

Perpetua's Passions

*Multidisciplinary Approaches to the
Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*

Edited by

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Preface

The contributions to this volume have a particular background, which deserves a brief telling. Most of them represent reworkings of papers delivered at a conference organized at the Humboldt University, Berlin, in July 2007, with the generous financial support of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation (Cologne). Both the conference and the volume are the result of a passionate enterprise: as is explained at greater length in the Introduction, our major aims were to detach the text of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* from traditional historical readings by historians of the ancient world and early Christianity by emphasizing its broader literary and cultural aspects.

In order to endorse and facilitate what we were confident would be a successful experiment, we took a proactive approach by inviting scholars from various fields (classics, comparative and modern literatures, cultural history) who had not previously worked on the *Passion* to contribute their specific competences. Hence, a double challenge marks the origins of this volume: on the one hand, this mission included a campaign to convince a group of scholars to direct their attention to a text they had not studied or perhaps not even read before; on the other, we have attempted, as editors, to find a common thread through the different approaches and discursive styles. The basic unity of the work is of course given by the uniqueness of the text itself, which has been underlined throughout all the chapters. This uniqueness concerns the particular constellation of authorial voices, strongly marked by problems related to discourses of gender, the report of the dreams of Perpetua and Saturus, as well as the unsolvable textual problems presented by its double transmission, Latin and Greek. The extraordinary literary features of the *Passion* are in particular explored by the sensitive reading offered by Marina Warner, whose contribution appears here as an Epilogue. Finally, it is worth emphasizing that this volume offers a new translation of the entire *Passion* by Joseph Farrell and Craig Williams, who have also tried to capture the particular *Stimmung* during the discussion at the conference.

All of these concerns, we believe, require a special kind of reading, one which is not limited to the fields of religious studies, classical philology, or ancient history. The search for new approaches regards of course our *Passion* in particular, but it is our bold hope that it can be productively applied to other kinds of ancient texts, for the interpretation of which current classifications stemming from methodologies within Classical and Early Christian studies do not necessarily reflect their full complexity.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to the individuals and institutions who strongly supported our project at different stages, both the conference and the volume. Playwright Toni Bernhart directed a group of three actors in a staged reading organized during the conference with the title *Per auditum*, thus emphasizing the intrinsic theatricality of the *Passion* given by the plurality of the voices, as well as the oral dimension of the text as a liturgical reading. Christoph Holzhey and Manuele Gagnolati provided a perfect frame for the conference by offering the wonderful spaces of the Institute of Cultural Inquiry (ICI Kulturlabor Berlin). Christoph Marksches, President of the Humboldt University (2006-10), strongly supported the original project and carefully followed various phases of the organization. Viola van Beek, with the help of Nora Hammerschmidt, assisted the organizers during all stages of the conference with great communicative skills and courtesy. Friderike Senkbeil and Eline Veldt helped with the correcting and editing of the manuscripts. And Craig Williams has consistently offered his competent advice during the revision process. We are very grateful to them all.

Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano
Groningen and Berlin, Summer 2010

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List of Abbreviations

BHL	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
ICUR	<i>Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae Septimo Saeculo Antiquiores</i>
ILAFr	<i>Inscriptions Latines d'Afrique</i>
ILAlg	<i>Inscriptions Latines d'Algérie</i>
ILS	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
ILTun	<i>Inscriptions Latines de Tunisie</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JThS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
REAug	<i>Revue des Études Augustiniennes</i>
TLL	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i>
VigChris	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>

IX

Exemplum and Sacrifice, Blood Testimony and Written Testimony: Lucretia and Perpetua as Transitional Figures in the Cultural History of Martyrdom

by
Sigrid Weigel
translated by
Joel Golb

The following comparative reading of the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (AD 203) and the earlier account of the death of Lucretia appearing in the first book of Livy's *History of Rome* (27 BC) is meant to draw attention to a specific cultural-historical constellation: one forming the backdrop for a questioning of the widespread thesis of the singularity of the Christian conception of martyrdom.¹ Close consideration of those elements tying the narrative of Lucretia's death to that of the death of Perpetua makes clear that the idea—often unquestioned or simply assumed—of 'true' martyrs only stepping onto history's stage with the events transmitted in the *Acta Martyrum* is in fact unsustainable. In addition, an analysis of the connections between the two figurations can illuminate their differences as well, hence the specific elements significant for the emergence of the Christian culture of martyrdom.

¹ 'In religions other than Christianity, something comparable to the Christian martyrs is entirely lacking', is the way a Christian encyclopedia of religious history puts it; see 'Märtyrer', in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart IV* (Tübingen, 1986³), 587. Albeit in more moderate form, this viewpoint continues to dominate academic research on ancient and religious history.

1. CHRISTOLOGICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY VERSUS A CULTURAL HISTORY OF MARTYRDOM

The account of Perpetua's martyrdom, described by Jacques Le Goff as the 'most moving testimony in early Christian literature',² is not only part of a genre widely considered to be the origin of and model for the western concept of the martyr. As textual testimony of the death of martyrs, conceived as 'blood witnesses', the early Christian *Acta Martyrum* in historiography have been considered as evidence of the early Christian martyrs as a genuine Christian phenomenon,³ thus an ambiguous testimonial semantics (concerning: testimony/ evidence/ proof)⁴ being condensed into this corpus. The *Passio Perpetuae* here plays a prominent role, in that as the earliest such autobiographical text it attests the 'very special death' of the Christian confession in a specific way,⁵ namely by means of a text *and* a death, by means of a written witness and a 'blood witness' (*Blutzeugnis*).⁶

With regard to the meaning of the word 'martyr', we thus read in one of the leading historiographies of Christian martyrdom, G.W. Bowersock's study *Martyrdom and Rome*: 'But, until the Christian literature of the mid-second century AD, it had never designated *dying for a cause*'.⁷ Bowersock's book is devoted to the 'formative period of martyrdom' from the second to the early fourth century, when the Roman rulers saw themselves massively confronted with Christians prepared for 'voluntary martyrdom': 'Martyrdom, I argue, first came into being in the Roman Empire and was inextricably rooted in a society and culture peculiar to that world'.⁸ Where he thus sees the sources for the emergence of martyrs in Roman society, partly explaining it in terms of the 'civic role of martyrs' and their public visibility within Roman urban culture,

² J. Le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire* (Paris, 1981), 75.

³ H. Musurillo (ed.), *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972). A critical trilingual edition (Greek, Latin, French) of the *Passio Perpetuae* is available: J. Amat (ed.), *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité suivie des Actes* (Paris, 1996).

⁴ The German *Zeugnis* (the equivalent to *testis*) includes all three meanings and additionally also witness and document.

⁵ C. Straw, 'A Very Special Death. Christian Martyrdom in its Classical Context', in M. Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self. Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 39–7.

⁶ The Christian translation for *martyr* in German is *Blutzeuge*.

⁷ G.W. Bowersock: *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge, 1995), 8 (my italics). This study here exemplifies the criticized position which may also be found in many other contributions, both in the older scholarship and contemporary research-orientation; see for instance Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, *Die Idee des Martyriums in der Alten Kirche* (Göttingen, 1964); P. Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter oder Bilder des Bösen im frühen afrikanischen Christentum* (Berlin, 2004²). In distinction to his treatment of martyrdom, Bowersock, 'The Roman Empire and the Clash of Civilizations', *The Berlin Journal. The Magazine for the American Academy in Berlin* 14 (spring 2007), 4–13, has placed much stronger emphasis on the role of religions in linking antique cultures.

