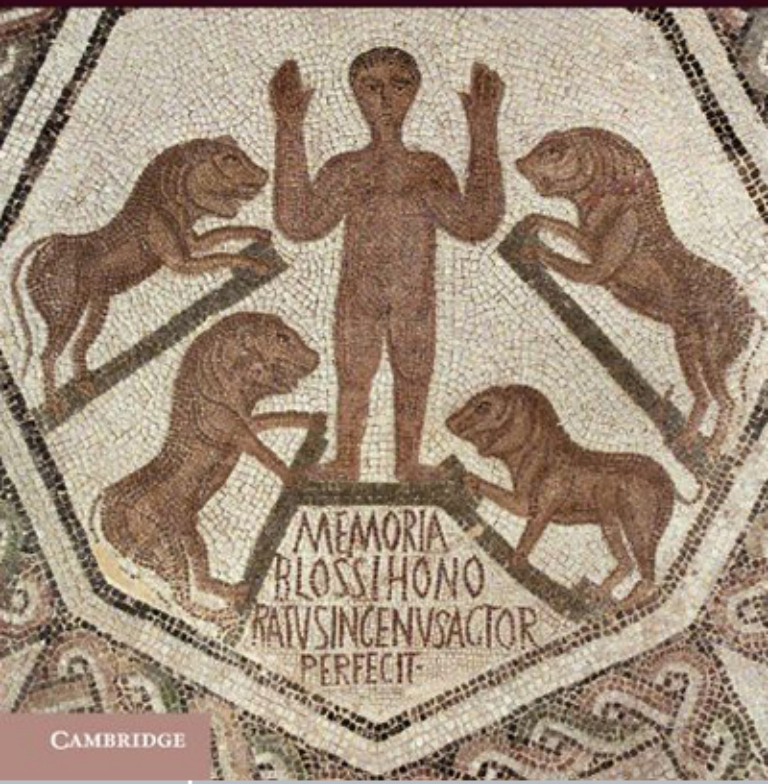
BRENT D. SHAW

Sacred Violence

African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine



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SACRED VIOLENCE

One route to understanding the nature of specifically religious violence is the study of past conflicts. Distinguished ancient historian Brent D. Shaw provides a new analysis of the intense sectarian battles between the Catholic and Donatist churches of North Africa in Late Antiquity, in which Augustine played a central role as Bishop of Hippo. The development and deployment of images of hatred, including those of the heretic, the pagan, and the Jew, and the modes by which these were most effectively employed, including the oral world of the sermon, were critical to promoting acts of violence. Shaw explores how the emerging ecclesiastical structures of the Christian Church, on one side, and those of the Roman imperial state, on the other, interacted to repress or excite violent action. Finally, the meaning and construction of the acts themselves, including the Western idea of suicide, are shown to emerge from the conflict itself.

BRENT D. SHAW is the Andrew Fleming West Professor of Classics at Princeton University. He has published widely on the regional history of the Roman empire, with particular emphasis on the North African provinces and the problem of violence in its historical contexts, in major journals including the *Journal of Roman Studies*, *Past & Present*, and the *American Historical Review*. He has also co-authored a new world history text entitled *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart* (2010).

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Shauna
devotissimo animo

Vengeance is mine – I shall repay (Romans 12: 19)

Contents

Abbreviations

All periodical, serial, and collection abbreviations, other than those noted below, are taken from the standard list in *L'Année philologique*.

AASS	*Acta Sanctorum*, Antwerp, Société des Bollandistes, 1643–
AfrRom	*L'Africa romana*, Atti del Convegni di Studio, Sassari, 1984–
AtlArch	S. Gsell, *Atlas archéologique de l'Algérie*, Paris, Gouvernement générale de l'Algérie, 1911 (reprint: Osnabrück, O. Zeller, 1973)
AugLex	*Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. C. Mayer, Basel, Schwabe, 1986–
BA	*Bibliothèque Augustinienne: Oeuvres de saint Augustin*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1948–
CCL	*Corpus christianorum, series Latina*,Turnhout, Brepols, 1954–
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin, 1863–
CLE	*Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1895–97 ed. F. Buecheler; E. Lommatzsch, *Supplementum*, Leipzig, 1926
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, Vienna, Tempsky, 1866–
CTh	T. Mommsen and P. M. Meyer eds., *Theodosiani libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et Leges Novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, 2 vols., Berlin, Weidmann, 1905
DACL	*Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, ed. F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, Paris, Letouzey et Ané, 1907–53
DHGE	*Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, ed. A. Baudrillart, Paris, Letouzey et Ané, 1912–
GCC	*Gesta conlationis Carthaginiensis anno 411*, ed. S. Lancel (see texts s.v. Church Councils)
GCS	*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, Leipzig and Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1897–

ICUR	A. Silvagni & A. Ferrua eds., *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*, nova series, Rome, 1922–
ILAlg	*Inscriptions latines de l'Algérie*, Paris, 1922–
ILCV	*Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*, ed. E. Diehl, Berlin, Weidmann, 1925–31 (reprint: 1961–67)
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, ed. H. Dessau, Berlin, Weidmann, 1892–1916 (reprint: 1954–62)
ILTun	*Inscriptions latines de la Tunisie*, ed. A. Merlin, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1944
IRT	J. M. Reynolds and J. B. Ward Perkins, *The Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*, Rome, British School at Rome, 1952 [and supplements: *PBSR* 23 (1955), 124-47; *LibStud* 20 (1989), 117–26]
MGH AA	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, auctores antiquissimi*, Berlin, 1826–
MiAg	*Miscellanea Agostiniana: testi e studi pubblicati a cura dell'ordine Eremitano di S. Agostino nel XV centenario dalla morte del santo dottore*, 2 vols., Rome, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1930–31
PAC	A. Mandouze ed., *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, vol. 1: *Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne (303–533)*, Paris, CNRS, 1982
PG	*Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. in 166, Paris, Editions Garnier Frères, 1857–66
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 222 vols., Paris, Editions Garnier Frères, 1844–66; second edition, 1878–90
PLRE	A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, J. Morris *et al.*, eds., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 3 vols. in 4, Cambridge University Press, 1971–92
PLS	*Patrologiae Latinae Supplementum*, ed. A.-G. Hamman *et al.*, 4 vols., Paris, Editions Garnier Frères, 1958–74
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Stuttgart, A. Hiersemann, 1941–
SC	*Sources chrétiennes*. Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1942–

Maps

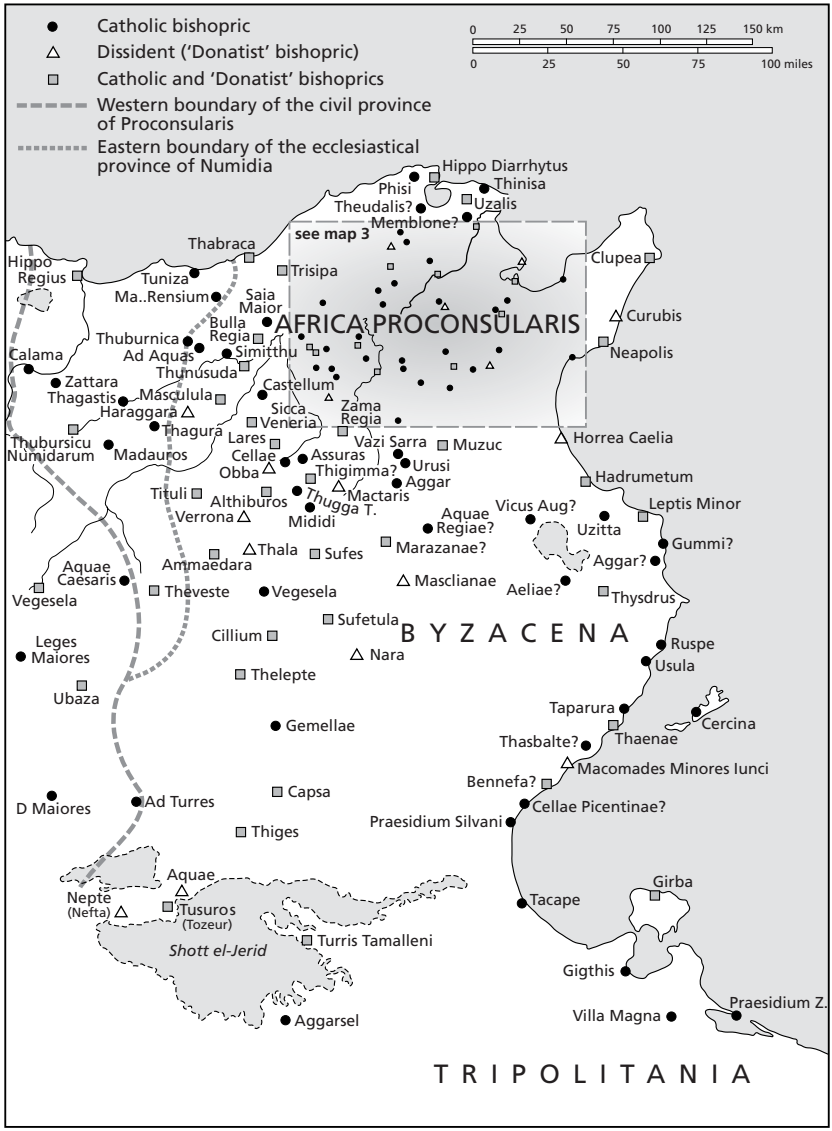
Acknowledgments

I would like to record some personal marks of gratitude. I must thank all the persons at Cambridge University Press who were involved in the publication of this book, beginning with Michael Sharp for his willingness to consider a large and daunting manuscript. My production editor, Thomas O'Reilly, remained throughout a modulated source of discipline and encouragement. I am also in debt to the anonymous readers of the Press for their perspicacity, their necessary cautions, and their constructive recommendations. Finally, Mr. Adam Gitner, a talented graduate student in the Classics at Princeton, brought his eagle eye to the checking of the primary texts cited in the annotation. The lapses of interpretation and fact that remain, as they say, are my responsibility. In the struggle of the writing, I was assisted by able and generous helpers. At the onset, at my request, Ineke Sluiter, at Leiden, photocopied a whole book and sent it to me, gratuitously—what else are good friends for? In the interim, to those who generously answered pestering questions on points of detail, and who offered other much needed help: Denis Feeney, Joseph Farrell, Bob Kaster, AnneMarie Luijendijk, Ann Matter, Aislinn Melchior, and Eric Rebillard. In the end, there were two wonderful colleagues and fellow historians, Peter Brown and Johannes Hahn, who took from their own valuable time and gave it to a reading of the final draft. I must thank the latter for his series of acute challenges and observations, as well as for his critical corrections. Quite apart from his creative insights and provocative suggestions on a draft of the book, my debt to Peter Brown is exceedingly great. Without him, as I am sure many other historians would happily confess, this work of mine would never have existed.

The dedication marks another ineffable debt. Shauna Shaw read several drafts of most of the chapters, a near endless rota of drudgery and thankless hard work. She made numerous helpful suggestions in aid of enhancing

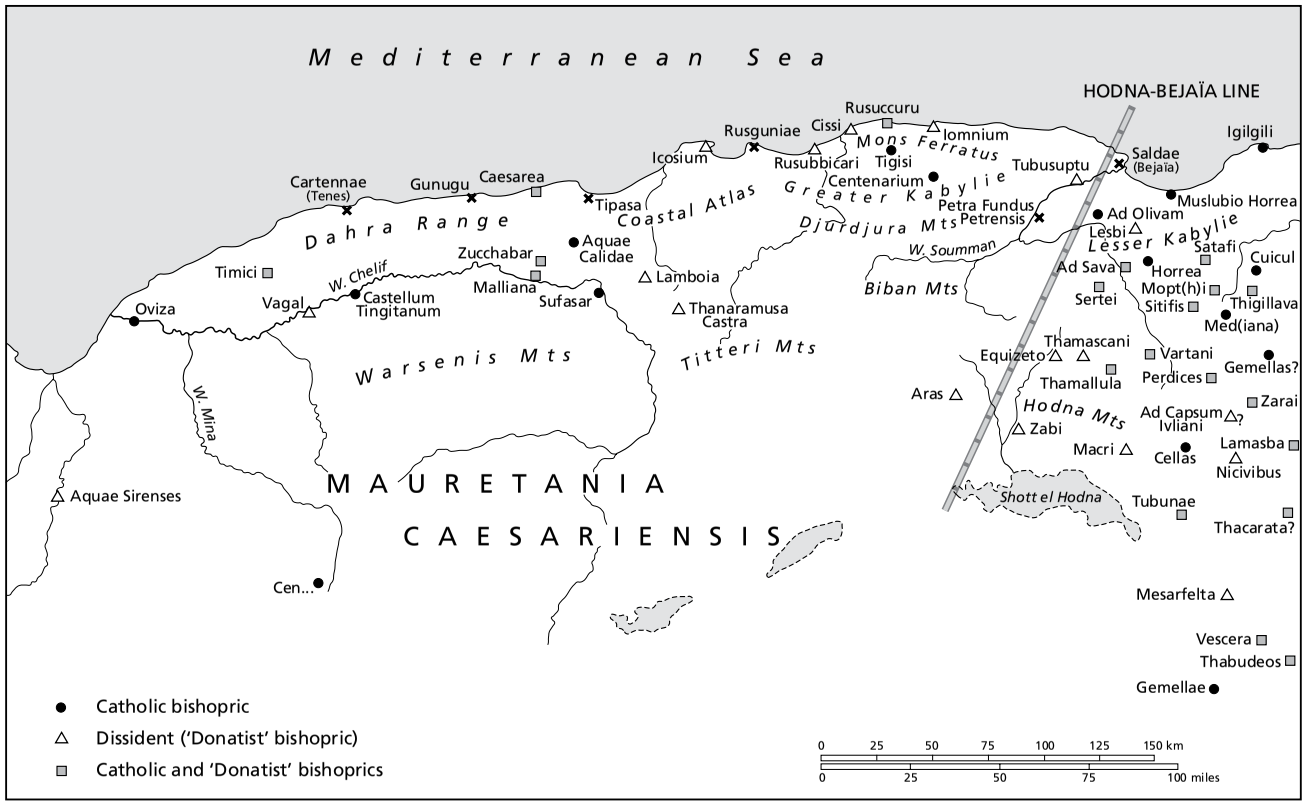
the readability of the text. I owe her for this, and for more of which she alone knows. And then there is the music, reminding one of true value. My thanks to E.C. and Derek Trucks at Philadelphia in November 2006, and to D.T. and his talented fellow players at the McCarter, Princeton, in May 2007. Life came back.

Map 1 North Africa and the western Mediterranean empire

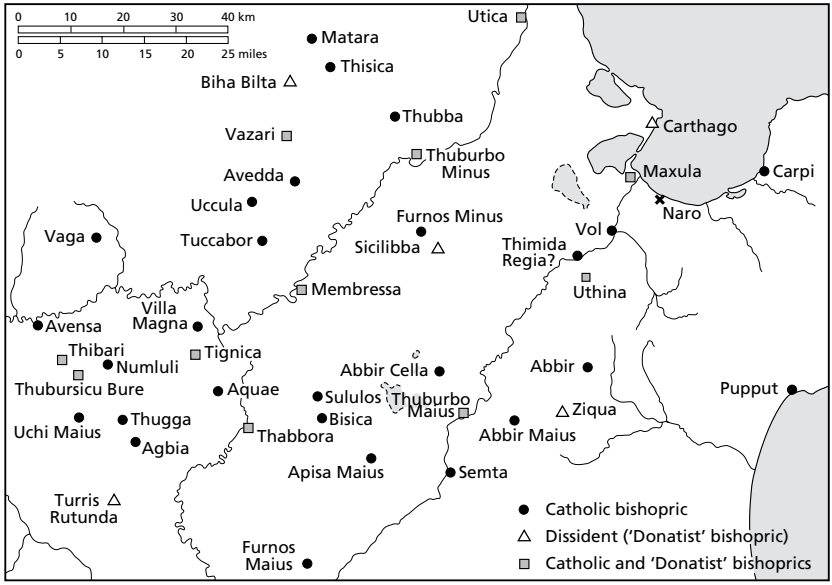


Map 2A Proconsularis and Byzacena
(The area in the dotted-line square is shown in Map 3.)

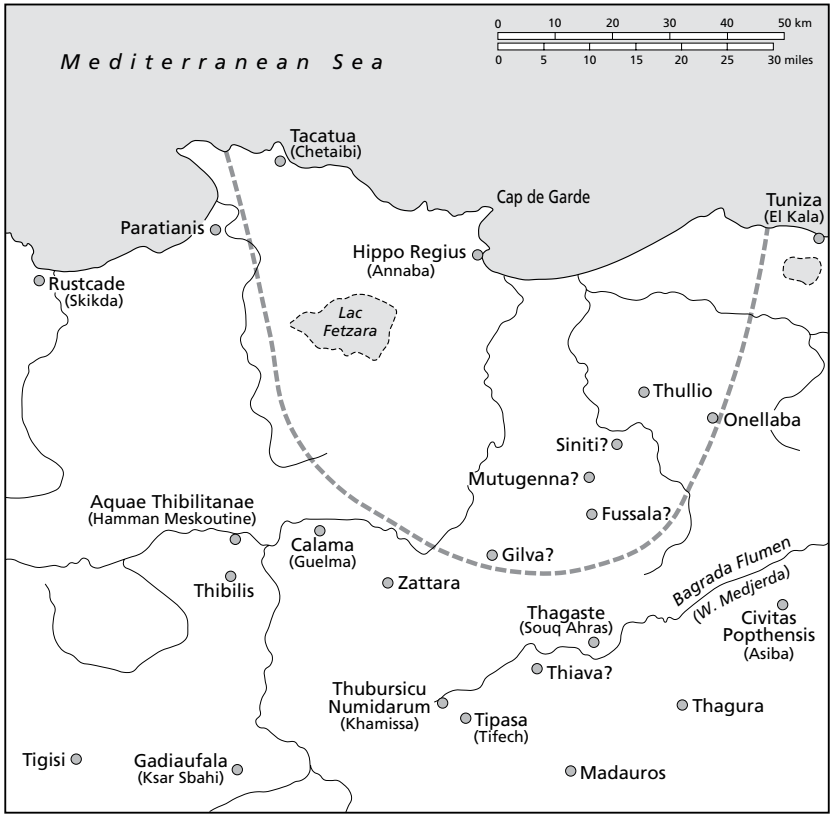
Map 2B Numidia and Mauretania Sitifensis



Map 2C Mauretania Caesariensis and Mauretania Sitifensis



Map 3 The Carthage region



Map 4 The Hippo Regius region
(The area within the dotted line approximates the boundaries of Augustine's diocese of Hippo Regius.)

Introduction

This is not a nice book. It begins with betrayal and ends with suicide. Set on this sad trajectory, the narrative suggests a mundane parallel to the city of God, a fallible human city. If the ideas created by its actors were transcendent, the story itself was enacted in an imperfect human way. The problem confronted in the following investigation is the meaning of religious violence. This story of violence happened in the age of Augustine in his native Africa, when its lands were provinces of the Roman empire. The events begin in the last decade of the fourth century and they end with the armed incursions of foreign Vandal invaders into Africa about the year 429. The spate of killing and destruction that accompanied the arrival of these "barbarian" outsiders put an end to the small story of sectarian violence that is our focus. The new Vandal lords of Africa swept away the cultural underpinnings of institutions and thought that had sustained the special hatreds of the generations that concern us here. There were now to be new dislikes, as one kind of violence decisively trumped another.

The diminutive tradition of sacred violence that I am considering served to create and to confirm intimate values and personal relationships in Africa. The war brought by the Vandals erased these rich meanings that had been created by sectarian conflict. Our attention is focussed on the earlier church struggles that were an integrating force of a social and religious world that disappeared in 430. Our interest is directed as much to the question of how acts of sectarian violence were thought about and represented in words as it is to the actual threats, beatings, burnings, and killings. In this light, it is perhaps disappointing that our narrative diminishes rather than exalts. Events claimed as peasant rebellions and revolutionary social struggles turn out, on closer inspection, to be smaller and meaner things. The principal actors were moved by the logical, if fulfilling, credulities of religious faith and by not much more. What I have encountered is a history of hate – a story of intimate dislike that was motivated by the profound love for one's own people, beliefs, communities, and traditions.

The age concerned is the lifetime of Augustine of Hippo, the greatest churchman of western Christendom. So it is perhaps best to begin with a warning. There can be no concealing the plain fact that the great body of writings of the bishop of Hippo make this work possible. But this is *not* a book about Augustine. It is an investigation of what he, along with many others, persuaded, explained, demanded and cajoled, and concealed, and sometimes just reported. Of the mountain of these words, it is the sermons that were preached to the parishioners who crowded basilicas at Hippo Regius, to congregations in the great basilicas at Carthage, and to audiences gathered in the humble churches in smaller provincial towns that are especially significant. Improvised to connect with a wide range of persons who listened to the preacher, they were meant to persuade on that occasion. We should listen to them with care. The written letters that were communications with peers, with the literate elites of Augustine's world, provide information bound by time and place, and by person. And there are the acerbic and polemical writings composed by bishops and laymen on the opposing sides – bitter attacks on their enemies. It is these real-time writings, much more than the elevated, consciously and elaborately wrought world of the theological treatise, that are of special significance to our inquiry.

To repeat: this is not a study of an individual man and his ideas, whether that individual was an Augustine or a Petilian, an Optatus or a Tyconius. Augustine, it is true, was a marvelous creator and marshaler of ideas, and of men. The mountainous weight of his writings and, even more, the ways in which they have profoundly shaped basic ideas of ours, dominate our understanding of the time. Insofar as they pertain to the problems that confront us, however, matters such as the essence of a Trinitarian god, the nature of the mystical or real body of Christ, fine distinctions in the dispensation of grace, the idea of predestination, or the doctrine of original sin are *not* our direct concern here. The long-term impact of Augustine's ideas – not in north Africa where they have all but vanished, but in western Europe and its cultural heirs and legatees – is no concern of mine here. In this investigation, my interest in Augustine is limited to his participation in events in Africa in his own lifetime and not in the later history of his magnificently successful project of self-promotion.[1]

As a history, the analysis here is drawn in a direction contrary to the natural course of the progressive unraveling of events. It is attracted, instead,

[1] There are already a number of outstanding biographies, including Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, still the classic; Lancel, *Saint Augustin*, all the facts, and in order; and O'Donnell, *Augustine*, for the age.

to the backwards rerunning of memory. My purpose is not to reconstruct events serially as they occurred from some point in time, beginning, say, with the first steps of the Great Persecution under the emperor Diocletian in the year 303 and working forward step-by-step to Augustine's death in his bed at Hippo Regius on 28 August 430. Our path will be the reverse of this. Attention will be focussed on the specific hatreds of Augustine's own generation. The majority of incidents of sectarian violence in Africa that can be studied in any coherent fashion occurred in his own lifetime, for the most part during his tenure as bishop of Hippo Regius from 395 to 430. The first problem is to understand the function of earlier quarrels and battles as part of the collected memories of the generation who lived in this later age. I am not especially interested in a blow-by-blow reconstruction of a grand narrative of the dissident Christian community in Africa, the so-called Donatist Church, from its inception to the final dissipation of Christian communities in the Maghrib. There already exist narratives, however imperfect, of this story.[2]

I am also less entangled in the struggle to determine precisely what happened during the state-directed persecution of Christians in Africa in 303–05, or the struggle to determine the facts of what happened in the bitter internecine struggles that emerged in its aftermath. I am more attracted to what each side remembered of this past. What men like Tyconius, Optatus, Augustine, Possidius, Petilian, Emeritus, Cresconius, and their peers and followers, could know is of direct relevance to why they were willing to encourage and engage in coercive and violent action. How the bishops and learned laymen construed the little that they knew of their past is one part of my problem. No matter how public or common this knowledge might seem, it was anything but given or natural. It was a matter of bishops, literary elites, imperial administrators, and teachers and pedagogues constructing this knowledge, and then educating and persuading the ignorant, as they called them. It is this constant rebuilding and replaying of the past by Augustine's peers that formed the context in which the violence was enacted in their present. The script was managed and manipulated. When the writers changed their minds, or disappeared, so did the peculiar acts of hate and harm that were tied to the script that they had made.

