

SAINTS COSMAS AND DAMIAN

Two doctors and brothers who suffered martyrdom at the time of the [Diocletian](#) persecutions (feast day: 22 Hatur). They were called anargyroi (silverless) because they did not ask [money](#) from the sick whom they cured. The Byzantine church, however, gradually came to distinguish three pairs of brothers named Cosmas and Damian, who suffered, respectively, in Arabia under the emperor Hadrian, at Rome under Carinus, and finally in Asia after Diocletian. Such was the opinion of the [patriarch](#) Methodius in the ninth century.

It has become clear that all three groups derive from Pheremma, a place near Cyr in Cilicia. The cult of the Anargyroi spread with extraordinary vigor because, as healing saints, they gradually supplanted their pagan predecessors Castor and Pollux, the Dioscuri. Numerous collections of cures were added to the many forms of the legend.

The shortest account, from Asia, is scarcely a martyrdom. Cosmas and Damian practice medicine without charge at Pheremma. One day Damian, for fear of hurting the feelings of a poor woman named Palladia, accepts three eggs. Cosmas tells him that henceforth they will always work together and that after death they should be buried together. Damian dies first.

Cosmas thereafter heals a camel with a broken foot. Cosmas also dies, and at the moment of his burial the people hesitate to comply with the brothers' request. But the camel announces in a human voice that the brothers are not to be separated in the tomb. This meager report presupposes the tomb at Pheremma and the commemoration on 1 November at Constantinople.

This story was taken up by Simeon Metaphrastes. It exists in Latin, Georgian, and Arabic versions, and is generally followed by accounts of miracles. In Greek, fifty-seven different arrangements have been counted

for sixty-two miracles. Some of them occur in Georgian or in Arabic.

The second group may be called Roman. The feast day is 1 July. The doctors are denounced before the emperor Carinus, who has them brought to Rome. At the time of their interrogation, the Anargyroi threaten the emperor with a stiff neck, and in fact, the emperor suddenly has his head inverted on his shoulders. Bewildered, he cries for mercy and proclaims the true God.

He is then cured and decrees an edict of tolerance throughout the empire. Returning to their own country, the doctors are the victims of an ambush by a jealous colleague, who kills them by guile in the mountains. There are no miracles associated with this legend. But already in the Syriac version one fifth- or sixth-century witness relates the episode of the eggs, attaching it to a persecution of Kurinos and to the emperor's stiff neck.

The two forms were thus not distinguished in Syria. What is more, the historian Malalas knew the story in the sixth century. Far from traveling to Rome, the brothers cured Carinus at the time of his campaign against the Persians to avenge his brother Numerian. When the emperor leaves the region of Cyr, their jealous colleague ambushes the saints. In spite of an interchange of Carinus and Numerian effected by Malalas, this version eliminates every difference between the Asiatic and the Roman groups.

In the third group, the Arabic, there is a Passion of the classic type in which the five brothers Cosmas, Damian, Anthimus, Leontius, and Euprepus are indicted before the tribunal of Lysias at Aegae in Cilicia. At the time of their examination, they declare that they are natives of "Arabia." They undergo drowning, scourging, fire, and the cross, and then are beheaded. The feast is on 17 October.

What appears in Coptic and Arabic is a combination of two legends, of which the substance is as follows. Under [Diocletian](#) and Maximian, the

widow Theodote lives with her five sons in the castle called Son of God (the name Theodote does not occur elsewhere, [save](#) in the Asiatic group). The two eldest sons, Cosmas and Damian, are doctors. The stories of the eggs and the camel appear in this account. Next it is explained how Diocletian, who apparently recognized this hospital of the Son of God, turned against the Christians.

The [bishop of Antioch](#) agreed to hold the son of the shah of Persia as a hostage on the emperor's behalf. Seduced by rich gifts from the shah, the bishop sets the hostage free. When [Diocletian](#) comes to reclaim him, the bishop says that he is dead and hands over another body, swearing by all that is most sacred in Christianity that this is the corpse of the shah's son. But Diocletian produces the young man, whom he had captured alive, and subjects the bishop and all Christianity, by which he had sworn, to the most wretched persecution.

Cosmas and Damian are then summoned to Antioch and suffer torture under the prefect Lysias. They come from Arabia, from the city of Dabarma (an Arabic corruption of the Coptic tpherema for Pheremma). The three other brothers are subsequently called to suffer the same fate. The archangel Michael heals them, and Lysias is replaced by Claudius. After a fruitless attempt to drown the brothers, they are cast into the fire in the middle of the great theater at Antioch.

But the pillar to which they are bound falls to the ground and the whole earth begins to tremble. Theodote their mother is executed. Victor, son of Romanus, has the courage to bury her. That is why he is banished to Egypt, where he will become a famous martyr. The story is followed by seven miracles, of which three are unknown among the sixty-two Greek miracles.