⁸ Bowersock, *Martyrdom*, p. xi.

he assigns the status of an initial 'martyrdom' to the early Christian martyrs, underpinning his argument with a distinction from other 'voluntary death' phenomena. Parallels to or preliminary forms of Christian martyrdom are here expressly rejected; indeed, 'I want to argue that martyrdom was alien to both the Greeks and the Jews'.⁹ In this manner, Bowersock negates not only parallels with Jewish tradition: scenes, transmitted in the Maccabean texts, from the struggle of the Jews against Antiochus IV Epiphanes's Hellenistic occupation at the start of the second century BC.; the collective suicide at Masada during the first Roman war around 70 AD, as reported by Josephus; the killing of Rabbi Akiva during the Bar Kochba revolt in the second Roman war in the period of Hadrian—all accounts concerned, already, with 'dying for something' in the sense of a struggle against the violation of religious law.¹⁰ Bowersock also rejects any comparison with accounts from the pagan world. He only admits an analogy with the Christian martyrs in the case of those philosophers who resisted Roman tyranny at the price of exile and death, although he ultimately considers these figures irrelevant: 'None of these *Acts of Pagan Martyrs*, as some of these narratives have been called, has the characteristics of Christian martyrdom except insofar as they oppose the ruling authority'.¹¹ Within such a perspective, the history of martyrs begins with the oldest extant early Christian witness—that of Polycarp's martyrdom in, probably, 156 AD, which thus gains the status of a primal proof in the mode of narrating the origin.

The first objection to such an approach is methodological: it is the result of a linkage between conceptual history and a narrative of origin in whose course the first expressly designated martyrdom cases become both the concept's model and measure and at the same time its origin, ideal, and apogee. In the result, a Christocentric image of the martyrs is to be found not only in theological discourse but also in many historiographical studies. A standard semantic explanation is that the term 'martyr' comes from the Greek word for 'witness', *martyrs*, source of the designation of 'blood witnesses' or 'witnesses of Christ's Passion' as *martyres* and their suffering as *martyrium*—without any explanation as to why the Greek word for witness has turned into a Latin name for a religious sacrifice. However, if the search for the origins of martyrs

⁹ Bowersock, *Martyrdom*, 8. This thesis has been rejected in, above all, D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, 1999). Boyarin argues that the religious-historical formation of the figure of the *martyr* (at least concerning the history of monotheistic religions) is a product of the process of differentiation and opposition between rabbinic Judaism and the Christian church in the third and fourth century. One proof for his argument's plausibility is the fact that Talmudic presentation of stories from the Jewish resistance to Greece and Rome focuses more explicitly on martyrdom than the earlier sources.

¹⁰ See M. Treml, 'Märtyrer im Judentum—Figurationen großen Sterbens', in S. Weigel (ed.), *Märtyrer-Porträts. Von Opfertod, Blutzeugen, und Heiligen Kriegerern* (Munich, 2007), 65–9.

¹¹ Bowersock, *Martyrdom*, 16. The cited title refers to H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs* (Oxford, 1954).

unfolds in light of this terminological history, the Roman Empire's second- and third-century Christian martyrs necessarily take centre stage. But at the same time, several things here remain obscure: both comparable phenomena that were not (yet) so defined and uses of the term in a similar or anticipatory sense; removed from consideration are other manifestations or pre-figurations of the linkage between sacrifice and confession, steadfastness and death, and examples of another sort of 'death for' something considered heroic. In his study—now almost nine decades old—of the martyr's 'Name und Bewertung' (name and appraisal), Franz Dornseiff already discussed an abundance of pre-Christian examples and evidence from the phenomenal and semantic fields which have not been taken into consideration in historiography.¹²

The normative Christocentric perspective at play here can be forced open through a reformulation of the central problem in a different framework: one encouraging inquiry into both the general cultural-historical conditions for emergence of the cult of martyrs and specific cultural and symbolic practices preceding its Christian form and entering into figurations of the cult in the second and third century. Against the horizon of the history of cultural practices—sacrificial cult, tragic and heroic deaths, suicides, and other forms of death under tyrannical conditions in Greek, Jewish, and Roman antiquity—the narratives in the *Acta Martyrum* can be read in another light. In turn, this reading suggests that the historical emergence of a Christian martyrs' cult was only possible because of formative elements comprised of pagan, polytheistic, and Jewish sacrificial practices together with tragic motifs as I have discussed elsewhere.¹³ Additionally, the positive image of sacrificial death profited from both the preceding antique tradition of *mors voluntaria* and heroic narratives of collective suicide in the face of occupation or lack of liberty. As we will see, against such an horizon the *Acts/Passiones* reporting on joyfully borne if not longed for and sanctified martyrdom of Roman Empire Christians share a striking characteristic: the connection of *martyrium* and *confessio* '*Christiana/Christianus sum*', of *constantia* and *testimonium*.

In the following discussion, such a cultural-historical perspective will be presented in the narrower historical context of Roman antiquity. Both Livy's pre-Christian report on Lucretia's suicide and the Christian account of Perpetua's martyrdom by being imprisoned and delivered to wild animals in the Carthage amphitheatre emerge from this context. In both scenarios, the blood testimony is as important as the public before which the testimony is performed: in the former case the *forum* (to which Lucretia's dead body is carried)

¹² F. Dornseiff, 'Der Märtyrer: Name und Bewertung', *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 22 (1923/24), 133–53.

¹³ S. Weigel, 'Schauplätze, Figuren, Umformungen. Zu Kontinuitäten und Unterscheidungen von Märtyrerkulturen', introduction to Weigel, *Märtyrer-Porträts*, 11–37. Theoretical and historical perspectives are here developed for a cultural history of martyrdom.

as a space of the city; in the latter the *forum* as a place of public interrogations, the *amphitheatrum* and *arena* as a scene for spectacles, with the *catasta*, the stage for assembling the prisoners.

2. SACRIFICE AND GAMES IN ROMAN ANTIQUITY

Contemporary sources already point to the presence in cultural memory of a complexly formed culture of martyrdom *avant la lettre*—a presence already rendering the singularity thesis obsolete. Consequently, the evocation in the early Christian period of an older heroic sacrificial culture as a referential system for the almost epidemic martyr-focused enthusiasm must be taken into account. It offers the only plausible explanation for what Bowersock has described as a 'seemingly irrational desire to die at the hands of persecutors'.¹⁴ Tertullian's consolatory address *Ad martyras* (circa 202) here takes on a prominent role, as a text emerging only fifty years after the appearance of the primal document, the martyrdom of Polycarp, and in close cultural proximity to the *Passio Perpetuae*, in North African Carthage: at the time the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire and the site of one of the Empire's largest Christian congregations where the events surrounding Perpetua's death took place. In his address, Tertullian, who was the first Christian Latin author, directly recalls the many individuals who not only incurred martyrdom but indeed had 'deeply and voluntarily desired' it, 'on account of honour and fame' (*imo et ultro appetita, famae, et gloriae causa*: 4.3).

In connection with the explication of such *exempla constantiae*, Tertullian cites, among other things, an annual fertility festival in which the Spartans venerated the goddess Artemis (whom Tertullian Latinizes as Diana) under her epithet Orthia, 'the upright one'. Educated Greeks and Romans such as Tertullian considered the festival as amazing, archaic, and brutal. In its course, young men could subject themselves to torturous flagellation to demonstrate their heroic endurance. This was an extremely bloody ritual in which the richly flowing blood was understood as a gift to the goddess, the reason why this cultic festival belongs in the aftermath of pagan practices involving human sacrifices. In any case, the genesis of religious cults of martyrdom cannot be understood without taking account of the history of sacrificial cults—without a view to previous rites involving the simultaneous sacralization and tabooing of sacrifices as described, for instance, in Walter Burkert's study *Homo necans*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bowersock, *Martyrdom*, 6.

