Classics in Hagiography

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Origins, Continuities, and Conflicts in Profiling Christian Heroes

Edited by

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This book first published 2025

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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In memoriam
Tiago da Rocha Miranda

Martyres nostri heroes nuncuparentur
Our martyrs should be called heroes
(Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 10.21)

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INTRODUCTION

Founded to celebrate the earliest heroes of Christianity, Christian hagiography was, at its origins, the place of convergence and divergence, for continuity and rupture between the "type" of hero venerated in classical antiquity (the warrior, the philosopher, the sage) and the new Christian hero: originally the martyr, and then, in a broader concept, the saint. This interplay between two contrasting paradigms of heroism—pagan/classical and Christian, different in their underlying values but often converging in symbolic form—played a crucial role in shaping the earliest notions of sanctity and, more broadly, of Christian identity. Thus, regardless of the perspective from which Hagiography is studied (philological, historical, sociological, political, theological, iconographic), it will always benefit from an understanding of its relationship with the classical matrix.

As the heir to the Hebrew tradition and having spread rapidly throughout the territories of the Roman Empire, Christianity consolidated its identity during the ensuing cultural and political confrontation with the empire. For its followers, Christianity did not merely entail religious rupture, but also social, cultural, and moral shifts. Paradoxically, however, one of the most identifying features of Roman culture, the *mos maiorum*, aligned with Christian morality, becoming religiously compatible with it. One of the most widespread accusations against Christians was precisely their abandonment of Roman ancestral customs, especially the observance of religious rituals, which guaranteed social cohesion in a religion as institutional as the Roman one. Morally, however, the *mos maiorum*, with its fundamental triad of *uirtus, pietas, fides*, resonated with ethical aspects of Christianity and found continuity within it. Although in semantic terms these concepts did not entirely coincide between the classical and Christian worlds, they were inherited and reconfigured in accordance with Christian ethics.

Necessarily opposing pagan culture, Christianity ended up dialoguing with it, as Tertullian's statement shows: "And so we are obliged by the heretics to engage in rhetoric, just as by the philosophers to philosophize" (Apologetic 50, 2–3). Thus, from Hellenistic culture, Christianity built much of its theological framework in dialogue with Greek philosoph, translating the initial *kerygma* into Greek philosophical categories that could be understood by its interlocutors. This duality of continuity and

rupture is also visible in the formulation of the Christian ideal of the saint. In fact, if the pagan hero really did chronologically precede the Christian saint, the presence of convergent traits between these two ideals is evident, much like their profound divergence. Although they are not opposed to each other, the heroic ideal, either in its physical aspect or the moral version of the sage or philosopher, and the ideal of sanctity diverge because of the profound difference between their conceptions of meaning for human being.

The pagan hero, like the saint, seeks the glory of immortality. The first seeks it in the collective memory, the latter in eternal life, and both necessarily involve death. Death is the stage and privileged setting for the manifestation of virtue for both the pagan hero and the saint. Both must face it with equal courage.

Another common confrontation between the pagan hero and the saint is that of suffering. Aeschylus's famous maxim, "pathei mathos" (learning through suffering), remained a key interpretive thread in Greek tragedy and continued to resonate in the pagan world at the dawn of our era. This is especially noticeable in the strongly ethical Stoicism represented in Rome by Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, among others. However, although suffering and the *virtus* of *patientia* are so relevant in the affirmation of Christian heroism, the heroism of the Stoic sage is radically different from it. If the Stoic sage affirms himself through human autonomy and finds strength in himself, the Christian hero is affirmed through christocentrism, with God being his strength, and his heroism being his trusting abandonment in God: his faith. As Jean-Claude Fredouille summarised: In its various forms, pagan heroism is an absolute. Holiness is participation, by grace, in the holiness of God.[1]

By its very nature, hagiography presents itself as a field especially suited to the education of the virtues and the apologetics of Christianity—its heroes, demonstrating *virtus* in action, always constitute models, *exempla ad imitandum*, and living arguments. *Longum est iter per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla*, states Seneca in one of his letters to Lucilius (Epistole, n. 6.5), showing what value the ancients attributed to "good examples" to follow and how much their role was appreciated in the educational process. In fact, both pagan and Christian classics base their education on the power of the paradigm.

The Christians of the first centuries, educated in the school of the classics, assimilated this vast literary production, adopting the ancient

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[1] Jean-Claude Fredouille, "Le héros et le saint", in *Du héros païen au saint chrétien. Actes du colloque organisé par le centre d'Analyse des Réthoriques Religieuses de l'Antiquité, Strasbourg, 1–2 décembre 1995*, ed. Gérard Freyburger and Laurent Pernot (Collection des Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 11–25.

canons and both rhetorical and literary devices in Christian literature. Classical culture thus became the passenger of a new European culture resulting from the acculturation of Christianity. Hagiographic typology played an important role in this process.

Medieval hagiography, known for its creative writing and its lack of concern for historiographic accuracy, always maintained its apologetic function. Its didactic interest lay in combating heresies, as well as strengthening the identity of Christian communities.

Renaissance humanism, the religious reform movements, and the Council of Trent, with its reaffirmation of Catholic dogma, laid the foundations for a modern hagiography that was certainly apologetic, but also had critical and historiographical concerns and an awareness of aesthetic and literary demands. In addition, the efforts of the church to centralise and control the emergence of new cults with the establishment of the foundations of procedural law also influenced the new hagiographic writings, as we will see in the following studies.

As we will see in each study, hagiographic literature offers different models of Christian perfection, which Christians of different generations and eras may attempt to emulate. The saints affirm with their lives that the ideal of Christian perfection is attainable. They are highly effective arguments for Christian apologetics, which strategically uses them in the spiritual and ethical realm, as well as in the doctrinal realm and in the defence of orthodoxy. For this reason, although the different profiles of holiness are the product of a particular moment in history, they also challenge subsequent generations. Often, certain characteristics are reinforced while others become more discreet, according to the appeals and aspirations of different eras and generations. That is why we can say that hagiographic literature is a "mirror" of the culture and religion of a particular era.

The opening contribution of the volume, *The Upended Hero. The Cult of the Martyrs and the Overcoming of Classical Heroes*, is situated at the very genesis of hagiographic literature, marking the emergence of the cult of saints. It explores the interaction between pagan and Christian religious traditions. Forlani's essay examines a thesis that emerged in the late nineteenth century, which posits a seamless continuity between the veneration of ancient heroes and the devotion to saints, the new heroes of the Christian world. Both figures share common characteristics: they are mortal yet endowed with extraordinary powers, such as the ability to perform miracles, vanquish monsters, combat evil, and avert calamities. They act as protectors of their communities, fight against injustice, civilise new lands, and endure hardships with superhuman courage.