In this investigation, violence is understood not just as the specific acts of physical hostility – the threats, the beatings, the blindings, the cuttings,

[2] Frend, *Donatist Church*, the standard treatment in English, innovative and influential in its time; and Brisson, *Autonomisme et christianisme*, more perspicacious on the motivating issues (and more accurate on the facts), are exemplary.

the mutilations, and the murders – but also the surrounding world of speech and writing of which these acts were a living part. The violent deeds were living extensions of the rhetoric in which their values and causes were formed. The acts of physical harm and material damage served specific tactical ends that must be understood. The investigation is difficult if only because, as many have already noted, violence is rarely seen as a thing in its own right and is radically under-theorized.[3] The interpretations and representations of violence fed on themselves and were seedbeds for novel and innovative acts of physical harm. But they were all part of a peculiar order of talking, thinking, and writing, at the center of which were new Christian narratives and discourses. The extent to which this new Christian story both displaced and substituted for all others is breathtaking. The power of this Christian talk was produced by many things, among them a remorseless hortatory pedagogy, a hectoring moralizing of the individual, and a ceaseless management of the minutiae of everyday life. Above all, it was a form of speech marked by an absence of humor. It was a morose and a deadly serious world. The joke, the humorous kick, the hilarious satire, the funny cut-them-down-to-size jibe, have vanished. What passes for a laugh is a ghastly gloss on your enemy's spiritual death, on your own coming demise, or on the misfortunes of the sinful and the stupid. Whatever it was, this violence was not funny.

This is also an experiment in time with its own bounds and closures. The contests and values, the affairs and the debates that mattered so intensely to the people that I describe were to become dead matters, things done and past in the generation after Augustine's death. In these later years, different and more pressing concerns were to consume public and personal agendas. In witnessing these ideas and actions at their most intense and meaningful, we are always close to an end when they were to become irrelevant. In the great age of transformation that engulfed the Maghrib at the end of the seventh century and through the remainder of the eighth, all these vitally significant beliefs and actions, the people involved in them, their writings and sermons, their emotional commitments and memories were to disappear forever from the valleys and fields, towns and villages in which they had been lived with such passion. Their only life now was in the memories and ideas borne on a refugee flotsam of Christian writings drifting to European shores. Although it is true that the people and their communities were not suddenly buried under layers of volcanic ash, what

[3] See Pandey (1992), esp. pp. 27, 41–42; Brubaker (2004), pp. 90–92; and Zizek, *Violence*, *passim*, for some of the cris-de-coeur, emphasizing the radical "under-theorizing" of violence, and its status as a phenomenon that has to be taken more seriously and understood as a thing in its own right.

they valued was subverted and replaced by different languages and narratives. One might like to imagine a transhistorical world of behaviors and purposes that informed so much of Western history, to imagine that they were part of continuous connections of a grand metahistorical narrative. This is not so. In the end, everything these people did, every communal conflict and personal battle to which they committed themselves out of a belief in transcendent values, became meaningless and worthless. It is enough to give history a bad name.

But bad names are at the very heart of my problem, and from this fact stem even more problems for the historian. In those days, there were good social and political reasons for calling someone a Maximianist, a Donatist, a Rogatist, or a Caecilianist. Sometimes these labels cohered with an accepted reality, but in others they did not. My approach will be to avoid the name-calling as much as possible. More neutral terms can be found to designate each side, words that the participants themselves would have found more or less acceptable as names of their own communities. The more powerful Christian community – in the sense that it was approved by the church in Rome and also recognized by the imperial state – was the one headed by Aurelius, bishop of Carthage and Primate of Africa, but which is most identified in our own age with the dominant literary personality of Augustine. This religious community did succeed, at some level, in asserting a claim to an identity as Catholic. But their opponents, persons whom they labeled "Donatists," consistently, and insistently, claimed to be just as Catholic as the party of Aurelius and Augustine. They insisted with some reason, since even their Catholic opponents admitted that, apart from the division between them, both sides shared the same trinitarian god, the same churches, the same baptism, the same approved canon of sacred scriptures, the same rituals, and the same sacraments. What divided them so bitterly was something else that was rather difficult for them to name and to describe.

Although both parties were Catholic, I have called the Aurelian–Augustinian church "Catholic" because this was their success-in-power identification of themselves. Their opponents are more difficult to designate with any neutral term. The word "Donatist" should be avoided since it was nothing more than a pejorative label foisted on them by the Catholics. In their own self-identity these others thought of themselves as both Christian and Catholic, and that was that. I had once thought that the term "African" Christians would be good since this caught the sense of regionalism that defined a critical part of their identity. I now think that this name must be avoided. They themselves would have found it an odd

distinction. More important, the label creates a fundamentally misleading impression that the Catholics in Africa did not share just as many African characteristics as did their opponents. I have therefore lapsed onto a general description of them as a dissident or dissenting party in a descriptive sense, since, even in their own terms, they saw themselves as a persecuted minority who fundamentally disagreed with the majoritarian party.[4] This means that I have committed myself to an imperial view of the situation since "the Donatists," although a minority in the empire, were a majority in their homeland. The imperial perspective is, I think, justified in part by the imperial stage on which Christians acted, and the critical role of the imperial state as a player in this drama. The signal warning, however, is that on their own home ground, in Africa, "the Donatists" were in the majority in numbers and could easily and quite legitimately see their own way as the right one.

As for those objects of our inquiry – the styles and modes of hatred – these are nothing new or unusual. Consider the following story of two chess venues in New York City at the end of the 1990s.[5]

In the Far East, where the game of chess was invented around 600 A.D., stones were supposed to be placed on each corner of the board to keep the evil of the match from spilling over into the world. But there are no stones on the boards in the rival chess shops on Thompson Street in Greenwich Village. And people here see evil all over the place.

The owners of the Chess Shop, at 230 Thompson Street, and the Chess Forum, at 219 Thompson Street, along with the patrons who will go to one shop and not the other, are bitter rivals. The two owners, former partners, have filed lawsuits, had their customers take loyalty oaths and accused each other of spying and theft. They have engaged in name-calling and what each side considers character assassination. One shop briefly debarred disloyal patrons. The shops unleashed price wars where each lost money. And all those involved, cursed with minds that often see life as an intricate battle between pieces on a board, have created whirlpools of intrigue.

The battle will probably not end until one of the shops goes into foreclosure.

"It does not make very good business sense," said Imad Khachan, 37, who owns the Chess Forum. "We would both make more money if we worked together . . . If I had to give him one book it would be King Lear," said Mr. Khachan of his former partner, George Frohlinde, at the Chess Shop. "He is the man who divided his kingdom. This did not need to happen."

[4] Georg Michels, facing an analogous problem with the labeling of the "Old Believers" in seventeenth-century Muscovy, has been compelled to this same solution: *At War with the Church*, pp. 16–18.

[5] Chris Hedges, "A Perpetual War Consumes Competing Chess Shop Owners," *The New York Times* (Monday, 23 December 2002), B 1 and 6.

The two shops are similar. They are dominated by tables where players sit, their heads bent over chess boards, for a dollar an hour. There is soft background music, with the Chess Shop preferring classical and the Chess Forum light pop. The players rarely speak . . . The walls in each shop could use a coat of paint, the bathrooms are a bit grimy . . .

The [biblical] commandment against bearing false witness calls on people not to defame and slander their neighbors. On Thompson Street, though, defamation and slander have divided the rival shops as neatly as two lines of pawns.

The dispute began with an exiled Russian grandmaster, Nicholas Rossolimo, a cabdriver who ran a small chess shop on Sullivan Street in the 1950's. He hired Mr. Frohlinde to run it for him in 1963,and eventually left to live in Paris.

The two eventually had a falling out and Mr. Frohlinde opened the Chess Shop in 1972. Mr. Rossolimo, an aristocratic exile from communist Russia, came back to try to save his shop but fell down a flight of stairs in 1975 and died; his shop perished not long after he did.

Those who are set against Mr. Frohlinde seize on the story of how he began his life in America by betraying Mr. Rossolimo. The Russian grandmaster has assumed the role of the martyr in the narrative spun out by those who seek to demonize Mr. Frohlinde.

Mr. Frohlinde, however, said it was he who was betrayed . . . and once he opened his own shop, he said he never spoke to his former employer again.

Enter Mr. Khachan, a graduate student at New York University who was also fleeing war, in this case from Lebanon. He soon became the manager of the Chess Shop. He dropped out of graduate school because he was promised a partnership which, he says, was never delivered . . . Mr. Khachan walked out in 1995 and opened the Chess Forum.

Some of the patrons walked out with him. The newest game began. When asked what happens when he bumps into his former manager on the street, Mr. Frohlinde answered, "You don't see people you don't like."

He paused, seated under a fly strip with numerous dead bugs stuck to it and a bare neon light, and grimaced at the thought of his rival across the street.

"I have not seen him since," he said.

Those who defected to the Chess Forum began to refer to Mr. Frohlinde as "the Nazi." Those in the Chess Shop began to call Mr. Khachan, a Muslim, "Yasir Arafat" . . .

The vitriol does not at all surprise Mr. Khachan, who said that during the war in Beirut he noticed that the worst savagery was always between those of the same religious or ethnic group.

"Former partners always tend to be worse than others when they go to war," he said. "People are meaner to their own people. Maybe this is human nature. You become more self-righteous with your own family. You feel the violence is more justified. You are the big brother who will whip everyone into shape, even if you have to kill them all."

Ernie Rosenberg said that he and his son were barred from entering the Chess Shop after they defected to the Chess Forum. "I printed up leaflets and told the owners of the Chess Shop I would distribute them on the sidewalk during the Christmas season unless they lifted the ban on my son," he said. "Why did they ban my son? Because he was my son. My son did not really want to go in there . . . I used to go in the shop just to annoy them. They would try and throw me out."

Mr. Khachan threw in that when he worked at the Chess Shop . . . "the place was crawling with cockroaches." "With all the fear and prosecution [sic] in the Chess Shop, it saves you from having to read Kafka," he said . . .

Mr. Khachan stood one evening in front of the plate glass window that displayed his chess sets. He watched a young man in a black fatigue jacket and a black wool hat pulled down to his ears linger at the door. The man carried a folded chess board under his arm.

"He's a spy," Mr. Khachan said in a whisper . . . Mr. Nash scoffed at the charge, calling Mr. Khachan paranoid . . .

"He's been doing this for years. He doesn't let some customers into his shop because he says they are spies, but they are just players who like to play in both shops. It is all very weird."

It *is* all very weird. A foundation, a betrayal, a split, a separation, martyrdom, bad names, traitors, libelous leaflets and pamphlets, banned sons who have inherited the stain of betrayal, claims to the truth, and sheer paranoia. It is all here in a smaller and neater scale. So mine is just another history, an attempt at understanding another specific instance.

In the late summer of 2005, a colleague at Princeton noted that I was busy re-reading Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*; with her usual acumen, she also noted that the reading was incited because "your heart is set on murder." It was. This is not a good mood in which to write history. But as my focus slowly but surely mutated from violence to lying, so did the avenues of approaching my problem. I now understood that it was no accident that Augustine had come to be so concerned with mendacity. His worry was not just the spinoff of a theological tiff with Jerome. It intimately involved himself and his own history. The special qualities of mendacity encompass another species of story telling, one that Professor Frankfurt at Princeton has formally labeled "bullshit," that is at the heart

of my problem.[6] I would have preferred to title the book "All Men are Liars." The biblical verse – much quoted by the Christian protagonists in the course of their murderous conflicts in Augustine's Africa – would have raised dangerous questions about historians and the making of fictions. As Verkhovensky once remarked to his sly little friend, "She lied to me so very well – it was almost as good as the truth." My memory of *The Demons* is so thin that I have perhaps mistaken the gender. But the words speak just as well to the history of anything.

[6] See Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* – an analysis to which I shall have occasion to return.

CHAPTER I

This terrible custom

Under the burning midsummer sun of the year 418, Augustine, the Catholic bishop of Hippo Regius, already in his mid-sixties and increasingly burdened with the ailments of old age, undertook a journey of unusual length and direction. The long trek took him well outside the heartlands of Africa with which he was familiar. He travelled the roads to Caesarea, the capital of the imperial province of Mauretania Caesariensis, well over 350 miles to the west.[1] Given the deliberate pace of an average day's travel on mule or horseback, the journey would have taken him and his companions about two weeks to complete. What is more, Augustine suffered badly from hemorrhoids and anal fistulae, afflictions that would have made the ride all the more painful.[2] Quite apart from the arduous nature of the trek, the people who lived in Augustine's part of Africa thought of Caesariensis, the far western province of Rome's African empire, as a barbaric and dangerous frontier land.[3] To them, its hinterland did not really belong to the civilized regions of the east. The people of Mauretania knew that they were

[1] Augustine himself regarded the place as remote and far off the beaten paths of the Africa that he knew: see Aug. *Ep*. 190.1 (CSEL 57: 137–38); dating to later in 418, this must reflect his opinion after his visit to Caesarea. For his journeys, see Perler, *Voyages de saint Augustin*, pp. 17, 25–26, 41. In fact, Augustine hardly traveled at all outside the core area of "Africa" well known to him. He had a brief three-year stint in Italy in 384–87. Following his return to Africa in 387, and his ordination as priest and then bishop, Augustine's travels were almost all by land and made in connection with business that directly occupied him in the strategic area west of Carthage, north of Numidia, and east of Mauretania.

[2] For Augustine's sicknesses in old age, see Legewie (1931), 10–14; Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, 193–94; for the hemorrhoidal problems, see Aug. *Ep*. 38.1 (CCL 31: 156): "corpore autem ego in lectum sum, nec ambulare enim nec stare nec sedere possum rhagadis vel exochadis dolore et tumore." *Rhagades* were internal fistulae or haemorrhoids; *exochades* were external piles. His personal difficulties with these afflictions probably provoked his interest in recording the miraculous healing of the anal fistulae of one Innocentius, a former advocate in the office of the Vicar of Africa at Carthage – an event that he himself witnessed: Aug. *Civ. Dei*, 22.8 (CCL 48: 816).

[3] Perler (1958), p. 25, presumes that the journey was made by land, citing Aug. *Ep*. 122.1 (CSEL 34.2: 742) and *Ep*. 193.1 (CSEL 57: 167) in support. But the earlier letter, dating to 410, only speaks of long journeys made by sea *and* land from which Augustine had been exempted at that time for reasons of ill health. The latter letter does not give any indication of the mode of travel to Caesarea. Nor is it clear why the journey would have had have been made all the way directly from Carthage, as Perler

different; some of them did not even wish to be called "Africans."[4] As he made his way through Mauretania Sitifensis, the province just to the east of Caesariensis, Augustine already felt that he was on the frontier next to "the land of the barbarians."[5] The forbidding mountains of Caesariensis, immediately to the west, harboured "innumerable barbarian peoples" to whom the Christian message had not yet been preached. Anyone could see as much by observing its "barbaric" inhabitants who were hunted down, men and women who were transported to the cities of the coast to feed the imperial slave trade.[6]

The reasons why Augustine made this arduous journey have been much debated, but the mission was sufficiently urgent to require the presence of the most prestigious bishop of the Catholic Church in Africa, and it was undertaken at the request of Zosimus, the bishop of Rome.[7] Augustine took with him two of his most-trusted fellow-bishops, Alypius of Thagaste and Possidius of Calama. All three were acting as legates sent on a mission by the Church of Rome. But they also had an agenda of their own. As one of the most talented, energetic, and committed leaders of the Catholic Church in Africa, Augustine decided to take advantage of his presence in Caesarea – which he reached by mid-September – to confront Emeritus, bishop of the dissident or "Donatist" Christian community in the city, and to do this in the basilica that had once been Emeritus' own church. Only a few years earlier, the basilica had been seized by the Catholics under the authority of decrees issued by the emperor that had ordered dissident bishops, like Emeritus, to hand over their places of worship to the

presumes. If Augustine took the usual inland routes and all the way from Carthage, the journey would have been 720–40 Roman miles (about 1,000 km); if made from Hippo, however, as seems more likely, the journey would have been about 530 Roman miles (about 785 km). If Augustine did brave the sea voyage, it would have been much shorter and conceivably quicker (*Itin. Anton.* 15.2–20.3 = O. Cuntz, ed. *Itineraria Romana* (Leipzig, 1929), pp. 2–3), only 378 Roman miles or about 560 kilometres. It would have been the *only* sea voyage other than the two that he made in the 380s, to Italy and back.

[4] Aug. *Ep.* 93.8.24 (CCL 31A: 185): "Mauretania tamen Caesariensis, occidentali quam meridianae parti vicinior, quando nec Africam se vult dici"; cf. Lepelley, *Cités d'Afrique romaine*, I, p. 50 and 50 n. 95.

[5] Concil. Carth. 28 Aug. 397, canon 4 = *Reg. Eccl. Afr. Excerpt.* canon 52 (CCL 149: 189): "Tunc de provincia Mauritania, propterea quod in finibus Africae posita sit . . . siquidem vicinae barbarico," where it is also compared to the land of the Arguzes in Tripolitania; the people of the ecclesiastical province often redeemed prisoners taken by "barbarian" raiders: Concil. Carth. 13 Sept. 401, canon 7 = *Reg. Eccl. Afr. Excerpt.* canon 72 (CCL 149: 202): "Hinc etiam legati Maurorum, fratres nostri, consuluerunt, quia multos tales a barbaris redimunt."

[6] Aug. *Ep.* 199.12.46 (CSEL 57: 284): "Sunt enim apud nos, hoc est in Africa barbarae innumerabiles gentes, in quibus nondum esse praedicatum evangelium ex his, qui ducuntur inde captivi et Romanorum servitiis iam miscentur, cotidie nobis addiscere in promptu est."

[7] See Bonner (1964) with Lancel (1984a and 1984b) and his "Le long voyage vers Caesarea (Cherchell), en l'été de 418," in *Saint Augustin*, pp. 489–92, for some of the debates.

state-approved Catholic Church. State coercion had transformed Emeritus' basilica into a Catholic place of worship. To drive home who was now in power, Augustine delivered a long sermon to the local congregation on the evils of his sectarian enemies in the very basilica that had once belonged to them. He expatiated on the good of the unity imposed on all Christians by imperial laws that had made "the Donatists" an illegal heretical sect and had forced them to return to the Catholic fold.

In what might be considered a calculated insult, Augustine invited Emeritus to come back to his former church to engage in a face-to-face public debate over the main points of contention between "the Donatists" and "the Catholics." The expected verbal fireworks turned into a strange and abortive confrontation between the two old enemies. Emeritus did turn up for the occasion. To enter as a legal outcast into what had once been his own church must have evoked feelings of bitterness and resentment. In the end, he did no more than utter one word – *fac* – "do what you want" – and then kept his silence for the remainder of the meeting.[8] The deliberate stonewalling left Augustine, suddenly, out on a limb. With the expected show aborted, he had to improvise a make-shift debate on the spot, a challenge that he met with his usual verve and skill: "I say this . . . " – "In reply, you would have said this . . . " – and so he went on for an hour or more.[9] One wonders. Was it in the same voice? Or did Augustine shift force and timbre to imitate his old enemy's tone? For the entertainment and the edification of the crowd, he acted out a lengthy virtual dialogue with his detested enemy.

It is not these sectarian hatreds, however, or any matters of the church that concern us about what happened in Caesarea in that year. What will claim our attention has no special connection with the Christian inhabitants of the city or their quarrels. It is, rather, a strange and violent episode that was revealed by Augustine, incidentally, in a work that was not even concerned with the city. In the year 426, eight years after his mission to Caesarea, while writing the closing chapters of his treatise on

[8] Aug. *Gesta cum Emerit*. 3 (CSEL 53: 184), the words come at the end of the five lines of dialogue that Emeritus did deign to exchange with Augustine; they were cued by a knowledge of the martyrs' responses to their persecutors, such as Polycarp, *Mart. Poly*. 11 (SC 10: 258): φέρε ὃ βούλει. In this case, however, it is more probable that Emeritus was intentionally echoing the final words of the great African bishop martyr Cyprian to the governor Galerius Maximus: *Acta Proconsularia*, 3.4: 'Fac quod tibi praeceptum est . . . ' (A. A. R. Bastiaensen, ed., *Atti e passioni dei martiri*, Milan, Mondadori, 1987, p. 224).

[9] Augustine was able to do this, in part, because he was so well practiced in these "virtual debates" from days as early as his confrontations with the Manichees in Africa: see, for example, his *Contra Faust*. praef. (CSEL 25.1: 251): "Commodum autem arbitror sub eius nomine verba eius ponere et sub meo responsionem meam" – followed by no less than twenty-three books of dialogic refutation.

Christian education, the *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine recounted an unusual event. It was so unusual that he remembered it many years later when completing his work on Christian rhetoric. However odd it might have been, the shocking behavior was something that happened regularly and ordinarily in the Roman city of Caesarea.

A LATE ROMAN CITY

First, a little background. Caesarea's history went back to its foundation as a colony by the Phoenicians in the sixth century BCE. Then it was known by its Punic name of Iol, meaning "the island" immediately offshore where the Phoenicians first landed. From its origins, Caesarea had always been connected with the metropolis of Carthage far to the east. The African king Juba II, put in place as ruler over the region of Mauretania in 25 BCE by the emperor Augustus, renamed Iol "Caesarea" in honor of his imperial patron. Furnished with Hellenistic-style architectural embellishments that marked it as a magnificent Roman-style *urbs*, it became an instant if somewhat artificial city – a symbol of the Roman imperial presence along the coastline of Mauretania. With the end of the African kingdom in 40 CE and the annexation of the region as a province of the empire by the emperor Claudius, this part of the former kingdom of Mauretania was named *Caesariensis*. The city of Caesarea became the capital city of the new province.[10]

Caesarea long retained its character as a government town. It has aptly been called a *ville vitrine*, an urban showcase of Roman power in this part of Africa. A core of bureaucrats, soldiers, imperial slaves, and the other agents of the provincial administration, including the governor and his entourage, anchored the most visible elements of its population.[11] The Italian soldiers, administrators, artisans, traders, and others, who came as emigrants to populate Caesarea would have found themselves in a familiar landscape. It has been remarked, rather poetically, that the countryside has a beauty and charm that is "entirely Campanian."[12] First as a royal center of local

[10] Coltelloni-Trannoy, *Royaume de Maurétanie*; Gsell, (1948) and *Cherchel*; Lepelley, "Caesarea," in *Cités de l'Afrique romaine*, 2, pp. 513–20, 547–48.

[11] Leveau, *Caesarea de Maurétanie*, chs. 1–6 on the development of the city and its history to Late Antiquity. On its type as an urban settlement, see p. 79: "Caesarea m'apparaît comme une ville résidentielle, capitale d'une province et lieu de résidence d'une aristocratie urbaine vivant de l'exploitation de la terre, et non comme un grand centre commercial ou industriel attirant des populations pauvres acceptant de vivre dans un habitat à forte densité" (an interpretation which I take to be essentially correct).

[12] Gsell, "Cherchel," in *Promenades archéologiques*, pp. 7–83, at p. 7: "Le paysage, dit M. Louis Bertrand, est 'd'une noblesse et d'une grâce toutes campaniennes'."

kings and then as a capital of a Roman province, African monarchs and then Roman emperors furnished the city with a full range of palatial and monumental edifices of power. Their benefactions encouraged imitation by the local wealthy who generously constructed facilities for the staging of spectacles: an impressive theater in the center of the city, an amphitheater for gladiatorial contests on a height to the east, and a circus for chariot racing to the west.[13] Its citizens enjoyed the amenities offered by three massive bath complexes. Like the rest of the city, the baths were supplied with water by means of an elaborate system of monumental aqueducts that transported water from a source some twenty miles away to the south.[14]

In the year that Augustine came to the city, in 418, Caesarea was as thriving a city as it had ever been in the halcyon days of the high empire. Its hinterland was densely exploited by agricultural establishments of every size and type. In the late fourth and early fifth centuries, its farms and villas were flourishing on an unprecedented scale. An impressive three-mile-long perimeter wall framed a great quadrant around its core, a large well-defended living space.[15] Within the walls, an urban populace, numbering perhaps 20,000 souls, formed a vibrant face-to-face community.[16] The sense of closeness was tightened by the cocoon-like environment of the city. If one thing was true of Caesarea and of the other Roman cities that dotted the Mediterranean shore of Mauretania, it was their relative isolation from each other and from the lands immediately inland. Like them, Caesarea was ensconced in a small niche of coastal territory, encircled on all sides by high hills and rugged, jumbled mountains. As island-like settlements along the coast, each of these towns was simultaneously a Mediterranean port-of-call and a settlement anchored precariously against a mountainous hinterland.

