

The Life of the Great Martyr St. Irene

(whose head is located in the Church of St. Basil the Great in St. Louis, Mo.)

In the city of Magdu or Magedon, located in Persia, a daughter was born to a King named Licinius.¹ She was named Penelope and at age six Licinius and his wife decided to place her into seclusion until she reached the age of marriage. Licinius built a castle outside of his city and adorned it with fine materials. Penelope was to have all the comforts of the royal court. She would be attended to by thirteen handmaidens and educated by her aged secretary and tutor, Apellianus. She remained in strict seclusion, except for her handmaidens, and Apellianus was only brought into her presence “with ropes by means of the contrivances of an engine of artifices to her own high windows in the castles.”² There were curtains hung between Apellianus and Penelope when he instructed her. King Licinius assured his daughter that his actions were for her well being, and that he had commanded that statues of ninety-eight gods be placed throughout the castle to watch over her.

The young Penelope did not welcome her forced seclusion and pleaded with her father not to shut her up within the “gates of Hades, where she shall never again hear the sweet voice of her mother. I shall not see the sun, nor the moon, nor shall I contemplate the brilliancy of heaven nor the stars. My eyes shall not delight in the birds of the air, and I shall not distinguish between day and night in my prison house.”³ In spite of her fears and protests, Licinius commanded that Penelope and her handmaidens be taken to the castle, where the gates were locked, and which the King placed the seal of his signet ring. Licinius ordered that the door was not to be opened until the time arrived for his daughter’s betrothal.

During her confinement Penelope continued to be tutored by Apellianus, who was a devote Christian. Each day the guards drew Apellianus up on ropes to the highest windows of the castle and he taught the young women many subjects, including the teachings of Jesus Christ. After six years and three months of confinement, Penelope experienced a vision, which was both frightening and wondrous. In this vision, she saw that the window on the east side of her castle was opened, and a dove flew through it carrying an olive-leaf in its mouth, setting it on the table in front of her bed. Soon afterward she saw an eagle fly into her room by the same window carrying in its mouth a wreath adorned with beautiful flowers, and it too placed on the table near her. Penelope next saw a raven fly into her room carrying a wriggling serpent, which was also placed on her table.⁴

In the morning Apellianus was brought to her window to begin her lessons. She immediately related this vision to him and asked for his counsel. First, her tutor asked her if the objects which the birds of heaven had laid upon her table remained there now. She answered no, and saying they were only in her vision. Apellianus responded excitedly saying to her:

“Hearken, O daughter of the King! The dove which thou has seen is the doctrine of the teaching of the Wisdom of God: and the olive-leaf is the grace of Christ, and it announces the opening of the baptismal font. And the eagle is a great and powerful king, and the wreath which it carried in its mouth, adorned with all flowers, the vocation which has called thee to espousals of the Heavenly Bridegroom, and the perfection which is completed by faith. And the raven is Satan the weak and crafty one, [who is] also the tempter of the righteous; and the serpent which he carried in his mouth is affliction and anxiety,

1 *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-Qanun in A. D. 778.* trans. Agnes Smith Lewis (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1900), 94.

2 *Select Narratives*, p. 94.

3 *Select Narratives*, p. 95.

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misery, and tumult, and persecutions. Therefore, hearken, o queen and daughter of the king to what I tell thee! Though art called to the city of the great and Heavenly King; and thou shalt be hidden under the shadow of His wings. Though shalt surely see much affliction upon earth. And thy father and thy mother shall deliver thee up to thy enemies; and thy father himself shall be a persecutor of thee; and shall mediate evil, and not good, against thee. But why do I talk much with thee? For lo, a man of God shall be sent to thee, an angel of peace from the presence of the mighty King of Heaven, and he will teach thee all that is necessary to thee.”⁵

A short time after Penelope experienced this vision Licinius summoned his queen and said that the day had arrived for the betrothal of their daughter. They and others went to the castle of their daughter to release her from her seclusion. As Penelope approached her father, he was pleased with her beauty and composure. He informed her that the day of her betrothal was at hand and that she should make preparations for marriage. She asked her father to allow her seven days to think about this important event in her life. Her father patiently agreed, saying that he would return in seven days.

