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Monasticism of Byzantine Africa in Narrative Sources

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Abstract: The object of the present article is to collect and analyse passages from narrative sources concerning monasticism in the Byzantine prefecture of Africa in the sixth to seventh centuries, in an attempt to determine the nature and extent of the monastic movement in the area. Due to the fragmentary nature of the surviving source base and its concentration around events of a political nature and relating to Christological controversies, the narrative texts (including the works of Procopius of Caesarea, the chronicle of Victor of Tonnona, and hagiographic literature) were also confronted with epistolographic (letters written by clergy and bishops) and normative (synodal acts) material, allowing for a more complete picture of the subject under study. The analysis has shown that there is no apparent continuity in the existence of monastic foundations between the Late Roman period, Vandal rule and Byzantine times; moreover, the information appearing in the sixth and seventh centuries basically concerns only monasteries and monks active in the area of Africa Proconsularis. The largest amount of data is provided by the Greek sources, which refer mainly to the situation in the first half of the seventh century and the Monothelite controversy, showing Africa as a place of settlement for numerous Eastern monks, but without mentioning the Latin-speaking monastic structures that had existed there before. The picture obtainable from the narrative of Byzantine monasticism in the area is therefore fragmentary and in many places hypothetical.

Keywords: Byzantine Africa; monasticism; monasteries; Christological controversies

The origins of the organized monastic communities in Africa have been linked to the activity of Augustine of Hippo, who – beginning from 388, the year of his conversion – had reportedly established 12 monasteries for lay people and mixed-type congregations (both types functioned across the secular diocese of Africa in the early 5th century). For the period of the Vandal rule, the thriving monastic life is attested in such works as the *De persecutione Vandalica* by Victor Vitensis and the *Vita Fulgentii* of the bishop Fulgentius of Ruspe, whose biographer Pseudo-Ferrandus referred to Africa as the land of many monasteries in chapters II and III of the *Vita Fulgentii*[2]. Generally speaking, the issue of

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[2] Victor Vitensis, *Historia Persecutionis Africanae Provinciae* I 10-11; II 1; III 15, 24; *Vita Fulgentii* II 6-7; III 9.

the monastic life in northern Africa in the Late-Roman period is a relatively well researched topic in scholarly discourse (the era of Vandal rule still requires comprehensive research), marking out a vast geographical range of the African monasticism in the provinces of Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena, and Numidia[3]. Following the conquest of this territory by Belisarius and the establishment of the Byzantine praetorian prefecture of Africa, the amount of the extant source records becomes significantly smaller and the narratives tend to concentrate mostly on military aspects of the politically new situation, leaving the picture of the life of the local Church and the indirectly related monastic communities in a fragmentary condition, more extensively represented only on the occasion of two events concerning the society of the entire Eastern Roman Empire, namely the Three-Chapters controversy in the mid-6th century and the Monothelite controversy of the 7th century, contemporaneous with the Persian and – later on – Arab conquests, leading to the emergence of a large immigrant population of Eastern monks[4].

This article aims to collate, arrange in chronological order, and analyze dispersed mentions from various categories of narrative (but also epistolographic and normative) sources relating to monasteries and monks in the prefecture of Africa, as well as to verify the findings by John Joseph Gavigan (in connection with a growing body of literature in the more specific areas of relevance), who published the still one and only monograph on the subject in the mid-1960s[5]. This paper is divided into three separate parts (1. from the establishment of the prefecture to the end of the Three-Chapters controversy; 2. second half of the 6th century,

[3] E.g. J.J. Gavigan, *De vita monastica in Africa Septentrionali inde a temporibus S. Augustiniusque ad invasiones Arabum*, Torino 1962, p. 30-181; P. Nehring, *Literary Sources for Everyday Life of the Early Monastic Communities in North Africa*, in: *La vie quotidienne des moines en Orient et en Occident (IVe-Xe siècle)*, ed. O. Delouis – M. Mossakowska-Gaubert, Athènes 2015, p. 325-336; A. Leone, *Christian North Africa in Antiquity*, in: *A Companion to North Africa in Antiquity*, ed. R. Bruce Hitchner, Hoboken 2022, p. 365-366. Generally, the prevailing opinion in the discourse is that the persecution of the Nicene Church by the Vandals took place primarily in the province of Africa Proconsularis, while in other areas of Africa it was incidental, cf. Y. Modéran, *Une guerre de religion: Les deux églises d'Afrique* à *l'*époque *vandale*, "Antiquité Tardive" 11 (2003) p. 21-44; A. Leone, *Bishops and Territory: The Case of Late Roman and Byzantine North Africa*, DOP 65/66 (2011-2012) p. 12-13; R. Whelan, *Arianisim in Africa*, in: *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed*, ed. G. Berndt – R. Steinacher, Farnham 2014, p. 245.

[4] Cf. R. Markus, *The Imperial Administration and the Church in Byzantine Africa,* ChH 36 (1967) p. 18.

[5] Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 182-230.

when the crisis of the Imperial administration affected by the conflicts with the Moors led to the formation of the exarchate of Carthage; 3. 7th century, with the arrival of Greek and Palestine monks and the Monothelite controversy), determined by the changing political and religious situations in northern Africa in the 6th-7th centuries, with a time frame of the article spanning the period 533-698, where the latter date is only presumable as the disintegration of the Imperial administration in this particular territory would have already started during the 650s.

It is worth noting the general state of preservation of narrative sources for Byzantine Africa. The only texts written in situ, namely *De Bello Vandalico* by Procopius of Caesarea and the poem *Iohannis* by Flavius Corippus, cover the period up to around 548, supplemented to some extent by *De Aedificiis* by the former author. However, in general, the period immediately after the destruction of the Vandal kingdom abounds in literary texts referring to events in Africa[6]. For the second half of the 6th century and the 7th century, there are only scattered references in narratives or letters written outside the African prefecture (including Theophylact Simocatta, John of Biclar, Theophanes, Pope Gregory), selectively addressing topics of a primarily political or religious nature. In this context, the few surviving sources on monasticism are of great importance, supplementing the far from complete picture of the functioning of both local society and administration, and often constituting the only mention of events or places. A symptomatic observation was made by Walter Kaegi, who stated that the writings and letters of Maximus the Confessor – a Greek-speaking monk who spent some time in Africa – form a structure and, apart from Theophanes' chronicle, are the only Byzantine source for the 7th century describing the internal situation in the prefecture[7].

1. From the Eastern Roman reconquest of North Africa to the Second Council of Constantinople

Information about monasteries founded during the Vandal period and still functioning immediately after the Byzantine conquest appears

[6] A synthetic overview of literary sources originating in Byzantine Africa was presented by A. Cameron, *Byzantine Africa: The Literary Evidence, in: University of Michigan Excavations at Carthage*, v. 7, ed. J.H. Humphrey, Ann Arbor 1982, p. 29-62.

[7] W. Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa*, Cambridge 2010, p. 31. General remarks on the preservation of sources for the 7th century Africa: Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa*, p. 21-40.

in the fragmentary records of the Carthaginian synod of spring 535[8]. Felicianus, bishop of the church in Ruspe, asked the assembled bishops to resolve monastic issues, pointing out that there was still a monastery in the town, founded by his predecessor Fulgencius[9]. In response, Felix, Bishop of Zactarensis in the province of Numidia, referred to the case of Abbot Peter's monastery (which was administered by Fortunatus in 535: "ubi nunc Fortunatus abba constitutus est"), discussed during the synod of 525 headed by Boniface, Bishop of Carthage. The issue raised on the second day of the council concerned a monastic foundation established by a subdeacon subordinate to the primate of Byzacena, but after the founder's death, Peter took over the leadership of the community, believing that the dependence concerned only the person and not the place, and that the monastery itself could choose which bishop it wanted to be subordinate to and whom it would ask to ordain priests. In connection with the controversy, Primate Liberatus of Byzantium excommunicated the monastery at the synod in Junci in 523, and Peter consequently appealed to Carthage, asking for a resolution to the dispute[10].

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[8] The preserved text was first published in *Concilia Africae, A. 345-A. 525*, p. 283, based solely on the codex Vat. Lat. 5845, fol. 201. Corrections using the codex from Verdun (Cod. 57, fol. 142) were made by H. Mordek, *Libertas monachorum. Eine kleine Sammlung afrikanischer Konzilstexte des 6. Jahrhunderts*, "Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonische Abteilung" 72 (1986) p. 10-16, cf. S. Kuttner, *The Council of Carthage 535: A Supplementary Note*, "Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonische Abteilung" 73 (1987) p. 346-351. On the issue of dating the synod in Carthage in 535, see Mordek, *Libertas monachorum*, p. 3-5, cf. W. Kaiser, *Authetizität und Geltung spätantiker Kaisergesetze: Studien zu den "Sacra privilegia concilii Vizaceni"*, Munich 2007, p. 103, n. 274.

