ecstatic trance; he was experiencing an epileptic seizure. It was a medical problem, not a religious expression.[131] The second-century religious skeptic Lucius offered a detailed and delightful description of a false prophet who capitalized impressively on people's desire to be in the presence of the divine.

Lucian wrote how a particularly fine-looking young man decided to take advantage of people's desire for prophecies. This young man, Alexander, would found a prophetic shrine so he would become rich. He succeeded beyond his expectations, and Lucian carefully exposed how Alexander wrapped a large serpent around himself and held a fake serpent's head in his hand. The head of the serpent seemed to speak, uttering prophecies.[132] The cult was structured as a mystery religion with all the appropriate ceremony, and it was also self-consciously established as an alternative to competing spiritual movements. Lucian wrote how Alexander led the crowds in shouting, "Out with the Christians!" and "Out with the Epicureans."[133] The cult was extraordinarily popular because it appealed to the religious hopes that were so pervasive in the second century.

As a daughter of Rome growing up in the late second century, Perpetua would have been exposed to all the ideas I have outlined here. She was raised in the closely guarded spaces of the family and the home, where sacrifices were offered to household deities, and where her father carefully guarded the destiny of his family. Further, Perpetua grew up knowing that the welfare of Rome was secured through the prosperity of the emperor and *his* family. In traditional fashion, Perpetua had watched and participated in sacrifices at the altars for the well-being of the imperial family. Finally, Perpetua could not help but see the spiritual longing that dominated the age. Magicians and astrologers were everywhere; processions for mystery religions were dramatically visible; and philosophers like Apuleius spoke in the forum and won great renown for their intellectual searches.

Perpetua shared this spiritual longing or she would not have been drawn away from the more traditional Roman path that her father had expected her to take. We know she sought after the prophetic dreams and visions that marked divine presence or she would not have recorded her own dreams so carefully. Other young daughters of Rome with such spiritual longings followed the cult of Isis. Perpetua sought out the mysteries of the risen Jesus.

two

Carthage

Perpetua was not purely a daughter of Rome. Her experiences and her interpretations of those experiences were shaped by her life in Carthage, the provincial capital of North Africa (see figure 2.1). Carthage was the wealthiest and most cosmopolitan city of the empire after Rome itself. Here one could see people and goods from all over the empire. Merchants (much as today) sold their wares in crowded stalls in the forum. The city hummed with the sounds of many languages. Perpetua, like Emperor Septimius Severus, could speak Punic, a Semitic language that had been brought to North Africa by the first founders of the city. Her preservation of the old language is one suggestion that we must look to her Carthaginian heritage as well as to her Roman one to understand her martyrdom.

THE CITY

According to legend (which we have no particular reason to disbelieve) Carthage was founded in about 800 B.C. by a Phoenician princess, Elissa, known more popularly as Queen Dido. Dido left Tyre in a dispute with her brother and sailed westward through the Mediterranean seeking a new region for settlement. Dido and her crew were not charting unknown waters; for centuries Phoenician vessels had sailed the western Mediterranean as far as Spain looking for raw materials (especially metals) for trade. As with all ships in antiquity, Phoenician vessels hugged the shore as they traveled during the day, and anchored every night. By the time Dido sailed, there were probably anchorages and

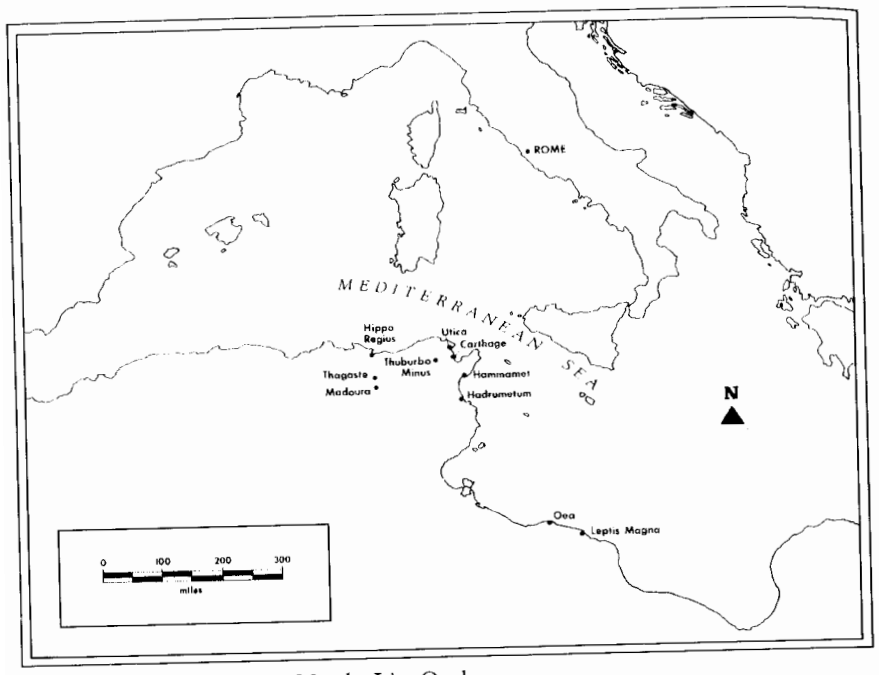

Fig. 2.1 Mediterranean. Map by Lisa Qualm.

some small settlements for Phoenicians about every thirty miles along the North African coast.[1]

Dido stopped at a promising harbor. The local tribesmen objected to the settlement, but legend tells us that they were persuaded to give her as much land as could be covered by one ox hide. She began to shave the hide so thinly that they relented and let her have the settlement she wanted for fear that her skill with the ox hide might let her claim all of North Africa. The dominant feature of Carthage (ancient and modern) is the Byrsa hill, which overlooks the port. The word "Byrsa" seems to have been derived from the term "ox hide" in recollection of the founding legend.

Queen Dido is said to have committed suicide rather than marry a local chieftain. Virgil changed the tale a bit to have Dido commit suicide at the departure of her beloved Aeneas, who went on to found Rome. However she died, the city Dido founded grew and prospered. Carthage is perfectly situated for a commercial center. The ports were improved by the Carthaginians to provide an interior, protected military harbor and an exterior one for the large merchant barges that ensured Carthage's wealth. The whole city covered about seven miles, with three sides protected by the sea (see figure 2.2). The remaining sides had more than twenty-one miles of walls with parapets and towers.[2] The center of