Alone, Penelope faced the idols her father had placed in her chamber and declared, “If ye be gods, tell me beforehand. Shall I be given to a husband, or no?”⁶ There was only stone silence. Penelope turned toward the eastern window and looked at the sky and prayed, “Lord of the heavens and the earth, and of the seas, and of all that move in them, if Thou are God the Almighty, Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God, He whom the Galileans have preached, if it is proper for me to make a transitory wedding-feast for myself, and to be given to a mortal man, and a bridegroom who will perish; show me plainly Thy divinity.”⁷ Following this Penelope began singing praises to God.

On that same night she looked up and saw an angel of God standing beside her clothed all in white. She was afraid and confused, and the angel seeing this said, “Peace be unto thee, fear not, for behold thou has found mercy and grace before God. I have been sent to you in order to show and teach you things that will come. From this day forward your name shall not longer be Penelope, but Irene, which means Peace. The angel declared that Irene will be a citadel against all the deeds and acts of the evil one and many will find safety and peace in her, repenting, and believing in God for her sake. The angel then stated that everything her teacher Applianus has told her about the birds in her dreams was true, for he spoke by the Holy Spirit! The angel told her that a man of God will come to you, a skilful doctor of the Church of God. He shall have a letter, which he shall read in your presence, and then teach you the word of God, baptizing you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. After your baptism, power and strength will be given to you, with you will have the wisdom of God.

On the following day the holy priest Timothy accompanied by an angel of God come to Irene. Irene declared to Timothy that it is time that her sins should be confessed and her transgressions and faults be blotted out. Timothy baptized Irene and her thirteen handmaidens who were with her. He then taught them the faith and fear of God. Irene obtained the power and strength of God and she lifted up the stone idols in her chambers and threw them from the eastern window, smashing them and shouting, “stand up yourselves, if you can, and help yourselves by your own power for you were not able to help me.”⁸

After seven days Irene’s Father, King Licinius, accompanied by many nobles of the city, returned to his daughter. He announced to her that the seven days were finished and he wanted her answer. Irene

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6 p. 100.

7 p. 100.

8 p, 102.

boldly declared to her Father and those with him that she had entered the palace of the Heavenly King and declared her love and faith in Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God. The nobles accompanying the King declared that by these words Irene perhaps was a Christian? Irene responded that all should know she was truly a Christian and the handmaid of Christ and the bride of Jesus. She further announced that she had been baptized. Irene then declared to her father and his nobles that they were oppressors of orphans and widows, and spoilers of the poor and unfortunate, and were enemies of righteousness and aliens from God! She called upon them all, especially her father, to repent and turn to the living God and embrace the resurrected Jesus Christ!

Licinius responded to his daughter saying that he has had great patience with her owing to her grace and beauty. He called on his guards to escort her to the city and face his punishment. However, his wife and mother of Irene, bent down and dug her hands into the dust where her daughter had been standing and covered her eyes and body with it, declaring, “May this dust from beneath the hold feet of my beloved daughter bring to me rest and healing, and for the redemption of my life and for the remission of sins and for the new eternal life.”⁹ Many people who were following them did the same, but the King ordered his guards to clear a path and to remove anyone who blocked their return to the city.

All who saw the face of Irene were filled with joy, and declared that it was like looking at the face of an angel. When Irene came to the door of her father’s palace, a vicious demon met her and declared, “What is there between me and thee, thou hand maiden of Jesus? Get out of this city, for no Christian can dwell in it, the demon shouted.”¹⁰ The blessed Irene then said to the demon, “Who art thou, and what is thy name?” The demon responded that Nargium is his name and that he guards the city, and many of the people within are his! I am the first charioteer of the gods, and I rejoice in quarrels and exult in slaughter. I excite disputes and I rejoice in the shedding of blood. I supply the wizards and enchain many by means of them. I am the father and the originator of all evils, and I am the rock on which all the souls of the wicked shall be dashed. Now I have made known to thee my power and my courage.

