

PREFACE

Whether in the fourth or in the twentieth and twenty-first century, martyrdom has at times been very much a reality for many Christians living in the geographical area of modern Iraq and western Iran, and this has been equally the case at particular periods during the course of the intervening centuries. For the most part, however, it is only for the martyrs living under Sasanian rule (AD 224–651) that written records, sometimes extensive, of these martyrdoms have been preserved.

Persecution only became a serious threat for Christians in the Persian Empire after Constantine's conversion to Christianity, and thus after the cessation of persecution within the Roman Empire. Significantly, persecution was most likely to take place in the Persian Empire during times of hostility between the two empires, and this was particularly the case in the mid fourth century, when it continued on and off during the last 35 years of the long reign of Shapur II (309–79). Indeed Shapur's reign witnessed the most extensive persecutions, resulting in a large number of deaths; the shorter bouts of persecution in the first half of the fifth century, at the end of the reign of Yazdgard I (399–420) and the beginning of the reign of Bahram V (420–38), and in that of Yazdgard II (439–57), likewise took place at times of tension between the two superpowers. By the mid fifth century, however, Christians had become an important minority within the Persian Empire, and subsequent martyrdoms were largely confined to high-profile cases of individual converts from Zoroastrianism who were of high birth.

The literary records, or Acts, of these martyrs vary enormously in character and historical value, ranging from what are little more than mere lists of names to writings with literary pretensions that have taken on a largely legendary character, though probably retaining traces of a historical core. The *History of Ma'in*, who was technically a confessor, and not a martyr, belongs to the latter category. Whereas all the other extant Acts of the Persian Martyrs have been published long ago, for the most part in volumes II and IV of Paul Bedjan's *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, the *History of Ma'in* has never hitherto been published in full, and so it has been chosen as an

appropriate text to inaugurate this new series of bilingual editions of the Persian Martyr Acts, whose aim is to make these interesting works more accessible to scholars and other readers.

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