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Rebuilding Christian Carthage after the Byzantine Conquest

by *Richard Miles*

Introduction

In *The Buildings*, Procopius' account of the emperor Justinian's construction projects across his newly restored and reinvigorated empire, the section on the North African territories includes an impressive list of fortifications, churches, shrines and monasteries that were built or renovated in the aftermath of the Byzantine conquest. In particular, Carthage, the most important city in the region and now renamed *Justinianê* in honour of the emperor, was the recipient of considerable imperial largesse. The city's circuit wall was refortified, new stoas were constructed on either side of the maritime forum and baths, named after the imperial consort, were built. Nor was the religious life of the city ignored. New shrines were constructed to the Virgin Mary within the palace and to a local saint Prima as well as a fortified monastery, the Mandracium[1]. In Procopius' account the physical reconstruction of Carthage and the other towns and cities of North Africa stood as glorious monuments to the restoration of peace, security and Nicene orthodoxy after the chaos, barbarity and heresy of the Vandal regnum[2].

Since the UNESCO *Save Carthage* campaign of the 1970s, a considerable body of archaeological evidence has built up that supports the view that the city did experience an upsurge in building activity in the decades after the Justinianic Conquest of Africa. The Christian Church, in particular, seems to have been a major beneficiary with as many as eight basilicas and a number of cult structures being either built or remodelled[3]. Historians and archaeologists, however, have generally been sceptical of Procopius' claims of a Justinianic rebuilding program in North Africa and across the Byzantine Empire as a whole. In particular, they have pointed to the apparent discrepancy between Procopius' survey and the actual surviving physical record[4]. A number of scholars have also highlighted the *Buildings* role as imperial panegyric rather than as a factual account of Justinian's physical restoration of the Roman Empire[5]. A recent study of building inscriptions associated with Justinian has highlighted how much of the restoration programme in fact comprised local initiatives conducted by imperial military officials, bishops and other secular and religious functionaries[6].

In the case of Byzantine Carthage, a dearth of epigraphic evidence has made identifying those behind the construction and renovation of these Christian monuments difficult. However, through the careful examination of contemporary evidence from both Byzantine Africa and Italy, it is possible to show that the most likely candidates were Carthage's ecclesiastical and lay elites, often working in cooperation with the imperial government. It will be argued that a number of these churches, as well as celebrating the return of imperial orthodoxy to Africa, were specifically designed to address the challenges of a post-conquest society still riven by divisions and tensions from the Vandal period. This paper will also show how the more architecturally ambitious of these ecclesiastical structures reflected a new openness to outside ideas and a willingness to innovate on the part of those who commissioned and designed them. This emerging cosmopolitanism, it will be argued, was not merely the inevitable cultural dividend of the Byzantine conquest but also a product of the close and sustained contacts between Romano-Africans and overseas communities, particularly in Italy and the eastern Mediterranean during the religious turmoil of the Vandal era.

1 Proc. aed. 6, 5, 8–11.

2 E. g. Coripp. Iohannis 3, 13. For Justinian as the restorer of Christian orthodoxy: Proc. aed. 1, 1, 9. – Vandal chaos: Proc. BV 3, 8, 3–4; 3, 8, 7–11. – Vandal disrespect of Catholic churches: Proc. BV 3, 8, 20–21. – On the Justinianic message of the restoration of peace and orthodoxy in North Africa see Merrills – Miles 2010, 234–238.

3 The basilicas Dermech I, Dermech II, Mcidfa, Bir Ftouha, Damous el-Karita Bir Messaouda, Carthagenna and Bir el Knissa. For an attempt at reconciling the literary and archaeological evidence see Ennabli 1997.

4 Feissel 2000, 101; Reynolds 2000.

5 Cameron 1985, 84–112; Whitby 2000.

6 Feissel 2000, 87–88.

Rebuilding Christian Carthage

Considering the extraordinary prominence of the city in the history of early Christianity, the archaeological record of Carthage provides disappointingly little information for the periods prior to the Byzantine conquest[7]. In the northern suburban districts, epigraphic evidence from a number of large cemetery churches indicate that Christian cult buildings existed at those sites by the late 4th c. CE, although physical evidence that reveals their full extent in this period is scarce. A cemetery church dating to the late 5th c. has been discovered at Bir el Knissia in the southern suburbs of the city[8]. Within the city walls a dome-roofed circular monument, thought to be a *memoria* for a martyr cult, has also been uncovered on an insula next to theatre[9]. Basilicas have also been found underneath the later 6th-c. churches of Dermech I, Bir Messaouda and Cartagenna but the latter two structures have no clear characteristics that mark them out as Christian religious buildings[10].

Generally, however, Christian architecture in 4th and 5th-c. Africa was marked by its conservatism, with the majority following the standard plan of a central nave aisles supported by colonnades finished by either a single or double apse and often accessed from a narthex or an atrium. Another strong element in pre-Byzantine African church building was the so-called Constantinian plan typified by the multiplication of side aisles[11]. Even with the limited evidence available, it is clear that the decades after the Justinianic conquest represented something of a watershed in the development of the Christian topography of Carthage, with a number of Byzantine-era basilicas displaying a striking architectural sophistication and willingness to innovate[12].

To the north-east of the city walls at Bir Ftouha, a new extra-mural church was built next to an earlier complex between 540 and 550 (fig. 1). To the west, a fine polygonal entrance hall led via a small gallery into the main three-aisled basilica. In the basilica, an ambulatory behind the apse provided a path for pilgrims around the screened-off sanctuary that presumably contained the tombs of martyrs and other saints. This path eventually led pilgrims to a large baptistery in the eastern part of the complex. The circular room that held the baptistery was itself surrounded by a 2.5 m wide walkway. Its excavators have also noted how an «unusually meticulous eye for detail, was applied to the design, the orientation and divisions of space, levels of floors, differing palettes of the walls and generous fenestration heightened the drama of those spaces and signalled their relative importance». Martyr veneration and baptism appear to have been key functions of the Bir Ftouha complex[13].

The Bir Ftouha complex was not the only architecturally innovative ecclesiastical building constructed in Carthage during this period. Towards the end of the third quarter of the 6th c. CE, at the site known as Bir Messaouda, a substantial transept basilica was built on an intermural insula bounded by the *decumanus maximus* to the north and *cardines* IX and X to the east and west on the lower eastern slopes of the Byrsa Hill. The construction project involved the extensive remodelling of an earlier 6th c. CE north-south orientated basilica. The terracing wall, which had also served as the western wall of the old building, was removed, and the structures on the higher ground to its west demolished providing enough level ground for a new five-aisled east-west orientated structure (22.5 × 34.5 m) that flowed into the renovated original north-south structure. A new eastern apse was also added to complete the reorientation. Where the north-south and east-west aisles converged, a domed or higher pitched roof was constructed with a ciborium covering a substantial installation comprising an altar and martyr relics underneath. To the south-west and north-west of the main basilica, equidistant from the central nave a large baptistery and a martyr crypt (constructed out of an old Roman cistern) were built. The baptistery was particularly impressive, with a ciborium over the hexagonal font supported by twelve pillars, and a further covered ambulatory around its circumference.

Like Bir Ftouha the architect(s) of the Bir Messaouda complex made clever use of the division of space and differing floor levels. The central east-west nave, flanked by chancels, created a channel leading to the core of the building, where a large colonnaded installation, most probably an altar under a ciborium was placed in the central area in front of the apse. The north-south transept was configured in a tripartite arrangement with the wings partially separated from the altar in the central bay by double columns. Staircases connected the east-