[9] *Concilium Carthaginense*, a. 535: "Felicianus episcopus ecclesie Ruspensis dixit: apud Ruspem monasterium est a domno Fulgentio predecessore meo constitutum".

[10] *Concilia Africae*, p. 273-278, cf. Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 193-194; Kaiser, *Authetizität und Geltung*, p. 95-101. The dispute concerned primarily the freedom of monasteries – in Africa, due to the rule of the Vandals since 439, the provisions of the Council of Chalcedon, which in canons 4 and 8 directly indicated that monasteries were subject to the authority of local bishops, were presumably not implemented. It is also worth noting that the re-examination of this issue at the synod in 535 preceded Justinian's legislative activity in the field of monasticism, which in Nov. 5 of March 535, Nov. 67 of May 538, Nov. 79 of March 539, and above all in Nov. 123 of May 546, confirmed the regulations of Chalcedon, subjecting monasteries to the authority of local bishops and prohibiting the construction of new ones without their consent. Africa, as a Byzantine prefecture, was also covered by this legislation. For a general overview of legislation concerning monasticism in the Justinian era, see C. Frazze, *Late Roman and Byzantine legislation on the monastic life from the fourth to the eighth centuries*, ChH 51 (1982) p. 271-276; P. Hatlie, *The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople*,

In general, the cited fragment of the synodal acts confirms the existence of a monastery in Ruspe and another one, located in an unspecified place also in the area of Byzacena[11], which was managed by Abbot Fortunatus in 535, i.e. at the beginning of the existence of the prefecture praetorio of Africa.

Chronologically, the next monastic establishment in Byzantine Africa, known from narrative sources, was the monastery of Mandracium at Carthage, the erection of which is recounted by Procopius of Caesarea in his *De aedificiis*[12]. In a short passage, the secretary to the *magister militum per Orientem* Belisarius points out that the emperor Justinian initiated the construction, the μοναστήριον was located at the seaside, inside the city walls and near the harbour/port called Mandriakon, surrounded by the defence fortifications turning it into an impregnable fortress[13]. In scholarly literature, the description of this location in the above work is associated with a fragment in the *De bellis*, also authored by Procopius, where the historiographer reports on the usurpation of the *dux* of Numidia Guntharis in 545, while the monastery (not identified as Mandracium *expressis verbis*) served as a place of refuge for the *magister militum* Areobindus[14]. The both accounts are in agreement on the exact

Cambridge 2011, p. 45-50; J. Hillner, *Prison, Punishment and Penance in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 2015, p. 327. A detailed analysis of the case of Abbot Peter discussed at the synod in 525 was presented by Kaiser, *Authetizität und Geltung*, p. 91-105.

[11] For the presumed location in Byzacena, see Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 193-194; Kaiser, *Authetizität und Geltung*, p. 95.

[12] Procopius, *De aedificiis* VI 5, 11: "ἐδείματο δὲ καὶ μοναστήριον τοῦ περιβόλου ἐντὸς ἐπιθαλασσίδιον, ἄγχιστα τοῦ λιμένος ὅπερ Μανδράκιον ὀνομάζουσιν, ἐρύματί τε αὐτὸ ἐχυρωτάτῳ περιβαλὼν φρούριον ἀνανταγώνιστον ἀπειργάσατο".

[13] Some other mentions about the Carthaginian port of Μανδράκιον can be found in Procopius, *De Bellis* at III 20, 3, he mentions the Carthaginians removing the chain blocking access to the harbour, while at III 20, 14-16 – the landing of the Byzantine invasion fleet there following Belisarius' victory at Ad Decimum in 533. For more on the port of Carthage, see D. Pringle, *The Defence of Byzantine Africa from Justinian to the Arab Conquest: An Account of the Military History and Archaeology of the African Provinces in the Sixth and Seventh Century, Oxford 1981*, p. 171-172. It seems therefore that the name of the monastery derives from that of the harbour; cf. L. Ennabli, *Carthage. Une métropole chrétienne – du IVe siècle à la fin du VIIe siècle*, Paris 1997, p. 41.

[14] Procopius, *De Bellis* IV 26, 17-18: "Ἔστι δέ τις ἐντὸς τοῦ Καρχηδόνος περιβόλου νεὼς πρὸς τῇ τῆς θαλάσσης ἀκτῇ, οὗ δὴ ἄνδρες οἰκοῦσιν οἷς τὰ ἐς τὸ θεῖον ἀκριβῶς ἤσκηται: μοναχοὺς καλεῖν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἀεὶ νενομίκαμεν: τοῦτον Σολόμων δειμάμενος τὸν νεὼν οὐ πολλῷ πρότερον τειχίσματί τε περιβαλὼν φρούριον ἐχυρώτατον κατεστήσατο. ἐνταῦθα καταφυγὼν Ἀρεόβινδος ἐσεπήδησεν, ἔνθα τήν τε γυναῖκα καὶ τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἐτύγχανε πέμψας". For interpreting the passages from these two works of Procopius as referring to one place, see A. Audollent, *Carthage romiane*, Paris 1901,

localization (inside the walls of Carthage, close to the coast), the military nature of the structure and the fact that it was inhabited by monks, although in the latter work Procopius states that "Σολόμων δειμάμενος" the monastic establishment a short time before, in spite of the fact that the emperor Justinian is indicated in the *De aedificiis*. This may be only an apparent contradiction since if we combined the information from the two accounts, it could be surmised that the emperor would have presumably initiated the construction, while Solomon acted as the actual founder of the monastery (as *praefectus praetorio Africae*), erected most likely during his second term in this office, i.e. in the years 539-544[15]. We have no surviving mention on a monastic community of Mandracium[16]; moreover, despite a fairly precise localization of the structure as found in Procopius, the remains of the monastery have not been identified to date, with a number of hypotheses proposed over the years, e.g., some of them linking it with the ruins of Byzantine-era structures on the hill of Byrsa[17].

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p. 223; Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 209; W.H.C. Frend, *The early Christian Church in Carthage*, in: *University of Michigan, Excavations at Carthage*, v. 3, ed. J.H. Humphrey, Ann Arbor 1976, p. 24; P. Gross, *Mission archéologique française à Carthage. Byrsa III. Rapport sur les campagnes de fouilles de 1977 à 1980*, Roma 1985, p. 125; Ennabli, *Carthage. Une métropole chrétienne*, p. 40.

[15] *Praefectus praetorio Africae* and *magister militum* Solomon held the both offices for the first time in the years 534-536, leading a series of campaigns against the Moors, but he was replaced by Germanus and Symmachus after the Easter rebellion in the Byzantine army. His second term in the years 539-544 made it possible for him to execute the task of fortifying the provinces of Africa and the monastery may have been erected during that time. For more on Solomon, cf. PLRE III, p. 1167-1177; A. Urbaniec, *Administracja cywilna i wojskowa bizantyńskiej prefektury praetorio Afryki w latach 533-698*, Kraków 2023, p. 211-230.

[16] S.A. Morceli (*Africa Christiana*, v. 3, Brescia 1817, p. 292) postulated that Mandriacium had been settled by monks from the Palestinian *lavra* of Saint Sabbas, but J.J. Gavigan (*De vita monastica*, p. 210) argues persuasively against such an interpretation, primarily on the basis of the absence of any relevant source material permitting the identification of the origin of the monks from that monastery. Research conducted by Ralf Bookman and Jonathan Conant shows a wide spectrum of Byzantine influences in Africa, in terms of Eastern cults and Marian worship, but again, the available source material does not allow us to link them to the monastery of Mandracium, cf. R. Bookman, *Bonding Experiences. Saints Joining Past and Present in Byzantine North Africa*, in: *The Making of Saints in Late Antique North Africa*, ed. S. Panzram – N. Klinck, Stuttgart 2024, p. 283-303; J. Conant, *Sanctity and the networks of Empire in Byzantine North Africa*, in: *North Africa under Byzantium and early Islam*, ed. S.T. Stevens – J. Conant, Washington 2016, p. 201-214.

[17] As based on the archaeological finds, P. Gross (*Mission archeologique*, p. 125-126) proposed the localization of the monastery on the hill of Byrsa, situated

Mandracium is also mentioned in the *Chronicle* by the African bishop Victor of Tonnona (written after 565), who – in an autobiographical passage concerning his role as a defender of the "Three Chapters" – writes that following a flagellation and the subsequent incarceration in the Balearic Islands, he was exiled to this particular monastery, from where he was transferred after an unspecified period to the island of Aegimuritana not far from Carthage, and then to Alexandria[18]. On the strength of this specific passage, Averil Cameron argues that Mandracium ceased to function as a monastic community at a certain time, becoming a prison, but this hypothesis appears to be far-fetched in view of the fact that during the Three-Chapters controversy and the ensuing repression measures applied by the Imperial authorities, some monasteries turned into places of internment for dissident bishops – e.g. Bishop Primasius of Hadrumetum was sentenced to the confinement at the Irenaion monastery of the Sleepless Monks (*Akoimetoi*) in Constantinople[19].

