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PERPETUA'S ASCENT: POPULAR CHRISTIANITY AND THE AFTERLIFE IN NORTH AFRICA

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The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* provides evidence of popular North African Christianity having more affinity with Jewish/ Christian apocalyptic literature than with the teachings of the early church fathers. This paper identifies the *Passion of Perpetua* as the earliest datable Christian text describing immediate post-mortem ascent. Affinities between the visions described in the *Passion of Perpetua* and in other Jewish/Christian apocalyptic works, as well as points of difference, will be examined, particularly in terms of understanding of the afterlife. This text therefore provides a better understanding of the nature of Christianity at the beginning of the third century. More specifically, this study highlights the key mechanisms by which the Christian communities embraced the idea of immediate post-mortem ascent of believers.

Key words: Passion of Perpetua, ascent, afterlife

1. The Significance of the Function of Perpetua

The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is significant in the history of early Christianity for several reasons. One that has not previously been recognized is likely the earliest *description* of an immediate post-mortem ascent of the *soul* to heaven. In a broader sense, it is one of the first Christian texts that clearly articulates the popular understanding of the afterlife common during that time period, apparently preceding the acceptance of this notion into more formal Christian thought. This paper not only identifies the *Passion of Perpetua* as the earliest reasonably datable Christian text to describe the immediate post-mortem ascent, but also argues that this understanding of the soul to heaven comes from the Graeco-Roman *topos*. Thus this text reveals a great deal about the nature of the Christianity during which it was produced.

The visions of Perpetua and Saturus are visions of the ascent of the *soul* to heaven. The eminent scholar of Graeco-Roman and early Christian religion, Jan N. Bremmer observes that "our martyrs expect to go straight to heaven after their execution."[1] The deaths of these martyrs are described in Platonic terms including separation of body and soul. Saturus writes:

> *Passi, inquit, eramus, et exiuimus de carne…*
>
> "We had suffered," says he, "and we were gone forth from the flesh…"[2]

There appears to have been an early tradition, reflected in *1 Clement*[3] and in Polycarp,[4] that all martyrs were transferred into the presence of God immediately after their death. Tertullian, a contemporary of Perpetua, held precisely the same view.[5] The martyrs were *exceptions* because they were perfected through suffering. By being exceptions, they demonstrated the validity of the general rule (for which the apostolic and earlier fathers argued) that *all of the other* righteous dead had to wait for the general resurrection before ascending to heaven and enjoying the presence of God.[6] No one except the martyrs came immediately at death into the Lord's presence in heaven.[7]

In describing the martyrs as coming into the presence of God at death, the *Passion of Perpetua* furthermore uses concepts and descriptions of ascent after death for which there were earlier Jewish and Graeco-Roman models.[8] However, what makes the *Passion of Perpetua* stand out is that it

1 Jan N. Bremmer, "The Motivation of Martyrs: Perpetua and the Palestinians," in *Religion im kulturellen Diskurs: Festschrift für Hans G. Kippenberg zu seinem 65 Geburtstag* (ed. B. Luchesi and K. von Stuckrad; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 548.

2 *Perpetua* 11.2, "The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas," in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (trans. by H. Musurillo; London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 4.1, 119.

3 *1 Clement* 5:4, 7; 6:2.

4 Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians* 9.2.

5 See J. B. Russell, *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 69.

6 See, however, the comments by Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 123–124, 133.

7 Russell, *Heaven*, 67–68.

8 In the Graeco-Roman tradition, see Plato's tale of Er in the tenth book of the *Republic*; the *Somnium Scipionis* in Cicero's *De re publica* 6.9–29; Plutarch's *De sera numinis vindicta* 22–31 (*Moralia* VII.44) and *De genio Socratis* 21–22. Within the Jewish tradition, see the Enochic literature generally, and more specifically to post-mortem ascent, *The Life of Adam and Eve*, and the *Testament of Abraham*.

assumes that the righteous Christians who had died previously also made the same journey of ascent. This is evident in Saturus' vision, in which there are many others who are not martyrs in heaven. Clearly, this is not a reference to an intermediate state, since these others are found at the end of the ascent. In fact, the martyrs themselves seem to be the minority, mentioned apparently as an afterthought:

> *Et coepimus illic multos fratres cognoscere, sed et martyras.*
>
> But then we began to recognize many brothers and sisters, even some martyrs.[9]

2. Popular Carthaginian Christianity

It is difficult to ascertain the popularity of the *Passion of Perpetua*. If the *Passion* was merely the expression of a small sectarian or even Gnostic form of Christianity, then it may have had marginal influence, or the converse may be also possible as representing the views of at least a significant section of North African Christianity.

The *Passion* of *Perpetua* appears to have been written in the context of the impending deaths of the martyrs, and most scholars accept both the early dating of *Passion* and the claims of the editor.[10] Indeed, Robeck notes both that the redactor of Perpetua apparently expected that the readers included eye witnesses of the events described in the text,[11] and that Tertullian mentions Perpetua in his work *On the Soul*, which is typically

9 *Perpetua* 13.8, *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*, in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice* (trans. by Maureen Tilley, ed. Richard Valantasis; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 394. On the compelling linguistic and contextual argument for this "exclusive" translation of *sed et*, see Jan N. Bremmer, "The Vision of Saturus in the *Passio Perpetuae*," in *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome: Studies in Ancient Cultural Interaction in Honour of A. Hilhorst* (ed. Florentino Garcia Martinez, Gerhard P. Luttikhuizen and Anton Hilhorst; Leiden, Brill, 2003), 70.

10 See Brent D. Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua," in *Studies in Ancient Greek and Roman Society* (ed. Robin Osborne; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 306; Emanuela Prinzivalli, "Perpetua the Martyr," in *Roman Women* (ed. A. Fraschetti; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 119; and Maureen Tilley, "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* (vol. 2, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; New York: Crossroad, 1994), 832–833. However, for a contrary view, see Stephanie L. Cobb, *Dying to be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 95, citing J. W. Halporn, "Literary History and Generic Expectations in the Passio and Acta Perpetuae," *Vigiliae christianae* 45 (1991): 224–231.

11 *Perpetua* 1.6.

dated to approximately 207 CE.[12] The *Passion of Perpetua* appears to have been an "extraordinarily popular" and influential work, particularly in North Africa,[13] and valued by both the orthodox and the heterodox.[14] This widespread use suggests, as Bremmer notes, that these visions were "widely acceptable as valuable representations of the life to come."[15]

The earliest firm evidence for Perpetua's commemoration is the liturgical Calendar of Rome in 354.[16] At the end of the fourth century, Augustine provided evidence of Perpetua's commemoration in three sermons.[17] Augustine also refers to a text of the Perpetua that was read in his basilica,[18] and to the *Dies Natales* of Perpetua and Felicitas as "a celebration of such universal devotion."[19] The rapid spread of the cult of Perpetua is materially demonstrated by the depiction of the martyrdom of Perpetua on one of the faces of the magnificent Sarcophagus of Briviesca in Burgos, Spain.[20] For all of these reasons, we can accept that by the mid-late fourth century, the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* was widely circulated in Western Christianity, which points to the popularity of this text.