7 Ennabli 1997, 142–146.

8 Stevens 1993.

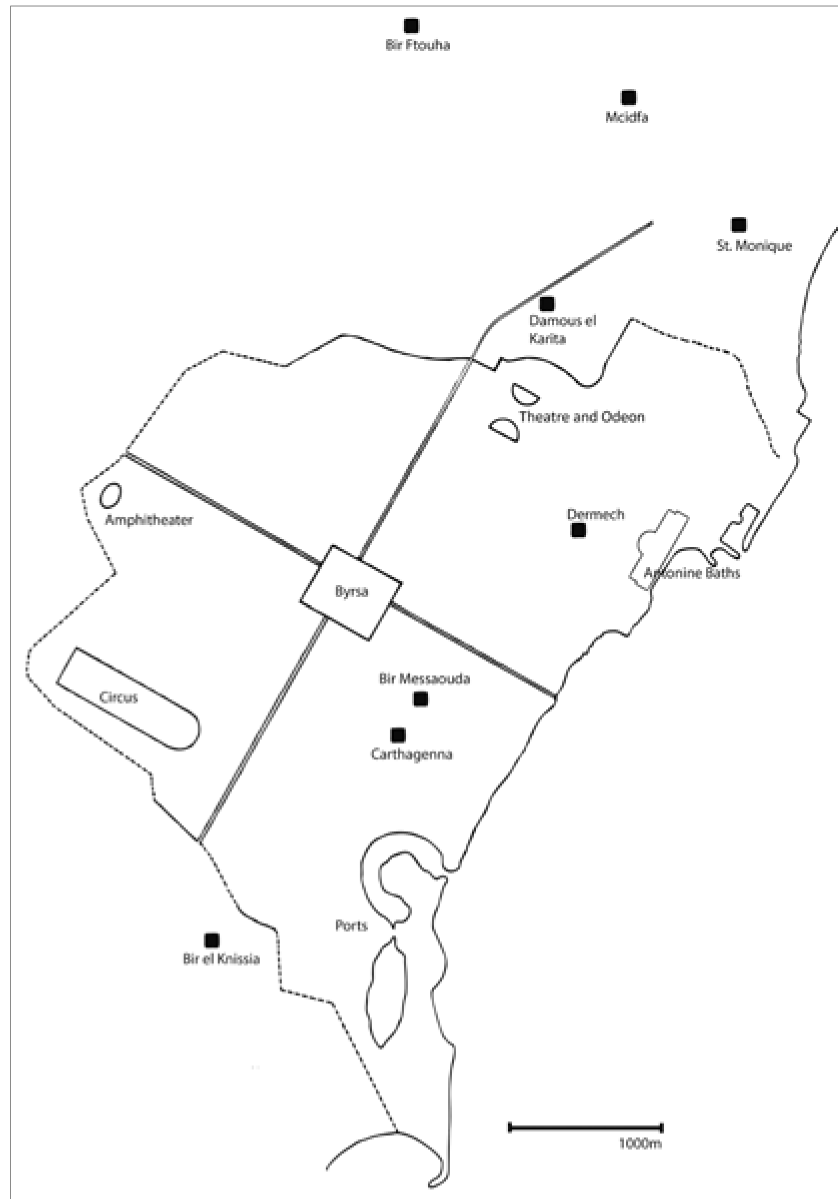
9 Senay – Beauregard 1986.

10 Ennabli 2000, 15–38; Miles 2006.

11 Krautheimer – Ćurčić 1986, 187–195. For large scale studies of North African Christian basilicas see Duval 1972; Gui et al. 1992.

12 Although a number of the churches built and renovated during the Early Byzantine period such as the Dermech I and Cartagenna churches followed a conventional basilical plan. For Dermech I see Ben Abed et al. 1999, 105–120 for the building phases. For Cartagenna see Ennabli 2000, 39–71.

13 Stevens et al. 2005, 537–580; Jensen 2011, 1673–1679; Stevens et al. 2005, 574.



1 Schematic plan of Carthage with main Roman monuments and Byzantine ecclesiastical sites (scale 1 : 50 000)

west aisles of the basilica with the crypt and baptistery on its northern and southern flanks. After ascending to the baptistery from the narthex, the faithful approached the font via the colonnaded ambulatory before descending another staircase back into the basilica. On the northern side of the church the archaeological picture is harder to reconstruct; however, it appears that supplicants also accessed the crypt entrance, which was covered by a stone lattice, from the main basilica by a staircase. The primary architectural purpose of the Bir Messaouda transept plan was the re-orientation of the original north-south structure as well as creating space for the large baptistery and martyr crypt. The inverted scale of the squat new east-west nave and the expansive north-south transept was determined by the existing space between *cardines* IX and X. The new eastern apse was also truncated to avoid excessive encroachment onto *cardo* X. The architectural emphasis of the Bir Messaouda transept basilica, therefore, was one of pilgrim circulation channelled by ambulatories, chancels and colonnaded aisles, with the baptistery, a saint's *memoria,* and a central altar replete with reliquary acting as its main foci[14].

The Damous El Karita, located outside the northern city walls was a large cemetery church and pilgrimage centre first constructed in the late 4th c. and significantly modified and expanded in the mid-6th c. A subterranean rotunda acted as the spiritual centre of the restored complex. Entering through a semi-circular forecourt screened

14 Miles 2006; Miles – Greenslade 2019.

2 Bir Messaouda Basilica, Phase 3. Plan of the church (scale 1 : 400)

by a portico, pilgrims would process into the circular martyrium. Access to and departure from the circular crypt, where the relics were housed under a marble ciborium, was gained by lateral, counter-rotating staircases. It appears that the rotunda was specifically designed for large-scale circulation with a constant flow of pilgrims processing past the relics[15].

In the Mcidfa district also to the north of the Late Antique city walls, another basilica was remodelled in the 6th c. At its largest extent, this structure was substantial with a *quadratum populi* of 61 × 45 m divided into

15 Dolenz 2001, 41–104.

seven aisles. The 6th c. changes to the building included a crypt covered by a ciborium between its sixth and seventh traverse column lines (fig. 2). The crypt contained two staircases leading to a room containing burials on two levels and a marble reliquary positioned in a small apse that strongly suggests that its function was for the veneration of relics[16].

These large and often architecturally ambitious ecclesiastical structures erected in Carthage in the decades after the Justinianic Conquest, although varied in design, are united in the prominence that they afforded to

pilgrim rotation, martyr veneration and baptism. In particular, the presence of ambulatories and staircases indicate a more complex and carefully staged series of interactions between martyr, clergy and congregation. For the clergy, processional ritual offered the opportunity to show their partnership with the saint and their joint leadership over the Christian community.

The impressive capacity and flowing architectural layouts of Damous El Karita, Bir Messaouda and Bir Ftouha strongly suggest that pilgrimage was a central part of the function of these particular structures. This seeming architectural emphasis on Carthage as a pilgrimage centre in the mid-6th c. correlates with contemporary developments in Italy and the eastern Mediterranean where there was major infrastructural investment in a number of important Christian centres to cater for large numbers of pilgrims[17]. In particular, the second half of the 6th c. saw a rise in the number of pilgrims travelling to the sacred sites of the Holy Land and saints' shrines across the eastern Mediterranean. Liturgical processional involving clergy moving between different areas of the church as well as between churches particularly during festivals, dedications of churches and the deposition of relics, also became more prevalent[18].

Carthage, due to its historical and present position as the premier see of Africa and, more significantly, the site of some of the early Church's most celebrated martyrdoms, was already an important setting for martyr veneration. By the early 5th c. there were at least two major ecclesiastical buildings dedicated to Cyprian, Carthage's most celebrated ecclesiastical figure and martyr; the so-called *mensa Cypriani* commemorated the place where the saint had been martyred, and the Mappalia basilica, where the martyr's remains were buried[19]. There are also references to a basilica dedicated to the 3rd-c. Scillitan martyrs and martyrs being buried at the Basilica of Faustus[20]. A Byzantine inscription honouring Perpetua and her companions found at the Mcidfa church has led some scholars to argue that it was the Basilica Maiorum where, according to the 5th c. polemicist Victor of Vita, their relics were interred[21]. There are few textual references to what took place in the basilicas. However, Augustine of Hippo, who was a regular visitor to Carthage, mentions in a sermon that great festivals regularly took place at Cyprian's church at Mappalia[22]. Augustine also made a disapproving reference to the singing and dancing that took place in the same basilica[23].

The surviving epigraphic evidence for the Byzantine period suggests that the emphasis in Carthage remained with local and some biblical saints despite there being a marked increase in the commemoration of foreign martyrs from the eastern Mediterranean, Italy and Spain across Africa in that period[24]. With the exception of two inscriptions referring to the relics of the Egyptian martyr Menas and the apostles Peter and Paul which both date to the 5th c., the only possible epigraphic evidence for the deposition of the relics of an overseas non-biblical martyr in the Byzantine period is a capital bearing an inscribed monogram discovered on the Byrsa Hill which might relate to the Spanish martyr, Vincent of Saragossa[25]. With regards to biblical martyrs there are epigraphic references to the «Three Young Hebrews», the Maccabees and St Stephen[26].

In terms of local African martyrs, a marble slab found at the Mcidfa basilica and dated to the Byzantine period records the presence of a martyrium to Perpetua, Felicitas and their companions Saturus, Saturninus and Revocatus, famously martyred in Carthage's amphitheatre on 7th March 203. The inscription also honoured

16 Ennabli 1997, 133 f.; Duval 1972. During the same period, the circular monument near the theatre was restored and, according to its most recent excavators probably acted together with an adjacent (very poorly preserved) basilica as a church-*memoria*-complex (Senay 1992, 109 f.).

