

***Passio Perpetuae* and *Acta Perpetuae*: Between Tradition and Innovation**

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Introduction

Classical literature bequeathed to us only a small number of works written by women that have survived to the present day.² This fact is the obvious corollary of women's social status at that time, a status that is almost unacceptable from a contemporary perspective. Christianity brought about a significant change in this realm (as it did in many others) by *inter alia* awarding the women in the Gospels a remarkably honourable position among the figures closely linked to the divine founder of the new religion, which went at least some way towards elevating their status in society as a whole.³

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² As for currently available anthologies comprising the texts under discussion in translation, let us mention, e.g.: MARY R. LEFKOWITZ – MAUREEN B. FANT (edd.), *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation*, Baltimore 1992; IAN M. PLANT (ed.), *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome: An Anthology*, London 2004; PATRICIA WILSON-KASTNER (ed.), *A Lost Tradition: Women Writers of The Early Church*, Washington D.C. 1981.

³ The role of women in early Christian society has been a much debated issue since the 1970s, particularly in connection with the feminist movement and later with *gender studies*. Cf. e.g. EVA CANTARELLA, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Baltimore 1987; ELIZABETH A. CLARK (ed.), *Women in the Early Church*, Wilmington 1983; GILLIAN CLARK, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles*, Oxford 1993; JEAN LAPORTE, *The Role of Women in Early Christianity*, Lewiston, N. Y. 1982; SARAH B. POMEROY, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, New York 1975.

The elevation of women was, however, only an outward one: their absolute subjugation to men was (much in accordance with the traditional attitude of the pagan majority) still firmly grounded in the Epistles of the New Testament; that is, in the very canonical texts which offered at least a hope of improvement of their condition. It is symptomatic that the only woman whose status was radically transformed as a consequence of the new attitude was the Virgin Mary, who, being declared to have given a virgin birth to Jesus, was in fact to a certain extent stripped of her femininity, becoming an asexual symbol in her new defeminised status.

Although during the early years of enthusiasm women were allowed to hold positions of some influence within the nascent (therefore not yet rigid) Church hierarchy, in later years they could in most cases attain society's recognition and esteem only after death.⁴ If they did not shrink from offering their lives in the name of Christ as the ultimate sacrifice in the face of persecution, they would then be held in commensurately high esteem for their martyrdom by the whole Christian community. But once again, as in the case of Jesus' mother, human martyrs are transformed into symbols, a kind of proof that members of the weaker sex (as it was commonly considered) – the sex which brought about the fall of Adam – can be rewarded with God's grace to such an extent that they manage to, in an almost unearthly fashion, heroically and unflinchingly overcome their innate imperfection – that is, their femininity – and die a man's (brave) death, thus becoming revered role models to their followers.⁵

This theme is a recurrent one in early Christian works; at the same time, this conventional model was ruptured at the very beginning of the literary tradition it was a part of. In A.D. 203,⁶ in the wake of a local flaring up⁷ of

⁴ Cf. KAREN JO TORJESSEN, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*, San Francisco 1995. Some branches of thought, later declared as heterodox, highly esteemed women; this is especially true of Montanism. Further reading, cf. e.g. CHRISTINE TREVETT, *Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy*, New York 1996 (hereafter TREVETT 1996); JOHANNES HOFMANN, *Christliche Frauen im Dienst kleinasiatischer Gemeinden des ersten und zweiten Jahrhunderts. Eine prosopographische Studie*, in: *Vigiliae Christianae* 54, 2000, No. 3, pp. 283-308.

⁵ Augustine uses this model to interpret the martyrdom and deaths of Perpetua and Felicitas in his sermons (AUGUSTINE, *Sermones* 280-282 [PL 38,1280-1286]). Further reading cf. PETR KITZLER, *Augustinova kázání In natali martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis (Sermones 280-282)*, in: *Querite primum regnum Dei. Sborník příspěvků k počtě J. Nechutové*, (edd.) HELENA KRMIČKOVÁ – ANNA PUMPROVÁ – DANA RŮŽIČKOVÁ – LIBOR ŠVANDA, Brno 2006, pp. 89-98.

⁶ Regarding the dating of the events to March 7, 203, cf. TIMOTHY DAVID BARNES, *Pre-Decian Acta Martyrum*, in: *The Journal of Theological Studies*, N. S. 19, 1968, pp. 509-

anti-Christian sentiment, a group of young catechumens were incarcerated in Carthage in Africa because of their Christian faith, and were condemned to participate in one of the hugely popular spectacles of those times: fighting with wild beasts in the amphitheatre. Thus they merited their undying fame as valiant and intrepid martyrs in the eyes both of believers and the Church as a whole. The account of their famous martyrdom, probably written shortly after the event,⁸ survived under the title of *Passio SS Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas), and it is this work and its variations that we will focus on in the article.

In the preliminary part of the article, I am going to provide a general analysis of the *Passio Perpetuae* and sum up its main issues. In the final part of the paper I will compare the text of the *Passio* with that of the *Acta* (mainly from the view point of literary history); I will draw attention to the different aims which both versions of the text try to achieve and refer to the narrative strategies used in this effort.

Passio Perpetuae: A Re-examination

Passio Perpetuae, which survived in both Latin and Greek versions,⁹ is one of the earliest Christian works written in Latin, second only to the *Acta Martyrum Scillitanorum* of A. D. 180. Whereas the *Acta Scillitanorum* em-

531, especially pp. 521-525. Both indications in the text and notes in later martyrologies point to this date.

⁷ Current *communis opinio* has it that empire-wide persecution of Christians did not begin until 249/50 during the reign of Decius. The Christian issue was the responsibility of individual administrators of the provinces; cf. TIMOTHY DAVID BARNES, *Legislation against the Christians*, in: *The Journal of Roman Studies* 58, 1968, pp. 32-50. The political background of the persecutions is summed up also by PETR KITZLER, *Tertullianus. Mezi Romanitas a Christianitas: Vybrané aspekty Tertullianovy „politické teologie“*, in: *Dějiny politického myšlení*, II, (edd.) VILÉM HEROLD – IVAN MÜLLER, Praha 2006 (forthcoming).

⁸ The precise date at which this narrative was composed can not be ascertained. It must have been written, however, between 203 and 210/213. As for the *terminus post quem*, one can refer to the *Pass. Perp.* 7,9, where Perpetua states she and her fellow soon-to-be-martyrs will fight with the wild beasts on the occasion of *natale Getae Caesaris* (March, 7; cf. the footnote no. 6). As a certain *terminus ante quem*, we may quote Tertullian's reference to the *Pass. Perp.* in his *De anima* (55,4 [CCL 2,862]), which was composed between 210 and 213 (see JAN HENDRIK WASZINK [ed.], *Tertulliani De anima*, Amsterdam 1947, pp. 5*-6*).

