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THE MOTIVATION OF MARTYRS: PERPETUA AND THE PALESTINIANS

by

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There is hardly a week going by that we do not hear of suicide bombers in Israel and Palestine.¹ Evidently, there are plenty of people who are willing to die for the Palestinian cause. Such a bomber is considered a ‘witness’, *shahîd*, a literal Arabic translation from the Greek word *martyr*. As has recently been noticed, there ‘can be little doubt that this concept – and this word – was absorbed directly from Greek during those early centuries of Islam when Christian churches still flourished in Palestine and Greek was still spoken’.² In my contribution I will examine the motivation of some Christian martyrs, who voluntarily died for their faith in the amphitheatre of Carthage on 7 March 203. Within a decade after their executions (§ 1), an unknown editor assembled both the report of the prison vision of Saturus, the leader of the group, and the prison diary of the young woman Perpetua into one document, the *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (henceforth: *Perpetua*). In the process he slightly edited these writings, added an introduction and gave an account of their deaths.³

¹ My study is part of a longer project on the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, cf. my ‘Perpetua and Her Diary: Authenticity, Family and Visions’, in W. Ameling (ed.), *Märtyrer und Märtyrerakten* (Stuttgart, 2002) 77-120; ‘Contextualizing Heaven in Third-Century North Africa’, in R.S. Abusch and A.Y. Reed (eds), *In Heaven as it is on Earth* (Cambridge, 2003) and ‘The Vision of Saturus in the *Passio Perpetuae*’, in F. García Martínez and G. Luttikhuisen (eds), *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome. Studies in ancient cultural interaction in honour of Ton Hilhorst* (Leiden, 2003).

² G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge, 1995) 20. For the early history of the Muslim views see A.J. Wensinck, *The Oriental Doctrine of Martyrs*, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie, Afdeling Letterkunde, 53, Serie A, 6 (Amsterdam, 1921) 147-74; E. Kohlberg, *Medieval Muslim Views of Martyrdom*, *ibidem*, NR 60 (1997) 281-307; T. Seidensticker, ‘Martyrdom in Islam’, *Awraq. Estudios sobre el mundo árabe e islámico contemporáneo* 19 (1998) 63-77 and ‘Die Transformation des christlichen Märtyrerbegriffs im Islam’, in Ameling, *Märtyrer und Märtyrerakten*, 137-48.

³ For a full bibliography see Bremmer, ‘Perpetua and Her Diary’, 77.

The text has come down to us in a Greek and Latin version.⁴ The standard editions of *Perpetua* do not rate the Greek version very highly.⁵ Yet in some passages it clearly offers better readings than our most important Latin manuscript, the eleventh-century *Codex Casinensis 204 MM*.⁶ Although the Greek version was transmitted in only one tenth- or eleventh-century manuscript, the *Codex Hierosolymitanus I*, it evidently goes back to a Latin *Vorlage* from before Late Antiquity. In other words, it may well be that both the Latin and the Greek version go back to a manuscript (manuscripts?) with a better text than we possess now.⁷

It is my aim to present and analyse the two chapters (*Perpetua* 17-18) that report the penultimate day of the Christian martyrs (§ 1) and the preparations before their actual execution (§ 2), as they provide some insight into the motivation of these Christians for bearing their terrible fate. Given Hans Kippenberg's interest in 'criminal religion' it may be appropriate to briefly compare the Christian martyrs from Carthage with the Palestinian suicide bombers (§ 3). Admittedly, he and Kocku von Stuckrad discuss Muslim suicide bombers in their excellent introduction into *Religionswissenschaft*, but they do not really go beyond Lebanon in the 1980s.⁸ I have chosen to focus on the Palestinians, as they are so much in the news today. At the same time, we should also realise that suicide bombers have to be contextualised in place and time. Modern studies often lump Iranians, Lebanese, Saudis and Palestinians together,⁹ but a closer look shows considerable differences between them. The Shiite Iranians organised mass 'suicides' of boy soldiers in the war against Iraq in the 1980s.¹⁰ From the early 1980s the Iranians also influenced the Shiite Lebanese,

⁴ It is a pity that our text has not been taken into account in his discussion of Greek in North Africa by J.N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge, 2003) 220-1.

⁵ C.I.M.I. van Beek, *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis I* (Nijmegen, 1936); J. Amat, *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité suivi des Actes* (Paris, 1996).

⁶ See the important review of Amat's edition by C. Mazzucho, *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 36 (2000) 157-67.

⁷ For the text see also my observations in Bremmer, 'Perpetua and Her Diary', 81-86 and 'The Vision of Satorus'. Glen Bowersock's comment (*per* email of 5-1-2003): 'I note near the end (of my 'Perpetua') that you admit that the Greek translator made substantial contributions of his own in the matter of sports vocabulary. How many translators do that kind of thing?' also suggests to me that our Latin tradition seems to go back to a better text than we have now.

⁸ H. Kippenberg and K. von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* (Munich, 2003) 175-83.

⁹ C. Reuter, *Mein Leben ist eine Waffe. Selbstmordattentäter – Psychogramm eines Phänomens* (Munich, 2002); F. Khosrokar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d'Allah* (Paris, 2002).

¹⁰ W. Schmucker, 'Iranische Märtyrertestamente', *Die Welt des Islams* 27, 4 (1987) 185-249; I. Brown, *Khomeini's Forgotten Sons. The Story of Iran's Boy Soldiers* (London, 1990); F.

who were the first to introduce the video, to use women and to organise individual suicide bombers on a systematic basis, but their attacks had virtually come to a halt in the middle of the 1990s.¹¹ In numbers the Saudis are by far the least represented, but they are the most prominent ‘bombers’ through their spectacular suicide attack, the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. Their case is really in need of a special investigation, as they did not suffer from Israel or from an arch-enemy like Iraq. Saudis also constituted by far the largest contingent of the Muslims that came to Afghanistan in order to support the Taliban, and more than ninety-seven percent of educated Saudis supported Al-Qaida after 9/11.¹² Consequently, they clearly constitute a special case. At the same time, many of the World Trade attackers came via Europe, examples of the trans-national *neo-umma* (a ‘virtual Islam’?) that internet and television have been fashioning in the last decades.¹³ This leaves us, finally, with the Palestinians to whom we will come back in our third section. But let us now turn first to the Christian martyrs.

1. *The penultimate day*

In the previous chapters of *Perpetua* the editor reported about Perpetua and Saturus on the basis of their own writings, but he also provided a detailed account of their fellow martyr Felicitas’ giving birth in prison to a girl (15). Unfortunately, both the basis for his report and the conversation between Perpetua and the tribune in charge of the prisoners (16) remain unclear. Yet his account of the martyrs’ execution gives one impression that he may have been an eye-witness, and he may well have been one of those Christians who regularly came to visit his fellow brothers and sisters in prison (3.8, 9.1), and even had dinner with them (16). So what does he tell us of their penultimate day?