¹⁵ W. Burkert, *Homo necans* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1983).

The *sacrificium* is one of the most important keys to the culture of martyrdom. In their anthropological study of the nature and function of the sacrifice, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss describe a foundational cultic transformation affecting those offering the sacrifice and those being sacrificed at once: 'Sacrifice is a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned'.¹⁶ If in the case of archaic or pagan sacrifice, in which the gift to the gods is ritually sanctified, the moral alteration of the sacrificing party is accompanied by a transformation of that (person) which/who is offered up into a *sacrificium*, with martyrs a significant difference is in play.¹⁷ For here one and the same person gets killed and offers herself up, thus becoming a martyr. This is the person, as well, within which the moral transformation takes place, which prepares her to become a saint. Already in the antique topos of *mors voluntaria*,¹⁸ we find an effort to transform death into a self-determined act. As a follow-up, Christian martyrs restamp their pending killing by Roman officials (either in the capital itself or in the provinces) into a phantasm of a self-chosen or even desired death. At the same time, the martyrs take up their role as successors to tragic heroes on the antique stage, scene of the transition from cult to culture¹⁹—this to be sure in an arena that in the course of Roman history had been transformed into a venue for popular *spectacula*.

The history of the Roman sacrificial cult extends from the sacrifice of children to honour the gods—not uncommonly on the occasion of wars—and killings as part of the burial ritual to the broadest range of sacrificial offerings, and onward to their transformation and incorporation into an elaborate festival culture; this in turn increasingly developed into a popular entertainment programme arranged by the ruling stratum. It is the case that in 97 BC the Roman senate forbade human sacrifice; but researchers generally believe that the practice lasted in many provinces, not least of all Carthage, until the third century.²⁰ Roman history cannot be imagined without

¹⁶ H. Hubert and M. Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, tr. W.D. Hall, Foreword E.E. Evans-Pritchard (London, 1964), 13.

¹⁷ In their analysis Hubert and Mauss do not speak of martyrs, but for these authors as well the highest sacrifice is that in which the sacrificer and what is sacrificed come together. But they carry this further, to the self-sacrifice of the gods, defined as 'the ideal limit of abnegation, in which no apportionment occurs' (10).

¹⁸ See A. van Hooff, 'Vom "willentlichen Tod" zum "Selbstmord". Suizid in der Antike', in A. Bähr and H. Medick (eds), *Sterben von eigener Hand. Selbsttötung als kulturelle Praxis* (Cologne, 2005), 23–63. In more detail: A. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide. Self-killing in Classical Antiquity* (London and New York, 1990).

¹⁹ On the significance of the tragic, esp. in relation to Antigone, see Weigel, *Schauplätze*, 25ff.

²⁰ S. Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice and Sacrificial Monuments in their Mediterranean Context* (Sheffield, 1991); J.B. Rives, 'Tertullian on Child Sacrifice', *Museum Helveticum* 51 (1994), 54–63; C. Grottanelli, 'Ideologie del sacrificio umano: Roma e Cartagine', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 1 (1999), 41–59; F. Ruggiero, 'La testimonianza di Tertulliano, *Apologeticum*

sacrificial acts, sacrificial gifts, and negotiations concerning sacrifice;²¹ that history could also be described as a history of sacrificial politics. Since offering animals and liquids to honour gods and emperors was customary, these could also be required as proof of loyalty to whoever was in power, cultic practice thus being transformed into an instrument of rule. In face of the Christians, this then became a means of coercion: sacrifice to *our* gods or you shall yourself be sacrificed!

But such a transformation of the sacrifice into the means to an end is only conceivable in the wake of a completed process of desacralization, as represented in the popular and widespread *spectacula* and *circenses* performed in the amphitheatres: theatre, gladiator battles, athletic competition, wagon races, and animal fights, as documented since the third century BC. In his account of the lives of the emperors, Suetonius thus reports that Julius Caesar staged the widest range of spectacles:

A combat of gladiators and also stage-plays in every ward all over the city, performed too by actors of all languages, as well as races in the circus, athletic contests, and a sham sea fight . . . Combats with wild beasts were presented on five successive days, and last of all there was a battle between two opposing armies, in which five hundred foot-soldiers, twenty elephants, and thirty equestrians engaged on each side.²²

Where in this case even members of the upper class participated in the gladiator battles, slaves and prisoners were increasingly sent into the arena. In this light, the public killings of Christians in Roman Empire amphitheatres, especially when condemned to battle with wild animals and sent into the arena in a context of festivals and contests, emerge as a remarkable variant and late form of the Roman festivals, with their perpetuation of archaic sacrificial rites in de-sacralized, popularized form.

Since Carthage, where the sacrificial cult persisted for a long time, represented an important centre for both early Christian congregations and the persecution of Christians, it seems that the Roman sacrificial tradition prepared cultural conditions and performative structures which functioned as prerequisites for the emergence of Christian martyrdom. The emphatic *confessio* and the divine referential frame of martyrdom as introduced by Christians to the performances of interrogation and punishment practices thus may be seen as a reintroduction of the sacred into the de-sacralized loci of sacrifice: as an effort to restore sacral meaning to a victimized sacrifice

9, 2–4 sul sacrificio del bambini nell'ambito del culto di Saturno', *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 18 (2001), 307–33.

²¹ On the continuity of sacrificial practices in the Roman Empire see L.C. Seelbach, *Perpetua und Tertullian* (Jena, 2000), 11–21.

²² Suet. *Vit. Caes.* 39, tr. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb.

debased into an object of entertainment, devoid of meaning on a stage for public games. It may be seen as a retransformation of a victim into a *sacrificium*. This process takes the form of a hyperbolic intensification of the total devaluation of life upon the martyred body, by means of reinterpreting it into a prison from which the redeemed soul, chosen by God, is freed in the very moment of death. In this manner the semantics of martyrdom unfold, above all, as a conversion of all concepts of life.²³

Against the horizon of this enmeshing of Roman festival culture and Christian martyr's culture on one and the same site, we can understand why the commentaries offered by that age's leading theoreticians of Christian martyrdom are ambivalent to the point of striking present-day readers as double-tongued: here, in *Ad martyras*, we find Tertullian's apology for those he is addressing, who are urged to 'battle' in the arena; there, in *De spectaculis*, we read a critique of the Roman games aiming at keeping the Christians away from them. In his attack on the games, Tertullian initially devotes considerable space to their description, both to the question of their origin—we learn, for instance, that they were introduced as 'spectacles in the name of religion' (5.2.)—and to their typology: *circus, theatrum, agon, munus*.²⁴ The points of accusation raised against the games in the second part are as follows: *idolatria* (15.1.), incitement of affects extending from *furor, bilis, ira, and dolor* (15.4) to *dementia* and *impudicitia*, together with incitement to criminality and carnality (17.7)—all of which he assails as work of the Devil and godlessness.²⁵ One phenomenon particularly sparks his indignation: the annulment on the stage and among the spectators' ranks of all feelings valid *extra stadium* and *extra amphitheatrum*, especially the shudder experienced at the sight of a human corpse (21.3). In this way Tertullian discovers in the games the enclosed temporal-spatial structure of a moral state of exception. This is, however, no longer different from the profane locus *extra stadium* in the same manner as was once the sacral ritual site, locus of a holy taboo, from everyday life. Rather, it had been inverted into an impure place now stamped

²³ On the interplay between conversion in the religious and economic sense, see S. Weigel, 'Die Konversion zwischen religiösem Ritual und Kulturtechnik. Schwellenkunde in der Dialektik der Säkularisierung', in Weigel, *Literatur als Voraussetzung der Kulturgeschichte. Schauplätze von Shakespeare bis Benjamin* (Munich, 2004), 86–95.

