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VIBIA PERPETUA'S DIARY: A WOMAN'S WRITING IN A ROMAN TEXT OF ITS
OWN

by
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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2004

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2009

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ABSTRACT

Writing the history of women in antiquity is hindered by the lack of written sources by them. It has been the norm to assume that the only sources that can tell us something about them are the sources written by men. This thesis challenges this convention as it concerns the social history of Rome through the exploration of a written source by a woman named Vibia Perpetua. She was a Roman woman of twenty-two years from Roman Carthage, who was martyred on March 7, 203 C.E. The reason that we know of this Roman woman and what happened to her is because of the diary she wrote. The diary survived because it was preserved in the martyrology *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. The *Passio* which was edited by an unknown redactor, documents the martyrdom of several people. Unlike any other martyrologies the editor of the story included the actual diary as it was written by Vibia Perpetua. Although we have a Roman woman's writing from the second/early third century C.E, her diary reached us through a filter that has influenced up to this day the way that the text is interpreted and preserved. The intention of this thesis is threefold; to analyze the diary of Vibia Perpetua with a new focus on the discourse of Roman women by first exploring the history of the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis*. Then, a method is formulated that makes use of contemporary studies on women's diaries and self-representation in texts in order to incorporate Perpetua's writing within the social history of Rome and the history of women more broadly. The study concludes by demonstrating how this diary can help to open a new dialog about the life of both women and men in antiquity and further question the history we have inherited from them.

To my parents
Mary and Manuel
thank you for giving me
my wings

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This M.A. thesis began its life in a research seminar on Roman woman conducted under Dr. Jonathan S. Perry in the spring of 2005. My first thanks go to him for encouraging me to pursue my research on the topic. My gratitude for the final product goes to my committee Dr. Connie Lester and Dr. Ezekiel Walker, thank you for your helpful comments and your direction. My biggest gratitude and thanks go to my advisor Dr. Peter L. Larson, thank you for all your advising, encouragement, the due dates, for keeping me in track, for your corrections and comments on my multiple drafts, but mostly for guiding me to the finish line. The responsibility for any errors is mine.

I had the opportunity to present my research at two conferences. Thank you to the 7th Southern Conference on Women's History for giving me the opportunity to present my initial study. Thanks in particular to my commentator Dr. Janet T. Sorrentino. After this, I had the pleasure of presenting my research at the 14th Berkshire Conference on the History of Women. I would like to thank my commentator Dr. Alison Keith, I also thank Dr. Kristina Milnor for her comments. While at this conference, I had the opportunity to visit the Special Collections and Rare Books Library at the University of Minnesota, particular thanks go to Tim Johnson for giving me access to the first edition of the *Passio*, and to Lynnette Westerlund for showing me some of the treasure of the James Ford Bell Library. On the late stages of my thesis research I had the opportunity to meet with Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano, I thank them both for their conversation with me about Perpetua.

At times, the researching and writing of my thesis seemed to be perpetual, but that was alleviated by my friends and colleagues. I thank all of my friends for their encouragements. I thank in particular my dear friend Patricia (Mrs. Greige) for her valuable friendship through the years. Thank you all for your help in this journey.

This work and this journey would not have seen the light of day if it were not for my family. Their support, encouragement, and advice kept me going. I am greatly indebted to my sister Clarissa (my rock) for her time, advice, and courage that have kept me going, thank you also to my sister Vanessa not just reading a draft of my work, but for indulging me on talks about women's history, and to my sister Marissa, thank you for reminding me about the important things. My brothers also played a role, thank you Emmanuel for your support and help, thank you Immanuel and Lysander for your help when called upon. Woofers and the gang thank you for your unconditional love. Finally, I owe everything to my parents, Mary and Manuel, for giving me such a wonderful support system (*mea familia*).

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Written with her own hand and in her own words.

Passio, II.¹

Women's history has advanced in the past forty years or so, given the wide spectrum of scholarly studies available in the subject.² Scholars have broadened the understanding of women's lives through the exploration of different sources, from literary to cultural material.³ In the study of more recent centuries these are more easily available, since we have more access to women's literary works, and personal writings such as diaries and letters. However, when investigating the more distant past of women, little if anything is said to have survived from their direct hands. This of course has its consequence, as Sarah B. Pomeroy observes, "it is most significant to note the consistency with which some attitudes toward women and the roles women play in Western Society have endured through the centuries."⁴ Pomeroy's book *Goddesses, Wives, Whores, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* had a wide impact on the study of women in Classical Studies and Ancient History.⁵ For the first time, a scholar explored the life of women in antiquity through a feminist perspective that questioned the way that women's lives were understood and explored at the time. Pomeroy questioned

¹ *Passio*, 2, W. H. Shewring, *The Passion of Ss. Perpetua and Felicity Mm: A New Edition and Translation of the Latin Text Together with the Sermon of S. Augustine Upon These Saints Now First Translated into English* by W.H. Shewring, Fascimile ed. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931), p. 24.

² See Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History: Revised Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) chapter on "Women's History."

³ For more on this see Ruth Rosen, "Sexism in History or, Writing Women's History is a Tricky Business," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 33, no. 3 (1971). and Honor R. Sachs, "Reconstructing a Life: The Archival Challenges of Women's History," *Library Trends* 56, no. 3 (2008).

⁴ Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), p. xvii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, First published in 1975.

what seemed to be obvious: “what women were doing while men were active in all the areas traditionally emphasized by classical scholars.”⁶ But what seems more troubling when investigating the lives of women from antiquity is that all the sources that have survived come from men.⁷ As noted by scholars, for example, the evidence that we have about Roman women is, if anything, biased.⁸ As such, scholars of Roman history, especially social historians, and scholars of women’s history are always left to wonder, as M.I. Finley put it best: “what the women would have said had they been allowed to speak for themselves.”⁹ This is one of the focuses of this thesis: to explore what would the women of the Roman world would have said if giving the chance to be heard, because of a surviving source. This thesis focuses on such discourse by exploring the diary of the Christian martyr Vibia Perpetua. By an exploration of the diary of Vibia Perpetua historians, at least, are able to hear what a woman had to say about herself and her Roman society.

Vibia Perpetua was martyred on March 7, 203 C.E. She was a Roman woman of twenty-two years from Roman Carthage. She was “of good family, recently married, and well educated with an infant son at her breast.”¹⁰ The reason that we know of this Roman woman and what happened to her is because of the diary that she wrote. However, the diary survived to this day because it was preserved within the Christian literature and most importantly in the document known as the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetuae*

⁶ Ibid., p. xiv.

⁷ Pomeroy, Goddesses and M. I. Finley, "The Silent Women of Rome," in *Aspects of Antiquity: Discoveries and Controversies* (New York: The Viking Press, 1969).

⁸ Pomeroy, p. xv, and Finley, pp. 129-130.

⁹ Finley, p. 130.

¹⁰ *Passio 2*. Shewring, *The Passion of Ss. Perpetua and Felicity Mm: A New Edition and Translation of the Latin Text Together with the Sermon of S. Augustine Upon These Saints Now First Translated into English by W.H. Shewring*, p. 23.

et Felicitatis (Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity).¹¹ The *Passio*, which is narrated by an unknown redactor, documents the martyrdom of several people. However, unlike any other martyrologies, the redactor or editor of the story includes the diary of Vibia Perpetua which tells us of her last days before her execution “as she left it written with her own hand and in her own words.”¹² As a consequence, although we have a Roman woman’s writing, her diary has come to us through a filter that influenced up to this day the way that the text is interpreted and preserved.

Problem and Questions

The diary of Vibia Perpetua is one of the earliest firsthand accounts of a martyrdom ever preserved.¹³ As such, the document is especially important in the history of the early Christian Church. It helps to shed light on the way that Christianity developed and spread through the Roman community of northern Africa.¹⁴ The document is a great resource for the understanding of the Christian world of the late second century/early third century C.E. as much as it is a great source of information about Roman women of the era. However, not much scholarly work focuses on the Roman woman’s writing found in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. Vibia

¹¹ Lucas Holstenius, ed., *Passio Sanctarum Matyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (Romae: Typis Iacobi Dragonelli, 1663) also see for an example of the literature: Augustine of Hippo sermons 280, 281, 282, which he preached the day of their feast. W.H. Shewring, *The Passion of Ss. Perpetua and Felicity Mm: A New Edition and Translation of the Latin Text Together with the Sermon of S. Augustine Upon These Saints Now First Translated into English by W.H. Shewring*, trans. W. H. Shewring, fascimile ed. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931), p. xxix.

¹² *Passio* 2, trans. Shewring.

¹³ Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. xxv. Also, Heidi Vierow, "Feminine and Masculine Voices in the Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas," *Latomus* 58, no. 3 (1999), p. 601.

¹⁴ See, 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), and J. B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

Perpetua's writing has been categorized as a diary; nonetheless, it has never been studied or explored through the theories or explanations of women's personal writings and diary writing.

The diary of Vibia Perpetua contains her personal views of her family relations—especially of interest are the dialogues that she describes between her father and herself—and her description of four dreams that she had while in prison. But most importantly, we find a self-reflection of a Roman woman of the late second/early third century C.E. This gives social historians a chance to evaluate the classical world through a woman's perspective. For example, she wrote:

A few days later the rumour ran that our hearing would take place. My father came over from the city worn out with exhaustion, and he went up to me in order to deflect me, saying: 'My daughter, have pity on my white hairs! Show some compassion to your father if I deserve to be called father by you. If with these hands I have helped you to the flower of your youth, if I favoured you beyond all your brothers – do not bring me into disgrace in all men's eyes! Look at your brothers, look at your mother and your aunt – look at your son, who won't be able to live if you die. Don't flaunt your insistence, or you'll destroy us all: for if anything happens to you, none of us will ever be able to speak freely and openly again.'¹⁵

Not only do we hear a woman's voice, but for the first time we have a woman quoting what a man said; this is rare—even for other periods—and gives the opportunity to not only study women and men in a new light but to study their gender relation through a female writing. Nonetheless, this presents a challenge. The diary of Vibia Perpetua is unique in that it is the only surviving document of its kind that has survived to this date. There are no other diaries written by men or women from this period making her diary a

¹⁵ As translated by Peter Dronke in *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (D. 203) to Marguerite Porete (D. 1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 3.

unique source, but harder to explore. By identifying the diary within the genre of women's diary and writing, we can incorporate a new methodology to explore it and bring out a new insight of Roman's society at the time.

The diary of Vibia Perpetua raises questions and assumptions we have of both men and women in the past. However, a reading of the diary of Vibia Perpetua sheds light on our understanding of the conditions of women in Roman society. An analysis of her diary questions notions we have about men and women living in Roman society. Further, her diary opens a dialog about a Roman woman and her family relations. Another interesting aspect of her diary is the ability it has in helping to add to the discourse of women and the law of Rome. Moreover, through the diary we can hear a political voice of a woman. However, the explorations of such statements bring with them problems. First, we have to explore the writing of Vibia Perpetua as it was preserved in *Passio*. This brings to view some problems we have when investigating this piece of writing. The diary preserved in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* might not necessary be Vibia Perpetua's complete diary but part of a longer diary kept by her. This bring to our attention that maybe women in Roman society kept diaries. However, not having other diaries written by men or women we can only speculate that it might have been a practice kept by some women. This leave us with questions like: were women encouraged to keep diaries and why? Were these diaries kept for family members to read, a woman's children for example, in case she died before her children? Where are these diaries? Second, besides her writing, we could question the reasons and the way that her diary survived to this day.

Methodology

This thesis is centered on a specific text of the year 203 C.E. and its history thereafter. The intention is threefold, to analyze the diary of Vibia Perpetua with a new focus on the discourse of Roman women by first exploring the history of the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis*, then by formulating a method to explore the diary of Vibia Perpetua to help incorporate her writing within the social history of Rome and the history of women. Attention will be paid to women's diary studies and theories through an interdisciplinary approach. The ultimate goal of the study is to explore the text of the diary of Vibia Perpetua, what has been written about it, how it survived, and explores other ways of using the text to shed light in the life of both women and men in antiquity and further question the history we have inherited from them.

Historiography: Roman Women, the Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis, and the Diary of Vibia Perpetua

In the past forty years, the studies of Roman women have tried to bring out from the shadows the other half that composed Roman society. The historiography centers on the roles women played in society; lacking direct sources from them, they are explored through their relationship within the family, law, culture, and society. The early works, especially works like Sarah B. Pomeroy's, were general studies that tried to supplement and expand the study of women in antiquity.¹⁶ Subsequently this gave rise to the study of Roman women; nonetheless, most works concentrated on the role and relationship

¹⁶ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. Eva Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity with a Foreword by Mary R. Lefkowitz*, trans. Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: John Hopkins Universtiy Press, 1987).

between the women and their family.¹⁷ Once again lacking direct sources from women, scholars turned to what they hoped would be less biased sources than literature: to legal documents—concentrating on marriage, property, and inheritance laws.¹⁸ Though much of these works brought to light a new discourse on women and Roman society, by the end of the 1990s, scholar Suzanne Dixon was once more questioning the sources and the way in which they are read and explored.¹⁹ Dixon argues that:

*all ancient texts—broadly defined—need to be read in new ways; that the genre of the texts determines what it treats, how it treats it and what it leaves out; and that each text is designed to project ideology (e.g. of proper womanly behavior) rather than circumstantial information about any given woman, even when it purports to record a specific, historicized woman.*²⁰

Once again, by the end of the twentieth century scholars of Roman women were questioning the sources. How could scholars explore Roman women's lives when all the sources, supposedly, come from men? When all the sources that we inherited seem to make women invisible at the same time that they made them visible; how do we read the silence of women?

In answering these questions and more, by turning to the historiography of the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (henceforth: *Passio*) and within it the diary of Vibia Perpetua scholars have an opportunity to break a trend on the study of Roman women and the way sources are read and explored. The historiography of the

¹⁷ Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), Judith P. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law & Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*.

¹⁹ Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women: Sources, Genres and Real Life* (London: Duckworth, 2001).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

Passio in the past twentieth century is broad; mostly, the work is mentioned within books related to the early history of the Christian Church.²¹ The other historiographical tradition is the editing of the text, and providing new philological approaches to the text—a scholarly tradition since its rediscovery in the seventeenth century. In the twentieth century, the study of psychology provided a new way for scholars to study the dreams/visions found in the diary of Vibia Perpetua. This in turn, has become part of the way that the diary is interpreted. Although these are not just the only way that the text and diary of Vibia Perpetua have been explored, they are at the root of how the diary is analyzed.

One of the earliest works that concentrated in the diary of Vibia Perpetua and not just in the *Passio* is *The Passion of Perpetua: A Psychological Interpretation of Her Visions*, a 1949 work of Marie-Louise von Franz, a Jungian scholar.²² Her study takes on the visions/dreams of Vibia Perpetua while attempting to give a psychological interpretation of her visions/dreams in relation to what we can learn about the foundation of the Christian dogma.²³ Though only concentrating on the visions/dreams of the diary of Perpetua, von Franz's work made an impact on the way that the diary of Vibia Perpetua could be explored through psychological studies, since later studies look are her work when explaining the visions/dreams of Perpetua.

Mary R. Lefkowitz takes a psychological approach in her study on women martyrs.²⁴ Lefkowitz's study, written in 1976, explores the diary of Vibia Perpetua to see

²¹ For example see, Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine*, pp.47-52, and Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), pp. 33-36.

²² Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Passion of Perpetua*, ed. Daryl Sharp (Toronto: Inner City, 2004).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9, 10.

²⁴ Mary R. Lefkowitz, "The Motivations for St. Perpetua's Martyrdom," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no. 3 (1976): pp. 417-21.

what led Christian martyrs to separate from their families in contrast to pagan martyrs who died for their families.²⁵ The way that Lefkowitz analyzed Perpetua and her motivation is through a psychological understanding of incest. Lefkowitz concludes by pointing out that the early Church provided women an escape from “the hierarchical structure imposed by patriarchal society, which the church in its own organization would increasingly incorporate and emulate.”²⁶ Outside from this parameter, Lefkowitz does not explore the diary of Perpetua. Instead, the focus is on psychological motivations in relation to sexuality.

Robert Rousselle continues this trend with his study, “The Dreams of Vibia Perpetua: Analysis of a Female Christian Martyr.”²⁷ Rousselle argues that Perpetua’s diary is little “studied for its psychological content.”²⁸ He gives credit to the studies of von Franz and Lefkowitz, but unlike the von Franz and Lefkowitz studies, Rousselle analyzed the visions/dreams of Vibia Perpetua through Freudianism psychoanalysis. His psychoanalytical interpretation focuses on a patriarchal mode, in which all the symbols in the dreams are replaced by male categories, for example Rousselle notes, “[t]he huge bronze ladder would represent Daddy’s huge phallus, while the serpent and the many metal weapons attached to the ladder represent all other men, in accordance with the well-known identification Big Man (Daddy)=all men.”²⁹ In his psychoanalytical

²⁵ Ibid., p. 418. Lefkowitz writes, “There is a distinctive emphasis in stories of Christian women’s martyrdom on separation from the family and on death as means to life. Pagan women martyrs were celebrated by their contemporaries for their defiance on tyranny and loyalty to their husbands and courage in the face of death,” p. 418.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 421.

