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Prison

PRISON AND TRIAL

Perpetua's baptism while she was under house arrest marked a turning point. She and her companions had directly violated Septimius's edict against conversion, which freed the proconsul to bring charges. A few days after the baptism, Revocatus, Felicitas, Saturninus, Secundus, and Perpetua were moved from house arrest to prison. The prison was probably next to the residence of the governor on the Byrsa hill in the center of Carthage.[1] The account of another martyr, Pionius, who was executed in Carthage at the end of the third century, describes the location of the prison in more detail. The account tells how the martyrs were arrested, led through the forum through the eastern entrance, and taken to the adjacent jail.[2]

The prison that was used for Perpetua may have been similarly located. The group was completed by Saturus, who had been a leader in the Christian community and who voluntarily joined the group in prison. Perpetua wrote of her fright at her imprisonment:

> *I was terrified, as I had never before been in such a dark hole. What a difficult time it was! With the crowd the heat was stifling; then there was the extortion of the soldiers; and to crown all, I was tortured with worry for my baby there.*[3]

Prisons in Roman Carthage were makeshift affairs, simply crude holding areas for prisoners until they were moved elsewhere. The most secure area of a temporary prison would likely be in an underground storage area, thus in the dark. Accounts of later Carthaginian martyrs

draw the same kinds of pictures of the holding prison. When Montanus and his Christian companions were arrested and imprisoned in Carthage in A.D. 259, the prison was termed a "foul darkness" like the "pitch-black veil of night."[4] Another imprisoned Christian woman told of a vision that reveals more information about the temporary nature of the holding area. She said she saw the stone that was in the window miraculously removed so she could glimpse the heavens.[5] Her vision suggests ways prisoners were kept secure (by placing large stones in the windows) and also reveals the longing for light. Perpetua, too, feared the dark, crowded conditions of the prison space.

It was customary for prisoners or their friends and relatives to bribe the guards to get better treatment. The surrogate family that made up the Christian community in Carthage rallied to the help of the prisoners. Perpetua expressed her gratitude for their help:

> *Tertius and Pomponius, those blessed deacons who tried to take care of us, bribed the soldiers to allow us to go to a better part of the prison to refresh ourselves for a few hours. Everyone then left that dungeon and shifted for himself.*[6]

The support of the free Christians for the imprisoned confessors played a crucial role not only for prisoners but in shaping the image of the church itself. Tertullian referred to two kinds of help. One was institutional: resources of the church that were given to ease the prisoners' condition, which he called "the nourishment for the body which our Lady Mother the church [offers] from her breast." This is one of the earliest references to the church as Mother, and it clearly derives from the serious need for sustenance that martyrs like Perpetua experienced during the hardships of imprisonment. The second kind of help was the generosity of individual Christians who contributed from their private resources.[7]

Tertullian himself offered something for the group: words of encouragement. In his tract "To the Martyrs," he sent "some offering that will contribute to the sustenance of the spirit. For it is not good that the flesh be feasted while the spirit goes hungry."[8] There is some dispute about the date of Tertullian's tract, but the evidence seems strong that it was written to this small group imprisoned in March 203.[9] Even if the tract had been written earlier,[10] Perpetua and her companions would have known of it. In it, Tertullian reminded the group of people in the past who had sacrificed themselves in the Carthaginian tradition. He even referred specifically to imprisoned women (which further argues for its composition for Perpetua's group), urging them to be as brave as men, and as other brave Carthaginian

women, like Dido.[11] Threads of Tertullian's letter weave through Perpetua's dream narrative; she seems to have taken his words to heart. The Christian community both as individuals and as a collective gathered to help the imprisoned members in their time of need. The strong community that formed part of the appeal of the early church was visible even in the darkest prison.

Once Perpetua had been released to a more comfortable place in the prison, her attention turned to her child. Perpetua's spiritual progress required her to break her filial ties with her father. Now she confronted her maternal ties with her son. Her immediate concern was to feed him: *"I nursed my baby, who was faint from hunger."* Then, as any young mother might, she consulted with her own mother. *"In my anxiety I spoke to my mother about the child, I tried to comfort my brother, and I gave the child into their charge."*[12]

Her family took the child and kept him for "many days," but this did not end Perpetua's concern for him. She requested and received permission to have the baby stay with her in prison. Her mind was eased once she had the child in her care: *"At once I recovered my health, relieved as I was of my worry and anxiety over the child. My prison had suddenly become a palace, so that I wanted to be there rather than anywhere else."*[13]

Perpetua's ambivalent position regarding her son reveals some potential ambiguity regarding the roles of mother and martyr. Did one have to renounce the maternal role in order to seek Christian spiritual perfection in the same way that Perpetua renounced her expected role as dutiful daughter? This ambivalence probably derived in part from the fact that the earliest example of martyrdom in the Judeo-Christian tradition centered on a mother who was martyred with her sons. This martyrdom was described in the *Book of the Maccabees* in the Old Testament Apocrypha, and Perpetua very likely knew this text.[14]

These Maccabean martyrs were tortured in the second century B.C. because they refused to break Jewish law and eat forbidden food. The longest account of this martyrdom is preserved in *4 Maccabees*, written probably in the first century A.D. In this account (which influenced many subsequent Christian heroics)[15] an aged mother was brought to the authorities with her seven sons. The author of *4 Maccabees* was careful to detail maternal love: "Observe how complex is a mother's love for her children, which draws everything toward an emotion felt in her inmost parts. . . . In seven pregnancies she had implanted in herself tender love toward them, and because of the many pains she suffered with each of them she had sympathy for them."[16] Yet, she did not try to save her sons, instead she "urged them on, each child singly and all together, to death for the sake of religion," and "they obeyed her even

to death in keeping the ordinance."[17] The mother, too, was martyred after watching her sons die.

Although the author of *4 Maccabees* found the mother exceptionally brave ("she fired her woman's reasoning with a man's courage"),[18] he nevertheless seemed to find nothing structurally incongruous about a mother's becoming a martyr. Judaism in the Hellenistic world was a community-centered religion. Indeed, the central tenet of Judaism was precisely to preserve a separate community intact in spite of the strength of the surrounding culture. One of the ways societies traditionally had marked community was by eating together, and indeed family and community meals were frequently guided by the women of the households, the mothers. So in this traditional structure, mothers drew the community together through control of the food that the group shared. Jewish dietary laws, while satisfying Biblical injunctions of purity, served to mark the Jewish community as a community, remaining separate from the surrounding society.

Presumably, before her arrest the Maccabean mother cared for the integrity of the Jewish community and the family's place within it. As part of that care, she kept the dietary laws that marked her family as Jewish, and she made sure her sons kept the same laws. After their arrest, the mother fulfilled the same function. She urged her sons to keep the dietary laws that preserved the family as members of the Jewish community. This martyrdom was about preserving family identity and piety in the face of oppression. This family role was appropriate to a mother, especially a pious mother raising dutiful sons. The author of the text called her the "mother of the nation, vindicator of the law and champion of religion."[19] Religion was joined with nationality and law, providing a complete picture of what traditionally constituted community. Mothers served to continue that community.

A century after *4 Maccabees* was written, Christian martyrs looked back to this model of martyrdom, but the situation had changed. Christian communities were creating new social structures that called for individuals to leave their fathers and mothers, to break previous community ties and form new communities. Motherhood, with its emphasis on family, on creating and preserving future generations, would seem to be incompatible with personal salvation gained through martyrdom. The goal of Christian martyrdom was to follow the example of Christ and not let considerations of family, society, or cultural continuity get in the way. The martyrs took seriously Jesus's call to leave worldly concerns behind. Tertullian, in his letter to the imprisoned group, reminded them of this point succinctly: "The Christian . . . even when he is outside the prison, has renounced the world."[20]

When Perpetua happily had her son in prison with her, she may have at some level hoped to maintain both her roles, mother and martyr. Perhaps she imagined herself, like the Maccabean mother, dying with her son. However, Christian witness was more individual than Jewish community solidarity. She was not to have her son join her in martyrdom, but it would take more time in prison before Perpetua came to that realization.