Even on the penultimate day they directed remarks to the crowd with the same steadfastness (viz. as Perpetua: 16.1), when they had that last dinner that is called ‘the free dinner’ (as far as they were concerned they did not celebrate the ‘free dinner’ but the *agape*): threatening them with God’s

Khosrokhavar, ‘Le martyr révolutionnaire en Iran’, *Social Compass* 43 (1996) 83-100 and *Les nouveaux martyrs d’Allah*, 115-73; Reuter, *Mein Leben ist eine Waffe*, 58-87.

¹¹ Khosrokhavar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d’Allah*, 228-31; Reuter, *Mein Leben ist eine Waffe*, 88-134.

¹² See Khosrokhavar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d’Allah*, 274-5; E. Sciolino, *New York Times*, 27 January 2002, A8, respectively.

¹³ See the perceptive observations of Khosrokhavar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d’Allah*, 233-327.

judgment, stressing the successful outcome (*felicitatem*) of their martyrdom and ridiculing the curiosity (*curiositatem*) of the onlookers. Saturus said: (2) ‘Is tomorrow not enough for you? Why are you so eager to see what you dislike? Friends today, but enemies tomorrow! But take careful note of our faces so that you will recognize us on that (already mentioned) day’. Thus all departed from there, speechless with admiration, and many of them began to believe. (17)

The martyrs, then, celebrated their penultimate day with a special meal, the *cena libera*. Given their performance on their final day in the company of *bestiarii*, the gladiators who fought against wild beasts, the custom of this ‘free meal’ may well have come from the world of these gladiators.¹⁴ Amat (*ad loc.*) suggests that the qualification *liber* hints at the Roman god Liber/Bacchus, but there is no reason to follow her, since Liber played no role of any importance in the world of the gladiators. According to Tertullian (*Apologeticum* 42.5), gladiators consumed their food in public, and it seems that this custom had also been introduced for the condemned, as evidently everybody was free to come and look at them. However, we should probably not imagine this meal as the height of culinary expertise, since Tertullian (*De spectaculis* 12.6) also mentions that it consisted of *puls*, a kind of porridge that once had been the main staple food of the ancient Romans.

The editor contrasts this meal with the simplicity of the *agape*, or *dilectio*, as Tertullian translates it - a simplicity that is also stressed by him when discussing pagan meals (*Apologeticum* 39.16). The *agape* was a special meal that enhanced early Christian sociability, but that was already on the way out in Perpetua’s time. Tertullian mentions that the Christians invited the poor to join this meal, and this custom may have contributed to the presence of a crowd.¹⁵ However, the presence of the onlookers was clearly not appreciated by the future martyrs, who warned them of the coming Judgment.¹⁶ The theme returns several times in the chapters 17.2 and 18.7-8 (§ 3), and it demonstrates their confidence in the successful outcome of their martyrdom; in this particular context, the choice of the term *felicitas* can hardly be

¹⁴ Petronius 26.7; Plutarch, *Moralia* 1099B; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 4.13; Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 42.5; Cyprian, *Ep.* 31.1.2 with G.W. Clarke *ad loc.*

¹⁵ For the custom in the time of Perpetua see Tertullian, *Ad martyras* 2, *De oratione* 28, *De baptismo* 9.4, *De ieiuniis* 17; E. Dekkers, *Tertullianus en de geschiedenis der liturgie* (Brussels and Amsterdam, 1947) 48; H. Pétré, *Caritas* (Louvain, 1948) 64-5; W.-D. Hauschild, ‘Agapen I’, in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 1 (Berlin and New York, 1977) 748-53.

¹⁶ For the theme see M.L. Ricci, ‘Topica pagana e topica cristiana negli *Acta martyrum*’, *Atti dell’Accademia Toscana di scienze e Lettere, La Columbaria* 28 (1963-64) 35-122 at 89ff.

separated from the presence of Felicitas amongst them.¹⁷ In other words, they were certain that they would not lapse at the very last minute.

Whereas the theme of the Last Judgment may hardly surprise us, we may be puzzled by the martyrs' ridiculing of the onlookers' *curiositas*. Musurillo translates the term with 'curiosity', Chiarini with 'vana curiosità' and Amat with 'curiosité'. Yet, surely, to reproach the onlookers with being 'nosy' after having threatened them with the Last Judgment is a bit of a let down. We will therefore look in a different direction. The word *curiositas* was perhaps invented by Cicero (*Ad Atticum* 2.12.2), but it probably was the African Apuleius who re-introduced the word into Latin in his *Metamorphoses*, which he wrote only a few decades before the turn of the third century.¹⁸ In his work, curiosity repeatedly occurs as a quality of a crowd that flocks to see a spectacle.¹⁹ However, this meaning hardly fits the context and we note therefore that the Greek *periergia* for the Latin *curiositas* points to a philosophic background. It is in this context that Tertullian repeatedly stresses the *stupida curiositas* of the philosophers (*Ad Nationes* 2.4.19) and opposes the Christian *simplicitas veritatis* to the *curiositas* of the heretics (*Adversus Marcionem* 2.21.2). *Curiositas* leads to meddling in astrology and magic (*De idololatria* 9.1) and is even used by Tertullian as a synonym of *superstitio* (*De praescriptione haereticorum* 40). In short, the good Christian should abandon *omnem libidinem curiositatis* (*De praescriptione* 14.2). It is, I suggest, in this direction that the reproach of *curiositas* by the future martyrs went. The onlookers had not made the right religious choice and they should abandon their pagan practices.²⁰

To these general reproaches Saturus added several other remarks that once again illustrate the ironic, if not sarcastic, temper that he had also displayed in his

¹⁷ For such word-play see C. Mohrmann, *Études sur le Latin des Chrétiens* I (Rome, 1961²) 293-96; G.J.M. Bartelink, 'Sur les allusions aux noms propres chez les auteurs grecs chrétiens', *Vigiliae Christianae* 15 (1961) 32-39; J. den Boeft and J. Bremmer, 'Notiunculæ martyrologicae IV', *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991) 105-22 at 114f.

¹⁸ See my discussion in 'The Novel and the Apocryphal Acts: Place, Time and Readership', in H. Hofmann and M. Zimmerman (eds), *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel IX* (Groningen, 1998) 157-180 at 170f.

¹⁹ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 3.2, 4.16.28-9, 10.19. For a good discussion and exhaustive bibliography see B.L. Hijmans Jr *et al.*, *Apuleius Madaurensis Metamorphoses IX* (Groningen, 1995) 362-79 (by Hijmans).

²⁰ For Tertullian and *curiositas* see A. Labhardt, 'Curiositas. Notes sur l'histoire d'un mot et d'une notion', *Museum Helveticum* 17 (1960) 213-24 (good on the Greek background); J.-Cl. Fredouille, *Tertullien et la conversion de la culture antique* (Paris, 1972) 411-42; L.F.

vision (13.3). His expression *hodie amici, cras inimici* is a variation on the opposition *hodie/cras* that was popular among the Romans and that we can also find in Tertullian.²¹ He closed his tirade with the exhortation to carefully note their faces so that they would recognize them *in die illo*. Undoubtedly, he meant that they would recognize them on the day of the Last Judgment when the martyrs would be on the right side, whereas their visitors were doomed to go to hell. His words reflect the Christian belief that on that fateful day the martyrs would be members of the heavenly court that would judge the judges that had condemned them – a thought that must have given some satisfaction to the martyrs.²²

In her translation, Chiarini refers to 2 *Timothy* 4.8 for the expression, but the Vulgata has *in illa die*, which is slightly different. In that text the expression means ‘that famous day’, whereas in our passage the anaphoric position of *ille* (*in die illo*) seems to refer back to what the group already said about the *iudicium Dei* (17.1), when they must have also spoken about the events to be expected on the Day of Judgment.