12 Cecil M. Robeck, *Prophecy in Carthage: Perpetua, Tertullian, and Cyprian* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1992), 13.

13 See Moss, *Ideologies of Martyrdom*, 99, 137; and D. Frankfurter, "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp, 1996), 168.

14 J. E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 158.

15 Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London: Routledge, 2002), 58. See also Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 176.

16 R. S. Kraemer and S. L. Lander, "Perpetua and Felicitas," in *The Early Christian World* (vol. 2, ed. P. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 2000), 1053. Canon 47 of the Council of Carthage allowed such non-canonical texts to be read.

17 Augustine, *Sermones* 280–282.

18 Augustine, *Sermones* 280.1, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (vol. 8, trans. by Edmund Hill; New York: New York City Press, 1994), 72.

19 Ibid. See also Kraemer and Lander, "Perpetua and Felicitas," 1053, 1063; Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 170.

20 José María Blázquez Martínez, "Posible Origen Africano del Cristianismo Español," *Archivo Español de Arqueologia* 40 (1967): 41–42. The sarcophagus is held in the Burgos Museum.

3. Perpetua and the Fathers

Where does Perpetua fit within the wide tradition of the early church Fathers? In the main, the early Fathers (up to and including Tertullian) broadly developed an emphasis on an eschatological resurrection of the flesh as the primary hope of the believer. This was the emphasis of the canonical New Testament, which predominantly reflect the post-mortem aspirations of earliest Christianity as being focussed on an eschatological resurrection of the body within the context of a monistic anthropology.[21]

If we accept that martyrologies can allow a glimpse into popular Christian belief of the period, in contrast to more establishment views by ecclesiastical and intellectual figures, then the *Passion of Perpetua* presents an interesting perspective. The *Passion of Perpetua's* perspective of what happens to the righteous when they die is noticeably different to the general thrust of the views championed by both the New Testament and authors such as Justin Martyr, Tatian,[22] Theophilus,[23] Octavius Minucius, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus.[24] Each of these writers present varying perspectives on the afterlife, yet they all broadly continue an emphasis on the importance of an eschatological resurrection of the body as the principle hope of the righteous, as indeed does Tertullian, Perpetua's contemporary and fellow Carthaginian.[25]

None of these establishment authorities *describe* nor explicitly refer to an ascent to heaven in any form. In fact, to the contrary, although Judith

[21] L. R. Lanzilotta, "One Human Being, Three Early Christian Anthropologies: An Assessment of Acta Andreae's Tenor on the basis of Its Anthropological Views," *Vigiliae christiane* 61 (2007): 419; J. Clark-Soles, *Death and the Afterlife in the New Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 67; A. F. Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 411; E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 555; M. J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: The Relation Between Resurrection and Immortality in New Testament Teaching* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1983), 140; E. W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston: Providential, 1982), 55–56; R. Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Settings* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 448–449; and Oscar Cullman, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1958). See, e.g., Matt 24:29–31; Luke 14:14; John 5:21–54; 11:23–24; 1 Cor 15; 1 Thess 4.

[22] See Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 15.

[23] See Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 1.7.

[24] See Hippolytus, *Against Plato* 2.

[25] See Tertullian, *De resurrectione* 62; and *Apologeticus* 18.3–4. See also Russell, *Heaven*, 67–68.

Perkins argues the point that there is no physical body in the *Passion*, there is still not even a hint of the resurrection of the body within the text.[26] With such an allowance, as Bremmer notes, "Perpetua was not a systematic theologian,"[27] a different type of discourse seems to have come into play in describing the Christian afterlife.

However, in this context, Augustine's interpretation of Perpetua's afterlife is helpful as a contrast. In the final book of the *City of God*, in a chapter titled "Whether the Bodies of Women Shall Retain Their Own Sex in the Resurrection,"[28] he explicitly describes the resurrection of women in real female bodies. It also seems that Tertullian has Perpetua and Felicitas in mind in this description, since the title of the last chapter of this book, "Of the Eternal Felicity of the City of God, and of the Perpetual Sabbath" (*De aeterna felicitate civitatis Dei, sabbatoque perpetuo*),[29] is based on an extended pun on the names of the two female martyrs..

However, there are several reasons why Augustine *would not* give an interpretation of the *Passion of Perpetua* that aligns with that of the original authors. Augustine considered the ideology and anthropology reflected within the text to be highly problematic. This is why he questions the authorship of the text, described as being "the saint herself, or whoever it was that wrote the account" (*nec illa sic scripsit, vel quicumque illud scripsit*).[30] This is also implied through Augustine's repeated subversion of the intention of the text,[31] in what Edmund Hill describes as Augustine's "thoroughly sexist" sentiments.[32] Augustine was embroiled in a debate

[26] Judith Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 166–167.

[27] Jan N. Bremmer, "Perpetua and Her Diary: Authenticity, Family and Visions," in *Märtyrer und Märtyrerakten*, Altertumswissenschaftliches Kolloquium 6 (ed. Walter Ameling; Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002), 111.

[28] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 20.2.17, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (First Series, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. by Marcus Dods; New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1890), 495.

[29] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 20.2.30, *Patrologia Latina: the Full Text Database* (vol. 44.801, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, trans. Dods; Ann Arbor: ProQuest, n.d.), no pages, available from http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk.simsrad.net, accessed 27 May 2012.

[30] Augustine, *De anima* 1.12, *On the Soul and its Origin Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (First Series, ed. Peter Schaff, trans. by Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 615.

[31] Augustine, *Sermones* 280.1; 281.1–3; 282.1; 282.3; 394.