A few days later, the prisoners heard they were to have a hearing to determine their fate. Perpetua's father, *"worn with worry,"* came to see her at the prison to try to persuade her to abandon this course. Any of us who has tried to persuade an intransigent twenty-year-old to renounce some course of action can surely react with compassion to Perpetua's father's desperation:

> *Daughter . . . have pity on my grey head—have pity on me your father, . . . if I have favored you above all your brothers, if I have raised you to reach this prime of your life. Do not abandon me to be the reproach of men. Think of your brothers, think of your mother and your aunt, think of your child, who will not be able to live once you are gone. Give up your pride! You will destroy all of us! None of us will ever be able to speak freely again if anything happens to you.*[21]

Perpetua's father tried to draw Perpetua back again into the family that formed the core of Roman society. He reminded her of her relatives, of the family honor in the community, and of the special ties between father and daughter. In his letter to the martyrs, Tertullian warned them that relatives would try to draw the martyrs back from their purpose,[22] and that was certainly Perpetua's father's desire. Tertullian need not have worried about the young woman; her resolve was strong. Perpetua wrote:

> *This was the way my father spoke out of love for me, kissing my hands and throwing himself down before me. With tears in his eyes he no longer addressed me as his daughter but as a woman. I was sorry for my father's sake, because he alone of all my kin would be unhappy to see me suffer.*
>
> *I tried to comfort him saying: "It will all happen in the prisoner's dock as God wills; for you may be sure that we are not left to ourselves but are all in his power."*
>
> *And he left me in great sorrow.*[23]

Romans who adhered to the values I described in the first chapter would have found this confrontation with the *pater familias* shocking. Perpetua had to forget or reject all her Roman upbringing to emerge victorious in this confrontation. Her rebellion and her father's sorrow

point to the split in families that was occurring as Christianity spread through the empire. Perpetua's statement that he alone of her family would grieve for her may suggest that the rest of her family was Christian, or at least had Christian sympathies. Perpetua and the Christian members of her family surely would have known of Tertullian's tract "On Patience," written only a few years before and circulated in the Carthage Christian community. In this tract, Tertullian specifically says that Christians were not to grieve for the death of a loved one. Instead they should rejoice that the loved one has gone ahead to God.[24] Following Tertullian's exhortation, Perpetua believed the Christian members of her family would rejoice in her martyrdom and the expected salvation that would follow. Her father would grieve alone.[25]

One morning as the prisoners were eating breakfast, they were suddenly taken out for their hearing, which was to be held in the forum on the Byrsa hill. It was usual for the Roman officials to hear cases in this most public space of Carthage. In the martyrdom of Montanus in Carthage in 259, the confessors were brought to the forum in chains, then "led back and forth all over the forum by soldiers who did not know where the procurator wanted to hear [the] case."[26] This anecdote of military confusion shows both the regularity of hearings in the forum, and the lack of a regular trial location within the public area. Since hearings were in the forum, crowds eager for novelty always gathered. This was also the case with Perpetua and her companions. The word spread quickly about the hearing and a *"huge crowd"* gathered at the forum to watch the proceedings. It was there that the small group confronted the rigorously conservative proconsul Hilarianus.

Of the other prisoners, Perpetua simply says they *"admitted their guilt"* when they were questioned.[27] In her case, she described in more detail the questioning that marked the final break with her family and confirmed her call to martyrdom. As her turn came to be questioned, her father appeared with her infant. He dragged Perpetua from the step as she began to climb to the prisoner's dock to undergo questioning. He made a final plea: *"Perform the sacrifice—have pity on your baby."* Hilarianus, too, tried to call her back to the duties of a Roman daughter and matron. He said, *"Have pity on your father's grey head; have pity on your infant son. Offer the sacrifice for the welfare of the emperors."* Perpetua refused concisely, *"I will not."* Hilarianus then asked the one question that was pertinent in the hearing, *"Are you a Christian?"* Perpetua answered, *"Yes, I am a Christian."*

With this statement, Perpetua repeated the words of the Scillitan martyrs who had died in Carthage twenty years before.[28] Since the reasons for persecuting Christians were vague, the crimes ill-defined, for a magistrate who wanted to pursue the persecution, no further information was needed other than Perpetua's obstinate self-definition. Like martyrs before and after her, by giving up her name and renaming herself as a Christian, Perpetua has taken on a new identity.[29]

The moment Perpetua identified herself as a Christian, she no longer belonged to Rome. Hilarianus would waste no more time in persuasion. As Perpetua's father persisted in his attempt to dissuade his daughter, *"Hilarianus ordered him to be thrown to the ground and beaten with a rod. I felt sorry for father, just as if I myself had been beaten. I felt sorry for his pathetic old age."* Perpetua felt compassion, but her confession had separated her from her father once and for all. Hilarianus passed the sentence, as Perpetua recounted joyfully: *"We were condemned to the beasts, and we returned to prison in high spirits."*[30]

The sentence Hilarianus passed was particularly harsh. The Scillitan martyrs had been beheaded, and for a young Roman citizen to be sentenced to the beasts was highly unusual.[31] This sentence reinforces my opinion that Hilarianus had a contest in the arena in mind when he arrested the group.

Once back in prison, it seems Perpetua thought to resume her role as mother as she continued to her martyrdom. She asked the deacon Pomponius to go to her father, retrieve her infant, and bring him back to the prison. Her father refused. Perpetua's final ties to her family were broken. She would seek salvation alone, leaving her son to find his own path. Perpetua saw signs of divine will in her withdrawal from her son: *"As God willed, the baby had no further desire for the breast, nor did I suffer any inflammation; and so I was relieved of any anxiety for my child and of any discomfort in my breasts."*[32] This seeming evidence of divine approval in the text reinforced the notion that martyrdom was incompatible with maternity.[33] The time of the Maccabean mothers was over; martyrdom was a matter of private conscience, not family ties.

The degree to which Perpetua rejected her maternal role to seek martyrdom was reinforced as the story of her passion was passed on through the Middle Ages. In a trial-transcript form of the Passion written probably in the middle of the fourth century, the author removed the tension Perpetua expressed throughout her own account and simply said the martyr pushed her child aside saying to her parents: "Get away from me you workers of evil, since I no longer know you."[34] In the influential thirteenth-century compilation of saints' lives written by Jacobus de Voragine and known as the *Golden Legend*, the Franciscan drew from the fourth-century version to emphasize again

Perpetua's rejection of family ties. In this account, Perpetua's anxiety for her child disappeared: "Then the father laid her child upon her neck, and he . . . said: 'Be merciful to us, daughter, and live with us!' But she threw the child aside, and repulsed her parents, saying: 'Begone from me, enemies of God, for I know you not!'"[35] Perpetua's family, including her child, were portrayed as "enemies," and in her search for martyrdom, she threw them aside. This account is consistent with Tertullian's warnings about the family's drawing its people from martyrdom, and highlights the strong notion in the early Christian communities that new social bonds were shaped in the confession of Christianity.

DREAMS AND VISIONS

The major part of Perpetua's diary consists of an account of her visionary dreams in prison. Saturus, too, described a dream as the only record he made during his imprisonment. It is not surprising that dreams were accorded such attention, given the prominence early Christians gave prophecy and visions. But the predominant place accorded to these dreams in the text is eloquent testimony to their value both for the dreamers and the subsequent Christians who preserved these dream testimonies with such care. Christian communities not only listened to ecstatic prophecy but recorded such visions for reflection later. In his work "On the Soul" (written after Perpetua's death), Tertullian described almost in passing the importance of recording visions. He told of a woman who during a service "became rapt in ecstasy." He went on to say, "After the services were over and the laity had left, we asked her as is our custom, what visions she had. All her visions are carefully written down for purposes of examination."[36] Perpetua and Saturus carefully recorded their visions, and the Christian community carefully saved them. All these actions were based on their understanding, their memories, of what one did with visions. Further, the visions were preserved by the ritual reading of them during the services.

Before I examine these dreams with the care accorded by Perpetua and her companions, I will first contrast their view of dreams with our own, for Perpetua's contemporaries understood dreams far differently than we do. For the most part, modern dream theorists fall into two basic groups: those who believe dreams reveal only the individual, and those who believe dreams may offer some transcendent insights. Both groups believe that interpretations of dreams may offer insights to help the individual.[37]

Theories that see dreams as revealing only the individual virtually began with Freud, who established for the nineteenth century and beyond the belief that dreams focus backward and inward. In *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud dismissed the concept of dreams as premonitory: "It would be truer to say instead that they give us knowledge of the past. For dreams are derived from the past in every sense."[38] Although Freudian theory has been changed and refined, most psychoanalytic dream analysis focuses on a dream as a pathway to the individual's unconscious, to his or her past.

Carl Jung established the possibility for modern dream theorists to see dreams as revealing something more transcendent than the individual. By exploring archetypical images in dreams, Jung believed dreams led individuals to a larger consciousness. Jung even allowed for the possibility that some dreams point to the future to anticipate an individual's future development.[39] Jung was not alone in exploring the transcendent in dreams. Kelly Bulkeley argues that even in our modern secular society dreams have a dimension of religious meaning.[40] Even among modern dream analysts who allow for transcendent or even prophetic dreams,[41] none whose works I have read share the ancient belief that dreams may originate from outside the dreaming psyche. Modern dreams originate within the dreamer.