In the context of the Three-Chapters controversy, the *Chronicle* by Victor of Tunnuna also includes the information about the fate of Felix, the hegumen of the African monastery called Gillium, who – following the sessions of the Second Council of Constantinople – was exiled to Thebaid, and subsequently to somewhere near Sinope, where he died

around 700 m from the seaside, at the site of the former palace of the proconsuls, Vandal kings, and presumably also the palace of the praetorian prefect. Such an interpretation, as contrary to Procopius' account, is contested in L. Ennabli, *Results of the International Save Carthage Campaign: The Christian Monuments*, "World Archaeology" 18/3 (1987) p. 306-307; Ennabli, *Carthage. Une métropole chrétienne*, p. 41. A. Audollent (*Carhage romiane*, p. 223) links Mandracium with Turris Solomonis (Bordj Abi Soleiman), known from the 11th-century relation of the Arab traveller Al-Bakri, cf. Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 210, but the site description would rather correspond to the hill of Byrsa, with some construction work also ordered there by the praetorian prefect.

[18] Victor Tonnonensis, *Chronicon*, a. 555, 2: "Victor Tunnunnensis ecclesiae episcopus, huius auctor operis (…) nec non etiam in monasterio Mandracum primo, ac secundo exilio Aegimuritanae insulae (…)". On the resistance of the African Church to the condemnation of the 'Three Chapters,' see Y. Modéran, *L'Afrique Reconquise et les Trois Chapitres*, in: *The Crisis of the Oikoumene. The Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity In the Six-Century Mediterranean*, ed. C. Chazelle – C. Cubitt, Turnhout 2007, p. 39-82.

[19] A. Cameron, *Procopius and the sixth century*, London 1985, p. 182; followed by Ł. Grotowski, *Prokopiusz z Cezarei. O Budowlach*, Warszawa 2006, p. 263, 585. The confinement of Primasius at the monastery of the *Akoimetoi* is mentioned by Victor of Tunnuna (*Chronicon*, a. 552, 2). More on imprisonment in monasteries during the Justinian era in Hillner, *Prison, Punishment and Penance*, p. 283-341.

in 557[20]. A confirmation of Victor's narrative can be found in the acts of the same council, citing Pope Vigilius' letter read out during one of the council sessions (written after 18 March 550), addressed to the Roman deacons Rusticus and Sebastian, in which the bishop of Rome refers to the excommunication of the abbot Felix and monk Lampridius for their opposition to the *Iudicatum*[21]. The passage from Pope's letter also contains some information on the monks of the Gillium community, who dispersed after the excommunication of their hegumen, although according to the prevailing scholarly view, it was not tantamount to the dissolution of the monastery[22]. Felix appears to have been a significant figure of the African Church in the mid-6th century and is most probably identical with a correspondent of Facundus of Hermiane, who in his *Liber contra Mocianum* refers to the information obtained from him, even though – unlike Victor of Tunnuna – the form of address he used was *abba* instead of *hegumenus*[23]. In scholarly literature, the figure of the abbot of Gillium is sometimes identified with the author of the preface to the Easter table of Dionysius Exiguus, which was presumably introduced in Africa in the second quarter of the 6th century, where the method of Dionysius'

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[20] Victor Tonnonensis, *Chronicon*, a. 553, 1: "Quorum decretis Rusticus Romanae ecclesiae diaconus et Felix Gillensis monasterii provinciae Africanae hegumenus contradicentes scripto Thebaida in exilium cum suis sociis transmittuntur"; a. 557, 2: "Eo tempore Felix, hegumenus monasterii Gillitani, exilio apud Sinopem de hac vitam igravit ad Dominum". R. Kosiński (*Wiktor z Tonnony i jego dzieło*, Kraków 2023, p. 448) observes that the correct form of the name of the monastery administered by Felix is the one used by the bishop of Tunnuna in the second quoted excerpt, as it is also attested in the acts of the Second Council of Constantinople; cf. *Concilium universale Constantinopolitanum sub Iustiniano habitum* 24, p. 194. Hypothetically speaking, the phrase from the first passage: "cum suis sociis", may point to the fact that some monks from the Gillium monastery shared the fate of their hegumen, suffering the repression at the hands of the Imperial administration.

[21] *Concilium universale Constantinopolitanum sub Iustiniano habitum* 12-14, p. 192: "nam et simili eis quantum perhibent, ratione dixisti in tantum ut diceres venisse ibi Lampridium et Felicem monachos qui nostrum Iudicatum suscipere noluerunt"; *Concilium universale Constantinopolitanum sub Iustiniano habitum* 24-28, p. 194: "Felicem etiam monachum Afrum qui Gillitano monasterio dicitur praefuisse et levitate sua atque inconstantia congregationem eiusdem monasterii per diversa loca, certum est, dispersisse (…)". J.J. Gavigan (*De vita monastica*, p. 214) considers the possibility of whether the aforementioned Lampridius may have been a Gillium-based monk subordinate to Felix, yet such a proposition finds no direct confirmation in the source text.

[22] Morceli, *Africa Christiana*, p. 318; Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 215.

[23] Facundus Hermianensis, *Liber Contra Mocianum*, PL 67, 855: "Nam sanctus frater abba Felix, inter alia mala quam plurimaquae nobis de illo scripsit".

determination of the beginning of his calculation of years is explained[24]. The narrative sources do not provide the precise information on the location of the monastery as the general phrase used by Victor may refer to the entire area of the African prefecture: "monasterii provinciae Africanae"; in addition, initially the local place name Gillium was considered as a distorted form of Cillium, effectively prompting some scholars to believe that the community supervised by Felix lived in the latter city (situated in the province of Byzacena)[25]. This view changed with the late-19th century discovery in the environs of modern-day Henchir el-Fras (south of the Roman city of Thibaris in the province of Africa Proconsularis) of an inscription, most likely from the period of the Severan dynasty, where the name Gillium is attested and this is where the localization of the monastery of Gillium is currently being assumed[26]. Likewise in the late 19th century, Anatole Toulotte theorized about the Eastern origin of this community and the foundation by the Palestinian monks from the *lavra* of Saint Sabbas, but this hypothesis finds no confirmation in the sources[27].

2. The second half of the 6th century

Successively, there are certain figures related to the African monasticism in some accounts in the 570s. Two transmissions surviving in the source material composed in the territory of the Visigothic Kingdom testify to the migration of the monastic circles from northern Africa to Spain during the reign of Liuvigild. The *Liber de viris illustribus* by Bishop Ildefonsus of Toledo contains a passage on the African hermit and monk Donatus, who – forced by "violentias barbararum

[24] G. Declercq, *Dionysius Exiguus and the Introduction of the Christian Era*, "Sacris Erudiri" 41 (2002) p. 230-242. For the current discourse and polemical argumentation focused on this topic, see Kosiński, *Wiktor z Tonnony*, p. 449-450.

[25] Morceli, *Africa Christiana*, p. 318, cf. Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 214.

[26] A.L. Delattre, *Fouilles de Carthage, localisation du monastère Gilllitanus*, "Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres" 43 (1899) p. 16-19. Delattre published four inscriptions founded most probably by local decurions, with the form GILLITANI attested in three.

[27] Delattre, *Fouilles de Carthage*, p. 18-19; J. Mesnage, *L'Afrique chrétienne. Évêchés Et Ruines Antiques d'Après les Manuscrits de Mgr Toulotte Et les Découvertes Archéologiques les Plus Récentes*, Paris 1912, p. 16. The absence of any source material to make this hypothesis plausible has been noted in Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 215 and Kosiński, *Wiktor z Tonnony*, p. 448; moreover, the American scholar questions attributing Greek origin to Felix, pointing to his Latin name.

gentium" – escaped by a sea route to the Iberian Peninsula along with a group of 70 monks and a large library, where he established a monastery called the Servitanum. A corroboration of this mention found in the chronicle by John of Biclar allows us to date this event to the year 569/570[28], while the unknown author of the *Vitas sanctorum patrum Emeretensium* (composed c. 650) refers to the abbot Nanctus who came from Africa and received a grant of land in Lusitania from the Visigothic king Liuvigild for the purpose of erecting a monastery[29]. It is not clear if the latter monk should also have left the prefecture of Africa because of the barbarian invasions, but such a conclusion appears to be plausible, alongside the hypothesis of a much more extensive scale of migration in that period due to the involvement of the Imperial administration at Carthage in suppressing the Moorish rebellion of king Garmul (until 578). The prefecture was afflicted with more Moorish incursions taking place through the 580s and 590s, most likely leading up to several sieges of Carthage, which would attest to the enormous instability inside the hinterland of this administrative unit and the definitely unfavourable conditions affecting the continuation of the monastic life[30].