²⁴ Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 12.2–4, explains the etiology of the gladiator games in terms of *munus* (service) to the dead in old burial rituals: 'For formerly, in the belief that the souls of the departed were appeased by human blood, they were in the habit of buying captives or slaves of low status, and sacrificing them during their funeral rites. Afterwards they thought good to throw the veil of pleasure over their iniquity. Those, therefore, whom they had prepared for the combat, and then trained in arms as best they could, only that they might learn to die, they, on the appointed day of the funeral, were killed at the places of sepulture. Thus they alleviated death by murders. Such is the origin of the "Munus",' tr. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Fathers III* (Edinburgh, 1869), slightly adapted.

²⁵ Two centuries later, in the sixth book of the *Confessions*, Augustine will carry this affect-centred critique further, but then focuses on circus games.

by Tertullian with a moral taboo. At least from a position of weakness, there would seem no egress from this situation, Tertullian thus having recourse to a logic of outbidding according to the following schema: 'What pleasure can be greater than disdain for that very pleasure (*quae maior voluptas quam fastidium ipsius voluptatis*: 29.2). Or: what death can be greater than that in which dying does not count and death counts for all? In the reassessment of the death penalty as a joyfully longed for death, as proposed in Tertullian's apologetics and in the acts of the martyrs, the phantasm of a sovereign subject emerges in the form of a kind of counter-sovereignty: a subject governed by its own laws, even in prison.²⁶

In *Ad martyras*, in accord with such an outbidding, re-evaluating logic, the imprisoned Christians,²⁷ addressed by Tertullian as *benedicti*, are bolstered morally and furnished with courage for death. To this end, the darkness of imprisonment is redefined as a sojourn in light, while the outside world is declared the real dungeon: *mundum carcerem esse* (2.1). In the familiar biblical light-rhetoric, 'Although it [i.e. the dungeon] has darkness, you yourself are the light. There are chains, but you are free before God' (*habet tenebras, sed lumen estis ipsi. Habet vincula, sed vos soluti Deo estis*: 2.4).²⁸ And the prisoners' certain death in the 'battle-place' of the amphitheatre is rendered into a *bonum agonem*, 'a good contest' before the divine referee. This is the emergence of the military metaphors of the *militia dei* that would have such a fateful impact on subsequent religious history.²⁹ Already Tertullian defines the martyrs as *miles* (3.1) of God.³⁰ As a reward (*praemium*: 2.3) he promises them eternal angelic fame and heavenly civil rights: *corona aeternitatis, brabium angelicae substantiae, politia in coelis, gloria in saecula saeculorum* (3.3). All this is made available to them in a kind of exchange (*negotium*). For although they have lost life's joy, this is for the sake of something greater (2.6).

But Tertullian does not, in fact, seem so sure of the steadfastness he demands from the martyrs he is addressing. For in his apology for martyrdom, he has recourse to rhetoric, the art of persuasion, by placing before them an

²⁶ This idea is prefigured in Antigone's death, when the chorus tries to soften the horror of the imminent death that Creon has decreed for her by presenting her with praise and future fame she will accrue as the only mortal to enter Hades *αὐτόνομος*, (*auto-nomos*), that means subjected under her own laws: 'But you / Of your free will walk breathing and conscious / To your death': Soph. *Ant.* 821, tr. D. Donnellan (London, 1999), 48.

²⁷ See C. Wild, 'Corona Aeternitatis—Der Wettstreit des Märtyrers', in Weigel, *Märtyrer-Porträts*, 71–3.

²⁸ Among the New Testament parallels, see Matt 5.14: 'You are the light of the world'.

²⁹ See M. Treml, 'Kreuzzug und heiliger Krieg—sakrale Gewalt im Christentum', in Weigel, *Märtyrer-Porträts*, 89–93.

³⁰ The only accessible German translation, found in the *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter* and originating in 1912, intensifies this metaphors into a consistently bellicose tone through a rendition back into the Roman military jargon from which Tertullian among others once took his terminology. See 'Tertullian: An die Märtyrer', in Tertullian, *Private und katechetische Schriften*, tr. H. Keller (Kempten, 1912), 215–23.

entire series of models of those who put an end to themselves with the sword: *qui se gladio confecerint, animo suo ducti* (4.4). Where in his text on the games he wishes to only acknowledge those sacrificed for their faith in the Christian God, in his rhetorical gesture of *energeia*³¹ he does not shy away from non-Christian models.

3. EXEMPLUM AND TESTIMONY

With regard to the text of the *Passio Perpetuae* there is an interesting passage in Tertullian's *Ad martyras* where he emphasizes the fact that among those who displayed resistance by means of their strong spirit there were not only men to be found 'but... also women' (4.3). Although enumerating each of them would take too long, it is enough to notice for us that he names Lucretia first and thus directly attributes to her a position as *exemplum* within the series of predecessors: in the eyes of her kin, she stabbed herself to death 'for her chastity's glory' (4.4). Tertullian even compares her death with the philosophers' suicides—he names Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Peregrinus, all of whom passed in the historiography as models of noble death or *mors voluntaria*. Against the backdrop of such a prominent position being accorded Lucretia in *Ad martyras*, the report on Perpetua's martyrdom needs to be read not only in the context of the history of Christian blood-testimony, as the figuration of an *imitatio Christi*, but also, as suggested, as that of an *imitatio Lucretiae*. Already in the first sentence of the *Passio Perpetuae*, Perpetua's history is ranked as one of the *fidei exempla*, while being designated, in distinction to the *vetera exempla*, as a case of *nova documenta*—in the Greek version the reference is to *palaia dogmata* and *kaina paradeigmata*.³² The position of the reports of martyrdom is thus unmistakably defined in the context of their transmission: as new testimony inheriting the old *exempla*.³³

In this manner, the historical epoch opening up between the accounts of Lucretia and Perpetua not only concerns the figure of the martyr and the momentous alteration of the testimonial semantics—both the religious

³¹ Quint. *Inst.* 8.3, summarizes the various figures of showing, Aristotle's *energeia*, Cicero's *evidentia*, and Stoic *enargeia*.

³² Amat, *Passion de Perpétue*, 98–100; den Boeft, this volume, Chapter VIII.

³³ In a certain manner Antigone's death is itself considered as one in a series of similar cases—this as an exchange between the choir's voice and Antigone's dirge in the fourth scene. When she compares her fate with that of Niobe, then the chorus' response points to the decisive difference—in her case the gods, in Niobe's case human beings; from this it arrives at Antigone's special greatness, which consists of having had 'although in ruin, the same lot as the gods' (Soph. *Ant.* 836). Consequently, we here already have the figuration of an *imitatio dei*, Antigone serving as both a tragic victim and a heroine.

reinterpretation of *martys* and the incorporation of the Greek word into the Latin lexicon—rather, it also concerns the *exemplum* and the shift of meaning of *fides* from fidelity to belief. For the history of the multivalent concept of testimony, the constellation being examined here is particularly salient because we can observe not only a differentiation in the widest range of *phenomena*—testimonies of both blood and death, eye-witness testimony, written testimony, and so forth—but also a differentiation of terminology: among others, *martys*, *martyrium*, *testis*, *testimonium*, *documentum*. A parallel reading of *Ad martyras* and the *Passio Perpetuae* makes clear that the evolving genre of martyrs' acts should not only be understood in the context of Judeo-Christian testimonial semantics, but also in that of both rhetoric and the role of *exempla* within it. Both in regards to religious history and the Bible, a great deal of research has been devoted to the broader semantics of the concept of testimony.³⁴ However, in this context, the focus is concentrated on the ties and displacements manifest between *exemplum*, testimony, and death. For both Lucretia's death and Perpetua's are presented thematically as both testimony and *exemplum*.

