

Heroines

and

Saints



INTRODUCTION

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In the opening lines of the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, we read: *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)*. Also, in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, we read: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)* While it is certainly possible to find many other similar expressions in the Holy Scriptures, we will limit ourselves to these two.

From the above, it seems quite obvious that in the sight of God there is no difference between males and females, men and women. To be sure, there are some very obvious physiological and biological differences between the two. These, however, are merely indicative of different functions. Certainly, no one would balk at that. What is abundantly clear is that these differences do not affect the personhood of the individual.

Male or female, both are children of God, made in His image and likeness. Together, they form the human race. The physical differences and differences in function can in no way be construed to predicate a superior-inferior relationship. For *"you are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3:28)

While at least broadly accepting these truths as part of our Faith, we are tempted to not apply them in actual practice. For example, in presenting Bible stories and/or the history of the Armenian Church, it seems that we are inclined to see women simply as adjuncts of men. We see Sarah simply as *Abraham's wife*. Elizabeth is the *mother of St. John the Baptist*. Shooshanik is *St. Vartan's daughter*.

We tend to forget that these and countless other women in the Holy Scriptures and the annals of the Armenian Church are heroines and saints NOT because of a particular relationship to a particular male. Rather, they are heroines and saints because of the value of their own personal lives and the strength of their own personal

ended in martyrdom. As such, they stand completely upon their own merits.

The purpose of the present small compilation, *HEROINES AND SAINTS*, is to graphically present this latter point. The booklet should be used in conjunction with another booklet, *WOMEN OF THE BIBLE*, published by the Channing L. Bete Company, Incorporated, of South Deerfield, Massachusetts.

In using these booklets for instruction, two points must be constantly borne in mind:

- 1.) The material in *HEROINES AND SAINTS* is by no means original. By and large, it was taken verbatim from *SAINTS AND SACRAMENTS* by Bishop Shnork Kaloustian and *THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH* by Krikor Sarafian. Although, deletions and additions to this material have been made.
- 2.) Taken collectively, the two booklets can only skim the surface of an interesting and important topic: the role of women in our Faith. Much more can and should be written and taught about this most important subject.

It is my own sincere hope that these small booklets, properly used in our Sunday Schools, will be at least a modest, albeit useful, beginning step toward acquainting all with the accomplishments and the role of women in our Faith. This, of course, is for the ultimate glory of Almighty God and the flourishing and strengthening of our Holy Mother Armenian Church.

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Feast of St. Hripsimeh

ST. MARY

One of the main differences between the Protestant churches on the one hand, and the ancient Apostolic churches, including the Armenian Church, on the other hand, is that the latter have canonized saints, while the former have not.

The first thing we must know about saints is that we do not adore them; we adore God alone. We simply venerate the saints as the true and closer followers of Jesus Christ. Just as the state honors and respects its great men and women, so the Church honors its saints. By honoring the saints, the Church values their love of God and their devotion to His cause on earth.



Saints are to us as models to be imitated, because they were better and closer imitators of Christ. St. Paul says: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1). The veneration of saints is really an incentive to a better Christian living.

Saints were made of the same flesh and blood as we are, meeting the same difficulties and temptations as we do here on earth. They were subject to the same infirmities as we are. Yet they became imitators of Jesus Christ by conquering those infirmities and temptations. That is why they are honored.

The list of saints is headed by the Holy Virgin Mary, as she is the first and greatest saint of the Christian Church.

She is a great saint for two reasons. a) She has the most and the highest qualifications which make a saint. b) She has played the most important role in the life of Christ, our Saviour. Therefore the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary is due to the recognition of her divine motherhood, and of the unique sanctity which was hers as the mother of the incarnate Son of God. Our veneration is shown by the fact that her picture with the Child Jesus in her arms is placed on all our church altars.

The veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary has been spontaneous and gradual, almost without stimulation of Church authorities. Speaking

of the gradual manner in which the veneration of the Holy Virgin has been established in the Church, someone has said: "As she increased day by day in God's grace in Nazareth, her home town, while the world knew nothing of her, so the Holy Spirit, working in the Church, has raised her silently and by a natural process to the place which she occupies in our churches."

