Creating the Female Martyr in Late Antique North Africa

Submitted by Alice van den Bosch
to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of
PhD in Classics and Ancient History
May 2023

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my supervisors, Richard Flower and Istvàn Kristo-Nagy. Since I first made contact with them regarding my few vague ideas about wanting to look at ‘female martyrs’, they have been unfailing in their academic and pastoral support. The Exeter Classics, Ancient History, Religious Studies and Theology Department, especially the Classics PGR community “ExWIP”, have been an enormous source of support and morale.

I would also like to thank the Exeter College of Humanities for the award of a scholarship to support my studies. To the staff and fellow guests at the Fondation Hardt in Geneva, where I was fortunate enough to spend a month’s sojourn there towards the end of my PhD, my work on my thesis was made even more enjoyable by their kindness, intellectual curiosity and good humour.

There are altogether too many people making up all the pieces of me and who have been instrumental in the process of this thesis so I apologise in advance in case I have missed anyone out. I would like to especially thank Rebecca Grose, Nathalie Klinck, Mengya Zhao, Jordan Poole, Hannah Thompson, Katherine Needham, Sam Nwokoro, Ben Malloy, the Library Lockdown Gang and Ricardo Caldeira. Last but not least to my family. All errors are my own.

Abstract:

In this thesis, I look at different representations of female martyrdom across the long durée of Late Antiquity. I am interested in specific martyrs within the communities that created them, and how they were being represented and reinvented for different audiences. I am interested in the ways these ideas are adapted and come back into fashion, across the many varied communities that made up Late Antique North Africa. In the first chapter, I take the popular figure of Perpetua and discuss some of the considerable literature on her and how focusing on her 'exceptionality' has had the effect of overshadowing the study of female martyrs. Next, I look at the much more local example of Salsa, in a close reading that re-examines her role as a local saint and more action-orientated figure, questioning some general assumptions about gender and martyrdom. At the start of the second half of the thesis, I turn to the collection of martyr narratives known as the *acta* and propose an innovative methodology based on their similarity, particularly when it comes to their so-called 'unoriginality', with scenes and characters from Roman comedy and mime. Using the case study of Crispina, among others, I am particularly interested in representations of the relationship between the female martyr and the figure of her antagonist. In the final chapter, I reconsider the role of mothers and maternal imagery across a selection of martyr narratives. This includes a comparative look at Christian and Islamic discussions of motherhood and martyrdom, as a way of incorporating the early history of Islam into the Latin West Late Antique context. Overall, this thesis argues not only for representations of female martyrs to be more diverse and nuanced than often assumed but also with implications for constructions of martyrs and martyrdom more generally.

Contents:

Front Matter
Note on transliteration, abbreviations and editions……………… 6

Prologue: Creating the Female Martyr in Late Antiquity
Leocritia: Between tradition and innovation? …………………….. 8
Themes ……………………………………………………………… 11

Chapter 1: Introduction
1. Literature Review
    i. Martyrdom in Late Antiquity ………………………..20
    ii. North Africa……………………………………………30
    iii. Women and Gender ………..………………………..33
2. Thesis
    i. Key questions ………………………………………..36
    ii. Methodology …………………………………………37
    iii. Chapter summary ……………………………………39

Chapter 2: Perspectives on Perpetua
1. Introduction ……………………………………………………43
2. Literature review ………………………………………………47
3. Perpetua's 'Fifth vision':
    i. Disdaining the world …………………………………54
    ii. "And then I woke up" ………………………………...56
    iii. Supernatural and metatheatrical elements ………..59
    iv. Perpetua's characterisation …………………………65
4. Conclusion: New and old perspectives …………………………67

Chapter 3: Salsa of Tipasa
1. Introduction ……………………………………………………69
2. Historical context ……………………………………………...71
3. Salsa: A local girl
    i. A "Vernacula" martyr ………………………………………75
    ii. Strangers ……………………………………………………79
4. Salsa: An action heroine
    i. Feminine and masculine ……………………………………81
    ii. Biblical models ………………………………………………90
5. Conclusion: a martyr and her city…………………………………..95

Chapter 4: Staging Courtroom Drama (The Female Martyr vs. the Antagonist)
1. Introduction ………………………………………………………….. 96
2. Background to the *Acta* and previous approaches ………………98
3. Drama, Comedy, Christianity ……………………………………....102
4. The Antagonist ……………………………………………………110
5. *Martyrdom of Crispina*
    i. Setting the Scene: Introductions and Prologues……….117
    ii. Female Martyr vs. the Antagonist…………………….……124
    iii. Happily ever after? ………………………………………129
6. Conclusion ……………………………………………………………131

Chapter 5: Childbirth and Maternal imagery in martyr narratives
1. Introduction ……………………………………………………………133
2. Roles of mothers (Mother knows best?) …………………………136
   i. Rejoicing vs. Grieving …………………………………138
   ii. Sacrificing children for future …………………………140
   iii. Supporting character/Main protagonist ………………142
   iv. Helpful antagonists ……………………………………..143
3. Imagery of maternity and childbirth ………………………………145
   i. Childbirth and Battle metaphors ………………………146
   ii. Gendered Imagery in Martyr Narratives ……………....148
   iii. Islam and military martyrdom …………………….....152
   iv. Dying in Childbirth: female route to martyrdom? ..……153
4. Intersectionality and martyr mothers: Felicitas and Sumayyah ...156
   i. Slave Mothers: Assumptions and Narrative uses ……159
5. Conclusion: Martyrdom and Motherhood.…………………….…...163

Chapter 6: Conclusion
1. Constructing a female martyr ……..……………..……………......165
2. Future research? ……………………………………………………167

Bibliography ……………………………………………………………… 169

Note on transliteration, abbreviations and editions:

Arabic words in this thesis have either been anglicised (e.g. hadith) or are transliterated according to the system of the Library of Congress: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/romanization/arabic.pdf [Accessed 4 May 2023].

Abbreviations for standard ancient texts and authors follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* with Late Antique authors following *PCBE* I. The remainder are referred to as follows:

Christian martyr acts:

The following editions and translations are used unless otherwise stated.

The Acts of the Christian Martyrs, ed. and trans. H. Musurillo, Oxford 1972:
A.Marc.: The Acts of Marcellus
A.Max.: The Acts of Maximillian
A.Scil.: The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs
M.Carp.: The Martyrdom of SS. Carpus, Papylus and Agathonice
M.Crisp.: The Martyrdom of S. Crispina
M.Marion.:The Martyrdom of SS. Marian and James
M.Mont.: The Martyrdom of SS. Montanus and Lucius
M. Poly.: The Martyrdom of Polycarp
M.Pot.: The Martyrdom of Potamiaena and Basileides
Lyons & Vienne: The Letter to the Churches of Lyons and Vienne

The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M. R. James, ed. and trans. J.K. Elliott, Oxford 2009:
APTh: The Acts of Paul and Thecla

Le dossier du donatisme, 2 vols, ed. and trans. J-L. Maier, Berlin 1987-9:
A.Ab.:The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs
P.Max: The Passion of Saints Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda
P.Marc: The Martyrdom of Marculus
P.MaxIsa.: The Passion of Maximian and Isaa

The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity, ed. and trans. J Farrell and C. Williams, Oxxford 2012:
P.Perp.: Passio of SS. Perpetua and Felicity

Passio Sancti Fabii: testo critico con introduzione e traduzione italiana, ed. and trans. A.M.G. Piredda, Sassari 2007:
P.Fab.: Passion of Fabius

La Passio sanctae Marcianae (*BHL* 5256): *editio princeps,* S.Fialon, *Sacris erudiri* 53 2014.
P.Marciana.: Passion of S. Marciana
Passio Sanctae Salsae Nouvelle Édition Critique, ed. and trans. A.M.G. Piredda, Paris 2015.
P.Sals.: Passion of S. Salsa

P. Agnetis: Passio sancti Agnetis (PL 17.735- 42).

Abbreviations:

LCL = Loeb Classical Library
PL = *Patrologia Latina*
PG = *Patrologia Graeca*
CSEL = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*
CC = *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*

Prologue: Creating the Female Martyr in Late Antiquity

At the periphery of Leocritia's vision the world shimmers, iridescent and contorted, time itself captured inside a bubble. Her dress, overlarge now on her thin frame, makes her stumble and the edge of her gilded sandal catches a dislodged tessera, sending it spinning out ahead of her across the coloured tiled floor. Halfway through its arc, glinting and winking, it hangs there, daring her to step out into the sunlight. Her right arm is numb, crooked at an awkward angle so that the heavy gold bracelets do not slide off. Her veil has half stuck to some sweat on her cheek, she reaches up to tug it free and her fingers brush against the now dried make-up. She had thought the ruse was up when, suddenly, her mother had materialised behind her, stepping forward to snatch the brush out of the slave woman's hands. Yet the expected reproach had not come; she had silently continued to paint Leocritia's face. When she was done, she had stood back and surveyed her daughter, now almost of the same height, all the unspoken words from the last few weeks unspooling between them. Leocritia met her gaze, wondering how those sharp dark eyes, that had always seemed able to detect her every infantile wrongdoing, could possibly fail to see the turmoil raging behind her daughter's painted face. But then she was gone, and Leocritia, ungainly as an ivory doll, had made her slow way out of her quarters. There is a hole in the mosaic floor, and in her heart, but that moment, like her former life and all the people she has known, are ghosts to her now. It is time to wake up.

Leocritia: Between tradition and innovation?

This imaginative vignette from the perspective of a young martyr named Leocritia, from ninth-century Cordoba, is inspired by evidence that will be expounded on in this thesis. The incentive behind this less traditional scholarly opening is to illustrate the enduring appeal to retell and update these stories and to highlight new perspectives or themes. Ideas such as status, dress, psychological struggle, and family relationships recur frequently in the literary sources of these figures, yet also in highly individualised ways that speak to the specific needs and intentions of their audiences rather than any general perception of a female martyr.

In the ninth-century hagiographical *Life of Eulogius*, set in Cordoba, the figure of Leocritia in particular stands out and not just because she is executed alongside the titular martyr Eulogius. She is one of several Christian martyrs supposedly put on trial for blasphemy and apostasy against the ruling Muslim regime. Towards the end of the narrative, Leocritia is introduced as a young virgin from a well-off Muslim family. In the hagiographical account, Leocritia has been secretly

converted by a Christian female relative, Litosa, and initially tries to keep her new faith secret. When her parents find out, they first try warning her but then escalate to shackling and beating her to try and get her to recant. She responds by pretending to disparage her new faith and finally succeeds in escaping from home by dressing up to attend a relative's wedding and is then hidden by various sympathetic households, including by a nun, Anulo, and a priest, Eulogius. Eventually, she is arrested and brought to trial, along with Eulogius, and the pair are executed. Her narrative closes with:

"The most blessed virgin Leocritia, whom they tried to charm with many delights and cajole with many promises, was instead strengthened in the solidity of her faith by the gift of divine grace, and so she too was decapitated, on the fourth day after the martyrdom of Eulogius."[1]

Leocritia is martyred with a large group of others, including the main subject of the *Life*, Eulogius, who gets considerably more attention. Yet the way she is described and fulfils her martyrdom seems particularly distinctive and highlights one of the driving questions behind this thesis, which is an exploration of the role gender played in discourses about martyrdom in Late Antiquity. In other words, what were women like Leocritia doing in these narratives, and what meaning did her gender have for the communities commemorating her and others like her? While Leocritia could make a fascinating case study in her own right, and indeed the martyrs (or 'neomartyrs') of Cordoba have generated a considerable amount of scholarly attention as well as controversy over the years, I am interested here in the variety of cultural ideas and assumptions that led up to this moment in the historical narrative.[2] As with martyrs from previous generations, these neomartyrs were consciously and carefully created with the earliest heroes and heroines of the Church in mind. Yet behind these were also plenty of resonances with older Greco-Roman models of the noble or ideal death, which also included women such as Lucretia or Antigone.[3] Despite this multitude of influences and with a few notable exceptions, female martyrs have invariably been seen as particularly passive victims even though there are many examples of both male

[1] *Vita Eulogii*. 16.
[2] See: Baxter Wolf 2019: 1-119; Ihnat has also given a recent overview of much of the historiographical schools of thought (2019: 1-15).
[3] Leocritia is sometimes referred to as Lucretia making the parallel even more blatant.

and female martyrs eagerly embracing their fate.[4] For example, the titular male character, a bishop, in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* does not resist arrest but allows himself to be taken, like Jesus in the gospels or indeed other models like Socrates.[5] This eagerness for martyrdom was not without its controversies, and in the same text there is a certain Quintus whose initial keenness for martyrdom fails and he recants, at which point the text emphasises: "because of this, my brothers, we do not commend those who surrender on their own accord, since the gospel does not so teach."[6] Ninth-century hagiography was a potent mix of familiar tropes and deliberate identification with the victims of pagan persecutions of the early Church in the first few centuries CE. At the same time, the setting and introduction of the characters also draw attention to the new context, Umayyad Spain. Leocritia and her fellow martyrs are supposedly executed in Cordoba, part of the province of Al-Andalus, which had been ruled by the Islamic Umayyad Caliphate for nearly a century. Starting in the mid-seventh century CE, only a few short decades following the Prophet Muhammad's first revelations of the Qur'an and the very inception of Islam, the 'Arab Conquests', as they are known, had conquered parts of Eastern Europe and into central Asia, as well as North Africa and up into Spain. Many Christians, such as the figures of Paul Alvarus and Eulogius, were now living under a minority Islamic ruling elite. However, as Kati Ihnat describes in a recent article, modern scholars have only recently begun treating such texts with their apologist objectives in mind rather than as purely social history.[7] As well as asking important questions such as why some Christian writers would have sought to promote stories of martyrs at this particular point within this cosmopolitan society, there have been recent studies that have made use of both archaeological and historical evidence that show a more varied picture of continuity as much as change.[8] I am interested in why and how Christian and Islamic writers used stories of female martyrs during Late Antiquity, that is the centuries leading up to Leocritia and her companions in medieval Cordoba. Writers within their respective religions had their own interpretations

[4] An example of a much later reception of this prevalent image of the passive female martyr is the use of Paul Delaroche's painting "La Jeune Martyr", not based on any martyr in particular, for the cover of 2015 edition/translation of *Passio Salsae* despite this particular heroine being far from passive.
[5] *M.Poly.* 7; on the various Biblical and Classical models for Polycarp, see: Pesthy-Simon 2017: 90-2.
[6] *M.Poly.* 4 (trans. Rebillard 2017).
[7] Ihnat 2019.
[8] E.g. Toral-Niehoff and Muñoz's chapter on Córdoba (2019: 107-160).

and opinions on the texts and traditions from their shared Classical past, building on as well as reframing earlier ideas. This intercourse between innovation and retelling the past is particularly striking when it comes to the creation of female martyrs.

Themes: Why is it significant that she is a *female* martyr?

Many of the tropes in the *Life of Eulogius* had become all too familiar in hagiographies across the Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds during Late Antiquity. For example, there have been many fruitful comparisons drawn between hagiography and Greek novels. As De Tennerman states in discussing protagonists from the novels, such as the incomparably beautiful, if unfortunate, heroines Callirhoe or Leucippe: "In ancient narrative literature, just as in other areas of ancient artistic expression, credible, realistic characterization is often a matter not of psychological individuation but of conforming to pre-existing or familiar literary, mythological, historical, or socially recognizable (and often morally significant) character types".[9] The example of Leocritia will thus serve as a useful means to introduce many of the themes that I will discuss in more depth in this thesis. Based on her narrative, I have made a list of eight notable aspects that have been chosen either because they relate specifically to the female martyr's experience or are used in particular ways to represent and distinguish this group. In this way, the story of Leocritia will be used as a kind of microhistory to illuminate the Late Antique environment which writers of the ninth century were drawing on to construct female martyrs. These aspects specifically seem to resonate with the experience of female martyrs compared with their male counterparts, such as in the way that they are treated and function differently both within the stories as well as how they were commemorated and shaped by the communities that venerated them. In this and other ways, the female martyr was explicitly shaped by Classical assumptions about women. If or when similar issues do crop up in stories of male martyrs, this more often than not seems to have been to deliberately make a point about it being so unusual.

1. **Physical attractiveness:**

[9] De Tennerman 2014: 9; see also: Chew 2003: 129-30. Interest in the relationship between the Greek novels and hagiography also part of the *Novel Saints* project, University of Ghent.

"There was a girl by the name of Leocritia of nobler birth and even nobler mind."[10] As well as reflecting antique ideas of beauty and goodness, female martyrs are invariably described as beautiful, whether this is made explicit (Perpetua as a "sweet young girl") or it is an assumed trait of such a heroine (Salsa: "regarding her corporeal form I cannot say: although she was, as they ascribe, a remarkable beauty").[11] This is even more significant when their physical appearance becomes a driving part of the plot such as when they become the object of lust by the antagonist or pity by other bystanders. Leocritia fits into this character of the noble, beautiful and virginal heroine and her rejection of finery goes along with her rejection of the expected behaviour of a girl of her upbringing and class, including a suitable marriage. Thus, when Leocritia is "covering her limbs with haircloth, and sleeping in the dust", this detail contrasts the humility and holiness of her chosen path with the life of luxury she has chosen to forego.[12]

2. **Youth and virginity:**

Leocritia's age is never explicitly stated, only that she is unmarried and still living under the control of her parents. Other martyrs are given more precise ages, such as Salsa who is fourteen and Agnes who is twelve, though both girls are also said to be older than their years in wisdom, another popular trope that we will explore.[13] Not all martyrs are young (Polycarp for example, one of the earliest martyrs, is an elderly bishop), however, there are many martyr accounts, including those with women, which feature very youthful protagonists.[14] Even more strikingly, where there are very young male martyrs such as the children Hilarianus and Ponticus, they are often explicitly paired up in the narrative with a female martyr (Victoria and Blandina respectively) who takes on a sort of motherly position, even if they are of a similar age.[15] This is perhaps reflective of the different ages of maturity for the sexes under Roman law, whereby girls were considered marriageable from twelve and this was considered their significant

[10] *Vita Eulogii* 13.
[11] *P.Perp.* 20.2: *puellam delicatam* (trans. Cobb & Jacobs 2021); *P.Sals.* 2: *egregia*.
[12] *Vita Eulogii* 13.
[13] Salsa, *P.Sals. 2*: *minor ad pugnam, maior ad gloriam*; Agnes, PL 17.735: *senectus mentis in moribus*.
[14] Jan Bremmer notes this feature in his chapter "Martyrdom of a Young African Woman" (2012: 50-1).
[15] Lyons & Vienne 1; *A.Ab.*17 and 18.

rite of passage into maturity, whereas boys were not considered adults until fifteen.[16] There is an added tension in the liminality of their age where they are between childhood and maturity. This connection between maturity and marriage, especially for the nobility, was also significant for female martyrs because of the importance of virginity. Connected to her social status and age, the female martyr's fierce commitment to her virginity often becomes a particular concern when it goes against the presiding wishes of her family given a woman's expected socio-economic role to marry and have children, with martyrs such as Victoria and Secunda going to extreme lengths to avoid family pressure. It again fits into the certain character types referred to above, so although there are examples of older female martyrs, such as Quartilosa or Domnina, who are mothers and this established social role is closely linked to their characterisation, such as being introduced by their relationship with their adult children. By contrast, the young unmarried virgin is in a more transitionary social role. As such, bridal imagery is often evoked where the female martyr describes Christ as her heavenly bridegroom (e.g. Agnes, Crispina), also again reminiscent of Classical virgins such as Antigone describing her tomb as her "bridal chamber".[17] Leocritia even uses the occasion of a wedding to cover her escape.

3. **Family and conversion:**

These factors, her youth, noble birth, and defence of her chastity, lead to the next important theme that comes up with female martyrs; her family context. This is linked to the private or familial space of the home in which the female martyr is generally found, at least initially. Ideologically, a young girl of noble birth would not be expected to leave her home unaccompanied, often necessitating some external factor to prompt her to leave or be discovered such as a festival or wedding. Having been converted secretly to Christianity as a child, it is only when "she attained the age of wisdom and began to reach for the lamp of knowledge" that she reveals her true faith to her parents and starts to plot her escape.[18] On the one hand, Leocritia has been converted to Christianity by "a certain kinswoman of hers named Litiosa", indicating a religious-mixed family which

[16] Laes and Strubbe 2014: 30-1.
[17] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 890 (trans. Nisetich 2016); Ashbrook Harvey 1996: 34-5 for this bridegroom trope in Syriac hagiography.
[18] *Vita Eulogii* 13.

would not have been uncommon given the cosmopolitan social context of ninth-century Cordoba.[19] On the other hand, Leocritia is directly contrasted with her parents, who are not even named: "She was a product of the dregs of gentiles, brought forth from the viscera of wolves."[20] Her new faith is both brought about by and also brings her into conflict with different members of her religiously mixed family and her parents respond violently by chaining her up, beating and threatening her. Intergenerational or interrelational tension such as this is a prominent theme across a lot of female martyr narratives, whether it is between them and their parents or husband, (e.g. Perpetua and her father). Although this can also occasionally be raised as a concern for male martyrs, the social status and age of the female characters make this a specifically socio-economic problem, whereas male martyrs' confrontation with the authorities or their families usually comes as a consequence of a conflict in performing their more public role, such as a soldier or bishop, for example, Cyprian or Maximillian. While there are examples of a male martyr's family conflict, such as the Armenian soldier saint Polyeuktos and his pagan wife Paula, concerned that he is abandoning her and their children, her main recourse is to appeal to her brother who is an official who can exert legal pressure on her husband. With female martyrs there is also usually an external catalyst for her conversion, whether from a family member or stranger; when this is absent it is also noteworthy.

4. **Deception and secrecy:**

There are several elements of deception in Leocritia's tale, which might seem surprising in a narrative praising a holy figure. First, her conversion and training by Litiosa where she "is clothed *secretly* in the faith of Christ [until she] shone forth" (my emphasis).[21] Then, after her parents have discovered her and she is concocting a plan to escape, she pretends to her parents to disparage her Christian faith and "thus presented herself as someone who, married to the world, actually found pleasure in it".[22] This 'act' is continued when she dresses up in finery and uses the cover of wedding festivities to make her escape. The fine clothes she wears during this performance also contrast with the asceticism she

[19] Ihnat 2019.
[20] *Vita Eulogii* 13.
[21] *Vita Eulogii* 13.
[22] *Vita Eulogii* 13.

adopts when, again in secret, she can practise her Christian faith. She is then repeatedly transferred between safe houses at night and it is only when her escort does not show up that she instead ventures out during the day and her whereabouts are betrayed to the authorities. All of these actions are framed in such a way as to emphasise the extremes she must go to fulfil her martyrdom. Unlike her co-martyr Eulogius, a priest and public figure, Leocritia has to go out of her way and have a respectable-seeming excuse for a wellborn unmarried young girl to leave the domestic sphere and be seen out in public. There are Classical and early Christian precedents of women using deceptive tactics to evade threats to their chastity.[23] There is also a certain irony in Leocritia using the event of a wedding for her escape for, contrary to her parents' hopes and expectations for her, she instead plans to be a 'bride of Christ' through embracing martyrdom. Other examples include Thecla who sneaks out at night to visit Paul in prison or Salsa who similarly uses the cover of night to carry out her plan to destroy her town's pagan idol. There is a certain ambiguity in this with other female characters and their actions, from antiquity (e.g. Antigone disobeying the king's edict to bury her brother) or in the Hebrew Bible where there are instances of women who have to resort to some form of trickery to get justice or overcome a more powerful enemy such as the figure of Judith who beheads an enemy general Holofernes.[24] Even where this deception is not so explicit, as with Leocritia or Salsa, there is often some suspicion initially cast on their character by virtue of them having refused to conform to the status quo, as in the case of Crispina.

5. **Rationality:**

The narrator often goes to lengths to emphasise the female martyr's rationality and logic, particularly when they take part in acts of deception, such as Leocritia does in initially only pretending to dress up in finery and appearing to disparage her new faith. This serves to emphasise that they have a clear aim in mind rather than acting on a whim. This seems to be of especial concern with female martyrs given the use of Greco-Roman ideas of sex and gender that linked masculinity

[23] An archetypal example being Penelope pretending to weave a shroud for her father-in-law in order to deceive the suitors and thus buy time waiting for her husband Odysseus' return, her loyal deception contrasted with Clytmnestra's pretend welcome of her husband Agamemnon (Recounted in *Od.* Books 2, 19 and 24).

[24] Judith 8-14. More discussion of Judith in the chapter on Salsa below.

with rationality and self-control while femininity was associated with irrationality.[25] On the one hand, female martyrs display their logic, such as engaging in rhetoric or staged debates, for example where Daria outdoes Chrysanthus in *Chrysanthus and Daria*.[26] On the other hand, the extreme or bizarre circumstances in which they are doing so also to some extent undercut this spiritual masculinisation and draw attention back to aspects of their femininity, whether through the failure of their rhetorical attempts and scornful response from onlookers (Salsa) or by being naked during their speech (Thecla).[27]

The logic behind Leocritia's behaviour is further contrasted explicitly with the behaviour of their 'other', in this case Muslim, relatives or the antagonist, such as Leocritia's parents' discovery of her deception: "Afflicted with a hitherto unheard rage and a pain never before seen, they overturned and defiled everything rushing about among people both known and unknown to them."[28] While in another context, her parents' response would seem the more rational one as they are concerned with the whereabouts of their only daughter, the narrative goes out of its way to subvert these feelings and emphasise the ignorance and cruelty of anyone, most notably male figures who should be representing authority such as the judges or prosecutors, who tries to prevent the heroine obtaining her martyrdom.

6. **Stubbornness:**

During her interrogation, though "they tried to charm with many delights and cajole with many promises", Leocritia refuses to recant.[29] While their rationality could be seen as female martyrs taking on more stereotypically masculine traits, this stubbornness is exhibited by male and female martyrs who despise all attempts to persuade or threaten them from their beliefs. The antagonist accuses various martyrs of being stubborn 'despisers' in their refusal to make a sacrifice to the imperial cult or serve in the military (e.g. Maximilian, Crispina).[30] Leocritia is especially lauded for resisting worldly temptations and instead embracing a martyr's death, a gesture that is supposed to be presented as an even greater

[25] E.g. Plut. *Mor.* 88C; Cobb 2008: 61-2.
[26] Bossu and Praet 2015.
[27] *P.Sals.* 6; *APTh.* 37-8.
[28] *Vita Eulogii* 13.
[29] *Vita Eulogii* 16.
[30] *M.Max* 2., *M.Crisp.* 1: "scorn, despise" (Lewis 1891: 180).

sacrifice and feat given the long associations of women with luxury and the body over spiritual concerns. The narrator's emphasis on Leocritia's ability to resist worldly temptations stems from many such assumptions and acts as a further testimonial to the female martyr's character and piety. With other female martyrs, this surprise may be expressed as concern or bewilderment by other characters such as Blandina's mistress who is worried she will be unable to withstand torture.[31] Elsewhere, the official conducting the interrogation may initially try gentler attempts at blandishments and other persuasions, which all too swiftly turn into even greater anger when the martyr persists in her beliefs, like Crispina who is addressed as a stubborn woman or "despiser" (*contemptrix*).[32] This creates an extra gendered tension between the male antagonist and the female martyr's continued refusal to submit.

7. **Torture and execution:**

In contrast to male martyrs, it has been noted how often the tortures and physical descriptions of female martyrs' suffering are explicitly eroticised, even though they are subsequently saved and their bodies are quickly covered by some kind of veil, such as Thecla whose nudity is concealed with a "cloud of fire".[33] Rather, it is through her display in the public space of the courtroom, and attempted persuasion, threats and public shaming of them that seems to make a more significant or dramatic climax. In contrast to Eulogius, who they physically beat during his trial, Leocritia's main physical torture is inflicted on her by her parents. Her trial takes place just after Eulogius' execution and, although she is also decapitated, it is described in notably briefer detail. In martyr stories, with both male and female individuals, the focus often dwells on the grisly torture devices (whether whipping, rack, starvation, etc.) and the effect on their bodies, even if they are unaffected. For example, after their judge has tried various tortures on them, Maxima and Donatilla respond that they have rather been "strengthened" by the ordeals while the torturer collapses with exhaustion.[34] It is also interesting that in some narratives martyrs are sometimes tried and executed alone, or are the main focus for a sizable portion of the narrative, many female martyrs are

[31] *Lyons and Vienne* 1.
[32] *M.Crisp.* 1.
[33] Chapuis Sandoz 2008; *APTh* 34; see also: Clarke 2021: 386-401 and Cobb 2016.
[34] *M.Max.* 5; also see: Cobb 2017.

listed as part of a larger group, although few of them have much characterisation or a speaking role. The violence against female martyrs is also explicitly sexual, with threats of rape, prostitution, mutilation of the breasts or being stripped in public.[35]

8. **Commemoration and miracles:**

Leocritia is thrown into the river where "her body would not sink or be concealed by the water; indeed it remained upright, offering a marvellous spectacle to all."[36] Her body is then recovered and buried in the church of St Genesius in a place called Tertios and then the narrative returns quickly to praising Eulogius. Miracles were of course associated with male and female martyrs, both during their interrogation and torture scenes as well as after death, particularly forces of nature acting to preserve or even restore the body such as Marculus' body being carried by a wind to land gently on the harsh rocks below "as if on the softest bed or the calmest waves".[37] The drawing of attention to the physical form of her body is striking and not uncontroversial when it comes to female martyrs, as noted in the paragraph above. Meanwhile, the brevity of the literary account contrasts with the intense popularity attracted by some female martyr cults, such as that of another young Spanish martyr, Eulalia, who attracted a variety of miracles including trees blossoming and warning or punishing would-be besiegers of her city.[38] It is perhaps a testament to their wide-reaching appeal to different sections of society, not just the elite or to the ascetic clerical circles writing the surviving stories.

Female bodies have, right up to the present, been used as cultural battlegrounds both within as well as between different religions and cultures. This thesis explores how the above aspects helped fashion female martyrs not only within early Christian persecution narratives but also in the centuries leading up to the Martyrs of Cordoba. While similar themes crop up again and again in these descriptions, the product of all the traditions of at least the preceding millennium, there was a lot of innovation in the particular types of female martyrs that were

---

[35] Chapuis Sandoz 2004.
[36] *Vita Eulogii* 16.
[37] *M.Marc.* 12. (English trans. Tilley 1997a: 85).
[38] E.g. Gregory of Tours, *Glor. Mart.* 90 (Van Dam 1988: 84-5); Hydatius of Lemica, *Chronicle*, 91 and 109 , (Burgess 1993: 91).

being described in different settings. Rather than seeing female martyrs as somehow separate or tangential to a ‘default’ ideal male figure, instead these figures are evocative of some of the creative and contradictory ways martyrs were and continue to be realised. This includes how ideas about martyrdom and gender were constantly reimagined and constructed during the formative development of Christianity and the emergence of Islam. It is to this background of Late Antiquity and previous studies of martyrdom to which I will now turn.

Chapter One: Introduction

1. Literature Review:

i. Martyrdom in Late Antiquity:

The study of martyrdom has, like the broader field of hagiography in which it sits, seen a significant renewal of interest in recent decades. This is not unlike the field of Late Antique studies itself, roughly defined as the period between the late third to the eighth centuries. Recent scholars of Late Antique studies have become more engaged with themes of continuity and change, including how individuals and groups adapted and interacted with the Classical past in more nuanced and interesting ways, compared with the older, simplistic narrative of decline from imperial dominance into the 'Dark Ages'. One of the ways the field has expanded, as with Classical Antiquity more generally, has been an appreciation for the interconnections and networks between the various ancient Mediterranean societies and cultures rather than limited to the modern geographical extent of Greece and Italy. Even so, amidst all the significant religious and literary developments of this era of history, hagiographical stories about saints and martyrs were largely neglected. There was a persistent attitude to view such stories about saints and martyrs as rather too lurid and fantastical when approached through a strictly historicist and theological lens: "Despite changing scholarly interests and tastes, hagiography has consistently been perceived as credulous (and hence incredible), repetitive, and stridently ideological."[39] Ever since Peter Brown's "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man" and *Cult of the Saints*, there has been a steadily expanding interest in the genre of hagiography, the genre of literature focused on the lives of holy men and women, including the narratives about the early martyrs, witnessing for their faith often through suffering and death. By appreciating and examining these characters as literary, philosophical and rhetorical constructions, recent studies of hagiographical texts have demonstrated the richness of the topic.

At the same time, martyr literature forms only a part of this tradition of hagiography, which includes writings about holy lives such as saints and confessors, as opposed to the former's specific interest in the events and

[39] Gray and Corke-Webster, *The Hagiographical Experiment* (2020: 4); Brown 1971 and 1981.

sufferings the martyr undergoes for their faith. While there is often much overlap, this inclusion under the broader umbrella of hagiography makes martyr narratives, with their own conventions, seem extra dry and formulaic by comparison. There has been a tendency to treat martyrs as more historical figures, such as in Tim Barnes' analysis of whether certain *acta* could potentially derive from genuine court proceedings.[40] In addition to a rich corpus of martyr texts and calendars, that have survived through medieval manuscripts, martyrs were commemorated in the material culture across a range of genres and materials. In a similar vein to Late Antique studies more broadly, some of these sources have already started to be revisited with a variety of new perspectives, including re-examining the development of the cult and transfer of relics.[41]

From the first few centuries CE, stories of saints and martyrs were collected and retold as part of the project of constructing an overarching narrative of the early Church. Some of these are ascribed to a named author and contain some narrative detail, like the early martyrs recounted in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, while other sources merely list the names and dates of their martyrdoms, like the *Deposition Martyrum*, which includes a selected list of thirty-eight martyrs.[42] These covered all genres and types of texts, including letters, prose and poetry, histories, calendars, and chronicles. This variation has had a significant impact on the choices made by subsequent generations of historians. In the sixteenth century, Héribert Rosweyde attempted a huge collection of saints' lives based on manuscripts sought out from various libraries. This was followed by the Bollandists' ambitious project, the *Acta Sanctorum*, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, gathered manuscripts from monasteries and archives across Europe.[43] Thierry Ruinart, a Benedictine monk and scholar, compiled the *Acta primorum martyrum sincera et selecta* as part of a narrative that emphasised the history of the persecution of early Christians by the Roman authorities.[44] While these churchmen had different principles of selecting the *acta* and hagiographies they included within their volumes, they were all, often explicitly,

[40] Barnes 2010: 81-82; see also, Rebillard 2020: 21-23. I will discuss Rebillard arguments on the 'authenticity' of early martyr narratives in a later chapter.
[41] Wiśniewski 2018.
[42] 'Chronographus anni CCCLIIII', *MGH*, *AA* IX (1892); Lapidge 2018.
[43] Delehaye 1922; Rebillard 2017.
[44] Rebillard 2017: 9-10.

following in the tradition of Eusebius and other writers of the early Church.[45] This sense of continuity with the past meant that there was often a particular concern with trying to dissemble the earliest or most authentic texts. One of the most notable Bollandists, Hippolyte Delehaye, sorted the passions of the martyrs into different classes such as 'epic' and 'historic', while other scholars, such as E.C.E Owen, have come up with their own classifications, depending on how credible they were presumed to be.[46] These manners of selection, whether inclusive or exclusive (i.e. of martyr *acta* that did not meet their criteria), continue to influence modern scholarly editions and attitudes.

In recent decades, however, the discussion has moved on from classifying texts in terms of their 'authenticity' and how they relate to these supposedly early martyr stories, particularly as it is often so difficult to establish with much certainty when they were written. In some more modern editions of collections of martyrs, such as those of Herbert Musurillo and Tim Barnes, for example, one can see echoes of some of the earlier preoccupations with authenticity with the selections of the acts that they consider the most "reliable" or "authentic" according to their specified criteria.[47] As Elizabeth A. Clark argued at the beginning of this century, early Christian texts have moved on from being a "sub-branch of theology" to having been exposed to a whole host of rhetorical and literary approaches.[48] Thus, hagiographies and martyr narratives have become of interest not only to historians of the early Christian church but placed back into their late ancient context as intrinsic products of the Roman and Mediterranean world rather than consciously separated from the 'pagan' elements of it. Classicists and ancient historians have brought their own questions and concerns to these texts, for example, observations on the continuity between hero cults and saints' cults, or aspects of social history such as the lives of women or other groups who do not receive as much attention in 'traditional' historiography.[49] Despite the explosion of Late Antique scholarship in the decades since Peter Brown's seminal monographs, one can still sense a lingering separation or hesitation even today in relegating certain sources to religious scholars and others to ancient historians. It is for this reason that my thesis methodology builds upon these previous

[45] Iohanni Bollandi Praefatio 1643: 6-lxii. Rebillard 2017: 6, n.46
[46] Owen 1927; Grig 2004: 147.
[47] Musurillo 1972: xii; Barnes 2010: 48.
[48] Clark 2004: 8.
[49] E.g. Wiśniewski 2018; Cooper 1999;

approaches in that while it advocates looking at the different texts individually, I am also concerned with stressing Classical roots and influence and context over their later medieval reception and afterlives of the texts. There is in addition scope for examining the construction of female martyrs specifically. The next section will look at martyr narratives, both as they are related to and a part of the broader field of hagiography, and how the figure of the martyr was viewed as distinctive.

As I have noted, there have been many different approaches over the years to studying the history of martyrdom and martyr literature in particular. Several such studies begin with the etymology of the term martyr, which originated in the specifically legal context of its meaning of "witness".[50] For example, the ancient Greek word *μάρτυρ* and Arabic *šhahid* (plural *šhuhada'*), the Arabic word most likely evolved from the same roots through influence from Syriac.[51] In antiquity, this meaning of "witness" was exclusively meant in the context of a legal 'eye-witness', as in a law court, in the witnessing of a will or the manumission of a slave. In a not dissimilar way, Afsarrudin notes that though the word recurs not infrequently in the Qur'an it is only in the sense of an "legal or eye-witness, used for both God and humans in appropriate contexts". [52] As various other scholars have noted, there are obvious limitations to adopting a strictly linguistic approach, not least of which is that by only including texts that use this vocabulary in its later specific meaning of witnessing for the faith we risk losing some of the nuances from other kinds of noble or voluntary death.[53] Nevertheless, it does serve as a useful point to remember when considering the debates around martyrdom texts, for example, the controversies surrounding the centrality of death and its voluntary nature, which, as will be discussed below, keep recurring in later sources.

---

[50] Some studies that begin the linguistic roots of martyrdom, and its limitations, include: Bremmer 2004: 535; Cook 2007: 1. See also, Middleton: 2013 and 2015.
[51] Liddell and Scott 1909: "*μάρτυς*". 426; Kohlberg, E. 'Shahīd'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, P.J. Bearman (Volumes X, XI, XII), Th. Bianquis (Volumes X, XI, XII), et al. [Accessed: Wednesday 3 May 2023 at doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1025.].
[52] E.g. Q. 3:98 or 41:53; Afsarrudin 2018: 86-7, she has a more comprehensive analysis of these and other related Qur'anic passages in her book *Striving in the Path of God* (2013); Cook 2007: 16-7 also talks about the ambiguity of the term in the Qur'an.
[53] Grig 2004: 9;

The traditional Christian narrative, from the first few centuries CE, depicts the early Church as surviving various bouts of persecution, especially the so-called 'Great Persecution' under the emperors Diocletian and Maximian. The Acts of the Apostles and Eulogius' *Church History* are populated with figures who suffer harassment, torture or even death, these being the origin stories of martyrs. Often formulaic, these generally have the martyr or group brought before the imperial official for questioning, often for refusing to sacrifice to the emperor's cult. There are exceptions to this set-up and variations such as details about the background circumstances of their arrest, which we will address later. One of the primary debates in contemporary scholarship has been about the extent of the historicity of these persecutions. Some scholars have historically taken a very positivist or literal view of the sources, especially when it comes to the difficulty of trying to date such sources, and these approaches have been critiqued.[54] At the other end of the spectrum, Candida Moss has argued for an interpretation of the sources to be presenting a "myth" of persecution.[55] However, the scholarly consensus being that any such persecutions were likely more sporadic and highly localised according to specific individuals and contexts, it has been just as useful to consider *why* early Christians chose to frame their history in this manner, especially where they achieved social and political dominance, their "persecution complex".[56] Strikingly, the fourth and fifth centuries have been seen as a particularly prolific and competitive period for martyr writing, considering such 'persecutions' would already be several generations ago. This distance between this past and the later communities commemorating and creating them is one explored in Elizabeth Castelli's *Martyrdom and Memory* where she argues for the significant role of martyrdom and gender in collective identity formation.[57]

Different sects sought to redefine martyrdom differently, notably the Donatists who claimed to be the 'Church of the Martyrs'. This claim was one that one of their opponents, Augustine attempted to dispute saying that martyrdom was *non poena sine causa* or "not the suffering but the cause".[58] There will be some more discussion of the Donatists below in the discussion of the North African context

---

[54]New Philology introduced new questions and approaches such as the contexts of manuscripts as well as the process of creating such texts; see, Clark 2004.
[55] Moss 2012; also, more recently, Rebillard's *Greek and Latin Narratives about the Ancient Martyrs*, 2017.
[56] Grig 2004: 11-13.
[57] Castelli 2004.
[58] August., *Ep.* 89.2.

specifically. As also discussed in another recent work on the Greco-Roman context of early Christian literature, martyr narratives reveal much more about the author or narrator's contemporary context or time, even where this particular figure is anonymous, such as the narrator of the *Passio sanctae Salsae*.[59] This fits in with other ways in which questions about the 'authenticity' of martyr texts are being reframed, whether through looking at how 'originality' was framed in antiquity, or why and how the authors and communities were rewriting and reshaping their past with these often unlikely heroes. Classical scholars have 'rediscovered' stories of Christian martyrs and found lots to say in terms of literary and cultural representation rather than simply dismissing them as problematically ahistorical. This has involved some comparisons between Christian martyrs and heroic models from Homeric epics as well as Greek tragedies.[60] As already mentioned above, there have been many fruitful studies exploring the relationship and influences from Greek novels, another vibrant literary genre with lots of crossovers in characters and themes.[61] In investigating the roots of martyrdom, there has been much discussion of Judaism and Christianity's interactions and engagement with the Classical world, including stories of noble death and martyrdom such as that of the Maccabees.[62] For example, there has long been discussion over the development of Christian martyrdom from antiquity and its Jewish precedents, with Daniel Boyarin's thesis in *Dying for God* arguing rather for a continued and ongoing discourse whereby Jewish and Christian communities, crucially not always neatly distinct from one another, were mutually influential.[63] Through this model, he was critiquing an earlier dichotomy in the discussion about the origins of Christian martyrdom in Jewish or Classical culture, as propagated by scholars such as W.H.C Frend and G.W. Bowersock, especially the assumption that each tradition developed discretely or one after the other.[64] It has only really been in the last couple of decades, that there has been an increasing current in the scholarship to incorporate the emergence of Islam into its broader context such as its Classical heritage, due at least in part to this expansion of Late Antique studies. Notable is Aziz al-Azmeh's *The*

[59] Walsch 2021: 4.
[60] E.g. Warwick 2018.
[61] Lowe 2000; De Tennerman 2014; Alwis 2020; Walsch 2021.
[62] E.g. Bowersock 1995.
[63] Boyarin 1999.
[64] See Bowersock 1995 and Frend 1985; see also, edited volume by Gardner, G. and Osterloh, K.L. which looks at Christian and Jewish pasts in the Greco-Roman world, 2008.

Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity, in which she draws from Classics and Islamic Studies, which have traditionally been, and continue in a large part to be, studied within different specialisms.[65] The last decade in particular has seen increasing studies of Christian and Islamic interactions, in the east between Roman, Sassanian and subsequently Arab territories, as well as in North Africa and Spain.[66]

Elsewhere, there is the figure of the martyr themself, which bears many similarities to other holy men and women and confessors, but is also distinct, although attempts to define exactly who ought to be classified as a martyr vary, sometimes in contradictory ways. It could be a controversial and even heated debate as to whether suffering and death were a necessary pre-requisite or central focus to martyrdom, as well as who should be considered a true martyr. One recent example is Diane Fruchtman's book, *Living Martyrs in Late Antiquity and Beyond*, which challenges this still pervasive assumption in modern scholarship in the Christian context and shows how there are still many aspects to unpick and consider carefully when it comes to analysing martyrdom.[67] Such debates echo Christian writers from centuries earlier. For example, Thecla is consistently described as a martyr or protomartyr despite escaping her various executions, while the Abitinian martyrs, who starve to death in prison, are also so celebrated.[68] These are some of the themes that recur across martyr narratives where the characters are otherwise represented quite differently.

Pertinent to these ongoing tides of revising and revisiting history, martyr narratives have been no different with their constant adaptation even while claiming to be direct heirs of this earlier tradition. As we saw in the opening case study of Leocritia and the other martyrs of Cordoba, the writer was very much positioning them in this model of the earliest martyrs undergoing state persecution despite the very different socio-historical context and other stories make these parallels more or less explicit. This leads us to the observation that

[65] al-Azmeh 2012; also Donner's examination of the roots of Islam in *Muhammad and the Believers*, 2010.
[66] Some recent examples of studies: Conant and Stevens, 2016; Kaegi, 2010; on martyrs and miracle accounts in Christian-Muslim interactions, see: Papaconstantinou, 2012 and Sahner, 2018.
[67] Fruchtman 2023: 3-5.
[68] *APTh* 22 and 34-5; *A.Ab* 23.

so far, there has been an overwhelming focus on Christian martyrs. While Christian sources will be the focus for the majority of the period that this thesis covers, another important Late Antique religion was Islam. Similar to Christianity, the first few centuries from the emergence of Islam saw some radically different interpretations of what constituted a martyr as well as some of the figures that attracted lots of attention or controversy, or indeed both.