Irene answered the demon saying, “in the name of Jesus Christ, it is not lawful for thee to be in this city, or to ruin or hurt anyone of its inhabitants. Be gone demon, let I destroy you in the name of Jesus! When the demon heard the glorious name of Jesus Christ he fled in fear and trembling, and went out of the city astonished. As he was going out, he approached the king and whispered into his ear, saying, “if you are truly mine Licinius, be strong and of good courage, for thy daughter is mixed up with the fervor of the Christians.” After the demon had said this he went out of the city shaking and howling. At dawn of the next day the king called his queen and asked her counsel regarding what should be done with their daughter. The queen responded that he should not think that their daughter was in error and declared “peace be to our daughter and glory to Christ, who hath called her to immortal life!” At this declaration the king became enraged and ordered that the queen be put out of the palace. When Irene learned of this action she quickly ran to her mother’s aid and to confront her father.

When Licinius encountered his daughter he bent his head down and gazed at the ground in anger. When she saw her fathers’ reaction, she asked him why he was so sad and angry with her. Licinius declared that she had confessed the Christ and believed in Jesus, rejecting the gods. Irene responded saying that there was nothing wrong with her and her faith in Christ, and that she prays that he too will confess and believe in Jesus Christ.

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The king responded by demanding that Irene sacrifice to the gods and cease calling herself Irene, for your name he said is Penelope! She responded by saying that her name is Irene, for by that name my betrothed did call me when I was in that castle, which you imprisoned me. King Licinius responded with anger, declaring that he renounces this child, and wished she had never had been born! He then commanded his soldiers to take her away to the circus, and to bind her with ropes and throw her in front of chariots so she would be trampled to death.

Irene was immediately taken by the king's soldiers to the circus. The crowds were weeping at the site of her in ropes as the soldiers laid her in the middle of circus floor. The King soon left his palace and went to the circus to witness the death of his daughter. As the King entered the circus his most prized war horse cut the ropes of its halter and destroyed its stall, running straight for the Licinius. The horse bit the King, seizing his right arm, ripping it from his shoulder. The king fell to the ground dead! The horse returned to its stall, which was given the speech of man for the glory of God. It spoke and said:

“Blessed art though Irene, handmaid of God and blessed are thou among women. Thou hast been delivered into the hands of the wicked upon the earth and in heaven thine espousal and their adornment are prepared. Thou has wept upon earth and in paradise thou shalt be embraced by the sweetness of heaven. Here thou art afflicted but thou shalt be made splendid beyond the splendor of light. Thou art hated by man upon earth, but thou shalt stand and be glorified beside Jesus they betrothed. Blessed be thou and blessed be thy soul.”¹¹

All the horses were brought to the circus but the one that had spoken these words was kept separate from the other horses owing to his great strength. The blessed Irene who had been bound with ropes by order of the King lay in the middle of the area, and all the horses came and knelt down in obeisance before her. Suddenly the ropes that had bound Irene fell from her, and the people who witnessed this immediately glorified God. At that very moment the servants of the King ran to Irene and declared, “A horse had bitten thy father and he is dead.”¹²

“Irene responded by declaring that they should not fear for he really is not dead, but only sleeping, and that all this has happened for the glory of God! When the crowd at the circus heard that the King was dead, they came to Irene and fell down before her and pleaded saying, “Lady, take pity on thy father who is dead; and it is grievous to them for his hand, too, has been taken away and thrown aside.”¹³

Irene then went to her father's corpse and stood over it. The people at this time were dumbstruck and fearful, for they were amazed at the speech of the horse, the miraculous loosening of Irene's bindings, and shocked by the sudden death of their King. The blessed Irene then declared, “Bring the hand that cut off close to place from which it was cut. And make it touch the place.”¹⁴ Once this was done, Irene turned to the East and lifted up her eyes and her hands to heaven. She cried with heavy sobs saying,

