
**Early martyrdom. Translations, comments, and research.
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The book is a collection of translations into Russian with comments on hagiographic texts devoted to the persecution of early Christians from the middle of the second century to the beginning of the fourth century AD, and is an accessible presentation of the history of the appearance of "martyrdom" as a phenomenon that had a huge impact on the subsequent perception and study of early Christian teaching, the appearance of stories about martyrs as a literary genre. Ten texts have been published with the author's comments with notes on the semantic interpretation of the translation itself, historiographical notes on the study of each of the texts separately, and author's hypotheses concerning the reasons for the creation of the original text. Also, at the end of the book there are two short articles: "The Martyr in prison" and "Christian martyrdom in the context of Roman spectacles", exploring the general questions raised for the interpretation of texts in the context of the historical era when the events described in the sources occurred.

In the introductory article "Christian martyrdom: the history of the phenomenon and genre", aimed at maintaining the reader's interest, the author offers a General idea of the development of the phenomenon of martyrdom in relation to socio-cultural relations within the Roman

Empire, explaining the reasons why “Christians” could not integrate into this structure and turned out to be an alien element for it, which caused such a powerful public response and changes in the legal field that led to accusations and executions. The reasons for the appearance of Imperial edicts aimed at combating Christians are discussed in detail. The author admits that “the legal form of these persecutions until the time of the Emperor Trajan is still unclear” (p. 8), presents different points of view of groups of historians and does so with caution, not considering the change in attitude to the afterlife, which was the complete opposite of what the majority of the population professed at the time described. You should pay attention to the interesting background desire of Christians to find it is the “crown of martyrdom” on which the author points out, since the idea of self-sacrifice in a religious context, for evidence of the truth of the doctrine is controversial and has not been spread among the Jews, Greeks and Romans. However, if we consider death in the arena as a sacrifice, an element of competition and struggle, then in this case, researchers are faced not with the desire of Christians to die by “execution”, but with a centuries-old tradition of public “spectacles” involving gladiators. At the same time the author returns to the traditional view that “the concept of martyrdom is the religion of Christ” (p. 17), and then the desire of Christians for martyrdom should be viewed as a special case of the concept of *imitatio Christi* in the context of the redemptive sacrifice, accomplished on the cross at some point.

Since the corpus of New Testament books was still in its infancy at that time, the study of martyrdom and passion is of particular interest, since these sources are a reflection of the early Christian community’s views on ways of expressing faith and interaction between its members without a firm reliance on dogmas. The author gives various classifications of sources that are accepted in the modern scientific environment. The reader’s attention is also drawn to the fact that any of the texts that have come down to our days is not an unchanged original, but contains elements of later editions intended for the needs of believers of a particular community, in order to convey to them certain judgments or to form an opinion on the deeds of their predecessors.

The first text offers the reader’s attention “The Martyrdom of Polycarp” from Smyrna, in the initial chapters of which it is instructively told how bravely and patiently a Martyr must accept all the tortures that are performed on his body: “at this hour, under torture, the martyrs of Christ were outside the body and the Lord, having appeared, talked with them” (p. 35). Although there is almost no mention of miracles in “The Martyrdom of Polycarp” (except for the description by his followers of the moment of death, p. 44), proper for Christian hagiographic literature, it corresponds to the ideas of “correct martyrdom”, typical for this historical time, which the author discusses in detail in the comments, with the involvement of various opinions of researchers and links to publications.

The following is a translation of “The Martyrdom of Carp, Papil, and Agatonica” (Greek and Latin translations), executed in Pergamum in the second half of the 160’s AD, which is alike “protocol of interrogation”. This form is interesting to the researcher, because from the lips of the martyrs one can hear a statement of faith explaining the refusal to sacrifice: “it is impossible that I should sacrifice to the false ghosts of demons, for those who make sacrifices to them are like them” (p. 71), as well as an interesting remark by a witness that characterizes the sacrifice of the Martyr Papil, who is being scourged: “as a noble athlete, he accepted the anger of the enemy” (p. 74), which, according to the author, is quite common in early Martyr Acts. Accordingly, the opposition to the Roman authorities is perceived as a competition. This text of martyrdom describes not only the controversy with the judge-proconsul, but also the punishments to which Karp and Papil are subjected — the scourging of three pairs of executioners. The description of the execution is similar to that of Polycarp of Smyrna: burning alive in an amphitheater. “The first one nailed to the post was raised, and when the fire was brought...” (on the execution of Papil, p. 75), “the Holy Carp tied to the stake” — the executed were crucified, nailed or tied to the stake (cruciformed?). Polycarp of Smyrna was burned alive, and at his request he was not nailed down, but tied up. In both cases, the remains were preserved by Christians, and the martyrs were declared saints.

