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The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas and Tertullian

Mohr Siebeck

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Gratitude

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It would also be ungracious of me not to acknowledge true friends who have helped and encouraged me when times have been tough. Prominent among these, I can name Dr Philip Rodionoff, Neal Moores, and Graham Hood.

But I have left the best till last…

τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ διδόντι ἡμῖν τὸ νῖκος
διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

Preface

Life is full of wonder, and because of that, we all wonder about life… and death. This book was born out of my own wondering.

The various cultural and religious traditions of this world typically reflect a refusal to accept death as the absolute end. The Christian tradition is an indispensable consideration for those who wish to try to understand the various ways in which Western culture conceptualises life and death.

So I wondered, where do our key contemporary ideas about what happens after death come from? But I didn't just stop at wondering; I did what most people don't do when they wonder about something; I turned it into a doctoral dissertation. Of course along the way it became more and more focused, as these projects tend to do. I focussed on a critical period in the history of the development of the concepts of the afterlife, and I focussed on a critical and fascinating text. This book is the fruit of this research.

Along the way, I have discovered many things; among them is that the majority of the ancients, whatever gods they worshipped, were nourished by hope. This wasn't just hope in this life alone, or just hope in life after death, but more broadly, hope in life itself. I suspect that this is still true for most of us today, and that this quest for hope is one of the brightest elements of the human condition.

Early Christianity, in its first centuries, was able to distil this hope in ways that galvanised the ancient world, and for many, still continues to do so today. I am glad that the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* has survived, and I am glad that I have had the privilege of learning through Perpetua's experiences, as well as from such interesting people as Tertullian. I hope that as you read and reflect on this book, you will learn things that go beyond just the words that I have written here. Perhaps you too will wonder at life and its big questions. If you do, I will be satisfied.

Eliezer Gonzalez

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Certainty and Uncertainties of Death

The certainty and uncertainties of death were a prominent theme in the discourse of antiquity.[1] For this reason, it is significant that at some time in the second and early third centuries, the Christian dead moved to better premises; they were essentially upgraded in status. Although the earliest Christian documents, such as 1 Cor and 1 Thess reflect a diversity of views within their communities about the fate of their dead, the predominant belief was that they were waiting for the resurrection, at which time they would receive their reward. In the new scheme of things, however, the righteous dead were thought to ascend to be with God immediately upon their deaths. This notion of the immediate ascent of the soul increased in emphasis and overtook the idea of eschatological bodily resurrection in prominence. Of course, this idea of resurrection has also persisted, more prominently in some streams of Christianity than in others, even to this day.

Generally, this upgrade in status was not a special privilege reserved for the Christian dead alone; it was part of a broader trend which had been occurring in Mediterranean and Near Eastern civilisations for hundreds, even thousands of years. Whereas the dead of many cultures, or at least their souls, had initially been believed to persist in different versions of a dreary, murky underworld, some of these cultures embarked on the process of creating a much-improved personal afterlife that was available to all, and not just to especially meritorious heroes or kings. These improved versions of the afterlife typically involved an ascent into the heavens to be with the gods.

We can trace this shift in broad outline in many contexts, including ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Israelite-Jewish cultures.[2] However, it is a very complex milieu of ideas, across many cultures and traditions. To attempt to examine how and when the notion of the immediate post-mortem ascent of the soul took prec-

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[1] Peter Bolt, 'Life, Death, and the Afterlife in the Greco–Roman World,' in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament* (ed. R. N. Longenecker), McMaster New Testament Studies 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 51.

[2] In reference to ancient Egypt, Rosalie David (*The Two Brothers: Death and the Afterlife in Middle Kingdom Egypt* [Bolton, UK: Rutherford Press, 2007], 42) calls this the 'democratisation' of the afterlife. For the emergence of Jewish beliefs, see Jon Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

edence over the idea of an eschatological, bodily resurrection in the thinking of early Christians might seem potentially unfruitful.