[32] *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (vol. 5, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill; New York: New York City Press, 1994), 76, note 4. See Augustine, *Sermones* 280.1, 72. See also Petr Kitzler, *"Viri mirantur facilius quam imitantur: Passio Perpetuae* in the Literature of Ancient Church (Tertullian, acta

over a treatise written by Vincentius Victor, in which the key text discussed anthropology just as in the *Passion of Perpetua*.[33] It seems reasonable to suggest that Augustine should not be relied on to give an impartial and accurate interpretation of the afterlife in the *Passion of Perpetua*. Furthermore, the textual history of *Perpetua* reinforces the notion that the *Passion of Perpetua*'s presentation of all the righteous in Paradise was considered subversive even from early times.[34]

In Perpetua's case, the depiction of her immediate afterlife does not appear to represent an interim state, or some stage in the journey to total blessedness or final fulfilment. In fact, there remains nothing in order that Perpetua's joy may be complete.[35] In *Perpetua*, there is no anticipation at all of an end-time, final, change of status in the joy of the righteous, who already are in heaven. This is demonstrated by Saturus' dialogue with Perpetua after the ascent: "Then the elders said to us, 'Go and play.' And I said to Perpetua, 'You have your wish.' And she said to me, 'Thanks be to God. However happy I was in the flesh [*quomodo in carne hilaris fui*], I am happier here and now.'"[36] The immediate context of this dialogue supports the idea that the afterlife depicted here does not include a resurrection of the body. The reference to being "in the flesh" (*in carne*) while alive on this earth by contrast demonstrates the incorporeal conception of the afterlife, in that it is the *soul* that has ascended to God.

This observation must be placed within the context that, as Dale Martin has demonstrated, "Greco-Roman constructions of the body were significantly different from our own" so that terms such as "soul" or "body" had a much different meanings from what some modern people expect.[37] This is in large part due to Descartes, who constructed the body/soul dualism as ontological, positing that these two things belonged to completely different realities. As Martins argues: "this was a system of which the ancients knew nothing."[38] There were, in reality, a "multiplicity of philosophical views of the body,"[39] even within the Greek and Hebrew

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martyrum, and Augustine)," in *Christian and Jewish Narrative* (ed. Judith Perkins, M. Futre Pinheiro, and R. Pervo; Barkhuis: Eelde, 2011), 8.

33 Augustine, *De anima* 1. See also Mary Sirridge, "Dream Bodies and Dream Pains in Augustine's 'De Natura et Origine Animae,'" *Vivarium* 43 (2005): 213–215, 248.

34 Bremmer, "Vision of Saturus," 70–71.

35 Compare with Augustine, *Sermones* 280.5.

36 *Perpetua* 12.6–7, 394.

37 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 3.

38 Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 6.

39 Ibid., 7

traditions. Aristotle, for example, did not consider "incorporeal" to be the equivalent of "non-material" as some later interpreters do.[40] Epicureanism understood that "all entities that act or are acted upon are bodies" [41] so that entities such as the mind and spirit must necessarily also be corporeal. Stoicism, which was highly influential in the period of the emergence of Christianity, taught that "everything that 'exists' is corporeal" and only things that were imagined could be said to be incorporeal.[42] Even Plato himself dealt with "something more like a spectrum of essences than a dichotomy of realms," rather than the radical ontological Cartesian dichotomies.[43] For these reasons, Martin suggests that in broad terms, we should think of a "hierarchy of essence" rather than necessarily "ontological dualism" when considering anthropological terms in the ancient conception.[44] Furthermore, the ancients distinguished the notion of a "body" from the idea of the "flesh." This is an important distinction that Jerome succinctly explained:

> Flesh is defined one way, the body another: all flesh is body, but not every body is flesh [*alia enim carnis, alia corporis definition est: omnia caro est corpus, non omne corpus est caro*]. Flesh is properly what is comprised in blood, veins, bones, and sinews. Although the body is also called flesh, yet sometimes it is designated ethereal or aerial [*aethereum vel aereum*].[45]

This is a distinction that is demonstrated by Tertullian by describing Jesus as being "possessed of flesh and of body" [*[c]arneum enim atque corporeum probantes eum*].[46]

The question then is to which anthropological discourse does the *Passion of Perpetua* belong? Tertullian gives the clearest glimpse of the situation among the Christian communities of North Africa in the early third century. He probably wrote *On the Resurrection*, as well as other

40 Ibid., 8.

41 Ibid. 9.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 12.

44 Ibid., 15.

45 Jerome *Letter 57.26* ("To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem"), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Second Series, vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. by W. H. Fremantle; Edinburgh: T & T Clark; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 424–448, 438. Latin text from Vallarsi's edition, in Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., vol. 23.355–396, 379B of *Patrologia Latina*.

46 Tertullian, *De Resurrectione* 2.6 (*Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection*) (trans. by Ernest Evans; London: SPCK, 1960), 6, 17.

works, in opposition to the views of Gnostics and Valentinians.[47] Tertullian describes the Valentinians as "the most commonly encountered group amongst the heretics" (*frequentissimum plane collegium inter haereticos*).[48] He is therefore referring to a *number* of *collegia* among the "heretics." It is within this context that Charles Hill aptly remarks that "Tertullian knows Christian opponents... who are neither Valentinians... nor Marcionites," and who profess the doctrine "that the saved no longer need visit Hades but may ascend immediately to Christ's heavenly presence at death."[49] However, while Hill seemingly refers to these opponents as "orthodox,"[50] it is significant to note that Tertullian, from the perspective of the established patristic and apologetic tradition, refers to them as *haereticos* and *ex apostatis veritatis*.[51]

The labels of "Valentinian" and "Gnostic" seem to be far too narrow to classify the views that Tertullian opposed. The case in point is that the *Scorpion's Sting* may also be viewed as being in polemical opposition to the views presented in the *Passion of Perpetua,* although *Perpetua* can hardly be called "Gnostic." It seems that Tertullian confronted popular views within North African Christianity that had common tendencies, and that he uses the term "Valentinian" broadly as a convenient polemical label.

Two key elements that these views had in common was the disparaging of the flesh, and a belief in the immediate ascent of the soul after death (doubtless within a spiritual body). Indeed Tertullian devoted much of his literary output to combatting these views.[52] It is within this specific anthropological discourse that the *Passion of Perpetua* takes place. Having died and their souls having left the flesh (*carnis*), it appears that the righteous dead now possess spiritual bodies, since they experience a seemingly full range of sensations in heaven.[53] However, resurrection of

47 See Segal, *Life After Death*, 569.

48 Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 1.1. See also *Q. S. Fl. Tertulliani, Aduersus Valentinianos: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Ph.D. diss., Stanford, 1971), available from http://www.tertullian.org/articles/riley_advval/riley_00_index.htm, 27 May 2012.

49 Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 31.

50 Ibid.

51 Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 1.1., ed. Riley.