Both the words of Saturus and, presumably, the behaviour of the group left the spectators, in the words of the editor, *adtoniti*, literally ‘thunderstruck’. It is a very strong expression, and it is therefore understandable that, again according to the editor, ‘many of them came to believe’. Bastiaensen (*ad loc.*) considers this ‘una pia esagerazione’ or ‘un motivo topico’. There is undoubtedly a truth in his skepticism, as the editor derived these words from the *New Testament* where the same expression is used three times (*John* 11.45, 12.42; *Acts* 4.4). Yet we should be careful with a judgment derived from our own time. Whoever looks at the enormous growth of the Christian Church in the first three centuries must wonder for what reasons pagans decided to abandon their own beliefs and to join the Christian community.²³ As Tertullian himself already observed, *semen est sanguis Christianorum* (*Ap.* 50.13). The editor may well have exaggerated, but it was precisely this kind of Christian behaviour that must have greatly contributed to the growth of the Church.

Pizzolato, ‘Tertulliano e la dialettica’, in *Paradoxos politeia. Studi patristici in onore di Giuseppe Lazzati* (Milano, 1979) 145-77 at 154 note 56 (bibliography).

²¹ Cf. Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 13.30.1; Horace, *Epist.* 1.16.33; Ovid, *Remedia Amoris* 93; Martial 11.65.6; Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.

²² Tertullian, *Ad martyras* 2.4: *Iudex exspectatur, sed vos estis de iudicibus ipsis iudicaturi*; Hippolytus, *In Daniele* II.37.

2. *The preparations for the execution*

Perpetua had already told us that the martyrs would fight on their final day in a *munere castrensi* (7.9). The expression *munus castrense* is unique and perhaps even an idiosyncratic coinage by Perpetua herself. The *castra* implies a military camp, and Perpetua seems to have been so intimidated by her stay among the soldiers that she suspected she was to be executed in the amphitheatre of the military camp that perhaps was situated near modern Bordj Djehid.²⁴ Instead the execution took place in the impressive amphitheatre on the west side of the city.²⁵ The *munus* meant a day of gladiatorial games and fights against animals, the so-called *venationes*.²⁶ Originally, the two events had been separate, but at least since Hadrian they had become combined.²⁷

Apparently, Perpetua had also provided the date of their final day: *natale tunc Getae Caesaris*, the birthday of Caesar Geta, the second son of the ruling emperor Septimius Severus, which was probably 7 March 203. However, the sentence is informative in two other aspects as well. First, the word *tunc* must have been inserted by the editor and thus demonstrates that he did not copy out Perpetua's diary literally but at least edited her words to some extent.²⁸ And secondly, this *tunc* provides us with the *terminus ante quem* of the composition of *Perpetua*, since it implies that the editor composed his report before the death of Geta, who was murdered by his brother Caracalla on 26 December 211. As traces of Geta's existence were assiduously removed after his death,²⁹ and the clausulae point to the beginning of the third

²³ For the arithmetics of this astonishing growth see Bremmer, 'Perpetua and Her Diary', 85f.

²⁴ W. Elliger, 'Karthago', *RAC* 2001, 229-84 at 254 and the map on p. 231-2. For such military amphitheatres see G. Ville, *La gladiature en Occident des origines à la mort de Domitien* (Rome, 1981) 214.

²⁵ D.L. Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre* (London and New York, 2000) 128-46; Elliger, 'Karthago', 238.

²⁶ A. Hönle, 'Munus, munera III', *Der neue Pauly* 8 (2000) 486-94.

²⁷ M. Buonocore, 'Munera e venationes adrianei nel 119 d. C.', *Latomus* 44 (1985) 173-77.

²⁸ For such examples see Th. Heffernan, 'Philology and authorship in the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*', *Traditio* 50 (1995) 315-25, to be read with the comments by F. Dolbeau, *R. Ét. Aug.* 42 (1996) 312-3.

²⁹ For Geta's birth, death and *damnatio memoriae* see T. Barnes, *Tertullian* (Oxford, 1985²) 263-5; A. Mastino, 'L'erasione del nome di Geta dalle iscrizioni nel quadro della propaganda politica alla corte di Caracalla', *Annali Fac. Let. Filos. Cagliari* N.S. 2 (1978-79) 47-81; H. Heinen, 'Herrscherkult im römischen Ägypten und damnatio memoriae Getas: Überlegungen zum Berliner Severertondo und zu Papyrus Oxyrhynchus XII 1449', *Röm. Mitt.* 98 (1991) 263-98.

century, we may safely date *Perpetua* to the years before Geta's murder. So what happened on this final day?

The day of their victory dawned, and they proceeded from their prison to the amphitheatre as if it was to heaven: joyful, gracefully looking, trembling, if at all, with joy rather than fear. (2) Perpetua followed with calm face and step, as a lady (*matrona*) of Christ, as a favourite of God, forcing everybody to lower their gaze through the vigour of her eyes. (3) Similarly, Felicitas, glad that she had survived giving birth so that she could fight the beasts, from blood to blood, from midwife to gladiator (*retiarius*), ready to be washed after birth, in a second christening.

(4) And when they had been led through the gate and forced to put on outfits – the men into that of the priests of Saturnus, but the women into that of the consecrated maidens of the Cereres (*Cererum*) – that noble woman Perpetua³⁰ has steadfastly offered resistance right until the end, (5) for she said: 'That is why we came to this of our own free will, so that our freedom would not be compromised. That is why we surrendered our life, that we would do no such thing. We agreed that with you.' (6) Injustice acknowledged justice: the military tribune gave in. As they were, so they would simply be brought into the arena. (7) Perpetua began to sing a song of victory: she was already treading on the head of the Egyptian. Revocatus, Saturninus and Saturus threatened the onlooking crowd. (8) Then when they came within sight of Hilarianus, they said to Hilarianus while gesturing with their hands and heads: 'You us, but God you!'

(9) At this the exasperated crowd demanded that they be scourged by a line of *venatores*. And they certainly congratulated themselves that they had obtained even a share in the Lord's sufferings. (18)

The day started early. In antiquity, shows normally had to end before dusk, and thus started at a time that would be unthinkable for modern entertainment. In Roman games, the *damnati ad bestias* performed in the morning, whereas in the afternoon the gladiatorial games proper took place; similarly, in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (30), Thecla was fetched at dawn for the combat with the animals.³¹ The editor notes how glad the martyrs were and he even stresses the expression on their faces.³² Musurillo translates *vultu decori* with 'with calm faces', Chiarini with 'pieni di dignità' and Amat with 'le visage serein'. The last version approaches the Latin probably best, as *decorus* means 'handsome, comely' but also 'conferring honour, noble'. In any case, Chiarini is wrong not to point to the face. The editor probably

³⁰ With the Greek text and E, I follow Bastiaensen in accepting the name of Perpetua into the text: another example where the Greek text is to be preferred above that of A.

