Adam MCCOLLUM

THE MARTYRDOM OF THEONILLA IN SYRIAC

In the Acta Sanctorum Augusti, Theonilla is the last in a narrative of five martyrs in the time of Diocletian. While she is mentioned in the ἡμολογια (or synaxarion) of Basil II, which is probably of the early eleventh century, and included in one Greek version of the aforementioned martyr series, she is, in fact, a very minor figure. I am unaware of any Syriac copies of her martyrdom other than that in Vat. Syr. 161 (foll. 143b-145b), so she was probably not widely celebrated among Syriac-speaking Christians. Both the differences and similarities between the Latin version as given in AASS and the much shorter Greek versions, on the one hand, and that in the Vatican Syriac manuscript, on the other, are remarkable enough that the Syriac text merits publication and translation.

* I wish to express sincere gratitude to the journal’s anonymous reviewers who offered some very helpful corrections and suggestions. I also thank Young Bok Kim of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio for retyping the Syriac portions in a form usable by the journal’s editors. The final form of the article, including any errors, is my own. List of abbreviations, see below p. 328.


3 On which see the article Menologion of Basil II by N. PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO, in Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, ed. A. P. KAZHDAN et al., vol. 2, New York – London, 1991, pp. 1341-1342. The text of the Menologion is available in PG 117 (see below) and, in facsimile, in Il menologio di Basilio II (cod. vaticano greco 1613), Turin, 1907.

4 Cf. note 2 above.

5 Membranae percuta... inter Syriacos Codices a nobis e Scevensi Monasterio in Bibliothecam Vaticanam inlatos: J. S. ASSEMANI, Bibliothecae Apostolicæ Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus, vol. 3, Rome, 1759, p. 324. The manuscript is available digitally on the DVD produced by the Vatican Library and Brigham Young University, Syriac Manuscripts from the Vatican Library, vol. 1, 2005.

The Syriac Compared with the Greek and Latin Versions

The Greek version of the martyrdom of Theonilla published by Lackner, as well as the brief mention she receives in Basil’s menologion, together with the the Latin version as given in AASS, will serve as a point of comparison for the Syriac text. The first point that arises from such a comparison of the texts is the much greater length of the Syriac version. The section on Theonilla in the Glasgow manuscript published by Lackner consists of seventy-six words, while the menologion allows her only one sentence (twenty-six words). The Latin version is longer, but still quite short in comparison with the Syriac: two paragraphs with a total of 285 words. The Syriac narrative, on the other hand, fills most of five pages in the manuscript, and the English translation below is just over 2300 words.

For convenience, I give here the Greek and Latin texts before coming to the Syriac version of the story. First, Basil’s menologion treats the brothers Claudius, Asterius, and Neon together in a brief description of their maltreatment by Lysias before closing with this sentence on Theonilla: ἔτα προσήχθη καὶ ἡ ἀγία θεονίλλα καὶ κρεμασθεῖσα καὶ αὐτή ἀπὸ τῶν τριχῶν, καὶ τυπτομένη βάρδοις ἐπὶ πολλαῖς ταῖς ὀραίας, ἀπέδωκε τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτῆς τῷ Κυρίῳ. The longer Greek text dealing with Theonilla and published by Lackner runs as follows:

Προσήχθη δὲ μετὰ τούτου ἡ ἀγία θεονίλλα, ἣς ἐν ἑνὶ δήσαντες τοὺς πόδας λῶρως τὰ πέλματα αὐτῆς κατέκοπτον· ἐνδώσαντες τε καὶ μικρὸν πυθόμενοι, εἰ τοὺς προστάγμασιν ὑπείκει, καὶ γνώντες ἀκαμπή αὐτήν μενειν ἐκρέμεσαι ἀπὸ τῶν τριχῶν καὶ βαπτίσαι ταῖς παρείας αὐτῆς ἰδίῳ. Ἐπειτα διὸ τὰς τρίχας ἀφελόντες καὶ βάκες περιώσαντες, αὐτὴν ἐπέτυπον αὐτῆς τὸν νότον γυμνὸν λῶρος, μέχρις ὅτον παρέθετο τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτῆς τῷ Κυρίῳ· τὸ δὲ ἄγιον τῆς μάρτυρος λείψανον σάκκω περιώσαντες τῇ βαλάσσῃ παρέδωκαν.

