, during the "forty-ninth year of Shapur," i.e., 358.

88. If correct, this hypothesis would provide a valuable *terminus post quem* for the variants in the Mosul manuscript. The East-Syrian calendar assigns only a few prominent saints fixed dates for their festivals: the apostle Thomas on 3 July, George the martyr on 24 April, and the Sasanian martyr Mar Pethion on 25 October. Most other saints, including Mar Qardagh, were honored on movable feast days that depended on the date of Easter. But as Dalmais ("Vénération des saints," 86) explains, it is rarely possible to identify which parts of the liturgical calendar preserve Išō'yab's reforms. For a more optimistic view, see Kannookadan, *East Syrian Lectionary*, 160–61.

89. See Dalmais, "Vénération des saints," 87, on summer as one of the two periods "priviligées" in the East-Syrian calendar of saints' festivals. The evidence is, however, very fragmentary.

or the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, whose fame extended throughout the Christian world, the cult of Mar Qardagh remained (until recently) restricted to the Syriac cultural zone of Iraq and possibly western Iran. The hagiographers of Byzantium, Armenia, and Coptic Egypt preserve no mention of the saint, despite their familiarity with the names and stories of other Sasanian martyrs.⁹⁰ More surprising, perhaps, is the silence of the West-Syrian sources, where Qardagh does not appear until a fourteenth-century church calendar from Ṭur ʿAbdin, which identifies him as “Mar Qardagh from the race (*gensā*) of Sennacherib, who was crowned on a Friday.”⁹¹ The absence of earlier references corresponds to the general reticence of West-Syrian writers about the Persian martyrs. The massive West-Syrian chronicles by Michael the Syrian (†1199) and Barhebraeus (†1286) contain only short notices on the persecutions under Shapur.⁹² The Ṭur ʿAbdin calendar also changes the date of the saint’s commemoration, assigning it a fixed date (1 Nisan) under the influence of Byzantine liturgical models.⁹³ Implied within this shift is the gradual detachment of the saint’s annual festival from the seasonal market at Melqi.

PLACES AND INDIVIDUALS NAMED AFTER MAR QARDAGH

Toponyms and personal names constitute the final category of evidence useful for tracing the diffusion of the cult of Mar Qardagh. As Elizabeth Key Fowden has recently demonstrated, onomastic patterns can offer valuable insight into the geographic and chronological diffusion of a particular saint’s cult.⁹⁴ As indicated in chapter 1, the name Qardagh is not uniquely Christian. It appears at least once in Sasanian epigraphy (on an undated seal in

90. For the Persian martyrs in Armenian tradition, see M. van Esbroeck, “Abraham le confesseur (V^e S.), traducteur des passions des martyrs perses: À propos d’un livre récent,” *AB* 95 (1977): 169–79.

91. P. Peeters, “Le martyrologe de Rabban Sliba,” *AB* 27 (1908): 179 (Syriac on 150). On the text’s provenance, see 129–30. For its place in the West-Syrian martyrological tradition, see R. Aigrain, *L’hagiographie: Ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire* (Poitiers: Bloud and Gay, 1953), 84–85.

92. See J. B. Chabot, ed. and trans., *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d’Antioche (1166–1199)* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899–1910; repr., Brussels: Culture et civilisation, 1963), 1: 257, 259; and E. A. W. Budge, ed. and trans., *The Chronography of Gregory Abū’l Faraj: The Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932; repr., Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003), 1: 59. For context, see S. Brock, “Syriac Historical Writing: A Survey of the Main Sources,” *Journal of the Iraqi Academy (Syriac Corporation)* 5 (1979–80): 21–23 (repr. in Brock, *SSC*, I).

93. Peeters, “Martyrologe,” 179. The Syriac month of Nisan corresponds approximately to April in the Julian calendar.

94. Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 85, on the adoption of saints’ names upon baptism. This methodology naturally works best when the saint in question bears a distinctively Christian name. See, for instance, Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 101–5, on the rapid spread of the cult of St. Sergius; and, for methodology, Davis, *Saint Thecla*, 192, 201–8.

the Tehran museum), and as the name of a Sasanian *marzbān* of Beth ‘Arbaye during the late fifth century. Correcting earlier etymologies, Philippe Gignoux has shown that the name is of Persian origin and corresponds to general patterns of Pahlavi personal names.⁹⁵ Individuals named “Qardagh” from Persian-speaking regions of the empire probably have no connection to the saint.⁹⁶ Subsequent appearances of the name, clustered in northern Iraq, are more plausible. Iṣō’dnaḥ of Basra tells, for instance, of a monk named Qardagh, who lived “forty years in solitude” after his initial ascetic training on Mount Izla.⁹⁷ A native of the region of Ma’alta and Ḥnita, ca. thirty kilometers north of Arbela, this monk’s career can be dated to the late sixth and early seventh centuries.⁹⁸ His adoption of the name Qardagh, whether at birth or upon baptism, thus predates the composition of the *History of Mar Qardagh* (ca. 600–630) by as much as half a century. A connection to the cult of Mar Qardagh is possible but cannot be proven. The hermit’s career does, however, document Christian use of the name Qardagh in a region where the saint’s cult would soon be established. Ma’alta and Ḥnita border the region of Dbar Ḥewton, where a “great monastery” dedicated to Mar Qardagh existed by the early seventh century.⁹⁹

The three “Qardaghs” mentioned by the monastic chronicler Thomas of Marga (writing ca. 860) offer a more probable link to the martyr’s cult. All

95. Gignoux, *Noms propres*, 496a: “Kirdag (*krtky*).” For the pattern of the name, see P. Gignoux, “Les noms propres en moyen-perse épigraphique: Étude typologique,” in *Pad nām i Yazdān: Études d’épigraphie, de numismatique et d’histoire de l’Iran ancien*, ed. P. Gignoux (Paris: Conseil scientifique de l’Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle: Klincksieck, 1979), 63 (nos. 2.3.2–3); correctly identified also by Wiessner, “Christentum und Zoroastrismus,” 414. Cf. the etymologies proposed by Peeters (n. 2 above). Others, including Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch*, 156, have mistakenly linked the saint’s name to the Gr. *καρδακίς*, a “soldier.” The Turkish etymology (*qardağ*, “black mountain”), proposed by Budge, *Book of Governors*, II, 386, is likewise erroneous. On the variant Syriac spellings of the saint’s name, see Feige, *Mar Qardagh*, 9.

96. The earliest attested Christian bearing the name is a mid-sixth-century bishop of Fars. See the *Synodicon Orientale* (Chabot, 331; 79, ll. 7–8), for the signature of “Qardagh, bishop of Ardaschir-Khurrah” at the synod of 544. The only other bishop attested for the diocese, Mar Farabokht at the synod of 424, also bears a Persian name. On the diocese, modern Bandar Tahirī on the coast of the Persian Gulf, see Fiey, *POCN*, 134–35.

97. Iṣō’dnaḥ of Basra, *Book of Chastity*, 45 (Chabot, 249; 28), identifying the saint as a member of the family of Babai the Great (†628). I assume here that the “Mar Abraham,” with whom Qardagh the hermit studied, was the famous Mar Abraham of Kaškar (†588), founder of the Great Monastery on Mount Izla, near Nisibis.

98. According to Iṣō’dnaḥ, Qardagh was appointed abbot by Bar Šabta, bishop of Ḥnita. For this bishop’s participation in the East-Syrian synods of 576 and 585, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 211.

99. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 37, on the “great monastery” at Dbar Ḥewton, which “exists to this day and is called after his name.” The hagiographer claims that the building previously served as a fire temple and aristocratic residence built by the saint’s parents. See chapter 4, n. 16 above. For the contiguous location of the districts Ma’alta, Ḥnita, and Dbar Ḥewton, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 225 (map 3).

three come from or were active in the region of Marga, the hill country on the northern side of the Great Zab River. The first was a monk at the monastery of Beth 'Abhe during the first half of the seventh century.¹⁰⁰ The second was an eighth-century monk and calligrapher from the village of Réša near the monastery of Beth 'Abhe. The *catholikos* Timothy I (780–823) selected him, together with his brother, Yaballāhā the bookbinder, to become a missionary to the mountainous districts on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea.¹⁰¹ The third and perhaps most interesting was a West-Syrian stylite (mid-eighth century), whose column stood in a village in western Marga named Beth Qardagh.¹⁰² It is not entirely clear whether this village received its name from its resident stylite, or whether both stylite and village were named after Mar Qardagh the martyr.¹⁰³ Either way, Thomas of Marga's account of this "wicked" stylite, who perched on his column "like a vulture and impure carrion crow seated upon a hill," implies the diffusion of the martyr Mar Qardagh's reputation in the highlands north of the Great Zab River.¹⁰⁴

More crucial for our purposes are Thomas of Marga's references to a "place

100. Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, II, 17 (Budge, 210; 90), on "Abba Qardagh, who occupied the same cell as Mar Išō'yab [of Adiabene]." Abba Qardagh was also a close associate of another native of Adiabene, the hagiographer Rabban Sabrišo' Rustam (fl. ca. 650) from the village Ḥrem in western Adiabene (n. 79 above). On this hagiographer, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 145 n. 3. Išō'yab was resident at the monastery of Beth 'Abhe from sometime after 596 until his appointment as bishop of Nineveh in 628. For the chronology, see Fiey, "Išō'yaw le Grand," 315.

101. For their home village, Réša (Rā's ul 'Ain), in the region of Marga, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 250–51, and the map on 225. For the brothers' story and their appointment as the metropolitan bishops of Gilan and Dailam, see Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors* V, 6–7 (Budge, 486–94; 263–70).

102. Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, III, 8 (Budge, 330; 164): "Now there was in the village called Beth Qardagh, a certain heretic [i.e., Jacobite], who dwelt upon a column of limestone; now this man had dwelt for many years on this pillar." Both the bishop of Ḥnita and the metropolitan bishop of Arbela traveled to the village to curse the "heretic" stylite. For the curse by the metropolitan Māran'ammeh, see *Book of Governors*, III, 8 (Budge, 332–34; 165–66); for the curse by Solomon, bishop of Ḥnita, see *Book of Governors*, VI, 15 (Budge, 650; 382). For the chronology, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 67–68, 108–9.

103. In favor of the latter possibility, see Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, III, 2 (Budge, 297; 144), where "Beth Qardagh" is included in the list of twenty-four villages of Marga, where Babai "the musician" founded schools during the early to mid-eighth century. This seems to indicate, as Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 285, concludes, that the village was already named Beth Qardagh, prior to the establishment of its resident Jacobite holy man. But the chronology remains murky. As indicated in the previous note, Qardagh the stylite lived "many years" on his pillar in Beth Qardagh.

104. See also Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, III, 10 (Budge, 363; 183), where the stylite's village is called "Qardaghia" in a metrical hymn celebrating the metropolitan Māran'ammeh's heretic-bashing tour of Marga during the mid-eighth century. The alternate name of the village may be attributable to the demands of the poem's meter. For the location and ruins of the village, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 285–87.

of Mar Qardagh” (*bēt mar qardag*) near Arbela, which is almost certainly identical with Melqi. Thomas’s allusions to this site are clustered in his account of the factional struggle over the metropolitan throne of Adiabene that erupted following the accession of the *catholikos* Timothy I in 780.¹⁰⁵ It is in this context that Thomas speaks of the “metropolitan throne of Beth Mar Qardagh” as a synonym for the region’s highest ecclesiastical office.¹⁰⁶ Thomas preserves two significant anecdotes about “Beth Mar Qardagh.” The first recounts the “swift judgment” that overtook the illegitimate candidate to the metropolitan throne appointed by the lay elites (*shahrigān*) of southern Adiabene:

And it came to pass one day when Rustam was riding upon a large, richly caparisoned mule [which he had chosen] in his pride, that as he was coming to his residence from his luxurious, riotous, and licentious orgies, he arrived near the habitation (*mautbā*) of Beth Mar Qardagh, and the dogs of that place surrounded him until at last he [was obliged] to dismount, and as soon as he put his feet on the ground they leaped upon his body, and they worried him and bit him, and brought him unto death, like that wicked woman Jezebel who persecuted the prophets.¹⁰⁷

Rustam’s sudden death at Beth Mar Qardagh illustrated for the allies of Timothy I the bankruptcy of Rustam’s claim to the metropolitan throne of Adiabene. Unfortunately, the story provides few details about Beth Mar Qardagh, beyond the ferocity of its village dogs.¹⁰⁸ Fiey has attempted to discern in this passage evidence for locating Melqi on the southern side of Arbela. This is possible, but by no means certain.¹⁰⁹ The second passage mentioning Beth

105. Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, IV, 5 (Budge, 384–87; 198–99) describes the dispute in detail. Upon becoming *catholikos*, Timothy appointed his elderly colleague and ally, Iṣōyab of Marga, to become the metropolitan bishop of Adiabene. The lay elites of southern Adiabene—the “*shahrigān* of Kafar ‘Āzail and the inhabitants of the province of Beth Ārō‘ē”—contested the appointment and installed their own candidate, Rustam, bishop of Ḥnita, a diocese in western Marga (n. 98 above). For the location of the two districts here linked to the *shahrigān*, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 222–23; and n. 109 below.

106. Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, IV, 5 (Budge, 386; 198). This is the first and only time in Thomas’s historical narrative where he uses the designation “Beth Mar Qardagh” for the metropolitan see of Arbela. Observing the sudden shift in Thomas’s terminology, Fiey has suggested that it was only toward the end of the eighth century that “la légende de Mar Qardag aurait commencé à fixer et à deviner populaire.” Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 69 n. 1. For the association of the Melqi monastery with an unnamed metropolitan bishop in the time of “Khusro,” see n. 82 above.

107. Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, IV, 6 (Budge, 386; 201).

108. The incident, which made Thomas of Marga think of the just death of Jezebel, inspires a memorable footnote by Budge, *Book of Governors*, 390 n. 4, in which he expatiates on the aggression of the region’s village dogs: “Nothing but a good long whip vigorously applied will drive them, and I have even known it necessary to shoot one or more of them.” A man riding a mule, rather than Budge’s horse, would have been particularly vulnerable.

109. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 189, 223. Rustam approached Beth Mar Qardagh after ban-

Mar Qardagh is a bit more helpful. In contrast to Rustam's gory death, Thomas describes the honorable burial of the canonically appointed metropolitan of Adiabene, Iṣō'yab of Marga, who was "laid with the fathers, his companions, in the dwelling (*mawtbā*) of the metropolitan of Adiabene, that is to say, in Beth Mar Qardagh."¹¹⁰ Thomas of Marga here presents unique, but reliable, evidence for the use of "Beth Mar Qardagh" as the funerary chapel for the metropolitans of Arbela. The fortress of Mar Qardagh at Melqi, first attested ca. 600, thus became by the eighth century (if not earlier) the stronghold of the metropolitan bishops of Arbela.

THE SASANIAN-ZOROASTRIAN PHASE AT MELQI

The long history of Christian settlement at Melqi—attested by five different Nestorian writers¹¹¹—raises the question of the historicity of the shrine's alleged Sasanian-Zoroastrian phase. As indicated above, the *History of Mar Qardagh* describes a precise set of Sasanian buildings at Melqi, consisting of a "strong fortress and beautiful house" on top of the tell with a fire temple at its base.¹¹² How much, if any, of this description is reliable? Was there an actual Zoroastrian phase of occupation at Melqi? Or did the Christian storytellers who elaborated the Qardagh legend simply imagine the existence of appropriate Zoroastrian buildings? While the dearth of material evidence for the Arbela region precludes a definitive answer to these questions, the archaeology of other regions indicates the plausibility of the hagiographer's description.