17 For instance, for Jerusalem see Voltaggio 2011.

18 Krueger 2005, 300–302; Baldovin 1987, 174–181. 187–189.

19 For a list and discussions of references to the Mappalia church and the *mensa Cypriani* from a topographical perspective see Ennabli 1997, 21–26. Some scholars have also speculated about the existence of a third funerary chapel, perhaps consecrated by a relic. (Duval 1982, 675–677).

20 Scillitan Basilica references: Ennabli 1997, 32–34. – Basilica of Faustus = Ennabli 1997, 27 f.

21 Duval 1982, 13–16; Ennabli 1997, 131–135; Victor Vitensis, Hist. Persec. Vandal. 1, 15.

22 Aug. Serm. Mayence 5 in Serm. Dolbeau 1992, 65, 1, 91–92.

23 Aug. Serm. 311. For a list of references to the structures dedicated to Cyprian in Carthage see Ennabli 1997, 21–26.

24 Duval 1982, 697–737.

25 Menas: Duval 1982, 22–24. 662. 742. – Apostles: Duval 1982, 5 f. – Vincent: Duval 1982, 6 f.

26 Three Young Hebrews: Ennabli 2000, 82–128; Duval 1982, I, 10 f. – The Maccabees: Duval 1982, 10 f.; Bairam – Ennabli 1982, 8–18. – Stephen: Duval 1982, 7–10. Like St Stephen, the cults of the Maccabees and the «Youths in the Fiery Furnace» were present in North Africa by the 5th c., therefore predating the Justinianic Conquest (Duval 1982, 619 f.).

another African martyr, Maiulus, who was martyred in Hadrumetum in 212. Although it cannot be confirmed, it seems likely that the inscription was associated with the 6th-c. CE *confessio* and crypt located in the basilica[27].

The names of Saturninus and Saturus are also recorded on a rectangular mosaic containing seven martyr names in medallions within a complex of rooms arranged around a peristyle courtyard close to the Antonine Baths. Of the three other decipherable names on the mosaic, two are the 3rd-c. African martyrs, Sirica from Hadrumetum and Speratus, one of the Scillitan martyrs. The last legible name is that of the proto-martyr Stephen[28].

Amongst the literary sources for the Byzantine period, the *Life of Gregory of Agrigentum* mentions that its hero visited a martyrium in Carthage dedicated to Julian, thought to be the Antiochene saint, in what must have been the last quarter of the 6th-c. CE[29]. This in turn has led the most recent excavators of the rotunda of the Damous El Karita to speculate that the complex might be the martyrium of Julian of Antioch[30]. However, besides this reference, the surviving literary evidence provides a similar impression of a heavy emphasis on local African martyrs in Byzantine Carthage. For the Early Byzantine period, although not featured in the surviving epigraphic evidence, Cyprian was mentioned in a number of contemporary textual sources. Procopius comments that the Carthaginians held Cyprian, their city's most celebrated ecclesiastical figure and martyr in special esteem and had built an impressive church in his honour[31]. Gregory of Tours in his work «Glory of the Martyrs» relates how Cyprian often offered assistance to the sick that asked for help. Gregory also described a huge ornate raised lectern in the church built in his honour that he claimed had been carved out of a single block of marble[32]. With regards to other local martyrs, the «Martyrologium Hieronymianum», a mid-5th-c. Italian translation of a 4th-c. eastern martyrology with further additions made in Gaul between the 6th and 7th c., stated that the Basilica of Faustus held the relics of local martyrs including Januarius, Florentinus, Pollutana, Iulia and Iusta[33]. Pope John II wrote in a synodal letter of 535 CE that the ground of the Basilica of Faustus was adorned with a large number of saints[34].

The changes that took place with regards to the veneration of martyrs in mid-6th-c. Carthage do not seem to have been related to the provenance of the saints, who appear to have remained predominantly local, but rather in its organisation, scale and complexity. In the time of Augustine, the festivals in honour of Cyprian, although large and raucous, seem to have been relatively local affairs drawing in the faithful from Carthage and its surrounding environs. The development of large new basilicas in Byzantine Carthage appears to have been a significant departure from earlier periods, and might have been part of a strategy to further bolster the prestige and profile of the city as a centre of Christian pilgrimage, not only in Africa but also overseas.

The ground plans of a number of these buildings also highlight churches changes in how relics were venerated. Traditionally the North African Church had followed the tradition of placing relics in caskets that were then deposited in a vault below the altar, or sometimes below the apse. The architectural plans of a number of these new or remodelled churches in Carthage, however, correspond with a growing emphasis in Christian communities in the eastern Mediterranean on what has been termed «tactile piety», the faithful worshipping in close proximity to, or even handling of holy relics or an object that had been in contact with them[35]. Pilgrims also acquired portable objects (usually bread, soil or oil) blessed by their proximity to the holy relics and carried home in vessels, ampullae and boxes[36]. The strictly controlled interplay between proximity and distance, accessibility and closure in these new structures seems to highlight a growing awareness amongst Carthage's ecclesiastical circles of how architecture could help to extenuate the power of those sacred contradictions.

27 Duval 1982, 13–16. Secundulus also features on another fragmentary inscription discovered in the basilica of Mcidfa which has also been dated to the Byzantine period (Duval 1982, 14–20).

28 Duval 1982, 7–10 Underneath this mosaic is an earlier mosaic floor that has also been dated to the Byzantine period which merely states *beatissimi martyres*. The reference to St Stephen has led to the inconclusive identification of the building as the monastery of Stephen referred to by the 5th-c. bishop of Carthage, Quodvultdeus. (Quodvultdeus Lib. prom. Dei 6, 9; Ennabli 1997, 76 f.).

29 Leontius, *Vita S. Gregorii Agrigentini* 8, 10.

30 Dolenz 2001, 102–104.

31 Proc. BV 1, 17–18.

32 Greg. Tur. mirac. 1, 93. Although doubts have been expressed about the veracity of Gregory's information on Africa (Moorhead 1995; Cain 2005, 414 f.).

33 Delehaye 1931; Ennabli 1997, 27 f. Its description as the Basilica of Fausta is generally seen as a mistake in the transcription. The Basilica of Faustus also appears in Augustine's sermons as well as being the venue for three ecclesiastical councils between 418 and 421.

34 Coll. Avell. 55, 1, 16–17. It has recently been suggested that the Damous El Karita might be the Basilica of Faustus (Dolenz 2001, 16–19).

35 For «tactile piety» see Wilken 1992, 115 f.; Krueger 2005, 300–311.

36 Vikan 1982, 10–14.

Ecclesiastical euergetism in Byzantine Carthage – a comparative approach

Although the idea of an empire-wide «top-down» centrally controlled Justinianic building programme is surely fanciful, the eastern imperial authorities clearly must have played a role in the raft of ecclesiastical building projects in Carthage in the decades after their military intervention. Legislation such as Justinian's novella 67 shows that the imperial authorities were certainly keen to encourage provincial elites across the empire to contribute to the repair of churches and religious buildings, and also that the government wanted to retain some kind of oversight over such projects[37].

The hand of the imperial authorities might also be detected in the increased amounts of marble and other prestige building materials from the quarries and masons' yards of the eastern Mediterranean transported to North African cities in the 6th c.[38]. In Carthage Proconnesian marble and a wide range of other prestige stones from across the eastern empire were used in the construction and renovation of the Bir Ftouha, Bir El Knissia, Damous El Karita and Bir Messaouda basilicas in conjunction with locally sourced materials[39]. These imports from the imperial east often consisted of more than raw building materials. The Marzamemi shipwreck off the south-east coast of Sicily, dating to the early to mid-6th-c., contained more than 500 fragments of the prefabricated marble decoration of a basilica (columns, capitals, bases, chancel screen slabs, ambo pieces, an altar as well as other architectural pieces)[40]. Although the cargo's planned final destination is unclear, the pieces had been sourced from a number of different locations including Proconnesus, Thessaly and Asia Minor, suggesting that it had probably been assembled at Constantinople or another eastern port to be transported to either Justinian's new western dominions (Africa, Sicily, Italy) or the Balkans[41]. The Marzamemi shipment was by no means a complete church but part of the interior furniture for a basilica that included a fine double staircased *verde antico* ambo[42]. In a polemic composed in the late 560s against his imperially backed opponents in the Three Chapters Controversy, the African dissident churchmen Facundus of Hermianae made an obscure reference to *manufactas ecclesias*, from which those who rejected Justinian's theological position were expelled[43]. The Marzamemi cargo might suggest that Facundus was referring to basilicas whose liturgical furniture and other finished decorative pieces had been imported before being assembled on site. Evidence exists of Justinian and Theodora providing finished building materials to ecclesiastical building projects as gifts, such as the capitals, shafts and bases for the Basilica of St John at Ephesus[44]. However, although the imperial authorities might have exercised some form of supervisory control over the shipping of prestigious quarried material, it is also clear from the sources that there was a market that could be accessed by other non-governmental parties[45].

