

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. LVIII 3929



Necropolis of Hierapolis (Pamukale, Turkey)


