Persecution: The Making and Memory of Martyrs (ii)

April 25, 2006

- Last Session: Martyrdom and persecution before 250
- This Session: Persecution 250–312 CE, and the impact on Christian communities
  - Imperial Persecution: Decius (250), Valerian (257–8), Diocletian (302–312)
  - The power of confessors and martyrs
  - Crisis of the lapsed

Housekeeping

- Eusebius Paper, due May 9
- Info on Final Exam next week. Expect essay questions that will appear on the exam
- Wilcken reading for next time: will be available through the web syllabus. Same password.
- Elizabeth will be in her office 3:30–4:30

Imperial Persecution: 250–312

- Decius (250)
  - Universal Sacrifice
  - Conservative, beginning of attempt to create empire-wide cult
  - Are Christians a specific target?
- Valerian (257–60)
  - Targets Christian clergy and property
  - Special targeting of people of rank
- Diocletian (302–312)
  - Series of decrees targeting first Christian property and Christians of status, culminating in universal sacrifice
  - Eusebius’ Martyrs of Palestine is set in this persecution
The Power of Confessors and Martyrs

- Terminology:
  - Power of confessor
  - Power of martyrs

Terminology:
- "Martyrs"—those who were killed
- "confessors"—those imprisoned, tortured, but not "fortunate" enough to die

Power of confessors
- Perpetua, urged to adjudicate between a bishop and presbyter (to her wonderment!)
- Tertullian, On Modesty 22, comments on Christians coming for absolution for sins to the mines and prisons
- Cyprian (eg., Ep. 28/35): Some confessors were giving "peace" to the lapsed; for Cyprian, a challenge to institutional authority
Power of martyrs
- Model for Christians to emulate
- Commemoration a central aspect of Christian piety (as early as Polycarp, d. ca. 165)
- Intercessory prayer
- Shaping of sacred geography
  - Martyr shrines
  - Bringing the dead into the city

Crisis of the lapsed
- In third century many lapsed in some form:
  - Certified acts of sacrifice (numerically greatest)
  - Having slaves sacrifice “for” owner
  - Forged libelli for Christians who did not sacrifice
- Question:
  - How was the Church to handle this? (Cyprian endorsed a rigorist position, of long penance)
  - What was the Church to be
- In the fourth century: “Donatist” schism, flourished in No. Africa throughout the fourth century.

Certificate of Sacrifice (250), from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt.
P. Oxy. L.VIII 3929
Necropolis of Hierapolis (Pamukele, Turkey)