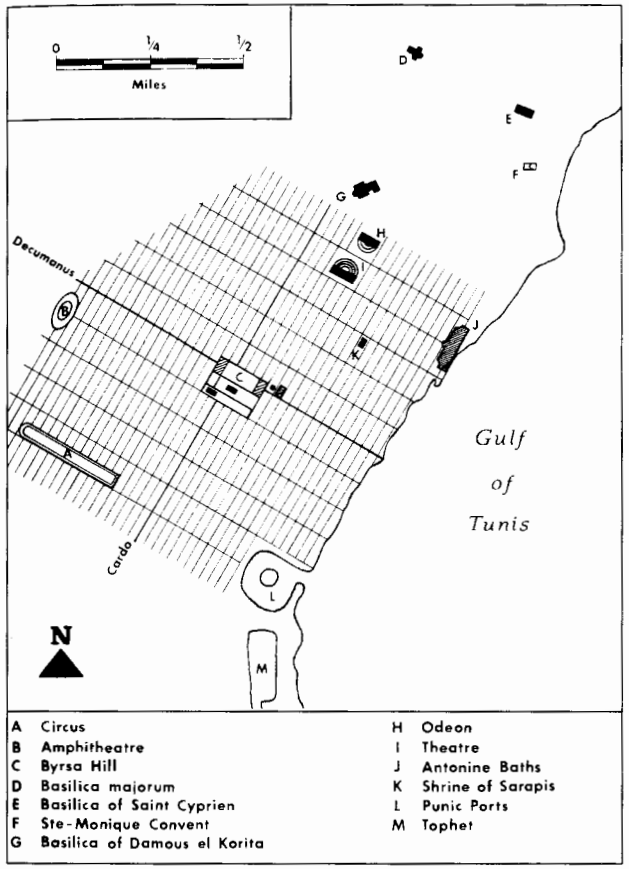

Fig. 2.2 Roman Carthage. Map by Lisa Qualm

the city, with its forum and grid of streets, was built near the ports at the foot of the Byrsa hill. The hill itself was capped with a strong fortification that guarded the city.

The cosmopolitan residents of ancient Carthage lived in attractive multistory stone houses that had courtyards equipped with even sinks and bathtubs. Excavations of these homes have revealed the earliest examples of true mosaic technique in the Mediterranean world.[3] Perhaps the Carthaginians developed and exported the technique that Greeks and Romans would turn into the magnificent works of art that would so lavishly decorate the floors of the houses Perpetua lived in and visited.

At the height of its power, the population of Phoenician Carthage probably approached 400,000, of whom probably no more than 100,000 were of fairly pure Phoenician heritage.[4] In response to this

ratio, the colonists and their descendants seem to have clung even more tenaciously than they might have to the old ways. They outdid the Phoenicians in their homeland in their unwillingness to change. They preserved their language, which became well entrenched in the city and countryside. Further, they preserved the worship of the gods and goddesses of the Canaanites of their home country. Although there were many minor deities, the focus of their worship centered upon Baal-Hammon and his consort, Tanit. These were demanding gods, and the Carthaginians appeased them with sacrifices, just as the Romans and other Mediterranean people did with their gods. However, the Phoenicians (much to the horror of their neighbors) retained the practice of human sacrifice long after it had died out even in their homeland in the East. This cultural tenacity was one of their strengths, but it would lead to estrangement from their neighbors in the Mediterranean world.[5]

One of the earliest descriptions of the ancient Carthaginians was quite positive. Herodotus, the Greek historian who wrote in the late fifth century B.C., praised their commercial integrity, relating an incident that shows the Carthaginian merchants as honest traders. The Carthaginians had sailed out of the Mediterranean to trade along the coast of Africa. Unloading their cargo, they returned to their boats and sent up smoke signals to summon the local tribesmen to trade. The natives approached and laid out what they thought would be an appropriate amount of gold for the goods, then withdrew without taking the items. Herodotus wrote with praise of these negotiations: "They say that thus neither party is ill-used; for the Carthaginians do not take the gold until they have the worth of their merchandise, nor do the natives touch the merchandise until the Carthaginians have taken the gold."[6]

This kind of description of honest traders disappeared from the primarily Roman sources after Carthage began to confront the power of Rome about two hunderd years after Herodotus. The Roman sources were neither particularly objective nor flattering. Nevertheless, we can at least get a sense of how their neighbors perceived the prosperous Carthaginians. Polybius, who wrote circa 200 B.C. during one of the Punic wars between Carthage and Rome, accused the Carthaginians of being too materialistic:

> At Carthage nothing that results in gain is looked upon as disgraceful; at Rome nothing is more shameful than to accept bribes or seek a profit by improper means. A proof of this is the fact that at Carthage candidates obtain public offices by openly presenting gifts, whereas at Rome the penalty for this is death.[7]

Livy, too, in describing the losses suffered by the Romans during the war, added a sarcastic reference to Carthaginian morality. The Carthaginian general had agreed to let the Romans go if they surrendered. "This pledge Hannibal observed with true Punic reverence and threw them all into chains."[8]

Plutarch, writing four hundred years later, was even more harsh in his assessment of the Carthaginian character: "It is bitter, sullen, subservient to their magistrates, harsh to their subjects, most abject when afraid, most savage when enraged, stubborn in adhering to its decisions, disagreeable and hard in its attitude towards playfulness and urbanity."[9]

Archaeological finds of beautiful jewelry, vials for perfume, and the comfortable houses belie Plutarch's dismissal of Carthaginian appreciation for "playfulness and urbanity." However, a conservative (stubborn?) clinging to tradition and a fear of change certainly marked their approach to life. These characteristics continued through the time of Perpetua, and shaped the Carthaginian view of the world.

Probably the characteristic that most marked the descendants of Dido's settlement was success. The city prospered and came into conflict with the other emerging power in the Mediterranean, Rome. Between 264 and 146 B.C., Rome and Carthage fought three devastating wars, known as the Punic Wars. ("Punic" referred to Phoenicia, looking back to Carthage's initial settlement.) These long wars were fought at sea, in Spain, Sicily, Italy, and North Africa. They included the famous invasion of Italy by Hannibal as he crossed the Alps with his elephants and succeeded in laying siege to the city of Rome itself. At times the two great cities fought themselves to exhaustion and signed treaties that temporarily stopped the warfare. However, the third, and last, Punic war ended with the destruction of Carthage.

Plutarch recorded the Roman statesman Cato's speech in 150 B.C. as he tried to spur his countrymen, after the second Punic War, to resume the fighting against Carthage, reminding the Senate that Carthage was "only three day's sail from Rome."[10] Cato was expressing the truth that there was no room in the western Mediterranean for two great maritime powers, and he ended all his speeches with "Carthage must be destroyed."[11] The inflammatory language worked, and the Third Punic War was begun. This time there would be no treaty to settle the dispute. Rome insisted that the city of Carthage be moved ten miles from the coast. The Carthaginians, whose history and power were linked to the sea, could not agree.

In 149 B.C., the Roman army led by Scipio Aemilianus blockaded the city of Carthage and approached from a three-hundred-foot-wide

sandbar in front of the commercial harbor (see figure 2.2). Only a single wall protected the city at this spot, and by using the sandbar, Scipio was able to break through the barrier.[12] After easily taking the forum near the ports, Scipio had to confront the fortress on the Byrsa hill. More than fifty thousand people had retreated behind its walls,[13] but thousands more tried to protect their houses along the slopes. Polybius, the Roman historian who witnessed the events, described vividly how the troops fought six days and nights on the hill, both at street level and on the rooftops of the buildings, some of which were six stories high. Scipio had his troops burn the neighborhoods of the hill that had represented the prosperous suburb of the old city. Finally, the stronghold itself could not hold. The Carthaginian general, Hasdrubal, surrendered; the Punic Wars were finally over.[14] Rome was the undisputed master of the Mediterranean.

