

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 (*neṣhānē*) 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. *vītaxa*), “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 Hystaspe 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 (Ataškuh 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 could 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 ʿalahāye*) 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.

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-nesorianische 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 früh-syrischen 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[ʃy]*). 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 (*šahlap 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 (*’ēstagni*) 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” (*’l’rāzē*: 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 curing 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 (*ʿaksnāyē*) 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" (*ʿaksnāyā*, 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" (*ʿahē ʿaksnāyē*). 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[y] 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 Cyrrihus, *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” (*kōlhein 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 Išošabran († ca. 620) provides a useful parallel. See the *Acts of Išošabran (Mahanōš)*, 1 (Chabot, 511–13), where Išošabran, 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.

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.