[13] Leveau, *Caesarea de Maurétanie*, pp. 33–36 (theater), 36–39 (amphitheater), and 39–40 (circus).

[14] On the baths, see Leveau, *Caesarea de Maurétanie*, pp. 51–57; on aqueducts, ibid., pp. 57–63; cf. P. Leveau and J. Paillet, *L'alimentation en eau de Caesarea de Maurétanie et l'aqueduc de Cherchel*, Paris, Editions l'Harmattan, 1976; and P. Leveau and J. Paillet, "Alimentation en eau de Caesarea de Maurétanie et l'aqueduc de Cherchell," in J. P. Boucher ed., *Journées sur les Aqueducs*, Paris, 1977, pp. 231–34, on the aqueduct and water supply.

[15] Leveau, *Caesarea de Maurétanie*, pp. 26–28, recapitulating the basic work by P.-M. Duval, *Cherchel et Tipasa. Recherches sur deux villes fortes de l'Afrique romaine*, Paris, 1946.

[16] Gsell, "Cherchel," guessed, certainly much too high, at 100,000; Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 108, placed his estimate at 37,000 based on an area coefficient of 140–150 persons per hectare, which Lezine argued, correctly I think, to be much too high since it did not take into the consideration the 20–30% of city space that was open and not inhabited in the city. See Leveau, *Caesarea de Maurétanie*, p. 79. The modern town of Sharshall, which occupied about a fourth of the site of the original Roman city, numbered about 2,500 inhabitants in 1830, about 5,300 in 1921 (Gsell, *Promenades archéologiques*, p. 26); and about 5800 inhabitants in 1951 (Gsell, *Cherchel*, p. 36). It is therefore to be doubted that the *intra muros* population of the Roman city greatly exceeded a figure on the order of 20,000 or so.

African outsiders who came to live at Caesarea whose origins are known without exception came from the other harbor towns that were strung out, archipelago-like, along the northern coast: Tingi, Gunugu, Icosium, Saldae, Tipasa, Rusguniae, Hippo Regius, and Carthage.[17]

The proximity of Caesarea's inhabitants by kinship, neighborhood, and occupation is something to remember. This sense of closeness must have been typical of many other African cities. Almost all of these towns, apart from the great metropolis of Carthage, were of rather modest to middling size. The cities were urban, but with a peculiar compactness that highlighted their urban skyscapes against the agrarian worlds pressing in immediately around them. Starkly distinguished from the countryside round about, the towns deep in the agrarian hinterland were intense islands of urbanity in vast oceans of rural space. To come upon them from the outside was to be introduced suddenly and abruptly to a world of walls, gates, paved streets, imposing fora, fountains, libraries, and monumental buildings. So it was at Caesarea. But with the recurrent advent of a new governor and his staff every few years, the rotation of military personnel, and the shipping of produce and tribute, the arrival and departure of vessels bearing travelers and traders, the city was more continuously connected with other big urban centers of the Mediterranean, including the imperial metropolis of Rome, than were most of the inland towns of Africa.

Seaborne connections enabled the inhabitants of the small coastal cities to move onto the larger imperial stage. Most spectacularly in the case of Caesarea, one of its native sons, Marcus Opellius Macrinus, became emperor of Rome in 217. His rise to power illustrates the close, if strange and unexpected, interpellation of high and low in the city. An African or *Maurus* who was born in Caesarea, Macrinus was the offspring of "most unillustrious parents." In appearance he had followed the customs of the Mauri by piercing one of his earlobes to take prominent earrings."[18] It was an African custom, one connected with magic and occult power.[19] But outsiders, like the Roman historian who reports this fact, no doubt tended to exaggerate the perceived "Africanness" of the locals. However much it was an isolated insular world on the African coast, Caesarea was well enough connected with the outside to provide ways by which men of refinement and connection might rise. The presence of all of the apparatus of imperial administration – most importantly, the governor's courts – meant that the city was also a center of rhetoric and education. The dissident Christian

[17] Leveau, *Caesarea de Maurétanie*, p. 96. [18] Dio 79.11.1–2.

[19] And therefore condemned by some Christians, including Augustine: see *De Doct. Christ.* 2.20.30 (CCL 32: 554) and *Ep.* 245.2 (PL 33: 1060–61).

bishop of Caesarea, Emeritus, a man of considerable talent with whom Augustine dueled throughout his life, was one of these professional men of law and speech. The rhetors were skilled politicians and leaders in a general sense, and the teachers who trained them were among the best. The last of the renowned Latin grammarians, the great Priscian, who flourished as the leading teacher of Latin letters and grammar at the eastern imperial capital of Constantinople in the first decades of the sixth century, was a native of Caesarea. And like Emeritus, he was also a Christian.[20]

In the age of Augustine, Caesarea played the role, as it had in the past, of a major staging port when the imperial government brought in expeditionary forces from abroad to repress outbreaks of violence of a kind that were deemed sufficiently large-scale and threatening to the empire to be recognized as wars. One of these incidents is retold in some detail by the historian Ammianus Marcellinus. It was an armed insurrection in the early 370s led by an African rebel named Firmus. The outbreaks of violence of the Firmus war included assaults on the isolated coastal cities of Mauretania in 372, attacks in which some of them, like Icosium (modern Algiers) and Caesarea, were pillaged and burnt. Tipasa, only seventeen miles to the east of Caesarea, managed successfully to repel the armed marauders.[21] Ammianus describes the consequences for Caesarea:[22]

> Then he [sc. the general Theodosius] turned to go to Caesarea, once a wealthy and noble city . . . and having entered it, he found the city almost entirely burned from widespread fires, with even the paving stones turned white from the scorching heat. He commanded the first and second legions to be quartered there for a time, with orders to clear away the heaps of ashes and to stay on guard, so that the city would not be devastated by a renewed attack made by the barbarians.

To exalt the image of the Roman commander Theodosius and to disparage "the barbarians," Ammianus might well have exaggerated the effects of the assault on the city. Even so, some seven or eight years later the local dignitaries of Caesarea were still expending their wealth to recover from the damage. But recover they did. By the early decades of the fifth century, the ornate houses of the wealthy were once again resplendent, dominating the heights just inside the city walls to the south, overlooking its

[20] Because of his consistent identification of himself with speakers of Latin, Niebuhr held that he probably came from Caesarea in Mauretania: R. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1988, no. 126, pp. 346–48; arguments have been made that his home city was Caesarea Maritima in the East – see Geiger (1999). I am not persuaded.

[21] On Tipasa and Iconium, see Amm. Marc. 29.5.16–17; Orosius 7.33.5 on the fate of Caesarea.

[22] Amm. Marc. 29.5.18; cf. 29.5.42, where he adds: "Qui [sc. Theodosius] Caesaream mitti dispositus, ubi saeva iniusserat monumenta facinorum pessimorum, dilatato vulneris hiatu discessit."

monumental center. Decorated with brilliant frescoes and mosaics, and statuary that replicated the prevailing modes of high-style Mediterranean fashion, the homes of the elite exuded a new confidence. The people of the late antique city of Caesarea, nested in their protective urban environment, were exemplary Romans. A wealthy curial class controlled the city's public affairs. A varied artisanal class provided for the material demands of everyday living. And there was the ever-present urban proletariat, large numbers of the not-so-well off whose names are not seen even in the simplest of funeral epitaphs that marked the gravestones in the city's cemeteries.

There was also a Jewish community of some importance. It boasted a chief rabbi, a synagogue, and an *archisynagogus*. And a separate Christian community had grown, developing its own sense of identity. A Christian basilica was located in the center of the town on the edge of the forum, probably the main church of the city.[23] In the generations after Constantine, this new community of believers had flourished. A local Christian, a self-styled Worshiper of the Word, a *cultor verbi*, had bestowed on the church a large piece of property just to the west of the city to serve as the burial ground for his fellow believers. In the late fourth century, the area had been repaired by Severianus, a Christian of senatorial rank. His act of benevolence was later remembered in a verse inscription restored by Asterius, acting in concert with his Christian "brothers."[24]

This same Christian community had an important role in the restoration of the city following the damage caused by the Firmus revolt. Clemens, the bishop, is mentioned in a letter written by the grandiose Roman senator Symmachus to his brother Celsinus Titianus in 380–81. In the letter, Symmachus solicited whatever interventions Titianus might be able to make in his capacity as Vicar of Africa to assist the hard-pressed magistrates of Caesarea.[25] They were being held responsible for replacing the monies robbed from the provincial treasury in the city during the violent raid staged by Firmus' partisans. Symmachus was able to help them because he was a powerful man in the imperial elite and he was someone with whom the men of the city had connections: he possessed estates in the province of which Caesarea was capital. The Firmus raid is worthy of consideration because it was one of the rare instances of hard war, of big violence, that marked the history of Africa in the fourth century. The ways in which it

[23] Potter, *Iol Caesarea*, p. 33, fig. 14, 42–44 and fig. 43; Potter (1996); and Potter and Benseddik (1993).
[24] CIL 8.9585 = ILCV, 1583 (Caesarea); see Duval, *Loca sanctorum*, 1, no. 179; "Severianus (2)," PAC, p. 1068; Gsell, *Promenades archéologiques*, p. 19.
[25] Symm. *Ep*. 1.64 (MGH AA 6.1: 29); see "Clemens (1)," PAC, pp. 212–13; for Titianus, see "Titianus (1)," PAC, p. 1115 and "Celsinus Titianus (5)," PLRE, 1, pp. 917–18.

affected the city of Caesarea suggest the significance that the violence of war had for African affairs of the time. But first, we must turn to the unusual event that happened in the city and to Augustine's connection with it.

THE GANGS OF CAESAREA

It was neither violence between the bitterly divided Christians inside Caesarea during these years – although such divisions marked by deep hatreds certainly existed – nor the damage caused in the war with Firmus that Augustine remembered from his visit to the city in 418. It was something different from full-blown war on the one hand and from sectarian violence on the other. The Caesarea that recovered and rebuilt after the Firmus war was a confident and burgeoning late Roman city. Embedded in the normality and order of its renewed urban life, however, were things that were not so ordinary. These events bring us back to Augustine, the *De Doctrina Christiana*, and to his memories of Caesarea.

In the year 426, in composing the final book of his treatise on Christian education and communication, Augustine described the different styles of speaking to an audience in ways designed to influence its behavior: the temperate, the subdued, and the grand styles of formal speaking. In writing these words, he recalled the visit that he had made to Caesarea some eight years earlier.[26] What provoked his memory was the reason that had driven him to deliver a speech in the grand style to the people of the city.[27]

> By its very weight, the grand style of speaking often crushes opposing voices, but it also elicits responses of tears. This was the case when I was persuading the people of Caesarea in Mauretania to desist from their civil battles, or rather something much worse than a civil conflict – something which they called "the *caterva*." At the same time every year, not just the citizens as such, but rather close relatives, brothers, and even parents and children ceremonially divided themselves into two parts and for several successive days they fought each other with stones, each one of them attempting to kill whomever they could.

[26] The reasons that prompted Augustine's visit to Caesarea in 418 are a matter of debate; suffice it to say that they had nothing to do with the *caterva*. See Lancel (1984a and 1984b) for a comprehensive discussion of the evidence. He estimates, rightly I think, that the affair had something to do with the need to confirm the position of a "primate" for the new ecclesiastical province of Caesariensis.

[27] Aug. *De Doct. Christ.* 4.24.53 (CCL 32: 159): "Grande autem genus plerumque pondere suo voces premit, sed lacrimas exprimit. Denique cum apud Caesaream Mauritaniae populo dissuaderem pugnam civilem vel potius plus quam civilem, quam *catervam* vocabant – neque enim cives tantummodo, verum etiam propinqui, fratres, postremo parentes ac filii lapidibus inter se in duas partes divisi, per aliquot dies continuos, certo tempore anni solemniter dimicabant et quisque, ut quemque poterat, occidebat."

In this unexpected way, Augustine unveils for us a violent, indeed lethal custom that annually divided the inhabitants of this coastal city, the capital city of a Roman province, into two warring factions who viciously set at each other purposefully to inflict physical harm. He continues:[28]

I pleaded with them, in the grand style, as far as I was able, to convince them to drive from their hearts and from their behavior such a cruel and chronic evil. It was not as much when I heard them shouting and chanting their approval that I thought that I had achieved anything as when I saw them weeping. Their shouts of approval indicated that they had been taught and that they had understood, but their tears showed that they had actually been changed. When I saw those tears, I believed that this terrible custom handed down by their fathers and grandfathers, and by even more remote ancestors, which had besieged their hearts like an enemy, or rather had occupied their hearts, had been overcome even before the victory had been proclaimed. As soon as my speech was finished, I directed their hearts and lips to give thanks to God. By the grace of Christ, nothing similar has been attempted there for eight years or more by now.

The strange violence that divided the community internally against itself was so thoroughly entrenched that only the grace of the supreme deity could eradicate it. The custom was so deeply ingrained because it defined the people who participated in it. Every year they willfully engaged in a murderous ceremony that demonstrated to themselves, even to the point of death, who they were. Its primal causes were almost irrelevant. More significant was the long-lived history and tradition. Handed down from distant ancestors, and more immediately from fathers and grandfathers, this violent custom – a *consuetudo* as they called it – was re-enacted ceremoniously year after year because, quite simply, it was what the people of Caesarea had always done. It was irrelevant that it involved real violence, injury and suffering, and even the occasional death; or that it pitted brother against brother. Splitting the community into two contending parts, the violent celebration took place every year under the eyes of the Roman governor and the units of guards and the army that were stationed in the city. They did nothing to to prevent it. They, too, must have accepted that this was something that everyone did because it had always been done.

[28] Aug. *De Doct. Christ.* 4.24.53 (CCL 32: 159–60): "egi quidem granditer, quantum valui, ut tam crudele atque inveteratum malum de cordibus et moribus eorum avellerem pelleremque dicendo, non tamen egisse aliquid me putavi, cum eos audirem acclamantes, sed cum flentes viderem. Acclamationibus quippe se doceri et delectari, flecti autem lacrimis indicabant. Quas ubi aspexi, immanem illam consuetudinem a patribus et avis longeque a maioribus traditam, quae pectora eorum hostiliter obsidebat, vel potius possidebat, victam, antequam re ipsa id ostenderent, credidi. Moxque sermone finito ad agendas deo gratias corda atque ora converti. Et ecce, iam ferme octo vel amplius anni sunt, propitio Christo, ex quo illic nihil tale temptatum est."

The *caterva*, as it was called, is a difficult thing to explain.[29] Examples from other cities in Africa are hard to find, and the fact that Augustine designates the practice by a local term – "*they* call it the *caterva*" – almost guarantees that even he found it a strange and unusual custom. But the word by which the local inhabitants designated this form of civic violence was appropriate, since it usually designated violently opposed groups of men, sometimes chaotic and violent, sometimes "barbaric" in nature, and sometimes informally organized and undisciplined.[30] As we shall see, it was conventionally used to describe the armed and violent bands of circumcellions who were some of the main propagators of sectarian violence in Augustine's Africa.[31] But any loose collection of things, from a farrago of words to a herd of wild animals, could be designated a *caterva*, but it could also be used to designate a group of men as organized, violent, and dangerous as a band of trained gladiators.[32] All of these uses are reflected in Augustine's prose, and *caterva* continued to have a negative connotation associated with violence in late Latin long after his time.[33] But it had an early history too. In Roman Pompeii of the mid-first century CE, the people celebrated the benefactions of Aulus Clodius Flaccus, one of the mayors or *duumviri* of the city. As part of the Apollonian Games that he staged in gratitude for being elected, Flaccus presented a parade, bulls, bullfighters, three pairs of *pontiarii*, and gangs of fist-fighters or *pugiles catervarii* – all followed by plays and pantomimic performances, one of them featuring the famous dancer Pylades. To celebrate his second duumvirate in which he was *quinquennalis* or town censor, Flaccus provided much the same range of entertainments displayed in the town forum which, in additional to gladiatorial contests, again included gangs of fist-fighters or *catervarii*.[34]

[29] For some recent attempts, see Rohozinski (2002) and Cecconi (2007), whose proffered explanations seem far-fetched, even if they do offer some interesting "anthropological parallels."

[30] Equivalent, therefore, to *manus* and *turba*, both of which were frequently used to designate informal collections of persons gathered in episodes of civil violence: Cic. *Verr.* 2.5.43.184; *Mur.* 33.69; Sall. *Bell. Cat.* 14.1; of animals (but usually a poetic usage): Lucr. *De rer. nat.* 6.1092; Verg. *Aen.* 11.456.

[31] See ch. 14, p. 657. [32] Suet. *Calig.* 18.

[33] Aug. *Ep.* 10.5.1* (CSEL 88: 49): Africa is losing its indigenous inhabitants to slavers not in "herds" (*gregatim*) or by groups (*catervatim*), but in a continuous stream; *Confes.* 6.3.3 (CCL 27: 75): importunate clutches of busybodies (*catervae negotiorum hominum*) pester Ambrose. More colorfully, the term is used of disorganized groups of ideas and images that "crowd" our minds: *Confess.* 10.8.12, 10.35.57 (CCL 27: 161 and 186); *De quant. anim.* 33.71 (CSEL 89: 219); or of batches of sins and evil desires: *En. In Psalm.* 57.19 (CCL 39: 725), 129.2 (CCL 40: 1891), 140.18 (CCL 40: 2039): all with generally negative connotations, as of bands of "nay-sayers" and sinners: *Sermo*, 216 (PL 38: 1082), 313 (PL 38: 1424), 363 (PL 39: 1635); for its continued negative associations with bad and violent behavior see Halsall, *Violence and Society*, pp. 8–9 and 9 n. 8.

[34] CIL 10.1074d = ILS 5053; for more comment, see J. L. Franklin, *Pompeis Difficile Est: Studies in the Political Life of Imperial Pompeii*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2001, pp. 23–25 (no. 9). To celebrate his third duumvirate, Aulus records "games of the first faction": *ludos prima factione*.

Two such men of violence, each of whom called himself a *catervarius* or gangster, are actually recorded. Perhaps equally significant is the fact that they both come from Africa, from the city of Cirta.[35] What were these *catervarii* or gang men – for that is what the word literally means – doing? The primal elements of fist-fights and the importance of neighborhoods takes us back to a passion of the first emperor, Augustus. In noting the emperor's attraction to the world of games and contests, his biographer reports:

> He was an avid and very knowledgeable spectator of boxers, and especially of the Latins, and not only of the professional and trained ones whom he was accustomed to pit against Greeks, but also of local town toughs, *catervarii oppidani*, who, at the drop of a hat, engaged in fist-fights in the narrow alleyways in the city's neighborhoods, but who were lacking in skill.[36]

By this chance notice, we happen to learn that there existed in the *vici* or neighborhoods of the city of Rome gangs of roughs, members of fight clubs who were accustomed to participation in neighborhood battles. They were the informal side of a sport that had an element of ethnic labeling to it, in which the locals, that is to say "the Latins," could be pitted against outsiders, called "the Greeks."

Ritualistic or entertainment-based fist-fighting in cities like Rome and Cirta, and their neighborhoods, could have been influenced in some fashion by the circus and theatrical violence known from other urban environments in the empire.[37] In condemning an immensely popular festival, the great "Day of the Torches," that took place in his own city of Hippo Regius on 24 June of every year, Augustine noted that the uproar could get out of hand. What else could one expect when many demons and much devilry was abroad? "Now the demons take pleasure," he says,

> don't they, in these pop songs, they take pleasure in vapid spectacles, in the manifold indecencies of the theaters, in the mad frenzies of the chariot races, in the cruelties of the amphitheater, in the unrelenting rivalries of those who take up quarrels and disputes to the point of open hostilities – all this on behalf of some comedian, actor, jester, charioteer, or wild-beast hunter.[38]

[35] CIL 8, 7413 = ILS 5176 (Cirta): d. m. / T. Iotelus / citirva/rius [sic], v. / a. LXXXI / h. s. e. / o. t. b. q. f.; and CIL 8, 7414 = ILS 5176A (Cirta): Cirius ca/thruarius / v. a. XXII. But one should perhaps not make too much of any negative element in the word, since a *Comes sacrarum largitionum* could bear the name Catervius (CTh 6.30.3).

[36] Suet. *Aug.* 45.2: "Spectavit autem studiosissime pugiles et maxime Latinos, non legitimos atque ordinarios modo, quos etiam committere cum Graecis solebat, sed et catervarios oppidanos inter angustias vicorum pugnantis temere ac sine arte."

[37] Cameron, *Circus Factions*, esp. ch. 10, "Riots and Politics," pp. 271–96.

[38] Aug. *Sermo* 198.3 (PL 38: 1026).

These theatrical venues of factional fan-driven rivalries and violence, all of them involving young men, also existed in Caesarea. But it is almost certain that the *caterva* was different from entertainment violence and rioting. Its purpose was simply the violence itself, not the support of some actor or gladiator, or a battle over a contested referee's call. And it involved everyone, the old and the young, women and men. It was a form of communal violence.

The city of Rome and, for that matter, Caesarea were not alone in exhibiting this behavior. Take the northern Italian city of Patavium, modern Padua, the home town of the historian Livy. He reports that in the year 174 BCE one of the two consuls, M. Aemilius Lepidus, had been assigned as his special task or "province," the repression of an inside war, a *bellum intestinum*, in the city that was caused by the struggle of gangs or *factiones* in the town.[39] We learn about this, surely, because it was a fragment of local knowledge that the historian knew because it came from the annals or the verbal lore of his home town. So the story, a little bit of Padua, was artificially inserted into his history of the city of Rome.[40] Another accident of recounting, like that of Augustine on Caesarea, it discloses to us the inner workings of community life. Was the split a *stasis* cutting vertically across the layers of the more and less well-off in the city, with battles that pitted the poor against the rich? It does not seem to have these characteristics.[41] Or was the community divided horizontally: neighborhoods turning violently against each other? The latter seems more likely. Brothers against brothers – rough contact in which young men clustered according to neighborhood sections, fighting each other. Violent ceremonials of this kind were part of life in the Renaissance city-states of Italy, perhaps best attested in the case of Siena.[42] But not there alone. There is the wonderfully well-documented history of the *pugni* of Venice, battles fought with fists and staves that involved divisions within the city that can be traced to post-Roman times when the town was still a series of settlements on the islands off the

[39] Livy 41.27.3: "Ex iis [sc. consulibus] M. Aemilio senatus negotium dedit ut Patavinorum in Venetia seditionem comprimeret, quos certamine factionum ad intestinum bellum exarsisse et ipsorum legati attulerant."

[40] Marcus Aemilius Lepidus was consul in 175 BCE (MRR, I, p. 401) when he commanded military forces in Liguria; it would be logical that this particular bit of "business" or *negotium* was appended to his duties in his northern Italian *provincia*.

[41] A. Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City, 750–330 B.C.*, London, Croom Helm, 1982, offers a convenient survey. The "classical city" is the Greek polis, and none of the cases of violence studied by Lintott is like the type documented for Caesarea.

[42] L. Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy*, New York, A. Knopf, 1979, pp. 34–41.

mainland.[43] Initially, the mini-combats were mêlées that involved districts or neighborhoods set against each other. As the city grew and unified, however, so did the opposing districts. In the end, they coalesced into two opposing sides and became an annual dyadic struggle.

As for Africa, the people of Caesarea had good reason to appeal to distant ancestors. The dyadic civic battle attested for Caesarea was not an isolated occurrence in Africa. In the earliest external ethnography that we have of Africa, Herodotus, in the fourth book of his *Histories*, reports a ritual that took place at a site inland of the Gulf of Gabès where two ethnic groups, the Machlyes and the Ausees, lived.[44]

> During a festival dedicated to the goddess Athena, their young women divided into two camps and then set to fighting each other with blows from stones and wooden clubs, thereby enacting, as they say, a ceremonial that was instituted by their ancestors in honor of the indigenous deity whom we call Athena. Some of them who die from the wounds are called false virgins.

It has been noted that in modern times in this same region near the Shatt al-Jerid, in the springtime, there have been festive chanting, dancing, and violent confrontations in which the young men of Tozûr and of Nefta divided into two camps and attacked each other, using stones and wooden clubs. The confrontation is violent and the participants risk serious injury. The ritual is an annual one for which those involved plan in detail, assembling in advance stores of the necessary ammunition, mainly staves and stones.[45] Detailed ethnographic reports of this festive moietic battle have occasioned much comment about "religious survivals" in this part of the Maghrib.

