

THE PASSION OF SAINT SHUSHANIK,

WHO WAS MARTYRED IN GEORGIA BY HER HUSBAND ANTIPATROS, THE LEADER OF THE GEORGIANS; SHE WAS THE DAUGHTER OF SAINT VARDAN, THE GRANDDAUGHTER OF SAHAKANUSH DAUGHTER OF SAINT SAHAK PART'EW [THE PARTHIAN], PATRIARCH OF ARMENIA*

ON THE SEVENTEENTH [DAY] [OF
THE MONTH] OF K'AGHOTS'

I. And it came about that at the time of the reign of the Persians, a certain margrave of the land of Georgia whose name was Vazgén, son of Margrave Ashusha, went to the royal court [of Persia] where he renounced Christianity, submitting himself willingly—not out of necessity or force—to the Persian religion. He had as a wife the daughter of Vardan Mamikonean, the commander-in-chief of Armenia—the grandson of Saint Sahak Part'ew [the Parthian], Patriarch of Armenia, [born] of his daughter Sahakanush. She had been given the name Vardeni by her parents and was later familiarly called Shushanik, [as she was] pious and fearful of God since her childhood. For her husband's lewd and dissolute behavior she begged the faithful to pray to God, so that he might perhaps come to his senses. When he went to the royal court, she became concerned and suspicious, fearing that he might forsake Christ, which is what the impious man did. Having renounced the true God, he worshipped fire and forming an alliance with Satan, he requested for himself a Persian wife from the king [of kings]. The latter consented and gave to him in marriage the mother of his wife. He [Vazgén] promised in return to convert his first wife and children to the religion of the Magi.

II. With such ungodliness and with gifts he returned to his land and realm, sending in advance a messenger to announce the good tidings of his arrival. The latter came before the princess to present her husband's greetings and the news of his arrival. She inquired: "Is he indeed sound in spirit?" And she made the man swear in [the name of] the living God. Shedding tears he uttered: "Your husband renounced Christianity, worshipped the the fire altars and accepted the Persian religion."

When the pious princess heard this, she collapsed; wailing bitterly, she bemoaned her husband who had forsaken God and considered her children unfortunate.

After much wailing and lamentation, she went to the church, taking with her the children—for she had three sons and a daughter. She threw herself before the holy altar and said: "Oh Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth and of the creatures therein, by means of the blessed word of Your Only Begotten [Son] You set up such a

* Translated from the long version of the Armenian text published by P. Muradyan, *Surb Shushaniki vkayabanut'yunè [The Passion of Saint Shushanik]*, (Erevan, 1996), pp. 18-43. The system of transliteration used is that of the Library of Congress but with a few modifications for the benefit of those who have no diacritical marks on their computers. These modifications are as follows: է = é, լ = è, ա = r'.

rule for freedom that through the seal of the life-bearing font [administered] by ministers who serve you [and] *through a new and second birth by means of water and the Spirit* [cf. John 3:5] we may *become children of the light and children of the day and be cleansed from the corruptible birth of the night* [cf. John 3:6 and 1 Thes. 5:5] that comes into being from the physical contact of a man and a woman; and that nourished by the luminous birth in Jesus Christ and we may truly become *one flock and one shepherd* [John 10:16]. Now, I think nothing of these [children], who are physically born of an impious man—mortals born of a mortal. Now, my Lord, if you consider them to be worthy of remaining in [their state of] rebirth in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, keep them true to the right faith and to good works, so that they *live on earth with self-control* [Tit. 2:12] and worship not the creatures but You, the Creator, Who are blessed for ever. For the apostate, who is full of impiety, is on his way, coming to ensnare me and my children in the abyss of perdition. And now, Oh Lord Jesus Christ, I entrust myself and my children to You. For You are Lord and God, and I am ready to accept tortures and die for your holy name, for You are true God and it is befitting to you worship and glory for ever and ever."