52 See Tertullian's impressive statement in *De resurrectione* 57.6.

53 It is the *physical* senses of *taste* (in Perpetua's vision, 4.10) and smell (in Saturus' vision, 13.8) that serve as connections with the afterlife. In both Saturus' and Perpetua's vision, the act of waking is characterized as a sensory transition from one world to the other. Even more than this, the lingering sweetness in Perpetua's

the flesh is not in view; neither does it seem to be at all required. Perpetua's afterlife is achieved through an immediately and fully realized eschatology in spiritual form.[54]

A text from approximately the same period has similar themes as the *Treatise on Resurrection*, from the Nag Hammadi corpus. Dated to the late second century,[55] the author argues for a concept of the resurrection that is significantly removed from that which Paul or the early church fathers would have understood,[56] in spite of New Testament citations. In the conception of the *Treatise on Resurrection*, believers participate proleptically in Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension,[57] and immediately upon death, they are spiritually resurrected and restored to the Pleroma via ascent,[58] in the form of a spiritual body.[59] This connection with Gnosticism, through the idea of an immediately realized spiritual resurrection upon death,[60] provides a connection to some key texts in the Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition, since Gnosticism itself, among the many streams of thought that influenced it, had deep roots in the Jewish apocalypses.[61]

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mouth when she awakes strongly suggests that the sensation of taste whilst in the soul is identical to the sensation of taste whilst in the body.

54 "Spiritual" does not necessarily mean incorporeal. Note that Tertullian considers the soul to be corporeal in nature. See *De resurrectione* 17. On this, see Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 10–24.

55 Birger A. Pearson, "Current Issues in the Study of Early Christianity in Egypt," in *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt: Studies in Antiquity and Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 67. So too H. Attridge, "The Treatise on Resurrection," in *Nag Hammadi Codex I* (Leiden: Brill, 1985], 145–146), who also notes that although the *Treatise* is of unknown geographic provenance, most scholars believe the author belonged to the Valentinian Gnostic School.

56 *Treatise on the Resurrection*, 45.23–46.2; *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (trans. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 53.

57 The "spiritual ascent" of believers in *life* is described in *Treat. Res.* 45.23–46.19, 53.

58 See ibid., 44.30–35 (trans. Meyer, 52).

59 Ibid., 47 (trans. Meyer, 54).

60 See as another example the *Gospel of Mary* 8.10–24 (another clearly Gnostic text).

61 Frankfurter, "Legacy," 151; Ithamar Gruenwald, ""Knowledge" and "Vision": Towards a Clarification of Two "Gnostic" Concepts in Light of their Alleged Origins" *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism*, Beitrage Zur Efrroschung Des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), 65–123, 97; Francis T. Fallon, "Gnostic Apocalypses," in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, *Semeia* 14 (1979): 123–47. See also Birger A. Pearson in "Jewish Sources in Gnostic

4. Literary Sources: General Remarks

If the *Passion* is a reflection of popular Christianity (in contrast to the more formal views of the church fathers), it is pertinent to attempt to identify the sources that informed this Christianity. The canonical Scriptures are an obvious source,[62] but there are also indications of non-canonical sources.[63]

Robinson made an important connection when he noted that "our dreams can frequently be traced back to... our recollections."[64] In this context, it should also be noted that Perpetua had only been converted to Christianity for a short time, as she is identified as a catechumen at the time of her arrest.[65] The implication is that whatever Perpetua recollected, and which therefore became part of her visions and dreams, must have been quite prominent in the catechetical teaching of the church at Carthage in the very early third century.[66] So what may have Perpetua, Saturus, and the redactor of the *Passion* remembered? What were these influences prevalent in early Carthaginian Christianity?

Literature," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period,* (Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 2.2; ed. M. E. Stone; Assen: Van Gorcum/ Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 471; and Guy G. Stroumsa, "Gnostic Secret Myths," in *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 56.

62 See Maureen Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa; The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 42; and earlier, J. A. Robinson, "The Passion of S. Perpetua," in *Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 26–27.

63 Note comments by Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 100–101. Also Roebeck, *Prophecy*, 27; P. Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter oder Bilder des Bösen im frühen afrikanischen Christentum* (2nd ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004) 85–90; and Fritz Graf, "The Bridge and the Ladder: Narrow Passages in Late Antique Visions," in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (ed. R. S. Boustan and A. Y. Reed; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32.

64 Robinson, "S. Perpetua," 26.

65 *Perpetua* 1.1. See also C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 398.

66 On the length and instructional content of the North African catechumentate, see Heny Fiskå Hägg, "Baptism in Clement of Alexandria," in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 176, ed. David Hellholm, Tor Vegge, Øyvind Norderdal, and Christer Hellholm; Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 974–976.

4.1. Jewish Apocalyptic Sources

Regardless of whether the *Passion* is of Montanist origin, or the identity of the editor,[67] two things are evident. First, the *Passion* was written within a Christian community, at a time and place in which involvement in mystical experiences and the reception of divine revelations from God were both sought and highly valued. Second, as revealed by the "apologetic" tone of the preface, the *Passion* was written in the context of some dispute with regard to these mystical and revelatory experiences.[68]

Within this broader context Jewish apocalyptic writings were valued by Christian communities. The many apocalyptic elements in the visions of *Perpetua* are "genuinely apocalyptic in character because they reveal sacred time and space."[69] In Daniélou's view, these apocalyptic elements illustrate a popular Christianity in North Africa that had strong and evidently Jewish roots.[70]

Frankfurter notes that the preface to the *Passion of Perpetua* evokes the revelations of the ancients in order to attempt to deliberately reformulate Jewish apocalyptic literature.[71] He comments that it is not surprising that the accounts of the visions of ascent in the *Passion* reflect "a deep acquaintance with Jewish apocalyptic traditions."[72] Frankfurter sees the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* as

[67] Supporting Tertullian as the redactor, see Robinson, "S. Perpetua," 47; and W. Farina, *Perpetua of Carthage: Portrait of a Third-Century Martyr* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2008), 26. For the contrary view, see Kraemer and Lander, "Perpetua and Felicitas," 1054; and Tilley, "Perpetua and Felicity," 832.

[68] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 446. See also Teresa Sardella, "Strutture temporali e modelli di Cultura: Rapporti tra Antitradizionalismo storico e Modello martiriale nella *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*," *Augustinianum* 30 (1990): 263; Jan Den Boeft, "The Editor's Prime Objective: *Haec in aedificationem ecclesiae legere*," in *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, Forthcoming), 178; and Fannie J. LeMoine, "Apocalyptic Experience and the Conversion of Women in Early Christianity," in *Fearful Hope: Approaching the New Millenium* (ed. C. Kleinhenz and F. LeMoine; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 202.

[69] J. Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity*, trans. D. Smith and J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 59.

[70] Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 139–176. . See also Frankfurter, "The Legacy," 141–142; and Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 402. For a summary of the debate surrounding this issue, see Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (London: Routledge, 2004), 13.

[71] Frankfurter, "The Legacy," 137.