The success of the early Islamic conquests in taking over much of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond meant that lots of the early believers who had died in the battles were commemorated as martyrs. In the sectarian disputes over the proper successor to lead the community after Muhammad's death, the figure of Husayn ibn Ali looms large, but also as an outlier as he was the victim of a defeat at the Battle of Karbala (680). As Muhammad's grandson, one of the sons of his only surviving daughter Fatima, he was thus connected to early debates about who should legitimately succeed as leader. This lineage to the Prophet being particularly important in Shi'a tradition, his martyrdom was considered much more shocking and is still ritually commemorated by contemporary Shi'a communities.[69] Of these battle martyrs, the most famous is Husayn ibn Ali, a grandson of Muhammad and the preeminent martyr in the Shi-a tradition. He was killed in the battle of Karbala, whose death and martyrdom were commemorated with ritual mourning as well as pilgrimages to the site of his tomb.[70] Although there were certainly reports of women present in these sources, including Husayn's sister Zaynab Bint Ali, which one recent study has translated and analysed her role and speech after Karbala as another form of witness, the overwhelming impression and focus has been on the warrior martyrs, unanimously men.[71] Martyrdom was also a particular interest of another influential early sect known as the 'Kharijites', (from the Arabic root meaning 'to go out'), so-called radicals who rebelled against the Umayyad caliphate in the seventh to ninth centuries. There has been recent interest in understanding this group, particularly as many of the surviving sources were written by scholars who saw them as heretics and rebels, and were often deeply pejorative, as has been re-examined in the recent work of Hannah Hagemann and Adam Gaiser.[72] As

[69] Yildrim's article on the memory of Karbala and Husayn in Persian popular piety (2015).
[70] E.g. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 2:453–519 (Maḥmūd al-Firdaws al-ʿAẓm, Damascus 1996).
[71] Qutbuddin 2019.
[72] Hagemann 2021; Gaiser 2016.

Hagemann notes, the sources for this group are often far from simple, a sentiment echoed in another recent re-evaluation of early Islamic martyrdom that concludes, in the first centuries martyrdom was “an expansive multivalent concept” and thus open to a much broader cross-section of society than those restricted by military contexts.[73] One of the earliest converts to Islam, as well as its first martyr, was a woman named Sumayyah Bint Khayyat. According to one early biographer Ibn Sa’ad (writing a couple of centuries later from the eighth century), Sumayyah was a former slave who was married to Yasir ibn Amir, and they had a son, Ammar.[74] Later accounts also stated that she was of Ethiopian origin.[75] She and her husband, along with a group of other poorer Muslims, are persecuted and tortured. Her husband and the rest are also executed and this was one of the events that led to Muhammad and his new followers being forced to flee Mecca for Medina in 622. There are many interesting features about Sumayyah’s story, as well as ones that seem familiar to someone who looks at Christian martyrologies, including the scrutiny of her gender and status, a cruel pagan persecutor losing his temper and the humble yet stubborn martyr. One of the most striking things about Sumayyah, however, is that she is on the one hand held in high esteem as the first *šhahida* and yet on the other hand remains obscure, being only briefly mentioned in the earliest biographies and histories, such as Ibn Ishaq, and even then barely by name.[76]

It is only in later Islamic literature and exegesis (*sira*, *tafsir* and *ḥadīth*) that the connection between witnessing and laying down one’s life seems to have been made more explicit.[77] While I will not discuss the first two of these extra-Qur’anic writings in this thesis, I will offer a short explanation about the *ḥadīth* as they provide some particularly fascinating insights into gender and martyrdom which I will discuss later on. The *ḥadīth* or “traditions” were sayings and anecdotes attributed to or about Muhammad and the early Companions. There are various collections of *ḥadīth* (for example, al-Bukhari, Muwatta Malik), that were evaluated and compiled by religious scholars from the eighth and ninth centuries. These were ascribed with different degrees of authority within certain schools of Islam. These were considered very important not only for Quranic exegesis as

[73] Hagemann 2021: 3; Afsarrudin 2018: 105.
[74] Ibn Sa’ad, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*. Vol. III (Bewley 2013).
[75] Cf. another early Islamic Ethiopian slave Bilal, also tortured for his faith though not killed, Cook 2007: 14.
[76] Cook 2007: 14.
[77] Afsarrudin 2018: 86.

well as the interpretation of *fiqh* ("laws"). There were numerous prominent collectors of these *ḥadīth* in the eighth century into the Middle Ages and beyond, who would rank their reliability, and hence level of authority. They would look at the *isnād*, the "chain of transmission", to attest to how historically reliable the particular *ḥadīth* should be. To be considered *ṣaḥīḥ* ("sound"), a *ḥadīth* had to have "continuity of tradition", the transmitters be considered of good character and not prone to mistakes, not contradict a more reliable source and there be no inaccuracies in reporting the actual chain of transmission.[78]

As Thomas Sizgorich wrote in his study of the shared rhetoric and imagery of militant piety by Late Antique Christians and Muslims, there was a "shared set of assumptions and associations [that] manifested itself, at one level, in the capacity of identical stories to express these shared assumptions and associations, even when recited be members of self-consciously distinct communities."[79] Muslim historiographers, no less than Christian ones, drew on the literary conventions of Late Antiquity, in particular, works that "placed primacy on narrative logic, credibility devices, and emotional persuasion".[80] Yet when Classicists and Late Antique historians have ventured into comparisons with Christianity and early Islam, there seems to have been a strong tendency towards drawing parallels between early Christian martyrs and Islamicist fundamentalists from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For example, Jan Bremmer compares Perpetua and her companions with Palestinian suicide bombers, including features such as their youth and eschatological aspirations. Sharon Dunn adopts a similar approach by comparing Perpetua with the specific figure of Wafa Idris, the first female suicide bomber of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with a more explicitly feminist approach.[81] It is yet another nod to Perpetua's popularity that she should be the chosen martyr in both these studies. While such comparisons provide fascinating insights from an anthropological point of view, this tendency to jump forward into a completely different socio-political context also has its issues. On one level, it skips over the potential for looking at encounters between Islam and Christianity, specifically relating to developments in martyrdom discourses, during this crucial developmental period for both religions. On another, these anachronistic comparisons risk further perpetuating the treatment of Islam as

---

[78] Robinson 2003: 15-17.
[79] Sizgorich 2009: 278.
[80] Haider 2019: 2.
[81] Bremmer 2004: 546-50 and 2012; Dunn 2010.

somehow separate rather than just as much a product of Late Antiquity. Many of the reasons for this so far limited comparative approach are methodological. For example, the types of sources, as well as the languages, have been traditionally studied in their separate disciplines. While this thesis, due to its scope and chronology, focuses for the most part on Christian martyrs, the inclusion of some comparative work in the final chapter is designed to keep the conversation open.

ii. North Africa:

North Africa has long been perceived as particularly interested in martyrdom as well as being a region that underwent various political regime changes during Late Antiquity. On this theme, scholars such as Maureen Tilley and Brent Shaw have been particularly influential. Shaw's *Sacred Violence* takes a look at the roles of violence and reports of violence in the North African context, including clashes between sectarian groups, notably, in the fourth and early fifth centuries, this included sectarian conflict between 'Donatist' and other forms of Christianity over legitimacy.[82] The 'Donatists' self-identified themselves and their heroes for their refusal to hand over sacred texts, unlike the *traditores* or "traitors" who had done so, under previous periods of persecution and strictures over rebaptising lapsed clerics.[83] Proponents of the ultimately triumphant 'Catholic' church, such as Augustine, virulently refuted them yet also found themselves in the awkward position of being the imperially mandated persecutors, hence the context for his attempts at redefining martyrdom to be the cause rather than the suffering.[84] Maureen Tilley notes, in the preface to her edition of translated *Donatist Martyr Stories*, how Donatists "valued martyrs of either sex over male hierarchical leadership".[85] Martyr stories and cults were often a central focus in these disputes, as explored in several chapters by Dearn and Moss in the recently edited volume, *The Donatist Schism*.[86] Many of these martyrs, such as Cyprian and also Crispina, were revered by both Donatist and Catholic communities, showing another important aspect – sectarian competition – for the creation and

[82] Shaw 2011.
[83] Miles 2016: 2-3: Labels such as 'Donatist', 'Catholic' have been acknowledged to be fraught and limited but have been widely used in the scholarship and are ultimately preferable to more pejorative terms like 'heretic' or 'dissident'.
[84] See note 48 above.
[85] Tilley 1997a: x.
[86] Miles (ed.) 2016.

propagation of martyr cults.[87] On the particular popularity of African female martyrs, Shaw noted how "[a] statistical analysis of all known pre-Constantinian martyrs reveals that, compared to general Mediterranean trends, African women represented a markedly higher proportion of all female saints."[88] For a re-consideration of martyrdom and gender, it seems like a logical region to focus on, besides the obvious restrictions of a thesis project.

There has been a significant amount of scholarship on Roman and medieval North Africa. However, the former tended to stop at the arrival of the Vandals in 429 or the Justinian conquest of the provinces a century later, perhaps with an epilogue looking ahead to the arrival of the Arab conquest.[89] The latter meanwhile, would start from the eighth century, for example, Elizabeth Savage's *A Gateway to Hell, A Gateway to Paradise*.[90] While there are methodological reasons for this choice regarding source materials, the general effect is for marking a definite and suspiciously neat periodisation between Late Antique and Byzantine North Africa and the medieval Maghreb. My thesis builds on lots of the recent and impressive work that has been done on re-examining some of these assumptions about these various regime changes by looking at some of the longer cultural continuities.

Scholars of Roman North Africa have long followed the narrative that the creation of the Vandal kingdom in North Africa during the fifth century marked a cataclysmic event and cultural transition from being a Roman province, at least until Justinian's brief reconquest of the Western Roman Empire in the sixth century.[91] To some extent, this is also a consequence of the interests of different historical disciplines as Late Antiquity by its nature intersects with Classical antiquity and the early Middle Ages and while a certain level of periodisation of this type can be necessary, as with other historical eras, it can also give a false sense of the people who were living through such times. One important literary source is the fifth-century bishop Victor of Vita who, in his *History of the Vandal*

[87] Moss 2016: 56.
[88] Shaw 1993: 14.
[89] E.g. Raven 1993; Decret 2011.
[90] Savage 1997; Christides 2000; Fromherz 2016.
[91] Scholarship on Roman North Africa tends to end around the fourth or fifth century, sometimes with a brief epilogue acknowledging the Arab conquest, e.g. Raven 1993; meanwhile, books on the medieval Maghreb situate themselves from the seventh or eighth centuries onwards, e.g. Crone 1997.

Persecutions, goes out of his way to highlight the destructive and cataclysmic scale of the Vandal invasion: "Finding a province which was in peace and enjoying quiet, the whole land beautiful and flowering on all sides, they [i.e. the Vandals] set to work on it with their wicked forces, laying it waste by devastation and bringing and bringing everything to ruin with fire and murders."[92] In the last couple of decades there has been a considerable amount of revisionist work done on the Vandals, in particular questioning their "barbarian" and "Roman" identities as well as taking a look at the remarkable continuity within material culture. From funerary practices to the decoration of private homes, scholars such as Merrills, Myers and Conant have stressed how there was often as much continuity as change in how Vandal elites presented themselves as Romans.[93] In revisiting the archaeological evidence, particularly for the later seventh to ninth centuries, there has been a new understanding of the periods of Byzantine and Arab rule. For example, nineteenth- and twentieth-century excavations were far more interested in the earlier Greco-Roman layers and would cut through and often destroy much of the evidence for the later early medieval and Islamic era layers, as outlined by the recent work of Corisande Fenwick.[94] By working across rather than in these more restrictive epochs, I am viewing Late Antique North Africa as an interconnected space in which stories and ideas about martyrdom and gender could be retold and adapted to suit the needs of different communities at different times, while still maintaining that link with the past. For example, David Woods has argued that the *Martyrdom of Saint Maximilian* was a "late eighth century fiction", with details he claims suggest the Arab administration, rather than a third-century "accurate account of a genuine martyr".[95] Leaving aside the assumptions about authenticity behind such a claim, this is a good illustration of how martyr stories could be reinvented or given new meanings in new contexts.

I have chosen to focus on this geographic area, defined in its broadest and most interconnected sense, as there is plenty of evidence for cultural and political links with other parts of the Latin West and Byzantine world, leading up to its eventual transition to a predominantly Islamic culture following the Arab conquest in the Middle Ages. The provinces, and then post-Roman kingdoms, of North Africa

[92] Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution* 1.3.
[93] Merrils and Miles 2009: 83-4; Conant 2012; Whelan 2018.
[94] Fenwick 2020: 10.
[95] Woods 2003: 266.

have been long noted for their fascination with martyrs as well as all the ground-breaking and revisionist research that suggests a degree of continuity through the various regimes that influenced them. All of these cultural and social influences in turn had an impact on the creation of the stories of female martyrs and the communities that curated and responded to them.

iii. Women and Gender

Over the last few decades, there has been a significant amount of attention paid to women in the early church and hagiographical texts and martyr narratives have been studied to better understand the social and cultural history of the Late Antique and early medieval world. Studies have looked at the impact of Christianity on Roman society such as the family structure and household.[96] The appearance of women in positions of leadership and authority in the hierarchy such as in the roles of "deaconesses" or patrons, has been explored in texts such as the biographies of prominent ascetic women such as Macrina the Younger.[97] Women are also more associated with urban settings, as Elizabeth Clark noted in her essay on the absence of the "holy women" in the same mould as Brown's 'holy man' ascetic.[98] While various types of holy women – whether ascetics, martyrs or saints – are shown to be able to confront tyrannical authority or even wield it themselves, seem almost revolutionary, it is important to note how they were being written by and shaped by a whole host of male writers, such as Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, as well as editors and copyists over the subsequent millennia. The mere possibility that her *Passio* could be authored at least in part by a woman is one of the reasons why Perpetua has exerted such a fascination on scholars for generations. This has encouraged historians to consider the role and significance that these female exempla might have had, especially for male-centred audiences. A prominent theme in many texts about female martyrs, as well as commentaries and other theological works, is the preservation of their chastity. For example, in *The Virgin and the Bride*, Kate

[96] Cooper 2007.
[97] Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina the Younger* (PG 46.774-8); also the famous letter in Plin. *Ep.* 10.96 (trans. Radice 1963: 293-5). Pliny's correspondence with the emperor Trajan during his governorship of Bithynia and Pontus, where he describes his encounter with a number of Christians, including a couple of slave women "deaconesses" (*duabus ancillis, quae ministrae dicebantur*), and his procedure of dealing with them, involving first giving them the opportunity to make a sacrifice to the emperor.
[98] Clark 1998: 415.

Cooper argues for how depictions of idealised female virginity could be used rhetorically by male ascetics.[99] Another trope that has been widely observed and discussed is the portrayal of the 'male holy woman', i.e. where a female saint or martyr physically dresses as or appears to take on masculine dress or characteristics for a temporary or extended period.[100] Classical thought had long associated women more with the body and irrationality, such as Aristotle's idea of women's inferior capabilities.[101] These influences were very prominent in the imaginations of these and later Classical writers, including early Christians, and there are countless examples of female ascetics managing by various means to overcome their feminine weaknesses. The 'masculinisation' of these women has been interpreted as a pragmatic means for a female character to enter and participate in traditionally male spaces and thus a type of spiritual promotion.[102] All of these differing views, while often complex to interpret and unravel, serve to show that there has never been a single fixed idea of what role women should play within the development of the early Christian Church.

There have been some other attempts to nuance some of the seemingly paradoxical ways women are portrayed in these narratives. Cobb analyses the language of gender in martyr texts, such as how female martyrs were masculinised through military or athletic metaphors.[103] Yet at the same time, many Christian martyrs, male and female, were the passive victims of persecution. Similarly, in her survey of the so-called "holy harlots", Pelagia of Antioch and Mary of Egypt, Patricia Cox Miller notes how "the femaleness of both Mary and Pelagia is affirmed, but oddly, through multiple transgressions of gender identities and boundaries."[104] In many ways, female martyrs seem to be much more heterogeneous in how they are portrayed.

In contrast to some of the reconstructive work that women's history has undergone in US and European histories, Ruth Roded observes a "plethora" of details and sources about women recorded by Muslim scholars such as in biographical collections.[105] There has been scholarship on the types of holy or

[99] Cooper 2011.
[100] E.g. *APTh* 40. Castelli (1991) "I Will Make Mary Male"; Clark (1998) also discusses the "holy woman" particularly in relation to Peter Brown's "holy man"; Cobb, *Dying to be Men* (2008).
[101] E.g. Arist. *Pol.*, 1254b13-14.
[102] E.g. Shaw 1993: 29.
[103] Cobb 2008: 33-59.
[104] Miller 2003: 425.
[105] Roded 1994.

otherwise influential women preserved in these sources, in politics or historiography.[106] More recently, other scholars have looked at women in more historically neglected genres; for example, Pernilla Myrne explores portrayals of women and female sexuality in other genres of Arabic literature, including erotic and medical handbooks and Tahera Qutbuddin examines the role of women and gender in Arabic oration and poetry.[107] Even in discourses still primarily written by and about men, these demonstrate some of the novel approaches to looking for and at women in such sources. It has also been observed how there were several prominent women within their accounts, such as al-Baljāʾ, some of whom are discussed in an article by Carolyn Baugh.[108] While the battlefield martyrs from the early conquests have received the most attention and were mostly male, there were also accounts of female warriors such as Nausayba d. Ka'b.[109] Yet there are also some sayings from prominent collections of *ḥadīth*, that seem to show different attitudes to how to define a martyr, including references to women, that have been neglected. While the focus on male military martyrs goes some way to explaining the relative dearth of female martyrs, it still does not give us a satisfactory way of examining characters, like Sumayyah, who get only fleeting mentions in the sources.

Unsurprisingly, as with other types of literary sources from antiquity, there is an overwhelming bias towards elite women, and yet hagiographies and martyr narratives also contain depictions of characters from a range of social levels. Indeed, female martyrs overlap some of these categories as the narratives they feature in were based in a context of enough social realism that their audiences would understand, yet the roles they play come from all levels of the social hierarchy, from elite queens and noblewomen to slaves. From the earliest narratives in both traditions, we see that martyrs could be men or women of any age or social status, and all were considered highly revered examples of their religious faith, with all sorts of privileges accorded to their status in the afterlife and abilities to be able to intercede with the divine on behalf of their living communities, as exempla for both men and women in ways that appear to

[106] For Aisha in hadith transmission, e.g. Geissinger 2004: 1-20; Zaynab's orations, Qutbuddin 2019b.
[107] Myrne 2019; Qutbuddin 2019a.
[108] Baugh 2017: 36-55.
[109] Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah* (trans. Guillaume 1989); Roded 1994: 35.

complicate some of the ideology and rhetoric about the expected place of women. To paraphrase a comment from a recent study of female medieval monasticism, there still seems to be significant scope for looking at female martyrdom's "perplexing heterogeneity and ambiguity" within a bigger framework.[110]

2. Thesis:

i. Key questions

A key question that I seek to address in this thesis involves looking specifically at the female martyr as a literary construction and in turn how better to reposition martyr narratives into hagiography and life-writing more broadly. Another question is how the influences from different types of Late Antique discourses were used and adapted in different times and contexts, rather than as a narrative of linear progression or evolution.

If there is one overarching assumption or trend that I have particularly noticed and seek to challenge, it is the tendency to view female martyrs as homogenous, to different degrees, particularly in comparison with their male counterparts. Many of the same themes do seem to come up repeatedly, for example, the attention paid to female chastity. This makes a lot of the literature seem repetitive, to the point that certain hagiographies seem to have been modelled on earlier texts, but this should not be seen as a failure of creativity or originality, as has been argued in the examples of the *Passio Caeciliae* and the *Passio Susannae*.[111] I will instead explore how these themes were being used and adapted in creative and innovative ways to suit the needs and contexts of certain communities of believers. Throughout this thesis, I will consider how female martyrs were constructed and treated, especially compared with male martyrs, to critique the idea of female martyrs being exceptions with the underlying assumption that the 'default' martyr was always male. As we saw with the example of Leocritia, one striking difference is how female martyrs are usually first encountered in a more private sphere than their male counterparts, requiring more narrative explanation for how they come under the scrutiny of a public or semi-public trial. The visibility of these women, often literally in arenas and theatres, would have had different

[110] Vanderputten 2018: 8.
[111] Bossu, Praet and De Temmerman 2015: 1072.

associations for Late Antique audiences, and writers shaped the roles that gender played in these narratives accordingly, such as the types of characters and characterisation, in ways that relied on their audiences' experience and expectations from other types of drama and performance. Building on ideas of female martyrs being masculinised, I am also interested in how different types of conventionally gendered imagery are applied to martyrs in general rather than a single direction (i.e. female to male).

Another important way that my thesis builds on the considerable scholarship that has gone before, is by broadening the scope and range of perspectives. This involves re-evaluating Perpetua's *Passio* alongside the lesser-known text of a martyr such as Salsa, in addition to revisiting some of the more well-studied narratives using fresh approaches. This includes, in the final chapter, a comparative study with some Islamic materials. By taking into consideration a more inclusive world of Late Antiquity, I aim to explore how some of these ideas were influential, or not, for how writers and communities shaped and created their martyrs. By looking at a few Islamic as well as Christian sources, I am also keen to look at depictions of female martyrs in different cultural contexts as a way of comparing how certain Late Antique ideas were adopted, evolved in different directions, or seem to have been ignored or discarded. In this way, I aim to contribute to conversations regarding how Late Antique women and holiness were continually evolving as regards the different understandings about martyrdom and gender that were being adapted to suit the needs or aspirations of communities of early Christians and Muslims. In this way, we will get to see some of the differing directions that Christianity and Islam had been adapting elements of their Classical legacy and how writers and audiences could wield and recognise a martyr like Leocritia.

ii. Methodology:

As such, my study focuses on a few individual case studies, some very well known, others of which have received substantially less attention but are no less interesting for this. It thus presents the opportunity to look at these martyrs from a different angle compared with previous studies that have focused on a small set of popular examples, like Perpetua, or presenting martyrs as a subsection

within broader studies of holy men and women.[112] This aims to give more of a window into 'everyday' martyr veneration by looking at what certain aspects or allusions about them might have meant to audiences. This includes my preference for the term 'audience' to encompass all those engaging with the stories in the broadest sense as well as more narrowly defined readers (i.e. literate, elite) of the physical texts. I am not looking for any historical basis for such figures, so far as the meaning that was invested in them by both individuals and whole communities, and the significance of gender in their construction and commemoration.

As well as serving as models of virtue to emulate, martyrs crop up in a wide range of visual and literary media, all of it a testimony to the diversity of their stories and functions within their different communities. While specific intentions are tricky to ascertain, writers used different techniques to promote the martyrs and their message, including being entertaining, educational or shocking. Given that individual martyrs could be represented differently in different contexts and media, it is also important to challenge assumptions about what makes a martyr, including the extent to which the suffering or death is centred in the narrative. For example, the same martyr in different places, and times could have different elements emphasised and other aspects left out, such as Thecla whose extremely popular cult around the Mediterranean sees her alternately as protomartyr, proselytiser and consecrated virgin, without apparent regard at times for any contradiction.[113]

One of the issues with this kind of comparative study is that the different types of historical sources have been studied within their respective historiographical conventions, whether from Classics, medieval studies, or religion and theology. This is a challenge for Late Antique studies more generally, which recent studies have sought to address, for example, looking at the development of certain concepts across different cultures and languages. [114] Despite such methodological issues, interdisciplinary work can enrich scholarly conversations and it is in this spirit that I have included a small selection of Islamic material. The

[112] E.g. Gold 2018, or Eastman 2011.
[113] Davies 2001.
[114] Dabiri 2021: 20. Se also examples such as Gaiser on asceticism and militant martyrdom, 2016; Conermann and Rheingans' volume on interdisciplinary approaches to hagiography and life writing 2014.

themes in the sources I have chosen can offer us an insight into the development of some of those I have already built up, through discussion of some of the earlier Christian literature. I have given some background information such as an introduction to some of the types of Islamic sources I will be discussing and will provide additional contextual or biographical information in the relevant chapter as it becomes necessary. This may give the impression of the Islamic material being more of an addendum rather than just as much a product of the Late Antique world. I would argue rather that, given the shortage of attention on these particular sources, there is a need for new ways of thinking about how to frame some of the more obscure figures and voices in the historiography.

This thesis argues that female martyrs in early Christianity were much more heterogeneous in their description and usage than has sometimes been assumed. Partly because the dating of many of these texts is so difficult, I have chosen several 'snapshots' from across this period to highlight some of the variety of notions related to female martyrdom. By honing in on a single text or group of texts, I can examine the individual context for a particular representation of a female martyr and offer my analysis via a close reading of the text. For each case study, I am primarily interested in literary representations of martyrs within their main narrative accounts, although I also take into consideration the cultural context in which these texts were being generated, especially the potential performance contexts of the texts, as attested by references in other types of writings, such as sermons, and the material evidence such as from churches and pilgrimage sites. It is important to read these literary texts in these novel ways to nuance our understanding of the topic.

iii. Chapter Summary:

This thesis is divided into four main chapters, each focused on an individual martyr or a new methodological or thematic approach to a selection of martyr texts. In this way, the single case studies break down some of the lingering assumptions about gender and martyrdom while the latter looks at their different roles within the communities that created and performed them. This all builds up to my overarching thesis that female martyrs should be understood to be much more nuanced and diverse than previous assumptions.

In Chapter Two, my first case study looks at Perpetua, a young mother executed in early third-century Carthage. Perpetua has been the subject of countless studies, especially the Latin version of the *Passio*, and this prolonged scholarly attention is due in no small part to the inclusion of a 'prison diary' that purports to be written in the first person by the persona of 'Perpetua' herself.[115] She is by no means the earliest martyr since there are plenty of martyrs from the previous two centuries, notably Stephen and Thecla who are referred to as protomartyrs. Other early examples include Polycarp, a bishop from Smyrna, and the *Martyrs of Lyon and Vienne* in Eusebius. Perpetua's cult was popular in North Africa, but also abroad such as in Italy and Spain. As such, she was influential on other martyr narratives as well as still dominating much of the modern scholarship and it is precisely because of this pre-eminence within the subject of female martyrs that I have chosen to start with her. I will discuss some of the aspects of her various texts, though especially the *Passio*, that scholars have found particularly fascinating, especially one of her visions in which she transforms into a man. I offer a novel interpretation of the text based on a close reading of a scene towards the end of the narrative, and how it argues for how her 'exceptionality' and appeal are due as much to the attention she has received to lead into a discussion about the less well-known Salsa in the following chapter.

By contrast, the cult of the second martyr I look at, Salsa, seems to have at least initially remained fairly local to the city of Tipasa and its surroundings (including links to Spain in the surviving manuscript tradition), and has received considerably less scholarly attention. For all that, her *Passio* is no less interesting than Perpetua's and it is this text that I take a close reading of, in particular how her portrayal as a "vernacular" martyr fits in with a re-evaluation of some of the material evidence from Tipasa. There are other curious aspects about her, including her lack of a conversion story and her 'action hero' destruction of a pagan statue, that also call into question assumptions about the supposed passivity of virgin martyrs.

[115] The bibliography on Perpetua and her companions, especially the *Passio*, is vast but recent notable works include Bremmer and Formisano's edited volume, 2012; Hefferman's translation and commentary, 2012a; Gold 2018.

In Chapter Four, I turn to a number of the earliest martyr *acta*, which presents a methodological problem in the sense that the female martyrs within these narratives are often far less characterised than figures such as Perpetua or Salsa. Despite receiving much less characterisation, they are still an important part of the discourses than extrapolating from a few unrepresentative cases. To try to recontextualise the dramatic impact of these characters, I look at the popularity of Roman comedies and mimes, in which the heroines are similarly starkly represented. I consider in particular the dynamic between the female martyr and the often-overlooked antagonist. I take the case study of Crispina to demonstrate how some of the influences from Roman comedy, such as plot and characters, might be able to shed new perspectives on how Late Antique audiences received these stories as well as some of the more 'comic' undertones of these texts.

In the fifth and final chapter, the thesis culminates with an exploration of the more general treatment of female martyrs whether or not they are the main focus of their texts. I look at some of the varied roles that mothers play within these discourses, as martyrs, supporters or even antagonists to their martyred children. This is a theme that seems to persist throughout antiquity and beyond; in particular, there seems to be a persistent and specifically gendered analogy made between the pain and risk of pregnancy and childbirth and battle and martyrdom. This type of gendered discourse is present not only in stories about female martyrs but also in some accounts of male ones. This is striking, not least the longevity of the imagery as well as how and when it is used by a tradition of writing so predominantly masculine. I also bring in some of the early Islamic discourses about martyrdom alongside various Christian sources, with a comparative case study of Felicitas and Sumayyah, including how their experiences as low-status mothers and martyrs are treated within their respective traditions.

I have picked these particular case studies to give an expanded overview of some of the developments in the construction of the female martyr in Late Antiquity. As I will show, a common thread that runs through all of these case studies is the significance of the gender of the martyr protagonists, those perspectives may be at times elusive or even contradictory. With Perpetua, despite the abundance of historiography, there is still scope for novel readings. Salsa's *Passio* likewise is

full of weird and wonderful details. Similarly, some of the comedic and theatrical influences of the martyr *acta* have been at risk of being overlooked or ignored, in no small part due to the liturgical and monastic circumstances of their transmission and reception. Finally, Christian martyrs have long been considered only concerning their earlier Jewish and Classical roots, so, looking at the role of mothers and maternal/childbirth imagery, I bring in some comparative analysis with early Islamic hadith and commentary as well as the figure of the first Islamic martyr, Sumayyah. Throughout the long Late Antiquity, we see many reiterations of the female martyr, whether certain figures or ideas proved influential or were for a specific time or place. This thesis looks at many of the performative aspects around gender to argue for the need to re-examine some of the assumptions we may still have about martyrdom itself.

Chapter Two: Perspectives on Perpetua

1. Introduction:

As already noted in the previous chapter, Perpetua's reach across disciplines is huge, appearing in studies and courses on women in early Christianity, women and writing, Montanism and New Prophecy, and of course gender and martyrdom. Thus, before we can begin to broaden the landscape of female martyrdom, we will start with the 'superstar' figure of Perpetua and a review of some of this literature below. She is a very early example of a martyr, from the beginning of the third century, and as such has received a great amount of attention both in commentaries in antiquity and modern scholarship. Indeed, she became one of the most well-known North African martyrs in the province and abroad, appearing as one of only three non-Roman martyrs to appear in the *Depositio Martyrum* (the others being Cyprian and Felicitas) as well as iconography such as in the Church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. It is in the text known as *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity* (*Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, from here on referred to as *Passio Perpetuae*) that "Vibia Perpetua" is notably described as *martyra*, specifically a *female* witness, here the noun's first attestation in ancient literature.[116] Already even in the language itself, there seems to be a considered distinction of a female martyr compared with her male co-martyrs. Perpetua is thus a suitable first case study with which to demonstrate my methodology as she is often seen as both the quintessential female martyr of North Africa and a highly unusual and distinctive case, for reasons which I will presently elaborate on. I will begin to show, through a new close reading of the *Passio Perpetua*, how these texts benefit from individual attention.

There is one moment towards the end of this text where a group of martyrs, including Perpetua, who have survived being attacked by various wild beasts in the arena, congregate by the "Gate of Life" (*portam Sanavivarium*):

[116] *P.Perp.* 20.5. Heffernan 2012a: 348; Ronsse 2006: 302.

Illic Perpetua a quodam tunc catechumeno, Rustico nomine, qui ei adhaerebat, suscepta et **quasi a somno expergita** (adeo in spiritu et in **extasi** fuerat) circumspicere coepit, et stupentibus omnibus ait: 'Quando,' inquit, 'producimur ad vaccam illam nescio quam?' **Et cum audisset quod iam evenerat, non prius credidit nisi quasdam notas vexationis in corpore et habitu suo recognovisset.**

'There, after she was welcomed and as if awakened from sleep (to such an extent was she in the Spirit and in ectasy) by a catechumen named Rusticus, who was ever with her at that time, Perpetua began to look around and said to the astonishment of all, 'When,' she said, 'are we getting taken to that—what is it—that heifer?' And when she heard what had already happened she did not believe it, except she had noticed some signs of a struggle on her body and clothing.'[117]

It is only now that Perpetua, the narrator and purported author of a significant part of the preceding narrative, appears "as if awakened from sleep" and, in the above passage, does not have any memory of being in the arena at all, let alone of her recent tussle with "an extremely fierce heifer".[118] Astonished and disbelieving, it is only when she sees the physical marks on her clothes and body that she accepts what her fellow martyrs are telling her has just happened. Her short-term amnesia is a peculiar detail considering how dramatic the previous scene has been, and it is reminiscent of the aftermath of the four visions she has had during the narrative, each of which has generated an accompanying entourage of commentary. The third-person narrator specifies that it is because she is full of or caught up in the Holy Spirit, and Perpetua goes on to interpret this with words of reassurance for her fellow martyrs, further cementing her position as one of authoritative status even within this special group. Yet several questions arise from this, apparently often overlooked, passage, many summaries skipping from all the interesting gender details with her and Felicitas's confrontation with the heifer to her dramatic gladiator execution at the end.[119] If Perpetua has no initial recollection of the previous dramatic beast fight, at least not until faced with some empirical evidence on her clothing, then there is already a divergence between what she has experienced in comparison to the others

[117] *P.Perp.* 20.8-9.
[118] Ibid.
[119] E.g. Shaw 1993: 9.

including the audience. It suggests some level of ambiguity over how an audience is supposed to interpret the whole previous scene. Along with this apparent disconnect between what the audience thinks they have just seen and Perpetua's experience, there is also her confusion that is swiftly followed up by her being able to turn and reassure the others with authority. The moment has invited intrigue from commentators such as Augustine: "What was she seeing, she who wasn't seeing? What was she enjoying, she who wasn't feeling?"[120] In her article on rhetoric in the *Passio Perpetuae*, Erin Ronsse lists major events of the text including referring to the scene above, the scene following the female beast fight, as "Perpetua's 5th vision".[121] The focus of this chapter will therefore be on this small episode. It is important because of how it offers a new look at her overall characterisation and cohesion in the structure of the narrative of the *Passio Perpetuae* which has been the source of so much fascination.

First, I will make a survey of some of the voluminous literature on Perpetua and her various texts. This will help show how, as a result of the sheer amount of secondary scholarship, she has practically become a synecdoche for female martyrs. In all of this, I argue that Perpetua's 'exceptionality' becomes self-fulfilling as it is only more emphasised due to the vast amount of scholarly attention she has received. This is in turn of huge importance to my overarching thesis on the need to re-evaluate how we think about female martyrs more generally. Instead of focusing on those aspects of Perpetua that seem to make her the exception compared to other martyrs, such as her child or visions, I am interested in the ways such a character has been constructed. However, this is not to take away from the fact that she is still a fascinating character witness for such a study as I then go into for the last part of the chapter. Having offered a context for the character and her strange behaviour in this passage, I propose that there is at least the suggestion here that the whole previous beast fight, even the whole arena scene, is another of Perpetua's visions, albeit being told from a

[120] August. *Serm.* 280.4 (Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 110-11). Very helpfully, Stephanie Cobb has recently compiled new translations of all the literary sources as well as other references of Perpetua and Felicitas from other sources, and visual culture, into a single volume.
[121] Ronsse 2006: 309-10, also p.290 for list of the major events in the text.

third-person rather than a first-person perspective this time. By outlining how the narrator may have chosen to suggest such ambiguity, I will discuss how ‘Perpetua’s fifth vision’ compares to visions in other martyr texts, how it relates to wider themes of martyrs disdaining a worldly reality as they anticipate heavenly rewards as well as the potentially didactic and exemplary elements of such a narrative.

The *Passio Perpetuae* is a fascinating text which has attracted a significant renewal of interest especially over the past couple of decades, not least for its relatively early dating and purported female authorship, of which I will say more below shortly. This text survives in nine Latin manuscripts and one Greek manuscript, none of which date to earlier than the ninth century.[122] There is now a scholarly consensus that the Latin version was the original composition with the Greek translation not long afterwards, possibly as early as the late third century CE.[123] In addition, there were also the *Acta brevia sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, of which two different versions survive that have been labelled *A* and *B*.[124] These contain a redacted version (though there are significant differences between the texts) of most of the events narrated by the *Passio*, albeit all from a third-person narrative perspective. The *Acta* have been traditionally considered to have been composed later than the *Passio*, in the fourth or fifth century, although the relationship between the two texts is not entirely clear.[125] The *Acta* have generally received less attention than the *Passio*, at least the Latin version,[126] although there have been several recent articles that have chosen to highlight some of the ways the *Acta* differ from the *Passio*’s narrative, such as having a different ending, or have re-examined the latter’s assumed early date.[127] When I discuss Felicitas in a later chapter, I will have more to say about some of the differences in the *Acta* versions of the story.

[122] Heffernan 2012: 60.
[123] Cobb 2021: 3-5. Recently, Muehlberger has reanalysed some of the evidence and argued for the *Passio* being a late fourth or early fifth century composition based on earlier martyr *acta* (2022: 316).
[124] Amat 1996; Cobb 2021.
[125] Cobb 2021: 67.
[126] E.g. Shaw 2020.
[127] Cobb 2019; Muehlberger 2022.

Debates about the various texts have had implications for the 'authenticity' and reception of Perpetua in Late Antiquity and the later Middle Ages. They should be put in the context of other evidence such as the sermons of fourth- and fifth-century clerics, such as Augustine or Quodvultdeus, as well as references in calendars, inscriptions and mosaics.[128] This analysis is primarily focused on the Latin version of the *Passio Perpetuae* which has already been the subject of several methodological approaches. To list some of these, scholars have looked at the text using feminist and psychological lenses, as well as drawing parallels between her and trying to understand women's roles in contemporary acts of fundamentalism.[129] There is in addition a Greek translation, roughly contemporaneous, that contains some interesting variations from the Latin version.[130] I will refer to this only so far as these changes affect the particular passages I am concerned with. However, by focusing on the *Passio* here, which has been the subject of a lot of previous scholarly interest, I aim to show not only how it continues to invite and reward close readings, but also how we must consider some of the myriad ways different audiences interacted with and formed their female martyrs.

2. Literature review of *Passio Perpetuae*

The text is made up of twenty-one chapters and is usually divided into four main sections in recent editions depending on who is narrating. First, a third-person narrator delivers the prologue which cites Scripture and introduces the group of martyrs (chapters 1-2). Next, Perpetua's first-person perspective "prison diary" which includes her interactions with her hostile father and her trial and is interspersed with her four visions (chapters 3-10). This is followed by another vision narrated by her fellow martyr Saturus, also from his first-person perspective, in which Perpetua appears speaking to two clerical figures (chapters 11-

[128] E.g. Codex Calendar of 354 or the mosaic procession in the Church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna.
[129] Cox Miller 1992; Dunn 2010.
[130] Shaw 's recent article in which he discusses the relative lack of attention on the Greek text (2020: 310-11).

13). Finally, the third-person narrator returns to relate the last days in prison, including Felicitas' miraculous premature labour, followed by their execution. There are also, as scholars have previously noted, two execution scenes, one in the arena facing animals which they all survive, then one at the end where they are dispatched by a gladiator.[131]

As already stated, one of the reasons for such keen interest in this text has been its relatively early date, which has generally been estimated to be about the mid-third century CE. The earliest calendar evidence giving a date for these martyrs' deaths, 7th March, comes from the fourth-century *Depositio Martyrum*. Other later traditions such as the fifth-century Prosper of Aquitaine, ascribed her martyrdom to a persecution in 203.[132] Tertullian, who refers to Perpetua as "the mightiest martyr" (*fortissima martyr*) in his treatise *On the Soul*, provides early external evidence for if not the text we have today then some iteration of the character or story, and he was previously considered as a potential candidate for the anonymous author-editor.[133] These disputes over the dating of the text are significant for the current thesis for although Perpetua was by no means the earliest martyr, with Christian tradition dating figures such as Stephen, Thecla, and Polycarp to the previous couple of centuries, she was nonetheless considered influential as a model for later narratives. This is not least because, unlike these previous important martyr narratives, the text chooses to narrate the story of the experiences of the martyrs' final few days from the perspective of one of their own.

It is not difficult to see how the voice of a female author from the Classical world seems something of a novelty, although its implications for social history and the history of women writers have only started to be explored more recently.[134] The editor claims that it was "written in her own hand and from her own experience".[135] Indeed, this has been considered novel for martyr literature in general as male and female

[131] This is a very different ending from the *Acta* where just the beast fight is narrated, as Cobb has recently discussed (2019: 599).
[132] Prosper Aquitanus, *Epitoma Chronicorum* (Mommsen 1891); Heffernan 2012a: 65.
[133] Tert. *De anim.* 55 (Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 97-101); Gold 2018: 13-14 and n.8.
[134] E.g. Perpetua missing from Snyder's 1989 collection of sources on women writers.
[135] *P.Perp.* 2.3: *sicut conscriptum manu sua et suo sensu reliquit*.

martyrs in previous accounts would be told often by a third person narrator with very few indicators of how the protagonists might be feeling about the events other than in their direct speech.[136] As Whitmarsh has argued, Late Antique North Africa seemed to have developed a particularly strong sense of this type of "fictional autobiography", as it is the background context of Perpetua as well as the two other authors who wrote in this style, Apuleius and Augustine.[137] Nevertheless, it is still striking that one of the earliest martyrs who speaks with such a memorable authorial voice should also be female. Like earlier examples of martyr narrative, the sections of Perpetua's "prison diary" are bookended and framed by an anonymous third-person narrator and editor whose identity, as we have already noted, has also been the subject of speculation. In addition to being relatively early and at least a constructed female author or authorial voice, Perpetua stands out in contrast to any number of young virgin martyrs, for she is arrested as a mother with a young baby boy. As a result, commentators have noticed the focus on her emotional state such as her "mental anguish" at missing her baby and later on her relief when she is allowed to nurse him in prison.[138] Although her husband is notably absent, although reinserted by reference in later redactions, she has several, often violent, interactions with her pagan father. This has proved particularly interesting for social history, as Kate Cooper, for example, has analysed these scenes, together with the absence of her husband, for details about her social status.[139] Meanwhile, Erin Ronsse has looked closely at her use of rhetoric in defending her Christian faith against her father's pleading and persuasions for her to save her own life.[140] The first-person perspective invites the audience into the inner life not just of a martyr but specifically a martyr who is young, female and a mother, which is another reason for its appeal. This perspective becomes complicated yet further by each of the visions that Perpetua reports on. There are

[136] E.g. Stephen or Thecla make speeches to their persecutors respectively pre or post their torture or execution scenes: Acts 7; *APTh* 37.
[137] Whitmarsh 2013: 233-247.
[138] Heffernan 2012a; Warwick 2018: 86.
[139] Cooper 2011: 685-702.
[140] Ronsse 2006: 318-321.

four of these, each framed by events such as her confrontations with her father, the martyrs' trial and other events in the plot.

In the first vision, which is prompted by one of her fellow martyrs asking her to pray to receive one, she steps on a dragon's head and climbs a ladder of swords into a garden where she meets a shepherd figure who gives her cheese. In both the second and third visions she sees her deceased younger brother Dinocrates, at first suffering and then, after she has prayed for him, restored and healthy. It is her fourth vision, however, which has received the most attention. She is brought into a crowded amphitheatre where an Egyptian opponent "of horrible appearance" comes out to face her. She is stripped and "made a man" (*et facta sum masculus*) before beating her opponent, treading on his head and exiting through the Gate of Life in triumph.[141] As scholars have noted, the scene abounds in the imagery of the arena in which Perpetua is stripped down and rubbed with oil together with the presence of the lanista are historical features of both gladiatorial combats and the *pankrateion*.[142] Yet it is the line about her becoming a man that has attracted a particularly extensive amount of attention. In antiquity, Augustine would later give a sermon on how Perpetua and Felicitas had "a manly soul (*virilis animus*) [that] made something greater in the women", a sentiment that recurs in other narratives.[143] Modern scholars' interpretations of this spiritual masculinity have ranged considerably, from taking it in a pragmatic sense that, given the Greco-Roman context, Perpetua simply has to be a male athlete to engage in a fight in the arena, or else interpreting it as a sign of her assuming her new spiritual authority.[144] This has parallels to other examples in Christian hagiography of women adopting male dress along with a new religious identity and authority, such as Thecla in the *APTh*. However, as Burnett McInerney notes, there is also an ambiguity that is striking in that other characters in the scene, such as the lanista, still see and address her as female.[145] As I will discuss in the second part of this chapter, this is by no means the first time that Perpetua experiences or feels things differently from outside observers, even her

[141] *P.Perp.* 10; 4.1-10.
[142] Heffernan 2012a; see also Robert 1982: 274-5.
[143] August. *Serm.* 281 (Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 117-18).
[144] Shaw 1993: 29.
[145] McInerney 2003: 26. See also discussion of the story of Iphis where Iphis also transforms from a woman into a boy "*nam quae femina nuper eras, puer es*" (Ov. *Met.*9.790), ambiguity in changing from a woman to a *boy* rather than a man - Pintabone 2002: 276.

fellow martyrs. Perpetua also later appears as a figure in her co-martyr, Saturus' vision. This is also recounted, by him from a first-person perspective, and he describes how he and others are flying escorted by angels to the Lord and witness Perpetua conversing in Greek with various named episcopal figures.
As I am interested in the use of the visions as a literary device within the text, I will take a look at some of the discussion on Perpetua's various visions and how these fit into the overall narrative as well as how they compare to dreams and visions that appear in earlier martyr narratives. This ties into the wider significance and process of dreams and dream-states in antiquity, particularly in relation to gender and authority, and the extent to which Perpetua's narrative seems to follow or subvert these traditions in promoting its Christian message.

The opening of the *Passio Perpetuae* explicitly places the martyrs within the tradition of "ancient examples of faith", with a quotation from Scripture: "For in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and their sons and daughters shall prophesy".[146] Perpetua's ability and authority to receive visions is introduced fairly early on, just a few paragraphs after she has taken over the narration, one of her new 'brothers' asks her to pray for a vision and she can confidently promise him that she will report back the next morning. As well as the Scripture quotation, she is addressed very formally and respectfully as "my lady sister" (*domina soror*), further distinguishing her from the rest of the group of martyrs who are reliant on her to report back and interpret for them, and thus establishing her in a position of considerable authority. Within the Hebrew Bible, several female prophets are equally venerated alongside their male counterparts, including Miriam, Deborah and Hannah.[147] There is also no shortage of female prophets and oracles in Classical mythology and literature such as Cassandra or the Sibyl, as well as the priestesses of Apollo's oracle at Delphi, the Pythia. One of the arguments for the scholarly theory of Tertullian's authorship of the *Passio Perpetuae* was his association with Montanism, a Christian sect well known for the prominence of its women prophets.[148] Markschies

[146] *P.Perp.* 1.4; Acts 2:17-18 (quoting Joel 2: 28).
[147] Male prophets (e.g. Hosea, Jeremiah) are also often depicted in stereotypically "feminised" ways, see: Graybill 2016.
[148] Butler 2006; Markschies 2012: 284-90.

describes how Perpetua has been argued to be a type of Montanist prophetess, specifically referring to the scene in which "she was in the spirit and ecstasy", but also acknowledges that these Montanist influences are rather isolated. Nevertheless, it is Perpetua's status as a visionary authority that earns her respect from her companions.