Despite the poverty of the epigraphic or textual material for Carthage, evidence from other cities in Byzantine Africa and Italy offers potentially useful insights into the involvement of local ecclesiastical and lay elites in the construction and renovation of basilicas. Ammaedara in Byzacena, a city where a number of important churches were built or extensively redeveloped in the decades after the Byzantine conquest, is of particular significance in this regard. At Basilica I, commonly identified as the cathedral of the city, new depositions of relics of Cyprian were made by the bishop Melleus under an altar in the western choir as well as very probably in the eastern area of the restored church in 568/569 CE[46]. Melleus himself was buried in an honoured position between the presbyterium and the western reliquary[47]. The sacred alliance between saint and bishop at the head of

37 Iust. Nov. 67. Justinian ordered potential euergetes to turn their attention to the necessary task of repairing the decaying churches of Constantinople and the provinces, rather than endowing yet more small churches. Procopius (Proc. aed. 1, 8) also states that imperial permission was required for the building or renovation of churches across the Empire.

38 Ward Perkins 1951, 103 points to a thriving Mediterranean marble trade in the mid-6th-c.

39 Ferchiou 1993, 225–255; Sodini 2002; Bessière 2005, 209–302; Leone 2013, 200–202. Where it has been closely studied, the overseas marble decorations show very little sign of having been reused spolia.

40 Ward Perkins 1951, 103. Although, the cargo of the Marzamemi wreck were in a finished state, generally more delicate pieces were probably carved and finally prepared by craftsmen at the destination.

41 Kapitän 1980, 130; Sodini 2002, 133; Leone 2013, 197 f. The ambo pieces made of verde antico have been reconstructed into a double stair-cased model. All bar one of the column shafts and the chancel closure slabs were made of white Proconnesian marble (Kapitän 1980, 98–106).

42 It has been argued that the most likely destination for the cargo was one of the new western provinces of Justinian (Krautheimer – Ćurčić 1986, 267). However, the presence of African red slip in the cargo has cast doubt that North Africa was the final destination, with the Balkans thought to be a possible destination. It has also been argued that the wreck dates to the pre-Justinianic period (Kapitän 1980, 129).

43 Facundus, Epist. Fid. 52: «A*n quia manufactas ecclesias palatino suffulti suffragio depulsis catholicis pervaserunt, ideo vos fidem catholicam pacemque Christianam in parietibus esse arbitramini?*».

44 Krautheimer – Ćurčić 1986, 242.

45 Sodini 2002, 134.

46 Duval 1981, 111–127; Bockmann 2013, 202–207. Inscription: Duval – Prevot 1975, 20–21 no. 1.

47 Duval – Prevot 1975, 25–27 no. 3.

the orthodox community of Ammaedara was reinforced by the reorganisation of the interior of the church.

Local ecclesiastical elites were not alone in taking a leading role in the renovation and construction of religious buildings in the decades after the Justinianic conquest. Also at Ammaedara a local official, Marcellus, commissioned an elaborate commemorative cenotaph with inscribed mosaic and balustrade in the so-called Church of Candidas to thirty-four local Christian martyred during the Great Persecution buried elsewhere in the building[48]. There is also some evidence of involvement in Christian euergetistic practices on the part of imperial officials. The church at Rusguniae in Mauretania Caesariensis was rebuilt by the *magister militum*, Maurice, after it had fallen into dereliction. However, the fact that Maurice and members of his immediate family were buried in the church suggests that he had undertaken the cost of the repairs in a private rather than an official capacity[49].

Although the political situation in Italy in the years after the Byzantine conquest was different from that in Africa, the extensive ecclesiastical building activity that took place in the city of Ravenna in the 540s and 550s makes for an interesting parallel with Carthage. As the previous capitals of the Vandal and Ostrogothic regimes, both cities were of immense strategic and symbolic importance to the Byzantine imperial authorities. Although the Arian Theodoric's constructive relationship with the Homoousian Church in Ravenna was in marked contrast to the religious stasis that existed between the Vandal kings and their counterparts in Carthage, the close involvement of resident lay Roman elites in the government of both barbarian kingdoms meant that the transition to Byzantine rule had its complications in both cities[50].

Six major churches and a number of smaller ones were constructed in Ravenna between 540 and 600. Dedicatory and textual evidence shows that these buildings were not the work of just one group or authority but the city's clerical and lay elites with the approval of the emperor and his officials. The intensive involvement of Ravenna's Nicene bishops, both as founders and benefactors, in these ecclesiastical building projects, has been well documented. Maximian, who held the episcopacy between 546 and 557 completed, dedicated or added decoration to the basilicas of San Vitale, San Michele in Africisco, Sant'Apollinare in Classe, St Andrew, St Euphemia and St Probus and the *Domus Tricollis* in the episcopal complex of Ravenna. Maximian also founded a church dedicated to St Stephen[51].

Ravenna's lay elites were also often heavily involved in these projects. The renovation or construction of San Michele in Africisco, San Vitale and Sant'Apollinare in Classe was paid for by the extremely wealthy banker Julius Argentarius and his relative Bacauda[52]. These lay patrons should not be viewed as mere bankrollers of episcopal projects. It is noteworthy, for instance, that the reported dedicatory inscription in the vault of the apse of San Michele in Africisco makes no mention of episcopal involvement[53]. Argentarius' contributions might have been the most spectacular but he was not alone amongst Ravenna's secular elites in acting as an ecclesiastical euergete. In 596 a certain Adeodatus, «primus strator praefecturae» paid for an ambo of the Church of St John and St Paul[54].

There is no evidence of direct imperial funding or patronage in the construction of Ravenna's churches. However, the depiction of Justinian and his consort, Theodora, with their closest associates offering gifts on the mosaics in the chancel of San Vitale is surely a strong indication of imperial support[55]. For an emperor struggling to assert control over Italy, Ravenna was clearly an important stage to assert the legitimacy of the imperial regime as the restorers of Homoousian orthodoxy and Roman *imperium* in Italy. Under Justinian, the see of Ravenna was rewarded with a series of privileges and promotions culminating in the bestowal of the status of Archbishopric on the see of Ravenna sometime before 553[56].

48 The commemorative inscription was inscribed not only on the mosaic but also on one of the slabs that made up the balustrade that enclosed the mosaic. Duval 1982, 101–115.

49 ILCV 234b. Pringle 2001, 333 f. For discussion of Maurice's background see Conant 2012, 243 f.

50 For the often constructive and supportive relationship between Ravenna and the Nicene bishops of Ravenna and evidence of thriving Nicene episcopacy see Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 114–119. 187–200. More generally on Theodoric's relationship with the Roman elites of Italy see Arnold 2014.

51 Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 213–274.

52 Agnellus Lib. Pontif. 59 and 77. It was reported that Argentarius spent 26,000 *solidi* on San Vitale. It has been estimated that Argentarius spent around 60,000 *solidi* over a period of ten years. Agnellus (Lib. Pontif. 57) states that Argentarius was also the founder of S. Maria Maggiore but the dedicatory inscription only lists the bishop, Ecclesius. On Argentarius see Bovini 1970, 125–150; Guillou 1983, 333–343; Barnish 1985, 5 f. Most scholars now view Argentarius as an important local business figure with strong contacts within imperial government circles rather than an agent of the emperor.

53 Deichmann 1976, 17–20; Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 252 suggests that the church was hastily built and dedicated because Ravenna was being ravaged by the plague at this time.

54 Angiolini Martinelli 1968, no. 25; Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 220.

55 For a discussion of the imperial images in San Vitale see Baker 1993. One might also add the figure of Justinian in the redecorated Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (Deichmann 1974, 151 f.; Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 173 f.).

56 Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 209–213. On Maximian's career Baker 1993, 182 f.; Carlà 2010, 257–259.

The celebrated mosaics in the chancel of the San Vitale basilica, with their depictions of Justinian, Theodora and their respective entourages together with ecclesiastical and lay dignitaries of Ravenna, presented a powerful image of local and imperial interests in complete unison[57]. Equally importantly, the imperial panels are clearly subordinated to those depicting Christ, his angels, and St Vitalis the martyr to whom the basilica was dedicated[58]. Thus, the San Vitale chancel mosaics, like the liturgical processions that took place in the basilica itself, emphasised the cohesion and unity of the community and its acceptance of the leadership and protection of the bishop, the imperial couple and their celestial ally, the martyr[59].