[72] Ibid., 137–138. See also Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 59–26 and Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 396–402.

representing "the continuity and use... of the textual self-consciousness of Jewish apocalypses."[73]

The influence of early Jewish apocalyptic literature is most prominent in the vision of Saturus. This may be because Saturus was Perpetua's catechist, and thus presumably more grounded in the Christian tradition. In Saturus' vision, there are a number of clear parallels with *1 Enoch*. Rowland observes that the vision calls for appropriate clothing for coming before God, which is a motif found in the Jewish apocalypses, for example, in *1 Enoch* 62:15.[74] Another connection is the mention of the "perfumes of Paradise" in Saturus' vision,[75] which is also found in *1 Enoch*. On the basis of the similarities between this section of the *Perpetua* and *1 Enoch* 32.3, Rowland comments that "it is difficult to resist the impression that there may be some direct knowledge of this text."[76] *1 Enoch* enjoyed a privileged position of authority within the early Christian community for centuries.[77] This is particularly evident in the writings of Tertullian. Tertullian unequivocally calls *1 Enoch* "Scripture,"[78] and mentions it frequently in his own writings,[79] exhibiting an extensive knowledge of the text.[80]

4.2. Contemporary Judeo-Christian Apocalypses

It is also evident that more recent apocalyptic influences were incorporated into the *Passion*. There are similarities between *Perpetua* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*, for example, with regard to the difficulties that attend the ascents.[81] For example, when Isaiah reaches the seventh

[73] Frankfurter, "The Legacy," 137–138. See also Phillip Munoa, "Jesus, The Merkavah, and Martyrdom in Early Christian Tradition," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002): 323.

[74] Noted by Rowland (*Open Heaven*, 401). See also *Ascension of Isaiah* 9.9; 9.30.

[75] *Perpetua* 11.5–6; cf. *Apocalypse of Paul* 24. See also Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 62, citing Erik Peterson, *Frühkirche, Jundentum, und Gnosis: Studien und Untersuchungen* (Fribourg: Herder, 1959), 291.

[76] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 400. See also, Robeck, *Prophecy*, 75, citing *1 Enoch* 32.2–6 and *2 Enoch* 42.3.

[77] Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 162, 167.

[78] Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* 3.3.

[79] Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 162, 167.

[80] Ibid., 167.

[81] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 398.

heaven, he first sees "a wonderful light."[82] This is similar to Saturus' vision, in which the author writes:

Et liberato primo mundo iam uidimus lucem immensam...[83]

"And when we were free of the world, we first saw an intense light.[84]

In Saturus' vision, he writes of heaven that "there we began to recognize many of our brethren, martyrs among them."[85] The *Passion of Perpetua* is therefore the first Christian text to *describe* the immediate post-mortem ascent of the soul, but must be distinguished because it may be not the first Christian text to describe the righteous as *all actually being* in heaven immediately after death since this is depicted in the *Ascension of Isaiah.* When Isaiah reaches the seventh heaven, he sees there all the righteous from Adam onwards ("the holy Abel and all the righteous").[86] Then he sees all the righteous draw near to worship Christ: "Adam, Abel and Seth and all the righteous approached first, worshipped him and praised him, all with one voice..."[87] Rowland calls the *Ascension of Isaiah* the "earliest apocalypse from the beginning of the Christian era," resembling the Jewish apocalypses "in including a fictitious setting and attribution to a figure of Israel's past."[88] Gieschen comments that "[t]he author of the *Ascension of Isaiah* was certainly familiar with Jewish mysticism."[89] This is evident in the clear links with Jewish mystical traditions, particularly in terms of Christology and Pneumatology.[90] The very least that may be said

82 *The Ascension of Isaiah* 9.6, *New Testament Apocrypha* (vol. 2, trans. by C. Detlef and G. Müller, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and R. McL. Wilson; London: James Clarke & Co., 1992), 615.

83 *Perpetua* 11.4.

84 *Perpetua* 11, trans. Musurillo, 119.

85 *Perpetua* 13, trans. Musurillo, 123.

86 *The Ascension of Isaiah*, 9.8, trans. Detlef and Müller, 615. Cf. Lorenzo Perrone, ed., *Ascensio Isaiae: Textus*, in *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Apocryphorum 7, (trans. Enrico Norelli; Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), 100. The Italian is as follows: "e là vidi Abele il santo e tutti i giusti."

87 *The Ascension of Isaiah*, 9.28, trans. Detlef and Müller, 616; cf. Norelli, 106. The Italian is as follows: "e Adamo, Abele, Set e tutti i giusti per primi si avvicinarono, e lo adorarono e lo lodarono tutti a una sola voce."

88 Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 386–387.

89 C. A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 239.

90 Ibid., 244. See also M. Jensen, "The Genesis of Hell: Eternal Torment in the Consciousness of Early Christianity," *The Reformed Theological Review* 65 (2006): 142; Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 62; and Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 386–387.

is that there is a more than superficial relationship between the *Passion of Perpetua* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*. Even if the *Ascension of Isaiah* does not predate the *Passion of Perpetua*, we may have some confidence that the concepts it expresses must have been well known in the Carthaginian Christian milieu in which Perpetua and Saturus lived.

Another obvious source is the *Apocalypse of Peter*. In Perpetua's vision, when the martyrs reach the top of the ladder, Perpetua sees a great garden. Rowland comments that "it is difficult to resist the conclusion" that this is a reference to Paradise. Indeed, it is significant that *both* Perpetua and Saturus see a garden at the apex of their ascents. In this, Salisbury sees the influence of the *Apocalypse of Peter*.[91] In fact, based on Perpetua's first vision, Salisbury is of the view that the Christian communities in Carthage "owed more to Peter's Apocalypse than to that of John, which later became canonical."[92]

A critical and striking feature of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which betrays itself, the *Passion of Perpetua*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah* as belonging to similar traditions, is that each of them portray all of the righteous as already being in heaven. Peter sees utterly beautiful beings, and he asks the Lord who they are. The Lord tells Peter "[t]hese are your righteous brethren the righteous whose appearance you wished to see."[93] Peter then asks the Lord further about the condition of the righteous. The Lord answers in a description that has unmistakeable parallels with Saturus' vision in the *Passion of Perpetua*:

> And the Lord showed me a very great region outside this world exceedingly bright with light (κόσμου ὑπέρλαμπρον τῷ φωτί),[94] and the air of that place illuminated with the rays of the sun (ἀκτῖσιν ἡλίου καταλαμπόμενον), and the earth itself flowering with blossoms that do not fade, and full of spices and plants, fair-flowering and incorruptible, and bearing blessed fruit (καὶ τὴν γῆν αὐτὴν ἀνθοῦσαν ἀμαράντοις ἄνθεσι καὶ ἀμωμάτων πλήρη καὶ φυτῶν εὐανθῶν καὶ

[91] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 398. See also Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 102, following Robinson, "S. Perpetua," 37–43; also Richard J. Bauckham, "The Apocalypse of Peter: An Account of Research," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* (ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 4738.