²⁷ Robert Rousselle, “The Dreams of Vibia Perpetua: Analysis of a Female Christian Martyr,” *The Journal of Psychohistory* 14 (1987): pp. 193-206.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 194.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 197.

examination he come to the conclusion that “A psychoanalysis of her dreams show Perpetua to be a deeply troubled, neurotic young woman.”³⁰

The discourse continues on Vibia Perpetua and her dreams in 1994. Patricia Cox Miller in her book *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in Imagination of a Culture* devotes a chapter titled “Perpetua and her Diary of Dreams.”³¹ Miller in this book focuses on the Mediterranean culture at large and tries to find a better understanding of that culture by looking at what dreams can reveal about their culture. She notes, “[t]his book focuses on a type of imagination that was deeply embedded in the culture at large; from my perspective, all of the people who tapped the resources of the imaginal forms of dreams can be viewed as ordinary people going about the ordinary business of trying to understand themselves and their world.”³² In her study of Perpetua Miller’s main argument is that Perpetua’s “dreams have been construed as texts that mirror theological ideas and cultural praxis; curiously, their function as *oneiric* experiences—that is, as expressions of transformations of self-identity and deepened self –consciousness—has been largely neglected.”³³ She further argues that her reading on Perpetua is not on a Christian *woman*, but on a *Christian* woman. In so doing, Miller explores the patriarchal influences that overshadow the diary of Perpetua. To explore this she uses the scholarship of French feminist scholars Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray to broaden the discourse of the text of Perpetua; adding to that discourse the way that Tertullian, that is, his theology, constricted the feminine voice.³⁴ By examining the dreams/visions this

³⁰ Ibid., p. 204.

³¹ Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). “Perpetua and her Diary of Dreams,” pp. 148-183.

³² Ibid., p. 12.

³³ Ibid., p. 151.

³⁴ Ibid., p.166, and 169-172.

way, Miller concludes that Perpetua's dream show how in a male dominated society and doctrine, a female identity was kept in her discourse and that what prevailed was a female identity and a woman's voice.³⁵

While, psychological studies gave an insight into the visions/dreams written by Vibia Perpetua, however, her diary is also explored in light of other information. During the 1970s and later the *Passio* and subsequently the diary of Vibia Perpetua began to attract attention by different scholars in different disciplines. The works of Rosemary Rader, "The Martyrdom of Perpetua: A Protest Account of Third-Century Christianity," and Mary Rossi, "The Passion of Perpetua, Everywoman of Late Antiquity" are examples of studies that centered in the early Christian Church and the participation of women.³⁶ Rader's argument questions what the diary of Perpetua can tell us about the participation of men and women in the early Christian church. Her main argument is that the early Christian Church provided a gateway that influenced a change in the oppression of social norms.³⁷ She concludes that the later Christian church denied women's participation in the hierarchy of the church.³⁸ In Rossi's article, she takes on the diary of Perpetua to propose a feminist focus to help explain the tensions between Christians and pagans and the probability that the tension was intensified by gender polarities.³⁹ Rossi explores such tensions through E.R. Dodd's hypothesis of misery and mysticism; re-examining

³⁵ Ibid., p. 183.

³⁶ Rosemary Rader, "The Martyrdom of Perpetua: A Protest Account of Third-Century Christianity," in *A Lost Tradition: Women Writers of the Early Church*, ed. Patricia Wilson-Kastner (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), Mary Rossi, "The Passion of Perpetua, Everywoman of Late Antiquity," in *Pagan and Christian Anxiety; a Response to E.R. Dodds* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

³⁷ Rader, pp. 7-8.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁹ Rossi, p. 53.

previous psychological studies on the diary of Vibia Perpetua. Rossi's purpose is to try to shed light on the writing of Vibia Perpetua for further studies.

Apart from the study of women and early Christianity, some scholars have put their attention on what the *Passio* can tell us about education in Rome. Lacking written sources from Roman women, scholars have questioned the degree of education they received.⁴⁰ Paul McKechnie in "St. Perpetua and Roman Education in A.D. 200," examines the *Passio* and the writing of Perpetua in opposition to the idea that Perpetua was just simply writing a 'prison diary.'⁴¹ McKechnie notes that the majority of the studies done on the diary of Vibia Perpetua concentrate on psychological works; instead he focuses his attention on the kind of writing she left behind and the educational system of Rome.⁴² He argues that "she wasn't just keeping a private notebook, but that she was writing with a view to the eventual production of something very like the document we read now."⁴³ In the article, McKechnie explores the type of education available in Rome at the time of Perpetua. Using the diary of Perpetua as a case study, he investigates the kind of education that was available at the time to both pagan and Christian, concluding that the early Church's influence on secular education is evident in Perpetua's writing.⁴⁴

Studies continue to concentrate on both the *Passio* and the diary of Vibia Perpetua. The work of Brent D. Shaw examines the *Passio* and its relation and influence

⁴⁰ See, Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, pp. 170-176.

⁴¹ Paul McKechnie, "St. Perpetua and Roman Education in A.D. 200," *L'Antiquité Classique* 63 (1994): 279-91.

⁴² See also, Amparo Pedregal Rodríguez, "Educación Para La Sumisión: La Educación Erudita y el Ascetismo Femenino en el Cristianismo Primitivo (Siglos III-IV D. C.)," in *Bien Enseñada: La Formación Femenina en Roma y el Occidente Romanizado*, ed. Virginia Alfano Bech and Rosa Francia Somalo (Malaga: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Malaga, 2001).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁴⁴ McKechnie, p. 291.

to the treatment of the life and writing of Vibia Perpetua in “The Passion of Perpetua.”⁴⁵ In the article, Shaw tries to shed light on the diary of Vibia Perpetua, a source which he regards as a rarity and a great opportunity for the historian, by showing how her diary was ‘bracketed’ within male voices with the purpose “to demonstrate the modes by which this unmediated self-perception, her reality, was subsequently appropriated by a male editor, and then greatly distorted by subsequent male interpreters.”⁴⁶ Shaw first analyzed the story of the *Passio* within the conflicts of Roman authority and early Christians. Then, he analyzed the writing of the redactor, and Augustine of Hippo paying attention to the way that they interpreted and presented the writing of Vibia Perpetua and how that has influenced the way that her text is studied. Such bracketing of her diary, Shaw concludes, gave little possibility of her diary to be seen.

Heidi Vierow, in “Feminine and Masculine Voices in the *Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*,” explores a similar argument.⁴⁷ Vierow like Shaw focuses on the way that the diary was framed within an anonymous editor that influenced how her text is to be read and interpreted. However, unlike Shaw, Vierow questions the complete authorship of the text, analyzing different ways the text as a whole or as separate sections can be read and what it can tell us about the authorships of the text.⁴⁸ Vierow shows how different readings of the text question the different authors presented in the *Passio* by pointing out the gender difference between Perpetua’s diary and the redactor’s and Satorius’ writings. Nonetheless, though a thoroughly examination of the different voices

⁴⁵ Brent D. Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua," *Past and Present* 139 (1993): pp.3-45.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁷ Vierow, "Feminine and Masculine Voices in the Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas.": pp. 600-19

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 602-603.

found in the text, Vierow concludes by questioning the authenticity and authors of the whole *Passio* and asking for further study before it can be taken at face value.

An important study that joins the Roman world and Christianity, and the only in-depth book that concentrates on Vibia Perpetua, is Joyce E. Salisbury *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman*.⁴⁹ According to the author, “This book studies the interaction between martyrdom and memory, both the memory of martyrdom and the memories that the martyrs brought to the moment of their brave death. It is a story of the confrontation of ideas as well as people.”⁵⁰ Salisbury notes, “I wanted to try to understand the mentality that would allow someone to walk confidently into an arena knowing that he or she would die violently.”⁵¹ She tries to understand this through the story of Perpetua by exploring the environment that brought her up and the influences that her environment had on her and in the decision that she made in becoming a martyr. Nevertheless, to accomplish this she first presents the history in which Perpetua might have grown up, and the contemporary issues that surrounded her community. The author lets us know that “[t]his book explores this conflict of ideas in the life of one individual. It further considers the power of the idea of this young woman whom we have remembered for so long.”⁵² She explores the story of Perpetua by using Perpetua’s diary and the *Passio*. She also used other written primary documents, for example, Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*, to show Perpetua’s acculturation, and Tertullian and Augustine of Hippo to show how her story was later transformed.⁵³

⁴⁹ Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵³ On the way that the text was later interpreted by Christians see pp. 155-179.

Although studies on the *Passio* and the diary of Vibia Perpetua seem exhausting, still by the twentieth first century there were unanswered questions brought forth by the uniqueness of the text. Jan N. Bremmer in “Perpetua and Her Diary: Authenticity, Family, and Visions” reexamines the scholarship on the *Passio* and the diary of Perpetua.⁵⁴ He pays especial attention to the way that the genre of *Acta martyrum* are understood and study by scholars, following that by looking at the authenticity and tradition of the text, and finally by looking at Perpetua, her family and visions.⁵⁵ While discussing the authenticity and tradition of the text, Bremmer analyzes previous scholarship which fails to discuss fully the text original language.⁵⁶ The text of the *Passio* until the nineteenth century was only known in Latin, but in the same century a Greek text was discovered.⁵⁷ Since then, scholars have questioned the language in which the *Passio* and the diary of Vibia Perpetua was originally produced. When turning to his discussion on Perpetua and her family Bremmer once more pays attention to the neglect of scholars on the text, noting “[i]n this respect *Perpetua* [the *Passio*] is a unique, often neglected, piece of evidence in the study of family life in the Roman Empire.”⁵⁸ In the analysis of the relationship between Perpetua and her family Bremmer concludes, “One thing seems now clear: Perpetua had grown up in a perfectly average Roman elite

⁵⁴ Jan N. Bremmer, "Perpetua and Her Diary: Authenticity, Family, and Visions," *Martyrer und Martyrerakten* (2002):77-120.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81-82.

⁵⁷ For more on the discovery and controversy see James Rendel and Seth K. Gifford Harris, *The Acts of the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas: The Original Greek Text Now First Edited from a Ms. In the Library of the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem* (London: C.J. Clay and Sons, 1890)., and J. Armitage Robison, *The Passion of S. Perpetua: Newly Edited from the Mss. With an Introduction and Notes Together with an Appendix Containing the Original Latin Text of the Scillitan Martyrdom, Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1891; reprint, 2004).

⁵⁸ Bremmer, p. 88.

family.”⁵⁹ In the section of Perpetua’s visions, Bremmer discusses the scholarship and the way scholars have interpreted and treated her visions. He critiques the works of Miller and Habermehl, noting that they are the latest to discuss Perpetua’s vision, and notes still the need for further understanding of her visions.⁶⁰ Instead of following psychological works, Bremmer analyzes Perpetua’s vision in a Christian context, that is, comparing her visions with the early Christian literature and other martyrs stories.⁶¹ By examining where the recent scholarship of the *Passio* and Perpetua, Bremmer comes to the conclusion:

Christian literature has all too long been neglected by classicists and ancient historians, due to the unfortunate opinions of leading lights in England and, especially, in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. Our observations have indicated that in this field there is still much to be done. One century later, it is time to make a new beginning.⁶²

Bremmer not only brings attention to the neglect of the study of the *Passio*, but also to exclusion of Christian documents in the study as a whole of antiquity.

As mentioned above, the scholarship of the *Passio* is broad, these articles and book are just examples that show where the scholarship is and the problems they faced. One of the problems the study of Vibia Perpetua’s diary has is the classification of the genre in which martyrologies are studied. Another problem that is yet to be explored in full is how to read a woman’s source by not overshadowing it with men’s sources that might relate the ancient world through a different perspective than that of a woman. How

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶⁰ For the discussion of Miller see chapter 8 in Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁶¹ Bremmer, p. 97-119.

⁶² Ibid., p. 120.

do we bring to light such a document that has survived through one perspective? How did it survive and why? The writing of a woman from the Roman world survived, there is no doubt about it. Perpetua was not a poetess, a philosopher, or a political commentator, she was a Christian. How and why her text might have survived is a reasonable question to explore not just to bring to light the textual history of the text, but to explore why other texts by women might have been lost to time. Turning to chapter two, an exploration of the history of the text as it was known and how it came to light, especially, in the world of academia in the modern world. This will be done by looking at the different editions of the text of the *Passio* with an emphasis to the first edition of the text first published in the seventeenth century and its editor Lucas Holstenius. Subsequently, going back and forth to other sources we have, of interest are the sermons of Augustine of Hippo, which document the diary of Vibia Perpetua and helps to reflect her historicity.

CHAPTER TWO: A TEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE PASSIO SANCTARUM MARTYRUM PERPETUA ET FELICITATIS: THE REDISCOVERY OF A TEXT

The story of the text known as the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis* has a long history. The story was preserved through the ecclesiastical tradition of sermons and record keeping of the martyrs or saints. The earliest record that directly discussed the story of Perpetua and her fellow martyrs are the sermons of Augustine of Hippo (St. Augustine). Somehow, by the time of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), their story as it was recorded in the text combining the diary of Vibia Perpetua, Saturus, and the redactor survived as an important event in the history of the new religion. How the whole text survived after the time of St. Augustine is not too clear. Evidence shows that the story of these martyrs reached the high middle ages. However, the story of these martyrs reached the middle ages through fragmentary information, that is, the story as it was originally recorded was not known. Moreover, it was because of the Church's interest in finding and correcting their history in the sixteenth century which gave rise to a need of finding and exploring the sources. It was because of this that during the early modern period, manuscripts were rediscovered which contained the whole martyrology of these martyrs, in which Vibia Perpetua's diary is found. The first rediscovery was by Lucas Holstenius around the middle of the seventeenth century. His rediscovery produced the first book edition of the *Passio* martyrology. His finding brought a new understanding of the early Christian Latin Church that particularly influenced, until the

late nineteenth century, the study of the *Passio*.⁶³ Tracing its textual history and its first editor shows how the diary of this Roman woman known as Vibia Perpetua has been mostly contextualized within the history of Christianity and not studied much outside of it. Finding and studying the first sources of the *Passio* helps to open a new way of understanding the woman's source found within the *Passio*.

The Roman Martyrology

Recorded in the sixteenth century in the *Roman Martyrology* is the day commemorating the martyrs of the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetua et Felicitatis*. From this source, we can perceive the way in which the story of Perpetua and her fellow martyrs was presented to the public. But, it also presents a reason why the story was important enough to be remembered in the first place. The day preserved to them as the day of their martyrdom was the 7th of March, as such on that day the following was remembered and read in the churches. As written down in the 1627 English translation of the *Roman Martyrology*, the day commemorated them in the following way:

In the monastery called *Fossa-Noua* neere vnto Terracina of S. Thomas of Aquin Cofessour and Doctour, of the Order of S. Dominicke, renowned for holynes of life, and profound knowledge in diuinity. At *Tuburbum* in *Mauritania* the birth-day of the holy Martyrs *Perpetua* and *Felicitas*, the last of whome (as S. *Augustine* recordeth,) being great with child, and her execucion, according to the laws, differed vntill the was deliuered, whilft the was yet in trauell, & in payne therof, was greatly comforred in being cast vnto the wylde beasts to be deuoured. There suffered also with them

⁶³ Alfonso Mirto, ed., *Lucas Holstenius e la Corte Medicea : Carteggio (1629-1660)* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1999), p. 20.

Reuocatus, Saturninus, and Secundolus, of which the last dyed in pryson, but the rest, vnder *Seuerus* the Emperour, were also cast vnto the beasts.⁶⁴

This entry into the *Roman Martyrology* is one of the first encounters a person had with the story of the martyrs. It also highlights what was known about these martyrs of North Africa. But most importantly it shows the place and name of a Church father that was associated with the transmission of their martyrology. The name of St. Augustine and his record of the martyrs becomes part of a reason the story is told and how it is remembered. The recording of the name of St. Augustine gave the scholar of the high middle ages and before a record, not just of time, of how old the story was, but on where the story was recorded, most probably. The mentioning of St. Augustine is important also because it helps, not just the authenticity of the original text of the *Passio*, what it includes and does not includes as part of the story, but the importance that such text had within his congregation. The above entry also helps to show what part of the story of Perpetua and Felicity was most popular before or by the sixteenth century.

The *Roman Martyrology* played an important part in the rediscovery of the text of the *Passio*. The *Roman Martyrology* follows the Gregorian calendar which documents the feast days of the saints and martyrs.⁶⁵ In 1584, Cardinal Cesare Baronius revised and corrected the *Roman Martyrology* under Pope Gregory XIII. Around this time, as is evident in the life of Baronius, Church scholars were returning to the manuscripts to

⁶⁴ Catholic Church, *The Roman Martyrologe According to the Reformed Calendar Faithfully Translated out of Latin into English*, by G.K. Of the Society of Iesus. (Saint-Omer: Imprinted with licence at the English College Press, 1627), pp. 71-72.