The victorious general, Scipio, recognized the loss of a great civilization:

> Scipio, beholding this city, which had flourished 700 years from its foundation and had ruled over so many lands, islands, and seas, as rich in arms and fleets, elephants, and money as the mightiest empires, but far surpassing them in hardihood and high spirit . . . now come to its end in total destruction . . . shed tears and publicly lamented the fortune of the enemy.[15]

The victor of such a long war did not remain unchanged. Even during the war, Rome departed from its usual customs, particularly during the desperate times when Hannibal threatened the city. At that time, Romans resorted to human sacrifice, burying four foreigners alive in the Cattle Market. Even the Roman historian Livy said this sacrifice was "wholly alien to the Roman spirit."[16] The modification of Rome did not end with the war itself. The Roman religion did not readily accommodate to empire, and after the Punic Wars, Rome had an empire that included much of the Mediterranean world. Some Romans lamented the price Rome had paid for the destruction of Carthage. One said that with the removal of Rome's rival, the city's "passage from virtue to vice was not a gradual process but a headlong rush."[17] The transformation of Roman values was even more poignantly mourned by Silius Italicus: "[I]f it was fated that the Roman character should change when Carthage fell, would that Carthage was still standing."[18] Carthage would not be left standing: Scipio was ordered to destroy the city completely and allow no one to remain there.[19] He did so, and the famous city was abandoned for a century. Contrary to modern legend, the land surrounding Carthage was not salted to keep it from producing.[20]

The newly acquired province of Africa was governed from Utica, an old city just north of Carthage that had supported Rome in the last Punic War, in the person of a proconsul, who was to be of a noble family and a member of the Senate of Rome. It was always Roman practice to let native communities govern themselves, keeping their traditional forms and worshipping their traditional deities. This was true in Africa, so the Carthaginian system of governance by representatives called "suffetes" continued,[21] and Baal-Hammon and Tanit continued to receive their customary veneration.

The port city founded by Dido was too valuable a location to remain ignored by the Romans. Caesar Augustus in about 40 B.C. recolonized the city by sending (according to Appian) three thousand colonists from Rome, and offering land there to others.[22] Augustus also reorganized the African provinces into one that was now known as Africa Proconsularis, with the capital at Carthage.[23]

When the Romans rebuilt the city, they kept the valuable ports and used the old Punic city grid by the shore. However, they centered the town on the top of the Byrsa hill. The area was not large enough to lay out a suitable forum, so they increased its size by building large columns over the rubble of the Punic houses to support the ground of the new forum.[24] The new forum was huge—more than 98,000 square feet—with temples and a porticoed plaza.[25] Then they laid out a new urban grid centered on the forum.

For their provincial cities, Romans used the same grid system that they used to set up their military camps for the night. The main road running from left to right was the Cardo Maximus, and the main road running top to bottom was the Decumanus Maximus. All the other left-right roads are cardines; all other top-bottom roads are decumani. To indicate decumani to the left and right of the Decumanus Maximus, surveyors used the terms "left" *(sinistra)* and right *(dextra)*. Similarly, to indicate cardines above and below the Cardo Maximus, they used *ultra* ("on the farther side") and *citra* ("on the nearer side"). For example: the intersection of the second road to the right of the Decumanus and the first road above the Cardo was indicated with the notation DD2UC1 (Dextra Decumanus 2, Ultra Cardo 1) (see figure 2.2).[26]

The grid provided the order that structured the growth of the city. By the second century, the city had returned to and even exceeded the prosperity it had known before its conquest. Under emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pious further building took place that created what became an intellectual center of the West for the next two centuries—the city that shaped Perpetua's experience in her youth.

Figure 2.2 shows the layout of Carthage after the constructions of

Antoninus Pious. The forum on the Byrsa hill remained the center of urban activity; people walked, prayed, and spoke together there. The great library that Apuleius praised in his speeches to the second-century Carthaginians probably stood there,[27] as did the bookstores and schools that drew a young Augustine in the fourth century. The forum was also the location of the trials of the Christians that were to draw as many curious crowds as the speeches of great orators.

The Byrsa remained the center of urban life, but the urban grid also contained the other great structures that were the hallmarks of a Roman city. The large amphitheater on the northwest edge of the town was second only to that in Rome itself. The circus for chariot races on the western edge of the grid was also one of the largest in the empire.[28] On the opposite side of the city, Carthaginians went to one of the two theaters. The first was built by Hadrian in the middle of the second century. This theater captivated the young Augustine as much as the crowds had in the forum. Hadrian's theater has been restored and its fine acoustics have made it the site of annual music festivals. The second theater, a covered theater, or *odeon*, was built during the second century, and, as a good Roman city, Carthage had many baths. The impressive Antonine Baths, near the sea, had a magnificent view (see figure 2.2). They enclosed an area of about 58,500 square feet, larger than any in the empire except those in Rome that had been constructed under Nero.[29]

Second-century Carthage was a great city. It was founded and grew in the Roman fashion and was second only to Rome itself in the immensity of its public buildings and the wealth of its citizens. Maps and monuments can be misleading, however. Carthage was not simply a copy of Rome; the city and its inhabitants kept their distinctive heritage. North Africans, even to the imperial family of Septimius Severus, continued to speak Punic. Yet language was not the only measure of North African ethnic identity.

There is a predictable rhythm to cultural identity in relation to colonization. At first, new colonists make a point consciously to preserve the culture they brought with them. The early Roman colonists to Carthage rebuilt their city and structured their lives modeled on Rome. In time, however, as colonists seem to feel more secure that they will not lose that which they brought, they seem more ready to embrace local customs.[30] Over the course of the second century, it became fashionable for the upper classes of Carthage to claim some African origin, even if their background was purely Roman.[31] This was visible not only in the preservation of the Punic language but also in the worship of Saturn and Caelestis, seen as the Roman equivalents

of Baal-Hammon and Tanit. Roman North Africans also gave their children names that were typically African, like Datus, Fortunatus, Saturninus.[32] In the second century, Tertullian described the traditional Carthaginian robes and asserted that these were the ceremonial robes worn by priests of Aesculapius.[33]

When Perpetua dreamed, she included in her dreams the priests of Saturn and the spaces of Carthage. Like so many provincial Romans, she was a product of Rome but also of the province that formed the backdrop of her life. The backdrop included the spaces and history of Carthage but also the daily life that was particularly North African, and the intellectual life that made Carthage famous for centuries.

LIFE AND CULTURE

The prosperity of Punic Carthage depended primarily on trade supplemented with olive oil and wine production; under the Romans the potential of the North African lands was more fully exploited. When Caesar Augustus founded the colony, Rome needed wheat to feed the many who lived in the capital, and the lands of the new colony were devoted to the growing of wheat. In the middle of the first century, North Africa, particularly the land surrounding Carthage, became the breadbasket of Rome. African wheat was especially praised for its quality, and Pliny reported extraordinary yields of 150 to 1.[34] The numbers were likely an exaggeration in the ancient world, where yields as low as 4.5 to 1 were common,[35] but they express a reality of awe for the productivity of the North African soil. They also show the wealth that was generated by agricultural riches in an empire whose demand for food was insatiable.