The archaeology of western Iran provides many examples of fortress complexes analogous to that described by Qardagh's hagiographer. Placed on defensible heights outside of cities, such fortresses typically guarded prime agricultural and grazing lands. The most famous examples, such as Qal'ah-

queting with the *shahrgan* of Kafar 'Azail (denounced by Thomas of Marga as "luxurious, riotous, and licentious orgies"). For the location of Kafar 'Azail, "near Arbela, between it and the Lower Zab [River]," see al-Yāqūt, *Mu'gam al Buldān*, VII, 266, as cited by Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 174. Thomas specifies only that Rustam was returning to "his residence" (*mawtbā*), when he passed "near" (*la-ḥdār*) Beth Mar Qardagh.

110. Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, IV, 13 (Budge, 413–14; 215–16). For Iṣō'yab of Marga, the former abbot and later patron of Beth 'Abhe, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 68–70; and n. 105 above.

111. These sources, discussed above, are in chronological order: the anonymous *History of Mar Qardagh* (ca. 600–630); Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors* (mid-ninth century); Iṣō'dnaḥ of Basra's *Book of Chastity* (ca. 860–870); the *Chronicle of Sé'ert* (before 1036); and the *Hymn to the Daughter of Má'nyo* (before 1310). Although the sources use different names for the site—Melqi, the monastery of Mar Qardagh, Beth Mar Qardagh—they refer to a single shrine in the vicinity of Arbela.

112. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 7.

i Dukhtar (Firuzābād) in Fars and Qsar-i Shirin in the central Zagros, were the products of Sasanian royal patronage.¹¹³ Far less attention has been given to the castles erected by non-royal elites.¹¹⁴ A short Pahlavi inscription discovered at Mishkinshahr in northwestern Iran in 1967 underscores the important function such castles played in the articulation of Sasanian elite identity. The inscription, erected in 335/336 (eight years before the outbreak of the “Great Persecution” under Shapur II) celebrates the accomplishment of “Narseh (from the family) of the Gopeds” who built his “fortress” (*dzy*) in “seven years.”¹¹⁵ Dedicating his castle to the gods (*yzd’n*) for the “glory of the King of kings,” Narseh challenged his peers to build a better one.¹¹⁶ The archaeology of western Iran suggests that many Sasanian elites accepted this challenge, constructing numerous small fortresses in mud-brick and stone. Systematic survey in the region of Fars has documented some of the best-preserved examples of this Sasanian architectural tradition. Although it was probably built during the early Islamic period, the compact mud-brick

113. For the early Sasanian ruins at Firuzābād, see esp. L. Trümpelmann, *Zwischen Persepolis und Firuzabad: Gräber, Paläste und Felsrelief im alten Persien* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1991), 63–71. Al-Ṭabari, *History*, 817 (Bosworth, 11), attributes the castle’s construction to Ardāshir I. For the late Sasanian complex at Qsar-i Shirin, which was damaged during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, see Schippmann, *Feuerheiligtümer*, 282–91; Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia*, 162, 286. J. Schmidt, “Qsar-i Širin: Feuer Temple oder Palast?” *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 9 (1978): 39–47, challenges the traditional attribution to Khusro II.

114. As Dietrech Huff has recently observed, “irregular fortresses on strategically important heights” are among the most frequent, but least studied, areas of Sasanian architecture. See D. Huff, “Architecture: (iii) Sasanian,” *Enc. Ir.* 2 (1987): 329–34, here 333: “This abundant but scarcely explored military architecture gives some insight into the Sasanian social hierarchy.” For one of the key examples cited by Huff, see R. Boucharlat, “La forteresse sassanide du Turang-Tepe,” in *Le plateau iranien et l’Asie centrale des origines à la conquête islamique: Leurs relations à la lumière des documents archéologiques* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1977), 329–42.

115. For the Pahlavi text with translation and commentary, see R. N. Frye and P. O. Skjaervø, “The Middle Persian Inscription from Meshkinshahr,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 10 (1996): 53–61. For the setting of the inscription “engraved on a large erratic block” in a valley beneath a hill crowned with a Timurid-era fortress, see H. S. Nyberg, “The Pahlavi Inscription at Mishkīn,” *BSOAS* 33 (1970): 144. For the location of Mishkinshahr, see the *Barrington Atlas*, 90 (C2); and map 2 in this book.

116. Frye and Skjaervø, “Meshkinshahr,” 54 (ll. 9–20): “Now, the prince, grandee, (or) free-man who may come along this road (and) whom this castle may please, then let him say a blessing for the soul of Narseh- . . . ! (You) whom it may not please, then you make a castle that is better than this one!” For the similar challenge to elite competition in the inscription of Shapur I at Hājjiābad, see chapter 2, n. 37 above. Direct address to the viewer is a common feature of both Achaemenid and Sasanian royal inscriptions. For discussion of these parallel texts, see Frye and Skjaervø, “Meshkinshahr,” 55; and G. Gropp, “Die sasanidische Inschrift von Mishkinshahr in Āzerbaidjān,” *AMI* 1 (1968): 154–57. Narseh’s dedication of his castle to the “glory (*GDH*) of the King of kings” may have served to defuse any suspicion that his fortress would be used (like Qardagh’s fortress at Melqi) to challenge royal authority.

fortress at Pūskān illustrates the type of construction favored by Sasanian elites (see figure 11).¹¹⁷

The Sasanian castle at Melqi, as described in the Qardagh legend, is fully consistent with this general pattern of Sasanian architecture. Completed in just “three years,” the fortress ostensibly served as the extra-urban base for the Sasanian viceroy in charge of Arbela and the surrounding region. While the story of its construction by “Qardagh the *marzbān*” may be fictive, the “strong fortress” itself was probably real. Its construction on the outskirts of Arbela would have brought practical advantages to the Sasanian lord or administrator who held it. As noted in chapter 1, the plain around Arbela is very fertile, fed by ample regular rainfall. The fortress at Melqi would have controlled a modest slice of “probably the best wheat-producing region of Iraq.”¹¹⁸ Transhumance routes linking the Arbela plain to the highlands of the Great Zab River valley may also have contributed to its importance. The biennial migration of modern Kurdish shepherds between the Arbela plain and the mountain valleys above Rowandūz forms a symbiotic bond between the two regions.¹¹⁹ It may be significant that Qardagh’s journeys between Melqi and the mountains of Beth Bgāsh follow essentially the same lowland-highland axis. Shepherds and other travelers from the highlands of north-eastern Adiabene would likely have known the fortress at Melqi, as well as the monastery of Mar Qardagh, which eventually replaced it.

The historicity of the Zoroastrian temple at Melqi remains less clear. Iṣō’dnaḥ of Basra and the *Chronicle of Séert* ignore it in their retelling of the legend. Whereas all three surviving versions of the Qardagh legend describe the “strong fortress” at Melqi, only the *History of Mar Qardagh* mentions the “fire temple” (*bēt nūr-wātā*) built “at the foot of the hill.”¹²⁰ The hagiographer’s

117. The fortress, thoroughly recorded by Belgian archaeologists, is located in central Fars, ca. 15 km south of the city of Kāzerūn. Though constructed during the early Islamic period, its design closely follows Sasanian models. See L. Vanden Berghe, *La découverte d’un château-fort du début de l’époque islamique à Pūskān (Irān): Survivance d’éléments architecturaux sassanides* (Ghent: Iranica Antiqua, 1990). For the nearby city of Kāzerūn, often mentioned by Islamic geographers, see Bosworth, *Sāsānids*, 13 n. 5. For another castle of the region, more securely dated to the seventh century, see D. S. Whitcomb, *Before the Roses and Nightingales: Excavations at Qasr-i Abu Nasr; Old Shiraz* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985).

118. *Iraq and the Persian Gulf: Geographic Handbook* (Oxford: Great Britain Naval Intelligence Division, 1944), 93, describing the Arbela region.