While Perpetua's visions are one of the most vivid aspects of her story, this feature is by no means unique. Dreams and visions play a significant part in the earliest martyr narratives. In The Acts of the Apostles, while being stoned by the mob Stephen sees a vision of the heavens opening and Jesus at the right hand of God. Polycarp, an elderly bishop of Smyrna, falls into a trance three days before his capture and sees his pillow on fire, which he interprets for his companions as predicting how he is to be martyred. Another North African female martyr, Quartilosa, describes a vision she receives three days after her husband and son have been martyred in which a giant young man offers her two cups of milk as a sign that is interpreted as meaning she will soon follow her family and be martyred as well.[149] The inclusion of dreams or visions was by no means compulsory, however. For example, in one *acta* also traditionally given a very early date, *The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, a group of male and female martyrs are interrogated by the proconsul Saturninus without any mention of any dreams.[150] I will have more to say about this particular *acta*, particularly the three women, Donata, Secunda and Vestia, in a later chapter, where different stylistic choices or literary influences may be seen. For Perpetua, Polycarp or Quartilosa, meanwhile, their visions all come at moments of high emotion or climax in the narrative, with the martyr themselves having the vision and usually interpreting it for an audience, prophesying either how they will achieve their martyrdom or looking forward to a heavenly afterlife. Some of these, especially Quartilosa, contain elements and themes that have been discussed with regard to Perpetua's visions, which have been analysed for clues about historical context as well as a variety of feminist and psychological

[149] Stephen in Acts 7:54-60; Polycarp in *M.Poly*. 5 and Quartilosa in *M.Mont.* 8.
[150] Musurillo 1972: xxiii.

perspectives.[151] For example, Patricia Cox Miller draws on literary and feminist theory to argue that the images in Perpetua's visions are even more striking and powerful discourse precisely because they appear to subvert the patriarchal structures that devalue her "other" status as a woman.[152] On a literary and narrative level, it is significant that the visions are always being reported to others, which, as Heffernan comments, shows that they have already undergone some sort of editing process within the structure of the narrative.[153] The audience, whether inside or outside of the text, is still kept at a distance, even before any further interpretations that might be put onto them, such as Augustine's argument that she was "made a man to contend with the devil", a sort of spiritual upgrade.[154] Her co-martyr Saturus also reports a vision, and while both his and Perpetua's visions are reported as similarly valid and important, it is striking that only Perpetua both reports *and* offers interpretations of her visions to herself and others, whereas Saturus just wakes up and rejoices. However, while the content of Perpetua's visions function and contain similar elements to those of other martyrs, such as supernaturally large figures and glimpses of heaven and/or how she is expected to die, there are also some notable differences. For example, two of the visions involve her witnessing Dinocrates' suffering and then interceding on his behalf with prayers. The interpretation of another of her visions requires an additional line where she explicitly reads her victory over the Egyptian to represent her fight with animals or Satan, in contrast to Polycarp who has a more literal dream of his pillow in flames forecasting his upcoming death by fire. In this way, Perpetua's visions fit in with what seems to have been an established feature of martyr narratives. In addition, Perpetua not only experiences the visions but offers an interpretation of them when she recounts them to her fellow martyrs, and by extension the audience. She is both a dreamer *and* an interpreter, in contrast to such biblical figures as Joseph or Daniel who offer dream interpretations to other people's dreams.[155]

[151] For an overview of Montanism and the *Passio Perpetuae* see Markschies' chapter in Bremmer and Formisiano 2012: 277-290; also, Butler 2006.
[152] Cox Miller 1992: 45-63.
[153] Heffernan 2012a:168.
[154] August. *Serm.* 281.2 (Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 120-1).
[155] E.g. Genesis 40: 12-14; Daniel 2.

Barbara Gold uses the term “dream-visions” as Perpetua is asleep when she has them and there are lots of standard dream elements (including supernaturally large figures, different relationships to time passing, etc.), but equally, as she notes, there are lots of words that emphasise the action of seeing throughout the text.[156] In Classical literature ‘dreams’ were often seen while asleep or in bed whereas ‘visions’ were seen while awake but they were often used interchangeably.[157] In the context of this chapter, I will refer to them as “visions” to highlight the motif of sight/seeing that pervades the narrative as well as emphasising the martyr as a “witness”. However, the level of uncertainty also fits in with the ongoing theme of appearances being deceptive and Perpetua experiencing reality in a different way to the other characters and the audience, both the audience in the narrative and listening or reading the text.

3. Analysis: Perpetua’s ‘Fifth vision’

i. Disdaining the world:

One of the striking features of the above passage is Perpetua’s apparent disbelief or rejection of the reality in the arena which the audience has just witnessed. A common theme or characteristic of early Christian martyrs is their disregard or disdain for the world. This may be shown through their attitude towards attempts to make them recant either by persuasion, such as tempting them with status, prestige or sex, or threats of torture and death. Even when they are in the middle of being tortured, they can remain contemptuous, or even cheerful, with some kind of miraculous divine intervention. This might be physical, as in the examples where Agnes’ hair keeps growing to cover her body or Marciana has walls spring up around her each night to prevent her from being raped. Elsewhere, the description of Perpetua “in the spirit and in ecstasy” during her encounter with the heifer suggests a more psychological form of protection.[158] As Cobb argues, this “divine analgesia” comes as a result of the martyr already demonstrating that they are contemptuous of pain and physical torture so when the moment comes and they are protected from it their faith is vindicated.[159] At the same time, for an

[156] Gold 2018: 23.
[157] Flannery 2014: 106.
[158] *P. Marciana* 5.9.
[159] Cobb 2017: 63.

audience listening or ‘watching’, there is a way in which they can enjoy the martyrs’ triumph without any qualms.

With female martyrs, however, there is an additional element to this disdain for worldly things, which stems from a context of Classical thought where women and the female body were much more heavily associated with the physicality of the flesh. This is shown in earlier literature with frequent tropes of women overindulging in food, alcohol or sex, while men who behaved in such ways were seen as barbaric and effeminate and thus even more reprehensible.[160] Meanwhile, with the women in martyr stories, this is the underlying assumption, exposed at moments such as how female martyrs are treated, at least initially, with a certain indulgence. We saw this in the opening example of Leocritia, and other examples such as Crispina, where they are at first flattered and tempted at their trial. One reason for this is that female martyrs are often required to explain themselves more, even if their antagonists will not or cannot understand, such as Perpetua trying to explain her position to her father in a philosophical or rhetorical style using a water pitcher, or elsewhere explaining their commitment to chastity and thus why they cannot get married by claiming Christ as their heavenly bridegroom.[161] This latter is particularly prominent with female martyrs, who often encounter sexual propositions and the threat of rape during their trials, and this is only prevented through some kind of miraculous intervention.

Perpetua’s disdain for the world is shown through the gradual distancing of her relationships with her father and baby, both reminders of her earthly status and traditional legacy. Her interactions with her father, who repeatedly tries to persuade her to give up her faith by appealing to her responsibility to her baby, have been read in this context, particularly how she seems to acknowledge or pity her father if in a detached sort of way: “What a pitiful old man” (*senecta eius misera*).[162] Her gradual distancing of herself from her baby, who is still nursing, comes as a result of these confrontations with her father when he refuses to bring the baby to her, however, she is helped through the pain of losing her baby as well as the pain in her breasts being suddenly eased.[163] By contrast, her

[160] E.g. in Old Comedy such as Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* or *Women at the Thesmophoria*, or tragedy such as Euripides’ Phaedra or Medea; in Latin literature there are plenty of murderous and greedy women in Tacitus’ accounts of the first Julio-Claudian emperors, or Juvenal’s *Satire 6*, and many more besides.
[161] Ronsse 2006: 319.
[162] *P.Perp.* 6.5.
[163] *P.Perp.* 6.

relationships with her fellow martyrs are emphasised, in the prison as well as in Saturus' vision, along with her visions where she can intercede on behalf of her dead brother Dinocrates, all serve to show how much more connected she is with the next world already than the earthly realities. In addition, there are other hints throughout the narrative that there are different perceptions of appearance and reality. For example, near the beginning, Perpetua describes the contrast of her experience of the prison when she has her son with her: " the prison suddenly became a palace" (*mihi carcer subito praetorium*).[164] The metaphor rather than a weaker simile "like a palace" seems to lend her perceptions a peculiar intensity.[165] Like in the penultimate arena scene, there appears to be a disconnect between how she experiences the same conditions as her fellow martyrs, let alone what an audience at a further remove might see. The almost dismissive way she describes the heifer – "or whatever is that?" (*illam nescio quam*) –adds to this.[166] The audience is dependent on her reporting this different, almost visionary, experience whether it is through her motherhood and close relationship with her baby or, in the case of the visions later on, the Spirit she has received through her faith and special status.[167] As a symbol of one of her earthly ties, her son provides her with some physical relief and even joy although this proves to be temporary when her father takes the baby away, due to divine intervention she miraculously still does not suffer. This carries through the theme of martyrs disdaining both earthly joys and temptations as well as sufferings. She instead sees and rejoices at thoughts of her future martyrdom and immortality.

ii. <u>"And then I woke up":</u>

Previous scholars have remarked on the uniqueness of the text's diary format, female persona, and "simple, conversational style". [168] The first-person perspective allows for some extra pathos, for example when Perpetua describes the pitiful sight of her aged father or her joy at being briefly reunited with her baby even though they are still in prison. It creates a feeling of intimacy with the

[164] *P.Perp.* 3.9.
[165] Heffernan 2012a.
[166] *P.Perp.* 20.8.
[167] There is lots of interest in Perpetua as a mother and how this relationship contrasts her to other martyrs, for example, as well as on her somewhat ambiguous status in the context of Roman North Africa (Cooper 2011). More on mothers in Chapter 5.
[168] E.g. Shaw 2020: 317.

audience, who are following her experiences from her arrest to just before her execution, in contrast to the more dispassionate recounting of events by the third-person narrator. In this way, the language is an important way for the audience to identify with and get a sense of the characterisation of the protagonist by engaging with them on a personal or emotional level: "When their exhortations in divine revelations and the triumphs of their sufferings were being read, we heard with our ears, we watched in our minds, we honoured with our adoration, we praised with our love."[169]

It is interesting that after each of Perpetua's first four visions, the same phrase recurs, "*Et experrecta sum*" or "And then I woke up".[170] Again, at the end of Saturus' vision, there is a similar "*gaudens experrectus sum*" or "I woke up with joy". On a practical level, the repeated phrase serves to indicate the next scene change in the narrative, separating the account of the vision in which the character was asleep or in a different state from the other events and trials that the martyrs and other characters such as their guards and onlookers are experiencing. It is also a reminder that the other martyrs as well as the audience are reliant on Perpetua and Saturus to recount their visions to them once they have woken up, and is not just limited to a literal meaning of waking up from sleep.[171] It marks the shift between the martyr's experience of reality within their vision, which the audience is only able to access second-hand, or at an even greater distance with the additional persona of the editor/narrator and then the world of the audience. In this way the audience is already primed for when a further and very similar phrase appears later on when Perpetua and the others leave the arena: "*et quasi a somno expergita*" ("as if awakened from sleep") and so it stands out. Occurring for the sixth time in the narrative, the use of an albeit slightly different but closely related verb that has become familiar to the audience could serve as a sort of trigger or recognition of how they are supposed to interpret the previous scene that has just been recounted. Similarly, the novel use of the modifier "*quasi*"[172] also lends an element of uncertainty, one that matches Perpetua's initial confusion and, to the audience thinking they have just heard one account of the previous scene of the beast fight, would already be

[169] August. *Sermon* 280.1 (Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 105-6).
[170] E.g. *P.Perp.* 4.10, 7.9, 8, 10.13.
[171] Ronsse 2006: 308.
[172] "*Quasi*" recurs some 19 times in the *P.Perp.* (Heffernan 2012a: 222).

primed to wonder if this is not another such shift between the reality of whatever Perpetua might have been experiencing versus what they just thought they saw. As Katherina Waldner notes, there seems to be a tension between how Perpetua stresses “her own rationality and sobriety in interpreting the visions, [while] the editor puts his stress on the depiction of female conformity to accepted behavourisms”.[173] The sense that Perpetua is also waking up is reminiscent of the character of Biblis, one of the Martyrs of Lyons, who almost denies Christ but in the middle of the torture she “recovered under torture, and, as it were, woke up out of a deep sleep” and then goes on to become a martyr with the others.[174] While Perpetua has not wavered in her faith, the familiarity of the metaphor of waking from sleep to realise some truth could rather be directed at the audience for assuming they know what is going on. This is further emphasised by the ambiguity of whether *quasi* could go with *a somno expergita* or just with *somno*. Also, in the case of Perpetua, it marks her characterisation as an active agent as well as her apparent detachment from and disdain for these mundane physical surroundings as having a vision means that she is not only an object being watched in the arena by spectators. This builds on the degree of agency the audience has already seen she can wield by her being able to pray for and receive her visions almost ‘on demand’, and her being able to additionally interpret and intercede as well as merely seeing. Along with the repetition of this particular phrase indicating when Perpetua or someone else “wakes up” or transitions between different realities, there are many parallels and allusions to the previous visions throughout the narrative. For example, Perpetua steps on the head of the snake, and then her treading on the Egyptian’s head is again referenced upon her entering the arena. There is also the repeated reference to her walking in triumph through the Gate of Life. These can also be seen as acting as a signal for an engaged audience, in this way serving the educational and ideological aims of such a work to increase their faith. In addition, this links to the ongoing theme of reality not being exactly how it seems throughout and this, accentuated by the spectacle of martyrdom itself being highly theatrical, is indicated not only taking place within the physical setting of an amphitheatre but also the other ways in which people and objects can be changed or appear to transform.

---

[173] Waldner 2012: 216-17.
[174] *Lyons and Vienne* 1. More on this particular type of imagery of martyrdom in Chapter 5.

Even the way she closes her portion of the narrative, after her fourth vision, where she finishes with: “But what happened at the show itself, if someone wants to, let him write it.”[175] The closing ambiguity again seems to invite several overlapping interpretations for the following scene, together with an active call for some other observer to do so if they wish.

While the outside observers or the audience cannot be certain of how differently Perpetua might have viewed the previous scene in the arena, the narrator does want to make it clear that she is full of and inspired by the Holy Spirit. This emphasis here is interesting not only linking back to the quotation in the prologue, but also as it hints at the fear that she might rather be under some more malignant influence or possession underlies, or is made explicit, in many other martyr narratives. There is often a specifically gendered element in the use of such direct or implicit language. In several martyr narratives, the female martyr is asked or accused, by her antagonist, relatives or other bystanders, of being mad or possessed by a devil or demons or seduced by a magician. For example, Thecla as well as Victoria, from *The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, are accused of being thus seduced.[176] Building on long-held Classical assumptions relating femininity to irrationality, this has the intended effect, on the part of the accusers, of implying their testimony should be considered invalid. This attempt to discredit their testimony works even when she is non-verbal or does not speak much as there are the same assumptions and suspicions implied by their presence in the public space of the courtroom. Similarly, all the way through the part of the narrative that is in Perpetua’s own words, the narrator bookends her account by stating that these can be relied upon as accurate, asserting that she wrote it “in her own hand and from her own experience” (*ipsius autem muneris actum, si quis voluerit, scribat*), and later that these visions that “they [i.e. Saturus and Perpetua] themselves recorded.”[177] Such assertions are also perhaps an attempt to assuage any ready or ingrained suspicions an audience might have regarding a female witness.

iii. Supernatural and metatheatrical elements:

[175] *P.Perp.* 10.15 (Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 31).
[176] *APTh* 15; *A.Ab.* 7.
[177] *P.Perp.* 2 and 14 (Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 23 & 35).

Continuing the theme of the characters, particularly Perpetua, experiencing different realities, are the supernatural elements across the visions that are also present in the 'fifth vision'. Perpetua's visions include a huge bronze ladder made of swords and other dangerous weapons, a huge dragon, a giant shepherd, and a lanista who is taller than the amphitheatre, yet she makes it through all of these unscathed and victorious. In addition, there is her appearance of changing into a man, as well as her being able to see and help her long-dead brother. Visions and dreams allow for unlimited travel to other worlds or realms, abilities that would be otherwise impossible in real life, without the input of deities or magic, and may include supernatural characters, including ghosts, or people with supernatural qualities such as size. In addition, time may travel at a different speed as well as the ability to traverse distances such as flying or climbing up to heaven. Working from a cognitive perspective, Boyer argues that the characters or "supernatural agents" that populate dreams have unusual abilities or appearances that make them more memorable and thus easier to describe to other people.[178] The vivid details contrast all the more sharply with most people's experience of reality but also have the potential to defy the audience's belief. In antiquity, dreams were often slippery and their interpretation was highly dependent on context.[179] In this case, the other martyrs and audience are dependent on Perpetua's interpretation hence why her status and thus the validity of her visions must be established early on.

The arena and beast fight scene also contains many of these strange or remarkable elements where things do not go or appear as one might expect. Upon entering the arena, Perpetua herself appears impervious to her surroundings, instead singing a psalm and, in an in-text allusion to her previous vision, "already stepping on the Egyptian's head".[180] Like Perpetua's surprise in her fourth vision at being pitted against the Egyptian rather than beasts, Saturus and Revocatus are not set up against the animals they expect, in this case, a bear and a boar rather than leopards.[181] Furthermore, the animals do not behave as expected and attack the martyrs: the boar gores the hunter rather than Saturus and the bear refuses to leave its cage and attack. This is a common trope in martyr narratives and hagiographies where the animals refuse to harm or even

[178] Boyer 2002; on "supernatural agents", see also McNamara & Bulkeley 2015: 2.
[179] Davies 2019: 87-8.
[180] *P.Perp.* 18.4.
[181] *P.Perp.* 19.4.

help their would-be victim or other means of torture are ineffectual or rebound on the torturer instead. For example, Thecla is saved by a lioness, and Donatilla addresses the bear set on her.[182] The animals' idiosyncratic behaviour also parallels that of the martyrs who are also not behaving as expected by sticking to their faith despite torture and death. Rather than lamenting their fate as condemned prisoners, they shout, sing, and celebrate their prospective victory. Also, as with the dangers and opponents in Perpetua's earlier four visions, none of the martyrs in the arena are seriously harmed by the beasts. Even though Perpetua and Felicitas are thrown by their wild cow, and Felicitas is injured, they are still both able to get to their feet and walk out through the Gate of Life, like after Perpetua's victory in her previous vision. Time in visions also moves differently: after Perpetua has been thrown to the ground, she pauses to adjust her hair and clothes, even asking for a hairpin, moving in a more leisurely way that suggests her sense of time and events is less hurried or distressing than one might expect of being set upon by a wild animal in front of a hostile crowd.[183]

As well as supernatural elements that seem to indicate that the martyrs are in a vision or at least experiencing reality differently from how they appear to the audience, there are also several ways in which the narrator seems to draw attention to the scene as a spectacle or piece of theatre. Roman executions were deliberately very theatrical, with prisoners often dressed up as scenes from mythology, as Tertullian recalls evocatively, in the *Ad Nationes*, about seeing criminals dressed up and castrated or burned like the mythological figures of Atis or Hercules.[184]

First, there is close attention to dress and costume throughout the *Passio Perpetuae*, especially what various figures wear or later take off within visions to signal a change of identity. For example, the man in shepherd's clothes in the first vision, or, in the fourth, the deacon Pomponius and the lanista are each wearing very elaborate shoes.[185] However, this also already leaves room for ambiguity, such as when Perpetua is stripped off before her wrestling match, not unlike the idea of actors playing characters by donning the appropriate masks

[182] *APTh* 33; *P.Max.* 6. See also, Tilley 1997: 24.
[183] *P.Perp.* 20.4-7.
[184] Tert. *Ad nat.* 1.10.47; Middleton 2015: 207-8. Cf. Recreation of the Judgement of Paris in Apul. *Met.* 10.30. See also: Edwards, 2007 and Middleton, 2015.
[185] *P.Perp.* 4.8; 10.2: *multiplices galliculas*; 10.8: *galliculas multiformes ex auro et argento factas.*

and costumes. In *Passio Perpetuae* 18-20, the visual display changes as the martyrs go through a series of controversial costume changes during the arena scene. Initially, the martyrs are dressed up as priests of Saturn and Ceres until Perpetua objects and these are removed. This is the second time she acts as an active spokesperson for the group, as earlier she spoke up to the tribune who had wanted to pre-emptively punish them to deter their escape.[186] She again asserts that as she and the other martyrs are there willingly they should be well treated by the guards to look good for the show, again there is the juxtaposition of the martyrs' eagerness, and they are instead brought in "just as they were".[187] Shortly later, Perpetua and Felicitas are initially displayed naked in nets but this time it is the audience that objects with horror and they are put in "loose robes" instead.[188] The frequency of these costume changes, as with the attention paid to clothing signifying the identity of various characters from the other visions, draws attention to it, especially the reaction of the spectators who insist on the women being changed.

How the martyrs interact directly with their spectators is also very metatheatrical. Not only was the idea of actors breaking the fourth wall to make jokes or asides or target certain members of the audience a common technique of ancient comedies, but the audience could be equally interactive and engaged in what they were seeing. When in the arena, this interaction goes both ways, with Saturus, Revocatus and the other martyrs shouting abuse at the spectators and the audience who look at the women with horror and force the organisers to change their dress to loose robes. The different ways in which the martyrs act towards the audience, whether by shouting abuse or appearing to be in a different place or state altogether, tie into how they show their disdain for what is about to happen to them. From the other perspective, there is also a discrepancy between how the crowd sees Perpetua only as the latest victim and someone to be pitied, a "beautiful young girl" ("*puellam delicatam*"), whereas the narrator describes her more triumphantly as a "bride of Christ" or "favourite of God" ("*matrona Christi*", "*Dei delicata*").[189] There is again a contrast between what onlookers see and what the narrator is describing, and how Perpetua seems directly to evade both

[186] *P.Perp.* 16.2.
[187] *P.Perp.* 18.4-6.
[188] *P.Perp.* 20.2: *discinctis*.
[189] *P.Perp.* 18.2 and 20.2.

potential gazes on her by “parrying the gaze of all with a strength of her own” (“*vigore oculorum deicins omnium conspectum*”).[190] It was not a new phenomenon that there should be an extra level of anxiety about female martyrs in public spaces, the added voluntary nature and agency about their defiance, especially in contrast with their later reverent status within their wider communities. The undesirability or even ‘danger’ of women appearing, let alone speaking, in public was a frequent subject for male writers and orators throughout antiquity. One of the ways this behaviour was seen as ‘respectable’ was if they were speaking up against some crime or injustice, such as Lucretia, or especially by emphasising traditional gendered relationships.[191] Perpetua’s status as “bride of Christ” is held up as a shield against potentially critical viewpoints, who are otherwise invited to, uncomfortably, find themselves siding with the hostile crowd who can only see her as a delicate young girl. During the fourth vision, when she “becomes a man”, there is still sufficient ambiguity in the language such as how she is addressed by the lanista as “daughter” (*filia*). Here also the audience may see her one way compared to how she sees and interprets herself and her surroundings and also from how an external audience reading or listening is encouraged to see her.

There are several of these apparent discrepancies in tone which build on this theme of appearance and reality. As has been noted, the *Passio Perpetuae* features two execution scenes, of which the second, in which the martyrs are killed by a gladiator with a sword, is successful.[192] It contrasts with the beast fight in the arena which, given the lack of any real danger or harm to the martyrs, with the animals refusing to cooperate, or the audience insisting on a costume change for the women, could be read almost as elements of a slapstick comedy. By contrast, in the final scene, Saturus’ death is described almost with maximum blood and gore: “with one bite [he] was covered in so much blood that the people bore witness to his second baptism”.[193] Perpetua’s death, in which she has to direct the hand of the nervous gladiator herself, is presented by the narrator as if she could not be killed “unless she wanted it”.[194] The way she shrieks out (“*exululavit*”) could evoke anything from a military battle cry, a woman shrieking,

---

[190] *P.Perp.*18.2.
[191] Beard 2017: 16.
[192] The *APTh* features two execution scenes although the heroine is miraculously saved both times.
[193] *P.Perp.* 20.2.
[194] *P.Perp.* 21.9.

or Cybele's priests.[195] There are also some deep allusions to tragedy where "manlike" women prefer the sword as a means of suicide rather than hanging, yet the slight tremble of the gladiator's hand evokes a sense of pathos.[196]
This second, somewhat briefer dispatch of the martyrs by sword also fits into the narrative structure of other early martyr narratives, male or female, where most of the focus is on their testimony before the judge, with only a few lines at the end that describe how they are taken away and beheaded, then often followed by a standard prayer and invocation to the martyrs (e.g. the group of martyrs in *The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*: "And straightaway they were beheaded for the name of Christ").[197] Such an abrupt ending to the *Passio Perpetuae* would fit more to these other literary conventions than the beast fights in the previous scene, which in turn might indicate to audiences whether, like with the similarities to the previous visions and Perpetua's strange reaction, all may not have just been as it seems.

Although I will talk about Felicitas and motherhood in more detail in a subsequent chapter, a word about her is pertinent to this discussion as she is the only other martyr that Perpetua has direct contact with during the penultimate scene in the arena. After she has adjusted her hair and clothes, she holds out a hand to help Felicitas to her feet and they stand together in a display of solidarity before exiting through the Gate of Life. It is striking that this is the sole interaction that these two figures have in the *Passio Perpetuae*, especially considering how often they come to be paired up, as in Augustine's word play on the two women being in a state of "perpetual felicity" as well as in inscriptions or iconography.[198] While Perpetua could just as easily be paired up with Saturus, another leader who also has a vision, or Rusticus, who offers her support during her confusion, she and Felicitas are the only women and both mothers, a factor that certainly sets them apart, even if certainly not unique, amongst legions of virgin martyrs. Perpetua's non-verbal gesture of support to Felicitas parallels Saturus' words of reassurance in her first vision before she plucks up the courage to climb the ladder after him. It is striking that in the later redacted *Acta*, one significant change is that the two

[195] Williams 2012: 76, n.52.
[196] Loraux 1987: 13-17; Heffernan 2012a.
[197] *A.Scil.*
[198] August. *Serm.* 281.3 (Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 122-3). Along with a number of other saints and martyrs in the sixth-century mosaics in the Basilica of Saint Apollinaris in Ravenna. Also see: Cobb 2019 article 'The Other Woman' which examines Felicitas' reception in particular.

women are interrogated together and separate from the male martyrs, as Peter Kitzler has noted, yet Felicitas and Perpetua no longer have this direct interaction, let alone this brief physical connection.[199] Felicitas also seems to propose an alternate version of reality when, in response to a mocking taunt by the guard while she is in the middle of giving birth, she maintains her composure and speaks back to him.[200] Her point of view of events in this way is again different from what this outside observer sees, in that in her version of reality she will be able to cope with the suffering inflicted on her because she will have divine support.[201] This disdain is also similar to how Perpetua views the prison differently when she has her baby with her. To have Felicitas feature in Perpetua's sort of vision shortly after her main scene, just as how Saturus appears on the ladder in Perpetua's first vision or Perpetua appears in Saturus' vision, also adds a further hint, to an attentive audience, that all is perhaps not as it appears.

iv. Perpetua's characterisation:

In this next and final section, I will discuss the significance of this 'fifth vision' for the characterisation of Perpetua and the overall coherence of the narrative. Some commentators on this passage have interpreted Perpetua's reaction as a state of shock, which on one level makes sense from a narrative point of view, given the drama that has just taken place in the arena.[202] However, this sudden show of vulnerability does not seem to fit with how her character has been carefully constructed throughout the narrative, rather as a figure who takes charge and to whom the other martyrs look as an authority with a special link to God. Despite admissions of a certain private vulnerability such as her missing her baby, she expresses a rational calmness in speaking to her father, is more than confident in her prophetic ability, and is outspoken when she takes charge in speaking to the prison guards about their treatment and insisting the martyrs not be dressed up as priests of Saturn and Ceres. Her actions and words just a few lines above and below this incident, where despite being thrown by the cow she still stops to adjust her dress and hair and is quickly able to reassure her fellow martyrs is also

[199] Kitzler 2007: 14-15.
[200] *P.Perp.* 15.6.
[201] Cobb 2017: 63.
[202] Heffernan 2012a: 343.

comparable to the Trojan princess Polyxena. In a particularly poignant retelling of the myth, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the young princess, upon learning that she is to be sacrificed to placate the ghost of Achilles, calmly adjusts clothes out of a desire to retain her modesty.[203] It is also significant that while female martyrs are generally portrayed as physically weak, such as the physical descriptions of how Perpetua and Felicitas initially appear before the crowd, this is used to contrast with the strength of their religious fervour. Perceptions of their presumed weakness are often brought up, either out of concern, such as Blandina's mistress, who worries that the slave girl will not be able to withstand her torture.[204] When accusations of insanity or malign influence are raised, these often come from their detractors (e.g. Victoria's brother). Female martyrs are not generally seen as emotionally vulnerable, if anything they are shown to be even more resolute because of overcoming these additional prejudices.[205]

Another important aspect to consider is the sense of purpose Perpetua wields in her interpretations of her visions for her fellow martyrs and the audience 'listening in', for whom the martyrs were idealised members and models of their communities who were already in paradise. After each vision in the *Passio Perpetuae*, there is an understanding or realisation, whether in Perpetua's head, spoken out loud or reiterated by the overarching narrator. For example, after Perpetua's first vision they realise they are facing martyrdom and "at that point we gave up our hopes for the world" (*et coepimus nullam iam spem in saeculo habere*).[206] Likewise, after each of her visions about her brother Dinocrates, Perpetua seems to know instinctively that she needs to pray for him and that this intercession has brought him relief. She then takes on a spokesperson role twice in the narrative, such as when she negotiates with the guards about their treatment and the costumes the martyrs are initially being forced to wear. Similarly, once Perpetua has been convinced by the evidence on her body and clothing that they were in the arena, she gathers the others together and instructs them all to: "Remain firm in faith, and everyone love each other and do not stumble because of our sufferings".[207] The progression through the narrative is

[203] Ov. *Met.* 13.479-80.
[204] *Lyons & Vienne* 1.
[205] Salsa is shown expressing some of her fears and urging herself on, as I will talk about in the next chapter.
[206] *P.Perp.* 4.10. (trans. Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 26-7).
[207] *P.Perp.* 20.10 (trans. Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 36-9).

shown through each vision and its interpretation, in some sense 'hand-holding' for a listening audience. In this way, we can see this martyr text as a rhetorical piece, with the writers and audience all actively engaged. By having us witness this character, who has so far acted as the authority and interpreter, appear to be in this trance-like state, the audience is invited to interpret the by now familiar situation. The ambiguity surrounding whether this was a final 'fifth vision' leaves open such an interpretation to people listening or reading who could pick up on the earlier themes and similarities and in a sense test their own faith. Thus, we have already seen the repeated language cues and the parallels with the earlier visions, as well as elements of a supernatural and theatrical nature that may also hint that reality is not always as it seems.

4. Conclusion: New and old perspectives

In the introduction to this chapter, I began by observing the unusual nature of a particular scene following the beast fight in the arena and linked it to how many scholarly assumptions about Perpetua's uniqueness have often been self-fulfilling or distracting. I then helped to contextualise it by looking at what has been discussed about Perpetua, including the textual traditions, her gender and her visions in the scholarship. While elements of the fight with the beasts have been discussed and compared to earlier episodes in the text, such as the physicality of Perpetua and Felicitas' bodies, less attention has been paid to what Perpetua is doing, or the psychological state in which she is supposed to be. There seem to be some doubts around appearance and reality throughout the narrative, made explicit by the repeated phrases for when either Perpetua or Saturus "wake up", thereby transitioning out of one version of reality and into another. It is also made implicit for example in the suggestions at various points throughout the narrative that Perpetua is seeing or experiencing things differently compared to her fellow martyrs, particularly in moments of emotional or physical danger. On one level, it seems to give her a layer of protection, both near the beginning where her relief at being able to have her baby with her makes the prison experience more bearable, and the beast fights at the end where she sings joyfully rather than be disturbed by the crowd and takes her time to adjust her hair and dress after being thrown by the cow. Yet it also manifests the contempt martyrs show towards the physical world. By suggesting at least the possibility

that the beast fighting scene is also a vision, I have been able to explore how it fits in thematically with Perpetua's character and previous visions, as well as the broader idea of martyrs rejecting worldly pains and pleasures in anticipation of their future reward.

Perpetua has become a memorable character and the *Passio Perpetuae* is a fascinating text that has generated a raft of different perspectives and interpretations. She has been so dominant that, despite her clear influence and popularity in Late Antiquity and beyond both in North Africa and elsewhere, it does both Perpetua and the other overshadowed female martyrs a disservice. It makes her out to be seen as 'exceptional' and thus draws attention away from less well-known portrayals of female martyrdom. This can all be a matter of perspective, as I have shown how a different interpretation and close reading of this relatively little discussed scene at the end of the *Passio* could alter perceptions of the rest of the text. By taking this narrow focus, I have argued for how Perpetua is not unlike other martyrs such as her disdain for the world. In the next chapter, I will examine the heroine of the *Passio sanctae Salsae,* who, as we shall see, is no less interesting despite having received considerably less attention. This theme will continue in the remaining chapters which have a more thematic take; first one that looks at the *acta* and the figure of the antagonist and then one on images of maternity and childbirth in an array of martyr narratives. In each of these, I again put the spotlight on some aspects within narratives that have been less considered. It has been valuable to start with Perpetua and look at some of the varied and interesting lenses of analysis that have been applied to her in different ways as, except for a few other figures such as Thecla, she has received a much larger share of attention compared to the majority of other female martyrs.

Chapter Three: Salsa of Tipasa

1. Introduction:

While the cult of Perpetua travelled across the Mediterranean and was cited across all kinds of sources in antiquity and modern scholarship, the majority of Christian martyrs were far more likely to be "particularly identified with a small village or rural region, and they were often unknown beyond it."[208] For example, there is a partially damaged inscription from a church near Mascara dedicated to a martyr, St Robba (or 'Bobba', the first letter having been erased), set up by her bishop brother Honoratus and "massacrée sous les coup des traditeurs elle a merité la dignité du martyre."[209] This inscription is intriguing, not least how it hints at a story long lost to time rather than surviving in literary form like other narratives. While we have no way of retrieving the lost stories behind numerous martyrs attested in scattered epigraphic evidence alone, certain figures have been attested in both epigraphic and literary types of sources so that, while still taking care, it is possible to compare, if not reconstruct, receptions of them in different contexts and audiences. One good example of a literary martyr narrative where the local identity of its subject comes across very strongly is Salsa of Tipasa.

Like Perpetua, though considerably less frequently cited by scholars, Salsa is the subject of a fascinating literary text, the *Passio sanctae Salsae* (from here on referred to as the *PS* and the dating and transmission of which I will discuss more below).[210] This text, as rich in its own way as the *Passio Perpetuae*, also invites and rewards a close reading through which we will be able to see the construction of another type of female martyr. Like the editor in the *Passio Perpetuae,* the narrator of the *PS* is also anonymous and recounts the story of the martyrdom and miracles of a fourteen year old girl, Salsa, in the port city of Tipasa, in the Roman province of Mauretania Caesarensis. The teenager is dragged reluctantly by her parents to attend a festival celebrating a local pagan deity 'Draco', a bronze statue of "a dragon with a golden head and with reddish eyes from which

---

[208] Shaw 2011: 610.

[209] Duval 1982: 410-11: *tradi[tor(um)] vexata, meruit dignitate(m) martiri(i).*

[210] *P.Sals.* (*BHL7467*). See Latin text and French translation in Piredda's edition from 2015 (also Italian translation by Piredda 2002). All English translations are my own, aided by Piredda's French translation.

it threw lightning bolts".[211] Outraged by the raucous festivities, Salsa first tries to persuade the townspeople to abandon their worship. When this fails, she then attempts to destroy and dispose of the statue only to be lynched by an angry mob of pagans who fling her body into the sea. At once, a huge storm blows up and only abates when a sea captain is warned in a dream to retrieve the martyr's body and return it to the city where it is buried and a shrine set up. Sometime later, an army besieges the city but when its leader Firmus attempts to propitiate the martyr to enter he is repeatedly repelled and the siege is lifted. The narrative is bookended with encomiums celebrating the virtues of martyrdom and Salsa in particular.

Given the highly formulaic nature of hagiography, it is not surprising that this story contains many features (such as angry pagans, idol worship, public acts of violence, and conversion) familiar to a reader with some knowledge of the genre, as described in the Prologue and Introduction. Another familiar element is the emphasis on her body/relics being restored to the city and properly buried along with an aetiological explanation for the site of her cult with a description of an example miracle that proves her efficacy and promotes the city as a site for pilgrimages. One might note, for example, the return of Maximian and Isaac's restored bodies from the sea.[212] Yet several more intriguing elements reward a closer reading of the text. There is a particular focus on Salsa's local identity and, rather than having her religious affiliations discovered by refusing to sacrifice or be forced into marriage, a more common sequence of events, she twice instigates acts of violence against the cult figure. It is also striking that she is the victim of a mob rather than judicial proceedings.

So much is always said about Perpetua's 'exceptionality', and indeed some of the features that appear to mark her out as such have already been discussed in the previous chapter. Across the wide genre of martyr literature, we have already seen that certain tropes and themes recur in narratives about female martyrs. For example, the importance of virginity, as well as how they are addressed and treated during questioning. Frequently, they are of noble birth, which leads to conflict with family members such as when they refuse to marry. Even the specific ways that they are tortured or threatened with torture also often aim to disfigure

[211] *P.Sals.* 3. Classical sources associated fire with coming out of the dragon's eyes rather than mouth, Ogden 2021: 39.
[212] *Maximian and Isaac* 16. See also, Tilley 1997a: 73-4.

their physical appearance or threaten their chastity. In contrast to male martyrs, there are a lot of assumptions about female martyrs being, for example, desirable, generally passive and outspoken. Their gender was often cited and heaped with extra praise to counter (but also to a certain extent reinforce) societal expectations of feminine weakness, both physical and spiritual: "For in a certain manner, it is only one step for strength in suffering [for men] to have surmounted the instinct of survival; while women have surmounted both the instinct of survival and their own sex."[213] This creates something of a confused argument as we already saw in the example of Perpetua being treated as not being like other female martyrs (such as being a mother, her visions and sense of authority). Yet to Late Antique writers and audiences, all female martyrs were seen as exceptional.

While Salsa is introduced and described like any other young female martyr, like Perpetua she could also be read as rather idiosyncratic. In this way, I would argue that there is no such thing as an 'ordinary' account of a female martyr, where people talking about Perpetua have tended to present other ones as a homogenous mass or different copies of a certain trope like the virgin martyr. There are two particularly distinctive elements that I would like to focus on in this fascinating martyr narrative. These are her characterisation as a very local martyr-saint and also the active role she plays in precipitating her martyrdom and preserving her city. In this chapter, I argue how the narrative makes use of each of these elements to construct and reinforce her relationship with the city where her cult was celebrated. As well as commemorating and narrating the origins and intercessory power of its young heroine, this highly literary narrative also celebrates an origin story for the city in which the martyr lives, dies and acts on behalf of when she becomes its powerful patron saint.

2. Historical Context: Dating, Firmus, Vandals, Tipasa

Hagiographic texts are often difficult to date and the *PS* is no exception. The text itself is part of the 'Mauretanian cycle', so described in part due to the circumstances of transmission; in addition, the setting and similar literary aspects

[213] *P.Sals.* 1.

have meant several of them have been attributed to the same author.[214] The earliest surviving manuscripts we have date from the tenth or eleventh century, from various monasteries in Spain.[215] Given the considerable cultural interaction between Spain and North Africa, this is unsurprising, especially due to the coastal location of Tipasa. Dating the *PS* as a literary text is less clear and has been reliant on internal clues within the text itself, an endeavour which is not without problems. For example, the main antagonist in the final section of the *PS*, Firmus, has been identified with a historical figure from the late fourth century. Firmus was a Berber-Roman nobleman who led a revolt against the governor Rogatus and was defeated in 372/3.[216] The appearance of Firmus has been used as an approximate *terminus post quem* and one of the justifications for a late fourth or early fifth-century date for the *PS*, although a later interpolation is also possible. Similarly, the absence of any subsequent events has also been used as evidence for dating the text. For example, Anna Maria Piredda argues for a date somewhere in the early decades of the fifth century, close to the sack of Rome, based on stylistic features as well as the polemical language used to describe Firmus' revolt. Piredda suggests that it must predate the Vandal conquest in 429 because otherwise some mention would be made of this event.[217] The assumption here is that the Vandal takeover of North Africa during the fifth century was such a cataclysmic event that the author of the *PS* could not have failed to make some allusion to it.

However, this chapter is more concerned with Firmus the literary character as depicted in the *Passio* rather than depictions of the historical figure – so far as might be allowed – as they appear in other sources. Yet the narrator's aim is specifically to celebrate the martyrdom and miracles of Salsa rather than give a broader historical account, and it suits the narrative tone of the *PS* to refer to the events as having happened at some vague time in the past so that: "When those who knew had sown in our heart like seeds the tale of those virtues that remained buried, I preferred to be accused of indiscretion rather than to be condemned for

[214] Fialon 2014: 15. Other martyr texts from the 'Mauretainian cycle', some of which I will refer to below, include the *Passio sancti Marcianae* (*BHL5256*), *Passio sancti Fabii* (*BHL2818*), *Passio sancti Typasi* (*BHL8354*) and *Passio sancti Victoris* (*BHL8565*).
[215] Sears 2016: 135. The four surviving manuscripts for the *PS* are: *Paris B.N. Lat. 2179, ff.160-165*; *Escorial R. Bib. B.I.4, ff.219-226*; *Madrid B.N. 822, ff. 32-36; Paris B.N. la. 3809, ff.49-52*. See: Piredda 2015: 219-31.
[216] See: PCBE volume 1, 'Firmus 1' (Mandouze 1982); see also: Shaw 2011: 16.
[217] Piredda 2002: 37-41.

staying silent."[218] Ammianus Marcellinus, a contemporary historian, describes Firmus as a barbarian and the devastation of his revolt including the destruction of Caesarea, a neighbouring city of Tipsa and "formerly a powerful and famous city" as "wholly burned down".[219] As we shall see, the narrator of the *PS* follows this characterisation of Firmus and his troops in similarly apocalyptic terms. The incorporation of a historical personage like Firmus, whether or not the events were within living memory for the author of the *PS* and his audience, serves another function of demonstrating the power of the local martyr cult of Salsa over other cities' patron saints against an external enemy, particularly a close rival city like Caesarea.

While the date and context in which the *PS* was composed (not to mention the identity of the author) remain elusive, the setting is described at some length and plays a significant part of the plot as I will describe below. This is even more interesting for how it appears to tally with the material evidence for Salsa's cult for the fifth century sees a not inconsiderable amount of investment and attention being paid to her.

Located on the coast of the Roman province of Mauretania Caesarensis, Tipasa was an important port city with origins as a Punic trading post. By the third century, it had been granted the rights and status of a full town, named *Colonia Aelia Augusta Tipasensium*, and contained temples, judicial buildings, baths, theatre, amphitheatre, all the familiar urban trappings of Roman cities across its empire.[220] During the fourth and fifth centuries, there appears to have been something of an "explosion" of Christian architecture in and around the city, with various devotions and dedications to various martyrs, some imported from elsewhere such as Peter and Paul, others apparently of more local origins, including St Salsa. The earliest site that has been associated with Salsa is a cemetery basilica, built in the second quarter of the fourth century, in a pre-existing necropolis on the outskirts of the city.[221] In the middle of the fifth century, this was replaced by a large basilica complex complete with the martyr's relics that seems to have been a centre of mainly local pilgrimage.[222] This dedication,

---

[218] *P.Sals.* 1. Piredda 2015: 237, n.3: allusion to *Matt.*13.3-23.
[219] Amm. Marc. 29.5.16-17 (trans. Rolfe 1939: 257). See Blackhurst 2004: 59-75 for discussion on different perspectives of Firmus' Roman-Berber identity.
[220] Lassère 2015: 19.
[221] Ibid: 21.
[222] Ibid: 21; also Fialon 2018: 208.

by a bishop named Potentius, was also adorned with a mosaic poem in which the martyr is described, rather enigmatically, as “sweeter than nectar” while the bishop is referred to twice:[223]

Munera quae cernis, quo sancta altaria fulgent,
[his opus l]aborq(ue) inest cura[q(ue) ... Pot]enti,
creditum [sibi qui gau]det perficere munus.
Ma[rtyr] hic est Salsa dulcior nectare semper,
quae meruit caelo semper habitare beata;
reciprocum sancto [gau]dens [mu]nus inpertire Potentio,
[m]eritumq(ue) eius celorum regno pro[babi]t.

'The offerings you see, whereby the holy altars shine,
In these is the work, labour and care of ... Potentius,
Who rejoices that he fulfilled well the task given him.
Here is the martyr Salsa, always sweeter than nectar,
Who, blessed one, earned an eternal home in heaven.
Rejoicing to bestow on the holy Potentius a reciprocal offering,
She will confirm his merits in the kingdom of heaven.[224]

Beyond the references to the bishop’s patronage, Salsa’s assumed position in heaven and her powers as an intercessor are both evoked as they are in the *PS*. Thus, in addition to the *PS*, there are some intriguing - if frustratingly fleeting as with so much of our knowledge of the ancient world - glimpses of some of the ways in which Salsa was deemed significant enough to be commemorated within the city and its environs. On the one hand, this can offer at least a sense of how she was being used and celebrated by generations of citizens and visitors to Tipasa as well as the intentions of the anonymous author of a literary work like the *PS*, which consciously presents itself as both a work to educate the faithful as well as a justification for her cult.[225] On the other hand, it also serves to contrast Salsa to the many saints and martyrs in inscriptions elsewhere in the city, such as at the ‘Church of Alexander’,[226] where there are several martyrs of whom we only know their names, for example, Victorinus; a poignant reminder

[223] Gsell (1893) Pl.V; Toulain 1891: 81-2; Griffe & Michaud 2015: 49-51.
[224] Translated Adamiak 2020, aided by Duval’s French translation, http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E07859 [Accessed Monday 15 January 2024].
[225] Ménard 2016: 236.
[226] Ardeleanu 2018: 480 and 483, see also figure 3.

that so many of these stories are lost to time.[227] Having such a rich account as the *PS* may thus give a skewed view of Salsa's unique importance to the city as opposed to one among many martyrs whose story happened to have been written down and preserved.[228] Nevertheless, though not uncharacteristically for a martyrology, the *PS* positions Salsa squarely as the most extraordinary exempla not least through her actions concerning the preservation of her city.