[28] Ildefonsus, *Liber de viris illustribus* III 1-6: "Donatus et professione et opere monachus cuiusdam eremitae fertur in Africa extitisse discipulus. Hic violentias barbararum gentium imminere conspiciens atque ouilis dissipationem et gregis monachorum pericula pertimescens, ferme cum septuaginta monachis copiosisque librorum codicibus navali vehiculo in Hispaniam commeavit", cf. Joannes Biclarensis, *Chronicon*, a. 571, 4: "Donatus abbatus monasterii Servitani mirabilium operator clarus habetur". In his teenage years, John left Spain to arrive at Constantinople, where he would continue to stay for probably 17 years until c. 574; thereafter, he returned to the Iberian Peninsula, first becoming the abbot of the monastery at Biclar until the year 591, and then the bishop of Gerona. The chronicle was composed most likely during his monastic period. For more on John of Biclar, see K.B. Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, Liverpool 2009, p. 1-10. Donatus' successor, Eutropius (presumably also from Roman Africa) and Leander of Seville played a key role at the synod of Toledo in 589; cf. R. Collins, *Visigothic Spain 409-711*, Oxford 2004, p. 153.

[29] *Vitas sanctorum patrum Emeretensium* III 3-6: "Narrant itaque plurimi ante multa iam curricula annorum temporibus Leuuigildi Visegotorum regis ab Africanis regionibus in provinciam Lusitanie Nanctus nomine advenisse abbatem". The authorship is attributed to Paul the Deacon of Merida; cf. NSWP, p. 710.

[30] The passages concerning the Moorish king Garmul and his fight against the Byzantine troops in the praetorian prefecture of Africa can be found exclusively as part of the account by John of Biclar, who provides some terse pieces of information, in several places, on the course of the rebellion, taking place most likely from around 570 to 578: Ioannes Biclarensis, *Chronicon*, a. 569, 2: "Theodorus praefectus Africae a Mauris interfectus est"; a. 570, 1: "Theoctistus magister militum provinciae Africanae a Mauris bello superatus interiit"; 571, 2: "Amabilis magister militium Africae a Mauris

The records in John of Biclar's chronicle are helpful in determining the time when Donatus and his monks reached the Iberian Peninsula as the information on the Servitani monastery is given under the same year as the death of the *magister militum* Amabilis. Therefore, the flight of the congregation would have occurred, as may be presumed, at the early stage of the rebellion, since considering the time necessary for the founding of the monastery, this event might have taken place still in the previous year, when the *magister militum* Theoctistus was killed in combat or even earlier, when the *praefectus praetorio* Theodore died in battle. The limitations of the extant source base do not allow us to hypothesize on the time-periods of the existence of the communities under the direction of the two abbots in Africa. It appears that the central provinces of the prefecture were in the most serious danger during the Moorish revolt, but such a broad territorial range of military activity makes it impossible to localize the sites of the original monasteries of Donatus and Nanctus. In view of the illusive nature of exercising any effective military control over the interior area of the prefecture, limiting this territory to Africa Proconsularis, eastern Numidia and central Byzacena is more plausible, especially as the monastery of Donatus owned a large library, something not very likely in peripheral territories of the prefecture[31].

occiditur"; 578, 1: "Gennadius magister militium in Africa Mauros vastat, Garmulem fortissimum regem, quiiam tres duces superius nominatos Romani exercitus interfecerant, bello superat et ipsum regem gladio interfecit", cf. PLRE III, p. 504. After the suppression of Garmul's rebellion, Carthage was besieged by the Moorish tribes yet again in the 580s and presumably during the 590s, as recorded in the *History* by Theophilactus of Simokatta (*Historiae* III 4, 8; VIII 6, 6-7), *Chronography* by Theophanes (*Chronographia*, AM 6080), and Pope Gregory's congratulatory letters addressing the exarch Gennadius on the occasion of the victorious campaign (Gregorius Magnus, *Ep.* I 59, I 72-73); cf. Urbaniec, *Administracja cywilna*, p. 270-271.

[31] Ch. Diehl (*L'Afrique byzantine: histoire de la domination byzantine en Afrique (533-709)*, Paris 1896, p. 326-328) localized Garmul's kingdom within the Mauretania Caesariensis, with the area of the hostilities also purportedly there; likewise, G. Camps, *Rex gentium Maurorum et Romanorum. Recherches sur les royaumes de Maurétanie des VIe et VII siècles*, "Antiquités africaines" 20 (1984) p. 215-217. This hypothesis is contested by D. Pringle (*The Defence*, p. 41, p. 27), pointing to the central provinces of the prefecture as the area afflicted by the rebellion, while his argumentation is persuasively elaborated on and complemented, also with the use of epigraphic sources, by Y. Modéran, *Les Maures et l'Afrique romaine, IV-VII siècle*, Paris 2003, p. 671-677, which in turn offers some circumstantial evidence permitting a hypothetical localization of the monasteries of Donatus and Nanctus in the provinces of A. Proconsularis, Numidia, or Byzacena. J.J. Gavigan (*De vita monastica*, p. 218-219) suggests the location of those two monasteries in the province of A. Proconsularis.

A certain relatively late hagiographical work can be used as a complementary source for this period, namely the *Life* of Bishop Gregory of Agrigentum in Sicily, who – as an eighteen-year-old youth following the voice of God heard in his sleep, calling him to visit Mount Zion – arrived at Carthage on board of a random ship (probably c. 577, as he was born in c. 559)[32]. His godliness caught the attention of the local bishop (unidentified by name)[33] and as he was praying at the Church of Saint Julian the Martyr, he encountered three monks, one of whom was the abbot of a certain (unspecified) monastery. After a conversation about a possible journey to the Holy Land together, all of them went to Gregory's quarters in the city and stayed there for a few days. Afterwards, they departed for the East and reached Tripolis after a 30-day-long journey[34]. The fact that the monks accepted Gregory's invitation may indicate that their monastery was not within the city of Carthage, but the brevity of the relation leaves no room for conjecture as to its location in Africa or in some other regions of the Latin West. A certain clue may be the dedication of the church where Gregory met the monks, due to the fact that the Church of Saint Julian (a martyr from Syria) in the prefecture's capital city, is not attested anywhere else and, if we follow Albrecht Berger's suggestion, was most likely founded by Greek monks in the 7th century[35]. Moreover, the travel companions of the future bishop of Agrigentum were, at the same time, his guides, so it may be presumed that the author wished to suggest their Eastern (Palestine?) origin in this way. A noticeable chronological incompatibility between Gregory's arrival at Carthage and Berger's suggestion on the construction time of the Church of Saint Julian (i.e., only in the 7th century) is

[32] Cameron, *Byzantine Africa*, p. 53; NSWP, p. 404, cf. C. Schmidt, *Gregorio di Agrigento*, in: *Dizionario di letteratura cristiana antica*, ed. S. Dopp – W. Geerlings, Vaticano 2006, p. 460-461; S. Leanza – A. Di Berardino, *Gregorio di Agrigento*, NDPAC II 2455-2456.

[33] Following the death of Primosius (who was involved in the Three-Chapters controversy) in 566/567, the subsequent mention referring to the bishop of Carthage turns up only for the year 582; see J.L. Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine*, Roma 1973, p. 95.

[34] A. Berger, *Leontios Presbyteros von Rom, Das Leben des heiligen Gregorios von Agrigent*, Berlin 1996, p. 149-153 (German translation, p. 276-278).

[35] Berger, *Leontios Presbyteros*, p. 58. L. Ennabli (*Carthage, une métropole chrétienne*, p. 42) considers the possibility of a local saint of the same name being the patron of this church, but she is eventually inclined to lend credence to the proposition of the Eastern provenance of the worship. On the worship of the martyr saint Julian of Antioch in Africa, see Y. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae: le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IVe au VIIe siècle*, v. 2, Roma 1982, p. 651-667.

related to the dating of the composition of the *Life* of the Sicilian bishop, written in Greek by the presbyter and hegumen of the Saint Sabbas monastery in Rome Leontius, known only as the author of a work he composed presumably between the years 750 and 830[36]. If the above-mentioned church had existed indeed and had been founded by Greek-speaking monks from Palestine escaping the Persian or Arab invasion, Leontius (head of the monastery established under the same circumstances) might have transferred the 7th–century reality into his own narrative.