Her image is found in catacombs, the earliest places of Christian worship. This proves that from the earliest times the Church has shown great veneration to the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary. The first and the most venerated shrine in the Armenian Church, Holy Etchmiadzin, is dedicated to her. Our Prayer Books, as well as our Hymn Books are full of songs in her honor. The honorable position which she enjoys in the Church is nothing else but fulfillment of her own prophecy about herself, as preserved in the Gospel: "From now on all generations shall call me blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things to me" (Luke 1:48-49).

Scripture and Tradition agree in ascribing to Mary the greatest personal sanctity. She has shown the greatest humility and patience in her daily life. Humility and patience are the key virtues in a holy life. She has exhibited a heroic patience under the most trying circumstances, on Calvary for example at the Crucifixion of her beloved Son.

Mary was truly the mother of Jesus; and as Jesus was truly God from the first moment of His conception, therefore Mary is truly the *Mother of God*, "*Astouadz-a-Mayr*," as we call her affectionately in our language.

As Mary is the mother of Christ, so she is mother of all those in whom Christ lives. Therefore, we have the right to claim Mary as our mother, in so far as we identify ourselves with Jesus by the life of grace, i. e., by a true Christian life.

Eve is our natural mother, because she is the origin of our natural life. Mary is our spiritual mother, because she gave birth to One who became the origin and source of our spiritual life.

We must realize and declare that nothing has exercised a more profound and a more salutary influence upon Armenian womanhood than devotion to and veneration of the Holy Virgin. If Armenian women had higher moral attributes in the East than their sisters in other neighboring nations, it was mostly due to the high esteem that our Church has about this Holy woman, the mother of Christ.

May she continue to be always an inspiration to all of us, particularly to our mothers and sisters, for a higher, purer and better life.

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The Armenian Church observes five main holy days in honor of

the Virgin Mary: a) *Annunciation* on April 7; b.) *Her Conception* from Anna, her mother, on December 9; c) her *Birthday* on September 8; d) her *Presentation* to the Temple when she was, according to tradition, three years old, on November 21; and e) her greatest holiday, however, is the *Feast of Assumption*, which is celebrated in our Church on the Sunday nearest to August 15, and lasts nine days.

Assumption means "taking up" (to heaven). The Armenian word for the feast, "VERAPOKHOUM," has the same meaning. This great feast of the Church honors the Holy Virgin for the sanctity of her life and purity of her heart with which God has endowed her, our blessed Mother. The story behind this great feast, in a nutshell, is this: because of her extreme holiness and purity, St. Mary was preserved from corruption after her death and was raised and taken into heaven. The Assumption differs from the Ascension of our Lord in the fact that Christ went up to heaven by His own divine power, whereas St. Mary was taken up by the power of God, and by the ministry of angels.

Scriptures

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord;
let it be to me according to your word.
(Luke 1:38)

Hymn for the Feast of the Birth of St. Mary

Sing, sons of Zion, a new song to the birth of
the Mother of the Lord; for the one who gave
birth to the timeless One, born of the Father,
today is born from the barren womb. Give
blessings to the One who has given us the
mother of Light.



Saint Sandoukht

SAINT SANDOUKHT

I. HER BIOGRAPHY

Saint Sandoukht was born in Armenia and was the daughter of Sanadrouk, an Armenian king, whose summer house and palace were in Shavarshan Village in the Province of Artaz, State of Vasbouragan (Van). Artaz corresponds to the historical Magoo province where the Battle of Vardanantz occurred.

When the Apostle Thaddeus (Judas, not Iscariot) established Christianity in Edessa, he came to Armenia and lived in the Province of Artaz near the residence of King Sanadrouk and began to preach the gospel and to heal the sick among the people.

Many of the people were converted and accepted Christianity to such an extent that their influence was felt in the palace of the king. Sandoukht, the daughter of the king, was also influenced by Thaddeus' preaching and was converted and became one of his staunch disciples. Princes Samuel and Zemand and also Zarmandoukht were also converted, the latter being one of the king's relatives.

King Sanadrouk seeing that even his daughter was converted to Christianity, was furious and immediately imprisoned her. The Apostle Thaddeus encouraged Sandoukht to remain faithful. Seeing her faithfulness at this time, thirty-three other persons who were prison guards accepted Christianity as their religion.