⁶⁵ Charles G. Herbermann and et al., *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: The Universal Knowledge Foundation, Inc., 1910), p. 741.

revise or double check the Church's history.⁶⁶ The Church was looking to correct its history, according to Pullapilly, "[r]evision of the *Martyrology* was largely a historical task. What the commission had to do was weed out the mythological and unhistorical saints from the existing *Martyrology* and provide more complete information about the lives of the later saints."⁶⁷ It is because of this revision of Church history, especially as done by Baronius that in the middle of the 1600s a scholar's attention was taken by the manuscript of where the text of the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis* was found. Lucas Holstenius is responsible for the rediscovery and the first edition of the *Passio* of Perpetua. How and why did he care to edit the text might be explained through a view at his life and work.

Lucas Holstenius and his Rediscovery

Lucas Holstenius in today's scholarship is known as a great scholar of the seventeenth century.⁶⁸ He was the librarian of Cardinal Francesco Barberini, subsequently becoming the Vatican librarian.⁶⁹ He was responsible for finding, collecting, and editing thousands of manuscripts and books for both Barberini's library and the Vatican's library, while also collecting book for himself.⁷⁰ Lucas Holstenius was

⁶⁶ Amabel Kerr, *The Life of Cesare Cardinal Baronius of the Roman Oratory* (London: Art and Book Company, 1898), p. 26-27. See also, Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, second ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 156-157.

⁶⁷ Cyriac K. Pullapilly, *Caesar Baronius: Counter-Reformation Historian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 38.

⁶⁸ Alfredo Serrai, *La Biblioteca di Lucas Holstenius* (Udine: Forum, 2000), p. 9. See also, Mirto, ed., *Lucas Holstenius e la Corte Medicea : Carteggio (1629-1660)*, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Serrai, *La Biblioteca di Lucas Holstenius*, p. 12. Although known mostly for his position as librarian for both Cardinal Barberini and the Vatican, a position of much diplomacy, he also was the librarian and advisor of Queen Christina of Sweden who converted in 1655.

⁷⁰ P. J. A. N. Rietbergen, "Lucas Holstenius (1596-1661), Seventeenth-Century Scholar, Librarian and Book-Collector. A Preliminary Note," *Quaerendo* 17 (1987): p. 206. Also, E. Sastre Santos, "Un Memorial de Lucas Holstenius Sobre la Propagacion de la Fe," *Euntes docete* 35 (1982): p. 508.

born in Hamburg in 1596 to Lutheran parents.⁷¹ In 1616, he was sent to the University of Leyden where he became acquainted with the most famous scholars of his time.⁷² In 1617 through 1618, he accompanied Philip Cluver (1580-1622), geographer and humanist, through a long trip around Italy.⁷³ This would not be his last trip while attending the University of Leyden; he traveled to other European cities among them were London and Oxford where he did researched at the Bodleian Library.⁷⁴ Soon after his visit to England, in 1624 he went to Paris. At some time between his traveling from the University of Leyden and his trip to England, Holstenius was “attracted to the ideas and ideals of St. Augustine, and contemplated conversion to Roman Catholicism.”⁷⁵ It was during his trip to Paris in 1624, according to Sastre in his article “Un Memorial de Lucas Holstenius Sobre la Propagacion de la Fe,” that Sirmondus and Petavius recorded Holstenius’ conversion to Catholicism.⁷⁶ While working in Paris he was recommended to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, who sometime later, around 1626, asked Holstenius to become his secretary and librarian.⁷⁷

⁷¹ F.J.M Blom, "Lucas Holstenius (1596-1661) and England," in *Studies in Seventeenth-Century English Literature, History, and Bibliography : Festschrift for Professor T.A. Birrell on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. G. A. M. Janssens and Flor Aarts (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1984), p. 25.

⁷² Rietbergen, p. 206. See also, Alfonso Mirto, ed., *Lucas Holstenius e la Corte Medicea : Carteggio (1629-1660)*, p. 8-14.

⁷³ Blom, p. 26-27.

⁷⁴ Sastre Santos, p. 508-509, Blom, p. 27, and Mirto, who presents more details on the trips undertaken by Holstenius p. 9.

⁷⁵ Rietbergen, p. 206. See also Mirto, who adds about Holstenius’s trip to Paris: “At the end of the same year we find him in Paris in order to continue in the library of that city those explorations initiated beyond [Manca]; also he was attracted to the works of St. Augustine, the which readings, perhaps, made him to complete the big step in his conversion to Catholicism.” (“*Alla fine dello stesso anno lo troviamo a Parigi per proseguire nelle biblioteche di questa citta quelle esplorazioni iniziate oltre Manica; fu anche attratto dalle operi di Sant’ Agostino, la cui lettura, forse, gli fece compiere il gran passo della conversione al cattolicesimo.*”) p. 9. All the translations of the Italian and Latin in this Chapter are done by Dr. Peter L. Larson, otherwise noted.

⁷⁶ Sastre Santo, p. 509.

⁷⁷ Rietbergen, p. 207.

Lucas Holstenius's scholarly interests laid in correcting or editing various topics that attracted his attention. Most of his scholarly works, especially his editions of manuscripts, were not published by him.⁷⁸ In his early career, Holstenius was interested in classical Greek geography; his interest focused on writing an edition on the less known Greek geographers, this research took him to England.⁷⁹ Later on his interest seemed to shift to the history of the Church, at which point he was already working under Cardinal Francesco Barberini, who sent Holstenius to various places to research and find books and manuscripts for his library. It was during one of these trips that Holstenius found the manuscript of the text of the *Passio* of Perpetua, thus rediscovering the whole text of the *Passio* and the complete story of Perpetua and her fellow martyrs.

In 1637, Holstenius visited the library of Monte Cassino, in which he found to his surprise, "such a pasture for my curiosity," as he wrote in a letter addressed to Cardinal Barberini.⁸⁰ In Monte Cassino he found a series of martyrologies, one of them was the martyrology of the *Passio Sancturum Perpetua et Felicitatis* "which enabled him to refute Baronius' famous *martyrologium* on some essential points."⁸¹ In the meantime, he was doing research on the lives of the popes. One of his better-known works, which

⁷⁸ Mirto, p. 20.

⁷⁹ Blom, "Lucas Holstenius (1596-1661) and England": p. 27.

⁸⁰ ("*Tanta pasture per la curiosita mia.*") Mirto, p. 20, note, 55.

⁸¹ Rietbergen, p. 209. Also see Mirto, "In his travel, an important stage was Monte Cassino, where there was an occasion to visit the famous library of the monastery; here he found very rare documents about the Council of Chalcedon, which permitted him to correct numerous current erudite opinions. A series of martyrologies was found, among which were those of saints Felicity and Perpetua, which [??] a way to refute the theses supported by Baroni on some essential points; at the same time, he was going around collecting materials on the lives of the popes for a future publication that unfortunately never saw the light." ("*Durante il suo peregrinare, tappa importante fu Montecassino, dove ebbe l'occasione di visitare la famosa biblioteca del monastero; qui trovo documenti rarissimi riguardanti il Concilio di Calcedonia, che gli permisero di correggere numerose opinioni erudite correnti. Scopri una serie di martirologi, fra i quali quelli di Santa Felicità e di Santa Perpetua, che gli dettero modo di confutare le tesi sostenute dal Baronio su alcuni punti essenziali; contemporaneamente andava raccogliendo materiale intorno alla vita dei papi per una futura pubblicazione che purtroppo non vide mai la luce.*") p. 20.

relates to the popes' history, is his edition of the *Liber diurnus Romanorum Pontificum*.⁸² Most importantly, many of his unfinished editions were published after his death in 1661.⁸³ The publications of most of his unfinished works were done by his friends/colleagues who valued Holstenius' friendship and position through the years.⁸⁴ One such unfinished work was his edition of the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis*, which was published two years after his death.

Holstenius's posthumous edition of the *Passio* of Perpetua was published in 1663. The edition of the manuscript found by him in Monte Cassino was completed; however, what it lacks was his view and the intention or purpose he wanted his readership to obtain from such work. As such, the edition was published with his notes on the text of the *Passio* of Perpetua and with his research on the text. This is most valuable information, for it gives us an opportunity to know how the *Passio* of Perpetua was known by 1637. However, and most importantly to note, is that he had been working on the text of the martyrology of Perpetua and others for some time before his death.⁸⁵ The publication of the *Passio S. Bonifatii: Martyris Romani* includes Holstenius' *Annotata Marginalia ad Martyrologium Romanum Em. Card. Baronij*, where he corrected Baronius' *Roman Martyrology* with the help of information found in the manuscripts of Monte Cassino. What is interesting about Holstenius's correction is his use of the text of the *Passio* of

⁸² Mirto, p. 20 and Rietbergen, p. 209.

⁸³ Rietbergen, p. 209.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 209, Rietbergen writes, "[Holstenius] contacts in high places and his own position enabled him to be of help to many, and thus make a great number of friends" p. 209.

⁸⁵ Serrai writes, "The letter of Francesco Maria Fiorentini, of January 29 1658, discusses questions relative to the Martyrologium Romanum of Baronius, and, in particular it stopped on the life of some martyrs, which the same were received from an ancient African codex, but which [] came to light only after his death." ("*La lettera a Francesco Maria Fiorentini, del 29 gennaio 1658, discute di questioni relative al Martyrologium Romanum del Baronio, e, in particolare si sofferma sulle vite di alcuni martiri, che lui stesso aveva ricopiato da un antichissimo codice africano, ma che sarebbero venute in luce soltanto dopo la sua morte.*") p. 62.

Perpetua. In his introduction to his critical notes he comments on St. Augustine and what he added to the *Passio*.⁸⁶ However, what is of most interest in this study is Holstenius' acknowledgement of the information that he found in the writings of the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis*, information that was not known before his finding, and his acknowledgment of his discovery:

The sign/record of these martyrs exists, a very ancient and beautiful record/memorial of the African Church, which having discovered in the library of Montecassino, I brought forth.⁸⁷

This shows that before the discovery that the story of the martyrology of Perpetua was mostly known, if not all together, through the sermons of St. Augustine. From Holstenius' notes we can see how the writings of St. Augustine provided the earliest direct record of the story of Perpetua and her fellow martyrs. Holstenius traced the Christian tradition of the text in his notes citing all the sermons of St. Augustine in which the text of *Perpetua et Felicitatis* is mentioned.⁸⁸ As shown above in the English translation of the *Roman Martyrology*, St. Augustine's name became adhered to the story of Perpetua. One could say that St. Augustine's writings on St. Perpetua are the major reason why this Roman woman was not completely erased from history.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

⁸⁷ Lucas Holstenius, ed., *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (Romae: Typis Iacobi Dragondelli, 1663), ("Extat insignium harum Martyrum, antiquissimum & pulcherrimum Africanæ Ecclesiae monumentum, quod in Casinensis Monasterij Bibliotheca repertum edidi." p. 57) Lucas Holstenius' corrections on the *Roman Martyrology* can be found on pp. 39-57.

⁸⁸ Lucas Holstenius, ed., *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (Romae: Typis Iacobi Dragondelli, 1663), pp. 39-57.

Holstenius and St. Augustine

From St. Augustine, as noted by Holstenius, we have three major sermons dedicated to Sts. Perpetua and Felicity in the day of their feast.⁸⁹ The first sermon of St. Augustine dedicated to these saints is important because it shows how the story was known by his time. It also helps to explain how much was directly known from the text of the martyrs, especially how much was known from the diary of Perpetua. St. Augustine opens the sermon with:

To-day with its anniversary and return calleth into our mind, and in a manner setteth anew before us, that day whereon the blessed servants of God, Perpetua and Felicity, being adorned with the crowns of martyrdom, did achieve the flower of perpetual felicity; bearing in the battle the name of Christ, and in the prize of battle finding their own.⁹⁰

He continues with the following, which is most important because it let us know how his public knew the story of Perpetua and her fellow martyrs:

Their exhortations in the heavenly visions, and the triumphs of their passion, we heard when they were read to us; and all these, set out and made clear with the light of words, we have received with our ears, pondered with our minds, honoured with ceremonies of religion, praised with charity.⁹¹

Through the praise of St. Augustine we can infer some important clues about the transmission of the story and the text's history. First, he let us know that the text of the *Passio* was read aloud; this is important to point out because it provides us with a clue

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 39- 56. And for more on the known sermons dedicated to Perpetua and Felicity see W. H. Shewring, *The Passion of Ss. Perpetua and Felicity Mm: A New Edition and Translation of the Latin Text Together with the Sermon of S. Augustine Upon These Saints Now First Translated into English by W.H. Shewring*, Fascimile ed. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931), p. xxix-xxx.

⁹⁰ Shewring, p. 45.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 45.

that points to a textual tradition and not an oral transmission of the story and text. Moreover, we can infer that there was a factual text that recorded the martyrs' story and that the writing of Perpetua made an impact in the community of northern Africa. Another important reference that St. Augustine made in this sermon was the following:

The dragon therefore was trodden down by the chaste foot and victorious tread of the blessed Perpetua, when that upward ladder was shown her whereby she should go to God; and the head of the ancient serpent, which to her that fell was a stone of stumbling, was made a step unto her that rose.⁹²

In this part St. Augustine paraphrases the words written down by Perpetua in her diary. This part of the story is not mentioned in any of the *Roman Martyrology* editions found by Lucas Holstenius.⁹³ The finding of the complete record of the text provided Holstenius with the writing of Vibia Perpetua who recorded her visions/dreams that she had while in prison. Without the original text it would have not been known that what St. Augustine wrote about are part of the actual diary of Vibia Perpetua. St. Augustine refers to the first vision/dream recorded by Perpetua which is worth quoting part of it is:

I saw a bronze ladder, marvelously long, reaching as far as heaven, and narrow too [...]. And beneath the ladder lurked a serpent of wondrous size, who laid ambushes for those mounting, making them terrified of the ascent. But Saturus climbed up first (...). And he reached the top of the ladder, and turned and said to me: 'Perpetua, I'm waiting for you – but watch out that the serpent doesn't bite you!' And I said: 'He won't hurt me, in Christ's name!' And under that ladder, almost, it seemed, afraid of me, the serpent slowly thrust out its head – and, if I were treading on the first rung, I trod on it, and I climbed.⁹⁴

⁹² Shewring, p. 46.

⁹³ Holstenius, ed., *Passio Sanctarum Matyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, pp. 59-61.

⁹⁴ Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (D. 203) to Marguerite Porete (D. 1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 2.

The words: “And under that ladder, almost, it seemed, afraid of me, the serpent slowly thrust out its head – and, if I were treading on the first rung, I trod on it, and I climbed,” are clearly paraphrased by St. Augustine in his sermons.⁹⁵ The sermons of St. Augustine and the rediscovery of the complete text of the *Passio* provided Lucas Holstenius with an opportunity to clarify the story and *history* of this martyrology. As we can see, Augustine incorporated part of Perpetua’s diary into his sermon. This add to the possibility that St. Augustine had a copy of the original martyrology. Subsequently, Holstenius’s interest in the history of the martyrologies provided not just a discovery of forgotten information, but concrete and important evidence to the scholar studying the Latin Church. Not only did the manuscript helped to add to the history of the Church in Africa, but to the history of the early Christians.

After Holstenius’ Edition

The publication of Lucas Holstenius’ *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis* in 1663 introduced a scholarly tradition of editions on the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis*. Soon after the first published Holstenius edition, in 1668, Ioannes Bollandus and Godefridus Henschenius, published an edition that seems to follow the edition of Holstenius.⁹⁶ What they add to their edition is more commentary on the history of the martyrs. This was followed by an edition published anonymously in Oxford in 1680 titled *Lucii Caecilli Firmiani Lactantii de Mortibus Persecutorum Liber*:

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹⁶ Ioannes Bollandus and Godefridus Henschenius, *Acta Sanctorum Martii a Ioanne Bollando S.I. Colligi Feliciter Coepta. A Godefrido Henschenio Et Daniele Papebrochio Eiusdem Societatis Iesu Aucta, Digesta Et Illustrata. Tomvs I. Cui Præmittitur Tractatus De Vita, Virtutibus Et Operibus Ioannis Bollandi, Arduo Labori Glorioso Immortui Subiunguntur Συναξάριον Basily Imper. Et Acta Græca Ad Octo Primos, Qui Hic Continentur, Dies Pertinentia.* (Antwerp: Iacobus Meursius, 1668).

*Accesserunt Passiones SS. Perpetuae & Felicitatis, S. Maximiliani, S. Felicis.*⁹⁷ An important aspect of this edition is its use of another manuscript which also contained the complete martyrology of Sts. Perpetua and Felicity. This edition, unlike the previous ones, was written using MS. Sarisburiensis in addition to the manuscript found by Lucas Holstenius in Monte Cassino. The claim of using another manuscript opened the possibilities of finding a better or intact manuscript that recorded in more details the whole narrative story of the text. This tradition of writing new editions with 'newfound' information was followed through the nineteenth century, which created a new debate on the study of the text of the *Passio*.