In the church the blessed [woman] tearfully offered many other supplications to the Lord of all from morning until evening. When the evening service ended, all the clerics of the church shared her grief. She got up and walked into a small hut which was near the church and stood at prayer before God, crying and wailing throughout the night, restless because of her grief and eating nothing. And none of those close to her dared to say anything.

III. And it so happened that Bishop Ap'ots' was not in the court of the margrave at that time, and the court chaplain of the princess took the liberty of comforting her with respect to the enormous perils, since it was three days and three nights that she had been without food and restless. He told the blessed one: "Remember God and console yourself with the hope of the one *Who gives patience to the faint hearted* [Isaiah, 57:15] and life to those who are *brokenhearted* [Ps. 34:18]. Now, comfort your own self in Christ *fighting the good fight* [1 Tim. 6:12] with which you live and distinguish yourself, and with consolation abandon the temporal and with hope approach God, Who is powerful in all matters, even though you have no confidante who could intimately take care of you. And with many other words he encouraged and consoled the blessed one.

Thereafter, also those who were close to her ventured to beg the blessed one to take food. Harkening to [their advice] she ate a little amount and rising she thanked the Lord. They spent the entire the night in prayer, chanting psalms and reading the Divine Scriptures. Thereupon her troubled heart, which was both disturbed and perplexed, was to some degree comforted with the hope of God. And when they [the clerics] finished the morning service, *they praised God* [Luke 18: 43].

The court priest approached the princess and inquired: "What have you decided and what can you do about this war waged against you by the apostate margrave—what about the many wicked deeds that he will do?" The princess replied: "These matters as well as doubts and concerns about my children trouble me, for I know [the extent of] the man's impiety and for that reason I am stretching out my grief and pining away with tears. *Who will give water to my head and fountains of tears to my eyes and lodges in the wilderness* [Jer. 9: 1-2] so that I—overcome by the appearances and carried away from knowing God to ungodliness and from light to darkness—weep over the perdition of my most impious husband

who renounced the true God and over [my] anxiety for my children? Who will not cry over the news of such perdition? In the same vain, whose ears will bear the news of perdition, if she who has no hope for consolation? Whose eyes will tolerate the sight of an impious husband who has forsaken God? Who has the words to talk about the misery and ill from such calamities? What report of death will in this way *destroy both soul and body in Gehenna [hell]* [Mat 10: 28]? Which dead person will not leave behind some consolation to his relatives on earth? With which of these shall I drive away my grief so that I calm down a little? Oh, the perils are many, one on top of the other! Is there a wise and prudent person who could find a solution to these happenings? Speak out, O people! *Why, O Lord, do you stand afar* [Ps 10: 1] and neglect—at a time of stress, trouble and peril—your maid servant, for whom there is no consolation from any where—not from overseers, nor relatives, nor dear ones, nor servants, nor maids, nor family members, nor outsiders, nor immigrants, nor those who are at a distance, nor those who are close by, nor mortals—but from God? My faith and entire trust in people and in the world have vanished. I shall turn to the Almighty God, who will save me and give me a dove's wings so that with them and the grace of the Holy Spirit *I could fly afar off and lodge in the wilderness* [Ps 55: 7]. May He grant that I receive power from the celestial providence and find a little relief from this troubled state, which He knows through His wisdom. I am ready to undergo imprisonment, fetters and all kinds of torments, which the impious apostate may impose on me. For I will abide by God and will die in His name and not forsake the tradition of my holy forefathers, the enlighteners of Armenia; nor will I be solicited by my opponents—who are taking arms against me and the traditions of the truth, namely the profession, worship and praise of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—so that I remain firm, steadfast and resolute through the power and grace of the Lord and neither unite with the apostate nor be defiled [by him] but with great patience apply myself to a saintly and righteous life for the glory of God *Who wants all humans to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth* [1 Tit 2: 4].