³¹ Ville, *Gladiature*, 393-4; K. Coleman, 'Fatal Charades: Roman executions staged as mythological enactments', *J. Roman Studies* 80 (1990) 44-73 at 55.

³² For the *hilaritas* of martyrs see Bremmer, 'Perpetua and Her Diary', 94f.

wanted to stress that the faces of the future martyrs in no way betrayed any anxiety but, on the contrary, demonstrated their nobility.

However united they may have been, the group still displayed a certain hierarchy in their marching order, as *sequebatur Perpetua* ('Perpetua followed').³³ Musurillo translates these words with 'Perpetua went along', but this misjudges the meaning of the text. Although not stated explicitly, the male martyrs apparently went in front, whereas Perpetua and Felicitas followed them. Given the exceptional nature of her diary, Perpetua naturally has become the focus of most modern investigations into the martyrdom, and we perhaps expect that the ancient Christians also saw it that way. Yet the case is not that simple. When relating their arrest, the editor gave their names in the following order: Revocatus and Felicitas, Saturninus and Secundulus, and, only finally, Perpetua (2.1); both enumerations of the group by the abbreviated *Acta* (1.1) also mention the female martyrs after the male ones. And when the editor reports the start of their actual execution, he first relates the sufferings of Saturninus, Revocatus and Saturus (in that order: 19) before coming to Perpetua and Felicitas (20). Finally, the editor first relates the death of Saturus and his group (21.1-8) and closes with the one of Perpetua (21.9). It is not surprising, then, that the early fifth-century African *Liber genealogus* has the order Saturus, Saturninus, Revocatus, Felicitas and Bibia Perpetua, and a Late Antique Carthaginian inscription Saturus, Saturninus, Rebocatus and Secundulus in line 2 and 3, with Felicitas and Perpetua only in line 4.³⁴

The same order is also apparent in the titles of the manuscripts of *Perpetua*. Although most of them miss the beginning and/or the title, the *Codex Einsidlensis 250* (c. XII) has the title *Passio sanctorum Revocati Saturni Perpetuae et Felicitatis* and a lost *codex Laureshamensis* carries the title *Passio sancti Saturnini et sancti Saturis, Felicitatis et Perpetuae*. Among the abbreviated *Acta* of group I, the *Bruxellensis 9119* (c. XII) carries the title *Passio ss. Saturi sociorumque eius*, whereas from the

³³ For the public performance of female martyrs see also the observations by E. Prinzivalli, 'La martire cristiana fra dimensione pubblica e privata: momenti di una conflittualità', *Rudiae* 12 (2000) 155-70.

³⁴ Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historicae, Auctores Antiquissimi* 9 (Berlin, 1892) 195; *CIL* 8, suppl. 4.25038 = *ICKarth 2.1* = W. Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia* (Macon, 1997) 105-10, cf. F. Dolbeau, *Rev. Et. Aug.* 48 (2002) 367-8, who convincingly refutes the interpretation of line 4 as *felicitas perpetua* by J. Divjak and W. Wischmeyer, 'Perpetua felicitate oder Perpetua und Felicitas? Zu ICKarth 2, 1', *Wiener*

abbreviated *Acta* of group II, the elder manuscripts, such as the *Monacensis* 4554 (c. VIII-IX), the *Monacensis* 22240 (c. XII) and the *Parisiensis* 5593 (c. XI), carry the title *Pasio ss. martyrum Saturi, Saturnini, Revocati, Perpetuae et Felicitatis*.

The names of the female martyrs perhaps appeared in front in a list of martyrs on a late sixth-century Carthaginian mosaic, but if so, only *-tas* has survived of their names; it is the names of Saturus and Saturninus at the end that suggests the restoration of the female martyrs here.³⁵ Otherwise, it is the Greek manuscript that mentions only Perpetua by name in the title, just as some later versions of the abbreviated *Acta* have Perpetua and Felicitas as the protagonists of the martyrdom.³⁶ The ‘marching order’ of the martyrs, then, reflected the importance attached to men and women in the ancient African Church. Yet despite this order, the editor clearly pays much more attention to the two female martyrs than to the male ones, with the exception of Saturus. Evidently, the behaviour of Perpetua and Felicitas impressed him to such an extent that in this respect he was able to rise above the gender prejudices of his milieu and time.

The description of Perpetua is not totally clear in our textual tradition. Musurillo, Bastiaensen and Amat print Van Beek’s *lucido vultu et placido incessu*, and it is true that Latin often combines *vultus* and *incessus* in a description.³⁷ Yet I have been unable to find the combination *lucidus vultus*, whereas *placidus ingressus* can at least be paralleled with *placidus gradus*.³⁸ That is why I prefer to read with the manuscripts B, C and E *placido vultu et pedum incessu*, as the latter expression was also used by Cyprian (*De habitu virginum* 13). At the same time, we are struck by the exaltation of Perpetua: *matrona Christi* and *Dei delicata* are no mean terms,³⁹ and it is perhaps not chance that the Greek version lacks the latter. Perpetua’s self-confidence

Studien 114 (2001) 613-27. Dolbeau also notes the priority of the male martyrs and my collection of passages builds on his.

³⁵ For text and discussion see Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions*, 112-3, who also suggests that their names appeared at front in a sixth-century mural ‘on the wall of a baptistery in the district of Sayda (Sainte-Monique)’ (115-6).

³⁶ For information on the manuscripts and the groups of abbreviated *Acta* see Amat, *Passion*, 84-90, 272-76.

³⁷ Cicero, *Leg. agr.* 2.13, *Pro Sestio* 17; Ovid, *Met.* 11.636; Seneca, *Ep.* 114.22.

³⁸ Phaedrus 2.7.6; Pliny, *Pan.* 30.4; Apuleius, *Met.* 11.12.

³⁹ Musurillo translates *matrona* with ‘wife’, but in Apuleius it can also mean ‘lady of good reputation’, cf. Hijmans Jr, *Apuleius Madaurensis, Metamorphoses Book IX*, 206. This meaning of *matrona* comes too short in P. Grimal, ‘*Matrona* (les lois, les moeurs et le langage)’, in R. Braun (ed.), *Hommage à Jean Granarolo = Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Nice* 50 (1985) 195-203.

is also given expression by the editor, when he notices that the crowd lowered its gaze through the *vigor* of her eyes.⁴⁰ As Perpetua's battle in the arena demonstrated (below), she did not conform to customary female behaviour.⁴¹ In this case, she exhibited more manly behaviour than most males would have done in a similar situation.