The veneration of heroes and saints is also expressed through the construction of sacred buildings on sites where their bodies or relics are preserved, as the mysterious power of the sacred requires a tangible presence—what remains of the body—to make itself perceptible. This reflects the fundamental human instinct to believe that what is dead remains, in some way, still alive and active. From this perspective, the need for heroic figures is an anthropological constant that transcends historical periods, affirming that collective identity is constructed around figures of reference. With the definitive establishment of Christianity, the cult of heroes fades, yet the figure of the saint inherits its legacy, becoming the new model of intercession with the divine.

Forlani's contribution, while acknowledging the evident similarities between the cult of heroes and that of saints, offers a particularly compelling interpretative framework that seeks to elucidate the novelty of sainthood and the shift in meaning introduced by Christian hagiography. Through an analysis of martyrial literature, such as *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* and *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, the author demonstrates how Christian texts subvert the paradigm established by classical writers: saints do not triumph through their own strength but through their very defeat, which becomes the ultimate symbol of spiritual victory. This inversion of perspective reflects the core of Christian doctrine and marks a clear rupture with the pagan heroic model. Hagiography, therefore, does not merely replicate classical models but redefines them within a new theological framework, presenting sanctity as participation in divine grace rather than as an assertion of individual greatness.

This perspective offers a deeper understanding of the interaction and dependence between the hagiographic tradition and classical antiquity, which extends beyond cultic practices to encompass literary models and narrative structures. An example of a classicism that is never outright rejected but rather reinterpreted is Pentericci's study, *Faster than the Devil: Hippomenes and St. Florian. The Mythological–Hagiological Tale of the City of Jesi*, which examines the legend of St. Florian and its parallels with the Greek myth of Atalanta and Hippomenes. In this narrative, the devil challenges St. Florian to a footrace in which only divine intervention secures the saint's victory. The episode echoes the myth of Hippomenes, who defeats Atalanta with the assistance of a deity. In both accounts, the theme of competition serves as a metaphor for spiritual struggle, with victory symbolising divine favour and moral superiority. By tracing the transformation of mythological motifs into Christian legend, the author demonstrates how ancient narrative structures were reinterpreted to express Christian theological and moral values.

Moreover, this study makes a significant contribution by situating this transformation within a broader historical context, examining how medieval and early modern communities employed hagiographic narratives to shape local identities and expressions of religious devotion. By linking the story of St. Florian to the legitimisation of Jesi's civic and religious authority, the study highlights the socio–political functions of hagiography. The author illustrates that Christian narratives did not simply erase classical mythology but instead reconfigured its symbols and structures to serve new spiritual purposes or civic–political objectives. These analyses deepen our understanding of hagiography as a dynamic literary form that both inherited and subverted classical heroism, reflecting the evolving landscape of Christian identity.

As part of this broader reworking of classical elements in hagiography, a crucial aspect of the narrative construction of saintly identity in biographies is the *topos* of family origins. This narrative structure, along with its adaptation within Christian hagiography, is the focus of Florence Bret's the contribution *Repudiato patrum stemmate. The Topos of Family Origins in the Early Latin Lives of Saints (4th–6th Centuries)*. In the classical tradition, the mention of a protagonist's noble ancestry served to elevate their status, conveying a sense of continuity between the virtues of their ancestors and those of the hero. This framework was so deeply embedded that, even in cases where an illustrious lineage was absent, authors employed rhetorical strategies to legitimise the subject's greatness. While noble genealogy reinforced the heroic stature of protagonists in classical literature, Christian *Vitae* underwent a dual transformation: the significance of aristocratic birth was explicitly rejected, and earthly nobility was replaced by spiritual genealogy.

Hilary of Arles, in his *Vita sancti Honorati*, acknowledges the classical model and the expectations of his audience, yet he rejects it in favour of a Christian genealogy, replacing the prestige of ancestry with divine filiation. Similarly, Jerome, in the *Vita Paulae*, dismisses the importance of the saint's aristocratic origins, yet still mentions them, revealing the rhetorical ambivalence of this legacy. By the sixth century, the *topos* was definitively reformulated: earthly lineage was supplanted by a new form of genealogy in which saints were no longer heirs to magistrates and senators but to bishops, martyrs, and eminent figures of the Church. Gregory of Tours took this principle to its extreme, juxtaposing aristocratic saints with those of humble origins to demonstrate that true nobility lay in Christian virtue rather than birth.

Another significant aspect is the case of biographies that omit information regarding the saint's social origins, signalling a further departure from

classical conventions. Some hagiographers justify this omission by asserting that the saint's true homeland is the Kingdom of Heaven, while others seem to adopt this strategy simply due to a lack of reliable data. Florence Bret also examines the role of conversion as a "second birth", showing how certain *Vitae* shift the emphasis from biological genealogy to spiritual lineage. This process reflects the progressive Christianisation of biography and the construction of a new aristocracy based on sanctity rather than bloodline. Bret's study reveals that rhetorical traditions were not merely discarded but actively reworked. While retaining the narrative structure of classical biography, Christian authors redirected the focus from earthly inheritance to celestial heritage, thereby redefining the very notion of genealogy in hagiographic narrative.

The inversion of the pagan hero into the Christian saint, the transformation of myth into hagiographic narrative, and the redefinition of genealogy in biography through a spiritual lens all exemplify Christian adaptations of elements drawn from classical antiquity. Another crucial dimension of this process of emulation concerns stylistic and narrative techniques, as explored in Sophie Sanzey's study the study *Epic and Hagiographic Models: The Dialogue between Classical, Late Antique and Medieval Sources in Heiric of Auxerre's Vita Sancti Germani*.

This study examines the relationship between epic and hagiographic models in Heiric of Auxerre's *Vita Sancti Germani* († after 875) and analyzes how the verse rewriting of an already existing prose biography transforms the saint into a Christianised hero. Drawing inspiration from the *Vita Germani interpolata* (seventh century), Heiric does not merely undertake a metrical transposition but expands upon the original text, incorporating historical, philological, and theological references. The use of epic language and the adoption of dactylic hexameter situate this work within the Virgilian tradition, contributing to a heroic atmosphere that blends classical and Christian elements.