And with many other words she piteously lamented the fruits of her womb and the barbarity of her impious husband who was coming to declare war against the truth and lay snares so that by means of apostacy and the abomination in accord with the Persian religion he may entrap his sons and daughter in the chasm of perdition of sins. She [Vardeni] consoled herself with the hope of God, recollecting what is said in the Psalms: *My soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and rejoiced*. [Ps 77: 2-3]. And immediately she turned her sadness to joy. In this manner she exhorted herself, entrusting everything to God.

IV. Then the apostate margrave returned to the land of Georgia to his residence. He summoned his bishops and priests and spoke to them with supplications, promising [to give them] gifts and to treat them better than before. "Do not loathe," he said, "and do not be apprehensive of my rule." He also sent messages to the princess to let go of her caprice and submit to his will in order to relish the splendor of the world more than before.

V. And when they [the messengers] arrived—with them was also the margrave's brother, whose name was Jojik—they were all in tears, reluctant to convey the apostate's messages. After much wailing and groaning the bishop and Jojik somehow began to tell what the margrave had said to them.

The princess spoke to the bishop in a harsh tone: "And you are commanding that I unite with an impious man who has forsaken God? Are you suggesting such things like a *deceiver* [Titus, 1:10]? Woe to my wretchedness, for I have no one to console me. Recognize the craftiness of the impious one who is luring me to the chasm of perdition through you. Do not hearken to his words, for through you he pursues the perdition of souls, as [he has done to] himself. I, however, am not deceived, since wisdom has led me to righteousness. I have listened to the Apostolic instruction which reminds the prophet's word by stating: *Go out from their midst and separate yourselves, says the Lord, and do not touch the unclean*, [Is 61: 11] *for he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body and he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit*. [1 Cor 6: 16-17] *And where the spirit is, there is freedom* [2 Cor 3: 17]. *And I, he says, will receive you, and I will be your God and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty* [2 Cor 6: 17-18]. Since we have these good tidings, my beloved overseers, set me apart from him and I shall unite with Christ, who will save me from a[ny] connection with the apostate, who has been ensnared by the Satan at his own free will. And let me worship the living God with all sanctity and righteousness and accept all the torments and ills which the apostate, who has forsaken God, and the enemy of righteousness will bring upon me."

The bishop replied: "What you said are good, but you should consider that he might perchance be provoked to a greater anger and hatred and stir up evil upon evil for the overseers and the people. But if you come, his anger might perhaps subside a little." The brother of the margrave also begged her in a like manner. As all of them insisted and begged her greatly, she gave in to their wishes and said: "I shall carry out your wish. I know that he is going to inflict pain upon me. Each one of you will go to your place and leave me alone. *But I am not alone, for my Lord is with me; in Him I have hoped, for the Lord is my helper and I shall not be afraid of what man can do to me*" [cf. Ps 56: 11, Heb 13: 6].

She went with them and upon her arrival at the palace, she refused to go to her room. Instead, she secluded herself in a hut where she stood at prayer before the Lord God and said: "*O Lord, my God, I trust in you* [Ps 7: 1], have mercy on me, have mercy, You Who are the helper of the helpless, the assurance for those who are in doubt, the hope of those in despair, the consolation of those in grief, the joy of those who are troubled, the comfort of those in stress, the arbitrator of those who are deprived; [You provide] health to the sick, happiness to those who are sad, asylum to the persecuted, recovery to those who are fractured, tranquility to those who are in danger, fortune to the poor, offerings to the afflicted, repose to those who are tired, strength to those who suffer, haven to those who are sailing; [You are] the father of orphans, the family of those who are of humble birth, the refuge and great hope of those who turn to you. Give me, O Lord, strength, patience and constancy, so that when the apostate, instigated by the evil one, is indignantly angry at me, I could keep myself *immaculate and undefiled* [2 Mac 7: 40], with the true faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. You know, my Lord, that since childhood I have hated and despised sin and loved your commandments. Remember, O benevolent Lord, your servants, namely my forefathers—whose scion I am—who loved You as the true God. Through their intercession help me in this war which lies before me, for I have no one to help me, neither a father, nor a brother, nor any one of my relatives who would either intimately and willingly care for me. You are my God and Lord, my father and *pilot* [Jam 3:4]. Do not deprive your maid servant of your attendance