3. Salsa: A Local Girl

i. A "Vernacula" martyr:

The anonymous narrator of the *Passio sanctae Salsae* closes the exordium with the epithet *vernaculae martyris* or "little homegrown martyr".[229] In doing so, the narrator ascribes this unusual description of "vernacular" to her, a word which traditionally referred to a "female home-grown slave", that is one born and brought up within a domestic household or estate, as opposed to imported. Although it did also convey connotations or a separate meaning of "native" or "indigenous", and indeed she is also referred to as "a native of the city" (*urbis indigena*) in the very next sentence, the term still carried a certain derogatory sense of slave into Late Antiquity.[230] Also, there is a sense of her being a "*little* homegrown female martyr" (my italics), as in the diminutive, which in addition adds a distinctly gendered note. On the one hand, this word choice makes sense for Salsa given the ubiquity of Christian slavery metaphors and imagery in martyr narratives and elsewhere. For example, despite both women being of highborn or freeborn status, Perpetua and Crispina are both described or describe themselves, as types of "female slave" (*ancilla* or *delicata*) of Christ or God, in contrast to how they are described or addressed by other characters as "*domina*", an assertion of their new Christian identity as superior to any of their previous earthly relationships or markers of status. Salsa herself evokes these same connotations when she prays to God for help destroying the statue, citing the example of the

[227] Noted by Duval 1982: 458 n. 88; also discussed in Shaw 2011: 611 and Moss 2016: 55.
[228] The transmission history of the *P.Sals.* is fascinating, and the earliest manuscripts we have date from 10th/11th century Spain (Dominique of Silos monastery, Castille; another 11th century manuscript from San Pedro of Cardena). See also: Fialon 2018: 203 and Piredda 2015: 219-221.
[229] *P.Sals.* 1.
[230] *P.Sals.* 2; Lewis 1891: 911; Souter 1949: 439. Cf. status of the vernacular languages (i.e. not given the same esteem as Greek or Latin) in Late Antiquity see: O'Loughlin 2013: 82.

Biblical prophet Daniel as “your slave” (*famulo tuo*), and in this way emphasises her humility and establishes herself in a similar relationship to her divine patron.[231] However, the use and associations of a more unusual word “vernacula”, as opposed to the more common “ancilla” or “famula”, simultaneously draw as much attention to her relationship with where she has sprung from as to accentuating her humble position. Even as the narrator praises the young martyr and expresses their intention of revealing the long lost or “buried” (*reconditarum*) account of this martyr, they are simultaneously evoking Tipasa where her relics were entombed.[232]

This close association between martyr and city is also demonstrated by the much more active role that the city itself plays, and the setting maintains a very physical presence in the narrative. The continued significance of the city of Tipasa to the plot of the *Passio*, notably when there is a massive army besieging its walls, can be contrasted to other martyr narratives where the setting locates the scene at the beginning but afterwards is no longer directly mentioned. For example, in the “Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas” where aside from the mention at the beginning of Thuburbo Maius, where the martyrs were arrested, the scenes of the prison, forum, and arena do not seem specifically set in Carthage as opposed to any other city. In “The Martyrdom of Crispina”, the date and setting are given at the outset in a formulaic fashion that quickly establishes the immediate context of the particular martyr but once the interrogation has got underway it is no longer referred to. By contrast, in her *Passio*, Salsa lives and dies in and around this one city and especially its port, which gets an extended description near the beginning and again during the storm that blows up. Even when her body is thrown into the sea, the sea does not even allow it to leave the harbour but keeps it protected until it can be rescued and returned to the same city for burial. This also contrasts her with other martyrs who are transported to various places, both before and after death. For example, Fabius, a fellow Mauretanian martyr, is killed in Caesarea and thrown into the sea which washes his body up in the neighbouring city of Cartenna.[233] The popular protomartyr Thekla, goes on various travels

[231] *P.Sals.* 6.
[232] Cf. Ambrose’s account (*Ep.* 22) of the unearthing of two saints Gervasius and Protasius which he claims specifically as martyrs of the “Church of Milan”. The language of how these two saints have been “rediscovered” echoes the narrator of the *Passio* who wishes to recount the “seeds” of “the tale of those virtues that remained buried” *P.Sals.* 1. Gervasius and Protasius are also described by Gregory of Tours alongside other examples of martyrs buried secretly in an earlier generation only to be ‘rediscovered’ by the later community, *Glory of Martyrs* 46.
[233] *P.Fab.* 10.

around Asia Minor and vanishes in a cave in Seleukia before travelling underground to Rome where she can be buried beside the Apostle Paul.[234] One of the effects of this was that it allowed multiple places to claim a physical connection to certain saints, often along with their relics as well as potential for rivalry. Salsa's birth, martyrdom, and eventual burial meanwhile all take place within the environs of Tipasa, emphasising its claims on her and her link to it. The narrator also gives this extended description of the port and the temple near the beginning:

Ubi enim dudum templa fuerant instituta gentilium, postmodum ibidem diabolus synagogam constituit Iudaerorum; sed nunc meliore uice migrauit ad Christum, ut in loco in quo gemina regnabant ante sacrilegia, nunc in honore martyris triumphet Ecclesia.

There, where a short time ago the devil set up a pagan temple, he later set up a synagogue of the Jews in the same place; but now, by a better change, the place has moved to Christ so that where previously two sacrileges ruled now the Church triumphs in honour of the martyr.[235]

The way the narrative sweeps through time, culminating in the eventual conversion of the whole city to Christianity for which Salsa is being credited, also gives her a specific role within the city's broader imagined history. While martyrs frequently precipitate conversions, both on an individual and mass scale, from both former enemies as well as sympathisers, it is most unusual that Salsa herself comes with no conversion story but rather, "sprang forth perfect and exposed".[236] This absence is even more remarkable as it is often one of the key events in a piece of hagiographical literature, whether brought about over time by an individual, such as a close relative, or as a consequence of a more dramatic miraculous conversion. For a female martyr, it may have been seen as even stranger that she was not associated with a male presbyter or apostle. This is one of the questions or accusations typically posed to a martyr during her interrogation in the numerous *acta*, usually couched in explicitly negative or cajoling terms of their having been seduced or bewitched, such as Victoria's brother during her trial as one of the Abitinian martyrs.[237] Other examples usually either explicitly tie them to a more senior male figure, such as Thekla with Paul,

[234] According to a fifth century retelling "The Life and Miracles of Thekla", see: Davies 2001: 47.
[235] *P.Sals.* 3.
[236] *P.Sals.* 2.
[237] *A.Ab.* 7; See also: Tilley 1997a: 42.

or else might highlight their transitional status, such as Perpetua and her companions as catechumens. Salsa meanwhile is specifically born to pagan parents: “while she was born to pagan parents, and her parents as yet walked in the darkness of idols, she alone with an innate quality to fortune”. This is a similar dynamic to the case of Leocritia, yet the language that her parents are in ignorance also leaves more potential for them to convert and “see the light”. However, the stakes involved in her opposition to them are increased when they force her against her will to attend the pagan festivities, though there is no other clue as to how she has come to follow such a different faith from them. Salsa is also set up in contrast with the other townspeople, from whom her parents are not much distinguished, and they are homogenously referred to as “followers of the antichrist” (*gregales antichristi*).[238] Strikingly, this same group are both the mob that killed her as well as the people who later set up her shrine to commemorate her. With her parents as pagans and both her youth and lack of education also emphasised during her brief physical description, her furious reaction to the Bacchanalian scenes in the temple is even more visceral. In addition, the idea of her faith as something more natural builds on her characterisation as a “homegrown martyr” so that she becomes something of an autochthonous figure and in this way also gives the impression that Tipasa’s Christian identity is something more innate and predestined. Tipasa is both her birthplace and the site of her “baptism of blood” (cf. Crispina, Perpetua and others whose trial and martyrdom take place at different locations), which in turn reinforces her connection to the city. Salsa’s body never even leaves the harbour until it is rescued by the sailor Saturninus:

Illico autem, Deo procurante indicium, manus eius ad cingulum beatae martyris adplicatur; adprehensoque cadauere, quo ita liberum iacebat ut facile posset amoueri, e medio mari caput extulit, onustus mercimonio sanctitatis pretiosam Christi ex uisceribus imi maris humeris reuehens margaritam.

Thus, in that very place, guided by God, his hand connected with the girdle of the blessed martyr; he grasped the body, which floated freely where it had been flung down, so that he could remove it easily, he raised his head out from the middle of the sea, laden with the sacred merchandise, carrying on his shoulders a precious pearl of Christ from the entrails of the deepest sea.[239]

[238] *P.Sals.* 7.
[239] *P.Sals.* 12.

The image of the Gallic sailor retrieving and returning Salsa's body to the city is almost reminiscent of a Classical heroine from a foundation myth, where the hero comes from elsewhere and marries a local princess or goddess.[240] Yet it is also explicitly through God's guidance that he takes hold of the Salsa's body. The way the narrative also describes the transformation of the city with the arrival of Christianity through the personage of Salsa, yet as she has originated from there, and in this sense is owned by the city, this reinforces the notion that there is something special or destined about the martyr's city itself. In either case, much of the attention remains focused on the city. Salsa is thus shown to have physically altered the urban landscape of the city, by removing and replacing the pagan god and being buried and commemorated in a new shrine. In this way, even though Salsa's conversion is not mentioned, her role as a tool in the conversion and preservation of Tipasa is central.[241]

ii. <u>Strangers:</u>

This focus on Salsa's local identity is especially interesting as it also contrasts her with the only other named characters in the *Passio*, both of whom are explicitly characterised as foreigners. The first of these is the sailor, Saturninus, the sea captain from Gaul, who retrieves her body after a repeated dream warning that threatens his ship and crew. This narratological conceit whereby the character has to be told several times by the dream or oracle is also reminiscent of foundation stories such as that of Battus in Herodotus' account of the foundation of Cyrene in Libya or the number of prior failed attempts at founding Rome in the first half of the *Aeneid*.[242] It is only after the third such warning that Saturninus dives in and succeeds in retrieving Salsa's body: "in that very place, his hand was guided by God, connected with the bridal belt (*cingulum*) of the blessed martyr; he grasped the body, which had been flung freely, he carried it on his head and, laden with sacred merchandise, the most precious pearl of

[240] There are many examples of this but one more well-known incarnation of the trope is that of Aeneas' marriages with first the Carthaginian queen Dido and later the Latin princess Lavinia in the *Aeneid*. Sabine Fialon has previously argued for the influence of Virgilian imagery in the *P.Sals.* as well as in some of the other "Mauretanian Cycle" (Fialon 2013: 208).
[241] There is perhaps even the sense that one could even see the city of Tipasa as not only the main protagonist but the narrative voice itself, for example in the way the narrator praises the sea directly for showing its loyalty to the martyr at *P.Sals.* 10.
[242] Hdt. 4.154; *Aen.* 3.

Christ, so he could remove it out of the entrails of the deepest sea."[243] The traditional narrative whereby this foreign rescuer might marry the local girl is subverted although the combination of marital and marine imagery is utilised to highlight her connection to Christ and the whole city, to which she has been restored.

His instrumental role in providing the martyr's body for the shrine contrasts him with the barbarian general Firmus, who attempts to besiege the city, and whose humiliating defeat and subsequent demise are credited to Salsa's intercession. Firmus also repeats his attempts to light the candles and take the Eucharist but, in a mirror of Saturninus, these attempts prove futile. Both these figures, although they behave in very different ways towards the martyr, the one as a rescuer, the other as an enemy, are explicitly characterised as coming from elsewhere. Firmus is especially interesting to be characterised in this way, that is, as an anti-Roman, mad, barbarian king. Within the context of the literary narrative, Firmus is a "madman" (at different points he is separately described as *insanus*, *confusus* and *vesanus*) after his failed propitiation of Salsa's shrine.[244] When his attempts to light the candles and take the Eucharist at the martyr's shrine have been thwarted, angrily tries to attack and utters curses and blows against the wall of the shrine: "as if this madman was able to strike the martyr when he struck the stone".[245] While the narrator uses this to further demonstrate his impiety, the association simultaneously has the effect of once again emphasising the martyr's physical relationship to a part of the city. In Firmus' eyes, at least, it is as if her remains have become a literal part of the landscape as well as more figuratively through her posthumous role in converting its citizens. It is also notable that her shrine is some distance outside of the city walls, yet still, Firmus seeks to get her favour before a full attack on the city. It is reminiscent of an episode from Livy's *History of Rome* where a Republican Roman general besieging the city of Veii prays to Juno to abandon the city, after which his successful sacking of the city is seen as 'proof' that the goddess has deserted it.[246] Several other female martyr-saints are reported defending cities, notably Eulalia who defends Emerita

---

[243] *P.Sals.* 12: "most precious pearl of Christ"; allusion to parable of the merchant in *Matthew* 13.45. It would also be an interesting future study to compare what role girdles. And belts play in martyr narratives, particularly the similarities between young virgin martyrs and soldier martyrs throwing down their belts (e.g *A.Max.* 2 or *A.Marc.* 1).

[244] *PS* 13.

[245] *P.Sals.* 13: *percusserat lapidem aut ad martyrem transierat iniuria.*

[246] Livy, *History of Rome* 5.21.

from two would-be invaders, throwing Heremigarius into the river Ana so he drowns and later warning Theoderic not to pillage the city.[247] There are some interesting parallels with Salsa's interventions with both Saturninus and Firmus. Salsa's loyalty to her city, despite Firmus' attempts at such an "*evocatio*" ritual, for those in the audience who might recognise the reference, further demonstrates her intercessory power (i.e. that she is no pagan goddess who can be persuaded to switch sides). The depiction of these two foreigners' reactions to the martyr illustrates their different intentions towards the city; Saturninus and his crew are saved from the storm and perhaps represent the importance of trade for a port city like Tipasa, while Firmus is the enemy invader who is successfully warded off. Further highlighting her unique protection, the author emphasises Firmus' devastation of the whole province, in contrast to Tipasa, where his army is not able to even get past its walls. Although not directly alluded to, there is even an element of rivalry as we are told that Tipasa was spared during the revolt in contrast to its neighbours, notably the capital Caesarea, which did not escape violence. Thus, the *Passio* concludes that Salsa is "propitious to citizens and pilgrims, hostile to enemies" (*ciuibus ac peregrinis propitium, hostibus inimicum*).[248]

While this all builds into a rhetoric of Christian triumphalism or destiny, there is also the sense in which Salsa is a more timeless link between the city's older origins and its more recent Christian identity. The physical prominence of the city throughout the text, combined with such an unusual martyr epithet, all emphasised Salsa as a local girl with a sense of belonging and even obligation alongside any other allegiances.

4. Salsa: An Action Heroine

i. Feminine and Masculine:

Just as Tipasa retains an unusually dominant presence throughout the *Passio*, Salsa too is a more active type of martyr. Where Tipasa proves itself more than just a backdrop, Salsa is not just a mere passive victim of violence but also an instigator of it and goes on to prove herself an effective protector of the city

[247] Hydatius of Lemica, *Chronicle*, 91 and 109 (ed. Burgess 1993: 91).
[248] *P.Sals.* 14.

against outside hostilities. While not a unique feature on its own, we shall see, as with how her local origins have been emphasised, the actions that precipitate her martyrdom also reinforce and are shaped by her connection to Tipasa. Through the use of particular biblical models, and the associations these might have raised for Late Antique audiences, the narrator could underline her piety and loyalty to her home city as well as to God and this in turn served as a justification against potential critiques of her actions.

From the beginning, the narrator accentuates how women overcome much more to achieve martyrdom than their male counterparts. There is even a reference to the sin of Eve as a further set up to the obstacles Salsa has overcome: "Thus a woman, whom at the beginning the devil learnt to vanquish, now by martyrdom, she is found marching in triumph from the devil".[249] This is followed by an extended prologue on the differences between female and male martyrs:

Inter omnes namque beatissimos uiros quos triumphales puluinar extulit admirandae constantiae, magnam puto gloriam feminarum. Duplicari enim arbitror in feminis quod laudatur in uiris. Uno enim quodammodo gradu a uiris fortibus in passionibus solus naturae superatur affectus; a feminis uero et affectus proculcatur et sexus. Habent ergo et mares et feminae quod imitari non pigeant quia quod uiris confertur ad laudem, geminatur feminis ad honorem, atque ita fit ut quod uiri admirantur in uiris, id etiam feminae admirentur in feminis.

For among all the most holy men, whom the seat of honour exalts as triumphant for their admirable perseverance, I believe that the glory of woman is great. For I think that what is praised in men is doubled in women. Thus so to speak, it is only one step for courageous men during their martyrdom to have overcome the instinct of survival; while women have surmounted both the instinct of survival and their own sex. So, men and women have something they are not unhappy to imitate because what is bestowed on men for praise is doubled for women for their honour and what men admire in men so too women admire in women.[250]

Despite the whole tone and message of the *Passio* being one of panegyric to the young martyr, it opens with this apparent fixation on her sex. Women receive "doubled" the honour only due to cultural assumptions that they would be able to be martyrs at all. The narrator then moves on from women in the abstract to talking about Salsa in particular, with the first two more personal details about her being how she is a "little homegrown martyr" and then that "this most glorious of women originated from Tipasa" (*Fuit namque gloriosissima feminarum*

[249] *P.Sals.* 1.
[250] *P.Sals.* 1.

Tipasitanae urbis indigena), again emphasising her relationship with the city. The subsequent description draws on metaphors that liken her to both a soldier serving on a campaign and a triumphant athlete receiving a crown as a prize.[251] When Salsa is described there is also a focus on her youth.

Annis ferre XIIII nata, sed iam martyrum felicitate grandaeua; minor ad pugnam, maior in gloriam, prouectior ad coronam, et quod minus cernebatur in temporibus aetatis, perfectum emicabat in ostensione uirtutis

She was not quite 14 years old, but already mature with the happiness of martyrs. Younger to the fight, older to the glory, elderly tohe crown, and what appeared lesser in terms of age, shone through as fully grown in the display of her manly courage. [252]

In the following lines, the narrator compares her physical appearance with her spiritual attributes, seeming to be reluctant or disinterested in the question:

Nam de corporis eius forma interea nihil dico: quae etsi fuit ut perhibetur, egregia, utpote quae fuerat sanctimoniae consecrata, non est adeo in hoc dumtaxat praedictione laudanda; in Dei enim rebus non membrorum uenustas adtenditur, sed morum pulchritudo laudatur.

For meanwhile, regarding the appearance ofher physical body say nothing: although she was, as is reported, a remarkable beauty since she was consecrated to chastity. I do not undertake to praise her so far as this is concerned at least with a prediction: indeed, in divine things, one does not consider the loveliness of the limbs but rather praises the beauty of one's conduct.[253]

Even as they focus on how Salsa is an exception or credit to her sex, the narrator does not seem to be able to resist drawing attention to the fact that she is a young woman, ostensibly because it serves to make her stand out as extra remarkable, though still also emphasising her physical desirability.

Salsa is initially introduced as powerless, which is expressed both in her lack of social agency, such as when she is forced by her parents to attend the festival, as well as her physical weakness on the long journey to the temple. It is also striking that she is powerless to resist her parents, for while this would be plausible within the social context given her age and status as a young unmarried girl, it contrasts her with the recurring image of more openly defiant female martyrs. As with Leocritia, Perpetua and others, this rebellion against family

[251] *P.Sals. 2*. More on the military and athletic metaphors in Chapter 5. The idea that Salsa has sprung forth fully formed is also reminiscent of Athena from the head of Zeus, as well as perhaps resonating with some of Salsa's arguments in chapter 5 of the *PS* in which she compares the limitations of a human creation such as Draco with God's creation of the cosmos.
[252] *P.Sals.* 2.
[253] *P.Sals.* 2.

seems to be more shocking or dramatic coming from young female martyrs. Despite her anxieties, as well as her physical frailty, about attending the festivities, Salsa initially complies with her parents' wishes: "She went, weak, stiff, cut through with the debilitating effort of the way, her steps mournful because she did not wish to go; she was unwilling, anxious, uneasy and her soul trembling with total horror" (*Ibat aegris poplitum succisa conatibus debilibusque gressibus luguburisque uestigiis quo nollet, inuita, trepida, anxia et toto animi horrore tremebunda*).[254] As well as repeatedly reinforcing her total disgust and reluctance, she is still able to arrive at the temple where she witnesses a scene filled with dancing, orgies, drinking and other festivities. There is a long description of the lavishly decorated walls and columns, and the costumed pagan priests whirling about with the sounds of tambourines and smells of incense and fire from the altars.[255] In this way, the narrator also allows the audience (referred to as both "Listeners and readers" at *PS* 13: *lector et auditor*) to experience the sounds, smells and sights of the pagan rituals vicariously through her eyes:

…exosam iudicans lucem quae obtutibus suis tam funesta uota impietatis ingesserat; deinde horrere aras bustis fetentes, focos lentis non tam ardere quam putere turicremis; detestari choros ludentium…

… she **was judging** the light detestable which had forced such pernicious rites of impiety into her sight; then she **shuddered at** the altars whose fires stank, the fires not so much burning as stinking with heavy incense; she **detested** the chorus of dancers…[256]

Yet even while she is on one level a passive bystander and reluctant observer to the festivities, there already seems to be a marked shift in how she is interacting with it; she is not just passively taking it in but rather she is actively judging, loathing and detesting what she is seeing. Similarly, her horror has a physical effect on her by making her tremble, and this seems to be building up until finally, she stands up to speak; her anger has reached such a pitch that she can no longer bear not to act. At the same time, there is still also the whole idea of her martyrdom being preordained, such as how she is sustained by her "secret future joys".[257]

When confronted with the scenes of these festivities, her outrage does cause her to properly step out of this conventional passive role, yet she does so in such a

[254] *P.Sals.* 4.
[255] *P.Sals.* 4.
[256] *P.Sals.* 4. My emphasis.
[257] *P.Sals.* 4.

way that draws attention to her femininity but still conforms to her characterisation as a rational figure. Her reaction to the sights and sounds in the temple is deeply physiological: “The saint, seeing this disgrace, began to tremble as her body betrayed a secret agitation by a breath and another deep breath”.[258] Yet despite her anger, that might leave itself open to accusations of losing control and irrationality, especially with Classical associations of her gender, “she checked her suffering conscience”.[259] She delivers an impassioned speech to the crowd in which she attempts to reason with and persuade the townspeople to reject their pagan god, going through various arguments as to why this pagan idol, made from human artistry, is inferior to God’s creation. She even finishes with a proposal where she offers herself as a champion to fight in hand-to-hand combat against Draco: “Let me fight hand-to-hand with your dragon. If it beats me then you have it as your god; however, if I am victorious, it will prove that this god is not to be esteemed, and you will convert your empty path to the true God with a pious exhortation”.[260] In this, she almost seems to be acknowledging the difference in the way Christians versus pagans saw such statues, as by this proposed demonstration she offers an empirical ‘test’.[261] This challenge inserts her into a long tradition of legendary heroes fighting dragons or snake-like monsters, as well as Christian allegory associating them with the devil.[262] As Daniel Ogden has noted, female dragon slayers, Medea from Classical mythology as well as other saints such as St Margaret, in general, overpower the creature with drugs or with the sign of the cross.[263] By contrast, what Salsa proposes and later carries out by physically attacking the statue with her hands, requires more physicality in dispatching the beast and this fits her into a more masculine heroic model of monster fighting such as Hercules or Apollo and Python. The narrator also alludes to Eve in the prologue of the *PS*, and perhaps to Perpetua’s vision of stepping on the snake (also referred to as *draco*).[264] Yet the Draco here is also a statue rather than a living creature, not unlike the mechanical dragon that a fifth-century bishop of Carthage Quodvultdeus describes as living in a cave near Rome, to which the local people sacrifice virgins

[258] *P.Sals.* 4.
[259] *P.Sals.* 5.
[260] *P.Sals.* 4.
[261] Kristensen 2013.
[262] Hamdoune and Chalon 2015: 67-9.
[263] Ogden 2021: 252-55. Salsa is conspicuously missing from an otherwise extensive list of dragon-fighting saints in Appendix B.
[264] *P.Perp.* 4.3.

every year, a striking contrast to the *PS* where it is the virgin who destroys the dragon.[265] The outcome of this pseudo-combat between the martyr and Draco is reiterated later when Salsa's body is recovered while the statue remains at the bottom of the sea.[266] This is especially striking when compared with the former emphasis on her physical weakness or even to other martyrs, who defeat their demons through prayer or making the sign of the cross rather than physical combat. When her rhetorical attempt fails, the crowd dismissing her as crazy, she steps even further away from her initial description of fragility when she plans and carries out a series of night-time raids to the temple to destroy and dispose of the statue.

Salsa is simultaneously a dragon-slayer *and* an idol-slayer and yet is still not quite either. There are plenty of other examples of martyrs physically attacking pagan statues or the imperial cult, including her fellow Mauretanian martyr Marciana, who destroys a statue of the goddess Diana, Maximian, who tears down an imperial edict, in addition to both male and female saints who confront dragons.[267] It is notable however that both of these incidents take place during the day and they are immediately seized upon and dragged before a judge. Meanwhile, most of Salsa's actions take place under cover of darkness, secretly, without anyone seeing or hearing anything on the first night. After Salsa has decapitated Draco, the townspeople are none the wiser as to who has committed the act and it is only when Salsa returns the following night to finish it off that she is seized and lynched; she has to go to extreme lengths to achieve her martyrdom.[268] The fact that Salsa is a young woman would also make her behaviour be considered more transgressive and shocking for her audience, not only the violence but also how she, at least at first, sets out her intentions in such a public venue. Perhaps it is then partly out of an attempt to exculpate her, that the narrator particularly re-emphasises Salsa's piety during these scenes as well as more generically in the opening: "she began to arm herself with the zeal of faith and the love of God to fight at close quarters so that she could raise the glorious standard against the

---

[265] Quodvultdeus, *Book of promises and predictions to God* 3.43, noted by Fialon 2018: 318, n.15.
[266] *P.Sals.* 10.
[267] *P.Marciana.* 3*; P.Max.Isaa.* 5. Outside of the North African context, Tatiana of Rome is another interesting female idol-destroying martyr (*BHG 1699*).
[268] *P.Sals.* 7.

devil".[269] This, along with the fact she has already failed once to persuade her fellow townspeople from their conduct, increases the stakes and the sense of urgency as, despite her physical frailty, she is the only one who can save the city. When she prays for the strength to shift the enormous statue, her youthful, feminine weakness is miraculously and explicitly transformed into the strength of a young man:

Et dum nisu inualido conatur immane tergus fusi aeris euertere, ac prostratum humi iuuenilitur deferre praecipitio, cum sonitum ex profundo pelagi dedisset detestabilis ruina serpentis, ab impiis custodibus deprehenditur.

And while she undertakes to overthrow with her feeble strength the monstrous body of cast bronze and, once it is on the ground, to throw it down it with the energy of **a young man** from the top of the cliff. Then when the fall of the detestable serpent had produced a sound from the depths of the sea, she was seized by the impious guards.[270]

The image of the masculinised holy woman had become a popular hagiographic trope, along with the idea that female saints and martyrs had to somehow be 'un-gendered'.[271] With such figures utilising the traditional male realms of rhetoric and logic, this often involved ideally removing all elements of femininity and sensuality from them, though still, as we saw with Perpetua, not without a remaining degree of ambiguity. This idea is familiar to the narrator of the *PS* who in the prologue emphasises how female martyrs are even more exceptional as having to overcome both the instinct to live and contemporary ideas about the inferiority of the female sex.[272] And yet in this particular narrative, as we saw with Perpetua, Salsa does not transform literally into a man, and her partial transformation only draws more attention to her physical body so that the juxtaposition between this frail little girl with the sudden strength of a young man able to tear down the "monstrous body" of the statue becomes even more pronounced.

Even though she is acting on behalf of her city, the narrator seems to feel the need to go to extra lengths to describe Salsa's exceptionality and the extraordinary extenuating circumstances in such a way as to mitigate against potential or existing criticisms of the more transgressive aspects of her behaviour. Given the potential for controversy around martyrdom, this was perhaps

[269] *P. Sals.* 6: *coepit cominus armari zelo fidei et amore Dei, ut diablo gloriosum possit ferre uexillum.*
[270] *P.Sals.* 8. My emphasis.
[271] Castelli 1991, Clark 1993. For Thecla's "cross-dressing", also see recent the discussion in Van Pelt 2022: 197-228.
[272] *P.Sals.* 1.

especially important given the close identification between Tipasa and its little homegrown martyr that is being established throughout the narrative. One of the ways this is illustrated is the repeated characterisation of Salsa as a rational and logical figure, particularly in contrast with the madness of the other characters within the narrative. Her address to the pagan townspeople, in which she argues that the statue of Draco is simply an object made by an artist in contrast to the power of God and his creation and issues her challenge to fight Draco, is framed to the reader-audience as demonstrating her self-control despite her rage. Yet the townspeople simply dismiss her outburst as "the vain ramblings of a disturbed mind" (*cum uerba eius ab impiis ridicula et moti capitis uanitas illa increpatio putarertur*).[273] The narrator continues to go out of their way to emphasise Salsa's sanity and logic, as if to pre-empt any critique on this score, especially coming from a fourteen-year-old girl "younger to the fight, older in glory".[274] For example, again when she sneaks into the temple later she is seen to be wrestling with the momentousness of what she is about to do on behalf of her city. First of all, she prays, citing the examples of Judith and Daniel, and then she proceeds "furtively but boldly".[275] She is seen to be considering all possible options: "after a short while she returned to what she had started; she counted the hours, **she weighed carefully the pros and cons** [*momenta perpensat*]: on the one hand, she was afraid of discovery, on the other she could not bear to delay her martyrdom".[276] The way she performs elements of uncertainty, both visually through her hesitation and physical trembling as well as verbally out loud, yet also later sticks to her resolve is reminiscent of a whole repertoire of tragic heroines. There are many literary portrayals of heroines expressing some sort of emotional dilemma, particularly rationalising their resolve by referencing examples from myth, such as Myrrha or Byblis.[277] Each of these heroines hesitates and debates with themselves over their way forward but ultimately goes through with it, regardless of the beliefs or potential consequences they have outlined to themselves. There is a substantial tradition of martyrs borrowing techniques of logic and rhetoric to score points against their persecutors or convert pagan characters but this is especially prominent when female martyrs take on this role as well as there not

[273] *P.Sals.* 6. Insanity seems to be a common accusation especially when it comes to female martyrs, as observed in the previous chapter.
[274] *P.Sals.* 2.
[275] *P.Sals.* 7.
[276] *P.Sals. 8*. My emphasis.
[277] Ov. *Met.* 9.470-515 (Byblis), 10. 320-35 (Myrrha).

being a straightforward gendered divide between rationality and irrationality: Salsa must always appear logical but doing so based as much on female models as male ones.[278]

As with the case of the characterisation of Firmus as a “madman”, the townspeople’s response to her desecration of their statue is portrayed as unhinged and excessive:

Tum facto in eam impetu, et clamore omnisono totum illud uulgus inululans exitiabili furore raptatur. Quid illam caedis, bone Deus, quid pertulisse credendum est passionis? Omnis ilico in eam turba expectorata humanitatis inruit et exarsit. Ante mortem uiua carpitur, et seminecis effecta dissicatur. Mortua iactatur, manu pedeque conserta distrahitur, tunditur saxis, fustibus quatitur, gladio dirimitur et in profundum pelagi sub silentio praecipitata iactatur. Et hoc addidit feritas saeuientium ad insaniam suam ut negari uelit insuper et corporis sepulturam, quae quasi ob uindictam daemonis sui uelut quasdam inhumatae martyris litabat inferias.

After the attack against her the entire mob, howling all kinds of sounds, was seized by deadly fury. Is it to be believed, good God, that she had to endure such slaughter, such passion? Right away, the whole crowd, their hearts deprived of humanity from whose breasts were a turmoil of human nature, blaed with rage and rushed at her. Before her death, she was torn, alive and effectively half-dead, and dismembered. Now dead, she was thrown about and, her hands and feet bound together, she was torn apart, struck with rocks, beaten with clubs, hacked with a sword and, thrown headlong in silence into the depths of the sea. And the wild savagery of these raging people added to their insanity for they wanted to refuse her corpse a burial: as if to avenge their demon they offered as a funerary sacrifice this unburied martyr.[279]

The townspeople are as enraged as Salsa was at the sight of their festivities, yet in contrast to Salsa’s self-control, they let loose with their emotions. As with the earlier pagan festivities, great attention seems to be paid to sound as well as the “wild savagery” and “insanity” of the mob.[280] They tear her body to pieces and even when she is already dead they do not stop there, also resorting to clubs, rocks and swords. They are further portrayed as ‘barbaric’ by not burying her body, in so doing they both dishonour expected funerary rites and almost have the suggestion of offering her as a kind of human sacrifice to Draco. The narrator repeats this sentiment by contrasting the townspeople’s impious treatment of her corpse, referred to as their “insanity”, with the way that the sea almost lovingly

[278] In a counter example in the *Passio Chrysanthi et Dariae*, Daria, a Vestal Virgin, tries to convert the Christian Chrysanthus with “elegant speech” (*elegentiae sermonis*) §8, discussed in Bossu et al. 2015: 301-326.
[279] *P.Sals.* 9.
[280] Cf. *exululavit* in *P.Perp.* 21 when Perpetua screams when gladiator’s sword has pierced her Bacchic connotations of the word, Heffernan 2012a (cf. its use in Ov. *Tr.* 4.1.42).

preserves her body until it can be revealed and restored.[281] Elsewhere, when the body of Marculus is thrown off a cliff, a kindly wind preserves it at the bottom of the cliff.[282] Showing the extreme consequences that Salsa outlined in her earlier prayer are realised, only serves to raise the stakes to existential levels. This in turn offers an implicit justification for otherwise transgressive behaviour such as secrecy or the vandalism of a temple that might otherwise be read as a mark against the martyr's spotless character.

ii. Biblical Models:

Such concern or justification for such dubious actions could also be mitigated by the choice of characters from the Hebrew Bible with which Salsa is directly compared at significant moments during the *PS*. The Hebrew Bible was an important, if ambivalent, source of legitimacy and interpretation in Late Antiquity, especially in a region such as Late Antique North Africa which lacked its own biblical past.[283] Martyr stories frequently alluded to figures such as the three youths from the *Book of Daniel*, in which the youths refuse to worship an idol and are flung into a fiery furnace yet remain unscathed.[284] Daniel's experience in the lions' den and the Maccabean martyrs were also popular subjects in literature and iconography. While these often served as allusions or direct models for many Christian martyr stories, the diverse selection of characters to which Salsa is compared – Judith, Daniel and Rachel – is especially striking. Not only is she compared to both female and male figures, but each of these characters' homes are in peril so they commit potentially questionable acts that are nevertheless justified within the protagonist's immediate set of circumstances.

The first character that Salsa is compared to, indeed whom she evokes in direct speech during her prayer to God, is the figure of Judith:

Tempus adest, quo meas infirmas uires audaciamque confirmes et dexteram mihi porrigas subiturae discrima quam sanctae Iudith uiduae in procinctu uictoriae tui nominis praebuisti.

The time has come for you to strengthen my weakness and my audacity and to stretch out the right hand to me when I am about to go into danger, just as you granted to the holy widow Judith in preparing for victory in your name.[285]

---

[281] *P.Sals.* 10 and 11.
[282] *M.Marc.* 13.
[283] Pohl 2018: 12.
[284] Daniel 3.8-25.
[285] *P.Sals.* 6.

In her eponymously named Book of Judith, Judith is a Jewish widow who tricks and beheads an enemy general, Holofernes, to save her city of Bethulia which is being threatened by his army.[286] Significantly, the narrator has Salsa make this comparison in direct speech, though she is alone this time deliberating on her options, as in this way she is identifying herself within a long tradition of Old Testament prophets and heroes. The direct parallels between Judith and Salsa's narratives are obvious enough to also draw attention to the differences between the two women. Judith, for example, is a well-educated and mature widow, respected among her wider community for her great piety. This contrasts with Salsa, a frail young girl whose attempts to assert herself have already resulted in ridicule from the other townspeople. But both women similarly have to make use of a combination of trickery and physical force during their mission; Judith dresses up in all her finery when she visits Holofernes as a guest, then waits until he is drunk and unconscious before cutting off his head and returning to Bethulia with it in triumph. Salsa sneaks into the temple under the cover of night yet, as observed above, resorts to physically tearing off the head with her own hands. In both cases, the defeat of the enemy "by the hand of a woman" and "the weak hands of a young girl"[287] serves to demonstrate the power of God acting through them. For an audience familiar with the former, Salsa's additional youth, and perhaps even the lack of a weapon, makes her deed even more miraculous. Salsa's refusal to accept Firmus' propitiations at her shrine could also be a way of removing the problematic aspects in Judith's story around the expectations of the host and the guest. Significantly, Judith thwarts and beheads the same enemy whereas Salsa overcomes the statue of Draco by beheading it and then it is through her intercession that a separate enemy general is defeated. In this way the narrator has Salsa both fit into this older Jewish tradition as well as having her surpass it by having interceded to defeat two enemies rather than just the one.

Salsa evokes the prophet Daniel in the same speech, again drawing attention to the similarities and differences between her and this biblical prophet: "just as you gave to your servant Daniel who killed and shattered into pieces the dragon of

---

[286] Also echoes of Jael (Judges 5.24-6) who kills an enemy general with a tent peg after accepting him into tent; unusual behaviour framed as a heroic act of loyalty to own people; on comparisons and the close association between Jael and Judith, see: Brine 2010: 14.

[287] Cf. Judith 9 in which Judith directly addresses God before undertaking her mission; PS 7: *imbecillas virginis manus*.

Babylon, accordingly, though I am a woman, allow me to dismember the bronze dragon and scatter its limbs."[288] In the final chapter of the *Passio*, the narrator again compares her with both Daniel as well as Rachel, a wife of Jacob and matriarch.[289] The reference to Rachel refers to the episode in Genesis where she secretly steals the household gods, the teraphim, from her father Laban as she and her family are about to leave their home for Canaan. Interestingly, the narrator has no concerns about the teraphim that Rachel is concealing, in contrast to Salsa's specific critique of her city's pagan cult, rather it emphasises the purity of Salsa's motives: "this was an act of reason rather than greed".[290] Specifically, it is Rachel's filial disobedience that the narrative chooses to reference to demonstrate her loyalty to her husband and the rest of her family. Similarly, Salsa has gone against not only her parents but all the other townspeople; yet the secrecy is portrayed as necessary because she is acting out of a greater sense of loyalty and duty to the city by destroying the demonic statue that has "deceived" them. For a point of comparison, Perpetua's behaviour towards her father seems to have caused enough disquiet for Augustine who addressed it in a sermon where he interpreted Perpetua's disobedience to her father as demonstrating her piety and resolve in countering the devil's tricks.[291] There is thus a parallel between Rachel and Salsa in that each in their way is preserving a part of their inheritance and the dubious means by which they do that – stealing and/or destroying the statue – are therefore necessary for the preservation of this tradition and identity. The story of Daniel alluded to is his uncovering of the worshippers of another pagan idol, in this case, the Babylonian dragon, which he goes on to kill by employing a poisoned cake. While it directly alludes to this particular episode that also involves a dragon being worshipped by pagans, the reference to Daniel might also put the audience in mind of related stories such as the three youths in the furnace or Daniel in the lions' den, which were seen to prefigure Christ and the martyrs and were popular topics in Late Antique funerary imagery. Scenes of Daniel and the lions and the three youths have been identified in a fragmentary mosaic at Tipasa.[292] It is interesting to

[288] *P.Sals.* 6: *et sicut Danielo famulo tuo draconem Babyloniae necandum disrumpendumque dedisti, ita mihi feminae hunc aeneum liceat dissipare draconem et figment huius membra discerpere.* Cf. Daniel and the Babylonian dragon Daniel 14: 23-30. Cf. Golindouche who faces a Babylonian dragon (Ogden 2021: 254).
[289] *P.Sals.* 14; Genesis 31.
[290] *P.Sals.* 14.
[291] August. *Serm.* 281.2 (Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 122-3).
[292] Chalon and Hamdoune 2015: 31.

imagine contexts of performance for texts such as the *Passio*, such as how visual and auditory stimuli might have worked together to emphasise or enhance certain meanings, for example, on the feast day of a martyr. The association of Daniel with these and other proto-martyr models might have helped consolidate Salsa further in the imagination of a Late Antique audience, whether in Tipasa or elsewhere. As with Judith, there are plenty of parallels between Salsa, Rachel and Daniel, including pagan statues and dragons, as well as the secrecy or rather underhand nature associated with their respective methods of theft and poison. Yet there is also a certain guile on the part of all the protagonists: Daniel uses a style of logical reasoning to argue that the statue cannot eat and drink and lays ashes on the floor to reveal the priests as the real culprits; similarly, Rachel claims she is on her period as an excuse for why she will not stand up and reveal the stolen gods.[293] Salsa is similarly presented as a rational character, especially in contrast to the pagans and Firmus, first in her address to the townspeople where she argues that Draco is the work of mere human artists and thus should not be worshipped,[294] and later when she "carefully weighed the odds" about whether to risk returning and destroying the rest of the statue.[295] Even her anger at the festivities is presented as more proportionate than Firmus' response to being rejected at her shrine, raging and tearing at his hair and hitting the wall with his weapons.[296]

While it is not unusual for female martyrs to be compared to male exempla, and occasionally vice versa, the mix to which Salsa is likened in the *Passio* is noteworthy. Salsa, a young virgin, is simultaneously compared to a pious widow, a young male prophet and the wife and mother of multiple biblical patriarchs.[297] As with Judith, it is also significant that Salsa's story combines elements from both Rachel and Daniel, proving herself, as a Christian intercessor, even more powerful than her models. However, another underlying theme throughout all these comparisons is the context in which they are taking place; all the examples alluded to are taken during a moment of crisis or uncertainty surrounding their home or even the continued existence of that home. Judith is determined to save

[293] Genesis 31: 35-6.
[294] *P.Sals.* 5.
[295] *P.Sals.* 8.
[296] *P.Sals.* 13.
[297] In the prologue of the *Martyrdom of Polyeuktos.*, which survives only in a Greek translation (*BHG 1566-7*), the eponymous soldier martyr is directly compared to two famous female martyrs, Thecla and Perpetua, (trans. Cobb & Jacobs 2021: 255).

her city from conquest by an overwhelming military power. Daniel, growing up in exile in Babylon, faces the perils of retaining and practising his faith amidst the pressures and temptations of a surrounding foreign culture. Rachel too, in preparing to emigrate with her family, faces an uncertain future. The backdrop of existential threat, and the perceived powerlessness of the protagonist, reinforces the various perils and uncertainties that Salsa delivers her city from, the moral corruption of Draco as well as the physical threat by Firmus and his army. The narrator anticipates potential criticism by purposely highlighting the concealment, theft and violence involved in Salsa's actions and, by framing them in terms of these biblical precedents, thus demonstrating how the means justify the ends. Crucially these ends are all in service of ensuring the future of their community: Judith by killing Holofernes to scare off his army, Daniel by exposing the pagan priests and rid the city of a false idol, while Rachel's motives are to secure her husband's inheritance of which he has been robbed by her own father. As Salsa is acting on behalf of Tipasa, her behaviour and status as a martyr are not to be damaged by the implied deception but rather, like the pious widow, famous prophet or beautiful matriarch to which she is compared, it must be considered in terms of the greater good. In this way the narrator anticipates and counters potential, or ongoing, criticisms of Salsa's actions that could potentially problematise her as a hero. This is even more important given the elevated status that the *PS* gives her with regard to the city from which she has sprung and which her actions and piety have preserved. She is also linked back to these biblical figures at similar times of crisis or uncertainty in such a way that also seeks to demonstrate her piety and purity of motive, which is the spiritual and physical protection of Tipasa and its inhabitants. In this way, while the three biblical exempla seem like a somewhat random selection, when placed together in the context of such a focus on civic identity, their immediate contexts of existential threat come to the forefront. While Salsa does disobey her parents and shock the rest of the townspeople through her sacrilegious act, this serves to emphasise the power that Draco holds over the whole city, and thus Salsa is proved an even more exemplary example of piety and strength in being the only one – and a young girl at that - able to withstand and overcome the threat. As Salsa is compared to multiple biblical figures, there is also the implication that she is even better as she has both preserved her city from earthly threats as well as helping its salvation. This recalls how the narrator previously described the

transformation of the pagan temple to a synagogue and then a Christian church, another link between how Salsa and Tipasa, person and place, are being elevated beyond earlier models.

5. Conclusion: Making a martyr, making a city

These two striking features – Salsa's local identity and the more active role she plays in her narrative – are each being used to craft her as an important martyr and saint worthy of veneration. Yet the continued presence of the city in the narrative, through this emphasis on her local origins and role as the initial instigator of the violence that precipitates the city's Christian transformation, are intertwined in the narrative to give the impression that both Tipasa and Salsa are distinctive and inseparable, and thus the *Passio* serves as a (re)foundation story for both. The *Passio* constructs Salsa in such a way that she seems to parallel her city, such as the role the sea plays in both preserving the martyr's body and ensuring the city's economic prosperity, and how the city's conversion is prioritised over that of the martyr. Likewise, the narrative's particular combination of biblical models serves to reinforce this portrayal of Salsa as a martyr who has a very special relationship with her native city. While the *Passio* is overtly a celebration of the making of its little titular martyr it also explains the making of the city in its current incarnation to its audience. In this way, the text emphasises a kind of symbiotic or reciprocal relationship between the saint and her city, whereby Salsa has been created by the city, her native soil, and also in the origin story it presents and extols Tipasa's conversion and continued survival. Despite the later manuscript transmission in Spain, this focus on the importance of Tipasa for Salsa perhaps allows a glimpse, however distorted, into the significance of the local identity of so many now obscure martyr cults across North Africa. In the next chapter, I will expand on this idea by considering instead some of the *acta*.

