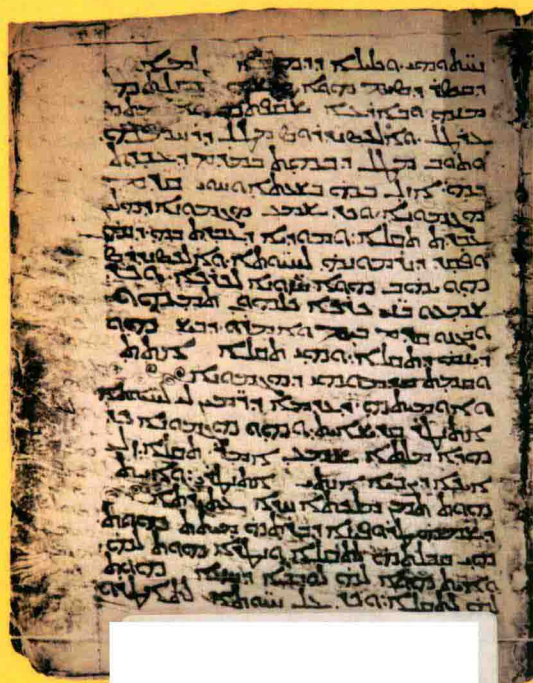


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# SELECT NARRATIVES OF HOLY WOMEN: TRANSLATION

FROM THE SYRO-ANTIOCHENE  
OR SINAI PALIMPSEST

TRANSLATED BY AGNES SMITH LEWIS



CAMBRIDGE

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*From the Syro-Antiochene or Sinai Palimpsest*

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STUDIA SINAITICA No. X

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SELECT NARRATIVES  
OF  
HOLY WOMEN

FROM

THE SYRO-ANTIOCHENE OR SINAI PALIMPSEST

AS WRITTEN ABOVE THE OLD SYRIAC GOSPELS BY JOHN  
THE STYLITE, OF BETH-MARI-QANŪN IN A.D. 778

TRANSLATED BY

AGNES SMITH LEWIS M.R.A.S.

HON. PHIL. DR. HALLE-WITTENBERG

*TRANSLATION*

LONDON

C. J. CLAY AND SONS

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## PREFACE.

THIS volume is so closely associated with No. IX. of this series that it hardly requires a separate Preface. The Introductory Notes which precede it belong quite as much to No. IX. as to No. X. ; and they have been made to accompany the English Translation, rather than the Syriac Text, with the view of equalizing the size of the two volumes. I shall therefore only recapitulate that these "Select Narratives" form the upper script of the Palimpsest which I discovered in the Convent of St Catharine on Mount Sinai in A.D. 1892, and that the under script is the now famous Codex of the Old Syriac Gospels. Whether the tales are in any way worthy of their position, the reader must judge for himself.

A. S. L.

#### ERRATA.

- Page 86, line 26. *For "Diocletian" read "Hadrian."*  
„ 122, „ 10. *For "Magdo" read "Magedo."*  
„ 140, footnote. *For Συναξαρίστης read Συναξαριστής.*

## INTRODUCTORY NOTES.

### THECLA.

The story of St Thecla is one of the oldest of Christian legendary romances, for it was composed in the beginning of the third century by an Asiatic presbyter, as Tertullian tells us<sup>1</sup>, "out of love to St Paul." The Ebionite heretics had sought to calumniate the character of the great Apostle, finding more than one supposed allusion to his fair disciple in the First Epistle to the Corinthians<sup>2</sup>, and the best antidote to these aspersions was a tale, wherein the acts of this first of women martyrs were placed in their true light<sup>3</sup>.

St Jerome alludes to Thecla as to a real person. He says that after her temptation at Antioch she was prohibited by St Paul from accompanying him any further<sup>4</sup>. This, however, does not actually prove her existence, for he may have simply pointed a moral from the romance.

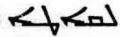
The story tells us that when Paul was preaching in the city of Iconium, a man named Onesiphorus went out to meet him, accompanied by his wife<sup>5</sup>, by Zeno, and by the sons of Simon ; that he recognised Paul, who was waiting for him on the highway to Lystra, by his personal appearance, which had been

<sup>1</sup> *De Baptismo*, cap. 17.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 34—38; ix. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Baring Gould, *Contemporary Review*, Oct. 1877 (p. 862).

<sup>4</sup> *Ad Oceanum de Vita clericorum*.

<sup>5</sup> In the Syriac Palimpsest her name is given as .

already described to him by Titus. Paul was a man of medium size, with scanty hair, bandy legs, large eyes, eyebrows which met, and a long nose; he was full of grace and mercy, at one time seeming like a man, and at another like an angel. Demas and Hermogenes, coppersmiths, who accompanied Paul, were filled with envy at his friendly greeting to Onesiphorus; but Paul entered the house of the latter, brake bread, and preached about the controlling of the flesh, and about our Lord's resurrection.

Whilst Paul preached a virgin named Thecla, daughter of Theocleia, betrothed to Thamyris, sat at a window which was close to the roof of Onesiphorus's house and listened to his words both by day and by night. She saw many women going in to hear him, but himself she saw not. Her mother, Theocleia, becoming alarmed, sent for Thamyris; but to him she would not even speak. He waxed wroth, and went down to the street, where he met with Demas and Hermogenes, who excited him still further against Paul. Next morning he went to the house of Onesiphorus, accompanied by the chief men of the city and many people with stones. They dragged Paul before Castelus the governor, the whole city accusing him of being a magician, and of corrupting their wives. The Governor questioned Paul, and sent him to prison.

