



FORTY-TWO MARTYRS OF AMMORIA

The Holy 42 Martyrs of Ammoria: Constantine, Aetius (Aetitus), Theophilus, Theodore, Melissenus, Callistus, Basoes and the others with them. During a war between the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus (829-842) and the Saracens, the Saracens managed to besiege the city of Ammoria (in Galicia in Asia Minor). As a result of treason on the part of the military commander Baditses, Ammoria fell, and forty-two of its generals were taken captive and sent off to Syria.

During the seven years of their imprisonment they tried in vain to persuade the captives to renounce Christianity and accept Islam. The captives stubbornly resisted all their seductive offers and bravely held out against terrible threats. After many torments that failed to break the spirit of the Christian soldiers, they condemned them to death, hoping to shake the determination of the saints before executing them. The martyrs remained steadfast, saying that the Old Testament Prophets bore witness to Christ, while Mohammed called himself a prophet without any other witnesses to support his claim.

They said to the soldier Theodore, "We know that you forsook the priestly office, became a soldier and shed blood in battle. You can have no hope in Christ, Whom you abandoned voluntarily, so accept Mohammed." But the martyr replied, "You do not speak truthfully when you say that I abandoned Christ. Moreover, I left the priesthood because of my own unworthiness. Therefore, I must shed my blood for the sake of Christ, so that He might forgive the sins that I have committed against Him."

The executioners took each one separately and led him off to be beheaded, then threw the bodies into the River Euphrates. In the service to them, these holy passion-bearers are glorified as: the "All-Blessed" Theodore, the "Unconquered" Callistus, the "Valliant" Constantine, the "Wondrous" Theophilus and "the Most Strong" Basoes.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich in his *Prologue* adds the following information:

They were all commanders of the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus. When the Emperor Theophilus lost the battle against the Saracens at the city of Ammoria, the Saracens captured the city, enslaved many Christians and among them these commanders. The remaining Christians were either killed or sold into slavery. The commanders were thrown into prison where they remained for seven years. Many times the Muslim leaders came to them. They counseled and advised the commanders to embrace the Islamic Faith, but the commanders did not want to hear about it. When the Saracens spoke to the commanders, saying, "Mohammed is the true prophet

and not Christ," the commanders asked them, "If there were two men debating about a field and the one said, 'This field is mine,' and the other, 'It is not, it is mine,' and near by, one of them had many witnesses saying it is his field and the other had no witnesses, but only himself, what would you say, 'Whose field is it?'" The Saracens answered, "Indeed, to him who had many witnesses!" "You have judged correctly," the commanders answered. That is the way with Christ and Mohammed. Christ has many witnesses: the Prophets of old, from Moses to John the Forerunner, whom you also recognize and who witness to and about Him [Christ], but Mohammed witnesses only to himself that he is a prophet and does not have even one witness. The Saracens were ashamed and again they tried to defend their faith in this manner: "Our faith is better than the Christian Faith as proved by this: God gave us the victory over you and gave us the best land in the world and a kingdom much greater than Christianity." To that the commanders replied, "If it were so, then the idolatry of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Hellenes, Romans, and the fire-worship of the Persians would be the true faith for, at one time, all of these people conquered the others and ruled over them. It is evident that your victory, power and wealth do not prove the truth of your faith. We know that God, at times, gives victory to Christians and, at other times, allows torture and suffering so as to correct them and to bring them to repentance and purification of their sins." After seven years, they were beheaded in the year 845 A.D. Their bodies were then thrown into the Euphrates river, but they floated to the other side of the shore where they were gathered and honorably buried by Christians.

Apolytikion in the Fourth Tone

Thy Martyrs, O Lord, in their courageous contest for Thee received as the prize the crowns of incorruption and life from Thee, our immortal God. For since they possessed Thy strength, they cast down the tyrants and wholly destroyed the demons' strengthless presumption. O Christ God, by their prayers, save our souls, since Thou art merciful.

Kontakion in the Fourth Tone

Ye who contended on earth for Christ's glory, and were shown forth as godly crown-bearing Martyrs, have been vouchsafed to dwell in Heaven joyously; for since ye brake all the snares of the enemy's cunning by your sufferings and the blood of your tortures and woundings, ye ever send down freely from on high loosing of sins unto all them that honour you.