and mercy. But give me strength to complete the course of my tribulation in the likeness of my ancestors, so that I may become an heir of their share of [eternal] rest. Now, I put my trust in You, Who saved Saint Hr'iwpsimé from the fury of the king and put to shame the powerful giant. Save my unworthy self from the fury of the apostate, for yours is victory and through You I shall be victorious. Glory to You for ever. Amen."

Having finished her prayer, she remained in the hut for three days without any food and drink. She was satisfied with spiritual nourishment, with ceaseless psalmody day and night.

VI. On the third day, when they went in to have supper, the [margrave] sent his brother Jojik and his wife to summon the princess to supper. She refused but after much solicitation and persuasive words, she went, crying with sadness. She possessed a small gospel book which belonged to her ancestor Saint Sahak, which she carried with her and with it she prayed to God in private. She neither ate nor drank anything at that diabolical supper, but was silently in tears, consoled with the memory of the good things promised by God and of the spiritual delights in Jesus Christ. [Thereafter] she went to her place.

Greatly irritated [by this], the margrave was provoked in anger. When the banquet ended, each one went to his place. [The margrave] sent for her again and summoned her. But she refused to come. Thereupon he himself went, furious like a beast and dragged her there with the [help of his] servants. And she screamed and said: "Lord Jesus, help me."

He had her beaten very severely with clubs and no one could mitigate the man's anger. Thereupon the margrave's brother was notified and he came, but was unable to mollify his brother's fury. Him also [the margrave] contemptuously sent off to his place and intensified the rigorous and merciless blows [on her] so that no part of her [body] remained unaffected by the beating. And she was like a dead person. As the blessed one did not utter a sound, she was assumed to be dead. Enraged to a greater degree, the margrave insulted God and the forefathers of the saintly princess. Overwhelmed and exhausted, he ordered to drag the blessed one from that place and take her to her hut, for he assumed that she was dead.

VII. Towards morning he [the margrave] went to see the blessed one. When he noticed that she was alive, he assigned guards, ordering them not to let any of the women or men visit her—so that she would die in the same [state of] agony. He instructed them to give her for sustenance barley bread and water. Though injured, the blessed one thanked God for becoming worthy of bearing torments in His name and for being spared of any connection with the apostate, as she herself had wished and expected such an outcome of events, which was carried out for the glory of God. And the margrave himself became engaged in the affairs of his land.

Thereafter the court priest came and begged the guards to see the blessed princess. After much supplication, he visited her and she was unable to stand up because of the severe swelling of the body and the blood that had coagulated around her. Upon seeing this, the priest wept bitterly. The blessed princess said: "Do not weep over me, for without the proof of torture and insult no human can become righteous before God and as for those who hope in Him, the grace of the Savior does not forsake anyone without mercy. Through these torments I have been cleansed of the filthy bed of an impious husband. I am glad for the tortures that I suffered, for

through this I shall attain the noble patrimony of my forefathers in Jesus Christ. And for all of this I have thanked and shall always thank Him."

The priest begged the blessed one to partake of food and though she wanted, she could not because of the severe blows. And then she hardly ate a small amount and after a few days she recovered a little and was ceaselessly—day and night—at prayer at the place where she was incarcerated, and she partook a little of the barley bread and the water.

At about that time there was [unexpected] fear from somewhere and her children were carried across the Kura River [and] taken to a certain fortress. And one of the children drowned in the river, causing great grief to the margrave and his realm. But when the princess heard [the news], she thanked the Lord saying "Even though he died physically, he was saved in spirit from the snare of his apostate father and now, glory to God for everything."