A significant source on the Byzantine monasticism in Africa in the late 6th century, notable for its remarkably informative content, is Pope Gregory's letter to the Carthaginian bishop Dominic of June 597, quoting a complaint from Cumquodeus, the abbot of one of the African monasteries, regarding the lack of a response from the accountable superior (i.e., Dominic) in the matter of certain monks violating the monastic rule and subsequently leaving their congregation[37]. According to the correspondence, following the failure to receive any reaction from his bishop, Cumquodeus sent his complaint directly to Rome, also protesting the fact that "quibusdam episcopis" defended the monks breaking the monastic rule, as a result of which the pope was expecting that the bishop of Carthage would take appropriate measures aimed at imposing hard sanctions on transgressing monks and attempting to make the members of the church hierarchy (most probably those from his own province, but perhaps also from some neighbouring ones) refrain from defending members of the monastic communities who acted against the authority of their superiors and violated the monastic rule. Despite the general tone of the whole passage, this is in fact the only possibility of taking a closer look into the problems of the daily life of African monastic communities in the Byzantine period as well as a testimony to the widespread presence

[36] Berger, *Leontios Presbyteros*, p. 47. As the German scholar argues, a chronological clue to be used to determine the *terminus post quem* is the issue of the so-called donation of Constantine (as found in Leontius' work), which had been absent in the West prior to the mid-8th century, while the *terminus ante quem* is hypothetical and connected with the Arab conquest of Agrigentum in 828. In turn, the first modern editor of the *Life of Gregory of Agrigentum*, Stefano Antonio Morcelli identified the author with a certain monk named Leontius, one of the signatories to the acts of the Lateran synod of 649, and dated the composition of the work in question to c. 680; see S.A. Morcelli, *Sancti Gregorii Agrigentii vita*, PG 98, 531-550. For a similar dating result, see A. Khazdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature, 650-850*, Athens 1999, p. 25.

[37] Gregorius Magnus, *Ep.* VII 32. The bishop of Carthage Dominic is mentioned only in this particular letter of Pope Gregory and in another letter dated 601 (Gregorius Magnus, *Ep.* XII 1); cf. Maier, *L'épiscopat*, p. 95.

of monasteries in the prefecture. The form used in the epistle: "de monasterio in Africana provincia posito" makes any precise localization of Cumquodeus' monastery impossible, but considering the fact that Pope Gregory's letter is addressed to the bishop of Carthage, we should guess that the province is Africa Proconsularis, while it may be assumed with much probability that the community was active in the capital city of the prefecture or somewhere on the outskirts[38].

3. 7th century

The Byzantine-Persian and Byzantine-Arab conflicts turned the praetorian prefecture of Africa into a place of refuge for those who had to flee from the territories affected by the hostilities during the first half of the 7th century, especially from Syria, Palestine, Cilicia, and Egypt, resulting in the significant increase in the number of sources dealing with the situation in the province. Among the exiles were such figures as Sophronius, a Palestinian monk and, later on, the Patriarch of Jerusalem (in the years 634-638), who arrived at Carthage with his library and established a monastic community known as the Eucratas[39], and his supporter named Maximus the Confessor – both of them opposed to the doctrine of Monotheletism strongly favoured by the Imperial court. The particular

[38] Cf. Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 215-216.

[39] The monastery of Eucratas was presumably situated in the proximity of Carthage (Maximus Confessor, *Ep.* 12, PG 91, 461-462). It was inhabited by monks from the Eastern provinces of the Empire – so-called *peregrini*, who were fugitives from the Persian invasion, according to what is communicated in Maximus the Confessor's letter *ad Petrum illustrem* (PG 91, 142). Following Sophronius' appointment to Patriarch of Jerusalem, the leadership of the community was entrusted to Konon, mentioned as presbyter and hegumen (Maximus Confessor, *Ep.* 25, PG 91, 614), while the name of the monastery and the designation of the resident monks derived from Sophronius' sobriquet, as attested by Maximus in one of his letters; cf. P. Sherwood, *An Annotated Date-list of the Works of Maximus the Confessor*, "Studia Anselmiana" 30 (1952) p. 6; Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 211-212; Ch. Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem: vie monastique et confession dogmatique*, Paris 1972, p. 72-73; C. Boudignon, *Maxime le Confesseur était-il constantinopolitain?*, in: *Philomathestatos: Studies in Greek Patristic and Byzantine Texts Presented to Jacques Noret*, ed. B. Janssens – B. Roosen – P. Van Deun, Leuven 2004, p. 21. Ch. Schönborn (*Sophrone de Jérusalem*, p. 75) argues that Sophronius became the head of a monastery in Africa that was formed by the Palestinian monks previously under the leadership of John Moschos; cf. Cameron, *Byzantine Africa*, p. 55. As a matter of fact, this particular monastery is only known from Maximus the Confessor's correspondence.

personal significance of Maximus and his impact on the situation in Africa were strong enough for his Dyotheletic position to be supported by the local Church, the praetorian prefect George, and then also the exarch Gregory, who rebelled against Constans II in 646 but was later defeated and killed in a battle against the Arabs at Sufutela (647). Meanwhile, Maximus left Africa and travelled to Italy, where he became one of the "architects" of the condemnation of Monotheletism at the Lateran synod of 649. In Averil Cameron's opinion, Sophronius and – later on – Maximus were active primarily among the monastic circles, bringing up their experience of Palestinian monasticism and subsequently developing it further in the prefecture[40]. Although some extant sources seem to confirm such a hypothesis, it is still difficult to take it as the basis for passing any conclusive opinion on the general condition of the African monasticism in this period, on account of the fact that the Latin circles – hypothetically co-forming it along with the Eastern monastic milieu – are practically nearly unrepresented in the contemporary narratives.

One of Maximus the Confessor's correspondents, and at the same time his friend, was the hegumen Thalassius, to whom the Palestinian monk dedicated his work *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*[41] and addressed five letters (with no specific dates given)[42]. In all probability, this figure is identical with the author (who is referred to as Thalassius the African or the Libyan) of the four spiritual *centuriae* – written in Greek and dedicated to the presbyter Peter – in which some inspiration from the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite can be found, just as in Maximus the Confessor's writings[43]. J.J. Gavigan regarded

[40] Cameron, *Byzantine Africa*, p. 54-57.

[41] The composition of the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (PG 90, 244-785) is dated to the years 630-634; cf. M. Jankowiak – P. Booth, *A New Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. P. Allen – B. Neil, Oxford 2015, p. 29.

[42] Maximus Confessor, *Ep.* 9; 26; 40-42 (PG 91, 445, 616, 633-637). For the dating of Maximus the Confessor's letters and some problems with their transmission and edition, see Jankowiak – Booth, *A New Date-List*, p. 22-23. In those letters, Thalassius is referred to as "πρεσβύτερος καὶ ἡγούμενος". On the significance of Maximus the Confessor's letters for the prosopography of Byzantine Africa, see Cameron, *Byzantine Africa*, p. 55-56.

[43] Thalassius, *De charitate ac continentia, necnon regime mentis, ad Paulum presbyterum* I 1-22, PG 91, 1428-1429; cf. Jankowiak – Booth, *A New Date-List*, p. 25. For the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagites on Maximus the Confessor's writings, see Y. de Andia, *Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. P. Allen – B. Neil, Oxford 2015, p. 177-193. It is worth noting that Maximus the Confessor's main exegetical

Thalassius as a Byzantine monk, that is – following the criteria he assumed – of Greek descent, who developed a monastic community in Africa Proconsularis in the first half of the 7th century[44]. According to a mention in the acts of the Lateran synod (649), an anti-Monothelite petition was submitted during the second session of the synod, subscribed by a group of monks from the East present in Rome at that time, among them a man named Thalassius, presbyter and hegumen of the Armenian community inhabiting the monastery of Renatus[45]. Theoretically, it is possible that the latter figure is the same hegumen who exchanged correspondence with Maximus, who had moved along with his monastic community from Africa to Italy because of the Arab invasion, but a certain indication found in the acts would contradict such an interpretation. Namely, Theophilactus – *primicerius notariorum* of the Holy See – while introducing the delegation of the monks to take part in the sessions of the synod, made a distinction between those who had recently arrived and those who had lived in the city of Rome for a long time, and the superior of the Armenian monks was included in the latter group[46]. Another argument against the identification of the both figures is the fact that the monastery of Renatus, situated most likely in the area south-east of the Esquiline, had existed in Rome since at least the pontificate of Pope Gregory, i.e., since the last

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treatise was written in response to questions from Thalassius, and Maximus himself may have been influenced by the African school of exegesis, cf. L. Dossey, *Exegesis and dissent in Byzantine North Africa*, in: *North Africa under Byzantium and early Islam*, ed. S.T. Stevens – J. Conant, Washington 2016, p. 264.

[44] Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 210-211. M. Jankowiak, P. Booth (*A New Date-List*, p. 25) argue that he may have been a bilingual African monk.

[45] *Concilium Lateranense a. 649*, p. 50: "καὶ Θαλάσσιος πρεσβύτερος καὶ ἡγούμενος τῆς εὐαγοῦς μονῆς τῶν Ἀρμενίων τῆς ἐνθάδε παροικούσης εἰς τὴν ἐπιλεγομένην μονὴν Ῥενάτου".