Building consensus and authority in post-conquest Carthage

Did the new and restored basilicas of post-conquest Carthage represent a similar investment on the part of the city's ecclesiastical and lay elites and the imperial authorities in promoting consensus and stability under the united banner of religious and political legitimacy? It was certainly the case that the aggrandisement of both cities helped to proclaim the victory of Roman imperium and Christian orthodoxy. However, the situation in Carthage differed in some important ways from that in Ravenna. Apart from the seven-year reign of Hilderic (523–530), the African Homoousian Church had never enjoyed good relations with the Vandal regime and had suffered at the latter's hands. Although the policies adopted by the various Vandal kings differed, most sought to fatally weaken the Homoousian Church by the rigorous enforcement of the ban of Nicene worship and the confiscation of the Church's property. The Nicene Church in *Africa Proconsularis* had been particularly targeted by the Vandal kings, who had sought to bring about the effective decapitation of its leadership through exile and a ban on new episcopal and clerical appointments[60]. The effectiveness of this campaign was borne out by the considerable depletion in the ranks of bishops, which dropped from 164 in 439 CE to just 54 by 484[61]. The see of Carthage had a particularly difficult time during this period, with no resident Homoousian bishop between 439–454, 457–478, 484–487 and 508–523[62].

Recent scholarly assessments of ecclesiastical and legal sources from the Vandal and Byzantine periods have confirmed that the Arian Church in North Africa had been far more successful than the Nicene African polemicists and eastern imperial sources admitted, particularly with regards to the conversion of the Romano-African population[63]. Included amongst those converts were an embarrassingly large number of previously Nicene bishops[64]. Furthermore, Carthage, as the regnal capital, had been the locus for the successful cooperation that had long existed between the Vandal kings and members of the Romano-African lay elites who had remained in, or returned to North Africa. Despite the polemical statements of Nicene African writers such as Quodvultdeus, Victor and Fulgentius, it is clear that an influential stratum of Romano-African elite played a significant role in the success of the Vandal kingdom. In particular, the royal administration and household, which was based at Carthage, contained a number of high-profile members of the Romano-African elite[65]. The career of Mocianus, Justininian's African envoy to Carthage during the Three Chapters Controversy, a Romano-African who became an Arian before returning to the Homoousian Church and a powerful job in the eastern imperial service, highlights continuities between the administrations of Vandal and Byzantine periods, which can only have strained relations[66].

It is difficult not to view the construction of these large and prestigious basilicas and ecclesiastical complexes in post-conquest Carthage as, at least in part, a reaction to this difficult state of affairs. A recent study has raised the possibility that the primary function of ecclesiastical complexes like Bir Ftouha, with its large, monumental baptisteries, might have been for ritual purification rather than baptism, as Arian converts were not rebaptised. Thus, the pilgrims who came to the Bir Ftouha complex might have been already baptized Arian penitents symbolically reconciling with the Nicene church[67].

These structures might have been used to heal the fissures in post-conquest Carthaginian society in other less direct ways. In the late 560s at Ammaedara, the

57 Baker 1993, 206 f.; Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 237–243. Apart from Maximian, whose name appears above his portrait, the identities of the other figures, save for the imperial couple, cannot be definitely confirmed.
58 Baker 1993, 200 f.
59 On the role of ecclesiastical and lay dignitaries in liturgical processions involving relics see Holum – Vikan 1979, 116–120.
60 Modéran 1998a.
61 Modéran 2002, 107–110.
62 Modéran 2006.
63 Merrills – Miles 2010, 187.
64 Modéran 2006, 165–182.
65 Merrills – Miles 79–81; Conant 2012, 143–146.
66 Dossey 2003, 113 f.
67 Jensen 2011. For the Arian Rebaptism of Nicene Christians in Vandal North Africa see Fournier 2012.

bishop Melleus had used the deposition of relics of St Cyprian to proclaim the basilica and the saint for Nicene Christianity and also to upstage the funerary monument of the Arian bishop Victorinus[68]. The deposition and subsequent veneration of such relics helped to recast Africa's recent history as one of resistance and self-sacrifice in the face of barbarous, heretical persecution would have sent out a powerful message.

Although tradition and issues of the accessibility/availability of relics must have played their part, the authority of the celebrated martyrs of the African church was a powerful way of proclaiming the victory of the Homoousian Church because their ownership had been so bitterly contested in Carthage during the Vandal epoch[69]. Victor of Vita, anxious to portray the Vandals as destroyers and persecutors, described how they used the Basilica Fausti as a prison for captives they had brought back from their raid on Rome[70]. However, the real issue was that the Arians also claimed most of these saints, particularly Cyprian. The Vandal king Geiseric had seized the two large and impressive churches dedicated to St Cyprian, one of which was the site of his martyrdom and the other where his body was interred[71]. The Vandals had also transferred to their Arian clergy the Basilicas Maiorum, of Celerina and the Scillitans and Restituta[72]. These churches must have been under Arian control for nearly a century and, despite the bullish rhetoric of writers such as Victor of Vita and Procopius, this reality surely had a major influence on how the Christian topography of Carthage was redeveloped after the Byzantine conquest. A sense of just how important it was for the Nicene Church in Carthage to reclaim their martyrs is apparent in a story recounted by Procopius of how, during the Arian stewardship of Cyprian's church and festival, the martyr had often appeared in a dream to the persecuted Homoousians telling them not to be concerned because he would be his own avenger[73]. The building and renovation of the basilicas where the relics of these local martyrs were venerated was just another aspect of the same process.

It also seems likely that more recent African martyrs, those who had been the victims of the Vandal persecutions, might have been venerated in some of these new and renovated basilicas. It has been proposed that a Byzantine-era mosaic inscription found close to the Antonine Baths commemorating the seven Macchabeen brothers might be the location of the monastery of Bigua, which, according to Victor of Vita, was where the relics of the seven monks of Gafsa, martyred by the Vandals in 483, were interred[74]. The veneration of more recent victims of the Vandal persecutions might also explain the presence of a considerable number of burials inside the Bir Ftouha basilica and late Vandal date of the pre-basilica phase[75].

The desire for consensus and unity, and the need to extol the virtues of the Byzantine imperial regime were not the only agendas behind the ambitious ecclesiastical building programme that took place in Carthage after the Justinianic Conquest. Restoring the prestige and authority of the see of Carthage within Africa must also have been an important objective. In the decades after the Byzantine conquest, the imperial law codes record a number of instances of the see of Carthage attempting to have its traditional primacy over Africa confirmed, and the primate and provincial synod of Byzacena attempting to resist those claims through lobbying officials in Constantinople. The church in Byzacena's sense of autonomy had clearly been strengthened by it having fared better than its counterpart in *Africa Proconsularis* under the Vandals[76].

Other claims to authority that might have impacted on these ecclesiastical construction projects were of a more individual nature. It is striking that the Nicene communities of Ravenna and Carthage were both led by bishops who owed their positions to the direct intervention of Justinian and his officials. In 546 Maximian, an imperial loyalist who went on to strongly support Justinian's position during the Three Chapters Controversy, had been personally appointed to the see of Ravenna by the emperor[77]. In Africa, after a number of years of taking a relatively conciliatory approach to African resistance to his condemnation of the Three Chapters, Justinian had finally lost patience. In 551 Reparatus, the bishop of Carthage, was charged with treachery, deposed and exiled[78]. A more compliant deacon, Primosus was subsequently promoted to the bishopric against the will of the clergy and people of Carthage, according to hostile sources[79]. The circumstances of Primosus' elevation were

68 Bockmann 2013, 202–207.
69 See Cain 2005 for the importance of miracle working in accounts of the contest between Nicene and Arian bishops in Vandal Carthage.
70 Victor Vitensis, Hist. Persec. Vandal. 1, 25.
71 Victor Vitensis, Hist. Persec. Vandal. 1, 5, 16; Proc. BV 3, 21, 17–25.
72 Victor Vitensis, Hist. Persec. Vandal. 1, 3, 9; 1, 15.
73 Proc. BV 3, 21, 17–25.
74 Ennabli 1997, 90–94; Ennabli 2000, 84–87. N. Duval (Duval 1997, 328–334) is sceptical of this thesis.
75 Stevens et al. 2005, 573.
76 On the efforts made by the see of Carthage to promote its authority over Africa after the Byzantine Conquest see Markus 1979; Modéran 2007, 72–78.
77 For the divisions in the Italian Church over the Three Chapters Controversy see Sotinel 2007.
78 Modéran 2007, 51.
79 Victor Chron. 145.

strikingly similar to that of Maximian of Ravenna, whose promotion to the bishopric was also initially unpopular with the citizenry. Maximian's energetic and high-profile ecclesiastical building programme in Ravenna was surely at least in part designed to strengthen his authority over his see[80]. This raises the question of whether a similar strategy was followed by the new imperial appointee, Primosus, in Carthage. African dissidents such as the Byzacene bishop Facundus of Hermianae later accused the supporters of the ban on the Three Chapters of using bribery and corruption to achieve the emperor's aims[81]. As we have already seen, Facundus had also complained that opponents of the imperial position on the Three Chapters had been driven from «manufactured churches» which had been subsequently handed over to their opponents[82]. This raises the question of whether the new basilicas of Carthage had become part of an imperial strategy to suppress religious opposition.