Felicitas too receives similar attention from the editor. In the same epigrammatic style that we already encountered, she is pictured as going straight from midwife, the *obstetrix* that normally was present at a Roman birth,⁴² to *retiarius*, the lowest rank among the gladiators, who would be expected to give the *coup de grâce* to those martyrs that had survived the animals.⁴³ Although the blood-drenched clothes from a birth are sometimes mentioned (Horace, *Epodes* 17.50-2), this seems to be one of the very few passages, if any, where the washing of Roman women after birth is alluded to.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the editor is perhaps less clear here than desirable. He does not mean that Felicitas' washing is her second baptism, since that would make her being baptised thrice. However, it was a widespread belief that martyrdom constituted a second baptism, and that is the belief that the editor alludes to in this passage.⁴⁵

When they had passed through the gate of the amphitheatre, the men were forced to doff the outfit of the priests of Saturn, and the women that of the maidens of the two Cereres. All recent editors print *Cereris*, but our oldest manuscript *codex Casinensis 204 MM* has the plural *Cererum*. This must have been the original reading,

⁴⁰ Note that Val. Max. 8.10.1 ext. uses the same expression for Demosthenes: *acerrimum uigorem oculorum*.

⁴¹ For a very interesting analysis of this detail within the wider context of martyrdom see K. Waldner, "Was wir also gehört und berührt haben, verkünden wir auch euch...". Zur narrativen Technik der Körperdarstellung im *Martyrium Polycarpi* und der *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*', in B. Feichtinger and H. Seng (eds.), *Die Christen und der Körper. Aspekte der Körperlichkeit in der Spätantike* (Munich and Leipzig 2003).

⁴² The *obstetrix* is often mentioned in Roman texts from Plautus onwards, cf. Plautus, *Capt.* 629, *Cistell.* 139; Terence, *Ad.* 353, 618, *Andria* 299, 513; Horace, *Epodes* 17.49 etc.

⁴³ For the *retiarius* see H. Wollmann, 'Retiarius. Darstellungen auf römischen Tonlampen', *Röm. Mitt.* 32 (1917) 147-68; L. Robert, *Hellenica* 3 (1946) 151-62 and 'Une vision de Perpétue martyre à Carthage en 203', *CRAI* 1982, 228-76 at 243-6, reprinted in his *Opera minora selecta* V (Amsterdam, 1989) 791-839; Ville, *Gladiature*, 424f.

⁴⁴ For the scarcity of data see G. Binder, 'Geburt II', *RAC* 9 (Stuttgart, 1976) 43-171.

⁴⁵ See especially Tertullian, *De baptismo*, cf. W. Bähnk, *Von der Notwendigkeit des Leidens. Die Theologie des Martyriums bei Tertullian* (Göttingen, 2001) 209-20.

as the Africans often mentioned Ceres in the plural.⁴⁶ However, within the frame of Roman culture the plural was so unusual that the expression must have soon become normalized by the scribes into the singular. But why did the Romans dress the future martyrs in the attire of the priests of Saturn and the Cereres?

Recent discussions of this aspect of our passage concentrate wholly on Saturnus and leave out the Cereres altogether. In the most detailed modern analysis of the human sacrifices to Kronos and Saturnus, Versnel states: ‘According to custom the convicts who were to die in a *venatio* were made up and dressed like priests of Saturnus, that is to say: they were “devoted” to the god. Thus the law was bypassed and Saturn – in this case the Punic variant – received his human sacrifices.’⁴⁷ Marcel Leglay, in his authoritative study of the African Saturnus, took yet a slightly different direction.⁴⁸ Following his compatriot Charles Picard (1883-1965), he interpreted this human sacrifice as a public form of the *molchomor* or *morchomor*, the well-known North-African vicarious sacrifice of Punic origin of a lamb instead of a child to Saturn.⁴⁹ Both authors, though, agree in seeing in the Christian martyrdom the continuation, directly or indirectly, of ancient practices of human sacrifice. Is that correct?

It is certainly true that the Carthaginian Saturnus/Kronos was once connected with human sacrifice.⁵⁰ Yet in this case, it seems impossible to speak of continuity of one kind or another. First, human sacrifice to Saturn had long been abolished and had

⁴⁶ See most recently P.-A. Février, ‘Le culte des Cereres en Afrique’, *Bull. Soc. Antiq. France* 1975, 39-43; G. Pugliese Carratelli, ‘Cereres’, *Parola del Passato* 36 (1981) 367-82; J. Gascou, ‘Les sacerdotess Cererum de Carthage’, *Antiq. Afric.* 23 (1987) 95-128; A. Drine, ‘Cérès, les “Cereres” et les “sacerdotess magnae” en Afrique: quelques témoignages épigraphiques et littéraires (Tertullien)’, in Y. le Bohec (ed.), *L’Afrique, la Gaule, la Religion à l’époque romain. Mélanges Marcel le Glay* (Brussels, 1994) 174-84; D. Fishwick, ‘On the origins of Africa proconsularis. 3, The era of the Cereres again’, *Antiquité Africaine* 32 (1996) 13-36.

⁴⁷ H.S. Versnel, *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual* (Leiden, 1993) 90-227 at 215.

⁴⁸ M. Leglay, *Saturne Africain* (Paris, 1966) 332-41 at 340; somewhat confusingly, the author later called himself Marcel le Glay.

⁴⁹ The standard formula is: ... *agnum pro vikario anima pro anima, vita pro vita, sanguine pro sanguine, libens animo reddit*, cf. J.-G. Février, ‘Molchomor’, *Rev. d’Hist. Rel.* 144 (1953) 8-18 and ‘Le rite de substitution dans les textes de N’Gaous’, *Journal Asiatique* 1962, 1-10; S. Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice and Sacrificial Monuments* (Sheffield, 1991) 29-32.

⁵⁰ In addition to Versnel, see now also my ‘Myth and Ritual in Greek Human Sacrifice: Lykaon, Polyxena and the case of the Rhodian criminal’, in Bremmer (ed.), *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice* (Leuven, 2004).

not been practised for several centuries.⁵¹ Secondly, human sacrifice to Saturnus consisted of the burning of children and not of adults.⁵² Thirdly and perhaps most decisively, these interpretations completely ignore the role of the Cereres. I conclude therefore that this line of interpretation is not really helpful in understanding the Carthaginian procedure.

As Kathleen Coleman has demonstrated in a classic article,⁵³ it had become more and more customary in Roman times to dress up criminals as mythological figures, such as ‘Orpheus’ or ‘Daedalus’, for their executions. Contrary to what we might expect from the reports of modern executions, these criminals were sometimes even gorgeously costumed. Plutarch (*Moralia* 554b) relates:

But there are some people, no different from little children, who see criminals in the arena, dressed often in tunics of golden fabric with purple mantles, wearing crowns and doing the Pyrrhic dance, and, struck with awe and astonishment, the spectators suppose that they are supremely happy, until the moment when, before their eyes, the criminals are stabbed and flogged, and that gaudy and sumptuous garb bursts into flames (tr. Coleman).

As the priests of Saturnus and Ceres were dressed in red and white, respectively, in ‘gaudily striking outfits’,⁵⁴ our martyrs were also presented to the public in striking costumes. Apparently, these gods had been chosen less for their religious functions than for the costumes of their priests.