Interesting historical commentary on the dates of martyrdom and the appearance of the Church in Pergamum, the dialogue between Karp and the proconsul about the gods, the behavior of Agatonica, who voluntarily accepted the execution (the phenomenon of voluntary confession, p. 89), the question of the ratio of suicide and martyrdom.

The following text, “The Martyrdom of Ptolemy and Lucius”, differs from the first two. Here is a story about the events that took place in Rome in the early 50s of the second century. Due to the fact that a certain noble Roman woman converted to Christianity and wanted to divorce her husband, her mentor in the faith, Ptolemy, was captured. He was sentenced to death, along with a certain Lucius and a third person who disagreed with the judge’s decision. The text is preserved in three manuscripts, but a single translation is provided. The plot is interesting because the person who converted a Roman matron to Christianity was punished, but not she herself. And here, according to the author, the story can be interpreted not as a story about a certain case, but as a damning and condemning story about an informer (the husband of a Roman woman) who became the culprit of the death of a good and righteous person. In the comment, the reader will learn a lot of interesting information about the relationship to denunciations and a variable image of the “informer”, since the reason may be not only a quarrel, fear of punishment, but also blackmail. An attempt at identification leads the author to the story of the “Valentinian school” in Rome (p. 105), whose representative may have been the mentioned

Ptolemy and his biographer, Justin, of whose martyrdom we learn from the following text.

The story of “The Martyrdom of Justin the Philosopher and his companions”, executed in Rome in 165 or 167 AD, is also constructed in the form of a “question-answer” characteristic of court records. Recognition of themselves as “Christians” of this group, according to the laws of the time, immediately led to condemnation and flagellation (which indicates that none of the convicts was a full citizen of Rome) and execution by beheading. Also interesting is the passage that Justin had a certain “school” (“if someone wanted to come to me, I shared with him the words of truth, p.127), and he himself entered into a public debate with other philosophers.

“The message of the Lyon and Vienne martyrs”, addressed to the Gallic Christians co-religionists in Asia Minor and Phrygia, dates back to 177 AD. The Christians talk about the anger of the pagans (“it was forbidden not only to allow us into the houses, baths and markets, but generally seem ever anywhere”, p. 133), and when their group suddenly came under the fury of the crowd which dragged them to the forum and demanded the condemnation. The text is interesting because it shows the heterogeneity of the group: some did not show resistance and did not recognize themselves as Christians, and also reveals the reasons for the hatred of people around them (Christians were slandered by their own domestic slaves): “fiesta feasts, oedipal mixing” (cannibalism and incest, p. 136), eating children (p. 140). In this martyrdom there is also a motive of competition. Also, several chapters describe how and who was tortured, which, apparently, was important to convey to their associates, showing the fact of martyrdom is in the resistance during torture and stay in prison.

The translation of this text is interesting and multi-faceted for research, since the story is, apparently, about representatives of a separate Christian community (all the victims, mostly, have Greek names), which existed in Lugdunsky (Lyon) Gaul and in Narbonne Gaul lying nearby. Also, the story does not have a traditional description of the trial and the exact reasons that provoked the executions are unknown: everything indicates that it was a spontaneous process, and the fact of the Christian faith caused hatred among the majority of the local population. A number of hypotheses have been put forward (pp. 158-161). In the historical commentary, some other aspects of persecution are considered — “Christians were executed with the observance of the ritual of sacrifice” (p. 161) and “the idea of correct martyrdom” (p. 164).

The “Acts of the Skilitan martyrs” report a group of Christians brought to trial in 180 AD in Carthage. Translations of the Greek and Latin versions are given. The originality of both versions is disputed, about which the author gives an extensive historical commentary. It is also interesting that all the martyrs (seven men and five women), although they bore the names typical of North

Africa at that time, were Roman citizens, so they were sentenced to beheading with a sword. Since the narrative is presented in the form of a judicial record, it also sets out the foundations of the Christian faith, which were (judging by the dating, although controversial) peculiar to the first communities of the second century: “Christians do not perjure themselves and do not commit criminal crimes, Christians are virtuous, Christians do not worship idols, Christians reject sacrifices to the genius of the Emperor and pray to the one God” (p. 188).