[46] *Concilium Lateranense a. 649*, p. 48: "Διδάσκω τὴν ὑμετέραν μακαριότητα, ὡς πλείους παρεστᾶσι πρὸ τοῦ εὐαγοῦς σεκρέτου τῶν ἁγιωτάτων ὑμῶν εὐλαβεῖς ἡγούμενοι καὶ μονάζοντες τῶν τε πάλαι παροικούντων καὶ τῶν ἐνδεδημηκότων ἀρτίως ἐνθάδε Γραϊκῶν, τουτέστιν Ἰωάννης, Θεόδωρος, Θαλάς<σ>ιος, Γεώργιος καὶ σὺν τούτοις ἕτεροι θεοφιλεῖς ἄνδρες". J.J. Gavigan (*De vita monastica*, p. 210-211) observes that there are no grounds for identifying one figure with the other, but the total rejection of such a hypothesis is not possible either. In turn, R. Price (*The Acts of Lateran Synod 649*, Liverpool 2014, p. 75, 137, 150) has argued in favour of rejecting the possibility of identifying the head of the monastery of Renatus with the African abbot from the first half of the 6th century. Likewise, J.M. Sansterre, *Les moines grecs et orientaux à Rome aux époques byzantine et carolingienne (milieu du VIe s. – fin du IXe s.)*, v. 1, Bruxelles 1983, p. 13.

decade of the 6th century[47] and the take-over of this monastic establishment by African "immigrants" after the year 647 should appear to be not very likely.

Thalassius is reported as the head of a monastic community settled on the outskirts of Carthage[48], but this is only a proposition based on another supposed identification, this time with a clergyman of the same name featured in a noteworthy eschatological composition, published in the *Incertii narratio* by François Combefis (1672)[49]. The narrative takes place at Carthage in the time of *patricius* Niketas and the main protagonist – a prefectural official – committed *adulterium*, at the devil's instigation, with a farmer's wife, then died because of the plague and was buried by his wife in the church of a "monasterium uno fere a suburbano milario"[50]. During the holy service, the deceased man spoke to the monks and requested them to take him to Thalassius "cuius splendoribus Africa omnis praeclare ornata est"[51]. A distorted variation of this narrative is included in the chronicle by George the Monk, who omits a chronological indication referring to the time of Niketas, replaces the prefectural official with a soldier (formally, all the officials of the civil administration belonged to the *milites*), while Thalassius – of his narrative – is the bishop of Carthage[52]. Chronological indicators found in Combefis' edition make it possible to identify the time of the narrative events as taking place in the early 7th century, if the above-mentioned Niketas is identical with the *patricius* who supported the exarch of Carthage Heraclius in the overthrow of

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[47] In his analysis of accounts on the monastery of Renatus, J.M. Sansterre (*Les Moines grecs*, p. 12-13) points to its initially rather Latin character, considering the name of its hypothetical founder and the figure of the abbot Probus mentioned in Pope Gregory's correspondence (*Ep.* XI 15). According to the Belgian scholar, however, at a certain time during the 7th century (at least several years before the Lateran synod), monks from the East (of Armenian origin but Greek-speaking) began to arrive and settle at the monastery. R. Price (*The Acts of Lateran Synod*, p. 137) suggests that the monks at the monastery of Renatus may have come from Palestine, despite the fact that they are called "Armenians" in the acts of the synod.

[48] E. Lévesque, *Thalassius*, DThC 15, 202; Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 210.

[49] F. Combefis, *Auctorum Novissimum Bibliothece Graecorum Patrum*, v. 2, Paris 1672, p. 324-326.

[50] Combefis, *Auctorum Novissimum Bibliothece Graecorum Patrum*, v. 2, p. 324.

[51] Combefis, *Auctorum Novissimum Bibliothece Graecorum Patrum*, v. 2, p. 325.

[52] Georgius Monachus, *Chronicon* IV 231, PG 110, 841-846. George the Monk is incorrect in referring to Thalassius as ἐπίσκοπον, as we do not know any bishop of Carthage named Thalassius; cf. Maier, *L'épiscopat*, p. 95. On the differences between the narrative of George and the text by Combefis, see C. de Boor, *Zur Vision des Taxaotes*, BZ 5 (1896) p. 306.

the emperor Phocas in 610[53], which would theoretically allow us to make an identification of the monk famous across northern Africa, the leader of the African monasticism during the reign of Heraclius, helping the soul of the sinful official, with the correspondent and friend of Maximus the Confessor, who had been staying temporarily in the exarchate of Carthage at least from the 620s. However, the exact location of the monastery he administered and supervised as hegumen is not quite clear and the localization on the outskirts of Carthage, if we should refer to the text published by Combefis, is purely hypothetical as, according to the narrative, the soul of the deceased man begs to be taken to Thalassius, who is not necessarily a member of the same monastic community, which is even more evident in the variation presented by George the Monk, where he resides in Carthage as the bishop of the city[54].

Another portion of interesting details on the monastic communities of Byzantine-era Africa in the 7th century can be found in some passages of the *Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor*. The composition of this work is most probably contemporary with the events being discussed, where the *terminus post quem* is the death of Maximus in 662, while the *terminus ante quem* – the year 681 and the deposition of Bishop Macarius of Antioch[55]. The translator and publisher of this narrative, entitled "On the wicked Maximus of Palestine who blasphemed against the Creator and his tongue was cut off", Sebastian Brock determined that its author was presumably George of Resh'aina – bishop and a member of the clergy subordinate to the jurisdiction of Patriarch Sophronius of

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[53] On Niketas, see PLRE III, p. 940-943. S.A. Morceli (*Africa Christiana*, p. 354) offers a precise dating of the story: year 606, while M. Jankowiak, P. Booth (*A New Date-List*, p. 25) point to the time of Heraclius' reign in the context of Thalassius' activity.

[54] C. de Boor (*Zur Vision des Taxaotes*, p. 307) argues that the story of the soul of the deceased Carthaginian prefectural official was composed under the influence of the Roman spirituality formed during the pontificate of Pope Gregory, who was particularly interested in eschatological issues, and it has some analogues attributable to Constantinople and Alexandria and attesting to the popularity of this motif in the contemporary spirituality. In addition, the narrative shares a number of literary analogues with one of Pseudo-Cyril's homilies published in PG 77, 1072-1089; cf. de Boor, *Zur Vision des Taxaotes*, p. 307-310, although it remains unclear which passage was composed as original and subsequently used by the other author.

[55] S. Brock, *An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor*, AnBol 91 (1973) p. 300, 335-336. The work survives in the manuscript preserved in the British Museum and consisting of two separate manuscripts with texts from the 7th and 8th centuries. 8th century assumed as the time of its composition is still an early dating for this *vita*; cf. S. Brock, *Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History*, "Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies" 2 (1976) p. 28-29.

Jerusalem, and at the same time an opponent of the Dyotheletic doctrine and a follower of the *Ἔκθεσις* of the emperor Heraclius, while the Syriac chronicle *ad annum* 1234 refers to him as a Marionite[56]. In the paragraphs 18-20 of his work, George relates that Maximus and his disciples escaped before the Arab invasion from the territories of Syria and relocated to Africa, where he began to spread the Dyotheletic heresy. For the present subject, a passage of particular interest is where the fugitives reach the northernmost region of Africa and stay over at the monastery called Hippo Diarrhytus in Latin, inhabited by 87 Nestorian monks from Nisibis under the abbot Esha'ya (with his son named Isho living there as well)[57]. The adversary of Monotheletism and his supporters were cordially welcomed at the monastery as they shared the belief in the Nestorian heresy, but due to the imminent threat of the Arab incursion, all of them (including the local monks) made their way to Sicily and then Rome, where they persuaded Pope Martin into their doctrine, after which he summoned a synod of 190 bishops with the aim of condemning Monotheletism[58]. Aside from the definitely hostile and discrediting-oriented attitude of the bishop of Resh'aina

[56] Brock, *An Early Syriac Life*, p. 300-301, 332-334; Brock, *Syriac Sources*, p. 28. The *Ekthesis*, affirming the acting of one will in Christ was promulgated by the emperor Heraclius probably in 638 (or already in 636; see Jankowiak), although its actual author was primarily Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople. On Monotheletism and the *Ekthesis*, see J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Division. The Church 450-680 A.D.*, New York 1989, p. 348-356; C. Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom. Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century*, Leiden – Boston, 2008, p. 73-76; N. Hächler, *Heraclius Constantine III – Emperor of Byzantium (613-641)*, BZ 115 (2022) p. 107-109.