The custom of the *caterva* at Caesarea, as well as the violent annual rituals found inland of the Gulf of Gabès from Herodotus to our own day, points to another deep structure that is important to sustaining ongoing violence: the power of tradition. In the division that split the community of Caesarea into two sides, pitted against each other, most of the participants defended their actions on the basis of the past: the practice had been handed down to them by their fathers and their fathers' fathers. What one's ancestors or *maiores* had done was what you did because it was, by that very fact, justified. In any premodern society this is usually true to

[43] Davis, *War of the Fists*, with the earliest surviving references going back to the ninth century; see pp. 19–20; 32–46 on connections with urban factionalism; and 117–28 on the role of neighborhoods.

[44] Hdt. 4.180; he goes on to offer some interpretation of the behavior and the antecedent ritual in which one of the girls was dressed up in armor and paraded around.

[45] Payre (1942), pp. 171 f., with the oral reports confirmed by Decret and Fantar, *L'Afrique du Nord*, pp. 248–50.

some extent. It was particularly true of the societies of the ancient western Mediterranean. But even among these, it was especially true of ancient north Africa. Everywhere where we can measure degrees of affection, duty, and other sentiments, Africans showed an unusual respect for age and seniority.[46] As at Caesarea, this devotion to old age had nothing to do with Christian influences; rather it had a profound impact on the structure of Christian practices and institutions in their local African form.

How many other urban communities in Africa had factions that engaged in *catervae*? And did these traditional violent rituals, where they existed, spill into the new religious factionalism of the fourth and fifth centuries? We do not know. What can be noted are a few circumstantial details. Few cities of the late empire of any size escaped violent factionalism of some kind. In larger towns it was often associated with the *factiones* or fans of the circus. Carthage was no exception. Augustine's testimony regarding his life as a young man in the city confirms the presence of this violence. He reports how he encountered "The Destroyers," groups of young men called *Eversores* that were prevalent when he came to the city as a young man in 371.[47] Although it is possible that such hell-raising was no more than a violent style engaged in by young men as individuals, it is more likely that they were groups, however passing and informal, tied to neighborhoods, work associations, or entertainment venues. They were engaged in violent gang-like acts. In other words, they too were *catervae*.[48]

How very calmly I behaved, my Lord, you know – I was completely removed from the acts of violence that the Destroyers, the *Eversores*, committed – an insidious and diabolical name which was adopted as a mark of stylish urbanity. I lived with them, but with a sense of shame because I was really like them. When I was with them and when I delighted in their friendships, I was still always horrified by the acts which they committed, by their violent deeds. In these, they would brashly harass some unsuspecting victim, gratuitously affronting his sense of decency, all for their own amusement and as a way to get their kicks. Nothing in their acts was more similar to those of demons. There could be no truer name for them than

[46] See Shaw (1984), pp. 479–81, on seniority, with the studies (1982) and (1991) documenting its social effects.

[47] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 26–27; Augustine was seventeen at the time.

[48] Aug. *Confess*. 3.3.6 (CCL 27: 29): "quamquam longe sedatior, domine, tu scis, et remotus omnino ab eversionibus, quas faciebant eversores – hoc enim nomen scaevum et diabolicum velut insigne urbanitatis est – inter quos vivebam pudore impudenti, quia talis non eram: et cum eis eram et amicitiis eorum delectabar aliquando, a quorum semper factis abhorrebam, hoc est ab eversionibus, quibus proterve insectabantur ignotorum verecundiam, quam proturbarent gratis inludendo atque inde pascendo malivolas laetitias suas. Nihil est illo actu similius actibus daemoniorum. Quid itaque verius quam eversores vocarentur, eversi plane prius ipsi atque perversi deridentibus eos et seducentibus fallacibus occulte spiritibus in eo ipso, quod alios inridere amant et fallere?"

Destroyers, since they were already themselves destroyed and thoroughly perverse in nature. The mockery and deceit which they loved to vent on others were the seductive hidden traps of the One [i.e. the Devil] by which they themselves were mocked and deceived.

This African youth violence is no imaginary thing of Augustine's, exaggerated for personal purpose. In the year immediately preceding the year of this incident in the *Confessions*, the emperors had issued an edict against the violent acts of student gangs in Africa, principally, one assumes, the youth gangs in Carthage.[49] When Augustine speaks from his own experience of "stylish urbanity" he cues another significant element of violence: style. It reminds us of the town of Hypata as imagined by the African writer Apuleius in the 180s, in which young men from the local town elite congregated in gangs to pulverize unsuspecting wayfarers who happened to stray though their part of town or who happened to run into them by accident. Their presence was well known, their activities mostly uncontrolled, and their violence part of a young man's style.[50]

In the imperial capital of Constantinople in the later empire, we have a good description that combines the elements of stylishness and violence among the members of such gangs of young men. Their hair was cut in the radical mullet skater style, the rough ponytail of the biker, the exaggerated ballooning clothes of the forties zoot-suiter or the seventies rapper, all purposefully meant to imitate a stylish civilized-barbarian mode. Here, again, we see Augustine's "stylish urbanity."[51]

First among the factions, they [i.e. the Blues] changed their hair to a completely new style. They had it cut and shaped very differently from all the other Romans. They did not alter the beard or moustache in any way, but took care to grow them as long as possible, like the Persians. But the hair on the head they cut right back to the temples, allowing the long growth to fall down behind to its full length in a mangled mess, like the Massagetai. That is why they call this fashion the "Hun style." Then, for their mode of dress, they all think it right to be wear rich clothing, putting on styles too ostentatious for their proper status – it is just that they were in a position to obtain such clothes at other people's expense. The part of the top covering their arms is drawn in very tight at the wrists, while from there

[49] CTh 14.9.1 (Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian, from Trier, to Olybrius, Praefectus Urbi; 12 March 370): in an attempt to control student violence in Rome, various controls were to be instituted, including the requirement of letters of reference and birth registrations; the students who were so violent that they had to be returned to Africa ("and other provinces" added for good measure, but indicating the main source of the problem) were to be registered by the authorities.

[50] Apul. *Met.* 2.18, cf. 2.31–32. Photis warns Lucius against the violent youths; Apuleius is probably reflecting African town life of his own time; a long-standing "fear" in the larger cities of the empire: see Juv. *Sat.* 3.268–301 on the streets of Rome.

[51] Procop. *Historia arcana*, 7.8–14 (ed. J. Haury).

to the shoulder it is spread out to an enormous width. Whenever they waved their arms as they chanted slogans in the theaters or the circuses, and urging on their favorites in their usual way, up in the air went this part of their clothing . . . Their capes and pants were also in the "Hun style" in both name and fashion.

Such violent youths in the towns and cities of the empire were very much part of Carthage in the later empire. They were still there ten years after Augustine's first encounter with the Destroyers, when, in 382, at age twenty-eight, he offered the continued violence of young men as his main reason for leaving the metropolis of Africa for Rome, where (as he heard) things were more peaceful.[52] Augustine was not thinking of the gangs of *Eversores*, as much as he was of the violent behavior of young students: "Their recklessness is unbelievable. They often commit outrages which ought to be punished by law, were it not for custom that protects them."[53] Like the Mohocks of early eighteenth-century London, the rowdy and violent gangs of the elite had protection to engage in the little acts of violence for their own enjoyment.[54] Custom was also central to this violence – *consuetudo* as Augustine puts it. Important persons had always offered a sort of patronal protection to the students: their violence was a place where custom and style converged. In other sources of the period, the sense of *caterva* is that of a gang, a group of persons gathered for violent purposes. It could be legal, as in a gang of torturers who vented violence on the bodies of others under the approval of the government.[55] More to the point, however, it could be a voluntary assemblage of private persons gathered to exert violent force as, for example, the "hired gangs" employed to provide "muscle" in the enforced repossession of a property from the current possessor – only after, of course, a court had given a judgment that legitimized the use of private force in effecting the dispossession of the current illicit owner.[56] It was the congregated force of young men.

[52] Aug. *Confess*. 5.8.14 (CCL 27: 64): "the greatest and indeed almost my sole reason [sc. for going to Rome] was that I heard that the youth at Rome were quieter in their studies and that, under a more regular compulsion, they were more attentive to their studies" ("sed illa erat causa maxima et paene sola, quod audiebam quietius ibi studere adulescentes et ordinatiore disciplinae cohercitione sedari").

[53] Aug. *Confess*., 5.8.14 (CCL 27: 64): "Multa iniuriosa faciunt mira hebetudine et punienda legibus, nisi consuetudo patrona sit, hoc miseriores eos ostendens . . . et impune se facere arbitrantur."

[54] Statt (1995) who points out, however, how exaggerated the short-lived phenomenon was.

[55] For example, in the *Passio Isaac et Maximiani*, 5.27 (Mastandrea, 1995: 79): the "savage gang of torturers" who punish Maximian after his arrest: "sine ulla dilatione proconsulis iussu vallatus est effera caterva tortorum."

[56] For example, in the *Passio sancti Donati*, 3 (Dolbeau, 1992: 259): speaking about the enforcement of the decree of *c*. 317, and the seizure of basilicas, the preacher speaks of a "superinducta gentilitatis caterva": the use of "a hired gang of pagans," revealing the use of such gangs for purposes of enforcement.

The good people of Caesarea were not the only ones to engage in catervic behavior. In the sectarian violence that rent the Christian communities of Africa in the fourth and fifth centuries, gangs of young men and women called circumcellions gathered in loose bands of violent proclivity. They were also called *catervae* by those who sought to label their behavior as chaos-ridden and subversively violent, including the same Augustine who preached to the people of Caesarea in 418.[57] More important is the ritual-like nature of low-level violence in forging local identities in every city, town, and village. So the people of Caesarea divided into two mortally hostile sides and the two opposing camps maintaining a brutal and vicious combat from one generation to the next, having been taught to do so by their ancestors for some primeval cause that was now dim in memory. Something like this was nothing novel for the inhabitants of Caesarea. Or in the dozens and dozens of other towns and cities like Caesarea. It was deeply bred in them. It was part of them. It defined who they were, and they loved doing it. Could these same sentiments and impulses be mobilized for sectarian violence? Perhaps. But the fact would have to be demonstrated.

After all, Caesarea was an enclosed town in which many if not most of the people who were Christians would also have participated in the annual rite of violence of the *caterva*. Popular behavior already had existing templates and modes of organization. In this light, events in Caesarea in 419, the year immediately following Augustine's visit, are of some importance. This time, the story concerns a bitter dispute within the Catholic Church in Caesarea in which the Christians were creating "a huge scandal." After the death of Deuterius, the "metropolitan" or senior bishop of the province, Honorius, another bishop in Mauretania, wished to be seated as Deuterius' successor in the provincial capital.[58] Some churchmen had written to Augustine to inform him about the resulting troubles in the city.[59] The bishops of the

[57] Aug. *Contra ep. Parm*. 2.3.6 (CSEL 51: 50): "quorum et catervae gregum furiosorum huc atque illuc armatae ferro ac fustibus volitant" of circumcellions; *Contra litt. Petil*. 2.14.33 (CSEL 52: 37): "quas furiosi vestri principes circumcellionum et ipsae catervae vinulentorum atque insanorum . . . "; 2.47.110 (CSEL 52: 84): "certe fatereis istum psalmum non ibi pertinere ad furiosas catervas circumcellionum"; and 2.96.222 (CSEL 52: 140): "Respicite paululum catervas vestras, quae non antiquo more parentum suorum solis fustibus armantur" (of the circumcellions).

[58] See "Deuterius (4)," PAC, p. 275–76; that he was already "metropolitan" bishop of the province is stated in *Gesta cum Emerit*. 1 (CSEL 53: 181); see S. Lancel, "Episcopus metropolitanus," *BA* 46B (Paris, 1987), pp. 527–30. As Lancel cautions, this man is not necessarily the one who held the *prima sedes*, the man who would have been the most senior in the line of succession.

[59] Aug. *Ep*. 22.5* (CSEL 88: 115); Lancel (BA 46B, p. 353 n. 9) thinks that these are local monks or monastics (seeing that in *Ep*. 23* the monk Renatus is one of his informants; were they part of an information network built up by Augustine?).

province had assembled in Caesarea to supervise the election of a bishop whom *they* wished to ordain.[60] They had been frightened by the harassment and the serious injuries inflicted on them by the turbulent crowd that supported Deuterius. A large faction of people in the city wished to have the man whom *they* wanted transferred to the city. Following more threats and violence, they insisted that the bishops send a delegation to the First Seat at Carthage to see if their wish could be allowed. Augustine says that the reply came to him that no "metropolitan" was yet properly seated for Caesariensis. Therefore the local bishops were not to cede to what the "seditious mob" was demanding, namely the seating of Honorius.

The finale of this incident is not known, but what the rough actions of 419 reveal are the discordant overlappings of violence in a late antique town. The Christians who were organizing in "turbulent crowds" in this year probably included many of the same persons who had annually participated in the *caterva* in these same years. The coexistence of different types of civic violence in the cities is therefore a problem that must be faced. How might one kind of violence feed into or affect another? What were the mechanisms?

A POPULAR LYNCHING

However it is construed, the year-in and year-out celebration of violence at Caesarea was not a conflict that mobilized the community against some hated alien presence. It was, rather, a violent ritual in which the community turned inwards on itself. Sudden outbursts of violence that were not so ritualized or regular as the *caterva* were also common, but they were mobilized in a rather different fashion.[61] An outburst of this type occurred at Hippo in the year 412 in conditions that were close to those of a general riot: an incident in which a crowd – or rather a collection of men drafted out of family, workplace, and other connections – was mobilized to hyper-violence, although only for a brief instant and for a specific purpose.[62] It

[60] Aug. *Ep.* 22.5* (CSEL 88: 115): "Interim episcopi cum ad ipsam civitatem necessitatis ipsius gratia convenissent, ut eligeret populus quem sibi cuperent ordinari."

[61] The extent of ritualization in such cases is, of course, debatable: Tilly, *Collective Violence*, pp. 81–98; cf. S. Silverman, "The Palio of Siena: Game, Ritual, or Politics?," in S. Zimmerman and R. Weissman, eds., *Urban Life in the Renaissance* (Newark DE, 1984), pp. 224–34; and Davis, *War of the Fists*, pp. 32–44, for some comparative cases.

[62] For what follows, see Aug. *Sermo* 302 = Guelferbytanus 25 + Mainz 37 (MiAg 1: 527–28; Lambot, *Sermones selecti duodeviginti* = SPM 1 [1950], pp. 100–11) and the edition and commentary by Pieri (1998). The date is that urged by Hombert, *Chronologie Augustinienne*, pp. 495–506. Not much can be added to the analysis of Magalhães de Oliveira (2004).

also happened in the heat of midsummer. Perhaps tempers had flared over an igniting issue. What happened next can only be gleaned with some difficulty from a sermon delivered by Augustine to his parishioners on 10 August, the festival day of the Roman martyr Lawrence, a day not long after the frightening event itself.

An imperial official who had a supervisory function connected with the collection of transit dues had been colluding with other officials and private persons in the systematic extortion of kick-backs, rake-offs, and other such extra payments out of merchants, transshippers and buyers: *concussiones* or "shake-downs" as they were popularly called.[63] Naturally, the businessmen and craftsmen, especially, became increasingly resentful. Matters reached a breaking point. The angry middling ranks of the town mobilized their familial and other dependents, including their slaves, all of them rough young men. According to one's point of view, these men either constituted themselves as "the people" who were enforcing popular justice or they were a crazed lynch mob. The "bad man" was not just killed by popular action. His body was badly mutilated.[64] Whatever he had done had roused the ire and the frustrated hatred of a community.

The crowd thought their actions to be a kind of popular justice, however rough, and the death of the official to be a well-deserved punishment. In what appears to be an angry disciplinary sermon, Augustine reprimanded his Christian parishioners who had participated in the riot. He denounced their violent actions as not constituting any kind of legal punishment, but rather as the brazen and lawless acts of bandits.[65] He denounced the murder not as a proper form of lawful retribution, but as an act of madness and insanity, denying that such legal powers had ever been placed in the hands of "the people." The bishop's concern was not just with the legality of the crowd's behavior and its relationship to duly constituted legal powers of the state) on which matters he did indeed have much to say (but also with the fact that the man, the object of their violence, had sought refuge in the church at Hippo. The mob had dragged the terrified miscreant out of the holy place and had proceeded to murder him. It may well be that the Christians had hesitated to violate the sacrosanctity of their church. The non-Christians probably had no such qualms. They dragged the man

[63] See Aug. *Sermo* 302.15–16 (Lambot, *Sermones selecti deodeviginti* = SPM 1 [1950], pp. 107–08).

[64] At least this seems to be what Augustine is alluding to *Sermo* 302.10 (Lambot: 105): "Quid saevis in malos? Quia mali sunt, inquis . . . Postremo saevit usque ad mortem. Quid et post mortem, ubi ad illum malum iam non pervenit poena, et alterius mali sola exercetur malitia? Hoc insanire est, non vindicare."

[65] Aug. *Sermo* 302.10 and 13 (Lambot: 105 and 106): "Tu quare saevis? Quam potestatem accepisti, nisi quia sunt ista non publica supplicia, sed aperta latrocinia?"

out. At last, the Christians themselves felt free to join in the killing of the man and the mutilation of his body.[66] Or so it seems. All of it done by religious and self-respecting citizens of the municipality.

Here we see more of the same convergences. Christians, who were used to violence in their own sectarian struggles, were now participating in a popular form of public retribution. Or perhaps, it was the other way around. Brief, violent, and final, it enforced community standards against a tyrannical outsider. Both in the arming and marshaling of dependants, and in the lynching of a hated imperial official, this incident was a miniature version of the violent *coup d'état* of 238 (which we shall consider presently). Instead of well-connected and powerful imperial aristocrats with high social connections, its leaders were less powerful municipal men and so the violence did not have the empire-wide implications of the assassination of the imperial procurator at Carthage. Both in the nature of the mobilization and in the manner of the killing, in the systemic mutilation of the body, it shared more with small-town ritual behaviors like the *caterva*. Here, then, was another form of collective violence, one that was not defined and periodic, but was rather provoked by specific kinds of hostilities tied to the "unjust actions" of one person. So how did the *caterva* or the lynching relate to the standard acts of sectarian violence of the time? This question prompts a prior one concerning the range, quality, and quantity of violence in late antique Africa.

WHAT WAS VIOLENCE?

The ritual internecine rioting that happened annually in the city of Caesarea was one kind of violence. It was a local affair that involved clubbings, beatings, stonings, and a lot of civic joy and festivity. Lower-level violence, like individual homicides, beatings, or robberies, happened everywhere and all the time. But Africans could and did face more serious, bigger, and more destructive kinds of disorder. At the other end of the spectrum of violent acts from the individual fist-fight, tavern brawl, or street mugging was the larger-scale violence of war. Everyone accepted the common presence and reality of war. On the possibility of "banishing wars to the ends of the earth," Augustine ruefully commented that it was not likely in the present time. In his eyes, these wars included the religious conflicts of the age.[67]

[66] I follow the reconstruction by A. Ducloux, *Ad ecclesiam confugere. Naissance du droit d'asile dans les églises (IVe-Ve s.)*, Paris, 1994, pp. 176–80, which is also accepted by Magalhães de Oliveira (2004), pp. 317–18.

[67] Aug. *En. in Ps.* 45.13 (CCL 38: 527): commenting on Psalm 45: 10: *Auferens bella usque ad fines terrae*; he ends by noting, plaintively, that "someday this might happen."

We do not yet see this fulfilled. There are still wars. Wars are fought between peoples to establish rule. They are fought between sects, between Jews, pagans, Christians, and heretics. Wars are fought, and with increasing frequency – some fighting for truth and others for untruth.

In the instances that he notes, the actors were not individuals or smaller ad hoc groups, but larger social entities like ethnic societies, cities, and states that created greater concentrations of violent force. As we have already seen, in the early 370s the city of Caesarea itself was implicated in the larger type of violence, the scourge of war, in which the city had suffered considerable destruction from which it was recovering only some decades later. This one place, we might note, like many in Africa, witnessed ordinary violent crimes, an annual ritual of civic mayhem, sectarian battles, and the frontal assaults of full-scale warfare.

But how are individual assaults that aimed at bodily injury or homicide, the group violence of sectarian religious battles, and the huge collective violence of war – all of which Africans experienced in various places and times – to be plotted? At one end of a simple linear spectrum of types of violence is the full-blown war: a conflict conducted with the full resources of a state that opposes enemy forces whose defeat will either conserve the existence of the state or might even extend its existing territorial and demographic resources. At the other end are highly localized and episodic fits or mini-events of violence in which the participants have as their targets individuals or tiny bits of property whose harm or elimination will serve not only to achieve their personal aims but also to confirm the norms of their society.[68] The one kind of violence is an immediate threat to the state, the other is not. The one kind upsets the locals on a Saturday night, tears families apart, and destroys individual lives, while the other transforms the status of regions and threatens to sweep social and political orders from existence. The levels of organization, of supply, of maintenance and continuity, the aims and purposes of the violence in each case are so different that in many ways they only share the instrumentalities of force and harm. Everything else in which the violence is embedded is so different that the languages in which the violence speaks are not the same.

Acts of violence are not uniform and transcendental universals, but rather variable elements of normal human behavior that are informed by culture and conditioned by human ecology. To begin to answer questions about violence demands a prior answer to the social and geographic contexts of

[68] Tilly, *Collective Violence*, pp. 12–21, argues for links between these apparently different kinds of violence.

the individual episodes of violence themselves. We might begin with the general place of Africa within the wider context of the Roman empire in the West. Despite several strands in historical argument that have suggested that Africa was a foyer of armed resistance, a hotbed of violent opposition to Roman rule, it must be firmly stated – in comparative terms at least – that such claims are far from the truth. Only by focussing narrowly on episodes within Africa itself and by carefully culling selected literary sources in ways that deliberately exclude the wider context of empire can this "armed resistance" hypothesis be sustained. This is not to say that Africa cannot provide its list of so-called provincial rebellions, as they have been mistakenly labeled, or "ethnic revolts" or "nativist insurrections." They have been duly catalogued.[69] Given the long six or seven centuries of Roman imperial rule in Africa, and the potential extent of problems caused by violent resistance, the one thing that is strikingly apparent about these incidents in context is that they are thin in social depth and sparse in number.[70] At no point until the early 430s of the fifth century did Africans face large-scale violence as it was experienced on the war frontiers of the empire, to the north along the Rhine and Danube and to the east along the frontiers with Sassanid Persia.

By contrast, violence in Africa tended to assume a number of rather limited kinds and types, none of which threatened the Roman imperial order. Even knowing about specific incidents is, of course, a big problem. A lot of violence that happened was never reported because it was a kind of harm that was not of interest to those who kept records. Like the *caterva* at Caesarea, we happen to learn about these cases because of accidental connections with concerns of greater relevance to the writer. A good example is provided by the Catholic Council of Carthage held in the year 403. Of all the considerable number of Catholic bishops from the province of Numidia, only three of them – Augustine, Alypius, and Possidius – made it to Carthage. The others could not, we are told, because of incidents of violence caused by army recruiting.[71] To prevent the numerous Catholic bishops from all of Numidia traveling to Carthage, the violence must have been very serious and widespread. But we only hear about it quite by chance. And we have no knowledge of the details of its events, structure,

[69] See Bénabou, *Résistance africaine*, pp. 67 ff., and Rachet, *Rome et les Berbères*, pp. 82 ff.

[70] For what follows, the standard references are the works of Rachet and Bénabou (above); and reviews and discussion of these, especially of Bénabou's work through the 1980s.

[71] *Reg. Eccl. Carth. Excerpt.* canon 90 (CCL 149: 209): "sed de Numidia legatio mitti non potuit, quod adhuc tumultu tironum episcopi propriis necessitatibus in civitatibus suis aut impediti aut occupati sunt."

or extent. Instances like this can be multiplied many times over. In the history that does survive, however, the big violence typical of Africa divides into two broader types connected with large organizing entities like ethnic groups or states.