“The martyrdom of Apollonius”, as the author notes, exists in several versions. The book provides a full version of the text without abbreviations in the wording of the judicial procedure. The text is interesting for its detailed description of the conversation between the Christian Apollonius and the Consul Perennius, who must condemn him. It should be noted that the answers of Apollonius, which are already on a higher level of philosophical reasoning, explain why he refuses to worship man-made idols (p. 196-197), as well as the attitude of Christians to death: “there is nothing more valuable than life-eternal life, which is the immortality of the soul that has lived well in this life” (p. 198). The trial of Apollonius took place in 185 AD in Rome, as we learn from the commentary, so it can be compared to the story of Justin the Martyr, who also enters into a philosophical dispute with his judge. This text is examined in detail, since there is an assumption in the compilation of two separate documents and the omission of some paragraphs by the copyist.

“The passions of Perpetua and Felicitata” is probably the most widely read and studied document, so the author limited himself to translating the full Latin version (there are also brief “Acts”). Many versions of the text have been preserved, and researchers use different approaches to it, trying to evaluate even the smallest details or plots. This work is also interesting in that it does not just give a story about martyrdom, but also contains diverse “visions”. The author gives a fairly brief overview, drawing the reader’s attention to the main details.

The following text “The Martyrdom of Potamiena and Basilides” describes the brief story of martyrdom of a young woman, which we know as “the illustrious virgin”, executed in a rather unusual way — the executioners poured burning pitch body parts from toe to the crown, and the warrior who led Potamiena to death and imbued her with sympathy, declared himself a Christian, and was also killed. However, the historical commentary on this story is quite voluminous. The author tried to describe the activities of Origen and his disciples in Alexandria at the beginning of the third century, to which Potamiena may have belonged, analyzing the testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea in the “Church history”. The construct of reasoning comes not from Potamiena, but from Basilides, who may have been a disciple of Origen, and already the story of the execution of a woman was tied to his death.

The author suggests that the inclusion of this story in the “Church history” had a polemical purpose (p. 258), in order to refute Origen’s accusations of infatuation with the teachings of the Gnostics and of “moral failure” (of preferring “speculative piety to practical piety, of avoiding martyrdom and sexual promiscuity”). This account is the first evidence of the Alexandrian martyrs.

“The martyrdom of the Holy presbyter Pionius and his companions” completes the list of translations given in the book and tells about the events that occurred in Smyrna during the persecution of Decius in the beginning of 250 AD. The first chapters of the story contain a defensive speech by Pionius on the agora, in which he explains his position in relation to the sacrifice on the orders of the Emperor. Then the story is built in the form of a dialogue—the interrogation of Christians by the guardian of the temple Polemon, and then there are descriptions: the actions of future martyrs in prison, where Pionius again talks about faith, attempts to force them to make a sacrifice, the interrogation by the proconsul, the burning of Pionius, crucified on the cross.

The historical commentary is interesting because it already introduces the reader to the details of the persecutions of Decius and the historiography of the research of the text itself about martyrdom: how its basis was formed. The question of “apostasy” is also raised, since many Christians no longer considered martyrdom as a sacred act (as we see in previous records of martyrdom). After the end of the persecution, the question of how to accept into the community those who had already renounced once also arose for the remaining Christians. “Pionius wanted to give them some hope, but tried to follow the “middle” path: he did not demand martyrdom from them as the only way of redemption, but also did not intend to forgive everyone indiscriminately” (p. 306) — the author draws attention, and this circumstance, when a single opinion was not developed, indicates the dating of the text.

Thus, the presented book fills a gap in the source base of domestic research on early Christianity and the history of the Church. The translations are provided with a detailed historical commentary involving an extensive database of sources, both foreign and domestic. The publication is intended for researchers of Christianity, historians and religious scholars, since it offers a look at the history of martyrdom not from the plane of persecution of “non-believers”, but perhaps as “dissidents”. The Christian concept of the world and subsequent metamorphoses of the soul radically diverged from the generally accepted one, completely denying it, and at the same time—the presence of an element of competition and struggle, internal social relationships in terms of common life and cultural values, is a premise for further research.