

NARRATIVE TRADITIONING AND ALLUSIVE GESTURING:
PERPETUA RECONSIDERED

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ABSTRACT

The early Christian martyr narrative *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* has been widely debated for centuries. Substantial interpretative quandaries remain about the *Passio*'s unique account of events surrounding the martyrdom of a group of catechumens in Severan-era Roman North Africa. Predominant scholarly assessment views the *Passio* as the product of a redactor whose text frames the prison diary of the elite matron Perpetua. Purportedly composed prior to her martyrdom, her account is undeniably exceptional among ancient texts.

This thesis counters such views and argues instead that neglected aspects of its contextual dynamics warrant reinterpretation of the *Passio*. Firstly, ramifications of Perpetua's identity – elite, abundantly educated, and a catechumen – can inform an alternative reading strategy. Perpetua's account can be viewed as a sophisticated narrative which displays awareness of the potency of, and strategies for, commemoration in both secular and Christian contexts. Her authorial act is demonstrably in symbiotic relationship with, not subsumed by, the narrative that introduces and concludes the text. Secondly, the *Passio* arguably is situated within pre-existing commemorative traditions. The *Passio*'s literary portrayal of events cultivates legitimacy with the aim to be received into these traditions, and its authors utilize rhetorical mnemo-techniques for this purpose. For this reason, the theoretical insights of social memory provide valuable tools for interpreting and classifying the text. This study contends that the *Passio* account, particularly the narrative section attributed to Perpetua, is more complex than has previously been recognized and, for that reason, merits significant reappraisal.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND THE TEXT

*Roman writing, to be sure, is an aid to signification.*¹
Thomas Habineck

*The texts that remain for us to interpret from the early Christian world are overwhelmingly rhetorical in their character, and they require approaches that treat them in their textuality.*²
Elizabeth Castelli

*If the ancient examples of faith that testify to God's grace and achieve the people's edification were made known in writing so that in their being read God would be honored and the people strengthened, should not new documentations be set forth also to serve both ends?*³
Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis, prologue, 1.1

1.1 Overview

Early Christian martyr accounts such as the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* deftly collapse many normative boundaries, perhaps none more so than time itself. Even as they guide their audiences to gaze on a landscape of an interpreted past and its martyr *exempla* of faithfulness, these commemorative works nurture present identities and future memories. While such accounts vary in provenance and content, they are like scenes in a kaleidoscope and are inextricable from larger settings: the dynamic configurations of social identities, traditions, texts, and practices within which they arise, affect, and then assist to maintain. In this way, martyr works cultivate a colorful interplay. The commemorated past and the commemorating present are positioned to extend, via various practices, into the future. For this very reason, these ancient narratives have increasingly entered into contemporary discourse on the processes and practices of memory. According to Elizabeth Castelli, whose work appropriates social memory theories to a variety of early Christian texts, “collective memory provides the critical interpretive framework” for the genre of martyr accounts.⁴ One ramification

¹ Habineck, “Situating Literacy”, 136.

² Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 26.

³ Unless otherwise indicated, translations in this study are my own.

⁴ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 9.

of such an approach is the recognition that these works were inherently invested with purposes both corporate and commemorative. They shaped the past into “a history with contemporaneous meaning”, made available within corporate frames of reference.⁵ Conversely, then, interpretation of early martyr accounts relies upon careful exploration of various memorializing techniques and frames of reference within contextual social realities. I contend that contemporary exegetical analysis of the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* in particular can benefit immensely from such an approach.

The *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (hereafter simply called the *Passio*) takes place in Roman North Africa at the dawn of the third century CE and features a fascinating narrative comprising of three distinct authorial voices. The first voice provides an introduction and conclusion for the account and depicts the events prior to and during the martyrdom event itself. This anonymous author, long classified as the redactor, blatantly declares the entire martyrdom account to be an edificatory demonstration of God’s favour and an *exemplum* for the *ecclesia* – one that extends and results from the pre-mortem commission of its main character and second narrator, a wealthy female catechumen by the name of Vibia Perpetua.

Even as studies of the *Passio* have burgeoned in recent years, as the review of literature in Chapter 2 of this study will display, several significant aspects of the work remain neglected. Firstly, questions and implications with regard to genre are in need of further examination. Although the *Passio* is overtly established within a pre-existing literary tradition of martyr accounts, ramifications of this explicit task for the whole of the narrative have not yet influenced interpretative investigation. Furthermore, aspects of the *Passio*’s efforts to craft a commemorative text that joins corporate tradition have not sufficiently been attended. The text displays various

⁵ DeConick, “Reading”, 207.

aspects of mnemo-technique, or methods for setting forth compelling perceptions of the past within a given community,⁶ that contribute to this aim but have yet to be explored as a part of the account's unified literary genre. If collective memory "animates the historiographical and hermeneutical activity" of the authors of martyr accounts, as Castelli has contended, then these authors ought to be viewed as shaping this memory "both narratively and rhetorically, using available concepts, practices, tropes" in their narrations.⁷ While it seems obvious that these "concepts, practices, [and] tropes" were drawn from the various texts and contexts of Christian communities existing within Greco-Roman culture, these contemporary frameworks as reflected within the *Passio* are in need of further consideration. It is to this multifaceted task that my study attends.

This thesis confronts typical views of Perpetua's narrative act and the redactor's function in this endeavour. I propose an alternative classification of genre for the *Passio* and seek to develop an interpretive strategy in light of this genre. I particularly examine the Perpetua of the *Passio* and conduct an exegetical engagement with her peculiar account within the text. A question may here arise: why juxtapose a reassessment of genre with an emphasis on the text of Perpetua, when she has most certainly not been ignored by the lengthy reception history of the *Passio*? I am convinced that her account has been misclassified and largely misconstrued in a variety of ways, and I suspect that this has had ramifications for readings of the text as a whole. As shall be demonstrated and further explored in this study's survey of scholarly literature, reasons for these false conceptions include assumptions about her first-person narrative style and dramatic language, the inclusion of peculiar visionary scenes, Perpetua's status as a catechumen in the Christian community, and also her

⁶ See Schwartz, "Christian Origins", 48-56; Kelber, "The Works", 221-248; Chapter 2 (section 2.2.1) of this study addresses this topic in more detail.

⁷ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 136-137.

gender. In every case, commemorative aims and cognizant motives for the *Passio* have been associated with the two other authorial voices of the *Passio* – that of the presumably male redactor (1.1-2.3, 11.1, 14.1-21.11) and that of Saturus, a man also within the martyr company⁸ (11.2-13.8) – but remain disconnected from Perpetua.

In fact, Perpetua's literary and theological naïveté has been assumed almost unanimously as *the* paradigmatic attribute of her narrative. This has been rendered as her endearing or even authentic quality. Rather surprising notions of idealised authorial innocence are replete: in nearly all studies, Perpetua's work is described as a “diurnal account”,⁹ a “memoir”,¹⁰ and a “simple and bare record of a human experience” marked by “simplicity and directness ...a piece of reportage stripped of the illusory rhetorical qualities of other martyr *acta*”.¹¹ Gendered postulations in regards to her account abound: “her concern is chiefly with domestic matters – the care of her child, her health, her father's distress, and the nature of the food one will receive in paradise”.¹² Perpetua's narrative and visionary accounts are frequently contrasted with the deliberately constructed, allusive, and generally “more literary” work of the other two authors of the *Passio*.¹³ Her account is assumed to be less ecumenically positioned and instead to display oneiric, subconscious confusion of shallow Biblical reminiscence and vestiges from her pagan past. A handful of scholars further connect Perpetua and the content of her visions with an “ecstatic female prophetic ministry” of a Montanist movement that was conceivably present in

⁸ For more on the identity of Saturus, see Chapter 3 (p. 99) of this study.

⁹ See especially Heffernan, *Passion*; 82; Bremmer and Formisano, “Introduction”, 5; Salisbury, *Perpetua*, 98, 130; Amat, *Passion*, 28-29; Dronke, *Women Writers*, 6; Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 85; Auerbach, *Literary*, 63.

¹⁰ Moss, *Ancient*, 132; Cooper, “A Father”, 685.

¹¹ Shaw, “Passion”, 302.

¹² Heffernan, *Passion*, 82. This view shall be more extensively critiqued in the following chapters of this study.

¹³ Heffernan, *Passion*, 82; cf. similar presentations in Judith Perkins, “Space, Place, Voice”, 129; Amat, “L'Authenticité”, 190, and even Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 85-92, among others.

some Christian circles of Carthage.¹⁴ There seems to be a consensus that emerges from the many commentaries on the *Passio*: Perpetua's work, as the product of a female, is viewed as extraordinary and fascinating, but also as less complex, as unengaged in rhetorical and literary devices, as generally more naïve, introspective, and even frenzied.¹⁵ It is ultimately seen as a textual victim co-opted by the redactor for his audience.

This study proposes a re-examination of suppositions about Perpetua and her authorial work. In a significant departure from typical readings, I argue in this thesis that the situation within the *Passio* is *not* that the redactor coerces Perpetua's diary and dreams. Rather, I suggest, it remains to be considered whether it was Perpetua, a wealthy and educated woman largely established in the Christian circles of Carthage, who prompted and even commissioned the redactor to complete the commemorative narrative in which she plays the main role. Her work thus may be classified as an act of self-writing, arguably quite cognizant of its dually potent circumstances. First, it is a martyr account within an already-existing textual and liturgical tradition which values martyrs and their deeds and, secondly, as the public memorial to a benefactress. As an act of legacy-inscribing – an exploit, it shall be emphasized, not uncommon among the Roman elite – this work may then be seen as partially completed by Perpetua and then commissioned to others within this circle, who collaborate with additional narrative and provide a depiction of martyrdom events. In doing so, they assist in ensuring the memorialization of the account. Written in a novelistic style aiming at signification, her text ought to be viewed as presenting a critically mediated narrative, including visionary scenes, depicting the time between her initial arrest and

¹⁴ Quotation from Heffernan, *Perpetua*, 42, 29; see useful summary in Marksches, "The *Passio*", 277-290, and discussion in Chapter 3 (section 3.5, p. 88-95) of this study.

¹⁵ For examples, see Habermehl, *Perpetua*, 87; Heffernan, *Passion*, 82; Amat, *Passion*, 28-29; Dronke, *Women Writers*, 6; Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 85-92; Auerbach, *Literary Language*, 63; Butler, *New Prophecy*, 1, 58-96.

her martyrdom. Since it is largely perceived as a diary, this narrative has never been viewed as on a comparable literary level to other works – Hermas’ paraenetic allegory, for example, or Cyprian’s self-styled corpus.¹⁶ Yet it is my contention that her text operates on equally rhetorical, informed, and intentional grounds. This extraordinarily textured literary act occurs through, and attempts to join, commemorative memory as she allies her presented ‘self’ (her story) with texts, teachings, and genres already established in local traditions. Thus, Perpetua’s work ought to be viewed as allusively situating itself among other *exempla*, a strategy common in its context but not explored as a significant factor within this account nor as a motivating factor for Perpetua’s authorial act. Her audience is not merely presented with an *exemplum* by the redactor: Perpetua the *exemplum* has rhetorically fashioned herself *as* an *exemplum* within her depiction of the unfolding events.

To appreciate the dimensions of this authorial act, the concomitant dynamics of authority, literary rhetorical device, textual transmission, and mnemo-techniques will be essential for this investigation. After all, narrative memory-making would have little motivation or meaning if such literary genres did not already exist to some extent within the contemporary Christian community. These authorities had to have been engaged with and, to various degrees, already echoed in, her Christian circle for her narrative to be successful in orienting a relationship with other authoritative texts¹⁷ Just as implicit juxtaposition with other works served to inform her text’s meaning and bolster its authority, reversely, I argue in this study, these works serve as a crucial interpretive key to her otherwise peculiar locutions. This study demonstrates that hitherto, scholarship has not adequately engaged with the presence of literary models

¹⁶ Amat calls the visions of Perpetua personal “images of hope in a dramatic situation”, and *contrasts* this to Hermas, which, she explains, is an allegory written to the Church, a fiction made of literary convention. See Amat, *Passion*, 50.

¹⁷ Averil Cameron, among others, has argued that imagery offered the most effective conduit for theological meaning in early Christian culture, because images constructed relationships between the viewer and the viewed. I apply this concept to narrative imagery. See Cameron, *Christianity*, 150-151.

and the rhetorical intention augmenting her descriptive accomplishment. Exegetical efforts have heretofore remained limited as a result. However, when read as a work of allusive gesturing and as an endeavour in the creation of a commemorative narrative, Perpetua's text calls for re-examination.

A purview of the *Passio*'s content and an engagement with pertinent textual issues are first in order; these tasks will occupy the latter portion of the present chapter. Chapter 2 will then turn to a review of scholarly interpretation and will emphasize critical questions still remaining as the *Passio*'s genre. As both problematic difficulties and a fascinating array of insights from various analyses emerge, I elucidate my own contentions regarding the genre of the undeniably unique *Passio* narrative. This assessment will be accompanied by an explication of my methodology in reaching such conclusions. Chapter 3 addresses the secular and ecclesiastical contexts of the *Passio*, specifically those contexts that are consequential for Perpetua. The setting of Christianity in Carthage will be examined, and the substantial difficulties surrounding the conjecture of proto-Montanist tendencies in the account will be highlighted. Most significantly, Perpetua's multifaceted social identities will be shown to be interrelated to, and of tantamount significance for, the interpretation of the *Passio* text. A foundational component in this re-appraisal is an adjectival triptych within the *Passio*'s brief introductory pericope on the martyr company: Vibia Perpetua is a *catechumena*, *honeste nata*, and *liberaliter instituta* (2.1). Not only is her account inseparable from these complex identities; these identities must also be viewed in light of one another.

It is the first identity, that of catechumen, that I suggest has been the most severely underestimated and misrepresented within analyses of Perpetua's narrative. The undertakings that Perpetua plausibly experienced as a catechumen receive an occasional imprecise nod, frequently via negation and a related assumption that

Perpetua had only *recently* “converted” or joined herself to the Christian community. Commentators indicate that since Perpetua “probably had very little formal teaching” in Christianity, an interpretation of her visions “need not look for elaborate theology”.¹⁸ A synopsis of scholarship on catechetical processes in the mid-to-late second century CE is clearly in order in relation to the *Passio*, and this is undertaken in Chapter 2. As shall be seen, the catechumenate was a lengthy and imperative process. Notably, contemporary authors, including Tertullian, indicate that ‘catechumen’ does not imply ‘newcomer’ at all. It denotes participation and advancement within a substantial and varied Christian education in both text and praxis. Indeed, evidence in Perpetua’s account for what was arguably an advanced and lengthy exposure to Christian texts, teachings, and practices will be brought to bear in Chapters 4-5.

Engagement with the catechumenate must take into account Perpetua’s elite social status and notable prior education. Although Perpetua is explicitly designated as well educated within the text, the abilities she would have acquired in a contemporary education have been expressly investigated by few scholars.¹⁹ Her education is typically only mentioned with broad general terms as part of her social background, if it is invoked at all, and I suspect that exegetical analysis of Perpetua’s account remains limited as a result. Within the contextual landscape set forth in Chapter 3, I highlight that the children of the elite of this era, including the girls, were

¹⁸ This is mirrored in all studies, from myriad approaches of *Quellenkritik*, that I have encountered concerning the *Passio*. Quotation from Robeck, *Prophecy*, 55; cf. Ameling, “*Femina*”, 100, which calls Christians “her new group”; “a recent catechumen”, in Sebesta, “*Vibia Perpetua*”, 103; her “new faith”, in Kitzler, “*Passio*”, 9. The one near-exception is Heffernan’s recent fleeting remark, “her memory of Scriptural passages suggests a serious study of the Bible as a catechumen, over some time, possibly years”, 151. This is the entire extent of his comment, and he moves on to another topic at that point.

¹⁹ In most studies, secular education is mentioned generally as a *background* for Perpetua’s context, though not extensively developed *specifically concerning* the character of, or nuances in, the account itself, e.g., Heffernan, *Passion*, 150-151; Salisbury, *Perpetua’s Passion*, 32-54; McKechnie, “*St. Perpetua*”, 279-291, does explore the possible depths of Perpetua’s education to a certain extent and implies that there would be implications for the *Passio*; cf. however Ameling’s critique, “*Femina*”, 78-102.

assumed to be educated, yet the *Passio* redactor chooses to indicate rather redundantly that this was so for Perpetua. Her account is not a Ciceronian treatise – as Auerbach infamously noted²⁰ – but does this insinuate an absence of education or a lack of engagement with its acquired skills? Might it not rather suggest the use of a different technique for a distinct purpose and intended audience, as well as a reliance upon other popular literary models? Increasingly, studies have revised interpretation of literary style for works in antiquity. Critical assessment of Sulpicia’s small corpus of elegiac poems, for example, has shifted tides entirely; poems that were viewed as “amateur” are now seen as sophisticated and embellished with generic techniques, neologisms, and complex rhetorical play.²¹ Scholarship in regards to Greek novels has shifted in quite similar fashion. Thus this study both calls for, and seeks to demonstrate, a reassessment of the socio-historical implications of an elite education in the late-second century Roman West. These findings are then corroborated with the aid of the exegetical analyses included in the following chapters, as specific elements in Perpetua’s narrative are argued to exhibit an advanced education in literary and rhetorical technique.

A final related contextual aspect of Perpetua’s identity that significantly informs her work in the *Passio* is her social status, *honeste nata*. This term, I aver, intimates her multifaceted socioeconomic position not merely in society but also in the local *ecclesia*. This might seem somewhat unremarkable – for in the public realm as well as private associations, wealth vested Roman women with significant authority due to benefactory relationships and roles – were it not so utterly neglected in *Passio* studies. The parameters and implications of benefaction for elite women during the

²⁰ Perpetua’s “language in general is brittle, quite unliterary, naïve, almost childlike” in its “unadorned realism”, according to Auerbach, 61-65. For more on his generic assessments, see Chapter 2 (p. 33) of this study.

²¹ See Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 154-160 and notes for extended documentation and examples.

late second and early third centuries will be summarised in Chapter 3, and the foundation will be laid for my argument that Perpetua repeatedly displays a *potentia* based on an elite standing and the mores of *beneficia*.²² Since the early second century, it was the wealthy converts who tended to be enrolled in the various tasks of ecclesiastical leadership, and I submit that an interesting corollary aspect of this reality is elite *female* converts. The most detailed picture of an affluent and educated female convert prior to the fourth century comes from the *Passio*'s Perpetua, but various assumptions have stunted this exploration. It is for this reason that the work in Chapter 3 serves as an essential thread in the consequent portions of my study; the remaining chapters employ these proposed interpretive paradigms in successive commentary on various selections of the *Passio*.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus sequentially on the entire portion of the text attributed to Perpetua. Her seemingly bizarre or selective chronicling, and the visionary content interspersed within this narrative, is interpreted as a rhetorical presentation. It is demonstrated that even seemingly mundane or peculiar details bear meaning and unified purpose. Chapter 6 addresses narrative from the other two authorial voices of the *Passio* that specifically portrays Perpetua, including the visionary account of Saturus and the redactor's depiction of the ludic events. Both narratives are shown to support my emphasis on the ramifications of Perpetua's elite identity. Furthermore, on a wider scale, both accounts substantiate my proposed classification for the genre of the entire *Passio* work as a commemorative narrative aimed at the ecclesial community, rather than common generic interpretations that view the redactor's work

²² see, e.g., Cohick, *Women*, 285-320, and Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Memory*, 288; over a century ago, Hatch (*Organization*), proposed that the organization of Greco-Roman social and political clubs served increasingly as a model for house churches and that both relied heavily on patrons of both genders. See also the fascinating contentions of Rebillard (*Christians*), which posits that individuals had a complex and even fluid sense of their religious and social allegiances.

as a victimizing appropriation of a personal diary or as a polemical championship of “Montanist heretical propaganda”.²³

Ultimately, then, just as the portions ascribed to Perpetua were shaped *by* catechesis and liberal education *for the* creation of collective memory, it seems that Perpetua’s text indicates anticipation not only of her audience but also of her redactor. She expects that this narrator will write within a generic tradition, that of commemoration which highlights the heroic nature of martyrs and the divine realities of their victories. The redactor carries out a memory-making narrative, one replete with liturgical invocation, to collaborate with her text and carry out its purposes. It ought to be emphasized that her text indicates that its purposes will be *completed*, rather than *created*, by another’s depiction of the spectacle to come. All of these elements will culminate to indicate that Perpetua uses text as “an aid to signification”, in that her work rhetorically gestures to authorities both past and present as a means of placing her narrative among them.²⁴ If “the texts that remain for us to interpret from the early Christian world are overwhelmingly rhetorical in their character”, and if these works thus “require approaches that treat them in their textuality”,²⁵ then the *entire* text of the *Passio* must be engaged in this manner – not merely the texts presumably authored by males.

The final chapter reviews the central arguments of this study and reflects further on the insights that my reading of the remarkable *Passio* text endeavours to offer. Indeed, my proposals bear implications for numerous scholarly dialogues underway. It was the anticipation of Carolyn Osiek that “new research on educational possibilities for girls in the empire can help us bring this severely underrepresented constituency of early church groups back to life and also strengthen the case for

²³ A notably extreme classification in Steinhäuser, “Augustine’s Reading”, 248.

²⁴ Quotation in chapter heading and footnote 1, above.

²⁵ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 26.

viewing females as intellectual contributors in their own right to early Christianity”.²⁶ This study, I think, significantly bolsters such a case. Furthermore, as the application of social memory in early Christianity continues to develop, I assert that the *Passio* can be seen as a viable text for further exploration, particularly in terms of commemorative narrative and mnemo-technique. Lastly, I hope to demonstrate that the *Passio* is worthy of careful consideration with regard to the dynamics of textuality in the early Christian era. The *Passio* is a work that has much to offer in various fields – far more than can be examined in this study alone – and will, I anticipate, have a significant place in future investigations. There is still more to the Perpetua of the *Passio* than has yet been conceded.

1.2 A Purview of the Text: Critical Editions

This study makes use of the critical editions of the Latin text of the *Passio* produced by C.J.M.J. van Beek and Thomas Heffernan.²⁷ Since its publication over half a century ago, the comprehensive transcription of van Beek has made it the authoritative Latin text among scholars. Recently, the nine extant Latin manuscripts of the *Passio* – parchment folia dating from the ninth to twelfth centuries which are located in medieval liturgical and hagiographical compendia – underwent careful re-examination and documentation by Thomas Heffernan, resulting in a new critical edition.²⁸ While his readings do not differ extraordinarily from those of van Beek, his extensive apparatus and utilitarian revision of MS sigils with a mnemonic system, along with a lemma that indicates differences in editorial decisions where the texts are unclear, has earned positive reviews and is widely seen as a long-needed contribution to *Passio*

²⁶ Osiek, et al., *A Woman's Place*, 249.

²⁷ Van Beek, *Passio*, 1-62.

²⁸ For the Latin text, see Heffernan, *Passion*, 100-135, and for detailed information about each manuscript, see 367-430.

studies. Although my thesis was already in progress when Heffernan's work was published, I have extensively consulted his edition of the Latin text. Other critical editions of the *Passio* include Lucas Holste's 17th century *editio princeps* and, with the later discovery of two additional manuscripts, the work of J.A. Robinson, which was long superseded as additional volumes surfaced, notably that of van Beek and Jacqueline Amat's edition and commentary for Sources Chrétiennes.²⁹ A standard numerical division for sections is consistent in all critical editions and is employed in this study for ease of reference. Throughout this study, I provide my own English translations.

1.3 A Purview of the Text: Synopsis

The *Passio* text itself can be broadly divided into twenty-one sections arranged in four segments according to narrative voice. The introduction (1.1-2.3), authored by an unnamed redactor who speaks in the first person plural, addresses a Christian audience as 'brothers and children'. In sermonically exhortatory tenor, the redactor establishes that the account attests the action of the Spirit. He (or she³⁰) insists that the martyrdom must be placed in memory, since it serves to further the glory of God, comforts those living in the present, and functions as an example for future generations. The redactor indicates that some among his audience apparently witnessed the events, while some now are learning the story "through hearing". Either way, the audience is assured that the narrative is a *beneficium* of God and that, in remembering and hearing, they may commune with Christ. The section culminates in liturgical flourishes and transitions to the narrative itself.

²⁹ Holste, "*Passio Sanctarum*", 1-37; Robinson, *Passion*, 60-94; Amat, *Passion*, 98-182; Musurillo's edition of the *Passio* in his compendium relies upon van Beek's text and does not include a critical apparatus see *Acts*, 107-131.

³⁰ The redactor remains anonymous. Though the redactor may have been female, current scholarly consensus uniformly employs "he". For sake of brevity, this study will employ the pronoun "he" for the redactor, with the understood caveat that the redactor's identity is unknown.

Apprehensi sunt adolescentes catechumeni, the next section begins. This is succinctly followed with a listing of the cadre of martyrs-to-be: fellow slaves Revocatus and Felicitas, as well as Saturninus and Secundulus. He then distinguishes a final member of the group, Vibia Perpetua; she is described as high-born (and is, in fact, the only one mentioned with a familial *nomen*) and as a well-educated matron with an infant son. It is she who writes from this point, the redactor asserts, according to her narration and her own hand. Her portion then spans from section 3.1 to 10.5 of the *Passio* and renders a version of events from the initial apprehension of the group until the day preceding their martyrdom.

A peculiar and selective narrative swiftly occurs within the course of Perpetua's account. It includes succinct descriptions of the initial apprehension, baptism, and various prison experiences of the martyr group. Also portrayed are four interactions with her inimical father, brief conversations with a fellow-prisoner and provision-bearing visitors from the Christian community, and an interrogatory trial scene at which she re-asserts her Christian identity and is duly condemned. Interspersed between these events, Perpetua describes four visions that she experienced. The first vision (4.3-4.9) transpires after a prayer requesting that she might know whether the martyr company will be condemned. In this vision, she climbs a ladder covered in weapons and guarded by a dragon; she ascends, carefully avoiding being mangled by the former and trampling the head of the latter. She finds herself in a large garden with a white-haired shepherd who offers her cheese, which she consumes and awakes at its sweet taste. She then interprets the vision as confirmation of the group's imminent martyrdom. The following two visions occur after the group's trial and determination of sentence; both concern her deceased young brother, Dinocrates. The first (7.4-7.8) features him as suffering in stifling darkness, thirsty but unable to reach a vat of water above him. This scene moves Perpetua to

pray for his relief, and the consequent vision (8.1-8.4) portrays Dinocrates as relieved and satisfied with accessible flowing water. Perpetua's last vision (10.1-10.13) occurs the day prior to the games. In it she is led by a deacon into an arena, transforms into a wrestler, and contends with an Egyptian. She defeats him with kicks of her feet, is awarded a fruit-laden branch of victory, and ends the vision upon exiting through the *Porta Sanavivaria*. Perpetua's narrative then draws to a close with a series of confident declarations: she knows that she will be victorious over the devil in the next day's combat, which will take place in an event someone else is to describe.

The redactor enters the text again only briefly to introduce the next section (11.1-13.7), which, rather than a narrative depiction of the expected ludic event, contains a long visionary scene experienced by Saturus, a Christian instructor who apparently submitted himself to arrest after the apprehension of the catechumens. His vision singularly cultivates an overt narrative in which he and Perpetua, already martyred, rise into a Paradisal garden where they are welcomed by angels and four previous martyrs. They are subsequently ushered into a throne room in which is a white-haired figure and trisagion-chanting angels. The figure bestows a kiss of blessing and instructs them to depart to the garden; here they find a bishop and a presbyter waiting outside the gates of entry. The two implore the surprised martyrs to resolve a disagreement between them. It is Perpetua who takes them aside to converse with them, but an angel ushers the two men away, explicitly directing the bishop to scold his people for their divisions. The vision-account then concludes rather abruptly with Saturus' declaration of contentment in his new surroundings.

The remainder of the *Passio* (14.1-21.11) returns to the authorial voice of the redactor, who explicitly indicates that he will provide even further demonstration that the confessors experienced the favor of God. One in the company dies while still in prison, and the redactor is careful to indicate that his early death did not indicate a

lack of divine grace. Felicitas gives birth in prison a month early as a result of the supplicatory prayers of her fellow confessors, and her child is given to a “sister” from their Christian community. The redactor also indicates that following the trial, Perpetua convinces a guard to allow the group to move again to a more comfortable area in the prison that allows visitors. On the day of the games, the confessors and unfolding events are depicted with overtly assertive editorial gloss and repeated imitation of Scriptural models drawn primarily from the Pauline epistles and the Book of Acts. When spectators see the prisoners, for example, “many began to believe”, and the martyrs sing as they enter the amphitheatre. The group trembles not with fear – the redactor insists - but with joy, and the tortures are declared to be the very type desired, predicted, or deserved by each martyr. Perpetua, Felicitas, and Saturus endure injuries in these macabre events yet victoriously earn the executioner’s sword. In the interval between the tortures and the soldier’s blade, Perpetua gathers a group of catechumens and exhorts them to faithfulness with three phrases (20.10), each strikingly resonant of New Testament passages (“stand firm in the faith”, 1 Corinthians 16.13; “love one another”, John 13.34; and “do not be weakened”, John 16.1). On the executioner’s platform, the sword is guided to her throat by her own hand. Her death is the last among the group and serves as the culmination of the passion account. The editor concludes the narrative with exhortatory liturgical flourish (11). He invokes his subjects as both courageous and blessed, then brings them into a relationship with his audience through a reprisal of his admonition that the *ecclesia* ought to recount their courageous deeds as a contribution to the building of the church and also as testimony to the working of God. The conclusion is a liturgically intonated flourish of an invocation of the eternal splendor and boundless power of God, finalized with *amen*.

1.4 Provenance

The *Passio*'s chronological and authorial provenance also deserves comment in this thesis. The event seems to have occurred on the *nonas* of March in 203 CE, a date determined by both narrative details and later evidence. Within the text, the name of the procurator Hilarianus, the indication of his recent ascent to power, and the stated occasion of the games, *natale Getae Caesaris*, provide useful chronological detail.³¹ Additional external confirmation of this specific date for the event can be found in the *Depositio Martyrum* of the Chronograph of 354, in the Syriac Martyrology of 411, and in a fourth or early fifth century inscription in the ruins of Carthage.³² The account seems to have been produced rather promptly after the event it portrays. The redactor refers to those among his audience who witnessed the event (1.6). The explicit reference to Geta as Caesar is significant, as he was made Augustus in 209.³³ Furthermore, his name and image were industriously eliminated from public memory after his demise and *damnatio* in late 211.³⁴ This assists in providing a general *terminus ad quem* for the text. Furthermore, Tertullian soon assumes that his audience is familiar with the account: in *De Anima* 55.4, composed in all likelihood between

³¹ P. Aelius Hilarianus indeed served as procurator of Carthage at this time. See also Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 46, and Rebillard, 202. Heffernan, *Passion*, 225-226, offers an intricate chronological postulation based on the dates of the Severan family's wintering in North Africa (autumn of 202 to summer of 203, with inscriptions hinting at a visit to the area of Carthage in spring of 203), the birthday of Geta (7 March) and the celebration of not only his birthday but possibly his assumption of the *toga virilis* – a perfect collision of events that Heffernan suggests indicates the significance of the games depicted in the *Passio*.

³² For the Chronograph of 354, see Salzman, *Roman Time*, 45-47, and Mommsen, ed., *The Chronographer*, IX.71. The Syriac martyrology is based on a Greek original from at least 50 years prior; see Aigrain, *L'Hagiographie*, 23-24, and Wright, "Syriac Martyrology", 45-46. The marble inscription is on an excavated building now called the *Basilica Maiorum* and bears a dedication to the martyr group. Whether a burial-marker (as Shaw believes, "Passion", 42) or merely a later memorial, the plaque is significant in that each martyr is explicitly named. For image and further information, see Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions*, 106-110, plate 34.14, and Clover, "Carthage", 9. Lastly, the date of 203 would also match with a rescript possibly issued by Severus against Christians mid-202: see also Birley, *Septimius*, 154, Barnes, "Legislation", 32-50, and Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 6.1.

³³ See discussion in Heffernan, *Passion*, 77.

³⁴ See Barnes, *Tertullian*, 263-265.

207-211 CE, he refers to the contents of one of Perpetua's visions to buttress a theological contention about the afterlife.³⁵

Perpetua and company appear on the martyrological radar in the official calendar of the church in Rome as soon as the 4th century.³⁶ Other works produced in Late Antiquity, both material and textual, attest a reception largely focused on the *Passio*'s main narrator and protagonist, Perpetua: these include mimesis in later hagiographical accounts, literary references to Perpetua as well as three sermons by Augustine on the anniversary of the *Passio* martyrdom, mention of Perpetua by both Quodvultdeus and Victor of Vita, mosaic depictions of Perpetua in late-antique sacred spaces in Ravenna and Porec, and a scene from Perpetua's first visionary account on a 5th century sarcophagus in Spain.³⁷

As for the *Passio* itself, nothing is known of an *Urtext*. All nine Latin manuscripts date to after the ninth century, and their contents do not unanimously trace to one known manuscript.³⁸ Two strikingly divergent versions of the *Passio* include one inexactly transliterated Greek version and a distinct Latin work known as the *Acta*, both of which date at the earliest to the fourth century, if not later.³⁹ The

³⁵ Tertullian appropriates one of the visions to support his contention martyrs alone have direct entry into paradise immediately after death. For the dating of *De Anima*, see Osborn, *Tertullian*, 212. It is interesting to note that Tertullian's *Passio* reference is rather offhanded and immediately follows a citation from the *Apocalypse* (Revelation). His reference not only suggests that his audience was familiar with the account but also that, to some extent, they saw it as worthy of some extent of authority.

³⁶ See footnote 32 above.

³⁷ Referenced works include the *Vita Cypriani*; Augustine *Serm.* 280, 281, 282, *Enn. Ps.* 47.13, *Disc.* 59/A 11, and *De Nat.* 4.18; Quodvultdeus *De Temp. Barb.* I.5.1-9; Victor of Vita, *Hist.* 1.9; mosaic roundels in the Archiepiscopal Chapel of Ravenna, San'Apollinare Nuovo, also of Ravenna, and the basilica of Euphrasius in Porec; 5th c. sarcophagus from Briviesca, now at the Archaeological Museum of Burgos, Spain. See Chapter 7 (p. 237-239) for further detail and discussion. It should be noted that these remnants of textual and material reception will not be discussed at length in this study. Each deserves separate and more extensive analysis, a task I aspire to accomplish in future work. A thorough documentation of the material reception of Perpetua in particular has not yet been done in *Passio* scholarship; this, too, I wish to address in future scholarly endeavors.

³⁸ See the excellent listing, discussion, and *stemma* in Heffernan, *Passion*, 369-443.

³⁹ For the text of the *Acta*, see Amat, *Passion*, 278-302. For more on the priority of the Latin *Passio* and a summary of scholarly views, see Shaw, "Passion", 286; Heffernan, *Passion*, 79-99; cf. Halporn, "Literary History", 223-241. The *Acta* must be dated after 258 CE, because it interjects the names of

Acta provides a more streamlined story with altered details, a more rapid and dramatic storyline, a more commensurate role for each character, and a surfeit of idealizing panegyric. In the *Acta*, for example, the events are said to be during the persecution of the later emperors Valerian and Gallienus (1.1), it is Saturus who first speaks, voicing the momentous “we are Christians” (*Christiani sumus*, 1.2) on behalf of the entire group during a collective interrogation, and both Saturus and Perpetua are devoured by lions in a dramatic culmination of events (9.3). The *Acta* is useful as a reflection of its own contemporary ecclesiastical contexts and sociological assumptions. It certainly operates within the commemorative traditions of its own era, a fascinating subject in its own terms. This version most likely emerged in order to meet later liturgical needs, such as use in annual commemoration homilies, dramaturgies, recitation and response practices, and moralistic exhortation.⁴⁰ It ought not, however, be considered as a source for any additional details about the *Passio* and will not be explored in this thesis.

1.5 Authorial Claims

The composition of the *Passio* is a topic that has been subjected to detailed scrutiny, particularly in light of its unique authorial claims. Inevitable questions concerning the veracity of these claims serve as the next building block towards a reading of the narrative itself. A purview of *Passio* scholarship reveals some controversy

mid-3rd century Caesars in place of Geta. The Greek often changes the meaning and implication of scenes via vocabulary selection; see, e.g., Heffernan, *Passion*, 234.

⁴⁰ Kitzler argues that the *Acta* were “composed in order to normalize the revolutionary and potentially dangerous features of the *Passio*” (“*Passio*”, 1-19). I counter instead that the origins of the *Acta* are not conspiratorial silencing but a more practically-motivated “organic” adaptation to both liturgical needs and contemporary understandings of sociological frameworks. If we are dealing with a liturgical (“homily-friendly”) text, or a dramaturgy or recitation/response, characters would be simplified and turned into simple and contemporary moral examples, the individual traits of primary characters would likely be marginalized while the traits of others (such as Felicitas) aggrandized – all of which are observable in the *Acta*. Since this later work operates within the needs of its own era’s commemorative memory traditions, the *Acta* will not otherwise be explored by this thesis.

concerning the “complexly polyglossal” nature of the text.⁴¹ *Passio* studies have traditionally opined that the Latin pericopes attributed to each of the three hands do contain distinctive features that, in themselves, can corroborate the authorial claims, and most contemporary analyses continue to confirm a genuine trivocality of the *Passio* narrative.⁴² A dissenting hermeneutic of suspicion has emerged in a handful of studies, notably those of Ronsse, Kramer, Lander, and Vierow.⁴³ These view the entire *Passio* text as a monovocal literary production consisting of “narrative manipulations”, the most prominent of which is the redactor’s very talented and very deliberate creation of a feminine voice as Perpetua.⁴⁴ Ronsse more specifically proposes that the *Passio*’s style and structure betray its actual origin and purpose: though perhaps loosely based on “notes” about or from an historic event, the characters and narrative are conceived as instrumental examples for a catechetical training that focused upon the cultivation of good martyrs.⁴⁵ While her study does give voice to the impressive complexity of rhetorical features in the *Passio*, her conclusions, like those of Vierow, Kramer, and Lander, have been soundly criticised from numerous angles. Hunink, for example, recently again disparaged these interpretive lenses, particularly - though not exclusively - in light of extensive studies on the *Passio*’s stylistic tendencies.⁴⁶

⁴¹ The apt term is Burrus’, *Saving Shame*, 28.

⁴² See introduction and discussion in Bremmer and Formisano, eds. *Perpetua’s Passions*, 1-13. Also, Heffernan’s book demonstrates a change of his own opinion in the matter: “We cannot claim with apodictic certainty that either she or Saturus ‘authored’ their respective narratives, but the weight of cumulative historical evidence in the text persuades me that they did”, 5. Both Heffernan and Hunink emphasize that rejections of trivocal authorship tend to be based on negative evidence; see Hunink, “Did Perpetua Write”, 147-155.

⁴³ Ronsse, “Rhetoric”, 283-327; Kramer and Lander, “Perpetua”, 1054-1058; Kramer, ed., *Women’s Religions*, 5-6; Vierow, “Feminine and Masculine”, 618-619.

⁴⁴ Phrase from Vierow, “Feminine and Masculine”, 618-619.

⁴⁵ “Revised early Christian lecture notes”, in Ronsse’s estimation (“Rhetoric”, 322-323).

⁴⁶ Hunink, “Did Perpetua Write”, 147-155.

Indeed, extensive evaluations have been conducted on the prose rhythms and styles of the *Passio* text, notably by Shewring, Fridh, Auerbach, and Amat.⁴⁷ Fridh's painstaking 1968 study, *Le Problème de la passion des saintes Perpétue et Félicité*, completed this endeavour to the most detailed extent, charting patterns according to clausulae. In the conclusions of all four studies, three styles of Latin are quite clearly distinguished in the *Passio*.⁴⁸ Auerbach and Amat followed Shewring and Fridh in presenting definable parameters of authorship, noting patterns of syntax and lexical choice exclusive to each voice. The redactor's flourish tends to follow a Ciceronian style and features several constructions that belie their late second-century origin within a distinctly ecclesiastical focus. Specific features include an affinity for the subordinate clause, a careful use of rhetorical repetition, a generally sophisticated sentence complexity, and frequent present participles.⁴⁹ The section attributed to Satorius, also distinctive in its syntactical and linguistic tendencies, features peculiar clausulae proportions in non-rhythmical prose – precisely the sort that occurs in texts translated from Greek to Latin;⁵⁰ this reflection, first observed by Shewring, is now echoed by nearly all scholars.⁵¹

Lastly, the sections of text attributed to Perpetua's hand have been meticulously and quite exhaustively examined, and in these analyses, a very distinct, rhythmic style with a high percentage of good clausulae and a style choice favoring a

⁴⁷ W.H. Shewring, "Prose Rhythm", 56-57; Fridh, *Le Problème*; Auerbach, 25-83; Amat, "Le Latin", 446-454; Amat, "L'Authenticité", 177-191.

⁴⁸ Fridh, 17; Shewring, 56-57; intriguingly, the results also reveal that Satorius' portion is one of distinctly non-rhythmical prose, with clausulae that demonstrate what occurs to Latin prose when a text is translated from Greek into Latin. McKechnie, "St. Perpetua", 281, wryly observes that a trivocality of prose such as this "tends to show that the editor is telling the truth" about authorship.

⁴⁹ Furthermore, though Labriolle long ago asserted Tertullian's authorship of the redaction in several instances in *History and Literature*, 104, *La crise Montaniste*, 345-351, and "Tertullien, auteur", 129, René Braun, "Nouvelles observations", 105-117, and others since have resoundingly indicated that Tertullian's style diverges significantly from that of the redactor. Tertullian did not have an authorial hand here. See also a more extensive discussion in Amat, "Latin", 446-448.

⁵⁰ Shewring, 57; Fridh, 15-18.

⁵¹ Heffernan tenuously disagrees, opining instead that Satorius' portion seems simply to have been orally narrated (in Latin), *Passion*, 80-81.

- - - χ - pattern emerges. This style, which employs less formal vocabularies and linguistic tendencies, have caused some scholars, notably Amat and Auerbach, to compare such propensities to Plautus. Both are replete with colorful imagery and use the conjunction *et* so frequently as to culminate into what seems to be a departure from formal rules of syntax and grammar. Furthermore, the occasional tendency to transliterate Greek words (e.g., *horomate*, 10.1) and a largely paratactic sentence structure have been particularly noted in the portion attributed to Perpetua within studies by Amat, Shaw, Petroff, Habermehl, and Ameling, among others.⁵² Analyses of this nature, notwithstanding their divergent conclusions about the implications of these observations (as shall be discussed in Chapter 2), do converge in regards to the *Passio* narrative at large. There is a distinct voice for each authorial section, and the stylistic differences within this trivocality indicate that not even the savviest forger in antiquity could be imagined to have singularly authored this text.⁵³

The text's own claims deserve attention as well as some nuancing. The first voice remains anonymous. It initiates the text by declaring the purposes of the written account and by connecting the audience to these ends. After a cadre of confessors are briefly presented, Perpetua's narrative is introduced. A transition in the text is made clear: "The entire narrative of her martyrdom from this point is her own, in the exact way that she left it written with her own hand and according to her own way of thinking" (*haec ordinem totum martyrii sui iam hinc ipsa narravit sicut conscriptum manu sua et suo sensu reliquit*, 2.3). Once her account concludes, the first narrative voice re-emerges to briefly introduce the visionary narrative of Saturus "the Blessed", which is also asserted to be written by its narrator (*Saturus benedictus hanc visionem*

⁵² Shaw, "Passion", 300; Amat, "Latin", 450-451; Petroff, *Medieval*, 28-29; Habermehl offers a strong defence of Perpetua's own authorship of the text; see, idem, *Perpetua*, 238-252, 267-275; Ameling, "Femina", 93-94.

⁵³ This summary concept is from Prinzivalli, "Perpetua", 119.

suam edidit, quam ipse conscripsit, 11.1). It should be noted that the lexical insinuations of *conscribere* and *scribere*, like those of *narrare* and *edere*, indicate that the act of authorship in Greco-Roman antiquity included both physical handwriting and verbal dictation.⁵⁴ In the case of dictation, something verbally narrated can be presented as “in the exact way” or “just as” (*sicut*) it was written by one’s own hand as a product of one’s own idea or perception; in the case of that which is written, a text can be transmitted “exactly as” (*sicut*) it was written by one’s own hand. Certainly either – or both – suffices as authorship in Perpetua’s case.⁵⁵ Whether she penned her account or used an amanuensis, her authorship is explicitly affirmed in the text, corroborated by her educational level and social status (as shall be delineated in Chapter 3), and will be understood as producing an authorial ‘voice’ throughout this study.

1.6 Conclusion

Rather than presenting a comprehensive commentary on the entire *Passio*, this thesis focuses primarily on the presentation of Perpetua and on the portions of the text in which she plays a prominent role. This thesis will argue that it is necessary to revisit assumptions about the classification of genre and possible techniques and motivations evident within the *Passio*, and, to do so, this study proposes an interpretive approach that is attuned to the implications of contextual aspects arguably neglected or misinterpreted in regards to Perpetua. In light of my assessments, an exegetical reexamination of her work and of the portions of the text that present her are undertaken in this thesis. While most scholarly analyses, present and past, echo the

⁵⁴ See, e.g., discussions and examples throughout Cribbiore, *Writing*.

⁵⁵ There are numerous examples of individuals actually *writing* in the world of imperial Rome with similar descriptions: e.g., Quintilian opined that writing in one’s own hand was superior to dictation (*Inst. Or.* 10.3); Pliny depicted his own process of composing, summoning his amanuensis, dictating what he had written, and then writing further (*Ep.* 9.36); and (at least according to Suetonius *Aug.* 2.27.3), the young Octavian Augustus observed an equestrian writing notes during his speech.

interpretative supposition that “Perpetua did not intend to construct spiritual allegory”,⁵⁶ perhaps the verdict ought not be so certain. This study ultimately counters this position with a question – *why not?* – and presents evidence drawn from the *Passio*, indicating that intentions somewhat comparable to those of spiritual allegory may actually be present in this text. After all, published collections of Latin letters, the visions of Hermas, Sulpicia’s poetry, and Augustine’s later *Confessions* are not read as rhetorically-innocent, literarily simple *cris de coeur*. Why, therefore, is it still assumed that this is the case for Perpetua? A thorough review of interpretive approaches to the *Passio* is required, and, consequently, I will elucidate my proposals with regard to the genre and aims of this fascinating text.

⁵⁶ Dronke, *Women*, 7.

CHAPTER 2 APPROACHING THE *PASSIO*

For nearly three centuries, the contents of the *Passio* have compelled scholars to exploration and analysis. Readings from various perspectives and disciplines continue to produce a colorful variety of interpretative commentaries on the text. Despite the diversity exhibited in these studies, nearly all nonetheless evince a common opinion with regard to one aspect. Perpetua's account frequently has been classified as an introspective dream diary or a memoir comprised of prison notes that, with or without her knowledge, entered into the hands of a redactor, who framed and employed the account to further his own purposes within the context of a liturgical community. This nearly ubiquitous generic categorization of the text - and its resulting interpretive corollaries - is based on significant assumptions and has numerous limitations. This chapter serves several related functions. Firstly, I set forth a summary assessment of scholarly approaches to the text. This serves as an essential foundation for the secondary aim of the chapter, which is to present an alternative classification for the *Passio*. I contend that the genre of the entire work is more properly defined as a commemorative narrative that is rhetorically aimed to participate with, and merge into, the corporate memory of the ecclesial community. The elucidation of my contentions with regard to the *Passio*'s genre includes a clarification of the methodological approaches that frame these arguments. Incorporated into this discussion are a summary of social memory theory, a note on the historiographical methods employed within in this study, and a delineation of key terms.

2.1.1 Review of Scholarly Literature

The sheer breadth of *Passio* studies confirms that the text has been of interest to a variety of disciplines over the centuries. Hagiographers, classicists, medievalists,

specialists in comparative literature, psychologists and philologists have approached the tantalizing narrative of the *Passio* from various vantage points. Indeed, in 2012 Jan Bremmer and Marco Formisano edited a volume containing nineteen fascinating and distinct multidisciplinary readings of the *Passio*!⁵⁷ While this *Quellenkritik* has cultivated lively and wide-ranging scholarly discussion, certain trends and general assumptions about the text have certainly emerged. As my study challenges dominant readings of the *Passio* and proposes an alternative interpretative model, a summary of influential approaches to the *Passio* narrative is certainly warranted. For the purposes of this study, and in relation to my contention that Perpetua's narrative is inextricably related to and even determinative of the genre of the account, the focus of this chapter remains upon offering a generic assessment concerning Perpetua's work within the greater text.

2.1.2 A "Framed" Diurnal Divulgement

Among the many methodological lenses applied to the *Passio*, nearly all readings initially converge in two foundational and related aspects. Firstly, they acknowledge Perpetua's genuine authorial role. Secondly, they classify her account as a diurnal act of self-revelation: Perpetua is inscribing a diary or personal prison notes, which are then framed by a redactor. From here, however, approaches to the text diverge along several paths. The most common interpretative commentary of Perpetua's account occurs via psychoanalytical approaches: descriptive adjectives pronounce that the text is an "intimate and unselfconscious" or "raw" stream-of-consciousness scribble of reflective autobiography, one replete with an unmediated recounting of dreams.⁵⁸ In this light, the redactional "frame" is generally presented as being somewhat coercive.

⁵⁷ Bremmer and Formisano, eds., *Perpetua's Passions*.

⁵⁸ Both example descriptors are from Dronke, *Women*, 6.

That is, the redactor presents Perpetua's personal work in order to further his purposes, regardless of whether or not they correspond to her own. Though such readings share initial vantage points, they differ in extent of application.

The analysis of von Franz, for example, explores the text as a case study for Jungian analysis and describes Perpetua's work and visionary accounts as "a vital reaction of the unconscious to the fate threatening the dreamer in the outside world".⁵⁹ While less overt in their use of psychoanalytical methodology, many scholars nonetheless view Perpetua's writing as a personal reflection that was never intended for public consumption. In such assessments, the purpose and scope of her narrative are said to be interior and related to personal angst. Sullivan avers that Perpetua writes for "clarity, strength, comfort, and direction... connected to her own personal anxieties".⁶⁰ Dronke's popular introduction to Perpetua's account states that it is "colloquial and homely...no emotion, no fantasy of Perpetua's appears disguised by stylistic ornaments. Nothing masks her tender – and determined – perceptions or her troubled dreams".⁶¹ In analyses such as these, Perpetua's visions are read as revelations into the physical and emotional deprivations that she was experiencing at the time. Thus, Habermehl's study argues that a great deal of Perpetua's account is an expression of her "angst". Similarly, McGowan indicates that each of her visions features "a prize of food or drink" as a direct result of the deprivations in her incarceration, a view that echoes Dronke's opinion that every ingestible visionary image – cheese, water, apples – are increasingly "consoling images" for Perpetua as

⁵⁹ She was, it is significant to recall, mentored by Jung himself. See von Franz, *Passion*, 34.

⁶⁰ Sullivan, "I Responded", 65.

⁶¹ Dronke, *Women*, 1.

she works through inescapable grief and violence within her cathartic diurnal entries.⁶²

Such approaches tend to focus on Perpetua's four visions rather than on the majority of her actual narrative, and they reveal such differences of interpretation as they appear utterly to contradict each other. As such, they provide a fascinating historiographical case study, in that they ultimately prove to discover in Perpetua's words whatever schema the interpreter seeks to promote. Hence, Cloke writes that Perpetua's voice is "protracted, torturous, and guilt-ridden", while Perkins and Lyman opine that it displays an exultant "self-realization" of feminine empowerment as it rebelliously reverses traditional hierarchies.⁶³ These psychoanalytical interpretations are not simply products of decades past: in his essay for the recent work *Perpetua's Passions*, Böhme asserts that the text *cannot* be properly interpreted without the use of psychoanalytical approaches.⁶⁴ However, these long-applied glosses of Jungian-esque evaluations upon a third-century Latin text have not escaped critical comment. Parvis and Bremmer's appraisals have repeatedly censured the psychoanalytical method as one that may in theory seem plausible and interesting but actually limits a historically-attuned study of Perpetua's text.⁶⁵

A great many readings over the last century have employed a historical approach, and yet they have maintained that Perpetua's text is a *diary*. As a result of this brief assumed term of classification, implications tend to surface of what is actually a rather modern genre. "I conclude, then", Dodds remarks, "that in the prison

⁶² E.g., Habermehl, *Perpetua*, 87; McGowan, "Discipline", 460; Dronke, *Women*, 15; Dronke references von Franz for this interpretation. As I shall argue in Chapters 4-5, this is quite problematic: the golden apples on the branch are not food (unless she has become a Cambridge Platonist), the water of Dinocrates' fountain is not a drink for Perpetua, and the cheese is not dessert.

⁶³ Cloke, "Mater or Martyr", 46; Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 112-113; Lyman, "Perpetua", 26-33, and "Motivations", 417-421.

⁶⁴ Böhme, "Conquest", 220-243; in the same volume, Williams, "Perpetua's Gender", 54-77, employs a Freudian approach.

⁶⁵ Bremmer, "Perpetua", 96; Parvis, "Perpetua", 106.

diary we have an authentic first-hand narrative of the last days of a gallant martyr. It is a touching record of humanity and courage, quite free from the pathological self-importance of an Ignatius".⁶⁶ Owen similarly depicts Perpetua's text as "marked by extreme simplicity and a complete absence of literary artifice".⁶⁷ Salisbury calls her narrative a "personal, spiritual quest" that grapples with troubling dreams.⁶⁸ Amat's critical commentary and studies also follow this lens of interpretation, particularly with regard to Perpetua's visions, which are "legitimized" by their bizarre oneiric syncretism.⁶⁹ In this interpretive approach, while the *Passio* as a whole is essentially viewed as the record of a historical event, it is the voice of Perpetua that is the most personal, authentic, unpretentious, and literarily simplistic. Perhaps the best example of this can be found in Auerbach's influential analysis, which declares that Perpetua's account was a rescued collection of "notes" scrawled in prison and not at all "conceived as a literary work", as it features a rustically endearing absence of rhetorical maneuver.⁷⁰ Such generic classification, of course, bears significant interpretive consequences. Since Perpetua's account is essentially perceived as a personal "record of her thoughts, reflections, and encounters", interpretations that view her words "as if they were a consciously written-out exposition" are seen as "preposterous".⁷¹ In recent years, while many studies have continued this trajectory,⁷² there is increasing acknowledgement of the literary intricacy of Perpetua's account (*contra* Auerbach). Konstan, for example, describes her text as "a journal of her experiences in jail", yet he nonetheless asserts that some structure and literary quality

⁶⁶ Dodds, "Pagan", 52; cf. the nearly identical Frend, "Blandina and Perpetua", 170.

⁶⁷ Owen, *Authentic Acts*, 74.

⁶⁸ Salisbury, *Perpetua*, 98, 130.

⁶⁹ Amat, "L'Authenticité", 182, and *Passion*, 28-29, 38-48.

⁷⁰ Auerbach, *Literary*, 63.

⁷¹ So overtly asserts Oberholzer, "Interpreting", 304, 294.

⁷² E.g., Perpetua's account is an expression of her "growing religious self awareness", pronounces Kitzler, "*Passio*", 9.

are also evident.⁷³ Indeed, a handful of studies have hinted that perhaps Perpetua's text features an intentionality and complexity that is often neglected by a more thoroughly psychoanalytical approach.

2.1.3 *A (Somewhat) Cognizant Presentation*

A minority of studies, particularly those of Cooper, Shaw, Bremmer, and Heffernan, have advocated a more nuanced analyses of Perpetua's own plausible cognizance of her significance and thus of her authorial act.⁷⁴ Cooper asserts that Perpetua "leaves her story as gift to others whom she hopes can take strength from the strength she foundShe explores her fears and experiences in a way that she hopes will have value for others".⁷⁵ While Shaw does depict Perpetua's account as a "simple and bare record of a human experience", he nevertheless views it as "an autobiographical *presentation of the self* with the necessary rhetorical stratagems thereby involved".⁷⁶ In a significant departure from typical interpretative assumptions, Bremmer opines that it is a mistake for interpreters to believe that they are reading an "actual" diary.⁷⁷ Instead, her account and its visions "will already have been discursively reshaped to make them as effective as possible", since they were "meant to be read and understood by her fellow Christians".⁷⁸ A responsible engagement with the text, Bremmer advocates, will engage with historical methods and acknowledge the impact of Perpetua's cultural environments on her "presentation of the self".⁷⁹ Some recent studies have, to a very limited extent, engaged with or adapted Bremmer's

⁷³ Konstan, "Perpetua's Martyrdom", 296.

⁷⁴ They are not alone in emphasizing the significance of context, but they tend to indicate that Perpetua is writing something *beyond* a 'diary' in a more conscious authorial act *impacted/informed* by context.

⁷⁵ Cooper, "A Father", 688.

⁷⁶ Shaw, "Body/Power/Identity", 202, 209. Italics mine.

⁷⁷ Bremmer, "Perpetua", 77-120.

⁷⁸ Bremmer, "Perpetua", 97.

⁷⁹ E.g., "we should connect the dreams to the material and mental world of Perpetua", Bremmer, "Perpetua", 120.

methodological contentions.⁸⁰ Yet even among these analyses there remains a tantalizing variety of divergent interpretive conclusions in regards to the contents of the *Passio* text.