The king dispatched a prince to the prison to urge Sandoukht to return to her old religion, but instead of turning her from her faith, he himself was converted and embraced the Christian faith with fifty of his followers.

Sandoukht was brought before the king who tried to convince her that she should return to her old belief and reject Christianity. She refused and remained faithful to Christ. Upon her refusal, the verdict was pronounced that Sandoukht should suffer death. However, by some miracle or by mistake, the chief of the hangmen was himself killed. Upon that event, some two-thousand persons were converted unto Christianity. However, in the end Sandoukht suffered as a martyr, being smitten at her breast by the sword, and followed the Apostle Thaddeus into martyrdom.

Saint Sandoukht at the time of her martyrdom is supposed to have been eighteen years of age, although some historians think she was younger. In any event, she is considered and ac-

cepted as the first female martyr of Armenia. According to historian Ormanian, "Some other churches accept Saint Thecla of Lycaonia, a disciple of Saint Paul, as the first female martyr. However, she was not a real martyr, but only a confessor. She suffered some torture but escaped and was saved from death and ended her life in peace, after having lived a full life. This being the case, it would be proper for us to regard Saint Sandoukht as the first real female martyr of Christianity."

Furthermore, the Armenian church accepted Sandoukht as one of her saints, and celebrates her memory every year in the beginning of summer when the memory of the Apostle Saint Thaddeus is celebrated.

II. HER SERVICE

1. Saint Sandoukht, a first martyr, became a great witness for the proclamation of the truths of Christianity to the world, and especially to the people of Armenia; and her life became the means in furtherance of the spread of Christianity among us.

2. Preferring the unseen and the eternal values above those of the visible and temporary, she became to be known as a great champion of the good cause of Christianity.

3. With the heroism of her faith which she manifested, she became a good example as a real Christian, not only to all Armenian women and the nation, but also to humanity in general.

III. HER OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS

1. *Piety was one of her main characteristics.* Saint Sandoukht, being naturally harmless, good, modest and religious, she could not obtain inner spiritual satisfaction from the teachings of pagan religion after she learned about the higher ideals of Christianity. Once she knew of this inner spiritual value, she foresook paganism forever. This was because of her sincerity and innate pious tendency.

Piety means love toward religion and devotion to its highest ideal, and not to deny it under any outward influence and intense persecution, even when in danger of death.

If one is really pious, he is steadfast in his faith and cannot work against his accepted principles at any time, at any place, and under any circumstances. Those who are of a false religion will deny their belief at once and forsake their principles when faced with worldly interests or any threat or death.

The piety of Saint Sandoukht was not merely an outward expression but was inwardly real, sincere and true. Therefore, she did not deny her religion under persecution, imprisonment, or when she was threatened with death. She did not sacrifice her freedom of conscience in order to live a few more years. For these reasons, all the Armenian people and the Christian world honor her today as a first martyr of Christianity and the first female witness of the Armenian church.

2. *She was appreciative of good things.* If someone really appreciates the best values of things, he gives up that which seems of less value. Saint Sandoukht was once a heathen because she did not know. She had not heard about the religion that was better than heathenism. Hence, she was satisfied with her religion. But when she was informed about the highest truths of the gospel through the Apostle Thaddeus, it extended the horizon of her mind and opened the eyes of her soul. She began to appreciate the eternal values of the Christian religion and promptly accepted it.

Appreciation means to estimate the values of things, to distinguish the right things from the wrong, to prefer the real values to the imitation, and to be firm in what is true, and to sacrifice temporary values in order to obtain the permanent and eternal.

Saint Sandoukht, the first female martyr of Armenia, had the sound judgment and innate capacity to appreciate the best values of worthwhile things. Therefore, when she heard about the new religion which had come from Palestine, she immediately estimated its great worth and accepted it faithfully, resigning from her former religion. Although there were great obstacles before her, she "held fast that which she had" until the end.

Nowadays, the material things and so many outward attractions have dazzled the eyes of the people and have weakened their judgment that they are no longer able to distinguish the right from the wrong. Instead of pursuing the things that are best, they follow the things which are wrong; and under the Christian label, they live a life that suits paganism.