Heiric of Auxerre appears to employ the structural framework of epic poetry deliberately: the division into six books recalls the *Aeneid*, while numerous citations from Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Statius lend a solemn tone to the narrative. However, Heiric does not simply imitate the classical epic; rather, he subverts its model. Germain, initially a young aristocrat devoted to hunting, undergoes a "conversion of heroism", transitioning from the paradigm of the epic warrior to that of the Christian saint. The influence of the epic is evident in several episodes, such as the struggle against the Pelagians—depicted using military language—or the scene in which Germain calms a storm, interweaving references to both Virgil and the Psalms.

By drawing upon both classical and biblical sources, Heiric of Auxerre situates Germain within a dual tradition: that of the epic hero, who fights for justice and leads his people, and that of the saint, who triumphs through asceticism and divine speech. The Carolingian poet plays with hagiographic *topoi*, attributing to Germain the titles of martyr, apostle, and virgin, despite him not belonging to any of these categories. In doing so, he suggests a form of sanctity that transcends traditional classifications.

Sophie Sanzey concludes that the verse rewriting of the *Vita Sancti Germani* is not merely an exercise in style, but a reworking of the very concept of heroism. Heiric of Auxerre constructs a hybrid model that merges epic tradition with Christian sanctity, transforming the saint into a new kind of hero, in which courage and physical strength are subordinated to divine grace. This process is not only an instance of the Christianisation of ancient literature, but also a literary operation that elevates the saint to the status of an epic figure, turning his life into a form of praise poetry.

The contributions by Joana Veiga and Helena Toipa focus on a distinctly medieval figure of sanctity, St. Elizabeth ofPortugal, known as the "Holy Queen", a revered figure throughout the kingdom, but particularly in the city of Coimbra, where she chose to spend the final years of her life and where her incorrupt body remains.

The early modern period, especially following her beatification (1516), saw the Queen's cult enjoying a strong boost, particularly within university circles and at the Royal College of Arts. In 1556, King John III decreed that every year, on the Queen's *dies natalis* (July 4), a public speech be delivered at the College in the presence of the students and professors of the University. This decree further contributed to the growth of the Queen's cult. This annual celebration gave rise to the abundant literary production, both in prose and verse, extolling Queen St. Elizabeth, which is preserved in the collection of manuscripts of the Colleges of the Society of Jesus. Since 1555, the College of Arts had been entrusted to this newly established religious order, which would be leading the educational movement of Renaissance Humanism in Portugal and Europe. Part of this production was compiled into a collection of codices, now scattered across various libraries.

Drawing on the philological rigour with which she approaches some of these poetic compositions, as well as engaging with her classical literary sources, Joana Veiga demonstrates how a "modernised" profile of the Queen's sanctity was woven—a complex model that, integrating both feminine and masculine characteristics, presented her as a model for kings and queens alike to imitate. Joana Veiga's interpretation highlights how various traits traditionally associated with different genders in the classical world were

used and moulded to suit the Queen's character, presenting her as the embodiment of virtue.

Helena Toipa examines the same figure of sanctity within the same educational context of the Jesuit Colleges, focusing on the work of Pedro Perpinhão, a Jesuit teacher at the College of Arts. Perpinhão authored several celebratory speeches in praise of the Queen, as well as a biography which, as Toipa demonstrates, helped define her profile of holiness just before her canonisation. Taking the Queen's medieval hagiographic tradition as his documentary source material, Pedro Perpinhão crafted a renewed discourse using the models of classical historiography and rhetoric, in line with the literary revival movement of Renaissance humanism.

Carlota Urbano's contribution also stems from the study of the hagiographic literary production of the Society of Jesus. She examines the work of Bartolomeu Pereira, a professor of Rhetoric and Sacred Scripture at the College of Arts, who published the neo-Latin epic *Paciecidos libri duodecim* (Coimbra, 1640) to commemorate the martyrdom of Francisco Pacheco in Nagasaki (1626). This text is another example of early modern hagiography, presenting martyrdom as a model of missionary heroism. This is a profile of sanctity genuinely born out of the *praxis* of the Society of Jesus, which was engaged in pioneering missionary efforts in Japan. Initially promising, Christianity in Japan soon faced harsh persecution, forcing missionary activity underground and making martyrdom a real possibility and opportunity. Thus, the first model of Christian heroism— martyrdom—once again came to the fore in hagiography. This study of Pereira's epic showcases how the modern profile of the martyred hero was deeply indebted to the classical epic models and how it functioned as a hagiographic ideal suited to the expectations of new generations of Jesuit students, trained in the *humaniores litterae*.

Finally, Paula Almeida brings to this volume an exploration of another model of female sanctity, contemporary to the Reformation and canonised in 1622: Teresa of Ávila. Almeida examines two epic hagiographic poems in which the saint is the protagonist: *Amaçona Christiana* (1619) by Friar Bartolomé de Segura and *Teresa Militante* (1630) by Friar Manuel das Chagas. Her study showcases how these poems are partly the result of the revitalisation of heroism and the importance given to the biographical genre, as well as the aesthetic–literary codes of Renaissance humanism, which emulated classical models. The choice of the epic genre reflects this environment, in which Christian heroism was exalted. The case of Teresa is another illustration of the female warrior *virtus*, revisiting the classical myth of the Amazons.

This designation, however, as Almeida observes, diverges from the original meaning of "warrior woman", since the *militia* of women and their *virtus* is mainly expressed through chastity. Teresa of Ávila is thus portrayed in these poems as a model of chastity and orthodoxy to be imitated, in accordance with the aims of the Tridentine reform. Almeida concludes that both poems reveal a revalorisation of classical epic models, which take on a renewed significance that is not without doctrinal and apologetic intent.

This book does not, nor could it, exhaust the theme of the presence of the classics in hagiography—an impossible endeavour. However, each author, prompted by a specific case study, presents their own critical reflection in an attempt to answer a central question: to what extent does the classical heritage determine the hagiographic portrayal of the Christian hero—that is, the saint?

With this volume, we hope to contribute to the ongoing discussion of a complex and multifaceted subject: hagiographic literature and its relationship with the vitality and richness of classical culture.