Finally, the Latin text from AASS, p. 572, reads:


We now proceed to a comparative look at all these varieties of the history of Theonilla.

Naturally, since there is more material in Latin than in Greek, there are more parallels between the Latin and Syriac versions. Furthermore, the Glasgow Greek text, as well as, of course, the very brief menologion version, is remarkable for having no dialogue at all; this is all the more important because it is so noticeable a feature in the Syriac and Latin texts. In both the Greek and Latin versions, the narrative of Theonilla comes only at the end of another presentation of martyrdom, that of the aforementioned brothers. It is indeed not difficult to imagine the story of Theonilla circulating separately from the martyrdom of the brothers, there being no real ties between her martyrdom and theirs from the point of view of narrative; that is, there is nothing in Theonilla’s passion that connects her to the events that her brothers experienced, aside from having the same persecutor. All that to say, even in the Greek in Latin versions, where the stories are presented together, Theonilla’s narrative is not inherently related to the other part; it is, therefore, no surprise to find Theonilla’s martyrdom standing alone in this Syriac tradition.

To make the similarities between the versions more easily visible, they are listed together here. B and G signify the texts of Basil’s menologion and the Glasgow manuscript, respectively. The Greek and Latin texts are given in the original and, being very brief texts, are not cited more specifically; the Syriac is given in translation and cited by the section numbers that are given in the full translation at the end of the article.
• Ego ignem aeternum timeo, qui potest corpus et animam perdere, & horum quam maxime, qui impie reliquerunt Deum, & adoraverunt idola & daemonia.

   “I fear the fire of the eternal judgement to come, in which both soul and body can be destroyed, especially in the case of those who leave God in their wickedness and sacrifice to demons in idols” (§ 3).

• Alapis tundite faciem eius.

   “Take the cloak from her head and slap her cheeks” (§ 4).9

• proicite eam in terram.

   “Throw her on the ground...” (§§ 5, 10).

• Si tibi bonum videtur, ut ingenuam mulierem & peregrinam sic torquetas, tu scis.

   “If it seems good to you to torture illegally a foreigner and a free woman, you know what you are doing” (§ 6).

• Suspensam capillis, faciem eius alapis saeclite / В крепаошёка кай аўті ἀπὸ τῶν τρυχῶν, και τυπομένη ῥάβδος ἐπὶ πολλαῖς ταῖς ώραις / G ἔκρέψεσαν ἀπὸ τῶν τρυχῶν και βατάσμαν τᾶς παρειάς αὐτῆς ἕκιζον

   “Hang her up by her hair” (§ 6).

   “Slap her cheeks and disfigure her face” (§ 8).

• Non sufficit quia me nudam statuis? Non autem me solam, sed & materem tuam & uxorem confusionem induisti per me: Omnes enim mulieres unius naturae sumus.

   “It is enough for you that you have set me up, while I am stripped bare. It is not only me that you have publicly shamed; you have brought shame on both your mother and your wife together with me. For all women wear one body and form, if you will consider carefully” (§ 7).

• Lysias dixit: Habes virum, aut vidua es? Theonilla dixit: In hodieum diem xxiii annos habeо, ex quo sum vidua; & propter Deum meum sic mansi, iemans & pervigilans in orationibus ex quo recessi ab immundis idolis, & cognovi Deum meum.

   The ruler said, “Tell me: are you married or a widow?” Theonilla said, “I have been a widow twenty-three years now, and for God I have thus remained in my hope toward him and I have spent my life in perpetual fasting and prayer, from the time that I departed from the religion of idols and received and the knowledge of the truth that is in God...” (§ 8).

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9 The martyr’s cheeks are struck twice in the Latin and Syriac versions, only once in the Greek.
• Novacula acuta radite caput eius, ut vel sic erubescat / G ξυρῷ τὰς τρίχας ἀφελόντες.

“Bring a razor and shave the hair of her head, so that by this, too, extra shame will be added to her” (§ 9).