Heffernan's somewhat evolving interpretations of the *Passio* have maintained that Perpetua's narrative portion within the text is her own: it is an "unadorned and direct" "diurnal account of [her] prison experiences", placed by the redactor within an edited "apocalyptic" work.⁸¹ Heffernan's approach, however, distinctly adds further layers of interpretative nuance: while he does call Perpetua's account a "prison diary", it is important to note that he sees it as consciously cast into a somewhat structured "narrative recreation...shaped in light of her present circumstances".⁸² It is these circumstances that motivate and drive the account: according to Heffernan, Perpetua "understands herself as part of that ecstatic female prophetic ministry" of the proto-Montanist movement that was conceivably present in the Christian circles of Carthage. Ultimately, Heffernan evaluates Perpetua's account as a prophetess' diurnal expression of both her prison experience and the "predictive dreams" which expresses eschatological predilection and consequent moral directive as revealed to her.⁸³ For this reason, Perpetua's work is an expression of her "search for self-understanding", but it nonetheless features content for which "her recall is deliberate, designed to support both herself and her fellows".⁸⁴

⁸⁰ E.g., Walder, "Visions", 201-219; Ameling, "Femina", 78-102; Heffernan and Shelton, "*Paradisus*", 217-223.

⁸¹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 193-194, 200; "Philology", 315-325. To Heffernan, all semantic nuance in the *Passio* belongs to the redactor; see also Heffernan and Shelton, "*Paradisus*", 219-220. In both works, he tends to attribute subtleties within Perpetua's account to the redactor's editing; in his more recent work *Passion*, he tends to give Perpetua a stronger authorial role in her entire section (as oral narration).

⁸² Heffernan, *Passion*, 168; *Sacred Biography*, 193-194, 200; he also called Perpetua's portion "a self-conscious *journal in time*" ("Philology", 320-21).

⁸³ Heffernan, *Passion*, 168.

⁸⁴ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 205.

An authoritative prophetess seems a far cry from the angst-filled new convert depicted in other studies, but Heffernan's classification follows similar proposals in past and contemporary analyses. As shall be demonstrated in Chapter 3, numerous scholars claim to find various attributes of Montanism within the *Passio* account, and, during the past several decades alone, notable studies have maintained that Perpetua's text displays traits that reveal affiliation with a nascent Montanist circle in Carthage.⁸⁵ Steinhauser's classification of the *Passio* as "Montanist heretical propaganda" seems excessive but is actually indicative of this relatively common opinion.⁸⁶ Butler's monograph - perhaps the most extreme on this interpretative spectrum - presents a commentary built entirely upon the purported Montanist nature of the text and argues that the *Passio* influenced consequent schismatic praxis; his analysis has, however, been unanimously viewed as irresponsibly speculative by critics.⁸⁷

2.1.4 A Rhetorically Sophisticated Literary Production

While many scholars do not find the same presence of New Prophecy in the *Passio* as Heffernan *et alia*, a small collection of more recent essays have asserted that the *Passio* is nonetheless a theologically-charged and sophisticated work with evident authorial awareness of a specifically intended audience. Following the approach demonstrated particularly by Bremmer, these studies do *not* view Perpetua's text as a diurnal extension of her psyche. Instead, they emphasize the presence of advanced rhetoric and literary allusion throughout the *Passio*, particularly in the portions of the narrative ascribed to her. Intriguingly, when these rhetorical embellishments are attended and viewed as cognizant, Perpetua's authorship is denied almost without

⁸⁵ For a useful summary and analysis of the studies that focus on this topic, see Marksches, "*Passio*", 277-290. See also my discussion on Montanism and related scholarly interpretation in Chapter 3 (section 3.5, p. 88-95) of this study.

⁸⁶ Steinhauser, "Augustine's Reading", 248.

⁸⁷ Butler, *New Prophecy*, critically panned, e.g., for "significant lapses in logic and failure to attend to detail", as Tilley censured in her review of Butler's book (320-321).

exception. Such has been the case in the essays of Kraemer, Lander, and Ronsse. Kraemer and Lander suggest that the account was “purposefully constructed by an ancient author to *appear* as a female martyr’s diary” and thus classify the text as “generated”, shaped to conform to Joel 2.28-29 in order to promote a Montanist agenda.⁸⁸ This reading, however, was promptly critiqued as lacking textual and historical substantiation: censures such as those found in essays by Hunink (who slyly asks if Egeria ought to be seen as a clever masculine invention as well) and Bremmer have called it overly critical.⁸⁹

In 2006, Ronsse claimed to find a rhetorical sophistication and teleological direction throughout the *Passio*, to an extent unparalleled in other analyses past and present.⁹⁰ Her study proposes that the *Passio*’s style, structure, and language betray pragmatic intent and she contends that the *Passio* is a monovocal text adroitly composed as a didactic preparation which is expressly aimed at apologetic discourse and teaching. Thus, the *Passio* is a text “about and for catechetical training – that is, the work was about and for martyrs, those prepared to defend Christianity publicly”.⁹¹ Ideological complexity, coherent structure, and sophisticated rhetoric are so replete in the text, argues Ronsse, that it cannot be seen as anything other than a literary work composed entirely *for* catechesis; it is intended as a pattern for the memory of future generations, who are to re-live its action through their own public witness. Ronsse’s interpretive attention focuses upon what she sees as the *Passio*’s subtle rhetoric and coherent literary nature: even if the account is loosely based on a contemporary martyrdom event, Perpetua is a fictional exemplar created by the author in order to be

⁸⁸ Emphasis added. Their argument is in some ways similar to that made over a decade ago by Vierow, “Feminine”, 600-619; Kraemer and Lander, “Perpetua”, 1048-1068. As shall be discussed in Chapter 3, they seem to forget that the New Prophets were not the only Christians to cite this passage of Joel and Acts; cf. Irenaeus *Epid.* 89-90, 99-100.

⁸⁹ Bremmer, “Perpetua”, 83; Hunink, “Perpetua”, 147-155.

⁹⁰ Ronsse, “Rhetoric”, 283-327.

⁹¹ Ronsse, “Rhetoric”, 296.

presented as an erudite catechumen with skills in “verbal jousting comparable to Paul”.⁹² Thus it is not necessarily the content of Perpetua’s narrative that is in need of further attention but rather the methods used in the *Passio* to create and structure the entire didactic account. While it does highlight the complexity of the text and character of Perpetua, Ronsse’s article has been criticised in numerous ways. For example, it largely ignores and also mistranslates compelling textual evidence for trivocality⁹³ and tends to take the definition of ‘martyr’ quite loosely in intertwining the already-distinguishable genre of apology with the acts associated with martyrs (i.e., anyone making an *apologia* was *not* instantly also a confessor). However, Ronsse’s observations concerning the rhetorical sophistication of the *entire* work, as well as the *Passio*’s evident anticipation of both an audience and ongoing influence in their memory,⁹⁴ has been neglected and undoubtedly deserves further consideration.

A recent essay by Formisano also notes the literary qualities of the *Passio*.⁹⁵ He challenges common assessments of the *Passio*, however, in a somewhat different light. Formisano suggests that the *Passio* is best approached with a “literary-theoretical reading” that recognizes the text’s “radical, enigmatic” qualities.⁹⁶ Though he refers to the work of Perpetua as “prison literature” written “precisely with the aim of being read”, he views its autobiographical content as a supreme and ultimately dark testimony of “the process from life to death” and the loss of self entirely, both in existential and literary ways.⁹⁷ While Formisano refuses to comment on issues of authorship with regard to the text, he concludes with several crucial claims. Among these is, firstly, that the entire *Passio* was written to become available to a public.

⁹² Ronsse, “Rhetoric”, 312.

⁹³ Her reading of *Passio* 2.3 has been disparaged by Hunink, “Perpetua”, 147-155, and Ameling, “*Femina*”, 81-82, in particular.

⁹⁴ Ronsse, “Rhetoric”, 296, 301.

⁹⁵ Formisano, “Perpetua’s”, 329-347.

⁹⁶ Formisano, “Perpetua’s”, 346.

⁹⁷ Formisano, “Perpetua’s”, 338, 341, 344.

Secondly, he insists that, as a unique literary production, the *Passio* cannot be defined nor classified, for it has “no strong relationship with previous texts”.⁹⁸ While I shall demonstrate contention with the latter claim, Formisano does provoke careful thought with regard to the *Passio*’s “vertiginous overlapping of life and literature”.⁹⁹ His final conclusion that the text “needs new and different kinds of readings” is, I think, a challenge worth accepting.

2.1.5 A Reflection of Social Memory Dynamics

A different interpretive approach, which is now burgeoning in early Christian studies, has opened significant territory for interpretation of accounts such as the *Passio*. Castelli’s *Martyrdom and Memory* appropriates Halbwachs’ theoretical framework of social memory and adapts Foucault’s concepts of “self-writing” in antiquity in order to contend that martyrs are produced (and, in cases of autobiographical narrative such as Perpetua’s, produce themselves) *within* corporate memory. Castelli’s emphasis upon the collective memory of suffering in martyrdom accounts is her primary means of engagement with social memory theories. Rejecting Halbwachs’ binary separation of the “history” that happened and the “memory” that distorts it, Castelli examines how early Christians portrayed and signified “the historical experience of persecution”.¹⁰⁰ In doing so, a portion of her book addresses what she views as collective memory via self-writing in three early Christian texts: an Ignatian epistle, Perpetua’s narrative, and Pionius’s speeches. She views these narratives as “conscious of the potential readership for their writings, and they appear to see themselves as contributing to their own memorializing”.¹⁰¹ Each text cultivates a nuanced

⁹⁸ Formisano, “Perpetua’s”, 347.

⁹⁹ Formisano, “Perpetua’s”, 329.

¹⁰⁰ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 10-32.

¹⁰¹ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 70.

presentation of claims to signify suffering “both narratively and rhetorically, using available concepts, practices, and tropes”, within a literary “portrait of the self” that renders violent suffering as meaningful, redemptive, and empowering.¹⁰²

To Castelli, Perpetua creates this “portrait of the self” by relating her experience in a “diary” that reveals a consciousness situated inextricably in a collective context.¹⁰³ Her narrative’s “driving force” is a personal “question of identity – Perpetua’s true self...[which] involves a series of struggles whereby she peels off worldly role after worldly role”.¹⁰⁴ A “broad metanarrative” of suffering and sacrifice ultimately dominates the diurnal work.¹⁰⁵ Perpetua both interprets this theme in light of her corporate identity and relays it to “render [her] experience meaningful in and for present contexts”.¹⁰⁶ While Perpetua understands her identity as a martyr only “within the context of a much more public, collective narrative”,¹⁰⁷ her *text* is nonetheless still classified by Castelli as a “diary” that “turns increasingly inward” and reveals transformation and eventual renunciation of secular ties via sacrifice.¹⁰⁸

In Castelli’s treatment of the *Passio*, then, Perpetua’s account is viewed as a diary, but nuance and complexity are introduced to this genre. Castelli extends this classification to engage with the generic category of “self-writing”, which she defines as “a literary activity by which a portrait of the self is generated”.¹⁰⁹ In antiquity, this was “undertaken by public figures who were devoted to the project of preserving in memory their public lives”.¹¹⁰ Within this discussion, Castelli complicates Foucault’s

¹⁰² Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 6-7, 69-70, 79.

¹⁰³ The term “diary” is used repeatedly and is often juxtaposed to a form of the verb “to record”, e.g., “Her diary records four visions she received while in prison” (Castelli, “Visions”, 14); “recorded in a diary” (Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 85).

¹⁰⁴ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 86.

¹⁰⁵ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 25.

¹⁰⁶ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 70.

¹⁰⁸ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 14, 85.

¹⁰⁹ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 91.

¹¹⁰ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 70.

evolutionary view of self-writing as moving from public to private from the ancient to late antique eras. As she defines the contours of self-writing in antiquity, she suggests a term of classification for ancient autobiography. This term of generic classification was, in fact, further refined and proposed in an early study of Heffernan specifically with regard to Perpetua's text: ὑπομνηματίζουμαι, *hypomnēmata*, or, in Latin, *commentarius*.¹¹¹ In its verbal form, *hypomnēmata* can mean 'to note for remembrance', 'to write memories', 'to explain and interpret', or 'to write an exegetical commentary'.¹¹² This is indeed a useful, if broad, genre to identify in a discussion of Perpetua's account. As I will argue in the latter portions of this chapter, this classification can be taken into further consideration. However, Castelli engages only the first two of the possible above definitions of *hypomnēmata*, and the primary theme within Perpetua's "diary" of memories is presented in Castelli's work as one of sacrifice – a suffering to which Perpetua increasingly "reconciles herself" over the course of writing as part of "the collective narrative" within the Christian community as well as her memorial for it.¹¹³

I suggest that Castelli's contentions with regard to Perpetua's text deserve further deliberation as well as critique. She argues that Perpetua relinquishes control of the *meaning* and *memory* of her life. In such an interpretation, Perpetua is aware that her story would be read, but the layered contemporary contexts of elite Roman memorializing practices and of Christian textual engagement (especially in light of her identity as a catechumen) are left largely unaddressed. Furthermore, in her reading of

¹¹¹ Castelli defines and delivers a concise summary of the word in *Martyrdom*, 91, 253, as does the useful study of Heffernan, "Philology", 320-321: it is "the term classical authors use when they describe their autobiographical works".

¹¹² Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *Greek-English Dictionary*; also Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1451-1452.

¹¹³ This self-writing amounts to a "production of the martyr's self within the context of a much more public, collective narrative. These authors/self-narrators of these texts are conscious of the potential readership for their writings" (*Martyrdom*, 70). It should be noted that Castelli sees this as serving within a larger Christian affront to Roman imperium (*Martyrdom*, 33-68).

Perpetua's text, Castelli's emphasis remains upon Perpetua's *personal* formation process *within* identities shaped by social memory. Thus, the end of her narrative is a submission not merely to death but to the eventuality that her story would be completed by another. What if it is less *submission* than *injunction* to complete her own willful act of self-styled commemorative memory-making? Such an act would have been almost inherent in Perpetua's layered contexts of an elite society that fostered such literary production and a Christian heritage that promulgated its own variety of textual *exempla* within its social memory.

Indeed, it might be pertinent to review Ronsse's proposals with regard to the rhetorical sophistication of the entire *Passio* text, including Perpetua's account, and to the *Passio*'s evident anticipation of both an audience and an ongoing influence in this audience's memory.¹¹⁴ When given further consideration and refinement, and when explored in relation to Castelli's application of social memory theory, these propositions can be further explored and, I think, are useful for both a generic classification of the *Passio* and a fruitful exegetical endeavour with its entire content, particularly the complex work of Perpetua. Ultimately, I propose that Perpetua's textual act operates as a highly literary, intricately rhetorical self-crafting both *within* and *for* collective memory. For this reason, a discussion of the theoretical framework of social memory, particularly as it has been applied within early Christian studies, and of the ways that I appropriate social memory theory in this study, is especially appropriate here.

2.2.1 Methodological Considerations in Social Memory

Now represented in a variety of disciplines, social memory theory traces its roots to

¹¹⁴ Ronsse, "Rhetoric", 296, 301. Ronsse associates this "memory" with a specific apologetic taught in catechesis, not social or commemorative memory.

Maurice Halbwachs' work *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, a Durkheimian interpretation of history and memory now nearly a century old.¹¹⁵ The most foundational aspect of social memory theory is that the memory of an individual is bound up in the memories of the community. In presenting memory as constituted by social frameworks, Halbwachs implied that the structure and dynamics of groups shape memory for people residing in those groups.¹¹⁶ Social memory is above all embedded in an inhabited context. The collective group determines the impact of the remembered past upon the remembering present, but it is also guided in this very activity by communications composed of various combinations of authorities and media.

While scholarship in regards to social memory has burgeoned in a variety of disciplines and contexts,¹¹⁷ application and revision of these theories in the field of early Christian studies has only more recently entered into academic dialogue.¹¹⁸ Schwartz, a leading scholar in this effort, defines social memory as “the distribution throughout society of what individuals believe, know, and feel about the past, how they judge the past morally, how closely they identify with it, and how they commemorate it”.¹¹⁹ This is accomplished via various avenues, including objects, rituals, and presentations both oral and textual. Crucial within his ongoing work are two related mnemonic terminologies.¹²⁰ The connection between a present person, experience, event, or group and a counterpart in the past is an act that Schwartz calls

¹¹⁵ The bibliography of social memory theory's development since then is vast. Useful surveys in terms of this study include Kirk and Thatcher, “Social and Cultural Memory”, 1-22, and Olick and Robbins, “Social Memory”, 105-140.

¹¹⁶ Or, put in another way, Memory “is produced in relation to the larger interpersonal and cultural world”; both quotations as summarized in Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory”, 2.

¹¹⁷ See, e.g., the summary of Olick and Robbins, “Social Memory Studies”, 105-140.

¹¹⁸ The benchmark volume of Kirk and Thatcher, eds., *Memory*, serves as a useful guide to both summarizing the development of this theory and demonstrating a contemporary application of and revision to its claims; see also Thatcher, ed., *Memory and Identity*, 1-6, and Schwartz, “Harvest”, 313-336.

¹¹⁹ Schwartz, “Where There's Smoke”, 10.

¹²⁰ See summary in Thatcher, “Preface”, 3.

“keying”. “Keying” instigates the act of “framing”, the construction of an interpretation of the present. Another term commonly employed in early Christian memory studies is commemoration, the hermeneutical contribution to the construction of a community’s memory.¹²¹ Commemoration presents collective identity largely via the paedagogical mnemo-techniques of dramatic, symbolic forms such as narrative.¹²²

In this study, I will frequently employ the phrase *commemorative narrative traditioning*. I use it to refer to a communicative activity within a social dynamic that pedagogically presents a person or event in light of a community’s memory and identities. This is a charged hermeneutical activity, presenting a narrative that both participates *with* and implies a worthiness to be *joined within* the present commemorative memory traditions of the community. While Schwartz’s “framing” relates to an interpretation of the present, *traditioning* communicates the way that a past event is not only interpretively drawn into the present in narrative fashion but is rhetorically “keyed” in such a way as to be seen as *already* associated with, and appropriately *belonging within*, the commemorated past.

I relate this theoretical framework to the *Passio* and aver that significant interpretive insight can result when the text is viewed as an act of commemorative narrative traditioning. However, it is important first to note the work that has been done specifically in memory theory and martyrdom.¹²³ As viewed in the light of this framework, a community’s commemoration of martyrs occurs through many interrelated aspects, including liturgy, morality, texts, and oral teachings. These commemorations reveal that martyrs’ deaths are instrumental not only for “establishing the urgent normative claims of the virtues he or she embodied and died

¹²¹ Social memory theorists contend that “commemoration is a hermeneutical activity” (Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory”, 7), and this activity can be explicit or, more commonly, implicit.

¹²² See Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory”, 2-19, e.g., the pedagogic commemorated past is “distilled into various commemorative artefacts – the paraenetic genres and media appropriate to...those settings” (18-19).

¹²³ See, e.g., Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory”, 19; Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 4-68.

exemplifying” but also for “instructional activities aimed at inculcating and securing commitment to those emblematic norms”.¹²⁴ Castelli avers that both aspects can be seen in the brief and captivating pronouncement of Ignatius to Christians in Rome: “I write to all the churches, and I command to all, that I am dying for God’s sake” (4.1).¹²⁵ On display is the power and task of martyrdom accounts not only to perpetuate memory but also hermeneutically to construct it.

Similarly, I argue that the *Passio*, particularly Perpetua’s account within it, is a participation with the memory of the Christian community and also an act of memorialization (particularly, in terms of Perpetua, *self*-memorialization) that sought to be placed within it. The work is set forth explicitly from its prolegomena as a written “documentation” of an *exemplum fidei* to be engaged within corporate memory: “If the ancient examples of faith that testify to God’s grace and achieve the people’s edification were made known in writing so that in their being read God would be honored and the people strengthened, should not new documentations be set forth also to serve both ends?” (1.1). I would suggest that commemorative narrative traditioning is evidently underway. The redactor rhetorically asserts firstly that his audience remembers the past in order to see both God’s works and the exemplary faithfulness of others. Secondly, he continues that he is relating a story in which Christians were faithful and God worked, therefore implying that this story is part of the Christian past and of course must be remembered. As I shall contend later in this chapter, this assertion on the part of the redactor is seen as the result of Perpetua’s own act of commemorative narrative traditioning. Her account is depicted via various

¹²⁴ Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory”, 19. This can be seen in *Mart. Poly.* 18.2-19.1: “Afterwards we therefore took up his bones ...and laid them in a suitable place, where the Lord will permit us to gather together in gladness and in joy, as we are able, and to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom *for the commemoration* of those that fought in the contest and *for the training and preparation* of those that shall do so hereafter. So the blessed Polycarp ...is especially remembered... [and] all desire to imitate his martyrdom, seeing that it was after the pattern of Christ’s Gospel...”

¹²⁵ See also Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 4-6.

rhetorically-charged mnemonic techniques in an effort to assert meaning. To apply the apt elucidation of Kirk, Perpetua's account demonstrates an acute awareness that "a community marks certain elements of its past as being of constitutive significance".¹²⁶

2.2.2 Historiographical Approach

In suggesting that the *Passio* account is essentially a text of history-recounting but perhaps more accurately a work of memory-making, it is important to note the relationship between *history* and *memory*. In contrast to Halbwachs' separation of history ("what really happened") and memory's distortion of it, most contemporary social memory theorists, particularly those in the fields of history, Biblical studies, and early Christian studies, assert that no such distinction exists.¹²⁷ As DeConick elucidates, "Communal memory does not simply retrieve, recall, or preserve past traditions and historical experiences. Nor does it invent new traditions or history out of thin air, or order completely distorted fabrications of it"; instead, corporate memory tends to interpret the past "in ways that conform to the present experiences and future expectations of the group".¹²⁸ Therefore, "the issue for the scholar shifts from investigating how accurately a text depicts what actually happened to why a particular group of Christians constructed its memories in a particular way at a particular time".¹²⁹ Similarly, commemorative activity is regarded in this study as intimately connected to (rather than a mythic manipulation of) both the past and present. This is significant in that it serves to connect my theoretical framework to a historiographical approach.

¹²⁶ Kirk, "Social and Cultural Memory", 5.

¹²⁷ See useful discussion in Kirk, "Social and Cultural Memory", 20-22; Castelli, *Memory*, 19-24; Schwartz, "Where There's Smoke", 7-37; DeConick, "Reading", 207-209.

¹²⁸ DeConick, "Reading", 207.

¹²⁹ DeConick, "Reading", 208.

In this study, the *Passio* will be viewed as a commemorative narrative – one that is more similar to a piece of literature than to a transcript.¹³⁰ This is not to suggest that the entire account, particularly that authored by Perpetua, expertly fabricates a fictional experience. I will employ a far more nuanced approach, in that Perpetua is seen as an imprisoned confessor who purposefully portrays an experience for an audience whom she knows she will have and, in doing so, astutely employs contextually appropriate images that lend deeper meaning to her narrative – a narrative mediated by *her* authorial intent, *her* rhetorical discourse to achieve that intent, and the complex contexts that informed both.

Thus, this study does not attempt to distinguish “what actually happened” during the group’s experience of imprisonment and martyrdom. With most *Passio* scholars, I suspect that many narrative details may be basically “accurate”¹³¹ but are rhetorically embellished in presentation to guide a hermeneutic of these details. I will focus upon *how* this complex text portrays and communicates the past within and for its community. Hartog’s observation that “The interrelationship between ‘facts’ and ‘literary presentation’ in martyrologies is a complex affair” is certainly here worth repeating.¹³² More pointedly, as Elizabeth Clark famously noted in her historiographical study of the presentation of women in antiquity, “We deal, always, with representation”.¹³³ This is also the case, I would add, in instances of self-presentation.

¹³⁰ A contention, it shall be emphasized, shared in part with Ronsse, “Rhetoric”, 298. Cf. the summary of Schwartz, “Christian Origins”, 55-56: “the content of the tradition they [the witnesses who preserve social memory] convey is more than mere reflection of their needs and troubles”, for memory is not simply created anew but is *something* that is inherited and transmitted.

¹³¹ E.g., Bremmer, “Perpetua”, 97; also, Rives, “Piety”, 1-26. Heffernan similarly argues in regards to the redactor’s work that ‘accurate’ depiction may include rhetorical device in its communication; he sees the redactor’s task as not “factual” journalistic reportage but as something far more subtle, in *Passion*, 347. For an example of this possible dynamic, see Chapter 6 (p. 213) of this study.

¹³² Hartog, *Polycarp’s*, 189.

¹³³ Clark, “The Lady Vanishes”, 30.

This approach is important for my exegetical engagement with Perpetua's visionary accounts. Because the visions are *presented* – regardless of whether or not they occurred – they are viewed as employing devices not dissimilar to those in ancient literature. To name merely a few examples: Macrobius stated that philosophers taught enigmatic truths through storied narratives or allegories in which a character has visions or dreams;¹³⁴ the paranetic visions of apostles and their compatriots in Acts and of confessors throughout the early Christian centuries were depicted as significant and symbolic revelations of divine truths;¹³⁵ dreams in literary epics and contemporary novels serve as foreshadowing devices;¹³⁶ and Cassius Dio, contemporary to Perpetua and for a time a proconsul in North Africa, attributed the inception of his *History* to a dream in which he is commanded to write.¹³⁷ Ultimately, the *Passio* as a whole, including Perpetua's entire account, is interpreted as contextually embedded within various literary traditions and frameworks, both secular and Christian. I approach the text as inextricably linked to its contexts – the layered configurations of identities, traditions, texts, practices, and relationships within which it was written – and strive to interpret it in this light. Such a reading complicates the common assumption that Perpetua “clearly believed that these dreams contained signs sent from heaven in order to help her”.¹³⁸ Instead, what might be clear is that Perpetua as an author demonstrates awareness that visions could be an effective literary vehicle; what she herself “believed” about them is another unrecoverable issue altogether.

¹³⁴ Macrobius *Comm. in Somn. Scip.* 1.2.9.

¹³⁵ E.g., Acts 10.9-17; *Mart. Poly.* 5.2; *Cyp. Ep.* 8; cf. Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 97; Miller, *Dreams*, 14-105. See Chapter 5 (p. 173-174) of this study for an exegetical engagement with Perpetua's vision vocabulary and that in Acts.

¹³⁶ Cf. Plastira-Valkanou, “Dreams”, 137-149.

¹³⁷ Cassius Dio *Hist. Rom.* 73.23.1-2.

¹³⁸ Cooper, “A Father”, 695; cf. a more nuanced discussion of this complication in Formisano, “Perpetua”, 333-334.

2.3.1 Genre: A Commemorative Narrative

While the *Passio* broadly belongs to the corpus of early Christian martyr accounts, a more specific elucidation of the *Passio*'s genre (or genres) is vital for exegetical investigation into the narrative as a whole. As a martyrdom text, this work is inherently invested with corporate and commemorative purposes. The divine realities of the martyrs' actions, experiences, and deaths are the primary subjects of this mediated account; in this way it acts as a commemorative work by casting the past "into a history with contemporaneous meaning" interpreted within communal frames of reference.¹³⁹ The classification and consequent reading of the *Passio* in this study emphasizes these commemorative techniques as performed within the work's contemporary social realities. Such contextual realities were dynamic and layered, comprised of a secular culture that fostered such public commemorative production and a Christian community that actively promulgated memory of such *exempla* in both text and practice.

Indeed, early Christian martyrdom accounts were a social and ideological enterprise that readily circulated and were expeditiously incorporated into activities and ideologies within liturgical praxis as well as texts.¹⁴⁰ As the *Passio* redactor fashions a casing for the account, this enterprise always provides an interpretive framework.¹⁴¹ Throughout his prolegomena in particular, the vocabulary and antistrophic doxologies attest to an intended liturgical audience and function, and his

¹³⁹ DeConick, "Reading", 207.

¹⁴⁰ This is primarily explored in Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 8-9, and Perkins, "Space, Place, Voice", 117-137, *inter alia*.

¹⁴¹ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 9, presents this point in a more general scale: in hagiographical accounts, "collective memory creates the critical interpretive framework". Cf. Moriarty, "Claims", 307-313, which argues that the redactor's words aim at Christian converts who retained their Roman attitudes, particularly in that their ancestral *traditio* still dominated life. Of all the martyr stories of antiquity, Moriarty contends, the *Passio* is most insistent on the consequences of Christian conversion as *rejection* of tradition and antiquity. This I counter, for the redactor is clearly referring to "deeds recounted about the faith" within the Christian past as faithful and good. Furthermore, Christian identity in North Africa during the second and third centuries perhaps ought not be seen as totally binary to that of Roman *traditio*, as Rebillard, *Christians*, more recently contended.

commemoratio comment that the strong in faith will hear this story - and find it just as significant a testimony as previous *exempla* - implies the rhetorical creation of an ideal (and truly faithful) audience's participation with the account. A roughly analogous situation may be seen in Aulus Gellius' crafting of his own ideal cultivated readership: when one *Attic Nights* passage presents a normative scene of an Antonine literary circle, Gellius seems to be implying how his readers ought to behave with his own text (which, it is implied, is of a worthy literary calibre to be engaged as such!).¹⁴² Other early hagiographical accounts perform comparable rhetoric: the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, for example, deploys guiding remarks in its introductory section. Polycarp is directly compared to Christ and is declared to be a martyr "in accordance with the Gospel" (2.1). This established, both the significance of the content and the audience's response are constructed: "blessed and noble are all martyrdoms that occurred according to God's will... Truly, who would not admire the martyrs' nobility, courage, and love of the Master?" (2.1-2).¹⁴³

The significant generic similarity is that both relay a configuration of the past as a commemorative narrative with content that is rhetorically joined to an already commemorated (traditioned¹⁴⁴) past. Thus past events are presented in dramatic, symbolic form; a hermeneutic, variously implicit and explicit throughout, interprets

¹⁴² The scene is a tantalizing section in Aulus Gellius 3.1: a work of Sallust, noticed to be in the hand of one in the company, is read aloud by request. After hearing a brief selection on avarice, the group pauses to question and discuss its meaning, Sallust's style and intent, and its implications. William Johnson observes that this is a model chronology of educated disputation and argues that this entire *Attic Nights* episode revolves around the relation to, conversational jockeying over, mastery of, and refined thinking about a text – in other words, this scene advocates how the elite *ought* to read and participate with his text. See Johnson, "Constructing", 326-328.

¹⁴³ Further parallels with the *Mart. Poly.* will be explored later in this study, particularly in Chapter 6 (section 6.5, p. 212-222).

¹⁴⁴ The term *traditioned* highlights the reality that this past is ensconced within the dynamic, interrelated, and multifaceted traditions, practices, teachings, beliefs, *et cetera*, of the community. For example, a Gospel can be *traditioned* in that its content is variously re-enacted, read aloud, sung, instructed, transmitted orally and textually, is engaged in both material and ideological dimensions.

this narrative.¹⁴⁵ From its very commencement, the *Passio* constructs a meaningful relationship between the narrative and its audience. In classifying this text as a work of *commemorative narrative traditioning*, I emphasize the memory-work occurring within its storied narrative, the inherently social and contextual aspects of this task, the significant category of ancient narrative and the rhetorical tools therein, and the palpable aim of this narrative to be received as joined to the traditioned past.

Even as corporate memory serves as my interpretive framework, it also informs my assessment of the *Passio*'s genre. It needs to be emphasized that this is the case for the *entire* text, because nearly all classifications of the *Passio*'s genre concur that the different authorial voices produce distinctly different types of works. Even amidst myriad approaches to (and extraordinarily diverse exegetical understandings of) the text, the vast majority of readings catalogue the redactor's "framing" work as liturgical and teleological. It is aimed at a specific audience, authoritatively articulated, and rhetorically-charged in its content. Many studies additionally view the section attributed to Saturus as equally purposeful and replete with rhetorical devices. The visionary account that comprises Saturus' work is, in the majority of cases, viewed as a mediated narrative vehicle (whether or not he "actually" experienced a vision) and as demonstrably aware that its content will be authenticated by his martyrdom and read aloud by the local Christian community. In contrast, Perpetua's portions are almost unanimously classified as a "first-person narrative of her experience in prison",¹⁴⁶ which the redactor uses for his own purposes.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Kirk's general contention that this is a key facet of commemoration within social memory, in "Social and Cultural Memory", 7-9.

¹⁴⁶ Such an interpretation of the redactor, Saturus, and Perpetua is seen, for example, in Perkins, "Space, Place, Voice", 135, 129; cf. the similarities and variations in interpretations such as that of Heffernan, *Passion*, 168, or Waldner, "Visions", 214-216, which present the redactor's more "strategic" work as rhetorical but Perpetua's visions as a genuine prophetic experience straightforwardly relayed because "they were not a private matter to her...she wanted to make her visions popularly accessible". It is still apparent that the males are viewed as presenting rhetorically-

Rather than viewing Perpetua's narrative as a kind of literary victim whose distinct genre and content is "appropriated" or even "distorted" by the redactor,¹⁴⁷ I contend that *Perpetua* may have had in mind to use the redactor in order to transmit her commemorative narrative. As such, Perpetua's account is emphatically not classified in this study as a visionary's dream-diary; neither is it viewed as an introspectively diurnal developing self-realization in which "the question of identity – Perpetua's true self – functions as the central driving force".¹⁴⁸ I argue instead that Perpetua's "identity" and legacy is intricately self-constructed through every word of the teleological episodic scenarios of her text and that the other two authorial voices greatly collaborate with this effort.¹⁴⁹

Ultimately, I classify Perpetua's text - as I do the whole of the *Passio* - as a commemorative narrative. Throughout its mediated episodic content, this work participates with the traditions and texts of her various communities. This participation is not a mere accident of context but is extremely potent and purposeful, for it serves alongside her martyr act to endorse the value of her legacy. In its aim for commemoration, Perpetua's account uses rhetorically-styled narrative as "an aid to signification":¹⁵⁰ it gestures to her community's authorities, both past and present, as a means of placing her narrative (and hence, memory of her) among them. While the terms *hypomnēmata* or *commentarius* may be useful in that they broadly denote

styled works, while Perpetua is relating (to a diary for her own reflection or for her Christian community) her personal reflections, visions, and experiences.

¹⁴⁷ Passive verbs taken from Shaw, "Passion", 301; Shaw here speaks of Perpetua's account as "unmediated self-perception, her reality, [which] was subsequently appropriated by a male editor", and argues that all theological interpretation comes from the redactor/editor, not Perpetua's "incandescent words".

¹⁴⁸ Quotation from Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 86.

¹⁴⁹ This is not to suggest that her entire 'account' cleverly fabricates a thoroughly fictional experience (see section on method above). Rather, I am proposing a more nuanced view that that Perpetua as an imprisoned martyr-to-be purposefully, selectively portrays a narrative based on an experience for a specific audience. Cf. Bisbee's observation that "The modern scholar who places texts as wholes into the categories 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' misunderstands the nature of ancient Christian literature" (*Pre-Decian*, 84).

¹⁵⁰ Habineck, "Situating Literacy at Rome", 136.

writing memories or composing commentary,¹⁵¹ I would opt for a more specific classification that can be consistently applied to the entire *Passio* and also highlight the complexity of Perpetua's authorial act. *Commemorative narrative traditioning* emphasizes that her work is viewed as intentional self-writing that presents a stylised narrative both taking place within and aimed at the traditions of communal memory.

It is important to note that such an act has layered contexts: commemoration was not merely a Christian exercise. The monuments and inscriptions that filled the daily visual experience of those living in the Greco-Roman world are a testimony to the memory-shaping, identity-confirming (and identity-constructing!) endeavors of the powerful. Indeed, I would assert that the oft-voiced critique of the redactor's enthusiasm regarding Perpetua fails to acknowledge the layered commemorative genre in which he participates.¹⁵² While the apparent panegyric used to depict Perpetua seems excessive by modern standards and has prompted most commentators to express suspicion – it “does not inspire me with confidence,” Dodds infamously remarked¹⁵³ – such a view neglects the operations of collective memory work in its Roman context. In fact, the hyperbole operates perfectly as a function in the paradigms of commemoration within Roman practices of *beneficium*.

These practices will be further elucidated in Chapter 3 of this study, but here it is significant to note that numerous specific terminologies used throughout the *Passio* originate in *beneficium*'s conspicuous social realities. This implies that the text

¹⁵¹ Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *Greek-English Dictionary*; also Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1451-1452. Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 91, 253, defines and delivers a concise summary of the classification and notes that this was the term for self-writing in antiquity employed by Foucault. See also Heffernan, “Philology”, 320-321.

¹⁵² Numerous recent studies have focused upon the modern failure to understand the pedagogic technique of hyperbole in antiquity: see the discussion in Griffin, 92-113, which explores the style of discourse and the pedagogic technique of hyperbole in the language of reciprocity. She points out that Cicero aptly describes this method, “Those teachers of yours and masters of virtue seem to me to have deliberately extended the bounds of moral duty a little further than nature intended, their purpose being that in our minds we should strive for perfection, and so at least make it to the point we ought to reach” (*Mur.* 65). Also, MacMullen, “Personal Power”, 512-24.

¹⁵³ Dodds, *Pagan*, 49.

participates within an entire web of social mores that has generally been left unacknowledged, despite the fact that this reality indelibly impacts on the content and genre of the narrative. In its Roman context, commemoration was a consistent means of ensuring the perpetuation of memory after death. Thus, it is possible to view Perpetua as locating herself within the dynamic memory traditions of her community by authoring a meaningful narrative and commissioning the completion of her “story”, just as contemporary elites exploited the opportunity to dictate aspects of social memory after death by commissioning inscriptions, monuments, histories, and the like. It is equally possible to view the redactor’s completion of her work as a literary cultivation of memory in reciprocation for her benefaction – an act also not uncommon in this era.¹⁵⁴ While the *Passio* text provides a fascinating window into the corporate relationships involved in *beneficia* within the North African community, as will be contended in subsequent chapters of this study, it is important to note that *beneficia* itself provides an essential element within the commemorative nature of the *Passio*.

Another significant dimension of this genre – one that will serve an essential role in my analysis of the text – is that implied by the term *traditioning*. As a mediated narrative, the *Passio* both explicitly and implicitly demonstrates juxtaposition to other works as a way of allying itself with them. In referencing other Christian works which, to a certain extent, are already situated in corporate traditions, this intertextual verbal imagery serves as a conduit for meaning.¹⁵⁵ This will be seen particularly in Perpetua’s textured literary exploit. This highlights the concomitant

¹⁵⁴ E.g., Calullus’ explicit poetic tribute to Allius in poem 68.41-46, 149-150: “I cannot leave unsaid, Muses, in what way Allius assisted me or with what quantity of services he helped me, lest fleeting time cover this deed of his with its forgetful ages like blind night....This gift for you [Allius], made from song, as much as I could, is given back to you for your many services...”

¹⁵⁵ In her analysis of Christianization and the “Rhetoric of Empire”, Cameron argued that in the emergence of Christian culture, imagery offered the most effective conduit for theological meaning, because images constructed relationships between the viewer and the viewed. I here suggest that Perpetua’s use of *verbal* imagery does precisely this. See Cameron, *Christianity*, 150-151.

nature of authority, recognition, and repetition.¹⁵⁶ That is, her memory-making would have no motivation or meaning if such traditions did not already exist to some extent within the contemporary Christian community. In any variety of possible forms and degrees, they had to have been echoed as authorities in her Christian circle for her narrative to be interpreted as allied with them. The seemingly varied content of her narrative ultimately unifies in its service to associate her (her story) with texts and teachings already in Christian traditions.¹⁵⁷

I argue throughout this study that Perpetua's account employs sophisticated methods to present an intentionally commemorative work to an ecclesial audience of which she is very much aware. Chapters 4-5 will specifically demonstrate the tools and tropes of her discourse and will further establish that they serve to enrich her account with rhetorical styling, provide theological depth and authority, cultivate foreshadow and leitmotif, and, given the narrative's generic aims, divulge the "desire that they be recognized".¹⁵⁸ All of this arguably culminates in order to indicate that Perpetua writes about herself in a purposeful, embellished narrative that itself is a discourse with corporate memory-making. The entire textured literary act of the *Passio*, and in particular Perpetua's account, demonstrates an underpinning assumption of the layered dynamics of contemporary social life and seeks to merge with their memory practices. As a work of commemorative traditioning, this text gestures to authorities both past and present as a means of placing its narrative among them. Within the engaging episodic form¹⁵⁹ that is replete with rhetorical tooling, each

¹⁵⁶ Though she does not apply this to Perpetua, Castelli refers to something similar in a more limited scope: repetition and recognition are essential "culture-making dimensions" (*Martyrdom*, 136-137).

¹⁵⁷ This shall be indicated specifically in the subsequent chapters of this study.

¹⁵⁸ The suitable phrase is taken from the Elder Seneca's remark that Ovid penned allusively "not for the sake of stealing, but borrowing, with this in mind: he desired it to be recognized" *non surripiendi causa, sed palam mutuandi, hoc animo ut vellet agnosci* (*Suasoriae* 3.7).

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Konstan, "Perpetua's Martyrdom", 298-299, which explicitly views Perpetua's section as an episodic narrative (one "not wholly alien to that of the romantic novel" of the era) but nonetheless still classifies it as a prison diary.

author variously employs vivid narrative throughout as a medium for meaning and conduit towards intent.

Ultimately, my classification of the *Passio* contends that, while the text is trivocal and features resultant variation in content and rhetorical technique, it ought to be viewed as a work operating within one genre. My challenges to dominant generic classifications fit into a larger re-assessment of the complexity of antique works that has been ongoing in various scholarly fields for several decades. Two among these provide interesting parallels. Firstly, the compositions of Sulpicia, the elite Latin poetess of the early Augustan age, have only recently been viewed as intricately rhetorical elegaic works of a literary caliber comparable to those produced by her male counterparts.¹⁶⁰ Secondly, it has been contended that a reading of Jerome's letters as a straightforward (or even diary-like!) presentation needs significant revision, for, in the words of Andrew Cain, "it vastly underestimates the multiple layers of rhetorical obfuscation at work in the correspondence as well as the rich literary traditions within which Jerome was working".¹⁶¹ Increasingly, these letters are being viewed as not only rhetorical compositions but also as parts of a collection of edited correspondence circulated in Rome by Jerome "as part of an aggressive text-based self-fashioning campaign".¹⁶² Perhaps, like Jerome's mediated epistolary corpus, Perpetua's mode of communication has led modern generic evaluation astray. Like Sulpicia's literary achievement, perhaps Perpetua's narrative has been classified primarily according to assumptions based on its author's gender, rather than its content.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ See Hallett, "The Eleven Elegies", 45-65.

¹⁶¹ Cain, "*Vox*", 500-525.

¹⁶² Cain, "*Vox*", 500-525.

¹⁶³ As I will specifically contend in the next chapter, the calibre of Perpetua's literary ability ought instead to be considered potentially quite advanced.

In my reassessment, a panoply of traditions both secular and Christian comprise the context for Perpetua's act of authorship and for the genre of the *Passio* as a whole. Its styled narrative joins the traditioned memories of a community; its content is not only rich with rhetorical embellishment to add interpretive meaning and associate it with the traditioned past, but also is legitimized by the martyr act (an act interpreted by a martyr herself prior to the event and by the redactor in his accounting of it!). The rhetorical arts, particularly allusion and mimesis, serve a vital role in this narrational presentation. Since a significant portion of my assessment revolves around the assertion that rhetorical gestures to other works ensconced in Christian memory serve as a legitimizing technique, a concise engagement with such features will serve as an important foundation for later exegetical analysis.

2.3.2 A Note on Allusion, Mimesis, and Literary Dependency

Intertextuality in antiquity has educed abundant analysis. From deliberate and extensive evocation to unconscious imitation, the instances, definitions, qualifications, and implications of intertextual literary embellishment continue to garner considerable debate – and have, in fact, done so since antiquity! The more recent angles of this discussion owe significant debt to the work of Conte. His significant philological endeavors, particularly in *The Rhetoric of Imitation*, challenged previous interpretive trends that viewed ancient texts largely in isolation from one another. In Conte's analysis, literary works of Roman Imperial era display a strong tendency towards the creation of systems of interrelated texts. This "intertextual continuity" via diverse forms of literary imitation was largely a rhetorical figuring and, in fact, were numbered among most common literary rhetorical devices during this time. Since the work of Conte, scholarship has continued to explore the aspects and limits of intertextuality in antiquity, and, indeed, much remains to be done in terms of viewing

the texts of antiquity in relationship with one another – at least, I would contend that this is the case with the *Passio*.

While a great many ancient literary works represent “new texts incorporating and negotiating their way through old texts”, to use the apt terminology of Finkelpearl, an important question is whether or not they do so consciously.¹⁶⁴ It can be difficult to discern “accidental” linguistic confluence, wherein specific phrases are simply part of a society’s parlance, and deliberate allusion, which is reference by covert, tacit, or indirect means.¹⁶⁵ The possibility of unintentional literary “memory” or “influence” presents yet another aspect of this ambiguity.¹⁶⁶ Yet, scholars have provided critical insights as to this matter. Despite the difficulties of defining and establishing criteria for aspects of intertextuality, many, including Hinds, have argued that critics must move “beyond philological fundamentalism”.¹⁶⁷ In other words, it is important to acknowledge that ambiguity will inherently be a part of the task of discerning intertextuality. It is simultaneously important to define and establish working criteria in assessing aspects of ancient intertextuality and it is difficult to come to universal and absolute standards for qualifying or identifying it.¹⁶⁸ Thus, interpretation must ultimately give close attention to intertextual *possibility*, particularly in light of the literary trends of the first two centuries CE.

One such literary trend and rhetorical device that was extremely common among imperial-era authors – and, in fact, the one that shall be among the most significant in this study – is that of allusion. As indicated above, and in opposition to literary influence or linguistic confluence, allusion is seen as manifestly and creatively

¹⁶⁴ Finkelpearl, “Pagan Traditions”, 90, 82.

¹⁶⁵ Hinds, *Allusion*, 17.

¹⁶⁶ As Conte points out, *Rhetoric*, 29.

¹⁶⁷ This is the topic of the second chapter of Hinds, *Allusion*, 17-51; this argument is similar to that of Finkelpearl, *Metamorphosis*, 8.

¹⁶⁸ As Finkelpearl, *Metamorphosis*, 1, points out, even if critics fail to universally agree on a system for identifying it, scholars can still subject their assessment of intertextuality to rigorous scrutiny.

deliberate. This can be seen, for example, in Seneca's description of Ovid's expertly purposeful art of allusion: it was "not for the sake of stealing, but borrowing with this intent – *that he desired it to be recognized*" (*Suas.* 3.7). This points out that allusion bears an extremely significant authenticating function. It is authenticating in that, firstly, a figural relationship is established between the allusive text and that alluded to, and secondly, the act functions as an indication of the author's integrity.¹⁶⁹ It is apparent that allusive gesture would be key to a literary exploit of commemorative traditioning, or to the construction of and joining to social memory, such as I contend is underway in the *Passio*.

This study will employ Finkelpearl's useful criteria for its investigations regarding allusion. Allusion, she submits, is a conscious literary evocation that involves distinct similarity of phrasing, including the appearance of certain grammatical constructions, distinctive vocabulary terms, correspondence in sentence structure, or a locution that is seems otherwise unsuitable "or jarring and wants to call attention to itself as allusion".¹⁷⁰ Indeed, the last qualifier is significant, for it notes both allusion's rhetorical attempt "to evoke a particular effect through the juxtaposition of texts", and its "tendency to carry a kind of built-in commentary, a kind of reflexive annotation, which underlines or intensifies their demand to be interpreted as allusions".¹⁷¹

A similar "demand" to be recognized and interpreted is seen as latent in the work of mimesis, or extensive literary imitation of recognized models.¹⁷²

MacDonald's work on mimesis in antique Christian texts suggests that six criteria can

¹⁶⁹ Hinds, *Allusion*, 15-16, 22; Conte, *Rhetoric*, 59.

¹⁷⁰ Finkelpearl, *Metamorphosis*, 3-4, 6-7.

¹⁷¹ Hinds, *Allusion*, 1.

¹⁷² See MacDonald, *Mimesis*, 1-3, which also presents it as writing "through imitation of recognized models".

be used for the purpose of locating mimetic achievement.¹⁷³ Each of his criteria asks a question in regards to the relationship between the model and its suspected imitator: accessibility (could the model have been accessible?), analogy (did other texts also imitate the model?), density (are there numerous parallels to the model in this specific work?), sequence of parallels (if there are numerous parallels, do they show a similar sequence?), distinct traits (are there peculiar elements of content in both texts?), and interpretability (why was the model possibly imitated?). While all six need not be simultaneously proven or present, the plausible presence of more criteria strengthens the case for the assessment of a mimetic undertaking.

It is important for the purposes of this study to call attention to the *creative* aspects of intertextual allusion and mimesis. While they are echoes that are “manifestly imitative”, they are not *simply* imitative.¹⁷⁴ Seneca’s *Epis.* 84 contains an intriguing explication of his perception of the creative intertextual act: “Whatever is collected by reading, the stylus may render in form. We should imitate the bees, as they say, which wander and pluck suitable flowers to make honey, then carry, arrange, and distribute through the honeycomb”. In fact, Seneca continues, creativity and intertextuality coexist. “May we welcome [other literary works] faithfully, and may we make them ours. In this way, something becomes one out of many, just as one number is made when a calculation joins together lesser and differing sums”, he exhorts, “even if there is evident in you a likeness of someone for whom you have high admiration, then I wish that you are similar like a song, not just as an image. An image is a thing for that which is dead”. What Seneca suggests is the rhetorical tool of literary transformation – a deliberate gathering, recognizably intertextual products,

¹⁷³ MacDonald, *Mimesis*, 1-3

¹⁷⁴ Finkelpearl, *Metamorphosis*, 3-4, emphasizes this common but essential understanding.

and also authorial creativity. As shall be contended, I suspect this may be a significant factor underway in the *Passio*.

In discerning the continual employment of skillful allusive gesture in the *Passio*'s styled narrative – particularly attending to that of Perpetua – I do not imply an authorial “consuming” or “subsuming” act upon the text of another. Rather, I emphasize that this exploit is dually directed towards enriching the literary aspect of the narrative and towards enhancing its authority and memory – an authority and memory that only her intended audience can ultimately grant. That is, my argument will seek to indicate that Perpetua uses narrative intertextuality as “an aid to signification”, in that her work rhetorically gestures to authorities both past and present as a means of placing her legacy among them.¹⁷⁵ I am convinced that there is a significant presence of various literary models in the *Passio*, and this presence augments its amazing commemorative accomplishment – an accomplishment that I contend has not been adequately explored to date.

2.4 Conclusion

Centuries after the emergence of the *Passio*, Gregory of Nyssa would render his sister's life in text. Clark suggests that he did so less out of fear that her life would otherwise be forgotten than to make a memory of her life “useful” for the instruction of others.¹⁷⁶ Despite all of their differences, neither the *Passio* nor the *Vita Macrinae* was meant to be simple documentation or personal reflection. They were created to make *exempla* that were both legitimized by - and intended to join - the memory-traditions of the Christian community. I contend that the whole of the *Passio* narrative can be read as an internally-varied trivocal work – and one with authorial differences in both technique and secondary purposes – but as one that ultimately

¹⁷⁵ Habineck, “Situating Literacy”, 136.

¹⁷⁶ Clark, “The Lady Vanishes”, 30.

maintains one genre, that of commemorative narrative. Each section of the text maintains a genre-conscious participation with significant texts and traditions so as rhetorically to assert meaning, relationship, and authority.

My study will maintain that the framework of corporate memory motivates and molds the narrative of the *Passio*. This interpretive approach views the text in light of its contemporary social dynamics, as these influence corporate identity and the commemorative strategies therein. I am convinced that exegetical endeavor with the complex content of *Passio* can benefit immensely from such an approach. This argument will be particularly emphasized in terms of Perpetua's narrative, as her work has not been interpreted as a rhetorical literary endeavour, much less as an exploit of commemorative traditioning!¹⁷⁷ Counter to common understandings, I suggest that the *Passio's* audience is not presented with an *exemplum* created by the redactor. Instead, Perpetua has rhetorically fashioned herself as one. She does so in a work that is not a new convert's naïve exercise in visceral introspection, but rather one of literary narrative always in the process of rhetorically-generating commemorative interpretive meaning. This meaning both draws from and seeks to join her community's corporate memory. Her work therefore ought to be viewed as one situating her among other *exempla*, a strategy common in its context but not explored as a significant factor within this account nor as a motivating factor for her authorial act.

The distinct discourse of her account will be presented in this study as a literary tapestry with an intent that directs the entire *Passio*, a work that as a whole operates in view of its audience.¹⁷⁸ This is consistent, I think, with the contention that “the texts that remain for us to interpret from the early Christian world are

¹⁷⁷ At least, among those according Perpetua's authorship.

¹⁷⁸ Again, I am not assessing the “historical accuracy” of the details within her account but am examining each narrative element as filtered for an audience, whether or not specific events “actually” occurred.

overwhelmingly rhetorical in their character” and thus “require approaches that treat them in their textuality”.¹⁷⁹ There is not an exception simply because Perpetua’s self-written narrative is that of a young woman. This interpretive strategy will be employed to resolve various outstanding exegetical quandaries in the text, particularly those replete in the narrative of Perpetua. It will reveal that Perpetua employs a complex array of literary tools and textual traditions, which in themselves reflect categories informed by Perpetua’s contextual identities. A crucial task in my analysis of the narrative, then, is an exploration of the key contexts that shape her authorial act. These contexts are the subject of the chapter to which this study now turns.

¹⁷⁹ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 26.

CHAPTER 3

PERPETUA AND HER WORLD: A RECONSIDERATION

As the *Passio*'s introductory pericope transitions to its narrative, an inculcate company emerges: "A group of adolescent catechumens were apprehended (*apprehensi sunt adolescentes catechumeni*); Revocatus and his fellow slave Felicitas, Saturninus, and Secundulus, and among them Vibia Perpetua" (2.1.1). The latter is quickly demarcated with a succession of phrases that closely resemble typical imperial-era epigraphs: "Vibia Perpetua, nobly born, abundantly educated, recently married" (*honeste nata, liberaliter instituta, matronaliter nupta*, 2.1.2).¹⁸⁰ Of course, the medium for this lexical *memoria* is ink rather than chiseled letters on grey stone. Yet, like those letters, these are meant to be more than laconic adjectives to fill a space: the phrases serve to emphasize publicly and to signify aspects of their bearer – aspects commanding authority as well as influencing participation with corporate memory traditions.

Perpetua's multifold status as a confessor and catechumen, and also as an affluent woman of noble status, notably educated, and only recently married, deserve substantial attention for a proper reading of both her narrative and the whole of the *Passio* account. These circumstances must not, however, merely be viewed as significant on their own terms, but also the extent to which they impacted one another and functioned as an interrelated whole. Furthermore, they must be set within their contemporary social contexts. This chapter focuses on precisely these tasks.

While a purview of contemporary cultural norms may seem redundant in light of the various scholarly studies on the *Passio* that set forth this background milieu, such an exploration proves to be an essential facet within the larger argument of this

¹⁸⁰ E.g., CIL VIII 870: *matronaliter nupta* and *honestae memoriae femina* (abbreviated per custom).

thesis. This is not simply because the text is ultimately inextricable from its larger cultural settings. Rather, several related and unequivocally vital aspects of the social world of the *Passio*, particularly in regards to Perpetua, have not hitherto received adequate attention. These aspects are of consequence to a reading of the work as a whole, and a lack of attention to this context has resulted in significant gaps and inconsistencies as far as the exegetical endeavor is concerned. The *Passio* is far more affected by contemporary conventions revolving around social status than has previously been acknowledged.

For this reason, further attention must be given to not only the name and standing that explicitly characterize Perpetua but also, and more specifically, the intricate practices and networks of relationships that existed within the fabric of Roman life. Secular social status and related mores do not simply vanish in the context of an early Christian community, despite the assumption to the contrary that seems to pervade many *Passio* studies. In such a stratum as hers, Perpetua would have participated in a number of behaviors and customs that, when attended to, distinctly impact the *Passio*. The utmost of these is the practical and ideological social mechanism of benefaction, which ultimately provided the functionality of imperial-era Roman society. A summary of the practices involved in benefaction will be undertaken here, while its potential effects within the *Passio* will also be highlighted.

A further interpretive solecism, one indeed connected to social standing, relates to another descriptor that is used to signify Perpetua: bountifully educated. The implications of these words are usually only mentioned by scholars in broad general strokes.¹⁸¹ They must, however, be extensively explored in light of her elite

¹⁸¹ One exception includes McKechnie, “St. Perpetua”, 279-291, who explores the likely depths of Perpetua’s education and points to its scale of implications for the *Passio*; cf. Ameling’s critique,

status, of the cultural and intellectual tenors of the late second century, and of what seems to be indicated throughout Perpetua's text. Readers cannot assume Perpetua's literary naïveté merely because she is a woman; if she experienced the level of education emphasized by the redactor, then many studies have underestimated her literary exposure and abilities as well as the indelible impact that these would have had on her experience in the Christian catechumenate. An analysis of what can be surmised about an elite young woman's experience in the *studia liberalia* within the intellectual *Zeitgeist* of the late second century CE is clearly in order, and it will be undertaken here as a foundational element towards exegetical engagement with her narrative.