Carlota Miranda Urbano and Filippo Forlani

1

THE UPENDED HERO:
THE CULT OF THE MARTYRS AND THE
OVERCOMING OF CLASSICAL HEROES

FILIPPO FORLANI

The hero stands to the world and classical culture as the saint stands to reality and Christian culture. This symmetry encapsulates the thesis proposed by Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri and Guidorizzi in their insightful essay *Corpi gloriosi: eroi greci e santi cristiani* (*Glorious Bodies: Greek Heroes and Christian Saints*), published by Laterza about a decade ago. In this text, the authors seek to demonstrate the substantial continuity between Hellenic heroes and Christian saints:

> When, in the space of little more than a century, between the fourth and fifth, the pagan religion collapsed under the overwhelming triumph of Christianity, and temples and heroic tombs were destroyed, the traditional hero was replaced by a new figure of collective veneration, in its own way equally heroic: that of the saint, the Christian hero par excellence, bearer of very different values, but in some respects heir to the ancient way of perceiving the presence of the divine in the world.[1]

The discussion kicks off with the fourth verse of the *Iliad*, in which Homer introduces the ἥρωες (heroes), the warriors who fought beneath the walls of Troy. These were great men of a bygone era, far superior to the men of the present age in strength and nobility; superhuman figures who, as Aristotle said, "have a nobler soul" (CG 6). The essay's authors identified multiple points of contact between these two figures—heroes and saints—after

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[1] Mariateresa Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri and Giulio Guidorizzi, *Corpi gloriosi: eroi greci e santi cristiani* (Roma–Bari: Laterza, 2012), 8. The translation from Italian is my own. From now on, all references taken from this book will be indicated in parentheses within the body of the text, using the abbreviated acronym CG followed by the page number.

analysing numerous sources related to the classical world, particularly the *Journey to Greece* by Pausanias—a writer who in the second century A.D. visited and described places connected to ancient myths—as well as sources related to hagiographic themes, especially from the legends collected in Jacopo da Varazze's *Legenda Aurea*.

Heroes and saints are both exceptional characters, far removed from ordinary men, whose extraordinary deeds nevertheless remain etched in the collective memory and persist even after their death (CG 12). This is particularly evident in the place of burial: the tomb of the hero—that of Protesilaus, the first warrior who died at Troy; Alcmeon buried in Psofis; or that of Geryon—as well the tomb of the saint, becomes a destination for pilgrimage and attention where the identity of the community is forged, a place where a sacrificial rite takes place and monuments are later erected in their honour (CG 37–46). In places of devotion, miracles and wonders occur, attributed to both the hero (in ancient times, especially those attributed to Helen of Troy, who bestowed exceptional beauty, which she held in the highest degree) and to the saint. In some of these places, the rite of incubation was practiced, by which the faithful, while sleeping in the temple over the tomb, trusted that heroes or saints would appear in their dreams and grant healings or warnings (as was the case with the cult of Asclepius in Epidaurus, Pergamon and Rome, or in a sanctuary near Alexandria in Egypt, which housed the relics of Saints Cyrus and John) (CG 14–17).

The bodies of heroes and saints become objects of veneration—both in life, but especially after death. The exceptional nature of the person is heralded by miraculous events even before their birth, and once deceased, a veritable *relic hunt* ensues that persists throughout the centuries, often escalating with thefts and struggles to obtain the mortal remains of saints and heroes. Attached to these bodily fragments is a kind of recognition, a power that can be exercised and that bestows a sense of honour and glory upon those who possess it (even those who have stolen it). And so, it was that in 334 B.C., Alexander the Great, having just landed from Asia, visited the tomb of Achilles and ran naked around the stele, as was customary to honour the deceased, before placing a crown of flowers on it. In the same way, the Venetians went mad with joy in 828 A.D. when two merchants, Buono di Malamocco and Rustico di Torcello, managed to steal the remains of Saint Mark from Alexandria. After burying his remains in the main basilica, the cult of Saint Mark strengthened Venetian determination in challenging the Muslims for control of the Mediterranean trade routes (CG 72–78). To modern eyes, this behaviour may seem illogical. But in reality, it is very similar to the conduct of us contemporaries when confronted with

a famous person from the world of entertainment, sports or public life—because there is something we see and perceive, tied to a person's identity, that passes through the body (CG 46–50; 56–63).

Another common element is that of life perceived as a long battle: Hercules, Cadmus and Perseus slay monstrous animals just as Saint George slays the dragon or Saint Anthony the Abbot fights against demons in the form of ferocious animals. We also find in both heroes and saints the internal moral struggle to overcome one's own fears, or the conflict against external enemies that threaten their respective communities (either by physical sieges or by immoral behaviour). Heroes establish city–states (polis) and become their protectors; saints mostly found monastic communities, but also serve as advocates, guardians and patrons of cities (CG 17–23).

And so, in the early centuries of Christianity, martyrs replace warriors, with little change in substance. Both figures are of exceptional deaths, often accompanied by a cloud of madness (well-described in the chronicles of their time), which ensures extraordinary courage, heroism or sanctity. Their extraordinary nature, however, remains imprinted in collective memory.

Adventure, the discovery of the fantastic and unknown, is integral to these extraordinary lives and is found in both heroic quests and pilgrimages/evangelistic missions. Saint Brendan's sea voyage to Christianize Ireland and the Great North on his tiny currach (an oar-and-sail vessel built of wood and leather by local fishermen) closely resembles the wanderings of Odysseus. Brendan and the thirteen monks aboard with him encounter a towering iceberg, an immense column of crystal emerging from the sea, and tell tales of an island with talking birds and enormous monsters blowing fiery vapours, just as the Navigator of Ithaca recounts encounters with sirens, Polyphemus and various enchantments (CG 124–130).

Another significant example, though not cited by Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri and Guidorizzi, is the episode of the swarm of bees that, enveloping Pindar and a young Plato—left by his mother on Mount Hymettus to perform sacrifices to Apollo—place honey in their mouths. This event is intended to symbolize the privileged connection between the writer or philosopher and the Muses, foreshadowing a flourishing compositional talent and the future greatness.[2] The same scene, with few variations, is recounted in the lives of St. Ambrose and St. Isidore of Seville,

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[2] Graziano Arrighetti, "La Biografia di Pindaro del papiro di Ossirinco XXVI 2438", *Studi Classici e Orientali* 16 (1967): 142.

two prominent figures in late ancient Christianity, emphasizing their poetic and compositional skills.[3]

The presence of these commonalities between the hero and the saint leads the authors to the following conclusion:

> The hero (whatever you want to call him) seems to be a necessity of collective psychology: every land needs heroes—though on this Brecht disagreed: 'Cursed be the land that needs heroes'—and chooses them on the basis of its own cultural coordinates. The heroic model, transmitted by way of culture, influences the formation of the individual personality; i.e., to borrow an idea from Heidegger, one could say that every existence is determined by the choice of one's hero. But there is more. A hero and a saint are fundamental models for the society in which they operate; to remain in the collective memory, they need a narrative container. More precisely, they need a myth, or rather, stories that transmit their memory to subsequent generations. These stories are built with the same mythical bricks, because they must fix themselves in the collective unconscious, amplifying the foundational values upon which their stories are constructed.[4]

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The valuable contribution of this essay has been to observe the presence of an anthropological, almost ancestral need of every culture throughout history to be confronted with a figure beyond one's natural abilities, a figure that becomes a model to be inspired by, a point of reference, a guide, a protector, an intercessor. As a consequence, the sacred can be diffused and perceived through exemplary individuals who, through their death, acquire extraordinary powers. And all this unites the Greco–Classical world with the ancient and medieval Christian world.