“God the Father in Heaven, who hast established the foundations of the earth; Thou rock that never movest, and fortress that never dost capitulate, Sun of righteousness and path of life, and Way of Salvation, who sittest on the right hand of Him who sent thee, O Lord, my God, and my betrothed Jesus the Christ, Son of the Living God, Thou who called sinner to repentance, that they may turn to the knowledge of the truth and not perish, Merciful and Pitiful One, hearken to my voice and look on the humble estate of Thy handmaiden. May thy strong power come from heaven on this dead man and

11 Page 110

12 Page 111.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

raise him up, that this crowd may see threes things and believe and glorify Thy holy name; and know that thou are the Lord of the heaven and of the earth and the Redeemer of all men who believe in thee.”¹⁵

When she had finished her prayer, the soul of the dead man re-entered him and he arose, and sat-up. His daughter turned and saw him, and she went to him and took him with her hands and set him up saying, “Rise my father, by the power of Jesus!” At this he rose and began walking as if he had never been injured. The people were amazed and on that very day 3,000 were baptized. Then King Licinius took his daughter by the hand, blessing God and saying, “Great is the triumph of thy victory, my daughter, and great is thy promise in heaven. Thou art called the possession of Jesus, and the inheritance of the Christ. Behold! Licinius declared, I also am now a Christian and a servant of Jesus, and I renounce this kingdom of the world that passes away, and I look for the kingdom of heaven that never passes away. He then announced his abdication, stating that he will take his wife and daughter to the castle that he had built for them and will also see Jesus as they have.”

Soon after this Zedkia, a neighboring king had learned of Lincius conversion and of the miracles done by his daughter. Zedekia assembled his army and marched to Magdu quickly occupying it. He summoned the leaders of the city and asked them where they king had gone? They answered that Lincius was in the castle he had build for his daughter! Zedkia then demanded to know where Irene lived, and was told that she was in the city, staying with her teacher, Apellianus. Zedkia’s soldier seized Irene and brought her to the King. When she meet him, she condemned his paganism. Zedkia became enraged and commanded his soldiers to dig a pit thirty cubits wide and thirty cubits deep, and to throw wild beasts and venomous snakes and scorpions into it. The king commanded that Irene be thrown into the pit.¹⁶ As Irene was brought to the pit she lifted her hands and raised her eyes upwards, weeping and saying, “O Lord the Christ, behold, for they sake I bear these things and I go down into this pit leaning on the power of thy divinity. Show thy favor to me, O Lord, and let the iniquitous people and their father, Satin, be ashamed.”¹⁷ Irene then made the sign of Jesus between her eyes, and on her breast, and threw herself head first into the pit. When she reached the bottom of the pit all the reptiles ran away from her and stuck to the sides of pit and died.

Irene remained in the pit for fourteen days and had nothing to eat or drink, but was nourished by the Holy Spirit. When King Zedkia was informed of the dead reptiles and that Irene was still alive, he had her brought before him and demanded that she make sacrifices to the gods. Irene replied, “O many headed Satan! O son of deceit, tell me, has the weak power of thy gods done any enchantment like these!”¹⁸ Zedkia became enraged and ordered his carpenters to bring two saws. He commanded that they squeeze Irene in their press and to saw her half. The carpenters followed the commands of their King, and placed a saw above her head and began to saw her, but the saws became blunted and did not hurt her body! The King being further enraged, commanded that they should tie her down and saw her in two, but the saw broke killing the two carpenters. Irene continued to sing praises to Jesus Christ throughout this ordeal! The King then ordered a large stone of 550 pounds to be placed on Irene and ordered that another large saw be brought. Then the King’s servants cut off Irene’s feet, but she felt no pain. The King then blasphemed God, when suddenly the air was aflame, and great thundering and fierce lightening occurred. Irene remained with the stone on her and her feet cut off. The King then

15 Ibid.

16 An ancient linear unit based on the length of the forearm, from elbow to the tip of the middle finger, usually from 17 to 21 inches or 43 to 53 cm.