It is in line with his previous picture of Perpetua that the editor now lets her represent the group of martyrs in refusing this pagan garb. Evidently, there had been some ‘negotiations’ beforehand between the military and the martyrs; in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* (10.34.3), the military also played an important role in the

⁵¹ Against Birley, ‘Persecutors and Martyrs’, 58 note 27, I cannot believe that in Africa human sacrifice of children could have continued until the middle of the second century AD.

⁵² Kleitarchos *FGrH* 137 F 9; Diodorus Siculus 5.66.5, 13.86.3; 20.14.6; Curtius Rufus 4.3.23; Plutarch, *Moralia* 171C, 552A, 942C; Tertullian, *Apol.* 9.2; Porphyry, *De abstinencia* 2.27. For these much debated sacrifices see most recently Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice*; K. Koch, ‘Molek astral’, in A. Lange *et al.* (eds.), *Mythos im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt* (Berlin and New York, 1999) 29-50; C. Grottanelli, ‘Ideologie del sacrificio umano: Roma e Cartagine’, *Arch. f. Religionsgesch.* 1 (1999) 41-59; F. Ruggiero, ‘La testimonianza di Tertulliano, *Apologeticum* 9, 2-4 sul sacrificio dei bambini nell’ambito del culto di Saturno’, *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 18 (2001) 307-33; J. Lightfoot, *Lucian, On the Syrian Goddess* (Oxford, 2003) 523-8.

⁵³ Coleman, ‘Fatal Charades’.

⁵⁴ For the outfits see Tertullian, *De testimonio animae* 2.7, *De pallio* 4.10; Leglay, *Saturne Africain*, 370-1 (archeological evidence); Coleman, ‘Fatal Charades’, 66 (quote).

organisation of the games. The martyrs must have agreed to participate in the *munus* without obstruction, and the tribune must have agreed to respect their Christian faith. The editor's comment in introducing him,⁵⁵ *Agnovit iniustitia iustitia*, betrays the same epigrammatic style that we already encountered before. He may have been influenced by Tertullian whom he probably knew well.

The reactions of the martyrs were perhaps not what the tribune had expected. For once, Perpetua is now mentioned first. She started to sing a psalm which the editor explains by reference to her fourth vision, where she mentioned that she stepped upon the head of her Egyptian opponent (10.11), a reference to the words *calcavi illi caput* (6.7) in her first vision.⁵⁶ Behind these words is *Genesis* (3.15) in the African version of the *Vetus Latina* (2.68-9): *ipsa (illa) tibi calcabit caput*. This text was very popular in martyrological contexts, as the letters of Cyprian and the *Passio Fructuosi* demonstrate, and clearly well-known in the circle of Perpetua.⁵⁷

However, it is probably a sign of the gender relations in the African Church that the males did not sing a psalm, but began to threaten the onlooking crowd. Presumably, they once again threatened with the Last Judgment, just as they threatened the Roman governor Hilarianus in a similar manner.⁵⁸ We are not informed exactly where the governor was sitting, but it is likely that his *tribunal* was at the end of a minor axis of the amphitheatre, which would provide the best position for watching the games.⁵⁹ The noise in the amphitheatre and the distance would have drowned the martyrs' words, so that they had to use motions and gestures (*gestu et nutu*) to be understood.⁶⁰ Roman governors did not like to be mocked, and the stern Hilarianus, who had already ordered that Perpetua's father be beaten (6.5), was probably only too glad to satisfy the crowd's wish to have the martyrs flogged by the

⁵⁵ Birley, 'Persecutors and Martyrs', 62 note 98 notes that no tribune is known from the time of Severus.

⁵⁶ For Perpetua's visions see now Bremmer, 'Perpetua and Her Diary', 95-119.

⁵⁷ Cyprian, *Epist.* 39.2.2: *calcatus serpens et obtritus et victus est*, 58.9.1: *cum serpens calcari a nobis et obtereri coeperit*; *Acta Fructuosi* 7.2: *diaboli caput calcaverunt*; Prudentius, *Perist.* 14.112-3: *haec calcat Agnes ac pede proterit stans et draconis calce premens caput*, cf. A.-M. Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs* (Oxford, 1989) 252.

⁵⁸ For Hilarianus see Bremmer, 'Perpetua and Her Diary', 91f.

⁵⁹ D.L. Bomgardner, 'The Carthage Amphitheatre: a reappraisal', *Am. J. Arch.* 93 (1989) 85-113 at 89 note 23.

⁶⁰ For the expression compare Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 10.31: *gesticulatione nutibus honestis*.

venatores for their insolence.⁶¹ Such a flogging was not unusual,⁶² but it is typical of their great love of Christ, which is frequently attested to in the reports of martyrs' deaths,⁶³ that Perpetua's group interpreted their ordeal as an imitation of the scourging of Jesus (*Matthew 27.26; Mark 15.15*).⁶⁴

With this scourging the initial stage of their execution had come to a close. From now on the martyrs were on their own, and each would have to play his or her part in the entertainment of the Carthaginian crowd. Yet the deep faith that had sustained them in their difficult last months would not leave them. The editor of *Perpetua* could hardly have chosen a more inspiring example for his fellow Christians than these courageous martyrs.

3. *The motivation of martyrs*

Similarity in terminology does not necessarily make for similarity in behaviour and motivation. It is clear that there are enormous differences between the early Christian martyrs and the modern Palestinian suicide bombers. For starters, the former were arrested and executed, while the latter kill themselves and usually also kill others. The former were often also executed in their own area, whereas the Palestinians usually go to that of the Enemy. Moreover, contemporary Islamic ideologies of martyrdom have been profoundly influenced by modernity and by seeing the West as the Other.⁶⁵ Yet at the same time there are at least two striking similarities. Let us first look at the early Christians.

From *Perpetua* we can learn that there were young martyrs amongst them, such as Perpetua and Felicitas, but also an older one, such as their spiritual guide Saturus. Our sample of known Christian martyrs is much too small for statistics, but

⁶¹ For a representation of *venatores* see most recently Y. Dubois, 'La *venatio* d'amphithéâtre: iconographie d'un décor de villa à Yvonand-Mordagne, Suisse', *Revue Arch.* 1999, 35-64.

⁶² Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.18, *Ad martyras* 5.1.

⁶³ J.N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London and New York, 2002) 103-4; add H. Crouzel, 'L'imitation et la "suite" de Dieu et du Christ dans les premiers siècles chrétiens ainsi que dans leurs sources gréco-romaines et hébraïques', *JAC* 21 (1978) 7-41; H. Bakker, *Exemplar Domini. Ignatius of Antioch and His Martyrological Self-Concept* (Diss. Groningen, 2003) 149-57.

⁶⁴ For the importance of Jesus' suffering and death for the martyrs see the many passages collected by G. Buschmann, *Das Martyrium des Polykarp* (Göttingen, 1998) 84; Bähnk, *Von der Notwendigkeit des Leidens*, 146-54.