119. For this transhumance route between the Arbela plain and summer pastures near the southwest corner of Lake Urmiye, see F. Scholtz and G. Schweizer, *Middle East: Nomadism and Other Forms of Pastoral Migration*, TAVO Map A X 4, Scale: 1:8,000,000 (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1992).

120. Cf. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 7 (n. 30 above) with Iṣō’dnaḥ of Basra, *Book of Chastity* 11 (Chabot, 231; 6): “He built a strong fortress in the vicinity of Arbela, on a high hill named Melqi”; and *Chronicle of Séert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 225): “On a raised hill, he built a great fortress and named it after himself.”

depiction of the temple is plausible enough. The combination of a fortified residence with an adjoining or nearby fire temple was a standard feature of Sasanian architecture.¹²¹ The layout at Melqi, with a fire temple constructed at the base of a high hill, likewise resembles known patterns of Zoroastrian sacral topography.

Although the most famous fire temples were placed on top of rocky heights,¹²² archaeologists have identified a number of sites in Iran that combine a “sacred hill” with a fire temple or altar at its base.¹²³ These archaeological comparisons cannot *prove* the reality of the Zoroastrian temple at Melqi. But they do lend credence to the hagiographer’s claim that the Christian shrine at Melqi was preceded by a Zoroastrian phase of construction and worship. The six-day duration of the annual fair at Melqi might also echo this Zoroastrian heritage. As Mary Boyce has shown, six days was the standard duration for the major religious festivals of the Sasanian period.¹²⁴ At other Sasanian sites, the cult of Ishtar the “Lady” was often replaced with that of the Iranian goddess Anāhitā the “Lady” (Phl. *bānū*).¹²⁵ It is possible—but no more than a hypothesis—that the Zoroastrian phase of occupation at Melqi followed a similar course.

121. For an overview of all known examples from Iran, up to 1970, see Schippmann, *Feuerheiligtümer*, Tafeln 1–2.

122. For Zoroastrian shrines placed on top of hills, see M. Boyce, “Ātaš,” *Enc. Ir.* 2 (1987): 3, on the three most holy shrines of the Sasanian period: Adur Burzen-Mihr, Adur Farnbag, and Adur Gushnasp. See also Schippmann, *Feuerheiligtümer*, Tafeln 1–2, which lists twelve fire temples built on top of hills and another two built on the tops of mountains.

123. For one such Zoroastrian shrine, south of Tehran, see M. Siroux, “Le site d’Ateš-Kouh près de Delidjān,” *Syria* 44 (1967): 70, with suggested parallels (cf. Schippmann, *Feuerheiligtümer*, 435–36, which questions Siroux’s identification of the nearby Sasanian “palace”). See also D. Stronach, “The Kūh-i-Shahrak Fire Altar,” *JNES* 25 (1966): 226, on the placement of stone fire altars at Naqsh-i Rostam and other sites in Fars in “that most favored of locations: the extremity of a tapering hill or mountain.” As both Siroux (70 n. 5) and Stronach (217) observe, this pattern of sacral topography has been incorporated into Iranian Islam, through the construction of the tombs of Islamic saints at the base of high ridges or hills.

124. M. Boyce, “Iranian Festivals,” *CHIr* 3 (2) (1983): 806–7, dates the development of the six-day festivals to the early Sasanian period. With the exception of the *gahambar* feasts, all of the major Zoroastrian holidays lasted six days, until some time after the tenth century. The Qardagh legend’s author explicitly links the construction of the “Magian” temple at Melqi to the *marzbān*’s creation of a “great festival (*‘ē dā*) for the pagan gods.” *History of Mar Qardagh*, 6, quoted above.

125. For the origins and diffusion of the cult of Anāhitā during the Sasanian period, see M. Boyce, “Anāhid,” *Enc. Ir.* 1 (1983): 1003–6; idem, “Bibi Shahrbānū and the Lady of Pārs,” *BSOAS* 30 (1967): 36–37; and esp. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, “Shahrbānū, dame du pays d’Iran et mère des imams: Entre l’Iran préislamique et le schiisme imamite,” *JSAI* 27 (2002): 527–58, n. 104. Archaeologists continue to debate whether Anāhitā was the principal deity worshipped in the Zoroastrian temples at Bishapur, Hājjiābad, and other Sasanian sites. For orientation in this debate, see M. Azernoush, “Fire Temple and Anahita Temple: A Discussion on Some Iranian Places of Worship,” *Mesopotamia* 22 (1987): 391–401.

THE CULT OF MAR QARDAGH SINCE CA. 1200

The history of Christian settlement at Melqi after ca. 1200 is equally difficult to trace. Although scribes continued to copy the Qardagh legend into the twentieth century, no text after the hymn to the daughter of Ma'nyo (twelfth or thirteenth century) mentions the saint's monastery. The disappearance of "Beth Mar Qardagh" from the literary record mirrors the general turmoil that engulfed the Christians of the Arbela region in the wake of the Mongol conquest of Iraq in 1258.¹²⁶ The Christians of Iraq had initially welcomed the Mongols as potential liberators and enjoyed the patronage of the Mongol court under the il-Khan Arghun (1284–1291). But they soon found themselves caught between the Mongols and their Arab-Muslim neighbors. With the accession of the Muslim il-Khan Ghazan in 1295, the Christians of Adiabene were left in a highly precarious position. Deteriorating Christian-Muslim relations culminated in the massacre at Arbela in 1310 in which all of the major churches of the lower city were looted and burned.¹²⁷ The twin specters of famine and pestilence fell upon the land.¹²⁸ Few of the Christian villages and monasteries of Adiabene survived these troubled times. Of the ten monasteries in the Arbela region mentioned by Thomas of Marga and other ninth-century sources, only three are known to have survived into the fourteenth century.¹²⁹ It is probable that the monastery of Mar Qardagh at Melqi was also abandoned during this period. Its location, like that of many monasteries and Christian villages in the region, was gradually forgotten.¹³⁰

The reading and copying of the *History of Mar Qardagh* ensured that veneration of Mar Qardagh endured long after the abandonment of the saint's monastery at Melqi. After ca. 1300, the East-Syrian Christian community explored in this book was reduced to a fraction of its former geographic

126. For the early phases of Mongol-Christian relations in Iraq, see D. Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318–1913* (Louvain: Peeters, 2000), 16–18; J. M. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Mongols* (Louvain: Peeters, 1975); idem, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 76–87; Joseph, *Modern Assyrians*, 54–55, esp. n. 72.

127. For a contemporary East-Syrian account of the deteriorating situation in Arbela, see the *History of Rabban Saumā and Marqos* (Borbone, 109–14, 124–29; Bedjan, 121–31, 154–66). Borbone's Italian translation includes useful historical annotations. See also his commentary on 224–27; Wilmshurst, *EOCE*, 17–18; Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 87–89.

128. The plight of the Christian community during this period is captured in the haunting imagery of the thirteenth-century poet George Wardā of Arbela. For context, see D. Bundy, "Interpreter of the Acts of God and Humans: George Warda, Historian and Theologian of the 13th Century," *The Harp* 6.1 (1993): 7–20.