The first was a regional response where local men who were mostly independent of direct Roman control, or who had been integrated with the Roman order and then withdrew from it, engaged in various kinds of entrepreuneurial or autonomist violence. The best-known of these episodes, because it was written up by the Roman historian Tacitus to promote his personal agenda in interpreting the Principate, was a series of incidents involving an African named Tacfarinas. In the late teens and early 20s of the first century, this former auxiliary in the Roman army in Africa spearheaded a spasmodic series of bandit raids along the southern frontiers from Gigthis in the southeast to Auzia in the west.[72] No subsequent incidents of a similar kind and scale are known to have happened in the whole of the eastern Maghrib down to and including the age of Augustine.

The normal location of the most serious threats of autonomist violence was, rather, in the mountain highlands west of the Hodna-Bejaïa longitudinal line (see map 2c). The rugged highlands and arid plateaux of the Mauretanias in the western half of the Maghrib formed the real cultural and military frontier of late Roman Africa. Its landscapes, especially the lowland valleys, were studded with chain-like links of army camps, forts, observations towers, and supply roads. The forts were manned by infantry units and fast cavalry detachments. Zones of detention marked out the lowlands, and the highlands were cordoned off by lines of forts, ditches, and roads. The roads and fortifications were not outer defensive lines, but rather a complex web-like network that covered the whole region in which raiders could be caught and trapped. It was this mountainous zone of the Mauretanias and not the periphery of the Sahara to the south, the romantic source of desert raiders, that was the real Wild West of Rome's hegemony in Africa. The mountain highlands immediately west of Sitifis were known to be populated with dangerous "barbarians." Occasionally, they descended into the plains to plunder, to rape, and to take captives.[73]

[72] The bibliography is immense. See Bénabou, *Résistance africaine*, pp. 75–84, and Rachet, *Rome et les Berbères*, pp. 84–126, for summaries to the mid 1970s; of the many items since, Bénabou (1978), Lassère (1992), and Gonzales (1998) are worthy of consideration.

[73] Aug. *Ep.* 111.7 (CSEL 34.2: 653–54): discusses a recent case ("a few years ago": i.e. before November of 409) of women who had been raped and captured by "barbarians," one of them a niece of Severus, the bishop of Sitifis.

COUP D'ÉTAT

Over the whole age between Tacfarinas in the 20s and a rebel named Firmus in 370s, the single most destructive episode that the provinces of Africa experienced was not any conflict with indigenous rebels, but rather a different kind of violence marked by the upheavals of the 230s. This short burst of killing and destruction was not caused as much by forces within Africa itself, as in the Tacfarinas case, as by external structural changes in the imperial state. The episode points to a second type of big violence: local repercussions caused by strategic shifts in the structure of the empire as a whole. With increasing military pressures along the Rhine and Danube frontiers in the 220s and 230s, a fundamental shift in the traditional civil mode of governing the empire took place, marked by the rise of a new breed of emperors rising from the ranks of the Rhine and Danube armies. The first of these new emperors was Maximinus "the Thracian." With his ascent to the throne in 235, the agenda of the northern military establishment became the driving force of imperial policy. The army needed more resources: more men, more pay, more equipment, more "subventions" for allies, and more and better fortifications. All of this would cost a lot more.

The military needs drove the new regime's concern with higher and more efficient levels of tribute collection.[74] These drives ran directly counter to the interests of the wealthy landowners and their peers. The landholders in Africa who were responsible for the bulk of the tax felt the new impositions most keenly. Africa was furthest removed from the military threats of the northern frontiers. Living in an isolated and protected land of peace and prosperity, there arose in the minds of its upper-class tribute payers resentments over the hugely increased tax burdens for problems that they did not see as particularly theirs. Three years into Maximinus' new regime, in March 238, the landowning elites rebelled. Faced with ever more severe tribute exactions and harsh treatment from the provincial procurators, aggressive young aristocrats, sons of the powerful, who were resident in Carthage, armed themselves with knives and their peasant dependants with wooden clubs and axes.[75] Seeking the provincial procurator at his

[74] These structural elements are difficult to apprehend because the literary sources, written by the usual civil upper-class authors, interpret them in such negative, hostile, and moralizing terms. So the new emperor Maximinus is portrayed as a brutish and violent barbarian, and his need for more funds is pictured as nothing more than an extreme personal avarice.

[75] The primary sources, the historian Herodian and the biographer of the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, are confused and misleading. This is my construal of the general course of events and the main

headquarters, they assassinated him, stabbing him to death in his office. Other landowners in the southern parts of the province stormed the official residence of the proconsul of Africa, M. Antonius Gordianus, who was then on assizes at Thysdrus in the region of Byzacena, and hailed him as their emperor.[76] From the arming of peasants with wooden clubs, to the lynching of a hated imperial official, this violence, as we shall see, had smaller-scale analogues in the age of Augustine.

The *coup d'état* was quickly countered by Maximinus who ordered the army in Africa, commanded by one Capellianus, the legate of the Third Augustan Legion, to take immediate action.[77] The result was not just the defeat of Gordianus' ramshackle civilian forces under the command of his son just outside the suburbs of Carthage, and his own death by suicide, but a murderous rampage of the soldiery that was vented on the municipal elites that had supported the tax revolt, men whose actions and attitudes threatened the legionaries' wages. Since Africa was not normally a war frontier of the Roman state, the function of the army was more like that of a national police force or a regional militia. Africa, indeed, was one of the most peaceful areas of the empire. The majority of its inhabitants were unarmed, and most of its cities east of the frontier zone of the Mauretanias were unwalled. This was Gordian's main problem. He had no ready access to a trained force of violent men, and not many of the ordinary inhabitants of the towns and cities of Africa had the requisite experience or skill with arms. They were too used to peace.[78] The result was a murderous disaster for himself, his family, and large numbers of the civilian elites who had supported him. Although it was an unusual and rare event, the regional *coup* of Gordian foreshadowed a type of violence that was to recur with greater frequency in the Africa of the later empire. Shifts in the attitudes of emperors and politicking at their courts produced these strange and violent local repercussions.

parties to it. The month of March is a best guess at a date. For a critique of the sources and a rather different reconstruction of the events, see Kolb (1977). The fact that peasant farmers were normally armed with wooden clubs, and such instruments, for acts of enforcement is an important fact to which we shall return.

[76] For the events, see Romanelli, *Storia*, pp. 447 f.; the principal literary source is the historian Herodian, 7.4.1 f. (on which see the valuable comments in C. R. Whittaker's Loeb edition). For Gordian as governor, see Thomasson, *Fasti Africani*, "Africa Proconsularis – Proconsules," no. 121, pp. 89–90.

[77] The figure of "Capellianus" is as obscure as most of the others in this drama; see Thomasson, *Fasti Africani*, "Legio III Augusta – Numidia," no. 63, pp. 184–85; the main references are SHA, *Gord. tres*, 15.1–16.2; Herodian, 7.9.

[78] Herodian, 7.9.4; rhetorically formed, of course, but nonetheless credible.

STRANGE WARS: FIRMUS TO HERACLIAN

By the fourth and fifth centuries, the structure of the Roman army in Africa had been fundamentally transformed. Military commands were systematically separated from the civil administrators of the provinces, and army commanders were more than ever directly responsible to the imperial court. The emperor himself appointed the generals or *duces* who commanded the different sectors of the African frontier. Over all of these forces, he placed a supreme commander, the Count of Africa, the *comes Africae*, who was the local commander-in-chief of the Roman army in Africa. To ensure a dependable control over the empire's armed forces in Africa, emperors were willing to concede an unusual term of office to the Count of Africa. On this frontier – the most peaceful and the least threatened by large numbers of external enemies – the long-term tenure of the commander-in-chief was not a bad idea. For one thing, measured in strategic terms against the entire military force of the empire, Africa was just not that important. The installing of the *comes Africae* was comparable to appointing the head of a home guard. While successive emperors and ever-rotating field commanders attended to unending warfare on the northern frontiers of the empire, its relatively quiet southern front could be held by a dependable man whom the emperors trusted. If a good man could be kept in place in Africa for a longer time, this would be one large sector of the frontier about which the emperors would not have to concern themselves on an ongoing basis. Trust was the key. The evidence that survives (admittedly thin) indicates that the Counts of Africa were kept in place for long periods of time when compared to the annual rotation of offices typical of other higher-level officials of the state, including provincial governors.[79] Being in power for so long, they were able to develop a wide range of social dependants and to acquire landed wealth. A man like Romanus, who was Count of Africa for about a decade, from *c.* 365 to 375, accumulated considerable personal wealth and power.

The position of the Count of Africa was therefore something of a paradox. The Counts held the power of violent force that permitted the usual

[79] The Counts of Africa relevant to our story include Gratian, the father of the emperor Valentinian, who seems to have held this position over a period as long as two decades, between the 320s and 340s (see "Gratianus (1)," PLRE, 1, pp. 400–01); Amm. Marc. 30.7.3; Symm. *Or.* 1.1 (MGH AA 6.1: 318); Cretio – his name is probably a misunderstanding of an African name – who had a son named "Masaucio" that is related to the African name Mausakes, who was raised in Africa when "Cretio" was there, was probably *comes Africae* from the late 340s until the early 360s (see "Cretio," PLRE, 1, p. 231; Amm. Marc. 21.7.4; 26.5.14; CTh 7.1.4, dated to 349–50); and Romanus, who was *comes Africae* from the early 360s until 372–73.

civil business of empire to continue behind the defensive perimeters of the frontier. The normal collection of tribute and the administration of justice, the principal concerns of the imperial court, were enabled by the Count's successful tenure of office. The paradox is that the better he performed this task, the more he might come under deep suspicion as a potential threat to central power. As the latter decades of the fourth century wore on and the first decades of the fifth ensued, this problem emerged with force and was exacerbated as the standing of the Count of Africa was increasingly enhanced, almost by default, by the concurrent decline in the power of the central court, first at Milan and then at Ravenna. As trust mutated into apprehension, a considerable part of the structural problem was one of perception. As the position of the central court progressively deteriorated, the more its leaders, fearful of possible threats to their position, were subject to a kind of paranoia. While the court lost one provincial region after another in the west, the man who controlled the flow of tribute and other resources from Africa – whether he liked it or not – found himself in an increasingly important and sensitive position.

Because of this emerging nexus of forces, the episodes of big violence in which Africa was involved in our period were far less ones of repelling "barbarian" incursions than they were conflicts between the commander of the state's armed forces in Africa and the imperial court. The problem is that the Counts of Africa, and men like them who were serving the Roman state in Africa, could easily be accused of holding power for their own purposes and of plotting to establish their own autonomous domain against the crown. Once accused of "rebellion" and "acts of treason" by their enemies in a distant and suspicious court, it was almost impossible for these men to correct the maliciously biased pictures of themselves and their actions. Any serious moves taken to defend themselves only "proved" to the court that they were dangerous men who had to be eliminated. The result was a self-reinforcing spiral of violence in which the court, increasingly protective of its one safe and sure source of supplies, the wealth of Africa, was willing to strike first against a perceived threat to its resources rather than to risk losing them.

This brings us to the strange episodes that are the closest to large-scale violence or war found in Africa before the Vandal incursions of the late 420s. These are the so-called rebellions of Firmus, Gildo, and Heraclian at the end of the fourth century and at the beginning of the fifth. Firmus and Gildo were supposedly "brothers" who were local leaders of the powerful and influential ethnic groups in the rugged mountain

region of the Grande Kabylie in what is today north-central Algeria.[80] Although they were men of regional power, their fates were inextricably bound up with the changing configurations of power in the late Roman state in the west. Both men came to be portrayed as rebels by the imperial court – men who set out with deliberate plans to attack the Roman state and its interests and who premeditated secessions from its imperium. These ancient prejudices, recycled in modern histories, do little more than parrot willfully contorted views created for and repeated by supporters of the court. In usual circumstances – almost all of the time – these Africans were loyal subjects of the state. Their dissent was provoked not by any conscious drive to independence in Africa, but rather by the changing configuration of the imperial state of which they were part. To apply to them the modern idea that they were guerrilla fighters for some notional regional autonomy is to overstate who they were and what they did to the point of falsehood. They were men who were caught in a power trap, forced into corners in which they had few alternatives left except to defend themselves. When they did so, they were labeled "rebels." This only incited more defensive behavior on their part. A frightened and factionalized court finally declared them to be enemies of the state. In the case of Firmus, the first of these "rebels," an analysis of the events helps in understanding this peculiar type of violence.

AN AFRICAN REBEL?

The best-documented episode of big violence that struck Africa in the later fourth century is the so-called "Firmus war."[81] The course of this conflict reveals not only its limited and marginal nature as large-scale violence, but also its pathology as a typical kind of conflict generated by the restructuring of the western empire. The regime of Romanus, who had been Count of Africa from the early 360s, involved disputes not just with local urban elites, such as those of the city of Lepcis Magna, but also with the quasi-autonomous big men who controlled large ethnic areas

[80] I say supposedly because, although they might have been biological siblings, I think it more probable that the word indicates a fictive kinship relationship between them: see Shaw (1997) for a discussion of these artificially "made" relationships between powerful men.

[81] Ammianus Marcellinus 29.5 is the principal, indeed the sole continuous prose narrative of any distinction. The other sources are minor and contribute only occasional detail: Augustine, *Contra ep. Parm*. 1.10.16; 1.11.17 (CSEL 51: 36–39); Aurel. Vict. *Epit. de Caes*. 45.7; Claudian, *De bell. Gild*. 330 f.; Orosius 7.33.5; Symmachus, *Ep*. 1.64 (MGH AA 6.1: 29), *Relat*. 10.1 (MGH AA 6.1: 279); Zosimus, *Hist. nov*. 4.16.3; *Passio Sanctae Salsae*, 13 (Piredda: 100-06). Among the modern treatments, see Seeck (1909), Kotula (1970), and Moreau (1973b).

for the Roman state, especially in the mountains of the Mauretanias. The highland lords had a double identity. They served both as local leaders of their own ethnic groups and as military commanders for the Roman state. In artistic representation, they portrayed themselves in mixed Romano-African mode as addicted to banqueting and armed for the hunt.[82] One of these powerful men was Nubel (or, Nuvel), the father of Firmus. His African side was highlighted by the Roman historian Ammianus – practically the sole contemporary source for the war – who labels him "a most powerful minor king among the Maurian peoples."[83] What Ammianus does not say is just as significant. This same African, Nubel, had a Roman name, Flavius Nubel. He was a Roman citizen, and he was the commander of Roman army units in northern montane regions of the Mauretanias: he was *praepositus* or head of the *equites armigerorum iuniorum*, a regional cavalry unit of the army. It is also known that Nubel was the son of an African named Saturninus, and that he was married to a local woman named Nonnica (that is, Monnica, the same name borne by Augustine's mother). Together with her, he constructed a Christian basilica in the coastal city of Rusguniae (modern Borj el-Bahri) and placed in it a piece of the true cross.[84] Nubel therefore belonged to an African family that had served the Roman state at least from the generation of his father, who himself ranked among the elite "companions" or *comites* of the emperor.[85]

Nubel's son, Firmus, was just one of several ethnic heads in the mountainous redoubt of the Kabylie. Another player in this little drama was a man named Sammac, supposedly one of Firmus' "brothers." Like Firmus, Sammac was local man of power in the mountain highlands. He had constructed a mountain stronghold at a place named the *fundus Petrensis*. He had built this place up, Ammianus says, in the manner of a town or city.[86] In one of those wonderful accidents of discovery, we know precisely where Sammac's domain of Petra was located, and we know more about the owner himself. An eight-line Latin poem in hexameters was set up at the fortified

[82] Février (1973).

[83] Amm. Marc. 29.5.2: "Nubel velut regulus per nationes Mauricas potentissimus."

[84] CIL 8.9255 = ILCV 1822 (Rusguniae, Bordj el-Bahri): "D(e) sancto ligno crucis Christi salvatoris adlato / adq(ue) hic sito Flavius Nuvel ex praepositis eq(u)itu/m armicerorum <i>unior(um), filius Saturnini viri / perfectissimi ex comitibus, et Col<e>cia<e>[?] honestissima/e feminae, primepos [sic] Eluri Laconiq [sic], basilicam voto / promissam adq(ue) oblatam cum coniuge Nonni/ca ac suis omnibus dedicavit"; cf. PAC, p. 790 and Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 1, p. 352, no. 167.

[85] If the fourth line is read properly, it seems to indicate that he is the grandson of one Elurus Laconiq(us) [?].

[86] Amm. Marc. 29.5.13: "Inter quos clades eminuere fundi Petrensis, excisi radicitus, quem Salmaces (Firmi frater) in modum urbis exstruxit."

site, boasting of Sammac's power.[87] In hiring a poet to create this little Latin display piece, Sammac was not so much vaunting his own status as he was advertising his loyalty to the state and his connections to certain powerful persons. Yet another one of the fanciful literary tours-de-force typical of the more spectacular gymnastic poetics of the age, the poem is a double acrostic. The first letters and the last letters of each line, when read vertically, spelled out the name of the place: **P R A E D I U M S A M M-A C I S**, The Great Domain of Sammac.

> **P** raesidium aeternae firmat prudentia paci **S**
> **R** em quoque Romanam fida tuta undique dextr **A**,
> **A** mni praepositum firmans munime monte **M**
> **E** cuius nomen vocitavit nomine Petra **M**
> **D** enique finitimae gentes deponere bell **A**
> **I** n tua concurrunt cupientes foedera, Samma **C**
> **U** t virtus comitata fidem concordet in omn **I**
> **M** unere, Romuleis semper sociata triumfi **S**
>
> The wisdom of eternal peace makes strong this fort.
> With sure loyalty it guards Rome's power on all sides;
> set high above the river, it guards the mountains with its walls
> by which it continually proclaims its name of Petra: "The Rock."
> All the neighboring peoples, ceasing from their wars,
> wish to rush into alliance with you, Sammac,
> so that your virtue, adorned with loyalty, is strong in its
> every duty, always allied with the victories of Rome's sons.

The inscription boasts of the great strength of the fortified place and of the loyalty of Sammac to the Roman state: his trust, his *fides*, in protecting Roman power, and his connections with the "sons of Romulus." The reference to the *Romuli* was perhaps intended to draw attention to his powerful patron, the Count Romanus. The historian Ammianus confirms the connection, speaking of the fact that Sammac had been received into the *fides*, that is, into the personal protection of the Count of Africa. These personal connections were part of the difficulties in which Firmus was to become implicated.

What happened next? No one knows for sure. For reasons beyond recovery, in the early 370s Firmus was drawn into an armed conflict with the Roman state. The war's only historian, Ammianus Marcellinus, certainly did not know why. Having no information other than the bare record of a few events, he composed his narrative as a replay of the *Jugurthine War*

[87] ILS 9351 = CLE 1916 (Ighzer Amokrane); see. S. Gsell, "Une inscription d'Ighzer-Amokrane," *CRAI* (1901), p. 176; Gsell (1902), p. 22 = *Scripta Varia* (1981), p. 114, no. 1; Lengrand (1994), pp. 159–61.

by the historian Sallust – the only model of an African war that he had at his disposal. As with King Micipsa and his sons in Sallust's account of the 120s BCE, all the major players in the Firmus episode are turned into sons of "King" Nubel. They are said to be born from legitimate wives or from concubines – Sammac being one of the latter – a fact that leads to inevitable conflicts between them. Ammianus also sets up his account as an extension of the Romanus affair, with which, in reality, it seems to have had only a tenuous connection, if any. Chronology is another problem since at this point in his history, Ammianus decided, in Sallustian fashion, to switch from an annalistic year-by-year framework into a continuous unbroken narrative of this one story. Some of the earliest events might well have happened as early as 370 or 371.[88] But even this much is uncertain.

The problems began with Firmus' murder of his "brother" Sammac, a killing that precipitated a breakdown of order in the mountain highlands of the Mauretanias. The collapse pitted powerful mountain barons, like Firmus and Sammac, against each other. The violence was especially dangerous since some of them, like Firmus, commanded units of the Roman army and state resources, they knew the terrain and people, and they knew the richest targets, including isolated coastal cities like Caesarea. The petitioning of the emperor Valentinian and the court at Trier by Firmus on the one side (pleading his innocence) and by Romanus on the other (condemning the African as culpable) only further complicated matters. Embassies went back and forth, each attempting to sway the sentiments of the emperor. According to Ammianus, Romanus, having greater clout at court with the support of his kinsman and ally, Remigius, the *magister officiorum*, won the first round.[89] Firmus is represented as not having intended any rebellion, but as having been driven into a corner by false accusations. Reasonably fearful of the unmerited consequences of arrest and execution, he chose the practical course of self-defense.[90]

The nature of the violence belies this easy personal story. The main assaults on Roman interests by Firmus' partisans in 372 were attacks on the vulnerable coastal cities. Icosium was attacked and occupied. Just to its west, Tipasa was also attacked but, relying on the strength of its fortifications, or so later memory held, the city successfully repelled the raiders

[88] Demandt (1968), p. 283 and (1972) favors dating the first events as early as *c.* 370, based on the fact that Remigius was no longer Magister Officiorum after 371; the latter's dates, however, are not as fixed as one might wish.

[89] Amm. Marc. 29.5.2: "Remigio tunc officiorum magistro, affine amicoque Romani, inter potiores imperatoris necessitates . . . "

[90] Amm. Marc. 29.5.3.

sent against it by the "tyrant" Firmus.[91] Finally, even further to the west, Caesarea, the capital of Mauretania Caesariensis, was burned and looted.[92] Pleas for help from these cities, and from the governor of Mauretania Caesariensis, elicited a heavy response from the imperial court. In the summer of 373, the situation in Africa was deemed sufficiently threatening for the emperor Valentinian to dispatch one of his more able, experienced, and successful commanders, Theodosius, the *magister militum*, a man who might well have had earlier field experience in Africa, to deal with the problem. Theodosius sailed from Arelate with a small force and landed at the port of Igilgili, well to the east of the main troubled region.[93] He moved quickly inland to the city of Sitifis (modern Sétif) to establish his main base in the heart of the great plains region immediately to the east of the mountain highlands.

Far from supporting Romanus' complaints about Firmus, Theodosius' brief was to bring the Count of Africa under control. To this end, he employed a local chief in Roman service, one of Firmus' "brothers," named Gildo, to arrest Romanus and to detain several of the Count's officials.[94] On the other front, what followed next was a rather strange on-again-off-again conflict in which Firmus repeatedly tried to meet with Theodosius to prove his innocence and to rehabilitate himself as part of the Roman administration in Africa. The first of these attempts was made soon after Theodosius arrived in Africa. It was a gesture to which Theodosius responded positively, saying that a peace agreement was possible if Firmus provided the required hostages to guarantee his words and behavior.[95] Theodosius had moved his main military forces to the city of Tubusuptu, just inland from Saldae on the coast. The shift enabled him to run his army units more easily into the interior, up the valley of the Wadi Soummam, the major riverine system that drained the most rugged of the coastal mountain ranges in north Africa: the Lesser Kabylie to the east of the river centered on the Babors Range, and the Greater Kabylie to the west of it, centered on the Djurdjura Range.[96] It was a forbidding region, heavily populated in antiquity, and difficult for any power anchored in the plains to control.

[91] *Passio S. Salsae*, 13 (Piredda: 104): "Illis enim temporibus quibus provinciam totam Firmianae labes tyrannidis devastaverat, incensis finitimis civitatibus, quarum aggeres ruinarum dabatur aestimare cineribus." The passage advances to speak of Firmus' ambition for imperial rule and the eight-day battle against the *catervae praedonum* of the the cruel and savage tribesmen.

[92] Amm. Marc. 29.5.16.

[93] Amm. Marc. 29.5.4–5: "abolendum cum Comitatensis auxilio militis pauci Theodosius magister equitum mittitur . . . Proinde ab Arelate secundis egressus auspiciis, emeatoque mari cum classe, quam ductabat . . . defertur ad Sitifensis Mauretaniae litus, quod appellant accolae Igilgilitanum."

[94] Amm. Marc. 29.5.6–7; see Oost (1962).

[95] Amm. Marc. 29.5.8.

[96] Despois and Raynal, *Géographie*, pp. 156–65; Admiralty, *Algeria*, vol. 2, pp. 53–55.