• & cingite eam rubo campestri, & extendite per quatuor palos, & loro non solum dorsum, sed & totum corpus eius concidite / G τοὺς πόδας λόροις τὰ πέλματα αὐτῆς κατέκοπτον ... ῥάκει περιζώσαντες, αὐτήν ἔτοπτον αὐτῆς τὸν νῶτον γυμνόν λόροις.

“Bind a strap on her loins and stretch her out by the hands and feet, and when her back and whole body are stripped and bare, rend her with scourging” (§ 9).

• Carbones etiam ventri eius supermittite, & sic moriatur.

“...Bring fiery coals and add them to her beating, that she may thus be silenced for good and meet an evil death” (§ 10).

• Euthalus commentariensis & Archelaus spiculator dixerunt: Domine, iam animam dimisit.

“Eleutherius the jailer and Archelaus the executioner said, ‘Your magnificence, there she lies dead’” (§ 10).

• Lysias dixit: Date saccum, & corpus eius in eum mittite & ligate fortiter, & proiciatur in mare. / G τὸ δὲ ἄγαν τῆς μάρτυρος λείψανον σάκκῳ περιδήσαντες τῇ βαλάσσῃ παρέδωκαν.

“Bring a sack and put her in it, and let her be tossed into the depths of the sea...” (§ 10).

• Augusto & Aristobolo consulibus is at the end in the Latin version, while this information is given at the beginning of the Syriac text.

While the Latin and Syriac share more in common than with the Greek, the Syriac is nevertheless hardly the same text as either of the other versions. The great difference in length has already been mentioned. With so many more words, the Syriac version allows the author to have Theonilla speak much more richly about her belief. While there is nothing here that we would be surprised to meet in other martyrdom texts, the Syriac version does stand out rather starkly from the Greek and Latin. In sum, the additional information we find in the Syriac comes to the following: The Greek and Latin stories reveal no information about Theonilla’s family and city, while the Syriac does. The Greek and Latin versions lack any specific references to Lysias’ court and tribunal, which are mentioned several times in the Syriac version. Similarly, the Syriac version highlights Theonilla’s status as a free woman and a foreigner, features indicated only once in the Latin (ingenuum mulierem & peregrinam), and not at all in the
Greek. Finally, there is no mention of a princeps in the Greek or Latin texts.

Of the differences that are not at least potentially due to the greater space given to the dialogue between Theonilla and Lysias, two stand out. First, in Latin the jailer is called Euthalius, but Eleutherius in Syriac. Secondly, the date in the Latin story is given as x Calendas Septembris, but “on the 25th of the month of First Teshri (October)” in Syriac.

To sum up, these two versions of the story, while clearly related and in the most basic terms presenting without doubt the same event, are nevertheless quite different recensions. The Syriac is hardly a simple translation of the Latin or some similar Greek version. The extant Greek versions, even assuming that they in fact contain the Theonilla martyrdom, according merely to their length in folios, can hardly come close to the detail and content of the Syriac version. It is possible of course that the Latin and Syriac share a common Greek origin, which has been augmented by further lines of dialogue that are wholly appropriate and unexpected. Until, however, more texts (in any language) of this particular narrative come to light, subinde lices est. The Syriac version of the story, which, in its current form, is not part of a menologion or synaxarion, clearly stands on its own without connection to the martyrdoms of her relatives given in the Greek and Latin traditions.

Remarks on the Language

A few observations on the language of the Syriac text are in order. Several times there is the contracted orthography of participle with enclitic pronoun. While it does not occur as often as the separate orthography, it occurs often enough to be worthy of mention. It is found with both Lysias and Theonilla (i.e. with both masculine and feminine participles) speaking and, in all but one of the occurrences, only with the first person singular pronoun. The forms are:

§ 3 – ἐκθέος ἐκθέος ἐκθέος ἐκθέος
§ 6 – ἐκθέος
§ 7 – ἐκθέος ἐκθέος ἐκθέος ἐκθέος
§ 8 – ἐκθέος

10 See note 2 above.
This feature of course is not tied to just this story and, should other manuscripts be found, they might present the other way of writing these forms. From a sentence-level point of view, there are some rather long and involved sentences, particularly in the mouth of Theonilla, which can be noticed even in the English translation. Finally, there are few sentences joined with καί, even in the numerous changes of speaker, “Theonilla said” or “The leader said”. Only once, for example, do we find ἦν ἔκτισαν ἐπὶ τὴν σεμνότατα (f. 145b). This feature gives an overall non-Syriac character to the text.

