Authorial Afterlives: The Reception and Transmission of Women's Writing in the Latin West, c. 200–900 CE

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For

Lisa & Philip Hitchman
Anne & Brian Basford

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and we still have to stare into the absence
of men who would not, women who could not, speak
to our life—this still unexcavated hole
called civilisation, this act of translation, this half-world.

Adrienne Rich, ‘Twenty-One Love Poems: V’

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I never skim past the acknowledgements of a book, so I had read a lot of this sort of thing by the time it came for me to write my own. Foolishly, I thought this would prepare me for the task. This thesis took almost four years to write – I have a lot of people I am indebted to, and whatever I write here will be insufficient compared to their kindness. But here I go.

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Short Abstract

The extent and significance of late antique women's writing has been underestimated. This thesis examines how texts authored by women from the late antique west (c. 200–400 CE) were read and interpreted, from the time of their writing and into the medieval period (c. 200–900 CE). In doing so, I explore the developing concept of Christian authorship, and how this concept was applied to women authors.

The core of the thesis is structured around case studies of four texts: Perpetua's account in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, a letter by Paula and Eustochium to Marcella, Egeria's *Itinerarium*, and Proba's *Cento Vergilianis de Laudibus Christi*. These were chosen as case studies because they are the longest and most complete texts by women from c. 200–400 CE, and they have left a visible record of transmission and reception. I investigate this record from multiple angles, considering how these texts circulated within manuscripts, how reactions of early critics shaped the views of later readers, and how each work was re-interpreted by different generations of readers. Although these women were read extensively, the extent to which they were accepted as the authors of their texts differs. A key factor in this acceptance is how the person of the author herself (e.g. as a saint, aristocrat, or abbess) was understood.

Much of the existing scholarship on late antique women authors is problematic. This thesis critiques the core assumption of that scholarship – that women had little to do with literary culture – and exposes this as unfounded. Furthermore, I highlight how this assumption has guided the understanding of these women's texts into the twenty-first century. This thesis returns the works of women authors to the heart of late antique and early medieval literary culture.

Long Abstract

The late antique west is often characterised by change and upheaval. The gradual collapse of Roman imperial administration combined with the spread of Christianity necessitated the unmaking and remaking of hierarchies and communities. These changes were naturally reflected in the literary culture of the time, which saw the production of new Christian literature. Continuity is found, however, in the persistent reading and copying of certain texts. This thesis explores how Latin texts authored by late antique women were read and interpreted into the medieval period. Only a limited number of these writings are extant – but many more texts were produced by late antique women than have survived. By observing the manuscript transmission of these writings, and the commentary surrounding them in the centuries following their release, it becomes immediately apparent that these texts were continuously read and copied, and variously praised and critiqued by invested commentators. Rather than being relegated to the sidelines, the writings of these women occupied a central position in late antique and early medieval literary culture

The bulk of this thesis operates within two overlapping chronologies. The main case studies of writings by women were composed from c. 200 to 400 CE. These are Perpetua's first-person account in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, a letter by Paula and Eustochium to Marcella, the *Itinerarium* of Egeria, and Proba's *Cento Vergilianis de Laudibus Christi*. The second chronology is from c. 200 to 900 CE, which is used to study the reception and transmission of these texts. This timeframe facilitates the observation of the immediate reception and transmission of these texts but also captures how this changes over time. The diverse (and at times divergent) interpretations and responses of both communities and individuals across the centuries are considered here.

Chapter One is a survey of writings by women in the Latin west. Here I lay out the evidence available for the thesis and identify methodological challenges presented by the sources. These are, namely, the scarcity of source material, and the overwhelmingly elite authorship (and therefore limited perspective) of the extant texts. The sources examined here are organised by genre and are broadly drawn from c. 200 to 400 CE, although at times an example from slightly outside this chronology, or in Greek, is employed to highlight wider developments in late antique Christian literary culture. This chapter demonstrates how women were involved in all areas of literary culture and production – as authors, scribes, patrons, and readers – but, despite this, there are relatively few surviving texts by women. It is not that women were not writing, but rather that writing by women was not kept or copied at some point in the process of transmission. To provide a fuller picture of the literary activities of women, I have kept in mind texts that once existed, but are no longer extant. This phenomenon is most easily observed in letter collections, where replies to women's letters survive but the original letters are lost. As well as giving an overview of the available evidence, this chapter demonstrates that observing their reception and transmission is crucial for understanding how our corpus of extant texts survived. The small number of extant texts disguise the extent of women's involvement in

literary culture, and the false impression of a male-dominated literary culture was created in part by the failure to consider texts by women that were not transmitted into the medieval period.

The following four chapters are case studies. I have selected texts written by women during the period c. 200 to 400 CE, and considered the following: the geographical reach of these texts, how they are transmitted in manuscripts, the contexts within which different versions of a text arise, their potential and/or actual readership, and how commentators have understood their authorship. The main case studies are all texts written by Christian women, although their observances of Christianity and its expression within their writings differ considerably. The reception of these texts is therefore shaped by shifts in Christian practice over time and influenced by local factors, such as the Donatist controversy in North Africa. The behavioural expectations placed upon late antique women, and the extent to which their authorship was acceptable, is another theme that arises from the analysis of these texts. The person of the writer herself emerges as a decisive factor in how the text is interpreted, and whether its author is remembered as such. The women whose texts are discussed in this thesis were venerated as saints and martyrs, praised as abbesses, and respected as members of the Roman aristocracy. At times, these identities could eclipse a woman's authorship altogether.

Chapter Two examines the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. A section of the *Passio* was by Perpetua herself, and gives an account of her trial and her stay in prison leading up to her martyrdom. The events described by Perpetua give her account the traditional composition date of c. 203 CE. This chapter examines how Perpetua's authorship is treated in the *Passio* itself, in manuscripts containing the texts, and by surrounding commentators. It highlights how understandings of Perpetua as an author shift when two abridged recensions of the *Passio* narrative, the *Acta*, became the most popular versions of her martyrdom story. Crucially, in the *Acta*, Perpetua is not presented as the author of the account. Augustine of Hippo is suggested as the instigator of – or, at least, a spokesman for – the tradition of doubting Perpetua's authorship. I argue that suspicion with which Augustine treats Perpetua's account in the *Passio* directly created the conditions for the *Acta*, which removed Perpetua's authorship. This study reveals that Perpetua's authorship, although crucial in her presentation in the *Passio*, was not an enduring feature of her martyrdom story. In fact, as evidenced by the popularity of the *Acta* and their more extensive manuscript transmission, Perpetua's authorship was not known to most late antique and early medieval readers of her martyrdom story. The legitimacy of Perpetua's authorship, and the related issue of dating the *Passio* text, remain subjects of debate. I argue that Perpetua contributed her first-person account, but it was edited, perhaps by the compiler of the dossier of texts that make up the *Passio*. Unlike most other studies of Perpetua, however, the questions of authorship and dating do not take centre stage here. Instead, I prioritise an investigation of the presentation of Perpetua as an author in the transmission and reception of the text. This is a line I take in later chapters where the authorship of a text is contested, choosing to highlight how the authorship of these women was viewed by their contemporaries and by readers in the following centuries.

An authorship controversy is at the heart of Chapter Three. This chapter investigates a letter in the collection of Jerome (*Ep*. 46) which was written by two aristocratic ascetic women, Paula and Eustochium, towards the end of the fourth century. The letter is addressed to Marcella, their friend and mentor, whom they ask to leave Rome and join their community in Bethlehem. The traditional attribution of this letter is to Jerome, and the rationale here is that Paula and Eustochium would not have possessed the literary abilities to write this letter themselves. There has been some pushback against this line of reasoning in recent decades, however. Both sides of this debate invoke the letter's manuscript transmission as proof of their alternate authorial attributions, but nowhere have the manuscripts been satisfactorily investigated. This chapter attempts to rectify that. I examine the authorship debate, and then turn to the content and manuscript transmission of the letter itself, ultimately arguing for Paula and Eustochium's authorship. There are two reasons for this attribution: the text predominantly circulates under the names of Paula and Eustochium in the manuscripts, and the message of the letter itself considerably contradicts ideas that Jerome expressed elsewhere. The chapter considers what we stand to lose, but also what we can gain, by discounting Jerome as the letter's author. *Ep*. 46 is often used as proof that Jerome approved of Christian travel to the Holy Land; without it, his views on such journeys are harder to discern. But by attributing *Ep*. 46 to Paula and Eustochium, we gain an insight into the formation and dissolution of early Christian communities of women. Marcella never joined them in Bethlehem, preferring to stay within the ascetic circle she established in Rome. Furthermore, this letter is the only witness to these women's lives not authored by Jerome – Jerome portrays these women as his disciples, intentionally obscuring their patronage of him. Ultimately, this chapter promotes Paula and Eustochium as the authors of *Ep*. 46.

Chapter Four explores the *Itinerarium* of Egeria, a woman who travelled far from her home in western Europe to Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor during the years 381 to 384. The manuscript transmission of the *Itinerarium* has received relatively little scholarly attention because of the limited number of extant manuscripts. Only three manuscripts bearing the text survive, and two of these are extremely fragmentary. Even the fullest version of the *Itinerarium*, found in an eleventh-century manuscript, is incomplete. Egeria's *Itinerarium* was rediscovered in the nineteenth century, and her identity remained a mystery until her account was linked with a letter by the Spanish monk Valerius of Bierzo. In this letter, Valerius praised a woman named Egeria for her bravery when travelling long distances. Despite the text's mysterious origins and limited manuscript witnesses, this chapter traces the transmission and reception of the *Itinerarium* by considering indirect manuscript witnesses, revealing that the text was more popular than the three extant manuscripts suggest. Furthermore, this chapter examines the transmission of texts related to Egeria's *Itinerarium*, such as the letter of Valerius and another travel document, the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*. From this, I reconstruct possible audiences for Egeria's text. Later interpretations of Egeria – as a nun, an abbess, or a wealthy laywoman – are investigated. Finally, this chapter documents Egeria's authorial processes, highlighting her self-conscious production and consumption of Christian literary culture.

The final case study, Chapter Five, discusses the Virgilian *Cento* of Proba and its readers. Of all the case studies I have assembled, Proba's text was by far the most popular in late antiquity,

and its popularity only increased in the medieval period. There is some controversy over the identity of the poet herself, but I follow the traditional attribution of the *Cento* to Faltonia Betitia Proba, a Roman aristocrat. I therefore date the composition of the *Cento* to the middle of the fourth century. The poem is comprised of lines and half-lines of Virgil, and in it Proba retells the Creation story and then presents vignettes from the life of Christ. The *Cento* has a high volume of manuscript witnesses and enjoyed a wide, diverse readership – although it was also subject to criticism and censorship. Jerome ridiculed people who sought Christian truths in Virgil, and the sixth-century *Decretum Gelasianum* condemned the author of Christian cento to eternal damnation. The most common explanation for the popularity of the *Cento* is that it was used for teaching both Christian stories and the works of Virgil to schoolchildren, and that it became a school text soon after its composition. This theory, however, does not align with the available manuscript evidence. The *Cento* was used in Carolingian monastery schools in the eighth and ninth centuries, but there is no sign that it was used as an educational text before. The *Cento* was, however, certainly read in monasteries, and in this chapter I have particularly highlighted its popularity in women's religious communities in early medieval Gaul. The narrative that frames the *Cento* as a school text leans heavily on identifying Proba as a wife and mother, and therefore overlooks one of the obvious intended audiences for the *Cento*: Christian women.

Much of the existing scholarship on the women authors of late antiquity is highly problematic. Although many elite women were evidently educated, the literary abilities of such women are continually called into question, which opens up women-authored texts to increased scrutiny. The works of some of the authors mentioned in this thesis have received hyperbolic criticism from scholars. Not only is this unhelpful, and often expressed in sexist terms, but this actively obscures the audience of these texts who read them for centuries. Furthermore, texts by women are often treated as a homogenous group. I have actively sought to rectify this by highlighting the differences between these authors, their texts, and their afterlives. Previous scholarship has informed, but is also led by, this flawed assumption of a male-dominated literary culture, which has guided the understanding of these women's texts into the twenty-first century. Rather than separating them from the literary output of men and treating the works of women authors as something 'other', this thesis returns these texts to their correct place – the heart of late antique and early medieval Christian literary culture.

Abbreviations

BHL	Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CIL	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
CLE	Carmina Latina Epigraphica
Ep.	*Epistola*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
Auct. ant.	Auctores antiquissimi
SS. rer. Lang.	Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum
SS rer. Merov.	Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PRLE	Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire
SC	Sources chrétiennes

Introduction: The Burden of Proof

In the latter half of the eighth century, an English nun named Huneberc wrote a travel narrative of her relative Willibald, later the bishop of Eichstätt. Earlier in his life Willibald had undertaken a difficult journey to Palestine. Willibald told Huneberc about his travels and she composed the *Hodoeporicon of Willibald*, claiming to be as faithful to his story as possible to ensure the details of his journey were preserved for others to read. Huneberc is unknown beyond this text. Even her name remained a mystery until 1931, when Bernhard Bischoff deciphered a cryptogram in one of the manuscripts containing the *Hodoeporicon*.[1] Huneberc wrote at some point between 761, when she arrived in the convent at Heidenheim, and 786, Willibald's death.

Over five centuries previously, around the year 203, a North African woman named Perpetua composed an account of her arrest and her time in prison, providing a record of events up to her martyrdom for her Christian faith. Her narrative forms part of the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, a dossier of texts which follows Perpetua and her co-martyrs to their violent deaths in the arena at Carthage. The rest of the dossier is comprised by a first-person account by a male martyr, Saturus, and commentary by an anonymous narrator. Perpetua relates the terrifying darkness of her prison cell, the oppressive heat and crowding. It therefore seems unlikely that she could have physically written out her story. Instead, it is more probable that she dictated her account to a visitor to the prison.

Huneberc took dictation, and Perpetua dictated. Writing in 2004, Ora Limor described Huneberc's compositional process. Limor argues that Huneberc is merely recording the story because she 'almost never interferes' and 'does not ask questions'.[2] A decade and a half later, Limor concluded that 'it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the voice of the itinerant monk and that of the sedentary nun.' Limor notes Huneberc's inclusions of connectives such as '*inde'*, '*ibi'*, and '*ille'*, which she identifies as marks of Huneberc recording Willibald's travels exactly as he dictated them to her, rather than her imposing the more formal language that she uses in her preface to the *Hodoeporicon*.[3] The possibility that Huneberc deliberately included words like '*inde'* to make the *Hodoeporicon* read like a first-hand travel account, thereby shaping her text to the existing genre, is not considered. The narrative is Willibald's, and Huneberc simply wrote down the tales that Willibald told her.

In 1995, Thomas J. Heffernan highlighted Perpetua's use of language in her narrative, drawing specific attention to verbs employed during Perpetua's description of her imprisonment.

[1] Bernhard Bischoff, 'Wer ist die Nonne von Heidenheim?', *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktinerordens und siener Zweige* 49 (1931), pp. 387–8.
[2] Ora Limor, 'Pilgrims and Authors: Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* and Hugeberc's *Hodoeporicon Sancti Willibaldi*', *Revue Bénédictine* 114.2 (2004), p. 266.
[3] Ora Limor, 'Willibald in the Holy Places', in Stefan Esders, Yaniv Fox, Yitzhak Hen, and Laury Sarti (eds.), *East and West in the Early Middle Ages: The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 234.

Perpetua mentions the passing of time, giving an indication of the hours or even days that elapsed between events she had chosen to expand upon. Her first week in prison is overwhelmingly described using verbs in the perfect tense: '*dictavit'* ('it told [me]'), '*expavi'* ('I became frightened'). Heffernan agrees that Perpetua dictated her narrative, but points towards the anonymous (and presumed male) narrator of the *Passio* as having true control over the direction of her account: 'an original record, whether written or dictated, may have undergone extensive editing sometime after the death of the martyrs … It is likely that the extant *Passio* has been reconstructed from a verbal report'.[4]

Both of these arguments – that Willibald's own words shaped Huneberc's writing of the *Hodoeporicon*, and that Perpetua's account in the *Passio* was edited extensively – have some merit. But I want to draw attention to the assessments of where true authorial intent lay, and determine what we can deduce about the treatment of women authors by historians. Perpetua's editor is credited with a lot of power over her account, and the ability to shape the martyr's words to his own ends. The result is a stylised, literary construction – but the literariness comes from the narrator, and not Perpetua herself. Conversely, Huneberc passively receives Willibald's story; he dictates and she copies, rather than edits. Although she occupies a similar position to that of the narrator of the *Passio* in relation to her text, Huneberc seems powerless in comparison. Even though we know some details about her life, logically giving her an edge on the narrator of the *Passio*, it is easier to imagine an anonymous, faceless third-century man directing the course of a text than it is an eighth-century woman. When approaching Perpetua, Huneberc, and the representation of their authorship, there are other possibilities to consider: that Huneberc shaped Willibald's words to her own intentions; that the anonymous narrator respected Perpetua's final words enough not to tamper with them. But such ideas go firmly against the grain of much of the existing historiography on women's authorship.

*

With dictation in play as a normalised, legitimate way to produce written work, there is already a marked difference between the late antique conception of authorship and our own. A late antique author could expect to have a scribe (*notarius*) on hand, or even a team of scribes, to streamline and codify a verbal delivery. In the later fourth and early fifth century, between Rome and Bethlehem, Jerome was one such author. In a letter to a mother and daughter living in Gaul, he urged the two women to set aside their illicit affairs. The mother had sworn herself to a life of chaste widowhood, and the daughter to holy virginity, but each had taken a man (posing as a monk) into their home. Jerome's furious letter ends with a description of its composition:

[4] Thomas J. Heffernan, 'Philology and Authorship in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis'*, *Traditio* 50 (1995), p. 324.

> *Haec ad brevem lucubratiunculam celeri sermone dictavi … extemporalis est dictio et tanta ad lumen lucernulae facilitate profusa, ut notariorum manus lingua praecurreret et signa ac furta verborum volubilitas sermonis obrueret.*[5]
>
> I dictated this speech, working quickly during one short night … my speech was unmeditated, and by the light of a small lamp I readily produced such a profusion that my tongue overtook my secretaries' handwriting and the volubility of my speech overwhelmed their signs and theft of words [shorthand].

Dictation was a common and efficient way of writing, and scribes had a key role in late antique literary production.[6] Both men and women undertook scribal work, and they were overwhelmingly enslaved, prized by their masters for their skills.[7] This group of highly-literate people are often on the fringes of discussions of late antique literary culture, if they feature at all. I mention scribes here for two reasons. The first is to establish a picture of late antique literary culture, which required the skilled labour of a group of enslaved people who go largely unnoticed. Some of these people were women. The second is to highlight that the use of a scribe does not denote shared authorship in late antiquity. The text is the product of the *auctor* and not the *notarius*. Crucially, using a scribe was not considered a sign of incompetence or illiteracy on the part of an author. Our modern conception of authorship is writing out longhand or typing, but this is an overwhelmingly solitary pursuit. Modern written work goes through many drafts and revisions, and these often occur in conversation with others, perhaps even with an editor – but the final product is that of the author. To our minds, the scribes who organised the stream-of-consciousness of the loquacious Jerome should get at least some authorial credit. But, in a world where the physical writing of texts was outsourced to others, the speaker remains the author.[8]

The concept of late antique and medieval authorship was dissected in an innovative edited volume by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Linda Olson in 2005, *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*. This study highlighted the layered nature of literary composition in late antiquity and the middle ages, and how this challenges our own notions of literacy and authorship. Particularly, the focus is on how current ideas of literacy and literariness limit our access to the writings of historical women. The chapter in this collection by Alison I. Beach

[5] Jerome, *Ep*. 117.12.
[6] See the discussion on dictation in Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *Greek and Latin Letters in Late Antiquity: The Christianisation of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 27–8. For a foundational discussion of scribal agency see Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[7] Most scribes remained enslaved until at least the year 600. See Candida Moss, *God's Ghostwriters: Enslaved Christians and the Making of the Bible* (New York, N.Y.: Little, Brown and Company, 2024). For a study of shorthand-writers and their education, both technical and ideological, see Ella Kirsh, ''Etched into the Soul': the Education of Shorthand-Writers in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies* (forthcoming 2024).
[8] The transformation of attitudes towards physically writing is explored by Mark Vessey, who particularly highlights Jerome's hand in elevating writing from a menial, manual task to the quintessential activity of the Christian man of letters. See Mark Vessey, 'From *Cursus* to *Ductus*: Figures of Writing in Western Late Antiquity (Augustine, Jerome, Cassiodorus, Bede)', in Patrick Cheney (ed.), *European Literary Careers: The Author from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 47–103.

(from which I have drawn the title of this introduction) discusses a group of twelfth-century nuns from Admont, a monastery in Austria.[9] Beach discovered that, when surveying the available evidence, these seemed by far the most likely authors of a collection of sermons and biblical commentaries, the majority of which were anonymous. The community was home to highly educated nuns, a well-stocked library, and an active scribal culture; the manuscripts themselves contained images of nuns preaching, and were owned by the nuns themselves. However, in the early eighteenth century these texts were attributed to Godfrey, Admont's abbot from 1172 to 1176, by the historian Bernard Pez. This attribution was restated by Jacques-Paul Migne in his edition of the texts in his *Patrologia Latina* (1874), despite there being no clear connection between Godfrey and these works.[10] Beach instead turns her attention to the nuns, whom she promotes as the authors of these texts. If they had not been women, the nuns would have been the clearest answer to the question of who wrote these anonymous sermons and commentaries. Beach writes that the persistent failure to reach the logical conclusion – that the nuns wrote these texts – highlights 'the power exerted by a historian's assumptions about the lives of medieval women'. Beach continues: 'Scholars attempting to identify female authors frequently bump up against the intellectual barriers erected by such assumptions, and therefore must shoulder a double burden of proof.'[11] Not only is the historian of women's authorship studying texts by women; they are making a case for expanding the (social, intellectual, behavioural) limitations placed upon such women.

The case of the Admont nuns is a clear demonstration of the problem I have attempted to unpack above – that women's authorship remains insufficiently studied, or even concealed, because of problematic historiography. Riffing on Beach's chapter, Linda Olson writes in her introduction that:

> … we as students of texts and writers of history, gathering our evidence and constructing our arguments, need to apply an even hand and eye to the men and women of the past. If we constantly make the women we study bear an extra "burden of proof" (Beach)—and there is no doubt that we do—then we should bring the same attitudes and questions to the men we study. Similarly, when we have the kind of evidence about women that would, if it were representative of male activities, present a convincing argument for high levels of literacy or attributions of authorship, then we should bring those same conclusions to bear upon the women.

The second part of this quotation – how evidence for authorship and literariness is approached differently depending upon the author's gender – is crucial for understanding much of the extant body of scholarship on late antique women writers. What I aim to provide here is something of a course-correction, illuminating how and what these women wrote, the

[9] Alison I. Beach, 'Listening for the Voices of Admont's Twelfth-Century Nuns', in Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Linda Olson (eds.), *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, I.N.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 187–98.
[10] On Migne's publishing enterprise see R. Howard Bloch, *God's Plagiarist: Being an Account of the Fabulous Industry and Irregular Commerce of the Abbé Migne* (Chicago, I.L: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[11] Beach, 'Admont's Twelfth-Century Nuns' (2005), p. 196.

conditions under which their writing occurred, and their readership throughout the following centuries.

This thesis focuses on writings by Christian women from the third and fourth century Latin west. It explores the reception of these texts, their transmission in manuscripts, and their later recensions, until around the year 900. Studying the transmission of these texts over the centuries following their composition reveals when and where attitudes shift or remain entrenched – sometimes to the text itself and its author, but other times to women's authorship in general. Shining a light on the transmission of women's writing also showcases the range of factors that determine whether a text is saved, copied, and preserved. The corpus of extant texts by women may be limited, but it is certainly a minute portion of what once existed. The backdrop to this study is the developing social and cultural expectations of Christian women, a burgeoning Christian literary culture, and the effects of regional variation on the accessibility (or even the acceptability) of these texts. Who read these women, where were their texts circulating, and why were their specific texts read? Finally, this thesis explores how the current understanding of both the texts themselves and their transmission has been shaped by decades, sometimes centuries, of historiographical discourse. This is to be expected, and sometimes applauded – but much of the historiography that still drives scholarship on women's writing from late antiquity is outdated, inaccurate, and sometimes openly sexist. This obscures the wider picture of the literary activities of late antique women as a result. It seems that medieval commentators had far less of an issue with the woman authors of late antiquity than did many of the historians and classicists of the twentieth century.

The traditional understanding of late antique literary culture in the Latin west is that it was male-dominated, founded upon a classical system of education that only men had access to. Men wrote for men. A representative example is Alan Cameron's *The Last Pagans of Rome* (2011), an overhaul of the mythic image of Rome's pagan aristocrats as admirable but doomed defenders of culture – and especially literature – in the later fourth century. The imagined conflict of Christians versus pagans that Cameron dismantles, and the cultural synthesis with which he replaces it, happens between groups of men.[12] Women do not feature in Cameron's idea of literary culture, neither as authors nor as patrons. There is a reason for this omission – literary women are much harder to discern in the historical record.[13] As I shall explore in this thesis, some texts by women were less likely to be copied and transmitted, and therefore we have only a partial picture of the extent to which women's writing was part of literary culture more broadly. My starting point is fundamentally different to Cameron's in that I deliberately place women's writing at the forefront of my enquiry, despite the (often frustrating) gaps in the

[12] Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 3–13. The exception to this is a short discussion of the *Cento* of Proba because it was known to the author of the *Carmen Contra Paganos*, pp. 313–4.

[13] The difficulties associated with discerning women writers in the historical record has led to an impression of a male-dominated literary culture in the west more generally. See, for example, Ernst Robert Curtius (trans. Willard R. Trask), *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), and Erich Auerbach (trans. Ralph Manheim), *Literary Language & its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965). By the same author see also *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953).

evidence. By doing so, I am placing myself in opposition to the idea that literary culture was overwhelmingly masculine.

Happily, there are several high points in the historiography on late antique women and their writings; my thesis builds upon decades of work in this area. Patricia Wilson-Kastner's monograph, *A Lost Tradition: Women Writers of the Early Church* (1981), highlights many of the same case studies I do, situating Christian women's authorship within a wider context of discussions surrounding women's authority in the first few centuries of Christianity. Thirty years later, Kim Haines-Eitzen's *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity* (2011) broadened the scope of Wilson-Kastner's study, bringing in Greek literature as well as the consideration of the materiality of texts, and the relationship between body and book. Haines-Eitzen went beyond women's authorship, considering women as readers, producers of manuscripts, and promoters of early Christian literature. An unpublished PhD thesis by Crystal Dean, *Roman Woman Authors: Authorship, Agency and Authority* (2012), places writings by early Christian women within the context of late Roman literary culture – Dean argues for a consistent tradition of Roman women authors. Additionally, dedicated studies of women and gender in the period help to develop (and at times directly investigate) the question of women's authorship. Emily Ann Hemelrijk's *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Élite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (1999), follows the lives of these learned women from around 190 BC to 217 CE – although ending at the very start of our period, this work highlights the extent of women's education before Christianity was established.

Following on from this theme, the late Elizabeth A. Clark extensively investigated women in early Christianity, in collections of essays such as *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith* (1986) but also through the study of individual women, as in *Melania the Younger: From Rome to Jerusalem* (2021). Similarly, Gillian Clark's *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (1995) discussed aspects of women's lives including medicine, marriage, and the domestic space, reducing the divisions between Christian and non-Christian people that are often artificially imposed.[14] Kate Cooper has provided a range of investigations into late antique understandings of gender and how it impacted the lives of women, namely in *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (1996) and *The Fall of the Roman Household* (2007). Lynda L. Coon's analyses of holy women and female monasticism have drawn attention various understandings of women within late antique and medieval Christian society.[15] More recently, Ellen Muelberger, Blossom Stefaniw, and L. Stephanie Cobb have addressed the use of gender as a category of analysis in the historiography of late antiquity,

[14] For the sources see Carolinne White (ed. and trans.), *Lives of Roman Christian Women* (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

[15] Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia, P.A.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) and *Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West* (Philadelphia, P.A.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). See also the collection of essays in Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth W. Sommer (eds.), *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity* (Charlottesville, V.A.: University Press of Virginia, 1990).

particularly as it applies to women.[16] The study of late antique women, then, is a thriving field of enquiry.

Commentaries upon late antique women's writings are often found in anthologies, alongside editions and translations of the texts themselves. Because the number of extant texts by these women is small, and remains relatively so even when the chronology is expanded, collecting them in this way seems helpful and logical. And perhaps it is – but the overall effect of these anthologies is to highlight women's writing as a curiosity, a phenomenon occurring separately to Latin literature as a whole. Anthologies can also flatten distinctions between the women themselves, making women writers a genre all their own and divorcing these texts from their wider literary milieu.[17] Two similar and roughly contemporary anthologies of women's writings – Peter Dronke's *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (1984) and Marcelle Thiébaux's *The Writings of Medieval Women* (1987) – highlight a growing interest in women's writing in the 1980s, spurred on by the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s and 70s and its creation of the field of women's history.[18] The first work in the three-volume series *Women Writing Latin* (2002) spans from ancient Roman to early medieval Christian texts, is one example of such an anthology. The work is doubtlessly useful, providing commentaries as well as the Latin text and an English translation, and bringing little-known writings by women to a wider audience. But, as is consistent with the genre of anthologies, the emphasis is on collection as opposed to analysis. A comparable work is Ian M. Plant's anthology, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome* (2004), which has a similar chronology but includes material from the Hellenic world. A variation on the theme of existing anthologies is Jane Stevenson's *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority, from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (2005). The focus on poetry sidesteps the anthologising issue of making women's writing a literary genre and Stevenson's work is much more a commentary than it is an anthology, highlighting how women's involvement in and relationship to literary culture changed over nearly two millennia. Overall, late antique women's writing is much anthologised.

It is clear, then, that late antique women have enjoyed much scholarly attention, as have their writings. Where the present study diverges from these previous efforts, however, is by analysing the reception and transmission of these texts, and considering what such an analysis can reveal about understandings of women's authorship. Some consideration is often given to the reception and transmission of their texts in dedicated studies of women authors – Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed's monograph on the poet Proba, which explores her reception into the later

[16] See Ellen Muehlberger, 'Simeon and Other Women in Theodoret's *Religious History*: Gender in the Representation of Late Ancient Christian Asceticism', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23.4 (2015), pp. 583–606, and 'Salvage: Macrina and the Christian Project of Cultural Reclamation', *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 81 (2012), pp. 273–97; Blossom Stefaniw, 'Feminist Historiography and Uses of the Past', *Studies in Late Antiquity* 4.3 (2020), pp. 260–83, and 'Masculinity, Historiography, and Uses of the Past: An Introduction', *Journal of Early Christian History* 11.1 (2021), pp. 1–14; L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia Press, 2008).

[17] Anthologies of women's writings and their significance in wider studies of women's authorship will be discussed in more depth in Chapter One of this thesis.

[18] For an early reflection on the development of women's history and its political roots, see Sally Alexander and Anna Davin, 'Feminist History', *History Workshop Journal* 1 (1976), pp. 4–6

medieval period, is a prime example of this.[19] A related mode of enquiry looks at the evolving reception of an individual author, part of which (but not all) is the continued reading of their text. This is most clearly observed in Margaret-Cotter Lynch's study of the cult of Perpetua from antiquity into the middle ages, which shows how the reception of Perpetua's text is unavoidably shaped (and therefore greatly complicated) by her veneration as a saint.[20] Even when taking these studies into account, a full consideration of the transmission of late antique women's texts is still missing – and it is that space which this thesis aims to fill.

Methodologically, however, I find myself on a well-trodden path. The field of reception studies, particularly of classical texts, continues to thrive: *The Reception of Classical Literature* (2012) edited by Christine Walde, a Supplement to *Brill's New Pauly*, is but one example. Perhaps more relevant to my enquiry is the study of the reception of late antique authors, for example *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine* (2013) edited by Karla Pollman. It is from reception studies that I take several of my main modes of analysis: highlighting direct commentators; observing the patterns of later quotations; tracking the changes made to an earlier text in later recensions; considering regional variation in an author's reception. Similarly, existing studies of textual transmission through manuscripts have been invaluable for developing my methodology. The study of the transmission of Jerome's *Martyrology* by Felice Lifshitz and the different recensions of the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours by Helmut Reimitz are two key examples of this approach.[21] Both Lifshitz and Reimitz utilise manuscripts to determine the origins of certain versions of their texts, and to provide some insights into the communities that read them. Similarly, manuscripts provide invaluable evidence for an invested, educated readership of writings by late antique women, and highlight the processes by which these texts survive today. Reception and transmission, therefore, go hand in hand.

This thesis is structured around four main case studies: Perpetua's account in the *Passio* (Chapter Two), Paula and Eustochium's letter to Marcella (Chapter Three), Egeria's *Itinerarium* (Chapter Four), and the Virgilian *Cento* of Proba (Chapter Five). The thesis begins with a survey of women's writings from late antiquity (Chapter One): this highlights the available evidence, and explores the question of why so few texts by late antique women are extant. Each chapter dedicated to a core case study (Chapters Two to Five) will provide a fresh reading of the relevant text and then analyse the interpretations of later commentators, paying particular attention to how they respond to women's authorship. I explore the manuscript transmission of the text, considering how the text is presented between manuscripts, how its authorship is (or is not) referred to, how it appears in manuscript catalogues, and where the

[19] Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet: The Christian Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).
[20] Margaret Cotter-Lynch, *Saint Perpetua Across the Middle Ages: Mother, Gladiator, Saint* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[21] Felice Lifshitz, *The Name of the Saint: The Martyrology of Jerome and Access to the Sacred in Francia, 627–827* (Notre Dame, I.N.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), and Helmut Reimitz, 'Social Networks and Identities in Frankish Historiography. New Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours' *Historiae'*, in Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger, and Helmut Reimitz (eds.), *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 229–68. For the broader context of the transmission of Frankish historiography see Helmut Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity, and the Framing of Western Ethnicity, 550–850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

manuscripts are produced and for whom. I also consider later redactions in their manuscript transmission. Each case study chapter highlights the historiographical discourse surrounding the relevant text, and the extent to which this has shaped approaches to the text. What often emerges from surveying the historiography is a persistent disparaging of women's writing, a dim view of the education of such women, and the sense that these texts fall short of the literary standards of the time. By contrast, I approach these texts primarily as historical artefacts as opposed to examples of their particular literary genre. The 'burden of proof' is a persistent feature of this study. Where possible I have highlighted the education an individual woman did, or might have, received. Particularly in Chapter One, I have drawn attention to the involvement of women in late antique literary culture at large, and considered how this might inform women writers.

The broad chronology for this enquiry is from c. 200, the earliest date of composition for Perpetua's account in the *Passio*, to c. 900, the final point for my observation of the reception and transmission of the core case study texts. Therefore, although the Huneberc's text is not part of my analysis, I am seeking to create a clearer picture of the kind of literary culture within which Huneberc, and other women like her, wrote. At times the sources I draw upon, such as manuscripts and library catalogues, extend beyond this date range, but they are included because of their reflection of an earlier reception tradition. This presents an immediate challenge in terms of periodisation. Because of her Christianity Perpetua is often brought under the late antique umbrella – but this project technically begins in antiquity, at a high point of Roman imperial power, then stretches beyond late antiquity and into the medieval era. But this thesis highlights an overwhelming continuity, rather than change, to attitudes towards these texts throughout the centuries. Although a disruption of periodisation is not its direct focus, this thesis then problematises the sharp distinctions frequently drawn between antiquity, late antiquity, and the medieval.

The wider context of this study is the changing nature of women's authority in the late antique and early medieval church. In the first centuries of Christianity there are multiple examples of women who were teachers, ascetics, and patrons, demonstrating that there were a range of ways for women to exercise authority in the church. Women appear in leadership positions from the outset. Paul entrusted Phoebe, whom he calls 'deaconess' (*diakonos*), to carry his letter to the Romans.[22] In the first epistle to Timothy the author rebukes widows who liked to socialise, and Harry O. Maier has argued these women were acting as patrons of Christian gatherings.[23] In the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Paul's sermon was heard by young noblewoman Thecla, who then rejected her family and fiancé in favour of travelling and preaching alongside Paul.[24] The process of institutionalisation of the church was also one of masculinisation, with

[22] Romans 16:1–2.
[23] 1 Timothy 5:11–15. Harry O. Maier, 'The Entrepreneurial Widows of 1 Timothy', in Joan E. Taylor and Ilaria L. E. Ramelli (eds.), *Patterns of Women's Leadership in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 59–73.
[24] For Thecla as a model of women's authority and her presentation in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* see Susan E. Hylen, *A Modest Apostle: Thecla and the History of Women in the Early Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 71–90.

men monopolizing the offices of priest, deacon, and bishop – but this was not always, or uniformly, the case.[25] In inscriptions and epitaphs women are named as deaconesses, and often described as a 'second Phoebe' – though these inscriptions fall tantalisingly short of giving an insight into the activities of the deaconess herself.[26] The widows of 1 Timothy find their parallel in the female aristocrats of the later Roman empire, who lavishly funded the construction of churches and the composition of Christian literature alike.[27] In fact, the power of the female patron within Christian community seemed greater than (and preferable to) that wielded by the male priest.[28] I am not proposing a direct line of continuity from the authority of Phoebe to the presence of women in literary culture, but rather highlighting the many ways that Christian women could wield power in the early part of my chosen chronology.

That said, even the authority of these women had its limitations. Christian women were expected to be modest, and to be led by male authority figures. This is best exemplified in the directive in 1 Timothy 2:12 that forbade women from teaching, or holding authority over men – instead, women should be silent ('*Docere autem mulierem non permitto, neque dominari in virum: sed esse in silentio'*). Christian attitudes towards women necessarily informed Christian literary culture and the place of women authors within it. If a woman was not permitted to teach, then should she write for an audience? This was evidently a matter of personal interpretation. The limited texts authored by women from this period certainly give the impression of a male-dominated literary culture. Looking to the manuscript transmission, it also appears that less value was placed upon women's writings. This is particularly apparent in letter collections. From the extant corpus of letters by men, it is clear that women wrote to them and that they wrote back. These women's letters, however, were not preserved. The point at which this decision was made is lost – perhaps the (male) recipient did not keep the letter in the first place, or the compiler of a manuscript chose to leave them out – but the fact remains that at some point there was a conscious choice to exclude texts by women from the historical record. The authority of the most formidable Roman patron during her lifetime did not ensure the survival of her writings after her death.

The texts that do survive from this period therefore do not necessarily indicate who held the most sway at the time, but rather showcase those men whose authority survived in transmission. Generally, their views held more weight after their deaths, the respect for these figures

[25] For a radical take on women as office-holders in the medieval church, see Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[26] 'Six Inscriptions of (Christian) Women Deacons' in Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 257-259. See also John Wijngaards, *Women Deacons in the Early Church: Historical Texts and Contemporary Debates* (New York, N.Y.: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2006), and Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek (eds.), *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (London and Baltimore, M.D.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).
[27] I will discuss women's patronage in Chapter One. For the methodological difficulties in rendering female patronage visible see Anne Kurdock, '*Demetrias ancilla dei:* Anicia Demetrias and the Problem of the Missing Patron', in Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner (eds.), *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 190–224.
[28] For a discussion of women's patronage in relation to the power of the institutionalised church see Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Patrons, Not Priests: Gender and Power in Late Ancient Christianity', *Gender and History* 2 (1990), pp. 253–73.

increasing over the centuries. A name that appears frequently in this thesis – and has appeared already – is Jerome's. In the later fourth and early fifth century, Jerome turned his pen to (and upon) many subjects, including several of the authors explored in this thesis. Jerome's commentary is sometimes the earliest evidence of reception of these texts, and therefore must be included. But Jerome's presence as a commentator should not be equated with his significance as a late antique literary tastemaker. He was a prolific author in his lifetime, but it was only by the ninth century that he gained his status as a saint and a *doctus* of the church.[29] Jerome was vocal, but he was not necessarily authoritative. He needed the support of his patrons (first Pope Damasus, and later a circle of aristocratic Roman women who appear throughout this thesis) without whom he may have accomplished very little. But it is Jerome's voice we can hear throughout the centuries, rather than that of his patrons. The beneficiaries of patrons, and not the patrons themselves, occupy greater space in the historical record because their output was of interest to those who made choices about the preservation and transmission of texts. Monastery librarians and copyists preserved the work of Jerome rather than the directives of his patrons – but we should not interpret this as Jerome being the more powerful figure, or even one half of a partnership of equals. Jerome was reliant on patronage.

Jerome was also formative for the idea of Christian authorship which he promoted through *De viris illustribus*, his collection of the works and lives of Christian male authors. As Mark Vessey has shown, this was foundational for how medieval readers understood the figure of the author as someone who physically wrote. Jerome transformed the act of writing from manual labour to the quintessential activity of the Christian man of letters.[30] But Jerome's attempts to promote the Christian author as a figure of respect should also be understood as a fundamental part of Jerome's own self-fashioning. After all, the final entry in *De viris illustribus* was on Jerome himself. This created a lasting impression – Megan Williams demonstrated the influence that Jerome's projected image had on later generations of monks, who looked to Jerome's life for assurance that biblical scholars could still be exemplary ascetics.[31] Because of Jerome's later reputation as 'Church Father', it is all too easy to retroactively bestow upon him an authority which neither he nor his literary output had during his lifetime. I include Jerome's (often scathing) commentary on these female authors not because it necessarily carried any special weight in its original context, but because it is relevant to their literary reception. Jerome's commentary is more influential by the end of my chronology, but by then the damage is done, and the writings of these women are in monastery libraries, used as reference works, and included in poetic compendia.

As Jerome's influence expanded into the early medieval period, there was a shift in women's authority within the church. An all-male clergy (and a vanishingly small number of deaconesses), the expectation of enclosure for monastic women, and the receding of Roman patronage relationships meant that women had fewer ways to exercise power, and those that did often had royal connections. The surviving texts by late antique women were read by

[29] Megan Hale Williams, *The Monk and the Book: Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago, I.L.: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
[30] Vessey, 'From *Cursus* to *Ductus',* pp. 47–103.
[31] Williams, *The Monk and the Book,* pp. 261–6.

communities that, even a few centuries removed, were unlikely to produce similar works themselves. My aim with this project is therefore to draw attention to the afterlives of texts written by women in the third and fourth centuries. I consider how the perceptions of the women themselves changed over time, and how this impacted the reputation of their work. The aristocratic rank of authors Proba, Paula, and Eustochium continued to resonate throughout the transmission of their texts. Perpetua received praise for her martyrial bravery after her death, just as Egeria's exceptional piety was highlighted, indirectly creating a later tradition which commemorated her as an abbess. These women, all elites to some extent, made a lasting impression on Christian literary culture.

The women whose writings survive are not exceptional – instead, they indicate a significant and consistent presence of women in late Roman literary culture. Previous scholarship has tended to focus on these writings in their immediate context, foregrounding investigations into the author's life (and, at times, identity) and motivations. Rather than exclusively returning to this well-trodden ground, I observe the circulation of writings by women in the centuries following their composition. Rather than speculating upon the lives of the authors themselves, I prioritise interpretations of their texts and their authorial personae. By approaching women's writing in this way two things become immediately apparent. The first is that there were far more women writing in late antiquity than the existing corpus suggests. The second is that the extant writings were widely copied, continuously read, and often praised.

Chapter One: Women Writing Latin in the Late Antique West

After her children had died in infancy, a young woman named Melania (c. 385–439) decided to shun the ostentatious wealth of her aristocratic upbringing and instead devote herself to a life of Christian asceticism. Melania and her husband, Pinian, committed to living in continence together, and steadily began to shed the trappings of their high status. Jewels, fine clothes, vast estates and hundreds of enslaved people were all sold, and the money was given to churches and to the poor. With Melania's mother, Albina, they left Rome and eventually settled in Jerusalem. Her *Life* is extant in both Greek and Latin. According to her hagiographer, Melania studied the scriptures and other Christian writings with great intensity, thereby ensuring that she was in a strong position to teach those in her spiritual care.[32] Melania was bilingual, with total command of both Greek and Latin, allowing her to draw upon writings from the Christian west and east. It is apparent that she was well-educated. And, although none of her writing survives, Melania also wrote as part of her ascetic practice. The *Life* describes Albina wanting to speak to her daughter and entering her cell, but Melania would ignore her until she had completed her reading and writing.[33] Melania decided the amount she would read and write per day, and she wrote regularly in small notebooks – or, according to the Latin version of her *Life*, on parchment.[34] The author of the *Life* compliments Melania's beautiful handwriting and comments that, as well as reading the Old and New Testaments three or four times a year, Melania would copy out the texts herself for others to read.[35]

It is not clear what Melania wrote in her notebooks, however. Elizabeth Clark's interpretation is that Melania used her notebooks to list her daily reading and writing tasks, but her *Life* mentions the notebooks twice – they seem far more significant to Melania than to-do list receptacles, and a reusable wax tablet would surely have been a more suitable choice for recording such a list.[36] Another possibility is that the notebooks contained Melania's copies of the Bible that she would give to others, and this is perhaps what the Latin *Life* is gesturing towards by describing Melania writing on parchment. But the Greek *Life* specifies that Melania wrote in small notebooks; their size indicates that they had a more personal use and were designed to be transported easily rather than read from. To me, this suggests that Melania used

[32] Gerontius, *Sanctae Melanie Junioris Vita* [Greek], 23; 26. The author of the life is commonly identified as Gerontius, the abbot who took over Melania's monasteries after her death. His name is not mentioned in manuscripts containing the *Life*, however, and Gerontius himself seemed to know details about Melania that her hagiographer did not. For the argument to designate the *Life* as an anonymous text see Kate Cooper, 'The Household and the Desert: Monastic and Biological Communities in the Lives of Melania the Younger', in Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Household, Women, and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 13–15. For the texts themselves with accompanying commentary see Elizabeth A. Clark (ed. and trans.), *The Life of Melania the Younger: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984).

[33] Gerontius, *Sanctae Melanie Junioris Vita* [Greek], 33.

[34] Gerontius, *Sanctae Melanie Junioris Vita* [Greek], 23; 36. The Latin version of the *Life* records Melania writing upon parchment, *'membranis'* – see *Sanctae Melanie Junioris Vita* [Latin], 23.

[35] Gerontius, *Sanctae Melanie Junioris Vita* [Greek], 23. Elizabeth A. Clark highlights that these copies were 'surely just excerpts' rather than the entire Bible; see *Melania the Younger: From Rome to Jerusalem* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 18.

[36] Clark, *Melania the Younger,* p. 18.

her notebooks for private reflection, transcribing excerpts from sermons or scripture that particularly resonated with her, or maybe writing out the Psalms again and again as a form of private, silent chanting. Perhaps she recorded her own prayers. The *Life* does not specify whether Melania filled one notebook before starting the next, or whether she kept multiple notebooks for different kinds of writing. Melania's notebooks are a puzzling feature of her *Life*, but her portrayal as a highly literary figure in the narrative demonstrates how reading and writing could not only be incorporated into ascetic practice, but form the basis of it.

Both versions of her *Life* record that Melania was proficient in Greek and Latin, that she read copiously and continuously, that she undertook scribal work for the benefit of others, and that she wrote regularly. It is the fervour with which Melania undertook these literary tasks, rather than the tasks themselves, that is presented as exceptional. For a woman of her wealth and social standing, Melania was an outlier due to her ascetic lifestyle rather than her level of participation in literary culture. And yet, because the contents of her notebooks do not survive, Melania's is not a name that comes to mind when considering the female authors of late antiquity. How different would the picture of female authorship look if we were to include now-lost writings by women in our analysis?

The Historiographical Context

The main body of this chapter is a survey of Latin writings by late antique women. I have focussed especially on the third to fifth centuries and limited the geographical scope of my investigation to the Latin west, but at times I have drawn upon examples from the east or from slightly outside my established chronology to indicate wider trends in women's education and authorship. In an effort to provide a clearer picture of women's involvement in all areas of literary culture, I have elected to hold space for writings by women that are no longer extant. This is a deliberate break from previous surveys of this kind. Unlike the authors of earlier attempts to gather together the writings of late antique women, I have the benefit of a wealth of research on the topic since it began to attract broader interest in the 1980s. This body of scholarship has only grown in the decades since. As such, I do not need to draw special attention to once-neglected (and now widely-celebrated) women like Proba, the author of a Virgilian cento which takes the form of a biblical epic. Rather, I want to emphasise that Proba was not exceptional. Other women from the late antique west attained a high level of education, wrote regular letters, read and annotated texts, composed poetry, and commissioned literary works. But, like Proba, these women were wealthy elites, often belonging to aristocratic Roman families. Nowhere in my research have I found a text by a woman that I could confidently identify as falling outside this category. Because these texts represent only a fraction of women belonging to the upper echelons of society, this necessarily limits the conclusions that can be drawn from them. But gendered distinctions certainly come into play in the transmission and reception of these texts. Writings by women were less likely to be preserved and copied, and women who wrote were not often remembered as authors – especially if, like Perpetua, they could be commemorated as saints. This, coupled with earlier studies which focussed solely on

extant works, has created a false impression that women in late antiquity rarely wrote, and were not involved in literary culture more broadly.

Foremost among earlier efforts to bring together writings by late antique women is Peter Dronke's foundational *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (1984), which comments on writings by women from the third century to the thirteenth.[37] In his introduction, Dronke framed his shining a light upon works by women as part of a greater project to convince readers of the intrinsic value of such works. Dronke set out to prove that texts by women were worth reading and he more than accomplished this aim. This is not to say that Dronke's approach was without fault. By prioritising texts which revealed something of the inner life and personalities of their authors – 'texts in which women tell how they understand themselves and their world, or construct imaginative worlds of their own' – Dronke left gaps in his research and introduced a misguided mission to access the something of the authentic thoughts and feelings of his subjects.[38] This is an illustrative example: on account of its meagre (to Dronke) revelations about the mindset of its author, the *Cento* of Proba received only a footnote.[39] Disregarding the longest extant Latin poem by a late antique woman in such a study seems a glaring error. Although Dronke ostensibly denies the existence of a particularly 'feminine' mode of writing shared by the authors he surveys, he is quick to draw parallels between them, for example by linking a fourth-century inscription by a grieving widow to Heloise's letters to Abelard.[40] Dronke prioritises texts that are beautiful and emotive to the ultimate detriment of establishing a clear view of the types of women who wrote, what they wrote, and how these texts were received by the literary public at the time. Dronke's statement on why women wrote is revealing:

> The women's motivation for writing at all … seems rarely to be predominantly literary: it is often more urgently serious than is common among men writers; it is a response springing from inner needs, more than from an artistic, or didactic, inclination.[41]

By invoking the 'inner needs' of women, Dronke here asserts a familiar trope of women being more in touch with their emotions than hard-headed, rational men. Furthermore, his conclusion is a direct result of prioritising more introspective and personal texts. As subsequent surveys of women's writings demonstrate (my own included), Dronke's assessment was inaccurate. Women, like men, could be practical, instructive, literary, formal, and exhortatory in their writings.

Of course, Dronke was not writing in a vacuum. The 1980s and 1990s proved productive decades for the study of late antique women and their authorship. Marcelle Thiébaux's anthology of writings by medieval women shortly followed in 1987, with new texts and a fresh

[37] Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (†203) to Marguerite Porete (†1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
[38] *Ibid.,* p. viii.
[39] *Ibid.,*, n. 69, p. 286.
[40] *Ibid.,*, p. 21.
[41] *Ibid.,*, p. x.

perspective.[42] Elizabeth Clark and Diane F. Hatch's monograph on the *Cento* of Proba in 1981, which included an English translation of the 694-line poem, had already made an important step in taking writing by late antique women seriously.[43] Ross S. Kraemer's 1991 overview of Jewish and Christian women's authorship remains the best route into the subject, and her 2004 collection of translated texts by and about these women expands upon the earlier work.[44] Another useful sourcebook is Ian M. Plant's collection of texts by ancient Greek and Roman women which includes some late ancient examples.[45] As discussed in the introduction, Kim Haines-Eitzen has considered how early Christian women were involved in literary culture and production, building upon her previous work on scribal agency.[46]

Catherine Conybeare's 2005 article 'Spaces between Letters: Augustine's Correspondence with Women', where Conybeare considers the letters sent by women to Augustine, is an important methodological influence for the information I have presented below.[47] More than acknowledging that such letters once existed and do not survive, Conybeare uses Augustine's replies to reconstruct some of their content and draw some conclusions about the preoccupations of these women (usually they wrote to Augustine for advice on matters of doctrine) and their relationship with the bishop of Hippo. The missing letters are treated, where possible, as documents in their own right. A similar approach is taken by Victoria Leonard, who refers to letters that women are known to have written to Augustine as 'ghost letters', emphasising their translucent, shadowy presence – but presence nonetheless – in the historical record.[48] Similarly, I consider the writings by women that were lost and the traces they have left behind, and include their remnants as much as possible whilst attempting to build a picture of what women's authorship looked like in late antiquity.

Educated Women

Before I embark upon the survey below, I want to dispel the idea that women were not educated in late antiquity. This is simply untrue. Education in the late Roman west was restricted to those who could afford it, meaning that it was primarily the preserve of the elite. And, though

[42] Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women: An Anthology* (New York, N.Y.: Garland Publishing, 1987, repr. 1994).
[43] Elizabeth A. Clark and Diane F. Hatch, *The Golden Bough, the Oaken Cross: The Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (Chico, C.A.: Scholars Press, 1981).
[44] Ross Sheperd Kraemer, 'Women's Authorship of Jewish and Christian Literature in the Greco-Roman Period', in Amy-Jill Levine (ed.), *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 221–42, and *Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World.*
[45] Ian M. Plant, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome: An Anthology* (London: Equinox, 2004). For a condensed survey of a similar period see Emily Hauser, '*Otpima tu proprii nominis auctor:* The Semantics of Female Authorship in Ancient Rome, from Sulpicia to Proba', *Eugesta* 6.1 (2016), pp. 151–86.
[46] Kim Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2012), and *Guardians of Letters*.
[47] Catherine Conybeare, 'Spaces between Letters: Augustine's Correspondence with Women', in Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (eds.), *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, I.N.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 57–72.
[48] Victoria Leonard, 'Gendered Violence, Victim Credibility, and Adjudicating Justice in Augustine's Letters', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2023), pp. 219–39.

schoolrooms were all-male, both boys and girls were educated in the home. As is evident from the examples below, women continued to educate themselves all their lives, having learned reading, writing, and sometimes the basics of rhetoric at a young age. Though some girls were educated with the express purpose of their becoming consecrated virgins, it was expected that a Roman *matrona* would have a good enough level of education to then oversee the education of her children and help manage the household. The question of education, and therefore literary ability, is consistently raised when determining whether a woman was a possible author of a text, and this increased scrutiny is founded upon the misguided understanding that women were not involved in late antique literary culture.[49] This misapprehension then guides the interpretation of extant texts. Whilst discussing prevailing modern attitudes towards late antique saints in 1981, Peter Brown wrote the following:

> Plainly, some solid and seemingly unmovable cultural furniture has piled up somewhere in that capacious lumber room, the back of our mind. If we can identify and shift some of it, we may find ourselves able to approach the Christian cult of saints from a different direction.[50]

This statement could be easily applied to women's writing, and women's involvement in literary culture more broadly, in late antiquity. If, to extend Brown's metaphor, we can take a thorough inventory of that mental lumber room, working out what is in there and where it came from, before then moving it out, we will be able to approach women's writing in a more fruitful and nuanced way.

In a chapter of his recent volume on education in late antiquity, Jan R. Stenger explores the phenomenon of Christian women like Melania who appeared in texts by men as both educated and educators.[51] Melania in her later years led a community of fellow religious, but her first student was her husband Pinian, whom she rebuked for wearing fine clothes and determinedly coaxed into a modest, chaste version of living. Stenger calls these women 'unconventional students and directors'.[52] They were intended to provide a rebuke to the male-dominated norms of the late antique schoolroom and to the classical ideal of paideia, the education of children based upon skill acquisition and social advancement. Via the writings of men who likely had received a classical education, women like Melania, Stenger posits, put forward a form of intellectual and ethical development that focused on spiritual growth. In short, these women exemplified a Christian education. Although Melania's biographer surely had some motives for presenting her as both a teacher and a student, I think that Stenger goes too far in his presentation of Melania and others like her as exceptional, or somehow butting up against educational norms. The women Stenger discusses are all elite, which would have allowed them

[49] For example, Neil Adkin, 'The Letter of Paula and Eustochium to Marcella: Some Notes', *Maia* 51 (1999), pp. 97–110

[50] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Late Antiquity* (Chicago, I.L.: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 13.

[51] Jan R. Stenger, *Education in Late Antiquity: Challenges, Dynamism, and Reinterpretation, 300–550 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 99–140.

[52] Stenger, *Education in Late Antiquity*, p. 103.

access to education; that they were not permitted in the schoolroom with the boys necessarily shaped this education. Whilst they seem to be eschewing classical paideia for a more holistic, inward-looking education, this was not a conscious opposition but rather a reflection of what was available to them.[53] The availability of resources surely differed from person to person, and household to household.