129. Wilmshurst, *EOCE*, 169–70.

130. As Wilmshurst (*EOCE*, 168) observes, many of the Christian villages of Adiabene mentioned in ninth-century sources "cannot be localized." Of the seven or eight dioceses of Adiabene in existence ca. 850, only three are attested at the synod of Timothy II in 1318.

range.¹³¹ Abandoning their ancient settlements in southern and central Iraq, Christians found refuge in the highlands north and east of Adiabene, and on the plain above Mosul. The only substantial evidence for the cult of Mar Qardagh during these centuries comes from manuscripts, such as the large hagiographical collection copied at Alqōš in northern Iraq in 1707. This manuscript tradition shows that Qardagh's story was integrated into the larger cycle of East-Syrian martyr literature, which indiscriminately mixed historical and legendary material.¹³² Presumably, the saint's story was regularly read aloud during the annual celebration of his feast day (see the epilogue below). The saint's cult has experienced a modest resurgence since World War I. The Christian community of Alqōš dedicated a new church to Mar Qardagh in 1936, after a series of visions in which Qardagh appeared to parishioners.¹³³ Farther north, at Déré, near the modern Iraqi-Turkish border, there is a monastery with a chapel dedicated to the saint.¹³⁴ Finally, veneration of Mar Qardagh continues in the Arbela region, at 'Aīnqāwā, a village on the northern perimeter of Erbil, where the majority of the region's Christians have lived since the nineteenth century.¹³⁵ While there is no

131. See the apposite summary by Wilmshurst, *EOCE*, 17: "At the end of the ninth century there were at least twenty-five East Syrian dioceses in southern and central Iraq . . . and a further twenty-nine dioceses in southern, central and eastern Persia. . . . Only four of these dioceses, all well to the north of Baghdad, certainly existed in 1318. Although isolated East Syrian communities persisted in the 'Ilam region of Persia [i.e., ancient Elam, in southwestern Iran] and in the towns of Marāghā, Hamadān and Tabrīz, the heartland of the Church of the East during the reign of Yahballāhā III (1283–1317) consisted of the Tigris plain north of Mosul, the mountains of Bohtān and Hakkārī, and the 'Armi [i.e., Urmiye] region of Persia: precisely those regions in which East Syrian Christianity survived up to the First World War." Before the outbreak of that war, approximately a quarter of a million East-Syrian Christians (Chaldeans and Assyrians) inhabited these regions.

132. See Abbeoos, "Acta Mar Qardaghi," 5–8, on the massive two-volume hagiographical collection (Sachau 222 in Berlin), based on the 1882 manuscript formerly kept in the church of Mar Pethion at Amida (Diyarbakir). The *History of Mar Qardagh* appears at the end of volume 1, following thirty other *acta* associated with the Great Persecution under Shapur II. For the scribal tradition at Alqōš, see Wilmshurst, *EOCE*, 13, 241–43; more than half of the approximately 2,200 inscriptions and manuscript colophons used in Wilmshurst's study were written at Alqōš between ca. 1600 and 1913.

133. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 2: 396, briefly describes these events and the annual pilgrimage to the saint's shrine on the last Friday of summer. Dedicatory plaques collected in the church record miracles of healing, including the saint's intervention to halt an outbreak of measles during the late 1930s.

134. For this chapel at Déré, near 'Amādīa, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 45 n. 4, 206 n. 3. The chapel at Déré is part of a monastery dedicated to one 'Abdišō' of Déré, a tenth-century ascetic, whose name could easily be conflated with that of Qardagh's ascetic mentor, 'Abdišō' of Ḥazza.

135. For Christian settlement at 'Aīnqāwā, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 167–72; Wilmshurst, *EOCE*, 171–73. For its location 2–3 km north of Arbela, probably on the route of the ancient Achaemenid royal road, see Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 40 (map 2). Barhebraeus mentions the village under the name 'Amkābā as the scene of a massacre of Christians in 1285.

church dedicated to Mar Qardagh in ʿAīnqāwā, his story has remained popular among the local Christian population. As recently as the 1960s, the Christians of ʿAīnqāwā encouraged Father Fiey to look for the ruins of the “house” of Mar Qardagh in Arbela.¹³⁶ The renewed interest in Mar Qardagh among the Christians of modern Iraq may be attributed, in part, to the saint’s royal “Assyrian” ancestry. The construction of the church of Mar Qardagh at Alqōš during the interwar years corresponds to the period in which the Christians of northern Iraq increasingly began to identify themselves as Assyrians.¹³⁷

This chapter has examined the Christianization of the shrine of Melqi on the outskirts of late Sasanian Arbela. Cuneiform documents excavated at Nineveh and other Neo-Assyrian sites prove the ancient origins of this shrine. As the *akītu*-temple of the goddess Ishtar of Arbela, Melqi (Akkadian ^{URU}*Milqia*) served as a prominent stage for Neo-Assyrian royal ritual during the reigns of Ashurbanipal (668–635 B.C.E.) and his predecessors. While the shrine’s fate after 612 B.C.E. remains obscure, evidence from other Neo-Assyrian cult sites (Nineveh, Assur, and Nimrud) cautions against assuming total abandonment. After a twelve-century gap in literary documentation, Melqi reemerges into the historical record, ca. 600–630, as the focal point of the legend of Mar Qardagh. The anonymous *History of Mar Qardagh* introduces a hero of royal “Assyrian” ancestry, descended from the “renowned lineages” of Sennacherib and Nimrod.¹³⁸ The legend also explains how Christians began to worship and to trade beneath the tell at Melqi. The following chronology, while strictly provisional, outlines this process of Christianization:

Stage 1. The Neo-Assyrian cult site Milqia was resettled at an indeterminate time during the Sasanian period (or possibly earlier). A fortress was built on top of the mound (Syr. *telā*) created by earlier phases of occupation. A Zoroastrian fire temple was apparently built at the base of the tell, and an annual six-day market was convened at the site.

Stage 2. Beginning ca. 500, Christian visitors to the annual market at Melqi developed stories about a regional Sasanian official (*marzbān*) who built the fortress and later converted to Christianity. It is possible that these stories

136. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, 1: 45, 69 n. 1.

137. For growing interest in Assyrian Christian identity after World War I, see Joseph, *Modern Assyrians*, 15–32, 156–57, esp. 18–19. For early attestations of the name, see J. F. Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England: A History of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Assyrian Mission* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 366–67 n. 12; also W. Heinrichs, “The Modern Assyrians—Name and Nation,” in *Semitica: Serta Philologica Constantino Tsereteli Dicata*, ed. R. Contini, F. A. Pennachietti, and M. Tosco (Turin: Zamorani, 1993), 99–114.

138. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 3. For the significance of these two kings in Christian exegetical tradition, see Walker, “Legacy of Mesopotamia.”

incorporated traditions about an actual fourth-century martyr named Qardagh. The annual six-day trading fair known as the “souk of Melqi” may have provided the setting for the original narration of these stories.

Stage 3. An anonymous hagiographer, writing ca. 600–630, molded the Qardagh legend into a single, coherent, and polished narrative, the *History of Mar Qardagh*. This hagiography provided its Christian audience with a compelling explanation for the origins of the “souk of Melqi” and the fortifications on top of the site’s ancient tell. A “great and handsome” church was constructed on the site.

Stage 4. Anonymous donors funded the construction, sometime after the liturgical reforms of Išō’yab of Adiabene (†658), of a larger, more ornate church at Melqi, with four naves (*hayklē*), a martyrium, and a baptistry.

While the details of this reconstruction remain debatable, the basic progression at Melqi seems clear. An ancient Neo-Assyrian shrine was resettled as a market center during the Sasanian period; Christians later claimed the same shrine as their own and developed a legend explaining the site’s most striking architectural and topographic features. This sequence corresponds to broader patterns in the sacral topography of the late antique Near East. Hagiography and the cult of the saints frequently served as the medium through which Christians (and later Muslims) laid claim to ancient shrines. An earlier generation of scholarship tended to see such continuity of sacral topography as evidence for “pagan survivals.”¹³⁹ But such labels merely obscure the dynamic process of reinterpretation involved in the Christianization of any ancient shrine. The Christians of late antique Adiabene used the story of Mar Qardagh to explain why they came, year after year, to the six-day market at Melqi. In this new Christian narrative, the buildings at Melqi became landmarks in the story of the great Sasanian viceroy, who repudiated his own “pagan” past and sanctified Melqi with the blood of martyrdom.