This chapter of the study continues to establish the layered contexts of the *Passio* by turning attention to Christianity in Carthage at the time of the narrative's composition. One aspect of this milieu is the contemporary significance of martyrdom and the distinctive authority given to confessors and martyrs. Another feature often alleged to be of significance to the *Passio* is the New Prophecy movement.¹⁸² The possibility of the nascent presence of New Prophecy, or Montanism, in Carthage at the time of the *Passio* events will be addressed, since a handful of scholars maintain that New Prophecy is *the* motivating characteristic overtly manifest throughout the text, particularly in the voice of Perpetua. The parameters of this movement at the time will be defined, and careful consideration

"*Femina*", 78-102. Ameling does purport to engage with this issue. However, (as shall be argued) his essay does not engage contemporary scholarship adequately concerning education and aspects of literacy during this era, and it is dismissive of key features in Perpetua's account. In most studies, secular education is mentioned generally as a part of Perpetua's general background, and it is not developed specifically concerning the character of or nuances in Perpetua's account itself; e.g., Heffernan, *Passion*, 150-151, which simply states "she may have received an education equal to that of an educated young man, and clearly had more than the young man in Petronius *Satyricon* (58.7)...[she] may have received a very good education", and Salisbury's chapter on Perpetua's general background, in *Perpetua's*, 32-54.

¹⁸² See useful summary in Marksches, 277-290.

will be given as to whether these characteristics are attested in the *Passio* and thus provoke or inform its content.

Another vital aspect of the context of contemporary Christianity is the introductory classification of the martyr company by the redactor. What is indicated by the adjectival phrase *adolescent catechumens*? This question is crucial yet ubiquitously unattended in *Passio* scholarship, particularly in regards to Perpetua. Her identity as a *catechumen* typically receives an imprecise nod via negation and the bi-fold assumption that she and the four others had *only very recently* “converted” or made a connection with their “new group”, the Christian community.¹⁸³ The implications and problematic nature of this assumption will be addressed, and the contours of what the phrase actually seems to imply will be mapped out through an exploration of contemporaneous voices and a survey of current scholarship on the early catechumenate. It cannot be assumed of the *Passio* that “catechumen” denotes “new convert” and implies very limited (if any) exposure to Christian texts, teachings, corporate practices, and identities. This is particularly significant in terms of Perpetua’s narrative, because scholars tend to begin with, and operate under, the assumption that because Perpetua “had very little formal teaching” in Christianity, the reader “need not look for elaborate theology”.¹⁸⁴ An exploration of contemporary catechetical praxis and attention to Perpetua’s social standing, however, allows for more extensive possibilities.

¹⁸³ Quotations taken from Ameling, “*Femina*”, 100. This assumption that the five are young in age and *new* converts is mirrored in all studies that I have encountered concerning the *Passio*, e.g., Ameling’s further comment that Perpetua’s employment of Christian Latin and distinctly biblical concepts is “astonishing” since Perpetua’s connection with Christianity was “recent” (he thus reasons that, like a child, she must be mimicking what she does not understand); she is “a recent catechumen” in Sebesta, “Vibia Perpetua”, 103; “Perpétue, nouvelle convertie” and “la conversion de Perpétue est recente”, in Amat, “L’Authenticité”, 180; her “new faith” in Kitzler, “*Passio*”, 9; Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 200; Ross and Lander, “Perpetua”, 1048-1063; Rader, *Lost Tradition*, 2; Robeck, *Prophecy*, 55, *et alia*. The one near exception would be Heffernan’s recent fleeting remark, “her memory of Scriptural passages suggests a serious study of the Bible as a catechumen, over some time, possibly years”, 151. This is the entire extent of his comment, and he immediately transitions to another topic.

¹⁸⁴ Ameling, “*Femina*”, 100; Robeck, *Prophecy*, 55.

Perpetua's status and her secular and Christian education provide significant synchronic lenses with which to read her narrative, when they are adequately acknowledged to the extents that the context and text seem to indicate actually may have occurred. She authors in a milieu where her identity as an elite, liberally educated catechumen offers significant viable keys for the construction of an interpretive paradigm for the *Passio*. A careful exploration of these layered contextual circumstances proves to be indispensable. Ultimately, this chapter serves to buttress my contention that portions ascribed to Perpetua reveal an authoritative but complex rhetorical narrative shaped *by* advanced exposure to contemporary texts and trainings both Christian and secular *for* participation with and creation of corporate commemoration.

3.1 *Elite Status*

When *Passio* studies address the subject of status, Perpetua's standing as confessor receives nearly all attention and comment. Indeed, while contemporary Christian tradition regarding the prestige of confessors has been the focus of much scholarly analysis (as shall be addressed later in this chapter), Perpetua's social status receives little more than passing comment. Perhaps this is due to the nearly *ad nauseam* emphasis that Christian martyrs "profoundly unsettled the social and familial relationships on which their world had depended for its coherence".¹⁸⁵ A stark binary opposition between secular and Christian – with the latter wholly inverting the realities and hierarchies of the former – seems to be comprehensively assumed, particularly with regard to the acts and identities of women.¹⁸⁶ The redactor's

¹⁸⁵ Cardman, "Acts", 150.

¹⁸⁶ For example, the implications of Cyprian's social status are often acknowledged to have influenced his writings in multifold ways, e.g., Brent, *Cyprian*, 4. Yet in regards to Perpetua, entire studies are dominated by Perpetua's supposed inversion of all existing Roman social structures and assumptions.

deliberate, even emphatic, introduction of Perpetua's social background and intermittent remarks about her standing indicates, however, that Roman social structures may be of greater importance than has yet been acknowledged. It is important to recall that early Christians did not, in fact, reject or invert *all* secular social paradigms but continued to operate within many of them, albeit in complex ways. As Rebillard's significant study of early Christianity in Roman North Africa has recently emphasized, Christian individuals and groups actually demonstrate a complex relationship with their religious and social assumptions and allegiances.¹⁸⁷ Many norms were sustained and served to shape and maintain ecclesiastical structure; this was particularly the case for the significant networks and functions related to social status. Specifically in regards to the *Passio*, these norms deserve careful engagement.

The redactor first distinguishes Perpetua among the martyr company by means of a familial *nomen* and by emphasizing the fact that she is "nobly born" and "of a noble marriage" (*Vibia Perpetua, honeste nata, matronaliter nupta*, 2.1.2). If attention is given to this status as well as its implications, it is apparent that they are variously emphasized, implied, and assumed over the course of the entire *Passio* narrative. The name Vibia alone indicates a comparatively high social status.¹⁸⁸ Three Carthaginian proconsuls during the first century CE bore the name Vibii, and it is widely accorded that the family was thoroughly Romanized, well-connected, wealthy, and likely to be involved in some level of local government affairs as *honestiores* at the time of the composition of the *Passio*. Estimation of the family's specific rank includes a range from the decurial to the senatorial, since the term

¹⁸⁷ Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200-450 CE* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

¹⁸⁸ Bremmer, "Perpetua", 86-95, comments extensively on the Vibii and Perpetua's social standing; cf. also Heffernan, *Passion*, 21, 150-151; Shaw, "Passion", 292-293; Barnes, *Tertullian*, 70; Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 4. See D. Devoti's study of Perpetua as evidence for elite family life in the empire ("La Passion", 66-72). Perpetua should have been exempt from such legal punishment due to this standing; on the abnormally stringent policies of Hilarianus, see Rives, "Piety of a Persecutor", 1-25.

honeste natum can refer to those of senatorial and equestrian status.¹⁸⁹ The phrase “of a noble marriage” is paralleled in epitaphs and serves as a signifier of a female’s dignity and elite family networks.¹⁹⁰ Interestingly, Tertullian complains of elite Christian women in Carthage who are “puffed up by their matron title” (*matronae nomine inflata*).¹⁹¹ He also expresses concern that aristocratic Christian women are still maintaining their public civic duties “out of the obligations of wealth, birth, or former dignities”.¹⁹² Repercussions of Perpetua’s elite status – implications that I contend are manifestly present yet ubiquitously neglected in *Passio* scholarship – demand attention. What could the tapestry of Perpetua’s world have entailed, and how extensively may this context have affected the *Passio*?

3.2 Benefaction

One significant facet of reality for all economic strata in the Roman world involved the dynamics of patronage and benefaction.¹⁹³ Set as they were within the constellation of Roman norms and values, these relationships of reciprocity served, in Seneca’s estimation, as “the foremost bond of society”.¹⁹⁴ Over the past three decades, the complexity and pervasiveness of these networks and mores have received increasing attention, with benefaction, or euergetism, being highlighted as a

¹⁸⁹ Shaw, “Passion”, 292-293, argues for decurial rank; most studies follow this assessment. Barnes, *Tertullian*, 70, avers senatorial standing. Cf. Suetonius *Aug.* 43.3, where the term can apply to either.

¹⁹⁰ E.g., *CIL* VIII, 870.

¹⁹¹ Tertullian *Ad Ux.* 2.8.3. See also discussion in footnote 192 below.

¹⁹² Tertullian *De Cult. Fem.* 2.9.4, 2.11.2-3. Scholars are generally quick to associate Perpetua with Tertullian. Yet it is equally possible that Perpetua numbers among the aristocratic women that instigate his pugilistic pen. As I suggest on p. 110 of this study with regard to a circle of literate female exegetes receiving Tertullian’s literary wrath for their interpretation of the Thecla narrative, it certainly ought to be considered (but heretofore has not been) that Perpetua numbers among the elite Christian women that Tertullian writes polemic *against*.

¹⁹³ The general tendencies of patronage and benefaction (or euergetism) are often extremely difficult to distinguish from one another, particularly during the Roman imperial era; I will follow standard terms as nuanced to context as necessary but often interchangeably in the face of indistinguishability. See Crook’s chapter “Defining our Terms”, in *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 59-66; Elliott, “Patronage and Clientism”, 39-48.

¹⁹⁴ Seneca, *Ben.* 1.4.2.

fundamental aspect of social fabric in the Roman imperial eras. The foundational work in this field, Paul Veyne's *Bread and Circuses*, defines euergetism as "private munificence for public benefit",¹⁹⁵ and, in doing so, highlights its layered realms of influence and relationship. Benefaction was simultaneously personal and public, for even as its ramifications reached into the public realm, it nonetheless was a function rooted in the household and in individuals.¹⁹⁶ It was, furthermore, both magnanimous and decidedly reciprocal. As such, the interactions in these bonds were vertical, asymmetrical and could be collective or individual; they were also often tiered, featuring ascending levels of support regarded as reaching to divine realms. The recipients of "benefits" –which included but were not limited to money or various provisions, connections, legal support or influence, advice, and "help from the gods," to list Seneca's own catalogue of more personal forms of munificence – were informally bound to certain obligations, namely various forms of public expression characterized by gratitude via flattering honorary remembrance for the benefactor or patron and his or her deeds.¹⁹⁷

The most common way in which a community could express gratitude to benefactors and memorialize their munificence for posterity was through the erection of honorific inscriptions, statues, and monuments in public spaces.¹⁹⁸ The commemoration of acts of munificence on a grand public scale are attested in self-funded inscriptions or *ante mortem* tombs and monuments. Such acts were relatively secure means to ensure the perpetuation of memory after death. In commissioning such works, benefactors exploited the opportunity to dictate aspects of memory *post mortem*. These types of inscriptions name the benefactor and elaborate upon roles or

¹⁹⁵ Payne, *Bread and Circuses*, 362; see also Lomas and Cornell, eds., 'Bread and Circuses', 1-12.

¹⁹⁶ Wiedemann, "The Patron", 12-27.

¹⁹⁷ Seneca, *Ben.* 1.2.4; e.g., the reciprocity seen throughout Apuleius' *Met.*; see the useful summaries of Elliott, "Patronage and Clientism", 39-48, and Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 56-58.

¹⁹⁸ Witschel, "Public Presence", 87; MacMullen, "Women in Public", 208-218.

actions undertaken in the community; they also frequently allude to the benefactor's erudition and wealth, and commemorate a variety of the benefactor's social relationships.¹⁹⁹ Within the grand networks of benefaction, then, the honorary inscriptions and funerary monuments of antiquity frequently served larger purposes of memory cultivation; whether established by clients or benefactors, they generally convey the honor involved in munificence – a *dignitas* worthy of commemoration.

This significant aspect of social reality was by no means exclusive to males. By Perpetua's era, imperial women had long set a trend for engaging with public actions of benefaction. The increase in such activity among females in the first centuries CE coincides with the rising tendency for elite women to marry later in life and *sine manu*, thus maintaining unprecedented legal capacities with regard to their property.²⁰⁰ "Roman women of wealthy families exercised significant economic power as property owners in their own right, often with the capacity to use and dispose of a significant portion" of their economic holdings,²⁰¹ and those women who chose to make a public mark on their communities and in their networks via benefactions were honored accordingly.

Indeed, Roman women were prominent members of the social world of the Roman empire; they never existed "a society apart".²⁰² In every strata of society, women actively participated in the networks and operations of their social circles, including the business life of cities; as a great many scholars have recently observed, "the fact carries its own implications".²⁰³ Euergetism by wealthy females involved the same factors and tools as those of males, and such relationships and actions integrated

¹⁹⁹ E.g., *CIL* X. 810-813, *CIL* 10. 292; Cooley, "Women Beyond Rome", 23-46; Hemelrijk, "Female Munificence", 65-84.

²⁰⁰ Hemelrijk, "Female Munificence", 70; Shaw, "Age", 38.

²⁰¹ Hemelrijk and Woolf, "Introduction", 3.

²⁰² Hemelrijk and Woolf, "Introduction", 2.

²⁰³ MacMullen, "Women in Public", 210.

women into the public realm and offered a direct avenue to achieve *dignitas*.²⁰⁴

Hemelrijk has emphasized that during the first centuries CE, “*female munificence changed the notion of exemplary womanhood*”.²⁰⁵ For women of Perpetua’s era, exemplary womanhood – that is, the public memory of exemplary women – no longer relied on exemplary male offspring. Instead, benefaction could bring prominent public influence and honors, the latter of which are seen in the typical ideal venues for memorial recognition such as inscriptions, statues, and epistolary collections intended for public consumption.

A great deal of material evidence attests the variegated activity of female benefactors in the cities of the Roman empire. It has been estimated that perhaps a tenth of the benefactors and patrons of *collegia* and associations throughout Rome and its provinces were women. Though there are an ever-increasingly discovered number of examples of this reality,²⁰⁶ those most often cited involve Eumachia of Pompeii.²⁰⁷ Her funding of a lavish public passageway is noted in an inscription on one of its walls. Its words indicate her honor, her legacy, and indicates her divine dedicatees, who then feature as her own benefactors and highlight her connected status: “Eumachia, daughter of Lucius, public priestess, in her own name and that of her son, Marcus Numistrius Fronto, built with her own funds the porch, covered passage, and colonnade and dedicated them to Concordia Augusta and to Pietas”.²⁰⁸ The largest extant tomb in Pompeii was her commission, built “for herself and for her own [household]” (*sibi et suis*),²⁰⁹ and monumentally promoted the public memory of her legacies honor. Lastly, a public statue, dedicated by an association of clients, portrays

²⁰⁴ Wiedemann, “The Patron”, 12-27; McDonnell, “A Gendered Landscape”, 19-35.

²⁰⁵ Hemelrijk, “Female Munificence”, 80. Emphasis mine.

²⁰⁶ See Hemelrijk and Woolf, “Introduction”, 1-5; Cenerini, “Women”, 9-22; Hemelrijk, “Female Munificence”, 65-84; MacMullen, “Women in Public”, 208-218.

²⁰⁷ Cooley, “Women”, 23-46; Cohick, *Women*, 296.

²⁰⁸ *CIL* X. 810.

²⁰⁹ *CIL* X. 813.

her as a pious civic priestess; it bears an inscription largely repeating her own: “To Eumachia, daughter of Lucius, public priestess, the fullers [dedicate this statue]”.²¹⁰

These three works illustrate the public and complexly vertical asymmetrical gears of *beneficia* in the imperial era; they furthermore display the reality that a woman, as a wealthy female benefactress, could participate in the public life of the *civitas*.²¹¹ Similar material evidence is attested around the cities of the Roman empire, including North Africa. Witschel recently tabulated that an average of 29% of all inscriptions related to euergetism in the cities of Roman North Africa indicate a woman as the benefactress.²¹² Approximately 90% of these are both funerary and honorific, indicating a tendency for both self-commemoration and public honor by recipients to be situated around the benefactor’s death.²¹³

MacMullen long ago observed that, in the Roman world, power greatly depended “on perceptions, on symbols and gestures”.²¹⁴ This applies also to benefaction, which naturally involved various dynamics of power and prestige; it also depended on various social mechanisms involving “symbols and gestures” more than explicit indications. At times, key words such as *gratia*, *beneficium*, *mandatum*, and *officium* indicate such affiliations.²¹⁵ Particularly in literary venues, however, indications of benefactory situations are not always as explicit as those often carved into stone. This can be observed in the case of Ummidia Quadratilla, a woman of consular rank in the late first century CE. In one of his self-published letters, Pliny the

²¹⁰ This statue is located now in the Museo Nazionale, Naples.

²¹¹ Cohick, *Women*, 320.

²¹² Hemelrijk, “Female Munificence”, 69. This number excludes statues as well as women in the imperial households.

²¹³ Witschel, “Public Presence”, 85-106.

²¹⁴ MacMullen, “Personal Power”, 518.

²¹⁵ See Saller, “Status and Patronage”, 838-39, and *Personal Patronage*, 145-194, which explores the extensive patronage terminologies, networks, and expectations in Roman North Africa specifically; see also Griffin, “*De Beneficiis*”, 92-113, and Gold, “The Master Mistress”, 284, which summarizes the extensive epigraphical evidence for many prominent wealthy women actively engaged in the public life of their Roman communities via benefaction during the early imperial era.

Younger sets forth an obituary in her memory.²¹⁶ Though he calls her a “leading lady” (*princeps femina*) and includes in the letter a brief catalogue of her various traits and deeds, as well as panegyric suitable for a benefactress, he never directly indicates her benefactory roles or relationships. Inscriptions from her hometown, however, confirm that this was precisely the case: she funded the building of a temple and an amphitheatre, paid for the repairs of a theatre, and sponsored several public banquets in acts of overt munificence.²¹⁷

The benefactory roles of women extended into various religious spheres around the Mediterranean world. In the relatively independent Jewish communities of the first century, an *archisynagogue* led the congregation of a synagogue; several communities, however, commemorate their *archisynagogista* or *mater* – terms that seem to indicate functional and authoritative positions held by an elite, networked, and educated woman, whose support of and gifts for the community were well established.²¹⁸ The role of wealthy females as patrons and benefactors has long been seen as significant in the development and maintenance of Christian communities in the first centuries; authors of New Testament texts, Hermas, Irenaeus, and myriad others indicate various services provided by elite women, particularly householders.²¹⁹

Indeed, various aspects of the cultural ethos of patronage and benefaction as a whole can be observed among early Christian communities.²²⁰ Even while Tertullian attempts to downplay the pervasive reality of socio-economic differences among

²¹⁶ Pliny *Ep.* 7.24.

²¹⁷ *CIL* 10, 5183; see Hemelrijk, “Female Munificence”, 65-66.

²¹⁸ E.g., Rufinia of Smyrna, whose tomb inscription identifies her as a Jewess and *archisynagogista*; Veturia Paula, a convert to Judaism, is called the “mother” of two synagogues in cities just outside of Rome (“mother” is used throughout the Greco-Roman world during the first three centuries to denote a benefactory and functional civic or religious role, one not indicating actual maternal/marital status). See Brooten, “Female Leadership”, 215-223, and Cohick, *Women*, 210-216.

²¹⁹ E.g., Luke 8:3; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.13.4-7.

²²⁰ E.g., Stewart-Sykes, “Ordination Rites”, 115-130.

Christians in Carthage, his vocabularies assume the paradigms of Roman *beneficia*.²²¹ Cyprian's epistolary works consistently confirm as a norm the operation of patron-client relationships within the networks of Christians in Carthage and beyond.²²² If indications of the variety of euergetism and reciprocal relationships are attended in other early Christian authors and communities as an assumed aspect of life, the *Passio* ought to be examined carefully for these relationships as well. In fact, it is strange that no such exploration has taken place in regards to the content of the *Passio*, despite its references to and clear display of dynamics involving social status. Perpetua's elite economic standing is not merely indicated by the redactor's introduction. As I demonstrate in this thesis, various terminologies, assumptions, and rhetorical stylings throughout the *Passio* text act as "symbols and gestures" that confirm social roles and corresponding mores surrounding Perpetua's status as a householder and benefactress within her Christian community. These specific instances will be indicated in the exegetical analyses included in the next three chapters of this thesis. Ultimately, I suggest that the inescapable contextual realities of benefaction would have indelibly shaped the world of the *Passio* and therefore demand further attention in interpretive explorations of the text.

3.3 Liberal Education

Perpetua emerges as a distinct figure among the inculpate confessors when she is demarcated by the redactor as not only nobly born but also as "abundantly [or liberally] educated" (*liberaliter instituta*). The education provided to Perpetua was apparently remarkable enough to deserve a descriptive term beyond that which could be assumed by an indication of economic status. What content and extent of

²²¹ E.g., Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.1.

²²² Cyprian, *Ep.* 39.5.2; cf. Stewart-Sykes, "Ordination Rites", 115-128; Groh, "Upper-Class Christians", 41-47; Maier, *Social Setting*, 118.

education might *liberaliter instituta* imply for an elite daughter in a Roman North African household of the late second century, and how might this impact the *Passio*?

Liberaliter instituta may be placed among a collection of Latin synonyms, including *institutio*, *studia*, *liberalia studia*, *artes*, *principia*, *cura docendi*, and *praecipienda*, for what is typically called the *orbis doctrinae* or ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία, the “circular” or “rounded” education.²²³ From what can be gathered in a broad sense regarding this process, “liberally educated” meant that a student had exceeded the general progressive educational experience in the primary stages of learning, which taught literacy skills to children between ages seven to twelve.²²⁴ After this stage, those with continued investment received instruction for an additional three or four years in the Latin and Greek languages, the oratorical arts, and literature under the instruction of an instructor often called a *grammaticus*. Quintilian summarizes this phase in an elucidation of its bifold goal: to teach students “the art of correct expression,” and “how to read the poets”.²²⁵ More advanced prose composition, at least as Quintilian presents it, was not taught until further educational stages, either with the *grammaticus* or under a more specialized *rhetor*. In this third tier or cycle, it seems that students also advanced in rhetorical oratory.²²⁶ It seems that the three

²²³ Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* provides a detailed account of the educational processes in late first-century Rome, and *orbis doctrinae* was his Latin rendition for the Greek term *encyklios paideia*. See also Seneca *Ep.* 88 and Philo *Congr.* 11-18, 74-76, 142, 148-150, for descriptions of this process. See also Morgan, *Literate Education*, 35-36. A useful summary and pertinent discussion concerning Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* can be found in Sandnes, *Challenge*, 28-39. A thorough recent summary of this “rounded education” can also be found in Ryan, *Hearing*, 8-37. There are “a bewildering and undefined variety of other terms” associated with education in the first several centuries AD, Morgan, *Literate Education*, 28, notes; Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 51-59.

²²⁴ Ryan, 9-14; Marrou, *History*, 273; Clarke, *Higher Education*, 11-55; Morgan, *Literate Education*, 35-36.

²²⁵ Quintilian *Inst. Orat.* 1.4.2; he argues that much attention in this phase should also be given to Greek, since students speak Latin at home, 1.1.12.

²²⁶ Quintilian *Inst. Orat.* 9.4.45-147; this basic tradition of education had continued to Perpetua’s era; see Rawson, *Children* 146-209; Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 15-44, 185-244, and *Writing*, 14-15; Morgan, *Literate Education*, 35-45; Marrou, *History*, 285.

cycles featured a wide range of literary authors; the “encyclical” approach meant that students returned to the same works with increasing depth during each tiered cycle.²²⁷

It should be noted that this somewhat normative ‘framework’ for education in antiquity is a broad generalization, and considerable fluidity between the three cycles ought to be emphasized. Marrou’s classic study on *paideia* in antiquity is being revised as different questions, new sources, and alternative approaches emerge.²²⁸

Recent studies, such as those of Cribiore and Morgan, maintain a cautionary *caveat* that various social dynamics and contexts must be acknowledged when estimating the progression of *liberalia studia*.²²⁹ While diversity is the foremost of norms, a broad consensus among current scholars and ancient evidence does indicate a general educational content, including extensive literary exposure (e.g., canons such as Virgil and Homer), the strong emphasis upon rhetoric, and the determinative importance of social position and location in determining attitudes towards and extents of education.²³⁰

Since the reign of Hadrian, a revival of philhellenism had pervaded Rome and its provinces via ports and imperial courts, and literary education and activity received remarkable prestige. The multifaceted cultural phenomenon of the second and third centuries summarily termed the Second Sophistic thus impacted on the culture of the cosmopolitan elite in both west and east: not only literacy but also rhetoric and oratory

²²⁷ Ryan, *Hearing*, 9-22, summarizes this cycle and contains useful charts depicting this process and the authors likely therein; he relies largely on Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 173-284, and Morgan, *Literate Education*, 90-151.

²²⁸ Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 173-284; Ryan, *Hearing*, 10-13; Morgan, *Literate Education*, 70-73, replaces the three-tiered model with her proposal that there was a more dynamic “core” and “periphery” model.

²²⁹ E.g., Morgan, *Literate Education*, 44-45.

²³⁰ Too, *Education*, 10-16, 241-259; Sandnes, *Challenge*, 16-58; Cribiore, *Writing*, 13-15; Ryan, *Hearing*, 14-22; Kaster, “Notes”, 323-346, are but a few examples. Intriguingly, all concur as to the foundational role of the poets (particularly Homer and Virgil) in education, cf. Quintilian *Inst. Orat.* 1.8.5: “the admirable practice which now prevails is to begin by reading Homer and Virgil, though intelligence needs to be further developed for full appreciation of its virtue. But there is plenty of time for this, since the child will read them more than once”.

received considerable emphasis in the pedagogy of this era.²³¹ This era's trends in rhetoric, particularly in the West, tended to blend emphases on proof analysis, rational speech accompanied by visual example, and various well-established rhetorical trope embellishments, particularly allusion and anaphora. Advanced rhetorical education aimed further to nurture habitual habits of persuasion: physical gestures and proper external appearance were emphasized in juxtaposition to appealing syntax, persuasive rationale, and potent ekphrasis.²³²

The latter, generally defined as discourse revolving around images, appears as a frequent tool not merely in the most advanced circumstances but also in various aspects of contemporaneous popular cultural life – widely disseminated Greek adventure novels, various epic and poetic works, and theatre productions, for example – and flourished in the many literary aspects of cosmopolitan centres.²³³ Since Vespasian's era, major cities had received ever-increasing opportunity for such consumption via gifts of libraries, schools, theatres, and even rhetoricians subsidized by the imperial purse or wealthy patrons. As a wealthy metropolis prominent in the Western Empire at the time, the Carthage of Perpetua's era featured these in abundance, and cultural, literary, and educational opportunities, including easy access to texts and tutors from around the Mediterranean, rivaled other urban centers.

This literary culture and the variegated skills developed in its *orbis doctrinae* were not only available to males. Since the days of the late Republic, there had been an ever-increasing amount of extremely educated aristocratic young women,

²³¹ Goldhall, "The Anecdote", 113.

²³² As Connolly points out in "The New World", 161, these can be seen in the connected aspects of *stasis*, *inventio*, *dispositio*, *pronuntiatio*, the systematic approach to determining an issue, drawing upon available evidence, arranging arguments, and delivering with appropriate gestures.

²³³ This is discussed by various scholars, e.g., Connolly, "The New World", 139-165; Marrou, *History*, 252-259; A. Rouselle, "Images as Education", 388-389; Webb, "Rhetoric and the Novel", 529; e.g., Philostratus *Eikones* 1.1.1. and Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata*.

particularly in the Latin west.²³⁴ By the mid-to-late second century, sources depict elite women with extensive literary educations and notable rhetorical accomplishments, including erudition in both traditional and recent Greek and Latin literature, philosophy, dialectic, and music. Girls generally gained their education under private tutors in the home.²³⁵ Fathers were traditionally the supervisors of these educational processes, and a girl could have numerous additional instructors at various levels, depending on the family's financial resources and investment.²³⁶

Furthermore, in urban centers of the late second century CE, the daughters of the urban elite increasingly experienced relatively late marriages, often in the late teens and early twenties.²³⁷ The redactor indicates that Perpetua is twenty-two years old and married (*matronaliter nupta*, 2.1.2). There is strong likelihood that she would have spent more time in her parents' household before marriage, and the education obtained there would have been extensive. It is also worthy of note that a woman's intellectual cultivation need not be considered limited to tutorial provision nor terminated when she married. While aspects of educational investment could continue

²³⁴ Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 1-97; Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 74-100; Cribiore and Bagnall, *Women's Letters*, 65-68, 75-81.

²³⁵ An example of a female's private tutor would be Q Caecilius Epirota, who taught Atticus' daughter Pomponia, in Suetonius, *Gram* 16. McKechnie, "Perpetua", 284-7, notes that in some cases girls did attend a *grammaticus* with boys; he is following Marrou, *History*, 274, which opined that boys and girls often studied together in groups under a *grammaticus*. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 21-25, notes that many Roman sources do assume the presence of both boys and girls in the grammar phase, though she avers that most elite girls probably had private tutors who taught a parallel course, such as we see in many elite daughters' cases, e.g., Pompeia, Julia, Agrippina, Hortensia, and Julia Domna. In Rome, Martial *Epig.* 9.68 re-creates the daily morning scene of early-morning recitals echoing from a school (much to the chagrin of the neighbours), and he indicates that both boys and girls are in attendance and mutually despise their school-master "What have you to do with me, cursed school-master (*ludi magister*), person abhorred by boys and girls?" See also Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 74-100, *Writing*, 14.

²³⁶ Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 5.16) mentions a thirteen year-old girl's retinue of educators: "how warm her regard for the nurses, the *paidagogoi*, and the instructors, who, in their positions, had her care and education". Suetonius *Aug.* 64.5 claims that Augustus taught his grandsons to write. Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 1.1.6-7 noted that parents (including mothers) should be as educated as possible and should invest in the education of their children. For further discussion on mothers and their children's education, see Cribiore, *Writing*, 15-16; Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 87, 143; Hemelrijk, 85-126.

²³⁷ The extensive studies undertaken by Shaw on the age of Roman girls at marriage includes investigations into urban centers of Roman North Africa at the end of the second century; he concludes that evidence points to later age at marriage, often in the very late teens, for the elite, in Shaw, "Age", 38. Cf. Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 32-57, for a purview of elite family culture and marriage in contemporary Roman Carthage.

in a new household,²³⁸ the more common instances of adult female intellectual engagement seem to have occurred in what sources depict as numerous intellectual ‘circles’ variously attended, led, and funded by elite matrons.

Such circles were not rare during the Antonine and Severan eras. Classified by Johnson as “elite reading communities”, these gatherings were “culturally constructed text-centered events” which seem to have occurred frequently among the privileged classes.²³⁹ Aulus Gellius’ *Attic Nights* provides several depictions of such gatherings: portions of select texts are read aloud, repeated, discussed, and scrutinized by a small community of *literati*, often over a meal.²⁴⁰ Depictions from Cassius Dio and Philostratus confirm instances of elite females precisely contemporary to Perpetua who serve as patronesses of various intellectual circles and activities.²⁴¹ Not all portrayals of this kind of female involvement are positive: Juvenal acerbically relates an incident in which an educated matron ridiculously dominates an *intelligentsia* dinner-party conversation about the poets in the presence of established grammarians and rhetoricians.²⁴²

Ultimately, no matter the variations, motives, or prejudices involved, literate education is featured in myriad ancient sources as a common capital investment, one that steadily increased in popularity among elite females in the Latin west. While the numerous testimonies to learned women of the imperial era need not be extensive foci

²³⁸ E.g., Suetonius, *Gram.* 16, features a married woman who has a private tutor; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 55.1-2, describes Cornelia, famous daughter of the *gens* Scipio and wife to two triumvirs, as “learned in literature, a good lute player, intelligent in geometry, and accustomed to listening beneficially to philosophical discourses”. Rawson, *Children*, 155, argues that Cornelia had not only acquired a superb education in her parent’s household but also continued to gain the skills of and participate in intellectual culture once married.

²³⁹ Johnson, *Ancient Literacies*, 320-330; he is speaking of such circles in general, not merely those attended by women.

²⁴⁰ Gellius, *Noct. Att.* 3.1, 11.13.

²⁴¹ Dio, *Hist.* 75.15.6-7. Philostratus’ *Apol. Ty.* prologue to names Julia Domna as a research assistant and patroness: “she set me to transcribe the words”. See Hemelrijk, *Femina*, 124, and ch. 7; cp. Musonius Rufus, 3.12-15; 4, 13a; for further discussion on what some have called a nearly salon-like culture for females during the Severan era, see Swain, *Severan Culture*, 1-28.

²⁴² Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.434-439.

here – such documenting has been done well elsewhere²⁴³ – a discussion of the topic as it pertains to Perpetua is vital yet currently deficient. I argue instead that, in light of the context, readers of the *Passio* should appropriately regard with expectation the literary, rhetorical, and philosophical abilities of the Perpetua who is emphatically *honeste nata, liberaliter instituta*.

Though the redactor emphasizes her education, Perpetua ought not be expected to produce a formal Ciceronian treatise within the pages of the *Passio*. In a recent essay, Ameling asserts that Perpetua was hardly functionally literate, with less than even the limited education of a male; his arguments are for the most part *ex silencio*, dismissive of current scholarship in regards to women and literary education, and founded upon a critique of Perpetua's style and perceived lack of literary allusion ("by the way," Ameling scathes, "*The Golden Ass* is not 'literature'").²⁴⁴ Such a dismissal is, however, problematic on a number of counts. First, in the contemporaneous literary environment, a variety of styles, including novels, could have been as formative to one's scholarly background and context as Virgil and Homer. Current studies have decisively dismissed the stereotypical classification of Hellenistic novels as intended for nonintellectual and female audiences. Indeed, these works continue to be re-evaluated as popular feats of considerable rhetorical sophistication cast in a creatively

²⁴³ E.g., Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 92-97, 154-174, 206-210; Cribbore, *Writing*, 22-23; Haines-Eitzen, . For useful resources, see Rawson, *Children*, 197-209, Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre: Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1989). M.L. Clarke and Theresa Morgan. A few *exempli gratia* may be illustrative: Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 1.1.6; *CIL* VI.33898 is an imperial-era Roman funerary inscription for Euphrosyne Pia, "a philosopher learned in skills of the nine muses" who died at 20 years of age (*docta nouem Musis/Philosophia vixit) a(nnos) XX*); Sulpicia, a high-ranking woman of the early Augustan age and the only Latin poetess from the imperial era whose work has remained even partially extant: see Hallett, "The Eleven Elegies", 45-65; Musonius Rufus argued that girls as well as boys should be educated, girls particularly in literature and philosophy, and he notes the present participation of matrons in intellectual circles (*Disc.* 3.12-15, 4, 13.1); and in Alexandria and several other cities in Egypt during the Roman period, inscriptions feature women as not only scholars but also instructors, with female *grammatike* and *didaskaloi*. Literate women are also, of course, featured in several famed frescoes of Pompeii.

²⁴⁴ Ameling, 91; this tends to ignore the difficulty of determining what is "vulgar" versus erudite, for what is "popular literature" can soon transform into a 'classic' (e.g., Charles Dickens).

multifaceted narrative style.²⁴⁵ New conclusions concerning novels, particularly in regards to their considerable audiences, the various styles, the complexity of plots, and depth of ornate rhetoric, vocabularies, and intertextuality and allusion; similar additional consideration has been given to the ways that Latin literature, such as that of Apuleius and Petronius, openly refer to and employ them.²⁴⁶ Nuanced studies of late have concluded that novels reached “an audience who would be able to recognize these intertextual relationships and incorporate their import into an interpretationthe only audience who could reliably be expected to recognize even a quarter of the references was the highly educated elite, not merely the functionally literate”.²⁴⁷

With regard to Ameling’s dismissive estimation of Perpetua’s abilities, it ought to be noted that allusion to Plato, popular Greek and Latin novels, and Christian texts can happen within the same work via a style that reflects genre, intent, audience, time available, rather than most advanced ability.²⁴⁸ Analyses of Perpetua’s narrative content, style, and vocabularies²⁴⁹ must take into account far more factors related to education and literary culture than have previously been employed, as shall be explored in detail in Chapters 4-5 of this study.

Invaluable interpretive lenses in regards to Perpetua’s narrative content may not be the only thing at stake. Some studies of the *Passio* have noted the account’s rhetorical complexity, but they consider such textual intricacy to be beyond the capabilities of a woman. The interpretations of both Kraemer and Ronsse contend that the various rhetorical strategies are so assiduous throughout the *Passio* that their

²⁴⁵ E.g., Callirhoe. See Hägg, *The Novel*, 107-108; Doulamis, “Forensic Oratory”, 21.

²⁴⁶ see Trzaskoma, *Two Novels*, xiv-xxix.

²⁴⁷ Trzaskoma, xvi; furthermore, the papyri fragments on which such novel portions have been found are of high quality, confirming that these novels would have been expensive and limited to the elite.

²⁴⁸ In contrast to Ameling. I would submit that contemporary literary culture did not only engage Plato but popular novels as well. In an environment of conspicuous literary consumption, novels (such as I shall explicitly engage later in this thesis) can be as formative to one’s literary background and context as Virgil, etc.

²⁴⁹ E.g. frequent use of the conjunction *et*, “vulgar” prepositions, and “incessant repetition of the same words”, to Ameling, 91-93.

source must be the redactor himself. These studies, however, fail to take into account what capabilities may have been fostered in Perpetua by an elite liberal education. Ronsse's assessment of Perpetua's oratorical skills finds that she is a "commanding visionary... [with] verbal jousting comparable to Paul,"²⁵⁰ yet, due to this assiduous rhetorical skill and the overt authorial awareness of the intracommunal utility of the text, determines that one (male) member of the Christian community must have written the entire *Passio*. I counter that Perpetua would have been able to display the former, whereas the latter – an awareness of the use within and value of such an account to her Christian community – would have been a consequence of her exposure to Christian texts and practices. Here, contemporary Christian instruction deserves close exploration in juxtaposition to that of the secular strain. What might be known of Perpetua's Christian community, and how advanced could her *Christian* education have been?

3.4 Christianity in Carthage

As the second-largest city in the Roman empire by the late second century CE, Carthage²⁵¹ was a flourishing metropolitan centre that featured colorful variety and opportunity for trade, travel and communication, religious cults, forms of entertainments, and literary and philosophical pursuits. Historical detail about the advent of Christianity in Carthage remains unknown. The earliest known evidence of Christians in the city, and indeed in the whole of Roman North Africa, comes from an embellished record of a trial in the year 180 CE. The *Passio Sanctorum Scillitanorum*

²⁵⁰ Ronsse, "Rhetoric", 321.

²⁵¹ There is some dispute as to whether the events take place in Carthage or Thurburbo, a smaller city fifty-five kilometres west of Carthage, since the Greek version of the *Passio* places the martyrdom events in the latter. See Chapter 1 (p. 22-23 and notes) of this study on the unreliability of the Greek version of the *Passio*. Most scholars conclude that the details in the *Passio* conclude that evidence suggests that both the setting for the *Passio* narrative and Perpetua's city of origin is Carthage. Cf. Heffernan, *Passion*, 138.

names a local official, Saturninus, as well as twelve condemned Christians, six from a village near Carthage, and six others, whose hometown is not provided, generally assumed to be from Carthage.²⁵² Later centuries of invasions, destruction, and rebuilding leaves little material trace of early Christianity in Carthage.

By the end of the second century, according to Tabbernee's estimation, the Carthaginian Christian community was organized into various gatherings – he tentatively proposes five or six – that consisted of three to four hundred members each.²⁵³ These circles seem to have met in the larger homes of wealthier members and possibly, as seen in Rome, in rented larger spaces. While the nuance of distinctions in these circles, both among the clergy and between the clergy and laity, was still in development, bishops, deacons, and presbyters are typically presented as specific ecclesiastical leaders by this time.²⁵⁴ Scholarship has significantly evolved with regard to membership and Christian social identity. Rebillard has convincingly argued that while conversion to Christianity would have been identifiable in one's proximate social contexts, and while Christians were seen as a collective identity by the general populace, Christian identity and Roman social life were not necessarily perceived by Carthaginian Christians as exclusive contraries.²⁵⁵ In fact, Rebillard reads Tertullian's pugnacious emphasis upon this division²⁵⁶ as a polemical strategy in the face of the general *absence* of such stark opposition.²⁵⁷

²⁵² Merdinger, "Carthage", 233; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity*, 1-7. Tertullian *Ad Scap.* 3.4 names this same official, Vigellius Saturninus, as the first Roman official to persecute Christians in North Africa. This account reveals a great deal about Christianity in Roman North Africa at the time: for example, the group possesses a collection of scrolls that they identify as letters of Paul. See Musurillo, *Acts*, xxii–xxiii, 86–89.

²⁵³ Such homes would have been remodelled to provide adequate space; see Tabbernee, "To Pardon", 381; Merdinger, "Roman North Africa", 235; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity*, 1-7; while Tabbernee estimates that there were twelve hundred Christians at most in Carthage, Hopkins, "Christian Number", 202, avers that there were between five and ten thousand.

²⁵⁴ Burns and Jensen, *Christianity*, 369.

²⁵⁵ Rebillard, *Christians*, 1-33.

²⁵⁶ Tertullian *Apol.* 7.4, *De Nat.* 1.7.19, *Fug.* 3.

²⁵⁷ Rebillard, *Christians*, 14-15, cf. discussion on p. 68-69 of this study.

Even as the social identities and activities of Christians in Carthage were layered and complex, the rare and sporadic instances of persecution would have influenced individuals and their circles in significant ways. In 193, the North African Septimius Severus became emperor. He showered his native land with public works, and in return he received constant and varied public acknowledgements of his family's munificence. While the exact chronology and causes of persecution against Christians in Carthage is unknown, a series of events seem to have occurred in the summer of 197.²⁵⁸ It is at this time that Tertullian authored a passionate tract for his fellow Christians containing exhortations in regards to martyrdom. If they are brought to trial, the Holy Spirit will guide their speech, and, furthermore, he assures them, a martyr's death not only serves as the ultimate baptism but also brings instant access to Paradise.²⁵⁹ Written several months subsequent, his *Apologeticum* seems to have been prompted by recent events, and it mentions Christians recently killed. Whatever the extent of persecution and martyrdom that year, even a few martyrs would have fostered a sense of solidarity within the Christian communities, and leaders would have guided collective responses both during and after the occurrences.²⁶⁰ Even before the events of 197, it seems that corporate commemoration of martyrs was well in place among Carthaginian Christian circles.²⁶¹ Tertullian casually refers to hymns sung in honor of their victories.²⁶² Like contemporary Christian authors elsewhere,²⁶³ he does not seem to think it novel to write that martyrs experienced the ultimate

²⁵⁸ Rebillard, *Christians*, 36; Merdinger, "Carthage", 237; Birley, *Septimius*, 41, suggests the persecution may have been sparked by the defeat of Clodius Albinus that Spring, as a way for authorities to deflect attention from themselves.

²⁵⁹ Tertullian *Ad Mart.* 2.4.

²⁶⁰ Rebillard, *Christians*, 46; Merdinger, "Carthage", 237.

²⁶¹ Merdinger, "Carthage", 237; see e.g., Tert. *Ux.* 2.4.2. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity*, 520, asserts that "it is certain" that by the end of the second century, "the names and victories of [martyred] Christians were remembered and cherished". See also McGowan, *Ancient*, 243-244.

²⁶² Tertullian, *Ad Scorp.* 7.2.

²⁶³ Origen's *Ex. Mart.* features martyrs as intercessors, e.g., *Ex. Mart.* 30; Eusebius *HE* 6.42.5 cites a letter from the mid-third century from Dionysus, a Bishop of Alexandria, to a bishop in Antioch; the letter details recent martyrdoms and assumes that martyrs "now are assessors of Christ and share the fellowship of his kingdom, and take part in his decisions and judge along with Him".

baptism and had instant access to Paradise.²⁶⁴ Certainly, the introductory exhortation in the *Passio* assumes that martyr events are “recounted and celebrated” within a liturgical context.²⁶⁵ Later, Cyprian treats such occurrences as a matter of course in various epistolary remarks: one letter comments, “We celebrate in commemoration the anniversary days and sufferings of the martyrs”.²⁶⁶

It was within this context that the company of the *Passio* was arrested, but it does not seem that all had been recently peaceful. There seems to have been another very recent outbreak of anti-Christian sentiment as well as at least one other martyrdom event: Saturus’ narrative scene in Paradise names three “who were burned alive in the same persecution” (11.9). Tertullian furthermore refers to a riot in 203 CE instigated by a mass protest of a Christian burial area, though whether this was before or after the *Passio* events is unknown.²⁶⁷ A great deal of ink has been spilt as to whether or not there was at the time a vast, imperially sponsored persecution of Christians in the form of a prohibition of proselytism and conversion. While Eusebius’ history indicates as much, this has been called into question, largely in the face of the absence of evidence for such legislation.²⁶⁸ Many have suggested, particularly in the case of the *Passio*, that persecutions during this era were entirely local and instigated by native authorities in thorough displays of pious commitment to the empire and its

²⁶⁴ Tertullian *Ad Scorp.* 7.2; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity*, 9, 520-521; Tertullian *Ad Mart.* 19,1.6, *De Pud.* 22, *Ad Scorp.* 10.8;

²⁶⁵ For a thorough engagement with the *Passio*’s introductory and conclusion pericopes, see Chapter 6 (section 6.1, p. 192-201) of this study.

²⁶⁶ Cyprian *Ep.* 39.3.

²⁶⁷ Tertullian *Ad Scap.* 37.2; *Ad Scap.* 3.1 also refers to what may be a larger movement against Christians.

²⁶⁸ Eusebius *HE* 5.21 posits an imperial movement against Christians, but Barnes, “Pre-Decian *Acta*”, 526, Birley, *Septimius*, 209, and others doubt one actually existed and insist persecutions were led only on a local level. Others have countered that there is enough evidence to posit a vast persecution, e.g., Frend, “Open Questions”, 340. It is interesting that those arrested and martyred in the *Passio* were guilty of either proselytism or conversion. No known imperial legislation against Christians by the Severii exists, though legislation against magic is indicated in Julius Paulus, *Sententiae* 5.21.1-3; 5.23.18. Cf. Rives, *Religion*, 23, 224; Barnes, *Tertullian*, 89;

religio.²⁶⁹ Ultimately, whether or not an empire-wide movement against Christians was contemporarily underway, both the audience and characters of the *Passio* would have been exposed to corporate commemorative practices and perspectives with regard to martyrdom.

3.5 New Prophecy?

Another context, one only possibly present in Carthaginian Christian circles by 203, receives the most attention by far in *Passio* studies. For over three hundred years, scholars have opined that the *Passio* displays distinguishable, though never quite explicit, traits that indicate affiliation with a nascent Montanist circle in Carthage.²⁷⁰ Montanism, also called New Prophecy, would be lauded and unequivocally referenced by Tertullian within approximately a decade. Question remains, however, as to whether this movement was even known by the *Passio* redactor and martyrs, and, if so, whether or not it informed their motivations.

Since New Prophecy has been advocated by some as a significant factor in the *Passio*, and in Perpetua's narrative in particular, a summary of the movement is crucial.²⁷¹ Originating in Phrygia approximately between 156 and 170 CE, New Prophecy seems to have primarily concerned itself with the reception of oracular knowledge from the Holy Spirit.²⁷² Three prophets, Montanus, Priscilla, and

²⁶⁹ Rives, "Piety", 1-26; Rebillard, *Christians*, 39; Carthage and Alexandria, which both underwent persecution at this time, boasted the two largest cult centers of Serapis, the very divinity that Septimius Severus associated himself with. See Rankin, *Tertullian*, 13, and Davis, "Was the Devotion", 73-76.

²⁷⁰ For a useful summary and analysis of the studies that focus on this topic, see Marksches, "The *Passio*", 277-290. The first proposal came in 1706 by the pen of the Reformed thinker Samuel Basnage and was followed closely by most scholars of similar ilk for the next two centuries, notably Zahn and Harnack. See, e.g., contentions in Klawiter, "The Role of Martyrdom", 251-261; Farrell, "Canonization", 319; Kraemer and Lander, "Perpetua", 1048-1068.

²⁷¹ Useful summaries of the New Prophecy movement include Trevett, *Montanism*; Heine, *Montanist Oracles*; Aune, *Prophecy*; Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions*; Barnes, "Chronology", 403-408.

²⁷² The term 'Montanism' has become a pragmatic classification. It seems to have been coined by Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech*, 16.8, and made popular in Epiphanius *Pan.* 49.1. Prior to this, the movement was referenced by the name "Phrygian" (e.g., in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 4.13.93.1, and in the Muratorian Canon); for the term "New Prophecy", Tertullian *Adv. Mar.* 3.24.4 and Serapion of Antioch

Maximilla, seem to have served as its figureheads: an illustrative utterance attributed to Maximilla proclaims, “The Lord sent me under compulsion, willing or not, as adherent, messenger, and interpreter of this labor... to teach the knowledge of God”.²⁷³ The weight given to revelatory instruction meant that these recent oracles were not merely spoken but also written and disseminated; remnants of these prophecies can be found in quotations in patristic authors and inscriptions.²⁷⁴ Hippolytus, a presbyter at Rome from the mid-190s, writes of “innumerable books” produced by the Prophets or their immediate followers.²⁷⁵ Eusebius reports that “the disciples of Montanus in Phrygia... published among many their opinion about prophecy”, and, in counter-reply, many treatises soon circulated which attempted to denounce it.²⁷⁶ During the 170s, Apollinarius authored the earliest known refutation of New Prophecy; his polemic was apparently produced even before the New Prophetic works became known to the West.²⁷⁷ According to Eusebius, the movement had been intensely debated in Rome prior to Victor’s ascension as Roman bishop in 189, and Tertullian confirms that Victor condemned the New Prophets and their oracles.²⁷⁸

The evidence that remains of New Prophecy provides insight into its defining contours, but many of these contours are fraught with difficulty if treated on an individual basis. It must be emphasized that it was not necessarily the acts of prophecy, the acknowledgements of the Holy Spirit, nor the emphasis on the ‘new’ that distinguished New Prophecy. Indeed, each of these are assumed as normal by

in Eusebius *HE* 5.19.2. There is discrepancy in the sources as regards to the date of origin. Eusebius *HE* 5.18.12 makes a range from 137-171 CE possible. Epiphanius *Pan.* 48 gives the year 156. See Barnes, “Chronology”, 403-408; Trevett, *Montanism*, 1-55.

²⁷³ Preserved in Epiphanius *Pan.* 48.13.1.

²⁷⁴ Collected primary in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, and Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions*.

²⁷⁵ Hippolytus, *Ref.* 8.19.

²⁷⁶ Eusebius *HE* 5.3.4, 5.16.12; Jerome, *Vir. Ill.* 26, 37, 39, 40.

²⁷⁷ Eusebius *HE* 4.27.

²⁷⁸ Eusebius *HE* 5.3.4-5.4.3, 4.27, 5.17.4; Tertullian *Adv. Prax.* 1.5-1.6.

contemporaries.²⁷⁹ Irenaeus, for example, relayed that Christians “see visions, utter prophecies,” and heal the sick.²⁸⁰ His brief *Epideixis*, more commonly referenced by the title *Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching*, explicitly lauds the effects of the Holy Spirit: “He [God] has poured forth rivers of abundance, to disseminate the Holy Spirit on the earth, as He had promised through the prophets to pour forth the Spirit on the face of the earth in the end of days....So our calling is in the newness of Spirit and not in the oldness of the Letter, as Jeremiah prophesied...” (89-90). The closing exhortations of 99-100 address aberrant teachers, and he specifically includes those who “do not admit the gifts of the Holy Spirit and reject the chrism of prophecy...they do not accept the Spirit, that is, they reject prophecy. We must beware of all such men”. Eusebius later affirms this reality in his discussion of the New Prophets: “The many other wonders of the divine charisma still being accomplished up to that time in various churches caused many to believe that these [New Prophets] prophesied, too”.²⁸¹

Earliest polemic reveals that discomfort was not with the *act* of prophecy via the Holy Spirit in itself but rather with its *mode*: an anonymous author preserved in Eusebius asserts that the New Prophets spoke in a manner “contrary to custom...in a frenzied manner, abnormally”, whereas “a prophet does not have to speak ecstatically”.²⁸² Ecstasy appears in a number of sayings attributed to the Prophets, such as, “Behold, the Lord is the one who throws human hearts into ecstasy”.²⁸³ Tertullian later explains the prophetic phenomenon as ecstasy in the Spirit (*per ecstasin in spiritu*), so that no prophet actually understands what is being said, making

²⁷⁹ Even earlier, the *Didache* 11.7-10 explores the question of prophecy with the assumption that it does occur, “While a prophet is making ecstatic utterances, you must not test or examine him....However, not anyone making ecstatic utterances is a prophet; [this is] only [the case] if he behaves like the Lord”.

²⁸⁰ Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 2.32.4; 3.11.12 refers to a group who reject the spirit of prophecy and speaks of them as an anomaly.

²⁸¹ Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.3.4.

²⁸² Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.16.7-9, 5.17.1.

²⁸³ Quotation in Epiphanius *Pan.*, 48.4.1.

necessary the interpretation of another, and, significantly, he further notes that this is a matter of disagreement between New Prophets and those who disavow the movement.²⁸⁴ The prophetic trance of ecstasy indeed enters both early and late polemic against the Montanists.²⁸⁵ This promotion of “new” revelations could additionally be seen as somewhat subversive. Maximilla’s claim “the Lord has sent me as a revealer”²⁸⁶ may have challenged concepts of authority evolving in contemporary Christian communities. Hippolytus certainly expresses concern when he writes that the writings of “the Law, the [Hebrew] Prophets, and the Gospels” should guide the church, as opposed to recent additional revelations.²⁸⁷ However, reference to a manifestation of the Holy Spirit and its chrisms cannot alone be seen as evidence of the movement.

In addition to its marked emphasis on ecstasy, New Prophecy also demonstrates a defining and rigorous apocalyptic moralism. Perhaps this strict outlook was a product of the crucible of its own environment: Christianity in Phrygia in general demonstrates an exacting juxtaposition of Christian discipline and eschatology.²⁸⁸ Tertullian, rarely himself accused of moral laxity, provides a small glimpse of the implications of this moralism: “It is on this account that the New Prophecies are rejected: not that Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla preach another God, nor that they disjoin Christ Jesus [from God], nor that they overturn any

²⁸⁴ Tertullian *De An.* 9.4; *Adv. Marc.* 4.22.4-6 is worth quoting: “Was it by a simple mistake that we, in our argument for the gift of New Prophecy, claim that ecstasy is a result? When a person is in the Spirit, especially when he beholds the glory of God, or when God is speaking by him, he must necessarily fall from his senses, as he is overshadowed by the power of God—on which there is disagreement between us and the ‘natural/fleshly’ [non-New Prophecy]. Meanwhile it is easy to prove Peter was beside himself. For how could he have known who Moses and Elijah were, except in the Spirit (for the people could have had no pictures or statues of them, since the law also forbids imitations), unless in Spirit he had seen these? And so it was not possible for him to know what he had said when out of his senses in the Spirit”.

²⁸⁵ Jerome’s prologue in *Comm. in Naum Proph.* wryly comments, “Nahum does not speak in ecstasy, as Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla raved”.

²⁸⁶ Epiphanius *Pan.* 48.12.3.

²⁸⁷ Hippolytus, *Ref.* 8.19, 10.25.

²⁸⁸ See Stewart-Sykes, “The Original Condemnation”, 1-22; Nasrallah, *Ecstasy of Folly*, 155; Tabbernee, “Remnants”, 193-201; Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 5.33.3; Justin Martyr *Dial. Trypho*, 80.

particular rule of faith or hope, but that they plainly teach more frequent fasting than marrying”.²⁸⁹

Other qualities at times attributed to New Prophecy have been shown to be extremely problematic, if not simply erroneous. The view that members of New Prophecy were particularly fervent for martyrdom and uniquely eager to grant a spiritual authority to confessors has been soundly dismissed.²⁹⁰ Equally erroneous, if not fraught with polemic, is the view that women were more spiritually authoritative than men in the New Prophecy, that they held positions of authority unlike women outside of the movement, and that they even uniquely served as prophet-priestesses among the New Prophets.²⁹¹ These, too, have been critiqued, so that none of these features can be invoked to viably demarcate the presence of Montanism. Another alleged aspect often problematically associated with the New Prophecy involves revelation via visions. Bovon and Waldner, among others, have noted that the granting of authority to visions was not exceptional nor characteristically Montanist; in fact, it was an “expression of a general tendency” in the cultures of antiquity.²⁹² Over the

²⁸⁹ Tertullian *De Ieiun.* 6.6, 1.3; cp. *Exh. Pud.* 10.5.

