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The Canonization of Perpetua

by

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Not very long ago, the concepts of 'canon' and 'canonization' were much discussed, and even hotly contested, in literary and academic circles.¹ The fact that these controversies have died down somewhat in the last few years might give the impression that we now live in a post-canonical age.² But of course canons of various kinds, even if they occasion less debate and are defined and defended with less fervour, continue to govern the ways in which academic research and education proceed. One particular kind of canon is the reading list published by most if not all PhD programmes. The meaning of such lists is not always entirely clear, but one can probably assume that they are efforts to define what is essential, if not sufficient, for every prospective classicist to read as part of his or her basic training in the discipline.

The *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* can hardly be called a fixture of such lists.³ The reasons may seem obvious. The *Passio* is generally regarded as a 'later' text, although its earliest portions were written perhaps only twenty years after the death of Apuleius († 180), who can now perhaps be safely regarded as successor to Juvenal († 140?) as the latest canonical Latin author. But the *Passio* was written late enough to ensure that its influence was felt in late

¹ The major interlocutors in the debate and the issues involved are too well known to require going over here. For a review of the action, one could do worse than browse through A. Sar (ed.), *Quick Studies: The Best of Lingua Franca* (New York, 2002).

² Not that they have gone away entirely; a short list of interventions over the past five or six years would include T. Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003); M. Bérubé, *What's Liberal about the Liberal Arts? Classroom Politics and 'Bias' in Higher Education* (2006); W.B. Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* (2006); D. Horowitz, *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* (2006) and *Indoctrinationu: The Left's War against Academic Freedom* (2007).

³ I should admit that I have not undertaken a systematic survey, and also that my impressions about this point are confined mainly to North American classics programmes. The fact that the conference from which this volume sprung was organized by two European scholars may well indicate that the situation in Europe is rather different.

antiquity and in the Middle Ages rather than in the classical period as literary historians generally define it. Of course, there are other texts of which the same thing could be said, but that they are more familiar to classicists than is the *Passio*—some of Augustine's writings, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, the poetry of Claudian and Ausonius, and a few other texts written well after the *Passio* would be the principal examples—and it is worth considering why this is so. Unlike some of these texts, the *Passio* is not in any important sense the product of the classical rhetorical and educational tradition: it belongs to no classical genre, and the styles represented in it, while hardly vulgar or soloecistic, are not really comparable to Cicero as suitable models for imitation and emulation. It is also a hybrid text to which at least three authors evidently contributed, a characteristic shared by no canonically classical text. And one of the authors was a woman, a simple fact that by itself differentiates the *Passio* from almost every earlier Latin text that has survived, and certainly from every text enshrined in the literary canon.⁴ Finally, as a Christian text the *Passio* differs from all of the earlier, pagan texts of what we call the classical period.

It might be assumed that this final reason alone is the basis of all the others. Perpetua was a Christian. She insisted on this point, and died for it. She presents her Christian identity as the basis for her rejection of Roman authority, of paternal authority. So for this reason in particular it seems easy to explain why the *Passio* lies outside the classical canon and why it makes sense for it to do so.

However, as specialists know, the status of the *Passio* as a Christian text is not without its problems, either. Moreover, within the Christian sphere the concept of the canon takes on a special relevance. And if anything this is even more true of the *Passio* than it is of many other early Christian texts. For this reason, it is instructive to consider the status of the *Passio* in light of not just the classical literary canon, which is after all a rather loosely defined thing, but also of the several confessional canons to which the text and its author do or do not belong. What I want to suggest is that the peculiar status of the *Passio* within these canons as well is due to some of the same reasons that have kept it outside the classical canon, and that the recognition of this possibility might tend to blur the sharp line that divides this text from those that seem to fit more comfortably within the classical canon.

⁴ These two characteristics, multiple authorship and female authorship, also apply to the cycle of poems by and about Sulpicia that come to us as part of the *corpus Tibullianum*. I have commented on the relationship between Perpetua and earlier Roman women writers, including Sulpicia, in my *Latin Language and Latin Culture from Ancient to Modern Times* (Cambridge, 2001), 76–8.

1. THE PASSIO AS A NOVUM FIDEI DOCUMENTUM

The status of Perpetua's memoir simply as a piece of writing was a matter of serious concern from the earliest stage of its reception. This stage is represented within the text itself by the framing material of the *Passio*, especially the preface, which makes a case for the importance of the first-person account that it introduces and in doing so inaugurates a highly contested process of reception.⁵ The very first sentence of the *Passio* addresses this point:

If ancient examples of faith that attest the grace of God and cause the edification of man have been written down so that God may be glorified and man strengthened when those deeds are read aloud, as if by making them visibly present, then why should not new documents also be published that likewise serve either end?

Many have read this sentence as evidence of a Montanist outlook on the part of whoever wrote it—let us call him 'the editor'—and I tend to agree with that interpretation.⁶ But for the moment let us focus not on what the editor says about Perpetua's experience, but on what he says about the written record that she left behind. The simple fact is that this sentence puts a significant amount of stress on the idea of texts (*in litteris . . . digesta, lectione, documenta*).⁷ It also lays stress on the contrast between the old and the new (*vetera fidei exempla, nova documenta*). If the old *exempla fidei* were written down for man's benefit and God's glory, the editor reasons, why should we not recognize and read new *documenta* as well? Without getting into the doctrinal implications of this reasoning, I would note that the attitude it reflects is entirely typical of certain periods and movements in classical literary history, and in fact of any age that is burdened by a heavy sense of the past. One encounters similar sentiments among the Hellenistic poets, whose cultural reference points were Homer, Pindar, and the great tragedians, all of whom had lived centuries before. The same factor is equally typical of almost all Roman writers, who acknowledged the Hellenistic canons of literary excellence in

⁵ I assume that the text contains the work of the three authors that it purports to contain, namely, of the editor, of Perpetua, and of Saturus. For my immediate purposes, the most important portion of this work is the Preface, which makes a case for the importance of the first-person account that it introduces.

⁶ On this question see Marksches, this volume, Chapter XIV. On the question of Perpetua's Montanism see most recently R.D. Butler, *The New Prophecy and New Visions: Evidence of Montanism in The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (Washington, DC, 2006).

⁷ Note also 1.6 (*audivimus . . . per auditum*) and 21.11 (*legere*). On the liturgical purpose of such texts see den Boeft, this volume, Chapter VIII.

each genre.⁸ But the Romans had an advantage over their Hellenistic predecessors, who had to compete directly with Homer, Demosthenes, and the rest. For even if the Romans too had to compete with the Greeks, they also saw, as the Hellenistic poets did not, the possibility of winning their own places in an entirely new, as yet undefined Roman canon analogous to that of the Greeks.⁹ In this sense, the canon of Latin literature sits alongside that of the Greek in somewhat the same way that the New Testament canon is modelled on that of the Hebrew Bible. The older canon serves as a model for the new, but does not limit the number of new texts that can be entered into the new canon. The stakes here are higher than in the case of Horace's wish (*Carm.* 1.1.35–6) that Maecenas might place his dedication copy of the *Odes* next to the poems of Sappho and Alcaeus, and so make Horace a new member of the lyric canon.¹⁰ Still, the idea of gaining entry to a new canon, modelled on an older one, is much the same.