One woman whose education ostensibly steered clear of the classics was Macrina (d. 379); she was a philosopher, consecrated virgin, leader of a religious community at Annisa, and the sister of Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea. And, though Macrina is beyond the bounds of the Latin west, she is a useful example of a woman who is both educated and an educator. In Macrina's *Life* written by her brother Gregory, it is revealed that Macrina's mother Emmelia did not want Macrina reading poetry or tragedies. Their themes of violence and sexuality would cause emotional confusion – instead, Emmelia set Macrina to reading scripture, especially the psalms.[54] This set-up is usually interpreted as Macrina not engaging with the classics at all. But, as Anna B. Christensen notes, Gregory here describes only Macrina's early education via her mother, and not what Macrina studied beyond this point. Furthermore, Emmelia did not expressly ban all the classics, but only those that would stir up unwanted feelings in the young Macrina.[55] Stenger holds up Gregory's rendering of Macrina in her *Life* as a prime example of women teaching men, and therefore showing the benefits of a non-traditional education.[56] But Gregory also depicts Macrina trouncing Basil (who would come to be famed for his eloquence and persuasiveness) in an argument because of her superior command of rhetoric.[57] Macrina was clearly able to glean some rhetorical skills from her brothers who attended school, but their faither was also a professional rhetorician. Although Macrina's early education (via her mother, no less) was grounded in scripture, she possibly received instruction in rhetoric from her father at home. When their father died, Macrina took on the responsibility of educating her younger brother Peter.

Women often arise as the educators of their children and other dependents, either directly (as in the case of Macrina and Peter) or in a more roundabout way. We learn from his *Confessions* that Monnica, the mother of Augustine, organised his education and secured patronage for his studies after her husband, Patricius, had died. Monnica also gave Augustine money to buy necessary texts.[58] Styled directly after this pen-portrait of Monnica was Mariana, the mother of Fulgentius of Ruspe, who taught her son both Latin and Greek literature before he attended school:

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[53] The renunciation of worldly education in favour of Christ as teacher is a recurring theme in late antique Christian thought. See Konrad Vössing, 'Victor of Vita and Secular Education', in Peter Gemeinhardt, Lieve Van Hoof, and Peter Van Nuffelen (eds.), *Education and Religion in Late Antique Christianity: Reflections, Social Contexts and Genres* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 159–70.
[54] Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Sanctae Macrinae,* 4.3–5.
[55] Anna B. Christensen, 'Not Veiled in Silence: The Case for Macrina', in Katharine R. O'Reilly and Caterina Pellò (eds.), *Ancient Women Philosophers: Recovered Ideas and New Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 185–6.
[56] Stenger, *Education in Late Antiquity*, pp. 119–28.
[57] Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, 8.2–3.
[58] Augustine, *Confessiones*, 3.4.

> *Litterarum proinde Graecarum percepta scientia, Latinis litteris (quas magistri ludi docere consueverunt) in domo edoctus, artis etiam grammaticae traditur auditorio*.[59]
>
> Therefore, having attained a knowledge of Greek letters, he was taught Latin literature at home (which schoolmasters tend to teach) but was given over to a lecture theatre of grammatical arts.

It goes without saying that these women needed to be educated to act as educators. And though that education was perhaps of a different quality or extent, it was certainly present for elite women. A lack of education is therefore not a sufficient reason why there are so few extant texts by late antique women. Further, texts that indicate possible female authorship should not be dismissed on the grounds that women were not educated enough to produce them.

*

Of course, women were educated and wrote in Latin before late antiquity.[60] In the first century the poet Martial wrote about Sulpicia, herself a poet, who composed verses about love and sexuality.[61] A roughly contemporaneous invitation to a birthday party, addressed to Sulpicia Lepidina and written by Claudia Severa, is preserved on one of the many wooden tablets recovered from the Roman fort at Vindolanda.[62] Julia Balbilla composed the inscriptions carved into the statue of Memnon close to Thebes in 130, in the course of a visit with the emperor Hadrian and his wife Sabina, and her verses praise the imperial couple.[63] But the spread of Christianity – a religion of the book – in the later Roman empire produced new ways of reading and writing, and changed how information was disseminated. The papyrus scroll was steadily being replaced by the parchment codex.[64] Authors had a raft of scriptural references at their disposal as well as (and sometimes, pointedly, instead of) classical ones.[65] There was an overhaul of established gender norms too. Christian women could theoretically choose lives of holy virginity or chaste widowhood rather than becoming a wife and mother as a default.[66] All of this fundamentally shaped how, what, and why women wrote in the late antique west.

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[59] *Vita Fulgentii*, 5.
[60] See Emily Ann Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London: Routledge, 2004).
[61] Amy Richlin, 'Sulpicia the Satirist', *Classical World* 86 (1992), pp. 125–40.
[62] Bartolo A. Natoli, Angela Pitts, and Judith P. Hallett (eds.), *Ancient Women Writers of Greece and Rome* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 278–9.
[63] Plant, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome,* pp. 151–4; Josephine Balmer, *Classical Women Poets* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1996), p. 108.
[64] For the process of Christianisation see Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially pp. 3–26. On Christianity and intellectual life, particularly literary culture, see Mark Letteney, *The Christianization of Knowledge in Late Antiquity: Intellectual and Material Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), especially pp. 127–44 on Christianity and the codex.
[65] Alan Cameron, 'Paganism and Literature in Fourth Century Rome', *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique de la Fondation Hardt* 23 (1976), pp. 1–30.
[66] On the changing behavioural expectations for Christian women in late antiquity see Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1996), and Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early* Christianity (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1988).

In the survey below I have organised the works available into broad categories of form and genre, but there is inevitably some overlap – for example, poetry and inscriptions make up two distinct categories, but there are multiple poetic inscriptions. The survey is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to provide an indication of the types of writing by women that are available. I have prioritised the writings of Christian women, but not to the total exclusion of women from other religious traditions. I have not sought to identify anonymous works as having female authors based upon their writing style, and I am highly suspicious of those who suggest that a particularly 'feminine' writing style exists. In places, I have promoted a woman's authorship based upon the contents of a text, its manuscript transmission, or both.

Scribes

As the transmitters, the producers, and at times the censors of texts, scribes had a vital role within literary culture at large. In addition to copying out extant texts, as exemplified by the *Life* of Melania, scribes were also on hand to take dictation, crafting the spoken words into letters and even treatises. As the mediators between the written and spoken word, scribes evidently held considerable influence over how texts were presented.[67] The existence of female scribes in the ancient and late ancient world also problematises attempts to define literary culture as an exclusively, or even primarily, masculine sphere. Although many known scribes were men, there are thousands more whose gender cannot be determined – where this is the case, we should not assume that the scribe was male.[68] Stepping back, it is worth considering whether scribal interventions – editing, censoring, reorganising – can be construed as a collaborative form of authorship in the broadest sense of the word. As we saw in the introduction, scribes physically wrote, unlike many late ancient authors. Scribes shaped the presentation and even the contents of a text, and crafted their texts with a specific readership in mind. If authorship is the process by which an individual crafts a text, then scribes should certainly be considered as existing on its fringes.

Origen's Female Scribes

Eusebius of Caesaria described the writing process of Origen as follows: he would dictate, and as he did so he was attended by a group of more than seven shorthand-writers who would each write for a while before passing their duties along to the next; there were also the same number of copyists. With the copyists and the shorthand-writers were 'girls trained for beautiful writing'.[69] These female calligraphers were not presented as unusual by Eusebius, but (as Kim Haines-Eitzen has previously noted) they were excised from Jerome's later account of Origen's authorial set-up in *De viris illustribus,* where it appears as part of a discussion on the works of the bishop Hippolytus.[70] Jerome writes that, support Origen's writing, Ambrose of Alexandria provided the author with staff:

[67] Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*, pp. 105–28.
[68] *Ibid*., p. 42.
[69] Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VI.23.
[70] Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*, p. 42.

> *Ambrosius … cohortatus est origenem in scripturas commentarios scribere, praebens ei septem et eo amplius notarios eorum que expensas et librariorum parem numerum…*[71]
>
> Ambrose … encouraged Origen to write scriptural commentaries, providing him over seven secretaries and an equal number of copyists and paying their expenses…

Jerome included the shorthand writers (‘*notarios’*) and copyists in this vignette, but the ‘girls trained for beautiful writing’ are conspicuously absent. Why Jerome left these women out of his entry on Origen is unclear. Perhaps this is indicative of differences in scribal practices between the west and east at this time, or maybe Jerome did not see the calligraphers as an important feature of the process. Either way, these female scribes are not part of the western discussions of Origen.

Anonymous Texts

The Bordeaux Itinerary

In 333, an individual travelled from Bordeaux to Jerusalem, stopping via Rome and Milan on their way. The anonymous document recording their journey is known as the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*. The text details important rest stops and the distances between them in a functional list. This is a representative example:

> *mutatio Stomatas leugae VII*
> *mutatio Sirione leugae VIIII*
> *civitas Vasatas leugae VIIII* [72]
>
> Change at Stomata, seven leagues
> Change at Sirio, nine leagues
> The city of Vasates, nine leagues

The author then uses more descriptive prose when reaching key sites, especially those with a specific biblical relevance, for example *‘Inde ad Iordane, ubi dominus a Iohanne baptizatus est, milia quinque’* (‘From that point to the Jordan river, where the Lord was baptised by John, five miles’).[73] In 1996, Laurie Douglass suggested that this travelogue was written by a woman. Douglass noted the author’s visits to locations relating to women from the Bible, but also sites that held associations with fertility, speculating that the traveller was a pious married laywoman who wanted to have children.[74] Susan Weingarten responded to Douglass in an article

[71] Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, 61.
[72] *Itinerarium Burdigalense,* V 3.
[73] *Ibid*., V 24.
[74] Laurie Douglass, ‘A New Look at the *Itinerarium Burdigalense’*, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996), pp. 313–33.

highlighting the problems with the latter's argument, namely that the supposed fertility sites were also water sources (and therefore necessary for travellers), and that the author's route seems largely directed by the *cursus publicus*, so they were not making special trips to sites associated with either fertility or biblical women.[75] To Weingarten's comments, I would add that Douglass assumes in the course of her argument that women were exclusively and especially concerned with fertility; this is highly problematic. Although Douglass was correct to oppose the assumption that the author of the *Itinerarium* was male she went too far in attempting to prove that the traveller was a woman, and made some worrying gender essentialist leaps in the process. There is nothing compelling within the text that indicates either a male or female author, but this discussion is illustrative of the broader issues of attempting to gender an anonymous text; without clear internal evidence, these conversations often devolve into unfortunate gender stereotyping. The *Itinerarium* will be discussed further in Chapter Four of this thesis, as part of an exploration of the *Itinerarium* of Egeria.

Two Letters in Codex Sangallensis 190

Copies of two letters addressed to women are found in a manuscript from Saint Gall, Codex Sangallensis 190. The manuscript itself dates to the late eighth or early ninth century and its scribe attributed these two letters to Jerome, although their contents prove that certainly the first letter, and perhaps the second, were written by a woman.[76] The two letters are dated to c.400 and both their wording and their inclusion in Codex Sangallensis 190 suggests an origin in Aquitania (like several other letters in the manuscript) or Spain (because of the specific ascetic practices discussed).[77] The first letter (beginning *'Nisi tanti seminis'*) is full of biblical references and quotations; this feature is partly a response to the letter she received from the unknown female addressee, which the author described as encompassing the entire body of canonical scripture (*'totum canonis corpus'*).[78] She comments upon her addressee's obvious scriptural knowledge: *'Latuit mihi hactenus arca testamenti, hoc est, conpago tui cordis, in qua omnis librorum bibliotheca congesta est'* ('Thus far the ark of the covenant has lain hidden from me, that is, the clasp of your heart, in which a whole library of books is gathered').[79] Both author and addressee clearly had a detailed knowledge of scripture, and had therefore likely dedicated themselves to a programme of scriptural study. Of how this letter makes use of biblical references and the personal memorisation they reveal, Burrus observes that 'The biblical library is the heart of writing … Correspondingly, the human heart is a library …

[75] Susan Weingarten, 'Was the Pilgrim from Bordeaux a Woman? A Reply to Laurie Douglass', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999), pp. 291–7.

[76] Germain Morin thought it likely that these letters were written by the same woman; see 'Pages inédites de deux pseudo-Jérômes des environs de l'an 400', *Revue Bénédictine* 40 (1928), pp. 289–318. The attribution of the second letter to the same woman is questioned by Virginia Burrus and Tracy Keefer, 'Anonymous Spanish Correspondence; or the Letter of the "She-ass"', in Richard Valantasis (ed.), *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 330–9. For an analysis of the manuscript, see Ralph W. Mathisen, 'The *Codex Sangallensis* 190 and the Transmission of the Classical Tradition during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 5 (1998), pp. 163–94, and Evelyn J. Lowe, 'Asceticism and Context: The Anonymous *Epistolae Sangallensis 190*', M.A. thesis (University of Manchester, 1998).

[77] Burrus and Keefer, 'Anonymous Spanish Correspondence', pp. 330–2.

[78] Morin, 'Pages inédites', p. 293, 1.4–7. For a detailed analysis of this letter see Virginia Burrus, 'The Bible as Writing Machine: Reflections on a Late Ancient Theory of Literature', *Arethusa* 54 (2021), pp. 473–86.

[79] Morin, 'Pages inédites', p. 293, 1.7–10.

reading, remembering, and writing texts.'[80] The author of the second letter (beginning *'Quamlibet sciam sacerdotali'*) refers to themselves as an '*asina'* ('she-ass') and describes themes relating to pregnancy and childbirth, which led Morin to conclude that a woman had written it.[81] However, as Burrus and Keefer have observed, the she-ass is a constructed 'scriptural persona' which is in keeping with the highly allegorical content of the letter, and therefore does not necessarily reveal anything about the author's gender.[82]

Inscriptions

Determining the authorship of inscriptions is a difficult matter. This difficulty is neatly exemplified by a discussion of inscriptions upon funerary monuments occurs in the *Satyricon* of Petronius, written in the later first century. Trimalchio, a character who is equal parts wealthy and ridiculous, hosts a lavish banquet to which he invites his friend Habinnas, a stonemason (*'lapidarius'*).[83] Trimalchio instructs Habinnas on how his tomb should be constructed, giving directions on the size and imagery. Then Trimalchio orders an inscription stating that the funerary monument will not pass to his heir (*'hoc monumentum heredem non sequatur'*), which he wants above all other things (*'ante omnia ... volo'*).[84] This exchange is obviously set up to satirise the excesses of the newly wealthy freedman – Petronius expends great effort putting Trimalchio back in his place, as a comment upon what Petronius perceives as wider societal degradation – but it also gives an insight into the process of writing a funerary inscription. Trimalchio's petty inscription is, to him, the most important part of the tomb – and yet, Trimalchio does not give further details about the other writing on the monument, like his name. This he seems happy to leave up to Habinnas.[85]

Trimalchio evidently did not write the monument's entire inscription. But was Trimalchio's lack of concern about the rest of his inscription used here as further evidence of his idiocy? Or was it standard practice to leave your stonemason with an idea of what you wanted, with the expectation that they would find the correct words as well as carve them? If Trimalchio had wanted a poetic inscription, this would further muddy the waters – would the stonemason or the commissioner hire a poet for the task, one which Trimalchio was clearly not up to completing himself? Trimalchio's exchange with Habinnas reveals the range of individuals and influences which went into creating a monument and its inscription, highlighting the difficulty of crediting the speaker of the inscription with its authorship.

For inscriptions then, there are at least two people involved: the commissioner and the stonemason. To these could be added a third person: a poet or writer, who would compose the

[80] Burrus, 'The Bible as Writing Machine', p. 478.
[81] Morin, 'Pages inédites', p. 291.
[82] Burrus and Keefer, 'Anonymous Spanish Correspondence', p. 331.
[83] Petronius, *Satyricon*, 65.
[84] Petronius, *Satyricon*, 71.
[85] See the discussion of Trimalchio and Habinnas in Lawrence Keppie, *Understanding Roman Epigraphy* (Baltimore, M.D.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 100.

monument's inscription. The extent to which an inscription bears the direct words of its commissioner, represents a collaboration between the commissioner and stonemason (and/or another writer), or is the work of a hired writer is often undeterminable.[86] These interactions and processes should be kept in mind when considering inscriptions and their authorship; in short, the speaker may not be the sole author. This is not to suggest that commissioners always left the inscription entirely or partially to the stonemason. For example, in the mid-fifth century Sidonius Apollinaris composed a poem for the tomb of his grandfather and was insistent that it be inscribed in its entirety without mistakes.[87]

Despite the ambiguity surrounding how much of an inscription was composed by its commissioner, I have included several inscriptions in this survey as examples of women's authorship. Here I am intentionally broadening authorship as a category, recognising the agency of the women who commissioned these monuments as a form of authorship. Inscriptions were a contribution to public discourse; the intention came from the commissioner, if not always the words. Furthermore, inscriptions were presented as the work of the commissioner both on monuments and in their later transcription in manuscripts (several of the inscriptions I have included in this survey only survive in manuscript form). Even if a commissioner did not write an inscription they are remembered as its author. Inscriptions by women are therefore a lasting example of visible women's authorship which should be taken into consideration alongside the more well-known texts by women which have circulated in manuscripts.

Fabia Aconia Paulina

Although most of the texts covered in this chapter were authored by Christian women, the funerary inscription for Vettius Agorius Praetextatus following his death in 384 is a notable exception. His wife, Fabia Aconia Paulina, composed a poem of forty-one lines mourning her husband; this inscription is still extant on the funerary monument, which is held by the Musei Capitolini in Rome. Praetextatus was a towering figure in late Roman politics and represented the last of the adherents to traditional Roman religion; his death was interpreted as the sun setting on Roman paganism.[88] Paulina's tribute captures elements of this, and confirms her own commitment to pagan rites as a priestess of Hecate and participant in mystery cults. Paulina also commemorates her own sorrow, writing *'maesta coniunx maceror'* ('I weaken, a mournful wife').[89] She died shortly after Praetextatus. Ever compassionate, Jerome wrote to his friend Marcella that Praetextatus was suffering eternal damnation rather than resting in peace, 'as his unfortunate wife pretends'.[90] This characteristically nasty comment from Jerome suggests that Paulina's inscription and its contents were common knowledge in Rome.

[86] For the stylistic conventions of Roman funerary inscriptions see Maureen Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead: Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 126–50.
[87] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep.* 3.12.5; Keppie, *Understanding Roman Epigraphy*, p. 14.
[88] Praetextatus was a key figure in the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, showing his intellectual importance; see Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, pp. 231–72.
[89] *CLE* I: 111.
[90] *'non in lacteo caeli palatio, ut uxor conmentitur infelix, sed in sordentibus tenebris continentur'* ('he is not in a milky palace of the sky, as his unfortunate wife pretends, but he being held in foul darkness'), Jerome, *Ep*. 23.3.

Papiria Tertia

Another funerary inscription was composed for the tomb of Papiria Tertia in Ferrara, whose children had predeceased her. It is written in the first person, as if Tertia herself is speaking to those visiting her final resting place. The inscription itself is short, comprised of only four metrical lines, and its precise date is unknown. It reads as follows:

> *Cernis ut orba meis, hospes, monumenta locavi*
> *et tristis senior natos miseranda require.*
> *exemplis referenda mea est deserta senectus,*
> *ut steriles vere possint gaudere maritae.*[91]
>
> You perceive, stranger, that deprived of my own, I placed a monument,
> Sad and elderly, pitiable, I miss my children.
> Deserted, my old age is evidence to be called upon
> That infertile wives should truly rejoice.

The tomb itself has no Christian imagery, which could indicate that Tertia was a pagan – instead carved busts depict Tertia with her husband and son, who were both named Titus Truppicus. Although the verses were composed using the first person, Tertia could have commissioned a poet to write them on her behalf. Similarly, though the poem creates an image of desertion, Tertia may have had family members who engaged the services of a poet after her death. In some ways, the poem's theme of loneliness sits in tension with the existence of the monument it was inscribed upon.

Flavia Valeria Constantina

Constantina, the daughter of the emperor Constantine I, composed a dedicatory poetic description for the church of St Agnes on the Via Nomentana in Rome. Constantia had founded the church dedicated to the Roman martyr, probably in the 340s between her two marriages. She would later be buried there after her death in 354. Constantina's poem is an acrostic, with the first letters of each line spelling out *'Constantina Deo'* – whilst the poem praises as Agnes the 'blessed virgin' ('*felix virgo'*) who conquered death, it continually links the saint back to Constantia.[92] The second line commemorates Constantina's total financial support of the church-building project: *'Omnibus impensis devota mente paratis'* ('[I Constantina] having devoutly provided for all expenses').[93] The church itself is in ruins, but Constantina's fourteen-line inscriptions survives in some manuscripts containing the *Peristephanon* of Prudentius,

[91] *CLE* I: 369.

[92] See the discussion in Hannah Jones, 'Agnes and Constantia: Domesticity and Cult Patronage in the *Passion of Agnes*', in Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner (eds.), *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 115–39. See also Marco Conti, Virginia Burrus, and Dennis Trout (eds.), *The Lives of Saint Constantina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 14–5.

[93] *CLE* I: 301. For an analysis of the poem itself, see Dennis E. Trout, 'Vergil and Ovid at the Tomb of Agnes: Constantina, Epigraphy, and the Genesis of Christian Poetry', in John Bodel and Nora Dimitrova, *Ancient Documents and their Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 263–82.

following on from Prudentius's poem dedicated to Agnes.[94] This is an interesting example of a poem intended as an inscription having a more literary afterlife; though removed from its original context, later readers still found value in Constantia's composition.

Taurina

Another acrostic inscription, this time funerary, was composed by a Christian woman known only by the name of Taurina.[95] Taurina writes to commemorate her four aunts, whose names are revealed by the acrostic: Licinia, Leontia, Ampelia, and Flavia. According to the poem, these were Christian women dedicated to lives of chastity. Taurina describes them as *'sacratas'*, consecrated, which suggests that these women had elected to live set apart from a normal way of life, perhaps in a Christian community. Similarly, Taurina describes herself as consecrated: '*Taurina sacrata'*. In the final line of the poem Taurina reveals that she is the *'neptes'* of the four women, which (along with the poem's content that appears to describe an early religious community of women) gives a clue to the date of the inscription. In classical Latin *'neptis'* most often translates as granddaughter, but in later Latin it means 'niece'. Taurina may not have been a blood relation of these women, but rather she styled herself as their niece to denote their superiority. The inscription itself is no longer extant in its original form, but the text survives in a transcribed manuscript of the life of St Eusebius of Vercelli; this later text also contains other Christian acrostic poems.[96]

Galla Placidia

Galla Placidia, the daughter of Theodosius I and his second wife Galla, used inscriptions and related building projects to demonstrate her strong ties to her imperial family members; she took on multiple building and refurbishing projects before her death in 450. Galla Placidia moved to Ravenna some time after 425 and there she founded a church dedicated to St John the Evangelist. The church was ostensibly built in gratitude to the saint for saving Galla Placidia and her children from some sea-related peril, but (seemingly unrelatedly) multiple portraits of powerful figures from the imperial family were decorated the interior walls. Leslie Brubaker has highlighted that because of this the finished church functioned as a display of imperial power, with Galla Placidia at its heart.[97] An inscription commemorated her funding of the project:

> *Sancto ac beatissimo apstolo Iohanni euangelistae Galla Placidia augusta cum filio suo Placido Valentiniano augusto et filia sua Iusta Grata Honoria augusta liverationis periculum maris votum solvent.*[98]

[94] On the founding of the church of St Agnes and Constantina's involvement see P. M. Barbini, 'S. Agnetis basilica, coemeterium', in *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae: Suburbium* 1 (2001), pp. 33–6.
[95] *CLE* I: 748.
[96] Joannes Stephanus Ferrerius, *Vita s. Eusebii episcopi Vercellensis* (Vercelli, 1609). See also Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, pp. 79–80.
[97] Leslie Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Female Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries', in Liz James (ed.), *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (Routledge, 1997), pp. 52–75
[98] Agnellus, *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis,* 42.

> To the holy and most blessed apostle John, the evangelist, Galla Placidia Augusta, with her son Placidus Valentinianus Augustus and her daughter Iusta Grata Honoria Augusta, concerning liberation from the danger of the sea, fulfil a vow.

The inscription is no longer extant, but was recorded by Andreas Agnellus in the ninth century in his narrative history of the church in Ravenna, *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis.* As well as instigating and funding her own building projects, Galla Placidia also contributed to repairs of existing edifices by her imperial ancestors. In 384 her father Theodosius I had instigated the construction of a basilica at the location of St Paul's tomb in Rome, and this project was completed by his imperial successor Honorius. When the basilica was damaged in the 440s, Pope Leo I organised its repair with the help of Galla Placidia; the extent of her involvement is unclear but an inscription records her happiness at the completion of the repairs, so it is highly likely that she provided some (if not all) of the financial backing.[99] As part of her wider effort to secure and display her power through building projects, Galla Placidia used inscriptions to enter public discourse and to commemorate her financial contributions.

Poetry

Attusia Lucana Sabina

Sabina was described as a skilled poet by her husband Ausonius (d. c.395), who wrote about her in some of his own poems.[100] Ausonius describes his wife embroidering her verses onto cloth that she has woven, giving an insight into Sabina's creative process. Unfortunately (and predictably, if they were stitched onto cloth) none of these poems are extant, nor have the texts survived in other forms. But one poem in the collection of Ausonius has Sabina as its speaker and describes this practice of combining poetry and weaving. No other poem in the corpus is written in Sabina's voice, and therefore this poem may in fact be by Sabina herself.

> *Licia qui texunt et carmina, carmina Musis,*
> *licia contribuunt, casta Minerva, tibi.*
> *Ast ego rem sociam non dissociabo Sabina,*
> *versibus inscripsi quae mea texta meis.*[101]

> Some weave yarn and some verse,
> They dedicate their verses to the Muses,
> Those of yarn, chaste Minerva, are dedicated to you.
> Whereas I Sabina will not separate kindred things,
> I have inscribed my verses on my own weavings.

[99] Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena', p. 55.
[100] Ausonius, *Epigrammata,* 27–9.
[101] Ausonius, *Epigrammata,* 29.

If this poem was by Ausonius, however, it is notable that he does not indicate that Sabina's projects were particularly unusual. Perhaps Sabina's stitched poetry represented a broader trend in compositions by late antique women, irretrievably lost on decomposed cloth rather than safely inked onto parchment.

Faltonia Betitia Proba

The most renowned female poet of Latin late antiquity was Proba.[102] Proba was a wealthy Roman aristocrat and her *Cento Virgilianus de Laudibus Christi,* composed around the mid-fourth century, was extensively read and copied, evidenced by its many manuscript witnesses. The 694-line *Cento* is a patchwork poem comprised of lines and half-lines from the works of Virgil, thereby appropriating the language and authority of classical literature and imbuing it with a new Christian message.[103] The *Cento* itself retells parts of Genesis with a particular focus on the figures of Adam and Eve, and then details key events in the life of Jesus. In her poetic preface to the *Cento* (which still uses Virgil's characteristic dactylic hexameter but contains more of her own words) Proba reflects on the kind of poetry she used to write before she turned her pen to Christian compositions. She laments the time she spent on the '*regum crudelia bella*' ('cruel wars of kings'), confessing that war and death had been her previous subject matter – '*confiteor, scripsi*' ('I confess, I wrote [about this]').[104] Nothing survives of Proba's poetry apart from the *Cento*. Perhaps her other compositions were not circulated as widely, nor received as favourably, to warrant the same extensive manuscript transmission.

Greek literary culture had its own tradition of cento-writing, for which Homer rather than Virgil was the primary source of material. The empress Eudocia (d. 460), wife of Theodosius II, wrote several poems towards the middle of the fifth century, and some of these were centos. In a parallel to Proba's *Cento*, Eudocia's biblical Homeric cento focuses on the life of Christ based around the narratives established in the Gospels, with a shorter introductory section based upon the Old Testament.[105] Eudocia's biblical cento is longer than Proba's, at a staggering 2344 lines. Although the similarities between Proba and Eudocia are often highlighted – both were elite women writing biblical centos within a century apart, using non-Christian texts – it is notable that Eudocia had a model for Homeric biblical centos in the work of the bishop Patricius.[106] Proba, by contrast, seems to have taken to writing her *Cento* without an established precedent in Christian literature.[107] Later Christian authors attempted Virgilian centos of their own, but

[102] On the significance of Proba, see Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet,* and Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough, the Oaken Cross.*

[103] This is a core feature of the Christian poetry of late antiquity. See Karla Pollmann, *The Baptized Muse: Early Christian Poetry as Cultural Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[104] Proba, *Cento*, 3, 8.

[105] See Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Gospel "According to Homer and Virgil": Cento and Canon* (Leiden and Boston, M.A.: Brill, 2011), pp. 181–228.

[106] On the Homeric cento tradition see Mary Whitby, 'The Bible Hellenized: Nonnos' *Paraphrase* of St John's Gospel and Eudocia's Homeric Centos', in J. H. D. Scourfield (ed.), *Texts and Culture in Late Antiquity: Inheritance, Authority, and Change* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2007), pp. 195–231.

[107] The cento was established in non-Christian literature, however; one example is the *Cento Nuptialis* of Ausonius. See Scott McGill, *Virgil Recomposed: The Mythological and Secular Centos in Late Antiquity* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 92–114.

none were as successful or as popular as Proba's *Cento*, which I will discuss in Chapter Five of this thesis.[108]

Letters

Following the methodology set out in Catherine Conybeare's article 'Spaces between Letters', in the following section I will consider letters to women that survive in the collections of three figures in the early church in the west: Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome. Too often, generalisations are made about the interests and ability of late antique women based upon the limited surviving texts by women.[109] However, these arguments overwhelmingly fail to take into account texts by women which are no longer extant but which have left an impression upon the historical record – namely, in the writings of their male contemporaries. Although letters by women overwhelmingly do not survive, we should not act as if they never existed in the first place. I will close this section with a brief foray into the Greek tradition via Macrina, and conclude by exploring two letters written by Galla Placidia in the mid-fifth century. I will first establish what Christian letter-writing looked like in the fourth- and fifth-century.

Letters were sent by a messenger, and acted as an accompaniment to the messenger's spoken communication which came direct from the letter-writer. Writing to Marcella, Jerome gives two reasons for the brevity of his letter: he is extremely busy, and the messenger is eager to set off.[110] Demonstrated by their inclusion in the section on himself in his *De viris illustribus*, Jerome saw his letters as part of his public literary output rather than as private communication.[111] Some of these letters also functioned as epistolary treatises and were intended for a wider readership beyond their addressees. In a long letter to the Gallic noblewoman Geruchia, Jerome encourages her not to marry again after being widowed; he concludes his letter by directing Geruchia to his other works on the topic, namely his letters to Eustochium, Furia, and Salvina.[112] Because of Jerome's intentions for his writings, it is important to be mindful that his letters were, at least in part, about and for himself. Andrew Cain puts it like this:

> Jerome had a profound awareness of how to harness the potency of the epistolary medium for the purposes of self-presentation. Indeed, it is above all in his letters that we see him constantly refashioning himself rhetorically to accommodate the demands

[108] For the tradition of Christian cento writing after Proba, see Martin Bažil, *Centones Christiani: Métamorphoses d'une forme intertextuelle dans la poésie chrétienne de l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2009), pp. 201–30.
[109] Gillian Clark offers the following explanation for why fewer letters by women survive: 'Men did not usually correspond with women: it would not, as a rule, have been proper if the woman was not a close relative. Jerome's extensive correspondence with women may well have been a factor in his being asked to leave Rome. Besides, the major reasons for letter-writing were to display literary talent, make contacts, and request favours, and for this men really were more use', *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 134.
[110] Jerome, *Ep*. 32.1.
[111] Jerome, *De viris illustribus,* 135.
[112] Jerome, *Ep*. 123.17, referencing *Ep*. 22, 54, and 79.

> made upon him by ever-changing audiences and by the ever-changing circumstances of his own controversy-ridden life.[113]

Jerome's letters, like many others at the time, were often dictated to a scribe rather than written in his own hand.[114] Some of his letters also contain reflections upon the practicalities of dictation. For example, as highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, in one of his letters Jerome described the speed of his dictation confounding his multiple secretaries, even though they were using shorthand.[115] Jerome was not boasting about speaking quickly, but rather about the fact that, despite his speed, he could produce off-the-cuff scriptural references and quotations. Letters resulting from dictation were therefore the result of a collaboration between author and scribe, from which miscommunications could naturally arise. Augustine diligently checked at least some of his letters, which then ended with a formulaic sign-off indicating that he had read the transcription and approved it.[116]

Correspondents of Augustine

Maureen Tilley has noted that Augustine took pains to keep the women he wrote to at a distance, and that he was particularly anxious not to be in their debt.[117] Similarly, Kim Power has argued that Augustine did not have female friends, but rather female 'correspondents' – an argument which Conybeare challenges, noting the level of agency and independence which Augustine grants these women.[118] In a response to the wealthy Maxima, who had written with concern about those in her community practising their faith incorrectly, Augustine takes for granted that she is able to influence those around her to maintain (or return to) orthodoxy.[119] Furthermore, this letter shows Maxima's capacity, potential or actual, for involvement in literary culture – she is shown as someone who can disseminate texts and arrange for copies. Augustine urges her to send him documents written by the other Christian group so he can better correct their errors, and states that if Maxima wants her own copy of Augustine's written refutation she can send a scribe to make one because she was wealthy enough to do so ('Because God, who gave you the ability to do this, willed that you could do this most easily').[120]

In some cases, however, it is clear that Augustine sought to keep a female correspondent at a distance. For example, Augustine sent several letters to Paulinus of Nola and his wife Therasia,

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[113] Andrew Cain, 'The Letter Collections of Jerome of Stridon', in Christina Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, and Edward J. Watts (eds.), *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide* (Oakland, C.A.: University of California Press, 2017), p. 221.
[114] For the practice of dictation see Allen and Neil, *Greek and Latin Letters in Late Antiquity,* pp. 27–8.
[115] Jerome, *Ep*. 117.12.
[116] For example, see Augustine, *Ep*. 238.29, 239.3, and 241.2.
[117] Maureen A. Tilley, 'No Friendly Letters: Augustine's Correspondence with Women', in Dale B. Martin and Patricia Cox Miller (eds.), *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 40–62.
[118] Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine's Writing on Women* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1995), p. 110; Conybeare, 'Spaces between Letters', p. 58.
[119] Augustine, *Ep*, 264.2.
[120] *'voluit enim deus, ut hoc facillime possis, qui tibi dedit, unde possis'* ('Because God, who gave you the ability to do this, willed that you could do this most easily'), Augustine, *Ep*. 264.3.

and they sent their own letters in return.[121] Although the letters are ostensibly to and from the couple, Augustine is primarily addressing Paulinus, and Paulinus is the one replying. The inclusion of Therasia seems like a courtesy, rather than indicating her active participation in composing or replying to the letters. For example, in one letter from Paulinus and Therasia they begin by both addressing Augustine, but the body of the letter is written in the first-person singular from the perspective of Paulinus. Similarly the letter closes with first person plurals, indicating that the loaf of bread sent to Augustine was coming from both Paulinus and Therasia.[122]

Melania, the woman with whom this chapter begun, was a recipient of one of Augustine's letters along with her husband Pinian and her mother Albina.[123] Augustine also sent a separate letter to Albina wherein he addressed the attempts made in Hippo to ordain her son-in-law Pinian against his will in 411, much to Albina's distress – and Augustine's letter makes clear that Albina had written to him first.[124] Through this letter Augustine attempts to placate Albina and prove his innocence, writing that he had threated to resign if Pinian were forcibly ordained. It is clear that it was important to Augustine to maintain their relationship, which was unsurprising; Albina and her family had by this point already donated vast sums of money to the North African church. Tilley has highlighted the power disparity in this letter, writing that 'Of all his correspondence with women, this is the only letter in which Augustine was at a distinct disadvantage … he is doing "damage control."'[125] As well as his letter to Albina, there are other letters by Augustine which show that a woman had written to him first – at times quite insistently. In a letter to Italica, Augustine begins by explaining that he had already received three letters from her before he started to write back.[126] Similarly, Augustine began a letter to Seleuciana by saying he had read her letter and was writing a reply straight away.[127] To Ecdicia, a married woman who had written to Augustine after dedicating herself to a life of continence without the consent of her husband, Augustine wrote that he had both carefully read her letter and also quizzed the messenger who brought it for further details, in order that he could reply most fully; his rebuke to Ecdicia for leaving her husband is swift.[128]

Correspondents of Jerome

Forty of the 123 surviving letters attributed to Jerome were addressed to women. The foremost of all Jerome's correspondents, male and female, was Marcella, an aristocratic Roman widow who had chosen a life of Christian asceticism. Marcella led a community of likeminded women from her grand villa on the Aventine. Among this group were Paula, another high-ranking woman with considerable wealth, and her daughters Eustochium and Blesilla. In Jerome's

[121] Augustine, *Ep*. 31, 42, 45; Paulinus of Nola, *Ep*. 25, 30, 94.
[122] Paulinus of Nola, *Ep*. 25.
[123] Augustine, *Ep*. 124.
[124] *'Dolorem animi tui, quem te scribis explicare non posse'* ('your letter tells me that the grief of your heart is indescribable'), Augustine, *Ep*. 126.1. Tilley suggests that the cause of this incident was the wealth that Pinian and his family would bring to the church at Hippo; see 'No Friendly Letters', pp. 43–4.
[125] Tilley, 'No Friendly Letters', p. 44.
[126] Augustine, *Ep*. 99.1.
[127] Augustine, *Ep*. 265.1.
[128] *Ibid*., 262.1.

version of events, Marcella and her community in Rome had sought out Jerome in the hope that he would teach them more about their faith, especially eastern asceticism.[129] The Bible – reading, absorbing, translating, and committing it to memory – was the bedrock of their religious practice. Peter Brown described these women as being 'driven by a search for the inner meaning of the Scriptures that was at once and the same time scholarly and mystical.'[130] It is worth remembering that Marcella, Paula, and Eustochium also acted as Jerome's patrons, a relationship I will explore towards the end of this chapter; it is therefore important not to overstate Jerome's authority or autonomy in his dealings with them. And though they certainly sought his instruction, the presentation of these women solely as Jerome's 'feminine mentees' fails to recognise the economic aspect of their relationship and its implications.[131]

Jerome gathered some of his letters to Marcella for publication, naming this collection the *Liber ad Marcellam* including it in the entry on himself in his *De viris illustribus*, his list of biographies and bibliographies of male Christian authors.[132] It seems that Jerome did not preserve Marcella's letters to him, however. Jerome's letters to Marcella discuss their mutual friends, offer moral advice, and provide interpretations on passages of scripture. In 412, two years after Marcella's death from the injuries she sustained during the sack of Rome, a grieving Jerome composed an epistolary epitaph which he sent to their mutual friend Principia (*Ep*. 127). In this long letter Jerome presented Marcella as an ascetic innovator in Rome, thereby choosing to ignore the precedent set by other women such as Ambrose's sister Marcellina. Jerome writes that, when Marcella first dedicated herself to a life of chaste widowhood, no other Roman noblewomen at the time knew anything about the monastic lifestyle ('*Nulla eo tempore nobilium feminarum noverat Romae propositum monachorum'*).[133] In this letter Jerome also highlighted Marcella's credentials as a scholar of the Bible, commending the depth and enthusiasm of her studies.[134]

Crucially, Marcella's erudition remained respectable because of her modesty. When people sought her advice on interpreting scripture, Jerome comments that Marcella would often pass off her learning as his, not wanting to draw attention to herself but also not assuming to teach men.[135] Here Jerome includes the directive in 1 Timothy 2:12 that women not teach or assume authority over men, and frames Marcella's actions as in accordance with this. Even Marcella was allowed to teach, however, when people were truly in the wrong. In the middle of the Origenist controversy, a dispute over interpreting the work of the biblical scholar Origen,

[129] On Jerome's self-presentation as an ascetic expert see Andrew Cain, 'Rethinking Jerome's Portraits of Holy Women', in Andrew Cain and Josef Lössl (eds.), *Jerome of Stridon: His Life, Writings, and Legacy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 47–57.
[130] Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton, N.J., Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 274.
[131] Jerome 'spiritually and intellectually steered these ladies' and 'shone the best possible light on the authority he exercised over his feminine mentees, be it women of mature standing or little girls.' Stenger, *Education in Late Antiquity*, p. 128.
[132] Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, 135.
[133] Jerome, *Ep*. 127.5.
[134] *Ibid*., 127.4. Marcella and Jerome compare different translations of Psalm 73 in *Ep*. 23.1.
[135] *Ibid*., 127.7.

Marcella weighed in to defend Jerome's position and to defend (at least in her mind) orthodox belief.[136] Jerome writes that part of how Marcella accomplished this was through letters:

> *... acciti frequentibus litteris heretici, ut se defenderent, venire non ausi sunt tantaque vis conscientiae fuit, ut magis absentes damnari quam praesentes coargui maluerint.*[137]
>
> … so they might defend themselves, she summoned the heretics with repeated letters. They did not dare to come, because such was their remorse that they greatly preferred to be absent and damned than present and convicted.

These 'heretics' (*'heretici'*) were, in Jerome's version of events, thoroughly chastened by Marcella's letters, and this 'glorious victory' ('*gloriosae victoriae'*) was solely due to her efforts.[138] Although these letters do not survive, it is notable that Jerome described Marcella both as highly educated and as a writer of corrective exegetical letters.

One letter by Jerome's female correspondents appears to have survived, however. A letter to Marcella in Jerome's collection appears to be from Paula and Eustochium. With Jerome, they founded Christian communities in Bethlehem. The letter (*Ep*. 46) exhorts Marcella to leave Rome and come to Bethlehem, and describes the unique advantages for Christians living in amongst sites of biblical importance. This letter is often described as Jerome's work; the traditional line is that Paula and Eustochium commissioned Jerome to write the letter, and he did so in their voices.[139] The is no compelling reason to suggest that the two women did not write the letter themselves, because Paula and Eustochium were perfectly capable of writing letters. Jerome describes the daily exchange of letters that he had with the two women in the entry on himself in his *De viris illustribus*: '*epistularum autem ad paulam et eustochium, quia cottidie scribuntur, incertus est numerus'* ('however, the letters to Paula and Eustochium, which are written daily, are of an uncertain number').[140] It is most likely, therefore, that Paula and Eustochium wrote this letter themselves. The letter is the subject of Chapter Three of this thesis.

Although Jerome wrote many letters to women that were part of an extended mutual exchange or in reply to their queries, on several occasions he wrote the initial letter to a woman in order to start a correspondence. Jerome's letter to his estranged aunt Castorina, wherein he attempts to repair their relationship, makes it clear that they have not spoken for some time. Jerome is unsure how she will receive his letter, or whether she will respond at all.[141] Similarly, Jerome wrote to the newly-widowed Salvina upon the death of her husband Nebridius, despite not

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[136] For the wider context of the debate surrounding Origen's teachings see Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014).
[137] Jerome, *Ep*. 127.10.
[138] *Ibid*.
[139] For example, J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London, 1975), p. 141; Pierre Nautin, 'La lettre de Paule et Eustochium à Marcelle (Jérôme, Ep. 46)', *Augustinianum*, 24 (1984), p. 441; Adkin 'The Letter of Paula and Eustochium', pp. 97-110; Ferdinand Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme: Sa vie et son ouvre,* Vol. I, (Paris: Champion, 1922), p. 165, n.1.
[140] Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, 135.
[141] *Ibid*., 13.

being acquainted with her.[142] The couple were part of the imperial court and, although Salvina and Jerome were complete strangers, Jerome took the opportunity to exhort her to embrace widowhood and never remarry. It is one of Jerome's more brazen letters.

Some of Jerome's instructive letters to women were in response to requests for help. Two letters to Gallic women named Hedibia and Algasia (*Ep*. 120 and 121) are structured around the questions they asked Jerome in their initial letters, which reveal that they had sought him out particularly for his knowledge of scripture. Hedibia asked Jerome to reconcile what she interpreted as inconsistencies between the Gospels of Matthew and Mark; similarly, Algasia quizzes Jerome on the meanings of parables and Bible passages, and is troubled by differences between the narrative in John and Luke.[143] Although praising her interest in deepening her faith, Jerome offered a slight rebuke to Algasia for her questions about the Gospels, saying that her ignorance revealed that she either did not understand the Old Testament or did not read it enough.[144] Interestingly, Jerome challenges both women by suggesting that they ask him questions to test his knowledge.[145] This is especially true of the letter to Algasia. Jerome compares her to the Queen of Sheba ('*reginae Saba'*) who went to Jerusalem after hearing about the wisdom of Solomon and wanted to learn from him; the queen put Solomon to the test with difficult questions, but Solomon adeptly responded to them all. By setting up this dynamic, Jerome explicitly acknowledges that Algasia may want to test him as well as learn from him – although naturally, Jerome insists he is not Solomon ('*non quidem ego Salomon'*).[146]

Ambrose and Marcellina

Only three letters from Ambrose of Milan addressed to his sister Marcellina survive.[147] Marcellina moved to Milan along with their brother Satyrus when Ambrose became bishop of the city. She was a consecrated virgin and the dedicatee of Ambrose's treatise on virginity, *De Virginibus*; Ambrose states that he wrote the treatise at Marcellina's request, and he repeatedly makes reference to her throughout the text.[148] Internal evidence from the surviving letters demonstrates not only that Ambrose wrote many more letters to Marcellina that did not survive, but also that Marcellina wrote multiple letters to her brother. When replying to a letter of Marcellina asking for updates about the church in Milan, Ambrose opened with the following:

> *Quoniam omnibus fere epistulis sollicite quaeris de ecclesia, accipe quid agatur. Postridie quam accepi litteras tuas, quibus significaveras quod exagitarent te somnia tua, moles inquietudinum gravium coepit moveri.*[149]
>
> Since in almost all your letters you make a worried enquiry about the church, learn of what is happening. The day after I got your letter, wherein you expressed that you had

[142] *Ibid*., 79.
[143] *Ibid*., 120.3 and 121.1–2, 6.
[144] *Ibid*., 121.*praef*.
[145] *Ibid*., 120.*praef* and 121.*praef*.
[146] *Ibid*., 121.*praef*.
[147] Ambrose, *Ep*. 76, 77 and *Extra collectionem* 1.
[148] *Ibid*., *De virginibus*, 1.3.10; 1.6.26; 1.9.54; 3.1.1; 3.4.15; 3.7.32; 3.7.37–8.
[149] *Ibid*., *Ep*. 76.1.

been disquieted in your dreams, a weighty multitude of disturbances began to torment me.

From the remainder of the letter, it seems that Marcellina had written with concerns about the ongoing conflict between Ambrose and Milan's Arian contingent. The other surviving letters from Ambrose to Marcellina indicate that they had a close bond. Ambrose begins one of the letters with the honorific (and somewhat hyperbolic) *'Dominae sorori vitae atque oculis praeferendae frater'* ('Lady sister, dearer than life and eyes, [from] a brother').[150] The body of this letter is occupied by Ambrose's address to a large gathering in Milan following the discovery of the relics of martyrs Gervasius and Protasius. Ambrose's opening to the letter explains that he customarily keeps Marcellina abreast of major church events in Milan when she is absent – she is a crucial sounding board.[151] As is common in late ancient letter collections, we can see the drawbacks of this form of communication when Marcellina writes to Ambrose that she is concerned ('*sollicitam'*) about him – he replies in an attempt to assuage her worry, but Marcellina does not receive his reply and so writes again, her anxiety doubled.[152] Ambrose was evidently in receipt of multiple letters from his concerned older sister, which surely increased in frequency when she was away from Milan. Although Marcellina's own letters do not survive, Ambrose's letters to her preserved his side of the exchange.

Macrina

Here I will briefly turn my attention to the east and consider Macrina. Although none of her letters survive, it seems they circulated in manuscripts up until at least the fourteenth century. Midway through a Greek manuscript held by the Vatican the copyist states that although they have transcribed the letters of Theano, they will not include the letters of Macrina because of the centuries between when the two women wrote.[153] Melania died in 379, and from a series of conversations on her deathbed, Gregory of Nyssa wrote the philosophical dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. Here Macrina counsels her brother on death, the afterlife, and the relationship between body and soul. Gregory repeatedly calls her teacher ('διδάσκαλος') and positions her knowledge as superior to his own.[154] Theano is insecurely located to the later sixth century BC as a follower (and in some traditions, the wife) of Pythagorus. The letters attributed to Theano were likely written much later by another author, or authors. The scribe's comment indicates that they had a copy of Macrina's letters in front of them whilst they wrote; perhaps the letters of Macrina and Theano were both present in the copyist's exemplar, and they were often transmitted together. Pierre Maraval highlighted this scribal aside in his 1990 edition of Gregory of Nyssa's letters, but was less optimistic about the prospect of Macrina's lost letters. Maraval notes that Macrina is not referred to as a letter-writer elsewhere, and posits

[150] *Ibid*., 77.*praef*.
[151] *Ibid*., 77.1.
[152] *Ibid*., *Extra collectionem* 1.1, *'unde mirror quod litteras non acceperis meas quibus refusam mihi scripseram securitatem'* ('this makes me speculate that you have not received my letter, within which I wrote that safety had been restored to me').
[153] See the discussion in Anna Silvas, *Macrina the Younger: Philosopher of God* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 247–8.
[154] On Macrina as a philosopher in her own right see Christensen, 'Not Veiled in Silence', pp. 170–89.

that the copyist has interpreted Gregory's *On the Soul and the Resurrection* as letters of Macrina.[155]

There are two problems with Maraval's interpretation. Firstly, especially as a community leader in Annisa, Macrina had certainly written letters, as did all the women in similar positions (like Paula and Eustochium). These letters were likely so regular as to be mundane, and paled in comparison to Gregory's celebration of her many virtues in his *Life of Macrina*. Although Macrina is not described as writing letters, this does not necessarily reflect a reality in which she did not write them. Secondly, *On the Soul and the Resurrection* is a dialogue, with Gregory and Macrina in conversation to one another; although its philosophical content would mesh well with the letters ascribed to Theano, the text could not reasonably be called (or even be mistaken for) a series of letters. At the very least, this demonstrates a later medieval tradition of Macrina as a philosopher. The debate surrounding Gregory's dialogue – whether or not he accurately represented Macrina's words, or used her as a stand-in for ideas previously expressed by Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* – takes on a new dimension if we consider a time in which the dialogue circulated alongside letters by Macrina herself, perhaps even in the same manuscripts.[156] The content of the letters may well have supported the philosophical character Macrina presented in *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. It is almost incredible that a single fourteenth-century scribe's concern about anachronism could be the deciding factor in removing a fourth-century woman's letters from the historical record. This episode is illustrative of the fragility of manuscript transmission, and how it hinged upon decisions that were often obscured. Here, unusually, we have an insight into the scribe's thought process.

Galla Placidia

A fraction of letters written by women, however, were preserved. In these rare instances it is important to note the circumstances of their composition and transmission; the person of the author could be as important as the epistolary collection these letters travelled with in the manuscript tradition. Precious little remains of the writings of even aristocratic women, and therefore it is perhaps unsurprising that these few surviving letters are imperial and official in nature – they are a handful of letters from Galla Placidia, composed in the first half of the fifth century. Galla authored three of the letters in the *Collectio Avellana*, a group of 244 imperial documents and letters compiled in the latter half of the sixth century.[157] Perhaps 'authorised' would be better than 'authored' here because, as Julia Hillner has pointed out, these letters are exceedingly formulaic. This suggests that they are the careful work of a group of court officials as opposed to exclusively Galla herself.[158] These three official imperial missives are dated to

[155] Pierre Maraval (ed. and trans.), *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres*, Sources Chrétiennes 363 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990), pp. 272–3.

[156] For example, Ellen Muehlberger interprets the dialogue as the rehabilitation (and therefore the Christian reclamation) of a non-Christian philosophical tradition; see 'Salvage: Macrina and the Christian Project of Cultural Reclamation', pp. 273–97.

[157] *Collectio Avellana*, 25, 27, and 28. On women's letters within the *Collectio Avellana* see Julia Hillner, 'Preserving Female Voices: Female Letters in Late Antique Letter Collections', in Rita Lizzi Testa and Guilia Marconi (eds.), *The Collectio Avellana and Its Revivals* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), pp. 210–44.

[158] Julia Hillner, 'Empresses, Queens, and Letters: Finding a 'Female Voice' in Late Antiquity?', in *Gender & History* 31 (2019), pp. 353–82. I am more optimistic than Hillner, however; I do not see these letters as primarily

419 and contain invitations to Aurelius, the bishop of Carthage, a group of seven other African bishops, and to Paulinus of Nola to attend a synod in Spoleto that year. The intention was to end a dispute in Rome between Boniface and Eulalius, who were both elected as the city's bishop in December of 418. It was crucial, therefore, that these letters were as sensitive and diplomatic as possible; the letters were sent by Galla in her capacity as the sister of the emperor Honorius.[159] Two of the letters that an older Galla Placidia wrote in 450 are still extant: one is to the emperor Theodosius II, her nephew, and the other is to his sister Pulcheria. Both letters were written in Rome where, Galla explains, she had travelled to venerate St Peter.[160] The letters are preserved in the epistolary collection of Pope Leo I, whose emotional outpouring Galla describes in both letters.[161] These later letters of Galla were preserved not simply because of her imperial position, but because of their inclusion in (and subsequent circulation with) Leo's letter collection.

Prose

There are limited examples of extant prose written by women in late antiquity, even when expanding this category to include anonymous letters, or letters with contested authorship. One of the prose texts in this section, the *Itinerarium Egeriae*, is also in an epistolary form. Its transmission alongside other travelogues and also saints' lives, as opposed to circulating within letter collections, has informed my choice to place it here. Because of the limited available non-epistolary prose ascribed to women, I have also included some early examples of reported speech. The textual transmission of reported speech does not qualify as authorship per se – however, this is an example of the words and works of women entering the textual (and therefore manuscript) tradition, and it should therefore be considered within a wider context of women's writing and women's interactions with literary culture at large.

Priscilla, Maximilla, and Quintilla

Montanism, also known as the 'New Prophecy', prioritised encounters with the Holy Spirit and continuous revelation. It also placed women in leadership positions within the church, although this is does not necessarily mark Montanism as an unusual sect; in the early church women were frequently found in authoritative and teaching roles, for example the deaconess Phoebe mentioned in Paul's letter to the Romans.[162] Alongside Montanus, the foremost prophets of the second-century Montanist sect were two women, Priscilla and Maximilla. There are sayings attributed to another female prophet, Quintilla, but her name does not occur in the earliest texts,

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the product of male authors ventriloquising Galla Placidia, but rather as part of a collaboration between Galla and court officials.

[159] There was a tradition of ecclesiastical officials writing to aristocratic women regarding similar disputes; women were regarded as having the ability to influence the spiritual and political direction of their families. See Kate Cooper, 'Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianisation of the Roman Aristocracy', in *Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992), pp. 150–64.

[160] On the significance and context of these letters see Hagith Sivan, *Galla Placidia: The Last Roman Empress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 137–41.

[161] Leo, *Ep*. 56 to Theodosius and *Ep*. 58 to Pulcheria.

[162] Romans 16:1–2.

suggesting that she belonged to a subsequent generation of prophets.[163] No writings by Priscilla (also called Prisca), Maximilla, and Quintilla survive, but some of the revelations attributed to them were quoted in other texts.[164] For example, in the later second century Tertullian recorded some of their sayings. Tertullian identifies Priscilla as a holy prophet ('*sanctam prophetidem'*) and attributes the following saying to her:

> *"Purificantia enim concordat," ait, "et visions vident, et ponentes faciem deorsum etiam voces audiunt salutares, tam manifestas quam et occultas."*[165]
>
> "For purification is harmony", she said, "and they see visions, and placing their faces downwards they hear salutary voices too, as apparent as they are hidden."

These reported sayings could refer to an earlier tradition where the prophecies were written down by the Montanists themselves, but because of their fragmentary tradition in other texts it is more likely that the prophecies were transmitted orally. Recorded speech is generally not classified as authorship per se. However, it must be noted that the above debate between a Montanist and an orthodox Christian draws a direct comparison between prophecy and authorship. Furthermore, the sayings of Montanist prophets have been transmitted as text as well as through an oral tradition.[166] The recorded sayings may not be classified as 'authorship' in the traditional sense (as far as we know, Priscilla, Maximilla, and Quintilla did not write down their prophecies) but dictation was standard practice for ancient and late ancient authors, and it was perhaps the intention of these women to have their sayings recorded in this way. The recorded prophecies certainly blur the line between reported speech, which should not be constituted as authorship, and dictation, which should be.

Perpetua

Chapter 2 of this thesis is dedicated to Perpetua, but I will briefly outline her significance here. Perpetua was among a group of Christians who were imprisoned, tried, and eventually executed for their faith at Carthage in around 203.[167] An account of the events leading to their martyrdom appears to have circulated within a decade of their deaths, and it was composed by three separate authors – or, at least, it has three distinct authorial voices and styles. The text is opened and concluded with the framing commentary of an anonymous narrator, and another of the

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[163] Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 167–8.

[164] For a comprehensive collection of the sayings of Montanist prophets, see Ronald E. Heine, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Maxon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989), especially pp. 2–9.

[165] Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis*, 10.5. Tertullian records another of Priscilla's prophecies in *De resurrectione carnis*, 11.2.

[166] On the authority of women in Montanist circles see William Tabbernee, 'Women Office Holders in Montanism', in Joan E. Taylor and Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *Patterns of Women's Leadership in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 151–79.

