

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES

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Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis. Edited by **Jan N. Bremmer** and **Marco Formisano**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. viii + 390 pp. \$150.00 cloth.

The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity is one of the most unique early Christian texts from the Principate. The prose of the text is an account of a pogrom written in four voices—two of which claim to be first person narratives and two are by later redactors. The persecutions took place in the City of Carthage in spring of 203 when P. Aelius Hilarianus was senior procurator. The reason for this persecution is unknown. Accusations that place blame on Septimius Severus are without foundation. Nine Latin manuscripts survive and one Greek. The Latin text is earlier than the Greek and is the language of the original composition. The manuscript tradition is late; the earliest surviving manuscript is the ninth century, St. Gallen 577. Lucas Holstenius first published the text in 1663, from the late eleventh-century version in Montecassino 204. Although not widely known in the Middle Ages, the *Passion* has remained popular since the seventeenth century and been edited many times. There are two later hagiographic epitomes of the *Passion* that were popular throughout the Middle Ages called the *Acta*.

The narrative details the arrest of five young catechumens who were seized for their refusal to sacrifice to the health of the emperor. The prisoners were condemned to the beasts and executed in the Carthage amphitheater. While imprisoned, two of the five wrote of their experiences: Perpetua, a young educated married woman likely of the *curiales*, and a free man, Saturus. Perpetua's eloquent and moving account of her imprisonment is the earliest surviving first person narrative written by a female. Her story confounds many of our dearly held assumptions concerning the relationships within Roman families, particularly in the depictions of her relationship with her father.

Jan Bremmer and Marco Formisano edited a nineteen-essay volume that seeks to read the *Passion* from perspectives other than that of early Christian and Classical scholars. To that end they have recruited some individuals who

have not written on the *Passion* before. Happily they do include essays by readers who have a deep familiarity with the text. The nineteen essays are divided into three parts: part 1: “The Martyr and her Gender”; part 2, “Authority and Testimony” and part 3, “The Text, the Canon, and the Margins.” Before I describe the nature of these varied approaches, it is well to note the varied, sometimes eccentric and wide-ranging interpretations made of the *Passion*. This first person narrative, to paraphrase Marco Formisano’s essay, exists on the margins; it resists interpretation, existing somewhere between fiction and historical fact. Perpetua’s narrative complicates the hermeneutic circle between reader and narrative, drawing the reader into an interpretative frame in which the historical is often contested by the idea of the fictive. Readers’ interpretations often on the most elementary issues depart from what the text states. Some essays in this present volume illustrate such interpretative distances. For example, her trip from the prison to the amphitheatre in dream four is called “subterranean,” it is not (it is *et coepimus ire per aspera loca et flexuosa*); the Egyptian wrestler is described as black, he is not (he is *Aegyptius foedus*); there is no suggestion that Felicity is married to Revocatus; nothing is said to indicate that Perpetua’s mother is Christian; and Perpetua is referred to as God’s whore, when the text uses the phrase “*ut Dei delicate*,” making “whore” an improbable semantic choice.

Bremmer and Formisano open the volume with a solid and sensible introductory essay providing much of the basis historiography associated with the *Passion*. It is their hope that the “radical originality” of the *Passion* will challenge traditional reading approaches taken by classicists and placing the text in its rightful place within the frame of classical literature. Joseph Farrell and Craig Williams provide a sprightly new translation derived with little critical emendation from van Beek’s Latin text with the occasional nod to that of Amat but surprisingly not to the excellent editions of de’Cavalieri or Bastiaensen. I do not have the confidence they have in the two Swiss manuscripts, as St. Gallen is corrupt and the Greek manuscript is derived from an earlier Latin exemplar. I strongly suspect the identification of Thuburbo Minus, which they print, is a later corruption and is not in Montecassino 204 which is van Beek’s copy text.

Bremmer’s essay begins the volume and argues that the *Acta* are closer to the original exemplar which judgment he bases on a phrase in the *Acta* which also appears in a recently discovered sermon of Augustine. Williams looks at grammatical expressions which reassert Perpetua’s agency in her final dream and in the redactor’s depiction of her martyrdom. Ameling provides a very instructive essay on Perpetua’s education, parsing the phrase *liberaliter instituta* in a more limited way, as indicative of someone who could read and write, but someone who need not have been exposed to classical literature.