From its origins at Melqi, the Qardagh legend spread through northern Iraq and also through the East-Syrian chronicle tradition. Two later texts, Išō’dnaḥ of Basra’s *Book of Chastity* (ca. 860–870) and the anonymous *Chronicle of Séert* (ca. 1000–1030), preserve summaries of the legend that reflect the changing priorities of later generations of readers. Both writers, for instance, present Mar Qardagh as thoroughly Persian, without any mention of the “Assyrian” ancestry emphasized by the saint’s original hagiographer. The editorial excisions by the *Chronicle of Séert*, in particular, expose the superfluous character of some of the *History*’s most distinctive features—its rich

139. For a response to this line of argumentation, see H. Delehayé, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. D. Attwater (London and New York: Fordham University Press, 1962; based on the 4th edition of the 1907 French original), 119–60, esp. 134–35. For a nuanced analysis of the role of hagiography and martyr cult in the Christianization of “pagan” holy sites in southwestern Europe, see A. Rousselle, *Croire et guérir: La foi en Gaule dans l’Antiquité tardive* (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

philosophical dialogue, its use of scripture, and its forceful emphasis on Qardagh's rejection of his biological family. Iṣō'dnaḥ and the *Chronicle of Séert* focus instead on the legend's most essential element: Qardagh's construction of a fortress on top of the tell at Melqi, where he was later crowned in martyrdom. The same writers also report the establishment at Melqi of a "great" or "fortified" monastery, where "remembrance is made of him every year."¹⁴⁰ Both Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors* (mid-ninth century) and the anonymous *Hymn to the Daughter of Ma'nyo* (twelfth or early thirteenth century) confirm the existence of this monastery dedicated to Mar Qardagh and closely associated with the metropolitan bishops of Arbela. This monastery was eventually abandoned, or perhaps destroyed, during the disturbances set in motion by the Mongol conquest of Iraq. The churches of 'Aīnqāwā, two to three kilometers north of Arbela, which are today the only functioning churches in the Arbela district, serve as an isolated reminder of what was once a thriving Christian community.

140. *Chronicle of Séert*, I (II), chap. 32 (Scher and Dib, 230). This is the only passage that explicitly links the saint's annual commemoration to the monastery built in his name. Iṣō'dnaḥ of Basra's account describes the construction of the "fortified monastery" on top of the tell at Melqi but omits mention of the festival. Cf. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 68–69 (n. 1 above), which is apparently the source for both accounts.

EPILOGUE

The Festival of Mar Qardagh at Melqi

At the end of each summer in late Sasanian Adiabene, farmers and merchants from various districts of northern Iraq congregated at the shrine of Melqi near the city of Arbela. The market or “souk” of Melqi lasted six days, with three days dedicated to the commemoration of Mar Qardagh, the Christian martyr alleged to have built the fortress overlooking the site. Mar Qardagh’s hagiographer offers few details about what happened during this annual festival, although analogy with neighboring regions gives some idea of the probable atmosphere. The feasts of the martyrs were joyous, sometimes even raucous gatherings that brought together participants from the whole Christian community: clerical and lay, young and old, male and female.¹ Wine flowed generously at such festivals, even among the monks.² In the Church of the East, monasteries typically provided the backdrop for these martyr festivals. Bishops and even metropolitan bishops sometimes came in person to pre-

1. On the raucous reputation of martyr festivals, see, for instance, Davis, *Saint Thecla*, 72 n. 142. One Armenian hagiographer explicitly greets the diverse members of his audience. See the preface to the *Acts of St. Atom* translated in L. Gray, “Two Armenian Passions from the Sasanian Period,” *AB* 67 (1949): 360–76, where the hagiographer addresses his hearers as “priests and people, old men and children, young men and maidens.”

2. See the *Canons Attributed to Marutha*, 25 (Vööbus, *Legislation*, 143), setting aside an unspecified “portion” (*püršānā*) of wine for the monks on “commemoration days” (*dūkrānē*). Despite their attribution to Marutha, the East-Syrian origin of these canons is disputed. West-Syrian monastic legislation often hints at the difficulty of keeping ascetics away from the martyr festivals. See the fragmentary *Rules for the Nuns*, canon 2, and the *Rules of Jacob of Edessa* (ca. 700 C.E.), canon 8, both in Vööbus, *Legislation*, 64, 96. For parallel legislation in Egypt, see, for example, the early fifth-century *Canons of Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria: The Arabic and Coptic Versions*, ed. and trans. by W. Riedel and W. E. Crum (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904; repr., Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1973), canon 92.

side over the “commemorations.”³ Not surprisingly, some martyr festivals became the locus for bustling commercial activity. In sixth-century Edessa, a festival held in honor of the apostle Thomas attracted crowds so large that a “miraculous” rainstorm was needed to wash away the debris from the church courtyard where the festival was held.⁴ The souk at Melqi was shorter and presumably smaller—a regional rather than an international fair—but it involved a similar combination of commerce and religion. The epilogue to the *History of Mar Qardagh* openly acknowledges that this “market” (*ḥagā*) was established at Melqi prior to any form of ecclesiastical architecture.⁵ Qardagh’s hagiographer explains this market as a natural outgrowth of the annual commemoration honoring his hero.⁶ As argued in the previous chapter, this claim probably reverses the actual chronology of the shrine’s development.

The annual six-day trading fair at Melqi seems to have attracted participants from a variety of social and religious groups. The hagiographer’s observation that “Christians, Jews, and pagans, great and small, men and women,” came rushing to watch the stoning of Mar Qardagh hints at the diversity of the crowds.⁷ The tomb of the prophet Daniel at Susa, as described by the *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, offers another late Sasanian example of a shrine shared by Christians, Zoroastrians, and (probably) Jews.⁸ This pattern of shared shrines would become common throughout Iraq in

3. Canon 19 of the East-Syrian synod of 410 rules that bishops, who have invited their metropolitan to the “commemoration of the martyrs” (*dūkrānā d-sāhdē*), must allow the higher-ranking bishop to preside. *Synodicon* (Chabot, 271; 32, ll. 5–6). By the late Sasanian period, some martyr festivals had been moved nearer to cities to be placed under closer episcopal supervision. See canon 20 of the synod of 554, repealing an earlier canon that prohibited the construction of monasteries and martyr shrines (*bēt sāhdwātā*) in cities or in the vicinity of cities (*ba-ḥdār mdinātā*). *Synodicon* (Chabot, 364; 106, ll. 27–28).

4. Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs*, 32 (Van Dam, 52; Krusch, 57), on this month-long fair at Edessa, which attracted people “coming from various regions with (their) prayers and business” (*de diversis regionibus cum votes negotiisque venientes*). U. Monneret de Villard, “La fiera di Batnae et la translazione di S. Tomaso a Edessa,” *Rendiconti delle Sedute dell’Accademia nazionale dei Lincei*, ser. 8, vol. 6 (1951): 77–104, argues persuasively that this Edessan fair replaced an earlier pre-Christian fair in the nearby Syrian city of Batnae.

5. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 68.

6. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 68: “But because of the size of the crowds, they also began to buy and sell during the days of the saint’s commemoration.”

7. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 64.

8. *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 85–86, chap. 14 (Thomson, 30), where Sebeos explicitly notes the divergent narrative interpretations of the shrine’s relics: “The Persians called it (the body of) Kay Khosron [a legendary Iranian king], and the Christians said it was that of the prophet Daniel.” For later accounts of the tomb, see Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, 2: 175. The Spanish Jew Benjamin of Tudela, visiting Susa in 1173, noted the tomb’s holiness among “Jews, Muslims, and Gentiles.” The medieval shrine, destroyed by a flood in 1869, has been replaced by a lavish modern tomb that attracts tens of thousands of Islamic pilgrims each year.

subsequent centuries.⁹ Melqi's origin as a Neo-Assyrian cult site, documented in chapter 5, supports the hypothesis that it too was a long-standing shrine shared by multiple ethnic and religious groups. The hagiographer's claim that Zoroastrians worshipped at Melqi, prior to its Christianization, is entirely plausible.