IV. HER MESSAGE TO THE PRESENT GENERATION

1. Do not sacrifice permanent values for temporary profit.

2. Prefer freedom of mind and conscience above everything else.

3. Pursue the real way of life at any price, as found in Christianity, rather than follow false piety.

4. Develop your capacity of appreciation to be able to esti-

Scriptures

And I tell you, every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God. (Luke 12:8)

Hymn for the Feasts of Martyrs

Patient and enduring in sufferings
and fearless in the face of threats,
by the flow of their precious blood,
they proudly received the glory.
(Ode in the Divine Liturgy)



Saint Khosrovadoukht

SAINT KHOSROVADOUKHT

I. HER BIOGRAPHY

Khosrovadoukht was the daughter of the Armenian King Khosrov and the sister of Tiridates. When Anak, the father of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, killed Khosrov, the king of Armenia, by the instigation of King Ardashes of Persia, Khosrov at the last moment ordered to massacre the descent of Anak. Meanwhile, King Ardashes of Persia massacred the descendants of Khosrov. Only two children were rescued from that massacre; they were Tiridates and Khosrovadoukht, son and daughter of King Khosrov.

Ardavazt Mandagooni sent Tiridates, the son of Khosrov, to Caeserea. Later from Caeserea he went to Rome, and there was made king of Armenia, with the support of the Emperor Diocletian; and later he returned to Armenia. His sister, Khosrovadoukht, was taken to the castle of Ani by Oda Amadooni, who was a minister in the kingdom of Armenia.

When Khosrovadoukht was grown up, she also returned to Armenia and dwelled there with her brother, King Tiridates.

Khosrovadoukht was influenced by the preaching of Gregory the Illuminator. It is said that when Gregory was cast into the deep pit (dungeon), a pious lady brought a loaf of bread daily and lowered it into the pit. That daily loaf of bread was the only nourishment to keep him alive. Historians think that this pious lady was either Khosrovadoukht herself, or, by her suggestion, some other Armenian lady.

The martyrdom of the virgins Heripsimiantz had a depressing effect upon the mind of Tiridates to such an extent that he became very nervous and ill. This illness caused him to wander in the mountains of the country, like the wild swine, as it is told about Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon (Daniel 4:31-33).

One day Khosrovadoukht had a dream, and in her dream somebody told her that her brother could be cured if Gregory the Illuminator was freed from the pit. Oda Amadooni was sent to the pit to get him out. He prayed for Tiridates who was healed and became a Christian. Queen Ashkhen and Khosrovadoukht, the sister of the king, also were converted into Christianity.

From then on, Khosrovadoukht and her brother, the king, devoted themselves to spread Christianity in Armenia, together with Saint Gregory the Illuminator. Khosrovadoukht, towards the end of her life, retired into the castle of Carni and lived there as a hermit.

Her memory is celebrated every year in the Armenian Church in the month of July with that of Tiridates and Queen Ashkhen.

II. HER SERVICE

1. She was the one that caused the rescue of Gregory the Illuminator from the dungeon and practically saved him from death.

2. By securing Gregory's freedom from the prison, she helped her brother to be cured from his sickness. At the same time, this deed helped to spread Christianity among the Armenian people.

3. As the sister of the king, she became a good example to the people of Armenia and especially to the high ranking ladies by her devout life and Christian behaviour.

III. HER OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS

1. *She was a good-hearted lady.* As mentioned above, a pious lady put a loaf of bread daily into the pit for Gregory that he might live. It is believed that Khosrovadoukht herself personally did this service, or someone else by her suggestion. At any rate, this was the result of two things; one, of course, was the influence of the gospel upon her, preached by Gregory, and the other was her innate good-heartedness.

The last one is more important, because if she was not good-hearted, she could not have sympathy toward the Christian religion.

Goodheartedness is to have good will towards human beings, to be sincere and gentle, having good behaviour at all times.

Goodheartedness is a virtue which is the fruit of real Christianity, pious life and also nobility of family. Our ancestors had this fine virtue, even before Christianity.

In Edison's words, "Goodheartedness is nothing if it has not been proved by good deeds". Khosrovadoukht, the sister of the king, proved this virtue by her good deeds.

There are many malices in our daily life; we are eye witnesses for them all the time, because goodheartedness is lacking among the people. If this virtue of Christianity had been developed more among the people, we all would be happy always and have mutual respect for one another. Now, if humanity will be happy, it is necessary to have cordial relationship and good will between neighbors, between rivals, between families and between all nations.