But the editor of the *Passio* faces an additional predicament. He is not in the position of someone like Vergil or Horace, who were probably among the very first writers for whom the possibility of becoming the canonical poets of Roman epic or Roman lyric could be articulated in just those terms.¹¹ True, he was writing before there actually was a fixed or even generally recognized new canon of Christian scripture. But by the end of the second century the idea of such a canon, constructed by analogy with that of the Hebrew Bible, was

⁸ The anthem of Roman belatedness is Vergil's *omnia iam vulgata* (*G.* 3.4). On the imitation of Greek models see Horace, *AP* 268–9, *vos exemplaria Graeca / nocturna versate manu, versate diurna*. Quintilian, our most extensive source for the Greek and Roman canon in the first century AD (*IO* 10.1.46–123), makes it clear that, in his opinion, Roman authors truly challenge their Greek models in only one or two instances, such as satire, which he regards as an entirely Roman genre, and elegy (93); in epic Vergil gets honourable mention as second to Homer, but far ahead of whoever comes in third (86, where Quintilian quotes the opinion of his teacher, Domitius Afer).

⁹ Quintilian and predecessors on canon formation: N. Horsfall, 'Empty Shelves on the Palatine,' *Greece & Rome* 40 (1993), 58–67; M. Citroni, 'The Concept of the Classical and the Canons of Model Authors in Roman Literature,' in J. Porter (ed.), *Classical Pasts. The Classical Traditions of Greece and Rome* (Princeton, 2006), 204–34; Farrell, 'Literary Criticism', in A. Barchiesi and W. Scheidel (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, (Oxford, 2010), 176–87.

¹⁰ On the image involved in Horace's *inseres* see Farrell, 'Horace's Body, Horace's Books' in S.J. Heyworth (ed.), *Classical Constructions: Papers in Memory of Don Fowler, Classicist and Epicurean* (Oxford, 2007), 174–93 at 189–90.

¹¹ Most of the Augustan poets show an awareness of what seems in retrospect like a shared project to establish a Roman canon. Vergil implicitly (*Ecl.* 4.1, 6.1, *G.* 2.176) and Horace explicitly (*Carm.* 1.1, 3.30, *Epist.* 1.19.23–34) boasts of being the first Roman poet to excel in a given genre, while Propertius declares himself to be *Callimachus Romanus* (4.1.64), i.e. the canonical elegiac poet in Latin. Ovid very clearly articulates who belongs to this canon: Cornelius Gallus, Propertius, Tibullus, and himself (*Tr.* 4.10.51–4), the same list given by Quintilian (*IO* 10.1.93). By the Flavian period, however, belatedness and inferiority had become constitutive features of contemporary poetic self-representation: see e.g., in different ways, Martial, *Epigr.* 8.56; Statius, *Theb.* 10.445–48, 12.810–19.

already familiar.¹² And furthermore, even if the specific contents of a new Christian canon were much contested, some of the principles by which a given work might gain inclusion were widely accepted. Most of the contenders had been written, or at least were thought to have been written, within a generation or so of Jesus' death.¹³ So, when the editor of the *Passio* asks why a new *documentum fidei* should not be read along with the *vetera exempla*, he has these earlier Christian texts belonging to an already developing Christian canon very much in mind. To pursue further the previous analogy, the *Passio* faced a situation similar to that of a Roman poet of what used to be called the 'Silver Age,' writing after Vergil and Horace had staked their successful claims to canonical status, and so having to be compared to them as well as to the canonical poets of Greece. By that time, opportunities for gaining entry to the Latin canon were very few indeed; and by the time the *Passio* was written, gaining entry into the New Testament canon was a thing of the past.

The editor then is comparing the *Passio* not just with the books of the Hebrew Bible, but with those texts that already were most commonly regarded as Christian scripture, as if it were in fact a candidate for inclusion in the New Testament canon. Such a comparison would still have been possible at a time when the canon of Christian scriptures was so much in flux. The comparison is made in somewhat indirect terms, and to some it might seem tendentious to argue that the editor of the *Passio* is making such an ambitious claim for this text. But it makes sense to understand him in this way, for reasons that will become especially clear when we turn to some of the later stages of the work's reception. And even before doing so, one sees that the editor's claim is consistent with his apparently Montanist perspective. Prior to Perpetua's martyrdom, Irenaeus had argued for the existence of two Testaments, both inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ At about the time of Perpetua's martyrdom, Tertullian took the position that the body of the New Scripture is an *instrumentum* on at least an equal footing and in the same specific class as the *instrumentum* formed by the Law and the Prophets.¹⁵ Not until later did

¹² On this issue see L.M. McDonald and J.A. Sanders (eds), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody Mass., 2002).

¹³ B.M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford, 1987); F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill., 1988); W. Schneemelcher (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols. (Louisville, 1989^b); E. Ferguson, 'Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon', in McDonald and Sanders, *The Canon Debate*, 295–320; H.J. de Jonge, 'The New Testament Canon', in H.J. de Jonge and J.M. Auwers (eds), *The Biblical Canons* (Leuven, 2003), 309–19; E. Thomassen (ed.), *Canon and Canonicity* (Copenhagen, 2009).

¹⁴ On Irenaeus' views on both Testaments see R. M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyon* (London, 1997), 29–35.

¹⁵ A. von Harnack, *The Origin of the New Testament*, tr. J. R. Wilkinson, *New Testament Studies* 6 (London, 1925), Appendix 5, "Instrumentum" ("Instrumenta") as a name for the Bible', 209–17; Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 159.

Clement of Alexandria first apply the word 'Testament' to the sacred library of the New Dispensation, implying that these texts amounted to a fixed patrimony handed down from the originary period of the Christian movement.¹⁶ In such an atmosphere, it is anything but far-fetched to find in the opening sentence of the *Passio* an implied case that the work is being presented as if for inclusion in the developing canon of Christian scriptures.¹⁷

2. THE *PASSIO* AND THE COMPOSITION OF THE *ACTA SS. PERPETUAE ET FELICITATIS*

In the earliest stages of the reception of the *Passio*, firm dates are hard to come by. It goes without saying that the core of the *Passio*, which purports to contain the *ipsissima uerba* of Perpetua herself, was composed at the time of the events that it describes, which is 203. This was also the time of the Montanist controversy. It also makes sense that the editor of the *Passio* is someone to whom the Montanist controversy was a living issue. For this reason it is understandable that this role has sometimes been assigned to Tertullian, who died in about 220, even if it is totally unnecessary for most purposes to maintain that it was in fact specifically he who edited the account left by the martyrs.¹⁸

At this point we must confront a familiar problem of transmission. A second text known as the *Acta SS. Perpetuae et Felicitatis*—the definitive version of our story from the end of antiquity until the publication of the *Passio* in 1663¹⁹—probably belongs to a period somewhat later than the core of the *Passio* when martyrological literature had begun to circulate in some quantity and generic characteristics were beginning to make themselves known. The reason for believing this is that we possess three similar collections of Acts concerning five North African martyrs who died in a second persecution that took place about half a century later than the one in which Perpetua died. These are the Acts of St Cyprian; of SS. Marian and James, and of SS. Lucius and Montanus, respectively. Most scholars agree that these works are modelled specifically on the *Passio*, a position entirely in line with the idea that the *Passio* as we

¹⁶ J.A. Brooks, 'Clement of Alexandria as a Witness to the Development of the New Testament Canon,' *Second Century* 9 (1992), 41–55; E. Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge, 2005), 68f.