To conclude: there was no one dominant agenda behind the plethora of ecclesiastical building projects that took place across Carthage in the first decades after the Byzantine conquest. A more realistic scenario is that over a period of several decades these basilicas were commissioned by a variety of different groups and individuals from amongst Carthage's elites with the approval and perhaps, on occasion, the material support of the imperial authorities. What is clear, however, is that all of the euergetes who were involved in these construction projects shared a common interest in bolstering the prestige and authority of the see of Carthage. Developing Carthage into a major pilgrimage centre not only helped to further that aim but also to heal what was in reality a society still beset by potentially serious tensions generated by the intentionally divisive religious policies of the Vandal kings.

A cosmopolitanism age?

Despite the emphasis on local African martyrs, the ways in which the local ecclesiastical and lay elites chose to articulate their relationship with those saints and their own recent history represented a significant break with the past. It is noticeable that the few churches in Carthage that can be definitely dated to the Vandal period, such as the suburban cemetery church at Bir El Knissa and the second phase of the north-south orientated building underneath the Byzantine-era Bir Messaouda complex, were conventional three-aisled basilicas[83]. However, in the Byzantine period, although some smaller preexisting local churches such as Carthagenna and Dermech I maintained the traditional basilical form, others exhibited considerable architectural ambition.

It is tempting to view these developments in ecclesiastical architecture and ritual in post-conquest Carthage solely within the context of the Byzantine conquest of Africa. Archaeologists have detected strong eastern influences in the architecture of a number of these new or remodelled ecclesiastical buildings in post-conquest Carthage. The most recent excavator of the Damous El Karita rotunda has argued that the prototype for this architectural schema can be traced back to the palace architecture of Constantinople[84]. The Bir Ftouha complex was measured out in Byzantine rather than Roman feet[85]. A number of existing basilicas in Carthage were re-orientated through the construction of new (eastern) apses in line with eastern liturgy in the mid-6th-c.[86].

The remodelled Damous El Karita was an eclectic mixture with the eastern influences of its rotunda set against the traditional North African massed aisles of the basilica. This arrangement was partly a result of the gradual development of the complex but it was also clearly defined by the function of the Byzantine-era complex. The Bir Ftouha complex, with its mixture of Roman and Byzantine elements combined with the traditional church architecture of North Africa, has been aptly described as a 'sophisticated fusion of unusual elements in a «highly idiosyncratic design»[87]. Its excavators have convincingly argued that Bir Ftouah's ambitious architectural plan was specifically focused on a range of functions (ritual purification, martyr veneration and pilgrim circulation) that addressed specific challenges faced by the Homoousian Church in post-conquest Carthage[88]. The Bir Ftouha complex has strong similarities with the contemporary ambulatory basilica at Siagu in *Africa Proconsularis*. However, its excavators have also noted strong parallels with a series of ambulatory basilicas in Italy, including the 5th-c. S. Maria Maggiore in Rome and a number of 4th-c. churches in the environs

80 Baker 1993, 193 f.
81 Facundus, Lib. contra Moc. 3.
82 Facundus, Epist. Fid. 52: «An quia manufactas ecclesias palatino suffulti suffragio depulsis catholicis pervaserunt, ideo vos fidem catholicam pacemque Christianam in parietibus esse arbitramini?»
83 Stevens 1993, 15–71; Miles 2006, 201 f.
84 Dolenz 2001, 104.
85 Stevens et al. 2005.
86 The basilicas Dermech I, Mcidfa and possibly also Carthagenna were originally orientated east-west. The basilicas Damous el-Karita and Bir Messaouda were re-orientated east-west. Basilicas Dermech II, Dermech III and Bir Ftouha have insufficient archaeological evidence to establish a clear ground plan (Ennabli 1997, 152–154). For eastern apses in 5th-c. eastern Mediterranean basilicas see Krautheimer – Ćurčić 1986, 99–166.
87 Stevens et al. 2005, 573 f.
88 Stevens et al. 2005, 573.

of the city. The strongest Italian parallels, however, are with the Byzantine ambulatory basilica of S. Trinità of Venosa in Basilicata, built between the late 5th and mid-6th-c. CE and designed for circumambulation within the church itself[89].

Although architecturally very different, similar observations can be made about the Bir Messaouda basilica. The creation of a transept was a marked departure from North African architectural traditions. The only other Byzantine-era transept basilica discovered in North Africa is the so-called Basilica III at Iunca in Byzacena. However, the Bir Messaouda basilica transept adopted a particular tripartite form with the central bay partly separated from the wings by columns, a form most commonly but not exclusively found in a series of churches dating to the 5th and 6th c. in Greece and the southern Balkans[90]. One prominent example of the tripartite transept in the Latin West was the Basilica of S. Pietro in Vincolo in Rome also built in the 5th c. Yet, the Bir Messaouda church differed from these other structures because it involved the conversion of an already standing conventional basilica. The primary purpose of the Bir Messaouda basilica was the re-orientation of the original north-south structure, which was transformed into the transept of the new building, as well as creating space for a large baptistery and martyr crypt. The inverted scale of the squat new east-west nave and the expansive north-south transept was determined by the existing space between *cardines* IX and X. The new eastern apse was also truncated to avoid excessive encroachment onto *cardo* X. Thus, the Bir Messaouda basilica was a markedly individual building perfectly aligned to the topographical limitation of the site and the liturgical functions required of it. Moreover, despite its alien ground plan, the Bir Messaouda church, with its use of *opus Africanum* and multiple side aisles was an unmistakably North African building.

When thinking about the blend of cosmopolitanism, tradition and pragmatic functionalism that informed the architectural plans of the Bir Messaouda, Bir Ftouha basilicas and the Damous El Karita, it is worth recalling Krautheimer's speculations on the identity of the architect of another ambitious western «Byzantine» ecclesiastical structure, San Vitale at Ravenna. Although probably a westerner «intimately acquainted with the new architecture which was being created at that time at the court in Constantinople», Krautheimer wrote, the architect «strove to translate into his own terms the new architecture of Justinian»[91]. This observation is equally applicable to the architects and euergetes behind the construction of the Bir Messaouda, Bir Ftouah and the Damous El Karita basilicas.

It is tempting to view the architectural transformation of Christian Carthage in the mid-6th c. merely as the direct result of Justinian's conquest of North Africa. However, the fuller evidence from Ostrogothic Ravenna, where Theodoric used eastern craftsmen on his churches, imported large quantities of prestige building materials and finished furniture from Constantinople and used some of the eastern imperial capital's most celebrated basilicas as the architectural blueprints for his new churches, warns against such an assumption[92]. The great basilicas and cult complexes of Byzantine Ravenna, with their mélange of local, Roman, northern Italian and eastern Mediterranean influences, were rather a reflection of a longer-term process that predated the eastern imperial invasion of Ostrogothic Italy. The strong parallels between the basilica of San Vitale whose planning and construction was started whilst Ravenna was still under Ostrogothic control and Justinian's churches of St Sergius and St Bacchus in Constantinople have long been recognised[93]. The basilica's founder, the Nicene bishop of Ravenna, Ecclesius has spent time in Constantinople in the 520s but had left for Italy before the construction of the basilicas of St Sergius and St Bacchus had begun. The bishop, however, seems to have brought back contemporary architectural ideas from Constantinople for his own foundation which were also subsequently used on Justinian's two basilicas[94].