In Livy's version of Lucretia's death this perspective is even placed in the mouth of the protagonist herself, through the double motivation she offers for her suicidal intentions. On the one hand she wishes to have her death understood as a *testis* of her *animus insons*, her blameless heart: *ceterum corpus est tantum violatum; animus insons; mors testis erit* (1.58.7). On the other hand, in view of posterity and her posthumous fame, she models herself as an *exemplum*, insisting that no woman who has lost her chastity should evoke her example afterwards: *nec ulla deinde impudica Lucretiae exemplo vivet* (1.58.10). Written at the end of the first century BC, Livy's interpretation of Lucretia's death as testimony and example thus stands at the start of a tradition, in which Lucretia serves as an *exemplum virtutis*, as an embodiment of chastity.³⁵ She is even introduced into Rome's historiography as such, Livy presenting her as the victor in the contest arranged between the Tarquinians concerning the chastity of their wives and reporting that it was more chastity than beauty that stirred the royal son Sextus Tarquinius to be violent towards her (1.57.11).

The ambivalence at work here in the simultaneous praise for and allure of chastity—of being allured by chastity—later entered the rhetoric of the *exemplum virtutis*. When a debate began, for instance in Jerome and Augustine,

³⁴ Alongside the article by Dornseiff, which explicates a comprehensive Jewish and Christian apologetics centered on the witness-topos, see the detailed study of the biblical and Christian terminology in N. Brox, *Zeuge und Märtyrer. Untersuchungen zur frühchristlichen Zeugnis-Terminologie* (Munich, 1961); A.M. Schwemer, 'Prophet, Zeuge und Märtyrer. Zur Entstehung des Märtyrerbegriffs im frühen Christentum', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 96 (1999), 320–50.

³⁵ See K. Greschat, 'Lucretia', in *RAC* vol. 23 (2010), 596–603.

over whether preserving *pudicitia* and *castitas* was more important than the Christian ban on suicide, an affiliated rhetoric of suspicion could emerge in which Lucretia's *animus insons* was discussed and quickly doubted.³⁶ Augustine's logic was as follows: if she was actually innocent, then her death attested to a thirst for glory; if she was actually not innocent, then her death was punishment for her lewdness.³⁷ Within such a logic, reinterpreting Lucretia's suicide as an act of self-punishment was more than merely implied; likewise, for women there is no escape from that logic. In the rhetoric of suspicious chastity, they are enclosed, as it were, in the ambivalence of every possible evidence. If the feminine body represents the *corpus delicti* of impurity, then 'true innocence' is transferred to the soul—thus becoming inaccessible to any form of empirical evidence.

It is the case that already in Livy a consensus exists between Lucretia and her relatives over the principle determining guilt: *mentem peccare, non corpus*, the spirit errs, not the body (1.58.9).³⁸ However, this is here presented as a legal principle and explicated in the context of a kind of court scene initiated by Lucretia herself and upon which, following her convening of family members as a type of forum, she herself directs the action, appearing as the accused, the accuser, and the judge at once. Yet, in Christian rhetoric the principle is transformed into a chastity-centred moral discourse taking the form of a discourse about purity. Within it, female innocence continues to stand under suspicion. At the same time, with the shifting of the truth of innocence into the interior, the 'inner forum' so important for Christian cultural history comes into being;³⁹ with it, judicial authority is doubled—a situation leading to competition and often to conflict. Crucially, through this process the status of testimony is itself altered in a foundational way. Where as in Livy, in the framework of a guilt discourse following the model of the tribunal, Lucretia's death is acknowledged as a *testis*, with the force of proof, of her guiltless soul, precisely such significance of *testis* loses its validity within Christian rhetoric.

³⁶ In the fourteenth century, this rhetoric of suspicion will be pointedly emphasized in Coluccio Salutati's *Declamatio Lucretie*, where Lucretia confesses guilt as a motive for her suicide: 'An putatis nullam esse violati corporis voluptatem?'—'Do you really believe no feelings of pleasure are present in the violated body?' Cited from J. Follak, *Lucretia zwischen positiver und negativer Anthropologie. Coluccio Salutati's 'Declamatio Lucretie' und die Menschenbilder im exemplum der Lucretia von der Antike bis in die Neuzeit* (Diss. Constance, 2002). When he had Emilia Galotti speak over her fear of being seducible, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing would endow this figure, here reduced to a caricature, with features of a subject position holding an equally morally and sensually receptive sensibility.

³⁷ See Greschat, 'Lucretia', referring to Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 1.19.23–62.

³⁸ Cf. S. Weigel, 'Lucretia—Exemplum, Gründungsoffer und Bluteignis', in Weigel, *Märtyrer-Porträts*, 45–8.

³⁹ On the history of the inner and outer forum, see P. Prodi, *Una storia della giustizia: dal pluralismo dei fori al moderno dualismo tra coscienza e diritto* (Bologna, 2000).

Once testimony is called into question and has to be shored up or confirmed by more testimony, testimonial proliferation is in play—as can be seen in the case of Perpetua. We need to consider this multiplication of testimonial semantics in the second and third century against the horizon of early Christianity's devaluation of legal discourse and introduction of a divine judge. Perpetua, designated as spouse of Christ and favourite of God, *matrona Christi, ut Dei delicata* (18.2), and her *conmartyres* put it to Hilarianus, her examining judge, as follows: 'You judge us; God will judge you' (*tu nos, inquirunt, te autem Deus*: 18.8).⁴⁰ A complex testimonial terminology is already evident in the first section of the *Passio Perpetuae*, the introduction of her story by the redactor. The old examples of faith, *vetera exempla*, we learn, offer testimony of God's mercy, *Dei gratiam testificantia*, for the sake of the edification of mankind. For this reason, the *nova documenta*, serving the same purpose, should be transcribed and read aloud, 'as a testimony for the non-believers, a solace for the believers' (*non credentibus in testimonium, credentibus in beneficium*: 1.5). This new document has received its special value from being, as is underscored, 'written by her own hand' (*conscriptum manu sua*: 2.3.). In Perpetua's autobiographical report, her own steadfastness is then demonstrated by a repeated confessional affirmation, *Christiana sum*, once before her father (3.2), who implores her to disavow her faith, and again in the examination *ad forum* (6.4). Since she can no longer herself report on the last proof of her steadfastness and greatness of soul, *documentum de ipsius constantia et animi sublimitate* (16.1), the author of the frame narrative considers it a duty (*mandatum*) to and fiduciary transmission (*fideicommissum*, 16.1) for the now sanctified Perpetua to describe her struggle and death in the amphitheatre, hence to certify her martyrdom as an eye-witness, or attest to the testimony.⁴¹

The motif of blood testimony is now introduced in the account of the death of Saturus, a fellow prisoner, the blood covering him from a leopard's bite being designated as a sign of his second baptism, *secundi baptismatis testimonium* (21.2).⁴² And in the final passage's rhetoric, it is once more confirmed that the new *exempla* are not inferior to the old, bearing witness, *testificentur* (20.11), to one and the same spirit. In this contribution to the acts of the

⁴⁰ Lessing has Emilia's father, presented as the bourgeois counter-image to the tyrant, express the same idea in his final words. See S. Weigel, 'Emilia—Opfer, Säkularisierung, und tragisches Subjekt', in Weigel, *Märtyrer-Porträts*, 59–62.