These particular mountain ranges – the *qabiliyya* or "tribal lands" as they have been called in Arabic – have been reservoirs of local autonomy over the ages of Maghribi history. It was not without significance that, in antiquity, the highland was called the Iron Mountain, the *Mons Ferratus*. As Theodosius moved his forces into this montain zone, a second peace feeler was sent out by Firmus. It was rejected by Theodosius, apparently because the required hostages had not been provided.[97] Leading his forces up the Wadi Soummam, Theodosius founded a supply base at Lamfoctense at a place that would allow him to divide the ethnic groups of the Tyndenses and the Masinissenses, headed, respectively, by Mascizel and Dius, two other "brothers" of Firmus. On the way upriver he attacked and seized the Fundus Petrensis, the fortified place once held by Sammac and now defended by Firmus' supporters.[98] Under this unrelenting pressure, Firmus again attempted to contact Theodosius, sending two Christian bishops as intermediaries to ask for a peace agreement. This time, they brought the required hostages. A meeting was arranged between the two men and their forces, a colloquy marked by much pageantry and display on both sides. Terms were agreed. Theodosius kissed Firmus. Firmus promised to return prisoners he had taken and, two days later, also as promised, his followers handed over the city of Icosium to the Roman authorities.[99]

No doubt considering the matter on the way to resolution, Theodosius moved quickly around the mountain mass of the Great Kabylie to the coastal city of Tipasa, to the west of Icosium, to receive reassurances from the local Africans, collectively called "the Mazices," who had originally sided with Firmus. He then moved further westwards to the provincial capital of Caesarea. Here he stationed two legions to prevent the return of "raiding barbarians."[100] It is at this point that the events became murky. Certain men, it is said, intimated to Theodosius that Firmus might be breaking his word. Theodosius immediately headed inland from Caesarea to Zucchabar to deal with military units that had been under the command of Firmus, including the *equites cohortis quartae sagittariorum* (Fourth Cohort of Mounted Archers) and the *pedites Constantiniani* (Constantinian Infantry Regiment). He ordered both units to go to Tigava Castra, to the west, where they were severely punished with demotion to the ranks, with decimation, and with the ritualistic amputation of right hands.

Theodosius' subsequent armed forays were concentrated in this same far western sector until he returned to the coastal base at Tipasa in

[97] Amm. Marc. 29.5.11. [98] Amm. Marc. 29.5.11–13.
[99] Amm. Marc. 29.5.15–16. [100] Amm. Marc. 29.5.17–18.

February 374.[101] It is manifest that his military operations had not resulted in the hoped-for success, so he decided to change his tactics, shifting to a more diplomatic approach to the problem in which he tried to gain the cooperation of the local tribes. This negotiating phase in which Theodosius no longer depended mainly on military force is glossed by Ammianus as a wonderful imitation of the tactics of Quintus Fabius Maximus "the Delayer" in the war between Rome and Carthage in the third century BCE.[102] Focussed less on the deployment of violent force, Theodosius' new strategy was more successful. Firmus was gradually hemmed into a region inhabited by the Isaflenses, and the Jubaleni, the "royal tribe," who were the original ethnic group from which his father Nubel came. Going to ground in his home turf, however, was not sufficient to protect him.

One of Firmus' main supporters at this time, another of his "brothers," named Mazuca, who was head of the Isaflenses, had been severely wounded in a clash with Roman forces; he died on the road and his corpse was dispatched to Theodosius. Mazuca's head was hacked off his body and was paraded around the streets of Caesarea, to the great joy of its inhabitants.[103] Increased pressure on the new chief of the Isaflenses, one Igmazen, finally worked. He betrayed Firmus to the Romans, so neatly completing the replay of the Jugurthine War in Ammianus' narrative. The parallel was not quite so neat, however. Realizing that he was to be handed over to Theodosius, Firmus managed to escape. He took his own life by hanging himself. A much-disappointed Igmazen had the body taken on camel-back to Theodosius. After a positive identification of Firmus' face by locals, Theodosius made his triumphant return to Sitifis.[104] The end came either late in 374 or early in the next year. A final footnote: if Firmus had been deemed a very dangerous man by the court, then, by definition, so was the man who finished him off in such an expeditious manner. In suitably mysterious circumstances, Theodosius was murdered, a demise no doubt engineered by other fearful and suspicious elements at the court.

Some characteristics of state-based violence in late fourth-century Africa should now be manifest. First of all, it was not all that violent. The largest field force that Theodosius mounted is said to have been about 3,500 men strong. The entire war from Theodosius' arrival to the death of Firmus

[101] Amm. Marc. 29.5.25–31.
[102] Amm. Marc. 29.5.32–33, where the ethnic groups involved are named.
[103] Amm. Marc. 29.5.40–42.
[104] Amm. Marc. 29.5.45–54. Note that Firmus hanged himself. This was not a mode of self-killing chosen by Christians of the time. The display of the corpse of a dead enemy on camel back was a typical mode of humiliation used in the display of a defeated enemy.

lasted two years at most. And all of it was restricted to the mountain zone well to the west of the "civilized Africa" where Augustine lived, a region that was admitted by all concerned to be a region of "barbaric" peoples. It was a zone of permanent dissidence where isolated towns – indeed, unusually isolated by the standards of the rest of Africa – were heavily walled and defended. The reality of the threat that Firmus posed was supposedly proved by his acclamation as emperor by some of his men. But the whole episode as told by Ammianus is a doublet of his description of the hailing of Julian as emperor by his Gallic troops in 363. It is not sustained by any other evidence. And the claim flies in the face of the repeated attempts by Firmus to reach a normalization of his status through Theodosius.[105] It is of a piece with the parallel claim that Roman military units were "deserting" to Firmus when in fact they were units of the army that had always been under his command. What was normal was being deliberately re-read as something strange and aberrant. When the senator Symmachus travelled westwards, following the end of his governorship of Africa in 373, to inspect domain lands of his in Mauretania, he dismissed the uproar as nothing more than another *rebellio barbarica* typical of the region.[106]

Nor is there any sign of systemic linkages between this kind of political violence and the sectarian religious violence of the time. What little evidence has been scraped together to support this hypothesis is utterly unconvincing. The fact, for example, that Firmus sent two Christian bishops to act as intercessors in making his appeal to Theodosius is not evidence of any special cooperation between Firmus and the dissident "Donatist" Christians.[107] In attempting to seek peace with Theodosius, it is most unlikely that Firmus would have deliberately chosen to insult a most orthodox Catholic Christian by purposefully sending to him bishops of a dissident church that had been repeatedly condemned by the imperial government. Nor is there anything to indicate that Firmus himself was especially inclined to favor the dissident church. His father Nubel had built a church containing a piece of the cross of Jesus, almost certainly an indication that he was an orthodox Catholic. Mascizel, another of the "brothers" of Firmus, is described by both Orosius and Paulinus of Milan as a fervent Christian.[108] Given the religious predilections of these men, they

[105] Amm. Marc. 29.5.20; refuted, rightly, by Kotula (1970), p. 141.
[106] Symm. *Ep.* 1.64 (MGH AA 6.1: 29).
[107] Argued by Frend, *Donatist Church*, p. 73, but rejected, for example, by Matthews (1976), pp. 178 and 186 n. 93.
[108] Oros. *Adv. pagan.* 7.36.5–7; Paulinus, *Vita Ambros.* 51.1–2 (Bastiaensen: 118).

must have believed that Mascizel was an orthodox Catholic. All the evidence connecting Firmus and "Donatist" violence comes from one source: from Augustine's polemical assertions made three decades or more after the events to defend the Catholic Church's use of the violent force of the Roman state to repress its sectarian enemies in Africa.

ALL AFRICA GROANS

Two decades and more passed with no hint of comparable violence in Africa. Then one of Firmus' so-called brothers – the same Gildo who had helped Theodosius to contain Romanus and to rally the mountain tribes of the west to his side – became implicated in a carbon-copy "rebellion." The violence surrounding Gildo in the late 390s is significant not just because he was a "brother" of Firmus, but also because his rebellion was later presented as a dire threat to the court at Ravenna.[109] In these hostile accounts, the dissident church is presented as being in league with this dangerous enemy of the state. Gildo himself is said to have been involved with circumcellion gangs who were serving as violent sectarian enforcers for the "Donatists."[110] As just noted, Gildo had been closely involved with the *magister militum* Theodosius in the repression of Firmus in the mid-370s. Given this fact, it is notable that he was rewarded for his loyalty by Theodosius' son, also called Theodosius, when the latter became emperor of Rome. It was probably in the mid-380s that the junior Theodosius appointed Gildo the commander of all Roman forces in Africa.[111] He was grandly styled *comes et magister utriusque militiae per Africam*: Count and Master of Both Armies in Africa.[112] From the time he was appointed to high office until his demise in 398, Gildo wielded considerable power for

[109] The main literary sources on Gildo are Claudian, *De Bello Gildonico*, *Libri in Eutropium*, and the *De consulatu Stilichonis* (MGH AA, 10: 189–233); Orosius, 7.36.2–13 and Zosimus, 5.11 (the main historical accounts); the main legal sources are: CTh 9.7.9 (Dec. 393), 9.39.3 (March 398), 9.42.16 (December 399), 7.8.7 (June of 400), 9.42.19 (April 405), 9.40.19 (November 408), and 7.8.9 (August 409). Ancillary are Symmachus, *Ep*. 4.5 (MGH AA 6.1: 99); Augustine, *Contra ep. Parm*. 2.4.8 (CSEL 51: 47); *Contra litt. Petil*. 1.24.26 (CSEL 52: 20–22) and Jordanes, *Rom*. 320 (MGH AA, 5.1: 41). See also Seeck (1910).

[110] The connection has been accepted as standard in most histories; see, e.g., Monceaux, *Hist. litt*. 4, pp. 188–90; Baldwin (1961), p. 8; Frend, *Donatist Church*, pp. 213, 220–23; and Congar (1963c), pp. 729–30; at length, more recently, in Rubin (1995), pp. 168–72; Atkinson (1992), p. 490, almost alone of all the more recent studies, candidly admits that the evidence is "circumstantial."

[111] For the sources, see "Gildo," PLRE, 1, pp. 395–96: he seems to have become *Comes Africae* in 385, a date deduced from Claudian, *Bell. Gild*. 154; cf. Olechowska, *De Bello Gildonico*, 161–62.

[112] CTh 9.7.9 (30 December 393), given at Constantinople by Theodosius, Arcadius, and Honorius: "Gildoni com(iti) et mag(is)tro utriusque mil(itiae) per Africa(m)."

much longer than any other imperial official sent to Africa – for longer, in fact, than most emperors held power at Milan and Ravenna.[113]

During all of the long tenure that Gildo held his office, there is no good contemporary evidence that he failed to show due loyalty to the central government or that he had any pretensions to local autonomy. Gildo's high status had been created by the court. And his demise was determined not by events in Africa, but by happenings at the imperial court in the aftermath of the death of Theodosius on 17 January 395. The instability of central power threw the status of regional power-holders like Gildo into doubt. Theodosius' sons, Honorius and Arcadius, became nominal emperors, respectively, of the western and eastern halves of the empire – but in tenuous circumstances. At the time, Honorius was an eight-year-old child surrounded by influential courtiers and by a guardian regent general, Stilicho. Radical uncertainty about the court encouraged the emergence of regional contenders to imperial power, like Maximus and Eutropius. In the confusion, the position of Gildo – a critical one since he controlled security in one of the richest resource bases for the western court – came under nervous scrutiny. A combination of fear, mistrust, and misunderstood intentions led the court in Ravenna to label Gildo as an enemy of the state. In this situation, Gildo's options were few. He could stand fast and hope for the best, or he could do what his enemies at court were accusing him of doing: he could form an alliance with the eastern court at Constantinople.

Up to the year 397, there is no evidence to sustain a picture of Gildo busily preparing a local power base independent of the court or of showing any signs of disloyalty to the central government. It was the situation of extreme fluidity in 396–97 that compelled Gildo to reconsider his position. Even so, there is no evidence to support the assertion that in the autumn of 397 he decided to suspend the normal grain shipments to Rome.[114] But it was on the basis of such *fears* that Stilicho had him declared a public enemy. Once this step was taken, Gildo had no practical alternative except to confirm his own position in Africa. Even in this final extremity, there is

[113] Between Julian in 360 and Gratian in 383, no emperor in the West had held power for more than eleven years, many for less than this; Theodosius himself, exceptionally, was to hold imperial power for about a decade and a half.

[114] *Chron. Gall.* a. CCCCLII.36 (MGH AA 9:650). Gebbia (1988), p. 125, based on Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 145n. asserts the standard view of a stoppage of grain supplies to Rome, but neither cites any evidence in support of the claim. As Modéran (1989), pp. 863–65, points out, however, neither CTh 14.15.3 (15 April 397) nor CTh 14.15.6 (28 September 399) are relevant; both speak of the illegal manipulation of grain supplies by certain powerful persons and nothing more. So, rightly, Romanelli, *Storia*, p. 609.

no evidence to show that Gildo was doing much to prepare a military strike against the hostile court. On its side, Ravenna used the same device against him that had succeeded against Firmus in the 370s. It found a Gildo to fight a Gildo. A "brother" of Gildo's, named Mascezel, was dispatched to Africa with a modest military force.[115] Whatever support Gildo had seems to have had melted away. He died in a minor skirmish in the spring of 398. The whole of his "great armed threat" to the Roman state had not lasted even a year.

In the morass of the surviving evidence, all of it biased beyond redemption, it is almost impossible to say where the truth lies. One hostile series of sources, those close to the court at Ravenna, including the poet Claudian, tried to portray Gildo as someone who was planning to betray Africa to forces in the eastern court.[116] Another hostile line promoted Gildo as someone who intended to go his own way to form an autonomous state in Africa.[117] Both claims were equally distorted and both threw up a barrage of fictions about Gildo.[118] Most of the rabid assertions about him as a threatening barbaric African were nothing more than derivative literary types plundered from images of "bad Africans" found in Livy and Vergil. The stereotypes of bad Africans were then placed in an ethnographic background copied from Sallust. These were book-learned prejudices about literary Africans that had little or nothing to do with living contemporary Africans of the late fourth century.[119] They tell us nothing about Gildo's motives, which surely shifted and changed during this period as he found some options opening to him while others were closing.

Relying on these distorted fictions, modern historians have portrayed Gildo as an African rebel who allied himself with the dissident church in Africa and with its "armed wing," the violent circumcellions. If true, these claims would establish a basis for a connection between the secular armed force of the state and the armed gangs fronting the sectarian violence of

[115] This Mascezel is very probably the same Mascizel who was involved in the Firmus revolt in the 370s, see "Mascezel," PLRE, I, p. 566; cf. Melani (1998).

[116] Claudian, *De Bello Gildonico*, esp. ll. 4–6, 235–40, 277–78, 283–87, and 324; see Gebbia (1988), p. 125.

[117] Orosius, 7.36; Zosimus, 5.11.1–2. Jordanes' statement, *Rom*. 320 (MGH AA 5.1: 41): "sibi velle coepit Africam optinere" is simply derivative of the earlier traditions; see Gebbia (1988), p. 125.

[118] Modern interpretations, like those of Gebbia (1988), Olechowska, *De Bello Gildonico*; Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 145–46, and Frend, *Donatist Church*, pp. 208–10, 225–26, are fantasies, based on the outsiders' fiction of the "African rebel"; they have no independent evidence to support their main hypotheses (the supposed collapse of African grain prices and his alliance with circumcellions are just a few of the modern inventions).

[119] Modéran (1989), pp. 825–38, based, in part, on the literary analyses of Cameron (1970) and Olechowska, *De Bello Gildonico*.

the time. That is to say, an historical case of salience in violence. But the hypothesis raises a simple and basic question. Did the man who held the power of state violence in his hands in Africa up to the year 398 involve himself and the military forces at his command in the sectarian battles of the age? Despite a long historical tradition that has held this to be so, the evidence in support of the assertion is wholly without merit.[120] In its various forms, the argument is that Gildo was an African nationalist rebel who gave special support to the dissident church since it was "more African" than the Catholic church.[121] The only data arraigned in support of the claim are a series of tendentious statements made by Augustine in his polemical writings in which he refers to Optatus, the dissident bishop of Thamugadi (modern Timgad), as a "Gildonian," that is to say, a supporter and adherent of Gildo.[122]

Following his condemnation as an "enemy of the state" by the western court in 397, and his murder in 398, Gildo became a loser who had successfully been labeled as a traitor by the central government. If an important dissident bishop and his supporters could be closely identified with Gildo, this bad connection would add to the negative picture that was being constructed of them and their faction as a real danger to the state. It would condemn "the Donatists" as hypocrites. Rather than being just critics of the state's intervention in church affairs, the historical record would show that the dissidents were just as willing as the Catholics to join hands with a secular power when it suited their interests. But other than the device of name-calling – labeling Optatus as a "Gildonian" – Augustine offers no evidence in support of any effective or special alliance between the bishop of Thamugadi and the Count of Africa. Since Optatus was bishop of Thamugadi in the same years that Gildo was *comes Africae* and since Thamugadi was a major army settlement close to the southern frontiers of Numidia, there must have been some normal dealings between them, as was generally true of Christian bishops and officials of the Roman

[120] Tengström, "Die Donatisten und Gildo," in *Donatisten und Katholiken*, pp. 84–90, was the first seriously to question the connection.

[121] The idea is basic to Frend, *Donatist Church*, pp. 220–26; Romanelli, *Storia*, pp. 606–09, 617–18, thinks of him as an autonomist rebel, with interests parallel to those of "the Donatists"; Kotula (1972) and Diesner (1962b) see him as a populist leader forging links with "the masses."

[122] On Optatus, see Quinot (1967a) and De Veer (1968b); Aug. *Contra ep. Parm.* 2.2.4 (CSEL 51: 47) of "the Donatists . . . who, surrounding with honors as a bishop and a colleague Optatus the Gildonian, that man who made all Africa groan for ten years, whom they kept in their communion." *Contra litt. Petil.* 1.24.26 (CSEL 52: 20) just repeats the same phrase: "et sub uno Optato Gildoniano decennalem totius Africae gemitum"; *Contra litt. Petil.* 2.83.184 (CSEL 52: 112–14) where he refers to "the time of Gildo" and the fact that "one of your colleagues (sc. Optatus) was his very close friend."

state in general. But there is no hard evidence supporting anything more sinister.

HERACLIAN

The same violent cycle was repeated again in the crisis of 413 in which Honorius and the court at Ravenna turned on Heraclian, the *comes Africae*, who found himself similarly driven to rebellion, again facing few other good alternatives.[123] The incident was similarly court-driven, but it shows how one of these typical "revolts" might involve very little violence for Africa itself. Heraclian had been appointed to the position of Count of Africa for his proven trust and loyalty. When the emperor Honorius turned on his regent, Stilicho, in 408, Heraclian acquired great kudos by personally murdering the German on 22 August. The court also ordered the assassination of the sitting Count of Africa, Stilicho's brother-in-law Bathanarius. With no clear line of succession evident to the people in Africa, a man already on the ground named Johannes took over following Bathanarius' death. Knowing that he was unacceptable to the court, popular mobs in Carthage were encouraged to lynch the poor man.[124] These murders opened the way for the appointment of Heraclian as the emperor's trusted man in Africa. He probably assumed the position of *comes Africae* in early 409. Throughout the events that transpired over the years immediately following, the court at Ravenna found itself almost without an empire. When Alaric laid siege to Rome and pillaged the city in the summer of 410, Heraclian not only remained loyal, but sent additional funds and resources to Honorius that enabled him to survive. The Africans were rewarded for their loyalty by the court with imperial benefactions, as was Heraclian when he was appointed consul for 413. To the last months of 412, therefore, there were no apparent signs of trouble.

The best guess for the immediate cause of what transpired next is that an old friend of Stilicho's, the new *magister equitum* or Commander of the Cavalry army, Flavius Constantius, began making trouble for Heraclian. Given Heraclian's manifest power, it would not have been difficult to

[123] The principal sources for the Heraclian episode are Zosimus, 5.37.6, 6.7–12; Orosius, 7.42.10–14; Sozomen, 9.8; Philostorgius, 12.3; Procop. *Bell. Vand.* 1.2; among the analyses, see Oost (1966), Kotula (1977), and Gaggero (1991).

[124] See "Ioannes (5)," PLRE, 2, p. 594; the dating of this incident depends on the credibility of the Gallic chronicler who places it in this year: "Iohannes comes Africae occisus a populo est" (Chron. Gall. 452, no. 59, s.a. 408–09). But there are arguments that the chronicler might be in error and that the incident is to be connected with one mentioned in Aug. *Ep.* 15*–16* and 23* and therefore to be dated to the year 419: see Delmaire and Lepelley (1983b). I am not convinced.

suggest to the emperor and his circle that Heraclian might be planning "something." It is said that Heraclian feared certain dangers and suspicions being mooted about his power. Finding himself cornered, Heraclian had no other pragmatic alternative except to assert his own defense. He apparently stopped critical grain shipments to Rome in April 413. The court reacted by declaring him a public enemy. Heraclian responded by mobilizing the grain fleet and transporting part of the army in Africa to Italy. The only fighting took place in Italy not in Africa (Heraclian's force was quickly defeated at Ocriculum on the Via Flaminia, to the north of Rome). Heraclian fled back to Africa. He was hunted down by agents of the emperor who, in July, found him hiding in the Temple of Memory at Carthage. They had him put to death. In Heraclian, the same cycle of causes involving the court at Ravenna repeated itself, but with different results for the problem of violence.

All these violent episodes in Africa, from Firmus to Heraclian, were insignificant when compared with the wars along the northern frontiers of the empire. The African incidents were fundamentally different in cause in that they were primarily driven by the suspicion, even paranoia, in which the central court increasingly operated. They bear striking structural similarities to each other and they occurred more frequently as the central state in the West entered the recurrent crises that marked its end. The focussing of the court's apprehensive perceptions, and frights, on the figure of the supreme military commander in Africa provoked the very instability that it feared. These occurred in 308–11 with Domitius Alexander, the Vicar of Africa; in 370–73 with Romanus, the *comes Africae*, and in 396–98 with Gildo, also as Count of Africa. The last of these frights, these self-inflicted crises, involving the *comes Africae* Bonifatius in 427–28, indeed, was to signal the final end of the Roman hegemony in Africa.

The type of violence produced by the fissioning of the late Roman state, as with the state-induced violence of the Mauretanian highlands, was, in most of its most important aspects, markedly different from the modalities of the sectarian violence of the time. Rhetorical assertions constantly tried to identify one's sectarian enemies with the hated enemies of the state. Within this tactic, it was always the "barbarian" African rebels, Firmus and Gildo, who were the favorite *bêtes noires* that were identified with the dissident Christians. The other option was just too dangerous. In the cycle of causes peculiar to it, each kind of violence had its own history. To connect the sectarian gangs and the religious violence with the political meltdowns and the regional *coups d'état*, quite artificial and fictitious links had to be suggested by lobbyists, that is the ecclesiastical parties

who were seeking the state's approval. But their biases do not count as evidence.

HOW VIOLENT WAS VIOLENT?

In terms of large-scale killing and damage, these preliminary stories serve to show how relatively non-violent Africa was in late antiquity. Indeed, in comparative terms, it was actually becoming *less* violent than many other regions of the empire. Apart from strange episodes of political-military breakdowns that were much smaller and short-lived versions of the great military fissionings that were afflicting the rest of the empire, there is little else to note. But to say that Africa in late antiquity was, relatively speaking, a rather civil and peaceful society is to suggest *what*? In the face of an absolute deficit of the relevant evidence, one can only speculate. Not including all sorts of other attacks on persons and property that do harm and surely count as violence, homicide rates alone in hyper-peaceful post-industrial countries in our own time usually range between 1 and 2 persons per 100,000. The United States is an exception, where, over recent decades, homicide rates have ranged between 7 and 10 per 100,000. These higher rates are still rather low when compared with the rates of less stable communities that are several orders of scale higher.[125] The low rates are created by a combination of modern manners of civility, a generally disarmed population (the United States is a modest exception), and the pervasive effect of civil policing.

Africans in the age of Augustine shared few of these civilizing virtues, and the institutions in the measure needed effectively to repress civil violence to low modern levels were generally absent. So let us hypothesize that Africa of the time managed to be as civil and peaceful, say, as England in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. What would that mean? In Elizabethan England homicide rates perhaps ran at about 7–9 per 100,000; in the following century at about 5–7 per 100,000 population.[126] If Africa was no more violent than this – a stretch, but useful for the purpose of argument – then there were would have been over a thousand murders every year – a total of about 35,000 homicides over the years that Augustine was bishop. Even if one settles on a number as very low as this, there is no sign of a special awareness of these deaths, records of them, or any particular significance attached to them in the writings of Augustine or his peers. But

[125] A. Underwood and M. Carmichael, "Guns: The Global Death Toll," *Newsweek* (30 April 2007), pp. 44–46.