¹⁷ Den Boeft, this volume, Chapter VIII, emphasizes that the editor's immediate point is that this text, like the gospels and a few other authoritative texts that would eventually come to define the canon, deserved to be read aloud in liturgical contexts.

¹⁸ On the question of the relationship and possible identity of the editor with Tertullian see Ameling and den Boeft, this volume, Chapters III and VIII, respectively.

¹⁹ On the early publication history of the *Passio*, see J. Amat, *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité suivi des Actes. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et index* (Paris, 1996), 92–94.

have it was assembled shortly after Perpetua's martyrdom, but that the *Acta*, conversely, are a later text modelled in turn on the Acts of Cyprian *et al.*²⁰ The chief reason is because this work incorrectly dates the events that it covers to the principate of Valerian, evidently misled by the date of the later persecution given in the other acts, and not to that of Septimius Severus, like the *Passio*.²¹ This detail cannot have inserted itself into the *Acta* before 258 or even later, and it is quite conceivable that the general form of the work belongs to this period as well.²²

It seems unlikely that the erroneous date was the thing that the person who produced our *Acta* specifically wished to borrow from the various Acts of 258. Rather, the particular feature that has caught the attention of scholars is the scene of interrogation, which corresponds to nothing in the *Passio* but closely resembles similar scenes in the acts of Cyprian *et al.* The inference is that such scenes had become by the second half of the third century a generic feature of 'Acts' literature and that the acts of 258 provided the author of our *Acta* with a

²⁰ See P. Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Passio SS. Mariani et Iacobi* (Rome, 1900), 13 n. 1; J. Aronen, 'Marianus' Vision in the Acts of Marianus and Iacobus,' *Wiener Studien* 97 (1984), 169–86 at 172–3; E. Jurishevich, 'Le prologue de la *Vita Cypriani* versus le prologue de la *Passio Perpetuae* de la prééminence du récit de la vie et du martyre d'un évêque sur le récit de la passion de simples catéchumènes et laïcs,' in A. D'Anna and C. Zamagni, *Cristianesimi nell' antichità: fonti, istituzioni, ideologie a confronto* (Hildesheim, 2007), 131–48.

²¹ According to Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 7.10), the emperor Valerian (253–60) was persuaded by his *a rationibus* Macrianus to institute a persecution of Christians in 258. The opening sentence of the *Acta* dates the events that it covers to the consulate of Valerian and Gallienus.

²² On the other hand, most scholars have come to accept that the *Acta* also contain at least one bit of valid historical information—the fact that Perpetua was arrested at Thuburbo Minus—that is not found in the *Passio*. (The relevant passage is *Acta* 1.1. Thuburbo Minus is also mentioned in the Greek translation of the *Passio* at 2.19.) This point is emphasized by Jan Bremmer in his review of P. Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter oder Bilder des Bösen im frühen afrikanischen Christentum* (Berlin 2004²) in *BMCR* <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/2006/2006-01-34.html>; cf. his 'The Motivation of Martyrs: Perpetua and the Palestinians,' in B. Luchesi and K. von Stuckrad (eds), *Religion in kulturellen Diskurs: Festschrift für Hans G. Klippenberg zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin and New York, 2004), 535–54 at 535–6 and his contribution to this volume (Chapter I). So whoever composed our *Acta* had access to an authoritative source different from our *Passio*. It is also true of Augustine (to whom we shall be turning in the next section of this chapter). Although in most of his writings he appears to respond mainly to the text of our *Passio* (because he specifically mentions episodes of Perpetua's martyrdom that are not contained in the *Acta*), nevertheless in one of his sermons on Perpetua and Felicitas he echoes a phrase, *onus uteri*, that occurs in the *Acta* but not in the *Passio* (*Serm.* 282.5.1, *in hoc agone Felicitas a confessione martyrii nec uteri onere praepedita est*; cf. 5.20–21 *demonstratum est ei, quid ipsa fuerit, in uteri onere, quid illi donatum | sit, in martyrii passione*; see I. Schiller *et al.*, 'Sechs neue Augustinuspredigten', *Wiener Studien* 121 (2008), 227–83 at 253 n. 65). It is possible that Augustine knew both the *Passio* and the *Acta* as separate texts and that he referred to both; but a more economical hypothesis would be that he knew a single text having more or less the form of the *Passio* but also containing at least some language and perhaps other elements that now belong only to the *Acta*. In this case the text of the *Acta* as we have it would have come to form a distinct tradition only later in the fifth century or even after. But it seems clear that the *Acta* cannot simply be dismissed as a spurious version of the *Passio*. In regard to the form of the text in which Augustine read of Perpetua's martyrdom see further below, note 32.

pattern to follow in remodelling the *Passio*. If this is correct, then the *Acta* are in effect a redaction of the original *Passio* that remakes the earlier work along what prove to be quite distinct ideological lines.²³

The probability that the Acts of SS. Cyprian, Marian and James, and Montanus and Lucius were modelled on the *Passio* seems clearly to attest the esteem in which the *Passio* was held. In all these cases, one motive for taking the *Passio* as a model must have been to produce a work that would be as successful as the original had been in making the case for its subject. In the case of St. Cyprian especially there is a second possibility as well, one which is not incompatible with the first. The relationship implied by such literary modelling can be emulative as well as imitative; that is, the goal may be not only to approach the standard set by the model, but if possible to surpass it. In this case, of course, to challenge the story of the martyrdom of Vibia Perpetua, an otherwise unknown woman, by telling that of Cyprian, a bishop and in other respects as well an important figure in the history of the Church during the age of persecution, carries with it clear ideological implications. To an increasingly hierarchical Church obsessed with defining and limiting the sources of religious authority, how convenient it would have been if the narrative of Perpetua's martyrdom, with its possibly heretical implications, should have been eclipsed by that of an Orthodox bishop.