2. *She was also a fairminded lady.* She could not endure seeing Gregory suffer untold tortures from day to day because of his strong faith, and she could not justify his being imprisoned in the dungeon. She realized that it was unfair and wrong what her brother did to Saint Gregory. Therefore, she wanted to help and release him from the prison.

This was her attitude toward Saint Gregory, and circumstances at the time helped her to realize her intention of helping him to find freedom. This good intention was the result of her sound judgment and fairmindedness.

Fairmindedness means to have a fair sense, to see straight and explain fairly all human affairs, good or evil, without having any partiality and to be upright in everything.

One who loves justice cannot judge the affairs of daily life by hidden motives but by fairmindedness. To love justice and to pursue its good cause is only the act of a righteous man. According to Epictetus. "Every place is safe to him who lives with justice."

If men would have loved justice and cultivated it among themselves, the life of humanity would have been very happy today, and we would be free from many evils and wrong doings.

IV. HER MESSAGE TO THE PRESENT GENERATION

1. Cultivate among yourselves at any price the virtue of goodheartedness.

2. Follow the good life and spread the good works among the people, and as a result, the evil destroys itself naturally.

3. Love justice and protect it at any price.

4. Cultivate among yourselves fairmindedness in order to see and comprehend human affairs fairly and straight.

Scriptures

Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. (Matthew 25:40)

Hymn for the Feast of St. Khosrovadoukht

We bless You, O Christ our King, Who with Your victorious cross crowns Your saints with Your wondrous glory; O God of our fathers.

(Hymn of the Fathers)



Saint Heripsime

SAINT HERIPSIME

I. HER BIOGRAPHY

Saint Heripsime was a descendant of the royal family of Rome. According to the tradition, she, with some other Christian maidens, escaped from Rome because of persecution. One of the maidens, by the name of Kayiane, was their leader. They came to Armenia and established themselves in the vicinity of the City of Vagharshabad where they found an old building of an abandoned wine press in which they lived.

They earned their livelihood by making and selling beads. Some have thought there were thirty-seven of these maidens, but according to the historian Khorenatzy, there were more than seventy.

Saint Heripsime was prettier and more attractive than the others. Therefore, King Tiridates (Dirtad) of Armenia, who was still a heathen at that time, wanted to marry her and ordered that she be brought to his palace. When Heripsime was brought before the king, she refused to deny her Christian faith and also refused the marriage proposal of the king.

Then King Tiridates called Saint Kayiane, who was the leader of these Christian maidens, to his palace and asked her to persuade Heripsime to submit herself to the command of the king. But, contrary to his command, Kayiane advised Heripsime not to submit to the demands of the king, and continue in her resistance, even to a martyr's end if necessary.

Because of her bravery, Saint Kayiane suffered great torture for her faith. Heripsime also remained firm in her attitude. Heripsime and Kayiane escaped from the palace of King Tiridates and returned to their dwelling place.

By the order of King Tiridates, executioners came to the place of the maidens. They put Heripsime to torture; first they cut off her tongue, then chopped her body to pieces, and put them on a wood pile to burn. They also killed all the other maidens by fiendish tortures, including their leader Saint Kayiane.

The martyrdom of these maidens took place in the last year of Saint Gregory the Illuminator's imprisonment in the deep pit (dungeon). When Saint Gregory was released from prison, he immediately picked up their relics and buried them and built martyriums upon them, designating them as "Heripsimyantz" and "Kayianyantz."

In the Armenian Church, the celebration of the memory of Heripsime with the other maidens, takes place every year in the beginning of summer under the name of "Heripsimyantz Gouyser" a little before the feast commemorating Saint Gregory the Illuminator's deliverance out of the dungeon.

In the seventh century, Catholicos Komitas wrote a hymn for the virgins under the name of "Antzing Nouviryalk," which is sung in the church during the Feast of "Heripsimyantz Virgins."

II. HER SERVICE

1. In spite of her feminine frailty, Heripsime was brave to make known to the world the inward power of Christian religion and opposed the deadly threats of a king with moral valor and fearless resistance.

2. Preferring the love of her religion to the attraction of temporary values of the royal palace, she elevated the value of eternal truths of Christianity before humanity.