[167] Perpetua's life, death, and martyrdom narrative are the subject of multiple recent works. For a representative sample, see Barbara Gold, *Perpetua: Athlete of God* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2018); Thomas J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jan Bremmer and Marco Formisano (eds.), *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

martyrs, Saturus, contributes an account of a vision, but the bulk of the narrative is written by Perpetua herself in the first person. The resulting composite text, named the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, is frequently examined by historians as an early example of Christian women's authorship – although, as I demonstrated in the introduction to this thesis, this is not without controversy. Nevertheless, even if we treat the authenticity of Perpetua's account with the utmost scepticism, it is significant that she is presented as its author in the first place. If someone other than Perpetua was the author, it is interesting that a first-person narrative by a persecuted Christian woman was (correctly) assumed to be attractive to potential readers. This indicates that it is not outlandish to think that Perpetua, or a woman like her, could have authored such a text in the early third century. Perpetua's account is discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Egeria

In the later fourth century a woman, probably named Egeria, wrote an account of her long journey. She travelled through Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor, and ended her narrative with a thorough description of the liturgy in Jerusalem.[168] Although Egeria's precise origins are unknown, it seems most likely that she started out from northern Spain.[169] The foremost reason for Egeria's travels was to visit sites that featured in the Bible and the shrines of saints, but she also valued the interactions she had with clergy and those living dedicated religious lives. Egeria's travelogue, the *Itinerarium Egeriae*, is in the form of a long letter, and is addressed to a group of women whom Egeria calls her 'respected lady sisters' ('*dominae venerabilis sorores'*).[170] Although their precise relationship with Egeria cannot be determined from the Itinerarium, they were clearly very close and shared a passion for the Bible; for example, when Egeria describes visiting Mount Sinai, she refers her readers to the 'holy books of Moses' ('*libris sanctis Moysi'*) if they want more detail on what she is seeing.[171] At every holy site that Egeria and her companions visit, a relevant passage of scripture is read aloud and the group join in prayer and worship. Egeria's journey is through the Biblical text as much as it is through a physical landscape. Several wealthy Christian women travelled to Palestine in the fourth and fifth centuries – Melania the Elder and her granddaughter Melania the Younger, Paula and her daughter Eustochium, and the widow Fabiola, to name only a few – but Egeria's text is the only example of a woman traveller reflecting on the practice of moving from place to place.[172] The *Itinerarium* is the subject of Chapter Four of this thesis.

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[168] For a recent translation and commentary see Anne McGowan and Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria: A New Translation of the* Itinerarium Egeriae *with Introduction and Commentary* (Collegeville, M.N.: Liturgical Press, 2018). Egeria's journey is dated to 381–4; on this see Paul Devos, 'La date du voyage d'Égérie', *Analecta Bollandiana* 85 (1967), pp. 165–97.

[169] A woman named Egeria is praised in a seventh century letter by Spanish ascetic Valerius of Bierzo, and this is used to suggest a Spanish origin for Egeria. See Marius Férotin, 'Le véritable auteur de la 'Peregrinatio Silviae', la vierge espagnole Éthéria', *Revue des Questions Historiques* 74 (1903), pp. 367-97.

[170] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 3.8.

[171] *Ibid*., 5.8.

[172] Reflecting on the phenomenon of women travellers, Ora Limor suggested that this was a specifically feminine act of Christian devotion; see 'Reading Sacred Space: Egeria, Paula, and the Christian Holy Land', in Yitzhak Hen (ed.), *De Sion exibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem. Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), pp. 1–15.

Readers and Patrons

In the final section of this chapter I will consider the broader picture of women's involvement with literary culture in late antiquity, using the female companions and correspondents of Jerome as case studies. I have chosen to focus here on these women for two reasons. Firstly, much of Jerome's extensive extant oeuvre is about, directed towards, or in response to these women; though it is inevitably filtered through Jerome's lens, this body of work provides a tantalising insight into how elite Christian women interacted with literary culture. In the introduction to a long letter to Principia wherein he expanded upon the meaning of Psalm 44 Jerome defended his practice of writing to and for the 'weaker sex' (*'fragiliorem sexum'*), writing that if men were asking him about the scriptures he would not be talking to women.[173] This is obvious hyperbole (he corresponded with plenty of men) but Jerome then details the vital actions of biblical women, ostensibly to bolster Principia with holy confidence, but with the effect of making his own letters to women seem not only legitimate, but vital.[174] Secondly, Jerome knew women at many different stages of life – older widows like Marcella, young virgins like Eustochium, recently bereaved wives like Paula, and new mothers like Laeta – and therefore a diverse set of examples can be gathered. Although, as this chapter has illustrated, women did write in this period, there are still limited extant texts. We can get a fuller picture of how and why women wrote by considering their interactions with literary culture more broadly: as readers and patrons.

The presence of Scripture as a divinely-inspired text naturally gave literate, learned Christians a greater incentive for immersing themselves in reading. And, as many of the above examples show, the Bible could (and should) be refashioned for or intertextually woven through new works of literature. In observing women's reading practices, therefore, we can find women who were well-placed to write. Kim Haines-Eitzen has highlighted the importance of reading within the female ascetic tradition and draws particular attention to women who used their reading of biblical and devotional texts as a form of extreme self-discipline.[175] We are told that these women chose to read rather than eat or sleep. Haines-Eitzen observes that 'the construction of the ideal woman reader depends on the combination of fasting and reading … reading has become yet another means by which the body can be disciplined.'[176] In Jerome's letter to Furia on the proper conduct for pious widows, he immediately follows a passage on the spiritual benefits of a restrictive diet with a directive to read scripture daily, specifically instructing Furia to pray and read immediately after she eats.[177] Reading, then, was not merely something that aristocratic women were expected to do, but a crucial expression of women's faith. I began this chapter with a description of Melania's voracious reading and subsequent writing, and I will now turn to a model reading list for a Christian woman, the kind that Melania herself may have followed.

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[173] *'si viri de scripturis quaererent, mulieribus non loquerer',* Jerome, *Ep*. 54.1.
[174] *Ibid*., 54.1–2.
[175] Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest*, pp. 39–52.
[176] *Ibid*., p. 51.
[177] Jerome, *Ep*. 54.10–11.

Jerome wrote to Laeta with instructions on how to bring up her daughter Paula, and these instructions included a list of works to read and the order Paula should read them in. Laeta intended Paula to lead a devout life, having consecrated her to Christ before her birth and even her conception.[178] Laeta was the daughter-in-law of Jerome's patron, also called Paula; though little Paula was still very young Jerome placed great importance upon her education, telling Laeta that because Paula was destined to be a 'temple of the Lord' ('*templum domini*') she must remove herself from the 'songs of the world' ('*cantica mundi'*).[179] A section of Jerome's letter was therefore given over to an ambitious reading list, with the aim that Paula would treasure the 'divine books' (*'divinos codices'*) rather than fine clothes or jewellery. The foundations of Jerome's proposed educational programme were biblical, starting with the Psalms and the Proverbs then moving to the Gospels. Jerome clearly instructed Laeta that Paula should avoid apocrypha, seemingly a reference to hagiography and miracle stories:

> *caveat omnia apocrypha et, si quando ea non ad dogmatum veritatem, sed ad signorum reverentiam legere voluerit, sciat non eorum esse, quorum titulis praenotantur, multaque his admixta vitiosa et grandis esse prudentiae aurum in luto quarere*.[180]
>
> May she guard against all apocrypha, and if she wants to read it not because of its truthful doctrines but rather because of reverence for the miracles, let her know that they are not written by those they are ascribed to, and that they are contaminated with many defects, and it takes great wisdom to search for gold in the mud.

Jerome also gave directions for the order in which these works were to be read to build the young Paula's knowledge and enthusiasm. The lasting impression is the considerable importance placed upon the education of a little girl; through reading, she would be able to shape her mind and therefore her life. Jerome situates little Paula within her traditional aristocratic Roman family whose religious life is reflective of the turning tide in Rome at large. Paula has Christian parents but she also has a pagan grandfather, Albinus; part of Paula's job (and indeed, Laeta's purpose for seeking Jerome's advice) is to become a sort of charming Christian sleeper cell, so that she might sway Albinus and other non-Christians around her into converting.[181] There is no question of Paula not being astute enough for the task at hand, either; Jerome wrote that, if she did read non-Christian works, it should be to judge them rather than to follow them (*'ut magis iudicet, quam sequatur'*).[182] Of course, this letter reflects Jerome's views more than Paula's actual reading habits, and is meant to position Jerome as an authority in educating young Christians.[183] It is notable, however, that Jerome thought that reading was a suitable activity – in fact, one of the only suitable activities – for the young girl. Jerome wanted Paula's world to be constructed from holy texts. It is not clear whether Paula followed

[178] *'quae prius Christo est consecrate quam genita, quam ante votis quam utero suscepisti', ibid*., 107.3.
[179] *Ibid*., 107.4.
[180] *Ibid*., 107.12.
[181] *Ibid*., 107.1; 4.
[182] *Ibid*., 107.12.
[183] For an analysis of the letter and how it fitted in with Jerome's wider project of self-promotion, see Christa Gray, 'Jerome, Quintilian and Little Paula: Asceticism, education and ideology', in Jan Stenger (ed.), *Learning Cities in Late Antiquity: The Local Dimension of Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 87–111.

the educational programme that Jerome set out for her, but whatever learning she received had the desired effect; she led the religious women's community at Bethlehem following Eustochium's death in 419.

Reading was a way for women to embody their faith, especially when it was used as part of a wider ascetic practice. It follows that these readers, if they had the resources, would want to commission works from authors that answered their specific questions, or explored topics they were interested in. Literary patronage was another way for women to be involved in literary culture. Elizabeth Clark has drawn attention to women's patronage in the early church and highlighted that, though they were barred from the clergy, women were able to exercise authority by funding building projects and other ecclesiastical endeavours.[184] These wealthy women were, in many cases, far more powerful than priests and even bishops – Constantia and Galla Placidia, whose inscriptions commemorate their funding of churches, are good examples of this.[185] Though some were married, women patrons were overwhelmingly widows or virgins. It was one thing to have wealth at your disposal, but the ability to dispose of it freely was quite another.

As we have seen with the vast retinue of Origen given to him by Ambrose of Alexandria, serious authors needed people with sufficient resources to support their efforts. The writers of the early church needed to secure patronage if they did not have generational wealth behind them (like Ambrose of Milan and Basil of Caesarea) or an episcopal income (like Augustine). Jerome had neither of these.[186] As Andrew Cain has noted, Jerome collected and published earlier letters on his self-imposed exile and rigorous ascetic practice in order to appeal to Marcella and her friends as a religious teacher; and, though Jerome is not explicit about this point, it is almost certain that money changed hands over the course of these long relationships.[187] This financial support could also occur indirectly, like Jerome living in the religious community at Bethlehem that was funded by Paula and then Eustochium.[188] A trace of these transactions survives in the prefaces of several of Jerome's commentaries. His gratitude towards several wealthy women in these prefaces, and his acknowledgement that they specifically desired he completed the project that he is introducing, suggests an arrangement where the women would fund Jerome to work on what they wanted him to. Jerome's introduction to his *Commentary on Isaiah* is a useful example here:

> *… cogis me, uirgo Christi Eustochium, transire ad Esaiam et quod sanctae matri tuae Paulae, dum uiueret, pollicitus sum tibi reddere. Quod quidem et eruditissimo uiro fratri tuo Pammachio promisisse me memini … Itaque et tibi et illi per te reddo quod debeo,*[189]

[184] Clark, 'Patrons, Not Priests', pp. 253–73.
[185] See Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena', pp. 52–75, and Jones, 'Agnes and Constantia', pp. 115–39.
[186] Clark also makes this point in 'Patrons, Not Priests', pp. 258–9.
[187] Cain, 'Rethinking Jerome's Portraits of Holy Women', pp. 47–57.
[188] For Jerome's life in Bethlehem see Stefan Rebenich, *Jerome* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), pp. 41–59.
[189] Jerome, *Commentariorum in Isaiam prophetam*, 1. See also the prefaces to Jerome's *Commentaria in Ezechielem,* dedicated to Eustochium in memory of Paula, and the *Commentarii in Epistulam Pauli Apostoli ad Galatas,* which mentions Paula and Eustochium, Marcella, and Marcella's mother Albina.

> … you are urging me, virgin of Christ, Eustochium, to go on to Isaiah and to provide you what I promised to your holy mother Paula when she was living. And I remember that I also promised this to the most erudite man, your brother Pammachius … And therefore to both of you, and to him through you, I give back what I owe.

The use of *'debeo',* 'I owe', strongly implies a monetary transaction; '*reddo'*, 'I give back', can also be translated as 'I pay back'. Although Jerome is not explicit here, the impression is that Eustochium (and perhaps also Pammachius, her brother, and her mother Paula) paid for the completion of the work. The power to commission texts should not be underestimated; through sponsoring Jerome's work and encouraging him to pursue certain projects, these women shaped the trajectory of late antique Christian tradition into the middle ages.

Conclusion

In the survey above I have explored the broader context of women who wrote in Latin in the late antique west, providing a foundation for the case studies that comprise the rest of this thesis. This chapter demonstrated that multiple women were involved in literary culture and at every stage in the process of literary production – though these women were wealthy elites, and very little is known about the literary involvement of non-elite women. Women were authors themselves, but they also worked as scribes, commissioned texts to be written, and read extensively. By recognising that many elite Christian women were immersed in literary culture, even though we do not have their writings, the picture of women's writing begins to change. In short, it seems likely that there were far more texts authored by women circulating in late antiquity than those that survived into the medieval period, and even fewer that survive today. The number of extant texts authored by late antique women compared to men is limited, but this is evidently not because women could not or did not write. Other factors must therefore be considered: how was women's writing received by the literary community at large immediately following its publication, and in the centuries after? How was women's authorship conceptualised within a literary culture that was still predominantly, though not exclusively, male? And how does this change how texts by women were altered, abbreviated, and transmitted within manuscripts? Did attitudes to women's writing shift over time, or is this determined more by the use and content of their writing itself?

The question of what happens to texts by women when they are in the hands of readers is at the core of my thesis. I will highlight how responses of readers (medieval and modern) shaped the trajectory of the reception and transmission of these texts, variously creating, undermining, and suppressing the reputations of these women as authors. What will become apparent throughout this thesis is the impact of modern scholarship on the later reception and presentation of these texts – recent critique has too often obscured the early popularity of these texts. Overall, this chapter has demonstrated that more women were more involved with literary culture than has been previously thought. These literary women appear too frequently to be

considered exceptional. This is the context within which Perpetua, Paula and Eustochium, Egeria, and Proba were writing – and it is to their writings that I will now turn.

Chapter Two: The Death of an Author? Considerations of Authorship in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* and its Reception

In North Africa, in the early third century, a group of young people freshly converted to the new Christian religion – *'adolescentes catechumeni'* – were martyred.[190] Two members of this group, named Perpetua and Saturus, appear to have written about their experiences. If Perpetua's account is genuine it is the earliest extant prose text authored by a Christian woman.[191] Because of its early date, and the text's extensive (though convoluted) transmission, Perpetua's account is the first case study in this thesis. Here I will explore the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* and the subsequent versions and interpretations of this text. I will examine how later readers approached Perpetua's authorship in reflective sermons, treatises, and abridgements of the *Passio* narrative. In doing so, I will consider the *Passio* as an example of how texts authored by women were treated by readers in the later Roman Empire and into the middle ages.

Perpetua's authorship was almost entirely written out of the transmission of her narrative when two new versions of the story, the *Acta brevia sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis,* were privileged over the *Passio*. In this later recension Perpetua has no hand in writing the account, and in places appears like a different person altogether; because of the more extensive manuscript transmission of the *Acta*, it is this version of Perpetua that readers and worshippers were more likely to recognise. Ultimately I will conclude that the tradition of Perpetua's authorship was suppressed for three main reasons. The first is her sanctity; as devotion to the cult of the saints became more widespread, Perpetua's commemoration as a saint naturally took precedence over her portrayal as an author. Secondly, and relatedly, in the hagiographic genre it is not customary for the saint to write their own account, but rather be praised by another. Finally, there were anxieties that the *Passio* and similar texts were being given the same reverence as scripture, and therefore Perpetua's authorship was called into question to undermine the text's authority. Perpetua is commemorated as a saint well into the medieval period, but is not remembered as an author.

The *Passio*: Contents and Contexts

The *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* narrates the story of a group of catechumens who are arrested, tried, and ultimately martyred for their Christian faith. The group of martyrs

[190] *Passio*, 2.1.

[191] There is a wealth of literature on Perpetua and the *Passio*. See L. Stephanie Cobb and Andrew S. Jacobs (eds. and trans.), *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 2021); Gold, *Perpetua: Athlete of God;* Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity;* Bremmer and Formisano (eds.), *Perpetua's Passions;* Judith Lynn Sebesta, 'Vibia Perpetua: Mystic and Martyr', in Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis Rugg Brown, and J. Elizabeth Jeffrey (eds.), *Women Writing Latin: From Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Europe*, vol. 1 (London and New York, N.Y.: Routledge), pp. 103–30; Brent D. Shaw, 'The Passion of Perpetua', *Past & Present* 139.1 (1993), pp. 3–45.

is comprised of four men, Revocatus, Saturninus, Secundulus, and Saturus, and two women, Perpetua and Felicitas. The majority of the events in the *Passio* take place in Carthage; the group are martyred in the arena there in the spring of 203 CE as part of the birthday celebrations of Geta, a son of emperor Septimus Severus. The *Passio* has three narrative voices – Perpetua, Saturus, and an anonymous narrator – and the result is a complex and layered text with multiple perspectives of the lead up and aftermath of Christian martyrdom. In the *Passio* Perpetua relates a series of prophetic visions she receives whilst in prison, adding a dreamlike dimension to the text. Saturus also contributes an account of a vision he experiences. Significantly, it is Perpetua who occupies the most space in the *Passio* narrative. Her account is longer than all the sections by the narrator combined, and significantly longer than the part written by Saturus. The *Passio* provides the reader with the story of Perpetua first and foremost. Others – certainly Saturus but also Felicitas, a young pregnant woman – feature only as supporting characters. Perpetua unmistakably holds the leading role. The *Passio* narrative is structured as follows:

> **1–2:** an introduction by the narrator who argues for the importance of recording the deeds of Christians and establishes the identity of the martyrs.
> **3–10:** Perpetua's prison diary. She describes her family relationships, particularly her care for her infant son (3.5–8) and her conflict with her father (3.1–3), and recounts her trial (6). Perpetua also relates her four visions: she steps on a serpent's head and then ascends a ladder into heaven with Saturus (4.3–10); two linked visions of her brother Dinocrates, who had died whilst he was still a child, suffering (VII.4-8) and then playing (8); and finally Perpetua's transformation into a male gladiator to fight an Egyptian in the arena (10.1–13).
> **11–13:** Saturus's account of his vision. The group had been martyred, and he and Perpetua (and perhaps also the other co-martyrs, although they are not named) are carried by angels into heaven.
> **14–21:** the narrator's description of Felicitas's pregnancy and labour (15) and the group's martyrdom in the arena, where they faced beasts and gladiators (18–21).

The identity of the anonymous narrator has been the subject of debate, with Rex D. Butler notably arguing that it was Tertullian, a North African Christian apologist based primarily in Carthage.[192] Butler states that the *Passio* should be read as a Montanist document, Montanism being the Christian sect which flourished in Phrygia and North Africa in the later second century. A core tenet of Montanism was a belief in continuous revelation through prophecies, which were delivered by new prophets. There are clearly parallels here with the visions of Perpetua and Saturus which predict their deaths, and this is compounded by the anonymous narrator's preface which honours 'new prophecies and visions' (*'prophetias ... et visiones novas'*).[193] Tertullian's increased adherence to Montanist beliefs, particularly a resistance to

[192] Rex D. Butler, *New Prophecy and New Visions: Evidence of Montanism in the Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (Catholic University of America Press, 2006), pp. 44-57. The antiquarian Andrea Gallandi also argued that Tertullian was the author of at least parts of the Passio, though he did not think the text was Montanist. See the discussion in *Bibliotheca Veterum Patrum Antiquorumque Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum postrema Lugdunensi multo locupletior atque accuratior*, vol. 2 (Venice: Joannis Baptistae Albrithii Hieron. Fil., 1766), pp. 167–73.
[193] *Passio*, 1.5.

remarriage, led Butler to identify him as the narrator of the *Passio*.[194] Tertullian died in c. 220, placing him within the appropriate date range for authoring part of the account, but there is no compelling evidence beyond this; he was simply another Christian in Carthage. When Tertullian wrote about Perpetua (see below) he did not give any indication that he was involved in creating the text the *Passio*. Furthermore, Butler's argument for a Montanist *Passio* is based upon retroactively applying the labels of heresy and orthodoxy to the early third century. It is more accurate to appreciate the multiplicity of beliefs at this time, 'Christianities' as opposed to Christianity, which was the case into the sixth century and beyond.[195] Perpetua and most of her companions were not yet baptised before their arrest; it is unlikely that this group appreciated the distinctions between Montanist and Catholic Christianity.[196]

It is more probable that the anonymous narrator was someone involved with the wider Christian community that the martyrs belonged to, and perhaps had a hand in their religious instruction. This narrator was either an eyewitness to the group's martyrdom or had access to those who were. The description of Felicitas giving birth in prison is a puzzling addition; her child was adopted by a Christian woman, who could have described the situation to the narrator.[197] Felicitas does not feature in the accounts of Perpetua and Saturus, however; she may even be the narrator's invention, added to give the narrative some heightened drama.[198] It seems logical that this narrator compiled the accounts of Perpetua and Saturus along with their own text, therefore creating the version of *Passio* we have received via the manuscript tradition – but there is no way to be sure. The narrator and the compiler could be separate entities entirely.

The dating of the *Passio* therefore depends upon the authenticity of the martyrs' accounts, and the time that elapsed between their composition and the compilation of the *Passio* itself, along with the commentary by the anonymous narrator. The *Passio* is traditionally dated to c. 210 because Tertullian wrote about Perpetua between 210 and 213, calling her the 'bravest martyr' ('*fortissima martyr*').[199] Tertullian is the earliest author to refer to Perpetua directly, but this does not definitively confirm that the *Passio* was in circulation at the time he was writing. It is possible that Tertullian heard about Perpetua's story via an oral tradition; this is customarily how the narratives of the lives of saints developed before they were codified into one authorised hagiography.[200] The cult of Perpetua and Felicitas was well-established by the later fourth and

[194] For example, Tertullian's anti-remarriage stance in *Ad Uxorem*, his treatise to his wife.
[195] On the variation in Christian beliefs in this period of North African history, see Éric Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200–450 CE* (New York, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012). See also Philip Rousseau, 'Late Roman Christianities', in Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith, *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Vol. 3: Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600–c. 1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 21–45.
[196] Although it does not discuss the case of Perpetua outright, in a useful recent study on the persecution of Christians James Corke-Webster argued that Christians were most often persecuted by other Christians. See James Corke-Webster, 'By Whom Were the Early Christians Persecuted?', *Past & Present* 261 (2023), pp. 3–46.
[197] *Passio*, 15.
[198] This argument is best expressed by Judith Perkins, 'The Rhetoric of the Maternal Body in the Passion of Perpetua', in Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (eds.), *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses* (Leiden and Boston, M.A.: Brill, 2007), pp. 330–31.
[199] Tertullian, *De Anima*, 55.4.
[200] On orality and hagiography see Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York, N.Y.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 22–5.

early fifth centuries, spreading from North Africa into Rome and Hispania.[201] Following Tertullian in c. 210, there are also multiple witnesses to Perpetua and her co-martyrs in inscriptions, sculpture, and martyrologies. But the earliest evidence for the use of the actual text of the *Passio* comes from other North African martyr texts from the middle of the third century.[202]

Because of this ambiguity there is some controversy around the dating of the *Passio*, which in turn impacts our reading of its contents. A recent notable example is Ellen Muehlberger, who argued that the *Passio* was written in the later fourth or early fifth century; the story of Perpetua and her co-martyrs is, according to Muehlberger, an act of reverent ventriloquism, which is consistent with a broader tradition of rhetorically-trained late antique authors who were accustomed to write for others in the first person.[203] Muelberger argues that it is far more useful to dispense with the idea of the *Passio* as an authentic text, and instead view it as a product of late ancient Christianity.

However, there is no shortage of support for the traditional early third century date, and the subsequent view that the *Passio* contains the words of an early Christian woman, however edited or tampered with they may be. For our purposes, the authenticity of Perpetua's account is somewhat incidental; it is how Perpetua was received as an author that is under examination here. Although the question of authenticity certainly comes into some late antique readings of the text, when tracking its transmission Perpetua's actual authorship does not signify. I do, however, think that Perpetua wrote her account, even if it was altered by a later editor. I am therefore in favour of the early third century dating of the *Passio* narrative. The extent to which Perpetua's experience was altered during its process of being mediated through copyists and editors, then packaged into a cohesive narrative with the vision of Saturus and the narrator's commentary, is impossible to accurately identify. Consequently, the ambiguities of the *Passio* and the questions surrounding its authorship are a running theme throughout my treatment of this text.

The Manuscript Transmission of the *Passio*

The transmission of the *Passio* can shed some light on its use within medieval communities and also the treatment of a woman's writing within the manuscript tradition. The Latin text survives in nine manuscripts, the earliest of which is Codex Sangallensis 577, a ninth or early

[201] For the spread of the cult of Perpetua and Felicitas see Jonathan P. Conant, 'Europe and the African Cult of Saints, circa 350–900: An Essay in Mediterranean Communications', *Speculum* 85 (2010), pp. 1–46.
[202] These are the *Passio Montani et Lucii*, the *Passio Mariani et Iacobi*, and the *Vita Cypriani*. For an overview of the reception of the *Passio* until the end of the fifth century see Petr Kitzler, *From 'Passio Perpetuae' to 'Acta Perpetuae': Recontextualizing a Martyr Story in the Literature of the Early Church* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 123–4.
[203] Ellen Muehlberger, 'Perpetual Adjustment: The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* and the Entailments of Authenticity', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 30.3 (2022), pp. 313–42.

tenth century codex produced at the monastery of St Gall.[204] As is common with ancient and late ancient texts, the manuscripts are chronologically quite far removed – but they can still provide an insight into how the *Passio* was circulating, as well as the other texts it circulated with. A Greek version of the *Passio* was discovered in the later nineteenth century, and I will explore the significance of this text in due course.

There is some variation in how the *Passio* is presented in the manuscript tradition. For example, Codex Sangallensis 577 bears a shorter version of the *Passio*; it lacks the preface of the anonymous narrator (1) and finishes with Saturninus and Revocatus being charged by a bear in the arena (19.3), therefore missing out the death of Perpetua altogether. Similarly, Paris BNF Lat. 17626, a tenth-century manuscript, does not include the narrator's preface but has the narrator's full description of the martyrdom and closing commentary (21). These variations demonstrate that multiple different versions of the *Passio* were in circulation. The text was almost entirely copied alongside other saints' lives (the Paris manuscript, for example, is a collection of the lives of saints who had feast days in March), with priority given to the passions of martyrs. Several of these manuscripts also include liturgical calendars. Occasionally other material is copied in these manuscripts, although these additions rarely stray far from the theme of sanctity. For example. an eleventh-century manuscript held in the British Library, Cotton Nero E.1, also features a sermon of Augustine on the Virgin Mary. From the manuscript transmission at least, we can infer that the *Passio* was firmly considered as a work of hagiography. The differing incipits given to the *Passio* in the manuscripts also provide an insight into how readers were interpreting the narrative – and, crucially, which of the martyrs they felt was the most significant. Some incipits mention only a couple of the martyrs, most commonly Perpetua and Felicitas; the St Gall manuscript bears the incipit *'Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis'*. When there are more names present, it is interesting to observe whose comes first. The incipit to a twelfth century manuscript, Einsiedeln 250 (382), unusually places Revocatus before the others: *'Passio Sanctorum Revocati, Saturini, Perpetue et Felicitas'*. The overall impression is that Perpetua was seen as a driving force of the narrative, often in conjunction with Felicitas; although he also contributed a first-person account, Saturus does not feature as much in the incipits.

There is one manuscript bearing a Greek version of the *Passio* (henceforth the Greek *Martyrdom*), which was discovered in 1889. J. Rendel Harris found the manuscript containing the *Martyrdom* in the library of the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and subsequently published an edition of the text in 1890.[205] Significantly, the edition's commentary proposed that the Greek *Martyrdom* came before the Latin *Passio*; the argument

[204] For the list of the extant manuscripts see Cornelius Ioannes Maria Ioseph Van Beek (ed.), *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis, vol. I: textum Graecum et Latinum ad fidem modicum MSS* (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1936), pp. 17–29. For a comprehensive discussion of the manuscript tradition see Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, pp. 369–444.

[205] J. Rendel Harris and Seth K. Gifford, *The Acts of the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas; The Original Greek Text* (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1890), pp. 13-18. Harris later changed his mind about this, concluding that the Latin text was indeed the earliest; see the discussion in Brent D. Shaw, 'The passion of Perpetua', in Robin Osborne (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Greek and Roman Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 322–23.

has since been largely dispensed with in the century that followed, though is still occasionally raised as a possibility.[206] Although it broadly follows the same narrative arc as the Latin *Passio*, the Greek *Martyrdom* significantly diverges from the *Passio* in its dating of events.[207] It locates the group's martyrdom within the joint reign of the emperors Valerian and Gallienus in 253–60; a persecution of Christians under their rule started in 257 and lasted until 260. Furthermore, the *Martyrdom* correctly names Minicius Opimianus as the late proconsul whose death led to the involvement of Hilarianus in the proceedings, whereas the Passio gave his name as Minucius Timinianus. It gives Thuburbo Minus, a town outside Carthage, as the location of the catechumens' arrest, and also provides two contradictory dates for their deaths: four days prior to the nones of February, and the nones of February. The earlier versions of the Latin *Passio*, by contrast, gives a date of the nones of March. Rather than imagining a contrarian Greek copyist deliberately misrepresenting the Latin text, or misreading the Latin itself, we should instead recognise that multiple versions of the Latin text were circulating at the time the Greek version was copied – which, because of its reference to the reign of Valerian and Gallienus, is estimated to be c. 260.[208] Although these other versions of the *Passio* do not survive, the text of the Greek *Martyrdom* usefully highlights the variations in how Perpetua and her companions were commemorated, thereby providing a cautionary tale to modern readers who instinctively privilege the version of the *Passio* that is present in its extant manuscripts. The reality was far less straightforward.

From its manuscript transmission and its inclusion in hagiographic collections, it seems that copyists treated the *Passio* as any other martyrdom account, as opposed to transmitting it in a different way due to the authorship of Perpetua, or indeed Saturus. However, the manuscript transmission of the *Passio* in the medieval period demonstrates that, at least in some strands of her veneration, there was an awareness of Perpetua as an author; this was not the case in later, and more popular, versions of the *Passio* narrative, which enjoyed a more extensive manuscript transmission. I will now turn to the text of the *Passio* itself.

Who was Perpetua?

Before embarking upon a consideration of how Perpetua's authorship was presented in the *Passio* and interpreted by its readers, I will first consider the character of Perpetua in the *Passio* and the extent to which we can know about her experience – or, at the very least, the experience of a young, newly-converted Christian woman in early third century North Africa. This is how Perpetua is introduced by the narrator of the *Passio*:

[206] Note that Heffernan prefers a fourth-century date for the Greek *Martyrdom*. See *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, p. 370. Shaw has dated the Greek *Martyrdom* as late as the sixth century, as anti-Arian propaganda, in 'The passion of Perpetua', pp. 322–25.
[207] See the discussion in Cobb and Jacobs, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (2021), pp. 43–5.
[208] Controversially, Brent D. Shaw has argued for a much later date for the Greek text, instead locating it in the later fifth or sixth century. See 'Doing it in Greek: Translating Perpetua', *Studies in Late Antiquity* 4.3 (2020), pp. 309–45.

> *Revocatus et Felicitas, conserva eius, Saturninus et Secundulus; inter hos Vibia Perpetua, honeste nata, liberaliter instituta, matronaliter nupta. Habens patrem et matrem et fratres duos, alterum aeque catechumenum, et filium infantem ad ubera. Erat autem ipsa circiter annorum viginti duorum.*[209]
>
> Revocatus and Felicitas, who was enslaved with him, Saturninus and Secundulus; among these Vibia Perpetua, honourably born, liberally educated, respectably married. She had a father and mother and two brothers, one who was also a catechumen, and an infant son at her breast. She was around twenty-two years of age.

Here the narrator clearly sets Perpetua apart from her companions, who are given the briefest of introductions. By contrast, we learn Perpetua's age, marital status, family situation, and upbringing – and the narrator highlights that she is born a social elite and thereby implicitly outranks the rest of the group whose status is not properly elaborated upon.[210] The description of Perpetua as educated is particularly interesting, and indicates that Perpetua received some of the components of a classical education; this is entirely possible, and would align with the education given to some high status girls at the time so they might better manage their households once married.[211] This should also be read as a statement of authenticity by the narrator, proving that Perpetua had received the education required in order to write her account. The title '*Vibia'* is used to demonstrate that Perpetua is of aristocratic rank. Combined with the loss of her family, Perpetua's elite status made her willingness to be arrested enter the squalor of the prison more dramatic; compared to her companions, Perpetua had a lot more to lose when she chose martyrdom.

Perpetua may not be all she seems, however. As well as the narrator's description of her as a nursing mother, Perpetua herself refers to breastfeeding her young son and the worry that he will starve if she is separated from him.[212] Though Perpetua's family may have preferred a more traditional set-up, it was the norm for aristocratic Roman households to employ wet nurses. There is also the question of Perpetua's husband: no father comes forward to claim the child. According to the rules of *patria potestas*, the Roman legal custom whereby any children resulting from a marriage are the property of the father, the child would be under Perpetua's husband's stewardship. Instead, following his stint in prison, the baby remains with Perpetua's

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[209] *Passio*, 2.3.

[210] *'conserva eius'* is sometimes interpreted as an indication that Felicitas and Revocatus were enslaved, with some commentators interpreting Felicitas as Perpetua's own slave, thereby further widening the social gap between them. However, the language of slavery was often employed in early Christian communities to denote religious devotion. On this debate and the wider significance of Felicitas, see Jan Bremmer, 'Felicitas: The Martyrdom of a Young African Woman', in Bremmer and Formisano (eds.), *Perpetua's Passions,* pp. 35–53, and L. Stephanie Cobb, 'The Other Woman: Felicitas in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 15.1 (2022), pp. 1–27.

[211] Walter Ameling, '*Femina Liberaliter Instituta* – Some Thoughts on a Martyr's Liberal Education', in Bremmer and Formisano (eds.), *Perpetua's Passions*, pp. 78–102, especially pp. 83–5. For an overview of the education of upper-class Roman women, see Hemelrijk, *Matrona docta,* and Chapter One of this thesis for the late Roman context.

[212] *Passio*, 3.8; 6.7.

family.[213] Kate Cooper has drawn attention to both of these points, arguing that Perpetua was unlikely to be the aristocratic lady that the narrator painted her as. Instead, Cooper posits, Perpetua was more likely the concubine of a high-status man. Perhaps Perpetua broke off their relationship when she became a catechumen, or he rejected her because of her conversion or her subsequent imprisonment.[214] The extent of Perpetua's education has also been questioned; her repetition of words and phrases and the clunkiness of some of the sentences have sometimes been taken as evidence of a lower level of literacy, which in turn contrasts sharply with the rhetorical excesses of the narrator.[215] Perpetua may therefore be neither high-born nor highly-educated.

Taking the narrator's commentary alongside Perpetua's own account, however the character of Perpetua that emerges from the *Passio* is conflicted, determined, and authoritative. The source of her conflict is her relationship with her family, particularly her father, and her concern for her child. When Perpetua is first arrested her father attempts to reason with her, urging her to make the sacrifice of burning incense to the imperial cult. Perpetua refuses, saying she is unable to call herself anything other than a Christian.[216] Her father turns on her and attacks her in response.[217] Because of his resistance to her choices Perpetua's father is traditionally read as a pagan – but it is entirely possible that he was a Christian who did not relish the idea of his only daughter being martyred.[218] However, as Perpetua's time in prison wears on, she gains a measure of authority over her father. Perpetua's father attends her hearing and, weeping, once again encourages her to change her mind. Crucially he now calls her lady rather than daughter (*'non filiam nominabat sed dominam'*), indicating that he recognises and respects the power of her choices, even if he wished she would choose otherwise.[219] Another man calls Perpetua 'lady', specifically 'lady sister' ('*domina soror'*); she calls him her brother ('*frater meus*'). This is likely one of the two brothers that the narrator mentions in his introduction of Perpetua, presumably the brother who was also a catechumen, to whom she calls whilst in the arena.[220] However, it is worth noting that these familial titles could indicate their shared Christianity as opposed to a biological relationship, a common practice that is reflected in the *Passio* itself – in the account of his vision Saturus refers to his fellow Christians as brothers.[221] Perpetua's impending martyrdom and divine favour as evidenced by her visions make her a commanding figure, able to exercise authority over male family members. What is more, the narrator of the *Passio* clearly sets her up as the group's leader.

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[213] *Ibid.*, 6.7–8.
[214] Kate Cooper, 'A Father, a Daughter, and a Procurator: Authority and Resistance in the Prison Memoir of Perpetua of Carthage', *Gender & History* 23.3 (2011), pp. 685–702.
[215] Butler, *The New Prophecy*, p. 47.
[216] *'"Sic et ego aliud me dicere non possum nisi quod sum, Christiana"'*, *Passio*, 3.2.
[217] *Passio*, 3.3.
[218] Rather than drawing anachronistic and overly-simplified boundaries between the categories of 'Christian' and 'non-Christian', it is more productive to view Perpetua's conflict with her father in the context of multiple competing religious sects, including Christian ones. See discussion of 'Christianities' above.
[219] *Passio*, 5.5.
[220] *Ibid.*, 4.4; 2.3; 20.10.
[221] *Ibid*., 13.7.

I have discussed (and mostly dismissed) the connection between Perpetua's visions and the Montanist sect in the above, but it is worth discussing her visions in their own right here. These visions form a central part of her account, and have shaped how later readers have approached the *Passio* as a text and Perpetua as an individual. Perpetua receives four visions: she ascends a ladder with Saturus, stepping on a serpent's head as she does so; she transforms into a male gladiator to win a brawl against an Egyptian fighter in the arena; and she sees her long-dead brother Dinocrates in two visions, firstly wounded and dirty and unable to drink from a pool of water, and secondly happy and well-dressed and drinking his fill.[222] The vision of the ladder is the first, and also the simplest. Perpetua and Saturus climb up to a meadow where they are greeted by a wise shepherd. This somewhat obvious prefiguring of their automatic receipt into heaven as martyrs clearly resonated with the listeners of the *Passio*; the image of Perpetua and Saturus climbing the ladder was carved into a fourth-century stone sarcophagus from La Bureba in Roman Hispania, the earliest visual representation of the story.[223]

In her vision that takes place in the arena, Perpetua's clothes are removed and she becomes male. Her newly-transformed body is rubbed with oil before she squares up to an Egyptian gladiator – a fight she wins.

> *Et expoliata sum, et facta sum masculus, et coeperunt me favisores mei oleo defricare, quomodo solent in agone; et illum contra Egyptium video in afa volutantem.*[224]
>
> I was stripped naked, and I became male, and my supporters began to rub me down with oil, which is the custom for a contest, and on the opposite side I saw the Egyptian rolling in the dust.

This is traditionally interpreted as Perpetua's feminine body physically transforming into a masculine one.[225] Alternative readings are available, however. Maud Burnett McInerney has posited that Perpetua's statement about being made male – *'facta sum masculus'* – was a product of deliberate manipulation of Latin grammar which allowed Perpetua, at least linguistically, to inhabit a space beyond the gender binary. The subject of the phrase '*facta'*, is feminine; this is Perpetua referring to herself. But the adjective, '*masculus'*, is masculine. The phrase can therefore be literally translated as: 'I, a female, was made masculine'.[226] This gender subversion has an interesting counter-point in the latter parts of the narrative, where the anonymous narrator chooses to present Perpetua as hyper-feminine in the arena. Perpetua covers herself modestly when she is attacked by a fierce heifer and her clothes are ripped, she asks for a hairpin so she might appear presentable, and she is described as *'dei delicata'*, God's

[222] *Ibid.*, 4.3–10; 10.1–13; 7.4–8; 8.
[223] For the significance of the La Bureba sarcophagus and its depiction of Perpetua see Cobb and Jacobs, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, pp. 346–8.
[224] *Passio*, 10.7.
[225] For a representative example of the traditional interpretation see Heffernan: 'Her clothing hides her femininity, but her nakedness reveals her masculine identity. As soon as she is stripped naked, she is revealed as a man', *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, p. 251.
[226] Maud Burnett McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 26.

beautiful girl.[227] Shortly after this the narrator reveals that Perpetua was not in pain at all, but she had experienced a kind of miraculous painlessness, and expressed confusion when she realised she had in fact already been gored by the beast.[228] Overall, both the narrator and Perpetua seem preoccupied with ideas of gender, with Perpetua presenting herself in more masculine ways than the narrator does. I mention this here because it is interesting to note how later authors and commentators responded to (or ignored) Perpetua's gender transformation, and I will analyse how this aspect of the *Passio* shaped the reception of Perpetua as an author in due course.

Although Perpetua's vision of herself as a victorious male gladiator understandably draws a lot of interest, it is the joint visions of her brother Dinocrates which (as we will see) had the most significant impact upon the reception of the *Passio* and views on Perpetua's authorship. Dinocrates had died of a facial tumour when he was still a young child, and in her first of these two visions she sees him suffering. When she wakes she resolves to help him, and prays for a cure.

> *Et experta sum, et cognovit fratrem meum laborare; sed fidebam me profuturam labori eius. Et orabam pro eo omnibus diebus quousque transivimus in carcerem castrensem … Et feci pro illo orationem die et nocte gemens et lacrimans, ut mihi donaretur.*[229]
>
> And I arose, and I knew my brother suffered; but I trusted I could benefit him in his suffering. And I prayed for him on all the days until we were moved to the military prison … And I prayed for him day and night, with lamenting and weeping, so that this might be given to me.

The subtext here is that Dinocrates was never baptised and could not go to heaven, therefore his soul is suffering in the afterlife. Perpetua, with her link to God, is presented as a way for the soul of Dinocrates to finally rest. Perpetua's prayers are successful, and Dinocrates appears happy and cured in her next vision on account of her prayers. What are we to make of this? Is Perpetua able to intercede on behalf of unbaptised souls? As we shall see, this episode causes some consternation in its approach to salvation and the mechanics of baptism, and raises the issue of how to approach texts that, however holy, are not scripture.

Overall then, the Perpetua of the *Passio* is a complex character whose actions and self-presentation do not always align with how she is portrayed by the anonymous narrator. Her

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[227] *Passio*, 20.4–5; 1. On the sexualisation of Perpetua by the anonymous narrator, see Hanne Sigismund Nielsen, '*Vibia Perpetua* – An Indecent Woman', in Bremmer and Formisano (eds.), *Perpetua's Passions*, pp. 103–17. See also Sarah Parkhouse, 'The Fetishization of Female Exempla: Mary, Thecla, Perpetua and Felicitas', *New Testament Studies* 63.4 (2017), pp. 567–87, especially pp. 84–6. On the use of sado-erotic violence in early martyrdom narratives see David Frankfurter, 'Martyrology and the Prurient Gaze', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17.2 (2009), pp. 215–45.

[228] *Passio*, 20.8–9. On the phenomenon of pain removal in martyrdom narratives see L. Stephanie Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (Oakland, C.A.: University of California Press, 2017).

[229] *Passio*, 7.9–10.

arrest and time in prison raise important questions about how she was able to write her account. This Perpetua strove steadfastly for martyrdom, but did not entirely forsake the world; with one hand she reaches back into the past, encouraging readers to learn from her example. What that hand specifically did is the subject of my next enquiry: how was Perpetua's authorship presented in the *Passio*?

In *'manu sua'*: Perpetua's Presentation as an Author in the *Passio*

The anonymous narrator of the *Passio* goes to great lengths to represent Perpetua as the true author of her account, and particularly emphasises that Perpetua physically wrote it. This same emphasis also features in the Greek *Martyrdom*. After introducing Perpetua and her co-martyrs the narrator of the *Passio* gives the following statement: '*Haec ordinem totum martyrii sui iam hinc ipsa narravit sicut conscriptum manu sua et suo sensu reliquit'* ('From here is her whole martyrdom narrative as she left it, written in her own hand and according to her own understanding').[230] Perpetua's account immediately follows. This statement should be read as a claim to authenticity; the narrator wants the reader to know that Perpetua's words are her own. The extent to which we can take the narrator at their word is, of course, another matter.

The narrator's description of Perpetua as both elite and educated seems linked to the authenticity of her account, which is strongly stated at the end of this passage – as we have seen, these aspects of Perpetua's character are up for debate. Perpetua gave the account *'suo senso'*, as she understood it, heading off accusations of overzealous editors interfering with her story. Furthermore, the narrator states that Perpetua wrote the account with her own hand, *'conscriptum manu sua'.* This emphasis on Perpetua physically writing her account, rather than simply telling it, is significant. Dictation was standard practice for those composing written works, and the 'author' was not always the person who pushed the pen.[231] The narrator here tells us that Perpetua wrote her account whilst in prison, yet Perpetua does not complain about lack of writing materials or light. Her account gives the impression that she wrote it all at once, rather than as events occurred; perhaps this writing took place in the better part of the prison that Perpetua and the group were moved to after their first few days of incarceration? Regardless of whether Perpetua physically wrote out her account, here the narrator links the act of writing with the process of composition and credits Perpetua with both.

Saturus receives comparable treatment. The narrator introduces Saturus's account in the *Passio* as follows: '*Sed et Saturus benedictus hanc visionem suam edidit, quam ipse conscripsit'* ('But blessed Saturus made known this vision, his own, which he himself wrote').[232] There is not the same emphasis on Saturus writing in his own hand, but he himself is writing (*'ipse conscripsit'*) rather than telling his account. Although verb '*conscribere'* is best translated as 'to write', its

[230] *Ibid.*, 2.3.
[231] Heffernan thinks that, given the difficulties of writing in prison, Perpetua and Saturus dictated their accounts to a scribe, and these accounts were then consolidated by the anonymous narrator; see *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, p. 83.
[232] *Passio*, 11.1.

meaning also includes connotations of composition. This is as opposed to '*scribere',* which describes the physical act of writing. The narrator uses '*conscribere'* after Saturus's vision to indicate that the martyrs' section of the *Passio* had ended: *'Hae visiones insigniores ipsorum martyrum beatissimorum Saturi et Perpetuae, quas ipsi conscripserunt'* ('These are the extraordinary visions of the most blessed martyrs themselves, Saturus and Perpetua, which they themselves wrote').[233] It is notable that the narrator wants to emphasise the authorship of Saturus as well as that of Perpetua. This indicates that the narrator was worried about both accounts being met with scepticism because of their contents, and not because one of them was written by a woman. The only other reference to writing in the *Passio* comes at the end of Perpetua's account, where she states with remarkable frankness that someone else would have to write up the rest of her account due to her impending martyrdom: '*Hoc usque in pridie muneris egi; ipsius autem muneris actum, si quis voluerit, scribat'* ('This is what I did on the day before the public spectacle; however, when that spectacle is done, if someone wants to write that up they can').[234] Here '*scribere'* is used rather than '*conscribere'* to describe the act of writing. This is consistent with Perpetua's use of simpler language in her account, which contrasts with the rhetorical style of the narrator.

Whilst the authors of the *Passio* could not have envisioned the afterlife of their text, they had their eyes on a future wherein it would be read by others who sought examples of Christian faith during times of religious persecution. The narrator's preface stresses the importance of recording these *'fidei exempla'* – if the old accounts ('*vetera'*, presumably a reference to scripture) are a continual source of inspiration, then these should be added to.[235] The *Passio* includes the visions and testimonies of martyrs, and both Perpetua's and Saturus's authorship is a central part of the text's claim to authenticity and authority. This emphasis on authorship was not taken up in the two later versions of the *Passio* narrative, known as the *Acta*, in which Perpetua does not feature as an author at all. This suggests a shift in ideas surrounding authorship and authenticity of texts in the centuries following the composition of the *Passio*, and it is these adapted versions of the *Passio* to which I will now turn.

Between the *Acta*: Authorship and Speech

The *Acta brevia sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (henceforth *Acta A* and *Acta B*) are two shortened versions of the *Passio* narrative. These texts can be roughly dated to the fifth century, and located in North Africa; their origins will be explored further in due course.[236] Although the *Acta* cover a lot of the same ground as the *Passio*, there are some core differences. The character of Perpetua has none of the complicated emotional messiness that was present in the *Passio*, and is instead rigidly clear about her purpose as a martyr. She does, however, have a

[233] *Ibid.*, 14.1.
[234] *Ibid.*, 10.15.
[235] *Ibid.*, 1.1.
[236] For the fifth-century dating see Éric Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives about the Ancient Martyrs* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 300–1, and L. Stephanie Cobb, 'Suicide by Gladiator? The *Acts of Perpetua and Felicitas* in its North African Context', *Church History* 88.3 (2019), pp. 597–628.

husband. The visions of Dinocrates are cut, but the visions of the ladder and the gladiatorial combat are included – although Perpetua does not undergo a masculine transformation in either of the *Acta*. The characters of Saturus and Felicitas are more prominent; whereas Perpetua was unquestionably the star of the *Passio*, she has to share the stage with her co-martyrs in the *Acta*. The martyrs' trial is more prominent in the *Acta* narratives, allowing the characters to make strong declarations of faith. Finally, and crucially, both of the *Acta* are written in the third person – and neither Perpetua nor Saturus were credited with authoring them. The *Acta* (and especially *Acta A*) circulated far more widely than did the *Passio*; it is therefore this version of the martyrdom narrative that medieval readers were most likely to be familiar with. All of this has implications for the reception of Perpetua as an author.

There are eighty-nine extant manuscripts which contain the *Acta*: seventy-six have *Acta A*, and thirteen have *Acta B*.[237] When compared to the ten extant manuscripts containing the *Passio*, the extent of the *Acta*'s popularity is impossible to ignore. The increased importance of Saturus and Felicitas in the *Acta* narratives is reflected in their manuscript transmission. The texts did not have a standardised title when they circulated and the names of Saturus and Felicitas often appeared in the incipits given to the text. For example, an eighth or ninth century German manuscript names all the co-martyrs in the title it gives to A*cta B*: *'Passio sanctorum martyrum Saturi, Saturnini, Revocati, Perpetuae et Felicitatis'*.[238] At times Perpetua was excluded altogether. In a twelfth or thirteenth century manuscript containing *Acta A* the incipit reads *'Passio sanctorum martyrum Satyri sociorumque eius'* – here the other martyrs are the 'companions' of Saturus.[239] That said, titles including the names of Perpetua and Felicitas, either alone or alongside their co-martyrs, are still the most common for both *Acta A* and *B*. In titles only containing the names of the two women Perpetua's name usually appears first; there are two manuscripts, both containing *Acta A*, in which the order is reversed.[240] One extant twelfth-century manuscript (Cotton Otho D.VIII) bears the *Passio* and excerpts taken from *Acta A*. This demonstrates that there was some tradition of both texts circulating at once; that the *Passio* was included in full and *Acta A* only in excerpts could indicate that the copyist found the former the most authoritative version of the narrative, despite it being less prominent.

Although very similar, the two *Acta* narratives have minor differences. *Acta A* appears to draw its information directly from the *Passio*, whereas *Acta B* relies more upon *Acta A* than the *Passio* for its contents and structure. Furthermore, *Acta B* is shorter than *Acta A.* Because of their largely consistent contents and shared origins I will refer to both of the *Acta* below, but I will note where they diverge if relevant. The *Acta* are structured as follows:

> **1–2:** the names of the group, the location of their arrest, and the wider context of persecution

[237] A catalogue of the manuscripts containing the *Acta* can be found in Van Beek, *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, pp. 107–31.
[238] Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 4554, a collection of lives of saints. *Acta B* is at fol. 114r–117r.
[239] Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, MS 9119, fol. 79r–80r.
[240] Dusseldorf, Landes-und Stadt-Bibliothek, cod. C 10b, fol. 100v–102r; London, British Library, Harley MS 2800, fol. 97v-98r.

3: Perpetua's vision of the ladder
4–6: the interrogation of the group at their trial. Perpetua and Felicitas are then separated from the group and interrogated alone. Perpetua then rejects her family.
7: Perpetua's vision of the Egyptian in the arena
8: the group pray for Felicitas to give birth prematurely
9: the group are brought from prison into the arena, where they are killed by beasts

The trial is the central point of the *Acta* narratives, marking the sharply increased tension which then builds steadily until the martyrdom itself. Saturus is positioned as the group's leader, refusing on their behalf when the proconsul Minucius demands them to make a sacrifice to the gods:

> *Proconsul dixit: "Pro te respondes an pro omnibus?" Saturus dixit: "Pro omnibus: una enim est in nobis voluntas." Proconsul ad Saturninum, Revocatum, et Felicitatem et Perpetuam dixit: "Vos quid dicitis?" At illi responderunt: "Verum est: unam gerimus voluntatem."*[241]

> The proconsul said: "Do you respond for yourself or for all?" Saturus said: "For all, because we have a single will." The proconsul said to Saturninus, Revocatus, and Felicitas and Perpetua: "What do you say?" They replied: "It is true: we bear a single will."

The longer interrogation scene and its prominent position in the narratives is reflective of a prioritisation of the martyrs' speech in the *Acta*, as opposed to their inner conflicts and struggles. Interiority and reflection are left behind in favour of direct action; the martyrs of the *Acta* are more likely to say and do than they are to think and feel. The late antique Christian notion that martyrs could give voice to the will of God through their speech – what Kate Cooper has called 'divine ventriloquism' – makes martyrial speech all the more important.[242] It becomes a vehicle for the miraculous, a call-to-arms for would-be Christians that provokes a tidal-wave of conversions. The Perpetua of the *Acta* speaks with unflinching authority and uses quotations from the Bible to hammer home her points when her family attempt to change her mind; this is a marked contrast to her concern for her father and her baby in the *Passio*.[243] In the *Acta*, Perpetua transforms from concerned mother and daughter into a heroic martyr. With all of this in mind, the prioritisation of speech in the *Acta* can be read an expression of a contemporary understanding of the power of martyrs – though it unavoidably came at the expense of the authorship of Perpetua and Saturus.

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[241] *Acta A*, 4.2–4; Saturus also speaks *'pro omibus'* in *Acta B*, 4.2–4.
[242] Kate Cooper, 'Ventriloquism and the Miraculous: Conversion, Preaching, and the Martyr Exemplum in Late Antiquity', in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (eds.), *Signs, Wonders, and Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), pp. 22–45.
[243] Matthew 7:23 in *Acta A*, 6.6, and *Acta B*, 6.6; compared here with the ambivalence of Perpetua in *Passio*, 6.5–7.

During the trial the men are separated from the women, and Perpetua and Felicitas are then interrogated alone. In the *Passio* we hear only Perpetua's answers at the trial, but in the *Acta* Felicitas also declares her faith. In her exchange with the proconsul in *Acta A* we learn that Felicitas had a husband whom she now despises (*'habeo quem nunc contemno'*); no husband for Felicitas was mentioned in the *Passio*, despite her late-stage pregnancy.[244] Perpetua's husband actually appears at her interrogation along with her parents and brothers, but here she firmly rejects them all. Her husband even brings their child with him, but to no avail.[245] Felicitas occupies a more significant part of the narratives in both of the *Acta*. Her premature labour and parturition the day before the games is portrayed as a successful miracle in the *Passio*, brought on by the prayers of the group in prison. In *Acta B*, however, the birth becomes symbolic of martyrdom itself. This is how the episode is rendered:

> *... Felicitas sequebatur, quae desiderio Christi et amore martyria nec obstetricem quaesivit, nec partus sensit iniuriam, sed vere felix et suo sanguine consecranda, non solum femineo sexui, sed etiam virili martyria praebebat exemplum, post onus uteri coronam martyria perceptura.*[246]
>
> Felicitas followed, who through the desire of Christ and love of martyrdom had not asked for a midwife, nor did she feel the pain of childbirth, but she was truly delighted to be consecrated by her blood, not only did she give an example of the female sex but also of masculine virtue, about to gain the crown of martyrdom after the burden of her womb.

The painless childbirth here is likely a reference to Eve's punishment to give birth with painful labour.[247] Felicitas, by choosing martyrdom, has gained an exemption from this inherited penalty.[248] The emphasis of Felicitas's experience also serves to place her on a par with the character of Perpetua. Perpetua's character is, in turn, de-emphasised in the *Acta*. Whereas in the *Passio* Perpetua asks for her visions and her request is granted (and this ability is what prompts her brother to call her 'lady sister'), in the *Acta* she is the passive recipient of her visions. She does not have the twin visions of Dinocrates, and therefore does not save his soul through her prayers. Perpetua has no agency in her visionary experience, and this becomes more marked due to the shift in how her vision of the ladder presented between *Acta A* and *B*. In *Acta A* Perpetua recounts this vision in the first person, beginning *'vidi in visu'* ('I saw in a vision').[249] This calls to mind her diary-style account in the *Passio*. In *Acta B* the vision is recorded in the third person, with the author writing *'haec sanctae Perpetuae revelata sunt quiescenti'* ('these things were revealed to holy Perpetua when she was was sleeping').[250]

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[244] *Acta A*, 5.3; this episode does not feature in *Acta B*.
[245] *'maritus simulque cum parvulo eius',* ('and her husband with her young child'), *Acta A*, 6.1, also *Acta B*, 6.1.
[246] *Acta B*, 9.1–2.
[247] Genesis 3:17.
[248] On the broader significance of motherhood within the *Passio* narrative and its reception, see Mary Hitchman, 'Martyred Mothers: Augustine's Sermons on Perpetua and Felicitas', in Kirsty Bolton and Lauren Sisson (eds.), *Motherhood in the Medieval World* (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).
[249] *Acta A*, 3.2.
[250] *Acta B*, 3.1.