⁴¹ According to Paul Celan's famous 'Wer zeugt für den Zeugen', this constellation has become very prominent since the holocaust. For an analysis of different meanings of testimony or witness after the holocaust see S. Weigel, 'Zeugnis und Zeugenschaft. Klage und Anklage. Zur Geste des Bezeugens in der Differenz von Identity politics, juristischem, und historiographischem Diskurs', in *Zeugnis und Zeugenschaft = Einstein Forum Jahrbuch 1999* (Berlin, 2000), 111–35.

⁴² On this scene see F.J. Dölger, 'Gladiatorenblut und Märtyrerblut. Eine Szene der Passio Perpetuae in kultur- und religionsgeschichtlicher Bedeutung', *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1923–1924*, ed. Fritz Saxl (Leipzig and Berlin, 1926), 96–214.

martyrs, reporting on the imprisonment, examination, and death of Perpetua and her fellow prisoners, we thus find the personified figure of the witness with the name *martyr* accompanied by an extensive testimonial semantics: *exemplum, testimonium, documentum, confessio, sanguis as baptismatis testimonium*, and *conscriptum manu sua*.

When Tertullian presents the female martyrs with the example of Lucretia,⁴³ he points to Perpetua's death as a kind of mimesis of the *exemplum*, which is to say as a performance of the assimilation of life to the exemplary death. At the same time, her case surpasses that of Lucretia and her—from a Christian view in any event dubious—proof of virtue, in that she endows the testimony of her own death with a higher meaning, confirms it through her confession and proof of her own steadfastness before dungeon and torture, and finally entrusts and hands over her soul to a divine judge: all this attested to in writing, which beyond this is itself certified as authentic by an eye-witness, in order to present the entire report, the *Passio*, as a model to others in turn, through its conveyance to their ears. Hence, in the context of a simultaneous multiplication and condensation of the testimonies and proofs, shape is endowed to a concept more meaningful than any *testis*, and that is named in its stead with a loan-word: the *martyr* as both embodied testimony and a surpassing of both testimony and proof.

4. BLOOD TESTIMONY

Since the blood testimony of martyrdom defines the Christian martyr's singularity it is especially striking that also Livy's account of Lucretia's death refers to blood, and this already functions as testimony. And in Lucretia's case as well, purity of blood is underscored, Brutus indicating that before her dishonouring by Tarquinius, her blood was the purest possible, *castissimum ante regiam iniuriam sanguinem* (1.59.1). But, in respect to blood, there is also a noteworthy contrast with the *Passio Perpetuae*: where in that narrative the imprisoned Christians are still waiting, indeed eagerly so, to shed their *sanctus et innocens sanguis* (15.2), in the account of Lucretia, Brutus delivers his vow, as described in the retrospective historiography, upon the shed blood of the already dead victim:

⁴³ The rhetoric on Lucretia as an *exemplum* already contains the motif of the female martyr as a man in a woman's body, a motif appearing in one of Perpetua's visions and then intensively preoccupying interpretations of this text. Valerius Maximus thus names Lucretia the spearhead of Roman chastity whose manly soul received a female body through an evil fate. See Greschat, 'Lucretia'; Williams, this volume, Chapter II.

While they [i.e. Lucretia's husband and father] were overwhelmed by grief, Brutus drew the knife out of Lucretia's wound, held it, dripping with blood, before him, and called out: 'By this blood, which was the purest until its dishonouring by the king's son, I swear and call to you, gods, as witnesses, that I will pursue L. Tarquinius Superbus together with his wicked wife and all his children with sword and fire and every possible violence and will not let any of them or another to rule in Rome as king'. (1.59.1)

Prompting a shift from mourning to rage among Lucretia's family and leading to the fall of the royal house, this scene signifies a sort of *peripeteia* to the entire Lucretia narrative, remarkable in its scenic and dramatic qualities, that Livy calls up from a distance of nearly half a millennium.

With the appearance on the scene of Brutus, the fourth act begins with the presentation of these events of Roman history said to have transpired at the end of the sixth century BC—events sealing the fate of the royal period and ushering in the republic. The first act is the contest of the Tarquinians over the chastity of their women. In the second, the royal son Sextus Tarquinius surprises the wife of Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus in her sleep and violently forces himself on her. In the third, Lucretia convenes her husband and father, recounts what has happened, judges herself—'although I absolve myself from guilt, I do not free myself from punishment' (*ego me etsi peccato absolvo, supplicio non libero*: 1.58.10)—and kills herself to demonstrate her innocence, in a suitably theatrical way: 'With this she plunged the knife, which she had hidden beneath her gown, into her heart, sank down over the wound, and fell dying to the floor. Her husband and father cried out'. The final two acts, Brutus's vow and the uproar caused by the display of Lucretia's corpse in the forum leading to the downfall of the royal house, play no further role for the rhetorical chastity-*exemplum*, which is why in the later historical accounts Lucretia's story usually ends at this point. For the foundational myth of the Roman republic, these final acts are all the more important.

Following Brutus's entry and vow over Lucretia's blood, the fourth act continues with the momentous transformation of mourning into rage, *luctus* into *ira*. This affective reversal is, as indicated, the precondition for subsequent quasi-revolutionary manifestations and introduces the political action: 'He then handed the knife to Collatinus, then to Lucretius and Valerius... their mourning turned into rage, and when Brutus appealed to them to overthrow the kingdom they followed him as their leader' (1.59.2). With the corpse's conveyance to the forum in the final act, the transformation of lamentation into provocative speech is highlighted, Lucretia's violation and deplorable death serving as a basis for presenting other atrocities by the king and his family; this leads to their downfall. At this moment the corpse is transformed from a *corpus violatum* to a *corpus politicum*, the

exemplum virtutis to a *corpus delicti* of royal rule and an affair of the *res publica*.⁴⁴

Let us now consider the relation between blood and testimony in Lucretia's case and in Perpetua's. In both accounts, blood connects the elements of sacrificial death, innocence or chastity, and testimony: for Lucretia, death as proof of innocence; for Perpetua, a martyr's death is testimony of pure and true faith. The opposition between soul or spirit and body itself already comes to the fore in Livy's guilt-determining principle, *mentem peccare, non corpus*. When the capacity for guilt is assigned to the spirit, then the opposition already also implies the idea of the soul's superiority to the body, an idea so important for the martyrs' acts, albeit radicalized there to the point of complete devaluation of physical existence, to the soul's deliverance from the 'prison' of body and world.

For Livy, the body-spirit opposition culminates in the difference between *peccatum* ('transgression') and *supplicium*, a highly multivalent term whose semantics ranges from supplication and sacrifice, a gesture of humbleness and submission before the gods, to punishment and beyond to the suffering of torment and execution. In this way the entire genesis of the Roman legal system, from polytheism and pagan cult of sacrifice, is condensed into the history of this term. When *supplicium* is translated as punishment, a secularizing dimension surfaces within which the emergence of Roman law from a religious grounding, the legitimation of worldly power by the gods, is elided; inversely, the translation of *peccatum* as sin corresponds to a Christianizing viewpoint in which ecclesiastical Latin semantics is in play.

