



The Martyrdom and History of Blessed Simeon Bar Sabba'e (Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac: Text and Translation)

By Kyle Smith

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On Good Friday, sometime between 339-344 C.E., the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon on the River Tigris was beheaded by the executioners of King Shapur II. The death of the bishop, Blessed Simeon bar Sabba'e, marked the official beginning of Shapur's 'Great Persecution' of the Christians of Persia, a forty-year period of oppression that continued until the king's death in 379. Of the dozens of texts included in the Acts of the Persian Martyrs, over half are set during the time of Shapur II and many make reference to Simeon, the first one to excel in the land of the East as a blessed martyr of God. According to his acts, Simeon was killed not only because he was a rebel who refused to collect a double tax levied on the Christians of Persia, but also because he would not bow either before King Shapur or the Zoroastrian sun god. As a result, Simeon was accused of being furtively allied with the Christian king of the Roman Empire and of inciting the Christians of Persia to rise up in rebellion.

Though the Syriac texts of the Martyrdom and the History were edited in the early 20th century, this is the first time that either of the two versions of Simeon's acts the Martyrdom, and the longer and later History of Simeon bar Sabba'e have been translated into English.

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