²⁹⁰ Particularly by Trevett, *Montanism*, 123, 189-191; Tabbernee, “Early Montanism”, 33-44; Robeck, 15-16, Weinrich, *Spirit*, 227-228, and Trumbower, “*Apocalypse*”, 307-312. This counters the interpretation of Klawiter, “The Role”, 251-261, which argued (among other points) that Montanists singularly and fervently sought martyrdom. Furthermore, early Christianity in general granted spiritual authority to confessors: Cyprian *Ep.* 6, 15, and 27 demonstrate confessors’ high status, as does *Apost. Trad.* 10; cf. Bovon, “Those Christians”, 144-162; Tabbernee, “To Pardon”, 375-386, and “Perpetua, Montanism”, 421-41; Hall, “Women”, 1-21; Fox, *Pagans*, 338, 448-459; Bremmer, “Perpetua”, 107.

²⁹¹ This view was promoted by Klawiter, “The Role”, 251-261, and has since influenced interpretation, e.g., Huber, *Women*, 45-48, and Heffernan, *Passion*, 41-42, as well as Butler, *New Prophecy*, 46 (e.g., “Montanism nurtured such gifted women, whom the ecclesiastical establishment limited”, which “indicated her association with the egalitarian movement”, per Butler). The reasoning, however, is largely circular (in sum, Montanists place women in authority based on what is demonstrated in the *Passio*, and Perpetua is Montanist because she obviously has authority in the *Passio*) and uses as its sole alternative buttress much later anti-Montanist polemic (namely, Epiphanius’ *Pan.* 49.2.12, in which a contemporary Cataphrigian sect he calls the Quintillians are accused of ordaining women as members of the clergy). See the counter argument in Trevett, *Montanism*, 160-163, and “Spiritual Authority”, 46; also, Hoffman, *Status*, ch. 4. Furthermore, Montanist oracles never indicate that women are priestesses, and the male Montanus often seems to serve as the “handler” of his frenzied female companions.

²⁹² Bovon, “Those Christians”, 157; Waldner, “Visions, Prophecy, and Authority”, 204-219. Visions are commonly invoked in contemporary Greco-Roman culture: e.g., Dio Cassius’ compilation of dreams that served as portents for Severus’ ascension (Cass. Dio. 73.23.1-2), Hellenistic novels such as Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, 2.26-27, and incubation, e.g., Ovid *Fasti* 4.649-676.

chronological spectrum of the early Christian centuries, visions continue to play a revelatory and authoritative role. Irenaeus explains that among the chrisms of the Church are “seeing visions and uttering prophetic foresight”.²⁹³ Visionary accounts appear throughout the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, in Hermas’ *Shepherd*, in numerous early Christian martyrdom accounts, and in Eusebius’ histories, among others.²⁹⁴ Though often invoked as proof of Montanist affinities in the *Passio*,²⁹⁵ the presence of visions actually only indicates participation within a wider Christian and cultural phenomenon.

One further challenge in identifying characteristics of the New Prophecy movement involves one of its famed adherents, Tertullian. In fact, he serves as the most complicated source on the matter of New Prophecy, at least as it may have manifested itself in Carthage early in the third century. In works that seem to have been written after 208 CE, Tertullian demonstrates a personal knowledge of a textual collection of Montanist oracles, an affinity towards the movement’s emphases, and increasing ideological separation from those who rejected its tenets.²⁹⁶ The extent of the movement in Carthage beyond Tertullian is ultimately unknown, and its presence is no longer seen as the cause of any kind of schism but rather to have manifested as

²⁹³ Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 2.32.4.

²⁹⁴ E.g., Acts 7, 10, 16, and 18 and John’s Apoc.; *Mart. Poly.* 5.2; Cyprian *Ep.* 16.4.1 and 11.7.1; Eusebius *HE* 7.4 and *VC* 1.28.

²⁹⁵ E.g., by Heffernan, *Passion*, 142, 167; Butler, *The New Prophecy*, 59-64; Trevett, *Montanism*, 176-178; Huber, *Women*, 45-54.

²⁹⁶ A panoply of scholars concur that these references do not occur in the *oeuvre* of Tertullian until at minimum 5 years *after* the *Passio* events. Cf. Barnes, *Tertullian*, 54-56; Dunn, *Tertullian*, 2-12; Tilley, “The *Passion*”, 829-858, and the useful summary of Marksches, “The *Passio*”, 284-290. Essential to note is the broad current consensus that “Tertullian’s adoption of New Prophecy in mid-career should not be read as making a *significant* change of direction in his religious and theological orientation”, as elucidated by Wright, “Tertullian”, 1029. There are subtle shifts, however, and increasing animosity towards those who reject the Phrygian oracles’ authority. For example, in his earlier writings, Tertullian uses *nos* in reference to Christians and *vos* for non-Christians, but in his latter writings, the *nos* often becomes Montanist Christians who think like him, and the *vos* is often reserved for those within the church whom he has lost fellowship of opinion, e.g., *De Pud.* 1.10, *Adv. Prax.* 2.1, *De Ieiun.* 6.6, 1.3.

an *ecclesiola in ecclesia* dedicated particularly to the interpretation of personal revelation via the Spirit.²⁹⁷

A close relationship between the *Passio* confessors and Tertullian cannot be inferred simply on account of temporal and geographical proximity. If there were at minimum five major circles of Christians in Carthage at the time - each meeting in different households - it is overenthusiastic at best to infer automatically that the *Passio* company and Tertullian belonged to the same groups.²⁹⁸ In a polemical work composed after 208, Tertullian does refer to a scene from the *Passio* to buttress a contention about the *post mortem* corporeality of the soul (*De Anima* 55.4). This has been taken by a handful of scholars to indicate that he knew the martyrs personally and that, furthermore, the *Passio* account as a whole promotes a Montanist agenda much like that of the later Tertullian.²⁹⁹ Such an interpretation, however, is fraught with difficulties. He provides the *Passio* as secondary support immediately after a reference to the biblical text of the *Apocalypse*, or Revelation, and there is no mention of New Prophecy when using either example. He furthermore does not use his phrase “us” in referring to New Prophets when mentioning Perpetua and company, and Tertullian certainly would have taken advantage of the usefulness of that situation for his polemic, had it existed. The reference, *sans* any connotations of relationship with the authors of the *Passio* (or, for that matter, with the author of Revelation), simply

²⁹⁷ E.g., Tertullian’s emphases in *De An.*; Powell emphasizes the unity of Christians in Carthage, contra views that posit that Tertullian instigated a schism, “Tertullianists”, 33-54, and explores the facets of the movement in Carthage; R. Heine, “Gospel”, 95-100, points out that the New Prophecy controversy had three distinct geographical focal points, Phrygia, Rome, and Carthage, each likely somewhat unique in its strain; see also Labroille, *La Crise Montaniste*, 356, 418, 461.

²⁹⁸ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 79, discusses this as a possibility; Trevett, *Montanism*, 177-178, opines that they are in the same circle, as does Heffernan, *Passion*, 16-17; cf. Bastiaensen, “Tertullian’s Reference”, 41-47; Braun, “Novelles observations”, 105-117 and “Tertullien”, 79-81. In contrast, cf. my suggestions on p. 70 of this study.

²⁹⁹ Trevett, *Montanism*, 177-178, interprets Tertullian’s knowledge of the *Passio* as support that the martyr group was part of the New Prophecy adherents; Heffernan agrees, “Philology”, 315, and *Passion*, 16-17; Steinhauser, “Augustine’s Reading”, also mentions this to support his opinion that the *Passio* is “Montanist heretical propaganda”.

indicates that his ecclesial audience was familiar with the *Passio* narrative and even would have viewed it as an authoritative resource.

Ultimately, the possible presence of the New Prophecy movement in Carthage at the dawn of the third century must be approached with extreme analytic caution, perhaps more than is often recognized in many modern *Passio* studies. It is practically impossible to identify the movement at all without explicit reference to the Phrygian prophets or overt mention of ecstatic prophecy and consequential interpretation.³⁰⁰ Not only are these elements not present in the *Passio*, but they do not seem to have been present in Carthage at all at the time its events occurred. The contextual “setting” of Montanism, then, proves to be distinctly problematic and likely anachronistic, and I suspect that it has entirely overshadowed other far more tenable and impactful surrounding contextual constructs.

3.6 Catechesis

With a locution that has elicited perhaps the *least* amount of commentary, the redactor of the *Passio* indicates at the beginning of the narrative that the martyrs were “adolescent catechumens” (*adolescentes catechumeni*, 2.1.1) at the time of their arrest. The lack of scholarly engagement with this descriptive term is due to an ubiquitous assumption as to its meaning: the redactor is indicating that the group is literally adolescent in age and comprises of neophytes, recent “new converts”, to the Christian community. This unchallenged conjecture is reflected in studies past and present, and remarks such as “hardly had their training begun” abound.³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Intriguingly, *Hermas* was once accused of Montanist tendencies, but the standards used in doing so (namely, prominent roles of females, use of visions, and general apocalyptic expectation) have been confirmed to have been common in contemporary Christianity in general and thus unable to stand. See Osiek and Koester, *Shepherd*, 5.

³⁰¹ Quotation from Finn, “Mission”, 305. All scholarly assessment asserts that Perpetua (along with the confessor group) was a *very* recent convert: cf. “a recent catechumen” (Sebesta, 103); her “new faith” (Kitzler, “*Passio*”, 9); similar phrasing is used in, e.g., Miller, *Dreams*, 154; Heffernan, *Sacred*

This general interpretive path continues with consequential corollaries for Perpetua's narrative in particular. Due to the "limited nature" of her Christian instruction, she would not have advanced knowledge of biblical texts, nor would she possess any theological sophistication as a veritable novice within the Christian community.³⁰² Therefore, analysis of her account "need not look for elaborate theology".³⁰³ Ultimately, then, interpretive lenses applied to Perpetua's narrative as well as to the portrayal of the entire martyr company are near-sighted from the outset. Significant adjustment in approach must be undertaken. To do so, this section investigates catechetical praxis in the late second century in general and in Roman North Africa specifically. As shall be seen, this process was comprised of various stages and protracted in temporal length, necessitating a reevaluation of the assumption that the phrase "adolescent catechumens" implies young and very recent initiates. A secondary question, one also heretofore neglected, will also be addressed: what can be known of contemporary Christian catechesis for elite, educated converts? Would Perpetua's status and background, or possibly her gender, have affected this process, and, if so, how?

Though catechetical praxis is historically multifaceted and naturally featured variations depending upon time, place, and participants, some generalities may be discerned for the era roughly contemporary to the *Passio*.³⁰⁴ It seems that the formality of catechumenate had developed substantially in major cosmopolitan centres

Biography, 200; Amat, "L'Authenticité", 180; Ross and Lander, "Perpetua", 1048-1063; Sullivan, "I responded", 73; Robeck, *Prophecy*, 55; Ameling, "Femina", 100; *inter alia*.

³⁰² E.g., "She was new to Biblical texts" (Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 200). It should be noted that, although he does not discuss catechesis, his 2012 book does not include the assertion that Perpetua was a new convert.

³⁰³ Robeck, *Prophecy*, 55.

³⁰⁴ A select list of secondary scholarship on the catechumenate includes Young, "Towards", 485-502; Johnson, *Rites*, 1-40, 83-114; Bradshaw, *Reconstructing*, 55-97; Grant, "Development", 32-49; Leclercq, "Catéchèse", 2530-2579; Dujarier's classic *History*, 31-76; Daniélou, *La catéchèse*; Turck, "Aux origines"; Folkemer, "A Study", 367-377; Buell, *Making Christians*, 107-109; Ferguson, *The Early Church*, 1-51; Clarke, *Education*, 119-129; Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy", 3-25; and Finn's useful collection of sources in *Early Christian*.

by the mid-to-late second century. Occurring prior to baptism and full participation in the liturgical life of a Christian community, its processes seem to have typically lasted up to several years.³⁰⁵ Increasingly technical terminologies for advancement reveal some complexity.³⁰⁶ It is important to note that in both eastern and western Christian texts, words associated with “catechumen” do not indicate “novice”. Instead, as the *Letter of the Churches at Lyons and Vienne* reveals, the term “neophyte” (νεοφώτιστος) delineates a new convert.³⁰⁷ Clement of Alexandria distinguishes between “neocatechumens” and “catechumens” (νεοκατήχητος; κατηχούμενοι), Origen mentions catechetical “stages”, and, later, Sotas in Oxyrhynchus delineates without further explication “a catechumen in the beginning of the gospel” from “catechumens of the congregation”.³⁰⁸ In Carthage, by the time of the *Passio*, Tertullian could take its existence for granted and witheringly remark –expecting his audience to be swayed by the polemic – that an additional offense of the Marcionites is that they initiate converts without adequate instruction.³⁰⁹ His passing comments in other works further imply that catechesis was not at all brief: preparation for the Christian life is compared to the preparation of professional soldiers, in that both

³⁰⁵ Many texts suggest a time of three years, “just as newly-planted trees are nourished for three years” (Clement *Strom.* 2.18). Dujarier, *History*, 43, recalls that although the specific length and structure of catechesis likely varied, by the end of the second century, “one thing is certain: there was a group of converts who followed a special course of formation before being admitted to the sacraments of initiation”. *Trad. Ap.* 17.1, which most aver to be an early portion in this very layered text, indicates the goal was three years; cf. Johnson, *Rites*, 64-75.

³⁰⁶ Even in the New Testament, the term “neophyte” and “catechumen” are distinguished: Gal. 6.6 features “the one being instructed in the Word” (κατηχούμενος τὸν λόγον), and 1 Tim. 3.6 uses “novice” (νεόφυτον). Ferguson, *The Early Church*, 20-21, surveys these terms in early Christianity and emphasizes that, while there were terms for teacher, student, and process, there is no extant evidence for definitively fixed content.

³⁰⁷ Preserved in Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.17. The anonymous author of the *Letter* considers it remarkable that this neophyte, by the name of Maturus, is such a notable contender for the faith during the persecution (Μάτουρον, νεοφώτιστον μὲν, ἀλλὰ γενναῖον ἀγωνιστήν).

³⁰⁸ See Luijendijk, *Greetings*, 116-119, for discussion on Sotas’ letter to Paul, PSI 9.1041; Clement of Alexandria *Paed.* 1.36.3, *Strom.* 6.130.1; van den Hoek, “The Catechetical School”, 69-70; Buell, *Making Christians*, 107-109.

³⁰⁹ Tertullian *Praes. Haer.* 41.2-4, worth quoting here: “it is uncertain who is a catechumen and who is baptized, as both exhort, both hear, both speak prayers....Even before they are instructed, their catechumens are perfected”, *quis catechumenus, quis fidelis incertum est, pariter adeunt, pariter audiunt, pariter orant... Ante sunt perfecti catechumeni quam edocti*. Cf. van den Hoek, “The Catechetical School”, 59-87; Marrou, *History*, 315.

require time and training, Christians are made, not born; both knowledge and moral habit must be observably manifest in catechumens prior to the “extensive interrogations” that preceded their baptism.³¹⁰

The content of the catechumenate broadly involved instruction from appointed teachers as to both belief and practice.³¹¹ The process was devoted to reading and explication of Scripture as well as doctrinal, liturgical, and moral directives, and, like liturgical gatherings, catechetical instruction included exhortation and prayer.³¹² By the late second century, the process seems to have been administered in small gatherings connected, in all likelihood, to the larger local Christian circles.³¹³ Catechumens were not sequestered from the larger Christian community and they seem to have partaken in its liturgies, albeit in a limited manner,³¹⁴ for the length of instruction. The instructors tasked with the “tutelage in the teachings of heaven” are called by assorted terms, including *doctores*, *doctores audientium*, *presbyteri doctores*, and *lectores*, although, again, it is unknown what distinctions existed between each and whether all locales featured similar roles and distinctions.³¹⁵

³¹⁰ Tertullian *De Paen.* 6, *Apol.* 18.4, *De Bapt.* 18, *De Cor.* 3.

³¹¹ This dual emphasis can be seen in very early literature; e.g., the “Two Ways” of the *Didache*; cf. Justin, *I Apol.* 61.2; Irenaeus *Epid.* 1, 2; *Ap. Trad.* 7.39; Ferguson, *The Early Church*, 3, 18-25.

³¹² Cf. Justin, *I Apol.* 13-17, 61, 65-67; Irenaeus *Epid.*; Tertullian *De Paen.* 6.1-22, *De Bapt.* 18.1, Origen *Hom. In Lev.* 6.2, *Hom. in Jesu Nave* 4.1. The *Didache* indicates a required recitation prior to baptism, which would have been received through instruction (7.2), and both the *Didascalia* and the *Ap. Trad.* 17.1, 20.1, indicate a “lengthy catechumenate” consisting of instruction and examination in both doctrine and conduct. See Bradshaw, *Reconstructing*, 56-57; Dujarier, *History*, 31-76; Daniélou, *La catéchèse*, 89-102; Ferguson, *The Early Church*, 1-17. In Ferguson’s analysis (*The Early Church*, 15), the layout of Justin *Dial.*, Irenaeus *Epid.*, and Cyprian, *Ad Quir.* seem to delineate three aspects of catechetical instruction: historical, doctrinal, and moral.

³¹³ Young, “Towards”, 487-492, notes that the possible presence of both presbyters/catechists and “freelance” teachers or leaders of ‘study circles’ in larger cities such as Alexandria could have caused some tension but notes that this distinction is a tentative one, since many may have concurrently partaken in different levels of teaching. See also Snyder, *Teachers*, 10, 149, and “Classroom”, 669-91.

³¹⁴ Sources such as Justin, *I Apol.* 67.1, as well as the technical term “hearers” seen in Irenaeus, *Epid.* 1 and Cyprian, *Ep.* 18.2, indicate that they were naturally excluded from practicing the Eucharist.

³¹⁵ Cyprian’s quotation in *Ep.* 73.5.2; for student vocabulary, *Ep.* 18.2.2, 29.1.2, 73.22.1, *Test.* 3.98; for teachers, *Ep.* 29.1.2, which has two different terms for instructors, suggesting a difference in tasks, cp. *Ep.* 73.3-73.5, 69.7.1. 70.2.1. Tertullian distinguishes *doctores*. e.g., in *Praes. Haer.* 41. Additionally,

Some catechumens may have simultaneously experienced varied settings: Origen and Clement, for example, write of private tutoring and groups with an instructor cultivating moral and doctrinal formation, two aspects not unlike secular and Jewish educational processes.³¹⁶ Indeed, van den Hoek's study on what she called the early catechetical "schools" or "circles" of Alexandria emphasizes the many ways that early Christian educational practices variously adapted contemporary approaches.³¹⁷ As shall be demonstrated later in this chapter, these seemingly extra-ecclesial catechetical "circles" appear to have catered to the intellectual elite within the late-second-century literary culture of cosmopolitan centres and to have continued to do so even after initiation.³¹⁸

In terms of what the catechumens of the *Passio* may have experienced, little is directly stated in the text. Perpetua does refer to Saturus as "he who built us up" (*qui ipse nos aedificauerat*, 4.5), so he may have been an instructor of some kind. This term, *aedificāre*, seems to be commonly known in local ecclesial circles: in various works, Tertullian uses forms of it for the training and "building up" of those within the Christian community.³¹⁹ Teachers served a particularly significant role in a convert's life, so the prominent role of Saturus in Perpetua's portions of the *Passio* need not appear peculiar and may indirectly confirm his role as catechist.³²⁰

Cyprian *Ep.* 8.3.1 indicates an assumption that the catechetical systems of Carthage and Rome are nearly identical.

³¹⁶ E.g., Origen *Cont. Cels.* 3.51. For Jewish educational processes, see, e.g., the ideals set forth in Philo *Hyp.* 7.12-14, Josephus *Cont. Ap.* 2.175-178, 2.204; Rabbinic tradition relates that R. Simon b. Sheeta and Joshua b. Gamla led extensive educational reforms involving the creation of schools (*y. Ket* 8.11.32c.) Even if these sources are exaggerated, they nonetheless relay a cultural ideal.

³¹⁷ Van den Hoek, "The Catechetical School", 59-87; this is also emphasized by Clarke, *Higher Education*, 119-129. If we can believe Eusebius *HE* 6.18.2-4, Origen put his catechumens through a rigorous program of secular education before they engaged the Scriptures.

³¹⁸ Consensus is that Eusebius (and those following him in asserting the early second century existence of an Alexandrian Christian academy) was a bit premature in this; cf. Buell, *Making*, 108, and Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy", 8.

³¹⁹ E.g., Tertullian *Ad Mart.* 3.4; *Apol.* 23.18; 46.18; *Praes. Haer.* 3.

³²⁰ Hall, "Women", 21. I maintain that Saturus ought to primarily be seen as instructor. However, it should be noted that speculation in some studies has placed him as Perpetua's husband, not entirely arbitrarily: see Oseik, "Perpetua's Husband", 291-302, and Moss, "Blood Ties", 204.

Additionally, Aspasius, the “learned presbyter” referenced in Saturus' narrative (*presbyterum doctorem*, 13.1) may have been involved in catechetical teaching to some capacity, as the appellation fits contemporary terminologies for such a role.³²¹ If Perpetua, as a member of the wealthy *literati*, experienced a Christian catechesis akin to what Origin and Clement depict, there is reason to consider the possibility that Saturus, Aspasius, and unnamed others may have had various and concurrent roles.

With regard to the *Passio* martyrs and to Perpetua specifically, it is essential to emphasize that catechumens were not isolated from the life or liturgies of the larger Christian community (aside from their exclusion from the Eucharist rituals). The admiration and commemoration of martyrs in the contemporary *ecclesia* means that they would have been exposed to the theologies of martyrdom and the roles of such accounts in the corporate memories of the community. Indeed, social memory theorists have pointed out that “a synergistic connection exists between commemorative and instructional activities”.³²² Martyrdom, of course, provided the perfect medium for this, particularly if there had been a spate of such recent events. The catechumens of the *Passio* arguably would have been acutely aware of the layered significance of martyrdom and would have been exposed (aurally, textually, liturgically, *et cetera*) to those such as Stephen, Ignatius, and Polycarp, as well as their own local contemporaries.

Such realities of catechesis thus ultimately render as problematic the very few analyses that speculate about Perpetua's catechetical training. For example, Ameling acknowledges Perpetua's seemingly informed convictions concerning baptism, prayer, and the “spiritual contest” of martyrdom; nonetheless, as a catechumen, she could not

³²¹ If Tertullian's appellation 'teacher' (*doctor*) in what is apparently a list of ecclesiastical figures in *Praes. Haer.* 3.5 is an indication; see Tabbernee, “Perpetua”, 421-440. It is interesting and indicative of possible tensions in that Christian circle in that he is presented as arguing with the bishop (*episcopus*).

³²² Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory”, 19.

have actually understood any of these concepts.³²³ “Perpetua must have acquired the *language* of her new group very quickly – and this is surely one of the ways a newcomer got himself or herself accepted”, he comments, thus insinuating that Perpetua did not possess actual knowledge but rather only a vocabulary, much like a child who mimics words that she is too young to understand. This is symptomatic of many treatments of Perpetua’s catechumen identity. While few even pose the question – as Ameling does with a short foray into his enquiry, “what kind of theological doctrines did Perpetua acquire as a catechumene” – presuppositions inhibit an actual exploration of Perpetua’s catechesis.

As demonstrated in the wording Ameling’s question itself, assumptions exist not merely about the catechumen identity in itself but also the nature and content of the catechumenate contemporary to the *Passio*. Ameling concludes that since “there is no general outline of the faith discernable” in Perpetua’s account, there is no real “notion” or understanding of Christian theology therein, and thus Perpetua must be a quite “recent” convert.³²⁴ In many ways his reading follows that of Amat decades earlier. Both note the presence of allusion to non-Christian literature as well as to contested works such as the *Acts of Paul* in Perpetua’s narrative, and both conclude that “Perpetua’s imagination does not faithfully reflect catechesis”.³²⁵ It deserves to be queried, however, whether the explicit presence of systematic theology and solely proto-canonical Judeo-Christian texts ought to serve as a measure for catechetical experience, particularly in the late second century. Here it is imperative to avoid modern connotations of systematic, cerebral, and nuanced theological training: one cannot mentally place something akin to a modern theology course into the variegated catechetical praxis of this era. If Perpetua’s narrative was not *intended* to be an

³²³ Ameling, “*Femina*”, 100-101.

³²⁴ Ameling, “*Femina*”, 100-101; cf. Amat, “L’Authenticité”, 180.

³²⁵ Amat, “L’Authenticité”, 180.

apology, it cannot be expected to *be* one. Neither can the absence of “an outline of the faith” in her work nor the presence of non-Christian literary influence directly insinuate a lack of exposure to Christian texts, teachings, and traditions.

One last common conjecture with regard to the redactor’s introductory phrase “adolescent catechumens” must also be addressed, though it has hitherto been left unattended in *Passio* scholarship. Does the *Passio* narrator’s initial description of the catechumens as *adolescent* refer to actual age? Strong reservations about this pervasive supposition ought to be voiced. Firstly, depending on context, descriptive adjectives surrounding aspects of Christian identity are not always literal: “little children”, “brothers and sisters”, “flock”, “slave”,³²⁶ and so on, appear abundantly in early Christian texts and are rarely taken at face value. It additionally should seem odd that the *Passio* narrator would have thought it so important to indicate the age of the group and juxtapose this to their spiritual status. It is all the more bizarre that such a vague term as the Latinate *adulescens*, which can indicate anything between 14 and 40 years of age, would be employed for this purpose.³²⁷ Could the narrator rather use *that* term, at *that* place, to indicate the “spiritual” stage of this company – in their *catechumenal adolescence*? If so, they would not be veritable infants to the enterprise but technically adults.³²⁸

Ultimately, the assumptions brought to the *Passio* in regards to the descriptor “adolescent catechumens” continue to impact but also arguably limit exegetical possibilities. If Perpetua “probably had very little formal teaching” in Christianity,

³²⁶ E.g., the use of *conserva/conservus* in Tertullian means ‘slave of God’, not literal servant-hood, in *Ad Ux.* 1.1.1. Cf. 1 Thess. 4.10, 2 Peter 4.10.]

³²⁷ E.g., Cæsar is called *adolescentulus* when he was in his thirty-third year: Cicero *Philipp.* 2.46.

³²⁸ This may account for the baptism of the group before their transfer to prison. In light of the view that martyrdom was the ultimate baptism (e.g., Tert., *Bapt.* 16; cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity*, 175), and in view of the extremely negative contemporary Christian attitudes towards initiation rituals administered too soon (see above; also Jensen, “With Pomp, Novelty, Avarice”, 77-83; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity*, 173-175), I suspect that the company would not have been (or “needed” to be) baptised unless they were nearing the end of their catechumenate.

then scholarly interpretation of her narrative, particularly her visions, generally presumes that the reader “need not look for elaborate theology”.³²⁹ Conversely, if elaborate Christian thought *is* encountered within Perpetua’s account, scholars deny the possibility that she, as a catechumen, was its author.³³⁰ I would suggest that this pretense may be culpable for limited interpretive approaches to the portions ascribed to Perpetua. Acknowledgement of contemporary catechesis can lend exquisite insight into the text. Perpetua’s learning as a catechumen could arguably have been extensive, and it must be considered feasible for her writings to betray sophisticated formation from contemporary Christian avenues of instruction, particularly those catering to the liberally-educated elite.

3.7 Christian Literary Culture

Even as scholars continue to uncover new sources and entertain a variety of analyses regarding the literary culture of early Christianity, a broad consensus has emerged in recent decades: Christianity was a movement within “a culture of composition”, “with texts at its very heart and soul, in its background and foreground”, characterized even in its earliest centuries by what Mitchell describes as a “a pervading, even obsessive preoccupation with and *habitus* for” the written word.³³¹ This ought to be seen in tandem with orality and aurality, not as opposed to them.³³² Throughout this era, Christians composed, collected, distributed, interpreted, and incorporated a vast

³²⁹ See Ameling, “*Femina*”, 100; Robeck, *Prophecy*, 55.

³³⁰ E.g., Ronsse, “Rhetoric”, 283-327.

³³¹ Mitchell, “Emergence”, 178, 191. Mounting critique over the past decades has challenged the dated presumption that early Christians universally preferred the oral to the written; see the excellent summary and analysis in Hurtado, “Oral Fixation”, 321-340; Parker, “Books”, 186-229; Hurtado and Keith, “Writing”, 63-80; Mitchell, “Emergence”, 177-194; Petersen, ed., *Gospel Traditions*; Bagnall, *Early Christian*, xi-24; Cribiore and Bagnall, *Women’s Letters*, 33-40; Gamble, *Books*, 39-78. In the second-century obloquy of the Stoic Lucian (*Mor. Per.* 11-13), Christians exhibited a ridiculous devotion to the reading and examining of their sacred texts, even in prison.

³³² As seen, for example, in the *Passio* prologue (1.1-1.6), which features writing, hearing, and reading equally as significant (and related) actions among his audience.

corpus of works.³³³ While the burgeoning of Christian texts suggests that writing was widely regarded as “a customary and trusted medium for communicating the truths, values, roots, promises, and expectations” of the movement,³³⁴ *Passio* scholarship has yet to consider the ramifications of this zeitgeist with reference to the work’s context and content. Such an oversight has long limited the way that the *Passio* is viewed. This section, therefore, addresses the *literati* culture within ecclesial circles contemporary to the *Passio*, particularly regarding what can be associated with and known of Carthage.

By the mid-to-late second century, scholars concur that major metropolis centres featured various forms of Christian *intelligentsia* circles that, like their secular and Jewish counterparts, centered upon reading and interpreting texts.³³⁵ Authors such as Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen provide explicit glimpses into Christian literary engagement and instruction in Rome and Alexandria.³³⁶ In a revealing selection of his *Oration to the Greeks*, Tatian contrasts Christian and secular education: in the former no payment is exchanged, the setting is private, and recipients include the old and young, rich and poor, men and women. His boast then transitions to elite groups beyond a catechetical context: “the wealthy among us pursue our philosophy”. He then explicitly includes this pursuit among women: he catalogues a litany of women in the history of secular philosophy and literature, then states,

“My object in referring to these women is that you may not regard as something strange what you find among us, and that...you might not treat the women with scorn who among us pursue philosophy. ...Be ashamed, therefore, you who are professed disciples of women yet scoff at those of the sex who hold our doctrine, as well as at the solemn assemblies they frequent... *among us there are learned women*”.³³⁷

³³³ Mitchell, “Emergence”, 191.

³³⁴ Mitchell, “Emergence”, 178.

³³⁵ Young, “Towards”, 486; Buell, *Making Christians*, 108; Kovacs, “Divine Pedagogy”, 8; cf. secular elite literary circles, as discussed above.

³³⁶ See Hunt, *Christianity*; Sandnes, *Challenge*, ch. 7; Tatian *Or. Graec.* 30.

³³⁷ Tatian *Or. Graec.* 32-33, transl. *ANF*, 78-79, emphasis mine; indeed, myriad texts indicate that neither the catechetical system nor Christian elite literary circles seem to have been limited to males:

Indeed, myriad texts indicate that neither the catechetical system nor Christian elite literary circles seem to have been limited to males.³³⁸

Writing within a few decades of Tatian, Clement of Alexandria directs his works to an audience comprising of those who were conceivably participants in elite intellectual circles, and he himself seems to have been a *didaskalos* within such communities. *The Instructor*, for example, was written during the mid-to-late 190s and addresses cultivated aristocratic converts – explicitly, both men and women, regardless of whether their catechesis was yet complete³³⁹ – and features a synthesis of Judeo-Christian and Hellenic thought that assumes a high level of prior education.³⁴⁰ An additional work in Clement’s corpus includes a brief essay directed to wealthy converts, *Who is the Rich Man that May be Saved*, indicating that there was a considerably sized audience needful, at least in his perception, of receiving such content.

Works such as Clement’s must have reached more than a local audience alone, and, conversely, the literary circles of cosmopolitan Christianity ought not be perceived as being limited to only local texts. A lively intellectual commerce at the time entailed extensive and “dynamic interchanges of people, literature, books, and letters”, particularly between Egypt and cosmopolitan areas such as Carthage that had access to ports and engaged in significant trade.³⁴¹ Manuscript evidence indicates that diverse literary works, both Christian and classical, were disseminated through

Hall, 19-20; this is especially evident in Clement of Alexandria’s works, i.e., *Strom.* 4.62.4 and *Paed* 1.4.

³³⁸ E.g., Clement *Paed* 1.4.

³³⁹ Clement, *Paed* 1.4.

³⁴⁰ See Kovacs, “Divine Pedagogy”, 3-25, and Marrou’s introduction and notes in *Le Pédagogue*, 26-28, 99-102.

³⁴¹ This “brisk” exchange ought not be underestimated, Epp avers, particularly when it came to texts composed in Alexandria: one dated papyri, *PSI V* 514, travelled from Alexandria to Philadelphia (over 150 miles) in less than four days: Epp, “The Significance”, 44, 55, 81. Epp argued this accelerated and lively commerce is *particularly* the case for Alexandria and major cosmopolitan centres of the Mediterranean such as Rome and Carthage.

translocational social networks, in which repeated epistolary requests to “make and send us copies” were voiced.³⁴² It is important to note that textual transmission largely occurred via webs of relationships among the aristocracy, who tended to have scribal copyists and couriers at their disposal; collections in most communities seem to have been the exclusive result of the benefaction of such patrons.³⁴³ Indeed, wealthy members within the Christian communities seem to have facilitated this literary geographical diversity. While not all scholars agree, Haines-Eitzen’s investigation into the creation and dissemination of Christian texts has concluded that the transmission of early Christian literature was almost entirely private, occurring between interested members within various communities rather than by the instigation of the larger assemblies as a whole.³⁴⁴

The proliferation of texts gave further stimulus to the role of texts among individuals and diverse interpretive communities, and vice versa.³⁴⁵ Extant Christian manuscripts not only attest to a dynamic culture of literary creation and transmission; they also reveal that this culture was far from monochrome. As Hurtado elucidates, “early Christians produced, copied, and read a noteworthy range of writings”,³⁴⁶ a “range” certainly not limited to those now considered to be canonical texts. The letters of Ignatius provide a vivid example of the tandem collection and dissemination of a small literary collection of writings within a very short period in the early second century.³⁴⁷ As both material and textual receptions indicate, Hermas’ popular visionary work travelled from Rome to other cities across the Mediterranean within a

³⁴² The quotation is from *P.Oxy.* 2192, among others, and is further discussed in Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 78. Hurtado, *Earliest*, 26, emphasizes that the literary translocational efforts of early Christians was remarkably geographically extensive.

³⁴³ See Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, ch. 4-5; see also the useful Starr, “Circulation”, 213-223, and Cohick, *Women*, 239. In the conclusion of Pionius’ *Mart. Poly.* (22.2-4), whether authentic to the second century or a fourth-century addition, we see one kind of scribal network in action.

³⁴⁴ Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 104, indicates disagreement with Gamble (see Gamble, *Books*, 121).

³⁴⁵ Gamble, *Books*, 143.

³⁴⁶ Hurtado, *Earliest*, 24.

³⁴⁷ Gamble, *Books*, 111.

decade or two at most, demonstrating a pace of distribution consistent with the depiction of textual circulation and dissemination mentioned in the text itself.³⁴⁸

Irenaeus in Gaul, Clement in Alexandria, and Tertullian in Carthage assumed familiarity with the work among their audiences, and a place in the Muratorian list testifies to its circulation.³⁴⁹ Furthermore, papyri remnants of the text have been dated to the mid to last quarter of the second century and indicate an extraordinary popularity.³⁵⁰ Irenaeus' theological polemic now known as *Against Heresies* travelled just as swiftly, if not more so: the text is featured within Tertullian's corpus or writings as well as in a late second century copy discovered in Egypt.³⁵¹

The writings of those viewed as beyond the bounds of orthodoxy also seem to have disseminated quite rapidly. The different situations instigated by Marcion, the New Prophets, and Philumene, for example, only further confirm the significance of *texts*.³⁵² Both their textual output and the literary responses of their detractors seem to have been duplicated and spread quite rapidly around the major cities within the imperial world.³⁵³ Ultimately, the varied collections of writings among Christians contemporary to the *Passio* is vast indeed, not only including the Septuagint and what is now known as the New Testament but also the epistles of a pending martyr, a

³⁴⁸ E.g., *Vis.* 2.4.3.

³⁴⁹ Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 2.20.2, which uses terminology used elsewhere to introduce Scripture and references the text alongside Paul and Malachi; Tertullian *De Orat.* 16 and *De Pud.* 10, 20; Clement, *Strom.* 2.1.9.12, 6.15; I am convinced of a second-century date for the Muratorian list, see Gamble, "New Testament Canon", 267-294.

³⁵⁰ The Papyrus is *P.Mich.* 130, cited in Haines-Eitzen, 163; see also Hurtado, *Earliest*, 26-33.

³⁵¹ Gamble, *Books*, 121; Hurtado, *Earliest*, 26-27; Barnes, *Tertullian*, 127-128, 220-221; the text is *POxy* 405, see Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 89.

³⁵² Marcion interpreted, collected, and edited texts; oracular utterances of the New Prophets were to some extent written and disseminated. Philumene apparently taught within a Christian community and converted followers of Marcion, and her teachings apparently were circulated in multiple works, including texts titled *Apophthegmata* and *Phanerosis*. She attracted the attention of Tertullian and Rhodon, both of whom perceived the need to publicly object to her: Tertullian *Praes. Haer.* 6.6, 30.6; Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.13.2.

³⁵³ The beginning of Tertullian's *Adv. Marc.*, for example, notes not only *three* different editions but also numerous copies and what seems to have been a rather rapid dissemination of both his own works and Marcion's; both Pliny and, later, Cyprian provides excellent testimony of 'self-publication'; see also Gamble, *Books*, 128-129.

tripartite apocalyptic paraenesis comprised largely of ‘visions’, theological polemic, textual interpretation, apocalyptic prophecies, and likely many more.

For a person of Perpetua’s status in Carthage, there would have been little impediment to the acquisition of texts. North African Christian communities, which seem to have boasted a considerable quantity of well-heeled literate Christians, are known to have possessed, produced, and translocally exchanged an immensely diverse body of texts by the late second and early third centuries. Burns’ study on the production and distribution of texts among Christians in North Africa at the time of the *Passio* notes a compendium including Tertullian’s own exchange of letters, reference to contemporary texts of assorted natures from Gaul, Asia Minor, and Rome, citation of ecclesiastical *ordines*, and Cyprian’s later references to church records from earlier decades.³⁵⁴ In a location such as Carthage, every resource necessary to obtain, create, copy, send, receive, and study translocal texts seems to have been at the fingertips of individuals and their communities, provided the propinquity of financial resources.³⁵⁵

This is significant for *Passio* studies for a number of reasons, especially in that such a vast collection of texts were a significant part of the tapestry of Christian culture. These texts could exist within a community’s oral *praxis* in whole or part through various liturgical, ecclesiastical, or pedagogical engagements, and many

³⁵⁴ Noteworthy also is the earlier attestation of material copies of Pauline epistles in non-cosmopolitan North Africa (in the Scillitan Martyr account) and the later confiscation of numerous textual copies under Diocletian’s reign; cf. Burns, “Production and Distribution”. Furthermore, if there is any accuracy in Eusebius’s detail that Origen’s patron in Alexandria supplied Origen with stenographers, copyists, and calligraphers (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.23.2), and that, as Gamble, *Books*, 120, has surmised, Origen’s prodigious writing output and the resulting textual availability of his writings were likely linked to this provision, then the possibility must be at least be asked as to whether a similar situation could have existed for elite Christians elsewhere as well.

³⁵⁵ Both contemporary literary references and material finds in locales such as Oxyrhynchus and Herculaneum continue to confirm that if a person or community wanted to augment a collection and had the financial means to do so, texts generally could be obtained. E.g., *Shepherd* is attested in Egypt in second-century manuscripts, and a fragment of Irenaeus’ *Adv. Haer.* from ca. 200 was found in Oxyrhynchus (*P. Oxy.* 405). See Houston, “Papyrological Evidence”, 233-267; White, “Bookshops”, 268-287; Tombley, “Geographical Spread”, 305; Pearson, “Egypt”, 331-333.

became both a manifestation *of* and shaping narrative *for* the collective identity of the Christian community. As singular as the *Passio* text is, it was not without precedent and it followed within a broad tradition. Texts written by or about imprisoned Christians, such as the epistles of Paul and Ignatius and the narrative of Acts, and texts employing visions as literary devices, such as Hermas' *Shepherd* and the Stephen scenario in Acts 7, appear to have been inscribed in the collective memory of Carthaginian Christians. The depiction of Stephen's exemplary vision and martyrdom, Ignatius' epistolary paraenesis, Thecla's anomalous acts as a confessor, and Hermas' visionary narrative, formed a history and identity – a dynamic corporate memory – for the Christian community contemporary to the *Passio*. Tertullian's ceaseless literary encomium for martyrdom and confessors reflects this zeitgeist, as does the voice of the redactor, which insists that the "examples of faith" (*fidei exempla*) in the past were preserved and must continue to be preserved "in writing" "for the use of the church" (*in litteris, ad instrumentum ecclesiae*) in both the present and future.

Perpetua would have been exposed to this collective memory, quite feasibly so in literary circles beyond catechesis and liturgical gatherings. This would have informed how she then participated in its example. Furthermore, Perpetua's knowledge of some Judeo-Christian works, such as Genesis or Hermas' *Shepherd*, seems *prima facie* defensible. Upon consideration, however, given the literary culture, it is entirely plausible that Perpetua had at her fingertips a literary corpus far larger than has previously been assumed. It is also feasible, given the context, that Perpetua was involved in a literary study circle within the fabric of the church in Roman North Africa. After all, there was evidently at least one group of literate Christian women in Carthage who met to discuss texts during Perpetua's lifetime; it has somewhat surprisingly never been considered whether Perpetua may have participated in those

circles.³⁵⁶ In sum, it was this literary cultural context, sometime around the end of the second or dawn of the third century, that Vibia Perpetua, *honeste nata, liberaliter instituta*, apparently entered into a Christian community. Exposed to the discursive function of texts in various facets of the Christian community and intellectually capable to participate within it, Perpetua would have been able to write a carefully mediated narrative, styled within already-existing traditions, and unambiguously aimed at corporate commemoration.

3.8 Conclusion

Brent's interpretive evaluation of Cyprian's literary corpus hardly seems novel: Cyprian wrote "in light of his secular education and general social conditioning".³⁵⁷ It ought to be remarkable, then, that scholarly appraisals of Perpetua's account tend to inadequately explore the contexts of her own education, both secular and Christian, and to largely neglect the "general social conditioning" and mores that would have impacted the tapestry of her reality as well as that of her communities. This chapter has presented several interrelated circumstances that indelibly influence the narratives of the *Passio*. In exploring these contexts, I argue that the depths of their realities ought to affect exegetical approaches to the text and, ultimately, challenge current assumptions about and also open new possibilities concerning Perpetua and her narrative work.

³⁵⁶ Tertullian *De Bapt.* 17. This group evoked Tertullian's ire by reading the Thecla narrative in the *Acta Pauli* and interpreting it to mean that they could baptize others. I do not posit here that Perpetua was or was not associated with this group – that remains unknown – but it is nonetheless interesting that the possibility does exist. It has never been suggested that Perpetua and Tertullian (or their ecclesial circles) could have been inimical to one another if Perpetua was associated with the group referenced in *De Bapt.*; I suspect that this is due to the overabundant haste to associate them. Cf. my contentions pertaining to Perpetua and Tertullian, p. 74 and footnotes; also, cf. p. 94. With regard to early Christian women and the plausible impact of the Thecla narrative, see Lehtipuu, "The Example", 358-361, and Matthews, "Thinking", 50.

³⁵⁷ Brent, *Cyprian*, 4.

Contemporary cultural dynamics must be emphasized in an exegetical study of the *Passio*, particularly in light of the redactor's introduction of Perpetua as elite and abundantly educated. While it would be naïve to claim that wealth and the pervasive norms of benefaction leveled the genders in antiquity, both would have impacted Perpetua's realities in a number of ways. Similarly, the lively contemporary literary culture and availability of extensive education cannot be ignored or underestimated. Sulpicia's poetry, Julia Domna's philosophical gatherings, Pamphilia of Epidauros' literary circles, and Philumena's exegetical efforts were not the only instances of women in antiquity partaking in the intellectual realm.³⁵⁸ In a related aspect, the predominant dismissal of Perpetua's Christian knowledge in the face of what is assumed to be a "recent immersion in Christian belief"³⁵⁹ becomes inadequate when examined alongside catechetical practices contemporary to the *Passio*. Perpetua could have experienced considerable exposure to Christianity before her arrest. As a result, interpretive endeavor in Perpetua's narrative ought to allow for the possibility of potentially sophisticated engagement with literary rhetorical stratagem as well as with Christian texts, traditions, and teachings. Osiek famously observed that ever-ongoing research on women in the Roman Empire "can help us bring this severely underrepresented constituency of early church groups back to life and also strengthen the case for viewing females as intellectual contributors in their own right to early Christianity".³⁶⁰ In light of the contemporary dynamics surveyed in this chapter, Perpetua ought to be considered, at least potentially, to be one such contributor.

If the *Passio* emerges in a distinctly literary era within a Christian subculture where collective memory fostered identity and, furthermore, this memory itself had

³⁵⁸ See Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 143-145, 159-186; Pamphilia's details are according to the Byzantine 9th c. author Photius, *Bibliotheca* 175s.119b: if he is accurate, she was a mid 1st century daughter and wife of scholars, apparently had access to libraries, composed a text which referenced other works, and hosted and participated in intellectual circles at her home.

³⁵⁹ Miller, *Dreams*, 154.

³⁶⁰ Osiek, *A Woman's Place*, 249.

strongly textual dimensions, then I would suggest that perhaps a question ought to be posed: why would Perpetua, as a confessor and as an elite participant in a broader society of public commemoration, *not* have written a work of commemorative significance, if she had the means to do so? She does not need to be a Montanist prophetess for her words to be considered of value to her community. I simply contend that the text attributed to Perpetua, a female convert from the same social strata as Tertullian and Cyprian, be granted an adequately expectant interpretation, so that perhaps the reader *can* find forms of theological engagement within what could be a complex embellished memory-making narrative. This study claims that Perpetua, as an imprisoned confessor, purposefully portrays an experience for an audience whom she knows she will have. To do so, she astutely employs contextually appropriate methods and images that are indicative of the depth of her exposure to Christian text and teachings. Advanced literary skills, coupled with a cognizance of narrative as an effective vehicle for memorializing discourse, are observable throughout her work. The exegetical exploration to be conducted in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this study will provide specific demonstration of these dynamics at work.

CHAPTER 4

“I AM A CHRISTIAN”: AN ANALYSIS OF SECTIONS 3-6

Sections 3-6 of the *Passio* comprise the first half of Perpetua’s narrative and depict a trajectory of events:

- 3.1-3: Perpetua begins her account under house arrest; a terse discussion with her father establishes her Christian identity and resolve.
- 3.3-9: The group of apprehended catechumens is baptized prior to being moved to a municipal prison; the horrible conditions are lamented before visiting deacons mediate with bribes and the company is relieved with a better place in the prison; visiting family members bring Perpetua’s infant son to her.
- 4.1-2: An unnamed Christian “brother” petitions Perpetua to pray to be given knowledge of the fate of the group.
- 4.3-9: Perpetua narrates what she is divinely shown in a vision.
- 4.10: She relays the conclusion of her dream to the brother and acknowledges, “we knew it would be martyrdom”.
- 5.1-6: An unexpected visit from Perpetua’s father prior to the trial; his passionate pleas contrast with Perpetua’s calm response.
- 6.1-8: The hearing on the forum platform; the public confession of the group; another emotional plea from Perpetua’s father; Perpetua’s interaction with the presiding governor, her repeated *Christiana sum* earns her condemnation; her frenzied father is publicly humiliated; the martyr company returns to prison to await their execution.

The narrative sequence and content of these sections is chronologically imprecise and, in many cases, seems inexplicably bizarre. Action frequently begins *in medias res*. Laconic remarks do not seem to correspond to their settings. Peculiar discursions and developments appear to digress from the account’s trajectory. However, rather than following common interpretive strategies to resolve such tensions, this chapter will approach the text from a different angle. A reading is here undertaken through interpretive lenses that focus upon context and content, but, at the same time, with an awareness of plausible authorial intention based on models found

in various contemporaneous traditions that would have oriented and informed such a task.

In the previous chapter of this study, essential groundwork was laid for my argument that contextual elements within the text call for a revised approach to Perpetua's narrative. This method is arguably more consistent with interpretations of other contemporary Christian literary creations. Furthermore, it does not decipher apparent oddities in the work by construing Perpetua as an effervescent prophetess, as a naïve introspective scribbler, or as a psychologically-repressed dreamer. Instead, this chapter employs the text's interrelated contexts as interpretive keys. My reading is attuned to the presence of the language and activities of an elite benefactress who is a participant in the literary culture, to the rhetorical tools acquired in contemporary secular education, and to diverse Christian texts, teachings, and practices that may have been a part of Perpetua's experiences. When read through such lenses, the seemingly peculiar descriptions of conversations, responses, settings, activities, and visions in Perpetua's narrative can be regarded as integrally connected to each other. All of these can furthermore be viewed as a complex and teleological participation in commemorative social memory.³⁶¹ This chapter thus examines sections 3-6 as part of a literary unit which betrays inherent thematic, stylistic, and rhetorical links with the rest of her account.

4.1 Defeating the Devil's Arguments: Sections 3.1-3

³⁶¹ It ought to be reiterated that the extent to which Perpetua may relay "historical event" and the extent to which these "events" are embellished are not questions that I am concerned with here. Rather, I attend to elements of what I contend to be a deliberate discourse that can assist an interpretation of the complex narrative dynamics within this work.

Commentaries regularly indicate that Perpetua's account commences "without introduction".³⁶² This seems to lend itself to the conclusion that her narrative is composed *ad hoc*. Another possibility must, however, be entertained: what if this *is* her introduction, and an intricate one at that? Her initial pericope establishes that despite her legal apprehension, she is resolute, skilled in elocution, noble, and thoroughly in control. In fact, this kind of introduction is not at all unusual. The melodramatic opening declaration with regard to the heroine of Heliodorus' *Ethiopica* only requires the addition of the word "resolution" for Perpetua's prolegomena to nearly mirror it: "Despite the distress of her plight, she had an air of courage and nobility".³⁶³

While the text's content and aims do differ from *Ethiopica* and other Hellenistic novels, Perpetua's narrative styling is extremely similar. Seeming digressions and discursive descriptions are literary devices that thematically construct a nexus between settings, plots, and events.³⁶⁴ Scenes and elements that may appear peculiar or trivial are actually essential literary components intended as authorial maneuvers. For example, Greek novels commonly include several significant features in their preliminary acts, namely, a densely allusive or symbolic scene that foreshadows future events or the ultimate resolution of the story, and family conflict in the form of parental opposition, often that of the father.³⁶⁵ Perpetua's narrative similarly opens with both, and such comparisons allow the initial action in her narrative to be viewed differently. Like comparable scenes in contemporary

³⁶² E.g., Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 87.

³⁶³ Translated by Hägg, *The Novel*, 55; current consensus avers that this work was written by the late second century, prior to Apuleius' *Metam*.

³⁶⁴ Hägg, *The Novel*, 45.

³⁶⁵ Within the first sections of the *Callirhoe*, for example, it is made clear that the parents of the protagonists are opposed to the relationship of their children, Eros' intervention and ultimate victory is foreshadowed, and allusion is made to previous Greek authors. See Trzaskoma, *Two Novels*, xi-xxxiii; Hägg, *The Novel*, 12-13, 49, 74-79; and Konstan, "Perpetua's Martyrdom", 298-299, which notes parallels between Perpetua's use of visions and those in *Ephesiaca* but concludes, "Perpetua's prison diary, then, has a form that is not wholly alien to that of the romantic novel".

novelistic literature, the content of this pericope serves to establish the primary theme of her account and its buttressing leitmotifs.

Perpetua's verbal jousting with her father is not only significant as far as the narrative is concerned but also revealing in regards to its author. First, the exchange is not atypical of the close and often complicated father-daughter relationships that is common in *honestior* family dynamics.³⁶⁶ Furthermore, the rhetorical skill displayed by Perpetua features the colors of advanced contemporary literary education. She commences with an oratorical flourish, "for the sake of words" (*verbi gratia*) that confronts her father's approach: "He desired to subvert [me] with words" (*verbis evertere cupiret*). This verbal representation of the visual, an evocation via words which is also known as *ekphrasis*, was a significant element within the educational processes of antiquity and is observable in the work of philosophers, grammarians, and rhetoricians, as well as in literature.³⁶⁷ An argument involving *ekphrasis* was called *significatio*: an image was chosen to make an impression, develop an idea, or stress meaning. Dialogue then commenced with a verbal recognition of the image, "Do you recognize this [item]...?"³⁶⁸ A subtle exchange followed as an issue was declared, available evidence employed, and specific arguments arranged, all delivered with appropriate gestures (*significatio, stasis, inventio, dispositio, pronuntiatio*).³⁶⁹ It has not been adequately emphasized that each of these gestures are manifested, in proper order, in Perpetua's introductory scene. These elements are not coincidental:

³⁶⁶ On the Father's role, see Wiedemann, *Adults*, 87, 143. This also seems to be affirmed in the father's later comment, "I have raised you to this prime of life, I have favoured you among all your brothers" (5.2).

³⁶⁷ Discussed in, e.g., Marrou, *A History*, 252-259 and Rousselle, "Images", 388-389. *Significatio* was not a novel concept, as observed in Socrates' dialogues (which feature visualization and argumentation) and in Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.2.8. For popular literature, see Webb, "Rhetoric and the Novel", 529; a good example of such a novel is Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata*.

³⁶⁸ I.e., Philostratus *Eikones* 1.1.1; this is a significant point in Rousselle, "Images", 373-403, who develops this in terms of both visual arts and 'memory images' and who herself employs the illustration from Philostratus.

³⁶⁹ Further delineated in Connolly, "The New World", 148.

they confirm the cultured background of Perpetua's education, which can inform the text as a whole.

Perpetua's dialogue exhibits further dialectical skills as well. The scene is accounted as a unity through repetition of conjunctions for the series of syllogistic phrases (*et...et...et...*), a rhetorical tool that is propitious for suspense building known as *polysyndeton*. This ontological manoeuvre not only effectively pronounces the end of the dialogue but also serves as a crucial inauguration of a motif. Above all else, Perpetua declares herself to be *Christiana*. Here a classic Aristotelian notion of semiotic signification, in which *name* is bound in essence to *being*, is evoked. According to Aristotle, names are words that have a genuine link to reality: spoken and written words are not arbitrary but have a symbiotic connection to thought and experience.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, Perpetua's elocution serves as an early echo of the fate-sealing confessions of others such as the Scillitan martyrs and Polycarp, and it thus implies her association with them. Her awareness of the significance of this proclamation is evident and is corroborating evidence, I suspect, of her experience in the Christian community and her aim to join its commemorative traditions. This association must be made explicit from the commencement of her narrative, since it grants authority and worth to her authorial voice.

The section continues with a depiction of the father's reaction to her identity: he is so moved with anger that he throws himself at her with a menacing jolt, as if to pluck out her eyes. This seems odd unless it serves to confirm the centrality of Perpetua's previous statement. First, this episode seems to be one of rhetorical *catachresis*, a commonly crafted irony that entails using an oddly hyperbolic or graphic metaphor. A laconic wit, furthermore, emerges if this section is read catachrestically, for, in response to the father's verbal challenge, Perpetua engages in

³⁷⁰ Aristotle *De Interp.* 1.1-4.

words that employ his “sight” and consequently nearly loses her own eyes. Additionally, Perpetua’s resolve is established by means of stark contrast. As he lunges, it seems as though the father will perform an action typically associated with furious, unstable passion. She, however, emits no such emotional response. A strikingly similar situation is posed hypothetically in Seneca’s *De Constantia*. In the midst of an encomium on acceptance of all circumstances, Seneca exhorts that one’s countenance must never be shaken, “even if one’s eyes are gouged out (*si oculus illi eruetur*). Nor may one feel insult if being led amidst obscene voices of a crowd through the forum” (1.15). If Perpetua is, consciously or unconsciously, gesturing to Seneca’s work, the latter portion of his line above would serve as an interesting foreshadowing of her own fate – a fate accepted as a consequence for her resolution. This will not be the last time in her narrative that the father is used as a kind of ironic foil to display Perpetua’s own ability, dignity, and resolve.

The conclusion of this brief episode features another definitive establishment of Perpetua’s strategic direction for the account: the father is “defeated along with the devil’s arguments” (*victus cum argumentis diaboli*). Heffernan rightly emphasizes that Perpetua’s syntax indicates not that the father’s arguments are simply diabolical, as in the translation of Musurillo and most other commentators. Instead, “the arguments of the devil” are literally defeated as well. Heffernan here associates the father with the regime and *religio* trumped by Perpetua.³⁷¹ While it is interesting to view the scene as a dialogue about power, I suggest that this pericope is concerned with Perpetua’s establishment of strategic themes. First, it is worthy of note that the *Mart. Poly.* features an extraordinarily similar comment: “plentiful were the strategies used by the devil (διάβολος)” in an attempt “to persuade them to deny the faith” (2.9-

³⁷¹ Heffernan, *Passion*, 157, and *Sacred Biography*, 215. In a similar vein, Böhme, “The Conquest”, 238, understands this vanquishing as a grand act of “de-potentiating” not only the father but the spiritual regime he seems to represent.