Beyond this concern for the origin of the dream, one of the first things that distinguishes ancient dream wisdom from ours is the ancients' assumption that some dreams were true and some were not. This question does not come up in modern dream analysis because we believe that although some dreams might be more significant or reveal a deeper insight than others, all truly reflect some aspect of the inner life of the dreamer. However, the ancient world believed that dreams did not all come from within the dreamer; some came from other sources and were received into the soul of the dreamer. With the possibility of an outside source for dreams the question of their validity became more important. Virgil in the *Aeneid* offered one explanation for the two kinds of dreams, and his explanation was widely known and quoted in the ancient world: "There are two gates of sleep, one of which is said to be of horn, by which an easy egress is given to true spirits; the other is gleaming, wrought of dazzling ivory but the shades send by it false dreams to the upper world."[42] In this model, dreams offer access to the transcendent world, in this case the world of the dead. From there, spirits send dreams that are either true or false, which raised the important question of how to tell the difference. For this, a skilled dream interpreter was required.

An interpreter was also frequently required for dreams that foretold

the future, even if they were acknowledged as "true." In the second century, Artemidorus wrote a summary of dream lore that distilled the status of pagan beliefs on dreams. This work circulated during Perpetua's life and influenced people's understanding of dreams. Artemidorus said there were two general kinds of dreams. The first kind had no particular meaning and derived from the dreamer's present experience. (It would not particularly matter if these dreams were true or false because they were not offering any advice.) The second kind of dream was more important: dreams that predicted the future. This category of premonitory dreams could be subdivided into dreams that predicted directly and those that needed interpretation.[43] These were the dreams for which it was most important to determine whether they came through the gate of horn or the gate of ivory.

Dreams that predict were seen to come from the divine, for the future was known only to the gods. As Artemidorus explained, "For the god presents to the dreamer's soul, which is by its very nature prophetic, dreams in response to future events."[44] Souls were susceptible to the influence of the divine, and there were many ancients who saw in dreams the way individuals were able to come in direct contact with God. For example, the Neoplatonists of the second century thought individuals could reach God through ecstasy, contemplation, and dreams.[45] Initiates into mystery religions frequently had to be invited directly by the deity, usually through a dream.[46] In Apuleius's *Golden Ass*, Isis appears to Lucius in a dream that foretells his salvation.[47] Thus, the pre-Christian world had ample precedent for concern with dreams, their validation and their interpretation. It would have been remarkable if the Christians who shared these ideas would not also have given dreams their close attention, even without the association of dreams with Christian prophecy.

Christians drew their ideas on dreams not only from the classical world but from sacred Scripture. The Old Testament portrayed the dream world as the place where the holy and the secular came together. Jacob's famous dream of a ladder extending to heaven with angels ascending and descending became a prototype for the linking of God and his world.[48] In the Book of Job, Elihu reminds Job that God communicates with men in dreams.[49] In addition, the Old Testament contains numerous examples of famous premonitory dreams, such as the dreams by Pharoah described in Genesis about the seven years of famine that would follow seven years of plenty.[50] The New Testament has fewer examples of divinely inspired dreams, but they are there, particularly in Matthew and Acts.[51] However, simply because there was ample Christian precedent for valuing dreams, that did not mean

Christians were fully comfortable with them. There were always the problems of the origin of the dream (divine or otherwise) and its interpretation (accurate or not).[52]

Christian ambivalence about dreams began in the earliest years and continued throughout the Middle Ages.[53] For the Christian communities in second-century Carthage, Tertullian defined Christian attitudes toward dreams. In his tract "On the Soul," written between 206 and 210, Tertullian included several chapters analyzing dreams, and these became the first Christian study of the subject. Tertullian began by establishing the problem: there has to be a *Christian* "explanation of dreams as accidents of sleep and rather serious disturbances of the soul."[54] After exploring pagan views on dreams, Tertullian established an understanding of his own. Everyone dreams, and dreams derive from three sources: the Devil, God, or the soul itself. The first source can include dreams that are true and false, but they are not to be trusted. The dreams from God are blessings of the Holy Spirit,[55] and it was these dreams that Tertullian valued so much as prophetic utterances. Given this theory, it is not surprising that Tertullian emphasized the importance of knowing the origin of the dream. In this he followed Artemidorus in trusting an interpreter to locate the dream's origin. If it were from the Holy Spirit, it was less important to get a specific interpretation of its meaning. In this he departed from ancients and moderns who emphasize dream interpretation.

For the ancients, for Freud, and for subsequent dream analysts, the dream and the dreamer represented only half the story. Equally important was the dream interpretation. Modern psychoanalytic literature gives at least as much attention to the best way to understand the meaning of a dream as it does to any dream or dreamer. A dream can be understood by a dreamer's free association on the dream, by group projection and discussion, or by direct interpretation by a sensitive counselor.[56] All these methods share the assumption that the dream has something to tell, that it offers insights that will help or heal the dreamer. These techniques also assume that the dreamer wants to know the meaning of a dream. By these last assumptions, modern dream theorists begin to have things in common with ancient dreamers who frequently sought the services of a dream interpreter to help them understand the meanings of their dreams.

Pharoah's dreams required Joseph to interpret them.[57] Artemidorus was a skilled dream master who argued it took an expert to take into account such things as the gender, occupation, legal status, and social position of the dreamer before he could accurately interpret the dream.[58] The ancient pagan and Judaic world shared our modern de-

sires to have the meanings of dreams assessed by experts. As we saw in Tertullian's tract, however, the early Christians did not emphasize the need for dream readers. The fourth-century Neoplatonist Synesius of Cyrene most clearly articulated the attitude that was emerging in the early Christian communities. Jacques LeGoff summarizes Synesius's position: "There was no need to resort to oneiromancers because every man and woman was capable of interpreting his or her own dreams. He saw this, moreover, as one of man's fundamental rights. To each his own dreams and their interpretation."[59]

The origin of the Christian attitude toward personal dream interpretation must be sought somewhere other than in the classic dream literature that virtually always argued for expert analysis. In the second century in Carthage two texts from the biblical apocrypha circulated widely and were valued and read. These were *Second Esdras* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*.[60] In the second century the biblical canon had not yet been established, so Christians treasured such works as highly as those that later would become Scripture. Both of these works deal with dreamers and prophecy and both portray the dreamer as the best interpreter. Such texts changed the nature of dream interpretation for Christians, making it more personal than it had been before.

The apocryphal *Second Book of Esdras* (called the *Fourth Book of Esdras* since the Council of Trent) was written near the end of the first century A.D. The main part of this work is a series of seven revelations that the dreamer is led to understand by the angel Uriel, who also appears in dreams. After Ezra achieved wisdom through these dreams, God spoke through him in prophecy.[61] In this text, the most important question in a Christian context was settled early: the dreams were of divine origin. Presumably, if God cared enough to send a dream to Ezra, He cared enough to make sure that the dreamer understood it. Thus, the interpreter was provided within the dream itself.

This message was even more clear and direct in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which was written in the middle of the second century and was extraordinarily popular during the early church. Tertullian put it in the category of sacred Scripture, and other early church fathers also valued it.[62] In this text, Hermas was led to wisdom through five dreams or visions. Hermas had dreams within the dreams of spiritual dreamguides who interpreted the dreams for him.[63] Through the interpretations of the dreams, Hermas grew in spiritual understanding until his final vision, when he saw a shepherd. In the dream, he is told that the shepherd has "been sent by the most venerable angel to dwell with you for the rest of your life."[64] The shepherd will remain Hermas's "dream companion," representative of Hermas's newfound wisdom.[65] Like

Ezra, Hermas finished his work with a series of prophecies, or mandates for living a Christian life. The dreams, interpreted by people within the dream itself, form the basis for subsequent prophecy.

Hermas concluded with Ezra that when God selects his vessel, he empowers that person with the ability to interpret the dream. Many Christians, perhaps influenced by texts like these, renounced the pagan practice of consulting dream interpreters who seemed altogether too much like augurs and diviners. Hermas, in his mandate against false prophets, says, "For, no spirit granted by God has to be consulted. It speaks everything with the Godhead's power, because it is from above, from the power of the divine Spirit."[66] This Christian message led Tertullian and others to worry less about interpreting dreams and more about whether or not the dreamer was worthy to have a vision from God. If so, the dreamer could interpret it. Augustine's mother, for example, repeatedly interpreted her dreams to her famous son, and he accepted her interpretation because he was sure that her dreams had been sent by God.[67]

It was not difficult for Augustine to decide his mother's dreams were from God because he had already decided she was saintly. As we saw in the case of prophets in the early Christian communities, it was not always easy to be certain whether their prophecy was true or, to phrase it a different way, whether their visions were from God. Christians had to assess the worthiness of the vessels as well as the strength of the message.