17 Ibid 115.

18 Ibid 116

shouted, “now we will see if the Christ will come to deliver her.”¹⁹

All the people had fled, but a harlot came to the side of Irene. Her name was Curica. She said to her, “I will not leave thee, handmaid of the Christ! With thee I will die, and with thee will live in life eternal.”²⁰ When the King saw the harlot beside Irene, he ordered his men to kill her. She asked Irene to pray for her that they would not be separated, and Irene sealed her in the name of the Fathers, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When the King's men cut the head off of Curica, two angels came down from heaven by the command of God, and they freed Irene from the stone and took her feet which had been cut off and brought them to the places where they have been severed and healed her, and then went up to heaven. The handmaiden Irene continued singing praises to God without ceasing. Suddenly a strong current of air followed the king and his men who were bitterly were assaulted by a killing hail. It slew three thousand of the King's men, but it did not hurt the king, because he was kept for the wrath to come.

The king then summoned Irene and said you have killed three thousand people with your enchantments. He also said that when the people saw that your feet were healed, they believed in your God and you have stolen 8,000 souls from the gods! Irene then declared that the king did not escape death because of his righteousness, but that her crown of martyrdom might be witnessed by the people. The king was again enraged and ordered his Eparch to take Irene to a mill and bind her to against the spokes of the wheel. He ordered that iron hooks be attached to the ends of the spokes and the water be opened to the mill wheel. When the force of the water hits the wheel the hooks will rip Irene apart he shouted! Irene was tied to the mill wheel, and the water was released, but the mill did not move and she was unhurt. The King and his men were completely bewildered. Irene was then taken off the mill wheel and imprisoned. But God created doubt in the minds of the people of the King, who suddenly rose up against him. The King was stoned by the people and he left the city for his own, but died within seven days. His son Severon ascended to his father's throne and quickly reoccupied Magedon with a large army.

While Irene was in prison the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to her with a host of angels. He said to her, “Irene, fear not, I am with you, and my Father with the Holy Spirit, are helping you with your struggles. All the armies of heaven are helping with your conflict. And even the bones of the righteous fathers delight in thy victory.” Then the Lord set His seal upon her, and ascended up to heaven with His holy angels. Irene remained in prison for fourteen days, when the king called her and demanded that she make sacrifices to the gods. When she refused King Severon was enraged and ordered three hundred nails be brought to him and that they be fastened under St. Irene's feet, and that heavy sacks of sand be tied to her. She was then muzzled, and a soldier of the King's made her run five miles outside of the city and back again. She was then mocked by the populace as she was brought back into the city. But Irene saw an angel standing in front of her as she entered the city, and suddenly the earth opened up and swallowed all those who were mocking her and many pagans were destroyed. The nails were taken from her feet and the sacks of sand were removed from her sides, and the muzzle fell from her mouth. When the king saw this he was astonished, but his heart was only hardened. Then the angel of God turned to the king's assembly and slew many of them. The King still would not believe, and the Lord also slew him.

Irene went into the city and taught many people the words of Christ, and baptized them in the name of the Holy Trinity. She also healed many who were sick and cast out demons. She remained in the city of Magedon for three years proclaiming the word of Jesus Christ. After Zedikia and Severon,

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Numerianus ruled after them in Magedon, the son of Septinus. He asked about the blessed Irene, and when told that she was in the city, he ordered that she be brought to the city of Callinicus and confined until he arrived.

When Numerianus arrived in Callinicus he declared that: “This maiden is very like her father; she is the daughter of Licinius who abandoned his kingdom, and renounced it, and now this city is without a king. Because of her actions Zedekia, my brother was stoned and died, and because of her the angel of the Lord killed Severon his son. I fear a fate worse than that befell my kinsmen. I see this woman as a destroyer of the kingdom. I do not know what to do with her. He then turned to his leading men and asked them to advise him on a course of action.” He then ordered that Irene be brought before him. Numerianus said to Irene, “ Will you sacrifice to the gods or will you remain obstinate? Will you persist in the folly of Christians?”

