

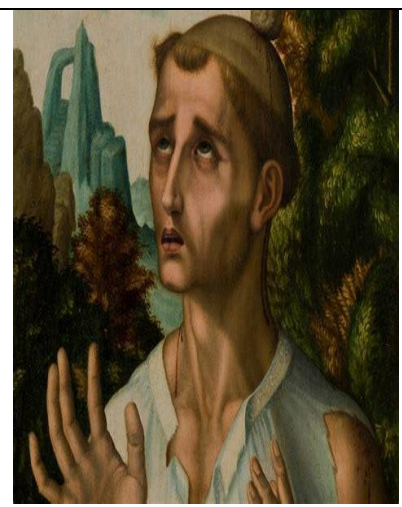
**MARIA VALTORTA READERS' GROUP**  
**THE SUPPLEMENT No. 107 – SEPTEMBER 2022**



**DINNER AT SIMON'S HOME**



**BANKS OF THE JORDAN**



**SAINT STEPHEN**

**PEOPLE & PLACES THROUGH THE EYES OF MARIA VALTORTA**

The following detailed descriptions of people and places highlight Maria Valtorta's acute observational ability and her poetic literacy skills. These passages are not just visual but auditory, sensitive to touch and smell too.

**A DESCRIPTION OF ANNE & JOACHIM AND MARY**

(Maria says:) I see the inside of a house. In it, there is an elderly woman sitting at a loom. Noting that her hair, which formerly was definitely jet black, is now quite grey and her face, though not wrinkled, has the seriousness that comes with age, I would say that she must be fifty-five years old. Not more. In estimating a woman's age, I base my calculations upon my mother's face, [...] I could therefore be mistaken in estimating the age of an elderly woman. [...] The woman is beautiful in her definite Jewish features. Her eyes are black and deep and while I do not know why, they remind me of the Baptist's. But, although they are as proud as the eyes of a queen, they are also sweet, as if a veil of blue had been laid on the flash of an eagle: sweet and somewhat sad, as of a person who thinks of and regrets lost things. Her skin is brown, but not excessively so. Her mouth, slightly large, is well formed and is motionless in an austere setting, which, however, is not a hard one. Her nose is long and thin, slightly drooping, an aquiline nose, which suits her eyes. She is well built, but not fat, well proportioned and I think tall, judging her by the position in which she is sitting. I think she is weaving a curtain or a carpet. [...] The woman is wearing a very plain dark dress, a red violet colour, the hue of a kind of pansy. She stands up when she hears someone knocking at the door. She is actually quite tall. [...] An elderly man (Joachim) comes in from the orchard. He is a little smaller than Anne, and his thick hair is completely white. His face is of a clear complexion with a squarely cut beard; his eyes are like blue turquoises and his eyelashes are light brown, almost fair. His robe is dark brown. [...] Here is Mary at Her birth, in Her linen, in the arms of Her earthly father, whom She resembles. Not at the

moment [...], I mean that She will be like him when She has grown into a woman. She has nothing of Her mother. She has Her father's colour of complexion and eyes, and certainly also his hair. His hair is now white but when he was young, it was definitely fair as one can tell from his eyebrows. She has Her father's features, made more perfect and gentle, being a woman, but that special Woman. She has also the smile, the glance, the way of moving and height of Her father. Thinking of Jesus, as I see Him, I find Anne has given her height to her Grandson and her deep ivory colour to His skin. Mary, instead, has not the stateliness of Her mother: a tall and supple palm-tree, but She has the kindness of Her father.

*(Poem Vol.1, pp.8-10, 25; Gospel Vol. 1, pp.14-15, 35)*

**A DESCRIPTION OF THE TEMPLE**

(Maria says:) I see Jesus entering the enclosure of the Temple with Peter, Andrew, John, James, Philip and Bartholomew. There is a very large crowd both inside and outside the enclosure. Pilgrims are arriving in flocks from every part of the town. From the top of the hill on which the Temple is built, one can see the narrow, twisted streets of the town swarming with people. It seems as though a mobile, multi-coloured ribbon has been laid between the white houses. The town looks like a rare toy indeed, made of gaily-coloured ribbons between two white threads, all converging onto the point where the domes of the House of the Lord are shining. Inside, it is... a real market. The concentration of a holy place has been destroyed. Some run, some call, some bargain for lambs, shouting and cursing because of the extortionate prices. Some drive the poor bleating animals into their enclosures (rough partitions made of ropes and pegs, at the entrance of which stand the merchants or owners, awaiting buyers). Blows with cudgels, bleating, curses, shouts, insults to the boys who are not quick in gathering together or selecting the animals, abuses to the purchasers who haggle over prices or who go away, more serious insults to those who wisely brought their own lambs. Near the benches of the

## MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

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money-changers, there is more bawling. It is obvious that either always, or at Passover time, the Temple operated as a... stock exchange or black market. There was no fixed rate of exchange. There must have been a legal rate, but the money-changers imposed a different one, making whatever profit they fancied for exchanging the money. And I can assure you they were not joking in their usury transactions!... The poorer the people were and the farther they came from, the more they were fleeced: old people more than young people, those coming from beyond Palestine more than the old folk. Some poor old men looked over and over again at the money they had saved in a whole year, (I wonder with how much hard work), they took it out and put it back into their purses dozens and dozens of times, going from one money-changer to another and, at times, ending up by going back to the first one, who took revenge for their original desertion by increasing the premium for the exchange. And the big coins passed from the hands of the sighing owners into the clutches of the usurers, and were changed into smaller coins. Then a further tragedy would take place with vendors over the choice and payment of their lambs, and the poor old men, particularly if they were half blind, were fobbed off with the most wretched little lambs. I see an old couple, man and wife, come back pushing a poor little lamb which must have been found faulty by the sacrificers. They cried and begged the vendor, who, far from being moved, replied with nasty words and rude manners.

*(Poem Vol.1, pp. 285-6; Gospel Vol.1, pp.343-4)*

### A PLACE OF ISOLATION AND PRAYER FOR JESUS

(Maria says:) Jesus is once again at the foot of the massive height on which Jiphthahel is built. But He is not on the main road (let us call it so) or a mule track, along which the cart came. He is instead on a little footpath fit for ibexes, so steep it is, strewn with large stone splinters and deep crevices, and seems to be stuck onto the mountain side; I would say that it is engraved on the vertical face of the mountain, which looks as if it were scratched by a huge claw. At its edge there is a precipice, a sheer deep drop, at the bottom of which an angry torrent foams along. To slip there means to fall hopelessly, bouncing from one bush to another of bramble or other wild plants, which have grown between the crevices of the rocks, I do not know how, as they have not come up vertically as is normal with plants, but obliquely and even horizontally, compelled by their ubication (location). To slip there means to be torn to pieces by the thorns of such plants, or to have one's back broken by the impact on rigid tree trunks protruding over the abyss. To slip there means to be lacerated by the sharp-edged stones sticking out from the face of the precipice [...].

Jesus proceeds slowly, cautiously, watching each step on the sharp stones, some of which are wobbly. At times He is compelled to squeeze against the mountain-side when the path narrows. And to pass over some particularly dangerous spots, He has to get hold of branches hanging from the rocks. He goes round the western side thus, and reaches the southern one, where the mountain, after a perpendicular drop from the summit, becomes more concave than elsewhere, allowing the path thus to widen a little, but reducing its height, so that Jesus now and again must lower His head to avoid knocking it against the

rocks. Perhaps He intends to stop there, where the path ends abruptly because of a landslide. But when He sees that under the cliff there is a cave, a fissure in the mountain rather than a cave, He lets Himself down among the fallen stones. He goes in. There is a cleft at first, then a large grotto inside as if the mountain had been hollowed out a long time ago by man for some unknown reason. [...] Jesus slips into the narrow semi-dark tunnel and goes along it until He reaches its opening, [...] Jesus is satisfied with His exploration and He goes back into the large cave.

