



SAINT GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

By Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594), painted about 1555. The National Gallery, London, UK.

Saint George (Aya Yorgi) is believed to be born to Christian parents in Cappadocia, in modern-day Turkey. He was a Roman soldier during the reign of Emperor Diocletian who implemented a religious cleanse of Roman Christians. St George was executed in 303 AD after being subjected to seven-year of torture, later becoming a martyr and a popular patron saint. However, another 700 years passed for any dragons to be involved in his story. Then, the legend says St George rescued a princess from a dragon and his heroism inspired the people living in a nearby city to convert to Christianity. There is also a Muslim version of this legend where St George is called Girgus as a prophetic figure who lived in Mosul and confronted Dadan, the King of Mosul.

Today April 23rd is celebrated as St George's day throughout the Western Christian World. The European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID) created the "International Day of Fighting Infection" in 2008, allegorically St George's slaying the dragon represents defeating the microbial threat. Seven consecutive, one-day meetings under this title covering historical aspects of infectious diseases were organized by ESCMID until 2015.