Ostrogothic Italy had long been well connected through trade and diplomacy with Constantinople, Spain and Africa. There are also numerous recorded in-

89 Stevens et al. 2005, 563 f.

90 Garrigue 1953, considered that the Iunca church was a triconch basilica mainly due to the lack of transept basilicas in Africa. Duval 1973, 245 argues for a transept basilica. For the Basilica of Probus see Bovini 1965. For tripartite transept basilicas in Greece and the southern Balkans see see Snively 2008, 64 f. For S. Pietro in Vincolo see Krautheimer 1941.

91 Krautheimer – Ćurčić 1986, 236. Rest: Krautheimer – Ćurčić 1986, 232–236.

92 For Theodoric's use of eastern craftsmen see Nordhagen 1983. For the importation of Proconnesian marble to Ostrogothic Ravenna see Johnson 1988, 94 f. For the importation of finished ecclesiastical furniture from Constantinople see Deichmann 1974, 131–136. For the parallels between Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, which was originally constructed as Theodoric's palace church, and the palace church built by Constantine at Constantinople see Johnson 1988, 85–87. For the suspected influence of the Studios Basilica on Theodoric's Arian cathedral see Johnson 1988, 80. For the parallels between Theodoric's palace and the Great Palace of Constantinople see Johnson 1988, 82–85.

93 Mango 1972; Krautheimer – Ćurčić 1986, 232–236.

94 Although the dates of San Vitale's construction has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate, there is no strong case for rejecting both the epigraphic and textual evidence that the initial planning and foundation of the basilica took place under bishop Ecclesius in the late 520s and early 530s whist the city was still under Ostrogothic control. Deichmann 1953 argues that the design of the church was only decided in 540. However there is no

stances of members of the Romano-African elite travelling back and forth from the eastern imperial capital during that period[95]. With the considerable religious freedoms that Theodoric granted to the Nicene Church, its bishops and clergy of Ravenna were able to found new ecclesiastical structures in the city that reflected the cosmopolitanism of the age.

The Nicene Church in Vandal Carthage and *Africa Proconsularis* was clearly operating under a very different set of circumstances, suffering exile for extended periods of time, its basilicas turned over to the Arians or closed down, and a ban on the building of new ecclesiastical structures. However, it is telling that one of the few ecclesiastical structures in Carthage whose building can be confidently dated to the Vandal period, the suburban cemetery church of Bir el Knissa, was constructed in the late 5th c. using column bases, pillars, capitals and other internal liturgical furniture imported from Constantinople[96].

The recent work of Jonathan Conant has strikingly shown how the commercial, cultural and political connections between Vandal Africa's Roman elites and the wider Mediterranean world endured throughout the Vandal era[97]. Carthage remained an important coordinate in the pan- Mediterranean communications and transport networks of the 5th an early 6th c. Some trading relations, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean, declined but others, such as those with Visigothic Spain, expanded[98]. Significantly, the trade routes that connected the city with Naples, Rome and to a lesser extent Milan and Ravenna remained strong[99].

Members of the Romano-African elite still travelled to and from a range of destinations across the Mediterranean, particularly to Italy and the East[100].

Lay travellers from Vandal Africa included landowners, teachers and merchants[101]. The majority of those, however, who are recorded as undertaking overseas journeys in this period were from the clerical orders for whom mainland Italy was for understandable reasons a frequent destination[102]. African bishops journeyed as far as Constantinople on church business and attended church councils in the imperial capital and at Chalcedon[103]. In rare periods of relative tolerance, African ecclesiastical institutions also received visitors from overseas[104]. Books and treatises also circulated between Africa and Italy, particularly Rome and the Bay of Naples as well as Constantinople and southern Gaul[105].

However, the continuing significance of Carthage as an important Mediterranean trading hub and political centre into the Vandal period is not a satisfactory explanation in its own right for the Romano-African elite's subsequent embrace of new liturgical practices and ecclesiastical architecture in the post-Conquest period. The transformation of Carthage's Christian topography in the wake of the Byzantine conquest suggests a transformation in attitudes for an African ecclesiastical hierarchy long known for its conservatism and suspicion of what it considered to be outside interference[106]. Furthermore it hints at a transformation in the nature of the interactions that the African Church had with Christian communities overseas.

The catalyst for this change in attitudes was surely the disruption caused by the Vandal invasion and the subsequent frequent episodes of exile that the Nicene church in *Africa Proconsularis* suffered under the Vandal kings. The Vandal invasion had initially prompted a number of prominent ecclesiastical and lay Romano-Africans to seek refuge overseas, mainly in Italy, Syria, Asia Minor and Egypt[107]. Others who had been dispossessed of their property travelled to the imperial court at Constantinople in order to lobby the authorities there[108]. Although some of these refugees eventually returned to

real evidence to support a later date. For a discussion of the debate see Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 223–226. There are also parallels between San Vitale and the basilica of San Lorenzo, a double-shelled tetraconch built in the late 4th c. CE (Mango 1972; Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 131).

95 Mathisen 1986, 35–49; Moorhead 1994, 109 f.; Croke 2001, 28 f.; Gillett 2003, 172–219. Some might well have settled in Constantinople (Croke 2001, 86–88; Barnish 1988, 150). Some certainly fled to the east during the Gothic Wars: Brown 1984, 27–30; Amory 1997, 145).

96 Ferchiou 1993.

97 Conant 2012, 67–129. See also Handley 2011.

98 With regards to the eastern Mediterranean, although exports of African red slip tailed off significantly in the 5th c., olive oil was still exported in large quantities to Egypt and wine continued to be imported from the East into Africa throughout the Vandal period (Conant 2012, 90–103). Keay 1984, 414–417. 423–424 and Arce 2005, 353–356 on commercial contacts between Spain and Africa.

99 Conant 2012, 90–95.

100 African travellers to the west: Conant, 2012, 83–86. – African travellers to the East: Conant 2012, 76–83.

101 Conant 2012, 69.

102 African clerics in Rome and Italy: Conant, 2012, 83–85. There was considerably less migration to Gaul and Spain (Conant 2012, 86).

103 Possessor the exiled bishop of Zabi was in Constantinople with his deacon Justin in the late 510s/early 520s, intervening in what became known as the Theopaschite Controversy (Possess. Ep. Afr. Relat. Labbe, iv. 1530. Hormisd. Ep. 70, ad Possess). African bishops also attended the Council of Chalcedon.

104 Conant, 2012, 86–90.

105 Conant 2012, 104–110.

106 For the African Church's often testy relations with the see of Rome during the 4th and early 5th c. see Merdinger 1997; Wermelinger 1975.

107 Conant 2012, 76–83 (East). 83–86 (West). 86–90 (Travellers to Africa). 90–103 (Goods). 104–110 (Letters and books). 110–114 (Cult of Saints).

108 Conant 2012, 76–83.

North Africa whilst it was still under Vandal rule, others spent a considerable amount of time overseas[109]. During the Vandal period there was clearly a considerable expatriate Romano-African diaspora across the Mediterranean. In Italy Rome was an important centre as was Naples, which had a substantial community of resident African churchmen from the time of the Vandal invasion when Quodvultdeus, the bishop of Carthage and many of his clergy had relocated there[110].

Exile both in Africa and abroad had been a common weapon used by the Vandal kings against the African Homoousian clergy, and it must have played an important role in creating a fertile environment for contact and the exchange of ideas between African churchmen and their overseas counterparts[111]. The *Life of Fulgentius of Ruspe* presents a compelling picture of the networking opportunities exile could offer. Whilst in exile on Sardinia, Fulgentius exchanged letters and books with correspondents on the island as well as Africa and mainland Italy[112]. Fulgentius was undoubtedly something of a special case, whose network of contacts extended to senior members of the Roman and Italian ecclesiastical and secular elites, his fellow African churchmen, as well as ecclesiastics and monks in Jerusalem and Constantinople[113]. However, there were also instances of other exiled African bishops and clergy being in close contact with churchmen in Italy. In the early 6th c. a community of exiled Africans wrote to Pope Symmachus (498–514) asking for a benediction, a secondary relic of the Milanese martyrs, Nazarius and Romanus, which he sent to them. It is not known where this community was but it has been presumed either in Sardinia or Italy[114]. Symmachus also sent money and clothes every year to exiled African bishops in Africa and Sardinia[115]. The popularity of the cult of St Eugenius, bishop of Carthage between 480 and 505 in Albi in Visigothic Gaul, his final place of exile, also gives a sense of the impact that these banished African churchmen could have on local Nicene populations[116].