Perpetua's vision of the Egyptian gladiator, included without her masculine transformation, appears in third person in both the *Acta*.[251]

The very existence of the *Acta* point to deficiencies in the *Passio* narrative for meeting the needs of at least some Christian communities.[252] The North African church in the fourth and fifth centuries was characterised by what is now called the Donatist controversy, a schism between the rival sects of Catholics and Donatists, both claiming to be the true church.[253] The roots of the schism primarily lay in the persecutions of Christians under Diocletian. The Donatists argued that those who had handed over the scriptures to the persecutors were traitors – *traditores* – and needed to be re-baptised. What is more, the Donatists emphasised clerical purity. If a priest or bishop was ordained by one of these *traditores*, the Donatists believed that their authority was questionable. The Catholics, who had imperial backing, argued for one saving baptism. Because of the attempts by the Catholics and the empire alike to suppress their movement, the Donatists styled themselves as the church of the martyrs and saints.[254] They claimed the holy inheritance of North African martyrs like Perpetua and Felicitas, but also presented themselves as the persecuted church resisting imperial dominance. Speaking at the 411 Conference of Carthage, the Donatist bishop Petilian argued the true church suffers persecution, rather than inflicting it. With the legacy of martyrdom at stake in this highly-charged atmosphere, the story of Perpetua, Felicitas, and their companions was of crucial importance.

The Catholics were no longer persecuted by the Roman state, therefore martyrdom (and its attendant glory) was not accessible for them as an expression of their faith. But Donatists were being persecuted in North Africa. As Adam Ployd put it, these 'competing Christian communities act as rival claimants to the martyr's reward and as would-be heirs to the kingdom haggling over the Lord's own will and testament.'[255] Indeed, L. Stephanie Cobb has argued that the *Acta* are a concerted attempt to wrest the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas from the Donatists, and their reframing of Perpetua's death is a direct refutation of the Donatists' desire for martyrdom.[256] I am inclined to agree that anti-Donatist sentiment was at least part of the reason why the *Acta* were created. Moreover, the contested legacy of North African martyrdom had practical implication for clerics, Catholic and Donatist alike. Catholic clerics were charged with the task of reinterpreting the significance of martyrdom narratives in their sermons.[257]

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[251] *Acta A*, 7.2; *Acta B*, 7.2.

[252] For a full study of the transformation of this transformation see Kitzler, *From 'Passio Perpetuae' to 'Acta Perpetuae',* especially pp. 80–105. On the literary context see J. W. Halporn, 'Literary History and Generic Expectation in the *Passio* and *Acta Perpetuae*', *Vigiliae Christianae* 45.3 (1991), pp. 223–41.

[253] For an overview of the Donatist Controversy see Richard Miles, *The Donatist Schism: Controversy and Contexts* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), and Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[254] On the centrality of persecution to the self-perception and group identity of Donatists see Maureen A. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), and *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis, M.N.: Fortress Press, 1997).

[255] Adam Ployd, '*Non poena sed causa:* Augustine's Anti-Donatist Rhetoric of Martyrdom', *Augustinian Studies* 49.1 (2018), p. 28.

[256] Cobb, 'Suicide by Gladiator?', pp. 597–628.

[257] On the proliferation and significance of martyr cults in the fourth and fifth century, see Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2004).

Martyr texts were increasingly taking up space within the Mass. In 393, the Synod of Hippo ruled that hagiographies could be incorporated within the liturgy on the feast days of relevant saints.[258] As abridged versions of the *Passio*, the *Acta* were the more convenient forms of the narrative. The new inclusion of hagiographies in the liturgy seems another likely factor in the creation and subsequent popularity of the *Acta*. For the North African Catholics, the representation of the martyrs' steadfast piety in the *Acta* was more relevant than their gruesome deaths that were detailed in the *Passio*. Despite being martyr narratives, the *Acta* somewhat skim over the group's deaths. As I have demonstrated above, the *Acta* tidy up the messy complexity of the *Passio*. Both Perpetua and Felicitas gain husbands, and Perpetua does not transform into a man. Perpetua feels no compunction about rejecting her child and her family, but instead does so easily. Finally, her complicated visions featuring Dinocrates are expunged. This suggests that, even a couple of centuries removed from its initial composition, some readers found these aspects of the *Passio* troubling. In the following section I will explore what specifically worried these early readers of the *Passio*, how these concerns were expressed, and their impact on both the reception of the *Passio* and the tradition of Perpetua's authorship. In doing so, I will suggest that one of the reasons that the *Acta* were created was to remove Perpetua's authorship from the story of her martyrdom.

Augustine, Authorship, and the *Acta*

Two centuries after the martyrdom of the group of catechumens at Carthage, Augustine wrote several sermons on Perpetua and Felicitas in his capacity as bishop of Hippo. He also used Perpetua and Felicitas as behavioural examples and topics of discussion elsewhere in his work.[259] Significantly, Augustine dissects Perpetua's vision of Dinocrates in *De natura et origine animae*, a treatise on the soul in response to Vincentius Victor.[260] Augustine's responses to Perpetua in particular mark a major turning-point in the reception of the *Passio* and of understandings of Perpetua as an author.

Augustine delivered his sermons on Perpetua and Felicitas (*Sermon* 280–282*auct*) on their feast day, 7th March, likely in the Basilica Maiorum at Carthage.[261] We should not underestimate the emotional investment of the congregation in these martyrs, and the role of place and space; Carthage was thought to be the location of their martyrdom and their tombs, and the martyrs

[258] See the discussion in Cobb and Jacobs (eds. and trans.), *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, pp. 103–4.
[259] Augustine, *Serm.* 159A.11. Here Augustine argues that it is sometimes necessary for Christians to disobey their families. See also Augustine, *Ennarationes en psalmos* 47.13, where Perpetua is used as an example of defying family.
[260] Augustine, *De natura et origine animae*.
[261] Augustine became bishop in 395 and these sermons were likely delivered between 400 and 420, although a firm date is impossible to establish. On the difficulties of dating of Augustine's sermons, see Shari Boodts, 'Navigating the Vast Tradition of St. Augustine's Sermons. Old Instruments and New Approaches', *Augustiniana* 69 (2019), pp. 83–115. On the significance of *Serm.* 282*auct*, which was discovered in 2007, see Isabella Schiller, Dorothea Weber, and Clemens Weidmann, "Sechs neue Augustinuspredigten: Teil 1 mit Edition dreier Sermones." *Weiner Studien* 121 (2008), pp. 227–84.

and the congregation had shared North African origins.[262] All this was compounded by the sermons immediately following a reading of their martyrdom narrative.[263] Augustine was one of many late antique clerics tasked with giving martyrs new relevance when preaching to a Catholic congregation that was not being persecuted.[264] Augustine was a vocal anti-Donatist, coming to lead the Catholic movement against the Donatists.[265] His sermons on Perpetua and Felicitas should therefore be viewed as an effort to bar the Donatists from claiming the two women for their own sect, but also part of a wider project to refute the Donatists' claim that they were the church of the martyrs.

In his sermons Augustine purposefully focuses on Perpetua and Felicitas, virtually ignoring the other martyrs in the group. He justifies this choice by saying that they 'shine and stand out amongst their martyr comrades' (*'refulget et praeeminet inter comites martyres'*) because they triumphed over their inherent feminine weaknesses, which the men did not have to suffer. In his portrayal of Felicitas Augustine links her pregnancy with her impending martyrdom, describing her as pregnant in both body and heart (*'Gravida enim erat in corpore et corde'*); her premature labour gives way to her spiritual rebirth.[266] This presentation of Felicitas is part of a wider project to emphasise the femininity of the martyrs, making their triumph all the more spectacular. 'The crown is more glorious where the sex is weaker' (*'corona gloriosior, ubi sexus infirmior'*), writes Augustine.[267]

Augustine continually puns on the two women's names throughout these sermons, using 'perpetual felicity' (*'perpetua felicitate'*) as shorthand for martyrdom's reward.[268] Through their names alone, according to Augustine, Perpetua and Felicitas represent all the other martyrs.[269] Augustine consistently promotes Perpetua and Felicitas over the other martyrs, but also emphasises their closeness as a duo, and one way he accomplishes this is by elevating the

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[262] On how these sermons related to their surroundings see John Kitchen, 'Going to the Gate of Life: The Archaeology of the Carthage Amphitheater and Augustine's Sermons on Saints Perpetua and Felicitas', in Georgiana Donavin, Cary Nederman, and Richard Utz (eds.), *Speculum sermonis: Interdisciplinary Reflections on the Medieval Sermon* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 29–51.

[263] Augustine, *Serm*. 280.1. Here Augustine refers to this custom of reading the martyrdom narrative aloud before the sermon: *'Exhortationes earum in divinis revelationibus, triumphosque passionum, cum legerentur, audivimus'* ('Their encouragement in divine revelations and the triumph of their sufferings, when these were being read, we heard them').

[264] On Augustine's interpretation of martyrs more broadly see Elena Martin, 'Commemoration, Representation, and Interpretation: Augustine of Hippo's Depictions of the Martyrs', in Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (eds.) *Saints and Sanctity,* Studies in Church History, Vol. 47 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), pp. 29–40.

[265] On Augustine's ecclesiology and his anti-Donatist stance see Alexander Evers, 'Augustine on the Church (Against the Donatists)', in Mark Vessey (ed.), *A Companion to Augustine* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 375–85, and Adam Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[266] Augustine, *Serm.* 282*auct*.5.

[267] Augustine, *Serm.* 281.1. The contrasting images of masculine hero and feminine mother is highlighted in Katherine E. Milco, '*Mulieres viriliter vincentes*: Masculine and Feminine Imagery in Augustine's Sermons on Sts. Perpetua and Felicity', *Vigilae Christiana* 69 (2015), pp. 276–95. Women attaining manly holiness is a recurrent theme in martyrdom narratives; see Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, especially pp. 92–123 on female martyrs.

[268] Augustine, *Serm.* 280.1; *Serm.* 281.3; *Serm.* 282.1. See also Dorothee Elm von der Osten, 'Perpetual Felicity: Sermons of Augustine on Female Martyrdom (s. 280–282auct [Erfurt 1])', *Studia Patristica*, 49 (2010), pp. 203–10.

[269] Augustine, *Serm.* 281.3.

significance of Felicitas. As discussed above, this strategy that was also present in the *Acta*. Perpetua's visions direct the course of events in the *Passio* and this both confirms and enhances her prominent position in the narrative – but Augustine implies that Felicitas also had visions. He opens *Sermon* 280 by relating that both women were encouraged by the 'divine revelations' ('*divinis revelationibus'*) they received.[270] Furthermore, Augustine does not suggest a class divide between Perpetua and Felicitas, indicating that one was nobility and the other enslaved. Instead, Augustine introduces both women as *'Dei famularum'* – the slaves of God.[271] Why was Augustine so keen to present Perpetua and Felicitas as a united front? Was it out of respect for their shared sanctity, and the increasing success of their cult in North Africa and beyond? Was it a rhetorical strategy, used to prop up his use of the 'perpetual felicity' pun? Perhaps. But I suggest that Augustine's decision to make Perpetua and Felicitas far more equal than they appeared in the *Passio* was at least partially motivated by a concern to detract from Perpetua's authorship.

Augustine responded to the question of Perpetua's authorship in *De natura et origine animae*, his reply to a treatise by Vincentius Victor. Although this work by Vincentius is no longer extant, much of its contents can be pieced together by examining Augustine's critiques. It appears that Vincentius argued that unbaptised souls could be saved, and thereby find their way to heaven. One of the examples Vincentius used to support his argument was Perpetua and her prayers for Dinocrates. Augustine strenuously refutes this, making three core arguments. Firstly, Augustine states that unbaptised people will not be saved, even infants, and this belief is antithetical to Catholic teachings.[272] Secondly, Augustine argues that Dinocrates was indeed baptised and therefore could be saved, but had fallen back under the control of his father so he was suffering in the afterlife.[273] Thirdly, Augustine states that the *Passio* (*'ipsa lectio'*) is not in the biblical canon, and therefore cannot be used to answer such questions (*'non sit in eo canone Scripturarum, unde in huiusmodi quaestionibus testimonia proferenda sunt'*).[274]

Augustine's anxiety about the use of the *Passio* to develop doctrine had a broader significance within the North African church, where many hagiographies and martyrdom narratives enjoyed immense popularity which sometimes eclipsed that of scripture. When these texts were included within the Mass itself (as permitted by the 393 Synod of Hippo) the lines between hagiography and canonical scripture inevitably became even more blurred. The way that Vincentius used the *Passio* to support his ideas about the soul was emblematic of a wider context of people using such texts in place of biblical ones. Augustine wanted to strenuously dissuade others from doing this, but because of the prominence of Perpetua and Felicitas he

[270] Augustine, *Serm.* 280.1.
[271] Augustine, *Serm.* 281.1; see also *'famulae Dei'* ('slaves of God') in *Serm.* 280.1.
[272] *'Noli credere, nec dicere, nec docere, "Infantes antequam baptizentur morte praeventos, pervenire posse ad originalium indulgentiam peccatorum," si vis esse catholicus.'* ('Neither believe, nor say, nor teach "Infants who are prevented from being baptised by death are able to attain the forgiveness of original sins," if you want to be a Catholic.'), Augustine, *De natura et origine animae*, 3.9.12.
[273] *'cur non tibi visus fuerit baptizatus potuisse ab impio patre ad Gentilium sacrilegia revocari, et ob hoc fuisse in poenis, de quibus sorore orante liberatus est, nescio',* ('I do not know why it does not seem possible to you that he was baptised, but he returned to Gentile sacrileges through his impious father, and he was being punished for these things when his sister prayed and freed him'), *Ibid*.
[274] *Ibid*.

had to do so diplomatically. Rather than attacking the content of the *Passio* or critiquing Perpetua's actions, Augustine questions the provenance of the text and Perpetua's authorship:

> *De fratre autem sanctae Perpetuae Dinocrate, nec scriptura ipsa canonica est, nec illa sic scripsit, vel quicumque illud scripsit, ut illum puerum qui septennis mortuus fuerat, sine Baptismo diceret fuisse defunctum: pro quo illa imminente martyrio creditur exaudita, ut a poenis transferretur ad requiem.*[275]
>
> About the brother of holy Perpetua, Dinocrates: this is not canonical scripture, and she who wrote this, or whoever wrote this, did not do so in a way as to say that this boy, who died when he was seven, had died without baptism. It is believed that, when her martyrdom was at hand, it was granted that he would be transferred from punishment to rest.

Following yet another assertion that the *Passio* is not part of the Bible, Augustine then introduces doubt about the text's authorship. Augustine is the only commentator to directly identify Perpetua as one of the authors of the *Passio* (*'illa sic scripsit'*, 'she who wrote this') but he immediately counters this by questioning her authorship with the phrase *'vel quicumque illud scripsit'* ('or whoever wrote this'). If Augustine did not have a copy of the Passio to hand, this could reflect his confusion about the structure of the text with its multiple narrative voices; he was simply unsure of who specifically was relating this part of the story. However, given the prominence of martyr texts in the fifth-century North African liturgy and their elevation to scriptural status by those such as Vincentius Victor, it seems more likely that Augustine intended to create ambiguity around the *Passio*. We have seen that the anonymous narrator was keen to emphasise that Perpetua's account was her own; her first-person testimony in the *Passio* likely added to the text's authority, which Augustine sought to destabilise.

Augustine's efforts were rewarded; none of the later commentators on the martyrdom narrative mention Perpetua as an author. And I argue that it was partly Augustine's stance on the authorship of the *Passio*, as well as his representation of Perpetua and Felicitas in his sermons, that led directly to the creation of the *Acta*. Augustine's interpretation of Perpetua and Felicitas shares many similarities with that found in the *Acta* narratives: the de-centring of Perpetua, the increased importance of Felicitas, the added significance of her pregnancy and labour, and the removal of the authorship of Perpetua and Saturus. Versions of Augustine's punning appear in the *Acta*, although they only play with Perpetua's name. Perpetua tells her father that once she is martyred she will be a 'perpetual daughter' (*'perpetuam filiam'*); whilst on trial, Perpetua responds to the proconsul that she will follow her name 'in order to become perpetual' (*'ut sim perpetua'*).[276] To my mind, this indicates that the *Acta* were directly inspired by the sermons of Augustine, and were created in part as a response to Augustine's doubt of Perpetua's authorship.

[275] *Ibid*., 1.10.12.
[276] *Acta A*, 6.3, 5.9; *Acta B*, 2.2, 5.5.

Another interpretation of the relationship between Augustine and the *Acta* has been raised. Jan Bremmer posited that Augustine took inspiration from the *Acta*, not the other way around.[277] Bremmer's comments came following the discovery of Augustine's *Sermon* 282*auct* in 2007, a longer version of *Sermon* 282. In the newly-discovered sermon, Augustine appeared to quote from *Acta B*. He uses *'in utere onere'* ('the burden of her womb') to refer to the pregnancy of Felicitas, and *Acta B* contains the *phrase 'post onus uteri coronam martyria perceptura'* ('about to gain the crown of martyrdom after the burden of her womb'). Similarly, Bremmer argues that 'manly virtues' – *'virili virtuti'* in *Acta B*, *and 'virilus virtus'* in Augustine – are evidence of Augustine borrowing from the *Acta*, and he therefore proposed a fourth-century date for the texts.[278] Éric Rebillard, however, soon demonstrated that Augustine's 'borrowed' phrases were not unique to *Acta B*, but in fact appeared elsewhere in Latin literature.[279] It therefore seems more likely, given their shared subject matter, that the *Acta* took these phrases from Augustine.

The Perpetua and Felicitas of the *Acta* are far closer to Augustine's portrayal than they are to their characters in the *Passio*. Augustine intentionally idealised these women as heroes of their faith, but in a way that purposefully distanced them from the *Passio* text. Under Augustine's pen, Perpetua transformed from a worried mother bearing her testimony to a triumphant, steadfast martyr. Augustine knew that the story of the martyrs was true, but in his response to Vincentius Victor he revealed the concerns he had over the provenance of the *Passio*, including whether Perpetua was truly its author; this may have been Augustine's personal anxiety, but it could equally reflect a wider controversy over the authorship of the *Passio* at the time he was writing. Perpetua's visions of Dinocrates are noticeably absent from the *Acta*. By removing Perpetua's authorship, the *Acta* directly responded to Augustine's fears that the *Passio* and texts like it were being used to determine doctrine. The *Acta* privileged the actions and speech of the martyrs over their eyewitness accounts and personal testimonies, and ensured that Perpetua's authorship was written out of her martyrdom story.

Saint, not Author: Perpetua's Medieval Afterlife

Following Augustine's intervention on authorship of the *Passio* in the early fifth century, the cult of Perpetua and Felicitas continued to proliferate into the middle ages; I will survey how the martyrs were celebrated below.[280] Perpetua's authorship, however, was not mentioned in any commemorations or celebrations of her sanctity. As a figure, Perpetua continued to gain superhuman power and authority throughout the medieval period; as in the two *Acta* narratives, this refashioning of Perpetua into a saint necessitated the flattening of some of the complex elements of the *Passio*, namely Perpetua's ambiguous gender and her internal conflict about

[277] Bremmer, 'Felicitas: The Martyrdom of a Young African Woman,' in Bremmer and Formisano (eds.), *Perpetua's Passions*, pp. 35–53.
[278] Augustine, *Serm.* 282*auct* 6.3 and 6.2; *Acta B*, 9.2.
[279] *'onus uteri'* features in Ovid and Ambrose, and Paulinus of Nola used *'virilis virtus'*. See Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives,* pp. 300-301.
[280] For a comprehensive study of how the cult of Perpetua developed from the *Passio* into the later middle ages see Cotter-Lynch, *Saint Perpetua Across the Middle Ages*.

martyrdom. The medieval reception of Perpetua as a person is often divorced from the reception of the *Passio* as a text. Many other elements are at play, even beyond both of the *Acta* and Augustine's work; sermons, shrines, liturgical calendars, festal performances of the martyrdom narrative, and other texts on the martyrs all fed medieval understandings of Perpetua. That Perpetua was not remembered as an author was a direct result of her commemoration as a saint. If only the *Passio* circulated in the medieval period – such as the *Cento* of Proba (Chapter 4 of this thesis) and the *Itinerarium* of Egeria (Chapter 5) – without the surrounding noise of veneration, Perpetua's authorship would have been more legible. This is impossible, however, because of what she wrote. Perpetua was always going to be more saint than author.

Initial celebrations of Perpetua and her co-martyrs were recorded in martyrologies. These are short, but many show familiarity with the martyrdom narrative. The entry below from an early medieval martyrology attributed to Jerome, is broadly reflective of the genre. Perpetua and the group are celebrated alongside other saints with the same feast day. Curiously, Saturus, Revocatus, Saturninus are located in Africa, without Secundulus. A Satyrus, Saturninus, Revocatus, and Sedundulus are located in Antioch, however, showing some confusion about the origins of these saints and their narrative. Perpetua and Felicitas are removed from the rest of the group and placed in Thuburbo Minus:

> *Non. Mart. In Africa Saturi Revocati Iocundi Saturnini Alibi Silvani Rogati Eroii et Victorinae. Antiochia Leocis Taxis Nistoris Equini Satiri Saturnini Revocati Secundoli Italici. in Mauritania civitate Turbitanorum passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis.*[281]
>
> On the nones of March. In Africa, Saturus, Revocatus, Jocundus, Saturninus, Alibus, Silvanus, Rogatus, Hero, and Victorina. In Antioch, Leo, Taxis, Nestor, Equinus, Satyrus, Saturninus, Revocatus, Secundulus, Italicus. In the Mauretanian city of Thuburbo, the passion of holy Perpetua and Felicitas.

The veneration of the individual martyrs in separate traditions is apparent here; despite their shared martyrdom the men are separated from the women. The *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* was compiled in the sixth of seventh century (certainly not by Jerome in the fourth or fifth), and it provided lists of saints' names in calendrical order.[282] This martyrology did not include biographical details of the saints it commemorated but others did, such as that by the Northumbrian monk Bede. Written between 725 and 731, Bede's *Martyrologium* contains and entry on Perpetua and Felicitas that is more detailed than equivalent entries in earlier martyrologies. Bede was more selective with the saints he chose to include in his martyrology, and therefore had the space to include biographical details; that Perpetua and Felicitas were

[281] *Martyrologium Hieronymianum,* non. Mart.
[282] All extant manuscripts of the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* are descendants of one Burgundian exemplar from around 600. Many of the saints it commemorates have Gallic origins, and it therefore seems likely that the *Martyrologium* was produced in Gaul. For a discussion on the contents, dating, and transmission of the *Martyrologium*, see Lifshitz, *The Name of the Saint,* pp. 3–14.

included at all speaks to the importance of their cult. The entry is as follows, and is worth quoting in full:

> *Apud Carthaginem, Perpetuae et Felicitatis, quae bestiis sunt deputatae, sub Severo principe: et cum Felicitas parturiret in carcere, omnium militum qui simul patiebantur precibus impetratum est ut octovo mense pareret. Iamvero Perpetuae inter alia concessum est ut eius mens quodammodo averteretur a corpore, in quo vaccae impetum pertulit: ita ut adhuc futurum exspectaret quod in se iam gestum esse nesciret.*[283]
>
> At Carthage, Perpetua and Felicitas, who were condemned to the beasts under the *princeps* Severus; and whilst Felicitas was pregnant in prison, it was attained by the prayers of all the soldiers who were likewise suffering that she would give birth in the eighth month. Truly it was granted to Perpetua (among other things) that her mind would somehow be turned from her body, in which she bore the cow's attack: in this way, in order that she might anticipate the future, she did not know what activity happened whilst she was in herself.

As well as the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, Bede probably used the fifth-century *Chronicon* of Prosper of Aquitaine as a source of information for this entry. The *Chronicon* has the following entry for 7th March: *'Qua tempestate Perpetua et Felicitas pro Christo passae sunt non. Mart. apud Carthaginem Africae in castris bestiis deputatae'* ('At this time Perpetua and Felicity suffered for Christ on the nones of March at Carthage in Africa and were condemned to the beasts in the arena').[284] The other text that Bede drew upon was the *Passio*, which contains the details about Felicitas's premature labour achieved through prayer, the beasts in the arena, and Perpetua's miraculous painlessness.[285] Bede's presentation of these saints is rooted in what happens *to* their bodies (childbirth and painlessness) as opposed to what they do *with* their bodies (authoritative martyrial speech, visions, and interpersonal conflict). In this short vignette, Bede effectively removes the agency of both women in their martyrdom. As I have demonstrated, this is representative of wider efforts to update the narrative for new contexts.

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Despite the versions of the narrative presented in the above, there was clearly one aspect of Perpetua's medieval veneration wherein she was remembered as an author – the manuscripts bearing the *Passio*. These manuscripts preserve Perpetua's first-person account, carefully copied throughout the centuries. The earliest manuscript bearing the *Passio* (Codex Sangallensis 577) was likely used by Notker, St Gall's librarian, when he produced a hymn in celebration of holy woman: *In natale sanctarum feminarum*. This hymn does not mention

[283] Bede, *Martyrologium*, non. Mart. For the significance of Bede's text within the genre of martyrology see Vicky Gunn, *Bede's Historiae: Genre, Rhetoric, and the Construction of Anglo-Saxon Church History* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2009), pp. 131–43.
[284] Prosper of Aquitaine, *Chronicon*, 757.
[285] *Passio,* 15.1–3; 19–21; 20.8–9.

Perpetua by name, but it is obviously based upon her vision of the ladder ascending to heaven. The hymn is structured in short verses arranged into two separate columns, giving the text the appearance of a ladder. The image of the ladder is also used in the hymn's opening verse to evoke the Christian struggle against sin: *'Scalam ad caelos subrectam, tormentis cinctam'* ('A ladder rising to heaven, encircled with torments').[286] That Perpetua was able to fit into the hymn's generalising theme of female sanctity demonstrates the extent of the transformation of her account by the late ninth century. Just as Perpetua and Felicity became symbolic of the 'perpetual felicity' of martyrs in the sermons of Augustine, so too did Notker's Perpetua function as a cipher for all holy women.

Much of the reception of the *Passio* is marked by a similar removal of Perpetua's individuality, as both a character within a narrative and as the creator of that narrative. The *Acta* were far more popular than the *Passio*, as evidenced by their extensive manuscript transmission; because they are written in the third person, this partially explains why Perpetua is not remembered as an author. But, as in the case of Bede and Notker, even when later commentators had access to Perpetua's first person account her authorship is not commemorated. This was initially due to Augustine's criticism of the *Passio*, which likely spurred the production of *Acta A* in the fifth century. Although they removed Perpetua as an author, the *Acta* were not the deciding factor in the communal forgetting of her authorship – but Augustine was. The later tradition of commemorating Perpetua is concerned with her sanctity above all else. Perpetua's authorship was not important to medieval commentators, not even to verify her story, but her martyrdom certainly was. Perpetua was commemorated not as an author, but as a saint, and in this chapter I have tracked why this was the case.

[286] Notker, *In natale sanctarum feminarum*. For a discussion of the hymn's wider significance see Margaret Cotter-Lynch, 'Mnemonic Sanctity and the Ladder of Reading: Notker's "In Natale Sanctarum Feminarum", in Margaret Cotter-Lynch and Brad Herzog (eds.), *Reading Memory and Identity in the Texts of Medieval European Holy Women* (New York, N.Y.; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 39–56. Cotter-Lynch also considers the hymn in the context of later interpretations of Perpetua in *Saint Perpetua Across the Middle Ages*, pp. 92–106.

Chapter Three: Disputed Authorship in the Manuscript Tradition: Paula and Eustochium's Letter to Marcella

In this chapter I will discuss a letter from the collection of Jerome. This letter (*Ep*. 46) is addressed to Jerome's regular correspondent Marcella, and it is from Marcella's friends Paula and Eustochium.[287] There have been continuous attempts to attribute this letter to Jerome, rather than to Paula and Eustochium, over the last century – with considerable success. This has resulted in a broad scholarly consensus assuming Jerome's authorship. The letter's contested authorship is usually mentioned in a footnote, but sometimes Jerome is presented as the author without comment or justification. When the authorship of the letter is debated, however, the manuscript transmission is often called upon to prove Jerome is the letter's true author – but this is done without proper recourse to the manuscripts themselves. I have therefore provided a thorough investigation of the manuscript transmission of the letter to shed some light upon this authorship controversy. As it stands, the evidence clearly points to Paula and Eustochium as the true authors of this letter. Because of the letter's transmission within Jerome's letter collection, and the complexities of the manuscript tradition surrounding it, this chapter stands out amongst my other case studies. The reception of the letter is analysed primarily through its manuscript transmission, rather than responses and commentary, because later commentators followed Jerome's idealised presentation of Paula and Eustochium.[288] They are not received as authors in the same way as Egeria (Chapter Four) and Proba (Chapter Five) but this does not mean their authorship was not acknowledged at all – instead, it was clearly marked in several manuscripts bearing their letter. Furthermore, if the letter had not circulated within Jerome's collection in the first place, it likely would not have been preserved into the medieval period. As we have seen, this was the case for the majority of women's letters at this time.

Paula and Eustochium sent their letter from a Christian community they had established in Bethlehem. The letter was composed in the final part of the fourth century, no earlier than 386, the year when Paula and Eustochium had settled in Palestine. There they found a deep connection with the place and its (Christian) people. Jerome had left Rome in 385 after becoming the subject of a scandal and from there made his way to Bethlehem, where Paula and Eustochium joined him. In *Ep*. 46 Paula and Eustochium try to persuade Marcella to come to Bethlehem too, writing evocatively about the joy of their potential reunion among the holy sites. Paula, Eustochium, and Marcella had all acted as Jerome's literary patrons at various points, and this allowed him to continue his writing projects in relative comfort. In his letters and prefaces to his scriptural commentaries and treatises, Jerome described his life with these women and their circle, portraying himself as their spiritual advisor. Almost all our information about Paula and Eustochium comes from Jerome himself, inevitably casting him in a positive

[287] Paula and Eustochium, *Ep*. 46, in Isidor Hilberg (ed.), *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, CSEL 54, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 1996), pp. 329–44.
[288] For example, the sixth century poet Venantius Fortunatus compared the former queen Radegund to a litany of holy women, and among them were Paula, Eustochium, and Marcella. *Carmina*, 8.1.41–4.

light; this is another reason why it is crucial that *Ep*. 46 is correctly identified as the work of Paula and Eustochium. Whilst adding to the small corpus of material authored by fourth-century women, the letter reveals aspects of the complex relationship and dynamics between three of the most powerful Christian women in late antique Rome.

I will examine Paula and Eustochium's letter in its broader context, considering contemporary Christian attitudes to religious travel and the debate surrounding the value of visiting biblical sites, before turning to the content of the letter itself. I will then outline the authorship debate before analysing the letter's manuscript transmission. Finally, I will consider the implications of Paula and Eustochium's authorship of this letter for our understanding of the text itself, but also of the broader debate around Christian tourism. *Ep*. 46 is often used as evidence that Jerome approved of such ventures, but the picture becomes decidedly murkier once his authorship is removed. I will begin by considering Jerome's letter collection, and how he deliberately crafted the portrayal of his relationship with Paula, Eustochium, and Marcella in these letters.

Jerome's Letters and the Aventine Circle

Jerome was born in Stridon, in the middle of the fourth century, and as a young man he was educated in Rome. He left in the early 370s for Antioch, where he discerned his commitment to the more ascetic type of Christianity for which he would become known. From around 375 to 377 he stayed in Chalcis, probably at an estate named Maronia which belonged to his patron Evagrius, situated around thirty miles away from Antioch.[289] In the beginning of the 380s Jerome was resident in Constantinople, before coming to Rome in 382. Here he caught the attention of the bishop of Rome, Damasus, who relied upon Jerome's skill with languages for scriptural interpretation, and perhaps communication with Greek churches.[290] After settling in Bethlehem with Paula and Eustochium in 386, Jerome would remain there for the rest of his life. Jerome was a self-styled man of letters, and the peak of his literary self-fashioning came around 393 with his composition of *De viris illustribus*, a collection of the biographies of famous Christian male authors with lists of their works. Jerome's final entry is on his own life and literary output, and here he records his letters alongside his translations, commentaries, and treatises.

> *... epistularum ad diversos librum unum ... ad eustochium de virginitate servanda, ad marcellam espitularum librum unum, consolatorium de morte filiae ad paulam ... epistularum autem ad paulam et eustochium, quia cottidie scribuntur, incertus est numerus.*[291]

[289] For a good brief overview of Jerome's life see Rebenich, *Jerome*. For a more extended biography see Kelly, *Jerome.*
[290] An analysis of the relationship between Jerome and Damasus based on their extant correspondence is found in Andrew Cain, *The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 43–67.
[291] Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, 135.

> … one book of letters to various recipients … to Eustochium on the preservation of virginity, one book of letters to Marcella, a consolation to Paula on the death of her daughter … however the letters to Paula and Eustochium, which are written daily, are of an indeterminate number.[292]

None of the letters which Jerome wrote daily (*'cottidie scribuntur'*) to Paula and Eustochium survive, and neither do their replies. It is likely that the letters were written on wax tablets for expedience, and contained details about the day-to-day running of the communities in Bethlehem.[293] But from his inclusion of these in *De viris illustribus*, it is immediately clear that Jerome saw his letters as an integral part of his oeuvre.

Whilst at the estate of Maronia Jerome wrote the series of letters entitled *Epistularum ad diversos liber*. These letters detailed his time at Maronia, which he described as self-imposed exile; by emphasising (and exaggerating) his remoteness from Latin-speaking centres of Roman life, he consciously portrayed himself as desert ascetic in the style of Antony of Egypt.[294] Andrew Cain has argued that, in the autumn of 382, Jerome compiled the *Epistularum ad diversos liber* with the hope of capturing the attention of wealthy noblewomen Marcella and Paula, in order to secure their patronage.[295] This group of women were intensely interested in eastern monasticism and a strict kind of Christian asceticism. Jerome's letters detailing his time spent in the 'desert', therefore, acted as an epistolary *curriculum vitae*, demonstrating his experience as a hermit and his capability to instruct others in the ways of desert monasticism. Jerome was ultimately successful in securing the patronage of Marcella and Paula, although (as we will see below) he framed their relationship as that of a spiritual advisor to grateful, albeit accomplished, acolytes, rather than as a mutually beneficial partnership of equals.[296] Jerome's propaganda was so successful that his female patrons were instead described as his 'aristocratic groupies'.[297] This disguises Jerome's financial realities: he had to rely on the generosity of patrons to make a living whilst continuing to write, and literary patronage was not easy to secure. As a relative stranger when he arrived in Rome, Jerome was fortunate to attract such wealthy patrons.

Although our information on Marcella, Paula, and Eustochium is mostly restricted to what Jerome wrote about them, there are still significant details to be gleaned here. Marcella, a wealthy aristocrat, had dedicated herself to a life of strict abstinence by the 340s after becoming a widow within only a year of marrying and electing not to remarry.[298] It was from Marcella's splendid villa on the Aventine that a community of likeminded women began to form. Paula, also of aristocratic status, was widowed in 381 and similarly committed herself to an ascetic

[292] Jerome, *Ep*. 22 to Eustochium on virginity, and *Ep*. 39 to Paula following the death of her daughter Blesilla.
[293] Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, pp. 222.
[294] These letters are probably Jerome, *Ep*. 1–17.
[295] Cain, 'The Letter Collections of Jerome of Stridon', pp. 225–31.
[296] On Jerome's framing of his relationship with the Aventine circle see Cain, 'Rethinking Jerome's Portraits of Holy Women', pp. 47–57.
[297] Cameron, *Last Pagans of Rome*, p. 3.
[298] Jerome, *Ep.* 127.2.

life.[299] Eustochium, one of Paula's five children, became a consecrated virgin as an adolescent.[300] Other women, including Asella and Principia, were also members of this community that had its base in Marcella's family home on the Aventine.[301] Another of Paula's daughters, Blesilla, also pursued an ascetic lifestyle after being widowed. Blesilla died aged only 20, most likely due to her extreme self-denial. It was on this occasion that Jerome wrote his letter of consolation to Paula included in his *De viris illustribus* entry.[302] Jerome had encouraged Blesilla in her asceticism, and her death was probably a factor in his departure from Rome. He left in disgrace, seemingly amid accusations of impropriety, in 385.

Between 382 and 385, this group of ascetic women debated, corresponded with, and learned from Jerome. Jerome's epistolary portraits of Marcella and Paula following their deaths (in 410 and 404 respectively) describe both women as intensely learned, studying scripture at every opportunity, and unwaveringly committed to their ascetic practices.[303] Jerome had taught Paula, Eustochium, and Marcella to read Hebrew, and commented that Paula's knowledge of the language came to outstrip his own.[304] Writing in 387, Jerome described Marcella's sharp intellect in the preface to his *Commentary on Galatians*. This passage is worth quoting in full. Despite his praise, Jerome still takes pains to identify Marcella as his *'discipula'*:

> *Certe, cum Romae essem, numquam tam festina me vidit ut non de scripturis aliquid interrogaret. Neque vero more pythagorico quicquid responderam rectum putabat, nec sine ratione praeiudicata apud eam valebat auctoritas, sed examinabat omnia et sagaci mente universa pensabat ut me sentirem non tam discipulam habere quam iudicem.*[305]
>
> Truly, when I was in Rome, she never saw me without asking me a question on the scriptures, even when she was passing by swiftly. Unlike the manner of the Pythagoreans she did not accept my answer as truth, nor was my authority effective if it was unsupported by prejudged reason. But she examined everything, and considered the entire matter so wisely that I felt I did not have a student, but rather a judge.

Marcella also weighed in on the Origenist controversy, supporting Jerome in his opposition of Origen's teachings through writing letters and speaking with influential figures in the church at Rome.[306] These brief examples show both Marcella as a theological heavyweight in her own right. Her formation of a community of Christian community of women speaks to her considerable influence. Paula and Eustochium followed Marcella's innovative brand of

[299] For Jerome's description of Paula's widowhood and turn to asceticism see *Ep*. 108.5–6.
[300] Jerome, *Ep.* 22.
[301] Jerome, *Ep*. 45 to Asella and *Ep*. 65 to Principia.
[302] Jerome, *Ep.* 39. For a detailed reading of this letter see Rebecca L. Littlechilds, ''If you wish to be my mother, take care to please Christ': The Posthumous Speech of Blesilla in Jerome's Letter 39', *Journal of Early Christian History* 4.1 (2014), pp. 97–111. For a discussion of Blesilla's death in the wider context of Roman asceticism in the later fourth century see Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride,* p. 69.
[303] Jerome, *Ep.* 127 and *Ep.* 108.
[304] *Ep.* 108.27. See also *Ep.* 39.1, where Jerome describes Paula and Blesilla reciting psalms in Hebrew together.
[305] Jerome, *Commentarii ad Galatas*, preface.
[306] Jerome, *Ep.* 127.10; see also Chapter One of this thesis. On contemporary debates around Origen's teachings see Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*.

asceticism in Rome before leaving for Bethlehem. Their departure allowed Paula and Eustochium to establish themselves as leaders in the Christian community there, but they clearly felt Marcella's absence.

Christian Travel to the Holy Places

Although Paula, Eustochium, and Jerome had all decided to settle in Bethlehem, such a move was the subject of some debate. The value of sites featured in the Bible, and whether Christians should attempt to visit such places, was an ongoing discussion in the fourth century. I mention the debate here for two reasons: firstly, because the unique importance for Christians of visiting biblical locations is a running theme throughout *Ep*. 46, and secondly, because Jerome's position on spiritual tourism is repeatedly included in discussions of the letter's authorship.[307]

The strongest statement against Christians visiting biblical sites came from Gregory of Nyssa, who in the 380s wrote a letter about the specific dangers of a journey to Jerusalem.[308] Gregory was particularly concerned for the wellbeing, both physical and spiritual, of those who decided to visit. He noted that Jerusalem has all the same evils of any other city. If the city were somehow blessed, why would corruption be allowed to flourish there?[309] Overall, Gregory argues for the prioritisation of the inner life over outward travel, concluding that travel to Jerusalem was unnecessary for those who had already chosen to live in Christ.[310] Other commentators may not have argued against Jerusalem as strongly, but they expressed ambivalence towards Christians travelling for their faith. In a letter to Macedonius written in 413 or 414, Augustine stated that people could draw closer to God not through travelling, but by loving (*'non ambulando sed amando'*).[311] Given his emphasis on the reward in the next life, it is fitting that Augustine was sceptical about the benefits of spiritual travel in this one.

Despite the fact that spiritual travel was not universally approved, Jerome, Paula and Eustochium were among several Christians who had chosen to make a journey in order to feel closer to God.[312] In the context of this wider debate on travel, Jerome's views have therefore received a lot of attention. Jerome's ambivalence, expressed in similar terms to Augustine's and Gregory's, is regularly noted. In 395, when he was well-established in Bethlehem for

[307] Here I am deliberately using the phrases 'spiritual tourism' and 'religious travel' rather than 'pilgrimage'. Pilgrimage routes were not defined in this period, nor did Christians travelling from the west to the east see themselves as pilgrims – the concept of pilgrimage had yet to develop. See Maribel Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 300–800* (University Park, P.A.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), pp. 30–42. See also Chapter Four of this thesis.
[308] Gregory of Nyssa, *Ep*. 2. See also the comparison between the views of Gregory and his brother, Basil of Caesarea, in Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkley, C.A.: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 30–44.
[309] Gregory of Nyssa, *Ep*. 2.10.
[310] *Ibid*., *Ep*. 2.16–8.
[311] Augustine, *Ep*. 155.13.
[312] For the context of Christian travel to Palestine and its surroundings, see E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, AD 312–460* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) and Pierre Maraval, *Lieux Saints et Pèlerinages d'Orient: Histoire et Géographie des Origines à la Conquête Arabe* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985).

several years, Jerome wrote to Paulinus of Nola that it was far from necessary to make such a journey for one's faith, arguing that Christians should worship God in 'spirit and truth' (*'spiritu et veritate'*) rather than fixing themselves on a particular place.[313] Rather than praising him, Jerome actively discouraged Paulinus from making a journey of his own. Around the same time, in a letter to Furia on the proper conduct of widows, Jerome criticised female travellers to the east for their luxurious excesses which included fine clothes and extravagant dinners.[314] Whilst it was better not to travel at all, travel certainly did no good if it was accompanied by poor behaviour.

In the letters to Paulinus and Furia, Jerome seems to take a dim view of Christian travel – but elsewhere he is more positive. In letters to Desederius and Exuperantius (*Ep*. 47 and *Ep*. 145) Jerome urged the recipients to come to Bethlehem. He asks Exuperantius, a soldier, to give up his military profession and the comfort of a secure income in order to become an ascetic in Bethlehem; the emphasis is on Exuperantius changing his way of life, rather than the specific place.[315] The letter to Desiderius is much more explicit about the value of visiting biblical sites, and urges both him and his sister Serenilla to make the journey:

> *Certe, si consortia displicuerint, adorasse, ubi steterunt pedes domini, pars fidei est et quasi recentia nativitatis et crucis ac passionis vidisse vestigia.*[316]
>
> Truly, even if our company displeases you, it is part of the faith to have worshipped where the feet of the Lord once stood, to have seen the recent traces of his birth and cross and passion.

Visiting biblical sites is framed as 'part of the faith' (*'pars fidei'*), which is a strong endorsement for holy tourism. But crucially, Jerome states that it was Paula who asked him to write to Desiderius and invite him; the views expressed in the letter could therefore reflect Paula's opinion more than Jerome's.[317] Similarly it is in *Ep.* 108 to Eustochium, Jerome's epitaph on Paula following her death in 404, where we see his strongest support for travel to the holy places. He portrays Paula as the ideal visitor, who gave generously to monastic communities on her travels, conducted herself with the utmost modesty, and enthusiastically venerated biblical sites. Through Jerome's eyes, Paula's engagement with the holy places is both textual, with repeated reference to biblical passages, and profoundly embodied: Jerome describes Paula visiting the Holy Sepulchre, where she licked the place where the body of Jesus had lain.[318] The short letters to Desiderius and Exuperantius lack the lavish descriptions of the holy places that abound in Ep. *46*, as we shall see shortly, as well as the emotive language used to describe worshippers' experience of them. But even in *Ep*. 108 on Paula, where comparable language is

[313] Jerome, *Ep*. 58.3.
[314] Jerome, *Ep*. 54.13.
[315] Jerome, *Ep*. 145.
[316] *Ibid*., *Ep*. 47.2.
[317] *'venerabilis Paula me est deprecata, ut facerem'* ('the reverend Paula interceded with me in order that I might do this'), *ibid*.,
[318] Jerome, *Ep.* 108.9.

present, Jerome makes it clear that it is Paula's own faith that allow her to have such an enriching spiritual experience.[319]

In spite of the letters discussed above, the scholarly consensus on Jerome's feelings towards religious travel is that he approved. This conclusion relies entirely on attributing *Ep*. 46 to Jerome, rather than to Paula and Eustochium. What tips the scale is the letter's descriptions of the holy sites, and its long refutation of arguments against such a journey.[320] The views in *Ep*. 46 compared to those expressed in the letter to Paulinus in particular are difficult to square. Bruria Bitton-Ashkelony has reconciled these letters by arguing that Jerome's feelings changed over time – *Ep*. 46 is his enthusiastic endorsement of the holy places having just arrived, and *Ep*. 58 is a world-weary warning to would-be travellers.[321] Bitton-Ashkelony casts Paula and Eustochium as 'upper-class enthusiastic female ascetics', firmly under Jerome's influence rather than shaping his views.[322] Of course, a more satisfying explanation for these inconsistencies is that he did not write this letter at all. When removing *Ep*. 46 from the picture of Jerome's views on religious travel, his approval is all directly related to Paula; his praise of her in *Ep*. 108, and writing on her behalf in *Ep*. 47. Not only is it difficult to determine Jerome's true feelings on visiting the holy places, but *Ep*. 46 is a sharp contrast to the views he expressed elsewhere.

The Letter to Marcella

I will now turn to the letter to Marcella, *Ep.* 46, where Paula and Eustochium urge her to join them in Bethlehem. At almost 3,000 words it is one of the longer letters in Jerome's collection, and one of twenty-one letters in this corpus that are classified as exhortatory.[323] The letter reveals the complex nature of the relationship between the three women, and hints at a power struggle. Marcella was the leader and instigator of the community of ascetic women in Rome, with Paula and Eustochium falling under her spiritual jurisdiction by default. In Rome, as wealthy aristocrats themselves, Paula and Eustochium had their own authority and independence. But in Bethlehem, the two women had established themselves as community leaders, thereby putting themselves on a par with Marcella.

[319] A similar attitude is expressed, albeit more explicitly, in *Ep.* 58.3, where Jerome states that visiting the sites where Jesus was crucified and resurrected will only benefit those who take up their own crosses and choose to live like Christ every day (*'Et Crucis igitur et Resurrectionis loca prosunt his, qui portant crucem suam; et cum Christo resurgunt quotidie; qui dignos se tanto exhibent habitaculo'*).
[320] See, for example, Limor, 'Reading Sacred Space', pp. 1–15; Giselle Bader, 'Paula and Jerome: towards a theology of Late Antique pilgrimage', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 18.4 (2018), pp. 344–53; Lorenzo Perrone, 'The Mystery of Judaea (Jerome, *Ep*. 46): The Holy City of Jerusalem between History and Symbol in Early Christian Thought,' in Lee I. Levine (ed.), *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York, N.Y.: Continuum, 1999), pp. 221–39.
[321] Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, pp. 71–97.
[322] *Ibid*., p. 65.
[323] This classification is based upon Andrew Cain's taxonomy of Jerome's letters. The other exhortatory letters are *Epp*. 14, 18, 22, 27, 38, 43, 46, 47, 52, 53, 54, 58, 71, 107, 117, 122, 123, 125, 128, 130, and 145. See Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, pp. 214–15.

Paula and Eustochium open the letter with an acknowledgement of Marcella's influence, stating that she provided the 'first spark' (*'prima scintillam'*) for their commitment to an ascetic life and continued to nurture them through her example. But Paula and Eustochium state that 'we students desire to teach our teacher' (*'magistram cupimus docere discipulae'*).[324] On first reading this seems to refer to the two women's efforts to teach Marcella about the benefits of living in Bethlehem, but there is another possible interpretation: here, Paula and Eustochium are flexing their authority as the founders of the religious community in Bethlehem, and (in a reversal of their roles up to this point) indicating to Marcella that she would come under their leadership. Paula and Eustochium then describe themselves as little chicks bereft of the protective wings of their mother hen, exposed to birds of prey. This image, itself a reference to Matthew 23:37, elevates Marcella once more to the role of teacher and protector.[325] Despite this attempt at mollification the implication of the role reversal lingers throughout the entire letter, where Paula and Eustochium refute Marcella's arguments against the importance of the holy places.

The next section of the letter is comprised of a barrage of biblical quotes and references. It recounts Old Testament urgings to leave home and seek the promised land, meaning Jerusalem and its surroundings, beginning with God's directive to Abraham.[326] One New Testament example – Mary's departure from her home in Galilee to visit Elizabeth in Judah – is also included, showing the relevance of these Old Testament directives to those who know Jesus, but also to women.[327] Paula and Eustochium rely on scriptural authority to argue that Marcella should come to Bethlehem, rather than asserting their own. The scriptural references in the letter are not given in the order they appear in the Bible. Paula and Eustochium anticipate that Marcella will not approve of their ad hoc quoting, but they state that this lapse is due to their love for her rather than ignorance of the texts: *'nos non ignoratione, sed adfectu labi.'*[328]

If Marcella had wanted to upbraid her former students for their ignorance, however, Paula and Eustochium had provided her with ammunition. This section of the letter contains a misreading of 1 Samuel 18:7, a passage that refers to the military victory of the future king David, whose successes had aroused the jealousy of Saul, the present king. The passage describes a group of women who danced in the streets following David's successful completion of yet another mission, singing "Saul has slain thousands, and David tens of thousands."[329] But Paula and Estochium write instead that, whilst singing, a chorus of ten thousand predicted David's

[324] Paula and Eustochium, *Ep.* 46.1.2.
[325] Paula and Eustochium, *Ep*. 46.1.2: *"Hierusalem, Hierusalem, quae occidis prophetas, et lapidas eos, qui ad te missi sunt, quoties volui congregare filios tuos, quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos suos sub alas, et noluisti?"* ("Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing"), Matthew 23:37. The passage is found at the end of Jesus's long critique of the Pharisees and other teachers of Jewish law, and it is later quoted in full at *Ep*. 46.4.2. It is one of very few examples of feminine imagery in the New Testament, and describes Jesus's wish to gather and protect the people of Jerusalem from persecution.
[326] Paula and Eustochium, *Ep.* 46.2.
[327] Genesis 12:1; Genesis 11:3–9; Genesis 7:10–24; Psalms 137:1; Ezekiel 5:1–5; Exodus 16:4; Luke 1:26–39; 1 Samuel 18:7; 1 Chronicles 21:15–16; Genesis 14:18–20.
[328] Paula and Eustochium, *Ep.* 46.3.2.
[329] *'et praecinebant mulieres ludentes atque dicentes percussit Saul mille et David decem milia'*, 1 Samuel 18:7.

victory: *'exultantium animarum turba processit et concinens chorus decem milium David nostri victoriam praedicavit.'*[330] Ten thousand is given in the singular form (*'decem milum'*) but in Samuel it appears in the plural, *'decem milia'*, and it refers to the singing women rather than the people killed by David. It could be argued that, as the passage originally appears in Samuel, the song's focus does in fact predict the eventual victory of David over Saul. But the misattribution of ten thousand to the chorus rather than the subject of the song, and the use of the singular rather than the plural, could suggest an intentional misrepresentation of the quotation, with the intent to cajole Marcella into coming to Bethlehem.

The main body of the letter is occupied with an imagined dialogue with Marcella about the significance of the Holy Land, particularly Jerusalem, for Christians. Marcella was clearly a shrewd debater; Paula and Eustochium describe how they sense her wanting to interrupt their arguments with her own.[331] The two women outline potential objections to visiting Jerusalem that Marcella or others may hold, often accompanied by relevant scriptural references, and refute them. The arguments for staying away from Jerusalem are plentiful, and Paula and Eustochium do not shy away from describing them. It is likely they participated in similar debates, certainly with Marcella but perhaps with others too, when they announced their decision to leave Rome. Their previous disagreements would have allowed Paula and Eustochium to predict Marcella's responses with some accuracy.

The main arguments against the importance of Jerusalem raised in the letter are as follows: Jesus prophesied its destruction, and God's protection left it after the crucifixion; the apostles were sent out from Jerusalem to preach the Gospel; and the land of Jerusalem is cursed because Jesus died there.[332] At the centre of Paula and Eustochium's counter-argument is the idea that Jerusalem was the location for some of the most significant biblical events and therefore holds an enduring importance for Christians:

> *quantos haec urbs prophetas, quantos emiserit sanctos uiros, longum est recensere. totum mysterium nostrum istius provinciae urbisque vernaculum est. in tribus nominibus trinitatis demonstrat fidem: Iebus et Salem et Hierusalem appellatur.*[333]
>
> How many prophets, how many holy men this city has sent out, it would take a long time to recount. Our entire mystery is native to that province and city. In its three names it shows the faith of the trinity: it is called Jebus and Salem and Jerusalem.

Paula and Eustochium proceed to argue that Jerusalem has since gained more significance than it is afforded in scripture because it is the site of Jesus's place of burial and resurrection. Underpinning many of their arguments is a persistent disparaging of Jewish beliefs. Although

[330] Paula and Eustochium, *Ep.* 46.2.4.
[331] *'Iamdudum te cupientem in uerba prorumpere ipsi litterarum apices sentiunt et uenientem contra charta intellegit quaestionem'* ('This letter feels you long since desiring to burst forth in words, and recognises the question coming against it'), Paula and Eustochium, *Ep*. 46.4.1.
[332] *Ibid*., *Ep.* 46.4; 8.
[333] *Ibid*, *Ep.* 46.3.5.

not openly hostile to Jewish people, the letter makes clear that Jerusalem is a significant place for Christians above anyone else. Paula and Eustochium list Jerusalem-based wonders described in the Old Testament, such as manna raining from heaven and the golden altar, and then ask Marcella: does the sepulchre of the Lord not seem more venerable ('*venerabilius'*) to you?[334] In their descriptions of the city, Jerusalem seems predominantly populated by Christians, sites of Christian importance, and a high volume of churches and places of contemplation that was steadily increasing. The pull that Jerusalem exerted for Christians throughout the known world was a core aspect of Paula and Eustochium's exhortation to Marcella, and the letter deliberately seeks to incite a fear of missing out in its intended reader. Jerusalem is presented as the most logical and natural centre of Christian learning:

> *Longum est nunc ab ascensu domini usque ad praesentem diem per singulas aetates currere, qui episcoporum, qui martyrum, qui eloquentium in doctrina ecclesiastica uirorum Hierosolymam uenerint putantes se minus religionis, minus habere scientiae nec summam, ut dicitur, manum accepisse uirtutum, nisi in illis Christum adorassent locis, in quibus primum euangelium de patibulo coruscaverat. certe, si etiam praeclarus orator reprehendendum nescio quem putat, quod litteras Graecas non Athenis, sed Lilybaei, Latinas non Romae, sed in Sicilia didicerit, quod uidelicet unaquaeque prouincia habeat aliquid proprium, quod alia aeque habere non possit, cur nos putamus absque Athenis nostris quemquam ad studiorum fastigium peruenisse?*[335]
>
> From the time between the ascension of the Lord to the present, it would be laborious to run though how many bishops, martyrs, and men eloquent in ecclesiastical doctrine came to Jerusalem thinking they were lacking in religion, or the height of learning, or (as it is said) a handful of virtues, unless they had adored Christ in those places in which the first Gospel gleamed from the cross. Certainly, if our magnificent orator thought someone reprehensible for studying Greek letters not in Athens but in Lilybaeum, Latin letters not in Rome but in Sicily, since each province has its own manner of doing things that cannot be had elsewhere, why do we think we can attain the apex of our studies without our Athens?

The metaphor of classical education, particularly language learning, is used to explain the importance of attaining a Christian education from its source: Jerusalem. This desire is reflected in the women's extensive education, and their training in Hebrew via Jerome. As well as highlighting the importance of Jerusalem as a site for attaining a deeper understanding of Christianity, this passage directly appeals to Marcella's pursuit of education. This passage is also a play on Tertullian's famous question 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' (*'Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?'*), and therefore purposefully demonstrates a grounding in Christian literature as well as knowledge of the classics.[336] The letter also explores the

[334] *Ibid*, *Ep.* 46.5.4
[335] *Ibid*, *Ep.* 46.9.
[336] Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum,* 7.9.

hypocrisy of Christians who wanted to avoid Jerusalem. These people would gladly visit elaborate churches and the shrines of saints, but would shun the lowly birthplace of Christ and the city of Jerusalem, returning to the idea that the land is cursed because it is where Christ's crucifixion took place.[337] In his epistolary tribute to Marcella following her death in 410, Jerome recounted how fond she was of visiting the churches in Rome and praying there; although Paula and Eustochium present the accusation of hypocrisy in general terms, this can be understood as a direct criticism of Marcella's behaviour.[338]

It is unclear how Marcella responded to this letter – none of her correspondence is extant – but she never accepted the invitation, remaining in Rome until her death. Whether her refusal to join the community in Bethlehem was due to a desire to remain leader of her own circle of ascetic women, thereby retaining her spiritual upper hand, is unknown. Jerome left Rome in the August of 385 and then joined Paula and Eustochium on their journey throughout the Holy Land, supporting their efforts to create a Christian community there. As well as removing himself from a souring social situation in Rome, Jerome's flight to Jerusalem was probably motivated by a pragmatic desire to follow the money; patronage was hard to come by, especially for disgraced non-practising priests, and Paula remained immensely wealthy.[339] The date traditionally given for *Ep.* 46 is 386, soon after Jerome had joined Paula and Eustochium on their travels. But the letter's authorship is contested, and Jerome is overwhelmingly credited with penning it.