3. Challenging death in her early youth, she proved to the world that death could be defeated by the power of faith in Christianity just as had been done centuries before by the Apostle Paul who exclaimed, "O death, where is thy victory?"

III. HER OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS

1. *Heripsime possessed a deep sense of honor as a respectable woman. Honor is the greatest treasure of a man, but for a woman it is a crown and a real ornament. Shakespeare said, "If I lose my honor, I am lost already." According to Marlowe, "Honor is purchased by the deeds we do; honor is not won until some honorable deed be done." But as Calvart says, "A man without honor is as maimed in his equipment as an accounted knight without helmet."*

To have a sense of honor means to live a life dignified and spotless, and in time of need to hold high one's reputation and moral sense at any cost.

Saint Heripsime had this moral understanding; and under the influence of Christianity, she had developed this good characteristic in herself. The forces of this world could not charm her because she possessed a great sense of honor and a keen spiritual vision.

Those who do not have a higher spiritual vision and sense of honor and dignity usually give up easily under outward press-

ure, and especially in days of tribulation and persecution, malice and hatred, they quickly lose their balance of mind and are carried away in the rushing stream of the times.

2. *She was always seeking God's pleasure. She always pleased God rather than man. "No man can serve two masters" at the same time, nor can he satisfy both God and the world. Apostle Paul said, "If I yet pleased man, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). This principle guided Saint Heripsime; she was one that pleased God only.*

Seeking to please God signifies doing the Will of God in everything, to satisfy Him always and to hold spiritual values higher than worldly interests.

Saint Heripsime lived her life according to this principle. If she had desired to please man, it would have been very easy for her to become a queen in the palace of a king and to attain a high social position; but, in such a worldly situation, she could not have pleased God.

In seeking to please God, although she lost the opportunity of possessing glory, social position, honor and the pride of this transitory world, and she died at an early age, she nevertheless attained that which is eternal. Although Heripsime was a beautiful young woman, she did not boast of her beauty. Like the Apostle Paul, she preferred the glory of the Cross of Christ.

IV. HER MESSAGE TO THE PRESENT GENERATION

1. Hold your sense of honor high above everything else.
2. Do not disgrace yourselves before the momentary glories, honors and worldly profits.
3. Do not run after the false fashion of this world.
4. Do not fear the hatred of men which is temporary only, but fear God and obey Him always.

Scriptures

I kept my faith, even when I said,
"I am greatly afflicted".
(Psalms 116:10)

Hymn for the Feast of St. Hripsimeh

Today, the holy Hripsimeh is invited into the kingdom of heaven; and bravely resisting overcame the ravisher by confessing Christ the King, the Lord God of our Fathers.
(from Hymn of the Fathers)



Saint Queen Ashkhen

I. HER BIOGRAPHY

Queen Ashkhen was born in the country of Alans. She was the daughter of King Ashkhatar of Alans. The Country of Alans is in the neighborhood of Armenia, in the northwest of the Caspian Sea. The people of Alans often intermarried with the Armenians. For instance, King Ardashes of Armenia had married Satenig who was the daughter of the King of Alans.

The King Tiridates (Dirtad) married Ashkhen, the daughter of the king of Alans, in 291 A. D. But, before the marriage, she was enlisted as Arshagooni (the name of the Armenian tribe to whom Tiridates belonged); and after the marriage ceremony, she was called the Queen of Armenia. The marriage ceremony took place in the City of Vakharshabat, the capital of Armenia. Their family was blessed with a son that was called Khosrov, which was the name of the father of Tiridates.

Ashkhen was converted unto Christianity with her husband through Gregory the Illuminator. When the martyriums were built upon the relics of Heripsimyantz and Gayianyantz virgins, Ashkhen encouraged this construction with King Tiridates. She did the same when the cathedral of Etchmiadzin was built, personally working there and helping to dig the ground for the foundation of this sacred building, along with her husband King Tiridates and Gregory the Illuminator.

Queen Ashkhen spent the last years of her life in the castle of Karni, a City of Armenia, as a hermit; she died there in the year 341 A. D.

Her memory is celebrated every year by the Church in the month of July with Tiridates and Khosrovadoukht.