⁶⁵ See most recently M. Tavakoli-Targhi, 'Frontline Mysticism and Eastern Spirituality', *ISIM Newsletter* 9 (2002) 13 and 38 (with thanks to Peter van der Veer); Khosrokar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d'Allah*, 65-88.

the general impression is one of mixed ages with a great majority of older (married) men albeit with a sizable amount of women, and a deep belief in God/Christ. What is virtually always lacking in our sources, with the exception of *Perpetua*, is a social context. We are usually left in the dark regarding the martyrs' familial relations, occupations, and the ways they spent the period immediately leading up to their martyrdom.

For our purposes I would like to make three observations. First, many martyrs went to their death voluntarily, like Saturus in *Perpetua* (4.5). Rodney Stark has entitled his illuminating analysis of Christian martyrs: 'The Martyrs: Sacrifice as Rational Choice'.⁶⁶ And indeed, martyrdom can be seen as a rational decision, since most martyrs could have escaped by denying their faith or by making a sacrifice to the emperor. Yet martyrdom was not always a well-pondered, rational choice. Some people displayed their solidarity with the martyrs in an impulse and subsequently became martyred themselves;⁶⁷ clearly, Rational Choice Theory does not explain everything, just as domestic violence or hate killings fall outside that theoretical framework.⁶⁸ Understandably, the early Church was not too happy with the tendency towards voluntary martyrdom, as too many martyrs could be harmful to its survival and expansion, and the *Martyrium Polycarpi* (4.3) already polemicizes against it.⁶⁹

Second, Stark stresses that religious convictions are the more valuable when they are 'promoted, produced, or consumed collectively'.⁷⁰ And indeed, an important factor in the martyrs' steadfastness must have been the ruling discourse within their milieu. Tracts advocating the value of martyrdom and testimonies about 'successful' martyrdoms, going back to the proto-martyr Stephen (Acts 7.58-60), were popular in the early Church, and martyrs were officially remembered from an early stage onwards.⁷¹ This discourse must have helped to sustain the faith of the believers under

⁶⁶ R. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, 1996) 163-89.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Justin Martyr, *II Apologia* 2.19-20; *Acts of Lyons and Vienne* 1.10, 49; *Acta Carpi* A, 42-44; *Passio Eupli* 1; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 8.9.5.

⁶⁸ S. Atran, 'Genesis of Suicide Terrorism', *Science* 7 March 2003 = vol. 299, 1534-39 at 1536.

⁶⁹ C. Butterweck, "Martyriumssucht" in der Alten Kirche? *Studien zur Darstellung und Deutung frühchristlicher Martyrien* (Tübingen, 1995); A.R. Birley, 'Die "freiwilligen" Märtyrer. Zum Problem der Selbst-Auslieferung', in R. von Haehling (ed.), *Rom und das himmlische Jerusalem* (Darmstadt, 2000) 97-123; Bähnke, *Von der Notwendigkeit des Leidens*.

⁷⁰ Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 172-74.

⁷¹ The cult of the martyrs has ancient roots, cf. H. Delehaye, *Les Passions des Martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Brussels, 1921) 11-59.

attack,⁷² just as the many visits of Christians to their brothers and sisters in prison must have done. Part of this discourse even coincided with pagan discourse of the time that also strongly advocated endurance and patience in the face of suffering.⁷³

Third, there also was an important compensator. This useful term, to be distinguished from this-worldly rewards, has been introduced to indicate rewards in the life to come.⁷⁴ Such an ‘other-worldly’ reward is also manifest in *Perpetua*, as our martyrs expect to go straight to heaven after their execution.⁷⁵ This expectation is manifest in the visions of Perpetua (4) and Saturus (11), but is also demonstrated by the martyrs’ reference to the Last Judgement (17.1, 18.7-8). Evidently, this was a strong belief that helped to motivate their endurance in the face of their terrible tortures and death.

Mutatis mutandis, we can find a rational choice, supporting discourse and the promise of heaven also among the Palestinian martyrs, about whom we are much better informed. Investigations have shown that the great majority of the well over 200 suicide missions from 1993 until August 2002 are male,⁷⁶ unmarried, early twenties, relatively well off, educated, from refugee camps and in general no more religious than the population at large,⁷⁷ although since December 2001 these categories are no longer so clear cut.⁷⁸ Yet we very soon reach the limits of understanding the bombers when we leave behind more general considerations. This

⁷² Compare the hunger strikes of IRA-militants and their long tradition of self-sacrifice, G. Sweeney, ‘Irish Hunger Strikes and the Cult of Self-sacrifice’, *J. of Contemporary History* 28 (1993) 421-37.

⁷³ See the important study of B. Shaw, ‘Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs’, *J. Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996) 269-312; add C. Spicq, *Notes de lexicographie néo-testamentaire. Supplément* (Göttingen, 1982) 658-65; J. Perkins, *The Suffering Self* (London and New York, 1985); Bremmer, ‘Perpetua and Her Diary’, 93-5.

⁷⁴ Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 36, 168-9, 171-4.

⁷⁵ For this early Christian belief see Bremmer, ‘Perpetua and Her Diary’, 101-2 and ‘Contextualizing Heaven’.

⁷⁶ Although there are now an increasing amount of females amongst them, cf. Reuter, *Mein Leben ist eine Waffe*, 239-40; S. Ghazali, ‘The story of Hiba, 19, a suicide bomber: Can the road-map put an end to all this?’, *The Independent*, 27 May 2003, 1. The gender aspects deserve a more detailed discussion, as male perpetrators often have themselves recorded on video with a Kalashnikov, cf. A. Margalit, ‘The Suicide Bombers’, *The New York Review of Books*, 16 January 2003, 36-39 at 38; *NRC Handelsblad* 19 May 2003, 5 (photo of three suicide bombers of Hamas).

⁷⁷ Margalit, ‘Suicide Bombers’; Atran, ‘Genesis of Suicide Terrorism’, 1537. Non-Palestinians, such as the 9/11 Saudis or bombers from England, seem to be more religious, cf. N. Fielding, ‘Passport to Terror’, *Sunday Times* 4 May 2003, News Review 5-6 on the two English Muslims who intended to bomb a Tel Aviv night club at the end of April 2003.

⁷⁸ Margalit, ‘Suicide Bombers’, 37; Khosrokar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d’Allah*, 203.

is the main problem with the well-informed study by Khosrokhavar, who formulates the reasons behind the suicide bombing as a refusal of a world – Western and Israeli – that refuses them. Such an analysis assumes that everybody is desperate and fails to explain why not all people become suicide bombers. A more persuasive analysis has to combine (1) the general political situation, (2) the ideological discourse and (3) the personal aspects.

First, the general political situation in Palestine is clear. Whatever one's own political conviction, a decent intellectual cannot but arrive at the conclusion that the attitude of the State of Israel towards the Palestinians and their land is the main factor behind the Palestinian resistance. Solutions are of course debatable, but any honest analysis of the problem must start from this conclusion.⁷⁹

Second, the twentieth century has seen the gradual development of a new discourse of martyrdom that challenged Islamic tradition. Whereas originally *jihad* and martyrdom had been closely associated, the Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati (1933-77) separated the two and pronounced conscious martyrdom far superior to accidental death during a *jihad*. The voluntary death of Imam Husain at the battle of Kerbala (AD 680) should now be the example to imitate. From a collective martyrdom in the *jihad*, Shariati thus individualised martyrdom.