*(Poem Vol.3, pp. 217-8 ; Gospel Vol.5, pp.132-3)*

### THE ROMAN LADIES

(Maria says:) Three Roman ladies are casting glances at [Jesus and the Apostles] from the threshold: Plautina, Valeria and Lydia. The first and last ones are hesitant, but Valeria runs out and makes a curtsy saying: 'Hail, Saviour of my little Fausta!' [...] The friends curtsy without speaking. We already know Plautina: tall, stately, with beautiful dark, rather authoritative eyes, under a smooth very white forehead, a perfect straight nose, a well shaped rather tumid (protruding) mouth, a roundish and a well defined chin. She reminds me of some beautiful statues of Roman empresses. Heavy rings shine on her beautiful hands. Large golden bracelets surround her statuesque arms, her wrists and above her elbows which appear pinkish white, smooth and perfect under her short-draped sleeves. Lydia, on the other hand, is fair-haired, thinner and younger. Her beauty is not the stately beauty of Plautina, but she possesses all the grace of feminine youth which is still a little unripe. And since we are on a pagan subject, I could say that if Plautina looks like the statue of an empress, Lydia could well be Diana or a gentle modest-looking nymph (a beautiful maiden). Valeria, who is not in the desperate situation in which we saw her at Caesarea, appears in the beauty of a young mother, rather plump-shaped but still very young, with the quiet look of a mother who is happy to breastfeed her own child and see it grow healthy. Rosy and brown, her smile is a quiet but very kind one. I am under the impression that the two ladies are of a lower rank than Plautina, whom they respect as a queen, as is obvious also from their attitude. *(Poem Vol.2, pp.108-9; Gospel Vol.3, p.54)*

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOENICIAN SEA TOWN

(Maria says:) It is early morning when Jesus arrives in front of a sea-town. Four boats are following. The town juts out strangely towards the sea, as if it were built on an isthmus. Or rather: as if a slender isthmus linked the part protruding on the sea to the part stretching along the shore. It looks like a huge mushroom, as seen from the sea, with its crown lying on the waves, its roots under the shore, the isthmus being the stem. There are two harbours, one on each side: one, to the north, is wider and full of small boats; in the other, to the south, which is more sheltered, there are large ships arriving or departing [...]. I can see that the isthmus is an artificial one, a kind of Cyclopean dam linking the little island to the mainland. They built lavishly in those days! I conclude from the work and from the number of boats in the harbours [...] that the town was wealthy and commercially very active. Behind the town, beyond a flat area, there are some pretty-looking little hills, and the Great Hermon and the Lebanon chain of mountains can be seen very far behind [...]. Two

## MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

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beautiful fishing boats come towards them and the crew bend over the smaller boats of the disciples [...] and they go to an inlet in the cliff, farther north. The very steep cliff protects from the sun. It is a lonely spot: only sea-gulls and wood pigeons live there: they fly out for their raids at sea and then fly back to their nests in the rocks, squeaking loud. Some smaller boats have joined the leading one and have thus formed a little fleet. At the end of the tiny bay, there is a very small beach. It is really a sham beach: a small square strewn with stones. It can hold about one hundred people. They land making use of a large flat rock emerging from the deep water like a small natural wharf, and they gather on the little stony beach sparkling with salt. They are thin swarthy men, parched by the sun and the sea. Their short under-garments leave their thin agile limbs uncovered. They are clearly a different race from the Jews of the present time, but the difference is not so striking with regard to Galileans. I would say that those Syro-Phoenicians are more like the old Philistines than their neighbouring peoples. Jesus draws close to the beach and begins to speak.

(*Poem Vol. 2, pp. 605-6 ; Gospel Vol. 4, pp.169-70*)

### THE HOME OF THE WEDDING OF CANA

(Maria says:) I see a typical middle-east house: a long, low, white house, with few windows and doors, with a terraced roof, surrounded by a little wall, about one metre high, with a shady vine pergola, which reaches up to the sunny terrace and stretches its branches over more than half of its surface. An outside staircase climbs up along the front, reaching up to a door which is situated half-way up the facade. At ground level, there are a few low doors, not more than two on each side of the house, and they open into low dark rooms. The house is built in the middle of what looks like a kind of threshing-floor, but is actually more a grassy open space with a well in the middle. There are some fig and apple trees. The house faces the road, but it is not set right on the roadside. It is a little way off the road, and a path along the grass links it to what looks like a main road. It seems to be on the outskirts of Cana: a house owned by farmers who live in the middle of their holding. The country stretches calm and green far beyond the house. The sun is shining in a completely blue sky. [...] If I am correct, the rooms on the ground floor are the ones where they actually live, where they have their storeroom and wine cellar. Whereas the hall upstairs is used on special occasions, such as feast days or for tasks that require a lot of space, such as drying and pressing foodstuffs. For special celebrations, the hall is cleared of every object and then decorated, as it is today, with green branches, mats and tables prepared with rich dishes. In the centre, there is a richly laid table with amphorae and plates full of fruit. Along the right-hand side wall, compared to where I am, there is another table already prepared, but not so sumptuously. On the left-hand side, there is a kind of long dresser with plates of cheese and other foodstuffs, which look like cakes covered with honey and sweet meats. On the floor, near the same wall, there are more amphorae and six large vases, shaped more or less like copper pitchers. I would call them jars [...]. It is early morning, I would say about nine o'clock, perhaps earlier, because the country has the fresh look of the early morning hours when the dew makes the grass look greener and the air is still free from dust. It appears to

be springtime because the grass in the meadows is not parched by the summer sun and the corn in the fields is still young and green and earless. The leaves of the fig tree and apple tree are green and tender, and those of the vines are the same.