When it came to confessors, however, the task was simpler. People who had been selected for martyrdom were seen to have been selected by the Holy Spirit.[68] Thus, their dreams were accepted as prophetic.[69] Accounts of martyrs are full of dreams that were premonitory. Eusebius wrote of the dream of Polycarp in which his martyrdom by fire was predicted in a dream of his pillow bursting into flames.[70] The martyr Renus had a vision that showed him leading his group with lamps, and he interpreted that dream to mean all would be saved.[71] The list of martyr visionaries can be extended considerably,[72] but these should suffice to show that the dreams of martyrs-to-be were considered to be always from God. Furthermore, the interpretation of the dreams was not left to discussion; the confessor interpreted the dream for the faithful. When Perpetua and Saturus recorded their dreams, it was in this spirit. They preserved and interpreted their dreams for the community.

In the twentieth century, we can analyze the meaning of the confessors' dreams from many different perspectives. One could take a Freudian approach to the images, focusing on the phallic dragon and swords,[73] or one could take a Jungian approach, focusing on the arche-

typical images in Perpetua's dreamworld.[74] Instead, I shall rely on Perpetua's and Saturus's own interpretations of their dreams. This approach concentrates on Perpetua's understanding of her experience and acknowledges the way subsequent readers understood this text. The faithful who for centuries listened to the account of Perpetua's visions accepted her interpretation of her dreams. Of course, Perpetua's interpretations of her dreams were shaped by her understandings of dream interpretation which she brought from her pagan and Christian experiences.

Beyond the direct meaning of these dreams, however, I want to focus specifically on the content of the dreams and the relation between the dream images and the dreamer's waking life, both past and immediate.[75] I will look closely at the images Perpetua saw in her visions, as well as the way she chose to express these images. In our dreams, our minds select impressions that are familiar to us, that are in some way part of our thought world. Cicero noted this tendency of dreams: "It often happens that our thoughts and words affect us during sleep."[76] Although the images may certainly have symbolic meaning that may point to a larger truth, they directly reveal our mental world. I will explore the images that Perpetua's subconscious selected to express the truths she believed she saw. This will reveal how Perpetua's memories were brought to bear on her understanding of her imprisonment and her forthcoming execution. In these mental images, we can see a microcosm of the conflict of cultures that led to the imprisonment of the young mother and her companions. And for me most surprising, we see revealed a remarkable synthesis that led to the confessor going confidently to her death in the arena.

THE CONFESSORS' DREAMS

Once the prisoners had been moved from the darkest prison, Perpetua had her first vision. This dream was solicited. One of Perpetua's fellow prisoners (whom she referred to as "brother"), said to her: "*Dear sister, you are greatly privileged; surely you might ask for a vision to discover whether you are to be condemned or freed.*"[77] The Christian community believed an arrest indicated that a person had been selected for martyrdom, thus Perpetua was "privileged." Again, within the context of early Christian understanding, this selection placed her among those who could expect a premonitory dream sent from the Holy Spirit. Perpetua shared her companion's confidence and responded: "*Faithfully I promised that I would, for I knew that I could speak with the Lord, whose great blessings I had come to experience.*"[78] We cannot know what "blessings" Perpetua had experienced in the past, but it seems likely she had already had dream-visions, or had participated in other forms of ecstatic experiences in the community. She was too confident in her ability to speak to God for the presence of the Spirit to be new to her. This was perfectly consistent with what she would have learned in the Christian gathering.

Furthermore, Tertullian in his letter to the martyrs reassured them that their imprisonment would not separate them from the experiences they knew in the services. He wrote that prison might confine their bodies, but it was conducive to setting their spirits free. He urged them, "In spirit wander about, in spirit take a walk. . . . The spirit carries about the whole man and brings him wherever he wishes."[79] In the ancient world, people believed dreams sometimes came because the spirit wandered free during sleep. Perpetua could well have taken Tertullian's words to heart and expected fruitful dreams in prison. She tells her brother/companion she will tell him the next day the results of her vision. She continues briefly and confidently: "*Then I made my request and this was the vision I had.*"

Perpetua's First Vision

> *I saw a ladder of tremendous height made of bronze, reaching all the way to the heavens, but it was so narrow that only one person could climb up at a time. To the sides of the ladder were attached all sorts of iron weapons: there were swords, spears, hooks, daggers, and spikes; so that if anyone tried to climb up carelessly or without paying attention, he would be mangled and his flesh would adhere to the weapons.*
>
> *At the foot of the ladder lay a dragon of enormous size, and it would attack those who tried to climb up and try to terrify them from doing so. And Saturus was the first to go up, he who was later to give himself up of his own accord. He had been the builder of our strength, although he was not present when we were arrested. And he arrived at the top of the staircase and he looked back and said to me: "Perpetua, I am waiting for you. But take care; do not let the dragon bite you. "He will not harm me," I said, "in the name of Christ Jesus." Slowly, as though he were afraid of me, the dragon stuck his head out from underneath the ladder. Then, using it as my first step, I trod on his head and went up.*
>
> *Then I saw an immense garden, and in it a grey-haired man sat in shepherd's garb; tall he was, and milking sheep. And standing around him were many thousands of people clad in white garments. He raised his head, looked at me, and said: "I am glad you have come, my child." He called me over to him and gave me, as it were, a mouthful of the milk he was drawing; and I took it into my cupped hands and consumed it. And*

all those who stood around said: "Amen!" At the sound of this word I came to, with the taste of something sweet still in my mouth.[80]

When Perpetua requested this dream, she had been preoccupied with what was to happen to the group. This dream was about salvation, but it was equally about fear and about the strength of community. The images she chose drew from various elements of her past experience to express these ideas. These memories were Roman, Carthaginian, and Christian.

First, the general association that would have contributed to the shape of this dream was Perpetua's knowledge that she would have to face beasts in the arena. The serpent represented a foreshadowing of that struggle in which she hoped to be victorious "in the name of Christ Jesus." Perpetua's subconscious could have naturally selected a snake to oppose her salvation, drawing from images she read or heard from Genesis. The serpent was given "enmity between you and the woman" and his head would be bruised by the woman's heel,[81] just as happened in the dream. Perpetua's dream might also have been influenced by Tertullian's letter "To the Martyrs," wherein he referred to the devil, saying the martyrs had come to prison "for the very purpose of trampling upon him." Tertullian further compared the devil that she was to confront to a snake (or dragon).[82] In dream images, one can expect words recently read from an influential source to mingle with other recollections, and this is what happens in Perpetua's mind.

Artemidorus also offered insights that might have shaped Perpetua's dream of the dragon at the foot of the ladder. He argued that venomous animals represented powerful men, and further that the head signified parents.[83] These interpretations express vividly, albeit symbolically, Perpetua's current situation: she was treading on the authority of her father, a powerful man, in her quest for spiritual progress.[84] Because she probably knew of Artemidorus's ideas, her mind, struggling with her relationship with her father, might certainly have drawn on this image to express her concern.

In a dream that demonstrated a longing for a better world, the ladder ascending from this world and the serpent that attempted to impede the ascent were natural and obvious symbols. The ladder recalls the Genesis account of Jacob's ladder leading to heaven, but Perpetua's image draws from a much richer background than only scriptural.

Perpetua's mind uses and modifies the images to begin to reveal a more full expression of her experiences. In the Genesis account, the ladder is not described in any detail. Yet, Perpetua sees a ladder of bronze, dangerously framed with weapons. Why would she have seen

the ladder in this way? She may have been reaching for an older, non-Christian example of an ascent to heaven. There was ample precedent in the ancient world for ladders as symbols of crossing beyond to another world,[85] and Perpetua would surely have known of them. Artemidorus believed a ladder in a dream symbolized travel, progress, and danger,[86] all of which work consistently in Perpetua's dream. An ancient Assyrian dream book offered an interpretation that would have applied well to Perpetua's dream: if a man ascends to heaven and the gods bless him, he will die.[87] She may well have been familiar with such dream interpretations that might have shaped the images her mind created. It may also be that the modification to the ladder was a symbolic reflection of her status in prison. The ladder—the path to heaven—was bronze, a weak, soft metal. The weapons affixed to it were iron,[88] much harder than the ladder. Her fear at the strength of the impediments that might get in the way of her salvation may have shaped the image of the ladder itself.

