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Perpetua and Felicity: The Unofficial Lesbian Saints

Mari Tonsfeldt

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Use of the term "lesbian-like", coined by Judith Bennett, helps to avoid anachronism and allows for more open interpretation. “Lesbian-like” means any behavior that could be interpreted as queer. This behavior can be anything female-centric; love of women, socializing with women, sex with women, dedication to women, etc. It can also be anything that leads to the voluntary loss of male authority.

Examples of “lesbian-like” from Perpetua’s Passio and history:
• Masculinized visions
• Rejection of motherhood and familial bonds.
• Death by sword
• Tertullian: Masculinization of martyrs
• Secondary author’s attempt to feminize
• Imitation by male saints
• Female companionship

Conclusion:
Based on the masculinization of Perpetua and the women’s rejection of their expected roles, we see that they are “lesbian-like” making them fit the title of patron saints of same-sex relationships.

Abstract
The concept of homosexuality did not exist prior to the nineteenth century. In literature, this made lesbians a rarity. With the absence of women writers and even fewer lesbian writers, the question for historians became how to find our queer ancestors. Defining anyone in the Medieval Age as homosexual is anachronistic at best but modern lesbians could hardly be the first.

Saints Perpetua and Felicity are commonly regarded among the LGBTQ community and members of the Catholic Church as the patron saints of same-sex relationships but in St. Perpetua’s self-penned diary and martyrdom story, the two women have only one direct interaction and it isn’t sexual. In my research, I would like to prove that there is “lesbian-like” behavior exhibited in their hagiography which makes it plausible that the two women are lesbians.

Research Question(s)
• What is a lesbian and is the title reserved for only those who are sexually active?
• What does it mean to be “lesbian-like”?
• How does the characterization of Saints Perpetua and Felicity contribute to their status as the patron saints of same-sex relationships?

Selected Bibliography