By the late first century, Rome's grain supply seemed secure and African agriculture was permitted to diversify. Great groves of olive trees were planted in the hills surrounding the grain fields, and vineyards were restored to the North African land.[36] Olive trees were (and still are) particularly suited to this climate since, they require remarkably little moisture, efficiently taking advantage of the morning dew. Once planted, they take almost ten years to bear fruit, but they require little labor and produce for decades. Great presses were built throughout the countryside to extract the precious oil. The dry air itself was (and still is) rich with the aroma of ripe olives.

Pliny, in his work on natural history, praised the oil that was so essential to Mediterranean life: "Olive oil has the property of imparting warmth to the body and protecting it against cold, and also that of cooling the head when heated."[37] Olive oil was also burned in the many

small oil lamps that archaeologists now excavate by the hundreds. These lamps have an opening for a wick to be submerged into the oil but are covered to keep mice from drinking it. The liquid that brought light to homes and warmth to bodies also brought wealth to purses, for it was easy to transport and in great demand.

To exploit these productive agricultural resources, the land was organized in large estates cultivated by slaves or peasants who reaped little benefit from the production. The Romano-African owners lived very well, some in manor houses on their estates but more often in houses in town so they could participate in the urban life that so defined the Roman culture. Just as the wealthy in Rome would go to their country estates periodically, so did the North African elite, but in the second and early third centuries, the good life was defined as urban life.

By the early third century, there were about two hundred cities in the farmlands that surrounded Carthage, some only six or eight miles apart.[38] The townhouses in the cities were small, yet comfortable. Most were laid out with rooms around a courtyard, and excavations show that the wealthy surrounded themselves with beauty. The courtyards had running water for fountains and flowers. The floors of many of the houses were decorated with beautiful mosaics, which have served as valuable sources relative not only to their owners' artistic sensibilities but also to their daily lives.

The Punic Carthaginians may have developed the technique for mosaic floors, but the Roman Carthaginians transformed it into a high art. At least by the second century, there was a busy mosaic workshop in Carthage. At that time, by far the principal patrons commissioning mosaics were individuals decorating their homes. Public mosaics (particularly in the public baths) would not become popular until later. North African designers developed images that influenced other regions in the Mediterranean.[39]

Some mosaics showed garden scenes and recounted mythological stories, but the North Africans seemed to favor more concrete images—representations of events in their daily lives. In the time of Septimius Severus, the most popular image was a hunting scene.[40] Figure 2.3 shows one such scene: a man riding to the hunt following his hunting dogs, whose names, Ederaturs and Mustela, were immortalized in the mosaic. Another kind of image popular in the mosaics is less appealing to modern tastes: these depict shows that patrons sponsored in the arenas of the cities. Figure 2.4 is of two boxers, with the realistic detail of blood gushing from the head of the loser. To see beauty and fame in blood shed publicly was a characteristic of Rome in general

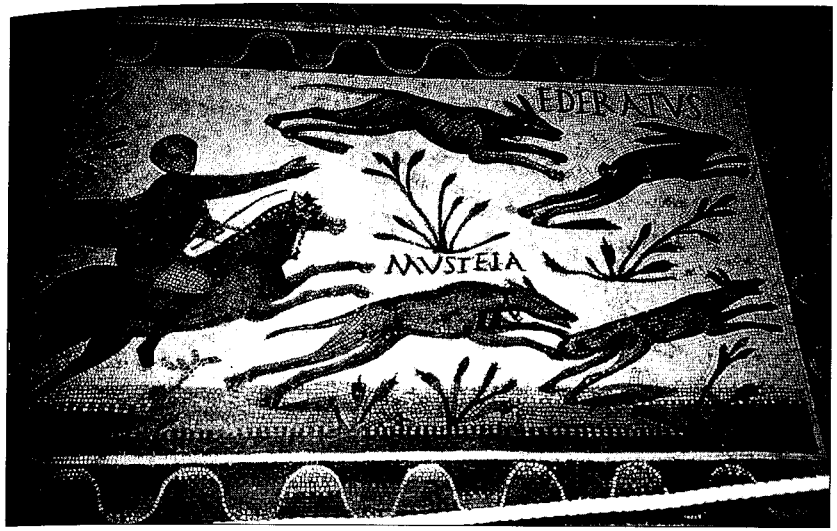

Fig. 2.3 Hunting scene (mosaic). Bardo Museum, Tunis. Photograph by Bob Balsley.

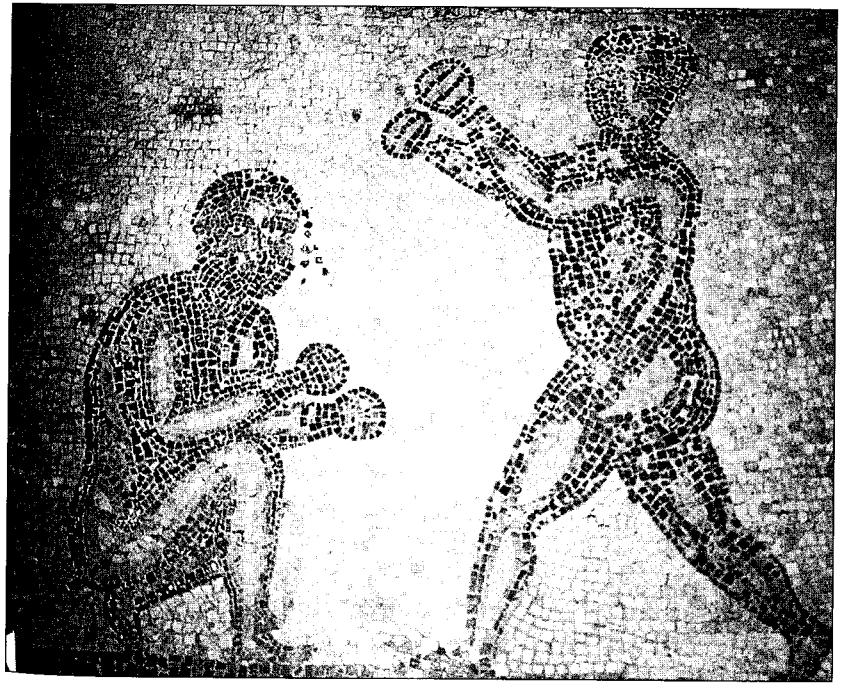

Fig. 2.4 Boxer (mosaic). Bardo Museum, Tunis. Photograph by Bob Balsley.

and North Africa in particular. The mosaics that graced the floors of families like Perpetua's both reflected and shaped the way they looked at the world.

As Romans moved their urban style to North Africa and as they relied on the great farms to provide grain for export, they confronted a fundamental reality of life in North Africa: scarcity of water. The ways of Roman agriculture demanded a great deal of water, and the Roman engineers built dams, reservoirs, and gigantic cisterns.[41] But the cities' "thirst" seemed almost unquenchable. The fountains in the private houses, the latrines, and most of all the great baths required that water be brought from springs in the mountains down to the cities.

The great aqueduct of Carthage was built in the early second century under Emperor Hadrian, who reacted to a drought and the suffering of Carthaginians by commissioning an aqueduct that would be one of the longest in the Roman world. It brought water from thirty-five miles south of Carthage, meandering for about seventy-five miles before its water flowed into the city at a remarkable rate of almost eighty gallons a second.[42] Great cisterns were also built on the outskirts of Carthage near the amphitheater to supplement the supply.