Walter Ameling has noted that the martyrs, and by extension, martyrologies, made a large contribution to the conceptions of the afterlife in early Christianity.[3] Indeed, among the writings that Christianity left us in the first two centuries of its existence, one text stands out as being particularly relevant and focused on the question of the afterlife: the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*. This is a text that has been called 'one of early Christianity's most extraordinary documents.'[4] The ecclesiastical historian and Tertullian scholar Jerónimo Leal expresses the view of many when he writes: *Constituye esta passio la obra maestra de la literature hagiográfica, por su patetismo y amplitud de miras, la obra más bella y original de toda la literatura Cristiana de los primeros siglos, el arquitipo de todas las demás obras de este género.*[5]

Therefore, for many reasons, the *Passion of Perpetua* has long fascinated scholars, and scholars in the fields of hagiography and comparative literature have written extensively on the text.[6] In reference to the enormous scholarly output concerning the interpretation of Perpetua's dreams, Leal writes that *[l]a interpretacíon de los sueños recogidos en la Passio Perpetuae ha hecho correr ríos de tinta.*[7]

When one surveys the history of scholarship on the *Passion of Perpetua*, it becomes apparent, as Erin Ann Ronsse ably demonstrates, that one of the key difficulties of dealing with this text is that it has been subjected to multiple layers of interpretative history, with 'classical Antiquity, the Middle Ages, modern interests, and contemporary scholarly concerns all represented.'[8] An illustration of this is evident in the fact that the text of the *Passion of Perpetua* still continues to appear in anthologies of writings of the Middle Ages.[9] As Ronsse aptly remarks, the Middle Ages 'are not quite so elastic' as to include the late second

[3] Walter Ameling, 'Das Jenseits der Märtyrer,' in *Topographie des Jenseits: Studien zur Geschichte des Todes in Kaiserzeit und Spätantike* (ed. Walter Ameling; Franz Steiner Verlag: Stuttagart, 2011), 81.

[4] Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador, 1978), 70.

[5] Jerónimo Leal, *Actas Latinas de Mártires Africanos*, Fuentes Patrísticas 22 (Madrid: Editorial Ciudad Nueva, 2009), 57.

[6] Emanuela Prinzivalli, 'Perpetua the Martyr,' in *Roman Women* (ed. A. Fraschetti; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 221.

[7] Jerónimo Leal, 'Nota Martyrologica: El Sueño de Dinócrates en la *Passio Perpetuae* y las Fuentes de la *Passio Fabii Vexilliferi*,' *Studia Patristica* XLV (ed. J. Baun, A. Cameron, M. Edwards, and M. Vinzent; Leuven; Paris; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2010), 349.

[8] Erin Ronsse, *Rhetoric of Martyrs: Transmission and Reception History of the Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* (Ph.D. diss., University of Victoria, Canada, 2008), 3.

[9] For example, Peter Dronke's *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), and Elizabeth Petroff's *Medieval Womens' Visionary Literature* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

century.[10] To characterise Perpetua's experience as 'medieval,' or even 'late antique' is to do it violence, and in the words of Brent Shaw, 'completely to ignore the normal meanings of historical periodization.'[11] This is one particular layer of interpretative history that obscures the original meaning of the text. Another is that since the Protestant Reformation, the text has also become a 'confessional football.' This is reflected in many of the ongoing debates about this text, as will be highlighted later in this work.

There is of course great value in understanding the reception and transmission of the text throughout history, and some of these insights will be important to this study. However, if the study of reception and subsequent interpretation wrenches the text from its historical, social, and literary contexts, then it also distances it from its original meaning. This present work will not focus primarily on the reception and meaning of the *Passion of Perpetua* throughout the history of its transmission, but rather on key aspects of its meaning in its original historical context.

Ronnse is correct in noting that in spite of the extensive scholarship on this text, there are still more 'legitimate interpretative possibilities' to be explored.[12] Although this unique text has in fact been studied from many different perspectives, it has still not been fully explored in terms of its most central and explicit theme: where do Christians, both martyrs and those who are not 'so fortunate,' go when they die?

At the same time, an attempt to study the text in its original setting allows the historian some fundamental insights into the nature of the Christian community in early third-century Carthage. This is especially the case when we read the *Passion of Perpetua* within the context of the much larger corpus of the works of Tertullian, who was Perpetua's contemporary. That we have these two 'texts' from the same period and the same place is a rather fortuitous outworking of the vagaries of historical preservation, and this present research takes the position that neither can be properly or fully understood without the other.

When read within the context of one other, *Perpetua* and Tertullian reveal a dynamic Christian community at Carthage: a community that found its roots in, and drew on a variety of ideological traditions from the Jewish, Christian, and Graeco-Roman contexts. Moreover, it was not a homogenous community in terms of its ideology; it was a community in the very process of transformation through polemical discourse. When, therefore, we consider the ideology of the afterlife presented in *Perpetua*, we are in effect exploring an example of funda-

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[10] Ronsse, *Rhetoric of Martyrs*, 3, referring to Dronke and others who include the *Passion of Perpetua* in anthologies of the writings of the saints of the Middle Ages.