In her narrative, she shows no fear or uncertainty in the path she has chosen, but she knew full well that until a martyr had died constant in the faith, there was no certainty of salvation. She knew this from martyr stories she had heard, for example the stories of the martyrs who died in Lyon in 177, and from the letter from Tertullian that warned repeatedly of the frail flesh that might fail. Her fears may have been expressed symbolically in a ladder much more dangerous than that seen by Jacob.

Furthermore, the ladder as she describes it was shaped by her experience as a Roman/Carthaginian. When she describes the weapons on the ladder, she says quite graphically that someone would be *"mangled and his flesh would adhere to the weapons."* This is what happened in the arena when gladiators and others were killed. It is unlikely that a young Carthaginian of Perpetua's status would not have seen people die in the arena. In her mind, her fear of her upcoming ordeal combined with her previous experience to yield a concrete image that gave vivid shape to her fears. Finally, the images of bronze and weapons were likely shaped by classical authors she had read. Dronke sees echoes of Virgil in the dream as when Pyrrhus breaks into the bronze portals of Priam's palace with weapons like a "snake coming into the light."[89] Perpetua, who grew up reading this literature, drew from it images of struggle and courage.

Perpetua's vision of heaven as a garden also shows a creative mingling in her mind of several Christian sources. The crowd of people dressed in white surely mirror the vision of John in Revelation. For John, these were martyrs whose clothing was washed white in the

"blood of the lamb."[90] Perpetua, in expectation of imminent martyrdom, drew from these consoling images of martyrs in heaven. Yet, John's heaven was not a garden; it was a synagogue or basilica.[91] John's vision was not pastoral, it was resplendent with gold and jewels, the glory of human production.

The Carthaginian community was also familiar with the visionary work written in the mid-second century called the *Apocalypse of St. Peter*. This work offered the first vision of heaven and hell after the Book of Revelation.[92] Peter saw heaven as "a great garden, open, full of fair trees and blessed fruits, and of the odor of perfumes. The fragrance of it was pleasant and came upon us."[93] As we shall see below, Saturus's vision also saw heaven in the form of a garden, and Saturus even emphasized the fragrance that Peter had recalled. It seems that the image of heaven in the Carthaginian communities owed more to Peter's *Apocalypse* than to that of John, which later became canonical.

The image of the shepherd in Perpetua's dream is easier to explain than her choice of a garden. In the early church, by far the predominant image of Christ was of the Good Shepherd; it appeared on Christian carvings, sarcophagi, and frescoes. Furthermore, a shepherd as welcoming guide to a dreamer had appeared in the *Shepherd of Hermas*. In her vision, Perpetua, like Hermas, gained the company of a comforting shepherd/guide, although, unlike Hermas, she placed the shepherd in a garden. She had combined her memories to create a new heavenly vision.

Perpetua's dream offered many elements that revealed the confessor's fear of the upcoming ordeal, but it was not predominately about terror. The dream was primarily about community: the Christian community that she joined as she renounced her father, and the community for whom she recorded this vision. In my emphasis on community, I depart from other scholars who have analyzed these dreams, and who have been so impressed by the singularity of these personal visions that they have stressed their individuality. These visions were only partly about Perpetua's personal spiritual growth; they were also about her integration into a new community as she gave up her old one.

The first element that points to her concern for community is the image of the shepherd. In her vision, the shepherd was old with gray hair; he resembled her description of her father.[94] In portraying the shepherd as a older man, Perpetua changes the images that she brought to her dream world. Early Christian art portrayed the Good Shepherd as a young man, and neither did the *Shepherd of Hermas* show the shepherd as old.[95] In Perpetua's dream, familiar images were changed to replace the father figure she had recently rejected in life. She was welcomed into the heavenly family with paternal caring: *"I am glad you have come, my child."* Her new father was proud of her choice in a way her old father was not.

In addition to the shepherd, another father figure was Saturus, the leader of the small group in prison, and the leader up Perpetua's dream ladder. Perpetua interrupted the narrative of her dream to tell the reader about Saturus. She explained that he was the *"builder of our strength,"* and that he was not arrested at the same time the others were, and later he gave *"himself up of his own accord."* The digression in the middle of the dream narrative is important because it contributes to our understanding of Perpetua's interpretation of her dream. If this dream were in large part about the forging of a new community in heaven, it was important for Perpetua that readers of her vision knew about the leadership of that community. Perpetua may have had to give up a beloved father on earth, but she gained two in heaven.

Another element in her dream that pointed to her concern for a Christian community life was the presence of the *"many thousands of people clad in white garments"* in the garden, recalling the vision in Revelation. Heaven for her was not a lonely place. She could look forward to the same kind of community that had shaped her earthly Christian experience.

This earthly community experience also informed her vision of the heavenly garden. The portion of the dream in which she seems to receive a ritual nourishment of milk from the shepherd while the heavenly community closes her dream with an "Amen" has been much analyzed for its Eucharistic symbols.[96] However, Perpetua had a more specific, local, precedent for this image; Carthaginian Christians ate milk and cheese along with the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Further, at their first Holy Communion the newly baptized were given a cup of milk and honey as a taste of the sweetness of heaven they could later expect.[97] This dream experience collapsed together the ritual community experiences that made Christians part of a new society. When Perpetua awoke with *"the taste of something sweet still in her mouth,"* it was both the taste of honey she had recently received at her baptism and the taste of paradise that she had been promised.

When Perpetua awoke, she "at once" told this dream to her "brother." Because she was able to relate the dream immediately, the "brother" to whom she refers must have been a brother in Christ, a fellow prisoner. Here the words she chose reveal again her bonding with a new community, which was so evident in the dream itself. Her direct

interpretation of the dream addressed its prophetic nature, and answered the question that she had posed when she requested the vision: *"[W]e realized that we would have to suffer, and that from now on we would no longer have any hope in this life."*[98] The vision and her certainty of its meaning shows the intricate way Perpetua's memories and previous experiences began to be integrated in a new and comforting synthesis. This dream resolved her hopes for the future and her relationship with her father, and it confirmed the new community to which she belonged. But her maternal role seems not to have been addressed, and perhaps was still unresolved in her mind.

Perpetua's Second and Third Visions

"Some days" after the hearing and after Perpetua had finally separated from her son and broken her maternal ties, the group was at prayer in prison. During this prayer, Perpetua *"suddenly . . . spoke out and uttered the name Dinocrates. I was surprised; for the name had never entered my mind until that moment."*[99] Because it was not uncommon for Christians to utter prophetic words during prayer, Perpetua naturally looked for meaning in her exclamation.

Dinocrates was her younger brother who had *"died horribly of cancer of the face when he was seven years old, and his death was a source of loathing to everyone."* Because Perpetua had not thought of him for a while until his name came to her during prayer, she interpreted the experience in this way: *"At once I realized that I was privileged to pray for him. I began to pray for him and to sigh deeply for him before the Lord."*[100] Perpetua had ample Christian precedent for believing she had the ability to pray effectively for someone. In his letter to the imprisoned martyrs, Tertullian reminded them they had the ability to pray for and help others in the Christian community.[101] As Perpetua exerted this care for others, she was reclaiming a new maternal role after having renounced the old one.

From the earliest martyrdoms, confessors were recognized to have the power to pray for their new Christian family. Eusebius described this care in maternal terms. He claimed confessors had the power to forgive the lapsed, allowing the church to receive "her stillborn children back alive."[102] The martyrs in this case served as mothers giving rebirth to others in the community. After birth, mothers care for their children. Irenaeus described the care confessors showed other Christians in their community also in maternal terms. He said the confessors "bestowed . . . motherly affection on those who lacked. . . . Shedding many tears on their behalf in supplication to the Father."[103] This is

what Perpetua was doing for her deceased younger brother. In renouncing her role as a mother of Rome, Perpetua did not really renounce maternal caring; she simply changed the locus. If her first visions were in part about belonging to a community with father figures, these next two visions were about belonging and contributing to that community in a maternal way.