This analysis contributes, enriching it, to the line of research that emerged in the late nineteenth century, thanks to the studies of Hermann Usener (1834–1905), one of the leading German classicists of the time and among the most eminent historians of the religion of ancient Greece and Rome. His book *Das Weihnachtsfest*, published in 1889, is the first to study

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[3] Paulinus of Milan, *Vita di Ambrogio*, ed. Antoon A. R. Bastiaensen, in *Vite dei santi. Vita di Cipriano. Vita di Ambrogio. Vita di Agostino*, ed. Christine Mohrmann (Milan: Mondadori, 1975), bk 3.1; Ilona Opelt, "Das Bienenwunder in der Ambrosiusbiographie des Paulinus von Mailand", *Vigiliae Christianae* 22 (1968): 38–44; Antonio Hernandez Parrales, "El XIV centenario del nacimiento de san Isidoro, arzobispo de Sevilla", *Boletín Instituto de Estudios Giennenses* 23 (1960): 13.

[4] Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri e Guidorizzi, *Corpi gloriosi*, 12–13. The translation from Italian is my own.

the origin of Christmas from a purely historical perspective, rather than a theological one.[5] However, as demonstrated in various studies by Jan Bremmer, Usener's interest was not solely historical; it was driven by the desire to purify the Catholic Church from its pagan elements, aiming to construct a Church that would unify all Germans, both Protestants and Catholics.[6] To this end, Usener also examined the lives of saints in search of their pagan antecedents. In the subsequent years, several scholars joined this line of research, including Wobbermin, who considered the saints of the Greek Church as a direct development of the cult of Greek heroes, and posited that saints are the heroes of antiquity. Similarly, Deubner suggested that even the Christian religion has its demigods, its heroes, namely the saints and martyrs.[7] Geffcken and subsequently Holl theorized a direct connection between the *acta martyrum Christianorum* and the *exitus virorum illustrium*—the accounts of the demise of eminent individuals who fell victim to tyrannical emperors—and the *acta martyrum paganorum*.[8] These studies were also influenced by the development of anthropology and the history of religions, which regarded the belief in the soul and the cult of

[5] Hermann Usener, *Das Weihnachtsfest* (Bonn: M. Cohen & Sohn, 1889).

[6] Jan N. Bremmer, "From Heroes to Saints and from Martyrological to Hagiographical Discourse", in *Sakralität und Heldentum*, ed. Felix Heinzer, Jörn Leonhard, and Ralf von den Hoff (Würzburg: Ergon, 2017), 35–36; Michel Espagne and Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn, ed. *Hermann Usener und die Metamorphosen der Philologie* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011); Jan N. Bremmer, "Hermann Usener", in *Classical Scholarship: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, ed. Ward W. Briggs and William M. Calder III (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990).

[7] Georg Wobbermin, *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien zur Frage: der Beeinflusung des Urchristentums durch das antike Mysterienwesen* (1896; repr., Berlin: Ebering, 2023), 18; Ludwig Deubner, *De Incubatione* (1900; repr., Leipzig: Teubner, 2010), 57; Ernst Lucius, *Die Anfänge des Heiligenkults in der christlichen Kirche* (1904; repr., Tübingen: G. Anrich, 2011), 14–48; Pierre Saintyves, *Les saints, successeurs des dieux: essais de mythologie chrétienne* (1907; repr., Paris: Émile Nourry, 2013). For further exploration of the topic and additional bibliography, I refer to David L. Eastman, "Early Christian Martyr Cults", in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Paul Middleton (Hoboken: Wiley–Blackwell, 2020); Elena Zocca, "Modelli martirio–santità: un rapporto multidirezionale", *Adamantius* 14 (2008): 378–379.

[8] Johannes Geffcken, "Die Christlichen Martyrien", *Hermes* 45, no. 4 (1910): 481–505; Karl Holl, "Die schriftstellerische Form des griechischen Heiligenlebens", *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum, Geschichte und deutsche Literatur und für Pädagogik* 29 (1912): 406–427; Karl Holl, "Die Vorstellung vom Märtyrer und die Märtyrerakte in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung", *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum, Geschichte und deutsche Literatur und für Pädagogik* 33 (1914): 521–556.

the dead as the primary, if not the sole origin of religion. Consequently, the early cult of saints was seen as a continuation of the ancient cult of the dead.[9]

The proposal to establish a perfect continuity between pagan heroes and Christian saints was not embraced by all scholars. In 1905, the Jesuit and hagiographer Hippolyte Delehaye (1859–1941) published *Les légendes hagiographiques*, in which he strongly contested the assertions of German scholars. Delehaye emphasized, with various nuances, the complete novelty and independence of the cult of saints in comparison to that of heroes.[10] Musurillo demonstrated that there cannot be a dependency of the *acta martyrum Christianorum* on the *acta martyrum paganorum*, as their composition occurred simultaneously.[11] Both theses were later taken up and further developed by Mohrmann and Bastiaensen.[12] In the subsequent years, Peter Brown focused on a more sociological interpretation of the Ἅγιος ἀνήρ (the holy man), and the role it played within society in the Late Antique period that immediately followed the crisis of the Roman imperial institutions. According to Brown, the cult of heroes does little to explain that of saints, and it is a fact that the cult of saints emerges independently, if not in opposition, to that of heroes. These would be independent phenomena, not only because the essence of the pagan hero differs from that of the Christian saint, but also because heroes are not intercessors—unlike saints, whose power comes from God.[13]

Recently, there have been numerous comparative articles to identify possible literary similarities between narratives in hagiographic literature

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[9] Bremmer, "From Heroes to Saints", 36.

