

The religious policy of Septimius Sever in the light of anti-Christian persecution

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The name of Emperor Septimius Severus is associated with the tradition of local anti-Christian persecution (202-203), when an edict prohibiting Christian and Jewish proselytism appeared. After that many believers suffered: Perpetua, Felicitas and their comrades in Carthage, Origen's father, the rhetoric Leonidas, Potamina and Basilides in Alexandria and others — as evidenced by the authentic hagiographic tradition and the messages of Christian historians. However, a detailed consideration of the circumstances of the death of Christian heroes causes considerable difficulties for researchers. If the martyrdom of the Carthaginian Christians is respectively well dated, the time of the death of Alexandrian comrades has been longly discussed in the scientific literature. Although formally Christianity at the beginning of the 3rd century continued to be a «forbidden religion», notable outbreaks of persecution rarely occurred, and the dramatic, according to Christian historians, change in the policy of Septimius Severus regarding the Church deserves special attention. The influence of Eastern cults on the emperor (Dio. LXXVI, 13, 2) or of his fears of possible unrest in the east of the Empire are usually mentioned. The article analyzes the extant evidence of Septimius Severus in the Roman and Christian traditions and answers the questions about the causes and circumstances of the anti-Christian persecution. A detailed analysis of the historiography on the subject is given, with diametrical divergence in the positions of individual researchers being noted. The main attention is paid to the testimony of Tertullian, who, according to the author, in his treatise «On Baptism» gave instructions to catechumens who were in real danger.



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