⁹ The interdependencies of the two versions as well as determining the original has been the focus of research for more than one hundred years. As for early research up to 1940s, cf. CORNELIUS IOANNES MARIA IOSEPH VAN BEEK (ed.), *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae*

ploy an austere, interrogatory style consisting of a series of questions and answers (which is, however, a contrived literary device, and not a verbatim transcription of the trial,¹⁰ as has sometimes been claimed), in *Passio Perpetuae* it is the narrative form that becomes prominent. In later works of the genre, the narrative element would come to be elevated to the realm of fairy-tale: fantastic, miracle-abounding yarns similar to those found in the Classical novel, to which these, to a degree, often provide a Christian alternative.

Passio Perpetuae's literary structure is of note in itself: the text is not a monovocal, homogeneous narrative flow, but a dexterously composed work consisting of three distinct yet ultimately integrated narrative voices. The first of these is the voice of the narrator/editor, which some (early) sources have wrongly identified as Tertullian's.¹¹ In the space of the first two chapters, this narrative line provides the whole text with a kind of theological anchor, since, as the editor expounds, the visitation of the Holy Spirit was not limited solely to the times of ancient martyrs; on the contrary, the Holy Spirit bestows his gifts continually on all, even to the present day. People, however, tend to cling to those ancient demonstrations of faith, foolishly setting

et Felicitatis, Noviomagi 1936, pp. 84*-91* (hereafter VAN BEEK 1936); the newer opinions are summed up e.g. by JACQUELINE AMAT (ed.), *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité suivie des Actes* (Sources Chrétiennes, 417), Paris 1996, pp. 51-66 (hereafter AMAT 1996). Currently, the Latin version is thought to be the original, whereas the Greek version is considered to be a translation which may have, however, drawn on a slightly different, occasionally even better original than the one that has survived until the present (cf. JAN N. BREMMER, *The Vision of Satorius in the Passio Perpetuae*, in: *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome. Studies in Ancient Cultural Interaction in Honour of A. Hilhorst*, (edd.) FLORENTINO GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ – GERARD P. LUTTIKHUIZEN, Leiden 2003, pp. 55-73, here pp. 57f.). Opinion is divided as to the original language of Satorius' vision, which some researchers deem to have been a stand-alone edition owing to some of its prosodic components or a Greek original. See e.g. ÅKE FRIDH, *Le problème de la Passion des Saintes Perpétue et Félicité*, Göteborg 1968. For a brief summary see ANTONIE WLOSOK, in: *HLL (Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike)*, IV, München 1997, § 472.3, pp. 423-426, here pp. 425f. (hereafter WLOSOK 1997).

¹⁰ Cf. ANTONIE WLOSOK, in: *HLL* IV, § 472.2, pp. 422-423; HANS-ARMIN GÄRTNER, *Die Acta Scillitanorum in literarischer Interpretation*, in: *Wiener Studien* 102, 1989, pp. 149-167.

¹¹ The issue of the editor/narrator is as frequently discussed as the relationship between the Latin and Greek versions. For a summary of early research see again VAN BEEK 1936, pp. 92*-96*. A tempting hypothesis pointing to Tertullian as to the author of the work is untenable for both stylistic and factual reasons. For a summary see WLOSOK 1997, p. 425. For more details on the stylistic and linguistic analysis refuting the authorship of Tertullian cf. e.g. RENÉ BRAUN, *Tertullien est-il le rédacteur de la Passio Perpetuae*, in: *Revue des Études Latines* 33, 1955, pp. 79-81; IDEM, *Nouvelles observations linguistiques sur le rédacteur de la „Passio Perpetuae“*, in: *Vigiliae Christianae* 33, 1979, pp. 105-117.

greater store by the old over the new, not realising that those acts, now ancient, were once new and novel, and that what is topical today will before long become yesterday's news.¹² Following this introduction, which has marked Montanistic features,¹³ the editor/narrator without further ado goes on to introduce and briefly describe the group of young catechumens arrested and incarcerated for their faith. There were two women among the prisoners: Felicitas and Vibia Perpetua, a 22-year old educated woman of "noble birth" (*honeste nata*),¹⁴ on whom the text is primarily focused.

At this point the editor/narrator is relieved by Perpetua herself: in chapters 3-10 – central to the whole *passio* – she relates her disagreeable experiences from the prison, where she found herself together with her newborn baby. She conveys the painful unravelling of all social ties with her family and the world at large, and puts down in writing four visions she experienced – which, amongst other things, unmistakably prefigure her future martyrdom. Perpetua's account is a first-person narrative and is claimed to be the *ipsisima verba* of the soon-to-be martyr.

¹² As for this aspect of the prologue, whose polemical tenor could have been directed against the newly baptized, who found difficult to abandon the traditional Roman thinking with its emphasis on *mos maiorum*, cf. RACHEL MORIARTY, *The Claims of the Past. Attitudes to Antiquity in the Introduction to Passio Perpetuae*, in: *Studia Patristica* 31, 1997, pp. 307-313.

¹³ The accentuation of the workings of the Holy Spirit, which is typical of Montanism, as well as chiliastic awaiting of the end of the world appear almost exclusively in the prologue and epilogue; for this reason Perpetua can hardly be thought of as a kind of "African Montanists leader", as some researchers have indicate. Cf. e.g. TREVETT 1996; KENNETH B. STEINHAUSER, *Augustine's Reading of the Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, in: *Studia Patristica* 33, 1997, pp. 244-249; REX D. BUTLER, *The New Prophecy & "New Visions": Evidence of Montanism in The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, Washington D.C. 2006 (I was able to study Butler's book thoroughly only after completing my paper: Butler, who claims *Pass. Perp.* to be „a uniquely Montanistic document“, p. 120, provides an analysis of the connection between *Pass. Perp.* and *Acta Perp.*, see esp. pp. 98ff., often stressing similar points to mine; in Butler's opinion, however, the novel features of *Pass. Perp.* that I discuss below were smothered in later *Acta* because they were Montanistic. According to Butler, the *Acta* represents a Catholic redaction of the originally Montanistic *Pass. Perp.*, ready for „orthodox consumption“, p. 103).

¹⁴ *Pass. Perp.* 2,1f. The Latin and Greek versions of *Passio Perpetuae* as well as the shorter *Acta Perpetuae* cited in this article appear in the VAN BEEK edition of 1936. In addition to the van Beek edition, two more recent commented editions have appeared recently in French and Italian translations respectively; these cannot, however, quite supersede the van Beek work. Cf. ANTOON ADRIANUS ROBERTUS BASTIAENSEN (ed.) – GIOACHINO CHIARINI (tr.), *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, in: *Atti e passioni dei martiri*, Milano 1987, pp. 109-147 (text), pp. 412-452 (commentary), and AMAT 1996. The new critical edition

Here the editor/narrator takes over again, only to introduce yet another narrative voice: that of Saturus, the catechist of the whole group of novices, who also had a vision and wrote it down in his own words. Saturus' account, spanning chapters 11-13, evokes a vision where Saturus and Perpetua, following their martyrdom, are being borne to heaven by angels to meet the Lord. After this, the editor/narrator steps in for the very last time, and, prompted by Perpetua herself, devotes chapters 16-20 to recounting the final fate of the martyrs, including their fight with the wild beasts. He describes in a naturalistic fashion and vivid detail the various deaths the martyrs suffered. The martyrs themselves are by dint of this account transformed into heroes of almost suprahuman proportions, who not only do not fear death, but on the contrary, seem to hope for as painful and prolonged a death as possible. The last chapter then reiterates some of the themes from the prologue, and the *passio* is concluded by the final doxology which testifies to the liturgical function of the whole text.¹⁵

As has already been mentioned, the core of the work consists of Perpetua's notes, which are often labelled a kind of prison diary and claimed by the narrator/editor to have been put down in Perpetua's own hand. Whether or not the text is authentic (in which case it would be the earliest instance of Latin autobiography, or rather, a fragment of it, and furthermore one penned by a woman) is not relevant for the purposes of this article. This issue has obviously been widely debated by modern researchers, most of whom favour the theory upholding the text's authenticity.¹⁶

of the Latin text of *Passio Perpetuae* together with English translation and commentary is being prepared by Thomas J. Heffernan for the series "Ancient Christian Writers". The quoted English translation of *Passio Perpetuae* is taken from HERBERT MUSURILLO (ed.), *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford 1972 (hereafter MUSURILLO 1972).

¹⁵ The reading of the *Passio Perpetuae* during the liturgy (especially on the occasion of the *dies natalis* of the martyrs) is attested by Augustine, *Sermo* 280,1 (*PL* 38,1280); cf. also ANTONIE WŁOSOK, in: *HLL* IV, § 472,1, p. 421; VICTOR SAXER, *Morts, martyrs, reliques en Afrique Chrétienne aux premiers siècles*, Paris 1980, pp. 77-79. The fact, that the cult of both martyrs was restricted mainly to Carthage was recently pointed out by JOHANNES DIVJAK – WOLFGANG WISCHMEYER, *Perpetua felicitate oder Perpetua und Felicitas? Zu ICKarth 2,1*, in: *Wiener Studien* 114, 2001, pp. 613-627.

¹⁶ Cf., e.g. PETER HABERMEHL, *Perpetua und der Ägypter oder Bilder des Bösen im frühen afrikanischen Christentum. Ein Versuch zur Passio Perpetua et Felicitatis*, Berlin – New York 2004², esp. pp. 267-275 (hereafter HABERMEHL 2004). Also cf. JACQUELINE AMAT, *L'authenticité des songes de la Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité*, in: *Augustinianum* 29, 1989, pp. 177-191; JAN N. BREMMER, *Perpetua and her Diary. Authenticity, Family and Visions*, in: *Märtyrer und Märtyrerakten*, (ed.) WALTER AMELING, Stuttgart 2002, pp. 77-120. Substantive doubts regarding the authenticity of the text have been voiced e.g. by THOMAS J. HEFFERNAN, *Philology and Authorship in the Passio Sanctarum*

While reading Perpetua's account, we are struck primarily by the moving simplicity of her style¹⁷ as well as her matter-of-fact, down-to-earth insights such as are found only rarely in the literature of classical antiquity. This is manifest in her very first comment, which is in marked contrast to the usual evocation of Christians rejoicing in trials and tribulations of all kinds. After the young catechumens were taken to prison, Perpetua, an educated woman of respectable family¹⁸ and well versed in Latin and Greek, finds herself in a state of genuine shock at the circumstances in the prison: "A few days later we were lodged in the prison; and 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."¹⁹

The openly declared concern regarding her child is another remarkable aspect within the context of Classical literature. Perpetua's baby, still unweaned, stays with her in the prison for several days and is then handed over to Perpetua's father. After the trial, Perpetua asks him to give her back her child but is refused. In her words: "But my baby had got used to being nursed at the breast and to staying with me in prison ... But father refused to give him over. But 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."²⁰ Such a comment as quoted from Perpetua's account would have been inconceivable (as P. Dronke rightly comments) in "Classical" literature, "except in a key of vulgarity or comedy".²¹

Perpetuae et Felicitatis, in: *Traditio* 50, 1995, pp. 315-325, or HEIDI VIEROW, *Feminine and Masculine Voices in the Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, in: *Latomus* 58, 1999, pp. 600-619.

¹⁷ Nevertheless, this is not supposed to mean, that her narrative lacks, as ERIN RONSSSE has recently pointed out, the "rhetorical sophistication"; cf. her article *Rhetoric of Martyrs: Listening to Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14, 2006, No. 3, pp. 283-327, here esp. pp. 307, 310-311, 318-320 (hereafter RONSSSE 2006).

¹⁸ Her name Vibia indicates a comparatively high social status, as this name was borne by three Carthaginian proconsuls during the first century; this status, however, derived rather from property and wealth, not birth (it is improbable that Perpetua and her family belonged to the *honestiores*). For further reading on this matter cf. GEORG SCHÖLLGEN, *Ecclesia sordida? Zur Frage der sozialen Schichtung frühchristlicher Gemeinden am Beispiel Karthagos zur Zeit Tertullians*, Münster 1984, pp. 197-202.

¹⁹ *Pass. Perp.* 3,5f.

²⁰ *Pass. Perp.* 6,7f.

²¹ PETER DRONKE, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages. A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua († 203) to Marguerite Porete († 1310)*, Cambridge 1984, p. 10 (hereafter DRONKE 1984).

There is a recurrent theme running through Perpetua's narrative: the desire to settle the score with the world around and to disentangle herself from all its bonds. The world at large with its impositions finds its incarnation predominantly in the character of Perpetua's pagan father, who visits her in prison, imploring her to discard her faith and thus save her own life; he also attends Perpetua's trial, and can be probably traced as a projection in Perpetua's visions.²² It is the figure of the father who in the beginning springs on Perpetua "as though he would pluck [her] eyes out"²³ after she uncompromisingly proclaims her Christian faith to him. Following his unsuccessful attempt to persuade Perpetua to offer a sacrifice to the pagan gods, Perpetua "gave thanks to the Lord ... and was comforted by his absence".²⁴

Perpetua's second encounter with her father is even more dramatic: he again implores Perpetua to renounce her faith not only for her own sake, but for the sake of the whole family, which has become suspect in the eyes of the authorities in the wake of Perpetua's conviction. He rounds off his arguments by falling at his daughter's feet, kissing her hands, and tearfully addressing her not as a daughter, but as a lady.²⁵ The final meeting takes place before the fight in the amphitheatre; her father's grief reaches its climax as he falls flat on his face before his daughter, plucking his hair and beard and "saying such words as would move all creation".²⁶ The more desperate the father becomes and the more "effeminately" (by the standards of classical antiquity) he behaves (his attempt to claw out his daughter's eyes, plucking his hair and beard as a token of grief, prostrating himself on the ground), the more Perpetua – "turning the normal gender-hierarchy upside down" and gaining "the position of dominance"²⁷ – grows in self-confidence, the more quickly she

²² Cf. DRONKE 1984, pp. 1-17; HABERMEHL 2004, p. 72 (Habermehl's analysis of Perpetua's visions in his – in other respects very valuable – book, however, proves to be often speculative, relying on not firmly grounded psychological/psychoanalytic hypothesis; cf. my review-article *Perpetua develata? Poznámky ke knize P. Habermehla o Passio Perpetuae a k Passio Perpetuae obecně*, in: *Listy filologické* 129, 2006, pp. 422-430.

²³ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 3,3.

²⁴ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 3,4-5.

²⁵ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 5,5-6: "Haec dicebat quasi pater pro sua pietate, basians mihi manus, et se ad pedes meos iactans et lacrimans me iam non filiam nominabat, sed dominam."

²⁶ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 9,2: "Ut autem proximavit dies muneris, intrat ad me pater meus consumptus taedio, et coepit barbam suam evellere et in terram mittere, et prosternere se in faciem, et inproperare annis suis, et dicere tanta verba quae moverent universam creaturam."

²⁷ Cf. DANNY PRAET, "Melioire cupiditate detentus": *Christian Self-definition and the Rejection of Marriage in the Early Acts of the Martyrs*, in: *Euphrosyne* 31, 2003, pp. 457-473, here pp. 463f. (hereafter PRAET 2003).

disentangles herself from her social and filial bonds. Though at the beginning she views her father's antics with understanding and sympathy, this sympathy is gradually replaced with the resolve to fulfil the requirements of her new faith (she is baptised in the prison), even at the cost of her own life, as the affinity for her new transcendental family gains the upper hand over her earthly one. Thus she comments on her father's most emotional outburst by saying laconically: "I felt sorry for his unhappy old age."²⁸

Perpetua's growing religious self-awareness also manifests itself in her visions. When her brother asks her to request a vision so that he may learn whether martyrdom and death are in store for her, or whether her life will be spared, Perpetua – with remarkable confidence – assures him that she will let him know whatever God has to impart to her the very next day. Judging from her comment, she appears to be unusually self-assured for a novice only very recently baptised: "Faithfully I promised that I would, for I knew that I could speak with the Lord, whose great blessings I had come to experience. And so I said: I shall tell you tomorrow".²⁹

Similarly, in her second vision, Perpetua sees her dead brother Dinocrates in soiled clothes and bearing an ugly wound on his face; thirsty, though there is water enough in a nearby pool, but he cannot reach it, as its edge is beyond his reach. Perpetua, in no doubt that her brother is in pain, "was confident [she] could help him in his troubles".³⁰ And she does indeed manage to alleviate her brother's suffering by means of prayers and supplications to God. Dinocrates before long appears to her dressed in clean clothes, his

²⁸ *Pass. Perp.* 9,3: "Ego dolebam pro infelici senecta eius." Cf. also PRAET 2003, esp. pp. 463-464.

²⁹ *Pass. Perp.* 4,2: "Et ego quae me sciebam fabulari cum Domino, cuius beneficia tanta experta eram, fidenter repromisi ei dicens: 'Crastina die tibi renuntiabo'." Note particularly the use of the very familiar verb *fabulari* in the sense of "chatting" (cf. *ThLL* VI/1,35), which is, to put it mildly, rather unusual in association with God (cf. ANTOON ADRIANUS ROBERTUS BASTIAENSEN, *Commento alla "Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis"*, in: *Atti e passioni dei martiri*, Milano 1987, pp. 412-452, here p. 419). Different opinion was delivered by CLARA BURINI, "*Me sciebam fabulari cum Domino*" (*pass. Perp. Fel. 4,2*), in: *Curiositas. Studi di cultura classica e medievale in onore di Ubaldo Pizzani*, (edd.) ANTONIO ISOLA – ENRICO MENESTÒ – ALESSANDRA DI PILLA, Napoli 2002, pp. 219-229; according to her, the verb *fabulari* (analogically to Greek ὁμιλέω/ὁμιλία, found in the same meaning e.g. in *Martyrium Polycarpi* and *Martyrium Lugdunensium*, as well as in the Greek translation of *Pass. Perp.*) "significa anzitutto l'intima unione con Dio" and is therefore "verbo di 'comunione' prima ancora che di 'conversazione'" (quotations from p. 229).

³⁰ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 7,9.

wound healed, having left only a scar. The pool's edge, previously too high for the boy to reach, is now comfortably low; and in addition there is a magical golden cup in which water never dries up, so Dinocrates can refresh himself to his fill. Perpetua firmly believes that it was through her agency that Dinocrates' punishment was alleviated.³¹

Perpetua also manifests spiritual power in Saturus' account of his own vision.³² Following their martyrdom and death, Saturus and Perpetua meet the Lord in a kind of heavenly garden, where they see Optatus the bishop and Aspasius the priest standing all by themselves and consequently feeling forlorn. The two top dignitaries within the hierarchy of the Church fall at the feet of the two martyrs, begging to be reconciled with each other, whereupon Perpetua begins to converse with them in Greek. This subversion of the traditional hierarchy may be partially accounted for by the exceptional status that confessors and martyrs enjoyed in the early Church;³³ nonetheless, Saturus' perceptions do testify to the extraordinary standing Perpetua had amongst her fellow believers.

Perpetua's transformation from a daughter fully subordinated to paternal authority, painfully experiencing the conflict between the mutually irreconcilable obligations to her parents and her new faith; from a mother who pines

³¹ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 8,1-4, in particular *Pass. Perp.* 8,4: "Tunc intellexi translatum eum esse de poena."

³² Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 13,1-7.

³³ As for the respective meanings of *passio* and *confessio*, which may not have referred to two distinct concepts, but rather may have stressed different aspects of Christian life see, e.g. HARRY JANSEN, *Kultur und Sprache. Zur Geschichte der alten Kirche im Spiegel der Sprachentwicklung von Tertullian bis Cyprian*, Nijmegen 1938, pp. 150-161, esp. pp. 159-160. Both *confessor* and martyr were highly respected by the whole early Christian community. According to Tertullian, the souls of the deceased remain in the Hades until Judgement Day – with the exception of martyrs (cf. *De anima*, 55,4 [CCL 2,862-863]). Martyrdom is according to him (at least in his later works influenced by Montanism) the only way of atoning for grave sins committed after baptism (for more on the theory of martyrdom according to Tertullian cf. WIEBKE BÄHNK, *Von der Notwendigkeit des Leidens. Die Theologie des Martyriums bei Tertullian*, Göttingen 2001). A practical demonstration of the special status martyrs had is to be found e.g. in Tertullian's *Ad martyras* (1,6 [CCL 1,3]), in which Tertullian refers to what was presumably a common practice among early Christians temporarily banished from the community, that is, asking for the absolving of their sins and readmission into the cultic community through the intervention of imprisoned, soon-to-be martyred believers. To the theological connotations of the martyrs' status among the believers cf. also ANDREW MCGOWAN, *Discipline and Diet: Feeding the Martyrs in Roman Carthage*, in: *Harvard Theological Review* 96, 2003, No. 4, pp. 455-476.

for her baby when it is gone, and once reunited with her child, finds the prison “suddenly... a palace, so that I wanted to be there rather than anywhere else”,³⁴ is completed in her final vision, which she has on the eve of the fight in the arena. In this vision, arguably the most discussed of the four, and subject to often opposing interpretations, Perpetua takes on a hideous Egyptian in a kind of pancratium in the arena, vanquishes him, and treads on his head in token of her triumph. Perpetua, quite in keeping with early Christian typology, views the Egyptian as the devil itself,³⁵ the same devil she will encounter and defeat the following day.³⁶ The gradual divestment of the common social roles associated with femininity (those of mother and daughter) has as its ultimate consequence the logical physical defeminisation of Perpetua – who steps into the arena as a man.³⁷

³⁴ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 3,9: “... et usurpavi ut mecum infans in carcere maneret; et statim convalui et relevata sum a labore et sollicitudine infantis, et factus est mihi carcer subito praetorium, ut ibi mallet esse quam alicubi.” As for the theological implications of this phrase, closely linked to the conception of the prison as “an abode of rest and of a refreshment on ... pilgrimage towards martyrdom”, see now THOMAS J. HEFFERNAN – JAMES E. SHELTON, *Paradise in carcere: The Vocabulary of Imprisonment and the Theology of Martyrdom in the Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14, 2006, No. 2, pp. 217-223 (quotation from p. 221).

³⁵ Passages referring to Egypt or Ethiopia as to a sinful, godless world can be found in abundance both in the Bible and patristic texts, cf. e.g. HABERMEHL 2004, pp. 145-160; GAY L. BYRON, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*, London 2002.

³⁶ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 10,14: “Et intellexi me non ad bestias, sed contra diabolum esse pugnaturam; sed sciebam mihi esse victoriam.” Cf. FRANZ JOSEPH DÖLGER, *Der Kampf mit dem Ägypter in der Perpetua-Vision. Das Martyrium als Kampf mit dem Teufel*, in: *Antike und Christentum* 3, 1932, pp. 177-188.

³⁷ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 10,7: “Et expoliata sum, et facta sum masculus.” In the succinct words of ELIZABETH A. CASTELLI, “‘I Will Make Mary Male’: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity”, in: *Body Guard. The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, (edd.) JULIA EPSTEIN – KRISTINA STRAUB, New York 1991, pp. 29-49, here p. 35 (now reprinted also as *Female Martyrs*, in: *Feminism & Theology*, [edd.] JANET SOSKICE – DIANA LIPTON, Oxford 2003, pp. 62-71): “As Perpetua moves closer to the arena, she strips off the cultural attributions of the female body – first figuratively in leaving behind her child and in drying up of her breast milk, and then finally and ‘literally’ in her last vision, in the transformation of her body into that of a man ... Perpetua’s spiritual progress is marked by the social movement from a female to a male body ...” Some of many other explanations of Perpetua’s change of sex were summed up by HABERMEHL 2004, pp. 122-144.

Passio and Acta: Interpreting the text

Later interpreters³⁸ did not fail to notice this somewhat subversive aspect of Perpetua's full-fledged self-awareness, so distinctly opposed to the traditional hierarchy of social values of that time. *Passio's* editor/narrator himself may well be assumed to be the first of the series of interpreters (and manipulators) to come: he complements the text with an account of the martyrs' fight with the wild beasts. Although he is at first quite explicit in his unwillingness to venture upon this task – claiming that he is unworthy of it – he then acquiesces, recalling Perpetua's wish that he write a testimony of the martyrs' fate and equating it with the explicit approval of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ The most remarkable shift in the narrator/editor's technique is the way he heroises the martyrs, which is accentuated by the "lofty" style he employs, very much in contrast to Perpetua's *sermo humilis*.⁴⁰ The martyrs as portrayed in the editor's account seem to be completely devoid of any trace of fear or doubt – unlike Perpetua who, in her account, gave hers a very plain and clear expression. The editor's recounting of the final fate of the martyrs may on the one hand be driven by his aim of providing believers with a model example of being steadfast and intrepid in one's faith, a kind of a narrative with educational overtones. However, he does not content himself with a static presentation of the text to provide the listeners merely with an

³⁸ Arguably the finest analysis of subsequent interpretations and manipulations of *Passio Perpetuae* appeared in JOYCE E. SALISBURY, *Perpetua's Passion. The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman*, New York – London 1997, pp. 166-179.

³⁹ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 16,1: "Quoniam ergo permisit et permitendo voluit Spiritus Sanctus ordinem ipsius muneris describi, etsi indigni ad supplementum tantae gloriae describendae, tamen quasi mandatum sanctissimae Perpetuae ..."

⁴⁰ Cf. ERICH AUERBACH, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, Princeton 1993. Also cf. JACQUES FONTAINE, *Aspects et problèmes de la prose d'art latine au III^e siècle*, Torino 1968, pp. 69-97. To the *Passio Perpetuae* in general as a "subtle and intriguing rhetorical work", cf. now RONSSE 2006 (quotation from p. 298); in this context I want to draw attention especially to Ronsse's analysis of – in the existing research probably completely unnoticed so far – the "figurative names" of single characters of *Passio Perpetuae* (cf. RONSSE 2006, esp. pp. 301-305; quotation from p. 302): "Although not clearly stated in the *Passion*, it may have been that upon the admission to the catechumenate, or at their admission, early believers were given or adopted new names. This speculative notion can help explain the uncanny fit in the *Passion* of the Christian figures' proper names, but it may also be, that these individuals simply lived up to their original names or, in hindsight, were figuratively designated by the literary compiler."

example to follow; he also attempts to make them feel involved in the events being depicted, which become almost tangible during a liturgical reading of the text – so much so that the listeners may feel they have become eyewitnesses to the scenes described. To achieve this, the editor at times freely resorts to evocations whose (surprising) parallels can be found in the Classical novel,⁴¹ and whose function is to arouse compassion for Perpetua and her fellow believers in their victimhood and cruel death at the claws of the beasts, as well as allowing the listeners to savour – in an almost voyeur-like fashion – scenes informed with a marked erotic element.⁴²

Acta Brevia Perpetuae et Felicitatis, as the work has been known since van Beek edition,⁴³ constitutes a much more noticeable shift in meaning of the original *passio* and a conscious manipulation of it. In contrast to the longer *passio*, the work has survived only in its Latin version, in two variants (A, B) each of which gives a slightly different account. The precise date of its genesis is unclear, though there is no doubt that the text is more recent than the original *passio*.⁴⁴ Earlier researchers repeatedly expressed the con-

⁴¹ Particularly Perpetua's triumphant entry into the arena, as it is evoked by the editor (*Pass. Perp.* 18,1-3), which is reminiscent of Chariton's description of Callirhoe (V,3,9), cf. KATHARINA WALDNER, "Was wir also gehört und berührt haben, verkünden wir auch euch...". *Zur narrativen Technik der Körperdarstellung im Martyrium Polycarpi und der Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, in: *Die Christen und der Körper. Aspekte der Körperlichkeit in der christlichen Literatur der Spätantike*, (Hrsg.) BARBARA FEICHTINGER – HELMUT SENG, Leipzig 2004, pp. 29-74, here pp. 49f. (hereafter WALDNER 2004).

⁴² Especially the editor's evocation of Perpetua and Felicitas' fight with the wild cow (*Pass. Perp.* 20,1-8). The two women are at first thrown into the arena naked, clad only in nets. The audience is so upset by the sight that the women are made to put on loose robes instead. Perpetua's robe is torn at the side as the cow assaults and mauls her, and she draws down the robe to conceal her thigh from the eyes of the crowd, "thinking more of her modesty than of her pain" (*Pass. Perp.* 20,4-5). The parallel to the similar gesture of Polyxena (cf. Eur. *Hecuba* 568-570), which became a literary *topos*, has been already noticed by MUSURILLO 1972, p. 129, footnote no. 19; cf. also WALDNER 2004, pp. 51ff.; HABERMEHL 2004, pp. 225ff.

⁴³ The term *Acta* was not used for the title until van Beek did so – to differentiate the work from the longer *passio*. In manuscriptal tradition even van Beek's *acta* are designated as *passio* (cf. VAN BEEK 1936, p. 58).

⁴⁴ The precise dating of these narratives has not been established yet. The opinions of scholars vary; HABERMEHL 2004, p. 1 dates both versions to the 3rd century (probably because the *Acta Perp.* A 1,1 ascribes the martyrdom to the persecution under Valerian and Gallienus, i.e. to 257–258), AMAT 1996, p. 271, more prudently, concludes that "les *Actes* sont l'oeuvre d'un hagiographie, vraisemblablement assez ancien, sans être pour autant contemporain de la *Passion*. Il ne saurait guère être antérieur au V^e siècle". Thus the only certain fact remains that Augustine in his sermons on the occasion of the *dies natalis* of

viction that the *Acta* were merely a variation on the original *passio*, a kind of reworking of it without any literary value whatsoever.⁴⁵ The erroneous nature of this conclusion becomes apparent upon closer inspection of the work itself, for it does not take into account the purported aim of the editor/narrator, that is, to satisfy the expectations of the listeners (who must have found *Passio Perpetuae* disturbing in a number of aspects); and in this respect the editor succeeded exceedingly well.⁴⁶

The first conspicuous change in narrative technique is the re-emergence of the interrogatory question-answer style by means of which the editor/narrator of *Acta Perpetuae* consciously signals his preference for the established genre which was well known to the listeners. Unsurprisingly, the editor omitted the polemical, theological prologue included in *Passio Perpetuae*, which had long since lost its original meaning, for Montanism was already a thing of the past by that time. The whole text is formally underpinned and unified through the use of the impersonal third-person narrative perspective incorporating the dialogic voices of the characters in place of the original multivocal form of *Passio Perpetuae*. Perpetua of the *Acta* is no longer the central character of the work – which is testified by the title variations of the manuscript, which foreground the character of Saturus as the catechist of the group.⁴⁷ It is Saturus who becomes the leader of the group in the editor's account – possibly due to the fact that a female central character might have been thought too revolutionary or subversive by the mainstream traditional-minded reader-

Perpetua and Felicitas, delivered separately probably between 400 and 420 (cf. AUGUSTINE, *Sermons III/8 [273-305A] on the Saints*, translation and notes EDMUND HILL, in: *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*, III/8, (ed.) JOHN E. ROTELLE, New York 1994, pp. 76, 80 and 82), refers to the text of the *Passio* and not that of *Acta*. This not yet clarified question does not undermine the thesis developed in this paper, namely that the *Acta* were composed in order to normalize the revolutionary and potentially dangerous features of the *Passio*.

