



## St. Aristidis the Philosopher

September 13th

Very little is known of Aristides, except for the introductory information given by Eusebius of Caesarea and Saint Jerome. According to their account, Aristides practiced philosophy in Athens, where he lived, prior to and after his conversion to Christianity. Eusebius writes in his *Ecclesiastical History* "Aristides also, a faithful disciple of our religion, has left an *Apology* of the faith dedicated to Hadrian."<sup>[1]</sup> Eusebius and Jerome both state that

the *Apology* was given to Hadrian at the same time as Quadratus delivered his own apology. This suggests that Aristides gave his apology during Hadrian's reign (r. 117–138) as emperor of Rome, which supports the theory of Aristides died between the years 133–134 AD. It is also supported by the express language of the *Apology* in the Armenian version. It is contradicted only by the second superscription to the Syriac version, which says that the *Apology* was given to Emperor Antoninus Pius in the year 140. If this is taken to mean that it was delivered in person by Aristides, it would rule out the dating of Aristides's death in 133–134 AD. It has been suggested that Eusebius was confused by the fact that Antoninus Pius had adopted the name "Hadrianus" (Caesar Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius) and believed it was Hadrian to whom the *Apology* was given, and further that Jerome had never read the *Apology* and copied Eusebius's mistake accidentally.<sup>[2]</sup> But Jerome tells us that the *Apology* was extant in his day, and he gives an account of its contents. The testimony of Eusebius and Jerome and the text of the Armenian version are all in favor of its being delivered to Hadrian, probably in circa 124–125 AD.

### *The Apology of Aristides*

In 1878, an Armenian fragment of an apology titled *To Emperor Hadrian Caesar from the Athenian Philosopher Aristides* was published by the Mechitarists of San Lazzaro in Venice from a 10th-century manuscript. The Armenian translation was accepted by most scholars as the long lost *Apology of Aristides*; however, a few did dispute its authenticity, most notably Ernest Renan.

In the 1889 Syriac translation, Aristides begins his apology by stating his name, where he is from and that he is delivering it to Antoninus Pius. In the first chapter, he proclaims God exists because the world exists and that God is "eternal, impassible and perfect."<sup>[1]</sup> In the second chapter, he writes that there are four races of the world; (1) Barbarians, (2) Greeks (includes Egyptians and Chaldeans), (3) Jews, and (4) Christians. He then devotes chapters 3–16 to describing the different groups of people and how they practice religion. The Barbarians (chapters 3–7) worship dead warriors and the elements of the Earth, which he claims are the works of God, therefore they do not know who the true God is.<sup>[5]</sup> The Greeks (chapters 8–13) are next because:

"...they are wiser than the Barbarians but have erred even more than the Barbarians, in that they have introduced many gods that are made; and some of them they have represented as male and some of them as female; and in such a way that some of their gods were found to be adulterers and murderers, and jealous and envious, and angry and passionate, and murderers of fathers, and thieves and plunderers."<sup>[6]</sup>