In calling to the gods as witnesses—*vosque, di, testes facio me*—in the scene of his vow upon Lucretia's blood, Brutus himself is invoking higher authorities who here bring older tradition into play, in contrast to the Christian martyrs, who venerate their new, sole God. This scene corresponds precisely to the description of a state of exception, to be sure one initially declared by the actor Brutus with the help of a corpse. Brutus, who has seized both the knife and control, wishes to see himself legitimized through the gesture of a double attestation: through Lucretia's blood and an appeal to the gods. To this extent he transforms Lucretia's death, which she had intended as a *testis* of her guiltless soul, into a blood testimony, which is to say into a *sacrificium*, here profiting from the sacral significance of blood in sacrificial rites. This is the reason that confirmation of the 'purest' quality of Lucretia's blood before her defilement is so important to him. Brutus is here participating in the moral transformation accorded those offering the sacrifice, as analysed by Hubert and Mauss.

⁴⁴ On this aspect of the Lucretia narrative see M.T. Fögen, *Römische Rechtsgeschichten. Über Ursprung und Evolution eines sozialen Systems* (Göttingen, 2002).

In the case of Perpetua, the confession—*Christiana sum*—precedes death, as a manifestation of readiness for it,⁴⁵ while the subsequent death renders her pure and guiltless blood into a testimony of Christian steadfastness. *Constantia* in face of tyranny serves, in turn, as a *documentum* of the martyr, less a legacy than a mandate and fiduciary commission for reporting, promulgation, and reading; for the mediation of a call to do the same as her. In the one case, then, blood is a legitimization of interventionism, in the other, blood a model for imitation. A basic difference at play here is the position of the testimony vis-à-vis higher authority. When Brutus calls to the gods as witnesses in his vow upon the 'pure' blood of dishonoured Lucretia, in this manner ritually, hence pre-legally, legitimizing his actions, he is then symbolically shoring up the republic's foundational act; and he is doing so in relation to a sphere *beyond*, for which the blood of the sacrificial victim testifies in the *here and now*. In this regard, the decisive difference introduced with the Christian martyrs is consideration of sacrificial death and blood as an avowal of and attestation to the Christian God and His grace. In the one case, in Livy, invocation of the gods is legitimization for the toppling of a tyrannical sovereign; in the other case acceptance of God in the face of a tyrannical sovereignty. Where in his capacity as the sovereign deciding over the state of emergency, Brutus's actions follow the laws of political theology, the persecuted Christians, subjected to the tyrant's rule, try to manifest their sovereignty through an anti-gesture aimed at judging the sovereign: the *confessio* as a deadly decision *within*—not over—the state of emergency. In the one case, a gesture symbolizing a staking claim to power; in the other case, a reinterpretation of subjection into a kind of inner triumph.

Corresponding to the symbolic-political significance of blood testimony in the foundational myth of the Roman republic is a remarkable social function of martyr's blood for the founding of a Christian congregation: as the symbol for a fraternal community of *conmartyres* united through sacrifice. This comes into conflict with actual kinship and supplants it—in Perpetua's case both the father and *frater meus carnalis* are referred to. The sixth chapter of the *Passio Perpetuae* expressly tells of Perpetua's sacrifice and a concomitant double devaluation of familial ties involving daughter Perpetua's disregard for paternal care and mother Perpetua's disregard for care of her own child. On a number of occasions, Perpetua's father appears and begs her to spare her life, to take account of his old age and have mercy on her child, her response being simply *non facio*—*Christiana sum* (6.4). Similarly, we read of the pregnant Felicitas that she was sad that due to her pregnancy she would not be able to die with the others and that her *conmartyres* prayed successfully to God for a

premature birth so that she was able to hand her daughter over to a sister of the congregation and accompany her *conmartyres* to death.

The devaluation of bodily kinship here manifest in the explicit juxtaposition of the physical brother—*frater carnalis*—with martyr brothers—*multos fratres cognoscere sed et martyras* (13.8)—is located at the origins of the Christian tradition and inscribed in its culture.⁴⁶ The *consanguinitas* of relationship is repressed and replaced by the *conmartyres*, physiological genealogy by a chain of martyrs engendering, as a culture of *imitatio*, an entirely *other* sort of relationship. This is a literal blood relationship, a community of blood witnesses: a substitution of propagation through holy martyrs' blood. Corresponding to this is a metaphorization of generative seed in the definition of blood attributed to Tertullian, *semen est sanguis christianorum*. Hence the blood of martyrs is not only testimony of a willingness to pay the price of Christian confession with death, but also the medium of a specific Christian genealogy in which blood emerges in opposition to flesh. With blood here considered both a precarious confessional testimony and a second baptism, Lessing can confirm in *Zur Rettung des Cardanus* that martyrs' blood is 'a very ambivalent thing'. Benjamin then critically intensifies this observation when in his critique of the dogma about the 'holiness of bare life' he denies blood any significance going beyond mere life by insisting that 'blood is the symbol of mere life'.⁴⁷

5. WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Because of the significance of blood testimony as a transitional topos on the threshold from antiquity to early Christianity, the element of written testimony earns a special importance. In this respect the *Passio Perpetuae*, as one of the first personal attestations of martyrdom, takes on a prominent role because the autobiographical character furnishes one more testimonial element to the martyr's acts, which anyhow is a genre of condensed testimonial elements. Although considered an exceptional case because of its autobiographical character, the *Passio* nevertheless is, therefore, often considered as the origin of the genre.

The way the redactor emphasizes the written word in his opening commentary is striking—as mentioned, in indicating that the *nova documenta* are as significant as the old testimonies of God's grace and offering a grounding for transcription of the new testimonies. And when the author

⁴⁶ D. Praet, "Melior cupiditate detentus": Christian Self-definition and the Rejection of Marriage in the Early Acts of the Martyrs', *Euphrosyne* 31 (2003), 457–73.

⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, tr. E. Jephcott and K. Shorter (London and New York, 1985), 151. See my discussion of his 'Critique of Violence' in connection to the history of martyrdom in S. Weigel, *Walter Benjamin. Die Kreatur, das Heilige, die Bilder* (Frankfurt, 2008; English translation forthcoming, Stanford).

⁴⁵ For the confession see Bremmer, this volume, Chapter I, note 43.

of the frame-narrative, in his function as redactor or editor, attests to both the autobiographical authenticity of Perpetua's writing and her death in the arena, then blood testimony and written testimony are directly tied together. To formulate this differently: they receive their *empirical* authentication through the report of eye-witnesses, while their status as a *sanctified* record is owed to the object of their narrative: the martyr's confession, torment, and sacrifice of life.

We here can observe the intertwining, by way of an accumulation of testimonies, of a number of heterogeneous symbolic systems. In the context of the early Christian martyrs' acts the male and female martyrs serve as mediums between an inner-worldly arena and the heavenly spheres, and this is achieved through their deaths, understood as testimony of transcendent meaning, God's grace. The words and writing then serve as testimony of a privileged sharing of this sacral sphere. To this extent the acts of martyrs belong to those testimonies less concerned with historical or juridical evidence than with attesting to exceptional events or suffering, through which the martyr is separated from the congregation, like the corpse he or she will soon be from those who survive. What is at stake here is more the testimonial gesture than any evidence.⁴⁸ But since the dead cannot report on their own deaths, it is incumbent on eye-witnesses, for the most part appearing as authors of passion narratives, to testify to the authenticity of the blood testimony: to its 'having been so' and not otherwise.

