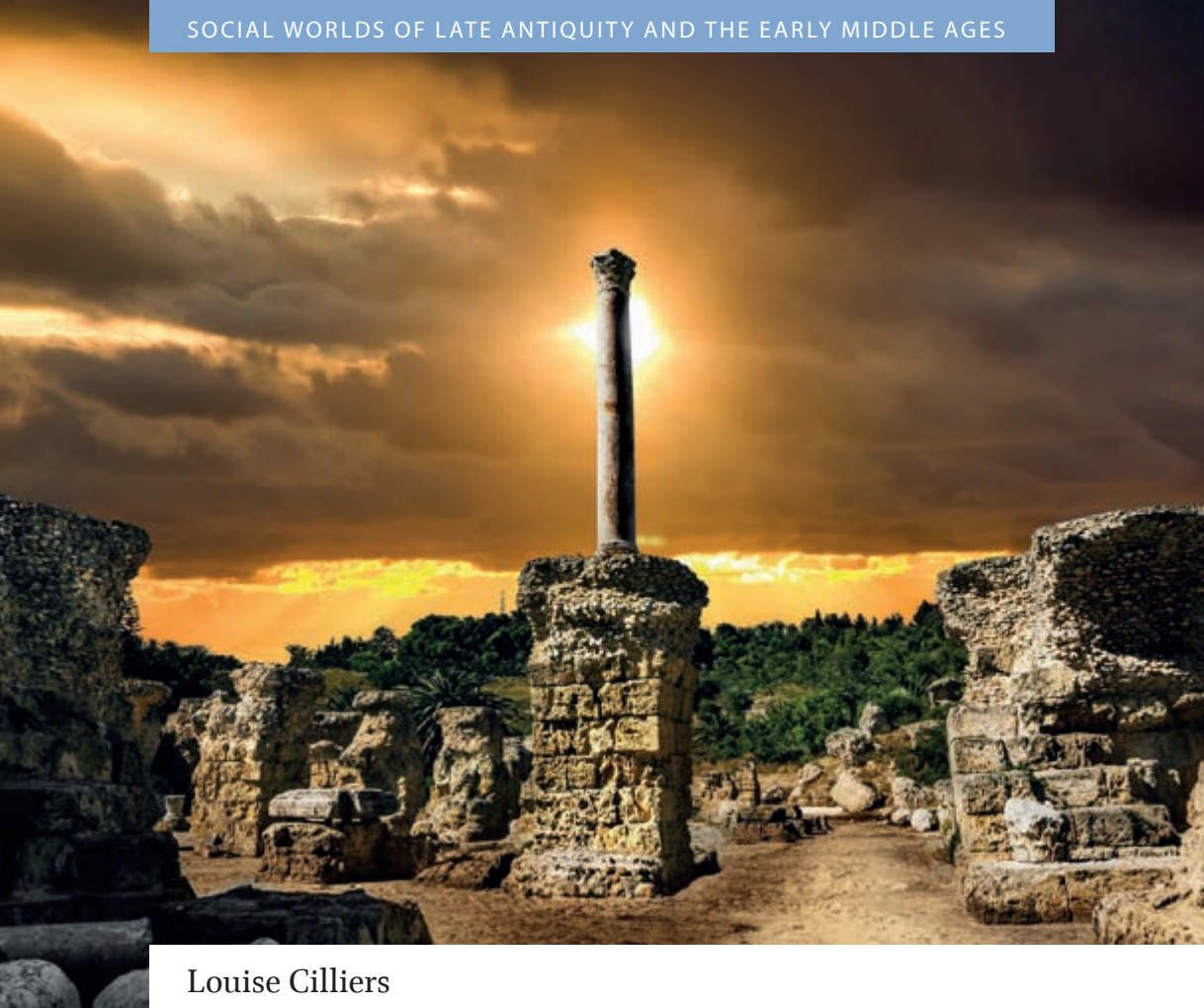


SOCIAL WORLDS OF LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES



Louise Cilliers

# Roman North Africa

Environment, Society  
and Medical Contribution

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## Roman North Africa

# Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

The Late Antiquity experienced profound cultural and social change: the political disintegration of the Roman Empire in the West, contrasted by its continuation and transformation in the East; the arrival of 'barbarian' newcomers and the establishment of new polities; a renewed militarization and Christianization of society; as well as crucial changes in Judaism and Christianity, together with the emergence of Islam and the end of classical paganism. This series focuses on the resulting diversity within Late Antique society, emphasizing cultural connections and exchanges; questions of unity and inclusion, alienation and conflict; and the processes of syncretism and change. By drawing upon a number of disciplines and approaches, this series sheds light on the cultural and social history of Late Antiquity and the greater Mediterranean world.

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# Roman North Africa

*Environment, Society and Medical Contribution*

*Louise Cilliers*

Amsterdam University Press

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## Preface

North Africa was the most prosperous province during the late Roman Empire and experienced a flowering in all fields, but especially in science and medicine. A great number of medical texts produced in this period in the Roman Empire at large originated in North Africa. Four outstanding physicians/medical authors in late fourth- and early fifth-century North Africa immediately attract our attention: Helvius Vindicianus, Theodorus Priscianus, Caelius Aurelianus and Cassius Felix.

It is my intention to envision these four authors in their own environment and time frame. The first chapter thus deals with Roman North Africa in general – its rise and its fall after three waves of foreign invaders had swept across the country; the development and demise of some of the cities, especially Carthage, where Vindicianus would have had his seat as proconsul, and Cirta, the home town of Cassius Felix; the people who inhabited these cities, each with their own language and culture; and some famous contemporary Classical and Christian authors.

The health facilities available so many centuries ago are astounding. The aqueducts, the massive bath complexes and the Cloaca Maxima, a sewer in which an ox wagon could turn around, are only a few examples of the amazing level of architectural and technological knowledge of the Roman engineers. Yet the cities were deficient in disposing of human waste, which must have led to many diseases. Hospitals, a Christian initiative, were only established in the fourth century.

Various epidemics for which there were no cures swept through North Africa in the fourth and fifth centuries, killing thousands of people. It is interesting to note the changing views of the reasons for these epidemics in the course of centuries.

The question then arises what the standard of health services was. Not only was the lack of antibiotics and antiseptics, discovered some 1500 years later, a problem, but also the fact that diagnoses and operations were done with little knowledge since there was a veto on dissection. The absence of a health board to supervise the standard of physicians meant that any quack could present himself as a doctor. And yet doctors were trained as well as was possible at that stage, with an impressive curriculum and modern didactic techniques, in highly developed institutions in, *inter alia*, Carthage and Alexandria.

The discussion of the contributions of the four physicians/medical authors forms the core of the book. The remarkable physician Vindicianus, who was

proconsul and attained the prestigious post of Count of the Medical Board of Doctors in Rome, was the first to translate the works of the Greek masters of old into Latin, realising that since the knowledge of Greek was becoming extinct in the West, these works would be lost forever. Vindicianus' student, Theodorus Priscianus, followed in his footsteps and also translated Greek works, of which his *Gynecology*, a textbook containing recipes for drugs and therapies for women's diseases (*inter alia* for abortion and hysterical suffocation), is best known. Caelius Aurelianus, considered to be one of the greatest Latin medical authors in Antiquity, also wrote a *Gynecology*, basing his work on that of the famous first/second-century physician Soranus; it represented ancient gynecological and obstetrical practice at its height. Caelius' work *On acute diseases* and *On chronic diseases* is a complete handbook for pathology, therapy and pharmacology. Cassius Felix, a much-loved Christian physician, discusses 82 diseases with suggested treatments in his book *On medicine*; this text was used throughout the Middle Ages.

The Church also had a great interest in medicine. This is exemplified by the Church Father St. Augustine, who had an amazing knowledge of medical sciences. The question of how the (sometimes obligatory) conversion of the population to Christianity in the fourth century influenced the practice of contemporary physicians is discussed.

Finally, the important role played by our four authors in the preservation and transmission of medical knowledge is looked at. The foreign invasions that caused many citizens to flee the country were, paradoxically, the reason the precious works of the old Greek masters were saved from oblivion, since the translations taken along had in this way reached Italy and Spain, whence they were disseminated through Europe. The reader will find some repetition since every chapter is, as it were, a unit on its own, especially in the last chapter, where all the strands are pulled together to present an integrated picture.

The circle must be closed. The history of Roman North Africa encapsulates within half a millennium the rise from the ashes of a burnt city to become the most prosperous province in the Roman Empire, and its demise after three waves of foreign invaders had swept over the country – to disappear completely from the radar. It is indeed an extraordinary phenomenon that after some 500 years of rule (146 BCE–439 CE) hardly a trace of Rome's influence was left. However, the fact that the shipment of the erudite Arab merchant Constantine the African in the eleventh century did not contain the usual drugs and spices that he transported to Italy, but learned Arab medical books, affirms that Kairouan, the new capital of North Africa, where he probably studied medicine, was an important centre of Islamic

scholarship and learning. Thanks to the immense medical contribution of Constantine, North Africa thus did flourish again after the fall of Carthage, albeit not in a Roman way.

The foregoing overview of the content of this book may have enlightened the perceptive reader as to its aim, which is to envision the four authors and Augustine in their own environment and time frame. Roman North Africa was their home country. Carthage, or Hippo Regius (now Bône), was the city where they would have spent most of their time as practicing physicians or medical writers, or as a bishop or proconsul. Some of them would have been alive to witness the Vandal invasion and the destruction of Carthage in 439 – Augustine died while the Vandals were besieging Hippo, close to Cirta, the home town of Cassius Felix. In Carthage they would have been educated in an excellent school, being taught not only Greek to the extent of becoming thoroughly bilingual (Theodorus Priscianus' Greek was so good that it is thought that it was his first language), but also Classical literature, as is evident from Vindicianus' knowledge of Latin authors in his letter to Valentinian and from his being asked to adjudicate a literary contest.

We may imagine them functioning in the political and social milieu of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. In daily life they would have rubbed shoulders with Phoenicians, Berbers and Greeks – Cassius and Muscio later even with Vandals – and heard the cacophony of all the different languages in the streets. They would have watched the games in the arena, visited the Baths, and smelled the sewers while walking through the filthy streets of the city. As physicians they would have had to cope with patients whose problems were due to inadequate health services – patients who would have contracted contagious diseases from unclean water in the Baths, or from contaminated water, or from buying food infested with flies from street vendors. We can envision Cassius, the surgeon, with his precise Latin, making instruments for his operations, educating his senior medical students, and impressing them with many Greek synonyms for Latin terms.