There are three main types of argument used by those in favour of Jerome's authorship. Firstly, Jerome assumed the names and perspectives of Paula and Eustochium to write as a literary exercise. Secondly, Jerome wrote on behalf of the two women as a favour, perhaps due to their patronage relationship. Thirdly, Paula and Eustochium had little to do with the letter and Jerome is its true author. It is worth investigating why this letter, which is overwhelmingly attributed to Paula and Eustochium in manuscripts and in pre-twentieth century printed works, came to be at the centre of an authorship controversy.

Debating the Authorship of *Ep.* 46: 1920–Present

The authorship of *Ep.* 46 is often described as if it is a settled matter. The letter, whilst bearing the names of Paula and Eustochium, was in fact written by Jerome on their behalf; here opinions diverge on whether Jerome purposefully adopted the voices of Paula and Eustochium whilst writing, and why Jerome undertook such a project. This line of thinking has its roots in early twentieth century scholarship on Jerome, and often does not acknowledge either the pre-existing tradition in nineteenth and twentieth century scholarship of attributing the letter to Paula and Eustochium, or the more recent pushback against Jerome's authorship of the letter. Furthermore, many of the recent attempts to engage with the authorship controversy

[337] Paula and Eustochium, *Ep.* 46.8.
[338] Jerome, *Ep.* 127.4.
[339] Donating her wealth to holy people was a core feature of Paula's life. See Jerome, *Ep.* 108.

surrounding *Ep.* 46 are relegated to the footnotes, despite the letter's provenance having serious consequences for historical investigations into the evolution of Jerome's opinions on religious travel, the activities undertaken by Paula, Eustochium, and Jerome whilst in Palestine, and the formation of early Christian communities of women, to name but a few examples. The following section will outline the origins of the authorship controversy, set forth the foundational arguments for and against Jerome's authorship, and map out the historiographical context for those reckoning with this authorship question today.

In late nineteenth and early twentieth century printed editions *Ep.* 46 is presented as the work of Paula and Eustochium, apparently without controversy. In 1889 an abridged English translation of *Ep.* 46 was published by the Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society for the benefit of its subscribers.[340] Paula and Eustochium are unambiguously named as the letter's authors, and the commentary draws comparisons between the letter and *Ep.* 108, Jerome's epistolary epitaph on Paula wherein he describes her deep spiritual connection to the biblical sites she visited. The audience for the 1889 translation of *Ep.* 46 was primarily a small group of late Victorian Christians who were interested in travelling to the locations described in the Bible, therefore the edition was devotional and educational (but non-academic) in nature. But Paula and Eustochium were also named as the authors of *Ep.* 46 in academic works, for example in Isidor Hilberg's *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* editions of Jerome's letters, published between 1910 and 1918.[341] Although Hilberg includes the principal manuscripts of *Ep.* 46 in this edition, we do not have an insight into the editorial choices that led to his attribution of the letter to Paula and Eustochium. Hilberg had intended to write a further volume on his edition of Jerome's letters explaining his process, but his plans were interrupted by the advent of the First World War.[342]

In 1922, Ferdinand Cavallera's work on Jerome proved an influential intervention in Hieronymian scholarship that set the tone for discussions of Jerome and *Ep.* 46 into the later twentieth century. Cavallera argued that Jerome was the author of *Ep.* 46 on the basis of its style – *'La lettre est de Jérôme, comme le démontre le style'* – although he did not put forward any analysis of the letter's tone, form, or use of language to support his claim.[343] Instead, the core evidence for his attribution was a supplement to a manuscript containing Jerome's *De viris illustribus*, published in 1920 by L. Feder.[344] The manuscript in question was Bamberg MS Patr.87, and in his supplement Feder had transcribed the manuscript's rendering of *De viris illustribus* 135, Jerome's auto-bibliography. Among the list of Jerome's works appears *'ad Marcellam ex nomine Paulae de scs. locis'*.[345] Feder and Cavallera interpreted this to mean that Jerome had written *Ep.* 46 in the name of Paula (and Eustochium, although the manuscript does not mention her), and this framing of *Ep.* 46 gained traction due to the wider influence of

[340] Aubrey Stewart (trans.) and Charles W. Wilson (ed.), *The Letter of Paula and Eustochium to Marcella, About the Holy Places (386 A.D.)* (London: 1 Adam Street, Adelphi, 1889); translation at pp. 9–16.
[341] The letter is labelled as *'Paulae et Eustochiae ad Marcellam'* in Hilberg, CSEL 54, p. 329.
[342] See Jérôme Labourt, *Saint Jérôme: Lettres,* vol. 1 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1949), pp. xliii-xlvi.
[343] Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme,* p. 165, n.1.
[344] L. S. J. Feder, 'Zusätze zum Schriftstellerkatalog des hl. Hieronymus', *Biblica* I (1920), pp. 500–13.
[345] *Ibid*., p. 502.

Cavallera's work on Jerome. It is important to note here that neither Cavallera nor Feder referred to other manuscripts in their attribution of *Ep.* 46 so that, by 1922, the attribution to Jerome was based solely upon the Bamberg manuscript. Furthermore, the possibility that this entry could refer to another letter that was no longer extant (for example, a letter that appeared to solely be from the perspective of Paula, rather than Paula and Eustochium) was not considered.

Despite the issues with this interpretation, the idea that Jerome had written *Ep.* 46 in the name of Paula and Eustochium took root. This had interesting implications for how Paula and Eustochium's literary capabilities, and even their personalities, were understood. Eleanor Shipley Duckett, writing in 1965, stated that:

> … from Bethlehem, Paula and Eustochium wrote to beg their friend Marcella to join them. They did not trust their own pleadings; it was Jerome who wrote those sixteen Latin pages in their names.[346]

In Shipley Duckett's reading of *Ep.* 46, Jerome's authorship of the letter becomes a symbol of his literariness and his relationship with Paula and Eustochium. The framing of Jerome's authorship of *Ep.* 46 as on behalf of (and in the voice of) Paula and Eustochium was taken up by J.N.D. Kelly in his biography of Jerome. Kelly identifies *Ep.* 46 as 'written in the name of Paula and her daughter but manifestly by Jerome himself', though does not offer any supporting evidence for this attribution. Furthermore, Kelly notes how the language and content is in fact inconsistent with Jerome's other writings, remarking that the letter is 'an idyllic piece … and stands in striking contrast with [Jerome's] querulous, often vituperative note … during these years.'[347] There is certainly a gendered element at work here: the male spiritual guide and his reverent female acolytes, relying upon him for his wisdom and judgement. This image originated with Jerome's own presentation of his relationship with these women.[348] That said, Paula and Eustochium were by Jerome's own description, prolific letter-writers in their own right, and it seems unlikely that they were not up to the task of detailing the benefits of their new life in Palestine.[349] Furthermore, given the extent of their Christian education, honed over years of study and asceticism alongside Marcella, Paula and Eustochium's own voices would surely hold the most weight when exhorting their friend to live in community with them once more.

Like Kelly, other commentators have attempted to reconcile *Ep.* 46 with Jerome's other writings whilst still maintaining that he is the letter's author. The most significant of these interventions is by Pierre Nautin; his 1984 article on the dating of *Ep.* 46, which I will discuss here in depth, is the most regularly cited in discussions of the authorship debate. Because this article (frequently without recourse to others) is so often used to support Jerome's authorship

[346] Eleanor Shipley Duckett, *Women and their Letters in the Early Middle Ages* (Smith College: Northampton, M.A., 1965), p. 12.
[347] Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 141.
[348] Cain, 'Rethinking Jerome's Portraits of Holy Women', pp. 47–57.
[349] Jerome, *De viris illustribus,* 135.

of the letter, it is crucial to examine in detail how Nautin reached his conclusions and supported his arguments. Nautin's article opens by stating that Jerome wrote *Ep.* 46 on behalf of Paula and Eustochium, that this is evident from the letter's style, and on this point all historians are in agreement: *'tous les historiens en conviennent.'*[350] The evidence that Nautin employs here is Cavallera's 1922 study which I highlighted above, and the appearance of *'ad Marcellam ex nomine Paulae de scs. locis'* in Bamberg MS Patr.87. It is important to note that at this point the attribution of *Ep.* 46 to Jerome still rested upon analysis presented sixty years previously. This seems an oversight on Nautin's part – Jerome's authorship of the letter was crucial to his argument of the dating of the letter. Nautin dates *Ep.* 46 to the spring of 386, after Jerome arrived in Bethlehem and before he wrote *Commentary on the Ephesians,* and notes that a letter written later would have included a consolatory message on the death of Marcella's mother Albina.[351] Nautin here departs from Cavallera, who stated that the letter was written following the death of Albina, and consequently Marcella was free to move her household to Bethlehem if she wished.

The spring 386 date rests upon Nautin's interpretation of how the legend of Adam's burial at Calvary, and the subsequent cleansing of the body of the first man with the blood of the crucified Christ, is discussed in Jerome's works. This tradition is enthusiastically embraced in *Ep.* 46, where it is presented as the fulfilment of Ephesians 5:14:

> *In hac urbe, immo in hoc tunc loco et habitasse dicitur et mortuus esse Adam. Unde et locus in quo crucifixus est Dominus noster Calvaria appellatur, scilicet quod ibidem sit antiqui hominis calvaria condita, ut secundus Adam et sanguis Christi de cruce stillans primi Adam et iacentis propagatoris peccata dilueret, et tunc sermo ille apostoli conpleretur: "Excitare, qui dormis, et exsurge a mortuis, et inluminabit te Christus."*[352]
>
> It is said that this city, indeed this place, is where Adam had lived and died. And therefore the place in which our Lord was crucified is called Calvary, namely because the skull of the ancient man would be buried there, in order that the second Adam and the blood of Christ dripping from the cross may wash away the sins of the first Adam who sowed the seeds of the human race. And then that saying of the apostle is fulfilled: "Awake, you who sleep, and rise from the dead, and Christ will illuminate you." (Ephesians 5:14)

Nautin uses this passage to locate *Ep.* 46 in the spring of 386 because, by the summer, Jerome would take a more ambivalent stance on the tradition of Adam's burial at Calvary and the related reading of Ephesians 5:14 in his *Commentary on Ephesians,* which he addressed to Paula and Eustochium in recognition of their friendship and patronage. In this commentary Jerome states that he heard the legend from an unnamed person ('*quemdam'*) whom he heard speaking in church, and comments that it was received enthusiastically by the congregation.

[350] Nautin, 'La lettre de Paule et Eustochium', p. 441.
[351] *Ibid*., pp. 448–9.
[352] Paula and Eustochium, *Ep*. 46.3.

With uncharacteristic flexibility Jerome states that he will leave it to the reader to determine the veracity of this story: *'Haec utrum vera sint necne, lectoris arbitrio derelinquo'*. But Jerome cannot resist a parting shot, and he adds that the Adam legend does not fit with the sense or interpretation of the passage itself.[353]

In 398 Jerome wrote his *Commentary on Matthew*; in the twelve intervening years between this work and his *Commentary on the Ephesians*, Jerome's suspicion of the Adam legend had morphed into a solid refutation. Again in the *Commentary on Matthew* Jerome states that he has heard the legend from 'someone' (*'quemdam'*) but he immediately states that despite its popularity it is not true. Jerome then explains that Calvary was named as a location for the beheading of criminals, with *'calvaria'* meaning 'skull', and not because it was the final resting place of Adam. Finally, Jerome reminds his readers that Adam's burial place is named as near Hebron and Arba in the book of Joshua.[354] Nautin argues that, in the months between writing *Ep.* 46 to Marcella and the *Commentary on the Ephesians*, Jerome had reflected on the inconsistencies of the Adam burial legend and revised his opinion. Nautin concludes that *Ep.* 46 therefore had to be the earlier text. Given Jerome's extensive study of scripture, which he draws upon in his critique of the Adam legend in his *Commentary on Matthew*, it seems unlikely that Jerome would have received the Adam legend favourably in the first place, let alone pass it along to Marcella as the author of *Ep.* 46 enthusiastically does. As with Kelly's comment that *Ep.* 46 differs considerably in tone to Jerome's other works, Nautin's analysis does more to highlight the letter's inconsistency with sentiments he expressed elsewhere. More than prove Jerome's authorship of *Ep.* 46, Nautin's article assumes that Jerome is the letter's author in order to date the text; it is therefore concerning that Nautin's is the work most frequently cited when scholars want to support their attribution of *Ep.* 46 to Jerome.

Neil Adkin's 1999 article on *Ep.* 46 marks the most sustained attempt to attribute *Ep.* 46 to Jerome.[355] Adkin's work marks departure from Cavallera and Nautin in that his argument for Jerome's authorship does not rest solely upon the Bamberg manuscript. Adkin argues that the letter's intertextual weaving of references from the Bible and the classics – especially its use of Vergil's *Aneid* and *Georgics*, which Jerome drew upon elsewhere – is emblematic of Jerome's spiritual struggle with his love of classical (and therefore pagan) literature. Adkin highlights Jerome's tendency to employ biblical references rather than classical ones in his letters to women; if the letter were written by two women, Adkin argues, then one would expect fewer classical references than are featured in *Ep.* 46. And, as with Kelly and Nautin before him, Adkin noted that *Ep.* 46 differed from Jerome's other writings in that it contained more colloquialisms, especially when contrasted with Jerome's other letters to Marcella.[356] Undeterred, Adkin interprets this feature of *Ep.* 46 as Jerome convincingly adapting his writing style to that of a woman's. Despite the article's engagement with the language and style of the letter, Adkin in fact reveals his rationale for attributing *Ep.* 46 to Jerome before any such analysis has taken place:

[353] Jerome, *Commentarii ad Ephesios*, 3, 5:14.
[354] Jerome, *Commentarii in Evangelium S. Matthaei*, 4, 27:33.
[355] Adkin, 'The Letter of Paula and Eustochium', pp. 97–110.
[356] Adkin highlights *Ep*. 23, 24, and 27 as examples of how Jerome usually wrote letters to Marcella.

> Though the letter in fact purports to have been written by the two women themselves, modern scholarship is almost unanimous in ascribing its composition to Jerome. The reason adduced for positing Hieronymian authorship is the epistle's style: the writing seems to evince a higher literary standard than could be expected from Paula and Eustochium.[357]

Although Nautin and Cavallera's arguments may have included the assumption that two women were not capable of composing such a letter, Adkin is explicit on this point. Because his evidence for Jerome's authorship is the use of classical references in *Ep.* 46, the implication is that the elite Christian women with whom Jerome corresponded would be less familiar with classical literature.

There are two problems with this. Firstly, aristocratic Christian women in late fourth century Rome may in fact have been extremely well-versed in the classics. A prime example of this is Proba, who composed a patchwork poem or cento entirely from lines and half-lines of Vergil, showing both a profound awareness of and considerable access to classical literature. Secondly, Jerome's unwillingness to include classical references in his letters to women may not have been a result of these women's discomfort with the material, but perhaps an over-reliance upon it. Given his use of classical references in his letters to men, this surely has a gendered element. Jerome elsewhere takes steps to ensure that young women read only biblical texts or adjacent ones. For example, Jerome's letter to Laeta contains a list of approved reading materials for Laeta's young daughter, another Paula, whom she wishes to become a consecrated virgin.[358] Those texts in the list that extend beyond scripture are primarily concerned with biblical exegesis, and classical works are notably absent.

Jerome outlined his spiritual struggle with his love of the classics in a letter to Eustochium, his famous *Ep*. 22. Here he described how, when he was younger, the writing style of the prophets seemed unpolished ('*incultus'*) compared to Plautus and Cicero. Jerome then reports a dream-vision he had; he was brought before God who pronounced him a follower of Cicero rather than of Christ ('*Ciceronianus es, non Christianus'*), causing Jerome to bitterly repent. Although this letter is traditionally read as Jerome's self-reflection, it could also be understood as a warning or a rebuke to Eustochium about holding the classics in high esteem. Adkin's reading of *Ep.* 46 is rooted in Jerome's idealised view of the Christian woman as one who was unfamiliar with the classics, but also carries the assumption that Paula and Eustochium would not be capable authors. In recent scholarship seeking to attribute *Ep.* 46 to Jerome or to highlight the authorship controversy, Adkin's article is usually included alongside Nautin's in a footnote; only rarely does this discussion make it into the main body of the text. A representative example of how the contested authorship is discussed – or rather, not discussed – is found in Andrew Cain, *The Letters of Jerome* (2009). Cain describes *Ep.* 46 as 'an invitation

[357] Adkin, 'The Letter of Paula and Eustochium', p. 97.
[358] Jerome, *Ep*. 107.

to the Holy Land written in the names of Paula and Eustochium but drafted by him [Jerome]'. The Adkin article is footnoted, but no further explanation is offered.[359]

Although Jerome is commonly identified as the author of *Ep.* 46 in modern scholarship, the pushback has steadily grown. In 1984 (incidentally, the same year in which Nautin stated that all historians agreed that Jerome had written *Ep.* 46) Peter Dronke argued that Paula and Eustochium were the letter's authors. Dronke stated that there are 'no reasonable grounds for assuming that the letter was written on their behalf by Jerome and merely signed by the two women, as some modern scholars have affirmed, without evidence and without discussion', but rather the letter was by Jerome's 'aristocratic protégées'.[360] In a footnote Dronke critiques Kelly's assessment in particular, noting (as I did above) Kelly's attribution of the letter to Jerome despite its inconsistencies with other contemporary writings of his. Furthermore, Dronke states that he sees no reason to attribute *Ep.* 46 to anyone other than 'the two women to whom it is ascribed in the MS tradition.'[361] Despite critiquing the lack of evidence provided by Kelly and others, Dronke does not name the relevant manuscripts here, nor does he seriously engage in his attempt to attribute the letter to Paula and Eustochium. Dronke's reference to Paula and Eustochium as Jerome's 'aristocratic protégées' obscures their position as patrons of Jerome. Practically speaking, as the author of a work on female writers, it was convenient for Dronke to ascribe the letter to Paula and Eustochium. Dronke does not, however, support his attribution with adequate evidence. Similarly, and more recently, Maribel Dietz has argued that *Ep.* 46 'should be considered as having been written by Paula and Eustochium, as it is labelled [in manuscripts]' until 'new information comes to light', citing Dronke.[362]

The most extensive engagement with *Ep.* 46, and one which presents Paula and Eustochium as its authors, is the 2014 article by Anni Maria Laato.[363] This article is a close reading of *Ep.* 46, charting the debate between Paula, Eustochium and Marcella regarding the importance of Holy Land pilgrimage for Christians. Laato is the only commentator to provide a thorough analysis of *Ep.* 46, highlighting biblical references and the rhetorical strategies it employs, and quoting extensively from the letter.[364] Laato argues for Paula and Eustochium's authorship on the basis that the letter makes some errors regarding scripture which, in her mind, Jerome would not make. Laato highlights the letter's explanation of 1 Samuel 18:6–7 as celebrating crowds rushing from Jerusalem to celebrate the victory of David over Goliath, but notes that 2 Samuel

[359] Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, p. 151, n. 2. A similar lack of engagement with the authorship controversy (whilst still attributing the letter to Jerome) is found in Thomas E. Hunt, *Jerome of Stridon and the Ethics of Literary Production in Late Antiquity* (Leiden; Boston, M.A.: Brill, 2020), p. 150, and Bader, 'Paula and Jerome', p. 349.
[360] Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 17
[361] *Ibid*, p. 17, n. 70.
[362] Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims,* p. 129, n. 82. This stance (including the citation of Dronke) was also taken by Julie Ann Smith, ''What Now Lies Before Their Eyes': The Foundations of Early Pilgrim Visuality in the Holy Land', *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 4 (2007), p. 153, n. 76.
[363] Anni Maria Laato, 'What Makes the Holy Land Holy? A Debate between Paula, Eustochium, and Marcella (Jerome, *Ep.* 46)', in Erkki Koskenniemi and J. Cornelis de Vos, *Holy Places and Cult* (Turku; Winona Lake, M.I.: Åbo Akademi University Press; Eisenbrauns, 2014), pp. 169–99.
[364] In terms of direct engagement with the text of *Ep.* 46, the only comparable article is Nautin, 'La lettre de Paule et Eustochium'. Laato's work, however, is far more comprehensive.

5:6–7 identifies the inhabitants of Jerusalem as Jebusites, enemies of the Israelites.[365] And, following Dronke and Dietz, Laato invokes the manuscripts containing the letter as proof of Paula and Eustochium's authorship.[366]

Despite the frequent appeal to manuscripts by those who promote Paula and Eustochium as the authors of *Ep.* 46, these commentators do not investigate (or even name) the manuscripts themselves. In the following section of this chapter I will examine the manuscript evidence and determine the extent to which it supports the authorship of Paula and Eustochium.

Manuscript Transmission I: Core Manuscripts Containing *Ep.* 46

As the discussion of the authorship debate has shown, the letter's manuscript transmission is frequently called upon as evidence for or against Paula and Eustochium's authorship. Despite this, a full survey of the manuscript evidence has not yet materialised. Here I will analyse the manuscripts that contain *Ep.* 46, whether in full or as an excerpt, and consider the manuscripts containing *De viris illustribus*. In doing so I will contextualise the claims from either sides of the debate that relevant manuscripts offer proof of authorship.

Fig. 1: the core manuscripts containing Ep. *46, grouped by stemma.*[367]

Stemma	**Manuscript**	**Date**
G	Naples, Bibl.Naz.VI.D.59	Sixth to seventh century
Γ	Lyon, 600 (517)	Seventh to eighth century
K	Épinal, 68 (149)	Eighth century
A	Berlin, Staatsbibl., 17 (Phillipps 1674) Paris, B.N., Lat. 1791 Paris, B.N., Lat. 1866 Paris, B.N., Lat. 1868 Paris, B.N., Lat. 1869 Stuttgart, Landesbibl. HB.VII.12	Ninth century
D	Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 355–356	Ninth to tenth century
Σ	Zürich, Zentralbibl., Rh.41	Ninth to tenth century
Π	Zürich, Zentralbibl., Rh.49	Ninth to tenth century

[365] Laato, 'What Makes the Holy Land Holy?', pp. 175–6.
[366] *Ibid.,* p. 174.
[367] This classification is found in Bernard Lambert, *Bibliotheca Hieronymiana Manuscripta: la tradition manuscrite des oeuvres de Saint Jérôme*, vol. 1 (Steenebrugge: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), pp. 567–72. There are some gaps in Lambert's catalogue of manuscripts containing Jerome's writings; see Ilona Opelt's review in *Gnomon* 45 (1975), pp. 46–50. The stemma is an adapted version of that presented in Hilberg, CSEL 54, p. 329.

The Naples manuscript (see *Fig. 1*) is one of the earliest selections of Jerome's letters circulating in a group, and is the largest known collection of Jerome's letters at this stage in their transmission.[368] The manuscript contains twenty-one of Jerome's letters (or twenty-two, including *Ep.* 46) and Augustine's *Sermon* 251, although the manuscript is damaged; only quires 5–8, 9–13, and 15–25 are extant. Luckily, the incipit to *Ep.* 46 survives, and Paula and Eustochium are named as the letter's authors: *'Incipit paulae et eustociae exhortatoria ad marcellam de sanctis locis'*.[369] A slightly later manuscript, Épinal MS 68 (149), attributes the letter to Paula and Eustochium on its contents page and within the main body of the text.[370] In Paris MS Lat. 1868 the letter is introduced in the following way: *'Incipit Paula et Euchsthoch ad Marcellam: exortatoria: de s[an]c[t]is Locis'*.[371] The naming of the women as the authors of the letter is also present in much later manuscripts. MS Vat. Lat. 365, an Italian manuscript from the first quarter of the fifteenth century, includes this address for *Ep.* 46: *'Incipit ep[is]t[ol]a Paulae et Eustoch[ium] ad Marcellam exhortato[r]ia de s[an]c[t]is locis'*.[372] A similar address is found in MS Vat. Lat. 361, a manuscript dating to the final quarter of the twelfth century: *'Paulae et Eustochium [ad] Marcella[m] de locis s[an]c[t]is'*.[373]

Paula and Eustochium are not credited consistently with the letter's authorship, however. In another twelfth-century manuscript also held by the Vatican, MS Vat. Lat. 7083, the letter is introduced as *'ad marcella[m] de s[an]c[t]is locis'*.[374] The manuscript is primarily devoted to letters by Jerome, with the exception of four letters by Augustine, of which Jerome is the recipient.[375] Within Jerome's collected letters are the letters of some of his other correspondents, Augustine included. Except for Augustine's four letters, *Ep.* 46 is the only letter in MS Vat. Lat. 7083 that had previously circulated under a name other than Jerome's. There are a few possible explanations for why Paula and Eustochium's names do not appear in the letter's incipit in this manuscript. Firstly, their names were perhaps removed to maintain the appearance of consistency within the manuscript, which is primarily devoted to Jerome's work. However, given that no such steps were taken with Augustine's letters, this seems unlikely. Secondly, the scribe perhaps thought that the letter was Jerome's, and consciously decided to go against the attribution of *Ep.* 46 to Paula and Eustochium in other manuscripts. Thirdly, and most likely, the exemplum for MS Vat. Lat. 7083 also attributed *Ep.* 46 to Jerome, or did not name Paula and Eustochium as its authors. The missing attribution of Ep. 46 to Paula and Eustochium in MS Vat. Lat. 7083 points to a tradition of promoting Jerome's authorship of the letter. This tradition had started by the twelfth century at the latest, but possibly originated earlier. Broadening the scope of our enquiry to encompass other manuscripts, another reason that Jerome was promoted as the letter's author becomes clear. Sections of *Ep.* 46, as opposed

[368] Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, p. 225.
[369] Naples Bibl.Naz.VI.D.59, f. 132. For a discussion of this manuscript see August Reifferscheid, *Bibliotheca patrum Latinorum Italica*, vol. 2 (Vienna: Carl Gerold, 1871), p. 303
[370] Respectively *'Incipit paulae et eusthochiae ad Marcella exhortatoriam de locis s[an]c[t]is'* and *'Incipit Paulae et Eustochiae ad Marcellam exhortatoriam de locis s[an]c[t]is',* Épinal MS 68 (149), f. 2v and f. 40v.
[371] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Lat. 1868, f. 37r.
[372] Vatican MS Vat. Lat. 365, f. 129r.
[373] Vatican MS Vat. Lat. 361, f. 168v.
[374] Vatican MS Vat. Lat. 7083, f.16r.
[375] *Ep*. 67, 74, 73, and 28, numbered in Jerome's epistolary collection as *Ep*. 101, 111, 110, and 56.

to the full text, were sometimes included within manuscripts containing Jerome's letters. For example, both Paris MS Lat. 1869 and Paris MS Lat. 1866 contain only sections 11–12 of *Ep*. 46, which are mostly descriptive passages on the holy places.[376] Because these sections towards the end of the letter do not include the address from Paula and Eustochium, this has resulted in their names being excluded within some strands of the manuscript transmission.

Manuscript Transmission II: Excerpts of *Ep*. 46 in Two Manuscripts

I will now turn to two manuscripts bearing excerpts of *Ep*. 46. The first is a ninth-century manuscript from Stuttgart (Landesbibliothek, HB.VII.12), and the second is a tenth-century manuscript from the Vatican (MS Vat. Lat. 356). Both of these manuscripts contain the same excerpt of *Ep*. 46.[377] Unusually, rather than standing alone, the excerpt of *Ep*. 46 is stitched on to another letter from Jerome's collection, *Ep*. 43, which is also addressed to Marcella.[378] *Ep*. 43 is a short letter written by Jerome in around 385; here he describes the spiritual benefits of living in the countryside, where there is no noise to distract you from studying the scriptures and less chance for people to disturb you at prayer. Towards the end of this letter Jerome specifically criticised Rome for its noisy crowds (*'tumultus'*), violent contests in the arena (*'harena saeviat'*), and licentious theatrical entertainments (*'theatra luxurient'*).[379] The section of *Ep*. 46 excerpted in both the manuscripts also finds faults with Rome, unfavourably comparing its grand architecture to the cave in Bethlehem where Jesus was born. Below is a representative example of the kind of rhetoric Paula and Eustochium employ to contrast Rome with Bethlehem:

> *... sed ipsa ambitio, potentia, magnitudo urbis, videri et videre, salutari et salutare, laudare et detrahere, audire vel proloqui et tantam frequentiam hominum saltim invitum pati a proposito monachorum et quiete aliena sunt ... in Christi vero, ut supra diximus, villula tota rusticitas et extra psalmos silentium est.*[380]
>
> … but there is also ambition, power, the vastness of the city, the seeing and being seen, greeting and being greeted, praise and detraction, hearing or speaking, and one must suffer such a crowd of people however unwilling, which is alien to the subject and peace of monks … truly in that small villa of Christ, as we said above, all is rusticity and silence apart for the Psalms.

The composite letter that results from the combination of *Ep*. 43 with this excerpt of *Ep*. 46 is an extended criticism of Rome. I will now discuss the presentation of *Ep*. 46 in these

[376] *Ep*. 46.10–12 is sometimes included, but the excerpting of sections 11–12 is more common when the letter is presented in fragmentary form.
[377] Paula and Eustochium, *Ep*. 46.11–12.
[378] Stuttgart HB.VII.12, f. 48v–49r and Vatican Vat.Lat.356, f. 139r–140r.
[379] Jerome, *Ep*. 43.3.
[380] Paula and Eustochium, *Ep*. 46.12.

manuscripts and consider the implications that this practice of excerpting had upon the letter's authorship.

The Stuttgart manuscript was copied in St Gall in the mid-ninth century. It contains forty-one letters attributed to Jerome, eighteen of which are addressed to Marcella. The excerpt of *Ep*. 46 immediately follows on from *Ep*. 43, without a new incipit. The only indication that this is a different letter is that the excerpt starts with a slightly enlarged rubricated initial. This is a stylistic feature used across the manuscript to break up long sections of text and its use here feels somewhat unnecessary, the combined letters only stretching across three pages. A marginal annotation beside the excerpt does not illuminate the reader on the nature of the combined letters, but instead reads *'solitudo bona'* ('good solitude'). The scribe (or indeed their exemplar) omits the first phrase of *Ep*. 46.11: *'Tanta in ipsa urbe orationum loca, ut ad ea peragrandum dies sufficere non possit'* ('There are so many places of prayer in that city that in order to traverse them a day is not sufficient'). Instead, the excerpt starts with *'verum, ut ad villulam Christi et ad Mariae diversorium veniamus'* ('truly, if we are to come to the small villa of Christ and to the lodging-house of Mary'), and it is the *'v'* of '*verum'* which is capitalised and rubricated.[381] Shortly after this, the scribe inserts the place name of Bethlehem to provide important context, which is inevitably missing because of the absent sections of *Ep*. 46. The resulting phrase is a deliberate contrast to the empty splendour of Rome*: 'Bethleem ecce in hoc parvo terrae foramine caelorum conditor natus est'* ('Behold, in this small hole in the ground, Bethlehem, the creator of the heavens was born').[382] The Stuttgart manuscript's scribe also omits a discussion of the judgement of Babylon (*Ep*. 46.12.1–4, referencing Revelation 18:4), likely because that section does not mention Rome.[383] The text instead skips straight to a phrase that refers to Rome as the centre of Christianity (*'est quidem ibi sancta ecclesia'*, 'indeed there is the holy church').[384] This is followed by the more extended critique of Rome for its large crowds and ambitious people (see the quotation above) which made the city unsuitable for pursuing the idealised tranquillity of monastic living.

The Vatican manuscript is the second volume of a two-volume collection of Jerome's letters. It is written in a Beneventan script and originated from southern Italy, probably in or near Naples, in the tenth century. As Janet Blow has demonstrated through highlighting the use of certain spellings and abbreviations, the Vatican manuscript descends from a Visigothic exemplar, parts of which survive in fragments of Insular manuscripts (though, unfortunately, none bearing the *Ep*. 46 excerpt).[385] The presentation of *Ep*. 43 and *Ep*. 46.11–12 as a composite letter is even more striking in the Vatican manuscript, which does not distinguish between the two letters

[381] *Ibid*., *Ep*. 46.11.1.
[382] *Ibid*., *Ep*. 46.11.7.
[383] Beginning *'Lege Apocalypsin Iohannis'* ('Read the Apocalypse of John'), *ibid.*, *Ep*. 46.12.1.
[384] *Ibid*., *Ep*. 46.5.
[385] Janet Blow, 'Codex vaticanus latinus 355 + 356 and the text of Jerome's Letters in South Italy', in Fernanda De' Maffei, Penelope C. Mayo, Janet Blow, Jole Mazzoleni, Bernardo D'Onorio, and Francesco Lo Monaco (eds.), *Monastica IV, Scritti Raccolti in Memoria del XV Centenario della Nascita di S. Benedetto (480-1980)*, (*Miscellanea Cassinese* 48), (Montecassino: Pubblicazioni Cassinesi, 1984), pp. 69–83. Blow notes the unusual presentation of *Ep*. 46 following *Ep*. 43, p. 80. I have argued that we should consider this a composite letter, and that the excerpt of *Ep*. 46 should instead be considered as within *Ep*. 43.

with the use of a rubricated initial. *Ep*. 46.11, again beginning with *'verum, ut ad villulam Christi'*, follows directly on from *Ep*. 43; similarly, the place name of Bethlehem is provided, and the section of *Ep*. 46.12 dealing with Babylon is omitted.

More broadly, the Vatican and Stuttgart manuscripts have further similarities in how they have ordered Jerome's letters, particularly in the case of groups of letters to Marcella.[386] In the table below (*Fig*. 2) I have listed the letters from Jerome's collection that are copied in both manuscripts, and underlined where the manuscripts follow the same ordering of groups of letters.

Fig. 2: The ordering of Jerome's letters in the Stuttgart and Vatican manuscripts, with the composite letter of Ep. *43 and* Ep. *46.11–12 in bold.*[387]

Stuttgart HB.VII.12	**Vatican Vat.Lat.356**
48 + 97 + 145 + 122 + 120 + 121 + 59 + 40 + 26 + 41 + 25 + 42 + 27 + 38 + 23 + 24 + 44 + 11 + **43 + 46 (11–12)** + 29 + 34 + 32 + 30 + 28 + 45 + 31 + 130 + 123 + 13 + 79 + 64 + 107 + 75 + 127 + 66 + 58 + 53 + 21 + 40 + 17 (3–4)	147 + 6 + 8 + 125 + 10 + 7 + 9 + 12 + 2 + 119 + 140 + 49 + 48 + 97 + 50 + 22 + 45 + 11 + 130 + 107 + 64 + 117 + 13 + 54 + 79 + 123 + 120 + 121 + 59 + 40 + 37 + 25 + 41 + 42 + 27 + 44 + **43 + 46 (11–12)** + 38 + 29 + 34 + 32 + 30 + 28 + 60 + 118 + 39 + 108 + 75 + 77 + 23 + 24 + 1 + 127 + 66

Both manuscripts include *Ep*. 127, Jerome's epitaph on Marcella addressed to her friend Principia, after their sequences of Marcella-letters, thereby closing the collection with her death. The similarities between the excerpts of *Ep*. 46 in the Vatican and the Stuttgart manuscripts, as well as the similar ordering of letters, suggest that they were both copied from earlier exemplars which bore the same composite letter. The combination of *Ep*. 43 with *Ep*. 46.11–12 in both manuscripts suggests an alternative source for the authorship controversy surrounding *Ep*. 46. An earlier scribe chose to group these letters together because of their shared anti-Rome themes, which then removes the incipit naming Paula and Eustochium as the authors of *Ep*. 46 and, by attaching an excerpt to another of Jerome's letters, makes it look like his work. When later readers came across the full version of *Ep.* 46, having first encountered the excerpted form in the composite anti-Rome letter, they likely assumed it was the work of Jerome and labelled it accordingly. Incipits naming Jerome as the author of *Ep*. 46, then, are not necessarily a result of any additional proof circulating in the medieval period that he indeed authored the letter, but rather a reflection of the unusual transmission of *Ep*. 46.

[386] Letters addressed to Marcella in Stuttgart HB.VII.12 are: *Ep*. 97, 59, 40, 26, 41, 25, 42, 27, 38, 23, 24, 44, 43, 46, 29, 34, 32, 28, and 40. Letters addressed to Marcella in Vatican Vat.Lat.356 are: *Ep*. 97, 59, 40, 37, 25, 41, 42, 27, 44, 43, 46, 38, 29, 34, 28, 23, and 24.

[387] See Lambert, *Bibliotheca Hieronymiana Manuscripta,* vol. 1, pp. 129–312, for the ordering of Jerome's letters within the manuscript tradition; see p. 276 for Stuttgart HB.VII.12 and p. 293 for Vatican Vat. Lat. 356. Note that Lambert does not include the excerpt of *Ep*. 46 in his entry on the Vatican manuscript, which I have corrected in *Fig*. 2.

The excerpt ends before the description of how Paula and Eustochium will greet Marcella if she comes to them in Bethlehem (*Ep*. 46.13); by keeping out these personal details, the composite letter does indeed appear to be the work of Jerome – at least, to those unfamiliar with his letters. One question remains: why did copyists choose to excerpt *Ep*. 46 in this way? Interpreted generously, this was a grouping of material with a similar theme. More cynically, however, it is evident that this excerpt obscured the authorship of Paula and Eustochium – whether this was to add to the extant (and already extensive) corpus of Jerome's writings, or to deliberately erase the authorship of two women, it is difficult to say. This excerpting practice does, however, point to another source for incipits that do not name Paula and Eustochium as the letter's authors.

Manuscript Transmission III: Jerome, *'ex nomine'*, and *De viris illustribus*

As it appears in manuscripts, *Ep.* 46 overwhelmingly bears the incipit *'Paulae et Eustochium ad Marcellam de sanctis locis'*, or a variation of this. When this incipit does not feature in the manuscripts the letter is not always explicitly attributed to Jerome. At times a shortened incipit is used which includes Marcella's name and some indication of the letter's contents, but leaves out the names of Paula and Eustochium. In some instances *Ep*. 46 is transmitted without an incipit at all; as demonstrated above, this occurs when extracts of the letter circulate in combination with *Ep*. 43. Overall, then, the vast majority of the manuscript evidence points towards Paula and Eustochium writing *Ep*. 46.

Those who have used manuscript evidence to argue for Jerome's authorship of *Ep.* 46, however, have looked instead looked to a single manuscript – Bamberg MS Patr.87. As well as Jerome's *De viris illustribus*, the Bamberg manuscript also contains the later fifth century continuation of this project by Gennadius of Marseilles, and three works by Augustine. The manuscript originated in the monastery that Eugippius founded on the site of the Castel dell'Ovo in Naples, and was produced some time after 540. Cavallera and Nautin are foremost among those using this manuscript as evidence that Jerome wrote *Ep*. 46. As we have seen, the influence of their arguments on later scholarship surrounding the letter's attribution cannot be underestimated. Their work and this manuscript have continued to drive the conversation about the authorship of this letter. Cavallera and Nautin argue that the version of Jerome's auto-bibliography presented in this sixth-century manuscript categorically proves Jerome's authorship of *Ep*. 46. The version of *De viris illustribus* 135 in Bamberg MS Patr.87 deviates slightly, but critically, from the one presented above. Within this list of Jerome's works the following entry is included: '*ad marcella ex nomine paulae de s[an]c[t]is locis'*.[388] *'Ex nomine'* is a set phrase that best translates to 'in the name of', and it is used by authors writing in Latin into the early medieval period.[389] The intention is clear: readers are supposed to infer that Jerome wrote *Ep*. 46 under Paula's name.

[388] Bamberg MS Patr.87 (B.IV.21), f. 33r.
[389] For example, *'ex nomine'* is found in works by Cicero, Pliny the Elder, Tertullian, Macrobius, and Venantius Fortunatus, among many others.

The circulation of the extract of *Ep*. 46 as a composite letter alongside *Ep*. 43 perhaps started centuries before the Stuttgart and Vatican manuscripts were copied. The attribution of *Ep*. 46 to Jerome in the Bamberg manuscript could therefore be a reflection of an extract of this letter circulating under his name. It is possible that there were some late antique and early medieval readers who considered Jerome to be the true author of this letter. However, from the rest of the manuscript transmission it is evident that they were in the minority. Crucially*, 'ex nomine paulae'* does not appear in other manuscripts containing Jerome's *De viris illustribus* entry. Cavallera and Nautin therefore chose to prioritise the evidence of one manuscript over many others, and did not provide a satisfactory explanation for why the Bamberg manuscript should be treated in this way. Its age would not suffice here as an argument for its prioritisation – the Naples manuscript containing Jerome's letters (Bibl.Naz.VI.D.59) is roughly contemporary, and it attributes the letter to Paula and Eustochium.

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Jerome's auto-bibliographical entry in *De viris illustribus* demonstrates that by the time of writing he was organising his letters into smaller collections for circulation, and he was styling himself as a prominent Christian author. The entry includes his daily correspondence with Paula and Eustochium. And whilst Jerome clearly establishes himself as a man of letters in his *De viris illustribus* entry, by doing so he also portrays Paula and Eustochium (and Marcella) as more than capable of holding their own in epistolary exchanges spanning many years. The crux of the issue for later commentators when discussing the letter's authorship seems to be the literary capabilities of the women involved, and therefore Jerome seemed a likelier candidate for its author. Somewhat ironically, Jerome himself assured his readers of the abilities of Marcella, Paula, and Eustochium. Whilst the Bamberg manuscript may point to a tradition that considered Jerome the true author of *Ep*. 46, it is not robust enough evidence to discount the authorship of Paula and Eustochium.

The Implications of Paula and Eustochium's Authorship

At the beginning of this chapter I highlighted letters that Jerome had written encouraging others to come to Palestine, as part of a wider discussion to determine his views on Christians travelling to sacred biblical sites. Looking at the letters where Jerome explicitly and enthusiastically writes in support of such journeys – *Ep.* 47 and *Ep.* 108 – it becomes clear that both were written in close connection with Paula. Paula had asked him to write *Ep*. 47, and *Ep*. 108 was Jerome's epistolary tribute to Paula following her death, and addressed to Eustochium. When Jerome writes about the holy places without the encouragement of or a connection to Paula (*Ep*. 54 and *Ep*. 58), the result is far more ambivalent. Removing *Ep*. 46 from the discussion of Jerome's views on the holy places initially complicates the picture, but a new one appears: Jerome's support for visiting the holy places should be read as gratitude to Paula for her continued support and his respect for her devotional practices. Jerome would not have desired to alienate his primary patron and her daughter by denigrating a cause so close to their hearts.

In the above I have outlined the authorship controversy surrounding *Ep*. 46, and demonstrated that, unless compelling evidence to the contrary is discovered, Paula and Eustochium wrote the letter to Marcella. Given the overwhelming proof, both in quality and in volume, why was Jerome's authorship promoted over that of Paula and Eustochium's? It seems that there is some misunderstanding surrounding the extent of the education of elite Christian women – Paula and Eustochium were not thought able to write such a letter. This is untrue, but misguided ideas about the limited literary capabilities of fourth century women is supported by the lack of women's writing from the period. Beyond this, Jerome's later status as a learned man of the church gave adding to his corpus a specific allure. *Ep*. 46 addresses themes that Jerome does not touch on elsewhere, and explicitly approves of travel to the holy places. Many of Jerome's letters from his time in Palestine do not survive, and attributing *Ep*. 46 to Jerome was an alluring way to fill in the epistolary gaps and expand his existing corpus.

Paula and Eustochium's authorship of *Ep*. 46 also calls the dating of the letter into question; the popular date of 386 is based upon Nautin's analysis of Jerome's changing interpretation of a scriptural passage over time. That said, 386 could still work for this letter. Paula and Eustochium arrive in Bethlehem and they are overflowing with excitement about their travels, and the places they have seen that reaffirm the stories they have read in the Bible. They have studied Hebrew, the Bible's language of origin, and now they are in its place of origin. Paula and Eustochium knew that there was one person who would appreciate all they were seeing as much as they did, who would deeply understand it all on an intellectual as well as a spiritual level – Marcella. Although Paula and Eustochium's authorship unsettles the dating of the letter, it provides much-needed insight into the formation of early Christian communities of women. Paula and Eustochium's desire to teach Marcella as she once taught them may not be entirely altruistic, but instead hint at a power struggle where the duo had tired of being under Marcella's proverbial pedagogical thumb. As such, *Ep*. 46 captures the splintering of one women's community in Rome and the establishment of another in Bethlehem. It is a crucial document for the history of late antique Christianity.

Chapter Four: Wealthy, Wandering Women: Scriptural Authority and the *Itinerarium* of Egeria

In the later fourth century, a Christian woman undertook a gruelling three-year voyage through Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor. Her name was probably Egeria.[390] Egeria's record of her travels, the *Itinerarium Egeriae*, is a pioneering work in Christian travel literature. In describing the sacred sites and biblical locations she visited, her account was part of what made the 'holy land' holy, giving these places more significance and immediacy for a western readership.[391] Throughout her journey Egeria met other Christians whom she recognised as kindred spirits, employed local monks as tour guides, and deliberately sought out holy people whose lives she found inspiring. The main purpose of her journey was to visit places that featured in the Bible, and the shrines of saints. Egeria's travelling was steeped in the rhythms of the Christian liturgy. Whenever she stopped at a place of importance, be this a site mentioned in the Bible or the dwelling of a holy person, she would take part in prayers with locals and her fellow travellers, and observe the differences between how prayers were spoken at home and in these new places.

The text of Egeria's narrative was relatively late in coming to the notice of historians and it survives in only three incomplete manuscripts, but there is ample evidence to indicate that her work was widely copied and read throughout Spain, France, and then Italy into the later medieval period. Egeria's account, which is in the form of a letter to a group of women whom she calls her 'sisters', reveals very little about Egeria herself. Her age, occupation, marital status, place of origin, and social standing all remain unknown – but her narrative provides clues. Egeria is among several Christian women in the fourth century who made a journey to Palestine.[392] This tradition began with Helena, mother of Constantine, in 326.[393] Although Helena's journey was for imperial rather than spiritual reasons, the later tradition of her discovery of the True Cross perpetuated by Ambrose of Milan shows the developing interest of late antique Christians in the possibilities of visiting holy places.[394] Melania the Elder's ascetic life in Jerusalem inspired her granddaughter, Melania the Younger, to give up her life in Rome and travel there herself. Similarly, as discussed in the previous chapter, Paula and Eustochium left Rome to found a religious community in Bethlehem. These examples serve to

[390] For an introduction to Egeria and her journey see Victoria Erhart, '*Itinerarium Egeriae*: A Pilgrim's Journey', in Churchill, Brown, and Jeffrey (eds.), *Women Writing Latin*, pp. 165–81.
[391] Robert A. Markus, 'How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?: Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994), pp. 257–71. Markus argues that the veneration of martyr shrines and tombs laid the foundations for places to become holy for Christians; without this, the sites in Jerusalem and the associated liturgy would not have captured the collective religious imagination in the same way.
[392] Ora Limor suggests that travelling to the holy places was considered a specifically feminine devotional act; see 'Reading Sacred Space', pp. 1–15.
[393] Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.42–7. See Noel Lenski, 'Empresses in the Holy Land: The Creation of a Christian Utopia in Late Antique Palestine', in Linda Ellis and Frank L. Kidner (eds.), *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2004), pp. 113–24. For a recent study of Helena see Julia Hillner, *Helena Augusta: Mother of the Empire* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2023).
[394] Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims,* pp. 110–15.

illustrate that Egeria was not unique. Although the *Itinerarium* stands alone as a first-person account of Christian travel by a fourth-century woman, other such texts could have existed, authored by Paula or someone like her. The value of holy places for Christians was heavily disputed in the fourth century; travelling to biblical sites was variously described as a help, a hindrance, and completely immaterial to the development of one's faith.[395] But Egeria was either oblivious to or unmoved by these debates. She did not seek to persuade her readers to undertake a similar journey outright, or justify her wanderings. Instead, Egeria collects her experiences and links them to scripture, producing an account that is refreshing, vivid, and immediate. She invites her readers into the experience of her journey. Egeria travels for her readers as much as she travels for herself.

Discovering, Locating, and Naming Egeria

In 1884, in the library of the Pia Fraternità de Laici in Arezzo, Gian Francesco Gamurrini discovered a manuscript containing a text that would come to be known as the *Itinerarium Egeriae*.[396] The manuscript bore an incomplete version which starts, somewhat abruptly, in the middle of sentence. The eleventh-century manuscript, Codex Aretinus 405, was held by the monastery of Monte Cassino until at least 1532, and was included in the library's catalogue for that year.[397] Egeria's travelogue occupied twenty-two pages of Beneventan script in the manuscript, which had suffered damaged from humidity. Alongside it were a selection of hymns by Hilary of Poitiers and his *De Mysteriis*, an exegetical handbook designed to guide the reading of the Old Testament. The entire manuscript is comprised of three quires, which should have produced forty-eight pages, but the outer sheet of the middle quire is absent; as a result, the beginning and end of the *Itinerarium* are missing, and there are two major lacunae in the text.[398] Gamurrini published his edition of the text in 1887 under the title *S. Hilarii tractatus de Myusteriis et hymni et S. Silviae Aguitanae peregrinatio ad loca sancta.* The first printed edition of the *Itinerarium* therefore did not circulate under Egeria's name, but under the name of another woman: Silvia of Aquitaine. The relatively late discovery of the manuscript containing the *Itinerarium* and the nature of its subsequent publication immediately provoke the following questions: who was Egeria, where did she come from, and how did she get her name?

Internal evidence provides clues for dating the *Itinerarium*. Egeria writes that she could not visit Nisibis because of its capture by the Persians; since this occurred in 363, this is the earliest possible date for the account. Similarly, Egeria visits Antioch which was destroyed by Persian

[395] For a thorough investigation of the controversy surrounding Christian travellers to biblical sites, see Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred.* See also Chapter Three of this thesis.
[396] Published as G. F. Gamurrini, *S. Hilarii tractatus de Myusteriis et hymni et S. Silviae Aguitanae peregrinatio ad loca sancta*, vol. 4 (Rome: Biblioteca della Accademia storico-giuridica, 1887).
[397] Augusto Campana, 'La storia della scoperta del Codice Aretino nel Carteggio Gamurrini-De Rossi,' in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale sulla Peregrinatio Egeriae, nel centenario della pubblicazione del Codex Aretinus 405* (già Aretinus VI, 3), ed. Accademia Petrarca Di Lettere Arti E Scienze (Arezzo 1990), pp. 77–84.
[398] McGowan and Bradshaw, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria,* p. 13. The lacunae occur between *Itinerarium* 16.4 and 16.5, and within 25.6.

forces in 540, and her journey therefore happened before this event. The initial attribution of the *Itinerarium* to Silvia of Aquitaine by Gamurrini derives from the fifth-century *Lausiac History* of Palladius. Palladius describes Silvia as the sister of praetorian prefect Flavius Rufinus who worked under Theodosius I and Arcadius, adding that she was committed to a life of spiritual wandering.[399] The aligning of the dates and the mention of religious travel made Silvia a candidate for the author of the *Itinerarium,* although she was far from the only woman that travelled in the fourth century.

Another woman named as a possible author was Galla Placidia, who was discussed in Chapter One of this thesis for her letters and inscriptions. Following the death of her husband, the Visigothic king Ataulf, in 415, more fanciful commentators imagined the grand imperial lady celebrating her escape by wandering through sites of Christian importance.[400] There is no evidence of the author of the *Itinerarium* having the resources or receiving the kind of deferential treatment that would befit Galla Placidia – the attribution can be discounted on these grounds alone. But this is not the only issue with Galla Placidia as a possible author; in 1967, by reading the *Itinerarium* in conjunction with lists of bishops and using the date of Easter to determine when Egeria was in Jerusalem, Paul Devos was able to date Egeria's journey from 381 to 384, before Galla Placidia's birth.[401] The date range of 381–4 is now overwhelmingly accepted as encompassing the events described in the *Itinerarium*, and this is the dating I will follow.

The association of the *Itinerarium* with a woman named 'Egeria' first arose in 1903, when Marius Férotin drew parallels between the account and a description of a female traveller included in a letter by the Spanish monk Valerius of Bierzo.[402] The letter was addressed to a male monastic community and was written around the year 680. In it, Valerius praised this Egeria for setting out to undertake a long journey to visit sacred sites and holy people, making a particular effort to highlight her bravery as a weak woman (*'feminae fragilitatis*').[403] Valerius calls her *'beatissime Egerie'* ('most blessed Egeria') and then *'beatissima sanctimonialis Egeria'*, a blessed holy or religious person.[404] Valerius was evidently working from a written account of the *Itinerarium* whilst writing the letter, rather than gathering his information from an oral tradition. In the opening of the letter, Valerius highlights Egeria describing (*'describens'*) the places she saw, and narrating her account (*'narrat storia'*).[405] Furthermore, Valerius apparently had access to a fuller version of the *Itinerarium* than the one preserved in the eleventh-century manuscript found by Gamurrini. Valerius summarises Egeria's first visit to Egypt, the details of which are not present in Codex Aretinus 405, but does not mention her travels in Jerusalem or her account of the liturgy, which form the bulk of the *Itinerarium* as we have it. Although it is possible that Valerius focused on the aspects of the narrative that most

[399] Palladius, *Lausiac History,* 55. On Silvia herself, see E. D. Hunt, 'St. Silvia of Aquitaine: the role of a Theodosian pilgrim in the society of East and West', *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972), pp. 351–73.
[400] Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims,* p. 45.
[401] Devos, 'La date du voyage d'Égérie', pp. 165–97.
[402] Férotin, 'Le véritable auteur', pp. 367-97.
[403] Valerius, *Ep Egerie*, 1.1.
[404] *Ibid*.
[405] *Ibid*.

interested him, perhaps the version of the *Itinerarum* that Valerius consulted was also fragmentary. His letter survives in eight Latin manuscripts. Different manuscript copies of the letter of Valerius preserve different spellings of Egeria's name, which is rendered variously as 'Egeria', 'Aetheria', 'Eiheria', and 'Eucheria', amongst other versions. 'Egeria' appears in the oldest manuscripts containing the letter, and therefore emerged as the name commonly used for the author of the *Itinerarium* by the mid-twentieth century. The presence of variations on 'Egeria' in indirect witnesses to the text that were picked up since Gamurruni's discovery (for example, in the library catalogues of monasteries) effectively quashed any notion that either Silvia or Galla Placidia could have authored the *Itinerarium*.

The letter of Valerius also offers some insights into Egeria's origins or, at least, the place from which she set out on her journey. Valerius describes Egeria as travelling the whole world (*'totius orbis'*) even though she was from the farthest shores of the western ocean (*'extremo occidui maris oceani litore extorta'*).[406] These 'farthest shores' could be northern Spain, or Aquitaine. Furthermore, Valerius appears to claim Egeria as his own countrywoman, making her Galician. He explains that the Catholic faith was late in coming to *this* region of the West (*'huius occidue plage'*) but when it did, Egeria was kindled by the flame of divine grace (*'flamma desiderii gratie diuine succensa'*) and subsequently left for her travels.[407] Valerius does not explicitly date Egeria's journey, but links it to the region's conversion to Christianity. Egeria's own narrative also hints at her origins, though provides nothing specific. When Egeria arrived in Edessa, the bishop of the city praises her for travelling so far from very distant lands to reach this point (*'de extreme porro terris venires ad haec loca'*).[408]

The letter of Valerius, combined with these references to Egeria's long journey, has led most commentators to conclude that Egeria was Spanish – but there are some notable dissenters.[409] Hagith Sivan has argued that Egeria was from Arles based upon Egeria's comparison between the Euphrates and the Rhône; were Egeria not of Gallic origin, Sivan states, she would not have known about the Rhône's size and the speed of its current.[410] That said, Egeria equally could have picked up this knowledge from her fellow travellers, from another journey that was not recorded in the *Itinerarium*, or even from her extensive reading – as we shall see, Egeria and her correspondents read widely. Because of Egeria's unusual use of the word *'tumbae'* to mean earthen mounds, Clifford Weber posited that she and her correspondents came from Mont-Saint-Michel, formerly *'Mons Tumba'*.[411] This seems tenuous, and relies overly on the extant corpus of late antique and early medieval texts (of which many are lost) to determine which words were in use at which time. The letter of Valerius is the earliest reception of the *Itinerarium*, and it seems likely that this early reception should stem from the place of origin

[406] *Ibid*., *Ep. Egerie*, 1.1; 5.
[407] *Ibid*., *Ep. Egerie*, 1.1.
[408] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 19.5.
[409] Férotin first posited a Spanish origin for Egeria based upon the letter of Valerius; see Férotin, 'Le véritable auteur', pp. 367–97. See also Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims,* pp. 43–68.
[410] Hagith Sivan, 'Who Was Egeria? Piety and Pilgrimage in the Age of Gratian', *The Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988), pp. 59–72; Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 18.2.
[411] Egeria, *Itinerarium* 13.1; Clifford Weber, 'Egeria's Norman Homeland', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 92 (1989), pp. 437–56.

of the author or their text, or both. Although Egeria's origins remain unknown, Spain seems the most likely location.