The transformation of Melqi into a Christian shrine seems to have developed in stages over the course of several generations. Oral narratives about the Christian *marzbān* who built the fortress at Melqi may have circulated as early as the late fifth or sixth century. The earliest certain testimony to the legend, though, dates to the late Sasanian period, ca. 600–630, when an anonymous East-Syrian author composed the *History of Mar Qardagh*. This hagiographer, who was probably a resident of Adiabene, crafted a compelling story of Christian heroism aimed at a broad audience of readers and probably—although this is never made explicit—listeners.¹⁰ In his invocation, Qardagh's hagiographer reminds his audience, whom he addresses as "my beloved" (*hbibē*), that the stories of the martyrs are "banquets" (*būsāmē*) for all the "holy congregations of the Cross."¹¹ Gathered in the courtyard of the church of Mar Qardagh, after a long day of trading, the Christian community of Adiabene was invited to contemplate and admire the "heroic deeds" of that "athlete of righteousness."¹²

The narrative world created by Mar Qardagh's hagiographer also presents a banquet for the modern historian. Major themes of the Qardagh legend illustrate the diverse cultural traditions that shaped Christian society during the late Sasanian Empire (ca. 500–642). The court training scenes with which the legend opens vividly illustrate the hagiographer's familiarity with the ideals and narrative rhythms of Sasanian epic tradition. Although such "secular" traditions rarely appear in Syriac literature, they are common in the Christian literature of the Caucasus and may once have been an integral part of the oral culture of northern Iraq. The story of Mar Qardagh shows how this epic tradition could be reworked to create a heroic Christian warrior,

9. For shared shrines in modern northern Iraq, see, for example, J. P. Fletcher, *Notes from Nineveh, and Travels in Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Syria* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), 151, on Jewish and Christian worship at the tomb of the prophet Nahum at Alqōš. Anthropological accounts, based on the oral history of Jewish immigrants to Israel, often remark on this feature of traditional religious life in Iraqi Kurdistan. See Feitelson, "Kurdish Jews," 203.

10. For the oral presentation of hagiography in Latin Christendom, see B. de Gaffier, "La lecture des Passions des martyrs à Rome avant le 9e siècle," *AB* 87 (1969): 63–68; Aigrain, *Hagiographie*, 126–27; with further references at M. Van Uytvanghe, "Heiligenverehrung II (Hagiographie)," *RAC* 14 (1988): 150–83, here 153. A parallel study of the oral presentation of hagiography in Syrian Christian tradition is needed.

11. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 1. Cf. §33, where the anchorite Mar Beri scolds the hermit Abdišo for not inviting him to the ascetic "banquet" prepared in Qardagh's honor.

12. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 1.

whose “mighty strength” was used to defend the people of Adiabene. The long and complex disputation scene in the Qardagh legend highlights a very different side of Sasanian Christian tradition. The debate’s rhetorical format illustrates the emergence of a philosophical *koine* forged in the era of Justinian (527–565) and Khusro I (531–579) and widely used in both empires. Its arguments against the divinity of the celestial bodies, presented by an unwashed hermit from the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, unmistakably echo the philosophical discourse of sixth-century Alexandria. The scene’s format and substance thus exemplify the confidence with which the Church of the East appropriated the legacy of Christian Hellenism.

Qardagh’s conflict with his “pagan” family reveals yet another component of his hagiographer’s culture. Seizing upon one of the most common of hagiographic themes—a saint’s duty to renounce his biological family and “follow Christ” in the company of his new spiritual family—the hagiographer gleefully traces Qardagh’s renunciation of his “Magian” family. Christian audiences of late antique Iraq clearly enjoyed stories in this vein. Several Syriac martyr legends tell of violent clashes between saints and their pagan fathers. The challenge for the modern historian is to identify the variations within this narrative paradigm, and to explain the relationship between narrative ideals and actual social behavior. Comparison with other Syriac and Byzantine martyr literature suggests the harshness of the Qardagh legend’s rhetoric of renunciation. While affirming the role of spiritual “brothers” and “fathers,” the hagiographer allows his hero no reconciliation at all with his biological family. This ideal reflects, on the one hand, a long-standing tradition of Syrian Christian asceticism built upon the exegesis of Jesus’s injunctions for discipleship. On the other hand, hagiographic ideals should not be mistaken for social reality. As Syriac monastic legislation confirms, many monks maintained regular contact with their worldly biological families.

Finally, later East-Syrian writers document the evolution and diffusion of the cult of Mar Qardagh throughout northern Iraq and, to a lesser extent, adjoining regions of the Syrian Christian world. Descriptions of the “monastery of Mar Qardagh” by Thomas of Marga (mid-ninth century), Iṣō’dnaḥ of Basra (fl. 860–870), and other East-Syrian writers prove the longevity of the saint’s primary cult site on the outskirts of Arbela. Melqi’s disappearance from the historical record after the twelfth century probably reflects the devastation of the Christian community of Adiabene under the later phases of Mongol rule. European visitors of the nineteenth century found very few Christians left in Arbela,¹³ although the nearby town of ‘Aīnqāwā retains to this day a small Christian community. The revival of the

13. Beth Hillel, *Travels*, 82, where the Latvian rabbi who visited Erbil in the late 1820s describes its population as consisting of approximately six thousand Muslim families, two hundred Jewish families, and “very few Nazarenes.”

cult of Mar Qardagh farther north at Alqōš after World War I points to the growing tendency among the East-Syrian Christians to identify with the region's "Assyrian" heritage, a trend that has continued and intensified in the diaspora communities of North America.

This book's analysis of the Qardagh legend represents a particular brand of cultural history. While grounded in the study of a single text, its approach to that text is thoroughly interdisciplinary. Islamic, Byzantine, and Zoroastrian literature, Sasanian archaeology, and Syrian Christian art have all proven to be useful tools for understanding the narrative world created by Qardagh's hagiographer. This study has probed the imagery, language, and narrative structure of the Qardagh legend to reconstruct the cultural horizons of its anonymous author. Translated and annotated in this way, the Qardagh legend offers vivid insights into the culture and society of the late Sasanian Empire. The legend also shows how hagiography—that most popular and versatile literary genre throughout the medieval world—could be used to articulate new, distinctly local visions of Christian heroism. I hope that readers will leave this study with a sharper appreciation for how much these stories of Christian heroism can teach us.

APPENDIX

The Qardagh Legend and the *Chronicle of Arbela*

Earlier scholars, beginning with Paul Peeters, have often noted the thematic connections between the story of Mar Qardagh and the *Chronicle of Arbela*, first published by Alphonse Mingana in 1907.¹ A sequential history of the first twenty bishops of Adiabene up to the mid-sixth century, the *Chronicle* provides more detailed information about the early history of the Church of the East than any other literary source. A whole generation of scholars depended on Mingana's edition of the *Chronicle* for their studies of the expansion of Christianity into Mesopotamia and Iran.² Mingana's attribution of the *Chronicle* to "Mšihā-Zkā" (a compound East-Syrian name meaning "Christ has conquered"), a little-known church historian of the sixth century, implied the reliability of the *Chronicle's* account. In 1925, Mingana himself published a long article on the spread of the Gospel in Asia, partly based on the *Chronicle*.³ That same year, however, prominent scholars of Syriac literature began to raise questions about the historical reliability of the *Chronicle*. After his systematic study of the Syriac martyr acts of Adiabene, Paul Peeters called for a thorough reexamination of the text.⁴

1. Mšihā-Zkā, *History of the Church of Adiabene*, in *Sources syriaques*, ed. A. Mingana (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1907), 1: 1–168 (Syriac text on 1–76); Peeters, "Passionaire d'Adiabène," 302.

2. The annotated German translation by E. Sachau, "Die Chronik von Arbela: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis des ältesten Christentums im Orient," *Abhandlungen der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 6 (1915): 3–94, was particularly influential. See, for example, Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1924), 2: 683–91. For early scholarship in support of the *Chronicle's* reliability, see C. Jullien and F. Jullien, "La Chronique d'Arbèles: Propositions pour la fin d'une controverse," *OrChr* 85 (2001): 42, 44–45.