[10] Hippolyte Delehaye and Paul Peeters, *Les légendes hagiographiques*, 4th ed. (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1955); Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, 2nd ed., Subsidia hagiographica 20 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1933); Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1921).

[11] Herbert Musurillo, ed. *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs: Acta Alexandrinorum* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 236–244, 260–262.

[12] Antoon Adrian Robertus Bastiaensen, ed. *Atti e passioni dei martiri* (Rome–Milan: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla–Mondadori, 1987), IX–XL; Athanasius, *Vita di Antonio*, ed. Gerard J. M. Bartelink (Rome–Milan: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1998), VII–XXX.

[13] Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity", *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101; Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity", *Representations* 2 (1983): 1–25.

and classical texts.[14] Other authors, including Bremmer, have revisited the analysis of the cult between the classical hero and the Christian saint.[15]

Though these recent studies indicate that the observed similarity between the cults of heroes and saints is not so evident, the proposal by Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri and Guidorizzi opens up another path of investigation: concerning the meaning attributed by early Christians to the behaviours found in the texts and the cult of classical heroes—a path that appears to have not been explored yet. Assuming a constant *collective–psychological–necessity* (or anthropological need) for a reference point (hero or saint) and a certain similarity in behaviours and devotional practices, is there a complete continuity of meaning between the cult of heroes and the cult of saints? Or, from the analysis of hagiographic texts, can a new meaning be discerned? Perhaps this question may seem obvious, but it is not addressed by the authors, who certainly perceive a difference in worship, but do not explain the reasons behind it. Furthermore, once this difference is identified, from where did the hagiographers of the early centuries find inspiration to propose a new interpretation of reality?

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To begin investigating this aspect, I examined a number of texts in martyrdom literature, particularly *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* and *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*. The former recounts the events related to the capture, trial and death of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor. It is the oldest text in hagiographic literature, with its composition dating back to the years between the reign of Antoninus Pius and that of Marcus Aurelius[16]—between 156 A.D., the most credited date of martyrdom, and 180 A.D.[17] *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* remains the most

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[14] Celsiana Warwick, "Christian Martyr as Homeric Hero: A Literary Allusion in Perpetua's Passio", *The Classical Journal* 114, no. 1 (2018): 86–109. The autor argues that the scenes in Perpetua's Passion in which her father begs her to recant her Christianity contain allusions to scenes in the Iliad in which Hector's family begs him to preserve his life by fleeing the battlefield.

[15] Bremmer, "From Heroes to Saints", 64–66.

[16] Antonino il Pio (138–161); Marco Aurelio (161–180).

[17] I will employ the English translation of *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in: Michael W. Holmes, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids (MI): Baker Academic, 2007), 298–333. From now on, all citations from *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* will be drawn from this edition and indicated in parentheses within the body of the text. i.e. (MP 307, I.2 = *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* page number, paragraph number and line number). Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who became a Christian at a very young age, is counted

fascinating text among martyrdom literature that has been passed down to us. An anonymous hand (or perhaps more than one) from the early third century A.D. skilfully assembled the diaries of two Christians, Perpetua and Saturus, written during their imprisonment while awaiting the death sentence, and added the account of their martyrdom along with other individuals, including Felicity.[18]

The quintessential Christian hero is the martyr, that is, the one who has borne witness with his blood to his faith in Jesus Christ. Beginning precisely with the meaning of this Greek noun, μάρτυρ/μάρτυς, we can see a new meaning attributed to it by hagiographic literature, compared to previous Greek and Christian traditions: as Marta Sordi has observed, this word was first used in classical Greek to refer to a judicial and historiographical eyewitness—an interpretation later adopted by the New Testament to refer to the eyewitnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. From the second half of the second century A.D., precisely starting with *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the word *martyr* acquires a new technical–ecclesiastical meaning

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among the disciples of Saint John the Evangelist. Ignatius of Antioch, between 110 and 118, wrote a letter to Polycarp. When Anicetus was bishop of Rome (154/5–165/6), Polycarp traveled to Rome to find a solution to the disputes concerning the date of the celebration of Easter. The date of his martyrdom ranges between February 22, 156, and February 23, 167. The account of the event is contained in a letter from the church of Smyrna to the Christian community of Philomelium in Phrygia, composed less than a year after the event. For dating the Martyrdom of Polycarp, I have relied on the meticulous study by Silvia Ronchey, *Indagine sul martirio di san Policarpo: critica storica e fortuna agiografica di un caso giudiziario in Asia Minore* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1990), 55–65. Candida Moss's proposal to date the text after the 3rd century is not convincing. Candida R. Moss, "On the Dating of Polycarp: Rethinking the Place of the Martyrdom of Polycarp in the History of Christianity", *Early Christianity* 1, no. 4 (2010): 539–574.

[18] I will employ the following English translation of the Passion: Thomas J. Heffernan, ed. *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). From now on, all citations from the *Passio* will be drawn from this edition and indicated in parentheses within the body of the text. i.e. (PPF 125, I.6 = *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* page number, paragraph number and line number). The text of *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* was already known to Tertullian (who died around 220), who cites it in *De Anima* (55) written in 211. Most likely, the martyrdom took place during the persecution of Septimius Severus in 203. See also Jerónimo Leal, "El carisma de revelaciones en la mujer africana del siglo III: Perpetua de Cartago y la vidente tertullianista (De anima 9,4)", in *Between Freedom and Submission: The Role of Women in the History of the Church*, ed. Filippo Forlani, Silvia Mas, and Łukasz Żak (Münster: Aschendorff, 2024), 31–43.

to designate one who dies for the Christian faith: henceforth, the martyr is no longer one who has seen the Risen One with his own eyes, but one who rather bears witness to Him with his own blood.[19]

From the reading of the texts, the first element that draws attention is a sort of "self-abasement" of the martyr. As *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* attests, the martyrs can endure the suffering of torture ("not one of them uttered a cry or a groan". MP 309, II.2) and maintain their steadfast profession of faith because the strength of Christ acts in them. At that precise moment, it is the Lord who is present and speaks through them, with the martyrs "turning their thoughts to the grace of Christ" (MP 309, II.3).[20] Before the execution, Polycarp refuses to be bound and declares, "Leave me as I am; for the one who enables me to endure the fire will also enable me to remain on the pyre without moving, even without the sense of security that you get from the nails" (MP 321, XIII,3).