(*Poem Vol.1, pp. 279-80; Gospel Vol. 1, pp.337-8*)

### THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN

(Maria says:) You are beautiful, O banks of the Jordan, as beautiful as you were in the times of Jesus! [...] I am on a road which is quite wide and also well maintained. It must be a highway, or more likely a military road, built by the Romans to link the various regions with the capital. It runs near the river, but not precisely along it. It is in fact separated from it by woodland, the function of which I think is to consolidate the river banks and contain the water in times of flood. The woodland continues on the other side of the road, so that the road looks like a natural tunnel over which the trees interlace their leafy branches, a beneficial protection for wayfarers in the hot climate of this country. At the point where I am, the river, and consequently the road as well, form a wide bend, so that the leafy embankment appears to me like a huge green barrier built to enclose a basin of calm waters. It almost looks like a lake in a luxury park. But the water is not as still as the water of a lake. It flows, although slowly. This is evident from its rustling against the first reed thickets, the more daring ones that have grown down there, in the gravel bed, and also from the undulation of the long ribbon-like leaves of the canes, reaching down to the water by which they are sweetly lulled. Also a group of willows, with flexible falling branches, have entrusted the ends of their green foliage to the river, that combs the thin branches with a graceful caress, stretching them softly on the water surface. There is peace and silence in the early morning. One can only sense the warbling of birds, the rustling of water and leaves, the glittering of dew drops on the tall green grass between the trees, a grass not yet hardened or parched by the summer sunshine, but tender and fresh, since it came up after the springtime showers, which nourished the earth, in its very depth, with moisture and rich juices. Three wayfarers are standing on the road, in the middle of the bend. They look up and down, to the south, where Jerusalem is and to the north, where Samaria lies. (*Poem Vol.1, p.300; Gospel Vol.1,pp 361-2*)

### DINNER IN THE HOUSE OF SIMON THE PHARISEE.

(Maria says:) I see a sumptuous hall. A multi-branched candlestick is hanging in the centre and is completely lit. The hall is hung with beautiful tapestry; there are magnificent pieces of furniture and chairs inlaid and decorated with ivory and precious metal leaves. There is a large square table in the centre, consisting of four tables assembled together. The table has been laid for many guests (all men) and is covered with beautiful tablecloths and very expensive tableware. There are valuable amphorae and cups and many servants are moving round the table carrying dishes and pouring out wines. There is no one in the centre of the square. I can see the magnificent floor which reflects the lights of the oil chandelier. Around the table there are many couches, all occupied by the guests. I appear to be in the half dark corner at the end of the hall, near a door, which is wide open, although screened by a heavy piece of tapestry

hanging from its architrave. The landlord and the most important guests are on the opposite side, that is, the farthest side from the door. The landlord is elderly, wearing a wide white tunic tied around his waist by an embroidered belt. Round the collar, the cuffs and the hem of the tunic, there are strips of embroidered work, which have been attached as if they were embroidered ribbons or strips. But I do not like his expression. It is malicious, cold, proud and greedy. On the opposite side, facing him, there is my Jesus. He is wearing His usual white tunic, sandals, and His long hair is parted on His forehead. I see that both He and all the guests are not sitting up to the table, as I thought one would on those couches. Instead they are reclined in a parallel formation. [...] I saw that they were eating leaning on their left elbows, but they did not appear to be so reclined, probably because the couches were shorter and not so sumptuous. Those I see now are real beds, and look like modern Turkish divans. John is near Jesus and since Jesus is leaning on His left elbow, like everybody else, so this is their position [...] but if He wishes, He can lie comfortably on His chest.