[92] Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 102. See also Bauckham, *Research*, 4713, 4739, 4741; and Daniélou, *Latin Christianity*, 11.

[93] *The Apocalypse of Peter*, in *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (trans. by J. K. Elliot Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), 610.

[94] Compare this with the "boundless light" (*lucem immensam*) of Saturus' vision (*Perpetua* 11.4).

ἀφθάρτων καὶ καρπὸν εὐλογημένον φερόντων).[95] And so great was the blossom that the odour thereof was borne from there to where we were.[96] And the inhabitants in that place were clad with the raiment of shining angels,[97] and their raiment was like their land (ἐνδεδυμένοι ἦσαν ἔνδυμα ἀγγέλων φωτεινόν, καὶ ὅμοιον ἦν τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτῶν τῇ χώρᾳ αὐτῶν).[98]

It is important to observe that key aspects of the eschatologies of the Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition represented by texts such as the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Apocalypse of Peter* were aligned with Gnostic understandings. This was particularly the case with regard to the idea of an immediately realized, personal eschatology for the righteous.

4.3. The *Passion of Perpetua* and Graeco-Roman Influences

4.3.1. The Imagery in Perpetua's Dreams

Although some scholars have typically looked to Jewish and other early Christian writings, especially the canonical Scriptures[99] for sources of the imagery in Pereptua's visions, the texts also appear to point to still other sources.[100] Taking, for example, the image of the ladder in Perpetua's first

[95] This is to be compared with the vast garden (*factum est nobis spatium grande*) that Saturus sees in heaven, with "rose trees and every kind of flower" (*quod tale fuit quasi uiridarium arbores habens rosae, et omne genus floris; Perpetua* 11.5–6).

[96] The parallel in the *Passion* is found at 13.8, where it is said: "We all felt as if we were nourished by an incredible scent, which satisfied us" (*universi odore inenarrabili alebamur, qui nos satiabat*; trans. Tilley, 349).

[97] In Saturus' vision, the angels "clothed those who entered with white robes" (*vestierunt stolas candidas*; *Perpetua* 4.2). Translation by Luke Dysinger; see *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*. Available from http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/CH_583_Patr/05_%20mar_ign-pol-per-cyp/00f_st_per.htm. Note that Musurillo (121) renders this as the angels being those "who entered in and put on white robes." The former seems to be the better translation, even in spite of the variation in the manuscript tradition at this point. See Jacqueline Amat, *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité: suivi des Actes* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1996), 146–7. Amat herself translates this as "quatre anges qui nos revêtirent."

[98] *The Apocalypse of Peter* (Akhmim) 15–19, trans. Elliot, 610–611.

[99] A. P. Orbán, "The Afterlife in the Visions of the *Passio SS. Perpetuae et Felicitatis*," in *Fructus centesimus: Mélanges offerts à G. J. M. Bartelink à l'occasion de son soixante-cinquième anniversaire*, Instrumenta Patristica 19 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 269.

[100] Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 101.

vision, Robeck observes that the differences between Perpetua's ladder and Jacob's ladder are "at least as important as the similarities."[101] Correspondingly, Dronke asserts that "the ladder Perpetua sees must not be equated with Jacob's ladder."[102] Although Graf feels "less comfortable" with positing these other oriental sources for the ladder in Perpetua's dream, he still acknowledges the "vital" differences between Perpetua's ladder and the ladder of Gen 28, remarking that "[i]t is all the more surprising that it found no following; no other martyr texts take up the image..."[103] Amat calls Perpetua's ladder *l'archétype le plus ancien de l'ascension*,[104] and importantly argues that Perpetua's vision should not be understood simply as an expression of dogma, but also as a window into her psychology.[105] It is reasonable to see that Perpetua's psychology as formed by the conceptual world in which she had been educated.

The same may be said of other key imagery in Perpetua's visions. For example, her striking transformation into a man in the vision in which she fights with the Egyptian.[106] This gender transformation is not a Biblical image, yet it is far from unique. Renzo Petraglio argues that this motif has ancient roots prevalent in both Greek and Latin cultures.[107] It seems that *Perpetua* simply draws on the store of common images, metaphors, and indeed gender values that were available through the Graeco-Roman tradition, some of which overlapped with "Christian" images, and others did not.[108]

101 Robeck, *Prophecy*, 27. See also Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 100–101.

102 Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 6.

103 Graf, "Ladder," 32.

104 Jacqueline Amat, "Images du Martyre dans les Passions Africaines du IIIe Siècle," in *L'imaginaire Religieux Grèco-Romain* (ed. Jöel Thomas; Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 1994), 277. See also Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter*, 85.

105 Ibid., 277–278.

106 *Perpetua* 10.7. With regard to social and gender subversion, see, for example, Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries – The Apologies, Apocryphal Acts and Martyr Acts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 154.

107 Renzo Petraglio, Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis, *Stile narrativo e Sfondo biblico: La Narrativa cristiana antica*, (Studia Ephemeridis Augustiniarnum 50; Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1995), 188, 190.

108 See also Anders Kostergaard Petersen, "Gender-bending in Early Jewish and Christian Martyr Texts," in *Contextualising Early Christian Martyrdom* (Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 8, ed. Jakob Engberg, Uffe Holmsgaard

Similar considerations apply to the image of the huge dragon at the foot of the ladder in Perpetua's first vision. While the Scriptural allusions here seem more difficult to minimize,[109] many commentators have seen perhaps oriental influences in this vision. Habermehl, for instance, argues for a possible Egyptian source for the image of the dragon in Apophis, the dragon of darkness.[110]

Altogether this suggests that rather than looking for a single source for these images there is a complex interplay and mediation of traditions. Within this more complex milieu the "canonical" references gave the images deeper authority within Christian communities, while at the same time the images also had deeper resonances with other traditions found at that time. Francesco Corsaro argues this perspective when he observes that evidence of Graeco-Roman civilization is clearly discernible in the *Passion of Perpetua,* especially in Perpetua's dreams.[111] The text of the *Passion of Perpetua* was shaped by a thought-world in which canonical Jewish imagery was merged with imagery drawn from the Jewish apocalyptic texts. These were in turn mediated by ideas drawn from traditional popular culture in Roman Carthage. If the latter is true, then the education of Perpetua's takes on more significance.

Paul McKechnie asserts that the description of Perpetua provided by the editor as *liberaliter instituta,*[112] meaning that she enjoyed a literary education, and taught by a *grammaticus.* Accordingly, "most of [her] curriculum was poetry and Greek, starting with Virgil and Homer," and "[a]s a minimum Perpetua studied verse literature, both in Latin and Greek."[113] McKechnie considers that Perpetua's education progressed

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Eriksen, and Anders Kostergaard Petersen; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 251–256.