In the 1890s, the scholarship on the text of the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* becomes concentrated with a controversy of a Greek manuscript found in 1889 at the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem by Professor James Rendel Harris. Soon after the discovery, Professor Harris with Seth K. Gifford published *The Acts of the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas: The Original Greek Text Now First Edited from a MS. in the Library of the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem* in which they edited the complete newly discovered Greek text.⁹⁸

This discovery by Harris brought with it a debate on the original language in which the text of the *Passio* was first composed.⁹⁹ In their introductory pages, Harris and Gifford claimed the originality of the Greek text against the known Latin versions:

⁹⁷ *Lucii Caecilii Firmiani Lactantii De Mortibus Persecutorum Liber: Accesserunt Passiones Ss. Perpetuae & Felicitatis, S. Maximiliani, S. Felicis*, (Oxonii: E Theatro Sheldoniano, 1680). This edition unlike the previous ones was composed using the MS. Sarisburiensis.

⁹⁸ James Rendel Harris and Seth K. Gifford, *The Acts of the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas: The Original Greek Text Now First Edited from a Ms. In the Library of the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem* (London: C.J. Clay and Sons, 1890).

⁹⁹ The debate between in which language was the *Passio* produced seems to be brought out first by B. Aubé, "Les Actes Des Ss. Felicite, Perpétue et de Luers Compagnons," in *Les Chrétiens Dans L'empire Romain, de la Fin des Antonins Au Milieu Du Iiie Siècle (180-249)* (Paris: Didier et cie, 1881). This

These Acts have long been current in a Latin dress, but their language was often so obscure that it was not easy to extract a satisfactory meaning from the text, and there were many transliterated Greek words in their pages which must have seemed to scholars as not sufficiently accounted for by the fact that North Africa at the end of the second century was bilingual or rather trilingual, and that of the languages spoken and written the Greek was perhaps as much the accepted speech as either the Latin or the Punic.¹⁰⁰

Harris and Gifford have two objectives in this edition. One is to argue for the authenticity of the Greek text found in the *Lives of the Saints* in the library of the Patriarch of Jerusalem. The second is to promote more Patristic scholarship on the text, if they failed to persuade such scholars in their argument, as Harris writes:

At the present is sufficient to say that whether the Greek version be the primary or secondary fountain of the text, it is of such value for the understanding of it and for the clearing of its obscurities, that the welcome which it will meet from Patristic scholars will be sure to outweigh any blame that may attach to our unworthy presentation of it.¹⁰¹

The scholarship of Harris and Gifford not only questioned the original language of the text, but this also brought a new discourse which questioned who was/were the author/s of the text and the authenticity of each section of the text.

In 1891, soon after the publication by Harris and Gifford, J. Armitage Robinson published his reaction to their finding in *The Passion of S. Perpetua: Newly Edited from the MSS. with an Introduction and Notes Together with an Appendix Containing the*

argument still holds strong in today's scholarship, even though most scholars agree that the text was composed in Latin and not in Greek. See for example: Jan N. Bremmer, "The Motivation of Martyrs: Perpetua and the Palestinians," in *Religion in Cultural Discourse: Essays in Honor of Hans G. Kippenberg on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 535-536.

¹⁰⁰ Harris and Gifford, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Harris and Gifford, p. 1.

Original Latin Text of the Scillitan Martyrdom.¹⁰² In the book, Robison's focus is in proving the validity of the Latin against the Greek text, in addition to providing more information about the authors and authenticity of the Latin text of the *Passio*.¹⁰³ Robison starts by criticizing previous theory of scholars who presupposed the text to have been written in Greek and not Latin, and the publishing of the Greek text.¹⁰⁴ Robison stressed the importance of the document and its textual history.¹⁰⁵ Because of the questioning of the Latin text, Robison traces the history of the editions since Lucas Holstenius and the MSS where the text was preserved.¹⁰⁶

Robison furthers his study by trying to distinguishes the different written styles found in the text of the *Passio Sanctaru Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis* of each author

¹⁰² J. Armitage Robison, *The Passion of S. Perpetua: Newly Edited from the Mss. With and Introduction and Notes Together with an Appendix Containing the Original Latin Text of the Scillitan Martyrdom, Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1891; reprint, 2004).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Moreover, Robison provides the reader with the different manuscripts available of the text of what has become known as the *Passion of Sts. Perpetua and Felicity* in his section titled "The MSS. of the Passion of S. Perpetua." He first point to the Codex Casinensis (A), (the text discovered by Holstenius) and describes it, putting attention to say that "The Martyrdom has no title, but commences at once with the words: Si uetera fidei exempla: this is the only authority for the important opening section." The MS. comes from an eleventh century MS. of Cyprian and it is written in a twelve century hand. Then explores Codex Compendiense (B), which according to him, is the MS. in which Ruinart based his edition. He writes that the text "is assigned to the 10th century. Our Passion commences on f. 64 with the words: INCIPIT PASSIO SCAE FELICITATIS ET PERPETUAE. Reuocatus et felicitas conserua eius. Thus the prefatory section is missing: and, generally speaking, the condition of the test is far inferior to that of the Codex Casinensis." The last Latin manuscript he investigates is Codex Saisburgensis, or Sarisburiensis (C). Robison let us know that he was not able to find this MS., though it was one of the MS. used by Ruinart. He concludes, "The MSS. of the Domkapitel at Salzburg have been dispersed; and most of them seem to have gone to Vienna or to Munich. In neither place could I find any trace of this codex, nor was it to be found in the Peterstift at Salzburg." To help clarify the locality of this MS. Robinson turns to the 1680 Oxford edition published under an anonymous author. In this edition, he notes that a MS. called Codex Sarisburiensis is used to add to Holstenius' edition. However, even with this information, Robinson cannot conclude of its existence although "these suffice to give us a fair conception of the MS., and to shew its close relation to Codex Compendiense." Finally, he addresses the Greek version (g), which discovery is credited to Mr. Rendel Harris from whom he gathered the Greek edition and notes, although he writes that "I have not however fully recorded its numerous blunders." With all of the MSS. mentioned, Robinson investigates the differences encounter within each text, giving him an opportunity to explore the textual history of each. However, he comes to the conclusion that the best and most complete of the manuscript is that found at Monte Cassino: Codex Casinensis (A), pp., 10-12.

by looking at the way they composed their writings, meaning the kind of words and phrases and their usage employed by each author. By making a philological observation of the whole text he does something that previous scholars had not done. For example, by paying attention to the different sections and authors that make up the martyrology known as the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis*, he notes that unlike the writing of the redactor, who opens and narrates the story of the martyrs, and a vision/dream written down by Saturus, one of the martyrs, the writings found in the diary of Vibia Perpetua are “for the most part, admit of the same explanation: and accordingly we are justified in reckoning them as evidence of individuality of style in her portion of the narrative.”¹⁰⁷ He also makes a distinction between the martyrs’ and the redactor’s style of writing by pointing to the “extreme simplicity” employed by them, and though the redactor’s beauty lies in simplicity it does not lack eloquence and “is full of epigram and chastened rhetorical contrast.”¹⁰⁸ Although it is not Robison’s intention to point to the writing of Perpetua the woman, by separating and providing evidence of different styles found in the whole of the text, this provides an authenticity to each of the writers found in the text of the *Passio*.

As Harrison and Gifford contributed to the scholarship of the text by questioning the language in which it was first produced, Robinson’s contribution brought to the discourse a questioning of who the redactor of the text is: who seems to have been the one that preserved the text in the first place and who narrates the ordeal of the martyrs.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

By comparing the redactor's writings to that of Tertullian, he brings up the possibility that the redactor was Tertullian.¹⁰⁹

The questioning of the redactor of the *Passio* was something new in the discussion of the authenticity of the text by the end of the nineteenth century. However, the name of Tertullian has been part of the text since Holstenius' rediscovery. In Holstenius' research, we find a chronological order of the history of where the names *Perpetua* and *Felicity* were mentioned. The first entry that he has was Tertullian's *Libro de Anima, Cap. LV, or On the Treatise of the Soul*, where the name of a martyr named *Perpetua* appears:

How is it, then that the region of Paradise, which as revealed to John in the Spirit lay under the altar, displays no other souls as in it besides the souls of the martyrs? How is it that most heroic martyr Perpetua on the day of her passion saw only her fellow-martyrs there, in the revelation which she received of Paradise, if it were not that the sword which guarded the entrance permitted none to go in thereat, except those who had died in Christ and not in Adam? A new death for God, even the extraordinary one for Christ, is admitted into the reception[.].¹¹⁰

Of all of Tertullian's works, the name *Perpetua* is only mentioned in this part of *De Anima*. Unlike St. Augustine's sermons, where the names of Perpetua and Felicity are mentioned together, reference is made only to Perpetua. Tertullian's work did not escape the attention of Holstenius. A look at his posthumous notes makes known a complete study about Tertullian and the martyrologies of Africa.¹¹¹ The key to Tertullian's writing and the martyrology of Perpetua is that Tertullian is said to have been a contemporary of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 57.

¹¹⁰ Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, trans. Peter Holmes (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 101. See Holstenius's notes in *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, p. 38.

¹¹¹ Holstenius, pp. 79-177. These Holstenius note deserved a study of itself. The notes seem to be a critical analysis of the works of Tertullian in connection to the known Roman martyrologies in connection to what was known about the Church in Africa.

Perpetua.¹¹² Tertullian, scholars wrote, “may be said to have made Christian Latinity; it came from his hands rough-hewn, needing to be shaped and polished by later workers, but destined never to lose the general character which he had impressed upon it. He did more; he laid the foundation of Latin Christianity.”¹¹³ What is interesting, for the purpose of this thesis is that in the age of Lucas Holstenius the martyrology and the writing of Perpetua were sources that added to the writings of Tertullian. However, Tertullian lived around 160-220 C.E., around the same time as Vibia Perpetua in Carthage. Even though scholars because of the close proximity of each other believe that Tertullian could have been the redactor of the martyrology, the entry in the *Anima* points to another direction. It points to the fact that the diary of Perpetua was the text that was known by his time, and it was only known through the story of Perpetua, in other words, the writing of Perpetua was the only important source known for a group of martyrs that died in Carthage. Her diary then, at some time later, becomes part of the edited edition of someone’s else work, who added the story and names of the other martyrs.

The Passio and Vibia Perpetua’s Diary

There is no doubt that the finding of a source that added to the history of the early Latin Church was something that deserved much attention, however, Latin Christianity, the early Church Fathers, and the history of early Christianity overshadows the history of the Vibia Perpetua, the Roman woman’s writing. However, the diary of Vibia Perpetua cannot be addressed unless it is known where her writing was preserved and why her

¹¹² Tertullian c. 160-c.220, in Laurie Guy, *Introducing Early Christianity: A Topical Survey of Its Life, Beliefs, and Practices* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 303.

¹¹³ T.R. Glover, quoting H.b. Swete’ *Patristic Study*, in Tertullian, *Apology, De Spectaculis*, trans. T.R. Glover (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. ix.

writing survived to this day. The contextualization of the writing of Vibia Perpetua not only happened in the studies of the early modern period or in the writings of St. Augustine, but sometime before. Her writing is found within a work of an editor who added Perpetua's diary to his narration of a group of young martyrs who were executed because they refused to pay honor to the Roman emperor. However, the rediscovery in the seventeenth century not only helped to add to the story of this martyrology but it helped to clarify the whole story of these martyrs.

As pointed above, in the *Roman Martyrology* Perpetua is only mentioned by name and nothing is discussed about her unlike the martyr Felicity. Another early record of their martyrology and one that is not discussed by Holstenius nor by any other scholars is the book *Legenda Sanctorum* better known today as *The Golden Legend: Reading of the Saints*. It is a work that dates to the thirteenth century. Unlike the *Roman Martyrology*, Perpetua's story in the *Legend* follows her diary in some detail, although the attention of the entry is not on Perpetua or Felicity but more on the group of martyrs said to have followed Saturninus. In the *Golden Legend* the martyrs are introduced, after a paragraph dedicated to a martyr known as Saturninus in the following way:

There was another Saturninus, in Africa, the brother of Saint Satyrus, who suffered martyrdom with his brother, Revocatus, the latter's sister Felicity, and Perpetua, a woman of noble birth: their passion is commemorated at another time. Here we can say that when the proconsul told them to sacrifice to the idols and they refused, they were put in jail. Perpetua's father came running in tears to the prison and said: "Daughter, what have you done? You have brought dishonor on your family! No one of your lineage has ever been in jail!" When she told him that she was a Christian, he rushed at her and tried to gouge her eyes out, then went away shouting wrathfully.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ de Voragine; Ryan Jacobus, William Granger, ed., *The Golden Legend : Readings on the Saints*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 342-343. The passage of the *Golden Legend* is

Despite the fact that the *Legend* is not accurate in the information it provides, following the introduction of the martyrs it seemed, to paraphrase the first three sections of the diary of Perpetua. However, critically, without the rediscovery by Lucas Holstenius, it would have never been known that what Perpetua's father said was part of something that was written, very differently, by Vibia Perpetua.

From the writings of the *Roman Martyrology* which addressed Augustine's importance in the *Passio* of a group of martyrs, and the other earliest sources which addressed the martyrdom of Vibia Perpetua, we can see how a tradition that studied the text within the history of Christianity continued through the nineteenth century in the tradition of rediscovering manuscripts and publishing new editions. This type of scholarship frames the study of Vibia Perpetua within a discourse of Christianity. The analysis of the textual history of the *Passio* shows the history and sources for the transmission of a woman's text. Although, its authenticity and importance is known, it is mostly known as the writings of St. Perpetua and not Vibia Perpetua the Roman woman. It is her diary, what she can tell us beyond the 'Christian' world' of the late second century/early third century that is the importance of this study. Lucas Holstenius rediscovered part of the early Latin Church, but we are still to rediscovered the woman of this text. After establishing the history of the text, is time to see what the diary of Vibia Perpetua can showcase on women of Roman society. A discussion on women's self-representation in writing is the topic of the next chapter.

similar if not the same as what is known as the short Acts of Ss. Perpetua and Felicity, for more on the Acts see Robinson pp. 15-22.

CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN'S DIARIES AND VIBIA PERPETUA'S DIARY

The diary of Vibia Perpetua has been established as a document that is found within the text known as the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis*. The whole of the *Passio* is divided among the writing of three different authors: an unknown redactor who presents, narrates and edits the story (*Passio*, 1, 2, and 14-21), Vibia Perpetua's diary (*Passio*, 3-10), and Saturus' vision (*Passio*, 11-13).¹¹⁵ The whole of the text centers on the diary of Vibia Perpetua which the redactor introduced at the end of section 2 as "What follows here she shall tell herself; the whole order of her martyrdom as she left it written with her own hand and in her own words."¹¹⁶ Not only is the bulk of the text the diary of Perpetua, but the narrative story (*Passio*, 14-21) of the redactor centers on her. For example, the redactor ends the narrative of the martyrs with the death scene of Vibia Perpetua:

Perpetua, however, had yet to taste more pain. She screamed as she was struck on the bone; then she took the trembling hand of the young gladiator and guided it to her throat. It was as though so great a woman, feared as she was by the unclean spirit, could not be dispatched unless she herself were willing.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Brent D. Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua," *Past and Present* 139 (1993): p. 21, Heidi Vierow, "Feminine and Masculine Voices in the Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas," *Latomus* 58, no. 3 (1999): p. 604, and J. Armitage Robison, *The Passion of S. Perpetua: Newly Edited from the Mss. With an Introduction and Notes Together with an Appendix Containing the Original Latin Text of the Scillitan Martyrdom, Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1891; reprint, 2004), pp. 43-47.

¹¹⁶ W. H. Shewring, *The Passion of Ss. Perpetua and Felicity Mm: A New Edition and Translation of the Latin Text Together with the Sermon of S. Augustine Upon These Saints Now First Translated into English* by W.H. Shewring, Fascimile ed. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931), p. 24.

¹¹⁷ Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs: Introduction, Text and Translations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 131.

Why did the editor of the text decided to include the diary of Perpetua as she wrote it cannot be known, but because the editor decided to include it and tell her story and the story of the other martyrs is one reason her writing survived. The diary of Vibia Perpetua stands alone among other contemporary documents of its time, written by men or women, making it hard to investigate. Although labeled as a *diary* through the ages, the diary of Vibia Perpetua has never been fully explored, especially within studies on women's diary or women's self-representation in writing, e.g. memoirs or autobiographies. This chapter tries to illustrate a method in which to see the writing of Vibia Perpetua as found in the text of the *Passio*, to help highlight the woman's writing found in the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis*. An exploration through the literature of women's diary or women's self-representation in writing might help shed light on another way of using Vibia Perpetua's diary.