We may have empathy with the delicate health of Augustine, plagued in later life with hemorrhoids that sometimes totally incapacitated him, and we may smile on reading that the bishop had to tone down his grandiloquent rhetorical style (which his noisy middle-class congregation could not understand) and cut his sermons short since his audience, standing throughout, would become tired and impatient. We can understand Vindicianus' frustration with fellow physicians, even among the *archiatri* at the court, who were not well trained. We will admire a medical writer like Muscio and a physician like Theodorus Priscianus, who each devoted a whole book to recipes for drugs and therapies to cure female diseases. Vindicianus will

gain our respect for his expertise, exemplified in the authoritative tone of his letter to the emperor, and evident from his contact with the famous medical centre in Alexandria, where he would probably have acquired the Greek manuscripts that he translated into Latin. In addition, despite his important post, he still found time to act as mentor for the young Augustine. Finally, we cannot but agree with Temkin's remark that the efforts of these North African writers 'to salvage the tremendous treasures of the past can be seen as the historical achievement of the millennium', and that it accurately reflects the magnitude of their contribution.

# **1. History, environment, population and cultural life**

The history of the western part of ancient North Africa is to a great extent the history of foreign invaders who conquered the country and imposed their language and culture on the inhabitants. Apart from the Berbers, who were the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa west of the Nile Valley, the Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Turks and French all made their presence felt in the centuries gone by. In modern times, independent states – Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania – have replaced the region known as North Africa in ancient times.

The period during which the Romans held sway over North Africa (146 BCE–439 CE) in particular interests us, since it presents a remarkable phenomenon: not only does this period encapsulate within some 500 years the rise and fall of a country, but equally amazing, in the aftermath it appears that not a trace of Rome's influence on the region remained, even after half a millennium of rule. Only ruins as a sad reminder of a remarkable period in world history.

## **A brief overview of the history of Roman North Africa**

Approximately 3000 years ago the Phoenicians were the first to discern and exploit the strategic possibilities of a promontory in the Mediterranean Sea just across from Sicily. Ships crossing the sea from east to west and back all had to pass through the 320 km strait between the present-day Sharīk Peninsula and the western tip of Sicily, which made it a valuable strategic asset to the country controlling it. According to legend, the Phoenicians, Semitic colonists from Tyre (in modern Lebanon), founded a city on this promontory (near modern Tunis) in c. 800 BCE; they called it Quart-hadasht ('Carthago' in Latin), which means 'New City', implying that it was a 'new Tyre'. By the sixth century BCE Carthage had grown to one of the most important Phoenician settlements on the North African coast, especially after the influx of immigrants from the mother city, Tyre, after it had been conquered by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Carthage now became a serious rival to the Greek settlers in Sicily and Corsica. This led to a long and bitter war in Sicily itself and also in North Africa. One of the first battles took place at Alalia just off the coast of Corsica between 540



**Figure 1.1 Tophet (burial place) in Carthage where small children were buried (eighth century BCE)**



and 535 BCE, when a fleet of Phoenicians and their allies, the Etruscans, joined battle with a Greek fleet consisting of Phocaeans who had previously planted a colony in Alalia. Although the Greeks drove the allied forces off, they lost almost two-thirds of their fleet and had to evacuate Corsica and withdraw to Italy. During this battle (as in other crises), hundreds of small Phoenician children were sacrificed to appease the gods.<sup>1</sup> The Greeks, though defeated, left an enduring influence on the culture of the Carthaginians.

By the third century BCE Carthage had become one of the largest states in the ancient Mediterranean and was increasingly viewed by Rome as a threat to her growing influence and territorial expansion. It led to three Punic<sup>2</sup> wars between these two superpowers. The outcome of the first war in the middle of the third century BCE was undecided; the Carthaginians

1 Most archaeologists agree that infant sacrifices did occur. The remains of infants and children were unearthed in great numbers in, *inter alia*, a Tophet (burial place) in Carthage. It is not certain, however, what the motive for the sacrifices was, whether a religious rite, population control or a request to the gods to grant a favour. See Xella *et al.* (2013, 1191–1199), who summarized the textual, epigraphical and archaeological evidence for Carthaginian infant sacrifice.

2 From *Punicus*, Latin for Phoenician.

**Figure 1.2** Tombstone of a child

were eventually driven back to Spain, where they extended their power. In the Second Punic War (218–202) the Romans were pitted against the brilliant young African general Hannibal, who, against all odds, crossed the Alps from Spain with his army and a corps of elephants. Once in Italy, he inflicted some crushing defeats on the Romans. He remained in Italy for another thirteen years, but failed to accomplish anything of importance,

since he lacked resources, and the Italian allies did not defect to him as he had hoped. He was thus recalled to Africa, where the final battle took place at Zama in 202. The Roman historian Livy states that before the battle began, the 'two greatest soldiers of their time' met in the middle of the battlefield, each attended by an interpreter, and 'for a minute mutual admiration struck them dumb and they looked at each other in silence'.<sup>3</sup> However, negotiations failed, the battle began, and Scipio (later called Africanus in honour of his victory) put an end to Phoenician power in the Mediterranean – for the time being.

By the middle of the second century BCE the economic revival of Carthage led to renewed fear among the Romans of a resurgence of Punic political power, and, incited by the censor Cato's paranoid exclamation *Carthago delenda est* ('Carthage must be destroyed'), with which he concluded every speech in the Senate, the Third Punic War began. After a two-year-long siege of Carthage, the war was ended in 146 when Scipio Aemilianus, adopted grandson of Scipio Africanus, finally destroyed Carthage. The site of the city was declared accursed, and the Romans created a new province called Africa out of the rest of the Carthaginian territory.

Colonisation of the new region started slowly, but the strategic location of Carthage led Julius Caesar to re-found the city in 46 BCE, extending its territory to the south. Colonisation then increased rapidly, and many Italians and war veterans were settled there, especially during the reign of the emperor Augustus (r. 27 BCE–14 CE). He handed the administration of North Africa over to the Senate and a proconsul was appointed to rule the province (hence the name Africa Proconsularis), with the new Carthage as capital. One legion was allocated to the province, the Legio III Augusta. To the west, Mauretania was reconstituted as a kingdom, with the young Roman-educated Numidian prince Juba II as client-king. The emperor Caligula (r. 37–41 CE), however, had Juba's son and successor, Ptolemy, executed for the sake of the kingdom's treasure. He also annexed Mauretania, claimed it as a province, and divided it into Mauretania Caesariensis, with Caesarea as its capital, and Mauretania Tingitana, with Tingis (now Tangiers) as its capital. By the end of the first century CE the population of North Africa had increased to about five million. Revolts by semi-nomadic Berber tribes still occurred, but by the second century the greater part of the province was Romanized and urbanized.

From the middle of the second century until deep into the fourth century, North Africa experienced a period of great prosperity (this will be discussed

3 Liv. 30.30. Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

**Figure 1.3** Old Carthage with new city in the background



in greater detail later in this chapter). This was based largely on agriculture – the export of grain and olive oil to Rome and the provinces brought great wealth. Romanization left its imprint in many respects, especially in the architecture of the cities and towns, which all had at least a *curia* or senate house, statues of the gods and worthies, a forum, public baths and triumphal arches.

In the second half of the second century, Christianity reached North Africa and with it the persecutions. The intensity of the persecutions varied from emperor to emperor; the names of many martyrs are linked to this province. The fourth century is characterized by the Donatist/Catholic schism, which led to violent conflicts and much bloodshed. However, we also witness the building of numerous churches with beautiful mosaics; the century is further marked by the works of some brilliant Christian writers, like Tertullian, St. Cyprian and St. Augustine.

The period of prosperity in North Africa stands in strong contrast with the situation in the rest of the Roman Empire during a half-century of anarchy (235–284): from without came waves of barbarian invaders; within the empire, no less than 26 army generals were proclaimed emperor in the provinces (some not even reaching Rome), and epidemics ravaged the country. Africa was not greatly affected by these crises, but its prosperity was brought to an abrupt end in the early fifth century by the Vandals, who were in Spain at that point in time. The entire tribe – about 80,000<sup>4</sup> – migrated *en masse* to Africa under the leadership of Geiseric and invaded Africa.<sup>5</sup> Although they failed to capture the chief cities, they overran the country and were soon besieging Hippo Regius. After negotiations with the Romans, peace was concluded, but in 439 Geiseric broke the peace terms and seized Carthage in a surprise coup. The city was partially destroyed; Roman aristocrats were dispossessed in favour of Vandal overlords and many were exiled. The independence of the Vandal kingdom was recognized by the western emperor, Valentinian III, in 442, but in 455 Geiseric again broke the truce when the Vandals crossed to Italy and sacked Rome; fortunately, they only plundered it and did not wantonly demolish its buildings and monuments. Back in Africa, Geiseric defeated an attempted invasion by the Byzantines. At his death in 477 he was the undisputed master of the western Mediterranean: the Vandal kingdom included all of Roman Africa, Corsica, Sardinia and the Balearic Islands.

4 According to Victor of Vita (1992, c. 1.2), this number represents the total number of people, not of warriors.

5 According to Procopius (*Vandal War* c. 1.3), the Byzantine *Comes* (Count) Bonifacius, governor of Africa Proconsularis, found himself the victim of political intrigues in the court in Constantinople and, rather than face possible execution, asked the support of the Vandals, who were then in Spain. Schwartz (2004, 52) doubts this explanation on the grounds that the Vandals had already pillaged the coast of Mauretania under Gunderic, a former leader; he also points out that there is no indication of an accord between Bonifacius and Geiseric.

However, the Vandal regime lasted less than a century: in 533 the emperor Justinian sent a second expedition to conquer North Africa, against strong opposition from his officials, who feared the Vandals, remembering their recent defeat. But Roman rule was re-established when the Byzantines, under the leadership of Justinian's renowned general, Belisarius, defeated the Vandals under their new leader, Gelimer. Shortly after the beginning of the battle, Gelimer was informed of the death of his brother; overcome with grief, he left his forces in order first to bury his brother. Carthage was left undefended, and Belisarius simply walked into the city. During the break the Vandals regrouped, while Belisarius had the walls of Carthage rebuilt. In the final battle, the Byzantines again gained the upper hand; Gelimer went into hiding for a few months, but at last surrendered. He was taken to Constantinople to walk in Belisarius' triumphal procession, after which Justinian gave him a large estate in Galatia, where the former Vandal king retired and eventually died of old age. After the last battle, the Vandals simply disappeared – some were absorbed into the population and others fled to Spain.