The cult of saints also acted as a useful barometer of the strength and range of African ecclesiastical contacts in the western and central Mediterranean during the 5th and early 6th c. It is striking how it tended to be martyr cults centred on *Africa Proconsularis*, and in particular Carthage, that thrived overseas with the growth of the cults of Cyprian and Perpetua and Felicitas in southern and western Italy, as well as southern and eastern Spain[117]. The high profile of Perpetua and Felicitas during the pre-conquest period is underlined by their depiction on a series of mosaic medallions that decorated the barrel vaults in the Archbishop's Chapel in Ravenna which had been founded by the Homoousian bishop of the city, Peter II, shortly after he took office in 495[118]. Nor was this one-way traffic. From the 5th c. onwards the relics of Italian and Spanish saints such as Vincent of Saragossa, Ianuarius of Naples and Felix appear in greater numbers in Africa[119]. The second half of the 5th c. also saw a marked increase in the number of relics associated with Peter and Paul in North Africa, sent by an Apostolic See clearly keen to bolster the resolve of the kingdom's Nicene population in the face of Arian pressure[120].

The African Church had long had a reputation for its determination to maintain its ecclesiastical autonomy and for its propensity to resist interference in its affairs by overseas Churches, particularly the Apostolic See. The initial dogged resistance to protracted imperial pressure during the Three Chapters Controversy suggests that this remained an important component of the African Church's character after the Byzantine Conquest[121]. Yet, the disruption caused by nearly a century of discrimination at the hands of the Vandals must have had a considerable impact on the African Homoousian Church. In his explanation of the sudden disappearance of the long standing and bilious Donatist Controversy after the Vandal invasion of Africa, Brent Shaw observed that «In the new world of the Vandal overlords, Africans could no longer afford the luxury of their inside quar-

109 Fulg 1. Gordian, Fulgentius' grandfather, stays in Italy; however, after his death two of his sons returned to North Africa. Cyprian, an African bishop had fled to Cyrrhus in Syria via Galatia in Asia Minor. There are hints in Theodoret's letters that he might have been seeking assistance to return to Africa (Theod. epp. 52. 53. Allen – Neil 2013, 65). Others remained in exile. There is a reference to an African sometime between 533–537 seeking to inherit the estate of another African who had died heirless in Italy (Cassiod. var. 12, 9).

110 Victor Vitensis, Hist. Persec. Vandal. 1, 15.

111 Africa: Victor Vitensis, Hist. Persec. Vandal. 2, 26–37; Handley 2011, 369 f. 371 f. 421. 425. – Sardinia: Fulg. 17–18. More generally on the large-scale movement of ecclesiastics in the 5th and 6th c. CE through exile and other forms of displacement see Allen – Neil 2013, 44–52.

112 Fulg. 18–19. On Fulgentius' travels in Italy, Sardinia and Africa see Conant 2012, 100 f.

113 Stevens 1982; Conant 2012, 105–107.

114 Symm. 11; Ennod. vita Epiph. 2, 14. – Sardinia: Stevens 1982, 338. – Italy: Kennell 2000, 169.

115 Lib. pontif. 53, 11.

116 Cain 2005, 426–429.

117 Conant 2010, 6–21. In contrast, few African saints entered into the eastern Byzantine liturgy (Conant 2010, 5. 25–29).

118 Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 188–196. Later, the mosaic murals of processing male and female martyrs that we part of the redecoration of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo overseen by Agnellus, bishop of Ravenna in the 560s featured Perpetua, Felicitas and Cyprian (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, 164–171).

119 Vincent: Duval 1982, 645–648. – Ianuarius: Duval 1982, 650–651. – Felix: Duval 1982, 651–654.

120 For the epigraphic evidence on the Cult of the Apostles in North Africa see Josi 1969, 167–179.

121 For the best account of the role of the African Church in the Three Chapters controversy see Modéran 2007.

rels. The entire ground on which their struggles had been fought was being radically redrawn»[122]. The Vandal Conquest changed not only African Christians' relations with one another but also their co-religionists overseas. Flight and exile exposed the displaced Romano-African diaspora to new forms of religious architecture and liturgical expression.

Justinian and his officials might not have been the great rebuilders of Christian Carthage but their victory over the Vandals provided the Romano-African elite with the opportunity to practice ecclesiastical euergetism, an activity that had been suppressed or limited under the Arian Vandal kings[123]. When, after the Byzantine Conquest, the Christian topography of Carthage was being remodelled to celebrate the victory of imperial orthodoxy, as well as to reassert the city's ecclesiastical authority and promote sorely needed consensus, it was to these new architectural ideas that the city's elites often turned.

Conclusions

Archaeological excavation has confirmed that a considerable number of basilicas and ecclesiastical complexes were either built or extensively remodelled in the decades after the Byzantine conquest of Africa. Although the plans of some conformed to the conservative traditions of the North African Church, others display a new architectural ambition with a marked emphasis on processional liturgy, tactile piety and ritual purification. Although many of these buildings showed the influence of the eastern Mediterranean in their architecture, liturgical organisation and decoration, they should not be understood merely as a confirmation of a centrally organised imperial building programme as described by Procopius in the *Buildings*.

Despite some oversight by the imperial authorities, these buildings primarily reflected the aspirations of the local ecclesiastical and lay elites who commissioned them and were eager to promote consensus after the upheaval of the Vandal epoch. Rebuilding Christian Carthage in the decades of the mid-6th-c. was not just a question of impressive new or renovated physical structures but also the creation of a new simplified historical narrative that emphasised the resistance and sacrifice of the orthodox Romano-African population at the hands of the barbarous heretical Vandals. In particular, the veneration of local African martyrs from both the distant and more recent past was used as a powerful vehicle for the promotion of this new consensus.

Some of these structures must have also have been built to bolster the authority of Carthage's bishops during a period when their position was being challenged, internally due to the Three Chapters Controversy and externally by the other African ecclesiastical provinces, who had become increasingly autonomous during the Vandal era.

Despite a focus on local saints and issues, many of the ecclesiastical structures built or renovated in Carthage after the Byzantine conquest displayed a fresh architectural confidence and complexity with strong overseas influences, particularly from Italy and the eastern Mediterranean. This paper has argued that the cosmopolitan spirit that imbued the remodelled Christian topography of Byzantine Carthage should not be viewed merely as the result of an influx of new ideas from the imperial east after the conquest. Rather it stood partly as a testament to Africa's continued strong economic, political and cultural links with the wider Mediterranean world in the Vandal period, but more importantly as a result of sustained contacts between exiled members of the Nicene church and Christian communities overseas during the years of the Vandal persecution. However, it was not until the Byzantine conquest and the destruction of the Vandal Kingdom that the opportunity arose for the ecclesiastical and lay elites of Carthage to use these new ideas to once more reclaim their city through acts of ecclesiastical euergetism.

122 Shaw 2011, 803.

123 Conant 2010, 6.

Abstract

This chapter examines the extent of, and the motivations behind the impressive number of ecclesiastical building and renovation projects that took place in Carthage in the decades that followed the Eastern Imperial conquest of North Africa in 534 CE. In particular, it argues that despite some imperial involvement, it was the Romano-African ecclesiastical elites who planned and financed the majority of these projects. By radically transforming the Christian topography of Carthage, a new narrative was created which emphasised the heroic resistance of the African Homoousian Church at the expense of a more complex picture of considerable cooperation between the Romano-African lay elites and the Vandal kings, as well as significant desertion to the Homoian Church. It concludes by arguing that these new and renovated structures predominantly projected a local North African identity rather than any blueprint issued from Constantinople, and that even the broader Mediterranean architectural and liturgical influences found in some of these structures were just as likely a reflection of the cosmopolitanism of the Vandal African kingdom, as well as the peregrinations of exiled Homoousian ecclesiastics during that period.

Résumé

Cet article examine le grand nombre de projets de construction ecclésiastiques réalisés à Carthage après la conquête byzantine du royaume vandale. Il soutient qu'une grande partie de cette activité était le résultat de la nécessité de créer un nouveau récit de résistance héroïque de la part des élites romaines contre les Vandales et les Ariens. Ce récit cachait une réalité plus complexe de coopération politique étroite et de mouvement entre les églises nicéennes et ariennes. L'architecture éclectique et novatrice de ces nouvelles structures ecclésiastiques révèle également un élément important du cosmopolitisme parmi les élites de Carthage. Cependant, plutôt que d'être un simple reflet des nouvelles influences de l'empire byzantin, ces structures ont également mis en évidence le cosmopolitanisme du royaume vandale où commerce, voyages et exil avaient présenté une gamme de nouvelles influences liturgiques aux membres de l'élite romaine laïque et ecclésiastique.

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Fig. 1 R. Bockmann on the basis of Ennabli 1997, 6 fig. 1

Fig. 2 Miles – Greenslade 2019

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