Vibia Perpetua's Diary

The few pages that makes up her diary (or the pages that made up the last pages of her diary) are filled with dialogs between Perpetua and her family—especially her father. The other strong point that comes across is the way that she explained and dealt with her decision of becoming a Christian and her knowledge of what that decision carried, most importantly the death sentence. Apart from what she writes—if we are only to read her diary—we know almost nothing about her. In her writing, she introduces her father, her baby son, one of her brothers, her mother, an aunt, and a deceased brother who died at the young age of seven, and a fellow Christian named Saturus. However, the redactor starts his introduction of Perpetua's diary in the following way:

A number of young catechumens were arrested, Revocatus and his fellow slave Felicitas, Saturninus and Secundulus, and with them Vibia Perpetua, a newly married women of good family and upbringing. Her mother and father were still alive and one of her two brothers was a catechumen like herself.¹¹⁸

The redactor is the only one who provides the name Vibia and her age, and the only who mentions that she was married, all the missing information that is not found in her writing. In a section of her diary, she refers to herself as Perpetua; however, from her writing we cannot infer her age nor her marital status. As it is the case, her diary provides much information, but it is fragmented in the sense that it does not inform an outside reader about all the details of her life beyond the perimeters of what is found in her diary. However, her diary is rich in informing us about other details of *a* woman's life in ancient Rome.

The detailed information that is found in the entries of the diary of Vibia Perpetua can be summarized as followed:

III, While under house arrest she has a dialog with her father, where she explains to her father why she cannot be called other than a Christian. Later baptized. Taken to prison, she first lets us know how she felt in the prison and her anxieties that she had about her baby. While in prison, her mother and brother visit, she charges her mother and brother with the care of her son. She is then given permission to have her son with her while in prison.

IV, Her brother asked her to ask for a vision/dream. Perpetua tells him that she will ask for a vision/dream. It follows her first vision, in which

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 109, section 2 of the *Passio*.

she sees a ladder and where she mentions Satorus. The interpretation of her dream and her response to her brother.

V, Second encounter with her father, where her father begs her to renounce her decision and to think about her family and of what will happen to them if she continues with her affirmed decision. She then tells us her response to her father and the way that she felt towards him.

VI, She is taken to trial and sentence is passed on her and others. Her father tries to persuade her by showing her baby boy and asking her to have pity on her son. She refused and she is sentenced to the beasts. Back in the prison she asks for her baby boy to be brought back to her. Her father refused to give him to her.

VII, A vision/dream of a brother named Dinocrates who had died when he was seven years old and her explanation of that vision/dream. She is moved to a military prison.

VIII, A second vision/dream of Dinocrates where she is relieved to see her brother happy.

IX, Visitors are allowed to see the prisoners and Perpetua's father comes to see her and begs her to reconsider. She refuses and laments her father's old age.

X, Last entry in the diary where she had a vision/dream that she was in the amphitheater and had a wrestling contest against an Egyptian. She is victorious and exits the amphitheater. She awakes and interprets her dream. End of her diary.

We can see from the entries of her diary that much of her writings focus on her last days before her execution. However, in between her confirmation as a Christian and the events that led to her execution there is a lot of information about Roman society at the time. As we saw in the previous chapter, the diary of Vibia Perpetua survived because of the importance it had on the Latin Church of Northern Africa. It was a document that by the time of St. Augustine was read aloud in the Churches of North Africa, to the point that St. Augustine wrote yearly sermons based on the story of the martyrs. A focus of this chapter is to extract, beyond Christianity, what the writing of Vibia Perpetua contains.

Women's Self-Representation in Writings

The diary of Vibia Perpetua so far has been contextualized within the study of the history of Christianity. The importance of her writing has been limited on what she can say about Christianity and the early Latin Church. Little attention has been put on the fact that it is a woman's writing from antiquity and most importantly on what she can tell us about the society of Rome from a woman's perspective (apart from what she can say about the early Christian Church). Nonetheless, her writing has been labeled unique and a rarity from antiquity.¹¹⁹ There are two views to the uniqueness of her diary. One that sees it as a strong and unique piece of writing from a woman in antiquity that could not be silenced, even though it was framed within male voices.¹²⁰ The other view is expressed by Heidi Vierow who questions the uniqueness of the text: “[a]lthough its

¹¹⁹ Brent D. Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua," *Past and Present* 139 (1993): p. 45. See also 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), pp. 49-52.

¹²⁰ Shaw, p. 45.

unique status as the only first-person narrative of a martyr and one told by a woman makes it a text which we would like to have, its very uniqueness should make us doubt its authenticity and its narrative manipulations.”¹²¹ One of the difficulties in believing its authenticity lies in the way her diary is read. If the diary is read within the text of the *Passio* her diary becomes part of the story told by the redactor; the rhetoric and persuasiveness of the redactor and the Church are highlighted. However, when her diary is read by itself it becomes another document. It becomes just simply a woman’s diary, one which is not too unique—in the sense that it shares similarities to other diaries if understood through the genre of women’s private writing.

Diary writing is hard to categorize or to explain within a literary genre; as Jennifer Sinor writes, “No one really seems to know for sure what to do with diaries—critically, practically, or aesthetically. Read them? Save them? Mine them? Enshrine them?”¹²² Not only that but the writing style might differ depending on the author. Further, to add to the problem is each diarist’s intention when writing his/her diary. Last is the final intention the diarist had after decease for his/her diary. The studies done on women’s diaries highlight the unique source of information there are, since their writing deals mostly with the private, domestic, and daily concern of females.¹²³

The literature on the study of diaries or autobiographies brings another problem to the study of women’s self-representation in writing. For example Estelle C. Jelinek in her study *The Tradition of Women’s Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* brings

¹²¹ Heidi Vierow, "Feminine and Masculine Voices in the Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas," *Latomus* 58, no. 3 (1999): p. 619.

¹²² Jennifer Sinor, *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing: Annie Ray's Diary* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), p. 28.

¹²³ The majority of the diaries studied concentrate on diaries of women written during the nineteenth century and twentieth century. One can argue this is because of the easy availability of the diaries, since some might have come to the scholar by way of their grandmothers, or great-grandmothers.

out how the field of autobiography studies, once recognized as a valuable field, was dominated by famous men's autobiographies and the view of male writers on autobiographical writings.¹²⁴ Not until recently have women's self-representations in writing been studied. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff bring the scholarship of women's diary up to date by broadening the study of the diary within the genre of autobiography and memoir. According to them, "Women's diaries deserve to be understood and appreciated within the broadest possible contexts of academic discourse, the daily lives of their readers and writers, and the history of written forms."¹²⁵ They let us know how diaries are a source that can be used by most disciplines in academia.¹²⁶ However, to read a diary we have to understand that a diary's "content is wide ranging yet patterned, and what is excluded is as important as what is included."¹²⁷ Furthermore, there are some questions that have to be addressed first before reading a diary; for example, Bunkers and Huff note that diaries challenge the notions we have between the private and public since diaries have been classified as private text.¹²⁸ Moreover, Bunkers and Huff bring to view a few questions that need to be asked when investigating diaries:

Who reads diaries? How are the interactions between reader and writer affected by the social and historical positions of both? How does the accessibility of the diary influence readability? Why might we choose to read texts that required extensive attention? What are the ways in which a reader of fragmentary and manuscript texts construct the self, the text and

¹²⁴ Estelle C. Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), p. 5.

¹²⁵ Suzann L. and Cynthia A. Huff Bunkers, ed., *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 1

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2

the social milieu? How do these interactions influence how we read other texts and our culture?¹²⁹

Questions like these can be applied to the study of the diary of Vibia Perpetua. In the case of Vibia Perpetua's diary, her diary was preserved within a document that documented the martyrdom of a group of Christians. If read through the story of the redactor, one could said of a reader and writer, her diary, especially her diary writing, becomes secondary in the story—as in the case of St. Augustine's sermons and in the later editions produced on the *Passio*. In addition, her diary has been preserved, one could say, within different cultures, and different views of Christianity. The separation of more than a millennium since it was first written also brings with it a certain difficulty when reading her diary.

Furthermore, the diary since it is a broad genre can be categorized within the genre of autobiography. For example to broaden the study of diaries, Bunkers and Huffs use the word "*autobiographics*," a term conjured and defined by Leigh Gilmore as "those elements of self-representation which are not bound by a philosophical definition of the self derived from Augustine, those elements that instead mark a location in a text where self-invention, self-discovery, and self-representation emerge within the technologies of autobiography."¹³⁰ Furthermore, Gilmore adds, "Autobiographics, as a description of self-representation and as a reading practice, is concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation."¹³¹ A

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹³⁰ Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographic: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation, Reading Women Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 42.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 42.

diary is not necessarily a daily observation of the daily life of a person but instead a self-representation or self-construction of the self within their daily life.

Women's Diary Writing: A Reflection on Perpetua's Diary

As noted above, diaries can vary in the type of genre a diarist choose to write. Rebecca Hogan in her study of "Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form," discussed the treatment of diary writing as a feminine form of writing by expanding the discussion of diary and autobiography. She provides different considerations when reading a diary, noting, "If we consider the diary from the point of view of the writer, we can see its ability to entertain multiple purposes and intentions, often contradictory. If we think about the diary in terms of the reader, we can see that it has a wide range of audiences on a continuum from a confidante for the private self to the wider audience of a published diary."¹³² One important element that Hogan brings in her study is the idea of a diary as a feminine form of writing. Hogan points out that it was in the late nineteenth century and twentieth century where the practice of writing diaries became to be seen as a feminine form of writing.¹³³ Another important element that Hogan brings to the study of diaries is the way that diaries are composed, she writes, "a diary is a text composed of 'fragments' which nevertheless flow continually through the days."¹³⁴ This is something that is seen in Perpetua's diary. In Perpetua's diary, she always mentions the passing of days: "Then, for the few days that I was without my father...,"¹³⁵ "After a few days we were taken to prison..."¹³⁶, "A few days later the

¹³² Rebecca Hogan, "Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form," *Prose Studies* 14 (1991), p. 97.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹³⁵ *Passio*, 3.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

rumour ran that our hearing would take place,”¹³⁷ “Another day, whilst we were eating our midday meal, we were suddenly taken away to the hearing, and arrived at the forum.”¹³⁸ It is clearly seen that the diary of Perpetua follows a distinctive category of diary writing.

Diaries are also concerned with the ‘I’, that is with the self. Hogan also brings this point in her study: “Since the diary records the thoughts and feelings of past selves and present self without necessarily privileging one voice or stage of life over the others, it crosses the boundaries between self and others.”¹³⁹ In the diary of Perpetua, we find four dreams/visions. They make up most of her diary entries. Her dreams/visions have been the part mostly studied by modern scholars, from the theories of Jung to Freud. Yet in her recording of her dreams/visions, Perpetua not only writes them down but she also interprets them. In the case of Perpetua, as Hogan has noted of women’s diaries, she might have simply been dealing with her past selves and her future self.

Hogan in her study also brings out the syntax used in women’s diaries. Using the idea developed by Racheal Blau DuPlessi on “radical parataxis,” Hogan concludes:

Grammatically, parataxis describes a sentence structure in which related clauses are placed in a series without the use of connecting words (I came, I saw, I conquered) or clauses related only by the coordinating conjunctions. In other words, there is no subordination to suggest that one idea or event is more important than another; the clauses are ‘equal’ in grammatical structure and rhetorical force.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ *Passio*, 5.

¹³⁸ *Passio*, 6. Of course we need to keep in mind in the case of Perpetua’s diary that there are no specific dates mentioned since time was recorded differently in Roman society.

¹³⁹ Hogan, p. 100.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

In the philological study of Perpetua's writing done by J. Armitage Robinson in 1891, he characterized Perpetua's writing as "simple."¹⁴¹ He compares the writing of the redactor and Saturus to that of Perpetua resolving that each had a different style of writing. In continuing with the simplicity of Perpetua's writing, he concludes it is "due to two principal causes: first the constant use of the simplest of conjunctions; and secondly the incessant repetition of the same words and phrases."¹⁴² He further adds, "The second peculiarity which we have noted in Perpetua's style is the repeated employment of the same words and phrases where a careful writer would have been at pains to vary his language."¹⁴³ The repetitiveness, or the "simple" style used by Perpetua does not necessarily indicate her writing abilities, but indicates the writing style of a diarist, that is, of someone writing and not necessarily putting too much attention on the prescribed syntax of writing. The 'simplicity' found in Vibia Perpetua's diary helps to point out that she was probably not writing with an audience in mind. Instead it shows that the first intention of the diary was to write for herself, her concern is in writing, we can say, as pointed by Hogan, in the self.

The simplicity of a diarist's writing can be seen in the case of Jane Briggs Smith Fiske, who wrote a diary from 1871-1910, where we find a different woman in her diary writing than the woman who wrote sophisticated letters to her future husband; as Molly McCarthy notes, "the letter writing and the diarist were two different women, one speaking openly and frankly as herself and the other following the dictates of a form that

¹⁴¹ J. Armitage Robinson, *The Passion of S. Perpetua: Newly Edited from the Mss. With an Introduction and Notes Together with an Appendix Containing the Original Latin Text of the Scillitan Martyrdom, Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1891; reprint, 2004), p. 44.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

controlled her speech.”¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, in the case of Vibia Perpetua we do not have another written source to see what kind of a writer she was beyond her diary writing, but looking as an example to the diary of Fiske we can understand how women reflected upon themselves in their diaries in opposition to the different writing styles they had. In addition, McCarthy notes that Fiske used her diary especially during hard times to “vent her feelings of loneliness and despair.”¹⁴⁵ Such writing might come across as simple since they are written under a stressful time. This can be seen in the diary writing of Perpetua, who was arrested and was sentenced to death; her writing probably reflects the loneliness and despair that she felt while in prison and with the knowledge that she was going to die a horrible death. For example, as Fiske writes in her diary “Lonely and homesick—homesick and lonely.”¹⁴⁶ The final days of life written down by Perpetua are filled with her anxieties, not just on herself, but her anxieties on her family and child, for example:

After a few days we were taken to prison, and I grew frightened, for I had never known such darkness. Oh grim day! – intense heat, because of the crowds, extortions by soldiers. Above all, I was tormented with anxiety there, on account of my child.¹⁴⁷

Following the genre of women’s diary, Perpetua’s diary reflects not just a simple writing style which it can be seen as a direct writing style, but reflects a use of writing as a way to deal with what is happening to her.

Another thing that needs to be kept in mind when reading women’s personal writings is what kind of information is provided and what information is not provided to

¹⁴⁴ Molly McCarthy, "A Pocketful of Days: Pocket Diaries and Daily Record Keeping among Nineteenth-Century New England Women," *New England Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (2000), p. 277.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁴⁶ Fiske, 25 June 1865. As quoted by McCarthy, p. 289.

¹⁴⁷ *Passio*, 3, (trans. Dronke, p. 3).

the outside reader, that is, the contents missing in their writing. McCarthy notes of the writing of Fiske that she was four months pregnant, and throughout the pregnancy she never wrote anything about it except for one entry, “My baby born!”¹⁴⁸ In the case of Vibia Perpetua, she never mentions any details of her husband, if we assume she was married; as the redactor claimed. Some scholars have speculated on her marriage status because of her lack of mentioning anything about a husband. Arguments of widowhood seem to be the accepted norm, since the redactor informs the reader that she was married when introducing her diary—though not even the redactor mentions any husband in the martyrology.¹⁴⁹ Other possibilities could be explored.

Jane H. Hunter, in her study of Victorian girls’ writings and the diary, first presents us with the popular image that represents Victorian American girls “as avid readers—of romances, biographies, histories, and serials.”¹⁵⁰ But, most importantly she highlights that “Victorian girls were also avid writers. They spent long hours at writing desks producing pages of letters, composing poetry, copying passages from literature, keeping all manner of diaries and journals.”¹⁵¹ Hunter most notably adds, “[t]he historical literature has been less attentive to the cultural significance of girls’ *writing*.”¹⁵² In this study, Hunter presents how diaries were an instrument where adolescent girls could open up without breaking away from family obligations, by finding a way to discover their inner-selves.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ McCarthy, p. 275.

¹⁴⁹ See Carolyn Osiek, "Perpetua's Husband," *Journal of Christian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2002): 287-290.

¹⁵⁰ Jane H. Hunter, "Inscribing the Self in the Heart of the Family: Diaries and Girlhood in Late-Victorian America," *American Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1992), p. 52.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

In the diary of Vibia Perpetua, we see a woman who seems to be in contradiction with herself at the beginning of her diary but by the end of her diary she seems to have come to an acceptance of what is going to happen to her and what she is going to do – as she writes, “And I knew I should have to fight not against wild beasts but against the Fiend; but I knew the victory would be mine.”¹⁵⁴ Hunter notes that “Girls’ diaries offered them a compromise, without breaking with families.”¹⁵⁵ In the case of Vibia Perpetua, it seems that she used her diary to break away from her family. As Hunter adds, “[Diaries] sometimes served as surrogate battlefields upon which girls struggle to blend family expectation with personal impulse.”¹⁵⁶ Diary writing becomes a tool that girls could use to deal with their obligations.