The Vandal period is no longer regarded as one of universal decline. The word 'vandalism' was used for the first time in the eighteenth century by the Bishop of Blois in a dispute with revolutionaries who destroyed churches and their works of art, and the word 'vandal' was soon incorporated into daily use in a pejorative sense. Raven remarks that this saddled the Vandals with a reputation for wholesale destruction that they did not deserve.<sup>6</sup> They did not come to Africa to destroy, but to settle and enjoy the benefits of the Roman amenities; despite their greed for booty they did, for instance, not wantonly cut down the olive trees or the vineyards (in fact, the agricultural communities found Vandal rule less oppressive than that of the Romans). Roman administrative systems that were found effective were retained. Many of the Vandals eventually converted to Christianity; Latin remained the official language. The Greek-Byzantine historian Procopius stated that the Vandals rapidly adopted with enthusiasm the ways of life, the pastimes and the pleasures of the Romans.<sup>7</sup> However, no Vandal word survived in Latin or in the Berber languages. The only really far-reaching damaging action was their

6 Raven 1993, 213. See also George (2004, 134 n.4): 'The destruction of the Roman cities and imperial buildings of North Africa was not the work of the Vandals, but of their Byzantine conquerors and the African tribes during the expulsion of the Vandals in 534, and by the Arabs in later centuries.'

7 Procop. *Vand.* 2.6.5–9.



**Figure 1.4** Great Mosque in Kairouan, or Mosque of Uqba, established in 670 CE; one of the oldest places of worship in the Islamic world



leader's order that the cities dismantle their protective walls, which left them prey to future incursions.

The Berbers had grown audacious during Vandal rule, and when the Byzantine army had left, there were several serious barbarian uprisings. Justinian ordered Belisarius' successor in the province to repair the walls of the cities and build fortresses, and it was in doing this that the greatest damage was done to Roman monuments in North Africa – it was quicker to use the masonry of the splendid but now neglected monuments as building blocks than to build the walls anew. A huge civic building

program was begun, new towns were founded, aqueducts were repaired; in short, the region experienced a brief renaissance, even in the field of learning and art. Yet the cost was heavy and many African inhabitants were worse off than during Vandal rule. Corrupt administration of the Byzantines led to civil discontent; more uprisings followed and people sought refuge in fortified towns and huddled around churches and fortresses. There was a brief respite in the beginning of the seventh century when Heraclius was emperor; during these 30 years of peace even agriculture flourished again.

The revival under Byzantine rule, which lasted little more than a century, postponed but did not avert the final demise of Roman North Africa. Yet it had the benefit that the high level of civilisation of the previous centuries was maintained, with the result that the Arabs' inheritance was not that left by the Vandals and Berbers, but that of cultured people who could still read and write and remembered what the Romans had taught them. Raven rightly remarks that the Byzantines formed a link between two civilisations, and that, unlike the Vandals, the Romans' successors in North Africa made their own contribution.<sup>8</sup>

At the death of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius in 641, a few generations after the death of Muhammad, the Muslims had already started their drive to the West and made Palestine and Syria provinces of Arabia. It took them only half a century to swallow up North Africa. In 647 the region was invaded and an army consisting of the remnants of the Byzantine army and Berber reinforcements was annihilated. In 698 Carthage was taken and reduced to ruins. The few remaining Byzantine garrisons in what was Africa Proconsularis were taken. The Byzantines now vanished from history. To the newcomers, the Berbers were their real enemies. The Muslim general, Okba, founded a city, Kairouan, near the ruins of Carthage; the Great Mosque built by him made the city one of Islam's holy places.

With the fall of Carthage in the late seventh century we have come full circle: very soon not a trace of Rome's influence – after half a millennium's rule – was to be seen, and North Africa was lost to Christianity for good. Today the countries of the Maghreb (see note 9 below) are completely Islamicized and largely Arab-speaking.

8 Raven 1993, 229.



Figure 1.5 Map of the Mediterranean in the early Empire





## The environment

### Geography

One tends to think of Roman North Africa as a whole, but at no stage did the African provinces constitute a unity.<sup>9</sup> One should keep in mind that the coastline of Roman North Africa is approximately 2600 km (as the crow flies), the distance from Paris to Moscow. There was a great regional disparity: agricultural and commercial activities varied considerably from one region to the next.<sup>10</sup> The degree of Romanization also played an important role: there was on the one hand the rich, pacified, Romanized zone of the plains of Numidia, Byzacene (the southern part of Africa Proconsularis), Carthage, Mactar and Lambaesis, and on the other the rather primitive but invincible Berber cities in the Mauretaniae. Among the indigenous peoples too there were differences. It has been pointed out that in the 'old' part around Carthage, urban life had already been established before the Roman conquest, but that beyond this the indigenous tribes responded to the influence of Rome in different degrees and at different times.<sup>11</sup> In Numidia, for instance, flourishing cities like Cirta (now Constantine) developed, while Thamugadi (now Timgad) and Lambaesis, originally military camps, only gradually became the centres of cities, and other tribal centres developed into villages over a period of time. Farther westward and inland there were fewer cities, and in the Mauretanian mountains there were still 'enclaves of unsubdued barbarism', untouched by Roman civilization.<sup>12</sup>

9 Roman North Africa in the first century CE was divided into various regions. From West to East: Mauretania Tingitana (modern Morocco), Mauretania Caesariensis (the western half of Algeria), Numidia (the eastern half of Algeria), Africa Proconsularis (modern Tunisia), together with the fertile strip along the coast of Libya and Cyrenaica (called Tripolitana). This whole area was later known as the 'Maghreb' (an Arabic word meaning 'where the sun sets'), whereas eastern North Africa (Libya and Egypt) was known as the 'Mashrig' (meaning 'where the sun rises'). Dunbabin 1978, 15.

10 Lepelley 1979, 37.

11 Dunbabin 1978, 15.

12 Dunbabin 1978, 15.

## The wealth of North Africa

### The granary of the empire

The coastal areas and the eastern part of Roman North Africa have, on the whole, a favourable climate; this ensured reliable harvests. Even before Roman times the Phoenicians had learned the principles of crop rotation and irrigation and had great harvests, but they used this to feed their own population, not for export purposes. Italy's agriculture, on the other hand, had fallen on bad times in the late Republic and early Empire, and small farmers who could not make a living flocked to Rome, where they clamoured for food. From the first century CE Rome thus increasingly depended on the import of grain from Egypt and Africa. In fact, every year for 300 years North Africa sent half a million tons of corn to Rome to feed the masses.<sup>13</sup> For these exports the province received no credit – it was regarded as their annual tribute to Rome. There must therefore have been a sizeable surplus if, after the tax collectors had taken their share, there still remained enough to sell abroad and make a profit.

In order to encourage the cultivation of corn in Africa but also to protect the small farmers in Italy who grew olives and grapes, the emperor Domitian (r. 81–96) placed a restriction on the cultivation of the olive and vine in Africa. This was reversed by Hadrian (r. 117–138) after his visit to Africa in 125, with the stipulation that all land not yet under cultivation should be opened up. North Africa thus reverted to its former 'mixed economy' – growing wheat, olive trees and vines and providing pastures for sheep, goats and cattle, and game for hunting. The so-called *Dominus Julius* mosaic, found near Carthage, gives a good idea of the affluent agricultural scene in the fifth century CE: we see the house of the master, turreted at the corners with a domed bath house behind it; the living quarters are on the first floor for protection; around the house is a garden with cereal crops and olive trees, domestic animals and poultry, servants and farm labourers.<sup>14</sup>

The great expansion under the emperors Trajan (r. 98–117) and Hadrian caused Tertullian, the early Christian writer from Africa (c. 160–c. 240), to describe this period as follows: 'Smiling estates have replaced the famous deserts, cultivated fields have conquered the forests, flocks of sheep have put wild beasts to flight [...] certain proof of the increase of mankind!'<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Raven 1993, 88.

<sup>14</sup> Raven 1993, 165.

<sup>15</sup> Tert. *De anima* 30.3.

**Figure 1.6 Dominus Iulius mosaic**

### The olive culture

North Africa's greatest wealth, however, derived from the export of olives and olive oil, an industry that was especially flourishing in the third and fourth centuries. Olive oil was used for numerous purposes all over the empire – for instance, to cook, make soap and perfume and, importantly, to use as fuel for lighting. A remark made by St. Augustine (354–430) throws light on just how valuable this export from Africa was: he states that the room that he was renting in Milan at that time was rather dark, since the continued use of oil lamps was a luxury that only rich people in Italy could afford, whereas in Africa he could study at night with an oil lamp (of which archaeologists found innumerable examples) without worrying about excessive cost.<sup>16</sup>

The value of the olive is illustrated by the anecdote about a farmer in Sufetula (seventh century CE): when asked by the commander of the Arabs who had captured the city and was amazed at the amount of

16 Aug. *De ordine* 10.1.3. See also *Sermon* 177.10, *Patrologia Latina* 38–39, 959.

**Figure 1.7 Amphitheatre in Thysdrus**

treasure that had fallen into his hands, the farmer looked about him as if in search of some hidden object, and then picked up an olive and, laying it before the commander, told him that this little fruit was the cause of their prosperity.<sup>17</sup>

The wealth resulting from the oil production was the reason the Vandal leader, Geiseric, after having travelled through Gaul, Spain and Mauretania, wanted to settle in North Africa.<sup>18</sup> A contemporary, the African bishop Victor of Vita (b. circa 430), states that the Vandals saw Africa as ‘a peaceful and quiet province, the beauty of the whole region bright with colours everywhere’.<sup>19</sup> Salvian, a Christian writer of the fifth century, also became lyrical about the wealth of Africa – according to him, the Vandals ‘captured the soul of the empire’.<sup>20</sup>

17 Ibn Abd el Hakem, *Histoire des Berbères*, no date, p. 306 (reference in Graham 1902, 307 n.1).

18 Lepelley 1979, 33.

19 Victor of Vita 1992, 3.

20 Salv. *Gub. Dei* 6.12.



The olive tree is well adapted to dry regions: it does not require much water or fertile land, only space for its roots to spread out; thus olive trees were planted c. 10 m. apart. Though it takes ten years to bear fruit, it requires little upkeep, and thanks to the Pax Romana, long-term planning was possible. Olive trees could support a large population, but not a concentrated one. The enormous amphitheatre at Thysdrus (now El Djem), which could accommodate 60,000 people, is a good example: its size is quite out of proportion with the small surrounding town, but the theatre came into its own on market days or days on which games were presented, when thousands of the inhabitants of the hamlets and peasant villages in the vicinity came and filled the amphitheatre.

