



# The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity

By Thomas J. Heffernan

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**The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity** By Thomas J. Heffernan

**Winner of the Modern Language Association Prize for a Scholarly Edition**

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

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

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"This thick volume collects what readers would otherwise have to cull or create from several sources...Heffernan's study is easily recommended for libraries and for graduate students of early Christianity and hagiography." --*Journal of Late Antiquity*

"A felicitous translation, and a very detailed commentary on historical, prosopographical, theological, and philosophical issues." --*Common Knowledge*

"An elaborate, full-scale edition with translation, commentary, and supplementary material...For the first time, the [*Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*] has truly been made accessible for an international, English readership. Heffernan's impressive book is the fruit of many years of study and work. It covers nearly all basic material about the text one might wish, and conveniently bundles all relevant philological and textual information in one volume. The result is no less than breathtaking: this is a truly amazing achievement, which can make any classicist or historian feel proud of our field of studies...This edition of *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* will undoubtedly be the standard tool for Perpetua scholars in the foreseeable future. It is a splendid achievement, which will greatly serve both the scholarly community and a larger readership. Professor Heffernan has earned deep gratitude and admiration of all those working in the field of Classics." -  
-*Histos*

"Heffernan's edition, translation, and commentary of *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* will be considered the definitive work on the subject. It is a delight to the scholar, teacher, and student of late Latin or early Christianity." --Sarah Klitenic Wear, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*

"A meticulous line-by-line commentary" --*Times Literary Supplement*

"The result is no less than breathtaking: this is a truly amazing achievement, which can make any classicist or historian feel proud of our field of studies." --*Histos*

"Heffernan's comprehensive and critical treatment of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* offers specialists and other students of early Christianity the most thorough exposition to date of the Passion's textual, rhetorical, textual, and interpretive complexity. We all owe Thomas Heffernan a debt for lending his scholarly precision and intellectual generosity to this task. Heffernan's text, translation, and commentary will most certainly be the standard edition of this text on which scholars and students will rely in future

generations."

--Elizabeth Castelli, Professor and Chair of the Religion Department, Barnard College

"This edition, translation, and comprehensive commentary will remain the definitive resource for scholars who study this influential text. Furthermore, Heffernan's elegant translation perfectly captures the voice of this early Christian woman, whose diary has captivated readers for almost 2000 years."

--Joyce E. Salisbury, author of *Perpetua's Passion: Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman*

"At last here is a detailed edition and commentary that provides a close and much-needed analysis of the ancient texts in which this remarkable narrative is preserved. Heffernan's careful discussion of the historical context of Perpetua's martyrology shows how a woman of Perpetua's social class was able to write such a vivid account of her own experiences; it also explains how and why her story was preserved, and became an inspiration to Christians throughout the ancient world."

--Mary Lefkowitz, Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities emerita, Wellesley College

"This new, comprehensive work will enable the scholar and general reader to gain genuine insight, contextual and literary understanding, and appreciation of the work. The book provides a number of firsts... The result is a model work on contextualization of an ancient manuscript. TJH has set a standard for all to emulate and produced a monumental and painstakingly high-level work." --*Religious Studies Review*

About the Author

**Thomas J. Heffernan** is the Kenneth Curry Professor of the Humanities at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

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