[11] Brent D. Shaw, 'The Passion of Perpetua,' in *Studies in Ancient Greek and Roman Society* (ed. Robin Osborne; Cambridge, University of Cambridge, 2004), 297 n.41. Ronnse's dissertation, *Rhetoric of Martyrs*, focuses on the layer of interpretive history for this text that is provided by the medieval liturgical manuscripts.

[12] Ronsse, *Rhetoric of Martyrs*, 52.

mental ideological change within early Christianity. The importance of this to the general study of Christianity should not be underestimated.

A crucial aspect of the *Passion of Perpetua* is that it is the first datable Christian text that describes an immediate post-mortem ascent of the soul according to the Graeco-Roman *topos*. Although the general notion of ascent was of course an important theme from the very beginnings of Christianity, *Perpetua* is the first reasonably datable text that focuses specifically on the idea of the post-mortem ascent of the soul. It is evident that, within a generation of the appearance of *Perpetua,* this kind of personal eschatology largely won the day in North Africa over the concept of eschatological and bodily resurrection, and subsequently caught on throughout the other Christian communities.

This present work will firstly review previous and current scholarship on the *Passion of Perpetua*. This review will be somewhat detailed, since it provides the point of departure for the proposal of a new framework within which the text should be understood. The trajectories of the afterlife of the righteous demonstrated in early Christianity *up until* very early in the third century (i.e., the time of the writing of *Perpetua*) will then be broadly described. This will be extended to a consideration of the ideologies of the afterlife evident *after* the writing of *Perpetua*, which will allow the text to be situated in the broader context of the trajectories of the afterlife in early Christianity.

This work will then continue with an examination of the possible sources and influences for the complex intertextuality of the *Passion of Perpetua*. Following this, the discussion will move to a detailed consideration of the ideologies of the afterlife in the texts of the *Passion of Perpetua*, and in those of the contemporaneous Tertullian. An argument will then be made for the presence and role of traditional Graeco-Roman ideologies within the text of the *Passion of Perpetua* itself, and their modification within a Christian setting. This will lead to a consideration of the way in which the text of the *Passion of Perpetua* was used within the Christian communities of North Africa to build community and identity.

From there, this research will assay a more detailed examination of the *Passion of Perpetua* and the works of Tertullian. The object of this will be to explore what these texts, when read carefully and alongside each other, suggest to us about ideological conflict and change within the early Carthaginian Christian communities before the controversies that split the Carthaginian church under Cyprian in the middle of the third century.[13] This will allow some final observations about the fate of non-Christian dead in early Carthaginian Christianity, as well as the ways in which early Christianity sought material continuity in relation to notions of the body.

[13] See Cyprian, *On the Church: Selected Letters* (ed. Allen Brent; Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 17–29.

Chapter 2

Previous Scholarship on the *Passion of Perpetua*

A. Who Was Perpetua?

According to the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*,[1] in the year 203 A.D., during the reign of the emperor Septimus Severus, five Christian catechumens were arrested, tried and sentenced to death by the procurator Hilarianus. The five martyrs were joined in prison and in their fate by Saturus, who seems to have been their catechist,[2] and who had in fact handed himself in. After spending some time in prison, they were thrown to the beasts in the amphitheatre.

The *Passion of Perpetua* purports to have been substantially written by one of these martyrs, Vibia Perpetua, who wrote of her visions and dreams while in prison. Her account was seemingly augmented by a vision that Saturus had, and the whole text was completed by an unknown editor (or editors) who wrote an introduction, an account of the actual deaths of the martyrs, and a conclusion. The text itself is relatively short, consisting of less than six thousand words in English translation. However, its brevity is no indication of the scholarly and confessional debates that the text has engendered, or of the great significance of the text for the study of early Christianity.

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[1] Since this present research will focus principally on the visions of Perpetua and Saturus, the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* will subsequently be referred to as the *Passion of Perpetua*, or simply *Perpetua*. In a few instances, it will also be referred to as the *Passion*. This does not imply a minimisation of Felicitas' role in the broader study of the text. It is nevertheless true that Felicitas has not received much scholarly attention, a fact that Jan Bremmer's article 'Felicitas' ('Felicitas: The Martyrdom of a Young African Woman,' in *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 36–53) attempts to remedy.

[2] Carolyn Osiek ('Perpetua's Husband,' *JECS* 10 [2002]: 287–90) has intriguingly suggested that Saturus may have even been Perpetua's husband.