[126] Stone (1983), but see the serious reservations offered by Sharpe (1985) and by Cockburn (1991).

homicide rates in premodern western Europe often ran to figures much higher than 7–9 per 100,000; rates at three times this level were not at all uncommon, especially in particular social or regional contexts.[127] At these not at all unbelievable levels, Africa in the age of Augustine would have witnessed something on the order of 100,000, or more, violent murders. Compared to these numbers, the total number of all known and imputed deaths caused by sectarian attacks in the period is a slight thing.

This is hardly surprising. Public sensibilities of violence are matters of perception and commitment. In the years around 2000 CE, about a third of a million people in the global population suffered violent deaths caused by the armed conflicts that dominated the big news of the age. About four times that number died equally violent deaths in automobile crashes.[128] The first kind of death is highly public and very politicized, the second more private and personal. The one kind of death causes collective fear and public lament, the other, generally speaking, does not. Consider another example. Between 1950 and 1975, the United States was engaged in an armed conflict in Vietnam in which its military forces suffered about 52,000 combat deaths. Over these same years, about 225,000 Americans were murdered by their fellow Americans in homicides, a substantial portion of them inflicted by hand guns and other firearms.[129] This internal war, broken down and isolated into small one-by-one killings, never had the same impact on the "national psyche" or public action as did deaths in the foreign war. During this same period, for the sake of comparison, more than 600,000 Americans were violently killed in motor vehicle accidents. The slaughter on the highway greatly surpassed that on the battlefield but, once again, these violent deaths produced none of the same public emotional response in writing or oral debate. The latter two, but especially the second, are rarely, if ever, featured in general histories of the 1960s and 1970s.

This brief foray into numbers is only intended as a small caution. It indicates that there is a romanticizing of violence that leads one to assume that violent causes and effects are connected in a certain fashion. It might come as a surprise to find that the horse – a normal mode of transport in Roman Africa – was one of the most dangerous of tools commonly employed by humans. In the prime of their use, horses were generally responsible for as large a proportion of violent deaths as caused by motor

[127] Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 120–22, 130–31.
[128] *Time Magazine*: Global estimates for 2000/2003 (26 May 2003), p. 24.
[129] Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics Online (http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/pdf/t31062004.pdf), Table 3.106.2004.

vehicles in our own age.[130] Sensitivity to values and perspective is required. The actions that the selective and biased literary sources of late Roman Africa portray as violent and harmful are ones of which the writers of the time chose to be aware. They had an interest in highlighting particular kinds of violent acts while ignoring most others. They made heartfelt assertions about violent threats to the general social order: that dangerous movements involving peasant uprisings of rural workers were taking place, and that a general and widespread insurrection was being abetted by their hated sectarian enemies and their violent supporters. Why? Almost all the claims have to do with the writers' interests in forming certain kinds of knowledge. The result is that the reader is not presented with an even-handed or balanced reportage of violence, but rather with an aesthetic and moral ordering of it mainly for the purpose of persuasion. This is not to say that the violent acts that I am about to describe did not happen, but rather that, between individual murders on the one side and wars and rural rebellions on the other, there was a large and sometimes amorphous middle ground of violent acts that were interpreted as bearing a terrible meaning or which, in these terms, were simply ignored: the meanings were susceptible of being pushed to amnesia on the one side or to repeated celebration on the other.

INVENTED CONNECTIONS

To begin with interpretation, it is misleading to understand the violence involving the African military man Firmus as the core of a proto-nationalist or autonomist movement. The false assumption on which this argument rests is the assertion that his actions were part of the rebellion of an indigenous African who had the conscious aim of establishing a local power base independent of the Roman state. This is a misunderstanding of the context of the Firmus incident, which was typical, even if it was regionally specific. His violent actions fit into a frame produced by the shifting configurations of power implicating the western court. The ancillary claim that violent sectarian gangsters known as circumcellions formed a working alliance with Firmus and his forces is equally implausible.[131] This alliance, if it had existed, would be important since it would confirm links between different kinds of violence, with the one reinforcing the other. Gangs

[130] Hair (1971), pp. 7–12.

[131] It is in this context that the circumcellions are most frequently compared to the Bagaudae of late Roman Gaul: Monceaux, *Hist. litt.* 4, pp. 181–82; Frend, *Donatist Church*, p. 73; Rubin (1995), pp. 137–56, implicitly, specifically with p. 166.

purveying a localized and low-level sectarian violence could join a regional warlord seeking to assert his independence of the central government. But the claim is baseless. It is pure fantasy and invention, and not underwritten by any evidence. Only on two occasions does our best source on these events speak of any relationship between the dissident Christians and Firmus. It is in the context of the argument that Augustine makes that "the Donatists" were willing to use the violence offered by secular power to repress dissidents within their own church. It is in this context that he claims that they persecuted Rogatus "the Moor," who was the dissident bishop of Cartenna, through the agency of Firmus "the barbarian." But Augustine then goes on specifically to separate this violence in Mauretania against the so-called Rogatists from that of the circumcellions, which he sees as quite different in kind.[132] So not only does Augustine, our *only* witness to these events, *not* connect the circumcellions with Firmus, he explicitly *denies* the connection.

In the face of this denial, Augustine still uses Firmus to reprimand "the Donatists" for their hypocrisy. They had acted no differently than the Catholics. They too had used the secular force offered by Firmus to discipline one of *their* dissidents, Rogatus the bishop of Cartenna. This was the reason why his followers, the Rogatists, had called the mainstream dissidents *Firmiani*, the "adopted sons" or followers of Firmus.[133] It was a rhetorical term of condemnation that Augustine himself adopted: "the Donatists" in general were *Firmiani*, known supporters of the rebel Firmus.[134] Augustine suggests that there was a reported case where a "Donatist" bishop had allowed the partisans of Firmus to enter the coastal city of Rusubicari (modern Mers el-Hadjedj).[135] Not one of these assertions is persuasive.[136] Not one of them is supported by any credible independent evidence. Let us consider some of Augustine's rhetorical assertions more closely. In an initial foray, he rebuts the dissident bishop Petilian's claims about the Catholic use of compulsion to force people to adhere to the Catholic view of the Christian faith. Augustine defends the use of compulsion. After all, it is in the nature of God Himself who uses force to punish wrongdoers. He

[132] Aug. *Contra ep. Parm.* 1.11.17 (CSEL 51: 39): "quae etiam ad persequendum Rogatum Maurum ab eis per Firmum barbarum gesta sunt"; *Contra litt. Petil.* 2.73.184 (CSEL 52: 113): "Bello Firmiano quae a vobis Rogatus Maurus pertulerit."

[133] Aug. *Contra ep. Parm.* 1.11.17 (CSEL 51: 39).

[134] Aug. *Contra litt. Petil.* 2.83.184 (CSEL 52: 114).

[135] Aug. *Ep.* 87.10 (CCL 31A: 138): "Memento quod de Rogatensibus non dixerim, qui vos Firmianos appellare dicuntur, sicut nos Macarianos appellatis. Neque de Rusicazensi episcopo vestro, qui cum Firmo pactus perhibetur incolumitatem suorum"; "it is said," says Augustine, further adding that the anonymous bishop handed Catholics over to Firmus to be slaughtered.

[136] As Tengström, "Die Donatisten und Firmus," in *Donatisten und Katholiken*, pp. 79–83, clearly saw.

then proceeds to use the "what about you" ploy, a defense based on the other's hypocrisy. Augustine selects examples where his sectarian enemies had themselves been content to use compulsion.[137]

When Julian, in his invidious dislike of the Peace of Christ, returned to you the basilicas of the Unity [i.e. the churches that had been handed over to the Catholics by imperial decree in 347], what slaughters were committed by you at that time. It was a time when even the demons themselves were rejoicing with you when their temples were opened. Who has enough energy to retell the whole story? During the war with Firmus, what did Rogatus the Moor not suffer at your hands? The province of Mauretania Caesariensis itself should be asked.

Augustine's second statement is a little more explicit on the relationship. In it, he is once again attempting to refute the dissidents' charge that the Catholics were unjustly using secular force to compel adherence to their side.[138]

Perhaps they [i.e. "the Donatists"] say that have suffered more serious things at the hands of Catholic emperors than they themselves inflicted on the followers of Rogatus through the agency of the kings of barbarians, or by means of the civil judges [i.e. provincial governors] of Catholic emperors against the Maximianists, or which they committed against whomever they could by the mad actions of the circumcellions. As if indeed the question is simply whether they suffered *more* serious harm than they themselves inflicted on others – which, even if it is what you mean, I would never concede it. The most savage and violent acts are so numerous that they cannot be counted. And even if they were fewer in number or if those against whom these acts were committed were somehow harmed less, then on the following grounds alone they would be very serious: the fact that such acts were not ordered by established legitimate powers but were left to the extralegal

[137] Aug. *Contra litt. Petil.* 2.83.184 (CSEL 52: 113): "Quando Iulianus vobis Christi invidens paci basilicas reddidit unitatis, quae strages a vobis factae sint, quando vobiscum apertis templis suis etiam daemones exultabant, quis commemorare sufficiat? Bello Firmiano quae a vobis Rogatus Maurus pertulerit, ipsa Mauritania Caesariensis interrogetur."

[138] Aug. *Contra ep. Parm.* 1.11.17 (CSEL 51: 38–39): "Fortassis enim dicunt graviora se perpessos a catholicis imperatoribus quam isti fecerunt vel per reges barbarorum Rogatistis vel per iudices catholicorum imperatorum Maximianistis vel etiam faciunt per furorem circumcellionum quibuscumque potuerint. Quasi vero inde quaestio est, utrum graviora patiantur quam faciunt, quod quidem nullo modo concesserim. Multa enim eorum saevissima et acerbissima numerantur, immo numerari non possunt, quae si pauciora essent vel eos in quos admittuntur minus affligerent, eo ipso essent certe graviora, quod non ab ordinatis potestatibus iubentur, sed extraordinariis furoribus admittuntur. Non enim tam multa sunt quae adversus Maximianistas per iudices humanae constitutionis egerunt. In eo genere actionum ponant, si volunt, quae etiam ad persequendum Rogatum Maurum ab eis per Firmum barbarum gesta sunt, et illum licet hostem immanissimum Romanorum in legitimis potestatibus numerent. Sed haec non tam multa sunt, quam multa cotidie per furiosos ebriosorum iuvenum greges quibus principes constituunt, qui primum tantummodo fustibus, nunc etiam ferro se armare coeperunt, qui circumcellionum notissimo nomine per totam Africam vagantur et saeviunt, contra omnem ordinem legum potestatumque committunt."

acts of madmen. But, in fact, they [i.e. "the Donatists"] never experienced as many cruelties as they themselves committed against the Maximianists through judges established by earthly powers. They can also place in this same category of actions, if they so wish, those which were accomplished through the agency of Firmus the barbarian in their persecution of Rogatus "the Moor," and so to count amongst their duly recognized "legitimate authorities" an enemy who was so dangerous to the Romans. But none of these things is as serious as the multiple acts of cruelty that are committed every day – against the general order of laws and legal powers – by means of the mad herds of drunken young men whose leaders they appoint – men who at first were armed only with wooden clubs, but who are now beginning to use swords, and who wander and rage throughout all of Africa under the most infamous name of circumcellions.

This is a list of sectarian atrocities that catalogues the relationships that Augustine claims to have linked. First of all, he refers to court actions by which the dissidents used the civil authorities of the Roman state to reclaim basilicas and properties that were held by a renegade faction of their own party, the so-called Maximianists. He then castigates the use of Firmus – how is not specified – to direct similar punitive measures against another internal renegade within the dissident church, Rogatus, the dissident bishop of Cartenna and his followers. Finally, he refers to the quotidian acts of violence committed by the circumcellions, men whom he regards as more harmful by far.

A number of conclusions can be drawn. Augustine does make the explicit statement that Firmus or forces identified with him were somehow engaged in the "persecution" or "harassment" of bishop Rogatus and his followers. But this seems to be the full extent of any alliance with the dissidents. If there were any other facts concerning the serious consequences of this collusion, then Augustine would surely have offered them. Another important point emerges. It is that Augustine separates circumcellion violence from these other episodes of violence. In his eyes, the violent acts of the circumcellions are worse in kind and *different from* either the court actions against the Maximianists or the vicarious acts committed by the followers of Firmus against the bishop Rogatus. There is no evidence that there was any collaboration between the circumcellions and the forces of the rebel Firmus. The incidents are listed in serial order, and they are not linked in any fashion.

Since this is the sum total of the evidence bearing on an alliance between "the Donatists" and Firmus, it bears repeating how allusive and slippery it is. All that Augustine says is that during the war with Firmus, at that time and in those circumstances, the mainstream "Donatists" of his region of Africa

had reaped a vicarious advantage of the forces that Firmus' supporters used against the coastal city of Cartenna. At most, Augustine *suggests* that there might have been a link with Firmus, but the impression that one gets from a close reading of the evidence is that it is nothing more than a rhetorical incrimination by association. If Augustine had hard facts to sustain an active alliance between the two, he surely would have given explicit details of the collaboration. Even so, such acts did *not* include the circumcellions, whom Augustine sees as representing a different kind of violence that he locates precisely in the non-barbarian, non-frontier civilized core of lands in Africa between Sitifensis in the west and the heartlands of the old proconsular province in the east.

So much for Firmus. What then is the explicit testimony of the involvement of dissident church leaders with the "rebel" Gildo? Once again, the data are limited to an exiguous and finite number of polemical assertions made by Augustine. In his reply to the dissident bishop Parmenian, Augustine begins with the summary of a dissident complaint in which they used a biblical text – "The one who judges the just unjustly and the one who unjustly judges the just is an abomination before God" (Proverbs 17: 15) – to condemn the Catholics.[139] But, Augustine retorts, the execration is more appropriately directed against "the Donatists" themselves.

> In this way they have judged unjustly that which is just. On the other hand, they have judged just that which is not just, as when they held in high honor both as a bishop and as a colleague Optatus "the Gildonian" – that man who made all Africa groan for a decade – a man whom they kept in their communion.

Later, in his reply to the dissident bishop Petilian of Cirta, he elaborates:[140]

> Let's consider your achievements. I'll omit consideration of the tyrannical regimes that you run in the towns and cities, and especially on the rural domains that belong to others. I shall pass over the madness of the circumcellions and the sacrilegious and profane worship of the bodies of those who willingly hurl themselves off great heights, the bacchic orgies of drunken men, and the decade-long groan of all Africa under Optatus "the Gildonian" . . .

[139] Aug. *Contra ep. Parm.* 2.2.4 (CSEL 51: 47): "Hoc ergo modo quod iustum est iudicarunt iniustum, quod autem iniustum est iudicarunt iustum, cum Optatum Gildonianum, decennalem totius Africae gemitum, tamquam sacerdotem atque collegam honorantes in communione tenuerunt."

[140] Aug. *Contra litt. Petil.* 1.24.26 (CSEL 52: 20): "Vestros autem fructus si consideremus, omitto tyrannicas in civitatibus et maxime in fundis alienis dominationes, omitto furorem circumcellionum et praecipitatorum ultro cadaverum cultus sacrilegos et profanos, bacchationes ebrietatum et sub uno Optato Gildoniano decennalem totius Africae gemitum."

At the end of this same passage, he points to the dissidents' willingness to use official force under the brief reign of the emperor Julian, their treatment of Rogatus "the Moor" during the war of Firmus and, he continues, "In the time of Gildo, because one colleague of yours was his [i.e. Gildo's] very close friend, the Maximianists understood what they would have to suffer."[141] When challenged, however, Augustine had to admit that he had no hard written evidence or documentation to support his claims about Optatus. They were all matters of oral hearsay.[142] In the barrage of vituperation, a single theme stands out: that Optatus, the dissident bishop of Thamugadi, did indeed have some sort of relationship to Gildo. At various times, Optatus is labeled as a "Gildonian," as a friend or *amicus* of Gildo, and an accomplice or henchman, a *satelles*, of the Count of Africa.[143] And, further, that Optatus regarded Gildo as being something of a "god" to him.[144] Although he rhetorically denies the fact, all that Augustine can claim was a general hearsay knowledge that Optatus was someone who regarded Gildo as one of his patrons.[145] This is all that being a *Gildonianus* would technically mean.[146] This is hardly surprising and it does not add up to much. One would expect a very powerful Christian bishop, seated in the major city and army base in southern Numidia – it was also the seat of the *comes Africae* – to have had some such relationship with the Count of Africa. The latter needed to ensure conditions of peace and stability, and he had personal interests such as the need for a labor supply for his huge domain lands throughout Africa. Friendship of this sort with a powerful Christian bishop would be normal. It does not mean, as Augustine repeatedly insinuates, that as a high-ranking official of the empire Gildo was ready to put the armed forces of the state at the disposal of a Christian bishop, for which there is no evidence whatsoever.

[141] Aug. *Contra litt. Petil.* 2.83.184 (CSEL 52: 112–14): "Tempore Gildoniano, quia unus collega vester familiarissimus amicus eius fuit, viderint Maximianistae quae senserint."

[142] Aug. *Contra Cresc.* 3.12.15–16 (CSEL 52: 422–23).

[143] Optatus as a "Gildonian": Aug. *Contra ep. Parm.* 2.2.4 (CSEL 51: 46–47); *Contra litt. Petil.* 1.9.10; 1.14.14; 1.24.26; as a *satelles*: Aug. *Contra ep. Parm.* 2.4.8; 2.15.34; 2.29.209; *Contra Cresc.* 2.12.16; as an *amicus*: Aug. *Contra litt. Petil.* 2.27.88; 2.84.184.

[144] Aug. *Contra litt. Petil.* 2.33.78; 2.37.88; 2.100.230; to call someone *dominus* or *deus* in a context like this was just to indulge in the exaggerated language of clientage.

[145] Aug. *Contra litt. Petil.* 2.103.237 (CSEL 52: 151): "Itane vero Optatus, quem pagani Iudaei christiani nostri vestri per Africam totam furem raptorem proditorem oppressorem separatorem et illius, quem quidam vestrum eius dixit comitem deum, non amicum, non clientem, sed satellitem clamant, non fuit vel qualiscumque peccator?"

[146] The "-ianus" suffix in Latin words usually indicates an artificial kin-like identity such as this: adoption, clientage, or otherwise being the self-adopted member of a family or community – like "Christ-ianus," for example.

Given that this is the sum total of evidence linking one of the dissidents' bishops, Optatus of Thamugadi, to Gildo, the "brother" of Firmus, a few basic conclusion can be drawn. At no point are circumcellion gangs identified as part of this larger violence, much less as allies of Gildo's. The evidence connecting Optatus with Gildo is flimsy, but perhaps sufficient. It consists of nothing more than an epithet: Optatus was a "Gildonian," which has all the hallmarks of being not much more than standard polemical rhetoric: "such-and-such" is a "so-and-so," indeed a "bad so-and-so." A standard way of demonizing a hated opponent was to claim that his followers were nothing but the acolytes of a bad man. In calling Optatus a *satelles* of Gildo, Augustine was deliberately echoing the official pronouncement of the state which had used this precise word to condemn adherents of Gildo and to impose harsh penalties on them.[147] By saying that Optatus was one of them, Augustine was attempting to create dangerous links connecting political and military treason, a specific type of threat to the state, and the dissident bishop. The modern historian must make a better attempt to understand the causes of the Firmus and Gildo insurrections and their relationship to the Christian communities of the time. As the parallel incident of Heraclian shows, both sides played the game of appealing to local holders of secular power. It was not without reason that Augustine suspected that his man, Flavius Marcellinus, and his brother, Apringius, had been executed because "the Donatists" had successfully suggested that *these men* had been implicated in the "revolt" of Heraclian. The rhetorical fictions could cut both ways.

THE GOOD USE OF TREASON

Analysis of the incidents of large-scale violence in Africa of the fourth and fifth centuries that are the closest to war in type cautions against the exaggerated impression of the high levels of violence that are suggested and encouraged by tendentious literary sources. The violent episodes that involved Firmus, Gildo, and Heraclian are typical political crises in which local men who were high-ranking servitors of the Roman state found themselves cornered and could not convince the court of their loyalty. A huge official and quasi-official polemical literature of hatred directed

[147] See CTh 9.40.19 (11 November 408) on the *satellites Gildonis* and the penalties imposed on them (one must have suspicions about the date, but the governor, Donatus, to whom it was addressed and the consuls date to 408); in its legal condemnation of the supporters of Heraclian, the central court similarly labeled them as his "henchmen" or *satellites* (CTh 9.40.21; 5 July 413) – it was officialspeak for the supporters of a political enemy of the state.

against them sustained their labeling as enemies of the state, tyrants, and rebellious barbarians. It was then easy for others to exploit these hostile official lines for their own purposes. In doing so, they were all too willing to embrace and to expand the exaggerated picture of these men as native African enemies of the Roman state and their strange insurrections as genuinely threatening wars. To the extent that the big violence of war could be attached to the little violence of sectarian conflict, the connection could be used to convince the court of a serious link between the two: between religious dissidence and political conspiracy and rebellion.

The ordinary day-to-day reality was different. Rather than a war involving direct confrontation between the Roman state and perceived usurpers of power, it was the bloody little battle that was ritually repeated in the streets of Caesarea every year that better mirrored what African Christians were doing to each other in these same decades. They, too, had split into two opposing sides within their own community. They had also appealed for generations to what their ancestors or *maiores* had decided as the basis for their daily treatment of each other. And they kept nourishing their conflict with the food of tradition. The two sides had identified with themselves and had attacked each other over a number of generations because that is what their ancestors did. In their own peculiar way, the Gildo and Firmus episodes might reflect other cultural aspects of violence. Brothers fought and betrayed each other and, in the end, the violence was a manic and demented rage caused by the unfounded fears, illogical responses, and the bumbling and ignorant intrusion of a heavy-handed and suspicious imperial court armed with the resources of a great state. These aspects of violence were indeed shared.

In the age of Augustine, the two Christian communities behaved in a similarly divisive way and gave much the same reasons for their adhesions and actions. The causes proffered were so pragmatic and profound that even Augustine had to admit that they would be very difficult to eradicate and to overcome. Why were the two hostile Christian communities doing what they did? What was it that their ancestors had done to set them on this remorseless and repetitious course? The embittered hostilities were less the result of a neatly delineated series of causes and effects that produced the present hatreds. They were more a matter of contemporary memory and action. And if anything can be said about this memory where it concerned the contentious matter of faith, it is that the remembrance was very selective and that it depended on a few narrative lines that were firmly believed and acted upon by each side.

Other than oral tradition and a scattering of written documents contained in dossiers, the big single account for the Catholics in the last decades of the fourth century was a five-book treatise composed in the mid-360s by Optatus, the Catholic bishop from the city of Milevis in the province of Numidia. In his polemical treatise, he described the origins of the great division that had occurred within the Christian church in Africa. For African Catholics in the age of Augustine this account was both the history and the memory that justified and explained "who we are." The primal events that he retailed had occurred during and immediately after the trauma of the great persecution of Christians that had been initiated by a decree issued by the emperor Diocletian at Nicomedia in February 303. The heavily freighted act that subsequently came to be the litmus test for who was to be identified as on what side was that of collaboration with the authorities during the persecution. To be precise, who among the priesthood, the bishops, had collaborated in betraying or handing over the Word of God, the books or *codices* of Holy Scripture to the authorities when they demanded them? The identification of these traitors or *traditores* became central to separating the supporters of Caecilianus in his ordination as bishop of Carthage from those who supported his rival Maiorinus.

The contributing factors to the conflict quickly crystallized in the years immediately after the Great Persecution, in late 305 and in 306.[148] The division produced an odd sense of minority and majority parties, but the unusual nature of the conflict was provoked by the involvement of the imperial state in the conflict which, oddly enough, did not happen for a significant number of years. Seven or eight years passed until, following the involvement of the new Christian emperor Constantine and his entourage in the disputes, beginning in the year 313, the one side was declared, at the prompting of the emperor and his advisors, to be right and the other to be wrong. And yet, the "wrong" side, from the perspective of the central government, the "Rebaptizers" as they were called, were clearly the majority party on the ground in Africa in terms of numbers, and they appear to have remained so throughout the rest of the fourth century.[149]

In all of this, the hostility and hatred between the two sides increased and the gap between them grew. They viewed each other through the

[148] See Appendix B on the chronology of the events.