109 Moss, *Ideologies of Martyrdom,* 98. See also Robert Godding, "De Perpétue a Caluppan: Les premières Apparitions du Dragon dans l'Hagiographie," in *Dans la Gueule du Dragon* (ed. J. M. Privat; Sarreguemines: Editions Perrion, 2000), 146. In addition, see Tertullian's concept of the ladder in *De Fuga* 1.4.

110 Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter,* 89–90.

111 Francesco Corsaro, "Memorie Bibliche e Suggestioni Classiche nei Sogni della *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis,*" in *Gli Imperatori Severi: Storia Archeologia Religione* (ed. Enrico dal Covolo and Giancarlo Rinaldi; Roma: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1999), 271–272. However, Corsaro still seems to give too much weight to the Christian background of the imagery and the language used in the text.

112 *Perpetua* 2.1.

113 Paul McKechnie, "St. Perpetua and Roman Education in A.D. 200," *L'Antiquite Classique* 63 (1994): 280–281. Contra McKechie, see Walter Ameling, "*Femina Liberaliter Instituta*—Some Thoughts on a Martyr's Education," in *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer

beyond the study of the poetic classics since rhythmical prose composition was taught at an advanced stage in education.[114] He also suggests that Perpetua was trained in formal argumentation.[115]

Walter Ameling takes a considerably more pessimistic position about Perpetua's presumed education, largely based on the educational opportunities that may have been possible in her birthplace, Thuburbo Minus; and because of her father's position, a town magistrate who may have belonged to the *ordo decurionum*.[116] Both positions are articulately argued.[117] In all probability it seems likely that the truth may be somewhere between these two extremes. Certainly, the *Passion of Perpetua* reveals the author to be thoroughly versed in the thought and imagery of popular Graeco-Roman culture. Whatever the precise nature and level of Perpetua's education, we may be sure of one thing: she came from a thoroughly pagan background, and as such, her education was likewise correspondingly pagan.[118] In terms of what Perpetua "remembered" whilst processing her experiences and transmitting them in writing, this characteristic of her education should be given its due weight.

4.3.2 Perpetua's Intercession in its Graeco-Roman Context

Perpetua's intercessory powers take on new meaning within this broader context. Although the sharp focus on intercession in early Christianity is probably influenced by Christianity's apocalyptic Jewish background,[119] the explicit teachings of Jesus and Paul in this regard should not be

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and Marco Formisano; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 87. However, Glen W. Bowersock's convincing arguments tend to support McKechnie's view on this matter. Glen W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34.

114 McKechnie, "Education," 281, referring to W. H. Shewring, "Prose Rhythm in the Passio S. Perpetuae," *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1928): 56.

115 McKechnie, "Education," 282–4.

116 Ameling, "*Liberaliter Instituta*," 83–84.

117 Ameling's position is perhaps overly minimalistic.

118 Tertullian complains about the close relationship between education and pagan worship in *De idololatria* 10. See comments in Ameling, "*Liberaliter Instituta*," 94.

119 See Bremmer, *Afterlife*, 65–66, citing Richard Bauckham, "The Conflict of Justice and Mercy: Attitudes to the Damned in Apocalyptic Literature," in *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Boston: Brill, 1998), 136–148. Bremmer notes here that "in both Jewish and early Christian apocalypses exemplary figures, like Ezra or Paul, intercede on behalf of the damned."

underestimated.[120] However, it is important to note that the idea of intercession was certainly not unknown in the Graeco-Roman traditions either, particularly in terms of intercession by the dead. Fontaine remarks that "[t]he cult of the dead, the ancient veneration for the *mediae potestates*, which literally "intercede" between the human beings and the divinity, were beliefs and ritual forms too profoundly anchored in Roman spirituality for the laity to be able to content themselves with basilical liturgies."[121] Indeed, the notion of the dead as having intercessory competence was an important aspect of the traditional cult of the dead,[122] and was itself of great antiquity.[123]

However, Graeco-Roman afterlife was rather diffuse in its conception. This is readily apparent from the common dedication on Roman tombs, *Dies Manibus* ("To the Spirits of the Dead"). Intercessory competence was therefore generally diffused among one's ancestors. While the living could offer the dead *refrigerium* in return for benefits, the notion of deriving particular personal benefits from a specific deceased person outside of one's ancestors seems to have been unknown. This was the difference between Christianity and traditional Roman thought. For the notion of a "major intercessor," the authors of Perpetua therefore must have drawn on their Judaeo-Christian roots.

It is of course as a result of her visionary ascent as a confessor that Perpetua comes into her intercessory power, inaugurated through her eating of the cheese at the hand of the great shepherd.[124] The linking of ascent and intercessory power appears to be a particularly Judaeo-Christian idea,[125] evidenced by the Enochic literature, and of course, the intercessory power of the ascended Christ.[126] Perpetua sees Dinocrates "going out from a dark hole [*exeuntem de loco tenebroso*], where there were

[120] For example, John 14:13 and Rom 8:34.

[121] Jacques Fontaine, "The Practice of Christian Life: The Birth of the Laity," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (World Spirituality 16, ed. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 468–469.

[122] Jon Davies, *Death, Burial, and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 18.

[123] We also find it, for example, in ancient Egypt, where *akhs* were thought to be able to intercede with the gods on behalf of the living. To this end, family members left food offerings for the *akh* in the afterlife. See Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 150–8.

[124] *Perpetua* 4.9.

[125] See, e.g., *1 Enoch* 4:22; 13:3–4; and 15:2.

[126] See, e.g., Rom 8:34; 1 Tim 2:5; and Heb 7:25.

many others with him, very hot and thirsty, pale and dirty."[127] The text does not explicitly articulate what this place is.[128] Certainly, the medieval notion of purgatory is anachronistic if applied to this text.[129] Dinocrates must have been in a post-mortem existence that the readers of *Perpetua* presumably would have recognized. In this regard, Judith Perkins rightly observes the affinities between Dinocrates' fate and that of Tantalus, in that they were both unable to drink in the underworld.[130] Even Orbán, who prefers to ascribe the imagery to Jewish sources, acknowledges this as a probable allusion to the Greek Hades.[131] Indeed, Dölger's view should still stand: that the *locus tenebrosus* in Perpetua's dream simply refers to the traditional Graeco-Roman conceptualization of Hades.[132] More broadly, Dölger's view that Perpetua's account of Dinocrates should be understood within the context of *antikem Brauch und Glauben*[133] appears to be borne out by the text.