II. HER SERVICE

1. As the Queen of Armenia, accepting the religion of the gospel early, she made herself a good example for the wives of the high ranking officers and leading families, opening the way to them to accept Christianity without experiencing any difficulty.

2. As the first Christian queen of Armenia and being with her husband on the side of Gregory the Illuminator, she encouraged the spread of Christianity among the people of Armenia.

3. Encouraging the building of Churches in Armenia, and especially the construction of the cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, she became a great helper to Gregory the Illuminator, assisting him to realize his mission among the Armenian people.

III. HER OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS

1. *She was serious minded.*

Seriousmindedness means to be respectful and to avoid acts of bad behaviour, having all the time dignified conduct everywhere and under all circumstances. According to Emerson, "Seriousness is the virtue of the sense organs", although it is partly an innate tendency, but as a virtue, needs cultivation to possess it in full measure.

Queen Ashkhen was serious in her conduct, prudent and dignified. As the first lady of the country, having high social position, she made such good impression upon the people with her refined manners that the Armenian Church classified her with the rank of the saints.

Seriousmindedness is a top-ranking characteristic of the conduct which is necessary for everybody, and especially for social workers and official persons. The shallow-minded man by his shallow acts always hurts himself, and in the meantime he disturbs the peace of mind of the people with whom he works.

2. *She loved to build the Church.* To build the Church requires a great love of the Church. If somebody does not love the Church, he cannot want to build it. He that really loves the Church with all his heart sacrifices innumerable things in order to promote her advancement; and he that sacrifices willingly for the benefit of the Church, will naturally love to build it.

To love to build the Church means to encourage the construction of Churches everywhere. The exterior building of the Church is important, of course, but it is of extreme importance to construct the inner and spiritual building of the Church. This is the great truth and it is most appreciable.

When we say that Queen Ashkhen loved to build the Church it simply indicates that she loved to build not only the material building; but, at the same time, she encouraged the spiritual building of it. Because, if the moral building of the Church has been destroyed, it is in vain and senseless to have an elaborate building of finest material and construction.

Queen Ashkhen and her husband, King Tiridates, with Gregory the Illuminator first built the spiritual building of the Armenian Church. Then, her material construction was erected in an effortless and natural fashion. When Gregory the Illuminator decided the proper place of the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin by his instinctive taste and by divine guidance, immediately the

building was encouraged by the King Tiridates and Queen Ashkhen and also by the cooperation of the Armenian people.

Coleridge says, "An instinctive taste teaches men to build their Churches in the proper places."

IV. HER MESSAGE TO THE PRESENT GENERATION

1. Help the ministers of your Church and cooperate with them.
2. Spread the message of the gospel among the people by every way possible.
3. Be wise and thoughtful in your everyday life.
4. Encourage not only material but also the spiritual construction of your Church.

Scriptures

Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.
(I Corinthians 14:12)

Hymn for the Feast of St. Ashkhen

You who are a worshipper of Christ
and a promoter of the Holy Faith,
intercede for us with the
Heavenly King to forgive us
our sins.
(from the Hymn of Praise)



Saint Shooshanik

SAINT SHOOSHANIK

I. HER BIOGRAPHY

Saint Vardan Mamigonian married an Armenian girl named Dustrik. They had two daughters, Vardeni - Shooshan or Shooshanik and Vardanoosh. Vardanoosh married Arshavir Gamsaragan the Brave that followed the example of his father-in-law, Vardan, and faithfully cooperated with him in the battle he fought.

Shooshanik married Vazken, a Georgian consul; they had four children, three boys and one daughter. Vazken denounced Christianity and accepted the Persian religion and forced his wife, Shooshanik to follow his example. But, she being the daughter of a hero and brought up in a Christian family and herself a devoted Christian, rejected the proposition and remained loyal to her father's religion.

Because of her faithfulness to her religion, she was put to prison by her husband and tortured throughout the seven years of her imprisonment in Oupret at Tzoordav, near Tiflis (the capital city of Georgia). He did this to force her to give up her faith, but she remained firm.

In the prison, she had with her a relic of the Cross of Christ and a gospel which she had received as a gift from her grandfather, Catholicos Sahag Parthian. The relic of the Cross reminded her of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the gospel guided her to live like Christ. Therefore, both of them inspired her every day to be loyal to her faith. For this reason, she stood fast and kept spotless her Christian faith. She was martyred in the same prison in 458 A.D. at the age of forty-five.