3.1). In what can be seen as an appeal to and establishment of authority, or as an act of narrative traditioning, Perpetua portrays herself, like Christ and like the martyrs of the past ensconced in corporate memory, as the victorious subject of attempted temptation by the devil himself. Secondly, the main concern of this initial section is the demonstration that the declaration “I am a Christian” corresponds to an ultimate spiritual victory. At the end of Perpetua’s account, a chiastic repetition of *sum Christiana* will occur in the presence of her frenzied father, and the devil himself will be rendered *victus* by Perpetua. “I am a Christian” presents the apogee of the section as the authority-granting signifier of identity for her audience and as the leitmotif that will permit the theme of her ultimate victory.

Ultimately, this captivating introductory section of Perpetua’s account harkens back to hallmark strategies of the opening scenes of popular literature, it features educated rhetorical effort, signifies her identity, and evinces great effort to establish purpose and authority. What is *absent*? The lack of any kind of prophetic claims or ecstatic utterance is glaring and serves to counter scholars who maintain that these are the central aspect of Perpetua’s identity as a proto-Montanist. Furthermore, the focus is not actually upon her relationship with the father but upon the trope using him: Perpetua is not penning a cathartic introspection about their relationship. Instead, it is viable and even perhaps vital to view this portion of the account (3.1-3.3) as Perpetua’s establishment of both a narrative structure and the identity that will be central to the account and foreshadows the challenges to it and the ultimate victories in it.

4.2 *Baptism and Endurance: Sections 3.3-3.9*

An ablative of duration, *post die paucos*, demarcates 3.4-3.5a as a new section and establishes Perpetua’s literary technique of employing elusive chronologically themed

anaphora to serve as frames for each pericope. Here, Perpetua indicates that the following days granted her refreshment (*refrigeraui*) and that “during the space of those few days, we were baptized”. An interesting comment immediately follows the baptism: “the Spirit directed me to seek from the water nothing other than endurance of the flesh” (*mihi spiritus dictauit non aliud petendum ab aqua nisi sufferentiam carnis*). Unlike the preceding portion of the narrative, this section garners little scholarly comment. Heffernan and Amat note the stark contrast of two extreme terms (physical refreshment and physical endurance, *refrigeraui* and *sufferentiam*), and little else is made of the section beyond Castelli’s reading that Perpetua “recognizes the potential fragility of her spiritual situation”.³⁷² I contend, however, that Perpetua’s comment following the baptism is no mere vignette. Like the first portion of her account, it is necessary to explore *why* this assertion might be considered significant to her audience and what role it may have in Perpetua’s self-commemorating act.

The rather curious comment that she desires endurance of the flesh after her baptism is devoid of any connotations of ecstatic prophetic utterance or apocalyptic moralism. Instead, I suspect that this is an explicit cultivation of allusion that embellishes the greater narrative theme and points to another Christian text, perhaps known to Perpetua through catechetical teaching or participation in a literary circle. In fact, this inclusion is the first of what I suspect are several deliberate allusive gestures to the same author. These tropes, much like the allusion rife in contemporary literature, serve to enrich her account with rhetorical styling, provide ideological depth and plenipotentiary, serve to foreshadow or to further her leitmotif, and may ultimately be the result of meaningful exposure to Christian texts and teachings.

Perpetua’s association of baptism and endurance of the flesh is particularly interesting in light of the title of the contemporary work of Clement of Alexandria,

³⁷² Heffernan, *Passion*, 160; Amat, *Passion*, 197; Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 87.

Exhortation of Endurance to the Newly Baptized (*Exh. Bapt.* hereafter). This brief, fragmentary paraenesis is a practical work that admonishes newly baptized Christians to moral tasks of endurance and control of the passions. One particular passage of *Exh. Bapt.* is notable in this respect:

“Often communicate your thoughts to people but, most of all, by night and by day, to God. For you must not allow excessive sleep to prevail in keeping you from prayers and hymns to God... let heavenly meditation continually lead you upwards towards heaven. And give up the *many anxious cares of the flesh* by *taking comfort* in hopes directed towards God, because He will sufficiently provide all necessary things...Knowing this, make your spirit strong, *even in the face of anguish; be of good courage, like a man in the arena*, most brave with unmoved strength to submit to his toils. Do not be completely crushed by grief in your soul, *whether anguish rests heavily upon you* or some other hardship comes upon you, but *confront toils with nobility* and with understanding, *giving thanks to God* even in the midst of struggles...*and pity those in distress...*”

I propose that Perpetua’s work reflects an explicit engagement with Clement’s text. In the *Exh. Bapt.*, those who are baptized are to have endurance, which is defined as giving up fleshly concerns. Similarly, Perpetua indicates that she will not be anxious to “seek from the water” anything more than endurance. In light of Clement’s exhortation, then, her immediate connection of baptism and endurance is no longer peculiar. Furthermore, Perpetua may be gesturing to the contents of this section of *Exh. Bapt.* as a means to foreshadow upcoming developments in her narrative. Her experiences of anguish will be followed by provision (3.5-7), she will display “manly” courage in an arena (10.7), and she will show nobility and pity contrasted to distress (5.6, 6.5, 9.2-3).³⁷³ In addition, as shall be demonstrated later in this chapter, there is compelling evidence elsewhere in Perpetua’s account for allusive engagements with other works in the Clementine corpus. These allusions reveal literary connections,

³⁷³ Each of these will be explored in this chapter and the next, according to the relevant sections in the *Passio*.

contribute towards the overarching aim of the creation of an *exempla* within collective memory, and, as we shall see, can consistently explicate the seemingly bizarre.

Once the intertextual connection between baptism and endurance in 3.5a is identified, Perpetua's immediate transition to prison becomes more explicable, certainly more so than the other interpretations put forth. A transitional chronological anaphora at 3.5b, "after a few days", signals a new section. Perpetua indicates that the group is admitted into prison and commences what initially seems to be a melodramatic litany of complaints: "I was horrified, for I had never known such darkness. O cruel day! The mob's crowding produced a suffocating heat. And then there was the extortion of the soldiers!" The dramatic language continues, and it is not until two deacons arrive and bribe the soldiers to allow prisoners access to another area offering both fresh air and visitor access, that Perpetua conveys an improved situation. She indicates that her mother brings her infant child, whom she nurses; nonetheless, Perpetua's narrative employs hyperbole and repetition to describe herself as "melting in anguish" (*tabescebam*), because she sees her visiting mother and brother in such sorrow (*tabescere*). This situation continues for several "tortuous" days, until at last permission is inexplicably granted for her child to remain in prison with her. At this juncture, Perpetua remarks that her anxiety ceases and the prison becomes to her a palatial villa, a *praetorium*.

Scholarly commentary upon this section of the narrative approaches the text from a variety of angles. The depiction of the prison as dark, hot, cruel, stifling, and crowded (3.5-6) corresponds to the municipal prison excavated in Carthage, which, like most urban Roman provincial prisons, apparently featured two levels, subterranean cells, and a ground-level with an inner courtyard that feasibly allowed

for visitors.³⁷⁴ This section has also prompted various studies of the contemporaneous penal system. McGowan, for example, has noted that both literary and archaeological evidence from the Severan era indicates that, since traditional social divisions in penal jurisdiction were no longer observed, prisoners' access to the different types of confinement space and to visitors depended almost entirely upon the jailers.³⁷⁵ Tertullian's *Ad Mart.* similarly depicts the prison of Carthage as dark and malodorous, abhorrent to all.³⁷⁶ Why does Perpetua express such ostensible grievances to her audience?

Scholarly analyses follow general interpretive trends, although their particular emphases have little in common. Most commentaries view this section simply as a personal digression. Salisbury's analysis, for example, regards it as an introspective scene of Perpetua's inner confrontation with her own maternal instincts, "When Perpetua happily had her son in prison with her, she may have at some level hoped to maintain both roles, mother and martyr.... She was not to have her son join her in martyrdom, but it would take more time in prison before Perpetua came to that realization".³⁷⁷ Others contend that on exhibit here is inherent irony and conscious rebellion via subversion.³⁷⁸ Perkins, followed by Shaw, suggests that this segment depicts "empowerment through suffering", since the deplorable prison conditions are a means for Perpetua to exult victoriously in her own anguish.³⁷⁹ Heffernan and Shelton propose that Perpetua transforms "prison into a palace" as both an explicit rejection of secular expectation and a vibrant reflection of the apocalyptic glorification

³⁷⁴ Heffernan, *Passion*, 161, 164. I see this as another strong indication that the group is in Carthage, not Thurburbo as indicated in the later *Acta*.

³⁷⁵ McGowan, "Discipline", 457-458.

³⁷⁶ Though he often details the conditions, he tells his audience not to dwell upon them! See, e.g., Tertullian *Ad Mart.* 3.1, 4.1-3.

³⁷⁷ Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 87, 89. Salisbury here follows Frend, "Blandina and Perpetua", 170: "Her diary shows a struggle between her duty to her infant and her duty to her faith".

³⁷⁸ E.g., Amat, *Passion*, 197-200; Heffernan, *Passion*, 166; Perkins, "Space, Place, Voice", 117-118.

³⁷⁹ Perkins, 105-106.

of suffering.³⁸⁰ Alternatively, Amat postulates a dry tone of sheer irony: prison is, in reality, no palace.³⁸¹

Interpretive solecisms within the predominant readings of this section are significant enough to render the need for reevaluation. It seems that this section does affirm ideologies through verbal embellishment and multivalent Latinate expression (*concussurae militum, macerabar sollicitudine...tales sollicitudines, usurpavi, tabescebam...tabescere videram mei beneficio*). However, the vocabulary and syntax fail to confirm a *glorification* of suffering. Explicit physical travail and anxiety are expressed in vivid terms through the exclamatory accusative. Perpetua's relief is evident when the deacons' bribe allows the prisoners to relocate (3.7), but the prison is said to become like a palace only when she obtains an arrangement for the infant to remain with her. I would thus aver that while the agony and relief expressly indicated by Perpetua are related, they must be seen in tandem with other meaningful elements in the pericope and reflect a meaning and authorial intent different from what has thus far been proposed.

In constructing an alternative interpretive path, it is first crucial to note that Perpetua's narrative does not mention her child until she is moved to prison. From the prolegomena of her account, her self-identification as a Christian is depicted as trumping *all* other identities, not as a continually dawning awareness. The rejection of traditional familial ties manifests itself in literature elsewhere (e.g., the Maccabees' mother, Christ, Thecla) but ought also to be seen in tandem with the significance of

³⁸⁰ Heffernan and Shelton, "*Paradisus in Carcere*", 217-223. Klawiter indicated that since he interprets fervour in her approach to suffering and martyrdom, Perpetua is a Montanist (a view that Heffernan also espouses). This ignores the contemporary glorification of martyrdom across the Christian spectrum, geographically and ideologically, as many (e.g., Trevett, Tabbernee, Bremmer) have emphatically noted.

³⁸¹ Amat, *Passion*, 199.

her Christian community instead of the rejected one.³⁸² Perpetua's references to her child only occur in reference to lactation and nourishment and her own anxiety or relief at the lack or provision; this ought to be given further attention.³⁸³ Many interpretations highlight what they regard as Perpetua's emotional agony, wherein the baby serves as a last vestige of familial bonds that will be increasingly broken over the course of the story. Particularly in recent analyses, her images of nursing seem preciously embodied, deeply personal, and, in consequence, provide evidence of the intimate expression of maternal connection in her "diary".

However, it must be recalled that contemporary Christian literature also employs images of nursing mothers to convey spiritual realities. Clement of Alexandria uses metaphorical images of breast-feeding throughout his *Paed.*, with explicit comparisons made between breast-milk and spiritual/educational nourishment, particularly from the breast of God.³⁸⁴ Tertullian's *Ad Mart.* commences with a vivid image of the Church giving her breast by offering provision, both corporately and from individual members, to ease the suffering of imprisoned confessors.³⁸⁵ I suspect that, in her references to nourishment and lactation, Perpetua participates far more in common symbolic imagery than in a personally cathartic diurnal divulgence.

³⁸² As Cardman aptly elucidated, "women martyrs profoundly unsettled the social and familial relationships on which their world had depended for its coherence" ("Acts", 150); cf. Moss, "Blood Ties", 183-202.

³⁸³ It is worth briefly engaging here with what may be lurking in many Classicists' minds: why would an elite Roman matron be nursing her own infant? Though it may at first seem questionable that a woman of such social standing is nursing her own child, there was little contemporary consensus on whether the milk of a wet-nurse or the mother would more preferably impact the child's future. Favorinus had argued vigorously that well-born women ought to nurse their offspring, and contemporary depictions confirm that breast-milk was seen as nourishment to the intellect and character (Favorinus' view is preserved in Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights* 12.1.20). Yet Heffernan, *Passion*, 19-20, notes that if Felicitas was a slave in Perpetua's *domus* (and he makes a sound case for this), her pregnancy was likely not accidental: Felicitas may have been intended as *nutrix* for Perpetua's child once she herself gave birth.

³⁸⁴ See Buell, *Making Christians*, 125-179; e.g., Clement, *Paed.* 1.6: "You will certainly find nothing more nourishing, sweeter, or whiter than milk. In every respect, accordingly, it is like spiritual nourishment, which is sweet through grace, nourishing as life, bright as the day of Christ...".

³⁸⁵ Tertullian, *Ad. Mart.* 1.1, is worth quoting here: *Inter carnis alimenta, benedicti martyres designati, quae vobis et domina mater ecclesia de uberibus suis et singuli fratres de opibus suis propriis in carcerem subministrant...*

Indeed, throughout her account, we see suffering as mitigated by the provision of God and the Christian community (e.g., *refrigerium* is provided via others in 3.7 and via prayer in 7.9-8.1). This emphasis is particularly interesting in light of the passage to which reference is made in Clement's *Exh. Bapt.*, namely in his instruction that the baptized "give up many anxious carnal cares by taking comfort in hopes directed towards God, because he will sufficiently provide all necessary things". Perpetua's narrative may highlight the improved prison conditions as commemoration-worthy evidence that God has indeed provided. It should again be emphasized that I do not contend that Perpetua's text entirely fabricates a story about her suffering, the languishing of an infant, and divine provision through Christians as a piquant theological allegory. As indicated above, my analysis proposes the more nuanced view that Perpetua selects, mediates, and interprets aspects of an experience (one which occurred to an ultimately unknowable extent) for an audience. The identity of this audience is rooted in narrative and commemoration. As such, Perpetua employs contextually appropriate images within an authoritative medium and situation. These images lend layers of rhetorical meaning to her narrative and are indicative of a familiarity with Christian texts and teachings. Her suffering in prison and the parallel maceration of her infant can be read as a demonstration of her suffering in prison, of the favor of God, the provision of the church, and the victories wrought by her faithfulness.

4.3 *Petitioning a Benefactress: Sections 4.1-2*

Once Perpetua's anxieties have been relieved, indistinct chronological terminology again serves as a literary transition and a unifying anaphora. In this scene, Perpetua is given a petition: "Then my brother said to me, 'Lady sister, already you are greatly esteemed, so much so that you might demand a vision and it might be shown to you

whether it will be a martyrdom or a discharge””. She then depicts her own fascinating response: “Since I knew I could speak with the Lord, whose great benefits I had experienced, I faithfully promised that I would”. It is not surprising that interpretive methods perceive this exchange in a variety of ways, especially since 4.1-4.2 immediately precedes Perpetua’s first vision account and serves as a transitioning piece. I would suggest that the conversation between Perpetua and the unnamed brother does not reveal, under close scrutiny, what most interpretations assert; nonetheless, the scene proves crucial in a number of ways. My reading is shaped by two fundamental social constructs: first, the authority granted to both visions and confessors in the contemporaneous Christian community, and secondly, the intricate gears of Roman *beneficia*, which are arguably paramount but have never been applied to this conversation.

This section is often seen as a reflection of the contemporary presumption that confessors, as martyrs-to-be, possessed the ability to transmit divine information to others.³⁸⁶ Like many scholars, Salisbury opines that the brother assumes that Perpetua “could expect a premonitory dream from the Holy Spirit” because she “has been selected for martyrdom”.³⁸⁷ However, as is revealed in the question itself, the imprisoned group has not been formally condemned and thus has not yet been “selected for martyrdom”: literally, the quondary implores “whether it might be a martyrdom or a discharge”. Perpetua’s identity as a confessor does deserve attention, since confessors were perceived as spiritually potent individuals. Not only is this evident in early traditions, such as with Stephen in Acts 7, but Cyprian’s mid third-century epistles also present confessors as spiritual vessels, exemplars, and prophetic

³⁸⁶ Such interpretations include, e.g., Amat, *Passion*, 200, and McGowan, “Discipline”, 466. A vivid contemporary example is Blandina in *Mart. Lyons*, who converses in a familiar way with Christ (ὁμιλία πρὸς χριστόν).

³⁸⁷ Salisbury, *Perpetua’s*, 98; Amat, *Passion*, 200, indicates the same: this section illustrates the assumption that martyrs-to-be are conferred with the chrism of visions.

voices.³⁸⁸ Evoking his culture's pervasive realities of the systems of benefaction, Origen's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* portrays confessor-martyrs as those who experience God's "multiplied benefits and favors".³⁸⁹ As McGowan explains, "The capacity of the martyrs to inhabit and make present the example of Christ added a heavenly structure to the Roman world's patronage system".³⁹⁰ This certainly can be seen in Carthage at the time of the *Passio*, both in the text and in various writings of Tertullian. Tertullian even considered it necessary to critique Carthaginian Christians' superfluous praise and perception of potency for confessors; he acerbically remarks that confessors are "swarmed" in prison by those making a "plea for prayers".³⁹¹

It seems odd, then, that various interpreters have insisted that this portion of Perpetua's account indicates that she occupies a "quasi-prophetic role" or is an oracular figure within New Prophecy.³⁹² Indeed, those who approach the *Passio* as evidence of proto-Montanism in North Africa spill considerable ink commenting upon the significance of this section. Butler comments, "Both Perpetua and this brother expected visions on demand, as befitted Montanists".³⁹³ Not only is this interpretation highly problematic in light of the commonly assumed status of confessors, but also in that there is a glaring absence of an implied state of ecstasy and interpretation, of the prophetic utterance of God's words to all people, and of any kind of moralistic

³⁸⁸ Cyprian *Ep.* 8; also in this epistle, Cyprian relates a narrative of the confessor-martyr Mappalicus, who prophetically utters to the proconsul interrogating him, "You shall see a contest tomorrow". Acts 7.1-56 depicts Stephen as beholding "the glory of God and the Son of Man at God's right hand" immediately after delivering a resounding apology to a sizeable audience.

³⁸⁹ Origen *Ex. Mart.* 2.

³⁹⁰ McGowan, *Ancient*, 243.

³⁹¹ Tertullian *De Pud.* 22; notwithstanding Tertullian's slight tendency to hyperbole, his remarks not only display the common perception of a heightened spiritual status of confessors – seemingly somewhat comparable to spiritual benefactors – but also are interesting in that he specifically locates this practice among non-Montanist Christians in Carthage with whom he prefers to disassociate himself.

³⁹² Moss, *Ancient*, 134; Moss is ambivalent as to whether this definitively indicates that Perpetua is a Montanist. More extreme views that do see Perpetua as a specifically Montanist prophetess include Klawiter "The Role of Martyrdom", 251-261; Wypustek, "Magic, Montanism, Perpetua", 276-297; Heffernan, *Passion*, 167.

³⁹³ Butler, *New Prophecy*, 64; also asserted by Huber, *Women*, 45-54; Heffernan, *Passion*, 167.

apocalypticism. Instead, she writes of herself as seeking and interpreting a vision well within broader Christian traditions, and Perpetua herself deciphers each of the visions that she presents with vocabulary terms associated with clarity (*intellegere* and *cognoscere*, 4.10, 7.9, 8.4, 10.13).

It seems, nonetheless, that an imperative question lingers. If the unnamed brother is a fellow prisoner, is he not on the same spiritual level of confessorship, so to speak? He presumably need not solicit Perpetua to do what he could accomplish. Shaw's interpretation of the passage offers one apparent solution: this brother is merely accompanying their mother and the other Christians to visit Perpetua. Thus Shaw finds his honorary use of *domina* as a reference to her confessor status.³⁹⁴ This interpretation is weakened, however, in that the text seems to assume that the brother is a fellow-prisoner. An inclusive "we" is indicated in the vision's affirmation of martyrdom (4.10), and their conversations seem to take place outside of the time with the visitors elsewhere in the text. The brother's highly deferential, socially encoded approach may assist in providing another explanation. He addresses Perpetua as *domina* before *soror* and begins his request with obsequious praise: she is "great in honor" or rank (*in magna dignatione*), a formulaic phrase typically used to indicate elevated social and legal privileges.³⁹⁵ Perhaps a consideration of contextual social mores ought to be considered: might this request and her response reveal the social architecture of *beneficia*?

If section 4.1-2 of Perpetua's account is viewed within this fundamental context, alternative interpretations are possible. First, the brother's approach and vocabulary can be seen to reveal the social code of relationship between benefactor and recipient, which couched itself in encoded language of simultaneous deference

³⁹⁴ Shaw even then asserts that her father calls her *domina* in recognition of the status of a confessor! Shaw, "Passion", 7.

³⁹⁵ E.g., those granted by Augustus in Suetonius *Aug.* 46.1.

and familial mutuality. Among the scripted aspects of such a liaison was a *salutatio* consisting of formal salutation to the benefactor accompanied by reverent praise; a specific request could then follow via a transitional statement specifically honoring the patron with gratitude for the patron's present privileged social status.³⁹⁶ This procedure is duplicated in the unnamed young man's statement and question. He employs the distinctive deferential title *domina*.³⁹⁷ His subsequent *soror* reinforces the relationship of familial reciprocity, consistent with the terminologies seen in early Christian communities and throughout the *Passio*. The address of an anonymous letter writer in Upper Egypt provides a parallel: the sender greets the female recipient, whom Haines-Eitzen postulates was the owner of a library, as "lady sister in the Lord" and requests that she lend him her copy of Ezra.³⁹⁸ Featuring the same phrase as specified by the 'brother' of the *Passio*, the reverent language indicates a relationship that is both spiritual and benefactory in nature.

Furthermore, his compliment (*in magna dignatione es*) implies honorable *dignitas* and, in fact, is a phrase explicitly recommended by Seneca for use in relationships of munificence.³⁹⁹ The content of the brother's appeal, that Perpetua might request a vision and be shown the upcoming fate of the imprisoned company, recalls Seneca's catalogue of benefits, which included advice and assistance from the divine realm.⁴⁰⁰ The trajectory of the appeal is also similar to the formula of *Metamorphoses* 11.1-2, where Apuleius' Lucius makes an invocation to Isis: he greets her with an honorable identification, praises her status, then makes his request. This

³⁹⁶ Seneca, *Ben.* 2.24.4; also in Horace, *Sat.* 1.1.9-10; see Crook, *Reconceptualising*, 71-72, 119.

³⁹⁷ This term quite likely indicates that she is the mistress of a household, as seen in the likes of Cicero, Quintilian, Virgil, Propertius, the *Vetus Latina*, and the later Vulgate. The handful of 'exceptions' are ironic, like 'mistress of my passion' (Ovid *Am.* 2.16) and ultimately still reveal some degrees of deference and authority, proving faulty the suggestion of Amat, *Passion*, 200, that this greeting was merely one of affection, much like a grandmother might call her grandson 'little master'.

³⁹⁸ *P.Oxy.* 63 4365, as translated and discussed in Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest*, 33, and Luijendijk, *Greetings*, 70-74.

³⁹⁹ Seneca *Bene.* 7.22; cf. Apuleius *Metam.* 5.19.1, 5.12.15, 11.1-11.4.

⁴⁰⁰ Seneca *Bene.* 1.2; cf. Elliott, "Patronage", 39-48; Crook, *Reconceptualising*, 56-58.

ought not be seen as exclusive to the secular realm. Cyprian refers to divine *beneficia* granted to confessors with assumptions that recall the Pauline depiction of God's munificence as extending not merely from the divine to individuals but also between individuals and communities, themselves involved in relationships of reciprocity.⁴⁰¹

Thus it was within contextual 'normalcy' for Perpetua to receive a request from a recipient who already views her as a social intermediary. Perpetua's response seems to confirm as much. Her choice to refer explicitly to the young man as "brother" again emphasizes to her audience that her primary identity is *Christiana*, an identity that operates within a Christian *familia* in which munificence was the norm. Perpetua indicates that she agrees to the request because she could speak with the Lord whose *beneficia* she herself "had abundantly experienced". A metacritical aside may be exigent here. Nearly a century earlier, Tacitus had transformed Livia's patronage into a quintessential picture of sinister female domination.⁴⁰² A powerful and benevolent woman found no room, it seems, in Tacitean paradigms. Perhaps the same might be said of Perpetua: typical commentary has dictated that if a female seems to be exercising any kind of authority, this authority is not actually her own. It must stem from the chrism of oracular prophecy, one in which she is more of a vessel, rather than from sources that belong to her and are socially legitimate and empowered. However, the impact of the mechanisms of *beneficia* are integral to the *Passio* text, and in the interpretive negligence of the contextual web of roles and relationships created and maintained by benefaction, *Passio* scholarship has in this respect overlooked a significant interpretive key.

⁴⁰¹ Cyprian *Ep.* 39.1.1; e.g., 2 Cor. 4.15 and 8.4. "Benefit", "favour" or "beneficence" can all be considered equivalents of χάρις within the Graeco-Roman social system. For a useful discussion of the term χάρις, or grace, see Crook, *Reconceptualising*, 132-150. Use of the term precedes the Roman era; e.g., Herodotus mentions Pausianus' request for archers from Athens as a χάρις (*Hist.* 9.60.3).

⁴⁰² Tacitus *Ann.* 4.3.

4.4 Suffering...and Cheese? Sections 4.2-10

The requested vision is foreshadowed in order to reveal “whether there will be martyrdom or discharge”. A seemingly odd phrase, “this was shown to me: I see...” (*ostensum est mihi hoc: video*), instigates the vision and depicts it as neither a sleeping dream nor an experience of sudden spiritual possession or ecstasy. A comparable situation features in the later *Acta Cypriani*: as Cyprian awaits a legal summons, he already knows his fate, “just as it had been revealed to him” (*sicut ostensum illi erat*).⁴⁰³ The syntax embroiders a literary anaphora that will reappear to introduce the following two visions and in this way will rhetorically embellish, contain, and unify the narrative.⁴⁰⁴ The present form of the verb (*video*) juxtaposes the poetic present narrative technique (often interpreted as a Latin solution for the lack of the aorist) with the flexibility of *videre* as intuitive perception, discernment, or to see with the “mind’s eye”, just as *video* is often employed by Virgil.⁴⁰⁵ The vision that she is shown is generally portioned into two segments, with her description of the ladder, the defeat of the dragon, and her ascent, then her entrance into the garden, interaction with the shepherd, and acceptance and consumption of cheese. These images are variously explicated by scholars according to their methods. I suggest that this vision guides her audience along a path already established and contains allusive indication to the conclusion that will be confirmed by both her brother and herself: suffering, not discharge, lies ahead.

As the vision is examined, previous literary models assist to establish a contextual canvas. The travails depicted in the dreams of protagonists during the

⁴⁰³ *Mart. Cyp.* 2.1. There is possible literary influence of *Mart. Poly.* and the *Passio* upon the *Mart. Cyp.*. I here emphasize the “orthodoxy” (and exemplary memory-making in process) of being shown prophetic visions concerning one’s own fate as a confessor.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ostensum est mihi hoc: video* appears in 7.3 and 8.1. *Video hoc* is used in the last vision as well, but another introduction sets apart this vision as penultimate and employs a Latinised phrase - *video in horomate hoc* (10.1) - that contains its own rhetorically allusive gesture, as is discussed in the following chapter.

⁴⁰⁵ E.g., *Aen.* 3.19, as Aeneas recounts his previous ventures.

initial events of Greek novels often feature an allusive and symbolic narrative of the major events of the story. In this way, the visions serve as a literary foreshadowing of the story's resolution.⁴⁰⁶ Perpetua forebodingly remarks that they “knew” the interpretation of the dream, and she refers to the martyrdom that will bring the narrative to its culmination. How could Perpetua and her brother, as well as her anticipated audience, assume such a specific interpretation from the somewhat bizarre visionary account? I propose that, much like the narrative in Greek novels, Perpetua relies on the established rhetorical embellishments of allusion and symbol within her unique account.

The first portion of the vision itself (4.3-7) features two obstacles that demand Perpetua's vigilance to overcome them. The scene commences with an image of a narrow bronze ladder that reaches to the heavens. It is laden with hooks, spears, spikes, and blades, and it is guarded at the foot by a threatening dragon. Saturus, whom Perpetua mentions was the first to climb the ladder, appears and indicates that he awaits Perpetua at the ladder's end, but he instructs Perpetua cautiously to avoid the dragon's bite. Her confident response employs an established formula, “in the name of Jesus Christ”,⁴⁰⁷ then succinctly describes the ensuing action: she steps on the head of the dragon and climbs the ladder.

Interpretive commentary of the ladder and dragon alone can serve as examples of the varieties of lenses employed within scholarly discourse. The Jungian perspective of von Franz establishes each image as “a vital reaction of the

⁴⁰⁶ E.g., in *Ephesiaca* 1.2, *Callirhoe* 2.3. For further discussion on Greek novels in this regard, see Hägg, *The Novel*, 49, and Whitmarsh, *Narrative*, 193-195.

⁴⁰⁷ “In the name of Jesus Christ” is used as a kind of talisman in Acts 16.18 and is frequently employed for various uses in early Christian epistles, but the full development of the phrase as a shield against evil, as Perpetua seems to use it, can be seen in the nearly contemporary Origen's *C. Cel.* 67: “the name of Jesus can remove distractions from the mind, expel demons, remove diseases, and produce a wonderful humility of spirit and utter change of character, and a manliness, goodness, gentleness in those who ... have truly accepted the doctrine concerning God and Christ”.

unconscious to the fate threatening the dreamer in the outside world”.⁴⁰⁸ Similar views supply modern psychological analysis and identify oneiric representation and unconscious correlation between an object in the dream and something in her reality. Such engagement tends to figure specific images as figments of emotion or conflict that must either be overcome, such as her father and his arguments or her own angst, or are present to prepare her to the travails to come.⁴⁰⁹ Many studies find items in the vision to be corollaries to the world of the familiar,⁴¹⁰ and because these interpretations incorporate various methods to myriad ends, they are the most variegated, especially concerning whether or not her images are intentionally portrayed or sketched within a stream-of-conscious “diary”. Attending socio-political contexts, Bremmer contends that Perpetua is unconsciously creating an image from her public life,⁴¹¹ as the ladder image indicates the series of steps, *gradus*, leading up to the *catasta* for legal trial. On display on either side of these steps were weapons of war or torture, and Bremmer argues that Perpetua’s vision is intuitively confirming that the martyrs will be soon ascending to the place of their trial and must be aware of danger and resolute in their identity.

Other approaches view the ladder and dragon as an allusive gesture, but these studies rarely elucidate and explore such intertextuality in detail or in terms of the vision as a whole. A more extensive engagement is certainly in order. Reference to allusion typically occurs in interpretive comments that the ladder could be a curiously adapted ladder of Jacob’s vision from Genesis 28; others counter that Perpetua may have been more aware of the literary tradition of Artemidorus in which ladders initiate

⁴⁰⁸ Von Franz, 34.

⁴⁰⁹ E.g., Oberholzer, “Interpreting”, 300-301; Habbermehl, *Perpetua*, 77-87; Böhme, “The Conquest”, 234; Sebesta, “Vibia Perpetua”, 105; Perkins, *Suffering*, 106-107.

⁴¹⁰ E.g., Salisbury, *Perpetua’s*, 45-57; Musurillo, *Acts*, 111; Pettersen, “Perpetua”, 147-148; Frend, *Martyrdom*, 269; Miller, “A Dubious Twilight”, 153-165.

⁴¹¹ Bremmer, “Perpetua”, 100.

a transition into an unknown realm.⁴¹² The bronze composition of the ladder and the iron weaponry are sometimes seem as reminiscent of bronze and iron symbols in the *Aeneid* or as an imitation of the metaphorical use of metals in the Old Testament.⁴¹³ Many other studies appeal to Genesis 3 to present a case that Perpetua evokes victorious subjugation via the placement of Perpetua's foot on the head of the dragon. Significantly, Bremmer noted that Genesis 3.15 in *Vetus Latina* is phrased *ipsa tibi calcabit caput* – a locution remarkably echoed by Perpetua's *calcavi illi caput* (4.7).⁴¹⁴ Indeed, allusive reference to this crushing of the serpent's head by the very heel it attempted to bite seems quite possible. Such an implied comparison of her own visionary triumph and the ultimate victory over evil implied in Genesis 3 would be consistent with Perpetua's authorial aims.

Genesis is not, however, the only possible Judeo-Christian textual parallel worthy of attention. Hermas, too, evokes a visionary drama where he must pass by a diabolical obstacle painted as a dragon.⁴¹⁵ Hermas' work was familiar in North African Christian circles and apparently exerted considerable influence among many communities around the Mediterranean.⁴¹⁶ The fourth vision of Hermas' narrative begins with the explicit indication that his vision is a figure (τύπος) of impending affliction (θλίψις). As the scene unfolds, Hermas portrays himself on a journey; his progress is endangered when a colossal serpent-like creature materializes directly in his path. He hears a voice of encouragement from above, boldly proceeds unharmed

⁴¹² Artemidorus 2.42 explains that a ladder in a dream symbolized journey, progression, and danger; Dronke, *Women*, 7-8; cf. Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 101.

⁴¹³ I.e., Virgil *Aeneid* 2.469ff, where Pyrrhus, an enemy obstacle for the Trojans, is "exulting in weapons and sparking with the glint of bronze". Cp. Dronke, *Women*, 8-9; Zec. 6.1 features bronze mountains: see Heffernan, *Passion*, 173; cf. Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 100-103.

⁴¹⁴ Bremmer, "Perpetua", 101.

⁴¹⁵ Hermas *Shep.* 4.1. This is acknowledged as a possibility by some studies, e.g., Frend, *Martyrdom*, 289; Amat, *Passion*, 203; and Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 102. However, they make no further comment nor explore the surrounding content of *Shep.*

⁴¹⁶ Tertullian *De Pud.* 100.20, *De Orat.* 100.16, reveals its popularity as he scorns its use; Irenaeus cites a passage from Hermas verbatim and introduces it as Scripture (*Adv. Haer.* 4.20.2); Origen later refers to it rather defensively as both useful and authoritative ("divinely inspired", *Com. Rom.* 10.31). See further Osiek and Koester, *Shepherd*.

past the creature, and then immediately encounters a personified symbol of the Church, the woman in white, who acknowledges that he survived because he believed that he “could be saved by no other than the great and glorious name” (4.2.4). In a brilliant but rather obvious claim for plenipotentiary, Hermas is subsequently instructed by the woman to “relate these wondrous things to the elect of God”. In the ensuing vision, which serves as a prolegomena to his Mandates, he encounters a figure “glorious in his visage, in the garb of a shepherd, wrapped in white” whose theophanic purpose is to provide parables for Hermas to write and relate to the church.

I suggest that Perpetua’s first vision presents strongly allusive corollaries through images, progression of action, and inferred implications to this portion of Hermas: parallels include a journey, a snake-like monster, a voice of encouragement from above, the saving power of the name of Christ, a victory, and the written transmission of these images as a vision in narrative form that is couched within a rhetoric of legitimacy for other Christians. Like the passage from *Exh. Bapt.*, intertextuality is employed as a rhetorical stratagem. Such extensive allusion would have been a familiar trope to Perpetua, lends authority, enhances themes, and both develops and foreshadows the narrative action.

The second portion of Perpetua’s vision (4.8-4.9) deserves meticulous attention, since it culminates the entire scene, contributes to the revelatory conclusion (4.10), and is just as complex and indispensably allusive. For the most part, the events are perceived and interpreted with the aid of scholarly approaches that accord with those used for the first portion of the vision. Analyses view the scene as a psychological projection, a brief reflection of a Scriptural archetype, or, most commonly, as an unconscious combination of the two to varying degrees. The setting itself is widely acknowledged to follow abundant models of paradisiac gardens; these models in themselves feature complex intertextuality and cultural relationship,

meaning that is often difficult to call them exclusively Hellenistic, Christian, Hebrew, or Roman.⁴¹⁷

Unlike the venue, the narrative content seems inexplicably bizarre. A white-haired shepherd, who is surrounded by thousands in white raiment and is milking sheep, welcomes Perpetua by calling her “child”. He then places “about a mouthful” of cheese (*caseus*) in her hands. She consumes it, and the crowd in white pronounce “amen”. The vision ends as a strange sweet taste lingers in her depiction of waking reality. Thus the requested vision is brought to its culmination, and she immediately conveys its content to her unnamed brother. Perpetua connects the entire vision, from the ladder and dragon to the milking shepherd and the consumption of cheese, to an indication of future suffering: because of the vision, “We understood that we were to suffer, and we began now to no longer harbor hope in this world” (*intelleximus passionem esse futuram, et coepimus nullam iam spem in saeculo habere*, 4.10). She does not consider it necessary to provide an interpretation or a reason for her conclusions to her audience. As the first vision and one that foreshadows the protagonist’s fate, this narrative portion is certainly significant, but there is dissonance among scholars as to what this significance is.

Scholarly analyses invariably attempt to find an unconscious symbol drawing out psychoanalytical implications in this latter portion of the vision or seek to establish a direct correlation, conscious or not, between Perpetua’s consumption of the cheese and something that she would have actually done in reality. Four typical exegetical paths emerge. One reading strategy views the cheese as a reference to a singularly Montanist practice, another creatively seeks alternative translations in an attempt to foster comprehensibility, still another quite common approach presents the scene as sacramental, and a minority of analyses simply demur from any interpretive

⁴¹⁷ See Adamik, “The Description”, 81-82.

engagement with the idiosyncratic gift of the Shepherd. After a purview of the tenability of these diverse evaluations, I will propose that the most compelling interpretive strategy is one that attends to Perpetua's contexts and to her narrative's probable genre, aims, and literary strategies.

Under the interpretive lens of some scholars, unconscious connotations burgeon in the second portion of the vision; these assessments, however, are not without their difficulties. Viewing her account as a diary, Dronke argues that the dream represents Perpetua's own emotional state.⁴¹⁸ Here, the white-haired man serves as a counter-image to her father, and his gift of cheese is a physiological symbol of the process of rebirth into a heavenly family. Miller has suggested that a dream-like "carnavalesque perspective" of the psyche is here on display.⁴¹⁹ In her reading, the vision is sexually charged: the masculine, dominant male Shepherd, pointed weapons, and long serpent each feature as reflections of an "exaggerated phallicism" by which Perpetua refuses to be terrorized. Instead she subversively asserts her own power and thereby transforms her dream into a maternally colored scene of lactation and nurturing. Oberholzer somewhat similarly considers the cheese image in terms of an unconscious reflection on motherhood: because her son no longer needed her milk, she creates a scene that features the presence of a male parental figure and the consumption of solid food as opposed to milk.⁴²⁰ He articulates an unconscious causality at the core of this first vision: "she will now be nurtured by a loving father, and her son, who is in her father's care, will be nurtured".⁴²¹ Bremmer, among others, voices a sound critique of these thoroughly psychoanalytical approaches: in his analysis, they "fall victim to modern fascination

⁴¹⁸ Dronke, *Women*, 9.

⁴¹⁹ Miller, *Dreams*, 176.

⁴²⁰ Oberholzer, "Interpreting", 293-312.

⁴²¹ Oberholzer, "Interpreting", 312.

with Freudian psychology”, fail to rise above the banal, and essentially ignore the world surrounding Perpetua “to see how the elements of her vision fit into her own cultural environment”.⁴²² Furthermore, interpretation of the vision as psycho-speak cannot provide an explanation for the direct association of the consumption of a handful of cheese and immanent martyrdom.

A handful of scholars propose an alternative assessment and insist that this passage provides a clear reference to Perpetua’s participation in Montanism. Epiphanius’ late fourth-century catalogue of heresies portrays a later sect possibly of the Montanist variety, the Artotyrites, as notable for its distinctive proclivity to the ritual use of bread and cheese, presumably its Eucharistic meal.⁴²³ Relying solely upon this description, interpretations such as Kraemer’s summarily indicate that since “the Montanists celebrated a Eucharist of bread and cheese,” Perpetua’s “Eucharistic cheese-like substance” can be directly linked to the sect in Epiphanius.⁴²⁴ Butler echoes the claim: “Another important Montanist connection in Perpetua’s first vision was the use of cheese in the heavenly Eucharist”.⁴²⁵ Salisbury directly links Perpetua’s cheese with the later “Montanist ritual” in her proposal that the image reflects actual aberrance from typical Eucharistic practices and would come “to shape the rituals of the unorthodox”.⁴²⁶ Trevett cites the presence of *caseus* as one of the reasons that the *Passio* may reflect Montanism, though she expresses caution to ally the cheese, Artotyrites, and Montanism at all.⁴²⁷ It has further been proposed that the

⁴²² Bremmer, “Perpetua”, 96-97.

⁴²³ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 49.2: the Artotyrites “are the same as the Cataphrygians and derive from them, but are distinguished in a certain respect... in their rites they set out bread and cheese and thus celebrate their rites”. The name Artotyrites appropriately means “bread-and-cheesers”. Harris and Gifford, *The Acts*, 44-45, use Epiphanius to associate the Artotyrites with Montanism and then apply the taking of cheese by Perpetua to be a Montanist act.

⁴²⁴ Kraemer and Lander, “Perpetua”, 1061, following Kraemer, *Her Share*, 163-165.

⁴²⁵ Butler, *New Prophecy*, 101.

⁴²⁶ Salisbury, *Perpetua’s*, 158; this is a problematic claim that she cannot corroborate.

⁴²⁷ Trevett, *Montanism*, 177. She moves instead to briefly indicate that cheese was a dairy product, the consumption of which was not uncommon (as shall be engaged later in this essay); see also Trevett, “Fingers Up Noses”, 258-269.

later *Acta* version of the *Passio* entirely replaces the term *caseus* because the author of this later work knew of the Artotyrites' roots in Montanism, was aware of Perpetua's association with them in this dubious act of cheese-eating, and thus was possessed of the orthodox discernment to edit the scene with the term *fructu lactis* (3.6).⁴²⁸

Yet significant hazards are involved in such associations between Montanism and the cheese. Despite the ink spilled in an attempt to make this circuitous connection, ultimately, Perpetua's vision is unable to indicate in the least that Montanists, as practicing in Carthage no less, used cheese in liturgical rites, nor that she herself was a Montanist. It seems unwise to connect cheese with the Montanists via only the *Panarion*, as Epiphanius' heresiological strategy often links unassociated groups.⁴²⁹ Also, nearly two centuries separate Perpetua and any known "bread-and-cheesers" of Asia Minor. Furthermore, there are alternative (if perhaps less creative) ways of explaining the textual amendment in the *Acta*. Like scholars in our own era, the *Acta* author simply may have not known what to do with the seemingly bizarre cheese; thus, a gloss using a more common and more biblical term was provided – milk, *lactis*. This is no surprise, since this later rendition of the *Passio* removes complications and often adds fabricated detail to streamline and sterilize the account, likely for annual liturgies.⁴³⁰ In the early fifth century, Quodvultdeus, for a time bishop of Carthage, interpreted the *Passio* vision with reference to *lactis* to nicely serve his comparison of breast milk and the martyrs' "sweetness of perpetual

⁴²⁸ Butler, *The New Prophecy*, 101; cp. Trevett, "Fingers Up Noses", 258-269. For more on the *Acta*, see p. 22-23 and 237-238 of this study; also, Halporn, "Literary History", 223-241.

⁴²⁹ Epiphanius' strategy of linking all heresies in a kind of diabolical 'family tree' means that he associated groups that, more often than not, were not related. Epiphanius' reporting on the New Prophecy in itself (not its later supposed offshoots) seems to be based on a legitimate source: Labroille, *La Crise*, 343-344, and Trevett, *Montanism*, 177.

⁴³⁰ An illustrative detail in the *Acta* is the anachronistic dates of the event to 250 BCE, "during the persecution of Valerian and Gallienus". It is not my purpose here to analyse the *Acta* or to document its relationship to the *Passio* text. The conversation is long and complex and is handled well in conversations elsewhere. See, e.g., Kitzler, "*Passio*", 1-19; Halporn, "Literary History", 223-241; Heffernan, *Passion*, 60-78; Amat, *Passion*, 265-275.

felicity”.⁴³¹ These two fairly early sources represent a method of interpretation that has since plagued the *Passio*.

Indeed, the legerdemain of “milk” rather than the peculiar cheese is not a singularly antique endeavor. In his reconstruction of the severely fire-damaged Cotton Otho manuscript (BL Cotton Otho D.viii), a 12th century volume that includes the *Passio* among its damaged contents,⁴³² van Beek offered *lacte* rather than *caseo*. This would be an interesting addition to the history of the text, were it not an unverifiable hypothesis: at this segment on the severely charred vellum, transcription is actually impossible. Heffernan provides van Beek’s proposition in his recent lemma, but it is designated a supposition and is engaged in a discussion of examples in which van Beek’s transcription misleads at certain points by presenting the textually-ambiguous as certain.⁴³³ The other eight surviving Latin manuscripts, notably including the manuscript deemed the most reliable,⁴³⁴ unanimously employ *caseo*.

However, modern translations and commentaries at times present a far more ambiguous scenario. Oddly, Musurillo’s translation indicates “milk” rather than cheese. “It is most difficult to translate *caseo* as anything other than cheese”, admits Robeck, “yet its connection to milk goes without saying”, since milk is “the nourishment of eternal life”.⁴³⁵ In this questionable assumption he is not alone. Comments penned by Pothoff, Huber, Kraemer and Lander, Lefkowitz, and Salisbury almost exclusively refer to the substance as “milk”, an interpretation justified by the assumption of textual association with Paul’s epistolary imagery of milk as a spiritual

⁴³¹ Quodvultdeus *De Temp. Bar.* 1.5.

⁴³² For complete information on this severely fire-ravaged manuscript, see Heffernan, *Passion*, 413-418.

⁴³³ Heffernan, *Passion*, 102, 107.

⁴³⁴ Heffernan, *Passion*, 374-375.

⁴³⁵ Robeck, *Prophecy*, 36.

child's drink and the assumption that this milk confirms Perpetua's "new" Christian identity.⁴³⁶

Such readings should leave readers with a lingering taste of suspicion. In every case that translations and commentaries render *caseo* with "milk", they are correcting an ancient text: surely, they imply, Perpetua must not really mean "cheese". The narrative and its various manuscripts read *caseo* and must be taken seriously. If *caseus* can imply "milk", or if other Latin authors use the word as a substitute for milk, then my critique is misplaced. However, the translations and varieties of usage of *caseus* in the *Thesaurus Latinae Linguae* support my contention: *caseus* can be eaten as an aged hard food or as a fresh, supple curdled matter, but from classical Latin authors to those of Late Antiquity, including roughly contemporary North Africans such as Apuleius and Tertullian, it is made out of, but does not ever translate as, "milk".⁴³⁷

Perhaps other words in Perpetua's account can provide further assistance. First, the *TLL* definition of cheese, which does allow for a freshly curdled semi-solid substance coincides, at the very least, with Perpetua's joined hands (*iunctis manibus*). Perpetua also uses a verb that literally means "to chew", not drink, to depict her corresponding action (*et manducaui*).⁴³⁸ Ancient authors occasionally use *manducare* juxtaposed with the verb for "drink" (*bibere*), but these terms are not exchangeable. Lastly, the modifier *quasi* ("he gave me nearly a little mouthful", *dedit mihi quasi buccellam*) can be noted, as it not only acts as a term of approximation but also generally serves to bring attention to the situation. *Quasi* can also be translated "as it

⁴³⁶ Musurillo, *Acts*, 113; Huber, "Women", 49; Kramer and Lander, "Perpetua", 1049; Lefkowitz, "The Motivations", 417-421; Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 103. Lefkowitz, for example, explains that as a "child" in Christianity, Perpetua was nurtured on milk to enable and empower her identity as a gladiator.

⁴³⁷ *TLL*, vol. 2, 513-514: "*Caseus: potus ex lacte factus, qui butyro perfecto superest*".

⁴³⁸ *TLL*, vol. 8, 272-275.

were,” to emphasize an amplified sense of reality.⁴³⁹ Ultimately, to mistranslate *caseus* also leads to a problematic handling of other words in the clause.

Perhaps a more diplomatic affirmation is in order: the “milk” translation could be justifiable if Perpetua had neglected to specify cheese. When Perpetua enters the scene, the gray-haired man in shepherd’s garb is, after all, “milking sheep” (*oues mulgentem*). The scene remains somewhat unclear in terms of syntax, though the cheese could literally have been a product of what he had *previously* milked rather than what he was milking at that instant. With a connection to the shepherd’s “milking” at the forefront, many scholars have focused on context, namely, what they call the “dream” itself and contemporary Christianity, as a way to interact with the complex passage. By viewing Perpetua’s entire account as a diary, Dodds is able to suggest that the handful of cheese as a milking shepherd’s gift can be explained as “a sort of time-compression” common to dreams.⁴⁴⁰ To Dodds and those such as Heffernan who follow this proposition, the cheese is merely a subconscious sleight of chronology within Perpetua’s dream-world.⁴⁴¹

Many commentaries find in the cheese an instance of collapsed chronology pointing to the Eucharist. Amat, Boehme, Moss, and Burrus, for example, suggest that this section is an oneiric communion.⁴⁴² Postulating that the cheese is related to a different sacramental rite, many studies, including those by Musurillo, Pothoff, Robeck, Salisbury, and Bremmer, find a nexus between this scene and a reference in

⁴³⁹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 208-209, points this out as a caveat against his own reading of *caseus* (as a dream-image that simply collapses time), but he offers no alternative solution.

⁴⁴⁰ Dodds, *Pagan*, 51.

⁴⁴¹ Heffernan, *Passion*, 182, is partial to this option: it is “the logic unique to dreams”. Heffernan’s *Sacred Biography*, 208, opines, “such temporal compression and union of unlike objects is common in dreams”, and “contradiction of everyday experience in the dream record underscores the likelihood of the dream’s autobiographical authenticity”.

⁴⁴² Amat, *Passion*, 206-207; here and in “Songes”, 182, Amat does refer to the supposed communion of the Artotyrites but indicates that she is not convinced that the parallel indicates anything significant. Amat notes the “amen” as proof of sacramental engagement. See also Burrus, *Saving Shame*, 29; Böhme, “The Conquest”, 25; Moss, *Ancient*, 133.

two of Tertullian's works which connect baptism and milk: when baptismal initiation symbolically makes Christians newborns, they "taste first of all a mixture of milk and honey".⁴⁴³ The *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Apostolic Tradition* similarly mention sweetened milk in the context of baptismal rites.⁴⁴⁴ Bremmer's interpretation deftly (though problematically) connects the vision's cheese with milk: "when Perpetua woke up, she still felt the taste of something sweet in her mouth, a memory of the sweetness of milk and cheese".⁴⁴⁵ Von Franz views the cheese as a conflation of the two sacraments, the chewing of the solid bread of communion and the drinking of milk after baptism.⁴⁴⁶ Heffernan similarly views the scene as a collapsed "matrix of liturgical events" via "memories of other liturgical ceremonies in which food was administered", so that her dream is "an eschatological prophecy of her full reception into the community".⁴⁴⁷

However, the association of the cheese with the Eucharist and the baptismal drink does produce difficulties. The "amen" uttered by the *candidati* (4.10) does not automatically imply a sacrament, since there are numerous other uses for the phrase in Christian literature. For example, it is Polycarp's last spoken word, and in some accounts of the liturgy, a prayer concluded by "amen" occurs prior to, not after, the Eucharist.⁴⁴⁸ Furthermore, the text indicates only cheese, not bread and wine, not

⁴⁴³ *Inde suscepti, lactis et mellis concordiam praegustamus (de Cor. 3.3); Sed ille quidem usque nunc nec aquam reprobavit creatoris qua suos abluit, nec oleum quo suos unguat, nec mellis et lactis societatem qua suos infantat, nec panem quo ipsum corpus suum repraesentat, etiam in sacramentis propriis egens mendicitatibus creatoris (Adv. Marc. 1.14.3).* See Musurillo, *Acts*, 113; Robeck, *Prophecy*, 40; Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 103, claims that local tradition provided a precedent for the cheese: "Carthaginian Christians ate milk and cheese along with the bread and wine of Holy Communion", but no sources are provided as evidence for this claim (since, in fact, none exist).

⁴⁴⁴ *Epistle of Barnabas* 6.16-17 and Tertullian *Adv. Marc.* 1.14.3; also, the chronologically problematic *Apostolic Tradition* 21.27, though it is important to note that the latter makes separation between the bread and wine of the Eucharist and the honey and milk of baptism – the two are not part of the same rite, as Heffernan *Passion*, 183, seems to insinuate with an ellipsis of the text's contents.

⁴⁴⁵ Bremmer, "Perpetua", 104; it is important to note that the *Passio* text says only "something sweet" and indicates that she only ate cheese.

⁴⁴⁶ von Franz, 33-34.

⁴⁴⁷ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 209-210 and *Passion*, 182-183.

⁴⁴⁸ *Mart. Poly.* 15.1; Justin I *Apol.* 65.1.

milk and honey, and Perpetua is now past her baptism, immediately after which these other elements would likely have been administered. In his critique of attempts to find eucharistic or baptismal connotations in the cheese, Oberholzer asserts, “We should consider the image as it appeared in the dream, rather than what image might be more realistic or theologically useful”.⁴⁴⁹ What if the cheese *is*, in fact, “theologically useful” to Perpetua’s authorial task, even if it is not sacramental?

Tilley’s interpretation certainly implies as much: like Proserpina’s own eating in an otherworldly location, the act of consuming food in another world binds Perpetua to that place.⁴⁵⁰ Tilley notes that this visionary scene is a crucial point in Perpetua’s narrative, for it indicates that “she had already ascended [and] tasted heaven...she could not turn back in dream or in reality”.⁴⁵¹ Could the cheese thus imply something of Perpetua’s identity or task? If so, how? Heffernan admits, “I do not believe that the question [in regards to the cheese-eating] can be answered completely to anyone’s satisfaction”.⁴⁵² Shaw allows the vision to remain abstruse: “she offers no further interpretation of the meaning of her dream” and “does not get a direct answer to her brother’s request”.⁴⁵³ Rapprochement clearly is in order. Perpetua and her brother indicate that they *do* receive an answer; it would seem instead that the method of Perpetua’s interpretation is implicitly assumed, rather than being deficient.

Perpetua’s account up to this point should be taken into perspective: she has already established a complex themed narrative tapestry that features rhetorical skill, novelistic styling, and reference to Christian texts. An awareness of her identity is evident, as is her narrative direction. Her background as a well-educated elite matron, juxtaposed to her identity as a catechumen (not initiate) in a city with known ‘literary

⁴⁴⁹ Oberholzer, “Interpreting”, 301.

⁴⁵⁰ Tilley, “The Passion”, 839-840.

⁴⁵¹ Tilley, “The Passion”, 840.

⁴⁵² Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 209.

⁴⁵³ Shaw, “Passion”, 306.

circles' of both the secular and Christian varieties, provides useful context. I suspect her reception and consumption of the cheese serves as a connective thread within the narrative: Perpetua is working with an image found elsewhere which furthers her own text's meaning.

A scriptural selection from Job 10.10 has been proposed as the source for Perpetua's association of cheese and suffering: "Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me as cheese?"⁴⁵⁴ On the whole, however, the two situations are utterly discordant. In this passage, Job unleashes a tirade of complaints and indicates that he loathes his life, as it is in the midst of unwanted destruction seemingly sent by a duplicitous God (a perception for which the text will reprimand him). Unlike Job, Perpetua is inquiring into the future, depicts herself as already victorious over weapons and a dragon, accepts the cheese from the shepherd, chews it, hears "amen", and experiences a sweet taste. Although the Job text is of limited value as an explanation for Perpetua's narrative, it does connect cheese and suffering, just as Hermas connected his dragon with tribulation. Reference to Job is certainly feasible, for allusion to Christian texts via imagery has already contributed layers of meaning to her account. It would seem that the second part of the vision would not deviate from this technique but work along focal themes and draw from other works to further leitmotifs and enhance her audience's interpretation.