Other provincial towns also built aqueducts and cisterns and dug wells to try to maintain the comfortable way of life that marked Roman North African civilization. In the late second century, these efforts were successful; the province was marked by cities and prosperity, and dominated by the great center, Carthage.

Perpetua was born into the wealthy class that lived so graciously in the province, but we are not certain exactly where she lived. The original account of her martyrdom was Latin, and it gave no information about the location of the family's home. Shortly after this account was written, it was translated into Greek, but the Greek version adds information that was missing from the original. The Greek version says that the group was arrested in Thuburbo Minus (modern Tébourba), about thirty-three miles on the Bagrada River to the west of Carthage[43] (see figure 2.1). Because the Greek version is not the original, this information must be used with caution. The translator either had independent knowledge of the events and added the location accurately or inserted inaccurate information for reasons we cannot know.[44]

If the family did live in Thuburbo Minus or own property there, its members lived the life of the wealthy rural landowners described above. Thuburbo was in the prosperous agricultural region that served as Rome's breadbasket. The town itself had been founded as an early colony for veterans of the Roman army[45] and offered the full range of amenities for the urban-dwelling rural elite. Whether the family came

from Thuburbo Minus or lived in Carthage itself, which is the assumption scholars have drawn from the Latin version of the martyrdom, the capital of the province would have nevertheless dominated its experience. The trial and execution very likely took place in Carthage. Well before that, the family would have traveled to the city to take advantage of the cultural life there, and Perpetua's brothers would probably have been sent there to complete their educations. Throughout its existence, Carthage drew the wealthy and promising from provincial towns much further away than Thuburbo Minus.

One such promising youth was Apuleius, the famous philosopher discussed in the previous chapter. Like Perpetua, Apuleius came from a provincial town, Madaura, but he went to Carthage to complete his education.[46] Two centuries later, another provincial young man made his mark by studying in the intellectual center of the province: the Christian saint Augustine. Augustine began his education in his hometown Thagaste, then traveled to Madaura to study literature and public speaking, but his education culminated in Carthage.[47] Between the times of these two great men who had been educated at Carthage, Perpetua and her family, too, would have been drawn to the city. The intellectual life there shaped Perpetua's experiences just as it shaped the intellectual growth of men like Apuleius and Augustine.

The public world of Carthage was known for its intellectual vibrancy.[48] When Apuleius spoke to the cosmopolitan audience, he praised the city for "possessing so many friends of learning among her citizens."[49] Elsewhere, he praised the city even more extravagantly: "Carthage is the venerable instructress of our province, Carthage is the heavenly muse of Africa. Carthage is the fount whence all the Roman world draws draughts of inspiration."[50] Even allowing for Apuleius's rhetorical flourishes, his assessment of the city as a cultural capital was shared by many.

The intellectual life of Carthage included private conversations in the crowded forum and public orations of the kind Apuleius gave in the forum or in the theater. It also included an array of performances in the theater built by Hadrian. Among them were comedies by the Roman playwrights Terence and Plautus; these often told of comic situations, usually involving love trysts, that explored a full range of human emotion while playing out rather frivolous plots. Performances also included mimes and pantomimes with slapstick comedy, and shows ranging from comedy to tragedy to ropewalkers to jugglers and dancers.[51] Augustine was fascinated with the theater because, he asserted, he could encounter along with the audience all kinds of human emotions that might normally not be part of his experience.[52] People's

intellectual and cultural life in second-century Carthage was enhanced by their participation in theater and art, just as it is in today's cultural centers.

Perpetua and her family would have attended these performances, and as they walked through the town they would have learned from the formal and informal speakers. They also would have seen the praise of learning that was marked by such things as the statue of Apuleius that had been erected less than fifty years before. We can make general statements like these, but to translate them into specific intellectual influences that had an impact on Perpetua's choices as she moved toward martyrdom is more difficult. However, it is possible to trace a few specific aspects of Carthage's cultural life that seem to have made a direct difference to the young Roman matron: the languages of North Africa, the literature, and the very diversity of the place that exposed her to many new ideas, including those of the Christian community.

During the second and third centuries, the intellectual life of Carthage was expressed in both Latin and Greek. (By Augustine's time, Greek had fallen into disuse.) Apuleius claimed that he gave speeches in both languages to satisfy the cosmopolitan audience.[53] Perpetua's family was at least trilingual, speaking Latin, Greek, and Punic. That Greek was a significant part of her family's experience is strongly suggested by the fact that Perpetua's young deceased brother's name was Dinocrates, a Greek name. The prevalence of Greek in North Africa means that Greek literature was accessible and part of the intellectual heritage of Carthage, and hence of Perpetua herself.

One form of literature that likely influenced Perpetua's view of the world was the Hellenistic novel. Julia Domna (Septimius Severus's wife) probably included at least one of these novelists in her literary circle,[54] which suggests how popular they had become by the reign of Septimius (and in the lifetime of Perpetua). These novels increasingly are studied as revealing of the thought of the Hellenistic world.[55]

Most of the novels were written in Greek, although Apuleius wrote an influential one in Latin, *The Golden Ass* or *Metamorphosis*. Apuleius's work was influenced by earlier Greek novels, showing their availability in North Africa. Perpetua certainly read *The Golden Ass*,[56] and likely read, or at least heard about, other such novels. We know that at least one of the novels, *Metiochos and Parthenope*, was regularly performed in the theater,[57] and it seems implausible that so famous a theater as that in Carthage would not have featured this popular play. This body of literature is important because the novels share characteristics that in some way mirror Perpetua's actions.

The basic story of most of the novels involves a pair of (very) young

lovers who fall in love (usually at first sight). The two are then separated, and each undergoes adventures and trials before they are reunited to live happily ever after. Within this general plot summary, it is worth considering what lessons Perpetua might have taken from these Hellenistic novels.

First, there appears a praise of youth. The novel fragment *Ninos* describes a speech in which a young man argues that a girl of fourteen is plenty old enough to marry and bear children, and in fact the couple should seize the day to achieve their desires because the future is always uncertain anyway.[58] Although Roman society advocated youthful marriages, these were conducted under the guidance of the *pater familias*, not initiated by youthful lovers. These novels praised the idea of young people—teenagers—standing up for what they wanted. This was not Roman, but it was what the young Perpetua did when she defied her family to follow Christ.

A second characteristic of the novels is that they portray strong, independent female characters. This is in striking contrast to appropriate female roles as articulated in traditional Roman society. Heroines like Parthenope, Antheia, and Sinonis are resourceful and outspoken.[59] Some, like Chariclea in *The Ethiopian Story*, get captured by bandits or confront other dangers and comport themselves with bravery and wit.[60] A remarkable heroine in *Ninos* dresses in gender-ambiguous clothing and leads a band of Assyrians to capture a fortified city. Although wounded, she makes a brave escape while elephants are trampling her men.[61]

The heroines and heroes withstand all kinds of tests and trials during their adventures before they are restored to each other. These trials often took place in the center of Roman power, the amphitheater. One youth was tested in the arena to prove his worthiness.[62] Another had to wrestle a gigantic Ethiopian in the games as his final test. As these two examples show, the many private struggles that they experienced frequently culminated in a public trial that proved their mettle. The sequence mirrors the experiences of Christian martyrs who began with a search within their consciences and ended with a public confrontation with Roman power.

