PREFACE

The two texts presented in this volume concern Persian aristocrats put to death under Khusrō I (531–579 CE), whose reign was one of the most distinguished of the Sasanian dynasty. The Sasanians ruled over what is now Iran and Iraq from the third through the seventh centuries. The heroes of these two accounts, Grigor Pīrān-Gušnasp, who is described as a chief general of the Sasanian army, and Yazd-panāh, a Sasanian high dignitary and judge, were both Zoroastrians who converted to Christianity. The Martyrdom of Grigor seems to be the first work in what seems to be a narrative cycle: the story of the Martyrdom of Yazd-panāh, by the same hand, is directly related to it, as is the account of the confessor, the upperclass ‘Awira, which appears at the end of the latter text. Furthermore, akin to these two works is the account of Yazd-bōzēd whose life is preserved in Armenian.

The Martyrdom of Grigor Pīrān-Gušnasp and the Martyrdom of Yazd-panāh were likely written by a contemporary to the events described and, along with the better-known account of the famous Catholicos Mār Abbā (540–552), they are the only East Syrian hagiographies of that time extant in Syriac. They provide valuable information regarding the socio-religious and political situation of sixth-century Iran. These martyr acts are here translated into English for the first time, based on manuscripts from libraries in London and Berlin and at the Vatican. This work updates a French translation published in 2015 in the Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium series (Louvain, Peeters Publishers). Research on these texts was a part of the international program “Ctesiphon” (Corpus of Texts and Sources
about Iran: For a History of the Orient in the 6th century) funded by the National Research Agency of France from 2013 to 2015. The challenge of this project was to bring together new data on the reign of Khusrō I, to deepen our knowledge of the period, and to enable the analysis and comparison of sources by means of a cross-disciplinary database.

I want to thank Adam Becker, general editor of the “Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac” series at Gorgias Press, for his very helpful and valuable remarks, his careful readings and perceptive suggestions, and also Melonie Schmierer-Lee for her efficient editorial work and patience. I would like to express also my gratitude to my mother, Denise, and to Christelle whose comments improved this work. I also thank the CeRMI (Centre de recherche sur le monde iranien, UMR 8041, CNRS) and the INaLCO (Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales), Paris, for providing financial support.

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