While Perpetua prayed for Dinocrates, she received the following vision as she was sleeping:

> *I saw Dinocrates coming out of a dark hole, where there were many others with him, very hot and thirsty, pale and dirty. On his face was the wound he had when he died. . . . There was a great abyss between us: neither could approach the other. Where Dinocrates stood there was a pool full of water; and its rim was higher than the child's height, so that Dinocrates had to stretch himself up to drink. I was sorry that, though the pool had water in it, Dinocrates could not drink because of the height of the rim. Then I woke up, realizing that my brother was suffering.*[104]

Perpetua's previous concern for her son's suffering and his thirst for milk becomes transferred to her thirsty brother. Since her hearing, Perpetua increasingly was focused on the next world, so her maternal care was now for the dead.[105] Perpetua's vision of the afterlife and the suffering of her brother was shaped by pagan and literary views more than by any Christian vision of an early idea of purgatory.[106] She had an image of suffering children from Virgil, whose Aeneas heard the wailing of infants weeping at the threshold of the underworld. In the *Aeneid* underworld, Dido the Carthaginian queen bore the mark of the sword that killed her,[107] as Dinocrates carried the mark of his terminal cancer. Tantalus suffered in the pagan afterlife with an unquenchable thirst, as did many others in the pagan world of death.[108]

Although Perpetua's pagan background shaped this dream, her experience in the Christian community and her knowledge of the intercessory power of martyrs shaped her response to it. She said, *"I was confident that I could help him in his trouble; and I prayed for him every day. . . . And I prayed for my brother day and night with tears and sighs that this favour might be granted me."*

During this time of prayer for her younger brother, Perpetua and her companions were transferred to the military prison in preparation for the forthcoming games. It is at this point in the text that Perpetua tells us they are to die *"on the occasion of Caesar Geta's birthday."*[109] It may have been coincidental that Perpetua found out the occasion of the games at this time, but it seems equally likely that she chose this point in the narrative to relay this information. Just as she was in the midst of

expressing, indeed helping to shape, a new Christian motherly concern for the spiritual health of a family member,[110] the Romans were preparing to celebrate a ritual for the well-being of another child, the emperor's son. This conflict of cultures is revealed in a poignant way as the young mother writes of maternal concern for her dead brother.

After they were moved and while they were in chains in the new prison, Perpetua experienced her third vision:

> *I saw the same spot that I had seen before, but there was Dinocrates all clean, well dressed, and refreshed. I saw a scar where the wound had been; and the pool that I had seen before now had its rim lowered to the level of the child's waist. And Dinocrates kept drinking water from it, and there above the rim was a golden bowl full of water. And Dinocrates drew close and began to drink from it, and yet the bowl remained full. And when he had drunk enough of the water, he began to play as children do. Then I awoke, and I realized that he had been delivered from his suffering.*[111]

Perpetua's maternal care had been effective. Today we frequently judge a child's well-being by his or her appearance, and Perpetua seems to have shared that judgment. Dinocrates was clean, well dressed, and no longer thirsty. The poignancy of her vision is enhanced by the realistic detail of the image of a happy child playing in the water "as children do." Perpetua drew from her memories of family life in her vision of personal and maternal power.[112] Furthermore, these two visions confirmed the first vision in reassuring her that she truly was not cut off from all her social ties as she continued on her spiritual path.

Perpetua's analysis of her dream, that the child had been delivered from suffering, was validated not only by her motherly recognition of a happy child; pagan dream wisdom also confirmed her analysis. Artemidorus said in his dream book that drinking from a bowl symbolized great safety,[113] and a scar "signifies the ending of every care."[114] The efficacy of her Christian prayers was confirmed in her subconscious mind by pagan wisdom. Furthermore, in her dream state, Perpetua preserved her role as a mother, albeit in a changed form. She gave up her son, but cared for her dead brother.

Perpetua's Fourth Vision

The prayers, demeanor, and perhaps visions of the confessors made an impression on the soldier in charge of the prison. Perpetua said that this man named Pudens *"began to show us great honour, realizing that we possessed some great power within us. And he began to allow many visitors to see us for our mutual comfort."* As the day of the contest approached, one

of these visitors was Perpetua's father, who made one more appeal to his daughter:

> *My father came to see me overwhelmed with sorrow. He started tearing the hairs from his beard and threw them on the ground; he then threw himself on the ground and began to curse his old age and to say such words as would move all creation. I felt sorry for his unhappy old age.*[115]

As the previous visions showed, Perpetua was already beyond changing her mind. She had begun to focus on the afterlife and had shifted her community identity to the Christian community of the living and the dead. She had enough compassion left for her father to "feel sorry" for him, yet her response hardly matches the depths of his grief. Her final vision came shortly after this last confrontation and the day before they were to *"fight with the beasts."* She dreamed that

> *Pomponius the deacon came to the prison gates and began to knock violently. I went out and opened the gate for him. He was dressed in an unbelted white tunic, wearing elaborate sandals. And he said to me: "Perpetua, come; we are waiting for you." Then he took my hand and we began to walk through rough and broken country. At last we came to the amphitheatre out of breath, and he led me into the centre of the arena. Then he told me: "Do not be afraid. I am here, struggling with you." Then he left.*
>
> *I looked at the enormous crowd who watched in astonishment. I was surprised that no beasts were let loose on me; for I knew that I was condemned to die by the beasts. Then out came an Egyptian against me, of vicious appearance, together with his seconds, to fight with me. There also came up to me some handsome young men to be my seconds and assistants.*
>
> *My clothes were stripped off, and suddenly I was a man. My seconds began to rub me down with oil (as they are wont to do before a contest). Then I saw the Egyptian on the other side rolling in the dust. Next there came forth a man of marvelous stature, such that he rose above the top of the amphitheatre. He was clad in a beltless purple tunic with two stripes (one on either side) running down the middle of his chest. He wore sandals that were wondrously made of gold and silver, and he carried a wand like an athletic trainer and a green branch on which there were golden apples. And he asked for silence and said: "If this Egyptian defeats her he will slay her with the sword. But if she defeats him, she will receive this branch." Then he withdrew.*
>
> *We drew close to one another and began to let our fists fly. My opponent tried to get hold of my feet, but I kept striking him in the face with the heels of my feet. Then I was raised up into the air and I began to pummel him without as it were touching the ground. Then when I noticed there was a lull, I put my two hands together linking the fingers of*

one hand with those of the other and thus I got hold of his head. He fell flat on his face and I stepped on his head.

The crowd began to shout and my assistants started to sing psalms. Then I walked up to the trainer and took the branch. He kissed me and said to me: "Peace be with you, my daughter!" I began to walk in triumph towards the Gate of Life. Then I awoke.[116]

On the night before her ordeal, it is not surprising that Perpetua's thoughts were dominated by the coming struggle in the arena. This dream continues her affirmation of the new Christian family into which she has entered, but it also reveals more about her own changing self-identity (or in Jungian terms, her own individuation).[117]

Her sense of connection to community was reinforced in the dream by several father figures who replaced the father she had once again rejected just before this vision. The deacon Pomponius who escorted her to the amphitheatre (wearing in her dream the same white tunic that the inhabitants of paradise were wearing in Perpetua's first dream) assured her that he was with her through her ordeal. The trainer at the end kissed her in the Christian ritualized kiss of peace and called her his daughter. She was accompanied by two young men as seconds in her ordeal. Although this dream was about her struggle, she was not alone. The dream (and the dreamer) were framed by male supporters in a fictive family group.

This dream reasserts the presence of community that had been established in the previous vision. It goes beyond this by offering new insights into Perpetua's sense of her own transformation. Certainly there is no more vivid image of personal change than Perpetua's dream image in which she is transformed into a man. Others have struggled to interpret this complicated and, indeed, somewhat disturbing image. Does this transformation reflect the reality of a male-dominated world in which, to achieve power, Perpetua must see herself as male?[118] Is this a Christian symbol in which the martyr imitates Christ in whom there was to be no male or female?[119] Is it an image derived from a troubled mind?[120] Is this a practical accommodation in a dream in which the reality is that women could not fight in this particular form of wrestling contest (the *pankration*)?[121] Cassius Dio tells us that in A.D. 200 in Rome a great gymnastic contest took place in which women participated with such vigor that "jokes were made about other very distinguished women as well." Because of the impact of these games, women were henceforth forbidden to fight in single combat.[122] If Perpetua had heard of this event, which is likely, the knowledge could have entered her dream in this form.

All these insights shed light on this complicated image. For me, the most compelling part of this image is its signaling of transformation.[123] If one is looking for a metaphor of personal change, one cannot do better than a transformation of one's gender, which is at the heart of one's self-identity. In her dream, Perpetua was changed into a man. Led by the deacon of her new community, she was fully transformed from her old self into a new empowered individual who could stand in the arena and fight for what she believed. Here she was remembering in a dream-form her own baptism—the dramatic change from catechumen to baptized Christian.