In a penetrating archaeological article, Mattingly & Hitchner bring to light that the scale of the olive presses and their overall density in certain regions in North Africa are well in excess of what is found in other regions of the Roman world, and that the olive culture was without doubt the major contributor to the African economy.<sup>21</sup>

### Other products

Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE), who was in the late sixties or early seventies procurator in North Africa, made the following remark about this country: 'Nature gave Africa over entirely to cereal, though not depriving it altogether from oil and wine.'<sup>22</sup> Viticulture does not seem to have been a great success – wine was but a minor export product.

Ceramic production, though, constituted quite a part of Africa's economy: there was an abundance of red-glazed pottery, the so-called African Red Slipware, all around the Mediterranean; in fact, from the second century CE these semi-luxury ceramics (for instance, lamps and vases) dominated western Mediterranean markets.<sup>23</sup> African lamps and *amphorae* still reached numerous destinations in the Mediterranean, even through the seventh century, despite the economic decline in other parts of the Roman world.<sup>24</sup>

The forests of Mauretania were stripped bare for citrus wood, of which the most exquisite tables were made – Cicero had one imported for him from Africa at the exorbitant price of half a million sesterces.<sup>25</sup>

21 Mattingly & Hitchner 1995, 190. See also Shaw 1980, 28–60.

22 Plin. *N. H.* 15.8.

23 Lepelley 2001, 88.

24 Mattingly & Hitchner 1995, 200.

25 Plin. *N. H.* 13.2.9

**Figure 1.8 Mosaic portraying tigers and lions, favourites in the arena**

Marble for building projects was also very popular – at Smitthus, quarries were worked for the very striking yellow marble with red veins, which was used for decoration – for instance, in the Pantheon in Rome.

Another luxury product was the costly purple dye secreted by a certain species of sea snail – we read of an imperial purple factory on the island of Meninx (now Djerba) in the time of the emperor Claudius.<sup>26</sup>

Numidian horses, figuring prominently in racing inscriptions in Rome, were famous throughout the Roman world and were highly praised by the first century BCE geographer Strabo.<sup>27</sup> Wild animals like panthers, lions, elephants (extinct by the fourth century), bears and Barbary apes, to be used in the amphitheatre in Rome and for their fur, were ever popular exports.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Plin. *N. H.* 9.65.

<sup>27</sup> Str. 17.3.19. See also the inscriptions in *CIL* VI.10047, 10053 (reference in Frank 1975, 52).

<sup>28</sup> Frank 1975, 24.



Among edible products and exports, figs figure prominently – it was an important element in the diet of the poor in Africa.<sup>29</sup> There is a famous anecdote told by Pliny about the paranoid senator Cato, who, in the time before the Third Punic War, harboured a mortal hatred of Carthage, *inter alia*, because of his fear for the safety of his descendants; he is said to have brought into the senate house a ripe fig from Africa, and, showing it to the senators, asked them when they thought it had been plucked. They all agreed that it was fresh. So Cato said: ‘Well, it was picked the day before yesterday at Carthage – so near is the enemy to our walls!’<sup>30</sup> We also read about pears, dates, honey, pomegranates, salt and fish products (for instance, the salty sauce called *garum*) as export products.

Most of the products that were exported were processed in Africa beforehand. However, it has been pointed out that manufacturers had a low social status and that manufacturing was not a major source of wealth.<sup>31</sup> Romans were not supposed to work with their hands (doctors and architects, for instance, were not highly rated socially); wealth came from investment in land or mining. The ancients were thus not interested in technological progress or greater efficiency.

## The cities

### Development and demise

When Rome started colonizing North Africa in the first century BCE, there were already many towns – as the geographer Strabo mentions<sup>32</sup> – most of which were Punic in origin, but farther inland, Berber (consisting of Libyans, Numidians or Mauri/Moors, with some Hellenistic overlay). Many of the cities were well developed, especially those on the coast, which were cosmopolitan after many centuries of trading. Due to the well-established African culture in these areas, their assimilation to Roman culture took place slowly – in fact, there were few visible traces of Roman influence until the beginning of the second century CE. Then, during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, the two second-century emperors who showed an unusual interest in the provinces, the province experienced great prosperity thanks

29 Plin. *N. H.* 15.82.

30 Plin. *N. H.* 15.74.

31 MacKendrick 1980, 324–325.

32 Str. 17.3.15.

to the export of oil, which led to a boom in urban construction, as can be seen in all the monuments and buildings in Roman style.<sup>33</sup> The crisis of the third century – 50 years of civil war – which greatly affected the rest of the Roman world, left North Africa largely unscathed. But changes became visible in the late third and fourth centuries: the pace of building slackened, and the priorities for public buildings changed: ‘walls replaced theatres, baths and temples [...] [radiating] the message of a calculated intention to survive’.<sup>34</sup>

Yet the fourth century, the century of Constantine (r. 307–337), started with new vigour. There were 500 small cities in North Africa in that century; only Carthage had c. 100,000 inhabitants; Lepcis Magna had c. 80,000 while smaller cities like Utica and Hippo Regius had c. 20,000 to 40,000.<sup>35</sup> A reasonably high standard of living was kept up until the late fourth and early fifth centuries CE, contrary to the orthodox views of earlier scholars like Mommsen and Rostovtzeff who, disregarding archaeological evidence, believed that the cities were in full decline by the fourth century.<sup>36</sup> The period of anarchy in the third century had little impact on North Africa; in fact, the large estates of the senatorial class continued to flourish for most of the century.<sup>37</sup> And contrary to Rostovtzeff’s view, the landed aristocracy did not withdraw into their estates in the countryside like the feudal lords of the Middle Ages – excavations have shown that their villas were within easy distance of the towns.<sup>38</sup>

The Vandal incursion in the fifth century led to radical changes. Mattingly & Hitchner, evaluating the situation from an archaeological point of view, state that the most visible breaks in the Vandal period with the past period of prosperity were buildings that fell into disrepair or were used for more utilitarian purposes.<sup>39</sup> Temples, for instance, were used for Christian basilicas, large peristyle houses were split up into multiple dwellings and workshops, and city walls arose. Carthage in particular suffered heavily:

33 The not-inexpensive mosaics that covered the floors of private houses and public buildings are another sign of the wealth of the inhabitants. Thousands of these visual reflections of everyday life, which greatly enhance our knowledge of North Africa, have been excavated. See especially in this regard Wood & Wheeler (1966).

34 Brown 2012, 11.

35 Brown 2012, 4. Most of these small cities had a population of no more than two to five thousand inhabitants, and though they were close to each other (c. 16 km), they were ‘enormously diverse’ – some relatively prosperous, others very poor. Brown 2012, 6, 8–9.

36 Rostovtzeff 1957, 535–541.

37 Cameron 2012, 92.

38 Brown 2012, 20–21.

39 Mattingly & Hitchner 1995, 209–211.

wealthy aristocrats were evicted from their homes and often even exiled to make place for Vandal lords. In these dark days, Quodvultdeus, bishop of Carthage, bemoaned the situation: 'Where is Africa,' he lamented, 'which was like a garden of delights for the whole world? [...] Where are those great and most splendid cities?'<sup>40</sup>

The Byzantines found a much impoverished country. Smaller towns in the countryside also showed changes: the layout of towns was regrouped around churches and fortresses, no longer around forums, temples and bath complexes.<sup>41</sup> The church came to take the place of the classical city; leadership was now in the hands of bishops, no longer the town council. One must, however, remember that Romanization and urbanization only took place in the eastern Maghreb, that is, the northern and central part of the province (now Tunisia) and in eastern Numidia (now Algeria).<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere it was limited: 'Roman cities were enclaves in the still-foreign world of the Berbers.' This regional differentiation was a serious defect, as became apparent in the course of the sixth century when indigenous tribes attacked the province. The real decline, however, came at the end of the seventh century: Carthage was reduced to ruins during the Arab invasion, and then abandoned by the new conquerors. Kairouan, a new Muslim city, replaced Carthage as capital in North Africa.

As Lepelley details, however, 'archaeological phasing frequently does not coincide with conventional historical periodization, and in compartmentalizing urban activity into periods (Punic, Roman, Vandal, Byzantine, and so on) we are promoting historical over archaeological interpretation of the data. Urban life was a continuum in Africa from the first millennium BCE, in some cases evolving and developing after the Arab invasions of the seventh century.'<sup>43</sup>

In order to complete the picture of the social and economic achievements of the empire, it is enlightening to look briefly at the remains of some individual cities/towns.

40 Quodvultdeus, *Sermo II de tempore barbarico* ('Sermon II on the era of the barbarians') 5.4 (reference in Lepelley 2001, 87).

41 Lepelley 2001, 99.

42 Lepelley 2001, 96.

43 Mattingly & Hitchner 1995, 186.

## The environment in North Africa in the fourth and fifth centuries: Some of the cities

Only Carthage will be discussed in some detail, since this was the capital of Africa Proconsularis and was thus the city in which, for instance, Vindicianus as proconsul would have had his residence (see Chapter 5). Many of the physicians mentioned in the following chapters would also have had their consulting rooms there. However, a few other noteworthy cities will also be highlighted to illustrate the environment in which the events in the following chapters took place.<sup>44</sup>

### *Carthage*

Of the North African cities, Carthage was, due to its strategic location and good harbours, one of the oldest. Its turbulent history, with, *inter alia*, three wars against the Romans, has been discussed. The ban on habitation in the area of the destroyed city after the Third Punic War was lifted by Julius Caesar – it was too valuable a site to leave uncultivated and uninhabited. Augustus sent some colonists in 29 BCE, but it took nearly two centuries before the city took shape again. It flourished during the second to fourth centuries; Heather believes that the city fully qualifies to be described as ‘a teeming Roman metropolis’.<sup>45</sup> The author of the *Expositio totius mundi* (‘The description of the entire world’) remarked with admiration on its beauty: the excellent location, the trees that lined the paved streets, the safety of the harbour.<sup>46</sup> During the high Empire, Carthage was the third largest city in the Mediterranean after Rome and Alexandria.<sup>47</sup> The African writer and orator Apuleius (second century CE) left a description of several buildings, such as the Hadrianic theatre, the Severan Odeon (a music hall), the amphitheatre and the circus for chariot-racing, which housed 70,000 spectators.<sup>48</sup> There was also the Antonine Baths, one of the most sumptuous bath complexes in the empire, supplied with water from a new aqueduct bringing water from Zaghouan, 132 km away.