Then the [the provincial] governor and the lords of Georgia came to the margrave to console him for [the loss of] his child and to relieve his grief. He sent for the princess so that she would get out of the prison and stay in a house under guard until the governor and each one of the lords returned to his place. She gladly carried out the command of the impious man. Upon her arrival there, she displayed herself in a monk's apparel and according to [monastic] regulation—with an even greater willingness for fasting, praying, vigilance and tears, and she distinguished herself in all the splendid rules, so that all were amazed at the conduct of the saint. For she was so assiduous in her love of God that nothing relaxed her from her labor. For the blessed one was personally decked with all kinds of good works—she was saintly, clean, chaste, immaculate, one who hated sin, righteous, truthful, correct, lover of holiness, benevolent, humble, meek, condescending, attentive, obedient, modest, calm, merciful, charitable, hospitable, one who observed fasts, vigilant, wishing [people] well, shedding tears, studious, diligent, productive, well read, ready to listen, without malice, not envious, not arrogant, not aroused to anger, not greedy, not avaricious, not vain, but a lover of God, ingenious, wise, prudent, peace maker, full of devotion to God, who, having removed herself from all wicked things, conducted her thoughts in a manner worthy of the calling from heaven and led her life in a manner worthy of Christ's gospel, living immaculately on earth.

And when the magnates returned to their places, the margrave sent for the blessed princess to persuade her to turn away from such caprices and give in to his wishes. He promised [to give] gifts and greater majesty and honor than before. But she did not accept living with an impious man who had forsaken God. Instead she sent her ornaments and valuable garments to the margrave with the following answer: *What does a faithful have in common with an unbeliever and what fellowship is there between light and darkness and what agreement is there between a temple of God and a prostitute?* [2 Cor 6: 14-16] Now, through these tortures I have been cleansed of sharing a residence with you and of my former union with you. I have offered myself to Christ. Neither glory, nor honor, nor majesty, nor anything else of human dimension—[such as] delights and joys—could separate me from the love of Christ. But I shall depart this life with tortures and shall be near the great king and shall be imbued with the light that is there, a small promise of which I have received here through the grace of Jesus Christ. Now, I shall carefully abide in this manner with righteous thoughts. Do as you wish. I am ready to die with holiness in the name of Christ rather than violate the tradition of my holy forefathers.."

VIII. They brought the garments and the ornaments and told him what the blessed one had said. The impious margrave, becoming more angry, threatened to inflict wicked anguish on the blessed maid of Christ. Because of his rage he could not pardon her. But he went in person, taking with him some of his servants, and found her as she stood at prayer in the church. Relentless he went in and beat her up severely with a club and grabbing her from the hair, dragged her out of the church. And no one dared to lay hold of him in order to deliver the lamb of Christ from the wolf. One of the priests, however, said: "Why are you mercilessly beating her to such a degree? He poured his wrath on the priest and struck him very severely, so that all those who were gathered—men and women in general—raised a cry and wept. Like a wicked and undomesticated beast he turned on all of them with blows.

He dragged the blessed one on the ground, through thorns and stumbling-blocks, stones and bushes, and ordered her to be taken to the palace. Her entire body was torn to pieces—for the terrain was rough—and the blood spilled from her and to the onlookers it appeared as if the ground was saturated with blood.

IX. Upon his arrival at the palace, the impious one again resumed the flogging more than before. Yet the saintly maid of Christ did not even utter a sound but entrusted herself to God and temperance, and she stood with great fortitude, regarding the torments and the flogging with clubs as nothing. Moreover, the wretched coat that covered her body and head had been pulled off of her because of being dragged, and she, with her head bare, covered herself with her torn dress and thanked God for the events that happened. And the impious man was neither ashamed nor pitied her, but at the instigation of the wicked one he told her: "Let Christ, the church and your and your father's prayers, in which you have laid your hope, help you." He ordered the feet and the hands of the blessed one bound with iron fetters and had her taken to prison, and had chains cast around her neck. He also commanded to pierce iron rods into the wall and attach the chains to these and had the chains and the fetters sealed. He set up guards to watch over her with great alertness and attention and to let no one approach her, and ordered barley bread and water for sustenance. He said: "Now-rejoice. You attained the torments and the bitter fetters with which I shall torture you until death."