[57] Brock, *An Early Syriac Life*, p. 317. George evidently confused here the name of the monastery with the name of the city or this is just a "mental shortcut". On the locality of Hippo Diarrhytus, see H. Dessau, *Hippo*, RE VIII 2, 1721-1722. Earlier in the past, there had existed certain relations between Nisibis on the Euphrates and Africa, namely Julianos dedicated a theological work by Paul of Nisibis to Bishop Primasius of Hadrumetum; see Mesnage, *L'Afrique chrétienne*, p. 39-40; Brock, *An Early Syriac Life*, p. 326. The narrative of the bishop of Resh'aina suggests that Maximus arrived in Africa for the first time during the usurpation of the exarch Gregory, i.e., in the years 646-647, which is incorrect because according to some other sources, he was present in Carthage between 626 and 630, in 633, and again at least from 645; cf. P. Allen, *Life and Times of Maximus the Confessor*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. P. Allen – B. Neil, Oxford 2015, p. 3-15. For the details of *patricius* Gregory's usurpation against the emperor Constans II, see D. Woods, *Pope Zacharias (741-52) and the Head of St. George*, "ARAM Perodical" 20 (2008) p. 175-178; Urbaniec, *Administracja cywilna*, p. 298-299.

[58] Brock, *An Early Syriac Life*, p. 318. The number of the participants in this synod in Rome, as given by the author, is incorrect on account of the fact that there was a total

towards the character in question, it is worth taking a closer look at the accuracy of the details concerning the monastic community of Hippo Diarrhytus. According to the precise indication given by George, it was situated at the northernmost point of Africa; besides, the indication of a small town in the province of Africa Proconsularis, instead of the widely known city of Carthage, makes his account more plausible (in the same way as his accuracy in giving the number of the monks inhabiting the monastery)[59]. In the absence of any possibility of performing a source-based comparative analysis, it is difficult to determine if a bishop of a remote city in Syria would have known the geography of the African prefecture in so much detail and if the details given are purely a literary invention (or not) employed to achieve a semblance of the veritable transmission. In paragraph 5, the author communicates that he gathered the material for his work from his own experience as well as from those people who were trustworthy, while in par. 19 there is a passage reporting that the whole of Africa succumbed to the Dyotheletic heresy, with the exception of a hermit named Lucas, who immediately passed the information about the alarming events to Constantinople and it was thanks to his reaction that Patriarch Macarius of Antioch wrote three books against Maximus' doctrine[60]. It therefore appears that George should have probably received the knowledge of the information communicated by Lucas, which could possibly explain the relative accuracy of the account even if its authenticity should still

number of 106 bishops, most of them from Italy, attending the sessions during the days between 5 and 31 October 649; see Price, *The Acts of the Lateran Synod*, p. 69-72.

[59] Hippo Diarrhytus was situated in the province of Africa Proconsularis, around 100 km to the north-west of Carthage, while the monastery at the same place – as mentioned by George – is not attested elsewhere; cf. Brock, *An Early Syriac Life*, p. 326.

[60] Brock, *An Early Syriac Life*, p. 317. The above-mentioned hermit Lucas is most probably identical with the African presbyter and monk of the same name, mentioned in the acts of the 11th session of the Third Council of Constantinople (681), in the context of the condemnation of the Monothelite doctrine espoused by the bishop of Antioch Macarius: "Λόγος ἀποσταλεὶς ὑπὸ Μακαρίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Θεουπόλεως Λουκᾶ πρεσβυτέρῳ καὶ μοναχῷ τῷ Ἀφρικῆς γράψαντι περὶ τῆς <καινῆς> τῶν Μαξιμιανῶν αἱρέσεως" (*Concilium Universale Constantinopolitanum Tertium*, p. 504). Thus also according to the acts of the council, the African monk was the first person to have informed Constantinople on Μαξιμιανῶν αἱρέσεως and who would later become the addressee of a treatise written by Macarius, which confirms the authenticity of the passage from the work of George of Resh'aina. J.J. Gavigan (*De vita monastica*, p. 213-214) holds the opinion that Lucas' monastery was one of the communities of Greek monks in Africa, located most likely in the province of Africa Proconsularis, although this is only a hypothetical conclusion.

remain hypothetical – just as the fact of the existence of a monastery inhabited by Eastern monks at Hippo Diarrhytus[61].

George of Resh'aina returns to the theme of the above monastic community once more in par. 24, reporting that the disciples from Nisibis left Africa as well, taking flight before the Arab conquest, and reached Rome, where Pope Martin – having ascertained that their doctrine (essentially, Nestorian and Dyotheletic) was in agreement with his own, allowed them to take quarters at a monastery known as *Cellae novae* in Latin[62]. It is very much likely that the location in question is identical with the community of Saint Sabbas in Rome, a monastery playing a significant role in the Early Medieval history of the city[63]. This theme is related to the above-mentioned passage from the acts of the Lateran synod referring to the petition of the Eastern monks directed against the *Ekthesis* of the emperor Heraclius and the *Typos* of Constans II, which – along with Thalassius from the monastery of Saint Renatus and George, the head of a community based at the monastery of Aquae Salviae in Cilicia[64] – was submitted by John, hegumen of the Palestinian *lavra* of Saint Sabbas, and Theodore, presbyter and hegumen of a *lavra* in Africa which, according to the superior's signature, is also called "*lavra* of Saint Sabbas"[65]. According to a hypothesis proposed by Sebastian Brock, if the name of the abbot Isho's son, as mentioned in the *Syriac Life of Maximus*, is a hypocoristic for Isho'yahb, it is possible that this figure is identical with hegumen Theodore from the African *lavra*, but – as Jean Marie Sanasterre makes

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[61] On the credibility of these passages from the *Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor*, see Sansterre, *Les Moines grecs*, p. 26-27.

[62] Brock, *An Early Syriac Life*, p. 319; cf. A.J. Ekonomou, *Byzantine Rome and the Greek Popes. Eastern Influences on Rome and the Papacy from Gregory the Great to Zacharias, A.D. 590-752*, Lanham 2009, p. 229, n. 47.

[63] Sansterre, *Les Moines grecs*, p. 23-24. The identity of the *Cella novae* and the monastery of Saint Sabbas in Rome is indicated by a passage from the *Life* of Pope Adrian (772-795) in the *Liber Pontificalis* (ed. L.M. Duchesne, Paris 1886, p. 511), referring to Peter "religiosum abbatem venerabilis monasterii santcti Sabae qui appellatur Cella nova". During the pontificate of Stephen III (768-772), antipope Constantine was imprisoned at this monastery (*Liber Pontificalis*, p. 471-472). On the arrival of the Palestinian monks of the *lavra* in Rome, see Ekonomou, *Byzantine Rome*, p. 203-204.

[64] For more on this monastery, see Sansterre, *Les Moines grecs*, p. 13; R. Coates Stephens, *Byzantine Building Patronage in post-Reconquest Rome*, in: *Les Cités d'Italie tardo-antique (IVe-VIe siècle)*, Collection de L'École francaise de Rome 369, ed. M. Ghilardi – C.J. Goddard – P. Porena, Roma 2006, p. 154.

[65] *Concilium Lateranense a. 649 celebratum*, p. 50, 57. R. Price (*The Acts of the Lateran Synod*, p. 39) holds the opinion that the African *lavra* functioned as a satellite of the Palestinian community represented by John.

a correct observation – such a possibility would have precluded Theodore's return to Africa after the Lateran synod as his task was to deliver the acts of the synod to Carthage, after which he would have probably returned to his congregation (the Belgian scholar presumes there is a link between the Nestorians of Nisibis and the Palestinian community of Saint Sabbas)[66]. The location of the *lavra* in the prefecture of Africa remains unknown, while pointing to the capital city of the exarchate or its suburban locality may only have the character of an unverifiable hypothesis (with the current state of our source base)[67].

George of Resh'aina devoted much attention to Anastasius, one of Maximus the Confessor's disciples attested in other sources, who met his mentor around the year 617/618 and accompanied him during many of his peregrinations, acting in opposition to the Monothelite movement (he participated in such events as the Lateran synod in 649, attended two trials against Maximus, after which he was exiled and died in 662)[68]. In the academic discourse, he is usually described as monk – unlike Anastasius, the papal *apocrisarius* in Constantinople, who was also among Maximus' supporters – and as a bilingual African, with his place of origin possible to determine only on the basis of the *Syriac Life of Maximus*[69].

[66] Brock, *An Early Syriac Life*, p. 328; J.M. Sansterre (*Les Moines grecs*, p. 27-28) admits it is possible that the monks of Nisibis may have arrived in Rome, taking quarters at the *Cella novae* before the appearance of the community of hegumen John from the Saint Sabbas *lavra*, but he also remarks that the narrative of George of Resh'aina was aimed primarily at discrediting the Dyotheletic elites in the readers' eyes; for that reason, it only contains a mention referring to the Nestorians, while passing over the Palestinian monks' arrival in Rome. Pope Martin's letter to the Church of Carthage, containing the acts of the synod as well as the pope's encyclical was delivered to Africa by the monks Theodore and Leontius – most likely from the African *lavra*; cf. Price, *The Acts of the Lateran Synod*, p. 394; Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 213; Sansterre, *Les Moines grecs*, p. 29.

