



The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity

Thomas J. Heffernan

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Winner of the Modern Language Association Prize for a Scholarly Edition

One of the most widely read and studied texts composed in Late Antiquity is the prison diary of Vibia Perpetua, a young woman of the elite classes who was martyred in March of the year 202 or 203 C.E. in Carthage, as part of a civic celebration honoring Caesar Geta. She was well-married and had recently become the mother of a baby son, but despite her advantages, she refused to recant her faith when she was arrested with other recent converts to Christianity. Imprisoned with her was her pregnant slave Felicity. Perpetua's steadfastness in her belief led to her martyrdom in the amphitheater. A description of the heroic deaths of both women, and the autobiography of one of the leaders of the Christian community, Saturus, is woven into Perpetua's diary by an anonymous editor, who tells us that, as they died, Perpetua, Felicity, and the other condemned Christians bid farewell with a kiss of peace.

This unique and precious text survives in one Greek and in nine Latin manuscript versions. Thomas Heffernan's new study contains much that has never been done before, including a prosopography of all the individuals mentioned in the *Passion*, a new English translation and the first detailed historical commentary in English on the entire narrative of the *Passion*. It also includes a newly edited version of the Latin text based on all the extant manuscripts and - rarer still - the Greek text. He concludes the book with a complete codicological description of all of the known manuscripts and thorough scholarly indices of the text itself. Perpetua's prison diary is a revered text of early Christianity, and Heffernan's new translation and commentary brings unprecedented scholarly resources to the much-loved *Passion*.

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