44 The information gleaned from archaeologically based books like that of Wood and Wheeler (1966), Frank (1975), Lepelley (1979 and 2001) and MacKendrick (1980) have proved to be very useful in this section.

45 Heather (2005, 279, 280) states that at its peak Carthage was home to about 100,000 inhabitants, ‘a figure exceeded in the fourth century only by Rome and Constantinople, both of whose populations were artificially swollen by subsidized food supplies’.

46 *The description of the entire world* 1966, 200–203 (reference in Lepelley 1981, 24).

47 Lepelley 1979, 49.

48 Apu. *Flor.* 18.

The schools, especially those for higher education, were highly regarded throughout the Roman world – Augustine studied rhetoric and philosophy in Carthage. Apuleius enthusiastically praises Carthage, ‘where all the citizens are scholars, where every branch of learning is assimilated by schoolboys, displayed by the young, taught by the old. [...] Carthage, heavenly Muse of Africa, Carthage, inspiration of those who wear the toga.’<sup>49</sup> Salvian, a Christian writer of Gaul (early fifth century) also speaks with great admiration of the quality of the schools in Carthage before the Vandal invasion; according to him they taught the liberal arts, Greek and Latin literature and philosophy.<sup>50</sup>

The Vandal arrival disturbed Africa as seat of culture but did not permanently shake it. Even a Vandal poet, Florentinus, praised the city: *Carthago studiis, Carthago ornata magistris* (‘Carthage is fit for learning, Carthage is fit for teachers’).<sup>51</sup> The schools survived the Vandal conquest. Romans and Vandals alike were taught in the same classroom.<sup>52</sup> In 534, just after the reconquest by the Byzantines, the emperor Justinian provided for the public appointment of two teachers for primary and two for higher education.<sup>53</sup> The survival of the schools is reflected in the literature of the Vandal and early Byzantine eras. All of the writers must have been trained in this educational system.

The passion for the arena and horseracing that so often features in mosaics in Carthage is corroborated by literary evidence: the bishop of Carthage, Quodvultdeus, complained that when the Vandals were at the gates of the city, a great many of the population were still watching events in the arena.<sup>54</sup> Salvian, the monk from Marseilles, writing in 440, stated that the Vandal invasion of the ‘African Babylon’ was a just chastisement for their vices.<sup>55</sup> The fall of Carthage to the Vandals in 439 was a dramatic event that shook the Roman world. Its impact is comparable to that of the sack of Rome by the Goths under Alaric in 410.

The city suffered greatly during the Vandal occupation when the wealthy aristocrats were dispossessed and even exiled; rural domains were also confiscated. Yet, thanks to the momentum of two previous centuries of prosperity, the city survived during the Vandal occupation and even through

49 Hays 2004, 120.

50 Salv. *Gub. Dei* 7.16, 180 (reference in Lepelley 1981, 25).

51 *Anthologia Latina*, R 376 (reference in George 2004, 134).

52 Hays 2004, 120.

53 *Codex Justiniani* 1.27.1.42

54 Quodvultdeus, *Sermo II de tempore barbarico* 1.1 (reference in Lepelley 1979, 110).

55 Salv. *Gub. Dei* 7.13–17 (reference in Lepelley 1979, 33).

**Figure 1.9 Temple of Iuno Caelestis in Thugga**

Byzantine times. In fact, Carthage experienced a brief period of prosperity under the Byzantines: the city wall was rebuilt, streets were repaired and the basilica on the Byrsa Hill was converted into a Christian church.

Unfortunately, disappointingly little remains of Roman Carthage today, since it was built over with summer resort villas after World War II, and the remains of ancient monuments were used for buildings in modern Tunis and towns in the vicinity. However, in 1992 there was a report that international salvage operations sponsored by UNESCO have begun to reveal many facts about the ancient city.<sup>56</sup>

#### *Thugga (now Dougga)*

Lying off the main road, this little local metropolis had most of the amenities of a big city. It had more, and more varied, cults and religious buildings than any other city in the province, among which the Capitolium, dedicated to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, and, close by, the well-preserved temple of the Carthaginian goddess Juno Caelestis. There was also a theatre that could accommodate 3500 spectators, and the Licinian Baths, the size of Carthage's Antonine Baths.

<sup>56</sup> Ennabli 1992.

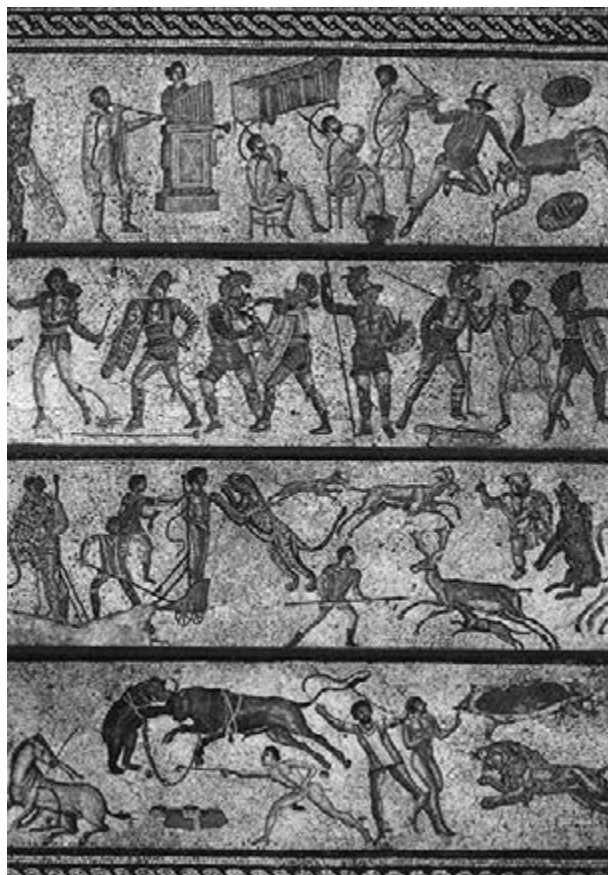
**Figure 1.10** Mosaic portraying the charioteer Eros and his horses



**Figure 1.11** Mosaic portraying Vergil seated between Calliope (Muse of poetry) and Melpomene (Muse of tragedy)





**Figure 1.12 Mosaic portraying gladiatorial combats in Zliten***Hadrumetum (now Sousse)*

Hadrumetum was the chief seaport on the eastern coast. It was one of the most prosperous cities in the province; more than 250 mosaics were found in private houses and public buildings, among which the famous mosaic portraying Vergil with the Muses Melpomene and Calliope next to him (now in the Bardo Museum in Carthage), and many mosaics portraying horses competing in events in the arena.

*Thysdrus (now El Djem)*

Reference has already been made to Thysdrus, the small town in the middle of nowhere with the huge amphitheatre which, thanks to olive production, was filled on feast days (especially when gladiator fights were staged) by thousands of farmers coming from farms and hamlets in the vicinity.



**Figure 1.13 Hippo Regius***Hippo Regius (now Bône)*

This town was, due to its sheltered harbour on an otherwise inhospitable coast, one of the earliest Phoenician foundations. Because of its strategic position, it was soon a regular trading post. The city is in Numidia, but was incorporated into Africa Proconsularis by Augustus. Its pre-Roman origin can be seen in the casual, un-Roman, winding street plan. The famous Numidian horses were bred here. The great Christian bishop St. Augustine had his see here and spent most of his life in this city.

*Lambaesis*

Lambaesis housed the only Roman garrison in Roman North Africa, the Legio III Augusta. It consisted of three army camps some distance from each other, and is famous because of its *praetorium*, which was a huge four-way

**Figure 1.14** Fourway arch in military camp, Lambaesis



arch with a tile roof and various workshops inside; the building was initially stuccoed bright yellow with the joins in the stonework painted red. The largest camp had baths and a prison; in the nearby town there was a market, amphitheatre, a capitolium and an Aesculapium, or 'hospital' for the sick.

### The population

According to the fifth century BCE Greek historian Herodotus, Libya was inhabited by four nations, of which two are indigenous: Libyans living in the north, and Ethiopians living in the south.<sup>57</sup> The Phoenicians and

<sup>57</sup> Hdt. 2.53.

Greeks came later. This statement needs qualification: the Greeks used the term 'Libyans' to describe the inhabitants of the whole of North Africa; the Romans later referred to the indigenous people of Roman North Africa as 'Berbers' or Mauri ('Moors'). Apart from them, the peoples the Romans encountered when they first set foot in North Africa were the Phoenicians and the Greeks.

## The Berbers

It is believed that Berbers inhabited North Africa from at least 10,000 BCE.<sup>58</sup> From the earliest times they formed the basis of the population in North Africa, and the situation remained thus despite the waves of conquerors that swept over the country. They were a Hamitic people who came from the east across Egypt and spread all over North Africa, even to the Sahara, where they drove the local peoples farther south.<sup>59</sup> They settled in the Maghreb. The ancient Berbers are described as 'long-headed, brown-skinned, black-haired'.<sup>60</sup> They were traditionally nomads, but by the second century BCE gradually settled down to farming; town life later developed. They lived mainly in the Atlas Mountains close to the Mediterranean coast or were oasis dwellers; those living in the Sahara remained nomads. A subsistence economy comprised pastoralism, agriculture and herds.<sup>61</sup> The ancient Berbers were organized in various loosely administered nations, the most important of which were the Maurousioi, or Moors, and the Numidians.<sup>62</sup> There is evidence of trade between Carthage and the Berbers, and of Berbers serving in the Carthaginian army. The Berber elite spoke more than one language: the early stages of the Berber languages that are spoken now, Punic, and occasionally Greek, or later, Latin.<sup>63</sup> Berber civilization reached its peak in the early second century BCE during the reign of King Masinissa

58 See Brett & Fentress (1996) for an excellent summary of Berber history.

59 'Hamitic' denotes a hypothetical language family including Berber and ancient Egyptian. *South African Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1999, 1065).