Her startling transformation was followed immediately by another surprising image—that of her male seconds rubbing her naked body with oil. There are unmistakably sexual overtones to this image,[124] and not simply to our twentieth-century ears. Perpetua, too, must have noticed. The second-century Greek author Lucian wrote a satire called "Lucius or the Ass" that contains an erotic passage in which the hero and a slave girl named Palaestra (Ms. Wrestler) engage in oil rubdowns in an extended and sexual parody of a wrestling match.[125] Because Perpetua knew Greek, she could have read Lucian's work. She certainly had read Apuleius's *Golden Ass*,[126] which drew from Lucian's satire. Recognizing that Perpetua probably knew of such references, we can understand her parenthetic explanation in her dream narrative, in which she explains that such oil rubdowns are simply part of this kind of wrestling match. This break from the dream narrative gives us a glimpse of the modest Roman matron probably somewhat surprised herself at the nature of her dream.

Just as most of the dream images are rich in meaning and associations from various thought worlds of Perpetua's past, the oil, too, draws various metaphors together. She was certainly correct in joining oil with pagan athletic contests. However, there were also Christian associations. The newly baptized were anointed with oil in ceremonies in which the new members were accepted naked into the congregation. The newly baptized Perpetua surely joined this image to the athletic one.

In addition, in his letter to the martyrs, Tertullian used the same metaphor of the athletic contest to represent the upcoming test as Perpetua did. Tertullian spoke of the Holy Spirit as the martyrs' trainer,[127] and Perpetua's vision of the trainer in purple and so large that he dominated the amphitheater echoes Tertullian's view of the Holy Spirit athletic trainer. Furthermore, Tertullian said that Jesus Christ "who has anointed you with His Spirit" brought the martyrs to the "training ground" of the athletic contest.[128] In Tertullian's metaphor, Perpetua's anointment with oil by the young men was a blessing by Christ. In her

dream, then, the modest Roman matron was transformed completely, anointed and ready to battle in a traditional forum against a new kind of enemy.

Although the waking and sleeping Perpetua expected to be confronted by an animal as she would be the next day, she instead was opposed by an Egyptian of loathsome appearance. Perpetua's mind could have selected an Egyptian as the demonlike figure because of Egypt's association with pagan wisdom;[129] she knew of Apuleius's passionate description of the cult of Isis. She also knew of Septimius's identification with the Egyptian god Serapis, so her enemy *was* the "Egyptian" emperor on the occasion of his son's birthday. Her mind's selection of an Egyptian as opponent would have been a natural image to oppose her Christianity. The images of Egyptians as opponents in her experience were even more rich than the associations of paganism with Egyptian deities.

She may also have shared a general Roman prejudice against "barbaric" Egyptians. Juvenal's Fifteenth Satire (written in the mid first century) is entitled "On the Atrocities of Egypt" and demonized Egyptians.[130] In addition, her dream may have drawn on Heliodorus's romance *Ethiopian*, in which the protagonist's last test was to fight in the arena against a gigantic Ethiopian (Ethiopians frequently were equated with Egyptians.) In sum, the gigantic Egyptian embodied many levels of evil for Perpetua, and he was thus a perfect dream opponent.

Perpetua engaged the Egyptian in the traditional Greek-style free-for-all wrestling match, the *pankration*.[131] It is quite likely that Perpetua had seen just such a contest in the arena. Early in the third century, Carthage had received permission to hold Pythian games in honor of Apollo.[132] These games included a wrestling contest similar to that described by Perpetua, and may well have shaped her dream of the contest in the arena.[133] The probability that Perpetua saw such a contest (instead of just having read about it) is increased by the fact that she did not have the accurate terminology for the match. When her narrative was translated into Greek, the Greek redactor corrected the jargon.[134] If she had read about the contest, the terminology would probably have been more precise than if she had simply witnessed it. Thus as her dream mind searched for images of a powerful struggle between good and evil, it probably drew from her experience of watching such a match. It would have been more impressive since it was an unusual festival, and required special permission for its celebration in Carthage.

She fought and defeated the Egyptian with her feet. The striking

emphasis on her feet in this dream and indeed throughout the dreams is noteworthy. In her first vision, she began her ascent to heaven by treading on the serpent's head, just as she stepped on the head of the Egyptian in her final vision. Further, in her final vision, she was careful to describe Pomponius's sandals, as well as the gold and silver sandals of the trainer in her dream. Her opponent tried to "get hold of my feet," before she ultimately defeated him by kicking his face and head. It is clear that Perpetua associates feet with power,[135] and these associations so permeated her classical world that they would have been a natural part of her memories. A newborn Roman child was placed at the father's feet in a token of the father's power of life and death over the child. (This image was reversed in Perpetua's narrative when her father threw himself at her feet to plead with her. The power between them had been reversed at that moment.) In the arena, the traditional gesture of the victor was to place one's foot on the head of the opponent.[136]

The power associated with feet extended in people's minds beyond the visible world of children and gladiators. In the pagan world, ritual barefootedness was believed to enhance the power of prayer and petition to the gods. Augustine complained that it was impossible to persuade Christians to abandon the "cultic custom" of barefootedness.[137] Other Christian martyrs used these images of the power of feet in their expressions of their most sacred moment in this life: martyrdom. For example, the martyr Fructuosus marched to the amphitheater. Once there, a lector tearfully begged Fructuosus for the privilege of removing the Bishop's shoes. Fructuosus refused and "strong and rejoicing and certain of God's promise, Fructuosus removed his own shoes." In another case, the most sacred relic of the martyrs Justus and Pastor was one of their shoes.[138] Perpetua had remembered these perceptions of the power of feet, and this notion emerged with strength and clarity in her dream imagery.

Perpetua defeated the Egyptian and received the prize: the branch of golden apples, and the kiss of peace by the trainer/Holy Spirit. Apples were a strong symbol of woman and woman's love in the antique world. The fruit of Aphrodite regularly played a role in marriage and erotic ceremony,[139] and Artemidorus believed apples in dreams symbolized the pleasures of love sacred to Aphrodite.[140] The equation of apples with women surely shaped the Genesis account of the Fall, but for Perpetua the symbol was too joyous and victorious to have been much influenced by biblical account. In searching for an image of victory, Perpetua's mind reached for images from the classical past, and

the image was one of a victorious woman. (Just as Aphrodite had won the apple for being the most beautiful of the goddesses, Perpetua, who turned into a man at the beginning of the contest, received the highest prize of womanhood at the end.)

These remarkable visions of Perpetua reveal all the fears and uncertainties one would expect in this circumstance. Images of struggle combined with those of comfort. Images of dislocation merged with those of community acceptance. But what is probably most extraordinary about these visions is the way in which all the competing forces are integrated really very comfortably. I expected to find much more difficulty and anxiety in both Perpetua's narrative and in her dreams. Yet, the experience of this extraordinary young woman shows the way in which people can manage what should be seriously conflicting ideas and emerge with a strong and clear sense of purpose. Perpetua drew from her classical past, both her experiences and her literary background, and she drew from her more recent experiences in her community of Christians.[141] For example, the trainer in her dream, who in Tertullian's words took the place of the Holy Spirit, wore the traditional robes of the African priests of Saturn.[142] These mental images did not clash in her unconscious; instead they blended to form metaphors that Perpetua interpreted clearly and unambiguously into a prophetic vision of her Christian future.