As to the vocabulary, I mention only several Greek (and Latin) words, most of which are commonly met with in Syriac. They include:

- βῆμα
- γένος
- δικαστήριον
- ἡγεμόν
- κομηταρίστας
- λαμπρότατος
- ξένος
- ὑπάντιος
- παρρησία

§§ 1, 6
§ 1
§§ 3, 5, 10
used throughout to refer to Lysias (Latin praeses)
§§ 1, 5, 10
§ 1
§ 8

12 Forms of ἔσχα (καί πέλατο) occur several times in the story, but I have not listed them here. On this word in Syriac see BROCK, Greek Words in the Syriac Gospels, pp. 412-413.

13 On the form of the word, cf. A. Schall, Studien über griechische Fremdwörter im Syrischen, Darmstadt, 1960, p. 96; see also BROCK, Greek Words in the Syriac Gospels, pp. 395-396.

14 BROCK, Greek Words in the Syriac Gospels, pp. 396-397.

15 Ibid., p. 401. The equivalence between ἡγεμόν and praeses is also made for the Greek documents from Elephantine, where a thoroughly Latin vocabulary served for administrative and military titles; see B. Porten, et al., The Elephantine Papyri in English. Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change, Leiden, 1996, p. 399.

16 PS 3541. For the Greek and Latin terms see Ch. Du Fresne Du Cange, Glossarium adscriptores mediae et infimae Graecitatis, vol. 1, Lyon, 1688, col. 693, and Id., Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis, vol. 2, Paris, 1842, p. 477; E. A. Sophocles, Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (From B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100), New York, 1900, p. 678; G. W. H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon, Oxford, 1961, p. 766. Du Cange (in both Glossaria) and Sophocles cite Hesychius, s. v. κατι(μ)ενταρῖος, but there is no such entry in the edition of K. Latte (Copenhagen, 1953). The commentariensis is thus briefly described in AASS, Augusti t. IV, p. 572: ille, cui cara resorum committitur, eo quod nomine resorum in commentariis scribat.

17 BROCK, Greek Words in the Syriac Gospels, p. 409.

18 Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon..., p. 970. The word also occurs in Greek documents from Elephantine: see Porten, et al., The Elephantine Papyri..., pp. 399-400.

19 BROCK, Greek Words in the Syriac Gospels, pp. 411-412.
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πράγκινος 20  ὁμοονία  § 10
σεβαστός  ὁμοονία 21  § 1
σπεκούλατωρ  ὁμοονία 22  §§ 5, 9, 10
σχῆμα  ὁμοονία  §§ 1, 2, 7
ὑπατεία  ὁμοονία 23  § 1
ὑπατικός  ὁμοονία 24  § 5
Χριστιανός  ὁμοονία 25  §§ 1, 2

Text

I have transcribed the text as it stands, including the diacritical marks. Editorial additions are enclosed in angled brackets < >, editorial deletions in curved brackets {}.

20 LAMPE, A Patristic Greek Lexicon... (see above n. 16), p. 1131.
21 SCHALL, Studien... (see above n. 13), p. 40.
22 BROCK, Greek Words in the Syriac Gospels, p. 416.
23 SCHALL, Studien... p. 40.
24 LS 179b, SL 349; the latter also cites the word from Palmyrene Aramaic.
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...
In margin.

Cf. LS 568a, SL 1191, and PS 3127.

The name is broken over two lines.
THE MARTYRDOM OF THEONILLA IN SYRIAC

Translation

1. [143b] The Martyrdom of St. Theonilla the Blessed, during the Consulship of Diocletian in his First Year, and of the distinguished Aristobulus.