60 Dennis (1970, 16). He adds further information gleaned from several ancient sources: 'They were lean and squalid. There were blonds as in modern times, but the population was for the most part dark. They [...] plaited their hair, trimmed their beards, cleaned their teeth, and pared their finger nails. They were very healthy and long-lived [...]. Their dwellings were stuffy huts and their couch the ground; their clothing was rough and meagre, often only the skins of beasts which served also for bedding.'

61 Fentress 2006, 20.

62 See Raven (1993, 7): 'for neither Carthaginians nor Romans, Vandals or Arabs invaded in sufficient numbers to alter the ethnic inheritance'.

63 Fentress 2006, 9.

(238–148 BCE), who, during his reign, greatly extended Numidian territory. After his death, however, his sons and grandsons alternately made treaties and war against Rome until Numidia was eventually annexed as a Roman province.

Ancient sources have a negative view of the Berbers, like many scholars of the previous century.<sup>64</sup> In the last few decades, however, scholars have repudiated as Eurocentric the view that the prosperity of North Africa was due to Rome, arguing that 'Rome happily exploited pre-existing social and agricultural systems'.<sup>65</sup>

Famous Berbers in later times included Apuleius, St. Augustine and Pope Victor I (who served during the reign of Septimius Severus).<sup>66</sup> Today there are some 25 to 30 million Berber speakers in North Africa, and the number of ethnic Berbers, mostly living in Algeria and Morocco, is far greater.<sup>67</sup>

### The Ethiopians<sup>68</sup>

Herodotus' remark about the Ethiopians 'who lived in the south' would refer to the people from deeper Africa, south of the Atlas Mountains, of whom a small number may here and there have seeped into North Africa, perhaps via the Nile Valley or by trans-Sahara trade routes, though it seems that they did not settle in the Maghreb. A small number of fair-haired, blue-eyed immigrants may have come from the north, but would have been absorbed by the local Berber population.<sup>69</sup>

### The Phoenicians

The Phoenicians were an ancient Semitic civilization that inhabited the western coastal part of what is now Lebanon, Syria and northern Israel, and flourished between c. 1500 and 200 BCE. Their origin has been traced back to the third millennium BCE. They are first mentioned in Egyptian

64 In Procopius we also read that the Berbers were noted for their perfidy, that they were superstitious, that women were treated as slaves, and that polygamy was practiced.

65 Merrills 2004b, 14.

66 *Encyclopedia Americana* 2005, III. 569.

67 Wikipedia s.v. Berber people.

68 The name 'Ethiopia' was applied by the Greeks to any region in the far south of Africa. The Greek word *aithops* is related to the word *aithos*, which means 'burning heat', thus the people of 'Aithiopia' were described as 'burnt-faced', i.e., sun-burnt, dark-complexioned, black. An ethnic connotation is already found in Homer (*Od.* 2.22).

69 Wood & Wheeler 1966, 11.

texts from the eighteenth century BCE, and in the ninth century BCE it was Hiram of Tyre who provided cedar wood and artisans for the building of King David's palace and later for Solomon's temple in Jerusalem.<sup>70</sup>

The country inhabited by the Phoenicians in Biblical times was known as Canaan, the land to which Moses led the Israelites and which Joshua conquered.<sup>71</sup> It is widely thought that the Phoenicians originated from the earlier Canaanite inhabitants of the region, which was named 'Phoenicia' by the Greeks; it consisted of port towns on the coast, organized as separate city states.<sup>72</sup> The collection of city states was eventually referred to as 'Sidonia' or 'Tyria'.

The Phoenicians were from earliest times a great maritime people due to the fact that they were hemmed in by a narrow strip of land next to the sea. They were famous for shipbuilding: there are several references in Homer's *Odyssey* to their ships.<sup>73</sup> The Phoenicians were thus great traders, and sold, bought and transported especially luxury goods to overseas markets: wine to Egypt in exchange for papyrus and Nubian gold, silver from the Iberian peninsula, tin from England (which they smelted with copper from Cyprus to make the valuable metal alloy bronze). They also established commercial outposts throughout the Mediterranean, of which the most important, of course, was Carthage.

Their skill in manufacturing articles was also commented on by various authors.<sup>74</sup> In 2 *Chronicles* 2:14 we read about Hiram-Abi (the person associated with the building of the temple in Jerusalem) whose father was 'a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold, silver, brass, iron, stone, timber, royal purple, blue and in crimson fabrics, and fine linens.' But it was especially for the production of purple dye that the Phoenicians were famous. The reddish-purple dye was derived from the secretion of Murex snails, which in early times were profusely available in the eastern Mediterranean Sea but later became extinct due to local exploitation. The dye was probably

70 2 *Sam.* 5:11; 1 *Reg.* 5:1–12 and 7:13–47.

71 In the Amarna tablets of the fourteenth century BCE the inhabitants of this region referred to themselves as 'Kenaani'. The Amarna clay tablets, written in Babylonian cuneiform script and excavated in the late nineteenth century, comprised correspondence between the pharaoh Amenhotep IV, also known as Akhenaten, and his subjects (Hansen 2005, 1336).

72 The word 'Phoenicia' is derived from the Greek word *phoinike*, which means 'blood-red' or 'purple', and refers to the purple dye of the Murex snail for which the Phoenicians were famous. In Latin it became *Poeni*, *Poenicus* and later *Punicus*.

73 Hom. *Od.* 13.272; 14.295; 15.215 ('men famous for their ships'). See also Ezechiel (26:17): 'o city [...] mighty on the sea'.

74 See Plin. *N. H.* 36.65 par. 191 for the production of glass.

first used by the Phoenicians in the fifteenth century BCE and was highly valued in ancient times because it was colour-fast.<sup>75</sup>

However, the most enduring legacy of the Phoenicians is probably the alphabet, which they transmitted to the Ionian Greeks along the west coast of Asia Minor, whence it spread to Greece and from there to southern Italy, where it was used by the Etruscans before it finally reached Rome.<sup>76</sup>

Some ancient sources also reflect negatively on the Phoenicians. In the eighth century BCE, in Homer's *Odyssey* 14.288, the hero is deceived by a Phoenician, who was on the point of selling him; Zeus saved him by causing a shipwreck, which Odysseus survived. In Roman times, *Punica fides*, or Carthaginian perfidy, became proverbial in the Roman vocabulary, as the historians Sallust and Livy attest.<sup>77</sup> Although undoubtedly biased, the Romans portrayed the Carthaginians as cruel, ferocious and despotic; their chief trait was that of deceit, shown especially in the flagrant breaking of treaties.<sup>78</sup>

## The Greeks

The ancient Greeks were from earliest times a seafaring people, seeking opportunities for trade as early as the ninth century BCE and founding new trading stations on coastal sites across the Mediterranean Sea. Greek goods such as pottery, bronze, silver and gold vessels, olive oil, wine and textiles were exchanged for luxury items and exotic raw materials that were then worked by Greek craftsmen.<sup>79</sup> In the eighth and seventh centuries many Greeks emigrated – fleeing famine, drought, the pressure of an increasing population or to expand their trading influence – and formed colonies in southern Italy and Sicily.

The emigration of the Greeks to the western Mediterranean Sea led to a long series of conflicts from 600 to 265 BCE between the Greek cities of Sicily and the Carthaginians (see pp. 15-16). The beginning of the Second Punic War, when the Carthaginians had to use their forces to fight the Romans, put an end to these hostilities.

The Greek traders who visited North Africa left no influence on the Libyan and Phoenician mixture of the population. There is nothing of the

75 A modern researcher reckoned that 12,000 Murex snails yielded about 1.4 gr of pure dye, 'enough to colour only the trim of a single garment'. See also Edwards 2000 on Tyrian or imperial purple and the mystery of the imperial dyes.

76 For more information on the development of the alphabet see Coulmas 2014.

77 Sall. *J.* 108.3; Liv. 21.4.9; 22.6.12; 30.30.27; 42.47.7.

78 Gruen 2006, 469.

79 Hemingway 2000.



quarrelsome gaiety of the Greeks in the Phoenicians, who tended instead to display gloom and hardness, as ascribed to them by ancient authors.<sup>80</sup> And, in any case, the number of Greeks was never very large; only the commercial activities of Hadrumetum and Carthage drew a substantial number.<sup>81</sup> Yet an all-pervading Greek influence was felt and played an important role in North African cultural development.

## The Vandals

Although the Vandals were latecomers, they formed an integral part of the population of North Africa after their invasion in the early fourth century, and deserve a closer look. The origin of the Vandals can be traced back to the Carpathian region, in what is today the Czech Republic and western Slovakia.<sup>82</sup> In 406/407 CE a significant number of people, consisting of a loose federation of Vandals, Alans and Suebi, crossed the Rhine and forced their way into the empire. Procopius gives hunger as the reason, but pressure due to the migration of the Huns who settled in the Carpathian region is more likely.<sup>83</sup> The Vandals moved through Gaul, raiding and devastating cities.<sup>84</sup> They eventually settled in Hispania; the Hasding royal house from which Geiseric descended received a very modest and barren piece of land in the northwest, yet they soon spread south, where they made their presence felt. Having reached the coast of Spain, they went farther, plundering the Balearic Islands. At that stage, their leader, Gunderic, died (428) and was succeeded by Geiseric. Jordanes, a sixth century historian, described Geiseric as 'taciturn [...] of violent temperament, extraordinarily resourceful and far-sighted, and prepared to sow the seeds of discord and hatred in order to stir people up against one another.'<sup>85</sup>

Geiseric's name is inscribed in history books because he was the leader who in May 429 led 80,000 Vandals and Alans across the Straits of Gibraltar,<sup>86</sup> but also because he was the most successful of the Vandal kings and lived the longest.<sup>87</sup> After going ashore they marched westward along the coast to

80 Wood & Wheeler 1966, 19.

81 Frank 1975, 108–109.

82 Pohl 2004, 34 and 36.

83 Procop. *Vand.* 1.3.

84 Jerome, in far-off Palestine but well-informed about the course of events in the West, lamented the devastation of the cities (*Ep.* 23).