The blessed one responded: "I am glad for these torments which you have inflicted on me. For the love of Christ I shall complement the deficiency of the afflictions with my fetters, so that I become worthy of the patrimony of my holy forefathers, whom and [whose] God you insult—you who are estranged from God and are the enemy of righteousness. For the more you intensify my tortures, the more you enhance my joy, which shall not fade, since *through these momentary troubles* you are preparing for me *a much greater glory* [cf. 2 Cor 4: 17], *which will never be shaken* [Ps 125: 1]. And you shall suffer vengeance from God, the righteous judge, on the day of His coming."

The impious margrave gave no answer, but was amazed at the temperance and patience of the blessed woman, and leaving her in the same fetters, he left the country.

X. Three days later, the court priest came [and] paying off the guards he called on the blessed one, whom he saw in fetters [but] full of joy and bliss, ceaselessly

chanting psalms. He yearned for her bliss, as she tolerated so much in the name of God, suffering torments and fetters. He said: "*Blessed are you among women* [Luke, 1: 42]; you have indeed shown yourself to be a good sprout from noble roots. Henceforth all the faithful shall rightly *call you blessed* [Luke 1: 48], for with the hope of God you vanquished the impious one and *inherited a [good] name and courage* [Mac 7: 5] in the likeness of St. Hr'ip'simé, with whom you also shall be crowned by the Lord of all and our Savior Jesus Christ."

The blessed one answered: "I am unworthy of that saint's crowns and bliss, for she did not approach an impious man, but lived in sanctity and championing the cause of sanctity, she vanquished the evil one, becoming more cleansed with her holy blood together with her comrades. I, on the other hand, lived with an impious man bore children [to be condemned] to perdition and corruption by a wicked man though they were reborn by means of the grace of the baptismal font, and I nourished [them] with righteousness, hoping to bring them close to God with the Lord's instruction and teaching. But they turned out to be unworthy, for they are seeds of wickedness. But there is one consolation: through tortures and iron fetters I have been cleansed of close ties with the apostate. And it became known to all that it was in my hands to be delivered from tortures, fetters, prison and other tribulations to which I was exposed. And now, I shall not be without *hope in matters in which I am confident* [cf. Job 11: 18], since *I gave my back to scourges and my cheeks to blows, and my hands and neck to iron fetters, and I did not turn my face away from shame* [Is 50: 6], for *the Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid of what man can do to me* [Ps. 56: 11; Heb 13: 6]. Accordingly in this manner I shall depart from this life on guard, in a perfect discipline of faith, for as long as there is breath in my body, so that I might perchance come into communion with the regiments of saints and enter their resplendent quarters."

Greatly overjoyed by the princess' patience, he [the court priest] returned to his residence and on a daily basis he secretly inquired about her bondage.

The margrave had gone to the region of Chor. When the second [series of] tortures and the fetters were applied to Saint Shushanik, the margrave's brother was not within the boundaries [of Georgia]. When he heard [of these matters], he was greatly saddened and he went and begged [the margrave] to undo the fetters. Many days passed until he barely persuaded the man who hated God to remove the chains from her neck alone. But as for the [fetters on] her feet, he had vowed not to unfasten them until the day of his death.

And thus she spent six years in prison in the same fetters, with affliction, starvation, thirst and stress and for six years she did not desist from her rigorous conduct, in which she excelled through fasting, prayer, vigilance and tears, ceaseless psalmody over day and night, with a battered body and horrible fetters, satisfied with a [loaf of] barley bread and water. During the fast of the Holy Easter weeks she ate nothing save for a little amount of vegetables she consumed on Saturdays and Sundays.