One of the most interesting and vivid parts of the diary of Vibia Perpetua is the way that she presents her father. For example in section III:

Then my father, angry at this word, bore down on me as if he would pluck out my eyes. But he only fumed, and went away, defeated, along with the devil’s sophistries. Then, for the few days that I was without my father, I gave thanks to God – I felt relieved at his not being there.

The image that Perpetua presents of her father evokes an image of an angry man who does not see reason. In the nineteenth-century diaries of girls, we see a similar expression of girls challenging their fathers. For example, Mary Thomas wrote in her diary about her father:

If I ever have to work for my living, I think I will give lessons in Calysthenics [sic]... I wonder what Papa would say, if I was to read him this part of my Journal, he would feel like shaking me, he has so much

¹⁵⁴ *Passio*, 9, (trans. Dronke, p. 4).

¹⁵⁵ Hunter, p. 58.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

pride, he could never bear to see his daughter teach and right there were he is so well known and everyone thinks he is so well off too.¹⁵⁷

Something to note about Perpetua and Mary Thomas is how they expressed their feeling of their fathers' disapproval. As far as we can assume, we do not know if their fathers knew what the daughter at times thought about their fathers. For example in the case of Perpetua, she points several times to her father's old age: in section VI she writes, "Spare your father's old age" and she adds, "that's how I mourned for his pitiful old age" and finally in section IX, "I ached of his unhappy old age."¹⁵⁸ We can see this as a disapproval of Perpetua towards her father, a way of her challenging her father's authority. "With private diaries, girls could have it both ways—retaining the protected status of obedient daughters at the same time that they caved out a measure of imaginative independence"¹⁵⁹ noted Hunter. This "imaginative independence" might be what Vibia Perpetua expressed in her visions/dreams. It is through these visions/dreams that Perpetua can acknowledge her authority towards her decisions and herself, even though she is aware that her family is against her wishes. The Victorian girls' diaries provides an opportunity to see how diaries were used. So far, what we can see is that as in Perpetua's diary, young women of the Victorian era also struggled with themselves in a world where their accomplishments were limited. Their dreams and imagination were known only to themselves in the form of a diary, but it serves them as a tool where they could express themselves, which probably helped them deal with other problems outside the written word.

¹⁵⁷ As quoted by Hunter, p. 61.

¹⁵⁸ *Passio*, 6 and 9 (trans. Dronke, pp. 3-4).

¹⁵⁹ Hunter, p. 61.

In the study of Estelle C. Jelinek *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* notes about women's writing that "In contrast to the self-confident, one-dimensional self-image that men usually project, women often depict a multidimensional, fragmented self-image colored by a sense of inadequacy and alienation, of being outsiders or "other"; they feel the need for authentication, to prove their self-worth."¹⁶⁰ This is something that comes out in the writings of Vibia Perpetua and in the way that Perpetua expresses herself. Furthermore, Jelinek adds, "At the same time, paradoxically, they project self-confidence and a positive sense of accomplishment in having overcome many obstacles to their success—whether it be personal or professional."¹⁶¹ In Perpetua's case she lets us know in her last entry:

And I knew I should have to fight not against wild beasts but against the Fiend; but I knew the victory would be mine.¹⁶²

There is no doubt that by the time Perpetua wrote this, she has come to accept her death sentence, but also there is no doubt that her written most have helped in some way to deal with the consequences.

Is undoubted that the writing of Perpetua is unique among the ancient sources we have about women. Yet there are scholars that read the diary of Perpetua as a document which she intended to write for posterity. Paul Mckenchnie writes, "Though some scholars have described Perpetua's work as a 'prison diary,' I'd argue that she wasn't just keeping a private notebook, but that she was writing with a view to the eventual

¹⁶⁰ Estelle C. Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), p. xiii.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

¹⁶² *Passion*, 10, (trans. Dronke, p. 4).

production of something very like the document we read now.”¹⁶³ One could ask the same about every diary ever written. Diaries hold a purpose not just to the individual but to those that inherit them. Yet we cannot assume she intended her diary to a specific audience. This, of course, does not take away the rich source that it is her diary. The last entries of Vibia Perpetua’s diary are strong, emotionally, especially to the reader. After all, we meet the writer in a most hazardous time of her life; she is not only dealing with her family members, but also dealing with her political stand against her society. Women’s private writing, even in the last centuries are yet to be fully explored and understood as Helen M. Buss brings out, “[W]omen’s private writings, although not exempt from the interpellation of subjectivity by ideology, offer a rich source of insight into women’s cultural and personal development for critics seeking a feminist New Historicist practice.”¹⁶⁴ Understanding Vibia Perpetua’s writing as a woman’s diary and not as a martyrology opens up the possibility to the historian of shedding new light to the lives of women in Roman society. In addition, since in her diary Perpetua quotes what men said to her, her diary can be used to help bridge a new gender discourse. This gives historians a new way of understanding and exploring what men of Roman society wrote about women. In the next chapter, we turn to an exploration of Vibia Perpetua’s diary through an analysis of her diary.

¹⁶³ Paul McKechnie, "St. Perpetua and Roman Education in A.D. 200," *L'Antiquité Classique* 63 (1994): p. 279.

¹⁶⁴ Helen M. Buss, "A Feminist Revision on New Historicism to Give Fuller Readings of Women's Private Writing," in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 86.

CHAPTER FOUR: RE-READING VIBIA PERPETUA'S DIARY

The history of Roman women is known through what their male counterparts wrote about them. Roman women's history has been written with the assumption that women did not leave any written documents. The past few decades have uncovered some documents said to have been written in Latin by some Roman women. But if women wrote and if they intended to write for posterity is something that is argued, since, no history of Rome, novels, or philosophical treatises—the written sources contemporary historians are used to use when writing the history of Rome—came down to us with a woman's name. However, Tacitus, a Roman historian, in his *Annals* written in the first century C.E. cites the memoirs of Agrippina the younger; he writes: “This incident, not mentioned by any historian, I have found in the memoirs of the younger Agrippina, the mother of the emperor Nero, who handed down to posterity the story of her life and of the misfortunes of her family.”¹⁶⁵ The importance of this quote is his reference to using a woman's writing. This is the only direct reference historians have of a large written work by a Roman woman.¹⁶⁶ However, besides this reference nothing is known of this memoir.

With most of what we know from women in antiquity we have had to rely on the words of men. Their words might be questionable concerning what part of a story they

¹⁶⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* IV. 52-55. Tacitus, *The Annals and the Histories*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), p. 150.

¹⁶⁶ Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 185.

recorded, however the authenticity of their writing is never questioned. We assumed men from Roman society wrote, and assuming further that they wrote with their own hands.¹⁶⁷ Why cannot we assume the same about, at least, upper class Roman women? One answer might be the lack of evidence of women's writings, though another answer might be the lack of interest in the past on women's personal writings. As Jennifer Sinor notes through her study of women's diary and ordinary writing in her analysis of what gets discarded in the historical discourse that on the "historical curb rest the domestic, the broken, the consumable, the useful, the female, and the ordinary."¹⁶⁸ A question we need to ask is how to include in historical discourse the domestic, the broken, the consumable, the useful, the female, and the ordinary. The history of women in antiquity, in this case, the study of women in Roman society, has been investigated through the writings of men. Vibia Perpetua's diary has only been considered through the literature of Christianity, impairing her writing within the study of women in Roman society. By including her writing within the culture she belonged to before the text became part of the culture of Christianity is a way to expand not just her voice in Roman society but expand the possibilities of exploring Roman social history in a new light. It also gives us a new gender discourse in the history of the distant past. In this chapter, we turn to a close analysis of the diary of Vibia Perpetua within a discourse of Roman women's history to see what she can tell us about the history of women through *a woman's* point of view.

¹⁶⁷ M. I. Finley, "The Silent Women of Rome," in *Aspects of Antiquity: Discoveries and Controversies* (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), p. 7.

¹⁶⁸ Jennifer Sinor, *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing: Annie Ray's Diary* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), p. 3.

Women's Sources in Roman Society

The lives of women in Roman society are only known through the writings of men. All of the sources where a scholar interested in searching for Roman women are based in the wording of men. The spectrum on what they write about women is diverse, some glorify, praise, chastise, or ridicule women. Worse, they do not give a female perspective, as such the history of Rome has been written through one point of view.¹⁶⁹ Having only one point of view of history, impairs the whole of the history of Rome. Although the history of Rome is fragmented, it is not labeled unreliable. The scholarship has concentrated in discovering the female voice in the male writing. Such scholarship has expanded our knowledge of women in the discourse of the history of Rome. However, when searching for the ordinary voices of women in Rome, Augusto Franchetti writes, "We lack the documentation needed for such a task, for Romans saw no point in recording the lives of women, because no one would be interested in reading about them. Every woman's life was surrounded by a thick silence imposed upon her by the outer world and by the woman herself."¹⁷⁰ The lack of written documentation by Roman women forces us, to a point, to assume that women were silenced, but worst that it was the norm for women to be silenced in the society of Rome.

However, material culture is filled with images of women, from whole sculptures to busts, frescos and jewelries which depict the everyday life of women.¹⁷¹ Why would a society that silenced women show them off in such public displays? Nevertheless, it is the lack of written documentations that we obsess about. There is a lack of written

¹⁶⁹ M. I. Finley, "The Silent Women of Rome," in *Aspects of Antiquity: Discoveries and Controversies* (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), p. 129.

¹⁷⁰ Augusto Franchetti, ed., *Roman Women* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 2.

¹⁷¹ See Diana E. E. Kleiner and Susan B. Matheson, eds., *I, Claudia: Women in Ancient Rome* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press; Distributed by University of Texas Press, 1996).

documentation from women, but we do possess a few that have survived posterity. There are letters written by women.¹⁷² However, our obsession depends on the kind of writing we are looking for. Classical scholars of Roman society are interested in finding written documents that were published by women and that represent a genre of literary expression in Latin. For the latter, the only surviving examples known to us so far are the poems attributed to Sulpicia. Classical scholars' investigation of the writings of women is in comparison to the literature writing of men. In the case of Sulpicia, classical scholars questioned the authenticity of the poems written by a woman.¹⁷³ Their researches and analyses focus on the philological parts of a document based on the literary tradition that have survived, that is, of male writers. Compared to the literature attributed to men of the same period, women's writings are scarce. If women wrote or not should not be the question; the question we need to ask is why we have so few surviving literary documents written by women in our possession.

With such limited written documentation of Roman women, scholars are left to discover the female voice in the writings of Roman men. As pointed above, the views of Roman men on women are diverse, but most of the surviving document seem to represent an ideal of women. Suzanne Dixon in *Reading Roman Women: Sources, Genre, and Real Life* brings to view the need of reading and discussing the sources we have from women in Roman society.¹⁷⁴ Dixon questions the sources written by men on the reliability they have in uncovering the real life of women, questioning not just the writing

¹⁷²See Judith P. Hallet, "The Vindolanda Letters from Claudia Severa," in *Women Writing Latin: From Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Europe. Volume 1: Women Writing Latin in Roman Antiquity, Late Antiquity, and the Early Christian Era*, ed. Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown, and Jane E. Jeffrey (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 93-99, for a discussion on the letters of two sister from the Roman province of England.

¹⁷³See Alison Keith, "Critical Trends in Interpreting Sulpicia," *Classical World* 100, no. 1 (2006): pp. 3-10.

¹⁷⁴Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women: Sources, Genres, and Real Life* (London: Duckworth, 2001), p. 16.

of the male authors but also the genre in which they wrote. Although aware of the little surviving written texts of Roman women, Dixon looks to other sources where the voices of Roman women could be found “namely, the inscriptions (especially, but not only, epitaphs), imperial rescripts, and petitions and contracts on papyrus which purport to be authored by women, as well as funeral and occupational reliefs commissioned by them.”¹⁷⁵ As we have seen, the diary of Vibia Perpetua was preserved through what we classified as a martyrology, a genre which has hindered the exploration of her text in Roman studies. The diary of Vibia Perpetua is one of the lengthiest written documents by a woman to survive. What can she tell us about the society that she lived in is where we shall turn.

Vibia Perpetua

The diary of Vibia Perpetua provides Roman social historians an opportunity to expand the missing link between what we know to be truth of Roman women and what men wrote on Roman women. In the diary of Vibia Perpetua we find a daughter, a sister, a niece, a mother, but above all a very independent voice. Through her writing we meet her father, her brother, her mother, aunt, her child, and her surroundings, be that her home, her town, the city, and prison. Through her writing, we hear the voices of her father, her brothers, the proconsul, the deacons, and her fellow companion in crime: Saturus. She describes for us her feelings, and the feelings of her family. She also describes, as a woman, how she feels towards her family. Last but not least, she records her awareness of her crime and penalty of it. We also meet the Christian religion of

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

northern Africa of the late second/early third century. In conclusion, we meet someone with family, with family obligations but also with an independent life away from her family through her participation in a ‘political society.’¹⁷⁶

Guardianship, Marriage, and Vibia Perpetua’s Diary

Vibia Perpetua in her diary recorded her daily life. Her daily life had much to do with her family relations; as such, the document sheds light on the Roman family through a woman’s perspective something that the historian of the Roman family has lacked. Bradley writes, “One of the more daunting obstacles confronting the historian of the Roman family is the rarity of private documents such as diaries, correspondence, or journals that allow individual families to be studied over time from the perspective of one or more of their members... But private records are not altogether lacking.”¹⁷⁷ The Roman family has been investigated through the few surviving private letters of Cicero or of Pliny the Younger. But to know the Roman family through just one gender is not enough. This is one of the interesting dimensions that the diary of Perpetua is able to bring, the female perspective. Perpetua also brings to light the Roman family not just in the city of Rome, but the family of the empire, since she lived in the province of Carthage.

Vibia Perpetua in her diary mentions and expresses her feelings for her child, but she never mentions any husband. As seen in the previous chapter, diarists, in this case women diarists, do not write about everything or everyone in their diary. However,

¹⁷⁶ Pliny the younger refers to the crime of Christians as belonging to a political society. Under the reign of Trajan political societies were banned and it was under this ban that someone called a Christian was punished, not because of the faith, but because of his/her participation in a political society (Pliny the younger, Book x. 96). Pliny, *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 294.

¹⁷⁷ Keith R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (1991), p. 177.

scholars have questioned the marriage status of Vibia Perpetua since the redactor in his introduction of her writes that she was married.¹⁷⁸ The question of the marital status of Vibia Perpetua might come as a consequence, once again, of an assumption that a woman with a child must have been married. In the case of Perpetua another problem is the Christian tradition in which her document has been read. Nevertheless, social historians intrigued by her not mentioning any husband should not rule out the possibility that she was married, widowed, divorced, or for that matter single.¹⁷⁹ But that lack of information should point the historian to another possibility—her closeness with her blood family. Marriage did not necessarily take away a woman’s relation with her family. This theme has been explored by Roman social historians, but they have yet to be explored using written documents by women.¹⁸⁰

The diary of Perpetua adds, through the perspective of a daughter, to the discourse of a child’s closeness to their natural family. This is important to note because the studies that have been done so far have been investigated through what the fathers write about their daughters and no investigation has been done of what a daughter writes about her father. Studies like these question the individuality of a daughter within her blood family; for example, Judith Hallett in her study of fathers and daughters in Roman society writes, “Yet the notion of elite Roman daughter’s interests as subordinate to those of the males they linked tallies with widely voiced Roman notions of proper daughterly conduct.”¹⁸¹ The diary of Vibia Perpetua also adds to the investigation of the Roman

¹⁷⁸ *Passio*, section 2 (trans. Dronke, p. 2).

¹⁷⁹ For an argument about Perpetua’s husband see Carolyn Osiek, "Perpetua's Husband," *Journal of Christian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2002).

¹⁸⁰ See Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pp. 15-16, and Judith P. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

¹⁸¹ Hallett, p. 77.

family in the classical period outside the city of Rome; these are important because it helps to reflect how tradition continued or changed and how much of Roman culture was spread throughout the empire.

Vibia Perpetua in her diary does not tell us everything about her family, but that should not make her writing to be dismissed among sources for the Roman family. In fact, social Roman historians do not know much about any 'famous writer's' complete family history, yet we have not dismissed the possibilities of exploring the family relationship they have to add to the history of Rome. For example we possess the letters of the younger Pliny, but from Pliny himself, we do not know much about his family history, especially his relationship with his father, because he does not mention him in his surviving letters.¹⁸² Yet his private writings, like those of Cicero, are said to be great sources to explore the society of Rome.¹⁸³ In such parameters is where the diary of Vibia Perpetua should be included, among Roman sources that can tell us much about the daily life of Roman society.