85 Jordanes, *Getica* 33,168 (reference and translation Pohl 2004, 38).

86 Victor of Vita 1992, 1.2.

87 Pohl 2004, 38.

Hippo Regius, which they besiege for fourteen months. This was the episcopal see of the bishop St. Augustine. The *Comes Africae*, Bonifacius, under whose protection the city was, led an army against the Vandals, but was defeated. The western emperor thus had to conclude a treaty with them, conceding a part of the African diocese to the Vandals. Breaking the treaty, Geiseric took Carthage in 439. The emperor had no option but to renew the treaty, which meant a further allocation of land to the Vandals.<sup>88</sup>

Geiseric had in the meantime acquired a sizeable fleet and soon occupied Sardinia, Corsica and the Balearic Islands; in 455 he broke the treaty for a third time and attacked and plundered Rome for two weeks, 'more thoroughly than Alaric and his Goths'.<sup>89</sup> In 468 the eastern emperor sent a huge fleet to North Africa, but the aged Geiseric had good luck on his side with favourable winds and defeated the Byzantine army. He died in 477 and was succeeded by various kings, until in 530 his grandson Gelimer came to the throne. In 533 Gelimer was attacked and defeated by Belisarius, who occupied Carthage without even a fight and immediately ordered the dilapidated defences to be repaired. Gelimer fled and entrenched himself in a fort in the Atlas Mountains but capitulated in the end; he walked in Belisarius' triumphal procession and then received an honourable exile in Asia Minor.

The Vandal occupation of the country brought great disruption and losses to the upper strata of society, and senators who went into exile lost their possessions. The lands and estates that had been confiscated were donated by the Vandal king to his family and followers, but it seems that the complaints of Victor of Vita and Procopius are exaggerated.<sup>90</sup> It was to the advantage of the Vandals to maintain the municipal systems uninterrupted, and some Romans still reached high positions. The excavations in Carthage show a decline, as elsewhere, but there is no indication of a break in urban development. This brings one to conclude, as George has, that 'the destruction of the Roman cities and imperial buildings of North Africa was not the work of the Vandals, but of their Byzantine conquerors and the African tribes during the expulsion of the Vandals in 534, and by the Arabs in later centuries'.<sup>91</sup>

88 Lee (2013, 117) states that 'the Vandal occupation of the north African provinces as far east as Carthage was a blow of incalculable importance to the western empire, for the provinces in question included the wealthiest in the western Mediterranean, based on their production of grain, olive oil and wine' and meant 'the loss of significant revenues for the government, with all that it implied for its ability to maintain the army'.

89 Pohl 2004, 38.

90 Pohl 2004, 42.

91 George 2004, 134.



It should also be pointed out that learning and culture did not come to an abrupt end with the Vandal invasion, but that it was followed by 'a transitional period of cultural adaptation'.<sup>92</sup> There is even evidence of a small circle of *literati* in the late Vandal and early Byzantine era with Vandal poets like Fabius Planciades Fulgentius, Martianus Capella and Dracontius. These poets shared a common social and educational background and were mostly Christians. Their poems reflect the Vandal interest in and enthusiasm for Roman pastimes and amusements. There was a vigorous cultural life under the Vandals: just over 70 years after the Vandal invasion, their king, Thrasamund, surrounded himself with theologians, rhetoricians and writers.

## Language

The history of North Africa makes it clear that the country was in the course of time subject to many cultural changes caused by the successive conquests. The language and culture of the Berbers were replaced by the Punic language and culture, which in turn was replaced by Greek and later Latin and their respective cultures. Latin remained the official language under Vandal rule, but Greek, the language of the Byzantine court in Constantinople, became official during the Byzantine occupation.<sup>93</sup> However, neither Greek nor Latin left a mark in North Africa, since many of the educated people fled to Europe after the Vandal invasion. All of these languages vanished like mist before the sun after the Arab conquest, leaving no language native to North Africa, apart from (modern) Berber. But the contribution of Roman North Africa was the fact that during the 'Golden Age' of the country, the second to the fourth centuries, the culture of the Greeks and Romans had, as it were, merged, and it was a Greco-Roman heritage that was transferred to the provinces in the north: Spain, Gaul and later Germany and even Britain.<sup>94</sup> When the Arabs came, North Africa turned its back to the north, faced east and became part of a new world.

The most important languages in North Africa before the Arab conquest, besides Greek and Latin, were early Libyan and Punic. Early Libyan was the

92 Hays 2004, 111; George 2004, 135, 143, 142.

93 By the time of the so-called 'last Roman emperor', Justinian (r. 527–565), who was based in Constantinople, Greek (a *koinê* form) had become the official language in the eastern (Byzantine) Empire – Justinian had to publish his famous law code, the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, in both Greek and Latin (Ostler 2007). However, the inhabitants of provinces in the eastern empire still regarded themselves as 'Romans'.

94 See Chapter 10 on the transmission of the texts.

language spoken by the Berbers, the original inhabitants. At an early stage, merchants and soldiers brought new languages to the coastal cities, but early Libyan continued to be spoken in the countryside. According to ancient sources it sounded 'harsh and barbarous' and could only be pronounced properly by mother-tongue speakers.<sup>95</sup> It was used at the time of the Punic Wars and even during Roman rule, but probably mostly in the countryside (especially in Numidia) – it was the language of the lower and less literate classes. According to some scholars (modern) Libyan is still used today in the rural areas in Libya.<sup>96</sup>

The Phoenician colonists brought with them their language, Phoenician or Punic, when they founded Carthage in c. 800 BCE. It became the official language at that early stage and was the language of the upper classes; it was spoken until the Arab invasion. In the fifth century CE St. Augustine stated that the debased Punic spoken around him was the cultural mark of what was specifically African: *Punica, id est Afra*<sup>97</sup> ('Punic, that is to say African'). It was at that stage on the same level as Latin, the language of the Christians in Africa. However, the difficulty experienced by St. Augustine in finding, for a remote village, a priest who could speak the native tongue gives the impression that there was not a widespread knowledge of Punic among the clergy. One should point out, however, that when St. Augustine died in 430, Punic had been spoken for over 1000 years – it had outlived the Vandals, and was probably still spoken in Byzantine times.<sup>98</sup>

Although the Phoenicians would have become acquainted with Greek merchants and colonists who visited the North African coastal towns from the earliest times, it was during the long and bitter battles between the Carthaginians and the Greeks in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE that the latter left their mark. Greek gradually came into use as the language of culture, even in Carthaginian times;<sup>99</sup> by the second century CE Greek was taught at schools and was greatly in favour among the aristocracy. The emperor Marcus Aurelius, for instance, wrote his *Meditations* in Greek. The influence of Hellenic culture was pervasive in higher circles. But the settlement of numerous Roman colonies in North Africa from the first century onward led to an increasing use of Latin, so that by the end of the fourth century, Greek, though still taught in schools and understood by

95 Sil. 3.305 (reference and translation Dennis 1970, 46).

96 Dennis 1970, 18.

97 *Tractatus in Epistulam Ioannis* 2.3 (reference in Lancel 1995, 437).

98 Lancel 1995, 438.

99 Nep. *Hann.* 13.2 (reference in Dennis 1970, 47).

scholars, was no longer used or understood by the natives in the western part of the empire.

In the second century CE, Greek and Latin were the predominant languages in North Africa. But when a law was passed in 212 by the emperor Caracalla to increase the income of the *fiscus* by making all citizens subject to inheritance tax, Latin was suddenly thrust upon the stage as the world language. This law, the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, conferred Roman citizenship on all free residents of the empire.<sup>100</sup> The advantages of having Roman citizenship at this stage were minimal, but the implication was that Roman law was now to be used in every province of the empire; local laws no longer applied. Lawyers, prosecutors and plaintiffs now all had to know and understand Latin when appearing in court. This led to a great increase in the number of people with knowledge of Latin: thousands of citizens all over the empire were frantically learning it.

The situation in the early Empire can thus be summarized as follows: Latin became the official language of the law and civil service (and eventually also of the Church), while Greek for a long period remained the language of cultural intercourse, and Punic the medium of middle-class exchange. In the background, among the humble Berbers, lurked Libyan and other native dialects.

## Cultural life

The wealth and prosperity of Roman North Africa during its 'Golden Age', from the second to the fourth centuries CE, had an advantageous influence on cultural life. Many families had enough money to send their children to school, even in far-off towns or abroad, and authors of all genres had time to devote themselves to writing. Apart from the schools in Carthage already mentioned, there were also centres of learning in Cirta (now Constantine) and Theveste (now Tebessa). Learning started early: local schools in the smallest towns provided an excellent basic education. Although knowledge of Greek was declining across the western empire by the third century, there is testimony that it was still being taught at a small provincial town in North Africa: St. Augustine tells us that he was taught Greek in primary school in the small town of Thagaste (now Souk Ahras). George concludes that 'North Africa challenged, if it did not surpass, Rome, as a centre of culture and learning; the home, in particular of celebrated grammarians, rhetoricians,

100 Boak & Sinnigen 1977, 328.

advocates and theologians'.<sup>101</sup> It is noteworthy that St. Augustine, one of the greatest intellects in Antiquity, spent the greatest part of his life in Hippo Regius – the resources of North Africa and his network of contacts in other intellectual centres such as Rome, Milan and the East appear to have been sufficient to keep him informed of intellectual life and theological developments in the Roman world.<sup>102</sup> A few of these outstanding figures in Roman North Africa in the fourth and fifth centuries will be discussed, starting with the famous author Apuleius.

**Apuleius** was born (c. 125) in Madauros in Africa Proconsularis in a newly rich family.<sup>103</sup> He received his schooling in Carthage and then used his family inheritance to study Greek and Platonic philosophy in Athens, where he was also indoctrinated in the mysteries of the goddess Isis. Thereafter, to refine his knowledge of Latin, he went to Rome, where, in the second century, there already was an influential group of Africans, including Fronto and Salvius Iulianus (see below). He soon squandered his inheritance and returned to Africa. In Oea (now Tripoli) he met an ex-student of his from Athens, who asked Apuleius to stay there for a year and marry his mother to protect the family fortune. Since she was a rich widow, much older than Apuleius, her relatives suspected dubious motives, and took him to court, accusing him of using magic to induce the lady to marry him. He conducted his own defence (later published as the *Apologia*) and was acquitted. He settled in Carthage as a public speaker, where he wrote a brilliant satirical novel, *The Golden Ass*, the only Latin novel that has survived as a whole.