A woman was brought by Philip the city centurion [ordinarius] of Aegaeon to the tribunal. Eleutherius the jailer said, “The woman whom my lord your magnificence commanded [to come] is here”. Lysias the ruler asked her and said, “What is your family, and where are you from? Or give your name”. Theonilla said, “Of the family of senators, and I am from Perga, a city of Pamphylia. I have come to Rhosos for family that I have there”. Lysias said, “What is your name?” Theonilla said, “My real name? I am Christiana. My common, regular name? I am called Theonilla”. Lysias the ruler said, “As a foreigner, then, be willing to carry yourself as is right for your freedom, and let the modesty that is right for your womanly gender be preserved with you. Bring yourself willingly to sacrifice to the gods. Leave the court”. Theonilla said, “I am a Christian, because I have come [lit. was] from among the nations: with knowledge I have believed in the God of truth, and I hate and despise all the abomination of idols, because it is wickedness”.

2. Lysias the ruler said, “Is it considered wickedness to you that people should sacrifice to and serve the gods?” Theonilla said, “I cannot turn back and take up again that which I have once despised as evil”. Lysias the ruler said, “I counsel you, woman, to act modestly from your nature and keep a manner right for your freedom. Be willing, then, to forsake this foolishness in which you stand; consent to be seen at the court as a modest and free woman”. Theonilla said, “I am keeping modesty and freedom, for it is the living God, who is eternal, that I worship; I also honor the Christ, by whose holy name I have been considered worthy to be called a Christian. And I keep the truth of my faith within me, without turning away to another religion: for even though I am a woman and my nature is weak, still I hope in my God, for God will affirm my purpose

29 This (modern Yumutalik, formerly Ayas, in Turkey) is the place of martyrdom in both the Syriac and Latin versions; in the latter it is naturally mentioned at the beginning of the five-part narrative, not at the start of the section for Theonilla. In the version as printed in AASS, Lysias is said to be the praecon of Lycia, but the editors rightly correct this word to Cilicia on p. 575, note b. Lycia is the region immediately west of Pamphylia, Cilicia immediately east of Pamphylia; for Cilicia as the place of these martyrdoms, see also BHG 2070.

with strength and might with my confession to him”. Lysias the ruler said, “The form of these words will not help you at all, wicked and wretched woman. Rather, have mercy on yourself and be willing to keep the manner right for your freedom. Convince yourself not to fall into dishonor\(^{31}\). Do not let the manner of your modesty be laid bare in shame, and do not allow your name to come to dishonor for those present here. For if you do not consent, Theonilla, [144a] I will make you a spectacle to everyone, that you will be publicly shamed as a dishonor and laughingstock, and you will end up utterly reviled”.

3. Theonilla said, “I do not flee from this dishonor. If, then, you want to treat me this way, get on with it quickly, for I hope in Jesus Christ my savior. For even if I am stripped of my clothing, I can still put on God. And if you destroy my body with lacerations, I will yet be redeemed in Christ”. The ruler said, “Those miserable, evil people who were before you also approached my tribunal and withstood my command: their bodies were destroyed with lacerations and trouble. They would say the same things, woman, but in the end they met destruction. There is not for you either, then, anyone to aid you in these lacerations, nor is there anyone to save you from it, when you are handed over to the fire. Look at these instruments of torture that are prepared [for you]! See the flame of fire that is ready for the destruction of those who are disobedient, and take this all to heart! Temper your intentions, woman: honor the gods, feel shame before kings, and respect my tribunal! Promise that you will sacrifice to the gods. Show to everyone that you are chaste and a free woman”. Theonilla said, “I fear the fire of the eternal judgement to come, in which both soul and body can be destroyed, especially in the case of those who leave God in their wickedness and sacrifice to demons in idols”. The ruler said, “Up to now I have been considering the feminine weakness that is present with you and because of this I have been restraining my anger against you, so repent and flee from shame, before the threats of the court are kindled against you. Make your escape from torments and sacrifice to the gods”.