B. The Latin and Greek Texts of The *Passion of Perpetua*

The Latin text of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is structured as follows: sections I–II consist of a preface written by an editor, sections III–X consist of the account, purportedly written by Perpetua herself, of her time in prison and her visions, sections XI–XIII consist of an account of a vision purportedly written by Saturus, a fellow prisoner of Perpetua's, and finally, sections XIV–XXI consist of the account of the martyrdom itself, written by the editor.[3]

The Latin text of the *Passion of Perpetua* was discovered by Lucas Holstenius in 1661.[4] Then, in 1889, J. R. Harris found a shorter Greek manuscript in Jerusalem, which he subsequently published with Seth K. Gifford.[5] In 1891, J. Armitrage Robinson published an edition of the Greek and Latin texts, in which he offered strong linguistic evidence for the Latin being the earlier text, and the Greek being a translation and redaction.[6] One of Robinson's principal reasons for asserting the priority of the Latin recension was the stylistic variation between the various sections of the Latin text, compared with the uniformity of the Greek. He noted that in the Greek text, the stylistic differences between the various sections of the Latin text 'are entirely obliterated.'[7] Correspondingly, this would suggest that the Greek text is a translation of the Latin.

Although most scholars have followed Robinson in this view,[8] Bremmer has importantly argued that the Greek translation seems at times to be based on a better text than the existing Latin version,[9] and that it is possible that both the

[3] For a more detailed summary of the various sections of the *Passion of Perpetua*, see Ronsse, *Rhetoric of Martyrs*, 54, Table 1.

[4] Rex D. Butler, *The New Prophecy & "New Visions": Evidence of Montanism in The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 45.

[5] J. Rendel Harris, and Seth K. Gifford, eds., *The Acts of the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas: The Original Greek Text* (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1890).

[6] Butler, *New Prophecy*, 45, citing Joseph Armitage Robinson, ed. and trans., *The Passion of S. Perpetua* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891; reprinted Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004).

[7] Robinson, *S. Perpetua*, 46–7.

[8] See Ross Kraemer and S. Lander, 'Perpetua and Felicitas,' in *The Early Christian World* vol. 2 (ed. P. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 2000), 1051.

[9] Jan Bremmer, 'The Motivation of Martyrs: Perpetua and the Palestinians,' in *Religion im kulturellen Diskurs* (ed. B. Luchesi and K. von Stuckrad; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 535. In this regard, we may note that both Latin and Greek as well as indigenous Punic were spoken in Carthage at the beginning of the third century (Kraemer and Lander, 'Perpetua and Felicitas,' 1051). Latin and Greek were particularly the languages of the educated (Franz Joseph Dölger, 'Antike Parallelen zum leidenden Dinocrates in der Passio Perpetua,' in *Antike und Christentum* 1, Kultur und religiongeschichtliche Studien Band 2 [Aschen-

Latin and the Greek versions are based on an earlier, better text.[10] In this regard, Glen Bowersock's views should be noted. He cogently argues that Perpetua wrote in Greek, adducing that in parts of Perpetua's section of the text, the Greek 'is far more precise than the Latin, and in my opinion…serves as a guarantee that Perpetua did indeed write in Greek.'[11] Bowersock gives the examples of the Greek and Latin expression in *Perpetua* X.15, the use of the precise word φιλοτιμία in the Greek, and the variant naming of the amphitheatre, when the Latin has *munus* both times. E. R. Dodds had previously come to the same conclusion, on the basis that the Latin in Perpetua's diary 'is in several places less appropriate than the Greek, and looks as if it originated through misreading of (or corruption in) a Greek manuscript.'[12]

Walter Ameling's assertions that the Greek words Perpetua uses in the Latin text 'are almost certainly loan-words,' and that 'her own text does not attest any further knowledge of Greek'[13] do not address these arguments. Saturus reports that in in his vision Perpetua spoke in Greek to Optatus and Aspasius,[14] and we should also consider that Perpetua's brother, Dinocrates, bears a Greek name. These points suggest that Perpetua knew Greek in real life, and that this was a notable enough fact to be reflected in Saturus' vision. Obviously, in this same vision, some of the leaders of the church were also able to speak Greek. The presence of the reference to this discussion in Greek in Saturus' vision is difficult to explain otherwise.