While the passage in Job may remain a possibility, albeit one with difficulties, I suggest that another Christian text offers a far more viable solution. A number of images and concepts in Perpetua's narrative, particularly in her first vision, may conceivably be traced to Clement of Alexandria's *Paedagogus* (hereafter *Paed.*). Written in the mid-190s, *Paed.* aims to provide advanced instruction for converts

⁴⁵⁴ Miller, "A Dubious Twilight", 59.

already in possession of preliminary Christian teachings and a secular education.⁴⁵⁵

Perpetua certainly could have been in some way familiar with *Paed.*, whether in partial or whole form, through oral transmission or in a circulated text, particularly if she had also encountered Clement's *Exh. Bapt.* I contend that *Paed.* appears to have a strong role in her narrative and assists in the interpretation of the problematic passage concerning the cheese and its connection to imminent suffering. The images from *Paed.*, from which Perpetua conceivably draws allusive meaning for her own text, are as follows:

We are enjoined to cast off our old and carnal corruption, as also the old nutriment, receiving in exchange another food, that of Christ.... Paul, using appropriate figurative language, and calling Him milk, adds, 'I have given you to drink,' for we drink in the Word, the nutriment of the truth. In truth, also, liquid food is called drink; and the same thing may somehow be both meat and drink, according to the different aspects in which it is considered, *just as cheese is the solidification of milk* or milk that has been solidified. I am not concerned here to make a nice selection of an expression, only to say that *one substance supplies both substances of food...Here you see an additional kind of food which, like milk, figuratively represents the will of God.* Besides, also, *the completion of His own passion* He called catachrestically "a cup", when He alone had to drink and drain it. Thus to Christ *the fulfilling of His Father's will was food* (1.6.45.2-1.6.46.1)

Milk is mixed with *sweet* wine, and the mixture is beneficial, as when *suffering is mixed in the cup on the way to immortality.* For *the milk is curdled by the wine* and separated, and whatever adulteration is in it is drained off. *In the same way, the spiritual communion of faith with suffering draws off as waste the desires of the flesh and commits one to eternity* (1.6.51.1-1.6.51.3)

...You may learn, if you will, the crowning wisdom of the all-holy Shepherd and Instructor, of the omnipotent and paternal Word, when *He figuratively represents Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep.* And He is the Instructor of the children...*Feed us, the children, as sheep...feed us on Thy holy mountain the Church, which towers aloft,*

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. Buell, *Making*, 108; Marrou, *Le Paedagogue*, fn. 1.7; Ferguson, *Clement*, xii-xvi; most estimate a date of 196 CE.

above the clouds, and touches heaven. “And I will be”, He says, “their Shepherd, and will be near them” (1.9.78.4-1.9.79.1).⁴⁵⁶

In *Paed.*, both the milking and the cheese are types of spiritual nourishment, somewhat similar to the Pauline metaphor of milk and solid food, but the latter is more specifically associated with *curdling*, “the communion of faith with suffering”. Just as *Paed.* speaks of sweet curdled milk as “suffering mixed in the cup”, Perpetua joins her hands like a cup to receive the cheese from the Shepherd, who both feeds her and calls her child, in a place “which towers aloft”. She understands that she will suffer and will “be committed to eternity”, no longer concerned with the present world.

While tentative hypotheses could inundate these pages to the point of distraction as to exactly how Perpetua had access to these texts, what might be less of an enigma is Perpetua’s use of Clementine works. His writings are directed towards an elite audience with advanced secular education (i.e., references to Greek philosophy and epic abound, and *Paed.* 2.40.1-2.44.5 contains a delightful vignette of advice for proper behavior at dinner-parties).⁴⁵⁷ While Marrou once opined that this work addresses recently baptized initiates,⁴⁵⁸ recent studies suggest that *Paed.* should be interpreted not as a treatise delivered to the recently initiated alone; rather, it may be an extended reflection upon the Christian initiatory process aimed at an audience of *literati* that possessed the ability to engage in such caliber of content, regardless of actual baptismal status.⁴⁵⁹ Lastly, Clement’s instruction is continually portrayed as being of value for both men and women, since there is “one church, one morality, one conscience, one common life” for the two sexes to participate in equally through

⁴⁵⁶ For the Greek text, see H. Marrou and M. Harl, ed., *Clément d’Alexandre, Le Pédagogue*, 3 vols. *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: les Éditions du Cerf, 1960). Translations here are from the *ANF*; italics are my own.

⁴⁵⁷ For further, see Buell, *Making*, 65, 92-94, 107-109.

⁴⁵⁸ Marrou, *Le Pédagogue*, fn.1.7.

⁴⁵⁹ Buell, *Making*, 108, further notes, “This context for interpretation better fits the understanding of Christian ‘study circles’ in late-second-century Alexandria and does not require retrofitting an institutional connection”.

education.⁴⁶⁰ *Paed.* was intended, in other words, for those of exactly Perpetua's ilk. That she could have drawn upon her knowledge of it for her own narrative is certainly arguable; Clement's connection of cheese and suffering seems to me to be an extremely viable option for interpreting Perpetua's own similar construction.

If viewed in light of these passages, Perpetua's first vision narrative and her interpretation of it are consistent with her authorial tendencies and abilities. Both the victory over the dragon and the cheese offered by the shepherd seem to be prominent allusive images gesturing to the very answer she had petitioned to gain knowledge of at the outset of the vision. She depicts herself as not only a benefactress for others in her fulfillment of the brother's request but also as a martyr-to-be who experiences divine confirmation of impending suffering. Parallels between Perpetua's work and the *Mart. Poly.* narrative also prove to be revealing. Polycarp experiences a portentous flaming-pillow vision prior to his sentencing, and he laconically interprets his vision as indicating his upcoming trial verdict and impending suffering by fire.⁴⁶¹ Like Polycarp, Perpetua displays visionary *potentia* as a divine favor. For both martyrs, a vision consisting of symbolic imagery occurs prior to their legal trials, and the visions are promptly, soberly, and explicitly interpreted to a companion as indicative of imminent martyrdom. The narrative content of Perpetua's account and that of the *Mart. Poly.* differ from each other in many ways, and it seems wise to remain hesitant in positing a directly mimetic connection between them. Perpetua may be drawing upon its general trajectory as a way of aligning her work with another account memorialized by her Christian community. I primarily emphasize the ways that the author of *Mart. Poly.* draws upon other texts ensconced in Christian social memory to enhance its content, to cultivate implications, and to further its own commemorative

⁴⁶⁰ *Paed* 1.4. Chadwick's nickname for Clement, the "liberal puritan", seems apt here (*Early Christian*, 31).

⁴⁶¹ *Mart. Poly.* 5.2.

aims.⁴⁶² I suggest that something precisely comparable to this is occurring in Perpetua's account. Perpetua's first vision and its interpretation arguably serve as a dramatic apogee for her act of self-inscription, and the sections surrounding this vision both confirm and create identity for Perpetua and her task.

4.5 "As God Wills": Sections 5.1-6.8

Sections 5-6 continue the events of Perpetua's account as they unfold in a series of vivid scenes in two related pericopes. As with other sections, both pericopes commence with Perpetua's chronologically themed yet imprecise anaphora, "after a few days" and "on another day" (*post paucos dies*, 5.1; *alio die*, 6.1). They conclude with a nearly identical antistrophe confirming the ongoing completion of the will of God (*quod Deus voluerit*, 5.6; *quomodo Deus voluit*, 6.8), which explicitly embroiders a relationship between the two scenes and partially fulfills the foreshadowed suspense fostered by the prior vision. Their content revolves around Perpetua's trial, and, like the initial section of her account, dramatic appearances by her father serve to demonstrate her own resolve and to set the stage for her public confession. Presenting an emotional panorama of performances, the descriptive embellishment in these sections furthers the narrative largely through a dexterous use of rhetorical tropes.

Section 5 begins with a sonorous narrative technique that creates tones of suspense: "Rumor rushed that we would be tried", piquing the ears of an audience that has just heard the somber note of the culmination of the preceding scene. The father then dramatically reappears and makes a rhythmical appeal to Perpetua followed by a layered castigation. His first petition relates to his authority as *pater potestas* and

⁴⁶² A task made explicit in *Mart. Poly.* 1.1-2.

reminds her that her status is due to his favor.⁴⁶³ The rhythmic commands directed to Perpetua (“Have pity”, *miserere*, “consider”, *aspice*, “abandon”, *depone*) appeal to their relationship, to social shame, and to personal guilt with regard to the impact of her decision on her family.

Although the father’s appearance and tearful pleas seem unexpected in a modern reading of the account, such dramatic scenes may not have been unusual to Perpetua’s audience and, in fact, serve further rhetorical purposes. Socrates famously warned his students that “tearful speeches” were an oratorical tool to “arouse pity for old age”,⁴⁶⁴ and, indeed, it was Socrates who was portrayed as heroically denying an impassioned invective to remember his own family, respect his old age, and abandon his stance. This plea is commonly seen in narratives prior and subsequent, secular and Christian.⁴⁶⁵ Perpetua’s reply, which expresses her pity for her father, highlights her noble sorrow (*ego dolebam, dolui*, 5.6, 6.5). In both pericopes the foil of her father’s response creates an ignoble contrast, as his anguish is unleashed as something wild, frenzied, out of control, and (in the eyes of antiquity) distinctly effeminate. As in her first section, Perpetua remains in control, never frenzied, in her identity as *Christiana*. Unlike her initial scene, Perpetua does not engage in argument here. Her identity has already been established. She casts aside his plea as irrelevant and, with victorious irony, evokes a higher *potestas*: “I know that we are not left to our own power but to that of God” (5.6). At this, the humiliated and defeated father withdraws, having regressed from *pater* to rejected suppliant. With this poignant reversal, the narrative transitions into the ensuing trial.

⁴⁶³ The father’s indication of his adoration for his daughter is normative in this culture. See, e.g., Cicero’s oft stated affection for Tullia (she is “my face and speech and mind”, *Epist. ad Quint.* 3.1.3). For more on the topic, see Cohick, *Women*, 33-64.

⁴⁶⁴ Plato, *Phaed.* 267c.

⁴⁶⁵ E.g., Hector is chastened to have pity on his aged father, *Iliad* 22.1; Clement of Alexandria *Exh. Bapt.* 6.

While the next section is allied to the prior action and continues the dramatic narrative (“we were suddenly seized for our trial”), a seemingly strange aposiopesis is featured in the midst of the action. The confessor company is briefly portrayed as eating a midday meal (the *prandium*: “we were lunching”, *pranderemus*, 6.1) when this abrupt snatching takes place. This detail is viewed by many scholars as an interpretive conundrum. Before the group undergoes something as significant as their public confession and condemnation, why would Perpetua mention “such a banal domestic detail”?⁴⁶⁶ If Perpetua’s entire account presents a mediated narrative intended for ecclesiastical engagement, this element initially seems unnecessary. A contextual detail emphasized earlier in this chapter, may provide some assistance. I suspect that Perpetua is here demonstrating an awareness of her audience and of contemporary social mores. Her vocabulary does not imply basic prison rations, if any were given: meals such as this would have occurred in prison only if brought by others.⁴⁶⁷ Notably, it is the deacons, not her father, who provides for the imprisoned confessors (3.7). The meal (6.1) is provided by the Christian community, individually or collectively. Like monuments and inscriptions memorializing benefactors, public demonstrations of appreciation were the norm in Roman society, touching every economic stratum.⁴⁶⁸ The meal need not be seen as a moment of pensive reflection nor as a domestic absurdity. Rather, it may be read as a subtle demonstration of commendation and as evidence of Perpetua’s acute awareness of not merely the mores of reciprocity but also of the audience whose corporate memory she seeks. Her

⁴⁶⁶ Heffernan, *Passion*, 193; he proposes that Perpetua is providing a “stark relief [of] the absurd dissonances of their situation...the juxtaposition of the banal, the everyday need for food to maintain life, placed alongside the imminent sentence for death highlights the fragility, the absurdity of the human condition...the surreal quality of their imprisonment”. His analysis here causes me to wonder if his Perpetua has morphed into an Albert Camus, as she comments on the “absurdity” of existence and enjoys a pensive draw from her cigarette.

⁴⁶⁷ Prisons rarely provided a ration for prisoners; if sustenance was provided, it was almost always from friends or family. See, e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 18.204 and *Acta Pauli* 18. On prison conditions in antiquity in general, see Bertrand-Dagenbach, *Carcer*; McGowan, “Discipline”, 455-476.

⁴⁶⁸ See discussion in Chapter 3 (section 3.2, p. 70-76) of this study.

account, which commemorates their benefaction, also aims to receive their approval of legacy.

The narrative trajectory continues with the dramatic flair of a novella as the catechumens are immediately ushered to a crowded hearing on the city's forum platform. Perpetua depicts only her own interrogation, and, like the preceding sections, this scene unfolds with notable rhetorical maneuvering. Just as her examination begins, her father appears and drags her from the steps. He persists in the demand that she have pity on her infant, and the governor presiding over the trial repeats the invective only once, adding that she must have pity on her father's old age as well as on her infant. Perpetua refuses succinctly ("I will not", *non facio*) and repeats her own significant phrase, "I am a Christian" (*Christiana sum*, 6.4).

The brief trial scene is unusual in that, *in medias res*, the father again makes an appeal to Perpetua based on familial ties, and Perpetua again refuses. The repetition certainly confirms her identity, but, considering the interruption that his presence makes in the proceedings, perhaps something more lies behind the passage. Interestingly, a discourse by Clement of Alexandria depicts a strikingly similar scene. This work, known by the title *Quis Dives Salvetur* or *Who is the Rich Man That Might Be Saved* (hereafter, *Quis*), was written in the mid-190s and practically reinterprets the difficult invectives of Mark 10.17-31 for a wealthy Christian audience. It is the passions and human relationships, not wealth, that are impediments to faithfulness. Within this sermon text, a hypothetical trial scene unfolds (22-23). A "godless" father invokes his paternity and attempts to sway a Christian from his or her identity:

...If *one's father*, or son, or brother, *is godless* and becomes a hindrance to faith and an impediment to a higher life, may he not be friends with *nor agree with him*, but *may he end the fleshly relationship on account of the spiritual enmity*. Think of this matter as a legal scene. Imagine that your father presented himself to you and said, "I begot and raised you. Follow me, join with me in wickedness, and do not obey the law of Christ", and whatever else a

blasphemer, dead by nature, would say. But on the other side hear the Savior: “I regenerated you born to death in the world. I freed you, healed you, redeemed you. I will show you the face of the good Father, God. Call no man your father on earth. Let the dead bury the dead; you follow Me....Having heard these considerations on both sides, decide for yourself and choose your salvation. Should a brother say something similar, should an offspring, should a wife, should anyone at all, in preference to all let Christ in you be conqueror. For He contends on your behalf.”⁴⁶⁹

Like this portion of *Quis*, Perpetua’s narrative again highlights her rejection of the arguments and paternal claims of her father. There is a similar presentation of the rhetoric of Christian identity, particularly involving familial relationships that must be severed, visualization of a trial scene, a father’s impassioned protest as he is “replaced”, and usage of the language of celestial contest. If an allusive gesture occurs, it serves to further Perpetua’s self-commemoration. Her story is worthy of memory, for she “in preference to all” steadfastly maintains a Christian identity.

As Perpetua’s trial narrative progresses, additional rhetorical tools and narrative styling further confirm her work as an intentionally stylized account.⁴⁷⁰ Since the father will not cease his pleas in the midst of the trial proceedings, he is hurled from the public platform and beaten. In this *double entendre*, he is not merely cast down physically, for the public beating of a man of his dignified social position would have other personal ramifications. As with the initial scene of 3.6, Perpetua portrays herself as momentarily suffering as a result of punishment – here, the feeling she herself had been struck during her father’s public beating (6.5). This travail is fleeting, however, because the identity *Christiana sum* has become more powerful than all other relationships. The governor’s interrogation and her succinct reply had

⁴⁶⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Quis* 22-23. For the Greek text, see Loeb edition, ed. Butterworth (William Heinemann, 1919), 316-318; translation here from *ANF*, 597-598.

⁴⁷⁰ Heffernan, *Passion*, 197-207, provides an excellent commentary on this section. He comments on the literary styling that is replete throughout this section, nonetheless maintaining his view that this is a Montanist prophetess’ “prison diary”. He also provides useful contextual commentary on the details of 6.4-6.6, such as the possible legal explanation for the beating of the father with rods, information about the platform described by Perpetua, and the length of time the martyrs must wait for their execution.

been a formulaic ritual for well over half a century and it guides her audience to associate her with those who already occupied corporate memory.⁴⁷¹

Once the governor Hilarianus condemns the group to death by beasts in the amphitheatre, they return *hilaes* to prison to await execution. This paronomasia, or wordplay made from similar sounds, would not have been lost on her audience. While hyperbole and irony also dominate this conclusion, of additional significance is Perpetua's continued penchant for allusion, here rhetorically functioning as a confirmation of the group's identity within her memory-making task. The scene mimics Acts 5.41: "They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to be dishonored for the name [of Christ]". In doing so, it associates the martyr company with Peter and a group of apostles. Here the account seems to deviate into a personal aside. Perpetua sends the deacon as her courier to obtain the infant from her father.⁴⁷² The father refuses, but Perpetua and the child no longer physically suffer as a result of their separation. Another paronomasia and an antistrophe - the repetition of the same words at the end of successive clauses - embellish meaning and expression and reveal that this detail is, in fact, not a narrative deviation. "As God willed" (*quomodo Deus voluit*), the child no longer needs her. This resonant symmetrical wordplay of the immediately preceding "the father refused to give" (*pater dare noluit*) also presents a now fulfilled repetition which gestures back to the closing statement of the prior section: "all will occur at the forum platform as God wills" (*quod Deus voluerit*, 5.6). As the trial concludes, and the martyrs return to prison, Perpetua depicts God's will as *already* occurring. This implied divine involvement grants authority to the account and endeavors to ensure that the story will be recounted in the future as a memorial to God's work.

⁴⁷¹ E.g., Polycarp, the Scillitan martyrs, the martyrs of Lyons, the martyrs interrogated by Pliny, and so forth; see further Heffernan, *Passion*, 202.

⁴⁷² Her command to Pomponius may confirm her status as benefactress within the community.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have suggested that sections 3-6 of the *Passio* present a unified narrative. Both style and content indicate that this work was authored by a savant whose Christian and secular social conditioning and commemorative intentions can be seen as informing each scene. The literary conventions consistently intimate prior models, particularly novelistic literature. Various rhetorical devices serve to enhance the narrative and also confirm Perpetua's educated status. The novelistic Latin style throughout is replete with ellipsis (the omission of grammatically necessary but contextually unnecessary words), polysyndeton (the inclusion of unnecessary conjunctions), and alliteration. The imagery in the narrative remains predominantly allusive to Christian texts and dually serves to enhance the account and to align it with those works. Ultimately, my approach views Perpetua as employing devices with an ultimate aim for commemoration. Rife with rhetorical embellishment, literary qualities, subtle intimation, and allusive gesture, these sections of Perpetua's narrative operate as an integrated act of narrative traditioning.

Viewed in this light, the prison experiences of sections 3 and 6, the interactions with her father in sections 3, 5, and 6, the conversations with a fellow prisoner in section 4, and the trial depicted in section 6 may be seen as a narrative carefully maneuvered along a specific path of thematic developments. Perpetua's first vision stands in greatest need of re-evaluation. This vision fails to present oneiric imagination, ecstatic prophetic utterances, or a convoluted mirror of actions partaken in reality, although these are variously proposed in other *Passio* studies. Rather, the visionary account, like its surrounding pericopes, offers intertextual engagement *with* and a creative manipulation *of* images drawn from other Christian works. My interpretive lens is not

limited to sections 3-6; this study now turns to the continued demonstration of these narrative techniques in the second half of Perpetua's narrative.

CHAPTER 5
“I KNEW THAT VICTORY WOULD BE MINE”:
AN ANALYSIS OF SECTIONS 7-10

A rapidly moving storyline accompanied by three visionary accounts comprises sections 7-10 of the *Passio*. This latter half of Perpetua’s narrative leads up to the day prior to her martyrdom:

- 7.1-2: In the midst of prayer, Perpetua utters the name of Dinocrates, her brother, whose cancer caused an early death; she realizes that she ought to pray for him.
- 7.3-8: A vision is shown to Perpetua that night. It depicts a troubling image of Dinocrates suffering and thirsty in a dark underworld.
- 7.9-10: Perpetua relays that she is faithful to pray daily and fervently for Dinocrates. Meanwhile, the confessor company is transferred to a military prison prior to the games.
- 8.1-4: Perpetua narrates her third vision: a happy Dinocrates drinks from a basin filled unceasingly with water. Perpetua understands the vision to say that he has been freed from punishment.
- 9.1-3: The soldier in charge of the prison recognizes the virtue of the prisoners and permits them to have more freedoms, including visitors; in contrast, Perpetua’s father visits and displays a dramatic frenzy of sorrow, causing her to grieve.
- 10.1-13: The day before the games, a fourth vision appears to Perpetua. She is ushered by Pomponius to an arena, where she is prepared to fight a rancorous Egyptian. A towering *lanista* announces the rules of the fight, which Perpetua wins by striking the Egyptian with her feet then stepping on his head. The *lanista* grants her a prize and a kiss with words of blessing as the vision closes with her triumphal walk towards the Gate of Life.
- 10.14-15: Perpetua acknowledges that, the following day, she will be fighting against “the diabolical one”, and victory would be hers. A brief line ends her narrative: she concludes, “this [is all]”, and insinuates that another will write about the martyrdom event.

The fascinating storyline of sections 7-10 has elicited many interpretations over the centuries. Like the first half of Perpetua’s narrative, its content is commonly read as a

peculiar compendium of disconnected pericopes. As a result, these portions of the *Passio* are typically analysed through various psychoanalytical methodologies, largely constructed on the assumption that Perpetua's account takes the form of a diary. Widely various interpretations of the text have resulted from this assumption, but, as shall be seen, none is without exegetical difficulties.

I propose that an interpretive approach to sections 7-10 must attend to the unifying literary factors within Perpetua's account in light of her contextual dynamics. This chapter views these portions of the *Passio* as maintaining stylistic, thematic, and methodological consistencies with the whole of Perpetua's account. They evince characteristics of the social identity of an elite benefactress, of an extensive classical education, and of an awareness of Christian texts and teachings, each of which presented models that seem to have oriented and informed Perpetua's authorial task. As proposed in Chapter 4 of this study, I will advocate a reading of the account that views other texts as interpretive keys to the otherwise bizarre content of sections 7-10. Significant themes and techniques established in the first half of the narrative continue and indeed conclude her account. As such, they are acutely teleological in employing various techniques to portray a trajectory of events that lead up to the day prior to the ludic event. These models serve as interpretive guides for the action and visions in Perpetua's account. They assist their author in cultivating insinuations which, together with their implications, are to be grasped by her audience. They also serve to legitimize the story by means of association. Ultimately, Perpetua's authorial act is viewed as the creation of a rhetorically complex narrative⁴⁷³ meant to commemorate her as a victorious martyr, an *exemplum*, within the memory of her Christian community.

⁴⁷³ Again, to what extent Perpetua may depict "historical events" and to what extent these "events" are embellished are questions I do not address here. This chapter continues the previous chapter's task of exploring what I suspect is a highly skilled and deliberate narrative discourse.

5.1 *The Prayers of a Confessor: Sections 7.1-8.4*

A transitional temporal phrase, “after a few days” (*post die paucos*), maintains the chronologically themed anaphora that serve as frames within Perpetua’s narrative; it alerts the audience to another transition in the narrative. The now condemned group is depicted as praying in prison, when Perpetua cultivates expectancy with an urgent and startling term, “quite unexpectedly” (*subito*, also at 3.9, 4.10, and 6.1), as the name Dinocrates spontaneously leaps from her mouth. Her initial surprise is followed by the realization that she is considered to be honored or worthy (*dignam*) and ought to petition for him; this supplicatory task is consequently undertaken. With “that very night” emphasizing an unbroken temporal succession of events, the phrase “This was shown to me: I see” (*ostensum est mihi hoc: video*) initiates another vision pericope. The phrase is not unfamiliar to her audience: it is an anaphora, an exact reiteration of the phrase used to introduce the first vision (4.2). It will be used to present the third vision as well. The expression, then, not only alerts the audience to another vision and consequential interpretation, but it also now rhetorically cultivates expectation.

As the vision begins, a young Dinocrates appears, coming forth from a dark place where he resides with others. Though a large abyss is depicted that keeps Perpetua at a distance from the scene, she sees that Dinocrates is dirty, hot, and suffering. As she narrates that his face displays the cancerous wound that was his demise at the age of seven, she uses a brief *in medias res* to supply an explanation that Dinocrates was her *frater carnalis*, her biological (as distinguished from spiritual) sibling.⁴⁷⁴ Next to him, the rim of a basin (*piscina*) of water remains tantalizingly above his reach and denies relief to his thirst. Indicating that she mourned at the tragic

⁴⁷⁴ Heffernan, *Passion*, 219-220, provides an intricate and nuanced discussion as to what Perpetua may have meant by “cancer”.

sight, Perpetua “comes to” and immediately indicates a recognition that Dinocrates is suffering. Here another rhetorical device confirms and serves as an entry for her explanation: her phrase “I came to, and I understood” (*experrecta sum et cognoui*, 7.9) ending this vision displays Perpetua’s penchant for antistrophe, here to the “I came to, and we understood” (*experrecta sum et intelleximus*, 4.10) of the first vision. A brief course of action follows the interpretation: Perpetua indicates that she prays with tears and groans for Dinocrates both day and night, “faithful that I could assist him”, until the group of prisoners are moved to the military prison. It is in this new setting that resolution occurs by means of the consequent vision.

The imagery of the third vision account proves no less fascinating than the first two. Perpetua emphasizes a continuation of her prayers for Dinocrates, even while the martyr company is kept in chains in the military prison. The narrative maintains the rhetorical anaphora by repeating the phrase that commenced the previous two visions, *ostensum est mihi hoc: video*. The setting is identical, but it is contrasted with a new situation. A clean, well-clothed, and refreshed Dinocrates displays merely a scar. The *piscina* has been lowered to the height of his waist. He drinks from this and then from another source of water just above its rim, a golden goblet (*fiāla aurea*) that is continuously filled even as he drinks. Satisfied, he engages in child-like play. With the anaphora “I came to”, the brief vision comes to a close. As with the previous visions, the text maintains the literary pattern and indicates a consequent interpretation: Dinocrates has been released from his torment and “penalty” (*experrecta sum tunc intellexi translātum eum esse poena*, 8.4).

Significant interpretive variety exists with regard to the two Dinocrates visions and surrounding narrative. Psychoanalytical approaches tend to dominate this landscape. Salisbury, for example, reads the vision sequence as Perpetua’s unconscious preservation of “her role as mother”, since it is “maternal power” that

secures his release from suffering, a reprieve to which Perpetua responds with “the motherly recognition of a happy child”.⁴⁷⁵ Such interpretations display the modern tendency to assess either the extent to which Perpetua emotionally loved her family or the processes by which she emotionally detached from it, simply as a corollary to her female identity.⁴⁷⁶ Such investigation is beyond the bounds of the text and is yet another instance of the domestication of Perpetua, as such assessments are not made for the martyrdom accounts of males. Furthermore, strong arguments can be made that there is no familial reconfiguring exhibited in these visionary accounts. There are no replacement sons to maintain maternity in a dreamy realm created by pop-Freudian psychological lenses. It ought instead to be considered whether a more consciously calculated narration is unfolding, using the visions as a vehicle for a larger thematic development.

If this is the case, critique is in order for another common approach to this vision sequence, one which views it merely as a nearly unconscious demonstration of engrained Greco-Roman motifs. Bremmer postulates that the caliginous setting within the visions seem to resemble the underworld of Virgil so strongly that, “Apparently, we have here the case of a newly converted Christian trying to connect her faith with received pagan eschatological notions”.⁴⁷⁷ Adding a nod to what he perceives as Perpetua’s Montanist identity, Heffernan similarly views the Dinocrates visions: “She dreams as a Christian prophetess remembering her life as a pagan maiden”.⁴⁷⁸ While the emphasis on cultural context ought not be dismissed, a metacritical question of this interpretation must nonetheless be posed: do these visions truly present an unconscious *attempt to resolve* apparent tensions of divergent

⁴⁷⁵ Salisbury, *Perpetua’s*, 105-106.

⁴⁷⁶ As critiqued also by Moss, “Blood Ties”, 189-208.

⁴⁷⁷ Bremmer, “Perpetua”, 109.

⁴⁷⁸ Heffernan, *Passion*, 214, 238-239.

eschatologies and thus confirm Perpetua's novice exposure to contemporary Christian teaching? Are they additional evidence - as Heffernan, Klawiter, and Butler suggest⁴⁷⁹ - of special Montanist convictions and abilities? Such proposals do not seem sustainable in light of Perpetua's entire narrative.

I present instead a reading of the two visions that focuses upon what has remained unaddressed, namely the influence of a contemporary secular education and, even more so, a possibly advanced exposure to Christian text and teachings. Rhetorical tropes, particularly the allusive gestures that may have resulted from Perpetua's multifaceted intellectual training, deserve particular attention. In fact, I contend that they can lend significant interpretive assistance in this endeavour. In this visionary duo and the surrounding account, Perpetua's prior and consequent interpretations – that she ought to pray for Dinocrates, that he was suffering, and that his suffering had been alleviated after her continual prayers – are illogical. Heffernan similarly acknowledges this problem: Perpetua concludes far more than the visions actually depict.⁴⁸⁰ While he attributes this to “special intuition that comes from God” and to Perpetua's “trust... that this same God has endowed her with special [prophetic] powers”,⁴⁸¹ I counter that Perpetua asserts such assumptions for her audience because she draws from and alludes to a common tradition of texts and teachings. In other words, Perpetua's visions and conclusions are nonsensical unless prior models, both secular and Christian, had previously demonstrated these conclusions.

The abysmal setting of the Dinocrates visions prompt scholars to consider and identify the influence of other texts on those visions. Commonly remarked upon are an apparent array of secular literary images, particularly Virgil's *Aeneid* underworld,

⁴⁷⁹ Heffernan, *Passion*, 238; Klawiter, “The Role”, 251-261; Butler, *New Prophecy*, 73.

⁴⁸⁰ Heffernan, *Passion*, 222.

⁴⁸¹ Heffernan, *Passion*, 222, 229.

which itself echoes the *nekuia* of Odysseus and is recalled in Apuleius. In each, the dead still display the wounds with which they died, and prematurely dead children suffer as they did on earth (e.g., *Aen.* 6.427-477). Such commentary is so common that it has become general practice to fail to acknowledge the education that would have likely given Perpetua such a detailed literary memory. Musurillo has proposed an additional possible literary influence for the scenery and unfolding events.⁴⁸² It would seem that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16.22-24) depicts a similar Hades of shadowy depths, holding thirsty, hot, and suffering inhabitants. Like the parable's main character, Perpetua understands that the chasm between herself and her brother cannot be crossed (7.6). However, significant divergences also exist, rendering comparison somewhat problematic. Dinocrates had not behaved abusively towards the poor, for example, and the Lukan parable emphasizes that the suffering of the rich man will not be alleviated.⁴⁸³ Alternatively, an array of descriptions from Tertullian's literary corpus might provide a comparison that possibly indicates common local Christian traditions and understandings. In Tertullian's works, all non-martyred dead wait in a temporary place until a final judgment. This location seems to be a "two-tiered Hades", with a place for both the non-righteous and the righteous, who respectively suffer and do not suffer, and who retain their age and form at time of death.⁴⁸⁴ In his *De Mon.* 10.5, a vignette on a widow's devotion to her dead husband contains an interesting parallel to the assumption in Perpetua's text: "She prays for his soul and requests refreshment (*refrigerium*) for him meanwhile". Because of his sister's prayers, Dinocrates is "refreshed" and freed of his suffering. This close

⁴⁸² Musurillo, *Acts*, 115.

⁴⁸³ Bremmer, "Perpetua", 107; Amat, *Passion*, 129; and Trumbower, "Apocalypse", 307, postulate instead that Dinocrates had not been baptized.

⁴⁸⁴ Tertullian, *De An.* 55-58 (56 features the retaining of age/form); *Adv. Marc.* 4.34; *De Cor.* 3.2-3; and *De Mon.* 10.5. "Two-tiered Hades" is Trumbower's phrase (*Rescue*, 82).

resemblance to Tertullian's assumption may reflect a wider tradition in Carthage to which Perpetua had been exposed.⁴⁸⁵

Other significant texts circulating in Christian circles during the second century receive little, if any, attention in *Passio* studies, but their possible influence on Perpetua's account should be considered. The *Acts of Paul* (*AP*) was famously mentioned by Tertullian's pugilistic pen as familiar to at least some within the Christian community of Carthage at the turn of the third century.⁴⁸⁶ The Thecla narrative within the *AP* seems to have been the most popular portion within the now fragmentary text, and a confessor's prayer scene within this work can provide a noteworthy background for Perpetua's own visionary sequence and corresponding action. As the novella-like *AP* narrative unfolds, Thecla has been condemned to death by the governor of Antioch and is staying in the interim with the wealthy woman Tryphaena:

...And after the exhibition [of the beasts intended for Thecla's martyrdom], Tryphaena received her again. For her dead daughter Falconilla had said to her in a dream, "Mother, receive this stranger, the forsaken Thecla, in my place, for she may pray for me and I may come to the place of the just". And when, after the exhibition, Tryphaena received her, she was grieved because Thecla had to fight on the following day with the wild beasts, but she also loved her dearly like her daughter Falconilla. She said, "Thecla, my second child, come pray for my child that she may live in eternity, for this I saw in my dream". And without hesitation she [Thecla] lifted up her voice and said, "My God, Son of the Most High, who are in heaven, grant her wish that her daughter Falconilla may live in eternity" (2.28-29).⁴⁸⁷

It is worth pausing to compare Thecla's experience at this point in the text with Perpetua's. Both elite young women have renounced an invested parent as part of

⁴⁸⁵ While there is *refreshment*, it is unknown to what extent "salvation" plays a role. On the subject of the healing of wounds and the resurrection in early Christian thought, see Moss, "Heavenly Healing", 1-27.

⁴⁸⁶ Tertullian, *De Bapt.* 17.5 refers to the Thecla portion of *AP*, with the assumption that his audience is aware of the text's content.

⁴⁸⁷ Transl. from Elliott, *The Apocryphal*, 369-370.

their association with Christianity, and both parents have been dramatic and vocal in their attempts to dissuade them. Both women have recently received a governor's condemnation at trial to death by beasts, and since both are awaiting martyrdom, they pray in their capacity as confessors. The name Falconilla is spoken to Thecla, and the voiced name "springs out" of Perpetua's mouth, spoken to her more than actually by her. Just as Thecla unhesitatingly prays for Falconilla, Perpetua understands that she has a "dignified status" and must petition on behalf of Dinocrates (*cognoui me statim dignam esse et pro eo debere petere*, 7.2). Visions of and prayer for a specific deceased family member thus feature as dual means for divine intervention.

It remains a conjecture as to whether Perpetua portrays and interprets the Dinocrates visions in a way that reveals mimesis of the *AP* 2.28-29. There are distinct differences between the scenes, as well; for example, Dinocrates himself does not instruct Perpetua to pray on his behalf. Yet the Thecla narrative likely would have been accessible to Perpetua, and her education modeled allusion as both a mark of achievement and as a way to direct the expectations of the audience. The *AP*, then, could be viewed as an evocative literary tool in Perpetua's own narrative. The similarities in the texts have been suggested to demonstrate a relationship not between Perpetua's account and the *AP* but rather the reliance of both independently on another work.⁴⁸⁸ Both texts, Trumbower suggests, reflect direct influence from the *Apocalypse of Peter* (*ApPt*), in that each demonstrate prayer for and rescue of dead non-Christian individuals in torment. In his establishment of ties between the *Passio*'s Dinocrates visions and *ApPt*, Trumbower focuses on a fragment of *ApPt* 14.1-4: "I shall give unto my called and chosen whomever they shall ask me, for out of torment

⁴⁸⁸ Trumbower, "Apocalypse", 307-312; cf. his later *Rescue*, 76-90, which develops and amends this position.

and will give them a fair baptism unto salvation from the Acherusian Lake”.⁴⁸⁹ Here, it seems, dead individuals in a place of anguish will receive reprieve – a reprieve associated with or consequential to baptismal imagery or action – when a righteous person intercedes with prayer on their behalf.⁴⁹⁰ Reflections of *ApPt* 14.1-4 may be present. It is entirely feasible that this text was known and used among Christians in Carthage at the time.⁴⁹¹ Indeed, once Perpetua prayerfully petitions on Dinocrates’ behalf, her following vision fulfills her request and contains a cessation of Acherusian-like torment through specifically baptismal imagery. Yet, as seen above, the *ApPt* is not the only text that features one location for all non-martyred dead, unquenched thirst for the non-Christian in this place, and prayer for and subsequent refreshment of these individuals. A direct relationship between Perpetua’s narrative and the *ApPt* thus remains quite tentative, as both texts could be reflecting common concepts. While a case for the relationship of the Dinocrates visions and the *AP* is slightly stronger, all that can be concluded is that Perpetua’s Dinocrates sequence reflects a common pool of Christian traditions in regards to prayer and refreshment for the non-martyred dead.

While many studies see the Dinocrates visions as evidence that Perpetua had “cobbled together bits and pieces” from discordant traditions,⁴⁹² Trumbower

⁴⁸⁹ Transl. James, “The Rainer Fragment”, 270-279. It should be noted that the portion referred to here is specifically located in a Greek remnant, the Rainer Fragment, and not the later Ethiopic version of *AP*. Nonetheless, James, along with Trumbower (“*Apocalypse*”, 307-312), holds this fragment to be authentically part of *AP* as 14.1-5a and purposefully edited so as to change its implications in the (now more fully extant) Ethiopic version. Not all scholars agree that the Rainer Fragment is part of *AP*: see Adamik, “The Description”, 78-89.

⁴⁹⁰ Both Copeland, “Sinners”, 91-107, and Trumbower, *Rescue*, 49-55, expound upon this and also compare this to *Sibylline Oracles* 2.194-338 (widely estimated to be a paraphrase of *AP*, i.e., “And to them, the Almighty, eternal God will grant yet more./ To the pious, when they ask the eternal God/ He will give them to save men out of the devouring fire/ And from everlasting torments...”) and contrasts it to 4 *Ezra* 7 and Plato *Phaedo* 111e-114c.

⁴⁹¹ Clement of Alexandria’s *Ec. Prop.* 41.48-49 attests to the use of *AP* as a theological authority in his own circles as well. The Muratorian Canon attests to the early use of *ApPt* in the West (assuming the list’s early provenance, a debate I do not wish to engage here); for other witnesses, see Jakab, “The Reception”, 174-186. See also Buchholz, *Your Eyes*, 20-81, Trumbower, “Apocalypse”, 308.

⁴⁹² Quotation from Heffernan, *Passion*, 214.

concludes his study of the intercession for the dead in the *Passio* with a singular sentiment: “Thus, her prayer for Dinocrates may show that, far from being unschooled, she had absorbed a great deal of Christian teaching about intercession and rescue for the dead”.⁴⁹³ While he demurs from elaborating on this observation, I contend that it ought to be carried further. Perpetua’s second and third vision accounts and her response to those visions seem to evince a nuanced awareness of Christian texts and teachings. Such a cognizance, often allusively expressed for the reader, would have plausibly stemmed from education and temporal length of exposure. My interpretive approach here harmonizes the visions and interpretations of sections 7-8 with the larger work attributed to Perpetua. To explore her unfolding narrative in these sections, there is no need to resort to an anachronistic Montanist classification, nor to an appropriation of the modern notion of a “diary”, nor to a psychoanalytical eisegetical construal based upon an assumption of naïveté in Christian text and teaching.

Indeed, an assessment of Perpetua’s immediate understanding that she is “dignified in status” and that she ought to pray for Dinocrates also ought to attend to contemporary Christian perceptions concerning the prayers of confessors in particular. Common traditions in Christian circles at the time gave confessors a special status, particularly concerning their prayers.⁴⁹⁴ Nevertheless, this form of spiritual ascendancy has not been connected to the rhetorical directions within Perpetua’s text as a whole. It fashions Perpetua as one who herself is worthy to petition. I suspect that this goes even beyond Tertullian’s eschatologically minded encouragement for

⁴⁹³ Trumbower, *Rescue*, 84.

⁴⁹⁴ Tertullian, *Ad Mart.* 19,1.6; *De Pud.* 22, *Scorp.* 10.8; Origen’s *Ex. Mart.* 30 features martyrs as intercessors; Cyprian *Ep.* 6, 15, and 27 demonstrates confessors’ high status, as does *Ap. Trad.* 10 and Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.2.5; Eusebius cites a letter from the mid-third century from Dionysus, Bishop of Alexandria, to a bishop in Antioch; the letter details recent martyrdoms and assumes that martyrs “now are assessors of Christ and share the fellowship of his kingdom, and take part in his decisions and judge along with Him”, a statement for which Eusebius demonstrates no concern, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.42.5.

wives' prayers to be given in request for the refreshment of their dead husbands, even if both texts reflect common belief.⁴⁹⁵ Rather, the narrative portrays Perpetua as an effective confessor. She hears Dinocrates' name while she is at prayer with the other confessors, she is granted a vision of him and understands that he suffers, she obediently prays, and on the day that *she* is placed in the chains of the military prison, *he* is granted refreshment according to her request. What is implicit in this pattern can be found explicitly in other contemporary Christian texts: righteous followers of the Lord who have suffered and nonetheless continue to serve God "will receive from the Lord whatever they will ask", in the words of Hermas' *Shepherd*.⁴⁹⁶

Beneath the surface of the unusual narrative developments of sections 7-8, then, I propose that Perpetua's construction of self-authentication is evinced. Not unlike the self-promotion found in published collections of letters throughout Roman antiquity,⁴⁹⁷ this strategy can be seen as part of Perpetua's commemorative aims. She, as a confessor, is worthy and faithful to voice prayers that are fulfilled; thus her story is worthy to be heard and recalled by her audience. Just as her words were victorious in the verbal sparring that commenced her narrative and confirms her identity as *Christiana*, her victory in prayer confirms her identity as a soon-to-be martyred confessor. Her audience is not merely presented with an *exempla*: I contend that the *exempla* rhetorically fashions herself *as such*, worthy of commemoration, within her very depiction of unfolding events.

⁴⁹⁵ Tertullian, *De Monog.* 10.5 (*pro anima eius orat et refrigerium*).

⁴⁹⁶ Hermas, *Shep.* 6.3.6.

⁴⁹⁷ Such collections established a flattering 'autobiography' for contemporaries as well as future generations. See, e.g., Cain, *Letters*, 17-42; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, "The Collected Letters of Ambrose of Milan: Correspondence with Contemporaries and With the Future", in L. Ellis and F. Kidner (eds.), *Travel, Communication, and Geography in Late Antiquity, Sacred and Profane* (Aldershot, 2004), 95-107; A.N. Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford University Press, 1966), 27-41, 54-56.

5.2 “Our Great Virtue”: Sections 9.1-3

After her interpretation of the third vision, Perpetua’s account continues with a brief sequence of action. Out of the whole of Perpetua’s narrative, this tends to be the section that is inveterately overlooked by scholars. While this is an understandable calumny, since the next section of narrative features quite a visionary spectacle, 9.1-3 warrants close attention. What might appear to be a random depiction of two peripheral events while the confessor group is interred in the military prison prior to the games can, however, arguably be read as an intentional display. 9.1-3 contains a meaningful contrast and works to further develop the rhetorical direction of the account.

The new pericope commences with Perpetua’s consistent use of temporal terminology. “A few days after” the transfer to the military prison⁴⁹⁸ and after “the day we were put in chains” (8.10), the official in charge of the prison, Pudens, is specifically named and portrayed as increasingly favourable to the confessor-prisoners, “perceiving the great fortitude (*magnam virtutem*) in us” (9.1). The specific lexeme which she portrays the confessors as possessing, *virtus*, is extraordinarily ironic in light of the group’s identity, for they are participants within a *religio illicita*, a *superstitio* counter to the *virtus* of the *mos maiorum*, one that ultimately endangered the peace of the empire.⁴⁹⁹ The obvious irony would not have been lost on the audience and ought not be overlooked: *virtus* was recognized by an appointed Roman official as located precisely in the condemned company that he guards. This device is not isolated in early Christian writings and, like other catalogues of significant persons who “recognize” Christian virtue, this inclusion serves a pragmatic function in several

⁴⁹⁸ For a nuanced discussion as to where this prison was, see Heffernan, *Passion*, 224; he concludes that it is possible she was first “in a military prison outside of the city, under the jurisdiction of the Legio III *Augusta*, and was subsequently [at this point in the *Passio*] transferred to a smaller unit”.

⁴⁹⁹ See Rives, “Piety”, 1-26.

ways. It confirms the character of the group and explains favour both divine and human that allows for various consequential provisions – in this case, visitors and *refrigerium* for the prisoners.⁵⁰⁰ Even beyond these immediate gains, another subtle use of rhetoric is on display with Perpetua’s depiction of Pudens’ approval and the prisoners’ evident *virtus*: this scene acts as a foil to the narrative scene that immediately follows.

As the day of the martyrdom draws near, Perpetua’s father visits the military prison. He is “consumed with weary loathing” (9.2), and this time Perpetua does not narrate their verbal exchange. She conveys only her father’s exploits and her reaction. He tears his beard, hurls himself prostrate on the ground, and reproaches his age in the midst of a vocal compendium that Perpetua summarises as “such a great many words” (*tanta verba*). Her solitary response, on the other hand, is a grief that does not actually reply to him: “I was sorry for his unhappy old age” (9.3). Though most commentators pass over the scene altogether, the few extant analyses view the scene as evidence of the finality of emotional estrangement between Perpetua and her father, a separation that has been augmenting over the course of Perpetua’s entire “diary”.⁵⁰¹ The lack of detail with regard to the exchange of words does present ambiguity, but there are other possible ways of interpreting the inclusion of this passage.

The juxtaposition of this brief scene with its immediate precedent can instead be viewed as part of the narrative construction of a rhetorical antithesis. This becomes clear as the irony of the first situation is recalled: the head of the military prison has recognized the virtue of the *Christiani*. In contrast, the father’s conduct is frantic and

⁵⁰⁰ This portion appears to overlap with the redactor’s remark in 16.4 that the officer in charge of the prison (who remains nameless there) “believed” (*credente*).

⁵⁰¹ E.g., Prinzivalli comments that Perpetua “record[s] his gestures of desperation with his incoherent, heartbroken protests. There can be no happy ending between father and daughter” (“Perpetua”, 127). Amat remarks only that the father’s actions are excessive and desperate (*Passion*, 221); Heffernan, *Passion*, 246-248, reads the “curious” selection as Perpetua’s diary account, genuinely depicting the father as experiencing “heart-wrenching” grief.

shameful, a solecism for both his social and familial status; his specified actions are not merely signs of sorrow but reflect the desperation of *deploratio*, a condition of irrational mourning and subservience. This category of grief is precisely what Cicero describes in his *Tuscan Disputations*: it is a publicly “afflicted perturbation” that involves “various and detestable kinds of lamentation: bodily neglect, effeminate tearing of our cheeks, striking our thighs, chests, and heads. Thus in Homer and also in Accius, Agamemnon tore his disheveled hair in his grief. From this comes that saying of Bion, ‘in his sorrow, the most foolish king tore the hairs of his head’”.⁵⁰² The public actions of Perpetua’s father would have been an obvious “demasculinization”, displayed by the tearing of his beard in a physical demonstration of a loss of manliness.⁵⁰³ This kind of frenzy in lamentation, in Roman eyes, demonstrated an “effeminate” choice that scorned public shame and contrasted to the more stoic standards of *virtue*.⁵⁰⁴

Ironically, it is instead Perpetua who depicts herself as possessing model virtue. She grieves at the old age her father has just cursed, and her sorrow is restrained. A lengthy discussion of proper and improper forms of pity and grief can be seen in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, a work that seems to have played an important role in the educational processes of Perpetua’s era. Aristotle states that “those who are utterly ruined are not capable of pity, for they think they have nothing more to suffer...those who are panic-stricken are incapable of pity, because they are preoccupied with their own emotion”.⁵⁰⁵ Perpetua depicts herself as the opposite of panic-stricken, ruined, or irrationally emotional. She is properly restrained and grievously pities her father, whose panic and ruin are obvious. This message is reinforced by a rhetorical

⁵⁰² Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 3.26.

⁵⁰³ Cf. Cobb, *Dying*, 102, who cites Musonius Rufus’s observation that a beard was the symbol of the male akin to a lion’s mane.

⁵⁰⁴ To choose frenzy is also seen as a rejection of divine decree. Much has been made of this concerning the ambivalent character of Dido; I will not enter into this fray. Cf. Toohey, *Reading Epic*, 134-139.

⁵⁰⁵ Aristotle *Rhet.* 2.8.3, 2.8.6.

conduplicatio, the repetition of a key phrase from an earlier section. The prior encounter between Perpetua and her father at the trial featured his shameful action and consequent humiliation, and it contained precisely the same response from Perpetua, “I grieved” (*ego dolebam*, 5.6, 9.3).

While the brief, often disregarded narrative of section 9 seems *prima facie* to be little more than a disjointed rendering of two events, the seemingly laconic section relays a significant rhetorical antithesis and further develops the image of Perpetua for her audience. The prison official sees the confessor group’s virtue and favors them; the father reacts to Perpetua’s virtuous pity with an even more extreme and debasing frenzy. Rather than an introspective diary entry on events, this section can be viewed as deliberate in content and implication. The pair of scenes acts to further cultivate Perpetua’s exemplary status for her audience. This leitmotif is developed over the course of her narrative, and as the account moves into the final dramatic vision, the audience now expects no less.

5.3 “Like a Man in the Arena”: Sections 10.1-14

In comparison with the three preceding visions, the fourth has been the unrivaled subject of extensive exploration. Many such studies leap into the tantalizing details of the vision itself, but, as with the prior visions, the text that circumscribes the account lends significantly to the content of the vision. In other words, the surrounding text is an interpretive tool for the vision itself. The pericope commences as usual with a chronological anaphora, the most specific yet: “On the day before we were to fight [in the arena]”. Following this, the final vision embarks with an allusive divergence in elocution that would not have escaped notice by its audience: Perpetua uses a new expression, “I saw this sight” (*video horomate hoc*, 8.1), diverging from her previous phrase employed for the three preceding visions, “this was shown to me” (*ostensum*

mihi hoc, 7.3, 4.2). The term *horomate* is anomalous here in the text and generally quite unusual. It offers a distinct Latinisation of the Greek ὄραμα, the word utilized repeatedly in Acts to depict spiritual “seeing”.⁵⁰⁶ The vision is thus distinguished from the other three, even from its commencement. An association with the visions of Acts seems to be implied in her use of *horomate*; it certainly will not be the last of Perpetua’s rhetorical maneuvering in allying her account with established and authoritative works.

As Perpetua advances the visionary narrative, she begins with the deacon Pomponius, clad in white like the heavenly being in her first vision. He takes her from prison and hurriedly leads her along a rough path⁵⁰⁷ into the center of a crowded amphitheater, where he leaves her with the parting phrase, “Do not fear, I am with you and struggle with you” (*noli pauere. hic sum tecum et conlaboro tecum*, 10.4). The phrase seems to echo Acts 18.9-10, which itself relays a vision that serves to confirm Paul’s authority as one protected by God. Here, Paul has a vision and hears, “Do not be afraid...I am with you. No one will take hold of you, so as to do you harm”. Similarly, Acts 23.11 portrays Paul as imprisoned in the military barracks of Jerusalem; here, Christ appears and assures him, “Take courage, for you have fully testified (διεμαρτύρω) about me”.

Other early Christian texts feature similar phrasing, themselves likely following the scriptural text. Hermas, for example, is told by an angel, “Do not be frightened of the devil, for I will be with you” (12.4.6-7). Tertullian’s *Ad Mart.* explicitly promises that it is Christ who leads martyrs into the arena and will remain

⁵⁰⁶ The form is used eleven times in Acts: 9.10, 9.12; 10.3, 10.17, 10.19; 11.5; 12.9; 16.9, 16.10; 18.9, though it tends to be rare in other Greek texts until after the mid-4th century.

⁵⁰⁷ Amat, *Passion*, 49, 223, compares this rough road to that in Hermas’s *Shep.* 1.1.3-5, but the comparison does not seem strong in that the roads are very different and the events subsequent to the roads quite divergent: in *Shepherd*, the road is steep, impassable, and so eroded by running water that an unidentified spirit must take him across to level ground, at which point he encounters a divine figure who reproaches him.

present during the contest.⁵⁰⁸ Already, Perpetua's vision is portrayed through the vehicle of works already in Christian traditions – concepts and plausibly texts with which both she and her intended audience were familiar. If Perpetua depicts herself as hearing the same injunction as Paul and Hermas, she concomitantly joins herself to their exemplar legacy. Furthermore, she reveals an awareness of Christian texts and teachings. This certainly coheres with the attempts to bolster her authority and the evident contextual constructs exhibited in the previous sections of Perpetua's narrative.

The vision account continues, and with the appearance of a massive Egyptian in the amphitheater, it is clear that a competition impends. Here Perpetua's infamous expression, "I was made manly/a man" (*facta sum masculus*, 10.7) enters the scene. While myriad interpretive possibilities have been offered in studies past and present, Perpetua's apparent gender-affectation antics are not as straightforward as many would have it seem. The traditional *mélange* of *Quellenkritik* typically begins with either Jungian psychoanalysis⁵⁰⁹ or the utilitarian conclusion that Perpetua simply and straightforwardly had to become a male if she was to fight, even in a "dream".⁵¹⁰ Several studies then read the scene as one of Perpetua's empowerment. Here, the gender-bending asserts her prowess and is a final subconscious coup d'état; Perpetua at last comes to terms with her destined identity. Salisbury, for example, contends that Perpetua "was fully transformed from her old self into a new empowered individual... who could fight for what she believed".⁵¹¹ Such a reading, however, implies that Perpetua was not yet "empowered" prior to her reimagination into

⁵⁰⁸ Tertullian *Ad Mart.* 3.4.

⁵⁰⁹ E.g., Petroff, "Medieval", 45, and Habbermehl, *Perpetua*, 184; Rossi, "Passion", 53-85, **who** see the Egyptian in this vision as a transformed father figure and thus an indication of her internal conflict about her own father, though there is nothing in the text to insinuate this transhistorical Freudian turn.

⁵¹⁰ Robert, "Une Vision", 256, seems to advocate such a position; Heffernan calls it primarily "an attempt at appropriating male prowess in combat" (*Sacred Biography*, 210).

⁵¹¹ Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 109.

masculinity. This is an interpretation that the text does not suggest; it runs counter to the message not only just prior to this vision, but to all of the other narrative developments and visions in Perpetua's text as well. She is *already* empowered.

Other studies view the fourth vision's gender-bending as an unconscious assertion of defiant, gladiator-like strength. If Perpetua is to fight successfully in the games, which are "quintessentially a male contest", she must – as Shaw postulates – dream of herself as a male. In the grander scheme of his reading, each of Perpetua's four visions entails a "recognition" of her own situation and her act of rebellion "subliminally released for Perpetua in a dream state".⁵¹² Cooper similarly maintains that in the logic of her dream world, "her perception of herself as a man is a sign of her growing confidence".⁵¹³ Although a thematic connection between the four visions is maintained, such interpretations nonetheless ought to call for hesitation. Oneiric processes of identity-construction and subconscious insurgence do not seem to be adequate summaries for the themes of this vision nor of Perpetua's account as a whole.

Cobb views the phrase and vision as the final step in the narrative depiction of Perpetua: it is the *Passio* author's "textual transformation of Perpetua the mother, daughter, and woman to the higher end of the scale, that is, to gladiator and man".⁵¹⁴ Yet aside from its problematic supposition that one author crafted the entire *Passio*,⁵¹⁵ Cobb's analysis, like Shaw's, assumes that the character of Perpetua begins as weak and strengthens over the course of the narrative. As this thesis has contended, however, the account of Perpetua does not present a veritable "coming-of-age" story or diary. Instead, the consistent display of Perpetua's victories, the rhetorical

⁵¹² Shaw, "Passion", 308.

⁵¹³ Cooper, "A Father", 698.

⁵¹⁴ Cobb, *Dying*, 107.

⁵¹⁵ See Chapter 1 (section 1.5, p. 23-27) of this study.

techniques employed throughout her account, and the complex engagement with Christian themes and novelistic literary styles demand a different approach.

Particularly in light of the use of visions in novels as well as early Christian literature, I maintain that it ought to be considered whether each of Perpetua's visionary accounts is more than merely a dream-world penned onto papyrus. If the thematic nexus between Perpetua's visions and the narrative surrounding each is kept in view, further possibilities arise for interpreting Perpetua's *facta sum masculus*. It is noteworthy that the narrative up to this point in the text has established a recurrent motif: she is a victor. Perpetua has identified herself as *Christiana*, has been victorious in the face of challenges both verbal and visionary, knows she will be martyred, prays effectively as a confessor, and acts virtuously within her various social roles. A combat situation, even a visionary one, will serve to continue Perpetua's construction of identity for her audience.