The other, and evidently the more effective way of dealing with this problematic text and of undermining its potentially subversive influence, was by rewriting it in order to make it both theologically more Orthodox and generically less distinct. Both objectives were accomplished by the *Acta*, which are relatively free of those features of the *Passio* that are most embarrassing from a doctrinal point of view and that are also among its most arrestingly individual characteristics. In place of such passages, the *Acta* makes a strategic addition, as J. A. Robinson noted in his edition of the *Passio* and the *Acta*, "The old story [i.e. the *Passio*] was lacking in the one feature that so conspicuously characterizes so many of the fictitious narratives of martyrdoms, and to which the appellation *Acta* especially refers. There was no account of the long controversy between the martyrs and the cruel or kind-hearted judge. This had to be supplied."²⁴ It seems impossible to pass judgement on the actual historicity of the exchange with the judge as related in the *Acta*.²⁵ It is certainly imaginable that both the *Passio* and the *Acta* draw on the same source for

²³ Pace J. W. Halporn, 'Literary History and Generic Expectations in the *Passio* and *Acta Perpetuae*', *VigChris* 45 (1991), 223–41.

²⁴ J. A. Robinson, *The Passion of S. Perpetua* (Cambridge, 1891; rpt. Piscataway, 2004), 15.

²⁵ Bremmer is the most prominent advocate for the historicity of the episode (references in note 22 above).

information about the interrogation of the prisoners. One can also imagine that the *Passio*, which focuses on the interiority of Perpetua's experience and that of her fellow martyrs rather than on legalistic and institutional matters, ignores authentic material of this kind that is preserved by the *Acta*. But if, as seems likely, the *Acta* that we have were composed after our *Passio*, they were probably also composed by someone who knew the *Passio*. One goal of this person may have been to restore to the *Passio* missing features that seemed to be authentic. But another may have been to bring the earlier narrative of Perpetua's martyrdom contained in the *Passio* into closer conformity with a standard that had in the meantime been established by later martyrologies.

If this supposition is right, then it too has a bearing on the reception of the *Passio*. As our previous examples have indicated, this text possessed an authority that was neither the same as nor wholly different from that of other works that were to be received as canonical scripture. It seems very likely that one of the factors that contributed to its authority was its incorporation of unusual and even unique elements, particularly Perpetua's visions, and the general fact that it is in various ways unlike other works of martyrology. The author of the *Acta*, however authentic his sources for the actual events of Perpetua's martyrdom, may be seen as producing a version of her story that fits more comfortably within the growing genre of martyrological literature.²⁶ This work, with its clearer generic identity, is less ambiguous from the standpoint of doctrinal authority as well: bearing the unambiguous identifying marks of a martyrology, it tends to classify itself as one of a number of texts whose general import has to do with the celebration of a heroic period in the history of the Church, but not with the doctrinal controversies of that age, and still less to do with the question of which specific books to include within the canon of Christian Scripture. For these reasons, it is not in the least surprising that it is the *Acta* that circulated widely in the Middle Ages, sending the fame and the influence of the *Passio* into eclipse.

3. AUGUSTINE, THE *PASSIO*, AND THE CONCEPT OF *SCRIPTURA CANONICA*

By the early fifth century, the cult of Saints Perpetua and Felicity was so popular in North Africa that local bishops like Augustine and Quodvultdeus had to confront the legacy of the martyrs on the anniversaries of their execution. We have a number of sermons on the subject, which have received some

²⁶ On the 'normalization of Perpetua' see E. Prinzivalli, 'Perpetua the Martyr', in A. Fraschetti (ed.), *Roman Women* (Chicago, 2001), 118–40 at 137–40.

illuminating discussion.²⁷ Augustine preached at least three sermons on the anniversary of Perpetua's martyrdom, and cited her example on other occasions as well.²⁸ But only once, so far as I know, did he mention Perpetua in one of his philosophical works. The passage occurs in *De natura et origine animae*, an anti-Pelagian tract, the individual books of which are addressed to several separate recipients.²⁹ The first book of Augustine's treatise attacks the views of Vincent Victor on the soul; and at one point, Augustine refers to the episode from the *Passio* in which Perpetua sees a vision of her brother Dinocrates. His comment on the episode is worth quoting:

De fratre autem sanctae Perpetuae Dinocrate, nec scriptura ipsa canonica est, nec illa sic scripsit, uel quicumque illud scripsit, ut illum puerum qui septennis mortuus fuerat, sine Baptismo diceret fuisse defunctum: pro quo illa imminente martyrio creditur exaudita, ut a poenis transferretur ad requiem. Nam illius aetatis pueri, et mentiri, et uerum loqui, et confiteri, et negare iam possunt. Et ideo cum baptizantur, iam et symbolum reddunt, et ipsi pro se ad interrogata respondent. Quis igitur scit utrum puer ille post Baptismum, persecutionis tempore a patre impio per idololatriam fuerit alienatus a Christo, propter quod in damnationem mortis ierit, nec inde nisi pro Christo moriturae sororis precibus donatus exierit? (1.10.12)

The story of Dinocrates, the brother of Perpetua, is not part of the canonical scripture. [Nor did she—or whoever did write it—mean to say that this child, who had died at the age of seven, did so without being baptized, and that when her martyrdom was imminent her prayer on his behalf was heard so that he was transferred from punishment to repose.] For children of that age are capable of lying and telling the truth and confessing and denying. And so when they are baptized they also confess their faith and answer for themselves in response to questioning. So who knows whether that boy, following his baptism, was alienated from Christ by his father, an unbeliever, through idolatry during a time of persecution and, though gifted with the prayers of his sister when she was on the point of death, did not make his escape from that place but through Christ?

²⁷ B.D. Shaw, 'The Passion of Perpetua: Christian Woman Martyred in Carthage in AD 203', *Past and Present* 139 (1993), 3–45; reprinted with postscript in R. Osborne (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Greek and Roman Society* (Cambridge, 2004), 286–325; D. Elm von der Osten, 'Perpetua felicitas: die Predigten des Augustinus zur Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis (S. 280–2)', in Th. Fuhrer (ed.), *Die Christlich-philosophischen Diskurse der Spätantike: Texte, Personen, Institutionen* (Stuttgart, 2008), 275–98 (I am grateful to Jan Bremmer for the latter reference).

²⁸ *Sermons* 280–2. Perpetua is also mentioned in *Sermon* 159A (Mainz 42, Dolbeau 13.11), which was preached on another occasion, and a later sermon preached at Carthage in the early fifth century on the anniversary of Perpetua's execution: F. Dolbeau, 'Un sermon inédit d'origine africaine pour la fête des saintes Perpétue et Félicité', *Analecta Bollandiana* 113 (1995), 89–106, reprinted in Dolbeau, *Augustin et la prédication en Afrique* (Paris, 2005), 337–54, 630–1.

²⁹ The passage is discussed by K. Steinhauser, 'Augustine's Reading of the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*', *Studia Patristica* 33/16 (Leuven, 1997), 244–9.