\(^{31}\) This common noun is usually given as “shame, dishonor” in Syriac (cf. PS 3427, LJS 634a, SL 1296), but in other Aramaic dialects the word can mean “(physical) pain” and it may have that meaning here and elsewhere in this text; the immediate context of this particular occurrence, however, is in favor of the usual meaning. For the word in other dialects see Onkelos (E. M. Cook, A Glossary of Targum Onkelos [= Studies in Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture, 6], Leiden – Boston, 2008, p. 238), Jewish Babylonian (M. SOKOLOFF, Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods, Baltimore, 2003, p. 970), Christian Palestinian (F. SCHULTESS, Lexicon Syro-palaestinum, Berlin, 1903, p. 171), and perhaps Jewish Palestinian (M. SOKOLOFF, Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period, Ramat-Gan, 1990, p. 468).
4. Theonilla said, “This is my aid, hope, and trust: that I am in the fear of God, for this world is a temporary hut, but the world to come is of better recompense and of a great eternal reward that does not pass away, especially for those who fear God in truth and justice. For even though I am a woman, I know what helps me, and I have chosen to endure the afflictions for my faith toward God”. The ruler said, “Who has advised and taught you to arrive at all this arrogance, evil woman?” Theonilla said, “My faith in God and confession in our Lord Jesus Christ”. The ruler said, “This is enough of the shame and derision that you are made here in court before those present, miserable woman”. Theonilla said, “It is no loss to me at all that for my God I should be an object of reproach to people; may I only please God”. The ruler said, “Take the cloak from her head and slap her cheeks”. And they said to her, “Where is the ornament of your words and your fruitless work, miserable woman? Look! You have delivered yourself to an evil death!” Theonilla said, [144b] “My body will be destroyed after a little while, even if you do not wish it, but my soul will remain without destruction after my body is ruined”.

5. The ruler said, “Throw her on the ground. Bind her hands and feet and stretch her out. Cut the soles of her feet with whips”. And they said to her, “Repent and do what is commanded you by the judge. Give yourself a way out from other punishments reserved for you”. Archelaus the executioner said, “I think she is dead”. The ruler said, “Release her from her bonds and set her up on her feet, while holding her on both sides”. When she came to herself, they asked her what she would respond to the things she had suffered. Eleutherius the jailer said to her, “Miserable woman, obey the consul and make an escape for yourself. What will you say or do in the face of these trials that are here prepared for you?” Theonilla said, “I have already delivered myself to death. Depart from me, man! Go and reprove yourself! For I know what aids me”. The ruler said, “Because you are stupid, you are willing to hand yourself over to destruction, for you are not aware that my tribunal will not have mercy on you. If you will not now do anything that is commanded you, I will inflict evils greater than these on you to the point of depriving you even of life”.

6. Theonilla said, “If it seems good to you to torture illegally a foreigner and a free woman, you know what you are doing”. Lysias the ruler said, “Am I torturing you as a woman illegally, while taking vengeance with you against wickedness? For if you have not had mercy on yourself, coming in your impudence to all this shame, and not obeyed whatever has been commanded you, how can I have mercy on you?” Theonilla said, “It
would have been right for you to have mercy on me and not torture me, since I have not caused offense in anything”. The ruler said, “In nothing, you say, ‘have I caused offense’? You blaspheme the gods and despise my judgement seat!” Theonilla said, “I have a good conscience before God, and in faith I have readied myself against your torments, and the intention of my soul is unmoved by your threats”. The ruler said, “Hang her up by her hair”. And they said to her, “So do you agree to sacrifice to the gods? Or if you remain in your foolishness, are you willing to fall into worse torments than these?”

7. Theonilla said, “I have [already] said once that I will not depart from the God of truth, and I remain firm in my confession of him. For it is enough for me, as I was previously in error [145a] and great folly, in that I would provide offerings of unclean idols, now that I have received the knowledge of the living God, I believe that no one can distance me from the glory that is in my God and from the hope I possess, which I must truly preserve and offer without blemish to God with endurance through Jesus Christ, the savior and helper of those who believe in him”. The ruler said, “It would have been right for the court to bring this to your mind too: that on account of your abundant error and your fruitless labor you would be handed over to the nakedness of whoredom32, yet even if you might be ashamed through this, as your body is handed over to destruction, because I honor the gods and am ashamed of nature, I am not willing to do this now, though I will use other tortures with you, until little by little I destroy you, impudent woman”. Theonilla said, “It is enough for you that you have set me up, while I am stripped bare. It is not only me that you have publicly shamed; you have brought shame on both your mother and your wife together with me. For all women wear one body and form, if you will consider carefully”.