The Manuscript Transmission of the *Itinerarium Egeriae*

Although the *Itinerarium* is the subject of thorough and near-exhaustive study, its manuscript transmission receives surprisingly little attention.[412] Only one manuscript is the source for the bulk of the text as we receive it today, and this has created the false impression that, at least as far as the manuscripts go, there is nothing worth investigating. This could not be further from the truth. If we neglect to discuss the manuscripts containing fragments of the *Itinerarium* (Fig. 3) and disregard indirect witnesses to now-lost manuscripts bearing the text (Fig. 4), it is impossible even to approach a clear understanding of the readership and reception of Egeria's writing.

Fig. 3: Extant manuscripts containing the Itinerarium Egeriae

Name	**Date**	**Location and Origin**
Codex Aretinus 405	11th century	Arezzo and Monte Cassino
Codex Matritensis Toletanus 14.24	9th century	Madrid and Toledo
Alturo manuscript	10th century	Madrid (private collection) and possible Septimanian origin

The eleventh-century Codex Aretinus 405 remains the fullest extant version of the account, but two further manuscripts have yielded fragments of the *Itinerarium*. In 1909 Donatien de Bruyne published his findings from a ninth-century manuscript, the Codex Matritensis Toletanus 14.24.[413] This manuscript was produced in Toledo but de Bruyne consulted it in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid. It contains eleven short excerpts from the *Itinerarium*. Grouped together and stripped of Egeria's interest in the liturgy and other narrative details, the function of these quotations seems to be to provide topographical information on the places she visited. These excerpts mostly follow the content of the text as it is present in the Codex Aretinus 405, albeit with some minor variations. Significantly, two of these quotations come from a gap in the text (between 16.4, a mountain in Phoenecia, and 16.5, the tomb of Job) as it is presented in the eleventh-century manuscript. The compiler of the Toledo manuscript therefore had access to a different, fuller version of the *Itinerarium*, and this version was circulating in northern Spain in the ninth century.

[412] A representative example of the treatment of manuscripts containing the *Itinerarium* is found in a recent edition of the text. The fragments in Codex Matritensis Toletanus 14.24 and the Alturo manuscript (see Fig. 4) are briefly discussed in a short appendix to the main body of the commentary, which focuses primarily on Egeria's identity and the Jerusalem liturgy. See 'Appendix C: Fragments of Egeria's Text' in McGowan and Bradshaw, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria,* pp. 140–1.
[413] Donatien de Bruyne, 'Nouveaux fragments de *l'Itinerarium Eucheriae'*, *Revue bénédictine* 26 (1909), pp. 481–84.

Almost a full century after de Bruyne shared his discovery of the quotations in the Toledo manuscript, Jesús Alturo found two further fragments of the *Itinerarium* from a manuscript held in Madrid, in a private collection.[414] Alturo's two fragments, which were found in the binding of an early printed book, are longer than the brief quotations highlighted by de Bruyne. The first includes the final word of chapter 15 and the introductory lines of chapter 16, and the second fragment arises from the gap between chapter 16.4 and 16.5 present in the eleventh-century version of the text. The script is Caroline miniscule in brown ink, and Alturo has palaeographically dated the fragments to around 900. Alturo notes several features of the text that hint towards a Septimanian origin, namely the Visigothic abbreviation '*qm'* for 'quoniam', the use of punctuation in the middle of the word *'hiero:so:lima'*, and distinctive Visigothic spellings (for example '*hubi'* for '*ubi'*, '*aliut'* for '*aliud'*, '*abet'* for '*habet'*).[415] Alturo does not overstate the usefulness of the fragments – he concedes that their interest is mostly cultural, as opposed to revealing any significant details about Egeria or how she composed her text – but he points towards the potential discovery of other fragments in future.[416] This attitude is reflective of the broad nature of earlier scholarly interest in Egeria, which prioritises investigations into who she was over the creation and afterlife of her text. Alturo's discovery brought the total of extant manuscripts bearing part of Egeria's *Itinerarium* to three, all dating between the ninth and eleventh centuries.

Fig. 4: Indirect manuscript witnesses of the Itinerarium Egeriae

Name	**Date**
MS used by compiler of Codex Matritensis Toletanus 14.24	9th century
Letter of Valerius	7th century
San Salvador monastery charter	952
Saint Martial library catalogues	12th to 13th centuries
San Miguel de la Vega endowment	1050
Liber Glossarum	9th century
Peter the Deacon, *De locis sanctis*	12th century; prologue 1137

In his 2005 article Alturo also surveys the indirect manuscript witnesses to the *Itinerarium* which I will elaborate upon here.[417] Some of these indirect witnesses may refer to the same manuscript bearing the *Itinerarium* (and therefore giving a false impression of more manuscripts) but there is, unfortunately, no way to be sure. Firstly there is the manuscript consulted by the compiler of De Bruyne's fragments in the Codex Matritensis Toletanus 14.24, mentioned above. Alturo notes this manuscript originated in Cordoba in the final quarter of the

[414] Jesús Alturo, 'Deux nouveax fragments de l' 'Itinerarium Egeriae' du IXe–Xe siècle', *Revue bénédictine* 115 (2005), pp. 241–50. Alturo notes that the book's owner wanted to remain anonymous, and Alturo was therefore only able to consult the manuscript via photographic reproductions, p. 244.
[415] *Ibid*., p. 246.
[416] *Ibid*., pp. 249–50.
[417] *Ibid*., pp. 242–44.

ninth century and was written in Visigothic script, and therefore suggests that there was a copy of the *Itinerarium* circulating in Cordoba at this time that was more complete than that contained in the Codex Aretinus 405. The second indirect manuscript witness is the letter of Valerius on Egeria. This letter indicates that another copy of the *Itinerarium* was in present in Galicia in the final quarter of the seventh century. Thirdly, there is a mention of the *Itinerarium* in a charter detailing a donation of books to the monastery of San Salvador de Celanova in Ourense, Galicia on its consecration day, 26th September 942. The charter was drawn up in the name of Rudensis, and the books listed were intended to form the basis of the library's collection – including one *'Ingeriarum Geriae'*.[418] Fourthly, an item named *'Itinerarium Egeriae abbatissae'* is mentioned in three separate inventories of the library of the abbey of Saint Martial in Limoges between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; we return to these below.[419] Another copy is mentioned in a text dated 12th May 1050. Felix, the founder and abbot of San Miguel de la Vega near León, endowed the monastery with a collection of books that included one titled *'Itinerarium Eria'*. A further manuscript, likely eighth or ninth century, needed to be consulted by the compiler of the *Liber Glossarum*, a large Carolingian reference work. The *Liber Glossarum* includes the following quote: *'Cepos tu agiu Iohanni: Graece quod Latine dicitur ortus sancti Iohanni'* ('*cepos tu agiu Iohanni*: in Greek, which in Latin is called the garden of holy John').[420] This is a direct reference to a passage in the *Itinerarium*:

> *'Tunc dixit nobis ipse sanctus presbyter: "In hodie hic hortus aliter non appellatur greco sermone nisi copos tu agiu Iohanni, id est quod vos dicitis latine hortus sancti Iohannis."*[421]
>
> Then that holy presbyter said to us, "Today this garden is not called anything other than *cepos tu agiu Iohanni* in the Greek language, which is, as you say in Latin, the garden of holy John."

The three primary manuscripts of the *Liber Glossarum* give three different sources for this extract: '*Egerie'* (Paris, 11529, 8th century), '*Egeriae'* (Vatican, Pal. Lat. 1773, first half of 9th century), and '*Egene'* (Tours, 850, end of 9th century). The different manuscripts containing the letter of Valerius discussed previously also demonstrate the variation in spellings of Egeria's name; the *Liber Glossarum* could reflect this diversity in spelling, but they could equally refer to variations of Egeria's name found in other manuscripts bearing the text.

Interestingly, Alturo leaves out one significant work in his survey of the indirect witnesses to manuscripts containing the *Itinerarium*: Peter the Deacon's *De locis sanctis,* a twelfth-century

[418] D. A. Wilmart, 'L'*Itinerarium Eucheriae'*, *Revue Bénédictine* 25 (1908), p. 461.
[419] Léopold Delisle, *Le Cabinet des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Impériale: Étude sur la formation de ce dépôt comprenant les éléments d'une histoire de le calligraphie de la miniature, de la reliure, et du commerce de livres à Paris avant l'invention de l'imprimerie*, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1874), pp. 493–504.
[420] *Liber Glossarum*, CE 379. See the discussion in J. F. Mountford, 'Silvia, Aetheria or Egeria?', *Classical Quarterly* 17 (1923), pp. 40–41.
[421] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 15.3.

text about sacred sites in Palestine and Egypt.[422] Peter was a monk at Monte Cassino and also its librarian. He added a prologue in 1137 dedicating the work to Abbot Guibald, and in it he explains that his *De locis sanctis* was compiled using information from many books: *'ex omnibus, ut ita dicam, libris collectum'* ('from all, so to speak, the collected books').[423] Peter's most important source of information, and the work that provided the structure and outline for his own, was Bede's *De locis sanctis*. In many places Peter's text directly reproduces that of Bede (and Bede, for his own part, made use of Adamnan's *De locis sanctis,* written at the end of the seventh century). Although it does not rival his extensive use of Bede, the second work on which Peter drew heavily was Egeria's *Itinerarium*.[424]

Peter's use of Egeria's text indicates that those interested in far-flung sites of Christian importance, and other readers besides, had a reasonable chance of knowing the *Itinerarium*. Peter may have consulted the same manuscript that Gamurrini would find in Arezzo centuries later (Codex Aretinus 405 originated in Monte Cassino). If Peter did use the Arezzo manuscript then he did so before the middle quire lost its outer sheet, because it appears that he had access to a fuller version of the *Itinerarium*. Egeria visited Egypt twice on her travels, and (as discussed above) the Arezzo manuscript begins partway through the first of these visits, as she is on the approach to Mount Sinai. But Peter's renderings of some significant Egyptian sites bear traces of Egeria's distinctive biblical literalism. The port of Clysma was thought to be the location where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea to flee Egypt, and Peter describes the tracks in the sand left by the Pharaoh's chariot that pursued them. The wheels were further apart than those of Roman chariots, and two feet across.[425] The precise measuring of the tracks, the close references to the Old Testament narrative, and the straightforward acceptance of the local tradition all seem distinctly Egerian. The existence of these chariot tracks was also recorded by Orosius, a near-contemporary of Egeria's, in the early fifth century.[426] This demonstrates the preservation of Clysma as a holy site in Egypt, and perhaps also the continuation of the chariot-tracks legend, but we should not discount the possibility that this is also some very early reception of Egeria's text. There are other instances of Peter using information that appears to stem from Egeria, for example his expansion upon Bede's description of Mount Tabor.[427] Valerius describes Egeria climbing the mountain and therefore this part of the account was present in the version of the *Itinerarium* he had to hand when writing the letter – but it does not appear anywhere in the incomplete version of the *Itinerarium* found in Codex Aretinus 405.

Taking these two instances of Peter's use of Egeria together, it is important to consider the possibility that Monte Cassino possessed another manuscript containing Egeria's *Itinerarium*

[422] See the commentary on Peter the Deacon in John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1981), pp. 179–80.
[423] Peter the Deacon, *De locis sanctis*, preface.
[424] Peter uses Egeria's *Itinerarium* in several places, for example describing the holy cross: *De Locis Sanctis* (C) 2, *Itinerarium* 37.1, 3.
[425] Perer the Deacon, *De locis sanctis*, (Y) 5. E. D. Hunt notes that the most likely cause of these tracks was ships being hauled out of the water. See 'The Itinerary of Egeria: Reliving the Bible in Fourth-Century Palestine', *Studies in Church History* 36 (2000), p. 39.
[426] Orosius, *Historia adversus paganos*, 1.10.17.
[427] Peter the Deacon, *De locis sanctis* (U-V) 16, *CCSL* 175, pp. 276–77.

in the first half of the twelfth century. Despite the rarity of extant manuscript witnesses to the *Itinerarium* today, we should not assume the same scarcity in the middle ages, especially not when considering the presence of the text in manuscript catalogues. When considered alongside the three extant manuscripts containing parts of the *Itinerarium*, the seven indirect manuscript witnesses discussed above show that the text circulated in both medieval Spain and France, and from there made its way into Italy, as evidenced by the Codex Aretinus 405. Furthermore, by highlighting indirect witnesses in its manuscript transmission, a picture of the *Itinerarium* emerges as widely read, copied, and circulated. The *Itinerarium* occupied an important place in a group of texts which explored the Christian holy places – including Bede's *De locis sanctis*, Adamnan's earlier work of the same name, and Peter the Deacon's compilation. This reality should not be obscured by the relative rarity of extant manuscripts.

The Reception of the *Itinerarium* and the Tradition of Christian Travel Writing

The *Itinerarium* does not stand alone as a text chronicling Christian travel to Palestine and the surrounding areas. In 333, half a century before Egeria wrote her *Itinerarium*, a traveller composed an account of their journey from Bordeaux to Jerusalem and back again, via Rome and Milan. This anonymous text, known as the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, provides an interesting precursor to Egeria's account.[428] The *Itinerarium Burdigalense* is more formulaic and less narrative in style than Egeria's *Itinerarium*, providing the reader with over three hundred cities, rest stops, and sites of importance:

> *mansio Arcas milia VIII*
> *mutatio Bruttus milia IIII*
> *civitas Tripoli milia XII* [429]
>
> Stopping-place at Acre, eight miles
> Change at Bruttum, four miles
> The city of Tripoli, twelve miles

The exhaustive listing of places turns to descriptive prose upon reaching sites mentioned in the Bible, for example *'Inde milia duo a parte sinistra est Bethleem, ubi natus est Dominus Iesus Christus'* ('From there two miles; on the left is Bethlehem, where the Lord Jesus Christ was born').[430] Because of its listing of places, the text is traditionally interpreted as a travel guide for those intending to make similar journeys.[431] The *Itinerarium Burdigalense* survives in four manuscripts dating from the ninth to the tenth centuries. Although its style diverges from

[428] The debate surrounding the gender of the author of the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* is discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.
[429] *Itinerarium Burdigalense,* V 18.
[430] *Ibid*., V 25.
[431] For a characteristic interpretation see Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), pp. 307–10. For the text's broader context as a travel narrative with parallels to pre-Christian material, see Ján Elsner, 'The *Itinerarium Burdigalense*: Politics and Salvation in the Geography of Constantine's Empire', *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000), pp. 181–95.

Egeria's *Itinerarium*, this roughly contemporary text covers a lot of the same (holy) ground, and its transmission gives some idea of how Egeria's text might have appeared in the manuscript tradition. The most complete witness to the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* is found in Paris BnF MS 4808. This is a composite manuscript, but the section containing our text originated in ninth century Metz. This section contains other material relating to travelling and geography, for example an excerpt from the *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti*, a list of places and distances between them that is dated approximately to the third century, and the *Cosmographica* of Julius Honorius, notes from a fourth or fifth century lecture on the map of the world. The grouping of the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* alongside geographical materials that were not explicitly Christian in the Paris manuscript suggests that the manuscript's compilers interpreted its use as a practical travel document.

However, another manuscript from around the same time tells a different story. In St Gall MS 732, dating to the early ninth century, the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* is grouped with another text that is concerned with Christian travel in particular: the *De situ terrae sanctae*, a sixth century text by a certain Theodosius who describes a journey to the holy places. Other texts in this manuscript, including a list of Merovingian kings and the *Lex Alammanorum*, do not relate to travel or the holy places. The placing of the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* alongside the *De situ terrae sanctae* therefore seems to be a deliberate comment on their similarity. The manuscript transmission shows that the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* was read both as a practical travel guide and as a valuable Christian insight into Jerusalem and its surroundings. Egeria's *Itinerarium* does not feature the same list of places and distances that characterise the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* and other comparable texts, such as the *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti*. The precise and practical nature of these lists is a clear contrast to Egeria's prose narrative. It seems more likely that her text would have circulated with similar devotional narratives, as opposed to these clinical lists of distances and places.

Another potentially fruitful avenue for exploring the reception of the *Itinerarium,* and one that supports the theory posed above, is observing the manuscript transmission of Valerius's letter on Egeria. There are eight extant manuscript witnesses of the letter, and it is therefore much better preserved than the *Itinerarum* itself. Without the ability to look at what the *Itinerarium* itself appeared alongside in manuscript compilations (with the exception of Codex Aretinus 405 and the texts associated with Hilary of Poitiers), observing how the letter of Valerius was transmitted is the next best option.[432] The principal manuscript containing the letter, Madrid BNE MS 10007, was compiled in 902. The manuscript primarily contains hagiographies of men in the early church, for example the third century Spanish martyr Fructuosus, the fourth century Gallic bishop Germanus of Auxerre, and Jerome's *Life of Hilarion*, a Palestinian ascetic who died in 371. A much later hand (possibly eighteenth century) has summarised the contents of the manuscript on its humidity-damaged first folio: *'vitae patrum'*. The manuscript does indeed appear to be a compilation of the lives of the fathers of the early church. Valerius's letter appears towards the end of the manuscript; that the majority of the material in the manuscript

[432] If it changed ownership, the manuscript consulted by Alturo held in a private collection could provide further answers here – there is certainly opportunity for future exploration.

is concerned with individuals living in the third and fourth centuries, it seems most likely that the letter is included because of its association with Egeria as a contemporary of these men, rather than including Valerius in this category. This raises the question: in some strands of her medieval reception, was Egeria considered to be a church father? It is a possibility.

The letter of Valerius was also copied alongside texts about women, placing Egeria within a broader context of female devotion. An eleventh-century manuscript bearing the letter of Valerius, Paris BnF MS NAL 2178, is a similar hagiographical compilation, including the lives of Germanus of Auxerre and Hilarion along others such as Martin of Tours. Valerius's letter is once again featured towards the end of the manuscript, but it comes shortly after the Latin *Life* of Melania, and alongside other works on female monasticism and virginity. Immediately following Valerius's letter in the manuscript is the life of Pelagia, a fourth-century ascetic who lived as a monk. The connections between Egeria and Melania as near-contemporaries and travellers to Palestine are clear, but the positioning of the letter so close to Pelagia's life suggests a medieval association between Egeria and female monasticism.

Neither Nun nor Pilgrim? Reidentifying Egeria

To consider the kind of reception Egeria and her *Itinerarium* might have enjoyed, both by her contemporaries and in the centuries that followed, it is important to establish how Egeria herself moved through the ever-changing world of later fourth-century Christianity as an apparently unmarried and independent woman of means. Egeria does not report those she encountered being surprised that she was a female traveller, and it is important to remember that she was not unique in this – there are several reports of elite Christian women who made similar journeys around this time. Egeria clearly wielded some measure of authority. This was picked up by later readers of the text who, as the manuscript catalogue of Limoges showed above, called her *'abbatissae'*, although there is no definitive evidence that Egeria ever held such a position. Medieval readers, when encountering a woman who moved from place to place under her own steam, may well have thought such a level of freedom could only be enjoyed by an abbess. As the following discussion will show, it is not only the compilers of the Limoges catalogue who slipped into anachronisms when describing Egeria. The broader context here for both medieval and modern readers of the *Itinerarium* is a lack of engagement with how authoritative Christian women operated in the later fourth century. When asking where Egeria's freedom stems from it is more productive to consider it in financial, rather than institutional, terms.

Mary B. Campbell succinctly summarised the competing identities which Egeria is assigned. Egeria is 'an untutored, fragile young nun, a sturdy old abbess with royal connections and

classical training, and a pious slut'.[433] To this I would add another descriptor: 'pilgrim'.[434] Egeria never once identifies herself in this way, nor does she describe her journey as a pilgrimage. The word *'peregrinatio'* is often translated as 'pilgrimage', especially when the travel has a spiritual element, although this is anachronistic.[435] The word for journey, *'iter',* receives similar treatment. *'Peregrinatio'* only begins to denote a pilgrimage in the seventh century, and this definition is reached via an interpretation of *De civitate dei,* where Augustine uses *'peregrinatio'* to refer to the allegorical travel of Christians throughout the world.[436] Egeria uses *'iter'* to describe her own journey but never *'peregrinatio'*. In a similar way to her later identification as an abbess, calling Egeria a pilgrim says more about her readers (past and present) than it does about Egeria herself. Although the routes Egeria took and the sites she visited would certainly be followed by later Christian visitors who did call themselves pilgrims, to designate Egeria's journey as a pilgrimage is reductive. Maribel Dietz has highlighted what she terms the late antique 'culture of movement', where conflict and upheaval made travel a frequent feature of daily life. Sometimes these journeys could assume spiritual meaning, or be undertaken for purely religious aims (as in the case of Egeria), but they did not have the uniformity or organisation of later journeys which were explicitly termed as pilgrimages.[437] By the medieval period in the west, Christian pilgrimage was a journey with a specific destination in mind, usually with the aim of healing and absolution, and with prescribed routes, behaviours, and liturgies. The same cannot be said of Egeria's three-year journey, which falls more easily into the category of spiritual wandering or Christian 'homelessness', which Dietz describes as the continual state of displacement and journeying being at least as important as the destination itself, if not more so.[438] The people she met were also an important part of her journey. Calling Egeria a pilgrim – when the term functions here as shorthand for a Christian who made a journey to Palestine – obscures her journeys to Egypt and Asia Minor, and her constant visits to the holy people who were as important to her journeying as the holy places. 'Pilgrim' is not a meaningful label for Egeria because it would not have held the same resonance for her. Although certainly a precursor to the medieval Christian pilgrims, Egeria herself was not a pilgrim. Egeria was a traveller, and a participant in a kind of religious tourism.

As we have seen, Egeria was not the only Christian woman travelling to Palestine and its surroundings. Around 394 Jerome wrote to Furia, the daughter-in-law of prominent Roman aristocrat Sextus Petronius Probus, after she had asked him to advise her on living as a widow.

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[433] Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400*–1600 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 20.
[434] To use one example among many, Egeria is called 'the most famous of these early intrepid [Christian] pilgrims' in Giselle Bader, 'Sacred Space in Egeria's Fourth-Century Pilgrimage Account', *Journal of Religious History* 44 (2020), p. 91.
[435] On the language for pilgrimage and its problems, see Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims*, pp. 27–8.
[436] Gillian Clark, 'Pilgrims and Foreigners: Augustine on Travelling Home', in L. Ellis and F. L. Kidner (eds.), *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 149–58.
[437] Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims*, pp. 30–42. For the classical origins of religious and/or sacred travel see Ján Elsner and Ian Rutherford, *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially pp. 1–38 on the concept of pilgrimage.
[438] Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims,* pp. 2–4.

In this letter Jerome sympathises with Furia, still at that time a young woman, who would have to withstand considerable pressure from her family to reject remarriage.[439] In later fourth-century Rome there was a strong emphasis among many elite Christians on the transference and inheritance of property, and on the importance of family. This is what Furia would have to contend with in her struggle to remain a widow.[440] In a section of the letter describing badly-behaved widows, Jerome takes the opportunity to complain about a female traveller in the East whom he had recently encountered, or at least heard about – the language is quite ambiguous.[441] Up to this point Jerome had discussed the ideal widow: she engages in charitable giving, shuns the company of men, reads the Bible whilst constantly praying, all whilst rejecting fine food and wine, drinking water instead.[442] Jerome then uses the following example as the antithesis to Christian widowhood. Rather than taking exception to the unnamed woman's travelling per se, Jerome felt that she was inappropriately ostentatious in how she moved from place to place:

> *vidimus nuper ignominiosum per totum orientem volitasse: et aetas et cultus et habitus et incessus, indiscreta societas, exquisitae epulae, regius apparatus Neronis et Sardanapalli nuptias loquebantur.*[443]
>
> Recently I have seen a shameful [thing] flit about the entire East: her age and manner and clothing and gait, her indiscriminate associations, her seeking out of feasts, and her regal bearing declared her to be the bride of Nero or Sardanapalus.

We should read this letter within the broader context of Jerome's opinions on appropriate female behaviour. Jerome advocated for extreme modesty, piety, and asceticism. He objected to any kind of female ornamentation. In his famous letter to the young Eustochium advising her on how to preserve her virginity (which, for Jerome, was the most exalted state of being available to a woman) he advised keeping herself separate from others, to devote herself to reading the Bible and to prayer, and to avoid the company of men – much of the same advice that he gave to Furia on widowhood.[444] It was Jerome who was the outlier here, not the woman he described, whose actions aligned with those expected of a Christian woman belonging to late Roman elite society. Furthermore, Christian travel was not wholly approved of. As discussed in Chapter Three, Gregory of Nyssa was a strong opponent of such journeys, particularly to Jerusalem.[445] As well as an expression of his views on women, Jerome's criticism of the unnamed traveller in the letter to Furia should also be read in the context of the ongoing debate on religious tourism.

The passage of Jerome's letter excerpted above is sometimes highlighted as a criticism of Egeria. In 1913, Germain Morin posited that Jerome was offended by Egeria (whom he calls

[439] Jerome, *Ep*. 54.
[440] John Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital: Rome in the Fourth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 279–80.
[441] Jerome, *Ep*. 54.13.
[442] *Ibid*., *Ep*. 54.12, 13, 11, 9–10.
[443] *Ibid.*, *Ep*. 54.13.
[444] *Ibid.*, *Ep*. 22.
[445] Gregory of Nyssa, *Ep*. 2.

'Eucheria') not visiting him when she was in Bethlehem, or contacting him to let him know she would be there. Morin attributes this lapse in Egeria's judgement to her naivety, which (for Morin) finds its expression in the credulousness with which she moves through the world.[446] In a close reading of this section of *Ep*. 54 alongside the *Itinerarium*, Morin notes that Egeria's frequent association with men (albeit monks and bishops) could constitute *'indiscreta societas'*. The *'regius apparatus'* may refer to the armed guard employed to escort her on a particularly treacherous part of her journey.[447] Morin concludes that Jerome is referring to Egeria in this letter. Furthermore, Morin argues the dating of Jerome's letter to c.394 means that the journey covered in the *Itinerarium* can be dated to 393–6.[448]

Morin's conclusions are tenuous on several grounds. Firstly, as Paul Devos has shown, Egeria's journey took place from 381 to 384, predating Jerome's letter by a decade, so Egeria could not have been the target of his criticism. Secondly, although she does not seem to be struggling for money, Egeria hardly travels in comfort, instead scaling Mount Sinai on foot and going from place to place with little rest in between.[449] Thirdly, there are many other women who travelled to the East that seem more likely to be Jerome's mysterious traveller. For example, both Melania the Elder and Poemenia are frequently raised as potential candidates. The former especially displeased Jerome because of her patronage of Rufinus of Aquileia. Although initially friends, Rufinus and Jerome had landed on opposing sides of the Origenist controversy in 394, and Melania was irredeemably tainted by association.[450] Poemenia was a very wealthy visitor to the monks of Egypt who made herself notorious with her excessive displays of wealth. Unlike Melania or Egeria, Poemenia's conduct drew actual criticism from onlookers, but her journey occurred in 375, meaning that there were almost two decades between her travels and Jerome's description of a scandal he had seen ('*vidimus'*) recently *('nuper'*).[451] Jerome's letter does not present us with the earliest testament to Egeria outside the *Itinerarium*, nor does it constitute reception of the *Itinerarium* itself, but it is significant that readers like Morin saw something in Egeria's behaviour that Jerome could object to. Although Paula and Eustochium likely outstripped Egeria in terms of their wealth and rank, they compensated for this with the very brand of extreme asceticism that Jerome advocated for. Egeria did no such thing. Egeria does not describe herself restricting her food intake, or purposefully choosing lesser clothes or lodgings than she could afford. However, the multiple identities offered for the cause of Jerome's ire demonstrate that Egeria was far from unique as a Christian woman traveller.

Egeria's identity as a pilgrim (or not) intersects with another contested aspect of her character which is vital to consider when reading the *Itinerarium*, especially with an eye to its transmission. Was Egeria a nun? Although she never refers to herself as *'monacha',* she was clearly knowledgeable about and interested in the liturgy. At the very least, this indicates that

[446] Germain Morin, 'Un passage énigmatique de S. Jérôme contre la pèlerine espagnole Eucheria?', *Revue Bénédictine* 30 (1913), pp. 174–86
[447] *Ibid*., pp. 181–5.
[448] *Ibid*., p. 186.
[449] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 3.2.
[450] Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims*, pp. 131-32. On the broader context of the spiritual conflict between Jerome and Rufinus, see Clark, *The Origenist Controversy.*
[451] Palladius, *Lausiac History,* 35.14–5; Jerome, *Ep*. 54.13.

she was a highly pious laywoman. She wrote home to a group of likeminded women whom she called her sisters (*'dominae venerabilis sorores'*), which may have constituted a religious community – although equally these could be her biological sisters, or fellow Christians.[452] Egeria's interest in the liturgy, evident piety, and her close relationship with her sisters is often enough for commentators to label her a nun without much contention.[453]

A possible clue to Egeria's identity lies in her interaction with a woman named Marthana. In the *Itinerarium* Egeria does not, as a rule, refer to the people she meets on her travels by name, instead speaking of 'the holy bishop' or 'the monks who lived there'.[454] The exception is Egeria's description of the deaconess Marthana, the leader of a group of virgins. Egeria and Marthana had met in Jerusalem, and Egeria once again sought her out in her home of Seleucia.[455] She writes about their shared joy at being reunited. There are many possible reasons for their closeness – both women, both travellers, both dedicated to a life set apart for Christ – and, although this is not made explicit in the narrative, they clearly shared a devotion to Thecla.[456] As well as being the location of Thecla's shrine, Seleucia was where Thecla reportedly spent the majority of her life following her travels with Paul, and Marthana's decision to base herself here was unlikely to be a coincidence. Egeria evidently revered Thecla, which is demonstrated by the visit to her shrine, and Thecla's departure from her home and subsequent travels would have provided Egeria with a compelling model of Christian behaviour on the road. Together, Egeria and Marthana comprised the two separate components of Thecla's story: travelling widely and staying in Seleucia. Egeria perhaps felt a particular affinity for Marthana as a fellow leader of a community of Christian women. Rather than simply being a member of the community that she wrote home to, Egeria could have had some spiritual jurisdiction over these women.

Egeria also reveals that she and her 'sisters' exchanged texts amongst themselves, which suggests the presence of a shared library. Whilst in Edessa, the bishop there gave Egeria copies of the apocryphal letter exchange between Christ and King Abgar (on which, see the discussion below). Of these letters she comments that, although she had copies at home, the version the bishop gave her seemed fuller – and she wanted to share these letters with her sisters.[457] This commitment to shared knowledge and property held in common aligns with what we know about the priorities of later communities of religious women. A good example here is the *Regula ad virgines* by Caesarius of Arles and his sister Caesaria, and its application in the Holy Cross nunnery in Poitiers in the first third of the sixth century.[458] Drawing upon Augustine's

[452] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 3.8.
[453] For example, Philip Mayerson introduces Egeria as a 'peripatetic nun' in his article 'Egeria and Peter the Deacon on the Site of Clysma (Suez)', *Journal of American Research Center in Egypt* 33 (1996), p. 61.
[454] Egeria, *Itinerarium,* 8.4; 3.1.
[455] *Ibid*.*,* 23.3.
[456] For the veneration of Thecla, see Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[457] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 19.19.
[458] For an overview of the governance of religious women see Julie Ann Smith, *Ordering Women's Lives: Penitentials and Nunnery Rules in the Early Medieval West* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). On the specific importance of monasteries for Caesarius, see Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 81–100.

earlier instruction to a community of religious women, and doubtless the experiences of his sister and niece (Caesaria the Elder and Caesaria the Younger), Caesarius laid out the principles and behaviours for a religious life.[459] Nuns should not have personal property, not even clothing; they should all learn to read, and dedicate two hours a day to reading; and all their tasks should be undertaken together for the common good.[460] The *Rule* of Caesarius also promoted strict enclosure for women, stating that a nun must never exit the nunnery up to the time of her death *('ad mortem suam de monasterio non egrediatur')*.[461] From the sixth century, the cloistering of female religious increasingly became the norm. If Egeria were part of a religious community, either they did not practice enclosure or she, perhaps as its leader, held special dispensation to make her journey. Prior to the *Rule* of Caesarius, devoutly Christian women would at times choose to retreat to cells as individuals (for example, Melania the Younger lived as a hermit on the Mount of Olives) but there is limited evidence for community-wide enclosure.[462] To say that Egeria could not have been a nun because she was allowed freedom of movement is to misrepresent the nature of later fourth-century female monasticism. At this point in time, female enclosure was not yet the status quo.

Andrew Palmer has argued that, based on the above evidence, especially her relationship with the deaconess Marthana, Egeria was a nun.[463] A similar position is taken by Julie Ann Smith, who argues (though less emphatically) that Egeria's interest in the liturgy indicates that she was probably not a layperson.[464] For Maribel Dietz, Egeria's account suggests she was a nun. In support of this, Dietz raises the point that Valerius calls Egeria *'sanctimonialis'*, a holy person.[465] Dietz reads this as confirmation that, at least by the later seventh century, Egeria was seen as a nun – her wide-ranging travels were not necessarily incompatible with her membership of a religious community.[466] Hagith Sivan noted the great expense at which Egeria undertook her journey, highlighting that she was not particularly frugal in her behaviours. For Sivan, Egeria's personal wealth and the alacrity with which she dispensed of it precluded Egeria from possible membership of any religious community.[467] Furthermore, highlighting Egeria's ability to deviate from her travel plans without telling anyone else, Sivan stated that her 'singular freedom of movement' demonstrated that Egeria did not belong to a community that required her to return, adding that it would be impossible for an abbess to leave her flock for

[459] On the collaboration between Caesarius and the two Caesarias in creating the *Rule*, see Albrecht Diem, *The Pursuit of Salvation. Community, Space, and Discipline in Early Medieval Monasticism: with a Critical Edition and Translation of the Regula cuiusdam ad uirgines* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), pp. 157–8. On Augustine's letter to the nuns at Hippo and its use as a Rule, see Conrad Leyser, 'Augustine in the Latin West, 430–ca. 900', in Mark Vessey (ed.), *A Companion to Augustine* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 460–4.
[460] Caesarius, *Regula virginum*, 17.1, 18.1, 19.1, 29.1–2.
[461] *Ibid*., 2.3.
[462] On Melania's retreat from the world, see Clark, *Melania the Younger*, pp. 146–69.
[463] Andrew Palmer, 'Egeria the Voyager, or the Technology of Remote Sensing in Late Antiquity', in Zweder von Martels (ed.), *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction: Studies on Fiction, Literary Tradition, Scholarly Discovery and Observation in Travel Writing* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 39–53.
[464] Julie Ann Smith, 'Sacred Journeying: Women's Correspondence and Pilgrimage in the Fourth and Eighth Centuries', in Jennie Stopford (ed.), *Pilgrimage Explored* (Woodbridge and Rochester, N.Y.: York Medieval Press, 1999), p. 41–56.
[465] Valerius, *Ep. Egerie*, 1.1.
[466] Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims,* p. 48.
[467] Sivan, 'Who Was Egeria?', p. 71.

such a long stretch of time.[468] Elsewhere Sivan argued that Egeria's behaviour suggested that she was part of a 'bourgeois milieu' rather than a rigidly organised monastic community.[469] Overall, Sivan interpreted Egeria as a woman who was too free to be a nun.

Rather than getting caught up the debate between two extremes – Egeria was a nun and part of an organised community of religious women (and possibly its leader), versus Egeria was a devout laywoman who devoted a significant portion of her life to religious travel – it is important to consider the landscape of female monasticism in the later fourth century west. There were certainly communities of women who were dedicating their lives to Christ. One only has to look towards Rome, and later Bethlehem, to see Paula, Eustochium, Marcella and others follow this path of so-called 'house asceticism'.[470] And, in the later fourth and early fifth century, these women were monastic innovators in the west, using Jerome's (apparent) knowledge of exile and the practices of eastern ascetics in order to bring the desert into the fine villas of the Aventine.[471] Although they were certainly adherents of a particularly ascetic brand of late antique Christianity, Paula and her friends were not an organised monastic community – though Paula and Eustochium would later found a dedicated religious community of women in Bethlehem.[472] They were guided by shared interests and Jerome's guidance, but not a *Rule* like that of Caesarius. Looking to late antique Spain in particular, Kimberly Bowes has noted the prevalence of villa-churches – households turned into places of worship, or churches constructed next to villas – in the landscape.[473] The boundaries between devout household and religious community were non-existent at this time. The likely transformation of Melania the Younger's female slaves into consecrated Christian virgins, and the transformation of Melania herself from slave-owner to member of a religious community, is just one example.[474] Egeria's community may have been more legible as a household than any kind of organised monastic life – and indeed, all late antique and early medieval monasteries functioned as households.

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[468] *Ibid*., p. 70.

[469] Hagith Sivan, 'Holy Land Pilgrimage and Western Audiences: Some Reflections on Egeria and Her Circle', *Classical Quarterly* 38.2 (1988), pp. 534–5. Here Sivan references Egeria writing up part of her journey whilst in Constantinople and revealing that she will be extending her trip; see *Itinerarium*, 23.10.

[470] Eliana Magnani (trans. Lochin Brouillard), 'Female House Ascetics from the Fourth to the Twelfth Century', in Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 213–31. See also Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford; New York, N.Y.: Clarendon Press, 1996), especially pp. 25–59.

[471] On Jerome's relationship with these women and how he positioned himself as an authority on asceticism see Cain, *The Letters of Jerome,* pp. 68–98.

[472] Jerome, *Ep*. 108; 46.

[473] Kimberly Bowes, '"…*Nec sedere in villam*." Villa-Churches, Rural Piety, and the Priscillianist Controversy', in Thomas S. Burns and John W. Eadie (eds.), *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity* (East Lansing, M.I.: Michigan State University Press, 2001), pp. 323–48. For an expansion of these ideas see also Kimberly Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[474] Clark, *Melania the Younger,* pp. 93–7, 164–6. The *Life* of Melania records the difficulty with which Melania and Pinian tried to dispose of their property, including their slaves, and Melania's establishment of a female monastery in Jerusalem to house ninety virgins. It seems most likely that these women were formerly enslaved by Melania and Pinian. Melania naturally refused leadership of the community. See Gerontius, *Sanctae Melanie Junioris Vita* [Latin], 10, 41.

It is also important to note the diversity of late antique and early medieval female monasticism.[475] Whilst Dietz saw the use of *'sanctimonialis'* by Valerius as proof that he considered Egeria to be a nun, the word does not necessarily translate as such. It holds connotations of being set apart, and also of holiness, but by the early medieval period it was one of several words (including *ancilla, dicata, puella, sacra,* and *virgo*) used to identify women who had chosen a religious life. This could mean they were firmly enclosed in a monastery, or had dedicated themselves to a religious life whilst remaining in their own home.[476] When modern readers of the *Itinerarium* discuss the possibility that Egeria was a nun – or indeed, argue that she could not be a nun because of her ability to wander freely – they are usually conjuring up a picture of a fairly homogenised, *Rule*-led form of female monasticism that should not be anachronistically applied to the later fourth-century west.

A possibility that I want to raise here is that Egeria was a widow from an elite family who, following the death of her husband, elected not to remarry, but instead to join a loosely organised circle of Christian women. This would explain her independence and wealth, and her ability to move around freely. Egeria never mentions a husband or children, but this does not necessarily preclude Egeria from widowhood. Her Roman contemporaries Paula and Marcella pursued similar paths after their husbands had died, opting out of the accepted norm of remarriage. There is no conclusive proof that Egeria was a widow, but it provides a new perspective with which to approach her text. Perhaps in the *Itinerarium* we are witnessing the second act of Egeria's life, where she is finally able to explore the places she knows from her Bible and immerse herself in the liturgy without the distractions of domestic life. It is equally possible that Egeria had a living husband and children. Perpetua, after all, does not mention the father of her child in her section of the *Passio*. The *Itinerarium* is addressed to a group of 'sisters', but Egeria could have written a parallel narrative addressed to her husband, or parents, or other family members, which does not survive. Conversely, Egeria's travels could be born from a desire to live out a role for herself beyond that of the late Roman *matrona*, and she purposefully rejected family life.

I mention the possibility of Egeria's widowhood in the context of an investigation into the transmission and reception of the *Itinerarium* because how we choose to interpret Egeria matters. How Egeria's identity is read has unquestionably shaped the reception of her writing. If the monks did not consider her to be an abbess, would Egeria's account have been welcome in the library of Saint Martial in Limoges? Perhaps not. Egeria is readily described as a nun and a pilgrim in modern scholarship, despite the elusiveness and ambiguity of those categories in the fourth century, but almost never as an author – which she demonstrably was. Why is there apparent resistance to labelling Egeria as such? Prevailing interpretations of Egeria cast her as someone who writes about her experiences on the move, with writing being incidental to her journeying rather than an extension or embodiment of it. I shall attempt to rectify this by exploring Egeria's writing style and the wider literary world she inhabited, highlighting

[475] Diem, *The Pursuit of Salvation,* pp. 11–16.
[476] Magnani, 'Female House Ascetics', p. 213.

Egeria's use of sophisticated literary techniques which would have been apparent to many late antique and early medieval readers of her *Itinerarium*.

Egeria and her Sisters: Literate Christian Women in a World of Christian Texts

So far I have considered the nature of Egeria's community and her membership of it based upon clues provided in the *Itinerarium* and broader contextual information about late antique female monasticism. From here I want to demonstrate how Egeria relates to her correspondents and the esteem she holds them in, the role of this group of women in the production and transmission of texts, and also Egeria as a reader and writer of Latin.

It is clear from even the most cursory reading of the *Itinerarium* that Egeria deeply cared for the women she wrote to, whom she calls her sisters. There are multiple forms of address that Egeria employs throughout the *Itinerarium* to continually remind her readers that she writes for their benefit, in an effort born from love and reverence. Egeria calls them *'dominae venerabiles sorores'* ('honoured lady sisters'), *'domine venerabiles'* ('honoured ladies'), *'dominae sorores'* ('lady sisters'), *'dominae'* ('ladies'), *'dominae animae meae'* ('ladies, my souls'), *'dominae, lumen meum'* ('ladies, my light'), and the more indirect *'affectio vestra'* ('your affection').[477] In some ways these women are active participants in Egeria's narrative – Egeria expects them to directly respond to the information she presents by referring to scriptural texts, which in turn shapes the narrative itself. One particularly salient example of this occurs following Egeria's description of Sinai and the surrounding valley. Egeria admits that there is simply too much information to write down, and encourages her sisters to read her account alongside Exodus and Numbers, which she calls the 'holy books of Moses':

> *Ac sic ergo singula, quecumque scripta sunt in libris sanctis Moysi facta fuisse in eo loco, id est in ea valle, quam dixi subiacere monti Dei, id est sancto Syna, ostensa sunt nobis. Quae quidem omnia singulatim scribere satis fuit, quia nec retinere poterant tanta; sed cum leget affectio vestra libros sanctos Moysi, omnia diligentius pervidet, quae ibi facta sunt.*[478]
>
> And therefore each thing that is written in the holy books of Moses as having been done in that place, that is in that valley which (as I said) lay beneath the mountain of God, that is holy Sinai, was shown to us. It has been sufficient to write all these things one by one because so many could not be retained; but when your affection reads the holy books of Moses, you will perceive more carefully all that was done there.

Egeria has an intense awareness of her sisters as a literate, literary audience, who can supplement (and indeed fact-check) the information presented in the *Itinerarium*. Egeria is also aware of her responsibility as an author to give an accurate account of what she saw. Whilst in

[477] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 3.8, 20.5; 12.7; 46.1, 4; 19.19; 23.10 (twice); 5.8, 7.3, 17.2, 20.13, 23.10 (twice), 24.1.
[478] *Ibid*., 5.8.

Segor Egeria was disappointed not to see the pillar of salt which Lot's wife had transformed into. The pillar, she tells her sisters, had long since disappeared below sea level, and she did not want to deceive ('*fallere'*) them by insinuating she had seen it.[479] Egeria knew that these women would be seeing the biblical sites both through the Bible itself and her own narrative, and takes her task seriously. For example, in a description of Mount Sinai, Egeria writes that she specifically wants her sisters to know ('*vos volo scire'*) about the view from the summit.[480] Egeria peppers her account with these shout-outs to her readers to draw their attention to certain aspects of her descriptions, and the result is an engaging authorial style. Interestingly, part of her account of Carrhae, Egeria reassures her sisters that although the monks there told many stories, these were only about other revered monks (perhaps an oral hagiographical tradition) or derived directly from scripture.[481] It is unclear whether the sisters would disapprove of Egeria receiving different kinds of stories from the monks, or whether Egeria is explaining why she cannot write everything down. Egeria did not want to replicate scripture, but rather sought to direct her readers to it. Similarly, Egeria wanted her readers to have a full narrative, but not an intimidatingly exhaustive one – she was conscious of the material she included.

Egeria deliberately crafted her narrative for a specific audience, and within the *Itinerarium* there is a short passage where Egeria reflects upon her authorial process. Here, around halfway through the extant text, Egeria pauses to explain that she had returned to Constantinople to give thanks to God in the city's many churches, grateful for having seen so many places she desired to.[482] She then explains that she has decided to journey to Asia Minor and continue her travels from there, rather than returning to them at home.

> *De quo loco, domnae, lumen meum, cum haec ad vestram affectionem darem, iam propositi erat in nomine Christi Dei nostri ad Asiam accedendi, id est Efesum, propter martyrium sancti et beati apostoli lohannis gratia orationis. Si autem et post hoc in corpo fuero, si qua preterea loca cognoscere potuero, aut ipsa presens, si Deus fuerit prestare dignatus, vestrae affectioni referam aut certe, si aliud animo sederit, scriptis nuntiabo. Vos tantum, dominae, lumen meum, memores mei esse dignamini, sive in corpore, sive iam extra corpusa fuero.*[483]
>
> From this place, ladies, my light, whilst I present this to your affection, I have already decided in the name of Christ our God to go to Asia, that is to Ephesus, for the purpose of prayer at the martyrium of the holy and blessed apostle John. And if after this I am still in the body, if I am able to discover other places afterwards, if God will deign to grant it, I will either relate them to your affection in person, or certainly, if something else shall be settled in my mind, tell you in writing. You, ladies, my light, see fit to remember me, whether I will be in the body, or out of the body.

[479] *Ibid*., 12.8.
[480] *Ibid*., 3.8.
[481] *Ibid*., 20.13.
[482] *Ibid*., 23.8–9.
[483] *Ibid*., 23.10.

The phrase *'De quo loco … ad vestram affectionem darem'* indicates that Egeria wrote up the first section of her travelogue in its entirety in Constantinople, rather than synchronously keeping a diary-style account. From here, the account abruptly turns to the liturgy in Jerusalem, without a description of travelling there from Constantinople. It seems most likely that Egeria sent the first section of the *Itinerarium* as a long letter to her sisters. After this (presumably whilst still in Jerusalem) she composed her account of the Jerusalem liturgy. The lack of continuity between these sections suggests that the two parts of the narrative were intended as separate texts, perhaps even circulating as separate manuscripts, and they were brought together by a later compiler, maybe Egeria herself. Technically it is therefore more accurate to refer to Egeria as the author of two texts rather than the one text circulating as the *Itinerarium*. Two of the loving forms of address Egeria uses, 'ladies, my light' and 'your affection', are found within this short passage, and they are both used twice. This is the highest frequency and concentration of personal addresses anywhere in the *Itinerarium*. Perhaps Egeria was worried that she might offend or upset her sisters by staying away longer than intended and therefore, when talking about her upcoming travels, wanted to soften the blow as much as possible. Egeria's intended audience was comprised of highly literate women, but Egeria was attentive to their emotions as well as their intellects. E. D. Hunt noted that, despite the clear fondness Egeria had for her sisters she never expressed a desire to return home, instead seeming endlessly enthused by her travelling. Hunt posits that it is unlikely that Egeria was reunited with her sisters at all.[484]

Egeria and her companions read a relevant passage, which was predominantly scriptural, at every site they visited. This was not necessarily standard practice for those embarking upon Christian travel. Early in the *Itinerarium* Egeria states that the reading is given because it is what she herself wants: *'id enim nobis vel maxime ego desideraveram semper, ut ubicumque venissemus, semper ipse locus de libro legeretur'* ('for I had always greatly desired for us that, wherever we came, [details about] the place itself should always be read from the book').[485] Without Egeria's urging, these readings may have ceased or not taken place at all. Further on in the narrative, she described the ritual that she and her fellow travellers performed when visiting a sacred site:

> *Id enim nobis semper consuetudinis erat ut, ubicumque ad loca desiderata accedere volebamus, primum ibi fieret oratio, deinde legeretur lectio ipsa de codice, diceretur etiam psalmus unus pertinens ad rem et iterato fieret ibi oratio.*[486]
>
> It was always our habit that, whenever we wanted to approach our desired place, prayer took place there first, then the reading was read from the book itself, and also one psalm pertaining to the topic was said, and a prayer took place there again.

[484] Hunt, 'The Itinerary of Egeria', p. 36.
[485] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 4.3.
[486] *Ibid*., 10.7; the description of this practice is restated in 15.4.

The formula established – initial prayer, reading, psalm, final prayer – was designed to ensure that the travellers experienced their surroundings in accordance with the Bible. This was the lens through which their experiences were filtered. As a result, Egeria's narrative does not record the alienation or confusion that one might expect a person so far home to be feeling, but rather she sees what she expects to.[487] The first phrase of the fragmentary Codex Aretinus 405, *'ostendebantur iuxta scripturas'* ('we were shown according to the scriptures') neatly summarises the experience of Egeria and her companions.[488] The Bible is effectively their guidebook. Egeria indicates what she read (or what was read) in certain places: the Book of Kings in Horeb, Exodus on Sinai, Deuteronomy after crossing the river Jordan, the Book of Judges on its banks.[489] Scott Fitzgerald Johnson has called this the 'aesthetic of the archive': Egeria's narrative is about collecting places, people, experiences – and texts.[490] Her own writing is interwoven with the writings of others, and guided by the scriptural knowledge she shares with her readers, who appreciated her layered collection of texts.

The above passage on the practice of reading at each sacred site brings with it some insight into the materiality of the rich textual culture Egeria and her travelling companions participated in. Egeria indicates that there is a Bible, which she calls 'the book' ('*codex'*). This could be Egeria's personal copy, or one that is used by the whole group. This was unlikely to be a single complete Bible, which were a rarity even into the middle ages, but may rather have been a group of biblical codices which were used and stored together. However, Egeria only discusses her book using the ablative singular, '*codice'*, which suggests it was indeed a singular volume. Did Egeria know which books of the Bible she wanted to consult on her journey and therefore take only these with her from home, binding them together to form her own bespoke travel Bible? Or are these loose quires, perhaps housed together in one travelling case and therefore referred to as a singular book? Either way, we should not think of the Bible that Egeria brought on her journey as complete or even as stable. Egeria was travelling during a period where the biblical canon was still undergoing change and ratification, and the distinctions between canon and apocrypha were often vague for the majority of practising Christians.[491]

The broader context of the formation of the biblical canon can be observed in the other texts that Egeria consulted during her travels and carried with her – and perhaps even bound together in her biblical codex. Egeria visits the shrine of Thecla in Seleucia and there 'all the Acts of Holy Thecla were read' ('*lecto omni actu sanctae Teclae'*).[492] This reading was likely taken from the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, a text which originated in the second century and had a western readership by the third century. Egeria could have brought this text with her from her

[487] See also the discussion of Egeria's lack of curiosity about the places she travelled to in Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*, pp. 18–22.
[488] This is also noted by Maraval, *Égérie*, p. 122, n. 2.
[489] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 4.3; 3.6; 10.7; 16.1.
[490] Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *Literary Territories: Cartographical Thinking in Late Antiquity* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 20.
[491] On the formation of the biblical canon in this period see G. W. Anderson, 'Canonical and Non-Canonical', in Peter R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible: From Beginnings to Jerome*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 113–59.
[492] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 23.5.

home, or picked up a copy on her travels in anticipation of visiting the site.[493] Similarly, at the shrine of the apostle Thomas in Edessa, there is a reading of 'things from holy Thomas himself' ('*aliquanta ipsius sancti Thomae'*).[494] The Latin is ambiguous, and could point to a text either on the subject of Thomas or that was written by Thomas. If the latter, this could be the first-person 'Hymn of the Pearl', which Thomas was thought to have sung whilst in prison, or the *Gospel of Thomas*; if the former, the *Acts of Thomas* seems most likely.[495] Egeria's presentation of this reading differs slightly from how she discussed other readings at sacred sites: elsewhere she customarily used the passive 'having been read' ('*lecto'*) to highlight the reading of the relevant passage, but at the shrine of Thomas she uses 'we read' ('*legimus'*).[496] Maraval has suggested that Egeria's use of '*legimus'* could denote a private reading of the text, as opposed to the more public and liturgical readings that occurred at other sacred sites.[497] However, the active verb '*legimus'* could also be interpreted as Egeria giving the reading herself, which shifts the practice of reading from something Egeria insists upon to something she leads. This also allows the alternative interpretation of the passive *'lecto'* – perhaps Egeria is always reading the texts herself, and using the passive to disguise this. As a text that encourages reader participation and continually points to scripture, the *Itinerarium* itself has a clear pastoral aim – Egeria wants to instruct her sisters on the places she visits. If Egeria herself was reading the relevant passages and leading the rituals at sacred sites, the *Itinerarium* becomes evidence of her spiritually guiding both her sisters and her travelling companions.

Whilst it is unclear whether Egeria brought the texts relating to Thecla and Thomas with her or bought them whilst travelling, there is one collection of texts which Egeria certainly acquired during her journey: the apocryphal exchange of letters between Christ and King Abgar. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius summarises the legend: Abgar, who was suffering from an illness, asked Jesus in a letter to travel to his city of Edessa and heal him; in return, Abgar writes, Jesus will receive protection from the Jews and be named co-ruler of Edessa. Jesus replies that he cannot make the journey, but will instead send one of his disciples.[498] The *Itinerarium* also provides a short summary of the letters' contents, and relates some of the deeds of Abgar whilst describing visiting his grave and palace whilst in Edessa.[499] As discussed above it is the bishop of Edessa, Egeria's tour guide in the city, who gives her copies of the letters between Christ and Abgar.

> *Et licet in patria exemplaria ipsarum haberem, tamen gratius mihi visum est, ut et ibi eas de ipso acciperem, ne quid forsitan minus ad nos in patria pervenisset; nam vere*

[493] See the discussion in Johnson, *Literary Territories*, pp. 89–91.
[494] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 19.2.
[495] On the various texts in the Thomas tradition and Egeria's potential use of them see Johnson, *Literary Territories*, pp. 86–8.
[496] For examples Egeria's use of the participle '*lectus'* see *Itinerarium*, 3.6; 4.7; 10.7; 15.4.
[497] Maraval, *Égérie*, p. 203, n. 6.
[498] For a discussion of the significance of the letters and the associated legend as expressed by Eusebius, see James Corke-Webster, 'A Man for the Times: Jesus and the Abgar Correspondence in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History*', *Harvard Theological Review* 110 (2017), pp. 563–87.
[499] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 17.1; 19.6–9, 15, 18.

> *amplius est, quod hic accepi. Unde si Deus noster lesus iusserit et venero in patria, legitis vos, dominae animae meae.*[500]
>
> And although I had copies in my homeland, it however appeared happier to me that I should receive them from him also, because maybe something lesser had reached us in our homeland; what I have received here is truly fuller. If Jesus our God commands it and I come home from here, you will read them, ladies, my souls.

I previously drew attention to this passage because it indicates the presence of a shared library that Egeria's sisters had access to, perhaps created or sponsored by Egeria herself. Certainly Egeria wants to share the text with her correspondents, and here shows an awareness of different versions in circulation, noting that the one that she received from the bishop of Edessa is 'fuller' ('*amplius'*). That Egeria was able to notice the difference between the version she knew and the one she received in Edessa, despite the fact that her own copy of the correspondence remained in her homeland ('*in patria'*), demonstrates that she was a close and careful reader who had an intimate knowledge of this text. Perhaps Egeria had read it immediately before embarking upon her travels. Even so, the visit to Edessa took place in 384, three years into Egeria's journey. This passage indicates that Egeria and her community were discerning collectors of texts, and desired the most faithful versions possible. The Abgar correspondence accounts for only one text in the shared library of Egeria and her sisters, but we should consider these women and those like them as important actors in the transmission (and perhaps even production) of Christian literature in the later fourth-century west.

Egeria's ritual of reading a relevant passage at sacred sites and her enthusiasm for Christian texts falling outside the biblical canon demonstrate that she was a committed and capable reader. Amid the continuing debates about the contents of the *Itinerarium*, this is something that all commentators can agree upon. Opinions diverge, however, when considering Egeria as a writer of Latin. Egeria's language is clear and simple, is therefore variously interpreted as refreshingly direct and intimate, or inferior and juvenile. The *Itinerarium* is certainly repetitive. As well as the repeated use of the participle *'lecta sunt'* highlighted above, Egeria employs other words, phrases, and constructions time and again.[501] For E. D. Hunt, Egeria's restating of her practice of reading relevant passages at sacred sites gave the narrative 'devotional electricity', adding to the quality of the finished product rather than detracting from it.[502] For Leo Spitzer, Egeria's repetition makes her precise, even 'legalistic', and is born from a desire to make her account as accurate as possible, intentionally slowing down the narrative so her readers can 'rest in awe' at the holy places as she does.[503] This view is shared by Sára Horváthy, who highlights Egeria's deliberate shift in style between the descriptions of her travels and the

[500] *Ibid*., 19.19.
[501] For example the high frequency use of the conjunction '*nam'*, which appears four times in *Itinerarium* 7.4 alone, and the pronoun '*ipse'*, which is repeatedly employed throughout the narrative, especially in *Itinerarium* 19.15–17. These repetitions are discussed in Leo Spitzer, 'The Epic Style of the Pilgrim Aetheria', *Comparative Literature* 1 (1949), pp. 225–58.
[502] Hunt, 'The Itinerary of Egeria', p. 42.
[503] Spitzer, 'The Epic Style of the Pilgrim Aetheria', p. 233.

later account of the Jerusalem liturgy.[504] For Horváthy, Egeria's presentation of the precise chronological order of liturgical events, the removal of first person verbs (singular or plural), and her silence on her own emotional responses are an intentional imitation of the fixed structure of the liturgy. Egeria's style is intentionally direct because she wants to clearly impart important information. John Wilkinson, a translator of the *Itinerarium*, admired her 'rich vocabulary, and her eye for the pointed word and phrase' – though did concede that 'by classical standards her writing is deplorable.'[505] Not everyone is as generous, however. Responding to Egeria's writing style, Mary B. Campbell provided the following reflection which it is worth including here in full:

> … her work is not an attempt at art, it is a letter to friends or colleagues back home. It is unlikely then that she was making any stabs at bold or problematic modes of perception, and she is clearly a woman of average intelligence.[506]

Here, Campbell argues that the epistolary form of the *Itinerarium* limits the sophistication of its contents and curbs any artistic or literary impulses its author may have harboured. (As an aside, it is hard to imagine a letter of Jerome or Augustine receiving this kind of treatment.) For Campbell, the *Itinerarium* is a functional document of communication, but her framing of this argument discredits Egeria as an author and her sisters as discerning readers.