[149] Possidius, the biographer of Augustine, admits as much in his synopsis of the situation in Africa at the time that Augustine became bishop in the mid-390s: "rebaptizante Donati parte, maiore multitudine Afrorum" (*Vita Aug.* 7.2: Bastiaensen: 146), unless one wishes to dismiss it as a rhetorical ploy.

screen of labels that each imposed on their enemies. Some of these grew out of the incessant court battles that each side undertook with the civil authorities in order to enforce possession orders or to recover property, mainly the churches currently possessed by their enemies. In Carthage, the main venue for such actions, the representatives of the dissidents were therefore called the "party of Majorinus" or the *pars Maiorini* and the "party of Donatus" or *pars Donati*, as they would be identified in order to provide the court with a legal person or *persona* on whose behalf legal actions could proceed. This labeling of one side or the other was a function of the Roman civil court system which, from the beginning of the dispute – quite unlike the *caterva* in Caesarea – was a critical referee in the process. The courts were an ever-present third-party representing the arbitrating power of the state that continually affected the ways in which the two sides were represented: not as catervic gangs but rather as parties to a legal dispute.

Yet how each side construed the other in these battles was not constant, but varied, sometimes considerably, as the surrounding circumstances of the time changed. If the immediate circumstance favored a conciliatory approach, the one side could present the other charitably as fallen "brothers" who could be reconciled with "the truth." In harsher and harder moments, they could just as easily construe their opponents as mortal enemies aligned with Satan or the Antichrist. Since the surviving literary evidence is very unevenly distributed chronologically, it is difficult to be certain about which perspective was dominant in any year or decade. But situational changes certainly defined the conflict. For example, in his long reply to the "Donatist" bishop Parmenian of Carthage – the man who commanded the dissident church in the decades after the death of the emperor Julian – the Catholic bishop Optatus consistently hewed a line that was conciliatory in tone. In his rhetoric, Optatus deliberately tried to minimize the differences between the two communities. He referred to the two sides as children of the same mother, Mother Church, and as the adopted children of the same God the Father. The dissidents and the Catholics are portrayed as brothers or *fratres* who share a common brotherhood or *fraternitas*. Throughout his treatise, Optatus directly addresses Parmenian as "brother Parmenian" or "my brother, Parmenian."

If he so chose, Optatus *could* portray the split as a family squabble, an unfortunate division between siblings of the same household – between brothers who ought to resolve their familial differences. In this mode, any bishop like Optatus (and, later, Augustine) *could* consciously draw

attention to the plain fact that there were really no differences of doctrine, belief, scripture, or ritual that separated the two sides. As Optatus said, the two sides shared all the same fundamentals of Christian belief and practice.[150]

> Between you and us there is one and the same manner of church life, the same shared scriptural readings, the same faith, the same sacraments of the faith, the same mysteries.

So Augustine himself would later ply this same line.[151]

> "Are you a Christian?" And the other replies, "Yes, I am" . . . and in many respects they have in fact been with me. We have the same baptism. In that they were with me. We have both customarily read the gospels. They were with me in that. We have both customarily celebrated the holidays of the martyrs. In this too they were with me. We both always observed the festival of Easter. And in this they were with me too.

On the other hand, not far removed from this position, and implicit in it, there always lurked a more sinister construction of one's opponents. Given different conditions, it came to the fore just as easily. In this perspective, the struggle was over real and finally irreconcilable basic differences, less a family squabble than a deeply embittered civil war scarred by the special hatreds of fratricidal killing. The fight was against evil and the final destruction of humans, over the damnation or salvation of a host of human souls. In the eyes of each party to the dispute, the loss of those souls was an unacceptable cost of acceding to the demands of the other. Reconciliation would require the surrender of bedrock values by one of the two sides. In the later 380s, when Optatus added a seventh book to his refutation of Parmenian, the dissident bishop of Carthage, he ended it on a rather darker note. Now the biblical model for the struggle was the fratricidal one modeled on the primal murder of Abel by Cain. The shift to a harsher way of seeing things should not be taken to mean that there was some predictable gradual narrative of these hatreds that worked its way, evenly, from beginning to end. Optatus' different attitude of the 380s was part of a

[150] Optatus, *Contra Parm*. 5.1.11 (SC 413: 116): "Denique et apud vos et apud nos una est ecclesiastica conversatio, communes lectiones, eadem fides, ipsa fidei sacramenta, eadem mysteria." This brief statement sums up the whole argument in book four on the substantial "brotherhood" between the two sides.

[151] Aug. *En. in Ps*. 54.19 (CCL 39: 670–71), leading, however, to an emphasis on difference: "but they are not with me in all respects." Similarly, Augustine, in a letter addressed to Macrobius, the dissident bishop of Hippo in 409 (*Ep*. 108.1.3–2.5 = CCL 31B: 65–68), goes out of his way to emphasize how much the two communions had in common.

changed set of circumstances that encouraged the use of a different part of an existing repertoire of hatred. What people selected from memory was a dynamic process. But everyone implicated in the struggle had learned from their ancestors that one hard fact was certain: a damnable act of betrayal lay at its origins.

CHAPTER 2

Church of the traitors

> When evening came, he reclined to dine with the twelve.
> When they were eating, he said:
> I tell you that one of you is going to betray me . . .
> and that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed will be cursed.
> It would be better for him that he had never been born.[1]
>
> (Jesus)

> It would take too long to explain the intimate alliance of contradictions in human nature which make love itself wear at times the desperate shape of betrayal.
>
> (Joseph Conrad)[2]

A primordial evil lay at the base of the conflict: an act of betrayal. And no one doubts that deep perfidy generates irreconcilable hatred. Betrayal moves and it paralyzes.[3] It was not for any trivial offense that Dante placed Brutus and Cassius, along with Judas Iscariot, in the ninth circle of Hell, freezing on eternal ice, being ripped apart by the maws of Satan himself. It was for the sin of betrayal.[4] And the betrayal at the heart of the sectarian conflict in Africa was not a personal betrayal of the usual kind. The betrayal was permanently branded by the handing over or *traditio* of the Holy Scriptures, the Words of God Himself, to secular authorities by Christian collaborators during the Great Persecution of 303–05. The history of this betrayal was incessantly asserted and denied, extended and elaborated by both dissidents and Catholics. It called out for explanatory

[1] Matt. 26: 20–24. [2] J. Conrad, *A Personal Record*, London, Dent, 1946, p. 36.

[3] The modern analytical literature on the phenomenon is strangely thin. A good beginning is found in Akerström, *Betrayal and Betrayers*, but even he remarks that as of the date of his foray into the subject (1991), his was a solitary and lonely piece of research. G. Simmel, "The Fascination of Betrayal," in K. H. Wolff, transl. and ed., *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, New York, 1950, pp. 333–34, provided some early insights; on the strong emotions, see Akerström, pp. 1–2, 18–21, based in part on the work of Gregory Bateson on the behavior of higher primates.

[4] On this betrayal as a form of inherited sin, see De Veer (1968m).

storytelling, and a lot of it.[5] The traitors, the *traditores*, were at the heart of their mutual hatreds and fears. The universal conviction was that certain detestable men had betrayed God Himself. In handing over His holy words to earthly officials to be destroyed, they deserved their notorious status as agents of the Devil and of the Antichrist. But real ambiguities about who precisely had done what meant that no one could let the question fade or slip from knowledge or from endless debate.

The act of faithlessness was meditated upon and condemned by the dissident Christians. They felt that their enemies were not just personal sectarian foes: they were the betrayers of God's words, traitors to his divine laws. The acts of betrayal were a common currency. They became a creative seedbed, causing a new community to come into existence whose members identified themselves as "not them," not the traitors.[6] In the eyes of dissident Christians in the age of Augustine, their Catholic enemies were genetically descended from the original collaborators. They had inherited the primal sin. And no one, not even the sometimes innovative Augustine, doubted the African conviction that primal sin was inherited – passed down from one generation of sinners to the next.[7] He himself was made to face his inheritance. At the great conference at Carthage in 411, the dissident bishop Petilian from Constantina verbally challenged him: "Who are you? Are you a son [sc. of that traitor] Caecilian or aren't you?"[8] "Was Caecilian your daddy, or your mommy?" Petilian then goaded, to which Augustine replied "He's my brother." Which only provoked the acidic counter from Petilian: "The person who procreates children is not a brother."[9] The answer, to Petilian, was manifest. All the talk about kinship was because the great sin was inherited, and to show who had acquired it. On these grounds, the Catholics were not just any congregation of bad Christians. They were a

[5] In the terms outlined by Tilly, *Why?*, pp. 14–17, there is some recourse in the stories, in his terms, to codification, that is, to a theodicy within which betrayal and martyrdom were embedded and in which everyone accepted the shorthand of why the events had to happen and made sense. In this way the combined discourse united his "popular" and "specialized" modes of explanation, see Tilly, *Why?,* pp. 18–20.

[6] Akerström, *Betrayal and Betrayers*, pp. 21–23; cf. Simmel, "The Fascination of Betrayal," p. 334.

[7] See Lamirande (1965a and 1965g); Augustine's final position was staked out in his little handbook on Christian doctrine: *Enchirid.* 13.46 (CCL 46: 74); for its relevance to the status of the Church, see Adam, *Kirchliche Sündenvergebung*, pp. 75–87; his views were nuanced, of course, and pushed first one way in his disputes with the dissidents in Africa and then the other in the disputes with Pelagius; see Dubarle (1957), pp. 113–20.

[8] GCC 3.221 and 227 (SC 224: 1162, 1168): Petilian challenges Augustine: "Tu, quid es? Filius es Caeciliani, an non?" and "Tu quis es? Filius es Caeciliani, an non? Tenet te crimen Caeciliani, an non?"

[9] GCC 3.231–32 (SC 224: 1170–72): Petilian: "Caecilianus tibi pater aut mater est, ut dixisti?"; Augustine: "Iam audisti quia frater erat." Petilian: "Frater non est qui generat filios."

segregated and polluted church of traitors.[10] This much was stated frankly in the programmatic statement about "who we are" enunciated before the conference of Carthage by the belligerent dissident bishop of Arusuliana who bore the wonderful name Habetdeum ("He-Hath-God"). Habetdeum read aloud a statement on behalf of "the bishops of Catholic Truth: the church which is suffering persecution – *not* the one that is conducting it." In it, the collected dissident bishops stated bluntly: "Our adversaries are traitors and they are our persecutors."[11] Habetdeum's statement advanced to link the Catholics closely with the arch-traitor Judas, going so far as to say that Judas was their patron, the one whose example they were following.[12]

Once the fact of betrayal was established, it had a long life. Few other human emotions and commitments possess such a natural longevity. To be caught up in collaboration is to invite a deep and powerful memory fixed on retribution. In this way Pierre Taittinger, founder of the house built on champagne, later remembered his arrest and transport to the Vélodrome d'Hiver in Paris that was serving as a prison in the fetid heat of August 1944 – just as it had not long before for Jews who were being transported to Auschwitz. As they were about to unload the prisoners, the guards incited the awaiting crowd, intent on vengeance: "You're about to see a gang of collaborators, agents of the Boches, traitors!" And so, "the dirty collaborator" Sacha Guitry, actor, writer, and director, was severely beaten as he fell from the prison van. As he lay on the ground, Guitry witnessed the beating of another prisoner, a distinguished scholar. His face covered with blood from the attack, the man collapsed and fell into Guitry's arms. This man, the eminent historian of imperial Rome, Jérôme Carcopino, was the target of a savage rage fueled by those who hated the government with which he had collaborated – in his case, as the Vichy regime's Secretary of State for National Education, no less.[13] The sentiments excited by betrayal are not far from our modern understanding or from the doing of ancient

[10] For a summation of the problem, with attendant literature, see B. Kriegbaum, "Die afrikanische Sicht der *traditio* und ihre Bedeutung für die innerkirchliche Kommunication," ch. 6 in *Kirche der Traditoren*, pp. 150–72.

[11] GCC 3.258 (SC 224: 1194): "et ceteri episcopi veritatis catholicae, quae persecutionem patitur, non quae facit . . . Adversarii igitur traditores persecutoresque nostri," this coming at the beginning of a long statement (SC 224: 1194–1218) in which Habetdeum outlines the basics of the dissidents' self-definition.

[12] GCC 3.258 (SC 224: 1208): "In defensionem deinde sceleris sui auctoritatem sibi exemplo Iudae traditoris adsumunt" (SC 224: 1210): "sed cum ipsa postmodum turba ad tradendum Dominum venit. Vadant ergo cum suo Iuda patrono inimici dominicae veritatis, qui suo more defendere reos manifestissimos elaborant."

[13] P. Taittinger, . . . *Et Paris ne fut détruit*, Paris, 1948, p. 239; as reported by H. Lottman, *The Purge*, p. 80; and Corcy-Debray, *Jérôme Carcopino*, pp. 270–85 (on the Vélodrome d'Hiver incident); pp. 276–82; on "Carcopino, traître à la patrie"; and pp. 295–97, on his difficult post-war "rehabilitation."

history. This same rage, we must imagine, was implanted deep in the Christian community in Africa, defining it for a century, and more, of inside war.

In a circular letter composed by a dissident writer in the conflicts of the late fourth and early fifth century – but paraded as a composition written a century and a half earlier by the great bishop Cyprian – the entire range of traitors is broken down into various subcategories of betrayers who merited different kinds of responses.[14] The writer mimics the legal language of the courts, and of imperial government decrees, to issue his own edict, in his guise as Cyprian, the founding father of the African Church, on how true Christians should abjure polluting contact with condemned persons.[15] His instruction taught men how to think in categories of traitors. Another more powerful reminder of the primal crime of betrayal was the rewriting and dramatic re-enacting of the stories of persons who had bravely stood their ground and who had perished in the Great Persecution. The sacred narratives, or selections from them, were replayed every year on the "birthdays" of the martyrs, the anniversaries of their deaths. In these mini-dramas, the holy martyrs addressed the parishioners directly. Because they had voluntarily sacrificed their own lives in order *not* to give in to the demands of the authorities to surrender the scriptures, they spoke with a singular, imperishable authority. Their response to Diocletian's edict requiring them to hand over the words of their God was refusal and the acceptance of torture and death. The judgments of these loyal persons on those who had betrayed the word of God echoed with a particular force in a host of churches throughout Africa every year.

One of these death narratives retells the story of the Christians from the small town of Abitina (Avitina), about fifty miles to the southwest of Carthage. Their case was heard by the Roman governor Anullinus at Carthage on 12 February 304. The story of their deaths as we now have it is a confection of a much later time, perhaps reaching its final form in the early decades of the fifth century. It therefore offers a window into

[14] It is normally included in the numerous pseudo-Cyprianic writings that form part of the larger "Cyprianic corpus" (CSEL 3.3: 273–74). See Mercati (1899/1937) for some analysis; of its author, he says, rather humorously: "il nostro deve essere un ignorante fanatico, forse vissuto in alcune delle provincie meno romanizzate dell'Africa Romana" (p. 277 n. 2), further pegging him as "un vero circoncellione letterario" (p. 270). The composition is most probably of late fourth- or early fifth-century date. The attribution to Cyprian was made, obviously, in order vicariously to claim the authority of the founding father of African Christianity.

[15] Ps.-Cypr., *Ep.* 3 (CSEL 3.3: 273–74); compare the frequent use of such officialese in the passion of the Abitinian martyrs: *Passio sanctorum Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*, 19 (Maier, *Dossier*, 1, no. 4, p. 84): "decreta coniungere constitutionesque sanctissimas . . . ex auctoritate legis divinae sanxerunt servandaque posteris reliquerunt . . . etc."

the ways in which the history of the Great Persecution was manipulated to produce current values in the age of Augustine.[16] In the narrative, a forceful point is made of the continued refusal to obey demands made by state officials.[17] Of all later African martyr stories, this one contains a vivid and almost complete replay of the blood sacrifices made by the Christians who courageously refused an imperial command. In obedience to the edict issued by the emperors, they were to hand over the Holy Scriptures to be burned.[18] Loyalties in the small town of Abitina at the time of the posting and enforcement of the so-called first edict of Diocletian polarized along the fault line dividing collaboration from resistance. The municipal authorities, aided by a local police detachment of the Roman army, arrested forty-six Christians, including seventeen women, and hauled them from their homes to a place of assembly in the town forum. Once registered and accounted for, they were marched from Abitina to Carthage, the capital of the proconsular province. Here they were put in holding cells to await the hearing before the governor.

The Christians of Abitina had been arrested and detained because they had refused to cooperate in the betrayal of their places of assembly and the Holy Scriptures. In the extreme emotions of the event, they faced a crisis that forced on them a decision about their identity. Their bishop, named Fundanus, faced with the same demands made by local municipal

[16] Monceaux, *Hist.litt.* 5, p. 53, who outlines the stages in the production of the document as we have it, including an original transcript-type, and then two later dissident recensions; cf. Dearn (2004), p. 16: "The text is not a reliable source for nascent Catholic or Donatist attitudes at the time of Caecilian's consecration or before, but for the way in which later attitudes were projected into the past for polemical purposes."

[17] On Abitina, actually formally called Avitina, see Lepelley, *Cités de l'Afrique romaine*, 2, pp. 56–62; on its identification with Chouhoud al-Batel, now confirmed, see Beschaouch (1976).

[18] *Passio sanctorum Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*, sometimes also known more generally as the "Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs." The standard text is printed in Maier, *Dossier*, 1, no. 4, pp. 59–92, who reprints (with only some minor changes) the edition by Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri (1935a), and takes into consideration the important review by Delehaye (1936). In their current state, the *acta* appear to go back to a series of documents written and assembled in the aftermath of the persecution of 303–05, but in the years after Caecilian was raised to the position of bishop (probably in 307–08). There is no date on the *acta* as they survive, but when *acta* like them were introduced at the third day of the proceedings of the conference at Carthage in 411, there was a specific consular year as well as day (GCC 3.432–433–35; SC 195: 528; cf. Aug. *Ad Donatist. post Coll.* 14.18 = CSEL 53: 115–16). In his later report on the third day of the council, Augustine specifically states what this date was: "Nam gesta martyrum quibus ostendebatur tempus persecutionis consulibus facta sunt Diocletiano novies et Maximiano octies pridie idus februarias" (*Brev. Coll.* 3.17.32; CCL 149A: 297), which is to say 12 February 304. I accept this as valid. I can only presume that the consular year-date was deliberately "obscured" in the new preface to the document written by a later dissident editor of the documents, precisely because the date of 304 was not supportive of their interpretation of the "council" of Cirta. The full document as we now have it, I presume, is the "edited" one produced in the aftermath of the Conference of 411, obviously as a confection of the dissidents: see also Dearn (2004) for detailed argument.

authorities, had surrendered to pressure and had handed over the Holy Scriptures to be burnt in public.[19] He had committed this act of betrayal at some point before the arrests of the Christians began in earnest. The books of scriptures were brought into the forum of Abitina to be fired in a conflagration that was witnessed by the Christians of the town. A sudden rainfall and hailstorm miraculously prevented the destruction of the holy books, or so the writer of the martyr narrative asserts. The justification of the terrible sufferings, the incarcerations, the judicial tortures, and the executions inflicted on the Christians of Abitina was that they had refused to surrender God's laws. Unlike the traitors, including, most shamefully, their own bishop, they defended the integrity of the scriptures and refused to hand them over to the authorities. The whole point of the story that retold the anguish of the martyrs from Abitina – a record that was read aloud every year in dissident churches throughout Africa – imprinted this historical fact on the minds of subsequent generations.

A dissident sectarian who later added to the narrative of the Abitinian martyrs made the issue of betrayal manifest in his vivid introduction to the story of their execution.[20]

> The person who is enriched by the belief of our most holy faith is happy and is glorified in Christ. He rejoices in our Lord's Truth. He condemns error so that he might hold fast to the Catholic Church and so that he can distinguish the holy communion from the profane. Let him read the acts of the martyrs which have been inscribed in the indispensable archive of memory so that, with the passage of the ages, the glory of the martyrs and the damnation of the traitors will never be forgotten.

The serial redactions of this story by the hands of later dissident writers allows us to see some of their perspective, including their claim, as this writer states, that *they*, the dissidents, were "the Catholic Church." Although the martyrs and the traitors are vitally connected with each other – both are shown to be part of the same living Christian community – they are presented as completely opposite types. There is no grey area between them. The aim of the story, as the writer states, was to provoke imitation

[19] *Passio sanctorum Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*, 3 (Maier, *Dossier*, 1, no. 4, p. 64): "In isto namque foro iam pro dominicis scripturis dimicaverat caelum, cum Fundanus ipsius civitatis quondam episcopus scripturas dominicas traderet exurendas." For context, see Monceaux, *Hist.litt.* 5, pp. 53–59.

[20] *Passio sanctorum Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*, 1 (Maier, *Dossier*, 1, no. 4, pp. 59–60): "Qui religionis sanctissimae fide praeditus exsultat et gloriatur in Christo quique dominica veritate gaudet, errore damnato, ut ecclesiam catholicam teneat, sanctam quoque communionem a profana discernat, acta martyrum legat quae necessario in archivo memoriae conscripta sunt ne, saeculis transeuntibus, obsolesceret et gloria martyrum et damnatio traditorum!"

of correct behavior: the reader was to be ready to die in defense of the scriptures and to avoid the fate of becoming a traitor.[21] The aim of the author in manipulating the narrative was that the listener would learn "the rewards of the martyrs and the punishments of the traitors."[22] The story therefore embodies a series of responses – in this case by at least two sectarians, one writing soon after the division between the two churches and one rather later.[23] Both dissident writers were using the powerful emotions surrounding the story of the martyrs to mobilize sentiment and action by highlighting the inflammatory issue of betrayal.

The basic lesson imparted by these later fabrications about the Christians of Abitina is that some persons in 304 had kept the faith in the war against the Devil, whereas others, faced by this same critical test, "fell away from the main path of the faith." These other despicable persons had betrayed God's words to non-Christians so that they could be burned in fire. The optimistic finale of the narrative, however, was that the bad were outnumbered by the good.[24]

To save these same writings, what great numbers of people freely poured out their blood for them. Filled with God, and having defeated the Devil and having laid him low, in their suffering they waved the palm branch of victory. With their own blood, they sealed the final sentence against the traitors and their supporters. *This* was the judgment by which they cast them out from communion with the Church. For it is not right that there should be both martyrs and traitors together in the Church of God.

In the sequence of tortures that the loyal endured, the attacks were inflicted first on the body of the priest Saturninus. The priest is shown to be more faithful to preaching the word of God than was his own

[21] *Passio sanctorum Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*, 1 (Maier, *Dossier*, 1, no. 4, p. 60): "consulto quidem hoc faciens duplici scilicet modo, ut et imitatoribus eorum ad martyrium animos praeparemus" [the other aim being to preserve memory of the persons themselves].

[22] *Passio sanctorum Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*, 1 (Maier, *Dossier*, 1, no. 4, p. 61): "et praemia martyrum et poenas quis noverit traditorum."

[23] Monceaux, *Hist.litt.* 5, p. 56, draws a rather severe, but useful, distinction between the two subsequent redactors: the first "intelligent" and "moderate," the second "a hate-filled and brutal pamphleteer, only half literate." It would seem that the first writer actually knew the circumstances of 304; he might have been writing in the aftermath of the crisis of 317; the second was writing much later and was, indeed, a pamphleteer, indicating the crisis of 347 or a later one.

[24] *Passio sanctorum Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*, 2 (Maier, *Dossier*, 1, no. 4, pp. 61–62): "Et quamvis tradendo gentilibus scripturas dominicas atque testamenta divina profanis ignibus comburenda a fidei cardine cecidere nonnulli, conservando tamen ea et pro ipsis libenter suum sanguinem effundendo fortiter fecere quam plurimi. Quique pleni Deo, devicto ac prostrato Diabolo, victoriae palmam in passione gestantes, sententiam in traditores atque in eorum consortes qua illos ab ecclesiae communione reiecerant cuncti martyres proprio sanguine consignabant; fas enim non fuerat ut in ecclesia Dei simul essent martyres et traditores."