

WOMEN MARTYRS, ANIMALS, AND GOD'S PRESENCE IN ANCIENT CHRISTIAN TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to examine the martyrdom of some Christian women (Blandina, Perpetua and Thecla) in close connection with the animals they have to face. On the one hand, these wild beasts become the incarnation of the Devil, ready to harass the female martyr; on the other hand, the animal, perceiving God's living presence in the female martyr, does not devour her. The wild beasts acquire symbolic meaning, strictly intertwined with God's providence.

Keywords: animals, God, female martyrs, allegorical meaning.

Replete with stories of gods and men interacting with animals, classical literature also encompasses a broad range of interaction between women and animals, as in the case of the myth of Europa riding on a cow, or the tale of the princess and priestess Io, transformed into a heifer by Zeus. We also find animals whose association to a deity must be interpreted symbolically: Pallas Athena with the owl, or Artemis,