Referring to Dinocrates, the text states that "he had the wound on his face that he had when he was dying [*quod cum moreretur habuit*]."[134] This underscores the notion that Dinocrates' fate and location has its basis in traditional Greek ideas, since Bremmer notes that the appearance of the person at the moment of death had great significance, pointing to the description of the dead warriors in Homer's Odyssey, who, at the entrance to Hades, are still "wearing their blood-stained armour" (ἄνδρες

127 *Perpetua* 2.3 (trans. Musurillo, 115). Dysinger translates *loco tenebroso* as a "gloomy place."

128 See Bremmer, *Afterlife*, 63.

129 Bremmer, "Authenticity," 108; and Alan E. Bernstein, "Named Others and Named Places: Stigmatization in the Early Medieval Afterlife," in *Hell and its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (ed. Isabel Moreira and Margaret M. Toscano; Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 65.

130 Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995), 108–9.

131 A. P. Orbán, "The Afterlife in the Visions of the *Passio SS. Perpetuae et Felicitatis*," in *Fructus centesimus: Mélanges offerts à G.J.M. Bartelink à l'occasion de son soixante-cinquième anniversaire* (Instrumenta Patristica 19, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1989), 274.

132 Franz Joseph Dölger, "Antike Parallelen zum leidenden Dinocrates in der Passio Perpetua," in *Antike und Christentum 1* (vol. 2, Kultur und religiongeschichtliche Studien; Aschendorff: Verlag Aschendorff Münster, 1930), 38–39.

133 Dölger, "Parallelen," 38.

134 *Perpetua* 7.4 (trans. Tilley, 398).

ἀρηῖφατοι, βεβροτωμένα τεύχε' ἔχοντες).[135] Clytemnestra's *eidolon*, in a similar way, also displays her death wounds.[136] As far as Dinocrates is concerned, within the Graeco-Roman tradition, "prematurely deceased children were thought to receive a separate place in the underworld"[137] and "were not thought to enter fully into the world of the dead."[138]

This belief impacted the Christian community in Carthage appears evident from the fact that Tertullian felt the need to emphasize in his *Treatise on the Soul* that *even* "the souls of infants" (*animas immaturas*)[139] found their resting places in Hades after death. In spite of Tertullian's statement, the strength of this tradition is reflected in the burial practices in 5th to 7th century cemeteries in Carthage. Susan Stevens observes that "the differential treatment of children in cemeteries, though manifested in various ways, continued unabated from the fifth through the seventh century."[140]

As a result of Perpetua's intercession, Dinocrates' condition is improved; however, it is important to note that he is still in the same place.[141] Perpetua clearly specifies that "I saw the place I had seen before" (*uideo locum illum quem retro uideram*).[142] Dinocrates' location is not an *interim* destination; he remains there. This little accords with notions of an interim state or of hell. It is not necessary to understand the Dinocrates' location, and the imagery used to describe it, in the context of a Christian conceptualisation of Hades.

135 Homer, *Odyssey* 11.37, *Homer: The Odyssey* (trans. by A. T. Murray LCL, vol. 2; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) , 403.

136 Jan N. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 83, citing Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 94. See particularly Plato's explanation of this concept in *Gorgias* 524d.

137 Bremmer, "Authenticity," 108.

138 Bremmer, *Soul*, 73.

139 Tertullian, *De anima* 56.8, *A Treatise on the Soul*, in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian* (vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, trans. by P. Holmes; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 233.

140 Susan T. Stevens, "Commemorating the Dead in the Communal Cemeteries of Carthage," in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context* (ed. Laurie Brink and Deborah Green; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 103. However, Bremmer also points out that an analysis of nearly fifty-five funerary stones indicates that "early Christians were much more likely than their pagan contemporaries to erect monuments to children." Bremmer, "Authenticity," 109.

141 Jan N. Bremmer, "The Passion of Perpetua and the Development of Early Christian Afterlife," *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 54 (2000): 108.

142 *Perpetua* 8.1 (trans. Tilley, 392).

Franz Dölger has discovered parallels in pagan funerary inscriptions with Perpetua's vision of Dinocrates,[143] which provide evidence of pagan beliefs in the efficacy of intercessory prayer for the dead to alleviate their condition in Hades.[144] As support for this he cites a funerary inscription to Julius Faustus on the Via Labicana in which Fortuna is petitioned as *sanctissima mater*.[145] Dölger also cites the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* as evidence for the transferal of the pagan notion of intercessory prayer for the dead in Hades into popular Christianity.[146] On the basis of Tertullian's reference to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla,* the text may have been known in North Africa around the year 200 CE.[147] In the text, Falconilla, Trifina's recently-deceased daughter, appears to her mother, and intercedes for Thecla, saying,

> Μῆτερ, τὴν ξένην τὴν ἔρημον Θέκλαν ἔξεις εἰς τὸν ἐμὸν τόπον, ἵνα εὔξηται ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ καὶ μετατεθῶ εἰς τὸν τῶν δικαίων τόπον.[148]
>
> Mother, receive this stranger, the forsaken Thecla, in my place, that she may pray for me and I may come to the place of the just.[149]

5. Conclusion

The *Passion of Perpetua* should be considered a significant text in the early Christian corpus as the first datable Christian description of an ascent to heaven, which occurs immediately after death. In its view of the destiny of the righteous, the *Passion* differs markedly from the general position

143 Dölger, "Parellelen," 1–80.

144 Ibid., 1–15.

145 *Anthologia Latina sive poesis Latinae supplementum* (vol. 3; ed. Franz Buecheler, Alexander Riese and Ernst Lommatzsch; Lipsiae: B.G. Teubneri, 1895–1926), 2121, cited by Dölger ("Parellelen," 1–2).

146 Dölger, "Parallelen," 13–16.

147 See Tertullian, *De baptismo* 17. However, on the textual problems with this passage, see T. Mackay, "Response," *Semeia* 38 (1986): 145–146; and Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7, note 20. On the late second-century dating of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla,* see Davis, *Thecla,* 8, esp. n.22; and Jeremy W. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla: A Critical Introduction and Commentary* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 3; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 29.

148 *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 28.11–15.

149 *The Acts of Paul and Thecla,* in *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader* (trans. by J. K. Elliot ed. Bart Ehrman; 2nd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 200), 181.

held by previous and contemporaneous church fathers and apologists. In this sense, the *Passion* provides a rare literary glimpse into the worldview of Christians in North Africa in the early third century, a time in which Judeo-Christian sources for this text were heavily mediated by the thought-world of Graeco-Roman culture.

The *Passion of Perpetua* anticipates, at a popular level, the views of the fate of the righteous at death, which were to be formalized in the succeeding centuries by thought-leaders within Christianity. The very existence of this text gives a window into the social processes through which Christianity morphed and adapted itself within its cultural environment. As far as the afterlife was concerned, it appears that the perspective of Augustine ultimately won the day.