In the first entry of the diary of Vibia Perpetua is recorded, one could say, the most common dialog between family members: an argument. She wrote down how her father reacted to her decision of becoming a Christian. She not only wrote what she said to her father but what her father said to her and his reaction. She writes:

When we were as yet only under legal surveillance, and my father, out of love for me, kept trying to refute me by argument and to break my resolve, I said: 'Father, do you see that container over there, for instance—a jug or something?' And he said: 'Yes, I do.' And I said to him: 'It can't be called anything other than it is, can it?' And he said: 'No.' 'So too, I can't call myself anything other than I am: a Christian.'

¹⁸²Radice in Pliny, *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, p. 12.

¹⁸³For the letters of Cicero and what he adds to the study of the Roman family see Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History*, pp. 177-204.

Then my father, angry at this word, bore down on me as if he would pluck out my eyes. But he only fumed, and went away, defeated, along with the devil's sophistries.¹⁸⁴

What is interesting in this, apart from the writing of Perpetua, is the voice of the father, his attitude and reaction to her daughter. In here Perpetua tells us about his father's reaction to her decision. She writes an elegant and simple argument in which she describes how she explained to her father her religious/political stand. But what is interesting and unexplored in this section is the subject of guardianship and *patria potestas*.

Both male and female children were under the *patria potestas* of a *paterfamilias*, that is, under the control of a male head of a household.¹⁸⁵ The family structure of Rome has been questioned in regards to the control of the *paterfamilias*. Male children, once the head of the household died, were able to receive their independence and became *paterfamilias* of their own. As independent subjects Roman men were able to bring criminal charges against someone in a criminal court and at the same time they were, as Gardner writes, "Men, once they were independent, were subject to the state's justice; sons *in potestate* and women were regarded as being still to some extent the responsibility of the family."¹⁸⁶ However, the case for women was different. It is believed that women of all ages in Roman society were always under the guardianship of a man. There were cases where a woman could become *sui iuris* (independent) through

¹⁸⁴ *Passio*, section 3 (trans. Dronke, p. 2).

¹⁸⁵ Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law & Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 5-6, and Richard P. Saller, "Pater Familias, Mater Familias, and the Gendered Semantics of the Roman Household," *Classical Philology* 94, no. 2 (1999): pp.182-197.

¹⁸⁶ Gardner, p. 7.

emancipation by the *paterfamilias*, or through widowhood.¹⁸⁷ However, independence was classified differently for men and women; for example, if a woman committed a crime she was first subjected to the family unlike an independent man who was subjected regardless to state's laws.

In the diary of Perpetua, the only person that seems to be her *paterfamilias* is her father. Perpetua, if married, would have been under the guardianship of her husband, based on what we know of Roman law. The *paterfamilias* was responsible and liable for his household's actions and the people living under it; as Gardner points out, "The *paterfamilias* was liable for the actions of his children, both male and female, as well as his slaves, and if one of these committed a delict, the *pater* must either make himself responsible in court for the damages or surrender the guilty person."¹⁸⁸ Even though he was responsible for his household and what happened within it, it does not seem that the *paterfamilias*'s power transmitted to his household when someone in it committed a crime against the state. What is interesting to see about the *paterfamilias* and the guardianship is how the guardianship of women probably did not apply when committing a crime against the state, as once again Gardner observes that "[w]omen condemned by the judgment of the state were sometimes handed over to their families for private punishments[.]"¹⁸⁹ This is important to highlight in the case of Perpetua, since basically no *paterfamilias*, be that her blood father or husband, would have been able to stop the charges against her, unless the state choose to give her to the family for their chosen punishment. The charges against belonging to a political society—how Christianity was

¹⁸⁷ Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 28.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁸⁹ Gardner, p. 6.

referred to—did not discriminate against male or female and the judgment was the same for both according to the writing of Pliny the Younger. Pliny the Younger wrote a letter to the Emperor Trajan on how to proceed with the punishment of Christian since there was an edict against political societies: “The question seems to me to be worthy of your consideration, especially in view of the number of persons endangered; for a great many individuals of every age and class, both men and women, are being brought to trial, and this is likely to continue.”¹⁹⁰ The punishment was death, unless the person recanted his/her political society. To this letter emperor Trajan responded, “if they are brought before you and the charge against them is proved, they must be punished, but in case of anyone who denies that he is a Christian, and makes it clear that he is not by offering prayers to our gods, he is to be pardoned as a result of his repentance however suspect his past conduct may be.”¹⁹¹ His response made it clear that both men and women of any class and age were subjected to the punishment of the state. Vibia Perpetua’s guardian, be that her father or husband, then did not have the power over Perpetua’s decision and consequence.

Roman Criminal Laws and the Charges against Perpetua

The *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis* assumes that Vibia Perpetua was charged with being a Christian. The martyrology assumes that the audience knew what it meant in the society of Rome at the time to be a Christian. Moreover, the martyrology never tells us how Vibia Perpetua was singled out and charged with the crime of belonging to a group of Christians. This could be explained by the letter written

¹⁹⁰ Pliny, Book x. 96. Pliny, *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, p. 294.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., Book x. 97. p. 295.

by Pliny the Younger to Trajan, who writes how people belonging to the political society known as Christians were anonymously singled out by people, and how he dealt with the charges brought to them. Pliny in the early second century C.E. writes:

Now that I have begun to deal with this problem, as so often happens, the charges are becoming more widespread and increasing in variety. An anonymous pamphlet has been circulated which contains the names of a number of accused persons. Amongst these I considered that I should dismiss any who denied that they were or ever had been Christians when they had repeated after me a formula of invocation to the gods and had made offerings of wine and incense to your statue (which I had ordered to be brought into court for this purpose along with the images of the gods), and furthermore had reviled the name of Christ: none of which things, I understand, any genuine Christian can be induced to do.¹⁹²

The accusation against Vibia Perpetua must have been anonymous, since it seems it was an accusation that took everyone in her family by surprise. Her diary is full of details of her trial. More importantly, when reading it we have to remind ourselves that we are reading a state trial. The charges brought against her are due in part to her disobedience to state order. The proceedings of her trial took place during a period of days, in section five of the *Passio Perpetua* wrote using her father's voice the worries brought up to her by the trial, but most importantly we can see how a state trial took place:

A few days later the rumour ran that our hearing would take place. My father came over from the city worn out with exhaustion, and he went up to me in order to deflect me, saying: 'My daughter, have pity on my white hairs! Show some compassion to your father if I deserve to be called father by you. If with these hands I have helped you to the flower of your youth, if I favoured you beyond all your brothers – do not bring me into disgrace in all men's eyes! Look at your brothers, look at your mother and your aunt – look at your son, who won't be able to live if you die. Don't

¹⁹² Pliny, Book x. 96. Pliny, *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, p. 294.

flaunt your insistence, or you'll destroy us all: for if anything happens to you, none of us will ever be able to speak freely and openly again.'

This is what my father said, out of devotion to me, kissing my hands and flinging himself at my feet; and amid his tears he called me not 'daughter' but '*domina*'. And I grieved for my father's condition – for he alone of all my family would not gain joy from my ordeal. And I comforted him, saying: 'At the tribunal things will go as God wills: for you must know we are no longer in our own hands, but in God's.' And he left me, griefstricken.¹⁹³

At this point of the trial Perpetua was already in prison, but not yet condemned. Through her father's voice we meet the worries of her family and herself. But it also brings up important information apart from her family, as the father said, "for if anything happens to you, none of us will ever be able to speak freely and openly again." This is something to be considered since an accusation of the daughter of being a Christian and her not denying it would also bring suspicion to other members of the family. What were the dangers of such accusations is something that needs to be further explored not just in the context of Christianity but in the context of crimes against the state in Roman society. Perpetua's crime was not due to her being a Christian but in participation, as Pliny the Younger writes, in a 'political society' and her disobedience to the state by not honoring the state.

The trial took place the following way:

Another day, whilst we were eating our midday meal, we were suddenly taken away to the hearing, and arrived at the forum. At once the rumour swept the neighbourhood, and an immense crowd formed. We mounted the tribunal. The others, when interrogated, confessed. Then my turn came. And my father appeared there with my son, and pulled me off the step, saying: 'Perform the sacrifice! Have pity on your child!' So too the

¹⁹³ *Passio*, section 5 (trans. Dronke, p. 3).

governor, Hilarianus, who had been given judiciary power in place of the late proconsul Minucius Timinianus: ‘Spare your father’s old age, spare your little boy’s infancy! Perform the ritual for the Emperor’s welfare.’ And I answered: ‘I will not perform it.’ Hilarianus: ‘You are a Christian then?’ And I answered: ‘I am a Christian.’ And as my father still hovered, trying to deflect me, Hilarianus ordered him to be thrown out, and he was struck with a rod. And I grieved for my father’s downfall as if I’d been struck myself: that’s how I mourned for his pitiful old age.

Then the governor sentenced us all and condemned us to the beasts of the arena. And joyful we went back to prison.¹⁹⁴

As Pliny the Younger lets us know in his letter, an accuser was punished if he or she did not deny their accusations. Perpetua did not deny her participation in Christianity. What is of significance in the part of the trial of Perpetua is her stand against the state, and also how under state’s laws there was no separation—according to the letter of Pliny the Younger—based on sex, age, or class. State’s laws then must have differed from other type of laws, for example civil law. The diary of Perpetua brings this view to another level. If as pointed above women were supposed to be under the guardianship of men, then why would women of any class be subject to stand trial under state’s laws?¹⁹⁵ One reason might be that women under state’s laws could exercise their voices. In the case of Vibia Perpetua, her words in modern studies have stood as inspiring but mostly in a Christian context or because scholars have not been able to compare her text to others similar to hers.¹⁹⁶ If we read the individual woman of the text, one of the inspiring parts

¹⁹⁴ *Passio*, section 6 (trans. Dronke, p. 3).

¹⁹⁵ For a discussion of the limitations women had in court and what is known about women’s participation under criminal law see Judith Evans Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook on Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood* (New York: Routledge, 2002).p. 60.

¹⁹⁶ Hemelrijk notes the importance and appeal of Perpetua’s writing but frames her writing as a North African Christian woman and only compares her writing to much later Christian women, Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna.*, p. 185 and note 1 of chapter 6.

is the stand she takes on her decision and on the consequence. The stand of Perpetua is not unique among individuals in history, she just simple stood against a political ideology. But it is through her going against a political ideology where something that has been dismissed in her scholarship is most clear—Vibia Perpetua’s political voice. Political voices of women, during this time period, especially coming from a female hand, are a rarity. Moreover, only in Vibia Perpetua’s diary do we have an opportunity to explore that side of an unknown part of Roman society: women’s participation in the public arena.

Vibia Perpetua’s Family Relations

Apart from the individual woman we meet in the diary of Perpetua, we also find a woman that had a family. The strongest relationships that come out of her writing are motherhood, sisterhood, and daughterhood. On the topic of motherhood, once again, scholars write that nothing is known about motherhood through a woman, and when Roman writers write about their mothers it is said that they do so idealizing an image of mother.¹⁹⁷ Another aspect that is little known of is the relationship between the mother and the young child.¹⁹⁸ The diary of Perpetua is able to show us a glimpse of a mother and her care of a young child.

The first introduction we have of Perpetua’s child comes when Perpetua is arrested and sent to prison. She described how horrible the prison was and that “[a]bove

¹⁹⁷ Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did: A Source Book in Roman Social History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 20.

¹⁹⁸ See Dixon, *The Roman Mother.*, pp. 104-140 for a full discussion of the relationship of mothers and child in Roman society and the evidence we have for such discussion.

all, I was tormented with anxiety there, on account of my child.”¹⁹⁹ The closeness a mother had for a child in Roman society is questioned because mothers did not had control over their children; such belief comes out because of the lack of information between mothers and their young children. Vibia Perpetua gives another contrast to this idea; the relationship between Perpetua and her child seem to have been a strong one concerning the care of the child. Once Perpetua is in prison, according to her the deacons bribed the ones in charge of them so they were able to go to a cooler part of the prison and Perpetua was able to see her family. She wrote:

I breast-fed my child, who was already weak with hunger. Anxiously I spoke to my mother about him, I consoled my brother, I gave them charge of my son.²⁰⁰

One of the most strange and rare parts of this quote is Perpetua’s breastfeeding her child, a part of a thought that seems to come natural to her in her writing. Yet, some historians doubt the activity of upper class women breastfeeding their child because of the lack of direct women’s sources in the subject. Scholars are doubtful when it come to the sources we have on breastfeeding, since they seem to prescribe an idealized idea of motherhood. Dixon questions the realistic notions of motherhood and breastfeeding noting, “[m]ale moralists piously asserted its desirability and condemned contemporary women for avoiding it.”²⁰¹ She brings the example of *CIL* 6.19128 honoring his wife which read:

To Graxia Alexandria, an outstanding example of womanly virtue, who actually nurtured her children with her own breasts.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ *Passio*, section 3 (trans. Dronke, p. 2).

²⁰⁰ *Passio*, section 3 (trans. Dronke, p. 2).

²⁰¹ Dixon, *Reading Roman Women: Sources, Genres, and Real Life*, p. 17.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

She then questions whether this inscription is to be read literally. An answer after reading a woman's source would be yes. Such inscriptions can be read literal when referring to the nature of a woman breastfeeding her child. The above inscriptions is said to refer to an imperial freed slave praising his dead wife; in the case of Perpetua, who was an upper class woman, adds to the discourse of women in the Roman society and their ideas on nursing their own child. Dixon, in her earliest work on motherhood, when analyzing upper class women and their views of motherhood, was only able to supply this information through the writings and perspective the male moralists' view of taking care of a child. Moreover, and an important question that has not been able to be asked before because of the lack of evidence from a woman is what it meant for a woman to breastfeed her child; not only what it meant to a woman to breastfeed her child and the contact she had with the child through such practice, but what practicality such a practice afforded for the body of the mother, that is, what other purpose beside feeding a baby breastfeeding had for the mother. Perpetua mentions her breastfeeding a couple of times; in her last entry about her child in the diary she wrote:

Then, as the baby was used to breast-feeding and staying in prison with me, I at once sent the deacon Pomponius to my father, imploring to have it back. But my father did not want to let it go. And somehow, through God's will, it no longer needed the breast, nor did my breasts become inflamed—so I was not tormented with worry for my child, or with soreness.²⁰³

Not only does Perpetua make clear that she breastfed her child regularly but she mentions the soreness accompanied by lack of breastfeeding a woman's breasts felt when not breastfeeding. This for women was not just a simple moral question; it becomes a

²⁰³ *Passio*, section 6 (trans. Dronke, p. 3).

question of what to do with their sore breasts. Perpetua's writing on breastfeeding is able to shed light on the simplicity of a practice, that not necessary was practiced by all women, but a practice that served two purposes, one as food for the child and the other as a way of retrieving the soreness of breasts from the mother. But one thing we can conclude is that breastfeeding was not uncommon among upper class Roman women.

Perpetua's closeness to her child not just come in the way that she fed her child but in her worries of what would happened to the child without her. The mother's relationship can be seen through her worries expressed about her child through the voice of the father. What is interesting is that Perpetua gave charge of her child to her mother and sibling:

Anxiously I spoke to my mother about him, I consoled my brother, I gave them charge of my son.²⁰⁴

But she does not expressed any spoken words by them on her worries of the child or family; instead she leaves that to the voice of her father (see p. 12-13).²⁰⁵ If, as pointed above, the father was the center of the household, that is, the *paterfamilias*, it was probably customary to refer to the family through the father in the way that Vibia Perpetua does in her diary. Her worries on her family are the "disgrace in all men's eyes," but her worries for her child are expressed by referring how her child might died without her through her father's voice (*Passio*, section 5). We have to remember that although we are listening to the father we are reading Vibia Perpetua, that is, the content is hers. As a diary writer, the first audience is the writer, as such when we read her father, her mother, her brother, her aunt, her child, we are reading first Vibia Perpetua.

²⁰⁴ *Passio*, section 3 (trans. Dronke, p. 2).

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, section 5 (trans. Dronke, p. 3).

As a family member of the household of her father, she is worried about what will happen to them—but *them* comes through her independent voice. The last mention of her family also comes in the voice of the father:

A few days after that, the adjutant, Pudens, provost of the prison, began to show us honour, perceiving that there was a rare power in us. He allowed us many visitors, so that we could comfort one another. But when the day of the spectacle drew near, my father came in to me, wasted and worn. He began to tear out the hair of his beard and fling it on the ground, he hurled himself headlong and cursed his life, and said such things as would move every living creature. I ached for his unhappy old age.²⁰⁶

By the time that Perpetua wrote this she has already been condemned: she knew her penalty which was to be thrown to the beasts. She seems happy at first with her decision, but then expressed once again her anxieties towards her family through her father's visit. But unlike the previous entries of her diary where she writes what her father told her, instead in this entry she describes his actions and his physical appearance. Throughout her diary Perpetua presents her concerns and worries of her family and herself. Her writing provides not only the family relations of *a* Roman family, but we are able to hear her family's voice through her writing.