The same idea is beautifully described in *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*. In her diary, Perpetua recounts three dreams she had during her imprisonment, and the third one depicts her own death sentence. In the dream, she envisions being led into the arena to fight against a formidable Egyptian gladiator. But during the preparation, just before the combat begins, she reports: "I was stripped naked, and I became a man" (PPF 130, X.7). The noblewoman Perpetua knows that it would be impossible for a woman like her to overcome a fierce gladiator, so in the dream, she perceives a true transformation of her nature, a change that will allow her to triumph and receive the crown of victory. This transformation in the dream is a way to show that the martyr is no longer herself, but rather is clothed in the strength of Christ, enabling His power to work within her.[21]

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[19] Marta Sordi, "La svolta del II sec. d.C. e la nascita del concetto ecclesiale di 'Martire'", *Aevum* 77, no. 1 (2003): 27–33.

[20] The same narrative structure of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* tends to show a complete identification of the bishop with Christ: the arrest takes place on a Friday thanks to the betrayal of one of his servants, he obtains permission from the judge, due to his venerable age, to have a last meal with his closest disciples, and on that occasion, he offers an intercessory prayer for all Christians. He is then interrogated during the trial, where the chief of police, who is named Herod, and the proconsul try to persuade him to sacrifice to the gods, and finally, he is stripped of his garments. Polycarp survives the fire that was supposed to burn him, so he is killed with a lance thrust to his chest, and from the wound, a stream of blood gushes out, extinguishing the fire. The sequence of events is the same as found in the Gospels, emphasizing this element of complete and total identification with Jesus.

[21] In various studies, scholars have sought to interpret the phrase "I became a man" as indicative of Perpetua's gender ambiguity and fluidity. However, from the examination of martyrdom texts (in this paper with examples from Polycarp,

Another testimony in this regard can be found in the paragraph of the *Passio* dedicated to the martyr Felicity. Being pregnant, she could not undergo martyrdom according to Roman law, which mandated the deferral of death sentences for pregnant women. However, she desired to face death alongside her companions, so she began to pray for the premature birth of her child. Her prayer was answered and Felicity went into labour, which was so painful that the jailer mocked her, saying: "If you are suffering so much now, what will you do when you are thrown to the beasts which you scorned when you refused to sacrifice?" (PPF 132, XV.5) Felicity's response is emblematic: "Now I alone suffer what I am suffering, but then there will be another inside me, who will suffer for me, because I am going to suffer for him". (PPF 132, XV.6) This passage also confirms that for the early Christian community, the martyr was a hero not so much for their own abilities or virtues, but because the power and strength of Christ acted within them.[22] All of this reasoning can be summarized by Tertullian's expression: "Christus in martyre est".[23]

The desire to preserve the body of the martyr, to bury it with all honours and to pay it due veneration has always been present since the early days of Christianity, and *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* bears witness to this. The bishop of Smyrna was killed by a spear, but the proconsul, under pressure from the pagan crowd, issued a decree so that "not even his poor body should be taken away by us, even though many desired to do this and to touch his holy flesh". (MP 325, XVII.1) The motivation employed by the

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Perpetua, and Felicity), it becomes apparent that every martyr, regardless of gender, undergoes a transformation into Christ. Therefore, it is artificial to interpret this transformation as a manifestation of "gender fluidity". Cfr. Barbara K. Gold, "Gender Fluidity and Closure in Perpetua's Prison Diary", *Eugesta* 1 (2011): 237–251; Barbara K. Gold, "'And I Became a Man': Gender Fluidity and Closure in Perpetua's Prison Narrative", in *Roman Literature, Gender and Reception*, ed. Donald Lateiner, Barbara K. Gold, and Judith Perkins (Londra: Routledge, 2013), 153–165.

[22] A similar transformation is also found in the Martyrdom of the Martyrs of Lyons, where Blandina, after enduring numerous tortures, is compared to a valiant athlete (man): "But the blessed woman, like a noble athlete, kept gaining in vigour in her confession, and found comfort and rest and freedom from what was done to her by sayong, 'I am a Christian woman and nothing wicked happens among us'". The martyrdom of the martyrs of Lyon has been transmitted by Eusebius of Caesarea in *The Ecclesiastical History*. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. Kirsopp Lake, Hugh Jackson Lawlor, and John Ernest Leonard Oulton, vol. 1 (1926; repr., Cambridge–London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 415, chap. 5.1.19.

[23] Tertullian, *De pudicitia*, ed. Charles Munier and Claudio Micaelli, vol. 1, Sources chrétiennes 394–395 (Paris: Cerf, 1993), 276, chap. 22.6.

mob to persuade the relevant authority is noteworthy: "they may abandon the crucified one and begin to worship this man" (MP 325, XVII.2); that is, the pagans are worried Christians could replace the worship of a hero, Christ, with the worship of another hero, Polycarp.

The attempt by pagans to prevent Christians from burying the bodies of martyrs is also found in *The Acts of the Martyrs of Lyons*:[24] indeed, the bodies were burned, and the ashes were thrown into the Rhone to prevent the initiation of a new cult in their favour. In accordance with pagan belief, the shades/souls of the deceased could cross the Styx and commence the new life in the afterlife only when their bodies had been buried. As evidence of this fear, Eusebius of Caesarea recounts in his *Ecclesiastical History* that during the persecution under Diocletian (305), even the pagans of Nicomedia feared that Christians would begin to worship the relics of their martyrs.[25]

In *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the hagiographer's response becomes a perfect explanation of the new significance attributed by Christians to the cult of martyrs:

> They did not know that we will never be able either to abandon the Christ who suffered for the salvation of the whole world, of those who are saved, the blameless on behalf of sinners, or to worship anyone else. For we worship (προσκυνοῦμεν) this one, who is the Son of God, but the martyrs we love (ἀγαπῶμεν) as disciples and imitators of the Lord, as they deserve, on account of their matchless devotion to their own King and Teacher. May we also become their partners and fellow disciples![26]

Polycarp's body was cremated, but the few remaining bones were collected by Christians:

> We took up his bones, which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and deposited them in a suitable place. There, when

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[24] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1:435–437, chap. 5.1.61–63.

[25] "As to the imperial servants, whose bodies after death had been committed to the ground with fitting honours, their reputed masters, starting afreh, deemed it necessary to exhume them and cast them also into the sea, lest any, regarding them as actually gods (so at least they imagined), should worship them as they lay in their tombs". Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. Kirsopp Lake, Hugh Jackson Lawlor, and John Ernest Leonard Oulton, vol. 2 (1932; repr., Cambridge–London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 267–269, chap. 8.