Indeed, in combat-themed situations or exhortations that involve women, it is important to acknowledge that the notion of being "made manly/a man" is not as rare in antiquity as might be assumed. The intonation of the symbolic crossing of the boundaries of gender by females is represented in literary and philosophical traditions both Christian and secular. The young heroine Semiramis in the novelistic historical work *Persika* dresses as a man to fight in a battle with a small group of Assyrian soldiers; daring and independent, she scales the walls of an impenetrable city in her gender-bending garb.⁵¹⁶ The Maccabean matriarch of 2 Maccabees 7.21 is depicted as "manly" in spirit as she exhorts her sons to battle,

"With fortitude she exhorted every one of them in the language of the fathers, resplendent with wisdom; and, joining feminine emotion with masculine spirit/mind/courage (*singulos illorum hortabatur voce patria fortiter, repleta sapientia: et, feminae*

⁵¹⁶ Ktesias *Persika*, now lost; the scene is summarized in Diodoros Siculus *Bib. Hist.* 2.6.6-8. See Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient*, 24-25.

cogitationi masculinum animum inserens), said to them, ‘I do not know how you were formed in my womb, for I did not give you spirit, nor soul, nor life, neither did I make each of your limbs. Yet the Creator of the earth, who wrought the nascence of humanity, who did establish the origins of all things, will in his mercy restore both spirit and life to you again, just as you spurn yourselves now for the sake of his laws’.”⁵¹⁷

The implications here are striking: to even exhort others towards battle and imminent martyrdom, a female voice must take on a masculine spirit. The equation of masculinity, virtue, and strength of both body and spirit in antiquity features a long heritage and numerous instances of attestation.⁵¹⁸ Christian traditions, too, reflect this assumption. The Pauline exhortation of Ephesians 4.13 equates spiritual maturity with manhood. In Clement of Rome’s oblique epistolary praise, “many women empowered by God’s grace have done deeds worthy of men”.⁵¹⁹ Throughout his works, Clement of Alexandria associates spiritual perfection with becoming “a man/manly” (ἀπανδρόω).⁵²⁰ In Carthage, Tertullian’s depiction of an easy death is described as a distinctly effeminate activity,⁵²¹ and Cyprian later continues the assumption in epistolary praise of a group of women who, “in displaying valor above their gender, by their steadfastness they set an example for the rest of womankind”.⁵²²

This was, of course, not an ideal exclusive to Christianity. “Manliness” ranks among Marcus Aurelius’ concise list of the components of a life guided by reason.⁵²³ As Cobb thoroughly documents in *Dying to Be Men*, the depiction of early Christian martyrs of both genders as “manly” athletes, soldiers, and gladiators is a common narrative technique that rhetorically indicates virtue, victory, and fortitude. It is no

⁵¹⁷ 2 Macc. 7.21-23, here from the Vulgate.

⁵¹⁸ E.g., Kovacs, “Divine Paedagogy”, 401-425. For an eloquent and nuanced exploration of the influence of these constructs in early Christian martyr acts, including a very focused reading of this influence in the *Passio*, see Cobb, *Dying*, 107-111, 121-123, and Moss, “Blood Ties”, 189-208.

⁵¹⁹ Clement of Rome *Ep.* 55.3.

⁵²⁰ E.g., in *Strom.* 4.23.150.3, 6.12, and 100.3.

⁵²¹ Tertullian *De Fug.* 9.4.

⁵²² Cyprian *Ep.* 6.3.1.

⁵²³ Marcus Aurelius *Medit.* 3.6.

surprise, then, that in order to do the virtuously heroic in a very public sphere, Perpetua had to become “manly” to participate in “masculine” virtues.⁵²⁴ As Cobb notes, “The question ‘Are you Christian?’ was answered by one’s actions: to be Christian was to embody masculinity”.⁵²⁵ In her last vision, Perpetua confirms her primary scene’s insistence that she is wholly *Christiana*.

It ought to be emphasized that the term *masculus* deserves to be treated with caution. While most translators and interpretations assume Perpetua was “made a man”, it seems that her gender identity actually remains that of a woman during the events of the vision. She is described with feminine pronouns throughout the combat and is called “daughter” at its end. If she is made *masculine* as an exhibition of victory and of her identity as *Christiana*, the vision can confirm in Perpetua the qualities that were normally viewed as exclusively the properties of males. This is an appropriate corollary to the scenes prior to the vision. The prison official recognized the virtue of the martyr company, and though her father behaved improperly and effeminately in his lamentation, Perpetua responded with measured, proper grief. Thus the vision continues the display of Perpetua as *virtuous*: she is explicitly here “made manly” and again confirms that she is enduringly committed to her Christian identity.

This display may not only be an act of exemplum constructing: like other portions of her account, it also seems to be an allusive act of narrative traditioning. Perpetua may be presenting herself in a way that specifically gestures towards and aligns her account with other Christian works. When Polycarp enters the arena where he is to be martyred, he hears an exhortation: “Be strong, Polycarp, and manly”

⁵²⁴ Cobb explores this tension and the “evidence of competition over this socially-agreed upon ideal” throughout her book. This argument seems to have been anticipated by others, including Shaw, “Passion”, 286-325, and Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 104-133. The difference between ‘virtue’ embodiment in public versus private spheres at the time has been discussed at length elsewhere; see e.g., Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 175-184; cf. Hoffman, *Status*, 84-85.

⁵²⁵ Cobb, *Dying*, 3.

(ἀνδρίζου).⁵²⁶ Similarly, Perpetua displays that she is instructed to be strong in courage; soon after, she is “made manly”. It is also important to recall the passage from Clement’s *Exh. Bapt.* noted in Chapter 4 of this study, which Perpetua’s narrative appears to reference with regard to her baptism.⁵²⁷ Images that mirror the exhortations in the same pericope of *Exh. Bapt.* seem to re-appear throughout her work, including this section. Among Clement’s instructions are the urgings, “Make your spirit strong, even in the face of anguish; be of good courage, like a man in the arena”. The consistency of similarities between Clement’s exhortation and what Perpetua depicts in her narrative are striking. Clement ultimately sets forth a series of imperatives to be followed by the ideal newly baptized Christian. With creative literary acumen, Perpetua portrays herself as enacting each one, including taking on courageous strength “like a man in an arena”. The effect of these allusions contributes to Perpetua’s larger aim of presenting herself as exemplary. Literary relationship, via allusion, textual memory, or both, with the *Mart. Poly.* and the works of Clement of Alexandria has arguably been present throughout Perpetua’s narrative. While being “made manly” certainly corresponds with widespread cultural understanding, specific textual traditions within which Perpetua aims to identify herself and her own account are also behind this phrase.

The fourth vision then transitions into a description of the action in the arena. Much has been written about Perpetua’s portrayal of the contest. It seems to a great extent that the details reflect and conflate various contemporary spectacles; whether in her own experience or vicariously via description, most studies conclude that she was familiar with the various forms of spectacle entertainment in Carthage.⁵²⁸ It must also

⁵²⁶ *Mart. Poly.* 9.1.

⁵²⁷ See p. 121 of this study.

⁵²⁸ Many scholars, e.g., Bremmer, “Perpetua”, 113-118, argue for the likelihood that she attended such games and draws on familiar images. Simultaneously, however, scholars do point out that there are

be emphasized that other influences and implications nonetheless are also present and worthy of further attention. As the contest begins, a towering man *quasi lanista* (10.8), in elaborate dress, briefly announces rules for the fight. As the mêlée between Perpetua and the Egyptian ensues, Perpetua strikes him repeatedly with her feet. Once he is knocked over, “I trampled him on the head” (*calcavi illi caput*, 6.7). This phrase employs the rhetorical embellishment of repetition: it is an epistrophe, in which a phrase from the beginning is repeated at the end, in that it features a precise duplication of the victorious step on the head of the dragon in the first vision (*calcavi illi caput*, 4.7). The repetition here, as well as the strong likelihood that both allude to the victory promised in Genesis 3.15, would not have been lost on her audience.

At this point, the *lanista* rewards the victorious Perpetua with a green branch bearing golden apples, a kiss, and a verbal blessing, “Peace be with you, daughter” (*filia, pax tecum*, 10.13). Perpetua concludes the vision with an image of her triumphant walk towards the exit for victors, the Gate of Life (*ad Portam Sanavivarium*). With the anaphora “I came to, and I understood” (*experrecta sum et intellexi*, 10.13-14), she briefly interprets the vision for her audience. The events on the day of the games, she indicates, would in reality be a spiritual battle: “I realized that it was not with beasts that I would fight but against the devil, and I knew that victory would be mine” (10.14).

The developments and details within this vision are quite commonly read with the aid of psychoanalytical methods. Salisbury, for example, insinuates that the Egyptian and the *lanista* in the “dream” are contrasting “father figures”; one is

details in this account that seem to blur separate public entertainment events; see the extensive analysis of Robert, “Une Vision”, 258-271. Habermehl, *Perpetua*, 183, argued that apparent inaccuracies demonstrate that she was not very familiar with arena events and terminologies, but Robert counters that her distinct imagery arises from not merely gladiatorial contexts but also the recent Pythian Games, which would have occurred in Carthage during the previous winter (“Une Vision”, 253-276).

rejected while the other provides a spiritual replacement.⁵²⁹ This seems problematic on several counts. Most significantly, the implication of such a blatantly objectifying insinuation is that since Perpetua is female, the need for father figures will be intrinsic to her account. In addition, I contend that the image and action of the *lanista* are far more revealing: they continue to confirm both contextual influence and reveal rhetorical guidance for her audience via allusion.

Firstly, his colossal height conjures typical artistic depiction of divine or authoritative figures at the time, and his clothing resembles that often featured by the overseer (*agōnothês*) of games.⁵³⁰ Yet the influence of Christian sources on Perpetua's intriguing *lanista* and his actions can also be proposed. Although the theme of spiritual contest and reward is present in various Pauline epistles, it is further developed by subsequent authors and can be located specifically in texts nearly contemporary to the *Passio*. Both Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, for example, exhort their audience with the *lingua* of a spiritualized ludic competition involving very similar figures. In his early work *Ad Mart.*, Tertullian promulgates, "You are to experience a noble contest in which the superintendent of the games (*agonothetes*) is the living God; the manager (*xystarches*) [is] the Holy Spirit".⁵³¹ Similarly, in Clement of Alexandria's aforementioned *Quis*, the following exhortation develops: "Let [the rich Christian] not expect to grasp the crowns of immortality without struggle and effort, continuing untrained, and without contest. But let him go and put himself under the Word as his trainer (*γυμναστῆς*), Christ as the contest-director (*ἀγωνοθετῆς*)....So that he might present himself victorious, with good conscience, to

⁵²⁹ Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 108.

⁵³⁰ Cf. Robert, "Une Vision", 258-271.

⁵³¹ Tertullian *Ad Mart.* 3.3. For a concise summary of tentative chronologies of Tertullian's works, see Rankin, *Tertullian*, xiv-xvii.

the judge who continually bestows the rewards”.⁵³² The striking parallels between this and Perpetua’s narrative again arguably demonstrate Perpetua’s familiarity with and employment of the contents of the Clementine text.

The *lanista*’s prize branch may also reveal the influence of other literary sources for the portrayal of events that unfold in Perpetua’s vision. While brief commentary on the branch occurs in many summaries of the *Passio*, most consist of fleeting remarks that reveal the typical variety of methodological approaches. The apples on the branch have been seen to indicate “the highest prize of womanhood”, based on the apple awarded to Aphrodite.⁵³³ Such a reading, however, leaves unexplained why Perpetua would associate an Olympian beauty pageant with a demonstration of Christian endurance. Alternatively, Petroff and Dronke view the apples as “gifts” akin to the cheese of the first vision and the kiss to be given at the end of this last vision, in that all are “solacing” tokens from “helpful” and “benevolent fatherly figures”.⁵³⁴ This seems to insinuate that the apples are little more than a sweet to ease a child’s trauma of a scraped knee (and, by implication, Perpetua is reduced to a mere child), and other interpretations ought to be considered. Amat suggests numerous possibilities from literature and theatre; golden apples, she comments, might be an image from the legends of Herakles, who receives them after defeating the Hesperian dragon.⁵³⁵

However, I suggest that Perpetua’s vision more arguably demonstrates familiarity with a scene from Similitudes 7-8 of Hermas’ *Shepherd*, a proposal which has remained unexplored until now. There are extraordinary similarities between Perpetua’s scene and those in Hermas’ *Shepherd*, and this merits exploration.

⁵³² Clement of Alexandria *Quis* 1.3.

⁵³³ Salisbury, *Perpetua*’s, 112.

⁵³⁴ Petroff, *Medieval Women*’s, 45; Dronke, *Women*, 5, 15.

⁵³⁵ Amat, *Passion*, 228.

Ultimately, when these elements in her vision are read as an allusive sequence, a new interpretation can be proposed of the entire final vision and of Perpetua's interpretation of it for her audience. Hermas' Similitudes 7-8 serve as an exhortation for faithful endurance and a promise of victory and reward. Here, the Shepherd speaks with Hermas, "Give thanks to the Lord, because He has deemed you worthy of showing you beforehand this affliction, that, knowing it before it comes, you may be able to bear it with courage'. I said to him, 'Sir, be with me, and I will be able to bear all affliction'. 'I will be with you', he said..." (*Shep.* 7.5-7.6.1). Soon after that assuring phrase, Hermas moves into a new vision in which "a splendid and exceedingly tall angel" distributes branches of a tree to people gathered under that tree. Once each person holds a branch, they are called to return it to the angel's hand. In the meantime, these branches have undergone a revealing transformation, either becoming withered and cracked or more resplendently green and fruit bearing. Those who hold green branches laden with fruit are rejoiced over and given crowns, for "they are those who contend with the devil and conquer him", the Shepherd makes explicit to Hermas (8.1.1-8.3.6).

The parallels between the two similitudes and Perpetua's final vision account are more extensive than has yet been acknowledged. Like Hermas, Perpetua depicts herself as having been "deemed worthy" of receiving exhortation about and before her affliction, she has been promised by a divine figure that "I will be with you", she will victoriously combat the devil, and she will receive the best of approvals with her green-branched reward and a statement affirming her Christian identity as *filia*. Four of the "qualifications" for *mimesis*, as elucidated by MacDonald,⁵³⁶ are present here: accessibility, density of parallels, sequence of parallels, and distinct traits. If this

⁵³⁶ MacDonald, *Mimesis*, 1-3; cf. this reference and discussion on mimesis in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.2, p. 57-61) of this study.

reading is accurate, then it has some significant implications. Firstly, this could again serve as confirmation that she had been exposed somewhat extensively to this work and was hardly a “new convert”. Secondly, the allusive participation with Hermas’ text would serve to add meaning to her own account and would even place her work in relationship with this already authoritative text in her community.

Perpetua’s interpretation of this vision, like the previous three, is brief and nearly laconic. She indicates, “I came to, and I understood” the greater reality and conclusion of the next day’s contest. This explanation expertly guides her audience back to the initial pericope, where she was victorious against “the arguments of the devil” (3.3). The rhetorical epistrophe in 10.14 repeats the same concept, that of the spiritual reality of Perpetua’s triumphs. The battle here, like her initial verbal contest, points to the spiritual dimensions of her reality, and victory results from and confirms her identity as a Christian. Her comment on the final vision, then, can be read as a thematic summary of her entire narrative: “I would be fighting against the devil, but I knew that victory would be mine” (*contra diabolum esse pugnaturum, sed sciebam mihi esse victoriam*, 10.14).

The vast majority of modern interpretations of this final visionary account tend to assuage its rhetoric by assuming that it took place at night as a kind of sleeping dream.⁵³⁷ This “dream” is then construed to be “the culmination of her personal, spiritual quest”.⁵³⁸ I counter that the content and communicative strategies within this vision – as with Perpetua’s entire account – make such a view untenable. Perpetua’s vision is hardly the stream-of-consciousness scribbling of an unsophisticated convert. The narrative instead can be seen as a highly rhetorical textual act of allusive gesturing and narrative traditioning. Social memory is not only present but also at

⁵³⁷ E.g., Salisbury, *Perpetua’s*, 108, 136.

⁵³⁸ Salisbury, *Perpetua’s*, 136.

stake in every martyrdom account. I contend that the narrative work of Perpetua, as demonstrated in the fourth vision and consistently throughout her account, is no different: it demonstrates both a *participation* with memory and an attempt to *construct* and join it. There is an arguable intentional alignment of her account with common Christian traditions as well as with specific portions of Hermas' *Shepherd*. This rhetorical strategy enriches the meaning of her own narrative and also implicitly aligns her story to those texts.

Most commentaries indicate that Perpetua's "diary" simply ends with her construal of the fourth vision. Salisbury's conclusion that "she had nothing more to say" is fairly typical.⁵³⁹ However, 10.14 does not actually conclude Perpetua's text: her work ceases only after a succinct and significant final command.

5.4 A Final Mandate: Section 10.15

It is at this point (whether or not there was more to say) that it would seem that Perpetua had written all that she could: it was the day before the martyrdom event, probably before the last meal that the prisoners and visitors would eat together (17.1) and the same day that the redactor's narrative of martyrdom events will continue. The finale of Perpetua's text seems brief: "This is all up to the day before the games; as to the events of the contest itself, may the person who will write about it, do so" (*hoc usque in pridie muneris egi; ipsius autem muneris actum si quis voluerit scribat*, 10.15). It serves, however, to accomplish several tasks. Perpetua's last section maintains the chronologically themed anaphora that served to establish divisions in the account. Even as they act as a guide for her audience, their vague imprecision creates the "timeless" quality necessary for participation with, and construction of, a

⁵³⁹ Salisbury, *Perpetua's*, 136.

collective memory. There is notion of narrative advancement, yet there is also a sense that the story is not bound to specific days.

Furthermore, the sentence conveys an unambiguous expectation that the account is not yet complete: there are events to be written about the following day. Again, there is a strong indication that this declaration corroborates with other textual signals that Perpetua's account is not an exercise in personal introspection but a work of 'self-writing' already in the process of generating interpretive meaning. Perpetua anticipates here not only her audience but also, to an extent, another author who will be tasked to finish the account. Her purposes will be completed, not created or coerced, by the hand of another. In the phrase, "may the person who will write about it, do so", or "let whoever write of it who will" (*quis voluerit scribat*), she uses what is arguably a final jussive or mandative subjunctive case. Rather than serving as an interrogative, then, the *quis* could operate rhetorically to emphasize the person who will render the remainder of the account. This would have been a signal of her commission to and a deliberate introduction of her assumed "co-author". Its jussive nature intonates the timbres of the reciprocity expected in the mores of benefaction that operate throughout the *Passio*. This line also emphasizes the textual nature of the narrative itself. It emphasizes the written word specifically, just as the redactor's work does at several key junctures of his account.⁵⁴⁰ All of these conclusions are fully corroborated by the redactor in section 16.1, as shall be discussed in the next chapter's analyses.⁵⁴¹ It seems to be expected that this person will operate in the memory tradition of martyrdom narratives, which emphasize the heroic nature of the martyrs and the divine realities of their victories and losses. Perpetua creates and confirms this interpretation in the first and last pericopes of her account.

⁵⁴⁰ E.g., "*in litteris*" (1.1), "*conscriptum manu sua*" (2.3), "*conscribi*" (16.1), "*legere debet*" (21.11). See also discussion on the redactor's narratives in Chapter 6 of this study.

⁵⁴¹ See Chapter 6 (section 6.2, p. 201-202) of this study.

5.5 Conclusion

My reading of Perpetua's narrative has proposed that the account's content is enhanced by various rhetorical strategies, particularly the employment of vivid imagery drawn from a panoply of Christian texts, which also assist in accomplishing its aims. A reading of the *Passio* can arguably benefit from an awareness of the text's variegated forms of embellishment as well as its commemorative ambitions. As sections 7-10 of the *Passio* continue Perpetua's narrative, they extend the themes, characteristics, tools, and contextual influences identified in the previous chapters of this study. In distinctly delineated sections, three further visions and consequential explanations are presented for her audience. A brief narrative precedes and anticipates what unfolds in the visions. Perpetua's intense Dinocrates vision sequence and the situations and explanations that frame these visions require a reading that is aware of her complex intellectual and social heritages. In the narrative segment between the third and fourth visions, the reactions of two men are contrasted in order to confirm Perpetua's virtue and identity. The last vision and interpretation serve as a finale image for the presentation of Perpetua's "manly" fortitude, perfection, and triumph. It also implies fulfillment of her baptismal request for endurance (3.5) and of the interpretation from the first vision that she would suffer (4.3-10). Established Christian imagery of endurance, victory, and reward, such as seen in both prior and contemporaneous Christian literature, continue to abound in these sections of the narrative. Perpetua's employment of rhetorical stratagem such as allusion, anaphora, alliteration, and epistrophe throughout her account is notable. In light of her literary and social contexts, it is feasible that Perpetua would have used such tools to guide her audience. In doing so, Perpetua constructs a projection of herself so as to shape an *exemplum* worthy memory of her faithful accomplishments, in alignment with figures

such as Stephen, Paul, Polycarp, the branch-bearers of Hermas, and the lauded women of Clement's *Epistle* who accomplish "deeds worthy of men".

Sections 7-10 thus bring Perpetua's text to completion. Prayer and visionary accomplishment act as a thematic thread through the account, and the surrounding narrative action confirms the same identities as depicted in the visions. This chapter thus continues my endeavor to offer an interpretive method that views Perpetua's contexts as significantly informing the content of her account. Such a reading emphasizes the rhetorical and allusive parlance that is manifested throughout the text. I contend that martyrdom already was an object of commemoration in her community, and that narrative provided a rhetorical vehicle for her participation with this memory. In other words, Perpetua anticipates the didactic employment of this text. Her audience is not merely presented with a martyr's prison story; instead, an *exemplum* is fashioning herself as such in her commemorative presentation of unfolding events prior to her own martyrdom. If the text indicates that Perpetua experienced an extensive secular education and encountered a degree of Christian instruction that rendered her familiar with a variety of early Christian texts, she ought to be considered as a recipient *of*, as well as an intellectual contributor *to*, the corporate traditioning that was concurrently developing in the life of the Christian communities of North Africa. In sections 7-10, then, Perpetua's act of memory-creation is brought to its culmination.

CHAPTER 6
“WE WILL CARRY OUT THE COMMISSION”:
AN ANALYSIS OF CORROBORATIVE *PASSIO* SELECTIONS

“The redactor’s gory and edifying narrative does not inspire me with confidence”, Dodds’ commentary on the *Passio* long ago remarked, adding cheekily, “it would seem that the Spirit must have supplied him with many of his details”.⁵⁴² Similar assessments are echoed through various *Passio* analyses past and present: Habermehl advocates that the redactor’s sections be treated with suspicion, Dronke accuses the redactor of adding “many edifying details that are quite alien to the Perpetua of the diary, and are almost certainly fictitious”, Salisbury expresses dismay at the portrayal of Perpetua during the ludic event, and Cooper asserts that the narrative of the redactor “stands in sharp contrast to the vivid, bold, and unapologetic voice of the martyr herself”.⁵⁴³ These analyses, however, contain implicit assumptions about both Perpetua and the redactor. Since they view Perpetua as the author of an introspective “diary” of her experience in prison, the redactor’s act is seen as nothing more than a subsuming containment of Perpetua’s story. In other words, the redactor’s text is an attempt to “use” and to control Perpetua’s work by creating an interpretive frame around it. In such interpretations, it is the redactor whose work has polemical content. It presents Perpetua as an *exemplum*, while Perpetua herself is innocent of such aims. The redactor’s description of the martyrs’ deaths cannot be trusted as accurate, while Perpetua’s text is trustworthy in that it truthfully betrays her personal experiences,

⁵⁴² Dodds, *Pagan*, 48-49.

⁵⁴³ Habermehl, *Perpetua*, 104-115; Dronke, *Women*, 15-17; Salisbury, *Perpetua’s*, 143; Cooper, “A Father”, 700.

“dreams”, and “spiritual quest”,⁵⁴⁴ in a “simple and bare...reportage stripped of the illusory rhetorical qualities of other martyr *acta*”.⁵⁴⁵

My thesis challenges this victimizing assessment of Perpetua’s narrative exploit. I contend instead that her account is a participation with the collective memory of her Christian community and an act of self-commemoration attempting to merge into that memory. If this is the case, then a reassessment of the aims and role of the redactor’s text is clearly in order. This chapter does not claim to address exhaustively all of the *Passio* portions authored by the redactor in light of my contentions. Such an extensive exploration is, I hope, the product of a future study. Instead, this chapter explores instances of corroborative detail within the *Passio* text of the redactor and the account of Saturus that support my central arguments. The analyses in this chapter thus include several different portions of the account. First, it involves the opening and final sections of the *Passio* – the prologue and epilogue in sections 1.1-1.6 and 21.11. An explicit comment by the redactor in 16.1 is then examined, for it further confirms my contentions concerning the work’s genre and intent. An examination of the lengthy vision of Saturus (11.1-13.8) follows. Exploration of this portion is specifically attuned to interpreting Saturus’ possible authorial aims, the strategies with which he seems to accomplish this, and his depiction of Perpetua. The chapter then undertakes an analysis of the redactor’s narrative in 16.2-16.4, a brief prison scene which specifically involves Perpetua. Lastly, focus turns to the substantial account of the events on the day of the martyrdom in 18.1-21.10.

Throughout this chapter, I offer critique of common interpretive assumptions and inconsistencies regarding the nature of the texts and the textual relationships

⁵⁴⁴ Salisbury, *Perpetua’s*, 98.

⁵⁴⁵ Shaw, “Passion”, 22, 30; cf. Dronke, *Women*, 17.

between the redactor, Saturus, and Perpetua. I counter such readings with an approach centred on the *Passio*'s presentation of Perpetua. This approach finds literary evidence of what is arguably a conscious participation with the commemorative genre, a demonstration of the social mores of benefaction, and, ultimately, a styled attempt at narrative traditioning. As argued in the two preceding chapters, Perpetua's sections of the *Passio* seem to display layers of rhetorical refinement and vibrantly gesture to other texts in order to participate with their authority and to present a narrative aimed at commemorative memory. I here argue that her work was not in some way coerced by the redactor; the situation in the *Passio* is *not* that the redactor has a polemical point and employs the "diary" of Perpetua as proof for his claim. This is a significant departure from most interpretations. I will instead argue that it was Perpetua who developed a rhetorically complex exemplary exhortation to be placed among the traditions of corporate memory. It was *she* who apparently commissioned the redactor to complete her task with an account of the martyrdom events themselves, well within the bounds of contemporary social practices. In sum, I suggest that the aims of Perpetua's narrative ought to be seen as instigating and directing those of the redactor.

6.1 Ancient Examples, Recent Testimonies: Sections 1.1-1.6 and 21.11

The prologue and epilogue of the *Passio* set forth a tightly rhetorical, liturgical, and literary composition. It is addressed explicitly to an audience and draws them into its persuasive polemic. The first sentence subtly introduces the *Passio* by rhetorically joining it to a tradition of written documentation of "examples of the faith" (*fidei exempla*): "If the ancient examples of faith that testify to God's grace and achieve the people's edification were made known in writing so that in their being read God would be honored and the people strengthened, should not new documentations be set forth also to serve both ends?" (1.1). A chiasmic statement follows the first sentence.

Here, seemingly paradoxical claims assert that recent examples of the “outpouring of grace promised for the final interval of time” ought to be documented, and they too will one day be considered ancient and authoritative by future generations (1.2-3). A paraphrase of Acts 2.17-18 immediately follows. “We, too”, the redactor then asserts, “acknowledge and honour prophecies and new visions, according to the promise, and we regard other virtues of the Holy Spirit as intended for the benefit of the church” (*ad instrumentum ecclesiae*, 1.4-5a). Consequently, he continues, it is “necessary that we both proclaim and celebrate through reading aloud (*lectione*)” such instances. After paraphrasing the prologue of 1 John (1.3), he indicates that some among his audience evidently also witnessed the martyrdom, as they are instructed to “recall” while others are to “learn now by hearing” (1.6).⁵⁴⁶ Thus, while the account itself is textual, it is to be aurally and corporately read by implied present and future audiences. The redactor further guides his audience by making explicit the purposes of the account. First, the documentation of “examples of the faith” gives honor to God and serves the instruction of the church (*ad instrumentum ecclesiae*). The account is a testimony of grace to those who not believe and a gift (*beneficium*) for those who do. Lastly, via the act of remembrance, fellowship is gained with not only the martyrs but, through them, with Christ himself.

In the brief epilogue (21.11), the central motif of the prologue is repeated with persuasive rhetorical flourish. The redactor reiterates that these “blessed martyrs” were called for the glory of Christ. Thus, anyone who honours him ought to read these new *exempla*, which are just as important as old *exempla*. Such works are “testimonies of virtue (*virtutes*)” to be corporately read for the edification of the church (*in aedificationem ecclesiae legere debet*). A nearly identical, liturgically

⁵⁴⁶ Tertullian *An.* 55.4, famously referred to the *Passio* in ca. 212 CE, with an assumption that it was already well known. The redacted version could have been relatively contemporaneous with the event, or it could have been edited somewhat after, within a decade or so.

formulaic expression concludes both the prologue and epilogue. This doxological acknowledgement that to Christ is the “glory and honour for ever and ever, amen” (1.6), and the “glory and immense power for ever and ever, amen”, serves as a demarcating antistrophe and ties the two sections together.

Commentators on the *Passio* have long recognized the importance of these sections. Interpretations differ greatly, however, as to precisely what the prologue and epilogue ultimately communicate. It has been widely acknowledged that the phraseology is highly liturgical and technically appropriate only for one bearing some authority within a Christian community, such as a bishop or presbyter.⁵⁴⁷ The audience is addressed as “brothers and children”, for example, and the many words for reading and hearing (e.g., *lectione*, *audivimus*, *per auditum*, *legere*, etc.) imply an aural intention for the account. While this lends credibility to Braun’s argument that the redactor was none other than the benevolent bishop Pomponius mentioned throughout the *Passio* (e.g., 3.7, 6.7, 10.1),⁵⁴⁸ the redactor’s identity and role within the ecclesia ultimately does remain unknown. This somewhat complicates an assessment of his portions of the work.

The content of the prologue and epilogue does nonetheless provide considerable interpretive guidance. It is important to note that these sections are rhetorically charged in both style and vocabulary.⁵⁴⁹ Persuasive *inclusio* is replete throughout the section and draws the audience into assuming that the redactor’s assertions are true. The martyrdom account is proof of the continued working of the Spirit. References to Acts⁵⁵⁰ and 1 John buttress this claim. The narrative testimony is, like older documentations, an edifying and authoritative example for the church

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. d’Ales, *La Théologie*, 444-446.

⁵⁴⁸ Braun, “Tertullien”, 79-81.

⁵⁴⁹ *Repraesentatio* is a rhetorical term *par excellence* discussed by Quintilian, for example, and *vel quia* is a formulaic phrase for an opposing argument. See den Boeft, “The Editor’s”, 170-171.

⁵⁵⁰ The author of this passage, of course, depicts Peter as referencing Joel to buttress the same claim.

and thus ought to be among those that are corporately read aloud. A question then arises: why does the redactor apparently need to use such tools of persuasion? It would seem that his audience needs convincing that the *Passio* is indeed what he claims it to be. What motivations might these claims ultimately belie?

Modern critical commentary frequently views the content of the prologue as an indication that the redactor is promoting a Montanist perspective. While interpretation of the theological affinities expressed in Perpetua's account varies, many scholars advocate that the redactor's polemic does specifically refer to and legitimize cruxes of New Prophecy.⁵⁵¹ This claim is based primarily on the redactor's apparently urgent apocalyptic tenor, the use of Acts 2.17-18 to emphasize the Holy Spirit and to sanction the prophetic visions that occur in the text, and his assumption that newer prophecy "is superior to canon".⁵⁵² Thorough critical challenges to such an interpretation of the prologue have not been posed often enough.⁵⁵³ Difficulties with readings that posit the characteristics of Montanism are numerous. It is important to acknowledge the actual characteristics of the New Prophecy movement,⁵⁵⁴ the larger contexts of contemporary Christianity, and the rhetoric of the entire prologue rather than simply portions or phrases contained within it.

If the redactor demonstrates the extreme apocalyptic tonalities attributed to Montanists, why does he assure his audience at the outset of the *Passio* that this account, though now new, will be ancient and necessary for the church in future ages?

⁵⁵¹ E.g., Heffernan, *Passion*, 137; Decret, *Le Christianisme*, 26; Miller, *Dreams*, 174; Bovon, "Christians Who Dream", 157; Klawiter, "The Role", 251-261; Butler, *New Prophecy*, 58-61. Tabbernee argues that Perpetua and company were never exposed to the New Prophecy, but the redactor was "influenced by the teachings of New Prophecy whose adherents and writings have recently reached Carthage" (*Prophets*, 77-78). He thus used Perpetua's "journal" to persuade local Christians of the legitimacy of the movement he has joined. The majority of other scholars (e.g., Butler, *New Prophecy*, 60; Heffernan, *Passion*, 67-78) view Perpetua as a Montanist prophetess whose vision diary is given to the redactor for interpretation and dissemination.

⁵⁵² Tabbernee, *Prophets*, 77-78; Decret, *Le Christianisme*, 26; Miller, *Dreams*, 174; Bovon, "Christians Who Dream", 157. The phrase "superior to canon" is in Heffernan, *Passion*, 136-147.

⁵⁵³ Though they are occasionally asserted, e.g., Marksches, "The *Passio*", 288-290, and Moriarty, "The Claims", 310.

⁵⁵⁴ See chapter 3 (p. 88-95) of this study.

Notably absent here is the avid moralism that accompanied the Montanist emphasis on the end of time. A plea on behalf of recent and new examples of work of God has more in common, in fact, with works such as the Acts, Hermas' *Shepherd*, and Irenaeus' *Epideixis*. Interestingly, Irenaeus also refers to Acts 2.17-18 to make a similar argument as that of the redactor: the Spirit's work is new as well as ancient.⁵⁵⁵ That very passage in Acts, of course, quotes Joel 2.28-29 to demonstrate that recent events are historically connected and are legitimate work of the Spirit of God. Hermas' work demonstrably contains fresh visions as well.⁵⁵⁶ The redactor's use of Acts and his emphasis on the recent work of God in the deeds and visions of martyrs thus place him well in line with larger Christian traditions, not New Prophecy in particular. Furthermore, an exclusive emphasis on the Spirit is not present; the Spirit is notably absent, in fact, in the concluding doxologies of both the prologue and epilogue.

The redactor's main argument that "new demonstrations" of the work of God should be written and recounted, just as the "ancient examples" before them, must be carefully explored. Many analyses, including those of Heffernan, aver that the redactor is here claiming that documented new prophecies are "superior to canon".⁵⁵⁷ The redactor is thus not only merely aiming for inclusion in the developing scriptural canon but also the authority of a new dispensation. Ferrell similarly articulates, "When the editor of the *Passio* asks why a new *documentum fidei* should not be read along with the *vetera exempla*, he has those earlier Christian texts belonging to an already-developing Christian canon very much in mind...[this is] consistent with his

⁵⁵⁵ E.g., Irenaeus' *Epid.* 89-90, concentrates on the effects of the Holy Spirit's dissemination and emphasizes newness, godliness, and prophecy; Irenaeus' discussion includes a reference to the Acts/Joel passage.

⁵⁵⁶ This caused some scholars in the 19th century to accuse Hermas of Montanist affinities as well. Such a proposal has since been soundly dismissed: see Osiek, *Shepherd*, 5.

⁵⁵⁷ Heffernan, *Passion*, 136-147; Tabbernee, *Prophets*, 77-78; Decret, *Le Christianisme*, 26; Miller, *Dreams*, 174; Bovon, "Christians", 157.

apparently Montanist perspective”.⁵⁵⁸ Perhaps the most problematic aspect of such an interpretation is that it is not clear that it is specifically to Scripture that the redactor refers throughout his prolegomena; readers ought not to assume as much. If this were the case, it seems odd that he would allude to scriptural texts, rather than recent prophetic oracles, as authoritative works that buttress his polemic. There is also no claim on behalf of the redactor that his account is “superior” to old works. Instead, he is aligning his work to operate “equally” *with* them. What “ancient documentation” might he be referencing?

Den Boeft, like Moriarty, has recently suggested that the redactor is indeed here referring to Scripture. The prologue’s argument, they aver, is that commemorative martyr texts in general, including the *Passio*, ought to receive “regular formal liturgical” celebration.⁵⁵⁹ Thus, the redactor is attempting to persuade his audience that there is an obligation for Christian communities to not only write down martyr accounts but also to read them aloud in the same gatherings in which they read scripture. Such a reading does acknowledge the ecclesial, highly rhetorical nature of the redactor’s prologue and epilogue. Yet I suspect that another interpretation is even more tenable and more consistent with the *Passio* content as a whole. I propose that the redactor’s references to the documented “ancient examples” are not specifically in regards to a corpus of proto-canonical Scripture. His polemic seems to be more specific than one working on behalf of martyrdom accounts in general. The older *exempla*, on the other hand, seem to be more expansive (as shall be demonstrated below). Thus, these examples might literally be what he says they are: previous accounts about martyrs. This can include scriptural examples such as the Maccabean sons and Stephen, and it can also include other documents, such as the

⁵⁵⁸ Farrell, “Canonization”, 304.

⁵⁵⁹ Moriarty, “The Claims”, 307; Den Boeft, “The Editor’s”, 178-179.

Mart. Poly. or the *AP*. The *new* “examples of virtue”, then, are expressly those portrayed in the *Passio*. They are novel in comparison to works already corporately recalled in the redactor’s ecclesial community.

This approach involves a proposal that the prologue and epilogue ultimately divulge the *Passio*’s genre and objective. I contend throughout this thesis that the *Passio* is a commemorative narrative that aims to join the ecclesia’s collective memory.⁵⁶⁰ These memory traditions already include historic rootedness in and commemoration of confessor and martyr *exempla*; in fact, the redactor, like Perpetua, gestures to them as a part of his rhetorical strategy. Thus the redactor does not merely tell his audience that the *Passio* is a testimony beneficial for the church. He also expertly guides his audience towards an ideal participation with the *Passio* text. The antistrophic doxologies imply a role for the account in liturgical praxis. With *inclusio* techniques and *commoratio* remarks that the strong in faith will hear this new account and find it as significant as previous *exempla*, he subtly shapes a model audience.

A similar strategy may be seen in other works. Aulus Gellius, for example, provides a narrative guide as to how his readers ought to interact with his work. One *Attic Nights* scene describes activities and conversations within an Antonine literary circle. Gellius seems to be providing a normative model implying how his readers ought to behave with his own text.⁵⁶¹ He is also implying that his text is worthy of being read within such elite literary circles.⁵⁶² The highly rhetorical prologue and initial epilogue of the *Mart. Poly.* similarly presents an ideal audience, an ideal

⁵⁶⁰ See discussion in Chapter 2 (section 2.2.1, p. 42-46; section 2.3.1, p. 49-57) of this study. My use of the term “tradition” here involves a nuanced and dynamic corporate interpretation, embodiment, transmission, and participation; cf. Casiday, *Tradition*, 122.

⁵⁶¹ Aulus Gellius *Noct. Att.* 3.1: here, a work of Sallust, noticed to be in the hand of one in the company, is read aloud by request. After hearing a brief selection on avarice, the group pauses to question and discuss its meaning, style and intent, and also its implications. Johnson observes that this is a fascinating chronology of educated disputation and argues that this entire episode revolves around how the elite ought to read and participate with his text (“Constructing”, 326-328).

⁵⁶² Johnson, “Constructing”, 326-328.

perception of the text, and an ideal response to the text. The story of Polycarp and his fellow martyrs are presented as “in accord with God’s will” (1.1; 2.1). The audience is rhetorically asked, “Who would not admire the martyrs’ nobility?” (2.2).

“Everyone desires to imitate” Polycarp’s example, both the prologue and epilogue proclaim, for Polycarp imitated Christ and gave glory to God (1.2; 19.1-2). *Inclusio* furthermore instructs the audience on how to respond to the narrative; it is to be part of “our” corporate gathering on the anniversary of the martyrdom and is to be treated as “a memorial” (μνήμη, 18.3). The term μνήμη is extremely layered. It can relay not only “memory” but also “monument”, “epitaph”, “remembrance”, “record”, and “acts of recollection”, all of which are corporate in nature and are arguably within the intentions for the account.⁵⁶³ Thus, the *Mart. Poly.* guides its audience into viewing Polycarp’s martyrdom as the ultimate *imitatio Christi* and participation with the Gospel; they are to conclude that it is worthy of commemoration.

Both Perpetua and the redactor are explicitly participating in this generic literary tradition. The redactor’s prologue and epilogue can, furthermore, be interpreted as presenting even another layer to this tradition. While the story of the *Passio* martyrs are to be “recalled”, it is never explicitly because their acts are deemed to be in *imitatio Christi*. Unlike the deaths portrayed in most passion accounts, particularly that of Polycarp, their deaths are never portrayed as a subsuming of their own identity and a transformation into Christ.⁵⁶⁴ As shall be demonstrated below in my analysis of sections 18-21, the redactor’s narrative depiction of the martyrdoms, particularly that of Perpetua, instead maintains the identity of the martyrs and is nonetheless modeled on previous celebrated confessor and martyr accounts. Thus, I

⁵⁶³ E.g., Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.7; Herodotus *Hist.* 1.14; Euripides *Phoen.* 1152; Plutarch *Sol.* 1.8; Cassius Dio *Hist. Rom.* 39.14.

⁵⁶⁴ This subsuming of the martyr’s identity can be seen in, e.g., the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne* (in Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1 41) and the *Acts of Paul* 3.22. Cf. Moss, *Ancient*, 113.

propose that Perpetua's deeds are presented in such a way that they are to be remembered as an *imitatio martyris*. In other words, the redactor not only contends that the *Passio* is similar to "older examples". In the content of his text, narrative events in themselves are portrayed as within the tradition of the "ancient examples". This authorial act, then, can be seen as an attempt to join commemorative hagiographical traditions in particular. The redactor's audience already recalls other such *exempla*, presumably within liturgical contexts, and his rhetorically constructed model audience will receive and celebrate this "recent example" as well. The redactor's prologue, therefore, presents an exceptionally clear example of what Kelber attributes to "works of memory": "interplay between the past and present, at times attributing greater force to the remembered past and at times to the remembering present".⁵⁶⁵

Thus, common scholarly critique of the prologue's enthusiasm fails to acknowledge the generic relationships and aims in which the redactor is arguably participating. Den Boeft has recently noted that most scholarship on the *Passio* does "less than justice to the author's shrewd polemical strategy, which has resulted in a carefully devised and well written argument, in which timely references and allusions to holy texts were incorporated with a persuasive goal".⁵⁶⁶ The redactor again assures his audience that the "new example" of the *Passio* is aligned with older deeds already recounted. Yet there seems to be even another implication within the layers of the redactor's work. The *Passio* is ultimately presented as not only a "testimony" but also as a "gift" (*beneficium*, 1.6) for the Church. This explicit use of the language of benefaction⁵⁶⁷ ought not to be overlooked. I am convinced that it gestures to

⁵⁶⁵ Kelber, "Works", 234.

⁵⁶⁶ Den Boeft, "The Editor's", 175; a similar argument is made by Walder, "Visions", 209. However, it has never been argued that this is the case for the entire *Passio*, not merely the redactor's work.

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. Chapter 3 (section 3.2, p. 70-76) of this study.

Perpetua's act of commissioning a commemorative account of the martyrdom within her role as benefactress. Explicit indication of this can be seen later in the redactor's work, when he again invokes benefactory language in a rhetorical comment to the audience (16.1). While the redactor's introduction and conclusion do "frame" the *Passio* text and set forth an interpretive expectation for its audience, they can also be seen as serving on behalf of Perpetua's aims.

6.2 Perpetua's Mandate: Section 16.1

The redactor's narrative from 14.2 to 17.3 consists of a series of brief scenes that display the "perseverance and nobility" of members of the martyr company prior to the ludic events. At 16.1, however, a comment directly addressing the audience provides a brief interruption. It is asserted that the Spirit has allowed and thus willed the account of these events to be written. "Because of this" (*quoniam ergo*), the redactor continues, "we will carry out the mandate (*mandatum*), or really the sacred commission (*fidei commissum*), of the most holy Perpetua, despite my unworthiness to add to such a glorious depiction". The *inclusio* comment rhetorically portrays the redactor and his audience as together being faithful to the will of the Spirit by writing down and hearing this account. In this way, they carry out Perpetua's "commission".

The significance of this section has been neglected in *Passio* studies. The redactor's employment of rhetorical constructions, of the *lingua* of commission and command, and of hyperbolic humility and praise ought to be emphasized as norms within the mores of benefaction and commemoration.⁵⁶⁸ This section ought to be viewed as an essential part of the redactor's task: the literary presentation of what is to be a public memory. The redactor's depiction of the martyrdom events employs

⁵⁶⁸ See discussion in Griffin, "De Beneficiis", 92-113, which explores the style of discourse and the technique of hyperbole in the language of reciprocity. Cf. MacMullen, "Personal power", 512-24.

various stratagems to call attention to Perpetua in particular, as shall be seen in sections below. This includes bold praise for her character, brief stories to illustrate her exemplary status, and, as seen here, blatant assertions of his own humility and unworthiness to relate her story – a story he has been commanded to relate. The language here fits well with contemporary practices of public praise for benefactors. It can be seen as not only rhetorical but also moral. That is, it can be viewed as a reciprocation for benefactory assistance. This is particularly the case in that *fideicommissum* is an expressly legal term for an obligatory testament, trust, or bequest to be delivered to a third party.⁵⁶⁹

While 16.1 seems to appear oddly *in medias res*, it serves several purposes. It operates as a transition to the remainder of the narrative, which is largely focused on Perpetua's noble deeds. Perhaps more significantly, it bolsters the authority of these subsequent *Passio* sections. By including the audience, the statement places responsibility upon them to receive the account, for it draws them into the ongoing fulfillment of Perpetua's command. Reference to her mandate gestures back to her jussive at the conclusion of her narrative (10.15). The redactor is confirming before his audience that it is he who fulfills Perpetua's command to write of the events on the day of the games. With the language of benefaction, the audience is implicitly reminded that the account is a *beneficium* (1.6) to them, but as such it requires a response on their behalf. Their response is modeled on the redactor's words, as he again constructs the ideal recipients for the text. "We will carry out" (*exequimur*) implies "carry out" as well as "relate" and "continuously fulfill" the commemorative aims – the binding bequest – of Perpetua.

⁵⁶⁹ See Quintilian *Inst. Orat.* 9.2.74; Gaius *Inst.* 2.184; Suetonius *Claud.* 23; Ulpian *Frag.* 29.1.

6.3 Satorus' Admonition: Sections 11.1-13.8

The redactor's voice briefly re-enters the *Passio* after Perpetua's narrative. With only a brief introduction, he initiates the next major section of the text: "Also, the blessed Satorus produced this vision of his own, which he himself wrote down" (*sed et Satorus benedictus hanc visionem suam edidit quam ipse conscripsit*, 11.1).⁵⁷⁰ The visionary account of Satorus begins abruptly, without surrounding narrative or interpretation. "We had died and had put off our flesh, and we were carried towards the east by angels", he begins. It is not the entire *Passio* martyr company that features in his dream; out of the group, only Perpetua is mentioned. As they behold a light, Satorus declares to Perpetua that God's promise has been fulfilled to them. They are welcomed by more angels as they are carried into a paradisiac garden. Perpetua and Satorus walk through the garden and are joined by four other martyrs who had died "in the same persecution" (11.9).

Passing through a gate and entering into a room with walls of light, Satorus and Perpetua hear the *trisagion* chant. They find themselves being lifted to kiss an "aged white-haired man with a youthful face", flanked by four elders (12.3). The white-haired man touches their faces, and the elders instruct Satorus and Perpetua to go and play. As they proceed back into the garden near the entry gates, they encounter two figures who apparently have not yet "put off the flesh". A sorrowful bishop (*episcopum*) named Optatus and a presbyter (*presbyterum doctorem*) named Aspasius throw themselves at the martyrs' feet, asking Satorus and Perpetua to make peace between them (13.1-2). The four of them draw away under a nearby rose arbour, and Perpetua begins to speak to the two men in Greek. Angels quickly interrupt the conversation. The angels tell the two men to settle their own

⁵⁷⁰ Frith, *Le Problème*, 33, makes an excellent argument for Satorus' portion originally being narrated (orally or in writing) in Greek, then transcribed into Latin.

disagreement and they also admonish the bishop to restore order to his quarreling people (13.4-6). Perpetua and Saturus are then directed to an area beyond a nearby gateway, where they smell “delectable odors” and see “many of our brothers, and also martyrs” (13.8). With the phrase, “I awoke, rejoicing” (*gaudens expectatus sum*, 13.8), Saturus’ narrative portion quickly draws to its conclusion.

Detailed studies and interpretations of this visionary narrative are not common.⁵⁷¹ In general, the scholarly work that does explore this portion of the *Passio* either reads the account of Saturus as the subversive visionary narrative of a Montanist companion of Perpetua, or as a taming device for an otherwise radical text. The former interpretation of Saturus’ section contends that the theme of his account is the demonstration of “chrism over authority”.⁵⁷² Here, the narrative of Saturus is said to be concerned with a demonstration of charismatic prophetic leadership as opposed to a more administrative hierarchy; the vision is a means to advocate these ends. Some, such as Heffernan and Butler, interpret this supposed defiance towards clerics to mean that Saturus’ work exhibits Montanist tendencies.⁵⁷³ Saturus is thus perceived as employing a visionary narrative consciously to promote the prophetic ministry. As a prophetess, it is she who is ultimately the spiritual authority.

Other interpretations view Saturus’ work as performing a nearly opposite function: it is meant to bring a normalizing tone to the account, which up to this point has consisted of the far more unusual work of Perpetua. Here, Saturus’ narrative is regarded as completely different in genre and intent from that of Perpetua. His work, as opposed to Perpetua’s, is deemed to be consciously aimed at an ecclesial audience. Dronke’s remark is echoed in many other studies when his commentary takes only “a

⁵⁷¹ For interpretations of Saturus’ pericope, cf. Heffernan, *Passion*, 46-47, 272-298; Amat, *Passion*, 73-75, 230-242 and “Songes”, 187-189; Habermehl, *Perpetua*, 189-196; Salisbury, *Perpetua’s*, 112-115; Butler, *New Visions*, 78-84; Shaw, “Passion”, 310; Oseik, “Perpetua’s Husband”, 291-302.

⁵⁷² Heffernan, *Passion*, 291-295; cf., e.g., Butler, *New Visions*, 83; Barnes, *Tertullian*, 78.

⁵⁷³ Heffernan, *Passion*, 46-47, 272-298; Klawiter, “The Role”, 251-261.

glance” at the “banal fabricated” vision of Saturus.⁵⁷⁴ This vision is seen as “impersonal” in tone and blatantly concerned with reinforcing “theological interpretation and ecclesiastical hierarchy”.⁵⁷⁵ Saturus’ depiction of Perpetua is read as a strategic manoeuvre that normalizes and idealizes her. Perpetua speaks formal ecclesiastical language and is subsumed by ecclesiastical concerns, unlike the “genuine” Perpetua of her own earlier sections.⁵⁷⁶ The redactor is perceived as providing Saturus’ vision so as to “bracket” Perpetua and include a suitable “bridge to the closing comments”.⁵⁷⁷ In sum, such analyses suggest that Perpetua’s narrative is personal and genuine, while that of Saturus is contrived and objectively didactic in its use of the vision genre.

Both interpretations, however, feature notable interpretive difficulties and inconsistencies. The vision does not uniquely elevate, distort, or normalize the Perpetua seen elsewhere in the *Passio*. She is a main character in each scene of Saturus’ vision. She is at his side in the journey and entry into Paradise, and she is equally addressed by angels, martyrs, the white-haired man, and elders. These aspects are consistent with the image and text of Perpetua in the whole of the *Passio*. Her first vision features Saturus as her companion in a journey upward to a garden paradise (4.5-4.8). In both her vision and his, Saturus exhorts her (4.6, 11.4). Just as she is victorious in the rhetorically laden debate with her father (3.1-2) and challenges a guard on behalf of the imprisoned martyr company in the redactor’s narrative (16.2-4, discussed below), she demonstrates verbal ability and an authoritative standing in Saturus’ vision. The detail that she speaks in Greek is not wholly unusual, particularly for one who has been “abundantly educated”. Various studies have noted

⁵⁷⁴ Dronke, *Women*, 15.

⁵⁷⁵ Shaw, “Passion”, 310.

⁵⁷⁶ Shaw, “Passion”, 310.

⁵⁷⁷ Shaw, “Passion”, 310.

that the educated elite of the Roman West would have been bilingual in Latin and Greek during this period,⁵⁷⁸ so Perpetua's ability hardly seems a fictional invention.

While a reading that finds Montanist undercurrents in Saturus' narrative supports the opinion of those who view Perpetua as a Montanist prophetess, it is not corroborated by the whole of Saturus' vision. Several scholars have asserted that Saturus' vision does not undermine ecclesiastical authority at all.⁵⁷⁹ Rather, it actually shows a deference to hierarchical leadership. The term used for the bishop, *papa noster*, is both affectionate and respectful.⁵⁸⁰ It is not the less personal term used by Tertullian, for example, in his own critique of the church as "a bunch of bishops" (*numerus episcoporum*).⁵⁸¹ There is no direct appeal to charismatic leadership in Saturus' vision. In fact, angels directly scold the bishop and presbyter for talking with Perpetua and Saturus about their problems: "*You settle dissensions among yourselves*" (13.5). When the bishop is instructed by the angels to reform his argumentative people, an implicit affirmation of his role as leader is on display. Perpetua and Saturus at this point merely *observe*.

Both martyrs are indeed entreated in Opatus and Aspasius' initial request for mediation. A key context is ignored, however, by the attempt to assign subversive or Montanist qualities to this occurrence. Confessors and martyrs held an extraordinarily potent position in contemporary Christian communities, as elucidated earlier in this study.⁵⁸² The spiritual authority given to confessors deserves more attention here than currently exists. Interpretations such as Bhöme's, which assert that the clergy enact a "*reversal of the Church hierarchy*" by throwing themselves at the

⁵⁷⁸ Brown, *Christianity*, 91; Amat, *Passion*, 30.

⁵⁷⁹ E.g., Weinrich, *Spirit*, 227-228; Robeck, *Prophecy*, 15-16, 282; Rankin, *Tertullian*, 139, 162-3.

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. Tertullian *De Pud.* 13.7.

⁵⁸¹ Tertullian *De Pud.* 21.17: *ecclesia spiritus per spiritalem hominem, non ecclesia numerus episcoporum*; cf. Barnes, *Tertullian*, 84.

⁵⁸² Cf. p. 206-207 of this study. E.g., Tertullian *Adv. Prax.* 1.4 speaks of one who inordinately boasts of his confessorship. See also Merdinger, "Carthage", 237; Origen *Ex. Mart.* 30.

martyr's feet,⁵⁸³ is therefore not entirely accurate. A hierarchy of *potentia* and patronage that involved laypeople, clergy, confessors, and martyrs alike certainly was present in Carthage at the time, however informal it may have been.⁵⁸⁴ Tertullian praises confessors as spiritual exemplars, but he also critiques the problems caused by the occasional extremes of common public perception of their significance.⁵⁸⁵ Half a century later, it is this high view of confessors and martyrs that often elicits problems in regards to the readmission of the *lapsi* in Cyprian's Carthage. Conversely, the vision of Saturus can be seen instead as *countering* extreme versions of this form of spiritual esteem and hierarchy.

I suspect that this is the reason why Perpetua and Saturus are depicted as conversing with the two leaders explicitly under a rose arbour (13.4). In the Roman world, roses were particularly associated with funerary activities and memorials for the dead, particularly for those who died young.⁵⁸⁶ The conversation, surrounded by roses, may be a reference to the earlier comment that Saturus and Perpetua have “put off the flesh” as martyrs. Despite the martyrs' spiritual status, angels quickly halt the mediation requested of them. Furthermore, at the end of the vision, Perpetua and Saturus see “brothers as well as other martyrs” in the heavenly garden. This implies that not only martyrs have access to paradise prior to the *parousia*. Such an insinuation counters an apparently common view elucidated by Tertullian: one of his various exhortations to martyrdom include the incitement that “the only key to unlock Paradise is your own life's blood”, whereas for non-martyrs, “the soul is detained in

⁵⁸³ Bhöme, “The Conquest”, 236, emphasis mine.

⁵⁸⁴ Cf. McGowan, *Ancient*, 243.

⁵⁸⁵ Tertullian *De Pud.* 22; notwithstanding Tertullian's slight tendency to hyperbole, his remarks not only display the common perception of a heightened spiritual status of confessors – seemingly somewhat comparable to spiritual benefactors – but also are interesting in that he specifically locates this practice among non-Montanist Christians in Carthage with whom he prefers to disassociate himself.

⁵⁸⁶ Pindar *Frag.* 129; Propertius 4.7.59–62; Brenk, *Clothed*, 87, 102; Toynbee, *Death*, 37; Phillips, “Rosalia”, 1335; *CIL* 6.10264, 6.10239, 6.10248.

safe-keeping in Hades until the return of the Lord”.⁵⁸⁷ Rather than promoting an extraordinarily high view of confessors and martyrs, then, and rather than rebelling against ecclesial leadership structures, Satorus’ vision may, in fact, be read as a didactic attempt at precisely the opposite.

There may be still another contextual layer behind the request of the bishop and presbyter. After all, it should be noteworthy that not all martyrs present in the vision are entreated, nor do all members of the *Passio*’s confessor group appear in this scene. It is Perpetua, not Satorus, who is portrayed as speaking with the two men. I suspect that this confirms that Perpetua possesses a certain status of authority due to her social standing and role as benefactress in the local ecclesia. Like the deferential request of the “brother” and fellow confessor in Perpetua’s narrative (4.1), this depiction seems to assume that Perpetua holds especial influence. The ramifications for and contextual views of a person in the standing of a benefactor (discussed earlier in this study⁵⁸⁸) certainly accord with the presentation of Perpetua in this case.

The intentions of Satorus’ visionary narrative can, therefore, be read as consistent with the whole of the *Passio*. It is important to recall that Satorus is not listed by the redactor among the catechumens initially detained (2.1). He is later described in Perpetua’s text as the “builder” of the catechumens⁵⁸⁹; according to her account, he turned himself in after the initial arrest of the company (4.5). Insofar as can be surmised, then, Satorus seems to have been part of the ecclesiastical network in Carthage.⁵⁹⁰ The vision narrative is consistent with this identity, as its primary concern appears didactic. He employs the visionary account, a narrative style highly rhetorical in itself, to present an authoritative and thinly veiled reprimand. His work

⁵⁸⁷ Tertullian, *De An.* 55.