The general point of Augustine's passage is that Perpetua's vision cannot be cited—as Vincent evidently had cited it—to show that someone, even someone undergoing the trial of martyrdom, could successfully intervene by means of prayer to save the soul of one who had died unbaptized.³⁰ Vincent must have assumed, not unreasonably, that Dinocrates had not been baptized and that at any rate he did not die a Christian, and he interpreted Perpetua's dream disclosing the boy's salvation as upholding the unorthodox belief that Perpetua as a confessor was able through prayer alone to save the soul of her brother. In rebutting Vincent's argument, Augustine makes three points, which I will summarize in reverse order.

Augustine's last point involves an extremely tendentious interpretation of Perpetua's words. Perpetua, he notes, does not actually say that Dinocrates had not been baptized; therefore, perhaps he had been. This is true as far as it goes, but the *argumentum ex silentio* is seldom convincing per se. And even if what Augustine suggests is not impossible, it is very, very unlikely. His argument requires the reader to believe that Dinocrates had been baptized as a Christian, despite his father's strong opposition to the sect (which is of course a major theme of the *Passio*), that he had subsequently fallen away, and that all of this had happened before the boy died of some terrible disease at the age of seven! Augustine's aim is evidently to argue for the orthodoxy of Perpetua's account on the grounds that Dinocrates' baptism remained valid, despite his having fallen away, because he lived to reach the age of discretion. This is an interesting move on Augustine's part. It shows, as do the sermons, that he felt obliged to preach on the anniversary of Perpetua's martyrdom, that he saw her memory as a force to be reckoned with. And, again as in the sermons, he saw his role as one of defining and limiting Perpetua's authority. Augustine might find his immediate opponent, Vincent Victor, to hold untenable views, but he is unable or unwilling to find similar views expressed in the *Passio* as well, or to acknowledge that Victor's interpretation of the *Passio* might be correct. Just as in the sermons, he must acknowledge Perpetua's authority while seeking to define and limit it as well.

Augustine approaches this task in the first instance by means of the tendentious interpretation that I have just summarized. But before advancing this interpretation, he makes the perhaps bolder move of challenging the authenticity of the *Passio*. 'Nor did she—or whoever did write it—do so for the following purpose . . .' (*nec illa sic scripsit, uel quicumque scripsit, ut . . .*) This phrase, *uel quicumque scripsit*, is a throwaway, but Augustine deploys it as the

³⁰ As P.C. Miller notes in her *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, 1994), 174: 'If Perpetua was a Montanist, this dimension of her profession of Christianity was ignored or suppressed by later interpreters like Augustine, who uses her witness as exemplary of orthodox Christian courage and faith'; see also Prinzivalli, 'Perpetua the Martyr', 137–40.

rhetorical master that he is. Saint Perpetua may be a figure of unassailable prestige, but it is possible, Augustine suggests, that she is not really the author of her account. Most scholars today accept the authenticity of Perpetua's diary—i.e. they assume, however the *Passio* came to have the form that it does, that it is constructed on the foundation of Perpetua's own account of her last days.³¹ But the *Passio* as we have it inevitably invites such innuendo, surrounded as it is by an interpretive frame that may be as tendentious in its interpretation as Augustine is in his. It is no wonder that Augustine tries to impugn the authenticity of the text.³²

So, Augustine limits the authority of the *Passio* by tendentious interpretation and by raising a doubt about its authenticity. But his first line of attack, and the most interesting one, is simply to assert that 'The story of Dinocrates, the brother of Perpetua, is not part of the canonical scripture' (*de fratre autem Sanctae Perpetuae Dinocrate nec scriptura canonica est*). That is to say, even if she did write it, and even if Augustine's interpretation of it is wrong, the *Passio* is not part of the New Testament canon.³³ It may indeed be an important focal point for the Christian community in Carthage and for the continuing development of the cult of martyrs throughout the Christian world. But these factors do not, Augustine feels it necessary to assert, give it the status of revealed wisdom. It is not clear how disproportionate this claim is to the situation that Augustine faced. One can imagine him as employing for effect an argument that was entirely overadequate to the context, almost as a means of ridiculing his opponent. Vincent Victor cites the *Passio* as evidence in a doctrinal dispute. What does he think, asks Augustine, that this text is on a par with the Gospels? But if we put Augustine's statement, which he repeats elsewhere in this treatise (3.9.12), together with the introduction to the *Passio* itself, we see at least two indications, which we can date to either end of the first two centuries after the work was composed, that different Christian authorities, with different interests, viewed the *Passio* with quite different reactions as a work that hovered on the fringes of the scriptural canon.

³¹ See especially J. Bremmer, 'Perpetua and her Diary: Authenticity, Family, and Visions,' in W. Ameling (ed.), *Märtyrer und Märtyrerakten* (Stuttgart, 2002), 77–120.

³² The episode involving Dinocrates is one of those that is found in the *Passio* but not the *Acta* and, with other passages, justifies the position that Augustine's reception of Perpetua's martyrdom is conditioned mainly by the *Passio*. Evidently, however, he did know the *Acta* (see note 29 above); and although the economical assumption is that he knew a single text that was the common ancestor of both our *Passio* and our *Acta*, it is not impossible that the two traditions had already grown separate. If so, he would have seen that the accounts of Perpetua's visions were missing in one branch, the 'Acta' tradition, and this might have seemed to justify casting doubt on the authenticity of the competing 'Passio' tradition.

³³ Augustine's discussion of the canon in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.8 indicates that the idea of a canon was accepted but that its contents were still contested and that there was no single authority capable of stabilizing it.

4. THE CANON OF THE SAINTS

The final stage of reception relates to the simple fact that the *Passio* tells about the martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicity. The work itself, as I have been discussing, is not canonical; but because its author is a saint, another kind of canon comes into play. In addition to the canon of the New Testament, the Roman Catholic Church asserts authority over the canon of saints, and the process of being recognized as a saint, as everyone knows, is called canonization.

Of course, Perpetua is such an early saint that she went through no formal process of canonization. We therefore cannot do much to examine the process by which she officially became a saint. But we can have recourse to a pair of very old, very similar documents. One of these is a kind of canon and is known as the *Litaniae sanctorum* or 'Litany of Saints.' The other is a canon in a very literal sense: it is called the 'Canon of the Roman Catholic Mass.' Both of these are liturgical texts, and their development is probably intertwined. Because the Mass is overwhelmingly the more commonly celebrated of the two liturgies, it makes sense to look first at it.