XI. At the report of her virtue, many—men and women, religious as well as laymen—came to see her and heard her [talk about] chaste and righteous living. She urged many to let go of the world and whatever there is in the world and seek the eternal life. Through her prayers the Lord visited many who were faint-hearted: He gave children to those with no children, healing to those who were possessed, good health to those who were afflicted with different kinds of sickness, consolation to all

of those in grief. Through her immaculate prayers, the blessed one gave each person respectively excellent gifts from God's protection. And whoever visited her returned full of joy. Wherever the report about the saint was heard, the name of the Lord was glorified through her. For that reason, a Persian woman, renowned among the Magi,¹ who was a leper and had not been cured [of her ailment] by the Persian physicians, came at the report of the saint, and falling before her asked for healing. Thereupon, the blessed one said: "If you believe in the true God and forsake the religion of the Persians, I shall ask the Lord with prayers and you shall receive healing from God and know the great power of our God." The Persian woman said: "I believe in the God of the Christians." She instructed to baptize her and she was immediately cured of her leprosy. She praised and blessed God and professed the Holy Trinity and resigned from the Persian religion and familiarized herself with God from Whom she had received healing. This miracle was narrated throughout the land. The woman herself recounted to the magi and the chief-magi and the Persian magnates the wonderful things which God wrought at the hand of the blessed princess.

XII. When the margrave heard all these [reports], he was enraged. After four years he returned from his far away sojourn, and coming [to the place] where the princess was, he inflicted severe tortures and blows on the guards, saying: "Did I not give you strict orders to be on guard, [and] not let anyone near her. He had them exposed to deadly blows and afflicted to a greater extent the blessed one in the fetters of her prison.

XIII. And after all of these, the impious margrave, failing to attain what he thought he could attain, sought other means. Then he found a sorceress and through her he tried to tear her [Shushanik] away from the wonderful faith. The woman accepted [the challenge]. For a year the margrave fought with her [Shushanik] by means of such diabolical fantasy, but accomplished nothing. He saw her display a greater [dedication] to God's will. In this matter as well he was put to shame and became the laughingstock of the faithful. He did not cease from [entertaining] vain thoughts, though like a tool [resisted] by a strong rampart he was rejected by the blessed one. Moreover, he also had his children convert and submit [to the Persian religion] at the hand of the chief-magi and made adulations to the king of the Persians so that he would receive greater honors from him. And through faithful individuals he informed the king about the tortures and the incarceration of the princess, saying: "She is the daughter of Vardan, who stood against the king of kings, and I shall harass and torture her until death for the reason that she, like her father who destroyed the country, did not agree to worship the king's gods."

XIV. But is there any other need to remember the wicked deeds of the man who sinned in every matter, but in no way was able to vanquish the spirit of the virtuous and magnanimous [woman], though in the likeness of sea tides surging

¹ The present interpretation of this passage replaces that of an earlier translator who understood it as follows: "a renowned Persian woman of the cast of the Magi." For a discussion of this see P. Muradyan, *Surb Shushaniki vkayabanut'yunè*, p. 96.

around a rock he afflicted the saint for six years with different tribulations and ills—blows, imprisonment, starvation, thirst, sorceresses? Yet the virtuous [woman], in no way harmed by any of these, labored to a greater degree for the name of the Lord God. The clothing on her bare [body] consisted of haircloth with an Antiochene tunic on top; at the head [of her bed there was] a small pillow of leather; [on the ground] a prayer rug; also her feet were bare and for food [she had] barley bread and water to drink. Also on many occasions it so happened that she went without food and excelling in every way in the wonderful traditions of her holy forefathers, she scorned with the perfect all the perils that threatened her. Communion on many occasions with the heavenly Providence encouraged her to be strong in battle.

XV. And at the beginning of the seventh year of her tribulation, bondage and incarceration, the blessed one was taken ill from the excessive tortures and the severe labors, which the holy maid of Christ tolerated.