But at the same time, in their status as eye-witness accounts, the acts of martyrs are media in the technical sense, which is to say documents of the cultural technique of writing. Since their goal is to circulate among Christians, and among potential Christians, they need to be transcribed, translated, and distributed, a fact that some examples of the genre, for example the martyrdom of Polycarp, acknowledge through their epistolary form. Its address to readers is as follows: 'The Church of God in Smyrna to the Church of God in Philomelium and to all congregations of the Holy and Catholic Church everywhere' (M. Pol. 1). But the constellation emerges as even more complex when we note that in many cases the transcriptions of martyrs' acts go back to protocols prepared during the examination of prisoners through local officials, in other words to forensic records.⁴⁹ In any event, in these protocols as well, the concern is not so much evidence, since witnesses are not being interrogated, but rather an examination of accused persons not following a logic of truth but of confession and renunciation. Although in some cases the examinations could slip into discussions between the examiners and their subjects,

⁴⁸ On this systematic distinction, in the context of the aftermath to the Holocaust, see Weigel, 'Zeugnis und Zeugenschaft. Klage und Anklage'.

⁴⁹ See in general C. Vismann, *Akten. Medientechnik und Recht* (Frankfurt, 2000); Bremmer and Formisano, this volume, Introduction.

the protocols then drawing close to the genre of religious disputation,⁵⁰ such cases have little relevance for the acts of martyrs. For here the focus is on persons condemned to death, whose merciless interrogations reflect an absolute disinterest in their religious views. In the distribution of such protocols by the passion-narratives, above all those scenes are cited attesting to the heroic steadfastness of the martyrs.

The martyrs' acts reveal not only an interweaving of blood testimony and written testimony, but also the two dimensions, spiritual and technical, of an ambivalent concept of media. The sacrificial victim's personal testimony here ties the ritual, religious act of blood testimony with the cultural, secular praxis of written testimony. Where the self-sacrifice guarantees the sacrality of the acts of martyrs, the written attestation guarantees the victim's collective veneration as a saint. Simultaneously it sees to both the community-founding impact of the martyrs—as sacrifice and witness—and reading of the martyrs' acts—as a model—extending beyond those who were present as spectators at the scene of the events. This meaning of written testimony is underscored a number of times as the object of ritual reading: *et ad gloriam Dei lectione celebramus*, and not only as testimony for non-believers and solace for believers, but also for the use of the Church, *ad instrumentum Ecclesiae* (1.5).

The written status of the acts of martyrs is an essential precondition for both the strikingly formulaic quality of their rhetoric and their afterlife in medieval and early modern veneration of martyrs. The rhetorical pathos formulae, already to be observed in the earliest Christian passion-narratives, not only demonstrate a recollection and paraphrasing of many *topoi*, turns of speech, images, and concepts from pre-Christian traditions. These formulae are also an effective medium in the genre's aftermath, both in the transmission of legends about martyrs and saints and in secular modalities revealing the Janus-face of saint and sacrificial victim as inscribing itself in literary history. But moving far beyond literature, many such formulae emerge as leitmotifs in European cultural history.

The revaluation of imprisonment into an inner or higher freedom is certainly among the *topoi* with the most impact. We have seen one example of the *topos*: Tertullian's rhetoric of reinterpretation, in whose framework he compares, in *Ad martyras*, the prisoners' dungeon to the self-chosen loneliness of the 'prophets in the desert': *Hoc praestat carcer Christiano, quod eremus prophetis*, 'the dungeon offers the Christian what the desert offers prophets' (2.8). Correspondingly, we read in Perpetua's report that her dungeon suddenly became a palace, *mihi carcer subito praetorium*, where she preferred living to elsewhere (3.9). The history of the impact of this emphatic *topos*

⁵⁰ See D. Liebs, 'Umwidmung. Nutzung der Justiz zur Werbung für die Sache ihrer Opfer in den Märtyrerprozessen der frühen Christen', in W. Ameling (ed.), *Märtyrer und Märtyrerakten* (Stuttgart, 2002), 19–46.

extends into modernity, now brought to a head in various—phantasmic—formulae for being trapped in a dungeon, yet free.⁵¹

Just as significant is the metaphors of battle inherited from Cynic-stoic popular philosophy: both the battle's revaluation in the *stadium tribunalis* into an—as it were decorporealized—contest in which martyrs stake their virtues, their souls and purity, and the reverse metaphorization, through which they become 'soldiers of Christ'. Numerous formulas from Tertullian's text belong in this register, including those concerning the *militia dei* (3.1) and the *exercitationem virtutis animi et corpori* as a *bonum agone* (3.3). We can understand the former as having written history, so to speak, in that in the form of the holy warrior, the crusader, or the aggressive, armed martyr, it became a historical figure. The presence of this battle topos within the figure of the early Christian martyr was the precondition for the possibility of its deployment as a soldier in 'holy war'. In contrast, Perpetua's characterization as a wife, as *matrona Christi* (18.2), involves a metaphor signifying the starting point for a special closeness of saints and martyrs to God. This led, in turn, to differentiated metaphors of love and kinship, with whose help the relationship to the threefold godhead could be in a sense intimicized, the 'bride of Christ' thus emerging as one of the central motifs in medieval bridal mysticism, allowing the suffering of 'Christ's discipleship' to be transformed into a passion-laden *imitatio*, with scenes of martyrdom and death here imaginatively reproduced as phantasmatic images of both *mors mystica* and physical torment. Along the track of this 'white' or bloodless martyrdom, a '*gloriosa passio* out of glowing love of God' was generated,⁵² which provides the basis for transforming *passio* (in the sense of suffering) into a passionate feeling: one of the most important affective foundations of Christian cultural history. These topoi did not disappear in the course of secularization. Rather, they were absorbed by secular culture like, to use one of Walter Benjamin's images, ink by a blotter and, thus, became nearly unrecognizable for a reading of the usual script of a seemingly secularized European culture.

⁵¹ See S. Weigel, 'Und selbst im Kerker frei' Schreiben im Gefängnis. Zur Theorie und Gattungsgeschichte der Gefängnisliteratur (1750–1933) (Marburg, 1982).

⁵² Erich Auerbach, 'Passio als Leidenschaft', in his *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur romanischen Philologie* (Bern, 1967), 161–76 (1941¹) at 164.

X

Visions, Prophecy, and Authority in the *Passio Perpetuae*

by
Katharina Waldner

1. INTRODUCTION: PROPHECY AND DIVINATION IN THE 'LABORATORY' OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE¹

The 'prison diary' of the martyr Perpetua impresses the reader with its simple and precise depiction of the four visions, in which the young woman writing describes her coming martyrdom in various and mysterious images: climbing away from a dangerous monster up a ladder spiked with instruments of torture to an idyllic place, in which a white haired man dressed like a herdsman offers her sweet cheese to eat in the first vision (4.1–10). Seeing her deceased brother Dinocrates tormented by thirst in the second vision, Perpetua is shown a little while later how she herself may ease his suffering by her prayers (7.1–8.4). The account ends with a fourth vision: she sees herself in the arena of the amphitheatre in Carthage—recalling very strongly the setting of Greek *agones*²—fighting a 'black Egyptian' while she herself has miraculously been transformed into a man. When she is presented with the winner's crown, she realizes that hers is not to fight 'with animals, but with the Devil', and that she will remain victorious (3.1–14). Ever since the *Passio Perpetuae* became the object of scholarly study, numerous papers were written, rich in material and rather compelling, which try to decipher Perpetua's visual language, be it from a psycho-analytical perspective, the perspective of motive history, or early Christian history.³ In my contribution to

¹ I thank Elisabeth Begemann (Erfurt) for translating the text from German into English and the editors, especially Jan Bremmer, for many valuable suggestions for improving my argument and style.

² Cf. L. Robert, 'Une vision de Perpétue martyre à Carthage en 203', *CRAI* 1982, 228–76, reprinted in his *Opera minora selecta* V (Amsterdam, 1989), 791–839.

³ P.C. Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1994) and E.A. Castelli, *Visions and Voyeurism: Holy Women and the Politics of Sight in Early Christianity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles,