Chapter Four: Staging Courtroom Drama[298] (the Female Martyr vs. the Antagonist)

1. Introduction:

In this chapter, I will re-examine female characters in several of the early martyr narratives that have been generally or collectively referred to by historians as the *acta*. As mentioned in the introduction, the dramatic and performative nature of these texts has already been acknowledged, however, I believe there is scope to take this notion further. These texts, formulaic in nature, typically dramatize the arrest, trial and interrogation of the martyr or martyrs by an official, sometimes also describing the torture or execution, followed by a short encomium of their virtues and martyrdom. Yet the female martyrs within these narratives typically receive very little characterisation or speech. First, I will discuss some of the previous ways in which these sources have been conceived and interpreted. I will look at how female martyrs appear in them and some of the problems with comparing them to those figures who are the central subjects of narratives such as Salsa or Perpetua. Then I consider the number of similarities and shared culture of Roman comedy and mime, especially the dynamic between the female martyrs and the, often overlooked, antagonists in these texts. Focusing on the example of Crispina, along with a selection of other figures for comparison, I will demonstrate how some of these influences, such as plot and characters, might be used to shed new perspectives on how Late Antique audiences received and created these stories. I will suggest how some of the same themes and character dynamics can be seen in *acta* with the less visible women, such as the Scillitan Martyrs, and thus offer a potential new way of accessing them. I propose one such new approach, borrowing methodologies from the study of Roman comedy such as the relationship between the audience and the spectacle they were watching. While this has some precedents, for example in New Testament scholarship, I will show how these ideas are suitable for looking at this particular set of martyr texts. This focus on the drama and relationships, within Late Antique communities imbued with over a millennium of Classical theatrical traditions, also

[298] For this title I acknowledge similarity to Chapter 4 in Grig 2004: 59: “Courtroom Dramas: Judicial Narrative and Judicial Violence in Late Antique Martyrology”.

invites more attention to the performance contexts and influences of martyrdom and its commemoration, which itself was inherently spectaclular.[299]

Returning to *The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, which was introduced briefly in an earlier chapter, a group of six or twelve martyrs are brought into the courtroom. These include three women: Donata, Secunda and Vestia.[300] The proconsul, Saturninus, interrogates Speratus at first and the women only speak about halfway in response to a direct admonishment from Saturninus to "have no part in this folly of his" (i.e Speratus), and each woman offers a very brief assertion of her faith including the declaration "I am a Christian" (*Christiana sum*).[301] After this, the proconsul goes back to Speratus and the women are only mentioned again along with the whole group as they happily embrace their martyrdom. There is a similar set-up in the *Martyrdom of St Crispina*, although here the eponymous heroine, from Tebessa in Mauretania Caesarensis, is the main spokesperson in a group brought before the proconsul Anulinus who asks her why she refuses to sacrifice to the Roman gods and gets increasingly frustrated by her opaque or evasive replies. After an escalation to threats—including having her head shaved in public—he orders her to be executed and she gladly embraces her martyrdom. Another brief, though no less memorable, episode is the character of Quartilosa, awaiting martyrdom following that of her husband and adult son, who occupies a brief role in one of the chapters in *The Martyrdom of Saints Montanus and Lucius* and who was briefly discussed in an earlier chapter.[302] In some ways, this is a radical shift in gears from the *passiones* of Perpetua and Salsa where the heroines are explicitly the main protagonist of the text or there is enough characterisation that they have been treated as such by modern scholars. Yet it was still considered important to list female martyrs such as Donata, Vestia and Secunda, despite their lack of prominence and the relatively small role they play in the surviving literary narrative that we have. It seems especially striking when one compares this to the extra attention and praise female martyrs often received in cults and feast day celebrations with encomiums specifically referencing their

[299] E.g. "Christian spectacularization of martyrdom" - Castelli 2004: 133.
[300] List of names appears to have been shortened in some manuscripts, see Musurillo 1972: 88, n.1.
[301] *A.Scil. 9.*
[302] *M.Mont.* 8.

gender and associated virtues.[303] This is not to mention the epigraphical evidence, for example at Tipasa where we have found inscriptions for at least seven martyrs even though Salsa is the only one for whom we also have her *Passio* written down and surviving through to the modern era.[304] As has already been noted, there is a discrepancy between the saints' names that appear in the archaeological record and those we have surviving from literary accounts. Yet even as such figures remain tantalisingly out of reach, it suggests that it is worth considering, albeit with a different methodological approach, taking a closer look at female martyrs in these *acta*, like Crispina or Donata, who appear much more briefly, yet often no less memorably. What I will suggest is that in contrast to the extended emotion and detail in a text such as the *Passio Perpetuae*, a great deal of the tension and drama seems to emerge more from these female martyrs being present in the court setting in the first place. In addition, there is their confrontation, however brief, with the antagonist character, typically an imperial official like Saturninus, whose treatment of them usually fixates on their gender. As I have already argued with Perpetua and Salsa, this chapter makes the case that the considerably more elusive female martyrs of the *acta* deserve the same level of attention, albeit with a different methodological approach due to the different lengths and style of their texts. While their appearance may be brief, it is their status and reputation that is – implicitly or explicitly – being called into question by their appearance on the court stage.

2. Background and Previous Approaches to the *Acta*

Previous scholarship on the early martyr narratives interpreted them to different extents as being based upon 'authentic' court records, i.e. that these were based on notes from trials that literally took place. In recent decades historians have been inclined to take a less positivistic view, which has included a more sophisticated understanding of how different literary genres and identities were self-consciously constructed as well as unpicking some of the rhetorical and ideological functions of such literature in building up nascent Christian identities.

[303] e.g. Victoria in *A.Ab.* is the "flower of virgins" (English translation Tilley 1997a: 41); the narrator of the *PS* in the prologue describes female martyrs as being "twice as praiseworthy" as their male counterparts.
[304] E.g. other martyrs mentioned in Tipasa inscriptions include: Victorinus, Rogatus & Vitalis, Sperantius, Eu[…]ius & Dativa (Duval 174-178, pp. 367-77); see also Christern 1976; Ardeleanu 2018.

Yet there has been an ongoing debate on the scale and type of mythologising being carried out by early Christian writers. For example, some scholars have argued whether they could be dated very close to the historical trials, while at the other end of the spectrum, there is the idea that the persecutions were a complete myth and these narratives merely carefully crafted propaganda.[305] Recently, Éric Rebillard has challenged and problematised this dichotomy, along with ideas of "authenticity" and "historicity" in the early martyr narratives, and instead proposed seeing them as "living texts", that is a more self-consciously literary format in which early Christian writers sought to shape these figures and questions of identity, which allows for a much greater degree of textual fluidity.[306] This also allows for the importance of oral tradition in the origins and transmission of such stories, as well as the different variations occurring over time and in different places of which it has been asserted we get hints (e.g. Augustine's additional information on Crispina). Rebillard notes how studies of the *acta* have been long haunted by this "spectre of authenticity", which, as he goes on to argue, is not necessarily the most helpful or accurate way of viewing them because of how the implied dichotomy of "forgeries" and "authentic accounts" is irrelevant to the actual understanding of Christian martyrdom being depicted.[307] In addition, the *acta* have often been seen as rather formulaic, not helped by what could be seen as the rather dry presentation in modern scholarly editions.[308]

The idea of seeing them as "living texts" also considers another aspect of the martyrs themselves; both of them having an authority that lives on beyond their human lifespan but also an intense vulnerability as that immortality is, necessarily, shaped and used by others. It is also far removed from how early communities would have encountered and experienced these stories. The fact that stories and performances can be adapted for different contexts also complicates or has the effect of raising questions about this antagonist figure and the role he plays. Depending on whether one views the narrative as historical, a forgery or a fiction casts the antagonist as a representative of the state or as a full-sized pantomime villain, a dichotomy that is by no means satisfactory for more than a handful of specific examples so we will also look at some of the different approaches to the figure of the antagonist.

[305] See Introduction. Useful recent overview/survey in Bremmer 2021.
[306] Rebillard 2021: 2 and 86.
[307] Ibid: 3.
[308] Cf. the recent creative translation/edition of Perpetua's story in the form of a graphic novel 'Perpetua's Journey' (Rea and Clarke 2018).

The treatment of female martyrs in these texts has to a large extent focused on those characters with the most description or speech, such as, again, Perpetua and Felicitas or those whose actions, such as Agathonice stripping off and leaping into the fire, provoke discussion.[309] While this is understandable, it has the effect of skewing the scholarship towards these particular examples and obscuring how women appear in these stories in a myriad of different, including non-speaking, roles. There are in addition certain difficulties with drawing any such sweeping conclusions about such a range of texts, many of which have an anonymous narrator. Female martyrs in these types of narratives may be the sole or joint focus (Crispina, Potamiaena and her mother or Basileides, or Maxima, Donatilla and Secunda) or listed as part of a much larger group. In these lists, (e.g. *The Acts of Scillitan Martyrs*) they are often listed together at the end. Individual female martyrs from such groups have been looked at extensively, such as Blandina from The *Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne,* but this approach can have the effect of taking them out of her immediate context and surrounding narrative. I am particularly looking at the female characters who appear in these sources and how they compare with their male counterparts. As discussed in previous chapters, female martyrs have frequently been compared to the heroines of Greek tragedy, characters such as Antigone, Phaedra or Iphigenia, yet this in itself is strikingly at odds with the triumphalist tone and happy resolution of the martyr obtaining their heavenly reward. While the scenes of torture and heightened emotional pathos would seem to have more in common with tragedies, this is a rather anachronistic perspective for a couple of reasons. On one level, the martyrs themselves are eager to win their crown of martyrdom, even though this could court the potential controversy that surrounded discussions of "voluntary martyrdom", and the martyrdom itself is viewed in terms of an athletic victory, military victory, or wedding, all joyous occasions. Second, how the martyrs react to their torture defiantly, eager for their martyrdom to take place, which in turn is such an unexpected reaction to the intent of the threats. In both these ways, I will argue that there are many underappreciated influences from New Comedy, for example, the plays by Terence and Plautus, and the reception of these plots in Late Antiquity through the popularity of mime. I will consider some of the ways in which aspects of Classical drama were very familiar

[309] E.g. Kozlowski 2020 on Agathonice stripping off before jumping into the fire. She has also been employed in discussions surrounding the controversy of "voluntary martyrdom" such as Moss 2012.

in all areas of Roman society, notably in the stock character types and how audiences accustomed to such plots might have viewed the martyr and persecutor. I will then discuss more particularly how scholars have looked at, or not, the figure of the antagonist.

In the latter section of the chapter, I will take the case study of Crispina, a late third or early fourth-century martyr. While also relatively short, the *Martyrdom of Saint Crispina* has received its share of attention, not least due to her being mentioned frequently in Augustine's sermons as well as her association with the pilgrimage basilica at Tebessa. Augustine presents her as a wealthy, well-born matron with children and a famous African martyr on a level with other notable saints. He describes her as: "a rich and delicate woman" (*feminam diuitem et delicatam*).[310] All this appears very different to the Crispina we saw in the introductory synopsis, where there are no descriptive details other than where she is from and a paean to her generic virtues of faith at the end. These extra details have led scholars to suggest Augustine was familiar with a different or fuller account than the one that survives today, as well as different sectarian versions that circulated among communities that claimed her.[311] For our purposes, imagining how Crispina's martyrdom was being recreated and retold, these hints serve as a valuable reminder of the fluid and often oral origins of these stories before the versions of them became fossilised as they were transmitted in medieval manuscripts. At Tebessa, a large basilica complex was excavated dating to the fourth century and seems to have been a popular pilgrimage site, with significant rebuilding work in the fifth and sixth centuries, following Justinian's brief reconquest of the province. As various scholars, such as Anne Marie Yasin, have described, visitors would be led through the Roman city to the sanctuary in its heart, an experience that would have involved multiple senses, memories and emotions.[312] It has been linked to Crispina based on a fifth-century inscription. Like Salsa, she appears both in the literature, in the aforementioned *acta* that bears her name, as well as the remains of a large pilgrimage complex in Tebessa in which a triconch building (a chapel with three apses) has been attributed as dedicated to her, primarily due to the location and some epigraphic evidence. This floor mosaic inscription gives a list of names of martyrs, though Crispina is conspicuously absent: "XI k(alendas) Ian(uarias) memoria sanctorum Heracli,

---

[310] August. *Exposition of Psalm 120,* ch.13.
[311] Recently, see article by Farrugia 2020.
[312] Yasin 2017: 181.

Donati, Zebbocis, Secundiani, Victoriani, Publiciae, Meggenis".[313] The assumption made about this interpretation is that these are her "companions" (*consortes*), however, it is another fascinating example of the discrepancies between literary sources and epigraphy.[314] It is striking that she is the sole martyr being interrogated in her *acta*, whether this is because she is being interrogated separately or because she is the spokeswoman of a group of companions, as it gives her a relatively substantial amount of dialogue, especially compared with the female Scillitan martyrs mentioned above. Yet at the same time, her narrative is still considered typical of these *acta*.

In this way, through a close reading of this often overlooked text, I will offer a new analysis of other aspects of character and relationship dynamics, in conjunction with a consideration of how this kind of performance was also going on within the multi-sensory experience of the pilgrimage site. As a more or less typical example of these types of text, I use Crispina, alongside a few other examples, as a way of demonstrating this new approach. Particular features that I focus on will be the setting and prologues, especially how the boundary between audience and characters and 'stage' become blurred, with the result that the contemporary listener is in a sense invited into playing an active, creative role as a 'witness' of the events being retold. I will then look at the relationship dynamics between the female martyr and the antagonist, including influences from familiar stock characters of the old man and the young girl together with the use of playfulness with language and expectations. The familiarity of the audience with the outcome, as in New Comedy, is also a key factor and so I will look at how the endings are handled or even subverted. In the final part, I will demonstrate how some of these ideas might be used to shed light on those female martyrs who make a much smaller appearance in their *acta*, like the Scillitan martyrs. Through this methodology, we can approach the *acta* afresh with a greater awareness of a shared tradition and familiarity with a cast of certain types of characters and a formulaic number of plotlines, while also giving more consideration to their performative attributes.

3. Drama, Comedy, Christianity

[313] Duval 1982: 123-8.
[314] *M.Crisp.* 3; Février 1968: 167-91, especially 189-90.

Some of these clues as to how Late Antique communities would have received and shared these stories come from comments such as those in Augustine's sermons that refer to accounts being read out on specific martyrs' anniversaries: "when their exhortations [Perpetua and Felicitas] in divine revelations and the triumphs of their sufferings were being read, we heard them; all of these things recounted in words and illuminated in lights".[315] As Augustine emphasises, with repeated references to hearing, as well as seeing, the *acta* being read out to a congregation and subsequently cited in sermons as oral performances. Reading martyr stories aloud, like sermons, was a very performative act, as bishops and clergy were fully aware of from their Classical rhetorical training. Another dramatic form that martyr stories borrowed from were dialogues. This literary form had a long and prestigious one in antiquity going back to Plato's dialogues featuring Socrates. The basic formula of a back-and-forth conversation building towards or challenging certain truths, particularly between a philosopher and figure in power, held many parallels for martyr literature. The genre also bore a certain resemblance, and likely influence, with other forms of drama. Yet this genre also tended towards a rather more select elite audience, compared to the flocked crowds for martyr *acta* that writers such as Augustine evoke, suggesting that at least some kind of oral form of them was familiar to a wider swathe of their community. For a more interesting parallel then, we can turn to the theatre and in particular comedies.

From at least the Late Republic onwards, there were plenty of precedents for how integrated elements of popular comedies were in all areas of Roman literature and society. For example, Cicero talked about his interactions with actors and in one of his earlier cases defending a young man accused of patricide, he was able to draw on the theme of tension and rebelliousness in a father-son relationship that would have been a well-established one in comedies going all the way back to Aristophanes and Menander.[316]
More recently, the themes and techniques of comedy have also been substantially explored not only in examples of rhetoric but also in poetry such as

[315] August. *Serm.* 280 (trans. Cobb 2021: 109).
[316] Cic. *Pro. Rosc. Am.* See: Harries 2007 on Cicero's involvement with various actors as well as influences from particular plots or characters.

that of Catullus.[317] For example, as several Catullan scholars have noted, the poet makes use of many stock characters from Roman comedy (indicated by their recognisable masks), such as the young lovers, the old man, the crafty pimp, the braggart soldier, etc.[318] The various types of stock characters in Pseudo-Quintillian's *Lesser Declamations,* such as wicked stepmothers and naïve young men, were also drawn from these types of plots.[319] As Christopher Polt has recently argued, in the context of Catullus and the Late Republic: "for everyone in Rome, traditionalist and iconoclast alike, comedy presented a convenient set of ethical touchstones with which to identify and to site themselves and those around them within the shifting flows of Roman moral, social, and political relations."[320] The genre of comedy was also highly meta-theatrical, with speeches and asides in which the poet or actors deliberately drew attention to the fact that they were onstage or in a theatre, including referencing other competing entertainments at festivals such as tightrope walkers or asking audiences to show their appreciation at the end of the performance. Such stock characters were already familiar within Roman society and, by the later empire, not just limited to specific times of the year such as festivals but to many other aspects of the society and culture.

As well as performances of tragedies and comedies, mimes and pantomimes were also very popular, showing up as they do in a variety of visual and literary sources such as in funerary decoration.[321] Pantomimes were solo dancers, the plots often based on mythological themes, to an accompanying chorus while mimes involved an ensemble unmasked cast of actors, male or female, often a similar store of stock plots and characters. While strikingly very visual types of performances, both pantomimes and mimes were frequently referenced in elite literary sources such as Tacitus, often with an air of disdain, a similar prejudice to that echoed by later Christian authors.[322]

We have limited evidence for the continued performance of tragedy, Old or New Comedy in Late Antiquity, and the general assumption has been that by the third

---

[317] Polt 2018 on Catullus and other elegists. Other examples of similar themes and plots in rhetorical exercises such as in Quintilian's *Minor Declamations.*
[318] Polt 2018: 3-5.
[319] E.g. Pingoud 2016.
[320] Polt 2021: 8.
[321] E.g. *Roman relief (first century BC – first century AD) depicting a seated poet (Menander) with three New Comedy masks* Princeton University collection (y1951-1), https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/23937 [Accessed: Monday 25 July 2022].
[322] E.g. Tac. *Ann.* 1.54 on Augustus and Tiberius' attitudes to mimes.

or fourth centuries drama was no longer regularly staged but rather read out in particular elite settings.[323] At the same time, some of how Christian writers reference theatre, even when this is negative, still relies on a certain amount of knowledge on the part of their audiences. The invective of various Christian writers against the theatre, such as Tertullian and John Chrysostom, often singled out the mime in particular and were suspicious of its perceived temptations and links to all kinds of vices. By contrast, some traces of nuance may be found in the writings of the fifth-century Chorikios of Gaza who wrote a declamation defending mimes.[324] Even where legislation sought to control the treatment, dress or behaviour of actors and mimes, particularly those who would go on performing in public after converting, this also acknowledged their continued popularity and function within society.[325] Unlike pantomime, which typically featured a solo performer in a mask in performances drawn from mythology, mimes would feature several actors and actresses. The settings were more everyday scenarios, such as a barber's shop or bedroom, as well as characters such as cooks, sausage-sellers, youths in love, etc.[326] The unmasked figure of the mime, along with the visibility of female actors in mime troupes, seems to have particularly incensed Christian churchmen such as John Chrysostom. In his sermons, he rails against the effect, particularly of the female mime actress on the (male) viewer. Earlier writers, such as Tertullian, identified the theatre with falsity and disproved of the indignity, whether the immorality of the low status of the actor in Roman society or the popular adultery plots, in contrast to Christian teachings and hymns. In one passage, he even imagines various actors, acrobats and poets suffering the tortures of hell in a particularly vivid scene:

> "If the **literature of the stage** delight you, we have sufficiency of books, of poems, of aphorisms, sufficiency of songs and voices, not fable, those of ours, but truth; not artifice but simplicity […] And, then, **the poets** trembling before the judgement-seat, not of Rhadamanthus, not of Minos, but of Christ whom they never looked to see! And then there will be the **tragic actors** to be heard, more vocal in their own tragedy; and **the players** to be seen, lither of limb by far in the fire."[327]

---

[323] An article by Eva Stehlíková from 1993 does attempt to go through the evidence of the extent to which various tragedies and comedies continued to be staged or read out, either whole or specific scenes.
[324] Chorikios of Gaza, *Apologia mimorum*; Webb 2017: 219-231.
[325] *Theodosian Code* 15.8-13 (Pharr 1952: 434-5).
[326] Webb 2008: 99
[327] Tertullian, *De spect.* 23.5 and 29-30. My emphasis.

Similar tones of disgust and anxiety were echoed by other early Christian writers, such as John Chrysostom, yet the type of language and context of such public sermons themselves were still inherently theatrical and performative, a tension that these writers were often uncomfortably aware of.[328] This has been acknowledged by various scholars, notably in Ruth Webb's book *Demons and Dancers*.[329] As she notes, the glimpses of theatre and performance we get in Late Antique sources from Apuleius to Procopius, "reveal its vital social function as a representation of the community in which the highest and lowest strata of society came into contact."[330] These all serve to demonstrate that the characters and plots, as well as the figures of actors and pantomimes within Roman society, were readily available and identifiable to Roman audiences such that writers in all genres from rhetoric to history, including early Christian writers of martyr acta, could depend on this audience familiarity to propagate their agendas. In this way, the sermons and writings by Christian authors are an important source for the continued popularity and awareness of such spectacles. Augustine has similar misgivings about the emotions and "follies" of the theatre, yet also draws heavily on his own Classical rhetorical training.[331]

As we have discussed in earlier chapters, links between martyrdom and tragedy have previously been well explored, particularly the model of a sacrificial victim such as Polyxena for the construction of the virgin martyr.[332] While various parallels have been drawn between female martyrs and heroines from Classical tragedy, most notably virgins such as Antigone or Polyxena, there are some even more striking parallels between the female characters in martyr plots and comedy plots.[333] One major difference between martyr narratives and (surviving) tragedies is the former are written to be explicitly triumphal with a clear message of who is the hero and who is the villain and these are respectively honoured or despised. This way of thinking about martyr stories perhaps says a lot more about

[328] Chrysostom, *Against the Games and the Theatres*, (PG 56.266); see also: Webb 2008: 170-1 and Lugaresi 2017.
[329] For some of the discussion on the performance of drama in Late Antiquity, Kelly 1979; Webb 2009. Also usually the topic of a later chapter on 'receptions' in handbooks of Classical drama, though a recent exception to this general trend is Puchner and White (2017, CUP) *Greek Theatre between Antiquity and Independence: A History of Reinvention from the Third Century BC to 1830* which takes Late Antiquity as a starting point rather than an epilogue.
[330] Apul. *Met.* 10.30-32; Procopius' *The Secret History* 9.20-23 on the Empress Theodora's supposedly racy past as an actress and performer (Webb 2008: 6).
[331] August. *De Doctrina Christiana* 2.38.
[332] E.g. Constantinou 2019.
[333] E.g. Palmer 2014; Constantinou 2019.

later medieval monastic receptions of these figures and stories than the earlier fourth and fifth-century audiences for whom they were being created and celebrated or the audiences of the first two or three centuries CE in which the narratives are set.

Less attention has been drawn to the parallels between martyrdom and Roman comedy or mime, despite all the above-mentioned similarities between them. With regards to martyr narratives, there are several examples of "actor martyrs", such as Genesius of Rome, whose initial performance mocking Christian rituals including an onstage baptism wind up in a real conversion.[334] Stephanie Cobb has also commented elsewhere on the "slapstick" nature of botched executions such as torturers tripping over or collapsing with exhaustion while the martyrs remain completely unaffected.[335] There has also already been a significant amount of scholarship exploring the influence of comedic characters and tropes in Jewish and early Christian writing from the first/second centuries CE onwards. Most frequently, this has involved the stock character of the clever slave (the *servus currens*) and the reversal of social hierarchies. In Segal's article, which looks at the use of this stock figure in the Talmud, this not only demonstrates the shared literary culture of the Hellenistic-Roman world, with the sixth- and seventh-century rabbis having enough familiarity to be able to creatively combine the subversive elements of this character with Jewish moral preaching.[336] Elsewhere, in an examination of a specific short episode in the Acts of the Apostles involving a slave girl, Rhoda, Spencer argues that the subverted master-slave framework from comedy would have to have been sufficiently familiar to at least a large proportion of its audience to help illustrate its message of model discipleship, providing an "extratextual framework for the implied auditor".[337] This fits into a wider discussion of the use and playfulness of these topoi, including subversion, of Classical tropes and literature, and as already mentioned, Greek novels and hagiography that have produced some fruitful comparisons. The aspects of gender combined with the status of the slave girl Rhoda in Acts are also interesting and relevant for the current topic, as female martyrs are likewise often presented as at least initially of dubious *humilior* status. In this way, while scholars have already long been making parallels between these types of

[334] Panayotakis 1997: 310-11. Cf. Thecla's self-baptism in the arena, *APTh* 34.
[335] Webb 2009; Cobb 2017.
[336] Segal 2015.
[337] Acts 12:12-17; Spencer 2017: 288.

narratives and comedy, this has not been realised in any sort of systematic way other than by looking at individual episodes or characters. In addition, such approaches have not been considered in the context of the early martyr narratives such as Crispina's *acta*. This is surprising, not only when compared to the substantial work on fictionality and comparisons of hagiography with other contemporaneous Classical literature. Again, this is perhaps due to the difficulties with knowing the extent to which dramas in Late Antiquity were still being performed as while one can look at literary evidence, it is harder to capture the more intangible aspects of a stage performance. Nevertheless, one of the ways to do this is to look more closely at the other major characters surrounding the martyr, notably the antagonist. While there is still admittedly a lot that we do not know about the original performance contexts of early martyr narratives, naturally coloured by the polemics elite Christian writers had against theatre and spectacles in general, it has also been recognised that these normative texts also often fail to represent what would have been the realities of day-to-day Christian experience.[338] While the original contexts of these texts are difficult to recreate with so much interpolation and creative reinvention, there is a significant amount of evidence in the sources about how they would have been communicated and performed within their communities that have already helped put them in a different light. The prominence of the female mime actress and everyday settings along with the semi-improvised nature of the plots, would have been familiar for these early audiences of mimes as well as there being overlap with New Comedy, especially with regards to the types of everyday settings and romantic plots. For my analysis of the case study of *The Martyrdom of Crispina*, I will also compare it with scenes from Plautus and Terence for which we have surviving scripts.

In Plautus' *The Rope*, a freeborn girl Palaestra has been kidnapped and sold into slavery to a pimp. Various complications and misunderstandings ensue before she is recognised and restored to her father and, status assured, can be married off to the highborn young man. Another plot, *Casina*, involves another beautiful young girl who has been enslaved and is being pursued by both the father and son in the household; in the end, she is also revealed to have been a highborn Athenian after all and married to the younger man. The conventional plot line

[338] E.g. de Bruyn 2017. In this particular analogy, despite many elite Christian polemics against such 'pagan' practices, plenty of archaeological evidence that amulets and curse tablets continued to be used often incorporating and adapting Christian symbols.

often involves a young and beautiful female character in some sort of peril – arrested, kidnapped, sold into slavery, raped, threatened with torture or sexual assault— as a result of which their legal status and morals are challenged publicly. Crucially, while there is occasionally some attention paid to the emotional pathos of the heroine in the drama (for example, Palaestra's speech when she is trying to evade the pimp who claims her in *The Rope* or Pythias' report of her mistress' rape in *The Eunuch*) she generally plays little role in resolving her plight which is at first complicated before being finally resolved by others.[339] In terms of the play's plot, by the end of the narrative, any aspersions over the young woman's status have always proven to be temporary and usually end in a marriage or resolution with her husband. This general plot contains many of the basic structure or plot elements of martyr narratives involving female martyrs. The comedy typically ends with a marriage and female martyrs' martyrdom is often described in exactly such terms, e.g. as 'bride of Christ', compared to their male counterparts. In this chapter, I will compare Crispina's *acta* to examples from Plautus and Terence, for the most complete plots and a large cast of characters to work with, as well as draw on some of the parallels with mime. One striking difference is that in these comedies the character of the young woman is often a silent one, perhaps not even appearing on stage, so that although her predicament in many cases is a significant part of the plot, the focus is on the male characters (such as her would-be young lover) to resolve.

In all of these ways, the character and function of the young woman in many surviving Roman comedies bear a lot of similarities to the role that female martyrs play. In one of the more popular mime plots that we have, the 'adultery mime', female figures featured prominently.[340] For example, involving a young wife trying to hide her young lover from her older husband's unexpected return.[341] Seeing this familiar persona in the female martyr, audiences might also likewise be encouraged to recognise certain aspects of other stock characters in their antagonist such as how they deal with these female characters in particular. In this case, the judge overseeing the trial, far from being a respectable authority figure, is shown up as behaving foolishly or irrationally to such an extent that they are mocked and tricked by lower-status characters and seen by the audience to

[339] Plaut. *Rud.* 206; Ter. *Eun.* 645-50 (trans. Barsby 2001: 386). Also, see: Pierce 1997: 164-5 on rape in New Comedy.
[340] Reynolds 1946: 77-84; Webb 2002: 288.
[341] Webb 2008: 96.

be on the 'wrong' side of history. Even though things appear to have been returned to the status quo by the end of the 'play' in that he has them executed, it is rarely through this character's personal qualities. While on one level this makes it seem as if even a finite conclusion such as death has been subverted by Christian writers and audiences, on another this very much fits into the expectations and conventions of Classical literature. As we shall see below in a comparison with the stock character of the old man, the ending of the comedy appears to resolve the social hierarchy but not without elements of ambiguity or this figure being restored from a complete position of ridicule.

There is also the physical setting of lots of martyr narratives that take place entirely or in part in theatres or an arena or a courtroom, further blurring the lines between 'stage' and audience.[342] While examples such as Perpetua and the others being initially dressed up in elaborate costumes or Thecla being paraded through the streets and then thrown to wild beasts have been much discussed, this has mainly been with regards to the arena and Roman public executions, which were often were highly theatrical, with criminals dressed up as characters from mythology, in their attempts to entertain as well as educate.[343] Yet the relationship between Christians and the theatre remains understudied. For this reason, I argue that drama and comedy are useful and still under-used tools for exploring the character and relationship dynamics present in these stories, both on and off stage.

4. The Antagonist

Despite being such a significant character in martyr narratives, overseeing the martyrs' trial and ordering their torture or execution, the antagonist has received remarkably little considered scholarly attention in and of themselves. While the focus in martyr texts is obviously on the martyrs, their dialogue with the antagonist is a crucial element and creates a dramatic, not to mention memorable, relationship dynamic. Their role is often seen as a "purely mechanical" one, although also essential as it is they who, though initially admittedly unwillingly, facilitate the subjects of martyrologies to achieve their martyrdom.[344] It is also important to consider how Christian audiences may have considered them

[342] Grig 2004: 59: courtroom/stage settings.
[343] Middleton 2015: 207; Gunderson 1996.
[344] Rives 1996: 1.

compared to other characters, not as some all-powerful existential threat (as in other examples where it is the forces of the devil with humans merely as their tools) but as a more foolish and petty villain on the wrong side of history.

In this section, I focus on the antagonist, first considering two rather more well-explored individuals; Pontius Pilate from the gospel accounts of Jesus' trial and Hilarianus from the *Passio Perpetuae*. I discuss how even while the *acta* are starting to be read less literally, there is still a tendency to see the antagonist figure as more or less borrowed straight from a historicist tradition as opposed to as a more literary construction. Rather, as has recently been looked at in the case of specific authors like Eusebius, there was a deliberate incentive in 'othering' the antagonist so that early Christian writers could better emphasise and showcase how their own heroes (i.e. the martyrs) were aligned with traditional Greco-Roman culture and values. The contrast between the male primary antagonist and the female martyr, I argue, could also be used consciously to exaggerate this dynamic.

Many of the early martyr *acta*, notably Polycarp, were explicitly modelled on Jesus' trial and execution. Thus, it also makes sense that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who presides over Jesus' trial in the various canonical and apocryphal gospels, would be a natural model for the antagonist figure in the various early martyr *acta*. For example, his status as an official of the state, his failure to understand Jesus' cryptic responses, even his ambivalence being contrasted with the more sympathetic views of his wife and, despite remaining unconvinced of Jesus' guilt, nevertheless ordering his crucifixion. Pesthy-Simon has argued that despite narrative similarities, the martyrs were not solely imitating Christ but also other models of Jewish and Greco-Roman types of noble death such as Socrates or the Maccabees.[345] This opens up the potential for re-examining additional models for the antagonist as the use of a broader array of influences needs by no means be limited to the martyrs but also their opponents. Comparisons have been drawn between the martyr's bold or confrontational attitude and similar interactions between philosophers and rulers in that both genres consist of an individual speaking their 'truth' to an authority figure who can range from foolish to tyrannically cruel.[346] The latter's "insolent and mindless"

[345] Pesthy-Simon 2017: 95-6.
[346] For examples, Harker's 2008 in-depth study of the 'pagan martyrs' in the *Acta Alexandrinorum*.

flaws accentuate the other's "fair and civilised" virtues, thus the resulting "dichotomy accounts for the tyrannical man's immoderation, brutality, and emotional outbursts, as well as the virtuous woman's nobility, self-control, intelligence, and eloquence."[347]

Considering how much of the scholarly attention Perpetua's *Passio* has and continues to receive, which has already been discussed, her prosecutor Hilarianus is an example of an antagonist who has received more attention than most. There was a considerable focus, and no little controversy, on Perpetua's conflict with father, to such an extent that Augustine seemed to have felt the need to rationalise this break from filial piety by attributing her father to rather be a symbol of the devil's influence.[348] Alongside this and the various dream opponents she encounters, her trial scene has unsurprisingly also received a fair share of attention. The judge who interrogates her is named Hilarianus, a Roman procurator in Carthage and the encounter makes up a comparatively brief part of chapter six once the martyrs have been led to the forum for the trial, ending with his ordering her father to be beaten and condemning the martyrs.[349] In addition to the standard role where he interrogates each of the martyrs in turn, asking them to renounce their faith, he is also introduced as having only recently received his authority. He has as little success with Perpetua as any of her other opponents (i.e. the dragon, Egyptian, wild heifer). When Perpetua refuses to comply, he orders her elderly father to be beaten publicly in an attempt to further humiliate and coerce her family.[350] Like Saturninus in the opening example of the Scillitan martyrs, Hilarianus appears initially reasonable in his attempts to persuade Perpetua and the others to recant, offering them several opportunities to renounce their faith, before starting to lose his temper and resorting to emotional threats and finally torture and capital punishment. In his article, James Rives argues how he might be potentially identified with the dedicatee of two inscriptions from a pair of altars from Spain and speculates as to how a certain reputation for personal piety could have been behind his treatment of Perpetua and the others.[351] He also notes that the name "Hilarianus" (meaning "cheerful") was a common name given to slaves, freedmen and their descendants, which,

[347] Monaco Caterine 2019: 201 & 204.
[348] August. *Serm.* 281.2 (Cobb and Jacobs 2021: 120-1).
[349] *P.Perp.* 6.1-4.
[350] *P.Perp.* 6; Cooper 2011; Hefferman 2012a: 26.
[351] AE 1968, 227 and 228; See: Rives 1996: 7, n.13 and 18ff; Cooper 2011.

given the longstanding negative portrayal of freedmen in Roman elite literary sources, could perhaps be seen as another signal to audiences about the moral inadequacy of this character.[352] Given the modern scholarly consensus that there was no empire-wide persecution of Christians, the composer of the *Passio* and other *acta* could have perhaps found such a figure to serve as a useful negative exemplum and thus a counterweight to further emphasise the martyrs' virtues. It is also very striking that Hilarianus is omitted in the later redacted *Acta*, where the presiding proconsul is instead called Minucius, who is Hilarianus' deceased predecessor in the *Passio*.[353] While several commentators do note this omission, it does not seem to merit the same attention as other details that have changed in this later, altered style version, such as Perpetua's more side-lined role, Felicitas' relative prominence or the removal of the gladiator execution scene.[354] This could perhaps be due to scribal error or confusion – to simplify the name of one antagonist rather than mention his successor – or it could also be the case of many different circulating versions that the author of this surviving later redaction sought to rationalise. Another possibility is if a subsequent composer of the *Acta* was concerned with altering the whole interrogation scene, such as by having the men and women interviewed separately, and also omitting the scenes between Perpetua and her father or his being beaten on Hilarianus' orders. However, another possibility that fits in with the argument of this chapter is that the use of a named 'historical' individual was of less importance compared with the literary role he occupied within the narrative, i.e. as a familiar type of character that audiences could recognise by certain cues and descriptions. One problem with the more historicist approach, as with the texts themselves, is that a great deal of the evidence has traditionally come from internal evidence within the martyr texts themselves, often cross-referenced between each other in modern editions. This is especially problematic as the dating of most of them is uncertain.

Sometimes the antagonist is some high-ranking imperial official with a plausible-sounding name and details that may have reflected oral memory or been drawn from consular lists to create a sense of historical authenticity or immediacy. In

[352] A notorious example is the figure of Trimalchio in Petronius' *Satyricon* who is a fabulously wealthy and vulgar freedman.
[353] *P.Perp.* 6.3.
[354] Hefferman 2012a; Cobb 2019.

cases where the antagonist initially seems to want to come across as reasonable, or even express their doubts or some sympathy for the martyr, such as the Pontius Pilate model, this also opened up potential for their conversion either in the narrative or in later tradition.[355] Elsewhere they are a representative of the authorities and only referred to the title of their office such as the governor in *The Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne*. In such cases, the individual figure is not so important as they are rather tools of the devil, which then need not hold back on details describing the monstrosity of the tortures they plan for the martyrs.[356]

There are so many intriguing traces to unravel and speculate on that it is worth taking a step back to consider how useful this approach is in fact for trying to reconstruct the creation of or more immediate experience of martyr texts within their communities. On the one hand, the cultural memory of particular figures might have given stories of earlier martyrs a certain extra kind of glamour by 'their' martyrs having been associated with, and triumphing over, a particularly notorious villain. The 'rationalising' approach also had a long tradition within Classical antiquity more generally. It may also have added to a sense of competition or superiority, particularly where an author might be putting particular emphasis on a saint's potency and affinity with a certain city or region. Invoking the memory of a particularly infamous local villain, whether or not based on a historical figure (such as Firmus in the *PS*), not only served to show one's own martyrs as especially courageous and pious but embedded them into local history. The figure of Pilate, while based on a historical figure for whom there is external evidence, has also become a literary construction in the gospel accounts of his confrontation with Jesus. What is noteworthy is a general consistency in modern scholarship to portray the main antagonist as a more historical than literary construction even within more recent sophisticated discussions of the genre's fictionality, such as the different ways people in antiquity understood things like 'myth' or 'history' compared to modern thinking. For example, other motivations in setting the scene during a particular period of persecution could be based more on the later infamy given to a specific emperor, such as Diocletian, i.e. what feels more plausible to a later audience that perhaps also evokes other martyrs from the same persecution. Of course, the emperor very rarely turns up as the actual persecutor in hagiographies, with a couple of notable exceptions

---

[355] Dusenbury 2021.

[356] *Martyrs of Lyons* 1.

being in Isaac's vision where he dreams he is wrestling with the emperor and the martyrdom of St. Catherine where the emperor Maxentius shows up in Alexandria.[357] Rather, references to the emperors, and other officials, seem to become more of an indicator for locating the text in time than specific characters. In addition, there is the potential of deniability by distancing any explicit accusations of villainy from an imperial figure, instead blaming corrupt or bad advisors. While in the last few decades, scholars have moved away from the traditional historical interpretation of martyrs, there can also be a danger in removing martyr texts too far out of their context.[358]

Building on these ideas of rejecting a direct search for 'authenticity', I suggest that it is more fruitful to avoid this altogether and focus on the figure of the antagonist as one more type of literary device. As already well established in Roman literary tradition, with both positive and negative exempla, the emphasis was often on whether audiences would find a character recognisable and plausible. In this way, with the martyr narratives, there was scope for the audience to play a more active role in their being expected to learn to recognise what sort of role the proconsul is likely to play, and perhaps apply to how they might act themselves, as citizens and inhabitants of the Roman world. It has been suggested that the figure of Annius Anulinus, who we will discuss below and who recurs in multiple *acta*, seems to become more of a cartoonish villain and "increasingly Satanic" over time. [359] As has already been reiterated, it is difficult to see any sort of clear development over time, partly due to issues with the dating of the texts and their various redactions and interpolations. Instead, given what we do know of the ongoing popularity and fluidity of these narratives, it might be more useful to consider the role of those listening and reading as a more active part of the conversation of creating martyrs.

One recent approach does present some relevant ideas for studying the figure of the antagonist. In his analysis of the martyr accounts included in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, James Corke-Webster comments that "the officials blatantly fall short of ideal behaviour [i.e. in contrast to their neutrality as symbols of the Roman state in earlier acta] and can thus be marked by Eusebius' readers

[357] *P.Maximian & Isaac* 8 (Maier 1987; Tilley 1997a: 69); the earliest reference to Catherine of Alexandria seems to come from the 7th century Syriac tradition (BAV, Ms. Syr.77) and her later passion (Walsch 2007: 3-4, n.5).
[358] Rebillard 2021: 5.
[359] Shaw 2011: 755.

as bad representatives of the state, unfit for the public office they hold."[360] This contrasts them with the male and female martyrs who are exhibiting traditional (masculine) Classical virtues such as self-control and rationality. This, as he argues, is all framed as part of Eusebius' motive of placing Christianity as the true heir of Classical antiquity and thus making it more palatable especially for Greco-Roman elites. This neutral/bad-apple dichotomy does not fit all the martyr stories, and, "[i]t therefore in no way diminished the sanctity of the martyrs that the interrogating judge, the main figure in the supporting cast of some of the acta, was often not a sadistic and intemperate villain (as he was later to become) but an harassed and uncomprehending official, trying to do his job."[361] Citing specific examples from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Corke-Webster argues that the author was crafting his narratives to show how Christian martyrs surpassed their non-Christian peers by embodying the ideals of a Greco-Roman elite.[362] For example, how the martyrs appear calm and self-controlled even as the antagonist orders various gruesome tortures.[363] This line of argument within the context of a particular case study, Eusebius' work, ascribed as it has been to a single identifiable author, for a specific posited elite literary audience, still leaves plenty of questions open for how antagonists function in the much more eclectic array of texts of the *acta*, where author or authors are often anonymous, and hence their motives or inclinations become more difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, within the wider corpus of the *acta*, I believe that the antagonist is not being portrayed merely as this neutral representative of the state but as I will show in the examples of Crispina and the other examples below, is in a more dynamic relationship with both the martyr and by extension the audience, both in the text (e.g. bystanders, court officials) and outside of it (i.e. the readers/listeners engaging with the text in its oral and written forms).

Such an imagined audience, the communities of worshippers most likely incorporating men and women from all levels of the social hierarchy, would be potentially much more diverse than a narrower Greco-Roman elite such as Eusebius was writing for. As such, they would bring their cultural assumptions and experience of any number of public performances, from Christian sermons

[360] Corke-Webster 2019: 193.
[361] Harries 1999: 225.
[362] Corke Webster 2019: 299.
[363] Cf. Seneca in *De Ira* 3.3.2 cautions against whipping a slave because of emotions it encourages in the master rather than out of any humanitarian impulse; Courtil 2014: 205.

to drama or mimes from festivals as well as legal trials. Thus, the authority figure who does not behave properly and is constantly undermined would have already been a familiar one from comedies and mimes (such as the common plot of a conflict between father and son). The audience was simultaneously able to laugh or feel superior towards certain characters during the play while ultimately the ending resolved in such a way as not to completely disrupt the social hierarchy or new or restored social reality. This means that there need not always have been a completely clear-cut dichotomy, as the antagonist figure could both draw on all these traditional tyrant qualities, such as a preference for extra-judicial torture, but also still represent, at least superficially, a respectable image of power. There is also, however, a sense that the figure of the female martyr mirrors this tension between the status and behaviour of the antagonist. From how the antagonist interacts with the martyrs, not only do they seem to be operating according to two radically different scripts, but, unlike their male counterparts, the female martyr's initial status and presence there is questionable. Nevertheless, with female martyrs, there is a different effect on or implication for the audience, and in particular male members who are being forced to identify with this physically powerless, young, female character against the normative male authority, both socially and militarily, of the antagonist.[364]

5. *The Martyrdom of Crispina*

i. Setting the Scene: Introductions and Prologues

Martyr narratives, whether contained within the form of a letter or by a named or unnamed editor, have different ways of introducing their themes and characters. For example, in the *Passio Perpetua*, the narrator opens by linking Perpetua and her companions directly back to the authority of earlier martyrs and exempla from the Old and New Testaments, even before they have been individually introduced.[365] The *PS* meanwhile also quotes from Scripture and praises the example of the martyrs before directly inviting the audience into the narrative by evoking the shared community with Salsa and the other martyrs: "Let us therefore by our prayers enter into communion with the saints […] if the weakness of the

---

[364] Monaco Caterine 2019: 194-208.
[365] *P.Perp.* 1.

flesh prevents us from imitating them and fighting by living like them, let us at least rejoice with those who have suffered and now celebrate in the Spirit what they have accomplished in victory".[366]

By contrast, *The Martyrdom of Crispina* begins by setting out the date and year before giving other details of the scene where the drama is about to unfold:

> *Diocletiano nouies et Maximiano [octies] Augustis consulibus, die nonarum decembrium aput coloniam Thebestinam in secretario pro tribunal adsidente Anullino proconsule , commentariense officium dixit.*

> "It was the fifth day of December in the ninth consulate of Diocletian Augustus and the eighth of Maximian Augustus in the colony of Tebessa. The proconsul Anullinus sat in judgement on the tribunal in his council chamber [in secretario] and the court clerk spoke"[367]

This opening is brief and formulaic, naming the date, consulate years of the emperors, Diocletian and Maximian, and the location, Tebessa. This has led to some discussion from scholars about how useful it is as a literal means to date the text.[368] With the introduction of the proconsul Anulinus overseeing a court session, it resembles the form of official court proceedings from the trial itself.[369] Yet to an audience in the fourth or fifth century who would be familiar with such stories, as they would be read out or retold regularly on the martyr's feast day, among other occasions, this factual information as background context is rendered technically unnecessary. For those hearing the story for the first time then this information does give them the date and location of this martyr who was executed, but for those who have heard it recounted perhaps many times, the prologue has another dramatic function. For a fourth or fifth-century Christian audience, the memory of persecution was synonymous with names such as 'Diocletian' and 'Maximian', with evidence from local martyr cults tied to both emperors.[370] One can imagine it becoming even more dramatic or poignant if it was being performed on the anniversary of the martyr's death, perhaps in the town of Tebessa itself, even within the basilica complex where audience members might simultaneously be looking at inscriptions, pictures or relics.[371]

[366] *P.Sals.* 1.
[367] *M.Crisp.* 1.
[368] Musurillo: xiii.
[369] Grig 2004: 23-25; Perkins 1985: 222.
[370] Usherwood 2022: 416.
[371] Basilica site at Tebessa - Yasin 2017: 179-82; Tipasa - Ardeleanu 2018: 476 .

The audience, who are already connected to the events before them in space, were also thus being transported in time to this period of persecution by the names of the infamous emperors being evoked.

