

Summary

***Athletae Christi*. Early Christian Hagiography between Imitation and Rewriting**

The purpose of this book is to introduce the reception of an early Christian martyrological narrative known as the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, starting shortly after its composition at the beginning of the 3rd century AD and culminating in the works of St Augustine and his followers in the 5th century. In the Christian North Africa, the *Passio Perpetuae* was enjoying an extraordinary authority and popularity since its publication, and it even became a paradigmatic text for other North African martyrological narratives in the subsequent fifty or sixty years after its composition. However, it contained a number of revolutionary and innovative features that were in conflict with existing social and theological conventions of that time. Through these novel features the text probably acquired its popularity, and yet in the new historical as well as theological contexts they gradually ceased to correspond to the changing ideal of sanctity, and it was necessary to “explain them away” or to normalize them by such an exegesis that removed their subversive potential, often without regard to the original text and its meaning.

The first part of this book briefly analyses the *Passio Perpetuae* from the viewpoint of philology and literary history, and also sums up the previous scholarship on the topic covering all the problematic points. First, the *Passio Perpetuae* is set against the backdrop of the oldest martyr literature; there follow chapters on the dating of this narrative, its authorship, existing versions and theological background. The next chapter analyses the innovative features of the *Passio Perpetuae* that can be summed up as follows: first, the *passio* turns the

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existent socio-gender hierarchies upside down, and its main characters break most of the social and family bonds that were, in antiquity, considered natural and inviolable for woman; second, it ascribes to Perpetua such characteristics that were usually considered to belong to men; and third, the emphasis is placed on an extraordinary spiritual authority of the martyrs (especially of Perpetua, evidenced e.g. by her ability to absolve the dead pagan of the punishment in the nether world) within the community of believers.

The second part of the book focuses on the impact of the *Passio Perpetuae* in the subsequent centuries. It seeks to elucidate how this narrative influenced the later literature of the early Church, and mainly how the original revolutionary features were disempowered and adapted to aims, theological as well as others, of later centuries. All of the relevant texts mentioning Perpetua and her companions or directly quoting or alluding to their passion are analysed, and the way in which they try to normalize its innovative characteristics is shown. These efforts, visible as they are already on careful examination of the passages of the anonymous editor of the *passio*, continue from Tertullian (who was a contemporary to the editor) to Augustine and his followers; the only exception are the North African passions of martyrs of the 3rd century which imitate the *Passio Perpetuae* in its macrostructure as well as microstructure. The normalization of the narrative reaches its peak in the anonymous *Acta Perpetuae* (probably from the mid-5th century, with *recensio A* being clearly older than *B*) which represent a radical rewriting of the original and an attempt to replace it by a purified text, more compliant with the socio-theological conventions of that time, and taking into consideration the criticism and reinterpretation of Augustine. In Appendix, all of the Augustine's and pseudo-Augustine's homilies on Perpetua and Felicity are translated into Czech.

Keywords: early Christian literature; early Christian martyrs; hagiography; reception; *acta martyrum*; *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*; *Acta Perpetuae*; St Perpetua; Augustine