Accordingly, the arguments for the priority of the Greek or the Latin text may all be somewhat misdirected. The text may be composite in terms of its original languages, with Perpetua's section originally in Greek, and the editors' sections in Latin. In addition to these issues, it is noteworthy that Bremmer also

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dorff: Verlag Aschendorff Münster, 1930], 16.) On North African Christian writings in Greek, see Jerónimo Leal, 'De Cartago a Cesarea: El Tertuliano Griego,' in *De Grecia a Roma y de Roma a Grecia: Un Camino de Ida y Vuelta* (ed. Á. Sánchez-Ostiz, J. B. Terres Guerra, and R. Martínez; Pamplona: Eunsa, 2007),' 347–59. Ultimately, Perpetua's Roman background should be given some weight in the question of the original language of the *Passion*.

[10] Bremmer, *Motivation*, 535–6.

[11] Glen W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34.

[12] Eric Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 50, n.1. Dodds provides several examples from the text.

[13] Walter Ameling, '*Femina Liberaliter Instituta*—Some Thoughts on a Martyr's Education,' in *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 88.

[14] *Perpetua*, XIII.4.

suggests that the two other abbreviated versions of the account of Perpetua, the *Acta Perpetuae*, commonly dated later than the Latin and Greek texts of the *Passion of Perpetua*,[15] may also contain authentic readings not preserved in the Latin text.[16]

The Latin text of the *Passion of Perpetua* itself has come down to us in nine manuscripts, which only differ from each other in small details.[17] The Greek text consists of a single manuscript.[18] Although Kraemer and Lander are correct in noting that it is difficult to reconstruct the history of the transmission of the text,[19] the relative integrity of the Latin affords some level of confidence. Various critical editions of the text of the *Passion of Perpetua* have been prepared by J. Armitage Robinson (1891), W. H. Shewring (1931), Cornelius van Beek (1936 and 1938), Herbert Musurillo (1972), and most recently, Jacqueline Amat (1996) and Heffernan (2012). Amat's edition has been relied upon for this present research; it is thorough and incorporates both the Latin and Greek texts.[20]

C. The *Passion of Perpetua* as a Popular Text

The early popularity of the *Passion of Perpetua* is a vital factor which must be considered in any discussion of the meaning of the text in its contemporary context. If *Perpetua* were merely the expression of a small sectarian or perhaps even semi-Gnostic form of Christianity, then its significance would have to be viewed differently. The early popularity of *Perpetua* also suggests that the text itself does indeed go back to the time and circumstances in which it claims to have been written.

Candida Moss has commented on how *Perpetua* was an 'extraordinarily popular account,' and how, as a result, it had a high level of influence on subse-

[15] Bremmer ('Felicitas,' 39) suggests a date shortly after AD 260 for the present form of the *Acta*.

[16] Jan Bremmer, Review of P. Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter oder Bilder des Bösen im frühen afrikanischen Christentum*, n. p. (cited 13 October 2010). Online: http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2006/2006-01-34.html. This is contra Shaw, 'Perpetua,' 3, n.2.

[17] Leal, *Actas Latinas*, 68.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Kraemer and Lander, 'Perpetua and Felicitas,' 1051.

[20] A detailed and helpful series of charts and lists of printed editions and translations can be found in Ronsse, *Rhetoric of Martyrs*, 19–31. Heffernan's edition was not primarily used here, although it is referenced, because it was only published towards the very end of this research.

quent *Acta*.[21] This relevance of this is that, as Bremmer comments, 'the *Acta* have the great advantage over the more apologetic works of the same period in that they allow us to observe…the ways the Christian faith was lived rather than conceived.'[22] Even more specifically, the enormous respect in which the *Passion of Perpetua* was held in North Africa strongly suggests that the text was 'widely acceptable as valuable representations of the life to come.'[23]

The rapid spread of the cult of Perpetua is materially demonstrated by the magnificent Sarcophagus of Briviesca made in Burgos, Spain.[24] This sarcophagus, dating from the first half of the fourth century, depicts the martyrdom of Perpetua on one of its faces. The earliest firm evidence for Perpetua's liturgical commemoration dates from the same time, and is provided by the liturgical Calendar of Rome in 354.[25] At the end of the fourth century, Augustine also provided evidence of Perpetua's commemoration in three of his sermons.[26] He refers to a text of *Perpetua* that was read in his basilica,[27] commemorating the *dies natales*[28] of Perpetua and Felicitas, which he emphasises as 'a celebration of… universal devotion.'[29] The respect and popularity of this text by the end of the fourth century may also be gauged by Augustine's warning the North Africans against giving the passion narrative the authority of Scripture itself.'[30]

Perpetua's victory in martyrdom was also tangibly perpetuated for centuries by her remains in the basilica, which formed 'the sacred space of the

[21] Candida Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 99. For example, Moss (ibid., 137) calls the later Carthaginian text of *The Martyrdom of Marian and James* 'Perpetua's literary offspring.' On the popularity of the veneration of the martyrs, see also Virginia Burrus, *Late Ancient Christianity* (vol. 2 of *A People's History of Christianity*; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 74.