To begin with a few important definitions. The word 'canon,' according to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, is the name used in the Roman Missal for the fundamental part of the Mass that comes after the Offertory and before the Communion,' or in other words, 'the Consecration prayer, the great Eucharistic prayer in the Mass of the Faithful'.³⁴ The name 'canon,' according to ancient and modern authorities, signifies 'the lawful and regular confection of the Sacrament' or 'the firm rule according to which the Sacrifice of the New Testament is to be celebrated'.³⁵ Accordingly, the text of the canon is fixed: again, according to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* 'whereas the lessons, collects, and Preface of the Mass constantly vary, the Canon is almost unchangeable in every Mass'.³⁶

Table 1 shows an outline of the Roman Mass, drawing particular attention to the canon and its fourteen sections, or rubrics. Two rubrics are of particular interest, because both contain litanies of saints' names. The first, known from its initial word as *Communicantes*, begins by naming Mary the mother of Jesus,

³⁴ A. Fortescue, 'Canon of the Mass', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (New York, 1908): retrieved 6 April, 2009. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03255c.htm>

³⁵ 'lawful and regular confection': Walafrid Strabo, *De reb. eccl.* 22; 'firm rule': Benedict XIV *De SS. Missae Sacr.* 2.12.

³⁶ This was true since the sixth century, when Pope Gregory the Great imposed on the canon the fixed form that it retained until 1970. Since that time, what is now called the Roman Canon became the first of four Eucharistic Liturgies. Apart from having been translated from Latin into vernacular languages, the current form is essentially unchanged from what it had been in the Roman Rite since the time of Gregory; and Gregory's canon is based on the form that had been in use at Rome for some time before he codified it and promoted its use throughout the west; see Fortescue, 'Canon'.

Table I. Outline of the Roman Mass

Mass of the Catechumens	<i>Asperges</i>	
	<i>Confiteor</i>	
	<i>Kyrie</i>	
	<i>Gloria</i>	
	Collect	
	Epistle	
	Gospel	
	Homily	
	<i>Credo</i>	
Mass of the Faithful	Offertory	
	Secret	
	Canon	<i>Te igitur</i> <i>Commemoratio pro vivis</i> <i>Communicantes</i> <i>Hanc igitur</i> <i>Quam oblationem</i> <i>Qui pridie</i> <i>Gratias agens</i> <i>Simili modo</i> <i>Unde et memores</i> <i>Supra quae</i> <i>Supplices te rogamus</i> <i>Commemoratio pro defunctis</i> <i>Nobis quoque peccatoribus</i> <i>Per quem haec omnia</i>
	Elevation	
	Communion rite	
	Final prayer and dismissal	
	Last Gospel	

and continues with a list of Apostles and martyrs. All of these are male. The second litany, in the section known as *Nobis quoque peccatoribus*, begins with John the Baptist and continues with fourteen male and female martyrs.

The names contained in these two rubrics probably derive from a single list, an early form of the aforementioned Litany of Saints, or *Litaniae Sanctorum*. This litany is regarded as being extremely ancient and, according to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* once again, 'The model of all other litanies'. And it does seem quite probable that both lists in the Roman Canon derive from this one list. The contents of these three lists—the *Litaniae sanctorum* and the rubrics *Communicantes* and *Nobis quoque peccatoribus* from the Canon of the Mass—can be found in Table 2.

There are some differences between these parallel lists. For example, each list contains some names that are not found in the other.³⁷ The majority of

³⁷ In the tables, these names appear in parentheses. Most of them have no part in this argument.

Table 2. Comparison of *Litaniae sanctorum, Communicantes, and Nobis quoque peccatoribus*

Kyrie, eleison – Kyrie, eleison.	COMMUNICANTES et in memoriam venerantes . . .
Christe, eleison – Christe, eleison	
Kyrie, eleison – Kyrie, eleison.	
Christe, audi nos – Christe, exaudi nos.	
Pater de caelis, Deus – Miserere nobis	
File, Redemptor mundi, Deus – etc.	
Spiritus Sancte, Deus – etc.	
Sancta Trinitas, unus Deus – etc.	
Sancta Maria – Ora pro nobis.	inprimis gloriosae semper Virginis Mariae,
Sancta Dei Genitrix – etc.	Genetricis Dei et Domini nostril Iesu Christi
Sancta Virgo Virginum	
(Sancte Michael)	
(Sancte Gabriel)	
(Sancte Raphael)	
(Omnes sancti Angeli et Archangeli)	Sed et beatorum Apostolorum et Martyrum tuorum
(Omnes sancti beatorum Spirituum ordines)	
Sancte Ioannes Baptista	
(Sancte Ioseph)	
(Omnes sancti Patriarchae et Prophetae	
Sancte Petre	Petri
Sancte Paule	et Pauli
Sancte Andrea	Andreae
Sancte Iacobe	Iacobi
Sancte Ioannes	Ioannis
Sancte Thoma	Thomae
Sancte Iacobe	Iacobi
Sancte Philippe	Philippi
Sancte Bartholomaeae	Bartholomaei
Sancte Matthaee	Matthaei
Sancte Simon	Simonis
Sancte Thaddaeae	et Thaddaei
Sancte Matthia	
Sancte Bamaba	(Lini)
(Sancte Luca)	(Cleti)
(Sancte Marce)	(Clementi)
Omnes sancti Apostoli et Evangelistae	(Xisti)
Omnes sancti Discipuli Domini	(Cornelii)
Omnes sancti Innocentes	(Cypriani)
Sancte Stephene	
Sancte Laurenti	Laurentii
(Sancte Vincenti)	(Chrysogoni)
(Sancti Fabiane et Sebastiane)	

Sancti Ioannes et Paule
 Sancti Cosma et Damiane
 (Sancti Gervasi et Protasi)
Omnes sancti Martyres

(Sancte Silvester)
 (Sancte Gregori)
 (Sancte Ambrosi)
 (Sancte Augustine)
 (Sancte Hieronyme)
 (Sancte Martine)
 (Sancte Nicolaë)
Omnes sancti Pontifices et Confessores
Omnes sancti Doctores
 (Sancte Antoni)
 (Sancte Benedicte)
 (Sancte Bernarde)
 (Sancte Dominice)
 (Sancte Francisce)
 Sancta Agatha
 Sancta Lucia
 Sancta Agnes
 Sancta Caecilia
 (Sancta Catharina)
 Sancta Anastasia
 Omnes sanctae Virgines et Viduae
 Omnes Sancti et Sanctae Dei

Ioannis et Pauli
 Cosmae et Damiani

et omnium Sanctorum
 tuorum, quorum
 meritis precibusque
 concedas, ut in
 omnibus protectionis
 tuae muniamur
 auxilio. Per eundem
 Christum Dominum
 nostrum. Amen.