Roman North Africa produced some of the finest lawyers in the history of the Roman Empire. In the late first century CE the satirist Juvenal already referred to Africa as 'the foster mother of lawyers'.<sup>104</sup>

**Salvius Iulianus**, born in Hadrumetum early in the second century, was one of the most important lawyers to come from Africa. The emperor Hadrian, who had a great appreciation of Iulianus' legal skill, appointed him to edit the praetor's edict. He became consul in 148, and thereafter governor of Lower Germany, then of Nearer Spain, and in 167/168 of Northern Africa. In the codification of law in the sixth century, the emperor Justinian honoured him as the most eminent of Roman lawyers and the precursor of his own codification which became known as the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*.<sup>105</sup>

101 George 2004, 134.

102 Several letters were exchanged between St. Augustine and St. Jerome in Jerusalem.

103 Harrison s.v. Apuleius in Hornblower & Spawforth 1996, 131–132.

104 Juv. 7.147ff.: 'nutricula causadicorum Africa'.

105 Honoré 1996, 778.

Although not a lawyer – but keenly interested in the administration of justice – a noteworthy person who came from Africa was **Lucius Septimius Severus**, the first African emperor (r. 193–211). He was born in Lepcis Magna of an equestrian family of Punic origin and of considerable local prestige. He was probably a person of colour, as were many of the Phoenician people in Libya. His mother tongue was Punic, but he also spoke Greek and learned Latin at a later stage, both of which he spoke with an African accent. He studied jurisprudence in Rome and followed the normal *cursus honorum* before becoming a commander of legions. After various civil wars he was proclaimed emperor by his legions in 193. He paid much attention to the provinces, and in 202/203 the whole imperial family visited Africa. He made use of the opportunity to visit his home town, which he showered with privileges and buildings. Numerous statues, monuments and triumphal arches erected in his honour attest to his popularity in North Africa.<sup>106</sup>

A great admirer of Severus was **Sextus Aurelius Victor**, the author of the *De Vita Caesarum*, a biography of the emperors from Augustus to Constantius II (360 CE).<sup>107</sup> He came from a humble background, but was not so humble when he stated that he owed his social advancement to his brilliant studies; he remarked that the African background he shared with Severus was clearly capable of carrying the brave to the highest point. Like many other young men of North Africa, he tried to escape what he regarded as the mediocrity of his African background by going abroad. Victor was fortunate enough to meet the pagan emperor Julian (r. 361–363), who favoured pagan intellectuals, at Sirmium, and was honoured by him with a bronze statue and the governorship of Pannonia in 361. This was followed in 389 by his appointment as *Praefectus Urbi* in Rome.<sup>108</sup>

**Marcus Cornelius Fronto** was born c. 100 in Cirta (now Constantine), studied in Carthage and then went to Rome, where he achieved the consulship in 143 and, at the request of the emperor Antoninus Pius, became the tutor of the emperor's two sons, Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius, adopted to secure the succession. Fronto's surviving correspondence with the future philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius throws an interesting light on daily life in Rome in the middle and late second century CE. Essentially an orator, he was forever looking for exactly the right word in a sentence. He left no

<sup>106</sup> Birley 1996, 1390–1391.

<sup>107</sup> Victor states that 'as regards Severus, nobody in the Empire is more celebrated than he' (*De vita Caesarum* 20.6).

<sup>108</sup> MacDonald 1996, 222.

work of consequence; it is said that 'he was more interested in how he said a thing than what he said'.<sup>109</sup>

Carthaginian-born **Sulpicius Apollinaris** studied in his home town and went to Rome during the reign of Antoninus Pius (r. 138–161). He too was interested in the meanings of words and in obscure points of etymology; he wrote important commentaries on Terence and Vergil.

Looking back, it becomes clear that Africa was the motherland of Christian literature in Latin. Starting with Tertullian in the second/third century, numerous works were written in the third/fourth centuries in defense of the Christian faith, such as those of **Gaius Marius Victorinus**.

After completing his studies in Africa he became a teacher of rhetoric in Rome in the time of Constantius II (r. 337–340). St. Augustine (who was introduced by Victorinus to Neoplatonism at a critical stage in his life) relates the story of his conversion: a staunch adversary of Christianity, he gradually felt a growing sympathy for the religion; it took him a long time to take the final step because he did not want to cause sorrow to his pagan friends. On the day he was to make his public confession of faith, the clergy offered to read it to him behind closed doors to save him embarrassment, but he bravely came forward and pronounced the formula of faith in front of the congregation; he did it with such conviction that the congregation 'gave him a place in the deepest recesses of their hearts'.<sup>110</sup> He wrote various works defending the Christian faith. He did not have a great mind; his contribution lay in his influence on great minds.<sup>111</sup>

**Arnobius** was a teacher of rhetoric in Sicca Veneria in Numidia (now Le Kef) in the late third century. Arnobius believed that human reason is powerless to discover the truth on its own: man must not exhaust his frail reason in vain speculation, but give himself entirely to God. In his *Ad nationes* he attacked opponents who state that since Christianity has been on earth, the world has gone to ruin, and used pagan legends to make his point. It has been said that Arnobius knew little of Scripture, made little use of it, and misunderstood some of its leading ideas; he thus 'enjoyed in Christian Antiquity only a very mediocre prestige'. His writings are likewise regarded as suspect from a doctrinal point of view.<sup>112</sup>

Another Christian apologetist was **Minucius Felix** (fl. 200–240 CE); he probably came from Africa, but acted as an advocate in Rome. He states

109 Ogilvie 1980, 270.

110 Aug. *Conf.* 8.2.

111 De Labriolle 1968, 262.

112 De Labriolle 1968, 198.

that he had been a pagan for a long time before converting to Christianity. His famous work, *Octavius*, a dialogue between a Christian, Octavius, and a pagan, Caecilius Natalis, was praised by Lactantius and St. Jerome as one of the finest defences of Christianity.<sup>113</sup>

From Numidia came Lucius Caecilius Firmianus, also known as **Lactantius** (c. 240–c. 320), who became famous as a teacher of rhetoric in Sicca Veneria (now Le Kef). He was summoned by the emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305) to teach rhetoric at his palace in Nicomedia in Bithynia. He did not, however, have success there, since it was a Greek world; furthermore, he lost his position after his conversion to Christianity. In his old age, when he had fallen into extreme poverty, he was called to Gaul by the emperor Constantine (r. 307–337) to become the teacher of his son Crispus. Although Lactantius shows knowledge of the Latin poets and especially Cicero, he has little of importance to say on Christian doctrine. In the Renaissance, Lactantius was, due to the purity of his style, regarded as ‘the most classical of all early Christians’ and became known as ‘the Christian Cicero’.<sup>114</sup>

**Tertullian** (Q. Septimius Tertullianus, 160–240) was born in Carthage in c. 160 from a pagan family. His conversion to Christianity came late in his life after a wild youth, frequenting public shows and committing adultery. At some stage after his conversion he joined the Montanists, a sect that believed that the Paraclete was incarnate in the person of Montanus; Montanism did however not alter his ideas radically.<sup>115</sup> There are references to Tertullian’s ‘intense African temperament’ and his tendency to fanaticism and rigidity, which is clear from his works.<sup>116</sup> He was still an exponent of the bilingual culture: he wrote in Latin but Greek idioms figure strongly in his works. He left an immense number of works and brought an honest (if undiplomatic) judgment to bear on many of the uncertainties of the growing Christian faith. His *Apologeticum* contains a fiery defence of the morals and beliefs of the Christians against the slander in Rome. His doctrinal works, among which the *De carne Christi* (‘On the body of Christ’), *De resurrectione Christi* (‘On the resurrection of Christ’), *De anima* (‘On the soul’) and *De pudicitia* (‘On chastity’), were directed against the dualistic view that body and spirit are not one. Tertullian had a great and abiding influence on Christian theology in the West. He is also known for the difficulty of his epigrammatic Latin style.

113 Becker 1967, 952ff.

114 Stevenson 1996, 811.

115 De Labriolle 1968, 60–102.

116 Thieling 1911, 171.



**St. Cyprian** (Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus, c. 200–258) became a teacher of rhetoric in Carthage and received a classical education. He was a great admirer of Tertullian. However, he broke with his classical background after he became converted to Christianity, and was shortly thereafter ordained as Bishop of Carthage. His works were all in relation to his office as bishop. Most of them provide important information on the persecution by the emperor Decius in 248/249, dealing with the problem of the Christ after the persecution, especially with the problem of the so-called *lapsi* (Christians who had succumbed during the persecution and now wished to re-enter the church). During Valerian's persecution in 257, Cyprian was banished when he refused to sacrifice to the pagan gods. He was recalled the next year, only to become the first African bishop to die a martyr's death. It is said that at his beheading in 258, the authorities treated him with the respect due to his class. He left an immense literary output, among which the most important was *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*.<sup>117</sup>

## Medical literature

Medical literature, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, flourished in the late fourth and fifth centuries. Whereas Greek had been the language used since the beginning of written medicine, it was the North African writers who in the fourth century started to translate, adapt and summarize Greek medical works into Latin. In making the works of the old masters available to the lay public who no longer understood Greek, these authors played an important role. **Gargilius Martialis** (220–270) was probably the first, writing on agricultural and veterinary science (*Medicina ex holeribus et pomis*, 'Medicines from greens and fruits'). Then the eminent physician and proconsul (in 379 or 380) **Helvius Vindicianus** (c. 330–410) translated and adapted various Greek works into Latin, and also sent a medical treatise highlighting his own expertise, to the emperor Valentinian I; in this treatise he styles himself as *Comes Archiatrorum*, which implies a high position (see Chapter 5 on Vindicianus). Vindicianus' pupil, **Theodorus Priscianus** (b. 364?), probably associated with the royal house in the western empire, was well known for his three books of *Euporista* ('Easily available medicaments'), of which the third book, the *Gynecology*, was famous even in the Middle Ages.

117 Matthews 1996, 419.



In the fifth century we find **Caelius Aurelianus** (425–460) from Sicca Veneria (now Le Kef), who translated into Latin the (now lost) books *On acute diseases* and *On chronic diseases*, as well as the *Gynecology*, written by the second-century physician and gynecologist Soranus (greatly abridged and adapted). In this time span too, there was the eminent physician **Cassius Felix** (c. 400–450), probably from Cirta (now Constantine), a respected *archiater*/civic doctor at Carthage, whose *On medicine* was dedicated to the two consuls of the year 447.

The careers of the authors discussed above, who all had contacts in Rome or were in Rome at some stage, reveal the gradual integration of provincials (especially those from North Africa) into the cultural, political and social life of Rome in the third, fourth and early fifth centuries. But after the Vandal conquest the gates closed, as it were, to North Africa. North Africans who used to go to Europe thereafter went as refugees fleeing their native country, no longer as young students or scholars seeking further education or wealth and honour.