Irene answered, “Because though has repeated that I am the over turner of royalty, I say to thee, if thou dost no believe in God, in a very little while the judgment of God shall overtake thee also; and thou shall die a frightful and uncommon death. And then thou shall know there is a God who rules in the heaven and in the earth.”²¹ When the King heard this, he was incensed, and ordered that his men bring him sheets of copper. They came to the King and he ordered that they make three large copper cows. They made them and brought them to the King. He then ordered that the cows should be heated for three days until the copper was almost melted. When they cows were heated he commanded that Irene be brought before him. He told Irene that if she would not sacrifice to the gods she would suffer a terrible death. She would be thrown in the first copper cow, but if she would “conquer that one by her witchcraft, she would be thrown into the second; and if again she conquers the second one, she would be cast into the third, and surely die. The King said, we will see if Jesus will come, he whom you believe in, and will save you from my hands.”²²

St. Irene responded by saying, “Be not troubled, O son of Satan, for however much thy father Satan has excited you against me, I am not afraid, nor of thy threats. The King then cursed St. Irene and commanded that his men prepare the copper cows. He also ordered his heralds to go out into the city and proclaim that all men should come and see the punishment and procession of the despiser of the gods. When all in the city were assembled, the King came and sat on his judgment-seat and asked Irene to again sacrifice to the gods or go into the copper cow! St. Irene declared, “O senseless fool and ignorant sinner, son of Satan the coiling serpent! I have said to thee once and for all that I am a Christian, and I will not sacrifice to the infidel demons or to the foul fiends. I will not forsake Jesus the Christ, my Load, and I shall not be forsaken by Him.

King Numerianus then ordered that Irene be thrown into the copper cow. As the servants led her toward the first copper cow, Irene made the sign of Jesus on her breast and between her eyes and ran boldly into the copper cow. Immediately the fire was quenched and water even flowed from the cow itself and the handmaid of Christ was set free. The King then declared, did he not say that she would conquer it by her witchcraft?

All the people began to weep as they saw the beauty of Irene’s youth and what torments she was to suffer! She then prayed to God, “O Lord God, who dwellest in the highest heavens, hearken to my voice and let thy mercy come hither.”²³ After she had prayed she saw an angel God standing beside her. He said to her, “Peace be to you Irene, and fear not for the Lord is with thee and I have been sent for

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they comfort.”²⁴

Then the King ordered that Irene be thrown into the second. Irene again sealed herself with the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and went into the cow rejoice and exulting in the power of Jesus to help. Once again the fire was quenched and fame was cooled and cow melted like wax, and Irene was unhurt. When the King saw this he said, her witchcraft has conquered the fire. He ordered Irene to be thrown into the third cow! When Irene freely went into the third copper cow, it walked as if it were animated in the flesh, and that it might proclaim to the unbelievers about the grace of God. All the people were amazed at this wonder. Even the King was astonished. Then the people all cried aloud, “there is none like unto thee, O Lord God, and there are none like unto thy servants. Be merciful to use as in the abundance of thy grace. Thou art He who hast done the miracle by the hands of Irene, and though ___ has shewn Thy might and thy valor amongst the nations.”²⁵ A hundred thousand people believed in God that day, and the few people who were left who were unbaptized believed nevertheless in God.

When the King saw the people praise God and rejoice with St. Irene, he again became enraged and blasphemed against God. Then suddenly, the Angel of the Lord struck him with a pain in his heart, and with an internal wound. The King was taken to his chambers and a fire was lit within him, and he refused all food, and his liver overflowed and swelled up, and his lung was nourishment for him, and worms came out of his mouth, and his kinsmen were afraid to come near him. He then made a great yell and burst apart and died. Before his death the King had ordered Bura the Eparch to try Irene.