The Masculine in Roman Women's Writing

In the diary of Perpetua—or as might be in the last entries of Perpetua's diary—a predominate voice that she uses to express her worries and pains is the voice of her father. We cannot assume from this that the father had much control on Perpetua's life; after all, she writes about his persuasion, but she is never persuaded. But once again, the

²⁰⁶ *Passio*, section 9 (trans. Dronke, p. 4).

diary of Vibia Perpetua is able to shed light on the masculine and feminine voices of the surviving texts of Roman society. As mentioned before, throughout the written history of Rome we lack documentations written by women, although we do possess the poems of Sulpicia, a few letters found in England published under *The Vindolanda Letters*, and, last but not least, the most extend and oldest known, the diary of Vibia Perpetua.²⁰⁷

All of these surviving documents written by Roman women have something in common: the letters and dairy could be considered in today's standards as private/ordinary documents. The poems of Sulpicia might have been private since it is not know if they were published at one time.²⁰⁸ As with the writing of Perpetua, they do not address all the matters of each writer's life, but give us glimpse of their daily personal lives. The letters of Claudia Severa (the letter writer from the Vindolanda letters), are said to have been found in England and dated to 100 C.E.²⁰⁹ Both of her published letters are addressed a Sulpicia Lepidina. The letters are short, mostly greetings and invitation; for example:

Claudia Severa sends greetings to her Lepidina.

On the third day before the ides of September, sister, I warmly invite you for the day of the celebration of my birthday, to make sure that you come to us, in order to make the day more pleasurable for me by your arrival, if you come.

Send greetings to your Cerealis. My Aelius and my little son send their greetings.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ For the Vindolanda letters see Judith P. Hallett, "The Vindolanda Letters from Claudia Severa," in *Women Writing Latin: From Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Europe, Volume 1 Women Writing Latin in Roman Antiquity, Late Antiquity, and the Early Christian Era*, ed. Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown, and Jane E. Jeffrey (New York: Routledge, 2002).

²⁰⁸ See Alison Keith, "Critical Trends in Interpreting Sulpicia," *Classical World* 100, no. 1 (2006).

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²¹⁰ Hallett, "The Vindolanda Letters from Claudia Severa," p. 98.

Since the letter is addressed to a Sulpicia Lepidina, and it is believed that in Roman tradition women from the same family shared their father's name, Judith Hallett concludes that when referring to Lepidina as a sister, Severa is addressing her warmly and not writing to a member of her blood family.²¹¹ In the second letter we have of Claudia Severa, Lepidina seems to have asked Severa for something:

Greetings, Sister, just as I had spoken with you and had pledged that I would ask Brocchus and come to you, I did ask him and he told me in response that it was always sincerely granted to me, along with...to go to visit you in whatever way I can. There are indeed certain necessary matters which...you will receive my letters by which you will know what I am about to do... I was and am about to stay at Briga. Send greetings from me to your Cerealis.²¹²

Both of the letters show the private life of two women. The 'conversations' are simple but centered on their relationship; the husband and child come second, though present in both letters. In the diary of Vibia Perpetua there is a part where her brother requests something from Perpetua:

Then my brother said to me: 'My lady, my sister, you are now greatly blessed: so much so that you can ask for a vision, and you will be shown if it is to be suffering unto death or a passing thing.' And I, who knew I was in dialog with God, whose great benefits I had experienced, promised him faithfully, saying: 'Tomorrow I'll tell you.' And I asked for a vision, and this was shown to me [.]²¹³

As her brother requested Perpetua asked for a vision/dream where she concluded in her interpretation of it the answer to her brother:

And at once I told my brother, and we understood that it would be mortal suffering; and we began to have no more hope in the world.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 95. Also see, Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family*.

²¹² Hallett, "The Vindolanda Letters from Claudia Severa," p. 99.

²¹³ *Passio*, section 4 (trans. Dronke, p. 2).

Perpetua's writing as opposed to the writing of Severa reflect another reality, other worries, and another time period, but both reflect a similarity of expression in words. As in the letters, Perpetua's writing reflects the concern for others and the consideration of somebody's else request; a brother in her case. Both Perpetua and Severa show in their writing their concerned to reply to the requests.

The writings of Sulpicia, the poetess from the first century C.E., are considered the "only poems in Latin by a woman of the classical era that were bequeathed to later generations."²¹⁴ However, her poems have come to us with a question of authenticity like the writing of Vibia Perpetua, since they are the only surviving poems to come to us through a female hand. Until this era, scholars are yet to attribute all the known eleven poems to the female writer Sulpicia.²¹⁵ But for our purpose, one of the peculiarities that make scholars doubtful in attributing all the poems to her is that some poems are written in the first person while others are written in the third.²¹⁶ As in Vibia Perpetua's diary, we see that she too refers to herself in the third person, while throughout her diary, maybe because it is a more personal writing, she refers to herself in the first person. One of Sulpicia's first person poems can be classified as a love poem between a woman and a young man where she describes the sorrow she feels while her beloved is out hunting:

Spare my young man, boar, whether you control the fine pastures of the plain, or whether you frequent the remote places of the shady mountain, nor may it be our lot to have sharpened hard tusks for a struggle: let the

²¹⁴ Judith P. Hallett, "The Eleven Elegies of the Augustan Poet Sulpicia," in *Women Writing Latin: From Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Europe, Volume 1 Women Writing Latin in Roman Antiquity, Late Antiquity, and the Early Christian Era*, ed. Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown, and Jane E. Jeffrey (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 46.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Hallett writes, "Yet, many scholars regard the first five (3.8-3.12) as garland by someone else, presumably a male admirer and literary impersonator." p. 47.

guardian god Love keep him unharmed for me. But Diana, goddess of Delos, leads him far away with a passion for hunting. O, if only the woods would perish and the hunting dogs disappear! What madness is it, what a state of mind, to wish to wound delicate hands circling the closely packed hills with a hunting net. Or why is it pleasing to enter, stealthily, the lairs of savage beasts and mark white legs with barbed brambles? But nevertheless, so that I may be allowed to wander with you, Cerinthus, I myself will bear twisted nets through the mountains, I myself will seek the tracks of the swift stag and I will remove the iron chains from the quick-darting hound. [...] ²¹⁷

Sulpicia describes the religious attachment to hunting and describes in some details the hunting game: the dangers associated with it. Apart from the love story that Sulpicia provides in this poem, what is interesting is the way that she described hunting—a masculine game. Not only does she notes the masculine details of hunting but because of the sorrow she feels towards the dangers her beloved might suffer, she too would endure the same dangers. In Perpetua's diary a similar circumstance can be seen where she describes and interprets the last of her vision/dream. In the last vision of Perpetua she describes a gladiatorial game where she is not just a spectator but a participant in a wrestling game/battle:

[...] And I saw the immense, astonished crowd. And as I knew I had been condemned to the wild beasts, I was amazed they did not send them out at me. Out against me came an Egyptian, foul of aspect, with his seconds: he was to fight with me. And some handsome young men came up beside me: my own seconds and supporters. And I was stripped naked, and became a man. And my supporters began to rub me with oil, as they do for a wrestling match; and on the other side I saw the Egyptian rolling himself in the dust [...]. And we joined combat, and fists began to fly. He tried to grab my feet, but I struck him in the face with my heels. And I felt airborne, and began to strike him as if I were not touching ground. But when I saw there was a lull, I locked my hands, clenching my fingers

²¹⁷Sulpicia 3.9 in Hallett, "The Eleven Elegies of the Augustan Poet Sulpicia," p. 62.

together, and so caught hold of his head; and he fell on his face, and I trod upon his head. The populace began to shout, and my supporters to sing jubilantly.²¹⁸

In the writing of Sulpicia as in the writing of Perpetua, we have two women, from different periods and parts of the empire writing about hunting and gladiatorial games through women's knowledge of both activities: activities that are associated only with men and that only have been studied through the perspective of what it is believed was a male audience. Women in Rome could attend gladiatorial games, but we do not know what women thought or how they described what they thought or saw in the games.²¹⁹ Perpetua's description of a gladiatorial game gives a different perspective of the game. She not only describes a game but she is a participant of the game. She participates in the game not as a woman, but as a man. The idea of her conversion into a male reflects her unimaginable thinking of a woman participating in a wrestling game against a 'beast.' In the case of Sulpicia, hunting like gladiatorial games were part of the daily life and literature of Rome, in her poem she describes her sorrow for a lover while showing knowledge of the practice and religious' association with men and hunting. However, what these two entries make us question is how much the 'sphere of men' has been studied under the perspective of women.

The diary of Vibia Perpetua can help shed light on different aspects of Roman history. The first and most important aspect of the diary is the rare opportunity it brings

²¹⁸ *Passio*, section 10 (trans. Dronke, p. 4). David L. Bomgardner, "The Carthage Amphitheater: A Reappraisal," *American Journal of Archaeology* 93, no. 1 (1989). Bomgardner notes in this article that the *Passio* is an important source of information about the structure of the amphitheater and a source of valuable information on "the procedure of public executions *ad bestias* and the role of the crowd in effecting the events in the arena at Carthage" (pp. 88-89).

²¹⁹ Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 129-130.

historian to explore a culture where historians are used to exploring it only through the perspective of men writers. Although we have other material culture which is full of women's images, and inscriptions said to have been written by women, historians are not too convinced of the exact participation of women when they were created. The diary of Vibia Perpetua provides a missing link. It provides information of a woman living at the end of the second century C.E. and her family. The source is able to shed light on a woman as a mother, as a daughter, as a sister and as a participant in different political ideologies. It provides information on women's participation in the public arena while also showcasing the way that state court operated. Most importantly, the diary of Vibia Perpetua adds to the group of women's writings that have survived to posterity. It is probably not the genre which scholars from the late twentieth century wanted to discover, since it is not a writing that was written with an intention to be published, as in the case of most of the literature of men. However, the unpublished aspect of the writing does not take away its value, it actually adds to it because it becomes a source that adds information that is not easily available; it opens up a new window from which to see the everyday social norms of Rome. Although it can be argued that the diary was written with an intention to be read as the memoirs of Agrippina were read by Tacitus; this opens up a possibility that women did write and that they wrote about their lives. It is time to open up and explore the culture of the past that influenced still ideas and attitudes of the present. What twenty-first century scholars need to ask is, where are the writings of women?

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Suppose, for instance, that men were only represented in literature as the lovers of women, and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers, dreamers; how few parts in the plays of Shakespeare could be allotted to them; how literature would suffer! We might perhaps have most of Othello; and a good deal of Antony; but no Caesar, no Brutus, no Hamlet, no Lear, no Jaques—literature would be incredibly impoverished, as indeed literature is impoverished beyond our counting by the doors that have been shut upon women.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*²²⁰

What would be known of men in antiquity if the only surviving written documents were those written by women? The answer to the question is unimaginable. The leading obstructive factor in the history of women in antiquity is the lack of written evidence by women. Historical facts found in written documents are believed to have been written by men. The further the historian wanders into the past, the harder it is to find any sources said to have come by the hands of women. The early modern period opened the way to the rediscoveries of some classical works that influenced historical writing and the culture at large. This was seen in the textual history of the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetua et Felicitatis*. In turn it shows that the historical understanding of the present culture excluded the inclusion of all the known history of the distant past. What was preserved and published had to do much with what the society of the seventeenth century valued. What was not preserved and made publicly at the time influenced the history of today. Nevertheless, recent times have uncovered the history of women.

²²⁰ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1st Harvest/HBJ ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), p. 83

Women's scholars since the 1970s have opened a discourse in the history of humanity to include the experiences of women from all faces of life.²²¹ Discovering the lives of women in recent decades opened the possibility of finding wrong ideas adhered to the lives of women in the distant past. Roman history influenced the ideas of western society. However, the understanding of Roman society by the modern time was already influenced by misinformation of the past. What was once Rome and their culture was understood and applied differently to a new culture.²²² Although understood differently, it nevertheless influenced ideas about women and men of Roman society.

The diary of the Roman woman Vibia Perpetua from the late second century/early third century provides a new perspective on the history of women in antiquity. The diary survived because it was preserved within the Christian literature and most importantly it is known because of the published edition of a martyrology in the seventeenth century—the *Passio Sanctarum Martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (*The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*).²²³ The publication allowed the diary of this woman to be transmitted and not to be forgotten on some manuscript on a shelf. Although the transmission continued to be in circles which for the most part dealt with the history of Christianity and the early Christians—even though early scholars of the text of the *Passio* gave little attention to it as a Roman woman's diary—it made possible the preservation of a Roman woman's personal writing.

²²¹ Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History: Revised Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 15-16.

²²² See Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750-1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 191-206.

²²³ See for example of the literature: Augustine of Hippo sermons 280, 281, 282, which he preached the day of their feast. W.H. Shewring, *The Passion of Ss. Perpetua and Felicity Mm: A New Edition and Translation of the Latin Text Together with the Sermon of S. Augustine Upon These Saints Now First Translated into English by W.H. Shewring*, trans. W. H. Shewring, fascimile ed. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931), p. xxix.

The diary of Vibia Perpetua comes to us as a unique source, since no other diary written by men or women from Roman times is known. This makes Vibia Perpetua's diary a source that is hard to explore within a literary genre, since it cannot be compared to a same genre of her period. This allowed for an interdisciplinary study using the literature of women's diaries and women's self-representation in writing. Understanding Vibia Perpetua's writing as a woman's diary and not as a martyrology opened the possibility for the historian of shedding new light on the lives of women in Roman society. Moreover, by incorporating her diary with other sources of Roman history, her writing helps to bridge a new discourse on gender relations between men and women in Roman society. This gives historians a new way of understanding and exploring what men of Roman society wrote about women.

An analysis of the diary, examining Vibia Perpetua as a woman living in Roman society, shows a fresh new way of exploring Roman society. The diary of Vibia Perpetua can help shed light on different aspects of Roman history. The first and most important aspect of the diary is the rare opportunity it brings historian to explore a culture where historians are used to only exploring it through the perspective of male writers. Although we have other material culture which is full of women's images, and inscriptions said to have been written by women, historians are not too convinced of the exact participation women had at the time these works were created. The diary of Vibia Perpetua provides a missing link. It provides information about a woman and her family living at the end of the second century C.E. The source informs us of a woman as a mother, as a daughter, as a sister and as a participator in different political ideologies. It provides information on women's participation in the public sphere while also showcasing the way that the state

charge and prosecuted its citizens. Most importantly, the diary of Vibia Perpetua adds to the group of women's writings that have survived posterity. It is probably not the genre which scholars from the late twentieth century wanted to discover, it is not a document that was written with an intention to be published, as in the case of most of the literature of men. The unpublished aspect of the writing does not detract from its value, rather it adds to it because it opens up a new window into the society of Rome.

Yes, Vibia Perpetua was a Christian, but we cannot assume that we know what kind of religious cult she was following—what being a Christian meant to her or what kind of Christianity she followed. We also need to explore why she was remembered, what impact she made in her community and what that has to tell us about who she really was and who she became. Vibia Perpetua leaves us with a hope of exploring other possibilities of women in antiquity since as Rebecca Langlands points out, “Yet almost all the texts written in ancient Greece and Rome which survive today were written by men, and the implications of this have long been appreciated; the texts offer male perspectives on their cultures; they do not allow the reader direct access to women's voices; they contain no expression of women's ideas.”²²⁴ However, this is what Vibia Perpetua offers us—a woman's voice and her ideas.

A final note, as Virginia Woolf asked of the impoverishment of women in literature, the writing of Vibia Perpetua and her story actually gained the attention of writers. Sarah Adams Flower (1805-1848) in 1841 published *Vivia Perpetua: A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts*, in her introductory page she notes:

²²⁴ Rebecca Langlands, "A Women's Influence on a Roma Text: Marcia and Seneca," in *Women's Influence on Classical Civilization*, eds. Fiona McHardy and Eireann Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 115.

An Account of the martyrdom of Vibia Perpetua, and those who suffered with her, is to be found in most of the histories that relate to the early Christian Church.

The main facts, in which they all concur, have been implicitly followed in this Poem. In the minor incidents, selected or imagined, and in the development of character and motive, dramatic effect has invariably been held a subordinate object.

A woman that takes her readers attention to point to the historicity of Vibia Perpetua.²²⁵

Yet, this was not the first time the diary of Vibia Perpetua and her history took the attention of a writer. One of the least explored aspects of Vibia Perpetua's diary has been the influence her writing has had on early writers. We have evidence that shows that Vibia Perpetua's writing influenced the writing of St. Augustine, since as seen on his sermons, which he dedicated to Sts. Perpetua and Felicity in the day of their feast, he paraphrased Vibia Perpetua's diary in his sermons.²²⁶In conclusion, St. Augustine, a man who has influenced greatly Western thought, was influenced by the writing of Vibia Perpetua and her history. What implications and influence Vibia Perpetua's writing had on St. Augustine's writings is something that needs attention.

²²⁵ Sarah Flower (1805-1848) Adams, *Vivia Perpetua: A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts* (London: C. Fox, 1841).

²²⁶ See Chapter Two; *Holstenius and St. Augustine*, pp. 26-28.

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