One of the functions of the prologue of a comedy, as Kathleen McCarthy has shown in her analysis of several prologues from Plautus, was to draw the audience into the setting and plot of the play. The prologue may also function in such a way that it "bridges the world of the audience and the world of the characters".[372] Take, for example, a look at a few samples from Plautus' prologues:

"This town in Epidamnus, while the play is on/But when we play another play, its name will change/Just like the actors living here, whose roles can range/From pimp to papa, or to lover pales and wan…"

"Plautus asks for a tiny piece of space from your great and beautiful city, so that he may bring Athens there without engineers…"

"Those two prisoners you can see standing here, they're both standing, not sitting, because the people back there are standing"[373]

The above extracts come from *Menaechemi*, *Truculentus* and *The Captives* respectively. In each opening, such as *Crispina*, the narrator draws the audience's attention to the setting, and the familiar types of characters that inhabit this world as well as noting what will be different. In each, Plautus also draws attention to the fact that these are actors playing characters and they are in a theatre, which is only temporarily representing the setting of the play. The ubiquity of this metatheatre, both self-referencing its theatrical elements within the play and quoting from or referring to earlier plays, is a topic that has been much discussed in scholarship on antique drama, especially how the playwrights like Plautus played with the idea of originality and their audience's expectations.[374] In *Crispina*, despite the audience's familiarity with some sense of the place, the very different circumstances draw the attention of the audience to those differences. Meanwhile, the martyrs with cults known and celebrated outside of North Africa,

---

[372] McCarthy 2016: 204; Dunsch also uses the terminology of a "threshold" between the spectators and stage, 2014: 498-9.

[373] Plaut. *Men.* 72-6 (trans. Segal 2006: 117); *Truculentus* 1-3 (trans. de Melo 2013: 269); *Capt.* 1-4. (trans. de Melo 2011: 511).

[374] Christenson 2014: 13-42.

such as Perpetua and Felicitas, the reference to these foreign names of places and people effectively brings their stories to wherever the audience was in reality in such a way as to make this localised saint and events more universal. As McCarthy goes on to argue, while those on stage and the audience "physically […] occupy the same space and time […] the world inhabited by those on stage is of a completely different order".[375] As well as simultaneously emphasising and blurring the boundaries between the audience and performance, there is a sense of intimacy created by such familiarity. A more modern analogy would be the tradition of beginning fairytales with the familiar phrase 'Once upon a time…' which similarly sets up the audience to have certain expectations as to what the story will involve and also assumes a certain amount of knowledge of what types of characters and plots they will encounter. As with the examples above set in Epidaurus and Athens, comedies generally have a limited range of settings, typically showing the street between the two households involved in the play. The courtroom would have been a similarly familiar urban setting and so members of the audience are given the sense that they are listening in or themselves witnessing this semi-private or intimate encounter between Crispina and her judge. At the same time, with the martyrs holding a high status within their communities, there might also have been a thrill in the juxtaposition of 'seeing' this exceptional figure within the more familiar everyday backdrop of a court trial.

The trial in *Crispina*, as in several of the other *acta*, is stated as taking place "*in secretario*" and the semi-public, semi-private setting for these trials seems indicative of the ambiguous nature and status of female martyrs being there at all.[376] There are no details given about the circumstances of Crispina's arrest, although Anullinus' initial treatment of her and reaction towards her perhaps suggests that she is out of place in this setting, for example, his first question to her is whether she is aware of what has been commanded by the sacred decree.[377] The circumstances of Crispina's arrest are more mysterious and extraordinary compared to male examples who, as clerics or soldiers, are usually arrested as part of a conflict between their religious beliefs and public duties as a soldier or cleric such as Cyprian or Maximilian. The case of Maxima and Donatilla demonstrates one example of this ambiguity as they are dedicated

[375] McCarthy 2016: 206.
[376] Bremmer discusses various trial settings including the quasi-public "*in secretario*", 2021: 93.
[377] *M.Crisp.* 1.

virgins who have been arrested on a private estate.[378] As a consequence of the circumstances in which the female martyrs have been arrested being especially exceptional or extreme, this means that from the moment they are there the women immediately face intense scrutiny and suspicion not only from the antagonists but even from fellow Christians.[379] There seems to be a tension in their very presence; in lots of the texts they say or do little or nothing at all and yet their names are included distinctly, if near the end of the list of arrested martyrs.

Here I think that the effect on ancient audiences is underappreciated by a modern one. The shock value of these female characters, especially elite ones, appearing in such a court setting should not be underrated, nor the threat to the personal and social order in such a patriarchal and hierarchy-conscious society as ancient Rome.[380] This has already been shown to some degree, with a great deal of attention having been paid to the common trope in which the female martyr is exposed to rape but has some sort of miraculous barrier to shield them from their attacker, as well as any onlookers, when in this public exposed space (for example when Thecla is covered by a magical mist in the arena or Marciana in prison has a wall spring up to prevent the gladiator raping her; Agnes in the brothel has her hair grow to completely cover her).[381] However, as Chapuis Sandoz also notes, this could be a self-consciously porous boundary, in *acta* where the female martyr is there in the courtroom, they are just as exposed and under the gaze of audiences both inside the narrative as well as watching.[382] They often have nothing to defend them but their faith and words, especially where they deliberately reject the protection of male family members who would traditionally have been expected to represent and defend them and the family honour (e.g. Victoria and her brother, Perpetua and her father). In this way the setting itself becomes more significant as the tension is even more heightened by the mere presence of female martyrs occupying this space, an awareness that the writers could use for dramatic effect such as if they speak or draw attention

---

[378] *M.Max.* 2; also see Tilley 1997a.

[379] An early example of this idea is Paul's initial reaction to Thecla after she finds him following her first escape from execution – he admits he is afraid that she will yield to temptation and refuses to baptise her - *APTh* 25.

[380] Women appearing elsewhere in court scenes in Roman historical accounts – e.g. Cic. *Font.* 46-49 Vestal Virgin called as a character witness in trial of her brother; see also: Gallia 2015: 78-79.

[381] Chapuis Sandoz 2008: 43-58.

[382] Ibid.

to their vulnerability whether through physical nakedness or the removal of other expected social protections.

While some examples, such as that of Crispina, do not mention a particularly large cast (beyond the crowds or mobs watching and sometimes participating in the execution scenes), other characters do appear within the narrative in different roles that also help to flesh out the background world. These include the types of characters one might expect to populate that specific setting, such as the court scribe and clerk in *Crispina* who perform their functions such as reading out Crispina's sentence at the end.[383] Elsewhere, there are soldiers that bring the martyrs in or escort them to their place of execution, gladiators, beast handlers as well as animals that are supposed to attack them. For the most part, the way they act and speak, if they do so, are formulaic or add 'authenticity'. Sometimes these background characters play a bigger role, such as Basileides, the soldier who helps Potamiaena, but these will be discussed more along with the relationship dynamics below.

There is also the, often anonymous, overarching narrator who gives the introduction, perhaps an echo of the comic convention of the chorus leader addressing the audience in the prologue. There is no audience mentioned for *Crispina*, other than various officials and clerks, however, there is still the audience listening or reading the narrative, at whatever time, of which I will say more presently. Thus, although neither Crispina nor Anullinus have yet spoken, already their dichotomy has been set up, and even if the audience already knows who their heroine is and who they are rooting for, there is still an anticipatory tension. In the *APTh*, the "women of the city" could be seen to perhaps function a little like the chorus of a tragedy in how they wail and sympathise when Thecla is condemned and later even attempt to help her by throwing down herbs to calm the beasts.[384]

Elsewhere in the *acta*, family members frequently appear, whether hostile (father or brother of Perpetua or Victoria) or encouraging (especially mothers, though there will be more on these types of characters specifically in the next chapter). These relatives may appear and have direct speech, or be mentioned, for example by the judge as an attempt at emotional coercion.[385] In some cases,

[383] *M.Crisp.* 1 and 4.
[384] *APTh* 27.
[385] Cf. Socrates in the *Phaedo*.

onlookers may be more individualised, especially when acting sympathetically towards the martyrs in direct contradiction to the antagonist's orders or wishes (the hostile crowd with one or more sympathetic individuals or else a sympathetic crowd with one or more hostile individuals).[386] Such onlookers are often inspired by pity, or the martyr's exemplary faith, or remark on the martyr's courage and tender years. For example, the soldier Basileides tries to protect Potamiaena from a hostile crowd, while a bear refuses to attack Maxima and Donatilla after the latter speaks to it.[387] This theme of animals refusing to hurt their victims is a common trope, seeming to show the martyr's purity or else nature itself on the martyr's side.[388] Moreover, the bear is perhaps implicitly contrasted to the minor human characters in the scene, such as the beast keeper Fortunatus who, following his orders, releases the bear on the martyrs, unlike the bear which abandons its expected ferocity. There is potential physical comedy in this subversion of expectations of a beast fight, with the bear not acting as trained or according to its instincts but rather understanding human speech. In addition, these intratextual witnesses of the martyr perhaps invite the audience to consider how they would act as extratextual witnesses of the events in the narrative. In other words, these 'extras' provide different reactions to the events for the audience, just as in a drama (e.g. the chorus). As with the opening prologue, in which there is the sense of the listening audience being invited into the unfolding and familiar narrative, these extra characters could also serve as more than mere 'set dressing'. In this way, the audiences have a much more active role in the creative process of martyr-making – i.e. not just the authors writing *for* them but the process of their being repeatedly performed in these public contexts, which although hard to trace because it was 'live' and intangible, was no less significant. Another crucial aspect of these subsidiary characters is in their reactions and emotions that they show, whether gleeful, angry, outraged or distressed on the martyr's behalf. As the martyrs cannot or should not show any fear, these reactions of the audience or family members help show how high the stakes are and thus emphasise the martyrs' courage. This contrast, whether or not the

[386] E.g. women in the crowd lament for Thecla and try to assist by throwing herbs at the wild animals - *APTh* 35.
[387] *M.Pot.* 1; Cf. Agathonike in *A.Carp*: significant differences between Greek and Latin versions: Greek – she spontaneously martyrs herself from being a spectator, Latin – she has a trial before being executed; *P.Max.* 6.
[388] *P.Max.* 6; Tilley 1997a: 17, n.18; on natural forces helping martyrs, also examples of Salsa (sea), Victoria and Marculus (wind), Thecla (lioness), etc.

location was local or somewhat more unusual or exotic, either way, would perhaps help to prime listeners that the martyrdom they were about to hear about was also exceptional. In this sense the boundary between the audience and the characters becomes blurred and the audience has a role in the reconstruction of these earlier events and emotions. There may even be a certain amount of ambiguity here as the audience is on the one hand siding with the martyr but also they are 'witnessing' the martyr's trial without helping her making them on the other hand, potentially culpable to some degree. In this sense, the boundary between the audience and the characters has become blurred and the audience has an active role as witnesses to this reconstruction of their earlier history.
In the final two sections, I will explore in more depth how this in turn affects the dynamic between the female martyr and the antagonist.

ii. Female Martyr vs. the Antagonist:

In comparison to her male counterparts, a great deal of the drama and tension comes already from the female martyr being in this public (or quasi-public) space, and the automatic suspicion surrounding her status. This ambiguity of status would be all too familiar for a Late Antique audience familiar with literary and historical women from Classical antiquity, especially considering many comic plots. In the interaction between the female martyr and the antagonist, there are multiple dynamics at play, inextricably linked, relating to some of these expectations of gender and social status.
Many of the interactions between the antagonist and the martyrs, male or female, evoke an inverted master-slave dynamic where the socially inferior character gets the better of the master through their wits. Anulinus asks Crispina whether she knows why she is on trial and makes several attempts to reason with her and persuade her to recant, with mounting frustration evidenced by the increasing severity of his threats. Crispina's responses often mirror his questions but in such a way that confounds him, for example, when he orders her:

Anullinus dixit: Ego sacrum praeceptum offero, quod obserues. Crispina respondit: Praeceptum obseruabo, sed domini mei Iesu Christi.[389]

[389] *M.Crisp.* 1.

"you must obey [the sacred edict]", she replies: "I will obey the edict […] but the one given by my Lord Jesus Christ"

Anulinus, with building frustration, tells her that "all the province of Africa has offered sacrifice, as you are well aware", to which she replies that she sacrifices to the one Lord and then, quoting from Acts, "who has made heaven and earth, the sea, and all things that are in them".[390] This dynamic is a familiar one from Roman comedies where a master poses an order or question to his wilier slave whose response varies from taking the words completely literally to refusing or otherwise subverting the expected social hierarchy. For example, Plautus' *The Rope* features an old slave Sceparnio who keeps interrupting his master and answering back freely. His master Daemones tries unsuccessfully to shut down Sceparnio and order him around but Sceparnio keeps interrupting. Another example is the slave Messenio from *The Brothers Menaechemus* who has no qualms about criticising his master's naivety as well as taking charge and resolving the confusion of the identical twin brothers that has driven all the comic misunderstandings throughout the play. Even where physical violence is threatened, for example when the master chases his slave across or from the stage, such as Demeas and Parmenon in *Girl from Samos*, this does not have the same effect of real danger or violence.[391] Similarly, the back and forth between Crispina and Anulinus is comparable to interrogations in other martyr stories. The use of such comic misunderstanding is comparable to Papylus' interrogation where the proconsul asks him if he has children, Papylus replies with "many" to which "someone in the crowd shouted out: 'he means he has children in virtue of the faith of the Christians.'"[392] The exchange between Crispina and Anulinus, although prisoner and judge rather than slave and master, seems to employ a similar role reversal of the expected power dynamic where the latter has no fear about answering back or critiquing his master's comments. Thus, Crispina acts completely unfased despite the not so subtle power dynamics of her being in a courtroom on trial for her life without any physical or social protections. Despite all the bluster and violence in Anulinus' threats to her, this is mitigated and shown to be an appropriate response as she also comes out unharmed.

[390] *M.Crisp.* 1
[391] Men. *Samia* 320-5 (Segal 2006).
[392] *A.Carp.* 2.

But further than this, arguably adding a further layer to their confrontation, there is also a conscious gendered dynamic between them. This invites a comparison which casts Crispina and Anulinus into the role of the stock characters of young woman and old man, which variably involve degrees of inappropriate sexual tension. A typical comic plot sees the old man falling for this young girl who might also be his son's lover or even on occasion his own long-lost and initially unknown biological or adopted daughter (e.g. *Casina*). It is emphasised how inappropriate this interest is by the absurd actions he ends up going through, and how his supposed authority (his *patriae potestas*) is undermined if not completely ridiculed.[393]

An example of this can be seen in the way Anulinus refers to Crispina as a "*contemptrix*", a 'woman who despises' or 'stubborn', or elsewhere perhaps also translatable as "bitch".[394] This description of 'despiser' was a common accusation in other martyr narratives. Two male martyrs are accused of being a 'despiser'; Maximilian by the proconsul prosecuting him, while, in *Marian and James*, one of the martyrs, Aemilian, is referred to as "you who despise this life" by his pagan brother interrogating him during a vision.[395] The situation with these male martyrs is both similar and different. The context is significantly different, as the male characters such as Maximilian have, or are expected to have, public roles such as soldiers or to otherwise participate in the civic life of the town and so they have come into direct conflict with the state's expectations of piety. There is also a significance in the types of relationships that the men have with their pagan adversaries. With Aemilian it is his biological brother ("*hoc est frater meus carnalis*") who challenges him while Maximilian is effectively being court-marshalled for refusing to take the military seal ("*signetur*") and serve in the army. The proconsul tries to get Maximilian's father Victor to intercede but his father just says "He is aware and can take his own counsel on what is best for him".[396]

With female martyrs like Crispina, there already seems to be more of an explanation needed as to why they are there in the courtroom in the first place and subsequently an automatic level of suspicion regarding the moral character of such a woman. The sexual tension may also be literalised in passion stories

[393] Ryder 1984.
[394] Lewis; Souter.
[395] *M.Marian* 8.
[396] *A.Max*. 2.

such as that of Agnes whose accusation and trial come about as a result of her wanting to preserve her chastity and having rejected a proposal from the prefect's son.[397] Similarly, Anulinus expects Crispina to easily submit and perform the sacrifice; when she refuses, his reaction is almost like she has rejected him romantically, while she subsequently goes on to proclaim her allegiance as a "slave girl" of Christ. Female martyrs, unlike their male counterparts, are framed by the end as triumphant 'brides of Christ'. As in Roman comedies such as *Casina*, the young girl has her actual highborn status confirmed by the end of the play, meaning that she can be disposed of safely through the means of a respectable marriage to the rich young man. In this sense, Crispina can on the one hand reject the 'bad' lover (i.e. Anulinus) because she is still safely 'married off' to the more appropriate partner (Christ) through her martyrdom. In both cases, the societal fabric is safely restored despite all the upheavals and comic misunderstandings that have been allowed to carry on within the constructed world of the narrative.[398] As well as the space which the female martyr occupies, and the role that she and the prosecutor seem to be embodying, we can see there is a difference in the way the antagonist speaks to them compared to male martyrs. This too has a strongly gendered element, as the antagonist begins by cajoling and treating them very gently, before quickly resorting to disproportionate and inappropriate anger at the female martyr's stubbornness.

They are shown shunning worldly incentives in preference for heavenly things, emphasising that on some level there is a choice, even though the martyrs themselves cannot choose any other way. For example, when asked to consider the consequences of their refusal, this allows the martyr to confess their faith in Christ (often the martyr cites 'bite-sized' quotations from scripture such as Donata's "Pay honour to Caesar as Caesar; but it is God we fear").[399] Anulinus makes several threats of violence towards Crispina, each time increasing their severity, from commanding her to make a sacrifice, then threatening to behead her, then to have her head shaved in public, and then executed with a sword. It may seem the wrong way around to have the threat of execution before the public shaming, but this is also evocative of the pattern where the punishments that are served out to female martyrs are frequently disproportionately sexual, being

[397] *P. Agnetis* (PL 17.735-42).

[398] The idea that "*contempta*" can have both an active meaning of 'despiser' referring to the crimes she is being accused of as well as more passive sense of 'despicable'.

[399] *A.Scilit.* 9, cf. Mark 12:17. It is interesting that there are a number of female trios in martyr stories, such as Maximilia, Donatilla, Secunda or Irene, Agape and Chione.

threatened with rape or sexual assault or some kind of bodily disfigurement targeting their sexual appeal and chastity.[400] As with similar threats to comic heroines, the tension is increased when the audience knows the girl's real identity and that other characters may already be looking to rescue her (e.g. the girl's father in *The Rope* or sister in *The Eunuch*), thus increasing the stakes. Again, this is reminiscent of violence in comedy where threats of violence are "neutralized" when they appear in a comic setting, such as a master threatening his slave (E.g. Demeas and Parmenon in Menander's *Girl from Samos*).[401] One significant point is the martyr's response to the threats, as when Crispina seems completely fearless, even though Anulinus holds power over her. She tells him: "I am prepared to undergo any tortures that you wish to submit me to rather than defile my soul with idols" (*quibus uolueris subicere tormentis parata sum sustinere quam anima mea polluatur in idolis*).[402]

This all calls for greater attention to the characterisation of the antagonist, a crucial yet often overlooked figure in modern scholarship where, as discussed above, he is usually depicted as either a frustrated but otherwise neutral representative of the state or else a fully blown pantomime villain. While issues with dating with these texts make it difficult to see if there is any kind of character development over time, it is perhaps more useful to ask what role this antagonist figure was playing for a more active participatory audience than has so far been imagined. To see this outwardly respectable Roman official behaving so foolishly and cruelly may have been just as shocking as the female martyr being presented in a court setting itself. To many audience members, the male, superficially respectable proconsul would be a more relatable figure than Crispina, a gendered tension which, as Burrus has argued, "invite[s] an implied male listener into a complex dual identification with both male sacrificer and female victim."[403] As Corke-Webster has argued about Eusebius' work, this outward show of respectability was not so far aligned with Greco-Roman traditions and morals as might be expected by their social rank. Rather it is the martyrs themselves who prove themselves to be the true heirs to these values, in an updated Christian

[400] Female shame was often considered worse than death, as in the example of Lucretia who submits to Tarquinus' rape after he threatens to kill her and make it look as if she has been caught in the act with a male slave (Livy 1.58).
[401] Wright 2021: 73-4.
[402] *M.Crisp.* 2.
[403] Burrus 1995: 44.

form. In this way, they aimed to show how Christianity could be non-threatening and more in line with so-called proper Roman values than the persecutor was. Moreover, to audiences long familiar with the conventions of Plautus and other Roman comedies, this social role reversal within the confines of the drama was more accepted and such a 'stock character', such as elements of the foolish old man/old lover could also perhaps be utilised to further demonstrate and diffuse the potential attraction of counter-arguments to Christianity and martyrdom in such a way as to make them more abhorrent to congregations because they should be coming from such a demonstrably ignoble character.

iii. …Happily ever after?

Towards the end of her interrogation, Crispina again asserts her faith in God and declares herself as "his slavegirl" (*ancillam suam*). This is comparable to the 'recognition scene' that takes place in a lot of comedies, even if it also subverts it on multiple levels. As with the prologue, the audience is well aware of the true status of the girl from the beginning. It is explained early on, usually in the prologue or opening scene, how the girl was kidnapped by pirates as a child and is under threat (e.g. *The Rope*). Similarly, the audience would be well aware of Crispina's status as a martyr as after all they are gathered to celebrate her feast day.

The recognition scene was often a crucial and expected one in comedies, where the lowborn girl is actually proven to be a citizen (recognised by a few tokens of jewellery/clothing) and thus means that they can be satisfactorily married off to their young lover despite his usually impecunious circumstances or entanglements with other less socially approved women. This plot device was so familiar that it could be recognisably subverted when the martyr claims to be a "slave girl of Christ" or elsewhere, as in Vestia's case, "I am Christian". There is a kind of role reversal as the martyr is often introduced as from a noble family, such as Crispina initially being addressed with respect. Yet their being in the courtroom then leads to questions and assumptions about their virtue and status which must be resolved by the end of the *acta* through recognition by an external or divine character (either stated directly or implied by a miracle) or by signs such as their bodies remaining undamaged. Crucially, here it is the martyr who states

her identity in comparison to comedies where usually it is an external character, such as a nurse, who recognises or provides the necessary proof.

As with the beginnings, the endings of the *acta* are also formulaic, such as closing with an evocation to the saints and martyrs or a prayer:

Et signans frontem suam signaculum crucis, extendens ceruicem suam decollate est pro nomine domini nostril Iesu Christi, cui honor in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

"And making the sign of the cross on her forehead and putting out her neck, she was beheaded for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is honour forever. Amen."[404]

An alternative ending, also cited in Musurillo's edition, again references that her martyrdom took place in Tebessa and again gives the date and consul year.[405] Like the prologue, this has the effect of reminding the audience of the gap between the scene they have just witnessed through hearing about it again, and their own present. But by closing with an evocation and prayer, the drama is also directly asking the audience to participate as congregants. This is again not unlike the ending of a lot of comedies, where a character from the play will turn and ask the audience to applaud. In *The Brothers Menachemus*, the newly-freed Messenio even announces an upcoming auction for his master's possessions, before saying: "For the moment, dear spectators, clap with vigour. Fare ye well!"[406] Just as at the beginning the audience is being drawn to participate in the narrative world of the martyrs.

To return to the female Scillitan martyrs, Donata, Secunda and Vestia, we can glean something from the significance of their role within the narrative if not their individual characterisation (or rather lack of). It also takes place "*in secretario*", with the proconsul Saturninus and, although his interrogation of the three women is much more brief than in the case of Crispina, he impatiently orders them not to be a part of this "folly" (*dementiae*).[407] The martyrs' replies are all short, or quotations from Scripture, perhaps highlighting the contrast with the ostensibly

---

[404] *M.Crisp.* 4.
[405] Musurillo 1972: 309 n.8. This older alternative ending given in Mabillon and Ruinart though the manuscripts they are supposed to have used have been since lost and was rejected as an interpolation by Cavalieri.
[406] Plaut. *Men.* 1155-62 (trans. Segal 2006).
[407] *A.Scilit.* 8.

respectable figure of the proconsul going down the line and targeting the three women together who nevertheless do not give in to him. The drama in their exposure in this semi-public setting is again part of the plot, particularly aspersions about the women's status. Like Crispina declaring herself as Christ's slave-girl, Vestia and Secunda's lines assert their identity as Christians but also cue audiences into these other tropes and dynamics long familiar from visits to the Roman theatre.

6. Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have addressed another important strand of my thesis by looking at how various female martyrs are presented across the *acta*. This is a topic that has only been sporadically addressed not least because of the brevity of many of their descriptions or participation in the action or dialogue. As I have shown, there is a certain consistency across these narratives in how the temporary breakdown of social norms culminates in a restored new or improved social order. This has been explored to some extent in comparison to other literature such as the Greek novels, yet the similarities to comic plots and the figure of the female mime are even more striking from the point of view of performance or spectacle. It makes the female martyrs' role more interesting, especially the idea of ending with a marriage, albeit a spiritual one as a bride of Christ. The relationship between the female martyr and the antagonist also becomes more interesting, particularly the characterisation of the persecutory characters as superficially respectable but barbaric in reality and thus un-Roman.

Another aspect that could prove fruitful to explore, though not here, is how these ideas of performance and gender could be related to the work on pilgrimage, especially considering the example of the basilica at Tebessa, which has long been associated with Crispina. It would be interesting to build on some of the scholarship that has looked at the various sensory explorations of pilgrimage and consider how some of these same storytelling techniques were used to shape female martyrs in their communities, especially in the context of the afterlives of Roman theatres across the urban landscapes of the Late Antique and early medieval world.[408] Instead, in the next chapter, I will continue this closer analysis

[408] E.g. Yasin 2017; Ashbrook Harvey 2006.

of performance by focusing rather on the roles of mothers in these narratives, as well as the ubiquity of maternal and childbirth imagery.

Chapter Five: Childbirth and Maternal imagery in martyr narratives

1. Introduction: Mater or Martyr?

At Tipasa, there was a certain third-century funerary inscription set up to one 'Fabia Salsa' by her children and grandchildren, which appears to have been moved to Saint Salsa's basilica in the fifth century during the latter's expansion.[409] There seems to have been some kind of motivation to associate the earlier Salsa with a building newly built to commemorate the young martyr who shared her name. Several pieces of scholarship have even suggested that it was some misreading of Fabia Salsa's epithet of "*matri sanct*" that inspired the basis for "the young thirteen year old holy martyr (*marturi sanct*)".[410] Aside from some of the more obvious difficulties with fitting together material and literary evidence in this manner, it already seems a rather large jump from 'mater' to 'martyr': in the *PS* Salsa is clearly described as a young virgin martyr, not a Roman *matrona*. Yet this example does serve to illustrate just how frequently mothers and maternal imagery crop up in a lot of the earliest martyr narratives, in both literal and figurative ways, and, as we shall see, sometimes apparently not even specifically tied to female characters. In this survey of some of the different ways in which female martyrs were being constructed, this is an aspect that requires a deeper exploration.

Motherhood plays all sorts of roles in the process of martyrdom from mothers functioning as supporting but often very vocal characters to the reframing of the act of childbirth itself. One prominent episode involving a mother coming from the Books of the Maccabees has been seen as especially impactful in the development of early Christian martyrdom. During persecution by the Seleucid king Antiochus, first a priest Eleazer and then seven Jewish brothers are brought before the monarch who tries to force them to violate their religious dietary laws. They are each tortured and killed until it is the turn of the youngest son. Here, the king has the boy's mother brought forward to address him, assuming that she will try to persuade the boy to change his mind and thus one of her children at least will be spared. However, the unnamed mother, an elderly widow who has just

[409] CIL 20913, Duval 1982: 447.
[410] Originally asserted by Henri Gregoire in 1937 but also more recently in Burns and Jensen's survey of Christianity in North Africa, 2016: 528.

watched the successive torture and deaths of her six eldest children, instead encourages her youngest son with the following words:

> "My son, have pity on me. Remember that *I carried you in my womb for nine months* and nursed you for three years. I have taken care of you and looked after all your needs up to the present day. So I urge you, my child […] Give up your life willingly and prove yourself worthy of your brothers, so that by God's mercy I may receive you back with them at the resurrection."[411]

The language she uses to convince him to follow the example of his brothers is emotive and directly refers to how she gave birth to, breastfed and raised him. After this speech, the youngest son and then the mother are both killed. This particular episode of the 'Mother and her Seven Sons', also eulogised at length in Book Four, forms part of a wider series of books, probably written in around the first or second century CE, detailing the revolt of Judas Maccabeus from a couple of centuries earlier.[412] It generated a huge amount of commentary and gained great prominence in Late Antiquity, and scholars such as Frend emphasised its importance in the development of martyrdom, while others have explored the development of the cult of the Maccabean martyrs from the fourth century into the medieval period.[413] This episode in particular has received significant attention in the scholarship, especially its influence on and adoption by Christians including a martyr cult dedicated to the Maccabean martyrs in Daphne, near Antioch. They were a popular subject of homilies and sermons, especially the mother, for example when Augustine directly compared her in an address to women in his audience: "Let women learn from the extraordinary patience, the inexpressible courage of that mother;".[414] The Maccabean mother was also influential as a model for many of the early martyr *acta*. Near the end of *The Martyrdom of Marian and James*, the figure of the Maccabean mother is

---

[411] 2 Maccabees, 7.27, also 4.16-17 gives further commentary and eulogising on the episode. Trans. *NIV*
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Maccabees%207&version=GNT [Accessed: Thursday 20th April 2023]. My italics.
[412] Many scholars have tended to agree on a date in the mid-first century CE with a general consensus of post-70 CE placing it within a Roman Jewish context. Has been dated to post 70CE, usually somewhere between the mid first or early second century CE. Place of composition likewise not certain, with various contenders being Antioch, Asia Minor or Alexandria - Rajak 2014: 42. See also, Limelin's recent monograph on the Maccabean mother and women martyrs, 2022.
[413] E.g. Frend 1965, Joslyn-Siemiatkoski 2009, also Rajak 2014.
[414] Augustine, *Sermon* 300.6 (PL 38.1379, English trans. by E. Hill 1994).

explicitly evoked in comparisons with the reactions of Marian's mother where she rejoices, "congratulating not only Marian but herself that she had borne such a son". Similarly, Flavian's mother, in *The Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius*, "grieved with a sorrow born of pride that his passion was to be postponed."[415] As we have already discussed in previous chapters, the subversion of expected tropes was a common literary conceit in antiquity which Christian writers adopted for their own purposes. On one level the image of these martyrs' mothers rejoicing rather than mourning echoes the reactions of the martyrs themselves who go to their fate eagerly. Yet, as Tessa Rajak notes, the prominence given to the Maccabean mother in Books 2 and 4 *Maccabees* is such that she becomes the "heroine" of the piece even above her adult sons, and even though throughout she is equated with "masculine" ideals of *virtus*, her role as a mother is her most defining characteristic.[416] The narrator eulogises at length about her in Maccabees Book 4, saying: "The moon in heaven with the stars is not so majestic as you, who, after lighting the way of your star-like seven sons to piety, stand in honour before God and are firmly set in heaven with them".[417] In the two examples from the *acta*, both of which also involve a mother and her adult son, the Maccabean mother is evoked as an explicit model.

Thus, in this chapter, I will explore some of the diverse ways in which ideas about motherhood and martyrdom became intertwined in Late Antique discourses. I will consider how this maternal relationship is presented in stories where the mother is the primary martyr on trial rather than a supporting character, as well as the significance of her relationship with their adult or young children. Next, I will take a close look at the different ways in which the experiences of childbirth and martyrdom are being placed within the same framework, just as we see above in the speech by the Maccabean mother. There is a recurring use of maternal imagery which results in even young virgin martyrs or male martyrs being represented as mothers. These were all ways in which motherhood could be used to describe and emphasise aspects of martyrdom, in ways that must have resonated differently to different sections of the audience.
Given the high mortality rates involved in pregnancy and childbirth in the ancient world, it is unsurprising that it was often conflated and compared with imagery of

[415] *M.Marian.* 13; *M.Mont.* 16.
[416] Rajak 2014: 46, also 51. More on this in section 2 below.
[417] 4 Maccabees 17.

violence and the battlefield. I will compare this maternal imagery with the martial and athletic imagery that has been more commonly identified in martyr narratives. This in turn suggests how the stereotypical gendered language could also work as part of the way martyrdom discourses challenged existing tropes more broadly. This association of military and athletic metaphors with female martyrs, as well as applying maternal and childbirth-related imagery with male martyrs, also serves to challenge the assumption about male martyrdom being the 'default'. In the third section, I will consider how motherhood intersects with age and status through the examples of Felicitas and Sumayyah bint Khayyat. These two figures have been considerably overshadowed and neglected either by contemporary commentators or modern scholars. I aim to address this through a cross-comparison focusing on how their other descriptors such as their motherhood, age and social status interact with their status as early martyrs of their respective traditions. In line with the overarching argument of this thesis, I will show how there is as much to be gained from examining some of these more obscure characters, especially by placing them in a conversation together. By looking at these two mother martyrs alongside female martyrs that did maintain or gain more popularity, we can begin to see that there was considerably more ambiguity and nuance in their portrayal, for example with regards to how their motherhood intersects with their low social status than has been previously acknowledged.

2. Roles of mothers (Mother knows best?)

Mothers play a diverse range of roles across martyr narratives in both the Christian and Islamic traditions, both drawing on but at times also subverting, some of these earlier ideas from antiquity. These roles both compare with other family members and the socio-cultural role of the Roman mother, but also at times are manipulated in very distinctive ways.

There has been a considerable amount written on the elite Roman mother, at least during the Republican and early Imperial period, both individually, such as Suzanne Dixon's *The Roman Mother*, as well as within broader discussions of the Roman family.[418] As Dixon argues, describing the different sort of

[418] Dixon 1988. See also, Harvey's article on mother-daughter relationships in Syriac hagiography 1996.

protectiveness of mothers over their sons compared with their daughters: "mothers were entitled to the regard of their children by virtue of the relationship rather than because of any particular service the mother provided in the early years."[419] This sense of the mother as a transmitter or instructor of traditional Roman virtue comes across in many examples from the Roman literary tradition. Thus, Roman historians could hold up exemplary mothers such as Cornelia, raising her sons Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, or Octavian's mother Atia, while, on the other side of the coin, the more infamous figures of Livia and Agrippina were depicted as wielding outsized and negative influence on their unpopular sons Tiberius and Nero.[420] Depending on whether their sons were considered good or bad, mothers were still perceived and written to have had a positive or negative influence over their children's education and character and there has been considerable attention to the use of both types of *exempla*. The mother's role is notably significant where their husband is absent, such as in directing the children's education as well as upholding the family's memory and *auctoritas*, but this could also be double-edged. For example, in his *Lives* Plutarch praises Cornelia for raising her sons with such care that "they were thought to owe their virtues more to education than to nature" and yet also blamed her for her sons not yet being as famous as her son-in-law Scipio.[421] By contrast, "in the fifth and sixth centuries Christian writers were less and less likely to perceive the materfamilias as a personage to be feared."[422]

Given so many of the other paradoxes surrounding martyrs, some of which have already been discussed above, I have chosen the following subcategories with paradoxical though they at first appear: i.) the mother's counterintuitive rejoicing at their children's death or mourning a potential reprieve; ii.) an almost role-reversal relationship with either their adult or even very young child who speaks to comfort them; iii.) the emphasis on the mother's sacrifice and also the lengths they are prepared to go to ensure their children's future. Then, looking at it from a narratological level, I compare how their role or actions within the narrative shift depending on whether she is a supporting character or the main focus; and, when

---

[419] Dixon 1988: 236.
[420] Plutarch's depicton of Cornelia in his lives of her sons, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus; cf. Tacitus' and Suetonius' depictions of Agrippina the Younger, Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.1-2; Suet. *Nero* 6.
[421] Plut. *Vit. Ti. Gracch.* I and VIII. On Roman *exempla*, see: Langlands (2018).
[422] Cooper 2007: 142.

they appear as the villains, how this too works to consolidate their role in passing on tradition.

A further Late Antique literary representation of the role of a mother and daughter is the depiction of Ceres' grief at the loss of her daughter in Claudian's poem *On the Rape of Proserpine*: "a vision of Proserpine lost troubled her every sleep. Now she dreams that an enemy's spear is piercing her body, now (oh horror!) that her raiment is changed and is become black, now that the infecund ash is budding in the midst of her house".[423] The attention Claudian spends on Cere's "emotional turmoil", as a mother as well as a goddess, makes it an interesting piece to consider as another reception of classical mothers like the martyr stories in the same literary and cultural milieu.[424]

i. Rejoicing versus grieving mothers:

The figure of the rejoicing mother on one level appears in diachronic opposition to the mourning mother and this 'shock value' lends it a certain power. The Maccabean seven sons are all presented as determined and happy to die for their faith, even the youngest, who is no more than a boy, and so on one level the mother's rhetoric is not technically required to persuade the sons. Rather, it comes as a surprise for the antagonist, and perhaps by extension to elements of the audience, who are expecting her to do one thing and beg her son to save his own life, perhaps in the same vein as Hecuba pleading with her son Hector not to face Achilles in *Iliad* Book 22.[425] Here the mother is siding with and encouraging her son to go to his death rather than begging him to save his own life at any cost. Her role then is to reinforce the son's resolve and she uses the same arguments that might be expected to beg them to live, i.e. all the time and energy she spent raising them. This is then extended to the exhortation to give up his life so that they can all be together again in paradise. This fits into martyr narratives more generally when faced with tortures or death that the prosecutor hopes will get them to recant, the martyrs themselves are presented as enthusiastic and as embracing death. Flavian and Marian's mothers rejoice at their adult sons' expectations or achievement of martyrdom although, unlike their

[423] Claudian, *On the Rape of Proserpine* Book III.67.
[424] Gerbrandy 2022.
[425] *Il.* 22.77.

Maccabean model, there is no mention of their being martyrs themselves.[426] When the narrator directly references the Maccabean mother, this is done consciously and with some extra nuance or pathos. Flavian's unnamed mother is mourning but this is instead because her son's martyrdom has been delayed. Marian's mother, Mary, rejoices and kisses her son's wounds. As the martyrs themselves were considered exemplary, it fits in very well that their mothers would be praised for having a positive influence. The emphasis on eternal life and the martyr's crown means that the mother's protectiveness and sense of duty gets reframed to the idea of rejoicing that their child will become a martyr and achieve spiritual immortality, in conjunction with the martyr's eagerness for this fate.

Meanwhile, a similar subversion occurs in examples where the child seems to act more maturely or even comfort the mother when she is, more understandably, grieving or anxious for them. Quartillosa, whose vision was discussed in an earlier chapter, is left waiting in prison after her husband and son have already been executed and the focus of her brief account is on her description of her vision in which she is told that she will shortly follow.[427] Her own torture and execution is due to take place three days later but is not described. In a similar way to the Maccabean mother who is just reported to have been killed following her sons' increasingly detailed tortures, part of the mother's torture is (or at least intended to be) witnessing their children's deaths. It almost feels as if a part of Quartillosa's torture is this waiting and the vision and example of her husband and son are designed to fortify her.

In the *Passio Perpetuae*, three mothers surrender their children, whether as a necessary step for them to become martyrs or to allow their children to undergo martyrdom themselves. Out of this trio, Perpetua's mother is both unnamed and easily missed. She visits Perpetua in prison along with her son, Perpetua's brother, just after the first dramatic showdown between Perpetua and her father. Her unnamed mother, along with her brother, are grieved at Perpetua's situation and the latter speaks to comfort them and asks them to take care of her son.[428] Although Perpetua's mother's reaction seems more sympathetic, especially when

---

[426] Flavian's mother in *M. Mont.* 16 and Marion's mother in *M. Marian* 13 (see n.425 above).
[427] Dixon: 221.
[428] *P.Perp.* 3.8. See also: Cooper 2011. In the text and subsequent scholarship there is more focus on her father because of the bigger role he plays in the *P.Perp.*

compared to her conversations with her father, it is a different reaction to the outright rejoicing of the Maccabean mother. Indeed, it would seem to fit more along the lines of the reaction one would expect of a parent whose child was being condemned to imminent humiliation and death, although it is the child this time who comforts the mother, and the focus on not worrying about this earthly life has a similar persuasive effect on the eventual martyr.

ii. Sacrificing children but also ensuring their future

Connected to this theme of mothers rejoicing, or of their children being the ones to comfort them or take charge, there is the seemingly counterintuitive expectation of looking to their child's future. This is the idea, as the narrator has the Maccabean mother voice directly, that they are not sacrificing their children because of the belief that they will be together in paradise, a subversion because it is prioritising the security of their spiritual over their earthly future.[429] In her book exploring the loss of children in Late Antiquity, Doerfler notes that, unlike Abraham and Jephthah and the titular children, the Maccabean mother is not the one directly responsible for her children's (intended) murder, but rather joins them in death.[430] This is yet another way in which the paradoxical role of mothers in these narratives reflects the paradoxical behaviour of martyrs themselves. One of the features in the above martyr narratives is the different interactions between mothers and their adult sons compared with adult daughters or infant children. A common thread in these martyr narratives is how often they function as supportive and encouraging of their adult children's enthusiasm in choosing martyrdom (like the Maccabean mother), or in a protective role for their virgin daughters. With the sons, like Flavian or Marian, they tend to instruct, encourage or berate, whether or not they are also martyred later on. However, in the case of their daughters, there is a specific concern with protecting their daughters' chastity. One such example is Domnina, who throws herself and her two daughters into the river to avoid rape by a group of soldiers.[431] In a sermon on their feast day, Chrysostom appeals to the women in the audience, in a similar way to Augustine talking about the Maccabees, to emphasise the extraordinariness of their sacrifice: "And you will bear witness to my account, all

[429] 4 Maccabees 17.
[430] Doerfler 2019: 125.
[431] Euseb. *Hist. ecc.* 8.12.

you who've become mothers, and experienced labor pains, and possess daughters."[432] As well as the connections audiences would have made between martyr stories and their Classical precedents, here Christian writers also tried to link the past heroic examples of martyrs with contemporary everyday experiences. These heroic examples would include mothers from tragedy such as Hecuba or Clytemnestra who are distraught at their daughters' fate to be sacrificed and it is the young girls who comfort their mothers and willingly go to their fates. However, in Domnina's case, she is the one to take action and preserve her as a 'bride of Christ'. Another prominent feature of the mother's role in these stories is that the mother is almost always their biological parent, in contrast with, for example, referring to one another as "brother" or "sister", which was often used as a signifier of their new Christian family, leaving space for ambiguity.[433]

While on one level the mother seems to stand in contrast with the virgin martyr, especially when the young virgin is their daughter, they are similarly paradoxical. Even as they are overriding their maternal feelings, these very feelings are being drawn attention to, especially to the audience to emphasise their sacrifice and piety. Although the Maccabean mother exhibits certain "masculinised" attributes in her use of persuasive rhetoric, her feelings and experiences as a mother are simultaneously stressed in such a way that, Rajak argues, "undercuts her temporary masculinity".[434] This can be compared to the example of a virgin martyr like Salsa who takes action "with the strength of a young man"; her youth and feminine frailty are repeatedly emphasised to contrast it with her spiritually acquired masculine strength. While the mother's protectiveness and sense of duty towards their more mature sons is transformed instead to concerns for their spiritual rather than earthly ambitions and wellbeing, for their daughters they are more likely to be focused on protecting their chastity at all costs.[435]

---

[432] John Chrysostom, *Sermon on Saints Bernike, Prosdoke and Domnina. A Homily of Praise on the Holy Martyrs Bernike and Prosdoke, Virgins, and Domnina Their Mother* (trans. Mayer and Neil 2006). Brooke Nelson discusses the story in relation to the construction of elite Christian motherhood (2016).

[433] Sometimes this ambiguity (i.e. as in 'father' or 'brother' in sense of new Christian family) seems almost to be played as a joke, for example in *M.Carp.* 3 where the proconsul asks Carpus if he has any children and he answers in the affirmative, referring to the Christians he has converted, to the annoyance and ignorance of his pagan interrogator.

[434] Rajak 2014: 51.

[435] This can sometimes extend to older sisters for younger siblings. Surrogate or pseudo-mother figures such as older sisters abound in comedies and generally appear supportive of or directly promoti their children, primarily through arranging wedding preparations (e.g. Thais looking out

iii. Supporting character or main protagonist?

In many of the examples so far, the mother is generally a supporting role, whether or not there is the implication that she will be martyred later on. In this sub-category, I discuss how this representation changes when they are solely defined by their relationship as mothers compared with when they are the main, or one of the main, martyrs on trial and the extent of the detail and characterisation given to them.

Eusebius describes another mother, Marcella, who is simply noted as being burned alongside her virgin daughter Potamiaena.[436] In contrast to the episode involving Quartillosa, or even the Maccabean mother, who appears only after the arrest and execution of their sons, Marcella is on trial with her daughter. In a reverse of the account of the noblewoman Domina and her daughters, here it is the daughter who receives most of the attention in the narrative. Indeed, the narrative pays more attention to Potamiaena's encounters with her judge, who threatens to have gladiators assault her, and then she is sentenced to death by boiling pitch. While Marcella is briefly mentioned as being burned along with her daughter, the more significant relationship in the short narrative is between Potamiaena and Basileides, a sympathetic soldier and onlooker who later becomes a martyr himself. Potamiaena appears to him subsequently in a vision where she crowns him to signal his imminent martyrdom. The lack of focus on Marcella, and anything more about the relationship with her young but maturely-acting daughter who is her co-martyr, is instructive. As Diane Fruchtman has observed, it seems as if the mother's witnessing of her child's torment is the key element of her own physical punishment.[437] In the above case, as with the Maccabees', the mothers both watch their children being put to death before being martyred themselves. As with Perpetua's mother, we get the impression of a sympathetic mother – in this instance a mother who is equally prepared to die along with her daughter for their faith – but other than their relationship as a mother, she has only a very small role in the story. There is a significant difference

for her younger sister Pamphile in Terence's *The Eunuch*). Cf. also comic dialogues and legal cases where the prostitute-mother is normally antagonistic towards her daughter's young lover (though arguably out of a sense of protectiveness), while older sisters are supportive of their younger maiden sisters, (Strong, 2012: 125).

[436] *M.Pot.* 1.