[67] The absence of any other details on the African *lavra* is noticed in Gavigan, *De vita monastica*, p. 213; likewise, J.M. Sansterre (*Les Moines grecs*, p. 29), offering a hypothesis that the monastery was founded after the Persian invasion.

[68] Sherwood, *An Annotated Date-list*, p. 2; Allen, *Life and Times of Maximus*, p. 8; Jankowiak – Booth, *A New Date-List*, p. 20, 25. It is presumed that Anastasius' signature can be found under the Eastern monks' petition from the second session of the Lateran synod: "Anastasius monachus similiter" (*Concilium Lateranense a. 649*, p. 57).

[69] A mention in the *Disputatio Bizyae* (p. 141, 746-747) makes the African origin of Anastasius appear to be more likely, also reporting that he was a *notarius* to Constans II's grandmother, i.e., to Eudoxia – daughter of Rogatus of Africa and the first wife of Heraclius, who died in 613 (PLRE III, 457), or the wife of *patricius* Niketas, Heraclius' cousin; see C. Boudignon, *Maxime le Confesseur et ses maîtres, A propos du 'bienheureux vieillard' de la Mystagogie*, in: *Maestro e discepolo, temi e problemi della*

The bishop of Resh'aina introduced this figure in paragraph 11 of his work, reporting that Anastasius arrived on behalf of his spiritual mentor at the synod of Cyprus in 636, while in paragraph 19 – in the context of the Dyotheletic monks' journey to Africa – he writes that Anastasius was familiar with this particular area because he was born there, saying it was already mentioned before, although the earlier sections of his composition contain no record of such detail[70]. George's error may have been due to the lack of a re-redaction of the text, nevertheless this is exactly the only passage explicitly confirming the African origin of Maximus the Confessor's disciple, with no mention of his involvement in the monastic life of the African prefecture. Apart from this particular theme, Anastasius is the author of a letter addressed to the monks of Cagliari in Sardinia (dated 658), in which he attempts to gain their support in Rome against the accord between the Holy See and the Imperial court regarding the adoption of the Monothellite Christology[71]. Richard Price holds the view that the community of Cagliari was composed of monks of Eastern descent, who had been staying in Africa earlier on and for whom Sardinia became a place of refuge in the face of the advancing Arab conquest, but this hypothesis has only some circumstantial basis in the sources (the phrase "ad commune monachorum apud Caralim constitutorum collegium" used in the letter's title) and it is possible that the monastery had already existed there earlier[72]. In terms of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, Sardinia was most likely subordinate to Rome but administratively constituted a province of the exarchate of Carthage. As such, it should be taken into consideration in a discussion of the monastic communities in Byzantine Africa.

4. Conclusion

In total, the extant narratives concerning Byzantine Africa feature items of information referring to 8 monasteries and 13 monks (mostly abbots/hegumens) mentioned by name. Considering the period of more than 100 years of the existence of the African prefecture, this

direzione spiritua letra VI secolo a.C. e VII secolo d.C., ed. G. Filoramo, Brescia 2002, p. 323-326; Boudignon, *Maxime le Confesseur était-il constantinopolitain?*, p. 33-34.

[70] Brock, *An Early Syriac Life*, p. 316, 317.

[71] P. Allen – B. Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions: Documents from Exile*, Oxford 2002, p. 124-131.

[72] Price, *The Acts of the Lateran Synod*, p. 74.

number is far from satisfactory, but the main problem of the surviving source material (both narrative and epistolographic) is their secondary treatment of monastic themes. Such a fragmentary picture of this subject makes it impossible to determine on a wider scale the continuity of the existence of the monasteries mentioned for the Vandal period, during the Byzantine era. The records relating exclusively to the congregation administered by Nanctus and the monastery at Hippo Diarrhytus permit us to estimate the numbers of monks in individual establishments (it is similar for these two) over the period in question, but it is not necessarily representative of other monasteries. Another issue is the distinction between the Latin and Greek monasteries being made in the current academic discourse. If the community of Sophronius known as the Eucratas, the congregation at Hippo Diarrhytus, and the *Lavra* of St Sabbas can be recognized in all likelihood as monastic establishments inhabited by "immigrants" from the Byzantine East, such an attribution applied to the other locations, sometimes turning up in scholarly discourse, is of a purely hypothetical nature, most often based upon disputable premises. In terms of chronology, most of the narratives under consideration, with the names of monks and the locations of monasteries mentioned therein, concern the 7th century and the period of the Monothelite controversy (therefore being derived from the Greek-language sources), while there are relatively few details on the African monks' position on the Three-Chapters controversy and their possible resistance to the depositions of the strictly Dyophysite bishops by the emperor Justinian. It is also characteristic that practically all the monasteries (with the exception of Cagliari and the monasteries of Byzacena referred in the acts of the synod of 535) mentioned in the relevant texts are situated presumably in the province of Africa Proconsularis (it should be stressed that this location is often hypothetical), i.e., at the center of the prefecture, while Byzacena, where numerous communities existed in late Roman and Vandal times, is represented in the source material only by two monasteries mentioned in 535, which were a continuation of the Vandal period. Numidia, in turn, does not appear at all as a place of monastic foundations in the Byzantine period. This latter conclusion is determined by the interests of the authors of our sources, describing the monastic themes exclusively from the perspective of their associations with political events or Christological controversies – except for Pope Gregory's letter to the bishop of Carthage Dominic in the matter of the abbot Cumquodeus' problems with his own community, thus allowing us to venture a hypothesis on the continued development of the African

monasticism, at least until the time of the Arab conquests and the resulting migration of the monks into the Mediterranean islands and Italy.

The preserved narrative source material also indicates that the trends visible in African monasticism in the 6th and 7th centuries were consistent with those occurring in the rest of the Empire. The model of the cenobitic community, widespread in the 5th century in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, also dominated in Vandal and Byzantine Africa, primarily due to its implementation by Augustine of Hippo, which, however, did not exclude the existence of eremitism (despite the institutional regulations of monasticism in Justinian's time, which subjected monasteries in Byzantium to the control of local bishops and emphasised community life)[73]. Leslie Dossey noted that ermitism never gained popularity in Africa, and the cult of saints originating from this group was virtually absent in these areas[74]. The researcher also pointed out that African monastic communities existed in a social environment – primarily urban, although monasteries located in rural areas are known from the Vandal period – but still close to cities[75]. Presumably, this factor could have been decisive in the process of the decline of African monasticism in the 7th century and later, after the Arab conquest, and indirectly explain the state of preservation of the source base. The decline of urban centres began as early as the Byzantine period, but rapid deurbanisation, especially in the areas of Africa Proconsularis, occurred under Arab rule, where the urban network underwent a decisive change (to a lesser extent in Byzacenia and Numidia), especially in coastal areas, which changed the social context of the environment and thus the conditions for the development of monastic life[76]. These processes affected other

[73] For a general overview of the development of monasticism in the 5th and 6th centuries and the dominance of communal life, see P. Rousseau, *Monasticism*, in: *The Cambridge Ancient History*, v. 14: *Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, AD 425-600*, ed. A. Cameron – B. Ward-Perkins – M. Whitby, Cambridge 2007, p. 745-780; B. Flusin, *Das Aufblühen des östlichen Mönchtums*, in: *Die Geschichte des Christentums*, v. 3: *Der latinische Westen und der byzantinische Osten (431-642)*, ed. L. Pietri, Freiburg im Breisgau 2001, p. 584-646; Hatlie, *The Monks*, p. 30-45. For details on the situation in Africa, see L. Dossey, *The Social Space of North African Asceticism*, in: *Western monasticism ante litteram: the spaces of monastic observance in late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. H. Dey – E. Fentress, Turnhout 2011, p. 137-157.

[74] Dossey, *The Social Space of North African Asceticism*, p. 150

[75] Dossey, *The Social Space of North African Asceticism*, p. 150-152.

[76] A synthetic picture of changes in Africa's urban network in the early Middle Ages was presented by C. Fenwick, *The Fate of the Classical Cities of Ifrīqiya in the Early Middle Ages*, in: *Africa – Ifrīqyia. Continuity and Change in North Africa from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic Age. Papers of a Conference held in Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano – Terme di Diocleziano, 28 February – 2 March 2013*, ed. R. Bookman – A. Leone – P. von Rummel, Wiesbaden 2019, p. 137-155.

areas under Umayyad rule to a lesser extent. Furthermore, in Palestine, Syria and Egypt, the traditional ground for monastic life was the desert, not urban centres. The above conclusion about the causes of the decline of monasticism in Africa during the 7th and 8th centuries is purely hypothetical and requires further research, taking into account the social and economic situation of these areas in the late Byzantine period and the early Middle Ages.

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