[26] MP, 325, XVII.2–3. It is worth noting the antithesis between worship (προσκυνοῦμεν), a term used in the New Testament almost exclusively to denote the worship that is given or should be given to God, and devotion (ἀγαπῶμεν), which indicates the love that is felt for the martyrs.

we gather together as we are able, with joy and gladness, the Lord will permit us to celebrate the birth of his martyrdom in commemoration of those who have already fought in the contest.[27]

To denote the day of death, the original Greek uses the term (ἡμέρα γενέθλιος, dies natalis in Latin, meaning the day of birth into heaven)—emphasizing a further difference with the cult of heroes, which was celebrated on the day of their birth.

In *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the execution took place in the stadium, and, in *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, the condemned were killed during the gladiatorial games organized on the birthday of Caesar Geta.[28] In both cases, the death sentence is compared to a sporting contest: in the Olympics, the victor was awarded a crown of laurel, and now the victor is the martyr who, despite always being defeated and dying, is "crowned with the crown of immortality" (MP 325,XVII.1). Here we find an element that was very dear to the early Christian communities: it is meant to emphasize that the martyr's death—just like the death of Christ on the cross—is a defeat in the eyes of the world, but in fact is a victory in the eyes of God, as recalled by the preface of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross: "The evil one, who conquered on a tree, might likewise on a tree be conquered".[29]

Finally, another difference concerns the sacrifice performed in the cult of heroes and that of martyrs. In the pagan world, we have evidence of a double sacrifice: one offered to the gods, where animals were killed and then burned on an altar, and another offered to the hero, which usually took place in pits or on low altars placed above their tombs. Animal blood, honey, wine and milk were poured into the sacrificial pits to nourish the heroes who, when buried, continued to live, and with whom the living desired to remain in contact (CG 8). In the cult of martyrs, on the other hand, the community of believers would gather at the site of the martyrdom or above the martyr's tomb to officiate the oblatio, the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice (which in Christian worship is always directed towards God): "in memoriis congregantes vos, sacrarum Scripturarum facite lectionem, et ad Deum preces indesinenter offerte, et eam, quae secundum similitudinem regalis Corporis Christi est, acceptam Eucharistiam offerte".[30]

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[27] MP 327, XVIII.2–3.

[28] Publius Septimius Geta (7 March, 189–26 December, 211), was the son of Septimius Severus and the brother of Caracalla. He served as a Roman co-emperor from 209 to 211, first alongside his father and later alongside his brother.

[29] Roman Missal (USA), 2010: 948.

[30] Franz Xaver Funk, ed. *Didascalia et constitutiones apostolorum*, vol. 1 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1905–1906), 376, chap. 22.2–5. In addition to this text, we can find Tertullian, "De corona", in *Opere montaniste*, ed. Giovanna Azzali Bernardelli

In summary, we can see how, for the hagiographers of the early centuries, there is precisely a reversal of the categories of hero worship. The martyr is able to endure suffering precisely because in that moment, he is invested with a power that is not their own: divine grace. They are defeated, but obtain the crown of eternal life. Their body is preserved so that the day of their eternal birth, that is, the day of their death, can be celebrated, and the cult attributed to them is actually a worship of praise and thanksgiving to Christ, who has acted and manifested Himself in their life. Confirming this new significance attributed by Christians to the cult of the martyrs, we find several conciliar canons or the sermons of bishops, including Augustine, reproving the custom of some who continued to perform sacrifices typical of pagan hero worship at the tombs of martyrs.[31]

(Rome: Città Nuova, 2011), 82, chap. 3.3: *oblationes pro defunctis, pro natalitiis annua die facimus*. Alternatively, Saint Cyprian pointed out that noting the day of the martyr's death on the calendar served precisely that purpose: *Sacrificia pro eis semper, ut meministis, offerimus, quotiens martyrum passiones et dies niversaria commemoratione celebramus*. Cyprian, *Sancti Cypriani episcopi Epistularium: epistulae, 1–57*, ed. Gerardus Frederik Diercks, CCSL 3B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994), 189, epist. 39, chap. 3.1. Augustine asserts: *Et tamen, carissimi, nos martyres nostros, quibus illi nulla ex parte sunt conferendi, pro diis non habemus, non tamquam deos colimus. Non eis templa, non eis altaria, non sacrificia exhibemus. Non eis sacerdotes offerunt: absit. Deo praestantur. Imo Deo ista offeruntur, a quo nobis cuncta praestantur. Etiam apud memorias sanctorum martyrum cum offerimus, nonne Deo offerimus? Habent honorabilem locum martyres sancti. Advertite: in recitatione ad altare Christi loco meliore recitantur; non tamen pro Christo adorantur. Quando audistis dici apud memoriam sancti Theogenis, a me, vel ab aliquo fratre et collega meo, vel aliquo presbytero: Offero tibi, sancte Theogenis? aut offero tibi, Petre? aut, offero tibi, Paule? Nunquam audistis. Non fit: non licet. Et si dicatur tibi, numquid tu Petrum colis? responde quod de Fructuoso respondit Eulogius: Ego Petrum non colo, sed Deum colo, quem colit et Petrus. Tunc te amat Petrus. Nam si volueris pro Deo habere Petrum, offendis petram, et vide ne pedem frangas, offendendo in petram*. Augustine, *Discorsi V (273–340)*, ed. Marcella Recchia and Antonio Quacquarelli, trans. Marcella Recchia (Rome: Città Nuova, 1986), 8, serm. 273.7. Saint Cyril of Alexandria: Τοὺς γε μὴν ἁγίους μάρτυρας, οὔτε θεοὺς εἶναί φαμεν, οὔτε προσκυνεῖν εἰθίσμεθα λατρευτικῶς δῆλον ὅτι, ἀλλὰ σχετικῶς καὶ τιμητικῶς (Indeed, we do not assert that the holy martyrs are gods, nor do we habitually worship them with liturgical worship; this is evident. Rather, we honor and venerate them relatively and respectfully. The translation from Italian is my own). Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Julianum imperatorem*, bk 6, in Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca, vol. 76, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: Migne, 1859), 811–812.

[31] Augustine, *Le lettere (1–123)*, ed. Luigi Carrozzi and Michele Pellegrino, trans. Terenzio Alimonti (Rome: Città Nuova, 1969), 182–197, epist. 29; Mario Righetti