[437] Fruchtman 2023: 79.

here compared to when she is the central focus or more dominant character in the narrative. One such example is Agathonice, from *The Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus and Agathonice*, who when she goes to launch herself onto the fire, spectators plead with her, fruitlessly, to consider her children.[438] Crispina, as we saw, only seems to be described as a mother in some versions as an added detail rather than a potential point for her antagonist to challenge her on. Among some of the varied, and in some cases controversial, traditions about the death of Fatima, her role as Muhammad's daughter and mother of Husayn and Hassan as well as an infant son are prominent in different accounts of her death. According to one biographer, Ibn Sa'd, she dies of illness or grief for her father.[439] A slightly later Shi'a tradition records that she is attacked by political opponents and this results in her miscarriage, thus her death is framed as martyrdom.[440] It is striking that her relationship as mother or daughter was intrinsically linked with her death: as a devoted daughter or as an expectant mother whose premature death brings extra pathos to a contentious and fraught political situation between splintering factions.

Even among martyrs whose primary descriptor is as a mother, there can be a significant amount of variation. It can put a different emphasis on their relationship with their child co-martyr, whether or not this might be sidelined by their child's other interactions. Where it has the potential purpose to humanise or add extra pathos to the martyr, there can be additional pedagogical signals for the audience such as a minor or negative character commenting on the fact of their motherhood as a possible obstacle that they then disprove through their going straight ahead with their martyrdom.

iv. Helpful antagonists?

All of the examples cited so far have involved mothers in a generally positive and supportive maternal role, whether or not they are martyred alongside their children. Their grief is often subverted into laughter and rejoicing in anticipation of their children's future triumph or mourning because their child has not yet been

[438] *M.Carp.* 6; as discussed earlier, Perpetua's father and Hilarianus both refer to her baby in their attempts to persuade her.
[439] ibn Sa'd, *Kitab at-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, 8.
[440] al-Mas'udi, *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya li-l-Imām ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib*.

killed. Occasionally, as with the conflicts that arise between martyrs and their other family members, mothers also play the role of antagonist alongside the father or husband, such as with the examples of Thecla or Salsa. When they do play a more hostile part, as in these two examples, it is striking that they are often the sole parental figure, like Theocleia where there is no mention of Thecla's father, or acting collectively, like Salsa's parents. Their protectiveness or sense of duty is twisted so that, if told from another perspective they might have valid concerns about their daughter's behaviour, they are instead yet another obstacle for the martyr to overcome. In both the examples of Salsa and Thecla the mother, whether acting alone or not, is concerned with her daughter's disregard for the expected status quo, i.e. getting married or attending the festivities along with everyone else. Their major concern is the social upheaval they will incite and by extension the danger if they will encourage others to follow their example. Their response is to resort to violence, rather than an emotional appeal to their position as mothers, as when Theocleia calls for her daughter to be burned: "Burn the wicked one; burn her who will not marry in the midst of the theatre, that all the women who have been taught by this man may be afraid".[441] Similarly, Salsa's frailty does not merit any sympathy from her parents who physically drag her to the temple, as with Leocritia's parents who tie her up and beat her.[442] It is therefore striking that on the rare occasions that mothers also appear in similar roles, as opposed to when they are encouraging their children to martyr themselves, they do not use emotional arguments or appeals. It is also notable that in both these cases the mother does end up converting (as it is implied with the rest of the townspeople after Salsa's body has been restored) or reconciled with their daughter (Thecla), making them more than just extra obstacles for the martyr to overcome and prove themselves but giving them a redemptive resolution. According to her biography, written by her brother, the ascetic Macrina the Younger was given the secret name 'Thecla' before she was born, "to signify by the sharing of the same name the sharing of the same choice of life".[443] This comparison perhaps casts their mother Emmelina as Thecla's mother Theocleia which is more striking as the two are close and Emmelina is supportive of her daughter's vocation. This might be compared to the equally rare character of the supportive father, such as Maximillian's father Victor who refuses to try to

[441] *APTh* 20.
[442] *P.Sals.* 4.
[443] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina* 372.16-373.3 (trans. Silvas 2008).

persuade his son to recant, and replies: “he is aware and can take his own counsel on what is best for him” (*Ipse scit, habet consilium suum, quid illi expediat*).[444] In a sense, when mothers do function as antagonists this works in a similar way as argued in the previous chapter, whereby displaying themselves as irrational or emotional they help reinforce the illegitimacy of the martyr’s opposition to ‘true’ Greco-Roman culture, such as how they quickly resort to acts of physical violence or restraint. When the mother does play the part of the antagonist, this may also contrast with the many more positive maternal figures more generally across martyr literature so that they still stand out more, i.e. have more ‘shock value’. Although the few examples of a later reconciliation with family members are also with their mothers, the mother has come around to the martyr’s point of view and converted, similar to the role reversal of the child comforting the parent, here the child is educating or directing the parent’s path.

As we can see, there is often considerable overlap in many of the roles mothers play but this serves to emphasise the degree of nuance in the character of the mother in martyr literature. Although they carry out varying roles and some are given much more emphasis than others, in all of them their status as a mother, and by extension the relationship with their children, is one of their defining signifiers or descriptors. Their relationship with their children also varies, depending on whether the child is an infant, a young child, or an adult. It also complicates the idea of martyrs straightforwardly rejecting family, as many of the examples of mothers rather are used to continue their established literary role of emphasising duty or tradition just directed towards a new faith.

3. Imagery of Maternity and Childbirth in Late Antique Discourses about Martyrdom

In her speech to her youngest child, the Maccabean mother explicitly references her experiences, in terms of both the pain and joy, of carrying him to term and then nursing and raising him. As Tessa Rajak notes, while the Maccabean mother is praised for possessing more “masculine” ideals of courage, for example from Stoicism, yet at the same time the “physicality, indeed the biology of being a

[444] *A.Max.* 2.

mother is repeatedly evoked".[445] Anna Rebecca Solevåg, in *Birthing Salvation*, goes a certain way to redressing this bias by looking at the Greco-Roman context around pregnancy and birth, including social status, as the background context in several early Christian texts including the *Pastoral Epistles*, *The Acts of Andrew* and the *Passio Perpetuae*. As she argues, the salvation of martyrdom is related to childbearing in different ways, directly related to how the gender of Perpetua and Felicitas respectively is constructed.[446] Building on this, I am interested in precisely how the more feminine imagery of maternity and childbirth, relates to other types of ways in which martyrs are imagined, particularly the more masculine-constructed fields of war and athletics. Rather than it being considered strange or shocking to see the use of such deliberately gendered imagery, in this section I argue how this imagery evoking childbirth fits into other types of specifically gendered imagery that have long been associated with both male and female martyrs, especially as they are configured as spiritual, and sometimes also literal, soldiers and athletes and how the distinctions are not always so clear cut.

i. Childbirth and Battle Metaphors and Similes:

Metaphors and similes evoking the experience of childbirth range far back and across the literature of antiquity, very often specifically focusing on the negative aspects such as pain and high rates of mortality. In the *Iliad*, wounded warriors on the battlefield are compared to "a woman in labour".[447] Although the semantic fields of warfare and childbirth seem diametrically opposed, this theme recurs again and again, including in the Hebrew Bible, as has been explored in the works of Katheryn Pfisterer Darr and Claudia Bergmann. As Pfisterer Darr argues, such imagery is employed in the Hebrew Bible "in order to portray human responses in the face of terrifying, mostly military threats".[448] Both metaphors are tied to gendered expectations of their cultural value, as in comparing a young injured warrior and a young mother in labour, as each arena was the expected destiny for young men and women and where they were most at risk of injury or death from the early teens onwards. Medea, in Euripides' tragedy where she infamously

[445] Rajak 2014: 46, also 51.
[446] Solevåg 2013: 250-2.
[447] *Il.* 11.267-72.
[448] Pfisterer Darr: 560–71.

takes up a sword to kill her children in revenge for her husband's betrayal, declares how she would rather stand three times on the frontline of battle than give birth once.[449] As well as similarities such as the pain and risk of death, Bergmann also observes how the use of the simile, in such moments of crisis, highlights the "unstoppable" nature of the birth process once underway, with there being no other option for the women giving birth than to bear the child, and with the uncertainty about whether both or either would survive, mother and child were between life and death.[450] Birth and battle were seen as both violent and inevitable parts of human existence.

We can also see how closely the themes of childbirth and battle were linked in the ancient imagination in how the sacrifice and risks of childbirth were commemorated in the material landscape of the ancient world, in literary accounts and material culture. There were any number of private and public tombs and inscriptions marking battles or fallen warriors. In *Genesis*, after Rachel has died giving birth to her youngest son Benjamin, near Bethlehem, Jacob sets a pillar to mark the tomb of his favourite wife.[451] "Rachel's Tomb" became an important destination for pilgrims, including later Christian pilgrims by the fourth century, such as where Eusebius lists it as an important holy site in a catalogue of Palestinian holy sites.[452]

We also see similarities in how the themes of destiny as well as the pathos of an untimely death were commemorated in Greco-Roman funerary culture. There are a large number of funerary inscriptions that record where a woman died due to complications during pregnancy or birth or shortly after. Across several of these inscriptions, the youth of the mother is often stressed, as well as the physical toll of the ordeal on her body and fate, and the grief of the family. In Tusculum, one inscription records a fifteen year old, unnamed, mother buried with her child; the youth as well as the physical toll on the body are also stressed in the example of Veturia of Aquicum whose verse records how she had multiple miscarriages before dying aged 27.[453] One epitaph from Mauretania describes the death of

[449] *Il.* 11.267-72 and 22.100. Eur. *Med.* 250.
[450] Bergmann 2009: 68.
[451] Genesis 35: 16-18.
[452] Euseb. *Onomasticon* 401/82:10 and 944/172:4.
[453] CIL XIV 2737, CIL III 3572, See: Caroll 2014: 163-4. Cf. public displays of grief in elite literature for young women who have died in childbirth: e.g. Cicero's grief at the loss of his daughter Tullia or Pliny the Younger at the deaths of his friend's two daughters (*Ep.* 4.21.1-2).

twenty-five year old Rusticea Matrona as “childbirth and malignant fate” and numerous other examples express the loss of the mother, particularly if she is leaving behind young children or a grieving spouse.[454]

In funerary evidence such as the above, the woman was celebrated in her idealised social role as a wife and mother. The words in the inscriptions were formulaic and/or most likely chosen by their (male) surviving relatives, even where the inscription was framed in the first person. For our purposes, due to the ideological nature of martyr representation, the social realities behind such commemoration, while interesting, need not concern us. If the focus seems to be on the untimely nature of the death, such as when the portrait of the baby is depicted dressed as the senator he would never be, or a young woman nursing or holding a swaddled baby, and “in some cases, we may be looking not at women who had given birth to a child or children, but at a pictorial device used to compensate for an early death that robbed these women of the chance of having offspring in the first place.”[455] At the same time, there is also a sense of the inevitability of the danger, such as with the references to fate. While the link to dying in battle is not explicit as in the literary examples, there are enough comparable themes in the untimeliness, the sacrifice of dying before or in the process of becoming the idealised role that Roman society dictated for men and women (i.e. a military hero or a mother). It is also interesting to look more closely at how and when the metaphors or other imagery are being used and the intended effect: for the warrior lying wounded on the battlefield, the comparison to a woman in labour emphasises his helplessness and agony, having a humanising effect similar to that which Pfisterer Darr has argued. By contrast, the reverse of comparing the act of childbirth to feats of battle raises this unfortunate but everyday danger of death to the stuff of epic. Although I have presented here only a small selection of sources, the themes of childbirth and battle seem to have been closely associated across a range of different types of literary as well as material evidence. It would not have been such a great leap of the imagination for Late Antique writers and audiences but instead rather natural.

ii. Gendered imagery in martyr narratives: military, athletic, weddings, childbirth

[454] CIL VIII 20288 (trans. Caroll 2014); expression of family’s grief: e.g. CIL VI 28753.
[455] Carroll 2018: 224.

There has been no shortage of attention paid to the language used in martyr narratives, notably imagery drawn from the areas of military and athletic competitions. Paul explicitly compares Christians to athletes: “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”[456] Tertullian compares Christians to gladiators or athletes in his *To the Martyrs*, with the Holy Spirit acting as the “trainer” (ξυστάρχης) for the martyrs who are promised spiritual versions of the awards successful athletes could expect: a crown of immortality, citizenship of heaven, eternal glory in cult.[457] There are in addition numerous stories of actual soldiers who become martyrs across a range of Christian *acta*. For example, one of these is Maximilian, a young soldier, who refuses to offer sacrifice to the emperor, and another figure Marcellus even throws off his military belt (*cingulum*) during festivities marking the emperor’s birthday.[458] This is seen as an act of contempt by his superiors and the prosecutor after which he is subsequently tried and executed.

Martial imagery, along with the image of a winning athlete, is used to describe and praise both male and female martyrs, emphasising their honoured status in achieving the “crown” of martyrdom. It also emphasises the idea of martyrdom as a spectacle such as the games, as well as the mental and physical discipline and endurance involved. While the image of the ‘crown’ of martyrdom is co-opted from athletic competitions or military triumphs, this appears even more striking when it is applied to female martyrs in particular. As we saw, Salsa is referred to with both military and athletic phrases: “she serves as a soldier (*militavit*) always keeping watch for they stop the war with virtues and face down all elegant vices with spiritual things.”[459] When applied to female martyrs, such imagery from military and athletic spheres would seem to build on the idea of their becoming spiritually masculinised based on Classical assumptions of the female body being associated with passivity and cowardice, as Gold has noted in the context of

[456] 1 Corinthians 9:25.
[457] Tert. *Ad mart.* 1.2: also in *De spect.* as discussed in previous chapter.
[458] *A.Max.* 1; *A.Marc.* 1. There are also some potentially interesting parallels between young soldier martyrs and young virgin martyrs (e.g. *cingulum* in different contexts as military belt or bridal belt). On wedding imagery ‘brides’ of Christ, Cooper notes, Jerome in his letter invites a young virgin to consider the spiritual life in terms of battle, and this theme of mixing bridal and battle imagery is continued and developed also in the *Ad Gregorium in palatio* (Cooper 2007: 17-18).
[459] *P.Sals.* 2, later on in the chapter she is also striving for the “palm of victory”.

Perpetua's fourth vision as well as the example of Blandina.[460] At the same time, what is also interesting when applied to female martyrs with the spectator's attention on the athlete's naked body; comparing the body of a young girl like Salsa or Blandina in this way also draws even more attention to the physical differences.

Yet it is not only female martyrs' virtues and achievements being described using such masculine imagery from battle or games, or, rather they are not only the types of metaphors to be employed. Indeed, the birth and fertility imagery in early Christian writings is also applied to male martyrs, often describing spreading the good news or producing new converts. As Solevåg argues, the language of "birthing" the word occurs in *The Acts of Andrew*, as well as in Tertullian's even more famous declaration from his *Apology* "the blood of Christians is seed".[461]
One such example also occurs in the *Martyrs of Lyons* where there is a mixed group of martyrs, men and women, who "came face to face with him in battle" against their spiritual foes in the sense that, we have seen, would become very familiar.[462] Only a short while later, however, several of the would-be martyrs are unable to follow through, "untrained, unprepared and weak".[463] This continues the athletics theme, emphasising their lack of the required endurance and strength, far from the ideal classical model but more emasculated. Of these, "about ten of these men miscarried", or in another translation, were "stillborn".[464]
On the one hand, this metaphor seems like an extension of the similar language that Tertullian famously uses in his Apology; if martyrs are the "seed" of the Church, then failed martyrs such as those of Lyons threaten this fecundity.[465] Not only have this group of men been thoroughly unprepared and untrained as spiritual athletes, but their bodies have to a certain degree become feminised enough that they have actually "miscarried" or "aborted" their conviction. It is in addition particularly striking how this metaphor is used to emphasise the pain and grief that these failed martyrs have on the community: "Then we were all in great

---

[460] Gold 2018.
[461] Solevåg 2013; Tertullian, *Apol.* 50.13.
[462] *Lyons & Vienne* 1.
[463] Ibid: οἱ ἀνὲτομοι καὶ ἀγὺμαστοι καὶ ἒτι ἀσθενεῖς.
[464] Musurillo (1972): 65 translates it as "stillborn" (also G.A. Williamson translation in Penguin edition 1965) cf. with Rebillard's version (2017) the failed (male) martyrs have themselves "miscarried" or "aborted"– active voice: ἐξὲτρωσαν.
[465] Tert. *Apol.* 50.13. In addition to the warrior/woman in labour motif, the image of the "pregnant male" in mythology and philosophy has been explored across the Classical Greek period in Leitao 2012.

distress because of the uncertainty of the confession, not dreading the punishments that were being inflicted, but looking to the end and fearing that any would fail."[466] The metaphor has been adopted to talk about the emotional effects on the whole group, not just the failed martyrs, just as martyrs' individual triumphs reflect on them all. This is only resolved a short while later when: "the martyrs bestowed grace on those who were not martyrs, and great joy was brought back to the Virgin Mother as she received alive those whom she miscarried as dead", then "most of those who had died were all over again conceived, grown in the womb and brought to life".[467] Here the Church has (re)conceived these individuals, in a sense undoing their personal error that 'de-masculinised' them by giving them the chance to be reborn, unlike the other failed male martyr, Quintus, whose cowardice in the face of the beasts in contrast with his initial eagerness to volunteer himself and others for martyrdom. Here then is the idea of martyrdom not only as a military conquest or athletics contest but as an unsuccessful pregnancy or childbirth, with the risks of death in the latter subverted to accentuate that the prospective martyr will not achieve their eternal reward but rather die. Also striking is the focus on the emotional impact on the community grieving the loss of potential Christians. This type of criticism or moral objection to abortion often concentrates on the idea of depriving the community or an individual of potential heirs crops up in Greco-Roman texts.[468]

The idea of martyrdom as a "baptism of blood" also suggests the violence implied within both the semantic fields of warfare and childbirth. The figure of Blandina, another of the martyrs from the same text, in contrast to her physical and social weakness as a young girl and a slave, is imbued with the strength of her faith "like a noble athlete" but later on also "like a noble mother encouraging her children".[469] Again probably alluding to the Maccabean mother, it seems strange to a modern reader that she is described as both an athlete and a mother, despite her age and physique to which so much attention has already been drawn. Yet, as we have already established, the link between these types of images would already have been close at hand for a Late Antique audience. The idea of Blandina as both a spiritual soldier and athlete, as well as a spiritual mother, is in

[466] *Lyons & Vienne* 1. Also cf. T. Laqueur's 'One Sex model' of sliding scale of masculinity (1992).
[467] *Lyons & Vienne* 1.
[468] e.g. Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 11.32.
[469] *Lyons & Vienne*: γενναῖος ἀθλητής […] καθάπερ μήτηρ εὐγενής παρορμήσασα τὰ τέκλα.

some ways reminiscent of the funerary representation of young mothers and infants that they never got a chance to nurse as what might have been. Additionally, one can see another related element of this idea in the way that the failed and, then reformed, male martyrs are described using rhetoric related to childbirth.

In the next section, we will jump forward to the seventh and eighth centuries, to explore yet another way in which the language of martyrdom incorporated imagery from warfare as well as childbirth, in a literal as well as figurative sense, with some discussion of early Islamic literature.

iii. Islam and military martyrdom:

As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, there is an assumption that there was already a well-established 'cult' or bias towards military martyrdom in Islam from the beginning. Despite acknowledgements that the Muslim definitions of martyrdom were by no means "static" in this early period, there has still been a trend towards exploring this more military angle, such as Gaiser's study of the development of the Ibāḍī imamate ideal especially their drawing on Khārijite ideas.[470] The early military successes in the early battles, such as the battle of Badr, both during Muhammad's lifetime and in the subsequent decades following the conquest of parts of Asia and Africa, were recounted in the *futūḥ* literature such as Ibn A'ṯam al-Kūfī's *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*.[471] Many of the victims of the early battle of conquest were declared and commemorated as martyrs with various *ḥadīth* stating their funerary preparations for their bodies and rewards in the afterlife. Similarly to Christianity, they occupy a special place in Paradise, such as in another *ḥadīth* where a mother is comforted for the death of her young son at the battle of Badr with the consolation that he is in the "highest garden", the *jannati at-firdāwsi*.[472] Several other sayings state how the bodies of fallen martyrs do not need to be washed in the standard funerary rites as their wounds will bear witness for them on the Day of Judgement.[473] To a certain extent, this preoccupation with military martyrs speaks to the different socio-political circumstances wherein within a few decades of Muhammad's death the

---

[470] Lewinstein 2001: 86; Afsarrudin 2018: 85; Gaiser 2010.
[471] Mkacher and Benabbès 2020: 151.
[472] Bukhari, *Sahih* 64:9 (جَنَّةِ الْفِرْدَوْسِ); Lewistein 2001: 81.
[473] Malik, *Muwatta Imam Malik*, Book 21.14-16 (trans. 'Abdarahman at-Tarjumana & Johnson 1982: 202-4).

adherents of the new faith already had an empire that stretched across territories in the Middle East and North Africa. In contrast, the earlier, very brief, persecutions before the *Hajj*, included lower-status figures and women, such as Sumayyah and her family, among the victims.

Yet this reflected only some of the viewpoints, and the tendency of scholars to emphasise the superiority of military martyrs over civilian ones was also countered by injunctions against those who would deliberately court martyrdom in battle.[474] With this being only part of the story, it is worth considering some of these other types of martyrs of which the battlefield martyrs were only one, albeit a major one. Martyrs in Islam fall into two major categories. The first, the 'battlefield martyrs' have indeed garnered a great deal of attention; however, for our purposes, we shall concentrate on the second category, the 'martyrs of this world only'.[475] These include many other types of martyrs, including women who died due to pregnancy complications or in childbirth. So far in this chapter, I have been particularly interested in the relationship between different kinds of maternal metaphors and images in martyr rhetoric rather than literal soldier martyrs although it is interesting that martyrdom is still connected with death. Thus, for this next section, I am interested in the second 'lesser' category "martyrs of this world only" which includes many other ways of being killed, including women who die in childbirth. I would like to explore this particular category which, unlike other types of death, is a way to martyrdom explicitly referencing women and also because it is an example from another Late Antique context where the imagery of childbirth, battle and martyrdom are all operating within the same scene.

iv. Dying in childbirth: a uniquely female route to martyrdom?

The first of the *ḥadīth* comes from Book 16 of a collection by Muwatta, in a chapter on 'Burials'. Here Muhammad visits a dying man called 'Abdullah ibn Thabit. The dying man's daughter expresses her hope that he will be counted as a martyr as he had been prepared for battle, to which Muhammad replies: "There are seven kinds of martyr other than those killed in the way of Allah. Someone who is killed

[474] E.g. al-Bukhari 4:481-82; Afsarrudin 2018: 98-100.
[475] Kohlberg, E. 'Shahīd'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, P.J. Bearman (Volumes X, XI, XII), Th. Bianquis (Volumes X, XI, XII), et al. [Accessed: Wednesday 3 May 2023 at doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1025.].

by the plague is a martyr, someone who drowns is a martyr, someone who dies of pleurisy is a martyr, someone who dies of a disease of the belly is a martyr, someone who dies by fire is a martyr, someone who dies under a falling building is a martyr and a woman who dies in childbirth is a martyr".[476] The Arabic is more literally translated as "the women who died are martyrs". A similar list, though with a different number and type of deaths listed, appears in other *ḥadīth* collections, all ending with or including some mention of specifically of a group of women referred to as martyrs. Thus, another *ḥadīth* from the Sunan al-Nasāʾī reads literally as: "the women in the way of God are martyrs".[477] Another one, from the Sunan ibn Mājah, can be rendered in a similarly ambiguous way as "the women who die in the cause of Allah are martyrs".[478] There are other variants but I will focus on these three for now as examples which seem to be unanimously interpreted as specifically women who are pregnant or giving birth. Unlike the other types of death in the list, including dying in one's bed or in plague or fire which prevent someone from participating in battle, women seem an unlikely inclusion on this list as they are generally not expected to fight, yet are still able to attain martyrdom.[479] In some ways, this seems to suggest an understanding or attempt to broaden the categories of who could be considered a martyr in the Muslim community, particularly post-conquest.[480]

Yet there appears then to be a strange discrepancy whereby a consensus of interpreters has chosen to translate these sayings as specifically referring to women dying in childbirth. The assumption that inspires this, and several other similar hadith in the same collection, is that the presumed main way to become a martyr was to be killed in battle and this ideal of a literal martial martyr figure was thus by convention male. As has been observed, there were certain traditions among scholars that also warned against the act of deliberately seeking martyrdom in battle purely for the rewards and status of martyrdom, which would have seemed dangerously close to suicide, also explicitly forbidden in the Qur'an.[481] This was found especially in polemical writings against particular sects

[476] Malik, *Muwatta Imam Malik*, Book 16.36 (trans.'Abdarahman at-Tarjumana & Johnson 1982) p.278): وَالْمَرْأَةُ تَمُوتُ بِجُمْعٍ شَهَادَةٌ

[477] Sunan al-Nasāʾī, Book 25.79.

[478] Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 24.51.

[479] Cf. traditions of women participating in battles, notably Muhammad's wife Aisha at the Battle of the Camel, and various women in Kharijite sources (Baugh 2017: 37).

[480] Lewinstein 2001: 82.

[481] Qur'anic prohibition of suicide: 2:195; 4:29; Afsarrudin 2018: 98.

such as the militant Kharijites, for whom martyrdom was a strong theme.[482] Elsewhere, there were also legal scholars, for example, the ninth century CE al-Shafi'i, who were not soldiers but wanted to equate dying during certain religious activities such as going on *hajj*, with the death of a warrior.[483]

As well as these being strikingly familiar or parallel to earlier controversies among different Christian sects such as between Augustine and the Donatists, this serves to illustrate the fluidity of interpretations of martyrdom in the first few centuries after the emergence of Islam. Within a broader Late Antique framework, there were many strands of Christian discourses of martyrdom which similarly sought to broaden or redefine the idea of enduring martyrdom through daily asceticism or illness rather than judicial persecution In the *Life of Anthony*, a paradigmatic ascetic hero who "was there daily being martyred by his conscience, and doing battle in the contests of the faith".[484] Whereas the military martyrs were assumed to be exclusively male, the juxtaposition between women and childbirth highlights a parallel which, in the context of the Late Antique mind could be easily connected. One way in which dying in childbirth connects to the other types such as plague or fire, is in the untimeliness of the death, which may in turn link back to beliefs in antiquity about the powers of the "restless dead", i.e. soldiers slain in battle or young women who had died before marriage.[485] There is also a degree of suffering or struggle in many of these types of death. The list of all the alternative ways in which one could become a martyr, other than on the battlefield, includes illness and everyday risks of death, including the explicitly gendered danger of dying in childbirth or pregnancy complications. Women dying in childbirth as a type of martyr fits in with this type of death, as does that of the warrior, as both do so in the process of fulfilling their established socially expected gender role yet their deaths are still untimely in that they have been sacrificed before they could grow old. This would seem to be building on what seems like a well-established tradition and long association between military and childbirth imagery that continued to be used to conceptualise martyrdom through Late Antiquity.

[482] For discussions of the condemnation of the Kharijites, see: Hagemann 2021: 93-6.
[483] Lewinstein 2001: 83.
[484] *Life of Anthony* 47 (trans. from Harmless 2004: 65-6).
[485] This literature is not insignificant, from Homer's *Odyssey* to appeals to their aid in love spells and curses, Johnston 1999.

It is not difficult to see how the idea of martyrdom, whether framed within the scope of an earthly or cosmic battle, should have been influenced by the seeming ubiquity of childbirth and battle metaphors used across different genres of literature and a range of different media. Thus, it is a short step to seeing how writers and audiences of martyrdom literature would make such an association. Not only this, but it is further evidence of how the definitions of making a martyr, always contested particularly on grounds of legitimacy, from early on, were continuing to be questioned and to evolve. In diverse and yet also persistent ways, we find a form of martyrdom that incorporated elements that encompassed both the everyday – the experience of childbirth carrying a high risk of mortality for women - and the epic, even heroising it. There is also the sense or effect of the wider impact on the community as well as the individual stakes, a reminder that martyrs are a part of a community. This sort of tension or paradox in itself was not unlike how martyrs themselves often functioned within their communities – they were individuals who were explicitly human, and thus relatable, as well as being extra exemplary in their behaviour and virtue. While to a modern reader, the use of warfare and childbirth imagery to describe martyrdom may come across as very strange, by focusing on some of the rhetoric and literature, I argue that within the Late Antique imagination, this was far from the case. The metaphor had been established in a range of writings for well over a millennium and was an easy tool for Christian and Islamic writers to draw upon and adapt. The comparative lack of scholarship on this hadith literature, meanwhile, links into the final section of this chapter in which we will examine two female martyrs who have also received relatively little discussion. These are both examples of non-elite mothers who were also martyrs and thus stand out from the majority of the figures we have talked about so far, even to the point of being potentially shocking and controversial.

4. Intersectionality and Martyr Mothers: Felicitas and Sumayyah

Many of the mothers I have discussed so far in this chapter have been to varying degrees members of the elites and thus representative of Christian ideals of motherhood of that class. Even though some of these mothers are described as “slaves” of Christ in a spiritual sense, this forms a deliberate contrast with how they are first introduced more respectfully such as by being addressed as

"*domina*". This may partly be due to the nature of the literary sources, where many of the young martyrs are from noble families who are appalled by their decision to take vows of virginity and refuse to give up their faith. Martyrs such as Crispina and Perpetua, in acting disdainfully towards worldly threats and temptations, declare themselves as "slaves" of Christ and are doing so specifically in contrast with their original noble birth and status that they have rejected. While there is the extremely popular literary trope of the young noble-born girl who opts for a vow of virginity over numerous wealthy suitors, or Domnina and her daughters, it is far less common to find a martyr who is an actual slave or even a freedwoman. Age is another interesting factor. As has been noted, many martyrs tend to be very young. The emphasis on their lack of strength and youthful ignorance is an important aspect during their interrogations and ordeals as we have already seen with previous examples. Female martyrs are particularly praised for their extra piety and strength in overcoming not only the relative physical weakness of their sex but also the implied temptations and worldliness of being young and beautiful. Similar assumptions occur if they have children, evoking their duty as a mother to ensure their children's preservation, or if they are described as elderly and frail. All these were seen as additional obstacles that, when overcome, demonstrated how even more extraordinary the female martyr must be and by extension the power of their faith. In this final section, I consider two particular examples and in particular how different aspects of their identities such as status, gender and age, intersect and overlap, or are alternately emphasised and downplayed.

The first, Felicitas, is one of a group of young catechumens imprisoned alongside Perpetua and the others in Carthage, narrated in the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*.[486] Aside from the briefest of introductions that establish that she is a slave and eight months pregnant, her main appearance comes in chapter fifteen. She and the others are afraid that her pregnancy will prevent her from joining the others in the arena as she will have to be executed once her baby is born and thus alone. They pray and she miraculously goes into early labour.[487] When a guard mocks her, she replies that she will be able to endure her martyrdom through Christ. She then gives birth to a daughter who she gives away to a fellow Christian to raise while she is eventually dispatched by a gladiator. In the later

[486] Not to be confused with Felicitas of Rome, another early Roman martyr mother with seven sons.
[487] *P.Perp.* 15.

redacted *Acta*, she appears in a slightly extended interrogation scene where she is questioned about her parents and husband. In her book *Slavery in Early Christianity*, Jennifer A. Glancey notes how slaves, both male or female, were defined as lacking any sort of autonomy over their bodies, particularly their sexual availability, with the result that female slaves existed in " a state of perpetual shame".[488] Solevåg also addresses this in her discussion of how Felicitas' social status as a slave intersects with her experience of giving birth and anticipated martyrdom, especially compared to the "well born" (*honesta nata*) Perpetua, including how due to the former being a slave, childbirth is not presented as a straightforward salvation route. [489] While an elite woman, whether a virgin or widow, could choose to take a vow of chastity, this was not an option for a female slave. As Solevåg describes, in the example of the apocryphal *Act of Andrew* where the king's wife can substitute a slave woman so she does not have to sleep with her husband, we get no insight into how this slave woman might feel or want, rather the slave woman is portrayed as 'bad' in contrast to her celibate mistress.[490] Elsewhere, the figure of Blandina, while in prison, has her mistress expressing concern that she will be unable to withstand her torture. As we have seen so far with various female martyrs, this discrepancy can be expressed in different ways by either the narrator emphasising it or other characters expressing surprise or disbelief that such a person would have the strength let alone the courage to undergo martyrdom.

Jumping forwards to the seventh century, Sumayyah bint Khayyat is another martyr and mother. She is a former slave, one of the first converts to Islam, and so faces torture and death from the openly hostile pagan authorities in Mecca. According to the earliest eighth- or ninth-century sources, she was an elderly woman, a former slave, and married to another early believer Yasir ibn Amir. They have one son, Ammar, and when the family is caught up in a persecution by the pagan authorities she is tortured and then finally stabbed in the stomach with a spear, thus becoming the first martyr (*shahida*) of Islam: "It is related that Mujahid said, 'The first person martyred in Islam was Sumayyah, the mother of 'Ammar. Abu Jahl went to her and stabbed her with a spear in the private

[488] Glancey 2002: 27.
[489] Solevåg 2013: 208; *P.Perp.* 2.i; Bremmer (2012) and Solevag (2013: 205) both favour reading it as a description of her physical status and background, based on details from the rest of the narrative.
[490] Solevåg 2013: 165-7.

parts”.[491] Other early and later accounts are similarly brief, but prominent alongside the details that are preserved are her role as an early believer and martyr and her description as a mother.[492] Despite the male bias in the sources, made especially complicated when it comes to different categories of slavery, early Islam contains several examples of idealised female models who were also of lowly origins or status and mothers. Elizabeth Urban observes how Abbasid rulers such as Abu Jafar al-Mansur defended their rights to rule despite being the sons of slave women by evoking figures such as Hagar or Mariya the Copt, a concubine of Muhammad.[493] A recent notable exception to the general disregard of Sumayyah, and extremely relevant to the subject of this chapter, is Shehata’s article on the role of martyr mothers in early Islam where Sumayyah gets a brief discussion primarily focused on her role as a model for her son Ammar.[494]

Both Felicitas and Sumayyah have been significantly neglected in the sources and subsequent scholarship, albeit in different ways. For Felicitas, the opportunity to compare her with someone other than Perpetua means we can look at her from a different perspective such as by addressing common assumptions as well as considering how she is depicted in other literary sources such as the redacted *Acta* as well as in the *Passio Perpetuae*. For the even more obscure Sumayyah, a more substantial analysis may be made by contextualising her within the wider Late Antique world and its circulating ideas about martyrdom, gender and slavery. Building on some of the studies mentioned above, I will look at the two figures of Felicitas and Sumayyah to explore not only how their physical low status affects the representation of them as martyrs, in comparison to ideas of ‘spiritual slavery’, but also how they combine these multiple identity markers, such as age, status and physical frailty, as well as mothers of children who also grow up within their respective faiths.

i. Slave Mothers: Assumptions and Narrative uses

[491] Ibn Sa’ad, *Kitab at-Tabaqat al-Kabir* 8 (trans. Bewley 1995).
[492] E.g. Ibn Ishaq’s early biography of Muhammad does not give her a name, *Sirat Rasul Allah* (Guillaume 1989: 144-5); al-Tabari mentions an alternative version where she remarries a Byzantine slave after her husband’s death, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa'l-Muluk*, 39 (trans. Landau Tasseron 1998: 29-30).
[493] Urban 2017: 225.
[494] Shehata 2022: 231.

What makes these two figures striking, aside from their shared relative obscurity, is the contrast between their prominence as martyrs and their lowly status as slave or former slave mothers. This serves to further illustrate such paradoxes by their martyrdom.
In some ways, these are still both 'straightforward' martyrdoms where they are persecuted, interrogated, tortured and killed (cf. other ideas of martyrdom in Late Antiquity e.g. asceticism or dying in battle, illness, childbirth etc.) At the same time, they are also distinctive, not least in the relative obscurity each has received within their traditions despite their names (Felicitas 'fortunate', Sumayyah 'elevated') being descriptive of their martyr status and anticipating their future reward. Felicitas is usually overshadowed by Perpetua. Sumayyah, while she has the honour of being the first martyr of Islam, has received far less attention than other (male) martyrs such as Muhammad's grandsons who are killed in battle during various sectarian disputes over succession of the *ummah*. (A later historian, from the tenth/eleventh century CE, al-Tabari, describes her as not martyred at all but rather going on to live a further life – but especially given her and her son's later association with Husayn and the *al-Bayt*, highly revered in Shi'ism, there were incentives to downplay her significance).[495]

With both these women, their physical and social weakness is emphasised, however, unlike some of the other female martyrs we have seen, this distinctive representation links back to their status. In not dissimilar way to the diversity of roles mothers play in martyr narratives, explored above, slave characters in ancient novels also appear in varied roles, though they are still subsidiary to the main characters unless the elite hero or heroine has been temporarily enslaved, such as Callirhoe and her lover Chaereas. The experience of female slaves has received a marked amount of attention, as in scholarly debates on whether they were manumitted more frequently, i.e. with a view to marriage.[496]

For example, while their physicality is emphasised, such as when they are exposed to torture, this is not in any overtly sexualised way, as we see with other martyrs, but instead highlights their fragility. Thus we are shown Felicitas' vulnerability when she is displayed naked in the arena as "a woman fresh from

[495] Al-Tabari 39 (see above n.486).
[496] Hilton 2019: 3.

giving birth and with dripping breasts" (especially compared to the highborn Perpetua who in the same passage is described as a "beautiful girl").[497] In a later redacted account the *Acta* Felicitas is addressed as "*puella*" ('girl') during her interrogation, perhaps a reference to her age or, as a slave, a deliberately infantilising term used to refer to slaves of all genders in antiquity.[498] One of several assumptions, perpetuated by scholars, is that she is younger than Perpetua, who we are specifically told is twenty-two, and that she is Perpetua's slave girl.[499] Neither Felicitas' age nor her relationship with Perpetua is indicated in either the *Acta* or the *Passio* and there is very little interaction between the two women.

Sumayyah too is described as elderly and frail. Her family is being persecuted because of their low status and thus they lack the protection that Muhammad and his immediate family have as members of the powerful Quraysh tribe. She too has been rounded up to be tortured in a group, including her husband and son, yet only her death is focused on. Despite being in a group with other martyrs then, both of the women are singled out for taunting, considered to be the 'weak link' or else able to influence their family to 'see sense', like Blandina or the Maccabean mother. Again, the result is sudden violence when she is stabbed in the stomach.

What is striking though is that in contrast to Perpetua's 'uniqueness' and privileged position as spokesperson and visionary, Felicitas' most prominent moments highlight her solidarity among the martyrs, such as when they are collectively praying in prison or Perpetua helping her to her feet so that they both stand together. Although, as Solevåg notes, her giving birth alone does seem to emphasise her low status, for example how she is exposed to the guard and any other onlookers, she also asserts how Christ will be with her during her upcoming martyrdom.[500] Her brief episode focuses on her pregnancy and miraculous labour. In the *Acta,* she is interrogated just before Perpetua and has a brief interrogation scene with some direct speech where she is questioned about the identity and whereabouts of her parents and husband. It is striking that while certain aspects of Perpetua and other characters are changed or omitted in the

---

[497] *P.Perp.* 20
[498] Glancy 2002.
[499] *P.Perp.* 2.
[500] Solevåg 2013: 234.

Acta, such as much of the details of her visions, Felicitas seems to gain more prominence in comparison and the episode of her miraculous early labour is still present. The figure of Felicitas seems to ask as many questions as she answers, missing details such as her age, and the paternity of her baby (in the later *Acta* the proconsul asks her about her husband but she replies that she despises him; other scholars have posited Revocatus as her husband as she is introduced as his co-slave, *eius conserva*).[501] Similarly, Sumayyah is also part of a larger group but the only one singled out, perhaps in part this ambiguity surrounding her status also adds to the tension or pathos.

In her final active part of the narrative, Felicitas makes sure that her daughter will be raised by a fellow 'sister' from the community as a Christian. Ronsse suggests that her nameless daughter can be "considered representative of the model student audience. Her ties to the martyrs are intimate and specific, and she is their inheritance and lifeline."[502] Like Felicitas, it is Sumayyah's adult son Ammar's importance as one of Muhammad's Companions that also reflects attention onto her. The earliest biographer, ibn Ishaq, only refers to her as Umm Ammar, 'mother of Ammar'.[503] Her relationship with her adult son also emphasises the link to the future of the community. There is anonymity through being unnamed or specifically referred to by her relational status to her son, like the Maccabean mother. Milco argues that Augustine develops both these themes from the *Passio*, comparing Felicitas to both Eve and Mary: "we see the image of the martyr as mother serving as the feminine counterpart to the masculine image of the combatant."[504] As we argued in the previous section, the use of imagery describing martyrs as both mothers and combatants was already closely connected in the Late Antique audience's imagination.

This all serves to contrast with their defiance when they speak boldly back to their persecutors. There is a long Classical tradition of philosophers standing up to tyrants, such as *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*, though here with an additional important gendered emphasis.[505] Felicitas responds to the guard's taunting that

---

[501] *Acta* 5, cf. her introduction as Revocatus' fellow slave in *P.Perp* 2 (trans. Cobb 2021: 23). See above the discussion of the different versions of the *Acta* at n.117.
[502] Ronsse 2006: 325
[503] See above n.486.
[504] Milco 2015: 292-3.
[505] *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs=Acta Alexandrinorum* (Musurillo 1954); see above n.340.

she will not be able to withstand the trials of the arena by invoking how Jesus will be with her, directly comparing the process of labour with her future martyrdom. Sumayyah is similarly mocked and tortured into abandoning her faith and her resolve, even non-verbal, is such that it only drives her torturer into increasing frustration and finally violence. There is a sense that while they are relatively powerless in their societies, even over control of their bodies, they take on some agency through their defiance. Another comparable figure is Zaynab, Husayn's older sister, who is captured after her brother's death at the battle of Karbala and brought before the ruler Yazid. Despite her newly denigrated status as a prisoner of war, she gives a bold speech to Yazid criticising his treatment of the Prophet's family and legacy. As Tahera Qutbuddin has argued, this belonged to a long tradition in of high-born women speaking at moments of societal rupture, "as a surviving flesh-witness, when her male relatives have been silenced by the sword".[506] This is also reminiscent of Antigone, another sister speaking truth to power in the aftermath of a civil war. Though strictly sisters here rather than mothers like Felicitas and Sumayyah, there is a similar theme in how all these factors such as status, age and physicality, are portrayed as 'weaknesses' in contrast to the ferocity of their ideological stance.

5. Conclusion: Martyrdom and Motherhood

To conclude, this chapter has argued how ideas of motherhood, while broadly conforming to earlier models from antiquity, exhibit an extraordinary diversity within their portrayal in martyrdom narratives, demonstrated by these mother figures and the representation of motherhood imagery, both literal and symbolic. The "formidable" figure of the mother familiar from earlier Greco-Roman literature appears in and persists across, lots of these early martyr narratives in ways that add nuance to images of maternity in Christianity.[507] While the Virgin Mary offered one particular, more submissive and gentler, image of the mother in Christianity, in Late Antiquity, as with female martyrdom more generally, there was a lot more diversity in how mothers and maternal imagery were being utilised. The ways that certain imagery used for male and female martyrs was explicitly gendered but also played around with, also show how martyr discourses were

[506] Qutbuddin 2019: 405.
[507] Dixon 1988; Pyy 2021.

challenging the status quo as well as readapting a long-established association between military and childbirth metaphors. The two overshadowed martyrs, Felicitas and Sumayyah, allowed for a further exploration of a combination of elements, including relationship with children, age, social status and physical appearance; these were all elements drawn from their female experience and yet also not restricted to it.

This chapter fits into the overarching argument of the thesis by showing how there is much more nuance to be found in depictions of these types of figures. It is by recognising and allowing for a greater appreciation of female martyrs through their relationships with other characters within the text, in this context specifically mothers and their children. While the mothers on one level seem to speak and behave according to certain societal and literary conventions, many of these Late Antique writers also used different assumptions of their perceived physical or emotional weakness, to serve as a contrast with their martyrs' spiritual strength. In this way, we can see another example of the creative reinventions of the female martyr that both built on as well as played with earlier traditions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

1. Constructing a Female Martyr

The primary focus of this thesis has been to look at different ways in which a specifically female experience and understanding of martyrdom has been assumed. Using a selection of texts from across Late Antiquity, I have attempted to broaden the landscape of figures which have previously been studied, as well as challenging assumptions about martyrdom being male by default. In this way, I have been able to build on previous research both through new approaches to well-known texts as well as foregrounding less well-studied sources. In each of the first two chapters I took an individual text to discuss in close detail, the *Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* and the *Passion of St Salsa*. In the latter part, I approached the roles that female martyrs play in these narratives more thematically. I looked first at the *acta*, particularly the *Martyrdom of Saint Crispina*, and then at mothers and maternal and childbirth-related imagery, this also across both Christian and Islamic texts. In this final section, I would like to draw some connections between the texts and indicate some of the similarities and differences. Before discussing the interconnections, however, let me summarise the main points of my analysis so far.

In Chapter Two I took as my focus the *Passio Perpetuae* and the potential impact of reading the arena scene as her "fifth vision". Visions and dreams recurred in many early martyr narratives and, as I argued, they could also have a performative and even an interpretative role for audiences as well as tie into the theme of martyrs disdaining the world and Perpetua's characterisation. Forming a response to, or the second part to a diptych of, the first chapter, Chapter Three consisted of a close reading of the *Passio Salsae*, especially the importance of her local identity and role as a more active heroine on the model of various biblical and Classical women. As with Perpetua, seeing her as an exception to some generally conceived notions of what a female martyr should be, she serves as further evidence of a much more nuanced and interesting picture of martyrdom and gender construction.

In Chapter Four I turned to the shorter and stylistically different martyr *acta*. Traditionally these have been often disregarded for their lack of rich detail, unlike

such a text as the *Passio Perpetuae*. With particular attention to the *Martyrdom of St Crispina*, I instead re-contextualised a number of these texts as examples comparing their features to characters and scenes from popular comedies. Such a comparison arguably fits much better with the tone and predictable nature of martyr plots, as well as how they would have been well known to their communities as familiar stories, especially in oral performance. It also allowed re-examining some of the female characters, who generally get very little speech or characterisation as well as reconsidering the figure of the antagonist. The significance of their relationship dynamic fits into how Christian writers used and incorporated their Classical surroundings, particularly in the context of the fourth and fifth centuries when these periods of persecution were already well-established foundation legends but distant from the experiences of contemporary congregations.