*(Poem Vol.2, pp. 510-1 ; Gospel Vol. 4, pp. 53-4)*

#### **ON THE MOUNT OF ABSTINENCE AND TEMPTATION**

A most beautiful dawn in the wilderness, seen from the height of a mountain side. It is daybreak. A few stars are still visible and a very thin arc of a waning moon looks like a silver comma on the dark-blue velvet of the sky. The mountain is completely isolated, that is, it is not linked to any other chain of mountains. But it is a real mountain, not a hill. The top is much higher up, but even from the middle of its slope, a very wide horizon can be seen, because one is well above ground level. In the fresh morning air, as the faint white-greenish dawn light becomes clearer and clearer, profiles and details slowly become visible, whereas before they were hidden in the fog that precedes daybreak, a fog that is darker than night, because the light of the stars seems to diminish and fade away in the transition from night to day. I thus see that the mountain is rocky and barren, split by gorges forming grottos, caves and inlets in its side. It is a real wilderness: only where there is some earth capable of receiving and retaining the moisture of the rain, are there a few green tufts, mainly stiff thorny plants with very few leaves, and low hard bushes of grass similar to thin green sticks, the name of which I do not know. Below there is an even more barren plain, a flat stony ground that becomes more arid as it stretches out towards a dark spot, at least five times longer than wider, which I think must be a thick oasis, which has sprung up in so much bleakness because of underground waters. But when the light becomes brighter, I see that it is nothing but water: stagnant, dark, dead water, a lake of infinite sadness. In the still feeble light, it reminds me of the vision of the dead world. It seems to be drawing to itself all the darkness of the sky and all the gloominess of the surrounding area, dissolving in its still water, the deep green of the thorny shrubs and stiff grass that for miles and miles around it and above it, are the only decoration of the earth. And after filtering so much gloom it seems to spread it around once again. How different it is from the sunny, smiling lake of Gennesaret! High above, looking at the clear blue sky, which is becoming clearer and clearer, looking at the light progressing from the east in deeper and deeper

brightness, one's soul rejoices. But looking at the huge, dead lake gives one a stab in the heart. Not one bird flies over the water. Not one animal is on its shore. Nothing.

*(Poem Vol.1, pp.424-5 ; Gospel Vol. 2, pp. 19-20)*

#### **THE BURIAL OF SAINT STEPHEN**

It is the dead of night, and a very dark night because the moon has already set when Mary comes out of the little house at Gethsemane with Peter, James of Alphaeus, John, Nicodemus and the Zealot. Because of the dark night, Lazarus, who is waiting for them in front of the house, at the beginning of the path that leads to the lower gate, lights an oil lamp, which he has fitted with a protection of thin sheets of alabaster or other transparent material. The light is faint, but when the lamp is held low towards the ground, as it is now, it always helps to see stones and obstacles that may be found on the way [...]. They go as far as the Kidron (a ravine) and proceed along it, so that they are half-hidden by the wild bushes that grow near its banks. Also the murmur of the water serves to conceal and confuse the noise of the sandals of the wayfarers. Going along the outer side of the walls all the time as far as the Gate closest to the Temple, [...] they arrive at the place where Stephen was stoned. They direct their steps towards the pile of stones under which he is half buried, and they remove the stones until his poor body appears. It is by now deathly pale, both because of death and because of the blows it received during the lapidation (stoning), it is hard, stiff, all curled up as it was when he breathed his last. Mary, who has been mercifully kept a few steps away by John, frees herself and runs towards that poor body, which is lacerated and covered with blood. Without worrying about the stains that the clotted blood leaves on Her dress, Mary, helped by James of Alphaeus and John, lays the body on a cloth stretched on the ground, in a spot devoid of stones, and with a linen cloth, that She dips in a small amphora handed to Her by the Zealot, She cleans, as best She can, the face of Stephen, She tidies his hair, trying to bring it round to his temples and wounded cheeks, in order to cover the horrible marks left by the stones. She cleans also the other parts of the body and She would also like to arrange them in a less tragic posture. But the chill of death, which had taken place many hours previously, only partially allows that. Also the men try, [...] but they also have to resign themselves to leave him in the position they have succeeded in placing him after so many efforts. They dress him again with a clean long tunic because his has been lost or stolen, in contempt, by the lapidators, and the short tunic they have left on him is all torn and stained with blood. Having done that, always in the faint light of the lamp that Lazarus holds very close to the poor body, they lift him and lay him on another clean cloth. Nicodemus picks up the first cloth, wet with the water used to wash the martyr and with the clotted blood, and places it under his mantle. John and James at the head, Peter and the Zealot at the feet, they lift the cloth containing the body, and they set out on the way back, preceded by Lazarus and Mary. But they do not go back along the same way they came, on the contrary, going into the country and going round at the foot of the Mount of Olives, they reach the road that goes to Jericho and Bethany. *(Poem Vol.5 pp. 912-14; Gospel Vol.10 pp. 501-2)*