

## Play in Visions of the Afterlife in the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*

This paper examines the use of the Latin verb *ludere* in the third-century North African Christian martyrdom narrative, the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, to characterize activity in the afterlife. Curiously, despite the vast scholarship produced in the last thirty years on this well-known martyrdom text, scant attention is paid to the role of play, which appears twice in the narrative: in Perpetua's vision of her deceased brother and in Saturus' vision of heaven. Specifically, this paper will examine the semantic domain of *ludere* (Amat: 1996; Heffernan: 2012), its use in the corpus of Tertullian, the North African Christian contemporary who is often believed to be its editor (Barnes: 1985), the nature and role of play in Greco-Roman representations of the afterlife (Miller: 1994; González: 2014), and the ludic elements of both early Christians conceptions of the afterlife (Petraglio: 1979; Pothoff: 2009) and worship (Gschwandtner: 2021) to make the case that the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, while rooted in certain Greco-Roman pagan and Christian theological concepts, presents an idiosyncratic view of the afterlife that contributes to its status as a rich and unique cultural artifact. In so doing, it will buck against the trend to view *ludere* in this text as the *refrigerium* associated with the Christian afterlife (Heffernan: 2012; González: 2014) or the mistranslation of a Latin translator (Barnes: 1985).

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