XVI. Jojik, the margrave's brother came and prostrated himself before the Holy Sign [=Cross] in front of the princess, and together with his wife they fell before the saintly maid of Christ so that she would bless them. He also confessed his sins and asked for absolution. She instructed [them] to love righteousness and hate iniquity. "You shall carry out all the good works which are against sin and are acceptable to God and are the fruits of repentance, and you shall receive the blessings of God and of the leaders of the Church. After doing good works sin no more so that no other evil would come to you." Instructing him with many other stimulating words and blessing [him], she sent him off to his place.

XVII. Also Samuél, the chief of the bishops and Bishop Hovhan came with priests and deacons—they had supported the blessed one and sympathized with her in her grief—so that they would escort the saint from her great labors to Christ's haven. In like manner, the lords, gentry, princesses and other cadets [of feudal families] of the land of Georgia [came] in order to take part in the invocation of the last rites for the blessed one.

They all sought to have the iron fetters as relics in memory of the saint. She said: "I am not worthy of that, but for your love of God have your way as you wish." She blessed them all according to each one's station. And the blessed one said: "May Christ, Who is the most perfect one, fill you with all the spiritual blessing and delights."

XVIII. She also thanked the court bishop for his concern [for her] as a father and mentor, and asked to be laid away at the site from where she was first dragged, adding: "do that, If I am worthy."

And thus, taking leave of all and blessing all in Christ, she, together with all those who were gathered, offered thanks of victory to the Holy Trinity in the highest to reach the Heavenly [Father], to Whom the blessed [woman] wished to rise from this world with affliction. God's saint stood at prayer and spreading out her arms said: "I thank you, O Lord God, for making my unworthy self worthy of completing my [life's] course with affliction. Now, You, Who are the receiver of souls and the Creator of all the creatures and the Savior and the Deliverer, accept my soul. Make me, with those whom you love, worthy of attaining rest in the eternal vaults [of heaven], which you have made ready for those who are dear to you [and] from

where sorrows, afflictions and woes as well as all the worldly effects are banished. Since I suffered minor afflictions—both fetters and incarceration—in your name in order to please you, accept me also [and] make me worthy of the remuneration [awaiting] my holy forefathers, Your beloved who—each one in his respective rank—worshipped You as the true God and died for your praised and holy name. And now, what other accounting of my afflictions shall I present? But hoping in the grace of Your love of mankind, I deliver my soul into your hands." And saying this, the saint delivered her soul into the hands of God Almighty. They were all in tears, weeping with a great apprehension and blessing the Lord our God.

XIX. The bishop and all those who were gathered claimed the body of the blessed [one], which was washed by virtuous women, and supplying the necessities in the way of sweet ointments and incense and shrouding [the body] with clean linen, they laid it in the designated place—as the holy maid of Christ had instructed them—with psalms, canticles, spiritual songs, chants of thanksgiving and lit candles. Throughout the night, until the noon hour, they offered blessings and praise to the Lord God.

XX. Then the Divine Liturgy was celebrated and a solemn feast was observed on the day of Saint Shushanik's repose, [which was] on the seventeenth day of the month of K'aghots'. They also arranged so that the memory of the saint would be annually observed amidst a large multitude of people for the glory and praise of the Holy Trinity. Through the intercession of the saint the Lord healed not a few of the faithful.

This is the testimonial of Saint Shushanik's martyrdom. This is how she offered herself to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; how she came close to Christ; how by becoming the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, she was martyred for the glory of the Holy Trinity and was with all the saints crowned with unfading glory in Jesus Christ, our Lord, to Whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is befitting glory, dominion and honor, now and always and to the ages and ages. Amen.

Translated by Fr. Krikor Maksoudian



1944 Սեպտեմբեր 11, Միաբանութիւն Սրբոց Յակոբեանց, Նորայր Վրդ. Պողարեան, առաջին շարք, աջէն ձախ՝ երրորդը: