

Female Identity and Agency in the Cult of the Martyrs in Late Antique North Africa

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the dual roles that women played in the cult of the martyrs in Christianity in Late Antiquity: as martyrs worthy of admiration and as venerators engaged in acts of celebration. The investigation is driven by questions regarding the identity, agency, and power of women in the cult of martyrs, focusing on late antique (second- to fifth-century) North Africa.

Late antique Christians expressed their veneration of the martyrs in a variety of ways, including (but not limited to) special church services, praying for the martyrs, visiting martyrs' shrines to ask for miracles (often healing in nature), and partaking in commemorative feasts at the martyrs' graves on the anniversaries of their deaths. In all of these modes of veneration, women took on various roles that were analogous with other roles outside of the cult of the martyrs, such as wife, mother, patron, or client. Female martyrs are also identified using these roles, and thus this provides a useful area of comparison. By exploring these roles, this thesis arrives at a more nuanced understanding of women's agency and power in traditional contexts and how such agency and power were transferred, continued, and challenged within the cult of the martyrs.

The thesis engages in textual and discourse analysis of the relevant primary sources, particularly the martyr texts, sermons, letters, and treatises by North African writers. In the secondary literature, this study engages with the diverse works of classicists, historians, archaeologists, religious studies scholars, and feminist theorists. The interdisciplinary approach of the thesis is further nuanced by an examination of the concepts of identity, agency, and power. Applying these analyses to the context of women's participation in the cult of the martyrs provides new insights into how we can uncover women's experiences in ancient sources, where women's voices are almost always obscured by male discourses.

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Introduction

It is a warm spring day in Carthage. The cool breeze from the sea is welcome, tempering the heat coming from the furnus as the Christian woman stands nearby, kneading the dough that would soon become loaves of bread. She spent the morning ensuring that her slaves had purchased the proper ingredients for the evening's meal and organizing the supplies. Normally, the preparation of the food would be left up to them as well, but for meals such as this one, she prefers to do it herself. This particular evening's meal would be in commemoration of some of the most important martyrs in Carthage, Perpetua and Felicitas; she wants to feel a connection to the food that would be consumed in their honour. As she works her fingers into the dough, she prays that her efforts will be worthy of being consumed on such an important day. She remembers how her mother had done the same.

She remembers when she was a child, sitting in the corner and observing in silent awe as her mother commanded the room and ensured that the slaves were doing things in the correct order. Her mother always made sure that everything was cooked properly, packed up, and made ready to take to the family tomb. When the evening came, the entire family would make the journey to the tomb by torchlight. She remembers a feeling of excitement and anticipation. When they arrived, the food was quickly unpacked and she was able to sit with her parents and siblings and share the meal. Her parents and the other adults took turns pouring bits of wine and other liquids into the tubes that emerged from the ground. As a child, she knew that these offerings were for the deceased and always had an image in her mind of someone just below the surface, eagerly sipping the wine that was offered and yet unable to come and join them.

She remembers laughter and loud voices. The people who they were honouring occupied a strange place in her mind. She knew that they were her ancestors and she knew what some of

them looked like, thanks to the busts that furnished the atrium in her home, but the stone faces and the stories told of their exploits while they were at the tomb made them feel larger than life to her. They existed in a space between her parents and the legendary Dido. They were real and yet not real, human and not human.

She remembers singing and dancing and running around with the other children. She remembers how some of her cousins would make games out of hiding among the other tombs, how her older brothers liked to jump out and scare her. She remembers rushing back to the comfort of her mother's arms, wanting desperately to stay awake and listen to the adult conversations that swirled around her. She remembers always waking up only when she was being placed back in her own bed at home.

She remembers how, after the death of her father, her mother began spending time with the neighbour, a fellow widow who belonged to the group of Christians. She remembers her mother teaching her new stories and new rituals that she learned from the neighbouring widow. She remembers continuing to go to the tombs of her family members, but now singing new songs. She remembers going to different tombs of people who were not related to them by blood but who were relatives all the same.

She emerges from her memories when she receives a message from one of her fellow Christians. She and many of the other women in the congregation had been in conversation all week in preparation for tonight's banquet, arranging and co-ordinating all the food and supplies that were necessary. She is confident that all would run smoothly.

That evening, she journeys to the shrine along with her husband and children. She is joined by the other men, women, and children in the congregation, all of whom she thinks of as an extended family. Once there, like her mother once did, she helps to lay out the food and drink on

the wooden tables supplied by other members of the community. When everything is ready, one of the other women—a wealthy widow who used to open her home as a place for their evening gatherings—moves to the position of honour. Raising her cup, she leads the group in a brief prayer and a joyful toast in celebration of the martyrs. This noble woman then passes the cup around, and everyone takes a sip of wine.

Another member of the group, a leading man of the city, reads passages aloud from the Passion of Perpetua. The woman holds her daughter close as they hear of Perpetua's anguish at being separated from her infant son. The crowd rejoices in the courage of Perpetua and Felicitas as they gave up their children in order to remain faithful to God. Perpetua's visions are especially popular, and young boys leap from their parents' arms to re-enact Perpetua's defeat of the fearful Egyptian in the candlelight. Although the persecutions have ceased, the amphitheatre in which Perpetua and her companions had suffered still stands; for the woman, it is a visible and imposing reminder of all the suffering that her predecessors endured. She reminds herself to emulate Perpetua's confidence in God and to be patient in all things. As the reading draws to a close, the woman wraps her mantle around her more tightly; Perpetua's bravery at guiding the sword of the gladiator to her throat never failed to send a shiver down her spine.

Soon after, the reading ends with another prayer of thanksgiving, and the night air is filled with the sounds of boisterous conversation, laughter, and the occasional hymn. She knows that some bishops do not approve of this kind of commemoration, that they prefer for people to gather together in the church to pray in quiet reflection. She knows that some of her peers think that way too, as a quick glance around the group reveals several notable absences. But for her

part, she cannot imagine honouring the holy dead in any other way, and she finds comfort in knowing that her daughter will continue these traditions when she has gone.

This imaginative reconstruction of the way that a Christian woman might have viewed her role in the martyr cult is drawn from evidence that will be presented in this thesis.¹ The anonymous woman depicted above is reflective of the central ideas that this thesis puts forward. She demonstrates a measure of agency within the cult of the martyrs by engaging in practices that were related to her roles within the household and society more generally.² She sees her behaviour as a continuation of the actions of her mother before her, demonstrating the importance of tradition even when individuals convert to Christianity. The actions that she undertakes in preparing the martyr feasts are ones that are associated with the typical roles of wife and mother, but are transformed within the cult of the martyrs to have greater meaning and prominence. Her agency in choosing to prepare the meal herself speaks to a specific, personal understanding of her role as a venerator/mourner; other women were certainly content with allowing others to prepare the food or with simply attending without providing any contribution to the meal. Furthermore, the woman's actions are intrinsically connected to the typical expectations placed upon her as a wife, as she would have been expected to oversee meal

¹ The inspiration for this reconstruction came from William Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones: An Imaginative History of Montanists and Other Early Christians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009). His work presents a history of Montanism through a series of vignettes that are based on carefully-considered evidence. The creativity with which the information is presented allows for the evidence to be viewed differently and for a more well-rounded picture to emerge. As Tabbernee notes, "Every account of an event in the past is an exercise of imagination, no matter how well supported by direct or contextual data, because the full knowledge of a given event and the context that surrounds it, as though contained in some cosmic spreadsheet, lies outside human capacity to comprehend as raw data" (xxiii). Thus, while the rest of this thesis takes a more straightforward approach in using imagination to interpret evidence, the consolidation of the available data into a short, imaginative vignette seemed a suitable place to start.

² This woman is depicted anonymously to represent the multitude of unnamed venerators of which only glimpses can be seen in the sources.

preparation in one way or another. Her role as mother provides another layer, as she seeks to provide an example for her daughter to follow, just as her mother had done for her.

Other characters in the reconstruction demonstrate the complexity of even this single ritual of the martyr feast. The wealthy widow acts as a patron of the group and as a leader of the feast, despite the fact that she is not part of any official church hierarchy. Nevertheless, her agency in this regard is perfectly suitable for a woman of high status and was not necessarily unique to the Christian context. Just as with the other woman, however, the widow's actions hint at an individualized understanding of her place within the community and of the best way to fulfill the ideal of the role of widow. The widow might best be seen as analogous to the man who reads the account of Perpetua's passion; neither hold official titles but both play central roles in martyr commemoration. Finally, the children's re-enactment of Perpetua's victory over the Egyptian alludes to the way in which the imitation of martyrs was open to anyone, regardless of age or gender. The woman's admiration for Perpetua's patience is more typical of the responses that are revealed and encouraged in the literature, but once again, this would ultimately be up to the individual, both in terms of the virtue that was imitated and the way in which this imitation took shape. The approach taken in this thesis allows for this kind of specificity to emerge with regard to the complexity of the ritual and the multitude of ways in which it may have been observed and understood.

While it is possible to overcome broad generalization in our understanding of the cult of the martyrs by analyzing the various aspects of veneration in the cult and women's many roles within the cult, the nature of the sources means that it is impossible to avoid generalizations altogether. The extant texts make it difficult to know how most individuals—particularly women—viewed themselves in Late Antiquity, and they do not typically allow for nuances such

as geographical or temporal changes to be traced. Therefore, some dependence on common tropes is inevitable. Still, as is clear from the reconstruction above, reliance on certain commonalities and shared experiences can be used judiciously to uncover the individuality with which participation in the cult of the martyrs might have been expressed. By examining specific roles of women in late antique society, particularly in the preparation of meals and in honouring the dead, one can re-read the accounts of ecclesiastical writers with a view to drawing out what they tell us, explicitly or implicitly, about the roles, identities, and agency of women in the cult of martyrs. This is what this thesis aims to do.

The thesis focuses on the dual roles that Christian women played in the cult of the martyrs in North Africa in Late Antiquity: as martyrs worthy of admiration and as venerators engaged in acts of celebration. At the core of this thesis are questions involving the identity, agency, and power of women. The question of whether and to what extent women had access to positions of power has been a subject of much scholarly debate. However, while many studies have examined both textual and material sources for evidence of women who held seemingly official and authoritative titles, such as deacon,³ it remains difficult (and perhaps impossible) to understand what a title would have meant for any particular woman's experiences. Furthermore, even with

³ The field is immense, but a representative sample of the different approaches and sources used can be found in the following works: Roger Gryson, *Le ministère des femmes dans l'Église ancienne* (Gembloux : J. Duculot, 1972); Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1979); Ramsay MacMullen, "Woman in Public in the Roman Empire", *Historia* 29 (1980): 208-18; Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Karen J. Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995); Ute E. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen im frühen Christentum: epigraphische und literarische Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); Anne Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

the inclusion of non-traditional sources such as inscriptions or letters, it is extremely difficult to obtain more than a vague notion of the lives of non-elite women.⁴ Since phenomena such as the cult of the martyrs attracted women of all statuses, focusing on this specific aspect of early Christian ritual practices increases the chances of gaining some insight into the behaviour of non-elite women.

Although scholars like Peter Brown and Brent Shaw have observed that the cult of the martyrs was more closely associated with women than with men, their remarks about women's involvement remain fairly general.⁵ This study serves in part to fill in these gaps and to demonstrate the variety of ways women participated in veneration practices in the cult of the martyrs. I argue that the cult of the martyrs provided a distinct context in which women exercised power in ways that did not translate into the broader Christian community but that are nevertheless important to consider when trying to better understand late antique Christianity.

North Africa offers an especially rich environment for this study because martyr texts and discourses about martyrs extend into the post-Constantinian period, contributing to the self-understanding of Christians on both sides of the Catholic-Donatist conflict. Although the cult of the martyrs was a popular phenomenon, there were tensions between the way that average Christians participated in it and the expectations and proclamations of church authorities. Additionally, the nature of the textual and material record leads to interpretive challenges,

⁴ For an overview of the scholarship and methodologies used in the search for “real women” in the field of early Christian studies in general, see L. Stephanie Cobb, “Real Women or Objects of Discourse? The Search for Early Christian Women,” *Religion Compass* 3 (2009): 379-94.

⁵ Peter Brown asserts, “In Carthage, it appears that the women in the Christian community were the leaders of the intense, physical reverence for the martyrs,” then lists as evidence only the frequency with which women visited confessors in prison (*The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. 20th anniversary edition [New York: Columbia University Press, 2008], 157). Similarly, Brent Shaw argues that the drunkenness of the martyr feasts “was linked with singing and with the presence of women” but elaborates more on the singing than the women (*Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], 468-69).

particularly when one seeks to uncover the actions of women as either martyrs or venerated of martyrs. Normative efforts to define “proper” forms of devotion resulted in depictions of women martyrs or venerated that overlook or recast their agency. This study aims to arrive at a more complete understanding of women’s identity and agency in the cult of martyrs by analyzing female martyrs in Catholic and Donatist texts alongside the depiction of female venerated and the backlash against certain aspects of martyr-veneration by North African Christian writers.

The thesis engages in textual and discourse analysis of the relevant primary sources, particularly the (largely anonymous) martyr texts themselves as well as the sermons, letters, and treatises by North African writers such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine. It examines the ways in which the behaviour of women within the cult of the martyrs was discussed by these authors and explores whether their remarks should be best understood as descriptive of reality or prescriptive of an ideal. The thesis also analyzes the relevant material culture, such as shrines, funerary reliefs, and inscriptions, and includes comparisons with sources from other regions and contexts when appropriate.

In the secondary literature, this study employs the diverse works of classicists, historians, archaeologists, religious studies scholars, and feminist theorists. The interdisciplinary approach of the thesis is further nuanced by an examination of the concepts of identity, agency, and power: the thesis draws on modern sociological analyses of the ways in which contemporary women experience power and agency within religious contexts. These analyses provide new insights into our understanding of women’s experiences in ancient sources, where women’s voices are almost always obscured by male discourses.

Outline of the Chapters

The first chapter provides a methodological foundation for the remainder of the thesis, demonstrating the way in which identity, agency, and power are used throughout. I draw on identity theory and Peter Burke's and Jan Stets' notion that there are three bases for identity: role identity, social identity, and person identity.⁶ Within the context of the cult of the martyrs, role identities and social identities are the most salient identities. Role identities are made up of the meanings that individuals attribute to themselves while occupying various roles within a particular social structure, while social identities are based on an individual's membership in a particular group. I use these categorizations in conjunction with Eric Rebillard's argument that "Christianness" was not an over-arching or all-consuming identity, but that, instead, Christians decided "on a situational basis" when to employ it.⁷ Since "Christian" is not the only identity to consider when discussing the cult of the martyrs, I explore the various ways in which women participated in broader Christian communities. These include private identities such as mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters as well as public identities such as clients, patrons, and martyrs. Other identities, such as virgins, widows, hostesses, mourners, and prophets, functioned in the space between public and private, demonstrating that women's agency (and the public recognition of this agency) varied depending on the context.

Similarly, the expectations placed on women who occupied certain roles varied according to the situation. Therefore, I also consider the way in which agency is reflected within different roles, as well as the way that the social nature of power influences the way it is manifested in different contexts. As with identity theory, the concepts of power and agency are derived from

⁶ Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷ Éric Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200-450 CE* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 96.

both modern and ancient sources. This interdisciplinary framework allows for the problems inherent in ancient sources to be partially overcome. That is, few sources deal with the personal intentions of their subjects, but new observations can be made by examining how women are discussed in the ancient texts using these methods.

The second chapter is a study of named female martyrs in the North African literary tradition, from the second to the fifth century. I first provide a brief overview of martyrdom in North Africa before introducing the female martyrs and their martyr texts. Through close textual analysis, I examine the different identities that were ascribed to these women (either by the women themselves or by the [largely male] authors/compilers of the texts and subsequent commenters). These include wife, mother, daughter, sister, virgin, bride of Christ, prophet, and imitator of Christ. The manner in which these identities were reimagined, discarded, or embraced when a woman adopted the identity of “martyr” suggests that opting into martyrdom was a complex personal decision for which there was no consistent template to follow. This complexity and lack of an established pattern is especially interesting, since texts within the martyr genre otherwise display many similarities, and compilers and commenters of these texts often attempt to shape individuals into easily-recognizable tropes. My examination of the named female martyrs beyond popular martyrs like Perpetua allows for the diversity of roles to be more fully appreciated and for trends to be identified.

The third chapter shifts from focusing on the martyrs to examining the identities available to women as they undertook activities that were directly related to the veneration of martyrs. I focus on the different actions that fall under the common roles of patron, client, and imitator to demonstrate the broad range of activities that women could undertake within the cult of the martyrs. As the commemorative feasts of the martyrs will be examined in detail in the next

chapter, the focus of this chapter is on the multitude of other ways that Christians expressed their veneration of the martyrs, including (but not limited to) special church services, praying for the martyrs, and visiting martyrs' shrines to ask for miracles (for themselves or others, often healing in nature).

I argue that women's participation in this diverse ritual context helps to reveal the way in which women exercised publicly agency traditionally associated with the domestic sphere. My analysis of the flexibility of the identities of patron and client in particular suggests that, while domestic agency is often interpreted as a lack of agency (since it is not rendered in the public, male realm), the range of practices of women in the cult of the martyrs proves that this was not the case for all Christian women in this period. The role of imitator is even more fluid and, consequently, even more difficult to isolate in the sources. I also call attention to the surprising paucity of specific information regarding women's behaviour within the cult of the martyrs apart from the much discussed context of the commemorative martyr feasts and suggest that the reasons why this might have been the case are related to women's expressions of agency and power.

The final chapter is a case study of the commemorative martyr feasts. I seek to overcome the silence of the sources regarding women in this ritual by placing commemorative martyr feasts within the broader context of communal meals in Late Antiquity. I examine women's roles at meals and funerals, demonstrating that there is an abundance of evidence for women's participation (to varying degrees) in different types of communal meals in both the Roman and Christian contexts. While women's participation in such feasts was not without controversy, it was a fact that Christian writers had to deal with. We can therefore assume, I argue, that women's role identities within the family (wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and widows)

allowed them to exercise certain measures of agency within funerary feasts and commemorative martyr banquets. When combined with other, more typically public roles, like client or patron, the roles available to women indicates that the martyr feast was a space in which women could have expected to participate fully. Their role in preparing, sponsoring, or presiding at funerary banquets or martyr feasts was taken as given and therefore elicited no comment. Because this kind of domestic agency is often obscured by the point of view of the male-authored texts, who pass it over in silence, it is also often overlooked in the secondary literature. However, I argue that it is present and significant, and that it should receive more attention.

This thesis makes several contributions to the study of women in the cult of the martyrs and posits some new possibilities for methods that can be applied to other contexts. These contributions fall into three broad categories, which I will outline below. They will, of course, be treated in greater detail throughout the thesis and in the conclusion.

First, this study examines women's roles in the cult of the martyrs in a comparative way that has not, to my knowledge, been done before. Looking at depictions of female venerators alongside female martyrs allows for comparisons to be made between average and extraordinary women, and highlighting the similarities and differences helps to create a fuller understanding of women's roles within Christian rituals.

Second, in addition to gaining new vantage points by employing a comparative framework, this study argues for the relevance of cross-cultural and cross-historical analyses when investigating the experiences or activities of women in Late Antiquity. This thesis employs modern theories of identity, agency, and power to examine late antique women and to approach well-studied texts from new angles.

Third, this thesis examines the evidence of martyrs who usually are not discussed in the scholarly literature. That is, in addition to the much-discussed examples of Perpetua, Felicitas, and to a lesser extent, Crispina, this thesis also explores other female martyrs such as Quartilosa, Victoria, and Secunda. By considering the evidence related to all these women, rather than a select few, the thesis uncovers the complexity of the identities of martyrs and the multiplicity of roles with which female martyrs are associated. Although the sources impose certain limitations, important insights can nevertheless be gained by including the accounts of lesser known women's martyrdoms alongside their more popular colleagues. These insights serve to complicate our understanding of female martyrs and the way in which they were described and perceived within their communities.

Finally, also central to my thesis is the goal of examining concrete actions and behaviours of women. Often, studies of women and the martyr cult focus on the extraordinary actions of the martyrs and the myriad of symbols and meanings found in the martyr narratives. By bringing the actions of average women into the discussion, and by comparing the way in which female venerated and female martyrs are portrayed, my study provides a fuller picture of this phenomenon, bringing specificity to areas that have otherwise been discussed only in general terms.

Chapter One

Identity, Agency, and Power: Women's Roles in the Cult of the Martyrs

This chapter seeks to establish the methodological and terminological framework that will shape this study going forward. While most of my project will be focused specifically on the activities associated with the cult of the martyrs, this chapter seeks to contextualize women's behaviour in a broader perspective, from the Roman Empire in general to North Africa in particular and from traditional Roman polytheistic religions to Christianity. I will engage with questions about what women did and whether or not it is possible to discern how they might have viewed themselves in particular activities. I will also seek to determine the ways in which power could be exercised at different social levels and how the definition of power might have changed depending upon one's social status. I will first discuss the methodologies for examining and interpreting primary evidence, with a focus on the concepts of intermittent identities, agency, and power. Then I will review the different roles that I have identified as being the most salient in my discussion of women in the cult of the martyrs. These roles will be briefly analyzed for their availability to women of different social classes and for the power and agency associated with them. This will be primarily an analytical exercise rather than a descriptive one, but examples will be given when necessary to support the analysis. Each of these identities will be examined further in light of individual situations and experiences in the remaining thesis chapters. Thus, this chapter provides the foundation upon which the rest of the arguments will be built.

Methodology

i. Intermittent Identities

One of the main objectives of my study is to focus on discerning individuals' behaviour in specific contexts rather than in generalities. My examination of identity is influenced by identity theory (as described by Peter Burke and Jan Stets),¹ as well as the way that identity is employed in the late antique context by Éric Rebillard in his recent work, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200-450 CE*. I will briefly provide an outline of the different types of identities that make up identity theory before turning to the way Rebillard uses identity in his discussions of late antique Christianity.

According to Burke and Stets, there are three bases for identity: role identity, social identity, and person identity. Throughout this thesis, I will use “role” and “role identity” interchangeably to refer to a person's sense of identity within a particular role. Social identity will be used to refer to a person's sense of identity in relation to others around them and will therefore be important for considering the way in which women were situated in relation to various groups within the overarching context of cult of the martyrs. Finally, person identity refers to how an individual sees him or herself as “a unique and distinct individual, different from others.” That is, person identity is based on the qualities that individuals use to define themselves as distinct from the role they happen to occupy or the group(s) to which they happen to belong.² This third basis for identity will not be examined in detail in this thesis because the extant sources on late antique women make it impossible to gain access to the necessary perspectives.³

¹ Burke and Stets, *Identity Theory*.

² Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, “Bases of Identities,” in *Identity Theory*, ed. Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 124-26, quote on 124.

³ In person identities, the qualities that individuals use to define themselves draw from cultural characteristics but they are internalized in such a way as the individual views them as defining his or her uniqueness. In the modern context, it is sometimes possible for the person identity to influence an individual's role and social identities (for example, if an individual sees herself as particularly caring and patient, she might become a teacher or a nurse), but

As they will play an important role in the thesis, it is necessary to consider roles and social identities in some more detail. Role identity refers to the meanings that individuals attribute to themselves while occupying various roles within their social structure. Although the term sometimes implies that the person is acting self-consciously within that role, it is also the case that they are applied to individuals by authors and thereby reflect the authors' conceptions of that role rather than the individuals described as occupying that role. Whether the individuals apply the role to themselves or have it imposed upon them, however, it is important to recognize that roles may have different meanings for different people. This complexity means that it is important to not only recognize the role that is being used to describe an individual but to, as much as possible, recognize the characteristics that are most salient in a given circumstance.

The roles themselves are encumbered with socially determined expectations, which guide people's attitudes and behaviours within the roles they occupy. These expectations are flexible and complex; there can be more than one expectation tied to a specific role as well as more than one way of fulfilling this expectation. The individual's focus on particular aspects of a role are influenced by the "internalized meanings" they apply to themselves, as well as their interactions with others, as some roles only exist with other roles (or "counter-identities") to which they are oriented. For example, the role of wife only exists as counter-identity to the role of husband; these two roles act in a reciprocal manner with each other and the pattern of the behaviour and expectations of the wife correspond to those of the husband.⁴ One of the expectations of Roman

such freedom of choice is not always available (since one does not choose the family, country, or social standing into which one is born). When considering individuals in the ancient world, the lack of such choice is more prevalent (particularly regarding women); furthermore, the types of extant sources makes it difficult to study this aspect of identity. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of person identities as they are more likely to be activated across various roles and situations, since they are connected to the individuals and not his or her role or social memberships. See Burke and Stets, "Bases of Identities," 124-26.

⁴ On counter-identities, see Burke and Stets, "Bases of Identities," 115-16.

wives was that they would oversee the running of the household in contrast to their husbands' duties, which were more related to the public sphere. For different wives, however, overseeing the household meant different things. For some, it mainly entailed ensuring the education of children; for others, it necessitated overseeing large numbers of slaves; and for still others, it meant running a business or preparing meals themselves. Any of these actions may fulfill the expectations that the individual sets, but these are also influenced by the social constraints and the way in which their particular role functions within the social structure. Performing one's role "correctly" is important because it provides satisfaction through verification from others (but, once again, the view of what is "correct" is fluid).⁵

Social identities are closely related to role identities. A social identity is based on an individual's membership in a particular group. People might identify as Christian, or as belonging to a particular class, or as members of a particular voluntary association. Individuals who belong to the same group are seen as thinking and acting alike based on the prototype of "the interrelated set of perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behavior that captures similarities among ingroup members and differences between ingroup members and outgroup members."⁶ However, these prototypes most often represent the ideal, not the reality. When individuals do associate closely with the prototype, "depersonalization" is said to have occurred, in the sense that they take on the group's identity as their own. For most people, prototypes simply help to guide their behaviour and create predictability within their environment (since they expect others within the group to behave similarly). Still, this should not be seen as an expectation of uniformity within the group, as people still interpret their membership and the meanings behind

⁵ Burke and Stets, "Bases of Identities," 113-18.

⁶ Burke and Stets, "Bases of Identities," 118-19, citing Michael Hogg, "Social Identity Theory," in *Contemporary Social Psychological Theories*, ed. Peter Burke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 111-36.

it in different ways. Furthermore, social identity is closely tied with role identity to the extent that it is often difficult to separate them analytically. For example, the role identities of husband and wife are embedded within the social group of the family. It is difficult to discern when an individual is acting out of their role identity or on the basis of their social one, particularly since one is “always and simultaneously in a role and in a group.” Both the role itself and the group to which that role belongs must be considered, particularly in terms of the interactions between different roles within each group.⁷

The classification of various identities into specific categories will be less important than Rebillard’s proposed shift in focus from the group to the individual and what this reconsideration means for our understanding of late antique Christianity.⁸ Rebillard argues that Christianness was not an over-arching or all-consuming identity but that, instead, Christians decided “on a situational basis” when to employ it.⁹ Being Christian was only one of many identities that individuals had for themselves, and one could choose whether or not to activate this identity depending on the specific context.¹⁰ Therefore, just because some behaviour was proclaimed by writers such as Tertullian or Augustine to be demonstrably Christian did not mean that most (or

⁷ Burke and Stets, “Bases of Identities,” 118-24.

⁸ In addition to Burke, Rebillard draws on the work of identity theorists such as Don Handelman, “The Organization of Ethnicity,” *Ethnic Groups* 1 (1977):187-200; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity without Groups,” *Archives européennes de sociologie* 43 (2002): 163-89; Bernard Lahire, “From the Habitus to an Individual Heritage of Dispositions. Towards a Sociology at the Level of the Individual,” *Poetics* 31 (2003): 329-55; Rogers Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Bernard Lahire, *The Plural Actor*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity, 2011). For Rebillard’s summary of this work and his approach, see *Christians and Their Many Identities*, 1-5.

⁹ Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities*, 96.

¹⁰ Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities*, 4.

indeed any) Christians in their community either agreed with them or followed their prescriptions in every circumstance.¹¹

Rebillard's focus is not on gender but on a reconsideration of the scholarly understanding of the individual in late antique Christianity. Nevertheless, his framework is particularly useful in dealing with Christian women in this period because it helps to address the problem of the (almost total) lack of sources about women's experiences composed by women. Rebillard argues for what he calls a "symptomatic reading", in which individuals' actual behaviour can be glimpsed and studied by reading against the grain and questioning assumptions that the texts put forth.¹² Beyond the obvious problems of dealing with textual and material evidence that largely focuses on the experiences of male members of the elite class, symptomatic reading is necessary because these sources do not, in general, reveal much about the actual experiences of the individuals who are their subjects. First, the genre or type of the sources in question must always be considered. Furthermore, regardless of genre, all of the sources were created to promote a certain message from a specific viewpoint. The identities espoused within these various forms of media cannot therefore be interpreted as "authentic individual expressions"; instead, they must be viewed as constructions of particular social, cultural, and temporal influences. Even when one can uncover examples of individual identity within the texts, these identities cannot necessarily be said to reflect "real" people or their self-identifications. Nevertheless, even when the access

¹¹ This is also connected to psychological theories of self-categorization and social identity theories of the group, in which the tendency to attribute behavioural or even psychological characteristics to groups "as if they were real and unitary psychological beings in the same way that we assume that individuals are" is questioned (John C. Turner et al., *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987], 3-4). Thus, in the study of early Christian groups, it must always be remembered that these groups are made up of individuals, each with their own beliefs and motivations. One should not assume a general characteristic of the group to be reflective of the characteristics of the individuals within the group. In his analysis of early Christian population size, Keith Hopkins notes this phenomenon, arguing that early Christians considered people who would either not have self-identified as Christians or for whom at least Christianity was not their primary self-identifier to nevertheless be part of the group (Keith Hopkins, "Christian Number and Its Implications," *J ECS* 6 [1998]: 186-87).

¹² Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities*, 5-6.

they provide to the real experiences of individuals is necessarily limited, the sources are still useful for providing testimony of different identities and the various influences and tensions that exist within specific contexts.¹³

Thus, just as male authors' conceptions of what constituted proper Christian behaviour must be reconsidered in light of individual realities rather than the construction of a unified Christian group, so must their conceptions of female behaviour be reconsidered by examining individual women in specific contexts. This does not imply a freedom from group constraints but rather the possibility that one could choose (consciously or not) to be part of different groups in different circumstances. This reconsideration of female behaviour using identity theory also suggests that any single woman's action cannot necessarily generalize about what "women" did. Rather, it is only an attestation to that individual's own experience, which may or may not be representative of other women in similar situations.

Another aspect of identity theory that will be paramount in my study is the concept that individuals can hold more than one identity either within a single group or within many different groups,¹⁴ and that the intermittency of the activation of one's Christianness does not serve to measure the significance of this identity to the individual.¹⁵ Both men and women were constantly engaging in identity construction (either consciously or unconsciously) through their reactions to the situational context and through their relationships to those around them. In other words, when multiple identities are in conflict with one another, a hierarchy of roles comes into

¹³ Rubina Raja and Jörg Rüpke, "Appropriating Religion: Methodological Issues in Testing the 'Lived Ancient Religion' Approach," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 1 (2015), 17.

¹⁴ On multiple identities, see Peter J. Burke, "Relationships between Multiple Identities," in *Advances in Identity Theory and Research*, ed. Peter J. Burke et al. (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003), throughout but esp. 200-3. See also Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities*, 4.

¹⁵ Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities*, 93.

play in order to determine the most salient role for that particular context.¹⁶ For example, a woman might identify herself first as a wife and a mother in a family situation, but at weekly church gatherings, she might identify primarily as a faithful Christian, placing her familial responsibilities behind her commitments as a Christian. These different identities are not more or less important than any of the others; rather, they are dictated by circumstance. The woman continues to be a mother when she identifies as a Christian, and the others in the group recognize this as one of her identities as well. But mother ceases to be the most salient identity for the particular situation.

This identity fluidity also means that a person's conception of their own identity might differ from the way they are perceived by others either within their group or outside of it. The outside reaction to an individual's particular identity is therefore another important aspect that must be considered (and indeed may play a role in determining which identity is most salient in a specific instance).¹⁷ However, the identity labels that are placed by outsiders do not necessarily coincide with a person's own self-identification, nor do these identities necessarily mean the same thing to everyone. In ancient sources, women are particularly susceptible to having labels placed on them that differ from the ones they might use for themselves because it is easier to apply labels (including those that may potentially be improper or incongruent) to those who are

¹⁶ Karen L. King, "Willing to Die for God: Individualization and Instrumental Agency in Ancient Christian Martyr Literature," in *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 351.

¹⁷ An example of the way that outside perspectives can be used in examining identity construction can be seen in the social-scientific concept of deviant theory, in which an action can only be described as deviant by the social reaction it creates. The inconsistency of what is labeled as deviant (that is, the same action may be deviant if performed by one person but not if performed by another) demonstrates the complex social influences that are at play in applying labels and identities. On deviant theory and applying it to the early Christian and Jewish contexts, see John Barclay, "Deviance and Apostasy: Some Applications of Deviance Theory to First-Century Judaism and Christianity," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific Studies of the New Testament*, ed. Philip Esler (New York: Routledge, 1995), 110-23.

socially weak than to those who are socially strong.¹⁸ As such, it is important to acknowledge the unreliability of labels and to interrogate the sources fully to determine whether alternative interpretations are possible. Throughout this thesis, I will interrogate whether women's self-identifications might differ from the way they are depicted in male-authored sources and how this might impact the interpretation of the particular context.

In general, a few main components of identity theory will be most salient throughout this thesis. First, different types of identities (such as role or social) will be discussed with a view to understanding how they relate to other types of identities and the way they function in the specific cultural context of the cult of the martyrs. Our discussion of these types of identities will have to take account of such issues as the limitations of the sources, the possibility for multiple identities (both self-imposed and imposed by others), as well as the intermittency of identities depending on changing circumstances. Furthermore, the flexibility of meaning attached to each identity will be considered, as individuals saw different ways of expressing the meanings they attributed to their role or social identities. In all cases, the terms "individual" or "individuality" should not be understood to imply a sense of autonomy or independence from social restrictions, as one might think when considering their connotations in modern usage. Rather, individuals and their identities in antiquity were always connected to (and influenced by) factors such as their social and economic positions.¹⁹ Even when adopting personal expressions of devotion within the cult of the martyrs that do not necessarily correspond to the way that church leaders thought Christians should behave, for example, individuals are still limited by their collective identity. That is, the culturally-accepted ideals that shape each identity cannot simply be abandoned, even

¹⁸ Barclay, "Deviance and Apostasy," 116-17. Although I am drawing these concepts from deviant theory, I am not arguing that women's behaviour was necessarily deviant nor that they were always labeled in this way.

¹⁹ See King, "Willing to Die for God," 350-51.

when there is some flexibility for the individual to determine how one's identity was expressed in relation to one's participation in the martyr cult.²⁰

ii. Agency

In conjunction with identifying the various roles and social identities that were associated with women in the context of the cult of the martyrs, I will seek to isolate the different types of agency that are associated with each kind of identity. This will demonstrate the way in which certain identities that are not normally associated with positions of authority actually do express agency within the context of the cult of the martyrs. Furthermore, just as a single identity can have different meanings depending on the internalized conceptions of the individual, so can a single identity be associated with various levels of agency. The ways in which agency is activated in conjunction with identity demonstrate that the concept should be understood as malleable to different contexts, just as is identity. Therefore, it is necessary to explore what is meant by agency in order to understand how it will be used in this study.

There is no single definition for the concept of agency, in part because of the complexity of the term itself as well as the number of disciplines in which it is used.²¹ For the purposes of this study, which attempts to uncover the actions of individual women within a specific cultural, social, and temporal framework, I expand upon Laura Ahearn's provisional definition that

²⁰ Johan Leemans, "Individualization and the Cult of the Martyrs: Examples from Asia Minor in the Fourth Century," in *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 194-95.

²¹ Various attempts at an overarching definition of agency have been made. For an overview of such attempts from a sociological approach, see Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, "What Is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1998): 962-1023. A good overview of the anthropological approach appears in Laura M. Ahearn, "Language and Agency," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2011): 109-37.

“[a]gency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act.”²² In the context of this thesis, agents are those who perform actions within a specific context in a way that is visible and recognizable to others within the same context and should always be seen as acting in concert with various social and cultural influences. However, agency should not be seen as a single, monolithic concept. Indeed, as there is a “multiplicity of motivations behind all human actions,”²³ this multiplicity must be reflected in the way that agency is defined and used. Agency is fluid in that an individual does not have or exercise agency at all times or in all contexts (or, indeed, repeatedly within a specific context); rather, agency is related to a specific situation and is determined by the unique components of that situation. As Karen King notes, “human actions are both enabled and constrained by social norms, practices, institutions, and discourses operating in a given situation, such that people are neither entirely free agents nor entirely socially determined products, however constraining the conditions.”²⁴ An individual’s agency is intrinsically connected to the cultural world in which the individual operates, insofar as an individual can be separated from this cultural world. However, the question of individual, independent, and autonomous action is a difficult one to answer within the ancient world, as so few sources deal with the personal intentions of their subjects.

Despite the difficulties with pinpointing specific definitions of agency, it remains an important concept for discussing the ways in which various social identities are expressed and understood in different contexts. The difficulties in trying to ascribe the activities of Christian women in Late Antiquity with a specific kind of agency can be mitigated by taking relevant sociological and anthropological studies into consideration. In particular, the theories and

²² Ahearn, “Language and Agency,” 112.

²³ Ahearn, “Language and Agency,” 116.

²⁴ King, “Willing to Die for God,” 362.

concepts currently being used to study modern Muslim women contain some parallels with the study of ancient Christian women, both in terms of the kinds of issues that ancient Christian women faced and modern Muslim women face (in relation to men and in relation to society more broadly) as well as in terms of the academic study of these two areas. This approach avoids tendencies to apply modern Western notions of agency to contexts in which such notions do not apply.²⁵ This study will aim to avoid these tendencies and will attempt to uncover the way that women would have seen themselves, rather than to try to judge them using an anachronistic or a-cultural framework. This is of course much easier to accomplish when one can conduct interviews and ask women questions about their actions and their motivations, as is the case in studies of contemporary Muslim women. In the study of Late Antiquity, however, we are limited by the extant sources and are forced to seek the voices of women through layers of male discourse. Nevertheless, the application of some modern concepts can yield fruitful new paths of interpretation and investigation.

One of the more problematic definitions of agency that is often applied within studies of female agency is the equation of agency with resistance.²⁶ Within this study, I will be drawing on Saba Mahmood's understanding of agency not as synonymous with subversion or resistance, but as a "modality of action." Within this modality are included certain behaviours that might look

²⁵ Of course, some scholars recognize this problem and seek to avoid using contemporary understandings of agency. For example, Lefkowitz rightly points out that it is unfair to imply that Roman or Christian women would have seen their roles as restrictive or oppressive and that, given the opportunity, they might not necessarily have described themselves differently than men described them. Furthermore, she argues, judging a woman's authority by male standards of accomplishment (which is most often the basis for definitions of agency) is not only anachronistic; it also relegates women even further into the background (Mary R. Lefkowitz, "Wives and Husbands," *Greece & Rome* 30 [1983]: 31-32). See also Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 84.

²⁶ For an overview of studies in which this definition is employed, and the problems inherent with it, see Ahearn, "Language and Agency," 115-16.

passive to outsiders but which are actually examples of active agency.²⁷ That is, apparent “acceptance” of what seem to be examples of social injustice may in fact be a site of “considerable investment, struggle, and achievement.”²⁸ In some cases, furthermore, women who desired to circumvent restrictions upon their behaviours were able to do so by changing the language used to describe their activities to make it fit within the accepted patriarchal framework.²⁹ Thus, what might appear to be acceptance or lack of agency might actually be agency reconfigured to be more acceptable within the prominent (male-dominated) discourse.

However, identifying women’s agency is further complicated by the fact that agency must include an understanding of the women’s desired outcomes, which often cannot be discerned from outer appearances. For example, freedom from perceived oppressions might not have been the goal of these women in certain situations, or at all.³⁰ Additionally, certain ideals to which women adhere and from which they gain strength (such as modesty or submissiveness) might be seen by outsiders as impediments blocking them from taking action.³¹ Thus, the question shifts

²⁷ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 153-7.

²⁸ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 174.

²⁹ For example, ancient women’s teaching might be redefined as private rather than public and preaching might be referred to as simply “speaking” (Elizabeth A. Clark, “Engendering the Study of Religion,” in *The Future of the Study of Religion: Proceedings of Congress 2000*, ed. Slavica Jakelc and Lori Pearson [Leiden: Brill, 2004], 221).

³⁰ Amy Hollywood, “Gender, Agency, and the Divine in Religious Historiography,” *The Journal of Religion* 84 (2004): 528.

³¹ Damla Isik, “On *Sabir* and Agency: The Politics of Pious Practice in Konya’s Carpet Weaving Industry,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10 (2008): 533-34. The modesty and submissiveness characteristic of *sabir* are reminiscent of the Greek concept of σωφροσύνη, which was associated in part with female sexual self-control and women’s fidelity to their husbands (see, e.g., Annette Bourland Huizenga, “*Sophrosyne* for Women in Pythagorean Texts,” in *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll et al. [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 382). One of the problems that can arise when applying modern feminist theories to ancient societies is that feminist theories often reject the notion that valuing these ideals comes from the women’s own agency; rather, they see it as a result of living in a restrictive culture that reinforces women’s subordination to the extent that women eventually internalize these notions. Thus, they argue that women are forced to adopt certain behaviours that reify the power of those who dominate them, thereby forgoing all power and agency (Amy Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity* [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999], 133-35). Especially in the case of ancient societies in which we often do not have the women’s voices themselves, I think it is important to keep as many options open as possible. Women might be “performing” certain ideals of womanhood because of cultural restrictions, but just as today, some women also

from whether or not a woman has agency to *how* a woman's agency is being expressed in different contexts and what kinds of limitations each context might place on her agency. That is to say, it is not sufficient to correlate a woman's agency with her perceived free will, since the concept of free will ignores both the social nature of agency itself as well as "the pervasive influence of culture on human intentions, beliefs, and actions."³²

Women's agency in Late Antiquity was dependent upon factors such as wealth, law, social custom, and religious hierarchies.³³ The sources must be interrogated to attempt to uncover which of these factors might be constraining a woman's access to agency. Furthermore, if a woman's desires cannot be clearly discerned, the possibility that what seems like lack of agency might actually be agency through either intentional adherence to social norms or through reconfiguring actions to fit a particular discourse must always be considered.

When speaking of martyrs, a particular kind of agency known as instrumental agency is often invoked. Ancient authors who are concerned with martyrdom often depict God as the only entirely independent agent, with the martyrs acting as God's instruments. As such, some argue that martyrs only exhibit active agency by submitting to God's will. That is, the martyrs are only able to endure the pain and torture imposed upon them as a result of their submission to God.³⁴ The concept of instrumental agency has been used in conjunction with modern anthropological and comparative psychological studies of female prophets, in which female prophets are viewed

might have felt that certain expectations did fit within their own personal desires and goals. Neither one should be seen as more or less legitimate. On the performance of gender and gender as a social construction, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

³² Ahearn, "Language and Agency," 114.

³³ Clark, "Engendering the Study of Religion," 220.

³⁴ King, "Willing to Die for God," 371-72.

as acting out instrumental agency that is derived from a powerful (male) divine figure.³⁵ However, this concept has been criticized for ignoring the cultural framework in which these incidents occur, thereby simplifying complex notions of power and authority.³⁶ Thus while instrumental agency may occasionally be an important lens through which to examine the way that female martyrs both understand themselves and are understood by the audience, it will not be the primary framework utilized.

Indeed, agency is closely associated with “the production of power and the shaping of social relations in specific situations,”³⁷ thus necessitating an individualized approach to its meaning and use within this thesis. The intermittent identities that Christians may employ do not correspond with a stable and consistent sense of agency. Rather, the context in which the agency is used must be taken into consideration at all times; this context includes ascertaining the identity that is activated, the way in which the identity is viewed by the individual, and the situation in which it is employed.

iii. Power

If agency is the production of power, it is also necessary to unpack what is meant by power. In this thesis, I consider power to refer to the possession of command over others, encompassing other concepts like authority and influence without necessarily being equivalent to these other ideas. I use power rather than authority, since the term “authority” often carries with it an

³⁵ Mary Keller, *The Hammer and the Flute: Women, Power, and Spirit Possession* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 9-10 and throughout.

³⁶ See, e.g., Hollywood, “Gender, Agency and the Divine,” 524-25 and Jonathan Stökl, “The Role of Women in the Prophetic Process in Mari: A Critique of Mary Keller’s Theory of Agency,” in *Thinking Towards New Horizons: Collected Communications to the XIXth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Ljubljana 2007*, ed. Matthias Augustin and Hermman Michael Niemann (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), 176-77.

³⁷ King, “Willing to Die for God,” 369.

implicit connection with being part of an official hierarchy, whereas power can be exercised in a variety of contexts by individuals with a variety of identities. In this way, power is distinct from authority in that power operates both within and without officially-sanctioned social systems and is recognizable by individuals within the broader cultural context. Unlike authority, power can exist outside of a public, official system and should not be considered to be weak or ineffective when compared with more public, sanctioned power. Indeed, it may be argued that “illegitimate power may be even more effective than legitimate power, since the way it is used is less circumscribed by social rules.”³⁸ The consideration of this type of power is particularly relevant to the examination of women as they are often restricted from public official roles that are more typically associated with power and authority. Thus, even if a woman’s power was restricted to the domestic realm (a point with which I will contend at certain points throughout this chapter), her agency in exercising this power and the way in which it relates to her identity must still be acknowledged.

Another important characteristic of power is that it could be exercised simultaneously by different people or groups even within the same context.³⁹ Thus, a woman’s access to power was not necessarily restricted by the fact that others also had power in the same situation. It was possible for a woman to experience empowerment (for example, in her authority over her children as a mother) while simultaneously being subordinate to her husband, the *paterfamilias*

³⁸ Jill Dubisch, ed., *Gender and Power in Rural Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 17-18, quote at 17. For more on how Dubisch’s discussions about power and authority relate to the early Christian world, see Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 42-46.

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 94-95; Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking beyond Thecla* (London: Continuum, 2009), 18-19.

(and the patriarchal system in general).⁴⁰ Thus, a woman could occupy the role identities of mother and wife simultaneously, with the different associated powers, within the social identity of being a member of the family.

Furthermore, the social processes by which power is “discursively constituted” allow for personal agency as people attempt to construct individualized identities and relationships within particular cultural and social parameters.⁴¹ It is therefore important to resist overarching generalizations and instead examine women’s power on a situational basis and to recognize the complex systems of power that may be occurring within the same context. Indeed, it is perhaps more effective to attempt to analyze the different spheres of power in which women operated than to question whether or not they exercised power (since it is clear that they did).⁴²

In studies of women’s power in the Roman world, scholars most often associate power with political positions or socioeconomic status.⁴³ A woman’s wealth and social class often superseded her gender in terms of determining her access to power within the community.⁴⁴ Furthermore, wealthy women had access to greater expressions of power by virtue of the influence that were conveyed through their material possessions (such as property) even as they remained excluded from political or military office.⁴⁵ However, this wealth- and status-oriented conception of power neglects the vast majority of women who lived in the Roman Empire. Non-

⁴⁰ Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory*, 25.

⁴¹ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *AHR* 91 (1986): 1067.

⁴² Dubisch, *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*, 18; MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, 42-43.

⁴³ See e.g., Elizabeth A. Clark, “Patrons, not Priests: Gender and Power in Late Ancient Christianity,” *Gender & History* 2 (1990): 253-73; Mary R. Lefkowitz, “Influential Women,” in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (London: Routledge, 1993), 49-64; Katherine Bain, “Socioeconomic Status in Early Christianity and Thecla’s Rejection of Marriage,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 27 (2011): 51-69.

⁴⁴ Stichele and Penner, *Contextualizing Gender*, 31, 123. On the importance of examining women’s socioeconomic status in studies of ancient women, see Bain, “Socioeconomic Status.”

⁴⁵ Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 61-65.

elite women exercised power to varying degrees on a daily basis, although certainly in a way that was less visible than their more elite counterparts.

In some cases, women exercised power through the agency of others (for example, their husbands),⁴⁶ but in other cases, women expressed power on their own. Whether direct or indirect, it is important to remember that power in one context does not necessarily mean power in all contexts. Power is not equivalent with authority or agency in the sense that women who exercise power do not necessarily become authority figures in the broader context.⁴⁷ That a woman may be powerful without occupying an official position (this may be the case, for example, with the wives of powerful men)⁴⁸ has been studied extensively. However, whenever a woman acts with agency in a particular context (even if this context is outside of the political or authoritative realms), that woman is still displaying a certain amount of power, even if there is no expectation that it could be translated to other contexts. This will be of particular interest because these less-visible modes of power available to average women, in particular that which is enacted in the domestic sphere, have not been studied sufficiently.

Although wealth and status are important indicators of the likelihood of women having access to power and agency, it is difficult to place women within a rigid stratification system because of the ever-changing dynamics of the relationships between different systems and because wealth and status were not the only factors in play. Gender and status were “interlocking systems of domination” wherein wealthy free women had access to power that was not available

⁴⁶ Dubisch, *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*, 18.

⁴⁷ MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, 46.

⁴⁸ Dubisch notes that these roles should be viewed as just as institutionalized as any others, since it was accepted that most male rulers had female relatives who exercised a measure of power over them and their decisions (*Gender and Power in Rural Greece*, 24).

to the vast majority of women in the lower classes,⁴⁹ but there were other hierarchies even within the category of “wealthy free woman.” For example, wealthy women who were unmarried (having either never married or, more likely, remained unmarried following death or divorce) occupied a different social position than a wealthy wife and exercised greater power over their own lives than did their married counterparts.⁵⁰

Since “power is always social,” it is essential to explore how it was manifested in different contexts and different social spheres, such as the public and private realms.⁵¹ While it is tempting to consider these as a rigid dichotomy, reality was much more fluid.⁵² Seemingly private spaces like the home were frequently the setting for public gatherings of non-family members, thus making the home simultaneously public and private.⁵³ Furthermore, while the activities of women in the early Christian world seemed to have been able to transcend the traditional association of women with the private and men with the public,⁵⁴ the frequent exhortations for women to adhere to the virtues associated with the private sphere (particularly chastity) suggest that the blurring of lines in reality remained a problem in the rhetorical and symbolic systems of the Roman world.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Bain, “Socioeconomic Status,” 58.

⁵⁰ Bain, “Socioeconomic Status,” 66.

⁵¹ Dubisch, *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*, 19.

⁵² On the ambiguity between the categories of public and private in the early Christian era and women’s place in these areas, see MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, esp. 30-41.

⁵³ This was particularly the case in Late Antiquity as the decline in mandatory public *euergetism* (εὐεργετέω) prompted the expansion of the private spaces. See Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4-5.

⁵⁴ E.g., Kraemer (*Her Share of the Blessings*, 142) argues that women were able to exercise public power by labeling the public an extension of the private household and therefore their seemingly public activities were still part of the private sphere. However, MacDonald notes that this blurring of public and private was one of the main criticisms directed at Christians and that it likely was not as unproblematic as Kraemer suggests (MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, 31-32).

⁵⁵ That is, “Social ideology concerning women’s behavior in the public sphere was not advancing at the same rate as the actual behavior of women” (Kathleen Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993], 25). This is closely connected to the honour/shame dichotomy found in anthropological studies and associated with traditional Mediterranean societies wherein men

For the purposes of this study, I follow Kim Bowes' definition of a private space as one which is maintained by a private individual for the primary use of his or her household (including family, slaves, and close friends).⁵⁶ I define public as the opposite: it is any space which is constructed with the purpose of being used by society in general and which might be maintained by a public group (such as the city council or voluntary associations) for the benefit of its citizens. Private actions are ones that occur in private spaces either alone or among members of the household and close friends. Public actions are ones which occur in a public space and which might be observed by anyone.

In between these two dominant modes of existence are a multitude of semi-private and semi-public activities that must be taken into consideration.⁵⁷ The late antique Christian funeral, for example, might begin in the home (private) before moving through the streets in a procession (public) and ending with a ceremony led by family members and attended by those in the community at the graveside of the deceased (public and private).⁵⁸ In general, women can be seen to exercise power more frequently within contexts that are more private than public. Once again, exceptions to this are most often found in cases where women occupy the role identities available to the highest social classes as patronage of individuals, groups, and buildings entails an expectation of public recognition and, to an extent, public benefit. However, this does not

were connected with honour and the public sphere and women with shame and the private sphere. On honour/shame and women in the early Christian communities, see MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, throughout but esp. 27-30; 144-54.

⁵⁶ Bowes, *Private Worship*, 14-15.

⁵⁷ These intermediate categories represent an attempt to acknowledge "the dynamic movement and interaction between realms which occurs in real societies" (MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, 38) and should not be seen as rigid or exact. Rather, they allude to the complexity of each role and the diversity of behaviour even within a single role.

⁵⁸ The different phases of the Christian funeral and the implications of identifying certain aspects as either public or private will be examined in the following chapter.

mean that the power exercised in the private sphere via role identities such as mother or wife is any less significant than that which is exercised in public.

Women's Roles

I have identified several roles that women played in connection with the cult of the martyrs that will be most salient to this study. Differences among women are brought about by factors such as wealth or stage of life as well as context. Subdividing women into these roles or identities is an attempt to avoid the broad generalizations that come with considering “women” as a stable or closed category. When one talks about “women” in general, a certain measure of specificity is lost; one could be misled in the conclusion one draws. Thus, I strive to qualify my conclusions by being as specific as possible about the roles of women and the way in which different situations affect the way that women exercise power and agency.⁵⁹ Of course, some reliance on commonalities in viewpoints and tropes is inevitable due to the nature of the sources. Nevertheless, I seek to emphasize that the role that takes precedence in a woman's life could change frequently and that these roles were not mutually exclusive. Women could claim more than one identity at any given time or shift the salient identity depending upon context.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of the identities that are most relevant to the larger goal of understanding the way in which women participated in the cult of the martyrs.⁶⁰ This will serve to create a foundation for the subsequent chapters where I will

⁵⁹ On the importance in emphasizing the dangers in generalizing, particularly in reference to the claim that Christianity afforded women in general a higher status, see Castelli's criticism of Rodney Stark's *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997) (Elizabeth A. Castelli, “Gender, Theory, and *The Rise of Christianity*: A Response to Rodney Stark,” *J ECS* 6 [1998]: 229-30).

⁶⁰ In the interest of brevity, I am not seeking to address all of the ways in which these roles were manifested, nor all the ways in which they have been defined or analyzed in scholarship. When applicable, opposing or contradictory interpretations will be discussed in footnotes.

situate these roles more specifically within the cult of the martyrs and demonstrate the various ways in which women navigated this important area of piety.

Wife

It was assumed that all Roman women desired to be married.⁶¹ While the eventual rise of asceticism challenged this assumption in relation to Christian women, the extant evidence does not show whether those Christian women who became wives were in any significant way distinct from Roman wives.⁶² Although Roman and Christian wives could in some sense operate in the space between the public and private sphere, the main focus of the role in this thesis will be on their domestic (that is, private) duties. Still, a brief word about wives in public is important for understanding the way in which the role of wife would have been understood outside the family.

A wife's ability to participate in the public sphere was more reliant on social class (and thus the social identity of the family to which they belonged) than gender. Wealthy married women's duties included both managing the household and attending cultural and social activities with their husbands.⁶³ Wealthy married women could appear in public with greater visibility than they could before marriage and they were often expected to become patrons of various groups in their communities.⁶⁴ In contrast, wives of lower statuses engaged with the

⁶¹ G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 13. For an overview of the scholarly approaches towards the study of Roman marriage, see Suzanne Dixon, "From Ceremonial to Sexualities: A Survey of Scholarship on Roman Marriage," in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 245-61.

⁶² Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 17.

⁶³ Hallet, "Women's Lives," 32-33.

⁶⁴ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 15. Inscriptions attest to these women's donations with such frequency that scholars identify them as "model citizens of the type 'married wealthy woman'" (LiDonnici, "Women's Religions," 86).

public sphere by working outside of the home while simultaneously overseeing the demands of the household.⁶⁵

Wives who appeared in public either with their husbands or with other family members and attendants were always transmitting information about their husbands. From the extant literary sources, it appears that wives were constantly seen as reflecting the character of their husbands.⁶⁶ For both men and women in the upper classes, marriage was a “political mechanism” with a great deal of public power and influence. A good marriage demonstrated that both spouses were fulfilling their proper duties as citizens and highlighted their families, education, wealth, and stability.⁶⁷

However, the role of wife is most closely connected with her duties as the household manager (regardless of the size of the household).⁶⁸ That wives were expected to oversee the activities occurring within the home and other specifically private spheres (such as the family grave, for example) demonstrates their potential for agency and power in this realm. It should be noted, furthermore, that while the wife’s power might initially seem to be limited because it is restricted to the private sphere, her husband’s power in the public sphere is similarly limited by factors such as social position, wealth, imperial decree, and the like.⁶⁹ Furthermore, household

⁶⁵ Judith P. Hallet, “Women’s Lives in the Ancient Mediterranean,” in *Women and Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33; Lefkowitz, “Wives and Husbands,” 44.

⁶⁶ Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 19.

⁶⁷ Johannes N. Vorster, “Construction of Culture through the Construction of Person: The Construction of Thecla in the *Acts of Thecla*,” in *A Feminist Companion to New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 113.

⁶⁸ The duties that fell under the domain of wives included: the care of children; obtaining food, water, and fuel; preparing meals; cleaning dishes and pots; making, repairing, and washing clothes and other general cleaning. Women who had slaves to do these tasks needed to oversee their work, as well as to take care of tasks such as managing the household accounts, settling arguments, and distributing supplies. Finally, with or without slaves, wives would spend time with the children, and visited (and were visited by) friends, relatives, and neighbours (Clark, *Monica*, 49-50).

⁶⁹ Dubisch, *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*, 62.

management included duties that had implications in the public realm such as ensuring proper education for children and being involved in the arrangement of appropriate marriages of children.⁷⁰ The limitations within which wives operated do not mean that their power was not real or that it was necessarily weak.

The question of wives' agency when it comes to religion has been a matter of some debate. Although there is evidence of "mixed marriages" (between a Christian and non-Christian),⁷¹ it is unclear how much this evidence reflects reality and how much it is used rhetorically to support various arguments. That is, while some wives certainly seem to have been free to convert to Christianity without their husband doing the same, the frequency of this occurrence may have been lower in reality than it appears from the literary sources.⁷² Furthermore, even when there were actual cases of mixed marriages, the extent to which wives were able to use their agency to exercise any power of conversion over their husbands is unclear.⁷³ Nevertheless, the potential for women's agency in this regard occasionally invited criticism by contemporaries, who were

⁷⁰ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 25. This overlaps with wives' identities as mothers. On this, see the sections in this chapter on mothers and daughters.

⁷¹ See, e.g., 1 Cor 7:12-16; Justin Martyr, *2 Apol.* 2 (PTS 38: 137-39), trans. ACW 56: 73-75; Tertullian, *Ux.* 2.3 (CCSL 1: 387-88), trans. ANF 4: 45-46. For an overview of early Christian sources on mixed marriages and the rhetorical use of Christian women married to non-Christian men, see MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, 183-248.

⁷² On this, see Salzman, "Aristocratic Women" and Kate Cooper, "Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy," *JRS* 82 (1992): 150-64. Both argue that, despite the writings of Jerome and Tertullian, Christians tended to marry within their religious circle. Nevertheless, the household remained an important locus of early conversion, and women undoubtedly played an important role. See Kate Cooper, "The Household as a Venue for Religious Conversion: The Case of Christianity," in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 183-97.

⁷³ Rodney Stark asserts that Christian wives were important agents of Christian expansion (Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 95-128). However, Stark's theory has been called into question by some, including, e.g., Castelli, "Gender, Theory, and *The Rise of Christianity*." Other scholars who question the extent to which wives were able to influence their husbands in this manner include Cooper, "Insinuations of Womanly Influence," Judith M. Lieu, "The 'Attraction of Women' in/to Early Judaism and Christianity: Gender and the Politics of Conversion," *JSNT* 72 (1998): 5-22, and Salzman, "Aristocratic Women." Nevertheless, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza notes that exhortations to women's submission to their husbands might be in part a tactic to convert their husbands to Christianity through their "quietness of spirit seeking peace and harmony" (*In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* [New York: Crossroad, 1983], 262). On Augustine's mother, Monica, and her ability to convince her husband to convert to Christianity apparently through her appropriately submissive behaviour, see Clark, *Monica*, 65-67.

anxious about the limits of their abilities to properly practice Christianity in a non-Christian household.⁷⁴

Occasionally, power in the private household was translated into a more public setting, as when wives hosted banquets for groups that included non-family members.⁷⁵ Furthermore, private concerns were never entirely separate public ones, as a harmonious marriage (including a well-managed household) was considered to be “a reassuring microcosm of the social order.”⁷⁶ Indeed, proper household management was considered to be representative of a wife’s *σωφροσύνη*, and was thought to bring honour to both herself and her husband.⁷⁷ That women’s interior qualities were thought to be reflected in the appearance and behaviour of her family members suggests that there was a great incentive to be considered a successful household manager.

Unfortunately, little is known about what wives thought about the different aspects of this role identity. Various inscriptions that were apparently commissioned by wives themselves emphasize the ideals of chastity, household management, and affection for their husbands and children.⁷⁸ This seems to suggest that women shared the same viewpoint as men with regard to

⁷⁴ See, e.g., Tertullian’s negative view of mixed marriages (*Ux.* 2-5 [CCSL 1: 387-90], trans. ANF 4: 45-47). Indeed, Christian sources worried about pollution between Christian wives and non-Christian husbands and about the possibility of tension and violence within the marriage (Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place*, 236-38). For a discussion of a typical non-Christian view of this phenomenon, see MacDonald’s discussion of Lucius Apuleius in *Early Christian Women*, 67-72.

⁷⁵ On wives as hosts, see below (in this chapter) and in the following chapter on commemorative martyr feasts.

⁷⁶ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 17. On the complexity of the term for such marital harmony, *concordia*, see Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity*, 17-18.

⁷⁷ Huizenga, “*Sophrosyne* for Women,” 397. A properly-run household was also indicative of a wife’s sexual fidelity.

⁷⁸ A sampling of some such inscriptions and a detailed discussion of what they might tell us about reality can be found in Lefkowitz, “Wives and Husbands,” 40-46. On the way that Christian women were commemorated in epitaphs in Rome, see Dennis Trout, “*Fecit ad astra viam*: Daughters, Wives, and the Metrical Epitaphs of Late Ancient Rome,” *J ECS* 21 (2013): 1-25 (with pp. 20-22 particularly focused on the representation of traditional virtues). However, there are many more inscriptions that do not include any indication of familial relationships or virtues. On the lack of inclusion of familial relationships between the living person and the deceased (or any

what constituted an ideal wife. However, the inscriptions must also be read critically by taking into consideration how they might have been shaped by the male viewpoint, both abstractly in terms of adhering to social ideals and concretely in terms of the mediating work of male inscribers and their templates. Both interpretive possibilities must remain open: some inscriptions might indicate that a particular wife expressed her agency by adopting a traditional role while others might reflect an adherence to a patriarchal model that the wife found oppressive.⁷⁹ We simply cannot know when to apply which framework.

Finally, it is important to note that the identity of wife continued to be important even as many Christians began to opt for lives of celibacy as can be seen in the common identification of virgins as “brides of Christ.”⁸⁰ Such metaphors suggest that there was a desire to remain connected in some way with the traditional roles of the past. Furthermore, those women who were already married but wished to take vows of celibacy were often advised not to abandon their husbands, but rather to reach an agreement with them.⁸¹ In doing so, a woman might primarily focus on her social identity of Christian but she would still also retain some of the

relationship at all) in the Christian inscriptions of Roman North Africa, see Brent D. Shaw, “Latin Funerary Epigraphy and Family Life in the Late Roman Empire,” *Historia* 33 (1984): 467-68.

⁷⁹ One way in which apparent submission may instead be viewed as a type of agency is in the example of Augustine’s mother, Monica, who avoided being beaten by her husband by not speaking out against him when he was angry and instead approaching him when he was calm in order to offer an explanation. She advises other women to take the same approach, which projects an image of authority in marriage. Furthermore, Augustine’s claim that Monica’s calm behaviour ultimately resulted in the conversion of his father to Christianity clearly demonstrates a strategic value in her submission to her husband (beyond the avoidance of domestic abuse), and it is possible that Monica may have seen her ability to control her reactions to her husband’s outbursts as being full of agency. On Monica’s advice to other wives, see Augustine, *Conf.* 9.9.19 (CCSL 27: 145), trans. Boulding, 224-25. On Augustine’s father’s conversion to Christianity, see Augustine, *Conf.* 9.9.22 (CCSL 27: 146), trans. Boulding, 226. On the connection between service/slavery and wifhood in Augustine’s writings on Monica, see G. Clark, *Monica*, 58-79.

⁸⁰ On the “brides of Christ,” see, e.g., Elizabeth A. Castelli, “Virginity and Its Meaning for Women’s Sexuality in Early Christianity,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2 (1986), 71-73; Daniel Boyarin, “Body Politic among the Brides of Christ: Paul and the Origins of Sexual Renunciation,” in *Aceticism*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 459-78; Brown, *The Body and Society*, 274-76; Teresa M. Shaw, “Virgin Charioteer and the Bride of Christ: Gender and the Passions in Late Ancient Ethics and Early Christian Writings on Virginity,” in *A Feminist Companion to Patristic Literature*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 193-210.

⁸¹ G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 52.

duties traditionally associated with the identity of wife. It is likely that she would have still considered herself to be fulfilling the ideals of the role identity of wife when undertaking certain activities of daily life, such as the continued maintenance of the shared household.⁸²

Mother

Although the identity of mother did occasionally extend beyond the household into the public sphere, I am considering it to be a private identity because the family context is a primarily private one. Thus, while the private power exercised by mothers had implications in the public sphere, any powerful or praise-worthy behaviour tended to be initiated in a private context. In contrast, the perceived power of mothers outside of the private sphere was, as expected, directly connected to and reliant upon the status of their husbands and children. Therefore, the role identity of mother is inextricably linked to the social identity of being part of a particular family group and to the counter-identities of her children.

In the Roman world, one of the main purposes of marriage was to produce legitimate children.⁸³ Marriage and motherhood therefore shared similar responsibilities, expectations, and social power. A woman's social respectability was elevated when she became a wife and mistress of a household, and it was further enhanced when she became a mother.⁸⁴ While the power associated with motherhood was rarely recognized through official laws, a mother had access to agency through her authority over such aspects as children's education, inheritance,

⁸² Tertullian suggests that a man who is unable to look after his own household should choose a "spiritual wife" from the order of widows who will take care of his domestic needs only, noting that only this kind of second marriage is "pleasing to God" (*Exh. cast.* 12.2 [CCSL 2: 1032], trans. ANF 4: 56-57).

⁸³ There does not, however, seem to be widespread negative stigma attached to those women who did not bear children. In some cases, the couple divorced (and one or both remarried seemingly without negative consequences), but some inscriptions attest to long and apparently happy childless marriages. On this, see Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 109-10.

⁸⁴ Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1988), 44.

business affairs, and future spouses through social convention.⁸⁵ The extant sources suggest that, particularly in the case of the higher statuses, the mother was understood to be a powerful figure to whom her children were to defer. As is perhaps to be expected, the mother was deemed especially responsible for overseeing a daughter's training in traditionally female areas, both moral and practical.⁸⁶

Mothers also exercised influence over their children's religious lives in both the Roman and Christian contexts.⁸⁷ Sociological studies suggest that Christian mothers married to non-Christian fathers exercised sufficient influence over their children to result in high numbers of their children opting into Christianity rather than the religion of their fathers.⁸⁸ It is possible (or perhaps likely) that this was accomplished not through active recruiting efforts but simply by

⁸⁵ For an overview of these issues and how changes in the law codes gradually came to reflect the mother's accepted authoritative roles, see Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 41-70.

⁸⁶ Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 227. On the way that Roman daughters learned the expectations of their particular gender roles, see Janette McWilliam, "The Socialization of Roman Children," in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs and Tim Parkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 272-73 (see throughout for an overview of the various influences on sons and daughters). On women's roles in the education of their children in the Christian and Greco-Roman context, and particularly the connections between older women and young girls, see Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Power of Children: The Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 114-25. For the relationship between mothers and their children in the Christian context, see also Geoffrey S. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 150-54. The moral and social education of daughters by their mothers can be seen in modern rural Greece, as mothers are expected to pass on to their daughters skills such as household management, frugality, and proper demeanor that would lead to her becoming a good wife (Dubisch, *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*, 107).

⁸⁷ On the transmission of religious practices from parent to child in the Roman world, see Francesca Prescendi, "Children and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge," in *Children, Memory, and Family Identity in Roman Culture*, ed. Véronique Dasen and Thomas Spath (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 73-94. On Christian teachings being conveyed from mother to child in Late Antiquity, see Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity*, 153-54. For the transmission of Christian teachings in a slightly later period (5th-11th centuries), see Pierre Riché, "L'éducation religieuse par les femmes dans le haut Moyen Âge: le 'manuel' de Dhouda," in *La religion de ma mère: Le rôle des femmes dans la transmission de la foi*, ed. Jean Delumeau (Paris: Cerf, 1992), 37-49.

⁸⁸ On intermarriage and the role of women in secondary conversion, see Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 111-15. (However, Keith Hopkins disputes Stark's assertions of a differential recruitment of women in early Christianity, thus making women's roles in secondary conversion more equal to men's. See Hopkins, "Christian Number", 204-6 esp. n. 40-41). Some scholars argue that children's religion was most heavily influenced by their same-sex parent (Michelle Reneé Salzman, "Aristocratic Women: Conductors of Christianity in the Fourth Century," *Helios* 16 [1989]: 215). However, this could work in a negative way, as mothers were occasionally shown as hindering their children from achieving their full spiritual potential (Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women* [London: Continuum, 1996], 124). See, e.g., Augustine, *Ep.* 243 (PL 33: 1054-9), trans. Teske, 165-71; *Ep.* 188.2.6 (PL 33: 851), trans. Teske, 255-56.

children accompanying their believing parent(s) to worship services (or observing these services in their own homes) and there absorbing the faith.⁸⁹ It should not be assumed, however, that all children of Christian mothers became Christians themselves, nor should it be assumed that all Christian mothers sought to encourage their children to follow their path.⁹⁰ It is likely that for some women the role identity of mother (with its traditional expectations of raising proper Roman citizens) held greater sway in their lives than did the social identity of Christian. Furthermore, even devout Christian mothers might not have seen their beliefs as necessarily changing the way they parented their children and prepared them for adulthood.⁹¹ The meaning of the role of mother differed, depending on women's personal understandings of the role as well as their marital relationship, their social status, or their economic position.

Furthermore, since the identity of mother is reliant upon the counter-identity of child, the interactions between mother and child are essential components to the way that each interprets the meanings of each identity and the way these meanings are played out through actions.⁹² That is, the behaviour of a woman occupying the role of mother will vary depending upon the characteristics of her children. It will also vary depending on the way in which she views the obligations of her role towards her children. As will be shown, many female martyrs viewed

⁸⁹ Margaret Y. MacDonald, "The Role of Women in the Expansion of Early Christianity," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 174.

⁹⁰ Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (London: Routledge, 1995), 135.

⁹¹ For example, while Augustine's mother Monica was a devout Christian and encouraged Augustine to follow this path, she still wanted her son to receive a traditional education and have a successful (non-Christian) career as a rhetor. See Augustine, *Conf.* 2.4 (CCSL 27: 19), trans. Boulding, 64. For other examples, see Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 135-36. On Monica's devotion to Christianity and her encouragement of Augustine's Christianity (which is separate from his career), see also Gillian Clark, *Monica: An Ordinary Saint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 116-44. On other ways in which Monica acted as a typical *materfamilias* (and whether Augustine depicts this as a positive or a negative), see Rebecca Moore, "O Mother, Where Art Thou? In Search of Saint Monnica," in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. Judith Chelius Stark (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 154 and throughout.

⁹² On counter-identities, see Burke and Stets, "Bases of Identities," 115-16.

motherhood as secondary to their martyrdom (once it became necessary to choose one above the other). Even identities as seemingly intrinsic as motherhood were subject to being rejected if other, non-compatible identities became more salient.

Daughter

The role of daughter is difficult to discuss as an independent identity because of the daughter's inherent connection to her parents. That is, the identity of daughter makes little sense without examining the counter-identities of her parents. The success of the daughter reflected the status and virtues of one or both of her parents and the ideal daughter was characterized primarily by an expectation of obedience and deference to her parents.⁹³ The difficulty in discerning the power or agency of the daughter is a reflection of the sources rather than indicative of reality. For example, a symptomatic reading of the frequent refrain for daughters to demonstrate absolute obedience reveals a concern that they frequently failed to do just that. Indeed, it was always possible that daughters would "withhold the kind of socially visible obedience that was crucial to men's standing"⁹⁴ and in that way exercise a measure of agency through resistance. Thus, daughters had the power through their (in)action to make private matters public, which changed the dynamic of the relationship between their parents. Since parents (and fathers in particular) were expected to maintain properly obedient households in order to be validated in their identities, this kind of rebellious action could have social implications beyond the private sphere and could invalidate their identities.

⁹³ Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 221-22. This expectation of obedience seems to have been particularly far-reaching in the mother-daughter relationship as a result of their shared experiences. A daughter's behaviour reflected the example of her mother and daughters, unlike sons, were rarely shown as questioning their mother's will.

⁹⁴ Kate Cooper, "Closely Watched Households: Visibility, Exposure, and Private Power in the Roman *Domus*," *Past & Present* 197 (2007): 8.

The obedience expected of daughters is part of the concept of *pietas*, which includes within it a sense of familial loyalty. While *pietas* exists within other familial relationships such as that between spouses and siblings, it is particularly significant between children and their parents. This is because *pietas* carries with it certain specific duties and expectations that children were expected to perform. In particular, adult children were expected to take care of their parents as they aged and they were responsible for eventually ensuring their proper burial. Children ensured their parents' immortality and played the proper role in honoring their ancestors.⁹⁵ According to the sources, the meaning with which sons and daughters were to understand their role identities was directly tied to properly honouring their parents in life and in death.

Sons and daughters who opted to die before their parents by taking actions that led to martyrdom (in most cases, by choosing not to sacrifice to the emperor when compelled to do so) broke this fundamental ideal and upset the social order at a broader level.⁹⁶ Thus, while daughters were expected to be entirely obedient (and while some may have expressed their agency through absolute and ideal obedience), daughters of non-Christian parents who sought to become martyrs did not fit this mold. They expressed agency not through submission but through resistance. Only by rejecting their duties (and thus, their very identities as daughters insofar as that identity was tied to obedience) were they free to become martyrs. The role identity of daughter and a daughter's place within the family could be replaced by the identity of martyr within the social group of Christians. These two identities could co-exist until the extreme

⁹⁵ On children's *pietas*, see Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity*, 26-27 and 144-45.

⁹⁶ Hanne Sigismund-Nielsen, "Vibia Perpetua – An Indecent Woman," in *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 110-11. On the different frequencies of *pietas* in Roman and Christian inscriptions, see 112-13.

situation of martyrdom resulted in the creation of a hierarchy and the favouring of martyr over daughter.⁹⁷

Evidently, the transformation in role identity that occurred most often was not that from daughter to martyr but from daughter to wife/mother. This shift in identity did not cause the level of anxiety as the shift to martyr did, because it was expected and because it generally did not require a rejection of one identity in favour of the other—a woman continued to be both daughter and wife/mother, depending on her interaction with individuals and their counter-identities. Indeed, much of the daughter's upbringing was focused on ensuring a smooth transition between the roles of daughter and wife. For example, to the extent that daughters were educated (and it seems as though wealthy families often chose to educate their daughters), education was important not for the sake of the daughter herself, but for the benefit of her future sons, whom she could be expected to educate.⁹⁸ In both education and in her obedience to her parents, then, the identity of daughter might best be viewed as a temporary place-holder for the future identities as wife and mother.

Becoming a wife did not mean leaving the identity of daughter behind entirely, however. Most Roman marriages were of the *sine manu* type, in which a woman's father retained control over his daughter's legal and financial concerns even after she was married.⁹⁹ Thus, women

⁹⁷ See King, "Willing to Die for God," 351.

⁹⁸ Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 215. For Roman examples, see Cohick, *Women in the World*, 45-46.

⁹⁹ On *sine manu* marriages, see Cohick, *Women in the World*, 100-1 and Karl-J. Hölkamp, "Under Roman Roofs: Family, House, and Household," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*, ed. Harriet I. Flower (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 127. Children legally belonged to the husband's *familias* rather than the wife's. On the issue of the decline of the *manus* marriage in the Republic and the rise of the *sine manu* marriage, see Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: 'Iusti Coniuges' from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 16-35. On legal marriages in general, see Treggiari again, 43-46. In Christian sources, this can perhaps be seen in the way that Perpetua's father, not her husband, seeks to intercede on her behalf (*Pass. Perp.* 3 [Heffernan: 105-6], trans. Heffernan, 126). Nevertheless, this is not without interpretive problems, on which see Thomas J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26-27, 30-31.

continued to alternate between being a daughter and a wife; marriage did not eliminate a daughter's relationship with either of her parents. Indeed, it seems that daughters remained especially close to their mothers after marriage.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, while a daughter's first marriage was most often determined by her parents alone, it is possible that an adult daughter acted together with her parents in cases of subsequent marriages.¹⁰¹

The traditional association of a daughter's duties with the expectation of marriage was problematized when Christian daughters began to desire perpetual chastity over marriage. This shift in the internalized meaning of what it meant to be a daughter was brought on by the changing emphasis on virginity found within Christian communities. Nevertheless, the rejection of traditional values had the potential to cause tension within families, particularly if the daughter was a Christian but her father or mother was not (or if they simply desired for their daughter to get married).¹⁰² This also put the church in the difficult position of praising the virtue of chastity while continuing to encourage daughters to remain obedient to their fathers' authority.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ On the continuation of the relationship between mothers and their married daughters, see Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 215-23. For the relationship between adult children and their parents, see Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity*, 155-58.

¹⁰¹ Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 215.

¹⁰² Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Life-styles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 52. On the ways in which this tension can be seen in popular Christian literature such as the Apocryphal Acts, see Ross Shepard Kraemer, "The Conversion of Women to Ascetic Forms of Christianity," *Signs* 6 (1980): 298-307. On the way that virgins fit within the context of the family, see Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity*, 130-32.

¹⁰³ Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 52. Although not related to chastity, Augustine's excuses for Perpetua's disobedience of her father's wishes demonstrate the pervasiveness of the notion of daughterly submission to paternal authority (Aug., *Serm.* 281.2 [PL 38: 1284], trans. Hill, 79) Augustine attributes Perpetua's father's behaviour to the Devil: "Saint Perpetua, however, answered her father with such moderation, that she neither violated the commandment by which honor is owed to parents, nor yielded to the tricks which the real enemy was practicing. Beaten at every turn, he caused her father to be beaten with a stick; so that while she had ignored his words, she would at least grieve at his lashes. She, though, did indeed grieve at the insult offered her aged parent; and while she did not give him her consent, she kept her affection for him undiminished." *Ubi sancta Perpetua tanta patri moderatione respondit, ut nec praeceptum violaret, quo debetur honor parentibus, nec dolis cederet, quibus altior agebat inimicus. Qui undique superatus, eundem patrem eius virga percuti fecit; ut cuius verba contempserat,*

Ultimately, a daughter's power was limited to her connections with her family. Her ability to have a say in the choice of husband or to choose chastity depended on her family dynamic, and her actions reflected upon both of her parents, either positively or negatively. Outside of marriage (or non-marriage), there were no tasks dedicated specifically to daughters. Their role was to prepare for their future roles, whatever those roles might be. Nevertheless, the limitation of power within the role is not necessarily indicative of a daughter's lack of agency. Adhering to the wishes of her parents in regards to her education and eventual marriage (or vow of celibacy) brought with it access to the promise of power in the next stage of her life. Furthermore, a daughter may have taken a great deal of pride and satisfaction at fulfilling these obligations and properly honouring her parents. In this way, duty and piety are not necessarily indicators of passivity for this role identity.

Sister

Much like the role identity of daughter, the identity of sister is difficult to analyze as an independent category.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the identity of sister should be seen as being closely related to that of daughter because just as the identity of daughter largely relies on the counter-identity of mother and father for both the internal and external meanings, so does sister only make sense in the context of other siblings and the broader parental context. As children, sisters and brothers were likely seen as children of their parents before they were viewed as siblings of each other.

saltem verbera condoleret. Ibi vero doluit illa senis parentis iniuriam; et cui non parebuit assensum, servavit affectum.

¹⁰⁴ This difficulty is reflected in the secondary literature, which can be easily seen by scanning briefly the index sections of works on the Roman family. It is rare to find an index entry for the term "sister" or even "sibling". One of the exceptions, Suzanne Dixon's *The Roman Family*, has a joint index entry for "sister/brother", suggesting difficulty in separating behaviours of sisters from the behaviours and reputations of their brothers (Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992], 277).

As such, the way that brothers and sisters are discussed in the literature is reflective of their parents rather than of any specific internalized meanings inherent to the sibling identity.¹⁰⁵ Finally, much of the discussion of adult sisters in the extant sources relates to marriage, particularly in relation to elite families. As parents often died before their children reached marriageable age, brothers frequently took on this obligation in place of their fathers.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the identities of brother/father and sister/daughter were blurred.

There are other factors that make it difficult to isolate the “sister” identity. Along with causing a brother to take on a father’s role, the frequency of the death of one parent and the tendency to immediately remarry resulted in a high number of “blended households” made up of siblings, half-siblings, and step-siblings. These different types of siblings might be decades apart in age and might not have ever even lived in the same household as one another.¹⁰⁷ As such, it is difficult to imagine any kind of standard for sibling relationships beyond the general expectations of family *pietas*.

Finally, when considering the identity of sister in the context of late antique Christianity, it must first be ascertained whether the role is being referred to in the sense of a biological sibling, or whether it is used metaphorically to refer to one who is a member of the spiritual family.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Indeed, sisters are often shown to reflect the virtues of their brothers, much the way ideal daughters reflected the virtues of their fathers. See Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 109-10 and the examples of the sisters in the Gracchi family in Ann-Cathrin Harders, “Roman Patchwork Families: Surrogate Parenting, Socialization, and the Shaping of Tradition,” in *Children, Memory, and Family Identity in Roman Culture*, ed. Véronique Dasen and Thomas Späth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 61-62.

¹⁰⁶ See Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 42-43. On the way that sons took on their father’s obligations, see Harders, “Roman Patchwork Families,” 45-72. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the opposite could occur, with sisters ensuring the dowries of their other female relatives, sometimes against the wishes of their brothers (Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 27-28).

¹⁰⁷ Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity*, 9, 28-30, 36.

¹⁰⁸ On the difficulties in determining the characteristics of the Christian family, particularly given the frequency of parental and sibling metaphorical language, see Carolyn Osiek, “What We Do and Don’t Know about Early Christian Families,” in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 198-213 (and pp. 210-12 on what can be known about the effect of metaphorical familial language on sibling relationships specifically). See also Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity*, 43.

The use of sibling language can be found in some of the earliest Christian texts, as in Acts and in the writings of Paul, making it foundational to Christian community creation.¹⁰⁹ Although familial language can help us to understand the way that Christians created and expressed group identities, this thesis will focus on the examples of biological siblings.

This can be difficult however, because just as the frequent metaphorical use of “sister” and “brother” could be problematic to ancient observers,¹¹⁰ so too does it limit modern interpreters, as it is not always clear whether Christians are referring to biological siblings or spiritual ones (or, indeed, both). As such, this thesis will examine only those instances in which a biological sibling relationship is explicit; most often, this occurs when one sibling is a Christian and the other is not—they would not refer to each other using familial language unless they belonged to the same biological family. Because there is a paucity of sources dictating what “ideal” sisterhood should look like, much of the way that the identity of sister is interpreted will rely on individual circumstances. The context for the relationship will determine the level of agency with which sisters are associated and whether they should best be aligned with the role identity of daughter, with a social identity within a family or religious group, or some other combination.

Virgin

In this study, “virgin” refers to those women who opted for chastity over marriage (or who were never married).¹¹¹ One of the defining characteristics of this role is the fact that virgins did not

¹⁰⁹ E.g., the use of ἀδελφοί (“brothers” or “brothers and sisters”) in Acts 6:3, 9:30, 11:1, 15:7 and in the writings of Paul (e.g., Romans 1:13, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1:26, Galatians 1:11, Philippians 1:12, 1 Thessalonians 1:4).

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., the way that some Christian critics used this familial language to accuse Christians of incest (MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, 60-61, 64-65).

¹¹¹ This is not always so straightforward in the ancient texts. Susanna Elm notes evidence of virgin widows, mothers, daughters and wives, thus demonstrating that the vow and the intentions were sometimes more important than the

conform to the typical societal expectations of women as they refused to marry and become wives and mothers.¹¹² Whether women opted for chastity consciously as a way to avoid the traditional expectations of the roles of wife and mother or whether that was an unintended consequence of their decision, we cannot say. Because of the nature of the extant sources, it is impossible to know how the women themselves would have viewed their choice or what caused them to make their decisions.¹¹³ However, in the context of identity theory, it can be posited that some women internalized certain cultural characteristics of virginity and that this unique sense of self led them to adopt or retain the role of virgin instead of the more typical roles of wife and mother. Under identity theory, this sense of self is known as the “person identity” and it occasionally influences the role identities that individuals choose for themselves. That is, it may be posited that those who chose to undertake a vow of chastity may have done so as a result of seeing certain characteristics of themselves as more salient to their overall identity. Their membership in the social group of Christianity allowed this person identity to influence their choice of role identity by making it socially acceptable (and at times even beneficial) to choose this path. However, the sources do not allow us insight into the myriad internal reasons why a woman might have chosen virginity, so this must remain merely a suggestion.

literal definition of “virgin” (Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], 182).

¹¹² Virginia Burrus emphasizes the difficulties that women would have had in resisting the urge to assimilate to these social norms even if they remained in their homes and communities (Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts* [Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1987], 96-99).

¹¹³ Some scholars have argued that women saw these roles as liberating them by allowing them to abandon the traditional roles and to focus on activities of interest to them (e.g., McNamara, “Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought,” *Feminist Studies* 4 [1976], 151; Castelli, “Virginity and Its Meaning,” 68-70, 82-83, 88; Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 2). In contrast, other scholars argue that women who opted for chastity were still operating within the established social models (e.g., Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*, 101-2) and that opting for virginity should not be seen as rejecting traditional female roles (MacDonald, *Women in Early Christianity*, 229). Furthermore, opting out of male control cannot have been the only reason for choosing virginity, since many men also chose celibacy over the traditional expectations of marriage and children (Outi Lehtipuu, “The Example of Thecla and the Example(s) of Paul. Disputing Women’s Roles in Early Christianity,” in *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions*, ed. Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, Paul A. Holloway, and James A. Kelhoffer [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 362).

While virginity before marriage was an expected quality of Roman women, it was rare for women outside of the Christian context to remain virgins in perpetuity. The most visible examples of celibate women in Roman society were the Vestal Virgins, but only a very small number of women made up this priestly order¹¹⁴ and these virgins were exalted precisely because they were uncommon.¹¹⁵ In the Christian context, however, perpetual virgins quickly became common as an increasingly large number of Christian women who opted to remain virgins, often with the encouragement and support of the church hierarchy.¹¹⁶ While there were a variety of reasons for choosing and encouraging chastity and asceticism, this role identity gave women access to a level of social prestige and agency otherwise unavailable to them by granting them a higher status.¹¹⁷ Thus, although there was no institutionalized body of virgins within the church until perhaps the fourth century, the ideal of virginity was part of Christian culture from a very early period.¹¹⁸ Therefore, the power of the role of virgin largely operated in a space outside of the official authority structure while nevertheless being recognized and exalted by officials.

The role of virgin was not entirely unproblematic, however; a woman's choice of celibacy could cause tension within her family, as her parents may have valued chastity but nevertheless still wanted their daughter to marry.¹¹⁹ As noted, this was difficult for some early church authorities, as they tried to reconcile support for celibacy with continuing to encourage marriage

¹¹⁴ G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 51. For comparison between Christian virgins and the Vestal Virgins, see Ambrose, *Ep.* 18.11-12 (PL 16: 1016), trans. NPNF² 14: 418-19. For an overview of the Vestal Virgins and their role in Rome, see, e.g., Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 210-14; Mary Beard et al., *Religions of Rome: A History*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 51-54.

¹¹⁵ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 8.

¹¹⁶ G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 52.

¹¹⁷ Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 84-85.

¹¹⁸ Castelli, "Virginity and Its Meaning," 78.

¹¹⁹ See, e.g., the way Thecla's mother and fiancé react when she announces that she wants to remain a virgin rather than become a wife (*Acta Pauli et Theclae* 14-15 [Lipsius and Bonnet, 245], trans. Elliot, 367). For an examination of the way that the *Acta Pauli et Theclae* is in opposition to the traditional teachings of the pastorals, see MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, 165-78.

as well as for daughters to defer to their fathers' wishes.¹²⁰ As a daughter's decision to remain a virgin needed to be made at the time at which marriage was expected to take place, this led to further complications. Daughters were not considered capable of choosing their own husbands, so the idea that they were able to choose not to have a husband at all was often discounted by family members.¹²¹

The extent to which virgins and ascetics occupied a more or less public and private role and could influence other members of their community was dependent upon their individual contexts. Virgins who were part of an ecclesiastical order would necessarily have held a more prominent place than those who opted for chastity and either retreated into an ascetic community or remained in their family home. Regardless, virgins and ascetics were seen as worthy of admiration and were frequent figures in martyr narratives and apocryphal acts. The different ways in which their identities were understood within these contexts reveals the varied understandings of their roles and social identities.

Mourner

The role of mourner is obviously limited to functioning in a specific social context but the way in which this role is expressed is related to the other roles that individuals play outside of the period of mourning. Just as in other contexts, men and women had different roles to play in the Roman rituals surrounding death and burial. Female relatives of the deceased were responsible for preparing the corpse for display, which included washing the body, anointing it with perfumed oils, and ensuring it was properly clothed while male relatives were responsible for giving the

¹²⁰ G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 52; see Ambrose, *Virg.* 1.65-66 (PL 16.218), trans. NPNF², vol. 10: 373.

¹²¹ Castelli, "Virginity and Its Meaning," 81.

eulogy for the deceased.¹²² Women's activities in relation to the corpse echoed the rituals associated with birth. In both, women were seen as escorting life either into or out of the world; the importance of performing these rituals properly meant that women wielded a certain measure of power.¹²³

In Christian contexts, women continued these traditions, washing and anointing the body before wrapping it in ritually pure garments.¹²⁴ In this way, the role of mourner reflected the duties associated with the roles of mother and wife and occupied an important position within the social identity of family membership. Furthermore, the process of mourning might also be a process of transformation between role identities within the family, since a wife was transformed into a widow with the death of her husband.

¹²² Darja Sterbenc Erker, "Gender and Roman Funeral Ritual," in *Memory and Mourning: Studies on Roman Death*, ed. Valerie M. Hope and Janet Huskinson (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 47-48; Emma-Jayne Graham, "Memory and Materiality: Re-Embodying the Roman Funeral," in *Memory and Mourning: Studies on Roman Death*, ed. Valerie M. Hope and Janet Huskinson (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 30. It should be noted, however, that although these activities incurred a measure of pollution while working to purify the corpse, this did not necessarily translate into a marginalization of women. Instead, it seems to have been a socially accepted difference in obligations (Erker, "Gender and Roman Funeral," 48). On pollution in death more generally and its eventual association with spiritual death/contamination in some Christian rhetorical contexts, see Antigone Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean (50-600 A.D.): A Christianization of the East: An Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 149-61.

¹²³ Erker identifies Roman women as "midwives to the dead" ("Gender and Roman Funeral," 46). The parallels between birth and death rituals (and women's roles therein) can still be seen in some areas of Greece. On this, see C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 67-72.

¹²⁴ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Second Edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 27. This washing and anointing would likely have seemed a natural extension of women's responsibilities of ministering to the sick (Ulrich Volp, *Tod und Ritual in den christlichen Gemeinden der Antike* [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 50; Janet H. Tulloch, "Women Leaders in Family Funerary Banquets," in *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006], 172-73). Tulloch also asserts that "it is probable that those who washed and prepared the bodies for inhumation also administered communion to corpses," but I can find no other evidence connecting the practice of post-mortem communion with women. Administering the Eucharist to corpses (by anyone) or in the presence of corpses was condemned in North Africa at an ecclesiastical council in 393 (*Registri ecclesiae Carthaginiensis* canon 41 [CCSL 149: 185], trans. NPNF² 14: 461). On the importance of the Eucharist as a ritual for the dying, see Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 32-34.

After the women prepared the body, both male and female relatives walked together in the funeral procession from their home to the graveside outside the city and all mourners were expected to display the Roman qualities of self-control and not mourn “excessively.”¹²⁵ However, not all mourners were family members, as some women were professional mourners called *praeficae*, who were hired by families to join the funeral procession and provide an expression of grief not acceptable for members of the family to display. The number of *praeficae* also served to demonstrate the prestige of the family.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, both professional mourners and kinswomen sang laments made up of a combination of weeping and literary refrains.¹²⁷ The distinction between familial mourners and professional ones is important for demonstrating the diversity of even this seemingly-specific role identity. The way in which the role of a mourner was expressed was dictated by factors such as cultural expectations and social identities.

Following the procession and burial, the family held a funerary feast (the *silicernium*) at the graveside in honour of the deceased.¹²⁸ The feasts served to comfort the living, to provide a continued sense of familial relationships in the face of loss,¹²⁹ and to provide sustenance and aid

¹²⁵ Erker, “Gender and Roman Funeral,” 49-50. Excessive grief was criticized as being both womanly and barbarous. See Semellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean*, 76-79.

¹²⁶ Caroll, *Spirits of the Dead*, 4.

¹²⁷ Seremetakis, *The Last Word*, 124. The tradition of female lamentation continues in some areas of modern Greece, although the practice of hiring mourners is more unusual. For an ancient example of female lamentation in the Christian context, see Gregory of Nyssa, *V. Macr.* (PG 46: 991-94), trans. FC 58: 186-87. Nevertheless, this was not without some controversy. On the criticisms of female lamentation by some Christian writers in the East in Late Antiquity, see Semellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean*, 79-84.

¹²⁸ Greek funeral banquets (the *περίδειπνον*) were typically performed in the home of the deceased and thus, except for the fact that they were held in honour of the deceased, were comparable to any other banquet (Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003], 40). On Greek funerals, see Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 21-37.

¹²⁹ That is, funerary feasts echoed the purposes of other kinds of communal feasts, which were (at least in part) methods of community construction. Thus, the gathering at funerary banquets would have been a reassurance that the family group remained intact, albeit modified.

for the deceased themselves.¹³⁰ As with any other meal, the actual procurement of provisions and the preparation of the banquet were probably undertaken by the women of the family.¹³¹ Although funeral banquets took place outside the home at the graveside, they were primarily private family affairs and should be seen as taking place in the private sphere.¹³² Thus, women's roles in relation to funerary feasts is perhaps most equivalent to their roles in the context of the typical family meal at home. The private sphere extended from the family home to the family tomb, and the role identity of mourner might not have always been distinguishable from that of wife or any other family member.

Christian funerals retained many of the same characteristics as Roman funerals. Indeed, although it is likely that prayers or scriptures would have been part of a Christian funeral, no clergy were required to be present at the earliest Christian funerals since there were no institutional rites that had to be given.¹³³ Christian authorities only gradually came to assume control over the rituals surrounding death.¹³⁴ Because of this, there was no reason to hold the funerals in the church and the funerary feasts of Christians should also be perceived as occurring in the private family sphere. Once again reflecting their roles within private meal practices,

¹³⁰ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 42. The Romans believed that souls survived after death (*manes*) and that the dead still remembered their relationships with the living, and thus could receive benefits from their remaining loved ones in the form of nourishing libations.

¹³¹ Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 169.

¹³² Peter Brown notes that for women, the graveside "had always been a zone of 'low gravity,' where their movements and choice of company were less subject to male scrutiny and the control of the family" (Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981], 44).

¹³³ Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 172. See also Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 31-32, 38, and Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings and Jeanine Routier-Pucci (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 123-27, who notes that the notion of a specific funeral liturgy was a later reconstruction of the past and that the development of rituals for death and burial was part of a social process that did not involve clergy or proscriptions from the church hierarchy, such as it was.

¹³⁴ Indeed, most early Christian burials occurred in the same burial grounds as non-Christians. For a discussion of mixed burial grounds and the lack of evidence in Jewish and Christian sources forbidding such mixing, see Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 27-36.

female mourners would have eaten alongside their male mourners at these early funerals.¹³⁵ The role of mourner is closely associated to the social identity of belonging to a particular family, and thus to the role identities of wife, mother, daughter, or sister. In some cases, the social identity of Christian acted as a surrogate family and the private sphere extended beyond immediate relatives. In other cases, however, Christian authorities sought to regulate mourning behaviour in ways that individuals resisted, preferring instead to honour the deceased in the way that they always had, regardless of religious association.

The continuity in mourning practices from non-Christian to Christian contexts will be of significant interest to this study, as will the anxiety this sometimes induced in Christian authorities. The attempts to regulate mourning more generally often mirror attempts to regulate veneration within the cult of the martyrs. The connection between funerals and commemorative practices within the cult of the martyrs can also be seen in the way in which women participated.

Hostess

Within this study, the role of hostess refers to a woman who presides over a particular ritual activity, often within her own home. Hostesses bridged the public-private boundary by inviting non-family members into their domestic space. Like that of a mourner, the role of hostess was closely tied with familial roles in large part because the types of activities over which she presided had parallels in the family context. For the purposes of this study, the most common

¹³⁵ This extension of the private sphere does not continue in contemporary Mediterranean societies, as women are seen leading religious rituals within the domestic sphere while men (such as church officials) perform the rituals in the public spaces of the church (Anna Caraveli, "The Bitter Wounding: The Lament as Social Protest in Rural Greece," in *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*, ed. Jill Dubisch [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986], 171). See also Seremetakis' (*The Last Word*, 163) distinction between mourning rituals (which take place within the household and are led by women) and funerals (which take place in the church and are led by male priests). That women continue to lead the mourning in the private realm represents a significant continuation of the ritual, despite the changes that occurred as a result of the institutionalization of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

way in which a woman could take on the role of a hostess was in the context of a commemorative feast.

In the early Christian movement, some women took on the role of hostesses of house churches, opening up their homes as gathering places for their fellow Christians.¹³⁶ Although most of the named hostesses of house churches are assumed to be widows, it is possible that wives also acted in this manner, since “women were expected to independently manage their households, with or without a husband.”¹³⁷ Thus, the role of hostess of a house church can be seen as an extension of the expectation of hospitality and management that accompanied the roles of wife, mother, and widow. Some women may have understood the role of hostess as fulfilling expectations they held of themselves as wives or widows. That is, opening up their households to Christian gatherings may have been one way that they were able to exercise the agency of their roles as wives or widows in conjunction with their social identities as Christians and their position in the early Christian social group.

Additionally, it is likely that the women who opened up their households to gatherings would have occupied a prominent place in these communities, thus leading to a social identity that was somewhat elevated within the public sphere compared to the typical expectations of their role identities within the private sphere. Furthermore, the social identity of a hostess may also be seen as working in parallel to that of a patron. Both supported communities, whether through finances or through the use of a space to meet. Both identities were also more likely to be available to wealthier women and were a way of exercising agency in a public way.

¹³⁶ Evidence of this appears already in the New Testament sources, e.g., Mary in Acts 12:12, Lydia in Acts 16:14-15, and Nympha in Colossians 4:15.

¹³⁷ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 163.

In addition to being the hostess of a house church (and sometimes in conjunction with it), women also acted as hostesses of banquets, whether in the context of communal meals with other Christians who were meeting in their homes or in the funerary banquets in honour of the dead.¹³⁸ As hostesses of the banquets, women would have organized the guest list and the menu¹³⁹ in addition to being full participants in the banquets themselves.¹⁴⁰ The hostess would also have initiated any toasts that took place during the meal and likely led the prayer or blessings that took place towards the end of the *cena* portion of the banquet.¹⁴¹ For a woman to preside over the meal in such a way was not seen as problematic, in part because there was a distinction between leaders of ritual meals and leaders in a broader sense. Leaders of the meals (the hosts) would not necessarily have been the same person to offer insight into scriptural passages or other kinds of formal instruction. This is consistent with the Greco-Roman banquet tradition wherein someone other than the host would address the group, perhaps by reading a text and offering interpretation.¹⁴² The way in which hostesses participated would have depended upon their own understandings of the place of their role identity within their particular group.

Thus, being the hostess of a house church or a meal within her home gave a woman access to a limited kind of power that did not necessarily translate into positions of authority within the broader Christian community. The agency connected with providing a common space within which the group could create shared experiences did not necessarily lead to official positions, although many of the duties that were carried out by leaders of house churches were analogous to

¹³⁸ On the (lack of) differentiation between different kinds of banquets, see the chapter below.

¹³⁹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 33.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 77. However, the question of whether these hostesses would have reclined alongside the men is unclear and might have varied depending on local or family tradition.

¹⁴¹ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 161.

¹⁴² This likely changed in the second century with the emergence of the model of the "teaching presbyter bishop" (Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 160-62). See Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 47-85, for a discussion of the ways in which someone other than the host often led discussions during philosophical banquets.

those of early presbyters and deacons,¹⁴³ and thus it is possible that hostesses in some cases self-identified by these titles instead. Since the role identity of hostess fits within the accepted aspects of power attributed to traditional role identities of wife and widow, the agency that they expressed in this context would not have been entirely unusual. Furthermore, the simultaneously public and private nature of house churches meant that women could both exercise the kind of agency expected of them in the private context and adopt some aspects of what would eventually become ecclesiastical offices.

Widow

The role of widow is complex, both with regard to the referent of the term “widow” and the different ways this identity operated within the church community. Although the term typically referred to a woman whose husband had died (and who had not subsequently remarried), in some cases widow (χήρα in Greek or *vidua* in Latin) also referred to any woman who lived without a husband. Thus, a woman who had voluntarily left her husband (for example, for the purposes of living chastely) could be called a widow just as legitimately as someone whose husband was deceased.¹⁴⁴ Eventually, widow came to be understood to refer in a more technical sense to a woman who had dedicated herself to chastity and piety and who had devoted herself to God rather than entered into an earthly marriage.¹⁴⁵ Thus, there may be said to be two kinds of widows in relation to the church: those who were destitute and relied upon the church for charity

¹⁴³ Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests*, 76-77; Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, 8.

¹⁴⁴ On this see Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), and Charlotte Methuen, “The ‘Virgin Widow’: A Problematic Social Role for the Early Church?”, *HTR* 90 (1997): 286-87. Tertullian alludes to this situation in *Ux.* 1.6.4 (CCSL 1: 380), trans. ANF 4: 42.

¹⁴⁵ Stevan L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 71-72. Gryson notes the similarities between the roles of virgins and widows and asserts that both came to be called widows, since the “profession of continence [w]as their chief characteristic” (Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, trans. Jean Laporte and Mary Louise Hall [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1976], 13).

and those who were of relatively high status, whether or not they carried out official tasks as part of an “order of widows.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, the role identity of widow was fluid and depended on the particular definition of widow being used and other factors such as wealth and social status. Furthermore, widow could be a social identity as well, when it refers to a social group such as the order of the widows.

These different aspects of the role identity of widow relate to different parts of the spectrum of agency and power. Poor widows were the recipients of the church’s charity; they did not occupy positions of authority and therefore did not exercise much (if any) agency within the community more broadly.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, although being a widow came with some measure of honour by virtue of having achieved the traditional Roman ideals of wifhood (and motherhood), poor widows likely remained vulnerable and had insignificant access to power.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the sheer number of widows that the church eventually supported meant that they were a very visible representation of the church’s benevolence.¹⁴⁹ In that way, these widows may not have exercised much individual agency, but as a group they might have been able to influence the way the church was perceived by outsiders. In some cases, these women lived together, perhaps in the house of a wealthier widow.¹⁵⁰ In these situations, a new kind of household and family dynamic

¹⁴⁶ On the primary sources dealing with the distinction between widows who received charity and those enrolled in an ecclesiastical order, see Ute Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 143-57. There is some debate about whether only those with a financial need were initially able to be enrolled as widows and receive financial assistance from the church. On this position, see Thurston, *The Widows*, 41, 46, 54.

¹⁴⁷ Peter Brown alludes to the lack of agency that this group had, noting that most of the widows were “helpless creatures, destitute old ladies only too glad to receive food and clothing from the hands of the clergy” (Brown, *The Body and Society*, 147).

¹⁴⁸ E.A. Clark, “Engendering the Study of Religion,” 219.

¹⁴⁹ The often-cited example of this is the evidence from Eusebius’ statement that the church in Rome in the mid-third century supported 1500 widows and poor people (Eusebius, *H.e.* 6.43.11 [GCS 9.2: 618], trans. Oulton, 211-12).

¹⁵⁰ MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, 226.

would have been in play, and some widows undoubtedly exercised greater agency than others within the group.

The type of widow that exercised the most agency were those who had occupied influential positions at other stages of life as a result of their wealth and status and who came to make up the order of the widows. Although widows did not necessarily always hold official positions, they were nevertheless influential within the church and performed some duties analogous with the clergy.¹⁵¹ These duties likely varied slightly from place to place, but in general, widows' tasks included the offering of prayers, visiting the houses of other believers, and teaching other women.¹⁵² In some cases it seems as though widows formed communities in which they were expected to pray constantly and which were responsible for looking after those within their ranks who were in need of financial support.¹⁵³

It is important to note that the tasks assigned to widows in a semi-official capacity are closely related to their expected life experiences. In 1 Timothy, the widows' qualities were all ones that were easily recognizable virtues of "respectable" women; widows were expected to draw upon their experience as mothers and wives in their care and instruction of their fellow Christians.¹⁵⁴ Thus, the agency that mothers and wives expressed within their own families extended to their Christian family in widowhood. Just as mothers were expected to look after the education of their children, so were widows expected to take part in educating the younger Christian women.¹⁵⁵ In this way, women could transfer the qualities from their role identities as

¹⁵¹ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 148.

¹⁵² Thurston, *The Widows*, 50-53; see also Gryson, *The Ministry of Women*, 35-41. It should be noted that these duties are primarily derived from the Eastern *Didascalia Apostolorum* and that it is possible that they differed slightly in the West.

¹⁵³ Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows*, 72.

¹⁵⁴ 1 Timothy 5:3-16; see Thurston, *The Widows*, 45-49.

¹⁵⁵ Methuen, "The 'Virgin Widow'," 293.

wives and mothers to their new roles as widows. The social identity of widow (within the order of widows) relied upon a prototypical understanding of this identity and assumptions about the types of experiences they would have acquired. Nevertheless, individual widows would likely have emphasized different aspects of these experiences, depending on their own viewpoints and the needs of their particular communities.

The traditional agency of widows within their family social groups seems to have translated into Christian social group as well. The frequent attempts to place limits on who could belong to the order of widows can be read in part as indications of the power they had within their communities.¹⁵⁶ However, in cases where the order of widows referred also to those who needed financial support from the Christian community, it might also indicate a practical attempt to limit the number of recipients because the community did not necessarily have the funds to provide for everyone who was in need. These poor widows themselves may have been concerned with ensuring that their church had the financial capabilities and willingness to provide them with support.¹⁵⁷ Thus, even poor widows may have exercised agency through either limiting their numbers themselves or finding ways within their own ranks to provide for all in need.

In summary, Christian widows represented the extremes of the spectrum of agency and power as one widow could be the recipient of charity and another could be responsible for providing it. Some widows—those who served in an official capacity—gained a certain

¹⁵⁶ See, e.g., 1 Tim 5:3-16; Tertullian, *Virg.* 9.3 (CCSL 2: 1220), trans. Dunn, 153-54; *Const. Apost.* 3.1 (Funk: 182-85), trans. ANF 7: 426-31. Yet, as Thurston argues, the prohibitions against what widows should not do might have been more than just attempts at constraints. In the case of the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the intention might have been to provide “the best conditions possible (as he understands them) for the spiritual development of the whole church” (Thurston, *The Widows*, 103). This is significant because it demonstrates the power of the widows to influence the greater church. Additionally, it serves as a reminder that just as one must be cautious in imposing modern desires for female liberation on ancient women’s behaviour, so must one be cautious in labeling all male writings about women as necessarily misogynistic or as attempts to limit the activities of women simply because they were women. The relationship between the church and the order of the widows was a complex one and should not be minimized into struggle to reassert patriarchal authority in the face of the widows’ growing influence.

¹⁵⁷ Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows*, 73.

prominence within the community by virtue of having completed their expected role identities of wives and mothers. Although the agency afforded to them was an extension of the agency employed by wives and mothers in the domestic realm, they exercised it in a much more public manner, as when they travelled from house to house and when they were afforded special seating positions within some churches.¹⁵⁸ In this way, the agency of these widows was made visible to outside observers, Christian and non-Christian alike. Still, it is important to note that the evidence suggests that the majority of these women were not using their agency to disrupt the status quo within the church. Instead, they were acting in accordance with the norms of the church and within the constraints that were occasionally placed upon them by male authorities.¹⁵⁹

Prophet

The role identity of prophet is shown to be available to women from the earliest Christian texts. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians demonstrates that it was an accepted part of Corinthian worship (although there were some questions about what form this should take).¹⁶⁰ Female prophets are also mentioned in Luke-Acts.¹⁶¹ In the second century, both male and female prophets were popular and well-attested.¹⁶² The fact that, theoretically, any person could have a

¹⁵⁸ On special seating positions for widows in the church, see, e.g., Tertullian, *Virg.* 9.3 (CCSL 2: 1220), trans. Dunn, 153-54.

¹⁵⁹ See, e.g., Ruether and McLaughlin's assertion that, rather than radicalizing against normative culture, Christian women who were under intense scrutiny by male authorities were likely to have been more scrupulous of their orthodoxy than they otherwise would have been (Ruether and McLaughlin, *Women of Spirit*, 19). It seems to me that widows who occupied visible positions in the church would have little reason to act against an authoritative structure from which they derived their greatest power and agency. This is not to say that there was no friction between the bishops and the widows, but only that the struggle did not necessarily come from widows attempting to use their agency to overturn the patriarchal system. On the tension between widows and bishops, see Charlotte Methuen, "Widows, Bishops, and the Struggle for Authority in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*," *JEH* 46 (1995): 197-213.

¹⁶⁰ 1 Cor 11-14. On female prophets in 1 Corinthians, see Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

¹⁶¹ E.g., Luke 2:36-38; Acts 21:9.

¹⁶² Eisen, *Women Officeholders in the Early Church*, 70-71.

prophetic experience meant that the authority and prestige associated with prophecy was equally available to women as to men.¹⁶³ In some places, therefore, it is likely that female prophets were seen as having power within Christian communities more broadly. This does not, however, mean that this power extended beyond specific prophetic moments.

Criticism of the earliest female prophets came in regards to the way in which they prophesied rather than the content of the prophecies themselves.¹⁶⁴ In some communities, restrictions were placed on when and where women were allowed to reveal their prophetic visions. In Tertullian's Carthage, for example, a female prophet experienced visions during the main assembly but did not reveal them until after the service was over and she was in an appropriately private setting with a select group of listeners.¹⁶⁵ A woman's authority to receive visions was not denied, but her agency in revealing them was limited. It is possible that these prophets preferred revealing their sometimes confusing prophecies within a smaller group; to do so would not necessarily have felt like a restriction was being placed upon them. Indeed, a smaller group may have led to a sense of exclusiveness and being part of a select group. Alternatively, the restriction of women's prophesying to more private settings is perhaps reflective of the expectation that women more appropriately belonged in the private, domestic sphere rather than in the public church.

The most prominent extant examples of female prophets are associated with the movement known as Montanism or the New Prophecy. The New Prophecy is associated closely with the

¹⁶³ Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 145. Indeed, some people seem to have thought that women had the greater ability to receive prophecies than did men. See, e.g., Tertullian, *Marc.* 5.8.11 (CCSL 1: 688), trans. Evans, 561.

¹⁶⁴ Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 155. See, for example, Paul's emphasis that women should only prophesy with their heads covered (1 Cor 11:2-16).

¹⁶⁵ Tertullian, *An.* 9.4 (CCSL 2: 792-93), trans. FC 10: 197.

female prophets Maximilla and Prisca (or Priscilla) alongside Montanus.¹⁶⁶ Although it is clear that Maximilla and Prisca were leaders in the Montanist community, it is not necessary to assume that all female prophets within this group were seen as particularly authoritative.¹⁶⁷ Not enough is known about the community itself to make these kinds of distinctions, and we know nothing about what the women themselves thought beyond what has been recorded of their visions.¹⁶⁸ As such, it is important to recognize the possibility that prophecy signaled an access to certain types of power within hierarchies, but this was not universal.

Prophecy is associated with the cult of the martyrs in that many of the martyrs are depicted as also receiving visions. In the most often discussed case of a female prophet-martyr, Perpetua is depicted as asking for these visions herself.¹⁶⁹ Her visions are also associated with the public sphere: they either come while she is at prayer or otherwise in close contact with her fellow Christians,¹⁷⁰ and the contents of the visions are interpreted for her companions (and intended to be disseminated throughout the rest of the Christian community).¹⁷¹ Furthermore, the narrative clearly demonstrates that Perpetua's prophetic abilities gave her access to a place of authority

¹⁶⁶ This term was first used by Cyril of Jerusalem in the mid-fourth century. Montanists called themselves "The New Prophecy" or perhaps even just "The Prophecy" (Trevett, *Montanism*, 2). For a summary of the way Montanism has been defined in scholarship, see Laura Nasrallah, *"An Ecstasy of Folly": Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 156-62.

¹⁶⁷ Trevett argues that, while Maximilla and Prisca seem to have been equal with Montanus, it is not clear whether they were (as is sometimes asserted) more prominent than him. She notes that the fact that the earliest sources pay the most attention to the women could instead be interpreted as an example of women being perceived as the most dangerous and the most compelling (Trevett, *Montanism*, 162).

¹⁶⁸ For the oracles attributed to Montanist communities, see Ronald E. Heine, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1989) and William Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997).

¹⁶⁹ *Pass. Perp.* 4 (Heffernan, 106-7), trans. Heffernan 127.

¹⁷⁰ Perpetua's brother encourages her to seek her first vision, and her vision of Dinocrates comes while she is praying with the group (*Pass. Perp.* 4.1, 7 [Heffernan, 106-7, 109-10], trans. Heffernan 127, 128-29).

¹⁷¹ After her final vision, Perpetua offers her own interpretation (that they were to die and through death find victory over the devil) and expresses her desire that the content and meaning of the vision be shared: "let whoever wishes to write about it, do so" (*Pass. Perp.* 10.14-15 [Heffernan, 113], trans. Heffernan, 130: *Si quis voluerit, scribat*). For more on the public and ritual elements of Perpetua's visions, see Katharina Waldner, "Visions, Prophecy, and Authority in the *Passio Perpetuae*," in *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 114-15.

and leadership in her community, as she is depicted as speaking for the other members of her group of martyrs.¹⁷² It is possible that she was looked to as an authority because of her prophetic gifts even before she was arrested and became admired as a potential martyr,¹⁷³ or that the redactor framed her as authoritative by using her visions. In any event, it is clear that she is recognized not just by the social identity of Christian but by the role identity of prophet and that this role identity gave her access to a higher level of authority than other martyrs or Christians.

Patron

One of the most common role identities that women adopted in the public sphere was that of patron, which functioned alongside the counter-identity of client.¹⁷⁴ Christian patronage should be seen as an extension of the Roman patronage system, which formed an important foundation of social relationships throughout the empire. Roman patronage had four distinct characteristics: it was a reciprocal social relationship involving the exchange of goods and services over time; it was personal rather than commercial; the relationship was asymmetrical (that is, between people of different social levels);¹⁷⁵ and it was voluntary rather than legally enforceable.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² *Pass. Perp.* 18.5 (Heffernan, 119), trans: Heffernan, 133.

¹⁷³ Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 43; see also Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 66.

¹⁷⁴ The system of patronage in Rome has been extensively studied. On this phenomenon in general, see, e.g., Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury (eds.), *Patrons and Clients: In Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977); Richard Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and S.N. Eisenstadt and Luis Roniger, *Patrons, Clients, and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). However, as Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 194, note, these studies generally ignore the presence of female patrons. On patronage and Christian women, see Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 273-88.

¹⁷⁵ Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 1.

¹⁷⁶ Peter Garnsey and Greg Woolf, "Patronage of the Rural Poor in the Roman World," in *Patronage and Ancient Society*, ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (London: Routledge, 1989), 166-67; see also Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London: Routledge, 1989), 3.

Female patrons had both male and female clients and could patronize both individuals and groups. Actions undertaken by female patrons included donating funds to be used to build or renovate temples and synagogues, construct public baths, and assist the poor.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, apart from the fact that women were not permitted to vote in public elections or be elected, there does not seem to have been any gendered restrictions on the activities of female patrons.¹⁷⁸ As in other aspects in the Roman world, wealth and social status were the most important determinants of a person's public activities. Thus, the role identity of patron was limited by the wealth of the individual, and the social identity of the patron (that is, the family, occupational, or religious group to which they belonged) determined the way in which this patronage was manifested.

Early Christian texts attest to the continuation of female patronage. For example, New Testament sources demonstrate that wealthy female converts exercised both personal and group patronage.¹⁷⁹ Later texts show that Christian women of both elite and non-elite status were expected to participate in the patronage system, particularly in relation to the poor, giving alms, ministering to the sick, and even founding poorhouses.¹⁸⁰ As Christianity evolved to become the

¹⁷⁷ For more detail on these and for examples of some female patrons in the Roman world, both elite and non-elite, see Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 199-209.

¹⁷⁸ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 209.

¹⁷⁹ Personal patronage: Paul's patron, Phoebe (Rom 16:2). Group patronage: the house churches held in the homes of Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), Nympha (Col 4:15), and Prisca, with her husband Aquila (1 Cor 16:19). On women's patronage in the missionary activities of the Judaism and the early Jesus movement, see Shelly Matthews, *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetoric of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). On patronage in the New Testament more generally, see Jens-Uwe Krause, *Spätantike Patronatsformen im Westen des Römischen Reiches* (München: C.H.Beck, 1987); John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004); Stephan J. Joubert, "One Form of Social Exchange or Two? 'Eugertism,' Patronage, and Testament Studies," *BTB* 34 (2004): 167-77. For an epigraphic study of this subject, see Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: An Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St Louis: Clayton, 1982). For an overview of female patronage in particular in the early church, see Carolyn Osiek, "Diakonos and prostasis: Women's Patronage in Early Christianity," *HTS* 61 (2005): 347-70.

¹⁸⁰ Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 46. See, e.g., Tertullian's description of women's duties that included visiting the poor and the imprisoned, providing food to the less fortunate, and providing hospitality to traveling pilgrims (*Ux.* 2.4

religion of the empire, identifiably Christian buildings became more numerous and prominent. Wealthy women continued to demonstrate their piety by sponsoring the construction of Christian buildings, including churches, martyr shrines, and cemetery complexes.¹⁸¹

Ultimately, patronage depended less on gender than on wealth and status.¹⁸² Only wealthy women could become patrons and have access to the kind of power associated with the public recognition of one's generosity and piety. As financial supporters, they had power within the community but perhaps lacked the authority to contribute to its growth or focus. Their agency was restricted to choosing whether or not to contribute to the growing movement. Still, patronage allowed for powerful women to extend their influence beyond their family sphere into broader society.¹⁸³ The role identity of patron could exist alongside almost every other kind of identity; what mattered most was not the stage of life or marital status but the level of wealth and social status.

Client

While only wealthy women could act as patrons, many more women occupied the counter-identity of clients, as clientage had far fewer limitations than did patronage. Much of the actions of women in relation to martyrs can be compared to the reciprocal relationship between clients and their patrons. Clients were not simply expected to do their patron's bidding but rather played

[CCSL 1: 388-89], trans. ANF 4: 46). While these women would not necessarily have been considered patrons, their activities certainly fell within the familiar patronage framework.

¹⁸¹ Carolyn Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial Practices and the Patronage of Women," in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context*, ed. Laurie Brink and Deborah Green (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 248. On the endowment of churches in Rome by private patrons, see Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, 245-48.

¹⁸² Clark, "Engendering the Study of Religion," 219.

¹⁸³ Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial Practices," 258.

an important part in maintaining and increasing their patron's social role.¹⁸⁴ Patrons relied upon clients to behave in a particular manner, and while individual clients might not have had power, clients as a group had the ability to influence the way in which their patron was perceived. The duties that clients were expected to perform for their patrons could vary.¹⁸⁵ In general in the Empire, clients went to the homes of their patrons every morning. This *salutatio* served to demonstrate the patron's prestige (the more people who came to his or her home, the more prestigious he or she was) and provided the clients with an opportunity to ask their patron for favours. Female clients participated in the *salutatio* just as male clients did.¹⁸⁶ In addition to providing supplementary labour and support in times of political crises or warfare,¹⁸⁷ clients (both men and women) were expected to acknowledge publicly the favours bestowed upon them by their patrons and to demonstrate sufficiently their gratitude for these favours. This was often done through dedicatory inscriptions.¹⁸⁸ Through praise, both verbal and inscriptional, the client was able to enhance the reputation of the patron, both during life and after death.¹⁸⁹

In the context of the cult of the martyrs, clients of martyrs traveled to martyr shrines, seeking healing,¹⁹⁰ and venerating relics.¹⁹¹ The actions that these client-venerators undertook were likely determined by the individual's perspective on the cult of the martyrs and his or her

¹⁸⁴ James Scott, "Patronage or Exploitation?," in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*, ed. Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury (London: Duckworth, 1977), 22.

¹⁸⁵ On the differences in the expectations of clients over various time periods and locations, see the diverse examples in Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends*, 43-165.

¹⁸⁶ Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial Practices," 257.

¹⁸⁷ Scott, "Patronage or Exploitation?," 24.

¹⁸⁸ Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 10.

¹⁸⁹ Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 27.

¹⁹⁰ See, e.g., Aug. *Civ. Dei* 22.8 (CCSL 48: 815-27), trans. Dyson, 1120-34.

¹⁹¹ A detailed exploration of the development of the cult of the relics is outside the purview of this study. On the emergence of the cult of relics in North Africa, see Victor Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques: en Afrique chrétienne aux premiers siècles: les témoignages de Tertullien, Cyprien et Augustin à la lumière de l'archéologie africaine* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980), 230-79. For the material evidence of relics, see Yvette Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae: Le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IV^e au VII^e siècle* (Paris: École française de Rome, 1982), 551-80. For an overview of the development of the cult of relics more generally, see John Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of the Saints in the Early Christian West, c. 300-1200* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), esp. 6-79.

own place within it. Thus, the role identity is reliant upon the client's social context and likely varied greatly over time and in different locales.

The impetus for seeking comfort from the martyrs could be strictly private, such as the desire to be healed from an illness. Nevertheless, Christians were encouraged to publicize the healing they experienced. Thus, the role identity of a client could be both private and public, and in certain situations was closely associated with the social role of Christian. That is, when a martyr's client expressed their role through the publication of miracles, this helped to create a sense of unity within the Christian social identity in relation to the cult of the martyrs. Furthermore, when these accounts were read aloud during public gatherings, they allowed for those Christians who did not experience healing first-hand to still take part in this aspect of the cult of the martyrs.¹⁹²

Those clients of martyrs who experienced and published miracles primarily gained authority by virtue of having received this miracle from the martyr. However, they also often had social authority based on their status and wealth, as can be seen in the two examples of female clients that Augustine reports in *The City of God*. Both women initially failed to publish their accounts, but Augustine encouraged them to change their minds. In the first case, a woman named Innocentia is described as "one of its [Carthage's] foremost citizens, a deeply religious woman" whose cancer of the breast was miraculously cleared after she was told in a dream to have a newly baptized person make the sign of Christ over the site of her cancer. When Augustine heard that Innocentia had not told anyone of this before, he reacted with anger,

¹⁹² Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 70; Power, *Veiled Desire*, 43.

rebuking her with “some severity.”¹⁹³ Likewise, the *clarissima femina* Petronia only published the account of her healing at the shrine of St. Stephen in Uzali after Augustine’s prompting.¹⁹⁴

In both cases Augustine seems to have believed that the women’s wealth and status would help to legitimize the accounts of the miracles.¹⁹⁵ In other words, female clients also retained whatever social prestige they possessed through their role identities as heads of households or patrons. Their authority over others would have been recognizable, even if everyone was there to participate in the same rituals. The cult of the martyrs provided a context in which multiple systems of agency and authority were in play simultaneously in both the mundane and the spiritual realms. Women who were patrons could become clients to martyrs who were themselves considered to be intercessors before God.

The social identity of client was fluid; depending on the person(s) to whom she was relating, a woman could be both a client and a patron. Contingent on the context, a woman’s position as a client might take precedence over other identities.¹⁹⁶ In this study, women often participated in the martyr cult as symbolic clients of the martyrs and exercised their duty to their patron by acknowledging the role the martyr-patron played on their lives through activities such as the publication of miracles.

Martyr

¹⁹³ Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 (CCSL 48: 818-19), trans. Dyson, 1124-25: *religiosissima femina, de primariis ipsius civitatis [...] Hoc ego cum audissem et vehementer stomacharer in ille civitate atque in illa persona non utique obscura factum tam ingens miraculum sic latere, hinc eam et admonendam et paene obiurgandam putavi.*

¹⁹⁴ Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 (CCSL 48: 824-25), trans. Dyson, 1130-31.

¹⁹⁵ Power, *Veiled Desire*, 43. On Augustine’s changing views of relics and the promotion of miracles, see Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 32-36.

¹⁹⁶ For example, a Christian woman may participate in events in honour of her patron, despite the fact that some Christian authorities thought that such gatherings were inappropriate for Christians to attend. Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities*, 76-77.

The most public way for women to participate in the cult of the martyrs was to become martyrs themselves, although this was only a viable option for a relatively short period of time. Indeed, a small number of women actually became martyrs,¹⁹⁷ particularly in comparison to the number of Christians who subsequently venerated these martyrs for centuries after their deaths.

Both men and women could become martyrs. Although there are differences in the way they are described in the literary sources and in the details of their punishments,¹⁹⁸ male and female martyrs shared the same fundamental experience. Through the act of being willing to die for their Christian identities, martyrs of both genders were elevated within the community to almost clerical positions.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, shrines in the cult of the martyrs were visited by all Christians, regardless of the gender of either the martyr or the venerators.

While the situations in which Christians were arrested, charged, and ultimately sentenced to death for their Christianity varied, all those who opted to assert their identities as Christian rather than acquiescing to the demands of the imperial authorities did exercise a measure of rebellious agency. Both male and female martyrs are depicted as resisting the imperial authorities' attempts to force them to recant by giving up their names and former social statuses

¹⁹⁷ The actual number of Christians who died during the persecutions is impossible to discern, but scholars agree that it was relatively small. See e.g., G.E.M. De Ste Croix, "Aspects of the 'Great Persecution'," *HTR* 47 (1954): 104; Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 12, citing W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), 536-37.

¹⁹⁸ This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. On female martyrs in general, see, e.g., L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Gail P.C. Streeter, *Redeemed Bodies: Women Martyrs in Early Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

¹⁹⁹ Martyrs were thought to be able to act as intercessors with God and imprisoned confessors were sometimes thought to be able to forgive sins by virtue of their willingness to die. See e.g., Cyprian, *Ep.* 27 (CCSL 3B: 125-32; ACW 43: 112-14) in which Cyprian writes against a confessor, Lucianus, who was distributing certificates of forgiveness on behalf of another martyr, Paulus. On Cyprian's struggles to limit the formal authority of the martyrs, see Allen Brent, "Cyprian's Reconstruction of the Martyr Tradition," *JEH* 53 (2002): 241-68.

and identifying themselves solely as Christian.²⁰⁰ This self-identification functioned in part as a rejection of the dominant culture by removing from themselves any names or identities beyond “Christian.” Particularly for female martyrs, this new name also released them from certain social and patriarchal expectations.²⁰¹

The act of suffering was an important part of the martyr identity. Particularly with female martyrs, pain was transformed into a kind of power for the women who were able to endure it.²⁰² In the *Acts of Lyon and Vienne*, for example, Blandina is described as being filled with such power that she was able to defeat those who were inflicting the pain.²⁰³ Even the potential for suffering was enough for the communities to view imprisoned confessors as powerful and allow them to adopt authoritative roles while they were still alive.²⁰⁴ Additionally, the literary accounts of martyrs depict them as gaining strength through suffering in part because they knew that their suffering would lead to glory in the afterlife.²⁰⁵ Additionally, the martyrs’ strength through suffering should be seen as agency, whether or not they had an “active intention” to become exemplars for their communities through their deaths. That is, martyrdom was a form of agency in part because of the impact that their suffering had both on the way the community came to

²⁰⁰ This pattern appears in nearly every martyr narrative. See, e.g., Perpetua’s response in *Pass. Perp.* 3.2 (Heffernan, 105), trans.: Heffernan, 126.

²⁰¹ Patricia Cox Miller, “The Devil’s Gateway: An Eros of Difference in the Dreams of Perpetua,” *Dreaming* 2 (1992): 48. However, such agency against (male) authority also needed to be qualified in later writings, lest women think that such agency could be translated into other aspects of their lives and interactions with men. See, e.g., Augustine’s explanation that Perpetua’s disobedience to her father is acceptable only because it is done in order to retain her Christianity and achieve the ultimate goal of martyrdom. Thus, the rejection of the identity of daughter should only be done in similarly extreme cases (Augustine, *Ser.* 281.2 [PL 38: 1284], trans. Hill, 79).

²⁰² The focus on women and slaves in martyr texts emphasizes that pain can be empowering even for those who are the most subordinated within society (Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* [London: Routledge, 1995], 115).

²⁰³ Eusebius, *H.e.* 5.1.18 (GCS 9.1: 408), trans. Oulton, 142; Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 114.

²⁰⁴ E.g., Perpetua resists putting on the clothing of the priestesses of Ceres and the officials yield to her demands (*Pass Perp.* 18.4-6 [Heffernan, 119-20], trans.: Heffernan, 133). On potential suffering and power in the *Passion of Perpetua*, see Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 104-10.

²⁰⁵ Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 108-9.

view them and on the way their suffering influenced their community.²⁰⁶ The impact and meaning of the identity of martyrs is dependent not only on the actions of the martyrs themselves, but also on the way they are remembered after their deaths.²⁰⁷

The identity of “martyr” functioned as all three bases of identities: role, social, and person. While there was certainly more than one way to fulfill the role identity of martyr (depending, for example, on whether one sought out authorities or waited to be found, whether one rejected or did not reject family members, and how one suffered or how death was experienced), it is more consistent than other types of identities in that death was the only way to truly fulfill this identity. The social identity of martyr had greater diversity, in that martyrs functioned within the community both when they were still alive (for instance, engaging with visitors in prison, or interacting with authorities in a public way) as well as after their deaths (through their representations in martyrologies, sermons, for example). Nevertheless, the stereotypical expectations for the social identity of martyr—suggesting, for example, that they go joyfully rather than fearfully to their deaths—certainly influenced the way that some martyrs experienced this identity for themselves (in terms of their expectations for themselves and the way that they acted) as well as the way that they were depicted in later writings. Finally, person identity is relevant for our understanding of martyrs in that the number of people who actually became martyrs was so small that it suggests there was something in particular about the individuals who opted to be martyred. That is, it may say something about the way these individuals internalized the characteristics of martyrdom and understood these characteristics in relation to their position

²⁰⁶ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 87.

²⁰⁷ On martyrdom identities and community construction, see, e.g., Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Grig, *Making Martyrs*; and Johan Leemans and Jürgen Mettepenningen (eds.), *More Than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).

in their community. While limitations associated with gender or social status may have prevented individuals from adopting certain person identities, the act of martyrdom could be undertaken by anyone.²⁰⁸

Although the identity of martyr ultimately overrides all prior identities (we know of most martyrs because of their martyrdom, not because of their prior lives), we become aware of prior identities through the accounts of martyrdom. Female martyrs in particular are associated with various familial identities within martyrologies. The transformation of these roles, alongside the power that is inherent in the martyr identity, will be an important area of focus for this study, as it suggests a fluidity to the types of agency associated with various identities. Furthermore, the tension between the way that female martyrs are depicted in texts and the way women are shown to memorialize them within the cult of the martyrs will reveal much about the way female martyrs were imitated and how this imitation manifested itself in women's daily life and ritual practices.

Conclusion

It is challenging to think about the lives and behaviours of women in Late Antiquity for several reasons. First, the sources have various biases and limitations. The majority of sources were written by and for men, regarding issues that primarily occupied the male domain. Thus, whenever women appear in these sources, their depictions must be interrogated against the biases inherent in the male discourse and must be examined for ways in which glimpses of real women

²⁰⁸ One instance in which such a worldview may be articulated is in the eagerness of Ignatius of Antioch to become a martyr and his insistence that none of his supporters try to obtain his release. I propose that this reveals that Ignatius' individualized understanding of martyrdom is a result of his own personal viewpoint and that, for Ignatius, "martyr" should be classified as a person identity as well as a role and social one. See, e.g., Ignatius, *Rom.* 4 (SC 10: 110, 112), trans. SC 10: 111, 113.

can be reconciled with the much more prevalent rhetorical ideal. Furthermore, different types of sources have different expectations and goals, which must also be taken into consideration. Sources in which information on women might be uncovered include inscriptions, fresco images, and literary works (treatises, letters, sermons, and martyr texts); all of these offer different types of data that must be carefully analyzed in order to create a fuller picture.

In addition to the issue of the sources, it is also important to account for the changing circumstances, social obligations, roles, and life stages of women in late antiquity, however they are represented in the extant sources. Sources that do reference women and women's lives must be read carefully to determine the types of women they are discussing and the circumstances in which the specific factors discussed in the text may be applied. It is essential to be as specific as possible, while recognizing that some generalities in terms of categories must always nevertheless exist.

While scholars have been sophisticated and careful in interpreting sources, taking their nature into account, and reading both with and against the grain, there is still much opportunity to further nuance the approach to women's behaviours and roles within specific contexts. The methodology and terminology proposed in this chapter provides an overview of the way in which women's roles will be explored in the rest of the thesis. Theories of identity and agency allow for specific roles to be examined in a way that recognizes the interaction between the roles and the diversity and complexity within the roles themselves.

The roles in this chapter were chosen because they most closely relate to women's participation within the cult of the martyrs as well as because there is enough information in the extant sources about these roles to engage in detailed analysis. Other roles certainly existed, whether they are visible in the sources or not. The brief overviews of each identity in this chapter

are intended to provide a foundation moving forward, in which the different ways that these roles functioned in the cult of the martyrs will be explored in more depth. Nevertheless, even in these overviews it has been possible to reveal the unique attributes of each role along with the ways in which some of them overlap with each other. As can be shown by applying the theory of intermittent identities, women chose to adopt different identities depending on specific contexts and few of these identities were either permanent or exclusive. This fluidity adds a level of complexity to any attempts to isolate individual women's levels of power and agency. As contemporary sociological studies have shown, often behaviour that outwardly appears to be submissive or lacking in agency is in fact seen as empowering by the women themselves. This discrepancy must be kept in mind when attempting to draw conclusions about the agency of ancient women.

Chapter Two:

Female Martyrs and the Rejection/Reconfiguration of Identities

At the centre of veneration in the cult of the martyrs are the martyrs themselves. Examining issues such as how these martyrs were described and the qualities that were attributed to them can provide some important insights into the values of their particular communities. Although both men and women venerated male and female martyrs, this chapter will focus on female martyrs. This strategy will allow for comparisons between female martyrs and the women who venerated them in subsequent chapters. The identities that are used to describe female martyrs (and which they are occasionally depicted as asserting for themselves) can demonstrate the ways in which these identities were perceived. The identities that are associated with female martyrs can also reveal areas of agency within the cult of the martyrs that venerated the martyrs may imitate.

For the purposes of this chapter, only martyrs originating in North Africa will be considered, even though some martyrs from outside of the region (such as Thecla, for example) were known and popular within certain North African congregations.¹ The focus on one particular region reflects the local nature of most martyr veneration; the majority of martyrs are only known by names inscribed in local shrines and churches, with little or no information about the circumstances of their martyrdoms, their lives before their deaths, or the characteristics for which they are remembered.² Indeed, it is rare to have a literary account of a martyr's death. The martyr acts that do exist have contributed to their subjects being remembered beyond their local communities, both in Late Antiquity and beyond. As these literary accounts contain information

¹ When comparisons between North African martyrs and their contemporaries from elsewhere in the empire are fruitful, these will be noted.

² And indeed, the inscriptions that have been found likely represent a fraction of those that once existed and do not necessarily accurately reflect the intensity or scope of the persecutions. See Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 464-74.

that reflects the way those in the community wish to commemorate their heroes, they may be analyzed to uncover what aspects of these martyrs were deemed most noteworthy. In addition, the way in which Christian authors like Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, and Quodvultdeus discuss martyrs helps to further nuance the understanding of the role of martyrs within Christian communities. Instances in which their descriptions of the martyrs differ from extant martyr narratives will be particularly helpful for drawing conclusions about the way in which values shifted depending on context. Just as individuals might adopt different identities under different circumstances, so might different aspects of martyrs' identities be highlighted or suppressed in subsequent retellings.

This chapter will first provide a brief overview of martyrdom in North Africa in order to situate it within the proper geographical and temporal context. This will be followed by a short discussion of the female martyrs from North Africa who are mentioned in literary texts (whether martyrologies, sermons, treatises, or some combination of these genres). Following a brief description of each, I will then examine the types of identities these women held in addition to being martyrs, following the roles that were laid out in the previous chapter. This will be done in order to demonstrate the diversity of North African female martyrs, many of whom are often overshadowed by the towering figure of Perpetua. By considering all the North African female martyrs together, it will be made clear that Perpetua's experience is not necessarily representative and that one must look more broadly in order to gain a more nuanced perspective on the variety of ways in which women experienced martyrdom. Ultimately, Heffernan's claim about Perpetua might be applied to all martyrs: the identities of female martyrs "involved multiple categories of shifting allegiances at different stages in [their lives], some of which were

overlapping and contradictory.”³ These contradictory categories and shifting allegiances reinforce the complexity of women’s experiences even within the seemingly uniform phenomenon of the cult of the martyrs.

Martyrdom in North Africa

The importance of martyrdom in the development of Christianity in North Africa can be seen in the fact that the first historical record of Christianity in North Africa occurs in reference to the martyrdom of a group of five women and seven men.⁴ The *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* records the names of those who died along with their testimony in front of the proconsul, providing the first glimpse into the way that these deaths were configured within the uniquely African context.⁵ The African origin (particularly Nartzalus) of the names on the Scillitan list provides insight into the multicultural makeup of North African Christianity by the late second century.⁶

That extant sources for North African Christianity begin with martyrdom may suggest a particularly strong affinity between the population and the ideologies of martyrdom.⁷ In particular, some scholars draw connections between the African and Punic practices of human (including child) sacrifice and the strong martyr tradition.⁸ In addition to human sacrifice, the

³ Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 28.

⁴ Shaw calls the Scillitan narrative “the foundational story of the Christian church in Africa [...] these men and women were *their* apostolic foundation” (*Sacred Violence*, 589, emphasis original). On the origins of North African Christianity, including the role of the Scillitan narrative and possible links to churches in Rome and the East, see also J.B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustine to Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 223-26.

⁵ François Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, trans. Edward L. Smither (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 10; *Pass. Scil.* (Musurillo, 86-89).

⁶ Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 122; see also Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, 10.

⁷ Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, 9.

⁸ Brent D. Shaw, “Cult and Belief in Punic and Roman Africa,” in *The Cambridge History of Religions in the Ancient World*, vol. 2, ed. Michelle Renee Salzman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 243: “It is hardly accidental that in Christian times Africa became the land of the blood of the martyrs. On North African Christianity’s connection with human sacrifice, which has some connections with martyrdom but is not completely

notion of self-sacrifice has a prominent place in Carthage's legendary past, including, for example, Virgil's account of the suicide of Queen Dido.⁹ The connection between voluntary martyrdom and suicide would thus appear to be particularly powerful for those North African Christians who had heard these origin stories throughout their lives.

However, as Moss points out, the notion of martyrdom as sacrifice was not universal. That is, martyrdom was constituted differently in different texts, with sacrifice being only one of many potential interpretations.¹⁰ Thus, making these kinds of connections might be anachronistic and might obscure the multitude of intentions behind the creation and promulgation of these texts and accounts. Furthermore, while the authors of the texts may have been drawing on the culturally available symbols of sacrifice, this does not mean that the martyrs themselves viewed their own actions in this same manner. In the rare instance in which we appear to have the martyr's own words (as in the *Passion of Perpetua*), we must interrogate the text closely for clues about what the martyrs themselves intended to signify. Additionally, while North Africa appears to have had a unique religious tradition before its official entrance into the Roman Empire,¹¹ by the time of Christianity, the Roman influence was strong, and so the martyrs' texts have the potential to be filled with a combination of Roman, African, Jewish, and Christian ideals and symbols.¹²

analogous, see also Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 588; Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 49-56. On the evidence of human sacrifice in pre-Christian traditions in North Africa and its significance, see Shaw, "Cult and Belief," 239-43. For a discussion on human sacrifice in Roman non-Christian and Christian discourses, see J.B. Rives, "Human Sacrifice among Pagans and Christians," *JRS* 85 (1995): 65-85. For the connection between human sacrifice and the deaths of criminals in the arenas in North Africa, see, e.g., D.L. Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre* (London: Routledge, 2000), 142, and Susan Raven, *Rome in Africa* (London: Routledge, 1993), 154.

⁹ Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 53-54. Tertullian cites Dido in his treatise to the martyrs, *Mart.* 4.5 (CCSL 1: 6), trans. FC 40: 25-26.

¹⁰ Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 123-25.

¹¹ Shaw, "Cult and Belief," 235-39.

¹² Although not focused on symbols specifically, J.B. Rives explores the various influences on the North African collective religious identities (with particular focus on Carthage) throughout his work, *Religion and Authority in*

Whether or not the reasons for the surge in popularity and prominence of North African martyrs can be attributed to their cultural past, it is clear that martyrdom was particularly popular in the region. Nearly two decades after the Scillitan narrative, the account of the martyrdom of Perpetua and her companions in Carthage in 203 provided a powerful template that was imitated by subsequent texts, and martyrdom is frequently referenced in the writings of its contemporary, Tertullian.¹³ Approximately half a century later, the imperial persecutions of Decius (250-251)¹⁴ and Valerian (257-260)¹⁵ created more martyrs; their effects on the community were recorded in the letters of the bishop Cyprian of Carthage. Cyprian's death under the Valerian persecution elevated the concept of martyrdom further, as his high social status made his death even more valuable as a model among various Christian communities.¹⁶ Following a short period of relative calm, the Great Persecution under Diocletian and the Tetrarchy created yet further martyrs in North Africa, although perhaps to a lesser extent than in other regions in the Empire.¹⁷

However, the rise of Constantine and the Edict of Milan (313) brought with it new challenges, as attempts at unification resulted in Christians from minority sects becoming martyrs. In North Africa, these post-Constantinian martyrs came from a group that came to be

Roman Carthage. On public Roman cults, see 17-96; on traditional African cults, see 132-72; on the scant evidence of Jews in Carthage, see 214-22.

¹³ See, e.g., Tertullian's treatise on some imprisoned martyrs in *Mart.* (CCSL 1: 3-8), his defense of Christianity in the face of some persecuting authorities in *Apol.* (CCSL 1: 85-171), his rejection of flight in times of persecution in *Fug.* (CCSL 2: 1135-55), and his treatise to the proconsul of Africa who had started persecuting Christians in *Scap.* (CCSL 2: 1127-32).

¹⁴ The Decian persecution did not specifically target Christians. See J.B. Rives, "The Decree of Decius and the Religion of Empire," *JRS* 89 (1999): 135-54.

¹⁵ For an overview of both the Decian and Valerian persecutions, see Reinhard Selinger, *The Mid-Third Century Persecutions of Decius and Valerian* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004).

¹⁶ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 590.

¹⁷ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 591. For the experience of the Great Persecution in the Eastern context, see G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, ed. Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 59-68. On Eusebius' account of the effect of the Persecution's edicts in Palestine and the East, see Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 148-63.

identified as the Donatists,¹⁸ which traced its origins to the disagreements that arose during the periods of persecution over the proper way to deal with those who lapsed (that is, those who chose to acquiesce to the Roman authorities' demands rather than to become martyrs). Prominent bishops throughout the third century debated the question of whether or not the *lapsi* should be re-accepted into the Church, with no consensus being reached.¹⁹ After Galerius' edict of toleration in 311, the division between the rigorists and laxists hardened into a schism when Mensurius, bishop of Carthage, died. Mensurius had long been unpopular with the rigorist faction because he was said to have condemned the imprisoned confessors.²⁰ The rigorists hoped that they could install a more worthy bishop in Mensurius' place. However, despite the fact that custom dictated that twelve bishops of the region should gather to elect a successor, the tolerant Carthaginians pushed ahead with the election of Caecilian before the rigorist Numidian bishops could arrive in Carthage. The Numidian bishops unanimously opposed Caecilian on the grounds that his ordination was invalid because it was undertaken by a *traditor*, Felix of Apthungi, and on the charges that he denied food to the Abitinian martyrs.²¹ In protest, the Numidians (and their supporters in Carthage) elected their own bishop, Majorinus, who was succeeded shortly by

¹⁸ The label "Donatist" was a pejorative title given to the group by their opponents, taken from one of the group's early leaders. The act of naming the members of a faction after their leader was a common rhetorical tool that served to strip away their identities as Christians or as adherents to a certain mode of thinking in place of portraying them as simply blind followers of a particular (mistaken) individual (on this and the difficulties with applying labels in modern scholarship, see Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 5-6 and 343-44). Nevertheless, in the interests of clarity and brevity, as well as because of a lack of viable alternative phrasing, I will continue to use the term Donatist while acknowledging its problematic origin.

¹⁹ For example, Cyprian of Carthage (249-258) advocated for a separation of the faithful from the lapsed, asserting that if Christians entered into communion with sinful bishops, they would be contaminated (Cyprian, *Epistle* 67.3 [CCSL 3C: 450-52], trans. ACW 47: 22-23). However, Cyprian also allowed re-entry into the church after the persecutions following appropriate periods of penance, on which see *Laps.* 13, 35 (CCSL 3B: 227-28; 240-41), trans. FC 36: 68-69; 86-87. For further analysis on Cyprian and the persecutions, see, e.g., J. Patout Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* (London: Routledge, 2002); Allen Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Optatus, *Contra Parmenianum* 1.17 (CSEL 26: 9), trans. Edwards, 16-17.

²¹ W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 17-21; cf. *Passio sanctorum Datui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* (TU 134: 59-92).

Donatus. The installation of two bishops in Carthage clearly demonstrates the starkness of the division that was the culmination of nearly a century of conflict.²²

In 313, the Donatists appealed to Constantine to judge the contested episcopal election.²³ Since (like any Roman emperor) he sought the highest number of supporters possible, Constantine favoured an inclusive form of Christianity. After a series of consultations the emperor ultimately sided with Caecilian's supporters.²⁴ The Donatists' attempt to be recognized as legitimate had the inadvertent affect of making them an imperial enemy. Between 317 and 321 Constantine attempted to suppress the Donatists using measures similar to those of the persecuting emperors. Imperial authorities confiscated Donatist churches and property, sent bishops into exile, and massacred a congregation inside a church.²⁵

²² The literature on the origins of the Donatist controversy is vast. Apart from the comprehensive overview provided in Frend, *The Donatist Church*, see also Bernhard Kriegbaum, *Kirche der Traditoren oder Kirche der Märtyrer? Die Vorgeschichte des Donatismus* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1986); Brent D. Shaw, "African Christianity: Disputes, Definitions, and 'Donatists'," in *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Religious Movements: Discipline and Dissent*, ed. Malcolm R. Greenshields and Thomas A. Robinson (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992): 4-34; Maureen A. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Alan Dearn, "The Abitinian Martyrs and the Outbreak of the Donatist Schism," *JEH* 55 (2004): 1-18; Alexander Evers, *Church, Cities, and People: A Study of the Plebs in the Church and Cities of Roman Africa in Late Antiquity* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), especially 137-63.

²³ Greater detail about Constantine's relationship with the Donatist bishops can be found in Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 210-23.

²⁴ Michael Gaddis, *"There is No Crime for Those who Have Christ": Religious Violence in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 52. The first hearing took place in Rome in 313, with Miltiades of Rome presiding and ultimately siding with Caecilian. The following year, the Donatists accused Miltiades himself of being a *traditor* and requested a second hearing before bishops from Gaul, whom they thought would be free of contamination since they had escaped persecution under Constantius. Constantine granted this request but the council of Arles in 314 likewise decided against the Donatist faction (Gaddis, *"There Is No Crime"*, 50-51). On the sources for Constantine's interaction with the Donatists, see Timothy D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 238-47. For further discussion about Constantine, the Donatists, and North African Christianity, see Claude Lepelley, *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine au Bas-Empire: La prominence d'une civilisation municipale* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1979), 279-82; W.H.C. Frend, *Saints and Sinners in the Early Church: Differing and Conflicting Traditions in the First Six Centuries* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1985), 104-10; K.M. Girardet, "Die Petition der Donatisten an Kaiser Konstantin (Frühjahr 313). Historische Voraussetzungen und Folgen," *Chiron* 19 (1989): 185-206; and Evers, *Church, Cities, and People*, 149-54.

²⁵ He may have underestimated the conviction of the Donatists and expected that a show of force would be enough to cause their surrender (Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 159-62; Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 191-93). Additionally, as a war with Licinius was becoming more likely, securing Africa became more important than resolving the schism (Gaddis, *"There is No Crime"*, 57-58).

Throughout the different periods of persecution, one aspect that remained consistent was the local nature of the veneration of the martyrs. The majority of martyrs did not receive empire- or even province-wide recognition. Rather, they were remembered only by their local communities and congregations. While some inscriptions of these otherwise anonymous martyrs remain in the archaeological record,²⁶ countless others were commemorated only in oral narratives among other members of the community; records of them do not survive.²⁷ Thus, the martyrs who appear in the literary record are the minority and may not be reflective of the typical martyr.

Additionally, all subjects of commemoration are the product of those who are commemorating them. That is, the concrete evidence of commemoration, whether through an inscription, a shrine, or a literary narrative, is always the result of the venerator's opinions, desires, and perspectives. This is especially prominent (and potentially problematic) in literary sources by virtue of their length and genre. Thus, we never gain direct access to the experiences of the martyrs themselves (which is always beyond the historical reach), but are always reading through the author's viewpoint and biases.²⁸ That the author is also most often male offers a further dimension of difficulty in analyzing texts about female martyrs.

A further issue with uncovering the experiences of women in martyr literature is the fact that, although evidence suggests that women were martyred with the same frequency as men during the persecutions, they do not find equal representation within the martyr literature.²⁹ In his compilation of references to male and female martyrs/confessors in North African literature,

²⁶ Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae* 2, 613-14.

²⁷ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 591.

²⁸ Francine Cardman, "Acts of the Women Martyrs," *ATHR* 70 (1988): 145.

²⁹ On the male domination of martyr narratives, see Johannes N. Vorster, "The Blood of the Female Martyrs as the Sperm of the Early Church," *Religion & Theology* 10 (2003), 80-82.

Monceaux found that 120 out of 600 names were unquestionably female.³⁰ While similar ratios appear throughout the Empire, according to Brent Shaw, more female martyrs seem to have come from North Africa than any other individual region.³¹ Even though this is still a relatively small number, the prominence of female martyrs in North Africa makes it an important area of study. Shaw has asserted that “[N]orth African females were reacting to martyrdom in almost exactly the opposite proportion to their actual devaluation in their own society.”³² That is, women’s prominence in North African martyr texts is in direct opposition to non-martyr women’s everyday experiences. However, the evidence from which he draws is primarily funerary inscriptions,³³ which tell only part of the story. As will be shown elsewhere in this thesis, women had access to power and agency in both the public and private spheres that would not necessarily be visible in the archaeological record. Delving deeper into the way these female martyrs are depicted can help to get beyond the statistics to understand the intermittence of these women’s identities, depending on individual contexts and the shifting agency that came along with this fluidity.

Indeed, exact statistics are not as important as understanding and acknowledging that the women who do survive within literary texts represent the minority of all women who were martyred. Because of this, this chapter will not focus on trying to discern the “real” experiences of female martyrs but will instead investigate the way in which the female martyrs who are featured in extant literary works are held up as examples and used within the Christian

³⁰ Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l’Afrique chrétienne depuis les origines jusqu’à l’invasion arabe*, vol. 3 (Paris: E. Leroux, 1905), 531-51; see also Rose Lockwood, “*Potens et factiosa femina*: Women, Martyrs, and Schism in Roman North Africa,” *AugStud* 20 (1989): 168.

³¹ Brent D. Shaw, “The Passion of Perpetua,” *Past & Present* 139 (1993): 14. This is despite the fact, as Shaw argues, that public recognition of women was not apparent elsewhere within this province (Brent D. Shaw, “The Cultural Meaning of Death: Age and Gender in the Roman Family,” in *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. D. Kurtzer and R. Saller [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991], 66-90).

³² Shaw, “The Passion of Perpetua,” 14.

³³ Shaw, “The Passion of Perpetua,” 14. On the evidence, see Shaw, “The Cultural Meaning of Death,” 66-90.

community. Since “the discourse of martyrdom is also the discourse of power,”³⁴ this will help to demonstrate the way in which female martyrs participated in this expression of power and whether or not different aspects of their identities allow them to have access to different types of agency.

Named North African Female Martyrs

i. Januaria, Generosa, Donata, Secunda, Vestia (Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs)

As previously mentioned, the first examples of female martyrs in the North African literary record are found in the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*. Seven women and five men were martyred together in 180. The female martyrs Januaria, Generosa, Donata, Secunda, and Vestia are named after the list of the male martyrs in the conclusion of the text.³⁵ The text itself purports to be the account of the trial of the martyrs and does not contain any narrative framework; there is no background information regarding status, familial life, or relationships to one another (apart from being fellow Christians).

ii. Perpetua and Felicitas (Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas)

³⁴ Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 197.

³⁵ *Pass. Scil.* 16 (Musurillo, 88-89). Musurillo notes that six martyrs' names (including three of the women) are missing from the proconsul's first sentencing but posits that the missing six names were accidentally omitted and that all six should be reinstated in the opening of the text as well. He notes that the six who were omitted do not actually speak directly to the proconsul and that this might account for their having been dropped from the text (Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], xxii-xxiii, 87). According to Moss, however, such explanations are unnecessary, as the text makes it clear that by the end all the martyrs speak and act together as a whole (Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 129).

The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is far more detailed and extensive than the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, though it does share some similarities with its predecessor.³⁶ Describing events that took place in 203, it purports to contain the prison diary of its central figure, Perpetua, along with the first-hand vision of another martyr, Saturus. These elements were then compiled and framed by an anonymous redactor, making it the product of at least three authors.³⁷ As with the Scillitan narrative, a group of Christians are martyred together, with both men and women facing the authorities. Revocatus, Saturninus, Saturus, Secundulus, Perpetua, and Felicitas are first under house arrest before being moved to a jail in preparation for their condemnation in the arena.³⁸ Throughout the text, Perpetua engages in conversations with her father, her fellow prisoners, and the procurator; she also recounts four visions that she receives while imprisoned.

The other female martyr within the text is Felicitas, who is described as miraculously giving birth to her child so that she may be martyred alongside her companions.³⁹ She also appears prominently in the arena alongside Perpetua, their shared identity as mothers and martyrs

³⁶ The account survives in four versions: the Latin *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, a Greek translation, and two shortened Latin texts known as the *Acta Perpetuae*. The long Latin text will be of primary interest here, although the other three versions will be referenced when the discrepancies add details vital to the argument. The Latin version is generally accepted to be the earliest, but the Greek translation goes back to an early stage of Latin transmission (and to an earlier version than that which is currently extant), as it preserves better the name of the place of Perpetua's origin (Thuburbo Minus) and the name of the deceased proconsul (Minicius Opimianus). The two *Acta* are later but appear to have been known to Augustine (Marco Formisano, "A Brief Introduction," in *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 3-5); Candida Moss posits a date as early as 260 for the *Acta*, arguing that it provides the basis for the *Martyrdom of Marian and James* and the *Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius* (Candida R. Moss, "Blood Ties: Martyrdom, Motherhood, and Family in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*," in *Women and Gender in Ancient Traditions*, ed. Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll et al. [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 190 n. 2). On the manuscript tradition and language of composition, see also Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 60-99.

³⁷ There has been a great deal of scholarly discussion about when this compilation occurred and how much the redactor edited the writings of Perpetua and Saturus before placing them within his framework. Heffernan suggests that the text was compiled some time between 203 and 209, based largely on the historical figures mentioned, and the language used to discuss them (Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 60-78). See also his earlier article, Thomas J. Heffernan, "Philology and Authorship in the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*," *Traditio* 50 (1995): 315-25.

³⁸ *Pass. Perp.* 3 (Heffernan, 105-06), trans. Heffernan, 126.

³⁹ *Pass. Perp.* 15 (Heffernan, 116-17), trans. Heffernan, 132.

uniting them in front of the crowds. Perpetua is mentioned by Tertullian,⁴⁰ and both Perpetua and Felicitas are the subject of some of Augustine's sermons.⁴¹ These sources will provide further insight into the way Perpetua and Felicitas were received in Late Antiquity.

iii. *Quartillosa (Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius)*

The next reference to a female martyr in a North African text occurs in the *Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius*, which tells of the martyrdom of clergymen in 259, during the persecution of Valerian. The text consists of a letter addressed by the martyrs to the Carthaginian Christians as well as an account of their martyrdom. The letter recounts visions that they experienced, thus drawing parallels with the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*. The structural similarities between this text and the earlier Perpetua narrative make it difficult to determine the date of composition, but it is possible that it was written shortly after the events took place.⁴² A large group of Christians were arrested together, including a woman named Quartillosa, who is accompanied by her husband and son. In the letter written by the martyrs, Quartillosa's husband and son are said to have died three days before Quartillosa receives a vision. Her vision contains many parallels to Perpetua's visions,⁴³ perhaps suggesting the influence of the earlier text.⁴⁴ That she is the only female martyr singled out in this text suggests that she is seen as important, both to the group of martyrs themselves and to the broader community to whom they are writing.

⁴⁰ Tertullian, *An.* 55.4 (CCSL 2: 862), trans. FC 10: 299.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Serm.* 280, 281, 282 (PL 38: 1280-86), trans. Hill, 72-82.

⁴² Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxxv-xxxvi; for a discussion of the section containing the letter, see Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire* 2, 165-78.

⁴³ *Pass. Montan.* 8 (Musurillo, 220), trans. Musurillo, 221. The most notable parallels are that they both see young boys suffering before water basins (*Pass. Perp.* 7), and receive milk from a heavenly figure (*Pass. Perp.* 4); see discussion below.

⁴⁴ Shaw notes similarities in "diction, themes, concepts, and structure" between this text and the *Passion of Perpetua* ("The Passion of Perpetua," 16 n. 42). This will be examined further below.

iv. *Crispina (Passion of Crispina)*

The martyr narrative of Crispina is rare because it is solely about a female martyr, without any male martyrs (or indeed, any other martyrs at all) featured in her narrative.⁴⁵ Although the dating of the text is uncertain, it purports to provide the account of Crispina's martyrdom, which took place in 304.⁴⁶ As with the Scillitan martyrs, the text is primarily concerned with the trial of the martyr, with her life outside of the trial and her death only being mentioned briefly. Much of the text is focused on Crispina's long dialogue with the proconsul, where she forcefully insists on her Christian identity and rejects any suggestion of recanting. It is unusual for a female martyr to engage in long discussions, and Crispina's outgoing nature frustrates the authorities.⁴⁷ As with Perpetua, Augustine mentions Crispina in his sermons.⁴⁸ Unlike with Perpetua, however, Augustine's discussion of Crispina differs significantly from the extant martyr text, raising the question whether this was a deliberate misinterpretation or whether Augustine had a different text at his disposal. The different identities ascribed to Crispina in her martyrology and in Augustine's sermons will be discussed below.

⁴⁵ Cardman ("Acts of the Women Martyrs," 144) asserts that this is one of only two extant martyr accounts that are solely about women, but she does not consider the *Passion of Saint Salsa* (below), in which Salsa is the only martyr mentioned. As that text has an unusual origin and narrative, this is not surprising. It should also be noted that "companions" are mentioned at *Pass. Crisp.* 3, which a later gloss identifies as three women named Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda (Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 307 n. 7). That three women with these same names have their own Donatist martyr text suggests that a later author may have tried to combine these accounts either in error or in an attempt to create legitimacy and enhance authority through a shared tradition.

⁴⁶ Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xlv.

⁴⁷ Cardman, "Acts of the Women Martyrs," 146. On the way in which the speech of male and female martyrs are represented differently within the texts and the gendering of public speech in general, see Vorster, "The Blood of the Female Martyrs," 84-86.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Serm.* 286 (PL 38: 1297-1301), trans. Hill, 102-7; *Serm.* 313G (PLS 2: 660-62), trans. Hill, 124-26; *Serm.* 354 (PL 39: 1563-68), trans. Hill, 157-64; *Psal.* 120 (CCSL 40: 1787-1801), trans. Boulding, 511-27; *Psal.* 137 (CCSL 40: 1979-89), trans. Boulding, 243-56; *Virgin.* 44.45 (CSEL 41: 290), trans. FC 27: 199.

v. *Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda (Passion of Saints Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda)*

Within the Donatist tradition, the *Passion of Saints Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda* is closely connected to the *Passion of Crispina*,⁴⁹ as the three young women are said to be the *consores* referred to in Crispina's narrative (and indeed, they are identified as such in one extant version).⁵⁰ This Donatist text tells of the deaths of three women during the persecution of Diocletian. As there is only one extant manuscript, dating is difficult, but there is evidence of interpolations and editing over time.⁵¹ All three women are described as young virgins who are arrested alongside other Christians, including clergy, and are the only ones to refuse to sacrifice.⁵² Thus, they are constructed as going against both imperial and Catholic authorities in such a way that would have made them ideal martyrs in a Donatist context.⁵³ As in the *Passion of Crispina*, Maxima engages in a long discussion with the proconsul.⁵⁴ Secunda joins the other two partway through the text (which may be the result of a later interpolation). Maxima and Donatilla initially discourage her from joining them, but she convinces them of her worthiness and follows them as they are transferred to their place of martyrdom.⁵⁵ All three are tortured before eventually being executed by the sword.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Lockwood, "Potens et factiosa femina," 171.

⁵⁰ See Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 307 n. 7.

⁵¹ Tilley puts the date as shortly after the deaths of the martyrs (*Donatist Martyr Stories*, 14), while Monceaux posits a date of the fifth century, making it particularly useful for Donatist propaganda during periods of imperial persecution (*Histoire littéraire* 3, 150-51).

⁵² *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae et Secundae* 1 (TU 134: 95-97), trans. Tilley, 17-18.

⁵³ This resistance seems to have been modeled on the three youths in Daniel 3, who resist imperial authorities and remain true to the "proper" faith even as others in their community fail to do so. See Maureen A. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 15.

⁵⁴ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 2-3 (TU 134: 97-100), trans. Tilley, 18-21.

⁵⁵ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 4 (TU 134: 100-1), trans. Tilley, 21-22.

⁵⁶ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae*, 6 (TU 134: 103-5), trans. Tilley, 23-24.

vi. *Salsa (Passion of Saint Salsa)*

The *Passion of Saint Salsa* tells the death of a young girl named Salsa, but the dating of this text and the historicity of Salsa are uncertain. Monceaux asserts that Salsa likely died sometime during the reign of Constantine,⁵⁷ but that the martyr text itself may date to the end of the fourth or the early fifth century (that is, the time of Augustine).⁵⁸ However, Burns and Jensen argue that the story of Salsa is an ancient fabrication based on a tombstone in Tipasa that commemorated a holy matron named Salsa (with *matri sanct* being reinterpreted as *marturi sanct*).⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the story of the young martyr became popular in Tipasa, and the shrine dedicated to her was expanded over some time and a church was also eventually built nearby.⁶⁰

For the purposes of this study, the question of whether Salsa actually existed or the origins of her martyr cult are less important than the way in which she is depicted in her narrative and how this compares with other North African martyrologies. Nevertheless, perhaps because of its unusual origins, Salsa's martyrdom itself is also quite unusual. For example, while it seems to depict events that take place after the Edict of Milan, it nevertheless retains the Christian/pagan divide; other examples of North African martyrdom stories from the post-Constantinian period involve disputes between Catholics and Donatists. Furthermore, unlike other pre-Constantinian accounts, Salsa is not the victim of imperial pagan persecution but rather of mob violence.

⁵⁷ Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire*, vol. 3, 163-64, 165-66.

⁵⁸ Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire*, vol. 3, 168.

⁵⁹ J. Patout Burns and Robin Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 528. See also Henri Grégoire, "Sainte Salsa, roman épigraphique," *Byzantion* 12 (1937): 213-24.

⁶⁰ Ramsay MacMullen suggests that the first phase of building of the shrine dedicated to Salsa in Tipasa may have been constructed around 320 (Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, A.D. 200-400* [Leiden: Brill, 2009], 56). On the shrine and the church, see Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 354-65. Burns and Jensen note that the location of her tomb was attractive to other Christians who wanted to be buried near her (Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 118, fig. 111).

The narrative recounts the death of a 14-year-old girl named Salsa, who despite having pagan parents, converts to Christianity, is baptized, and is consecrated to God.⁶¹ When she is forced to accompany her parents to a local festival of the dragon,⁶² Salsa tries to convince them of their error, telling both her parents and the crowd about the power of God. However, they do not listen to her,⁶³ so she waits until everyone is asleep after the celebrations and sneaks into the sanctuary. She steals the head of the dragon and throws it into the sea without being seen.⁶⁴ However, she is caught trying to steal the rest in order to completely destroy it. Salsa is immediately captured by the crowd, dismembered, and thrown into the sea.⁶⁵ Eventually, her body is recovered by a sailor who had a dream instructing him to find and bury her. She is buried on cliff where the shrine is built to commemorate her.⁶⁶

vii. *Victoria, Maria, and Januaria (Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs)*

The *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* (also called *The Passion of Saints Dativus, Saturninus the presbyter, et al.*) is a Donatist martyr text that purports to tell the story of forty-nine Christians killed during the Great Persecution. Like other North African martyr texts, the work includes a letter and the description of the trial, including long discussions between the authorities and the martyrs. Scholars are divided on the date of this compilation, with some placing it before Caecilian's election as bishop in late 311 or 312,⁶⁷ and others pushing it to the fifth century,

⁶¹ *Passio Sanctae Salsae* 2 (Piredda, 70, 72, 74).

⁶² *Passio Sanctae Salsae* 3-4 (Piredda, 74, 76, 78).

⁶³ *Passio Sanctae Salsae* 5-6 (Piredda, 80, 82, 84, 86).

⁶⁴ *Passio Sanctae Salsae* 7 (Piredda, 86, 88).

⁶⁵ *Passio Sanctae Salsae* 8-9 (Piredda, 90, 92).

⁶⁶ *Passio Sanctae Salsae* 11-12 (Piredda, 94, 96, 98, 100).

⁶⁷ Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 26.

sometime after the Council of Carthage in 411.⁶⁸ The later date suggests that the text was composed primarily for rhetorical purposes and might have little-to-no historical basis, while the earlier date supports a more or less factual kernel around which events may have been embellished, but without the baggage of a century of further division between the Donatists and Catholics. Thus, whether one is convinced by the earlier or later date will change the way the text is read.

However, while the later date seems to me more likely, the areas of the text that are most affected by the different datings are the interactions between the different Christian authorities. The female martyrs in the text do not interact with the hostile Christian authorities and therefore the way that they are presented may be examined without the question of dating at the forefront. Furthermore, the similarities in tropes between the way Victoria is depicted and the way other female martyrs under consideration are discussed suggests a continuation and cohesion with that particular aspect of martyr tradition, whether the text was composed in the fourth or fifth century.

The text introduces the martyrs in list form, with only some martyrs receiving any descriptions beyond their names.⁶⁹ The female martyrs who are given further identifying features are Maria (daughter of Saturninus and *sanctimoniali*, “the consecrated virgin”) and Januaria (*item matrona*, “another married woman”). Another martyr, Victoria, is mentioned without comment in the list but then appears in greater detail later in the text. Victoria is described as both a “most holy martyr” (*sanctissima martyr*) and a “most illustrious martyr of the Lord” (*clarissima martyr domini*)⁷⁰ as well as “the holiest of the women” (*sanctissima feminiarum*).⁷¹

⁶⁸ Dearn, “The Abitinian Martyrs,” throughout.

⁶⁹ *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 2 (TU 134: 63), trans. Tilley, 29.

⁷⁰ *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 7 (TU 134: 68-69), trans. Tilley, 33.

Unlike other martyrs, Victoria's past is also discussed, as her family's status and her apparent desire for chastity from a young age serves as further evidence of her character. Various aspects of the description of Victoria echoes that of other female martyrs (particularly Secunda).

Private Identities of North African Female Martyrs

As mentioned in the previous chapter, for the purposes of this thesis, private identities are ones that are primarily found in the household and which are chiefly associated with domestic agency. In other words, private identities are also family identities; for the female martyrs discussed here, the identities are limited to wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters. However, just because these roles originate in the private sphere does not mean that they do not have influence in more public spaces. Further, each of these roles is expressed in an individual way, despite the broader understandings of the ideal that were often put forth in the narratives. North African female martyrs' engagement with the roles of wife, mother, daughter, and sister reveals the complexity of relationships, both in terms of the ways these women interacted with their families and the ways in which these roles were projected to the broader community through the martyr narratives.

Wife

As adult Roman women were expected to be married, it is perhaps no surprise that the identity of wife plays a prominent role in North African martyr texts. Perpetua, Felicitas, Quartilosa, and

⁷¹ *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 17 (TU 134: 81), trans. Tilley, 41.

Crispina are all identified as wives at some point, although the implications of this role and the authority associated with it vary.⁷²

Perpetua's identity as a wife has been the subject of much scholarly interest, in large part because her husband is largely invisible in the text. In the Latin *passio*, he is not mentioned at all apart from the implicit mention of him in the assertion that Perpetua is "honourably married" (*matronaliter nupta*).⁷³ In the later *Acta*, her husband also appears silently beside her family at one of her appearances in front of the procurator and is included in the list of family members that her father recites. In the *Acta I*, the husband is shown as begging Perpetua, along with her mother, to have pity and return to live with them.⁷⁴ In the *Acta II*, Perpetua's husband is depicted as carrying her son and trying to urge her against going through with her martyrdom, along with her parents and brothers. However, he does not speak alone or specifically to her identity as his wife and Perpetua's response focuses on her parents, not her husband.⁷⁵ In all three Perpetua texts, therefore, her husband appears only marginally and his presence has no impact on her behaviour. She does not display any deference to him or provide any indication that she takes into consideration any expectations of her as a wife when she undertakes her path to martyrdom.

⁷² The martyr Januaria is also identified as "another married woman" (*item matrona*) in the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, which suggests that she was not the only wife in the long list of names that precedes hers. (There is a second Januaria, so it is possible that the editor simply means that both women named Januaria were married, or that there were others as well.) Unfortunately, there is no further information given about either this Januaria or the other wives, making its usefulness limited for this study. Nevertheless, the presence of several married women in the group of the martyrs is notable when considered in conjunction with other married martyrs discussed below. See *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 2 (TU 134: 63), trans. Tilley, 29.

⁷³ *Pass. Perp.* 2 (Heffernan, 105), trans. Heffernan, 126.

⁷⁴ *Acta I* 6.1, 5-6 (SC 417: 284; 286), trans. SC 417: 285; 287. *Audientes uero parentes eius, pateret mater, fratres et maritus simulque cum paruulo eius, qui erat ad lac, uenerunt, cum essent de nobili genere ... Pater uero eius iactans infantem in collum eius et ipse cum matre et marito tenentes manus eius et flentes osculabantur dicentes: "Miserere nostri, filia, et uiue nobiscum."*

⁷⁵ *Acta II* 6.1-2 (SC 417: 298), trans. SC 417: 299: *Venientes autem parentes eius pater et mater, fratres et maritus cum parvulo filio ante proconsulis tribunal, tali conabantur adloquio fidei eius mollire constantiam, dicentes: "Miserere senectuti nostrae, si florem tuae non consideras iuventutis, et si quae tibi imminent tormenta aestimas contemnenda, saltem parentibus tuis consule, ne per tuam obstinationem perenni inmoremur infamia." Perpetua ... dic[it]: "Non agnosco parentes, creatorem omnium ignorantes, qui et si essent, ut in Christi confessione persisterem, persuaderent."*

Despite the fact that her role as a wife is peripheral to the story, much has been made about the kind of marriage that Perpetua would have been in, and it is generally concluded that her father's involvement in her legal proceedings indicates a *sine manu* marriage in which the daughter remained *in patria potestate* and which was the most common kind of marriage in the third century.⁷⁶ In this case, Perpetua's husband might understandably not appear prominently in the narratives simply because he did not have any legal power over her. If he did not share his wife's religious convictions (and it seems likely that it would have been mentioned if he did), then it is possible that they were separated at the time of her arrest. Therefore, the fact that the redactor of the *passio* sees Perpetua's marital state as a significant part of her identity perhaps indicates that it was important for literary purposes that she be seen as the ideal Roman woman in every way (which included marriage and legitimate children). Other scholars have suggested that her husband was deceased, that they were actually divorced,⁷⁷ that a later redactor edited him out in order to emphasize that her focus was entirely on God,⁷⁸ or that the phrase *matronaliter nupta* was meant to foreshadow her final status in the arena as a bride of Christ.⁷⁹

Another recent suggestion is that Perpetua's marriage was entirely an invention of the redactor, since the arrangements that she makes for her mother and brother to care for her child

⁷⁶ Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 148. On *sine manu* marriages, see Cohick, *Women in the World*, 100-1, and Hölkeskamp, "Under Roman Roofs," 127. On the issue of the decline of the *manus* marriage in the Republic and the rise of the *sine manu* marriage, see Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 16-35.

⁷⁷ On the various possibilities, see, e.g., Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 148; Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passions*, 8.

⁷⁸ On this, see Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 282 n. ii.

⁷⁹ In this case, the respectable marriage denoted by the phrase does not refer to her social status but her relationship with God. The support for this suggestion comes from the constantly shifting familial language used by Perpetua and the narrator within the text. For example, her father calls her *domina*, not daughter, and she refers to her fellow confessors as brothers and sisters (Maureen A. Tilley, "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity," in *Searching for the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*. Volume 2, edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza [New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004], 843-44). I am not convinced, however. The context in which the phrase *matronaliter nupta* appears indicates that it refers to a typical, earthly marriage. Perpetua is not a "spiritual" mother to her infant, nor is she "spiritually" twenty-two years old. There is no indication that the description of her as being honourably married should be taken as referring to anything other than an earthly marriage, regardless of whether this reflected the reality of Perpetua's situation.

would not have been the norm for a married woman under Roman law; if Perpetua were “honourably married,” custody of her child should have been given to her husband and his family. If, however, Perpetua was of a lower class than the editor suggests, it is possible that she was in a concubinage relationship, not a marriage, with a man of higher status.⁸⁰ This also makes it understandable that Perpetua is not depicted as describing herself as wife anywhere in the narrative. In this case, the editor may have added the detail of marriage later to juxtapose the ideal Roman woman (of a high status, honourably married) with her violent death as a Christian in the arena.⁸¹ Still, as this argument is based strictly upon the description of the custody arrangements for her child,⁸² which themselves might have been the subject of later edits, it must remain a hypothesis.

Whatever the motivation behind the depiction of Perpetua’s marital status, it is clear that Perpetua’s identity as wife (or partner of a man in some other kind of arrangement) is not portrayed as a factor in her own self-identification. Thus, I argue that Perpetua’s agency in choosing martyrdom should not necessarily be seen as rebelling against the normative understanding of wifely behaviour, since she does not place importance on this identity in the first place. That is, Perpetua’s understanding of the role identity of wife did not entail placing it above all else or obeying her husband at the expense of her obligations to her Christian identity and her desire for martyrdom. Whatever way she internalized the meaning of wifehood before her conversion and arrest, it was no longer relevant afterwards. Indeed, as she is presented in the text, it appears that she has already rejected the role of wife before she entered the prison; she

⁸⁰ In this case, it is possible that not only Perpetua, but also her parents, would have depended economically on her wealthy partner. However, because they were not legally united, when her partner left her, Perpetua returned to her father’s home and authority (Kate Cooper, “A Father, A Daughter, and a Procurator: Authority and Resistance in the Prison Memoir of Perpetua of Carthage,” *Gender & History* 23 [2011], 689).

⁸¹ Cooper, “A Father, A Daughter,” 688-90.

⁸² Cooper, “A Father, A Daughter,” 690.

does not need to spend any energy learning to shed it as she does with mother or daughter, thereby demonstrating that these roles were more salient to Perpetua's self-identification, at least as it is framed by the redactor.

Perpetua's husband's absence (and thus, the minimized nature of Perpetua's wife identity) within the text did not go unnoticed in Late Antiquity. Augustine explains the absence of Perpetua's husband in this way: "It was not her husband he [the devil] introduced into the ring, because she was already, in her exaltation of spirit, living in heaven, and the slightest suspicion of carnal desire, would make her, for very shame, all the stronger."⁸³ That is, Augustine understood Perpetua to be living as if in heaven even before her martyrdom; she was already separated from her husband and from all physical aspects of marriage. He argues that her husband had no control over her; therefore, it would have been pointless to use him as a vessel with which to try to get Perpetua to recant. Augustine sees this role as being filled by her father instead, conflating the wife and daughter identities and equating their expected subversion to male authority figures.

However, in a later sermon, Augustine emphasizes Perpetua's marital status, adding it to the list of reasons her martyrdom should be seen as particularly remarkable: she was not just a woman, but a wife and mother as well.⁸⁴ This demonstrates that Perpetua's role identity as a wife was malleable and could be shaped to fit whatever rhetorical argument Augustine (or other commentators) saw as the most salient. Thus, fluidity in identity applies not only to an individual's own self-identification, but to the identities that outsiders applied to them. The qualities associated with each identity are reflective of the person applying them, not the

⁸³ Augustine, *Serm.* 281.2 (PL 38: 1284), trans. Hill, 78-79: *nec maritum supposuit, ne illa quae iam superna cogitatione habitabat in caelis, suspicionem desiderii carnis erubescendo permaneret fortior.*

⁸⁴ Augustine, *Serm.* 282.2 (PL 38: 1285), trans. Hill, 81.

individual to which they are applied. For Augustine, Perpetua's wifehood was simply one component of her configuration of an "ideal Roman matron" that could easily be set aside when necessary.

As with Perpetua, Felicitas' marital status is ambiguous; Felicitas is not shown referring to herself as a wife within the passage of the work that is focused on her, nor is the father of her child named. Indeed, the only potential reference to Felicitas' relationship status comes in the introduction, in which she is described alongside Revocatus as "his fellow slave" (*conservaeius*).⁸⁵ This has sometimes been used to suggest the possibility that Felicitas was married to (or at least in a relationship with) Revocatus and that Revocatus was the father of her unborn child. Evidence for this interpretation comes in part from the fact that Perpetua's and Felicitas' contemporary Tertullian used *conservus/conserva* to refer to Christian spouses, suggesting that *conserva* is being used in the same metaphorical way here. However, as Bremmer notes, this is only when Tertullian also includes terms like *in domine* to make it clear that he is thinking of metaphorical slaves in Christ and not referring to actual slaves.⁸⁶ When considered alongside the Greek version of the text, which translates this phrase as σύνδουλοι (which simply means that they are slaves in the same house),⁸⁷ and the *Acta I*, which calls her *soror eius*, his sister, presumably in the Christian sense,⁸⁸ it is clear that the relationship referred to here is one of Christian fellowship, not marriage.⁸⁹ It is possible, however, that the father of Felicitas' child

⁸⁵ *Pass. Perp.* 2 (Heffernan, 105), trans. Heffernan, 126.

⁸⁶ Jan N. Bremmer, "Felicitas: The Martyrdom of a Young African Woman," in *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetua et Felicitatis*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 37. See, for example, the way Tertullian describes his own wife: *dilectissima mihi in domino conserva* (*Ux.* 1.1.1 [CCSL 1: 373], trans. ANF 4: 39).

⁸⁷ *Pass. Perp.* 2 (SC 417: 104).

⁸⁸ But perhaps not. See the section on "sisters" in this chapter.

⁸⁹ Bremmer, "Felicitas," 37.

was not known or that he was another slave who was not able to contact the Christians.⁹⁰ Given her slave status, the absence of discussion of her partner is not as unusual as the absence of discussion of Perpetua's husband, even if both are rhetorical strategies in which the text seeks to focus on the women as separate from their husbands.

Still, a later version of the story of Perpetua and Felicitas makes Felicitas' marital status clear. In the *Acta I*, in a conversation with the proconsul (which is not found in the *Passio*), Felicitas is asked explicitly whether or not she has a husband, to which Felicitas replies that she does, but that she now despises him. When asked where her husband is, she simply answers that he is not there. The proconsul then asks what status he has, and Felicitas replies that he is plebeian.⁹¹ This clarification on the issue of whether or not Felicitas was a wife creates new questions, as Felicitas' assertion that her husband was a plebeian raises the possibility that she was not depicted as a slave in all versions of the Perpetua narrative (there is no section in *Acta I* that introduces characters as in the *Passio*).⁹² It is also possible that the later author of the *Acta* thought it necessary to include at least a brief mention of Felicitas' husband in order to justify her pregnancy. Still, despite the fact that the reference is brief, it does give a bit of insight into the complier's view of Felicitas' behaviour as a wife. According to this narrative, Felicitas despises her husband, presumably because he is not Christian (or a future martyr). The role identity of wife is clearly less important than the social identity of Christian. The question of

⁹⁰ Danny Praet, "'Melior cupiditate detentus': Christian Self-Definition and the Rejection of Marriage in the Early Acts of the Martyrs," *Euprosyne* 31 (2003): 466.

⁹¹ *Acta I* 5.3-5 (SC 417: 284), trans. SC 417: 285: *Proconsul dixit: "Virum habes?" Felicitas respondit: "Habeo quem nunc contemno." Proconsul dixit: "Ubi est?" Felicitas respondit: "Non est hic." Proconsul dixit: "Quo genere est?" Felicitas respondit: "Plebeius."*

⁹² Indeed, the historicity of Felicitas' slave status is not certain for reasons apart from the *Acta*. Kraemer and Lander note, for example, that neither Augustine nor Quodvultdeus acknowledge that she was a slave. Additionally, a fifth-century homily by an unknown author attributes Saturus' vision to Felicitas, raising the possibility that this vision was sometimes depicted as being experienced by Felicitas, whose leadership role may have been suppressed in subsequent generations (Ross Shepard Kraemer and Shira L. Lander, "Perpetua and Felicitas," in *The Early Christian World*, vol. 2, ed. Phillip F. Esler [London: Routledge, 2000], 1054-55).

whether she left her husband or he left her is unimportant; the only thing that matters is that she rejects this role altogether and that he has no influence on her actions, as he is even absent during her trial. Felicitas is depicted as being eager to cut ties with him and to remove the identity of wife in order to claim only that of Christian. Felicitas' agency in becoming a martyr is depicted as entirely her own.

The discrepancies within the texts on whether or not Felicitas was a wife suggests that there were different opinions on the level of importance of this identity in the broader context of female martyrs. Regardless of the way in which it is addressed (or not addressed) in the texts, it is clear that the role of wife is secondary to other roles that are ascribed to these women. Their ties with their children and, for Perpetua, with her father are more difficult to break than the ties with their husbands. While there are variances within the accounts, in all cases these ties are already broken when the women are arrested, and neither of them display any outward concern for the identities they have shed. Their actions are shown to be completely the result of their own agency in choosing the path of martyrdom.

The martyr Quartilosa's role identity as wife is mentioned only briefly, when the editor of the text notes that her husband had died as a martyr (along with their son) three days earlier.⁹³ Her qualities as a wife and the ways in which this related to her agency and power are not discussed. However, it is significant that, in contrast to Perpetua or Felicitas, she does not need to reject her role as wife in order to obtain her martyrdom. In this case, however, this was because her husband was a fellow Christian who was not hindering her ability to achieve martyrdom.

⁹³ *Pass. Mont.* 8 (Musurillo, 220), trans. Musurillo, 221. Naturally, this makes her a widow in the technical sense of the word. However, given how recently her husband died, and the fact that her new identity as a widow does not seem to factor into the way she is depicted in the text, it is appropriate that she is considered alongside other wife-martyrs. Further, the fact that there are no other widow-martyrs with which she may be compared limits the usefulness of this identity for this thesis.

Indeed, he went before her to his death, and she would have expected to be reunited with him and their child when it was her turn. Like Perpetua and Felicitas, however, she does not dwell on her husband or his fate, and her vision reveals only her son, not her husband. When considered along with the absence of husbands but relative prominence of children, this speaks to a greater trend within North African martyr texts. As will be shown in the next section, role identity of mother is much more enduring than that of wife.

Finally, although Crispina is never identified as a wife within the martyrology, Augustine identifies her with this role in his sermons. Throughout the *Passion of Crispina*, Crispina answers for herself, apparently not under the legal control of any male relative, and does not mention a husband or family members during her interrogation. There has not been the same kind of scholarly interest into the existence of Crispina's husband as there has been for Perpetua, perhaps because Crispina's lack of children makes the plausible explanations much clearer: either Crispina was not married at all, or, if she was, Crispina's husband simply did not share her beliefs and had no legal interest in her case (particularly if he realized that he would have no success in convincing her to change her mind). As the text is primarily framed as a record of a trial, there is no overarching narrative in which one might expect a husband to appear to appeal to his wife. Both the compiler of the text and Crispina herself seem uninterested in addressing her role as "wife" any further than the brief descriptive word of *domina*.

Regardless of the existence or non-existence of her husband, Crispina nevertheless becomes associated with the role identity of wife as a result of Augustine's sermons. Indeed, Augustine occasionally invokes Crispina when he needs an easy reference to a martyr who is

also an ideal wife, in contrast to popular virgin martyrs like Agnes⁹⁴ and Thecla.⁹⁵ This is especially evident in *Sermon* 354, which is concerned with contradicting the assumption held by some in his congregation that celibacy is preferable to marriage. Augustine asserts that marriage has its place within the community and that it should be admired equally with continence, provided that both are entered into with one's mind on God and not in the search of human admiration or approval.⁹⁶ It is in this context that Augustine provides the examples of Agnes and Crispina, a virgin and a wife who were able to equally find salvation through martyrdom.⁹⁷ Clearly, by the time of Augustine, the role identity of wife was one with which Crispina was closely associated and of which the audience did not need to be reminded.

Once again, the way in which this identity is understood is dependent on standard and stereotypical tropes about what it means to be a wife and does not necessarily reflect the way that Crispina herself understood or applied this identity (if, indeed, she would have seen herself as a wife at all). External views and societal expectations of what it meant to be a wife are used to shape the narrative.

For Augustine, Crispina's wifehood provides an ideal counterpoint to the virgin Agnes. Augustine simplifies Crispina's complex agency to a singular identifier ("wife") in order to fulfill his rhetorical strategy for this particular sermon. In this context, "wife" is not a complex term that can be interpreted differently by different women as a result of the different internal

⁹⁴ Augustine, *Serm.* 286.2 (PL 38: 1298), trans. Hill 102; *Serm.* 354.5 (PL 39: 1565), trans. Hill, 159.

⁹⁵ Augustine, *Virgin.* 44.45 (CSEL 41: 290), trans. FC 27: 199.

⁹⁶ Augustine, *Serm.* 354.3-4 (PL 39: 1564-65), trans. Hill, 158-59.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *Serm.* 354.5 (PL 39: 1565), trans. Hill, 159: *Ut autem non sit in vobis, hoc cogitate, persecutionis tempore non solam Agnen fuisse coronatam virginem, sed et Crispinam mulierem: et forte, quod non dubiatatur, aliqui tunc de continentibus defecerunt, et multi de conjugatis pugnauerunt, atque vicerunt.* Augustine elsewhere notes that readiness for martyrdom is superior to both marriage and virginity, and that it could be that a married woman might be better prepared for martyrdom than a virgin. See *Virgin.* 46.46-47 (CSEL 41: 291-92), trans. FC 27: 201-2.

meanings they might apply to it; it is simply a tool that he can employ to further his argument. “Wife” is a role on the opposite end of the spectrum from “virgin”; no further nuance is necessary.

The ambiguity surrounding women who are both wives and martyrs is somewhat surprising. The absence of their husbands within the texts leads to questions about the nature of their marriages, the way in which these women understood themselves as wives, and the place that the male authors and commentators of these texts considered marriage to hold within their communities. The martyr narratives do not provide insight into the internalized meanings that these women applied to themselves and do not demonstrate the various ways in which these women fulfilled their roles. Rather, the role identity of wife is often employed as a literary strategy only as something that must be overcome in order to achieve martyrdom, since it carries with it an inherent connection to the physical world through husbands and children.

The narratives around Perpetua, Felicitas, and Crispina reveal a common minimizing of these women as wives, mentioning it only when necessary and avoiding the question wherever possible. As a result, the agency that these women expressed in becoming or remaining Christian is rendered largely invisible. These women are all depicted as having non-believing husbands, but the process by which they converted and asserted their religious independence from their husbands is not known.⁹⁸ The glimpses of the husbands within the texts hint that there is more to the story; if we knew how these women behaved as wives before they became martyrs, we might learn a great deal about female agency and power.

⁹⁸ On some of the problems that might arise in mixed marriages, including ways that a non-Christian husband might limit his Christian wife’s activities, see Tertullian, *Ux.* 2-5 (CCSL 1: 387-90), trans. ANF 4: 45-47. On the probability that mixed marriages were likely infrequent and that, when they did occur, conversion of the non-Christian spouse was rare, see Salzman, “Aristocratic Women”, and Cooper, “Insinuations of Womanly Influence.”

Although it is easy to assume that both men and women were expected to reject all aspects of their earthly identities to focus solely on becoming martyrs, it is clear from the example of Quartilosa that this was not always the case. Nevertheless, Quartilosa's role identity as a wife is minimal within the text and does not provide any further insight into the way this role functioned and the type of agency she exercised. Thus, while the example of Quartilosa is useful for demonstrating that wives must only reject their husbands if they are hindrances to successful martyrdoms, it does not reveal anything about her individual understanding of what it meant to be a wife or about the way in which the author of her narrative viewed this role. We can simply conclude that Quartilosa is able to be depicted both a wife and a martyr because her husband is depicted both a husband and a martyr. She had no need for the kind of rebellious agency that Perpetua and Crispina evidently expressed at some point prior to the period of time covered by their narratives. Still, this demonstrates the significant point that not all wives acted in the same way and that familial context played an important role in the level and type of agency they expressed.

Mother

The role identities of wife and mother often exist simultaneously with each other. However, these roles are treated differently within the martyrdom accounts. The identity of mother is examined in much deeper detail and is shown to be more symbolically significant than that of wife. Perpetua, Felicitas, Crispina, and Quartilosa are all depicted as mothers who must either reject or reconfigure this role in order to become martyrs.

Perpetua's role identity as a mother is foremost in her text and is representative of the expectations that would have been placed on her as a married Roman woman. After the audience

is told of her martial status and that she was “honourably born” (*honeste nata*), it is revealed that she is a mother, with “an infant son still at the breast” (*filium infantem ad ubera*).⁹⁹ Thus, from the beginning, Perpetua’s motherhood is intimately connected with breastfeeding. Perpetua nursing her child is a consistent image throughout the narrative that reinforces her role identity as a mother and the societal expectations of this identity. For example, Perpetua’s main concern when she is transferred from house arrest to the prison is for her son. When she is reunited with him (as a result of bribery from the deacons), the first thing she does is nurse him, as he was “weak from hunger.”¹⁰⁰ She initially must return her child to her mother and brother, but soon arranges (likely through further bribes) for her infant to stay in the prison with her, and her worry disappears.¹⁰¹ Once again, the text depicts Perpetua connecting the role identity of mother with the physical act of breastfeeding. It appears that, at least primarily, Perpetua has internalized motherhood to mean the nourishment of her child above all else and she sees the role of mother as one that can continue in some manner, even when she is imprisoned.

However, this adherence to motherhood is soon tested when, a few days later, Perpetua’s father confronts her at a hearing and tries to convince her to change her mind and renounce her Christianity. He invokes her infant in the hopes that she will be persuaded to acquiesce to his demands based on her identity as a mother, if she cannot be persuaded to do so because of her obligations as a daughter. He reminds Perpetua that her death might mean death for her child also.¹⁰² As the audience has just heard that her son was weak from hunger after being away from her for a brief while, there is little reason for them to doubt that this is true. Additionally, since

⁹⁹ *Pass. Perp.* 2 (Heffernan, 105), trans. Heffernan, 126.

¹⁰⁰ *Pass. Perp.* 3 (Heffernan, 106), trans. Heffernan, 126: *Ego infantem lactabam iam inedia defectum.*

¹⁰¹ *Pass. Perp.* 3 (Heffernan, 106), trans. Heffernan, 126.

¹⁰² *Pass. Perp.* 5 (Heffernan, 108), trans. Heffernan, 127: ... *aspice filium tuum, qui post te vivere non poterit.*

Perpetua's motherhood is linked with the act of providing sustenance for her child, Perpetua's father is essentially asking her to continue being a mother.

Later, Perpetua's father actually brings the infant to another hearing at the *forum*, perhaps hoping the sight of her son will succeed where the mere mention of him failed. It does not cause her to repent, however, and Perpetua returns to prison. Nevertheless, Perpetua continues to identify herself as a mother as she immediately sends a deacon to go retrieve her baby from her father. Once again, Perpetua connects motherhood and breastfeeding, asserting that she needs the child "because my baby had become accustomed to nurse at my breasts and to stay with me in prison."¹⁰³ This time, Perpetua's father refuses to send the infant, thus severing Perpetua's identity as mother. Perpetua's role of mother is superseded by the counter-identities of father and daughter and the inherent power imbalance between these two roles. Perpetua's father may have had no authority over the way in which she defined and expressed her motherhood, but he could remove the child and thus take away this role altogether.

Indeed, without her son to nurse, Perpetua's identity as mother immediately disappears. Perpetua herself sees this as something divinely ordained, asserting that God made it so that her son no longer required her breast and, by extension, a mother. The complete withdrawal of Perpetua's motherhood identity continues when Perpetua reports that God also made it so that she would not suffer any physical pain as a result of stopping nursing abruptly; she neither felt pain in her breasts nor anxiety about the well-being of her son.¹⁰⁴ This divine gift made it possible for Perpetua to complete her transformation into a martyr. Indeed, Perpetua's narrative

¹⁰³ *Pass. Perp.* 6 (Heffernan, 109), trans. Heffernan, 128: *Tunc quia consueverat a me infans mammas accipere et mecum in carcere manere, statim mitto ad patrem Pomponium diaconum, postulans infantem.*

¹⁰⁴ *Pass. Perp.* 6 (Heffernan, 109), trans. Heffernan, 128: *Et quomodo Deus voluit, neque ille amplius mammas desideravit, neque mihi fervorem fecerunt, ne sollicitudine infantis et dolore mamarum macerarer.*

makes it clear that motherhood and the fulfillment of this role's obligations through the practice of breastfeeding are incompatible with martyrdom.

The importance of breastfeeding as a reflection or aspect of the role identity of mother within the *Passion of Perpetua* can be seen in the fact that Perpetua's breastfeeding is at odds with her social identity of an *honestior*, as women of high statuses would have been expected to employ wet nurses rather than nursing themselves.¹⁰⁵ There are several possible solutions to this seeming incongruity. First, it is possible that wet nurses were not as common in third-century North Africa as they were elsewhere in the Empire, as there is an absence of epitaphs mentioning these types of relationships in the region compared to others.¹⁰⁶ Augustine mentions both his mother and nurses when he references breastfeeding, implying that both were common and acceptable.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the normalcy with which Perpetua discusses her breastfeeding suggests that there was nothing inherently unusual about it and, certainly, nothing that needed to be explained to the audience.

The question of whether or not an *honestior* woman like Perpetua would have been expected to breastfeed her own child reflects the contradiction that can be seen in evidence from antiquity more generally, in which mothers breastfeeding their own children are depicted as the ideal in ancient philosophical and moral literature but wet nurses are nevertheless commonly employed by women of all statuses.¹⁰⁸ In this way, the image of an *honestior* mother

¹⁰⁵ On the frequent use of wet nurses in the Roman world for women of all classes, see Rawson, *Children and Childhood*, 122-24.

¹⁰⁶ Sigismund-Nielsen, "Vibia Perpetua," 108. On epigraphic evidence of wet nurses throughout the Empire, see the list of 58 names in Keith R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 15-16. Only one inscription comes from Carthage.

¹⁰⁷ Augustine, *Conf.* 1.6.7, 11 (CCSL 27: 4, 6), trans. Boulding, 43, 46. For further discussion of breastfeeding and wet nurses in Augustine, see Brent D. Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine," *Past & Present* 115 (1987): 41-42.

¹⁰⁸ For a summary of the evidence idealizing breastfeeding in Greek and Latin texts, see Patricia Salzman-Mitchell, "Tenderness or Taboo: Images of Breast-Feeding Mothers in Greek and Latin Literature," in *Mothering and*

breastfeeding her own child may have been expected in the literature but may not have been reflective of reality. Thus, Perpetua's breastfeeding may fit more within the literary tradition than what may have been the actual experience of many North African women.

However, as mentioned in the previous section, if it is the case that Perpetua was not an *honestior* at all, it is possible to read Perpetua's father's assertion that her son would not survive without her as implying that the family could not afford to hire a wet nurse in Perpetua's absence. If he was not exaggerating for dramatic effect, Perpetua's breastfeeding should be seen as a matter of necessity, not choice, implying that Perpetua's family had more modest means.¹⁰⁹ The connection between the role identity of mother and the act of breastfeeding is contingent on other social factors such as Perpetua's status and her own internalized conception of the value of breastfeeding. As such, Perpetua's social identity comes under scrutiny as a result of the way in which her role identity is described.

Regardless of whether or not the narrator's proclamation of Perpetua's *honestior* status is grounded in reality, it is clear that within the framework of the narrative, motherhood is inherently connected to breastfeeding. Perpetua does not stop breastfeeding or reject motherhood until the option of continuing it has been taken away from her. Her refusal to follow her father's desires to reject martyrdom shows her adherence to her Christian identity, but her continued attempts to have her son remain with her in prison and to provide nourishment for him there show that Perpetua seems to believe that both identities can exist alongside each other. While her impending death would necessarily cut these ties, she does not seem to regard it necessary to do

Motherhood in Ancient Greece and Rome, ed. Lauren Hackworth Peterson and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 141-64. On the wet nurse as a common occupation for women in antiquity (as well as some anxieties about the frequencies with which they were employed), see Bella Vivante, *Daughters of Gaia: Women in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 96-98.

¹⁰⁹ Cooper, "A Father, A Daughter," 688; cf. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 131.

so before that point. She shows no detachment from her son until her father makes it impossible for her to continue to have her child with her. Then it is only through God's intervention that she finds that the ties that bond her to her son have been severed and that her identity as mother has been removed. Nevertheless, Perpetua commits her son to the care of her mother and (Christian) brother, thereby attempting to exercise a different aspect of the role of mother, that of having agency over her child's education and religious training and ensuring that this is undertaken by other family members.¹¹⁰

As a result, I argue that, although it is impossible to access the emotions and motivations of the historical Perpetua, it must be considered that her rejection of motherhood was neither straightforward nor complete. Within the text, she only rejects this role when she is forced to do so as a result of her refusal to give up the role identity of martyr. While the compiler of the text makes it clear that motherhood and martyrdom could not exist together, a close reading of Perpetua's account reveals how Perpetua struggled to maintain both identities for as long as possible, suggesting that she would not have seen it this way, or, at least, not until the final moment. She takes care of her son until she is forced to choose, at which point she gives up all other identities except Christian martyr.¹¹¹

Still, motherhood looms large in the text, as Perpetua's fellow-martyr Felicitas is also defined largely by her identity as a mother-to-be. Eight months pregnant when she is arrested, Felicitas agonizes not over the fact that her child will grow up without a mother, but that her

¹¹⁰ Perpetua does not abandon her child but rather entrusts him to her (Christian) family members. On martyrs' rejections of their families understood as a reconfiguration of families, with a focus on Perpetua and Felicitas, see Moss, "Blood Ties".

¹¹¹ The possibility that her maternal feelings may linger in her vision of her younger brother Dinocrates will be explored in the section on prophets (below).

condition would preclude her from being martyred along with the rest of the martyrs.¹¹² Whereas Perpetua initially worried for the well-being of her son and found comfort in having him with her and nursing him, Felicitas' only concern seems to be to give birth as quickly as possible so that she might achieve martyrdom along with her companions. The entire group gets together to pray two days before they are to be killed in the arena, and miraculously she goes into labour immediately afterwards. One of the guards taunts Felicitas, saying that she will not be able to endure the pain in the arena if she cannot even endure the pain of childbirth. Felicitas remains steadfast, insisting that the pain in the arena will be bearable because she will be enduring it with God.¹¹³ Finally, Felicitas' child is given to another member of the Christian community, an unnamed "sister" who brings her up "as her own daughter."¹¹⁴ Thus, Felicitas' motherhood identity does not disappear entirely but is rather transferred to another woman. Like Perpetua, Felicitas' last actions as a mother are to ensure her child's religious upbringing, demonstrating that a rejection of the role of mother for the purpose of martyrdom did not necessarily indicate a complete lack of concern for the well-being of their children.

However, even as Perpetua and Felicitas both eventually reject the role identity of mother in favour of the sole identity of Christian martyr granted them by God, traces of their former identities remain within the text, both in the descriptions of their physical appearance and in various literary symbols. Maternal imagery in Perpetua's prophetic visions is abundant, and will

¹¹² *Pass. Perp.* 15 (Heffernan, 116-17), trans. Heffernan, 132: *Instante spectaculi die in magno erat luctu, ne propter ventrem differretur (quia non licet pregnantis poenae repraesentari).*

¹¹³ *Pass. Perp.* 15 (Heffernan, 117), trans. Heffernan, 132: *Modo ego patior quod patior; illic autem alius erit in me qui patietur pro me, quia et ego pro illo passura sum.* Later, in a sermon, Augustine further elaborates on the suffering endured by Felicitas: "the punishment of Eve was not missing, but the grace of Mary was at hand" (Augustine, *Serm.* 281.3 [PL 38: 1284-85], trans. Hill, 79: *Non aberat Evae poena, sed aderat Mariae gratia).*

¹¹⁴ *Pass. Perp.* 15 (Heffernan, 117), trans. Heffernan, 132: *Ita enixa est puellam, quam sibi quaedam soror in filiam educavit.*

be discussed in more detail below.¹¹⁵ In terms of the martyrs' physical appearance, when Perpetua and Felicitas are brought naked into the arena, the crowd is said to be shocked at the way the martyrs looked. Breastmilk once again serves as a physical symbol for motherhood, with the redactor describing that Felicitas' breasts were "still dripping with milk."¹¹⁶ Milk as a more abstract representation of maternal nurturing can also be seen in the animal with which Perpetua and Felicitas are faced. The "very wild cow" (*ferocissima vacca*) at once stands for maternity and the rejection of maternity, in which the cow's wildness negates the typical association with nurturing and fertility and replaced it with something unnatural. As motherhood was an ideal for Roman women, it is likely that some in the crowd (and perhaps even some in the martyrology's audience) would have seen Perpetua and Felicitas' rejections of their children as incomprehensible and uncivilized (or, indeed, animal-like),¹¹⁷ thereby making the animal with which they are faced much more meaningful than a simple agreement of the sexes. Although the women themselves both leave behind their children before they enter the arena (with the help of God), others continue to place this role identity upon them. Motherhood continues to be an important determinant of behaviour and interpretation even in cases where the women no longer view it as their most salient identity. Salience is very much in the eye of the beholder.

Indeed, Augustine imposes the rejected motherhood identity upon them when he holds up Perpetua's motherhood as a reason why it was even more surprising that she was able to endure the pain of martyrdom: "One of them was also a mother, so that to the weakness of her sex might

¹¹⁵ See the section on prophets.

¹¹⁶ *Pass. Perp.* 20 (Heffernan, 121), trans. Heffernan, 134: ... *alteram partu recentem stillantibus mammis*.

¹¹⁷ Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 339, 344.

be added feelings less capable of endurance.”¹¹⁸ Augustine’s amazement at the endurance of mothers (whom he clearly thought would be weaker than non-mothers) echoes the incredulity of the guard in jail who questions Felicitas’ endurance when she gives birth. While wifehood was easily pushed aside and justified, motherhood is a role that lingers and endures, despite what the women themselves assert.

Nevertheless, Augustine’s application of the identity of mother to Perpetua and Felicitas is understandable: motherhood occupies such a large portion of their narrative that it can hardly be ignored. This is in contrast to the example of Crispina, as Augustine refers to her as a mother despite a complete absence of such a role from her narrative. When warning his congregation against taking too much pleasure in earthly delights, he argues that Crispina rejected all of her earthly prosperity, including her children, as a result of her devotion to God alone.

In this case, Augustine does not use motherhood as a symbol of femininity or as a way to emphasize Crispina’s location within a family; rather, he uses it to show that the members of his congregation should concern themselves not with earthly rewards but only spiritual ones. Continuing to describe events that do not appear in the account of Crispina’s martyrdom, Augustine further elaborates that Crispina’s children wept and mourned for her, viewing their mother’s rejection of them as heartless. He argues that her children’s perception was wrong and that she did indeed care for them. Augustine asserts that Crispina’s focus on martyrdom was all the more praiseworthy precisely because she valued and loved her children; it was only because she knew that her death would lead to eternal happiness that she rejected them.¹¹⁹ Thus,

¹¹⁸ Augustine, *Serm.* 282.2 (PL 38: 1285), trans. Hill, 81: *Quarum altera et mater, ut ad infirmitatem sexus impatientior adderetur affectus.* (Interestingly, Augustine seems to count Felicitas as a mother after only she has given birth.)

¹¹⁹ Augustine, *Enarrationes en Psalmos* 137.7 (CCSL 40: 1982-83), trans. Boulding, 246: *natalitium sanctae et beatae feminae celebras, et forte felicitatem terrenam desideras. illa propter desiderium sanctum dimisit felicitatem*

Augustine uses Crispina not as an invitation for others to imitate by rejecting children outright; rather, the joy of earthly things such as having children should be tempered with the knowledge that true happiness comes only through God in heaven. In this way, although he frames Crispina's example in the context of motherhood, Augustine's point is not about motherhood specifically, but rather about earthly attachments. Once again, as with Perpetua, Augustine uses motherhood as a symbol for weakness, presumably because of the expected maternal attachment to children. For Augustine, the roles of motherhood and martyrdom are irreconcilable.

As Augustine only alludes to Crispina in one other place in this long sermon and spends the remainder focused on a close reading of the Psalm in question, it gives the impression that the martyr or her familial identities were not the main inspiration for the sermon, which spends much more time emphasizing the priority of spiritual over material matters. It is difficult, therefore, to draw any broader conclusions about the way in which Augustine viewed motherhood and martyrdom from this passage. Furthermore, the fact that this is the only instance in which Augustine refers to Crispina's motherhood implies that this particular role was not central to Augustine's understanding of her, and that this was likely true for his audience as well. The lack of any mention of Crispina's motherhood in the extant text, and the absence of any maternal symbols further separates Crispina from more well-attested mother-martyrs and makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about the way in which she viewed this role and whether she even identified with it at all.

quam habebat in terra; dimisit filios flentes et tamquam crudelem matrem dolentes, quia uelut perdidit humanam misericordiam, quae ad diuinam festinabat coronam. nesciebat uero illa quid desideraret, quid calcaret? immo uero nouerat psallere coram angelis dei, eorumque desiderare consortium, amicitiam sanctam et puram, ubi ulterius non moreretur, ubi iudicem nosset apud quem non ualere posset mendacium. quid ergo? illa uita nulla sunt bona? immo uero ibi sola sunt bona, non malis mixta bona; securitates in quibus gaudeas quantum uis, et nemo dicat tibi: tempera te. hic autem de bonis terrenis gaudere molestum est, et periculosum nimis, ne sic gaudeas ut haereas, et gaudendo male pereas. nam unde deus miscet tribulationes gaudiis terrenis, nisi ut tribulationem sentienteset amaritudinem, discamus aeternam desiderare dulcedinem?

One martyr who is clearly associated with the role of the mother even in her martyrdom was Quartillosa. She does not have to give up her maternal identity, since her child was not a helpless and ignorant infant but rather a fellow Christian who was ready to die for his faith like his mother. Thus, Quartillosa's maternal ties to her son did not impede her martyrdom; the roles of motherhood and martyrdom co-exist within this text.

Although Quartillosa's son dies before her, even his death does not sever the connection between mother and son, as he appears to her in a vision. The text reinforces the bond between mother and child, and the counter-identities continue to be influential even after her son has died. The absence of her husband in the vision, even though he was martyred at the same time as her son, suggests that marital relationship is less salient for Quartillosa (and for the martyrology's author) than the maternal one. Quartillosa's narrative is consistent with the prominence of Perpetua's and Felicitas' children and the coinciding absence of their husbands. While Quartillosa does not need to reject either her motherhood or her marriage, once again, a martyr is linked with the role identity of mother above the role identity of wife.

In the vision, Quartillosa's son comforts his mother, assuring her that God knows her pain and that they will be rewarded justly.¹²⁰ The depiction of a son comforting his mother reverses the expected power dynamic of the parent-child relationship and is the result of the authority gained by Quartillosa's son by virtue of having died a martyr. It is clear that martyrdom supersedes earthly bonds and the earthly order of power and authority. Still, although Quartillosa no longer has maternal authority over her son, some kind of familial connection does remain within the context of her vision. Quartillosa's understanding of the meaning of her role identity of mother may have changed with the death of her son, but she continues to identify with the

¹²⁰ *Pass. Mont.* 8 (Musurillo, 220), trans. Musurillo, 221.

social identity of belonging to the same family, both in a literal sense and in the more abstract sense of their mutual membership in the Christian family and the community of martyrs. While Perpetua and Felicitas needed to leave their children behind in order to adopt the identity of martyr, the martyr-death of Quartillosa's son provides her with the opportunity to maintain the role identity of mother without it interfering in any way her impending martyrdom; while Perpetua and Felicitas' children were hindrances, Quartillosa's son is an aide.

An additional aspect that elevates Quartillosa's motherhood identity is the fact that she is the mother of a martyr. She presumably comforted her son while he was alive and encouraged him to become a martyr. In Quartillosa's text the role of mother may have been closely tied to a particular understanding of their faith, one that led them both to become martyrs. In other words, while the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* depicts Perpetua as understanding the role identity of mother largely in the context of providing physical nourishment, Quartillosa may have been more focused on encouraging spiritual rewards in her son. Physical nourishment ended with death, but devotion to God could continue in the afterlife. Perpetua's understanding of the role identity of mother must necessarily end with the death of the mother, while the Quartillosa's faced no such limitations.

The mother in 2 Maccabees provides a clear precedent for a mother's encouragement of her children towards martyrdom. Furthermore, it also demonstrates that this kind of interpretation of a mother's duties to her children was met with admiration and glorification.¹²¹

¹²¹ E.g., 2 Maccabees 7: 20-21: ὑπεραγόντως δὲ ἡ μήτηρ θαυμαστὴ καὶ μνήμης ἀγαθῆς ἀξία, ἥτις ἀπολλυμένους υἱοὺς ἑπτὰ συνορῶσα μιᾷς ὑπὸ καιρὸν ἡμέρας εὐψύχως ἔφερε διὰ τὰς ἐπὶ Κύριον ἐλπίδας. 21 ἕκαστον δὲ αὐτῶν παρεκάλει τῇ πατρίῳ φωνῇ γενναίῳ πεπληρωμένη φρονήματι καὶ τὸν θῆλον λογισμὸν ἄρσενι θυμῷ διεγείρασα, λέγουσα πρὸς αὐτούς: "The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. She encouraged each of them." For a comparison between the way motherhood is represented in 2 Maccabees and the *Passio Perpetuae*, see van Henten, "The *Passio Perpetuae* and Jewish Martyrdom."

The memory of the Maccabean mother appears to have loomed large in North Africa, as two other North African martyr texts, *The Martyrdom of Saints Marian and James* and *The Martyrdom of Saints Montanus and Lucius*, portray mothers who rejoice in the martyrdom of their sons and who are directly compared to the Maccabean mother.¹²² While nothing of Quartillosa's conversations with her son are depicted in the martyrology, it is nevertheless possible that she was drawing on the ideal of the Maccabean mother in her interpretation of the role of a Christian mother. That she is depicted as seeing her son in a prominent and authoritative place in a vision after his martyrdom suggests to the audience that she glorified him and his death just as the Maccabean mother glorified her sons.

Clearly, there was a complex relationship between motherhood and martyrdom. Motherhood remained the ideal for Roman women, but for Christian women who faced martyrdom, the ideal of motherhood quickly became fraught with complications. Perpetua is shown as delaying her rejection of motherhood until the last possible moment, while Felicitas is depicted as trying to accelerate the process. Both are only able to sever ties with their infants through divine intervention and both continue to have maternal symbols and identities imposed upon them even after they no longer identify as mothers. Similarly, Crispina is not shown in the role of a mother anywhere within her narrative, but this does not stop Augustine from applying it to her in order to support a particular rhetorical argument, in which rejection of all earthly ties (with motherhood being the ultimate link to earthly relationships) is paramount. Finally,

¹²² *Pass. Mar. Iac.* 13 (Musurillo, 212), trans. Musurillo, 213: *His peractis Machabiacis gaudio Mariani mater exultans et passione perfecta iam secunda de filio, non illi tantum coeperat, sed et sibi, quae tale pignus ediderat, gratulari*; *Pass. Montan.* 16 (Musurillo, 230), trans. Musurillo, 231: *O matrem religiose piam! O matrem inter uetera exempla numerandam! O Machabaeicam matrem!* Augustine knows of the former text at least, and he glorifies Marian's mother as well (*Serm.* 284.2 [PL 38: 1288-89], trans. Hill, 89).

Quartillosa is able to be both a mother and a martyr because her son shares her martyrdom identity and his martyrdom only enhances the maternal bond between them.

Although the texts, with the possible exception of Perpetua, do not provide first-hand insight into the mindset of the women themselves, the diversity of the way in which motherhood is depicted does support the argument that the role identity of mother was not static and that the relationship between motherhood and martyrdom was likewise varied. Each woman brings her own experiences, values, and contexts to the role identity of mother and this influences the way in which she can or cannot reconcile motherhood with martyrdom. As to how motherhood is depicted in the North African literary accounts, the only generality that may be drawn is that the rejection of motherhood is not a prerequisite to becoming a martyr; rather, it only becomes necessary if failing to do so would result in a woman being unable to achieve martyrdom. However, such generality misses the nuances found from engaging in a close reading of the texts.

Daughter

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the role identity of daughter is largely depicted as inherently submissive to the counter-identities of parents. When daughters are Christians with non-Christian parents, the usual virtues of obedience and *pietas* become impediments to their continued faith. For North African daughters who became martyrs, this meant expressing agency through resistance. Only by rejecting such duties and the role identity of daughter could they be free from obligation to their parents and become martyrs. This can be seen in the accounts of the martyrs Perpetua, Secunda, and Maria.

The closest familial relationship in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is between Perpetua and her father. As has already been noted, her father retains legal control over her and advocates for her during her various interrogations. However, Perpetua consistently and repeatedly rejects his authority and thus does not operate within the socially-expected dynamic between the counter-identities of father and daughter. The significance of Perpetua's role as daughter is revealed in the prominent position it takes within the narrative. Immediately after the redactor's introduction, Perpetua's diary begins with her recounting a conversation between herself and her father. In it, Perpetua recognizes that her father is acting "out of his love" when he asks her to change her mind, but she does not yield to his demands.

Instead, Perpetua engages in a conversation about identity construction, asking her father whether or not a vase can be called anything other than what it is. When he answers in the negative, Perpetua asserts, "In the same way, I am unable to call myself other than what I am, a Christian."¹²³ Thus, Perpetua immediately starts to distance herself from the role identity of daughter. Just as a vase cannot be two things at once, so does Perpetua see herself at this moment as a Christian and nothing else. Perpetua's self-identification as a Christian alone points to the Platonic notion that "for each thing there is a true name, a name that reflects the nature or essence of the thing."¹²⁴ For Perpetua, having other role identities is ultimately impossible since her (only) true identity is as a Christian. While she saw the mother identity as being able to co-exist with martyrdom (until her child was forcibly taken away from her), Perpetua cannot be a daughter and a martyr (or even simply a Christian) because her father's demands force her to confront the incompatibility directly.

¹²³ *Pass. Perp.* 3.1-2 (Heffernan, 105), trans. Heffernan, 126: *Sic et ego aliud me dicere non possum nisi quod sum, Christiana.*

¹²⁴ Dronke, *Women Writers*, 5. Dronke quotes Jean Jolivet in calling this principle "grammatical Platonism."

This first interaction between father and daughter is also significant for the reversal of gender expectations. Rather than demanding that she obey him (as would be his right as a *paterfamilias*), Perpetua's father instead tries to persuade her. Perpetua replies with reason, and her resistance to persuasion is a masculine virtue. Perpetua's ability to reason stands in stark contrast to her father's feminine emotion.¹²⁵ Thus, Perpetua rejects the daughter identity both through her words to her father and by the way in which she expresses them. Her rebellious agency in speaking out against her father goes against the expectations of the role identity of daughter as well as the traditional expectations for women in general.

Some days later, Perpetua's father tries again to convince her, this time appealing to the pity that she still feels for him despite her assertions and reminding her of her former relationships with her family. Once again, although Perpetua recognizes that this was done out of love, she does not yield. In a dramatic reversal of the expected relationship, Perpetua's father throws himself down at her feet and kisses her hands. Perpetua's father appears to recognize the symbolic nature of this gesture, as Perpetua relates, "Weeping, he no longer called me daughter, but lady."¹²⁶ It is significant that, while Perpetua rejected the role of daughter in their earlier encounter by asserting her sole identity as a Christian, not until this second encounter does her father recognize and accept this rejection. Calling her "lady" removes all familial links between them, and, importantly, removes the duty of *pietas* from Perpetua. Since she is no longer his daughter, she is not longer required to obey any demands he might make upon her.

¹²⁵ Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 97. On allowing oneself to be persuaded as being seen as "unmasculine" in antiquity, see pp. 72-76.

¹²⁶ *Pass. Perp.* 5.1-5 (Heffernan, 107-8), trans. Heffernan, 127-28: [...] *lacrimans me iam non filiam nominabat, sed dominam*. The use of the term *domina* instead of other options like *femina* or *mulier* is also significant, since it frequently "connoted power, authority, and dominance" (Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 98).

This rejection of the father-daughter relationship is further emphasized in their final interaction. Perpetua's father no longer appeals to her as a daughter and he does not ask her to consider the consequences that her actions may have on him. However, he does not fully understand that claiming the identity of a Christian martyr means that Perpetua must remove *all* family ties. Instead, he references her role identity as a mother, asking her to have pity not for his own sake, but for the sake of her son.¹²⁷ Once again, however, her father is not successful.

Hilarius, the procurator, does not understand changes that have taken place in the relationship between Perpetua and her father, and does not realize that the typical expectations of the counter-identities no longer apply. He continues to appeal to the sense of duty that would normally accompany the role of daughter, instructing Perpetua to spare her father and sacrifice. When she refuses, Hilarius punishes her father for his failure to impose his authority. Despite Perpetua's own rejection of the role, she is still seen as a daughter by outsiders and her father is punished for not maintaining the proper father-daughter dynamic. When Perpetua's father is beaten on Hilarius' orders, Perpetua does not grieve for him as a daughter for a father. Instead, just as anyone might, she feels badly for him simply because of his old age, which she finds "pitiable."¹²⁸ Hilarius' punishment of Perpetua's father reflects the way in which many Romans considered Christianity to be a destabilizing force, creating new kinds of familial units and causing traditional families to be broken down. When the disobedience of Perpetua becomes public (and therefore dangerous) knowledge that had the potential to destabilize the social system, Hilarius punishes her father, publicly shaming him.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ *Pass. Perp.* 6.2 (Heffernan, 108), trans. Heffernan, 128: *Supplica; misere infanti.*

¹²⁸ *Pass. Perp.* 6.2-6 (Heffernan, 108-9), trans. Heffernan, 128: *Sic dolui pro senecta eius misera.* It is worth noting that Perpetua's father is not depicted as suffering bodily punishment in either of the *Acta*.

¹²⁹ Cooper, "Closely Watched Households," 8.

The two *Acta* generally retain the outlines of the interactions between Perpetua and her father, although they are greatly condensed compared to the *passio* versions. However, there are a couple of interesting distinctions. First, in the *Acta I*, Perpetua does not simply reject the daughter identity, but rather reshapes it. She tells her father that she had been his daughter for a time, but now she will be a perpetual daughter.¹³⁰ Thus, Perpetua continues being a daughter, but of a heavenly father rather than an earthly one. In contrast, in the *Acta II*, Perpetua states unequivocally that she will cease being a daughter altogether, refusing to recognize any parents who ignore God.¹³¹ The three different portrayals of Perpetua's negotiation of her daughter identity with her father reflect the complexity with which these identities were rendered and interpreted, even when the end result is the same. Whether Perpetua reorients herself as a daughter to a different father or whether she rejects her father repeatedly in various contexts, she ultimately must give up her connection to her father in order to become a martyr.

Throughout the interactions between Perpetua and her father in the *passio* and the *acta*, the social expectations of the father-daughter relationship and its associated power dynamic are undermined. This is largely done through Perpetua's rejection of her father's authority over her as a daughter. This rebellious agency serves to problematize both the expected father-daughter relationship as well as the differences between the genders. Perpetua's behaviour throughout the *passio* is depicted as masculine because of her reason and lack of outward emotion, in contrast to her father's increasing desperation and emotion. Perpetua adopts a dominant, masculine role and

¹³⁰ *Acta I* 6.3 (SC 417: 286), trans. SC 417: 287: "*Pater, noli vereri: Perpetuam enim filiam tuam, si non obstiteris, perpetuam filiam possidebis.*"

¹³¹ *Acta II* 6.3 (SC 417: 298), trans. SC 417: 299: "*Non agnosco parentes, creatorem omnium ignorantes, qui et si essent, ut in Christi confessione persisterem, persuaderent.*"

is ultimately the one who is able to exercise authoritative power over her father—even if that power is used to ensure her own death.¹³²

Significantly, Perpetua's rejection of the daughter identity through her disobedience seems to have still been a topic of some debate in Augustine's congregation, as he needs to explain why her refusal to acquiesce to her father's demands can be reconciled with the norm of unquestioning submission to one's parents. Augustine represents Perpetua's actions as necessary in order to achieve martyrdom. As martyrdom was the ideal representation of one's love for God, it needed to be put above all else, even one's parents. However, Augustine makes it clear that Perpetua does not reject her father cold-heartedly or without consideration. He emphasizes the parts of her narrative in which she is shown as grieving for her father's pain and notes that she did not stop having affection for him even when she was refusing to do as he wished. Augustine explains:

Saint Perpetua, however, answered her father with such moderation, that she neither violated the commandment by which honour is owed to parents, nor yielded to the tricks which the real enemy was practicing. Beaten at every turn, he caused her father to be beaten with a stick; so that while she had ignored his words, she would at least grieve at his lashes. She, though, did indeed grieve at the insult offered her aged parent; and while she did not give him her consent, she kept her affection for him undiminished. What she hated in him was his folly, not his nature; his unbelief, not her roots. Thus she earned all the greater glory by resolutely rejecting the bad advice of such a beloved father, considering that she could not see him thrashed without feeling the pain herself.¹³³

¹³² On volition over one's life (including having the option to end it) and masculinity, see Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 66-70.

¹³³ Augustine, *Serm.* 281.2 (PL 38: 1284), trans. Hill, 79: *ubi sancta Perpetua tanta patri moderatione respondit, ut nec praeceptum uiolaret, quo debetur honor parentibus, nec dolis cederet, quibus altior agebat inimicus. qui undique superatus, eundem patrem eius uirga percuti fecit; ut cuius uerba contempserat, saltem uerba condoleret. ibi uero doluit illa senis parentis iniuriam; et cui non praebuit assensum, seruauit affectum. oderat quippe in illo stultitiam, non naturam; et eius infidelitatem, non originem suam. maiore igitur gloria tam dilectum patrem male suadentem fortiter repulit, quem uapulanti uidere sine moerore non potuit.*

Thus, Augustine emphasizes that Perpetua does not hate her father but rather the fact that he was not a believer and was counseling her to do something against her Christian beliefs. While the Perpetua narrative demonstrates that it is not possible to be both a daughter and a Christian, for Augustine, Perpetua could both remain a daughter (since she still recognized and loved her father) and eventually become a martyr (because she nevertheless rejected his arguments). This fits within Augustine's teachings on parents elsewhere, where he draws on Matthew 10:37 and asserts, "You only love your parents properly and devotedly when you do not put your parents before God."¹³⁴ In her refusal to put her father's wishes before God's, Perpetua clearly fulfills this ideal. She is a loving daughter and a Christian until she can no longer claim both identities concurrently.

The tension between the role of daughter and the role of martyr can also be seen in the *Passion of Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda*, which introduces Secunda as the disobedient daughter of wealthy parents. By refusing to follow through on the marriages that they arranged for her, Secunda is shown as exerting rebellious agency in going against the expected obedience of a typical daughter.¹³⁵ In addition, Secunda also severs ties with the wealth and status of her parents, as the audience is told that she only desires to have eternal life in heaven. As with Perpetua, the role identity of daughter is immediately seen as being incompatible with the intent for martyrdom.

¹³⁴ Augustine, *Serm.* 72A.4 (MA 1: 158-59), trans. Hill, 285: *tunc enim ordinate et pie amas parentes, quando deo non praeponis parentes*; cf. Matthew 10:37 "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." See also Sigismund-Neilsen, "Vibia Perpetua," 111.

¹³⁵ She does this in an extreme way, apparently throwing herself from the balcony of her house to avoid the marriages (*Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 4 [TU 134: 100], trans. Tilley, 21). For further discussion, see the section on virgins below.

Despite these details that show that Secunda immediately and unhesitatingly rejects the identity of daughter, her fellow martyrs Maxima and Donatilla (who are the ones who inspired her to martyrdom) are initially depicted as doubting her commitment; they identify her *only* as a daughter. Speaking together, they say, “Go away, for you are the only child of your father: to whom would you leave him?”¹³⁶ When Secunda insists that it is better for her to defy her earthly father in favour of her spiritual one, Maxima and Donatilla again implore her to “consider the age of your father and do not abandon him.”¹³⁷

The insistence that Secunda stay and reject the identity of martyr in favour of that of daughter is striking, particularly since this insistence comes from two women who had themselves chosen martyrdom (and presumably, at some point outside of the narrative context, rejected their families). This may be explained by again referring to the understanding demonstrated in Augustine’s sermon on Perpetua, in which he shows that disobedience of one’s parents was potentially problematic and ideally should be undertaken with clear emphasis on the lasting love that remains. Since Secunda does not display any of the remorse that Perpetua showed, Maxima and Donatilla’s reaction is representative of the tension within some Christian communities regarding whether it was proper for young girls to reject their family, even for such a laudable goal as martyrdom. For some people, the role identity of daughter and its associated virtues of *pietas* and obedience likely took precedence over even martyrdom. Thus, the words of Maxima and Donatilla may serve a literary function, demonstrating the type of opposition martyrs faced and the kinds of arguments being made against the choice of martyrdom for young girls.

¹³⁶ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 4 (TU 134: 100), trans. Tilley, 22: *Vade, quia unica es patri tuo: cui eum dimitteres?*

¹³⁷ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 4 (TU 134: 101), trans. Tilley, 22: *considera aetatem patris tui et noli eum dimittere.*

The martyr Salsa is also depicted as a daughter who must eventually publicly reject her parents; however, the circumstances of Salsa's rejection of her parents are unique to other North African daughter-martyrs. While the other martyrs only act against their parents when they are put into situations in which it is the only way to preserve their Christian identities (when they are arrested by the authorities or forced into marriage, for example), Salsa's situation might seem much more flexible. She is forced to attend the festival of the dragon with her parents, but there is no indication in the text that she is expected to offer a sacrifice or otherwise participate in the ceremonies in a more active way.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, Salsa tries to convince the crowd to stop worshipping the dragon by telling them about the power of the true God; the crowd does not listen and instead ridicules her.¹³⁹ Her parents do not respond to her individually, and otherwise do not factor in to the story. They do not speak out in order to try to convince their daughter to renounce her Christianity, nor are they singled out among the crowd of worshippers who ultimately kill Salsa.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, Salsa's disobedience is not shown as reflecting negatively on her parents in any way. Therefore, while Salsa is indeed identified as a daughter within the text, her role as a daughter does not seem to have played a contributing factor in the way in which her martyrdom is described or in the type of meaning that is expected to be derived from it. Her role as a daughter stops being salient as soon as she decides to destroy the dragon (with God's help). Thus, the rebellious agency that Salsa demonstrates is not necessarily against her parents, but against the entire community.

Finally, the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* contains a brief mention of another martyr-daughter, Maria. Unlike the fathers of Perpetua and Secunda, Maria's father is identified as a

¹³⁸ *Passio Sanctae Salsae* 3-4 (Piredda, 74, 76, 78).

¹³⁹ *Passio Sanctae Salsae* 5-6 (Piredda, 80, 82, 84, 86).

¹⁴⁰ *Passio Sanctae Salsae* 9 (Piredda, 92).

Christian presbyter who encourages his children to be martyred with him.¹⁴¹ The way in which Maria's daughter role is depicted is therefore distinctive from the others because she did not need to reject this identity in order to become a martyr; she could be a martyr and a daughter because her father did not demand her to renounce her Christianity. However, this apparent harmony between the expectations of a father and daughter results in an absence of discussion about Maria's viewpoint on martyrdom. Indeed, the text completely glosses over the mindsets of Maria and her brothers, focusing instead on describing the children from the point of view of their father.

Maria's martyrdom is described in the context of a decision that her father makes on her behalf: "Then came the presbyter Saturninus surrounded by his numerous children. He chose some of them as his companions in martyrdom; he left the others to the Church as a memorial to his name."¹⁴² This passage is not concerned with the question of whether or not his children had any agency in choosing or rejecting the role of martyr. This decision is depicted as being made for them by their father, emphasizing the way in which the virtue of obedience was expected to function. Sons and daughters were expected to show deference to their father's wishes and this submission would serve to enhance their father's reputation and memory. The authority of her father completely obscures any agency that Maria might have had in agreeing or disagreeing with his decision regarding her fate. The example of Maria therefore provides an interesting comparison with those of Perpetua and Secunda. The rebellious agency ascribed to Perpetua and

¹⁴¹ Saturninus also has three sons, Saturninus, Felix, and Hilarianus. Saturninus and Felix are identified by the official title of *lector* while Hilarianus is described as still a child. Like her elder brothers, Maria holds an official title of *sanctimoniali*, or "consecrated virgin". The descriptions of Saturninus' children suggest that Christianity is seen as a family affair; familial roles exist in conjunction with official roles within the community. See *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 2 (TU 134: 63), trans. Tilley, 29. The account of the martyrdom of the younger Saturninus is recounted in *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 15 (TU 134: 78-80), trans. Tilley, 39-40.

¹⁴² *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 2 (TU 134: 63), trans. Tilley, 29.

Secunda allows for their perspectives to be delineated within the martyr narratives and for the role of daughter to be more nuanced. By being part of a Christian family, Maria is primarily identifiable as the daughter of a prominent official, thus disallowing any further nuance or view into the other identities or meanings she might have claimed for herself.

It is interesting that the narratives of Perpetua, Secunda, and Maria focus on the relationship between daughter and father, with Perpetua's mother playing a supportive role and Secunda and Maria's mothers going unmentioned. Although it is a small sample size, it may be posited that the public nature of the role identity of father affected the public way in which it features within these narratives. It is certainly clear that there is an overarching concern for the way in which a daughter's behaviour might reflect either positively or negatively upon her father's reputation. When the father is not a Christian, this is depicted as reflecting the broader concern for the social order; the abandonment of *pietas* and the submissive agency that daughters were expected to embody may prove dangerous to the social hierarchy. More practically, the focus on fathers may be representative of the way in which the relationship between mothers and daughters was seen as occupying the domestic realm while fathers were viewed as being responsible for the family in public. Only fathers could speak for their daughters in legal matters, whether to try to convince them to change their minds, as Perpetua's father does, or to confirm their identities as martyrs, as Maria's father does. In each case, the primary relationship between the counter-identities of father and daughter clearly reflects certain societal expectations relating to power and authority. Just as with the role identities of wife and mother, there is no single way to reject the role of daughter, nor is it always necessary.

Sister

As discussed in the previous chapter, the role identity of sister can at times be difficult to parse, as sibling imagery is so often used to refer to other members of the Christian community (and fellow martyrs) rather than biological relationships. Indeed, when considering its literal use, the identity of sister occurs less frequently in North African martyr texts than familial identities like wife, mother, and daughter. Nevertheless, sibling relationships do appear in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* and in the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, as both Perpetua and Victoria are depicted as sisters. In the *Acta I*, furthermore, Felicitas is depicted as being a sister to Revocatus, although whether this is meant literally or spiritually is unclear. This section will first explore the ambiguous example of Felicitas before moving to examine the more straightforward examples of Perpetua and Victoria. Perpetua and Victoria interact with their brothers in different ways, thus demonstrating the way that the identity of sister was expressed depended on the counter-identity of brother.

In the introduction of *Acta I*, Felicitas is described as being the sister of Revocatus (and Saturus and Saturninus are described as brothers).¹⁴³ This is in contrast with the way that she and Revocatus are depicted as being fellow-slaves (either in a literal or metaphorical sense to refer to marriage) in the *passio* and the Greek version of the text.¹⁴⁴ Later, when the proconsul asks Felicitas if her parents are still alive, Felicitas responds that they are not, but that Revocatus is her brother, and that she could not have better parents than the other martyrs who are with her.¹⁴⁵ Rather than *frater*, the word translated as brother is *congermanus*, which carries with it the sense of growing up together or being united. The fact that Felicitas is depicted as asserting this

¹⁴³ *Acta I* 1.1 (SC 417: 278), trans. SC 417: 279: *Facta itaque persecution sub Valeriano et Galieno, comprehensi sunt venerabiles viri iuvenes Saturus et Saturninus, duo fratres, Revocatus et Felicitas, soror eius, et Perpetua...*

¹⁴⁴ See the section on “wives” in this chapter.

¹⁴⁵ *Acta I* 5.6 (SC 417: 284), trans. SC 417: 285: *Proconsul dixit: “Parentes habes?” Felicitas respondit: “Non habeo; Revocatus vero congermanus meus est. Verumtamen his maiores parentes habere non potero.”*

relationship in response to the question about her (biological) parents certainly speaks to a close, and possibly, familial relationship. However, she immediately reverts to speaking in metaphors, calling all the other martyrs her parents, thus making it likely that she should be understood as speaking metaphorically the whole time.

Apart from these instances, Felicitas is not depicted as being particularly close to Revocatus elsewhere in the narrative. For example, he is not referenced when she gives birth, which may have been an opportunity to emphasize the continuation of biological family ties. Additionally, although they both die by being attacked by a leopard,¹⁴⁶ this fate also occurs in the *Acta II*,¹⁴⁷ in which there is no sibling relationship referenced. Thus, though familial imagery is clearly important to the author, it is not clear whether Felicitas and Revocatus were intended to be seen as true siblings or whether this represents the author's rhetorical attempts to "present the group as close-knit as possible."¹⁴⁸ Identifying Felicitas as a true sister of Revocatus does not give any further insight into her character. Their interactions are minor and neither one are shown as displaying any familial *pietas* towards one another that does not extend to the rest of their fellow martyrs-to-be. The example of Felicitas as a sister thus highlights the difficulties in exploring this identity.

In contrast, Perpetua is unambiguously depicted as a sister to three brothers, two living and one who is deceased and appears to her in two visions. One of her brothers is explicitly identified as being a Christian, as he joins Perpetua's mother in visiting her in prison. Perpetua comforts him, entrusts the care of her son to her brother and her mother, and notes that she "suffered

¹⁴⁶ *Acta I* 9.4 (SC 417: 288), trans. SC 417: 289: *Revocatus et Felicitas a leopardis gloriosum agonem impleverunt.*

¹⁴⁷ *Acta II* 9.4 (SC 417: 302), trans. SC 417: 303: *Revocatum et Felicitatem leopardi discernpunt.*

¹⁴⁸ Bremmer, "Felicitas," 37.

grievously when I saw how they suffered for me.”¹⁴⁹ Perpetua’s act of comforting her brother reflects a certain amount of agency and authority over him, perhaps by virtue of her status as a martyr-to-be or simply because he may be younger than she is.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the sisterly affection that Perpetua feels for her brother is combined with her love for her mother and is reflective of the way that she grieves for her father’s pain. Thus, it is not distinct to her identity as a sister, but rather reflective of general familial *pietas*.

Perpetua’s other living brother is only alluded to when Perpetua’s father tells her to “think about your brothers,”¹⁵¹ but her deceased brother Dinocrates appears in two visions.¹⁵² As will be discussed in more detail in the section on prophets below, although Perpetua explicitly identifies him as “my brother in the flesh” (*frater meus carnalis*), the visions of Dinocrates are filled with maternal, rather than sibling, imagery. Still, the fact that Perpetua’s brother appears in her visions combined with her seeming affection for her brother who visits her in prison suggests a close relationship between the siblings. While a great deal of narrative space is devoted to the way that Perpetua negotiates and eventually rejects identities like mother and daughter, Perpetua does not have to give up her sister identity because her brothers do not in any way impede her martyrdom. One of her brothers support her in life and she helps Dinocrates in death. Despite (or perhaps because of) their support, it is difficult to draw any broader conclusions about how Perpetua understood her sister identity or what the social expectations for this identity may have been.

¹⁴⁹ *Pass. Perp.* 3.8 (Heffernan, 106), trans. Heffernan, 126: *...et confortabam fratrem, comendabam filium; tabescebam ido quod illos tabescere videram mei beneficio*. It should be noted that the next section begins with Perpetua asserting that her brother asked her for a vision. While this may initially appear to be a reference to the biological brother just referenced, at the end of the vision, Perpetua makes it clear that this brother is someone who is going to suffer martyrdom alongside her and must therefore be one of her fellow martyrs who is referred to using sibling language (*Pass. Perp.* 4 [Heffernan, 106-7], trans. Heffernan, 127; see the note at Heffernan, 170).

¹⁵⁰ This may be evidenced by the fact that he seems to still live at home (since he comes to the prison with her mother). Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 44.

¹⁵¹ *Pass. Perp.* 5.3 (Heffernan, 108), trans. Heffernan, 127: *Apsice fratres tuos...*

¹⁵² *Pass. Perp.* 7-8 (Heffernan, 109-11), trans. Heffernan, 128-29.

In contrast, the martyr Victoria's sister identity is highlighted in *The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* when her brother argues with the judge during her interrogation and tries to convince her to reject her Christianity. He is immediately depicted as being in a position of authority because of his high status (he is first described as "a distinguished Roman citizen" [*vir sane togatus*] and then later a senator). He seeks to free Victoria by discrediting the one who influenced her to convert; he asserts that the martyr Dativus was only able to convince Victoria to follow him through seduction. He furthermore claims that Dativus was only able to enter their house because of the absence of their father (who is either still absent or perhaps deceased, given that Victoria's brother acts on his legal behalf).¹⁵³ His words are similar to the arguments that were used by critics of Christianity, who also drew on the common assumption that women were weak-willed and more susceptible to being swayed by outsiders.¹⁵⁴ It is clear that Victoria's brother expects his sister to be submissive to him because of his position as head of the family; he expects to have full agency over her in the same way a father would. Thus, the role identities of sister and daughter are conflated.

However, Victoria responds not with submission but rebellion, speaking out against her brother and insisting that no one persuaded her to leave. Victoria asserts her own agency, claiming, "I did everything on my own initiative and by my own free will."¹⁵⁵ In this, Victoria is not only referring to her martyrdom but also to her conversion to Christianity and her participation in the community more generally. Furthermore, it also may be an oblique reference

¹⁵³ *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 7 (TU 134: 68-69), trans. Tilley, 33.

¹⁵⁴ See, e.g., MacDonald's discussion of Celsus' critiques of Christian evangelization tactics in *Early Christian Women*, 109-15.

¹⁵⁵ *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 7 (TU 134: 69), trans. Tilley, 33: *Omnia mea sponte atque voluntate perfeci*.

to the rejection of her sister identity (alongside all of her other familial identities), her adoption of Christian identities like virgin, and her belonging to a metaphorical sisterhood.

The explicit affirmation that the martyr chose her Christianity of her “own free will” is not present in any of the other martyr texts discussed so far, which tends to take the martyrs’ Christianity as given. For example, although Perpetua’s father is shown as disagreeing with her adopting a Christian identity, the text does not explain where she first encountered Christianity or what factors led her to choose that path. That Victoria directly contradicts her brother’s (stereotypical) claims represents a shift in the typical understanding of familial obligations; if their father was not alive, then her brother would be expected to take on the role of *paterfamilias* and Victoria would have been expected to obey him. By contradicting him, she is both rejecting the biological type of sister identity and adopting the metaphorical, Christian one. Furthermore, by asserting that she was not persuaded by Dativus and by demonstrating her refusal to be persuaded by her brother places her within a masculine context.¹⁵⁶ In conjunction with the narrator’s description of her as “the most distinguished martyr” (in contrast to the earthly distinguished status of her brother, perhaps), it is clear the text views Victoria’s agency as positive, at least insofar as it is used to assert her Christianity.

The differences in the way that the role identity of sister is expressed in the accounts of Perpetua and Victoria are primarily reflective of the differences between supportive and non-supportive family members. Perpetua’s non-supportive father receives much more narrative space than her supportive brothers (and mother), and the only family member that appears in Victoria’s narrative is her non-Christian brother. Ultimately, while it is important to recognize that familial identities existed beyond the most prominent roles of wife, mother, and daughter,

¹⁵⁶ See, e.g., Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 72-76.

the relatively limited discussion about the sister identity suggests that sibling language was more salient metaphorically as Christians created new spiritual families than literally as Christians are depicted as having limited interactions with their biological siblings.

Private/Public Identities of North African Female Martyrs

There are many role identities that fit between the two dominant realms of public and private. However, the only role that will be examined in the discussion of female martyrs is that of virgin. The role of virgin has implications for both the family (private) and the community (public), depending on the way in which it is undertaken. Women may opt to remain virgins rather than marry, which has familial implications but not necessarily community ones, while women who become consecrated virgins hold different, more visible roles within their community and, by extension, society. Both the familial and the public implications of virginity can be seen in the martyr narratives.

Virgin

The role identity of virgin comes to be closely tied with the female ideal within the Christian context. However, it is not heavily represented in the North African martyr texts, only two of which feature virgins: the *Passion of Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda* and the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*. While there might well have been virgin martyrs in texts in which the martyrs' names are simply listed, such as the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, the fact that the virginal status of women is not always emphasized suggests that it did not necessarily contribute (either positively or negatively) to the extent to which they were able to either achieve martyrdom or be held up as exemplars within their communities.

In the *Passion of Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda*, all three martyrs are young virgins and are identified as such throughout. Maxima and Donatilla are called both *castimonialae* and *sanctimoniales* (“consecrated virgins”), which means that they took a vow of chastity but were not necessarily separated from the world or members of an ascetic community.¹⁵⁷ Thus, it is unclear whether they needed to reject their social identities as members of their families in order to also become members of the Christian community through the role identity of virgins. Maxima gives her age as fourteen, which is when a Roman girl would typically expect to marry,¹⁵⁸ further confirming that she has rejected the role identity of wife to remain a virgin.

While it is unclear whether Maxima and Donatilla’s families supported or opposed their choice of virginity, it is clear that Secunda must exercise rebellious agency in order to secure her role identity as virgin. Indeed, although Secunda is said to be only twelve, she has already refused many marriage contracts. She rejects one in a particularly dramatic fashion, throwing herself from the balcony of her home, thereby connecting her rejection of marriage to her rejection of her parents’ wealth and all worldly belongings.¹⁵⁹

Despite Secunda’s dramatic actions, there is nothing particularly unique or distinct about the martyrdom of Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda that can be directly related to their roles as virgins. Their virginity does not provide them with any special strength nor does it seem to affect the way in which they are treated by the authorities (they are not threatened with sexual violence, for example). The families of Maxima and Donatilla are not mentioned at all, and Secunda’s parents are mentioned only when Maxima and Donatilla echo the common arguments used to

¹⁵⁷ Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 18 n. 24.

¹⁵⁸ On virgins and the familial pressure to marry, see e.g., Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 47-56.

¹⁵⁹ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 4 (TU 134: 100), trans. Tilley, 21.

deter martyrs.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the three virgin-martyrs appear totally detached from the rest of the community and it is impossible to discern any broader conclusions about the way the role of virgin was understood within the Christian community in which this text was created.¹⁶¹

In contrast, the way in which the virgin Victoria is singled out within the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* provides an interesting look at the potentially disruptive nature of this identity and the way in which the role identity of virgin was viewed differently by different social groups. First, it should be noted that Victoria is not the only named virgin-martyr in this account. In the introduction, Maria is identified as *sanctimonialis*, “the consecrated virgin”. As with Maxima and Donatilla, this label implies a purposeful vow of chastity. Maria is described as the daughter of a presbyter father and as the sister of lectors. As her father is depicted as choosing which of his children became martyrs,¹⁶² it should also be assumed that he authorized Maria’s consecration. Thus, Maria’s virginity should be seen as being undertaken as an alternative to marriage; instead of choosing an earthly husband for his daughter, Maria’s father chose a spiritual one. Therefore, the role of martyr does not reveal anything about Maria’s corresponding agency; she may have exercised submissive agency in going along with her father’s plans, seeing virginity as a worthy cause and a way in which to contribute to the reputation of her family. Or, she may have viewed virginity as a way to exercise greater power within her Christian community than she otherwise would have been able to as a wife. It is simply impossible to know because the text does not elaborate on this point. The text also does not go into further

¹⁶⁰ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 4 (TU 134: 100-1), trans. Tilley, 21.

¹⁶¹ This might be a symptom of the fact that the text is filled with biblical allusions and so is more concerned with maintaining consistencies to earlier texts than with creating or describing unique characteristics of the individuals involved. On the three martyrs’ similarities to the three youths in Daniel, see Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 15. On the martyrs as imitators of Christ, see below in this chapter.

¹⁶² *Passio sanctorum Datui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 2 (TU 134: 63), trans. Tilley, 29.

detail about whether Maria was singled out in any way during her martyrdom because of her role as a consecrated virgin. Apart from the introduction, she disappears from the narrative.

Another virgin, Victoria, is the focus of much more narrative attention. Her conversation with her brother focuses much more on her rejection of her identity as his sister than on her virginity, although it is significant that her brother frames her vow of chastity as having been coerced rather than chosen as the result of her own agency. Victoria's explicit rejection of this claim suggests that she viewed virginity as being associated with a certain amount of agency and social power.¹⁶³ In contrast, for her brother, the role identity of virgin was powerful only in the sense that it had the power to disrupt their family and his reputation; it was not seen as being a way for Victoria to exercise any power herself and was certainly not something to be admired. However, it is also important to note that her role as a virgin is, at this point, only implied, since she was still living at home and was not married (her brother is the one acting as her legal representative). She is not a *sanctimonialis* like Maria and is depicted at this point in the narrative only as a Christian.

The narrator then recounts the torture that Victoria's fellow martyrs endured before returning to focus on her. This time her virginity is central. She is identified by the author using epithets like "holiest of the women, the flower of virgins, the glory and grandeur of confessors."¹⁶⁴ It is not just her martyrdom that makes her stand out, but her chastity before martyrdom. Her high status is emphasized as she is said to have been unwillingly forced into marriage by her parents. To avoid having to sacrifice her virginity in marriage, Victoria threw herself from a cliff and was miraculously saved from death by a breeze that carried her to the

¹⁶³ *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 7 (TU 134: 68-69), trans. Tilley, 33.

¹⁶⁴ *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 17 (TU 134: 81), trans. Tilley, 41: *Et ne devotissimus feminarum sexus florentissimusque sacrarum virginum chorus certaminis tanti gloria privaretur, omnes feminae, Christio domino auxiliante, in Victoria congressae sunt et coronatae.*

ground.¹⁶⁵ This leap apparently released her from her parents' authority as she then left her parents' home and took refuge in the Church. There she dedicated herself to God and made a vow of perpetual chastity.¹⁶⁶ When interrogated by the proconsul, she makes the expected response, claiming for herself the identity of Christian. The authority appeals to her sense of familial *pietas* alone, asking her to consider the ramifications that her refusal to sacrifice will have on her brother. Victoria remains steadfast, self-identifying as a Christian and nothing else.¹⁶⁷

This detailed reconstruction of Victoria's past demonstrates the importance that the text places on her identity as a virgin. The agency that she demonstrates throughout, both in her conversations with the proconsul and in her rebellious behaviour against her parents, is shown to be positive because it was driven by a desire to remain pure before God. The fact that she is the only woman singled out in a text full of detailed descriptions of male martyrs both highlights the extraordinary nature of her as a woman and emphasizes that her behaviour fits squarely within the masculine realm. Indeed, virginity was seen by many in the early Christian context to be a way for women to rid themselves of the passions that were inherent in their feminine nature and thereby become more masculine.¹⁶⁸ When this virginity is combined with Victoria's steadfast insistence that every decision she made was completely her own, it is clear that, within the

¹⁶⁵ *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 17 (TU 134: 81), trans. Tilley, 41. Compare with Secunda, who threw herself from the balcony of her home to avoid marriage; *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 4 (TU 134: 100), trans. Tilley, 21.

¹⁶⁶ *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 17 (TU 134: 81-82), trans. Tilley, 41: *Liberata igitur nuptialibus taedis illusoque simul cum parentibus sponso, media pene de ipsa nuptiarum frequentia prosiliens ad aedem pudicitiae portumque pudoris ecclesiam intacta virgo confugit: ibique consecrati deo dicatique capitis in perpetuam virginitatem sacratissimum crinem inconcusso pudore servavit.*

¹⁶⁷ *Passio sanctorum Datiui Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 17 (TU 134: 82), trans. Tilley, 43.

¹⁶⁸ On virginity as masculinity in ascetic literature, see, e.g., Castelli, "Virginity and Its Meaning," 73-77; Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 53-77.

context of this martyr narrative, Victoria has overcome the weaknesses of her sex to become more masculine;¹⁶⁹ through this she is able to become the ideal martyr.

Interestingly, in the North African context, virginity and martyrdom are not very closely linked. Nevertheless, in the two texts in which the female martyrs are explicitly said to be virgins, virginity acts as an expression of separation from family and familial expectations. Furthermore, although it is a small sample, both Secunda and Victoria are described as coming from wealthy families, giving up not only their families but also their material possessions. The role identity of virgin is linked with a certain measure of ascetic living. The women who opted for virginity over marriage are depicted as doing so because of their strong piety, which suggests a link between the internalized meanings that may connect the role identity of virgin and the role identity of martyr. Since virginity was not a prerequisite to becoming a martyr within the martyr tradition (as seen clearly in the examples of Perpetua, Felicitas, and Quatrillosa), it must have held more personal significance for the women themselves or for the authors of their accounts. That is, while virginity was not an expectation of martyrs in general, it did form the most salient aspect of the identities of these women and is depicted as influenced their actions in becoming martyrs; whether this is a literary trope or a reflection of the feeling of the women themselves is impossible to know.

Public Identities of North African Female Martyrs

Public identities are those which are primarily expressed in a public space, or which are intended to provide meaning to a broader community. As martyrdom is an inherently public action, the

¹⁶⁹ Victoria is in control of her emotions, acts of her own volition, and refuses to be persuaded, all of which Cobb points to as clear signs of masculinity within martyr acts (*Dying to Be Men*, 62-76).

overarching identity for this chapter has been a public one. However, there are other identities that provide a different nuance into the way that female martyrs are perceived in the public sphere; the roles of bride of Christ, prophet, and imitator of Christ are discussed below. These identities are best understood as public because of the way they are applied. The bride of Christ identity is either placed on the martyr by an outside observer (Perpetua, Crispina) or is used by the martyr as a way of explaining her actions to the public (Secunda). The role of prophet (that is, one who receives visions from God) is essentially public despite the fact that the visions themselves appear to individuals, because the visions gain meaning to the community when they are shared and disseminated as widely as possible. Finally, the role of imitator of Christ may be said to be public because these imitations are made self-consciously either by the martyrs themselves or by the authors of their texts in order to provide meaning to the rest of the community. Both their actions and the interpretation of these actions as being imitative serve as inspiration to others and, like visions, need to be disseminated widely in order to be most powerful.

Bride of Christ

The designation of bride of Christ is commonly placed upon female martyrs as it indicates a close relationship with God and provides an easily understood metaphor for this type of relationship. While in non-martyr contexts it typically refers to virgins, martyrs who are not virgins (such as Perpetua and Crispina) are nevertheless identified as brides of Christ. Indeed, the only North African virgin martyr who is also identified as a bride of Christ is Secunda.

Perpetua does not describe herself as a bride of Christ (or, as noted above, as a wife in any sense); rather, it is the narrator who provides this designation at the important moment when she

first enters the arena: “Perpetua followed, with a shining face and a calm step, as a wife of Christ and darling of God.”¹⁷⁰ It is important to consider the possible reasons the redactor of this text may have had for imposing this role identity upon Perpetua. First, the identity might indicate that Perpetua has made a vow for perpetual virginity since becoming a Christian or being imprisoned;¹⁷¹ certainly this terminology usually carried with it a sense of making the virgin sacred and recusing her from all earthly marriage.¹⁷² However, it is impossible to know whether Perpetua herself did anything to encourage this designation (such as taking a vow of chastity) or whether it was simply imposed upon her by a redactor who saw it as a fitting identity for a future martyr. If this was an invention entirely of the redactor, then it is possible that the absence of Perpetua’s husband may have been purposely edited out by the redactor in order to minimize his role, so that it would not interfere with the chaste expectations of Perpetua as bride of Christ.¹⁷³

Indeed, the role identity of bride of Christ carried with it great symbolic weight, making it a useful literary tool. Since becoming a bride of Christ was seen as an irrevocable marriage contract that should be honored with the same seriousness as any other marriage contract,¹⁷⁴ Perpetua is shown as making the shift from being in an earthly marriage to a heavenly one. Her role identity as the properly married *matrona* is no longer salient in the moments before her martyrdom. She ceases to have any connection to her family and instead is identified only through her relationship with God, as a true martyr should.

¹⁷⁰ *Pass. Perp.* 18.2 (Heffernan, 119), trans. Heffernan, 133: *Sequebatur Perpetua lucido vultu et placido incessu, ut matrona Christi, ut Dei delicata*. Heffernan notes that the word *delicatus* seems to be used here as a term of familial endearment (Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 328).

¹⁷¹ Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 176.

¹⁷² Brown, *The Body and Society*, 274-75.

¹⁷³ Dronke, *Women Writers*, 282 n. ii.

¹⁷⁴ Castelli, “Virginity and Its Meaning,” 71.

The bride of Christ imagery is much more straightforwardly presented in *The Passion of Saints Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda*. In this text, the youngest martyr, Secunda, is depicted as repeatedly rejecting marriage because she only loved God.¹⁷⁵ Secunda asserts her desire to become a wife of Christ explicitly, saying in response to Maxima's questions, "I seek a spiritual spouse, Jesus Christ." Thus, Secunda is depicted as fitting perfectly within the idealized image of a bride of Christ. Being (just barely) of marriageable age, she rejects the expectations of a physical spouse and instead chooses a spiritual spouse in Christ. This assertion meant that any attempts by her family to force her to be married are met with dismay on her part, since she considers herself to be married already. Secunda's commitment to lifelong fidelity to her husband (Christ) can be seen in the drastic measure she takes to avoid an earthly marriage, by throwing herself from her balcony.¹⁷⁶

The use of marriage language to express her desires demonstrates the way in which some women could use existing patriarchal language to express their agency in new (and potentially rebellious) ways.¹⁷⁷ Secunda's behaviour is subversive because her parents do not share her Christian faith. Thus her insistence on being a bride of Christ and nothing else constitutes a rejection of her parents' ideals. Although a record of Secunda's conversations with her parents (and particularly with her father) are not found within the martyr text, it is clear that Secunda's bride of Christ self-identification would have also functioned to sever her ties to the role of daughter. She could not be both.

Although she is never described in this way in the martyr narrative, Crispina is reconfigured as a bride of Christ in one of Augustine's sermons. In his *Exposition on Psalm 120*,

¹⁷⁵ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 4 (TU 134: 100), trans. Tilley, 21: [...] *soponsum quaero spiritalem Iesum Christum*.

¹⁷⁶ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 4 (TU 134: 101), trans. Tilley, 21.

¹⁷⁷ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 274-75.

Augustine depicts Crispina not as a wife of a man but as a bride of Christ. Augustine combines this identity with a further description of Crispina as someone who is weak and frail, a contrast to the ‘stubborn and insolent’ woman of her martyrology. He asserts:

She was of the weaker sex, perhaps enfeebled by riches and quite frail in body in consequence of the life to which she had been accustomed. But what did all this signify, compared with the bridegroom whose left hand was beneath her head, whose right hand was embracing her?¹⁷⁸

Augustine’s use of the bride of Christ imagery here is significant. As with Perpetua’s bride of Christ status despite her also being married, it should not be read as Augustine trying to ignore Crispina’s marital status but rather as a purposeful reframing of this identity within a specific argument. Here the weakness of Crispina the bride is contrasted with her all-powerful bridegroom.¹⁷⁹

Augustine’s depiction of Crispina as a weak woman who was “enfeebled by riches and quite frail in body” appears to remove some of the rebellious agency so clearly presented in her defiant discussions with the proconsul within her martyr narrative. The assertion of weakness therefore initially seems incongruous. However, Augustine routinely describes martyrs as weak, as when he emphasizes the weakness of Perpetua’s sex in *Sermon* 282, even though Perpetua is not described as such anywhere in her *passio*.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, weakness is not solely associated with women, as Augustine also refers to male martyrs as weak, noting, for example, that the

¹⁷⁸ Augustine, *Enarrationes en Psalmos* 120.13 (CCSL 40: 1799), trans. Boulding, 525. *Erat quidem illa sexu infirma, et diuitiis forte languidior, et consuetudine corporali infirmior; sed quid ad tanta munimenta? quid ad illum sponsum mittentem sinistram sub caput, et dextera sua complectentem?*

¹⁷⁹ The left and right hand imagery is interesting to note. Here, Augustine draws on the language of the psalm to assert that God’s left hand saves the body and the right hand saves the soul. On this see, Chris de Wet, “Domesticating Suffering in North Africa: Augustine and the Preaching of the Psalms on the Feast Days of the Martyrs,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 38 (2012): 205-6. Additionally, Augustine’s proclamation that Crispina has been “enfeebled by riches” reflects the idea that a luxurious lifestyle could be detrimental to future martyrs since it would leave them ill-prepared for the harsh conditions of the prison. On this, see Tertullian’s criticisms in *Ieiun.* 12 (CCSL 2: 1270-71).

¹⁸⁰ Augustine, *Serm.* 282.3 (PL 38: 1287), trans. Hill, 82.

martyr Vincent's "weakness refused to give in" during multiple tortures.¹⁸¹ For Augustine, then, weakness was not necessarily a negative character trait, nor was it necessarily gendered.¹⁸² The martyrs' endurance of pain could turn weakness into strength, and weakness in the form of deference to God was one of the strengths of the martyrs that average Christians could imitate. Indeed, Augustine emphasizes the importance of humility and the power of God's grace in all of the sermons in which Crispina is mentioned, thereby encouraging his congregation to imitate martyrs like Crispina through humility and submission.¹⁸³

Augustine's portrayal of Crispina as a wife or bride of Christ should, therefore, be seen as operating in conjunction with the way in which these identities relate to the ideal of humility. The change in characterization is not necessarily indicative of Augustine either having a different version of the text or of the audience's shifting conception of Crispina as the result of an oral tradition; rather, it must be seen as a result of the way Augustine views and uses martyrs. Crispina's transformation from a strong and stubborn woman who acted independently before the Roman authorities in the martyrology into a wife enfeebled by riches who is only able to find the strength to overcome her weaknesses by adopting a new identity as bride of Christ demonstrates the values that Augustine hopes his congregation will learn from the martyrs. This does not, however, imply a loss of power. Instead, whereas Crispina's power in the martyrology came from her rebellious agency, for Augustine, her power comes from allowing herself to be weak.

¹⁸¹ Augustine, *Serm.* 276.1 (PL 38: 1256), trans. Hill, 29.

¹⁸² On Augustine's use of the gendered language of weakness and his discussion of female martyrs, see Katherine E. Milco, "*Mulieres viriliter vincentes*: Masculine and Feminine Imagery in Augustine's Sermons on Sts. Perpetua and Felicity," *VC* 69 (2015): 278-85.

¹⁸³ The importance of humility and the power of God's grace on the humble can be seen in all of Augustine's sermons that reference Crispina. See *Serm.* 286.3 (PL 38: 1298), trans. Hill, 102; *Serm.* 313G.3 (PLS 2: 661-62), trans. Hill, 124; *Serm.* 354.5 (PL 39: 1565), trans. Hill, 159-60; *En. Ps.* 120.14 (CCSL 40: 1800), trans. Boulding, 525; *En. Ps.* 137.11 (CCSL 40: 1985), trans. Boulding, 251.

Still, it is significant that, although Crispina remains powerful under this new framework, Augustine reconstructs Crispina as an ideal woman who is ultimately submissive to the proper authorities—whether an earthly husband or a spiritual one. I would argue that, while Augustine was evidently profoundly convinced of the need to acknowledge the human frailty of the martyrs,¹⁸⁴ there may have been even more pressing reasons to recast Crispina as a submissive figure. I suggest that one of the reasons that Augustine opted to describe Crispina in this way, either consciously or unconsciously, was as a result of her association with the Donatists.¹⁸⁵

Augustine's rhetorical battle against Donatists entailed, among other things, reclaiming and reshaping martyrs like Crispina, implicitly as well as explicitly. The absence of direct reference to Donatists is not enough to reject the possibility that Augustine intended his sermons to, in part, argue against the Donatists and those in his congregation who might be sympathetic to their cause. We see this in Augustine's sermons on Cyprian's martyrdom. Although the former bishop

¹⁸⁴ Carole Straw, "Martyrdom," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allen D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 541.

¹⁸⁵ There are several pieces of evidence that link Crispina's martyrdom with the Donatists. First, Crispina's martyrdom occurred in Theveste (Tebessa), which Frend describes as one of 'the great Donatist centres' of North Africa (Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 234). As most martyrs were celebrated locally, it is reasonable to assume that some of those who first acknowledged Crispina and who therefore contributed to the growth of her renown were associated with Donatism. Furthermore, a Donatist connection may be seen in the transmission of the martyrology. The editions of Mabillon and Ruinart give the names of her companions as Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda, three Donatist martyrs who are featured in a later Donatist *passio*, while Musurillo leaves these companions anonymous (see Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 307 n. 7, referring to the editions of Mabillon and Ruinart; on the problematic connection between Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda and Crispina, see Lockwood, "*Potens et factiosa femina*," 171-72). Strengthening the Donatist connection even further, Monceaux posits that there were once two versions of Crispina's martyrdom: one Catholic, one Donatist. He suggests that the version that is extant today is the Donatist one and that Augustine was working from a now-lost Catholic one (Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire*, vol. 3, 161). If this is the case, it may be that the Catholic account simply contained more information about Crispina's life than the Donatist version, including the details of her wealth and familial roles, thereby explaining Augustine's knowledge of these particulars. However, it is difficult to see why the Donatist version would ignore such details. Furthermore, there is little that is "characteristically Donatist" about the extant text, undermining Monceaux's hypothesis. Indeed, Tilley opts not to include Crispina's narrative in her translation of the Donatist martyr texts for the reasons that it was not "characteristically Donatist and did not play a polemical role in Donatist-Catholic controversies" (Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, viii n. 6). Tilley notes elsewhere that, while the phrase *Deo laudes*, which appears in the text, had once been seen as characteristically Donatist, it has been used by Catholics as well and thus cannot be an indication of the text's origin or audience (Maureen A. Tilley, "Sustaining Donatist Self-Identity: From the Church of the Martyrs to the *Collecta* of the Desert," *J ECS* 5 [1997], 22-23).

of Carthage was a powerful symbol for both Catholics and Donatists in North Africa, Augustine only occasionally addresses Donatists' claims that Cyprian was one of their own.¹⁸⁶ As in his sermons on Cyprian, Augustine does not need to mention the Donatists when discussing Crispina. In fact, it might have been more effective to present Crispina as an exemplar for Catholics without even acknowledging that she was prized by Donatists. Crispina, the ideal bride of Christ who was submissive to God and obedient to his will, provided the perfect exemplar for Augustine's community to emulate. That she is not spoken of this way at all in her narrative demonstrates the flexibility of identities and the way in which identities can be imposed on individuals and texts to suit later interpretations.

The bride of Christ identity occupies a complex position within the martyr narratives, one that is either subversive or normative depending on the context. In the cases of Perpetua and Crispina, the bride of Christ identity was imposed on them by outsiders in order to shape the way in which they were interpreted within their communities. The rebellious agency that both express within their narratives is reconfigured to submissive agency to Christ. That they do not call themselves brides of Christ does not matter; what matters is the way their story comes to be understood. In contrast, Secunda calls herself the bride of Christ and appears to choose this role identity for herself. The meaning that she applies to this identity is one of strength and rebellion, not submission; she is able to oppose her family by claiming the identity of bride of Christ. Thus, this identity is both subversive when viewed by outsiders as well as acceptable and normative within Christian communities. The bride of Christ identity thus demonstrates the role that context plays in how each identity is employed and how each might be received.

¹⁸⁶ Vincent Hunink, "“Practicing What He Had Taught’: Augustine’s Sermons on Cyprian,” in *Augustine, Manichaeism and Other Gnosticism. Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty*, ed. Jacob Albert van den Berg et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 97 and throughout.

Prophet

Some female martyrs also take on the role of prophets, receiving visions that usually serve to contextualize their impending martyrdom. In this way, their visions often place prophetic women into an authoritative position, at least among their fellow confessors and martyrs. The examples of Perpetua and Quartillosa demonstrate different ways in which this authority is represented.

Perpetua's four visions make up a large portion of the diary section of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*. It must be assumed that both Perpetua and the redactor saw her visions as essential to expressing her understanding of her situation and her identity within the context of contemporary debates about the authority of visions.¹⁸⁷ The authority with which Perpetua's visions are expressed within the narrative must therefore be considered to be "consciously staged" points of argument within these broader conversations.¹⁸⁸ Perpetua's visions reveal the variety of role identities that she embodied, including those that others (particularly the redactor) imposed upon her.

Perpetua's first vision comes at the request of her brother, who claims that she is able to request such a vision (and be confident in receiving one) because she is "greatly esteemed" (*in magna dignatione*).¹⁸⁹ Her brother's words demonstrate that he (or, perhaps, the redactor) consider her to be in a position of some authority as a result of her ability to receive visions.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, Perpetua is not depicted as being surprised by her prophetic power; she is confident that God will answer her prayer for a vision to reveal her fate and the fates of her companions.

¹⁸⁷ See, e.g., Tertullian's assertion about the appropriate time for a female prophet to reveal her visions. Tertullian, *An.* 9.4 (CCSL 2: 792-93), trans. FC 10: 197.

¹⁸⁸ Waldner, "Visions, Prophecy, and Authority," 212.

¹⁸⁹ *Pass. Perp.* 4.1 (Heffernan, 106), trans. Heffernan, 127.

¹⁹⁰ Waldner, "Visions, Prophecy, and Authority," 212-13; Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 44.

She says, “And I, who knew that I was able to speak with the Lord, whose great benefits I had known, confidently promised him.”¹⁹¹ Thus, Perpetua clearly interprets the role of prophet as one that she can claim when necessary; she receives visions as the result of her own agency in asking for them specifically.

The vision that she receives is full of symbolic significance. A bronze ladder covered in weapons stretches up to heaven. Saturus (the group’s leader) appears and goes up the ladder first. When he reaches the top, he turns back and encourages Perpetua to come. A serpent then appears at the foot of the ladder, and Perpetua steps on its head and climbs the ladder successfully. At the top, she sees a garden with a white-haired man sitting in the middle dressed as a shepherd along with thousands of other people dressed in white. The shepherd is milking a sheep and welcomes Perpetua, giving her a mouthful of cheese from the sheep.¹⁹² Perpetua eats the cheese and when she awakens, she can still taste some of the sweetness in her mouth. She understands the vision to mean that they will die a martyr’s death and immediately tells her brother of what she saw and her interpretation.¹⁹³

Although there are many symbols that can be parsed in these visions,¹⁹⁴ the focus here will be on aspects of the vision that can be related to other role identities Perpetua adopts throughout the narrative. Of these, the shepherd himself and his gift of cheese both point to other aspects of Perpetua’s martyrology. The shepherd is a common image throughout early Christianity, but he

¹⁹¹ *Pass. Perp.* 4.2 (Heffernan, 106), trans. Heffernan, 127: *Et ego quae me sciebam fabulari cum Domino, cuius beneficia tanta expert eram, fidenter repromisi ei.*

¹⁹² The compression of time that allows the shepherd to milk the sheep and instantaneously produce cheese is noted in E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 51; cf. Dronke, *Women Writers*, 9.

¹⁹³ *Pass. Perp.* 4.3-10 (Heffernan, 106-7), trans. Heffernan, 127.

¹⁹⁴ On the significance of the ladder (including the type of metal and kinds of weapons), see, e.g., Dronke, *Women Writers*, 7-8; Salisbury, *Perpetua’s Passion*, 100-1; Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 129-30. On the garden, see, e.g., Salisbury, *Perpetua’s Passion*, 101-2; Moss, *The Other Christs*, 137. On the serpent/dragon, see, e.g., Dronke, *Women Writers*, 8-9; Miller, “The Devil’s Gateway,” 55; Moss, *The Other Christs*, 98-99.

is most often depicted as a young man.¹⁹⁵ Perpetua's vision of an old white-haired man (*hominem canum*)¹⁹⁶ could therefore function as a replacement for the father whom she had just rejected. Indeed, Perpetua's father's white hair is later referenced by both her father himself and by the procurator,¹⁹⁷ thus highlighting this comparison.¹⁹⁸ The shepherd comforts and supports her, whereas her father consistently tries to deny her Christian identity. Within the context of this vision, Perpetua's role identity as daughter is allowed to persist in the context of the counter-identity of her spiritual father, the shepherd.

While the milk/cheese offered to Perpetua certainly has Eucharistic and baptismal connotations,¹⁹⁹ it also should be read as being related to the breastfeeding imagery that symbolizes motherhood throughout the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*. In antiquity, cheese often symbolized the process of birth and is referred to as such in the Old Testament.²⁰⁰ Perpetua's vision may predict her impending rebirth (following her physical death in the arena) in addition to alluding to her role identity as a mother. The vision may also reflect uncertainty as to whether Perpetua should maintain or reject her motherhood identity.

This linking of the sheep's milk to Perpetua's breast milk was made also by at least one ancient commentator. Writing in the early fifth century, Quodvultdeus proposes that Perpetua's acceptance of the milk (or cheese) from the shepherd in her vision allows her to reject her child

¹⁹⁵ See, for example, the catacomb paintings in the Catacomb of Priscilla; Dronke, *Women Writers*, 9.

¹⁹⁶ *Pass. Perp.* 4.8 (Heffernan, 107), trans. Heffernan, 127.

¹⁹⁷ *Pass. Perp.* 5.2, 12.3 (Heffernan, 107, 115), trans. Heffernan, 127, 131. Perpetua's father makes reference to *canis meis*, while the procurator uses the phrase *niveos habentem capillos*. Although different vocabulary is used, it is clear that grey or white hair function as a shorthand for old age and, possibly, for a male/paternal authority figure.

¹⁹⁸ This connection has been made by many scholars. See, e.g., Dronke, *Women Writers*, 5; Miller, "The Devil's Gateway," 54; Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 102-3; Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 180.

¹⁹⁹ On the use of milk (and honey) in baptismal ritual in Carthage, see Tertullian, *Cor.* 3.3 (CCSL 2: 1042-43), trans. FC 40: 237; *Marc.* 1.14.3 (CCSL 1: 455), trans. Evans, 37. On the connection between Eucharist and baptism (and the use of milk in both), see Andrew McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 160-63.

²⁰⁰ See Job 10:10, "Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese?" For further discussion, see Dronke, *Women Writers*, 9.

(and cease giving him milk). Quodvultdeus says, “Perpetua gave milk so long as she received a ration of milk from the great shepherd and at the same time father; once this was received, the sweetness of perpetual felicity enabled her to condemn her son, despise her father, to let go the world, and to lose her life for Christ.”²⁰¹ Thus, for this bishop of Carthage, Perpetua’s reception of the milk from the shepherd in her vision allowed her to cease giving milk to her child and was therefore instrumental in her successful abandonment of her maternal identity.

However, the milk does not only symbolize Perpetua’s motherhood. As the one offering the milk, the shepherd himself adopts a quasi-maternal stance, simultaneously symbolizing both father and mother.²⁰² As Perpetua’s forceful rejection of her daughter identity means rejecting both parents (despite her mother’s sympathy to her plight), the presence of these symbols in her vision indicates to the audience that these relationships nevertheless lingered in some capacity. Finally, the milk that the shepherd offers Perpetua is sweet, affirming both the truth of her vision (since she can still taste it when she awakens) and the rightness of her actions. She is doing what God expects of her, and therefore her earthly family will be replaced by a heavenly one.

Perpetua’s second and third visions are likewise linked to her former familial identities. A few days after her father started calling her “lady” and God ensured that her son no longer need her breast milk, Perpetua spontaneously cries out the name of her brother, Dinocrates, while at prayer. A spontaneous cry was considered to be a definite sign of divine presence,²⁰³ and Perpetua immediately recognizes that she should direct her attention in prayer towards him. Furthermore, just as she was confident that she would be able to receive her first vision, so is she

²⁰¹ Quodvultdeus, *Sermo de tempore barbarico* 1.5.1-9 (quote at 1.5.3) (CCSL 60: 430-31), trans. Kalman, 147: *Perpetua lactauit, quamdiu acciperet ab illo pastore simul et patre buccellam lactis: qua accepta dulcedo felicitates perpetuae eam fecit contemnere filium, spernere patrem, non inhaerere mundo, perdere animam pro Christo.*

²⁰² This “androgynous parent” is also present in the *Odes of Solomon*, a collection of early Christian hymns. See McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 162.

²⁰³ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 66.

confident that her prayers will be able to help her brother. Although she may not have consciously uttered Dinocrates' name, once she does so, Perpetua acts with agency, praying so that she might have an impact on his plight.

Dinocrates had died at the age of seven of a cancer to his face. Perpetua sees him with others in a dark place, dirty and with the wound still upon his face. In front of him was a pool of water, but he could not reach the rim to drink the water. Perpetua awakens, knowing both that he was suffering and that she had the capability to help his suffering.²⁰⁴ After praying for a few days, Perpetua receives another vision. This time, Dinocrates is clean and well-dressed and his wound is replaced by a scar. The pool of water has a lower rim and Dinocrates is able to reach the water using a golden cup. He drinks until he has his fill and then plays in the water like the child that he is. Perpetua awakens and interprets this to mean that he has been freed from his suffering.²⁰⁵

Perpetua's prayers on her brother's behalf are representative of the widespread belief that martyrs had intercessory powers for other Christians.²⁰⁶ However, in addition to reflecting the identity of coinciding identities prophet and martyr, Perpetua's care for her deceased brother should also be seen as a remnant of the maternal role she had just previously severed. Just as God provided her infant with comfort as a result of her prayers, so does God answer her prayers and permit Dinocrates to drink and be refreshed.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ *Pass. Perp.* 7 (Heffernan, 109-10), trans. Heffernan, 128-29.

²⁰⁵ *Pass. Perp.* 8 (Heffernan, 110-11), trans. Heffernan, 129.

²⁰⁶ This includes intercession on behalf of the already deceased. For a near-contemporary example, see Thecla's salvific prayers for her patron Falconilla's deceased daughter in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (*A. Paul. et Thecl.* 29 [Lipsius and Bonnet, 256-57], trans. Elliot, 369-70).

²⁰⁷ See Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 229.

Perpetua's maternal identity is also reflected in the water, which is associated in Christianity with both baptism and life (including life given through a mother's milk).²⁰⁸ Thus, the link between nourishment and motherhood continues, whether through water or milk. It is furthermore significant that Perpetua notes the precise level to which the rim of the basin was lowered: "the boy's navel" (*umbilicum pueri*). As the umbilical cord (referenced explicitly by the Latin word for "navel") was the source of nourishment in the womb, that Perpetua's prayers result in Dinocrates receiving nourishment from this height is another demonstration of the prominence of maternal imagery.²⁰⁹

Perpetua's fourth vision is similarly complex. A few days before they were to be taken into the arena, Perpetua sees a vision of the deacon Pomponius knocking loudly at the door of the prison. He takes Perpetua by the hand and leads her down a rough path to the amphitheatre. He then leaves her alone and an Egyptian appears, surrounded by his helpers. Perpetua gains her own helpers, who strip her naked, and subsequently she "became a man" (*facta sum masculus*). Her supporters rub her with the oil that is customary for an athlete and she begins to fight the Egyptian. Perpetua kicks him in the face with her heels as he lifts her up. Finally, she grabs hold of his head and steps on it, defeating him. Her supporters begin to sing hymns and Perpetua receives the branch from the gladiator trainer. She is led out of the Gate of Life in triumph.²¹⁰

Scholars have puzzled over the phrase *facta sum masculus* and how exactly it should be understood.²¹¹ Certainly it is significant that this vision destabilizes an aspect of Perpetua's identity that might have been assumed to be self-evident and innate: her gender. It might best be

²⁰⁸ Miller, "The Devil's Gateway," 58.

²⁰⁹ Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 234. Heffernan notes that the umbilical was used as a symbol in ancient myths; the place where Zeus' umbilical cord fell near the river Triton came to be regarded as sacred.

²¹⁰ *Pass. Perp.* 10 (Heffernan, 111-13), trans. Heffernan, 129-30.

²¹¹ For a summary of the various theories see Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, 108.

understood as signifying the total nature of her transformation.²¹² Throughout, it is clear that Perpetua's self-identification has changed as she slowly strips away role identities that connect her to the world. She shakes off her roles as wife, mother, and daughter, leaving only the generic "lady" as an epithet others may apply to her. And yet in the context of her final vision before the arena, even that identifier no longer fits. Perhaps then, whatever other interpretations might be given to this part of the vision, it should be seen as another attempt at rejecting the identities by which she has been known for her whole life. The only identity left is that of "Christian."²¹³ Furthermore, that this identity is masculine in the vision reflects the ultimate ideal, since masculinization was seen as the highest spiritual achievement.²¹⁴ It was not enough to be the perfect female Christian; to be a perfect Christian, one must be masculine. Perpetua is depicted as achieving this through her vision.

In addition to this evocative phrase, there are other allusions to Perpetua's changing identity throughout this vision. For example, several other father figures appear, causing Perpetua's counter-identity of daughter to once again resurface. First, the deacon Pomponius encourages and comforts her in her path for martyrdom instead of trying to hinder her as her earthly father did.²¹⁵ Another paternal stand-in appears in the gladiator trainer, who congratulates

²¹² E.g., Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passions*, 109. Perpetua's transformation into a man shows that "she was fully transformed from her old self into a new empowered individual who could stand in the arena and fight for what she believed." However, Vorster disagrees that the association of female martyrs with gladiators should be seen as empowering, instead arguing that female martyrs suffered a loss of identity by being associated with male symbols of power; their bodies reinforce patriarchal norms rather than subvert them (Vorster, "The Blood of the Female Martyrs," 91-93).

²¹³ Cobb notes this identity transformation when she asserts that ideal Christianity is connected with masculinity, calling Perpetua's final vision "the culmination of her ascent to masculine Christianity [...] the textual transformation of Perpetua the mother, daughter, and woman to the higher end of the scale, that is, to gladiator and man, is complete" (*Dying to Be Men*, 107).

²¹⁴ Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 56.

²¹⁵ *Pass. Perp.* 10.1-4 (Heffernan, 111-12), trans. Heffernan, 129.

her on her victory with a kiss and calls her “daughter” (*filia*).²¹⁶ Unlike the way in which Perpetua was depicted as actively rejecting the role of daughter when her father attempted to continue to maintain this relationship, when the gladiator trainer uses this term, she is silent. Therefore, while she has rejected the identity of daughter in the world, she continues to play the role of daughter in correlation to more worthy spiritual fathers who recognize the value of her actions.²¹⁷

In *The Martyrdom of Saints Montanus and Lucius*, Quartillosa is singled out explicitly because of a vision she received, suggesting that the prophet identity is still rare enough to warrant mention, even among martyrs. Additionally, Quartillosa’s vision is closely related to her role identity of mother. Her son had been martyred three days earlier (along with her husband) and Quartillosa remained imprisoned with some other martyrs-to-be. The audience is told that Quartillosa is granted a vision just as some of her male counterparts had been.²¹⁸ As was the case with Perpetua’s visions within her martyrology, Quartillosa’s vision is recounted in her own words. The similarities to Perpetua’s visions continue with the content of the vision, as Quartillosa relates that she first saw her recently deceased son sitting at the rim of a basin of water.²¹⁹ This has clear echoes of Perpetua’s vision of her brother, Dinocrates, and his struggles to drink from the pool of water.²²⁰ Furthermore, the nurturing relationship between Quartillosa and her son and Perpetua and her younger brother emphasizes both martyrs’ continued

²¹⁶ *Pass. Perp.* 10.13 (Heffernan, 113), trans. Heffernan, 130: *Et osculatus est me et dixit mihi: ‘Filia, pax tecum.’*

²¹⁷ On spiritual mothers and fathers in martyr texts, see Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2005), 151-52.

²¹⁸ See, for example, Victor’s vision in *Pass. Mont.* 7 (Musurillo, 218), trans. Musurillo, 219.

²¹⁹ *Pass. Mont.* 8 (Musurillo, 220), trans. Musurillo, 221: *Vidi, inquit, filium meum qui passus est uenisse huc ad carcerem qui sedens super labrum aquarum ait.*

²²⁰ *Pass. Perp.* 7 (Heffernan, 110), trans. Heffernan, 129. The language is not identical, however, as Perpetua’s water container is identified as a *piscine plena aqua* rather than the *labrum aqua* of Quartillosa’s vision.

femininity and maternity. They persist in having some connections to their expected roles even as they act as prophets and prepare for martyrdom.

Unlike Perpetua's brother, however, Quartillosa's son has no trouble drinking the water and in fact he is soon followed by a young man carrying cups of milk. The young man then passes out the milk to everyone present and the audience is told that the milk cups are never empty.²²¹ Here, there are parallels with two different visions of Perpetua. First, following her intercessory prayers, Dinocrates' water basin becomes perpetually full;²²² and second, in an earlier vision, a white-haired shepherd gives Perpetua sheep's milk (or cheese), which she consumes.²²³ The similarities in symbols suggests that these were common themes within the Carthaginian Christian community, whether or not Quartillosa (or the author of the text) was consciously drawing inspiration from Perpetua's earlier narrative. The symbolism of the cups of milk is extended in Quartillosa's vision, as Quartillosa and her companions are shown one cup on the left, one on the right, and a third that will be left over for the martyrs.²²⁴

It is significant that Quartillosa's son is the one who speaks to her first, and not her husband, who was martyred at the same time. This emphasizes a shift in the power relationship between the counter-identities of husband and wife as well as mother and child, as in their earthly lives, Quartillosa exercised agency over her son by virtue of being his mother, but she would have been subordinate to her husband. By portraying Quartillosa's son as an authoritative figure in the vision, the text emphasizes the equality that the martyrs will experience in heaven.

²²¹ *Pass. Mont.* 8 (Musurillo, 220), trans. Musurillo, 221: *Et ex fialis quas ferebat dedit omnibus bibere; quae filae non deficiebant.*

²²² *Pass. Perp.* 8 (Heffernan, 111), trans. Heffernan, 129: *Et accessit Dinocrates et de ea bibere coepit; quae fiala non deficiebat.*

²²³ *Pass. Perp.* 4 (Heffernan, 107), trans. Heffernan, 127: *Et clamuit me et de caseo quot mulgebat dedit, mihi quasi buccellam; et ego accepi iunctis minibus et manduacui.*

²²⁴ *Pass. Mont.* 8 (Musurillo, 220), trans. Musurillo, 221: *Et posuit iuuenis ille quas ferebat filias, unam ad dexteram, alteram ad sinistram, et ait: Ecce satiati estis et abundant, et tertia adhuc fiala superueniet uobis.*

Quartillosa's son takes on a comforting (almost maternal) role, reassuring Quartillosa (and the rest of the community), "God has seen your pain and tribulation."²²⁵ That Quartillosa is depicted as recounting this vision in her own words, and that the narrator/editor does not find it necessary to elaborate on her vision is significant and shows that her words are expected to be able to be understandable and meaningful without explanation.

Although Quartillosa is not depicted as providing her own interpretation of the vision, the editor asserts that the vision immediately brought relief to the group, as the next day the subdeacon Herennianus and the catechumen Januarius visit them and provide them with spiritual sustenance; the two supporters are compared to the two cups of the vision.²²⁶ Quartillosa's vision is shown as having positive influence in easing the real sufferings of the martyrs. The audience is told that such refreshment was desperately needed, as they served to heal those who had fallen ill while imprisoned.²²⁷

It is also significant that Quartillosa's power is metaphorically related to access to food and drink, since women's agency in acting as hostesses during communal meals was well-established.²²⁸ Furthermore, the link between metaphorical meals and actual ones is a common one in the context of the prison. In his treatise *To the Martyrs*, Tertullian describes his treatise as contributing to their "spiritual sustenance" in contrast to the physical sustenance they will receive from others in the community.²²⁹ This kind of "discursive dietary supplement" is

²²⁵ *Pass. Mont.* 8 (Musurillo, 220), trans. Musurillo, 221: *Vidit Deus pressuram uestram et laborem.*

²²⁶ *Pass. Mont.* 9 (Musurillo, 220), trans. Musurillo, 221: *Subito autem ut sitientibus potus, esurientibus eibus, desiderantibus martyrium obuenerit, ita laboribus nostris refigerium dominus per Lucianum carissimum nobis praebeuit, qui disrupto catenarum durissimo obice, uelut per duas filias, per Herennianum hypodiaconum et Ianuarium catechuminum alimentum indeficiens omnibus ministravit.*

²²⁷ *Pass. Mont.* 9 (Musurillo, 220, 222), trans. Musurillo, 221, 223.

²²⁸ See chapter four on women's roles in the celebratory feasts of the martyrs.

²²⁹ Tertullian, *Mart.* 1.1 (CCSL 1: 3), trans. FC 40: 17-18: *Inter carnis alimenta, benedicti martyres designati, quae vobis et domina mater ecclesia de uberibus suis et singuli fratres de opibus suis propriis in carcerem subministrant, capite aliquid et a nobis quod faciat ad spiritum quoque educandum.*

associated with the conflation of the Christian community as a new kind of family wherein everyone is expected to do their part.²³⁰ In this case, Quartillosa completes her duty as a proper Roman wife and mother by providing sustenance for her remaining family members. The fact that the meal in this case consists of a vision elevates her service and further emphasizes the connection between prophecy and martyrdom.

The identity of prophet allows Perpetua and Quartillosa to stand out within their communities of other martyrs, but their visions are not only concerned with the role of martyr. Indeed, both women's visions contain many allusions to other identities that they occupied, most prominently the familial role identities of wife and mother. The role of prophet serves to create a sense of continuity between the women and their roles, regardless of the way in which these roles are depicted elsewhere in their narratives.

Imitator of Christ

Martyrs are often shown—through actions and speech—to be acting in imitation of Christ. This *imitatio Christi* served to both legitimize their behaviour and signal a shift in identity within their community. Indeed, being represented as “other Christs” (to borrow Candida Moss’ phrase) elevates martyrs from their limited earthly identities (regardless of their social status) into the highest point of the Christian hierarchy.²³¹ Thus imitation is important because it signals a shift to a new kind of role identity. That these martyrs leave behind their former selves (as mothers, daughters, wives, and so on) by imitating the actions of someone else also emphasizes the communal nature of this identity. The identity of martyr is both a role identity and a social one,

²³⁰ Andrew McGowan, “Discipline and Diet: Feeding the Martyrs in Roman Carthage,” *HTR* 96 (2003), 459-61, quote on 461.

²³¹ Moss, *The Other Christs*, 7.

and is subject to expectations and meanings that are imposed by the individual as well as the community.

As the moments of imitation are often not made explicit in the narratives, it is up to later audiences (including modern ones) to make the connections and determine what the acts of imitation mean for their understandings of the martyrs;²³² since martyrdom is inherently social, the meaning with which the act is imbued relies upon its interpretation by the community. Additionally, as Moss notes, imitation is a complex concept, with varying levels of directness and multiple interpretations.²³³ For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on the two most explicit examples of instances in which female North African martyrs can be clearly observed as acting in imitation of Christ. I will explore the way in which the example of Jesus was used in the earliest North African martyr text (*The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*) and in one of the latest (*The Passion of Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda*).²³⁴ These two texts will be useful for demonstrating the way in which scriptural allusions influence the way the identity of the martyr is constructed and how these might hinder attempts to identify anything particularly feminine within the representation of female martyrs.

In the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, three female martyrs speak in direct response to the Roman official. However, the words of Donata, Vestia, and Secunda serve to elaborate on the beliefs of all of the martyrs and do not distinguish them in any way from their male counterparts. In response to the proconsul's command, "Cease to be of this persuasion," the female martyrs respond as if continuing each other's sentences:

²³² Moss, *The Other Christs*, 4.

²³³ Moss, *The Other Christs*, 6-8.

²³⁴ For a discussion of scriptural allusions in *The Passion of Perpetua*, see Moss, *The Other Christs*, 98-103, 129, 139-40. On the comparison between the martyr Victoria being saved by when she jumps off a cliff to the story of Jesus' temptation in which angels would save him if he threw himself off the highest point of the temple (cf. Luke 4:9-12), see Moss, *The Other Christs*, 53-54.

Speratus said: "It is an evil persuasion to commit murder, to bear false witness."

Saturninus the proconsul said: "Have no part in this folly of his!"

Donata said: "Pay honour to Caesar as Caesar; but it is God we fear."

Vestia said: "I am a Christian."

Secunda said: "I wish to be what I am."²³⁵

The framing of the martyrs' testimony demonstrates the singularity of their purpose and the unity of their group.²³⁶ The Scillitan women say all the things that would be expected from an ideal martyr within a martyr discourse. It is significant that, by being an indistinguishable part of the voices for the group's arguments, the women are shown as having equal agency to that of their fellow male martyrs (except perhaps Speratus, who seems to have been the group's leader). This suggests that martyrdom provided the context for these women to be able to participate equally. It is also significant that there is no gender distinction between those who may invoke Christ's words in their testimony. As Tertullian notes, both men and women are able to endure pain for a higher purpose.²³⁷ In this case, it appears that both men and women were expected to be able to imitate Christ (and, in turn, be imitated by future martyrs). Donata's speech does nothing to give her a distinct identity, and this may be precisely the point. Her gender and her status do not matter; she is simply a martyr. In this way, the text treats "martyr" as a social identity; it is not the result of individually internalized meanings but rather of a specific prototype. The female martyrs are depersonalized and take on the group identity as their own, thereby embodying the group's ideal.

Although several centuries pass between the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* and the *Passion of Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda*, the later text is similarly filled with allusions to the gospels'

²³⁵ *Pass. Scil.* 7-9 (Musurillo, 86, 88), trans. Musurillo, 87, 89. See Mark 12:17; Matthew 22:2; Luke 20:25.

²³⁶ Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 129.

²³⁷ Tertullian, *Mart.* 4.3 (CCSL 1: 6), trans. FC 40: 24: *Sed spiritus contraponat sibi et carni: acerba licet ista, a multis tamen aequo animo excepta, immo et ultro appetita, famae et gloriae causa; nec a viris tantum, sed etiam a feminis, ut vos quoque, benedictae, sexui vestro respondeatis.*

accounts of Jesus and his suffering. Like Jesus, Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda are turned over to the authorities seemingly by someone who is known to them, and they engage in a lengthy conversation with the authorities in which they refuse to admit any wrongdoing.²³⁸ In the most literal allusion to Jesus' crucifixion, their punishment partly involves gall and vinegar.²³⁹ And finally, they also use language of the imminently approaching hour and urge the authorities to pronounce the sentence that they wish.²⁴⁰ These references to Jesus' suffering and death are pointed and would have been immediately apparent to the audience of this text. Placing these women in this tradition served to legitimize their behaviour and make their rebellious agency against the authorities less problematic. Indeed, they are not rebelling at all but rather they are adhering closely to the example set for them by Jesus himself.

Ultimately, this kind of framework, so common in martyrdom texts, represents the author's and community's expectations and ideals. Furthermore, it serves to homogenize the martyrs and to reconfigure their agency into something that fits within the normative Christian experience. Adopting the role of imitators of Christ necessarily does not allow for individuality, and therefore texts that are full of scriptural allusions reveal more about the communities in which their stories were disseminated than about the women themselves. Moreover, it does not reveal anything about agency or identity that is not already revealed in the role identity of martyr. Finally, it cannot be known whether the women themselves would have interpreted their actions in this same way. While it is significant that female martyrs were not in any way hindered from imitating Christ just like their male counterparts, this simply reinforces other evidence that

²³⁸ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 2-3 (TU 134: 97-100), trans. Tilley, 18-21. Cf. Mark 14; Matthew 26; Luke 22-23:12; John 18.

²³⁹ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 3 (TU 134: 99), trans. Tilley, 21. Cf. Mark 15: 23; Matthew 27:34; Luke 23: 36; John 19:29.

²⁴⁰ *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae, et Secundae* 6 (TU 134: 103-4), trans. Tilley, 23. Cf. Matthew 26:45; John 7:30, 12:23, 17:1, etc.

demonstrates that women could become martyrs just as easily as men. In short, although it can be helpful in explaining the depictions of certain martyrs, looking for examples of the way in which female martyrs imitated Christ is not very helpful when we seek to identify occasions for agency and the assertion of different kinds of identities.

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, the role identity of martyr contained within it a multitude of other constantly shifting identities with which these women had to contend in order to achieve their ultimate goals. The way in which these identities are configured within martyr texts reveals much about the way femaleness and martyrdom were reconciled.

The identities that are most associated with female martyrs are linked to familial life, with martyrs often being described as wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters. These roles are universal and give important information to the audience about the way in which the martyrs should be understood, even if their families do not otherwise appear in significant roles within the text. For example, Perpetua's identity as a wife is salient even though her husband does not appear in the *passio*, and Secunda's identity as a daughter is central to the way she is perceived by others despite the fact that her parents do not appear at all in the narrative.

Except in the cases of Christian families (as in the examples of Quartillosa and Maria), familial identities most often need to be rejected or reconfigured before martyrdom is possible. However, the details of this reconfiguration vary depending on individual context. Perpetua and Felicitas both give up their motherhood identities, but Perpetua only does so after her father refuses to allow her son to be with her, while Felicitas immediately gives her daughter to another woman; in both cases, however, maternal imagery continues to loom large in the text. In

contrast, Quartillosa remains bonded with her son even after his death, in part because they share the identity of martyr. Thus, it cannot be assumed that any single familial identity is necessarily incompatible with martyrdom; individual context must always be considered.

However, the shift in familial identities does not always appear as part of the narratives, and thus it is difficult to understand the precise ways in which women expressed agency in relation to their families. That is, women with non-Christian families must have at some point exercised rebellious agency in order to convert, even if they did not intend for it to lead to martyrdom. However, this pre-martyr agency is largely associated with the domestic sphere, and is only made public by virtue of the public nature of martyrdom. Thus, like other kinds of agency expressed within the domestic sphere, this is generally overlooked within the sources. The variety of ways in which women were able to become martyrs and to contend with their familial identities (whether they were retained, rejected, or reconfigured) is essential in order to better understand female agency in late antique Christianity.

The other, non-familial identities tend to be oriented more towards the public sphere, as the roles of virgin, bride of Christ, prophet, and imitator demonstrate the wide range of identities available to martyrs. While the identity of virgin certainly exists within the Roman context and is often associated with the family, the decision for chastity instead of marriage (as seen in the examples of Secunda and Victoria) has implications beyond the family, and this is only heightened by martyrdom. The bride of Christ identity demonstrates both a way to signify commitment to chastity (in the case of Secunda) as well as a way to reconfigure married women (like Perpetua or Crispina) as being focused on Christ above all earthly connections. Thus, even this seemingly specific identity has shifting meanings, depending on the context.

The role of prophet is more public, as the visions received by martyrs like Perpetua and Quatrillosa are shared publicly. These visions provide comfort for their fellow martyrs, and continue to provide meaning to other Christians by being recorded in the martyr texts. Thus, prophecy is connected to authority, as these women are seen as having a particular connection with the divine. This identity does not need to be reconfigured in order to achieve martyrdom, but rather is an important aspect of their martyr identities.

Finally, the role of imitator of Christ is important for the way in which it situates the martyrs in the broader context of the Christian tradition by connecting them directly with Christ and his sufferings. Furthermore, the role of imitator is most associated with the public realm, occurring frequently during the public interrogations or the executions, thus emphasizing its importance not just for the individual martyr but for the entire community. Although the identity of imitator is significant for understanding martyrs' roles within the Christian worldview, it does not allow for a great deal of insight into individual martyrs or different perspectives. The imitation may take on different forms (and may be more or less explicit), but unlike the diversity of familial identities, the broad outline of the imitator identity is fairly consistent regardless of the other ways in which the martyrs are discussed.

Ultimately, discussing all of the named female martyrs in the North African martyr literature has demonstrated the diversity of roles available to women. Although each martyr's story contains elements that are unique to the individual's context, some commonalities are important to recognize. First, unless all the members of the family were Christian, domestic and familial identities needed to be either rejected or reconfigured in order for martyrdom to occur. Nevertheless, female martyrs often continue to be associated with their familial identities, thus demonstrating the connection between these roles and the perception of ideal femininity. In

contrast, identities that are oriented towards the public sphere may be retained and often come to be associated closely with the overarching role/social identity of Christian martyr.

Chapter Three:

Patrons, Clients, and Imitators: Female Venerators in the Cult of the Martyrs

Female venerators occupied various positions within the cult of the martyrs. Just as female martyrs adopted various roles under the overarching identity of martyr, so did female venerators incorporate different roles and expectations in the context of honouring the martyrs. This chapter explores the three main types of venerators, namely patrons, clients, and imitators, and the different ways each of these roles could be expressed.

The role identities of patrons, clients, and imitators intersect with the concepts of power and agency in interesting ways, as the level of agency typically associated with these role identities elsewhere does not necessarily coincide with the way they function within the cult of the martyrs. For example, as discussed below, women who are clients of martyrs demonstrate agency by seeking out martyrs for healing and by publicizing their experiences to the Christian communities. In this way, a role identity that is typically associated with passivity takes on a different connotation within the cult of the martyrs.

As with many other facets of women's lives in late antiquity, uncovering the ways in which women participated within the cult of the martyrs is difficult because of the type and number of sources. Not only is it nearly impossible to reveal how the women themselves would have interpreted their own actions, but it is also difficult to know exactly what these actions were. Because of this ambiguity, it is not always clear how certain behaviours reflect particular role identities, nor is it always clear whether the women themselves would have seen their behaviour as fitting within a particular role. As such, the categorization of certain behaviours—particularly those that relate to role of client—has been done carefully and with the knowledge that the divisions are somewhat artificial. However, both the imposition of the rather broad roles

of patron, client, and imitator, as well as the judicious use of examples that have clear parallels in ancient descriptions of these roles, I have attempted to mitigate the problems that come with imposing modern classifications on ancient behaviours. Thus, while the terminology of clients, for example, may not always be used in the sources, I argue that the behaviour would have been recognizable within the standard tropes of patron-client relationship, and therefore that the categorization is both appropriate and useful.

Furthermore, this paucity of evidence regarding explicit descriptions of women's behaviours as well as the imposition of labels on these behaviours is interesting on its own merits. One might have expected the activities taken within the context of the cult of the martyrs to have warranted more attention in the literary record. Instead, apart from criticizing specific practices, ancient writers discuss specific behaviour in the cult of the martyrs only occasionally.

I suggest that one of the reasons for this lack of evidence is that the actions associated with the cult of the martyrs were consistent with the actions of Christians (both men and women) in other contexts. That is, the roles that were adopted in order to venerate martyrs were not unusual in any way. Because of this, they did not need to be explained or commented upon extensively in the literature. Both men and women adopted the roles of patron and client within the cult of the martyrs because they also adopted those roles in other contexts within their communities. The precise ways in which these roles were expressed may be unique to the martyr context, but the roles themselves were not. This can be demonstrated by comparing the more easily identifiable roles of patrons and clients with that of imitator; "imitator" is a much more nebulous concept and thus receives much more attention from male authorities who try to limit its expression.

Finally, it must be noted that the focus of this chapter is on practices that took place outside of the commemorative feasts of the martyrs. As these feasts receive most of the attention in the

primary sources, they similarly occupy a great deal of space in scholarship on the cult of the martyrs. As such, the feasts often overshadow the myriad other ways that Christians expressed their veneration to martyrs; this chapter attempts to correct that imbalance. Although it is true that the roles of client, patron, and martyr exist also in the context of the commemorative feasts, it is important to examine the other ways in which these roles are manifested throughout the year, and not just on anniversary of their death. Highlighting the other ways in which these roles can be expressed once again emphasizes the diversity of practice within the cult of the martyrs.

Patron

One of the most prominent ways for women to participate in the martyr cult was through the system of patronage. As is well known, Christian patronage was an extension of the Roman system of patronage, both for individuals and groups. In both cases, patrons expected to receive public honor and credit from their clients in exchange for the gifts they bestowed. In the case of public patronage, this was achieved through gestures such as inscriptions acknowledging the patron's gifts or being seated in the place of honor at their clients' banquets.¹

Within the cult of the martyrs, group patronage can be seen in the way in which the wealthiest members of the congregation began to sponsor burial places for the community at large. Thus, while the sponsorship of familial tombs had always been the responsibility of the head of the family, as Christian affiliation grew, the community co-opted earlier familial practices and re-classified them as the responsibility of the new Christian family.

¹ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 195-98. See also Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 102-10.

One way that Christian burial practices began to differ from their pre-Christian counterparts was through the increasing importance of the martyr and the holiness with which the martyrs' burial place came to be regarded. Indeed, as the cult of the martyrs grew in popularity, Christians began to want to be buried as close to the martyrs as possible.² This served to establish a connection between the average dead and the special dead,³ and to create a more united community as Christians commemorated their dead together.⁴ This expansion resulted in the joining of otherwise independent and individual burial grounds as well as in the creation of catacombs.⁵ Although this was a significant change in the way Christians buried their dead and sought to be buried themselves, the earlier private burial areas and the later communal complexes share a reliance on private patronage.⁶

² Such desires can be seen in both textual and material remains. For example, Augustine addresses this common belief in the short treatise *De cura mortuis* (CSEL 41: 619-60), trans. FC 27: 347-84. He concludes that, while being buried near a shrine might provide some comfort to those left behind, the deceased's destiny is ultimately in the hands of God (*Cur.* 2.4 [CSEL 41: 625-27], trans. FC 27: 355-56). See also Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 3; Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 752-53. In the material remains, the desire to be buried near to a saint can be seen in the clustering of graves around a prominent figure, as at the cemetery of St. Salsa in Tipasa (MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 63-65 [fig. 3.6]). For other examples of cemeteries where average Christians were buried near martyrs, see Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 460-63.

³ Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 519-20.

⁴ Ann Marie Yasin, "Funerary Monuments and Collective Identity: From Roman Family to Christian Community," *The Art Bulletin* 87 (2005): 433 and throughout. Cf. Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 69-75.

⁵ On catacombs generally, see Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 234-44. For an overview of the archaeological study of catacombs and the issues involved, see Amy K. Hirschfeld, "An Overview of the Intellectual History of Catacomb Archaeology," in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context*, ed. Laurie Brink and Deborah Green (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 11-38.

⁶ Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 255-56; Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 46-69. It should be noted, however, that as the church expanded, so did the authoritative hierarchy. As a result, church authorities slowly began to supersede the traditional role of the patron, and burial grounds eventually came to be ecclesiastical, rather than private, domain; see Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 267-69. The shift in patronage power from wealthy Christians to the bishop has been studied extensively. See e.g., Louis William Countryman, *The Rich Christian in the Church of the Early Empire: Contradictions and Accommodations* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1980); Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 35-39; Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). However, Rebillard has noted the limits of late antique church authorities regarding funerary liturgy and the care of the dead more generally (*The Care of the Dead*, throughout, esp. 174-75, 177-78). This demonstrates the resilience of custom in the face of innovation.

Many of the early Christian martyrs were buried in private burial grounds that had previously been established by wealthy patrons. Interestingly, although these burial areas quickly became sites of Christian pilgrimages by virtue of their holy inhabitants, they were generally not re-named to reflect this new function. Instead, they retained the names of their original patrons. For example, the first-century catacomb of Domitilla (*Praedium Domitillae*) was connected to an underground basilica dedicated to the martyrs Nereus and Achilleus that had become popular with Christian pilgrims in Rome, but it continued to be identified by Domitilla's name.⁷

This is significant because it demonstrates both the persistence of the role of patronage in the development of the early church as well as the normalcy with which female patrons were viewed. That there does not seem to have been any attempt to remove or overwrite the names of female patrons suggests that this particular role identity was not perceived to be problematic. The agency that they exercised in establishing places in which martyrs could be buried and venerated demonstrates the importance of these women on the growth of the cult of the martyrs. Furthermore, this agency was an extension of the expected agency of women who otherwise identified themselves as widows, wives, or mothers and established similarly appropriate burial places for their deceased relatives. The patronage of martyr cults was an extension of one of the ways in which the domestic agency of women could be viewed in a more public context.

While the patrons of these early Christian catacombs did not necessarily seek to patronize martyr tombs specifically, later generations of wealthy Christians focused their attention specifically on establishing *martyria*. Women as well as men sought to gain social prestige by adopting the role identity of patron in this way. Wealthy widows would have been expected to

⁷ Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 250-51, 255. For other examples, see Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 252-55.

take on this socially prominent role, but so could wives patronize *martyria* alongside their husband. Thus, the role identity of patron and the social identity of Christian were linked with the expectations of family membership and the associated agency of familial roles.

Material evidence for such patronage can be seen in dedicatory inscriptions in churches and on monuments throughout the Roman Empire. These dedicatory inscriptions are most often found within church buildings, in spaces where they would be noticed by everyone in attendance. Thus, the expectations of the role identity of patron are fulfilled as the inscriptions honoured their donation as well as reinforced their prominent place within the Christian community as a whole.⁸

In the extant evidence from North Africa, most of the inscriptions refer either to a male donor alone or to a couple. However, when an individual patron is mentioned, the families of the donors are also often signified, either by the phrase *cum suis* or by the abbreviation CS. The consistency with which couples' names are either paired or given alongside an indication of their family suggests that the donation should be understood as a gesture of familial piety.⁹ The importance of familial ties can also be seen in the fact that proper names appear far less frequently than family titles such as mother or father. Only in one rare instance—the construction of a funeral chapel in Sidi Ferruch—was the work completed by a sole woman, the mother of the deceased.¹⁰ The inscriptions demonstrate that women who were patrons of these dedications most typically acted in conjunction with familial role identities, particularly that of wife. Still, while women are most often depicted alongside their husbands, it should not be assumed that their husbands were the ones making the decisions; indeed, women may have been

⁸ Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 149-50.

⁹ See, for example, the inscriptions in the Basilica I at Djemila in Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 121-24; figs. 3.5, 3.6, 3.7. See also the inscription at Ain Kebira in Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 301-2.

¹⁰ Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 591; inscription 354-56.

the ones motivating their husbands to make such a donation, but this dynamic remains out of view within the limitations of the sources. It is clear, however, that women were active as patrons, both with their husbands and on their own, either as widows or as unmarried women. Once again, the domestic agency of wives, mothers, and widows is translated into the public sphere through the role of patron.

The fact that there is little evidence of women acting alone to dedicate martyr shrines or donate funds for their construction is more likely a symptom of the incompleteness of our evidence than an indication of a broader program that restricted women from engaging in patronage roles. North Africa seems to have relatively little material evidence for patronage in general,¹¹ but within the textual sources there is no indication of gendered restrictions in this kind of behaviour. Furthermore, most studies are concerned with finding the number and names of martyrs, not the people who erected the monuments. Given the difficulties in identifying with certainty who the martyrs were (or if the inscriptions really referred to martyrs at all), it is not surprising that it is equally difficult to discern who donated certain parts of the shrine. More issues arise from the fact that many of the artifacts were not examined *in situ* and therefore cannot be properly placed in context, and differences attested in the sources add further complications.¹²

¹¹ Saller, *Personal Patronage*, identifies fifty-three (non-Christian) patronage inscriptions out of 30,000 North African inscriptions. He argues that the low absolute number misrepresents the importance of patronage in the province and asserts that the inscriptions represent only a small part of the full picture of North African patronage. For a discussion of patronage in Roman North Africa and a list of the extant inscriptions, see Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 145-208 (chart of inscriptions on pp. 195-99). Further, Evers notes the continued importance of patronage in city life and the connection between patronage and city offices (for Christians and non-Christians) during the time of Augustine (Evers, *Church, Cities, and People*, 272-78). On the local aristocracy being appointed officials after the time of Constantine, see also Lepelley, *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine au Bas-Empire*, 168-93.

¹² For difficulties associated with positively identifying martyr inscriptions as distinct from other kinds of funerary inscriptions, see Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 464-65 and 499-501; for the types of standard themes and formulas relied upon to identify an inscription as being dedicated to a martyr, see 466-74.

Despite the unfortunate lack of material evidence for the phenomenon, North African women's engagement in patronage behaviour is attested in the literary sources. For example, in the *Acts of Maximillian*, the wealthy Christian matron Pompeiana takes the body of the martyr, transports it to Carthage, and buries it next to the martyr Cyprian.¹³ Since she makes provisions both for his proper burial and his commemoration, Pompeiana's behaviour can be seen to be analogous to that of other patrons who funded the construction of burial complexes or donated money to *collegia*. Although she is identified as a *matrona*, she displays independent agency, and her husband or other family members are not mentioned. Pompeiana's role identity of patron is central, and her social identity of a Christian takes precedence above all else.

Pompeiana further confirms both her independence and her association with the martyr by ensuring that she herself will be buried in the same place upon her own death.¹⁴ That Pompeiana was buried next to the martyr further solidifies her position within the Christian family, suggesting that perhaps she was actually a widow who did not have any biological family to arrange for her burial. Her Christian family ensured she was buried in a place appropriate for her honour, but it was Pompeiana's agency in providing for the burial of Maximilian that ultimately allowed her to become part of the martyr narrative and the martyr cult. Anyone who visits the tomb of Maximilian (or Cyprian) would have to see her tomb as well. However, while Pompeiana is attested in the literary sources, no archaeological evidence of her tomb remains. It is impossible to know how many other women like Pompeiana remain lost to the literary and inscriptional record.¹⁵

¹³ *Acta Maximiliani* 3 (Musurillo, 248), trans. Musurillo, 249.

¹⁴ *Acta Maximiliani* 3 (Musurillo, 248), trans. Musurillo, 249.

¹⁵ An example of this type of woman outside of the North African context can be seen in the female deacon Eusebia, who was the patron and keeper of the *martyrium* of the Forty Martyrs in Constantinople. She was buried alongside their relics (Sozomen, *H.e.* 9.2 [SC 516: 378-82], trans. NPNF² 2: 420). For examples of material evidence of tombs

The majority of the material remains relating to the cult of the martyrs in North Africa contains no indication of who built them, and literary attestations of female patronage of the construction of martyr buildings are rare. Nevertheless, given what is known about women's participation in patronage activities in the early Roman Empire and in early Christian communities,¹⁶ it is reasonable to assume that women were—or could be—as involved in the patronage of martyr cults as they were—or could be—of other non-official organizations such as burial *collegia*. The role of patron was therefore an important way in which some women were able to use their agency to express their devotion and piety.

Patronage of martyr churches and burial grounds contributed to the creation of a community by providing a place for Christians to go to celebrate martyrs in rituals such as commemorative feasts. Some female-sponsored complexes outside of North Africa also became important sites of pilgrimage. The continued association of the female patron's name with the complex ensured that her contribution would continue to be remembered by subsequent generations. Thus, while patronage of this type was not available to all women (but only to women with means or perhaps only to married women), it still represents an important acknowledgement of female power within the Christian community in Late Antiquity. While this may not have translated into positions of authority within the church hierarchy, it nevertheless allowed women's agency to be clearly seen in the public sphere and represented an area of Christianity in which women could make a lasting contribution.

such as the one described by Sozomen, see MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 46. Another example comes from Salona, in which a wealthy woman named Asclepia established a memorial space above the grave of the patron martyr Anastasius in a building that eventually housed her own sarcophagus and that of her husband (Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 33; Ejnar Dyggve, *History of Salonitan Christianity* [Oslo: Aschenhoug, 1951], 78).

¹⁶ On Christian women's patronage during the late fourth and early fifth century, see Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, 273-88.

Client

Although wealthy women could act as patrons of martyr cults, many more women were the clients of martyrs, as clientage had far fewer limitations than did patronage. Viewing martyrs as patrons did not require a significant shift in worldview since the martyrs themselves had often also been members of the community. Although they gained special authority by virtue of being willing to die for their faith, the fact that they had once been just ordinary people meant that they were relatively approachable or accessible. Thus, one could relate to martyrs by way of the common and familiar patterns of the patron-client relationship, even if the ideal of a patron-martyr infused the relationship with an added spiritual layer.¹⁷

As one of the main expectations for clients was to increase the reputations of their patron and to publicize their deeds,¹⁸ so too were the clients of martyrs expected to praise the martyrs and make public the miracles they received. This would serve to both increase the martyrs' esteem within the community as well as to elevate the client herself, as one worthy of receiving such a gift. The role identity of client was reliant upon the counter-identity of patron in order to establish the client's place within the community. By joining up with a martyr-patron, the individual's internalized meaning of what clientage entails was linked with the Christian social identity. Ultimately, interactions with martyr-patrons in the course of obtaining benefits constituted an important aspect of veneration within the cult of the martyrs, and these interactions included female as well as male clients.

¹⁷ Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 61.

¹⁸ Scott, "Patronage or Exploitation?," 22; Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 27.

Client behaviour in the cult of the martyrs took many forms. Clients interacted with live confessors, with the bodies of martyrs, and with their relics.¹⁹ The nature of these interactions included kissing the martyrs, visiting their shrines for healing, and publishing their accounts of these miracles. The diversity of this behaviour reflects the various identities that a woman could also claim while operating as a client.

i. Kissing

Although it was not always directly related to the client-patron relationship, kissing was a customary Greco-Roman and Christian social practice that helped to express the close relationships between members of the same community.²⁰ Within the cult of the martyrs, ritual kissing was sometimes simply a continuation of ritual kissing in other aspects of Christian fellowship. However, when the subject of the kiss is a martyr (or a relic of a martyr), it is suitable to frame this action within the patronage framework. When a non-martyr kisses a martyr, it is a sign of devotion and veneration, and renders the kisser as subordinate to the one being kissed. It is therefore analogous to the deference that clients must display towards their patrons; the public nature of many of the kisses further serves to emulate the way in which a client was expected to elevate a patron's status. Kissing appears in various forms in relation to the cult of the martyrs; the martyr texts themselves as well as accounts of Christian authorities all attest to the frequency of kissing and to the significance of this act in relation to the martyrs.

¹⁹ A detailed exploration of the development of the cult of the relics is outside the purview of this study. On the emergence of the cult of relics in North Africa, see Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 230-79. For the material evidence of relics, see Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 551-80. For an overview of the development of the cult of relics more generally, see Crook, *The Architectural Setting*, especially pp. 6-79.

²⁰ For the ways in which kissing was used in early Christian communities to signify both inclusion in the community and distinction from other groups, see Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 26-90.

That women participated fully in this ritual activity can be seen in early martyr texts and early accounts of martyr veneration. For example, in the *Passion of Perpetua*, after Perpetua defeats the Egyptian in her vision, the gladiator trainer kisses her and says, “Daughter, peace be with you”. Immediately afterwards, Perpetua awakens confident in her impending victory over the devil.²¹ The kiss reinforces Perpetua’s membership in the Christian community by sharing the peace with her, and also anticipates her special distinction as a martyr-to-be.²² The kiss elevates her to a position of authority, even as the Egyptian addresses her using the normally subordinate title of daughter. Kissing had no gendered limitations, as men and women could kiss either men or women in the context of acknowledging and revering martyrs.

Although the kiss in the *Passion of Perpetua* appears in a vision, kissing also appears in other texts as a model for proper behaviour for clients seeking to venerate martyrs and martyrs-to-be. For example, Tertullian describes Christian women visiting prisons and kissing the martyrs’ chains, questioning whether non-Christian husbands would have allowed for this practice: “Who will suffer her to creep into prison to kiss a martyr’s bonds?”²³ As this comes in the middle of Tertullian’s descriptions of the ways Christian wives may be hindered by non-Christian husbands, Tertullian reveals that when these women adopt the social role of Christian,

²¹ *Pass. Perp.* 10.13-15 (Heffernan, 113), trans. Heffernan, 130): *Et osculates est me et dixit mihi: ‘Filia, pax tecum.’ Et coepi ire cum Gloria ad portam Sanavivariam. Et experta sum. Et intellexi me non ad bestias sed contra diabolum esse pugnaturam; sed sciebam mihi esse victoria[m]. Hoc] usque in pridie muneris egi; ipsius autem muneris actum, si quis voluerit, scribat.*

²² For kissing as a method of distinction, see Penn, *Kissing Christians*, 76-80. The connection between kissing and the ritual of peace can further be seen at the end of the narrative, when the martyrs kiss each other in order to seal their commitment to each other (*Pass. Perp.* 21.7 [Heffernan, 123], trans. Heffernan, 135: *Et cum populus illos in medio postulare, ut gladio penetranti in eorum corpore oculos suos comites homicidii adiungerent, ultro surrexerunt et se quo volebat populus transtulerunt, ante iam osculati invicem ut martyrium per solemnia pacis consummarent.*)

²³ Tertullian, *Ux.* 2.4.2 (CCSL 1: 388-89), trans. ANF 4: 46. Kissing within both the martyrdom context and the general Christian community was not restricted along gender lines. However, objections to cross-gender kissing occasionally arose, thus demonstrating the pervasiveness of this practice. On this, see Penn, *Kissing Christians*, 80-85.

the typical expectations of the role identity of wife become secondary. The obligation of these women to behave as clients and to show their loyalty and admiration to the imprisoned confessors was primary. Through this, they gain spiritual benefit and the confessor received increased stature within the Christian community. Nevertheless, Tertullian acknowledges the tension that such behaviour might have for those who did not fully understand the reasons behind such practices.²⁴ For Tertullian, the practice is not necessarily gendered; rather, it is simply the expected behaviour of the role identity of a Christian client to venerate and promote his or her martyr patron.

Similarly, Cyprian reinforces the importance of kissing when he describes Christians who visited the imprisoned confessors. He says, “clinging to them with holy kisses we embrace them whom we have desired with a divine and insatiable eagerness.”²⁵ The intensity with which Cyprian describes this behaviour differentiates ritual kissing of confessors from ritual kissing between fellow Christians. Kissing between Christians of equal standing signified their shared membership within a community; kissing between Christians and confessors reflected the unequal and yet highly regulated relationship between client and patron. Since a confessor was made holy by his or her willingness to die for God, the ones kissing them shared in this

²⁴ The act of kissing a martyr's bonds also appears in martyr texts like the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Although this text does not originate in North Africa, it was known in the region. In this text, Thecla (not yet a martyr-to-be herself) visits Paul in prison and kisses his chains as a sign of love and veneration (*A. Paul. et Thecl.* 18 [Lipsius and Bonnet, 247], trans. Elliot, 367: κακείνης ἠϋξανεν ἡ πίστις, καταφιλούσης τὰ δεσμὰ αὐτοῦ.). Without disregarding the potential erotic overtones of this exchange (which were deemed problematic enough to warrant some scribal revisions in subsequent editions; see Kim Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 100-2), this may also be construed as a client showing proper devotion to her patron. The private nature of their interaction is counteracted by the fact that is told as part of her martyr narrative, thereby publicizing it and providing a model for both men and women to follow. Just as Thecla immediately made her veneration of Paul widely known, so should clients advertise their devotion to their patrons.

²⁵ Cyprian, *Laps.* 2 (CCSL 3: 221), trans. FC 36: 58: *Sanctis osculis adhaerentes desideratos diu inexplebili cupiditate conplectimur.*

holiness.²⁶ This is comparable to the way that regular clients shared part of the prestige of their patrons.

Kissing the martyr's body itself also occurs in the martyrologies, as in the *Martyrdom of Marian and James*. In this late-third-century North African martyr text,²⁷ the martyr Marian's mother Mary is portrayed as rejoicing in his holy death, as "again and again with religious devotion she pressed her lips to the wounds of his neck."²⁸ Mary is depicted simultaneously as a mother and a client; Marian is both her son and her patron. Mary acts in order to fulfill the ideal expectations of both of her roles. She does not grieve but is overjoyed, praising her son as well as herself, since she was able to bear such a child.²⁹ The act of kissing the wound, which had caused the death of her son, brings her even closer to the glory achieved through his act of martyrdom.

That other Christians should seek to emulate this type of client behaviour towards martyrs can be seen in a later sermon by Augustine. He refers to his own desire to acknowledge the martyrs in this way, saying, "We would have loved to embrace and kiss, if it had been possible, those ravaged limbs."³⁰ Once again, gender does not factor into the legitimacy of the relationship between the counter-identities of client and patron. What mattered was the reciprocal arrangement, and even seemingly problematic behaviours like a female client kissing a male

²⁶ Penn, *Kissing Christians*, 76-77.

²⁷ Musurillo argues that the martyrdom must have occurred sometime between 259 and 300 and that the text was written shortly thereafter, during this same period. He also suggests a connection between this martyrology and the contemporary *Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius*, arguing that they may share an author. Furthermore, he notes that both contain visions which are reminiscent of those found in the *Passion of Perpetua*, suggesting further literary influences (Musurillo, *The Acts of Christian Martyrs*, xxxiii-xxxvi).

²⁸ *Pass. Mar. Iac.* 13.2 (Musurillo, 212), trans. Musurillo, 213: *Et in ipsa ceruicis uulnera frequens osculum pietas religiosa figebat.*

²⁹ The text makes explicit the connection between Mary and the Maccabean mother, saying that Mary rejoiced like the Maccabean mother (*Pass. Mar. Iac.* 13.2 [Musurillo, 212], trans. Musurillo, 213): *His peractis Machabaico gaudio Mariani mater exultans et passione perfecta iam secuta de filio, non illi tantum coeperat, sed et sibi, quae tale pignus ediderat, gratulari*; see 2 Macc 7. Augustine also praised Mary for her willingness to give up her son and for encouraging him as he went to his death rather than pleading with him to reconsider (Augustine, *Serm.* 284.2 [PL 38: 1288-89], trans. Hill, 88).

³⁰ Augustine, *Serm.* 277A (CAI 1: 47 [PLS 2: 417]), trans. Hill, 47: *amplecti et osculari, si fieri posset, dilaniata illa membra uellemus.*

martyr were rendered safe within the confines of these ritualized identities. Furthermore, as the act of being close to a martyr through ritual kissing remained important metaphorically long after martyrs' bodies were no longer readily available, kissing continued to be an important physical manifestation of the patron-client relationship.

One way that this impulse could still be enacted was through kissing various relics associated with the martyrs,³¹ including martyrs' bones. Indeed, after the time of persecution was over, both men and women participated as clients of martyrs through the veneration of their relics. One particularly useful example of the way in which female clients engaged with martyrs' relics is the story of Lucilla. The narrative surrounding Lucilla also emphasizes the perceived power of the relic, as Christian authorities sought to categorize certain relics as legitimate and others as dangerous imitations just as they had previously distinguished legitimate and illegitimate martyrs. Thus, the example of Lucilla can reveal much about both women's behaviour and the way that their actions were perceived by certain male authorities.

The story of Lucilla is found first in the anti-Donatist writings of Optatus, bishop of Milevis in the latter half of the fourth century. According to Optatus, Lucilla was a prominent woman in Carthage who would kiss the bone of a martyr before she received the eucharist.³² Optatus' use of the word *libare* instead of the more common *osculum* immediately associates it with traditional Roman cult practices, including sacrifice.³³ Lucilla's actions are aligned with that of a client venerating a divine patron.

However, Lucilla's role identity of a client is complicated because of her wealth and high status, which made her behaviour both more public and more potentially dangerous. Optatus

³¹ Penn, *Kissing Christians*, 78-79.

³² There is no indication about where this bone fragment was kept.

³³ Robert Wisniewski, "Lucilla and the Bone: Remarks on an Early Testimony to the Cult of Relics," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 4 (2011): 159-60. On the language used in Christian ritual kissing, see Penn, *Kissing Christians*, 10-12.

reports that she was condemned by the Carthaginian bishop Caecilian on the grounds that this behaviour was inappropriate both because it diminished the importance of the eucharist and because it was not certain that the bone even belonged to a martyr.³⁴ Optatus furthermore asserts that the Donatist schism arose as a result of Lucilla seeking revenge against Caecilian for rebuking this veneration, thus placing the origins of the schism within a conflict in the cult of the martyrs.³⁵ Optatus' version of events was later accepted and repeated by others, including Jerome and Augustine. Indeed, Jerome includes Lucilla in a list of powerful women who harmed the church by using their wealth to support heretical men.³⁶ Similarly, Augustine emphasizes the power that Lucilla's wealth brought her when he asserted that she was angry at having been rebuked for her transgressions against the church (although he does not mention the kissing of the bone specifically) and, as a result, bribed others to turn them against Caecilian.³⁷

It is significant that nothing of her familial identities is known. It might be assumed that Lucilla was a widow based on the fact that she seems to be acting independently, but there is no evidence to confirm this. This is significant in and of itself, however, as powerful women (including martyrs) are most often described by their familial roles at some point. In Lucilla's case, however, her public actions far outshone whatever family life she might have led.

³⁴ Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 1.16 (CSEL 26: 18), trans. Edwards, 15-16: *Hoc apud Carthaginem post ordinationem Caeciliani factum esse nemo [est] qui nesciat, per Lucillam scilicet, nescio quam feminam factiosam, quae ante concussam persecutionis turbinibus pacem, dum adhuc in tranquillo esset ecclesia, cum correptionem archidiaconi Caeciliani [Lucilla] ferre non posset; quae ante spiritalem cibum et potum os nescio cuius martris, sit amen martyris, libare dicebatur, et cum praeponeret calici salutari os nescio cuius hominis mortui, et si martyris sed necdum vindicate, correpta cum confusione irata discessit.* Augustine emphasizes the importance of discerning "true" Catholic martyrs from imitations in several places, including *Serm.* 53A.13 (Morin 11: 634 [PLS 2: 684]), trans. Hill, 83-84 (on the importance of commemorating only those who died for the proper cause); and *Mon.* 28.36 (CSEL 41: 585), trans. FC 16: 384 (on the problem of false relics being sold or promoted).

³⁵ Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 1.18 (CSEL 26: 18-19), trans. Edwards, 18.

³⁶ Jerome, *Ep.* 133.4 (CSEL 56.1: 248), trans. Freemantle, 275.

³⁷ Augustine, *Ep.* 43.6.17 (CSEL 34.2: 98-99), trans. Teske, 2001: 165. That Augustine does not focus on kissing the bone may demonstrate that by Augustine's time, kissing a martyr's bone was considered to be accepted (Wisniewski, "Lucilla and the Bone," 161).

Indeed, Lucilla is framed primarily as a patron who uses her wealth and agency to support those whom she deemed appropriate. However, her behaviour regarding the bone is not that of a patron but a client. Thus, Lucilla is a good example of the way in which a woman could hold multiple identities even within the context of the cult of the martyrs. A woman could be both a patron and a client, depending on to whom she was relating. It is possible that, although the male authors focused on Lucilla's patronage and the potential danger that this caused to their points of view, Lucilla herself may have seen her client behaviour as equally essential. Indeed, we do not know how she viewed the role identities in relation to each other or the internal meanings that she placed upon each of them. Perhaps they were equally salient to her expression of piety, and perhaps she saw her agency as a patron to be instrumental in allowing her to obtain the bone and venerate it as a client should. As patron of a potential bishop and client of a martyr, Lucilla combines both material and spiritual wealth into the kind of authority that was powerful enough to instigate a movement.

ii. Visiting Shrines

Although Lucilla was apparently able to handle her relic whenever she wished, other women traveled to the shrines dedicated to martyrs in order to venerate them. One of the most prominent martyr cults in North Africa was that of Saint Stephen, whose relics were associated with many miracles and to whom several shrines were devoted throughout North Africa.³⁸ Augustine relates several miracles that occurred in North Africa in connection with Stephen, many of which

³⁸ On the cult of the relics of Stephen and the way it is discussed by Augustine, see Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 245-79. For the way in which Stephen's remains came to be translated from Jerusalem to Uzalis in North Africa and the associated miracles, see Giselle de Nie, *Poetics of Wonder: Testimonies of the New Christian Miracles in the Late Antique Latin World* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 277-337.

involved female clients.³⁹ His accounts can help further to illuminate the diversity of client behaviour within the cult of the martyrs.

Some of these female clients are described only by the type of healing they received, and not by any other role or social identities that might have distinguished them from others. For example, Augustine recounts that when a bishop was transporting the relics of Stephen, a blind woman approached him with the hope that she might be healed. The bishop gave her the flowers he was carrying and, when she applied them to her eyes, she was able to see.⁴⁰ Another miracle is said to have occurred when a woman simply touched the railing of Stephen's shrine. She immediately collapsed, and then rose up cured, although her initial illness was never specified.⁴¹ It is important to note that both of these women are identified primarily by their role as clients of martyrs; their familial status, their wealth, and other markers of their identities are almost completely absent.

These accounts are also significant because they depict these women as expressing agency with regards to their martyr-patrons. They actively seek healing miracles for themselves, thereby demonstrating ways in which women may have perceived themselves to have power even within the traditionally submissive role as a client. Thus, while clients may have been expected to act in deference to their patron, they were nevertheless able to exercise agency in seeking out a patron in the first place. Their trust in the power associated with the martyrs is rewarded when they receive healing for their various ailments.

³⁹ Augustine attributes the healing power of the martyr at the shrine to the presence of Stephen's relics, thus demonstrating the importance of maintaining physical proximity with the martyr. He asserts that, since the relics had been transferred to Hippo two years prior, there had been at least seventy miracles published and many more which were not advertised (Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 [CCSL 48: 823-24], trans. Dyson, 1130). On Augustine's views of martyrs and miracles, see de Nie, *Poetics of Wonder*, 341-65 (see 348-65 for a summary of the miracle stories attributed to Stephen in the writings of Augustine).

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 (CCSL 48: 821-22), trans. Dyson, 1128.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 (CCSL 48: 826-27), trans. Dyson, 1132.

Not all clients expressed this type of agency, however, as not all clients advocated for themselves. There are two similar cases of women's families seeking healing on their behalf. In the first, the dress of a "devout woman" (*sanctimonialis*) was brought to the shrine of Stephen at an estate called Audurus when she was on her deathbed. By the time her dress could be returned to her, she had died. Nevertheless, her parents wrapped the corpse in the dress and she miraculously came back to life.⁴² The woman with the dress is not labeled as a daughter, but she is depicted as one in the context of the funerary rituals that her parents would have been expected to carry out. Her role as a daughter did not influence the way in which she was healed by the martyr-patron. In a parallel account, Augustine describes another instance in which the family of a young girl asks for healing on her behalf, bringing her dress to Stephen's shrine in Hippo. As with the previous woman, the daughter died while her father was there praying, but when he returned home with the dress, she was miraculously restored to life.⁴³ In this case, the daughter identity is primary while the client identity is secondary; her agency is obscured by that of her father, as would be expected of the typical daughter. She is nevertheless also a client because she receives a benefit from the martyr-patron, though it was not her own actions that initiated this relationship. These two accounts demonstrate the diverse ways in which familial identities and family alliances may have influenced the roles that women played within the martyr cult.

In the miracle stories that Augustine relates within the *City of God*, there are no obvious gendered distinctions between the ways that men and women are healed. Both men and women are healed through touch, through the application of certain items of clothing that had been at the shrine, through the anointing of oil, through dreams, or through prayer. Likewise, Augustine

⁴² Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 (CCSL 48: 823), trans. Dyson, 1129.

⁴³ Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 (CCSL 48: 823), trans. Dyson, 1130.

does not display any anxiety about women being healed by male martyrs, or with women actively advocating for their own well-being. In this regard, it would seem that female clients of martyrs were free to make their needs known to their martyr-patrons.

It should also be noted that it was not necessary to receive healing in order to be a client of a martyr. Some clients simply visited the shrine of the martyr in order to pray. When describing a miracle received by a male client at the shrine of Gervasius and Protasius, Augustine notes that the healing or exorcism took place while a wealthy woman was visiting the shrine with her attendants for her evening prayers and hymns.⁴⁴ This almost incidental reference provides a glimpse into what might have been typical client behaviour—visiting shrines, offering prayers and hymns. Visiting the shrine may be seen as analogous to the way in which clients were generally expected to visit their earthly patrons and demonstrate their respect and devotion to them. That the woman described here visits the shrine with a group of people perhaps reflects the way in which wealthy women (and perhaps especially wealthy widows), who would have had clients of their own, simultaneously occupied the roles of patron and client within this ritual context.

iii. Publishing Miracles

One of the most important responsibilities of clients of martyrs was the publication of the miracles they received. Just as clients in the Greco-Roman tradition were expected to praise their patrons and ensure that others knew about their patrons' generosity, so too were clients of martyrs expected to make known the miracles granted to them by the martyr. The publication of such accounts seems to have taken the shape of pamphlets (*libelli*) that could then be circulated

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 (CCSL 48: 820-21), trans. Dyson, 1128.

within the communities and even recited within the church.⁴⁵ Augustine himself encourages this practice in the *City of God*, perceiving it to be of central importance to the veneration of proper martyrs.

Augustine refers to a wealthy woman in his congregation named Petronia. No other identifying information is given, thus suggesting that her familial identities (probably a wife or a widow) are less important than her identity as a client and eventual publisher of miracles. Petronia was said to have been cured of her illness at Stephen's shrine in Uzali, but she had neither recorded nor published her experiences. Augustine recounts that he exhorted her to publish an account of her healing that could then be read aloud to other people. After noting that she eventually obeyed his command, Augustine assures his audience that she can be believed since she is a noblewoman and a person of distinguished character.⁴⁶ In this way, Petronia's authority within the role identity as a client was supported by her wealth and status, factors which normally are associated more with patrons. This background allows her position to be more highly regarded; Augustine at least seemed to perceive the account of her miraculous interaction with the martyr to be more authoritative than accounts written by others. Indeed, Augustine clearly believes that Petronia's prominence in the community would help to legitimize her account of the miracle.⁴⁷ His strong reaction to the way in which Petronia kept the account of her miracle private demonstrates the way in which the role identity of client could have different

⁴⁵ De Nie, *Poetics of Wonder*, 358. See also Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 258-69.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 (CCSL 48: 824-25), trans. Dyson, 1130-31. Another woman named Innocentia, who is described as "one of its [Carthage's] foremost citizens, a deeply religious woman" *religiosissima femina, de primariis ipsius ciuitatis*), is also said to have received a healing miracle, although hers is not directly associated with a martyr. Nevertheless, Augustine rebukes her with "some severity" when he finds out that she has not told anyone of her experience. See Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 (CCSL 48: 818-19), Dyson, 1124-25: *Hoc ego cum audissem et vehementer stomacharer in ille civitate atque in illa persona non utique obscura factum tam ingens miraculum sic latere, hinc eam et admonendam et paene obiurgandam putavi.*

⁴⁷ Power, *Veiled Desire*, 43. On Augustine's changing views of relics and the promotion of miracles, see Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust*, 32-36.

meanings for different individuals. Furthermore, for Augustine, the role of a client contained within it the chief responsibility to become a publisher/promoter of miracles, while Petronia, evidently, made no such connection. For Petronia, perhaps the experience of the miracle (and presumably the continuation of visiting the martyr shrines to offer prayer) was enough to fulfil this role.

Augustine's insistence that Petronia publish her account even when she is initially not inclined to do so provides an interesting juxtaposition of the scope and limitation of women's agency. When acting as a client of a patron-martyr, Petronia expresses agency by seeking out a martyr for healing as well as by choosing not to make public her experience. This choice, however, is ultimately undermined by Augustine, who uses his own authority as bishop over her in order to insist that she fulfil what he perceives to be her duty as a proper client of a martyr and, perhaps, of himself. It is through Augustine's interference, therefore, that miracles that initially took place in the private sphere are made public and available to be interpreted and analyzed by the rest of the Christian community.⁴⁸

Augustine's discussion of these women also demonstrates that women were in no way restricted in their interactions or responsibilities as clients of a martyr. They could be healed just as men could, and they too could (and should) record their experiences so that the broader congregation could receive the benefit of their testimony about the legitimacy of the martyrs. These writings about the miracles performed were important aspects of the continuation of the living cult of the martyrs, proving Augustine's argument that God continued to perform miracles through the martyrs even in his day.⁴⁹ As such, the relationship between the counter-identities of

⁴⁸ Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 70; Power, *Veiled Desire*, 43.

⁴⁹ Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 262.

client and patron remained dynamic and vital even when the patron was a martyr. Furthermore, the fact that both men and women wrote down the miracles that had happened to them allowed the martyrs' fame to grow in much the same way as the inscriptions identifying the patron of certain buildings allowed for the patron's benevolence to be public knowledge. In this way, a female client could exercise agency within the community by promoting her patron-martyr and ensuring that the martyr's legacy continued.

Imitator

In addition to venerating martyrs through actions associated with the roles of patron or client, women often became imitators of martyrs. In general, the literary record of the actions of the martyrs in part served to provide examples of the perfect Christian life that subsequent believers could (and should) imitate.⁵⁰ Imitation of martyrs reinforced a conception of power in which the imitators were always in a submissive position.⁵¹ However, through imitation, venerators of martyrs could gain access to some of the qualities for which martyrs were admired, which in turn provided them with their own type of power. The martyrs' qualities that were worthy of imitation were transported from the distant past and made manifest in the present through the recitation of their stories in churches and in private homes. Imitation of martyrs' virtues functioned as an extension of this aspect of commemoration and provided an opportunity for men and women of all statuses to engage closely with the martyrs and their virtues.

⁵⁰ Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 143. For the way in which Greco-Roman people looked to literary figures as models to imitate and the way in which this manifested in Christian martyr and saint discourses in Late Antiquity, see Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations* 2 (1983): 1-25. Some martyr texts even state this purpose in their introductions. See, for example, *Pass. Perp.* 1.1-2 (Heffernan, 104), trans. Heffernan, 125-26. For more on the martyr as a model for imitation, see Moss, *The Other Christs*, 102-5.

⁵¹ Imitation has long played a role in the development of Christian communities. For example, see Elizabeth Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), on the way in which imitation, or *mimesis*, functions as a strategy of power in Paul's letters.

While women could be clients or patrons of either male or female martyrs, imitation usually occurred along gender lines. Imitation took various forms depending on the temporal and social context as well as the internalized meanings that each individual woman applied to the role of imitator. Some women took imitation in a literal sense, becoming martyrs themselves when the opportunity presented itself.⁵² Others imitated the martyrs' virtues in a more figurative sense. Indeed, the role of imitator often worked in conjunction with other role identities as the ideal qualities of the martyr were translated into daily life. This fluidity means that imitation is often spoken of in general terms in the literary record. It is therefore difficult to uncover the way in which it functioned in daily life. Conscious imitation of martyrs often coincided with unconscious application of certain virtues and behaviours. While most of the evidence regarding the ways in which women acted as imitators comes from male-authored texts, they can nevertheless provide important insights, since the way that women were imitating martyrs did not always align with the wishes of male authorities. The glimpses of women acting as imitators thus add further complexity to the various ways women's behaviour within the cult of the martyrs was understood and negotiated.

One of the contested areas of imitation involves a contested martyr: Thecla. Although her cult was most prominent in Asia Minor, she was nevertheless well-known in North Africa.⁵³ Indeed, Tertullian provides the first reference to Thecla in his treatise *On Baptism*.⁵⁴ That Tertullian mentions Thecla demonstrates that she was popular enough to both warrant his attention and that he expected others to be aware of her, too. Thecla is contested not just because

⁵² For example, in the *Passio SS. Maximae, Donatillae et Secundae*, Secunda is depicted as an onlooker who, upon seeing the confessors Maxima and Donatilla pass by her home, is inspired to join them (4) (TU 134: 100-1), trans. Tilley, 21.

⁵³ On the growth and spread of the Thecla cult in both textual and material culture, see Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁴ Tertullian, *Bapt.* 17.4-5 (CCSL 1: 291-92), trans. Evans, 37; Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla*, 7.

of the way that women used her as an example to be imitated (more on this below), but also because she was not technically a martyr.

Although she is punished in the text for following the teachings of Paul that exhort her to chastity, she does not die. However, her depiction as a confessor did provide her with the kind of charismatic authority that usually culminated with martyrdom.⁵⁵ Furthermore, she is included alongside lists of more conventional martyrs by ancient writers such as Gregory of Nazianzus⁵⁶ and Augustine.⁵⁷ Because of both the way she appears in the North African literature as an exemplar and the fact that she is recognized by ancient writers as a martyr, it is suitable that she is considered in this section. Thecla demonstrates that, while martyrdom may have been a largely local phenomenon, it was nevertheless possible for martyrs from outside the region to become popular elsewhere and influence people's behaviour. Just as the example of Stephen looms large in Augustine's discussion of the miracles that many in North Africa received, so does Thecla stand as an outlier in the discussion of North African martyr imitation. Though they did not originate in North Africa, the memories of them nevertheless helped to shape the cult of the martyrs there.

In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Thecla is depicted as a virgin who leaves her family after hearing the teachings of Paul about celibacy. She eventually gains approval from Paul to travel and teach others about God,⁵⁸ but is granted authority only after she baptizes herself in the arena⁵⁹ and adopts male dress while traveling the countryside.⁶⁰ Thecla's agency in baptizing

⁵⁵ On Thecla's charismatic authority as a confessor and the tradition of some confessors retaining their charismatic statuses without becoming martyrs, see Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla*, 27-31.

⁵⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 4.69 (PG 35: 589), trans. King, 139. On this, see Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla*, 5.

⁵⁷ *Virgin*. 44.45 (CSEL 41: 290), trans. FC 27: 199.

⁵⁸ *A. Paul. et Thecl.* 41 (Lipsius and Bonnet, 267), trans. Elliot, 372.

⁵⁹ *A. Paul. et Thecl.* 34 (Lipsius and Bonnet, 260-61), trans. Elliot, 370.

⁶⁰ *A. Paul. et Thecl.* 40 (Lipsius and Bonnet, 266), trans. Elliot, 371-72.

herself and adopting the role of an itinerant teacher apparently inspired other Christian women to act in imitation of her, including seeking greater authoritative roles within their own communities.

An account of this type of imitative behaviour in North Africa is found in the writings of Tertullian, who is critical of the practice. In his treatise *On Baptism*, Tertullian ignores the virtue of Thecla's vow of virginity,⁶¹ and instead asserts that certain women are using the "*Acts of Paul*, which are falsely so named" (*Acta Pauli quae perperam scripta sunt*) to claim the "example of Thecla" (*exemplum Theclae*) as the authority to teach and baptize (*ad licentiam mulierum docendi tinguendique defendere*). Such behaviour is absolutely inappropriate, he continues, given that Paul himself would never have given women the power to teach and to baptize when he did not even think it proper for them to learn by their own right.⁶² Tertullian's argument, therefore, is not that women should not become imitators of martyrs, but rather that they should only imitate *proper* martyrs. In his view, the Thecla narrative is a forgery that does not accurately reflect the teachings of Paul or the appropriate behaviour for Christian women. As such, any who imitate the behaviour of Thecla on the basis of this text do so mistakenly and their behaviour should not be admired.⁶³

⁶¹ On Tertullian's evolving views on the importance of virginity for Christian piety, see David G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116-20.

⁶² Tertullian, *Bapt.* 17.4-5 (CCSL 1: 291-92), trans. Evans, 37. Cf. 1 Cor 14:35. Interestingly, while Tertullian delegitimized Thecla by dismissing the attribution of the text to Paul, asserting that the entire text was a fraud, Ambrose claimed that Thecla's authority could be trusted precisely because it came directly from Paul (Ambrose, *Virg.* 2.3.19-21 [PL 16: 166-67], NPNF² 10: 376). Thus, Tertullian's views on Thecla and her imitators are not representative of the opinions of all male church authorities in Late Antiquity.

⁶³ For a summary of the potential problems with translations of Tertullian's reference to Thecla, see A. Hilhorst, "Tertullian and the *Acts of Paul*," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (Kampen: Pharos, 1996). On the (unlikely) possibility that Tertullian does not refer to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* as we know it in this passage, see Stevan L. Davies, "Women, Tertullian, and the *Acts of Paul*," *Semeia* 38 (1986): 142. On the way in which Tertullian uses Thecla as part of his overall argument on the necessity of baptism, and some of the incongruities between Tertullian's claims and the Thecla narrative, see Gail P.C. Streete, "Authority and Authorship: The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* as a Disputed Pauline Text," *LTQ* 40 (2005): 265-76. For an overview of

Despite (and indeed, because of) Tertullian's insistence otherwise, this brief passage reveals that some women did gain a measure of authority through imitation. By imitating the public agency of Thecla, they expressed agency themselves and adopted the role identities of teachers and baptizers. However, the example of Thecla also raises many questions which expose the limitations in our knowledge of imitative behaviours. For example, we do not know if imitation of Thecla was occurring only in one community or if the practice was more pervasive. We also do not know how many women were participating nor whether these women were also members of one of the special designations within the early Christian church (such as the orders of widows or virgins). We do not know whether these women were teaching and baptizing only women or whether men as well came forward to be baptized by a woman's hands. Furthermore, we do not know whether these women perceived their own actions to be subversive or whether they thought they were simply acting in imitation of the martyrs as all Christians ideally should. It is clear, however, that whatever the status and number of these women, they were prominent and problematic enough to warrant mention in Tertullian's treatise devoted to prescribing proper baptismal rites. Thus, while it is impossible to ascertain any specific details about the women who were acting in imitation of Thecla, it is clear that this imitation involved using agency to insert themselves to some extent into authoritative positions within their own Christian communities.⁶⁴

the way the example of Thecla was used by various ancient writers, including Tertullian, see Lehtipuu, "The Example of Thecla."

⁶⁴ Davis asserts that Tertullian's condemnation "confirms Thecla's early association with the social and religious empowerment of women" (*The Cult of Saint Thecla*, 8) and that the Thecla narrative "seems to have inspired women who read or heard it to embrace new roles of leadership in the early Christian mission" (13). While I think it is likely that Thecla's agency was admired by some women, I hesitate to say that these leadership roles should necessarily be considered "new", given how little we know about the role of women in the earliest Christian communities. Furthermore, as was seen in the previous chapter, women were participating fully in leadership roles in certain rituals, particularly within the home. Female leaders of house churches, for example, may have been undertaking teaching behaviour similar to that which Tertullian finds so troublesome as part of the *exemplum Theclae*.

The imitation of Thecla continued long after Tertullian's time, both in North Africa and outside of it.⁶⁵ Thecla's continued popularity in North Africa can be seen in the writings of Faustus of Milevis, which survive in quotations in Augustine's *Against Faustus the Manichean*. In the original work, Faustus sought to convince his audience that Manichaeism was simply the purest form of Christianity. In doing so, he used writings that would have been easily recognizable to his Catholic audience, including the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Focused on Thecla's virginity rather than her martyrdom, Faustus asserted that the Manichean emphasis on chastity was an imitation of Thecla's voluntary vow of perpetual chastity. Just as Thecla chose virginity over marriage after hearing Paul, he argued, so did the Manicheans choose chastity on the basis of Paul's teachings.⁶⁶ Augustine's response makes no mention of Thecla, but he does reject Faustus' notion that marriage should be forbidden. He argues, "[T]here is a great difference between exhorting to virginity as the better of two good things, and forbidding to marry by denouncing the true purpose of marriage."⁶⁷ For Augustine, the imitation of a martyr

Unfortunately, the evidence simply is not there to make a definitive claim one way or another. The many questions that this passage raises are nevertheless important to consider, even if the answers may never be discerned. For other scholarship that views Thecla as an advocate for female liberation, see, e.g., Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 151-54; Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*, 1-2. For an overview of this scholarship and a presentation of the opposing view, see Lynne C. Boughton, "From Pious Legend to Feminist Fantasy: Distinguishing Hagiographical License from Apostolic Practice in the 'Acts of Paul/Acts of Thecla'," *Journal of Religion* 71 (1991): 362-83.

⁶⁵ Imitation of Thecla outside of North Africa can be seen in the identification of ascetic women as "new Theclas." See, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, *V. Macr.* (PG 46: 962), trans. FC 58: 164. Thecla also seems to have been particularly popular in Egypt, where many manuscript copies are attested. Athanasius' writings also reveal a community of women who seem to have adopted Thecla as their patron saint and looked to her as an example. On Athanasius' use of Thecla and on Thecla's importance in the female monastic context in Alexandria, see Davis, *The Cult of St. Thecla*, 83-112; cf. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 144-46. See also Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 165-66.

⁶⁶ Augustine, *Faust.* 30.4 (CSEL 25.1: 751), trans. NPNF¹ 4: 329. On the work more generally, see J. Kevin Coyle, "Contra Faustum Manicheum," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 355-56. On Thecla's role as the "paradigmatic virgin exemplar for women," see Davis, *The Cult of St. Thecla*, 101.

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Faust.* 30.6 (CSEL 25.1: 755), trans. NPNF¹ 4: 330: (...) *uidetis ergo multum interesse inter hortantes ad uirginitatem bono minori bonum amplius praeponendo, et prohibentes nubere concubitum propagationis, qui solus proprie nuptialis est, uehementius accusando*. Cf. 1 Cor 7:38. For more on Augustine's views of marriage as something that had the potential to be positive, see his treatise *De bono conjugali* (CSEL 41: 187-231), trans. FC 27: 9-51.

was not enough to make a person's actions acceptable. Rather, the imitation must be undertaken with the proper understanding of what the actions mean. The Manicheans were not wrong because they imitated Thecla's virginity, but rather because they imitated her on the basis of an improper understanding of Paul's teachings.

Augustine himself uses Thecla as the paradigm of an ideal virgin,⁶⁸ but her virginity should only be imitated if it is done with the appropriate mindset. He compares her to the married martyr Crispina, demonstrating that imitation of martyrs was not restricted to one role identity. Later, when faced with those in his community who argued that celibacy was preferable to marriage because it might prepare individuals for martyrdom, Augustine once again asserts that marriage should be admired equally with continence, provided that both are entered into with one's mind on God and not in search of human admiration or approval.⁶⁹ By admonishing people for using the role of imitator to justify elevating their own statuses within the community, Augustine demonstrates that the imitation of martyrs carried with it the possibility of increased authority. Imitation of martyrs might therefore be another way for women in particular to gain access to increased levels of agency.

Furthermore, Augustine often advocates for the veneration of martyrs through the imitation of their virtues, arguing that martyrs' feasts should not just celebrate the martyrs but should also encourage the faithful to imitate them. For Augustine, honour without imitation is "false flattery;"⁷⁰ only by adopting the role of imitator could one truly honour the martyrs. This role

⁶⁸ *Virgin.* 44.45 (CSEL 41: 290), trans. FC 27: 199.

⁶⁹ *Virgin.* 46.46-47 (CSEL 41: 291-92), trans. FC 27: 201-2.

⁷⁰ Augustine, *Serm.* 325.1 (PL 38: 1447), trans. Hill, 167: *Sed honorare, et non imitari, nihil est aliud quam mendaciter adulari.*

identity may be applied in conjunction with any other, so long as one was operating with the properly devout mindset.⁷¹

However, while both men and women could imitate the virtues of either male or female martyrs, Augustine notes that it may be easier for men to imitate men and women to imitate women. For example, in a sermon mentioning the Maccabean martyrs, he distinguishes the different aspects that men and women should imitate: “Let men learn how to die for the sake of truth. Let women learn from the extraordinary patience, the inexpressible courage of that mother.”⁷² For Augustine, the fact that the Maccabean mother did not die like her sons did does not make her any less of a martyr. According to Augustine, she is equally deserving of imitation since by “becoming the mother of seven martyrs, she was herself seven times a martyr.”⁷³ This conception of the imitation of martyrs was therefore more connected with reifying social norms than challenging them. Thus, Augustine advocates for imitation within the contemporary social constrictions. Men should imitate martyrs regardless of the familial identities of these male martyrs while Christian mothers should imitate mother martyrs.

In another sermon, Augustine acknowledges the challenges of seeking to imitate martyrs of the opposite gender. Speaking of Perpetua and Felicitas, Augustine asks, “What, after all, could be more glorious than these women, whom men can more easily admire than imitate?”⁷⁴ What Augustine considers to be inherent differences between the genders makes it difficult for him to imagine the male members of his congregation being able to imitate fully the virtues of female

⁷¹ People may have found it easier to imitate martyrs than other biblical figures because they had once been regular members of the community. On this see Grig, *Making Martyrs*, 46, with 50-51 for further discussion of Augustine’s use of martyrs as exemplars.

⁷² Augustine, *Serm.* 300.6 (PL 38: 1379), trans. Hill, 279: *Discant viri mori pro veritate. Discant feminae, de matris illius tanta patientia, ineffabili virtute.*

⁷³ Augustine, *Serm.* 300.6 (PL 38: 1379), trans. Hill, 279: *Facta mater septem martyrum, septies martyr.*

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Serm.* 280.1 (PL 38: 1281), trans. Hill, 72: *Quid enim gloriosius his feminis, quas viri mirantur facilius, quam imitantur?*

martyrs. Instead, they should admire female martyrs while seeking out male martyrs to imitate. This difficulty remains despite the fact that imitation became a more abstract notion in the post-persecution context.⁷⁵ Once again, this is indicative of the maintenance of the social distinctions between men and women and their roles within the church and Christian society in general.

The imitation of martyrs formed an important part of worship within the cult of the martyrs. Over time, the evidence for type of imitation changed, shifting from a rather literal imitation, as in the women following the *exemplum Theclae*, to a more abstract imitation as advocated by Augustine. However, the exact nature of the way in which the role of imitator was adopted is largely obscured from the historical record, in part because much of the imitative behaviour was closely connected with other role identities. Still, even if it is difficult to observe in isolation, imitation was the most common and most easily-accessible method of venerating the martyrs. Additionally, imitation could be done in the home as part of the activities of one's daily life, thus shifting the cult of the martyrs from the public into private, and reorienting it towards individual actions rather than proclamations from church authorities. It is precisely because of this individualized component, however, that it is difficult to discern the exact activities that women undertook in conscious imitation of the martyrs.

Conclusion

It is clear that women participated in the cult of the martyrs in diverse ways, both publicly and privately. As a result of the limitations of Roman social structure and wealth, relatively few

⁷⁵ See, for example, Augustine, *Serm.* 280.6 (PL 38: 1283), trans. Hill, 75. Augustine suggests, "If we are not capable of following them in action, let us follow in affection; if not in glory, then certainly in joy and gladness; if not in merit, then in desire; if not in suffering, then in fellow feeling; if not in excellence, then in our close relationship with them" (*Si eos sequi non valemus actu, sequamur affectu: si non gloria, certe laetitia: si non meritis, votis: si non passione, compassione: si non excellentia, connexione*).

women could participate in the cult of the martyrs as patrons. Many more women included martyr veneration as part of their daily lives, making clientage and imitation the most common modes of veneration within the cult of the martyrs. The diversity of practice within each of these categories must be emphasized. Despite what authorities such as Tertullian and Augustine may have argued in their writings, there was no single way that women expressed their devotion to the holy dead.

It is interesting to note that most of the restrictions placed upon veneration in the cult of the martyrs are not specific to women but are rather more generalized. The diversity of behaviour that fits within women's role identities of patron, client, and imitator that have been the subject of this chapter suggests that women's behaviour within the cult of the martyrs was not considered to be threatening to broader social norms simply by virtue of gendered expectations. For example, while Augustine asserts that men should imitate male martyrs and women should imitate female martyrs, he does not impose gender restrictions on who can visit shrines to be healed or who can kiss either martyrs or their relics. Furthermore, I would argue that the cult of the martyrs can act as a kind of protection, shielding women from certain social expectations, as when women, in the role of the client, visited male confessors in prison and kissed their bonds; in any other context, this kind of interaction would have been improper. Likewise, engaging in client behaviour towards the relics of a martyr-patron whose provenance was not known rendered otherwise acceptable behaviour as dangerous, as when Lucilla kissed the bone of an unsanctioned martyr. It is not the role identity itself that is problematic but rather the counter-identity; a woman being a client is acceptable as long as the counter-identity of patron is a proper martyr.

Indeed, the reciprocal bond between patron and client remained prominent within the cult of the martyrs, as women could adopt both role identities and engage in behaviour that followed previously established parameters for this social relationship. Female patrons within the cult of the martyrs provided for the proper burial of their martyr-clients and female clients publicized their martyr-patrons' good works. This behaviour was neither unique nor particularly Christian; women were simply continuing the traditional expectations of patrons and clients. This consistency in behaviour might help to explain why extant sources do not, for the most part, go into detail about the precise ways in which women were engaging with the cult of the martyrs. They were doing the same things that they had always done. Translating this into the Christian context did not necessarily alter expectations for particular role identities.

The role identity of imitator, however, was much less concretely defined. Efforts to shape or limit women's imitation of martyrs reveal some of the behaviour that was associated with this identity as well as some of the ways these behaviours might be construed as problematic. Everyone could imitate virtues such as patience and endurance, but writers from Tertullian to Augustine sought to ensure that this kind of imitation was done properly. In most cases, this meant asserting that such imitation need not go against cultural norms. For example, as Tertullian argues, women imitating martyrs should not adopt more authoritative practices such as teaching or baptizing. Augustine, for his part, grapples with the question of whether imitation necessarily entailed chastity. He argues for moderation, noting that marriage can be just as acceptable as virginity, provided one has the proper intention. It is significant that the martyrs' virtues highlighted by these authors as the most important to imitate were ones that ideal women already possessed. Christian women who stepped too far outside of the realm of the traditional conception of acceptable behaviour were discouraged, not praised.

It is clear that women could adopt multiple roles within the cult of the martyrs, depending on the particular context and occasion for martyr veneration. This kind of situation-specific identity construction echoes the various roles that are attributed to women who became martyrs. Roles like client and patron are analogous to the public aspects of the roles of wife and mother, and martyrs fulfill the role of imitator by emulating both Christ as well as other martyrs. However, most of this behaviour was undertaken outside of the ecclesiastical purview and is thus largely invisible within the sources. Nevertheless, just because the authoritative identities of these women are not the focus of the extant writings does not mean that women who participated in the cult of the martyrs as patrons, clients, and imitators in all their permutations did not exercise agency within their communities. These role identities were integral in the perpetuation of the cult of the martyrs and of its central place within the social identity of Christian.

Chapter Four:

Domestic Agency:

Women's Roles in Communal Meals, Funerary Feasts, and Martyr Veneration

One of the most frequently contested aspects of worship within the cult of the martyrs was the celebration of commemorative feasts at the graves and shrines of the martyrs. Evolving from rituals in honour of the average dead, these celebrations were extremely popular among Christians who sought to recognize the martyrs' achievements. Despite this popularity, North African Christian writers from Tertullian to Augustine continually expressed their disapproval of these feasts, citing a variety of reasons from closeness to pre-Christian practices to an inappropriate co-mingling of genders in an unregulated atmosphere. Much of what we know about the feasts comes from the critical remarks of such writers. However, despite the relatively abundant evidence about commemorative martyr feasts, there are still great spaces of silence regarding women's behaviour within these practices.

Indeed, studies that address the commemorative feasts in the cult of the martyrs are more concerned with the fact that the feasts were occurring than with exploring the question of whether and how women participated. Both the literary and material evidence supports the existence of the feasts, but neither type of ancient source provides significant detail about the participants, their roles, or the actual structure of the feasts. Scholarship about these feasts has generally followed the lineaments of the evidence, using the fact of the feasts to situate this Christian practice within the broader cultural context. In most cases, studies of the commemorative feasts acknowledge the connection between these feasts and the ordinary celebrations of the dead (in both Roman and Christian contexts). Christian venerators are depicted as partaking in the feast by gathering around a *mensa* either over or near the tomb of the

martyrs. The meal included bread and wine, and the latter caused some anxiety among Christian authorities; their frequent objections to the drunkenness of those who continued celebrating the martyrs late into the night provides further information about the practice, which apparently remained popular well into the fifth century.¹

Studies that fit within this general pattern provide important insight into the cultural context of the feasts.² However, these studies generally do not consider the way in which gender changes the way that this ritual was experienced.³ As women were centrally involved in the preparation of meals and had specific roles to play within the context of funerals and mourning, including gender in a discussion of the commemorative feasts of the martyrs is essential in order to establish a clear picture of the ritual and its components.

This chapter will attempt to overcome the spaces of silence regarding women's behaviour within these practices by placing commemorative martyr feasts within the broader context of the communal meals in Late Antiquity. Here I follow Dennis E. Smith and Matthias Klinghardt, who posit a common meal tradition throughout the Mediterranean world, regardless of whether the meals were partaken by Jews, Christians, or practitioners of traditional Greco-Roman religion.⁴

¹ For an example of this type of summary within a larger exploration of the use of *mensae* in Christian structures, see Richard Krautheimer, "Mensa-coemeterium-martyrium," in *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval, and Renaissance Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 46.

² Éric Rebillard places the martyr feasts in the context of the Roman *parentalia*, tracing the literary evidence from Tertullian to the fifth century; see *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, 142-53. Robin Jensen considers both material and literary evidence, emphasizing the continuity and the ubiquity of such practices; see Robin Jensen, "Dining with the Dead: From the *Mensa* to the Altar in Christian Late Antiquity," in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context. Studies of Roman, Jewish, and Christian Burials*, ed. Laurie Brink and Deborah Green (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 107-43 (on martyr celebrations in particular, see pp. 128-43).

³ The exceptions are Augustine's mother Monica and the inscription for Aelia Secundula. Both of these examples will be examined within this chapter.

⁴ This thesis was first put forward in Dennis E. Smith, "Social Obligation in the Context of Communal Meals: A Study of the Christian Meal in 1 Corinthians in Comparison with Graeco-Roman Communal Meals" (dissertation: Harvard University, 1980) and published by Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (London: SCM Press, 1990). Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1996) and Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, represent the fully formed thesis using independent evidence. See also their

That is not to say that all meals were identical; rather, there was a common banquet tradition⁵ that was adapted to various settings.⁶ The importance in recognizing the connection between the seemingly different types of banquets is that it demonstrates an underlying commonality in patterns of socializing in the Mediterranean world,⁷ thus allowing evidence from multiple kinds of meals to help to fill in the lacunae regarding commemorative meals. That is, if all meals are communal meals, then the meals at graves are also communal meals, and they will follow the same structure and have the same social expectations whether they are in honour of family members or of martyrs. Thus, I postulate that one can reasonably extrapolate from women's behaviour and participation in meals in the household to their behaviour and participation at meals at the graves of loved ones and of martyrs.

There have been many studies that have examined both Greco-Roman and Christian communal meals.⁸ It is not my intent to contribute another study to this extensive corpus. Rather, I seek to highlight some of the most pertinent factors that have been uncovered by previous scholarship and demonstrate new ways of looking at this information when considered within the structure I have proposed. I will focus on the ways in which women participated (or did not

articles in Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig, *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), for concise summaries of their theory and evidence (Matthias Klinghardt, "A Typology of the Communal Meal," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, ed. Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012], 9-22; Dennis E. Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet as a Social Institution," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, ed. Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012], 23-33).

⁵ Klinghardt prefers to identify these meals as "communal meals" ("A Typology of the Communal Meal," 9), while Smith prefers "banquet" in order to emphasize the social baggage these meals carried regardless of the social status of those partaking in such banquets ("The Greco-Roman Banquet," 23). I use the terms interchangeably, with the implication that "communal meals", "banquets", and "feasts" all represent a kind of formal dining that imparted certain social significance in a way that made them distinct from the simple consumption of food for sustenance.

⁶ See an illustrated depiction demonstrating the difference between this model and earlier studies that emphasized distinctions between these kinds of banquets in Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 3.

⁷ Klinghardt, "A Typology of the Communal Meal," 18.

⁸ For a general overview of the topic and the literature, see Inge Nielsen and Hanne Sigis Nielsen, *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1998); Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*; and Smith and Taussig, eds., *Meals in the Early Christian World*.

participate) in meals and funerals in both Greco-Roman and Christian contexts. While descriptions of meals and funerals occur primarily in literary sources, some non-literary textual sources and artistic representations in funerary art will also be considered to provide further context and evidence. The comparison between female martyrs and female worshippers is necessarily limited in the sense that martyrs could not attend their own commemorative banquets; as such, some evidence of communal meals within martyr texts will also provide an important context for the ritualization of these meals within the cult of the martyrs.

Unlike previous chapters, which were divided based on identities, this chapter will instead trace the different types of banquets and the roles that women played throughout. Examining the roles of women through the development of a specific practice within the cult of the martyrs will also allow for roles to be extrapolated even when they are not explicitly mentioned. Furthermore, the role identities that women adopted within these various banquets will demonstrate some of the ways in which women had agency within this context. I will argue that, despite the way in which their private/domestic roles made them less visible within the sources, women were nevertheless able to exercise a great deal of agency within the context of the commemorative feasts in honour of the martyrs.

Greco-Roman Banquets

As Klinghardt notes, Greco-Roman banquets are characterized by their division into two parts, the δεῖπνον or *cena*, which was the meal and involved various courses of food, and the συμπόσιον or *convivium*, which involved drinking, conversation, and entertainment.⁹ All ancient

⁹ Klinghardt, "A Typology of the Communal Meal," 10. The distinction between the meal proper and the symposium seems to have been more strictly observed by the Greeks than the Romans (Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999], 48).

banquets had a religious component even if the banquet was not primarily a “religious” event. Libations to the gods were expected at specific points (for example, between the end of the *cena* and the beginning of the *symposium*) and banquets of all types could take place in temples.¹⁰

Attendance at banquets varied, depending on an assortment of factors including the purpose of the banquet, the wealth of the host, and even the region in which the banquet was occurring. Generally, the *cena* would have included both men and women, although respectable women usually attended only in the presence of their husbands or immediate male relatives.¹¹ There is evidence that in some cases both Greek and Roman women participated in *symposia* with their male family members,¹² although the presence of respectable women there was tolerated more easily in Roman custom than in the Greek.¹³ Thus, women’s participation at both portions of the banquet was, if not common, at least not unheard of.

Nevertheless, it is clear that their participation produced some uneasiness among male authorities. Critics of women attending *symposia* played on the Roman stereotype that drinking wine would cause a woman to be more open to sexual misbehaviour and therefore that drinking in the company of non-related males would almost certainly lead to a respectable woman acting

¹⁰ For a discussion of the libations to the gods, see Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 28-30. For specifically “sacrificial” banquets, see pages 67-85.

¹¹ For a discussion of the changing practices and perceptions of women dining with men, see Corley, *Private Women*, 24-34.

¹² The level of acceptability of such participation varied according to time period and geographical location, but examinations of a variety of evidence including inscriptions, literature, archaeological remains, and vase paintings demonstrates that women had greater opportunities to engage in communal meals than appears in the (male-dominated) literary discourse, particularly outside Athens. Burton asserts that women were present at *symposia* from at least the third century BCE (Joan Burton, “Women’s Commensality in the Ancient Greek World,” *Greece & Rome* 45 [1998]: 143-65). Even when respectable women were present during the *symposia*, however, they did not normally recline with the men, but rather sat either at the end of their male relative’s couch or on separate chairs (Katherine M.D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 22-23).

¹³ Jason König, *Saints and Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 26-27.

dishonourably.¹⁴ Ultimately, this type of criticism disguises the extent to which it was common or acceptable for women to participate in the symposia. Rather than focusing on real behaviour, women's participation was often used as a rhetorical device within literary works. They were used as tools for men to think with and through.¹⁵ Regardless of the way in which this role identity is superseded by other rhetorical goals within the literary sources, such depictions were based at least in part on the fact that women were there and did participate as guests.

In some cases, women did not simply participate in the banquets in the role of a guest. They could also act as hostesses of banquets, as can be seen in some extant papyrus invitations.¹⁶ One invitation from the third century shows a mother named Herais inviting guests to the marriage of her child.¹⁷ In this case, the banquet is taking place in her own home, the traditional, private sphere most closely associated with women. Thus, she exercises domestic agency associated with the role of mother in inviting people into her home in order to celebrate her

¹⁴ Angela Standhartinger, "Women in Early Christian Meal Gatherings: Discourse and Reality," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, ed. Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 92. On the Roman view of these characteristics of women and womanly behaviour, see Catharine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 78-81. On overindulgences in feasts being associated with women and, perhaps even more troublingly, "the effeminate male," see Anthony Corbeill, "Dining Deviants in Roman Political Invective," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 99-128.

¹⁵ In other words, the literary depiction of women as participating in symposia should often be seen as introducing the subject of "women at the symposium" as a discursive tool to either describe the ideal/non-ideal dichotomy or as a subject to further the philosophical reflections of the text itself. Thus, they are discursive rather than descriptive texts and better serve to demonstrate the construction of gender ideals than to document women's actual practices and behaviours. See Standhartinger, "Women in Early Christian Meal Gatherings," 88. The concept of using women "to think with" was first proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 60-62, in which he argues that women's roles in the social group had significant symbolic value that can be seen in the development of language, particularly in the language of marriage relations. However, this is a complex process; although men use women to think with, women cannot simply be reduced to symbols to be used by men since women also speak and produce symbols themselves. See also Brown, *Body and Society*, 153-157, for the ways in which the male authors of some martyr texts and apocryphal acts used women to verbalize concerns about the direction of the church.

¹⁶ A collection of thirty invitations as well as a discussion of the basic structure of invitations can be found in Chan Hie Kim, "The Papyrus Invitation," *JBL* 94 (1975): 291-402. See also Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 22-25.

¹⁷ *P.Oxy.* 1.111: ἐρωτᾷ σε Ἡραῖς δεῖπνῆσαι εἰς γάμους τέκνων αὐτῆς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐρίου, ἥτις ἐστὶν πέμπτη, ἀπὸ ὥρας θ, trans. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 24: "Herais requests your company at dinner in celebration of the marriage of her children at her house tomorrow, the 5th, at 9 o'clock."

child's marriage; the act of sending out the invitation renders this agency visible in the public sphere as well.

Women could also host banquets that took place in more public spaces outside the family home. For example, another third-century invitation portrays a mother named Dioscoros inviting guests to the wedding of her son at the temple of Sabazius.¹⁸ A mother's domestic agency is once again depicted as having influence in the public sphere since the temple is outside the home (even though the marriage meal itself should still be considered to be a private, family affair). As the hosts of these banquets and the senders of the invitations, these women were responsible for the guest list, for procuring the place for the feast, and for all of the aspects of the feast itself.¹⁹ Furthermore, the hostesses would have been full participants in the banquets.²⁰ This is particularly true of the wedding banquets that feature in the examples, as women were expected to attend all aspects of wedding banquets, including *symposia*, regardless of whether they were hosts or simply participants.²¹

From this brief examination of Greco-Roman practices, it is clear that women could and did participate in banquets, although to what extent remains somewhat unclear as a result of the

¹⁸ *P.Oxy.* 33.2678: ἐρωτᾷ σε Διοσκοροῦς δεῖπνῆσαι εἰς γάμους τοῦ υἱοῦ τῇ ἰδ τοῦ Μεσορῆ ἐν τῷ Σαβαζεϊωτᾷ ὥρ(ας) θ. Διευτύχει, trans. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 24: "Dioscoros invites you to dine at the wedding of her son on the 14th of Mesore in the temple of Sabazius from the ninth hour, farewell."

¹⁹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 33.

²⁰ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 77. However, the question of whether these hostesses would have reclined alongside the men is unclear.

²¹ Corley, *Private Women*, 29; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 40. Nevertheless, they were generally seated together at their own couches apart from the men. However, as is perhaps to be expected, women's presence at communal meals, including wedding feasts, inspired a great deal of concern among male writers, who worried, among other things, that the drinking portion of the evening would lead to the corruption of women. Furthermore, it was common to depict the decline of social morality by referencing inappropriate behaviour of women at the symposia, whether or not this reflected reality (Standhartinger, "Women in Early Christian Meal Gatherings," 90-91). On this, see also Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, "Remembering and Remembered Women in Greco-Roman Meals," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, ed. Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 118, and Jennifer A. Glancy, "Temptations of the Table: Christians Respond to Reclining Culture," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table*, ed. Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 229-38.

paucity of sources. For the purpose of this study, it is enough to recognize that women's attendance at Greco-Roman banquets would have been common enough to make women's inclusion in comparable Christian feasts "noteworthy but not unique."²² The dual roles of guest and hostess represent the range of agency that women could exercise within this particular social ritual. Furthermore, the way in which the role identities of mother in particular can be seen operating in conjunction with the role of hostess demonstrates the way in which domestic agency could be rendered more visible within the context of the communal meal.

Christian Banquets

Early Christian communal meals differed little from Greco-Roman meals. The social institution of the banquet provided an important model for the creation of a new social community and allowed for a common space within which to create shared experiences.²³ Since women participated in all aspects of worship within the house church in earliest Christianity,²⁴ they certainly also participated in Christian communal meals, which formed a central aspect of early worship gatherings.²⁵ The extension of the biological family to the Christian communal family perhaps made women's inclusion even easier, as family meals evoked less anxiety regarding sharing a meal with both men and women present. Thus, women should be seen as participating

²² Corley, *Private Women*, 24.

²³ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 279. While the traditions linking Jesus' teachings to a kind of theology of "table fellowship" are likely not historical, it is clear that the ritual meal did play an important role in the early Jesus movement. On this, see Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 80-83.

²⁴ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 9.

²⁵ Many scholars have examined the early Christian meal tradition in comparison with the multiple depictions of meals in the New Testament gospels (e.g., Mark 2:13-17, 14:3-9; Matt 22:1-14, 26:6-13; Luke 7:36-50, 14:15-24; John 12:1-8, etc.) On meal depictions in the New Testament, see, e.g., Corley, *Private Women*, 83-179; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 219-77; Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 298-304. However, it is important to note that communal meals were important to Christians also simply because of the centrality of the communal meal in Greco-Roman culture more generally (Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 279; Glancy, "Temptations of the Table," 230; Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 114-15).

in these communal meals as both guests and hostesses, with the corresponding agency and visibility within the community.

Even when communal meals came to take on more specifically “Christian” characteristics in terms of the type of entertainment or the kinds of discussion during the meal, little changed in the actual structure of the meal.²⁶ These meals continued to follow the two-part structure and to occupy a particular space within the Christian social world. The structure can be seen, for example, in Tertullian’s *Apology*. He describes the meal as beginning first with a prayer to God before the participants ate and drank together (though they only drank as much as was befitting the chaste). After the meal, the Christians had their own version of a *symposium* during which, instead of passing the time with drinking and (potentially risqué) entertainment, the participants sang hymns together. Finally, the meal concluded with another prayer.²⁷ The fact that Tertullian’s ideal Christian banquet so closely mirrors the ideal banquet in the Greco-Roman world demonstrates the consistency of meal practices. Even the prominence that Tertullian places on prayer and hymns would not have been that different from Greco-Roman banquets, during which libations at certain points were common and expected. Thus, the banquet provided a familiar experience to new Christians as they could continue participating in some of the same social activities as they had before their conversion.

It should be noted that part of Tertullian’s aim with this description of the banquet was to counteract accusations of immorality by critics of Christianity, and so he likely exaggerated the

²⁶ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place*, 161. The evolution of the Christian communal meal is of course complex. One of the main points of discussion by scholars is the differentiation of the form of meal known as ἀγάπη (“love feast”) and the Eucharist. They seem to have developed initially alongside each other, but at some point became distinct from one another. On this question see, e.g., Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 114-20; L. Michael White, “Regulating Fellowship in the Communal Meal: Early Jewish and Christian Evidence,” in *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World*, ed. Inge Nielsen and Hanne Sigis Nielsen (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1998); McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*.

²⁷ Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.17-19 (CCSL 1: 152-53), trans: FC 10: 101. For context, see Barnes, *Tertullian*, 107-13. On this type of meal in relation to Christian worship in Carthage, see McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 48-49.

chasteness of the typical Christian meal.²⁸ Such critiques against Christians were recorded by the Christian writer Minucius Felix. They included accusations that people of both sexes and ages gathered together at banquets, which would inevitably lead to inappropriate sexual behaviour.²⁹ However, just as Tertullian's assertions of absolute chastity should be read as a rhetorical exaggeration, so should the critics' accusations of out-and-out debauchery be seen as serving a rhetorical function. Once again, the Roman assumption that wine would lead to sexual impropriety is at the forefront of such critiques, in particular the supposition that if Roman matrons participated in banquets, they would become corrupted. However, while such criticisms may not be reflective of reality in terms of relations between the men and women participating in the banquets, the types of accusations recorded by Minucius Felix are nevertheless significant because they reveal that Christians were generally assumed to partake in mixed-gender banquets. This could only be a relevant point of criticism if it were a frequent and well-known occurrence.

That Tertullian is silent on who may be present at the feast is significant because it allows for the possibility (or indeed, the probability) that women commonly dined alongside men in Christian communal meals. Given the ability of women to participate in Greco-Roman meals of all types and given Tertullian's proclivity to concern himself with the behaviour of women within the Christian community, it is reasonable to assume that if there were any attempts to forbid women from attending these feasts, Tertullian would have made these attempts explicit. Asserting that women were not permitted to be present at the meals would have been an easy response to accusations that deviant sexual behaviour was taking place at these meals. Since he does not use this argument, we can infer that both men and women were present at the meals and

²⁸ On Tertullian's descriptions of the feast as recognizing the similarities between Greco-Roman feasts and exaggerating the contrast between them, see Veronika E. Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting, the Evolution of a Sin: Attitudes to Food in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1996), 112-14.

²⁹ Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 9.6-7 (CSEL 2: 13-14), trans. FC 10: 337-38.

that Tertullian did not see excluding women as an acceptable or necessary reaction, regardless of the potential for misrepresentation and misunderstanding. Thus, by considering the typical structure of Greco-Roman meals, it can be posited that women were present at Christian communal meals and participated fully in various roles, at least in North Africa.

In addition to extrapolating from Greco-Roman meal sources, the presence of women at Christian meals can furthermore be supported by the writings of Tertullian's contemporary, Clement of Alexandria. Clement somewhat inadvertently reveals the customary presence of women at communal meals in his attempts to restrict their participation out of fear that they would become corrupted. Clement preferred that neither young women nor young men be present at any banquets, but he particularly asserts that young women should avoid attending banquets in which men are drinking.³⁰ He also argues that if married women must attend banquets, they should at least dress modestly so as not to draw attention to themselves.³¹ In this way, Clement expresses anxiety over women's participation and tries to limit their attendance at banquets. That his suggestions seem to be responding to criticisms similar to the ones recorded by Minucius Felix demonstrates both the ubiquity of such critiques as well as the ubiquity of women's participation. Clement's proposed restrictions on women reflect that women of all statuses were commonly present at the feasts. Women acting in various roles could be guests at the meals and could express a certain measure of agency through their visibility at these feasts.

Above all, however, it is significant to note the way in which Clement's anxieties about women and men sharing the meal together contrast with the modest image that Tertullian

³⁰ His concern on this point likely demonstrates that young unmarried men and women were at least occasionally present at such feasts and often participated in drinking at the meal.

³¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 2.7.53-60 (SC 108: 110-24), trans. FC 23: 140-46. On Clement's instructions regarding meal practices as a promotion of group identity, see Blake Leyerle, "Clement of Alexandria and the Importance of Table Etiquette," *JECS* 3 (1995): 123-41 (on women, see especially 132-33).

projects. Both authors should be seen as reacting at least in part to the way that Christian meal practices were being perceived by others. Their reactions demonstrate the important role that women played in these perceptions. While Clement attempts to restrict women, Tertullian instead insists that nothing other than chaste prayer occurred at the meals, thus making the presence or absence of women at the feasts irrelevant.³²

The evidence of women's participation in Christian communal meals can also be extrapolated from the fact that Christian banquets, like all other forms of early Christian worship, took place primarily in the home. Since women undertook the bulk of household management and hospitality duties,³³ they would have participated in various aspects of meal preparation, whether preparing and serving the meals themselves³⁴ or overseeing the slaves responsible for the procurement of supplies and cooking of meals.³⁵ The role identities of wife and mother therefore contained within them expectations for household management that included expected agency with respect to participation in communal meals. When Christian meals took place within the home, this created a blurring of the lines between public and private spheres, thus making domestic agency public, at least temporarily. It should be expected that some women would have seen their role identities as wives and mothers as including within it an expectation of providing for their extended Christian family; others may have conceptualized their Christian social

³² On the way that public opinion of the private behaviour of Christian women influenced the development of Christianity, see MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, throughout. On women and meals in particular, see pp. 55-59, 64-69.

³³ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 10-12; 144-45. On women's lives in the Greco-Roman world, the differences between Greek and Roman women, and the way these conventions influenced Christian women's roles, see Hallet, "Women's Lives."

³⁴ An example of this can be seen in Mark 1:29-31, where Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, who subsequently serves Jesus and his companions a meal. Such "table service" would have been common for families without house servants (Corley, *Private Women*, 87-88). See also the story of Mary and Martha at Luke 10:38-42, wherein Mary sits at Jesus' feet while Martha works to prepare and serve (although, indeed, this pericope is concerned with the roles of ministry rather than a simple revelation of traditional household duties). For discussion, see Corley, *Private Women*, 133-44.

³⁵ For an overview of female household management, see also Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 144-59.

identity to be more salient, and thus perceived their participation within the meals as reflective not of their familial roles but of their membership within this new group.

The house church added another layer to women's roles and agency within the early Christian household, since women were able to be leaders of house churches, and therefore were involved in all aspects of house church worship, including communal meals. Women who led house churches adopted the role identity of a hostess and would therefore have been expected to provide for the meal. They would likely also have expressed a certain kind of visible agency by, for example, initiating toasts or offering special prayers.³⁶ For a woman to preside over the meal in such a way was not necessarily seen as problematic, in part because the role of hostess was not a new one, but also because the early Christians saw a distinction between leadership at ritual meals and other kinds of authority. At least initially, those who acted as host (or hostess) of a house church did not need to have the same kind of qualifications as did a teacher or official. The hostess could therefore pass the cup or offer prayers without necessarily taking on a pseudo-clerical role. Indeed, such behaviour was consistent with the Greco-Roman banquet tradition wherein someone other than the host would address the group during the symposia, perhaps by reading a text and offering interpretation.³⁷ The agency that a hostess expressed did not challenge expectations; rather, women who acted as hostesses continued to follow the traditional structure of the meals within the new Christian communities.

While the role identity of hostess was limited by the context of hosting a house church or a meal, it was still connected with the familial role identities of wife, mother, and widow. In this way, the domestic agency of these roles was made more public during through the meal. Early

³⁶ Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 161.

³⁷ This likely changed in the second century with the emergence of the model of the "teaching presbyter bishop" (Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 160-62). See Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 47-85, for a discussion of the ways in which someone other than the host often led discussions during philosophical banquets.

Christian meals all took place in what was essentially the private sphere, even if the lines between the public and private realms were blurred within the house church as members of the public Christian community were invited into the private family sphere. Additionally, the private sphere influenced greatly the public perception of Christianity, as was clearly seen in the accusations recorded by Minucius Felix and others. Thus, particularly in the early centuries of Christianity, Greco-Roman meal ideology played an important role in the way in which Christians sought to identify themselves and to place themselves in the broader social context. Christian authorities' attempts to restrict women's participation in banquets were prompted by traditional Greco-Roman norms and the reactions of non-Christians to subversive behaviour.³⁸

From this brief examination of Greco-Roman and Christian communal meals, it is clear that women could and did participate in all aspects of the banquet, although the extent of their participation and the frequency with which it occurred varied both temporally and geographically. Broadly, however, it may be concluded that women's presence at Christian banquets was not a rejection of Greco-Roman societal norms but rather a reflection and continuation of them. Both Greco-Roman and Christian wives were expected to be household managers and would have been heavily involved in procuring the supplies and preparing the meal (whether doing the work themselves or overseeing those doing the work). Moreover, in both the Greco-Roman and Christian contexts, women could act as hostesses and invite people to banquets in the home as well as in public places such as temples. Thus, the domestic agency employed by women who occupied the role identities of wife, mother, or widow extended from the household into the more public realm. Women were accustomed to occupying certain kinds of authoritative roles in conjunction with the preparation of meals and the celebration of

³⁸ Corley, *Private Women*, 75-78.

banquets. Christian women who presided over gatherings at house churches were therefore continuing the practices of their non-Christian counterparts. The occasions when this caused anxiety in male observers reveals a continuity of viewpoint with regards to women and meals, as such anxiety is present in both Roman and Christian sources. Ultimately, these criticisms serve as evidence of women's participation and visibility within these rituals.

Banquets in Martyr Texts

Before turning to meals in commemoration of the martyrs, it is important to examine the way in which the ideology of the communal banquet can be seen both in treatises about martyrs and in martyr texts themselves. The connection between the banquet and the martyr ideal demonstrates the importance of the meal to Christian group identity. Examining those meals that include women as participants in various roles will help to further demonstrate the different identities that women adopted within this context and the way in which agency within meals was reflected within the broader community.

First, the social importance of meals as a way of creating a distinct community with shared social bonds can be seen in the practice of providing those who were imprisoned with food as a way of continuing the practice of communal meals. Those confessors who were imprisoned and awaiting martyrdom shared meals both with each other and with other members of their communities. As part of the conventions of the Roman prison system, Christians who were imprisoned and awaiting martyrdom had to rely upon other members of the community to provide them with some necessities, including food.³⁹ Thus, bringing food to the martyrs came to

³⁹ This was not necessarily an act of mercy on behalf of the prison officials; rather, it allowed the prison to save money by not having to provide for the maintenance of the prisoners (McGowan, "Discipline and Diet," 458-59). On Roman prison conditions more generally and the provisions allowed, see McGowan, "Discipline and Diet," 456-

be an important expression of Christian *pietas*.⁴⁰ For example, Tertullian asserts that it was the duty of the Christian community to provide both physical and spiritual nourishment for imprisoned confessors,⁴¹ thereby advocating for the continuation of both symbolic and literal communal meals. Most often, individual Christians brought food that they provided themselves, but the procurement of food may have also been organized by the church or by smaller independent community groups. As with other types of meals, women were part of this meal preparation, and Tertullian includes the bringing of food to the martyrs as one of the pious acts of Christian wives that might be disallowed by ignorant non-Christian husbands.⁴² Tertullian's concerns are once again reflective of the way in which the role identity of wife was closely associated with the preparation of meals. He also demonstrates the ways in which the agency that is most closely associated with the domestic sphere may be employed in the public realm as, for instance, wives venture into public in order to take the meals to the prison. Thus, behaviours that are perfectly acceptable within the context of the household—bringing meals—are also shown as being acceptable (and perhaps expected?) within the context of the cult of the martyrs.

58; Brian Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody*, ed. B.W. Winter (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004); Julia Hillner, *Prison, Punishment and Penance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 256-58

⁴⁰ That this was an expected and important act of piety can be seen in the Donatist account of the Abitinian martyrs, in which the Catholic bishop Mensurius and his deacon Caecillian are condemned because of their refusal to allow Christians to bring food and drink to the martyrs in prison; see *Passio sanctorum Datui, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 20 (TU 134: 87).

⁴¹ Tertullian, *Mart.* 1.1 (CCSL 1: 3), trans. FC 40: 17-18: *Inter carnis alimenta, benedicti martyres designati, quae vobis et domina mater ecclesia de uberibus suis et singuli fratres de opibus suis propriis in carcerem subministrant, capite aliquid et a nobis quod faciat ad spiritum quoque educandum. Carnem enim saginari et spiritum esurire non prodest. Immo, si quod infirmum est curatur, aequè quod infirmius est neglegi non debet.*

⁴² Tertullian, *Ux.* 2.4.2-3 (CCSL 1: 388-89), trans. ANF 4: 46. He assumes that the non-Christian husband will find it problematic when his wife desires to give her own food to the martyrs: *Quis in carcerem ad osculanda uincula martyris reptare patietur? Iam uero alicui fratrum ad osculum conuenire, aquam sanctorum pedibus offerre, de cibo, de poculo inuadere, desiderare, in mente habere?*

Occasionally, such acts of charity seem to have included the celebration of a kind of communal meal within the prison itself.⁴³ For example Tertullian notes that the confessors were looked after through “the charity (*agape*) of the brethren.”⁴⁴ Here *agape* likely refers to both the kind of charitable love associated with Christian kinship as well as the communal meal that Tertullian describes in *Apology* 39.16.⁴⁵ Within this communal meal, familial metaphors reinforce a sense of cohesion and unity between the martyrs. Still, as the location of the meal was shifted from the home to the prison, it should not be imagined that these meals echoed the leisure of the standard banquet.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the continuance of the meal tradition in this unlikely place is significant, as it is likely that it brought with it the same kind of social bonding.

However, there seems to have been limits to the kinds of meals that were acceptable for imprisoned confessors. Tertullian provides an example of one confessor, Pristinus, whose immodest and unchaste behaviour made him an imperfect candidate for martyrdom. In contrast to Pristinus’ apparently insatiable appetite, Tertullian argues that ideal martyrs should practice abstinence and discipline in order to prepare for the difficulties of prison. Whereas elsewhere he encouraged Christians to bring food for the martyrs, in relation to Pristinus, Tertullian mocks the practice as contributing to Pristinus’ ultimate inability to confess his Christianity because he was

⁴³ McGowan, “Discipline and Diet,” 460. Prison structures varied widely throughout the Roman Empire, and even within a single prison, there were different areas of the prisons that could allow for different levels of access for visitors (McGowan, “Discipline and Diet,” 458. See, for example, the way Perpetua is moved to a more comfortable part of the prison in *Pass. Perp.* 3.7 (Heffernan, 106), trans. Heffernan, 126. On prison structure and the way in which this allowed for the provision of food for the prisoners, see McGowan, “Discipline and Diet,” 456-60 and the primary and secondary sources cited throughout. On prisons in Carthage in particular, see Salisbury, *Perpetua’s Passion*, 85-86.

⁴⁴ Tertullian, *Mart.* 2.7. (CCSL 1: 4), trans. FC 40: 20: *per curam ecclesiae et agapen fratrum*.

⁴⁵ Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.16 (CCSL 1: 152), trans. FC 10: 101. See McGowan, “Discipline and Diet,” 460, n. 24.

⁴⁶ It also replaced the family ties that were often severed as a result of conversion to Christianity and arrest. See Tertullian, *Mart.* 2.1 (CCSL 1: 3-4), trans. FC 40: 19 and *Pass. Perp.* 5-6 (Heffernan, 107-9), trans. Heffernan, 127-128.

too drunk to do anything but belch.⁴⁷ Tertullian's rejection of the same system he promoted in *To the Martyrs* should probably be viewed as a symbolic rejection of problems he identified within the broader Christian community, in particular overindulgence and a lack of ascetic discipline.⁴⁸ The imperfect martyr acts as a representative for all Christians and his offensive behaviour reflected poorly upon the community as a whole. In the earlier text, the ideal behaviour of the martyrs was reinforced by the ideal behaviour of the Christians who piously visited them and shared in a communal meal; in Pristinus' case, however, he was the only one eating and he effectively rejected membership in the Christian community by being unable to properly confess. Tertullian in turn disowned him from the Christian family, thereby denying him access to the Christian banquets and their ritual benefits.

The martyr texts themselves also contained examples of communal meals. In the *Passion of Perpetua*, for example, Perpetua and her companions were permitted to dine in the company of their visitors.⁴⁹ However, this meal was only able to take place after Perpetua berated and embarrassed the tribune for treating them so harshly.⁵⁰ As the one who convinced the tribune to treat them more kindly, Perpetua may be said to adopt the role identity of hostess, taking on the responsibility for enabling the meal to be held and inviting others into her temporary home, the prison.⁵¹ Despite the rebellious agency that Perpetua exhibited to allow the meal to occur, she is

⁴⁷ Tertullian, *Ieiun.* 12.3-4 (CCSL 2: 1271), trans. ANF 4: 110-11.

⁴⁸ McGowan, "Discipline and Diet," 470. Nevertheless, the "cooktops" (*popinae*) mentioned by Tertullian alludes to the place where meat was prepared for gladiators and implies the consumption of meat for strength and endurance (McGowan, "Discipline and Diet," 473-4).

⁴⁹ The word used here is *refrigerium*, which, although it can mean simply "rest" or "refreshment," is the term for funeral banquets used in Christian literature and inscriptions. It was probably initially used in reference to the state of rest between death and resurrection. For more on the term and a review of literature on the subject, see Jensen, "Dining with the Dead," 122 n. 26. Perpetua should perhaps be understood as participating in her own funeral banquet.

⁵⁰ *Pass. Perp.* 16.2-4 (Heffernan, 118), trans. Heffernan, 132.

⁵¹ For her it had earlier been transformed into a palace: *et factus est mihi carcer subito praetorium* (*Pass. Perp.* 3.9 [Heffernan, 106], trans. Heffernan, 126).

ultimately operating within the domestic sphere, exhibiting agency as would befit her former identity as a Roman matron who participates in a communal meal with her default family.

Indeed, the identity of those who dined with the confessors is not explicitly stated; they are simply described as “her brothers and the others.” While it is possible that this refers to her biological brothers, it more likely alluded to the spiritual brotherhood to which the confessors and non-imprisoned Christians belonged.⁵² As such, Christian familial metaphors serve to contextualize communal meals and women’s roles in them. The act of dining together would likely have had a positive effect on both the prisoners, as visitors were said to bring comfort to the imprisoned confessors.⁵³ However, the members of the community who were present would have also benefited, as it was believed that martyrs had the ability to forgive sins and impart peace by virtue of their willingness to die for their faith.⁵⁴ The context of the meal therefore created social bonds that would have been even more significant because some of the participants were seen as special and having an extraordinary connection to the divine. While the structure and general purpose of the meal remained consistent with other communal meals, the inclusion of martyrs elevated it beyond an ordinary feast.

In the *Passion of Perpetua* a second, more formal meal also takes place on the day before the martyrs were to die in the arena. The narrator asserts, “And then on the day before the games, when at that last meal which they call ‘free,’ they partook, as far as it was possible, not of a ‘free

⁵² Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 319. The lack of specificity here might also suggest that the editor of the text either did not know the names of those in attendance or did not want to reveal them for fear of further persecutions.

⁵³ *Pass. Perp.* 9.1 (Heffernan, 111), trans. Heffernan, 129.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Tertullian, *Mart.* 1.6. (CCSL 1: 3), trans. FC 40: 19. Cyprian acknowledged that this belief is still prevalent in the third century. However, he noted some of the potential problems of this belief, including that some confessors were granting peace without ensuring that proper penance has been done or without even meeting all the people they were pardoning. See Cyprian, *Ep.* 15 (CCSL 3B: 85-89), trans. ACW 43: 90-92.

meal' but a 'love feast'."⁵⁵ The "free meal" seems to have been a reference to the traditional last meal of gladiators and others who faced death in the arena,⁵⁶ but the editor of the text emphasizes that the Christians reconfigured this free meal into an *agape*.⁵⁷ Thus, the narrator ensures that the meal should be viewed as a specifically Christian ritual. Just as with the earlier description of the *refrigerium*, there is no mention of men and women dining separately, and it must be assumed that martyrs of both sexes shared in the banquet together. In many ways, therefore, this *agape* would have been like any other. Both genders dined together in prayer and fellowship, and the martyrs were said to have been happy.⁵⁸

However, the location of this final feast was unique for a communal meal: rather than taking place in private, it seems to have been shared in an open area, with members of the public observing the proceedings and heckling the martyrs-to-be throughout.⁵⁹ The shift from private to public marks a significant departure from the expectations of communal meals in the Greco-Roman and Christian contexts, thereby making it stand out to the audience and highlighting its importance. Indeed, the Christians are said to overcome the strangeness of a public feast by using the opportunity to convert many in the observing crowd.⁶⁰ While the communal meal always provides the opportunity to create and strengthen social bonds, this final *agape* goes one step further, acting as an agent of conversion that results in new members joining the community and

⁵⁵ *Pridie quoque cum illam cenam ultimam, quam liberam vocant – quantam in ipsis erat, non cenam liberam sed agapem – cenarent.* (*Pass. Perp.* 17.1 [Heffernan, 118], trans. Heffernan, 132-33).

⁵⁶ Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, 320.

⁵⁷ This perhaps implies also that the confessors ate only food that was permitted as part of a eucharistic meal (McGowan, "Discipline and Diet," 473). On the connection between food and eucharistic and baptismal imagery in *Passio Perpetuae*, see McGowan *Ascetic Eucharists*, 100-3.

⁵⁸ They are described as "bearing witness to the happiness they found in their suffering" (*contestantes passionis suae felicitatem*) (*Pass. Perp.* 17.1 [Heffernan, 118], trans. Heffernan, 133).

⁵⁹ *Pass. Perp.* 17.1-3 (Heffernan, 118-19), trans. Heffernan, 132-33. See Heffernan, *Passion of Perpetua*, 320-21, for a discussion of the layout of the prison that would have allowed such observation.

⁶⁰ *Pass. Perp.* 17.3 (Heffernan, 119), trans. Heffernan, 133.

therefore future meals. The communal meal is shown once again to be an important part of the way in which early Christian communities constructed their social identities.

Greco-Roman Funerary Banquets

Just as the communal meal was an important part of the Roman social world of the living, the funerary banquet was a central aspect of the commemoration of the dead. Funerary feasts combined two common aspects of Christian and Roman society, namely communal meal rituals and death/burial rituals. A broader context that encompasses these two kinds of rituals is the location, which is almost uniformly a private setting, usually the home (for communal meals) and the family grave (for funerals and martyr celebrations).⁶¹ A brief discussion of some distinctive features of Greco-Roman funerary banquets and women's roles therein is necessary before examining their Christian counterpart.

Before the funeral banquet, men and women had distinct roles to play regarding the preparation of the body for burial. These roles were determined by the women's relationship to the deceased; familial role identities such as widow and mother were central. The female relatives who were closest to the deceased were responsible for preparing the body for display, including washing, anointing, and clothing it.⁶² Both men and women walked together in the

⁶¹ The public/private dichotomy is anything but rigid, as private spheres are constantly being made public through the entrance of outsiders. On the dichotomy between public and private in Christian worship practices in general, see Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values*. I will be focusing on so-called "private" meals that took place primarily in people's homes and around family tombs. Although they followed similar structures and ideologies, public banquets thrown by prominent citizens for the benefit of the entire community occupy a slightly different place in society and are therefore outside of the scope of this study. For the ways in which both men and women participated in such public feasts in the Roman world, see John F. Donahue, *The Roman Community at Table during the Principate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

⁶² Erker, "Gender and Roman Funeral," 47-48; Graham, "Memory and Materiality," 30. It should be noted, however, that although these activities incurred a measure of pollution while working to purify the corpse, this did not necessarily translate into a marginalization of women. Instead, it seems to have been a socially accepted difference in obligations (Erker, "Gender and Roman Funeral," 48). Roman funerals often included the application of the

funeral procession from their home to the graveside and both were expected to display the Roman qualities of self-control and not mourn “excessively.”⁶³ Still, mourning did take on a specifically gendered connotation when female mourners called *praeficae* were hired by families to join the funeral procession and provide an expression of grief not acceptable for members of the family. The number of *praeficae* also served to display the prestige of the family. The distinction between female mourners who were family members of the deceased and those who were hired by the family is representative of the diversity of roles that women occupied and the vastly different agency associated with them. Both were visible within the public space, but female relatives reflected the agency of the family name and should be viewed as an extension of that family and of their domestic agency within that family, while the *praeficae* projected the power of the family without becoming part of it.

Once the body was buried, the resting place of the deceased became a sacred space.⁶⁴ The funerary feast (the *silicernium*) at the graveside should therefore be seen as occurring in a private, sacred place. As all banquets created a sense of community, the funerary feasts served to comfort the living, to provide a continued sense of familial relationships in the face of loss,⁶⁵ and to give sustenance and aid to the deceased.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the feasts helped to establish boundaries and identities by marking the transition of the deceased from the society of living to

mortuary crown, on which see J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 44.

⁶³ Erker, “Gender and Roman Funeral,” 49-50.

⁶⁴ Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead*, 4.

⁶⁵ That is, funerary feasts echoed the purposes of other kinds of communal feasts, which were (at least in part) methods of community construction. Thus, the gathering at funerary banquets would have been a reassurance that the family group remained intact, albeit modified.

⁶⁶ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 42. The Romans believed in the survival of spirits (*manes*) after death and that the dead still remembered their relationships with the living, and thus could receive benefits from their remaining loved ones in the form of nourishing libations (Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 35-36).

the society of the dead.⁶⁷ All of these ritualized meanings of the funerary feast served to create a united identity among the attendees; they formed a community of mourners that, for the duration of the meal, signified them as distinct from the rest of society.

The deceased were understood to be taking part in the meal with the mourners through the libation tubes. Made of lead or tile, these provided the conduit through which libations such as wine, water, milk, and honey could be poured.⁶⁸ As this was part of the meal, both men and women poured libations.⁶⁹ Although there was no consistent Roman tradition about the location of the souls of the dead, they were generally thought to remain in the tombs themselves, or at least reside somewhere near the graves so that they could take advantage of these offerings.⁷⁰

The living participants in the feasts used dining couches and tables similar to ones in their own homes. As there is relatively little archaeological record of couches and tables at tombs, it is likely that the participants brought portable furniture with them and removed it after the meal.⁷¹ Mourners also brought eating utensils with them, and grave goods consisting of drinking cups, dishes, and bowls have been found,⁷² demonstrating the perceived need for the dead as well to have the objects necessary to participate in feasts. Cooking was sometimes done on-site (rather than having food prepared at home and then brought to the grave), as there is epigraphic evidence of communal kitchens as well as some remains of temporary graveside hearths.⁷³

⁶⁷ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 24.

⁶⁸ Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead*, 59-60. In the case of cremation, the tubes would lead directly into the urn. On libations and libation tubes in the Roman world, see, e.g., Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 37, 51-52.

⁶⁹ Erker, "Gender and Roman Funeral," 53.

⁷⁰ Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead*, 4.

⁷¹ Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead*, 71. Nevertheless, there are some examples of stone couches at tombs. See the stone *biclinium* at the tomb of Veria Zosima in the Isola Sacra cemetery Portus in Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead*, 73 (fig. 25). See also Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 104-6.

⁷² Jensen, "Dining with the Dead," 107; Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 52-53.

⁷³ Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead*, 71.

Just as with other kinds of communal feasts, this feast followed the two-part structure, with the meal proper followed by a period of drinking and conversation. The type of food served depended largely on the social status of the hosts,⁷⁴ but wine was always part of the occasion.⁷⁵ Female family members most likely procured the provisions and prepared the banquet, as they were expected to do for any other meal.⁷⁶ Although funeral banquets took place outside the home at the graveside, they were primarily private family affairs and should be seen as taking place in the private sphere.⁷⁷ Thus, women's participation at funeral feasts is perhaps most equivalent to their participation in the typical family meal at home. The private sphere extended from the family home to the family tomb, and a woman's familial role as wife, mother, daughter, sister, or widow determined the level of agency and visibility she was expected to take within the context of the meal. The occasion may have heightened the significance of the meal, but the domestic agency that women employed was the same as with any other communal meal. The familial nature of this type of feast meant that male and female family members were expected to participate in all aspects of the funerary feasts.⁷⁸

Subsequent feasts for the dead were also held at the grave on the ninth day after the funeral (the *cena novendialis*). On this day, a libation to the *Manes* was poured onto the grave, which marked the end of the period of full mourning. The dead were also commemorated throughout

⁷⁴ On the kinds of foods that would have been part of the burial and commemorative offerings in non-Christian graves in North Africa and the difficulties in finding such evidence in the archaeological record, see Lea Stirling, "Archaeological Evidence for Food Offerings in the Graves of Roman North Africa," in *Daimonopylai: Essays in Classics and the Classical Tradition Presented to Edmund G. Barry*, ed. Rory Egan and Mark Joyal (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Centre for Hellenic Civilization, 2004), 427-49.

⁷⁵ Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 170. For a brief overview of the importance of wine in the deification process of the deceased, see Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 171-72.

⁷⁶ Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 169.

⁷⁷ Peter Brown notes that, for women, the graveside "had always been a zone of 'low gravity,' where their movements and choice of company were less subject to male scrutiny and the control of the family" (*The Cult of the Saints*, 44).

⁷⁸ Erker, "Gender and Roman Funeral," 52.

the year by funerary feasts on their birthdays (*dies natali*) and during annual festivals of the dead (*Parentalia*, *Lemuria*).⁷⁹ Both men and women participated in these events, bringing offerings to the tomb.⁸⁰ These frequent celebrations served a dual purpose in the Roman worldview. They both ensured that the dead continued to live in the memories of loved ones and sought to guarantee the perpetual comfort of the deceased's immortal soul through the provision of refreshment and commemoration.⁸¹ Participation in these events was an essential part of familial *pietas*; the feasts reinforced membership in a particular family.⁸² As these festivals were ultimately considered to be private rituals, not public ones,⁸³ familial roles remained the most significant determinants of the way in which women participated.

The importance of this ritual meal can be seen in the frequency with which aspects of meals appear on funerary art (including reliefs, statuary, and mosaics) in the Greco-Roman world, stretching from the fifth century BCE to the fourth century CE. Many scenes depict a reclining male figure holding a drinking cup with his wife seated beside him. Children and servants may also appear as part of the image. Mosaics in North Africa also contain depictions of funerary meals and scenes of eating and drinking either alone or with a group.⁸⁴ There is some debate about whether such imagery was meant to represent actual funerary meals, whether they should be interpreted as an idealized version of the deceased, or whether they should be read as representative of the deceased's continued enjoyment of the feast in the afterlife. Indeed, it is

⁷⁹ Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 50-51, 63-64.

⁸⁰ Erker, "Gender and Roman Funeral," 55. Still, women performed these sacrifices only on their own behalf, while men could perform sacrifices on behalf of the entire family.

⁸¹ Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 61-62.

⁸² Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 55.

⁸³ Jon Davies, *Death, Burial, and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 145-46.

⁸⁴ For descriptions and images of these various types of funerary art, see Jensen, "Dining with the Dead," 107-16 (figs. 4.1-4.6), and Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 103-40 (figs. 54-83), although Dunbabin focuses primarily on Rome and Italy. On North African Christian mosaics on funerary monuments and on the *mensae* at the shrines of the martyrs, see Noël Duval, *La mosaïque funéraire dans l'art paléochrétien* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1976), 13-41, 70-71.

possible that this ambiguity was intentional or that the monument was meant to signify more than one of these options.⁸⁵ Regardless of the intended interpretation, the frequency with which meals appear in Roman funerary art is further evidence for the close relationship between the meal and the funeral in the Roman thought-world. However, apart from reinforcing the presence of women and the importance of family at these meals, such art does not offer any further insight into the various roles that women adopted within the funerary feast.

Not all families had the financial ability to provide a proper funerary feast. For those with limited means, membership in burial clubs (*collegia funeraticia*) may have allowed them to receive an appropriate funeral and commemoration.⁸⁶ There were two broad types of *collegia*. One was by a collective arrangement in which members of the lower classes (usually slaves and freedmen) would make a monthly contribution so that the group would be able to make the necessary provisions for a proper funeral when the time came. The members of these groups sometimes practiced the same trade or were all the dependents of the same wealthy family. The club also functioned as a kind of social group, with members dining together on special occasions.⁸⁷ The surviving bylaws of some such clubs reveal that members were sometimes expected to donate food for the communal meal and that all members were expected to attend the

⁸⁵ Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 125-26.

⁸⁶ Éric Rebillard has called into question the historical accuracy of the assertion that *collegia* existed exclusively to ensure the burial of its members. He argues rather that this was just one of many functions that a *collegium* performed and that having one's burial arranged by a *collegium* was more a matter of choice than necessity. He argues, "The idea that the *collegia* were sought primarily for the funeral arrangements they provided must thus be carefully qualified. Accordingly, the *collegia* helped the plebs media to find its place in the social order of the city rather than constituting an institution that would compensate its members for their reduced participation in this social order" (Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 41; for his full argument, see pp. 37-41). For the limited examination of such *collegia* in this study, it is enough to recognize that while there is some disagreement on the details of such *collegia*, communal dining and burial did play an important role within these groups, no matter what other functions they served.

⁸⁷ Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 54-55.

funeral when one of its members died.⁸⁸ The burial club often had a common burial plot (*columbarium*) in which its members were laid to rest and at which funerals would be held.⁸⁹ Although some clubs (such as the ones formed by tradespeople) only had male members, the burial club was generally open to both genders. Thus, the clubs may also be understood as forming a kind of surrogate family. They took over the responsibility for the funerals that normally fell under the prerogative of familial *pietas*.

A second kind of burial club was financed not by the members themselves but by a wealthy patron.⁹⁰ The patron would provide gifts of food or money and in return would be honoured by the society with feasts on the birthday of the patron (and sometimes the patron's family) as well as by the social prestige of being remembered as providing such an important service to the people.⁹¹ Just as women could act as patrons in other areas of society, so could women act as patrons of burial clubs.⁹² Thus, the role identity of patron intersected with familial identities that were involved in funerals such as household manager, wife, and widow. These kinds of banquets simply provided a more public way in which women could exercise the agency associated with the communal meal.

It is clear, therefore, that funerary feasts functioned as a type of communal meal and that women's role identities within the communal meal largely transferred into the funerary context. While there were some distinct actions that took place both before the funeral (the preparation of

⁸⁸ For some examples of different types of burial societies and their bylaws, see Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead*, 45-48; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 98.

⁸⁹ Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 55.

⁹⁰ For a study on the financial aspects of these clubs more generally, see F.-M. Flambar, "Éléments pour une approche financière de la mort dans les classes populaires du Haut-Empire," in *La Mort, les morts et l'au-delà dans le monde romain: Actes du Colloque de Caen 1985*, ed. F. Hinard (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 1987), 209-44.

⁹¹ Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead*, 46; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 98-99.

⁹² For an overview of female participation in this system of patronage, see Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial Practices," 257-63.

the body and the procession to the grave) and during it (the use of libation tubes), the overall structure of the meal and the social purpose of the feast remained constant. While wealth and status contributed to the elaborateness with which funerals were conducted, the sharing of the feast remained central to the ritual whether it was an extravagant family funeral or a small funeral that was paid for by a *collegium*. Just as the communal meal was an important aspect of Roman social life, so was it equally important in death. Women's role identities were central, though their agency is often obscured because they largely reside in the domestic sphere.

Christian Funerary Banquets

Just as meal practices are one of the most stable aspects of societies, so do death and funeral rituals change slowly.⁹³ Funerals in Christian contexts closely resembled their non-Christian counterparts,⁹⁴ including their two-part structure and the way in which they reinforced the social bonds of the participants. Like Roman and Jewish women, Christian women also prepared bodies for burial by washing, anointing, and wrapping them in ritually pure garments.⁹⁵ This washing and anointing therefore was a natural extension of women's roles in relation to the dead, and may have also been seen as a natural extension of Christian women's responsibilities of ministering to the sick.⁹⁶ Thus, the way in which women participated in the pre-funeral rituals

⁹³ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 24. See also various works examining the continuity of modern practices of mourning with ancient ones, in particular Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*.

⁹⁴ Indeed, most early Christian burials occurred in the same burial grounds as non-Christian burials. For a discussion of mixed burial grounds and the lack of evidence in Jewish and Christian sources forbidding such mixing, see Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 27-36.

⁹⁵ Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, 27.

⁹⁶ Volp, *Tod und Ritual*, 50; Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 172-73. Tulloch also asserts that "it is probable that those who washed and prepared the bodies for inhumation also administered communion to corpses," but I can find no evidence connecting the practice of post-mortem communion with women. Administering the Eucharist to corpses (by anyone) or in the presence of corpses was condemned in North Africa at an ecclesiastical council in 393 (*Registri ecclesiae Carthaginensis* canon 41 [CCSL 149: 185], trans. NPNF² 14: 461]). On the importance of the eucharist as a ritual for the dying, see Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 32-34.

extended their roles within the Christian community and reflected the way in which domestic agency could nevertheless serve more public functions.

However, while there are significant similarities, Christian funerals did differ from traditional Roman funerals in some ways. First, from a very early period it seems that Christians rejected the placement of a mortuary crown on the head of the deceased as a form of idolatry.⁹⁷ As this was a central act in the Roman preparation of the dead, it would have immediately signaled to any outside observer that the funeral was Christian. Secondly, the Christian conception of death as marking a transition into the eternal life in Christ changed the viewpoint of the entire proceedings and infused Christian funerals with a sense of hope.⁹⁸ Death came to be viewed not as a permanent state but rather as a kind of temporary sleep.⁹⁹

This also affected the extent to which mourning and lamentation were considered acceptable parts of the funeral. In the North African context, for example, Augustine's account of his mother's funeral describes that nearly everyone present restrained themselves from openly weeping, with only the child Adeodatus actually breaking down into tears. Augustine explains that this restraint was necessary, since lamentations should be used to mourn the misery of the

⁹⁷ The rejection of this particular act can be seen in Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 38.2-3 (CSEL 2: 53-54), trans. FC 10: 399-400, as well repeatedly in Tertullian. See, e.g., *Apol.* 42.6 (CCSL 1: 157), trans. FC 10: 107; *Cor.* 10.1-2 (CCSL 2: 1053), trans. FC 40: 252. For a full discussion of Tertullian's rejection of the mortuary crown, see Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 39-42. On the rejection of the crown as a way Christians distinguished their funerals from non-Christian funerals, see Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 124-26. Nevertheless, the metaphorical imagery of the crown was still important in reference to the very special dead (that is, the martyrs). See, e.g., Augustine, *Faust.* 20.21 (CSEL 25.1: 562), trans. NPNF¹ 4: 262.

⁹⁸ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 24.

⁹⁹ This perception gives us the word "cemetery," from the Latin *coemeterium*, meaning "a sleeping place." Its first attested usage is in Tertullian's *An.* 51.7 (CCSL 2: 856), trans. FC 10: 292: *Est et illa relatio apud nostros, in coemeterio corpus corpori iuxta collocando spatium accessui communicasse*. Therefore, it is an anachronism to use "cemetery" to refer to pre-Christian burial grounds since there was no such conception of the dead as merely sleeping (Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead*, 2-3). For further discussion of the term, see also Volp, *Tod und Ritual*, 151-56.

dying that comes with the understanding of death as a finality. Since Monica was not miserable, nor was her death the end of her life, tears and lamentation in her honour were not appropriate.¹⁰⁰

Although the recitation of scripture and prayers would have been a central feature of the Christian funeral, no clergy were required to be present at the earliest Christian funerals since there were no designated institutional rites for the dead.¹⁰¹ As such, there was no reason to hold the funerals in the church; funerals were held at the graveside just like the funerals of Roman and Jewish antecedents. The Christian funerary feast would have been perceived to be occurring in the private family sphere. Christian women ate alongside their male family members at these early funerals. All mourners ate around a *mensa*, usually made of stone. In North Africa, some Christian tombs still had libation tubes so that mourners could share the meals with the deceased. Other tombs contained representations of plates and dishes, which emphasize the importance of the meal to the ritual for the dead.¹⁰² Assuming, as we have, cultural continuity in the performance of such banquets, we may plausibly imagine that Christian women experienced these feasts in a way that was commensurate with their positions within their families. Wives, mothers, and widows would have been expected to lead the funerary feasts just as they did with everyday meals.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *Conf.* 9.12.29 (CCSL 27: 150), trans. Boulding, 232. See also Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 129-131. Criticisms of female lamentation can also be found in the Eastern context. On this, see Semellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean*, 79-84. Of course, not everyone would have seen things this way or followed these guidelines.

¹⁰¹ Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 172. See also Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 31-32, 38, and Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 123-27, who notes that the notion of a specific funeral liturgy was a later reconstruction of the past and that the development of rituals for death and burial was part of a social process that did not involve clergy or prescriptions from the church hierarchy, such as it was.

¹⁰² Krautheimer, "*Mensa-coemeterium-martyrium*," 46.

Christians continued to celebrate their dead in other ways similar to the Romans, including on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after the death,¹⁰³ as well as on the anniversaries of their deaths.¹⁰⁴ Tertullian regarded such memorializing of the dead as characteristic of Christian behaviour, connecting it with the sacrament of the Eucharist. He noted, “[W]e make offerings for the dead on their anniversary to celebrate their birthday.”¹⁰⁵ Tertullian may here be referring to food and drink left at the grave for the nourishment of the body and soul of the deceased as well as to gifts brought to the church in the name of the dead.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the celebration of the Eucharist on the anniversaries of the dead demonstrates the continuing connection between ritual meals and funeral celebrations, even as it began to be reconfigured into a more recognizably Christian event.¹⁰⁷

Over time, there was a shift from the unaffiliated grave to the church. Between the fourth to seventh centuries, funerary churches begin to be built in which ordinary Christians were buried below the floor of the church. Still, although the establishment of the funerary church represented a distinct step in the process of institutionalizing the funeral ritual, many aspects of the rites at the graves continued the actions of the past, even if these rites came to be performed

¹⁰³ The traditional offerings on the thirtieth day seem to have been changed in some regions to the fortieth day in reference to the tradition that Moses was lamented after forty days. Similarly, the other days were given acceptable theological explanations: Christ rose on the third day, and the soul reaches heaven on the ninth (*Didasc.* 8.42 [Funk, 552-55], trans. ANF 7: 498; see also Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament*, 32). On some apparent discrepancies between the East and West, see Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 135-36.

¹⁰⁴ MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 60. However, it should be noted that by the time of Augustine, there is no reference to celebrations on the anniversaries of the ordinary dead (martyrs and bishops are the extraordinary dead for whom such commemoration is reserved). On this, see Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 157-59.

¹⁰⁵ Tertullian, *Cor.* 3.3 (CCSL 2: 1043), trans. FC 40: 237: *Oblationes pro defunctis, pro natalicii annua die facimus*. See also Tertullian, *Exh. cast.* 11.2 (CCSL 2: 1032), trans. ANF 4: 56, in which he asserts that one of the problems with remarriage is that it makes it difficult to know to which spouse one should offer the “annual oblations” (*oratione commemores*). While in this context Tertullian was clearly talking about the traditional familial obligations to the dead, in the context of *De corona*, Tertullian seems to refer to a broader practice of commemorating the deaths of all Christians, even the ones outside of one’s biological family. On the implications of these examples, see Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 72, and Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 65.

¹⁰⁶ Jensen, “Dining with the Dead,” 122.

¹⁰⁷ Jensen, “Dining with the Dead,” 107.

in a church. For example, most of these churches were built in rural areas, thus continuing the ancient custom of burying the dead outside the city limits.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, stone dining tables of various sorts continued to be set up over the burial site for the funeral banquet.¹⁰⁹ In the case of funerary churches dedicated to martyrs and other “special dead,” the stone dining tables were gradually abandoned and replaced with funeral *mensae* inside of the churches themselves. At the same time, the funerary meal at the *mensae* slowly evolved into the celebration of the Eucharist at the altars.¹¹⁰ The importance of the meal in the worship of the dead can be seen in the fact that the word *mensa* came to refer not only to tables specifically, but to any kind of altar or epitaph in commemoration of the faithful dead.¹¹¹

The eventual establishment of funerary churches and Christian-only cemeteries helped to create a shared collective identity that was based on the Roman family structure even as it expanded the understanding of family beyond the traditional household to include a spiritual family.¹¹² This can be seen at the Alexander chapel in Tipasa, North Africa, where there was an open space that could have been used for memorial meals by multiple families at the same time.¹¹³

An inscription in another part of North Africa provides further insight into the ways in which funeral meals might have been conducted. In Mauretania Sitifensis, an epitaph for a Christian woman dated to 299 CE reads:

¹⁰⁸ Yasin, “Funerary Monuments,” 433. Such funerary churches were found throughout the empire, but North Africa has the highest number of preserved sites, with over thirty churches from Late Antiquity preserved in modern-day Algeria alone. For several examples of funerary churches in North Africa and elsewhere, see Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 69-91.

¹⁰⁹ MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 45-46.

¹¹⁰ Jensen, “Dining with the Dead,” 134. Unfortunately, the details of this evolution are lost, as the practice of celebrating the eucharist as part of a funeral is only mentioned at the end of the fourth century.

¹¹¹ Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 525-26. See also Krautheimer, “*Mensa-coemeterium-martyrium*,” 49-50.

¹¹² Yasin, “Funerary Monuments,” 439-40.

¹¹³ MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 60-61 (see also figs. 3.4-3.5).

To the memory of Aelia Secundula
 We all sent many worthy things for her funeral.
 Further near the altar dedicated to Mother Secundula,
 It pleases us to place a stone table
 On which we, placing food and covered cups,
 Remember her many great deeds.
 In order to heal the savage wound gnawing at our breast,
 We freely recount stories at a late hour,
 And give praises to the good and chaste mother, who sleeps in her old age.
 She, who nourished us, lies soberly forever.
 She lived to be seventy-five years of age, and died in the 260th year of the province.
 Made by Statulenia Julia.¹¹⁴

The inscription indicates that a stone table was brought to the grave along with food and cups. Once gathered, the family members dined and told stories of their deceased mother, all of which helps to ease the grief of those left behind. It should also be noted that this epitaph was built by the woman's daughter, who clearly took an authoritative role in determining the way in which her mother was commemorated, thus demonstrating agency within this particular funerary and familial context. The inscription is evidence of the way in which meals continued to be a rallying point for sharing memories of deceased loved ones and of the fact that women remained active in the commemoration of their loved ones.

In addition to private family commemorations, Christians also began to serve a kind of communal role analogous to the *collegia*, collecting money to be used in part for the burial of those unable to afford it.¹¹⁵ Tertullian asserts that such contributions were not a requirement, but rather that each person should give only what they are able to afford as a form of piety. He is also careful to note that the collection was not used for banqueting or drinking parties, but rather

¹¹⁴ *CIL* VIII.20277, translated by Jensen, "Dining with the Dead, 125-26, and cited by MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 58, and Krautheimer, "*Mensa-coemeterium-martyrium*," 46 (among others).

¹¹⁵ On the similarities between the Christian community in Carthage and traditional *collegia*, see Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage*, 226-27.

for the support and burial of the poor.¹¹⁶ This is significant because it demonstrates that Tertullian knew that collections that took place as part of the *collegia* would have been used (at least in part) to pay for banquets. Additionally, although Tertullian insisted that the money was not to be used to pay for raucous banquets, meals of some sort were a common part of Christian burials and probably would have continued even when the burial was paid for by donation. As Tertullian's *Apology* partially serves to create a distinct Christian identity, it is not surprising that he would try to distance himself from practices such as funerary banquets that were common in the Roman tradition, regardless of how popular they were in reality among his fellow Christians.

While most Christians may have understood such actions as simply continuing the traditions of their ancestors, certain Christian authorities thought that such continuity (or at least, the appearance of such continuity) was problematic and composed arguments that downplayed the similarities between the two.¹¹⁷ For example, despite acknowledging the fact that Christians brought offerings to memorialize the deceased, Tertullian argues that Christians did not actually consume meals for the dead or make use of libation tubes because such Roman practices of honouring the dead through ritual meals were akin to offering sacrifices to the gods.¹¹⁸ Tertullian

¹¹⁶ Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.6 (CCSL 1: 151), trans. FC 10: 99: *Haec quasi deposita pietatis sunt. Quippe non epulis inde nec potaculis nec ingratis uoratrinis dispensatur, sed egenis, alendis humanisque et pueris ac puellis re ac parentibus destitutis.*

¹¹⁷ This echoes Minucius Felix's assertion that Christian banquets were nothing like their Roman counterparts.

¹¹⁸ Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.10.26-29 (CCSL 1: 26-27), trans. ANF 3: 120. See also *Apol.* 13.7 (CCSL 1: 111), trans. FC 10: 44. Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.10.26-29 (CCSL 1: 26-27), trans. ANF 3: 120. Nevertheless, this practice is still attested in the time of Augustine, who criticizes the funerals of the wealthy, saying, "They will carry bread and wine to the tombs, and there call upon the names of the dead. Just think how fervently the name of that rich man in the gospel must have been invoked after his death! People would have been getting drunk at his grave-cults, yet not a drop found its way below to his burning tongue. The celebrants are providing a treat for their own bellies, not for the spirits of their ancestors. Nothing reaches the spirits of the dead except what they did for themselves while they were alive; if they did no good in their lifetime, nothing will avail them when they are dead. So what do their descendants effect? Nothing but invoking their names in their own lands" (Augustine, *Psal.* 48 s.1.15 [CCSL 38: 563], trans. Boulding, 365): *Tollent panem et merum ad sepulcra, et invocabunt ibi nomina mortuorum. Putas quantum invocatum est nomen ilius divitis postea, quando inebriabant se homines in memoria ipsius, nec descendebat una gutta super linguam ipsius ardentem? Ventri suo serviunt homines, non spiritibus suorum. Ad spiritus mortuorum non pervenit, nisi quod secum vivi fecerunt; si autem vivi secum non fecerunt, ad mortuos nihil pervenit. Sed quid faciunt illi?*

further mocks traditional Roman funerary practices for what he perceived to be an incongruity between preparing the deceased “gluttonous meals” (*gulosissime nutrit*) made with the same fire used for cremation.¹¹⁹ He characterizes Roman funerary feasts as a place of drunkenness and excess, where people went not to honour the dead but rather to indulge in earthly pleasures.¹²⁰ Further distinguishing Christian funerary practices from Roman ones, Tertullian claims that Christians detest both temples and tombs equally, asserting, “[W]e [Christians] celebrate no funeral rites. Nor do we eat of what is sacrificed, or offered at funeral rites.”¹²¹ Thus, Tertullian associates the food consumed at funerary feasts with the food of the sacrifices to the gods.

Tertullian’s insistence on the complete separation between Christian and Roman practice was, however, a rhetorical strategy intended to introduce a difference where likely none existed, or at least it was not perceived by everyone. The writings of Cyprian reveal that Christian funerary practices were not substantially different from their Roman counterparts. Mingling between Christians and non-Christians was still occurring in the third century, as can be seen when Cyprian condemned the bishop Martialis for maintaining membership in a traditional Roman *collegium* and using this association to pay for the burial of his son rather than relying on the Christian church to provide it.¹²² Although it is not explicitly stated, it is likely that

Solum invocabunt nomina eorum in terris ipsorum.

¹¹⁹ Tertullian, *Res.* 1 (Evans, 4), trans. Evans, 5. By the time Tertullian was active in the second century, inhumation had already become the most popular burial method for Christians and non-Christians alike. Nevertheless, Tertullian depicts inhumation as a particularly Christian method of burial because of the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body, in contrast to the Romans who had no such beliefs; see Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 52. For Tertullian’s discussions elsewhere of cremation and burial, see Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 55-58. On the shift from cremation to inhumation in the Roman world more generally, see Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 39-42. On Christian attitudes towards cremation and inhumation in the second and third centuries, see Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 79-88.

¹²⁰ Tertullian, *Test.* 4.4 (CCSL 1: 179), trans. FC 10: 137.

¹²¹ Tertullian, *Spect.* 13.4 (CCSL 1: 239), trans. FC 40: 81.

¹²² Cyprian, *Ep.* 67.6.2 (CCSL 3C: 456-57), trans. ACW 47: 25. On the interpretation that this is a condemnation of using non-Christian associations for funerals rather than a general rejection of the mixing of Christian and non-Christian tombs, see Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 28-29.

participating in a *collegium* and in a *collegium*-sponsored burial would have included sharing a meal with the other non-Christian members. The fact that a bishop was maintaining membership in a non-Christian *collegium* as late as the third century demonstrates the pervasiveness of these groups within the Roman world. It was not easy to discard them and the role that they played in preparing for funerals, even if one was a member of the church hierarchy who deemed such *collegia* unnecessary.

Funerary feasts were still popular practice among Christians during the time of Augustine.¹²³ Although much of Augustine's discussion of the practice focused on Christian banquets in honour of the martyrs,¹²⁴ there are a few examples in which Augustine reveals that Christians continued to have meals in honour of their loved ones at the graveside even in the late fourth century. One such example can be seen in a letter from Augustine to Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, written sometime between 391 and 393.¹²⁵ The purpose of the letter was to obtain Aurelius' help in abolishing funerary feasts throughout Africa, as he notes that such behaviour is forbidden in the writings of Paul¹²⁶ and that churches elsewhere had been successful in eliminating such practices.¹²⁷ However, Augustine acknowledges the level of importance that funerary feasts held in his community and concedes that simple meals may be tolerated at the tombs as long as they were reconfigured into alms for the poor. That is, the meals must be shared with everyone, not just the friends and family of the deceased.

¹²³ Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 157-59. However, the tradition of returning to the tomb with meals on the anniversary of the death seems to have faded.

¹²⁴ This will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

¹²⁵ Teske, *The Works of St. Augustine*, 58.

¹²⁶ Augustine cites Rom 13:13-4: "Let us live honourably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealous. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (NRSV); see Augustine, *Ep.* 22.2 (CSEL 34.1 55-56), trans. Teske, 59.

¹²⁷ Augustine, *Ep.* 22.4 (CCSL 34.1: 57), trans. Teske, 59-60. An example of this can be seen in the *Confessiones*, in which Augustine relates how his mother, Monica, used to visit the shrines of the dead when in Africa, but when she went to Milan, she was told by Ambrose that such behaviour was forbidden and subsequently only honoured martyrs at the church (*Conf.* 6.2.2 [CCSL 27: 74-75], trans. Boulding, 135-36).

Augustine also addresses one of the main issues he had with funerary feasts, namely the fact that people seemed to think that banqueting in such a manner acted as consolation to the dead, not simply commemoration and comfort to those remaining. Only by converting the meals into an act of charity, Augustine argues, would the banqueters truly be comforting the deceased; otherwise, their actions were meaningless.¹²⁸ Furthermore, such elaborate funeral practices had the potential to be socially divisive, which could be particularly dangerous in a community in which all social classes were split between Catholics and Donatists. Thus, Augustine seems to have thought it was best for both individual Christians and for a united Christian community that feasting should continue only if it was not competitive or exclusionary.¹²⁹

However, in a later homily on Psalm 48,¹³⁰ Augustine reveals that his congregation had neither given up feasts entirely nor reconstructed them as acts of charity. Instead, people continued to carry bread and wine to the tombs in an act that Augustine describes as providing not care for the dead but rather food and drink for their own enjoyment.¹³¹ Clearly, for Augustine, funerary banquets were simply an excuse for Christians to overindulge in food and drink. In another sermon, Augustine associates such practice with non-Christian customs, noting

¹²⁸ Augustine, *Ep.* 22.6 (CCSL 34.1: 58-59), trans. Teske, 60.

¹²⁹ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 35.

¹³⁰ Augustine, *Psal.* 48 s.1 (CCSL 38: 550-74), trans. Boulding, 350-67. Precise dating of Augustine's expositions on the Psalms is nearly impossible, although the corpus as a whole is dated approximately between 392 and 418 and internal references can occasionally provide more precise date ranges. On this, see Michael Cameron, "Enarrationes in Psalmos," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 290-91.

¹³¹ Augustine, *Psal.* 48 s.1 15 (CCSL 38: 563), trans. Boulding, 365. This example focuses on the funerals of the rich, which became a common theme in Augustine's sermons. For further discussion of Augustine's comments on the overindulgences common in funerals of the rich and for other examples of texts in which the issue is explored, see Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 153-56.

that since non-Christians do not believe in bodily resurrection, the offerings of food and drink brought to the graves were obviously to benefit themselves alone.¹³²

It is significant that in their discussions of the problematic aspects of Christian funerals neither Tertullian, Cyprian, nor Augustine mention any restrictions on women's participation, nor do they assert that there were any special activities for which women were primarily responsible. However, this is not necessarily evidence for women's absence. Indeed, women's roles (as preparers of the body and the meal) may have simply been so deeply established that they were not thought worthy of comment. It was the expectation that women would take on these duties as part of their familial roles as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, or widows. The necessary agency that was associated with leading aspects of these important and popular rituals likewise were not cause for comment.

While the textual sources are lacking, there are material representations of women holding cups of wine and seeming to offer toasts as part of a funerary ritual. One example can be seen in the frescoes of the Roman catacomb of the martyrs Marcellinus and Peter, which depicts a woman raising a goblet of some kind towards a table full of fellow worshippers.¹³³ Above her head is the word ἀγάπη, which may refer to the toast that would have been part of such commemorative meals.¹³⁴ Although it is rare to see women actually holding cups of wine in Roman art, this has more to do with Roman anxieties about respectable women and alcohol than it does with the reflection of what women were actually doing. It should therefore be assumed

¹³² Augustine, *Serm.* 361.6 (PL 39: 1497), trans. Hill, 228. Augustine also notes that Christians should instead follow the example of the Jews, who, despite their own flaws, at least do not make any grave offerings.

¹³³ For image, see Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 178 (fig. 8.2, detailed view at p. 184).

¹³⁴ For a discussion of this conclusion, see Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 186-91. For alternative interpretations, including the suggestion that the inscriptions of "agape" and "irene" refer to personifications of these virtues rather than spoken words, see Peter Dückers, "Agape und Irene: Die Frauengestalten der Sigmamahlszenen mit antiken Inschriften in der Katakomben der Heiligen Marcellinus und Petrus," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 35 (1992): 147-67.

that women participated fully in funerary rituals, including sharing wine and offering toasts in honour of the deceased, before the depiction of this first appears in the third century.¹³⁵

Significantly, however, funerary rituals for private individuals inspired much less discussion than did the rituals for the martyrs, who, by virtue of their perceived closeness to God, occupied a more public space both in the Christian worldview and in the expanding church authority structure. An exploration of the ways in which banquets figured in the commemoration of martyrs reveals even more about the practices of both men and women, in part simply as a result of a greater amount of evidence.

Commemorative Martyr Banquets

The earliest examples of the martyr cult indicate that there was little to differentiate the commemoration of the average dead and commemoration within the cult of the martyrs. The primary difference seems to have been that, while average Christians were memorialized by their own family and members of their household, veneration in the cult of the martyrs was undertaken by the entire Christian community.¹³⁶ This is a natural extension of the way in which the Christian community replaced the household in communal meals.

The actual burial of martyrs differed from the burial of average Christians in that martyrs' bodies often could not be freely collected and buried by their Christian family members as was typically the case with the deceased. Although Roman law did not deny burial to those who had been condemned to death, many martyr acts emphasize that Christians had to remove the martyrs' bodies in secret. While this may have been in part an attempt to imitate (whether in

¹³⁵ Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 182-83.

¹³⁶ Decret, *Early Christianity*, 95.

reality or as a literary device) Joseph of Arimathea's secrecy in going to Pilate and burying Jesus' body after dark,¹³⁷ it is possible that individual persecutors deliberately blocked the burial of martyrs in an attempt to prevent creating a gathering place for worship of the martyrs' bodies.¹³⁸ Whether literary device or actual practice, the representation of Christians as overcoming these obstacles to ensure the proper burial of their special dead demonstrates both the strength of the community and provides yet another example of the way in which the Christian community formed a surrogate family. Thus, the death rituals served to create social bonds even outside of the context of the ritual meal.

There are several examples of the Christian community making provisions for the burial of the martyrs. For example, the *Acts of St. Cyprian* asserts that Cyprian's body was removed by a group of Christians at night and transported to the cemetery for a proper burial. The Christians did not transport his body in secrecy, but carried torches and candles along with it so that anyone watching would be able to recognize the procession as one of a Christian funeral.¹³⁹ This demonstrates the way in which martyrs and rituals played an important role in the continuing development of a Christian communal identity.¹⁴⁰ Although the circumstances were specifically Christian, the burial procession and the focus on ensuring a member of their community received a proper burial echoes Roman practices. As such, although the text does not specify, it is reasonable to assume that women were present both in the procession and at the funerary celebration (including the funerary feast) in honour of Cyprian at his grave.

¹³⁷ Mt 27:57-61. It should be noted, however, that Roman funeral processions usually occurred at night (Davies, *Death, Burial, and Rebirth*, 149).

¹³⁸ Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 95-96.

¹³⁹ *Pass. Cypr.* 5 (Musurillo, 174), trans. Musurillo, 175.

¹⁴⁰ Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 61-62.

Women's agency in the burial rituals of the martyrs can be seen in another North African martyr text, the *Acts of Maximilian*. This text asserts that a Christian woman named Pompeiana was able to obtain the martyr Maximilian's body from the magistrate and was responsible both for transporting the body back to Carthage and for burying it next to Cyprian. Pompeiana herself was buried in the same place when she died thirteen days later. The text also makes clear that this was done despite the fact that Maximilian had a Christian father who had rejoiced in his son's martyrdom.¹⁴¹ It is possible, therefore, that Pompeiana was able more easily to convince the magistrate to hand over the body of the martyr because of her wealth or elevated status.¹⁴² As previously discussed, rather than adopting the private role of widow or mourner, Pompeiana adopts instead the public role of patron. She uses the same agency as did patrons of *collegia* within the Roman context. Her agency allows her to overrule Maximilian's own family, thereby demonstrating the strength of the Christian community in ensuring the proper commemorative practices of their special dead.

Although they sometimes relented, Roman officials were right to be concerned about the power of the martyrs' bodies as their burial places quickly became popular pilgrimage sites for Christians. In North Africa, these martyr shrines most often contained a *mensa* upon which a commemorative meal of some kind would be held, possibly, but not necessarily, an *agape* or eucharistic sacrifice. Martyrs' *mensae* can be identified by their inscriptions, the content of which varied, but which generally included the names of the martyrs or at least the acknowledgement that the worship space was created in honour of the acts of a martyr.¹⁴³ The size and shape of the tables themselves also differed between locations. Some lacked any

¹⁴¹ *Pass. Maximil.* 3 (Musurillo, 248), trans. Musurillo, 249.

¹⁴² Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 33.

¹⁴³ On the different types of inscriptions on the tables of the martyrs, see Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 526-28.

decoration apart from the names of the martyrs.¹⁴⁴ Others, however, contained various amenities that alluded to meals taking place there, including benches, beds, and basins.¹⁴⁵ In this way, martyr shrines continued to borrow from the local funerary traditions, and Christians continued to honour their dead in a similar way as their non-Christian contemporaries did. The different sizes and decorations of the tables suggest that they were used for different purposes specific to their community of origin.¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately, the nature of the archaeological remains makes it difficult, if not impossible, to be precise about how these *mensae* were used. Questions that cannot be answered strictly from the archaeological record include how often the meals were celebrated, how the meals were organized and conducted, and who participated in the ritual. Through comparisons with their non-Christian counterparts, however, it can be assumed that women as well as men gathered around these tables to honour the martyrs through feasting just as they had always honoured their dead loved ones. The food was likely provided by some of the women and women may have presided over the feasts in the role of host or patron. A combination of domestic agency related to typical family values and more public agency associated with the role of patron represents the variety of identities with which women participated in the cult of the martyrs.

Further demonstrating continuity between traditional Roman death rituals and Christian ones, commemorative feasts of the dead were not restricted to the funeral. Indeed, just as Romans celebrated their dead on the anniversaries of their deaths, so was it particularly popular to visit martyr shrines on the anniversaries of their deaths. As with other aspects of the martyr

¹⁴⁴ See for example, Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 320 (fig. 216), 322 (fig. 217). For an explanation and description of these and other *mensae*, 532-33.

¹⁴⁵ On some evidence of meal practices at martyr shrines, see Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 535-37.

¹⁴⁶ For some of the conclusions that may be drawn from examining some of the differences between the *mensae*, see Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae*, 541-42.

cult, the institutionalization of this practice developed over time. While Tertullian recognized the importance of commemorating the martyrs, he does not indicate any knowledge of official celebrations on the anniversaries of their deaths.¹⁴⁷ By the time of Cyprian, however, it is clear that the cult of the martyrs was becoming more organized and that celebrations of the martyrs' "birthdays" were becoming more common. For example, in one letter, Cyprian emphasizes the importance of keeping a record of the dates of the martyrs' deaths so that they might be included in future celebrations.¹⁴⁸ In another, he asserts that such annual commemorations had been going on for generations,¹⁴⁹ as he refers to a confessor, Celerinus, knowing what would happen after his martyrdom since his grandmother and uncles had also been martyrs. In their cases (and therefore in Celerinus' also), Cyprian writes, "[W]e offer sacrifices for them always, as you remember, as often as we celebrate the passions and days of the martyrs with an annual commemoration."¹⁵⁰ The "sacrifice" referred to is the Eucharist,¹⁵¹ which was offered as a way of helping the martyrs' souls in the afterlife.¹⁵² Thus, although Cyprian does not refer explicitly

¹⁴⁷ Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 107.

¹⁴⁸ Cyprian, *Ep.* 12.2.1 (CCSL 3B: 68), trans. ACW 43: 82.

¹⁴⁹ Cyprian, *Ep.* 39.3. (CCSL 3B: 188-89), trans. ACW 44: 55. The fact that such annual commemorations in other regions of the Christian world predated Cyprian's time can be seen in the account of the mid-second century martyrdom of the bishop Polycarp, which notes that Christians gathered at his burial place every year to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom. The text asserts that this was done to honour both Polycarp himself and other unnamed martyrs. Additionally, it acted as a way to prepare those gathered for their potential (or inevitable) upcoming martyrdoms (*M. Polyc.* 18 [Musurillo, 16], trans. Musurillo, 17). That the anniversary celebrations are shown as strengthening Christian identity as a persecuted group demonstrates the importance of funerary rituals in the construction of community identity. Once again, the gender of the ones assembled is not made known.

¹⁵⁰ Cyprian, *Ep.* 39.3.1 (CCSL 3B: 189), trans. ACW 44: 55: *Sacrificia pro eis semper, ut meministis, offerimus, quotiens martyrum passionem et dies anniversaria commemoratione celebramus.*

¹⁵¹ Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 106.

¹⁵² Decret, *Early Christianity*, 95. Indeed, the act of praying for the martyrs as described by Cyprian went alongside praying to the martyrs in this relatively early period, with little contradiction between the two. The act of praying for martyrs was later rejected by Augustine, who instead argued that praying for martyrs was both unnecessary as well as insulting, since martyrs were not in need of such prayers or sacrifices. Indeed, Augustine also had to correct the assumption that Christians actually worshipped the martyrs themselves, not God. See, e.g., Augustine, *Serm.* 273.7-8 (PL 38: 1251-52), trans. Hill, 20-21; *Serm.* 311.2 (PL 38: 1414-15), trans. Hill, 71-72; *Serm.* 330.1 (PL 38: 1456), trans. Hill, 185; *Faust.* 20.12 (CSEL 25.1: 552), trans. Stothert, 262. On the shift in practice from praying for the martyrs to praying to them, and liturgical and regional differences in how this comes to influence later intercessions, see R.F. Taft, "Praying to or for the Saints? A Note on the Sanctoral Intercessions/Commemorations in the

to the kind of raucous feasts that Tertullian had already condemned as part of family funeral worship or that Augustine would reject a century and a half later, the fact that the eucharistic meal was a central part of the annual commemoration of martyrs does reflect the importance of ritual food in martyr worship.¹⁵³

It is significant that Cyprian's discussion of the commemoration of martyrs does not include a distinction between the way male and female martyrs were to be acknowledged. Celerinus' grandmother is not in any way distinguished from her male relatives. Cyprian's concern for the behaviour of male and female confessors while imprisoned does not extend to their veneration once they become martyrs.¹⁵⁴ However, while the commemorations may be the same for male and female martyrs, the way in which gender affected the way in which individuals participated in these commemorations remains obscure. Instead, we must again return to women's participation in funerary feasts in order to posit that they were there and were partaking in both food and drink along with the men.

Martyr feasts continued to grow in prominence in the years between Cyprian's episcopate and the time of Augustine. As first a priest and then a bishop, Augustine frequently wrote and spoke against the practice, urging his congregation to celebrate the martyrs with somber

Anapora," in *Ab Oriente et Occidente (Mt 8, 11). Kirche aus Ost und West. Gedenkschrift für Wilhelm Nyssen*, ed. M. Schneider and W. Berschin (St. Ottilien: Verlag Erzabtei, 1996), throughout (and 441-44 on the cult of the martyrs in particular).

¹⁵³ Indeed, as Jensen notes, "funerals and food, then as now, are a natural combination" ("Dining with the Dead," 107).

¹⁵⁴ Cyprian addresses gender issues in a letter to the clergy about some male and female confessors who were sharing accommodations and beds. Although they professed to be doing so chastely, Cyprian condemned them not because he thought they were lying about their chastity, but because it might give the wrong impression to outside observers (Cyprian, *Ep.* 13.5.1 [CCSL 3B: 76-77], trans. ACW 43: 85). This demonstrates that Cyprian was obviously aware that the behaviour of women could affect how the church was viewed by the outside world. On this incident and others like it in which a confessor or virgin's chastity was in question, see Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage*, 253-56.

reflection rather than unruly feasts through the use of various evolving rhetorical strategies.¹⁵⁵ However, Augustine encountered much difficulty in eliminating this practice altogether, since, as we have seen, men and women had been eating and drinking at the graves of their family members and of the special dead for centuries, both as Christians and as practitioners of the traditional Roman religions.¹⁵⁶ As Ramsay MacMullen put it, “Eating and drinking was worship,”¹⁵⁷ and this worship was even more powerful when it was performed in honour of the martyrs.¹⁵⁸

For Augustine, these feasts were inappropriate for several reasons, and he strove to convey this message to his congregation in a number of ways.¹⁵⁹ The objections Augustine raises against the feasts included that they too closely mirrored both traditional Greco-Roman customs and Donatist ones;¹⁶⁰ that martyrs themselves do not want this kind of excessive celebration;¹⁶¹ and

¹⁵⁵ There are generally considered to be three periods in Augustine’s evolution of thought on the martyrs. First, from 390-401, he is mainly concerned with combating the drunken and inappropriate celebrations within the cult of the martyrs. From 401 to 415, Augustine was focused on Donatism and so becomes more concerned with ensuring that people are commemorating “true martyrs” than with the behaviour within these commemorations. Finally, from 415 onwards, Augustine becomes a proponent of relics and acknowledges that miracles occur at the martyr shrines. See Saxer, *Morts martyrs, reliques*, 123-24, and Tarcisius J. van Bavel, “Cult of Martyrs in St. Augustine: Theology Versus Popular Religion?,” in *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective: Memorial Louis Reekmans*, ed. M. Lamberigts and P. van Deun (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 351 (and throughout). However, although his focus shifted, a consistent attitude against drunkenness and towards a more sober reflection of the martyrs’ sacrifices can be seen throughout his lifetime (Straw, “Martyrdom,” 539). As I am concerned in this chapter primarily with martyr feasts, I will not be examining in any depth the later two periods of Augustine’s thought except for the ways in which they might illuminate his earlier attempts to reform martyr worship.

¹⁵⁶ Other church authorities were more successful in banning martyr feasts, however. Augustine reminds his audience that Ambrose, for example, was able to eradicate them (see, for example, *Conf.* 9.8.18 [CCSL 27: 144], trans. Boulding, 223-24; *Ep.* 22 [CSEL 34.1: 54-62], trans. Hill, 58-63).

¹⁵⁷ MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 58.

¹⁵⁸ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 609.

¹⁵⁹ A summary of the most common strategies that Augustine uses to preach against the commemorative feasts can be seen in *Letter* 29, written in the spring of 395 to another North African priest. In this letter, he also acknowledges the failure of many of these strategies. See *Ep.* 29.2-3 (CSEL 34.1: 114-15), trans. Teske, 95-96. For example, Augustine notes that using scripture to convince people did not work because too few people actually heard the sermons and that people questioned why the feasts that had been acceptable for centuries were suddenly forbidden.

¹⁶⁰ For evidence of closeness to traditional Roman customs, see Faustus’ accusations that Christians had simply taken the sacrificial feasts of the “pagans” and started calling them *agape* meals; that they prayed to martyrs just as pagans worshipped idols; that by bringing food and wine to the graves, they appeased the shades (*umbras*) just as their ancestors had; and that they continued to celebrate traditional holidays like *Paternalia* (Augustine, *Faust.* 20.4 [CSEL 25.1: 537-38], trans. NPNF¹ 4: 253-54]. For the ways in which Augustine’s arguments against the Donatists

finally, that the feasts included drinking, which could more easily lead to inappropriate behaviour between the sexes.¹⁶²

That excessive consumption of alcohol associated with the martyr cults is linked, Augustine argues, to drinking practices in the home. Thus, although Augustine generally attempts to discuss the cult of the martyrs as a distinct phenomenon, it is clear that many of the elements of this ritual continue to be derived from typical feasting practices that occurred daily within his community. Indeed, Augustine does not point to the public or celebratory nature of these feasts as necessarily leading to drunken excess; rather, problematic alcohol consumption exists equally in the home. In one early letter, he speaks of the impossibility of forbidding excessive drinking at the cult of the martyrs since he cannot forbid it in private.¹⁶³ Later, in his treatise *Against Faustus the Manichaean*,¹⁶⁴ Augustine acknowledges that there continues to be those who drink to excess at the feasts of the martyrs as well as at home, again arguing that he condemns excessive drinking regardless of the context. However, he admits that returning drunk from otherwise proper celebrations at the martyr shrines is nevertheless less of a sin than remaining sober but mistakenly offering sacrifices to the martyrs themselves rather than to

mirrored his arguments against the traditional Roman religious practices, see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 226-232. On Augustine's claims that the Donatists celebrated too raucously with singing and drinking, see Augustine, *Ep.* 55.18.34 (CSEL 34.2: 208-9), trans. Teske, 233-34; *Ep.* 29.11 (CSEL 34.1: 121-22), trans. Teske, 100. On singing as worship, see Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 466-69.

¹⁶¹ E.g., Augustine, *Serm.* 273.8 (PL 38: 1252), trans. Hill, 21: "The martyrs hate your flagons, the martyrs hate your roasting pans, the martyrs hate your drunken revels" (*oderunt martyres lagenas vestras, oderunt martyres sartagine vestras, oderunt martyres ebrietates vestras*). For emphasis on fasting instead of feasting, see Augustine, *Ep.* 36.9.21 (CSEL 34.2: 50-51), trans. Hill, 135-36. For encouragement to meet soberly in the church rather than at the graveside, see Augustine, *Serm.* 280.6 (PL 38: 1283), trans. Hill, 75.

¹⁶² See below for further discussion of Augustine's writings on this issue. The problematic nature of women's participation in the cult of the martyrs can be seen outside of North Africa in the work of Jerome, who explicitly connected the feasts in honour of the martyr with the errors of "young worthless women" (*iuuenum uilissimarumque feminarum*) (Jerome, *Vigil.* 9 [CCSL 79C: 20], trans. NPNF² 6: 421).

¹⁶³ Augustine, *Ep.* 22.3 (CSEL 34.1: 56-57), trans. Teske, 59: "For who dares to forbid privately what is called the honour of the martyrs when it is celebrated in public?" (*quis enim audet uetare priuatim, quod cum frequentatur in sanctis locis honor martyrum nominatur?*). The early date of this letter signals a very early origin for this particular struggle between the sedate Augustine and his more boisterous congregation.

¹⁶⁴ Composed in 397 or 398.

God.¹⁶⁵ This allowance (that drunkenness was not the worst type of behaviour that took place in conjunction with the martyr cult) demonstrates the ubiquity of drinking at feasts, both at martyr shrines and in the home. Thus, members of his congregation seem to have viewed the martyr feasts as a continuation of private family rituals for the dead that their ancestors had been practicing for centuries. The role identities that women adopted within the household communal meals would therefore have remained consistent for meals within the cult of the martyrs as well.

Given the closeness with which these celebratory feasts apparently adhered to typical expectations of other meals (and, I argue, with the funerary feast in particular), women would have been expected to be present and to participate. This, combined with the consumption of alcohol, provided another reason for Augustine to impose limitations on these feasts. Although women's attendance and participation in these feasts is rarely made explicit, and is not given as the reason for overall condemnation, Augustine does provide evidence for two instances in which women were present at these feasts and in which their presence was depicted as problematic.

First, Augustine's association of nighttime celebrations of the martyrs with inappropriate sexual behaviour between men and women is at least partly informed by his own experiences as a youth. It is not rather simply the result of his observations as a bishop. In a sermon preached in 404, Augustine admits:

I as a lad used to attend vigils when I was a student in this city, and I kept vigil like that, all mixed up together with women, who were subjected to the impudent advances of men, which no doubt on many occasions put the virtue of even chaste people at risk.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Augustine, *Faust.* 20.21 (CSEL 25.1: 563-64), trans. NPNF¹ 4: 261-63.

¹⁶⁶ Augustine, *Serm.* 359B.5 (*REtAug* 38: 65), trans. Hill, 333. Peter Brown uses more evocative language in his translation: "When I went to vigils as a student in this city, I spent the night rubbing up beside women, along with other boys anxious to make an impression on them and, who knows, should the opportunity present itself, to 'make it' with them" (Peter Brown, "Enjoying the Saints in Late Antiquity," *Early Medieval Europe* 9 [2000]: 6): *Ego puer*

Augustine seems to consider his own first-hand experience to be representative of the experiences of everyone at the martyr cults. Augustine went there as a youth in order to get close to women, not to honour the martyrs. He seems therefore to believe that others were attending the feasts for similarly impious reasons. As this passage is from Augustine's own point of view, it is impossible to know whether the women who attended these banquets would have done so with a view to taking the opportunity afforded by the commemoration of the martyrs to engage in otherwise illicit behaviour with men, or whether they were simply the unwelcome recipients of such attention.

The personal connection that Augustine makes between alcohol and the cult of the martyrs is also evident in the *Confessions*. He states that his mother Monica brought both food (cakes and bread; *pultes et panum*) and drink (wine; *merum*) to the martyrs' shrines (as befitted women's traditional roles as the procurers of the supplies required for a feast). But he asserts that Monica was unlike other venerators in that she did not do this as an excuse for excessive drinking, but rather out of a misplaced attempt at piety:

And no wonder, for her mind was not enslaved to any habit of wine-bibbing, nor did addiction to wine incite her to hatred of the truth, as is the case with many men and women who are as disgusted by any commendation of sobriety as are drunkards when offered watered-down wine. With my mother it was otherwise: she would bring her basket containing the festive fare which it fell to her to taste first and then distribute; but she would then set out no more than one small cup, mixed to suit her abstemious palate, and from that she would only sip for courtesy's sake [...] What she sought to promote at these gatherings was piety, not intemperance.¹⁶⁷

vigilans cum studerem in hac civitate, sic vigilai feminis permixtis improbitatibus masculorum, ubi forte et castitatem temptabat occasio. Brown also posits that Augustine might be referring to something similar in the *Confessions*, when he admits, "Even within the walls of your church, during the celebration of your sacred mysteries, I once made bold to indulge in carnal desire and conduct that could yield only a harvest of death", although this does not have an explicit connection to martyr feasts (*Conf.* 3.3.5 [CCSL 27: 29], trans. Boulding, 78); see Brown, "Enjoying the Saints," 6 n. 19): *ausus sum etiam in celebritate sollemnitatum tuarum intra parietes ecclesiae tuae concupiscere et agere negotium procurandi fructus mortis.*

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, *Conf.* 6.2.2 (CCSL 27: 74-75), Boulding, 135-36, quote at 136.

However, although Augustine does not depict his mother as doing anything that would lead to inappropriate behaviour, he nevertheless asserts that she “most willingly” (*libentissime*) gave up this practice once she was informed by Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, that the practice is forbidden in his community.¹⁶⁸

It is important to note that Monica’s behaviour echoed women’s traditional roles as the procurers of the supplies required for a feast and that she herself was also described as the one responsible for passing the wine to each person individually, ensuring that each worshipper had taken the amount necessary to honour the dead.¹⁶⁹ Although this is the only surviving text of a respectable Christian woman passing the wine in the context of a ritual of martyr worship,¹⁷⁰ it is unlikely that Monica was the only woman who engaged in such behaviour. As such, at least in some cases, women not only participated in ritual eating and drinking, they helped to facilitate it by bringing the food and passing the wine. This provides an example of a woman who exercised agency in leading an aspect of ritual within the cult of the martyrs but who was not necessarily a leader in the Christian community more broadly. Just as women could lead meals within house churches without taking on the role of a teacher or religious authority, so could women bring food and drink to the martyr shrines without assuming a role congruous with that of the clergy. Instead, this practice may simply have been understood as being associated with a woman’s typical familial roles and domestic agency. However, as the power of the bishops continued to solidify and expand, it is easy to see why the unofficial and ambiguous authority structure at the

¹⁶⁸ Augustine, *Conf.* 6.2.2 (CCSL 27: 75), Boulding, 136. Ambrose’s reasoning for forbidding these customs echo Augustine’s: he thought the wine would entice drunkards to indulge in excess and in any case, the practices themselves were too close to those of the “pagans.” On Monica’s correction of this behaviour as she matured and on the incompatibility of drunkenness with being a proper *domina* of a household, see Clark, *Monica*, 22-26.

¹⁶⁹ Augustine, *Conf.* 6.2.2 (CCSL 27: 74-75), Boulding, 135-36.

¹⁷⁰ Tulloch, “Women Leaders,” 182.

martyrs' tombs might have led to unease among some church authorities and a desire to create boundaries, thereby limiting the agency of women like Monica.

While Augustine could not have completely fabricated what happens at the martyr shrines, it is likely that he magnified those aspects of veneration that he found to be the most troublesome. The problems Augustine saw with the martyr feasts were twofold. First, the celebrations contained too much drinking and dancing, particularly for someone who thought quiet reflection of inner virtue was the best way to honour the martyrs. Second, the drinking and dancing were especially problematic because women and men partook alongside each other, thus creating the opportunity for inappropriate relations.

It is worth noting that the association of women with the problematic aspects of the cult of the martyrs in North Africa is not only found in the writings of Augustine. A Donatist sermon composed sometime between 317 and 321 (the first period of imperial suppression of the Donatists) contains a reference to improper feasting.¹⁷¹ As part of the anonymous author's description of the various misdeeds of the Catholic church, he asserts, "it is a crime even to publish what was said and done among the banquets of lascivious youths where despicable women were present."¹⁷² Although these feasts are not necessarily martyr feasts, the author's earlier reference to "holy assemblies" that are "transformed into splendid banquets" makes this connection plausible,¹⁷³ as does the similarities between these feasts and the martyr feasts that Augustine describes attending in his youth.¹⁷⁴ Whether these feasts were for martyr commemoration or some other purpose, the author makes the connection between feasting and

¹⁷¹ *Pass. Donati et Advocati* 4 (PL 8: 752-58), trans. Tilley, 52-60. On the dating of this sermon, see Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 52 n. 1.

¹⁷² *Pass. Donati et Advocati* 4 (PL 8: 754), trans. Tilley, 55: *iam quae dicta vel gesta sunt, illie inter epulas lascivientium juvenum et ubi praesto fuerint aspernamenta foeminarum scelus est edicere fidelissimi fratres.*

¹⁷³ *Pass. Donati et Advocati* 3 (PL 8: 754), trans. Tilley, 55: [...] *conventicula sacra fiunt, luculenta convivia*

¹⁷⁴ Augustine, *Serm.* 359B.5 (*REtAug* 38: 65), trans. Hill, 333.

improper behaviour among men and women explicitly clear. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the Donatist author is using the feasts as a tool to condemn Catholic behaviour in the same way that Augustine accuses the Donatists of celebrating the martyrs by having boisterous feasts.¹⁷⁵ The prevalence and popularity of these feasts in both Catholic and Donatist circles can thus be seen in the way that they are used as easy rhetorical targets by disapproving bishops.

Towards the end of the fourth century, both the feasts and the objections to the feasts continued. A council in Carthage in 392 sought to restrict the commemorative feasting that was being done inside churches. It asserts that bishops and clergy were forbidden from holding such feasts and that laity should also “as far as possible” (*quantum fieri potest*) be prohibited from attending them.¹⁷⁶ Another council in 401 acknowledged that the earlier proscriptions had not worked, noting that the feasts continue to be held in many places. The council dubiously placed the blame for this on “pagan error” (*errore gentili*) and asserted that the Christians who continued to participate in such ritual meals had been “forced” (*cogantur*) to do so. Furthermore, the feasts were considered particularly problematic because they violated the most sacred places where the martyrs were buried.¹⁷⁷

This is also interesting because it reveals a gendered aspect to the condemnation of such feasts, claiming that the dancing that took place made such feasts completely inappropriate for women to attend. It asserts that the honour and modesty of innumerable women were assaulted “by lascivious insults” (*iniuriis lasciuientibus adpetatur*) to the extent that any benefit gained

¹⁷⁵ Augustine, *Ep.* 55.18.34 (CSEL 34.2: 208-9), trans. Teske, 233-34; *Ep.* 29.11 (CSEL 34.1: 121-22), trans. Teske, 100.

¹⁷⁶ *Registri ecclesiae Carthaginensis*, canon 42 (CCSL 149: 185), trans. NPNF² 14: 462. *Ut nulli episcopi uel clerici in ecclesia conuiuentur, nisi forte transeuntes hospitiorum necessitate illic reficiant: populi etiam ab huiusmodi conuiuuiis, quantum fieri potest, prohibeantur.*

¹⁷⁷ *Registri ecclesiae Carthaginensis*, canon 60 (CCSL 149: 196), trans. NPNF² 14: 473. For a discussion of the way in which the restrictions of feasts were taken in gradual steps, see Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 141-44.

from honouring martyrs was lost on account of the impropriety of the celebrations themselves.¹⁷⁸

This is important for several reasons. First, it confirms that women were continuing to participate fully in such feasts well into the fifth century. Second, it echoes the earlier attitudes that any respectable matron who attended *symposia* would immediately become dishonourable, which demonstrates that the way in which attitudes towards meal practices are just as consistent as the practices themselves. Finally, it raises the question of whether the celebrations were seen as problematic *because* of women's attendance at them, or whether women were simply being used to condemn such behaviour in a way that would have been difficult for respectable Christians to refute. Given the lack of evidence that has survived on women's actions in daily life, it may not be possible to answer this question. However, the question helps to bring a different perspective on the issues involved in the rejection of certain aspects of martyr worship and their relationship to women's role identities and agency.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the commemorative banquets in the cult of the martyrs must be examined within the broader context of commemorative meals and funerary rituals. As has been shown in this chapter, there is an abundance of evidence demonstrating that women participated to varying degrees in the different types of communal meals in both the Roman and Christian contexts. While women's participation in such feasts was not without controversy, it was a fact that Christian writers had to deal with. Augustine spoke of the difficulty of condemning at the cemeteries what was done at the homes in terms of feasting in general; it would have been that much more difficult to exclude those who were traditionally connected with meal preparation

¹⁷⁸ *Registri ecclesiae Carthaginensis*, canon 60 (CCSL 149: 197), trans. NPNF² 14: 473.

and the private sphere. We can therefore assume, I would argue, that women's role identities within the family (wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and widows) allowed them to exercise certain measures of agency within funerary feasts and commemorative martyr banquets.

In the literary and material record we catch only brief glimpses of women's participation in martyr feasts. Descriptions of meal practices within the martyr cult are confined primarily to texts written by church authorities who were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the worship behaviour of Christians outside of authorized feasts and liturgies. Although there are many surviving examples of martyr shrines that contain *mensae* and indications that the rituals at the shrines included meals, the artistic representations are open to interpretation and do not reveal the precise manner of celebration, nor who was involved. Christian women who participated in these rituals did not leave a record of what they did and why they did it. Modern scholars are therefore left with many gaps to fill. Nevertheless, what Christian writers from North Africa disclose is consistent enough one with another and with what is known about other meal practices that we can use their remarks to draw conclusions about women's roles and the agency and authority associated with these roles.

First, it is remarkable that our North African writers do not unequivocally condemn women's presence at the feasts of the martyrs, particularly given their evident concern with women's behaviour in other contexts. Thus, women's legitimate participation in the feast of the martyrs is implicitly, if silently, recognized. The various role identities that women could adopt within the context of this participation (from familial identities such as widow to public ones such as patron) carried with them access to certain levels of agency, whether domestic or public. However, this agency is almost always undetectable within the surviving narratives.

Next, one of the most criticized aspects of the martyr feasts was the tendency of the participants to overindulge in wine and revelry, and this was made all the more problematic because both sexes indulged together. Such critiques played on the Roman stereotype that drinking wine would cause a woman to be more open to sexual misbehaviour and therefore that drinking wine in the company of non-related males would almost certainly lead a respectable woman to act dishonourably.¹⁷⁹ The Roman conception of women as being particularly susceptible to luxuries and over-indulgence also contributed greatly to the idea that women could not attend a lavish banquet without becoming corrupted. Thus, although women are not always explicitly mentioned, it is likely that the constant references to unrestrained drunkenness among non-relatives of both sexes would have reflected more poorly on the women than the men. The condemnation of the martyr banquet is therefore also a reflection of the male view of women and their position within the community.

However, we should assume not only that women were present at the feasts, but that they prepared the feasts, sponsored them as patrons, and may have presided over them in some capacity. Indeed, while it is clear that gendered stereotypes influenced how women who drank wine as part of the commemorative feasts were perceived, there is little evidence that women were otherwise singled out for their actions in funerary banquets or, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, in commemorative martyr feasts. Their role in preparing, sponsoring, or presiding at funerary banquets or martyr feasts was taken as given and therefore elicited no comment. I would argue, therefore, that the agency that women expressed as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, or widows within the private sphere—again, simply taken as given—extended into the cult of the martyrs. This domestic agency is often obscured by the point of view of the male-

¹⁷⁹ Standhartinger, "Women in Early Christian Meal Gatherings," 92.

authored texts, who pass it over in silence, but it is legitimate and significant and should receive more attention.

Indeed, I would suggest that we need to reconsider what it meant to take on an authoritative role within some Christian ritual contexts. By offering a toast, passing the cup, or providing the food used to honour the dead, women were demonstrating agency within the cult of the martyrs, whether or not this translated into positions of authority within the church hierarchy more broadly. Furthermore, women of all statuses were visible within these rituals; one did not need to be wealthy to, for example, provide food to be consumed as part of the commemoration. While I suspect that women who were already heads of their households (such as wives, mothers, or widows) would have more readily taken on such principal roles within the cult of the martyrs, I do not believe that this would have been a requirement for this type of participation. Instead, the level of one's piety was likely a more salient determinant.

As can be seen in the commemorative feasts within the cult of the martyrs, women adopted leadership roles within a specific ritualized context that both emphasized their importance within the Christian community and reified their traditional roles within the private domains of the household and the cemetery. That these rituals were generally considered to be separate from the Christian authority structure and from the church organization more generally may have given women greater space to act in more prominent ways, with less interference from the emerging male-dominated authority structure. Ultimately, the cult of the martyrs provided an extra-ecclesiastical space in which female leaders were not only permitted, but perhaps expected. The recognition of domestic agency as a legitimate source of agency and power should be examined within other ritual contexts in order to create a more nuanced understanding of the way in which women engaged with their communities in Late Antiquity.

General Conclusion

This study began with a short vignette that portrayed a particular woman's experience in the cult of the martyrs. In this imaginative reconstruction, I attempted to show the ways in which women's participation in the cult of the martyrs was connected to their actions in daily life and the intermittent identities that they embodied. The point of the vignette was to illustrate how women's roles in the cult of martyrs would often have been an extension—and sometimes a reversal or reconfiguration—of their roles in other aspects of life. This assumption—that women's roles in the cult of martyrs were related to their roles in other aspects of life—underlies the methodological turn that this study has taken. In order to compensate for the relative silence about women's roles in the cult of the martyrs, this study has taken into consideration evidence of women's roles outside the cult of the martyrs. And in order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of women's roles in the cult of martyrs, it has focused not only on women as martyrs but also on women as venerators, along with all the echoes and exchanges between those groups.

In compiling the evidence of women's roles, each chapter offered different contributions that may be seen as pieces of a puzzle. Chapter one provided the methodological foundation and described the most salient identities of women in Late Antiquity; chapter two explored the roles attributed to named female martyrs; chapter three uncovered the ways in which women could venerate martyrs in the cult of the martyrs in general; and chapter four was a close examination of a particular aspect of the cult of the martyrs, the commemorative martyr feasts. When taken together, these pieces form a series of complex and at times confusing or even paradoxical images: women were publicly visible and yet relegated to domestic duties. Motherhood was an essential identity for some martyrs to claim, but it also needed to be rejected. Women should

venerate martyrs, but not too enthusiastically. Meals created social bonds, but were also sites of great social anxiety. Female martyrs should demonstrate masculine courage, but should also remain feminine and submissive. Women were patrons, but also clients. They were mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, widows, and virgins. Some women prepared the meals but did not participate in them; other women oversaw the preparation of the feasts and led the meals, offering toasts on behalf of the entire group. Women were both submissive and authoritative; lacked agency and had agency; were visible and invisible; outspoken and silent; masculine and feminine; martyrs and venerators. There is no singular description that can summarize the roles of women in the cult of the martyrs in Late Antiquity. With every broad claim of “what women did” must come caveats like “it depends” and “sometimes” and “in one case”.

In order to avoid generalizations based on selected roles of women in the cult of martyrs or certain types of evidence, this thesis has described women’s behaviours in the smallest possible units of analysis permitted by the evidence. Sometimes the extant evidence has permitted an extended analysis of the roles and identities of individual women within the cult of martyrs—of women who figure prominently in martyr-texts or of socially prominent women within the cult. At other times—particularly when the literary sources refer to women in the cult of martyrs in only general terms—what has been required is a detailed consideration of customary roles of women in Roman and Christian contexts, so as to be able plausibly to extrapolate from women’s activities within those roles. The evidence of the roles from other contexts has allowed us to learn a great deal about the martyr cult. However, intermittency of identity also necessitates complexity of identity; women could choose to be mothers and wives and patrons and clients at different points, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes not, and each of these identities could

be internalized and expressed in different ways. Thus, the pieces put forth by this thesis can be rearranged to form many different images, some that overlap and others that do not.

Nevertheless, some of these pieces can be helpfully compared in order to draw conclusions about the ways in which participation in the cult of the martyrs reflected the general expectations of women's behaviour. That is, whether women were venerators of martyrs or martyrs themselves, their actions reflected the types of identities that they played in other areas of late antique society. Despite the differences between the place that venerators and martyrs occupied in society, they in fact share much in terms of the way they are described and the levels of agency and authority to which they have access. The findings of this thesis with regard to the identities and agency of women in the cult of martyrs will, accordingly, be summarized under three broad categories: identities common to both Roman and Christian discourse, identities that have special meaning in Christian discourse, and identities that are specific to the cult of the martyrs. This will be followed by reflections on the methodological contribution of the thesis.

Roman and Christian Identities

This category refers to those identities that have common meanings within Roman discourse and operate in Christian contexts with minor changes. In general, these are identities that relate to the family and daily social life. Because of the universality of these identities, they frequently appear in both martyr and venerator discourses. Even when not explicitly stated, the characteristics of roles are standardized in such a way that it is possible to infer their presence, or at least suggest that certain actions may have been understood as being associated with a particular identity. As there is a great deal of evidence about them, examining the martyr cult through the lens of these identities can reveal much about the way in which it functioned in society. This can be seen in

the following brief exploration of each of these identities in the context of martyrs and venerated.

There are several North African martyrs who are associated with the identity of wife, although there is much diversity in each of the examples. Perpetua's husband does not appear in the *passio*, and only appears peripherally in later versions, but nevertheless her identity as a wife provides important information about her status in the community. For example, Perpetua's wifehood highlights the fact that wives and husbands could and did have different religious affiliations and that this could cause tension within the marriage, regardless of whether martyrdom was involved. The *Passion of Perpetua* does not go into detail about the way in which Perpetua negotiated this aspect of her wife identity, but it nevertheless provides evidence for wives' assertion of agency in adopting Christianity. In contrast, the example of the martyr Quatrillosa shows a wife who is perfectly aligned with her husband, as they both become martyrs.

The uncertainty of the wife identity of Crispina (who is identified as a wife in Augustine's writings but not in the extant text) demonstrate both the apparent rhetorical importance of this identity and the ambiguity of the sources. In the case of Felicitas, her status as a wife does not change the way in which she is understood, since her wife identity is superseded by her role as a mother. However, Augustine uses Crispina's wife identity to demonstrate that all women—regardless of marital status—could be ideal martyrs. The fact that so many North African martyrs are identified as wives reflects the typical expectations for all women and therefore provides an important point of similarity between the martyrs and the wives who venerated them.

In the discussions of venerators, the role of wife is rarely identified explicitly. Rather, the presence of wives can be inferred by examining the types of activities that women engage in within the cult of the martyrs. For example, since the commemorative martyr feasts have the same components as typical communal meals, it should be expected that the same people were responsible for preparing the food for both. Since wives oversaw the preparation of regular meals, they likely fulfilled the same role for martyr feasts, even if this is not explicitly stated. Furthermore, just as Perpetua acts independently of her husband in converting to Christianity and opting for martyrdom, it is reasonable to expect that some of the wives who venerated martyrs did so without their husband's approval.

Like that of wife, the role identity of mother remains consistent between Roman and Christian contexts and can be seen in both martyrs and venerators. All of the martyrs who are identified as wives are also identified as mothers. This reflects the ancient conception that one of the main purposes of marriage was procreation. Mother-martyrs have unique relationships with their children, as they typically need to reject their children at some point in order to fulfill their martyrdoms. The exception to this is the martyr Quartilosa, whose son is also a martyr and therefore does not need to be rejected. However, even after Felicitas gives her child to another Christian woman to raise and Perpetua's son is no longer allowed in the prison with her (and no longer has to be breast-fed), there is still an abundance of maternal imagery throughout the text, demonstrating that the author of the text still sees the identity of mother as significant. Finally, just as the wife identity proved rhetorically useful to later writers, so too does the mother identity: Augustine highlights Perpetua's motherhood and describes Crispina as being a mother who abandoned her children even though there is no such description in the extant text. The commonality of the mother and wife identities in society allows for them to be readily invoked in

the service of larger points about the importance of placing devotion to God above all earthly pleasures.

Motherhood among venerators is also closely tied to the wife identity, as mothers and wives shared many of the general duties involved in maintaining the household. Without the explicit mention of children, it is difficult to confirm which identity was most salient during the activities surrounding the cult of the martyrs (and indeed, this may have been different for different women at different times). However, mothers occasionally appear in the literature as mourners of their children who become martyrs (as in the case of the mothers of the martyrs Marian and Flavian), and as clients who seek out patron-martyrs to heal their children. In these cases, the Christian mothers do not appear to be engaging in behaviour that is unique to the cult of the martyrs; rather, they are reorienting obligations associated with motherhood within a specifically Christian context.

So too, the expectations of the role identity of daughter do not change when shifted from a Roman to a Christian context. Daughters are still expected to obey their parents and to demonstrate the proper *pietas*. Daughters also continue to exist primarily in the private sphere, but their behaviour reflects on how their parents are perceived in the public realm. In martyr texts, the identity of daughter is frequently the site of rebellious agency, as daughter-martyrs reject their parents (most often, their fathers) who try to convince them to recant their Christianity. The most detailed of such encounters are Perpetua's various conversations with her father. When Perpetua does not demonstrate the obedience that was expected of daughters towards their fathers, her conduct is seen as dangerous to the public order and Perpetua's father is punished as a result. In other cases, as in the examples of the daughters Secunda and Salsa, the rejection of parents is marginalized in favour of focusing on the women's determination to

become martyrs. They are identified as daughters, but the counteridentity of parents does not play a central part in the narratives; thus, the identity of daughter was powerful enough to convey the appropriate meaning to the audience without requiring extended interactions like those in the Perpetua narrative. When daughters of unbelieving parents become martyrs, rebelling against their parents is an expected part of the process, whether it was depicted in the literature or not.

The only example of a daughter with a supportive father is the martyr Maria. Maria's father actually volunteers Maria and some of his other children for martyrdom, and they obey him fully. In this way, Maria demonstrates the absolute obedience of an ideal daughter. Thus, the daughter identity only needs to be rejected if that is the only way to fulfill one's martyrdom. Perpetua's forceful rejection of her father requires later writers such as Augustine to rationalize her behaviour and place it within the specific context of the cult of the martyrs; disobedience is acceptable only under certain extreme circumstances like martyrdom.

Indeed, there is no indication that daughters who venerated martyrs necessarily either identified with or imitated the rebellious natures of the daughter-martyrs. In part, this is a result of the lack of extant evidence regarding this identity. Because daughters were expected to be submissive, they often do not appear in the literary record. They do appear in the evidence as the recipients of healing miracles following their parents' visits to martyr shrines. But we can also assume that they were present (either with their parents and siblings or without them) at various events associated with the cult of the martyrs, including church services, shrine visits, and commemorative feasts. However, their nature of their relationships with their parents and whether they identified particularly with martyrs who were also daughters remains unfortunately out of view.

The role identity of sister is similarly difficult to identify with any specificity, and indeed, no sisters are explicitly singled out as venerators of martyrs. In the martyr texts themselves, the role of biological sister is secondary to the metaphorical use of this term, making it difficult to isolate sibling relationships and explore them in a meaningful way. Perpetua's sister identity is highlighted through her relationship to her living brother who is also a Christian, and through her visions of her deceased brother, Dinocrates. However, her conversations with her brother are tied closely to her mother as well as her fellow Christians (that is, her metaphorical brothers and sisters), and her visions of Dinocrates are replete with maternal imagery. In this way, the sister identity is linked with familial love and *pietas* in general, and there is little that may be highlighted as being specific to sisters; the actions of sisters echo the actions of other family identities. Similarly, Felicitas may be depicted as a sister in one version of her martyrdom, but she is not shown as behaving any differently to Revocatus, whether he is her brother, husband, or simply fellow slave. So too, the martyr Victoria's relationship with her brother echoes Perpetua's with her father, as Victoria's brother seeks to convince her to recant her Christianity. He speaks on behalf of their family in a legal setting, thereby being framed as a guardian rather than a brother.

In all of these cases, therefore, the sister identity is overshadowed by other factors. This is not specific to martyr texts, however, as sibling relationships are largely absent from ancient works, with certain exceptions such as the concern for the proper marriage of siblings. Particularly following the deaths of their parents, sisters and brothers seem to have both been influenced by and been influential upon their siblings, depending on family dynamic. Thus, the lack of identification of venerators as sisters should not be seen as evidence for the absence of venerators who were also sisters; rather, it is a byproduct of the extant evidence. It is possible

that some women saw this identity as being salient and meaningful within the context of the cult of the martyrs; for example, siblings may have attended commemorative feasts with their parents as children, adult sisters may have sought healing at martyr shrines on behalf of their siblings, or there may have been disagreements within families when some siblings were Christian and others were not. Just like other familial identities, sibling relationships were subject to great diversity. It is possible that they found great comfort in recognizing, for example, Perpetua's continued affection for her brothers, and that this may have influenced their practices. However, the sources make it impossible to know how prevalent this may have been, or whether the role of sister was overshadowed by other identities

The identity of widow is also obscured in the sources, as virtually no widows are depicted as either martyrs or venerators of martyrs. One exception may be the martyr Quartilosa, whose husband is said to have died three days before she appears in the martyrdom narrative. However, the wife identity remains the most salient in this case, as she soon becomes a martyr herself. Although no widows are explicitly identified venerators, some of the women who are described as visiting martyr shrines alone (as when Petronia visits the shrine of Stephen), paying for the burials of martyrs (as when Pompeiana arranges for the burial of the martyr Maximilian), or possessing relics (as in the case of Lucilla's bone) may in fact be widows, given what we know of widows in Roman society. The lack of reference to a husband combined with public behaviour and apparent authority over certain funds is indicative of widows in other contexts and thus can be applied in these cases. Thus, knowledge of widowhood outside of the context of the cult of the martyrs allows for a more nuanced conception of the participants in the cult of the martyrs to emerge.

Finally, the non-familial counteridentities of patron and client loom large in the cult of the martyrs. The broad outlines of the identities of patrons and clients, common in Roman society, transfer easily into the context of the cult of the martyrs, even if patronage terminology is not explicitly used. Martyrs are not in fact identified as patrons within the martyr texts (although some of the leadership behaviour exhibited by martyrs like Perpetua, for example, might be understood as being analogous with patronage). After their deaths, however, martyrs become patrons for the community, as client-venerators visit shrines to ask for assistance. However, female venerators could also be patrons of martyr cults through actions such as arranging for the martyrs' burial, providing funding for their shrines to be built, or ensuring proper supplies for martyr feasts. The presence of women in the patronage system would have been expected, which perhaps explains why female patrons of martyrs did not attract any particular consideration in the extant sources. Similarly, patronage often reflected the expected authority of women's familial roles, as when wives or widows were considered to be the heads of their households and when women hosted meals in their homes.

The role identity of client is associated with venerators rather than martyrs. As already mentioned, clients visited the shrines of martyrs, reflecting the way in which clients visited their patrons in Roman society. Additionally, Augustine expects clients of martyrs to publicize their experiences of healing and miracles, just as clients are expected to praise their patrons publicly. As most of the venerating behaviours in the cult of the martyrs can be associated with typical behaviours of clients, it is difficult to separate the client identity from other identities, in particular familial identities; the role of client could exist simultaneously with other identities within the cult of the martyrs just as it could in other aspects of Roman society. Thus, the

identities of patron and client provide another example of identities that did not need to be drastically changed in order to be salient within the cult of the martyrs.

Christian Identities

Unlike the identities discussed above, there are some roles that take on distinctive meanings within a Christian context. The identities of virgin and prophet, for example, also exist in Roman discourse, but in a Christian context these identities have different connotations.

One way in which the identity of virgin was reconfigured in a Christian context is its association with the identity of bride of Christ. These two identities are closely linked to familial identities, with virgins typically associated with daughters or sisters, and brides of Christ replacing the change in identity that occurs when a young woman marries and becomes a wife. Thus, although the roles of virgins and brides of Christ are depicted in ways that were unique to Christianity, identifying martyrs as virgins and brides of Christ nevertheless fits them within a particular framework of the family. The emphasis on the chastity associated with these two identities does not, however, play a large role in the cult of the martyrs in North Africa. Only three martyrs (Secunda, Victoria, and Maria) are depicted as virgins. Secunda and Victoria's chastity is closely connected to their rejection of familial expectations—their parents try to force them into marriages and they flee rather than give up their virginities. Although this goes against the typical expectations of obedience, these daughters are praised in the Christian context because they undertake these defiant actions in the name of God; the identity of virgin is more valued than that of daughter. However, it is not always necessary to decide between familial identities and the role of virgin, as Maria is a consecrated virgin alongside her roles as daughter

and sister. Once again, however, sharing these identities is only possible because her family members are also Christians.

The bride of Christ identity provides a different way of understanding vows of chastity, as women are shown as foregoing earthly marriages for heavenly ones. However, the identity is not only applied to virgins like Secunda or Victoria, since Perpetua is identified as a bride of Christ by the redactor of the *Passio* and Augustine calls Crispina a bride of Christ despite elsewhere emphasizing her status as an earthly wife. Thus, the discourse should be seen as using marital language to reflect commitment to Christ rather than virginity in a literal sense.

Despite the importance that virginity and chastity eventually come to have in certain Christian communities, none of the female venerators that have been discussed in this thesis are explicitly identified as either virgins or brides of Christ. Nevertheless, that venerators of martyrs are not described in this way does not mean that some women who participated in the martyr cult did not identify as such. Rather, it indicates that it was not necessary for women to adopt these specific role identities in order to participate in the martyr cult or to be a proper venerator. In North Africa at least, there was no particular emphasis given either to those venerators who had taken such vows or to chaste martyrs.

Another role identity that exists in the Roman context but takes on a special meaning within Christianity is that of prophet. The visions received by martyrs like Perpetua and Quartilosa are related directly to their impending martyrdoms. Depicted as happening in the days before the martyrdoms will take place, the visions provide reassurance that martyrdom is the proper path and that the martyrs will be rewarded in the afterlife. Additionally, the visions provide a connection between martyrs-to-be and the martyrs that have died before them (as, for example, Quartilosa sees her martyred son in her vision), demonstrating that martyrdom is part

of an important tradition. Thus, even though Perpetua and Quartilosa are the only ones to actually experience the visions, the fact that they share these visions with their companions, and that they are ultimately included in the martyr narratives, makes the visions part of the public realm. It is not enough to simply have a vision; these visions must be shared and properly interpreted in order to be rhetorically powerful.

This echoes the way in which venerators of martyrs were expected to publicize the miracles that they experienced. For authorities like Augustine, it is important that the entire community share in this facet of the cult of the martyrs, even if it is just by hearing about someone else's experiences. His encouragement of wealthy women in particular shows how factors like social status influenced whose accounts were seen as most salient, while other identities associated with gender (such as familial roles, which are not usually specified) appear to be secondary. While the women who were healed at martyr shrines are not necessarily identified as prophets, they nevertheless occupy the same rhetorical space as martyrs like Perpetua and Quartilosa. Just as martyrs' visions provide support and encouragement, so too the miracles associated with martyrs provide comfort to the living clients. Furthermore, the expectation in both instances to make the content of the visions or miracles public demonstrates the importance they had to the community as a whole.

Identities Specific to the Cult of the Martyrs

As has been shown throughout this thesis, the majority of identities associated with the cult of the martyrs are consistent with the types of identities associated with women in other aspects of both Roman and Christian societies. Even if these roles take on particular meaning within the

cult of the martyrs, the actions and ideals associated with the roles remain generally consistent with the way they are manifested in other contexts. The exception to this is the role of imitator.

When taken in conjunction with the role of martyr, this role has the connotation of imitator of Christ. Through their actions and speech, martyrs are often shown to be echoing Christ's life and sufferings. The conscious construction of martyrs as imitators of Christ (whether by the martyrs themselves or by the authors of the martyr texts) places the sufferings of the martyrs themselves in direct contact with the tradition of Christ's suffering and emphasizes that the martyrs' pain serves a divine purpose. Gender does not seem to have been a factor in the role of imitator, as female martyrs could be imitators of Christ as well as male martyrs. However, because this identity requires the conscious adoption of another's words and actions, it is difficult to reveal anything unique about the agency of individual martyrs. Thus, imitator is just one facet of the broader identity of martyr.

The identity of imitator with regards to venerators has not been recognized to the same extent, in part because the diversity of practices that could be undertaken in imitation of the martyrs makes it difficult to isolate the imitator from other roles. Still, this is an identity that is central to thinking about the way that the image of the martyrs is manifested in the day-to-day lives of Christians. The imitation of martyrs includes not only imitating characteristics associated with them (such as patience, courage, or chastity) but also specific, concrete actions (as when Tertullian discusses women who imitate Thecla by baptizing and teaching others). The more abstract types of imitation are nearly impossible to find in the literary records, despite the possibility that this was likely the most common and accessible method of venerating martyrs. Women who wished to imitate the virtues of a martyr did not need to be of a particular class or occupy a certain familial role; imitation was available to anyone and could be done at any time.

This inherently private nature of the identity of imitator also makes it difficult to locate within the extant texts. Ancient writers like Tertullian and Augustine write about the importance of proper imitation, but they provide few examples of how this imitation actually expressed itself. Thus, even though the identity of imitator cannot be discussed in specific detail, it must be acknowledged because it is an essential component of understanding women as venerators in the cult of the martyrs.

Methodological Advances

This thesis demonstrates that models of identity and agency can prove fruitful for the study of women's roles in Late Antiquity. Identity theory makes it possible to explore women's roles with a view to uncovering the internalized meanings of each role as well as the connections between roles. When combined with Rebillard's theory of the intermittency of identity, this heuristic method allows for a greater appreciation of the complexity of women's lives in Late Antiquity. Theories of agency also help to contextualize women's identities, since recognizing different types of agency (such as domestic or rebellious agency) can add important nuances to identities that otherwise may seem to be lacking in agency and power. Thus, this methodological approach has demonstrated that it is possible to draw conclusions about women's activities with some specificity even in texts where women are marginalized.

Nevertheless, some important limitations remain. It should be recognized that, even as more nuance and detail is uncovered, the conclusions reached in this thesis do not encompass all forms of agency or identifications available to individuals in antiquity. That is, the types of agency and identity that are discussed do not represent the entirety of roles that were available to women in antiquity, nor do they necessarily reflect the way they would have been interpreted in

all cases; rather, the focus has been on the roles and interpretations that are most salient to the cult of the martyrs. As this thesis has demonstrated, however, complexity is itself a central characteristic of women's experiences in Late Antiquity. One of the benefits of the methodology of the thesis is that it provides a framework for more questions to be raised and possibilities to be considered.

These limitations are mitigated by broadening the scope of evidence on women's roles beyond the cult of the martyrs. Considering women's behaviours outside the cult of the martyrs made it possible to extrapolate the kinds of actions they would have expected to be doing within the ritualized context. As has been shown in this study, the vast majority of identities associated with the cult of the martyrs have well-established meanings and expectations outside of it. Positing the way that these meanings and expectations must have translated into the cult of the martyrs allows for some of the spaces of silence regarding women's participation to be filled. This approach to the literary record is perhaps most persuasive when the evidence is silent but nevertheless cannot be fully understood unless certain customary roles are assumed to be at play. This is the case, for example, with the commemorative martyr feasts in which "women" are said to be present in the sources, but little or nothing is said about what they did. By examining women's roles in regular meals, their participation in these martyr feasts is brought into focus and one can plausibly argue that it entails certain specific activities and certain forms of agency. This approach to the evidence influences the way that arguments against women's attendance at these feasts should be understood. It also suggests that for many people, women would have been expected to not only be there, but also to provide important components of the feast and to even act as a hostess or leader of the meal.

In addition to the above analysis of the different types of identities within the cult of the martyrs, this thesis makes several other contributions to the field. Both identity theory and the concept of intermittent identities moves us in the direction of viewing late antique Christianity not as a monolithic whole, but as a diverse collection of individuals who each had their own sense of the most salient aspects of Christianity's place in their lives. These concepts may be applied to other ancient phenomena as a way of mitigating the biases in the sources and reading beyond the authoritative viewpoints of the elite authors who are the source of most of the extant literary record. The search for diversity within the texts might allow for certain assumptions to be questioned and open up new avenues for study, particularly for marginalized groups such as women or members of the lower classes.

The use of identity theory also speaks to the importance of cross-cultural and cross-historical analyses. As we have already argued, research focused on women and other marginalized groups can benefit from contemporary theories of identity, agency, and power, because such theories may enable one to recognize ways that women may have exercised agency and power even though such forms of agency and power are not acknowledged by ancient sources. For example, this research has revealed that many of the identities with which women are most commonly associated coincided with traditional familial and domestic expectations for women. Using theories of agency, this thesis has argued that relegation to the domestic sphere does not necessarily correlate with submissiveness or lack of agency. Women's roles and behaviours within the cult of martyrs is largely invisible in the extant sources because it corresponded to women's expected familial roles and behaviours in daily life. This research has shown that invisibility is not equivalent to submission. By exploring late antique martyrs through this theoretical lens, this study reveals a fuller picture of women's actions than has previously

been portrayed. This study argues for the recognition of domestic roles as a legitimate source of women's agency and power within late antique Christianity in contexts beyond the cult of the martyrs and suggests that agency within a certain role was flexible. For example, clients could exercise submissive agency in deference to their martyr-patron and overt agency in the publication of their experiences.

The cult of the martyrs provides the ideal context in which to examine women's roles in late antique North African Christianity. The large number of surviving texts regarding martyrs allows for women's roles to be traced more easily in North Africa than in other regions, and the popularity of martyrs means that Christians of all backgrounds probably engaged in some way with the cult of the martyrs. As martyrs occupied prestigious positions that were outside of the hierarchical structure of the clergy, the cult of the martyrs for a time provided an extra-ecclesiastical space in which individuals' actions were not regulated by church authorities. When bishops like Augustine attempted to establish proper methods of veneration, they seem to have been met with some resistance, as boundaries were much more fluid in reality and many Christians sought to venerate martyrs by engaging in the same kind of commemorative activities that they always had performed. This study moves beyond the condemnations and the accounts of scandalous activity in order to find out what women were actually doing in the cult of martyrs and how that exploratory investigation can help uncover the lives of Christian women.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations of the names of periodicals and series follow *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*. Second Edition. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014.

ACW – Ancient Christian Writers

AHR – American Historical Review

ANF – Ante-Nicene Fathers

AThR – Anglican Theological Review

AugStud – Augustinian Studies

BA – Bibliothèque Augustienne

BTB – Biblical Theology Bulletin

CIL – Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum

CCSL – Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina

CSEL – Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum

FC – Fathers of the Church

GCS – Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte

HTR – Harvard Theological Review

HTS – Harvard Theological Studies

JECS – Journal of Early Christian Studies

JEH – Journal of Ecclesiastical History

JRS – Journal of Roman Studies

JSNT – Journal for the Study of the New Testament

LCL – Loeb Classical Library

LTQ – Lexington Theological Quarterly

MA – *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, 2 vols.

NPNF¹ – Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1

NPNF² – Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2

PG – *Patrologia Graeca*

PL – *Patrologia Latina*

PLS – A. Hamman, ed. *Patrologia Latinae Supplementum*, 5 vols. Paris, 1958-1974.

PTS – *Patristische Texte und Studien*

RAC – *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*

REAug – Revue des études augustiniennes

SC – *Sources chrétiennes*

TU - *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristliche Literatur*

VC – *Vigiliae Christianae*

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Abbreviations of the titles of Latin sources follow Albert Blaise and Henri Chirat, *Dictionnaire Latin-français des auteurs chrétiens*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1954; titles of Greek patristic texts follow G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961. Full publication information is not given for editions that have appeared in the most common series: CSEL, CCSL, PL, PLS, PG, and SC.

Ambrose

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- *Virg.*
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Anonymous Authors

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Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani. In Herbert Musurillo, ed. *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.
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Passio sanctae ac beatissimae Salsae virginis et martyris Christi, quae passa est sub die VI nonas Maias. In Anna Maria Piredda, *Passio Sanctae Salsae: Testo critic con introduzione e traduzione italiana*. Sassari: Edizioni Gallizzi, 2002.
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- *Vita Melaniae Iunioris* (SC 90)

Augustine of Hippo

- *Civ.*
De civitate dei (CCSL 47, 48)
- *Conf.*
Confessiones (CCSL 27)
- *Cur.*
De cura pro mortuis gerenda (CSEL 41)
- *Faust.*
Contra Faustum Manichaeum (CSEL 25.1)
- *Ep.*
Epistulae (CSEL 34, 44, 57, 58, 88)
- *Mon.*
De opere monachorum (CSEL 41)
- *Psal.*
Enarrationes in psalmos (CCSL 38-40)
- *Ser.*
Sermones (CCSL 41; PL 38, 39; PLS 2; MA 1, 2; REAug 38)
- *Virgin.*
De sancta Virginitate (CSEL 41)

Clement of Alexandria

- *Paed.*
Paedagogus (SC 70, 108, 158)
- *Str.*
Stromateis (GCS 2)

Cyprian of Carthage

- *Ep.*
Epistulae (CCSL 3B, 3C)
- *Laps.*
De lapsis (CCSL 3)
- *Unit. eccl.*
De ecclesiae catholicae unitate (CCSL 3)

Egeria

- *Itinerarium Egeriae* (SC 21)

Eusebius

- *H.e.* (GCS 37)
Historia ecclesiastica

Gregory of Nazianzus

- *Or.*
Orationes (PG 35)

Gregory of Nyssa

- *V. Macr.*
De vita Macrinae (PG 46)

Ignatius of Antioch

- *Rom.*
Epistula ad Romanos (SC 10)

Jerome

- *Ep.*
Epistulae (CSEL 54-56.2)
- *Vigil.*
Adversus Vigilantium (CCSL 79C)

Justin Martyr

- *2 Apol.*
2 Apologia (PTS 38)

Minucius Felix

- *Oct.*
Octavius (CSEL 2)

Optatus of Milevis

- *Contra Parm.*
Contra Parmenianum Donatistam (CSEL 26)

Pseudo-Augustine

- *Sobr.*
De sobrietate et castitate

Quodvultdeus of Carthage

- *De tempore barbarico* (CCSL 60)

Sozomen

- *H.e.*
Historia ecclesiastica (SC 306, 418, 495, 516)

Tertullian

- *An.*
De anima (CCSL 2)
- *Apol.*
Apologeticus (CCSL 1)
- *Bapt.*
De baptismo (CCSL 1)
- *Cor.*
De corona militis (CCSL 2)
- *Exh. cast.*
De exhortatione castitatis (CCSL 2)
- *Ieiun.*
De ieiunio adversus psychicos (CCSL 2)
- *Marc.*
Adversus Marcionem (CCSL 1)
- *Mart.*
Ad martyras (CCSL 1)
- *Nat.*
Ad nationes (CCSL 1)
- *Res.*
De resurrectione carnis (CCSL 2)
- *Scap.*
Ad Scapulam (CCSL 2)
- *Spect.*
De spectaculis (CCSL 1)
- *Test.*
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- *Ux.*
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- *Virg.*
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