[22] Jan Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London: Routledge, 2002), 57.

[23] Ibid., 58.

[24] José María Blázquez Martínez, 'Posible Origen Africano del Cristianismo Español,' *Archivo Español de Arqueologia* 40 (1967): 41–2. The sarcophagus is held in the Burgos Museum.

[25] Kraemer and Lander, 'Perpetua and Felicitas,' 1053. Canon 47 of the Council of Carthage allowed such non-canonical texts to be read.

[26] Augustine, *Serm.* 280−82.

[27] Augustine, *Serm.* 282.2.

[28] Ibid. That is, their 'birthdays,' being the anniversaries of the martyrdoms. Note that abbreviated citations for primary references are used throughout the footnotes. Full bibliographic details of critical editions of the primary sources used are shown in the bibliography.

[29] Augustine, *Serm*. 280.1 (for the translation, see vol. 8 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* [ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill; New York: New York City Press, 1994], 72).

[30] Ronsse, *Rhetoric of Martyrs*, 74, citing Augustine, *An. Orig,* 1.X.12.

memory.'[31] Furthermore, it is significant that the *Passion of Perpetua* was valued across a significant breadth of early Christianity.[32] The text itself appears to have been embraced from early times firstly by Carthaginian Christianity, and then across the broader Christian communities.

The *Passion of Perpetua* indeed seems to have been, from the start, a text that belonged, within Ramsay MacMullen's paradigm, to what he calls 'the Second Church'; in other words, to the majority popular Christianity rather than to the hierarchy and 'intelligentsia' of the church.[33] It is therefore entirely reasonable to conclude that the views and ideology of the afterlife expressed in the text are most likely consonant with those of the Christian communities in which the text was accepted. The *Passion of Perpetua* reflects a world-view that either was, or soon became, largely normative for a significant number of the Christian communities in Carthage and North Africa, and influential even in the East.[34]

D. Genre and Literary Features

Questions of genre in relation to the *Passion of Perpetua* are complex and vexed.[35] One of the many issues is that, as Finn notes, *Perpetua* 'appears to differ markedly from the genre of Christian biographies.'[36] *Perpetua* seems to belong to an earlier time, and hence to an earlier literary tradition. On the other hand, there are similarities between *Perpetua* and the 'genre' of the *Acta Martyrum*.[37] It is worth noting that Jan Bremmer has sounded an important caution regarding the usage of the genre of *Martyr Acts* as a modern construct, since the

[31] Joyce Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 176.

[32] Ibid., 158.

[33] Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200–400* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), xi–xii. This is a point that will be elaborated in Chapter 6.

[34] Kraemer and Lander, 'Perpetua and Felicitas,' 1063.

[35] See Sabine Van Den Eynde, 'A Testimony to the Non-Believers, A Blessing to the Believers,' in *More than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity* (ed. Johan Leemans; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 27.

[36] Thomas Finn, 'Mission and Expansion,' in vol. 1 of *The Early Christian World* (ed. Philip F. Esler; London: Routledge, 2002), 305.

[37] Keith Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods: The Strange Triumph of Christianity* (London: Free Press, 1999), 14–121; and Rick Altman, *A Theory of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 85.

term *Martyr Acts* imposes an artificial unity on a heterogenous group of texts.[38] Certainly, as Marco Formisano reminds us, although '*la scrittura assume un ruolo fondamentale nella* Passione' (*di Perpetua e Felicita*),[39] neither the so-called martyr acts nor the passions belonged to any such literary genre at the time of their composition.[40] The result of categorising them together and calling them a 'genre' is to risk dismissing them as valuable historical evidence in their own right.[41]

Perhaps Van Den Eynde characterises the *Passion of Perpetua* best, using the term 'genre' in its broadest sense, and representing the text as a 'mixed genre of autobiographical, biographical and introductory / concluding text.'[42] We can also certainly agree with Brent Shaw's remark that the *Passion of Perpetua* seems to belong to a very early stage in the production of narrative memoirs, which indeed were later used to reinterpret the meaning of martyrdom.[43] This raises the question that if *Perpetua* is indeed a 'literary prototype' for the genre of the *acta*, then how can we be certain that it does not belong to another previous 'genre,' or merely represent a transitional form? There are therefore significant difficulties in attempting to apply the concept of 'genre' to the *Passion of Perpetua*.[44]