Hanne Sigismund-Nielsen supports the theory that Perpetua wrote in Latin and discusses the crucial Roman cultural value of *pietas*. Jan Willem van Henten reviews the depiction of Jewish mothers who were martyrs in 2 and 4 Maccabees and compares the idea of motherly love in these Jewish texts with that of Perpetua's for her infant son, finding her lacking in maternal affection. Mieke Bal's essay is a psychoanalytic reading and sees the text as moving Perpetua away from femininity. Her interpretations are classically Freudian. For example, she depicts the *lanista* as tall because he represents a suddenly erect penis. Weitbrecht examines depictions of Perpetua in medieval legends and finds that these variants all go back to the *Acta*, which she correctly dates to the third or fourth century. She examines the opposition between maternity and sanctity and shows how in the *Buoch von den heiligen megden und frowen* Perpetua is presented as a loving mother.

Part 2 opens with a careful essay by Jan den Boeft on the Latinity of the Preface in Montecassino 204. He points out the editor's efforts to claim equal status for new revelations in the *Passion* as that given to canonical texts and suggests that the editor was proposing that the *Passion* deserved to be read during official worship. Den Boeft suggests that the editor may have been someone who belonged to a circle around Tertullian. Sigrid Weigel argues that the emergence of the cult of Christian martyrdom (pace Bowersock) was only possible due to an amalgam of pagan and Jewish sacrificial practices and provides an interesting reading of Livy's presentation of Lucretia's death as an *exemplum virtutis et castitatis*. Katharina Waldner reads Perpetua's visions as carefully constructed rhetorical replies to contemporary debates about the power and the authority of visions, divination and martyrdom. Hartmut Böhme, argues that the *Passion* cannot be understood without recourse to psychoanalytic approaches. Perpetua's suffering and martyrdom is a secondary narcissistic symbiosis of the self with Christ. Unlike Bal's Freudian reading of the *lanista* as a suddenly erect penis, Böhme also psychoanalytically reads this figure but here the *lanista* is the internalized and transcendence presence of Jesus Christ within Perpetua. The utility of Freudian readings lies in their democracy of interpretation. Giulia Sissa reviews Roman stoicism's fascination with the death of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo*, intimating that Perpetua may have been familiar with it. Perpetua's journey to martyrdom moves her closer to the ideal stoic man. Luca Bagetto's believes the *Passion* wrestles with the issues of law, authority, politics and transcendence with a long excursus to Hamlet's questions about *phantasma*, appearance, and reality and Paul's political theology.

Part 3, opens with a fine essay by Christoph Marksches on the *Passion* and montanism. He shows conclusively that the religiosity in the *Passion* in North Africa was not heresiological, that the martyrs were never later viewed as

adherents of a heretical group, nor would the editor of the preface and doxology have been considered an apologist for the New Prophecy movement. David Konstan seeks to situate the *Passion* in the genre of the Greek novel, particularly Xenophon's *Ephesiaca*. Farrell underscores the important and often overlooked point that the *Passion* is not the product of the classical rhetorical tradition. He maintains that the *Passion* was composed in 203 and that Augustine likely knew a text in the form of the *Passion* but one containing some language from the *Acta*, that the *Acta* are later, and he notes Augustine's concern about authorship. Philippe Mesnard tries to draw some parallels of the *Passion* with religious persecution of the twentieth century. Marco Formisano's deep understanding of the *Passion* is a welcome essay. He underscores the difficulty of constructing interpretations. He reminds us that the *Passion* is not only one of the precious few surviving texts composed by a woman but also the only surviving *journal intime* from antiquity and that it resists generic classification because its literariness appears to undercut its historical context. Marina Warner's memoir, the final essay in the volume, concerns her growing up in a Convent school in England in the 50s. She touchingly illustrates the power of the nun's simple faith and tradition to reshape the psychology of the present. She tells of the female martyr Maria Goretti who was a powerful symbol for her and her school chums and how Goretti's story bridged the millennia separating the Italian peasant girl from the Carthaginian matron Perpetua.

In sum, the volume is a worthy attempt at seeing a single text from a prism of different positions, some of which do bring new light to illuminate old questions.

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Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach. By **Hans Boersma**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. xviii + 283 pp. \$135.00 cloth.

Hans Boersma begins this book with a confession that is exceedingly rare among scholars. He wrote it to prove a point, he explains, but ended up changing his mind. He set out to “test my hunch that the premodern Platonist-Christian synthesis does not require us to abandon the goodness of

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