Finally, the novels promised a happy ending for the worthy (and, of course, the heroes and heroines who withstood all the trials the evil world threw at them were worthy). In part, the happy endings offer what we have come to expect from modern romances: lovers reunited to live happily ever after. However, the Hellenistic novels frequently offer a spiritual dimension to their happy endings. After wrestling the Ethiopian, the hero of the tale claims to have earned the ability to

prophesy,[63] which was the mark of spirituality in the ancient world. In this tale the two lovers end up not only being married but being invested into the priesthood.[64]

The moral of these stories is that if you are young, brave, and persistent, you will achieve your earthly desires. You will also be rewarded by the gods with spiritual benefits. In the *Golden Ass*, Apuleius creates a perfect example of this integration of adventure story with a spiritual result. At the center of the novel, Apuleius tells an enchanting tale of Cupid and Psyche. Psyche is a beautiful young woman who captures the heart of the God of Love himself. The two live and love happily in a handsome, hidden palace. Because of Psyche's jealous sisters and her own tragic curiosity, the lovers are separated. The God of Love seems lost to the young woman. However, she is determined to seek him out, and withstands a number of trials in that search: the wrath of Venus; having to perform seemingly impossible tasks; and facing death by going into the underworld. Her efforts make her worthy in the eyes of the gods, and Jupiter brings her to heaven. She drinks a cup of ambrosia to make her immortal, and she and Cupid have a celestial wedding and produce a child, Joy.[65]

On the one hand, this tale fits exactly the formula of lovers separated and finally rejoined after adventures and trials. On the other hand, by having the God of Love himself be one of the lovers, the story takes on an allegorical tone and becomes a longing of the soul (Psyche) for God. In this allegorical form, the tale was popular among pagans filled with spiritual longing and later with Christians searching for God.[66] The close connection between spiritual quests and the romantic Hellenistic novels is further confirmed by Apuleius's ending of *The Golden Ass*. In a novel that clearly drew on the Greek romances, Apuleius ended not with the marriage of a happy couple but with an autobiographical religious experience of the cult of Isis, the culmination of his own soul's longing for the divine.

We can see how Apuleius was led from romantic novel to spiritual quest because he wrote his own novel depicting that transition. When we turn to Perpetua, we cannot be so certain about this kind of influence. We do know she read Apuleius, and it is highly likely that she read or saw theatrical depictions of other romantic novels. I suggest (without being able to prove it exactly) that the novels may have influenced Perpetua by offering a particular kind of role model that might have made it easier for her to proceed so proudly to martyrdom. I think it is difficult (if not impossible) for us to act if we cannot imagine ourselves doing so first. This is the modern argument for the influence of science fiction literature, for example. Once we imagine in fiction the creation of certain technological advances, we can proceed to invent them. In the same way, the fiction adventure stories may have helped Perpetua imagine herself as an active young heroine who could withstand trials in the expectation of a happy and spiritual ending. We cannot know for sure the exact nature of this literature's influence on the intelligent young woman, but we can say that it formed part of the cultural heritage that shaped her world in Carthage.

When the narrator of the Passion of Perpetua wrote briefly that she was well educated, the phrase implied full participation in the rich cultural life of Carthage. Perpetua grew up not only shaped by the Roman values that her family firmly advocated but shaped by the diversity that was Carthage. This included a variety of language and of literature, and it included a range of ideas—Roman, Greek, African, and of course Christian. Carthage in the second century was marked by diversity as well as by prosperity and a vibrant intellectual life. All those things shaped Perpetua's experience, and one would imagine that such a setting would have led to a positive view of life. However, that was not so.

Although the literary sources praise the dynamic urban life of Carthage, we should remember that, from a modern perspective, ancient cities were remarkably crowded, filthy, and dangerous because of both crime and disease.[67] Life was exciting but fragile. The Carthaginians seem to have confronted this fact perhaps more than most. Perpetua grew up exposed to a profound anxiety that had always marked the people of Carthage, and that led them to emphasize the importance of personal sacrifice as a way of preserving their prosperity.

SACRIFICE AND SUICIDE

Throughout the ancient world, offering sacrifices to the gods was the central form of worship. Romans offered animals, cakes, and wine at the many altars both public and private. They hoped the gods would respond favorably and offer benefits or at least withhold destruction. It would not take much of a leap for people who held this worldview to decide that the greatest sacrifice would bring the greatest benefit, and the greatest sacrifice was human blood. Aline Rouselle captures the power that such a sacrifice held for people: "Paradoxically, the spilling of blood, . . . symbolized the respect in which life was held by all. Everyone was insistent on the necessity of spilling blood, as it was the price that had to be paid for the survival of the community and for the salvation of each individual."[68]

Although it is difficult to get precise information about so distant a

time, it seems that the Semitic world in the ninth century B.C., where Dido and her crew originated, included the practice of human sacrifice. The Bible describes a king of Moab who was losing a battle against Israel. The king then took his eldest son and "offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall." The sacrifice worked and Israel withdrew.[69] More generally, the Bible describes people who "offer up their sons and daughters in fire to their gods."[70] Israel itself was not exempt from at least the possibility of offering an ultimate sacrifice. The Book of Exodus relates God's command "You shall give Me the first-born among your sons,"[71] and the Bible further tells of Abraham's willingness to follow this command by sacrificing his beloved Isaac. That Isaac was saved at the last minute by an angel's intervention does not change the fact that human sacrifice was seen as a requirement that the Hebrew God might ask of his people.[72]

There were many connections between the ancient Phoenicians who were Dido's ancestors and the Hebrews who recorded the command for human sacrifice. Jezebel, daughter of the Phoenician king of Tyre, married the king of Israel and brought Phoenician idolatry to Israel.[73] Hiram, the king of Tyre, provided lumber and workers for the building of the Temple of Solomon. Further, there were many similarities between these two Semitic languages.[74]

In the seventh century B.C., the Hebrew prophets began to oppose the sacrifice of eldest sons.[75] Jeremiah vehemently separated the people of Israel from their Phoenician neighbors as he cried out against the practice of human sacrifice: "[t]hey have filled this place with the blood of innocents, and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal. . . . [T]his place shall no more be called Topheth or the valley of the son of Hinnom but the valley of Slaughter."[76]

After the seventh century, there is no more real evidence of human sacrifice among the Hebrews or the Phoenicians of the eastern Mediterranean.[77] Long before that, however, Queen Dido and her crew had left the East. When they came to settle Carthage, they brought with them both the ancient gods and their hunger for human blood. With the zeal of new colonists, they preserved the ancient ways long after those ways had died away in their homeland.