8. The ruler said, “My patience has made you come to rashness and considerable impudence. I have not taken vengeance against you equal to your works and your shameless evil”. Theonilla said, “I am not stupid and shameless as you have said. I am shameful before the living God: because you do not know him, you are doing these things to me”. The ruler said, “Slap her cheeks and disfigure her face”. Theonilla said, “May God see my humiliation and my shame, and may he preserve me in my faith toward him, because I am enduring these things as a lone foreigner, trusting

32 Since she has already been stripped naked, this expression may well mean “to be raped”.
not in any person, but in God, who has given me boldness with him through Jesus Christ my Lord”. The ruler said, “Tell me: are you married or a widow?” Theonilla said, “I have been a widow twenty-three years now, and for God I have thus remained in my hope toward him and I have spent my life in perpetual fasting and prayer, from the time that I departed from the religion of idols and received and the knowledge of the truth that is in God. You have not considered the weakness of my body, nor respected the number of my years, because you have thus tortured me mercilessly. May God see and judge you, because you are acting this way toward me, wicked man!”

9. The ruler said, “If you were a free woman and worthy of our rendering honor to you, you would have consented to me, obeyed the royal command, and sacrificed to the gods”. Theonilla said, “Let that honor be yours in uncleanness and wickedness, and let it remain with you in the destruction of your soul. But let it be mine to worship God with a pure heart and with faith that does not respect persons, through the knowledge of the Christ, and to escape from all [145b] the wickedness of the religion of unclean idols, which you are compelling me, God’s handmaid, to worship and to depart from my God”. The ruler said, “Bring a razor and shave the hair of her head, so that by this, too, extra shame will be added to her”. But Theonilla said, “My body, as it is destroyed, shall not make me suffer that I should turn from my God, nor the hair of my head, when it is removed, persuade me to be distressed and depart from the confession that is toward God”. The ruler said, “Bind a strap on her loins and stretch her out by the hands and feet, and when her back and whole body are stripped and bare, rend her with scourging”. And they said to her, “Stop chattering, wretch! Rather, obey that which is commanded you: sacrifice to the gods and escape torment”. Archelaus the executioner said, “No, my lord, your magnificence, she answers nothing”.

10. The ruler said, “Throw her on the ground. Bring fiery coals and add them to her beating, that she may thus be silenced for good and meet an evil death”. Eleutherius the jailer and Archelaus the executioner said, “Your magnificence, there she lies dead”. Lysias the ruler said, “Bring a sack and put her in it, and let her be tossed into the depths of the sea. And

33 This expression is literally “evil head”, apparently a term of abuse. Cf. J. G. E. HOFFMANN, Itulamos der Abtuennige. Syrische Erzaehlungen. Leiden, 1880, p. 82, line 12 which is cited by both PS and LSL s.v. αἰματος. In the Greek text of the martyrdom of Domina, Lysias addresses her with the same expression: ὡ κακὴ κεφαλὴ (LACKNER, Eine umedierte griechische Passion... [see above n. 2], p. 254, § 4).
let her be guarded by the diligence of the princeps, Eleutherius the jailer, and Archelaus the executioner, that her body might not be given to her co-religionists by means of a bribe or anything else, so that it will not be revealed after some time to my tribunal and that those guarding [her] will not receive an evil death."

The blessed woman was crowned with martyrdom on the 25th of the month of First Teshri (October), in the faith of Jesus Christ, her helper, to whom be glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

The martyrdom of the blessed Theonilla is ended.

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Résumé. Cet article présente une édition et une traduction anglaise, pourvue de quelques annotations, du Martyre de St Théonille en syriaque, fondée sur le ms. Vat. Syr. 161, l'unique témoin, à notre connaissance, de ce récit. Le texte syriaque apparaît notablement plus long que les notices grecques ou latines consacrées à cette martyre de la persécution de Dioclétien. Dans l'introduction à son édition, l'A. a mené une comparaison serrée entre ces versions et le récit syriaque, sur le plan du contenu comme sur celui de la langue, et formule à l'égard de cette dernière quelques remarques d'ordre linguistique.

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Abreviations