Chapter Five continued this thematic direction with a look at mothers and maternal imagery across a selection of these texts. While certain mothers have attracted much attention, not least Perpetua and the Maccabean mother, there is a great deal of variation in the role given to mothers across these narratives, including being martyrs themselves, as background parts, as supporters or even as antagonists. I also found it helpful to take a closer look at the proliferation of maternal and childbirth imagery, which is especially revealing where it is applied to male martyrs. In the second part of this chapter, as an epilogue, I also showed how the theme of motherhood and childbirth persisted in early Islamic discourses on martyrdom. By comparing the figures of Felicitas and Sumayyah, I was also able to explore this by looking at how slavery or low status was used in their characterisation as mothers and martyrs.

Although we see many themes, including those I initially highlighted with the example of Leocritia in the Prologue, recurring across these narratives in different guises, female martyrs were by no means homogenous. Rather, we see how such familiar tropes were interpreted in new directions or given subversive twists while adhering to older traditions and models. Despite the dominance of Perpetua in scholarship, a close reading of Salsa likewise offers an example of a female martyr who seems both typical and atypical in the emphasis on her local identity and the active stance she takes. Another such avenue is a greater appreciation

for the influence of comedy in these narratives, such as seeing female martyrs within the *acta* as character types. Similarly, there was considerably more nuance in the use of motherhood, childbirth and pregnancy imagery in martyr narratives across antiquity, including the use of gendered language associated with childbirth to describe *male* martyrs. While there has been extensive scholarship on how female martyrs challenge gender roles, particularly Perpetua, my argument is that martyr discourses as a whole were engaged in this type of function. Thus, while sometimes specifically gendered elements are stressed in particular texts, as I have discussed with certain clichés of female martyrs, there are also other ways in which martyr discourse seems to disregard or play with gender in fluid ways. Overall, in this thesis, I have demonstrated some of the myriad ways in which these stories were developed and their impact on their Late Antique communities in North Africa and beyond.

Although the scope of this thesis has been necessarily limited, in different ways it has re-evaluated and re-examined a specifically female experience of martyrdom. For this reason, I will propose some further directions to take, based on some of the above ideas and their implications.

2. <u>Future study:</u>

There is significant scope for more detailed comparisons between female martyrs within Christianity and Islam as my brief foray in the previous chapter demonstrates. There is, for example, a body of legal texts as well as other understudied sources. Here methodology from the study of Christian sources could be adapted in new ways, especially looking at their Classical influences and the interrelationship of ideas. In addition, female martyrs or holy female figures from other traditions around the Late Antique Mediterranean as well as cross-comparisons with other cultures and religions could be a fruitful field.
There is also the potential for building on the recent archaeological re-evaluations for the continuity of Christian communities during at least the first few centuries following the Arab conquests of North Africa. This should allow us to investigate in more detail the survival of specific Christian martyr cults in North Africa during these later centuries and re-consider the material culture as well as the links and the transmission of local martyr stories elsewhere such as the manuscript

transmission of Salsa and Marciana in Iberia and Perpetua's cult in the eastern Mediterranean.[508]

As I have attempted to demonstrate in this thesis, there are new ways to look at literary texts, even those that have been extensively analysed. For example, I argue how the role of theatre and in particular comedy has previously been underappreciated in these narratives. Elsewhere, there are parallels between martyr narratives and calendars and chronicles, also previously seen "as practical documents and sources for the writing of history, rather than as literary and historical compositions in their own right."[509] With all the comparisons that have been drawn between martyrs and earlier Classical and biblical figures from history and mythology, it would be interesting to look further into how chroniclers played around with the chronology within these texts, such as the placement of certain martyrs near Classical or other figures and any comparisons that could be studied.

---

[508] Piredda 2015: 219-222; Cobb 2021: 253.
[509] Burgess and Kulikowski 2013: 183.

<u>Bibliography:</u>

Primary sources:

Quotations and references to the Bible and Apocrypha are from the New King James Version (NKJV). Quotations and references from the Qur'an come from https://quran.com/2?startingVerse=154, [Accessed: Monday 27 February 2023].

As previously stated, the martyr text editions used are found in the 'Note on transliteration, abbreviations and editions' at the beginning of this thesis.

<u>(Classical works)</u>

Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum Libri* (LCL 331)
Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* (LCL 453)
Cicero,
Pro Cluentio (LCL 198)
Pro Roscius Amerino (LCL 240)
Homer, translated by Fitzgerald, R. (2008). *The Iliad*. Oxford: Oxford's World Classic
Homer, translated by Rieu, D.C.H (1982). *The Odyssey*. London: Penguin.
Livy, *History of Rome* (LCL 114)
Ovid, translated by Raeburn, D. (2005). *The Metamorphoses.* London: Penguin.
Plautus,
The Brothers Menaechemi, translated by Segal, E. (2006). *Classical Comedy*. London: Penguin.
Truculentus, (LCL 328)
Casina, (LCL 61)
Captivi (LCL 60)
Rudens (LCL 260)
Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* (LCL 55)
Plutarch,
Lives. Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus (LCL 102)
Moralia (LCL 222)
Quintillian, *Minor Declamations* 2 volumes (LCL 500, trans. Shackleton Bailey 2006).
Seneca the Younger, *De Ira* (LCL 214)
Sophocles, *Antigone*, translated by Nisetich, F. in Lefkowitz, M.R. and Romm, J.S. (eds.). (2016). *The Greek Plays: Sixteen plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides*. London: ML Classics.
Suetonius, translated by Graves, R. (1957). *The Twelve Caesars*. London: Penguin.
Tacitus, *Annals* (LCL 249)
Terence, *The Eunuch,* (LCL 22).
Virgil, translated by Ahl, F. (2007). *The Aeneid*. Oxford: Oxford World Classics.

(Patristic works)

Ambrose, *Epistulae,* translated by Liebeschuetz, J.H.W.G. and Hill, C. (2005). *Ambrose of Milan: Political Letters and Speeches*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
Augustine,
Confessions (CC 27)
De doctrina christiana (CC 32)
Enarrationes in psalmos (CC 38)
Epistula 89 (CSEL 57)
Sermones 280-81 ed. and trans. Cobb, L.S. and Jacobs, A.S. 2021, University of California Press; 300 (PL 38)
Chorikios of Gaza, *Apologia mimorum*, ed. Foerster, R. and Richtsteig, E. (1929). Stuttgart.
Eusebius, translated by William, G.A. (1965). *Church History*. London: Penguin.

Eusebius, translated by Notley, R.S. and Safrai, Z. (2005). *Onomasticon: A Triglott Edition with Notes and Commentary*. Leiden: Brill.
John Chrysostom, translated by Mayer, W. and Neil, B. (2006). *The Cult of the Saints: Select Homilies and Letters*. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
Against the Games and the Theatres (PG 56.263-70).
Gregory of Nyssa, translated Silvas, A.M. (2008). *Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God.* Turnhout: Brepols.
Gregory of Tours, translated by Van Dam, R. (1988). *The Glory of the Martyrs* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
Hydatius of Lemica, translation and edition by Burgess, R.W. (1993). *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana: Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Paul Alvarus, *Vita Eulogii*, translated by Baxter, K. (2019). *The Eulogius Corpus*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
Quodvultdeus, *Book of promises and predictions of God*. Corpus Christianorum Series Latina LX Typographi. Turnholt: Brepols.
Tertullian,
Apologeticus, De Spectaculis, (LCL 250)
Ad martyras (CC 1)
Ad nationes, ed..Borleffs, J.W.Ph. (1929). *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani: Ad Nationes Libri Duo*, Brill, Leiden.
The Theodosian Code, translation by Pharr, C. (1952). *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions, Vol. 1*. New York: Greenwood Press.
Victor of Vita, translated by Moorhead, J. (1992). *History of the Vandal Persecution* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

(Islamic works)

Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ishaq, translated Guillaume, A. (1989). *The Life of Muhammad A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*. Oxford University Press.
Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Sa'ad, translated by Bewley, A. (1995). *The Women of Madina, Volume 8.* London: Ta-Ha.
al-Tabari, translated by Humphreys, R.S. (1985). *The History of al-Tabarī: Ta'rikh al-rusul wa 'l mululc.* New York: State University of New York Press.
Manhaj al-Mas'udi, translated by Awad Najafi, M. (1965). *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya li-l-Imām ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.* Intisharat Islami.
Imam Malik, translated by 'Abdarahman at-Tarjumana, A. and Johnson, Y. (1982). *Al-Muwatta Imam* Malik. Diwan Press.

Secondary Scholarship:

Afsarrudin, A. (2013). *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2014). "Martyrdom in Islamic Thought and Praxis" in Janes, D. and Houen, A. (eds.). *Martyrdom and Terrorism: Premodern to Contemporary Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2018). "Martyrdom and its Contestations in the Formative Period of Islam" in Kitts, M. (ed.). *Martyrdom, Self-Sacrifice, and Self-Immolation: Religious Perspectives on Suicide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

al-Azmeh (2014). *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Alwis, A.P. (2020). *Narrating Martyrdom: Rewriting Late Antique Roman Martyrs in Byzantium*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
Amat, J. (1996). *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité suivi des Actes: Introduction, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et index*. Paris: Cerf.

Ardeleanu, S. (2018). "Directing the faithful, structuring the sacred space: funerary epigraphy in its archaeological context in late-antique Tipasa", *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 31. pp.475-500.
Ashbrook Harvey, S. (1996). "Sacred Bonding: Mothers and Daughters in Early Syriac Hagiography." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, No. 1, pp. 27-56.

- (2006). *Scenting Salvation: ancient Christianity and the olfactory imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Barnes, T. (2010). *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
Barton, C.A. (1989). "The Scandal of the Arena", *Representations*, No.29, pp.1-36.
Barrier, J.W. (2022). "A Cainite Invocation of Thecla? The Reception of the *Acts of Paul* in North Africa as Exemplified in Tertullian's *de Baptismo*" in Dabiri, G. and Ruani, F. (eds.). *Thecla and Medieval Sainthood: The* Acts of Paul and Thecla *in Eastern and Western Hagiography*. Cambridge University Press. pp.35-60.
Baugh, C. (2017). "Revolting Women? Early Kharijite Women in Islamic Sources", *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies*, Vol.2, No.1, pp.36-55.
Beard, M. (2017). *Women and Power: A Manifesto*. Profile Books Ltd.
Bergmann, C. (2009). *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis: Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1QH XI, 1-18.* Berlin: De Gruyter.
Blackhurst, A. (2004). "The House of Nubel: Rebels of Players?" in Merrills, A. (ed.). *Vandals, Romans and Berbers.* Aldershot: Ashgate.
Bolland, J. (1643) *Acta Sanctorum Volume 01: Jan. I, Antwerp.* Antwerp: pp. 6-lxii.
Bossu, A. and Praet, D. (2015). "A Marriage of Equals? Characterization in the *passio Chrysanthi et Dariae*" *Philologus* Vol.159:1, pp.301-326.
Bossu, A., Praet, D. and De Temmerman, K. (2015). "Erotic Persuasion and Characterization in Late Antique Hagiography: the *Passio Caecilliae* and the *Passio Susannae*", *Latomus*, 74, pp.1059-1072.
Bowersock, G. W. (1995). *The Wiles Lectures Given at the Queen's University of Belfast: Martyrdom and Rome.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Boyarin, D. (1999). *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Boyer (2002). *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts that Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors*. New York, NY: Random House.
Bremmer, J. (2004). "The Motivation of Martyrs: Perpetua and the Palestinians". *Religion im kulturellen Diskurs / Religion in Cultural Discourse: Festschrift für Hans G. Kippenberg zu seinem 65. Geburtstag / Essays in Honor of Hans G. Kippenberg on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, edited by Brigitte Luchesi and Kocku von Stuckrad, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, pp. 535-554.

- (2012). "Felicitas: The Martyrdom of a Young African Woman" in Bremmer, J. and Formisano, M. (eds.). *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2021). "Roman Judge vs. Christian Bishop: the Trial of Phileas During the Great Persecution" in Maier, H.O. and Waldner, K. (eds.). *Desiring Martyrs: Locating Martyrs in Space and Time*. Munich: De Gruyter.

Brine, K. R. (2010) "The Judith Project" in Brine, K.R., Ciletti, E. & Lähnemann, H. (eds.). *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*. New edition [online]. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers. pp.3-22.
Brown, P. (1971). "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity", *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 61, pp.80-101.

- (1981). *The cult of the saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (1988). *Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Burgess, R.W. and Kulikowski, M. (2013). *Mosaics of Time: The Latin Chronicle Traditions from the First Century BC to the Sixth Century AD*. Turnhout: Brepols.
Burnett McInerney, M. (2003). *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Burns, J.P. and Jensen, R. (2014). *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Burrus, V. (2008). *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Butler, R. D. (2006). *The New Prophecy and "New Visions": evidence of Montanism in The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*. Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press.
Cameron, A. (1991). *Christianity and the rhetoric of empire: the development of Christian discourse*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Carroll, M. (2014). "Mother and infant in Roman funerary commemoration" in Carroll, M. and Graham, E.-J. (eds.). *Infant Health and Death in Roman Italy and Beyond*. Portsmouth R I: Journal of Roman Archaeology supplementary series, no. 96.
- (2018). *Infancy and Earliest Childhood in the Roman World: 'A Fragment of Time'*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carvalho, C.L. (2016). "Judith" in Yee, G.A. and Page, H.R. (eds.). *Apocrypha: Fortress Commentary on the Bible Study Edition*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.
Castelli, E. (1991). '"I Will Make Mary Male": Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity" in Epstein, J. and Straub, K. (eds.). *Body Guards: The cultural politics of gender ambiguity*. London: Routledge.
- (2004). *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Chapuis Sandoz, L. (2004). "Les seins des saintes : l'intimité profanée", *Études de lettres*, 1-2, Lausanne, pp. 147-164.
- (2008). "Cachez ce sein…', ou comment dire le corps des saintes dans le récit hagiographique" in Dasen, V. and Wilgaux, J. (eds.). *Langages et métaphores du corps dans le monde antique*. Rennes: Rennes University Press.

Chew, K. (2003). "The Representation of Violence in the Greek Novels and Martyr Accounts" in Panayotakis, S., Zimmerman, M., & Keulen, W. (eds.). *The Ancient Novel and Beyond.* Leiden: Brill. pp.129-141.
Christern, J. (1976). *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa. Architektur und Ornamentik einer spätantiken Bauhütte in Nordafrika*. Franz Steiner.
Christenson, D.M. (2014). "A Roman Treasure: Marriage, Metatheatre and Concord in Aulularia", Perysinakis, I.N. and Karakasis, E. (eds.). *Plautine Trends: Studies in Plautine Comedy and its Reception*, Berlin, München, Boston: De Gruyter, pp.13-42.
Clark, E.A. (1998). "Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the "Linguistic Turn", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol.6, No.3, pp.413-430.
Clarke, J. (2021). "Female pain in Prudentius' *Peristephanon*". *The Classical Quarterly*, 71(1), pp. 386-401.
Cobb, L.S. (2008). *Dying to be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- (2017). *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- (2019). "Suicide by Gladiator? The Acts of Perpetua and Felicitas in its North African Context", *Church History*, 88:3 (September 2019), pp.597–628.
- (2021). *The* Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas *in Late Antiquity*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Conant, J. (2012). *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean 439-700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Conant, J. and Stevens, S.T. (2016). *North Africa under Byzantium and Early Islam*. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks.
Conermann, S. and Rheingans, J. (eds.). (2014). *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing: Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe*. Studien des Bonner Zentrums für Transkulturelle Narratologie (BZTN), Vol. 7. Berlin: Ebverlag.
Coon, L.L. (1997). *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Cook, D. (2007). *Martyrdom in Islam.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Cooper, K. (1999). *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity.* Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

- (2007). *The Fall of the Roman Household*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2011). "A Father, a Daughter, and a Procurator: Authority and Resistance in the Prison Memoir of Perpetua of Carthage", *Gender & History*, Vol. 23, No. 3 pp. 685–702.

Corke-Webster, J. (2019). *Eusebius and Empire: Constructing Church and Rome in the* Ecclesiastical History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Corke-Webster, J. and Gray, C. (2020). "Introduction" in Corke-Webster, J. and Gray, C. (eds.). *The Hagiographical Experiment: Developing Discourses on Sainthood*. Leiden: Brill.

Courtil, J. (2014). "Torture in Seneca's Philosophical Works: Between Justification and Condemnation" in Wildberger, J. & Colish, M.L. (eds.). *Seneca Philosophus*. De Gruyter. pp.189-208.

Cox Miller, P. (1992). "The Devil's Gateway: An eros of difference in the dreams of Perpetua", *Dreaming*, *2*(1), pp. 45–63.

- (2003). "Is There a Harlot in this Text? Hagiography and the Grotesque", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* 33 (3) pp.87-102.

Dabiri, G. (ed.). (2021). *Narrating Power and Authority in Late Antique and Medieval Hagiography across East and West*. Turnhout: Brepols.

Dann, M. (2017). "Between History and Hagiography: The Mothers of the Imams in Imami Historical Memory" in Gordon, M.S. and Hain, K.A. (eds.). *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davies, J.P. (2019). "Whose Dream is it Anyway? Navigating the Significance of Dreams in the Ancient World" in Driediger-Murphey, L.G. and Eidenow, E. *Ancient Divination and Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp.87-108.

Davies, S.J. (2001). *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

de Bruyn, T. (2017). *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dearn, A. (2016). "Donatist Martyrs, Stories and Attitudes" in Miles, R. (ed.). *The Donatist Schism: Controversy and Contexts.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Decret, F. translated by Smither E. (2011). *Early Christianity in North Africa*. Cambridge: James Clarke Co.

Delehaye, H. (1922). *The Works of the Bollandists through Three Centuries, 1615-1915.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

DeSoucey, M., Pozner, J.-E., Fields, C., Dobransky, K., Fine, G.A. (2008). "Memory and Sacrifice: An Embodied Theory of Martyrdom", *Sage Publications*, Volume 2(1): 99–121.

De Tennerman, K. (2014). *Crafting Characters: Heroes and Heroines in the Ancient Greek Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dixon, S. (1988). *The Roman Mother.* London: Croom Helm.

Dugan, J. (2005). *Making a New Man: Ciceronian Self-Fashioning in the Rhetorical Works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dunn, S. (2010). "The Female Martyr and the Politics of Death: An Examination of the Martyr Discourses of Perpetua and Wafa Idris.", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (March, 2010) pp. 202-225.

Dunsch, B. (2014). "Prologue(s) and *Prologi*", in Fontaine, M. and Scafuro, A.C. (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dusenbury, D.L. (2021). *The Innocence of Pontius Pilate: How the Roman Trial of Jesus Shaped History*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Dutsch, D. (2008). *Feminine Discourse in Roman Comedy: On Echoes and Voices*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- (2019). "Mothers and Whores" in Dinter, M.T. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Duval, Y. (1982). *Loca Sanctorum Africae: Les cultes des martyrs en Afrique du IVe au VIIe siècle*. Ecole francaise de Rome.

Eastman, D.L. (2011). *Paul the Martyr: The Cult of the Apostle in the Latin West*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.
Edwards, C. (1997). "Three Unspeakable Professions: Public Performance and Prostitution in Ancient Rome" in Hallett, J.P. and Skinner, M.B. (eds.). *Roman Sexualities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- (2007). *Death in Ancient Rome*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

El Cheikh, N.M. (2020). "Violence against women in the Early Islamic Period" in Gordan, M., Kaeuper, R. and Zurndorfer, H. (eds.). *The Cambridge World History of Violence, Volume 3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Elliott, J.K. 2009. *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M. R. James.* Oxford: Clarendon.
Fenwick, C. (2019). "The Arab Conquests and the End of Ancient Africa?" in Hitchner, R.B. (ed.). *A Companion to North Africa in Antiquity*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- (2020). *Early Islamic North Africa: A New Perspective*. London: Bloomsbury.

Février, P.-A. (1968). "Nouvelles recherches dans la salle tréflée de la basilique de Tébessa", *Bulletin d'archéologie algérienne*, 3.
Fialon, S. (2013). "l'impregnation virgilienne dans l'imaginaire marin de deux passions africains: la Passio sanctae Salsae et la Passio sancti Fabii", *Latomus*, 72, pp.208-220.
- (2018). *Mens immobilis : recherches sur le corpus latin des actes et des passions d'Afrique romaine (IIe-VIe siècles)*. Institut d'études augustiniennes.

Fialon, S. and Meyers, J. (2015). (eds.). *La Passio sanctae Salsae (BHL 7467). Recherches sur une passion tardive d'Afrique du Nord avec une nouvelle édition critique de A.M. Piredda et une traduction annotée du GRAA* (15-26). Ausonius.
Flower, R. (2019). "Witnesses for the Persecution: Textual Communities of Exile under Constantius II", *Studies in Late Antiquity*, Vol.3, No.3, pp.337-368.
Fournier, E. (2019). "'To Collect Gold from Hidden Caves' Victor of Vita and the Vandal 'persecution' of heretical barbarians in late antique North Africa" in Fournier, E. and Mayer, W. (eds.). *Heirs of Roman Persecution: Studies on a Christian and Para-Christian Discourse in Late Antiquity*. Abingdon: Routledge.
Frank, G. (2000). *The memory of the eyes: pilgrims to living saints in Christian late antiquity.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
Frend, W.H.C. (1965). *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church, a study of a conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Fromherz, A.J. (2016). *The Near West: Medieval North Africa, Latin Europe and the Mediterranean in the Second Axial Age*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Fruchtman, D. (2023). *Living Martyrs in Late Antiquity and Beyond*. Abingdon: Routledge.
Gaddis, M. (2005). *There is no Crime for Those who have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Gaiser, A. (2010). *Muslims, Scholars, Soldiers: The Origin and Elaboration of the Ibadi Imamate Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2016). *Shurat Legends, Ibadi Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism and the Making of an Early Islamic Community*. Colombia SC: University of South Carolina Press.

Gallia, A.B. (2015). "Vestal Virgins and their Families", *Classical Antiquity*, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp.74-120.
Gardner, G. and Osterloh, K.L. (2008). *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
Geissinger, A. (2004). "The Exegetical Traditions of ʿĀʾisha: Notes on their Impact and Significance", *Journal of Qur'ranic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp.1-20.
Gerbrandy, P. (2022) "Claudian's De raptu Proserpinae: Grief, Guilt, and Rage of a Bereaved Mother" in *Emotions and Narratives in Ancient Literature and Beyond* (eds. Bakker, van der Berg, Klooster), pp.667-681.
Gleave, R. & Kristo-Nagy, I.T. (2015). *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Qur'an to the Mongols.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Gold, B. (2018). *Perpetua: Athlete of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Graybill, R. (2016). *Are We Not Men?: Unstable Masculinity in the Hebrew Prophets*. Oxford University Press.
Greeley, J.A. (2017). "Models of Devotion?: The Rhetoric of Ambivalence and Admonition in Late Antique and Early Christian Discourse on Women and Motherhood" in Cooper, D. and Phelan, C. (eds.). *Motherhood in Antiquity*. Palgrave Macmillan.
Grig, L. (2004). *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*. London: Duckworth.
Gsell, S. (1893). *Recherches archéologiques en Algérie*. Paris: Leroux.
Gui, I., Duval, N. & Caillet, J.-P. (1992). *Basiliques chretiennes d'Afrique du Nord, 1: Inventaire d'Algerie*. Collection des Etudes augustiniennes serie Antiquite 129.
Gunderson, E. (1996) "The Ideology of the Arena", *Classical Antiquity*, Vol. 15, No.1, pp.113-151.
Hagemann, H. (2021). *The Kharijites in Early Islamic Historical Tradition: Heroes and Villains*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
Haider, N. (2011). *The Origins of the Shi'a: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kufa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2019). *The Rebel and the Imam in Early Islam: Explorations in Muslim Histography*. Cambridge University Press.

Hallett, J. (1984). *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Haines-Eitzen, K. (2011). *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing and Representation in Early Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hamdoune, C. and Chalon, M. (2015). "Salsa et le dragon: fondements historiques et reconstruction hagiographique" in. Fialon, S. and Meyers, J. (eds.). *La Passio sanctae Salsae (BHL 7467). Recherches sur une passion tardive d'Afrique du Nord avec une nouvelle édition critique de A.M. Piredda et une traduction annotée du GRAA* (15-26), Ausonius.
Harker, A. (2008). *Loyalty and Dissidence in Roman Egypt: The Case of the Acta Alexandrinorum.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Harmless, W.S.J. (2004). *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Harries, B. (2007). "Acting the Part: techniques of the comic stage in Cicero's early speeches" in Booth, J. (ed.). *Cicero on the Attack: invective and subversion in the orations and beyond*. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales.
Harries, J. (1999). "Constructing the Judge: Judicial Accountability and the Culture of Criticism in Late Antiquity" in Miles, R. (ed.). *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*. London: Routledge.
Hatina, M. (2014). *Martyrdom in Modern Islam: Piety, Power, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hefferman, T.J. (1995). "Philology and Authorship in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*" *Traditio*, Vol.50, pp.315-325.
- (2012a). *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2012b) "Gender and Sources of Authority in St. Augustine's Sermons on Perpetua and Felicity" in Ott, J.S. and Vedriš, T. (eds.). *Saintly Bishops and Bishops' Saints*. Hagiotheca.

Hillner, J., McCarron, M. and Vihervalli, U. (2022). "The Politics of Female Namelessness between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages", *Journal of Late Antiquity*, vol. 15 no. 2, pp. 367-401.
Hilton, J. (2019). "The Role of Gender and Sexuality in the Enslavement and Liberation of Female Slaves in the Ancient Greek Romances" in Panayotakis, S., and Paschalis, M. (eds.). *Slaves and Masters in the Ancient Novel*. Barkhuis. pp.1-18.
Hughes, J. (1998). "Invective and Comedic Allusion: Cicero, 'In Pisonem', fragment 9 (Nisbert)", *Latomus*, 57, 3, pp.570-7.
Humfress, C. (2007). *Orthodoxy and the Courts in Late Antiquity*. Oxford University Press.
Hutson, C.R. (2014). '"Saved through Childbearing": The Jewish Context of 1 Timothy 2:15', *Novum Testamentum*, 56 (4), pp.392-410.

Ihnat, K. (2019). "The Martyrs of Cordoba: Debates around a curious case of medieval martyrdom", *History Compass*, 18 (1).
Johnston, S. I. (1999). *Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, D. (2009). *Christian Memories of the Maccabean Martyrs*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Junior, N. (2019). *Reimagining Hagar: Blackness and Bible*. Biblical Refigurations. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Kaegi, W. (2010). *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Kelly, C. (2015). "Narratives of Violence: Confronting Pagans" in Papaconstantinou, A.,
King, H. (2013). *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence*. London: Routledge.
Kitzler, P. (2007). *"Passio Perpetuae* and *Acta Perpetuae*: Between Tradition and Innovation", *Listy filogické*, 130, pp.1-19.

- (2015). *From 'Passio Perpetuae' to 'Acta Perpetuae' Recontextualizing a Martyr Story in the Literature of the Early Church*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Kohlberg, E. 'Shahīd'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, P.J. Bearman (Volumes X, XI, XII), Th. Bianquis (Volumes X, XI, XII), et al. [Accessed: Wednesday 3 May 2023 at doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1025.].
Kozlowski, J.M. (2020). "'And she took off her clothes…'. Agathoice's Nudity in *Acta Carpi* 44", *Vigilae Christianae* 74, pp.121-128.
Kraemer, R.S. (2010). *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Kristensen, T.M. (2013). *Making and Breaking the Gods: Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Late Antiquity*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.
Kueny, K. (2013). *Conceiving identities: maternity in medieval Muslim discourse and practice*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.
Laes, C., and Strubbe, J. (2014). *Youth in the Roman Empire: The Young and the Restless Years?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Langlands, R. (2018). *Exemplary Ethics in Ancient Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lapidge, M. (2018). *The Roman Martyrs: Introduction, Translations, and Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Lassère, J-M (2015). "Tipasa et Salsa" in. Fialon, S. and Meyers, J. (eds.). *La Passio sanctae Salsae (BHL 7467). Recherches sur une passion tardive d'Afrique du Nord avec une nouvelle édition critique de A.M. Piredda et une traduction annotée du GRAA* (15-26), Ausonius.
Leitao, D.D. (2012). *The Pregnant Male as Myth and Metaphor in Classical Greek Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Leone, A. (2021). *Urban Decor and Public Spaces in Late Antique North Africa*. Casa de Velázquez.
Lewinstein, K. (2001). "The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam" in Cormack, M. (ed.). *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Lewis, C.T. (1891). *An Elementary Latin Dictionary*. Oxford University Press. This impression 1993.
Limelin, I. (2022). *The Origin of Women Martyrs: The Mother of 2 Maccabees 7*. Turnhout: Brepols.
Loraux, N. translated by Forster, A. (1987). *Tragic ways of killing a woman*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Lowe, N. J. (2000). *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lugaresi, L. (2017). "Rhetoric against the Theatre and Theatre by Means of Rhetoric in John Chrysostom" in Quiroga Puertas, A.J. (ed.). *Rhetorical Strategies in Late Antique Literature.* Leiden: Brill. pp.117-148.

Marcos, M. (2015). "Religious Violence and Hagiography in Late Antiquity", *Numen,* Vol.62, No.2/3, pp.169-196.
Markschies, C. (2012). “The *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* and Montanism?” in Bremmer, J. and Formisano, M. (eds.). *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Maier, J-L. (1987-9). *Le dossier du donatisme,* 2 vols. Berlin.
Maurice, L. (2013). "*Contaminatio* and Adaptation: The Modern Reception of Ancient Drama as an Aid to Understanding Roman Comedy", *Oxford Journals, Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement*, No.126, pp.445-65.
Mayer, W. and Neil, B. (2006). *St John Chrysostom: The Cult of the Saints*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006)
Mayer, Wendy. (2006). *The Cult of the Saints: Select Homilies and Letters.* United States: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
McAuley, M. (2015). *Reproducing Rome: Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
McCarthy, K. (2016). "Prologues Between Performance and Fiction" in Frangoulidis, S., Harrison, S.J. and Manuwald, G. (eds.). *Roman Drama and its Contexts*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
McNamara, P. and Bulkeley, K. (2015). “Dreams as a source of supernatural agent concepts”, *Front. Psychol. 6:283.*
Mena, P. (2019). *Place and Identity in the Lives of Anthony, Paul and Mary of Egypt*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
Ménard, H. (2011). "Discours de la violence, violence du discours : réalités et stéréotypes dans la Passion de sainte Salsa de Tipasa.". halshs-00807045.
Merrills, A.H. (2010). "totum subuertere uoluerunt: 'social martyrdom' in the Historia persecutionis of Victor of Vita" in Kelly, C., Flower, R. and Stuart Williams, M. (eds.). *Unclassical Traditions. Volume II: Perspectives from East and West in Late Antiquity. Cambridge Classical Journal, Supplemental Volume 35*.
Merrills, A.H. and Miles, R. (2009). *The Vandals.* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
Middleton, P. (2013). “Early Christian Voluntary Martyrdom: A Statement for the Defence”, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, Vol. 64, Pt. 2, pp.556-73.
- (2015). “Noble Death or Death Cult? Pagan Criticism of Early Christian Martyrdom” in Labahn, M. and Lehtipuu, O. (eds.). *People under Power: Early Jewish and Christian Responses to the Roman Power Empire*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Milco, K.E. (2015). “Mulieres viriliter vincentes: Masculine and Feminine Imagery in Augustine’s Sermons on Sts. Perpetua and Felicity”, *Vigilae Christianae* (Brill) 69, pp.276-295.
Mkacher, A. and Benabbès, M. (2020). *La Conquête Arabe de L'Afrique Romaine: Anthologie bilingue de textes arabes*. Hermann.
Monaco Caterine, M.A. (2019). “Tyrannical Men and Virtuous Women in Plutarch's Mulierum Virtutes”, *Illinois Classica Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1, pp.194-208.
Moss, C. (2010). “On the Dating of Polycarp: Rethinking the Place of the Martyrdom of Polycarp in the History of Christianity”, *Early Christianity* 1: 4 pp. 539-574.
- (2012). “The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern”, *Church History*, 81: 3, pp.531-551.
- (2013). *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom*. New York: HarperCollins.
- (2016). "Martyr Veneration in Late Antique North Africa" in Miles, R. (ed.). *The Donatist Schism: Controversy and Contexts.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Myers, A. (2017). *Blessed Among Women? Mothers and Motherhood in the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Myrne, P. (2019). *Female Sexuality in the early medieval Islamic world: gender and sex in Arabic literature*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Nelson, B. (2016). "A Mother's Martyrdom: Elite Christian Motherhood and the Martyrdom of Domnina", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 32(2): pp.11-26.
Ogden, D. (2021). *The Dragon in the West: From Ancient Myth to Modern Legend*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
O'Loughlin, T. (2018). "The Latin West in the Period of Transition from "the Late Roman Empire" to "Early Medieval Europe": Consolidation and Innovation" in Lossl, J. & Baker-Brian, N. (eds.). *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*. John Wiley and Sons. pp.81-97.
Owen, E.C.E. (1927). *Some authentic acts of the early martyrs / translated with notes and introductions*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
Packman, Z.M. (1999). "Feminine Role Designations in the Comedies of Plautus", *American Journal of Philology*, Vol.120, No.2, pp.245-256.
Panayotakis, C. (1997). "Baptism and crucifixion on the mimic stage", *Mnemosyne*, Vol. 3, Issue 3, pp.302-19.
Papaconstantinou, A. (2012). "Saints and Saracens: On Some Miracle Accounts of the Early Arab Period" in Sullivan, D., Fisher, E. & Papaioannou, S. (eds.). *Byzantine Religious Culture: Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*. Leiden: Brill. pp.323-343.
Papaconstantinou, A., McLynn, N. and Schwartz, D.L. (eds.). *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
Patzelt, M. (2021). *Prayer and the Ancient City: Influences of Urban Space*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
Pesthy-Simon, M. (2017). "Imatio Christi? Literary Models for Martyrs in Early Christianity" in Saghy, M. and Schoolman, E.M. (eds.). *Pagans and Christians in the Late Roman Empire: New Evidence, New Approaches (4th to 8th centuries)*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
Pfisterer Darr, K. (1987). "Like Warrior, like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42:10-17", *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 4, pp.560-71.
Pieczonka, J. (2016). "Family Relations of Stock Characters in Atellan Farce – a Few Remarks on the Influence of Palliata on Atellana", *Graeco-Latina Brunensia*, 21, 2, pp.229-246.
Pierce, K. (1997). "The portrayal of rape in New Comedy", in Deacy, S. and Pierce, K. (eds.), *Rape in Antiquity*. London: Classical Press of Wales. pp.163-94.
Pingoud, J. (2016). "Le théâtre dans les *Petites declamations*" in Casamento, A., van Mal-Maeder, D. and Pasetti, L. (eds.). *Le "Declamazioni Minori" dello Pseudo-Quintillian*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
Pintabone, D.T. (2002). "Ovid's Iphis and Ianthe: When Girls won't be Girls" in Sorkin Rabinowitz, N. and Auanger, L. (eds.). *Among Women: From the Homosocial to the Homoerotic in the Ancient World*. Austin: University of Texas Press. pp.256-83.
Piredda, A.M.G. (2002). *Passio Sanctae Salsae: testo critico con introduzione e traduzione italiana.* (Quaderni di Sandalion, 10). Sassari: Edizioni Gallizzi.

- (2007). *Passio Sancti Fabii: testo critico con introduzione e traduzione italiana.* (Quaderni di Sandalion, 13). Sassari, Edizioni Gallizzi.
- (2015). "Les monologues de sainte Salsa" in Fialon, S. & Meyers, J. (eds.). *La Passio sanctae Salsae (BHL 7467) : Recherches sur une passion tardive d'Afrique du Nord*. Ausonius.

Pohl, W. (2018). "Disputed Identifications: Jews and the Use of Biblical Models in the Barbarian Kingdoms" in Hen, Y. and Noble, T.F.X. (eds.). *Barbarians and Jews: Jews and Judaism in the Early Medieval West*. Turnhout: Brepols.
Polt, C.B. (2021). *Catullus and Roman Comedy: Theatricality and Roman Drama in the Late Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Potthoff, S.E. (2017). *The Afterlife in Early Christian Carthage: Near-Death Experience, Ancestor Cult, and the Archaeology of Paradise*. London: Routledge.
Prevost, V. (2007). "Les dernières communautés chrétiennes autochtones d'Afrique du Nord", *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, Vol. 224, No.4, pp.461-83.

- (2012). "Des églises byzantines converties à l'islam? Quelques mosquées ibadites du djebel Nafûsa (Libye)", *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, Vol. 229, No.3, pp.325-47.

Pyy, E. (2021). “Maternal absence and heroic identity in Virgil’s Aeneid” in Huebner, S.R. and Ratzan, D.M. (eds.). *Missing Mothers: Maternal Absence in Antiquity*, vol. 22. Leuven: Peeters Publishers. pp.187–208.
Qutbuddin, T. (2019a). *Arabic Oration: Art and Function*. Leiden: Brill.

- (2019b). "Orations of Zaynab and Umm Kulthum in the Aftermath of Husayn's Martyrdom at Karbala: Speaking Truth to Power" in Korangy, A. and Rouhi, L. (eds.). *The 'Other' Martyrs: Women and the Poetics of Sexuality, Sacrifice, and Death in World Literatures*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Radice, B. (1963). *The letters of the younger Pliny.* London: Penguin.
Rajak, T. (2014). "The Maccabean Mother Between Pagans, Jews, and Christians" in Harrison, C., Humfress, C. and Sandwell, I. (eds.). *Being Christian in Late Antiquity: A Festschrift for Gillian Clark*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Raven, S. (1993). *Rome in Africa*. London: Routledge.
Rebillard, E. translated by Trapnell Rawlings, E. and Routier-Pucci., J. (2009). *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.

- (2017). *Greek and Latin Narratives about the Ancient Martyrs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2020). *The Early Martyr Narratives: Neither Authentic Accounts nor Forgeries*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Renard, J. (2020). *Crossing Confessional Boundaries: Exemplary Lives in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions*. Oakland: University of California Press.
Richlin, A. (1991). *Pornography and representation in Greece and Rome*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Riggs, D. (2020). "Scripture in Martyr Acta and Passiones" in Yates, J. and Dupont, A. (eds.). *Volume 1 The Bible in Christian North Africa: Part I: Commencement to the Confessiones of Augustine (ca. 180 to 400 CE)*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
Rives, J. (1996). "The Piety of a Persecutor", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol.4, No.1, pp.1-25.
Robert, L. (1982). “Une vision de Perpétue martyre à Carthage en 203”, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, *126e année,* N. 2, pp.228-276.
Robinson, C.F. (2003). *Islamic Historiography.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Roded, R. (2018). *Women in Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sa'd to Who's Who*. Piscataway: Gorgias Press LLC.
Ronsse, E. (2006). "Rhetoric of Martyrs: Listening to Saints Perpetua and Felicitas", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol.14, No.3, pp.283-327.
Ryder, K.C. (1984). “The Senex *Amator* in Plautus”, *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 32, No.2, pp.181-9.
Sahner, C. (2018). *Christian Martyrs Under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Savage, E. (1997). *A Gateway to Hell, a Gateway to Paradise: the North African Response to the Arab Conquest*. Berlin: Gerlach Press.
Sears, G. (2016). "A Catholic Stronghold? Religious and Ethnic Identities at Tipasa" in Mugnai, N., Nikolaus, J. and Ray, N. (eds.). *De Africa Romaque: Merging Cultures across North Africa: proceedings of the international conference held at the University of Leicester (26-27 October 2013).* London: Society of Libyan Studies.
Segal, E. (2006). *Classical Comedy*. London: Penguin.

- (2015). "A Funny Thing Happened on My Way to Sodom", *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period*, pp.103-129.

Shaw, B. (1993) “The Passion of Perpetua”, *Past & Present*, No. 139, pp.3-45.

- (1996). "Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol.4, No.3, pp.269-312.
- (2011). *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Violence in the Age of Augustine,* 587-629. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2020). “Doing it in Greek: Translating Perpetua”, *Studies in Late Antiquity*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp.309-345.

Shehata, A. (2022). “Martyrdom in Early Islam: The Role of Martyrs' Mothers” in *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies*”, Vol. 02, Issue 01, pp.228-34.

Sizgorich, T. (2009). *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Snyder, Jane M. (1989). *The Woman and the Lyre: Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
Solevåg, A.R. (2013). *Birthing Salvation: Gender and Class in Early Christian Childbearing Discourse*. Leiden: Brill (Biblical Interpretation Series).
Souter, A. (1949). *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.* Oxford University Press.
Sowers, B. (2015). "Pudor et Dedecus : Rhetoric of Honor and Shame in Perpetua's Passion", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol.23, No.3, pp.363-388.
Spellberg, D.A. (1996). "Writing the Unwritten Life of the Islamic Eve: Menstruation and the Demonization of Motherhood", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.28, No.3, pp.305-324.
Spencer, P. (2017). "'Mad Rhoda' in Acts 12: 12-17: Disciple Exemplar", *The Catholic Bible Quarterly*, Vol.79, No.2, pp.282-298.
Steele, C. (2007). "Name and shame? Invective against Clodius and others in the post-exile speeches" in Booth, J. (ed.). *Cicero on the Attack: invective and subversion in the orations and beyond*. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales.
Stehlíková, E. (1993). "Drama in Late Antiquity", *Folia philologica*, Vol. 116, No. 1, pp.1-9.
Stowasser, B. (1997). *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Streete, G.P.C. (2009). *Redeemed Bodies: Women Martyrs in Early Christianity*. Westminster John Knox.

- (2018). "Performing Christian Martyrdoms" in Kitts, M. (ed.). *Martyrdom, Self-Sacrifice, and Self-Immolation: Religious Perspectives on Suicide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strong, A.K. (2012). "Working Girls: Mother-Daughter Bonds among Ancient Prostitutes" in Hackworth Petersen, L. and Salzman-Mitchell, P.B. (eds.). *Mothering and Motherhood in ancient Greece and Rome*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Tilley, M.A. (1990). "Scripture as an Element of Social Control: Two Martyr Stories of Christian North Africa", *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol.83, No.4, pp.383-397.

- (1997a). *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in North Africa*. Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press.
- (1997b). *The Bible in Christian North Africa: the Donatist world*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- (2000). "The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity" in Valantasis, R. (ed.). *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Toral-Niehoff, I. and Muñoz, A.L. (2019). "Ornament of the World: Urban Change in Early Islamic Qurṭuba" in Panzram, S. (ed.). *The Power of Cities*. Leiden: Brill.
Trites, A.A. (1977). *The New Testament concept of witness*. Cambridge University Press.
Undheim, S. (2017). *Borderline Virginities: Sacred and Secular Virgins in Late Antiquity*. London: Routledge.
Urban, E. (2017). "Hagar and Mariya: Early Islamic Models of Slave Motherhood" in Gordon, M.S. and Hain, K.A. (eds.). *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- (2020). *Conquered Populations in Early Islam: Non-Arabs, Slaves and the Sons of Slave Mothers*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Usherwood, R. (2022). "Where Are the Names of the Iovii and Herculii? Exploring Christian Responses to Tetrarchic Material Culture", *Journal of Late Antiquity*, Vol. 15, No.2, pp.402-427.
Valérian, D. (2011). "La permanence du christianisme au Maghreb: L'apport problématique des sources latines." Islamisation et arabisation de l'occident musulman médiéval (VIIe-XIIe siècle)" in Valérian, D. (ed.). *Islamisation et arabisation de l'Occident musulman médiéval (viie-xiie siècle)*. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne.
Vanderputten, S. (2018). *Dark Age Nunneries: the ambiguous identity of female monasticism, 800-1050*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Van Pelt, J. (2022). "Thecla, the First Cross-Dresser? The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the Lives of Byzantine Transvestite Saints" in Dabiri, G. and Ruani, F. (eds.). *Thecla and Medieval*

Sainthood: The Acts of Paul and Thecla *in Eastern and Western Hagiography*. Cambridge University Press. pp.197-232.
Vuolanto, V. (2015). *Children and Asceticism in Late Antiquity: Continuity, Family Dynamics, and the Rise of Christianity*. Burlington: Ashgate.
Waldner, K. (2012). "Visions, Prophecy and Authority in the *Passio Perpetuae*" in Bremmer, J. and Formisano, M. (eds.). *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp.201-219.
Walsch, R.F. (2021). *The Origins of Early Christian Literature: Contextualizing the New Testament within Greco-Roman Literary Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Warwick, C. (2018). "Christian Martyr as Homeric Hero: A Literary Allusion in Perpetua's *Passio*", *Classical Journal*, Vol.114, No.1, pp.86-109.
Webb, R. (2008). *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

- (2017). "Mime and the Dangers of Laughter in Late Antiquity" in Alexiou, M. and Cairns, D. (eds.). *Greek Laughter and Tears: Antiquity and After*. Edinburgh University Press. pp.219-231.

Whelan, R. (2018). *Being Christian in Vandal Africa: The Politics of Orthodoxy in the Post-Imperial West*. Oakland: University of California Press.
Whitmarsh, T. (2013). "An I for an I: reading fictional autobiography" in Marmadoro, A. and Hill, J. (eds.). *The Author's Voice in Classical and Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Williams, C. (2012). "Perpetua's Gender. A Latinist reads the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*" in Bremmer, J. and Formisano, M. (eds.). *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Willem van Henten, J. (2012). "Noble Death and Martyrdom in Antiquity" in Fuhrmann, S. and Grundmann, R. (eds.). *Martyriumsvorstellungen in Antike und Mittelalter*. Leiden: Brill.
Wiśniewski, R. (2018). *The Beginning of the Cult of Relics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Witschel, C. (2013). *The Public Presence of Women in the Cities of Roman North Africa. Two Case Studies: Thamugadi and Cuicul*. Leiden: Brill
Wood, J. (2015). "Persecution, Past and Present: Memorialising Martyrdom in Late Antique and Early Medieval Córdoba", *Al-Masaq*, 27:1, pp.41-60.
Woods, D. (2003). "Saint Maximillian of Tebessa and the Jizya" in Defosse, P. (ed.). *Hommages à Carl Deroux: Christianisme et Moyen Âge, Néo latin et survivance de la latinité*. Latomus.
Yasin, A.M. (2009). *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult and Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- (2017). "The pilgrim and the arch: Paths and passageways at Qal'at Sem'an, Sinai, Abu Mena, and Tebessa" in Kristensen, T.M. and Friese, W. (eds.). *Excavating Pilgrimage: Archaeological Approaches to Sacred Travel and Movement in the Ancient World*. London: Routledge.

Yildrim, R. (2015). "In the Name of Hosayn's Blood: The Memory of Karbala as Ideological Stimulus to the Safavid Revolution", *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 8, pp.127-154.