⁴⁵ Cf. e.g. HIPPOLYTE DELEHAYE, *Les Passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, Bruxelles 1966², esp. pp. 53f.; other negative opinions are quoted by JAMES W. HALPORN, *Literary History and Generic Expectations in the Passio and Acta Perpetuae*, in: *Vigiliae Christianae* 45, 1991, pp. 223-241 (hereafter HALPORN 1991). See, however, JAN N. BREMMER's review of HABERMEHL 2004 (in: *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2006.01.34, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/2006/2006-01-34.html>), where he pleads for the value of *Acta* and even asserts that "the report of the interrogation in these versions makes an authentic impression". Bremmer's *Het martelaarschap van Perpetua en Felicitas*, in: *Hermeneus* 78, 2006, pp. 128-137 to which he refers for "more detailed discussion" was unavailable for me, while I was writing this paper.

⁴⁶ Cf. HALPORN 1991.

⁴⁷ Cf. VAN BEEK 1936, pp. 58-59.

ship: it is him, who speaks on behalf of all the martyrs⁴⁸ and it is also him, who was firstly addressed by the proconsul, after he had separated the martyrs according to sex.⁴⁹

Those passages of *Passio Perpetuae* that the modern reader finds the most moving for their unaffectedness and the marks they bear of Perpetua's personality were completely omitted from the *Acta*. The individual traits of the characters, especially those of Perpetua herself, are much marginalised. Whereas in the *passio* Perpetua asks for a vision at the prompt of her brother, and then both of them together proceed to interpret it, in the *Acta* she is portrayed as a mere passive receptacle, a medium through which God's will is made known to the whole group.⁵⁰ This is also apparent in the vision in which Perpetua fights the Egyptian: while in *Passio Perpetuae* this is seen as the direct consequence of Perpetua's growing self-awareness, spiritual transformation and the sloughing off of social bonds, in the *Acta* this is a mere episode, inconsequential and once again related to the community as a whole.⁵¹

As for the omission of Perpetua's vision of Dinocrates in both versions of the *Acta*, this may on the one hand be attributed to the thoroughly personal nature of the vision, which presumably had little relevance to the community at large;⁵² while on the other we should not underestimate the potential theological brisance of Perpetua's self-assured conviction that she could (by means of prayer) commute the punishment inflicted on the deceased in the nether world.⁵³

⁴⁸ Cf. *Acta Perp. A* 4,2-3: "Proconsul dixit: 'Pro te respondes an pro omnibus?' Satorius dixit: 'Pro omnibus: una enim est in nobis voluntas'."

⁴⁹ Cf. *Acta Perp. A* 4,5: "Proconsul iussit viros a mulieribus separari et ad Satorium dixit..."

⁵⁰ Cf. *Acta Perp. A* 3,1: "Orantes vero et sine cessatione preces ad Dominum fundentes, cum essent multis diebus in carcere, quadam nocte videns visum sancta Perpetua alia die retulit sanctis commartyribus suis ..."

⁵¹ Cf. *Acta Perp. A* 7,2-3: "... iterum vidit visionem Perpetua: Aegyptium ... iacentem et volutantem se sub pedibus eorum, retulitque sanctis fratribus et commartyribus suis ... illi gratias egerunt Domino, qui, prostrato inimico generis humani, eos laude martyrii dignos habuerit." Also cf. *Acta Perp. B* 7,2.

⁵² According to HALPORN 1991, p. 235.

⁵³ The significance of Perpetua's vision of Dinocrates and its role in theological disputations of the 5th century is manifested by the fact of Vincentius Victor's alluding to it in his treatise (which has not survived) to support his thesis that salvation can be obtained even without the sacrament of baptism. To use a work such as *Passio Perpetuae* as a kind of shield was a very deft tactical move given the reverential status the text had within the early Church. Augustine went to considerable lengths in his *De natura et origine animae* to ward off the danger, including a questioning of Perpetua's authorship. Cf. FRANZ JO-

With regard to the omission of Satorius' account, it is plausible that the editor did not include it in the *Acta* as it may have contained allusions to dissonances between believers and the African Church hierarchy (which were of little interest for subsequent readers);⁵⁴ furthermore, such allusions could have been construed to undermine the authority of the Church in general.

The editor's efforts to purge the *Acta* of certain potentially grating features contained in *Passio Perpetuae* are manifest also in the way he supplies circumstances and facts that are not present in the original *passio*.⁵⁵ The traditional-minded readership of those times must have been disturbed by the way Perpetua, as well as Felicitas, "moved away from the normal constraints imposed by husbands, fathers, and others".⁵⁶ Whereas in *Passio Perpetuae* the martyrs' husbands do not appear on the scene at all (the reader must be content with the editor's statement that Perpetua was *matronaliter nupta*),⁵⁷ in the *Acta* the narrator actually brings the husbands onto the stage, thus "normalising" the marital status of the two martyrs for the audience.⁵⁸ Felicitas' plebeian, banished husband is mentioned only in one of the two versions of the *Acta* during her interrogation at the trial,⁵⁹ while Perpetua's makes his

SEPH DÖLGER, *Antike Parallelen zum leidenden Dinocrates in Perpetua Vision*, in: *Antike und Christentum* 2, 1930, pp. 1-40, here pp. 20-28; ALBERT C. DE VEER, *Aux origines du De natura et origine animae de saint Augustin*, in: *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 19, 1973, pp. 121-157.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 13,5-8.

⁵⁵ Cf. also PRAET 2003, p. 466.

⁵⁶ BRENT D. SHAW, *The Passion of Perpetua*, in: *Past and Present* 139, 1993, pp. 3-45, here p. 36.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Pass. Perp.* 2,2. As for the possible explanation of the absence of Perpetua's husband in *Passio Perpetuae*, cf. e. g. DRONKE 1984, pp. 282-283; HABERMEHL 2004, pp. 60-63; CAROLYN OSIEK, *Perpetuas Husband*, in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, 2002, pp. 287-290; PRAET 2003, pp. 465-468. In my opinion, the most persuasive is Habermehl's solution: Perpetua may have dissociated herself from her non-Christian "carnal" husband, either "nur innerlich" or "mit den möglichen äußeren oder rechtlichen Folgen" (quotations from p. 63) in order to become *matrona Christi* (*Pass. Perp.* 18,2).

⁵⁸ Similar observation is made e.g. by AMAT 1996, p. 266; PRAET 2003, p. 466.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Acta Perp.* A 5,2-5. The claim that Felicitas was Perpetua's female slave, as has been often reiterated in various sources, is quite groundless, cf. HABERMEHL 2004, p. 209, note 14; M. POIRIER, *Note sur la Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis: Félicité était-elle vraiment l'esclave de Perpétue?*, in: *Studia Patristica* 10, 1970, pp. 306-309. The question remains: what was the social status of Felicity? That it was that of a slave seems to be reinforced by *Pass. Perp.* 2,1 which reads *Revocatus et Felicitas, conserva eius* (according to *ThLL* IV,422, the primary meaning of *conserva* is *serva eiusdem familiae*). The word *conserva* is interpreted by some scholars (cf. HABERMEHL 2004, p. 209, note 14; PRAET 2003, p. 465 with footnote no. 35) as a "wife; matrimonial partner"; in this mean-

appearance in both versions – (together with the father and other relatives) to vainly try to make her bring a pagan sacrifice and thus save her own life.⁶⁰ Similarly, her refusal to comply with her father’s entreaties does not seem to result in torturous inner turmoil as it does in *Passio Perpetuae*; Perpetua appears remarkably stable and calm, with her thoughts dwelling on God from the very beginning, answering the implorations of her family with quotes from the Gospel.⁶¹

The aim of this literary “production”, as penned by the editor, is to present readers with a kind of model, educational work which would be in accord with the established tradition of the given genre, and where novel, innovative character traits and idiosyncrasies would be “interpreted away” and partially neutralised by means of excessive, incessant idealisation of the characters. In addition, the editor resorts to various rhetoric devices in order to make the text more palatable and attractive for the readers.⁶² The consequence of such an adaptation of the original *passio* is that the feats of the characters – potentially subversive if adopted as guideline and imitated by followers – become ultimately a cause for admiration rather than imitation: *admiranda, non imitanda*.⁶³

Conclusion

These attempts to smother all innovative and revolutionary features of the text are much in evidence in the *Acta Perpetuae* and also present to a degree in the original *passio*, reflecting the tension between what we have termed “tradition and innovation”. However, the terms themselves carry potent theo-

ing, however, it never appears in Latin (cf. *ThLL* IV,422-423). Tertullian uses this word figuratively to designate “the fellow sister in Christ” and he also refers to his Christian wife as to *conserva* (cf. STEPHAN W. J. TEEUWEN, *Sprachlicher Bedeutungswandel bei Tertullian. Ein Beitrag zum Studium der christlichen Sondersprache*, Paderborn 1926, pp. 127f.). But when the whole group of martyrs is by the editor described as *adolescentes catechumeni* (*Pass. Perp.* 2,1), it seems unlikely that he would use the term *conserva* to stress again the Christian religion of Felicity. More probably, *conserva eius* simply “means that they (Revocatus and Felicity) were both slaves, as opposed to the other catechumens” (PRAET 2003, pp. 465f.).

⁶⁰ Cf., e.g. *Acta Perp.* A 6,1; 6,2; 6,5; *Acta Perp.* B 6,1.

⁶¹ Cf. *Acta Perp.* A 6,6.

⁶² Cf. the pun the editor ascribes to Perpetua – and which Augustine will repeat ad nauseam in his homilies to commemorate the two martyrs, cf. *Acta Perp.* A 5,9: “Perpetua respondit: Christiana sum, et nominis mei sequor auctoritatem, ut sim perpetua.”

⁶³ A similar remark can be found in Augustine’s homilies (*Sermo* 280,1 [PL 38,1281]): “Quid enim gloriosius his feminis, quas viri mirantur facilius, quam imitantur?”

logical connotations. In the early Church and also elsewhere, what was deemed traditional, time-honoured, and time tested was later associated with orthodoxy; whereas novelty and innovation smacked of heterodoxy. In the succinct words of the late Maurice Wiles, the British historian of early Christian doctrines: “Orthodoxy is by nature essentially conservative, heresy, by the same logic, innovative.”⁶⁴ This peculiar bipolar approach associated with *Passio Perpetuae* produced a somewhat different effect this time. *Passio Perpetuae* is in itself a text of considerable novelty, as it was unprecedented both at the time of its genesis and in later Christian literature as well. Though unprecedented, the work was not later considered as symptomatic of heterodoxy. Notwithstanding the attempts to “normalise” its innovative influence, the popularity of *Passio Perpetua* within the early Church was such that its very novelty was to become, perhaps paradoxically, a tradition in its own right and (in certain aspects) a paradigm for subsequent martyrological literature.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ MAURICE WILES, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, in: *Early Christianity. Its Origins and Evolution to 600 AD*, (ed.) IAN HAZLETT, London 1991, pp. 198-208, here p. 202.

⁶⁵ *Passio Perpetuae* became a kind of paradigm especially for subsequent African hagiographic literature. Cf. e. g. JACQUELINE AMAT, *La langue des Passions africaines du III^e siècle*, in: *Latin vulgaire – latin tardif V*, (edd.) HUBERT PETERSMANN – RUDOLF KETTEMANN, Heidelberg 1999, pp. 301-307; WŁOSOK 1997, p. 425. Cf. also PIO FRANCHI DE’ CAVALIERI, *Gli Atti de SS. Montano, Lucio e compagni. Recensione del testo ed introduzione sulle sue relazioni con la Passio S. Perpetuae*, in: IDEM, *Scritti agiografici*, I, Città del Vaticano (Studi e testi 221), esp. pp. 199-262 (originally published in: *Römische Quartalschrift, Supplementheft VIII*, 1898, esp. pp. 1-68). Against the dependence of *Passio Montani et Lucii* and *Passio Mariani et Iacobi* on *Pass. Perp.* argues on the basis of textual analysis MICHAŁ KACZMARKOWSKI, *Struktura pionowa tekstów: Passio sanctorum Perpetuae et Felicitatis, Passio sanctorum Mariani et Iacobi i Passio sanctorum Montani et Lucii*, in: *Vox Patrum* 11-12, No. 20-23, 1991-1992, pp. 213-221 (not entirely convincingly).

SUMMARY

The article *Passio Perpetuae and Acta Perpetuae: Between Tradition and Innovation* focuses – after general analysis of the text and its issues was given – on the extant versions of the hagiographic narrative known as *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. This text contained a number of innovative and – in the context of Antique and early Christian society – potentially subversive features: the central character, Perpetua, is a woman who is claimed by the editor of the text to have extraordinary spiritual authority (e.g. to absolve the dead from punishment in the nether world, to reconcile differences between major Church figures etc.). Perpetua rejects all conventional social roles that were considered natural for a woman (mother, wife, daughter fully subordinated to paternal authority etc.). These novel features were felt to undermine the existing social order and hierarchy, and it was necessary to “explain them away” in order to make the text more compliant with traditional and generally accepted social values. This was the aim of the later version of the narrative known as *Acta Perpetuae*. In spite of these efforts, *Passio Perpetuae* remained highly venerated in the mainstream Church and, though innovative, it paradoxically became a tradition in its own right.