⁵⁸⁸ See Chapter 3 (section 3.2, p. 70-76) of this study.

⁵⁸⁹ See p. 99 of this study for a discussion of the term and Satorus’ possible role.

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. Tabbernee, “Perpetua”, 421-441; Dunn, *Tertullian*, 13-18.

demonstrably encourages ecclesial order and unity. In this respect, it is similar to the epistolary corpus of Ignatius. Both authors appeal to one of the rhetorical functions of martyrdom: the encouragement of conceptions of church unity.⁵⁹¹ Satorus, furthermore, arguably addresses perceived problems in belief and praxis among the people, particularly in regards to confessors and martyrs. Lastly, there is an indirect confirmation of the *potentia* that corresponds to Perpetua's position as a highly educated benefactress in this community. Like the other authorial voices in the *Passio*, Satorus produces a rhetorical narrative aimed at a specific audience.

Ultimately, rather than serving to normalize the text after Perpetua's account, Satorus' narrative can be seen as providing a literary sequel to Perpetua's four visions. Her first vision portrays the spiritual dangers and ultimate victory in her proclamation, "I am a Christian". She knows she will suffer martyrdom as a result, but this is seen as a reality given to her by God. The second and third visions confirm her faithful deeds and effective prayer as spiritual *potentia*, as she takes on the identity of an imprisoned confessor. Her fourth vision depicts the spiritual realities of the martyrdom events and confirms her victory as a martyr. Satorus' vision then follows, portraying her as one being "taken up", receiving a welcoming blessing from God, and as entering into the garden of Paradise, satisfied and "happier now than I was in the flesh" (12.7). I argue that the visions attempt to portray a spiritual reality as well as a narrative trajectory, even as their authors craft these visions in different ways. If my reading is correct, then it means that Satorus is not only providing the redactor with a didactic narrative to be shared with the ecclesia; he is also partaking in the same act as the redactor: he is furthering the accomplishment of Perpetua's commemorative aims.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. Moss' comments on Ignatius' Letters (*Ancient*, 57).

6.4 *Perpetua's Challenge: Sections 16.2-16.4*

In 16.2-4, the redactor narrates “one further example of her [Perpetua’s] resolve”. In this brief scene, Perpetua is shown boldly acting on behalf of the confessor-company. A confrontation transpires in the military prison, as the official in charge of the prison, a Roman tribune, treats the prisoners with extreme cruelty. Perpetua challenges him “to his face”, arguing that since the group is “the most distinguished of the condemned”, they ought to receive permission to access refreshment. She emphasizes that if the company can be displayed in good health at the upcoming games – games that will be held in the emperor’s honor, no less – then it will be a mark of glory for the tribune. Her appeal to social shame is effective. “Horried”, he capitulates to Perpetua’s request by allowing visitors to again enter this prison to provide refreshment to the detainees. The redactor completes the story with an additional comment: “already by this time, the head of the prison believed” (16.4).

This scene is largely viewed as a dramatic embellishment added by the redactor. Interpretations differ, though, as to what the redactor is attempting to convey and accomplish. Some readings argue that the scene is meant to be a testament to Montanism in displaying Perpetua’s charismatic prophetic authority and “radical theology of martyrdom”.⁵⁹² Heffernan even proposes that the redactor depicts Perpetua as motivated by the desire to maintain “her body as a worthy vessel” so as to be an “acceptable sacrifice”.⁵⁹³ There are, nevertheless, other ways to analyze this portion of the redactor’s work. It is important to note the literary connections in this section to Perpetua’s narrative. Perpetua’s rhetorical skills in verbal debate have already been on display (3.1-3). Pudens, the officer in charge of the military prison, perceived the “great virtue” of the martyr company and is depicted as allowing

⁵⁹² Heffernan, *Passion*, 314-318; Butler, *New Prophecy*, 84-86.

⁵⁹³ Heffernan, *Passion*, 318.

visitors to provide refreshment (9.1). The change in situation for the group is notable, as Perpetua's previous section noted that they were "kept in chains" (8.1). The redactor seems to be embellishing the events of 8.1 and 9.1. Instead of perceiving the *virtus* of the imprisoned group (9.1), the unnamed military official of the redactor's account is directly confronted by Perpetua (16.2).

It would normally be extremely unlikely for a prisoner to have access to a military official in charge of the prison, an administrator called here a *tribunus castigatus*,⁵⁹⁴ were it not for Perpetua's noble status. The redactor can be viewed as again paying homage to Perpetua's role as benefactress. Like the panegyric of contemporary commemorative inscriptions, this description of Perpetua's "loftiness of spirit" presents to the *Passio* audience another exemplary undertaking of a benefactor—that of advocating on behalf of those whose status prevents them from defending themselves. Her rhetorical oratory is received by the official with hyperbolic shame, and the group is allowed visitors once more. The additional final detail presented by the redactor, indicating the newly found belief of the head of the prison himself, again seems to present a situation that highlights the exemplary status of Perpetua. This detail seems to overtly allude to Acts 16.34 and serves as a complement to the redactor's prologue. In Acts, the head jailer who had imprisoned Paul and Silas comes to believe. This *Passio* parallel to other famous confessors presents Perpetua and company as "recent examples" of faithfulness and a "testimony of God's favor" (1.1). The redactor does not assert that this recent occurrence is superior to the older example.⁵⁹⁵ Rather, the old is used allusively to legitimize that which is recent. Ultimately, throughout section 16, the redactor's dramatic style, embellished content, and use of rhetorical tools such as alliteration, allusion, hyperbole, and irony can be

⁵⁹⁴ For information on this administrative position, see the detailed comments of Heffernan, *Passion*, 314.

⁵⁹⁵ Contra Heffernan's contention in regards to the redactor's polemical prologue (*Passion*, 313).

seen as contributing to his generic task. That is, this section further demonstrates his literary creation of a commemorative work aimed to join the collective memory of the ecclesia.

6.5 Most Blessed Martyrs: Sections 18.1-21.10

The redactor's depiction of the martyrdom events comprises section 18.1-21.10 of the *Passio*.

- 18.1-3: On the day of the martyrdom event, the group is led from the military prison to the amphitheatre.
- 18.4-6: At the arena, the group is to be dressed in the costumes of religious priests and priestesses. Perpetua refuses, arguing with the military officer and convincing him otherwise. The group then enters the arena without costume.
- 18.7-9: The initial actions of several martyrs in the arena demonstrate their courage and resilience. Perpetua sings, and Revocatus, Saturninus, and Saturus gesture and warn the crowd and the governor himself that God will eventually condemn them. The martyrs are scourged as a result.
- 19.1-6: Each male member of the group is depicted as receiving the death he desired. Their encounters with various beasts are depicted. Saturus remains unhurt.
- 20.1-7: Perpetua and Felicitas are brought into the arena, but the crowd is horrified at their nudity. They are clothed before they face a wild cow. Perpetua is tossed to the ground, and Felicitas is trampled. They survive and stand, and then they are called to the *Porta Sanvivaria*.
- 20.8-10: Here Perpetua "comes to" and is unaware that she had been tossed by the cow. She speaks to a gathered group of catechumens and, with her final words, exhorts them to "stand fast in the faith, love one another, and not be led astray by our suffering".
- 21.1-7: Saturus' suffering is further depicted. He speaks with the tribune Pudens: "remember me, remember the faith, and be strengthened, not disturbed, by this". Saturus then dips Pudens' ring in his blood "as a memorial".
- 21.8-10: The crowd demands that the martyrs yet remaining are to be killed with a sword. Saturus is the first to climb onto the platform for execution, and the last is Perpetua. She must guide the trembling gladiator's sword to her throat, which the redactor interprets as an indication that she could not be killed unless she was willing.

A dramatic rhythmic pronouncement begins this portion of the narrative and sets the theme that will refrain throughout its content: “The day of their victory dawned”. While the reference to victory continues Perpetua’s central leitmotif, the redactor’s style is far less subtle than hers. His flamboyant depictions present the unfolding events like a dramatic novella. The lines intermingle the redactor’s omniscient commentary with the account of events, so that the sections predictably interpret and impart meaning for the audience as the ludic events unfold. Overt allusions and mimetic gestures assist his attempts to influence his audience, for they not only guide expectation but also implicitly convey similarities between “older examples” (*vetera exempla*, 1.1) and the *Passio*.

Scholars have produced a wide diversity of analytical comment upon these sections of the text. By far, the most common refrain among such studies is that the redactor’s work is disingenuous, particularly in regards to Perpetua. Yet his task is hagiographical in nature. An “accurate” depiction in his perception would not have excluded the use of multiple rhetorical devices to portray what he may have seen as the wider reality. Thus, as indicated in my earlier section on methodology,⁵⁹⁶ I do not aim to speculate whether the martyrs “actually” performed the actions that the redactor describes. This study is more interested in an exploration of how the *Passio* scenes are portrayed. Sections 18-21 certainly provide a fascinating consideration in this regard.

As the section begins, the prisoners are led to the arena “if trembling, with joy rather than fear”. The redactor’s interpretive guidance for his audience not only again presents the martyr company as without weakness, but it also may here corroborate that indeed there are some among his audience who saw this event (1.6). If the group was observed to be trembling, the redactor would likely have attempted to remove any

⁵⁹⁶ See discussion in Chapter 2 (p. 47) of this study.

suspicion that they were less than perfectly willing and courageous martyrs. As usual, the redactor's focus returns to Perpetua. As she walks from the prison to the arena, she is portrayed as displaying a glowing countenance, direct gaze, and calm step (18.2). This is interesting, for the *Mart. Poly.* describes Polycarp as being courageous and grace-filled in countenance, as maintaining eye-contact with the mob, and as calm when he himself is in the amphitheatre.⁵⁹⁷ Furthermore, just as the *Mart. Poly.* emphasizes Polycarp's willing submission to martyrdom,⁵⁹⁸ the redactor repeatedly reiterates the willing compliance of his own subjects (18.5; 21.7-8; 21.10).

The martyrs are opprobriously costumed in the priestly dress of Saturn and Ceres⁵⁹⁹ as they stand at the arena gates prior to their entry. This mode of punishment within the arena is well attested in antiquity; it carried additional connotations of shame in that even the identities of those condemned were stripped away.⁶⁰⁰ Here, Perpetua again argues with a Roman official on behalf of the martyr company (18.4-6). She contends that the martyr company has already refused to participate in Roman *religio*. It was for this refusal that they were condemned, but they agreed to such consequences in order to maintain this freedom (*libertas*). If they are forced now to participate, Perpetua rhetorically contends, the legal agreement would be technically offended (*hoc vobiscum pacti sumus*, 18.5). The tribune immediately grants concession; "injustice recognized justice", the redactor comments. This parallel to 16.2-16.4 displays Perpetua again defending the cause of the martyr company by means of oratory. The redactor here calls her *generosa illa* (18.4), a term frequently used in Latin literary works and inscriptions to describe exemplary character; in imperial-era literary works, this word is most commonly used for

⁵⁹⁷ *Mart. Poly.* 12.1 and 9.2.

⁵⁹⁸ E.g., *Mart. Poly.* 7.1 and 13.3.

⁵⁹⁹ Heffernan, *Passion*, 330-331, notes that during the Severan era, Ceres was a goddess favoured by the lower classes, increasing the insult to Perpetua.

⁶⁰⁰ See Coleman, "Fatal Charades", 44-73.

noblewomen who have been unjustly accused of a crime or committed suicide after rape.⁶⁰¹ Once more Perpetua is presented as an exemplar of courage and, in particular, as an ideal benefactress. Bold speech that victoriously challenges Roman authorities is possible for her even in the moments before her martyrdom.

As the group walks into the arena, the redactor directly gestures to Perpetua's earlier visionary narratives. "She was already was stepping on the Egyptian's head", as she sings (*psallebat*, 18.7) upon entering through the gates. This action detail serves several functions. Its blatant irony furthers the theme of victory: the ritual *pompa* music that would have commenced amphitheatre events is replaced by a noblewoman's song. The reference to her vision displays yet again that the redactor is presenting his portion of the account as completing that of Perpetua. Lastly, because only Perpetua sings, not the entire group, this action may be an additional brief nod to her status. The education for the female elite included instruction in the art of song as part of a woman's cultured refinement. Sallust describes a trifold educational content in his depiction of the accomplished Sempronia: her cultivation was such that she was learned (*docta*) in both Greek and Latin literature, had an ability to sing (*psallere*), and was capable in composition (*posse versus facere*).⁶⁰²

As Perpetua sings, the males in the martyr group perform ironic gestures towards the audience: "they were saying, 'you condemn us, but God will condemn you'" (18.8). A similar subversively ironic action in an arena is performed in the account of Polycarp's martyrdom. Here, Polycarp shakes his fists at the crowd and says, "Away with the atheists".⁶⁰³ The similarities of settings, martyrs' hand gestures, the depiction of the surrounding mob, and the appeal to irony is fascinating and, it

⁶⁰¹ E.g., Suetonius *Tib.* 49 (here, to depict Lepida, a noblewoman victimized by unjust charges and a penalty of death amidst the political maneuverings of the consul Quirinus); Ovid *Met* 13.457; Cic. *Parad.*, 20; CIL v.2.7116.

⁶⁰² Sallust *Bel. Cat.* 25.

⁶⁰³ *Mart. Poly.* 9.2.

would seem, beyond coincidence. The redactor appears to be crafting another mimetic comparison between his description and that of the *Mart. Poly.* The similarities continue when the animal chosen for the torture of Perpetua and Felicitas is announced. “The evil one had prepared” (*diabolus praeparavit*, 20.1) a ferocious cow,⁶⁰⁴ just as the various tortures undergone by the martyr group in the *Mart. Poly.* are explicitly strategies of the evil one (διάβολος).⁶⁰⁵

Among the most critiqued features of the redactor’s text have been the seemingly bizarre scenes that detail Perpetua’s death. Tunic-straightening, hair re-pinning, unconsciousness while “caught up in the spirit and in ecstasy”, cogent exhortation of other catechumens, and participation in guiding the sword that causes her death all make an appearance on the stage of the redactor’s dramatic narrative. Each detail cultivates a specific image of Perpetua, but scholarly opinion varies as to the redactor’s motivations and intimations. As she is tossed by the animal and lands on the ground, Perpetua immediately pulls her ripped tunic over her thighs and searches for a pin to re-fasten her loosened hair (20.4-5). The redactor not only narrates but also specifically interprets these actions: she desires to appear neither immodestly clad nor in mourning. His comments have received the censure of many modern interpreters. Such comments range from Salisbury’s skeptical remark, “It is hard to imagine that Perpetua would have been thinking of modesty or of the appropriate hairstyle”,⁶⁰⁶ to Dronke’s reprimand that the “certainly fictitious” words portray Perpetua in a “fit of prudery”.⁶⁰⁷ One study even indicted the redactor for

⁶⁰⁴ Heffernan, *Passion*, 344, and Shaw, “Perpetua”, 287-290, discuss the elements of torture in these events, including the animals, and explain them as calculated efforts employed publicly to shame those condemned.

⁶⁰⁵ *Mart. Poly.* 3.1.

⁶⁰⁶ Salisbury, *Perpetua’s*, 143.

⁶⁰⁷ Dronke, *Women*, 15.

indulging in a sexual fantasy by pausing for a strip-tease presentation of Perpetua's exposed body.⁶⁰⁸

A handful of other readings emphasize cultural context and view the redactor's description as a report of Perpetua's actual actions that day. Petroff interprets the scene as blatantly subversive in that "to a world in which a married woman with loosened hair and torn clothing was the image of grief, Perpetua's gesture denied both grief and death".⁶⁰⁹ Prinzivalli suggests that the adjustment of hair and dress were simply "conditioned reflexes" for a woman of Perpetua's status.⁶¹⁰ Indeed, self-presentation confirmed and maintained social persona: adornment of both clothing and hairstyle carried cultural weight and maintained an ability to manipulate attitudes.⁶¹¹ Various forms of ornamentation and deportment spoke a recognizable language, one bound up in mores and hierarchies of power. In the amphitheatre situation, both status and sexual probity were threatened in various ways. Such interpretations, therefore, do seem consistent with the Perpetua of the *Passio*. The narrative, however, arguably displays evidence that there are additional authorial aims and strategies at hand. In order to explore these, the remainder of the narrative must be kept in view.

After she endures injuries from the cow, she stands and then gives her hand to Felicitas, who is still on the ground after being trampled. As they stand, the crowd is satisfied, and they are called to the *Porta Sanavivaria*. Christians who have not been arrested await Perpetua and hold her upright. Here, she "awakes", unaware that she had already faced the animal. "She had been caught up in the Spirit and in ecstasy (*adeo in spiritu et in extasi fuerat*)", the redactor explains (20.8). Several commentators pause at this point, emphasizing that the reference to Spirit and ecstasy

⁶⁰⁸ De Nie, "Consciousness Fecund", 122.

⁶⁰⁹ Petroff, *Medieval*, 63.

⁶¹⁰ Prinzivalli, "Perpetua", 131.

⁶¹¹ See Olson, *Dress*, 70-76. Like clothing, hairstyle functioned as a statement of social identity; the elaborate hairstyles of wealthy women during the second and third centuries would have required pins to hold them in place.

are obvious manifestations of Montanism in the account.⁶¹² I would suggest that some hesitation is in order. Firstly, no oracular utterances are spoken or interpreted while she is portrayed in this state. Secondly, a significant *et* makes the clarification that she is in ecstasy *and also* in the Spirit. This is an essential distinction to be acknowledged by readers, for it corresponds to what seems to be a general separate treatment of the two in New Testament accounts. For example, Acts 22.17 features “ecstasy” (ἐκστάσει) as experienced by Paul, while Rev. 4.2 portrays its author as caught up “in the Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι). The presence of both are certainly within the norms of early Christian traditions.

While still in the doorway, Perpetua calls for a group of catechumens, a gathering presumably comprised of those not in her confessor group. Here the redactor depicts Perpetua’s last spoken words, three exhortations that are expressively allusive. “You must all stand firm in the faith, and love one another, and do not go astray because of our suffering” (*In fide state, et invicem omnes diligite, et passionibus nostris ne scandalizemini*, 20.10). The first invective invokes a common Pauline epistolary refrain.⁶¹³ Directives from 1 Peter 2.17 and John 13.34 are evoked by the next exhortation. The last indirectly echoes Christ’s words in John 16.1, “I have spoken these things to you so that you might not go astray” (σκανδαλισθῆτε). The tripartite configuration of imperatives spoken by Perpetua is fascinating and, when viewed as an essential part within the entire narrative of her death, provides further evidence of the redactor’s strategies and intentions.

Meanwhile, at another doorway, Saturus addresses the military official Pudens. “Farewell. Remember the faith and also me” (*memento fidei et mei*, 21.4). He then requests Pudens’ ring, dips it in his own blood, and returns it. The redactor’s

⁶¹² Tabbernee, *Prophets*, 77-78; Butler, *New Prophecy*, 91.

⁶¹³ στήκετε/*state*, in 1 Corinthians 16.13, Ephesians 6.14, Galatians 5.1, Philippians 4.1.

omniscient voice here interprets, “he left it as an oath and as a memorial of the bloodshed” (*pignus relinquens illi et memoriam sanguinis*, 21.5). The scene is curious, particularly in that a material object is associated with the act of remembering both the faith and Satorius himself. The ring is a *pignus*, a term used in terms of items of legal guaranty, security pawns, and hostages. *Memoria* is equally complex and associated with that which is recalled and transmitted without end; the term is equally applied to that which is committed to the mental faculty of memory, to written accounts relaying the past, as well as to public monuments.⁶¹⁴ Some interpretations dismiss the ring as an unremarkable “memento”, while other analyses assume that the ring is given within an already developed Christian praxis revolving around relics.⁶¹⁵ While the extent of practices involving relics is not known at this time, the ring is nonetheless assumed to serve as a commemorative object that both instigates and participates with the act of recollection. Satorius makes a clear connection between his martyrdom and “the faith”, thus merging his account with an account of the faith. The ring, as a *pignus*, can be viewed as placing responsibility upon Pudens for the *memoria* of the acts of the martyrs that day. In these ways, the ring can be viewed as a near parallel to Perpetua’s text. That is, she leaves a material item that demonstrates her suffering, and she has commissioned the redactor to maintain and participate in its commemorative functions.

The final deed of Perpetua is performed on a platform, as she guides the hand of the executioner to her throat. This act serves to close the ludic event, since she is the last of the company to be executed. In her exploit of willing the deed that is her

⁶¹⁴ E.g., Suetonius *Claud.* 1.5: Claudius was “not satisfied by inscribing an epitaph in verse, written by himself, upon his tomb; he even wrote an account (*memoriam*) of his life in prose”. Cf. Livy 5.21 for *memoriam* as that which is handed down; Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* 2.21.6, 4.6.1; Cicero, *Brut.* 3.14; Cornelius Nepos *Han.* 8.2.

⁶¹⁵ Moss, *Ancient*, 68, says it is only a memento; Salisbury, *The Blood*, 36-37, asserts that Satorius knew it would be used to perform miracle; Heffernan, *Passion*, 352-353, argues that it is both a token memento and a proto-relic, an object “brought out” in the church’s liturgical commemoration of the martyrs.

final demise, the figure of Perpetua is able to both maintain and complete the narrative of victory that was initiated in her own account. When considered as a whole, the death scenes of this portion of the *Passio* bear strong resemblance to dramatic scenarios from Christian and secular literature. In addition to the aforementioned similarities to portions of the *Mart. Poly.*, two secular works provide descriptions that seem echoed in the *Passio*'s ludic events. Euripides' depiction of the death of Polyxena in *Hecuba* provides a number of parallels to the redactor's work in regards to Perpetua's death.⁶¹⁶ Polyxena's noble demise occurs when Achilles' son offers her as a sacrifice to his father. On display in front of the Achaean army, she shouts, "Of my own free will I die!...If you aim your sword at my neck, this throat is here and ready". The narrator here comments, "Even in death, she was careful to fall with grace, hiding from the gaze of men what must be hidden". Another literary work, one more contemporary to Perpetua, may model its own main character after that of Euripides. The virtuous heroine of the Hellenistic novel *Leukippe and Kleitophon* is kidnapped by Egyptian bandits, who plan to sacrifice her publicly. As her death approaches, she proclaims to her executors, "Here is my neck – slice through! Watch a new contest: a single woman competes with all the engines of torture and wins every round".⁶¹⁷ Cultural traditions surrounding the dramatic, unjust, and noble deaths of exemplary women, then, ought to be kept in view in regards to the redactor's depiction of Perpetua, in addition to Judeo-Christian martyrdom traditions.

Ultimately, these details culminate to make the case that the redactor can be viewed as drawing from established dramatic genres to style his account of the amphitheatre events in sections 18.1-21.10. Throughout this depiction, the narrative maintains allusive gesture to other works already commemorated in the memory

⁶¹⁶ Euripides *Hecuba* lines 545-570.

⁶¹⁷ Achilles Tatius 6.20-22, transl. Winkler and Stephens.

traditions of Christians in Carthage. This creatively fosters connections between this text and collective memory and thereby bolsters the redactor's case that the *Passio* martyrs are new examples of faithfulness. The redactor's narrative of Perpetua's final actions during the events of the games features an array of seeming curiosities and hyperbole, including a walk into the amphitheatre, bold rhetorical defense, diabolical torture, a final speech of exhortation, and a willing victorious demise. Each element serves as a means of legitimization.

The absence of reference to another earlier martyr account, namely, the one depicted in the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*,⁶¹⁸ is here deserving of comment. Why would the *Passio* redactor not incorporate the deeds of this exemplary group of martyrs into his narrative in the same way that he gestures to the *Mart. Poly.*? I suspect it is for one of several possible reasons. The most plausible cause seems to be that the account simply had not yet become known in the ecclesiastical circles of Carthage. While established relationships and direct lines of communication certainly existed between Christians in Gaul, Asia, and Rome during this time,⁶¹⁹ the extent and nature of direct ties between Christians in Gaul and Carthage are unknown. The *Letter*, directly addressed to the churches in Asia and Phrygia, might not yet have been extensively disseminated beyond its destination. Tertullian, whose encomium for martyrdom often refers to heroic examples, can possibly serve to corroborate this; his works never refer to the martyrs or persecution of the *Letter*. While texts certainly *could* travel quickly and with ease at this time, as discussed earlier in this study, it was not always the case that they *did*.

⁶¹⁸ Preserved in Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.3-5.2.8.

⁶¹⁹ E.g., While writing in Gaul, Irenaeus demonstrates awareness of the martyrdoms of both Justin and Polycarp (*Adv. Haer.* 1.28.1, 3.3.4), and he quotes from Ignatius' letter *To the Romans* (*Adv. Haer.* 5.28.4). There are two men from Asia that are martyrs in the *Letter* (Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.17, 5.1.49). See also Moss, *Ancient*, 100-106.

Another possible reason for the lack of reference is that, if the *Letter* had reached Carthage, it was not yet considered an established or ancient *exemplum* of the faith among the works that the *Passio* redactor called *vetera fidei exempla* (1.1). Thus, at least among the *Passio*'s audience in Carthage, it was not yet given the same memory traditions that were already bestowed on other works. A third possibility is that the redactor did not aim to create ties between the *Passio* and the *Letter*. The female protagonist of the *Letter* is a slave by the name of Blandina. Her bravery is depicted as hyperbolically ironic in light of her "weak and insignificant" status.⁶²⁰ Over the course of the narrative, as her identity is completely surmounted by that of Christ, it is clear that she is an *imitatrix Christi*. It is Christ who is the "invincible athlete" during Blandina's tortures, not Blandina herself, and those who look at her see Christ instead.⁶²¹ The portrayal of Perpetua contrasts with that of Blandina in a number of significant ways. Perpetua's victory is never ironic, and her identity remains distinct and at the forefront of the *Passio* narratives. Neither do the sporadic *Passio* portrayals of the slave Felicitas show any similarities to the *Letter*'s Blandina. If the *Letter* was known in Christian circles of Carthage at the time, the *Passio* seems emphatically to ignore it. Could this be a window into the politics of *exempla*? Any contention for such a possibility would be *ex silencio* in numerous ways, but the possibility is a tantalizing one. The strongest argument at present seems to be that the *Letter* was simply unknown in Carthaginian Christian circles at the time of the *Passio* events.

⁶²⁰ Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.42.

⁶²¹ E.g., those who look at Blandina do not see her but Christ (Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.41). See discussion in Moss, *Ancient*, 113.

6.6 Conclusion

In an attempt to challenge oversimplified readings of the *Passio*, Ronsse classified the text as “more literature than transcript”.⁶²² Indeed the *Passio* account is arguably more unified, rhetorical, and consciously crafted than many commentaries assume. Yet this chapter suggests that the three authorial voices of the text combine to present a narrative that is more complex in its genre than Ronsse’s assessment would make it seem. With regard to early Christian martyr accounts, in fact, the insights of social memory theory complicate boundaries between “transcript” and “literature”. I propose that the *Passio* redactor puts forth his portions of the martyr account as seen through the lenses of collective memory and as written in the styles of expression appropriate to the commemorative genre.

The redactor’s interpretive omniscient voice guides the audience’s perception of every detail, but his polemic need not be viewed as disingenuous or as coercing Perpetua’s account. The redactor indicates that some among his audience actually saw the event take place (1.6). If this is indeed the case, a postulation can be made that the general events in his narration of the games may have indeed occurred. Whether or not this conjecture is accurate, the narrative itself ought to be viewed as true to its aims. It never claims to be a transcript. Rather than simply coming to the conclusion that his work is “literature”, a close reading of the text suggests that perhaps “literary *testimonium*” is a more appropriate description of the redactor’s account of the martyrdom. As a *testimonium*, more than a “document” is implied.

The work is aimed to become part of the commemorative traditions of the ecclesia. While this can be seen throughout his account, it is particularly explicit in both the prologue and the epilogue. Because it is a literary narrative, the reader can expect rhetorical trope and strategic styling. As suitable to the encoded and

⁶²² Ronsse, “Rhetoric”, 298.

deferential language of a recipient of benefaction, and as proper for expressions of praise in the genre of commemoration, the redactor portrays Perpetua and her companions as *exempla nova* during the events of the arena. In doing so, he maintains the noble image of Perpetua to the very end of her life. She was throughout her own account exemplary and victorious via assorted literary tropes. She is all the more so in the literary *testimonium* that depicts her death. The redactor may be viewed as faithful to his commission (16.1). While Satorius' vision is in one regard highly didactic, it also can be seen as deliberately participating in the advancement of Perpetua's commemorative aims.

Ultimately, as the *Passio* redactor crafts a literary frame for Perpetua's own memory-making account, collective memory is already providing his interpretive framework. *Passio* studies have largely neglected the possibility that the redactor's text seems to be a participation with an established genre of commemorative accounts within the Christian community. In what I contend is an attempt to situate the *Passio* within this genre, the redactor's work is, like Perpetua's, an endeavor in narrative traditioning.

CHAPTER 7
“THEY WILL BEAR WITNESS”: CONCLUSION

*Historical material is transformed into exempla through a series of techniques
designed, amongst other things, to represent events as relevant beyond their specific
historical context, as conforming to useful patterns.*⁶²³

Rebecca Langlands

*Anyone who praises, honors, and worships His glory ought to read
these exempla for the edification of the Church.*
Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis, epilogue, 21.11

The commemorative narrative set forth in the *Passio* defines the scope of *what* is to be remembered, but the traditions of collective memory largely define *how* its story is presented. The *Passio* contains a martyrdom account unique on its own terms. Yet in every way this account is situated within already existing textual and liturgical commemorative traditions. The entire work, in fact, is directed towards the reception of these very commemorations, and it employs various strategies to achieve that end. It is, in sum, a dazzling display of tradition in action. For this reason, this study has proposed that the *Passio* ought to be read as work of commemorative narrative traditioning. The account's events are made present as edifying *exempla* within compelling narratives – narratives that are intentionally, rhetorically communicated in such a way as to seem associated with and belonging within the memorialized past.

The memory of “ancient examples of faithfulness” (*vetera fidei exempla*, 1.1) joins the past, present, and future of its remembering community. These examples, or *exempla*, include the martyrdom accounts themselves, the events narrated in these stories, and the main characters therein.⁶²⁴ As Langlands' analysis of Roman *exempla* observes, “This embracing of form, content, and purpose in one idea is no accident; it

⁶²³ Langlands, *Sexual Morality*, 79.

⁶²⁴ Langlands, *Sexual Morality*, 79.

reflects the Roman conceptualization of the interrelation of great men, great deeds, a great past, great moral qualities, a great moral tradition, and a great literary and rhetorical tradition”.⁶²⁵ The *exempla* unequivocally relay a message, for they are presented with a hermeneutic, however subtle or overt, by those who narrate and perpetuate them. *Exempla* thus “represent events as relevant beyond their specific historical context”.⁶²⁶ Each authorial voice in the *Passio* demonstrates awareness of the memorialized significance of martyrdom, particularly within their Christian context. Each author operates within norms appropriate to their identity (e.g., Perpetua and benefactory roles for the elite), and each holds and rhetorically appeals to certain expectations of their assumed audience. When the *Passio* is viewed as a work situated within the realities of collective memory, the vivid literary embellishment and rhetorical stratagem employed by each author come to light. Interpretation of the *Passio*’s fascinating but seemingly strange content thus greatly benefits from a reading that is attuned to the dynamics of memory.

The narrative landscape of the *Passio* circumvents simplistic classification as it ever draws readers into its captivating trivocal scenery. Over the centuries, as these readers have sought strategies to assist their textual exploration, various disciplinary approaches have been employed to read the account. As Chapter 2 has noted, even a brief survey of commentaries exposes the variety of interpretative methods and conclusions that have been proposed with regard to this particular text. From this vantage point, various trends and paths, some posing more difficulties than others, can be chronicled and examined. Many studies view the *Passio* foremost as a bricolage compilation comprised of a recent convert’s dream-diary, a presbyter’s thinly veiled narrative admonition to his community, and an overly enthused polemical presentation

⁶²⁵ Langlands, *Sexual Morality*, 79.

⁶²⁶ Langlands, *Sexual Morality*, 79.

of the story of their recent martyrdom. Since most previous analyses view Perpetua's account foremost as "diary", it is a common perception of her portions of the *Passio* that they are personal, authentically reflective of her experiences, and literarily without artifice. Her narrative, including the visionary portions, is typically seen as innocent of rhetoric and of complex authorial intentions. Since she is described as a catechumen, her text is assumed to be largely unexposed to other Christian traditions and texts. This has made her work particularly vulnerable to psychoanalytical readings of varying measures, especially readings that bring highly engendered assumptions to bear on the text and person of Perpetua. Another result is that the redactor's work is often viewed as coercing, dominating, or misrepresenting Perpetua and her account. The redactor's sections are seen as personal polemic that frames - literally and symbolically - Perpetua's work and person. Alternatively, a small number of scholars have suggested that the *Passio* demonstrates the characteristics of Montanism. In these readings, Perpetua's account is the "prison diary" and oracular dream utterances of a prophetess, which the redactor shares and uses as evidence for the validity of the Montanist movement.

Two other interpretative approaches have emerged in recent decades. Firstly, the *Passio* has been viewed by a small but increasing number of scholars as a coherently structured, rhetorically complex, stylized, and didactic hagiographical text. The majority of scholars who examine the account in this light contend that the work is monovocal - that is, one author has adroitly crafted three "voices", loosely basing the story on an actual martyrdom event. While such analyses diverge in regards to the theological affinities and intentions expressed in this composition, the ways in which they challenge predominant suppositions in regards to the "simplicity" of the portions of the work attributed to Perpetua ought to be carefully considered. The second recent evaluation of the text is represented in the work of Elizabeth Castelli, which

appropriates the methodologies of social memory theory to examine the *Passio*. Her analysis of the text focuses upon Perpetua's account, and the emphasis here centers on the ways that collective memory shaped Perpetua's act of "self-writing". Castelli contends that Perpetua was increasingly submissive to the reality that her "diary" would ultimately be taken up into the corporate narrative of her community. The significance that Castelli places on the collective dimensions of representing and remembering the past, and her suggestion that Perpetua was aware of the memory traditions of the ecclesia, undoubtedly demand further deliberation.

The significance of social memory theory for biblical and early Christian studies is increasingly being recognized, but its methodological constructs have yet to be thoroughly applied to the *Passio* in light of the text's secular and ecclesial contexts. The summary of the theoretical framework of social memory in Chapter 2 has suggested that this approach offers significant potential in a reading of the *Passio*. This is particularly the case for Perpetua's narrative, because it allows for her portion of the text to be viewed in light of its internal consistency, literary complexity, and rhetorical intentionality, and it pays heed to the ways that Perpetua's layered social contexts have influenced her authorial act. This thesis therefore operates within the understanding that collective memory "animates the historiographical and hermeneutical activity" of each of the *Passio* authors, most notably Perpetua.⁶²⁷ This framework has allowed me to propose a genre for the text that is more specific than the ambiguous classification of *hypomnēmata* (or *commentarius*) suggested by Castelli and Heffernan.⁶²⁸ In advocating that the *Passio* is a work of commemorative narrative traditioning, I emphasize the memorializing techniques and aims that guide the rhetorically styled narrative of the entire text. The *Passio* can be viewed as at

⁶²⁷ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 136-137; this quotation is applied by Castelli to all authors of martyr accounts, not the *Passio* specifically.

⁶²⁸ Castelli, *Martyrdom*, 91, 253; Heffernan, "Philology", 320-321. See p. 41 of this study.

once participating *with* and implying a worthiness to *be perceived as belonging within* the commemorative traditions of the ecclesial community. The *Passio*'s *exempla* are memorialized in a narrative that is rhetorically placed into a relationship with the remembering present via the remembered past.

The *Passio*'s memory work ought to be viewed in light of contemporary social dynamics, as these dynamics influence the commemorative strategies and content therein. For that reason, Chapter 3 contains an examination of significant contextual social realities. This includes an exploration of the implications of Perpetua's elite status, including the norms of benefaction and the plausible content of an "abundant" education. Aspects of Christianity in Carthage, including contemporary realities and ideologies of martyrdom, catechetical practices, and Christian literary culture and textuality, are also essential for an examination of the *Passio* text. Unfortunately, these considerably complex topics are often neglected in *Passio* scholarship. This is possibly due to the general overabundance of attention to the proposal that the text's contents exhibit attributes of Montanism. Chapter 3 highlights the problematic nature of that contention, as the movement's demarcating characteristics are, in reality, absent from the text. Instead, the theological assumptions within the lines of the *Passio* share more in common with those of Irenaeus, Hermas, and other early Christian traditions typically considered to be "proto-orthodox". Ultimately, a reconsideration of Perpetua's portions of the *Passio* in light of her layered contexts has been deemed necessary.

Chapters 4 and 5 have therefore specifically focused on a reading of Perpetua's account in light of my contentions, and heretofore unresolved exegetical quandaries were examined. An affirmation that Perpetua authored a narrative in the first person perspective need not consequentially imply that the account is her "diary". It indicates instead that the portion attributed to her is mediated by *her* authorial intent,

her rhetorical discourse to achieve that intent, and the nexus of social status and educated abilities – both secular and Christian – that informed her task. Interpretation of the seemingly peculiar locutions, complex patterns, and unusual images of her account reveal a highly allusive literary narrative worthy of no less complex analysis than other contemporary texts. From the dramatic and determinative opening scene with her father to the last vision's definitive victory in the arena and a final mandate for her co-author, every element of the narrative is portrayed and interpreted by Perpetua through the lenses of her social conditioning and her consequential intentions. Her work may be viewed as an act of self-writing, specifically one quite cognizant of her dually potent circumstances as a benefactress and a confessor-martyr. As such, Perpetua's account cannot be viewed as innocent of intentional rhetorical maneuver, nor is it the textual victim of an independently acting redactor. Instead, her narrative voice defiantly asserts *Christiania sum* and allusively gestures her audience towards an ultimate victory that is at once her own but also one in which her audience participates in their act of remembering. As she authors a text that aims at public commemoration, she appeals to contemporary mnemo-technique. The ability of her narrative imagery implicitly to cultivate relationships with an audience as well as with authoritative texts and established practices ought not be underestimated. This is because, firstly, a rhetorically sanctified relationship is constructed by the image-based intermingling of a potent martyr narrative and authoritative texts and practices familiar to her audience; secondly, this striking imagery acts as a hermeneutical tool for her audience. Thus the pervasive use of literary models both informs and augments her textual achievement – an achievement that I contend has not previously been adequately explored or highlighted.

In the exegetical work of Chapters 4 and 5, Perpetua's narrative is shown to employ a complex array of literary tools and textual traditions, which in themselves

reflect categories informed by her contextual identities. The account displays what appears to be an advanced knowledge of various Christian texts and teachings working in conjunction with the skills acquired in her classical education. Distinct rhetorical tools and narrative styling converge in order to demonstrate that Perpetua expects an audience. Traditions surrounding the efficacy of faithful confessors' prayers are both assumed and participated within as her account unfolds. Her unified narrative establishes and demonstrates a leitmotif of victorious triumph, thus presenting a public portrait for commemoration. Texts such as The *Shepherd* of Hermas and Clement of Alexandria's *Exh. Bapt.* and *Paed.* are repeatedly followed and fulfilled within Perpetua's novelistic narrative. Allusion frequently acts as a hermeneutical tool within her text; without an awareness of this trope, images would otherwise be viewed as oneiric or bizarre. This can be seen, for example, in Perpetua's post-baptismal desire for "endurance of the flesh", and in the association of cheese and suffering in her first vision account.

The last section attributed to Perpetua's hand includes her interpretation of not merely her final vision but also her entire narrative: "I knew that victory would be mine" (*sciebam mihi esse victoriam*, 10.14). Her concluding imperative commission indicates that her purposes will be completed, rather than created, by another's depiction of the spectacle that is to come. All of this arguably culminates in order to indicate that Perpetua writes about herself in a purposeful, embellished discourse that constructs relationships with texts, teachings, and genres already established in the collective memory of her community.

Chapter 6 of this study has explored the other narrative voices of the *Passio*, including the prologue and epilogue, the depiction of the martyrdom events, additional brief narrative portions authored by the redactor, and the vision of Saturus. Each of these sections directly participates with the major themes and aim of the work, and the

reading undertaken in Chapter 6 emphasizes the unity of the *Passio* composition. While Perpetua's text employs literary methods to present an intentional narrative trajectory for an ecclesial audience of which she is very much aware, Saturus transparently proffers didactic intonations to this same community in the form of a single visionary account. The redactor's persuasive, liturgically located commemoration overtly associates the *Passio* martyrs with previous *exempla*. The memorializing work of the redactor employs the mnemo-technique of a dramatic and highly rhetorically styled narrative to present Perpetua and company as within the corporate tradition of exemplary martyrs. The brief work of Saturus affirms but also limits the significance of confessors, and the ways in which it highlights Perpetua's role accord with the norms of benefaction. In both of these aspects, it is clear that Saturus expects the account to be read within the context of the local ecclesial community. All three authors can be viewed as participating within and attempting to contribute to the multifaceted collective memory of their community. They reveal awareness of various Christian traditions and texts ensconced in this memory. These traditions, such as the liturgical commemorations of martyrs and the spiritual elevation of confessors, seem to have combined with the memorial practices involved in Roman benefaction in orienting and informing the narrative task.

The conclusions of this study complicate several common assumptions. Firstly, my contentions can be seen as challenging the general conclusion that "for actions (*res*) narrated in the lives of the saints to be binding for the community, they had to be an *imitatio Christi*".⁶²⁹ While the *Passio* claims to bring its listening audience into "fellowship" with Christ (1.6), its martyrs are presented as imitating a larger collection of paradigmatic models. I have proposed that the *Passio* martyrs' deeds and deaths, particularly that of Perpetua, are depicted by the redactor in such a way

⁶²⁹ Heffernan, "From *Logos*", 5; cf. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 203-229; Moss, *Ancient*, 130.

that their story can be considered an *imitatio martyris*. That is, the redactor's polemical prologue and epilogue makes explicit that the *Passio* is similar to "older examples". His narrative largely accomplishes this via consistent allusion and implied association to cultural exemplars and Judeo-Christian confessors and martyr accounts, both scriptural (e.g., Paul) and extra-biblical (e.g., Polycarp). Among the works that his account invokes, one that seems to resurface consistently is the martyrdom account of Polycarp. If this is indeed the case, it means that modern attempts to reposition the date of the emergence of the *Mart. Poly.* account to the middle of the third century, largely due to claims that there is no evidence the *Mart. Poly.* carried any influence until this time, may be unfounded.⁶³⁰ By gesturing to other authorities within corporate identity and traditions, the redactor's text is rhetorically given kinship to these works; it participates with and attempts to be considered among established *exempla*.

Secondly, the conclusions of this study challenge limited views of textuality in Christian circles at the dawn of the third century CE. The authors of the *Passio* are shown to be highly aware of the significance of writing within the ecclesia; it is implied throughout this account that which is written, spoken, and heard converge within the liturgical and commemorative acts of the community. That is, there are certainly relationships between the textual and the aural: that which is "written" is meant to be that which is "read" and "heard" (1.1-1.6), and together they both testify and foster communion both human and divine (1.6, 21.11). As I demonstrate that Perpetua's work foremost reflects a novella-like narrative engagement with the works of Clement of Alexandria and the *Shepherd* of Hermas, I challenge the assumptions of her account's literary simplicity or naiveté. This means that the ubiquitous notion that

⁶³⁰ Advocacy for the later date for the entire *Mart. Poly.* text has surfaced most notably in Moss, *Ancient*, 57-76.

Perpetua is a “new” (and therefore largely unexposed literarily and liturgically) Christian composition is extremely problematic. It also insinuates that the textual reception of at least portions of Clement’s work may be wider and earlier than heretofore acknowledged and may therefore expand knowledge of the lines of textual communication along social networks of Christians at this time.

The complexity of intertextuality in classical and early Christian texts must certainly be acknowledged. Seneca’s ancient reminder that creativity and intertextuality ought to coexist is worthy of repeating here: “May we welcome [other literary works] faithfully, and may we make them ours. In this way, something becomes one out of many....Even if there is evident in you a likeness of someone for whom you have high admiration, then I wish that you are similar like a song, not just as an image”.⁶³¹ Perpetua’s account creates a narrative song, so to speak, with rich notes from a diversity of texts comprised for the most part of a varied selection of Christian works. While the arrangement itself is unique, the styles, methods, tropes, images, and implications do nonetheless bear echoes of these other works. As they are incorporated into her text, Perpetua demonstrates the literary ability subtly to *maintain*, not obliterate nor exaggerate, these echoes in her own narrative setting. Here another insight of Seneca deserves reiteration: he indicates that Ovid’s literary allusive gesture is “not for the sake of stealing, but borrowing with this intent – *that he desired it to be recognized*”.⁶³² This certainly merits consideration in terms of the aims of the allusive gesture in Perpetua’s work.

Of course, the description of Perpetua as *incorporating* such embellishment, particularly through allusive connections that enhance a rhetoric of relationship, implies that her entire account is written intentionally. From dramatic and

⁶³¹ Seneca *Epis.* 84. See also p. 59-61 of this study.

⁶³² Seneca *Suas.* 3.7; emphasis mine. Also referenced in the discussion on allusion in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.2, p. 57-61).

determinative scenes with her father, to the vision of the ladder and cheese-giving shepherd, the pair of visions with Dinocrates' torment and relief, and the final vision of a manly victory in the arena, every element of the narrative that informs, interprets, and confirms is portrayed and interpreted by Perpetua through the lenses of her conditioning and her consequential rhetorical intentions. The pervasive voice of literary models both informs and augments her remarkable achievement.⁶³³ I contend that this intertextual literary accomplishment has not hitherto been sufficiently explored.

Thirdly, this thesis argues that the *Passio*'s layered contexts, both Christian and secular, warrant further attention. This means that readings that isolate the text from any of its settings remain quite limited. Contextual elements are foundational factors in my interpretive approach, which emphasizes her extensive education, social status, probable catechetical experience, and what seems to have been a considerable exposure to diverse Christian practices, teachings, and texts. I am convinced that this reading of the text is consonant with the spirit of Perpetua's era, particularly with regard to her noble pedigree and to contemporary western Christianity. In an era displaying the impact of the increased significance of literacy as cultural capital, and in a community that specifically valued instruction, text, and collective memory within its practices, Perpetua's undertaking and the descriptive, allusive intertextuality therein seem to have been an act of public posturing. In light of contemporary social mores, the redactor's various forms of enthusiasm towards Perpetua can be viewed as operating as a response to her commission to complete it and as reciprocation for her benefactory assistance. The redactor and his audience, in obedience to her commission, carry out their responsive 'memory-making', just as imperial-era clients

⁶³³ This contention also directly opposes Formisano's conclusion that has the *Passio* "no strong relationship with previous texts" (Formisano, "Perpetua's", 347).

established public monuments to their patrons in honor of their euergetism near to *ante mortem* tombs built for the same purpose.⁶³⁴ Thus, Perpetua anticipates not only her audience but also her redactor, whom she expects will operate in the traditions of corporate commemorative praxis.

Lastly, the conclusions of my thesis directly confront gender-based assumptions in regards to the authorial act of Perpetua. Rather than viewing Perpetua as a textual victim whose “voice is muffled by the layers of interpretation” of others, beginning with that of the redactor,⁶³⁵ this study reads Perpetua’s account as her creative, intentional, and victorious literary self-commemoration. I have even proposed that Perpetua should be seen as the primary instigator of the text, and that she does so within both Christian and secular memorialization practices. *Passio* scholarship has not adequately acknowledged the rhetorical intentions augmenting Perpetua’s accomplishment. As a result, exegetical efforts with regard to her narrative have remained often contradictory or inadequate and, furthermore, frequently reflect “domesticated” psychoanalytical assumptions. It is thus hoped that my contentions problematize readings that assert that the “images of hope” in the “dreams” of Perpetua’s personal “memoirs” are in direct *contrast* with the intentionally styled images in other visionary works, such as Hermas’ constructed literary allegory.⁶³⁶ Perpetua, as a woman of classical antiquity, ought to be viewed as an astute intellectual contributor in her own right.⁶³⁷ These challenges endeavor to participate in a variety of ongoing conversations, including scholarly engagement with the hagiographical texts of antiquity, the burgeoning field of theoretical work with

⁶³⁴ E.g., Eumachia: see p. 73-74 of this study and Cohick, *Women*, 285-320.

⁶³⁵ E.g., here, the opinion of Moss, *Ancient*, 132. Cf. p. 190-191 of this study.

⁶³⁶ Amat, *Passion*, 50, explicitly makes this contrast.

⁶³⁷ I here refer to Osiek’s hopeful statement, “New research on educational possibilities for girls in the empire can help us bring this severely underrepresented constituency of early church groups back to life and also strengthen the case for viewing females as intellectual contributors in their own right to early Christianity” (Osiek, et al., *A Woman’s Place*, 249).

collective memory and early Christianity, academic dialogue about textuality and transmission in terms of early Christian works, and the work of classicists on women in antiquity. In sum, the *Passio* has much to offer future explorations.

Given the contention of this thesis that the *Passio* ought to be viewed as a text situating itself among other *exempla*, an auxiliary question could well arise: was the *Passio* successful in its task? Even an all-too-brief glance at its reception, and at the reception of the figure of Perpetua in particular, indicates that the answer is undoubtedly *yes*. This reception extends far beyond brief literary reference in a polemical work of Tertullian written not long after the *Passio* events.⁶³⁸ True to the dynamics of corporate memory and indicative that the *Passio* and its martyrs did indeed come to be seen as *exempla*, the *Passio* was imitated by several later martyr accounts, most notably the *Vita Cypriani*.⁶³⁹ The martyrs of the *Passio* certainly played a part in the Roman church's liturgical celebrations of the saints by the 4th century, and Perpetua specifically was honored through a variety of late antique media, including the depiction in the visual art of three sacred spaces and as an *exemplum* in an array of sermonic and other literary works.⁶⁴⁰ Late antique literary references are

⁶³⁸ Tertullian *De An.* 55.4.

⁶³⁹ Cf. Aronen, "Indebtedness", 67-76. Also, the *Passio Montani et Lucii* and the *Passio Mariani et Jacobi*.

⁶⁴⁰ As indicated in my introduction, the textual and material reception of the *Passio* has not been discussed at length in this thesis. The reception includes commemoration on the nones of March in the *depositio martyrum* of the Chronographer of 354 (in Salzman, *Roman Time*, 45-47, and Mommsen, ed., *The Chronographer*, IX.71) as well as the Syriac Martyrology of 411 (itself based on a Greek original from around 360; see Wright, "Ancient Syriac", 45); Augustine *Serm.* 280, 281, and 282, *En. Ps.* 47.13, and *Disc.* 59A.11; Quodvultdeus *De Temp. Barb.* 1.5.1-9; Victor of Vita *Hist.* 1.9; the ruins of the *Basilica Maiorum* of Carthage, which display a marble inscription dated between the early 4th century to the mid-5th century that bears a dedication to the martyr group; three mosaic roundels in sacred spaces of late antiquity (the Archiepiscopal Chapel of Ravenna, the church San'Apollinare Nuovo, also in Ravenna, and the basilica of Euphrasius in Porec) that specifically feature the bust of Perpetua. Also, a 5th c. sarcophagus from Briviesca, Spain, features a carved scene with woman, a weapon-laden ladder, a shepherd, and a man, presumably from Perpetua's first vision. The Medieval *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine also features an adaptation of the martyrdom account, one largely based on the *Acta*. A 15th century reworking of the *Acta* and *Golden Legend* appears in a moralising compilation of stories known as the *Buoch von den Heiligen Megden und Frowen*. The multifaceted reception continues into our own era. Formisano has pointed out that modern scholarly reception has often viewed Perpetua's text as an important work of medieval women's literature (Farrell, "Canonization", 319-320), a strange and historically problematic categorization. Modern reception has not been limited

furthermore revealing in that they assume their audience is familiar with Perpetua: “As we know and read in the passion of the blessed Perpetua”, Augustine’s commentary on the Psalms casually remarks.⁶⁴¹ A generation after Augustine, it is Quodvultdeus who explicitly designates “Perpetua and company” to be “magnificent *exempla*”.⁶⁴² The reception legacy continues, of course, in the numerous versions of the *Passio* that appear from late antiquity into the medieval era.⁶⁴³ These later manifestations, including the Greek version and the two forms of the *Acta*, receive the *Passio* into their own era’s concerns, emphases, assumptions, and linguistic categories.⁶⁴⁴ Collective memory is a dynamic, responsive, relational thing; the existence of these versions, references, and interpretations, with all of their divergences and aims, demonstrates how well received the *Passio* was and indeed continued to be for many centuries.

Yet precisely because corporate memory is never stagnant, the complexity of the reality that Perpetua, her text, and the martyrs of the *Passio* were (and continue to be) cast and recast in various presentations must be acknowledged. This complicates the question and definition of “success” with regard to the commemorative aims of the *Passio* narratives. Even a very brief survey of the reception content can appear somewhat daunting and is difficult to assess. Augustine’s repeated puns upon Perpetua’s name and deeds seem to patronize and objectify her, and his sermons focus on the irony of her victories in light of the “weakness” of her gender.⁶⁴⁵ In Cloke’s analysis, Augustine’s Perpetua is “sanitized as necessary [to the late 4th century

to academic dialogue, however: e.g., in 2009, an abbreviated cartoon version of the *Passio* titled “The Perpetua Story” was released in the evangelical “Torchlighters: Heroes of the Faith” series for children. Each of these plays a fascinating role in the reception discourse of the *Passio*.

⁶⁴¹ Augustine *En. Ps.* 47.13.

⁶⁴² Quodvultdeus *De Temp. Barb.* I.5.1-9.

⁶⁴³ On the different versions, see footnote 640 and p. 22-23 of this study; also, Halporn, “Literary History”, 223-241; Bremmer and Formisano, “Introduction”, 3-5, and Heffernan, *Passion*, 80.

⁶⁴⁴ Cf. discussion on these versions on p. 22-23 of this study; see also Halporn’s exploration of literary history and changing generic expectations in “Literary History”, 223-241.

⁶⁴⁵ Augustine *Serm.* 280.

context], and then venerated from a distance”.⁶⁴⁶ Furthermore, a medieval German version of Perpetua’s story casts her as an ideal Christian wife and mother yet pays no heed to any other aspect of her identity.⁶⁴⁷ More recently, Satorius’ visionary narrative has been regarded as insipid and incongruous with the account of Perpetua; the redactor has frequently been cast as a textual perpetrator; and scholarly attention features an abundance of speculation with regard to Perpetua’s missing husband rather than her catechesis or educated literary acumen.⁶⁴⁸ This handful of examples demonstrates both a complication of the question of the *Passio*’s “success” as well as the reality of the dynamic nature of collective memory. This memory evolves over the eras in response to the nexus of theological and practical issues in the changing contexts of various communities. Yet Schwartz’s observation about this aspect of memory is here worth repeating: this phenomenon of evolution is also “more than mere reflection of [each new community’s] needs and troubles”, for memory is not simply created anew but is inherited and transmitted.⁶⁴⁹ What is striking is that so many contexts have found the *Passio* to be compelling; its long and storied reception and transmission continues to this very day.

There is, of course, a danger in studying a text with a rich reception and an ever-increasing history of interpretation. Thomas Pratsch’s vivid *caveat emptor* for the study of hagiographical literature deserves reprising: “keep in mind that the jungle is still the jungle”.⁶⁵⁰ At once a cause of trepidation and motivation, his admonition seems particularly apt for frequently attended narratives such as the *Passio*. This text has certainly not been ignored. However, I suggest that modern studies have not

⁶⁴⁶ Cloke, “*Mater* or Martyr”, 37-57.

⁶⁴⁷ In the *Buoch von den Heiligen Megden und Frowen*: see Weitbrecht, “Maternity and Sainthood”, 162-165.

⁶⁴⁸ E.g., Dodds, *Pagan*, 48-49; Habbermehl, *Perpetua*, 104-115; Dronke, *Women*, 15-17; Salisbury, *Perpetua*’s, 143; Cooper, “A Father”, 700, and “The Voice”, 147-157; Oseik, “Perpetua’s Husband”, 291-302.

⁶⁴⁹ Schwartz, “Christian Origins”, 55-56:

⁶⁵⁰ Pratsch, “Exploring”, 59-72.

properly classified it. This has particularly affected how the narrative portions and person of Perpetua are viewed. In this possible misdirection, analyses have neglected integral interpretive tools that must be recovered and explored, including the social mores of benefaction, Christian catechetical praxis, contemporary elite literary culture, and the allusive intertextuality that serves within a rich rhetoric of legitimacy. When this task is undertaken, more nuanced and consistent readings of the whole of the account may emerge. Ongoing caution and curiosity will always be necessary in approaching the textual “jungles” of hagiographical works. However, an exploration attentive to the pervasive realities of collective memory within the captivating and intention-bearing commemorative narrative landscape of the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* offers significant - and exciting - interpretative potential.

“But I shall tell you [Muses],
and you are to declare it to many thousands hereafter,
and see to it that this page speaks forth when it is old ...”
sed dicam vobis, vos porro dicite multis milibus et facite haec charta loquatur anus
(Catullus 68.45-46)

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