Some of the commentary surrounding Egeria's writing style has an overtly sexist edge, which has parallels with the treatment of other contemporary authors (especially Proba, as we shall see in Chapter Five). The philologist Benvenuto Terracini argued that Egeria's use of reflexive verbs of movement demonstrated her tiredness on her gruelling journey, which occurred as a natural consequence of her feminine fragility.[507] Terracini provides the following example taken from Egeria's discussion of the Jerusalem liturgy: 'The bishop withdraws and everyone goes to their lodgings in order to recover' ('*Recipit se episcopus et vadent se unusquisque ad ospitium suum ut se resumant'*).[508] The reflexives '*recipit se'*, '*vadent se'*, and '*se resumant'* are, for Terracini, proof of Egeria's weariness. There are two obvious issues with his interpretation of this passage. Firstly, Egeria is not actively travelling at this point in the narrative, but is in Jerusalem. Secondly, Egeria is not speaking about herself, but rather a general practice of when the bishops and worshippers retire. The leap between Egeria's use of reflexive verbs and their employment as signs of fatigue is vast. That Egeria was especially fatigued because she was a woman is even further removed from the evidence presented in the *Itinerarium*. Egeria was constantly on the move, seeking out mountains to scale and extending her journey wherever she could. Rather than being exhausted, she seems indefatigable. This was picked up by Valerius, who especially praised her bodily strength – albeit in spite of her

[504] Sára Horvàthy, 'Thémes et variations. Réflexions stylistiques sur l'Itinéraire d'Égerie', *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientarum Hungaricae* 59 (2019), pp. 611–21.
[505] Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, p. 5.
[506] Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, pp. 22–3.
[507] Discussed in Spitzer, 'The Epic Style of the Pilgrim Aetheria', pp. 225–6, n. 1.
[508] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 25.7. Another example of the reflexive '*recipit se'* is found in *Itinerarium* 24.12.

sex.[509] Terracini's misinterpretation surely reveals more about his attitudes towards women than it does Egeria's text.

There are two aspects of Egeria's literary technique that I particularly wish to highlight here: her repeated use of the adverbs '*item'* and '*tunc'* (to mean 'and then') and the absence of personal names in her narrative. These, I argue, are features of her writing that are both distinctive and deliberate, and are employed with the experience of her readers in mind. The word '*item'* appears frequently in the *Itinerarium*, and this passage describing the surroundings of Mount Sinai is an illustrative example:

> *Item ostenderunt nobis locum ubi incensus est vitulus ipse, iubente sancto Moyse quem fecerat eis Aaron. Item ostenderunt torrentem illum, de quo potavit sanctus Moyses filios Israel, sicut scriptum est in Exodo … Item ostenderunt locum ubi filii Israhel habuerunt concupiscentiam escarum.*[510]
>
> Then they showed us the place where the bull calf which Aaron had created for them was burned, upon the command of holy Moses. Then they showed us that stream, from which (just as it is written in Exodus) the holy Moses made the children of Israel drink … Then they showed us the place where the children of Israel had a desire for food.

In each case '*item'* is immediately followed by '*ostenderunt'*, producing the image of Egeria and her companions continuously being shown new sights and receiving new information. The effect is constant, cumulative revelation. Similarly, in her description of the spring Aenon, Egeria repeatedly starts sentences with *'tunc'* as she receives more information about the site from a helpful local priest.[511] In contrast to Spitzer's interpretation of Egeria's repetitious language slowing down the narrative and encouraging her readers to take moments of devotional pause, seems more that repeated use of '*item'* and '*tunc'* create an effect of movement. Egeria is always moving onto the next thing, and the next, receiving more information as she goes. Egeria is a traveller producing travel-writing, and her repetition of '*item'* and '*tunc'* makes her narrative seem like it is always in motion. Egeria's writing is literally travelling with her. What Campbell criticised as 'pleonastic repetitiveness' that gave her account 'something of the quality of a rosary being recited', Egeria's use of repetition is a deliberate literary strategy so that her sisters can, as much as possible, experience the journey with her.[512]

There is an absence of personal names in the *Itinerarium*. The notable exception is the deaconess Marthana, leader of a community of female virgins in Seleucia, whom I discussed

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[509] *'feminae fragilitas'*, Valerius, *Ep. Egerie*, 1.1. On Egeria's spiritual understanding of mountains see Jason König, *The Folds of Olympus: Mountains in Ancient Greek and Roman Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2022), pp. 69–92.
[510] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 5.6–7. For a comparable effect produced with both '*itaque'* and '*tunc'*, see *Itinerarium* 12.3–4.
[511] *Ibid*., 15.1–4.
[512] Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World,* p. 26.

above.[513] Egeria describes her joy at seeing Marthana, but immediately after this states that she must return to her subject ('*Sed ut redeam ad rem'*), recognising that the naming and discussion of her friend was a digression from her established narrative mode.[514] In the rest of the narrative Egeria categorises the groups and individuals she meets along her journey rather than naming them, for example the 'holy monks' ('*sancti monachi'*) from the church near Mount Nebo, and the 'bishop of that place' ('*episcopus loci ipsius'*) in Segor.[515] This literary device is highly practical; Egeria met many people on her travels, and the *Itinerarium* could easily end up being a list of names if she identified them all. Interestingly, Egeria repeatedly uses reported speech rather than summarising what these anonymous acquaintances said to her, putting quotations directly into the text. This practice of quoting gives Egeria's readers the opportunity to immerse themselves in the sounds, as well as the sights, of her travels.[516]

The absence of personal names also ensures that the (possibly wandering) attention of the reader remains on the sites that Egeria visited and their corresponding scriptural passages, rather than the people. This is an indication that, for Egeria, the sites she visited were the most significant part of her journey. A similar technique of limiting the use of personal names is employed by Augustine in his *Confessions*. Augustine does not name his beloved concubine, nor the young heiress he left his lover in order to marry. Those individuals that Augustine does name in the narrative, then – such as his son Adeodatus, his mother Monnica – occupy positions of special significance, though he uses their names very sparingly indeed.[517] Augustine's technique of leaving seemingly important figures unnamed allows readers to immerse themselves in the *Confessions* more easily, and we should credit Egeria with the successful employment of this literary strategy. Considering Egeria deliberately leaving personal names out of her narrative and the effect produced by the repetition of '*tunc'* and '*item'* it is clear that Egeria was deliberately and consciously producing a literary product for a literary and literate audience – rather than, to paraphrase Campbell, just writing home.

Egeria the Author

I will now draw together my findings on Egeria and present some conclusions. Firstly, it is evident that Egeria's *Itinerarium* was more widely-read than was once thought. The limited and fragmentary extant manuscripts bearing the *Itinerarium* have long since prevented a thorough examination of the transmission of Egeria's text. Because there are relatively few extant manuscripts, none of which contain the complete text of the *Itinerarium*, this has created

[513] Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 23.3.
[514] *Ibid*., 23.4.
[515] *Ibid*., 11.1; 12.7.
[516] On Egeria's use of quotations and her creation of a soundscape, see Blake Leyerle, 'The Voices of Others in Egeria's Pilgrim Narrative', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 29 (2021), pp. 553–578.
[517] For the wider context of Augustine's refusal to name certain people and its literary effect, see Matthew G. Condon, 'The Unnamed and the Defaced: The Limits of Rhetoric in Augustine's *Confessiones*', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2001), pp. 43–63.
On Augustine's relationship with his mother, see Kate Cooper, 'Augustine and Monnica', in Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith (eds.)*, Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe, 400–1400: Essays Presented to Henrietta Leyser* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 7–20.

a false impression of an obscure and little-read text. This impression is swiftly rectified by taking note of indirect manuscript witnesses, which reveal that the *Itinerarium* was an influential text with a wide readership. This is supported by investigating the transmission of related texts, namely the letter of Valerius on Egeria and the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*. These texts (and the multiple extant manuscripts containing them) demonstrate a respect for Egeria as a person and a receptive audience for her work.

Secondly, this chapter has illustrated that the transmission and reception of Egeria's *Itinerarium*, both medieval and modern, is led by perceptions of Egeria herself. These perceptions need to be unpacked and examined. Multiple labels are attached to Egeria – nun, pilgrim, abbess, aristocrat, Gallic, Spanish, reviled-by-Jerome – which inevitably shape the understanding of her writing. I have particularly resisted labelling Egeria as a nun or a pilgrim. Not only are these labels anachronistic in the context of the later fourth century, but they obscure important aspects of Egeria's narrative.

Finally, by reading the *Itinerarium* and paying close attention to the style, structure, and lexical decisions, it becomes clear that Egeria is deliberately crafting her narrative. Egeria's agency as an author has been overshadowed by scholarship that is excessively negative about her literary abilities – this, in turn, has shaped how her text is read. The instructions to look up scriptural references and the sense of perpetual motion created by word choice invites Egeria's readers to travel along with her. Egeria's intended audience, her 'sisters', are credited with a deep knowledge of the Bible and other holy texts – this is something they share with Egeria. By taking seriously the commitment of Egeria and her sisters to the absorption and transmission of Christian writings, the *Itinerarium* provides some insights into the agency of later fourth century women in the west as producers of Latin literary culture. It is time that we remove distracting labels and finally recognise Egeria as an author.

Chapter Five: Commanding Virgil for Christ: The Contested Legacy of Proba's *Cento*

The final chapter of this thesis concerns a woman who was consistently recognised as an author. In Rome, at some point in the fourth century, an educated Christian woman named Proba wrote a cento – a patchwork poem – comprised of lines and half-lines of Virgil: the *Cento Virgilianus de laudibus Christi*.[518] As the title suggests, Proba spurned the themes of classical epic that Virgil provided and instead used her *Cento* to retell the story of Creation, the Fall, and some prominent events in the Gospels that detail the life of Christ. The effect is startling. Under Proba's command, the pagan Virgil becomes a mouthpiece for the foundations of Christian thought. A cento must appropriate and reuse the words and metre of a truly canonical author so that the newly produced poem is instantly recognisable as a cento; if it is a successful attempt at the form, the original material will be brought together in surprising ways, and its initial context would inform its place in the cento. Such a work is without a true modern equivalent. It seems that authors of the last century have been happy to imitate, to satirize, and even to plagiarise, but not to centonise. An approximate parallel example might be the poet and classicist Anne Carson writing blank verse using fragments of Shakespeare, but even that does not get close to the place of Virgil within the imagination and education of the upper echelons of Christian, and especially Roman, society. The centuries between Virgil and Proba and their differing religious beliefs disguise important convergences; Proba, like many others of her upbringing and social status, knew Virgil inside out. His work was an inescapable part of the cultural lexicon of the elite, and provided a starting point for those wanting to write Latin verse. By picking apart and restitching the works of Virgil to make something new, Proba was highlighting the dominance of non-Christian poetry in literary culture, and choosing to work within it in order to further her message. She was successful: Proba's *Cento* was the earliest in a series of Latin centos that used Virgil (and later, Greek centos that used Homer) to praise Christ.[519] Of the four extant Christian centos from late antiquity, Proba's *Cento* was by far the most popular. The fourth century, when Proba wrote the *Cento*, was also an important starting point for the emergence of Christian poetry as a genre on its own terms – that is, without the use of a previously established poet like Virgil.[520]

Proba's *Cento* received immediate praise and some criticism, perhaps even censorship. Despite its detractors, the *Cento* was repeatedly copied and evidently had a wide readership; when the people for whom Proba initially wrote were lost to the past, new readers found considerable value in her work. Proba was (and is) remembered as an author, which was unusual for a late

[518] The most recent comprehensive work on the *Cento* and its reception is Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*. At several points Cullhed is in dialogue with an earlier monograph on the *Cento*: Clark and F. Hatch, *The Golden Bough, the Oaken Cross.* A still earlier contribution on Proba's *Cento* and its place within late antique literary culture is Filippo Ermini, *Il centone di Proba e la poesia centonaria latina: Studi* (Rome: Ermanno Loescher & Co., 1909).
[519] On the cento genre see McGill, *Virgil Recomposed,* and Sandnes, *The Gospel "According to Homer and Virgil".*
[520] Karla Pollmann has highlighted how early Christian poetry used form and language associated with the classics, and therefore endowed the emerging genre with a certain venerability; this made it more appealing to social elites. See *The Baptized Muse.*

antique woman who wrote in Latin. She was commemorated for her *Cento* among the male authors listed in Isidore of Seville's *De viris illustribus*; indeed, she was the only woman included. This marked a considerable break from previous iterations of *De viris illustribus*. The first version compiled by Jerome, and the later continuations by Gennadius and pseudo-Gennadius, were all-male lists until Isidore included Proba. Proba's commemoration by Isidore should be understood not only as an acknowledgement of her literary capabilities, but also a result of the *Cento*'s continued cultural relevance, intellectual resonance, and wide readership. The recognition of Proba's popularity and skill as a poet prompted the humanist Conrad Celtis to place her alongside Sappho and Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim as an example of a highly educated woman writing Latin verse.[521]

> *Felix si Latiam didicisset femina linguam,*
> *Iam respondissent verba Latina meis.*
> *Non Proba, non Sappho nec Hrosvita blandius illa*
> *Scripsisset lyricis carmina docta modis.*[522]
>
> If the lucky woman had learned Latin,
> Latin words would answer mine now.
> Neither Proba, nor Sappho, nor Hrotsvitha
> Would have written sweeter learned poems in the lyric manner.

A generous reader might interpret Celtis's inclusion of Sappho as an example of female poetic genius, despite the fact she belonged to the Greek tradition. Others may doubt whether Celtis had read any Sappho at all. Incidentally, Celtis is writing that his lover Ursula has sent him some poems, but he is disappointed that they are not in Latin. For Celtis at least, an important purpose of a woman's literary education was to please men. This theme – women writing poetry to be useful and pleasing to others – also runs through the later reception of Proba's *Cento*.

In recent historiography the *Cento* is overwhelmingly identified as a teaching text that was used to help school children learn Latin, Virgil, and important biblical events in one fell swoop. This is the explanation given for the text's popularity, evidenced by its many manuscript witnesses from the early medieval period onwards.[523] But this becomes something of a self-fulfilling prophecy: the *Cento* was used in schools, therefore it was widely copied, or the *Cento* was widely copied, and therefore it must have been used as a school text. The focus on the *Cento*'s educational usage has overshadowed its other purposes and readers, and has at times credited Proba with a maternal care for her future young readers which speaks more to the gender norms of the twentieth century than the fourth. This diminishes the sophistication of the *Cento* itself

[521] For a discussion on Celtis and learned women, see David Price, 'Desiring the Barbarian: Latin, German, and Women in the Poetry of Conrad Celtis', *The German Quarterly* 65.2 (1992), p. 159–67.
[522] Conrad Celtis, *Quattuor libri amorum secundum quattuor latera germaniae*, 3.9.13–6.
[523] For a survey of the extant manuscripts bearing Proba's *Cento*, see Carlo M. Lucarini, 'La tradizione manoscritta del Centone di Proba', *Hermes* 142.3 (2014), pp. 349–70. Lucarini lists 80 manuscripts, and Cullhed notes that there are 21 further manuscripts that Lucarini should have included; see *Proba the Prophet*, pp. 7–8, n. 21. Cullhed also highlights that a twelfth-century manuscript listed by Lucarini as extant (Chartres, Bibliothèque Municipale 97) was in fact burned in 1944.

and shifts focus from Proba's other readers. By studying the reception of the *Cento*, it becomes clear that some of these readers were women in monastic orders. It is worth asking why the *Cento* appealed to this group.

In this chapter I will explore the literary and cultural context within which Proba lived and wrote. I will track how the *Cento* was received and transmitted from its composition to its earliest extant manuscripts, and then turn to the *Cento* itself to consider what early female readers, especially those in monasteries, may have found appealing about it. The *Cento* is a patchwork of patchworks: immediately apparent is the conjoining of Virgilian verses, but an underappreciated element is Proba's version of the Gospel narratives, which both draws upon and diverges from the story of Jesus as presented in those four books. Much is made of Proba's use of Virgil, but considerably less attention is given to Proba's deliberate transformation of the Bible. Proba particularly highlights the agency of women, giving the figures of both Eve and Mary a significance beyond what they had in the original narratives. Reframing the Bible to prioritise the experiences of women evidently resonated with later communities of Christian women, which can be observed via the manuscript transmission of the *Cento* – this I will explore in due course. First, however, I will address the question of the *Cento*'s authorship.

Probas and Probabilities: Who Wrote the *Cento*?

There are two candidates for the authorship of the *Cento* who lived in fourth-century Rome, both confusingly named Proba: Faltonia Betitia Proba and her maternal granddaughter, Anicia Faltonia Proba. The orthodox attribution of the *Cento* (and the one I follow) is to Faltonia Betita Proba, but I will briefly outline the debate.

Faltonia Betitia Proba is an obscure figure, and is minimally attested beyond the attribution of the *Cento*. Her husband was Clodius Celsinus Adelphius, who was the urban prefect of Rome in 351, and her father was Petronius Probianus, who was consul in 322. She was the mother of Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius, who was consul in 379, and Faltonius Probus Alypius, who was the prefect of Rome in 391.[524] She was well-connected, then, to Roman politics, but also to the Petronii, an elite Roman family. Anicia Faltonia Proba, as a member of the Anicii family, had a considerably higher profile. Her father was likely Olybrius, the son of the elder Proba; she was mother to Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius and Anicius Probinus (consuls in 395), Anicius Probus (consul in 406), and a daughter, Anicia Proba.[525] Claudian wrote a panegyric to Olybrius and Probinus, and as their mother the younger Proba was also praised in this poem.[526] Fragments of this Proba's correspondence exist, although not in her own hand. After

[524] A. H. M. Jones, John R. Martindale, and John Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire: Volume I, A.D. 260–395* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 732. The entry for Clodius Celsinus Adelphius is at pp. 192–3.
[525] *Ibid*., pp. 732–3.
[526] Claudian, *Panegyricus dictus Olybrio et Probino*, 176–206. On the significance of the poem itself see Stephen Wheeler, 'More Roman than the Romans of Rome: Virgilian (Self)-Fashioning in Claudian's *Panegyric for the Consuls Olybrius and Probinus'*, in J. H. D. Scourfield (ed.), *Texts and Culture in Late Antiquity: Inheritance, Authority, and Change* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2007), pp. 97–134.

the death of her husband she received two letters from Augustine, a further letter jointly addressed to her and her daughter-in-law Anicia Iuliana, and a letter from John Chrysostom.[527] She fled Rome for Africa soon after the city was sacked in 410, and had died by 432.

The attribution of the *Cento* to the elder Proba dates to the 7th century and is derived from the works of Isidore of Seville. In both the *Etymologiae* and *De viris illustribus*, Isidore identified Proba as the wife of Adelphius.[528] There are two further medieval attributions of the *Cento* to Proba, wife of Adelphius. One is within the ninth century manuscript Pal. Lat. 1753, where the *incipit* of the *Cento* describes Proba as both the wife of Adelphius and the mother of the Anicii.[529] The other was found within a tenth century manuscript, now lost, which the French monk and antiquary Bernard de Mountfaucon saw in 1697 during his travels around Italy. Montfaucon recorded the manuscript's identification of Proba as wife of Adelphius, mother of Olybrius and Alypius, and as the author of both the *Cento* and another work about the war of Constantius and Magnentius.[530] Finally, the eleventh century manuscript Reg. lat. 1666 attributes the Cento to *'Flatonie Vetitie Probe clarissime femine'*.[531]

Writing in 1986 (and restating her argument in 1994) Danuta Shanzer argued that the anonymous *Carmen contra paganos* exhibited strong similarities to Proba's Cento. The *Carmen contra paganos* is dated to 384 and therefore, for Shanzer, the younger Proba is the only possible author.[532] Shanzer's case was supported by Timothy Barnes in 2006, who highlighted an inscription on a column in the church of St Anastatia in Rome which had been commissioned by Adelphius, husband of the elder Proba: *'Clodius Adelfius v(ir) c(larissimus) ex praefectis urbis uxori incomparabili et sibi fecit'*.[533] Barnes argued that the inscription suggested that the elder Proba had predeceased her husband, who likely died soon after his tenure as prefect had ended in the December of 351, and therefore the younger Proba was the author of the *Cento*. Roger Green summarised the arguments of Shanzer and Barnes in a 2008 article but did not find them sufficient evidence to overturn the evidence that already indicated the elder Proba had authored the Cento. The inscription did not necessarily indicate that the elder Proba had predeceased her husband, and there was no way of determining that Proba the author had drawn upon the *Carmen contra paganos*, rather than (as Green saw it) the other way

[527] Augustine, *Ep*. 130, 131, and 150; John Chrysostom, *Ep*. 169.
[528] Isidore of Seville, *De viris illustribus* 5 and *Etymologiae* 1.39.26.
[529] This manuscript will be discussed in more depth in the course of this chapter.
[530] *'Proba uxor Adelphi, mater Olibrii, & Aliepii (sic pro Alypii), cum Constantini (sic pro Constantii) bellum adversus Magnentium conscripsisset, conscripsit et hunc librum'*, Bernard de Montfaucon, *Diarum Italicum sive Monumentorum veterum, Bibliothecarum, Musaeorum etc. notitiae singulars in Itinerario Italico collectae* (Paris: Joannem Annison, 1702), p. 36.
[531] MS Reg. lat. 1666, f. 41r.
[532] Danuta Shanzer, 'The Anonymous *Carmen contra paganos* and the Date and Identity of the Centonist Proba', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 32 (1986), pp. 232–248; 'The Date and Identity of the Centonist Proba', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 27 (1994), pp. 75–96. See also John Matthews, 'The poetess Proba and fourth-century Rome: questions of interpretation', in M. Christol, S. Demougin, Y. Duval, C. Lepelley, and L. Pietri (eds.), *Institutions, société et vie politique dans l'Empire romain au IVe siècle ap. J.-C. Actes de la table ronde autour de l'oeuvre d'André Chastagnol* (Paris, 20–21 janvier 1989), *Collection de l'École française de Rome* 159 (Rome, 1992), pp. 277–304.
[533] *CIL* 6.1712. T. D. Barnes, 'An Urban Prefect and His Wife', *Classical Quarterly* 56 (2006), pp. 249–56; see also Matthews, 'The poetess Proba', pp. 299–304.

around.[534] These arguments were expanded by Alan Cameron in 2011, who went further by attributing the *Carmen contra paganos* to Damasus – this will be discussed in the course of this chapter.[535]

Proba provides tantalising clues to her identity in the *Cento*. This is certainly not an anonymous work, and she names herself in her introductory verses.[536] She reveals that she is married by exhorting her sweet husband, *'dulcis coniunx',* to continue living a Christian life with her.[537] She also confesses that she used to write about war, but she has given up recalling evils (*'meminisse malorum'*) in favour of composing poetry on the Christian story.[538] Partly as an effort to date the poem and to identify which Proba was its author, historians have taken her discussion of the cruelties of wars between kings *('regum crudelia bella'*) to refer to an actual civil war, specifically that between Magnentius and Emperor Constantius II that lasted from 350 to 353. The elder Proba especially would have had an interest in writing about such a war; her husband Adelphius became urban prefect under Magnentius and, according to Ammianus Marcellinus, was subsequently accused of treason when Constantius returned to power. This earlier poem on the war may have been Proba's effort to clear her husband's name. Returning to the lost tenth-century manuscript seen by Bernard de Montfaucon, the incipit to the *Cento* read that Proba had written about the war of Constantine against Magnentius *('cum Constantini imperatorus bellum adversus Magnentius conscripsisset'*).[539] The use of '*Constantini'* where '*Constantii'* would be expected is scribal error. In the same passage, the scribe also rendered the name of Proba's son Alypius as '*Aliepii'*. Following the interpretation of the inscription provided by Barnes, the elder Proba could not have written about the conflict between Constantius II and Magnentius because she died in or before 351, predeceasing her husband; Proba's reference to her previous poem in the *Cento* is therefore taken as evidence for the younger Proba's authorship. However, as Green has demonstrated, the language of the inscription itself is not precise enough to suggest this, nor are inscriptions so formulaic as to indicate without a doubt that the elder Proba died before her husband in 351.[540]

Here I would also note that, in the *Cento* itself, Proba does not specify that she has written about a historical event. Proba was perhaps referring to a mythological war, a conflict of her own invention, or even a war that had happened centuries previously. Proba's declaration that she would not write about the cruel wars of kings is a direct (and I think deliberate) contrast to Virgil's famous opening line of the *Aeneid*, *'arma virumque cano'* ('I sing of arms and the man').[541] With her line, Proba provides the antithesis to Virgil's statement of authorial purpose. Furthermore, the note in the manuscript that Montfaucon saw might have been an effort to identify the subject matter of Proba's lost poem rather than a reference to an extant work. There is no proof that either Proba wrote about Constantius and Magnentius, and conclusions about

[534] Roger Green, 'Which Proba wrote the Cento?', *Classical Quarterly* 58.1 (2008), pp. 264–76.
[535] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, pp. 327–37.
[536] Proba, *Cento*, 12.
[537] *Ibid*., 693.
[538] Ibid., 1–8.
[539] de Montfaucon, *Diarium Italicum*, p. 36.
[540] Green, 'Which Proba Wrote the *Cento*?', pp. 265–8.
[541] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.1.

the *Cento*'s author drawn from this idea rest upon unstable foundations. More broadly, the debate about which Proba wrote the *Cento* has had the effect of shifting attention from the text itself. The *Cento* has been generally disparaged by classicists and historians alike. Centos are called a 'despised technique of composition' and a 'frivolous genre', and Proba's *Cento* is 'grotesque' and in 'poor taste', even 'perverse'.[542] Because of this, both Proba's agency as a poet and her centuries of readers (especially those outside the confines of the schoolroom) are often overlooked. The above comments on the quality of the *Cento* came from within the debate on its authorship, and this is perhaps not a coincidence. Although I promote the elder Proba as the author of the *Cento*, I think the form and content *Cento* itself is more historically significant, and indeed more compelling, than the debate surrounding its authorship.

The Mother, the Teacher, and the Prophet

I have outlined the debate about Proba's identity above – I follow the attribution of the *Cento* to the elder Proba, placing the date of composition in the mid-fourth century. A related debate is why Proba chose to compose her poem in the first place. A better way of framing the question is this: what kind of person wrote the *Cento*? Proba clearly had the skill and the desire to write. Beyond this, however, determining her motivations often comes down to reconstructing her personality from the brief snippets of it Proba reveals in the *Cento* itself, and also considering the preoccupations that a woman of her social standing and family situation might have had in mid-fourth century Rome.

This investigation and its limits are captured by the two most recent monographs on Proba: Elizabeth A. Clark and Diane F. Hatch's *The Golden Bough and the Oaken Cross* (1981) and Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed's *Proba the Prophet* (2015). Clark and Hatch's work was the first significant intervention on Proba since Filippo Ermini's analysis of the *Cento* in 1909.[543] This earlier analysis was far more textual, highlighting Proba's specific uses of Virgil and later cross-references, whereas Clark and Hatch draw attention to Proba's perspective as an aristocratic woman who sought to preserve her own interests and those of her family, and foregrounded this in their analysis of Proba's Virgilian excerpting and the overall themes of her *Cento*.[544] Cullhed sets her work up in dialogue with – and to an extent against – Clark and Hatch. Cullhed disagrees with how Clark and Hatch represent Proba as an elite Roman *matrona*, taking exception to their identification of the *Cento* as children's literature. Cullhed argues that, by confining Proba to domestic concerns and viewing her primarily as a devoted wife and mother, Clark and Hatch do not fully appreciate her poetic skill, and nor do the later proponents of their interpretation.[545]

[542] Shanzer, 'The Anonymous *Carmen contra paganos'*, p. 232; Green, 'Proba's *Cento'*, p. 554; Shanzer, 'The Date and Identity of the Centonist Proba', p. 86; Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets,* p. 67.
[543] Ermini, *Il centone di Proba.*
[544] Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough, the Oaken Cross*, especially pp. 110–21.
[545] Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, pp. 50–4.

Cullhed's title, *Proba the Prophet*, refers to a line in the *Cento* itself which has proved difficult to interpret: *'arcana ut possim vatis Proba cuncta referre'*.[546] The use of '*vatis'* (poet or prophet) could here mean Proba and therefore the translation is 'in order that I, Proba, may disclose all mysteries of the poet'. In this interpretation the genitive '*vatis'* refers to Virgil. An alternative reading is that Proba herself is the prophet or poet who will 'disclose all mysteries'.[547] This interpretation was taken by the scribe of one early manuscript, which supplied '*vates'* in the nominative rather than '*vatis'*, firmly identifying Proba as the prophet-poet.[548] Clark and Hatch also follow the latter interpretation, translating the line as 'I, Proba, prophetess'.[549] Cullhed herself acknowledges the ambiguity of the line, but I mention its use in her title because I think it reflects her attitude to Proba, which at times borders upon reverence. Admirably, Cullhed wants to restore Proba's literary respectability. She rightly identifies that Proba often does not receive appropriate recognition as an author, and that this is unjust considering the wide reach of the *Cento*. But Cullhed interprets Clark and Hatch's identification of the *Cento* as a school text and the subsequent popularity of this view as a denigration of her capabilities as a poet, and the damning of the Cento as a text that is only useful for children learning Latin literature. Clark and Hatch note Proba's concern for her descendants and her hope that they will also know the Christian story. From this, they deduce that one of the functions of the *Cento* would have been to teach her own children. Cullhed sees this aspect of Clark and Hatch's commentary as limiting Proba's concerns to domestic ones and robbing her of literary ambitions, thereby confining Proba to the household. Cullhed extends her criticism to those following Clark and Hatch's interpretation, especially Michelle Salzman and Kate Cooper, whom she sees as perpetuating an unhelpful stereotype of women's behaviour.[550]

In this, I think Cullhed misunderstands how the household operated as a unit of power in late antiquity, and she therefore interprets Clark and Hatch's representation of Proba acting in her family's interests as disempowered – if anything it was the opposite. Although she did not belong to the wealthiest or most noble family in the city, Proba was still a member of the elite in fourth-century Rome. As an elite Roman *matrona*, Proba had considerable authority within her household which extended beyond her immediate family to all those under her roof, including enslaved people. Fourth-century Rome was a society organised around households, and the concepts of public and private life were very different. A woman like Proba could expect to be constantly seen, even in her own home, and therefore needed to set clear expectations and maintain control, sometimes through violence.[551] Rather than responsibility within the household being a limitation for elite women, it was instead an opportunity to exercise power. Clark and Hatch do not domesticate Proba (as in Cullhed's criticism) so much as accurately portray the society within which she wrote, and the values she held. Clark and

[546] Proba, *Cento*, 12.
[547] Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, p. 18.
[548] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Lat. 7701, f.129r.
[549] Clark and Hatch, Golden Bough, p. 15.
[550] Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 65–7; Michelle Renée Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire (*Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 163.
[551] On scrutiny in the late antique home see Kate Cooper, 'Closely Watched Households: Visibility, Exposure and Private Power in the Roman Domus', *Past & Present* 197 (2007), pp. 3–33.

Hatch show Proba assuming responsibility for her household's spiritual wellbeing, but also protecting her family's economic interests. In contrast to (perhaps in defiance of) the severe asceticism espoused by Jerome at the time, no one is giving away their possessions or sacrificing their status to follow Christ in Proba's version of the Bible. The source of the tension here is between the desires to generalise and to specify. Cullhed writes about an exceptional, special Proba, who wrote in an innovative way and defied contemporary expectations for women at the time. Clark and Hatch want to contextualise Proba, and to understand her as an important figure within the time in which she lived, and they do this by taking cues from the lives and interests of other elite women. I certainly would not go so far as Salzman, who called the *Cento* 'the typical woman's response to Christianity in the fourth century', but overall I think Clark and Hatch's approach has more merit.[552] All we can learn about Proba comes from her poem, and some minor scraps of detail relating to her family, and it is therefore more productive to place her within her social and historical context – but we should be careful not to breathe life into tired stereotypes whilst doing so.

However, Cullhed's problematisation of the consensus that the *Cento* was used as a school text (which Clark and Hatch subscribed to) has great merit. Cullhed has highlighted how nineteenth- and twentieth-century readers and scholars took aesthetic exception to Proba and denounced the *Cento* as a literary aberration; this, Cullhed argues, directly informed the conclusion that the intended readers of the *Cento* were surely children.[553] The oft-repeated phrase is that the *Cento* was used as teaching material 'within a generation' of its composition.[554] An early example of this view is found in Ermini, who suggested the *Cento* was promptly used as a school text.[555] Ermini's argument was based upon early analysis of the *Cento* and its manuscripts by Karl Schenkl, who theorised that the presence of the *Cento* in manuscripts used by schools in Carolingian monasteries meant that it was read primarily by children.[556] The problem is immediately apparent: there is a vast expanse of years (and readers) separating Proba's composition of the *Cento* in the mid-fourth century and its presence in the Carolingian manuscripts in the eighth and ninth centuries.

The use of the *Cento* in schools is sometimes connected with the Emperor Julian's decree that Christians should not teach the classics, issued on 17th June 362 and recorded in the *Theodosian Code*.[557] Julian's specific issue was that Christians were at odds with the content they taught, and therefore could not be sound of mind. Proba's *Cento*, therefore, would provide Christian teachers with material they agreed with whilst ensuring that Christian students still had access to a classical education (albeit a doctored one), which was essential for young men seeking to

[552] Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, p. 163.
[553] Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, pp. 50–4, 67.
[554] For example see John Curran, 'Virgilizing Christianity in Late Antique Rome', in Lucy Grig and Gavin Kelly (eds.), *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity* (Oxford and New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 327, and Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets,* p. 159.
[555] Filippo Ermini, *Storia della letteratura Latina medieval: Dalle origini alla fine de decolo VII* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1960), p. 197.
[556] Karl Schenkl, *Poetae Christiani Minores*, CSEL 16 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1888), pp. 515–7.
[557] *Codex Theodosianus*, 13.3.5.

climb up the imperial ranks.[558] The efficacy of the June edict and the extent to which it was an empire-wide directive at all remain topics of debate. It is certainly curious that much of the real outcry occurred in the fifth century, decades removed from the edict itself.[559] I do not discount the possibility that Proba's *Cento* was related to an atmosphere of hostility towards Christians teaching the classics, but there is no concrete evidence tying the composition of the *Cento* to this specific edict of Julian's – this would also require the writing of the *Cento* to have taken place between 17th June 362 (or, more likely, the receipt of the edict in Spoleto on 29th July) and Julian's death on 26th June 363. And this argument requires the acceptance of the hypothesis that the *Cento* was in fact used in schools. Part of the impulse to link Proba's work to children's education is undoubtedly a gendered one; Cullhed rightly criticises representations of Proba which lean heavily into gendered stereotypes of a loving wife and mother, driven to write poetry solely out of love for her children (even with the best will in the world, without a profound interest in Virgil and meter producing something like the *Cento* would be nigh impossible). It is these stereotypes, coupled with the conviction in the literary inferiority of the poem and bolstered by Julian's hostility to Christian teachers, which have allowed the narrative of the *Cento* as school text to be accepted for so long.

The debates around the identity of Proba and the usage of the poem demonstrate the extent to which gender shapes the historiographical discourse from every possible direction. This prompts the following questions: after the *Cento's* composition, did the fact that its author was female change the attitudes and reading behaviours of its readers in the four subsequent centuries? And do the responses of these readers match up at all with the images of Proba conjured by the historiography? To approach these questions, we must first establish the wider literary context within which Proba wrote, where her *Cento* was only one of many Christian poems on offer.

Contextualising Proba's *Cento*: Latin Christian Poetry in Late Antiquity

Proba's *Cento* was an important early contribution to the flourishing genre of Latin Christian poetry. Key poets and near-contemporaries of Proba are Paulinus of Nola and Prudentius, and later there is Venantius Fortunatus, who was active in Gaul in the later sixth and earlier seventh century.[560] Karla Pollmann has noted that Christian poems written in the fourth to sixth centuries sought to harness the 'cultural authority' of classical verse and imbue their own poetry with the same ancient literary dignity; this was a tactic to spread the Christian message among

[558] This view is held by Roger Green. See 'Proba's *Cento'*, pp. 551–63.
[559] For a nuanced take on Julian's edict see Neil McLynn, 'Julian and the Christian Professors', in Carol Harrison, Caroline Humfress, and Isabella Sandwell, *Being Christian in Late Antiquity: A Festschrift for Gillian Clark* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 120–36.
[560] Foundational for the study of late antique poetry is Michael Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); a recent response assessing the legacy of Roberts's work is Joshua Hartman and Helen Kaufmann (eds.), *A Late Antique Poetics? The Jeweled Style Revisited* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023). For an overview of the Latin literary tradition in late antiquity, see Ian Wood, 'Latin', in Scott McGill and Edward J. Watts (eds.), *A Companion to Late Antique Literature* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2018), pp. 27–46. On Prudentius see Anthony Dykes, *Reading Sin in the World: The 'Hamartigenia' of Prudentius and the Vocation of the Responsible Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

highly educated social elites.[561] This meant the use of the forms, images, and metre associated with classical verse, especially Virgil, and (in the case of Proba and others) the repackaging of Virgil's own words, whilst keeping the poem Christian in content.

Writing poems with Christian content but employing classical form and meter was not a tactic used by all Christian poets, however. A third-century example is the poet Commodian, a Christian convert whose *Carmen apologeticum* was composed in a quasi-hexameter; on account of the poem's meter and its criticism of the revered pagan authors, Pollmann terms it 'anti-classical'.[562] In the poem Commodian specifically criticises Virgil, Terence, and Cicero for confining the purpose of their works to the edification of the mind, rather than other aspects of life.[563] Commodian then questions where the good is in knowing about the vices and wars of kings: *'Et scire de vitiis regum, de bellis eorum?'*[564] This is reminiscent of Proba's declaration at the beginning of her *Cento* that she no longer desired to write about kings and their cruel wars *('regum crudelia bella'*) as she had done in a previous poem.[565] It is interesting that two poets who ostensibly had the same loathing of non-Christian subject matter would go about their work in such different ways. Whereas Commodian rejects classical content and meter, Proba takes Virgil and bends him to her will, forcing him to say what she wants. She is explicit on this point, too: *'Vergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi'* ('I will declare that Virgil sang about the pious feats of Christ').[566] The contrast between the different poetic tactics employed by Commodian and Proba have much to do with the century between them, which (as Pollmann has identified) saw a new way of writing Christian poetry come to the fore, but it also encapsulates the tensions that some Christians felt when engaging with non-Christian literature.

Proba's *Cento* is the earliest example of a Virgilian cento with an explicitly Christian message. Whilst Proba should be recognised as an innovator within the genre, she was certainly not the first to use the cento form. The earliest extant Virgilian cento is *Medea*, composed by Hosidius Geta in the late second or early third century, which retells the myth of Medea in the form of a tragedy using Virgilian hexameter. This is almost certainly the cento that Tertullian describes in *De praescriptione haereticorum* ('*denique Hosidius Geta Medeam tragoediam ex Virgilio plenissime exsuxit*').[567] This description is found within a passage that provides a short definition of the cento form, whilst also denigrating it as wicked and erroneous. A more useful (and less polemical) late antique definition of the form is found in the work of Ausonius, in the prose preface to his own Virgilian cento: the *Cento Nuptialis*. There are two prefaces, and the longer of the two takes the form of a letter addressed to the rhetor Axius Paulus. In this letter,

[561] Pollmann, *The Baptized Muse,* especially pp. 215–35.
[562] *Ibid*., p. 29.
[563] Commodian, *Carmen apologeticum*, 583–4.
[564] *Ibid*., 586.
[565] Proba, *Cento*, 1–8; quote at line 3.
[566] *Ibid*., 23.
[567] 'Besides, Hosidius Geta sucked his complete tragedy, *Medea*, out of Virgil', Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 39.3–4.

Ausonius defined the genre of the cento so that all readers, not just Paulus, could approach his work armed with the context to properly comprehend it.[568]

> *variis de locis sensibus que diversis quaedam carminis structura solidatur, in unum versum ut coeant aut caesi duo aut unus et sequens medius cum medio. nam duos iunctim locare ineptum est, et tres una serie merae nugae.*[569]
>
> It is a poem fastened together from various passages and diverse meanings, so that in one line two half-lines are brought together, or one half-line and the following with the other half. Because to place two [lines] together is silly, and three in a row is a sheer joke.

Here Ausonius sets out rules for the cento form. Borrowing half-lines and combining them to make a new whole line, whilst of course maintaining the meter, is ideal. Taking two or three full lines in succession is frowned upon because too much of the material is lifted directly from the original text, thereby defeating the point of the metrical game. Ausonius goes on to say that, whilst a good cento by a skilled poet scans well and is a pleasure to read, a bad cento is simply ridiculous ('*sed peritorum concinnatio miraculum est, imperitorum iunctura ridiculum*').[570] What Ausonius makes clear throughout his prefatory letter is that centos are not serious poems and should therefore not be read as such; his representation of the form is a playful one, which primarily tests the author's memory.[571] Ausonius explains that his composition was instigated by the Emperor Valentinian, who had composed his own poem and wanted to challenge Ausonius to a cento-writing competition.[572] Although the content of the *Cento Nuptialis* is not exactly light-hearted (it contains a scene of violent marital rape) its purpose is still to entertain both author and reader as part of a literary game.[573] Although his *Cento Nuptialis* was composed shortly after Proba's *Cento*, Ausonius does not appear to have read the latter work. If Ausonius had read Proba, her *Cento* does not guide his definition of the form. The seriousness of the message of Proba's *Cento* complicates, and even undermines, Ausonius's presentation of centos as poetic memory games. The purpose of Proba's *Cento* is first to instruct, and then to entertain.

Proba's *Cento* is the most well-known of the four Virgilian Christian centos produced in late antiquity.[574] The others, which date from between the fifth and sixth centuries, are as follows: *De Ecclesia,* an account of the life of Jesus, which is associated with an author named Mavortius; *De Verbi Incarnatione,* on the humanity of Jesus; and *Versus ad Gratiam Domini*

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[568] On the prose preface to the *Cento Nuptialis*, see McGill, *Virgil Recomposed,* pp. 2–7; for McGill's analysis of the *Cento Nuptialis* itself, see pp. 92–114.
[569] Ausonius, *Cento Nuptialis*, *praef*., 25–27.
[570] 'The composition of experts is a wonder, but the arrangement of the ignorant is ridiculous', *ibid*., *praef*., 41.
[571] Ausonius, *Cento Nuptialis*, 42–5.
[572] *Ibid*., 1–11.
[573] *Ibid*., 101–9.
[574] On the literary context and reception of the late antique Christian cento, see Bažil, *Centones Christiani.* On Virgilian centos, see Bažil, 'Epic forms and structures in late antique Vergilian centos', in Christiane Reitz and Simone Finkmann (eds.), *Structures of Epic Poetry, Vol. III: Continuity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 135–73; on mythological and secular centos, see McGill, *Virgil Recomposed*.

by Pomponius, about Christian salvation and conversion.[575] If we expand the category of centos from self-contained poems to include sections of other works, a possible fifth Christian cento is found within Minucius Felix's dialogue *Octavius*, which was composed in the early third century and takes the form of a debate between a pagan and a Christian. Embedded into the text of Octavius is a short series of verses which employ, and at times combine, extracts from the *Aeneid* and *Georgics*.[576] It is the first four, however, which are considered true Christian Virgilian centos, and there are some commonalities between them. Scott McGill has noted how Proba's *Cento*, *De Ecclesia*, and *De Verbi Incarnatione* all use Virgil's fourth Eclogue when writing about Christ's birth, providing a fascinating example of the late antique tradition of reading Virgil as a prophetic text which foretold the coming of Christ.[577] All of the Christian centos are written in what Michael Roberts referred to the 'jeweled style' of late antique Christian poetry. Thee use of Virgilian fragments and the focus on sparkling vignettes is reflective of the broader aesthetic principles that Roberts observed across the poems of the period.[578]

In the Greek tradition it was Homer, rather than Virgil, who was centonised. An important composer of Homeric centos was the empress Eudocia, the wife of Theodosius II, who left the imperial court after losing favour and settled in the Holy Land.[579] Eudocia wrote multiple poems, some of which were centos, in the mid-fifth century. Her biblical Homeric cento is, at 2344 lines, a thorough exploration of the life of Jesus based upon the Gospel narratives. Eudocia's presentation of the Old Testament is much shorter (lines 30–201b) and has a Messianic focus, constantly indicating the direction of travel towards the events of the New Testament.[580] In some ways, Eudocia is Proba's parallel in the Greek tradition – both poets are women, both wrote centos, both fashioned a biblical narrative from pagan verse. But Eudocia had a model in the biblical Homeric cento of the bishop Patricius, which guided the Greek tradition of cento-writing, and she also had Proba's *Cento* in the Latin tradition.[581] Proba, from what we can tell, went into writing a Christian cento without the works of predecessors to direct her.

I have devoted some space in this chapter to discussing Proba's intended readership and the debates surrounding it, but I want to touch upon how the *Cento* gestures to the learning of its readers, which is a feature that is common to much of the poetry of this period. Aaron Pelttari

[575] For the other Christian centos and their relationship of Proba's *Cento* see Elizabeth Dorothy Adams, 'Disarticulation in Poetry: Intertextuality, Gender, and the Body in the Vergilian Centos', Ph.D. thesis (University of Texas at Austin, 2022), pp. 149–81. On the cento by Pomponius see Scott McGill, '*Poeta Arte Christianus:* Pomponius's Cento *Versus ad Gratiam Domini* as an Early Example of Christian Bucolic", *Traditio* 56 (2001), pp. 15–26.
[576] Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 19.2.
[577] Scott McGill, 'Vergil's Christian Children: Patterns in Christian Centos and Responses to Vergil's Fourth Eclogue', in Hartman and Kaufmann (eds.), *A Late Antique Poetics?,* pp. 201–14.
[578] Roberts, *The Jeweled Style*, especially pp. 55–8.
[579] Alan Cameron, 'The Empress and the Poet: Paganism and Politics at the Court of Theodosius II', *Yale Classical Studies* 27 (1982), pp. 270–9.
[580] For an analysis of Eudocia's Homeric cento, see Sandnes, *The Gospel "According to Homer and Virgil"*, pp. 181–228.
[581] On the origins of the Homeric cento tradition see Whitby, 'The Bible Hellenized', pp. 195–231.

has highlighted how, in the Latin poetry of the fourth century, poets were increasingly likely to describe their work as necessitating unpicking and unpacking.[582] Poets saw themselves in dialogue with imagined and intended readers who would step in to do the work of uncovering true meanings in a way that was playful or profound, or somewhere in between. Much of this communication with the reader was done through allusion to other texts or myths because the poet expects the reader to be capable of making sense of the finished poem. A cento is the most overt gesture to the presence of an interested and well-read reader. As Pelttari puts it, 'The Vergilian centos blur the line between composition and reception. Without their reader, these poems collapse into dazzling but incoherent fragments, technically stunning but incomplete.'[583] Proba's *Cento*, therefore, is the one of the clearest demonstrations of the heightened awareness of the reader that characterises much of fourth century Latin poetry.

The Structure and Contents of the *Cento*

I will now turn to the *Cento* itself. This poem was no casual undertaking – at 694 lines, it is a detailed exploration of the Creation story and the life of Christ. After the dedication and Proba's preface (discussed above), the subject immediately turns to the beginning of the book of Genesis:

> *principio caelum ac terras camposque liquientes*
> *lucentemque globum lunae | solisque labores*
> *ipse pater statuit* [584]
>
> In the beginning, heaven and earth, the fluid fields
> And the shining sphere of the moon, and the work of the sun
> Were set up by the father himself

Unlike many parts of Proba's *Cento*, these opening lines closely mirror the section of Genesis which they are drawing upon in both word choice and sentiment. Genesis opens thus:

> *in principio creavit deus caelum et terram. terra autem erat inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi et spiritus dei ferebatur super aquas.*[585]
>
> In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty and the darkness was on the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved on the waters.

The compromises Proba has to make to meld Virgil's text into her desired meaning are evident, but also revealing of her poetic skill. The first extract here is the start of a speech by Anchises,

[582] Aaron Pelttari, *The Space That Remains: Reading Latin Poetry in Late Antiquity* (New York, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014), pp. 1–11.
[583] Pelttari, *The Space That Remains*, p. 73.
[584] Proba, *Cento*, 56–8.
[585] Genesis 1:1–2.

the father of Aeneas, on the continuation of the soul after death – already there are clear commonalities between Proba's Christian purpose and Virgil's raw material.[586] 'Heaven and earth' are readily supplied. Virgil's lyrical rendering of the ocean as *'camposque liquientes'* ('fluid fields') is the first textual sign that Proba's approach to Genesis will be a departure from the more straightforward biblical descriptions. The extract from the *Aeneid* continues for a line and a half, until *'solisque labores'*, drawn from an earlier part of the *Aeneid*.[587] Finally, *'ipse pater statuit'* comes from the *Georgics*, in a passage discussing observable natural phenomena for determining weather patterns.[588] Both of Proba's primary Virgilian quotations respond directly, albeit in different ways, to her retelling of the Creation narrative. This follows throughout the Cento; rather than choosing suitable Virgilian extracts at random, where possible Proba deliberately selects passages that speak to her subject matter. This shows a considerable knowledge Virgil, from both the specific word choice to the overall narrative arcs.

After retelling the Creation narrative (lines 56–169) and the Fall (lines 170–272), Proba then launches into a series of short vignettes from Genesis, cleverly providing images of key figures that indicate who they are without their names. Cain and Abel are described as 'twin brothers' (*'gemini fratres'*), using Virgil's passage about the twins Catillus and Coras who fought against the Trojans. Although Virgil's twins are not fighting one another, the context is still combative.[589] Noah is a man honoured for his 'piety and service' *('pietate gravem ac meritis'*).[590] This phrase in the *Aeneid* comes shortly after a speech by Neptune, who calmed the sea which had scattered Aeneas's ships, yet another example of Proba's apt use of her core texts.[591] Proba willingly explores aspects of Genesis, but neatly summarises the rest of the Old Testament as follows:

> *quique sacerdotes casti | altaria iuxta,*
> *quique pii vates | pro libertate ruebant,*
> *qui bello exciti reges* [592]
>
> and the pure priests next to their altars,
> the pious prophets who fell for freedom,
> the kings who waged war

This, Proba states, is not her subject material, she will pass it by and leave it to others to remember after her *('praetereo atque aliis post me memoranda relinquo').*[593] Proba's focus is instead, of course, the life of Christ. The *Cento* covers the birth of Jesus and the danger posed by Herod (lines 340–74), Jesus as a child (lines 375–87), his baptism by John the Baptist (lines 388–414), the Sermon on the Mount (lines 463–504), the calming of the storm (lines 535–61),

[586] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.724–5.
[587] *Ibid*., 1.742.
[588] Virgil, *Georgics*, 1.353.
[589] Proba, *Cento*, 285; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7.670.
[590] Proba, *Cento*, 313.
[591] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.151.
[592] Proba, *Cento*, 327.
[593] *Ibid*., 332.

the Last Supper (lines 583–99), and the crucifixion and resurrection (lines 600–88), which is the culmination of the *Cento*. No scenes from beyond the Gospels are included here. Instead, Proba leaps directly from Genesis into the life of Christ. In the writing of her *Cento*, Proba changes the biblical narrative almost as much as she does Virgil, leaving out far more than she includes. Proba's poetic license extends to the Bible itself.

Proba's Women

As part of this discussion on Proba as a poet, I want to draw particular attention to how Proba presents women in her *Cento*. Sometimes in an expansion or even a contradiction of the biblical narrative, the women in Proba's *Cento* are important witnesses to the life of Christ. Throughout the *Cento* Proba makes several direct appeals to her audience, asking for their attention and exhorting them to remember the Christian message and to teach it to others.[594] Proba closes her introduction with the following directive, which makes it clear that the *Cento* was designed to be read aloud and that its contents was relevant to different kinds of people:

> *ore favete omnes | laetasque advertite mentes,*
> *matres atque viri | pueri innuptaeque puellae*.[595]
>
> Keep silent everyone, and happily turn your minds to me,
> Mothers and men, boys and unmarried girls.

Here Proba sorts her audience into gendered categories, and the women and girls are characterised by their marital status. The specific appeal to '*matres'*, however, recurs throughout the *Cento* in the parts relating episodes from the Gospels, with Jesus repeatedly encountering and preaching to mothers. The '*puellae'* are conspicuously absent. In Proba's rendering of the time the adolescent Jesus left home and his parents eventually found him preaching in the synagogue (Luke 2:41–47), Jesus is specifically recognised by a group of mothers.

> *turbaque miratur matrum: | "qui spiritus illi,*
> *qui vultus vocisque sonus vel gressus eunti est!"*[596]
>
> A crowd of mothers marvelled at him: "His spirit,
> his countenance, the sound of his voice, his advancing steps!"

Proba's telling departs from the version of events given in Luke, where no such maternal crowd is present; a very tenuous connection may be the elderly widow Anna who lived in the temple, and recognised Jesus's importance (Luke 2:36–38). This theme recurs when the newly-baptised

[594] *Ibid*., *praef*., 14–5; 691–4
[595] *Ibid*., 54–5
[596] Proba, *Cento*, 387–7

Jesus receives a long speech of fatherly encouragement from God, who urges his son to be passionate towards *'matresque virosque'* (mothers and men).[597] Again, when Jesus enters Jerusalem mounted on a donkey, he is surrounded by '*matres atque viri, | pueri'* ('mothers, men and children').[598] Proba seems to be using the term 'mothers' as a stand-in for a group of married, more mature women. A more specific use of 'mother' is found in Proba's descriptions of Mary; Mary is more often described 'the mother' ('*mater'*) than 'the woman' ('*femina'*).[599] Mary's role in the *Cento* is an intensely maternal one, shielding the infant Jesus from Herod and taking them to safety. Joseph is never mentioned, and it is therefore the relationship between mother and baby that comes through the most strongly.[600] One of the final images of the infant Jesus in the *Cento* is Mary breastfeeding him.[601]

Another mother in the *Cento* is Eve, although she is described as such only once; the appellation comes after she and Adam are expelled from the garden of Eden, and is used in reference to her suffering in pregnancy and childbirth:

> *matri longa decem tulerunt fastidia menses,*
> *unde homines nati, durum genus.*[602]
>
> For ten months the mother bore prolonged discomfort,
> from which humans were born, an unyielding race.

In fact, Eve is more often called 'spouse' ('*coniunx'*), a term never associated with Mary.[603] This, Stratis Kyriakidis argues, is to emphasise Eve's sensuality and sexuality, and her ties to the world; an additional strategy Proba uses to accomplish this presentation of Eve is by describing her physical characteristics, especially highlighting her beauty and availability for marriage.[604] Whereas Eve is called *'et pulchro pectore virgo'* ('a virgin with a beautiful breast'), Mary is *'virginis os habitumque gerens'* ('wearing the countenance and dress of a virgin'), suggesting that her true character and importance cannot be discerned by her outward appearance.[605] Eve, with her self-interested, main-character tendencies, provides the foil to the quiet and selfless maternal concern of Mary.

Some patterns emerge from these addresses to and descriptions of women in the *Cento*. Firstly, Proba portrays biblical events with consideration for how the women were thinking and feeling, encouraging sympathy and identification even with Eve. Although Proba does not substantially change the course of the narrative, she allows readers to briefly inhabit the minds of Eve and

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[597] *Ibid*., 409
[598] *Ibid*., 564
[599] *Ibid*., 359; 372; 340.
[600] *Ibid*., 359–61; 372–4
[601] *Ibid*., 376
[602] *Ibid*., 278–9.
[603] *Ibid*., 171; 194; 204; 263.
[604] Stratis Kyriakidis, 'Eve and Mary: Proba's Technique in the Creation of Two Different Female Figures', *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 29 (1992), p. 148; Proba, *Cento*, 130–2.
[605] Proba, *Cento*, 131; 341.

Mary. Secondly, Proba seems most concerned with older women with dependents, especially mothers, both as characters in and the audience of the *Cento*. She is appealing to women in positions of authority who had jurisdiction over their households; given the social circles that Proba herself moved within and the high register of the *Cento*, these would likely be elite Christian Roman *matronae* like herself. Such women would have responsibility for the moral and religious instruction of their children, and descendants upholding the Christian faith of their ancestors is a core concern of the *Cento*.[606] How the *Cento* represents women suggests that Proba wrote for the specific attention of elite women to the exclusion of other women, and shaped her narrative accordingly. This, in turn, made the *Cento* ideal reading material for elite women in early medieval religious communities.