This text combines the Asiatic and the Arabic groups, and excludes the Roman. Two features connect this legend with the Coptic literature: the presence of Victor and the attitude with regard to the events at Antioch

as a whole. The son of the shah of Persia appears in a series of other Passions, but there he bears the name of Nicomedes: the Passions of Claudius, Basilides, John and Symeon, Justus, Epimeus, and also the eulogy of Theodorus. This is the cycle of Basilides, in which the martyrs are artificially united into a family.

But the very name of Nicomedes is no accident. It was at Nicomedia that ARIANISM [chiefly](#) flourished. The memory of Paul of Samosata, the [bishop of Antioch](#) shortly before the coming of Diocletian, is not strange to the presentation of this legend. Paul of Samosata was deposed for corruption before [Diocletian](#) came to power. Elsewhere the memory of emperors favorable to Christianity is probable.

The group of seven miracles has been preserved in Coptic at the beginning of a manuscript in the [Pierpont Morgan](#) Library (Codex 586, dated from 844, fols. 8-15). Mutilated though it is at the beginning, it preserves some interesting details. At the time of the miracles, the five martyrs are all called twice by their names. The martyrdom of the brothers is fixed on 22 Hatur and 10 Ba'unah.

This last date is explicitly proclaimed as the day of the victory of Constantine, who is said to have taken part on this occasion in a eucharistic liturgy on the day when the [bones](#) of the saints were gathered from the dust for burial at Pheremma. The text continues that this was the day on which the icon of the Son of God, which [Diocletian](#) had torn down, was set up again. This last detail is clearly linked with the exordium of the Coptic-Arabic Passion, in which Constantine repairs what a genuinely deceived Diocletian had destroyed.

The astonishing thing about this legend is that, apart from its elements of fiction at Antioch, it rather coincides with the Latin Passion, which serves as the basis for the inauguration of the cult at Rome under Pope Felix IV toward 530. In no Passion is the need to explain Diocletian's volte-face more perceptible than in the Copto- Arabic form of the legend of the

Anargyroi. The real opposition between the groups of Anargyroi is between the Roman group known to Malalas and the Coptic Arabic group, which both go back to the tradition of Pheremma, near Cyr.

The cycle of the king of Persia's son, Nicomedes, could have its roots in the justification of Diocletian, who at first was favorable to the Anargyroi. This favor might even be a consequence of Carinus' edict of tolerance. But the fact remains that the ambush by the jealous rival is irreconcilable with the martyrdom of the five brothers, except in their final conjunction well after the persecutions under Constantine.

The Coptic documents on the Passion are very widely scattered. They have in part been collected by W. Till (1935; this includes a leaf from Naples, one from Berlin, and three from Paris, to which must be added the leaf, now burnt, used by Lefort, 1940, pp. 40-41. This page immediately precedes the Coptic 102, 8 in the National Library, Paris. The mutilated series of the miracles are in the [Pierpont Morgan](#) Library, manuscript MS 586).

The Copto-Arabic Passion would be difficult to reconstruct without the help of the parallel Arabic versions. An Arabic version has been published by Yuhanna Sulayman (1926; cf. Graf, 1947, p. 501). But more numerous witnesses are extant:

Mingana Syriac manuscript 367 (Garshuni, thirteenth century), fols. 98-114 Oxford, Hunt 470 manuscript (1577) Oxford, Bodleian, manuscript 3266, Selden 54 (fourteenth century) [British](#) Museum, Oriental 4723 (seventeenth century), fols. 1-13 Paris, Arabic manuscript 4776 (1896), fols. 33-59 Paris, Arabic manuscript 4879 (nineteenth century), fols. 54-111 and 111-21, four miracles Mingana Syriac manuscript 240 (1686), fols. 25-41 and 41-48.

These texts present a group of seven miracles that are also found in the Cairo manuscript 712 (fourteenth century), fols. 339-47 (Graf, 1934, p.

266).

Mingana Syriac manuscript 562 (1815), fols. 219-28 Paris, Arabic manuscript 154 (seventeenth century), fols. 38-53 Mingana Syriac manuscript 22 (1527), fols. 4-29 as well as in manuscripts inadequately described, such as Sharfet 11/6 (twelfth century), Beirut 625 (seventeenth century), and Gotha 2882, fols. 97-104. The fragment in Paris 258, fols. 250v, contains the third miracle of Rupprecht's Greek series (Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca 373b). But the Arabic tradition has also inherited texts from the other collections which have still hardly been studied.

In the Asiatic group, we have the Sinai Arabic manuscript 540 (twelfth century), fols. 40 and 534 (thirteenth century), fols. 293. For the miracles, Sinai Arabic manuscript 540 contains a collection of twenty stories in fols. 42-104.

In the uncontaminated Arabic group, the Arabic version (Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca 378) will be found in two manuscripts in the [British](#) Museum: Or. 5019 (eleventh century) and Sinai Arabic manuscript 534 (thirteenth century); for the Passion, see Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca 379, on 17 October, Sinai Arabic codex 540, fols. 33-40).

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