Perhaps of more importance is the question of why these kinds of narratives were written at all. If we assume that the introduction to the *Passion of Perpetua* was written close to the time in which the visions themselves were recorded, perhaps the introduction itself holds some indications as to the reason for at least the writing of this particular text. Moriarty points out the emphasis in the introduction 'on the written word, *literae*, on reading, *lectio* (twice), or re-enactment, *repraesentatio*, and a final plea to read the stories, *legere*.'[45] Mori-

[38] Jan Bremmer, 'Perpetua and Her Diary: Authenticity, Family and Visions,' in *Märtyrer und Märtyrerakten*, Altertumswissenschaftliches Kolloquium 6 (ed. Walter Ameling; Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002), 78.

[39] Marco Formisano, ed., *La Passione di Perpetua e Felicita*. Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli: Clasici Greci e Latini (Milano: RCS Libri S.p.A., 2008), 22.

[40] Formisano, *Passione*, 22.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Van Den Eynde, 'Testimony,' 27.

[43] Shaw, 'Perpetua,' 296.

[44] Although Jan Bremmer ('Authenticity,' 80) considers that the notion of 'genre' is 'not entirely useless' in relation to the study of the *Passion of Perpetua*.

[45] Rachel Moriarty, 'The Claims of the Past: Attitudes to Antiquity in the Introduction to Passio Perpetuae,' *Studia Patristica* XXXI (ed. E. A. Livingstone; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 312–3. Jan Den Boeft ('The Editor's Prime Objective: *Haec in aedificationem ecclesiae legere*,' in *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* [ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 177) remarks that 'Bastiaensen and Amat, and others, are undoubtedly right in re-

arty validly asks whether the introduction is not only an argument about the value of the accounts, but also about their liturgical value in terms of 'regular formal liturgical readings.'[46] Based on the similar and related textual observations of Bremmer[47] and Amat,[48] the answer to Moriarty's question should be settled in the affirmative. The liturgical terminology of the introduction itself also suggests the early litugical use of the text, and a key reason for its composition and early transmission.

Frankfurter notes that the 'genre' of martyrology evolved from the Jewish apocalyptic texts, and that this process is particularly evident in the *Passion of Perpetua*.[49] The corollary is that even if this correct, then the intentional liturgical elements evident in this text should be seen as a Christian innovation that has no parallel in Judaism. Daniel Boyarin argues that the ideology of martyrdom developed together and symbiotically within both Christianity and Judaism.[50] Without denying that this may indeed be the case, the *Passion of Perpetua* illustrates how both traditions also developed they own unique morphologies.

E. The Authorial Authenticity of the Text

The editor of the *Passion of Perpetua* informs the readers that the text presents the visions of Saturus and Perpetua 'which they themselves have written' (*quas ipsi conscripserunt*).[51] Furthermore, the editor assures us that Perpetua's section

garding *lectio* as referring to the reading of texts during an official liturgy.'

[46] Moriarty, 'Claims,' 312–3. Moriarty comments here, in response to her own question, '[i]f so, the author of the introduction was strikingly successful.'

[47] Bremmer, 'Authenticity,' 80. With regard to this, Bremmer also cites Hans Urner's careful study of the liturgical elements that underly the use of liturgical terms in *Die außerbiblische Lesung im christlichen Gottesdienst: Ihre Vorgeschichte und Geschichte bis zur Zeit Augustins,* Veröffentlichungen der evangelischen Gesellschaft für Liturgieforschung 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1952), 25–42.

[48] Jacqueline Amat, *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité: Suivi des Actes* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1996), 191.

[49] David Frankfurter, 'The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories.' Pages 129–200 in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (Edited by James Vanderkam and William Adler; Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1996), 193.

[50] Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 125.

[51] *Perpetua*, XIV.1, tr. Tilley, 394; ed. Amat, 152–4.

of the text is as she left it, specifically stating that *ipsa narrauit, sicut conscriptum manu sua et suo sensu reliquit.*[52]

Cobb observes that most modern interpreters have tended to unconditionally accept these assertions.[53] The work of Robinson, together with that of Shewring in 1928, was instrumental in establishing the idea of Perpetua's authorship.[54] Significantly, based on his consideration of the prose rhythms, Shewring noted that the Latin rhythms in Perpetua's section of the text are markedly distinct from the redactor's. This, he argued, made it 'reasonably certain' that the different sections represent two different hands, and that Perpetua's section was not revised by the editor.[55]