But Thecla in the night-time bribed the door-keeper of her mother's house with her own bracelets, and the gaoler with a mirror of gold, and having thus got access to Paul, she sat at his feet, listening to his teaching and kissing his fetters. Her family and her betrothed having found her there, they informed the Governor, who commanded that both Paul and Thecla should be brought before him. Thecla simply stood and looked at Paul, being quite silent when she was questioned. Then her mother cried out that she must be burnt, as an example to other women. The Governor commanded Paul to be scourged, and Thecla to be burnt in the theatre. When she had been brought out for

that purpose she gazed intently on the crowd, in the hope of seeing Paul. And she saw the Lord Jesus, in the likeness of His apostle, sitting by her side. Whilst she gazed at Him He rose and ascended to heaven. The faggots were piled around her by youths and maidens, but she would not burn; a shower of hail and rain extinguished the flames and killed many of the spectators.

Paul in the meantime was fasting after his scourging, with Onesiphorus, his wife and his children, in a sepulchre by the roadside of the Iconians. Paul gave his tunic to a boy, directing him to sell it and buy bread. The boy, meeting Thecla, brought her to Paul, who had been praying for her deliverance. She proposed to cut off her hair, and follow him everywhere. Then Paul sent away Onesiphorus and his family, and went with her and with other people to Antioch. There they met an influential man named Alexander, who fell in love with Thecla, and offered to buy her from Paul. He replied that she did not belong to him. Alexander tried to embrace Thecla in the open street. But she resisted him, tore off his garments, pulled a golden crown from his head and dashed it on the ground, leaving him standing naked. Alexander complained to the Governor, and Thecla was condemned to be thrown to the wild beasts. Thecla begged from the Governor that she should be kept in purity until the sentence was executed. Taking pity on her, he sent her to the house of a rich queen named Tryphæna, who had lately lost her daughter.

Thecla was taken to the theatre, stripped, and exposed to a huge lioness. Tryphæna stood weeping at the door, but the lioness only licked the martyr's hand. Other beasts were let loose, but they would not touch her, and Tryphæna obeying the commands of her own daughter, whom she had seen in a night-vision, took her away, and adopted her. Thecla then prayed for the gift of everlasting life to the daughter of Tryphæna.

Early next morning Alexander himself came to fetch Thecla. She was snatched from the arms of Tryphæna, and was again exposed naked in the theatre. A lioness was brought, but it lay at her feet; a leopard burst, and a bear was killed by the lioness. Then a lion was brought, but he and the lioness fought till both were dead. Whilst other beasts came against her she looked round and saw a pond of water. Invoking the name of the Christ, she leapt into it, as to her baptism. Many evil beasts which were in the water died, whilst a cloud of lightning encompassed her, screening her from view.

Then Alexander brought out two bulls. Thecla was bound between them with ropes, red-hot spits were applied to their thighs, but as the bulls sprang up, a flash of fire consumed the ropes, setting Thecla free. Tryphæna fainted, thinking that Thecla was dead; and this alarmed Alexander, who ran to the Governor, and begged him to release Thecla, and thus save Tryphæna, who was of the family of Cæsar.

Thecla was then brought before the Governor, and when she had confessed her faith in the Christ, he ordered clothes to be brought for her, and all, especially the women, joined in praising God. Tryphæna was converted, with many of her maidens, and Thecla remained eight days in her house, teaching her God's commandments. But the maiden could not forget Paul. She sent messengers to seek for him, and they found him in the city of Myra. She dressed herself like a man, and took many people with her, even some of the queen's maidens, and went to Myra. Paul was astonished, and took her, with her attendants, to the house of Hermæus. There she related all that had befallen her, and after they had prayed for queen Tryphæna, Paul sent her to the city of Iconium with a commission to teach.

Thecla went to the house of Onesiphorus, where she learned that Thamyris was dead, but that her mother Theocleia still lived. She had the satisfaction of trying to persuade her mother



to believe in the Christ, then she went to Seleucia, where she taught for some time, and where she died in peace.

The Latin Church commemorates Thecla on Sept. 23rd. She is said to have died in Isauria, or Lycaonia, her native province, and to have been buried at Seleucia, where a magnificent church was built over her remains. The great cathedral of Milan is dedicated to her. But her body is supposed to rest in a chapel formed out of a natural cave in the Convent of St Thecla at Ma'lula in the Lebanon.

The Greek Church commemorates Thecla on the 24th of September, under the titles of *Πρωτομάρτυς* and *Ἰσαπόστολος*.

It also commemorates two other martyrs of the same name, one of them on June 9th, Sept. 6th, and Nov. 20th, slain with the sword, the other on August 19th, slain by a wild beast at Gaza.

An Arabic inscription several centuries old at the back of the first leaf of the famous Codex Alexandrinus (A) of the Greek Bible, states that it was written by the hand of Thecla the martyr<sup>1</sup>. This is translated into Latin by another hand, which Mr Aldis Wright recognizes as Bentley's<sup>2</sup>. To Thecla is also ascribed the beautiful and complete little Psalter, which the monks of St Catherine's Convent on Mount Sinai show as one of their chief treasures. Though it can be read only through a microscope, no mistake has ever been detected on any of its twelve pages. Unfortunately for these traditions, scholars have assigned the Codex Alexandrinus, by the weight of its own internal evidence, to the fifth century.

As the story has already been edited by one of the greatest of Oriental scholars, Dr William Wright of Cambridge, I have only given in Appendix II. a collation of the Syro-Antiochene text on that published by him. The chief differences between

<sup>1</sup> See Scrivener-Miller, *Introduction*, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> *Academy*, April 17th, 1875.