After this extraordinarily complex dream, Perpetua analyzed its meaning with simple clarity: *"I realized that it was not with wild animals that I would fight but with the Devil, but I knew that I would win the victory."*[143]

Saturus's Vision

The leader of the group who had volunteered to join the martyrs also had a vision while imprisoned. Here is his account of his vision that the narrator also claimed was in the martyr's own words:

> *We had died and had put off the flesh, and we began to be carried towards the east by four angels who did not touch us with their hand. But we moved alone not on our backs facing upwards but as though we were climbing up a gentle hill. And when we were free of the world, we first saw an intense light. And I said to Perpetua (for she was at my side): "This is what the Lord promised us. We have received his promise." While we were being carried by these four angels, a great open space appeared, which seemed to be a garden, with rose bushes and all manner of flowers. The trees were as tall as cypresses, and their leaves were constantly falling. In the garden there were four other angels more splendid*

> *than the others. When they saw us they paid us homage and said to the other angels in admiration: "Why, they are here! They are here!"*
>
> *Then the four angels that were carrying us grew fearful and set us down. Then we walked across to an open area by way of a broad road, and there we met Jucundus, Saturninus, and Artaxius, who were burnt alive in the same persecution, together with Quintus who had actually died as a martyr in prison. We asked them where they had been. And the other angels said to us: "First come and enter and greet the Lord."*
>
> *Then we came to a place whose walls seemed to be constructed of light. And in front of the gate stood four angels, who entered in and put on white robes. We also entered and we heard the sound of voices in unison chanting endlessly: "Holy, Holy, Holy!" In the same place we seemed to see an aged man with white hair and a youthful face, though we did not see his feet. On his right and left were four elders, and behind them stood other aged men. Surprised, we entered and stood before a throne: four angels lifted us up and we kissed the aged man and he touched our faces with his hand. And the elders said to us: "Let us rise." And we rose and gave the kiss of peace. Then the elders said to us: "Go and play." To Perpetua I said: "Your wish is granted." She said to me: "Thanks be to God that I am happier here now than I was in the flesh."*
>
> *Then we went out and before the gates we saw the bishop Optatus on the right and Aspasius the presbyter and teacher on the left, each of them far apart and in sorrow. They threw themselves at our feet and said: "Make peace between us. For you have gone away and left us thus." And we said to them: "Are you not our bishop, and are you not our presbyter? How can you fall at our feet?" We were very moved and embraced them. Perpetua then began to speak with them in Greek, and we drew them apart into the garden under a rose arbour. While we were talking with them, the angel said to them: "Allow them to rest. Settle whatever quarrels you have among yourselves." And they were put to confusion. Then they said to Optatus: "You must scold your flock. They approach you as though they had come from the games, quarrelling about the different teams."*
>
> *And it seemed as though they wanted to close the gates. And there we began to recognize many of our brethren, martyrs among them. All of us were sustained by a most delicious odour that seemed to satisfy us. And then I woke up happy.*[144]

The account of this dream offers a striking contrast to those of Perpetua. It lacks the dreamlike quality of compressed images and surprising associations. It reads more like a polished theological tract designed to present a lesson to a Christian congregation.[145] If it were a dream, either Saturus's dream life is very clear and linear, or he edited it substantially in the recording to be sure that the Christians for whom

it was intended would not misunderstand any dream images. Unlike Perpetua, Saturus did not include a statement of the dream's meaning; it seems likely that in his recording of the dream he allowed his interpretation of the meaning to shape his narrative. Whether it was a "real" dream or a record of a pseudodream designed to instruct, it nevertheless expresses the concerns of Saturus on the eve of his execution.

Saturus shows much the same care for the community as Perpetua. However, Saturus's concern is that of a leader of the Christian communities. Echoing the early Christian writers from Paul through Ignatius, he was worried about strife in the congregation. The bishop and presbyter pleaded with Saturus and Perpetua to settle the differences in the quarreling community. In Saturus' narrative, angels reprimanded them and urged them to settle their differences. Saturus was telling the community to avoid fragmenting dissent, and gave divine sanction for this advice. In this exchange, Saturus expressed his view that martyrs, not church officers, were the leaders of the church.[146] With this perspective, it is perhaps understandable that he voluntarily joined the martyrs in prison, rather than continue his position as a leader of the Carthage Christian community.

Saturus saw himself and Perpetua joining the heavenly community that included angels and martyrs who had predeceased them.[147] By directly naming martyrs who had died, Saturus both reestablished his case for the importance of martyrdom, and reassured himself of his salvation after the coming struggle.

In a number of ways, Saturus's vision parallels the first vision of Perpetua. As in Perpetua's vision, the two share the passage to heaven (without any of the others of the group). Heaven for both is a garden with a gray-haired man. (Although Saturus does give the man a "youthful face," which is more consistent with the portrayals of the youthful good shepherd that were available in the art of the Christian community.) Saturus drew in more detail from the Book of Revelation than did Perpetua, keeping the liturgical chant, the gates, and the angels portrayed in some detail. However, like Perpetua, he placed the scene in a heavenly garden, following the *Apocalypse of Peter*. The visions share many of the same images, from the descriptions of the angels to the awareness of feet as symbols of power. Finally, they are similar in concern for community and the shared prophetic vision of their martyrdom. The differences between them—primarily Saturus's concern for hierarchy and organization against Perpetua's very personal visions—may derive from personality, age, gender, or differential power.

All combine to allow us a poignant look into the individual and collective mentalities of the early Christian communities.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

The diary written by Perpetua ended shortly after her account of her final vision. At that point, she was certain of her victory; she had recorded the most important things for the Christians who would be left behind: her dreams that she believed had come from the Holy Spirit. She concluded her diary briefly: *"So much for what I did up until the eve of the contest. About what happened at the contest itself, let him write of it who will."*[148]

Whoever continued the *Passio* next included the vision of Saturus purportedly written with his own hand. After recording his vision, Saturus, too, fell silent in the text. Like Perpetua, he ended his record of his prison ordeal with a visionary guide for the living. The eyewitness then included some information about the other confessors in prison before turning to the events in the amphitheater. The narrator tells us that one of the confessors, Secundulus, died while in prison. The circumstances of his death were not explained, but the cryptic sentence *"Yet his flesh, if not his spirit, knew the sword"*[149] suggests that something happened in prison that caused the soldiers to execute him there by the sword.

The last of the imprisoned confessors to be discussed was the slave Felicity. She was pregnant in the eighth month when she was arrested, and as the narrator described, Felicity's greatest worry was that her condition would keep her from sharing the struggle in the arena with her companions:

> *She became greatly distressed that her martyrdom would be postponed because of her pregnancy, for it is against the law for women with child to be put to death. Thus she might have to shed her holy, innocent blood afterwards along with others who were common criminals.* [150]

Felicity was right about the Roman law; a pregnant woman would not be executed, even if she were a confessed Christian. Accounts of martyrdoms repeatedly showed pregnant women exempt from execution. One example was that of Eutychia, who was arrested with several female companions. The others were executed, and the prefect said of Eutychia: "Since Eutychia is pregnant she shall be kept meanwhile in jail."[151] Although Felicity was a slave, Rome had an interest in her child even if it no longer valued the mother. The child represented property belonging to Felicity's owner, and as such was important.[152] In accor-

dance with the law and with the values of Rome, a pregnant Felicity would not be executed with her companions.

The narrator said that "*her comrades in martyrdom were also saddened; for they were afraid that they would have to leave behind so fine a companion to travel alone on the same road to hope.*" The group prayed together and the Lord answered their prayers by bringing on premature labor pains two days before the contest in the arena. (It is a bit surprising that Perpetua's diary, which covers the same time period, did not mention this incident. Were they in separate quarters, because Perpetua was of higher birth? Perhaps Perpetua's diary was self-consciously intended to be about herself, so there was no room for Felicity's experience. We cannot know for sure.)

Felicity bore her child, experiencing the pain of a difficult birth and the additional ordeal of a taunting guard:

> *She suffered a good deal in her labour because of the natural difficulty of an eight months' delivery. Hence one of the assistants of the prison guards said to her: "You suffer so much now—what will you do when you are tossed to the beasts? Little did you think of them when you refused to sacrifice." "What I am suffering now," she replied, "I suffer by myself. But then another will be inside me who will suffer for me, just as I shall be suffering for him."*
>
> *And she gave birth to a girl; and one of the sisters brought her up as her own daughter.*[153]

Just as God relieved Perpetua's maternal responsibilities so she could focus on her martyrdom, he freed Felicity's burden of motherhood.[154] Both Perpetua and Felicity had to reject their maternal roles if they were to proceed to martyrdom, and once again the strong statement in this account of the need to separate from family to seek God was reaffirmed. At the same time, the message that the Christian community was a new group that brought solidarity was also reaffirmed. The community that had been arrested together could stay together through the final ordeal.

Felicity's dialogue with the prison guard expressed the same kind of secure hope in God's assistance during her martyrdom as had appeared in the dreams of Perpetua and Saturus. The perceived miraculous deliverance of the child was seen as a sign of God's selection of Felicity as surely as the prophetic dreams that he sent to the other two martyrs.

The time was short from Felicity's delivery to the appearance in the arena. The very brevity of the statement that Felicity gave up her daughter points to both the immanence of the martyrdom and the

martyrs' readiness for the ordeal.[155] This ends the portion of the *Passio* that decides the imprisonment of the small group. Perpetua, Saturus, and Felicity had already felt the hand of God and the presence of the Spirit in preparing them for the ordeal that was to come the next day. Secundulus was dead, but the remaining group, the leaders, Saturus and Perpetua, Saturninus, and the slaves Revocatus and Felicity, would face the beasts in the arena the next morning.

Perpetua's Passion

The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman

Joyce E. Salisbury

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