Archaeologists of Carthage have excavated a cemetery that would have been on the edge of the ancient city near the ports (see Figure 2.2). It contained only urns and stelae of children and animals that had been sacrificed to Baal-Hammon and Tanit. Archaeologists have called this the "tophet," after the biblical reference in Jeremiah to the spot where children were sacrificed. Almost all the stelae record that the

sacrifices were given in fulfillment of a vow or in response to some divine favor.[78] This still sad space, which is filled with layers of rubble, vividly expresses the fears of ancient parents who responded to their deep anxiety about the future by sacrificing their children. What is perhaps most impressive about the site is the sheer number of urns buried there. Between 400 and 200 B.C., during the height of Carthaginian power, as many as twenty thousand urns may have been deposited: an average of one hundred deposits a year or slightly fewer than one every three days.[79] Such numbers mean either that this was an everyday feature of Carthaginian life or, more likely, that many children were sacrificed at once in times of perceived danger. Most probably the large numbers of urns came from a combination of parents satisfying individual vows by sacrificing a single child and an occasional public need demanding a sacrifice of a goodly number of children. The archaeological evidence to date indicates that the majority of the sacrifices involved one to three burials at a time.[80]

The remains in the tophet show both child and animal bones, but both children and animals were sacrificed throughout the period of its use; there was not a progression from human to animal offerings.[81] Instead, apparently at times an animal could substitute for a promised child, just as Abraham could substitute a ram for his beloved son Isaac. An inscription on a stone in rural North Africa describes this practice. A family sacrificed a sheep to Saturn (the Roman name for Baal-Hammon) in thanks for the cure of their daughter. The parents, like the biblical Abraham, claimed to have received permission for the substitution in the form of a "vision and a vow," and thus the sheep offered "breath for breath, life for life,"[82] and the child was spared. The presence of animal bones in the place of human sacrifice simply testified to the occasional kindness of the Punic gods who at times suspended their harsh contract—Carthaginian prosperity in exchange for the lives of an astonishing number of their children.

The excavations in the tophet bear silent witness to the truth of the written sources that tell of the Carthaginian practice of child sacrifice. Christian writers as late as the fourth century A.D. recalled in horror the practice of sacrificing children. Eusebius of Caesarea wrote that rulers had to give up the most beloved of their children in times of "great crises or danger."[83] Augustine wrote that Carthaginians sacrificed their children because humans were the most valuable sacrifice of all. Of course, Augustine used this information as a contrast with the more benign practices of the Christian God, but the memory of the sacrifice was powerful.[84]

The most detailed description of the sacrifice came from the ancient

author Diodorus of Sicily, who wrote an account of the Punic wars with Rome. Diodorus wrote that during the dark days of the First Punic War, the Carthaginians tried to understand how they seemed to have lost the favor of their gods. They looked to their traditional rituals to see if any had been neglected. Diodorus tells us they selected two hundred of the noblest children for sacrifice, and another one hundred voluntarily were sacrificed. Then the author described the way the children were burnt: "There was in their city a bronze image of Cronus [Baal-Hammon, known as Saturn or Cronus], extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire."[85] Although Diodorus did not say what happened next, archaeological evidence shows the burnt bones were gathered and placed in urns and buried under a commemorative stele.

It seems that the children were killed before they were placed in the arms of the god. Plutarch described the sacrifice: "They themselves offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds."[86] This sacrifice also required that the children and the parents offer it willingly. Tertullian explained that youth helped in the children's complicity. Describing the worship of Saturn in the "Apology," Tertullian wrote that children must be selected who are too young to understand death so they would laugh at the knife; further, compliant parents fondled their children to make them laugh at the moment of death.[87] Minucius Felix also described the importance of parental involvement in the sacrifice: "Infants are sacrificed to him [Saturn] by their parents, who stifle their squalling by caresses and kisses to prevent the sacrifice of a tearful victim."[88]

Plutarch's description suggests that the parents' complicity did not come easily. He says if mothers shed a "single tear" the good effect of the sacrifice was nullified and the child would be sacrificed anyway. Furthermore, "[T]he whole area before the statue was filled with a loud noise of flutes and drums so that the cries of the wailing should not reach the ears of the people."[89] Of course, this makes sense. For a sacrifice to be efficacious, it must be difficult. The most difficult sacrifice of all would be for parents joyfully to hand their children to the knife and flame.

The Carthaginian tradition of sacrifice was made more influential by the fact that it was not limited to parents' willingness to deliver their children to the flames of Baal-Hammon. If this had been so, the inclination may have died out under Roman pressure to abandon the practice. However, Carthaginians also valued self-sacrifice, a sacrificial suicide that offered the most precious gift to the gods, themselves.

Suicide is a particularly troubling concept, for us and for the ancients who contemplated it. Some philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle, disapproved of it; others like the Cynics and some Stoics approved of it as an honorable option in a dishonorable world.[90] In many instances, an acceptable suicide is linked to powerlessness. We are accustomed to reading about heroes who by their strength or influence make a dramatic impact on their societies. However, this does not mean that only people who have strength or power care deeply about things larger than themselves. How does an individual who has little to offer make a contribution to his or her community? How do powerless people rise above that constraint to make a political or even a spiritual difference? Women frequently are in the position of lacking the power to change their circumstances, so in the ancient texts, women at times sacrificed themselves in the hope that their deaths would make an impact. These sacrifices became part of the cultural memory, a recognized contribution, and a model for other people who felt powerless to make change.

This notion of sacrificial suicide is not limited to the ancient world, nor is it limited to North Africa. However, it held particular appeal in Carthage—both Punic and Roman. In a society that preserved the idea of human sacrifice, self-sacrifice captured the imagination. The crucial turning points in Carthaginian history were marked by a sacrificial suicide, usually of a woman.

North Africans remembered the suicide of Queen Dido mostly through Virgil's telling. The poet described how the queen built her own funeral pyre, climbed on it and killed herself with her sword. Dido's sister held her bleeding body while the city mourned and honored the death of its queen.[91] This story formed the starting point for the history of Carthage. It was used to explain the animosity between Carthage (embodied by Dido) and Rome (in the person of her lover Aeneas) that led to the destruction of Punic Carthage. However, it was also a model of the supreme sacrifice that an individual could offer.

As late as the fourth century, the Christian Augustine wrote against suicide[92] but nevertheless recalled that in his youth he had been profoundly drawn to this tale; he had cried for Dido who "died for love of Aeneas" and who "surrendered her life to the sword."[93] Dido was only the first of many Carthaginians who were remembered because they sacrificed themselves.

The Carthaginian general Hamilcar Barca in 485 B.C. was fighting

the Greeks in Sicily. The battle was going against him, and the historian Herodotus describes the Carthaginian account: "Hamilcar remained in camp, sacrificing and offering for favorable results whole bodies of victims on a great pyre. But when he saw the rout of his troops happening and he was at that moment pouring the libations on the victims, he threw himself headlong into the pyre." Herodotus goes on to say that the Carthaginians recalled his sacrifice as worthy, and "have made memorials to him in all the cities of the colonists, the greatest monument of all being in Carthage itself."[94] Hamilcar was remembered more for his sacrificial suicide than for his victories in battle.