However, some scholars have also seen in the *Passion of Perpetua* what Testard calls *toute une série de problèmes philologiques, traditionnels dans nos études*.[56] Doubts about the authenticity of the text as a diary were expressed by Benjamin Aubé in 1881,[57] and are not new. Aubé believed that a single author had fabricated the entire work in order to promote his Montanistic views, and was of the opinion that *[l]es Actes de Perpétue et de Félicité sont plus intéressants peut-être pour le psychologue que pour l'historien*.[58] More recently, Heffernan, in a philological study, suggested that rather than write the account herself, Perpetua transmitted it orally to an editor, who then composed the narrative.[59] Heffernan accordingly concludes that '[t]he character of Perpetua in the *Passio* is not the "authentic" person, but rather a self that has been deliberately constructed, and one in the process of being mediated by an editor and by the reader's own experience.'[60]

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[52] *Perpetua*, II.2. Note that Maureen Tilley (*The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity* in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice* [ed. Richard Valantasis, trans. M. Tilley; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000], 389) translates *suo sensu* as 'her own impressions,' while Herbert Musurillo ('The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas,' in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], 109) translates it as 'according to her own ideas.'

[53] Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, Gender, Theory, and Religion (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 95. For example, Shaw, 'Perpetua,' 306, and Prinzivalli, 'Perpetua the Martyr,' 119.

[54] See Butler, *New Prophecy*, 47.

[55] W. H. Shewring, 'Prose Rhythm in the Passio S. Perpetuae,' *JTS* 30 (1928): 57.

[56] Maurice Testard, 'La Passion des Saintes Perpétue et Félicité: Témiognages sur le Monde antique et le Christianisme,' *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* (1991): 59.

[57] Benjamin Aubé, *Les Chrétiens dans l'Empire Romain de la fin des Antonins au Milieu du III^e^ Siècle (180–249)*, Studia Historica 103 (Roma: "L'Erma" di Bretschnrider, 1972), 215–29.

[58] Ibid., 219.

[59] Thomas Heffernan, 'Philology and Authorship in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*,' *Traditio* 50 (1995): 324. Kraemer and Lander ('Perpetua and Felicitas,' 1054-5) suggest against authorship by Perpetua based on Heffernan's work.

[60] Heffernan, 'Philology,' 324.

However, due weight should be given to Butler's observation that neither Aubé nor Heffernan took the philological evidence presented by Robinson and Shewring, accepted by most scholars within the context of the authorial claims of the text itself, fully into account.[61] The 'stylistic variations' argument has indeed been the most persuasive in supporting the text's origins as being with its purported authors, Perpetua, Saturus, and an unknown redactor.[62] This is based on the reality that the text consists of at least three parts, with one of these parts being possibly written by Perpetua herself, and one by Saturus.[63] The stylistic differences between these three sections strongly suggest three different authors/editors.[64]

Further bolstering the authorial claims of the text, as Joyce Salisbury has observed, Perpetua's dreams have a 'dreamlike quality of compressed images and surprising associations.'[65] In other words, they bear the hallmarks of authentic dreams. Specifically, Rowland refers to 'the occurrence, in visionary literature of diverse origins, of the tendency of the visionary to mark a separation between his normal experience and his visionary life by speaking his visionary self as if it had happened to another person, what Lindblom calls *die Objektivierung des Ichs*.' Lindblom believes that this sense derives from the visionary experiences themselves.[66] In the canonical Scriptures, this seems evident, for example, in Isaiah 21:9. In the *Passion of Perpetua*, this seems to occur in III.2.

In reality, the text of the *Passion of Perpetua* does not specify whether the recorded visionary experiences occur in the form of dreams during sleep, or while awake. Ronsse cogently argues that the terms in the manuscripts of *Perpetua* most often translated as 'I awoke'[67] need not be limited to the notion of awaking from sleep, and can also be reasonably translated as 'I came to.'[68] She

[61] Butler, *New Prophecy*, 48.

[62] See Robinson, *S. Perpetua*, 46–7. See also Jean Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity* (trans. D. Smith and J. A. Baker), vol. 3 of *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 61, and Bremmer, 'Authenticity,' 82.

[63] Bremmer, 'Authenticity,' 82.

[64] Ibid., 82–4. See Robinson, *S. Perpetua*, 46.

[65] Salisbury, *Death and Memory*, 113.

[66] Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 243, citing Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 44.

[67] *experrecta, expergefacta sum, experta,* and *experta sum.*

[68] Ronsse, *Rhetoric of Martyrs*, 79.