NOBIS QUOQUE
 peccatoribus famulis
 tuis, de multitudine
 tuarum sperantibus,
 partem aliquam, et
 societatem donare
 digneris, cum tuis
 Sanctis Apostolis et
 Martyribus:
Cum Ioanne
Stephano
Matthia }
Barnaba }
 (Ignatio)
 (Alexandro)
 (Marcellino)
 (Petro)

(Felicite)
 (Perpetua)
 Agata
 Lucia
 Agnete
 Caecilia

Anastasia
 et omnibus sanctis tuis,
 intra quorum nos
 consortium, non
 aestimator meriti, sed
 veniae, quaesumus,
 largitor admitte. Per
 Christum Dominum
 nostrum. Amen.

those named in the Roman Canon—some twenty-seven out of forty names—do appear in the *Litaniae* as well, and of these twenty-seven, twenty-three appear in the same relative position in both lists.³⁸ Four additional names appear in transposed positions within the generally parallel sequence. The names that

³⁸ In Table 2 these parallels are marked by horizontal grey bands.

are shared between the *Litaniae* and the Roman Canon tend to support the view that the latter is essentially a redaction of the former. The first list of the Roman Canon (under the rubric *Communicantes*) begins (as does the *Litaniae*) with the Virgin Mary, then skips to John the Baptist (who comes next in the *Litaniae*), and goes on to Peter, Paul, and the rest of the Apostles (again, just as in the *Litaniae*). Commenting on this passage, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* notes: 'It is strange that St. John the Baptist, who should come next [after the Virgin], has been left out here'—left out, that is, if one assumes that the Roman Canon is based on the *Litaniae sanctorum*. But, as the same article goes on to note, John 'finds his right place at the head of our other list' in the Roman Canon—that is, under the rubric *Nobis quoque peccatoribus*, which does indeed begin with John the Baptist. Since he is named next after the Virgin Mary not only in the *Litaniae sanctorum*, but also in the comparable sections of certain eastern liturgies, it seems likely that that was his original position, but that at some point in the development of the Roman Canon, John was transferred from the second position in *Communicantes* to the first position in *Nobis quoque peccatoribus*.³⁹

A similar transposition occurs in the case of Stephen, Matthias, and Barnabas, who have been shifted from their earlier positions in the *Litaniae Sanctorum* to later ones in the Roman Canon.⁴⁰ The point of these transpositions may be aesthetic as much as anything, and I want to pause very briefly to comment on the form of the lists in the Roman Canon, which is quite beautiful. They are symmetrically constructed, both individually and taken together as a balanced pair. Each list is introduced by a single figure, the Virgin Mary or John the Baptist, who is followed by lists that divide into even halves of twelve plus twelve and seven plus seven respectively. In the first list, twelve Apostles are balanced by twelve martyrs, while in the second, seven male martyrs are balanced by seven female martyrs. In both lists, natural or conventional pairs (like the twin brothers Cosmas and Damian, and the co-martyrs Marcellinus and Peter) are a prominent feature that enhances the rhythm and musicality of the lists. For these reasons, the litanies of the Roman Canon would stand comparison with any of the virtuoso catalogues of classical poetry, which frequently use such lists of names to great effect. Such lists are not much of a factor in modern aesthetics, but it is clear that the Christian

³⁹ Cf. for instance the position of John in the litanies of the Syrian and the Coptic Jacobites in F. E. Brightman, *Eastern Liturgies* (Oxford, 1896; rpt. 2004) 93 and 169.

⁴⁰ In *Communicantes*, the list of Apostles proceeds in exactly the same order that we find in the *Litaniae sanctorum*—right until the very end, where, in *Communicantes*, the final two Apostles, Matthias and Barnabas, are missing. But looking ahead once again at *Nobis quoque peccatoribus*, we find Matthias and Barnabas there, right after St Stephen, the ur-martyr. We may also say that Stephen has been transposed from a list of martyrs in the *Litaniae* to his place in the *Nobis quoque* between John the Baptist and the Apostles Matthias and Barnabas.

poetry of saints and martyrs, and the pagan poetry of nymphs and fallen heroes, have at least this much in common with one another.

So far I have concentrated on those names that are shared by the two lists. There are also those names that are found in one list but not in the other. The *Litaniae* is in this respect much more expansive than the Roman Canon. Among individual male names it includes those of three archangels, St. Joseph, two evangelists, five martyrs, seven popes, confessors and doctors of the Church, and five founders of monastic orders.⁴¹ Among the women, it includes one, St Catherine of Alexandria, who was for some reason not included in the Roman Canon.

On the other hand, the Roman Canon, which excludes all of these archangels, evangelists, and so on, also adds a few names. Most of those added, like those that were taken over from the *Litaniae sanctorum*, had some connection with Rome itself. This is entirely understandable: thanks to Gregory the Great, the Canon eventually became the universal liturgy of the western Church; but it began as the liturgy of the Church in Rome. As such, it reflected the realities of local Roman cultic practices in late antiquity, and most of the names that it adds—i.e. those that are not found in the *Litaniae sanctorum*—were the patron saints of titular churches in Rome, a very great distinction in local cult, or were in some other way connected with local cult in Rome. The *Depositio martyrorum* contained in the Chronograph of 354 contains more information about which saints received public cult in Rome in the middle of the fourth century, and we find that at least three-quarters of those named in the Roman Canon—including those names that appear in the *Litaniae sanctorum* as well—were so honoured.⁴²

The Roman focus was especially important in the names of those added in the rubric *Communicantes*, where the names of six men are followed by those of six women. John the Baptist and Stephen the ur-martyr, as we have seen, have been transferred to this position. Neither of them ever went anywhere near Rome, but are presumably included here because of their prominence in the *Litaniae sanctorum*. The names that follow, however, all had or were thought to have had strong Roman connections. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, did travel to Rome, according to his *Acta*, and died in the Colosseum in 108, according to Eusebius.⁴³ He received cult at Rome from at least 637, and

⁴¹ The ancient monastic exemplars Anthony and Benedict (fourth and fifth century respectively) are followed by the founders of three monastic orders (Bernard of Clairvaux, Dominic, and Francis of Assisi, twelfth to thirteenth century) whose names must be late additions to a long-established text.

⁴² This is a section of the Chronography of 354 (*MGH, Chronica Minora* 1 (1892), 71f.).

⁴³ Ignatius' journey from Antioch to Rome is narrated both in the Antiochene and the Roman versions of his *Acta*: see the edition of J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: St Ignatius, St Polycarp (London, 1885), 476–80, 492–3; Eusebius apud Hieron. *Chron.* 276g Helm.

probably much earlier than that.⁴⁴ Alexander I was the fifth or sixth pope (c. 105–116); tradition regards him as identical with a Roman martyr of the same name.⁴⁵ Flavius Marcellinus (d. 413) was a tribune and notary at the imperial court in Aquileia, and adjudicated a doctrinal dispute in Africa. He never went to Rome, so far as is known; but it is not unlikely that he was identified with the better-known Pope Marcellinus (reigned 296–304), who with Peter the exorcist gave his name to a network of catacombs near the via Nomentana.⁴⁶