Praise, Criticism, Censorship: The Reception of Proba's *Cento*

Here I will outline the reception and transmission of the *Cento* from the point of its composition to the earliest extant manuscripts. Proba composed her *Cento* in Rome in the mid-fourth century, probably around 360 to 370. Its earliest discernible reception is an anonymous dedicatory poem addressed to the Emperor Arcadius (r. 377/8–408), which is included immediately before the *Cento* in some manuscripts. The fifteen-line poem functions as a preface to Proba's own preface, and encourages Arcadius to read the *Cento* and pass its message along to his decedents. It is unreservedly positive about Proba's use of Virgil which, as other responses to the *Cento* will demonstrate, was far from guaranteed. In fact, the author of the dedication states that Proba has improved Virgil*: 'dignare Maronem mutatum in melius'* ('deem it worthy to know Maro changed for the better').[607]

As discussed above in the context of the authorship debate, several readers have noted the similarities between Proba's *Cento* and the *Carmen Contra Paganos.* The latter is a 122-line verse hexameter on the death of a famous non-Christian figure in Rome, traditionally dated to 394.[608] For example, the phrase *'iurgantesque deos'* appears in both the *Cento* and the *Carmen Contra Paganos*.[609] Danuta Shanzer has argued that this indicates both a later composition date for the *Cento*, and that the *Cento* was actually composed by Proba's granddaughter, Anicia Faltonia Proba. In response to Shanzer, Alan Cameron highlighted shared features between the epigrams of Pope Damasus (d. 384) and the *Carmen Contra Paganos*, notably that both authors avoided '*et'* and preferred to use the enclitic *'-que'* instead. Cameron then demonstrated that the epigrams of Damasus and *the Carmen Contra Paganos* both made repeated reference to the *Cento* of Proba, at times referencing the same part of the *Cento*. For example, *'pia foedera'*

[606] *Ibid*., 691–4.
[607] *Ibid*., dedication, 3–4.
[608] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, pp. 313–4; Danuta Shanzer 'The anonymous *Carmen contra paganos*', pp. 232–48. The wider context for this debate is which Proba wrote the *Cento*; Cameron makes a case for Faltonia Betitia Proba, whereas Shanzer puts forward her granddaughter, Anicia Faltonia Proba, arguing that the *Cento* is in fact quoting the *Carmen Contra Paganos*. Cameron engages with (and successfully refutes) Shanzer's theory at pp. 327–37.
[609] Proba, Cento, 17; *Carmen Contra Paganos*, 22.

is used by all three authors.[610] Both Proba and Damasus employ the phrase *'penetralia cordis'*.[611] Cameron highlighted these similar references to Proba to argue that Damasus authored the *Carmen Contra Paganos*. Whether or not Damasus wrote the invective, both his poems and the *Carmen Contra Paganos* demonstrate the early influence of Proba's *Cento* on its readers, and show the exiting possibilities for intertextual references that played with both Virgil's original meaning and Proba's new approach.

The apparent popularity of the *Cento* did not equate to universal approval or respect, however. In the later fourth century, whilst in Bethlehem, Jerome compiled his *De viris illustribus*, a list of Christian authors and their works.[612] This list did not include Proba (or indeed any other centonist, or woman), which I mention here because of the commemoration of Proba and her *Cento* in a later iteration of the *De viris illustribus* tradition. In 394 Jerome wrote to Paulinus of Nola urging him to make a concerted effort to study scripture. In this letter Jerome wrote disparagingly about uninformed biblical exegetes, and includes centonists who wrote *'Homerocentonas et Vergiliocentonas'* (Homeric and Virgilian centos) in this category. Jerome identified the types of people who might write a cento and participate in this inferior form of exegesis:

> *Sola scripturarum ars est, quam sibi omnes passim vindicent: "scribimus indocti doctique poemata passim"; hanc garrula anus, hanc delirius senex, hanc soloecista verbosus, hanc universi praesument.*[613]
>
> Writing is the only art that everyone everywhere claims for themselves. "Learned or unlearned, we all write poetry here and there" (Horace, *Epist*. 2.1.117). The chatty old woman, the mad old man, the loquacious sophist, every one presumes [to try] this.

More broadly, Jerome criticises the idea that Virgil could be interpreted as a Christian without Christ (*'Christianus sine Christo'*).[614] That Virgil, the pinnacle of Latin learning, could have in some way predicted the birth of Christ was surely a compelling theory for several early Christians, especially those who had received a classical education. Virgil died in 19 BCE, and his Christian readers would have noticed how close the poet came to sharing the earth with their saviour. It would have been tempting to credit the revered Virgil with predicting Christ's coming, and Jerome seems particularly sensitive to even the suggestion of this possibility. In the letter, Jerome quoted two extracts from the *Aeneid* and one from the *Eclogues*, saying that even though Virgil's words here could be interpreted in a Christian light, it would be childish and facile to do so.[615] Multiple commentators have noticed that Jerome quotes parts of Virgil that Proba had used in the *Cento* to signify the same biblical events that he said they did not

[610] Proba, *Cento*, 1; *Carmen Contra Paganos*, 84; Damasus, *Epigrammata*, 1.4.
[611] Proba, *Cento*, 11; Damasus, *Epigrammata*, 2.5.
[612] See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of Jerome's *De viris illustribus*.
[613] Jerome, *Ep*. 53.7.
[614] Paraphrasing Jerome, *Ep*. 53.7: *'non sic etiam Maronem sine Christo possimus dicere Christianum'* ('we are not able to say Maro is a Christian without Christ').
[615] Jerome, *Ep*. 53.7; Virgil, *Eclogues*, 4.6–7; *Aeneid*, 1.664; 2.650.

represent.[616] Jerome highlights the *Eclogues* verse to how it might be distorted into a prediction of the birth of Christ: *'iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna; / iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto'* ('Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns; / now a new generation descends from heaven on high').[617] Proba uses *'iam nova progenies'* to indicate the birth of Christ in her introductory lines. Later, Proba employs a half-line from the *Aeneid* to identify Jesus a heaven-sent child – *'caelo descendit ab alto'* (descended from heaven on high) – which is very similar to the *Eclogues* verse.[618] The first of Jerome's quotations from the *Aeneid* is used by Proba in its entirety in her description of God speaking over Jesus at his baptism: *'nate, meae vires, mea magna potentia solus'* ('my son, you alone are my strength and my great power').[619] Similarly, Jerome's second quotation from the *Aeneid* is used by Proba to describe Jesus on the cross, which is the precise interpretation that Jerome criticises: *'talia perstabat memorans fixusque manebat'* ('uttering such words he stood still and remained motionless').[620]

In light of Jerome's deployment of these quotations, the '*garrula anus'* Jerome criticised for her lack of understanding of biblical exegesis is often (I think reasonably) understood as Proba herself.[621] This becomes more plausible when the remainder of the letter is taken into account; the letter especially denigrates those incompetent exegetes who would discuss their interpretations among inferior women ('*mulierculas'*) or, worse still, learn from these women what they would later teach to men ('*a feminis, quod viros doceant'*).[622] This could be a reference to the use of the *Cento* as a teaching text – perhaps male instructors were using Proba's work to teach both Virgil and the Christian story to their male pupils. Even if this letter is taken as a generalised attack on centonists, and the *'garrula anus'* is simply a stereotypical figure of whom he disapproves, Jerome's use of these three specific Virgil references and his criticism of female teachers strongly suggest that his ire was directed, at least in part, at Proba. As an aside, it is interesting to note that the letter's recipient, Paulinus of Nola, was also a poet. The cento form dominates the extant corpus of early Christian poetry, and perhaps Jerome worried that his correspondent would try his hand at writing one. Paulinus, for his part, did not attempt a cento of his own.

Jerome's criticism of the cento form did not have the desired effect. As the poem's later reception and transmission show, the *Cento* clearly enjoyed a wide readership and other authors included references to it in their work. The anonymous late fifth-century account of the martyrdom of Saint Eugenia, the *Passio Sanctae Eugeniae*, borrows parts of a line from the

[616] For example, see Green, 'Proba's Cento', p. 553.
[617] Virgil, *Eclogues*, 4.6–7
[618] Proba, *Cento*, 34 and 338; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8.423.
[619] Proba, *Cento*, 403; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.664.
[620] Proba, *Cento*, 624; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.650.
[621] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, p. 337; Zoja Pavlovskis, 'Proba and the Semiotics of Virgilian Narrative', *Vergilius* 35 (1989), p. 83; Shanzer, 'Date and Identity of the Centonist Proba', p. 239. There is substantial pushback against the *'garrula anus'* being Proba in Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, pp. 56–8; Cullhed's argument is upheld in Thomas Tsartsidis, 'Jerome, *Ep*. 53.7 and the Centonist Proba', *Classical Quarterly* 70.1 (2020), pp. 453–8; Tsartsidis argues that the *'garrula anus'* should be understood as a literary topos and not an actual person, and that the extracts of Virgil Jerome highlighted were interpreted to have Christian meaning in other texts beyond Proba's *Cento*.
[622] Jerome, *Ep*. 53.7.

Cento to describe Eugenia's appearance. It is a particularly dramatic moment in the narrative because Eugenia had up to that point disguised herself as a man, but here she sheds her assumed identity:

> *Et haec dicens, scidit a capite tunicam qua erat induta et insignis facie paruit et pulcro pectore virgo*.[623]
>
> And saying this, she tore off from her head the garment covering her, and she appeared as a maiden with a distinguished face and beautiful breast.

Proba uses the two phrases from the Aeneid, '*insignis facie'* and '*pulcro pectore'*, to describe Adam seeing Eve's virginal beauty for the first time.[624] Because they come from disparate parts of the *Aeneid* but are in the same line of the *Cento*, it is easy to spot Proba's influence here as opposed to Virgil's. It is odd that the author of the *Passio* has used a description of the original fallen woman to describe a virgin martyr. Gordon Whatley has posited that the purpose was to identify Eugenia with the virgin Eve, and to put Christ in the place of Adam as an admiring husband.[625] I would also suggest that this is a reminder of Eugenia's humanity; for all her sanctity, she is still a woman and must therefore shoulder the burden of Eve's punishment. The author's use of a deeply layered poetic form as an intertextual reference at this crucial point in the narrative could also be a nod to Eugenia's concealment of her true identity under men's clothing, and a playful acknowledgement of the many hidden meanings inherent in the cento form. As Eugenia hides under her clothes before this dramatic revelation, so too do Proba and Virgil hide within the *Passio Sanctae Eugeniae*.

Shortly after the composition of the *Vita*, a Virgilian cento was included twice in a list of apocryphal works that comprises the fifth and final chapter of the *Decretum Gelasianum,* a pseudo-epigraphical work attributed to Pope Gelasius, and less commonly Pope Damasus, in the manuscript tradition.[626] The list itself (*'Item notitia librorum apocryphum'*) likely dates from the later fifth to the mid-sixth century.[627] Its author damns the producers and readers of apocrypha for eternity, and lists *'Centonem de Christo virgilianis conpaginatum versibus'* (the Cento on Christ composed in Virgilian verse) twice.[628] Proba is not identified by name, however. The duplication could be an error, but equally it could refer to the multiple Christian

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[623] *Passio Sanctae Eugeniae*, 15.
[624] Proba, *Cento*, 131; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 9.583; 3.426.
[625] Gordon Whatley, 'More than a Female Joseph: The Sources of the Late-Fifth-Century *Passio Sanctae Eugeniae'*, in Stuart McWilliams (ed.), *Saints and Scholars: New Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture in Honour of Hugh Magennis* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), p. 108.
[626] *Decretum Gelasianum,* V.
[627] For the dating of the list of apocrypha, see Ernst von Dobschütz, *Das Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis,* Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 38/4 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1912), p. 348. For other works included in the list, especially martyr narratives, see Julia Hillner, 'Families, Patronage, and the Titular Churches of Rome, c. 300–c. 600', in Cooper and Hillner (eds.), *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage*, discussion at pp. 254–5.
[628] *Decretum Gelasianum*, V.4.8 and V.8.

Virgilian centos in circulation at this point.[629] The list of apocrypha closes with a strong condemnation of the authors and those who subscribed to their teachings:

> *... et omnes heresei hereseorumque discipuli sive scismatici docuerunt vel conscripserunt, quorum nomina minime retinuimus, non solum repudiata verum ab omni Romana catholica et apostolica ecclesia eliminate atque cum suis auctoribus auctorumque sequacibus sub anathematis insolubili vinculo in aeternum confitemur esse damnata.*[630]
>
> … and all disciples of heresy, and of the heretics and the schismatics, whose names we have barely retained, have taught or written, we agreed is not only to be repudiated but eliminated from the entire Roman Catholic and apostolic church, and with their authors and their authors' following to be damned for eternity in the incontestable chains of anathema.

The *Decretum Gelasianum* exhibits a firmer stance on the cento form than the one taken by Jerome, who disapproved and ridiculed the composers and readers of such poems but did not damn them outright. But neither Jerome's disapproval nor the *Decretum Gelasium*'s condemnation proved effective. In the later sixth century, Venantius Fortunatus wrote a poem addressed to the former queen Radegund and the abbess Agnes at the Holy Cross nunnery at Poitiers. Michael Roberts has noted that the short composition references Proba's *Cento*.[631]

> *Hoc quoque non metuas quod ramo umbrante pependit: non tellus fungos, sed dedit arbor opes. Non ego crudelis, qui matri incongrua praestem; ne dubites puros sumere fauce cibos.*[632]
>
> Do not be afraid of what hung from a shady branch; these are not the earth's mushrooms, but a tree's fruit. I am not cruel enough to present my mother unsuitable [things]; do not hesitate to take the safe food into your throat.

Virgil employs very similar wording in the *Aeneid*, '*ramo frondente pependit',* to describe a swarm of bees around a tree, foreshadowing the arrival of the conquering Trojans. In the *Cento* this phrase refers to the serpent in the garden of Eden hanging from a branch, waiting to trick Eve into eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.[633] Fortunatus had written his poem to Ragedund and Agnes as an accompaniment to a gift of plums. Keeping in mind how the *Cento* used the image of the shady branch, this reference would inform the reader that the plums were not Eden's forbidden fruit, and nor was the gift-giver the malicious serpent. Rather than a

[629] Besides Proba's *Cento*, three other such Christian Virgilian centos from this period are extant (see discussion below). The existence of these four suggests the form's popularity, and there were likely many other such centos which are now lost. The other Christians centos testament to the success of Proba's *Cento*.
[630] *Decretum Gelasianum,* V.9.35.
[631] Michael Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow: The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus* (Ann Arbor, M.I.: University of Michigan Press, 2009), pp. 295–6
[632] Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 11.18.5-8.
[633] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7.67; Proba, *Cento*, 176.

dramatic declaration of his good intentions, this poem should be understood as Fortunatus joking with his friends (and his patron, in the case of Radegund) about something they had both read and could easily call to mind. It is a witty and layered textual reference which takes a playful approach to Proba's complex composition.

In the early seventh century, Isidore of Seville wrote *De viris illustribus*, his continuation of the form established by Jerome and perpetuated by Gennadius. Isidore included Proba as one of the famous authors worthy of commemoration. Notably, Proba was the only woman to be included in this list; *De viris illustribus* had remained exclusively male since Jerome began the tradition.

> *Proba, uxor Adelphii proconsulis, femina idcirco inter viros ecclesiasticos posita sola, pro eo quod in laude Christi versata est, componens centonem de Christo, Vergilianis coaptatum versiculis. Cuius tamen non miramur studium, sed laudamus ingenium. Quod tamen opusculum inter apocryphas scripturas inseritur.*[634]
>
> Proba, wife of the proconsul Adelphius; a woman, and for this reason she is alone amongst the men of the church, because she was skilled at praising Christ, composing a cento about Christ by joining Virgilian lines. We do not admire her endeavour, but we praise her talent. Nevertheless, this little work is included in the apocryphal scriptures.

It is from Isidore that we receive the attribution of the *Cento* to Faltonia Betitia Proba, who was married to Clodius Celsinus Adelphius, prefect of the city of Rome (although not proconsul, as Isidore writes) in 351. Isidore does not unreservedly celebrate Proba's literary contribution, however. The practice of centonising Virgil was not to be admired ('*non miramur*') even if the end result of Proba's use of the form showed talent ('*ingenium'*). Isidore notes that Proba's *Cento* is included in the list of apocrypha, likely referring to the fifth chapter of the *Decretum Gelasianum.* He does not subscribe to the opinions of the author(s) of that work, however, and seeks to promote Proba rather than condemn her. Isidore's comment that Proba is the only woman included in his all-male list of authors ('*femina idcirco inter viros ecclesiasticos posita sola'*) indicates that he specifically wanted to commemorate Proba as a female author, rather than including her quietly. Isidore also referenced Proba's work as an example of the cento form in his *Etymologiae*; that she was the first author to come to mind here demonstrates the attention that both she and her *Cento* had received.

> *Denique Proba, uxor Adelphi, centonem ex Vergilio de Fabrica mundi et Evangeliis plenissime expressit, materia conposita secundum versus, et versibus secundum materiam concinnatis. Sic quoque et quidam Pomponius ex eodem poeta inter cetera stili sui otia Tityrum in Christi honorem conposuit: similiter et de Aeneidos.*[635]

[634] Isidore of Seville, *De viris illustribus*, 5.
[635] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, I.39.26. When writing his *De viris illustribus* in the eleventh century, historian and chronicler Sigebert of Gembloux copied the information Isidore provided on Proba in the *Etymologiae* verbatim. Isidore of Seville's interpretation of Proba clearly resonated across the middle ages, carried at least in part by the reputation of Isidore himself.

> Thereafter Proba, wife of Adelphius, produced a most complete cento on the creation of the world and the Gospels out of Virgil, the material being ordered in accordance with the lines, and the lines in accordance with the material. And likewise a certain Pomponius, amongst other things from his pen, composed from the same poet Tityrus, in honour of Christ, and similarly one from the *Aeneid*.

Proba is also mentioned by the early medieval English poet and chuchman Aldhelm in his work on the metrical rules of Latin poetry, *De metris et enigmatibus ac pedum regulis*. In a similar way to Isidore in his *De viris illustribus*, Aldhelm couches his praise of Proba by calling her Cento frivolous, Aldhelm also characterises her work as apocrypha, which is likely a nod to the condemnation of the Virgilian cento form in the *Decretum Gelasianum*. Nevertheless, Aldhelm concedes that Proba knew her way around a hexameter:

> *... Proba inter poetas clarissima in exordio Vergiliocentonis quamvis apocriforum frivola sub specie prophetica continentis, sed tamen legitimam exametri regulam servantis eleganter deprompsit dicens "Iam dudum temerasse duces pia foedera pacis".*[636]

> … Proba, renowned among poets, in the introduction of her Virgilian cento, though producing frivolous apocrypha under the guise of prophecy, however produced an elegant example maintaining the proper rule of the hexameter, saying: "Long ago, leaders who violated the blessed pacts of peace".

Aldhelm introduces another of his works, the *Enigmata*, with a repudiation of the Muses as a source of poetic inspiration.[637] In this he follows several early Christian poets, including Proba, who rejects the Muses in her introduction to the *Cento*: *'non nunc ambrosium cura est mihi quaerere nectar, / nec libet Aonio de vertice ducere Musas'* ('Now I do not care to look for ambrosian nectar, nor is it pleasing to lead the Muses down from the Aonian peak').[638] In the emerging genre of Christian poetry, poetic inspiration could only come from God.

The anonymous author of the *Laterculus Malalianus* also read Proba. The *Laterculus* is an enigmatic text – the first half is comprised of a translated extract from the Greek *Chronicle* of John Malalas, which is taken from the years covering the life of Christ, and the second half contains Christological meditations. As Jane Stevenson has convincingly argued, the most likely candidate for this author is Theodore of Tarsus, or a Greek member of his circle in Canterbury in the later seventh century.[639] The *Laterculus* engages with Latin literature in a

[636] Aldhelm, *De metris et enigmatibus ac pedum regulis*, 135.
[637] Aldhelm, *Enigmata, praef.*
[638] Proba, *Cento*, 13–4; Virgil, *Georgics*, 3.11.
[639] For a discussion of Theodore's authorship of the *Laterculus Malalianus* see Jane Stevenson, *The 'Laterculus Malalianus' and the School of Archbishop Theodore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 8–11; see also the discussion in Bernhard Bischoff and Michael Lapidge (eds.), *Biblical Commentaries from the School of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 180–2. For a more recent argument

limited way but has a rich knowledge of the Greek patristic tradition. This, as well as the translation of Malalas, indicates an author with a Greek education rather than a Latin one. The clearest reference to the *Cento* in the *Laterculus* is drawn from Proba's description of Eve (*'insignis facie et pulchra pectore uirgo / iam matura uiro, iam plenis nubilis annis'*).[640]

> *de terra fincxit incolomem iuuenem, et eius coniugem plenam nubilis annis, pectore uirgo, decora in omni membro, iamque maturam, ita pulchrum oculis uisum, eduxit ex latere dormientis.*[641]
>
> …from the earth he made an unimpaired young man, and drew out from his side whilst he was sleeping a wife of fully marriageable age, with a virgin breast, graceful in all her limbs and already matured, and therefore beautiful to the sight of the eye.

Here the *Laterculus* uses the same phrase to describe Eve – '*pectore virgo'* – as the *Cento*. In the *Aeneid* this phrase forms part of a description of Scylla the sea-monster luring ships onto rocks.[642] In the *Cento, 'pectore virgo'* is dependent upon '*coniugium'*, but in the *Laterculus* its left hanging ungrammatically, giving the impression that it was plucked from another work.[643] The *Laterculus* describes Eve as old enough to marry, '*plenam nubilis annis'*, which is only a slight variation on Proba's '*plenis nubilis annis',* also originating from the *Aeneid*.[644] Significantly, these two quotes are drawn from Book III and Book VII of the *Aeneid* respectively. The *Laterculus* draws together these seemingly distant lines in a similar manner to Proba whilst also discussing Eve, which clearly indicates that its author was inspired by the *Cento*. Because of their Greek background the author of the *Laterculus* may have encountered Virgil exclusively through Proba.

Overall, the reception of Proba's *Cento* demonstrates that the text was well-read, and familiar enough to be used as an intertextual reference. Crucially, when she is named, Proba is consistently credited with authoring the *Cento*. The *Cento* was not consistently admired or praised – but it was consistently read.

The Manuscript Transmission of the *Cento*

Proba's *Cento* survives in multiple manuscripts, so I will focus on only a select few here. Two of the earliest extant manuscripts containing Proba's *Cento* date to the eighth and ninth centuries and were held in the monastery of Corbie; these are Par. Lat. 13048 and Par. Lat.

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for Theodore's authorship, see James Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus: The Laterculus Malalianus and the Person and Work of Christ* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).
[640] Proba, *Cento*, 131–2.
[641] *Laterculus Malalianus,* 17.
[642] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.426.
[643] Stevenson, *The 'Laterculus Malalianus'*, p. 208; *'coniugium vocat',* Proba, *Cento*, 134.
[644] Virgil, *Aeneid*, VII.53.

7701.[645] In both of these manuscripts the *Cento* was copied alongside poems by Venantius Fortunatus. The group of Fortunatus's poems included in Par. Lat. 13048 immediately follows the *Cento*, suggesting a close association between the texts; furthermore, the manuscript preserves a unique selection and ordering of Fortunatus's poems.[646] These two manuscripts highlight that Proba's *Cento* was read as (or at least interpreted as) poetry, which was enjoyable as well as instructive. The presence of the *Cento* in these manuscripts alongside the complex poetry of Fortunatus somewhat jars with the dominant historiographical trend that identifies the *Cento*'s primary use as a teaching text for children, designed to instruct them in both the biblical story and the poetry of Virgil.

That said, another of the earliest manuscripts containing the *Cento* lends itself well to the theory of Proba's composition being used for teaching: Pal. Lat. 1753, which originated from Lorsch Abbey in the ninth century.[647] In this manuscript the *Cento* travels alongside instructional texts for grammar and poetry, for example *Ars grammatica* by Marius Victorinus, and Aldhelm's treatise on the composition of poetry and riddles, *Epistola ad Acircium, sive Liber de septenario, et de metris, aenigmatibus ac pedum regulis.* Another cento, the *Cento Tityri* of Pomponius, immediately follows Proba's in the manuscript. This shorter composition was perhaps also included to aid readers in their understanding of poetic metre. As we have seen, the incipit of Proba's *Cento* in Pal. Lat. 1753 identifies her as 'mother' of the Anicii, one of the most ancient and powerful Roman families.

> *Incipiunt indicula centonis Probae, inlustris Romanae; Aniciorum mater de Maronis qui et Vergilii, Mantuani vatis libri praedicta Proba, uxor Adelphii, ex praefecto urbis, hunc centon[em] religiosa mente amore Christi spiritu ferventi prudenter enucliate defloravit.*[648]
>
> Here begin the notes on the *Cento* of Proba, the famous Roman: mother of the Anicii, wife of the prefect of the city, Adelphius, this aforementioned Proba, from the book of Maro or Virgil, the Mantuan poet, with her devout mind, adoration of Christ, and fervent spirit, picked out this cento prudently.

This incipit encapsulates the confusion and debate surrounding the attribution of the *Cento*, and it seems to hold the door open for the authorship of either Proba. The elder Proba was married to Adelphius, but she was not one of the Anicii. The younger Proba, however, did belong to this illustrious family. The only unambiguous aspect of the incipit is its praise of the author. Proba's use of Virgil is admired, as is her Christian faith, which provided the impetus for such a composition. There is no admonishment of Proba for the genre in which she wrote, or for her method of refashioning Virgil. In this way, the ninth-century incipit resembles the anonymous dedicatory poem written as a preface to the *Cento* in the later fourth or early fifth

[645] Note that Par. Lat. 7701 was removed from its codex, which is now held in Saint Petersburg (Public Library, F. V. XIV. 1).
[646] In Par. Lat. 13048 the *Cento* is at ff. 31v–38v, and the poems of Venantius Fortunatus are at ff. 39r–46v.
[647] In Pal. Lat. 1753 the *Cento* is at ff. 62r–69r.
[648] Pal. Lat. 1753, f. 62r.

century. These two expressions of praise bookend the reception of the *Cento* from its fourth-century composition into the ninth century.

The reception of Proba in the Latin west reveals that, even if there is some confusion in the manuscript transmission as to which Proba should be credited, a 'Proba' is always accepted as the author of the *Cento*. There are a very limited number of female-authored texts from Latin late antiquity, which is not because women were not writing – a brief look at the correspondence of Augustine or Jerome could disprove this notion immediately – but rather because what they wrote was not kept or copied, and therefore did not find its way into early medieval manuscripts. But these same manuscripts bore Proba. There are several reasons for this. The first is that Proba writes her authorship into the *Cento* itself, and gives some insight into her writing process. Proba reveals that she rejects her previous way of writing poetry, and instead wants to focus on the biblical narrative.[649] And, by weaving her own name into the poem, Proba makes it impossible to transmit the full *Cento* without an authorial attribution.[650] The second is the recognition (although not universal) that putting together a work like the *Cento* took considerable poetic skill and necessitated an absolute command of Virgil. Proba's finished product may not have met with blanket approval in the centuries that followed, but many (like Isidore and Aldhelm) admired how she got there. Thirdly, Proba was a noblewoman who wrote in a way that pleased nobility. The cento, as we learn from Ausonius, was a playful form for educated elites who could compete in a metrical memory game by swapping their own Virgilian patchworks. Virgil remained important for those seeking a classical education in the subsequent centuries, and his works were met with renewed interest due to the efforts of the Carolingians, most of all in elite-dominated circles and monasteries. Proba consistently had readers in high places who recognised in her *Cento* a reflection of their own values and interests. Beyond assisting in identification, the frequent mention of Proba's husband Adelphius in biographical descriptions and incipits provided a clear link between Proba and the structures of imperial power, something which may have especially impressed early medieval readers. Coupled with her skill and self-conscious poetic styling, Proba's nobility was crucial in ensuring the continued transmission of the *Cento* under her name and perpetuating her commemoration as an author.

Proba in the Monasteries of Early Medieval Gaul

One aspect of the transmission and reception of Proba's *Cento* which I want to draw particular attention to is her readers in Gaul, especially nuns, in the sixth and seventh centuries. It is worth asking why a poem written in fourth century Rome, in a style and form that seems very particular to the needs of the Christian aristocracy at that time, resonated centuries later in another place altogether. A clue lies in the transmission of the works of the Venantius Fortunatus. The Italian poet plied his trade in the royal courts of Merovingian Gaul before turning his attention to ecclesiastical patrons like Gregory of Tours, and was eventually himself

[649] Proba, *Cento*, 8–12.
[650] *'vatis Proba'*, *Ibid*., 12.

ordained a bishop around 600. His extensive poetic corpus includes a versified *Life* of Saint Martin as well as many shorter works, and some of his prose is also extant. As discussed above, an intriguing aspect of the *Cento's* reception is the appearance of one of its lines in a poem by Venantius Fortunatus addressed to Agnes, abbess of the Holy Cross nunnery in Poitiers, and the former queen Radegund.

Radegund herself was a poet. In one of his own poems, Fortunatus describes Radegund writing great poetry (*'carmina magna'*) on small wax tablets *('brevibus tabulis'*).[651] Three poems attributed to Radegund survive, although none could fit onto a small tablet. These are *De excidio Thoringiae,* on the destruction of her homeland Thuringia, *Ad Artachin*, addressed to her nephew Artachis, and a versified address to Emperor Justin II and Empress Sophia. These poems, especially *De excidio Thoringiae* and *Ad Artachin*, were transmitted in manuscripts as part of the corpus of Venantius Fortunatus. In Par. Lat. 13048, the eighth-century manuscript which contains works by Fortunatus and also Proba's *Cento*, the *Cento* is immediately followed by *De excidio Thoringiae*. Like Proba, Radegund wrote her name into her poems and therefore makes her authorship clear: *'sic Radegundis enim post tempora longar requiror?'* (Should I, Radegund, ask after such a long time?).[652] On account of their style, Judith George has argued that Fortunatus, not Radegund, composed these poems.[653] Others, namely Peter Dronke and Jane Stevenson, think the poems are the work of both Radegund and Fortunatus.[654] From the latter's writings it is clear that they wrote poetry for one another, and a collaborative effort seems a natural extension of such an exchange. Radegund was also a committed reader, and one of Fortunatus's poems lists works that she read, including Athanasius, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Orosius, and Sedulius.[655] (Sedulius wrote Latin epic verse that was heavily influenced by Virgil in style, but its content depended upon the Gospel narratives; a reader of Sedulius would find much of interest in Proba's *Cento*). In a way that is familiar to those who have encountered the reading habits of ascetic women like Eustochium and Marcella, Fortunatus describes Radegund as shunning actual food and instead receiving her nourishment from these instructive books.[656]

In the sixth century, Fortunatus was at the cutting edge of poetic innovation. The allusion to Proba's *Cento* in Fortunatus's poem to Radegund and Agnes shows that all three must have been very familiar with the *Cento*, and that Fortunatus had his readers' reading habits in mind when he wrote. With their shared love of in poetry in mind, it is particularly unsurprising that Radegund and Fortunatus had read the *Cento* with such interest. In addition to Agnes, it is likely that other nuns at Holy Cross read the *Cento* as well. The nunnery followed the *Regula ad virgines* of Caesarius, which stipulated that all nuns should learn to read: *'Omnes litteras*

[651] Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, appendix, 31.1-6.
[652] Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, appendix, 3.13. See also *Carmina,* appendix, 1.48: '*Hamalafrede, tibi tunc Radegundis eram'* ('Hamalafred, I was your Radegund then').
[653] George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 163–4.
[654] Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages,* p. 28; Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets,* pp. 87–8.
[655] Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 8.1.54–60.
[656] *Ibid*., 8.1.61–2; on reading as an ascetic practice for women, see Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest,* especially pp. 39–52.

discant'.[657] Reading and listening to scripture was at the heart of the devotional practice established in this *Rule*, and it is likely that this emphasis on literacy was a driving force in creating a community that especially prized literature. Despite the strict cloistering of women promoted by Caesarius, Radegund regularly welcomed outsiders (Fortunatus included) into the Holy Cross.[658] Far from being cut off from developments in literary culture, the community of the Holy Cross was therefore part of the Frankish literary network, with many of the nuns coming from noble families.[659] All this made the Holy Cross nuns ideal readers of Proba's *Cento*, and offers some explanation for the copying of the *Cento* alongside works by Fortunatus and Radegund in the two manuscripts formerly held in Corbie.[660]

The presence of Proba's *Cento* in these manuscripts and its highly literate readers in early medieval Gaul undermine the narrative that the *Cento* was used primarily as teaching material for children. It also demonstrates that, although some clearly considered the *Cento* an inferior literary work, this opinion was far from universal. I have already indicated that Proba's *Cento* appealed to the fourth century Christian wealthy aristocrats because of its essentially conservative and household-oriented content which did not challenge their value system. This feature of the *Cento* was perhaps also a factor in securing its readership in the Holy Cross. Furthermore, the *Cento*'s portrayal of women as active participants in the biblical narrative and as recipients of the Christian message would not have gone unnoticed by such astute readers. Proba consistently reframes events to consider the perspective of women. Whilst Proba's own intentions for her readership will always remain a question, Proba does seem to address the elite wives and mothers of fourth-century Rome. And, as one of their own, Proba is especially attentive to their concerns. I suggest that this inadvertently yet directly mapped onto developments in early medieval monasticism, where elite women like Radegund were increasingly founding religious communities and, like Proba, had the spiritual welfare of their household to consider. Without knowing it, Proba wrote for a category of women that did not yet exist.

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In this chapter I have tracked the reception of the *Cento* of Proba, considered its transmission within manuscripts, and grappled with its legacy of mixed responses. The *Cento* was not (and is not) universally admired, but its detractors have a times obscured its legacy as a work of literature, instead reducing it to a poetic curiosity. A survey of both the readers of the *Cento* and the early manuscripts containing it clearly show that it was not solely, nor even primarily,

[657] 'Let all learn letters', Caesarius, *Regula ad virgines*, 18.7. On Caesarius see William Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994).
[658] For Radegund's interpretation of the *Rule* of Caesarius see E. T. Dailey, *Radegund: The Trials and Triumphs of a Merovingian Queen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 111–37.
[659] The standards of the Holy Cross nunnery were called into question in the aftermath of a rebellion in 589. See Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, X.15–6, and the discussion of one of the rebellion's leaders in Rachel Singer, 'Gregory's Forgotten Rebel: The Portrayal of Basina by Gregory of Tours and its Implications', *Early Medieval Europe* 30.2 (2022), pp. 185–208.
[660] Par. Lat. 13048 and Par. Lat. 7701. See the discussion in Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, pp. 83–4.

a school text for children. Later medieval admirers of Proba included Petrarch and Boccaccio, and the latter praised Proba for her poetic skill in his *De mulieribus claris,* his collection of famous women. The manuscripts containing this work of Boccacio's often feature illustrations of Proba writing at a desk, or in a scholarly pose. The *Cento* continued to be read and praised, and interest in Proba reached a peak in the sixteenth century.[661] Proba's success somewhat undermines the jibes of her critics both late antique and modern.[662]

Proba is consistently remembered as the author of the *Cento*, which was transmitted in manuscripts bearing her name in both the incipit and the body of the poem itself. The commemoration of a late antique woman as an author, let alone a poet, was highly unusual. In fact, Proba is without a parallel in the Latin west. Not only is Proba remembered as a name attached to a text, biographical details are often given for her and she is praised for her work. This comes out most clearly in how Isidore of Seville writes about Proba, especially when he included her in the previously all-male tradition of the *De viris illustribus*. Proba's wealth and status ensured that her *Cento* made its way to an elite audience immediately, as did the *Cento*'s use of the authority of ancient classical epic. Proba refashioned the works of Virgil for a Christian audience that increasingly sought to Christianise their surroundings and culture. The *Cento*'s appeal to the aristocratic wives and mothers of fourth-century Rome was apparently a factor in its popularity with another set of elite women, one that did not exist at the time Proba was writing: highly literate early medieval nuns from noble and royal backgrounds. The readers of Proba in the Holy Cross nunnery require us to question the dominant historiographical trend of identifying the *Cento* as a school text for children, a narrative bolstered by outdated stereotypes of Proba's character and intentions. The reception of Proba clearly shows her authority as a poet and the extensive reach of her *Cento*.

[661] For the later medieval reception of Proba see Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, pp. 82–112.

[662] A sixth-century descendent of Proba, also called Proba, was the patron of Eugippius, who used her library to write his *Excerpta ex operibus sancti Augustini.* See Kate Cooper, 'The Widow as Impresario: Gender, Legendary Afterlives, and Documentary Evidence in Eugippius' *Vita Severini'*, in Walter Pohl and Maximilian Diesenberger (eds.), Eugippius und Severinus: Der Autor, der Text, und der Heilige (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001), pp. 53–63.

Conclusion: Great Women Authors?

In concluding, I will address two of the major considerations of this thesis: women writers in transmission, and how these writers are treated in modern scholarship. I will first draw together some historiographical commentary, consider recurring themes and ideas, and propose how to move forward. To do so, I will turn to a landmark essay of feminist history written over fifty years ago: Linda Nochlin's 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?'. Several of the issues that Nochlin explored in this essay recur in the modern commentary on late antique women writers. I will suggest possible methods to avoid the pitfalls that Nochlin identifies – the identification of a 'feminine style' (based upon the erroneous idea that there is some coherence in the output of all women), and the hyperbolic elevation of these artefacts over those produced by male counterparts.

Linda Nochlin, Artists, and Authors

In 1971, Linda Nochlin published her ground-breaking essay exploring links between art and gender. Nochlin promoted assessing the merits of women artists based upon not only their art, but also considering their background and upbringing, their exposure to art and other artists, and their access to art as a possible career. The title is drawn from a conversation with an imaginary (though representative) interlocutor who engages, in bad faith, with ideas of gender equality: 'Well, if women really are equal to men, why have there never been any great women artists (or composers, or mathematicians, or philosophers, or so few of the same)?' When posed in such a way the question, Nochlin concludes, answers itself: 'There are no great women artists because women are incapable of greatness.'[663]

Nochlin disparages attempts to 'discover' forgotten women artists, or to over-emphasise the greatness of artists such as Artemisia Gentileschi or Angelica Kauffmann. In Nochlin's mind, they simply cannot measure up to the male greats. Even worse for Nochlin is the attempt to flatten the distinctions between art produced by women in search of a cohesive, feminine style. Women's art from a specific time period and region will have more in common with contemporary artworks, she observes, than with works by other women centuries before or after.[664] In the course of this essay Nochlin identifies several excellent women artists, but argues that we do them a disservice by judging their artistic merits against those of (white, and ideally middle-class) men. Women, Nochlin argues, simply did not have the same advantages. Social institutions did not encourage greatness for women. Nochlin highlights Pablo Picasso and his precocity, passing all the entry exams to a prestigious art academy aged only fifteen. Picasso's father was a professor of art, and encouraged him. Would the older man have supported his child in their artistic development if he had a daughter, rather than a son? Not

[663] Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1989), pp. 145–78, quotes at p. 147.
[664] *Ibid*., pp. 147–8.

necessarily.[665] As a comparison, Nochlin introduces the artist Rosa Bonheur, who was active in the mid-nineteenth century. Bonheur's father was a drawing teacher with a limited income, though he was unusually committed to gender equality, and he supported Bonheur in her early artistic endeavours. Despite this, Bonheur was never to be as great as Picasso. Bonheur lived with another woman, wore trousers, and was considered something of an oddity in society – her talent, and the extreme demand for her paintings during her lifetime, was not enough to ensure her legacy as an artist.[666] Nochlin concludes that, for much of history, the social limitations placed upon women and the advantages given to male artists mean that art by men is, technically, better – but this is not because men are better at art. Art and artists must be viewed as a product of many factors which are governed by race, wealth, class, and gender.

Nochlin's essay presents one way of viewing the creative output of women in a culture dominated by men. Many of Nochlin's women artists worked on the fringes of artistic circles, but others (like Bonheur) were brought into the mainstream because of their training, talent, and circumstances. But can Nochlin's arguments be applied to the women writers of late antiquity? To some extent they can. Elite women were profoundly involved in literary culture, not only as authors but as patrons of literature, as readers and collectors of books, as scribes and calligraphers. Paula, Eustochium, and Marcella directed the literary output of Jerome though their patronage; their insistence that he turn his attention to one project or another is preserved in his prefaces to his works. These women, and others like them, were obviously at the centre of the production of Christian literature. And, although its precise nature and extent is unknown, elite women received an education grounded in literature. In spite of their literary involvement and education, there are relatively few surviving texts by late antique women. Although many of the works of women artists do survive, their names and reputations are often unknown. In short, they are not credited with the elusive 'greatness' which is applied to many male artists. The core difference between these authors and artists seems to be how their output was viewed. What is at stake is primarily the propriety of a woman author in late antiquity, versus the inherent ability of women artists of the nineteenth century.

Here I will attempt to answer a variation of Nochlin's loaded question: 'Why were there no great women authors from the late antique west?' This was partly due to repressive attitudes towards Christian women and their behaviour. The resistance to women holding leadership positions is best represented by the directive in 1 Timothy 2:12, which forbade women from teaching or holding authority over men. Although, judging by the presence of deaconesses in the early church and the moral authority wielded by women as heads of household communities (Marcella particularly comes to mind here), the attempts to circumscribe women's leadership were limited in their effectiveness. Furthermore, although elite girls were certainly educated at home, they did not receive the same education as boys. The very existence of Proba's *Cento* demonstrates that she was highly educated, both in the Latin classics and in verse composition. Classical education and literature continued to be a source of cultural capital, as the schooling of a young Augustine demonstrates – being well-versed in such texts was a step towards a

[665] *Ibid*., p. 155.
[666] *Ibid*., pp. 170–5.

flourishing public career.[667] Jerome's list of books for little Paula, the daughter of his friend Laeta, showed the extent to which a girl could be steeped in Christian literature from the youngest age.[668] This was perhaps also an attempt by Jerome to course-correct the education of elite young women which, if Proba is anything to go by, was grounded in the classics. There is a clear contrast here between the elite literary women of late antiquity and Nochlin's women artists; their artistic education was often facilitated by a male relative who was an artist, rather than provided as a matter of course due to their social status.

Nochlin points out that almost all successful artists were from the middle classes. 'Why have there been no great artists from the aristocracy?', she asks.[669] As I have highlighted throughout this thesis, the majority of women whose texts were investigated were of an aristocratic rank, with Perpetua as a probable exception. For the elite Christian women in the Latin west, writing was neither the only nor the most effective way to exercise authority. Women who were literary patrons had greater power than those who relied upon their generosity to fund their writing projects – consider Paula, Eustochium, and Jerome. Ironically, because Jerome wrote and his works were preserved, it is he who now appears the most powerful party in this agreement. Paula and Eustochium are rendered as hangers-on as a result of Jerome's literary self-fashioning. Because there were fewer incentives for women to write, there were fewer women authors in situ. But, crucially, there is clear evidence of women writing and their writings not being preserved or transmitted – the women who wrote letters to Augustine are one example. The point at which these texts were lost is often unclear. Did they not keep copies of their own letters? Or, like the lost letters of Macrina, were their letters transmitted well into the medieval period until they eventually fell out of circulation?[670] We do not know whether Augustine himself discarded the women's letters, or if this was the work of later copyists. What is clear is that authorial reputations are created in transmission. Proba has such a reputation – but with one surviving poem she cannot compete with the recognition of a contemporary poet like Prudentius, of whose output much more has survived. Perhaps the late antique west had no great women authors because not enough of their works were transmitted, and therefore their authorial reputations could not be solidified.

Some of Nochlin's observations of women artists – that they lacked time, resources, and support – certainly resonate when considering women writers. But at the core of Nochlin's essay is a response to public discourse. Nochlin criticises the idea of a uniquely feminine style, 'a subtle essence of femininity', observable in the output of all women artists.[671] Nochlin's critique is reminiscent of Peter Dronke's statement in the preface to *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*:

> While I was writing this book, a number of friends and colleagues asked me: do you think there is something about these women writers that distinguishes their work from

[667] Augustine, *Confessiones*, 3.4.
[668] Jerome, *Ep*. 107.
[669] Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', p. 157.
[670] Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, pp. 247–8. See also Chapter One of this thesis.
[671] Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', p. 148.

> that of men? I would always explain that I was not searching for a Platonic Form, Femininity-in-writing, which would manifest itself similarly in every feminine text. The women writers I was considering showed individuality in all kinds of different ways, and it was this many-sidedness that I wanted to characterize.[672]

Ostensibly, Dronke too resisted the notion of a feminine style. But, because of how Dronke chose and organised his texts, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* creates the opposite impression. The conjoined ideas that women had a particular manner of and reason for writing run throughout Dronke's work. As I highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, Dronke differentiated a woman's purpose for writing from that of a man, and intentionally selected texts that revealed something of the inner life of their author.[673] By doing so, whether intentionally or not, Dronke was categorising women's writing as other. As this thesis demonstrates, women's writing was read and copied alongside that of men, and was not treated as something separate. Even if the existence of a feminine style is denied, much of the scholarship on late antique women's authorship seeks to draw similarities between texts by women because of their author's gender.

Another aspect of public discourse that Nochlin rejects is the idea that men are simply better artists than women. A similar phenomenon occurred – and is occurring still – within the commentary on women authors. When surveying the historiography, it becomes clear that late antique women authors and their work do not generally receive glowing write-ups. This partly arises from the terminology used to describe women writers, which seeks to immediately distance them from their male counterparts: 'poetess' for poet, even 'authoress' for author.[674] The criticisms of women's texts are especially acute when they are compared to those of men writing at the same time, or in a similar genre. As we have seen, Mary B. Campbell complained about the style of the *Itinerarium* of Egeria, calling its author 'a woman of average intelligence'.[675] John Wilkinson commented that 'by classical standards' Egeria's writing is 'deplorable' – even though he complimented her talent for observation, Wilkinson did not hold back his criticisms of Egeria.[676] The criticisms of Perpetua, Paula, and Eustochium took a slightly different form, but had similar undercurrents. For Neil Adkin, Paula and Eustochium's letter 'seems to evince a higher literary standard than could be expected' from the two women.[677] Relatedly, Alan Cameron referred to Paula and Eustochium as Jerome's 'aristocratic groupies'.[678] This conjures an image of a rockstar and his adoring fans, not a patronage relationship. Perpetua's authorship is doubted not because of her writing style, but rather because the anonymous narrator is assumed to have more power over her text than she did.[679]

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[672] Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. x.
[673] *Ibid*., p. viii.
[674] Proba is described as both 'poetess' and 'authoress' in Matthews, 'The poetess Proba', p. 284, and as 'poetess' in Pollmann, *The Baptized Muse*, p. 117, n. 98. Finally, Huneberc is called 'authoress' in Limor, 'Pilgrims and Authors', p. 254, n. 5.
[675] Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*, p. 23.
[676] Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, p. 5.
[677] Adkin, 'The Letter of Paula and Eustochium', p. 97.
[678] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, p. 3.
[679] Heffernan, 'Philology and Authorship', p. 324.

In the case of both Perpetua's narrative and the letter of Paula and Eustochium, the implication is that a man would write better.

Proba and her *Cento* have received the strongest backlash from scholars, which is due in part to the distaste that some (mostly classicists) have for the genre. Danuta Shanzer opened an article on the *Cento* as follows: 'Vergilian centos are a generally despised technique of composition.'[680] Elsewhere, this is what Shanzer had to say on Proba:

> "Proba", in such writing as we have from her, is a completely inadequate poet, no, better say it, *poetaster*. Jerome knew how grotesque the *Cento* was … she is no better in the opening of her poem where she is not centonising. One cannot imagine what a sustained panegyric effort from her pen would have been like, and it is hard to believe that any senator of taste would have trusted his past (or his future) to this lady's poetry. [681]

Shanzer establishes a contrast here between the unworthy female poet and the hypothetically learned (but crucially anonymous) male senator, who was infinitely superior in his literariness. The criticism extends beyond the cento genre and to the poetic abilities of Proba herself. The term '*poetaster'*, meaning a bad poet, was invented by Erasmus, himself no fan of Proba,[682] By using it here, Shanzer gestures towards a long history of disparaging the *Cento*. But, despite Shanzer's disapproval, Proba was clearly read and admired – more so than any other woman author from the period, but more than many male authors too. Jerome's jab at the *'garrula anus'* ('chatty old woman') who wrote centos, which was probably a reference to Proba, was in fact less scathing than many of the criticisms levelled at Proba by the historians and classicists of latter half of the twentieth century.[683] This is worth noting, given Jerome's famed sharp tongue and even sharper pen. What purpose does commentary like this – mostly on Proba, but also the other women authors – serve? Surely its purveyors do not regret that these texts were read, or preserved, or written. It seems more likely that it is a reassurance to the reader that there is not a wider project of reclaiming (and then indiscriminately praising) women's writing here. Nochlin warned against scholarship that uncritically lauded women, but crucially considers how these women's circumstances shaped their output. Shanzer does not allow Proba that same grace.

It is important to highlight that many of the responses to late antique women's writings are deeply problematic. These readings have directly impeded a proper assessment of these texts. These authors and their work can be approached without condescension or fawning, which Nochlin and Shanzer both sought – albeit in different ways – to resist. Taking late antique women seriously as authors need not come with an aesthetic appreciation of their work. I am not claiming, for example, that Proba was the greatest Latin poet of the fourth century. That said, hyperbolic criticism obstructs the previous centuries of willing readers, not to mention the author herself. This thesis has demonstrated that there is another way to approach these

[680] Shanzer. 'The Anonymous *Carmen contra paganos'*, p. 232. See also Green, 'Proba's *Cento'*, p. 554.
[681] Shanzer, 'The Date and Identity of the Centonist Proba', p. 86.
[682] Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, pp. 96–7.
[683] Jerome, *Ep*. 53.7.

texts. Firstly, considering the geographical movement and reach of a text can provide insights into the groups that read it, the (religious, literary, cultural) purposes it served, and the different social contexts it resonated within over time. Secondly, surveying the (positive and negative) commentary of a text's readers will assist in determining the extent to which these early critics shaped its later reception. Finally, by closely observing how a text is presented, glossed, and transmitted within manuscripts, the other texts it travels with, and the communities that created and used these manuscripts, we can build a picture of the position of an author within literary culture more broadly. Collating this information allows us to observe the author's impact – their authorial afterlife.

Women's Authorship and Authority in Transmission

Here I will draw together my findings on the writings of late antique women, the status of women's writing in transmission and the factors that governed its reception. There are also broader contexts to consider. I have highlighted the involvement of women in literary culture writ large, drawing attention to women as both educated and educators, as patrons and readers. I have also explored the reception and transmission of women's writing as an indicator of women's authority in Christian circles. Manuscript production primarily took place in monasteries, and was therefore necessarily governed by Christian principles. Observing the transmission of women's writing within the manuscript tradition is therefore one way to track shifting attitudes to women's authority in the early medieval church.

The institutionalisation of the church steadily increased into the Carolingian period, shifting away from its early foundations as a collection of households and moving towards a hierarchical organisation. An all-male clergy meant that the church was increasingly a masculine institution, and enclosure became the norm for women's monasteries. By 900, the expected behaviour of devout Christian women had irrevocably changed. This shift is reflected in the extant writing by women after the fourth century. Compared to the period from 200 to 400 (and especially 350 to 400), the frequency of surviving texts by women which attracted a wide readership decreases from 400 to 900.[684] The authors of these later texts are similarly elite, often royal women or writing in proximity to royalty, and denote the presence of highly-educated women in royal and monastic circles. There are a handful of poems attributed to the former queen Radegund (d. 587), who left her husband King Lothar to found the Holy Cross nunnery in Poitiers.[685] It was here that she and her friend the abbess, Agnes, apparently read Proba. In the early seventh century, a *Life* for Radegund was composed by a nun named Baudonivia.[686] Baudonivia also lived in the Holy Cross. Between 761 and 786 another nun,

[684] See Lisa M. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) for an overview of women's lives in the period. For the English context see Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450–1500* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995).
[685] For a recent account of Radegund's life see Dailey, *Radegund: The Trials and Triumphs.*
[686] On Baudonivia and her *Life* of Radegund see John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 134–53.

Huneberc, wrote up an account of the travels of her relative Willibald.[687] Towards the middle of the ninth century, Carolingian noblewoman Dhuoda wrote a behavioural manual – the *Liber Manualis* – for her son.[688] Each of these texts, like those covered in this thesis, provides a tantalising snapshot into the literary culture of the time, showcasing the varied genres within which women wrote and evidencing the education that allowed them to do so. It therefore seems unlikely that fewer women wrote in the early medieval period compared to the years between 200 and 400. Rather, it is more plausible that their writings did not extend into an immediately accepting literary circle, as Proba's *Cento* apparently did, and that these writings were not preserved and copied. The surviving texts and their authors are associated with saints, nobles, and royals – this likely influenced their continued transmission.

Of the extant texts by women that were circulated into the medieval period, the person of the author emerges as an important factor in the creation of the text, how widely the text was read, and the extent to which they were remembered as an author at all. For Perpetua, her sanctity was the most significant part of her identity; her authorship paled in comparison to her ever-expanding cult, which occurred within the context of the great popularity of martyr cults in general. The anonymous narrator of the *Passio* also emphasises Perpetua's noble birth – though this was likely not the case, it is an important aspect of Perpetua's characterisation and commemoration. Paula and Eustochium, although later venerated as saints, were remembered primarily as aristocratic companions of Jerome. It is within this context that their authorship was highlighted and questioned, and sometimes erased in order to add another letter to the collection of a doctor of the church. However, it was their wealth and status that allowed this letter to be written in the first place, and their aristocratic ancestry made their letter an interesting later Roman artefact. Similarly, Proba was a wealthy elite. Her background allowed her to gain her grounding in Virgil and verse composition, and her aristocratic birth was mentioned by later readers of her work. Egeria was viewed by readers of her *Itinerarium* as an exceptionally holy woman, but later on she was also assumed to be an abbess. This interpretation of Egeria's position explained the freedom of movement which Egeria enjoyed (later readers could not imagine any pious woman but an abbess having such independence) but also invested her text with additional authority. Egeria's presumed status as an abbess likely attracted more readers – although the popularity of the *Itinerarium* is difficult to observe given the fragmentary state of the extant manuscripts. As mentioned above, all these women (perhaps excluding Perpetua) were from wealthy and elite families, and it is because of this that they received sufficient education to write.

There is also the question of genre, which relates to the use of the text. Perpetua's account in the *Passio* was likely read as part of early celebrations of the feast day of the Carthage co-martyrs; readings from hagiographies were customary on feast days. The *Passio*, however, was

[687] For a recent assessment of Huneberc's writing style see Aidan Conti, 'The Literate Memory of Hugeberc of Heidenheim', in Robin Norris, Rebecca Stephenson, and Renée Rebecca Trilling (eds.), *Feminist Approaches to Early Medieval English Studies* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), pp. 317–41. See also the introduction to this thesis.

[688] Janet L. Nelson, 'Dhuoda on Dreams', in Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith (eds.)*, Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe, 400–1400* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 41–54.

soon replaced by the more popular *Acta*, which removed both Perpetua's first-person account and the tradition of her authorship. It better served the hagiographical genre to have a saint as a speaker, rather than an author. The letter of Paula and Eustochium was widely read and copied because of its inclusion in the epistolary collection of Jerome, and the continued tradition of creating and copying such collections – not only of Jerome, but also Augustine, Paulinus of Nola, and many others. As a Virgilian cento, Proba's poem found a home in many different contexts; in poetry collections belonging to women's monasteries, in later schoolroom books, but also in works focusing on the intricacies of Latin language. It was therefore useful to many different groups of readers. As a travelogue, Egeria's *Itinerarium* was incorporated into later texts detailing sites in the Bible, and therefore held a practical use as well as its more obvious devotional one.

Of all these authors, it is Proba who emerges as the most successful, and the most popular. Her authorship is consistently recognised, both by copyists and by commentators like Isidore of Seville. The contents of her text was criticised, but its authenticity was not doubted. Proba is consistently credited with authoring the *Cento*, even by critics like Jerome. Unlike Paula, Eustochium, and their promotion of asceticism, Proba did not write against the grain of elite late Roman Christian society, but rather expressed the ideas of a more moderate Christian elite who sought to maintain the status quo. Part of the success of the *Cento* in transmission lay in its versatility as a text; it used Virgil, it retold biblical stories, and was fundamentally a work of poetry. It held joint purposes of instruction and entertainment, using a traditionally playful form for a serious didactic purpose. Particularly because of its use of Virgil (not only a male poet, but an exceedingly influential one) Proba's *Cento* was able to transcend many of the debates of authenticity and authorial ambiguity that have surrounded the other texts I have discussed in this thesis.

The writings of late antique women were read and copied into the medieval period. They informed later works, with intertextual references and borrowed phrases revealing plentiful groups of engaged readers. Rather than being relegated to its fringes, writings of these women occupied a central position in Christian literary culture. There is still much work to be done of women authors, and how the subsequent authorship of Christian women was interpreted within circles that read Proba, or Egeria, or both. Was it the continued presence of fourth-century women writers in broader literary culture that inspired, or even facilitated, the work of Hrotsvitha in the tenth century? Writings by late antique women surely shaped ideas about the authorship of women who wrote in the centuries that followed, with these later authors making their own waves within literary culture. But, to paraphrase Perpetua's parting line: someone else may write up what happens to the works of medieval women authors, if they wish.

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