3. A. Mingana, "The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East: A New Document," *BJRL* 9 (1925): 297–371. On the broad scope of Mingana's scholarship, see S. K. Samir, *Alphonse Mingana, 1878–1937, and His Contribution to Early Christian-Muslim Studies* (Birmingham, England: Selly Oaks Colleges, 1990); and Jullien and Jullien, "Chronique d'Arbèles," 47–48.

Doubts about the *Chronicle* culminated with the scathing critique by Jean-Maurice Fiey, whose 1967 article challenged not only its reliability as a historical source, but also the integrity of its editor.⁵ Fiey's critique built upon the observations of Julius Assfalg, who, during the previous year, demonstrated the marked irregularities and divergence between Mingana's text and the only known manuscript of the *Chronicle* (Berlin MS or fol. 3126).⁶ Other scholars, including the editor of the CSCO edition of the text, have defended the *Chronicle's* authenticity and historical value,⁷ although these responses have failed to address, in most cases, the substance of Fiey's critique.⁸ Additional evidence of Mingana's lapses in scholarly integrity has only deepened the controversy.⁹

Two recent studies have reopened the question of the *Chronicle of Arbela's* authenticity and historical value. In a meticulous review of the entire controversy, Christelle Jullien and Florence Jullien have vigorously defended the *Chronicle* as a potentially legitimate East-Syrian source. While conceding Mingana's manipulation of the text, they renew the suggestion that Mingana's edition may have been based upon a genuine medieval text.¹⁰ They also argue that the *Chronicle* could preserve an early documentary core ("un premier noyau primitif").¹¹ The historian Erich Kettenhofen reaches a slightly more pessimistic conclusion.¹² His study confirms that virtually all

4. Peeters, "Passionaire d'Adiabène," 303. See also I. Ortiz de Urbina, "Intorno al valore storico della Cronaca di Arbela," *OCP* 2 (1936): 5–32.

5. J. M. Fiey, "Auteur et date de la *Chronique d'Arbèles*," *OS* 12 (1967): 265–302. Fiey readily acknowledged (265) Mingana's considerable contributions as a collector, editor, and translator of Syriac texts. On these contributions, see n. 3 above; and J.-M. Voste, "Alphonse Mingana," *OCP* 7 (1941): 514–18.

6. J. Assfalg, "Zur Textüberlieferung der *Chronik von Arbela*: Beobachtungen zu Ms. or. fol. 3126," *OrChr* 50 (1966): 19–36; Fiey, "*Chronique d'Arbèles*," 281; Jullien and Jullien, "*Chronique d'Arbèles*," 48.

7. P. Kawerau, ed. and trans., *Die Chronik von Arbela* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1985); also W. Hage, "Early Christianity in Mesopotamia: Some Remarks Concerning the Authenticity of the *Chronicle of Arbela*," *The Harp* 1, nos. 2–3 (1988): 39–46; idem, "Synodicon orientale und Chronik von Arbela—Die Synode von 497 und die zwei Metropolen der Adiabene," in *Syriaca: Zur Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen: 2. Deutsches Syrologen-Symposium (Juli 2000, Wittenberg)*, ed. M. Tamcke (Münster, Hamburg, and London: LIT Verlag, 2002), 19–28.

8. J. M. Fiey, "Revue de Die *Chronik von Arbela*," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 181 (1981): 544–48, reiterates the arguments of his 1967 article, and makes more explicit his accusations regarding Mingana's forgery of the manuscript.

9. See, for example, J. F. Coakley, "A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library," *BJRL* 75 (1993): 105–207, where Coakley (109–13) documents Mingana's covert transfer of manuscripts into the collection that has become the Mingana collection at the Selly Oaks Library in Birmingham, England.

10. Jullien and Jullien, "*Chronique d'Arbèles*," 81, reviving the hypothesis of J. Assfalg, who proposed a genuine *Vorlage* to Mingana's manuscript.

11. Jullien and Jullien, "*Chronique d'Arbèles*," 81, citing the *Chronicle's* incorporation of the Qardagh legend as evidence for a ninth-century *terminus post quem*.

12. E. Kettenhofen, "Die Chronik von Arbela in der Sicht der Althistorie," in *Simblos: Scritti di storia antica*, ed. L. Criscuolo (Bologna: Università degli studi di Bologna, 1995), 287–319. Cf. Jullien and Jullien, "*Chronique d'Arbèles*," 83.

of the *Chronicle's* evidence was already known from other literary sources available during Mingana's lifetime (Procopius and pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, in particular). Kettenhofen nevertheless defends the possibility that the *Chronicle* is a late medieval compilation of "perhaps the late eleventh or twelfth century."¹³

With these recent studies in mind, let us consider the unmistakable thematic parallels between the *Chronicle of Arbela* and the *History of Mar Qardagh*. The *Chronicle of Arbela* describes two figures whose careers resemble that of Mar Qardagh. The first is "Gufrašnasp, the *mohapat* of Adiabene," who revolted against the Sasanian king, Bahrām II (274–291). After retreating behind the ramparts of his fortified tower (*magdalā*), Gufrašnasp defies the king's armies and rains down "many arrows . . . shot with great skill" against his attackers.¹⁴ The fortress proves unassailable, until a ruse leads the rebellious *mōbad* out into the hands of the king's men. The second figure, who appears in an earlier section of the *Chronicle*, is Raqbakt, a ruler of Adiabene (his exact office is not specified) during the mid-second century. Baptized by Isaac, the third in the city's succession of apostolic bishops, Raqbakt becomes "a Constantine of his time."¹⁵ In the service of his worldly lord, the Parthian king Vologeses III (112–148), Raqbakt leads an army of twenty thousand foot soldiers against an "onslaught of rebellious peoples from the lands of the mountains of Qardu." In this war, Raqbakt, fatally wounded by a spear thrust into his side, "gave up his spirit like Judas Maccabee."¹⁶ The similarities here with Qardagh's story are fairly obvious. Raqbakt's office as a viceroy of Adiabene, his conversion to Christianity, and his military victories in the service of the Parthian king all recall comparable aspects of Qardagh's career.¹⁷ The echoes are closer still in the case of Gufrašnasp, whom the *Chronicle* depicts as a pious "Magian," who revolts against the Persian King of kings and defends his fortress in Adiabene by heroic archery.¹⁸ Although neither Raqbakt nor Gufrašnasp provides an exact model for Qardagh, their combined careers contain many of the central features of the Qardagh legend.

The question, therefore, is, how does one explain these similarities? Obviously, there is no reason to accept either Raqbakt or Gufrašnasp as a historical figure.¹⁹ But could each represent a fictive or legendary figure analogous to Mar Qardagh? Could a common pool of narrative traditions have contributed to the depiction of all three heroes?²⁰ A late medieval compiler certainly could have known stories similar to those embedded in the Qardagh legend. I would argue, however, that these similarities sug-

13. Kettenhofen, "Chronik von Arbela," 318.

14. *Chronicle of Arbela*, 10 (Kawerau, 60; 37).

15. *Chronicle of Arbela*, 3 (Kawerau, 24; 6).

16. For the military campaign, see the *Chronicle of Arbela*, 3 (Kawerau, 25–26; 7–8).

17. Cf. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 6, 27–28, and 41–46.

18. Cf. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 6, 27–28, and 41–46.

19. Brock, "Syriac Historical Writing," 24: "Whatever the date of the chronicle's composition, it is now generally agreed that the very full account of the early Christian history of Arbela is totally unreliable."

20. See Jullien and Jullien, "*Chronique d'Arbèles*," 64, for a chart comparing the common narrative elements shared by the *Chronicle of Arbela*, the *Chronicle of Se'ert*, and the *History of Mar Qardagh*.

gest a closer relationship between the texts. The author of the *Chronicle of Arbela*, whenever he wrote, seems to have adopted themes from the *History of Mar Qardagh* to fill in the murky early centuries of the Church of the East. While this could be the work of a late medieval compiler, it is far more likely in my view that Mingana himself composed these sections of the *Chronicle of Arbela* based on his familiarity with the Qardagh legend.

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