Thus, the cult of martyrs specifically in Rome is a prominent factor in the list of men; and the same is true of the women. Felicity (who, curiously, is named first among the women) and Perpetua are followed by five names taken from the *Litaniae sanctorum*. Of these, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, and Cecilia were famous Roman martyrs, and Anastasia, who was martyred either at Aquileia or at Sirmium in Slavonia, for some reason became very popular in Rome by the fifth or sixth century.⁴⁷ On the other hand, St. Catherine, whose name occurs in the *Litaniae* between Cecilia and Anastasia, has no Roman connection and is not included in the Roman Canon. So the Roman orientation of the the female martyrs who are included is very strong—apart from the first named, Felicity and Perpetua. Possibly we should explain this exception with reference to the first two names in the list of men, John and Stephen, who also had no direct connection to Rome and to whom Perpetua and Felicity are counterparts both on that score and in being practically the earliest female martyrs we can name, just as John and Stephen are the first male martyrs.⁴⁸ But however their names came to be included, it is at least curious to find them in the most widely celebrated canon of the Church, but in a section of that canon that reflects largely local, Roman traditions rather than universal ones.⁴⁹

Quite apart from this Roman focus, however, Felicity and Perpetua stand out in another way from the other women named in this rubric, all of whom are not only martyrs, but also virgins. Indeed, virgin martyrs represent one of the more distinct categories within the entire Roman Canon.⁵⁰ After Mary the

⁴⁴ J. B. O'Connor, 'St. Ignatius of Antioch,' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (New York, 1910); retrieved 29 April, 2009 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07644a.htm>

⁴⁵ T. Shahan, 'Pope St. Alexander I,' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (New York, 1907); retrieved 29 April, 2009 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01285c.htm>

⁴⁶ J. P. Kirsch, 'Pope Saint Marcellinus,' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 (New York, 1910); retrieved 29 April, 2009 from New Advent: <http://www.%20newadvent.org/cathen/09637d.htm>

⁴⁷ J. P. Kirsch, 'St. Anastasia,' *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (New York, 1907); retrieved 29 April, 2009 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01453a.htm>

⁴⁸ On the primacy of Perpetua and Felicitas, see Shaw, 'Passion of Perpetua', 15–19 = 296–300.

⁴⁹ They are included within the *Depositio martyrorum* of 354, a fact that certainly helps to explain their presence in the Roman Canon, and perhaps explains why they were added there when their names are not found in the *Litaniae sanctorum*. Possibly even in the sixth century this list was thought to be more universal in its orientation than the Canon, which (as I have noted) was originally a local Roman liturgy.

⁵⁰ On virginity and the cult of virginity in the acts literature of the early church, see S.L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows* (Carbondale, 1980); J.A. McNamara, *A New Song: Celibate*

mother of Jesus, all of the women named there are virgin martyrs, with the exceptions of Felicity and Perpetua. It is, of course, centrally important in the *Passio* that the two women are not virgins: one nurses her baby and the other actually gives birth while in prison. Shaw has discussed the reaction to these features of the *Passio* as a prominent feature of the sermons that Church authorities like Augustine and Quodvultdeus preached on the feast of these two holy women.⁵¹ So the fact that Felicity and Perpetua were not virgins was hardly likely to be forgotten. It is therefore all the more remarkable to find them included in this list of virgin martyrs commemorated in the canon of the Mass.

Finally, there is still another, more important reason that it is strange to find Felicity and, especially, Perpetua included here. The other female martyrs named never presented any challenge to Orthodox Catholic dogma. In fact, their virginal status more or less defines the greatest achievement of which the Church thought women capable. But the editor of the *Passio*, as we have seen, ascribed to Perpetua, and to all martyrs, much greater powers; and again as we have seen, the *Passio* itself provides some warrant for the belief that Perpetua herself held Montanist views, whether her account is meant to be polemical or not.⁵²

For all of these reasons, the inclusion of Felicity and Perpetua in the Roman Canon must be considered really quite unusual. In the first place, their names are not found in the *Litaniae sanctorum*, the probable model of the lists included in the Roman Canon. Secondly, they do not belong (like Mary, John, and Stephen) to the originary phase of Christianity, nor are they figures of institutional importance, or virgins, and they are not connected to Rome. But in any case, this difference between the Roman Canon and the Litanies of the Saints seems to illustrate Vibia Perpetua's unusual position within some of the canons of the Church.

5. THE MODERN SCHOLARLY RECEPTION OF THE PASSIO

This odd history of reception in the first century following Perpetua's death with respect to the various canons, scriptural, saintly, and liturgical, governed by the Church, parallels the modern reception of the *Passio* within the canons

Women in the First Three Christian Centuries (New York, 1983); V. Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of Apocryphal Acts* (Lewiston, 1987); P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), 153–9.

⁵¹ Augustine, *Sermones* 280–2; Quodvultdeus, *Sermo* 5.6.

⁵² That is to say, Perpetua's diary gives an account of her experiences that is congruent with the view that, as a confessor, her prayers on behalf of Dinocrates had a special efficacy. This is not to say that she consciously self-identified as a Montanist in contradistinction to any other variety of Christian practice or belief, or that such distinctions meant anything to her.

of the academy and of the literary world more generally. To summarize very briefly, the status and significance of the *Passio* has had to contend first with the existence and wider circulation of a rival text, the *Acta*; then with a putatively more authentic work that appears in fact to be a Greek translation; and then, most recently, with a highly sympathetic appreciation that has effectively categorized the *Passio* both as a significant piece of *women's* writing and also as an important work of *medieval* literature.⁵³ One effect of this categorization—unintended, no doubt, but nevertheless real—has been to ascribe the *Passio* not to the wider area defined by both these fields together, women's and medieval literature, but to the narrower area of their overlap, the writings of medieval women. Another consequence has been to promote the near-invisibility of this work to classicists. As was mentioned above, the year 203 is not conventionally regarded as either late antiquity or, still less, the Middle Ages; and yet Perpetua is constantly labelled a late-antique or medieval writer, and almost never a classical one. In addition to all these problems, there is the fact, darkly mentioned by Augustine himself, that we can never be sure just how heavy a hand the editor used in redacting Perpetua's memoir when fashioning the *Passio*.

To conclude, the complicated and somewhat marginal position of the *Passio* within our modern canons corresponds to, and quite likely derives from, its similar position in the past. I think this is a situation that should be corrected, although I am not sure that it can be. To do so would require us to think of the *Passio* not as an example of women's literature, or as a heterodox theological tract, or as a text for which classicists need not take professional responsibility, or to trammel it with any of the other labels that circumscribe its significance. The history of its reception has been one largely of just such circumscription, in spite of the powerful impression that it makes on most who take the trouble to read it and to study it. But it is just that impression which makes this a text that deserves to be as widely read as possible, certainly by classicists as well as medievalists, students of religion and of women's studies, and scholars of other disciplines.

⁵³ Peter Dronke's excellent introductory chapter in *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984), 1–35, while it acknowledges Perpetua's relationship to classical literature, nevertheless effectively labelled Perpetua the first woman writer of the Middle Ages rather than one of the few of classical antiquity. On this point see Shaw, 'Passion of Perpetua', (1993), 16 n. 41 = 297 n. 41.

Perpetua's Passions

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