While the King was dying, Irene had traveled to the town of Callinicus. She was there for thirty days, preaching the word of Christ and healing the sick. At the end of thirty days the Eparch went to Tela of Mauzalet, also known as Membria.²⁶ The Eparch ordered soldiers to arrest Irene bring her to him. The soldiers were told by the people of the many wonderful things Irene had done. When they found her, they greeted her by declaring, “hail to thee, handmaiden of Christ! The Eparch send for thee!”²⁷ Irene went with the soldiers and entered the city of Tela and was brought before the Eparch. He greeted her with “Peace be to thee, Irene.” She replied that you greet me with peace, but there shall be no peace upon thee because God has said that there will be no peace to the wicked. The Eparch Bura called Irene an impudent and godless woman, and ordered her to sacrifice to the gods. Bura said that he will bring tortures to Irene that have not yet been seen the world before nor have they ever entered into the heard of the judges.

The Eparch ordered that an iron chair be brought and Irene was forced to sit in it and bound with chains so she could not move. Wood was then piled around her and fat, wax, naphtha, sulphur, pitch, and resin were put on the wood. Then torches were placed under the kindling. The Eparch declared, “let us see if Jesus will deliver her from my hands.”²⁸ Immediately, by the commandment of God, an angel descended from heaven and seized Irene by her hand, and set her out of the chair. The chair and iron chains were melted like the wax. When the Eparch saw that she was standing outside the fame he was astonish, and fear overtook him. He ran and fell on his face before her feet, weeping and sought to persuade her saying, “I implore thee, O lady, handmaiden of the Christ, have mercy on me. Lo! I also believe in thy God, and henceforth I am a Christian. I renounce all the gods of paganism, and let me

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not die a fearful death.”²⁹ Irene said, didn’t I tell you that you would speedily turn towards Jesus. Bura then pleaded with Irene that he may be accepted and not rejected. Irene said, fear not, let no anxiety come to thee. When the crowds saw that the Eparch now believed in Jesus the Christ, many also believed and confessed God. Irene remained in to Tela of Mauzalet for fifty days, preaching the word of God and converting many.

However, Shabar, the Persian King had come to the city of Nisibis, and he had heard about the blessed Irene and that she was in Tela. At the end of fifty days he sent seven horsemen after her, and they brought her to Nisibis. She entered the city; and Shabar ordered that Irene be brought before him. When he saw her he did not want to interrogate her, for he said, “This is the destroyer of royalty,”³⁰ As Irene stood in front of Shabar, he struck her with his sword and killed her. Her Christian brothers then came and took her body and buried it.

The death of the Holy Great Martyr Irene has been reported differently in several sources. Some accounts report that after four days in the grave and angel came from heaven and raised her and she went into the city Nisibis where the entire citizens saw that she have been raised from the day. After three days by the command of God a cloud took her to the city of Ephesus, where she healed the sick and performed miracle in the Name of Jesus. In Ephesus she again met her teacher Apellianus and one day later she instructed him to find six good Christian men of the patrician class and she instructed them to put her in a marble coffin that was to be secured with iron clasps and that for four days on one should open or disturb her burial place. They followed Irene’s instructions and after four days they opened her coffin and all they found were the clothes of the virgin folded in her coffin.³¹

Various other accounts state that when the Lord revealed to St. Irene the day of her death, she went into a mountain cave in Ephesus and asked that its entrance be blocked by stones. There she died peacefully and her relics were recovered by her followers.³² Another account states she was burned at the stake in Thessaloniki. In any case, there is no doubt that her holy relics were transferred to Constantinople, where several shrines were built in her honor, including the magnificent Hagia Irene.³³

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32 Sergei Bulgakov's, *Nastolnaya Kniga Dlya Svyaschenno-Tserkovno-Sluzhitelei (1900)* by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris (2008) <http://www.transfigcathedral.org/faith/Bulgakov/index.shtml>

33 “*The Relics of the Great Martyr Irene and St. Basil the Great Orthodox Church – St. Louis, MO*, page 2; Denis Bethell, “The Making of a Twelfth-Century Relic Collection,” *Popular Belief and Practice: Papers Read at the Ninth Summer Meeting and the Tenth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical Society*, ed. G. J. Cuming and Derek Baker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972): 69.