His teachings were rejected by Khomeini and the Iranian clergy, but television, translations and contacts with Shiite Iraqi and Lebanese have promulgated his views in the Arab world far beyond Iran.⁸⁰ These new ideas about martyrdom constitute the ideological basis of the bombers, and Palestinian society also supports these martyrdoms by the elevation of the martyrs via portraits, photos and songs. Moreover, the perpetrators know that their families will be supported with money from Iraq or the Saudis.⁸¹ In short, they perform their missions knowing that society at large supports them.

It is part of this ideology that Paradise is promised to the martyrs. This means that the martyr will go straight to Paradise and not feel his wounds, that his sins are

⁷⁹ I stress this point, since Atran, 'Genesis of Suicide Terrorism', manages to discuss the problem without mentioning the role of Israel once; similarly, *Countering Suicide Terrorism* (Herzliya 2001), the report of an international conference organised by the International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya in February 2000, manages to discuss the problem without looking once critically at Israel itself.

⁸⁰ Khosrokhavar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d'Allah*, 72-96.

⁸¹ Khosrokhavar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d'Allah*, 203-4. The Anglo-American occupation of Iraq may well have an unexpected influence in this respect, too.

forgiven, that he escapes the Last Judgment and, last and sometimes least, that he will enjoy the voluptuous *houris*.⁸² This expectation of Paradise was also manifest in the Iran-Iraq war in the early 1980s, when Iranian boy soldiers had iron keys to Paradise around their necks; the hijackers of the WTC-planes also carried a description of Paradise with them.⁸³ It is sometimes also claimed that modern martyrs display the *Farah al-Ibtissam*, the ‘smiling of joy’, during their last moments. If true, this would form a striking parallel with the *hilaritas* of the Christian martyrs. However, at the moment of their death, if it was witnessed at all, the bombers look serious rather than joyful.⁸⁴

Third, these new ideas and the material support are not enough in themselves to make somebody commit suicide. This is a fully personal decision, as is often stressed in the videos or testaments left behind, and this very individual choice is part of the modernity of the bombers.⁸⁵ It is therefore not helpful to speak about this choice in terms of ‘indoctrination’ or ‘brainwashing’.⁸⁶ Such accusations used to also be levelled against New Religious Movements, but continuing investigations have demonstrated that such qualifications have not been substantiated and are theoretically implausible.⁸⁷ It is true that once the choice has been made, the future bombers are spiritually supported with readings from the Koran, but these preparations last shorter and shorter with the deteriorating political situation.⁸⁸ Why the choice was made is not always clear, but the martyrs regularly say that their act is an act of revenge for the death of someone close to them. In the weekend of 17 and 18 May 2003, three young Palestinians from the same

⁸² Khosrokavar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d’Allah*, 209-10; Reuter, *Mein Leben ist eine Waffe*, 259-65.

⁸³ Reuter, *Mein Leben ist eine Waffe*, 60-1 (who also notes that the keys were later made of plastic because of the heavy losses); D. Cook, ‘Suicide Attacks or “Martyrdom Operations” in Contemporary Jihad Literature’, *Nova Religio* 6 (2002) 7-44 (WTC). Paradise also seems to have played a role in the motivation of the Chechens who occupied a Moscow theatre in October 2002, since a female ‘kamikaze’ wrote down a prayer for a Russian that had shown interest in her and told him: ‘If you recite this very often, you will join us in Paradise’, cf. C. van Zwol, ‘De gijzeling in Moskou van uur tot uur’, *NRC Handelsblad*, Zaterdag Bijvoegsel, 2/3-11-2002.

⁸⁴ This is still claimed by Khosrokavar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d’Allah*, 18, but see Reuter, *Mein Leben ist eine Waffe*, 91f.

⁸⁵ Khosrokavar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d’Allah*, 205f.

⁸⁶ Contra R. Paz, ‘The Islamic Legitimacy of Suicide Terrorism’ and B. Ganor, ‘Suicide Attacks in Israel’, in *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, 86-94 at 87 and 134-45 at 141, respectively.

⁸⁷ See the excellent discussion by L. Dawson, *Comprehending Cults. The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (Toronto, 1998) 102-24.

street in Hebron committed a suicide attack. All three were heavily frustrated by the Israeli violence and last year one had been detained by the Israelis for six months without due process.⁸⁹ Apparently, personal circumstances are often the final push to suicide martyrdom.⁹⁰

This is as far as we can get at the present moment. Evidently, those factors that I identified as important motivators for the early Christian martyrs, discourse and the promise of the afterlife, are also important in modern times. Yet the final motivation often remains beyond our reach. Our understanding of past and present martyrs will always be ‘through a mirror darkly’.⁹¹

p. 2, the last lines of the page. Please replace by:

Consequently, they clearly constitute a special case, *which probably cannot be separated from the extremely heavy stress on an orthodox, if not reactionary, form of Islam in their education.*⁹²

p. 8: the name is indeed Rebocatus (a late Antique spelling of Revocatus)

p. 10 the first sentence of the page. Please replace by:

Perpetua’s self-confidence is also given expression by the editor, when he notices that the crowd lowered its gaze through the *vigor* of her eyes, *whereas contemporary upper-class women normally lowered their gaze when meeting that of a male.*⁹³

For starters: an American expression!

p. 12: enemy should indeed not be capitalised.

p. 18 replace note 90 by:

⁸⁸ Khosrokar, *Les nouveaux martyrs d’Allah*, 210-1; Reuter, *Mein Leben ist eine Waffe*, 142-3, 201f.

⁸⁹ *NRC Handelsblad* 20 May 2003, 5. The same report also suggests a certain amount of peer pressure, a factor I have not seen mentioned before..

⁹⁰ Margalit, ‘Suicide Bombers’; 38; Ganor, ‘Suicide Attacks’, 140. D. Ergil, ‘Suicide Terrorism in Turkey’, in *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, 10-28 at 122 notes the same for female suicides of the Kurdish PKK. In the most recent case at the time of writing (Haifa, 4 October 2003), the suicide bomber was a young woman, Hanadi Dscharadat from Jenin, whose brother and cousin had been shot by the Israeli army on 12 June 2003, cf. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 6 October 2003, 7 (‘Die Rache der Schwester’).

⁹¹ For comments and discussions I am most grateful to Peter van Minnen, Rodie Risselada and, especially, Ton Hilhorst. Michelle Breaux kindly and skilfully corrected my English.

⁹² PROKOP 2002, 2003; ABDELLA DOUMATO 2003.

⁹³ Chariton 2.5; Xenophon of Ephesus 6.6, 8.4. Note that Valerius Maximus 8.10.1 ext. stresses the *vigor* of Demosthenes’ eyes: *acerrimum vigorem oculorum*.

⁹⁰ MARGALIT 2003, 38; GANOR 2001, 140. ERGIL 2001, 122 notes the same for female suicides of the Kurdish PKK and HOLM 2003 for Chechen female suicides.

For the titles of Clarke, Palmer and Musurillo see below in the bibliography

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