As the history of Carthage continued, so did the tradition of suicide. At the end of the Third Punic War, the moment of Punic Carthage's destruction was framed and recalled with the death of a woman. After the Carthaginian general Hasdrubal surrendered, his wife reproached him for cowardice. In a final gesture, she cursed her husband, "Upon this Hasdrubal, betrayer of his country and her temples, of me and his children, may the gods of Carthage take vengeance." With these words, she killed their children, flung them into the fires that were consuming the city, and plunged in after them. Appian concluded his account of the incident with his own reproach of the husband: "With these words, . . . did the wife of Hasdrubal die, as Hasdrubal should have died himself."[95]

With the reestablishment of Carthage under Roman rule, the nature of worship of the old gods changed. Baal-Hammon became known as Saturn and Tanit became Caelestis. The nature of the sacrifice to these deities changed as well. In Rome human sacrifice had been banned as early as 97 B.C., but it took much longer than that for the prohibition to take full effect. Hadrian in the mid second century A.D. extended the ban throughout the empire, but it was not until the third century A.D. that the practice of human sacrifice was virtually eliminated in the Roman world.[96] Christian apologists like Minucius Felix would repeatedly point to the continuation of human sacrifice in the Roman world as evidence of Roman spiritual decadence.[97]

It is difficult to trace the practice of child sacrifice specifically in North Africa, for the sources are ambiguous and the practice tenacious. Tertullian in the late second century said that the public sacrifice of children was banned in the "proconsulate of Tiberius." Tertullian offers as witness to this ban the testimony of members of the army who killed the priests who performed the sacrifice.[98] This passage has generated controversy because we do not know whether he refers to Emperor Tiberius in the first century A.D., or to a proconsul of North

Africa in the second half of the second century.[99] Tertullian's text citing contemporary witnesses suggests the later date.

Christian authors asserted that child sacrifice continued in private even after its public banning. This may be supported by excavations of regular cemeteries (not the tophet, which ceased to be used during Roman times). These cemeteries had an unduly high percentage of child burials, which some experts suggest supports the continued occasional practice of child sacrifice in response to some vow.[100]

Whatever was going on in private, the Romans vigorously banned public human sacrifice on the altars of the gods. However, they preserved a particular form of human sacrifice: gladiatorial combat, which Tertullian tells us arose from the practice of human sacrifice. The contests came from the "belief that the souls of the dead are propitiated by human blood," so captives or slaves were sacrificed at funerals.[101] Later, gladiators were condemned men who were trained to die fighting in the arena. They swore a deep and terrible oath to be "burnt, to be chained up, and to be killed by an iron weapon,"[102] and ultimately to bare their necks unflinchingly to the killing blade. While banning human sacrifice in one form, the Romans kept it in another. The games in the arena where humans and animals were killed in a ritual fashion were immediately popular in North Africa. They were perfectly consistent with the sensibility of sacrifice and suicidal sacrifice that was so deeply ingrained in the people's consciousness.

The mosaics that graced the North African homes and showed scenes from the arena like the boxers shown in figure 2.4 show visually the Carthaginian attachment to blood sacrifice. Illustrations in chapter 5 show even more shocking mosaic scenes from the arena. The praise of sacrifice surrounded the prosperous North Africans.

Rome changed the space and expression of human sacrifice from the arms of Baal-Hammon to the arena but did not change the ideal of sacrifice and of sacrificial suicide. Nor did it change the Carthaginian tradition of marking important points of its history with a mythology of sacrifice. For example, such a legend arose to explain the building of the all-important aqueduct of Carthage. The story says that a Roman soldier fell in love with a native princess. She scorned his attentions and established what seemed to be an impossible condition to his winning her hand: she would not marry him until the waters of the Zaghouan flowed to Carthage. The enterprising Roman built the impressive aqueduct and went to claim his bride. Like Dido and General Hasdrubal's wife, the princess killed herself rather than submit, throwing herself from the top of the newly built aqueduct.[103] By adding this

legend to the founding of the aqueduct, the wary Carthaginians could rely on sacrificial blood to ensure the continuation of the water supply to the city.

Such stories continued to mark the history of Carthage until its conquest by the Arabs. At that turning point, a daughter of the defeated Christian general committed suicide by throwing herself off a camel rather than be taken captive.[104] (I admit the height of a camel does not seem lethal, but the significant fact here is the importance placed on the suicide even though the mechanism at hand seems fairly improbable—unless we assume that the camel was walking along the edge of a mountain cliff.)

Even the novels that circulated during that time contained praise for the willingness to die rather than compromise one's principles. In the novel *Babyloniaka*, the heroine is ready to kill herself rather than marry against her will.[105] In the *Golden Ass*, Apuleius tells a tale of a woman who committed suicide at the tomb of her dead husband after brutally avenging his killers. [106]

Perpetua grew up hearing the stories of sacrifice and sacrificial suicide. For a Carthaginian, the opportunity to die for a cause was a deeply ingrained value. During her imprisonment, Perpetua's compatriot Tertullian reminded the group of the long tradition of people who died willingly. He wrote to the imprisoned Christians listing pagans who threw themselves into a volcano or onto a funeral pyre. He continued his chronicle of suicides, writing "even women have despised the flames." He mentions Dido and the wife of General Hasdrubal, both of whom were part of the Carthaginian mythology. He continues cataloguing other men and women who died bravely and concludes that these examples should make it easier for Perpetua and her companions to face death in the arena:

> Therefore, if earthly glory accruing from strength of body and soul is valued so highly that one despises sword, fire, piercing with nails, wild beasts and tortures for the reward of human praise, then I may say the sufferings you endure are but trifling in comparison with the heavenly glory and divine reward.[107]

Tertullian's use of pagan examples to stir Christian resolve points up one of the ironies we confront when we study the ways memories are used. In some tracts, Tertullian is fierce in his condemnation of pagan rituals, in particular rituals calling for sacrificial blood. In his tract "Spectacles," he succinctly articulates the Christian position: "Do you have desire for blood. . . ? You have the blood of Christ."[108] Christ's blood was the sufficient sacrifice that replaced all others. Yet, Tertullian lived and thought in a time and place that valued sacrifice and sacrificial suicide. He drew from this tradition to bring people's actions to a Christian purpose.

Like her contemporary Tertullian, Perpetua brought the sum of her education and experience—all her memories—to her decision to die for her faith. These experiences included the strong tradition of Rome that made it so difficult for her to withstand the pressure of her family and her obligations. However, her ideas were also strongly shaped by her experience in North Africa. As a Carthaginian she was prepared for self-sacrifice. She was also exposed to the many ideas that circulated in the cosmopolitan region. These ideas included literature that advocated far more feminine initiative than her traditional Roman upbringing might have permitted.

Her intellectual heritage from both second-century Rome and North Africa included a spiritual longing. This longing fueled a search for new truths on the part of educated North Africans like Apuleius and Tertullian and many others. Perpetua must have been included in that group. Her writings and her dreams show that she drew from her rich background in her spiritual quest. However, there remains the most significant influence in her intellectual progress. Among the diverse ideas that she heard about in the cosmopolitan region was the story of the risen Christ. The ideas Perpetua learned in the Christian community in Carthage formed the third great intellectual thread that wove the pattern for the martyr's brief life.

Perpetua's Passion

The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman

Joyce E. Salisbury

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New York and London