The Armenian Church appreciating her heroism in faith classified her as a female martyr into the rank of the saints. Her memory is celebrated every year on the Thursday of Varaka Cross Feast.

II. HER SERVICE

1. Sacrificing her life for the faith of her father's, she became a great female witness to the truth of Christian religion in the foreign country of Georgia.

2. She showed the inward invincible power of Christianity by her heroism of faith that was revealed in her life at the time of crisis.

3. She became also a powerful champion for the good cause of Christianity, like her father, following in his footsteps.

III. HER OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS

1. *She was a sincere believer.* She could stand the many sufferings that she faced, even sacrificing her life willingly because she was a sincere believer in Christ and was ready to defend the principles of Christianity which she had learned beginning from her childhood.

To be a believer means to be faithful at all times and under all circumstances to the religion that one has and practices fully in daily life.

A person that has no certain principles and the spirit of perseverance in his life cannot be useful for humanity. Vardan the Brave and his fellow workers were true believers, and, therefore, they became worthy of the everlasting gratitude of the people because they could stand firm on their Christian faith.

Faith is a key that can open the door of God's treasures. Vardan and his fellow workers possessed that key of faith.

The Apostle Paul also was a great champion of the faith, and he kept his faith until the end of his life, as he said, "I have kept the faith."

Likewise, Saint Shooshanik began her life with faith and continued and ended it with faith. Therefore, she could declare with the great apostle and say, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; *I have kept the faith.* Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only but unto all of them that also love his appearance."

The world always needs this kind of real believer. Christianity has been spread in the world all over through this kind of sincere and real believers.

2. *She was strong in spirit.* *To be strong in spirit means to live with spiritual inspirations, to be equipped with spiritual armaments and to be filled with power which is descended from Heaven in order to resist temptations.*

While in prison, Shooshanik always read from her Bible to receive inspiration from it. She communicated with God through her daily meditations and prayers and strengthened herself each day with new spiritual power.

This was the secret of her spiritual strength, and by this power she could conquer all kinds of difficulties, suffering and even death. Whittier says, "Let it be in God's own might, we gird us for the coming fight."

Christianity is a religion of spiritual power. Every sincere Christian needs always this moral and spiritual strength because it is impossible without this strength to live a spiritual life and also preach it successfully. All the martyrs and the champions of the Christian faith could conquer the death by this spiritual power.

When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane under the shadow of death, although he felt weak himself physically, but was strong spiritually, he was willing to face any suffering even death on the Cross of Calvary. People who deny easily their religion and resign from their faith under persecution do not have this spiritual power which Shooshanik had. By this power, only she could challenge death in spite of being a delicate woman.

IV. HER MESSAGE TO THE PRESENT GENERATION

1. Hold fast to your Christian faith, because for its defense, a valuable price has been paid by your ancestors.
2. Be not only a real Christian but also try to spread your faith among the people by your words and deeds.
3. Equip yourselves with moral and spiritual power in order to resist the difficulties and the sufferings in life.
4. Inspire yourselves with the uplifting messages of the gospel and impart them also to the new generation.

Scriptures

We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left.
(I Maccabees 2:22)

Hymn for the Feast of St. Shooshanik

You glorified the Church of God with the asceticism of the holy witnesses who were martyred here on earth and in heaven were crowned.

(Jashou Hymn)

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

As mentioned in the INTRODUCTION to this small volume, portions of the material were taken from other sources. We here present that information in detail.

The material on St. Mary was taken from the book SAINTS AND SACRAMENTS by Bishop Shnork Kaloustian, pages 9 to 11. The section on St. Sandoukht was taken from the book THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH by Krikor Sarafian, pages 53 to 56. All of the following sections were also taken from the same book by Krikor Sarafian, as follows: St. Khosrovadoukht, pages 72 to 74; St. Herip-sime, pages 57 to 60; St. Queen Ashkhen, pages 67 to 70; and St. Shooshanik, pages 107 to 110.

In each case, the selection of the Scriptural verses and the translation of the representative hymns were done by The Rev. Fr. Vartan Kasparian, Coordinator of the Department of Youth Activities and Christian Education for the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America.

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